

Poetry Series

UNNIKRISHNAN E S
- poems -

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UNNIKRISHNAN E S(01.12.1957)

I am fortunate to have been born into a family with keen literary interest. My father taught Malayalam (the language that people of Kerala speak) literature in the High Schools. My mother, though a home-maker, has excellent knowledge in literary works in Malayalam, English and Hindi. Both of them took keen interest in our education.

There was a good collection of books at home, which served as our introduction to serious literature. Poetry, fiction, biographies everything was available to sate our hunger. Moreover, at home we subscribed Mathrubhoomi (Mother Land) , a weekly in Malayalam, that used to dwell on serious literature. This shaped our interests and promoted our talent.

I still read whatever I can lay my hands keen on poetry. Malayalam, English, Hindi, translated. Fiction too. A true fan of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Umberto Eco. I write both in Malayalam and English. Especially, fiction, book reviews, sometimes about banking, literature.

A book of my poems in Malayalam has been published recently by " Green Books" , by name " OZHINJA KOOTUKAL" (Nests vacated) . The book is available in Amazon, the book store.

I am a banker by profession. Married. We are blessed with one daughter.

A Cloud In The Silver Lining

When you see a silver lining in the sky
just look for the dark cloud
that it encircles, ready to break
into a thunderous shower.

Weeps itself into nothingness!

Cloud that dissolves into thin air
But would flaunt a happy smile
A rainbow of smiles
hidden behind a gust of tears.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

A Drop Of Tears

Tiananmen
Is a drop of tears
That is yet to fall down
And get shattered.
A drop of tears
That still burns
And tastes blood.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

A Grain Of Rice

A grain of rice
Alone
In the cooking pot
Cries, "I wish
I could get out!"

I wish I could get out
Of this cooking pot
With the entire waters
Of The Flood,
Nay, Styx drained
Enough to drown
The Universe
And the infernal fire under it.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

A Journey Without Company

I have embarked upon a journey long
Have no friend, not a soul to keep me company
I am beautiful as a blossom, pure as a breeze
This journey I have started on my own
A journey with no company.

Like a dry leaf, I have been shed from my branch
Could be swallowed by the waves of wind
The roads are lonely, silence rules everywhere
Still I have hope, I will find my destination.
This journey I have started on my own
A journey with no company.

Like seasons change, so do people and their faces
Many do I meet today, who'd leave me tomorrow
Whom should I complain to, who would listen to me
There is nobody who is my own, all are strangers
Know not, where this journey of life takes me.
This journey I have started on my own
A journey with no company.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

A Letter Of Love In Your Name

The words that have dried upon my lips
The dreams hiding behind the veil of my eyes
The lonesome nights or the promises of yore
That could not be reduced to words.

Or all those evenings I had spent without your company
Or the days when I had forgotten even a smile
Would my pen bring the spring on this paper
Or those messages of seasons spent, without you beside me

May I write down the lore of my olden days
Or a new story or the emotions
That takes shelter in my heart
Or something that I had read in the books

May I describe the golden days
Of my newest feelings
Or the rhythm of my heart-beats
Or all that is hidden in my silent words

May I entrance my pen on the brine of my tears
Or shall I write down how lonesome my life's without you
Or may I write down my request for a meeting with you
Or a recommendation to forget you.

My heart asks me to send you this message
An emotion-filled letter of love, in your name.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

A Road In The Middle Of Nowhere

Clouds

In November
They just turn into grief
And pour upon you.
And the road to your nest
And to your heart
Is washed away.

Clouds

They hide everything vile on earth.
Dare not open their hearts
Lest the stain of blood will show.
No one is innocent until proved guilty.

In Lakhimpur, Nellai*
Anywhere
The road in the middle of nowhere
Starts nowhere, ends nowhere.
It is just washed away.
Just washed away.

*Thirunelveli

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

A Silent Prayer

The room in the rear
A dirty bed
There he lies
Uncared for, unattended.

