

Sahitya Akademi Award-winning Collection of Kannada Poems



HS SHIVA PRAKASH

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LIKE MIST THROUGH VALLEYS



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The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodhana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From: Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi

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**LIKE MIST
THROUGH VALLEYS**

Mabbina Haage Kaniveyaasi

HS SHIVA PRAKASH

(Translated from Kannada by the Poet)



SAHITYA AKADEMI



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THE POET'S SELF-INTRODUCTION

The poet is a stubborn pilgrim ill-fated
Whose ambitious journeys are always defeated.

Whatever be his destination, he cannot reach there;
To reach somewhere else he is fated.

Though he invokes gods, saints and angels
But only in dire hells is he appreciated.

Yeats wanted to grasp his passion, Maud Gonne
Cold statues were to him allotted.

The poem is a river never reaching the ocean
To be a stream or river always it was created.

The poet is the brother of all revolutions
Whose burning hopes are pick-pocketed.

Lovers who vowed to be always together
Are mysteriously ever parted.

The poet challenged destiny: 'I will get you,'
A true yogi of unsuccess, he was routed.

To wait forever Shiva Prakash's heart was fated
Now that he is statue, he feels sated.

O RUDRA

O Rudra,
The thirteenth arrow
You released from your bow
Has entered fourteen worlds,
Penetrated
Thirty-two elements.
Split
Time-worlds from time-worlds,
Substances from word-substances
Substances and word-substances
From meanings,
Meanings from silences,
Silences from
The unmanifest.
The arrow-struck world screamed
Speech too died after screaming
Silence everywhere
Sounds exploded away from ears
Severing my voice from my voice
Senses from sense-objects,

Like an uprooted tree
Like a baby cut from the umbilical cord.
Screams my voice
In a hundred shattered sounds:
Who can rescue our bodies, O Rudra,
From the onslaught
Of your sharp, murderous arrows,
The endless, from the beginning-less,
This pure moment, from cosmic worlds?
Who will rescue us from your cruel compassion
Separating
Proliferating us?

MIDNIGHT CALLS

(To the departed poet-friend, Veechi)

That midnight had burnt down
My worlds
In the drawing room of the vast night
There was nobody
Except me
And my orphaned telephone

When my fingers wandered
Like a restless mendicant on number buttons
They pressed as if by instinct
Your reviving number
Wrong, my guess that you too
Had drowned,
Like my world,
In sleep maya

Your affectionate voice was still awake
Like ancient symbols waiting for ages
To assume today's meanings

Your words fondled my tired heart
And awakened my sleeping dreams
Word-sounds formed in silence:
'This is how life goes on...'
But tell me about your poetry
Our prached paddy fields are smiling green again
My daughter has given birth to another daughter
My grumbling son-in-law has started speaking to me
The body is tired,
No good for tilling any more.
But the heart is full of joy
Remember that sad evening?

We both sat in the surrounding gloom
In the middle of a cracked dry pond.

When suddenly lighted on a telephone cable
A blue-throated beauty —
a neelakantha bird!

But in the vast drawing room of this night
My restless fingers are again
Pressing you number
But I remember:
You are gone.

Some dark night
Somebody will surely call me —
May be my younger brother Vikram
Or my younger sister Pushpa
When I am gone.

Will the same
Blue-throated beauty-
Neelakantha bird —
Fly into their dark night too?

FIVE BLIND MEN

When five blind men
Touched the elephant,
The elephant smelt
The five blind men

Said the first blind one:
The elephant's a pillar
Thought the elephant:
You are a builder!

The second one said:
No, it's a flag
Thought the elephant:
A soldier for sure

Said the third one:
It's like a wall
Thought the elephant:
Should be a jailbird

Said the fourth one:
It's just a rope!
Thought the elephant:
A simple rope maker
Said the fifth one:

A pipe
Thought the elephant:
Hurray, piper!

