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The Enchanting Poet for ISSUE XVII November 2012

Sayed Gouda (b. 1968, Cairo) is an Egyptian poet, novelist and translator. He majored in the Chinese language. Sayed Gouda won a first prize of poetry in 1990 before he migrated to Hong Kong in 1992. His works and translations have appeared in Arabic, English, Chinese, French, German, Spanish, Macedonian, Uzbek, Thai and Mongolian. He has translated hundreds of poems from and into Arabic, Chinese and English, which have already been published in several periodicals in Egypt, China and Hong Kong. Currently he is the editor of a literary website called ***Nadwah*** in five languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French and German. Sayed Gouda has organized a monthly literary salon in Hong Kong since April 2004. He has been invited to participate in many international poetry festivals around the world like *Man Hong Kong Literary Festival* in Hong Kong (2002–2007), *International Poetry Festival of Cairo* in Egypt (2007, 2009), *Qinghai International Poetry Festival* in China (2007 & 2011), *Struga Poetry Evenings* in Macedonia (2009) and so on.

Published works: ***The Smoke of Love*** – a book of Arabic poetry published in Cairo in 1990; ***The Sad Questions of Cassandra*** – a book of Arabic poetry published in Cairo in 2005; ***Between a Broken Dream and Hope*** – a book of Arabic poetry published in Cairo in 2005; ***Once Upon a Time in Cairo*** – English novel published in Hong Kong in 2006; ***Bottle of Glue*** – a collection of poems translated from Arabic into Chinese and English published in Hong Kong in 2007; ***Prophet of the Poets*** – a collection of poems translated in Macedonian language published in Macedonia in 2008; ***Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry*** translated in English and Chinese (upcoming publication); ***Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*** translated in Arabic (upcoming publication).

Poetry by Sayed Gouda

The Thing

Something here,
dimly lit,
calling me.
Enchanted, I walk for it
with heavy steps
and glassy eyes.
A thousand clusters around me
and no one to fill my cup.
Bored of circumambulation,
no house in sight, no stone.
Where are the garments of pilgrimage
Did I really wear the pilgrimage garments?
Or did I forget,
as I forgot to say a prayer today?
A prayer of those knowing their ignorance
a prayer of those ignorant of their knowledge
and they will never know.
The typhoon, no doubt, is coming to the city
to uproot the trees,
break the heart of my window,
and break me.
I got used to my defeats
because I got used to life;
she got used to me
like our eyes getting used to darkness
when the rays of light are suddenly cut.
I got used to life.
The typhoon will go in two days;
I'll get up, collect the broken glass of my window,
go out to the city to buy bread,
milk, some fruit, and a sheet of glass,
and search in people's eyes for something,
dimly lit,
calling me.
Enchanted, I walk for it.
2 September 2008

Penelope, a Circle of Love

She said that I would be the only outcast.
For years, I will lose the way home.
In vain, I would blow wind in my sails,
and would come to him,
a stranger on a shore of emptiness.
He would collect in my bag
winds from all the corners
and blow the wind in my sails.
I would fight the waves of devils
and sail on a wave of flame
to offer him a goat, our ransom,
to return to our families,
waiting on the blazing shore of their longing.
Everyday I dream that I return,
stretch my bow that beats the strong men,
clean my yard from the evildoers,
empty the longing of my long nights
on her lips,
and pour into her ears
some divine words.
She is Penelope:
The soul's joy in salvation
when the circles are complete:
The circle of love
when it turns into worship;
the circle of eternity
when the final beam departs;
the circle of death,
and the circle of resurrection.
For her, the journey of the soul begins.
For her, it ends.
She is Penelope:
A Ka'ba of pride when pride bows down,
humble, like a lover to his beloved;
a brook of milk,
and branches of light and perfume,
in whose shade the nightingales sing.
She is Penelope:
Like a prophet's intercession,
a reward to him
who is lost in her love.
Everyday I dream that I return
in spite of Heaven telling me
that I will be the only outcast!
20 September 2006

Editor's Choice

Sllave Gjorgjo Dimoski is an award-winning Macedonian poet and essayist, born 1959 in Velestovo, near Ohrid. He graduated from the Faculty of Philology in Skopje. He is president of the Managing Board of the international poetry festival ***Struga Poetry Evenings***.

Published poetry collections: *Engravings* (1979); *Project* (1982); *Cold Urge* (1985); *The Last Manuscripts* (1988); *By-way* (1991); *Subjects and Arguments* (1994); *Anabasis* (1994); *Forms of Passion* (1999); *Dark Place* (2000); *Words and Water* (2001); *Measurer of Words* (2007); *Holy Body* (2010).

His poetry is presented in many anthologies and his works are translated into several languages.

Awards include ***Miladinov Brothers*** for best Macedonian poetry book, ***European Prize for Poetry*** by Romanian Foundation Orient-Occident, ***Golden Autumn - Sergei Esenin*** by Moscow organization of Russian Writers Association etc.

A dark horse weighs over the mountains

A dark horse weighs
over the mountains.
Dark horse dark foundation
dark underground water
that sounds
through centuries.
I
pass under the horse,
gloom and madness deaf
in its stride
I drive away
howling nightmares:
What have I lost here?
What have I lost?
something tightens the air
something has dragged
the very heights
like a great tortoise
towards me.
Dark horse weighs over the mountains.
Its hooves are in the crags.
Dark underground water
mutters in the very joints
that set centuries into motion.
Dead silence. I must move
through this moss
(this rapture of terror).
What have I lost,
what? I ask the horse.
It weighs dark
over the mountains.
Translated by Ewald Osers

Poem

I live but a single moment.
This moment I disappear and transform myself into a
sound-sheet
this moment is too long for my death and for my fragile life
but a single hour buried in the snow
in the horizon's echo, included in the flash.
In the steep slopes, in the wind-swept mane.
This day is too long for my fragile life
for the voice I raise. I live
this single moment, like the grass.
High as the sky one moment.
I have but a single moment and the last,
when I must wake and shout,
but one final moment when I shout,
when I begin and when I end,
when at the end I shout at the top of my voice,
I live but one single moment, one single hour,
this single day.

Translated by Ewald Osers

Sea Nymphs Sea Pixies Thing

By James Robinson

This was supposed to be a villanelle
But all the parts apart fell oh,
go to hell.
It was about kids in a surfing class.
But up your ass. A thing happened, (things do)
And things resist rhyme and
Tap dance time, besides, my nymphs
Out of the cresting
Surf, dumped on the sands,
Were just Justin Bieber fans,
And couldn't lure even an air drowning breem
To the smiting mightily, wine dark sea.
The ruins of the verse are below.
Time equals gravity. Because the 11 year olds,
New as tears for tragedies, in their surfing class on the glowing beach
Weigh no more than the shadows they cast, but I lug every second of my seventy years, an aggregate mass
Heavy with deaths, Scotch, door handles, naps,
On my jog like an old rot-fanged Falstaff
Or Senior Citizen Caliban,with iron shins, glass knees.
The kids are easy as leaves, or sketches in
Clay, and brief as the slash of waves and
Fresh on their white boards paddling or on the beached boards straddilng their own gray shade;
These were my glittering subjects.
I was thrilled by their buoyancy, kids leaping in kids' gravity,
Sleek as seals. They seemed from the deep, with hair kelp slick
And glossy backs and through sunflamed water swam,
Through polished green and rising waves and
Its crests capped to dump them back—okay, stop.
Look. Three large dolphins breech and round, close
With black fins and seabirds whirl
Spinning over the feeding dolphins,
Wanting the flying silver fish they chase,
The dolphins are between the sandbar.
And the shore—too close? I don't know.
This family of morons,
Moron dad and mum, two idiotic teenaged sons,
Are fishing from there and
One kid with his rod and reel, whips a stroke
At the dolphins, so I say Don't!
I'm hot and fat and out of air but
I say "Don't-fish-dolphins-"
Permissive asshole dad: "He's not."
The mom says, "He should probably stop," but
The moron son casts again, and
I say, "Stop now you dumb fuck."
He does. They go. Maybe afraid of such a
Crazy violent fat old monster.
It feels that I run for thirty days
Beside child surfer girls, who ponder no more
Than shadows weigh the prints of their forms and curls.

James Robison *has published many stories in The New Yorker, won a Whiting Grant for his short fiction and a Rosenthal Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters for his first novel, The Illustrator, brought out by Bloomsbury in the U.K. His work has appeared in Best American Short Stories, The Pushcart Prize, Grand Street and thrice in The Manchester Review. The Mississippi Review devoted an issue to seven of his short stories. He co-wrote the 2008 film, New Orleans Mon Amour, and has poetry and prose forthcoming or published in Story Quarterly, The Northwest Review, The Green Mountains Review, The Dublin Quarterly, Salt Hill Journal, The Montreal Review, Scythe, Pirene's Fountain, The Raleigh Review, Smokelong Quarterly, The Santa Clara Review, elimae,The Blue Fifth Review, Istanbul Literary Review, Wigleaf, Commonline, BLIP Magazine, The Ramshackle Review, Blast Furnace, Stepaway Magazine, The Toronto Quarterly,The Houston Literary Review, Metazen, Corium Magazine, Wilderness House Literary Review, Message In A Bottle, Thrush Poetry Journal, The Innisfree Poetry Journal, Necessary Fiction, Danse Macabre, THIS magazine, The Paradise Review, Drunken Boat,The Philadelphia Review of Books,The 2River View and elsewhere. He taught for eight years at the University of Houston's Creative Writing Program, was Visiting Writer at Loyola College of Maryland, was Fiction Editor of The North Dakota Quarterly and 2011 Visiting Artist at The University of Southern Mississippi.He is the winner of a Pushcart Prize for 2013 and his story appears in that anthology.*

Strawberry
By Changming Yuan

Bolder than blood
Fleshier than a whole collection
Of summer spots

You wear your heart inside out
With sun-stained seeds

We wrap your body greedily
With our tongues and minds

Family Reunion: Once, and Forever
By Changming Yuan

Yuan Hongqi, may your spirit, Dad, come
And join us from Pure Land in this poem
(Conceived in and dedicated to Vancouver)
With Liu Yu, my mother, who is paying us
A visit from the other side of the world
Let's gather together behind these thin lines
Where I and Hengxiang Liao, my old girl
Have prepared a big dinner according to
Our own recipes. Please, sit here with Mom
Above my central metaphor. First, take a sip
Of Luosong Soup, our only family specialty
George Lai and Allen Qing, my two sons
Always love to drink, even Hyunjung Lee
(George's Korean wife) finds it agreeable --
By the way, the young couple has finally
Decided to buy a condominium in Sunnydale
Now, try some consonance, and this assonance
Fried with Tofu, a course you never heard of
In your lifetime. Look, right beside you is
Julian Han Yuan, your most favoured grandson
The pride of our family who's doing his PhD
In New York, and across the table are Liu Yun
My brother and his current wife Chen Jing
Still working far away in Jingzhou, China

Dad, since you were a vegetarian, a Buddhist
Let's have internal rhyme instead of wine, let's
Celebrate our grand family reunion. Cheers!

