

## Poetry & Prose of Bhaskar Chakrabarti

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**Abstract:** Bhaskar Chakrabarti's debut poetry collection, "Sheetkal Kobe Ashbe Suparna" (When Will Winter Come, Suparna), was published in December 1971 by Adhuna Prakashan. The forty poems in this collection were written between December 1965 and August 1971. Subsequently, he published several other poetry collections: "Eso Susambad Eso" (Come, Good News, Come) in 1981, "Rastay Abar" (On the Road Again) in 1983, "Debotar Sange" (With the Deity) in 1986, "Akash Angshato Meghla Thakbe" (The Sky Will Be Partly Cloudy) in 1989, "Swapno Dekhar Mahora" (Rehearsal for Dreaming) in 1993, "Tumi Amar Ghum" (You Are My Sleep) in 1998, "Neel Ronger Groho" (The Blue Planet) in 1999, "Kirakam Acho Manushera" (How Are You, People) in 2005, and "Jiraffer Bhasha" (The Language of the Giraffe) in 2005.

This study divides Chakrabarti's poetry into two phases: the first phase encompasses poems published from 1965 to 1989, and the second phase covers poems published from 1990 to 2005.

From 1988 to 2004, Chakrabarti consistently translated the works of Polish poet Tadeusz Różewicz into Bengali. He also translated poems by Kannada poets K.V. Puttappa, Gopalakrishna Adiga, Chandrashekhara Kambar, K.V. Tirumalesh, H.S. Venkatesh Murthy, B.R. Lakshman Rao, Kamala Hemmige, Siddalingaiah, and Sukanya Kalasa, among others. Additionally, he translated poems by Yehuda Amichai, Ernesto Cardenal, William Carlos Williams, Yannis Ritsos, Guillaume Apollinaire, and George Seferis. A separate chapter is dedicated to discussing these translations.

The fourth chapter focuses on Chakrabarti's prose works. It begins by examining his essays on his own poetic philosophy and the poetry of his contemporaries. The final chapter delves into his diaries and notebooks, memoirs, letters, and biographies.

**Key words:** Bhaskar Chakrabarti, "Sheetkal Kobe Ashbe Suparna", "Eso Susambad Eso", "Rastay Abar", "Debotar Sange", "Akash Angshato Meghla Thakbe", "Swapno Dekhar Mahora", "Tumi Amar Ghum", "Neel Ronger Groho", "Kirakam Acho Manushera", "Jiraffer Bhasha", Tadeusz Różewicz, K.V. Puttappa, Gopalakrishna Adiga, Chandrashekhara Kambar, K.V. Tirumalesh, H.S. Venkatesh Murthy, B.R. Lakshman Rao, Kamala Hemmige, Siddalingaiah, Sukanya Kalasa.

### ***Bhaskar Chakrabarti's Poetry, Phase One 1965-1989***

Between 1965 and 1989, five poetry collections by Bhaskar Chakrabarti were published: "Sheetkal Kobe Ashbe Suparna", "Eso Susambad Eso", "Rastay Abar", "Debotar Sange" and "Akash Angshato Meghla Thakbe". Additionally, some poems from the collections "Swapna Dekhar Mahora" and "Neel Ronger Graha" were written during this period. If we read Bhaskar Chakrabarti's poems, we will notice that poems written at the same time

found their place in different collections. The poet was very discerning in selecting poems for his collections.

1971 was a time of significant political turmoil in West Bengal. The organised Naxalite movement was underway, and the Bangladesh Liberation War was also taking place. It was against this political backdrop that Bhaskar Chakrabarti's first poetry collection, "Sheetkal Kobe Ashbe Suparna" was published. Prior to its publication, several other notable poetry collections had already been released, including Shakti Chattopadhyay's "Hemant Aranye Ami Postman" and "Chaturdashpadi Kabitaboli" Shankha Ghosh's "Nihita Patal Chhaya" Alok Sarkar's "Bishudhha Aranya" Alokeranjan Dasgupta's "Nishidhho Kojagori" and "Raktaktya Jharokha" Sunil Gangopadhyay's "Ami Kirakom Bhabe Beche Achi" Arun Mitra's "Mancher Baire Matite" Nirendranath Chakrabarti's "Ulanga Raja" and Buddhadeb Basu's "Swagata Bidayi".