What the elephant was
Not one of them knew

Who were they?
Neither did the elephant have no clue

THE RAIN MAGIC

The girl opened
The balcony door
Outside, the rain's magic —
A cascade
She went out
Along with the door
And became
Rain

When I was left all alone
At home,
The house too went out along with the girl and the door
And turned into rain
I too turned into rain.

ON THE BEACH OF A VAST OCEAN NEXT TO A HUGE CITY

I saw:
In every grain of sand,
An unfinished dream:
Long nights we had to traverse;
The dawn wonders deserving celebration;
Unending distances we had to cover;
Cities we had to end up in somehow;
Houses kind like a mother;
The sun-rise rooms;
The sunlight bars coming in from windows;
The floating grains of dust turned golden

Unfinished wakeful dreams,
Each one of them,
On the vast beach,
Next to a huge city

A HUGE STOVE

Someone lit up
A stove the size of the world to cook
For marriages, birth and death ceremonies
All green forests
That spread from north to south pole,
And cut down to make firewood
They have now turned into cold ash
Feel it!
How cold!

The rapacious fire that burned the forests down,
Then invaded cities,
Killing all inhabitants
Was it the curse of wild beasts destroyed?

When I, the sole survivor,
Was drawing on the stretch of endless sands,
The agonising scenes of destruction
Look!
The sun!
A new foetus
In the womb of the colossal
Blue stove
Above
Descending

ALL NIGHT

The hurricane blew,
Roaring all night,
My rented house
Must have been blown away.

The whole day
Heavy rain was pouring down,
My rented house must have drowned

The whole summer
Was burning the huge blue stove above,
My rented house must have become scorched

The whole winter
Benumbing snows
My rented house must have turned into ice

But my rented house
Still stands,
Unshaken,
Waiting for me to make
My rented house
My own...

COME, MY GIRLS

Come, my girls, sisters of sunlight,
Come, spreading fragrances
When you want to sport with stars,
Go back on the path of lightning.

Sing, girls slim like a bamboo,
Sing in whispering tunes
To silence, then return, silent
Like an immense night.

Cover me, all of you, like spring
Green covering woods,
Before you go as you must.
Goodbye, autumn dreams!

THE DRUNKEN OCEAN

When drunken, the sea
Drank up the city on the shore
Swallowed up the most beautiful boy and the girl
And choked them in its womb

Three days and nights
It listened non-stop
To the sad earth and wind
Wailing

The sea was moved to pity
And calmed down

After three days and three nights
It spat the boy and the girl
Back on the shore

Swollen, their limbs
Had no sign of life

The whole earth is littered about
With such boys, such girls.
What will you do with them?
Tell me, my Mother Earth

THREE BLIND MEN

Three blind men
Three great friends,
In three directions went,
Exploring three times.

The first one:
Went further and further back
With each step,
Entered the mother's womb again;
Became stone among stones,
Water among waters
The road too turned into water
And flowed back to the source

The second:
Walked further up
And further ahead,
Faster than birds
Beating his steel wings
Soared over the earth,
Crossed even the horizon
And turned into a star

The third:
Shammed walking
While standing
Thinking the earth still
Turned like tap,
Giving night the day's love
And the day, the night's joys
Turning and turning like a tap
He became completely
Ignorant

Three blind men
Then abandoned
Their three roads
Not even worth
Three base coins
And have now returned
To where they began:
The fourth time

IN MY GARDEN DURING SUMMER

The soft and round bunches of black grapes
Spreading themselves
All along the canopy:
Tell me:
Whose eyeballs were they once?

The cooling breeze that came
From the rain in a far-off place and fondled my tired body:
Tell me:
Whose breath was its fragrance?

The burning sun that paints
The ocean golden at midday
While burning himself out:
Tell me whose heart's desire was he?

The pearls and corals
Glowing in the ocean full of
Whales and crocodiles
And waves roaring in fury:
Tell me:
In whose frightened sleep
Were they hidden as dreams?

The green, blue and brown earth
Swaying like a wild dancer's body:
Tell me:
The dance of whose deep passions was it?

