

POETRY

Two Hungarian Poems on the Ganga

GÁBOR GARAI

Beside the Ganga

I stood beside the Ganga.

Below my feet the bank staggered step by step to the water
like an oriental devotee who falls on his knees
then sits on his heels, prostrates,
finally lying down full-length, mute and trembling ...

And there did bodies shrivel in the "light of a southern noon".

From under glistening cloaks weathered feet and arms
stretched out like limbs melted off the trunk,
yellow pariah dogs licked the stones,
a cow followed me, looked at me.

Children buzzed around begging, half-naked, black to their soles
one held the stump of his arms, pleading
another sold pictures, waving his rags
fly-covered delicacies were offered by a third.

From the bellies of houses, life hung out on to the streets.

In a recess sprawled three bent old men,
in another a man cooked brown mush in a brass bowl.
Inside people waited, outside they admired it with
intoxicated patience.

And all was for sale:
the treasure, the spice, the dreams of the earth,
the strength, the pain, the hope, the misery of man.
And all was immovable and impossible to buy

Like the sun in the sky and the frozen silence in the hearts.

And I stood on the banks of the Ganga

I knew that no objects or pictures would I take back with me
but some unspeakable brotherhood,
no celestial or earthly light, ancient or entangled mystery,
but that heat which the stones were breathing into my face,
the thirst of plants, beasts and men,

while the river marched below through the desert of time
while the golden domes of the sandstone temple gleamed above
and those who slept at its entrance did not believe they were doomed ...
and that fate had brought me here to see what I had only known -

that salvation lies not in mantras but in liberation.

Gábor Garai (1929-1987) poet, essayist, literary translations from Russian and English. He was politically committed and served as a Member of Parliament. He visited India in the 1970s and told of his experiences in a travelogue *Summer in March: Notes and Poems about an Indian Journey*. During this visit, he met Amrita Pritam and translated some of her poems. The current poem is a counterpoint to *On the Banks of the Tisza* by Ady and the romantic vision of India in Hungary.

JÁNOS HÁY

Lamps on the Ganga

You return home tired.

You throw something off
then throw something on,
stir food on the gas,
and have no inkling
that at that instant
in the evening
I am floating a lamp for you
on the Ganga
from a boat in Banaras,
smearing my forehead
with a few
drops of the holy water.

I don't know
in honour of which god
people are dancing
near the bank.
Across me, on a stone
sits an English girl
I met on the train.
I can see her but she cannot see me
as I have now placed your lamp
on the waters of the Ganga
and in the boat
I sit in complete darkness.

The boatman says something
I don't understand,
he falls silent
when I reach
for the money,
but starts speaking again -
perhaps the bank notes were not enough,
and he does not wait
for me to watch
your lamp float away
out of the darkness
into darkness.

János Háy (1960 -) poet, playwright, novelist, essayist, leading literary figure of his generation, plays music with his poetry readings. He comes from a rural background but lives and works in Budapest. He came to India in the 1980s and wrote this poem on a visit to Varanasi.

Translations by Vijaya Shankar Varma

GOWHAR YAQOOB

Three Poems

PAINT ME

Paint me into a long shadow
silhouette of a full length curve
devoid of khaki greens.
Paint me in the dark
when mysteries are at work.
Paint me with saint's blood
then wash with snow -
do not forget
to stain my soul with your blood
and freeze your memory under my skin.

INSECT'S LIFE

(un)like the river
I crawl
An insects' life
On the snow, under the sand,
Between the pebbles, in the shallow waters
Giving away life to exhaustion
And (not) remembering where?
I am the longing of my wriggling
pain; and memory of distance
drenched in shadows
I suck the earthliness
of whichever land I crawl upon!

Post Cards of a Stranger

I
I am a
stranger
who wishes to become
familiar
with the clear skies
drowned in the arms of
dark night
melting away in
solitude.

II
Certain familiarity
comes with
time
At times with
deeper sense of
abandonment .

III
Come inside my
blood O mist
You carry within
you
the delusions of
familiarity .

IV
There are numerous stories
lying under my armpits
un-willing to open up
the burial
where the language of
familiarity is dropped.

V
I am still a
stranger

Perhaps I never had
a vocabulary of
familiarity
Everyday the floating
clouds carry the
message of memory
can I be contemplative .

VI
Little I could clasp
in my fist
even a water drop-let
escaped into the
metaphor of unfamiliarity.

VII
If I were to live on this
green moss will it heal the
sores ?
Even the wind that sounds
like sermons to pines and
cedar has lost the rhythm
of valor.
Were these butterflies to witness
martyrdom -
the clouds wouldn't kneel
down.

There are old graved under the pebbles.
Who doesn't wish to be delirious?

VIII
It's a gray morning
and the mist has archived
permanence over
my shoulders.
Sometimes the long stretch
of silence is broken
by the loud rain

breaking on the tin roofs
where the burden of
(un) familiarity begins to
enter into my flesh.

