



A
Thousand-
Petalled
Gerland
" "
K. L.
Chowdhury

**A THOUSAND-PETALLED GARLAND
AND OTHER POEMS**

K L CHOWDHURY

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Dr. K L Chowdhury Profile

Born on 7th March, 1941 in Srinagar, Kashmir, India

Graduated in Medicine from Panjab University in 1962 and post-graduated from Delhi University in 1966.

Married Dr. Leela Chogtu in 1966

Joined Medical College, Srinagar as a faculty member and rose to be a Professor of Medicine.

Completed a Fellowship in Neurology at London and pioneered the teaching and research in Neurology, developing it as a subspecialty in the Medical College.

Was forced to leave Kashmir 1990 when the wild fires of terrorism engulfed the valley; made Jammu his second home.

Deeply moved by the health trauma of fellow refugees and the alarming rise in the incidence of various diseases he held numerous medical camps for them and started the charitable Shriya Bhat Mission Hospital and Research Center.

Has published papers on various medical topics in national and international journals, but is widely known for his pioneering work on the health trauma of the Kashmiri refugees and is credited with drawing the attention of the world to this tragedy. He coined new syndromes like 'Stress Diabetes' and the 'Psychological syndromes' in the exiled population, and highlighted the adverse effects of stress, environmental and lifestyle changes on a displaced population.

Writes regularly on various subjects - medical and scientific, social-cultural and political.

Published a volume of verse, "Of Gods, Men and Militants" in 2000. A highly acclaimed anthology, this book takes the reader into the vortex of militant violence in Kashmir, resulting in the forced exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley. It speaks about their travails in exile, their struggle for identity, their endeavors at self-discovery, their dreams and aspirations, their cry for roots and their ongoing debate with the gods whom they left behind and who they are now trying to re-create in exile.

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DEDICATION

PART ONE

To Leela,
the source and the inspiration

PART TWO

To the memory of my father, Pandit Jia Lal,
of Boyseb Chogtu, Mohanji, Krishnaji, Chuni Masi, Jigri, Nathseb
and numerous other victims of cancer
and to those who share their pain

PART THREE

To my fellow exiles
from
the valley of Kashmir

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Who may my reader be?

That my work may sell a million copies
or be a best seller
is not my desire,
nor that it be a prize collection
to adorn the drawing rooms everywhere,
nor that it be stacked
in the dark labyrinths of libraries,
eating the dust and moth of time there,
nor that it become a topic of dreary discussion
in restaurants and coffee houses
for the tired intellectual or the bored lover,
nor that it be gifted to people
who shuffle through its pages
and toss it away,
to be read hardly ever.

Even if it be a solitary reader
whose heart beats in unison with mine
as he travels from one page to another,
who takes it all in -
each word, each line, each stanza -
as I give it to him, my love's labor,
I covet that single reader.

PART ONE

ADORATION

Like a mountain stream
is my love,
eternal in its course.
it may swell or shrink
but neither swerves nor stops
unless dammed.
And then it backlogs,
only to brim over
in so many streams,
to keep its tryst

Dream

I saw her in a dream
that lingered for some time
in the twilight between waking and sleeping,
waiting for me to hold it in my palm.
I closed my fist on the dream
lest it slip away.
My fist will not open
till the night descends
and I dream her dream again

Often as children
we tied a knot in our handkerchief
to capture a star
and would not let it go
till we got our wish.
I have again trapped a star
and will hold it captive
till she materialises for me.

Spring is here

A pair of bulbuls on the *gulmohar**
huddled close together,
cooing in each other's ear;

a bunch of chirping sparrows
flitting from one tree to another,
looking for a nesting site somewhere;

a couple of rosebuds
raring to unfold and scatter,
their secret and precious treasure;

a grand dad away in a distant land
craving to hear the dulcet chatter,
divine music to his ear.

and a lover,
a song on the lips and heart aflutter
frisking to be near.

*gulmohar - an ubiquitous tropical tree of the Indian plains.

Retinal images

I open my eyes on her
first thing in the morn
to capture her for the day,
else distortions mar the images,
the doves hide in the groves,
the butterflies turn into smudges,
and the flowers shy away.

I close my eyes on her
when I retire at the end of the day
to capture her for the night,
else the phantoms of darkness
stalk my sleep,
and sweet dreams turn into nightmares.

I must open my eyes on my love
and keep her there all through the day,
I must shut my love in my eyes
and take her with me
all through the night.

Taking you in

Oft do I upbraid myself
for not having taken you in fully
when you had been with me.

Now when you are away
you materialise everywhere
all times of the day,
emerging like a mermaid
from the vast sea of memories,
breaking yourself into rainbow colours
from the tear drops of my reveries,
flowing like a gurgling brook
alongside life's journeys,
wafting fragrance into the garden
like the gentle spring breeze.

You move with me the whole day
like my own shadow,
and, after the day's toil ,
creep silently by my side
to rest your soothing palms
on my tired eyes.

Then you filter my repose
of terrors and nightmares
and lull me to sleep
with a lullaby
as you become the plectrum
that gently plays
on the strings of my soul,
and the music that flows
is your symphony.

No, I could not have taken you lightly
when you had been with me.

Sacred space

How can someone else bear the name
that sends my heart aflutter,
the name that can belong only to her?

That name conjures the image
that embellishes for ever
the matrix of my soul,
the image that none can ever replace.

Her name embodies her whole self,
her sights, smells, and sounds
her traits, tastes and tenderness,
her velleity, her vision.

A rose is a rose is a rose,
let no other flower be called a rose
nor no rose bear a name other than rose
no matter what the bard may say.

When uttered,
her name, like a mantra,
throws up a space,
her reverent space,
that allows no infringement
that bears no encroachment.

I carry that sacred space with me
wherever I be
for there she reigns,
my supreme deity.

Love tree

The heart is full of pining
watching the *gulmohar*
that can no longer hold its secret.
Burnished by the blazing sun
it pours itself out
in a riot of red blossoms

Love blushes into so many flames
offering an inspirational skyscape
across my bedroom window.

Battered by the hot wind
the red flowers fall -
so many martyrs -
scattering themselves
at the altar of love.
Even in death
they cover the shame
of the brown and black patches
on my arid lawn below.

The birds of love coo in delight
and play their amorous games
in the canopy of this tree.
They evoke, in this languid season,
the blissful memory
of many a secret rendezvous.

The yearning mounts
as the awareness grows
as to whence the flaming red blossoms
stole that cool and soothing touch,
the perfect foil to the ferocious sun
and the birds that melody,
the anodyne for the aching heart.

