

## INTRODUCTION

*The Bride of the Sky*, a poetic play written in 1924, has remained unpublished to this day. It is a remarkable piece of literature of its kind, that is, idealistic-romantic. A nymph of the sky falling in love with a man of the earth affords a theme which has captivated the minds of men in all ages and climes. Venus and Adonis, in the West, and Urvashi and Pururvasa, in India, have given to world literature poetry and drama of the noblest stature.

In this poetic play the characters have not been given any names (except the nymph in the second half), on which technical point Puran Singh may be said to have anticipated a modernist tendency. But, as he claims, the characters have persistent individualities which serve for names equally well.

The story is simple but has vast dimensions, like a geometric or cubist drawing. A nymph is flying about in the earthly air when a young man sees her. He instantly falls in love with her. The nymph responds to his love, comes down to the earth and stays with him for a day and a moonlit night, and then flies back to heaven.

The young man goes mad from the ecstatic pain of love. But his madness is heightened by a mystic silence which makes the people around hail him as a saint.

Then again one day the nymph 'steals away from the side of heaven' and 'appears in the crowd wearing the earthly guise of woman. . . . The young ascetic ran into her arms. . . overwhelmed her with his kisses. . . caught her and concealed her away from all eyes.' He elopes with her to the Himalayan snows.

In the next scene the *Yaksha*, the nymph's heavenly spouse, thinking that 'she must have gone back to earth to love that black little man again' bids 'a cluster of damsels' of heaven 'to go and search for her in the moon-light on earth and down the deep lakes below the snows.'

The damsels of heaven descend to the earth 'one moonlit night.' Roaming 'on the Himalayan snows' and searching it's crystal lakes, 'they come to the lovers' hut.

The nymph knows of it and warns her lover not to go out for 'they are casting nets in the light for me, . . . fishing for me there on those white lakes' and 'would bear me away from you.'

But the young lover foolishly prevails upon her to come out in the moonlight, arrayed in 'silver gauzes and white jewellery.' She had not taken many steps outside the hut when she fell in his arms a-scream! As far as the young ascetic could see she was killed by the moonbeams.

Here there is an ambiguity. In the synopsis given in the beginning of the play, Puran Singh simply says, 'At last the saint elopes with a woman' and 'retires with his lady-love to the Himalayan solitude.'

'The people said', Puran Singh continues, 'the saint has fallen. He has eloped with a woman, his miracle is gone.' And the place where temples rose was again a wilderness.

Anyway, struck with the love of a woman, heavenly or of this earth, an ascetic dare not live among the common people, in a common habitation. He must perforce retire to a lonely

place—the perpetually sought heaven of lovers, as celebrated in a couplet of Omar Khayyam, too.

And now it is the turn of heaven to take its revenge. The moon-sickness which had made the man a popular saint in the first instance, only kills the woman who chooses a life of solitude with him, away both from this world and from heaven.

The *Upaschara* had been lifted from earth, snatched, as it were, from the embrace of the young man by the damsels of heaven. This we learn in the fourth scene. When taken to heaven, she is senseless, and the *Yaksha*, her heavenly lover, and the heavenly damsels with difficulty revive her.

Here Puran Singh rises to the level of his own romantic philosophy. The *Upaschara* whose name is now given as Alanika, in answer to the rebukes of the *Yaksha* that she is carrying too much of the earth with her, in her love of a man of the earth, enunciates this philosophy in words such as: ‘but is not love and freedom one?’

‘. . . Heaven is freedom. It is love and there is no restraint on love here. You are dreaming of earth as earth sometimes dreams of heaven. Love is beyond all sense of possession, beyond all needs of sense. It is self realisation of God in Beauty.’

The *Yaksha* helplessly pleads: ‘Alanika, misunderstand me not. I do not limit love’s freedom when I ask you if you love me as you did before. If so, why go away to earth so like a thief? If there is love, you can trust me with your life just as you trust yourself.’

The *Upaschara* replies to this insinuation in crushing words like:

I smell a lot of earth in what you say.  
You know how I love that man who suffers for me;  
And if I loved you, I love you more now by loving him;  
Heaven is in his sufferings, too,  
And not all in pleasures you describe so glowingly.

The *Yaksha*’s surrender comes at the end of the scene in these words: ‘Such is the fate of all those, who like me waver on the path and toil not to earn joy, love, grace, but only wait until His Mercy fills them and their passion all of a sudden grows infinite, shoreless, rich, embracing a whole universe in a simple You, a woman, a child, a tree, a river, a stone.’ Left alone once again, the saint-lover overhears, as in a dream, the voices of the nymph, her *Yaksha* spouse, and the damsels of snow, summer and spring, expostulating with the nymph for loving a man of the earth.

In this state of mind the saint-lover seeks to make it a thing of heaven with a universal impact. ‘We love a myriad when we love one, and we have to love millions as if we really loved one.’ ‘That is the philosophy of the east which sublimates love of a person to love of mankind or of God.

He cannot believe that when he ran away with her, he had sinned. ‘Could that be sin which gives such lasting pangs of pleasure?’ He argues further, ‘If one soul grows strong as two with one sin. And the two flames burn, blending in one still more glorious! Are these sins then? Or new kindlings of faith, new life centres in the void vasts?’

And the sum of this philosophising is this: 'In one little body there come a myriad preceding and following, the beauty of this one of our choice this day is of a myriad that no one sees for all days! Or else it is a dead, dead thing, no love but devilry, a mad meeting of wild creatures, a dissipation of striking atoms of lifeless clods of day.'

But the nymph has not forsaken her earthly lover. She pleads with the damsels of spring, snow and summer, and the little cherubs to lavish their gifts at his door.

She argues with herself, too:

You should not be sad,  
Or else he would be restless as fish without water.....  
For his sake, gladness here is penance of love, a sacrifice, a supreme unselfishness.

And she exhorts herself to

Shower every night the stars on his path, on the road he treads,  
And pour dreams in his sleep.

Her human lover she consoles thus:

Your Alanika has not forgotten you!  
O good great saint!  
The whole heaven knows you  
What is one earth, no one can dive deep into you and find what is in you!  
Alanika is your slave!

Why people in love want to be slaves is indicative of a frame of mind that psychoanalysis or an idealist philosophy may be able to explain!

The cottage of the lover-saint now becomes a place of pilgrimage and pilgrim-guests bring him whatever consolation can be available, or at least they provide him the much-needed diversion.

Who are these pilgrim-guests? One was 'well-fixed in the ceremonies of religion', who had his forehead crossed with sandalwood-paste *tilaks*. He wore a *dboti* of yellow silk with his wallet filled with idols to which he rang brass bells and bowed. He asked the hermit what his religion was. The hermit had no answer.

The second pilgrim is a young man 'intoxicated with his youth. . . who had roamed on the highest mountains. . . played on the bosom of the Himalayas.'

He asks the hermit:

What is this mystery, Sir!  
You must know  
Your muscles are strong and you are brave,  
Living alone, away from the haunts of men,  
Your face is ablaze with divine effulgence!

In answer the hermit can only ask back:

My dear young man!  
You have been all over the glaciers,  
What have you found?

I find a mystery in the white mountains from here;  
What are they like when you are close to them?

The third pilgrim is 'an old ascetic leaning on his bamboo-stick, clad in fire-coloured clothes'. After a few questions are put and answered, the hermit tells the old ascetic:

I am immortal, a suckling now on mother's breast, then a child, a boy or girl playing with  
my toys, then a young man I, that loves a woman, dies in her love to live!

.....

And men like you are the poison of this earth if men with the spark of life in their bosom  
are its salt.

The fourth pilgrim is the poet of Hindustan, who says, 'We of the plains are vain and proud of every little thing we do, we are miserably small and rejoice in the colours of our little paint-boxes, our books.

Here divine profundities the little blades of grass proclaim!

He regards all knowledge in this world as madness, a curse, and in the spirit of Tennyson's Lotos-eaters declares to the milk-vendor who is attending on the hermit and would not let the poet disturb him:

Ah! mother, here at last is rest, that holy leisure of soul!

The milk-giver later speaks to the holy man of the poet of Hindustan as

A man who was here the other day from the plains

.....

He said, to be happy in this world of woe, is a sin, a crime, . . .

The holy man tells her what he had told the poet, that he is one of the sufferers,' not 'one of the saviours.'

Finally, the holy man bids farewell to the milk-giver with these words:

Sometimes I have thought I have lived a beggar's life,  
How unworthy of a man!  
I begged when I needed a thing,  
I did not work for very bread,  
The alms you have given me have blessed me,  
After all it is false self-respect to teach everyone to earn.  
Some should earn, some should weep and cry and beg.

The hermit walked out in the snow and on to the mountains.  
And on the snows he died,  
And under his head was a pillow,  
On his dead face there was that ineffaceable smile!

The shepherds raised a little shrine in memory of him and called it 'The Mirror of Peace.'

There is a deep vein of meaning in this play, whether we take it as spiritual insight or social satire. Perhaps the second meaning has crept in unknown, as often happens in works of art.

First of all, there is the level of allegorical meaning. Does the young man stand for life and desire and aspiration on earth? And the nymph (*Upaschara*) for the hopeful unknown to which man prays for fulfilment? Are desire and aspiration like asking for the moon and their fulfilment like lunacy, like being moon-struck?

Then there emerges a sociological meaning. Do such men become heroes and heads of cults? Is divinity a kind of madness? Or is madness invested with divinity by the credulous among men? The realist would say that such a man is struck with megalomania, and behaves like mad. And the common people are so impressed by his curious, self-destructing behaviour that they begin to think that he is inspired from heaven above, that heaven speaks through him, and that if they could do some little service to him, heaven would reward them with earthly gifts. Indeed, the common people seek and are content to receive earthly gifts as crumbs from the royal table which the man they regard as heaven-inspired has spurned. Such a man 'becomes a popular saint' in Puran Singh's own words in the synopsis.

On the third plane of sublimated passion, it is discovered that it is not all the gifts of earth that 'a popular saint' may spurn.

The love of a woman or man or love on earth is not to be spurned. Says the saint:

When a woman sleeps in the arms of a man, he imagines she is one single soul.  
This is ignorance, *Avidya!*  
And when a man takes a woman to love, she imagines he is one single soul,  
Just what she sees and scents.  
This is ignorance of the infinite background of the multitudes coming behind and  
going before!

In the words of the nymph:

Love is His wealth, not ours,  
Love burns, the life-pulse throbs,  
We are, this is enough,  
He gives it all,  
He prompts all lovings of ours.

In Panjabi folk-lore romantic love is celebrated as sublimated passion that lifts the lovers to the divine level. Only this folk-lore does not care to give it a human meaning. Nor does Puran Singh do any more. Whereas our *Kissakars* were wont to speak of love in sufi terms, Puran Singh speaks in terms of Vedanta. How one would wish that the passion of love were given a proper human meaning!

SANT SINGH SEKHON

## CONTENTS

|  |     |   |
|--|-----|---|
| INTRODUCTION                                 | V   |   |
| CAST   |     | 1 |
| SYNOPSIS                                     | 2   |   |
| PRELUDE                                      | 5   |   |
| 1. THE LIGHTNING IN THE SKY: A YOUTH'S DREAM | 5   |   |
| 2. THE SECRET KISS                           | 8   |   |
| 3. THE YOUNG SAINT                           | 10  |   |
| 4. THE YOUNG SAINT ELOPES WITH A WOMAN       | 13  |   |
| 5. DEATH                                     | 14  |   |
| 6. MEMORIES                                  | 19  |   |
| 7. REFLECTIONS                               | 21  |   |
| 8. CONVERSATIONS ON THE HIGH                 | 25  |   |
| 9. HEARS VOICES OF THE SKY                   | 40  |   |
| 10. HEAVEN AT HIS BACK                       | 44  |   |
| 11. A PILGRIM GUEST                          | 48  |   |
| 12. "WHAT IS YOUR RELIGION, SIR?"            | 49  |   |
| 13. THE SECOND PILGRIM GUEST                 | 53  |   |
| 14. THE THIRD PILGRIM GUEST                  | 58  |   |
| 15. THE DEATH OF A FAWN                      | 65  |   |
| 16. THE FOURTH PILGRIM GUEST                 | 68  |   |
| 17. VISIONS                                  | 72  |   |
| 18. THE MILK GIVER                           | 77  |   |
| 19. THE WAY TO POWER                         | 79  |   |
| 20. FAREWELL                                 | 85  |   |
| 21. THE TEMPLE-THE MIRROR OF PEACE           | 90  |   |
| OTHER POEMS                                  |     |   |
| 1. A VILLAGE BOY                             | 93  |   |
| 2. THE <i>Alzi</i> BLOSSOM                   | 94  |   |
| 3. THE SHELTERING IN CLOUD                   | 97  |   |
| 4. THE MAID AND THE MISTRESS                 | 100 |   |
| 5. MY FLOWER                                 | 105 |   |
| 6. THE BIRD OF HEAVEN                        | 106 |   |

## CAST

Persons, with no names, but persistent individualities, as their only names.

A Yakhsha, the songster of the mid-air with *vina* in his hands.

A Nymph of great elfin beauty,

The Young Man of extremely fascinating face and form of the god of love or Kamadeva (Eros)

|   |   |                                |
|---|---|--------------------------------|
| The Saint.<br>The Lover,<br>The Hermit,<br>The Holy Man | ] | One and the same individuality |
|---|---|--------------------------------|

A group of Hindus and Muslims, men and women, raising shrines, worshipping and praying, asking boons and offering thankfulness.

|                                       |   |                   |
|---------------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Summer,<br>Snow,<br>Spring And others | ] | Damsels of Heaven |
|---------------------------------------|---|-------------------|

The First Pilgrim Guest, A Hindu Priest and Idol-worshipper

The Second Pilgrim Guest, A lover of mountains and divine life, a man of cosmic consciousness.

The Third Pilgrim Guest, An old Hindu *sanyasin* clad in orange robes of an ascetic.

The Fourth Pilgrim Guest, A poet of Hindustan.

The Milk Giver, A middle aged woman, the dweller of the mountains, who is the genius of service, pure and disinterested as of a mother. She has the soul of a bard and lives labouring as a peasant woman of plain features that flow with vitality and ecstasy of life.

A few shepherds, grazing their sheep on the green velvet grass of the Himalayas in summer above the snow line.

A beautiful young shepherd girl who gets attached to the holy man.

## SYNOPSIS

### SCENE I

A young man sees a nymph flying with a Yaksha in the sky. He desires her acquaintance and falls deeply in love.

