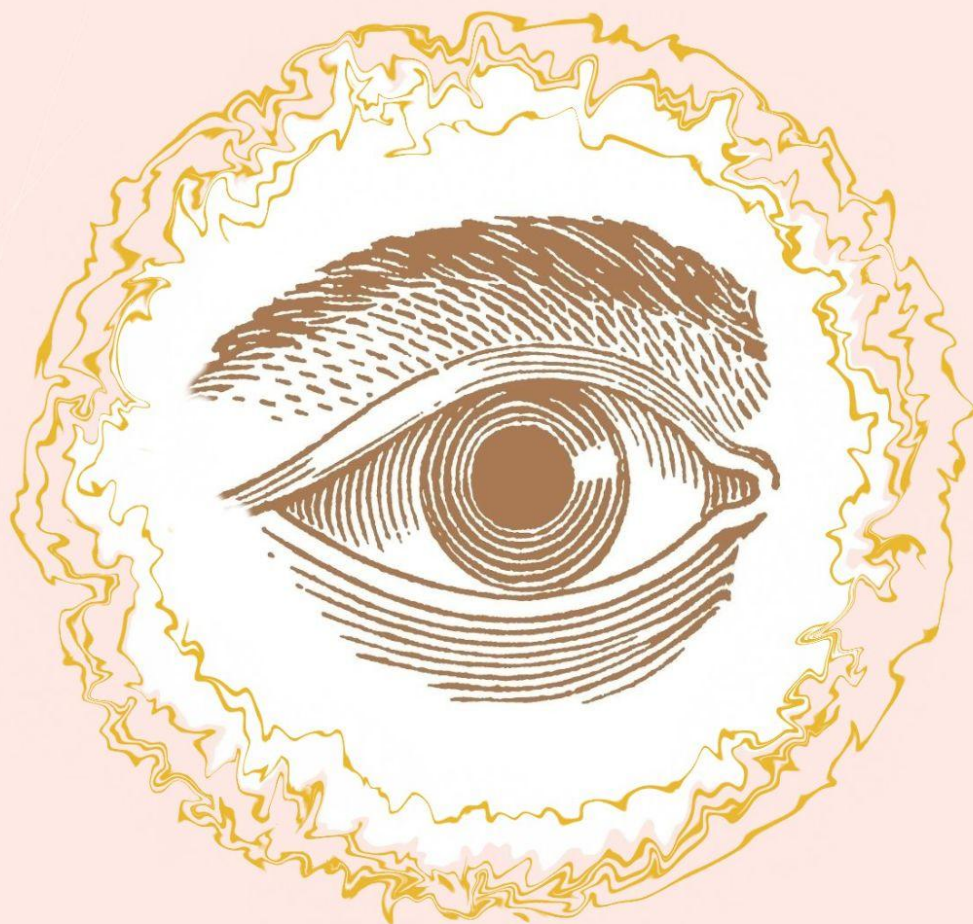


RAAB FELLOWSHIP 2020-21

THE LANGUAGE OF DREAMS



A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

PREETHA SWAMINATHAN

This excerpt (I will send an audio recording, to accompany it):

As I sit to write this essay, I feel it necessary to begin with something other than race. Perhaps this is for the sake of creativity, originality. Perhaps to make the introduction something other than my-life-as-a-brown-woman. More likely, though, I am afraid. There are few stories that are easy to tell; one's racialized history is certainly not one of them. Here I sit, then, afraid to talk about my race, unaware that, in my attempts to avoid it, I have already begun.

The settings of this history tell a story in themselves. Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, in my grandfather's office library, his love for the British, his profession teaching English literature, held in each of his dusty books; the Christian school my grandfather sent my father to in order to give him a *proper* English education, only to have his son return with a Bible in his hands and a new God in his heart; on an airplane, inside my mother as a fetus, my father and older sister beside us, headed to San Francisco with idlis and chutney, wrapped in foil, stowed away in the suitcases; at Hillview Bible Chapel, age four, with my baby brother in my lap, watching our formerly Hindu mother accept her husband's religion as her own, dipped gently into a tub of water by a man with kind, blue eyes; in the photo hanging above my family's fireplace, all five of our brown bodies dressed in white shirts, blue jeans, smiling wide for the camera, and under the framed image, a wooden carving on the fireplace mantel: PRAISE THE LORD.