



## LOOKING STUPID

Monday, January 29, 2018 – Bagodara (India) Nal Sarovar Link Road

22.703181,72.145592

«Those are very common birds. They fly around everywhere.»

The man must have swum 500 meters through a sea of robust barley ready for harvesting in order to find out why I had my taxi stop, why I got out and walked back to his fields. When he arrived, he was gasping for breath and sweating – as if he was afraid that I would disappear into thin air before he reached me.

«What you do here?» he panted.

«I'm watching these birds,» I said and pointed at a couple of black sparrows sitting in front of us on the blossoming field of dill.

«What's so special about them?»

«How gracefully they hold onto the thin stalks, as if they had no weight at all.»

«All birds can do that.»

«But how lovely it looks, these small black bodies in the radiant sea of yellow through which the green stems shimmer from below, no, flicker almost electrically.»

«There are fields like that everywhere.»

«I know, but this one here, right now, doesn't it look like a sheet of music? The heads that gently sway back and forth with the wind. The stalks the birds are sitting on move differently, slower, more clumsily. It has rhythm. Isn't that a melody?»

I realize that I have overtaxed the man. He probably does not know what a sheet of music is. When he looks at his fields, he is presumably only interested in the plants' stage of maturity or the price per kilogram he will get for his dill or his barley. Now, in many fields one sees farmers who are simply standing around as if they wanted



to watch the plants grow until they are ready for harvesting. They are probably keeping an eye on them so that nothing goes wrong at the last moment. Others are mowing the edges of their plots with a sickle or are cutting out stalks that have already matured.

I realize that I have also overtaxed myself. I do not really see a sheet of music; I do not hear a melody when I look at this «symphony in yellow,» as the spirit of the calendar sheet would probably call this scene. During my journey across India, how often have I already been asked what I am doing at this or that place? How often have I tried to find words that might explain why I am standing here looking stupid? And I have almost always noticed that I do not even really know myself; that I cannot explain, that I have no compelling reasons to

gape at the world here and now. And yet as insufficient as they might be, for me words are the only possibility to maneuver a couple of trubs into the vitreous fluid of experience – buoys along which my thoughts can make their way.

But these words always make for a certain disillusionment. Do they take away the world's magic? In the same way that they sometimes take away art's magic? Is silence perhaps the only thing that befits beholding?

«Okay,» the man suddenly says, tilts his head, and looks out into his vast field. «Okay, I can see the melody.»

Translated from German by Rebecca van Dyck.

The German version of this text has first been published in *ProgrammZeitung*, March 2018, p. 18.