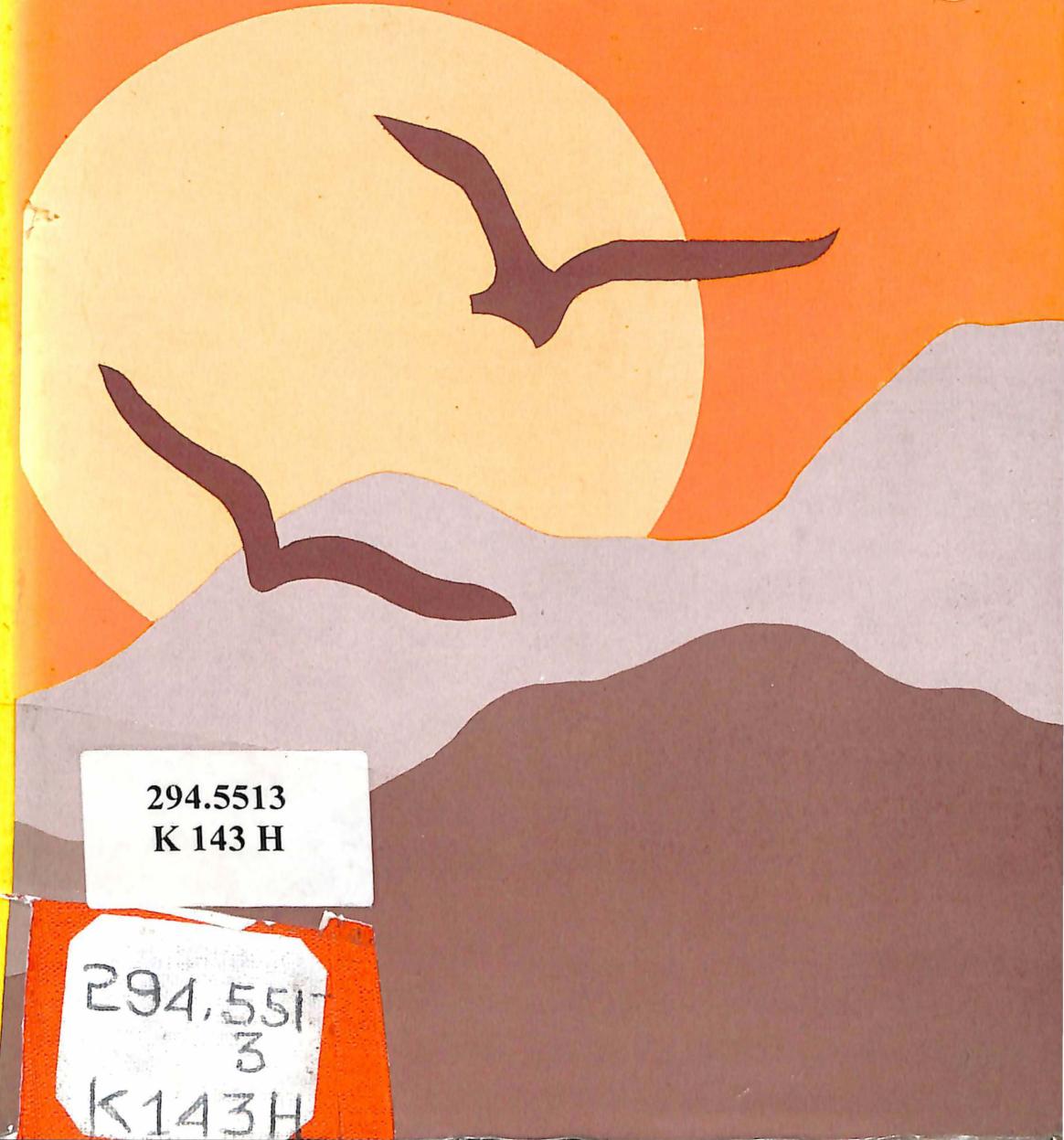


Hymn to Shiva

and Other Poems

Karan Singh



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Hymns

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and Other Poems

Karan Singh



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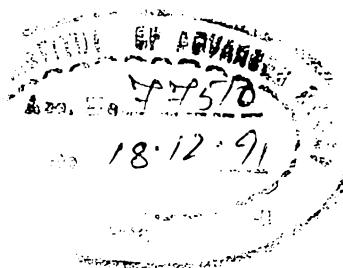
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Foreword

