UNDERCURRENTS

2004 chapbook

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Down in the Dirt Scars Publicationsa

UNDERCURRENTS

This one is for Pranesh, who is grossly overweight, told my driver to mow down sundry motorcycles and rickshaws, and ultimately motivated the driver to hit the Finance Minister's car; I love you, sweetheart.

1

Take me into your womb, Israel,
Rebirth me as a beggar
With malnutritioned
Child in the crook of my arms,
Whining at railroad crossings
While Genghis Khan
Piles up his skulls,
Caterpillars gorge
On giant monsoon leaves
And become butterflies,
As Kolkata walks on

Camels tread
Where humans fear
And yet,
The humans are blessed by God;
Camel milk in Ulan Bator
In agony my garments I tore,
And wore
What I wear,
As Kolkata walks.



In Kalighat
The naked black lady
In the Greek Orthodox sanctuary,
As the car lurches over tramways,
I see you,
Virgin Lady,
I see you go to church.
With Kolkata,
As Kolkata walks on.

N

Gossamer threads,
Tire treads over steel girders
Take silted waters over the silt;
In this humidity, flowers wilt,
The tides will turn
Porpoises will have their watery fun,
And just as the Ganga breaks up
Into estuaries, slows down, before it meets the sea,
So is Kolkata,
It will walk on.



Heritage bridges Buckling like a bow-legged mule, Spices, incest and astute avarice, Supply the fuel; On this street there never was a duel Just blood extracted from human mules. That you see out of your taxi window Drawing carts with windless tires, Over merciless tram-lines. Trams are stationary Because of power outage Just as life is. Yet in the shadows that candles throw Grotesque, on dilapidated walls across Kyd Street, Kolkata walks on.

VI

The sun went the wrong way
So I shall have to sway,
And duck and dance
Go every which way
But in the Victorian cadence,
Of pouring goblets into an appurtenance,
Aurobindo stays,
Unmoved by pigeon-shit
As Victoria is;
Royalty shows
And Kolkata walks.



A hundred years from today,
Who is it that sits and reads
My poem,
Curious, intrigued?

Robindranath, crows keep vigil,
Over garbage heaps
Rotting in the monsoon sun,
Giant leaps;
Trees grow out of your ears,

After a heavy downpour, Streets are waterlogged, With filth bubbling up From manhole covers As Kolkata wades on.



Subterranean rivers sustain Undercurrents of culture

Despite the moisture On your upper lip, Kolkata walks on.



Ascetic boxed in
By Victorian angels,
There is a Neruda revival
In newspaper supplements
And little magazines,
Neruda essays and Neruda prizes;

Pablo, your Macchu Picchu
Stands white and tall and still,
In my dreams,
I see a Peruvian
Fall off a hand-pulled rickshaw

As Kolkata walks on.



Skeletal art,
In crumbling brickwork
Of dead columns,
From dust to dust
I lust
As Kolkata walks on.



Tramlines give you abdominal cramps,
Tramps bathe by the leaking water hydrant,
An old Sikh with 'hennaed' beard
Waits his turn,
Vodka fumes waft from and across my nostrils,
It has to rain,
How will they transplant the paddy,
How will I wet my feet?
As Kolkata walks.



The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want Psalm 23.

Bluebeard and sundries, Gathered in the Auschwitz gloom Counting golden tooth fillings,

As Kolkata walked on.



Portents turn out impotent,
Rain clouds with pregnant bellies,
Are nothing but gas,
Bloated with little purpose,
Blown away by the wind
Burned by the sun;
Sweat leaves deposits of salt
There has to be some bloodletting
The proverbial wetting of the pants,
Malnutrition,
The rising price of rice,
The 'poverty' laureate,
Is in Town

A solitary shower A stumble here or there, And Kolkata walks on.



The wind picks up in the morning light,
There are dimples in the ripples,
Lakeside.
Leaves turn upside down,
Bells clang,
In morning fervor,
In temples there is cross-fire,
As good conquers evil,
Hovels outside temples;

In hovels whores yawn, And Kolkata walks on.



Towers of silence,
Bodies to vultures,
Minds to culture,
And sundry other birds of prey,
Sunshine
Reflecting off sharded window glass
Pushed and pulled,
Buffeted this way and that,
As Kolkata walks on.



On my way,
All alone,
My lamp is snuffed out,
The wind picks up
And there is a storm.

Now, the storm and me
Are companions in arms,
Armstrong
On the moon,
While I swoon
On backstreets of Verona,

Matadors,
A swirl of the cape,
I drape you in a thousand mysteries,
The eclipse of the midday sun,
And as always the storm,
As Kolkata walks on.



Not words only, Friend, sweetheart, Sometimes, once in a while Touch me with your soul.

The fatigue,
The perpetual thirst,
How do I quench this,
Which way do I turn?

Oh! So romantic,
Touch me,
Brush past me
Once,
Just as Kolkata does.



With sixteen balance teeth,
It sits heavy on my tongue,
And yet,
It is built so beautiful,
It slips into fragrance as it were,
Without sleep;

I try
To fry an egg in the morning sun,
And the flower-laden tree is deaf-mute,

On the note of a flute, Kolkata walks on.



In Writers' Building,
Writers write,
Contrite;
And yet
I look for touts
Filling Post office forms,
I know that all the while,
Tides ebb and flow,
And Kolkata walks on.



On this night of storms
I have a date with the winds,
A tryst with you,
My friend, my me.

And 'Spivach' will see, She will hear the train, Sounds in the deep of night As Kolkata walks on.



Slow, ever slow,
Lamps are lit,
The moon will not be allowed
To peep through
As the city tosses and turns
In its slumber;
Crumpled sheets,
And the air is like glue,
Through oceans of treacle,
Kolkata walks on.



From every branch A candle flames,

Whenever you come You raise the magic,

I find you in wildflowers On wayside shrubs,

> I add and add And total up;

Now, if the calculator misbehaves, It does,

But I can still steal This city from the seals,

Whales spout As Kolkata walks on.



What I took from you
On the grass of 'Princep Ghat',
Eyes turned turtle
Gazing at woolly cloud,
I give back to you
With the ebb and flow,
Go.

The ice-cream vendor will stand
Where he does,
Pigeons will continue to shit
On the Jubilee Queen,
Carriages with horses
Grazing the land,
Holding hands
On the promenade.

Football fans piled onto hired trucks,
Madness
In the afternoon slush:

And then the evening sun,
Sets fire to a 'Tata Center' window,
A lone mounted policeman
Canters and pirouettes in the afternoon rain.

Take back your sweaty palm,

Cease and desist

From perking up your impudent breasts

Against my elbow.

Kolkata, walk on.



Drunk blind
On the top deck of a bus,
Lurching madly
Through tram lines
While beggars beg
And hawkers hawk,
Mothers stalk
Children
Outside school gates,

Slippers from 'Radu's' shop
Awkward glances
At flyovers and new found girls,
Flared jeans
Tight at the crotch.

Take your temple Beneath the tree, Kolkata, walk with me.



When I walk up to his door For alms, He sings psalms.

Whenever, whichever way I try, I cry.

Then I walk And Kolkata walks with me.

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