

Each One, Teach One

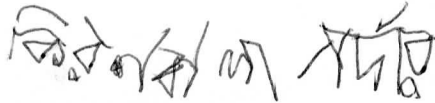
Because that summer my mother wanted to believe
she could be a more effervescent version of herself: drawing lines on the ground,
plucking the sky that forever hung right outside her window,
she persuaded our maid, Kiran Pishi, to open her first bank account.

Because her thumb-print kept Kiran Pishi's contract only incompletely realized,
because it is in Kiran Pishi my mother saw a ground to etch upon,
for four consecutive afternoons Kiran Pishi learnt to sign her name from my ma.

They sat on the cold cement ground-,my old school notebooks between them.
The smell of the coconut leaves in the air,
my mother's wet hair lose on her back,
Kiran Pishi's hair greasy with oil, tight in a bun.

My mother wrote the letters on the pages of the book--in blocks, separated out, big as her own thumb-- as
if for a child.Kiran Pishi rubbed my old pencil stubs over my mother's outlines.Of the forty-four alphabets,
my mother chose only seven--Of the eleven diacritics, only two.Kiran Pishi wrote them over and over
again, in the same way an artist copies the masterworks, memorizing the letters through their curves.

After a week, she would write-- in the bank-papers and elsewhere,



without much effort.

The rest of the thirty seven letters-- sounds with different curves and corners ,she wouldn't bother to learn
for the rest of her life.

Neither would my mother bother to teach. She was done with breaking the sky into two.