

**Saumitra Chakravarty 2002: *The Silent Cry*. Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation.**

Selection, introduction and translation by:  
Isabel Alonso Breto  
Universitat de Barcelona  
alonsobreto@ub.edu

**Abstract**

Dr. Saumitra Chakravarty, an alumni of Calcutta University with an Hons degree in English Literature, secured a gold medal in her Masters degree and a Ph.D on the topic “The Search for Identity in Contemporary British Fiction”. She teaches English Literature at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Bangalore and guides research students. She has presented papers in several national and international seminars. She has published a book of poems, *The Silent Cry* (2002), and co-authored a book of critical essays, *The Endangered Self* (2003). A book of translations of short stories of four major Bengali women writers on women’s issues is currently under publication with Oxford UP. She is working on a second book of poems on issues related to tribal women and their habitat, some of which have already been broadcast over All India Radio. She has also been joint co-ordinator for a British Council project on translations for which Prof. Susan Bassnett, at the University of Warwick, is the over-all co-ordinator.

In his Foreword to Saumitra Chakravarty’s first book of poems, Prof. Sumatheendra Nadig makes the following remarks:

Women’s anxieties, their hurts and their endurance is the subject of many of the poems. But there is no whining, no rhetoric of feminists and no irony. There is only a metaphorical observation and remarkable emotional control. These are not cold poems. They draw us into themselves and create an unusual empathy.  
(7)

Yet, although the experience of womanhood is the thread that articulates Chakravarty’s collection, her poems touch on very different subjects. The poet herself—in private correspondence with the translator—has thus explained the concerns of the pieces selected here:

“Seed within” is about the birth of creativity.

“Oasis” is about the concept of chastity (*satitwa*, as it is called in the Indian languages). It is a one-eyed one and entirely female. The poem raises questions about its scope—whether it is purely a physical one or mental too.

“Red Beads” is about the honey collectors of the Sunderbans, tribals who leave their families and go in search of honey into the depths of the forest, and how each year some fall prey to the Sunderbans royal Bengal tiger, their only protection being offerings to the tiger goddess, Bon Bibi.

“Resurrection Unsung” reflects upon the dichotomy between the human and divine aspects of a Messiah, and how every age produces its own Christs, who live out their lonely quests and are martyred for their ideals, unsung.

“Cyclops (The Eye in the Sky)” is about the destruction of the mystery and beauty of the universe by the curse of science or Faustism.

Later on in his prologue, Prof. Nadig praises the author as being “a poet in chains who is capable of chewing the chains to pieces” (12). And he goes on to anticipate Chakravarty’s position in the context of contemporary Indian poetry in English, a writing which, according to him, is still struggling to become a tradition by itself:

I think that the English poetic tradition has not yet started. What we have so far is only minor talents, and the real challenging tradition will begin with a great poet or poetess who becomes a real heir to the European tradition through English poetry and to the great Indian Sanskritic tradition and regional language traditions. Will the new poets like Saumitra Chakravarty pick up the gauntlet? (12)

#### SEED WITHIN

When I despaired of seed,  
Seed was in me forgotten,  
Below. But first  
To peer through that crack  
In the caked earth  
Where, unseen, briars sprang,  
And nettle, even in the rain.

But then the gnarled banyan  
Let down its hair.  
Its first crystal tear  
Trembling long ages  
On unwilling branches,  
Met the gentle crack  
In the hard earth;  
And embraced, long and long  
And sank, deep—  
To where the little seed  
Waited, in youthful hope  
Of birth.

#### SEMILLA INTERIOR

Cuando perdí la fe de echar simiente,

La simiente se perdió en mi interior,  
Abajo. Pero antes  
Acechar a través de esa grieta  
En la tierra apelmazada  
Donde germinaban invisibles zarzas  
Encrespadas, bajo la lluvia también.

Pero entonces el nudoso baniano  
Se soltó los cabellos.  
Su primera lágrima de vidrio  
Temblorosa de siglos  
En inhóspitas ramas  
Se encontró con la grieta  
De la dura tierra;  
Y se unieron por los siglos de los siglos  
Y se hundió, en lo profundo...  
Donde la breve simiente  
Aguardaba, con tierna esperanza  
Para poder brotar.

## OASIS

He never came. But  
Her soul, like a sapling  
Refused to recline,  
A tendril, timorous in the mirage.

Greedy hands  
Clawed at her body  
Mined into her soul:  
The nuptial shovel  
Striking rock  
In impotent fury.

Forehead smeared  
In servile red  
She lived, she loved:  
Linked her soul  
To the mirage,  
Her body coupling  
Manacled, red-gold  
To the pyre of purity.

One-eyed chastity  
Bared yellow teeth;  
Ghostly faces leered  
Around their burning prey.  
Red shadows

Of downed maidens  
Danced in the lurid light.

Silently she screamed:  
But none heard,  
In the orgy of red  
That had choked her  
Since she came of age.

## OASIS

Él no llegó nunca. Pero  
Su alma, como una tierna cepa  
Se negó a reclinarse,  
Tímido zarcillo en un espejismo.

