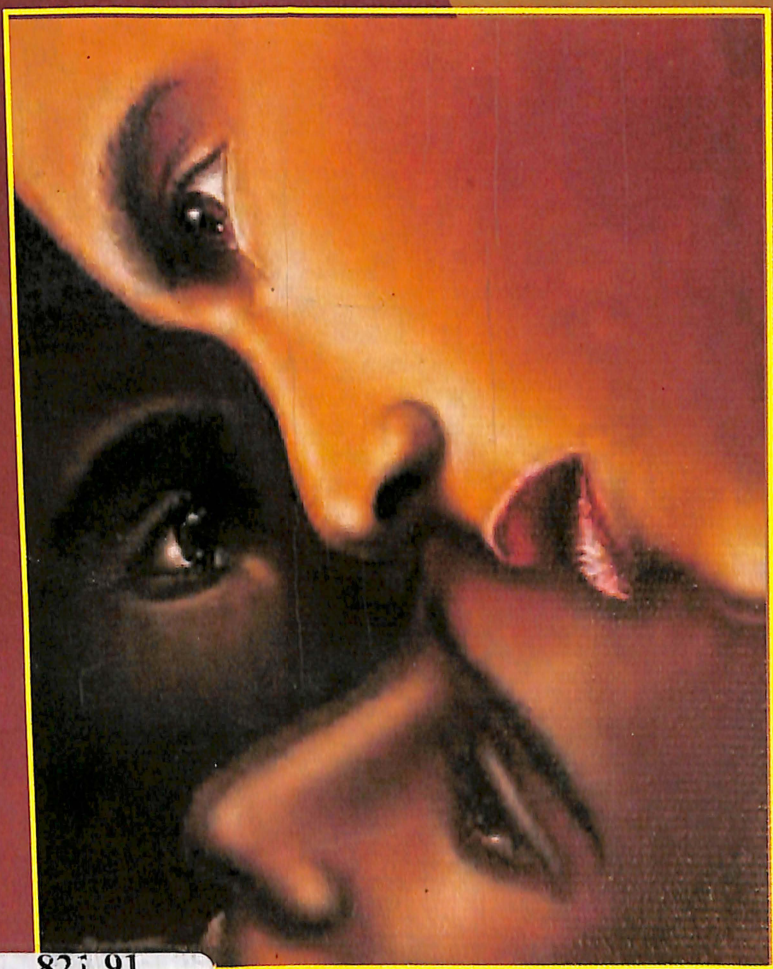


# THE CHAOTIC AGE



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DR. BALBIR SINGH

# **The Chaotic Age**

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**Dr. Balbir Singh**

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**For**

**my**

**loving**

**mother**

**Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world....**

—W.B. Yeats, “The Second Coming”

## Foreword

It is only when one reads poetry that one is reminded of the power of words: power to evoke, entice, enthrall, seduce, reveal, offend, ennoble, inspire and power to disturb the complacency of the everyday. The poet, with an elegant phrase, opens a door to the mystery of life. Dr. Balbir Singh's poem 'Birthday' reflects on growing older, when he, with some melancholy says, that he has not "...the heart to celebrate, to sing and dance, on my birthday past middle age".

The poems in this book capture the changing existential world of Dr. Singh, a world of passage, of ageing, of the dawning of wisdom or perhaps of a growing puzzlement about what it all adds up to, and even in a small way of a country in transformation . I hope his readers will enjoy the richness of his words, and the world they reveal, as much as I did. More power to the poet. I wish the book every success.

29 June 2009

**Peter Ronald deSouza**  
*Director,*  
Indian Institute of Advanced Study  
Shimla

## Preface

I want to express my deep sense of gratitude to readers, who have received my first anthology of poems so warmly. It is their enthusiastic response which has encouraged me to bring out my second book of poems. I hope these poems will serve my purpose, viz. to share my joy in living a wholesome life— individually, socially, morally and spiritually.

Poetry is never forced or intentional. I fully agree with John Keats when he says that we “hate poetry that has palpable design upon us.” A small wild flower does not blossom for any ulterior motive. It has to blossom simply, naturally. The poet writes out of an aesthetic and moral compulsion though his morality is not confined to any specified ethical norms of ordinary society; rather it is the morality of the highest order. A rare concern and sympathy for other creatures is the hallmark of his morality. The poet has to write following the instinct either of pain or (which is the other side of the same coin) joy. In any case, his poetry makes the reader feel a sense of understanding, enjoyment, happiness, and peace.

In this postmodern era of satellite television, internet, video and a host of other media, poetry has dwindled to rather meager scope and seems to be of not much value. Quite a few people are of this opinion. Eavan Boland, for instance, observes, “People at large think ‘Poetry is of little use’”. But this is not true. In fact, poetry is the most refined



genre in literature which is the highest of all arts. Whatever one can say about the popularity of novel, drama, movie, internet or television in different periods of history or regions of the world, poetry never dies. It will come forth in any form, in any language, or in any society. There are always a number of people, howsoever small, who are capable of understanding and enjoying this sublime, the highest and the purest, though the most difficult, form of art. And so poetry does not depend for its survival on the popular culture or the latest fashions in the sphere of entertainment.

There is no poem in which I did not offer an idea, explicitly or implicitly, whether it is social, moral, political, or philosophical. In "The New Era", for instance, the persona is lamenting the hypocrisy of the twenty first century human being, conscious at the same time, of the material progress and the comforts the era has brought with it. One of the recurrent themes in these poems is death. In "The Great Departure" the inevitability of death is shown notwithstanding all human efforts (foolish but brave) to prevent or, at least, to delay it. "To Enter the Jungle" describes the cruel relationships of life. In "Perspective" the persona underlines the difference in outlook and perspective of humans in various stages of life. As a child, youth and old person he or she perceives things in different manner forgetting his or her earlier stage. In my opinion, this is what the core of poetry is, though the primary function is aesthetic joy. But this joy is of higher kind and it has to be presented through concrete ideas and images. I hope that all will enjoy the poems in this anthology.