How long do I wait, my love
on the lonely road
of this long summer?

The magic of distance

No longer do I stomp home and enter,
with shoes on, in unthinking defiance,
despoiling sacred space.
I stop short at the portal,
take off my shoes and enter
with a devotee's barefooted reverence
even when you are not there watching me.

No longer do I rush to the computer,
when my work is done,
to take flight in cyberspace
because you are not there
waiting to be with me.
I prefer to shut myself with my muse
and take refuge
in your sublime presence within me.

No longer, in leisure time,
am I eager for the twin feat
of a brisk walk and a visit to the temple,
leaving you behind
because you can not keep pace with me.
I rather embark on an odyssey
cloistered with you
in the sanctum of my heart,
my supreme deity.

The more distant you may seem,
the stronger your presence ,
and the nearer to you I manage to be.
For distance does generate
an acute awareness of you,
and obedience too.

Quintessential love

When she shied away from me
she most wanted me to be
near,
and nearer than could be.

When she denied me a kiss
she would like it to be
much more than a mere formality.

When perchance I spied her
in the act of changing her dress
she seized the towel
to hide her shame
that I may unravel,
sooner than I would dare
or her eyes could see.

Now, when she is no longer with me
and I am left to myself
she knows it is the surest way
of having me to herself entirely.

Surrender

How is it, I ask myself,
that in your absence now
I find myself in a state of compliance,
doing exactly as you ordained
when you had been here.

Why would I match your bidding
with reckless defiance
in your presence
and gloat over my nonchalance,
while now, when you are away,
like a repentant devotee,
I try everything to propitiate thee,
even as I know
you desire none of my amends,
nor entreaty.

For don't you already know
that it was sham insolence
trying your patience,
that it was my childish impudence
in doing exactly the opposite
of what you wished me to?

My total surrender now
to your erstwhile bidding
may make no sense
except a small recompense
to my guilty conscience.

Metaphor of the soul

The fingers ache
to pierce cyberspace,
to send thoughts
that have been bouncing back,
to package the idiom of the soul,
to open the breast *Hanuman-like**,
that my heart I may lay bare,
for you to discover
your own self
woven into each strand and fibre.

*Hanuman - the monkey god in the Hindu pantheon
who had the images of lord Rama and his consort, Sita etched in his heart

Alter ego

When she serenades me
with *Maneka's** charm,
when the darts of *Kama***
strike my sleeping heart,
when my subliminal self
is transfixed by a seductive hold,
when she proxies to land
into my unconscious embrace,
when my nightly cantillations
are smothered with passionate grace,
when my meditation
is sullied by amorous advance,
when her trespass into dreams
burst my passion's dams,
I wake up with a sense of infidelity,
in a maelstrom of guilt,
but soon to realise
that it is not a dreamy aberration,
this transmutation
of the object of my supreme devotion,
but her alter ego,
and my alter love.

*Maneka - a celestial fairy

**Kama - the god of desire

Something in her

Unlike the gravitational pull
that dims with distance
she draws me closer
the further she moves from me.

There is something in her,
more than the natural laws can explain,
that guides all my actions,
my uncontrollable heartbeat,
the ebb and flow of emotions,
the content of my dreams,
my conscious thinking streams.

Like a surrogate
I live her life in me,
having mortgaged my whole being
at the altar of my love,
transposing my soul with her
like the genie of Arabian nights.

A decade of matrimony

What's it that makes marriage click
and grow from strength to strength
to arrive at the ten year milestone?

Not the peace
that one buys with selfless service
and the other demands with over-lordship,
nor the harmony
which prevails when one orders
and the other unquestioningly obeys,
nor the joy
which one gets giving all the time
and the other merely receiving,
nor the quietude
that descends where life is mechanical
and the voice of argument still;
but the deferential acknowledgement of each other
an acceptance - grooves ridges and all -
an adjustment, but not a compromise,
to fit the grooves and ridges into each other
like a hormone to its receptor.

Sacred trust - 1

When she left
I made it a point not to forget
feeding the derelict bitch
who craved our attention;
scattering grain to the birds
every morning without fail
and filling the pitcher of water
for them to wash and drink;
tending the garden
and watering the plants
and not let them wither away.

But instead of lunging at the plate
the bitch looks at me with liquid eyes,
wags her tail ever so lustily
and in a rush of devotion
opens her bosom for me to stroke.

And when I am about to wake up,
and before I scatter the grain,
the nightingale regales me with his song,
the bulbul twitters atop the tree,
the sparrow flits past me in joy,
and the mynah taps at my window
to bring her tidings to me.

And when I go into the garden
to tend the plants,
the jasmine bursts its bosom
to spray incense in my tracks,
the ivies unfurl their tendrils
to curl round me in sweet embrace,
my path turns saffron with the pollen shower,
and the roses lean gently toward me
whispering her secrets to me

I believed she had left them
as a sacred trust to me
but I discover that it is me
she has left as a trust
with the beast, the bird and the flower.

Sacred Trust - 2

It was the call of duty,
it was the call of love,
as she journeyed again
across the oceans
with pain still raw,
a strangled heart,
a bruised knee,
an unsure step,
to take charge
of our grandchild out there,
crying out for care.

For a change
it was not the infant god
carried across the *Yamuna** in spate
who opened the path in a miracle
when his tiny feet touched the water.
It was *Yasoda*** who crossed the seas
to accept the sacred trust,
to foster the divine kid.

And, no sooner she took charge,
miracles happened again,
as time was held on leash,
the long journey became a stroll,
the jet lag turned into a laugh,
the pain left at the infant's first touch,
the knee steadied once again
and the heart got unstrung.

Who is in whose trust,
I wonder,
between the infant
and his ailing grandmother.

*Yamuna - a north Indian River

**Yasoda - the foster mother of the Hindu god, Krishna,
who was delivered to her care soon after his birth to escape execution by his
maternal uncle.

A Thousand-Petalled Garland

A Thousand-petalled garland

When I wished to make you a garland
you would not let me pluck flowers -
fresh, fragrant, of diverse colours -
for you desired these to stay
where they belong on the trees,
dancing in the breeze,
luring the butterflies,
beckoning the honeybees.

Yet a garland I fain would offer
as an emblem of my devotion
but knew not of what essence,
of what substance,
that would be worthy of your form,
that you would accept with grace.

