

Kashmir
and
The Blind Man

by Jayak Krishna Gokak

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Kashmir And The Blind Man

Vinayak Krishna Gokak



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Foreword

I am grateful to my friends in the United Writers, Calcutta, who so kindly offered to include this book of poems in their series of publications.

The poems in this book beginning with *Tarka Tirth* are free renderings of my Kannada poems. The others were composed directly in English.

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about the author

Vinayak Krishna Gokak (b. 1903) is a senior Professor of English ; former Director of the Central Institute of English and Vice-Chancellor of Bangalore University ; in 1957 was a delegate to the International P.E.N. Conference at Tokyo ; in 1960 attended the International Conference of poets in Belgium ; recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award and also the Padmasri Award ; widely published in India and abroad.

CONTENTS

The Poem	9
Visnagar Again	10
Suratkal Beach	11
Simla	12
Seeing Whole	13
The Parliament of Birds	14
All Men Are Words	16
The Mantra of Péace	16
The Supreme Artist	17
We Two	19
A Child's Railway Romance	21
Some day	21
A Prayer	22
The Brass Gods	23
The Rhythm and Beauty of Earth	24
To Tarka Tirth	25
The Well-Beloved	26
Arthur Seat	27
The Himalayas	29
Kashmir and the Blind Man	30
Autumnal Mood	31
The Song of Youth	32
Visnagar in Monsoon	34
The Million-Armed Person	35
The Song of Earth	36
India and the World	37
India and Europe.	38

by the poet

The Song of Life (Poems) (*Hind Kitabs*)
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Kashmir and the Blind Man (*United Writers*)
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India and World Culture (*Vikas*)

anthologies :

The Literatures in the Indian Languages
(*Union Ministry of Information, New Delhi*)
The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian poetry
(*Sahitya Akademi*)
The Golden Book of Sathya Sai Lyrics (*Sathya Sai Publica-
tion Foundation*)
Twentyone Indo-Anglian Poems (*Sahitya Akademi*)

KASHMIR AND THE BLIND MAN

The Poem

Who writes ?

Me.

Me that will be dust,
yet claiming immortality
for the quintessence of my dust,
my poetry.

What vanity !

When suns are bottled out,
who cares for Shakespeare ?

And how does it matter
to him, Shakespeare,
even if some one does ?

What do I write ?

A poem.

A word on which time spills its ink
the moment the word's written.
A figure of speech that's disfigured
the moment it's spoken.
A wave that spills and kills itself
on the shore of eternity.

The Noumenon exists apart.

It's in the phenomenon
that the poet and poem are real.

Visnagar Again

Sleeping restfully at night,
I wake up aching with delight.
A flash of lightening holds my eyes.
A peal of deep love fills my ears.
Gurgling in the throat surprise
songs that sing of bygone years.
There is a rose-bud in my heart
and a jasmine in my memory :
Visnagar !

My pulse beats to a marvellous tune,
my soul wakes dimly to a rune.
In my head wander heavenly strains.
My heart sings fluttering like a bird
and my blood runs in my veins
like music through harp-strings unheard.
There is a rose-bud in my heart
and a jasmine in my memory :
Visnagar !

Long after pulse, heart, ears and eyes
and blood are no more than surmise,
and I am but a breath of wind,
a glint of light, a speck of shade,
my soul will leap up there to find
a magic spell upon her laid,
an eternal seal : rose-bud of love
and jasmine of sweet memory :
Visnagar !

Suratkal Beach

(South Canara)

The Taj is a star on the Jumna crescent.
Shahajehan chose a bend in the river
for Nature said : 'I am Islam',
though the river had a holy Hindu name.
He put the Taj-star in the bend
for Art perfects what Nature initiates.

Here to the Siva shrine
where the ocean bends and curves royally
into a crescent blue, Nature says :
'I am infinity curving into eternity.'
Says the Divine, King of Artists,
to the ocean through the Siva symbol :
'I am the Soul of Silence and you are its Word.
I am the straight line whose curve you are.
I am the still centre before whom you bend
into a crescent for ever and ever new'.

Simla

Simla or Syamala ?

'Tis hard to say.

But the *la la* is common.

