

Race

When I tied my ankle to my partner's
or pulled the gunny up to my waist
and crazily hopped to the tape,
When I gleefully carried a bag of sand or stones
or thrust the scroll in my haste
into my teammate's face instead of hand,
When I ran for the sheer joy of wind
or monsoon drizzle on my face and beat
my brothers to our mother's arms
to Dad's fond chiding that I belonged
to Hanuman's clan,
I never thought that one day I would wait
in this lovely land of endless skies
for my little ones to return safe
from school, unharassed by boys
with blonde hair gelled or spiked,
their blue eyes glazed with glue,
or worse, with plain cold hatred
all faculties intact,
thrusting their fists into Krish's face,
no accident, pelting stones and eggs
by summer light on our window panes.

My children,
sack, potato, three-legged, relay, marathon,
one hundred, two, four hundred yard dash,
that's what race once meant
and only that. But, for you
that simple childhood word never was.

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