

BIRENDRA CHATTOPADHYAY

HERE LIES YOUR MOTHERLAND A SELECTION OF POEMS

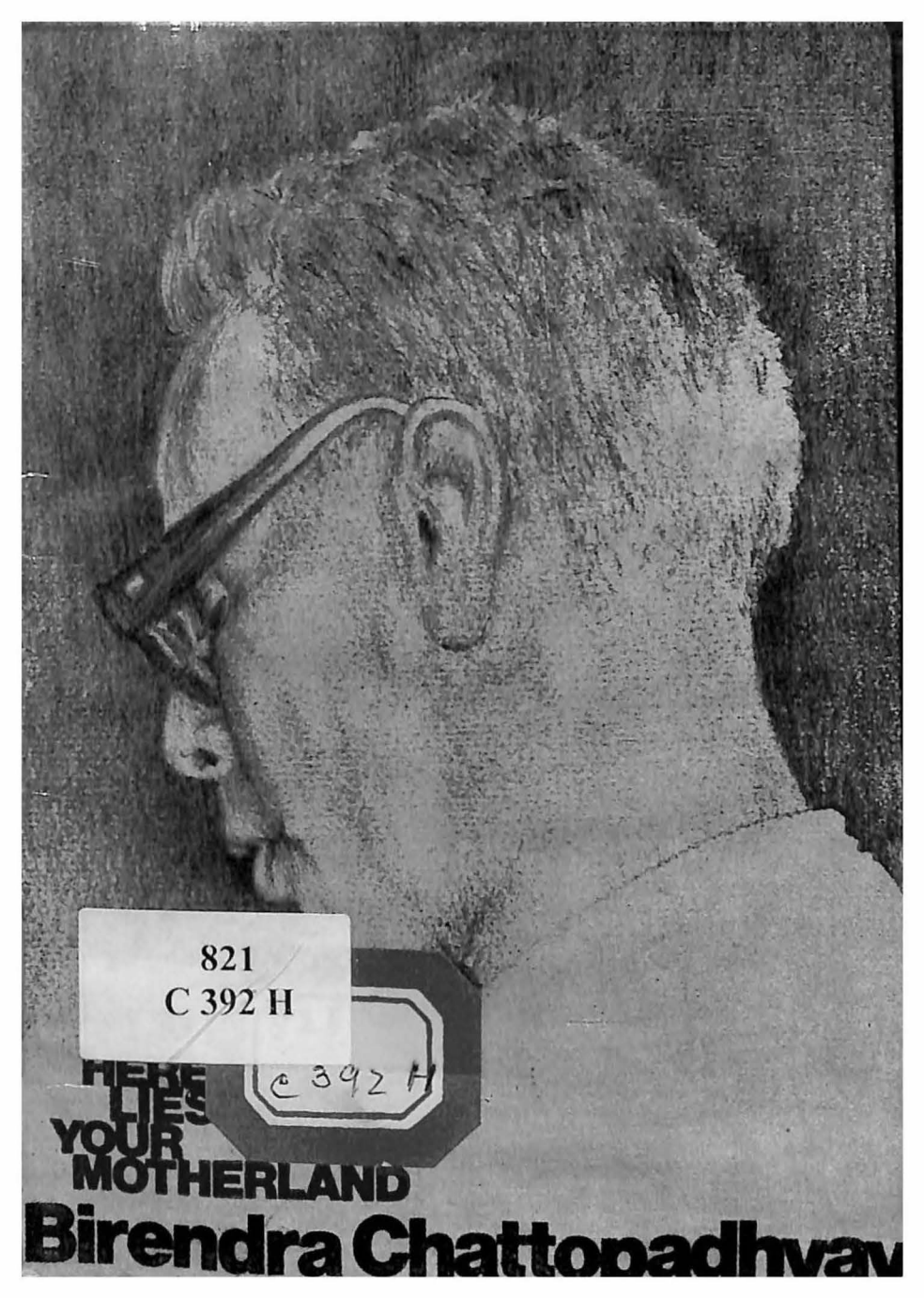
Birendra Chattopadhyay not only contributed relentlessly to the expanding universe of modern Bengali poetry, but created a distinguished place for himself. He was no mere observer, but one who identified himself with the forces that were consciously oriented towards bringing about a revolutionary change in society. In fact, from the early seventies, he had become the standard bearer of the revolutionary literary movement in West Bengal.

