

Time to Die Alone
and
Other Poems

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Dr. Balbir Singh



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Other Poems**

Dr. Balbir Singh

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Time to Die Alone and Other Poems

By Dr. Balbir Singh

Dr. Balbir Singh

Dr. Balbir Singh (b. 1956) 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 for his work on Philip Roth. His poems and research papers have been published in various journals and newspapers. In 2002 he was selected Associate of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. At present, he is Head of P.G. Department of English, Government P.G. College, Karnal (Haryana).

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For

ROHTASH SINGH KHARB

*"Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,
As 'twere all life's epitome."*

— W.B.Yeats

*O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames;
Before this strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, its divided aims....*

— Matthew Arnold, “The Scholar Gypsy”

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Foreword

I felt a pleasant surprise when I received the manuscript of his poems from Balbir Singh for my opinion and suggestions. No doubt, he used to write poems even when we were science students in NRS Govt. College, Rohtak in early seventies. Though they were never published except occasionally in the college magazine, he was well known as an imaginative boy wrongly caught up in the web of benzene molecules and dissection of helpless frogs. After that we were classmates in MA English in Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra in late seventies and this was the time we spent together enjoying literature and literary life. How often we repeated Wordsworth's lines

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,

But to be young was very heaven!

How true the lines seem now when I reminisce about that golden phase of our life! I was enthralled to read these fine, mostly lyrical poems written in simple language and lucid style. But the simplicity is deceptive inasmuch as the poet expresses the deepest and gravest emotions in a light style, perhaps, for fear of being branded as a moral prig. Yet his poems portray the feelings of every person irrespective of age, gender, cast, creed, religion or any other criterion. Some of them are sparkling with day to day insignificant moments of living, and others are loaded with gloom and suffering that is part and parcel of life. But almost invariably they strive to rise to

metaphysical speculation. And this is his artistic triumph. The most significant element of his poetry is that his poetic sensibility originates from rural Indian milieu and blossoms into the postmodern labyrinth of cosmopolitan life at the outset of the twenty first century. He often fuses these dual, sometimes diametrically opposed, aspects of life with remarkable ease without any sign of discordance. In my opinion, this is no mean achievement. I hope that these poems will serve their purpose, namely to help the reader to understand his predicament, to experience the happiness and joy all around him, even in the shabbiest circumstances, and , above all, to bear stoically the burden of living which is the common lot of us all.

Rohtash Singh Kharb
H.C.S.
Joint Director,
Haryana Institute of Public Administration,
Gurgaon

Preface

It seems that poetry has lost its appeal for the contemporary reader. Auden's famous line "Poetry makes nothing happen" seems to echo this general apathy towards verse form of literature. In this postmodern era of electronic and other kinds of media, and a revolutionized and progressive sensibility, it is generally believed that the genre has lost its relevance except perhaps the prescribed syllabuses of educational institutions and academic awards. Since the days of Plato and Aristotle, a number of arguments and counter-arguments had been put forward in this regard. But in the last analysis poetry undoubtedly emerges as the most effective medium of expression of truth, which is the ultimate goal of all forms of art. A poem is the outcome of an epiphany enjoyed by the poet while expressing pain or pleasure and it evokes the same feelings in the reader who reads it sincerely and properly. A poem needs no additional embellishments notwithstanding the artistic requirements peculiar to its nature. Above all, poetry originates from and is received by the heart directly. Keats emphasized this quality of spontaneity of poetry in his observation, "If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all". More over, few will disagree that it is the most nutritious and satisfactory diet to satisfy human hunger for aesthetic pleasure and ethical conviction. In fact, no art deals with emotions so directly and effectively as poetry does and no art has such a vast range of

beneficiaries – from the most refined sensibility to the crudest one.

According to T.S.Eliot, “The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates...”. I may only add that the severer the suffering or higher the ecstasy of the artist the nearer to perfection will be his art. The poems in the present anthology do not fall in some specific movements, metaphysical schools of thought, or stylistic categories. They simply express the fears, hopes and yearnings of an ordinary person. I merely hope that all the readers feel joy and pleasure through a process of understanding of and sympathy with life and those who live it.

Dr. Balbir Singh

Time to Die Alone

Time has come
to die alone.
Now there is no need
of calling those
who claim to be your own.
Only money creates need.
Relations are woven by greed.

The red slogans rightly declared
that economy was all that matters;
was the backbone
of living and all relations.
The capitalists were not wrong,
power of capital
when they proclaimed.

Only the son of man
has proved wrong,
who craved for brotherhood
of the race.

But hate is no longer
the privilege of the poor.
The haves equally dread
each other's company,
and prefer to live alone,
scattered in loneliness,
driven by horn of plenty,
looking away from each other.
Need might have brought them
somewhat closer.

We should be prepared
for the new phase
of civilization of the individual.
The singleness of society
will be the latest concept.

The history of medieval times
will be read with interest,
curiosity and surprise,
about such simple truths
as we imagine.
Hunting by stones,
and cannibalism.
Society of humans is not formed
in a day.

We cannot go backwards.
Human path leads forward,
only to progress.
Human mind has always
found solutions.
Archimedes and Newtons never die.

Whatever and whenever
the crisis of civilization
whether in congregation
or in the jungle
of plants, big or small.
Some things are intertwined,
knotted inextricably.
It is time to untie, to solve.

They Said Something

A man is crying, they said.
A man is dying, they said.

It is pitiful, pitiful.
There must be justice, justice.
Evil cannot reign supreme,
they said, and all applauded.
These are bad times, they said,
everyone nodded,
bad times, bad times.