Bhaskar Chakrabarti dedicated his first poetry collection to his friend Buddhadeb Dasgupta. The first poem from this collection, "Digbhranti" was published in the twenty second issue of the Krittibas magazine in 1966. Winter is the poet's favourite season. Unlike other poets, he did not immerse himself in autumn, spring, or monsoon. On winter nights, the poet prefers to stand in an impossibly empty field. From the beginning of this collection, we see the poet enveloped in sadness. In the poet's words, "Whenever sorrow comes, I remember my mother." The poet wanted to spread a cool love like a winter night, but he repeatedly faced failure. That failure pulled him towards hibernation.

Three other friends share the poet's pain. Their anger, expressed as "There is no heaven, there is Saridon" echoes in the subsequent poems. The poet's three-month sleep is not actually sleep but a patient self-exploration amidst adversity. It is the intense yearning of a twenty-two-year-old to reach the depths of his consciousness in the dead of winter. That's why, in the poem "Sheetkal Kobe Ashbe Suparna" we find the mention of walking on the road even after falling asleep to the smell of burnt hair. Poems like "Mosh" and "Asukh" also tread the path of social rebellion. 'Suparna' is not a woman or a human. She is not even the poet's beloved. In fact, Suparna represents the shedding of all biological maturity accumulated in the body. It is the song of awakening after a long defeat.

The introduction to the poetry collection "Eso Susambad Eso" begins with these words: "So I'm starting with just a hello. I never thought I'd be able to come back to you again someday, and that the same old smile would remain." After a long ten years, the poet's publication of a new collection is expressed in these witty words. This collection is divided into three main sections: Din Ratir Alo, Eso Susambad Eso, and Manusher Deshe. All the poems in the "Din Ratir Alo" section are written in prose form. This style is Bhaskar Chakrabarti's favourite. In the poems of the "Eso Susambad Eso" section, words, silence, rhythm, and space are very important. Most of these poems are written in Aksharbritta metre. The poems in the "Manusher Deshe" section may seem rhythmic in terms of line arrangement, but they are actually prose poems. The Emergency (June 1975), chaos, disorder, sadness, suppressed irony, and protest touch this collection.

The poems in the collection "Rastay Abar" were written during a very difficult time.

This becomes clear when reading the poet's diaries from 1982 and 1983. Poverty, despair, fatigue, loneliness, isolation, and a brief separation from his loved one made the poet a wanderer. This book talks about malnutrition, social aggression, and self-aggression. Rabindra Sangeet became a major source of relief from despair for the poet during this time. He listened to a lot of Rabindra Sangeet, and his attraction to Rabindranath Tagore grew stronger. In his 1982 diary, we find information about 192 Rabindra Sangeet songs. It was during this time that the twenty-five untitled prose poems of the collection "Debotar Sange" were written.

"With the Deity, I suddenly went to the city by minibus this afternoon." This deity is Rabindranath Tagore himself. The lonely poet feels the companionship of Rabindranath. The poet returns from the muddy path of suicide. As a result, we get this feeling from the poet: "I am happy, such a philosophy of life has come into my poetry, which urges others to live." Bhaskar Chakrabarti wrote this in his draft poetry notebook in 1985-86. After a long illness, the collection "Akash Angshato Meghla Thakbe" was published in 1989. In this collection, we find some poems related to the memory of the Baranagar massacre (August 1971), some poems dealing with the thought of death, and some elegiac poems.

Winter, sadness, domestic life, the consciousness of death and life, malnutrition, love, trust and deviation towards people repeatedly appear in the poet's first phase of poetry. Bhaskar Chakrabarti skilfully used imagery and symbols in his poems. We notice the use of figures of speech like similes, metaphors, hyperbole, and alliteration in his poetry. Lines like "cigarette butts like Bakul flowers" and "wingless Chaitra afternoon" bear witness to the above statement.