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# CONTENTS

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	<i>Foreword</i>	<i>vii</i>
	<i>Preface</i>	<i>ix</i>
1.	Power and Boundaries	1
2.	The Mansion of the Viceroy	8
3.	The Great Departure	10
4.	The Old Wisdom	11
5.	Death of a Hare	13
6.	Death of the Poet	14
7.	Dream	16
8.	Born Free	18
9.	Birthday	19
10.	The New Era	20
11.	One Life and So Many Hazards	21
12.	Extinction	23
13.	Evil in Guise	25
14.	A Visit to the Beloved	26
15.	Wait	27
16.	Stasis	29
17.	The Leader	30
18.	The Job Is Never Finished	31

19.	The Haves and the Have-Nots	33
20.	Let the Truth Triumph	34
21.	In My Cocoon	35
22.	On Seeing Cleopatra	36
23.	Patched Clothes	38
24.	The Wild Garden	39
25.	Lift	40
26.	The Civilization	42
27.	Preparing for the Last Journey	43
28.	Earthworms	44
29.	Rain	45
30.	Money	46
31.	Perspective	48
32.	The Uprooted Creeper	50
33.	Modern Death	51
34.	Happy New Year	52
35.	Vacating the Room	53
36.	The Pattern of the Jungle	54
37.	Embracing Nature	55
38.	Rehearsal	56
39.	The Yellow Power	57
40.	The Annual Festival	58
41.	In Quest of a Man	60
42.	The Massacre	61
43.	The Art of Survival	62
44.	Enjoy the Show	63
45.	The Curtain Falls	64
46.	The Factory Worker	66

47.	Enter the Darkness Alone	67
48.	Hoping for Mermaids	68
49.	I Was in Love	69
50.	Moving in the New House	71
51.	Goodbye, All	73
52.	The Priorities	75
53.	The Overpowering Evil	77
54.	The Shepherd Boy	79
55.	Spineless	81
56.	Tiny Drops of Energy	83
57.	The Bazaar	85
58.	Enter and Exit	86
59.	To Enter the Jungle	88
60.	At the Top	89

# 1

## Power and Boundaries

### Part I

The heart craves for power  
to embrace its base desires  
that the beauties bare all;  
milky breasts exposed to the roots,  
soft glossy sinewy thighs may bend  
to enter the ultimate bliss.

Let the human frame  
drenched in the fountains of wine,  
gulping down each variety greedily,  
turn by turn like a hungry dog.

Rapt bodies grapple in ecstasy,  
minds emancipated layer by layer,  
new and original ideas originate.  
When physique is free from  
worry, want and hunger  
some benevolence is really done.

When the spirit is free,  
nerves are relaxed by chemicals  
to receive more, and still more

## **The Chaotic Age**

excitements and thrills.  
Faces breathing against flushed faces,  
red cheeks, quivering lips,  
in the middle of golden brown,  
taut, erect nipples,  
thighs rubbing against thighs  
of self's and others'.

Serpentine tongues protruding  
to reach all the intimate recesses.  
Heaving bosom waiting to be caressed,  
then pressed harder and harder,  
pleasure cupped in closed eyes,  
half opened mouth demanding more  
and every organ vibrating  
for consummation.

## **Part II**

Burning fire for mad revenge  
may be smothered,  
evil punished deservedly,  
the arrogant may be snubbed,  
the haughty may be clubbed,  
and the tyrant butchered  
at the bloody altar of justice,  
as he himself massacred.

The haughty submit to the meek,  
the poor and weak be protected,  
and just be recognized and praised,  
so all may breathe in peace.

To hunt for more pelf and power  
human hunters traverse the jungle,  
like the wild lion, though  
it prowls only for its little belly.  
They growl fiercely  
for the entire territory.

Theft, robbery have been committed  
by stray outcasts in all ages.  
But plundering by the head of state,  
the guide, saviour, protector  
of less strong defenseless commons!  
Beyond justification and imagination.

Glittering pearls and precious jewels  
are not just hoarded  
but worn around the neck,  
on the breast and head,  
to make beggars of the lesser mortals.

The dying monarch seizing his gems,  
lying on his mounds of pearls,  
lamenting the loss of this world  
and leave his treasure on this side;  
unable to gulp a morsel  
amidst all his wealth.

Power grabbed for more might,  
looting gold to buy more power,  
power multiplying like cancerous cells  
leading only to dark death.

### Part III

The herd of slaves in ceremonial row  
with humble low cast eyes  
offering naked solid breasts  
to the shrunken might.  
Grasping in both wrinkled hands,  
supported by the pull,  
turn by turn, ascends the bull;  
pleasure neither given nor gained,  
mere insult is showered  
on the naked maids.

Psyche of a race hurt beyond repair.  
Insults buried in consciousness  
like in the womb of a seed,  
passed on to the next generation.

Tender fair budding damsel  
hanging by skilful devices  
in amorous postures,  
made to fall on the flabby organ  
at will, just by a gesture  
to gratify insatiable lust.

The youth butchered limb by limb  
and left to die in dark gutter  
of filthy common street  
in full view of the terrorized mob,  
that the others may learn a lesson  
of imperialism, cruelty and suppression.



A horrible vision of absolute power.  
The naked dance of violence  
and dark black instincts,  
with breasts chopped off,  
headless bodies hopping in the square,  
dumb men, women, with their children  
auctioned off in alien plaza  
like herds of goats and sheep.  
Some may repent and weep  
But who will forgive us?

## Part IV

There does exist a difference  
between a man and a beast.  
Both breathe and eat  
to preserve the self and reproduce.

But the levels and means  
are not the same.  
Man cannot run wild  
even if he has the power of a lion.

There is no such thing on earth  
as unbridled liberty for any one  
though some may nourish  
the myth of absolute power.

*Bhasmasur* ran amuck,  
intoxicated with power infinite  
which, turning inward,  
burnt him to ashes.

*Ravana* roared with pride  
till he was humbled into dust.  
Satan had to be bridled,  
though boasted of his evil designs.  
He tasted fire in purgatory  
and had to face His justice.

Even heavenly stars obey  
and do not deviate  
from their fixed path;

rivers flow down the hills  
to mingle with the mighty seas.  
Nature means balance and peace.  
Even the Maker is bounded in holy plan  
by the sacred laws of Heaven.  
Boundaries do not restrict life  
but ensure the smooth flow  
of humanity and the universe.  
Otherwise there will be nothing  
but dark discord and chaos,  
and anarchy would reign supreme.

## 2

### The Mansion of the Viceroy

I was standing below the casement  
of the Viceregal Lodge,  
gazing spellbound at the beauteous scene.  
The vast deep valley below,  
tall lush green pines,  
an expansive feast for the eyes.

But above,  
the castle of the king,  
the ruler of an entire continent,  
erect, stately, imposing mansion.

And the window of that room  
opening on the mysterious, oriental wild,  
the princess, beloved of the ruler,  
enjoying all his powers.

How would she have felt  
watching the tall deodars,  
the vast empire  
from Rangoon to Peshawar,  
under her rule.  
All the native people  
with their petty homes, petty life,  
a subjugated society.

## **The Chaotic Age**

But, perhaps, loneliness too,  
far away from the familiar hearth,  
the Hampton Court, the balls,  
the Hyde Park, the Thames.  
And somewhat scared  
amidst the alien faces.

