

## Veil

Amma's face is up close, she is tying my sash  
My dress is pink with tiny white spots

Her eyes open wide as she stares at my thighs  
I tilt my face away, light strikes me.

Grandfather is strolling in the mulberry grove  
His walking stick, covered in bits of torn grass.

Does amma see marks the color of burnt milk  
Where grandfather hurt me?

Why does she shut her eyes?  
I want us to be a mother and daughter

In someone else's poem.  
How old was I?

Seven, at the rim of turning eight.  
That season when mulberry bushes

Loosen their sleeves  
And silk from grandmother's trousseau

Starts its slow pucker and float.  
All through her wedding grandmother's face was veiled

Silk from Varanasi the color of moonlight  
—Veiled with a special veil...

Burned up in love and longing...  
When grandmother died, she was wrapped

In her wedding sari so worms the color of milk  
Could bite into her flesh.  
How old was I when they laid grandfather  
Down beside her in the muddy earth?

I cannot tell.  
I tore skins from mulberry stalks using my teeth.

I refused to swallow the wet sour stuff.  
Some things you never forget.

*Note:*

*In italics are the words of the Sufi poet Faridudin Attar (c.1230 CE) describing the most celebrated of the Sufi women mystics, Rabi'a al Adawiyya (c. 801 CE) also known as Rabi'a of Basra.*