

The *Pipal* tree

I saw the *pipal* tree before I saw the house,
battle worn warrior, silent chronicler of small things
sleepless at night, mourning time through the day.

I saw the leaves wave me into the house,
hardened skin softening, reaching out
as I stepped under its shadow away from
the fevered sun, feeling the cool breath of
the *pipal* hold me close, safe, forever.

You, my dear, saw nothing but our new house,
past the tree, past its darkening brows, gnarled
limbs, half closed eyes and the sad sighing.
You poured over plans, marking, chopping,
changing, with red, blue and green lines -

the tree a beautiful pink from where I stood.
Did I forget to tell you of stories *daadi* made up
about the *pipal* punishing those that would destroy
it. "Fear it," but we laughed for she could neither
read nor write and prayed to gods day and night.

You saw grand staircases, chandeliers, quarters
for servants, garages and garden parties.
I saw only the dark corners, heard whispers
behind closed doors, silenced patter of tiny feet,
a crescendo of hearts and a stolen kiss.

Did we both miss the shrine under the tree
with shards of broken red bangles, spilt
vermillion, little prints of hands in clay, rotting
remains of chopped limbs of the *pipal*
in a forgotten time? Did we?

From my window I see the sky for miles -
with the tree and you gone, I wait for new
leaves in the dead stump, and chant the songs
daadi did with her gods in the shrine near the old *pipal* tree.