

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.