

Srinagar, December

by **Sutapa Chaudhuri** (January 2016)

It is winter here. The tulips

in the Mughal Gardens stay

nipped by the customary frost:

yet refuse to breathe in cellophane

bouquets. The young shoots

of the sunflower die, rejected

by the frost bitten earth.

The Dal lake, freezes,

a bejeweled landmark—

a thin sheet of ice obliterating

the bustle of the ferrying shikaras;

the trees silent and still with frost,

matching emptiness ricocheting

through the latticed windows

of ornate houseboats moribund
in the still waters. Life hibernates,

waiting again for another season
of slight warmth, playing

hide and seek in the piled up snow—
an innocuous whiteness rests

on the thorns of the hoary rosebushes
and the encrusted apple trees,

like the dollops of smile
from bright eyed honeymooners.

The snowy roads eager for the touch
of gamboling children on the mountain slopes

or to taste the warmth of a kiss stolen
from the embracing lovers strolling

hand in hand on this earthly paradise.

The snow dredgers clear the roads—

neatly cutting away, shearing the skin,

soft and smooth, exposing the dark flesh

for the army patrol and the ire of their

ever voyeuristic rifle eyes.

Sutapa Chaudhuri has two poetry collections – *Broken Rhapsodies* and *Touching Nadir. My Lord, My Well-Beloved* is a collection of her translations of Rabindranath Tagore's songs.

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