Humanity is dead,
the evil phase has arrived.
But what can be done,
they wondered.
What can we do?
And their heads fell.
Nothing can be done!

And silence fell upon the scene,
save the gurgling hookah.
Silent twinkling of the stars,
night fell on the rustic scene,
to add to the pal of
darkness and gloom.

All the voices were sinking,
sleep was laying
its drowsy hand on all.
Only the poet was awoke restless,
his eyes wandering and wandering,
all alone in the lonely night.

Why is this eerie silence
where the humans live?

It is time to rise alone,
It is time to rise alone.

Awkward Times

A young boy staggers and falls down,
awkwardly and ungracefully,
though there is no accident or scuffle,
in the early fresh air.

A dirty middle-aged vendor
is threatening a youth,
brandishing a knife!

Though the day has hardly begun.

A cow is lying dead flat
in a pool of blood
on the stinking road.

A lunatic girl winking at the youths,
smiling invitingly,
sex gone to head.

How to respond?

To be excited, attracted or disgusted?

What is seen can't but be felt,
that all is not well in the air.

Something drastically has changed.

We also witnessed life,
violence, struggle, cheating and fraud,
youth turning unruly
and silently rebellious.

Sometimes even genocide for land.

But everything had a holy design,
even though not approved by all.

A human pattern
still flowing
like the sparkling water of the Ganges.
But now it has lost the human grace,
has turned ugly;
its ugliness seems uglier.

The Great Earth

Let me escape into the vast void
with a rare centrifugal force
from this mind-whirling cycle
which keeps me tethered
to this ugly center.

Anywhere, from this beaten track
going round and round endlessly
like the oil man's ox
without as much a glance over
the beauty spread around me,
with half my eyes muffled
to deny me the view,
enclosed in the eternal boundaries
of fate, this world and this life.

Life is something more than this drudgery,
like the wayward clouds
drifted by the wanton wind,
now here, now there.

The sparkling waters of the river,
gushing down from
the high and lofty greens
through the mossed boulders
to the plains,
to the newer and fresher regions.

I would fain shift my posture
like the naughty twigs and leaves
always swaying to and fro
showing that they are alive.

But look at them, my heart said,
the sun, the moon, the earth,
and the stars, who show their bright faces,
in the morning, in the night,
traverse the trodden path,
the fixed trajectory
and sink down at the same point.

*The moon, though proud of her beauty,
never deviates from her fixed route.
The stars are as they were, long ago,
and are still happy and gay.
Let us be like the earth,
bearing burden, her own and the others'.
but never grumbling.*

Fortitude is all.

The Clouds

The clouds appeared suddenly.
I found the blue sky covered with them
in the morning,
like motley flowers in a basket.
I searched for some light, blue patches,
but there was none.
There was no sun, no air,
no storm or thunder.
Only peace, calm, stillness,
as if there was no pain in the past.

They came so late,
after long, painful days of summer.
Such a long awaiting!
I wish you to stay forever, clouds,
like happiness.
Without rain, drizzling and flood
that accompany you,
like the thorns in a bunch
of soft and fragrant flowers.
I was expecting rather too much.

The clouds smiled,
"That would not be fair.
Moreover, after some time
you would wish us away,
longing for sunlight.
We are pleasant because
we arrived after such scorching heat,
the long, burning summer.
Enjoy while we are here.
Then prepare for the summer."

The Dying Voice

All things are brief;
the moment, the world, the life.
Fleeting is the moon,
season shortlived.
Vigor gives way,
the years slip by hastily.
Youth bids adieu in your face.

Happiness departs like a fast train
leaving you behind
on a deserted platform,
staring into void,
hopeless, alone, forlorn,
facing the cold dark night,
empty roads, desolate lanes.
Vast cruel city.

Here, there are no friends.
No relatives.
No one.
Is it the legendary death, they talk,
or the modern predicament, they talk?

Is it the human drama
they enacted in the Globe,
in the sandy desert of Arabia,
the bands of travellers on camel back,
in the strange seas of the New Land,
the Columbuses, dying to see the earth,
the Keatses in search of permanent joy?
The society.
The people.

Now the pen is falling down,
spirit is sinking to a new low,
all the dreams have crashed,
the voices have sunk,
things seem to be untrue.

No one is nearby.
Everyone seems to have left.
Soul is left alone
as it has always been.

Would that it were
in some lonely snowy hills
with fair love
in the lap of nature
with the earthly beauty in my lap!

He died of loneliness.
Friends, he called you again and again,
and no one responded.
Music he loved but lacked the lyre.
Pleasures he relished,
but didn't have the means.
Humans he craved for,
but no one obliged.
Society he liked,
but could not conform.

Pity, the man didn't die in his own house.
Pity, the man yearned for petty comforts.
Sad, he pined for human contact.
Alas! the human died without a human voice.

But it will not survive.
Things will crumble down

like a house of cards.
The whole pattern will be topsy-turvy.

You can't leave a man alone.
Humanity is no beggar.
Friends I call thee.
Society, I warn thee.
Things will not happen without him.
Civilization will cease without him.

Remember Time

Remember Father Time,
as we in the fast flow of life
too often forget.
And feel the shock later,
if fortunately survive.

I met that beauty the other day,
and was pained to see her person.
All wrinkles and gloom was she,
altogether different
from what she used to be,
glamour, beauty, grace and vanity,
sought after by the crowd.

