

ROOFTOP FLYING IN AHMEDEBAD

--after the photo by Tal Streeter

They call it kite fever, kite madness, gangs of kite looting children
hoarding bright acid kites, darting through rows of kite kiosks,
until the kite wars of the Festival of Kites begin. One string must cut
another, the *Manjha*, the fighting string, fortified with a paste of spices, rice,
crushed glass and gems. *I felt I was being born again as a bird*, says a boy
of his virgin festival who ever after seeks that primal pull.

Bird or warrior? Bushad missed his wedding for lingering on the roof
flying kites, the sandalwood reel humming, his ring finger
clacking against the tug of flight. And what of our British photographer,
trekking the roiling Punjab to capture the eyes of God?

Let him rain on us the hands of kite makers, parsimonious
vendors of kites, the multicolored rice paste dyed and infused,
mythic kite creatures, kites hung with pennants and years ago,
so the story goes, a single gold wafer from the Mughul Nawab
that would fall into the arms of the one lucky man
in a crowd of thousands who could now support his family for a year.

Thus beneficence wafts down from a heaven full of dancing
symbols and backlit bamboo bones standing out
in sunlight. Love me when I least deserve it
says my love, because that is when I need it most.

My friend likes to go “kiting off” by train
to cities, concerts, plays she loves, and I want to keep that
tug forever, age or illness notwithstanding. I would make hers
a proper shield kite, not a fighting kite, and keep her kiting always—
kiting, yes, but never off, unlike my father’s lifelong friend
on parasail whose heart gave out kiting swells of air.

Not *tako kichi*, kite crazy, let me stay small and humble
like vendors who bundle kites in old papers tied with scraps of string,
or the string itself, and the wrapped hand that holds it, rapt
by a buoyant music, the aeolian hum of the line.