

Scattered Leaves



Kanchan Chatterjee is a fifty one year old government service holder in the finance department of Government of India.

He writes poems especially Japanese style poems, e.g. haiku, tanka and haibun. He has won several awards for his haiku from Japan, USA, Romania, Poland etc. He has been published regularly in various online haiku and other poetry journals e.g. 'Frogpond', 'The heron's Nest', 'Wales Haiku Journal', 'Cattails', 'Asahi haikuist network', 'Mainichi', 'Akitsu Quarterly', 'Fox Poetry Box' etc. His poems were featured in a few Indian poetry anthologies namely 'Love in verses' and 'Indus valley'. His haiku appeared regularly in Japan's official broadcaster NHK's program 'Haiku Masters'.

He was a 'Pushcart Award' nominee in 2012.

There is a glowing orange coal between the ash and the as-yet unburnt stick of incense; Chatterjee's haiku are like that coal, quietly intense and subtly moving. His poems take us on strolls through morning markets, where we note and care about the tea sellers and vendors. In *Scattered Leaves*, we pass through the fields and holidays of India, and encounter the sharp edges of modernity poking through. Chatterjee's poems linger, like whiffs of incense that curl in the upper corners of a room, adding a new dimension to the air we breathe.

– **Kit Pancoast Nagamura**,
Award-winning haiku poet and photographer

Scattered Leaves

haiku by

Kanchan Chatterjee



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haiku by
Kanchan Chatterjee



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*Dedicated to
Elaine Andre Sensei,
my haiku teacher*

FOREWORD

Scattered Leaves is a fitting title for a collection of verses written over time, covering many seasons and events. By eschewing word play, tropes, and Western literary devices that divert attention toward the author's own cleverness, Kanchan Chatterjee shows the reader glimpses of his Bengali world. His world is still largely agrarian and natural, familial—intrinsically bound to the cyclic seasons and religious festivals while in the midst of change. Chatterjee's world is one of contradictions, where bullock carts, haystacks, and teaming populations are commonplace, yet the individual's sense of aloneness exists. There is profound loss in the mention of a child's grave, one of steady going in the face of difficulties, and of delights in the exchange of Holi gifts. It is a world where tea stall attendants serve up more cups of tea than Starbucks serves of coffee worldwide.

Craftsmanship in haiku comes through study of the classics. This collection of verses evidences an easy familiarity with the Japanese haiku masters' toolbox: *karumi* (lightness), *mono no aware* (pathos, empathy, a gentle sadness about the reality of life), *wabi* (simple, austere beauty), and *yugen* (dim, deep, vague, mysterious, profound grace) to mention a few. The conditions of haiku are clearly present in *Scattered Leaves* through comparison, contrast, and cinematic

shift (long shot/close-up, setting/scene, etc.). For example:

power cut . . .
a firefly settles
on my iPhone

Many towns and villages in India have frequent power outages, some of which are due to generators that are run only certain hours each day or the frequent breakdowns of old equipment. One might react to these outages with annoyance over the inconvenience or choose to simply disregard them and go on with life. Perhaps the cell phone is also in blackout mode. Here, attention turns from a man-made energy source that fails to a firefly that lands on a cell phone. All of this is encapsulated in just eight words. We also know the season to be summer since that's when fireflies appear. Those familiar with the 2009 movie *Avatar* might associate the verse with a particular scene that comes shortly after Jake Sully's avatar enters the Na'vi world. As Neytiri begins to teach Jake about her world there is a scene in which luminous dandelion-seed-like spirit beings descend to land on Jake, confirming Jake's right spirit. The firefly's luminescence, too, invokes a certain sense of awe. Hints of the author's daily life are subtly revealed in his verses. For example:

a clay lamp
flickers by the basil pot . .
spring evening

It is customary in Hindu households to light a clay oil lamp by the potted basil plant each day at sunset as an offering to Krishna, the basil plant being symbolic of Krishna. Elsewhere verses mention temples, incense ashes, and statues in an atmosphere that is also punctuated by a muezzin's call to prayer. Like curry spices, the world about which Chatterjee writes has a certain blend of cultural flavors that are part of daily life. To a great extent his is a world positioned on the boundary between heaven and earth.

Moon viewing is a universally enjoyable experience, which holds a particularly prominent place in Japan, where viewing the full August moon is a much anticipated communal event. Chatterjee's moon viewing verse addresses a human foible:

moon viewing . . .
we compare the price
of our cameras

Even the best moon view doesn't seem capable of holding our undivided attention for very long. Many of us will attempt to capture a second-hand view via camera. But in this verse we step back even beyond the mechanics of taking a picture to compare camera prices with one another. There may be a hint of ego involved in dealing with price or we may simply be interested in discovering how much it might cost to get a better photo.