These poems, with one exception, were written in the late fifties and early sixties when I was still a young man living up in Kashmir, in one of my previous incarnations in this life, long before I entered national politics. They have been out of print now for several years, and although subsequently my writing has been in prose, some friends felt that these poems should be once again made available. Among them was Shri Narendra Kumar, the dynamic publisher of Vikas books, to whose request I finally acceded. The solitary exception is the *Hymn to Shiva* which, was written during an inter-continental flight thousands of feet above the Atlantic, just a few years ago.

Poetry and prose serve two inter-related yet distinct purposes. Prose is written mainly to be read, while poetry is written essentially to be recited and heard. This distinction is often blurred in practice, but nonetheless is, to my mind, an important one. Sometimes on hearing these poems they seem to have been written by someone else on some other planet. The intervening years have been so full of activity on the national and global scale, that the quiet ambience of the Kashmir Valley—now so tragically marred by conflict and strife—seems to belong to another age.

And yet poetry does have the capacity to transcend time and space, and speak directly to the heart. It is my hope that these poems will speak to some hearts, although what the poet writes is not always what the reader hears!

9 March 1991

KARAN SINGH

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The Friend

Whoever you are, unknown to me,
we are fated to meet, I know not when
but I hear a sound like a distant sea
deep in my heart, I sigh and then
like a radiant flame of myriad hue
my heart leaps up as I hear you call
from the distant hills, O, where are you!
I cry out aloud, but the echoes fall
on soundless wastes and no one replies
though I strain my ears for the slightest sound,
and I stand alone in a world of sighs
alone with the Friend I have not found.

2

The Night of Nights

A night of stars
startling the darkness with their brilliance,
pulsating, straining to break through the heavens
into our consciousness;

A night of love,
strange, sad and deep,
yearning to break through the body
into our finer being;

A night of death,
phantasmal, dark, obscure,
breaking at last
into the truth that lies beyond.

3

A Lovely Day

The sun is shining bright and clear
Upon the lake, and on the hills,
And there is silence everywhere,
A silence that the spirit fills

With peace; while softly through the air
A cool and gentle current blows
Upon my face, and standing here
My soul no fear nor worry knows:

The distant line of poplar flows
Fringing the deep and tranquil lake—
The Dal—which now no ripple shows;
And gently with the breezes shake

The mighty chinars, gnarled and old
But still in leafy foliage decked;
The distant corn is gleaming gold,
The meadows with bright flowers flecked:

Across the sky so pure and blue
A few young clouds in joy do play,
The world takes on a rosy hue
To match the beauty of the day.

4

Clouds

Airy sprites that roam at will
upon the soft blue firmament,
Twisting and turning in the wind,
Dissolving into nothingness
Or taking shapes and forms unheard of
Bending castles, toppling spires,
Misty cities ringed with fire;
Filmy wisps of finest spray;
The wind cascading through soft hair,
flying with a gay abandon
through the depths of liquid space,
Gazing proudly into mirrors,
lakes and rivers, streams and ocean;
Now retreating, now advancing,
Like a charger, proudly prancing,
Like a slender maiden dancing.

Sonnet Written on Shivratri

The mount Kailash, upon whose snowy height
a figure broods, inscrutable and still,
but charged with vibrant power that seems to fill
the universe with glory and with light,
the eyes half closed, the body pure and bright
like to the sun which from the distant hill
its golden homage pays, as angels thrill
to gaze upon the grandeur of His might;
The matted locks wherefrom the Ganga flows
down to the earth, the chant of sacred hymns,
the trident and the drum adorn the snows,
the serpents twist and twine on ashen limbs;
He is the Lord who life and death bestows,
the Sea of Light in which the cosmos swims.

