



# 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 malnourished  
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.





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.

## VII

*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.



## IX

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.





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.



## XIII

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.

# XVI

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.

## XVII

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.





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.





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.





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;





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.

# XXVI

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.