Changming Yuan*, 4-time Pushcart nominee and author of Allen Qing Yuan, grew up in rural China, holds a PhD in English, and currently tutors in Vancouver; his poetry appears in nearly 600 literary publications across 23 countries, including Best Canadian Poetry, BestNewPoemsOnline, Exquisite Corpse, KNOCK, Mad Hatters' Review, Red Rock Review and World Literature Today.*

The Waters We Trod

By Suman Singh

Summer's here,
the gusts of heat propel us
to the stream that rolls its waters
over rounded mounds, slick with slime,
we shift the slippery stones, close to the bank to hunt
for pools where tadpoles swim the gaps left free by creeping weeds
our shoes unshackled roll to freedom
while we curl our toes around curves to cling on hard lest
we tumble and break those precious

jam jars
half filled with water and bread scramble
we think the tadpoles love to eat to grow
into fish that swim where we sit later, in a place
a little more than shallow: here water slowly seeps
into the heat of clothes, of skin till we wrinkle up with cold—

it was on the tenth day
that you climbed out of those
rocks that weighed you down
that kept you buried in fathomless sleep—

Deep from the waters you did rise
your clothes intact and clean, your skin unwrinkled.
your skin, so you, but not—
so beautiful; so unmarked: just you and just not so—
why did you tread into those depths
when all we'd ever known were shallow streams
where we did sit with tadpoles
stuffed in glass jars to take home to
the fish pond, to watch them
grow to fish,
they never did:
that baby in your womb
didn't grow up either:

Geraniums

By Suman Singh

Her house
vermillion flames
flowing out of window boxes
lush with the warmth of life.

Geraniums:
Scarlet blooms
like a burst of sun
like the heat in veins
like wedding red

Her life amidst this life:
a blank
like canvass sheets
like snow as cold
like shrouds of white—

Go pick the sparks of life again
and blow back warmth,
write back geraniums into life,
go take the colours back from fate;
go pluck them up;
geraniums
and put them in your hair
vermillion, scarlet, red.

Suman Singh *lives in the lake town of Nainital, in the Himalayas, in India. A former English teacher and now a freelance writer, Suman's short stories, articles have been published in 'Hindustan Times' 'Reader's Digest', 'Teacherplus', 'Children's World' and chillibreeze.com. She is a writer/editor with Tushky.com. Her poetry has found place in 'Asiawrites', 'Quest' 'Browne Critique' and in an anthology 'Rendezvous'. She has also won first prize for her poem 'The Road has Cracks' in a competition organized by www.poetsindia.com.*

Battle ground

By Rhea Dhanbhoora

Back and forth past the battle lines

we wait for the war to end.

Raging silent in incessant, needless thoughts
washed away by an unpleasant haze of yesterday.

The battle-ax prepared to strike,
upheavals heavy in the murky air.

Let the tears drip like the pitter patter of
raindrops
as they sink below rays of light
- into despair.

Rising up from fallen clouds, it's over now
- drop heavy like angels making their way
down to hell –

Rhea Dhanbhoora *has been writing since she was seven years old, has had a book of poems published at the age of 13, (Poetry Through Time, published by English Edition in 2003) and is currently a Literature student who writes features for a daily newspaper as part of a full time job. Writing to her is everything she's ever wanted and she hopes to be able to live and breathe off the words, preferably in an idyllic country setting somewhere. She also enjoys a good meal, is an avid reader and loves music. Writing to her is an adventure – a journey to find her place, to define and redefine who she is over and over again and to live and learn through the process.*

Lamb Chops in Miami: A Chronology of our Shared Lives
by KJ Hannah Greenberg

Thirty years ago,
We ate lamb chops in Miami,
Grilled in Nana's toaster oven,
In an apartment complex,
Surrounded by geriatric mango trees.

Twenty years ago,
We dined on cheese fondue in Pittsburgh,
Mixed in chic, ethnic crucibles,
In a reincarnated train depot,
Surrounded by surviving smoke stacks.

Ten years ago,
We sipped maple slush in Bartlett,
Boiled for leaf peepers and townies,
In a high altitude sugar shack
Surrounded by snowy cross country trails.

Last year,
We toasted "l'chaim" in Jerusalem,
Distilled by lifelong yearnings,
For the ancient city of timeless sensibility,
Enveloped by ethereal holiness.

KJ Hannah Greenberg *snorts and snuffs in poetry and prose. In 2009 and 2011, Hannah was nominated, in the genre of poetry, for the Pushcart Prize. In 2012, again, in poetry, she was nominated for The Best of the Net. Her newest collections are: A Bank Robber's Bad Luck with His Ex-Girlfriend, Unbound CONTENT, 2011, poetry, Don't Pet the Sweaty Things, Bards & Sages Publishing, 2012, short fictions, and Fluid & Crystallized, Fowlpox Press, 2012, poetry.*

Alchemy

By Jim Davis

This beauty is killing me; do me a favor, would you
Conjugate the algae? Convert nitrogen to
Something divisible by whisky. I'll handle the
Denominator, you be the numeration of sky.
Why, when we speak of alchemy, do we always turn to
Flames licking the face of your Orion Constellation?
Hunter, Jäger, Cazador, you, con-
Sistently astonished by a system of ladders and
Chutes, your one chance to insist the congregation submit
Their daily wages to pay penance for the shepherd boy,
Back after translating the desert, to speak of camels
Blinking a third eyelid in the wind, crocs the same, as they
Submerge demurely into the marsh: universal safeguard,
Suggesting that water once was sand.

Jim Davis *is a graduate of Knox College and now lives, writes, and paints in Chicago, where he edits the North Chicago Review. Jim's work has appeared in Seneca Review, Blue Mesa Review, Poetry Quarterly, Whitefish Review, The Café Review, and Contemporary American Voices, in addition to winning the Line Zero Poetry Contest, Eye on Life Poetry Prize, multiple Editor's Choice awards, and a Best of the Net nomination. www.jimdavispoetry.com*

"The Melting Soul"

By Asad Aziz

Let me dance in mystify rain.
Let the spirit melt in you.
A fragrance through the listless vein.
Love is you, everything else seems untrue.
A giddy horse turning into camel.
An ego turning into ecstasy.
Let the heart burn its coated enamel.
Let the wisdom be my legacy.
My angst was the childish notion.
Why to fear when the best in me.
Let the drop mixed in ocean.
Let the love be my destiny.

Asad Aziz *is an engineer working in MNC.*

Darkness In A Four Room Attic
by Iolanda Scripca

Midnight's hollow streets...
Rolls Royce crushes cigarette butts as sinful, cold drizzle of animalistic desire
lurks on shadowy corners of locked buildings, for a price... negotiable..
Balconies bear yesterday's broken beads as a jazz musician is soundly asleep.
So much hard numbness in those easy to open bottles...
It rains over useless signs: " Do Not Park On Bridge!"
Skid marks end in despair...
A street light dies totally alone...
The phone rings with a grin looking for a Call Girl.
... Hello?
I tear out my heart and replace it with a wallet
Lipstick crosses boundaries of good taste so romance cannot develop.
I lay down frames with pictures of loved ones, face down...execution style...as I pour myself a glass of Morality Suicide...I drink it before I let myself go for, yet, another night of desensitized numbness...

Iolanda Scripca *lived in Eastern Europe for the first twenty four years of her life, in a loving family. Her mom was a teacher, a high school principal, and a cultural promoter. Her dad was a published novelist, poet and TV producer. An unforgettable moment was her collaboration with her Dad in the translation and adaptation of a children's book by the Bulgarian author Leda Mileva. She is a graduate of Foreign Languages and Literatures from the University of Bucuresti/Romania. Nowadays she enjoys Southern California and possesses a CA Teaching Credential from Chapman University. Ms. Scripca publishes in several Romanian-American Newspapers both in Romanian and English. "Lava Of My Soul" is her recently released collection of poems and essays*

Pancake
by Syed Zulkifil

The pangs of guilt over fry the pancakes of
Un-prioritized hopes, and flavor it
by a pinch of sweet
Roasted cocoa and raspberry essence
cut into neat trapezoids
–like a delicate piece of fine jewelry treated by hands [roughed by routine]
And laugh upon my dim-witted aesthetics
In the pan of life like the obscure
(Pompous) paintings of magic realism
The curve of my fantasy over the low flame
Shouts to reach out the circular dimensions of being
Round like my circular thoughts
To which
My striving is an asymptote
Un-intersecting even in the stream of my wildest fancies
Never reaching a catharsis, her dreams of bliss- a line of sanity that defines her
[Infinities lay approached, tried and worn like a pair of denim jeans]
a semi-appetizing grainy, coarse texture of starch and salt
[savory by the cream topping reflect the affected appearances of life]
Experiments with eager taste buds
A reality too bizarre for the physical space of my body
Hyper-realistic like hypothesis of quantum physics
Infinitely tired by the zeal of perfection
[my wishful thinking gets better of me]
at the end
[slowly] towards
an insatiable lust for more
-Losing itself in its own search,
asking me, “is this what you had aspired?”

Syed *holds a BS in Social Sciences from Lahore University of Management Sciences and is currently pursuing an MA in Critical Methodologies at Kings College, London. His research interests include exploring the links between Anthropological perspectives of Literature, Critical Theory and the influence of Postmodern sensibility in poetry. He writes poems in Urdu and English and has published two research essays in BUNYAD and NUMUD, to date.*

Stalag Zehn B
by Jan Theuninck

the feldwebel became a general
the campdoctor , a professor
and we the jews - it's banal
we stayed jewish - no error

Jan Theuninck*(°Zonnebeke, June 7, 1954) is a Belgian artist and writer of poessays, ekphrastic poetry and short verses.*

To Emancipation
By Fahmeena Aslam

My father chains me tightly,
Bars me from embracing the times,
Lambasted for lacking zeal and mind,
I'm Blamed for villainous tricks only.

My husband suppresses me cruelly,
Entombs me within four walls
For I tempt sensually:
I exist but to serve his calls.

My son calls me a soother,
A balm for his testy father.
I gave him nothing except life,
My role, therefore again circumscribed.

But oh my son, my father and my mate
I protest, I protest, I protest!

Though I constitute fifty one percent
My participation is not even one percent.

I am proud to be a mother
For I nurse a culture in my womb.
I am proud to be a tempter
For I tempt both peace and love.

O most forgetful human being
Whenever you stir evil
In my peaceful abode,
God puts a prophet in my womb!!

Fahmeena Aslam *is a lecturer by profession. Currently, she is pursuing M.Phil in English Language & Literature at Fatima Jinnah Women University, Pakistan.*

Delhi Buses
By Prabhat Kumar Sharma

Dilapidated cuboids on capital boulevards,
honking their way through automotive crowd.
Anomaly in sedans, hatchbacks and go karts,
grotesque among surrounding ferrous shroud.

DTC's, Bluelines, RTV's and charted,
colour coded and alpha numerically apart.
Glitch to recognize the minutiae painted,
may land you in an alien mart.

Pivotal for business and commuters.
Epicenters of fun and gossip for students.
Domain of debate and engine friskers,
if indulged in frequent accidents.

Discarding them altogether is no solution,
excruciating the deed may be.
In swarms we wait for our Delhi buses,
as a part of social melody.

Prabhat Kumar Sharma *is a nuclear scientist presently working with Institute for Plasma Research, Gandhinagar. He completed his schooling from Sainik School Ghorakhal, Nainital and subsequently his graduation from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi with honours degree in Mechanical Engineering.*

Poems by Matthieu Baumier

From *Mystes*
English text by Elizabeth Brunazzi

Memory of Joel Coutura

To enter the cavern places of being
And travel in the crucible of darkened lands
The *prima* matter of all light

And *Ecce homo*

This is accomplished on the inside
Behind the spiraling coils of the heavens
And appears as a spark
Ecce homo

Behold the *reflection*

And from the confines of the work
We recreate chaos
We strike, mallets in our hands
We sculpt entire continents
And see nothing of them.

We await the very order of the real
The apparent impossible signs
Of the Island silence
where we are reborn at the waters' root.

*****

In Memory of Luc Dietrich

Then, all around the *Axis Mundi*
Like trapped bees looking for a way out
We, strange creatures of rough stone,
Trace red cliffs in charcoal.