And that bent old man,
such a haughty bully once,
would frighten the weak and meek,
now staggering his skeletal physique,
knowing not he lives or has lived.

Nothing is future.
Always keep in mind
the show would be over
and curtain would fall.
In place of the glittering crowd
you would have to face
the darkness and chill of the night.

Nothing avails but the grave,
without beauty, dignity, power,
waste fodder of flames or worms.

The Beckoning Past

I went on wandering breathlessly
through the winding alleys of the past,
searching for rest and romance,
for joy, peace and life,
little knowing that
most of it would turn out
to be old, rotten, decayed
and, moreover, dead.

Dead things cannot be revived,
howsoever beautiful they may be,
like the corpse of a fair damsel
with stiff limbs, fixed gaze, face lifeless.
But how can you shed it?
Man drags his past as a snail
its shell, inseparable , integral,
a living, vital part of his soul.

I can't go to the dark recesses
to forget the present.
Illusions cannot allure you for long.
They vanish instantly
and cannot be sustained
either in Past or in Future.
But new life will soon sprout
from the decayed heap of the past.

Be Thou Happy

You can look at an eyeful
of the vast blue sea and sky,
relish rare delicacies,
savor the richest wine,
or gloat over
the ripe body of your paramour,
love and caress your children,
and still the grumbling,
with muffled complain
you plead for His mercy!

You are among the lucky ones,
the chosen.
Is there still any place for hate,
any room for envy,
any time to kill others,
or to think about it?

There is so much to love.
Beauty and serenity,
the gardens, lakes, hills,
the moon, the stars, the world.

The greatest and the mightiest have left,
the richest couldn't prolong their stay.
You are fortunate to be living.
So live, and be grateful.

The Seventh Stage

There was hardly anything in living.
False teeth, spectacled eyes,
with hearing devices in ears,
he walks on crutches,
food vapid, walking joyless.
Shrivelled senses,
by which he lived four score years.
He had reached his seventh stage.
What should he live for?
Only the core of thinking
and the throbbing heart of feelings.

The happy days of pleasures
turned now to anguished memories
that cannot be obliterated.
Was it worthwhile at all
to have emptied the cups
of orgies in youth?
The lurking fear to face the end,
the painful exit.
O God! take us in your lap
while we are sleeping
and dreaming about you.

Age and Power

Now that the tide of passion
has ebbed away,
fire in the blood has pacified,
passions have subsided,
the fiery giant of desires has slept,
it is proper time to live.

And to reflect upon
what is to be done
and not to be done.

Blinded by youth,
eyes see through coloured glasses.
If only the energy is regulated
through sense and wisdom
gained by living in years!
If some of the greatest
had been old enough,
had a few wrinkles of experience,
history would not have been the same.

That warrior from Greece
burning with mad ambition,
brandishing his mighty sword,
his years could not realize
the truth of war
and beheaded so many.
He would have been wiser
if he has learnt his fencing
a bit later.

Power should be wielded
by those who least hanker after it,
not dazzled by its glitter, otherwise
it brings about a lot of suffering
to self and others.

The Larger Canvas

The June morning was as cruel
as the last evening.
No stir of the branches,
not a trace of the wind,
no relief of a fresh gust of wind
cooling the moist sweaty face,
hot naked body.

O, for the frozen plains of Siberia,
the cool breezy Alps
or the deserted Alaska!
The Indian summer!
The night seemed to have ceased
as if nothing happened
between the evening and the morn.

No dreams of hills,
nor snakes' nightmares.
The world only slept
like the virgin's chaste night.
The sly gray clouds in the far north,
perhaps in a grim conspiracy.
Nothing happened.
Like the phase between birth and death.

It might be,
nothing happens after death
till the next birth, if at all it is granted.
There may be visions broader than ours.
The eyes seeing more clearly.
The fingers which work
on a larger canvas than ours.

Sleep and Peace

To take part or to rest aloof.
They were lost in merry-making
and I was mutely lost in myself.
The boisterous fun, heart throbbing orgies.
The desire to impress,
lewd gestures to attract,
mad lust to touch.
Why don't they just eat and sleep?

I was contented to do that
and awake the next day
to do the same.
Was it sufficient life?

To live is to feel the joy.
What is better than song and dance?
I was not one of the living,
I was among the dead,
like the solemn figure,
dead, in the graveyard,
the bronze statue in the corner.
Living is not just sleep and peace.

Origin of Evil

The bony young maiden
with perspiration on her
red shining cheeks and forehead,
doing all the domestic chores
actively, vigorously,
enjoys neither physical comforts
nor the emotional security of the parents.

Angry abuses of the mother,
cursing for everything
done or undone.

And last evening
the drunk father
caught her by her fleshy breast,
unripe and still swelling,
either out of a pervert lust
or hate or anger.

Everyday she faces
cursing, crying, scuffle and violence.

Life is not lived here.
It is a breeding culture
for criminals, prostitutes,
psychopaths and sociopaths
who deviate from the normal hearth
and its sacred boundaries.

Though poverty provides the best nursery,
it is but the step mother.

Glut of plenty and pleasures
is a good sitter for the eggs of evil.
The nice and the fair
fall into the gutter of vice
and scatter what they have received.

And thus it perpetrates itself,
like the cancerous virus.
Nobody is born infected,
spawned after the entry
into the diseased world.

Change

Just a couple of years
and the little skinny brat
with cropped hair,
always crying nuisance around,
has grown into a bony buxom,
red plump face burning with youthful hue.
You never know what you can become.
That back-bencher crony of yore
now heads the revenue department
and sways the common humans.

