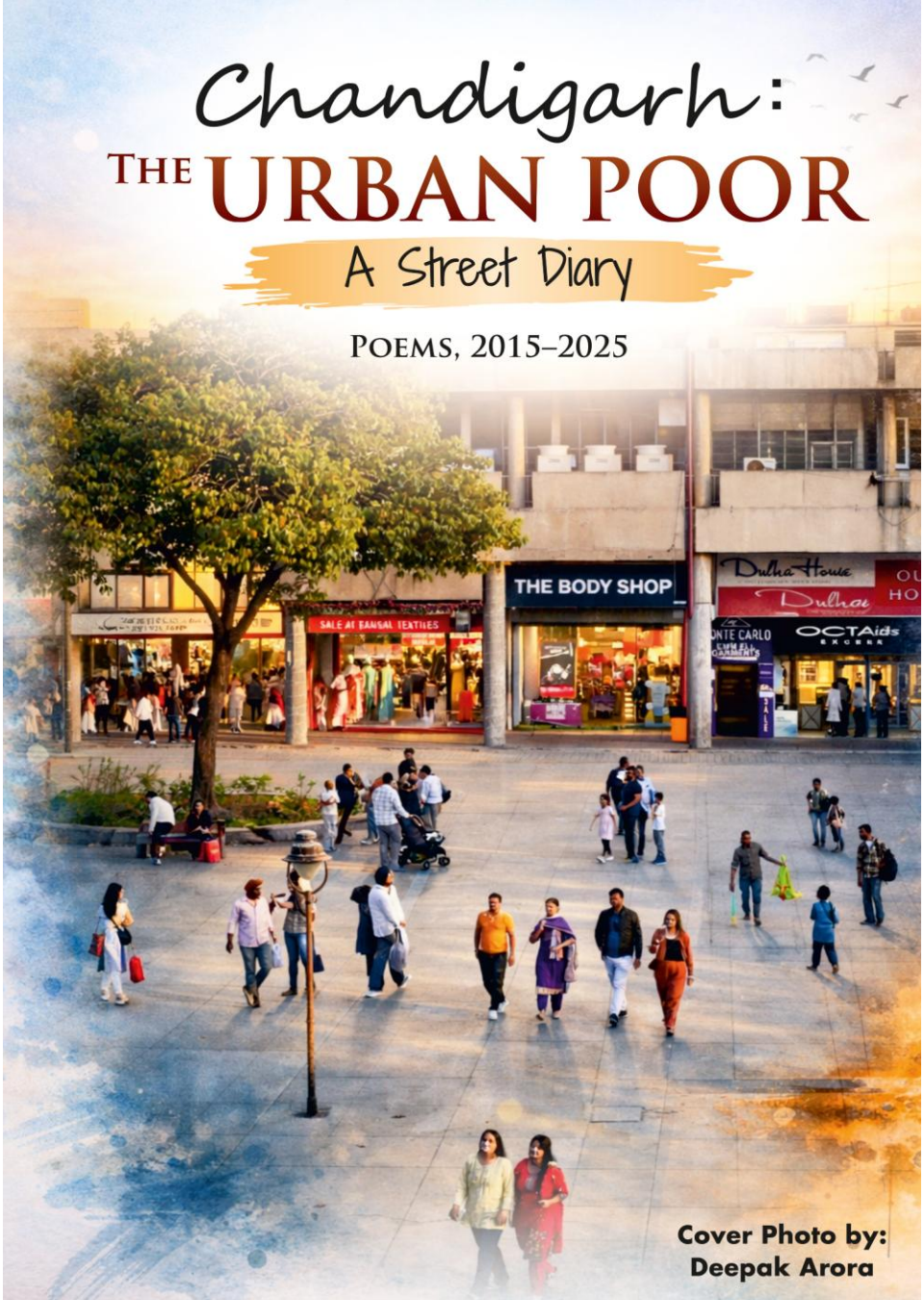
Chandigarh: THE URBAN POOR

A Street Diary

POEMS, 2015–2025



Cover Photo by:
Deepak Arora

Manu Kant

Chandigarh: The Urban Poor

A Street Diary

Poems, 2015–2025

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DEDICATION

This poetry book is dedicated to my wife, Anvita Kant, who stood by me through all seasons.

To my sister-in-law, who endured my difficult moments with quiet strength.

To my youngest brother, who continues to stand by me—giving me the space to practise my art and convictions, and supporting me in every way.

To my daughter, Irina Kant, whose patience and understanding have remained constant over the years.