WHAT A PILGRIM SAID

Said a pilgrim to me:
"When I was in Tarakeshwar in Bengal
On a pilgrimage.
I appealed to the *Shivalingam* in the temple:
'O Shiva! O self-born!
You made the ocean destination
To rivers that travel thousands of miles;
You gave nest to birds wandering in the sky;
A path, to constellations
Which fumble around like beggars in outer space;
To earthquakes, your earth's womb for rest;
To tempests, a pause,
To take a deep breath.

But what have you given me,
Tired of travelling
Weary of wandering?
Yes, weary of wandering
Since the moment of birth to the present,
As if I have two wheels for legs....
The roofs above me flew away,
The doors gave way,
Cities pushed me away,
Villages kept me at bay,
Give me a home
As you do to a lone star
Resting on the lonely rock pillow
On a mountain peak'

When I came out after my prayer
I saw
A *bahuroopi* in Shiva's guise,
Wearing a garment of tiger's hide,
A trident in hand,
A red dot on the forehead

To mark the third eye

'Why are you here, sir?'
Before I could ask this,
He stretched before me
His empty palm

I saw:

Beneath five fingers
Made of five elements,
The palm that stretched from
The beginningless to the endless....
On the palm the size of the palm
Without lifeline,
Without wealth line,
But full of immeasurable cosmic distances
Where innumerable constellations
Were searching for their lost orbits
Amidst civilizations, rising and setting
Between battles concluded
And pacts broken

Said *bahuroopi* in Shiva's guise:

'What is there here
For me to take,
For you to give?
The giver too is a beggar
The beggar too is a giver
So is astronomy
So is geography

Listen!
The endless howl
Of stars
Turned into beggars'
(2004)

O WATER-DIVINER!

O water-diviner! O water-diviner!
Show me where is the well-spring,
The wet eye of earth's core,
The compassion of clouds and rocks

Cocoa water, Limca water
Water imprisoned in bottles
Water enchanted by sly
Magicians of market
Sweat-water blood-water-
Drunken on all these waters
My tongue has turned a burning shard,
Fires are raging in the heart,
Famine is spreading in the guts

Auctioned rivers are crying out
O water-diviner! O water-diviner!
Dying oceans are crying out
O water-diviner! O water-diviner!
Wells full of corpses are crying out
O water-diviner! O water-diviner,
No end to the cry of ponds!
O water-diviner! O water-diviner
Ponds and wells, rivers and oceans
Are crying out in a chorus
"O water-diviner! O water-diviner
No more coolness in our water,
No strength to quench thirst
Tell us where is the well-spring?
The spring of sweet cooling water
That can quench all our thirst"

In midst of the day's endless labour
And, at night, catching fire

Like will-o-the wisp!
Beings of our secret dreams
Are constantly crying out
In every human tongue,
In every cry of every beast
And in silences
Of destroyed crops
And lifeless things:
O water-diviner! O water-diviner
Wake up your sleeping wand
Turn it towards the well-spring
O when will you tell all of us
Look! Here it is!
The panacea for all ills!
The life-giving gurgling water
Here it is! Right here!

O water-diviner! O water-diviner!

(2007)

A DREAM CITY POEM

My favourite hero turned 80 today,
The brave man
Who has been fighting every inch of his way
With unabated ferocity.
His eyes now have cataract;
His joints have begun to ache;
Every time he plants his foot down
It slips and shakes;
The tighter he holds his neck
The more it sways.

He is to begin his voyage today,
He wants go somewhere beyond all seas —
Something he has dreamed in so many lifetimes

Despite his protests
A young man called by my name
Is leading him by the hand
Towards the harbour

O, what a harbour-city!
An emerald city!
On the bank of the sapphire ocean
Where green is warm and cosy
Sunlight, pleasantly green;
Streets, full of shops
And shops full of precious objects
Full but not bursting,
As if history here is celebrating
Its coming of age.
Put another way:
This city is an utterance of splendour;
Its temples, bits of paradise, are its commas;
Even serpents have turned here into
Fascinating statues
Installed in a magnificent temple

Circled around by a dream city —
Snake City!