My quest led me back in time
when, as little children,
we would joyfully gather
the fall from the almond blossoms
and weave them into wreaths
as offerings to deities

I waited patiently
for spring's arrival.
I walked in the almond grooves
watching the buds grow fatter.
I held my breath in wonder
as the pink-white blossoms started to appear.
Then I prayed Zephyrus
to blow some petals over
and, before the early riser
trampled on them,
or the morning sun
caused them to wither,
I carried a slender needle
and a thread of the finest silk.
Picking them virgin from the ground,
petal by petal ,
I threaded them together,
in an entire morning of weaving
a thousand-petalled garland,
embellished with your thousand names,
each petal bearing my signature,
for you,
my beloved of a thousand attributes.

A moment frozen in time

The phone cut off
at the fag end of the call
that had lasted nearly an hour
and was almost over
except for the adieus and byes.

Yet the feeling remained
of an incompleteness,
a half taste,
a draft without a signature,
a task unfinished,
thirst unquenched,
hunger insatiate
when, by some accident,
the last morsel drops from the plate.

Each side tried to reconnect,
to speak those parting words,
those affectionate good byes
but the phones wouldn't click.

Even as the re-dial button
was pushed repeatedly without avail
the feeling crescendoed,
of a breath suspended in the middle,
the last line of a sonnet longing for rhyme,
a moment frozen in time

Victory

In the checkered course of our lives
that we traveled together
oft did we argue, and bitterly too,
yet, made up each time,
to emerge the friendlier.

Unique were the battles
we fought with each other,
with all the tools we could muster,
our positions to bolster,
yet neither came the loser
for we would never falter
in our love
nor our deference
for each other.

Now this round threatens to prolong
and run into a stalemate,
with not an inch to move along,
on your side, or mine,
for the tools have been thrown away,
while cold hostility
and a menacing indifference
hold the battle's sway.

Lest we get frozen
into back-to-back attitudes
of cold war and détente,
why not be face to face again,
to fight this war to the end,
to its logical outcome,
to yet another victory
for both of us?

No mean devotee

I admit having hurt you
and caused you wrong
in so many ways.
Pray do not mistake
this waywardness
for mean insolence.

You are no ordinary mortal,
I know,
but a gift of the gods,
born of your parental vows and fasts,
of so many acts of piety and penance ,
of numerous wish-knots
tied at *Kshir Bhavani**
and *Baba Rishi***,

And are we not united
by that divine force
they call destiny,
bound to each other
from life to life?

While I may have nothing
to show in my defense,
no words,
no great deeds,
no arguments,
yet if you accept any testimony
to my adoration,
here is a heart
that beats to your moods,
a mind
incandescent with your thoughts,
a conscience
inundated in your essence,
a spirit
that soars in your presence.

I grant, you are no ordinary deity,
but I too am no mean devotee.

**Kshir Bhavani* - incarnation of goddess Durga at Tullamula in Kashmir

***Baba Rishi* - a pious saint buried near Gulmarg, Kashmir

The examined life

How much of this world do we observe in depth,
how much escapes the mortal eye?
The oceans, the hills, the mountain vales,
the earth, the plants, the infinite sky?

How often do we pause and ponder
at the insect, the flower and the butterfly,
or fathom the meaning in the haunting notes
of the bird perched high?

How much do we care to know each other
beyond the moles, the warts, the colour of the eye,
the hopes and fears, the longings and desires,
the mind's sweep that we can't spy?

Between the two of us, my love,
there is so much to live by,
to learn, to unravel, to share,
so much, my love,
between you and I.

When she is not here

When she is not here,
my life,
what a dreary affair!

There is no change in the day's routine
yet every thing I undertake
bears a flaw,
the fault of the absence of that unseen mark
that she leaves in all I do.
There is an inner emptiness
and an outer vacuum,
and I hover between the two.

I am a downy feather
floating without purpose in sultry weather,
a marble in the river's bed
where water has ceased to flow,
a fish from the ocean deep
sighing helplessly in an aquarium,
a wingless bird in airless space
neither able to sing nor fly.

Then she materializes everywhere

Then she materialises everywhere -

In my sleep when I turn fitfully
she is there to reassure me,
her palm on my palm,
the touch of balm,
that gives my repose a fresh lease
sending me back into reveries.

At the break of dawn
her unstruck voice joins mine
in the invocation to the rising sun:
*'Om bhoor bhuvasa..'**
and I carry that sweet music ,
wherever I go
as the days mantra.

In my workplace,
she is there by my side,
moving unseen through the vicissitudes,
transforming the humdrum routine
into a pleasant fare.

In my leisure hour
I find her there,
walking by my side
as I go out for a stroll,
and talking to me
at the dinner table,
watching the TV
sitting on the settee with me,
and again there to put me to bed
reciting the day's events to me,
singing them in a lullaby.

Time and distance melt away
as she materialises everywhere
I seek her.

**'Om bhoor bhuvasa..'* - The sacred Gayetrei mantra invoked in Hindu prayers.

Seeking your cosmic wholeness

Often do I seek you in so many ways -
in colours and fragrances,
and in peoples and places;
frequenting your favourite haunts
for the foot prints you left behind;
soliciting the plant, the bush, the tree
for the mantras you breathed into them;
quizzing the birds that came to your window
for the secrets you shared with them;
listening to the *ragas** you so much loved
to fathom the music of your soul;
searching for features in your brothers and sisters,
the sharp nose, the audacious chin,
the serene smile, the sparkle in the eye;
rifling through your prized books
for the lines that strike a familiar chord;
watching the clouds in the sky
to catch the shapes you wove in them;
visiting the temples of your chosen deities
for the devotional streak so unique to you.

I gather a bit here, a bit there
yet it leads me nowhere near,
till I seek you in my inward eye
and there you materialise
in your cosmic wholeness.

**ragas* - musical compositions

Your voice

Whenever you call from that distance
it is like a wish fulfilled
to scale the lofty mountain peaks,
to run wild in the glades,
to sit hand-in-hand together,
under the cool *Chinar* shades.

Through that voice I see
the *Dal's* ripples in the morning breeze,
and feel the *Vitasta* flowing past me
under the bridge across the *Tawi*,
and hear the *Lidder* flowing down
singing her song of eternity.

Your voice comes through
the interminable maze
of the highways and byways of memory
till I hear my own first cry
when I was born to the valley.

The hairs grow grey and sparse with the years
the skin taints and wrinkles with time
the back bends and bows with age
the hearing impairs, the sight obscures,
but your voice always comes back to me
in its pristine purity
unchanged by time and distance
like the primal sound,
to bring me today
tomorrow's memory

Chinar - the state tree in Kashmir
Dal - the famous fresh water lake in Srinagar, Kashmir
Vitasta - a river cutting across the valley of Kashmir
Tawi, - a river in Jammu
Lidder - a mountain stream in Pahalgam, Kashmir

Aging together

How does it feel, my love,
moving together
into the golden autumn of our lives
and to the very end of the journey ?

