

Srinjay Chakravarti

At Viper Island

The British colonial rulers had used the open jail on Viper Island, near Port Blair in the Andamans, to imprison convicts and freedom fighters. The island still has the ruins of a gallows atop a hillock, where condemned prisoners were hanged.

The black-tarred prows
of the fishing boats
are slick with the moon's
silver blood.

A stench of rotting garbage,
this miasma of decay,
hangs like an invisible shroud
over the old harbour.

Decapitated torsos of clouds
drift across the night sky,
like viscous ectoplasm
inhabited by forgotten ghosts.

The stars, blinded with pain
and memories of another age,
look down with their
blank, unseeing eyes.

A wind, garrotted,
gargles with a sore throat
on the haunted hill.

The sandbanks glitter
in the pointillist darkness.
Pinpoints of light,
dripping from the distant town,
congeal into shining drops.

And the moon,
guillotined by the coming storm,
rolls away in the inky waves,
into the sea's thick oily blackness.

About the author: Srinjay Chakravarti is a writer, journalist and translator based in Salt Lake City, in Kolkata, India. His book *Occam's Razor* (Writers Workshop, Calcutta: 1994) received the Salt Literary Award from John Kinsella in 1995. He has won first prize (US \$7,500) in the Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Memorial Poetry Competition 2007–08.