The Nymph comes down and desires to love the young man. The young man is overwhelmed with fulfilment. She stays with him for a day and for a moon-lit night. Her secret caresses drown the individuality of the young man in ecstatic pain of love. The Nymph flies back to Heaven, leaving him dead with joy on the grass.

### SCENE II

The young man goes mad. His madness is lighted with a mystic silence. He becomes a popular saint. At last the saint elopes with a woman.

### SCENE III

The saint as a hermit-lover retires with his lady love to the Himalayan solitude. They live in a pine and oak forest, their pure sylvan hamlet commanding a clear view of the great summit of the Himalayan glaciers, streams and springs and general mountain scenery. Here the lady dies (killed by the touch of moon-beams one night).

The lover is seen alone with his lonely memories and reflections.

### SCENE IV

The Yaksha and the nymph in Heaven with Snow, Summer and Spring as damsels conversing on love.

### SCENE V

The lover hears half of what passes in Heaven and is seen talking to himself and doubting if he hears the voices of Heaven.

The Pilgrim Guests come and hold conversation with the Holy Man.

The Holy Man sees visions. In a vision he sees a procession of swan-shaped cloud-boats with nymphs in them voyaging in the sky; the breezes embodied as fairies are softly gliding the barges.

The Milk Giver and the Holy Man talk on certain themes. The Holy Man and the Milk Giver part.

### SCENE VI

The Holy Man passes on to the snows of the Himalayas and dies, mourned by a shepherd girl. The shepherds raise a temple to his memory.

## PRELUDE

### 1

#### THE LIGHTNING IN THE SKY

A youth's dream

(The Young Man to himself)

The lightning flashes, the cloud flies,  
I feel it is a woman passing in the sky.  
I toss my arms. I sigh, I try to kiss  
Those bridal ribbons burning in someone's hair,  
But the rain smites me,  
The skies shake their locks and laugh,  
And the thunder passes scoffing.  
How insane is the earth's desire for the beauty of the sky!

As she lifts her veil,  
The lightning gleams in her eyes,  
A white-winged angel is seated on the mosque-arch of her eyebrows,  
It is the passion-ripe maidenhood,  
It is the soul covered in sky-blue robes,  
The robes flutter in the sky,  
The lightning flies

She passes and I know not where?  
Her name is but a face to me, and her form a flying memory,  
A newly wedded wife of some Celestial, An Apa shchara, a nymph,  
She flies with her Yaksha in the mid-sky!

Beauty rains down, sword flashes,  
Life is a crimson wound,  
I tear my bosom with my nails,  
To find the sky in unseen depths below,  
I rip open my heart to catch perchance  
The beams of the Self-face in the bleeding rose-bud of my heart!  
It wounds, it flashes!

My wounds heal no more,  
The sword-flash pierces and they bleed afresh,  
I am beyond cure.  
Youth too vanishes, this is earth!  
The illness of the Narcissus' eye is mine,  
My heart aches for the Ever-Young that blossoms  
In the gardens of the sky!

I rise on my seat as I see her pass,

I bow in dumb submission,  
I press my pain against my own breast,  
I shed tears that no one wipes.

Her perfect pride does toss both life and death aside,  
And a hundred lives like mine and more are cast  
Uncared for in the offered incense that  
Constant burns at her shrine of fulfilment,  
A hundred glows, a hundred youths, are lost  
For a glance from those prophet eyes!

In blossom of youth she comes down on earth,  
The Bride in the new-wedded woman shines above her lines and curves,  
The Bride in all brides on earth!

It is the bride of the sky!  
The angels fly on earth unseen, unknown,  
The man cries for them,  
And the woman is God.  
The mere clay sparkles,  
The passion of youth is pure as faith;  
Love is glorious, its visions float!  
All earth and Heaven is moulded into her limbs and eyes,  
In dust lives God.

How could one gather the flying colours of the dawn in the tattered shreds, the leaking laps of  
mind?  
How could one gather a whole stream in the little bubble of a heart?  
How could God be known?  
The wounds heal not,  
The lightning flies  
The new Bride grows old!  
How could one capture the thrilling images  
That rise and sink in the flowing waters that never halt!

## 2 THE SECRET KISS

This is the very spot,—  
Where she fettered him with her curls,  
Here she unveiled her face,  
And she did pass—  
The wife of some Celestial—an Apashchara—  
With a shy young man of this earth by her side!

She looked at her youth and him and smiled!  
Her hands of light quivering with prayer  
For his hands to come and touch hers and interlace with them,  
And his hands lay lightning-struck with love,  
The young man was ashamed of the broad sunshine!

Her moon-round breasts pointed to the youth its fruits,  
The dazzle of her face was naked, sun-like;  
She showered on him the half-opened buds of her starry smiles,  
She poured her eyes into his,  
But his eyes were closed.  
She loved him, over-stepping all borders of self-restraint, like a fountain that flows.  
The sun did laugh on high,  
And a murmur and a subdued laughter passed in the sky,  
The young man was ashamed of the broad sunshine!

She knew she was young, ever-young,  
And what else should there be for him when she was there?  
Was God, Heaven and earth there?  
It was an all-kindled love,  
It was a whole sky of flowers that suddenly had  
Caught fire of their own bloom and attire.  
The moment was of the lifting of veils,  
And of God appearing in a face of clay;  
The moment was ashamed of the broad sunshine!  
She looked at him quietly,  
As her fine black lashes, swept the beauty that blazed in the sky,  
Her heart beat with moaning of the lover's-lonely nights.  
Was it her forehead sparkling?  
Or the moon?  
The young man was ashamed of the white, soft light!  
She waved her veil to uncover her graces,  
She flaunted a braid aimlessly,  
As a bird ruffles the surface of a lake and arranges its plume.  
She played with her robe, A white Swan floated on the lake of his heart;  
The young man was ashamed of the soft sweet sounds!

She touched her jewels lightly,  
And uncovered a cluster of stars in her hair,  
And the bright jewel hanging at her neck  
Decoyed the moon-beams to her breast!  
And he was a black, brown man,  
He was trembling, pale and hushed.  
The young man was afraid of that death-sweet caress!

3  
**THE YOUNG SAINT**

She had gone, flown back to sky!  
Her Yaksha had seen her condescending much too low.  
He laughed and called her back.  
Getting interested in an earthy black speck, stain of a man,  
Always deeply touched by trifles,  
After all a woman's heart! I he soliloquised,  
And there the two Celestials passed.  
And a deep murmur of music rang in the sky.  
Only two clouds in each other's arms perhaps!

The boy was left lying dead on the bed of green grass  
In the garden where at night she had led him  
In the soft moon-light;  
That death-sweet caress!  
And as she flew from his side, he woke.  
"Where was she?" asked his dream-lit eyes.  
His speech fumbled for a name, arid felt searching;  
With what name to call her back?  
He hardly saw her face.  
In a moment the young man went mad.  
He could not speak,  
And he cried when he wished to say a word;  
He sat waiting there for her.  
He remembered nought about himself,  
Whether he had a raiment on or not.  
Some one fed him, and gave him a drink;  
He was like a goat that grazed beside him,  
At the mercy of winds and rain  
And of the man that enslaves the goat.

His silence was a shining axe, keen-edged, it smote him,  
His eye-sockets had sunk,  
His lips wan and lustreless  
His colour a holy pale.  
He, was a skeleton,  
Only his eyes gleamed, his silence flamed in them!

Curious men and women thronged where he sat,  
And thought him a god,  
He would cure their children, they believed,  
He would get rain from the sky for their fields  
And fruits on the branches of their trees!

And true or false,  
It did happen thus,  
Whoever came there, asking a boon or curse, had it,  
Though the love-smitten hermit nor spoke nor blessed nor cursed.  
But the rain-clouds ran in the sky when the people came thither  
And cried and prayed to him for rain;  
Did he bless?  
And the fountains played in the lap of deserts,  
Like children in barren women's laps.  
Heaven fulfilled the wishes of the simple, faithful folks.

The man was vested with powers he had none of,  
The young man was as if a new folk-religion.  
There came a new mythology for him from the mouth of the people;  
A new scripture, a church, a creed, a brotherhood;  
Yet not a word on his holy lips!  
Whenever he tried to speak, he cried  
Since long ago, no word was left on his tongue, no action in his limbs;  
He had the appearance of a dumb animal;  
And yet altars were raised, incense burnt, and Allah Allah and Ram Ram  
The holy chants sounded like prayers round him!  
And a hundred crowds gathered in sacred fairs at the place,  
A new blazing faith shone on the faces of men and women,  
And from a hundred pulpits, his unknown name was preached  
With the inspired speech of a new revelation!

#### 4

### THE YOUNG SAINT ELOPES WITH A WOMAN

One day again, at last, she could steal away from the side of heaven,  
And she appeared in the crowd wearing an earthly guise  
Of a woman whose lightning bright face struck every one.  
It seemed she came from distant climes,  
From some country unknown,  
At least no one owned her a foreigner.  
She was alone like a torch burning in the night;  
The young ascetic ran into her arms,  
And she held him tight,  
Colour returned to his cheeks and flesh to his ribs,  
Youth returned to him like spring to a wind-smitten apple-grove,  
And the young man was as bright and gay but not shy.  
He overwhelmed her with his kisses,  
He caught her and concealed her away from all eyes,  
He drained her lips of that heavenly rose-glow in a single draught,  
She was happy!

The people said the saint had fallen!  
He has eloped with a woman, his miracle is gone!  
And the place where temples rose was again a bleak wilderness:  
And the inspired ministers hung down their heads in shame,  
And others tried to set themselves as prophets in his place!  
The world went on with its display undismayed.

## 5 DEATH

She must have gone back to earth,  
To love that black little man again.  
Go and search for her in the moon-light on earth  
And round the deep lakes below the snows.  
She has given herself, so much paid for the love  
Of a mere man, and lost Heaven.  
I feel for her more than for her love for me  
Which is not a thing I would like to beg of her  
And relish it if she had no more  
That bent of her soul towards me as of old;  
I would love to salve her if I can.  
She has foolishly left this Paradise.  
Pray go and search her out and add  
This feeling of Paradise to her famished soul,  
Said the Yaksha to the damsels as they rose  
To descend on earth.

So a cluster of damsels came down, one moon-lit night,  
And they roamed on the Himalayan snows,  
And searched the crystal lakes,  
They glided through the woods, making soft shady sounds  
As of light passing under the trees in search of itself!

### *Apashchara*

Beloved! Do not go out tonight,  
They are casting nets in the light for me,  
Do not go near those white lakes below the snows,  
They are fishing for me there,  
And they would bear me away from you  
And I would be bereft.  
Heaven is hell for me, and this earth Heaven with you,  
I do not wish for Paradise,  
Though my Yaksha still waits there for me,  
And I am not free.  
Yet I do not like to have wings and be an angel,  
I'd rather be a woman to you, Beloved!

And break old ties of celestial memories.  
But alas! I am only a nymph—

*The Lover*

Your Yaksha! My darling!  
Who is the Yaksha?  
You are wedded then?  
When you came to me,  
Surely you were not wed then,  
And I still know there is no one else between you and me, darling!  
We are one, united for ever in this supreme, supreme love!

*Apashchara*

Love is music,  
We of the Paradise play it on a much vaster scale.  
There is no such thing as marriage, and yet there is.  
A note of that music comes from you,  
A note from him.  
It is freedom according to scale,  
The more skilful player has more, the less less!  
He is the greatest who is absolutely free in love,  
He plays upon all beauteous things as on a harp of a million strings,  
But that love is rare.  
Ours is a humble poor little bird music, no more,  
We meet and part;  
A tune we sing this side death,  
A tune on the other; we are being trained,  
What else?  
I wish to linger here,  
To love you and die in your love.  
But I am bound by my own freedom in the rhythm of life  
And the notes I have struck already sweep this one in their swing,  
And I feel I am leaving you.

*The Lover*

You are dreaming a bad dream,  
You are Paradise, O Love!  
There is no one in the sky,  
Only bright dead stars.  
Why should you be afraid of mere moon-beams, darling?  
On those white lakes below the snows,  
Have, we not talked and laughed?  
And have not the lakes so oft replied?  
Have we not been on those grassy lawns for sights?  
Have you not laid yourself on the bed of those violets so softly,  
When I lay by your side, drinking  
Deep at the fountains of your lips, breasts and eyes,  
And we both lay asleep with bliss in the rapture of pure youth.

*Apashchara*

You cannot comprehend my words,

And you do not know what I know, Beloved!  
Reason not, listen, obey,  
I bid you not to stir out tonight.  
Look! The moon-light is dangerously fair,  
And the silver lakes like so many eyes of thieves are conspiring!  
The jealous maidens of Heaven are bathing there!  
Look! Indoors we are safe, in outer air there is death!

*The Lover*

Darling! what ails you?  
You are not yourself.  
Afraid of death?  
As if the ascetic humble moon-light were a warrior with a spear!  
As if the lakes had hands and feet!  
The poor grass is our enemy!  
And violets would offer a poison cup to us!  
Darling! What ails you?

*The Apashchara*

Look, Beloved! at my bare bosom,  
I am fairer than the moon-light,  
And you know my eyes are lovelier than all  
The lakes of the earth and the sky,  
For my sake, come lie on my breast,  
And do not take me out tonight.

*The Lover*

No! No! My darling!  
What madness is this for loneliness?  
When the richest white light is on our door,  
And the snow-peaks have gathered for a sight of us,  
Everything is calling my love,  
They have gathered for a glimpse of your beauty,  
And it is unlike you to deny our neighbours your familiar smile.  
No, put on your best silver gauzes and white jewellery,  
And your snow-white garment  
And let me put the silver anklets round your feet,  
As you swing your girdle of little bells round your waist.  
Come, my sun of life, it is a moony night.  
O Brave Bright Gem of Maidenhood!  
Give me your arm, arise!

*The Apashchara*

Pray, I array myself as you bid  
And here I sing the song you desire,  
But come, shut the doors, turn the latch on,  
And lie with me.  
Forget all else,  
Do not go out in the moon-light, pray.  
I fear, I tremble, my limbs are giving away,  
Save me, save me from those denizens of Heaven,

They arrive!  
I see a dozen nymphs behind the trees,  
Their arms are quivering in the light!

