

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.