6

Resurrection

There comes a time, a moment, when despair
with clasping tentacles that slide and
creep into the soul
assails the fount, and all the lights are dimmed,
and silence shouts around the shadowed
walls of morbid contemplation
the world spins lost,
lost in the eternal void from whence it came;
the galaxy of noises that make up
the daily round of men
join in wild confusion to create
a storm implacable and dread.
But then, just as the groping soul would
lose all hope,
just when the deafening laughter of the thing that men
call evil
grows to overwhelm our nerveless might,
there comes a sudden whisper
in the breeze,
a silver ripple in the lake of thought,
a stir amidst the sere and withered leaves,
an intimation that so close at hand

stands One whose bliss and
knowledge shelters all.

His power it is that lights for us the path,
that comes from far to show to us the trail,
the trail which leads us on to greater things,
to mystery that is the seed of life,
to majesty that is the goal of death.

Eternity

The ocean of Eternity is calm,
stretched with rhythmic majesty
for aeons immemorial
over the deep and fathomless depths
of Infinity.
Its waves rise and fall in cosmic rhythm
whose music is the music of the spheres,
unutterably profound.
Through the apparent stillness
the primeval beat pulsates with ecstasy...
throughout the billions of light years:
universe upon universe,
time upon space....

The Mystic

Alone he sits,
as through the crystal landscape of his mind
drift golden dreams and rainbow adorations
like bouquets of butterflies
whirling in intricate ecstasy across the lawn;
In the murmur of the distant stream vibrates
the ancient, longing call of the Unknown,
and liquid notes of the eternal flute
thrill through his veins.

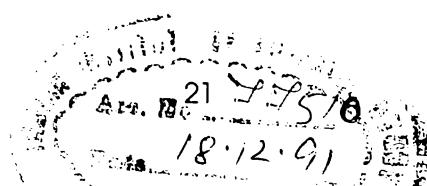
My Friend

All beauty and all grace is here
that ever shone on human face,
enshrined in eyes that gently bear
the subtle grandeur of the race,
the sorrow and the joys of life,
the friendships and the heartbreaks too,
the bitter scars of living strife,
O such a one, my friend, are you.

The eyes that with a noble calm
survey this world of good and ill,
the laughter that like gentle balm
softens the hauteur of the will,
the handshake that fresh strength imparts,
such hope and life and courage new
as soothe the burden of our hearts,
O such a one, my friend, are you.

Storm

Thunder crashing
the rain slashing
through the trees,
water swirling
the leaves twirling
in the breeze;
lightning glowing
the sleet blowing
through the air,
hail pounding
the earth resounding
everywhere;
lovers meeting
their hearts beating
in the night,
shadows waving
the darkness craving
for the light.



Some Thoughts on Love

Someone I love is near
in fact next door,
but I can't get through
can't communicate,
barriers erected by society,
predilection, fate perhaps
stump me;
it is a ghastly bore, though,
to be so close and yet so very far;
perhaps I will have to fall *out* of love,
deliberately, grimly,
gritting my emotions—
but can it be done?

Its an odd thing, love,
like lightning it falls without warning
suddenly, devastatingly
stripping us raw of our pretences,
our fatuous private images of ourselves,
and once fallen
nothing can free us of it
however much, like harpooned whales,
we may thrash around in agony;

time helps a bit, I suppose,
but only superficially,
deep inside the scar remains
until, of course,
the lightning strikes again
replacing it with a fresh one

Why should it happen,
why do we have to fall in love
knowing well the heartache and the pain
that always follow,
the tossing nights and twisting, writhing days
wearing the exhausting mask of normalcy;
can't we ward it off
put up a lightning conductor or something,
seal off our hearts against the virus,
become love-proof?
perhaps we could
but would it really work?
and then if the higher love descends—
what a disaster,
love-proof in paradise!

12

Vision

The burning splendour of an unknown world
shone from his face, and in one hand he held
aloft a mighty trident, I beheld
the glistening serpents round his forehead curled;
and then he seemed to melt with mystic change
into a boy of dark resplendent hue
who played upon a flute, on which he blew
a tune mysterious, haunting, sweet and strange;
a woman then appeared, a radiant wave
with fiery eyes that flashed with light divine
and charged with mighty power incarnadine,
one arm upraised to slay and one to save;
and then there sat, serene beneath a tree,
a figure clad in saffron robes austere,
with eyes that banished hate and lust and fear
and shed their bliss upon humanity;
and lost there rose a man of gentle mien,
compassion on his face writ large and free
and eyes blue as the waters of the sea
where for mankind he preached and suffered pain;

and then these figures merged into a sea
of shining light that spread throughout all space,
and gathered in its folds the human race
and mounted upwards to Eternity.

