

Summer, Kolkata

by Sutapa Chaudhuri (August 2015)

The upturned blank eyes of the street children,
like little dried up pools thirsty for a drop of love,
mirror the wrath of the loveless blank skies.

Their ramshackle hovels home in on the dreams of
droning air-conditioners in luxurious high-rises;
the friendly neighbourhood wind, once their play-mate

too scorches in sudden betrayals. The burnt leaves
of barren, derelict shrubs on novel road-dividers
by the spectacular Race Course fit correlatives

for their sooty, charred bodies, emaciated with
hunger and an abject thirst for a shady refuge.

As if in a deadly collusion of nature and culture,

the mighty trees lining the Sardar Patel Sarani

are trimmed bare suddenly to satisfy some

law-makers' whimsical decree. Their shady

foliage, like the nesting birds, now just a blank
dream of broken lives on bare branches. Yet the
pavements get redressed; colourful terracotta tiles

dress up the lifeless roadsides, blue, white or striped
in tiger hues; a fresh coat of paint dazzles the
beauty of the iconic Howrah Bridge; huge blue

rhombuses grace again the creamy borders of
the Vidyasagar Setu. The mighty Ganges and her
brother Hooghly, aged and moribund in a solitary

river, silently sits and silts – unable to utter the
promise of a compassionate monsoon. Only the homeless
children, little bodies naked and brown like the dried,

sun-baked earth, cracked and rent asunder by the searing heat,
beg to the impassive passing cars, their bare arms outstretched.
Caught at an undue traffic-signal, their rolled up dark glasses

keep off the blazing sun; their sun-shades priceless
to ward off such unsightly images. Stopped engines

come to life as bored passengers whir past, cold and apathetic.

The dark roads of Kolkata glisten hazy with heat, the
marks of indifferent tyres on melted pitch offer for a moment
nurturing dreams of shadows and soothing dark waters.

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