

Poems from **River and Bridge** (Delhi: Rupa, 1995/ Toronto: TSAR Press, 1996)

River and Bridge

Trees on the other side of the river  
so blue, discarding light into water, a flat  
white oil tank with HESS in black, a bridge  
Holzer might skim with lights - I will take her  
down before she feels the fear - no sarcophagus here:

I have come to the Hudson's edge to begin my life  
to be born again, to seep as water might  
in a landscape of mist, burnished trees,  
a bridge that seizes crossing.

But Homer knew it and Vyasa too, black river  
and bridge summon those whose stinging eyes  
criss-cross red lights, metal implements,  
battlefields: birth is always bloody.

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Elephants in Heat

Soon after we met  
you sent me a book  
it had many pictures of elephants

I saw a male beast  
scorched by stove fire  
belly and curling tail stacked  
with precise flesh  
eyes irregular in passion.

On the margins faced in red,  
two others sporting,  
a female down below  
licked by waterlilies,  
buoyant in the curlicues of waves.  
I used to make up nightmares as a child

so mother would come in  
and lift me up,lips wet  
in all that moonlight.

I saw elephants in heat  
crawl over garden trees  
the myna's nest slipped loose,  
it clung to ivory

The sky was colored in blood  
as in this painting  
Elephant on a Summer Day  
Bundi School, circa 1750.

I wonder what it knew  
that painter's eye  
seared by a fullness we cannot seize  
in stanzas stone or canvas  
short of stark loss

Our wiry bounding lines  
silks and weathered ivories  
scored by the Kerala sun

Thinned and dissolved  
into desire's rondures  
mad covenant of flesh

A beast unpacking  
delight from his trunk  
your tongue scorching mine  
undercover this spring season

As sulphur bubbles from limestone  
and the unquiet heart  
like the pale monkey in the painting  
takes it all in.