Like yesterday
or like an eternity?

Like knowing so little of each other
or having imbibed so much
as not to be able to tell
one from the other?

Like admitting it could not have been better
or wanting to undo it all
to re-mould it to our hearts' desire?

Like groaning under the burden of regret
that we ever met
or thanking blessed providence
to have thrown us together?

Like wanting to give it a fitting finale
here in this life
or carrying on the vows
from here
to the hereafter?

.

Flower behind the boulder

Often do we recall how chance
threw us together,
two strangers
who seemed to know
so much of each other
in the very first hour.

It did seem, when we first met,
that we were made for each other
through a cycle of rebirths,
yet it was the days that followed,
month after month, year after year
that were to unravel
more and more of each other.

The human mind often mirrors
the essence of a person
in the very first encounter,
yet, having spent a lifetime together,
there springs a surprise now and then,
a new shade, a new color
like you suddenly discover
a nevus, a mole or a freckle
in your armpit or your shoulder.

It is these little unknown bits
of each other
that are the secret and spice of life,
like, having cherished your garden
day in and day out,
you suddenly discover a unique flower,
springing from a bush,
or hidden behind a boulder.

The essence of life together,
between you and I, my love,
is to ignore the sour and the bitter
and to look for that flower
which is always there,
hidden behind the boulder

Love is no monopoly

Sometimes when you seek me most ardently
and find me engrossed with others
oh how you despair!
You wonder
am I am sincere
do I care,
when, in fact, where ever I be,
you are always there.

Know you not that
it is only the abundance
of my love for you
that, like pearls, I so joyfully scatter
for others to gather?
That the more I give of it
the more it grows between you and me,
and the more I am able to share.

How then can you be
such a selfish deity?
How can you raise that invisible wall
that I bang my head against
every time I want to be near,
and dig that wide moat around you
that I can not wade across and enter
and build that impregnable fort
where you retreat - so cold, so remote -
a statue in a dark corner?

Was it not you that taught me
that love is free
of all shackles and fetters,
that it respects no boundary
and knows no terms and conditions,
that love is not a monopoly
and love for a solitary god
can only be an anomaly.

Know it then that
like the expanding universe
love grows from that point in you .
Verily,
it is only there that it will return.

A spring sunset

An invisible force splits the cloud
and a silvery sea of light
cascades down
in a gigantic arc.
Shining daggers
slicing gently through
splash rainbow colors in the east
to set the earth ablaze.

A million deft hands
darn a fiery pink braid,
in the hem of the dark princess.
Lightning trails weave
a golden mosaic in her robe,
shimmering into shades of delight..

A cool luminous point
diffuses into a red ball
tearing the dark veil over it
in a big bang of thunder
to force from your lips
the mantra,
'om bhoor bhuva sa..' *
as the universe is born again.

* *'om bhoor bhuva sa..'* the Gietrei mantra chanted with the sunrise and sunset

Eyes

Eyes,
language unto themselves
that no vocabulary can ever match,
no Shakespeare, Kalidasa or Homer
put down in prose or verse,
no artist draw or paint,
no sculptor elaborate in bronze or stone.

When eyes meet eyes,
words, phrases, philosophy and all
dissolve in a wink.

It is in the eyes where you find
the plaints of a tender heart,
it is they that reveal
the innermost thoughts of the mind,
and it is them that mirror
the sprouting of first love.

And it is eyes
that gently lower when modest and coy,
that smile at you in joy,
that kindle with the vision of heaven,
that shut in peace,
that turn inwards in bliss.

Yet it is eyes
that betray and beguile,
that enslave and ensnare,
that burn and tear,
that hurt,
that pierce,
that kill.

Look into eyes,
delve deep into their depths,
seek the quiet language of eyes.

PART TWO

TESTAMENT

Pain, like fire, consumes.
Like fire it purifies.
And like fire it sublimates.

Each one of us
has to go through
the fire test of pain -
our own
or of a near and dear one.

Pain

The phantom stalks all the time,
now lurking in the shadows,
now only in the mind,
now seizing hold -
inflicting itself on me
with unerring constancy.

With its invisible armory
it pierces and bores,
crushes and grinds,
saws and hammers,
cuts and tears,
burns and sears,
and delivers lightning bolts,
any place of its choosing,
now forewarning,
now catching me unawares.

There is neither fire nor smoke,
no visible wounds,
no lacerations, no tears,
no letting of blood,
no gore,
yet my ship staggers,
and sinks little by little
as it is struck
again and again,
now on the larboard,
now the starboard,
now from the stern to the stem,
now the mast and the helm.

I twist and turn,
roll and fold up,
and shift positions -
sit, squat and half-squat,
on my haunches,
on my buttocks,
and on my hands and feet -
for the elusive reprieve.

I try to stand and walk away
from the pain,
and from myself,
only to stagger,
as it gets the better of me

and hurls me down.
Crumpled,
I sink into another abyss of pain.

No feelings remain,
only the tantalizing pain
No thoughts remain,
only the mind-transfixing pain.
No ambitions remain,
only of fighting the pain -
remorseless pain
that draws each action and emotion,
each breath and heart beat,
each cry and wail,
into the black hole of pain -
to harass and to embarrass,
to brutalize and to demoralize,
to humble and to humiliate,
to defile and to denigrate.

I fight my pain
with pills, suppositories and syrups,
capsules, patches and injections.
But, the pain,
in its timelessness,
returns with a vengeance,
to bite me again and again.

And the pain has the last laugh,
as it itself proves
the only anodyne,
to usher in that twilight state
where pain becomes
the cause and the effect,
and the *raison d'être*,
of living and dying.

Battle ground

My body is the *Kurukhestra**.
They are fighting a righteous war -
the warriors on my side,
my doctors, my family, my friends –
arrayed bravely against the enemy
sounding their bugles,
their weapons drawn out.

My surgeons, with their deft strokes,
carve my tissues away
where the fiend has burrowed his way.
The radiotherapists, armed as they are
with lethal rays of all denominations,
under a scorched earth strategy,
bombard his tracks to burn him out.
And the oncologists,
ever ready for the chemical warfare,
infuse into my vessels
alkaloids, antibiotics and vaccines,
to snuff him out from holes and bunkers
where the fugitive may hide and survive
and conspire to strike again.