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HERE
LIES
YOUR
MOTHERLAND

Birendra Chattopadhyay

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BIRENDRA CHATTOPADHYAY

HERE LIES YOUR MOTHERLAND

A SELECTION OF POEMS

TRANSLATED BY

NILANJAN DUTTA

First Published : December 1985

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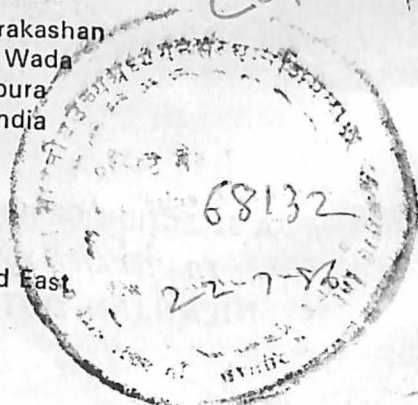
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Birendra Chattopadhyay : Life and Work

Birth : 2 September, 1920, at Bikrampur, Dhaka.
Death : 11 July, 1985, in Calcutta. Parents : Harendra-nath Chattopadhyay and Surabala Debi. Education : Schooling in Jagadbandhu Institution and Ripon Collegiate School, Intermediate Degree from Ripon College, Calcutta. Served in the Dhakuria Banking Corporation, Bagha Jatin School and Tippiara Tea Corporation. Married in 1944. Received several literary awards, viz. Ultorath Award, 1961, Narsingh Das Memorial Award, 1981 and Rabindra Puroshkar (Tagore Award), 1982. Survived by his wife, Rani Chattopadhyay, two sons and three daughters.

Books : Grahachyuta (Exiled from the Planet), 1942, Petrol O Anyanya Kobita (Petrol and Other Poems), 1943, Natun Mash (New Month, with Pijush Bandyopadhyay), 1943, 26 January (with Naren Sengupta), 1945, Ranur Janya (For Ranu), 1951, Ulukharer Kobita (Poems of the Lay), 1954, Mrityuttirna (Transcending Death), 1956, Jataka. 1958, Sabha Bhenge Gele (When the Meeting Breaks), 1964, Teen Paharer Swapna (Dream of Three Hills), 1964, Mukhe Jodi Rakta Othe (If Blood Spills Into Your Mouth), 1964, Visa Officer Samne (In Front

Of The Visa Office), 1967, *Mahadever Duar* (The Gateway Of Shiva), 1967, *Ora Jatai Chakkhu Rangai* (However Red Their Eyes May Be), 1967, *Ratri Shivaratri* (Night, Shiva's Night, with Ateen Majumdar), 1967, *Ei Hawa* (This Wind, with Arun Bhattacharya) 1968, *Rabindranath Kishore Sahitya* (Tagore's Writings for the Young, a collection of articles, with Arabindo Poddar), 1970, *Sreshtha Kobita* (Best Poems, a selection), 1970, *Mundaheen Dharguli Alhade Chitkar Kare* (The Truncated Bodies Cry Out in Joy), 1971, *Amar Raja Habar Spardha* (My Audacity To Be The King), 1972, *Rastay Je Hente Jai* (The Man who Walks on the Road), 1972, *Jaluk Sahasra Chira Ahoratra E Parai O Parai* (Let a Thousand Funeral Pyres Burn Night and Day in This or That Locality), 1973, *Shei Manushti Je Fashal Faliéchilo* (The Man Who Raised The Crop, translations), 1973, *Manushkheko Baghera Baro Lafai* (The Maneaters Pounce), 1973, *Ei Janma, Janmabhumi* (This Life, My Motherland) 1973, *Vietnam : Bharatbarsha*, 1974, *Bahaba Samay, Tor Circuser Khela* (Bravo, Time, Your Acrobatics, a selection), 1974, *Prithivi Ghurchhe* (The Earth Revolves), 1975, *Sheet Bashanter Galpa* (The Story of Winter and Spring), 1976, *Mahaprithiveer Kobita* (Poems Of The Earth, translations), 1977, *Collected Poems, Vol. I*, 1977, *Benche Thakar Kobita* (Poems of Keeping Alive), 1978, *Dibash Rajaneer Kobita* (Poems of Day and Night), 1978, *Nirbachita Kabita* (Selected Poems), 1980, *Bhata Porlo Machhi* (A Fly In the Rice, with Samsul Haque) 1981, *Ar Ek Arambher*

Janya (For a New Beggining), 1981, *Collected Poems, Vol. II*, 1981, *Collected Poems, Vol. III*, 1982, *Ek Je Chhilo* (Once There Was, a book for children), 1982, *Shottor Ashir Kobita* (Poems of Sixties And Seventies, with Shobhan Shome), 1983, *Uccharan* (Pronunciation, with Manash Roy Chowdhury), 1983, *Amar Kobita* (My Poems, a selection), 1984, *Amar Jagger Ghora* (My Sacrificial Horse, with Manibhushan Bhattacharya), 1984, *Athacha Bharatbarsha Tader* (Yet India Belongs To Them) 1985, *Kishore Bichitra* (A Selection For The Young), 1985, *Afuranta Jibaner Michhil* (Unending Rally of Life, published posthumously), 1985.