Though the domestic chores  
had been the same.  
The morning walk in the lawn,  
the family members, relatives,  
visitors, parties, games,  
meetings, talking, human passions.

The Gothic Victorian mansion,  
now amidst artificial flood lights,  
darkness engulfing the whole scene,  
vanquishing even the imperial palace,  
rising high among the pine trees.  
But there was the moon  
still higher above it,  
higher above everything.

Actually she never disappeared,  
had always been there,  
perhaps reminding,  
that nothing can remain high for ever,  
the royal glory, splendor.  
Everything is so transient.

Now the common tourists  
were treading the lawns  
which once received the royal tender feet,  
fit only for rich velvety carpets.  
Everything gets lost in surging history,  
Rome, Troy, Egypt,  
the Kauravs, the Romans, the Moghuls,  
All must return to dust.

### 3

## The Great Departure

And lo! the great departure has come,  
unannounced, unexpected, uncalled for.

Every trick was used to avert the moment.  
Glucose bottles hung overhead,  
antibiotics were injected,  
inhalers were administered,  
even oxygen was pumped in.  
But the great departure had come.

Worried elders were standing beside.  
The youngsters shed their grief in tears,  
old friends had arrived  
to bid the final adieu.  
The neighbors were punctual to visit.  
Still the great departure had come.

He inquired if the harvest was done,  
about the welfare of the grandson,  
broken relations, breaking bonds,  
tears surged for the past follies,  
future plans made and unmade,  
though the great departure had come.

## 4

### The Old Wisdom

The burning, hateful obscenities,  
crude passions flaring up,  
shabby poor altercation,  
each justifying his case to strangers,  
hands flaring high in the air,  
at their shrillest voices.

Suddenly the disgusting male  
gripped two hands frail,  
lifted the feminine body  
swinging it full circle,  
the woman whirling, howling,  
as in a merry-go-round.

The elderly, perhaps her mother,  
crying hot tears over her daughter,  
now flat on the ground.  
The youth, his passion's slave  
with bitter hateful tears  
accusing both of them in vain.

The drama is the same  
though the setting be different.  
No grey haired admonitions

rebuked, consoled or pacified.  
No deep voiced authority  
hushed them in timid corners.

The saffron ascetic stared mutely,  
the passers-by looked on helplessly,  
some started moving away,  
callous to the pain involved,  
food for some for the next day.  
And the need of human touch!

May be they were enacting  
the next day's paper headlines:  
"YOUTH HANGS HIMSELF".  
The old wisdom was missing.  
The new, born out of pain,  
was fighting it out alone.



## 5

### Death of a Hare

He was lying flat, dead  
on the brutal metalled road.  
His soft fur,  
which never touched anything  
but the softness  
of leafy verdure of nature,  
crushed against the stony hardness.

He never ventured out of the jungle,  
enjoyed its graceful order,  
except, sometimes when the ferocity  
of his own brethren  
or some mightier foe attacked him.  
But he survived it all bravely  
and was proud of himself.

Only once he left the benevolent jungle,  
drifted into the mechanized jungle.  
And met with his gory fate,  
lying disgracefully on the highway  
with blood oozing out of his soft mouth.

## 6

### Death of the Poet

The poet was dying, alone.  
The room was empty.  
The streets wore a deserted look,  
devoid of human warmth and mess.  
All had gone to the royal celebrations.

Dying is really painful  
when it graces your door in solitude.  
Some companion should provide  
at least a passive company  
to the writhing soul  
leaving its mansion.  
But everyone does not get it,  
in life or in death  
save for some lucky ones.

The poet was not so fortunate.  
But what was wrong with the public,  
so social, so compassionate,  
so caring!

The poet was dying unattended,  
it was pitiful.  
There should have been a human noise,

otherwise the community would be  
mute and voiceless.

They should pay obeisance to their voice.  
All the progress, civilization  
is the progeny of voice  
anywhere, anytime, anykind.  
Listen to the voice.

## 7

### Dream

Yes, that was the night;  
we both were together.  
The moon kept us company,  
the stars watched us gleefully,  
waves in the lakes applauded  
just to remind us  
that we are in this very world—  
harsh, cruel, beautiful world—  
though the signs were contrary;  
as if we were in a fairy land.

The boat sailed smoothly  
cutting across broad flat lotus leaves.  
There was no one else  
besides us,  
the king and the queen.  
This was not all;  
the hills rose high  
and they were golden, blue and green  
and snow-topped too  
like silver cap on a green bust.

What more does one want?  
All hopes came true.

Your breasts half-exposed;  
soft, moist, muscular;  
bare thighs glistening golden  
and I, sure to touch them at night  
just a couple of hours ahead,  
spared them for sweeter scenes;  
to be caressed, to be kissed,  
then to be used, as I wish.

I knew the lips were mine,  
the cheeks, blooming freshly,  
soft and pink like rose petals,  
untouched by anyone;  
deep, lovely, inviting eyes,  
all flashed vividly  
before my inner eyes.  
What more in a paramour?  
Everything was so perfect.  
All dreams were fulfilled.

But there was a rub.  
Everything lacked something,  
probably an element of reality;  
smacked of something,  
perhaps some sort of illusion,  
damnation of a colleague,  
killing of a friend,  
the fainting girl who did not yield.  
Some wrong committed at the roots  
of the dream.

## 8

### **Born Free**

There is no freedom  
though one may be born free.  
Only the illusion beckons you,  
in family, in society.

In this world of the living  
even your parents and children,  
the partners of life  
offer you bondage  
in the guise of liberty.

May be the bondage  
in itself is freedom.

## 9

### Birthday

The day was special.  
But I had not the time  
nor the heart to celebrate,  
to sing and dance  
on my birthday past middle age.

Beautifully the turbulent years  
have rolled by,  
crossing safely  
the ups and downs,  
the critical junctures of passions.

But I was a year older,  
away from the joyous beginning,  
turning about to the sliding road,  
from the cool heights  
to the simmering plains.

To be proud of what was done.  
Or grieve over what was to be done.  
Life is brief and work is more.  
If only one could start it  
all over again.

## 10

### The New Era

The new millennium is drawing,  
I am waiting for the second resurrection,  
for the new era,  
in my room alone.

There is no one to share the feelings  
or argue the case.  
Is this how the century bangs,  
evolution takes place, the progress?

Or is it retrogression?  
Or am I at fault,  
confounding the concepts,  
advancement and backwardness?

Everything does not depend on  
the refinement of the decoration,  
even if the man in the hut  
starts believing in duplication.

That will be more pity.  
At least he should have been spared  
his choice and liberty  
to enjoy the oriental poverty.



# 11

## One Life and So Many Hazards

Panic has gripped humanity  
as the asteroid evil  
will strike the earth  
in two score years hence  
with an imaginable bang.  
Uncertain future:  
Where to hide,  
and how to save ourselves?