This is the hour of perception
Of the twisted mirror of the "world"
And of what we learn from the shadows in fossils
We say:
This is the hour of all silences
Of the surge of poetry
Of the lighting of stones
Of the waking of builders

And, with eyes that observe the limitless
We say:
And see, *see*
Look again, *look* at the extent of fading
landscapes
Banish the pathless ones
And call upon the spirit of witness

At the moment of all silences, at the moment of
poetry
Nothing moves.
In the humus, all is embrace and rebirth
And we speak here of the entirety of the world.

*****

We have gone to the earth,
We have gone beneath the oak,
Facing the stillness of
The winged speech of the world.

The oak is inscribed on the earth,
The wings of the world folded within,
Nothing moves.

In that place stones and trees converse,
In that place stars and clouds empty out
The unmoving crease of the world.
We have gone toward the eye
Of the sun,
We have gone inside the bark
Of the silver birch,

And the wild cherry trees.

In the silence of the heart, the immobility
Of the tree,
We have gone there.

In places far off from men, without language,
Vanity,
We have gone.

Born in 1968, ***Matthieu Baumier*** *is a French writer who have publishing novels, essays and poetry. His poetry is feature by many French review and magazine. Also by Àgora (Espagne), Ditch (Canada), Polja (Serbie), The French Literary Review (Angleterre), Poezija magazine (Croatie), Word Riot (Etats-Unis), Poetry quaterly (Etats-Unis).*
He is the chief editor of Recours au Poème, www.recoursaupoeme.com .

The Walk
For Pauline
From the French "Sainteté je marche vers toi," by Gwen Garnier-Duguy, English text by Elizabeth Brunazzi

At daybreak I take up the walk again. My body carries the leavings of the European continent whose peoples inhabit my stride. Innumerable hands of those now gone to earth flutter over my shoulders, sustaining me with their hope that I will return to the certainties they have bequeathed me. I speak Old French, Latin. It seems I know the Greek language. The Loire, the Rhone, the Tigris and Euphrates and the Nile run in my veins. The waters of the Jordan flow through my memories. I do not know how I will survive. My refusal to walk with the princes on the razor's edge of power has left doubts. Doubt returns to me. The horror of deprivation makes my heart beat too fast. The spectacle of corruption invades the pupils of my eyes. I know I can kill. I catch a glimpse of a triangular white sail on the horizon. I exhort Icarus to rise toward the sun of my body. I have grown arms to embrace the immensity of life. I start my walk again. I believe in God but today I do not know how to name him. I crush all doubt with a firm step like the pebbles beneath my feet. I follow the beacon light that my mind shows me. Blood trickles from every pore of my skin. The blood makes a perfect circle around the estuaries of my body. My blood is as red as the skies. The skies perch on my shoulders and flap like a cape as I advance. I look with compassion on the cries of the traitors who have tried to deafen us. To their siren songs I hold out my hand in pardon. I walk in the flux of the world, my muscles, my body filling with the energy of those who plunge into life. I continue the walk. I take the invisible stairway. I breathe the glorious music of the Pyramids. Behind me all the trees are blossoming. My gaze steady, I walk toward the widening constellations of my azure sky. I walk in the purity of its music, rising toward the summit of my hope, the saints, there, I walk toward you.

Your hands have left
the imprint of love
in the vicinity of our dreams
and retracing your steps
we traverse
your love
sometimes permitting
our seedings
to dance with your own
Through this miracle
all life
remains intact.

Interpreted in English by Elizabeth Brunazzi
From Danse sur le territoire, amorce de la parole, éditions de l'Atlantique, 2011.

Gwen Garnier-Duguy's *poetry was first published in 1995 in the surrealist-inspired review Supérieur Inconnu and continued to appear in the publication until 2005.*
In 2003 he participated in a colloquium on the poet Patrice de la Tour du Pin at the Collège de France and gave a presentation on the poetics of absence central to La Quête de Joie.
Fascinated by the painting of Robert Mangú, Garnier-Duguy wrote a novel on the artist, Nox, published by the Éditions le Grand Souffle.
His poems have also been published in the reviews Sarrazine, La Soeur de l'Ange, POESIEDirecte, Les cahiers du sens, Le Bateau Fantôme, La main millénaire, and Nunc.
His poem Sainteté je marche vers toi was published in L'année poétique, 2009, by Seghers.
In 2011 Éditions de l'Atlantique published his first collection of poetry Danse sur le territoire, amorce de la parole, with a preface by Michel Host, recipient of the Goncourt prize in 1986.
Gwen Garnier-Duguy and Matthieu Baumier founded the online magazine Recours au poème ((www.recoursaupoème.com) devoted to international poetry in May 2012.

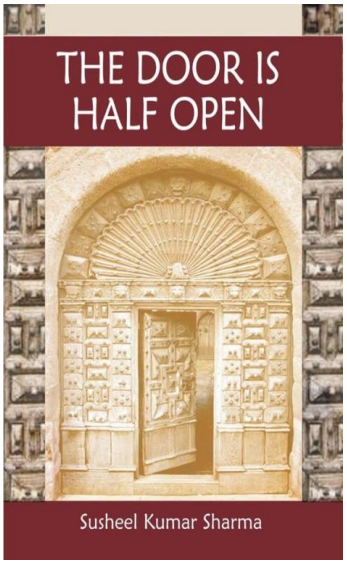
You Are Your Own Cage
"Mental Complacency" by René Magritte

You are your own cage, your own prison, the stone of your own tomb when you lock yourself in yourself. You are your own cage when you squirm and fret, the air thick and fetid, folded back on itself, breathed over too many times. You are your own prison when you languish and wait, close the doors, bolt the windows, draw the curtains and turn on the light, while outside the trees are swinging their leaves in the breeze, dancing their dance, tiptoeing. You are your own prison when you wall yourself in, instead of laughing and stepping outside to bathe in the waters of the mid-morning, to welcome the blue of the sea, the expanse of the sky, the waves of clean breath, the rhythm of running deep in your lungs. You are your own tomb when you skitter inside the room, fidget and lament, instead of listening to the song of the trees, the waves of the sea, the silence of a small fire lit on the beach.

When You Don't Write
"The Blank Page" by René Magritte

When you don't write, I always think I did something, as if I were four years old again. When you don't write I think I hurt your feelings, forgot your birthday, sent you the wrong gift, my gift was too expensive or got lost in the mail. When you don't write, I feel like a child again, eager for my mother's approval, eager to please her, eager for her smile, a good word, and a praise. And my mother is not a river of praises. When you don't write, I always think my words got mangled in translation and you read my compliment as an insult, my encouragement as a slight, my gift as a reproach. When you don't write, it's dark outside, and the moon mixes the deep blue of your eyes with the gold of trembling candles.

Lucia Cherciu *is a Professor of English at SUNY/ Dutchess in Poughkeepsie, NY. Her poetry appeared in "The Prose-Poem Project," "Cortland Review," "Memoir," "Connotation Press," "Connecticut Review," "Paterson Literary Review," "Spillway," and elsewhere. She is the author of two books of poetry: "Lepădarea de Limbă" ("The Abandonment of Language"), Editura Vinea 2009, and "Altoiul Râsului" ("Grafted Laughter"), Editura Brumar 2010.*



Nataša Miladinović on "***The Door is Half Open***", the poetry book by Susheel Kumar Sharma

The Taming of Fear

Collective mind gathers symbols through time, transferring them from one culture to another. There are numerous fields of study trying to break the code of the meaning of symbols and similar archetypal phenomena, such as myths, religious, poetry and philosophy writings, from their earliest stages to the present date. Anthropology, ethnology, along with comparative mythology, sociolinguistics and its counterpart the sociology of language, to name only a few, stand at the forefront of this archaeological excavation.

At the beginning of our existence, the physical aspect of human being was dependent upon the earth and its bearing of fruits. Due to the inexorable course of evolution, the omnipotent forces of nature presented themselves upon him and his peers. One can only try to imagine how deeply the underwhelmed minds of our forefathers were shaken after hearing a clap of thunder, or witnessing a flood. The being that had the ability to generate such a force was perceived as the more powerful one in the equation of existence.

What else could they do but choose the best among them who, in the behalf of all, was to use all his might in propitiating such supreme beings? Such outstandingly wise and insightful individuals started being revered together with their actions and words, and were named shamans, druids and prophets, who took on the roles of priests and teachers in the modern times. They became the saviours of societies, those to whose actions and words every member of society turned to in the times of both prosperity and hardship.

Thus, the rituals of sympathetic or homeopathic magic became a part of religious rituals, such as prayer, sacrifice, or the observance of a taboo. Religion was erected, on the foundations of magic and myth, and generated the human beings who started building up – word by word – the new realm of civilization within the walls of nature.

The first places of worship and performing rituals were in the natural environment, at the sites considered to be ports between the mundane and spiritual world. Trees and rocks, rivers and springs were the first revered places serving as altars. These later shifted into the sanctity of a house where people performed rituals either at the centre of the building by the fire (which should under no circumstances be put out), or at the doors and thresholds.

Since the number of people constituting a society started to increase, the first places of worship large enough to embrace all of the society members began to emerge – temples, churches and cathedrals became sacred in their own right. They were even built on sites previously considered sacred.

The old Slavic faith was a system of belief which had similarities with other Indo-European religions. The old Slavs revered the deities of nature and supernatural beings and saw the evidence of their existence everywhere around them. After the Great migrations of Slavs in the 5th and 6th centuries, the Slavic system of belief split into several branches, and at the same time they started to accept the existing systems of the territories they settled upon. Since they were mostly exposed to the influences of the Holy Roman and Byzantine Empires, the Slavs began accepting Christianity in its Western and Eastern form. The Nestor's Chronicle, written in the middle of the 11th century, speaks of the so-called Slavic dual form of religious belief – the simultaneous existence of paganism and Christianity among the Slavs. The Slavs unwilling to accept Christianity, who remained devoted to their original faith, were later forced to convert into Christianity. The Slavic shrines were demolished, and Christian churches were built at their sites. The statues of old deities were destroyed without exception since they were considered to represent "demonic" idols. After the conquest of territories by Byzantine Emperor Basil I, known as the Macedonian (867-886), many of the old shrines and idols were demolished, apart from the

Temple of Svetovid. The temple was “purified”, and the Church of St. Vid was erected on its foundations. By the end of the 12th century, under the rule of Stefan Nemanja, Christianity in the form of Serbian Orthodox Church was the only officially accepted form of religious worship. However, Serbs kept clinging to their old Slavic practices, and the last pagan temple was destroyed by the Emperor Dušan in the 14th century.

There are numerous examples of single religious buildings being taken over by different cultural and religious members. Such is the case with the Basilica of St. Peter in Italy, The Cathedral and former Great Mosque of Córdoba in Spain, and Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey.

The Basilica of St. Peter is believed to have been erected over the spot where St. Peter was buried after his martyrdom in Rome around 64 CE. Over two hundred years later, in the early 4th century, Emperor Constantine erected a basilica dedicated to St. Peter on the Vatican Hill on the south side of the Tiber River. The basilica was erected with difficulty on the sloping side of Vatican Hill. Excavations undertaken in 1939 underneath the floor of St. Peter's, uncovered a Roman cemetery which was considered to be a sacred place. At a spot located directly beneath the main altar of the basilica a small shrine was discovered. Although there was no indication other than location, it was claimed by some that the shrine was dedicated to St. Peter. Constantine's basilica was demolished in the 16th century, and the present church was built on the same site.

