Classic Poetry Series

Shakti Chattopadhay

- poems -

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Shakti Chattopadhay (25 November 1933 - 23 March 1995)

Shakti Chattopadhay (Bengali: □□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□□□ Shokti Chôṭṭopaddhae) was a Bengali poet and writer, widely regarded as one of the greatest poet of 20th century Bengali literature.

Early Life

Shakti Chattopadhyay was born at Baharu village in modern-day South 24 Parganas district, Paschimbanga (West Bengal), India to Bamanath Chattopadhyay and Kamala Devi. He lost his father at the age of four and brought up by his maternal grandfather. He came to Bagbazar, Calcutta in 1948 and got admitted to Maharaja Cossimbazar Polytechnic School in class VIII. Here he was introduced to Marxism by a teacher. In 1949 he established Pragati Library and started a hand-written magazine, Pragati, which was soon changed into a printed one, changing the name to Bahnishikha. He passed Matriculation Examination in 1951 and got admitted to City College (Mirzapur branch) to study commerce as his maternal uncle, who was a businessman and also his guardian, promised him a job of an accountant. It was the same year when he got membership of the Communist Party of India (CPI). In 1953, he passed Intermediate Commerce Examination, but gave up studying commerce and got admitted to the Presidency College (now Presidency University, Kolkata) with Honours in Bengali literature but he did not appear in the examination.

Early writings

In 1956, he had to leave his maternal uncle’s home and moved to a slum at Ultadanga along with his mother and brother. At this time he was solely dependant on the meagre wages of his brother. In March 1956, his poem "Yama" was published in Kabita, a literary magazine published by Buddhadeb Bose. After that he started writing for Krittibas and other magazines. Buddhadeb Bose also invited him to join the Comparative Literature course in newly-opened Jadavpur University. He joined the course, but could not complete it either. In 1958, he terminated his relationship with the CPI.

He worked at Saxby Pharma Ltd. as a store assistant and later taught at Bhowanipur Tutorial Home (Harrison Road branch). He also started a business himself and ran it for sometime before he gave up and joined Hind Motors as junior executive. But he could not continue anywhere. He started indulging in a wayward lifestyle and drinking heavily.

Shakti started writing in 1950s, but is usually associated with the generation of poets in 1960's. Regarded with great acclaim in Bengali literature, Shakti is equally well known for his legendary bohemian lifestyle. Most of Shakti's

life was spent in Kolkata, India. During Allen Ginsberg's stay in India, the American poet is said to have developed a close friendship with Chattopadhay, and both are said to have influenced each other in various ways.

Shakti Chattopadhyay’s first collection of poems, named □□ □□□□□, □□ □□□□□□□□□□ "He Prem, He Noihshôbdo" (O Love, O silence) came out in 1962. These poems were written at Chaibasa, Singbhum district in Bihar (now in Jharkhand) where he was guest of Samir Roychoudhury for a few years and fell in love with Samir's sister-in-law, which changed Shakti from a novelist to the best lyric poet after Rabindranath Tagore. In the next thirty-two years, he wrote around two thousand five hundred poems which were published through forty-five books.

Hungry Generation

Along with Sunil Gangopadhyay, Shakti remains the most famous poet of his generation. He was the leader of the Hungryalists (□□□□□ □□□□□□□), also known as the Hungry generation poets, which changed the course of Bengali poetry once for all. He was one of the founder members of the Hungry generation movement which started with the publication of a one page bulletin in November 1961. He, along with Malay Roy Choudhury, Samir Roychoudhury and Debi Ray had launched the movement in November 1961 from Patna where Malay resided at that time. However he left the movement in 1963 due to differences of opinion with the other members. In fact, till date Hungryalism (□□□□□ □□□□□□□) remains the only literary movement in Bengal. With Sunil, he was instrumental in the influential Krittibash magazine. These two poets are often referred together as "Sunil-Shakti" due to their friendship, poems and personal exploits. Together with two other friends, they feature in what is probably the most representative poem of that generation of poets, containing the now famous line □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□□ □□□□ "Moddhorate Kolkata shashon kôre charjon jubok" (In midnight, Kolkata is ruled by four young men).

Awards

In 1983, he received the Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection of entitled □□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□ □□□ □□□□ "Jete Pari Kintu Kêno Jabo" (I can go but why?).

Death

This ever-bohemian legend died on March 23, 1995.

Acknowledgments

Apart from the sensational popularity that Shakti Chattopadhyay has attained among the lovers of modern Bengali poetry, he has also been the subject of serious academic research. Dr. Kuntal Chattopadhyay, Associate Professor in English at Narasinha Dutt college and a Guest Faculty in the Department of Bengali, University of Calcutta, did his Doctoral research on the Poetry of Shakti Chattopadhyay under the supervision of Dr. Sumita Chakraborty.The said thesis has also come out in the form of a book called "Mrityur Pareo Jeno Hete Jete Pari": Shakti Chattopadhyayer Kavita--Bishay, Prasanga O Prakaran''.

Works:

Poetry

□□ □□□□□ □□ □□□□□□□□□ He prem he noishshôbdo
□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□ □□□ Dhôrmeo achho jirafeo achho
□□□□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□□ Shonar machhi khun korechhi
□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□□□□ Hemonter ôronne ami pos□mên
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□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□ Choturdôshpodi kobitaboli
□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□ □□□ Probhu nôsh□o hoe jai
□□□□ □□□ Shukhe achhi
□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□ Ishshor thaken jôle
□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□ Ostrer gourobhin êka
□□□□□□□ □□□□□ Jôlonto rumal
□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ Chhinno Bichhinno
□□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□ Shundor ekhane nôe
□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□ Kobitar tulo ore
□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□□□□ Ami chhï□e feli chhôndo tontujal
□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ Hemonto jekhane thake
□□□ □□□ □□ □□□□□ Ae ami je pathore
□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□ □□□ □□□□ Jete pari kintu kêno jabo.