'Tis *la la la* in Simla

when summer crowns her hills

and there's *loo loo loo* on the plains.

But winter comes and splinters

her undiminished glory.

Then the lips are sealed and snow-bound

and the muffled heart throbbing

is the only sign of life.

That and the lone bird singing.

Let's sing a lullaby for Simla !

When she's new-born in spring

on Summer Hill

birds trill

hearts thrill

and laughter and dance

have their golden chance.

Sunrise dripping with jasper and pearl

sunset brimming with rainbow spray.

Even the weathercock crows

to the white-red rose :

summer is i-cumen in

thude sing cuckoo !

But the wind among the pines

that stand

like statues in a row

begins to sigh again

and the bier of summer is borne

down the shrouded chasm...

Then the monsoon oars and roars
amid the mountain vapours
churning cloud into rain.
Earth, wearing sea-green garments
hangs rainbow foliage arches
to welcome Summer again.
summer
though he be late in coming
for the sleet and the snow
block his path like the sheeted dead.
But the king comes into his own
on the sapphire throne
and Syamala, his queen,
bathes and suns in his smiles
the livelong day
and at night lies down on the hills
like a golden galaxy.

Seeing Whole

In my mind is sense that falters.
In my heart is love that alters.
In my will is a titan weary.
My brain is full of fact and theory.

May your lightening be my cross
and the thunder purge my dross.
I will be your flash of lightening,
I will be your peal of thunder.

When I am your flash of lightening
and I am your peal of thunder,
the world will see in a blinding flash
and hear a deafening voice with wonder :
hear the voice of its own soul
and see, not maimed and dark, but whole.

The Parliament of Birds *

(Thoughts on a conference of student representatives of Indian Universities)

Ah, there : the kingfisher in troubled waters.
The peacock struts on the lawn.
The owl sings its lullaby
long after it is dawn.
The purblind bat clasps death
clinging to the electric wire
and the eagle soars aloft
shrinking from hell-fire.

Pak, pak, pak,
the woodpecker pecks away..
Mao, mao, mao,
is the cawing all the day.

Dame Nature,
Mother India,
call her what you will,
wept at the strange demeanour
of this bewildering throng,
as if it was her swan-song,
till she had her fill ;
wept for the birds that had flown,
for the fledgelings that did not own
her motherhood.

* This is the title of one of Chaucer's poems.
Chaucer uses the middle English word 'foules'
for birds.

But a bulbul there was and a skylark
that sang though it was dark ;
sang the song of the morning
that centuries hive like bees ;
the song that springs like perfume
from paradisaal trees
of the ancestral wood.

And then there was calm,
argument, even consent,
the natural dissonance
of a mingled choir.
And then again the tumult
of the catapult,
the swinging of clubs
and the twanging of bows.
When will the notes blend
and this discord end ?
Not till gold has passed
through the baptism of fire.

But the baptised lose their franchise.
All birds are birds of passage.
There are other young ones in the field.
How to baptise youth ?
For that the national mould
itself has to be pure gold,
the golden vessel of Truth.

All Men Are Words

All men are words
 in the great poem of God.
Some of them, words
 that make a lovely song ;
some others that lead
 the giv'n sense along.
Numberless words
 in the beatings of wings
bring the joy of the bird
 that soars as it sings.
Great men there are
 that are made like birds.
But millions of men
 are words, words, words.
All men are words
 in the great poem of God.

The Mantra of Peace

When the god of Peace descends
with his feet covered with snow
on the uplands of the brain,
Peace neither begins nor ends
but is the eternal present
enfolding stillness and movement,
enthroning Siva who would consort
with Sakti in silence and sport.

How do I know ?
I am drenched in a golden rain !

The Supreme Artist

A lifetime were barely enough
to win words
to woo the honey of the soul.
The chrysalis may become butterfly
sucking soul-honey.
Even the hundredth part
of a single drop of honey
will turn butterflies
into dancing flowers.
But the honey eludes them
except in hints and flashes.

More than a lifetime is needed
to make a life
express the honey of the soul.
Our days flit like passing clouds
beneath the blazing glory
of the diamond sun,
a few transparent
but many opaque to that lustre.
And our life becomes
a segregation of vapours.