Who knew the towering glory
of Egypt, Greece and Rome
would be the ruins of the past,
one day, a few centuries thence.
And the terrible, desolate wilds
will be the Mecca of modern civilization.
The deserts of yesteryears
will be waving luxuriant greens.
Time and fate join hands
and change things beyond recognition.

Entering the New Century

Humans have evolved and matured.
To be honest is old fashioned.
Pragmatism is the latest fad.

Even the overfed snatch bread from the poor,
masked in humility the cunning peep,
the hypocrite passes himself off as socialite,
evil smiles unashamedly and is applauded.

Conscience is huddled in the corner,
shamefaced and uneasy for survival,
ugliness boasts of its glittering beauty,
dirt is awarded by the authority.

People awaiting in the queue
like dumb cattle in abattoir,
dignity to be butchered.
Barren houses and deserted streets,
eyes glued on artificial, unreal images,
empty community centers, the bonds broken,
rotten fruits and stinking pleasures.

Where to turn, O my heart!
Have we taken the right course?

Life of a Thousand Years

Life of a thousand years
be given to humans.

Two hundred to laugh
and play in mother's lap.

Otherwise one craves for her
even on the verge of grave,
lamenting it was not enough.

Three hundred to run after the fair sex
to satiate fully the urge
so that the gray-haired
doesn't make unpardonable mistakes,
causing ripples in the calm
pond of the social order,
and hang his head in shame.

Two hundred to squander youth
for life sometimes fails you
and leaves you in the lurch.
The senses, source of all pleasures;
with the system failed,
what can one do
with the collapsed organs?

Three hundred to gather gold,
for without it
the previous remains incomplete.
And the remaining to the pursuit
of the mirage of fame.
It may take infinity to be surfeited,
though there must be a stop somewhere.

Some years may be granted
for repenting and prayer,
to forgive — if one asks for it,
so that the sting of the end
may be less painful.
Even then if it is not plenty,
one should pray for a next birth.

The Puppet Show

The flushed faces, the roaring music,
rich wine with sumptuous delicacies,
friends to talk, beauties to watch,
the supple dancing bodies,
soft faces with hard passions,
hungry eyes, covetous senses,
sly invitation, stealthy signs of acceptance.
Youthful life embracing tightly
like a new sensuous bride.

But nobody seems to feel
the presence of the dark shadow,
the hooded figure in black,
eyeing everything with suspicion,
ready to pounce upon anyone,
anytime, the vagary of fate.
No one knows when the show may end,
sees the invisible thin ropes,
the manipulators of the puppets.

A Pair of Shoes on the Highway

The busy highway crossing
was deserted in the early morning,
except the curious old man.
I followed his gaze
at the pair of lonely shoes
and a cloth bag, scattered on the road,
an old bicycle lying as if dead,
like its master, so we guessed.
Fruits and grocery,
symbols of the warm hearth.
Human harnessed in domestic bond.

There was no indication
of any violent accident.
But something gruesome and
frightening had happened there.
Something inimical to society,
which impaired humanity.
I stared solemnly
And waited for the guardians of peace.
Who knew who was dead.
Even if not a relative of mine,
but certainly related to mankind.

The Last Act

At last the grand occasion arrived.
The high aspirations of youth,
actions and intentions,
name, fame and glory,
the battles fought,
the heroes, the followers.
So much thought, planning, hopes
for the great departure.

Parents, children, colleagues, friends,
neighbors and foes
would have gazed at the sad face
with worried silence.
Consoling, tearful eyes
and the innocent faces of childhood
would have waved goodbye gently
with promise to meet in the next act.

But nothing of the sort happened.
It was so different.
Dull, monotonous, and pathetic.
He was lying alone on the cot,
gazing vacantly at the ceiling.

Children busy with their routine play,
she with her daily chores,
father already in the grave.
Mother in the village, arriving soon.
Brothers, after inquiring of the progress
and seeing no hope of survival
had gone back to their daily routines,
waiting for the death,
so that the last rites

may be performed and life resumed,
and the legend might end.

Friends were not to be seen.
They were perhaps preparing
to pay the visit,
finishing hurriedly their tasks,
applying for casual leave,
or to implant paddy in the last acre.

The wretched poor neighbour
was harping on the feats
of the local doctor,
how he had saved his dying relative.

Common herbs and medicines
lying on the table,
an acquaintance knocking at the door
to inquire about the new milkman.
Call from the office
about a missing file.

He has not imagined it
to be so lack-luster, routine happening,
for the last breath to depart in a sigh.
But perhaps all departures are alike,
without grace, ceremony
and hope of a future meeting.

On a Higher Level

The skinny ugly bitch
carried the almost newly born piggy,
disfigured blood stained dead body,
pain writ large on the small innocent face
prior to dying.

Ignorant, weak, defenceless.
Didn't the cruel hunter
feel any pity on him?
Or was it her compulsion of hunger?

If pity was unknown in animals
why was I feeling it?
I was a human.
The cat nearby looked on silently
not feeling any pity.

Though I was one of them,
sometimes acted like them,
even worse.
(When I hoarded for generations to come.)
But I was different,
certainly on a higher level.

The Wild Charge

And the charge began wildly
as if the dogs of war
let loose upon the enemy flock;
bloody, ferocious, and trembling to kill,
all—weak, tough, male and female.