The Garden by the Sea

How does it go now,
that haunting tune
which wafts me to a garden by the sea
where I stood once, alone with one I loved?
how sweet the sad remembrance of that day
when we stood hand in hand,
sat cheek to cheek,
lay breast to breast,
and loved each other with a loss of fear;
sweet yet sad,
for after that we parted
leaving behind a part of our twin souls
upon that garden by the sea;
surely we have not forfeited those salty hours
unto eternity,
surely we carry somewhere deep within
the memory of our last, deep parting kiss,
the memory of the garden by the sea.

The Adventurer

For I have gone where men have never been,
and wandered over countries far and near
and crossed great mountains with no trace of fear,
and gazed on many a strange and wondrous scene;

on mighty oceans have I plied my raft
where monstrous fishes close beneath me played,
and endless water heaved and lurched and swayed,
as tirelessly I hurled my lethal shaft;

and through the great primeval forests tall
I plied the lonely furrow of my life
and slew great monsters, waged untiring strife
with creatures of the darkness, great and small;

and often as I strove with might and main,
and with each victory won far renown,
I thought that I had mown my troubles down
and conquered fear and death, old age and pain;

but ever were my hopes rudely belied,
for wander as I might throughout the world
I could not rid me of the terror curled
somewhere within my being, deep inside;

for over all our mortal hopes and gains
hovers the constant shadow of the grave,
of Time, that dims the glory of the brave
and lays at waste our labour and our pains;
and what adventure, what exploit will stay
with us beyond the folded veil of death?
and what, when we have shed our mortal breath,
will speed us on our far, eternal way?

15

Kaleidoscope

A fleeting moment,
culled from the woven web
of deep infinity;
a passing glance
pregnant with meaning,
orange with hidden fire;
a sudden thought
leaping upon the crest
of the unconscious;
a spasm of love
wrenched with cruel intensity
from our inner being,
a flash of hope
lighting the darkened corners
of dim despair;
a ray of light
seeking throughout creation
its glowing haven.

16

The Second Fall

What does one do, when all the world is dark
and hope has lost its last, small, lingering spark
and voices murmur from the hidden deep
beckoning us to long, eternal sleep?

How does one answer, when the glowing well
of faith is empty, and the senses dwell
in nether regions deep, devoid of light
and earthly visions vanish from the sight?

Where does one go, when all the paths are barred
and the warm living tissues warped and scarred,
and deep within the phantom voices call
and all is ready for the second fall?

A Whispered Dialogue

Someone whispered in my ear
one evening,
as the setting sun set fire to the landscape;
I cannot quite recall the words
but the burden went something like this:
'Time speeds by on flying feet
and all our life is bitter-sweet
with expectation, hope and sorrow,
and we vainly seek tomorrow
what we could not find today;
for this we strive, for this we pay
with our life's blood but then at last—
all strength expended, hoping past—
we fail and sink, and lose our breath
into the nothingness called death'
I sat quite still,
so quiet I could hear the beating of my heart,
until another whisper spoke
with somewhat firmer tone and sweeter voice:
'This is not true, the daily strife
that builds the structure of our life
need not be always fought in vain
and need not end in death and pain;

there is a path the mystics know
wherein the lights of heaven glow,
there is a path the sages tread
which leads them past the hosts of dead
and dying bodies, leads them on
to that one place where none has gone
who has not shed his mortal dross,
the rainbow bridge which all must cross
who seek in life finality,
and glowing immortality.'

The Seminar

There sat the learned,
like rows of soda-water bottles
awaiting their turn to be drunk,
and one by one
they waddled to the mike and there unfurled
their private prejudices
garbed in the robe of reason;
one, a jaunty little cockroach,
leapt to and fro while speaking,
another stood in solemn grandeur
like a statue carved with moving lips,
a third, bearded and grim
and glaring like a hawk,
bore down in garrulous ferocity
upon the audience;
and thus it went
until, in God's own time,
their words sloshed all around the crowded hall,
they mercifully left for lunch.

