



In Conversation

Tathagata Sagar Pal and Subhadrakalyan



Subhadrakalyan, born on July 27, 2000, is a young, aspiring poet from Kolkata. He graduated from Vijaygarh Jyotish Ray College, University of Calcutta, with a major in English literature, and then completed his Master's in Comparative Indian Language and Literature from the University of Calcutta. Subhadrakalyan worked as a junior journalist in The Statesman, Nices, TIS - The Telegraph in Schools, and The Telegraph, Young Metro, when he was in school. He now works as a freelancer for different print and digital media platforms such as The Astoryn and Bangalive.com. Subhadrakalyan has kept his academic pursuits active having presented papers in both national and international seminars. His papers have been judiciously acknowledged in the state academies. Subhadrakalyan is a practicing Indian classical musician specializing in Tabla. He has also trained in Dhrupad, Khyal and Surod. His creative endeavours have got him a national scholarship from the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, and many other national-level awards.



Aparajita Chakrabarty is one of the most popular young exponents of Rabindranagari and Eshaj today. She completed her studies on Rabindranagari from the Visha Bharati University and continues her career as a musician. She is a self-taught painter and draws most of her inspiration from the introspective space one is offered by Tagore's literature and songs.

Poetry reaches where nothing else can. The poems here do exactly that: they touch you, move you, reconnoitre unknown spaces in the heart, wake up mysteries you never knew that existed within you. And that is what poetry is all about.

Priyish Nandy

Subhadrakalyan's poems are natural, direct, and spontaneous, and speak to the body and mind at the same time. They reveal an astonishing clarity of memory captured in detail and address some of the deepest human instincts.

K Satchidanandan

Subhadrakalyan is a new voice, young, restless but distinctive and intense. The poetry is deeply rooted in everydayness but reaches out to that which lies beyond the obvious. It subverts the tyranny of the dominant time by attempting to touch and apprehend eternity. The unique and the mundane, joy and sadness reside in the routine business of living. In the current scenario where English poetry written in India has reached a point of enduring existence, the poet carves out a place of modest space with this debut collection.

Sharmila Ray

Embers and Ashes



A simplicity rings through the poems in Embers and Ashes as they voice angst and care in a world that is torn and troubled. Subhadrakalyan's voice is characterized by a youthful restlessness that wonderfully reveals the nuances of the lived experience of life with an intensity and feeling that lingers. Ideas, emotions, feelings coalesce in the poems creating new registers of thought and expression.

Nishi Palgartha

ISBN : 978-93-93960-61-0



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₹. 99.99

Subhadrakalyan

Tathagata: Dear Subhadrakalyan, I feel very honoured and privileged to initiate this dialogue with you. First, I would like to congratulate you on your poetry collection, *Embers and Ashes*. It is marvellous in its artistry and thematic selection, daring to go beyond the obvious. The poems, possessing the power to touch the deepest chords in one's heart, are distinctive and intense. In the poem "Prologue," you wrote about poems coming to you "torn at one point, wounded / at another...half empty and half filled / with ageless remorse and / a threat." Since this is your first collection of poems to be published, how did you navigate through these "uncertainties", "strains of sorrow, loss or pain" to conjure such mellifluous melodies?

Subhadrakalyan: Initially, I did not think that this poem would be the introductory poem of the collection. This was written in 2023, more recently than the other ones. Poems do voice my

emotions, but after a point, language takes over and I tend to focus more on the structural construction of my poems than anything else. Once I collected the other poems, I felt that this should also be added to them, because this appeared to be an appropriate introduction to a set of narratives that largely deal with emotions not felt in an otherwise normative situation. It was never navigating through any one thing or two in particular. Writing this book was putting the pieces in their places in a puzzle.

Tathagata: I feel that this anthology can be seen as a journey of your exploration and growth. The poems refer to your childhood innocence, flights of emotions in teens. Particularly, I find the poem, “Rechal,” captivating in its wondrous imagination.