The chair he used to sit on
Lies abandoned
With broken arms and legs.

The setting sun
Covered his body
In a hurry
With a brand new cloth.

Hard to understand
That he is alive.
A smile dried up on his lips
Skewed face, arched limbs...
His soul hides
In the cage of bones.

In the fag end of his life
Time has rendered him
Ugly, abjectly miserable.

His sons and relatives nearby
Whispered
That he lost his memory
That he may not be able
To call anybody by name
That he may not
open his eyes anymore.

Impatience ruled:
Many left
A few came afresh
They Walked, sat, lay,
yawned.

A movement
A groan,
They prayed,
It should be the last.
He would have done the same
Had he discerned his state.

No!
He is still there
Lying on his dirty bed
As a silent prayer!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

A Winter In Delhi

Winter,
The goddess of the longest nights
Of the netherworld Hades
My days she invades!

Sun shies away from the days:
Unable to stand the cold he retreats
Hesitant to peep in for hours few
Leaves even the dawn's sheenless dew.

She who wraps my passion
In a pall of hibernation,
Spews venom, dust and virus
That block my lungs and nerves.
A beat or two of my heart she steals
And leaves a wound that never heals.
Her worms of cold slither into my bed
And my sleep she smothers
Leaving me to gasp for a wisp of air
As if I were in the Stygian waters.
My nights she invades!

Winter,
As she waxes in
Light wanes, days wane.
She litters my pavements
With a gray pall of scales she shed.

Winter,
The goddess of the darkest nights
Of the netherworld Hades
My world she invades!

I now search for a firewall
That her attack can forestall!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

About Me

I tread those lanes
whose destination is unknown

I am an unfinished story
that He has omitted to complete.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

After My Lover Has Gone Abroad

After my lover has left for abroad
Happiness and gaiety are annoyed of me
Sleep does not visit me even in the nights
How do I, friend, put the angst of separation in words
How do I spend my life ahead
This world is no longer dear to me
Without him, I've become desparate
How do I tell you, but want to live no longer

I have stopped adorning up myself
It is as if I have melted down in his love
Nights show me their animosity
How do I tell you, friend, about our love

I am by his memories deeply perturbed
When night falls, my peace disturbed
All hues pale, my life's become bland
How do I tell you, friend, the tale of our love

Since when my love has left me, lonely
I have become and lost my flair for words
My eyes are tired always watching the road
Until now, my lover has not returned.
My life is being spent thus
How do I tell you, friend, the tale of our love

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Agreement

The way you change in a second
Acting as if you don't remember me
Ignoring me and always acting angry with me
I do not understand why thus you behave with me...

Many may come who may hold your hands
But not one like me who'd share your pains
You have left me at this juncture,
A ray of hope too is not seen anywhere.

Dare not to visit me even in my dreams
For, I have already revolted against sleep
And from the treasure trove of your memory
I have stolen hope a little, so I could keep myself alive.

Have no desire to be with you any longer
Just need to get lost in you. In the ocean of
Memories of the time spent with you
Like waves, I'd love to stay afloat.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

And Silence Is What I Choose

He was as old as my grandfather and I, just twelve.
Marriage meant nothing to me, not even a new cheeram.
He lived in penance and I, just a little child, tended the aashram,
Never cared for, not even acknowledged of my existence.

Years of spring visited me, uncalled for, for life never bloomed
In the aashram. New yearnings of my body intrigued me.
He never cast even a glance though I longed for him to caress me
Kiss and fondle me, albeit with his wrinkled hands and quivering fingers.

Indra once visited us. His lustful smile and longing eyes haunted me.
I tried to ignore him though my heart went after his handsome roop.

I was elated when Gautama finally came to my talpa before one dawn
My happiness knew no bounds on his interest in my untouched body
Though I was worried about him missing his time for the holy ablutions
I wanted him in my bed all night, holding me in his old but strong arms.