*The Lover*

What strange ailment of the soul?  
Come with me, my darling!  
I will hold you firm,  
Cling to me, my arms have all the power of your love,  
I take my hatchet with me slung on my side,  
But I must take you out.  
Your nerves are on edge,  
Your soul is ailing!  
The little welcome of the dear dispel all fear,  
And soon, soon we would return,  
I in my darling's arms,  
And my darling in mine,  
And we would lie together  
And die till morning!  
Not many steps outside the hut,  
Not many breaths between.  
She fell in his arms a-scream,  
The moon-beams killed her!  
There was no one, only moon-light,  
A few shades brighter on the spot near their door,  
Where she died there was a little flare.  
Was it her soul departing?  
Or a mere illusion of his distressed eyes?

6  
**MEMORIES**

*(The Lover talks to himself)*

The earth is full of jealousies!  
And heaven is no less,  
There are too many eyes that love Beauty  
And Beauty is truth only when it is she,  
But those that loved best are blinded by the others' curse;  
Love is more than eyes, more than light  
And love can suffer most and endure more.

What is life without her breath in mine?  
Without her face, what is mind itself? What soul?  
Without her what is this vacant vault of the sky  
That mocks me with the echo of a cry?  
And she used to say someone lives in the sky!

O Diamonds! Where is your mistress gone?  
You too wail like me!  
You too are tears!  
The moon-beams were spies of someone!  
They killed her with their silver spears.  
I little knew!  
And ye are her dear drops of blood!  
O Rubies! O Rubies!  
There is no one who hears my cries!

O Violets! I did not love her enough,  
But you did more than I,  
Ye heard the chiming of her anklets,  
Ye kissed her feet,  
Ye worshipped her more than I.  
Then why did she die?  
Ye do not know,  
Your eyes are filled with tears,  
Ye too cry,  
O Violets! O Violets!

O Woods! Whenever I stray from your side,  
I hear her laughter still ringing here,  
Her foot-steps still make a sound on your wet earth,  
And I wait and wait.  
From there, from there she would come out!  
And I come every day,  
And I return every day as I come!

O Birds!  
Ye come again and again and hover round this but!  
She has left!  
Where is the arm on which you perched?  
And the palm from where ye took your grain?  
Where are the bands that arranged your plumes?  
And the voice that put you on wing?  
Your coos are cries, alas!  
When ye come and gather here, ye are more bereft than I,  
I tell ye my sorrow is less,  
Your pain is tongueless and mine is loud!

*(The Lover thinks aloud)*

My pain is conscious of a sweet companionship,  
There is a tender delight in the full-blown rose,  
Its touch soothes me, as a night-bitten man is blessed  
By the warm sunshine,  
I become calm, assured.

Why am I not always sad?  
Nor lonely as I should be, being so bereft?  
The little rivulets dance and make me laugh,  
And I laugh at my own loneliness!  
Ah! Why am I glad?

The little snowy, musk-fawns,  
As they come and stand at my door,  
What a concourse of Celestials!  
They take mouthfuls of the skimmia leaves,  
Held on the palm of my hands,  
It is children's company, aromatic and innocent.

Why my embrace at times is full!  
My heart is brimful of joy,  
And I feel I am clasping her!  
No! I gather only my breast in my arms!

I kiss the empty air in my hut,  
It is wild remembrance.  
Why do my lips feel satiated as if I have kissed her!  
When I feel very lonely,  
Some guest comes from afar,  
"Sir! I saw a little lamp burning at your door,  
Its light has led me here," he would say,  
Though both my lamp and heart are extinguished since she went!  
"This hut is all dark, my friend!  
And the hut of my heart too,  
Surely! there must be a lamp in your eyes!"

It is strange,  
But when a breeze comes from the north-west,  
Almost a woman in the tenderness of her touch,  
At its touch at times my wilted flower of heart  
Wakes refreshed in the full expanse of its old bloom  
The bloom that once it had.  
My soul's gloom is gone!

Why, at times the fit of laughter seizes me!  
If oppresses me with its joy, my eyes are choked  
With tears, my throat with breath,  
Still I laugh, I know not why?  
And afterwards I think, why did I disturb my deep sacred silence?

Many times it happens now,  
My hands drop,  
My head like a flower rests on the side of its own stem,  
My eyes close,  
And for hours I am dead,  
A death in which I taste my soul full of some bliss till then I did not know!  
Mostly when I sit to write a letter to Heaven, asking for her return!

I do not know if the dead do not die!  
For many a time I see her,  
There under that oak grove!  
I fly, I fly bare-footed,  
I die, I die in her embrace,  
When I rise and wake, it is only the oak tree in my arms!  
And the trembling ferns on its stem are softly touching my eyelids!

The rain-clouds run to hold an umbrella over my head,  
When I go tramping in the burning sun,  
Tired of the emptiness of my living.

And the sky is clear,  
The sun shines warm and kind,  
When for days the rain has made me sick.  
Who throws this flood of light?

I was restless,  
Impatient as fish out of water.  
I was angry with life, love, God and all!  
And suddenly I was soothed,  
My head rested on my left palm, on the elbow bone,  
My breathing became soft and slow and rhythmical,  
My heart filled with silence deep of death,  
And in silence I was soothed like a weeping child by a familiar sound!  
I wonder what it is!  
Am I I?

When I am breathing soft and peacefully,  
She must be well,  
Well, quite well, though dead!

Why do I forget she died on my breast?

It was rapture once,  
It is pure remembrance of that bliss now,  
An all-time dedication to that sacred memory!

8

CONVERSATIONS ON THE HIGH

*Damsels:*

She has not yet revived,  
There is odour of man in her breath,  
There is stench of human flesh,  
She is soiled, she stinks:

*The Yaksha:*

And yet she is pure like a lily flower.

*Damsels:*

But why is it so?

*The Yaksha:*

It is the effect of loving earth,  
The earth-shadow is on her moon-soul!  
The moon is full moon below,  
She has left her whole heaven in him she loved,  
And the whole hell of him she has brought in,  
Do you not know?  
But she is pure as fire, she is holy as the dawn.

*Damsels:*

Let us burn her in fire.

*The Yaksha:*

She won't be purer.

*Damsels*

Let us dip her in the liquid silver of song.

*The Yaksha:*

She won't be holier.

*Damsels:*

Let us pour on her the salt of the Infinite Expanse.

*The Yaksha:*

She won't be nobler.

*Damsels:*

Let us talk to her of the man she loves,  
And promise her that we will make her sorrow less.

*The Yaksha:*

I will be happy if she regains herself.

*Damsels:*

Sister Alanika! Rise! Shine!  
The sky of Heaven waits for the beams of your face,  
For its sun that had long ago set for us!  
Sister Alanika! Rise! Shine!  
Awake! We will serve your man, We will make his sorrow less.

*Alanika:*

Then you think you have done some good to have raised me up here from earth?  
Where is Heaven? My Heaven is where he dwells !!

*The Yaksha:*

No thought of me, Alanika!  
I once was a man like that,  
And you loved me,  
You brought me up to this Heaven,  
And you forget!

*Alanika:*

I am sorry, my love! I cause you pain,  
You who are beyond pain now,  
But you have caused him the pain that may never heal.  
You know he once went mad:  
The dwellers of Heaven have no pity.

*The Yaksha:*

Alanika! Tell me what is he to you?  
That you feel so afflicted on his account,  
Is not Heaven full? Is not the bliss here untold?  
Is not all the beauty here that the soul needs for its feast?  
Is not the sun near, next door,  
And the moon in your very palms?  
There are stars to dance with, Arm is arm with the music of the orbs?  
And here for you are cups of wine In the hands of dawns that wait for you as maids,  
To be yourself, eyes red with wine, half-closed, and languid:  
And the abandon of the richness of the infinite pulsation of life,  
The sweet oblivion of being and not being  
at the same time in the bliss of the gods!!  
Is it not enough?  
Can the dwellers of Heaven have a need, and more?  
And of what?  
Of poor brown, black earth,  
Of those rotten fishes of the little ponds?

*Alanika:*

My flier in Heaven! I am sorry I cause you much surprise;  
But is not love and freedom one?  
Absolutely free?  
Is not the choice always mine?  
Is not my choice more than Heaven?  
And still more?  
The soul is not what you put in celestial or in earthy words?  
Where are you? In Heaven, not on earth.  
It ill becomes you to speak like men of earth,  
Heaven is freedom.  
It is love,  
And there is no restraint on love here.  
You are dreaming of earth as earth sometimes dreams of Heaven,  
There is a faint lingering of the Animal—  
Sense of possession if not in your feelings, at least in your words.  
Love is beyond all sense of possession, beyond all needs of sense,  
It is self-realisation of God in Beauty.

*The Yaksha:*

Alanika! Misunderstand me not, I do not limit  
Love's freedom when I ask you  
If you love me as you did before!  
If so why go away to earth so like a thief?  
If there is love, you can trust me with your life just as you trust yourself.

*Alanika:*

I smell a lot of earth in what you say.  
You know how I love that man who suffers for me!  
And if I loved you, I love you more now by loving him,  
Heaven is in his sufferings too,  
And not all in pleasures you describe so glowingly.  
Your choice is there, have the whole Heaven to yourself,  
But leave to me what is mine, the black brown man.  
If you bye me as you say,  
Why not leave me free?  
We have not toiled to Heaven to limit each other  
By the odours of hell of possessing each other.

*The Yaksha:*

Misunderstand me not,  
I am only having an intense memory of your deep personal passion for me once.

*Alanika:*

It seems you had none for me,  
Otherwise if you were to love anyone as I do now,  
You will surely not be surprised at yourself.  
If you love me, look! The flower is more beautiful in its glow  
Than when you put it in your vase  
And look at it lovingly!

*The Yaksha:*

I will not discuss with you, darling!  
You are free,  
You have only to assert your freedom, and you are free.  
Who can enslave you? Ask for it and you have it, you are it,  
What joy is there after all in receiving love  
From a slave of one's own vow or of another's power?  
It is rank devilry!  
There is no wish in me to enslave you,  
But what use is my coming to Heaven if I had to lose you thus?  
I would still fain exchange places with him! And go to the earth again to have a woman like you  
all to myself!

*Alanika:*

My great Bird of Altitudes: I know you do not mean Horrid things of earth, earthy, odorous,  
That woman is for man, for one man, kept by him under lock and key  
As an animal kept by its keeper:  
And if she stirs and sees even the sun she dies,  
When the cold steel of her husband's sword drinks her life blood,  
That tiger-like love of men, animals, that devilry, devilry!  
And all become devils who love a pretty woman too much.  
Love that is hunger, it is feasting like ghouls on her flesh and blood,  
I do not mean you are a lover of mine in that sense,  
Only the shadow of that earth falls on us too  
Just as Heaven steals on like a shadow on earth in every youth  
That ripens up down there,  
You are ideal man, only you are ill like the moon in eclipse. .

*The Yaksha:*

Alanika! I am glad you know me thus as the lover of freedom,  
And that my love for you is pure as this blue sky,  
I feel consoled, you see my soul as I see it myself,  
I am not begging your love nor forcing it out from you,  
I love you, you know it, that is enough.

*Alanika:*

Pardon me!  
If I can, let me say,  
To love is Heavenly, to be loved earthly.  
Exchange places with me,  
Be me, not so much that distant you.  
No one can ever be disgusted of his me  
But even angels are tired of this you,  
Do not call me you,  
Make me me.  
And freedom is in the hollow of your palm!

*The Yaksha:*

My beloved!  
Why not give me a draught of poison, of stupor

Rather than this philosophy of Self?  
I do not yet wish to die, this is the path of Nirvana,  
I am for the beauty of form, for personal love,  
Not yet for that rapturous calm of self in self.  
If it means the loss of you for me,  
Yet it is of no use being without that beautiful you!  
Eyes know love as- a face and a form,  
And they love soundlessly!  
Alanika! As for an embodied soul,  
Truth is in flesh and it knows even God  
In the cooling, blessing touch of flesh,  
So for the disembodied soul it is you, you!  
Without you what is me?  
A dead remembrance, sad, sad, and lonely!

*Alanika:*

But you forget  
The higher intenser love is the coalescing of one, two, three myriads into one,  
And making that one in turn strong and bright with love as God Himself.  
A little flickering flame burning brighter and for ever!  
God is not what the earth and the earthy think Him to be,  
You are in dreams of earth, I fear,  
It is the Being in which all the lighted souls, freed souls,  
Burn like stars, increasing His effulgence!  
And God is the brightest!  
I am thinking this time of the personal God,—  
The one you know and I! We are risen high, But He is still far from you yet!  
And we have toiled upward like birds  
To get a glimpse of those luminous approach,  
To scent somewhere somehow those holy precincts!  
Fie on us if we are still what we used to be on earth,  
Now floods of love for each other  
And then a mess of bitterness  
As if we never had been known to each other!

*The Yaksha:*

But is this the religion of places where we live now?  
We are still little beings like those of earth, only disembodied,  
Here where the light of God falls as on earth on our mutual love and surrender.

*Alanika:*

This is true,  
But you are here,  
High up, you know.  
He is not even here,  
He is still on earth and yearning for my face!  
He desired me, I obeyed,  
There is God in him earth-fettered, trying to be free.

*The Yaksha:*

Alanika!

You are sweet,  
Your words are bitter,  
Your anger gives you a glow which nothing else gives.  
In this anger, you are noble.  
I am proud of the freedom of soul you prize above all concerns.

*Alanika:*

No, No, pray stop,  
This is sentimental,  
What is the use of wasting love?  
Love you know is substance.  
If you and I are not one yet,  
And your quarrels on earth still persist here,  
Either let me be you  
Or you be I,  
There is no other way of being free.

*Alanika:*

*(To the damsels, Spring, Summer, Snow)*

O Spring! O Summer! O Snow!  
What a shame I you did not take precaution to keep  
The wall of death raised high up.  
You did not put up the banks of clouds between.  
He must have heard all this!  
I do not wish our talks to be heard on earth.  
You know husbands and wives always quarrel; Intense and deep intimacies strike and flash!  
Prey, haste, raise our death-wall, Throw the banks of thick dark clouds between!  
There is no secret to keep in this secret, no betrayal in  
My loving him if we wash ourselves clear  
Of trifles and littleness behind the veils.

*(To The Yaksha)*

Sir! Let us settle our dispute,  
What is the function of life itself?  
Is it not love?  
And does not love radiate?  
Does not love love to be sweet to everything?  
What is this foolish "me", "me", "you", "you", "mine, mine"?  
Simple being is beautiful, . not being "yours", "his", or "hers"!

*The Yaksha:*

And to be loved, if you please!  
Love is always personal,  
And clings to forms as life

*Alanika:*

Yes sir! I forgot. To be loved  
Is personal, clinging to forms, to abide, to persist!  
You say I love that man, and I am loved also;  
Is it life or death?  
I cling to forms, yours and his and of these sisters here.  
We are loving, are we not?