Subhadrakalyan: “Rechal” was written in 2022. It refers to a dream that I describe vividly in the sixth and the seventh stanzas of the poem. I saw this dream when I was barely four-year-old, and I remembered every bit of it for a very long time for some reason or the other. I still have relics of the visions that I had, though now I cannot remember the dream as exactly as I did before I wrote the poem. A friend of mine called it a Coleridgean effect, for the dream evaporated from my memory after I wrote down what I had dreamt.

Tathagata: Obviously, this is where the powerful agency of memory is brought up, as evident in other poems like “Lethal Lines” and “Moonstruck.”

Subhadrakalyan: “Lethal Lines” has a clear background. It records my experience of being brutally sexually abused by a lady teacher at my first school before I shifted to A. K. Ghosh Memorial. I could not come out of the trauma for quite many years. But eventually I came to terms with this experience, thinking that her actions might have been provoked by what she might have faced in her own life.

Tathagata: So, the poetry then becomes the medium of your phoenix like revival. Here, the thematic progression of the anthology catches my attention. Take for instance, your ruminations on death. The poem, “On Death,” begins with these lines: “Ah, grant me farewell, free me from her arms, / And, let me never turn back on my way” and ends with: “For I’ll return with sordidness reborn.” This tone is carried in the next poem, “Lost and Resurrected,” too.

Subhadrakalyan: There are a few poems in this collection that follow the metrical structure of iambic pentameters. “On Death” is one such poem; it’s rather a sonnet. “Jhinook” is the other one in this category. “On Death” was written on facing a personal loss. Now, since I already talked about language taking over, I would like to bring to your attention how I brought the classical reference to Helen in it as a means of emphasis. This probably also shows that I wanted to focus more on the aesthetic progression of the poem than the personal experience that triggered me to write this.

Tathagata: In my opinion, such allusions magnify your poems to something more than a mere chronicle of your life. There are ample references to music too. We find semiotic translations of musical notes, references to musical tunes that haunted you, inspired you in your process of

writing as you struggled with “words.” So, would you say that the tempo of music had a meditative impact on the relation between yourself and “words”?

Subhadrakalyan: The connection between music and words in my poems is a little peculiar. Sometimes I approach words through music, and sometimes it’s the other way round. My Moon poems might help you understand this a bit better. The first one, “Moonstruck,” is about the warm dialogues that I shared with the moon until I was at the doorstep of my teens. The poem has a clear reference to Vilayat and Imrat Khan’s duet performance of the *raga*, Chandni Kedar. Imrat Khan’s firm and assertive strokes in the *surbahar* echoed the authority of the moon and Vilayat Khan’s lilting phrases of the *sitar*, my racing heart. The other one, “Claire de Lune,” is apparently a mock rewrite of Paul Verlaine’s poem of the same name, and writing it helped me understand how Claude Debussy interpreted Verlaine’s poem as the celebrated music piece that it is even to this day.

Tathagata: Yours references to music have obviously been influenced by you hailing from the discipline. Do you think that the readers will be able to understand your works better if they become familiar with music?

Subhadrakalyan: I do not think it is mandatory. Even if you are not familiar with the pieces or the terms that I have referred to, you can read the poems and feel as much as someone acquainted with this art would have. But there would always be brownie points for the readers if they knew a little music as it gives my poems a particular shade that I would have wanted them to address. “Shyam Kalyan” is one poem where I have used the name of the *raga* as the title. To my personal understanding, the melodic movements of the *raga* accord to what I have chosen as the narrative for my poem. A reader knowing the *raga* might or might not be able to capture that, but his/her reading will always be a little deeper than someone else’s who comes to know of the *raga* for the first time through my poem.

Tathagata: I consider it my success as an interviewer. Such conversations are meant to reflect on the process of creation, where meanings come and go, assuming new colours.

Subhadrakalyan: Of course. I would also like to put some focus on “The Watcher” and “Jhinook.” Among all the poems in the anthology, “Jhinook” most clearly talks about childhood. It talks about Russa Road where I spent the first ten years of my life. And, “The Watcher” remains one of my three most favourites from this anthology.

Tathagata: Can it be said that Jhinook is the muse of your poetic creation?

Subhadrakalyan: I do not consider anybody in particular to be my muse. I gather my content from everything I face in life, and everybody involved contributes to my poems.