Amid the sinewy bulging strength
the awkward figure also charged,
little black dog with only hind legs.
(Forelegs lost perhaps in a similar encounter.)
Followed the leader with strange growling so
unbecoming of a hopping caricature.

Was it for fun, fear or defense,
or some unknown beastly instinct,
to attack the rivals in groups?
There was no apparent enmity between them.

The great wars were also fought like this.
Humans siding with humans
to form gangs against others.
From Kurukshetra to Troy,
from Germany to Pearl Harbour.
But what had been the outcome?
Did they resolve all their disputes,
and survived happier, more peaceful?

There is a beast lurking
in every human heart
which links him to our ancestors
like the vestigial tail.

The Exit

It comes suddenly,
without grace, formality, in the most
unromantic situations, in a gutter,
mind totally blacked out in alcohol.

On a shabby, stinking bed
in a charitable hospital,
with only a peon nearby,
looking indifferently:

Anxious to take his supper,
while the great soul,
with reluctance and longings,
waves the final goodbye.

Or with a fatal blow
in dubious streets,
with every soul
afraid to touch humanity.

Only a few lucky ones
are granted the virginal embrace.
Who knows, where the soul cries first,
and where the dead bones scattered.

Weeds of Evil

Everybody cannot encounter evil
and digest it,
like the vast sea which
swallows and engulfs
all ugly, poisonous things.

It remains undigested.
The little poisonous crumbs
which contaminate
all things around them.

It perpetuates like life,
from tiny seeds to vast trees,
again sprouting and sprawling
small innumerable seeds
to germinate again.

If only all the mankind will
and weed it out
again and again,
like the persevering farmer.

It can be rooted out,
and the world be cleaned up
and purified.
Breaking the vicious chain
of evil done for evil received
since the beginning.

Otherwise it would last
till the end,
as seeds of weeds
eaten along with the grain.

The New Species

The war has been going on forever
among all of them,
from bone spears to atomic missiles.
Though peace is talked about,
whispered hesitantly, slyly,
behind closed door.

Of all the animals
he uses force most cunningly.
Always in the garb
of velvety softness.

Survival is ensured for those
who fight for it.
Life is not a picnic
in a neatly maintained park.

In the unknown ferocious jungle
it is to explore your path
crawling stealthily,
to avoid the crafty fox,
to threat away the vicious cobra
and to grapple with the bear.

Then expect the daylight,
once out of the moist darkness.
There is no way to evade the fight
and to survive.

One needs to be born
with a little thicker hide
and a pair of horns,
till after a million years
a new species is evolved
out of us.

The Terrible Rest

After the hectic phase of labour
I was thinking of rest.
Duties performed, works done,
I was longing for repose.

But I was mistaken,
as in many other things of life.
There was no such thing as rest.
Rest was withdrawal from things,
happenings, hustle bustle, joys and pains.
From life.
Now I was frightened of rest.

The grand repose was imminent.
The permanent rest.
The cessation,
The dead rest
Motionless
Lightless
Lifeless

Unnamed painless horror.
The vast eternal vacuum,
like the outer darkness of infinite space.
To act is better instead.

The Moon in the Morning

The moon laughed at my face
over the mango grove
as if mocking at the Sun,
who had not entered the stage so far
and dressing on the back stage.
He alone was the hero
in the cool onset of dawn
outshining the mighty.

So the small can also rise
to glory, fame and heights,
dazzling the great and mammoth
by its sheer beauty and grace.
Can do better than the other
or at least equal.
Achievements are not the privilege
of the great.

Inseparable Past

Outside it was horrid weather.
The clouds were embracing
each other, breathlessly,
begetting thunder menacingly,
trembling the faint and virtuous
hearts of humanity.

One of those terrible moments
when past unhappiness
creeps over the present life.
The lived life mingles with the unlived
to confound what is being lived.

That never leaves you
which you have left behind.
It apparently becomes a part of you
like the tartar on the tooth,
seemingly supporting it
but ravaging it in the end.

The Peacock's Song

Suddenly the sky was overcast
with dark clouds.
(Last night it was clear,
with twinkling stars,
and young moon girdled with pale halo.)
Though it was not grim,
strangely beautiful darkness.

It was neither hot nor cold,
how it is in mid-March!
When mango trees are in blossom,
dark green interspersed with yellowish,
faint fragrance floating
to me, through the windows,
echoes of peacocks' songs,
myaoo-myao, myaoo- myao
in the mango grove.

I imagined the peacock dancing,
full dark blues
spread like a wide fan
revolving on rugged claws,
in protected solitude,
(We used to hide behind the henna plants.)
surrounded by peahens.
We knew them by their stumpy tails
and gray colorless feathers.
While chasing them one afternoon
even saw their eggs, large and pale
(The largest eggs we ever saw).

But it was long ago.
I mean, the things like
the clouds and the peacocks.
I rarely see them now.
Too lost to enjoy their songs.

Years seem to have passed
since I took
an enchanted glance at the sky.
Sometimes days elapsed
and I did not hear the peacocks
nor saw mango trees change their array
in autumn and spring.

Passing by things beautiful
I was heading gasping
leaving behind the whole show
towards that old forbidden tree,
the last haven of tired souls,
to bid final adieu to the living
and embrace the dead,
who left us wailing,
now lying silently and peacefully
with their eyes closed
to the warmth and fever
of mortal passion.

The Beautiful Garden

There were all kinds,
the erect poplar
with its soft, glossy leaves,
pears with small button like fruits,
still raw and pure, like the unripe
and still ungrown breasts of a teenager.