A shout from the door woke me up from the trance. My husband!
From my talpa rose Indra; Gautama tore me apart by his words:
'You slut, how could you not discern this lecher's touch from mine? '
How Could I, for he had never touched me! I froze as a stone, in shame.

Away from Gautama's aashram, I lived in penance and stony silence.
Proved women could be tapaswins too. Came Ram looking for his wife,
His sage-like demeanor and compassionate words; my silence fell at his feet
Overwhelmed by his love for his wife. But that Ram died in my heart
The day I heard he ordered Sita to enter fire to prove her chastity.

Now he has abandoned her on the gossip that the child in her womb is of
Ravan's.
Ram, thy name is Ravan. And silence is what I choose, Eternal Stony Silence!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Anyam Ninnu Poya Jeevithangal- A Poem In Malayalam

Slateukallude vamsam
Anyam ninnu poyittum
Paavam mashitthandu innum
pallikkoodatthileykulla
Vazhi chodicchu
Idavazhiyil parungi nilkkunnu.

Thanks to Ms Farisa, I post this poem in Malayalam Alphabets:

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(Translating my own poems from Malayalam to English is another task which fails me thoroughly. Can anybody help?)

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Black Eyed Susan□

Black Eyed Susan

A heart of pure gold
Eyes, black like an Indian
And thick dark tresses
Abundant green foliage

Her real name is
Rudbeckia Hirta
Whatever that means,
A real tongue twister.

The State of Maryland
Named her its State Flower
Was it for her gold
Or `cause she cures cold?

They say she cures cold
But it is a lie so cold
For Maryland is still cold
Come winter, MD shivers.

All around her lovers swarming
For her smile's so disarming*
And a little honey she shares
With every one of them.

Oh No, I'm not talking `bout
Susan Williams, the poet.
Her eyes are blue, I hope
Deep and serene, as her poems.

But sure, everything else
I wrote here is true of her
You know it well, her poetry
Cures you of all ill, what cold!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

By The Rivers Of Babylon

By the rivers of Babylon, we sat
And wept when we remembered Zion.
There on the poplars we hung our harps*

Babylon, founded by Ctesias
Built by Hammurabi and rebuilt by
King Tukulti Ninurta the Assyrian
We entered through Ishtar Gate
By the Hanging Gardens of Babylon
Nebuchadnezzar holds us prisoners here,
Exiled from our homeland.

Six hundred years hence
Son of God will be born
Then shall deliverance bless us

And we hear the Caribbeans* sing
Many hundred years later still
"By the Rivers of Babylon...."
and we weep...

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Dark Truths 01

Darkness is the eternal truth,
But we prefer to live in a bliss
Of fleeting light.

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Dark Truths 02

Void are our lives
Like flat balloons;
We try filling them
With our dreams.

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Dark Truths 03

The sun is going away downcast
Having failed to alleviate darkness
And will be back again, in vain.

He thinks he is Robert Bruce.
Failed.

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Dark Truths 04

Dreams are mere dreams
Like waves on the oceans
Amorphous water.

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Dark Truths 05

Truth is always hard to relish,
Better keep it covered in a pot of gold.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Dark Truths 06

Those who spoke the truth
Unpalatable to the uncouth
Always died a violent death
Gowri Lankesh, Jamal Khashoggi
And Mary Colvin are not the first
Nor will they be the last.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Death, The Reality

Body said to the soul
There are many who adore my beauty
Ready to die for me, like moths in fire;
You are just an imagination
That nobody has yet set eyes on;
To all, you are just unknown.