Edited publications : *Rakte Bhasha Mukh* (Blood-Bathed Face, an anthology of poems, co-editor Ateen Majumdar), *Amar Bangla* (My Bengal. poems), *Kalpurush* (Poems dedicated to Rabindranath Tagore) *Jibanayan* (Poems dedicated to Jibanananda Das), *Bhorer Nakshatra* (The Morning Star, poems dedicated to Madhusudan Dutt, co-editor Arun Bhattacharya), *Khara Pahar Beye* (Climbing up the Steep Mountain, poems dedicated to Lenin), *Bhaier Mukh* (Brother's Face, poems, co-editor Dakshinaranjan Basu), *Durgam Giri Kantar Maru* (Terrain Unsurmountable, poems dedicated to Kazi Najrul Islam), *Amal Manush* (The Unblemished Man, poems dedicated to Maxim Gorky), *Manusher Naame* (In the Name of Humankind, poems against communal riots), *Vietnam* (poems) *Manusher Adhikar* (The Rights of Man, poems demanding political

prisoners' release), *Rabindranath : Uttarpaksha* (collection of articles on Tagore's heritage), *Madhusudan O Uttarkal* (collection of articles on the heritage of Madhusudan Dutte), *Samay Asamayer Galpa* (Timely and Untimely Stories, collection of short stories), *Bratya Padabali* (Verses of the Fallen, poems, *Amra Je Gan Gai* (The Songs We Sing, poems), *Chiriakhana* (The Zoo, poems for children). He published many issue-based poem-pamphlets besides these and had been the joint-editor of *Uccharan*, a literary journal,

Compiled by : **Subrata Rudra**

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

About The Author

Birendra Chattopadhyay ; Poet ; Born : Dhaka, September 2, 1920 ; Died : Calcutta, July 11, 1985.

This bio-data would not make a person significant if one does not know what he stood for in his society and time. Birendra Chattopadhyay not only contributed relentlessly to the expanding universe of modern Bengali poetry, but created a distinguished place for himself. The four decades over which his life as a poet was spread were marked by a constant turmoil and transition in the society of Bengal. The quality most distinguishable in the poetry of Birendra Chattopadhyay was his ability to react to the events that marked these turmoils. He was no mere observer, but one who identified himself with the forces that were consciously oriented towards bringing about a revolutionary change in society. From this standpoint, he broke the police cordon and suffered imprisonment in 1967, wrote piercing poems and prose pieces decrying the massacre of revolutionary youth by the State in the early seventies, raised an almost lone voice of protest among the elder intellectuals of Calcutta against the Emergency, campaigned wholeheartedly for

release of the political detainees and joined with his inspiring poems in numerous rallies and meetings, including the 'risky' ones. In fact, from the early seventies onwards, Birendra Chattopadhyay had become the standard bearer of the revolutionary literary movement in West Bengal. The revolutionary fervour of his poetry was intricately entwined with his romantic perception of nature and human relationship. These two aspects were not counterposed for the poet who believed till his death that "the core of humanity must remain unblemished even in the midst of hell". These qualities elevated his poetry to sublimity, and even the literary 'Establishment' with which he had never compromised, was compelled to recognise him as a great poet. He was felicitated with the prestigious 'Tagore Award' and had been often referred to as 'the greatest refuge of Bengali poetry since the death of Jibanananda Das'

About this selection

The day the news of the sudden demise of Birendra Chattopadhyay came, I, like many young people deeply attached with him through personal acquaintance as well as through his work, could feel the earth shivering below my feet, and a terrible void engulfing me.

A couple of weeks later, Mr. K. V. Ramanna Reddy and Mr. Varvara Rao, noted revolutionary poets of Andhra, requested me to translate a few poems of Birendra for them. Mr. Buddhadeb Chattopadhyay, the younger son

of the poet, insisted me to do some more translations and came out with the idea of bringing out a book of Birendra's poems translated into English. I took the task upon myself, thinking that through this I would be paying my tributes to the great poet. I do not know how far I have been successful.

In consultation with Buddhadeb, I have selected the poems which, perhaps, would help the reader to visualise the dimensions of the space of Birendra's poetic expression. The poems have been arranged chronologically by combining the dates given by the poet himself, and, in cases where the poems had been undated, the dates of their first publications in books. The latter has been indicated in the present selection by square-brackets. The poems which Birendra wrote from his death-bed have been put in a separate section. They seem to form a distinct group, and are very important for understanding the direction of evolution of the poet.

Acknowledgements

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Prof. Rathindranath Chattopadhyay, the poet's brother, and Prof. Kunal Chattopadhyay, my friend, who have gone through the translations with great care, put forward important suggestions and helped in many other ways. I am also grateful to Mr. Buddhadeb Chattopadhyay, Mr. K. V. Ramanna Reddy and Mr. Varvara Rao, whose support has greatly encouraged me.

Nilanjan Dutta

PUBLISHER'S NOTE :

At last our attempts have been successful. For the first time it has been possible for us to offer a full-fledged translated work of Birendra Chattopadhyay's poems to our readers. It is proper on our part to say right now that the poems included in this volume are in no way the best poems of Chattopadhyay. we should say that we have chosen some of Chattopadhyay's best poems. We could not publish more of such poems for reasons of paucity of space. It may be possible for us to collect more of such poems and publish them in another anthology. It is not expected that the publisher should say anything about the nature of Chattopadhyay's poems—how far these are connected with the happiness and frustrations of common people and how much these are vociferous against the tortures and humiliations of common people. We leave those judgments to our readers. We are sure that the prudent judgements of our readers will enable us to formulate our future plans and programmes.

