

Mapping Womanhood

*in a child's understanding of geography
the boundaries were set by paper margins
and tumultuous folds of countries
that unsteady fingers could not charter*

*Perinthalmanna was a dot
on a map thus created
a noisy, unglamorous pit stop
with a name far too long perhaps
though the letters rolled off one's tongue
distinctly, comfortably, tasting of home*

*in womanhood, the once-child
is introduced to the virtues
of a dusty town with nothing to claim
as its own
except clandestine bars
where men throw up on statues
of voluptuous, naked women
their curvatures even more pronounced
after one drink too many*

*by the roadside
lined by bars they call 'cool',
on a hilltop,
stands the temple
where girls are promised grooms
in return for prayers*

*she climbs the steps her silk skirt swishing against her toes
the jasmine flowers in her hair
wilting in the sun*

*wondering about the goddess
in whose name
women were encouraged to
jump into their husbands' pyres*

*in Perinthalmanna,
the goddess answers prayers
with a groom
to die for,
she frowns as she imagines this*

*she has seen no temple
where men can pray
for worthy wives
where a morning of chants
and push and shove
to see a bedecked goddess
gets you closer to the
one with whom you will share your bed every day,
the father of your children,
and if lucky,
a man who will not be angry
if you do not make his tea
sugary, as his mother always did*

*in the redrawn boundaries
of womanhood
she wishes a pencil stroke
could smoothen the jagged edges,
that all uncomfortable topography
could be overlooked,
or translated into a straight line
with a child's quiet self-assuredness*

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