The Conference

In trudge the white-maned elders
— some with no manes at all—
flamboyantly attired with files and brief-cases
and assorted aides;
cameras clicking, movies whirling,
the all-pervasive air of tired concern,
the tinkering with this and that
lengthening into interminable hours—
statistics eddying up and down the table—
and then the exit,
not by the door wherein we went—
this one leads downstairs.

Tea

'Let's have a cup of tea'
I said,
to break the voluble mediocrity of the meeting,
'One cup for the eight of us?' someone countered
—an eternal wise-guy—
and so it came,
the steaming, golden beverage
poured into gleaming cups and passed around
with the abysmal 'how much?' 'how much?',
the tea squirming at the gross contact
of milk and sugar;
and then the gulping silence,
a blessed oasis in this desert of words.

21

Fallings

It happened on a sunny day
when skies were deep and blue,
and every hedge a purple spray—
I fell in love with you;

the clouds were white and silver-grey
and tremulous the sea,
a bird was singing something gay—
you fell in love with me.

22

Quiz

What is the promise of a glowing day?
the bloom before the roses fade away;
why do the lovely flowers droop at noon?
because their beauty vanishes too soon;
what is the purpose of the flowing wind?
it seeks to emulate the human mind;
why does the rainbow sparkle bright and high?
because the earth is wedded to the sky;
why does the moon-orb change from day to day?
because what once has come must pass away;
why does the sun its fiery rays unfold?
because its heart is young, its body old;
why does the poet long to have his say?
because for him there is no other way.

The Tree at Night

At night the tree awakes to life
with many a murmur soft and low
as through its leaves the breezes blow
that calm the day's ignoble strife;

its branches sway in pure delight
and moonlight through them flits around
and throws upon the dewy ground
white patterns gay of dancing light;

and far away a silver flute
thrills through its being's inner reach,
as when the gift of human speech
descends on one who has been mute;

and far above a million spheres
pursue their pre-determined flight
and traverse space throughout the night;
the tree in silent wonder hears

the sonorous, deep, eternal song
that throbs within Creation's heart,
the secret longing to be part
of Nature's essence, deep and strong.

The Wind

The wind invisible flows along,
a crystal stream of whispering sound
for undetermined regions bound,
singing its soft, eternal song

that sometimes drops to whisper low
as to be almost soundless, and
at others shrieks from sea to land
lashing the shrinking earth below;

at times it moves in breezes sweet
and lifts the perfume from the flowers
into the secret, silent bowers
where fond and anxious lovers meet;

or passing over a sleeping lake
it traces on its placid face
soft patterns shy of liquid grace
that with its motion sway and shake;

and blowing through the rolling downs
it flings the clover to and fro
and bends the timid grass below;
it glides through villages and towns

and brings a breath of gentle air
to city-dwellers, grim and glum,
who live in tenement and slum,
a hint of hope and promise fair.

Stormy Night

The clouds tempestuous gather overhead
with ominous rumblings deep of distant thunder,
the brow of heaven darkens, and the bed
of the vast sky is almost rent asunder
by vivid snakes of lightning flashing
from cloud to saturnine cloud,
and suddenly with sound of cities crashing
the rain begins to fall in torrents splashing
in murky pools and on the river loud.

The wind howls like a demon, mad and screaming,
and flings the solid walls of rain
upon the cowering village which is seeming
to shrink the cruel blows with shuddering pain,
the fiery bursts of lightning grow more vivid
and deeper sound the thunderous drums of hell,
the deafening thunder and the lightning livid
transform the sky into a canopy vivid,
as through the dreadful night sharp falls the hail.

Department Store

Rushing tangents of human feet
pressing, ever pressing
towards the counters;
the excited hum
of voices in perpetual motion,
the shelves agleam
with shining superfluities of modern life—
Oh, my aching feet!
what a relief to sit down
and gulp cold orangeade,
savouring its icy meander
down my gullet,
watching awhile the frenzied beehive
rocking and rolling;
then up again
to join the swirling eddy of humanity
pressing, ever pressing
towards the counters.