And to my daughters by love, Dr Ishana Kant Gupta and Suhani Kant Gupta.

A Note to My Daughters

If these words outlive me, let them carry what I could not always say.

I was not a perfect father. I had my tempers, my silences, my struggles.

But you were always at the centre of my concern.

Stand on your own feet. Think independently.

Do not bow before injustice, nor grow hard in the face of the world.

Hold on to reason, compassion, and dignity.

If my life and writing have any meaning, let it be this— that you walk forward with courage, without fear.

Thursday, 04-09-2025

09:12am - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

Janmashtami night—
a boy and a girl with their family
dressed up as Krishna
standing on the roadside

Thursday, 04-09-2025

09:11 am - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

August drizzle

Just a few years ago

a chubby child

now selling strawberries

in Sector 17 Plaza

Thursday, 04-09-2025

09:09 am - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

September night

a banana vendor

having cucumber & onion salad

Thursday, 04-09-2025

09:08 am - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

inside the clinic of a homeopath

on his table

plastic soda bottles

filled with water

Thursday, 04-09-2025

09:07 am - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

September night

a vegetable vendor in Sector 15,

Chandigarh

sitting on a double chair

Tuesday, 02-09-2025,

17:28 pm - Gymkhana Bar & Restaurant, Sector 17, Chandigarh

August evening

an elderly Rajasthani musician

with his wife

playing on the Ravanahatha

beside him a water bottle

and a bidi packet

Sunday, 27-07-2025,

16:48 pm - Costa Coffee, VR Punjab, Mohali

sunny July morning

young blind beggar with his companion

begs at traffic lights

Saturday, 30-08-2025

20:39 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

August night

a ragpicker woman seated on a bench

next to a Verka booth

licking ice cream cone

Sunday, 27-07-2025

16:46pm - VR Punjab, Costa Coffee, Mohali

July afternoon,

in a crowded public bus

passengers fan themselves with
gamchas

Wednesday, 11-06-2025

19:38 pm - at home, Sector 16 Chandigarh

June early morning

a shirtless vendor bringing vegetables on his cycle cart

from the vegetable market

Wednesday, 11-06-2025

19:38 pm - at home, Sector 16 Chandigarh

June evening

AC Patanjali shop

the sweat glistening on the bald head

of a working class man

Wednesday, 04-06-2025

18: 19 pm - Gymkhana Beer Bar & Restaurant, Sector 17, Chandigarh

June afternoon

while giving me change

I see the pic of Zomato delivery man's

little daughter in his wallet

Thursday, 29-05-2025

16:52 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

hot May afternoon

a roadside chaiwala returning to his tea stall

with a Mirinda bottle

Thursday, 29-05-2025

16:50 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

May early afternoon

a mali going to work

on his bicycle

his head & face covered

by a cotton cloth

Tuesday, 06-05-2025

19:08 pm - Rawat AC Tavern, Sector 16, Chandigarh

May evening

inside an AC car

drinking beer

a waste picker picking

abandoned bottles outside

a liquor shop

Tuesday, 06-05-2025

12:08 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

May evening

a domestic worker's two daughters

sleeping

sprawled on the plaza pavement

Tuesday, 06-05-2025

11:51 am - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

subdued May mid-morning

a waste picker fanning her daughter with
a dupatta

asleep on the pavement

Saturday, 03-05-2025

8:36 am - outside my house, Sector 16, Chandigarh

May morning

a bunch of school kids from a working

class background

with their moms & dads

swarming a small stationery shop

Tuesday, 16-01-2024

12:02 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

cold January morning

just arrived for work

dhobi doing dhoop batti

inside his shack

Wednesday, November 16, 2022

16:04 pm - the Indian Coffee House, Sector 16, Chandigarh

sunny November afternoon

an under- construction house

a worker helping his 7-yr-old daughter

in making a 'gudda'*

from clay

*a male doll

Tuesday, November 1, 2022

16:09 - the Indian Coffee House, Sector 17, Chandigarh

a posh locality

I never get to see a soul there

just the cars

coming & going

or the drivers sitting near the gates

Wednesday, 07-10-2015