They prompt me to fight back,
to shore up my defenses,
to marshal my immunity,
to invoke the humors and hormones,
the messengers and mediators.

They initiate me into yoga,
and urge conscious imagination,
fervent prayer and meditation,
to propitiate the gods,
to help me fight the *asura*
who seeks new abodes in my body
in his manifold incarnations.

And when I tire and despair
that great *Charioteer*
reminds me of my *Karma*,
exhorting me
to uphold my *Dharma*,
to fight this righteous war,

and, either to win
and savor the ecstasy of victory,
or to fall a martyr
and enter heaven for ever.

**Kurukhestra* - the battle-field of the epic war Mahabhart

**Asura* - demon

Charioteer – lord Krishna

**Karma* – destined action

**Dharma* – righteous duty

Make-believe

My distraught family and friends
humour me into believing
that I am improving every day.
I humour them back
that I disbelieve not
what they want me to believe,
even as I suffer more and more,
even as I fade day by day.

In this make-believe
I start believing
what they want me to believe,
against their own belief.

But it is not long
before the next round of pain
that takes an effort to conceal,
that makes me
bite my hands and lips,
that makes me
wince, wail and squeal..

Then I plead with them,
and with myself,
to stop the make-believe!

At Peace

Can I have a day off therapies,
of infusions and injections,
of blood-letting and tests,
of x-rays and scans,
of numerous queries
from doctors, friends and busybodies?

Can the mind be free
even while the body suffers?

Can I have some time alone,
face to face with my fell disease,
to sort things out between us,
to be at peace with each other?

Can I dream of a dreamless sleep,
of a peep at the dawn,
of hearing the cock's crow,
and the twitter of the birds
before I sing the farewell song?

I have not looked at a rainbow for long.

Reconcilement

We are all getting used
to my slowly fading away
as we all know -
me and my family -
that it is a malignancy
that vice-like holds me.

While we wait impatiently
for the dénouement
they suffer my pain quietly
and gratefully
I suffer their indulgence.

My children from different climes
will soon depart
to get on with their lives,
reconciled that all that could be done
has been done.

I too am reconciled
that they are reconciled
but I know not
how to take into confidence
my garden that misses my walk,
my books that I am too feeble to read,
my dairy that I have not entered for long,
my home which I will quit soon
to make place for whom?

How do I reconcile them all
to depart in peace?

Paying the debt

My son abroad
wants to be with me
in my final hours,
to ferry me across
the last lap of my journey.

But there is a job crunch in America
since the 9/11 tragedy
and he can avail a limited break,
two weeks or at the most three.

He will be sought here
to perform that last ceremony
and put to flame my funeral pyre,
a cross that a Hindu son has to bear.

He could be here now
to watch over my dying
but I may hang on much longer
than he can afford ,
and beyond the time
of his return journey.

He would rather wait
till I am ripe and ready
but who can tell him
with any degree of certainty
as to when that will be.

He has sounded his boss
that he may have to fly
at a short notice,
but fifteen days
is what he has got,
at the most twenty.

He speaks to me on the phone, regularly,
to figure out for himself.
'Papa, when you need me I am ready.
Say yes and I will be there.'
But I change my tone,
from pain to bonhomie,
and leave him guessing.
I will not let his job in jeopardy
however much, in my death throes,
I would wish him to be with me.

I fear his presence by my side
may give me a fresh lease
and prolong his agony.
Isn't it me
who pushed him to that country?

Oh how I think of him when awake,
how I dream of him in sleep,
how I call his name
when, in delirium, I rant and rave!
Yet, I have the comfort of the thought
that he will make it
and lend his shoulder to my mortal remains,
or gather my ashes while they are yet warm,
or take them in an earthen pot,
for their final immersion in the river,
to flag me off to my final voyage.

That is how he will discharge his debt,
while I am discharging mine now
by dodging his journey to this place
when I need him most.

Dying for deliverance

How I am dying to meet you,
faithless lover,
how you spurn me
and make me cry!

How you force yourself upon others,
unwilling and unguarded partners -
embryos in wombs with the first spark of life,
innocent infants and dreamy youth,
the middle-aged in the midst of their earthly duties,
and the old craving to live a little longer -
when there is me,
dying to embrace thee?

My ears are cocked
to hear your footsteps,
the eyes unblinking
seeking your visage,
the breath held in anticipation
and the heart aching
with the tedium of waiting.
Every time I sense you near
you give me the slip
and pass me bye.

How long can you escape me
when all life has to end in thee
as all the rivers end in the sea?

Why tarry then
and give me the throes,
why serenade me
and play hide and seek,
why stalk a willing prey
only to spare the effort
to gobble it up ?

Verily, one day,
your game will be up
and like a beggar,
you will return
knocking at my door.

Alas! I may not be in a state then
to receive you
as royally as I do now!.

Give me a kiss happily then,
take me in your arms
ere it is late,
and while there still is this urgency,
this dying wish to meet with you.

Sacrosanct

Not being able to bear
the full burden of your joy
whenever it came your way,
you would never demur
to pass it on to me.

But now,
when you are dizzy
with the pangs of agony
you guard it,
oh, how zealously!

Can I forgive myself
for ignorance about your pain?
Can I forgive you, my dear,
for refusing to share it with me?

Oh how you wear the mask
of those beguiling smiles,
how you scatter the pearls
of your affected laughter,
how you put on that peaceful visage
while your anguish grows
within you!

And with each passing day
how stingy you become,
how selfish,
and how possessive of your pain,
that you refuse to part with
even a thought of it,
while it consumes you so,
to make you sublime!

That you hold on to your pride
to bear it alone with such equanimity
may be your victory.
That you ever believe
that what has steeled you
would break me so easily
as to compound your pain,
alas, is my tragedy!

(For my brother, Robin)

Gratitude

Pray do not torment your mind
with the burden of gratitude
for the time I spend with you
or the little service
that is in my share to render

It is me who am indebted
for the trust and confidence
you repose in me,
as you painfully plod
to the fiery end
of your journey.

Not easily does one get a chance
to be near,
or to extend a helping hand,
to a Titan
facing the hour of his reckoning
with such courage and fortitude.

To share a bit of your pain,
to live some of your suffering,
to feel a whiff of your agony,
to get singed while you smolder.
to wince while you groan,
to brave the shadow of *Mahakala**
while he waits on you
is the fire test for me
and my expiation.

No, my dear,
it is me,
beholden for your indulgence,
not you,
whose suffering humbles and purifies.
and makes my life sublime.