It would never be possible to publish this book by individual endeavour. We have received valuable advices and inspirations from Sri Abaniranjan Roy of *Kathasilpa*, Sri Ranjit Dev of *Uccharan*, Sri Suren Dutt of *New Book*

Centre, Sri Anil Acharya of *Anushtup* etc. Apart from them poets like Sri Samir Roy, Sri Kanchankumar, Sri Kamalesh Sen, Sri Mihir Chakraborty, Sri Sumit Chattopadhyay, Sri Bipul Chakraborty, Sri Ratnangshu Bargi and many others have helped us in different ways in our process of publication of this book. We are grateful to all of them.

We have nothing more to say about Sri Nilanjan Dutta, the translator of this book, who is an active member of the mass and cultural movements. This young friend of ours is very closely acquainted with the poems of Chattopadhyay. It is our belief that the spirit of Chattopadhyay's poems has been fully retained in this translated work.

In conclusion we are naturally very happy in shouldering the responsibility of publishing this book. We have tried our best to make the book faultless. If, in spite of all our efforts, there are mistakes, we offer our sincere apologies for them.

Buddhadeb Chattopadhyay

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In Front Of The Visa Office

They took two different roads.
As long as they could stare
At each other's face, they had waited.

One said in a mute voice,
Adieu !
The other silently suffered
In the parting of his step-brother.

Two faces carved in granite
Two pairs of eyes, expressionless and pale,
Felt the tide in a hidden stream of blood
And remembered the dead father in equal right.

If now, on such a day
That face comes in mind again, the blood
Swells with the pangs of long absence,
Where would two brothers meet ?
At which crossroads ? The sky
Is divided by the wall.

1958

Through A Cracked Mirror

Through a cracked mirror the face of a poet
Seems monstrous.

The new apparels slap and
Pierce him with old nails
Howl like ugly beasts,
And some people make songs
By tearing his body into pieces.

The face of a poet in his forties
Groans like a beaten wolf and wants to live.

1960

Mask

Haven't you ever thought, that a mask
Is not something you wear
To hide your face? Instead
There is perhaps
Nothing a man can really call his face.

Try to tear the mask ;
You will get your fingers bent
But ther'll be no change in the scenery.

July/August 1962

Remembering 'Julius Caesar'

There is someone else inside
Who has seen the terrible sights :
The birth of a lion-cub in the street,
 Blood in the east and the west
Blood in the north and the south ; the terrible
 cries of birth
Have been heard by someone else within the soul.

An owl, a night-rider
Screeched in the market-place,
And the dead came out of graves
To the nooks and corners of the parliament ;
Their bodies vomiting puss ;
And frenzy and hatred
Began to spread them on all sides.

In the sky, air, water and on land
Rained blood, the bodiless ghouls roared ;
There were killings and wailings ;

And as soon as they came to rest in the blood
Of a hundred thousand sacrificed animals,
It was found that all of them
Were without their hearts !

There is someone inside
Who asks you not to go out today.

1963

River Of The Dark Frontier

I can't see anything
When I go to drink water
From the river
That is darker than my weariness.

Yet as I hear it calmly
Chirrup
The strange expectations of my heart
Kneel down in prayer.

In the darkness of my palms
Shivers
An offering of tears I

1963

If Blood Spills Into Your Mouth

If blood spills into your mouth
You will sin if you utter it now.
The enemy is present everywhere,
The ministers are spending sleepless nights :
At such a moment you commit a sin
If you vomit blood ;
If you convulse in pain ;
If you lie still in a pool of your own blood.

April 1964

Despair

Where shall I keep these people
With their limbs fractured ?
Some of them are mad, showering only curses
Some point to their bellies and say "Give us food" ;
Some place their heads on railway tracks...

I can no longer bear these human beings in my breast.
But to be a poet one should bear the people
In his consciousness and within his blood.
If such corrupt and blockhead kings reign
Who can even make children lame
One must face the terrific tortures day and night.

No longer can I bear the fire, this terrible fire
In my heart.

[1964]

Soring Eyes

With these soring eyes
Read poems no more ;
Instead, look at the evening sky,
The birds of dusk, the weary clouds.

With these soring eyes
Go into the deep no more !

[1964]

The Strange Savour Of Rice

The strange savour of rice
Hangs in the night sky
Some people still cook rice
Serve rice, eat rice.

Ane we keep awake all night
Feeling the strange fragrance,
At prayer, all the night.

[1964]

Who Stares At The Face In The Mirror

Who stares at the face in the mirror,
Is it Lady Macbeth or Lear?

Whose house's burnt? Is that Hamlet's or of Othello?
Or is it Brutus ramming his head
Inside the heart of Caesar in dreadful darkness!

What a mirror is this, how strange
These faces, who are the owners of these houses?

[1964]

A Friend's Hand

If I touch I may be reborn
But in between
Lies the void of the air, and tears roll down
Like the yellow leaves in winter.

1965

The Beauty That Is Bengal

Tears, only endless tears
Wash away the marks of the kisses !
You've taken her in your arms in vain,
Her face is a sea of tears.

1966

The Funeral Pyre

The burning sky of the noon
Is spread above my head ;
Alas ! I took you for a tree
And slept on your lap !

13 November, 1967

Bengal, My Bengal

Where have you kept my heart
Prithoo, tell me I
All is lost,
That is the only extra
Ornament I have

To dream for a couple of days.