### **Poetry, Phase Two 1990-2005**

The collections 'Swapno Dekhar Mahora', 'Tumi Amar Ghum', 'Neel Ronger Groho', 'Kirakam Acho Manushera' and 'Jiraffer Bhasha' were published between 1990 and 2005. As mentioned earlier, the poems in 'Swapno Dekhar Mahora' and 'Neel Ronger Graha' were written over a long period. The composition period for 'Swapno Dekhar Mahora' was 1986-92, 'Neel Ronger Groho' was 1966-98, and some poems in 'Tumi Amar Ghum' were written between 1985 and 1988.

We intend to discuss the journey from the poetry collection 'Swapno Dekhar Mahora' to 'Jiraffer Bhasha' as the post-'Akash Angshato Meghla Thakbe' phase, or the second phase of Bhaskar Chakrabarti's poetic life. In the August 28, 1993 issue of *Desh* magazine, this collection was advertised as a "Poetry collection of troubled times." The collection was published by Ananda Publishers. Let us briefly explain why we consider this collection of the poet as a significant marker in dividing his poetic journey.

In Bhaskar Chakrabarti's 1985 diary, we find these words: "I am cheating time. Every moment of being awake must be conscious, mindful, and receptive to poetry again. I have to work hard again, even more." The poet feels that there is a gap somewhere in his poetry writing, so he wants to devote more time to poetry and work harder. There are also a few words written in the poet's diary about the poem "Smriti" from the collection 'Akash Angshato Meghla Thakbe': "Why are the poems becoming so short? Cheating - When Sunil Gangopadhyay told me today, 'Maybe I'm becoming dumb,' what else could I say but laugh?" It is clear that Sunil Gangopadhyay wanted Bhaskar Chakrabarti to pay a little more attention to the form of poetry. We will see the rehearsal of that effort in this

collection. Another point must be mentioned. In an interview given to Adrish Biswas in the 1999 book fair issue of the magazine Raktamangsh, Bhaskar Chakrabarti said about this collection, "At one time I used to have terrible nightmares. Dreams of fear and fear. Going to sleep itself became a worry. I started thinking about how to get rid of this. Sri Aurobindo's books helped me in this thought... I don't have nightmares anymore." Sri Aurobindo's writings helped the poet transform nightmares into good dreams. From then on, we will see that Bhaskar Chakrabarti leans more towards positive thinking by reducing negative thoughts in his life. This is exemplified in his poetry. In this collection, the poet has written the poems in a kind of flowing prose rhythm without any punctuation. The poet is much more urban in this collection. Various memories and experiences centred around Kolkata have blossomed in detail in the poems of this period. Description is predominant in these poems.

At the time of writing the poems in the collection 'Tumi Amar Ghum', the poet was also working on one of his major prose works 'Shayanayan' and a biography of Vivekananda for children, titled 'Vivekananda'. He was also translating Kannada poetry. In this collection, we find poems on the subject of Buddha, poems of paternal love written about his daughter, poems written about his elder sister, poems remembering Shakti Chattopadhyay, poems reminiscing about a lover from the sixties, and various poems on the subject of death. If you read the poems carefully, you can understand the mature thinking of the poet in this phase and the peace of his mind. In his 1983 diary, the poet repeatedly wrote, "I have to be very calm.

'Neel Ronger Graha' is actually this dreamy Earth; it's about the world of words on Earth. By analysing this poetry, we have found the poet's pure love for the people around him. The poet loves the environment of the earth. The poet has shown the progressiveness of global thought in this collection. To understand nature in this poetry, one has to start by observing the cover. The poet's own illness has repeatedly made him think about his daughter's future in this collection. The poet's desire is expressed in the introduction—

"From within the white bones, I rise and sing again: O old harmonium, come back to me"

There is joy in every verse of this poetry. The poet knows that joy has to be derived from within the world, so he repeatedly talks about the vast blue world. If you read this poet's poems closely, you will understand that the same tune has not been played from the first to the last poem of the collection. These poems are a collection of many mixed emotions.

