

Classic Poetry Series

Sukanta Bhattacharya
- poems -

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Sukanta Bhattacharya(15 August 1926 - 13 May 1947)

Sukanta Bhattacharya (Bengali: সুকান্ত ভট্টাচার্য) was a Bengali poet and playwright. Along with Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam, he was one of the key figures of modern Bengali poetry, despite the fact that most of his works had been in publication posthumously. During his life, his poems were not widely circulated, but after his death his reputation grew to the extent that he became one of the most popular Bengali poet of the 20th century. He has had a significant influence on poet Subhas Mukhopadhyay and composer Salil Chowdhury who set some of his popular poems to music.

The poetry of Sukanta Bhattacharya is characterized by rebel socialist thoughts, patriotism, humanism and yet romanticism.

Life

Sukanta Bhattacharya was born to Nibaran Chandra Bhattacharya, owner of Saraswat Library, a publishing and book selling enterprise, and Suniti Devi. He was the second of their six sons, Sushil, Prashanta, Bibhash, Ashoke and Amiya being the other five sons. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, the former Chief Minister of West Bengal is his nephew. Sukanta was born at his maternal grandfather's house at Kalighat, Calcutta (now Kolkata, West Bengal), although his family hailed from the village of Kotalipara in Gopalganj of modern day Bangladesh.

Sukanta spent his childhood at their house at Nibedita Lane, Bagbazar. He was sent to Kamala Vidyamandir, a local primary school where his literary career began. His first short story was published in Sanchay, the school's student magazine. Later another of his prose writing, "Vivekanander Jibani", was published in Sikha, edited by Bijon Bhattacharya.

After studying at Kamala Vidyamandir, he got admitted to Belegkata Deshbandhu High School. He joined the Communist Party of India in 1944. In the same year, he edited an anthology, named Akal (Famine) published by the Anti-Fascist Writers' and Artists' Association. In 1945, he appeared in the entrance examination from Belegkata Deshbandhu High School but failed. He was the editor of the Kishore Sabha (youth section) of the Bengali daily organ of the party, Dainik Swadhinata from its inception in 1946. He died of tuberculosis at the Jadavpur T. B. Hospital (later, K. S. Roy T. B. Hospital) in Calcutta at a very young age of 20. A comprehensive account of the poet's life can be found in Kabi

Sukanta Bhattacharya O Sei Samay written by the poet's youngest brother, Amiya Bhattacharyya.

 Works

Prodigious Sukanta's poetry was published in magazines while he was alive, and except for Chharpatra his books were all published posthumously.

His works are deeply marked and influenced by his communist experience. One of his shorter poems name "Hey Mahajibon" (?? ????????) from the book Chharpatra (?????????) compares the moon with a burnt roti, a prosaicness born of hunger:

"???????? ??????? ??????? ?????????? ?????????? ????? ??? ??????? ?????"

"Poetry, we do not need you anymore. A world devastated by hunger is too prosaic, The full moon now reminds us of toasted bread"

Sukanta Samagra (????????? ??????) (Complete Works of Sukanta) (1967), published by the Saraswat Library, Kolkata was edited by Subhash Mukhopadhyay. This includes all the printed texts, some lesser known writings, his plays and stories, which include Khudha (Hunger), Durboddho (Incomprehensible), Bhadrlok (Gentleman) and Daradi Kishorer Svapna (Dream of a Compassionate Adolescent), an article, Chhanda O Abritti and also a selection of letters.

Poetry And Being

No more of this poetry.
Bring on the hard, harsh prose instead.
Let the jingle of verse disappear
And the strong hammer of prose strike.
No need for the serenity of a poem;
Poetry, I give you a break today.
In the regime of hunger, the earth belongs to prose,
The full moon now reminds us of toasted bread.

[Translated from original poem 'He Mahajiban' (Benglai)]

Sukanta Bhattacharya

The Testimonial

The news came
From the child who was born today.
She has got the testimonial,
And therefore she proclaims her rights to the new
unknown world
With piercing cries.
She is helpless and small, yet her fist is raised,
Glowing in an incomprehensible oath.
No one understands.
Some laugh, some reprove.
I recognize her language, though.
I see the signs of a coming age
As I read the child's credentials
In her hazy, misty eyes.
The new child has arrived. We must make place for
her;
And move away
Into the wrecked and dead wastelands
Of this old earth.

And leave we will. Yet as long as I breathe,
I will go on clearing the debris
with all my strength
From the face of this earth.
I will make this world habitable for this child;
This is my firm pledge to the newborn.

Once my work is done,
I shall bless the child
With my own blood.
And then, I shall become history

[Translated from 'Chhadpatra' (Bengali) by Rini Bhattacharya Mehta]

Sukanta Bhattacharya