4 December, 1967.

Masks Of Dreadful Death

The masks of dreadful death
Glow in the rhythm of dance.

And we, in the lighted hall
Knowing there's no shelter or escape
Can't help the wailing of our hearts.

We know, after this
They'll shove us out of the floor.

[1967]

Never Did I

Never did I hear
A harlot cry, never saw
Through the door the light
On the pale faces of branded thieves,
Murderers and bastards

Never did I
Kissing their sins, resting my head at their feet,
Become pure.

I did not learn anything in life except jealousy, hatred and
The quarrels of the poets.

[1967]

If I Had Known The Soil

Instead of writing poems running thirty-six thousand lines
For all my life if I had
Sown a seed in the ground
Could father a plant that gives
Flowers, fruits and shade
Visited by the butterflies, fed on by the birds ;

Instead of writing poems running thirty-six thousand lines
If I had known the soil !

[1967]

My India

My India

Belongs to the fifty crore naked human beings
Who toil in the sun all day
And all night fail to sleep
For the pangs of hunger, and cold ;

In history, so many kings enter and exit
Jealousy and hatred
Pollute the sky, blacken the water ; with the smog
Gradually darkness descends in the air
There're conspiracies and the delirium of the greedy
everywhere
War and famine come kissing each other
The earth quivers under snakebites and fierce tigers'
clutches !

My India does not know them
She does not go by their decrees;
Through hunger, cold and lashing from every side
Her children still remain the children of God,
The first of kins to each other.

[1967]

For A Spoiled, Rotten Fruit

For a spoiled, rotten fruit
The beggars all stretch out their hands
'Give me, Give me, Give me'—
The sound like wild-fire spreads.
As soon as it's thrown, a riot starts ;
Who can control these riotous beggars ?

[1967]

This Darkness

Breathing is forbidden
Because the human beings in this darkness
To hide their faces from the slaughterhouses all around
Have to sit still six feet under the earth.
There is no window here
Not to think of a door,
Because if one lets in air from outside
Some people would turn Hindus and some Muslims.
Because an endless fire of hatred is raging everywhere.

[1967]

The Fire Of Paris Lights Up The World

(To Bethoven's Fifth Symphony)

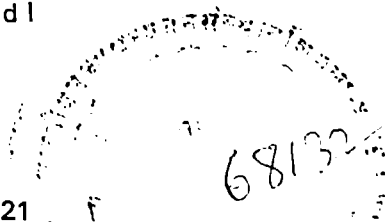
Crimson clouds dance. The possessed fears
Slowly, very slowly, with their shy eyes to the ground
Pass, like the untuned cacophony of the orchestra ;
All on a sudden the violin stops.

Then storm breaks out. Like Europa breaking down in
tears,
Tearing the red lotus from her breast and
Throwing alms from her eyes to the shanty's doors ;
Rages the orchestra !

The Louis of France trembles, shivers the Roman Empire ;
The Bastille, reddened by the blood of the hungry and
the naked,
Quivers ; flutes and sitars waver in a tremolo—
With the dreamy days of the Pope and the Tsar.

Singing out in unison, with cheers
A procession, by the fire of Paris, lights up the world ;
The symphony laughs aloud !

May, 1968



The Mask And The Face

Which is a mask, which is the face
Nothing can be seen clearly. I feel
Helpless as one feels after a terrible fever ;

Memories haunt my brain ; near the head,
Near the feet, my desires are dark
Like kisses of snakes ; and in sleep
My dreams cannot take breath.

6 July, 1968

Motherland Of The Naked

"The proletariat has nothing to lose, but his chains".

—Communist Manifesto.

We are standing on a strange land ;
I mean, we are trying our best to stand.
We do not know what is beneath this earth ;
Although if one places his ears on the ground,
He would hear a sound more grave
Than the hissing of a thousand serpents
That tells of a terrible end approaching near.

But we're not moving even one step
This way or that ; as if we are secure
By standing alone, and that's possible.
We stare at the church domes
And the massive pillars of the Stock Exchange
And know how noble is the Lord.
We are content to know that our country
Is sovereign, guarded by armed forces at the borders.

Although we can feel the fire underground ;
And see, there's nothing like a sky overhead.

22 July, 1968

Mayakovsky

In his voice was fire, so he
Sang out his heart at rally ;
In his heart was fire, so
He took the sun to his heart.

The sun had fire in it,
So he played with fire itself.

[1968]

Winds Of Change

From where does this wind come,
How far would it go ?

No doubt, a storm is raging,
But can only rely on the wind ?
Still, the word 'people' carries
An incomprehensible power
And it can now be heard clearly behind the wind.

It is my trust
That they will reach somewhere in the end.

[1968]

Tribute Of Blood

Hard is the rite of the sun,
So I don't keep awake writing poems in the night.
Yet I do not know whether poetry
Can be anything but hymns to the sun today.

To the trees of dawn and the rivers of dusk I ask...
They remain silent... Only the noon demands
a tribute of blood.

3 August, 1969

In My Heart

Even though it's pitched dark outside
I can hear the rain drizzle in my heart;
Like the children reaching out for water
Thinking the night has ended in the world
washed by tears.