19: 26 p.m - At home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

in an optical store

a farmer's tattered wallet

he counts money

to buy an injection

for his son's eye operation

Tuesday, July 25, 2024

19:25 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

rainy July morning

a chowkidar reciting loudly

Kabir bani

while sitting on a cot

in a half-built house

Wednesday, September 25, 2024

18:20 pm - Sector 16 park, Chandigarh

hot September afternoon

a bead of sweat

on the tip of the nose

of a female worker from Tamil Nadu

clearing the road divider

of weeds

Wednesday, October 23, 2024-

09:49 am - the Indian Coffee House, Sector 17, Chandigarh

October early morning

a kid going to school

with his father

while holding his master's

brown pomeranian dog

Thursday, December 19, 2024

19:57 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

December evening

a young toiler in sagging jeans

buys santra*

from a liquor shop

*cheap whisky

Friday, April 4, 2025

8:32 am - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

March evening

time for the cobbler

to head home

his shining black shoes

ready at his feet

Friday, April 4, 2025

8:42 am - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

April morning

at the traffic lights

a paralyzed beggar goes back

just in time

to the other side of the road

after collecting alms from me

Sunday, April 27, 2025

9: 16am - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

April night

an elderly provision store owner

licking a choco bar ice cream

while closing his shop

Thursday, March 13, 2025

8:47 am - Dr Sharma Homeo Store, Sector 23, Chandigarh

cool March morning

taking a stroll in the Sector 17 market

after a long time

all cobblers in their usual place

only one missing

Monday, January 13, 2025

9:05 am - at home, Sector 16 D, Chandigarh

after work

a labourer in a great coat

buying cheap whiskey

from a liquor shop

Thursday, March 13, 2025

8:47 am - at home, Sector 16 D, Chandigarh

March morning

a father taking his daughter

to school

on his shoulders

Tuesday, December 31st, 2024

22:32 pm - the United Coffee House, Elante, Ind. Area 1, Chandigarh

New Year Eve

inside the United Coffee House

a young beauty with her husband

repeatedly wiping her nose

after every spoon

of chilli chickpeas

08:28 am - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

rainy December night

a beggar with her child

in her lap

in the corridor of a shopping centre

which lullaby would she sing

to her little daughter tonight?

Tuesday, December 24, 2024

19:21 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

Christmas Eve evening

a middle-aged female domestic helper

holding a bag full of fruits

buys a bottle of Smirnoff for herself

Sunday, December 22, 2024

10:33 am - our neighborhood park, Sector 16, Chandigarh

December mid-morning

a 2-year-old girl on the swings

with her working class father

holding the tricolour

Friday, December 20, 2024

17:25 pm - outside PNB Sector 16, Chandigarh

December afternoon

during his lunch break

a middle-aged cobbler cutting

the nails of his feet

with a nail cutter

Thursday, December 19, 2024

20:00 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

December evening

just outside the Louis Philippe shop

a beggar with his kid girl in the

beggar's buggy

the smell of room freshener

Saturday, December 07, 2024

20:29 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

December night

in the local market

buying a plate of boiled sweet potatoes

the vendor woman discusses her

family problems

on the phone

Thursday, December 19, 2024

19:55 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

December early morning

just before his second round

the milk delivery boy

having his breakfast

right inside his cart

Saturday, December 07, 2024

18:16 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

December evening
a daily wager placing freshly bought
coriander & cabbage on the counter
buys a cheap whiskey

Saturday, November 16, 2024

17:29 pm - Don Bosco Church, Sector 24, Chandigarh

November early morning

a mother-child duo

in an auto rickshaw

wrapped up in a single woollen blanket

going somewhere

Monday, November 04, 2024

12:18 pm - At home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

early November morning
a beer pub employee taking a
walk
in the main market square
while sipping mixed fruit juice