The Cathedral and former Great Mosque of Córdoba, in ecclesiastical terms the Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción (Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption), and known by the inhabitants of Córdoba as the Mezquita-Catedral (Mosque–Cathedral), is today a World Heritage Site and the cathedral of the Diocese of Córdoba. It is located in the Andalusian city of Córdoba, Spain. The site was originally a pagan temple, then a Visigothic Christian church, before the Umayyad Moors converted the building into a mosque and then built a new mosque on the site. After the Spanish Reconquista, it became a Roman Catholic church, with a plateresque cathedral later inserted into the centre of the large Moorish building. The Mezquita is regarded as the one of the most accomplished monuments of Islamic architecture.

Hagia Sophia is a former Orthodox patriarchal basilica, later a mosque, and now a museum in Istanbul, Turkey. From the date of its dedication in 360 until 1453, it served as the Greek Patriarchal cathedral of Constantinople, except between 1204 and 1261, when it was converted to a Roman Catholic cathedral under the Latin Empire. The building was a mosque from 29 May 1453 until 1931, when it was secularized. It was opened as a museum on 1 February 1935.

The Streaming of Consciousness

Doors, thresholds and gates are all symbolic entrances into new worlds. These entrances can be into a new life or they might represent communication between one world and another, between the living and the dead. The symbolism between gate and threshold is very similar. The symbolism of a gate, though, suggests more of a protecting and guarding aspect while that of a threshold suggests simply a passage from one realm to another.

One of the characteristics of civilization development which significantly influenced the notion of human living was the invention of doors, for when the man put the door at his primitive shelters, he turned them into habitats. Namely, he ceased simply to shelter and possum himself, and started permanently settling within the building which represented his home.

From the architectural point of view, the door is a movable structure, be it of simple or complex design, whose main purpose is to protect the people or assets in a closed building from the dangers lurking outside – by making it weatherproof, serving as protection from wild animals, enemies or burglars, but also as an entrance or exit from closed space into the open one. Apart from its physical characteristics, the symbolism of the doors was becoming ever more complex and enriched, together with its constituent parts, namely the threshold. Therefore, the door symbolizes the passage from one world into another, and the threshold stands as the borderline between those two – the outer, earthly one, and the interior, sacred world.

The threshold is the meeting point of natural and supernatural, the place at which various rituals connected with the most important moments in family life, such as childbirth, wedding, or death rituals, are performed. Archaeology has revealed that, in the prehistoric era, it was common practice to bury the family and household members underneath it. Therefore it was not allowed to sit or step on it; when entering or leaving the house it was advised to jump over it – especially when a bride is entering the groom’s house for the first time; consequently she was carried in (this custom is still witnessed in many different cultures). It was also customary for the bride to spread honey on it and kiss the door frame.

The practice of food, libations or objects offering was performed there, in order to protect the family and bring them prosperity. It was forbidden to shake hands at the threshold when welcoming visitors in. In many traditions, the threshold of a temple, a shrine or a mausoleum is considered to be sacred. Even today it is not to be stepped on, before it the believer falls on his knees in piety, and honours it by kissing. Since the doors were the core place of protective magical rituals, various objects such as knives, hayforks or pieces of a scythe, were put onto them at the exterior side, or symbols painted on it in order to protect the household members from the forces of evil. During the spring or summer rites, the plants with apotropaic effects were hanged on or above them. If needed, offerings were placed on the threshold.

In *A Dictionary of Symbols*, J. E. Cirlot discusses temple doors and altars: "There is the same relationship between the temple-door and the altar as between the circumference and the centre; even though in each case the two component elements are the farthest apart, they are nonetheless, in a way, the closest since the one determines and reflects the other." Cirlot notes that this is well illustrated in the architectural ornamentation of cathedrals where the facade is nearly always treated as an altar-piece.

A closed door signifies rejection, exclusion, secrecy, but also protection against dangers and the unknown. A door, which is only half open or swinging in a draft, is something disturbing, since it symbolizes moral irresolution and lack of courage. Sometimes it may be our duty to open a door and to enter a room although it is evident that we shall encounter very disagreeable things by doing so. A priest, for instance, may have to visit a house in which a person is suffering from a very contagious disease. The Jews considered themselves unclean if they had entered the house of pagans. The ancient Romans thought that it meant a profanation of their soldiers if they marched out through the gates of Rome and fought with the enemy outside. For it was generally believed that what was within the walls of a city or of the individual houses was holy; whatever was outside the walls was considered profane and evil. Consequently the enemies with whom their soldiers fought were looked upon by the Romans as unholy and impure. When the soldiers came back from a campaign they had therefore to be purified by religious rites under the very gates of the city. Somewhat later majestic triumphal arches were erected by the Roman Senate that the "sanctification" of the returning army might be performed under them.

In *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, J.C. Cooper notes this guarding and protecting nature of gates. They are the "protective, sheltering aspect of the Great Mother." Usually they "are guarded by symbolic animals such as lions, dragons, bulls, dogs or fabulous beasts." C. G. Jung speaks of doors in the same manner, as the feminine symbol, and the antithesis of the wall. In *Psychology and Alchemy*, he noted that doors contain all the implications of the symbolic hole.

At the gates of the House of Osiris a goddess keeps each gate, whose name has to be known. The Gates of the East and West are the doors of the World Temple through which the sun passes morning and night. The “strait gate” is the central point of communication between the lower and higher; the passage, in “spiritual poverty” for initiates or at death, leading to new life. In the Orient, for instance, in Palestine, the gate of the city was the gathering place where the king and the wise men of the land came to judge the people and to discuss political matters.

In Christianity the Virgin Mary is the Gate of Heaven. She is greeted as a door, Salve Porta, in the antiphon Ave Regina Coelorum, and addressed: Maria, quae est coelestis porta, in the beautiful antiphon Adorna thalamum on the feast of her Purification. She was given the title of Janua coeli, door (gate) of heaven, in the Litany of Loreto. This can be seen further in the verse "A porta inferi erue Domine animas eorum— From the gate of hell deliver their souls, O Lord" in the Office of the Dead. But let us not forget that Christ refers to Himself as the door of His sheepfold. "I am the door. If any man enter by Me, he shall be safe". His invitation is: "Pulsate, et aperietur vobis—And I say to you… knock, and it shall be opened to you. For to him that knocketh, it shall be opened".

Honouring the Forefathers

The modern-day religious buildings keep their original religious symbolism. The First Kadampa Temple opened its doors on August 1, 1997. Venerable Geshe Kelsang gave an explanation on the way it was constructed, and the meaning of the symbols implemented. The designing of the building was based on the *mandala* of Buddha Heruka, who is the Compassion Buddha of Highest Yoga Tantra. The Temple has four doors, and is surrounded by eight auspicious signs which show us how to progress along the Buddhist path to enlightenment. On top of the wall, on each side, are two deer and a Dharma Wheel. At the very top there is a golden five-pronged vajra. The four doors symbolize the four doors of liberation. These are four different types of wisdom realizations that are explained in the Essence of Vajrayana. The four doors have the same symbolism as Heruka’s four faces. They teach us that if we want to attain permanent liberation from suffering we must enter the four doors, that is,

develop four special wisdom realizations that understand the ultimate truth of things. The four doors therefore teach us the spiritual path.

This Temple is surrounded by the eight auspicious signs: The umbrella symbolizes the umbrella of the Buddhist community and teaches us that those who have the sincere wish to progress on the Buddhist path to enlightenment should first enter the Buddhist family, which means taking refuge in the Three Jewels and becoming a Buddhist. The fish symbolize harmony and peace, and teaches us that under this umbrella you should always live in harmony and peace. The vase symbolizes wealth and teaches that Buddhist practitioners always enjoy the inner wealth of faith, moral discipline, study and practice of Dharma, benefiting others, the sense of shame, the consideration for others, and wisdom. The knot of eternity symbolizes an uncommon quality of Buddha's realizations – his realization of omniscient wisdom – and the victory banner symbolizes an uncommon quality of Buddha's abandonment – his abandonment of delusions and mistaken appearance. The last two signs together, the knot of eternity and the victory banner, indicate that through gaining the Dharma Jewel, the realization of the stages of the path to enlightenment, we shall attain these two uncommon qualities of Buddha. The Dharma Wheel indicates that having attained these two uncommon qualities of Buddha we now have the ability to lead all living beings to permanent liberation from suffering, principally by turning the Wheel of Dharma, that is, by giving Dharma teachings. This is our final goal. So the eight auspicious signs show how to begin, progress along, and complete the spiritual path. First we need to gain the realization of the stages of the path. Through this we shall attain the two uncommon qualities of Buddha; and through this we have the ability to lead all beings to permanent liberation from suffering by giving Dharma teachings, which is our final goal. Therefore the symbolism of This Temple being surrounded by these eight auspicious signs reminds you that you should put the meaning of these signs into practice and integrate them into your daily life.

Above each doorway there are two deer and a Dharma Wheel, and at the very top of the Temple there is a *vajra*. Together, these symbolize the stages of the path of Highest Yoga Tantra. The eight auspicious signs symbolize in general how to progress along the Buddhist path, and the deer, Dharma Wheel, and top *vajra* teach us the stages of the path of Highest Yoga Tantra. The male deer symbolizes the realization of great bliss, the female deer the realization of emptiness, and the Dharma Wheel the union of these two. Through progressing in this union of great bliss and emptiness, finally we will attain the five omniscient wisdoms of a Buddha, which are symbolized by the top five-pronged *vajra*.

In summary, the symbolism of the Temple is as follows: Through progressing in the basic practice symbolized by the eight auspicious signs and then progressing in the uncommon spiritual path of Highest Yoga Tantra that is the union of great bliss and emptiness, finally we will attain Buddha's five omniscient wisdoms.

Walking the Path

The appearance of gates, thresholds and doors is common to all story genres. Usually the hero passes through them to symbolically mark the beginning of his journey. The name of our hero is Susheel Kumar Sharma. He was born in India in 1962 and works as an English language Professor at the University of Allahabad. Does it surprise you that he is a teacher? And a poet? He journeyed beyond numerous doors and gates, and skipped over many thresholds to meet Shakespeare, John Milton, Samuel Johnson, Bernard Shaw, W. B. Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, George Orwell, Miriam Waddington, Sandra Lunnon, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Rabindranath Tagore, Arun Joshi and Anurag Mathur, and was kind enough to share his experiences by writing research articles and sharing them selflessly. One of his research books titled *The Theme of Temptation in Milton* was published in New Delhi. Fancy taking a stroll through his new book of verse? How kind of him to leave the door half-open. Which way the path beyond it leads?

To heaven or hell? Or somewhere else?

Christianity depicts heaven and hell in a fairly clear way. The Christian view describes these as permanent abodes, with the good going to God who dwells in heaven, and the bad rotting in hell for all eternity. But there is a different view on the matter. According to the Hindu *Puranas*, there are fourteen worlds in the universe - the seven upper and the seven lower. The seven upper worlds are *Bhuh, Bhavah, Swah, Mahah, Janah, Tapah*, and *Satyam*; and the seven nether worlds are *Atala, Vitala, Sutala, Rasatala, Talatala, Mahatala*, and *Patala*. The region known as *Bhuh* is the earth where we dwell, while Swah is the celestial world to which people repair after death to enjoy the reward of their righteous actions on earth. *Bhuvah* is the region between the two. *Janah, Tapah*, and *Satyam* constitute *Brahmaloka*, or the highest heaven, where fortunate souls repair after death and enjoy spiritual communion with the personal God, and at the end of the cycle attain liberation, though a few return to earth again. The world of *Mahah* is located between *Brahmaloka* and *Bhuh, Bhuuah*, and *Swah*. *Patala*, the lowest of the seven nether worlds, is the realm where wicked souls sojourn after death and reap the results of their unrighteous actions on earth.