Our eternal mutual blaming is perfecting each other.  
The infinite Heaven is at our back, we are infinite!  
And the heart? Yours? Or mine?  
Is it heart, Sir?  
I did not ask it to love,  
Nor I bid it now,  
Truly it is not my promptings.  
It is the promptings of the Maker of this earth and Heaven, is it not?  
Say, is death possible? and if to die in love of only you is possible I am ready to die, bequeathing  
    life to others who are not tied like myself and yourself.  
But you know we cannot die  
The sword and the poison cup the foolish kings of earth in vain apply to life; it is life,  
The heart of life beats and new desires for myriad-beauty in thousand ripples of pain and  
    pleasure rise; and the boat of heart, like the boat of moon in the infinite vasts, on these  
    ripples flies.  
Have you its oars or I?  
How can I the life-board guide?

*The Yaksha:*

Alanika! I am proud of your argument,  
But this has not taken pain out of my heart and the memory of that passionate love between you  
    and me,  
But I am satisfied that you are right,  
I am wrong, but this takes not away the sigh from my breath.  
What vanity is life?

*Alanika*

My great Swordsman! I hope you can still rely if I say a secret truth to you, and bless me still for  
    saying what is truth.

*The Yaksha:*

My Alanika, you know how I rely on you,  
Though I feel at this time the speaker of the truth is by no means real, the illusion that loved me  
    once speaks!  
I am getting more acutely “philosophised”, —  
“Poisoned by excess of thought”;  
Passion for you is life,  
And sitting close by you, I do not find my ‘you’ here.  
What a distress of loneliness!  
To find Absolute familiarity of love receding,  
And those whom we know as heart of our heart, breath of our breath, suddenly turning “others”!  
What hope for religion itself, if this faith abides not, rests not, between a single pair of hearts!

*Alanika:*

My sweet-voiced Songster! Can’t you see it is my love of you, from you, it is substance, I spend  
    it as I choose,  
Why do you make accounts of love, this mine that is yours,  
Love is ours, to love all,  
It would be infinitely rich to give love profusely.  
To waste it in fierce floods with restless joy!  
Am I not of you?

And are you not of me?  
Then what is this dispute? I do not comprehend.

*The Yaksha:*

It is not the question of thinking or analysing love.  
What you say is quite true,  
But it is emptiness in me that needs filling somehow,  
A secret kiss from you, a deep confidence might do what nothing else may,  
And an act is needed where you give me sweet words.

*Alanika:*

My angel of prayer! lust that I have been hinting too,  
It is emptiness of soul that makes us fight with the best we love,  
And as I drain you through taking all your love,  
You, when empty; feel vexed with me the most.  
In this way to be an exclusive owner of a man like you is a curse!  
And so perhaps is to be of a woman like me,  
But have you not seen the angel that descended to us that day from the yonder Heaven where  
the powerful dwell, and who lift us up there when they will,  
That God's love fills all the emptiness of soul. Did he not say? That prayer makes us rich of the  
substance of love, which we derive from there and spend, you on me and I on you or on  
some once else,  
Our own love cannot fill us when we are depleted of that God substance,  
It is only when I gather in myself by prayer His Name-Love, that I can impart that satiation to  
you by a secret kiss or the familiarity deep which you think from me does bestow on you  
the richness of prayer.  
Even on earth it is youth that gives love to youth,  
It is Heaven's substance which men and women waste for the bliss in it and intenser still in the  
very waste of it  
And when you are full of "name" and prayer, I know you love me, you have the abundant  
forgiveness of God in you Whose Holy Name fills you with His unlimited richness of gift  
meagrely known as self-sacrifice.  
And all my lovings of birds and beasts and men and angels will be still greater things of joy and  
pride to you.  
For you know, Love gives the human soul wings of infinite expanse.  
My Beloved! So it is,  
When you are empty of that higher grace, even if I give you the kiss, you would know it as a trifle  
that woman gives and still keeps her heart not for you but for someone else,  
Your doubts are symptoms of that emptiness.  
Nothing avails but His grace, a new youth descending on you alone can unite you back to those  
who love,—  
This doubt is an old age,  
You need a new intoxication that my face no more gives.

*Yaksha:*

God is, Love is, no one can hate who knows this,  
Ah! I had forgotten truth, that is why I did think you loved me no more.  
How can angels like you not love?  
How can you be anything else but love?  
I am oppressed, life has gone out of me, I am emptied of God's Grace.  
My protest to you was my weakness, old age,

Forgive me, Alanika! it was my fault.  
Have I hurt you, darling?

*Alanika:*

No, Love! How can love hurt?  
And you who were an angel when I loved you on earth, are a good now!  
We are in Heaven now, my love,  
Still more glorious,  
Here all is love,  
Love is His Wealth, not ours,  
Love burns, the life-pulse throbs,  
We are, this is enough.  
He gives it all,  
He prompts all lovings of ours.  
It is His mercy we say you, you, I, I.  
These are the bubbles crying and dying in Him— the sea, in sweet and still sweeter raptures;  
Dying to each other and being born anew the next moment to love again is the pastime of those  
    who live, who bye, whose passion no hatreds, betrayals, falsenesses of the world can  
    extinguish, They are the ever-burning ones!  
Did not the angel from Higher regions tell you the other day;  
“Love is music?”

So it is, you and I realise while singing together,  
I go to the earth for a note of passion,  
I come and mingle with you for a note of prayer,  
And the angels bear both of us high for a note of pure ecstasy,

Life is the creator of joy,  
And above all in the loftiest sky resounds the note of His mercy, which we fain would catch ; we  
    fly together in mid air to receive that spark-shedding blessing.

Life is a song.  
A hundred streams of singing passions meet in me  
And another hundred such in you,  
And I in you and you in me,  
We love, it is a concourse celestial.  
Doubt not, we are eternally each other's.  
We both sing, you and I,  
And in deep relishes of song  
We know each other as each other's!  
What is love but a deep, unfathomable, unknown,  
Continuous satiation of soul found in each other?  
The break in this rich intoxication is faithlessness, unchaste and unholy.  
And in this knowledge of love, the Way is the Destination too,  
For the wine-cup holds the whole intoxication in its ruby sparkle.

*The Yaksha:*

Great is your philosophy of love, Alanika,  
For me, all knowledge is in your sun-like face,  
When you are mine and you love me,  
This is enough satiation of my soul,

In your case it is continuous because you toil and gather the sweet memories,  
And I think idly of your face.  
At times I soar to the highest Heaven,  
At others, I fall into the lowest Hell,  
And doubt even God Whom I see and touch and feel in you.  
And doubt if you love—  
I am yet on the way, not familiar with the infinite surprise of the Destination being everywhere,  
Such is the fate of all those like me who waver  
On the path and toil not to earn joy, love, grace, but only wait when when His Mercy fills them  
And their passion all of a sudden grows infinite, shoreless, rich, embracing a whole Universe in a  
simple youth, a woman, a child, a tree, a river, a stream, a stone!

9

HEARS VOICES OF THE SKY

*(The Lover hears voices and doubts)*

I must have only dreamt,  
A fond mind!  
It is my own memory perturbed.  
Or how have I seen her  
And where?  
Have I heard her speech?  
Surely it was her voice.  
How could it be? The husband and the wife of the same shape and colour and sex, both angels  
And yet there was a quarrel as between a man and a woman.  
“Alanika”, one of the voices said. They too were like hers,  
Could that be her name?  
My mind is at rest,  
My soul is calm,  
Is there Heaven beyond? Is she there?  
Shall I call on her as Alanika?  
Oh! What a stupid thing!

A myriad lovers coalesce for the freedom of a new choice of love, is it so?  
No soul is single, it seems,  
We love a myriad when we love one,  
And we have to love millions as if we really loved one.  
Is tragedy of love an illusion through which we catch the glimpse of another soul?  
Is love like music and men we love the notes, one is myriad and myriad is one?

When I first ran away with her,  
They said I sinned.  
Could that be sin which gives such lasting pangs of pleasure?  
I never thought so, mine was not.  
But hers? Was it?

She had someone else whom she loved, and she gave herself to me!  
She gave me what she already had given away?  
Was it so?  
But how could that even be sin, if what I have dreamt be true?  
If one soul grows strong as two with one sin;  
And the two flames burn blending in One still more glorious!  
Are these sins then?  
Or new kindlings of faith, new life-centres in the void vasts?  
How can it be wrong when it gives birth to mighty song  
The world is mad,  
Or perhaps I am mad, more likely both!

They must be sins of God Himself!  
Otherwise how could one be ever free to get to broader, larger love?  
When love enchains us down in a glance in our first choice, beauty fetters the soul, if we are at all  
alive! what choice have we but fain submit?  
When love and our free choice makes us prisoners thus for one life, who knows it may be even  
for more? We must choose to be bound.  
And can an internal fettering up of the two with ropes of duty then be the goal of all this singing,  
of glances, of all this ecstasy of the mingling of souls however grotesquely, crudely in  
these cages of clay?  
The fetters of beauty need never break, only beauty flits like flashes of lightning from cloud to  
cloud, from form to form, it is the fascination of one self-same face in myriad new  
glimpses.  
Duty clings to mere dead forms, beauty to the spark Divine.  
A new forging of links is liberty.  
Once loving is, we will or no, loving for eternity.  
The chains of love are ornaments as its pains are beatitude.  
The ties once formed are everlasting,  
And no man can ever be faithless to love or beauty or youth!  
We all pass through animal-errors of jealousy, hatred, doubt and even bloodshed for love.

Only when a woman sleeps in the arms of a man, he imagines she is one single soul!  
This is ignorance,

*Avidya:*

And when a man takes a woman to love, she imagines he is one single soul, just what she sees  
and scents.  
This is ignorance of the infinite background of the multitudes coming behind and going before!  
In one little body there come a myriad preceding and following, the beauty of this one of our  
choice this day, is of myriad that no one sees for all days! Or else it is a dead, dead thing,  
no love but devilry, a mad meeting of wild creatures, a mad dissipation of striking atoms  
of lifeless clouds of clay.

Is it?  
I must have only dreamt,  
It is my memory perturbed.  
Could it be as I have dreamt?

Is her name Alanika?  
And would she come if I called on her?  
Oh! What a stupid thing?

10  
**HEAVEN AT HIS BACK**

*Damsels:*  
Sister! Bid us do what may be your pleasure.

*Alanika:*  
O Spring! Thou daughter of God!  
Even if it be winter all around, you must-lavish your wealth of beauty on his door!  
A rose bush, a genial warmth, a companionship.

*Spring:*  
I go,  
And make the dried trees on his door bloom early,  
And that plum you planted would burst forth even when it snows.

*Alanika:*  
He will be assured and his pain grow less violent!

*Snow:*  
And I?

*Alanika:*  
Snow! Ever-virgin! Thou holy daughter of the moon!  
He is not on good terms with the moon  
Nor with the moonlight, since my departure, you know,  
He thinks moon-beams killed me,  
He doubts if I am dead,  
He doubts if I live,  
You kindle a tiny lamp on the door where he lives, to guide some pilgrim footsteps to him for  
sudden joy, you know he forgets me when there is a guest, to love him or her he thinks is  
loving me.  
He is good, but ignorant,  
He would pass a night well in a little service, in a little warmth of sweet companionship!

*Snow:*  
As you bid, my loved Alanika!  
What greater pleasure can there be than to be near your man, to light a lamp o~ dark nights on  
the door which was yours?

*Alanika:*  
And is mine, dear Snow

*Summer:*

And I, Alanika!

*Alanika:*

Thou daughter of the sun glorious, thou of the white race!  
He is old and and infirm with grief and thought!  
Driven out from man's habitation for the sin of running away with me!  
I was nobody's, yet they owned me to blame him!  
The sinner must be stoned with any stone their blind hands may get to hit him!  
This is all the foolish religion left in the worlds below, to call others sinners and themselves  
    pious, and stone them to death!  
They forgive no one but themselves, the beasts  
The blind men standing together to mock the Sun  
His nerves are over-wrought since you foolishly dragged me to this place.  
He is too feeble with loving me!  
A little cold wind from the North makes him quake,  
Too much rain worries him,  
You keep a watch that his heart may feel warm,  
And there may be summer everywhere round him in dreary winters of the earth!  
And this separation!

*Summer:*

What a sweet companionship you give me by giving me this song-like task!  
O music-sound Alanika!

*The little Cherubs:*

And we?

*Alanika:*

O little cherubs! You be the white musk-fawns  
And go and devour mouthfuls of the Dhup-leaves from his hands,  
And let him look into your eyes!

*Alanika:* (to herself)

And I?

*Alanika:*

You should not be sad,  
Or else he would be restless as fish without water.

*Alanika:*

I must be glad. How?  
When he is bereft?

*Alanika:*

For his sake, here gladness is penance of love, a sacrifice, a supreme unselfishness.

*Alanika:*

Is it? Or am I minting shining excuses for my innate mirth?

*Alanika:*

You shower every night the stars on his path, on roads he treads!

And pour dreams in his sleep,  
And fill his nights with visions of these unknown places!  
Yes. You should be happy for the sake of him who is sad for you!

*Alanika:*

Your Alanika has not forgotten you! O good great Saint!  
The whole Heaven knows you.  
What is one earth?  
No one can dive deep into you and find what is in you!  
Alanika is your slave.

## 11 A PILGRIM GUEST

The pilgrims came and went.  
Many were the conversations and on a hundred themes light and heavy,  
This was on the whole his only regaling.  
At times it gave him deep offence, at times a comfort akin to company round one's hearth-fire as  
it shows outside.  
Once, a pilgrim well-fixed in the ceremonies of religion came thither,  
He crossed his forehead with sandal-wood-paste *tilaks*,  
He wore a dhoti of yellow silk, never missed his morning chants of Bhagwad Gita,  
He had his pebble-gods in his wallet, he took them out, just rang the brass-bells in their faces and  
deeply bowed to them,  
And by just doing these things, he thought himself so unworldly, so pious, so religious,  
And after his performance, he went and asked the hermit :-  
What is your religion, Sir?

## 12 "WHAT IS YOUR RELIGION, SIR?"

*Hermit:*

I do not really know, my friend!  
It must be living with the musk fawns, picking Dhup-leaves for them from the forest and storing  
them in the corner of this hut,  
And looking at them as they devour leaves with crisp, crisp sound!  
And their eyes looking into mine with no other speech between us but a look!  
It is a dumb life like this,  
I do not know.  
Or it may be, lighting a tiny earthen lamp as you see every evening,  
I do not know.  
Or taking a handful of boiled rice, or a bowl of milk a good hill-woman brings me every day,  
Or a palm-cup of water from the running rivulet.  
Or breathing a pinch of air from the vasts,

And seeking all this you see,  
It must be it or not,  
I do not know.

