

Kalagora

Siddhartha Bose is a poet and performer based in London. He grew up in India, followed by a seven year stint in the USA. Selections of his work have appeared in the anthologies *City State: New London Poetry* (Penned in the Margins, 2009), *Voice Recognition: 21 Poets for the 21st Century* (Bloodaxe Books, 2009) and *The HarperCollins Book of Modern Poetry in English by Indians* (HarperCollins, 2010).

Bose has recently completed a PhD at Queen Mary, University of London. His one-man stage show, *Kalagora*, was produced by Penned in the Margins and received its premiere in London in 2010. He is developing a full-length play with WhynotTheatre, Toronto, and was dubbed one of the 'ten rising stars of British poetry' by *The Times*.

kalagora.com

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Siddhartha Bose

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This book is for my father, who opened the doors.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Kalagora has grown with me for many years. It has been conceived and written across three continents.

The 'Animal City' of the book is Bombay, city of my childhood. Many other cities have contributed to its inception including New York, Columbus, Bangalore and, above all, Calcutta, city of my birth, and London, where this book became what it is.

Kalagora is a Hindi neologism that translates as 'black man/white man'.

This book tells his story.

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Kalagora

Do you know what we are? They are wise and they tell us there is a new species on this earth. It is not this or that, it belongs not here or there, it is nothing. In the beginning when we were born, Sanjay, we were just what we were, the sons of our mothers and fathers, but now we are something else. But time has passed and the years have made us a new animal: chi-chi, half-and-half, black-and-white. Do you know what this means, black-and-white?

— Vikram Chandra, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*

For

Shyamal Kumar Bose

(1950–2008)

father, philosopher, guide

I

Prolectric

Kalagora

I

Been given a set o' mirrors, a
net o' raw reflecting jewels,
cut crystal ruins o' billboards,
dustbins, cars, caravans o' meat,
computer chips, shards to
clay, soap operas,
wheels o' fire, statue rituals—

been smoked o' herb, witch, junk, pills, the
lot. Been made the god o' monkey, been told to
squeeze out oil o' ma veins, pore o' ma lobes, to
strike match altars and build
towers o' words in
clothes o' clown stripped o' language, home,
made many o' accent with ten heads,
to reflect, with gaunt o' breath o' rain,
alien worlds—story boxes— in glass that
slashes my wrists.

I heard the leper o' Calcutta say,
the bowl o' her hands cradling the city,
the soul o' monsoon wind, her voice—

'The holy stains

the need, the hour.'

And O' so me a c-c-caterpillar, not
yet a b-b-butterfly, cocooned in
confines o' brick,
sitting 'midst straws o' iron,
shells o' sulphur,
quicksilver graffiti,
open wounds, aaaaaart.

In immaculate gestation
I bounced round the oceans
o' the Earth, and like my wandering shadow,
sowed cemeteries in
animal cities.

Yet, I come clear —

my tales lung others.

So I hide behind a curtain,
fall asleep, snore.

II

In my tapestry o' dreams
I'm at a theatre,
covered in hill, tree, a river o' diamonds, a

sky bleached brass.

I'm not alone —
to my right, a brown king
draped in spots o' red is
eaten by black horses —

blood sprays. They rip
flesh, chew with hints.

To my left, a gathering o' sun ra trumpets
played by robed black women
greet this serenade, this gluttony.

A thunderclap o' applause
spreads like plaguefire as many
in blue jeans,
masks o' rotting wood chiselled to smiles
begin to laugh, pricked
by farce.

I noticed myself nude,
hid in
bushes o' hair,
my cock jutting out
like a promontory.

Laughter smells as a
man with black beard,

Caliban's curse, enters from
backstage left.

With a wand o' hair
he plucks another
mask from the air round us,
and with smile o' passion
on red wrinkled face, he
holds it to me, this magic
mask o' mud,
o' my shame—

eyes large, luminous, like
the moon on a night
o' scorching, pagan rites.