

DIRECTION

'The Hanuman temple street is one way now
come from the old pond side, its right opposite
the big Banyan tree'

Chandru wanted his mother to close down
the old house and move with him to America,
she wanted to give me
a pair of traditional brass lamps,
a heirloom piece, so come and take it

It was not the old familiar place any more
In less than two kilometres I had lost my way
four times. Asking for directions is
a woman's preoccupation they say

The auto driver was quick,
'Oh, it's right next to the next road hump,
just slow down and you will hit it' *

I missed it.

What gym?

The postman, I thought would lead
'I am going on the other beat, this is the old number,
now all that has changed, 88 comes after 97, ask anyone'

The traffic police was more helpful,
'Just go back and it's at the first signals'

It was the same one I had passed

The doctor in a fancy car was more specific
'Take a right. It's right next to the superspeciality
diagnostic centre, you can't miss it'

His right was my left.

Surely they were on a weekend picnic
the SUV was full of sweat shirts and football
'It's behind the gym auntie, just drive on' *

I just stood there wondering which way to turn

Someone was frantically waving out from a window.
It was grandmother. I looked around.
The asbestos sheet roof super speciality diagnostic centre,
next to a corner called gym, behind number 97,
opposite to the signal without lights turning right to the hump,
a small tree sort of a trunk cut into half, an old temple
hiding behind a giant billboard calling out freshness,
my old ancestral home that was going to be pulled down
to make way for a mall.

Prathibha Nandakumar