

I make out my report: "The characters
 Are stock, the emotional line somewhat
 Naive . . ." I stop, and put down
 My pen — who after all am in the same boat.

Stewart Conn

The Dhobi Poem

In the morning the washed
 undergarments smelled of water
 in the road-side ditches and
 thin bamboo poles fixed
 crosswise over the whole of the land of India.
 A sagging jute cord supported
 the monsoon sky, binding
 all fears into
 a prayer of no more rain.

The indigo applied to the white
 clothes was going thinner in the drizzle.
 Coins had changed their faces
 and markings and worth in the local bazar.
 Rumbblings in the sky and lightning
 hastened him on the
 beating-stone in the dhobi-ghat, for ages.
 Price of indigo was still going higher.
 The milk-goat had died last winter.
 Kanwali will have to wait another
 year for her golden bangles.

For centuries
 cross-legged
 the dhobi sits
 thinking of the rising prices of
 indigo and lamenting
 the death of the Sun-god.

Feroz Ahmed-ud-din