

Who Am I?
Renee Phillippose

“What are you?” is a question I always get asked
To me, I am just Renee Susan Phillippose
An Indian girl born in the United States
To parents who immigrated here
With hopes and dreams for a better life for the children they would eventually have

I am constantly asked, “Where are you from?”
My answer is always the same, “Skokie, Illinois”
A few seconds later, I am asked the same question again
“No, I mean, where are you from?”
Like I did not understand the first time they asked
They do not see past my skin color and so assume I must be from another country
Even though, I speak perfect English
They cannot accept that I was born in the United States
The feeling of being silenced is stifling
I am more than just a checked box on a form

When I go back to India, I am ridiculed for being an “American”
These people, who are Indians just like me, question my existence
I am not good enough to be called a “true Indian” like them
Since I was not born in India, to them I am “American”
They point out and yell, “you Americans”

When I visit India, I fear speaking in Malayalam
I am afraid I may say something wrong and get made fun of
I am afraid I will butcher the Malayalam pronunciation of certain words
There are just too many different sounds that I cannot say right
I will just sit here, listen to everyone else speak, and be silent

All I want more than anything, is to be accepted for being me
I want to be accepted and appreciated by both the American and Indian people
I am me, and that is an Indian American!