

LASAN GARLIC ਲਸਣ

In a distant country  
When you come across a compatriot  
You're thrilled to the bones  
Your eyes and your hands reach out to him  
And a chain of words is formed

I came on it once, the Punjabi word Lasan ਲਸਣ  
written up on a huge billboard  
For women farm workers  
In a far-flung corner of California  
And I felt

My language had welcomed me  
Shaken my hands  
Embraced me  
Wished me good luck  
For a moment the taste of the word  
Lasan was like  
A sugar lump on my tongue

Only words die  
As a fish dies out of water  
They lose their meanings  
And gather new ones  
Here the word Lasan means –

Fifteen dollars a day  
Bricks of the house  
Ticks of the clock  
A crane left behind in anguish  
Gold ornaments  
dresses and rings  
The deep troubled waters of greed and indulgence

And very few fish escape the net.

*[Translated from the original in Punjabi with Amin Mughal and John Welch*