* *Mahakala* - the lord of Time/Death

Denouement

And then there was nothing,
no pain,
no feelings,
no pangs of conscience,
no fears,
no desires,
no thoughts whatsoever.

The seven Chakras* froze
the Kundalini* sapped
the Shasradalkamal* faded away
and all consciousness snapped
as the clock stopped
and Mahakala* took over.

The contortions of the face leveled,
the taut muscles relaxed,
the limbs fell limp by the side,
the twisted torso straightened out,
the bellows collapsed
the pump stopped
the eyes glazed,
the warmth evaporated
and all colour faded

A pale handsome visage remained,
washed of all tarnishes and taints,
in cold and stony repose,
ever grateful for the deliverance
and ready for the pyre,
for the final test of fire.

The soul soared away
waiting to don a new garb
to begin life all over again.

*Chakra - plexus or a confluence of nerves/ energy

*Kundalini – the hidden serpent power coiled in the spinal column that ascends through the Chakras to Shasradalkamal

*Shasradalkamal – literally the lotus of one thousand petals, the place in the crown of head., to where the ascent of Kundalini leads to Turiya or the super-conscious state

*Mahakala – the lord of Time

To eternity

My son,
he did come.
He would not let anyone down,
not me,
not himself.
He took the first flight
when he received the phone call
he was waiting for.
It had to be got over with,
this last duty
of a dutiful son.

When we depart from our loving ones
do we know whether we meet again,
when, where and in what state?

What a unique reunion this,
we both eagerly looked forward to,
on the cremation ground!

Oh how poignantly
he gathered me in his hands!
What a solemn feeling for him,
how blissful for me!
Carefully he secured me in the earthen urn,
like a treasure,
and with what resignation he surrendered me
to the swirling bosom
of the holy confluence
of the Ganges, the Jamuna
and the invisible Swarasati!

My soul will wander no more
for my first-born son
has blazed a path for me,
to eternity?

PART THREE

EXILE

If I die in exile
think this of me
that there is a corner
out there in Kashmir
that was for ever my abode
where my soul will come to rest.

Keys

Even after a decade in exile
I hang, from my girdle, this bunch of keys,
keys that I carried with me
when I was forced to flee,
keys to my home,
keys to my relics, my diary, my library,
keys that opened the sanctum
where my gods reside,
all the keys
except the keys to my new destination.

I keep wandering in exile,
carrying these keys
like an albatross.

I know the locks to these keys
have been forced open or broken,
and all they guarded taken away,
my little possessions squandered,
my secrets laid bare,
the books consigned to flames
or sold worth their weight as trash,
the prayer room desecrated,
the gods defiled.

These keys that I carry with me
are rusted with disuse
but I do not throw them away .
I rub them softly, gently,
like Aladdin's lamp,
and all my treasures materialize.
They help me unlock
the memories of yesteryears.

The new millenium

The neighbor's truck honked me out of sleep
and the millenium dawn broke today
like any other dawn.

The sky, the earth and the hills
stood in their places as before
and the morning daily
brought the news ever so faithfully
of so many terrorist strikes,
scams, kickbacks and violent deaths.
Yet the phone kept ringing,
each time a spirited greeting,
while I forgot to scatter the grain
till the birds came pecking
at my window pane.

Pray what is this furore all about,
this bonhomie,
the media hype,
the noise and frenzy
and last night's revelry
when my faucet is waterless as before,
the power shut off for the day
and the thought so scary
of the bumpy commute to my work,
in the bus overflowing with jostling humanity
along roads, pot-holed and dirty.

And why this fear that grips everyone
the panic about the millenium bug
going to turn the world topsy-turvy,
and some computer glitch
about to stop the march of humanity?
Does it matter to me,
the millenium that faded away
or the millennium that begins today
when it is all a part of eternity,
of Time without a beginning or end,
Time that we partition artificially
into a year, a decade, a century ?

Are there candles in the house
to light up the millennium night ?
Is there enough kerosene in the stove
to cook the millennium meal ?
Is a trailer somewhere handy
to tow water to my house
that I buy weekly

for five hundred and fifty?
Do I have for my ears
cotton wool to shut off the noise,
and a mask to wear on my face
to ward off the dust and fumes?

In that case I am okay
and need not fear Y2K.
I am immune to the bug,
compliant and ready
to face the new century.

Old man and the tree

I did not cry when he was gone
for, they say,
we should bid a happy farewell to those
that lived a full life.

Yet when his body was laid on the pyre
tears streamed down my eyes
for he was my grandfather,
and more,
there was this long kinship with him,
an abiding friendship,
that had suddenly snapped.

One day I asked him
about the tree in our backyard
that was gaunt and bent with age.
“Why don’t we cut it down, grandpa,
lest it fall down in a gust of wind
or break with the force of a lightning?”.
“Wait my child”, he replied,
“for the tree gets old with me.
Together have we journeyed thus far,
together we go to the very end.
When an old man dies in these climes
his tree makes his pyre
and hand in hand they travel
to the life hereafter.”

Alas! my grandpa died in exile
but, the tree back home?
Nobody knows who felled it down,
nobody knows whose pyre it made.

(For Adarsh Ajit. This is a modification of his poem)

The curse

They say accursed is the valley
and weeping tears of blood
since we were forced to flee
and thrown into the wilderness of exile

It hardly rains or snows there
and when it does
it rains red
it snows black.

That mighty river of life,
the Vitasta,
now a foul gutter,
her bosom laid bare
and unable to hide the secrets
of broken bones and crooked skeletons
of her once daughters and sons.

The roaring mountain streams
are a gurgle,
the glaciers
but specks of dirty white,
the proud Aharabal fall
a trickle.

The lake Dal,
that jewel of the city of Srinagar,
shrinks into a stinking pond,
overtaken by the red weed
that feed on innocent blood.
The proud lotus
gripped by its tentacles
hangs its head in shame.

The bush, the vine and the tree
all wither away slowly.
Black is the walnut shell,
hollow its kernel,
Scab-stained the apple
and the almond bitter.

The spring of Kheerbhavani
changes colour -
bright red to pitch black -
one presaging blood-shed
the other dark death.

The bulbul has lost his golden voice,
the *koel* hides in fear,
the parrot has flown far away,
the *bombur* is lost somewhere
looking for his *yamberzal*.

The sad October moon,
rising gingerly behind the *Mahadev* ,
shines as before
on the cold desolation of *Pampore*,
waiting the whole night long
for her tryst with the saffron.

The call of the muezzin
drowns in the din
of the grenade and the gun,
religion sells a penny,
curse sounds the sermon.