Abani, Are You Home?

Abani, are you home?

The neighbourhood lies in sleep with doors closed
But I keep hearing the night knocking at my door,
'Abani, are you home? '

Here it rains all the twelve months
Here the clouds roam like cows
Here the eager green grass
closes in on the door,
'Abani, are you home? '

In my heart, half-dissolved, long-traveled
I fall asleep within pain
Suddenly I hear the night knocking at my door,
'Abani, are you home? '

Shakti Chattopadhay

Amake Porao

Shakti Chattopadhay

Ami Jai

Shakti Chattopadhay

Atachora

Shakti Chattopadhay

Bagane ki Dhorechhilo Hat

Shakti Chattopadhay

Bhitore Baire Bishom Juddho

Shakti Chattopadhay

Chhinno Bichchhinno

Shakti Chattopadhay

Choturdashpadi Kabitabali

Shakti Chattopadhay

Din Jay

Shakti Chattopadhay

Ebar Hoyese Shondhya

Shakti Chattopadhay

Ek Osukhe Dujon Ondho

Shakti Chattopadhay

Ekbar Tumi

Shakti Chattopadhay

I Can Go, But Why Shall I?

I think, I will rather turn back
So long,
I have smeared so much soot in my hands
Never thought of you as you are -

Now, when I stand by the gorge at night,
The moon beckons, come on over -
Now, when I stand mesmerized by the levee,
The pyre logs call, 'come, c'mon over! '

I can go,
I can go in any direction
But why shall I go?

Got to kiss a long one to my kid
Will go,
But not right now
I will take you along as well
Won't go alone before time.

[Translated by Arindam Basu]

Shakti Chattopadhay

Kisu Maya Roye Gelo

Shakti Chattopadhay

Mone Mone Bahudur Chole Gesi

Shakti Chattopadhay

Otherwise Why Should You Be Human

A group of mud-smeared dark boys

Their loin-clothes raised above their knees
Excitedly catching fish, as they plunge into the water
Beside the ankle-high ridge in the middle of the pool.
Over on the other side
Their loin-cloth pouches fill with little jiyal
Their hollow hampers full already
Draining away water from one side of the pool
Into the other half
So they can grab the fish with bare hands.
Before the rains
The earth dry and parched
The naked backs of the boys burning in the sun
Like the outside of earthen pots darkened
In the smoke of burning sawdust
While they desperately pat themselves on the back
With wet mud to bring down the summer heat
Trying hard --
And later
Would come the inevitable rolling in the soft slime
For this was not the time to use the usual
Net-baskets of bamboo.
It's time now
Simply to run over the lowly varieties of fish
And seize them
And gulp the fish down, fried.
Even if no cooking oil is there.
And if one is lucky to catch any shol
Then, to roast this fish and take these
with a bowl of watered rice-
Enough if there is a little salt to go with it.
In the first rains
As mudskippers wriggle up with whirring noises
And streams rush down from high hillocks
To fill the pools, now clear and pellucid-
Delighted, the small fish rise
Erect with their barbed bodies
Becoming difficult to get a hold on them.
And bristles?
Yes, there are.
As there are ways and ways
Or else life can't go on.
It is the same everywhere in the world
It has to be caught the right way.
Otherwise it slips through your hands
And isn't there your loss or gain in this?
But, let things be as they are.
In the eyes of that man behind
One has to reach out for some such example
Of success, struggle or fear-
Otherwise why should you be human?

You could have been a shy mimosa creeper!

[Translated by Jayanta Mahapatra]

Shakti Chattopadhay

Pabo Prem Kan Pete Rekhe

Shakti Chattopadhay

Porstri

Shakti Chattopadhay

Shishir Bheja Shukno Khar

Shakti Chattopadhay

Simanto Prostab - 1

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Station Bhasiye Brishti

Shakti Chattopadhay

The Key

Till this day here lies with me
Lost long ago, your dearest key
You open still that chest of yours?

Touching your lips, that beauty spot,
A new land has my own heart got?
Now, right now, I write to thee.

Your key is there in loving care,
The time has come for you to dare,
Please write, if you do want it back?

In memories of no big need
Your tears, malay.., lie like a seed
Please write, if you do want it back?

Shakti Chattopadhay

Walks Behind, Remains Remote

He walks behind me, from a polite distance,
Keeping his eye on me. I try to hide in a crowd;
He pretends his mind is elsewhere, or, at best,
He looks as if he is fooled and separates himself.

Still he follows. I move quickly, silently,
Behind a crumbling wall, its moss rubs off on my face
When suddenly I find him holding on to the other side,
Standing, keeping up an appearance of studied regard.

His eyes, expressionless, he keeps fixed on me
Yet, in fact, he may be looking upwards
Seeing a bird, the clouds' movements, or the old tiles
Of a primary school. When it begins to rain,
Unconstrained, he moves under my umbrella, like a snail
Drawn into its spiral shell. Nearing, he remains remote.

[Translated by Sibnarayan Ray]

Shakti Chattopadhay