

Ganga

soft white sand warms orange
like turmeric under a bright Indian sun
(a sun greater than of the West)

dupattas, saffron waterfalls,
flutter over bronze necks as women
wade in sacred water, chanting lilting songs

maaf kar dijiye—forgive us—
their voices float sweetly on the jasmine breeze
silver *bangles* chime on slender wrists

beside them on the shore of
river Ganga, feet bare in the soft sand,
a solitary man bows his head

he dips trembling palms in holy water,
face golden in the all-consuming sun,
and whispers *prabhu—daya kijiye*
lord—have mercy