The many aeons of earth
and the millenniums dreamed by man
are but feeble words
or wandering butterflies
that can neither spell nor suck
the honey that lies hidden
in the World Soul.

Our eclipsed days
hang like a pall
on the chasm that opens
between that radiance
and the world's night.

Mother !
You are the artist supreme.
Your words are like winged bees.
The incipient light
in their waxen honey-bag
holds all the soul's honey.
Your days are rainbow-clouds
that conceal and reveal
your blinding sun-glory.
With a stroke of your golden hammer
you have released the Niagara
of the Over-soul upon the world
and wooed worlds, like words,
to express eternity
and yield all honey
beginning with the city of dawn
and ending with a perfect world.
My salutations to Thee !

We Two

I am what I am
that I may become
what I would become.
To be, to become
and to fashion perfection itself
is my aim.

I am now involved
in evolving into my being.
I shall begin my life
of becoming
and of fashioning perfection
only when I evolve
into what I already am
in the centre of my being.

O Master of Illusion !
You are divine
because you are close
and yet inscrutable.
You are inscrutable
because you are divine.
The cosmos itself is a cruel joke
you have played on human beings
within this cosmic framework.
Like dreams within a dream
are the Avataric jokes you play
on the poor mortals around you.

You laugh at the wisdom and simplicity
of pure men
and approve the folly and crookedness
of the impure

till the onlooker's brain begins to whirl
and he is ready to faint.
You revel in injustice
like the maker of this universe.

Is this how you break intellects
and pound human hearts
that souls may emerge from slime
like lotuses in a pool ?
Is this how you dispel injustice
by investing it with grace
that the third eye may see love
beyond justice and injustice ?

O Master of Illusion !
The cunning of your workmanship
exceeds the limits of my understanding.
But I say : '*Amen*',
for you are Playwright and Producer
and Architect and Engineer
of all that is or will be.
Parent of Illusion !
Grant me a vision of reality,
the reality that dawns with *Aum*,
that breaks into a universe with *Aum*
and lives in the silence above *Aum*.
Grant me a vision of reality
that fills time with eternity
and colours eternity with time.
Amen !

A Child's Railway Romance

O engine ! Though unseen,
I hear you calling, calling.
Your throat is full and keen,
your whistle so enthralling !

In what dream-lit forests
is your whistle flowing ?
And on what moonless nights
are your coal-fires glowing ?

I know the destination
for which I've to entrain
but not the railway station
that will you detain !

O engine ! though unseen,
I hear you calling, calling.

Some day

Some day,
may be years, lives or aeons hence,
find out I will
why this little white flower
bears in its snow white bosom,
a six-pointed star,
tinted dark, green, amber,
rose, gold and amethyst,
the flower itself
a brighter star.
Some day.

A Prayer

You are my Lord and Master.
You are the shatterer of darkness.
Show me again these realms of light,
and their ranging immensities
which once you revealed to me,
O Master of Light !

Ringed round with mountains,
I know not the sea
from which the sun rises
or into which he sets.
Place me on the peak
that overlooks the sea.
Take me to the polar region of truth
where the sun shines for ever and ever
and it is eternal day.

I grope in darkness
hoping through the years
that your ray will light my path.
Why this indifference
that looks like wrath ?
Why hide behind the mask
of this insensible gloom,
O Master of Light !

The Brass Gods

Up in the north country
there was a rolling plain
where, far as man could see,
they built through wind and rain
a winding wall with niches
for their worshipping gods.
There went priests and witches
for frauds and the singing of lauds.

Niched in the wall with pomp
were the brass gods they made.
Brass gods—child and adult ;
bronze gods—man and maid.
Crores of brazen faces,
also of copper and ore,
dear ones eying dumbly
the silver-paven floor !

Rinsing with holy water,
burnishing with unction,
the priest was god-preserver :
that was his only function !
Gleaning up the idols
he earned his daily wages.
But in that age of mad men
he was ranked with the sages !

Then came the Asian horde
and over-ran the valley.
The wall of the brass gods crumbled.
vanished the priests' rally.
the horde had its share of gold,
the gods could be reborn.
The people began to think,
it was a new morn.