Walking through the city,
We have now reached the harbour
Teeming with people;
My hero's ship is about to set sail
He is looking at me for the last time,
Wistfully,
But courageously!

Look
He has started to climb up the steps
Alone,
Waving to me.
His departure time is set,
What will happen to me later?
Before I think such thoughts
The ship has begun to move.
The fear has begun to grip me:
What if something bad happens to him?
What if the ship sinks
Somewhere in the unpredictable ocean?
But I can see:
Unafraid, he is looking at me
As if to ask:
When all life has been a challenge,
Why should the end be easy?

In a dream...
A beautiful afternoon...
A city of wonders...
The dream ship
Is his voyage
Towards death,
Or another life?

Vanished, the borders
Between the sea and the city,
Between dream and wakefulness

THE AIR HOSTESS'S SMILE

The air-hostess's smile:
It is as if it is not;
A forbiddingly precious jewel:
Light
Like flowers descending from trees quietly
To settle on the earth or stone
Below;
Or like a trembling dew-drop on a leaf;
Or like cloud's shadow on sands;
Or like mist passing through valleys;
Or like a bunch of stars
Afloat on night's pond;
Or like a beggar's dream of a palace!

How beautiful!
How evanescent!

THE GIRLFRIEND WAITING

The girlfriend is waiting
Her forgetful boyfriend has reached somewhere else!

Where a total stranger
Who had introduced himself as an old friend
- Let us call him Mr Bore —
Blocks his way
With his unending conversation:
'That is what I think of general elections...
As to the new traffic rules, you see...'

The girlfriend is waiting
But Mr Bore goes on and on:
'You know,
Kalidasa met me the other day
Maybe because he couldn't get you
He was shocked to learn from me
You are not the same caste as him'

The girlfriend is waiting
Alone
In a traffic island,
Mr Bore!
'I have taken a bet...
You will surely get
The upper house this time.'

The boyfriend remembers
So far away
She is waiting in the other end of the city
Nothing can stop Mr Bore:

'Don't say No — my advice
But then if you really don't feel like it
You can recommend me
I have no objection at all
In fact.....'

The boyfriend remembers
It is time he rushed,
He has got no car
No taxis or autos in sight
Mr Bore continues:
'Sir, isn't this Manmohan era?
Taxis will soon vanish
Even you can buy a car,
Easy loans just a call away
Easy instalments..
Shall we call the bank?'

The girlfriend is still waiting
Her eyes, a pair of deer,
Lost in the fibre-glass forest
Or in surrounding supermarket dreams
Mr Bore is still at it:
'Sir, what happened the other day was...'
Suddenly the dream ended,
Bringing the curtain down on,
The crowd and noise and Mr Bore
He wakes up
To the creaking fan,
Lonely night
Has passed through summer heat
Towards dawn
More burning than night
Somewhere amidst a clump of *neem* trees

Shameless sparrows
Sing their litany
As if it is still spring!
A peacock appears
Outside his balcony
Spreading his dream blue feathers
Swaying with cooling breeze —

The last traces
Of the earth's unending magic...
He is now waiting
For the beloved to come

BEING DEPORTED AGAIN AND AGAIN

We are deported
Again and again,
From dream to wakefulness
And back
From somewhere to somewhere else
We realise that we have arrived,
Long after reaching there
And begin to identify slowly...
These are my eyes...
My hands...
Yes, it is the same me...
This is the chair...
This is the table...
And this, the new book of old alphabets

We are deported again and again
Like the nomadic earth
From winter to spring
And back...
From revolution to counter-revolution
And back

It was Shiva Prakash
Who lay chained to rocks like Prometheus,
It was he who plucked away the prattling fifth head
Of Brahma,
That became my begging bowl of coconut shell
But later turned
Into a bird flying from cloud to cloud
The burning words,
Spreading sparks.