There is the fear of attack  
from the hostile neighbor  
bent upon bombing us  
with nuclear menace;  
the bunkers are few,  
certainly not for all  
and those also not foolproof.  
For how long must we fight?

Moreover, the terror looming large  
of racial bigotry and riots:  
Who knows who stabs whom,  
set ablaze our humble huts?  
(Past experience is no guide.)  
Hatred and violence let loose.

126 768

Who can save us,  
foe or friend?

The bullies of our own tribe  
are after our life  
over that piece of land.  
Wealth invites violence;  
hatred against your own blood  
is worst and furious.  
Not to talk of famines and floods,  
accidents and diseases.

Small evils for paltry things;  
in offices, shops, corridors.  
Women fighting over  
a pitcher of water;  
boys stabbing boys  
over girls, or with girls;  
the poor battling with poor,  
and their own poverty.

Ripened over the years,  
what is society for?  
When left alone  
one fights with one's self.  
Conflicts spinning the brains crazy  
culminating in the noose.  
Where is the sanctity of life  
that is granted only once?

## 12

### Extinction

Among the large motley crowd  
I was searching for a primitive man  
from dark ancient times,  
uncouth and unfashionable,  
perhaps a chimpanzee,  
so I could have a playmate.

The modern players,  
clad in gaudy dresses,  
seemed strange to me.  
May be I also resembled  
an old chimpanzee  
craving for my own kind.

They all have evolved so much  
that a new species has originated  
having some old traits  
but strangely different.

Who knows  
what he will become tomorrow?  
Like that old grotesque creature  
from Mars or Venus.

What will humanity mean then?  
What does it mean now, anyway?  
I am frightened of my loneliness.

- The evolution will not cease.
- We will not retrogress  
and grow tails  
(it is vestigial already).

How will we survive,  
hiding in our crevices or burrows?  
Living only to survive,  
that only for a short time.  
Extinction is imminent.

# 13

## Evil in Guise

Evil is dressed in the guise of good  
like a concubine in bridal attire.  
Pure good is scoffed at,  
evil is accepted by and large,  
even glorified by a few  
in its new role.

There are no Kauravas, no Pandvas,  
half Ravana, half Yudhishtra,  
most of them turned Bhishma and Karna,  
compromising with Duryodhana,  
not daring or willing  
to scold, defy or vanquish the devil.

Evil may look fair and strong.  
It may mouth pompous speeches  
even after the Fall.  
Temptress as a harlot  
yet cannot stand  
a single stroke of Truth.

## 14

### A Visit to the Beloved

I was wondering  
whether to look at your beauty  
or the magnificent face of nature.  
I could not choose one.

You inspire its glory,  
it intensifies yours,  
both vying with each other  
for my loving glances.

If you had not been with me  
it would not have been so fair.  
At some other place  
you might have seemed common.

Each enhances other's beauty  
and both excite my joy.

# 15

## Wait

Here nothing goes smoothly,  
seasons, world, mind and body,  
or the human life.

On the smooth way to lofty hills  
the car may break down  
and the surge of excitement ceases.

Riding high on the worldly glory  
a man may get a heart attack,  
forcing life to lie in bed.

Like when floating on the waves  
of heavenly music,  
the notes snap with a jerk.

You sink in a jarring silence,  
and left gaping and dumbfounded  
as if fallen into a dark pit.

You must be prepared to wait.  
Everything is not fast and quick,  
as you would fain wish.

Everything takes its time,  
the sun, the earth, the stars and sky,  
buds blossom slowly.

Life ripens at its own pace,  
longest for us humans.  
Wait patiently for the reincarnation.



# 16

## Stasis

I lay listlessly  
in complete peace and tranquility  
as if suspended in vacuum.

No wish, no urge to move forward,  
no dreams, physical or mental,  
not a trace of motive.

Is it the life of the noble souls,  
sans passion, sans desires  
and actions in order to fulfill them?

Only the calm and stable breathing,  
coming in and going out  
of the semblance of life.

But how will life move on  
without the force of dynamism,  
to advance towards the goal?

# 17

## The Leader

The leader addressed the masses.  
The king had arrived  
in the garb of the messiah,  
in the guise of the comrade.

The bowing slaves are the same  
though attire has changed,  
manners have changed,  
slogans are not the same.

Nowadays they are not anointed  
but are elected  
through consensus  
by the will of the masses.

## 18

### The Job Is Never Finished

I heaved a sigh of relief  
that the job was finished.  
I got a drink for me  
and relaxed on my couch  
little knowing work never ends.  
Only life ends.

What though you vanquish  
your boss, your neighbour,  
all the human beings;  
your passion and desires,  
rotting penury and disease.  
Even if you succeed.

Still the catastrophe looms large  
waiting to pounce upon you  
like a terrible giant  
at the opening of his den  
from which you thought to escape,  
grudgingly guarding it.

Even if you conquered your domain,  
don't rejoice that you are free.  
There are things which remain

and better to remain concealed.  
So hope for the worst  
and expect not the best.

## 19

### The Haves and the Have-Nots

Life cannot be reduced  
simply in haves and have-nots,  
though for some  
it is either to be rich  
or to be in need.

Rolling in money is to be happy,  
far from the pangs and tortures  
which life offers.  
Away from the clutches  
of humiliation and disease.

But it is not as simple.  
One must bear the burning harness,  
suffer the passion,  
pain and suffering intense,  
whether in gold or in rags.

Wrap yourself in gold  
or dance naked in the rain  
of life, you cannot escape from  
the envy, anger, cry and pain,  
and, above all, death.

## 20

### Let the Truth Triumph

O, for a club of crude power!

To survive, to live, to enjoy,  
the power to kill, to destroy,  
to crush the arrogant  
by the slightest wave of hand,  
to manipulate, to thrust  
the power to the hilt.

To flail evil  
so it does not dare  
to raise its ugly head again  
and let the truth triumph.

## 21

### In My Cocoon

Till now I was a child  
and thought every other person  
a good Samaritan  
who will do some good to me.

I opened all the windows and doors  
of my house so that  
I could feel a gust of fresh  
and cool air on my face.

But in place of fresh air  
I found a dusty storm  
shattering my window panes  
and polluting my pure,  
neat and holy house.  
More over, my innocent psyche.

In my middle age I realized  
that majority of others  
are not good, even bad,  
they feel happy doing harm, not good.

So I decided to be cautious,  
like a squirrel,  
so that I could survive.  
I decided to shut my windows tightly  
and to live alone in my home,  
peacefully in my cocoon.