Sunday, November 03, 2024

17:02 pm - Gymkhana Pub & Bar, Sector 17, Chandigarh

November early evening

entering the pub after a gap

like a religious guru

with raised hands

I greet all the employees

Wednesday, October 23, 2024-

09:56 am - the Indian Coffee House, Sector 17, Chandigarh

October morning

a rich garment shop owner's wife

in the coffee house

after a long time

visibly aged

& without her diamond nose pin

Friday, November 01, 2024-

09:55 am - Surinder Chai wala, Sector 17, Chandigarh

morning after Diwali

the workers of the Indian Coffee House

inside the kitchen

loudly discussing the increase

in the price

of the wheat flour

Wednesday, October 23, 2024-

09:54 am - the Indian Coffee House, Sector 17, Chandigarh

October early morning

a kid going to school

seated on the back of a scooter

his smile

& the missing tooth

Friday, October 18, 2024-

14:54 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

October morning

at the traffic lights

a baby of a young beggar woman

holding a banana

Friday, October 18, 2024-

14:52 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

October evening

Navratri festival

a coffee house dishwasher

having sliced pieces of apple

for his meals

Tuesday, June 25, 2024

21:41pm - Sagar Ratna, Elante Mall, Industrial Area 1, Chandigarh

in the Elante Mall

near closing time

a boy & lady team

emptying waste bins one

one after the other

Tuesday, June 25, 2024

21:36 pm - Sagar Ratna, Elante Mall, Industrial Area 1, Chandigarh

in the Elante Mall

near closing time

a cleaning lady while chewing gum

mopping the floor

Saturday, June 8, 2024

13:49 pm - at home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

hot June morning

an elderly Sikh sitting in front

of his confectionary shop

listening to Gurbani on his phone

Wednesday, May 29, 2024

10:54 am - Vegetable Market, Sector 15, Chandigarh

the local vegetable market

the sweet voice

of a dimwitted woman

selling cloth bags

in the scorching sun

Wednesday, May 29, 2024

10:25 am - Surinder Chai Wala, Sector 17, Chandigarh

hot May morning

a young Chai wala from Nagaland

making tea

all drenched in sweat

Thursday, May 9, 2024

12:32 am - At home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

hot May day

a toiler with his arms raised

having his armpits shaved

by a roadside barber

Tuesday, May 21, 2024

19:30 pm - At home, Sector 16, Chandigarh

May evening

a dhobi in a soiled vest

buying a bottle of 'santra'*

from a liquor shop

*a cheap whisky

Wednesday, May 29, 2024

9:48 am - the Indian Coffee House Sector 17, Chandigarh

back from his village

in the mountains

the sun tanned face

of a coffee house cook

ABOUT AUTHOR



Manu Kant is a writer, journalist, satirist and working-class poet but above all, a Marxist-Leninist. Born in Patiala, Punjab and brought up in Chandigarh, he studied journalism at the Lomonosov Moscow State University in Moscow from 1987 to 1993, during the final years of the Soviet Union. The intellectual climate of that period and the enduring traditions of Russian literature and revolutionary thought left a deep imprint on his world view. Russia remains close to his heart, not as nostalgia, but as a living connection to a people and a historical experience that shaped his understanding of society.

Over the decades, he has written essays, satire and political commentary for newspapers and journals including The Tribune, The Indian Express, The Pioneer and the Kolkata-based weekly Frontier, founded by Samar Sen. His writing seeks to combine literary expression with a materialist understanding of society and history. He is the author of fifteen books spanning satire, political reflection and literary commentary, including Chandigarh: The Urban Poor — A Street Diary (Poems, 2015–2025), Mother, and The Mad, Mad, Mad West: A Satire on Uncle Sam's War on Russia.

Kant's intellectual outlook is shaped by the traditions of scientific socialism and the broader history of revolutionary struggle. He draws inspiration from Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Joseph Stalin, and remains committed to the historical mission of the working class. He writes from the standpoint of the working class and opposes US imperialism and Israeli Zionism as expressions of monopoly capital and systems of exploitation and domination. He also opposes racism in all its manifestations—whether in the form of colonial attitudes, caste-like hierarchies, anti-Black racism, xenophobia against migrants, or everyday social discrimination—viewing it as a tool historically used to divide working people and sustain systems of exploitation.

His sympathies are not abstract. They extend to the struggles of peoples across continents—Russians, the Indian masses, Mayans, Incans, American natives, Africans, Asians, and working-class whites—linked by shared histories of labour, dispossession and resistance. From Toussaint Louverture and John Brown to Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Bhagat Singh, and to African leaders such as Patrice Lumumba and Thomas Sankara, he sees a continuous thread of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle in the modern world. The history of popular resistance, from medieval peasant uprisings to modern working-class movements, occupies an important place in his writing and thought. In literature and criticism, he is influenced by the Russian democratic thinker Vissarion Belinsky and the broader tradition of Russian cultural and revolutionary writing. His outlook is grounded in the lived experiences of the oppressed—workers, peasants, and marginalized communities across India and the world—whose struggles continue to inform his moral and intellectual commitments.

Manu Kant adheres to socialist realism in his poetry, pioneered and practised by Maxim Gorky, Bertolt Brecht and others. Alongside his writing, Kant has spent decades building a personal collection of Marxist and progressive literature, including rare works on revolutionary history, Soviet culture and the international labour movement. His engagement with books and ideas reflects a lifelong effort to understand and articulate the forces shaping society.

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