23 August, 1969

The Blood-Stained Mask

The leaves of green trees
Inhaling the smell of gun-powder,
Hearing the lame lion's roar
Vomit
Curses of the black people ;
The soil
Turns red when thousands of embryos
Cry ..

A dumb sun
Rises with a huge unfurled banner
In its hand ;
Africa
Like the *Yakshas'* treasures
Guards its blood-stained mask.

2 October, 1969

The Pledges

You had touched the fire
That's why
There's winter in your blood ;

The pledges
Are a grand display of dead flowers !
You
Had touched the fire ;

Now
There's a tremendous fear !

[1969]

To A Poet Who Has Been Murdered

(In memory of Saroj Dutta and Ashu Majumdar)

Are the executioners of the Time
Who play with this century's blood and mire
Rejoiced to slay you like a beast?
Or is it that the security of the State
Wants a sacrifice of the poet's heart?

Peace then ! Whose peace ? A thousand dogs loiter
In the famined, yet regal Bangal

Humming courtly tunes, chanting artificial verses—

You are dead ! For so long a time
Not a single poem did you write. For long
Wearing tattered clothes, like a mad, you
Roamed in the country of the naked and the starved—
So you are dead—you've shed your clothes; your sins...

10 September, 1971

All Night Lenin

Lenin does not sleep
He does not let us sleep

In his grave he lies
But still, a thousand Lenins
March with us all night

Lenin does not sleep.
He does not let us sleep.

Where mothers wipe their tears
And the mist trembles like a child,
All night, a thousand Lenins
Sit beside them sleepless

Lenin does not sleep.
He does not let us sleep.

[1971]

On The Pavements Of Calcutta

On the pavements of Calcutta one lakh mad
Hamlets spend their nights ;
While their mother, the land where they were born,
Mates with a naked beast.
The air stinks of a poisonous vomiting,
Ophelia floats in the water
Like the spoiled century's last dream and desire ..

One lakh Hamlets hear voices all night.
Ethereal, terrible voices!

October, 1972

Drunkenness

"I do not provoke, I am drunk"

I do not provoke. In the country that breeds death
The sparks of fire adorn the funeral ground.
Jackals laugh and hyenahs roar at a distance,
As the night grows, the eyes of tigers burn like ghostly
lights,
Spreading terror in the neighbourhood I Gradually
The heavy breath of the naked, their lamentations for rice
Become thinner and thinner, and pass out in the air...

I do not provoke. Instead, I search like a mad
The way to escape from this peace of the graveyard ;
These dreadful scenes, with both the hands I want to tear ;
But my hands are filled with the gruel I got by begging.
Whom can I show the way? What way?
"Freedom. cry Freedom"—my blood gets chilled as it's
stirred ;

A vapour of death makes me blind. Only glasses
Of wine bring me heaven, where the beast
called man is free,
Sings the songs of drunkards : "Who cares for
anybody else" ...

I put my arms around that drunkard, and dance,
And dream of a new life, perhaps, make some
slips of the tongue :
"In this hell the sons of God and stray dogs
Are equals—who shows bloody eye to whom I"

I do not provoke. When the liquor
Concentrates in my brain, I want to have a sound sleep,
Resting my head on the shoulder of any naked man,
And dream that I hunt a tiger with excellent marksmanship.
But sometimes in my dreams of horror, I cry :
“This constitution is fake ! Freedom ? Whose freedom is it ?”

When tip to toe is drenched in wine, dead-drunk,
I toss a dozen tumblers upside down to th' sky.

December, 1972

You

With what shall I compare ?

You

Are a sea of ice in sleep,
The endless blue sky awake !

All night the snowy peaks in my heart
All day the river where the sun rises ..

With what shall I compare ?

You

Are the watery clouds in sleep,
My motherland awake !

[1972]

The Rose Of The May Day

(To Rosa Luxemburg)

I saw the rose of the May Day bloom like a blood-bathed
dawn,

The executioner plucked her up.

I keep searching through the hell, heaven and earth ;
But find her nowhere, the first love since my birth :

She was a touchstone of fire : bared her breast with a
smile

Before the blood-shot eyes of the slayer : looking up
towards the sun,

With a stern indifference beyond any compare.

May Days come and May Days go, year after year
I look for her, the symbol of resurrection.

[1972]

Half

Half of the face is in the mirror
Half of the face is in your hand ;
Half of the face is flooded in sunshine
The other half is flooded in tears.

[1972]

The Man Who Walks On The Road

The man who walks on the road
Does he know, to whom does this road belong ?
Whose is this city ? This country...

Or does he think it belongs to all ! This road
Belongs to the king and the beggar alike ; this country
Belongs to Indira as well as to the wretched
People who spend their nights in jails ..

Shut up, you swine ! If you want to live
Leave this road alone and walk ; if you want to live
Forget the name of this city.
This country belongs to
The naked sleeping on pavements ; but not
To that naked wretch who keeps awake, looking towards
the sky.

[1973]

There Is No Man Inside

“Beware of Dog !”