## 22

### On Seeing Cleopatra

Oh, the maddening voluptuous face!  
The red cheeks curving plump,  
the slender round neck,  
white snowy half covered breasts,  
parts hidden to expose more,  
infusing blood in naked desires.

Fleshy smoothness of the golden thighs,  
enticing navel in marble flat belly,  
wild glance sliding down  
to the concealed gem.  
The beauty enslaving the mighty,  
the powerful and the rulers of men.

Who could have been a man  
and tamed his senses?  
Inspired by the charms,  
lingering sensuous dreams,  
passion goading the arrogance  
to massacre innocent heads.

The splendor and glory,  
grand arches, huge pillars,  
palaces replete with wealth



and sensual luxury,  
thousand slaves with bowed heads,  
willing to be slave forever.

Can there be any limit  
to human ambition and lust,  
sucking brief life to the lees?  
O man, with outstretched arms  
to the earth and sky,  
to embrace all!

## 23

### Patched Clothes

Patches, large and small,  
looking ugly and dull  
or gaudy and fashionable.

This is the dress of life  
I wear day and night.  
They may laugh or scorn,  
some are even amused,  
desire in some hungry eyes.

Clothes are clothes.  
You have to wear them  
till the last point  
when they will take them off  
to bathe you for the last time.

But you would have departed  
to another world then,  
to wear a new dress,  
fresh and unpatched.

## 24

### The Wild Garden

The garden is not maintained  
though designed and planned.

Often you are ensnared  
in vicious thorny thickets,  
bitter and venomous fruits,  
perils of wild, unknown beasts  
who suddenly leap at you.

You will have to search  
pleasant glade and grove,  
shady bower, balm to your soul,  
to rest your tired limbs,  
to feel relaxed and secure.

It is still harder to locate  
a cataract or lake,  
to cool your eyes and forehead  
and juicy sweet fruits  
for your dry palate.

It is not easy to find  
rest and peace, joy and beauty.  
Nobody is there to guide you  
or provide eternal safety.  
He has gifted you only the garden.

## 25

### Lift

The old bent lady  
waved for lift feverishly,  
begged desperately.  
I went on past her starved figure.

These are bad times.  
She could be the ugly hag  
heading the notorious pros gang,  
or a thief in rags  
prowling for her victims  
on the highway.

But she was so pitiable,  
my car screeched, at last,  
and I offered her a lift.  
Shyly she sat in, frightened.

I was cautious  
about her hand on my purse,  
or a hidden knife  
darting at my neck.

But nothing of the sort happened.  
Her face was somewhat relaxed.

She blessed me a thousand times,  
and got off at her place.

I felt ashamed  
that I suspected her.  
Times are bad, I agreed.

But who will help them  
if not we,  
their fellow brethren?  
God Himself will not  
descend down to help them  
-or will he? –  
out of the mire  
of penury, need and sufferings.

He has sent us for these little tasks.  
Isn't it the duty  
of the strong to help the poor  
or what is humanity for?

## 26

### The Civilization

The carefree, relaxed youth  
jerked clumsily on his bicycle.  
(It's as good as a token of poverty.)  
Just missed my luxury car,  
uttering, "You almost hit me",  
as if the rich are always at fault  
and pedaled leisurely  
humming a popular tune.

What an old species! I thought,  
he is not afraid of the luxury,  
moreover, civilization,  
which is fast advancing.  
And has reached a deadly turn.  
He does not fit at all  
in the new scheme of things.  
Beware of the civilization.

## 27

### Preparing for the Last Journey

All the voices have been  
proclaiming the message.  
All the religious preachers,  
true and false,  
wise and ignorant, prepare  
the frail and the tough alike,  
the kings and the beggars,  
for that last journey  
which breeds fear and anxiety.

Even before starting living  
they are afraid of death;  
thinking of the exit  
even before the role begins.

Frightened of the unknown,  
obsessed with the pain  
of severance of the contact  
with the known,  
visible and the felt,  
and of entering the dark void

## 28

### Earthworms

After the rain many earthworms  
came out of the earth  
crawling into my porch;  
trying desperately to survive,  
to live that wormy life,  
the joy and the glory.

One of them  
(perhaps the leader)  
was inching towards the dry floor  
contracting its ugly body,  
dragging its broken back.  
Desire to live!

What was the use of that life?  
Was it sacred enough  
to be lived?  
Or was it a selfish attempt  
to continue breathing  
and the flow of consciousness?



## 29

### Rain

The children danced in glee,  
the weather god suddenly smiled  
and the rain cooled down  
the simmering earth.

After a long spell of heat wave  
I felt the soothing cool air  
against my body.  
The drip-drop of icy pour.

And thanked God for his bounty,  
knowing pretty well  
the plight of my brother  
working on his farm.

He must be sad,  
his whole crop lying in the field  
scattered by the stormy wind,  
exposed to the vagary of the weather.

Disaster for a poor man.  
The same rain for me a boon,  
to him will bring ruin.  
He knows His secrets better.

## 30

### Money

Agreed that it can do miracles,  
and cut the Gordian knot,  
clear the haziness of pain,  
and brighten a man's fate  
with sunshine of fortune.

It can change human fate, status,  
and life—present as well as the next,  
can achieve all,  
desired or required by all  
to celebrate this brief sojourn.

But to pray for famine  
or the dreaded flood  
or look to the heaven  
for tremors of an earthquake  
and fleece the exhausted humanity,

looking forward to terrorism  
spilling human blood  
or the racial riots  
to churn mad money  
out of human misfortune!

### **The Chaotic Age**

Let not the self  
sweep the whole of mankind.  
Wait for the normal flow.  
The water can reach  
your threshold also.

## 31

### Perspective

Everyone sees the world  
through his own glasses,  
his own perspective, and finds,  
the world straight or crooked,  
topsy turvy or distorted,  
as it appears to him.

Though it is what it is.  
The child, the youth, the old,  
though creature one,  
look variously at it,  
reflecting their own inner  
tranquility or turmoil.

For the first it is a fairy land;  
wondering at every scene and sight,  
curious to know everything,  
laughing at those grotesque elders  
who are earnestly shaping it,  
running it as smoothly as they can.

He is in the world,  
still lives in another, his own.  
He pursues his joys  
like fairies in the darkness of night,

## The Chaotic Age

inside it and not in it,  
but fully convinced the world is his.

The youth believes  
that he is the master of the world  
and so it should fit in his image;  
He is so impatient and hurried  
to bend it and mould,  
like his own flexible physique.

He commits blunders.  
Often he destroys much,  
sometimes even himself.  
Invades, attacks, bellows and swears  
to change it, to improve it,  
ignoring its vastness, his smallness.

In his zeal he little knows  
that in its own way it goes,  
uncontrolled and free,  
like the great volcano,  
or the swelling stormy sea  
engulfing its invader.