There's good reason why Kanchan Chatterjee has won international haiku awards, including NHK – Haiku Masters competitions in Japan. In *Scattered Leaves* you will find many occasions to think beyond some simple words and appreciate the human complexity within them.

– Elaine Andre,
an award winning, widely published haiku poet
and sensei (teacher)

SCATTERED LEAVES

(haiku)

cold day...
sound of clipping nails
from next room



muggy night...
one more mango falls
on the tin roof



dense fog...
the paper boy misses
the first floor



power cut...
a firefly settles
on my iPhone



not one dog
barks at the car alarm...
autumn deepens



long night...
the heap of incense ashes
grows



fresh trimmed grass
on the golf course — a young man
takes a wild swing



Diwali* —
among the wine bottles
a laughing Buddha

* Diwali is one of the most popular Hindu festival. Also known as festival of lights, it falls on the new moon night of the Kartika month, sometime between October and November.



pilgrims trail...
getting wet in the fog
little by little



between thunder claps...
the front door's
soft creak



departing moon...
the muezzin's
first call



village trail...
the butterfly shifts
to another twig



darkening clouds...
a flock of mynahs descends
on a tiled field



evening mist...
a bullock cart's
creaking wheels



Father's Day...
my son offers to carry
the groceries



evening chill...
a paper plane stuck
on barbed wire



inside the temple
a monk describes paradise —
thunder clap



sundown...
a scarecrow stands
with open arms



end of the fair...
on the garbage heap
a pinwheel



evening haze...
a heron takes off
from the swamp



a clay lamp
flickers by the basil pot...
spring evening



a crow settles
on the windowsill...
monsoon dusk



summer field...
a farmer talks to his goat
while chewing a grass



a slight shudder
as the boat docks —
hazy moon



an army truck
hurries towards the border...
spring thunderstorm



Dussera* night...
an old woman gathers
her unsold flowers

* Dussehra or Dussera is a major Hindu festival celebrated at the end of Navaratri every year. It is observed on the tenth day in the Hindu calendar month of Ashvin or Kartik, the sixth and seventh month of the Hindu calendar respectively, which typically falls in the Gregorian months of September and October.



spring rain...
even the garbage bin
looks fresh



the border guard
asks for a cigarette...
autumn rain



drizzle
follows cicadas' cries...
Marpha* night

* *Marpha* – It's a small village in the Mustang district of Dhaulagiri Range in northern Nepal.



road to Pokhara*...
a group of bikers zooms
past the cool spring

* *Pokhara* is a famous tourist place in Nepal.



autumn rains...
an upside down paper boat
on the curb



Boy's Day...
an old slingshot hangs
on the wall



midday nap...
from my smartphone app
sound of waves



Harvest Moon...
the Kathakali* dancer's
happy smile

* A classical dance form from the south Indian state of Kerala.



pampas grass...
a buffalo rises
from it



all night long...
the sound of a rice huller
at the bend



Pitripaksha...
a long pause before
grandpa's name



pilgrim's trail...
on my cellphone's GPS
"You are here"



at the shrine...
as the young wrestler bows
a cuckoo's call



flapping hand fans —
the five hundred pound fury's
perfect pin



the trekking guide
doesn't notice the blossoms...
Mustang valley*

* *Mustang valley* is in northern Nepal.



homecoming...
on both sides of the highway
blooming pampas



moon viewing...
we compare the price
of our cameras



quiet morning...
a line of smiling faces
with their Holi gifts



shopping mall...
a cuckoo calls out
from my iPhone



monsoon drizzle —
the billboard model sips
Darjeeling tea



passing monsoon...
the weeds on the old roof
start to sprout



a sun break
on the drenched rose bud...
quiet morning



evening chill...
starting my Sanskrit lessons
with 'Karma'



Buddha's birthday...
an old monk scrambles to pick
a fallen fig leaf



monsoon clouds...
a candy floss hawker
crosses the road



airport lounge...
after the pilgrims' exit
an ant follows



a pause
during the talks —
spring rain



at the traffic light
a rickshaw puller
watches the moon...



on the billboard
all women in red sarees —
Chennai* summer

* Chennai was earlier known as Madras is a famous City in South India.