The two collections 'Kirakam Acho Manushera' and 'Jiraffer Bhasha' were written side by side at the same time. They were also published in the same year. In the collection 'Kirakam Acho Manushera', we see that due to the increase in the poet's illness, he wants to come closer to people, to be by their side. 'Jiraffer Bhasha' seems to us to be some unique words and poems spoken by the poet in a low voice with his neck raised. Forty-eight numbered poems of five lines each, without any figures of speech or embellishments. The poet may have realised that the incurable cancer would now take him away from people. So before leaving, the poet wanted to tell us a few things in a slow

voice. The poet dedicated this collection to his mother and father. We can understand the poet's pain in the first two lines of poem number 3—

"They want to see me die writhing. I'm dying, just dying."

Again, in poem number 48 of this collection, we find the poet's last wish—

"I am leaving because I have to leave, otherwise I would have stayed a little longer."

Prof. Manabendranath Saha, in his essay 'The Poetry of Poet Bhaskar Chakrabarti', informs us, "Bhaskar's poetry contains both the unspeakable joys and sorrows of life, all the emotions of a life lived without pretence. The poet's happiness, unhappiness, failure, guilt, pain, burning, everything has been expressed in the gesture of a lively life but in an inimitable language." (Palataka, January 2018) We also think that the poet has spent his whole life searching for the answer to the question of how to live and has expressed it in his poetry. Whenever the subject of life comes up, one has to read his poems again and again.

### **Translated Poetry 1988-2004**

Between 1988 and 1994, Bhaskar Chakrabarti dedicated himself to translating the works of Polish poet Tadeusz Rozewicz. This endeavour resulted in numerous translations, some of which found their way into various literary magazines. Chakrabarti's ambition extended to compiling these translations into a dedicated book, a project that unfortunately never reached fruition, leaving the poems unpublished and scattered.

For his translations, Chakrabarti relied on two primary English sources: "Tadeusz Rozewicz: Selected Poems" (1976), translated by Adam Czereniawski and part of the Penguin Modern European Poets series, and "The Survivor and Other Poems" (1975), translated by Magnus J. Krynski & Robert A. Maguire and published by Princeton University.

One notable translation is Rozewicz's "In the Midst of Life," which Chakrabarti rendered into Bengali as "Jiboner Majhkane" (In the Middle of Life). This poem delves into the complex relationship between a father and child, illustrating how a father, driven by a desire to equip his child for the world, gradually introduces them to the harsh realities of society. It underscores the universal parental aspiration to bequeath a better world to the next generation. The motif of the child, the father, and paternal love resurfaces in various forms throughout Chakrabarti's subsequent translations of Rozewicz's works. Among these, "A Voice, Another Form," "Let Us Be Alone," "Remove the Burden," and "The Survivor" stand out for their thematic significance.

These translated poems grapple with profound questions about the world we are shaping for our children and the challenges they will inherit. They offer a stark portrayal of societal issues and the zeitgeist of the poet's era. Chakrabarti deliberately selected these impactful poems for translation, recognizing Rozewicz's unique ability to replace traditional "poetry" with the raw power of "words." Chakrabarti was particularly drawn to Rozewicz's "Antipoetry" (1954), appreciating the poet's lifelong rejection of conventional metrical forms. This preference is reflected in Chakrabarti's translations, which eschew established rhythmic patterns. In May/June 1993, Chakrabarti embarked on a new project: translating modern Kannada poetry at the invitation of the Sahitya Akademi in Bangalore.

Poet Subhash Mukhopadhyay played a pivotal role in this initiative. Chakrabarti translated eleven Kannada poems by nine different poets, focusing on works that embodied a spirit of rebellion. For instance, the opening lines of K.V. Tirumalesh's poem "Nicaragua: Guilt" were translated as:

"Trivandrum 66, we were walking and, talking about the Sandinista movement."

These lines evoke the memory of the turbulent Nicaraguan revolution of 1966, led by Che Guevara.