Most of the boons of human culture  
are enjoyed as his own gifts,  
though often his share is grabbed  
by his shrewd seniors,  
who know manipulation—  
the ultimate art of survival.

When old he thinks  
he has grasped its meaning.  
Still he knows little, though  
manages the affairs, furious  
why the young do not obey,  
act wisely and conform.

## 32

### The Uprooted Creeper

The thick flowery creeper,  
lusty and fragrant, lay dead.  
I used to enjoy solace  
amidst its cool, dense leaves.

But that day it was gloomy.  
with leaves and flowers withered,  
from the lowest branch, droopy,  
right to the topmost twigs.

Such a huge ramification;  
rich empire of leaves and branches,  
intertwining here and there,  
had dried and shriveled.

Somebody had pulled it out  
by the root from the earth.  
Such a small root,  
disturbed with a single jerk.

And it had gone.  
How vital to nourish and protect  
the roots, once uprooted  
how difficult to grow and flourish!

## 33

### Modern Death

A friend had an attack last night.  
Another lost his legs in a mishap,  
a colleague was diagnosed cancer,  
operations, specialists, tests.  
Intensive Care Units!  
And thus death came.

In my childhood days  
I heard no such news.  
People simply died.  
Gracefully.  
Laid in mother earth quietly,  
as they had lived.

But now they seem  
neither dead nor alive;  
after such advancement  
in the matters of living and dying.  
The modern death is really turbulent  
and painful.

## 34

### Happy New Year

There was a time  
when every year was a new year,  
full of hope, dreams unbound,  
promise of infinite life  
compacted in limited days,  
still unopened box of treasure,  
like the plane  
taking off sharply skyward.

But now it is flying on a level plane.  
Every year with known routes,  
with hazards unknown,  
still unopened basket of a snake charmer  
full of strange venomous happenings.  
“Happy New Year”  
repeated like a parrot,  
seems to be meaningless, lifeless.



## 35

### Vacating the Room

I was thinking of a white-wash,  
mending some cupboards,  
that picture on the wall  
had to be refixed.

But now there was no use.  
Ceiling had to be cleaned,  
new carpet still lying in the corner.  
Now the room had to be vacated.

I was so irritated by the wall lizards.  
In the end you are totally confounded,  
you were so desperate about  
what was to be done, what was done.

Now I don't care if the lizards  
crawl freely on the walls or  
the spiders weave their snares  
more intricate and winding.

Oh, the illusion of owning things,  
the delusion of a permanent abode!

## 36

### The Pattern of the Jungle

The jungle has changed  
frequently and is inconstant,  
over the infinite layers of time,  
metamorphosed into endless patterns  
of different hues and outlines.

But the basic fiber  
remains the same, like  
the small pictures of children  
with overlapping lines,  
shifting with angles of vision.

So the real world changes.  
But the essential is unaltered.  
Everything emanates from the truth,  
evil as well as good,  
though the perspective shifts.

The core is eternal.  
The lesser souls are amused  
by the superficial glamour.  
The wise see the inner light,  
unflickering.

## 37

### Embracing Nature

In the morning fresh air  
I stood in the nyctanthes,  
the lush green flexible plant,  
and felt the moisture  
of its leaves and flowers  
against my bare body.

It embraced me  
like a genial elder.  
Its freshening beauty  
thrilled by human touch.

I jerked it slightly  
and it danced in glee  
with its drooping flowers  
shaking like a sweet-sixteen,  
bent shyly with its own beauty  
dangling its earrings,  
then raining them on me  
so profusely, liberally,  
like the benedictions  
of a noble saint  
ready to abate  
the pains of ailing humanity.

I wish man emulated it  
and showered bliss on all!

## 38

### Rehearsal

Breathless, hurried preparations,  
elaborate arrangements,  
aspirations to be the best,  
desire to top all.

And to what purpose?  
To win the trophy  
for acting a role  
in a make-believe world.

Such intensive, hectic rehearsals,  
just to perform a brief role  
in a play, which would last  
only eight minutes.

If only a little concern  
and some pain for our brethren,  
how much life would mean  
to one's self and the others.

## 39

### The Yellow Power

I dealt in feelings and emotions  
but there was no buyer.  
The highest bidder  
also turned away the offer.  
And confirmed the supremacy  
of yellow metal over human bonds.

If I had known this  
I would have strived for it  
from the very beginning,  
for the last three score years.

I would have opened the schools  
and taught the tender minds  
to amass millions  
instead of virtue and character.

## 40

### The Annual Festival

I once dreamed  
of all the annual festivals  
months before the real celebrations  
and counted days  
for the fresh cool morning.  
Inquired my grandmother  
about the phases of the moon  
to fix the time in my mind.

But now I rarely feel  
the day's arrival,  
I don't even feel  
its distinctive sacredness  
from all the other routine days.  
Despite the merrymakings,  
motley dresses, sweets,  
joy and mirth dancing in the air.

On this *Deepavali*  
I went about my humdrum chores;  
the money matters, mainly,  
though the children enjoyed;  
playing their crackers,  
their mother busy in rituals,

preparing elaborately  
for the worship of the deity.

I did not feel  
the excitement of the firework.  
Nor the rows of candles  
and the earthen lamps  
nor the juicy sweets.  
Though I felt happy  
in the happiness of the children  
and all other people.

## 41

### In Quest of a Man

I searched and searched  
but did not find  
a man who would share  
my grief and pangs.

Most of them even exposed  
their venomous fangs,  
threatening me and perhaps,  
expecting to face some teeth.

Finding none they retreated,  
happy to see me defenceless,  
no danger to their cruelties,  
to enjoy with the carnivorous.

At last I also decided  
to be poisonous.  
And one day he approached me.  
I displayed my fangs to him.

At the very first encounter  
he fled away from me,  
in the quest of a human being.  
And I was forlorn again.



## 42

### The Massacre

The prince killed all—kinsmen,  
father, mother, the king and queen,  
in a bloodied frenzy  
or some Machiavellian design.

Wallowing in such glory,  
pelf, power and wealth,  
one could be so unhappy,  
sad and so desperate!

The top star,  
burning with old, stale revenge,  
deals with the riff-raff  
to pacify her diseased cells.

Even though millions of hearts  
die on her, could die for her,  
still denied sweet sleep.  
And found dead alone.

Sure, mere things don't ensure  
joy, peace and stasis,  
rather pose threat to bare smooth living.  
Sometimes even spill much blood.

## 43

### The Art of Survival

The powerful stud of my fancy  
was halted by the worldly might;  
as the usurer stops  
the cart of the poor farmer  
who hasn't paid his loans;  
seizing the reins of the bullocks  
so they couldn't budge an inch forward.  
It has always been so.