*Guest:*

It is no more religion, sir  
Than of cows that herd on the green turf,  
It is-simple living from day to day.  
No God, no worship, no rites, no caste, no hymn singing, no bowing to the sun, no beating of  
cymbals, no songs, no bells, no feeding of gods, no sacrificial fire!  
This is no religion,  
Pray, say what is your religion?

*Hermit:*

Ah! I At times I feel a sensation within, as if a keen-edged dagger stabs me,  
I curl and coil with a secret pang,  
I am a bird left on the way,  
My mate has flown ahead;  
Perhaps separation aches my soul,  
Something unobtained, something obtained and lost,  
It is a deep hidden pang unforgotten!  
A choking of life-breath, a strange suffocation!  
It must be this,  
I do not know.

*Guest:*

No, no, what you see of God and feel and know,  
What is that? That hidden in the Cave of the Heart?  
Is there God or not? That I that!  
That thumb-size light that *yogins* see!!

*Hermit:*

I meet the dawn every day,  
And part with evening every sunset,  
The meeting gives me joy, and parting a pang;  
There is a tear in my eye;  
I see stars, I feel they are alive;  
And there are half-heard sounds in falling rain, in voices of the woods and of shaking leaves;  
There are unheard sounds in the falling snow, and the under-buried grass and worm,  
I feel there is a vague personality in these happenings and things, possibly hidden wholly from  
our view, possibly the whole, here, and we cannot meet. But there is, someone is.  
But I do not think this way  
It is too deep a thinking for me to bear,  
I run away and try to sleep.  
Sleep failing me, I weep!  
It may be, this is my religion,  
I do not know.

Next day he was restless,  
The poor woman who brought him milk, did come there with it,

He tossed the cup in the air, there it fell rolling on the grass,  
He tore off his clothes, dashed his black blanket on the ground,  
He flung himself on the grass with a scream!  
“What is this noise of milk-taking every day?” He said.  
She knew this always happened whenever some foolish  
Guest did put too many questions, or even one, it upset him,—  
“They must let him do what he pleases,  
But they vex him, poor soul!  
I do not like these men who come from the cities.  
They are hornless animals, so stupid.  
But I am more stupid than they.  
I should have been here,  
And I should have flung his mind-born gods outside and asked him to walk away if he could not  
have a roof, a fire and a straw pallet with comfort here and be still.  
These unhorned animals from the cities, the cities, the pens where they herd together,—  
They come on pilgrimages but do not leave the cities behind  
And their minds are so waspish, they do not rest till they have stung someone;  
Finding no one they sting each other!  
They seem to have a mental itch and they take pleasure in giving and receiving stings.  
These wasps come and sting this poor man!  
And there he, lies unrestored now for hours, dumb and dead!”

The milk-giver knows he is not to be disturbed.  
She goes.

Again in the afternoon, she comes,  
He is sitting on a boulder under a tree, looking calm in the setting sun,  
A tear hangs in his eyes,  
And as he sees her he rises.

*Hermit:*

‘Mother! Did I disturb you?  
I am tired of drinking milk, you get me some rice,  
You are mother, you are not cross, I dashed your milk-bowl on the ground?  
No, you are not cross.  
It is all right.’

*Milk-Giver:*

‘From tomorrow rice, my saint;  
Today only milk; rice without milk is also poison,  
Not too much of this, not too little of that.’

*Hermit:*

No, Mother! Nothing today,  
I am sick of this very progress of eating and drinking.

That day the musk-fawns came,  
They looked at him lying speechless,

They went back hungry, with their heads downcast!  
And he wept bitterly at night,  
And then slept.  
His tears made his straw pallet wet.

13

THE SECOND PILLGRAM GUEST

A young man intoxicated with his youth comes one day,  
One who had roamed on the highest mountains of this earth,  
He who had played on the bosom of the Himalayas as a young sailor plays on the sea,  
Happy to meet dangers and happier till to die; He had strayed into the pathless woods and was  
glad to have lost his way on the glaciers!  
Tramp, tramp on the snows!  
The snows are white, and the rocks are friends,  
They provide bed and roof and the young man sleeps  
Is not the sky near? He stands tiptoe to touch the blue;  
Where monkeys cannot climb, he climbs,  
Where the musk deer cannot tread, he sits reclining on his bare arm;  
He as the spirit of youth sparkles as a huge diamond, as a snow-peak himself!  
He reaches in his travels here and stays with the holy man.  
One day he confers with him.

*The second pilgrim:*

Are there any worlds beyond this happy beautiful world?  
You must know, sir, you are a holy man.  
I think God is Power,  
The powerful alone can climb up to Him.  
What is this mystery, sir?  
You must know,  
Your muscles are strong, and you are brave,  
Living alone away from the haunts of men,  
Your face is ablaze with divine effulgence.

*The holy man:* (laughing)

My dear young man!  
You have been all over the glaciers;  
What have you found?  
I find a mystery in the white mountains from here,  
What are they like when you are close to them?

*The Pilgrim:*

Scaling, scaling the heights,  
Gathering strength, joy and roses,  
Suffering while down the heights,  
And in ecstasies when on the tops of the mountains;  
There the air is light, the sky is blue and the fragrance of the heights! Oh!  
Sir! Heights, heights!

There is the expanse of snows, there the skies bend low to kiss, so holy, holy, divine!  
All little things are forgotten, the great things, of the valleys below are specks, miserable specks,  
dark, dark stains! !

*The Holy Man:*

Just this, I know no more.  
You are holier than myself,  
Since your advent here, I love more and still more everything I see and touch!  
I feel I am bodiless,  
And sky and earth are dyed in my eyes with strange loveliness!  
You are the god of snows sent to me by the gods above, so vision-like, light and gay and bright,  
you are not of this earth!

*The Pilgrim:*

The conscious, joyous contact with the snows makes us white; is it not so, Sir?  
And the concourse with these white mountains makes one high-statured and great;  
I do not like the plains, they are miserable, full of dust and dirt spread all over by the herds of  
men;  
These men have very low, small, mean outlooks,  
And whatever expanses they have got, they shut them by high walls that go round their hamlets  
and huts, and their hearts and minds!  
Is it not so, Sir?

*The Holy Man:*

Men? Where are men?  
So far I have seen but one.  
That one are you,  
A man who is a whole himself, clean like a god, transparent, shining with divine rare glimpses of  
the mystery and joy of creation itself;  
Made so by the close and conscious contact with these snows and the peaks that talk to gods!  
Others are just bundles of superstitions, desires and wild lusts, of thoughts and sensations all  
borrowed or heard or learnt!  
And amongst these those who call themselves good are worms that hide in cocoons of certain  
stiff principles, the mind-woven blinds round themselves, and they die without letting  
any ray of light enter into them  
To them their piety and goodness is as slow poison.  
The poor foolish dwellers of these dark holes, creating hells by the thousand for themselves even  
in paradise!  
Men! Where are they?  
These are blind creatures, blind of hands and feet, blind of heart and soul!  
They are animals, worse, for the animals are wholly physical, they are physical with instincts  
superior enough to degrade even the physical into still heinous and ingenious crimes!  
I hate men, though I like their courtesy and their very existence somewhere here, as without  
them this globe would be uninhabitable, they are the essential evil for men like you to  
blossom side by side!  
In these herds lives a beautiful, rare you,  
And out of them it flowers so fair!  
Without them, there can be no joy in the mountains, no life in the snows.  
These men! herds must be at the back of consciousness somewhere!  
I love the streaks of life to shine on these men—

There in the mother's heart, in sister's love, in wife's devotion, in child's smile!  
 There in the file of soldiers going to the battlefield for the honour of mother, wife and child, this  
     conscious seeking of death for God!  
 There in starved, naked, poor folks, men and women, toiling in the fields, in the mines, there  
     suffering, serving, sweating!  
 There, there, the daily martyrs of work, working for others, life-long without a complaint,  
     emaciated, pale in their very youth, mere shaky skeletons in their old age, they who with  
     their flesh and blood feed the brutes of the cities!  
 I love to see the streaks of light in the bright intellects, ablaze with the sense of law and justice,  
     protecting the individual's freedom, holding the scales even;  
 But true justice at last is in Godly love.  
 I see the divine streaks on the pale face of the student that toils for learning the alphabets and  
     books that men have left for him to be man!  
 And the famished teacher that is student all his life to distribute the wealth of knowledge;  
 There is a heroic action, where one lays down his life for another without a thought about  
     himself.  
 Only here and there the streaks of the far-off high snows shine on the hard black granite rocks of  
     this colossal, conscious selfishness of man, the brute!  
 But these are the hopes that the pilgrims see on their way;  
 God is everywhere hard at work to raise humanity on His shoulders up!  
 God is their destiny, and their goal;  
 Everyone that has once been moulded out of matter goes forth to his divine completion, may be  
     today or tomorrow!  
 I do not know if God made the world,  
 But I see God at work in making man an angel, a God like himself,  
 And He is hard at work,  
 Those who love Him should be as He wills, to lessen His task,  
 Let Him the Greatest Toiler on soul-materials rest in the tranquil hearts of His sympathisers!  
 There is no going back, the flights of the marching footsteps are on the gradual but steep ascents  
     and soon shall all be on these snows;  
 So God wills, and so it shall be.  
 And there is the ultimate altitude of soul for man, the angel, the god, the perfected divine  
     humanity!  
 The whole beauty is in winging upward! It is in soaring or, as you say, in scaling, scaling!!

## 14

### THE THIRD PILGRIM GUEST

An old ascetic leaning on his bamboo stick, clad in fire-coloured clothes, approaches one day the  
     hut of the Holy Man, and wishes a night's rest below the straw roof.  
 He is welcomed and comforted.  
 The Milk-Giver always provides bowls' of milk to the pilgrims and sees they are comfortable, for  
     the sake of the Holy Man.

*The Old Ascetic:*

Sir! You seem to have given up the world while quite young,  
 It seems you are celibate from birth,  
 You have loved no woman,

Nor did you breed young ones of man, as everyone here does.  
You are strong, rose-like,  
You are ablaze with divinity,  
I have never seen a bright young ascetic as you are.

*The Holy Man:*

You mistake me for someone I am not,  
I am neither a monk nor celibate, nor a yogin, nor a saint, nor an ascetic,  
I am only a man, an animal as good as those cows that graze on the turf,  
Perhaps less than they are, they give milk in return for the little grass they take,  
I only take and I have nothing with which to return the kindness of this earth.  
It is true I have not seen the faces of my own children, but I love the little ones even of the deer  
and I love the children of Man.  
It is true I have not rocked some of them on my knees, it is due to my having loved a woman  
much too much;  
Whenever I saw her I swooned on her breast, maddened by her matchless beauty unseen,  
unheard.  
I turned an angel, a god, seeing her, my only knowledge of her was a bliss felt in her presence!  
And I still love her though she is for ever beyond my reach, as I love nothing else!

*The Old Ascetic:*

(Scowling, a frown on his brows and his nostrils a bit contracted and sniffing about in arrogant  
disgust.)  
Ah! so am I really mistaken,  
You are a married man, a householder,  
And a widower,  
A man in mourning!  
How strange is this!  
And all my life I have never made a mistake.  
I can make out a householder by the very odours about him,  
But here I thought you were a monk  
There is the glow of pure spirit on your immaculate forehead,  
A sure sign that you ought not ever to have known a woman as your wife.  
But I am mistaken once in my life.  
So you are a poor householder!

*The Holy Man:*

Yes, Sir! You are mistaken badly.  
I love woman, the whole of her kind,  
And all women better than monks.

*The Ascetic:*

Ah! you are still young,  
Young men are always like that, joking with death and all serious things,  
Youth is the joy of soul that comes to every one Yet no one can hear, no one can swallow it,  
All spill it about to no purpose;  
And when it is spilled they see how great is the loss.  
And youth is spilled, alas;  
When youth is gone,  
Then all beauty is bitter, my friend!  
And sickness all the merry-makings of this world!

All this fun of joy lasts as long as youth lasts,  
And after—see this bamboo staff, The dry straight stick on which old age leans, waiting for  
death!

*The Holy Man:*

Quite true, Sir!

To those who have been worshipping false gods, this life is but a mourning, young or old, they  
mourn

And death is real, much too real for them,

Their hearts are empty drums,

And their mind stuffed with borrowed thoughts,

And their life is full of sad sensations and memories, as they have been thinking thus;

They talk of some far off bliss, which they never saw themselves.

It is all gloominess for them; they are too serious, too thoughtful, too learned, too respectful for  
themselves; they think and get nowhere, very fastidious, critical, and fine and grave.

Thus, Sir I true life is a sorry game for these great thinkers,

And what has it been for you yourself who are so wise?

*The Pilgrim:*

To tell you the truth, I too feel life is but a tragedy;

It is a calamity, an affliction, nothing more.

Man is selfish, woman is fickle, faithless;

Children are some joy, but I have loved none,

And death is the end of everything.

*The Holy Man:*

O ascetic! and even of soul?

*The Pilgrim:*

Soul! who knows? Sir!

When it is plain talk and not one on religion.

Soul? The vexations of the body alone are enough:

No one really knows,

All talk, talk, talk,

Whither one goes, and whence are we? Ah I who knows?

It is a blind Universe, in which the blind strike the blind and are going God knows whither?

*The Holy Man:*

This is heart-rending, Sir! After all your life of penance and religion!

If it all ends in death is it not better penance to make merry while we live? And if we know no  
better art of being happy, none so poor who knows not the wine-cup and how one can  
die uninterrupted by death in joy of things; Only let it be really too much!

Why not a pill daily of opium or a glass of green *bhang* or *dbatura*, say, any poison to kill oneself;  
And if tired, why not with one jerk a large measure of this draught that takes to  
overlasting nothingness, if there is no continuation of life, of personality, of faith, of  
love?

Why come seeking black death on these white mountains?

There is death to be found everywhere, only life is rare,

Only light that resides in the Heart of God is Man.