IX
I am suffering
the delusions of
Strangeness .
The colors of familiarity
unsettle my vision
every now and then.
Here,
when I claim to know
all the hues on
color palette dried.
I am searching
for images on a line ...

X
I cannot run away
from the infinite darkness
which appears darker
and barren than the
silence of waiting .
I can smell the
Unfamiliarity -
how would one
behold it.

XI
Can there be summing up
except the affirmation
that I have begun to feel
the insignificance of
familiarity.

Four Poems on Shimla

K. SATCHIDANANDAN

NOT ONLY THE OCEANS

(Shimla, December, 2015)

Not only the oceans,
mountains too have their secrets.

You will say the laughter
you hear from afar
is the sound of waterfalls.
No, it is seven fairies laughing.

These little crisscrossing pebbly
paths are ways that lead you
to different worlds. You may reach
the netherworld or the world of the dead.

Those wild paths that go up may
lead you to the Moon or Mars or Heaven.

Don't mount those horses:
The black ones will take you to the Middle Ages
and the white ones to solitude.

Did you see that blue bird?
It was a violinist in its last birth
and that brown bird was a drummer-
just as this white stone here
was a star.
The people here
call salvation water.

It is at night that nothingness,
beasts and ghosts come out.
The ghosts are mostly
of the White who once ruled here.
Don't be scared, they are no more;
only their guns live on.
Go through that tunnel,
and you will reach Hell.
That is where the subjects live.
They have been weaving
a blanket for centuries.
When it is done, this place
will come to an end.

This posture of the earth,
lying on her back,
eyes closed, knees in the air,
is an invitation.
You cannot refuse it
nor accept it.

None who came here has gone back;
and, as for her,
she never parts her legs.

I SPEAK TO MY GLASS

(Shimla, March, 2016)

Alone I sit in this valley of crickets
in the fog spreading
like frozen moonlight.
This house-gecko does not
understand Malayalam,
so I speak to my glass that
knows many languages.
It winks at me and tells me:
'Your time is not far'
I feel like flinging it down
and scream, 'Yours too',
But I restrain myself.
Instead like a beloved
I raise it to my lips, and intoxicated,
forget I am alone.

'Anand re...' Ulhas Kashalkar sings an *abhang*
in Bhairavi. Accompanied by the orchestra
of the future, assuring me that death happens
only in the present.

Pushing open the door I had locked from inside,
you and wind and rain rush in. You sit on my lap,
I play you like a *veena* in *yaman kalyan*.
Lightning or death can no more frighten me.
I will rise again and again in your love,
like the morning sun that reddens
that nameless flower below.

Marlon James's novel on my settee
opens by itself and the slain Bob Marley
descends its pages and sings: ' Rise up!
Stand up! Stand up for your rights!'

'Is it the right to love?', you ask. 'Yes,
That too is a right. And to sing. And dream.
Dreams have no constitution.'

I want to live. Until the earth is covered
with green feathers. Until that parrot sings
this time about Ravan who was
ready to die for his love.

I WALK INSIDE A CLOUD

(Shimla, July, 2016)

I walk inside a cloud
like the moon walks at times,
and at times, Michel Jackson.
The valley's breeze caresses me
like mother does at times
and at times, a banana leaf.
Red flowers glisten on the hilltop
like desire does at times
and at times Ashan(1)

I tread softly;
on the mountains, every stone is a goddess

While wondering if this violet flower
would turn pink if I name it 'love',
there appears before me :
a dancing blue waterfall.
'Leela'(2), she says, ' I am the eternal beloved'
'You are death', I say, 'a blue Menaka'.

She disappears into the mist with a scream;
only a light remains.

It is because I write in that dim light
that my poems become fireflies
with a dark present
and a bright future.

Now light may be.
That may be the beginning,
the genesis we always insisted
was not this , not this.

The story is yet to begin,
inside the cloud.

I am a Yaksha(3),
you won't understand my language.

Notes: (1) Kumaran Ashan, a great metaphysical rebel poet
of Kerala's renaissance (2) Leela, one of Ashan's famed female
protagonists(3) Yaksha is an otherworldly being.

MEDITATIONS: SHIMLA

(Shimla, September, 2016)

1. The Monologue of the Rock

Once I was in the Pacific:
among seahorses and coral reefs.
I was flung into the solitude of the shore
as the continents began to drift apart.
The secrets of the earth
lie engraved inside me, layer upon layer.

Wearing a flower I become goddess;
trampled upon, the outcaste woman.

When you sharpen your weapons
on me, I bleed.

I make no distinctions
between love and prayer.

I have in me the sea and the sky:
beginning, evolution, end.

This umbrella cannot
save you from my questions.

2. This Flower

I didn't know until yesterday
the colour of forgetting is violet.
And man's tendency to name everything
won't lead him anywhere.

3. Snow

I was the first-born.
I covered
all the languages.

Letters were revealed
as sunbeams melted me
They turned into trees and beasts,
thoughts and images.

I still stick to languages:
rendering them translucent.

(All poems translated from Malayalam by the poet)