Ávidas manos  
Aferraron su cuerpo  
Penetraron su alma:  
La zapa nupcial  
Golpeando la roca  
Con furiosa impotencia.

Con la frente manchada  
De rojo servil  
Vivió y amó ella:  
Uniendo su alma  
Con el espejismo,  
Su cuerpo hermanado  
Esposado, oro rojo  
A la pira de la castidad.

Castidad de un solo ojo  
Ralos dientes amarillos  
Impúdicos y espectrales rostros  
Rodean su presa inflamada de rojo.  
Descarnados contornos  
De doncellas abatidas  
Danzando en la lívida luz.

Y gritaba en silencio:  
Mas nadie la oía,  
En la orgía de rojo  
Que la estrangulaba  
Desde que se hizo adulta.

## RED BEADS

“He would return.”  
The blood in her veins  
Throbbled to tune  
And she knew.  
The red beads tapped  
Gently at her breasts  
And told her so.

“They are luck beads”  
The old hag had cackled  
Toothless, at the village fair;  
“Passion beds-red, like union,  
....Like Death,” she said.  
Spittle, like a spider’s web  
Spread thin, on furrowed lips.

Like red fruit they hung  
On black branches: on  
Black breasts fruited  
With desire. Breasts  
Taut with pain of toil  
Desolate, dawn to dusk  
In ripening acres  
For a handful of grain.

“He would return,”  
She said. Fingers  
Closed on red beads—  
Tiny talismans of fear,  
“He must.” Eyes closed,  
She murmured to  
The blood beads at her breast.

Black limbs rose  
And fell. Her scythe  
Was a half moon  
Of sunlight.  
Like the desire  
In the dark fear  
At her breast.

Together, they had spun  
Their dream: a home  
She would pour  
The song of her youth  
Into; life’s rythms  
In earth colours  
Upon earth walls;

The cry of a child  
At her breast.

He left; the wind  
Billowing in white cloth  
Round black loins,  
His rock-carved body  
Aflame, in the blood  
Of the dying sun.  
She watched him;  
Her earth-god, fire-lit  
In a dream of life,  
A dream they had  
Dared to dream.

“He would be home,”  
She said, “home to live  
The dream, with money  
From the hunt of honey.”  
Together they had knelt  
To bon-Bibi, yellow-eyed  
Goddess of the woods,  
Totem of fear in the dark.  
She must be fed  
Her yearly ritual  
Of blood and flesh.

Many moons would wane,  
Many sleepless nights.  
The honey seekers  
In the sundari trees  
Their ritual done  
Home to fields  
Gold with their sweat.  
“He would come...”  
Murmured the beads  
At her breasts.

They came, the honey-seekers  
From the sundari trees  
The boatman’s song  
Frozen, across cracked lips,  
Earth-jars at their feet.  
They came, the conquerors,  
The dreamers of distant dreams:  
They knelt to the tiger-goddess,  
Yellow-eyed totem  
In the woods.

They stood before her;

His loin-cloth, white  
With spilt red beads  
In their arms.  
“Luck beads,” they said  
With a shiver,  
“Bon-bibi chose her mate,”  
They said. The golden eye  
Leapt in the forest dark:  
The year’s ritual  
Was done.

## CUENTAS ROJAS

Él regresaría.  
La sangre en sus venas  
Latía en orden  
Y lo sabía.  
Las cuentas rojas golpeaban  
Dulcemente en sus pechos  
Y le decían que sí.

“Son cuentas de la suerte”  
Cloqueó la vieja bruja sin dientes  
En la feria del pueblo;  
“Cuentas rojo pasión, como la unión,  
...Como la muerte”, pronunció.  
La baba, una telaraña extendida  
Sutil, sobre labios agrietados.

Como rojos frutos que pendiesen  
De negras ramas: de  
Negros pechos sazonados  
Con deseo. Pechos  
Tensos por el dolor del esfuerzo  
Desolados, del amanecer a la noche  
Entre acres madurados  
Por un puñado de grano.

“Regresará”  
Repitió. Los dedos  
Cerrados sobre las rojas cuentas...  
Diminutos talismanes contra el miedo,  
“Tiene que hacerlo”. Ojos cerrados,  
Murmurando hacia las cuentas  
De sangre en su pecho.

Negros miembros se elevaban  
Y caían. Su hoz

Una media luna  
De sol.  
Como el deseo  
En el miedo oscuro  
De su pecho.

Juntos habían hilvanado  
Su sueño: un hogar  
Donde ella vertería  
El canto de su juventud;  
Los ritmos de la vida  
Entre colores de tierra;  
Entre paredes de tierra  
El llanto de un niño  
En su pecho.

Él se fue; el viento  
Ondulando el paño blanco  
Sobre sus negros lomos,  
Su cuerpo esculpido en piedra  
Incendiado por la sangre  
Del muriente sol.  
Ella lo vio alejarse  
Su dios en la tierra, encendido  
Por el sueño de la vida,  
Un sueño que ellos  
Osaron soñar.