Thus, from the viewpoint of Hinduism, heaven and hell are merely different worlds, bound by time, space, and causality. According to Hinduism, desires are responsible for a person's embodiment. Some of these desires can best be fulfilled in a human body, and some in an animal or a celestial body. Accordingly, a soul assumes a body determined by its unfulfilled desires and the results of its past actions. An animal or a celestial body is for reaping the results of past karma, not for performing actions to acquire a new body. Performance of karma to affect any change of life is possible only in a human body, because only human beings do good or evil consciously. Human birth is therefore a great privilege, for in a human body alone can one attain the supreme goal of life. Thus, in search of eternal happiness and immortality, the apparent soul is born again and again in different bodies, only to discover in the end that immortality can never be attained through fulfilment of desires. The soul then practices discrimination between the real and the unreal, attains desirelessness, and finally realizes its immortal nature.

"When all the desires that dwell in the heart fall away, then the mortal becomes immortal and here attains Brahman." – ***The Katha Upanishada***

When the chattering of an individual mind stops, as it does through Mudra, Bandha or Meditation, one's perception can be projected through the fissure of the mind into Reality. Then one sees behind the scenes of what we unquestionably consider to be real – our day to day, mundane life of fears and worries. We realize the super sensory and the Transcendental Dimension of our Being.

According to Hindu tradition, *Sahasrara* is the name of the seventh primary chakra. It symbolizes detachment from illusion; an essential element in obtaining higher consciousness of the truth. In the physical sense, *Sahasrara* is either located at the top of the head or a little way above it. There are also viewpoints arguing it to be located in either the pineal gland or the pituitary gland. Symbolically, it is depicted as 1,000 multi-coloured petals arranged in 20 layers, each of them having 50 petals. The pericarp is golden. Inside of it is an area with circular moon, and a downward pointing triangle. It is from this chakra that all the other chakras emanate.

In Hindu literature, it is known as "the supreme centre of contact with God". In Yoga, this psychic fissure is called the *Brahma Randhra* (Sanskrit, "*brahma*", consciousness; "*randhra*", fissure) - the Fissure into Pure Consciousness. In Yoga, it can be called the *Brahma Dwara* (Sanskrit, "*dwara*", door) - the Door to Pure Consciousness. It is also widely called the Tenth Door - the other nine doors being the nine orifices (two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, mouth, anus and sexual organ), which lead to the outside world. When these nine doors are closed through Yogic practices, then perception is obliged to go through the tenth door, the *Brahma Dwara* or the Door of Consciousness.

The crown wheel is important within the Highest Yoga traditions of Buddhist *Vajrayana*. It is triangular, with 32 petals or channels that point downwards, and within it resides the white drop or white *bodhicitta*. Through meditation, the yogi attempts to unite this drop with the red *bodhicitta* in the navel, and to experience the union of emptiness and bliss. It is very important in the Tantric practice of Phowa, or consciousness transference. At the time of death, a yogi can direct his consciousness up the central channel and out of this wheel in order to be reborn in a Pure Land, where they can carry on their tantric practices, or they can transfer their consciousness into another body or a corpse, in order to extend their lives.

In the West, it has been noted by many – such as Charles Ponce in his book *Kabbalah*, that *Sahasrara* expresses a similar archetypal idea to that of Kether in the kabalistic tree of life, which also rests at the head of the tree, and represents pure consciousness and union with God. Within the Sufi system of Lataif-e-sitta there is a Lataif called Akfha, the "most arcane subtlety", which is located on the crown. It is the point of unity where beatific visions of Allah are directly revealed.

The Silent Singing of Consciousness

The true name of God in Sikhism is *Ik Onkar* in Punjabi, or Om in Sanskrit, meaning an isolated Shapeless God. The true name of God in Hinduism is *Ishwara*, meaning Supreme controller, lord. The true name of God in Buddhism is Four Noble Truths. Allah is the most frequently used true name of God in Islam. The Holy Trinity is the true name of God in Christianity.

Guru Nanak Dev composed *Japji Sahib*, the language of pure silence of Shapeless God, which is the foundation of the Sikh religion, followed by many in the Muslim and Hindu community. *Japji* is written in the sutra or mantra form, like the ancient Indian sacred texts and contains concentrated thought expressed in the minimum words. It is this economy of words and brevity of expression which distinguish this composition from all others.

The whole prayer concerns itself with the problems of ordinary. Its theme covers a suggested course of training for an average family-man that would enable him to attain spiritual perfection. It does recommend passive contemplation or living an isolated life. It favours man's participation in the affairs of the world, combined with an integration of wisdom and selfless activity. In the very first verse, Guru Nanak states its whole theme in question form: How can one be a man of The Truth? How can one break down the wall of falsehood? He supplies the answer very briefly in the following line. The goal is to elevate ordinary people to the mystic vision of God. Prof. Seshadri explains it thus: "The quest is inward and the goal, God-realisation! The sacred shrine is within the heart of man, but the essential precondition for the success of man's earthly pilgrimage is to overcome his own Ego. Hence the need for Dharma and the discipline of morality." There is a constant inner urge of the human soul for Oneness with God, for every person has a Divine Spark within himself. Verse 15 of Japji Sahib proclaims that faith in the true name of God Shapeless carries us to the door of liberation. Punjabi script is as follows:

ਮੰਨੈ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਮੋਖੁ ਦੁਆਰੁ ॥ ਮੰਨੈ ਪਰਵਾਰੈ ਸਾਧਾਰੁ ॥
ਨ ਭਿਖ ॥ ਐਸਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਨਿਰੰਜਨੁ ਹੋਇ ॥ ਜੇ ਕੋ ਮੰਨਿ ਜਾਣੈ :

Transliterated it looks like this:

"Mann-ay_paaveh_mokh_duaar.
Mann-ay_parvaarai_saadhaar.
Mann-ay_tarai_tare_gur_sikh.
Mann-ay_Nanak_bhaveh_na_bhikh.
Aisaa_naam_niranjan_hoe.
Je_ko_Mann-ay_jaanai_man_koe."

And the word-by-word translation sounds like this: "Mann-ay": faith in the pure consciousness; "paaveh": achieve; "Mokh duaar": top of the door to nature of the true name of God Shapeless; "Parvaarai": dynasty; "Saadhaar": renovation; "Tarai": protected; "Tare": make protected; "Gur": mantra; "Sikhs": learners; "Bhaveh": make any sense of love; "Bhikha": begging; "Aisa": such; "Naam": name; "Niranjan": purity without spot; "Hoe": is; "Jaani": to review; "Mann": mind; "Koe": lost.

The 15th Pauri (prayer) stands for Kundalini Awakening. This final pauri promises the fruits of surrender: the 10th gate opens. We awaken, and in awakening we carry our family, our friends and their karmas with us as we cross the world ocean. One would never imagine that through the simple act of surrender we can manifest such victory, but that is the path of the Guru, the path of obedience, for in the seeds of surrender we generate the fruit of excellence and grace.

The Divine Cycle

Water has a central place in the practices and beliefs of many religions. Almost all Christian churches or sects have an initiation ritual involving the use of water. Baptism has its origins in the symbolism of the Israelites being led by Moses out of slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea, and from the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the Jordan. In Islam water is important for cleansing and purifying. Muslims must be ritually pure before approaching God in prayer. In Islam ritual purity (called *tahara*) is required before carrying out religious duties especially *salat* (worship). In Judaism ritual washing is intended to restore or maintain a state of ritual purity and its origins can be found in the Torah. These ablutions can be washing the hands, the hands and the feet, or total immersion which must be done in 'living water', i.e. the sea, a river, a spring or in a *mikveh*. Even in Buddhism where symbolism and ritual is pointless because they seek spiritual enlightenment – it comes from seeing the reality of unreality, water feature is used in funeral rites. It is poured into a bowl placed before the monks and the dead body. As it fills and pours over the edge, the monks recite "As the rains fill the rivers and overflow into the ocean, so likewise may what is given here reach the departed." Water in Hinduism has a special place because it is believed to have spiritually cleansing powers. To Hindus all water is sacred, especially rivers.

There is a particular river in India which is the central point of worship and religious awe. It is the major river of the Gangetic plain of Northern India and the holy river of Hinduism. Its source stream is the Bhāgīrathī – a turbulent Himalayan river in the state of Uttarakhand. This river runs from the Himalayas all the way to the Bay of Bengal. The river is Ganga Ma, "Mother Ganges". The name of the Ganges is known all throughout the land of India. It represents life, purity, and a goddess to the people of India.

"O Ganges!

The dweller in Lord Brahma's *kamandala*

The abider in Lord Vishnu's feet

The resider in Lord Shiva's locks

The sojourner in the Himalayas

The daughter of Sage Jahnu

The co-wife to Parvati and Lakshmi

The redeemer of Bhagiratha's race

The atoner of Sagar's progeny

The mother of brave Bhishma

O *Ganga Maiya*!

Homage to thee.

Accept my obeisance

O *Punyakirti*!" **("Ganga Mata – A Prayer", p. 1)**

Attracted by the sound of a prayer whose words fall on the water waves as lovingly as a lotus flower kisses the holy river's surface, I turn my head and behold the grey-haired man. I listen to his words attentively. He was the kind teacher who left the doors half open, and the banks of the river Ganges is the place where we finally meet. I rejoice, for he speaks! We shall walk together down the banks for a while.

It is written in the Shiva *Purana* that in order to assure the Earth's salvation, the gods had to hasten the birth of Shiva's son, who was the one destined to lead the divine hosts and to conquer the forces of darkness which had taken possession of the planet. But Shiva was in no hurry to make a son, and so the Gods found it necessary to steal Shiva's seed by interrupting his love play with Devi (Parvati) at the precise moment when the precious *bija* was to come forth. Intercourse having been interrupted, the seed fell to the ground. Agni, in the form of a Dove, took the seed in his beak and made off with it. The *Purana* then describes the adventures of the precious bija in a series of twelve stages until it finally comes back to Shiva and Parvati, transformed into the beautiful youth Skanda. It is stated in ancient tradition that the white Dove is often transmuted into the Unicorn. But in itself, the Dove is a key symbol and has a very special connection with the worship of Shiva and Parvati.

The two most important protagonists in the escapade of Shiva's stolen Seed are Agni and Ganga. Agni is the element Fire; his colour is red and his geometric symbol - according to the Yogatattva Upanishad - is the triangle. He is more specifically Mars, which the Indian Veda confirms by allotting him rulership of Tuesday, or Mars Day, as well as the colour red. And this, it must be remembered, was the day of birth of the Son. Ganga, on the other hand, represents the Water element, and she is connected with the Moon, as the story of her birth reveals; and through the Moon to Saturn, in the form of Mahakala.

The Vishnu Purana describes the birth of Ganga in the following manner: she is said to have issued forth from the big toe of Vishnu's left foot. Dhruva, the Pole Star, received her in her descent and sustained her day and night on his head, while the seven Rishis (the Pleiades) performed their ablutions in her waters (because the Pleiades revolve around the Pole Star). Ganga then encompassed the orb of the Moon by her currents, which added to the luminary's brilliance. Thereafter, having issued from the Moon, she alit upon Mt. Meru, and then flowed in four branches to the four corners of the Earth for the sake of its purification. The names of these branches are, Sita, Alakananda, Chakshu, and Bhadra. The southern branch, Alakananda, was held affectionately by Shiva on his head for one hundred divine years, and then was released from his matted locks. Hence Shiva is depicted in Indian iconography with a crescent Moon on his head, wherefrom a shoot of water springs forth. Thereafter, the southern branch of Ganga journeyed through India and divided itself into seven rivers which flow into the southern ocean. Hence the Alakananda, passing as it does through Bharatmata, is known as the most sacred of the four branches. Agni, unable to hold Shiva's powerful bija in his beak any longer, dropped it in the Ganges. The river then carried the seed and when the time of birth arrived she deposited it in a sacred reed grove situated on her shores; and there Kartikeya was born. He is called Kartikeya because the Krttikas, Sanskrit for the Pleiades, took up the child and nourished him. They were six in number, wives of the six (or seven) Rishis, therefore the child is also called Shanmugam, 'of six mouths', having suckled at the breasts of the six wives.