The Ocean

A heaving mass of rippling grey
swaying and surging
to the unseen rhythms of the distant moon
in futile endeavour to outwit gravitation,
peopled with salty creatures, large and small,
trapped for ever within its moving vastnesses,
their home and then—at last—their liquid grave;
the Ocean
moaning and groaning aeons before man's
venture into fate,
gyrating in channels dark of spiral time,
crashing with constant thunder at the land
with power primeval, rising from the depths
of cosmic anger.

Winter

The bitter winds sweep down
upon us from the glittering peaks of snow
and blow,
with hectic fervour grim and obdurate
a cold and deadly chill across the land;
biting deep into our inner core
they shrivel up the senses,
and with fingers numb and aching bones
the brave sentinels stand
frozen to their appointed posts;
an ominous silence reigns,
for far upon the distant peaks
a deadly certainty begins to grow
and menace, like a poised thunderbolt,
the placid fields and cottages below;
oh, for the sun,
the sun to leap aflame into the sky
and melt the menacing snow that chills and kills,
and fill fresh life into this drowsing land,
and strength and sinews into frozen arms,
and fire into the droop of listless hearts,
and power into eyes grown dim and cold
from watching, waiting for its fiery shaft.

The Living Flame

The spheres unroll their tangled trails
and sweep aloft through time and space,
and all our vaunted glory pales,
the splendours of the human race
shrink to a speck of cosmic dust
that whirls about its parent sun
and mocks our tales of love and lust
and dreams of deeds done and undone;

but yet within the human breast
there burns the mystic spark divine
that gives him neither peace nor rest
the living flame incarnadine
that ever strives to break away
and soar into the timeless light
where, luminous, the golden day
alternates with the silver night.

Lines Written in Milano

(after walking the streets below
the great cathedral)

The stream of pavement walkers—
raincoats swishing, umbrellas dripping—
surges around me,
and the crazy roar of traffic
blares its wordy music into the grey sky,
the comic opera of modern life
grinds relentlessly along,
and yet there stirs within me
a deep, abiding peace,
born perhaps of the mighty church that stands—
a trellised curtain of living stone—
aloof amid the turbulent scene below;
how strong its grey protuberances,
how full of hope and do they soar
into the boundless sky,
the saints stand in quick-frozen grace
pouring their permanent benediction
upon the unheeding crowd
that hurries to and fro with panic speed
unmindful of the beatitude above.

The Cinema

A curtain of swiftly changing light and sound
seeking to simulate reality,
flirting with rows and rows of gazing humans
packed neatly, sardine-like, within the aisles;
the painted images
bobbing and bowing huge upon the screen,
the grins and heartbreaks, sobs and interminable
intertwinings,
slick nuances and photo-generic twists,
the gasp, the muted breath, the orgasm of excitement,
the verisimilitude of existence,
an illusion sitting crowned upon another;
and finally—"The End".

There was Music

There was music and laughter and dancing galore
and couples were drifting around on the floor,
but his heart was not in it, his mind wandered wide,
for the one who adored him was not at his side,

He joked with them gaily and smiled as he spoke
but his heart deep within him was empty as smoke,
and he looked all about him for somewhere to hide
for the one who adored him was not at his side.

The tempo grew faster, and wilder the beat
of the swift throbbing dance and the quicksilver feet,
but the heart-rending rhythms he could not abide
for the one who adored him was not at his side.

Then the crashing crescendo, the zenith of sound,
the whirling of dancers around and around,
the first subtle touch of the upswelling tide—
and the one who adored him was there at his side.

Sometimes

Sometimes when you vainly seek
the one you love but cannot find,
a subtle whiff of living thought
drifts slowly through your fevered mind,
and brings to life the vanished days
and recreates the pulsing nights
and peoples them with sighs and songs,
with vibrant sound and vivid sights;
and though the loved one tarries far
beyond the reach of sight or sound,
a fragrance lingers in the air
and deep within you, underground,
the spring of love leaps up anew
with crystal force and swelling tide
that makes the walls of heaven ring
and challenges creation's pride.

The Gull

Perched in airy impudence
upon the heaving, billowing sea,
unafraid, perhaps just unaware
of the vast deeps beneath it;
white, a tiny bundle of cotton wool
braving the ocean,
flying with soft sleepy strokes
across the waves,
bright shiny buttons for eyes,
the face babyish, innocent
against the unending roar and thunder of the breakers,
the transient poised upon the never-ending.

