

## The Poverty Line

by the Bengali poet **Tarapada Roy**

I was poor. Very poor.  
There was no food to quell my hunger  
No clothes to hide the shame of my naked body  
No roof above my head.  
You were so kind.  
You came and you said  
'No. Poverty is a debasing word. It dehumanizes man.  
You are needy.'

My days were spent in dire need.  
My needy days, day after day, were never-ending.  
As I grew weaker  
Again you came.  
This time you said.  
'Look, I've thought it over,  
"Needy" is not a good word either.  
You are destitute.'

My days and my nights, like a deep longing sigh,  
Bore my destitution.  
Cowering in the burning heat,  
Shivering in the cold winter nights,  
Drenched in the never-ending rains.  
I went from being destitute to greater destitution.  
But you were tireless.  
Again you came.  
This time you said  
'There is no meaning to this destitution.  
Why should you be destitute?  
You have always been denied.  
You are deprived, the ever deprived.'

There was no end to my deprivation.  
In hunger and in want, year after year,  
Sleeping in the open streets under the relentless sky  
My body a mere skeleton  
Was barely alive.  
But you didn't forget me.  
This time you came with raised fist  
In your booming voice, you called out to me.  
Rise, rise the exploited masses.

No longer did I have the strength to rise.  
In hunger and in want, my body had wasted.  
My ribs heaved with every breath.  
Your vigour and your passion  
Were too much for me to match.  
Since then many more days have gone.  
You are now more wise, more astute.  
This time you brought a blackboard.  
Chalk in hand, you drew this glistening bright long line.  
This time you had really taken great pain.  
Wiping the sweat from your brow, you beckoned me.  
'Look. See this line.  
Below, far below this line, is where you belong.'

Wonderful!  
Profusely, Gratefully, Indebtedly, I thank you.  
For my poverty, I thank you.  
For my need, I thank you.  
For my destitution, I thank you.  
For my deprivation, I thank you.  
For my exploitedness, I thank you.  
And most of all, for that sparkling line.  
For that glittering gift.  
O great benefactor!  
I thank you.

Translated from Bangla by **Shahidul Alam**.