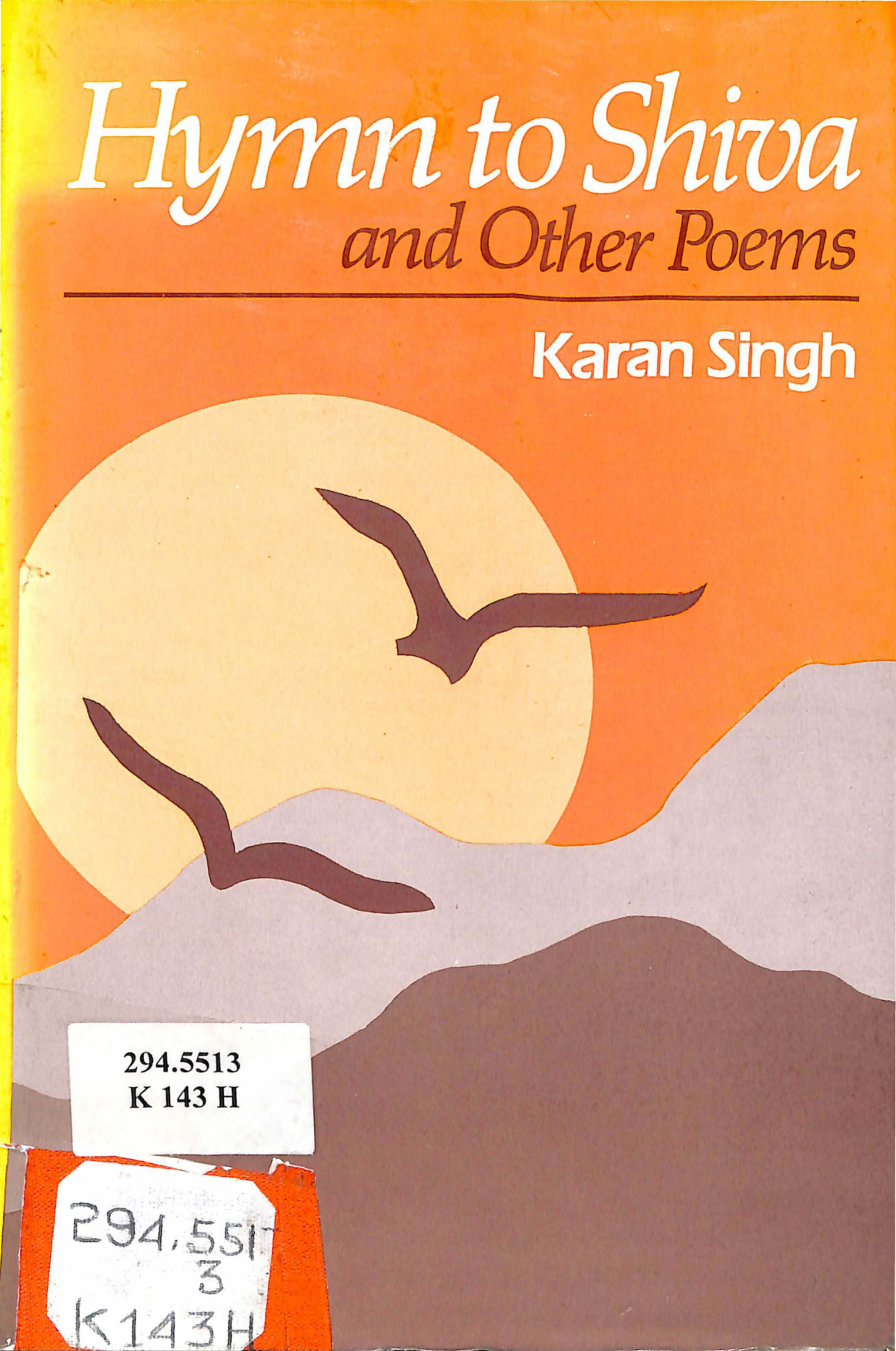


# *Hymn to Shiva* *and Other Poems*

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Karan Singh

The book cover features a stylized illustration. A large, pale yellow sun or moon is positioned in the upper left. Two dark brown birds are shown in flight, one above the other, against the orange background. Below them are stylized mountains in shades of grey and brown. The overall color palette is warm, dominated by orange and yellow tones.

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*Lilanga*

# *Hymn to Shiva* *and Other Poems*

**Karan Singh**



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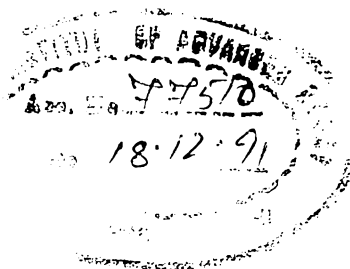
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# Foreword

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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# 1

## 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.

## 5

### 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.

# 7

## 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....



## 8

### 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

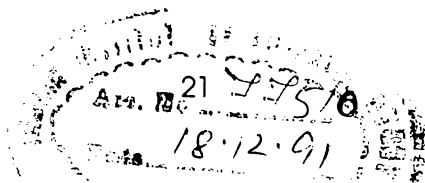
All beauty and all grace is here  
that ever shone on human face,  
enshrined in eyes that gently bear  
the subtle grandeur of the race,  
the sorrow and the joys of life,  
the friendships and the heartbreaks too,  
the bitter scars of living strife,  
O such a one, my friend, are you.

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.

10

## 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.

19

## 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.



20

## Tea

'Lets 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.

## 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.

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## 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?

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## 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.

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## Tamas

The morbid distillation  
that drugs the spirit,  
quietens 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.

