

## Selected Poems of Sukanta Bhattacharya

[Sukanta Bhattacharya (1926-47) died three months before India gained political independence from British rule and most of his writings were published posthumously. He experienced the headiness of the anti-colonial movement and wrote copiously about deprivation and humiliation under colonialism as well as resilience and resolve of the colonised to attain freedom.]

### Kite

Sukanta Bhattacharya

*(Translation from Bangla by Amitendu Bhattacharya, Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, K.K. Birla Goa Campus, India.)*

Walking the streets, I suddenly see:  
A dead kite on the sidewalk.

I'm shocked to see its pitiable, terrible form.  
The one who, from a great height regarded  
This earth as its empire for plunder –  
Whose piercing gaze harboured  
Excessive greed and dreadful filching trait –  
I see it lying face down on the sidewalk.

This kite lived atop a dome,  
Announced itself with shrill cries,  
Spread its wings in a gentle breeze against the azure sky –  
Solitary, it soared above all other birds,  
Distanced indefinitely from the surface of the earth.

The kite is now dead.  
Many are safe today: the newborn mice  
And besieged walkers carrying foodstuffs.  
There's none today to swoop down and snatch.  
Just like the things it was wont to discard,  
The kite now lies fallen on the sidewalk –  
Shrivelled, cold, disfigured.

Those who clutched life-nourishing food  
Close to their breasts, now forge ahead, fearless,  
Leaving behind them, like a cruel gibe,  
The fierce kite that fell from the sky.

## Stairs

Sukanta Bhattacharya

*(Translation from Bangla by Amitendu Bhattacharya, Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, K.K. Birla Goa Campus, India)*

We are stairs.  
You beat down on us,  
Every day you scale great heights.  
Afterwards you don't even turn back to look at us.  
Our bosoms, blessed by the dust of your feet,  
Are bruised daily by the blows of your feet.

You know it well too:  
That's why you want to conceal  
The wounds on our breasts  
Under the carpet.  
You want to cover up the signs of your tortures;  
Want to muzzle the pride-amplified sound  
Of your despotic footsteps.

Still, we know:  
The marks of your blows on our body  
Will not be hidden from plain sight for ever.  
And, like Emperor Humayun, someday  
You too might tumble down the stairs.

## Volcano

Sukanta Bhattacharya

*(Translation from Bangla by Amitendu Bhattacharya, Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, K.K. Birla Goa Campus, India)*

Sometimes suddenly a thought strikes me:  
I'm a volcano, a lion after many sleepless days  
Slumbering in a tranquil deep dark cave.  
In between my eruptions, time and again  
You've ridiculed me.  
I'm made of stone,  
I've put up with it.

A faint smile on my lips,  
Amassed simmering lava in my breast.  
With eyes half-closed like a lion's,  
I keep observing how –  
With a foundation of falsehood  
And the mortar of fancy –  
Your city is built.  
Centring on me are the festivities  
In your unfeeling paradise;  
Jeering laughter and hatred's fireworks –  
Haughty full moon in your city.

Look, just look at me:  
Dense shady silent woods,  
Look at this serene sylvaninity.  
Your city ridicules me;  
Let it chip away my patience bit by bit.  
In no way do you believe  
I'm the sibling of Vesuvius and Fujiyama.  
Let it be unknown to you that  
Magma churns secretly within me.  
Latent burning heat concealed  
Under a canopy of trees.

A pale ghostly light in your sky;  
A wispy veil of smoke on the forested hills.  
That's nothing: perhaps a new cloud messenger!  
Make merry, rejoice all you like.  
You forget there's a volcano in your backyard,  
Living kin of Fujiyama and Vesuvius.

Let the sacred event of a terrible explosion  
Be imminent in my diary.

## Matchstick

Sukanta Bhattacharya

*(Translation from Bangla by Amitendu Bhattacharya, Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, K.K. Birla Goa Campus, India)*

I'm a tiny matchstick.  
So insignificant, perhaps I'm not even noticed.  
Still, remember:  
My face is fat with gunpowder,  
An intense desire to be afire rules my heart.  
I'm a matchstick.

Just the other day a commotion was created.  
Do you remember? A blaze started  
In the corner of the house for dropping me  
Disdainfully, without putting me out?  
So many houses I've burnt down,  
So many palaces I've reduced to dust.  
Singlehanded, I did. A tiny matchstick.

Likewise, we can devastate  
Vast swathes of land.  
Will you still treat us with contempt?  
Don't you recall the day  
When we were all aflame inside a matchbox?  
You were startled – we heard  
The wails from your contorted faces.

Limitless is our power: you have sensed it  
Over and over. And yet, why don't you understand?  
We won't be contained in your pockets.  
We will break free, will go in all directions:  
To towns, marketplaces, and hamlets,  
From one horizon to another.

We burn repeatedly due to utter neglect –  
This you know all too well.  
What you don't know is  
When we will conflagrate together  
For one last time.