short night...
yawning, the tea seller
opens his shop



autumn rains...
slowly, the village trail
disappears



cold evening —
the number she gave
doesn't exist



village fair...
last year's tea seller
selling kites



spring cleaning...
on the globe some countries
with wrong names



monsoon dusk...
a group of women sings
the rice planting songs



monsoon dusk...
the man who asked for the way
has disappeared



long night...
the faucet's
slow drip



monsoon breeze...
her side of the park bench
still warm



not enough men
to carry the dead body...
long autumn rains



wish I could change
the scarecrow's old jacket...
sunny morning



deepening dusk....
a forgotten hand fan lies
in the cupboard



frog song...
the kid's final touch
to his paper boat



the tea seller
is still asleep at dawn...
autumn rains



third autumn...
now I call this place
my home



hot night...
I close the chat by sending
a smiley



spring rain...
even the garbage bin
looks cleaner



after dad's chemo
we talk of survival rate —
monsoon drizzle



last embers
fall from the incense stick —
Muezzin's first call



in the cow shed
among the mosquito song...
ringing cowbells



fish market...
the vendor spreads a koi's
fresh gills



warm breeze...
the ruffled feathers
of a kingfisher



the sold cuckoo
cries out suddenly...
evening deepens



the field
where the puppy was buried —
pampas grass



'single', my status
in the hotel register...
deepening autumn



morning breeze...
a snail comes out
in the carpark



no one noticed
its slight yellow...
floribunda



autumn evening...
from grandpa's room
the smell of anisette



homecoming...
just a lone cricket
at the front door



morning drizzle...
a million paper cranes
at the Peace Park



cold room...
the cell phone beeps to signal
a low battery



deep autumn...
the sound of a bookmark
falling on the floor



in the old house
a bent door gets repaired...
passing autumn



a window
is shut silently...
Full Frost Moon



from now on
grasshopper is my name...
morning breeze



north wind...
driftwood keeps hitting
the docked boat



muggy noon...
the post office clock
stopped at six



passing autumn...
the harmonica's coldness
against my lips



suddenly
a crow breaks the silence...
monsoon rain



summer solstice...
the yoga instructor
shifts her stance



an empty room
filled by the sparrows' sound...
spring has come



roses again...
I can't decide which one
to look at



Shivaratri*...
the smell of frankincense
from ma's shawl

* *Shivaratri* is a Hindu festival celebrated annually in honor of Lord Shiva, during February and in particular, marks the day of the consummation of marriage of Shiva. Literally, it means 'Night of Shiva.'



Dussera night...
on my lips the chants
of my dad



the man is gone...
a lone cricket chirps
by his front door



grandma's gift...
a fleeting butterfly
on the quilt



sickle moon...
a group of lanterns crosses
the rice field



tonight's moon
oh, how it brings me down
to my knees!



drifting moon...
stuck on the bedroom wall
a red bindi*

* A *bindi* is a coloured dot worn on the centre of the forehead, originally by Hindus and Jains from the Indian subcontinent, mostly by women and Sadhus.



hot night...
the falling saree's
soft rustle



north wind...
the old window
opens, closes



Pitripaksha*...
remembering the taste of barfis
that grandma made

* *Pitripaksha* - Generally in September crops in India and Nepal are ready and the produce is offered as a mark of respect and gratitude first to the ancestors be they parents or forefathers before other festivals like *Navaratri* begin.



making a place
for another friend...
moon viewing



cutting the moon
in half, a fishing boat
slides away...



cooling off the cows
in the river, a woman
in a red saree...



autumn dusk...
a one-legged sparrow
comes to my terrace



leaving his guests
the host goes to the terrace
for moon viewing...



warm evening...
the smell of tuna fish
from the trawlers



on the hand fan
a black bird with a red beak
about to fly...



long rains...
a solitary crow stretches
its wings



fading moon...
the muezzin's
first call



at last...
I put down the camera
to watch the moon



evening chill...
the street lights go on
one by one



a flash of green
on the monsoon sky...
parakeets



end of Dussera...
the boy keeps on blowing
the plastic trumpet



zazen...
on the prayer mat
me and an ant



from the dragon
the autumn cloud changes
to a rooster...