It is all a colossal kathakali
With thunder drums

And rain songs
Telling the story
Of a hero
Always in exile

As the peacock of the earth
Keeps spinning,
Everything replacing everything else
Between scenes,
Between roles.
Where are the actors?
Look for them
He is somewhere here
We will find them,
I promise!
Look,
Here they are,
The hails-stones from summer rains!
Hold them gently,
Cautiously,
So that they do not slip
Before they melt

PUNCTUATION MARKS

You, commas,
Whenever did you give a pause to any word?
You, full stops,
Whenever did you complete any sense?
You, exclamatory marks,
Words prefixed to you never exhausted
Earth's wonders!
You question marks,
You, like your tribe people,
Are just marks;
Not the irrepressible questioning spirit

Just marks,
All of you!
Like TV news readers' smile
Or
A dead rose stuck in the shampooed hair
Of the made-up receptionist
Of a multi-national company office

And, you fools
Who think that these aids to writings
Are writings,
Erase yourselves
So that we, the survivors,
Of the worlds you blew up
Can start our search afresh

You orphaned children!
You orphaned symbols
Look at these:

Silences without commas,
Fullness without full stops,
Questions beyond question marks,
Wonders without exclamations,
Friendship without fake smiles,
Beings before writing
Contours of consciousness,
Before creation

WHO SAID THESE WORDS TO WHOM

Tell me:
Who uttered those words
Of a magnificent line,
Of an eternal poem
Which slipped from my mind?
Even before I could ask:
Who said these words to whom?

Who said it, tell me,
In that moment
Between sleep and wakefulness?

Show me
The ones who showed to us
On the bank of the tired city afternoon
The circling dance of belled feet
That danced and disappeared
On the burning sands of the seashore

Smell, in this rocky place
The fragrances of rare flowers
That blossomed elsewhere;
Only to be pulled down by the wind
And powdered by sunlight,
Carried away by wind or rain
Unfit to decorate beautiful hair of a woman
Or the feet of any god

Where was the law of causality
Between
Futile prayers of a city pillaged
And the fear
That makes my lips tremble?

Or between
Sins of saints
And virtues of criminals.

Is it all make-believe?
Do the five elements
Speak of doubt?

Listen to how the seeds —
A stubborn one like me sowed
In the barren fields of your heart,
Have grown into green crops
And, in green sunlight,
Are whispering something in your ears...

WHAT THE EARTH NEVER TOLD HIM

He is about to set out
From the same airport
Where he had arrived not too long ago
'Boarding' light has already started blinking,
Why do farewells take so long?

Such a long wait
At the emigration counters
When his turn came
The woman visa officer
Asks for the passport
To examine
If it is the same man
The same man...
The same face,
The same eyes and ears
(Who knows if it is the same heart?)
Yawning, she affixes the seal
As if to tell me:
'Proceed'

It is now proved
That the man who came
Is the same
As the one who left
But
The man who came
And the man who went
Are not the same
As the one in the passport
Who never came
And never left!

I WILL JUST BE BACK

'I will just be back in a moment,'
You said and entered the market
 I am still waiting,
 You have not returned.
 That is why I kept saying:
 'Do not get into the market'

 Still I trusted you
When you said you would be back
 Like Shakuntala for Dushyanta,
 Like the axe for Parashurama,
 Like the flute for Krishna!

 I trusted it would be a moment
 But the whole evening passed;
 Many evenings passed
 Meanwhile
My Soviet empire collapsed one day,
 Gods turned to begging one day
 A Shiva Yogi came one day,
 Strumming his *ektara*
Drawing children from all nations
 All dreams from all hearts,
 Drew them all one day
 Into an ancient magic cave
Whose entrance was closed for all future
 All this happened in a minute,
 So many days have passed

When I was still waiting for you
Because I trusted your promise,
 I let the market enter me
 In the hope of finding you

What was it?
A dream world or a magic city?
The doors there close and open
On countless exotic goods
Which melt at your touch,
In a different space and time
Lightning smiles.
On lips of boys and girls —
They too wear price tags.
I, who came looking for you —
Was I lost too?
Then I went looking for myself
In the market world,
Where a million mirrors
Mirroring each other,
Multiply me a million times
Where am I?