**At the door
There is a dog,
Inside
There is no man...**

So beware !

[1973]

Prometheus

Do not be restive ;
Just be prepared !

Now, it's time to keep
Your eyes and ears open
And watch many a thing.

At this time
To lose your patience
Is to jump into fire.

Your task
Is not to go mad for the love of fire—
But to learn how to use the fire.

Do not be restive ;
Just, be prepared !

30 April, 1974

In The Rally

1.

In my front, back, left and right
Only a few old faces ;
And of those who are but teen aged
And of the mothers and sisters
of children long-lost in jails ..

2.

After a shower, the sky
Now looks up towards the sun. Their chorus
Is a bathing in sorrow and pledges.
They are now searching for those words and sounds
That can make the blood in our arteries
Deep and meaningful.
And yet, from the love filtered from their blood
When the words and sounds are born, raising fists to
the sky,
They are nothing but condemnations, hatreds, protests,
and demands
Of many a people in chains.
Yet they are more than that, because
There is no end to man's experience—
After swimming for days through the sea of blood,
man has known
That hatred is but another name for love ;
After stumbling night after night on the rocks of audacity,
Man has known, the other name of love is protest !

3.

Like a python, the convoy

Of black police-vans encircle them at their front and
in the rear.

They are only a few in number, since their old friends
Have forsaken them. But still they have taken to the
streets,

Remembering the faces of a thousand boys

And girls, bleeding from blows of a brute and mighty
power.

18 June, 1974

Mother Tells

Do not go that way, my child !
That's not a snake. but something more terrible ;
 —You are blind,
Can't you see,

The police is on the round !

[1974]

Here Lies Your Motherland, Waiting

If, in this truncated darkness, all four sides are mountains
of death

And fear, a hundred thousand armed policemen will prow!l
Making your blood chill, whichever way you go,
Maneaters'll roar and the prison camps'll
Turn red with blood inside barbed fences,

You'll find no one near. The gods are but masks
Or images made of straw; that would not turn,
Even in this hell...

And you, like a shadow, crawl on the ground
And hear the sound of boots
On this road or that! Still on the road,
For a thousand naked human beings like you
There's but one road, the one of tears
That's your home—wherever your eyes can reach;
You feel, here lies your motherland in the sea of blood,
Waiting...

[1974].

Portrait

To Karl Marx

Ever thought, what it is
To draw
The portrait
Of a man ?

Hold these, your brush
Colours and canvas !
I am a man, your subject
Do me a portrait, please !

Not an animal, not a divine being ;
Neither a slave, nor a slave-driver ;
Free among his free companions, he lives
The man within me ; draw his picture

He could do it.

[1974]

Your Security

I will hide you properly
In my veins and veinules
In the safest place
If you pledge to hold
Your humanity
That once I had given you myself
Like the red flag.
Before the evil spells that vomit
Inhumanity, conspiracy
And death...

Now my task
Is to foster you with care
In my arteries
Where I have staked my life to put to sleep
The volcano of my blood
For that day in the future
When the time would come,
When the rocks of darkness
As big as mountains
Would be uprooted, torn and drowned
By thousands of red flags
Flung high in an indomitable march—
And over the dead-bodies
Of people like you
Would be built a new humanity,
Its civilisation...

[1974]

New Confidence

Workers of the world, unite.'

—Communist Manifesto.

In fact, to be crucified isn't all ;
It means bleeding to the body of a human being
But nothing to those who pierce
That body with nails.

Instead, these generosities teach the deprived people
to be more humble.
And the lucky ones can donate a little more
to beautify the churches
So that to shed one's blood seems a noble deed
While in factories, mines, farms, temples and brothels
The human blood gradually becomes blacker.

In fact, to die on the cross is not all
We really need to break the cross to pieces.
The proletariat has nothing to lose but chains
But a lot to earn, in place of the trite beliefs
There is a confidence that will one day
Teach man the meaning of real religion

And that man certainly would not put on chains on legs,
In order to obey the commandments of God
Offer his neck towards a monstrous act of murder.

[1974]

In The Land Of Puck

(Remembering A Latin Proverb)

The mountains tremble in birth-pangs !

Now'll be born

Now'll be born

Now'll be born

A million giant rats, more savage than maneating tigers !

21 September, 1975

“Eppur Si Muove”

You order, and Galileo may write
The earth doesn't move at all

And yet, it moves in its orbit
However loud you may howl.

[1975]

Look At The Earth

Look at the earth, for once,
Look at the people.

The night has not yet ended,
Darkness lies like a heavy stone on your chest
You cannot breathe.
The sky with all its furies
Waits like a tiger to set its claws on you.

Push away that stone in whatever way you can
And in a calm voice tell the Fury of the sky
That you are not afraid.

The earth must turn into fire
If you can't make it yield
If you forget the rites of rain
You will leave your land a desert.
The one who cannot sing
Becomes dumb and blind when calamity comes.

Look at the earth, she is waiting,
Look at the people, they want to speak to you.

[1977]

Be Softly Born, Baby !