Diwali night...
after the fireworks
the silence



autumn moon...
only one window
with dim light



do I know you
from another life
grasshopper?



end of fair...
a crushed pinwheel lies
by the road



morning mist...
a silhouette lights a fire
at the bend



through mist...
a brass cannon points
at two lovers



garbage pick-up...
the smell of mango skin
fills the air



Miss World '90
covers the beer bar's wall...
Kathmandu night



muggy midnight...
the traffic light blinks
only yellow



spring drizzle...
I log out of facebook
to watch it



sweltering heat...
the stone lion's open mouth
at the gate



spring drizzle...
pink shorts and a pair of blue jeans
share one umbrella



thunderstorm...
all the poinsettias
stand stark



suburban station...
between two announcements
a cuckoo's call



cold moon...
a black robed priest closes
the temple gate



a plastic rose
nodding on the dashboard...
office commute



deepening dusk...
the dragonfly shifts
to the next twig



evening moon...
the man who showed me the trail
disappears



north wind...
the calendar's fitful twitch
through the night



a fallen tree —
it's mango picking time
in my village



evening pond...
a grasshopper settles
on a reed



hazy moon...
sensei starts a discussion
on art prices



hotel parking...
a Nissan comes drenched
in spring rain



evening rush...
the rickshaw puller starts
a rice cutting song



harvest over...
the farmer bends his head
in prayer



summer vacation...
from each tent a laptop's
blue light



railway station...
a bunch of cattle sellers
with cowbells



quiet evening...
a group of lanterns crosses
the rice field



grandpa starts
with his Sicilian Defense* —
monsoon dusk

* The *Sicilian Defence* is a chess opening move.



spring breeze...
the lama says you'll know
when it's time



dad's monitor glows...
through the ICU window
a sudden cuckoo



monsoon night...
the last boat's lantern
is full of soot



cuckoo's call
when did we stop
talking?



muggy noon...
the crows finish off
a dead mouse



monsoon dusk...
the pensive fisherman's
smoke rings



autumn evening...
sensei takes a last snap
of her roses



after fixing
the flush, the plumber asks for
a glass of water...



last bale of hay...
the farmer spits out
his tobacco



this snail and me
uprooted on a fourth floor
apartment...



just four or five men
at the railway station —
long autumn rains



deepening dusk...
a heron takes off
from the swamp



Earth Day...
a new water bowl
for the sparrows



spring hailstorm...
my reclusive neighbour comes
to the terrace



our pillow talk
while a dry leaf curls
in the fire...



summer vacation...
I change the phone's screensaver
to snowy peaks



the dazzle
of her pearl earrings —
Full Pink Moon



falling gently
on this young grave...
cherry blossoms



between tunnels
a glimpse of rain soaked leaves —
monsoon evening



AC compartment...
the guy next to me starts to talk
about iron ore



falling blossoms —
dad goes for the morning walk
without his cane



between us...
just the wipers' screech
and spring rain



morning shift...
the guard comes out whistling
through the blossoms



morning tea...
two or three ants wait
by the saucer



first semester...
jumping, the boy clears
a flower bed



Pink Full Moon...
a faint sound of bangles
from next door



flying flying
what else are you good at
dragonfly?



childhood home...
a broken Barbie lies
on young grass



stone Buddha...
one or two blossom fall
on him too



a lawn mower's buzz
comes from the nearby park...
scent of ripe mangoes



hazy moon...
a snail crosses
the carpark



spring rain...
a lone crow stretches
its wings



pollen grains
scattered on the priest's robe...
morning breeze



warm night...
a cat's tail slides
out the door



quiet evening...
the fig tree by the gate
starts to shed leaves



a firefly...
and just before switching off
another



morning haze...
before the sermon a monk
checks the mic



temple bell...
the faded chrysanthemums
on mom's shawl



spring morning...
the prayer wheels still cold
to the touch



springtime...
each day the jacaranda
lives, dies



spring breeze...
the moon on the lake
stirs a little



tonight
the beetle too is sleeping —
spring rain



daybreak...
a drawn-out croak
then another



spring breeze...
walking along, the priest
gives his sermon



cold room...
on TV the swearing-in
goes on



hazy moon...
the temple priest's
long yawn



cold morning...
the tea seller and I
share a joke



drive back home...
on the back of a bus
painted geese



quiet evening...
sipping beer grandpa switches
the skype on



power cut...
a chorus of croaks
from the courtyard



AC shop...
the mannequin's skirt
flutters



summer rain...
two sparrows meander
into my room



a ladybug sits
on the boy's horoscope...
match making



village fair...
the old tea seller
in a new coat



New Year's eve...
the tea seller adds
some extra sugar



facebook chat...
we talk about sushi
and beer



a crow begs
for crumbs at my window —
empty white plate



cold wave...
the morning muezzin's
crackling voice



Farmers' market...
among the vegetables
a cricket chirps



winter moon...
a man eating two rotis
is what I am



village tea shop...
the smell of rice husk
on their clothes



Christmas card...
the way mom wrote
"take care"