Ganga is India's sacred Artery, through which the power of her Time courses. She is the carrier of the pulse of India's soul/sun; she is the carrier of the Seed of Shiva, her beloved. Ganga is born of the Mountain, therefore she is, as it were, Parvati's sister. Ganga and Parvati are said to be daughters or consorts of the same heavenly Father. Yet at the same time Ganga is said to have descended from heaven and fallen onto Shiva's head, whence from his matted locks the Great God released her in a gentle flow upon the Earth. It is said that the Earth was spared the full impact of her power by this graceful act of Shiva, and that, had it not been so, the planet could not have tolerated the descent of Ganga in her full form.

As soon as the day begins, devout Hindus begin to give their offerings of flowers or food, throwing grain or garlands of marigolds or pink lotuses into the Ganges, or let small oil lamps float on its surface. Every morning thousands of Hindus, whether pilgrims or residents, make their way into the holy water of the Ganges. All of them face the rising sun with folded hands murmuring prayers. As stated in "Banaras City of Light" by Diana L. Eck, "they may take up her water and put it back into the river as an offering to the ancestors and the gods". In cupped hands they will also take the ritual drink of the Ganges and then fill a container to take with them to

the temple. On great festive occasions, Hindus ford the river in boats, shouting "Ganga Mata Ki Jai!" (Victory to Mother Ganga!)

Hindus consider the waters of the Ganges to be both pure and purifying. Nothing reclaims order from disorder more than the waters of the Ganges. Moving water, as in a river, is considered purifying in Hindu culture because it is thought to both absorb impurities and take them away. What the Ganges removes, however, is not necessarily physical dirt, but symbolic dirt; it wipes away the sins of the bather, not just of the present, but of a lifetime.

A popular paean to the Ganges is the "Ganga Lahiri" composed by a seventeenth century poet Jagannatha who, legend has it, was turned out of his Hindu Brahmin caste for carrying on an affair with a Muslim woman. Having attempted futilely to be rehabilitated within the Hindu fold, the poet finally appeals to Ganga, the hope of the hopeless, and the comforter of last resort. Along with his beloved, Jagannatha sits at the top of the flight of steps leading to the water at the famous Panchganga Ghat in Varanasi. As he recites each verse of the poem, the water of the Ganges rises up one step, until in the end it envelops the lovers and carry them away. "I come to you as a child to his mother," begins the Ganga Lahiri.

"I come as an orphan to you, moist with love.
I come without refuge to you, giver of sacred rest.
I come a fallen man to you, uplifter of all.
I come undone by disease to you, the perfect physician.
I come, my heart dry with thirst, to you, ocean of sweet wine.
Do with me whatever you will."

The grey-haired man, Susheel, shows an appreciation far deeper than the other bathers, who have come to wash their sins away. He has come before Ganga Mata, as a loving son comes before a mother to ask for love and protection. He stands there pouring his pure love in its waters, and through its magical power trying to appease her to create a place where he would dock and rest. The love expressed in his verse not only flows at the surface of water caressing the underwater creatures, but yearns for a permanent residence in its embrace. The poet knows that the river is the protector of life, and comes to present his deep respect.

"I have come to your shore

Not just to sharpen my nerves with your waves

Not just to play with the fishes in you

Not just to have a boat ride in the wee hours

Not even to wash my sins

And to be pure again;

… I want a small moorage

In an island created by you.

Allow me to have my way, O Suranadi!

Grant me my wish, O Girija!" **("Ganga Mata – A Prayer", p. 1)**

Since Ganga had descended from heaven to earth, she is also the vehicle of ascent, from earth to heaven. As the *Triloka-patha-gamini*, (*Skt. triloka*= "three worlds", *patha* = "road", *gamini* = "one who travels") of the Hindu tradition, she flows in heaven, earth, and the netherworld, and, consequently, is a "*tirtha*," or crossing point of all beings, the living as well as the dead. It is for this reason that the story of the *avatarana* is told at *Shraddha* ceremonies for the deceased in Hinduism, and Ganges water is used in Vedic rituals after death. Among all hymns devoted to the Ganges, there are none more popular than the ones expressing the worshipers wish to breathe his last surrounded by her waters.

Hindus from all over will bring their dead. Whether a body or just ashes, the water of the Ganga is needed to reach *Pitriloka*, the World of the Ancestors. Just as in the myth with King Sagar's 60,000 sons who attained heaven by Ganga pouring down her water upon their ashes, so the same waters of Ganga are needed for the dead in the Hindu belief today. Without this, the dead will exist only in a limbo of suffering, and would be troublesome spirits to those still living on earth. The waters of the Ganges are called amrita, the "nectar of immortality". And our poet sings:

"Fire consumes sins.

Fire consumes virtues.

After purgation

Nothing remains.

Brahma is revealed." **("Purgation V", p. 83)**

Cremation anywhere along the Ganges is desirable. If that is not possible, then the relatives might later bring the ashes of the deceased to the Ganges. Sometimes, if a family cannot afford firewood for cremation, a half-burned corpse is thrown into the water. A verse from the Mahabharata promises, "If only the bone of a person should touch the water of the Ganges, that person shall dwell, honoured, in heaven." No place along her banks is more longed for at the moment of death by Hindus than Varanasi, the Great Cremation Ground, or Mahashmshana. Those who are lucky enough to die in Varanasi, are cremated on the banks of the Ganges, and are granted instant salvation. If the death has occurred elsewhere, salvation can be achieved by immersing the ashes in the Ganges. If the ashes have been immersed in another body of water, a relative can still gain salvation for the deceased by journeying to the Ganges, if possible during the lunar "fortnight of the ancestors" in the Hindu calendar month of Ashwin (September or October), and performing the *Shraddha* rites. Hindus also perform *pinda pradana*, a rite for the dead, in which balls of rice and sesame seed are offered to the Ganges while the names of the deceased relatives are recited. Every sesame seed in every ball thus offered, according to one story, assures a thousand years of heavenly salvation for the each relative.

In the final verses of his book, Susheel makes a pilgrimage to Varanasi, and thus encloses the divine circle of life and death, leaving us protected in the embrace of the holy Mother Ganga.

"I turn to you, O Varanasi,

In the moments of anxiety

When faith has been lost

And love not found

In the streets of London

And democracy has been strangled

On the pavements of Washington.

Strolling on the roads

A bull stares at me

And a boatman beckons me.

The calm water of the Ganges

Tempts me to watch the floating lamps

The morning mist enwraps me with music.

The call of the gong from *Shivalaya*

The enthralling shouts, '*Har har Gange'*

The exuberant dance, '*Har har Mahadev*'

The melodious violin, *'Jai Bhole Ki'*

The enchanting hymns in

The rapturous *holi*

Beckon me to your lap, O Varanasi!"

("Liberation at Varanasi", p. 92)

Unfortunately, with all the life the Ganges brings, pollution is also brought. Some of the worst waterborne diseases are dysentery, hepatitis, and cholera. Money is being raised by the government and other groups such as the "*Swatcha* Ganga" to clean the Ganges. None the less, the Ganges is still the purifying waters for the Hindus of India. Our hero doesn't stay silent about this, and by chanting calls upon the awakening of his peers.

"From Kolkata to Gangotri

Just one scene —

Poverty, squalor, dirt, sloth and melancholy.

Everyone is weeping bitterly.

Everyone is crying hoarsely.

Everyone is worried knowingly.

No one has a solution!

Yes, India is one!

United we stand,

Divided we fall." **("Ganga Mata – A Prayer", p. 9)**

The Tehri Dam is a multi-purpose rock and earth-fill embankment dam on the Bhagirathi River. The Tehri Dam withholds a reservoir for irrigation, municipal water supply and the generation of hydroelectricity. The Tehri Dam has been the object of protests by environmental organizations and local people of the region. In addition to the human rights concerns, the project has spurred concerns about the environmental consequences of locating a large dam in the fragile ecosystem of the Himalayan foothills. There are further concerns regarding the dam's geological stability. The Tehri dam is located in the Central Himalayan Seismic Gap, a major geologic fault zone. This region was the site of a 6.8 magnitude earthquake in October 1991, with an epicentre 500 kilometres (310 mi) from the location of the dam. Were such a catastrophe to occur, the

potentially resulting dam-break would submerge numerous towns downstream, whose populations total near half a million.

The grey-haired man stands at the bank of the tamed river and wonders why it puts up with the abuse knowing that its power surpasses the mundane problems of mortals. He sees the river as a prisoner of its own people, and as a rape victim, who suffers silently. Could it be that the mother, through the act of absolute love, willingly shares the suffering with her children who are in spiritual chains and spiritually raped? The river is a mirror in front of which the world stands and watches the reflection of its face. Being a conscientious child who reached full maturity, the poet begs the mother to react, believing that by doing so, she would bring salvation to her children.

"Flow freely again

Overflow again

Dance rhythmically again

Be not bound by embankments and dams.

Let all power projects

Be shelved for ever."

("Ganga Mata – A Prayer", pp. 4-5)

It is sometimes believed that the river will finally dry up at the end of Kali Yuga (the era of darkness, the current era) just as with the Sarasvati river, and this era will end. Next in (cyclic) order will be the Satya Yuga or the Era of Truth. The poet waits piously in meditation by the river in Varanasi.

"If the world can survive

Through wars

If the world can survive

Through penury

If the world can survive

Through discrimination

If the world can survive

Through pollution

If the world can survive

Through pestilences

If the world can survive

Through ravages

If I can just survive by meditation

If I can just survive by *'Shivoham'*.

It is a call to find answers

On the banks of the Ganges and

In thy narrow streets

That brings me to you, O Varanasi."

("Liberation at Varanasi", p. 92)

The Vicious Circle

The harmonious circle of life and death has shifted from the caring embrace of the Mother Ganges to a circle created by a new kind of deity. New age is the age of materialism – the cruellest deity humanity ever came face to face with. It cannot be controlled by the acts of homeopathic or sympathetic magic. It cannot be propitiated by mantras or prayers, for it cares not for the spiritual ascent of humanity.

This deity shrouds its daunting face with the veil of good intentions, and goodwill to free the oppressed nations; it plants the seeds of disunion and waters them with blood of the fathers and sons whose bones are often scattered across the continents far from their homelands. It waters these seeds with the tears of mothers and daughters whipped by the pain often being oppressed themselves. It writes its myths across the barren lands after deforestation, across the scales of dead fish and the feathers and furs of extinct animal species. Its voice can be heard in the rumbling stomachs of starving children. Hand in hand with science, as a child at leisure, it blissfully whistles with the sound of the A-bomb and artillery. Brave is the poet who stands before it.

The Unveiling

It is generally accepted that the concepts of democracy and constitution were created in one particular place and time – identified as Ancient Athens circa 508 BC. There is evidence to suggest that democratic forms of government, in a broad sense, may have existed in several areas of the world well before the turn of the 5th century.

Within that broad sense it is plausible to assume that democracy in one form or another arises naturally in any well-bonded group, such as a tribe. This is tribalism or primitive democracy. A primitive democracy is identified in small communities or villages when the following take place: face-to-face discussion in the village council or a headman whose decisions are supported by village elders or other cooperative modes of government. Nevertheless, on larger scale sharper contrasts arise when the village and the city are examined as political communities. In urban governments, all other forms of rule – monarchy, tyranny, aristocracy, and oligarchy – have flourished.