The proud mango trees
full of budding wealth.
Small green fodder plants,
haven for still smaller birds.

Ragged old unnamed tree
with fresh and tender bunches
of leaves or flowers or both,
sprouting from its old rough stem
like the young offspring, in old age,
soft beside the worn rugged father.

And the garden nourishes all.
Like the society of humans
which harbours all,
big and small.

I Am Not Alone

I felt I was all alone,
an alien in this unknown world,
not belonging to any one,
nothing belonging to me.
I loitered in the garden
with my soul like the drooping leaves
of touch-me-not after the sun sank.
A gust of air brushed past my face.

And whispered in my ears,
"Everything is made for you;
the violets in the furrowed fields,
mature buds swinging on the soft green,
branches waving like slender arms,
half bright moon surrounded
by the stars dimmed by its halo.
All are for you.

You are the owner, the master.
Just look around and see,
touch, feel, enjoy and be happy.
Moreover, I am always with you,
while sleeping, sitting, strolling.
I never leave you alone.
You are for your brethren.
I am for you, forever".

The Traveller

The day was so fine.
The clouds floating aimlessly
uplifted by the lover air,
cool and soothing,
like life, which had
suddenly been freed of its pains.

The man on the bike
riding joyously,
unaware of the future moments
was hit suddenly
by the speeding car.
And all hell let loose.

He was on the right side,
obeying all the traffic rules,
careful of the lights of all colours,
convinced that he was right
and so cannot
and should not be wronged.

But the misfortune hits you
suddenly and unexpectedly,
howsoever right you are.
You may obey all the rules.
But you may not know
all of His rules.

Safety and Security

Life is keeping safe, cautious
like a leopard.
Relax, and take it for granted
and you are gone,
like the innocent worm
licked into the red mouth
by the darting tongue.

The chirping little sparrow
dancing the new youth of life
oblivious to the sly cat,
couched, watching ominously.
The sudden cruel pounce,
a little muffled cry
of pure physical pain
and the episode is over,
except some remnants of broken feathers,
like the pieces of shattered dreams.

Even the bravest and strongest
is hit by a hidden bullet.
Beauty is destroyed by cruelty,
divine wisdom by penury
and mighty sinews humiliated
by the ugly vanity of the rich.

There is nothing like rest and peace
to life which breathes.
Incessantly watch out for the hidden evil,
which does not spare
even the innocence of a child,
dignity of the honest,
labor of the sacred work ,

ethical beauty of character
and reverence of the old.

Beware the danger at every corner,
the village peer, the local bully,
envious friend, revengeful enemy.
The thieves and pirates,
The pickpockets eyeing the purse,
honored, well-fed guest
peeping at the newly-wed
wife, and the daughter un-wed.
Ugly disease rotting the tissues.
Time, the slow and merciless killer.
Old age, the harbinger of death
lingering around the corner.

The Young and the Old

Everybody is for excitement,
boys, girls, men and women.
Music is loud and lewd,
drinking heavy and wild,
passion untamed, orgies unbridled.

On the steeds of youth
they are galloping
through the adventures
of high romance.

Everything seems to be made
only for the young.
That fleeting, transient
immature and mad time;
that brief, bright lightening
in the dark cloudy night.

You hardly notice
its sudden onset
and miraculous adieu.

Everything for the young, right.
But where will the old go,
who crave for a little peace,
a bit of relaxation
after the hectic inning?

Will they be kicked
out of this fair island
or be herded into camps?
who sweated to beautify

and adorn this garden
with gaudy and juicy plants.

They invented the best devices,
mechanisms, and solutions;
found new medications
to abate the pangs of the living,
and offer some relief
to the tired humanity.

Now it is only a few
wielding power, out to consume
and exhaust this world.

The goal should be poise and stasis,
not the wild race of the heart
and the turbulence of desires
which will take you
to apparent giddy heights
only to drop dead
in sheer decrepitude.

Words and Actions

If words could change the world,
emotions divert the course of history,
intentions, good and sweet, could please!

Only in the garb of actions
do they take shape,
moulded in results.

While the poets wait
the Machiavellians reign supreme.

After the Storm

The Nyctanthes creeper was silent
under the dim light
of partly covered moon.
The clouds looked so innocent
after the violent storm.

Red and white flowers
dangling mischievously
like the glittering ornaments
of the newly wed bridegroom.
Its branches fell still
like the hair
of the paramour fair,
lying silent, calm,
eyes shut, lips slightly parted,
showing the dry pearly teeth,
fleshy bosom heaving slowly,
passion exhausted, lust satiated:
Amorous meeting with the lover.

Why such tranquility
after such a fury of passion?
After the hustle bustle, the flurry,
the mad struggle of dominance,
the rage of enmity
over the childish toys
or a piece of barren land
or a trivial remark, hollow words,
and the hurt honour.

The gray-haired angels of peace;
tranquility mingled with repentance.

The Wide Gulf

Was it for this
that the arrival was announced
with such fanfare?

Welcome was so grand.
Brass plate was violently beaten,
the women with flushed faces,
the menfolk puffing
at their smoking pipes, contentedly.

The good natured matron
instructing with her wise, ugly face,
sweet words and delicacies exchanged.
The colorful and hopeful
vision evoked before all eyes.

Was it for this
caricature of a man?
Merely in the middle
of the flow of his time span
and already crumpled and crushed,
beaten by the buffets
and thousand defeats!

Still far away from his goal.
What expectations,
and what achievements!