Goethe's friend Herder championed the idea that translation serves as a gateway to experiencing world culture. However, he emphasised that this experience is only truly enriching when translations remain faithful to the original text. Chakrabarti, mindful of this principle, employed a dual approach to his translations, combining literal renditions with occasional instances of free translation to capture the essence of the original poems.

### Prose on poets and poetry

In the first half of this chapter, we aim to discuss Bhaskar Chakrabarti's poetic vision, primarily drawing upon his essays on poetry. The poet believes, "The entire world is crafted from poetry." In his essay "Nijaswa Madal" (My Own Drum), he reveals, "For a boy from a poor, uneducated household like mine, poetry arrived with the promise of liberation." This hope of liberation fueled his life's consciousness. The poet never wished to align himself with any particular theory or ideology; he was simply a poet. Poetry, for him, was the language of stillness, the illumination of a thousand candles.

Bhaskar Chakrabarti formulated several points concerning the freedom of the poet and the freedom of poetry:

1. Poetry as poetry, or so-called poetry, must be abolished at this moment.
2. Poetry must be liberated from all forms of governance. It must be made free. The ornaments must be removed from conventional poetry.
3. There's mystery within words, and that can be made into poetry.
4. Every great poem is simple, but not every simple poem is great.
5. At the end of all kinds of poetry, there's an intensely innovative poem. A new world...

The poet's thoughts on the beginning and end of poetry become clearer with further quotes from this essay: "A poem can start from any line and end at any line. The poem will be seemingly simple, multifaceted. There will be no selection of subject matter. And the distance between one line of the poem and another will be at least a hundred kilometres. But there will be an intimate millimetre-level connection in the invisible subsurface." This statement characterises how the body of a poem should be.

In the second half, we intend to discuss Bhaskar Chakrabarti's views on his contemporary poets and his critique of their poetry, primarily based on his essays on poets. Bhaskar Chakrabarti has discussed the poetry collections of Tushar Roy, Alokeranjan Dasgupta, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Debarati Mitra, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Utpal Kumar Basu, Joy Goswami, Arun Mitra, Pranabendu Dasgupta, and others at various times. These discussions were published in newspapers and magazines like Anandabazar Patrika, Kalpratima, Parbasandhi, Kritibas, Desh, and Parikatha between 1977 and 2004. In the article "Shudhu Tushar Jhorche" (Only Snow is Falling), Bhaskar Chakraborty wrote,

"Someone dies at night, someone during the day. When Kolkata was waking up once again, when the footsteps were becoming loud again, slowly- Tushar fell silent for the last time." -One poet writes a memoir on the death of another poet. He acknowledged the musicality and intensity that "Bandmaster" (1969) brought to Bengali poetry. In every essay, Bhaskar Chakrabarti has thus explained the poetic talent and uniqueness of the poets under discussion.

### **Other Prose of the Poet**

In this final chapter, we intend to chronologically discuss Bhaskar Chakrabarti's other prose works. We will review 'Priyo Subrata' (1978), Bhaskar Chakrabarti's diaries and notebooks (1982-83), 'Vivekananda' (1996), and the prose work 'Shayanayan' (1998).

'Priyo Subrata' is a collection of Bhaskar Chakrabarti's personal prose written in the form of letters to his poet friend Subrata Chakrabarti. This book is divided into eighteen chapters. Subrata Chakrabarti was one of Bhaskar Chakrabarti's dearest friends. We understand this when we read 'Priyo Bhaskar,' a collection of thirty-one letters written by Subrata Chakrabarti to Bhaskar Chakrabarti. In this book, the poet mentions the city of his consciousness, life, and various personal topics. Sometimes the topic of his younger sister comes up, sometimes the topic of a mysterious, cloud-filled afternoon, the lack of resources in his household, various school-related topics, sometimes the topic of his own poetry, a comparison between the Kolkata of his time and the Kolkata of earlier poets, and finally, a sense of sadness and existentialism. Through these letters, the poet repeatedly tries to express himself, his illness, and the mystery of his poetry. Bhaskar Chakrabarti's prose is simple, straightforward, and elegant. Upon reading it, one can immediately recognize the poet's prose style. There is a poetic inclination in every line and verse.