New Year's Eve...
out of an old window
a drunk's face



a white patch
at the old calendar's place...
New Year's Day



north wind...
a rocker's long creak
from the park



after
the wind stops...
tulips



Jisei*
(Japanese death poem)

searching grass blades
on the barren field...
a grasshopper

* The death poem is a genre of poetry that developed in the literary traditions of East Asian cultures—most prominently in Japan. They tend to offer a reflection on death—both in general and concerning the imminent death of the author—that is often coupled with a meaningful observation on life.



barbed wire...
and spread across the field
first frost



New Year's Day...
a smooch emoji
in the inbox



cold wind...
origami cranes flutter
on the table



on its face
over the husk mound...
a scarecrow



wedding day...
smell of cut onion
and a cock's crow



evening lull...
a peasant takes his scarecrow
to the shed



growing dusk...
a crow settles to nibble
the blossoms



the fish vendor
silently speeds past my gate —
rolling thunder



morning walk...
cold sparrows chirping
behind the leaves



quiet morning...
among the blossoms a monk
dozes off



spring breeze...
'I too was a hippie'
says the tea seller



chanting sutras...
the young monk picks up
a fly swatter



the park keeper
has grown old clipping
bougainvilleas...



thunderstorm —
an elephant calls out
from the circus tent



this urge
to go in all directions —
spring breeze



sitting alone
at the office desk —
spring rain



cold wave...
people at the chai* shop
just as cold

* Chai is a Hindi word for tea.



Christmas break...
a half drawn heart
on the blackboard



one tree
one farmer's field...
morning fog



after the chemo...
a cuckoo calls in between
dad's whispers



short night...
one tea shop is opening
by the beach



hunter's moon...
the slingshot's long shadow
on the wall



cold evening...
the astrologer shifts his paan*
to the other cheek

* Betel



short night...
a life guard walks up
to his boat



light
from a distant trawler —
hazy moon



morning breeze...
an oil seller's shrill rises
from the alley



almost spring...
a crow flies over
the railroad



Deewali time...
the owner scrubs and paints
his sweets shop



on his face too
the cold wind blows...
stone buddha



almost spring...
a row of sparkling cars
in the car park



lunch break...
a horsefly settles
on my desk



cold room...
on the fridge a note says
'love you dad'



evening chill...
a dim lamp hangs
in the chai shop



late autumn...
a few more bare threads
in my rug



home coming...
from the curb's crack
blooming moss



on the terrace
the two dahlias' long wait
for the sun...



Kathmandu...
a gush of north wind
welcomes me



the piles of logs
at the cremation grounds
are starting to bud...



plastic rose...
a honey bee keeps circling
over it



almost dark...
outside the bamboo blinds
the sound of cow bells



Full Rose Moon —
smiling, the village bride
shows her teeth



sounds of bare feet
and a sari's rustle —
moon drift



a load of steel
rolls over fallen blossoms
at the gate...



summer rain...
two sparrows meander
into my room



village fair...
the tea seller offers
parakeets too



summer noon...
the coconut vendor sleeps
under his cart



evening glow...
my childhood home fades away
in the rear view



rugged palms
by the tea seller's fire...
cold morning



morning walk...
a brace of ducks waddles
into a rice field



clustered tents
along the Ganga Sagar* —
cold moon

* An island in the Ganges Delta in India, where pilgrims converge to take a holy dip during 'Makar Sankranti' which falls on 14th/15th January.



Jogbani out post...
the border guard kneels to pick
a chrysanthemum



Makar Sankranti...
after the holy dip
rush to the tea shop



four beers
make it harder to sleep...
Wolf Moon



New Year's Day —
I am, what I was
an old Sal* tree

* This tree is native to the Indian subcontinent, ranging south of the Himalaya from Myanmar in the east to Nepal, India and Bangladesh.



cold moon —
a selfie stick to catch
the bride's smile



jingling bells...
Maha Shivaratri starts
with ganja smoke



foggy morning...
after the train's whistle
a rooster's call



fresh firewood
at the burning ghat...
year's end



my humble room
just as it was yesterday —
New Year begins



year's end...
the haystacks overflow
the road



evening lull...
from the window the sound
of a flapping kite



Bodhgaya...
a monk unwraps his shawl
to take a selfie



forest trail...
the sound of dew drops
with each step



morning mist...
a fishy smell wafts
from empty boats



well then dahlink!
let's go out and become
sunflowers