“Volverá a casa”,  
Repitió. “Para vivir  
Ese sueño, con dinero  
De la caza de miel”.  
Juntos se habían postrado  
Ante Bon-Bibi, de los ojos amarillos  
Diosa de los bosques,  
Tótem del miedo a la oscuridad  
Que había de coleccionar  
Su ritual festín anual  
De sangre humana.

Muchas lunas pasarían,  
Muchas noches en vigilia.  
Los colectores de miel  
Entre los bosques Sundari  
Concluido el ritual  
Volverían al hogar en los campos  
Bañados en sudor dorado.  
“Volverá...”  
Murmuraban las cuentas  
En su pecho.

Regresaron, los colectores de miel  
De los bosques Sundari  
La canción del batelero  
Helada en los labios crispados,  
A sus pies las jarras de barro.  
Llegaron, los conquistadores,  
Soñadores de distantes sueños:  
Se postraron ante la diosa-tigresa,  
Tótem de ojos amarillos  
En los bosques.

Llegaron frente a ella;  
El taparrabos blanco  
Hollado de rojas cuentas  
En los brazos.  
“Cuentas de la suerte”, dijeron  
Con un escalofrío,  
“Bon-Bibi eligió su compañero”,  
Dijeron. La pupila dorada  
Embistió desde la oscuridad del bosque:  
El ritual anual  
Fue satisfecho.

#### RESURRECTION UNSUNG

The last peal died  
Years ago.  
No one knew; no one saw  
The brown blood  
In the imperturbable snow.  
Only the gaunt spruce  
In its brass urn,  
Tinsel, firelit, futile.  
In fire-bright cribs  
Celluloid Christs  
Were born, reborn;  
Faith's annual ecstasy.

No one heard  
The footsteps in the snow  
Hushed in the clang  
Of the belfry.

The empty chalice gleamed  
Dull, alone, forgotten:  
Sad symbol of Gethsemene.  
The brown blood in snow

Exquisitely human now;  
Its sacred smell  
Haunts the shadowy columns  
Of Time.  
Behind each, the hollow gasp  
And stifled cry,  
The agony of every Jesus  
Whom Time impales again  
Upon the lonely cross  
Of Christhood.

The footsteps die softly away;  
The pristine snow,  
Its virgin mask unshed  
Glow with lurid light  
Of neon and tinsel.

#### IGNORADA RESURRECCIÓN

El último eco murió  
Hace años.  
Nadie supo; nadie vio  
La sangre cobriza  
En la nieve imperturbable.  
Sólo la rígida picea  
En su urna de latón,  
Ostentosa, futil, vana.  
En iluminados pesebres  
Los Cristos de celuloide  
Nacían y renacían;  
Éxtasis anual de la Fe.

Nadie oyó  
Las pisadas en la nieve  
Acalladas por el tumulto  
Del campanario.

Relumbraba el cáliz vacío  
Opaco, aislado, olvidado:  
Triste símbolo de Getsemaní.  
La sangre cobriza en la nieve  
Ya exquisitamente humana;  
Olor sacro que permanece  
En las sombrías columnas  
Del tiempo.  
Tras cada una, la hueca boqueada  
Y el grito ahogado,  
La agonía de cada Jesús

clavado otra vez por el Tiempo  
a la cruz solitaria  
Del Cristo.

Las pisadas se disipan suavemente;  
La prístina nieve,  
Intacta su máscara virgen  
Reluce una luz mortecina  
De neón y oropeles.

CYCLOPS  
(The Eye in the sky)

It is the curse of Faustism.

A lonely Cyclops  
Hovers about his vigil.  
The peace of mystery  
Shatters; its myriad fragments  
Drip slowly to earth—  
Manna to a curious thirst.  
The anger of the Sun  
Is dissolute,  
Scorching the child at the mother's breast.

The third eye  
Gleams red as a gash  
Dispersing not Power  
But Death.  
For man whose fist  
Claws at mystery  
And rubs the horizon  
Thin, between lenses  
Insatiable.  
In the glare of noon  
God dies hard up there  
Where the blackness  
Evaporates—  
And man is suddenly along,  
Himself his own god  
In noonlight entangled.

CÍCLOPE  
(El ojo en el cielo)

Es la maldición del Faustismo.

Un cíclope solitario  
Suspenso sobre su vigilia.  
La paz del misterio  
Se quiebra; miríadas de fragmentos  
Se derraman sobre la tierra—  
Maná de una sed singular.  
La ira del sol  
Es disoluta.  
Abrasa al niño en el pecho de su madre.

El tercer ojo  
Centellea rojo como una cuchillada  
Irradiando no Poder  
Sino Muerte.  
Para el hombre cuyo puño  
Clama al misterio  
Y escudriña el horizonte  
Escuálido, entre lentes  
Insaciable.  
A la luz del mediodía  
Muere Dios de repente en lo alto  
Donde la oscuridad  
Se evapora—  
Y el hombre de pronto está solo,  
Él mismo su propio dios  
En el mediodía entrampado.