The Rhythm and Beauty of Earth

O the rhythm and the beauty of earth !
Green above green,
stair below stair,
the cresting hills, the undulations,
the dipping valleys !
The green mist of cloudy grass,
the yellow flower-beds curving, curving,
the wild plaintian flower, a sculptured lower,
the bunch of onyxes and rubies
blooming from one stem :
O the beauty of earth !

And the water that bathes the earth !
Water bursting from the heart of mountains
and carving giant rocks ;
water falling in supreme abandon
from dizzy heights like an unwinging bird ;
water playing hide-and-seek in crevices,
meeting like frolicking children : here we are !
Water carded like cotton
spun and woven into foam-white sheets ;
water that's one again, again
in the heart of the winding vale :
how many forms of water !

This plateau blanketed by clouds
reveals a sleeping hamlet
when the clouds lift.
In the valley where clouds flow like a river,
a lift shows the green earth below.
Loveliness within loveliness,
layer within layer !
Plunge into this infinity of beauty
and gather the truth.

To Tarka Tirth

I saw in you a fanatic.
You called me a mad man.
I conceded you were a logician.
You agreed I was a poet.
Of your all-absorbing logic
your politics was only a part.
Of the dreaminess of poesy,
my mysticism was merely a phase.
I needed your logic.
On this foundation, we agreed,
our house of friendship should built.

But O my friend !
That edifice had reared itself
during the days we spent together
wandering in the Krishna valley.
Here is a bunch of flowers
culled from that lovely valley.
Accept it.

These are poems in free verse.
Some may regard them
as the Trishanku world of poesy.
But you know my friend,
that harmory reigns
where the heart chimes in.
What the heart sings is song.
In these lines are my heart-beats.
Here has my muse braided her hair with dream,
wiped her tears gently
and cherished the divine hope.

The critic has to refashion his response
and rebuild his science
if he regards this child of the Logos
as an illegitimate offspring !
I welcome your logic, O friend,
as you would the nurslings of my imagination.

The Well-beloved

I worshipped you as my heart's queen.
But you flung my heart into the dust.
At that my heart raised its hood
and bit the hand that flung it.

Your very heart's blood
flowed through the wound
and you cried your soul out like a child.
And the truth dawned on me
that not out of scorn did you fling my heart
but unknowingly, even like a child.
And I felt also, deep down my soul,
that, even if you threw my heart away,
you were my own, my well-beloved.

Ever, for ever, my own well-beloved.

Arthur Seat

(Mahabaleshwar)

Standing on this slender isthmus of earth
between two giant voids,
the twin valleys to left and right,
Atibali, Mahabali,
I behold, I, a blade of grass amid grass,
the abode of the Infinite,
O the glory of creation !
The wealth of valleys and downs !
Wait ! My eyes start wildly,
my head begins to spin,
my nerves are numbed
and my muscles twitch.
This is the naked beauty of Nature,
her very terror !

I opened my mind's eye.
In the creeper of my imagination
blossomed epoch on epoch.
The curtain of time was lifted.
The pyramids would have looked like toys
near these granite walls of the fortress
designed by Vishwakarma, the divine architect.
All the wealth of Egypt
would not have vied with the hem of this green mantle
the mountain wears from head to foot.
There is an Athens and a Rome concealed
in each bend and curve of its body.
The river winding snake-like in the valley
is older than India herself !
One would give an empire away
for the mountain's little trinket of gold.

For it was time, the Titan Carver,
that curved this magnificent dream
in the medium of minerals and earth
for the delight of the giants and the gods.
What this mountain incarnates
is the beauty and terror of truth.

There was visible too
the multiple progression of mountain peaks
built into Sivaji forts by man,
stretching towards the horizon
a hundred miles away :

TORANGAD,
KAMALGAD
RAYAGAD,
PURANDARGAD,
SINHAGAD !

The bird of my sight
sat bewildered on each peak,
made an effort to lift its wings
and beat them in the void.
Mystery reigned supreme
and there was safety
on this bridgehead of earth alone.

But this truth flashed across the mind
that instant :
on this earth, the battle-stage of agony,
the quenchless spirit of man asserts itself,
raising its hand challengingly in the sky
like one of these peak-forts,
announcing to the assembled gods :
behold ! I am still alive
and hold my head high !

