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KANYAKUMARI

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KANYAKUMARI

Abstract

Forget the bird's-eye view; from a bus window you can touch gutters on both sides of the street.

Paul Sharrad

KANYAKUMARI

Forget the bird's-eye view;
from a bus window you can touch
gutters on both sides of the street.

Pilgrims in beards and black
scarves, t-shirts, lungi, faces
frolic like ebullient crows.

I calculate the crush,
the odds of clawing free
hands in green water.

This is it, I think: another ferryload
drowned in a news footnote.
Will I become history?

The temple guard, ignoring signs
for silence, sidles over: 'This solid stone,
all carve one piece'. I nod and seek sunlight.

At Kanyakumari the wind toys
with the volume of tourist stalls
incessant gusts of filmi qawwal.

A few faithful at the intersection
sting a banner, shout a litany
antiphonal communist demands.

Six cows, a dog and two pigs
pick the slow way home
across the guest house garden.

Some comfort from the bustle
and the sounds; the space of a sea breeze
at dusk, the straggle of familiar weeds.

Waiting on the governor,
tailored captains sprawl,
stomachs rounded with seniority.

A soldier guards an empty room
against the sky, his rifle
languid by the tall windows.

The guide looks apologetically at clouds
while bullying northerners demand
the sunset they paid for.