At last I reached the ancient land
Soaked in non-stop rain.
And entered a hut,
No rain can drown!
Where my great grandmother sat
Chewing her betel leaves non-stop
Along with areca nut
And went on weaving non-stop
On the shuttle
The yarn of fate
Saying:
'Look!
This is the knot you named market
Whoever enters there, never returns,
This is Bahma's decree

Didn't I tell you?
'Do not enter the market!'
You ignored my warning
And became caught in a maze
Where no-one will come for your rescue

How many times did I tell you:
'Do not enter the market'

THE HEAVENLY FRUIT

To Sheikh Shahabuddeen-i-Suhrawadi
His dying disciple made a request:
'Save me, master. Get me the heavenly fruit
Nothing else can stop my death'

The Sufi's heart melted in compassion
Lifting up his hands, Sheikh prayed,
Penetrating clouds, descended,
A burning fruit of immortality

Rejoicing this, the dying one
Held the fruit in both his hands
Only to find inside the fruit
Numberless tiny golden worms

Said the master: 'I knew
It became impure in this world
Perfect, all in divine worlds
Mortal, always, life on earth'

AN INSIGNIFICANT EPISODE OF THE WALLET LOST

(To Chris Meril)

The mega serial of nightmares
Was now in the last episode:
You had truly lost my purse

When did it begin,
This long chain of nightmares?
Was it when
Your U.S. laws had made you,
A citizen, into a soldier
So that you could destroy
The country you never hated,
For ideals you never loved
And transported you to East Europe!

Now, in 2000, in Iowa City
The nightmare came true:
You had lost your wallet
Shaken, you had begun to fumble
For your bank account number,
Your credit card numbers,
The police needed them all

I saw:
You were searching
Aside those mentioned above,
Your own soul
Among thousands of people killed

It was in a nightmare
That your wallet was first lost,
Just when U.S had found its wallet
In the dung heap of mangled bodies

It all came back to me the other day
When I had lost my wallet in Ujjain
As if my very life had vanished
Into Mahakala's colossal mouth

When Mahakala returned the wallet
To my tiny hands
I saw:
My India shining
And the whole world
Were trying to retrieve their wallets
From the dung heap of the capital
Of the 21st century

ROCKS OF MEGHALAYA

O rain's daughter
O wind's companion
O sun's sister
Tell me:
How could I bear the wounds of joy
You inflicted
On me,
Half-buried
Like a rock on the earth?
Here is the answer:
Look at the battered face
Of this sedimentary rock,
Laying on the lap of a tall mountain
Experiencing rapes and onslaughts.
Of sun, rain and wind
Unable to stay a rock,
Unable to turn into dust!

CALIBAN: A PROSE SONG

Don't mock my name, O Prospero
It sounds so horrid
When you call me in your savage tongue!
Look!
Before I complete this sentence,
I have turned into you

I:
The black version of your white language.
Look:
How disgustingly we have trained ourselves
Into wearing your snowland dress
Beneath our scorching sun
And cursing ourselves
Because our skin's colour
Is not like yours

O gods, I no more trust
If only you could change our bodies
As we change our dress,
His daughter, that white witch,
Would not have recoiled
From my warm touch
She would not have become hooked
To that white cockroach
I too would not languish like a stupid hermit,
I would not be waiting so long,
Exchanging my tongue for yours
Neither would I come to your shores
Riding the ship you condemned me to build
Wearing your abandoned rags,

Eating your left-overs,
Burdened with weapons,
You sold to me
At a forbidding price.

2

You came
To loot our minerals,
To name our favourite gods,
Blood-thirsty monsters!
To persuade us that your god,
A big lie with no eyes or ears
Is the lord who should rule us!