*The Pilgrim:*

To tell you the truth I am roaming only for the form of it. In this old age now why be faithless  
to my vow of asceticism? And it is my habit now.  
My mind does wander to all those things that make one intoxicated, wine, bhang, ganja, all this! I  
feel I am all so empty of soul, no relish in anything.  
Surely many "Saints" take to this, who give up pandering to the public taste and form of  
saintship.  
But it is too late for me to form any new habit, The past is a whole life in dead formalisms, in  
looking my face in mirrors if it is bright enough for saintship,  
Fie! Fie! all is vanity!  
I am tired of the lifeless formulae that we repeat to people when we preach religion to them.  
And yet we see they are greatly moved while we know what tinsels they like, It must have been  
like this, Even when these formulae were first made, possibly to keep people busy in  
temples to prevent them making any mischief on a large scale, And brandishing their  
ignorant big sticks in air and breaking the heads of these teachers of false religions!

*The Holy Man:*

How even nectar in the hands of stupidity turns poison!  
Even religion, the most winsome habit of the soul, when turned into an empty discipline of  
mind, kills whole generations of mankind,  
And it is allowed to kill, to make men more mean and cruel and selfish.  
And yet be known a religion and be branded as such.

*The Pilgrim:*

The end of my whole life of religiosity is this, Sir, that I have no doubt left that stronger than  
everything is death.  
Death is the end of all life,  
Death is the goal of everyone!

*The Holy Man:*

I admire your arid, barren honesty, as I sicken at its stupid lie,  
You think death is all truth, and everything dies and death is the goal of all!  
Fie on your religions and gods that teach you this!

*The Pilgrim:*

And pray what have you gained, Sir I to be plain and honest, pray.

*The Holy Man:*

I love only a woman,  
I am far below the thought and love of God,  
God that the great Prophets have worshipped and taught,  
But the love of woman is my religion, I am only this much yet, only this much, no further, Sir!  
And yet I have earned in this little life of mine a doubt that God is, His Presence is. It is, I am.  
A spark of a woman's love had kindled me like a star.  
Nothing dies,  
Death is not the goal,  
There are innumerable worlds still to come.  
There are millions of bodies yet that the soul has to take,  
And at last perhaps this soul is God, the beloved of the Prophets.  
I am immortal, a suckling now on my mother's breast,  
Then a child and a boy or girl playing with my toys,  
Then a young man, that loves a woman and dies in her love to live!

I sin the warrior lying dead on the edge of my sword and the old man on his stick, still served by  
woman's milk of kindness!  
I am the body of the beautiful and I am the soul that flings away the bodies and wings away!  
I am the soul.

*The Ascetic:*

Ah! This is what is also given in our old Vedantic scriptures, it is nothing new that you say,  
I could also talk to you in this strain,  
Oh! You wanted that!  
Ah! that love!  
And more glorious shall be my language and still more glorious the thought: you have spoken  
on religion so crudely, it is religion, Sir, not life.  
But to tell you the truth, it is all *vak-rachna*, the buildings made of mere words;  
I here is no substance,  
To be honest,  
It is all death,  
Death, death is the goal even of the soul!

*The Holy Man:*

You have wasted your years in ignorance,  
Your fire-coloured robe is a cremation flame,  
And men like you are the poison of this earth  
If men with the spark of life in their bosom are its salt.

## 15

### THE DEATH OF A FAWN

*The Milk-Giver:*

The stupid old ascetic talks of his religion and gods!  
This is how they understand the Great,  
And befool themselves and their followers!  
Death is the end!  
They come and leave their sickness of soul on this holy door!  
Poisonous rotten talk like this is enough to kill this simple man, innocent as a child!  
How I feel after he has left, dust, dust flying on the clear face of the sky!

*The Holy Man:*

Mother! You are not yourself.  
Are you angry?  
It is no good being angry in this world,  
It is much better to lie blank for some time and let the poison whenever coming work itself out,  
blaming no one;  
People do not like being told all that we think of them,  
And we might be wrong ourselves;  
Where is truth that we should insist on anything with that much strain that might wring our soul?  
And do we really help anyone?  
All go as they must, it is a play with many actors on the stage.  
We should rather enjoy as much as we may!

*The Milk-Giver:*

I do not see, Sir! Not that much breadth yet!

Breathes there a man who can think ill of this fairy world of the sun and the stars above and of  
the milk-giving cows and the innocent calves below?

Who sees nothing but the darkness of death hers?

Men come and go, this we know, even we poor folks know, but we have never seen the face of  
that dreadful death of which they should be so afraid.

And here was a man, an ascetic, who was so much afraid of death, he talked of nothing but  
death,

He has come and gone, revolving his wooden beads,

But I find dust, dust, despair, despair, poisoning the brightness of the air!

*The Holy Man:*

Mother! I am rather disturbed,

One of the fawns has not come today,

And the others who came were sad, as if the little fawn is dead on the way!

Shall we go on the track and see if it is so?

*The Milk-Giver:*

When the animals are sad there is sorrow for their comrades in their hearts,

There the fawn lies on the track with his little head thrown on the ground, breathing hard, his  
nostrils dilated and his eyes lustreless!

(This Fawn is Dying.)

*The Holy Man:*

Let us lift it up to the hut,

And keep it warm in the straw.

Perhaps it has overleapt the rocks.

*The Milk-Giver:*

In the basket here I lift it and bear it on my head.

*The Holy Man:*

Why, let me carry it thither in my arms?

*The Milk-Giver:*

No. They bear not too close a human touch.

(They reach the hut.)

*The Holy Man:*

Oh! The fawn opens not his eyes,

No more!

The fawn is dead!

*The Milk-Giver:*

The fawn is dead!

*The Holy Man:*

(Lifting the forelegs of the fawn softly)  
Ah! It had leapt much beyond the power of its limbs, here is the wound sustained.  
Had we gone early and seen it, perhaps we could save it!  
The little fawn is dead!  
(The holy man sheds a tear. So the messenger is called back, he returns).

*The Milk-Giver:*

O Immortals! receive the soul of the poor fawn,  
He was our comrade,  
We weep just for his parting from us.  
Ye, O gods! make him happy with you!

## 16

### THE FOURTH PILGRIM GUEST

Still another man come,  
The milk-giver saw him first,  
And she accosted him:-  
“Look here, sir, you are welcome here, come,  
But do not disturb the holy man,  
He is like a child.  
You can draw him out as you like, and he will be with you,  
But it is not good for him.  
He afterwards suffers in silence uncomplainingly,  
So take care you worry him not.

*The New Guest:*

No, no, O good woman!  
It is good you have told me all this,  
I only want to hide my head for a night.  
Early by the break of dawn I go,  
But the holy man seated yonder on the grass?  
Is it he you mean? He is quite a young strong man.  
You say he is troubled by mere talk.  
One such can talk to thousands if he were in the plains.  
Why? He gets disturbed even by poets like me?  
By mere talk? By the exchange of courtesies?  
Mere salaams, salaams?  
I have never seen such a strange man!

*The Milk Giver:*

It seems you have seen many men!  
Where is your native land? And who are you, O blazing young man?

*The New Guest:*

I am the poet of Hindustan,  
I write songs which people sing,  
And I too am child-like, pleased with the sounds I create!

*The Milk Giver:*

You have no birds there I suppose,  
No morning like here,  
No days perhaps, no mountains,  
No fountains there nor these singing rivulets.  
I wonder why people need songs?  
I have lived a whole life here,  
And I needed no song except the heart to take a bowl of milk to this holy man,  
I have no leisure from grazing my buffaloes and cows, milking them and making bread and  
butter for my children,  
And I chop grass and straw together and mix a little half-boiled maize with it, and feed my cattle.  
The day is not enough even for this much!  
I do nothing more,  
And in my ears always rings the song of silence of these valleys and hills, the hidden lilt which  
these fountains echo from their silver throats.  
There is a sweet meaningless murmur that for ever flows  
In the morning I need to rise early,  
The bird on my oak tree sings and wakes me in time,  
I sweep my hut, milk my cows,  
And I rise and go to the fountain for water, and stay there long to see the Aurora's dance in the  
eastern sky!!  
Till the sun rises and I return to my hut with the image of the sun in my heart.  
I love that great red orb, the great rolling sun.  
You know the sun is a god.

*The Poet:*

O mother! We of the plains are vain and proud of every little thing we do.  
We are miserably small and we rejoice in the colours of our little paint boxes, our books.

Here divine profundities the little blades of grass proclaim!  
Not only do birds and fountains mingle their lives but the whole creation is quiet in singing in  
unison!  
Your ordinary speech is poetry, your presence the fragrance of the deep!  
We of the plains would say,—You are a poem only.  
You should be a book —such are our tastes,  
You are the beauty of God, only you should be a picture, a statue!  
Adieu to all my books of poems! Art itself is sordidness!  
They are not half so alive as you : you, O breathing, beaming God in flesh!

Adieu to my singing verses to the crowds!  
I must lie in the dust under your feet, listening to the voices of these fountains, and forgetting  
what I so far have been!  
The touch of this dust bestows on me the vision of pure beauty,  
And, bathed in this dust, I rise a god.  
Let me be the poetry of your hut, of these romances in the shaking shivering leaves,  
Of looking at you as you are, looking into your eyes!  
Ah, let me watch as you walk and talk,  
As you sit and laugh, as you feed your cows and buffaloes! !  
Let me look at your face that beams with a light  
I have not seen so far on faces of men and women and many I have seen and met!

What is in being an empty poet when all poetry is you outside here!  
Truly, it was a delusion of my deranged sense to think I could write poetry,  
When you cannot be a book! And the soul is soundless, bliss,  
Ah! I was so far only blowing soap-bubbles, sitting on the window of my father's mud house!  
To bathe in the spring here,  
Loafing on the grass when the sun shines,  
Doing nothing but idling away the whole life, in aimless joy-death in dust under this sublime  
holiness!  
And being nobody here is life!  
All learnedness below this is death, worse than death I  
O! they measure the exact distances between star and star,  
And know not what separates a heart from a heart I  
Is not all that knowledge madness, a curse!  
Ah! mother, here at least is rest, that holy leisure of the soul!

## 17 VISIONS

*(The Lover describes visions seen, to himself, seated alone in his mountain hamlet.)*

A black sky!  
Or is it the dark night of my eyes?  
And I see—there is light in me.  
What are these canoe-shaped mists that are floating in the sky?  
Are these fire-clouds or golden swans that swim aimlessly?  
Whose swan boats are these?  
And who is voyaging in them?  
They glide gently,  
Some soft breezes embodied as winged fairies hold the oars and ply very gently the crafts,  
Some delicate ones are reposing in these barges, lest they be disturbed!

I do not know why?  
But I am feeling happy,  
Happy as I have never felt since the day she died.  
It is just as when we used to meet after a short absence when she was alive!  
We were never separated from each other for more than a wee bit of a while.  
And now we are separated for ever,  
The unknown long distances divide!  
But why this irrepressible joy unbidden floods my heart?  
It cannot be we meet again,  
She has died.  
A procession of cloud-boats painted snow-white is passing in the black sky,  
Here no stars shine, only clouds like lambent flames go by!  
Ah! The procession stops before the doors of my eyes!

In the snow-white, luminous cloud-barge,

A figure of light with a light violet aura rises out of a deep rapture-repose,  
Her black fairy eyes wake like the lover's nights,  
Waiting, expecting, doubting, believing, hoping and winging aloft in wonder!  
She reclines languorously, her head on her bare elbow resting.  
And then she sits up in the boat, her tresses gathered in a knot limned soft with the lustre of the  
jewels of light set in the knot,

Ah! Her soft seraphic gaze is fixed on me!  
As our eyes meet, mine are closed with the old familiar rapture, the bliss of it is so pure!  
Ah! I am again in her arms,  
And she loves me as before,  
It is as if we never had parted!  
The pang of separation like a bad dream is brief when over,  
And union is truth everlasting!

It might have been an embrace of many days,  
I felt it was as short as an eye-wink!  
But I met her,  
Whom I had thought dead,  
And what doubt is there she fell dead on these shoulders?  
It might have been a figure of my imagination,  
Her embrace was a dream in dream,  
But my dumb flesh felt the real ecstasy of her caress,  
My hair quivered with intense bliss as ever it used to do.  
Ah! It was true, real. It is cruel to disbelieve it.  
Was it an illusion then?  
It could not be.  
Only my senses can deceive, not my soul,  
And my senses had dropped there from me.  
I had no body, no mind,  
My soul, self, realised it was she, no one else.  
Sure, it was she.

Voices can be similar,  
And faces too.  
Two forms may be quite alike,  
But who can give signs of old intimacies, soul to soul, by a look, a smile, a presence, so  
soundlessly?  
Ah! There I know definitely she had not died,  
And here again the doubt crosses my mind.  
I am an infidel,  
Why do I believe in the truth of this myself, when I doubt of that more than myself?  
The super-sensation of my soul rebukes me for my unripeness for her love and friendship.

And did she not say when parting?  
"Do not think I am dead and have ceased to be,  
"I am.

“And one thing more, you always think it might be your memory that out of its past impressions keeps on creating me!

“No, it is otherwise,

“I think of you, beloved man!

“And it is then your memory wakes,

“Memory is only a rock on which souls engrave their shapes;

“Poor memory, a dead instrument, cannot create,

“You think it is the human mind that thinks,

“And its thoughts are creations?

“This too is a notion given to you by the illusory reality of your senses.

“No, thoughts are made like pearls in the seas, and in higher seas still vaster, brighter, where the Pure shines,

“And the gods rain them down, the minds are mere fields, where these rain drops germinate!

“A good deal more of this you shall know when you cross the wall of Death.

“But there is no tragedy,

“In the plan of things is Bliss, and all forms are made of joy!”

And again she said,

“I am always with you,

“Only you do not know!”

And my soul asked her while parting,

“Is this the love you gave me,

“A whole life of pain, of hunger and nakedness, a destiny unknown, a cry disallowed, a thirst unquenched, an aching heart, that must be endured?

“Or is it this your embrace in which there is all truth, all life, all love for me? Is it true I see you again? Is it true you are?”

And she kissed my closed eyes and waked them with a kiss,

My hungry eyes were fed with those soft tender looks of hers,

Ah! This was enough reply,

I questioned no more,

My questionings had died.

And with my opened eyes I saw the fleet of cloud-boats resume its gay passage in that stormless sky,

And did I not see another Figure of Gold that smiled from her boat as if she knew me from long, long ago,

Though I had never met her before?

At least I do not know.

And I still feel while passing, she showered roses on me!

I feel still her roses beating me!

How can it be all unreal!

Oh, I am an infidel here,

And I was a believer there.

What a shame!

The super-sensations of my soul rebuke me for being so unripe for her love and friendship!