They also say
that they hear strange moans
from the deserted Pandit* homes
and the frightened neighbourhood dogs
bark the whole night long
at the eerie shadows
that flit across
the open windows and doors.

Koel - dove

Bombur- the bumblebee

Yamberzal - narcissus

Mahadev – Mt. Mahadev

Pampore – a small town 15 km from Srinagar

Pandit – Kashmiri Pandit , the minority Hindu of Kashmir, presently in exile

Summer in exile

The heat pervades and penetrates,
plentiful humidity that saturates,
the leaden air that suffocates
the canopy of cloud
that covers like a shroud,
power breakdowns and water scarcity
that make life one long misery,
dust storms that blow every thing away,
also memory.

The limbs refuse to carry,
blank goes the mind,
limp and prostrate the body,
the lungs tired,
the heart tardy.
All desires take leave,
except the wish to hibernate,
to be silence's votary,
to assume the crocodile posture,
and to enter that death-like state,
the *Shavasana* of the yogi.

Summer, like exile -
a leveler of humanity,
a fellow feeling
of suffering and agony,
a wringing of the sins
like the sweat that pours out
from every pore of the body.

Summer in exile -
a sublimation,
a penance,
a transcendence.

Even Siva got a bath

For a change
the weekly trickle through the taps
instead of the customary spluttering and gurgling
progressed to a steady streaming
and we watched, unbelieving,
as we filled the empty buckets
while the flow continued
beyond the allotted forty-five minutes.

We opened the stopcocks to the tanks under ground
as word went quickly around
about this largesse, this welcome shower
after the weekly spell of drought.

The tanks underground filled steadily
and we switched on the pumps
to lift the life fluid to the tanks overhead
as we kept running up and down
between the roof and the ground
watching the levels go up and up,
rising incredibly to the very brim!

As the windfall continued
it was the turn of pots and pans
and of clothes in waiting
that needed a washing,
of sprinkling and rubbing and mopping the floor,
of toilet flushes to buzz and to roar,
of watering the lawns, the flower beds,
of washing the car, the path, the pets.

And then Siva too had a bath
and the *Ganga** that had dried up in his locks
came to life again.
Lamps were lit, incense burnt
and the lord was anointed
with vermilion and sandalwood paste
to the singing of chants
that hit the heavens.

It was a slaking experience,
that seven hour bonanza,
as the mystified beneficiaries kept guessing
about this unique occurrence,
this benefaction, this boon.

It was a quirk of fate, some thought,
that the turnkey man quite forgot
to turn off the valve in the supply line,
while others believed his palm was greased
so the wrench kept slipping from his hands,
and yet others, that he dozed off
after a mighty booze,
while Siva who so much fancied that bath ,
watching contentedly from his corner,
chuckled at what was and what was not.

**Ganga* - Ganges, a north Indian River, taking birth in the
Himalayas and held by Lord Siva in His locks before it was released lest it flood the
country.

Old Professor Shambu

Nothing seems to deter you
old professor Shambu,
neither your handicap
that hardly allows you leg space
and puts snails in your pace,
nor the heavy rimmed glasses,
nor the burden of the hearing aid;
neither the dangling cord of the sundered phone line,
nor the intercepted mail;
neither the verbal tirade and innuendo,
nor a box on the ear then and now ;
neither the canine existence
with morsels kicked towards your kennel,
nor the hunger insatiate,
nor the little needs ever denied,
nor the frightening solitude
and the craving for some company,
a bit of old bonhomie,
a jug of wine, a glass of whiskey,
or an idle pleasantry
with a neighboring beauty.

Nothing seems to distress you,
or dampen you spirits
old Professor Shambu,
for you seek the august company
of immortals, sages and seers
who dwell in your treasury
and though decrepit and old in body
you possess a youthful heart, a spirit lively
and a spring-well of mental energy
that leads you on to creativity.

With your sagacity
of having conquered pain with penance
you make light of the punishment
heaped on an unfortunate father
who chooses his son's abode
as his lair
and the final resting place.

When your beloved son
finally chooses to tie you up
and put you into a sac,
ready to drown,

pray narrate him another father's story
who, while being carried by his son
to drown on the river's east bank,
pleads and prods him on to the west.
"Why the west bank?" asks the son.
"That is where, my dear son,
I put my father to final rest,
on that bank yonder,
in the west".

Entombing history

Martand, Awantipura, Parihaspura-
O, ancient monuments
to the glory of the sun-god,
Kashmir's legacy
of a civilizational acme -
you withstood time's ravages,
the sword of the savages,
and the fanatic zeal of iconoclasts
who tried to break your spirit
but could just bruise your body.

Yet, when our country is free
of foreign yoke and invasion,
and wedded to a secular polity,
she fails to stop your ignominy
of being carried away,
piece by piece,
limb by limb,
in the darkness of the night
by her own progeny,
the ravenously greedy,
thieves of history.

Stealing their own past,
dismantling their own heritage,
they lay the foundations
of their temporal residences
of brick and concrete
with your stolen parts
and entomb them in ugly tin roofs.
Their dwellings stand like crosses
on these tombs of history.

The Bamiyan Buddhas
in neighbouring Afghanistan
escaped with a fairer deal
in being crushed into rubble instantly
with cannons spewing gunpowder.
They attained nirvana
and disappeared for ever from history,
and, unlike you,
not be desecrated
and profaned perpetually.

Dear departed ancestor

Dear departed ancestor
you will have to bear with me,
today, on your anniversary,
as I offer you water
that has been stored for days together
and not fresh either from the tap,
the spring or the river.
For while the taps run dry
here in exile,
*Vitasta** is only a memory
and, I hear,
the springs there in the valley have dried up,
and the lakes irrevocably overtaken by weeds.

Dear ancestor
I offer this oblation of water
on my bare palm
without the *sacred thread***
hooked around my shoulder
that is such a nuisance to wear
in this hot and humid weather,
stinging and sticking to my neck
like a slave's rope and a hangman's noose.
I have put it away in a cupboard somewhere.

Dear loving ancestor
as I offer water
the recitation that goes with it
has faded from my memory
nor is there the priest to help me
for their class fades even quicker
than the rest of the exiled community
as we lose, slowly but certainly,
the very foundations of our heritage
and the symbols of our identity.

Dear revered ancestor,
I fear, you will have to share,
some of the constraints of time and space,
here in my exile with me

for while I have myself been pushed into a corner
your framed photographs and heirlooms
that kept you alive in the drawing rooms
will have to be tucked away
for now.
Soon you will rest only in memory,
and only as long as it does not fail me.