The wide gulf between
the vision and its embodiment;
the idea and the action;
the holy conception
and its cruel materialization:
between the tender hopeful sapling
and the dry knotty tree.

Perhaps like the sacred inception
of the world
and its transformation with time.

And Only One Heart

So many troubles,
and liver one!
If there is warm blood,
the flying romance within,
the inner live amber,
how one can cope with
innumerable oozing wounds,
and the single throbbing heart!

Hypertension, diabetes,
tuberculosis, the dreaded cancer.
Livers and kidneys should be as many
as the problems and pangs,
the shocks and the stabs in the back,
to tolerate and absorb them.
But he is not to blame.
It is as it is.

Only one support and so many pangs;
one warm frame,
and countless, endless desires;
one soul and so many worlds.
Oh, the limitations of this frame,
and the world,
and the mind's flight
boundless and infinite.

Crossing the Boundary of the Living

No one can accompany you
on the journey
to the unseen territory,
not even those
whom you always accompanied
everywhere, loved and cared.

Plunging in the dark void
is shocking and frightening,
though to be undertaken
by the self alone.

But the human advantage
is on your side.
So many have crossed the threshold.
If they have done it
so can you, and so can I.

The Alexanders and the Cleopetras
have left the world,
gaily, sadly or sullenly.
The toughness and the softness alike,
has dissolved in the unknown.

Whether the saints or the prophets
or the sinners and the outcasts,
the bravest of the brave,
the timid and the weak.

Some trembling and some smiling,
others with pious benevolent visage,

the dull and the witty,
males and females alike,
even the tender beginners!
All have crossed the fearful fence.

And no one returned to tell
about the pain involved!
Some human trick
which has been useful there
can also work here.

Every moment, every atom
rushing towards that eternity,
and still the show
does not lose its dazzle a whit,
and beckons the human heart.

The Game at Billiards

Billiards was supposed to be played
in imperial palaces,
with force and aimed impact
on cool heights.

The stakes were really high.
The conquest of a weak state
or vanquishing a mighty rival.
Well-aimed, measured strokes
in a leisurely relaxed mood;
head swayed with wine and power.
The paraphernalia and ambience
meant only for aristocracy.

But here the uncouth youth
was fidgeting with the cues
in the simmering heat of June.
Cramped hall, suffocating smoke,
the noise of hi-fi music,
was wiping his sweaty face
with his shirt sleeve.

Everything is not made for everybody.
Democracy does not yield its profits.
A mere commonization of all things
deceives as much the commoners
as the governors.

All games are the same ,though,
played on different planes.
Tricks may be the same,
not the outcome.

Wallowing with Pigs

The pigs were basking in the mire.
despite the heat overhead
and the excreta below;
eating, thrusting their snouts
in the slush, swallowing, snorting.
Keeping his head high
he strived to stand erect;
but the jostling was too much for him
and so was pulled down again.

Why he tried and why he failed,
what was the logic,
justification, righteousness
and above all, use of the attempt?
To brave the naked furnace,
the scorching heat, the drought,
the parched throat,
and the deadly loneliness
in the vast sandy desert!

Why not lie down
with face in the mud,
enjoy the cool, moist stink,
splashing on the face
and the whole naked body,
entering the mouth, nostrils,
soothing the nerves
and the thirsty, dry senses!
But not touching the inner soul.

To tread one's path alone
if others are going their own
or to wait for them
and join the crowd?

Evil

The truck ahead of me
loaded with coarse sand
scattered it furiously, incessantly,
and blinded me,
spoiling the beautiful morning.

Some things and people
are made as such .
They spawn only dirt and suffering,
like the Evil one,
darting its tongue,
possessing poison in its very mouth
which is meant for love.

And can touch anyone fatally,
foe or friend,
even its benefactor.
He contaminates all life
and makes it less perfect.

Nobody can afford to be carefree.
Happiness and joy
can be snatched away
suddenly, with a jerk.

As a piece of sweet
from the hand of a poor child
by an ugly black crow,
leaving him confounded, shocked,
and perplexed by the antics
of the powers above.

It is our fate
to be always on our guard.

Youth and Old Age

Before the saddening fear
of the failure of the heart,
while it throbbed violently
at the sight of red cheeks,
crimson lips, half-opened
and bulging roundness,
overshadowed by shiny cascade,
the pleasures will never return,
nor will these pains leave.

Thus the time of life
passes through the transient youth
to the everlasting old age.

If the passion of youth be aware
of the melancholy of age,
the descending coldness
and the perpetual helplessness,
the old consciousness
could obliterate the joys of shiny days,
life would flow smoothly
into the vast eternity of non-life
like the sparkling river,
zestful and gay
into the vast ocean
where it dissolves itself.

Spring

The trees were sprouting now.
Poplars, so leafless, lifeless
a few days ago,
that my son remarked,
"What kinds of trees are they, anyway,
standing as good as dead"?

And now the soft leaflets appeared,
green, brown, red and glossy,
new, like the red sun,
emerging in the eastern sky
to see the light of the day, innocent
like a new born baby, with unopened eyes.

Soon their leaves will ripple in the air,
softly, gracefully, harmoniously,
like the young sprightly bodies
of the school girls
dancing with the soft music,
vying to outdo each other.

How God changes
the nature and us human beings
in unison with His harmony!

The Tailor of the Romantic age

The tailor casually told me
that he began his career
with the tight trousers
which were in vogue in the sixties.

The board hanging loosely
on the old building,
built in sixty five, testified him.
The skinny middle-aged man
working in the dark shabby chamber
eking out his livelihood
by sewing clothes,
has designed the tight trousers
in the sixties.