Bhaskar Chakrabarti's diaries and notebooks from 1982 and 1983 are crucial documents of time. By time, we mean the time within the context of poetry. Through the poet's diaries and notebooks, we have tried to understand the inherent language of his poetry collections. An example will clarify this. While analysing the poet's first phase of poetry, 'Debotar Sange' (1986), we mentioned Rabindra Sangeet. From the poet's 1982 diary, we learned about 192 Rabindra Sangeet songs he heard sung by Santosh Sengupta, Sahana Devi, Rajeshwari Dutta, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Malati Ghosh, Debabrata Biswas, Kanika Bandyopadhyay, Suchitra Mitra, Shantidev Ghosh, and others. We are constantly realising the musical backdrop against which the poems in 'Debotar Sange' were written.

'Vivekananda,' a biography of Swami Vivekananda written for children and divided into twenty-three chapters, was published in December 1996. This concise prose work begins as follows: "Vivekananda was abroad at that time. One day, a very strange incident happened there." Clearly, the poet adopts a storytelling approach in this case. The poet was conscious of avoiding monotony in the narrative while writing this book. The stories based on Vivekananda's childhood playfulness, the use of simple sentences, proper punctuation, avoidance of complex words, all contribute to making this book an ideal children's text.

Bhaskar Chakrabarti started writing 'Shayanayan' in 1995 after receiving a two-year fellowship from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The book was published in 1998. In the introduction to the poet's collected prose works, Sumant Mukhopadhyay informs us, "In this work, developed over two years, Bhaskar utilised his lifelong thoughts

and reflections." 'Shayanayan' is essentially the poet's own philosophy or perspective on his poetic life. Buddhists use the term 'yana.' We can consider 'Shayanayan' as the poet's memoir-style prose work. The poet writes in the introduction: "It's not a story, nor a novel. But is it a memoir? A journal? It will be something like that. I was supposed to write poetry, but ended up writing about horses, death, and rivers. About illness. About books and charlatans. About love and poetry. About childhood. And about the present too." This book is divided into twenty-three chapters. The first-person narrative strongly presents a personal sense of mortality, familial concerns, memories, the presence of tragic characters, sadness, lamentation, ego, existential awareness, and the city of Kolkata. 'Shayanayan' helps to read poetry and the poet's life together.

In a note dated 24.10.83 in Bhaskar Chakrabarti's Notebook-2, we find a mention of his own poetic characteristics: "Shankhababu said... poetry should be simple yet have multiple dimensions, just like my poetry!" Indeed, it is astonishing to contemplate the vast observation of life scattered throughout Bhaskar Chakrabarti's poetry. The poet repeatedly wrote in his notebook, "All my poetry books are the first poetry book." These works bear witness to the various ups and downs of life. Hence, they embody that life history, which repeatedly provides us with new insights into life. Bhaskar Chakrabarti believed, "In literature, sexuality is a third-rate pit," and "Empty optimism should never be in my poetry." We rarely encounter the theme of sexuality in his poetry. It is clear that this subject was not on the poet's list of preferences. During our analysis of his poetry collections, we observed that the poet expressed what he saw, understood, and felt in clear language, without complexity. There is no absurdity. Although the thought of death was intertwined with the poet's contemplation, there is evidence in his poetry that he was able to temporarily overcome it repeatedly. Many have attempted to compare the ups and downs of his life to the myth of Sisyphus, leading to discussions based on a superficial understanding. However, we disagree. The complexities in poet Bhaskar's life were largely rooted in psychological, economic, and social conflicts.

Bhaskar Chakrabarti was very conscious of the external form of his poetry. Textual variations are observed in different editions of each poetry collection. Sometimes he made changes in words, spelling, omission of the vowel 'o,' and rearrangement of lines. In reality, Bhaskar Chakrabarti's poetry possesses simplicity, grandeur, mystery, and the tragedy of a poet who wants to love life. In the poet's own words, it is the "Tragedy of a Perfectionist."

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