Even before the dark medieval man  
entered the enlightened era,  
Muse was given many a jolt  
by the mammons.

Heartless landlords and money lenders  
throttled the melody of poesy.  
Fragrant flowers survive hard  
while weeds flourish in abundance.

## 44

### Enjoy the Show

The fowl must know  
its limitations.  
The artist must realize  
the lack — the grand lack.

Courage is not granted to all;  
wisdom is not sold in bazaar.  
Chivalry does not grow on trees.  
Let us mark our place.

Everybody is not for the front row.  
Some should grace the rear,  
enjoy the show  
and applaud.

Beauty is everywhere.  
You must stretch your sight  
and strain the ears  
to catch the melodious note.

What though you are not at the center,  
part may be played in the corner  
of the small stage,  
on the fringes.

The role must be enjoyed,  
howsoever brief.

## 45

# The Curtain Falls

### I

Winds have melted  
and fancy jammed  
by the jolts of reality.  
Dreams lie shattered.

The age has come thunderously  
unannounced, unexpected  
like the unwelcome guest;  
the flight arrested amidst  
the pleasant journey.

### II

Feel the excitement of the drama;  
the spacing, the action,  
the dialogue, the gestures,  
the arrangement of property.

The lingering fears, the high hopes.  
Recline with grace  
and behold the active performance,  
after the breathless countdown.

At last the grand entry,  
the silence,  
the thrill of the moment,  
the roaring applause.  
And the curtain falls.

Let the impatient newcomers  
enjoy the show.  
We have to watch  
the curtain fall.  
Rest is silence.

## 46

### The Factory Worker

He played no game  
in the spirit of free childhood,  
without worried drudgery  
and servility to survive.

No growing muscles were flexed  
at the ripe time.  
No wrestling was allowed  
when most desired.

Time went by busily.  
There was never plenty.  
Nothing to buy the world.  
Life spent only in labour, for others.

## 47

### Enter the Darkness Alone

Who said that somebody  
will accompany you?  
The kinsmen who grew up with you,  
not even your parents,  
who begot you here.

The illusion of companionship  
is like the fancy  
that you are not going to die.  
Everybody leaves you,  
like the friends  
after a thrilling joyous tour.  
You are left with  
only its fond memories.  
(You might retain some bitterness though).

But the departure is lonely  
except the fear of the unseen,  
unknown journey.  
Separating the brief sojourn  
from the vast eternal life  
to throw away  
the mantle of human sympathy  
and enter the darkness.  
Alone.

## 48

### Hoping for Mermaids

Oh! the whole gimmick seems so hard.

May be He offered us  
an insoluble sum,  
or did not balance the strength  
or it remained unharnessed.

He might have rendered it so for us.

Whatever be the genesis,  
all are in the same boat,  
the hunter and the hunted,  
tossing up and down  
on the high seas,  
hoping to see mermaids  
but encountering the ghastly  
and ferocious sharks.



## 49

### I Was in Love

A single momentary smile  
with deep eyes feeding on me,  
saying something silently  
through all the signals of the senses.  
Eyes, lips, the flushed cheeks  
beckoning me  
though not with the hand,  
inviting me,

though not with overt signs  
but of passion, emotions, desires;  
dreams and romance  
surging in my entire being.

Beauty may dwell in other faces.  
Who will be more loved,  
a mother, father, brother,  
nay, my own blood and future hope?

But nothing moved me so  
as this old, known passion,  
and so I began seeing dreams  
like the young lovers,  
existing in this drab world

but living actually in the other,  
airy, dreamy, fairy.  
Well, then I was in love.



## 50

### Moving in the New House

My heart is dancing with joy.  
Merely the thought thrills me,  
owning the house of my own,  
in my fifties.

How I had longed for  
a room of my own to study,  
a room to sleep in,  
lawn to sit in,  
and say "This is my house".  
After putting in twenty plus years  
in a teaching job  
I have a house at last.

Earlier I thought  
I would do so much,  
achieve so much, for me,  
my family and the society.  
But wonder I would be able  
to do that now living in my house.

There are people  
who have put in more years in gutters  
than I

and are still without a house.  
Things have often been achieved  
without the horn of plenty.

Life is not lived best  
in the limitations of boundaries.  
It is open from all sides,  
without enclosures, without walls.  
Feel the wayward winds  
from all directions.

# 51

## Goodbye, All

Goodbye, all,  
God be your saviour!

She parted tearfully  
from father and mother,  
brothers, sisters, and friends  
to her new destination.  
Under the protection of other people,  
unknown and unseen.

Who knows what will be her fate,  
to thrive or suffer the penury,  
to be a queen or a slave.  
To breathe her last  
in burning flames  
or drowning water?

No security of job, estate, or money;  
without education, ignorant of law;  
and the antagonistic  
self-righteous pillars of society!  
The whole long life of her  
quivering in insecurity.

Who can stop them if she is starved,  
or beaten, treated like a dog,  
charged with meager dowry,  
or accused by a lascivious hog  
of ogling at strangers?  
Wholly at their mercy in this wide world.

O woman, the creator of the race!  
Is this your fate?

## 52

### The Priorities

Suddenly the clouds engulfed  
the bright sun, then, the blue sky,  
all dark, heavy and menacing,  
like the huge waves of the mighty sea.

Dark and heavy in the front,  
light and mischievous in the rear.  
A white crane floating gracefully  
below the dark shadow.  
My grandmother used to tell me  
he is the harbinger of rain.

But I was more worried  
about my petty jobs.  
It could rain anytime.  
Before the downpour spoils things  
I would have to rush  
through my domestic chores.

I wished to enjoy in the garden,  
bring the woods from the barn,  
thrash the neighboring brat  
for spoiling my grapevines.

I had to fetch medicines  
from the chemist in nearby town  
for the ailing neighbour  
writhing in pain.

What to do and what to put off  
in such a short time.  
“Beating can wait”, I thought,  
“let me alleviate the pain  
instead of inflicting more  
for my selfish sadistic gain.”



## 53

### The Overpowering Evil

The violet fields spread  
like a motley carpet  
with red-flowered green shrubs,  
velvety soft wild grass.

(I even fancied of lying on it,  
feeling the God's velvety blessings.)  
But before me the evil one  
crept into it hissing.

I saw it with my own eyes.  
Now I dared not tread on it  
as I could not detect the evil  
with its glossy serpentine body.

Graceful smooth crawling,  
yet full of deadly venom,  
coiled and crouched in underbrush,  
ready to bite unseen but sure.

I could not enjoy the beauty,  
felt uneasy even to watch

as I was ill-equipped to kill,  
to confront and end the evil.

I just stared and stared  
with wishful longing  
while the evil freely enjoyed  
the world and its splendour.