Oh, what a world he has seen!
Witness to the dreamy happenings.
Said he saw Jitendra
shooting for a film in the city,
shook hands with Dharmendra.
The water in the Dal lake was clear,
the sparkling Jhelum still intact.
The Himalyan mountains erect high
with silvery rim, untouched
by the ugly head of modernism.
Fit for the young eyes
of Marilyne Munroe and Sadhna.

If I were young at that time,
I would have lived eternal life
with no wish and dream
looming in my heart now.

The Ordinary Death

The poor man died suddenly.
I heard the wails of the folks.
The dead body on four shoulders.
I at once joined the funeral procession
though I would fain have a cup of tea.
(It was such a hectic day in office).

Later in the day, I went to sit mourning
on the mat spread on the ground
under the mango tree.
No respectable neighbour of mine.
Only the relatives of the poor man
and those who suffered directly.

Though the death was tragic,
solemnity was not observed.
Just the talk about the lunch arrangement,
convenient departure of the guests
and all sorts of humdrum things
unworthy of the occasion.

Do the rich men also die so?
Some meet their end otherwise.
Rather with a grand fanfare,
with more forceful outburst
of passion and emotions
though fake and dramatic.

The departed soul is least
concerned, though,
how you mourn the body.
But still it may oversee it
or the nearest ones see it.
Death is after all death.

There Is a Time

There is a time
when the game of life is played
on a feverish, harsh, taut pitch.
When things seem
most airy, fairy, light,
and heavy, gloomy, grim.
When passions burn body and mind
and life seems most real.

You are in the center of the stage,
all eyes fixed on you,
all others look dim, faded on the margin.
When a crude, clumsy creature
becomes the sighing lover,
fighting with the entire world
for the shadow of a fairy,
merely his opposite in features.

Or blazing the tenements
in his fury to conquer them,
himself vanquished by ageing decay,
years stealthily creeping in
like white ants, devouring him,
bit by bit, to the last crunch.
Slaving the lesser mortals by crafty tongue,
himself a victim of cunning Time.

There is a time for such things,
otherwise he is a common human,
merely a gullible child,
or a helpless fool of fortune.
A mere name
on the corner of a page,
on the annals of living beings,
to be rot off or burn off.

The Insect

I saw the insect
having suffered the accident,
kicking so many legs in the air
like a motor turned upside down,
all wheels in the air.
Alone, all alone.

Nobody took note of the catastrophe.
Even his peers passed by silently,
unconcerned, indifferent, callous,
in the morning air.
I carefully turned it up,
and it crawled into the grass.

I thanked God that I am not alone.
I won't have to suffer alone.
There will be some soul beside me,
I am a human-being.

Capture the Moment

The moments of life are fleeting
swiftly, like the stream down the hills
to end in the steep fall.

We are heading to plunge
in the dark sea of death.

The tiny patches of time lost forever
in scramble and scuffle
to snatch the petty gains
could become the vast mountains
of peace, joy and happiness.

Play in the snow before it melts away,
for life is slipping fast away.

Poverty

It doesn't allow anything
to grow and blossom,
hygiene, beauty, power,
culture, art, heritage.

The green mossed stones
which felt the sparkling flow
of pure holy water, once,
are swept by sewage.
The fair plump face
which might have launched
a few ships,
is blotted by sweaty mud,
worthy of merely a fleeting look.

The tall robust youth
fit to be honoured
with the Sword and the Hood,
for the intoxicating fame and the riches,
wanders unnoticed, humiliated,
begging the decrepit,
rotten, decaying rich,
for what they can grant
but will not.

The sacred places
littering with excreta
of animals and humans.
Greedy uncivilized mob
snatching golden earrings
from the dead ears.
When it raises its ugly head,
is not even worthy of mention
among those who have not tasted it.

But at least it is man made.
Heaven is not to blame for it.

The Retreat

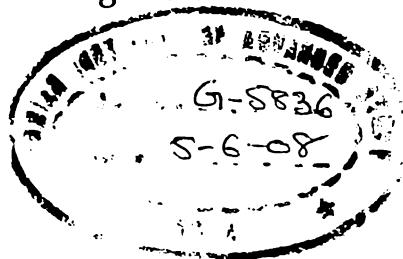
When I had a retreat
from the dim, hectic,
maddening worldly pursuits,
in the lofty, green, mighty hills,
they dwarfed my trivial gains
and vanished my trifling pains.

Silent Devdars standing calm,
reposeful, as if meditating
since centuries,
vying with the higher hills
to touch the wayward cloud
and play the game of hide and seek.

The sacred, pure Ganges
winding through the hills
telling the import of action
and struggle.

The clouds emerged and vanished
in the mysterious mountains.

I never thought
anything could be above the clouds,
and here the hills rose higher,
marring the glory
of the billowy clouds.
Who knows what is higher and mightier!



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In these poems Dr. Balbir Singh has portrayed human life in its greatest joy and deepest pain. Through simple and lucid images he depicts the contemporary man, essentially stripped of his illusions, yet trying to mask himself with something to present his persona before the society. Whether he needs society at all or his society needs him is the dominant note of some of these poems. Other poems touch upon highly tender aspects of human existence, namely disintegration of personal relationships; shattering of human expectations and the consequent disillusionment; brevity of life; unavoidable, fierce and constant fight with evil; and above all, the inevitability of death. The poems are meant for common readers and do not need any critical theory to be understood and enjoyed.



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