35

Please

Whatever else you do
please don't look at me that way,
its really quite disastrous—
my heart turns soft,
my stomach hard,
my head around—
if only your eyelashes were shorter
it wouldn't be so bad,
or your eyes dimmer,
or my love weaker.

Hope

The pain
knifing through one like the A-bomb through Hiroshima
and, worse, the hope that will not die
the anti-anaesthetist
keeping alive and raw the emotive tendons;
if only it would pack up
and let one drift away into the dark
once and for all,
and burn one's boats of yearning;
but hope's an awful clinger
and will not let us go so easily
until, squeezed dry of all emotion,
we fall exhausted by the wayside.

Tete-a-tete

She said 'You have a lovely face'
I said 'It only shares your grace'
She said 'Your eyes are dark and deep'
I said 'Your images they keep'
She said 'Your gaze is full of bliss'
I said 'The rapture of your kiss'
She said 'Your arms are bands of steel'
I said 'Your silhouette they feel'
She said 'Why do you love me so'
I said 'That I will never know'.

Quest

I thought that I had found the one I sought,
deep in some inner emptiness
an echo spoke,
a flash of light burnt bright a second,
hope awoke again and rubbed its eyes:
I thought I found him
in the glimmering web of sunlight
that streamed into my bedroom—
specks of dust dancing in luminous ecstasy—
in the soft wind that blew fine patterns on the grass,
in the sea crashing for ever against the shore,
I thought that I had found him
gazing deep into the waves of time
fathoming there the spinning loom of destiny
watching—waiting;
was it me he was expecting
fresh from the throb of life
with the sweat of achievement glistening on my brow,
body glowing with restless energy
heart aflame with love, mind asparkle?
Was the one I sought
in his turn seeking me?

39

City

A city vast, perambulating, bright
with garish music searing through the night,
the pavement dwellers aren't a pretty sight;

the rich have lots of money, crave for more,
the middle classes writhe in holy awe,
the poor, as usual, sleep upon the floor;

the priests are fat, well-fed and fully dressed,
the merchants buy and sell with vivid zest,
the teachers teach a bit, God help the rest.

The Demagogue

It would seem that his eyes were like gimlets,
for they looked through one's heart
and burned deep and fierce
through the thickest of wiles,
and they gave you a start
with their power to pierce
though you fled them for miles;

It would seem that his voice was like thunder,
for it rumbled and rolled
around and around
through hamlet and city,
and it made one feel cold
but so safe and sound,
plus a dash of self-pity;

It would seem that his words were like pigeons,
for they flew through the air
with a fluttering sound
in a circular motion,
and they flapped here and there
as they covered the ground
causing quite a commotion;

It would seem that his arms were like windmills,
for they waved up and down
and created a scare
with their fearsome swinging,
and no one in town
could resist the fanfare
or the voice and the singing.

Radha's Lament

When will this loneliness divorce my heart?
I await his footsteps, but he does not come
only the wind whining through the trees
and the distant stars twinkling in the sky
coldly aloof, as if to mock my hopeless vigil;
the thunder rolling
cascading in great loops around the sky,
and lightning crackling through the startled night
with vivid flashes searing through the deep;
I start at every sound, transmuted by my craving
into a distant voice,
his voice, perhaps, calling me out into the wilderness
to follow him into eternity:
Is that why he tarries long,
to chill my selfish craving, kill my ego, fill me with despair
so that I turn to him alone,
not as one among the many
but as the only thing that really is,
the one that shining, causes all to shine
the one that being, causes all to be?

Moonbeams

The moonbeams sing a tune of soft repose
cool, through the sleepy night,
and hearts in love beat in unison,
tremulous hope hangs overhead,
lacy,
 iridescent,
 a thing of loveliness
 glowing with inner wonder;
the stars, their glory dimmed by the moon's bright orb,
twinkle foam-encased,
far, far away
two hearts yearn kin ecstasy
their union kindling the universe.