**THE MILK GIVER**

*The Milk Giver:*

O holy man! It is the seventh day,  
 You have not opened your door,  
 You had slept or swooned, or were in a trance!  
 We poor people do not comprehend,  
 You have not taken milk nor rice.  
 You are well?

*The Holy Man:*

Mother!  
 So I pained you unnecessarily,  
 Your service is pure love, godly.  
 You are all divine,  
 You know I am not well,  
 Again and again I dream of things that  
 I myself do not feel very real.  
 But they fall in my way and impress me as more real than you and I.  
 You see it is like going away on travels from here.  
 So you do not find me, the door is shut.

*The Milk Giver:*

You must have been to the Heavens,  
 For strange as it is, it is true,  
 I came in to you wondering.  
 The rose bush on your door that flowers  
 In Spring, has put forth rare lovely flowers.  
 It is the other end of autumn, no, it is miraculous!  
 And then there is a lot of good news,  
 My daughter-in-law has given birth to a son,  
 And our cow licks a new white calf just born with the sunrise,  
 And my son has come home!

*The Holy Man:*

The roses are good, roses then!  
 The roses! The roses!  
 Someone rains roses down,  
 Ah! who knows who?

**THE WAY TO POWER**

My milk bowl lies before me!

And I lie bliss-unconscious at the feet of someone I see not,  
This hut is a palace of ecstasy,  
There is such a death-sweet sleep here?  
My body lies where I know not!  
I wake and feel light like a bird at dawn.  
It is not the hut,  
It is the holy man,  
It is those who love him in the unseen.  
The shades of the wings of the angels fall about him.  
He is the beloved of Heaven!  
Thus the Milk Giver talked to herself,  
As she rose from the yogic sleep  
She had had just as he entered and sat; her milk bowl before her, seeing the holy man in  
abstraction deep!  
The Holy Man too then waked  
And he asked her.

*The Holy Man:*

O Milk Giver! You seem to have slept,  
Are you tired?  
(And he smiles looking at her with deep tenderness.)

*Milk Giver:*

No, Sir!  
There is always a sleep-like, death-like bliss in your hut,  
Your presence is such.  
I am growing a yogi as they say.  
I have been I know not where,  
But it is bliss, bliss everywhere!  
I feel more strong and vital as I wake;  
I am more knowing, brighter, lighter, purer than before this wondrous sleep or death!  
What is it?  
I seem to have seen great lands which I forget as I wake,  
I seem to have come in contact with great beings whom I forget as I wake,  
I feel I am a flower that returned to its bud-state of rest and wake again as a new, fresh flower.  
I am so new, new to myself!

*The Holy Man:*

You are quite new always, O Milk Giver!  
Your face is ablaze with knowledge which you have never learnt,  
And your limbs are agile with fire you have never kindled!

*The Milk Giver:*

And may I ask, Sir!  
What do you feel when you lie like this?  
It seems your life is a perpetual dream,  
There is so little action in it.  
We die if we have no work,  
And you live on No work!  
You live on the luxuries of a blissful idleness?  
Are you never tired of this rest?

*The Holy Man:*

My good lady!

You seem to forget,

The aching of my wounds spends me out, my body feels prostrate.

And it is this rest that soothes, it is this dream that acts like a balm, and makes it possible for me  
to live.

No work it is not,

Some pull the strings,

Some are pulled up,

Both work and it is equal work.

I am the one who is being pulled,

The strings are tightened and ah! intense is the pulling up!

My nerves ring like fiddle-strings up to the breaking point, the storms of songs pass over me,  
thrilling my unknown depths,

My body is a *sitar* for ever vibrating, throbbing with someone's memories!

Action takes you up from the physical to the mental, moral world,

This is why you cannot live without work,

Because you are more spiritual, more moral than physical,

You must work.

But there are men so fatally wounded by love that the physical is left only a shadow clinging to  
them,

For them the ordinary little bath, the sylvan toilet, a promenade through the woods, taking a little  
milk and rice, Ah! even a laugh, a jump, a frisk is enough physical action to live.

For such ones are always on the point of death of this body.

The mind acts, they respond to the wishes of the Invisible Ones.

And this sleep, this dream, this ecstasy is intense work,

It is actionlessness above action of the physical world!

It is in the realm of spirit that such men live,

Their one wave of mind is enough to build a new universe and unbuild the old.

*The Milk Giver:*

Sir,

A man who was here the other day from the plains,

And who spoke much about this indolence,

And said there is for all a great work to do,

Humanity is suffering and needs doing something for them!

Saving man from his troubles, disease, slavery, hunger, thirst, and nakedness!

He said, to be happy in this world of woe is a sin, a crime,

We must be always sad for the lot of men.

What was all he talked?

I had gone away, I could not attend to the end.

But much that he said seemed sound,

As why should a single man be happy when his kind is in distress?

*The Holy Man:*

O good lady!

I had told him,

I am one of the sufferers,

Not one of the saviours.

If he was a saviour I bowed down to him,

And there ended my reply.

*The Milk Giver:*

This was a great noble reply,  
All are sufferers,  
But this is life.

And to find a smoothing howsoever little from within,  
To be happy from within, is the only reply vouchsafed to us poor people from Heaven,  
We have no command over Nature or man,  
Nor any control over the animal in man that howls and roars and preys and kills and dies!  
Great is your life, O Saint!  
You make all the sorry ones for once glad by the magic of your holy face and its joy,  
And everyone who comes here feels blessed for having seen you but once.  
There is a solace in your calm resignation,  
And even the kings of earth must feel you have more joy in your blood than they in the wealth  
and power they somehow wield over others, not over themselves.  
Ali who come here see a way out of the oppression of material facts,  
And they espy a reality in your dream-world of fancy they had not seen before!  
True! True!  
The busybodies are an arrogant lot of sufferers who pose as saviours,  
And all their hue and cry is a part of the general symptom of human distress,  
It is a negligence, a worse indolence that does not look into itself.

*To Holy Man:*

No, Mother! No.  
We should not say this  
When we do nothing but just simply live and die.  
Why blame those greater ones who feel they must do something for others of their kind?  
Why concern ourselves with affairs of mankind,  
When we cannot burn our own fires aright?  
We have no right to judge of saviours,  
If they are saviours, they are, if not,  
Their countings are not with us, they are with God!  
Only we know we are not fit for the task they wish to appoint to us.  
What concern has a sparrow how the seas roll!  
And what concern have you, O milk-giver!  
How the queens reign from their thrones.  
The tasks are allotted to us like our lives and we do our appointed tasks, that is right.  
What can one do to upset the physical nature?  
Most suffering is physical, bread, clothes, comfort and health,  
To quit the physical and to march inwardly to the moral sense, the spiritual fancy within us, may  
be best!  
One day perhaps the animals of the world who rule and prey in the forests of life on those deer  
and sheep and lambs may wake to some humanness  
And things of themselves may then be right.  
But the kingdom of love is up on the hill-tops,  
Beyond those higher snows, somewhere there near the skies!  
And if such one of us climbs,  
One day it may be, there may be no pain.  
So all sufferers have to begin their climbs,  
And the animals might follow still in pursuit of their prey,

And following on these heights they may lose their teeth and claws by miracles of the elevated  
mind,  
By the moral souse coming like the breaking of a new dawn within them!  
And love may reign where hatred so far held the sceptre and wore the crown,  
The lamb and the wolf drink at the same pool!  
The question for us, the sufferers, is—Are we ascending?  
Are we marching onward without missing a step?  
Or have we stayed our march?  
For us to halt on this path is to suffer more,  
For us to waste time in argument is death.  
We must needs only march on!

## 20 FAREWELL

A whole life passed!  
Under a simple roof of straw,  
With a frugal fare from a hill-peasant's home,  
And the peasant thought it a lucky privilege to serve him.  
The Milk-Giver, as "the mother" was known, had grown to be ecstatic, in simple service of the  
saint.

The corn in the fields of this peasant waved with larger and more numerous ears!  
The milk in her house was more,  
A blessing rested on her door,  
And all who came thither found a joy, a lightness, an openness they had not seen before;  
Her service of him was forever blessed!

Like a wounded doe, the saint lay, always rapt in his moods now sorrowful, sunk deep, then gay  
all of a sudden, afloat on the surface!  
His body growing thin and frail with intense abstraction at times and filling up soon when he  
laughed and played!  
Many guests came and drew him forth in conversation light and heavy,  
He preferred the flowing passionate light company, loving life and sport,  
But he said to no one neither aye nor nay;  
Only rarely at times he rejoined,  
And his words shone with a brilliance unknown;  
And everyone who heard him was reformed, his mind reformed, his soul elate.  
His word was cooling, calm, never restless, or impatient:  
It was less physical, more spiritual,  
It touched the soul, it was trans-intellectual;  
It did not strike as a genuine gem strikes,  
Less than the false, it did not exhaust,  
It was none of wine's ephemeral flush,  
It was one of Nectar's perennial glows.

Many bright intellects felt abashed at the littleness of their performance, when they heard his simple child-like words giving much more than intellect, without that superior barren pretence;

His cheeks glowed, his forehead sparkled with lustre, and sparks of holy fire were shed! And a flash of lightning occasionally passed from his left eye to the right, as he closed them in silent emphasis

And he spoke with an assurance that assured all wavering minds.

But his speech was rare,

His silence always spoke in simple kindly smiles.

*The Holy Man:*

I, have received the command, mother:-

And I must leave here for the higher snows,

And I am now going on a travel from which I may not return.

Sorrow not for me, I am old now.

Never fit for any thing have I been.

And now unfit even for what I might have been,

And my whole life is lived well in the sweet air of your religion of service.

Your heart-strings kept me fettered to this place.

You have been the mother to this orphan suckling,

And in your mother's service is your joy, ecstasy, no other recompense,

And there can be no higher reward for this,

It is priceless!

Sometimes I have thought I have lived a beggar's life

Now unworthy of a man.

I begged when I needed a thing;

I did not work for my bread,

The alms you gave me blessed me.

After all it is false self-respect to teach everyone to earn,

Some should earn, some should weep and cry and beg.

Why should children be half-men, the lame and the blind like me should all be compelled to earn?

It should be just as the father gives to his children, and sweats for them.

I see very few earn, many get all they want for the mere asking.

I should beg, only the attitude of the givers has to be like yours.

But all these thoughts came and went like birds in the sky.

I have been thinking of love, not of self-respect and honour and man's duty, these false ornaments of character.

The unadorned are pure of heart and pure simple love is true self-respect!

Why know oneself as an earner or a beggar?

The wounds are too deep for all this surfaceness.

You, you the milk-giver of mine are divine;

That is why I have always been light and gay!

Your affection for me has already exalted me.

And truly I have not begged—

I have been harsh many a time to you,

Many a time in my madness I have given you blows,  
Your ribs ached; all others said I did wrong,  
Ah II bet my own benefactress,  
But you bore all this from me.  
You said nothing.  
it was just like me,  
And that was just like you.  
I have never been sorry  
Because you never could be hurt by me.  
I was much, too much yours,  
And you so much mine that blows or no blows made no difference;  
Only fragile, glassy conventions did break their hearts in between and died!

Mother, the little musk fawns come no more;  
All have gone, it seems,  
The messengers are called back,  
The message has come for me.  
It is now my turn to go.  
I am happy,  
But if I could I would still linger here with you, you are so kind!

*The Milk Giver:*

And me!  
On which door shall I lay this grey-haired head now?  
To which temple shall I offer my heart's offerings?  
Who shall receive with your kindness the dumb songs of my heart?  
And how shall I live? And serving whom?  
Pray do not go!  
What can a dumb creature of the hills say now?  
You know, you know, you know!  
Pray stay here still more, more!

*The Holly Man:*

Only tears can reply to this hymn,  
Only life spent in service as yours dare speak a word,  
I have been a recipient,  
Mine is but a dumb wet good-bye!

The Milk-Giver's eyes were filled with tears,  
They rained drop by drop from her eyes and fell on the grass,  
Both stood speechless with their heads cast down.  
Her throat choked,  
Her head reeled,  
And she fell down.  
The holy man ran up to her side, lifted her up and soothed her soul.  
And then followed a painful but silent farewell.  
No one spoke!

**THE TEMPLE: THE MIRROR OF PEACE**

Far up to the snows he went.  
A few shepherds gathered around him,  
And their herds would come and give him dumb company.  
Snow white were his locks, uncombed, woolly,  
And still more pure his beard.  
Clad in a black brown woollen blanket,  
A little rugged mountain he looked on the mountains!  
And all who saw him loved him, served him.

And on the snows he died,  
And under his head was a pillow,  
On his dead face there was that ineffable smile!

A shepherd girl cried by his side,  
Her eyes were red with crying,  
Oh! He has died!

The shepherds saw the pillow,  
There were diamonds, rubies, the clothes of a woman,  
It was the pillow of life for him who had died.  
Let him rest on his pillow for a little while!  
And they buried him in the snow, gently laying his head on the pillow,  
And offered a shepherds' prayer,  
"May his soul rest in peace, O God!"

And there they raised a little hill-shrine.  
In his name, they called it "The Mirror of Peace,"  
And all who came thither had their rest,  
And they all said, "May his soul rest in peace."

## OTHER POEMS

*Note—*

*The following poems are given here as they are season sisters of “The Bride of the Sky”.*

*Puran Singh*

Saraya Estate,  
Gorakhpur,  
January, 1924.

1  
**A VILLAGE BOY**

A dark black boy laughed, his white teeth shone on the village path that had no aim nor mark,  
He went with hardly a piece of cloth round his loins, uncaring, uncared for, bare-footed, wading  
through ankle-deep sand, driving a country cart with the sound of his footsteps falling on the  
oxen's ears!  
And the oxen lazily plodded on without a thought.  
The boy had a reed flute in his hand  
And he was trying to get a tune, the pipe on his lips and his mouth full of breath.  
He waved his head, the tune came as he called!  
The sun was setting,  
The sky trembled with the colours of a bespattered river of gems,  
And below, the waving fields of rape-seed tossed their tufts of golden blossom.  
The air was rich with graces of a new rare evening  
That had in her eyes the passion of the bride returning to her husband's home.  
And someone in the sky was about to give a whole heaven of stars to the first corner on that  
Great Door, that night!  
But only two bullocks went lazily down,  
The boy followed behind alone, piping his reed-flute. . . !

2  
**THE ALSI<sup>1</sup> BLOSSOM**

Every year the Alsi flowers,  
It is little Alsi's youth;  
The fields are full of light blue eyes.  
Her face is of a poor labourer-woman whose youth is consumed in the fields,  
Nobody loves the Alsi flower,  
Oh! It is poor Alsi in bloom!