India laid its democratic foundations as early as the sixth century BCE in the form of the independent "republics" of India, *sanghas* and *ganas*. At the head was a monarch, usually called *raja* and together with him, a deliberative assembly. The monarch was elected by the *gana* and he belonged to a family of the noble K'satriya Varna. The monarch coordinated his activities with the assembly and in some states along with a council of other nobles. The assembly met regularly in which at least in some states attendance was open to all free men, and discussed all major state decisions. It had also full financial, administrative, and judicial authority.

Today, Indian is the largest democracy in the world. It is a fascinating country where people of many different communities and religions live together in unity. Indian population is polygenetic and is an amazing amalgamation of various races and cultures. Our poet seems to confirm this when stating:

"Believers of various faiths

Users of so many tongues

Eaters of countless varieties of food

Dwell here in infinitum.

Life in coexistence is

Not an ancient slogan only

But a mantra

Practised by one and all." **("A Poem for My Country", p. 62)**

However, opportunism and corruption have crept inside politics and brought in many problems with them, and India is no exception to this. There is inequality in social, economic and political sphere. Illiteracy is only one of the problems. Even after more than sixty years of Independence, one fourth of the population today goes to bed with an empty stomach, live below the poverty line without access to safe and clean drinking water, sanitation or proper health facilities. Governments have come and gone, politics have been framed and implemented, the large amounts of rupees have been spent, yet many people are still struggling for existence. Casteism is still pronounced. Untouchability remains abolished only in theory with frequent newspapers reports of Dalits being denied entry to temples or other public places. Violence has been taken a serious turn in country – Bandhs, strikes and terrorist activities have become a common affair. And so, there are two worlds coexisting within the vast country, and the poet offers the visitor to take a look at the other not so democratic one:

"The land offers you a sight of your choice --

A weeping child, destitute mother, naked faqir

Hungry farmer, homeless engineer,

Drug-addict father, free boarding house,

Free *langar* beseeching an empty belly,

A discourse on self and soul, this world and that world." **("A Poem for My Country", p. 63)**

But India, as a democratic country, has progressed in many aspects. It has archived self-sufficiency in food grains as a result of the green revolution. People vote for change whenever a government fails to come up to the expectations of the people. India has been a successful democratic country only because the people are law-abiding, self-disciplined and have the sense of social and moral responsibilities. Thus, feeling the urge to act, our poet wrestles with the core concepts of democracy, and wonders what will become of it:

"In the beginning is my end.

And yours, O democracy?

You shout the people's voice

You proclaim the lowly's rights

You denounce the high and mighty

You promise food and shelter

You provide vote and choice

You showcase quality and liberty."
("Democracy: Old and New", p. 70)

To his mind, there are a number of questions waiting to be answered:

"Where is the voice of Iraq?

Where is the voice of Vietnam?

Where is the voice of Afghanistan?

Where is the voice of the multitude?

Where have the arrows of Red Indians flown?

Where have the Brahmins of Goa gone?

Where is the Buddha in Bamiyan?

Why are the poisonous cigars sent to Cuba?

Why is Saddam allowed of bomb Kuwait?

Why are the innocents killed in Hiroshima?

Why has a Tony always to toe a Bush?

Why are stories planted against Emelda?

Why is a Mandela taken prisoner?

Why is Ceauşescu killed overnight?

Why is the UNO bulldozed?

Why does the International Court of Justice

Cease to be just?" **("Democracy: Old and New", p. 70)**

Having found no definite answers and feeling overwhelmed by the questions of why the world democracy has taken such a dramatic turn for the worse, our hero "remains couched in his cushioned sofa, and ponders over the philosophy of democracy". One can see the grey-haired teacher silently watching television in his living-room filled with book shelves, and piles of his students' papers and daily newspapers on the coffee-table, while the storm of emotions and thoughts sweeps through his mind:

"When the intact skulls of the

Young innocent children are found

In the big drain behind the house,

…When the mothers in the homes

Are happy to abort female foetuses

In a clinic on the highway,

When the fathers stop

To keep a count of their children

Playing in parks,

When the old parents

Come out displaying their bruises

In the open courts,

When the students

Hit their teachers to their doom

On the premises of their colleges,

When the degrees

Are rendered worth rough papers

By those who award them,

Be sure you've reached India,

You have reached my abode, O Yaksha!" **("Nithari and Beyond", pp. 56-57)**

The Nithari serial murders took place in the house of businessman Moninder Singh Pandher in Nithari, India in 2005 and 2006. His servant Surender Koli has been convicted of four murders and sentenced to death. The police also detained a maid named Maya whom they suspected had a hand in procuring women for the businessman. The two accused in the case were in police custody while the skeletal remains of the young children were being unearthed from behind and in front of Pandher's residence. Young girls constituted the majority of victims. There were 19 skulls in all, 16 complete and 3 damaged. Surender Koli, the manservant, after strangling the victims, severed their heads and threw them in the drain behind the house of his employer. Both the accused Moninder Singh Pandher and his domestic help Surender Koli were given death sentence in 2009, but in 2011, the Supreme Court upheld the death sentence of Surender Koli. Pandher faces trial in five more cases out of the remaining 12, and could be re-sentenced to death if found guilty in any of those killings. The same day Pandher was acquitted, the Allahabad high court upheld the death sentence for Surender Koli.

When it comes to children, India has the world's largest child population, but they are faced with some very serious problems, such as illiteracy, forced labour, and high mortality rates. High cost of private education and need to work to support their families and little interest in studies are the reasons given by 3 in every four drop-outs as the reason they leave. More than 50 per cent of girls fail to enrol in school; those that do are likely to drop out by the age of 12. A study found that children were sent to work as domestic help by compulsion and not by choice, mostly by parents, but with recruiter playing a crucial role in influencing decision. Poor and bonded families often "sell" their children to contractors who promise lucrative jobs in the cities and the children end up being employed in brothels, hotels and domestic work. Many run away and find a life on the streets.

Three million girls born in India do not see their fifteenth birthday, and a million of them are unable to survive even their first birthday. Every sixth girl child's death is due to gender discrimination. According to a recent report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) up to 50 million girls and women are missing from India's population as a result of systematic gender discrimination. The accepted reason for such a disparity is the practice of female infanticide, prompted by the existence of a dowry system which requires the family to pay out a great deal of money when a female child is married. For a poor family, the birth of a girl child can signal the beginning of financial ruin and extreme hardship. This anti-female bias is by no means limited to poor families. Much of the discrimination is to do with cultural beliefs and social norms.

Dowry or *Dahej* is the payment in cash or/and kind by the bride's family to the bridegroom's family along with the giving away of the bride (called *Kanyadaan*). *Kanyadanam* is an important part of Hindu marital rites. *Kanya* means daughter, and *dana* means gift. It originated in upper caste families as the wedding gift to the bride from her family. The dowry was later given to help with marriage expenses and became a form of insurance in the case that her in-laws mistreated her. Although the dowry was legally prohibited in 1961, it continues to be highly institutionalized. The groom often demands a dowry consisting of a large sum of money, farm animals, furniture, and electronics.

When the dowry amount is not considered sufficient or is not forthcoming, the bride is often harassed, abused and made miserable. This abuse can escalate to the point where the husband or his family burn the bride, often by pouring kerosene on her and lighting it, usually killing her.

Our poet feels the urge to speak to the young brides facing this form of abuse, reminding both her and her groom what the beauty of marriage really is:

"Young brides are not meant for burning

Like sandal wood in a yajña or like the

Gas emitted from Mathura refinery

The flames of which leap to devour the sky.

…

A bride belongs to a groom.

She is a flute to be played on

She is a harmonium to produce a rhythm.

She is a synthesizer to modulate a discordant note.

She is the tune of a young heart,

Full of music and meaning

Signifying harmony." **("For a Bride Who Thinks of Suicide", pp. 60-61)**

The official records of these incidents are low because they are often reported as accidents or suicides by the family. In Delhi, a woman is burned to death almost every twelve hours. In 1988, 2,209 women were killed in dowry related incidents and in 1990, the number rose to 4,835. It is important to reiterate that these are official records, which are immensely under reported. The lack of official registration of this crime is apparent in Delhi, where ninety percent of cases of women burnt were recorded as accidents, five percent as suicide and only the remaining five percent were shown as murder.

Being a witness to such disharmony in the outer world, the poet focuses on the people and things which influenced the formation of his own personality. Whose knowledge and wisdom was he to harvest in order to overcome the strife, but of those closest to him? He turns to his grandfather whose stories he enjoyed listening to when he was a boy. He was a man whom people disliked for "holding his head high despite being poor", and as any father would be, he was deeply concerned for his son living in a similar situation, but losing his dignity. The grandson is left to ponder:

"Is it really possible for one

To remain poor and

Also to hold the head high?"

("Dilemma", p. 17)

He also recalls his uncle who was sent off to fight in Basra, and feels the similar destiny awaits him:

"Why did my uncle go to Basra

To fight a war or

To earn money for his family

I don't know.

…

I wish I could see his clothes

And could keep them in a locked trunk.

Sometimes to kneel there, sometimes

To hear stories about the war front,

To know him well: to feel his body odour

To feel the actual shape of his arm and wrist.

An olive green signal beckons me

To tread his path.

I, too, have to earn bread for my family."

("Vicious Circle", p. 18)

The forces of British India played a major role in both World Wars. Nearly 1,700,000 men and women of the Commonwealth including some 169,700 from the forces of undivided British India died in the 1914-18 and 1939-45 Wars. In World War I, the strength of the British Indian Army rose to one million and in World War II to two and half million. During World War I, it fought in China, France and Belgium (Flanders), in Mesopotamia against Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Palestine, Gallipoliandin East Africa. Basra Memorial in Iraq has the largest 33,367 British Indian soldiers commemoration by Memorial.

Prophet Mohammed said: "The people will establish cities, Anas, and one of them will be called al-Basrah or al-Busayrah. If you should pass by it or enter it, avoid its salt-marshes, its Kall, its market, and the gate of its commanders, and keep to its environs, for the earth will swallow some people up, pelting rain will fall and earthquakes will take place in it, and there will be people who will spend the night in it and become apes and swine in the morning. "

Basra is the capital of Basra Governorate, in southern Iraq near Kuwait and Iran. It stands in a fertile agricultural region. The area surrounding Basra has substantial large petroleum resources and many oil wells. Iraq has the world's fourth largest oil reserves estimated to be more than 115 billion barrels, mostly found in Basra. 80% of Basra's oil bearing fields is unexplored.

Historian David Omissi's book on the Indian Army during the Great War, The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army 1860-1940, presents pieces of Indian soldier narrative not far off from the now-familiar agonies of American men returning from Iraq. The following is an excerpt on Indian soldier morale both in France and Mesopotamia:

> More and more letters from men in the trenches betrayed 'undeniable evidence of depression,' while those written by the wounded from British hospital were often hopeless in tone. 'Many of the men show a tendency to break into poetry,' remarked the censor, 'which I am inclined to regard as a sign of mental disquietude'. Of 220 letters from injured soldiers examined by the censor in January 1915, only fifteen displayed what he termed 'an admirable spirit.' Twenty-eight had been written by despairing men who clearly regarded themselves as dead already; many of the remainder gave a 'melancholy impression of fatalistic resignation.' Morale picked up a little in the summer of 1915, but another general collapse was clearly imminent in the autumn as the weather cooed and victory seemed as distant as ever.