## 54

### The Shepherd Boy

I saw him walking briskly  
after a cow.  
A stumpy cane in hand,  
trying to divert her  
where his father told him to.

A tiny plump child  
with a withered, sad smile,  
wrapped in tattered trousers and  
poverty, filthy and vile.

The village fields were his crèche,  
he never enjoyed delicacies, toys,  
gaudy dresses, a good house  
or such other comforts.

It was a pity.  
He could have achieved anything.

Was he deprived of these?  
Who pushed him in his plight,  
who conspired against innocence,

was it fate, actions of past births,  
or something human?

But was he really sad and low,  
and suffered life?  
May be only I thought so.  
The system offers each his share,  
neither less nor more.

## 55

### Spineless

There is no returning back  
from the boundaries  
of the past and the now.  
Humans will not leave you alone.  
You cannot shed off the human web,  
stand erect amid the quick-sand.

You can dream and dream  
but the past won't revive.  
You can neither wish it  
rise like the Phoenix  
nor can you wrench it away  
from your present.

It sticks to you like the world.  
Though it is simple to just go off  
like a shuttle in the outer space  
with no weight, no hold on earth,  
with only still motion,  
without moorings and force.

Do you know  
how it feels to survive  
sans force, sans identity?

Just to exist like a spineless worm,  
like a pig, a nameless insect,  
tossing like a ball in unfamiliar hands.

Some humans want their  
earthmates to live like that.  
And still long for their company;  
wishing theirs to be intact  
stripping others of it.  
The closeness of fellow human beings!

## 56

### Tiny Drops of Energy

I was consoling myself  
to do an unfinished job  
in the next birth  
if I am born to my mother again.

But then I felt  
I may not get the chance again.  
The innumerable births are merely  
layers and layers of illusions.

If the things are viewed from above  
through some broader glance,  
present times and places  
would seem rather small;  
petty battles for pettier things  
and issues meaningless.

Everything goes on smoothly  
even if the king is dead,  
a noble laureate breathes his last,  
the great scientist leaves the world  
or the poet bows out,  
in the midst of his last song.

I, as human being, am here  
incidentally and just by chance,  
like a drop of water in the sea,  
myriad of forms of that power,  
as some wild plant  
on the bank of the Ganges.

As a hopping rabbit  
or the huge dinosaurs  
who were the kings once.  
Tiny drops of energy,  
scattered here and there,  
always, everywhere.

Oh, the folly of priding oneself!  
Unlike any animal on the earth  
contented with himself,  
his food and his queen.

None of them is crowned thus  
by the members of his tribe.  
Only the burning vanity of man  
causes so much misery and pain.



## The Bazaar

They appeared suddenly  
just like the frenzy of their music,  
thumping on their drums,  
flinging their arms in vulgar gestures.

Unsexual faces; flushed with  
sunlight and cold excitement.  
All the passers-by turned to them.  
The traffic on the road was in chaos  
as if life halted for a moment:  
“*Dil de...Dil de de...Dil de...*” (Love me).

The cops struggled in vain,  
vehicles collided with each other  
and people sweated amid the jam.  
A hulky old man grabbed  
a young bike rider  
and started slapping him.  
“*Dil de de ...Dil de de*”.  
Nobody tried to stop him.

It was festive season.  
All were shopping and enjoying.  
The bazaar was buzzing  
with people and passion.

## 58

### Enter and Exit

Just one day remains,  
and I shall go back home.  
In fact, a night only now.  
Only a single shower  
in this unfamiliar bathroom.

Only a dinner,  
a breakfast,  
a lunch.  
A ritual of farewell.

Then I shall leave for home,  
after a month of stay in Shimla,  
away from home,  
my city, my family, my hearth,  
my daily routine.

And the first day I reached here!  
Just like our life.

Which looks so long and infinite  
in childhood and youth  
and how soon the blocks of time—

days pass  
and bring you to the brink,  
the edge of the cliff  
from where to look down  
deep in the gorge  
is really frightening.

But one must reach this  
brink of living—  
breathing, thinking, eating, breeding.  
And then just plunge  
in the unknown void darkness.

I won't embracing death  
or waking up to a new birth  
or freeing from all births.  
Or meeting with beautiful  
creatures in an alien ambience.  
But certainly to some other role,  
though unknown to us.

## 59

### To Enter the Jungle

Who will enter the jungle again?  
After wading through it,  
bruised and hurt.  
The shocks and traumas  
having passed off now  
except throbbing of severe pain.

Being out of that moist darkness  
into the clear space and light,  
looks like an incarnation.  
Passing through each phase  
was a relief, an achievement.  
What a life we lived!

The enlightenment we earned.  
The deliverance from the cycle.  
If on the verge of ninety  
one remembers the zealous,  
innocent face at eleven!  
See the difference.

A lofty beginning  
and an abysmal ending.

60

## At the Top

If one can remain at the top  
of the hills, feeling  
the lighter and cooler breeze, free  
from the dirt and muck of the plains  
and glance over the tiny hamlets  
with still tinier human beings.

At the peak of intoxication,  
cool, ripe, red wine,  
uplifted by Bacchus  
from the humble depths  
to the lofty heights,  
liberated from the humiliation  
and disgrace of the fallen,  
to enjoy the freedom at the pinnacles.

But one cannot dwell there  
for long.  
And has to climb down slowly  
from the lonely glory  
to mix with the common  
and mingle with the dust  
on the safe solid ground.

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# THE CHAOTIC AGE

DR. BALBIR SINGH

## ABOUT THE BOOK

In his second anthology of poems Dr. Balbir Singh has tried to present the essential predicament of men amidst all favorable and unfavorable forces around him – individual, societal and natural. Man has devised, and is continually devising, all the means to cope up with these forces. Some of the poems rake up the issue of temporariness of life and certainly of death. The phenomenon of death is as important as that of living, simply because throughout our life we are acutely aware of death. The theme of evil is a recurrent concern in many of these poems. All the aspects of evil – its origin, its inevitability, the destruction and suffering it causes, and the necessity of crushing it – are explored with a rare intensity. The language is simple so that the readers of all categories may enjoy the poems.

Singh's "poems are about here and now....but you will not be able to resist the food for thought [they] offer."

– The Sunday Tribune

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Balbir Singh (b. 1956, Panipat) passed his master degree in English literature in 1980 from Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra and has been teaching English since then in different Government colleges in Haryana. He was awarded Ph.D. degree by M.D. University, Rohtak. His poems have been published in various journals and newspapers. In 2002 he was selected Associate of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. His first anthology of poems *Time to Die Alone and Other Poems* appeared in 2008. *The early Fiction of Philip Roth* was published in 2009. At present, he is Head

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