Alsi has in her heart the poor woman's love,  
It has not the fire of the Rose,  
Nor the face of the Lotus,  
Nor the soul of the Hyacinth,  
But the half-clad labourer-woman of the mud-hut village knows it,  
It has the colour of God,  
It is Shyam, It is Bhagwan!<sup>2</sup>  
She says and worships it.

Two labourer girls went past me,  
On the edge of the Alsi fields,  
Bare of feet were they, nor a single bangle on their wrists,  
Their faces pale and wan and holy,  
Their hands coarse and rusty,  
Their tresses loose and dusty.

And tile thread-bare saris covering half their limbs.  
As they saw me, a smile went rippling in their eyes and faces,  
For they were young, though not rich enough to be fair.  
They stopped and laughed and said bashfully:  
“What are you looking for, Sir?  
It is poor Alsi in bloom,  
It blooms every year.  
Nobody loves the Alsi flower,  
Sir; It is Alsi in bloom!”

“The village Alsi blooms in you maidens,” replied I;  
“It is your youth mirrored in the Alsi flowers!  
“Nobody loves the Alsi flowers  
“But everybody loves you”.

“Who loves us poor maidens, Sir!  
“We die before we know we are young,  
“We never have time to see we are poor,  
“Our youth is lost like Alsi,  
“Nobody loves the Alsi flower,  
“it is true.”

I put a bunch of Alsi flowers in their hair,  
And a little one each on their ears, and said;  
“Never mind man, it is God who loves you,  
“You are maidenhood, womanhood, motherhood!  
“And you are the soul of this poor vast wilderness,  
“You are the homes in these mud-hut villages,  
“And you worship the Alsi flowers,  
“It is Shyam, It is Bhagwan!”

“Ah! It is Shyam, It is Bhagwan!  
“God is;  
“And His world is better they say, He loves,  
“There is rest beyond,  
“If here we are as good as our fields that give us Dhan;”<sup>3</sup>

“Yes, it is Krishna, it is Bhagwan  
“And His Vrindavanam lies behind your eyes,  
“There there beyond!”

They ran saying, and giggling like the half-filled water-vessels going back from wells,  
“Ah! Ah! What will our husbands say,  
“This man offering us Alsi flowers on the way,  
“Ah! We must go, it is getting late,

“O Shyam! O Bhagwan!”

3

**THE SHELTERING CLOUD**

The sky is full of clouds  
And all are raining, raining!  
The grass is wet,  
And the mango trees are dripping;  
No one is safe in this rain,  
They say the moon in the sky shalt be wet today before she reaches home!

The cowherds, girls and boys, with their cows on the river-side,  
On the banks in which the dear Jamuna flows,—  
A sky-coloured boy robed in golden light they espy, standing there in the rain untouched,  
The purple cloud above his head rains not!  
It shelters him;  
The rain is falling everywhere,  
But the spot is full of dust where he stands, and the dust of light flies there!

The girls and boys and cows all run with uplifted heads.  
“It is Krishna! There, it is Shyama!  
“We forgot,” they said, “it is Jamuna,  
“And this land is Vrindavanam!  
“There, there he stands, under that purple cloud,  
“That is why it rains everywhere but not there!”

And thither they did hie with haste and press around the sky-coloured boy, with unlifted heads!  
They stood in a coloured curious huddle, men and animals!  
The arriving pilgrims from afar passed that way,  
Their clothes were drenched,  
Their eyebrows dripped with rain,  
Their bamboo sticks were wet:  
On this spot they came and stood saying,  
“How are the cowherd boys and girls dry yet in this fury of a monsoon rain?  
“It rains everywhere but not on them.  
“It rains everywhere and pelts us all with drops as big-as stones,  
“And all of them are safe from these wild beatings of this old, mad rain!”

“See ye not?” cried the cowherds.  
“Krishna stands in the middle,  
“The purple cloud on his head,  
“And we are standing around,  
“So we are safe.

“Do ye not know he is Gopala,  
“He is Girdhari,  
“And this purple cloud on his head is the mountain of shelter that he bears on his little finger,  
“And saves us all cowherds and cows below this mountain-cloud!

But the pilgrims saw there was no Krishna, and said;  
“The herd boys and girls of Vrindavanam are making fun,  
“That particular cloud has no rain in it,  
“It stands here to take perhaps a breath after having shed itself somewhere else.  
“That is why they are not wet,  
“Or the skies cannot calculate well,  
“And so this little place is left to dust!”  
And shaking their bamboo sticks at the laughing boys and girls they went,  
Saying “Ah! Ye funny boys and girls of Vrindavanam!”

But all said;  
“Krishna! Shyama!<sup>4</sup> Gopala!<sup>5</sup> Girdhari!<sup>6</sup>  
“Krishna! Shyama! Gopala! Girdhari! Murari!”<sup>7</sup>

#### 4

### THE MAID AND THE MISTRESS

In the thick haunts of the Buddhist priests of Japan,  
Where the thin bamboo-shade swept the temple doors,  
And the sun came curious to know what the priests did chant and pray;  
The incense burnt within, the secret doors all were closed,  
And I had an entrance where all outer light was disallowed.  
The priest was my friend, I had known him before, though not quite as a priest.

There was the priest seated in the inner haziness of the cloister, not in the posture of that familiar  
poet-friend whom I knew, who sang verses to me as we both together gazed at midnight  
in the Uyeno Park on the Japanese pine, hill and moon:

He sat like a featureless man of marble, stiff with formal reverence, penance and thought!  
And his pose was of the calm Buddha, he looked a miniature of the bronze statue at Kamakura!  
A young Japanese, who had let his youth go as incense-smoke of sacrifice at the feet of the Lord  
of Love and Peace!

Melting all songs of his into but one life-long silent song of love, he sat singing under a temple-  
lamp!

This priest was an adept of the Mahayana Yoga,  
Everyone looked at him with reverence and awe,  
He was worshipful.  
I bowed,  
He smiled and bade me sit, as a little more of his chant was yet to do,  
And he was not free to speak till then.  
I could not endure all this.

He knew I loved him as a young man of dreams, I know him not so much as a priest.  
His prayers over, I did burnst like a wild man,  
I shook his hands, I embraced him, not yet enough,  
I clasped him in my arms still closer, and shook him,  
The whole of him, with the entire passion of my soul;  
I thoroughly disturbed him out of that cloistered calm reserve of a priest, a Yogi,  
I made him come out, joyous and bright and light like a little bird,  
Till he talked and laughed like a man and a comrade;  
He was happy, seeing me, come to him all the way from Tokyo.

He told me with some visible pride,  
“I have a disciple from America,  
“She is learning the Mahayana doctrine of Lord Buddha,  
“And she is a great woman who has come so far searching for it into the interior Japan:  
“Is it not wonderful how she comes!”  
He got up, and took me round the inner temple.  
We bowed together in that ancient darkness to the great light that showed on the face of the  
glorious Buddha.  
We felt together as if we sat again at Buddha Gaya under the Banyan trees with the Master,  
We thought we heard again the Lord speaking to Ananda,  
And the lips of the Bronze Statue almost opened to speak to us.  
We together felt thrice blessed by this great touch of the sacred memory,  
As we rose up to the priest’s little sanctuary,  
Where he sat on the mat teaching the scriptures for the day,  
When his American Pupil came.  
She was dressed in noisy brocades, silks that rustled as she passed disturbing the sweet hoariness  
of the place;  
Her complex toilet ill combined with the ascetic simplicity of the pure straw-mats;  
She had jewels all over,  
And the pearls she wore were like strings hung on a wall;  
She was a rich woman of modern means, comfortable,  
Perhaps a widow having nothing to do in Americas but make toilet all the day. .  
And behind her came her maid,  
A young girl poor and depressed,  
Who knew the world as an eternal frown of her mistress.  
And that under that frown to attend, to serve,  
As she might bid was the only way of getting bread and that wretched simple dress she wore,  
She too would look at the priest anxious to know what her mistress learnt and happy that there as  
one to whom she too bowed like a maid.  
She would look at the priest and from under the corner of her eyes also stealthily at her mistress,  
if she was not looking back at her.  
She was always afraid of a frown, a curse,  
For was she not told it was no part of her duties to look at the priest?  
The maid was shrunk with this fear up to her soul.  
And the poor terrified maid aroused me.  
I rose and went to her side, shook hands with her,  
And I looked at her, saying, “You are so beautiful, divine,  
You need not learn the Mahayana Doctrine.”  
“Is it not so, my friend?” I turned to the priest who bowed to what I said.  
And there was the answer made by her soul,

For a moment her youth laughed at the man-made world of rich men and women of America.  
She felt she was great as the Rockies, the pine wood,  
Her stature seemed to grow, and she called to the sun,  
“Stay I am great as thou, nothing on earth is equal to my glow.”  
There was a new soul flowering in her eyes.  
She looked at me freely,  
Unafraid,  
She looked at the priest wondering why he was looking for books when she stood there, the  
image of God.  
But the priest by habit could not look into her face, he kept poring on his books.  
The rich woman, her mistress, tried by her brow-beats to make her behave,  
Finally she said, “Are you gone mad?”  
But she was unafraid,  
And the rich woman felt ashamed of saying too much to her in the presence of others.  
So she was cold, reserved,  
When I spoke to the priest in Japanese which they understood not,  
“More glorious than the mistress is the maid.  
“Is she not the goddess of your shrine?  
“Behold her kindled face!”  
And he said, “This moment she is the goddess of the place.”  
The rich woman liked not my taking freedom with her maid;  
She must have been an Indian Brahman in her last birth;  
She could not stand the honours given to her maid,  
And she complained how I had disturbed the *great lesson* for the day!  
“He is my friend,” said the priest;  
“A priest but free,  
“He knows Mahayana Yoga more than I do, only he does not teach.”  
And the rich American smiled at me out of mere courtesy, her heart I knew was all empty, and  
there was jealousy smoking there!  
And to conceal still more her disgust of me she said,  
“How wonderful is this realm of Peace!”  
I made no reply.

And outside the temple doors,  
Under the tangled shades of the yellow bamboo-groves,  
I met the maid as I was departing from the Temple.  
“Sir, she said, “What good is calling me a goddess,  
“When I am destined to be a maid?  
“And have to spend my youth glorious and gay in dressing daily the coffins of these dead women  
Who pass their days in learning Buddhism?”

“A moment is life,  
“This moment, this breath, O Angel of Heaven,  
“Think not of the next.  
“You are a gem,  
“Why look at anything else?  
“You are a gem glorious,” carolled I to the maid,  
And as I wished to go, I said good-bye.  
But she would not let me, she wished me to stay,

Her wistful eyes dragging my very soul into herself.  
There was a tear in her eyes, saying this life was a string of good-byes.  
There stood a tear in my eyes, replying it was a garland of tears crowning the joy of being.  
We leapt into each other's souls as we parted,  
We met for ever though we never met again!

5  
**MY FLOWER**

*(To the tune of a Punjabi folksong)*

My flower,  
I have lost it.  
Here I lost it.  
Here I dropped it,  
There perhaps!

On the waves of the river it flies,  
Or the breezes have kissed it off my face,  
Or the man has stolen it,  
Whom I met in those mango-groves!

My flower,  
I had watched it,  
Coming out of the bud,  
As it opened half,  
And as it did burst full in my face!

My youth was set ablaze,  
My image was in the flower,  
My Flower.

I have lost it,  
Here I dropped it,  
There perhaps!

6  
**THE BIRD OF HEAVEN**

A blue bird of fairy plumage descended from the Heavens at night;  
In her wings it seemed the starlit sky cut in twain was flying;  
Her flight was of the storms that raged before the dawn of light.

As she approached the earth, her plumage turned snow-white, and herself a tiny little life!  
She kindled the woods,

She flew, a spark from tree to tree,  
She bit the flowers, kissed the leaves  
And set the bushes aquiver with her notes of nascent joy.

And she danced with the stream, and played with its light foam-veils,  
She lovingly hung dew-drops in its tresses,  
And cast a hundred winged shadows on its waves.

Alone, a little bird she was,  
But she darted,  
And filled the woods with her flights,  
And waked the silence of the river, rich and free with her melodious dream.

Hearing her hidden word the flowers of the valley caught her flame of passion; they were her  
songs burning!

Once a strange note arrived,  
A stray wanderer of the sky having lost its way,  
And a weird tune filled her throat unbidden;  
At midnight the bird woke and sang.  
Only a line,  
Or perhaps a name.  
Her eyes were red with it,  
Her tender white bosom aflame,  
And her little wings fluttered with restless impatience for what she knew not.

She flew everywhere on earth,  
But found no echo of her song below;  
It was an empty laughter she met.

She fancied she heard a voice that also rang in her soul, calling her from behind the silent star-lit  
nights,  
And following that unheard voice,  
She flew above the world, back to the sky.

Footnotes:

1. Alsi is linseed.
2. Names of Krishna the god.
3. Harvest of rice.
4. The sky-coloured one.
5. The protector of cows.
6. The lifter of mountains.
7. The killer of the giant, Mura.s

|     | chapter       | Book<br>page, line | Doc<br>page, line |
|-----|---------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| hie | 6 other poems | 98,1               | 4,34              |

***THE BRIDE OF THE SKY***  
***1995, First Edition***

1. The whole book is typed in Garamond font (English UK), with a consistent font format [i.e., size, bold (for titles), Italics, Underlines ect.]
2. Typographical errors such as shown in the example are corrected wherever noticed.  
Example: Page 37, line 26 of book and page 56, line 8 of the soft copy of **Spirit of the Sikh (Part I)**:  
*known as “Sikh” or Disciple”*. IN the given phrase the inverted comas before disciple are missing which have been fixed.  

Besides this corrections like making spaces before and after certain marks (like ; : , . ! ?), consistent with the standard space conventions. The Standards are No space before any of the above shown marks, one space after ; & , and two spaces after every ! : . ? mark.
3. All the Grammatical errors have been left as they are and spelling mistakes corrected according to British English which has been used by the author. At certain places to convey the essence the author has changed the form of words which are not permissible and hence account for grammatical errors. Example: Word “slightingly” appearing on page number 43 of the book and 29 of the soft copy of the **Spirit of the Sikh (Part I)**. All other spelling mistakes, which do not account for the above given explanation have been changed. All the mistakes noticed, but not changed for the lack of surety are listed in the file named mistakes sent along. We can correct them as per your instructions.
4. The present text is typed on A4 page (Size 11.69/ 8.27 inches) with one-inch margin on all the four sides.