

# 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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