Dear ancestor
how rapidly you are being pushed
into a distant pedigree!
A generation has departed
in its prime in exile
and the new generation that grows
mingles and loses its identity
in cross matrimony.
Slowly your genes get diluted
to fade into obscurity.

Dear ancestor,
exile throws us into a crisis of existence,
as it blurs your identity
and threatens mine.
Alas! You stand to lose your status,
as the dear ancestor,
in the none-too-distant future!

*Vitasta - a River cutting through the valley of Kashmir

**Sacred thread - a ceremonial thread worn by Hindu Brahmins

Anonymity

With your vows,
your meditation,
your steadfast devotion,
you have pleased me, my devotee.
It is time to ask your boon.

Your piety earns you admiration,
transforming you into a celebrity,
an icon threatening to be a god,
to compete with me.

There is always an obligation to a devotee
who has passed the fire test of fidelity.
Pray ask your boon, and let me be free

“I desire no boon, no benediction, my lord.
except to be in your favor,
in your eternal service
to carry out your wish”.

I grant your wish,
my favored devotee
and demand no more
of your penance and piety,
no sacrifice whatsoever,
except to disappear
into anonymity.

Creator

I created thee, my creator,
that thou re-create me
in thine own image -
the image that I shaped thou in -
materializing thee
from the non-being into being,
giving form to the formless,
shaping thou into gods and deities
with attributes divine,
effecting thine resurrections
revealing thy reincarnations,
making thee the cause and the effect,
the source,
the sum and the substance,
the be all and end all of existence..

And what didst thou create in return,
my lord,
except a human to the core,
far from thy own image,
the image that I gave thee?
All thou could shape
is an aberration,
an amalgam of opposites –
of good and evil,
of the base and the refined,
of sin and piety,
of turbulence and peace,
of hatred and love
of sorrow and joy.

Who is the better creator
between me and thee,
pray tell me my lord?

Release

Everyday,
every waking and sleeping moment
we seek release.

We seek release
all the way from our conception
through the sojourn in our mother's womb
to this world,
and from here
to the hereafter.

We seek release
from the busy tiring day
to night's repose
and back to wakefulness,
from the bondage of responsibility
that life forces upon us.

We seek release
from prying neighbors
and their perverse curiosities,
from our indulgent friends
and their small envies,
from our relatives
and their hypocrisies,
from our bullying bosses
and their egotistical mentalities-
from our cringing subordinates
and their sychophancies,
from our rivals and foes
and their atrocities.

We seek release
from the sloth of bureaucracies,
from the tyranny of autocracies,
from defiled democracies,
from terrorizing theocracies.

We seek release
from ourselves,
from life's drab banalities,
from our pricked consciences,
and unresolved conflicts.

We are born to seek release
from the non-being before birth
to the pain of being
and we die to seek release
to the uncertainties
of the mysterious void beyond .

Who is my enemy?

Who is my enemy?

Is he the one
who holds different views and beliefs,
who dresses and eats differently,
whose rituals differ from mine,
who belongs to a separate faith,
who prays a different god ?

Or the one
with whom there is known rivalry,
an open hostility,
the battle lines clearly drawn,
each charting out strategy
for a new confrontation,
a new argument,
a new weapon.

Or the one
from within my ranks,
from amongst my own tribe,
of my own faith,
a votary of the same god,
wearing a friendly mask,
on whom I shower my love,
to whom I give my sweat and blood,
who yet covets my position and my gold,
who never confronts me openly
but watching me fail or falter
waits for the first opportunity
to hurt and humiliate me,
to feed his ego on my hurt pride,
to stab me in the back,
and kill me with a thousand cuts ?

Or my uncle *Kansa**,
who, having imprisoned my parents
and killed my seven sisters,
now schemes to destroy me?

Or Judas,
my friend and companion,
eating from my plate,
ready to betray me,
to see me crucified?

Or *Harunakashypa*** , my father,
ever inventing new ways and means
to put me to eternal sleep?

Or me,
my other self of base desires,
ever battling inside me
with my vision of eternity?

**Kansa* - the tyrant uncle of Lord Krishna

***Harunakashypa* - Prince Prahlada's father who wanted his son killed
for worshipping Lord Vishnu and not acknowledging his own father as god

Stranger

I have been seeking you,
stranger,
in parks, malls and restaurants,
in trains, oceans and air.

There is much buried inside me,
welling up to deliver,
waiting for your virgin ear,
and much I would like to hear.

There are people close,
and so very dear -
parent and offspring,
friend and partner
and the kindly neighbor -
with whom I could share.
But, for the sake of kinship,
nurtured with such patient care
I do not dare,
for so much depends
on every word we speak and hear,
each intonation of the voice,
each action,
and the expressions we wear.
And so much is at stake,
so much of give and take,
an arithmetic so delicate,
that there is this lurking fear,
of judging and being judged
of hurting and getting hurt.

So we shuttle our words,
inflect our voice,
sham our actions,
and force expressions,
or wear a mask
and go into a shell.

Have not the most sacred vows
ended in a bitter divorce,
bosom friends
turned into sworn enemies,
and loving brothers
into strangers,
for reasons so trivial -
a rash remark,
an unwary gesture?

Between you and me,
dear stranger,
there is this unique factor
of not knowing each other,
of standing on an equal footing
with no prejudice or bias,
no binding commitments,
no expectations,
nothing to hide
and nothing to fear,
no contract whatsoever.

And free to exchange our thoughts
without fear or favor,
to share our little urges
without the dread of ridicule,
to relate our dreams and premonitions
with no fear of misinterpretations.

Stranger,
let us turn our hearts over,
let us share this treasure
buried inside here,
let us seek deliverance in each other,
and then part our ways
to move on,
to look for another stranger.

Golden silence

When words fail the sentiments
and succeed in whipping up arguments,
when words become double entendres
giving rise to faulty notions,
when words ruffle relationships
to cause fractured friendships,
when words reinforce mindsets
to forge widening chasms,
when words hurt and humiliate
and demean, debase and denigrate;
silence, golden silence,
you step in to the rescue,
as *Shiva-like** you swallow
the poison of words,
to absorb the insults and outbursts
to sooth the nerves, and still the tempers,
to change attitudes, and inspire deference,
to heal the wounds
and thaw the frozen relationships,
to recreate the vocabulary
of words that endear.

**Shiva-like* - To save mankind from doom, Lord Shiva swallowed the poison that was churned from the mythical ocean.

----- End -----