O soul !
Prince Arthur of the human race !
Here is the magic pageant spread before you
by Merlin, the Magician
and his Enchantress, Nature !
Spell out the meaning of their magic rites
and master them !

The Himalayas

Solidity and space,
grandeur and grace,
wave-crests of earth
in a sea of sky,
blue and brown
and somewhen green :
in this amphitheatre of the gods
you invite man
to sing and wing like a bird.

Kashmir and the Blind Man

A blind man came Kashmir to see.
His wife brought him along.
It was a sight to see them love each other :
a good theme for a song.

To escape the summer heat they wished to go
to a cool place.
Along with coolness here was loveliness.
To the wife it was an added grace.
Every moment she was entranced to see
this paradise on earth.
For her blind husband she strove to tell in words
its beauty and its worth.

‘Enough of this, my dear,’ the blind man said.
‘You I’ve never seen.
But never have I lost my faith that you
my alchemic stone have been.’

‘The beauty of Kashmir you body forth.
You’re felt in the blood, unseen.
If Kashmir is like you, I well can say
it’s lovely and green.’

The wife was in tears : ‘You’re Kashmir, my love !
‘Tis blind to its own beauty, like you.
Its blind affinity to you has brought
its beauty to my view.’

Autumnal Mood

I am in distress
to see these mountains in undress.
No cloud, no bird,
only the dense blue above
and the autumnal haze below.
No grass, only the moss.
Even the cactus blades are blunted.

Bare-bosomed and bare-headed,
but for tufts of ever-greens,
the giants lie naked;
shrunk trees clinging to them
like a man's hair in the cold.
The elephants reveal their rocky wounds,
their shrivelled and muddied skin
hanging loose by their side.

The monsoon mantle is gone
but for the rosy fire of scattered shrubs
flowering loneliness.

Whose the wardrobe
can clothe the nude mountains ?
Only the wind god's livery,
the winding sheet of snow.

The Song of Youth

Arise, O Youth !

in your face is valour beaming,
in your eyes the godhead dreaming.
A sovereign will in your tall bearing
stands erect. There is a daring
that rocks the world in your young arms,
a freedom in your steps that charms :
arise, arise :

Awake, arise and rule your realm.

The earth is yours. Be at the helm.

Master of all that you behold,

servant of each one, too, in the fold !

Be the Aswin of this age

and of the next the royal sage !

The great day dawns. O Morning Star !

Bring in the Sun's triumphal car !

Arise, arise !

O conch-throated ! long war proclaim
on the world's wickedness and shame.

Throw to the winds all caste and creed,
modern meanness; ancient greed.

March on, kill with your sun-like disk
the dragon and the basilisk.

To each god his task assign.

Make life a symphony divine.

Arise, arise !

Arise and twang your far-famed bow !
 Meet with magic shafts the foe.
 At one twang let selfhood die
 and love unfurl its flag on high
 and life, the lily-maiden, wed
 you, by the Dawn-Goddess led.
 Arise, arise !

May heaven and earth together twine,
 illumined by a plan divine.
 O bring the elixir of life
 to a nation long at strife.
 Re-enthroned for the rank and file
 the ancient mother in exile.
 God-blossom on the human tree
 and soul of all that's yet to be :
 Messiah, Hero, Avatar !
 Infinity's crown, our life's star !
 Arise, arise !

Visnagar in Monsoon

It has rained. The parched earth is cool
and has grown green with grass.
Perched upon the mansion like its own picture,
as blue and green sparrows chirp around,
the peacock contemplates the cavalcade of clouds.

As frogs grow clamant and crickets dance,
the male pigeon lifts its sky-blue throat
and welcomes the seeds sown in the fields.
All the birds that slept in the noon
wake in the monsoon.

Ruddy rustic women with lunch-baskets and a sheaf of talks
follow the farmer with his plough
and a pair of white oxen to the fields.
O their silvery laughter
and their song of thanksgiving to the god of rain !
Their cheeks grow ruddier than dawn
as the men listen to them enthralled.
May their singing never cease !

The Million-armed Person

In the Infinite Void has the Divine
stretched forth His palms.
O the million, million palms
of the Person myriad-armed !