Jet Fighters

With wide and vivid strokes they search the sky
filling it with primeval thunder,
glittering formations turn and wheel in mighty circles
sunlight shooting off them at curious angles,
wings glinting, tiny bodies speeding through the air—
sound following sheepishly a split-second behind—
hovering between sight and invisibility,
quicksilver motion, darting in bright discipline
weaving a complex web of light and sound
a twentieth century mandala;
pilots glued to yards of quivering dials
each needle tracing the horizon
between life and death, home and eternity.

Dream

I dreamt that I was seated in the sky
upon a throne made bright with burnished gold
and rainbows all about me, far below
the azure world spun dreamily around,
the oceans and the continents beneath
were vivid patterns to my lofty gaze,
the moon a neighbour, cool and softly pink
around her parent earth did circulate
with gentle rhythm, far away the sun
aglow with fire and light sent out his rays,
the planets speeded past without a sound
muffling their music lest they wake me up,
they knew I dreamt, and in my dream I knew
their knowledge and was grateful for their love.

In Memoriam

(written on the passing of
Jawaharlal Nehru)

Now you are gone, to join the ranks of those
whose names will ever live in every heart
with joyous fragrance, like the budding rose
that was of you so intimate a part;

you fought and strove to give our nation light,
to bring it freedom, break its binding chain,
you warred against a vast, imperial might
you suffered grief and anguish, loss and pain;

but yet you fought, and when at last we won
and took our place in freedom's glowing light
you did yourself become the nation's sun
and for her welfare laboured day and night:

Now you are gone, and we who stay behind
will cherish our sweet memories of you
and strive with every power of heart and mind
to make your dreams of glory come out true.

Tamas

The morbid distillation
that drugs the spirit,
quiets all our senses in the sleep of sloth,
low as the lumbering tortoise
dragging itself around the shallows of the world
in drear and meaningless languor;
the power that dims our faculties
and bids us sleep or sit around
with time a heavy burden round our necks
and life sheer boredom,
something to be borne because its there,
devoid of sense or meaning, hope or purpose,
an interminable journey towards a non-existent goal.

Rajas

The spirit, fierce and fervid,
sending shafts of lightning through our brains,
urging us on to passionate action;
the sword, red in smoke and war
dripping with liquid valour,
the cannon booming,
cries of lusty men and weeping women,
bold edifices
towering heavenwards built on sweat and tears;
the veins throbbing
pulsating with fear and anger, hope and joy,
moving us to delirious action,
high achievement, lofty failings,
the spirit quivering with undone deeds and
done remembrances,
and life a seething sea of constant change
wherein we ride the ever mounting wave
into the trough beyond.

Sattva

The calm dispassionate view
that looks on all creation
through lenses of equanimity,
the emotions finely balanced
lust transformed to beauty, hate to love,
anger to deep repose,
the poise whereby the world at last is held
in subtle equilibrium;
the senses calm,
not crushed and mutilated by repression
but fully rounded, free of edges, angularities;
the mind a luminous crystal
watching calm the varied show of life,
and life itself
an understanding, a fulfilment
aglow with inner wonder.

The Fourth

The state where words themselves fall back in awe
unable to describe its grandeur,
mind transformed
from seething mass to glowing thunderbolt
vibrant with power,
the broken arcs re-formed, the roof-beam split,
the thrill of laughter floating through the air,
the surge of power filling all of space,
and time a broken plaything left behind,
heaven a passing phase,
death a mere shadow to be seen no more
and life a living beam of radiant bliss.

Hymn To Shiva

I am your plaything.
You can breathe into me
the fire of eternal life,
and make me immortal;
or you can scatter my atoms
to the far corners of the universe
so that I disappear for ever.

You can fill me with light and power
so that I shine like a meteor
against the darkness of the midnight sky;
or you can extinguish my spirit
so that I sink for ever
into the deep and fathomless ocean of time.

You can set me among the eternal stars
resplendent with your divine fire;
or you can hurl me
into the abyss of darkness,
so that I can never again be visible
to mortal eyes.

You can come to me
with the glory of a thousand cupids;
or you can turn from me
and leave me stranded
in a grey and ghastly desert of despair.

You can smile at me
with the radiance that kindles the universe;
or you can open your eye of fury
and reduce me to a heap of ashes.

I am your plaything;
the choice is yours.

18-12-91