Only when I saw this,
I turned a rebel.
Thrust my hand into your daughter's gown.
Defeated by your guns
I was savagely beaten.
I took revenge by setting on fire
Your library of devil's books,
After which
You people spat at me,
And had me lashed

3

Look:
I am almost like you now
What you did to my people I too am doing to them
I am now my own enemy:
The Prospero in me
Is death to the Caliban in me

I cannot even wreak revenge,
Alas, you are dead.
Your cunning children,
Those bastards,
Have stolen our friendship;
Helping us turn
Our forests into lands,
Lands into cities,
Cities into markets,
Putting a price tag.
To our rivers, forests and mountains
With the ad song
Composed by our best poet,
Internationally acclaimed,
Well known and awarded,
Mostly in countries like yours:
Come and buy our emerald fields
Come and buy our sapphire rivers
Come and buy our exotic gods
Buy our yoga
Buy our tantra
Our healing herbs are yours
Buy our past;
Buy our future!

From within me,
Who is already Prospero.
Is jumping out I,
Caliban rejecting Prospero.
Reflecting:
Whom should I fight?
Whom should I burn into ashes?
Why should I fight for my people,

My enemies
Who have turned their own enemies?
Why should I save them?
Unable to find answers,
Caliban has set himself on fire
He is already half-burnt,
He will soon be ashes
A gentle breeze
Will blow him far away
From the markets of the world

GHAZALS

1-2

O winter! Why do you refuse to go?
The *koel* (cuckoo) should have sung ages ago

My longing is so long that I long for longing
Even when fulfilled, it cannot go

Odysseus too is tired of adventures
His palace and queen bring him woe

Centuries of struggles have brought no joy
You, O Kalki, are a cheat, I know

"Age of liberty!" they shout. "Plenty has arrived!"
Only a skeleton is knocking my door

"To hell with you," said God to creation,
Orphaned demons now run the show

I have thrown my pen away. But lo!
Starved similes cry out: Shivaprakash, OOO...

3

Your next life won't be at all in the future
But was in the past golden age, I am sure

Who said time moves on and on? Though devoured
By future, I am caught by past, your lure

Progress at all costs is today's *mantra*,
I have fallen into an ancient well, sweet and pure

Be reborn as a lost dazzling jasmine grove
So I, like breeze, can wrap around and play with you

Welcome back, O light jewelled Atlantis, before
Flood takes you away from my famished view

Future is banished from my broken *durbar*
Where you, my phoenix, dance at flame's cue!

"Cease my gazelle-eyed ghazal," said Shiva Prakash.
"In my broken heart what will you, my desire, do?"

4

It's not the pink you wore that drove me mad,
But the pink of sunset that made me sad

You came before me like the pink sun
That sets on me, an empire gone bad

How do you know pink is my desire
And wore it before being so told?

In that irresistible dimple, your smile's friend
I saw all secrets fully betrayed

A furtive glance or a treacherous glance
Is more eloquent than what's said

Between the pink of sunrise and of sunset
I am lost. Won't you hold my hand?

In a pink ocean I am drowning like day,
Which, to start with, was pink-made

Before night engulfs me with inconstant stars,
Envelop me O pink, before I fade

Blue and black is my sky's eternal nature
Still a pink moment will make me glad
By a pink moment was my eternity made,
Scattered ashes O Shiva are by pink waylaid

5

Four *yugas* have come and gone,
What remains?
Goodbye! Four seasons!
What remains?

With four flowers I have decked
Your silken hair,
So that their four-fold scent
Still remains

In four sounds your name
Is sweetly contained,
When I tell it to four directions,
The whisper remains

~~Here, my four fatal poems,~~
Your four precious ornaments!
Even if you throw them,
The longing remains

I have sung of freedom
In our chains,
Which after Shiva passes,
Still remains

6

Why do your sweet lips taste bitter. Why?
Why does cold wind in your hot breath sigh?

What arrested the mad heart's beating?

Like mad dogs shot, desires lie.

The Sheikh has got down heavenly fruit
Which, for me is rotten — nothing of the sky

The princess found her beloved's body
Wounded in a lotus-lake, refusing to die

The revolutionaries founded the new order
Over which, Look! Eagles fly!