One of these palms is Earth.
Watch its palmistry of curve and line,
its mounts of Venus and Mars
and its hieroglyphs of ensign, conch and disc !
Be palmist to that palm
and hold the key to the mystery of God
and the prism of the sky.

That palm is the battlefield of Desire.
There crawls man towards his cross or crown,
towards inescapable evolution,
towards an iota more of consciousness,
as his fortunes rise and fall :
the swell-head and the rake,
the climber and the coxcomb,
the lover and the anchorite,
sinner and saint,
criminal and saviour.

This cosmic palm is the kindergarten,
the academy of evolving souls. New lives
are but the beads that the five fingers tell
and shape them even as the beads are told.

The Song of Earth

When the heap of waters heaves and rages
and the frightened heart is still ;
where in the depth of ocean caves
the madly rushing waves
pass into fathomless sleep on the pearl-strewn floor :
then, there, my friend, is the only rock of Ages :
Earth, Mother Earth.

Great is the ocean of air
and the breezes that are its waves ;
enchancing the beauty beyond clouds
and the sky-blossoms culled in my hand :
And I return with them,—where ? O where ?
To the lap of earth,
to the only Rock of Ages,
Earth, Mother Earth.

Winging like a bird in Space
if my soul were to encompass in flight
the seven worlds and even if aeons passed in bliss of being
listen it would to the call of Earth
and re-enter her atmosphere.
Victory is no victory, unless it bears the stamp of Earth.
This mortal world, O my friend,
is the touchstone of the immortal.
She is the only Rock of Ages,
Earth, Mother Earth.

India and the World

Though she revolves round the sun
and lifts her eyes to the one and only moon,
she has dreamed of crores of moons
and tasted the truth of a million suns.

This is how earth has grown.
But a sun without beginning or end
is her comrade in spirit,
the friend of the thousand-petalled lotus,
the crown on her head.
And it is a birthless and deathless moon
that is throned on the water-lily in her heart.

This India is indeed the mint
in which gold mohurs and moidores
bear the impress of the One and Only.
Mother Earth has ordained this daughter,
an adept in that art,
to whisper the secret to her sisters
and bring a touch of paradise to earth,
devising a winding stair
which the true seeker climbs.

Consecration, not sacrifice,
leads us to the winding stair.
When the truth-consciousness
has set the sun-crown on your head,
the light of the full moon
will image your adventure.
The worlds will then be berries
in the palm of your hands.

India and Europe

With the dawn of the funnel era
began the churning of life
by gods and demons that were men.
Time was their serpent-rope
and their will the Mandara mountain.
When spirit-lore and bow-craft mingle
and man is himself Yogishwara and Partha,
the man of vision for thought and arrow,
then has life the ripeness of *yoga* and *bhoga*,
of acceptance as well as denial.
Then will a Republic truly blossom.

The two sisters embraced each other
and Europa said to her sister :
'I wore the *koustubha* and *parijata* in my hair
and lived in paradise.
I rode *Airavata*, the white elephant,
and moved on the winged steed, *Uchchaisravas*, in mid-air.
In my cow-shed was *Kamadhenu*, the wish-fulfilling cow.
In my lap dropped the moon
with the beauty of a new culture.
Lakshmi manifested herself in my temple
and all the arts adorned it.
But O Bharati ! The *apsaras* and the sirens
have descended on me from the cloud-city of Eros
and their dance and song have generated poison
that curls like smoke around me
and enters my nostrils like death.'

Then spoke Bharati, streaming with pity.
Her own sorrow had burdened her with pain :
'Sister, the blue-throated god I worshipped

absorbs such poison-flames.

I pined for the nectar of immortality.

I drank it to the full, but I suffer from another poison.

I said : I am one with Brahma; and I retired into solitude.

But, to my horror, my country grew rife with strife.

My children were apes, lustful and famine-stricken
and my land turned into a cemetery.

An adept in the lore of immortality,

I lived drowned in an ocean of Sorrow.'

Sweet is the concord of sisters.

Bharati will give her lore of immortality

to Europa, her younger sister,

and take from her *Indra Vidya*,

the science of world-mastery.

Then will there be one world,

one culture and one song.



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