**'Silence !
The Court proceeds.'**

**A king passes
Another comes,
The noise's slight**

**'Silence !
Make no noise
Speak softly,
Very softly ! Look at the Emperor himself, how softly
He walks in the street !**

**'How softly speaks the Emperor himself,
We
Are very humble people.'**

**A new century
Is born out of another
Century.
—Be softly born, baby.
Beware ! Do not throw your limbs like that**

'In front of you is the Court !'

[1978]

A Poem On The Pavement

The naked urchin reaches for the sky.
Although his body burns in hunger
The pavement today bathes in the full moon—
The smiling moon kisses his forehead.

The mother covers her face, wiping tears.

1979

Lu Xun

Those who could have been very close
Turned their faces and said :
'Touch us not.'

Because he had questioned
His father.

22 May, 1982

The Boy

His father wasn't there, his mother wasn't there
His brother wasn't there, his sister wasn't there

Yet the boy
Was there, he kept alive—
There's earth below his feet
And the sky above,
Although he had no home to live
There's the road to walk on.

If roads were there, human beings were there
If men were there, there're countries
Although the eyes had no tears
The lungs had ample air to breathe

The boy
Kept alive—wanted to live
So that he could keep alive.

18 June, 1983

The Anger That Is Like Fire

Endow me no more
With the anger that is like fire
Endow me no more
With the hatred that is fuel to the fire.

Let the youths grab
My sacrificial horse
With tigers' courage in their eyes
Let them walk through the fire.

My time is past
So is my courage
The love that burns in hatred
Has deserted me.

From my world
The youths have gone to
Where there is life
Where there is poetry ..

September, 1983

To Write A Poem

In my right hand
The fingers are five in number ;
To write a poem
I do not need so many fingers

But the pen must remain unbroken.

[1983]

The Walls

Thinking man to be the greatest enemy of the world
Once the Chinese Walls were raised on all sides.

Who is the best friend of the world, then ?
The one who is pure through penance for centuries,
Holy. How strange ! Who is it but a human being !

The walls are falling apart, piece by piece,
The longest road for the humankind is now being made.

29 October, 1984

Young Poets

Words have forsaken me long ago
And yet, I want to say something more.

Young poets ! Come forward !
The world has not run out of words.
By the sound of your footsteps
I would know the road I must tread.

4 April, 1985

Poems From The
Death-Bed

11
12

13

•

At The Thakurpukur Cancer Hospital

The struggle is between death and man
Since victory and defeat are both in the lexicon
None would step back without a fight.

Not only the doctors and the nurses
Even people who are condemned to death know
There is no point to surrender.
With a firm conviction to drive away death
They too keep their footprints on the soil and the grass.
Some never return home, but those who can,
Sing for us the song of a new life.

17 April, 1985

Sad People

People who are sad
For human beings or a flower

They know life from hunger
And tell Death : 'We will never recognise you.
There's no place for you on our earth.'

If they see a dead bird on the ground
Around it they sing songs of rebirth.
There's sadness in it ; but without sorrow
Can one take love to the heart ?

20 April, 1985

Cancer Hospital

As soon as I step out I feel a gust of southern wind
And the people in the street all seem to be different.
When they sip their cups of tea and gossip about cricket or
politics

The whole world looks different.

I too, needed a cup of tea,
And then, crossing the road, the same old world
Where you play the game only to lose—
And yet, everybody knows, we too, that losing is not all ;

Sometimes we too win the match, making Death himself
step back.

22 April, 1985

You, Death

(To Dr. Bhoomen Guharay)

It is not true that Death doesn't wait for anyone.

Often he has to.

He knows, victory would be his in the end. But

some small defeats, to the indomitable will of Man

He must forbear. Man knows—he is not immortal,

But still he writes poems, sings, draws pictures,

And then, Death sitting beside his bed, gradually

Loses his patience and courage.

Death, you must learn to be patient and

give us time to get prepared !

Let us feel that the touch of your cold hand's

Not a frightening story.

On that day, keeping you in the forefront,

We shall commence our undestined journey,

Let us then tell our dear ones frankly

'He is unsurmountable, but we too haven't been beaten in
the game.'

24 April, 1985

To The Young Poets

From behind the clouds your faces are becoming clearer
I am happy. I can see some real human faces, and
touch them.

Teach us to be fearless, so that we
Can cross Death now blocking our way in front.

April, 1985

A Few Lines For Chitta

In my country
Once there were countless such people
Who used to kiss the foreheads of their children
And say : 'This world is yours, its pains and joys are yours,
too.'

Now the people I see
Have sadness following them like their shadows.
They keep themselves away from children
And tell them : 'By any means, let this world know
That you do not share its joy or sorrow.
What we had taught you once were all wrong I
You must learn everything afresh, even
How to put a mark of kiss on your children's faces.'

13 May, 1985

A Few Lines For B. C.

Why does he write his name

On stone

When the sun goes down ?

The stone is washed away by the river
The water

Recedes, he knew it

He knows ...

28 March, 1985 / Revised 25 June, 1985

A Poem For My Daughter

Flowers do not bloom throughout the year
Birds do not sing throughout the year.

Still, dream remains. The people we know
Stay near.

Even if flowers do not, human beings remain.

28 January, 1983 / Received 26 June, 1985

