

## Brother Boatman's Ballad

[Translation of Chandrasekhar Kambar's "Ambigarannana Lavani," from the collection *BelliMeenu* (Fish of Silver) first published in 1989]

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1.

In the limpid water of the river, the Moon  
Swims like a fish of silver, he said  
To cast his net and catch the Moon,  
The young boatman set off then.

"All over the skies, storm clouds are gathering  
Thunder clouds roar and roam above  
Waters of deluge, water, water, everywhere  
Don't go to the river, young lad!"

Something beyond words beckons me, waves its arms  
Come, mount this peak of pleasure  
So, I must storm the palace of light  
And the Moon will surely be mine.

2

It was always bluer than blue,  
Why did the sky do this today?  
The grinning horizon moved away in horror  
What lurks in the corners of the world now?  
The shining stars have turned to coal  
Ah, the burnt smells of scorched dreams!

What shouldn't have happened had happened already  
The same water, the same wind—they let you down

Pushed you into the depths of the river  
The bronze hands of gods raised to bless  
Had simply turned cold

3

Brother Boatman,  
When your boat filled with dreams  
Plunged into the river,  
You made the treasures of the depths  
Rise to the surface, brother!  
Brother Poet, you sang the songs  
Of the sparkly swimming fishes  
To fill the desolate waters, brother!  
Into those flashy waves like burnished weapons,  
You thrust your boat, chased the storm with the rainbow,  
Went hunting the Moon, Brother Hunter!  
You rowed as if you were fighting the last battle with an unseen enemy  
What happened to that strong will now?  
You who tamed the waters,  
You who sowed dreams in those waters  
Brother Boatman,  
We never thought you would drown  
Even the gods weren't on our side  
The river did not know what it had done.

You looked like someone  
Laughing at yourself  
For having failed to mock  
A consummate actor  
Who could mime the Eternity!  
But the river flows without a care  
Choking the neck of the narrow

Path between the hills

4

This is not death but thirst  
To flow like lightening.  
The thirst to glow and scratch an unforgettable mark  
On the heart of Time, before you disappear forever.  
Not death, but the thirst  
Of those immortal dreams!

5

Whether or not you found  
What you set off to find  
Your fame isn't like tamarind  
Washed and wasted in water—  
You gave the rusty idols of gods  
Eyes filled with light  
You gave us ears to listen to this ballad of yours.  
Gave a heart to envy  
Gave joy to the God of Water  
You gave this river the stamp of epic dignity  
To the drowned boat,  
To the drifting oar,  
To the bones scattered on the riverbed,  
To the first rain drops,  
To the kiss of the spray  
And to the sighs of the smoky clouds,  
You gave them all a place in this great epic story.

The river flows without a care,  
Your dreams have grown big, and they come floating by.  
You rest now, my captain!