> The bad news which came from India compounded the worries of the men. They learned of the plague which afflicted the Punjab in the spring of 1915. Men grew anxious for the well-being of their families when they heard, second hand, that 'the rain has spoiled the crops, and in the Doab the dacoits have ruined the place.' One soldier's wife told him bluntly, 'I have been starving for lack of food.' Long separations strained marriages, and by July 1915 many letters were filled with conjugal reproaches. One man was warned, 'your honour is in danger. If you are a Pathan, and have any pride, look to you wife.' Betrothals were broken off, and some wives, despairing that their men would ever return, took new husbands. 'When our thoughts turn to our homes our hearts become soft like wax,' wrote one Muslim trooper.

As for the women in Susheel's family, his grandmother proves to be the true guardian of tradition and has some wise answers for her grandson:

"When I went to meet her last

The arthritis

Had impaired her joints and she protested

When I suggested a knee replacement

At my new mansion in Massachusetts.

She preferred to spend her time before Lord Ganesha

Asking for a peaceful time for me -

Me - whom she couldn't see anymore -

She had lost her eyesight.

She refused to accompany me saying

'It was a country of *malechhas*.'

'But the dollars are colourful.'

I had protested. 'You be happy with your notes.

I'm happy with my Krishna – I give him butter.

And, he plays his flute for me. I'm happy.' "
("Granny", p. 75)

It comes as no surprise then, that the poet camouflages himself when answering that he is fine and reprimands himself for not being honest; or feels like being a part of the masquerade, having been made to cleanse himself and become presentable to the society. He finds it hypocritical, since it is the inner cleanliness to which a man should strive for. He says:

"It is better

My wife doesn't

Ask me questions

And lets me remain

A husband.

My sons do not

Ask me questions

And let me remain

A father."**("Contemplation II", pp. 79-80)**

This is not because he feels safe and at ease lulled by the everyday decorum. It is because he would not want to burden his loved ones by his own view of the corrupt world. Being a husband and a father, and influenced by the dignity of his grandfather and the bravery of his uncle, he considers it to be his duty to carry the burden of the future of his family himself. Instructed by the wisdom of his grandmother, he is both grateful for having received the greatest gift a man could hope for and at the same time, since being aware of the decay of lives of many others, fearful of losing it:

"God has been very kind to me

He allowed me to have a dream

About plants, animals, creatures,

Colleagues, family and this life.

Sometimes I fear if the boundless dream

May come true.

Sometimes I pray fervently for

The sparkling dream coming true.

God has granted all my wishes.

How long will God keep my life

Enriched and embellished in a harrowing world

I sometimes wonder."
("Purgation IV", p. 82)

His is the life of self-examination, contemplation and constant attempt to reach the truth in its purest form. At times, he feels as if he is too slow, but he eagerly wishes to complete his life's task, and become a useful member of humanity:

"How long have I been sleeping?

When will the dawn of realization take place

To catapult me into creativity

Shedding off the burden of nothingness." **("Strings", p. 22)**

This quest proves to be the process of ups and downs, but even when he feels he has failed, he refuses to give up, knowing deep down that he is treading the right path:

"Zipping unzipping the mantra

Doesn't help.

It slips

On the moss.

No chances of my salvation.

I remain a ruffian.

I have once again

Failed God." **("Meditation", p. 25)**

Mighty is the realisation that even the smallest of objects, carry in them the seed of enlightenment. The growing mind of even one brave poet can make the world a better place through the acts of selfless love.

"When

The grain--

Minor in size, unimportant in colour

Less than a gram or two in weight

Sprouts to make a field green

To feed the hungry,

I am full of hope

By my Lord." **("Gifts", p. 58)**

Great is the master who obtained the knowledge of techniques performed to unlock the doors to the liberation of mind. The greatest one is he who shares the wisdom with his followers and students. Susheel Kumar Sharma, the kindest of teachers, shares the wisdom he gained journeying far and wide through the vast expanses of mind, and reveals to those who travelled with him the unveiled world of freedom and harmony:

"I've come a long way

To learn this art

Of sitting still and

Of watching the breath

And turning the back on

The baggage of nostalgic memories.

The world is at my door steps.

People don't salute me anymore

They just fall down on their knees

And, bow down to touch my feet

And, seek my blessings

As they did to Buddha.

The world will live longer now,

There won't be any War

Over the issue of water

Nor, to capture Oil Fields

Even the power of

Atom will remain dormant.

Neither will be required space-ships

Nor will be required space-covers.

The earth, my earth, has become

A safer heaven

I thank you Lord

For teaching me

To sit silently.

I thank you Buddha

For teaching me

To sit silently." **("Hope is the Last Thing to Be Lost, IV", pp. 87-88)**

There Are no Doors

After taking a stroll with the kind teacher, I went home to visit my Father. I was sitting on the porch and he made us some coffee. We were sitting in silence. The chirping of birds was mixing with the sound of a neighbour cutting wood and the squealing of wheelbarrow which my stepmother used while pruning the roses heads which withered in heat. Before the house, there was a recently built Christian church magnificently white with the golden cross reflecting the sunlight. Behind me, the forest trees danced in the soft breeze. The conversation started flowing through the hot early-summer air. I mentioned buying some curcuma spice which I read was good for general wellbeing. My Father patiently nodded while I was explaining all of its benefits for the body. He knew I was about to reveal more and so looked at me inquisitively. I smiled. He went inside and brought out some books of Hindu poetry and teachings, and a little box. I drank my coffee while he was turning the pages. "I will read you a poem which was my favourite when I was about your age," he said. It was the Creation Hymn.

There was nothing then, nor a thing did not be,

Neither the airy space, nor the sky above it.

But what was the thing that embraced everything?

And where? On whose lap it were?

Was it the water? The water without end?

There was no death or life without end.

Not a sign to divide the night from a day.

The One breathed without a breath

And in itself,

In It nothing and not a thing apart It.

In the beginning it was dark, and darkness enclosed the dark,

Everything without a form like the water of a flood.

And It in the void, rich with life,

Was born out of its yearning's spark.

And It bore love, and the love conceived a thought.

The wise through the thought dived into the heart

And knew the kin and saw the bond

Which linked nothingness with existence.

And they drew horizontally the divide.

What was up, and what went down?

The fruit-bearing might, the might giving strength,

Below was the urge of growth, above the bestowal one.

Who can really know and who can tell us well

Out of what everything came, where from did it emanate?

For gods came when the world was made:

Who can thus foretell where from all befell?

And what is It, the great origination,

And was the world created, or was it not

By the One who resides with the highest skies:

He is the one who knows, but perhaps even He knows not. (**Rig-Veda, X, 129)**

(The hymn was originally translated into Croatian by Vesna Krmpotić, and I took the liberty of translating it into English.)

He handed me the box, and in it laid the first hair cut off when I was a little girl – three strands interwoven in a braid. I kissed my Father on the hand. He put it on my head.

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Book Review of Mary Oliver's *A Thousand Mornings*

By Dr. Paula Hayes

The poetry of Mary Oliver is filled with a zest for life; but it is also filled with an ache. An accomplished writer, having won both a National Book Award and the Nobel Prize for Literature, her latest volume, *A Thousand Mornings* (2012), fulfills reader's expectations. Oliver is at her best when she gives us her songs of innocence and songs of longing. As she *intones* in the poem, "And Bob Dylan Too,"

"Anything worth thinking about is worth

singing about."

Which is why we have

songs of praise, songs of love, songs

of sorrow.

The first two lines of the poem are a quote, a reference, an allusion to a song by Bob Dylan; this connects the reader back to the Beat poetry of the 1950s and 1960s. But the lines go somewhere else too, when placed into the context of the poem's fuller meaning. The poem brims over with spiritual imagery.

Songs the shepherd sing, on the

lonely mountains, while the sheep

are honoring the grass, by eating it.

We are all a bit like those sheep, grazing on the solitary peaks, absorbing, consuming. Through our consumptions, our movements, our travels, our gains and losses, we find our voice, sometimes a loud one, and sometimes a community. We move in life from the secluded moments, where at our heights we are on those "lonely mountains," poised like grateful philosophers, and then to the deeper valleys. What is heaven? Where is heaven? Are we banging on the doors, asking to be let in, when in this life we can only find glimpses.

A chorus of many, shouting to heaven,

or at it, or pleading.

Rummaging through Oliver's poems, my mind ruminates on the connection between poetry, a secular practice, and meditation, a religious practice. Generally, when I pick up a Mary Oliver book, I am reminded of Emerson and Whitman, American pragmatism and transcendentalism, versions of Christianity and the kind of meditative practices belonging to Christian monasticism.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a tenth to eleventh century monk in the Catholic Church, wrote in his book, *On Loving God*, "Those who admit the truth of what I have said know, I am sure, why we are bound to love God…Who is it that gives food to all flesh, light to every eye, air to all that breathe?" The sentiment behind Clairvaux' statement is that we can find, even in the smallest and seemingly most taken-for-granted experiences, the wealth and the abundance of God's mercy. This is a classical tenet in Christian mysticism and in the monastic tradition. We find traces of this tenet in modernist poets like T.S. Eliot, in his *Four Quartets*. We find traces in Oliver's poem, "I Have Decided," where she describes how she has made a decision to look for a place of quiet—a place where she could meditate to find "revelations" and where the senses, while perhaps not entirely overcome, could at least be used to pave the way toward higher states of spiritual awareness, where doubts and "uncertainties" may be overcome and altered into the pleasantries of inner growth. She writes in the short prose-like poem, "I Have Decided,"

I have decided to find myself a home

In the mountains, somewhere high up

Where one learns to live peacefully in

The cold and the silence. It's said that

In such a place certain revelations may

Be discovered. That what the spirit

Reaches for may be eventually felt, if not

Exactly understood. Slowly, no doubt. I'm

Not talking about a vacation.

The poem, "I Have Decided," explains how the reflective path of the mystic-poet is a long journey, and how it does not lead to spiritual growth and enlightenment overnight. It is no picnic or "vacation," as the old saying goes. The decision to reach out toward something higher than oneself is a decision that requires patience and time as well as the grueling encounter of the "cold and the silence." It requires shutting off the outside distractions. It means the agony of looking at the ugly truths of who a person really is. Only through the travails of the "cold and the silence" can self find what it is seeking.

In this place of meditative calm that Oliver speaks of, we approach what St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote about— "We must not rank ourselves too low; and with still greater care we must see that we do not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think." The path of the mystic should bring one to a point of clarity, revealing an authentic portrait of the self. Or, as Oliver writes in the poem, "Hum, Hum," we have to come to a place where we face our delusions about who we are and then turn from these delusions to find out who we may become.

Oh the house of denial has thick walls

and very small windows

and whoever lives there, little by little,

will turn to stone.

Yet, there are times when the poet must break away from the "lonely mountains," from the solitude, and break down the "thick walls" that "house" and cage the self along its journey. A person cannot stay in a place of reflection forever. There are points in *A Thousand Mornings* where the poet wants to catch an escape.

I try to be good but sometimes

A person just has to break out and

And act like the wild and springy thing

One used to be. It's impossible not

To remember *wild* and want it back. So

What are life's lessons, if not memories? And the poet's memories take us to where we find intersections between serenity and frivolity, between sombreness and joy. If you are reading Oliver to find a poet transfigured entirely into a saint, you should stop reading. But if you are reading Oliver to find a poet who wrestles with the questions of this world, relishes in the unfinished answers, and remains positioned to find the sort of wisdom that moves us with yearning toward another plane, then keep reading. There is more than one way for the heart to open when reading *A Thousand Mornings*. As Oliver tells *her own* story in "An Old Story,"

Sleep comes its little while. Then I wake

In the valley of midnight or three a.m.

To the first fragrance of spring

Which is coming, all by itself, no matter what.

My heart says, what you thought you have you do not have.

The mystical path is like a cold, dark winter. In the winter, some things disappear. In the spring, that which is meant to be will return. And with that return, knowledge emerges.

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