The desire to win makes all goals die,
But, itself, like Shiva, refuses to die

7

After union, how sad the flowers lay scattered,
From your greying hair. Yes, aging mattered

Champak so inviting at the break of dawn
Was by midday by hailstorm shattered

The stupid gardener never knew that plants
Would wilt and wither unless watered

Odysseus set out as a here and conqueror,
Only to come back, famished and tattered

O, who knew that youth was just a mask,
Hiding a face, which by age was battered?

Sweetly, young ones, chattered and chattered
Don't frown, Shiva Prakash, youth mattered!

8

O don't ask me how long were nights of separation
For the great *pralaya* each one was a preparation

For all sins committed by all the living and non-living,
I was doing penance and making reparation

Hopes, like stars, were drowned in darkness,
Still, why was this palpitating trepidation?

"Your grammar is wrong," they say. "And idiom, stilted"
In the world gone awry, why think of perfection's imitation?

In her lips I saw the pink of everlasting sunrise
Who knew it was eternal death's invitation?

"Beware of her looks, her half-open eyes!"
No one obeys Buddha's wise fulmination

Shiva Prakash, love's corpse, yells in lamentation:
"Shut down your market, O creation"

9

How are pollens from flower to flower stolen?
Across flowers bees carry the pollen

I was convinced my desire's in treasure-trove.
When I unlocked it, I found it stolen

What is he still looking in vain for my Eve?
Though twice his Paradise has fallen

After I said goodbye to springs and summers,
A lovely autumn tells my winter:

"Listen!

From outside my peaks are quiet,
But inside them is seething lava, all molten"

In your wistful eyes I saw my summers dying,
Your hidden flame has torched my death frozen

An age I need to praise each of your aging hair,
When in great void, I am about to drown

O city of green joys of my youthful days!
When stars mock my age, you have come in

You have come in though I never expected
My longing land is earthquake-prone

Let us rest awhile in time's golden summer,
Making it eternity's reign

When I am trying to grasp red charcoal of now,
You talk of future yet unknown, unborn

My *ghazal* was burnt in final fatal passion,
Let Shiva Prakash melt into you, my ocean

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION

The poetry of the earth is not yet dead,
Taking birth
In unexpected nooks and corners
Amidst parallel rhythms.
Of the bulges and hallows of hills and mountains
Mist-covered valleys
Clear up soon.
Opening their secret treasures
Of emerald valleys;
In the shapes of the cloud,
Kind like cotton,
Leaning its chest on the heartless rocks,
Breast-feeding them with coolness;
In the blue sports of seawaves,
Whose withdrawing sights
Can calm broken hearts;
In the humble lamp
Still burning quietly
In the tiny house on the mountain top;
In the peaceful army,
Of fireflies in dark valleys,
Shining like earth's stars;
Far away from the cruel prose
You are writing with lethal arms;
From the present you are inscribing
With the ruthless logic,
Of mazes of markets
At the foot of this hill,
In these rows of butterflies flowers,
Laughing at themselves
For being flowers
Looking like butterflies

No, poetry of the earth is not yet dead!

Like Mist Through Valleys is the translation of Sahitya Akademi award-winning collection of Kannada poems *Mabbina Haage Kaniveyassi* by HS Shiva Prakash.

The poems here explore several related themes and experiment with several genres of poetry. Sad, angry, satirical and metaphysical, they take the reader into various dimensions of contemporary experience and at the same time they celebrate the human power of survival, resistance and resilience.

The forms pressed into the service include songs, sonnets, prose poems, dramatic narrative and satire.

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HS Shiva Prakash is the most influential Kannada poet and playwright of the post-1970 generation. Though shaped by modernist influences, he soon moved away from them and created a style all his own. Its roots deep in millennium-long Kannada traditions, his poetry has responded to and absorbed into itself varied voices of contemporary Indian and world poetry. He has extended and enriched the style and substance of Kannada poetry.

The present volume is the watershed between his early poetry of indignation and his later poetry of celebration and fortitude. HS Shiva Prakash is the author of 11 books of poems, 13 plays, 4 prose works and editor of several anthologies of creative and critical writings.

He is now Professor, School of Arts & Aesthetics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

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