Soul replied with a smile
The adorers of you beauty won't exist
Nor those who are ready to die for you
Neither would your love
Nor your lovers survive for ever;
I solely, am your identity
Without me,
You are nothing but dirt.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Desire

Come closer to me
And just touch my soul,
Kindle in me the desires
Of my love to you

My mind is parched and
You are the fountain of love
Please love me so dearly that
I become devoted to you ever

The fragrance of your breath
May be so instilled in me
That I would shine as if
Your soul I have become

May your eyes get inebriated
So much in your love for me
That I could get drunk
Just by looking in them

The smile on your lips would be
Sufficient to intoxicate me, so that
I never regain my senses, while
You hold me in a tight embrace

Let me float like a little boat
In the ocean of your arms
And you would surge on me
Like waves on the seashore

Let us make our home
In this land of love, where
The season of love lasts for ever
We shall build our universe here.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Diabolic Designs

When I was a little kid,
The world was round.
It turned elliptical
By the time I turned twenty,
For I developed acute myopia.

Much later, by advance of age
Or by the diabolic designs of the world,
My eyes succumbed to hypermetropia.

Now, I am not quite sure
What shape it really is!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Doomsday Prophet

Doomsday Prophet

Autumn,
The harbinger of maladies
The doomsday prophet.
The fall!

The fall
Saddest of all seasons
For all the wildest of reasons,
Wilted blooms, absent fragrance
Withered gardens, colours and gaiety
The evil spell of Hades
Everything spell of gloom;
All speak of darker days that loom
Large on this unhappy colourless world.

The ghosts of the begone Spring
Spring from the wildest dread
A mild nick of its thorns sharp
Drains my heart of all hues
How shall I gather myself
From the darker blues.

Colours and fragrance
Of the spring long begone,
Warmth and hopes of the summer
Too shown the door;
Longer are the nights to come
All pervading gloom,
Cascading cold and a darker sun,
When days grow leaner
Gone are those days greener.

Let me light a candle
In the darkening morn
And try staying awake, forlorn
Over the ages dark and cold
And dream of warmer days

Bright and fragrant.
Ateardrop rolling down my eyes
Glimmers!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Dreams Interred

Ants inter my dreams
In their subterranean worlds,
And love sprouts.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Ebrahim

Ebrahim

I was back in my native village
After, it seemed, many an age.
Out on a walk through the streets
So familiar, but strange like Neptune.

Suddenly, there appeared before me
Who other than Ebrahim, a friend of my schooldays!
I recalled how he had stayed back in every class
A year or two, so he could study the lessons more thoroughly!

We joined him Level VI, where he was a veteran.
Next year, all of us were in Level VII.
Hindi class, the teacher introduced the word, 'kamar'
Which meant 'the waist'.

Next morning, when the class assembled
The biggest girl in the class, Mary, was missing
Soon, a call came from the Head Master
For my friend, Ebrahim.

Mary had complained with the Head Master
That Ebrahim called her Kamarununnissa
In deference to her big buttocks.
Both were back, after he got a good caning.

Next Hindi class: someone asked the teacher,
'What does the name Kamarunnissa mean? '
She smiled knowingly, 'it is not Kamarunnissa,
But 'Qamarunnissa' and it is Urdu, not Hindi.

'Qamar' means full moon and Qamarunnissa
Is a girl as beautiful and radiant as full moon.'
I could not help looking at Mary and caught her
Looking at Ebrahim with her eyes shining.

One day, still in my college days,
we got the news, sensational:

Mary has eloped with Ebrahim.
I was the only person in the village, smiling!

I was called back to the present by his voice.
In reply to his enquiry I asked,
"How's Mary, no!
Your Qamarunnissa? "

Although a grandfather now, he blushed like a teen.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Ee Mohatthil Dahikkan

Ninakkullilenthō thilanguṇṇuvallo
Karuthothathenne valikkunnu ninniley-
Kkethirkaanenikkaavathillennu kanti-
ttillathil paapalesham ennuraykunnu njaan.

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Ninnaalenikken hrudayam pitaykku-
Nnarike..nin deha thaapam pakukkan
Karutthillenykkente moham marakkan.
Ooro mitippinnumarikatthanaykoo.

Njanoreeyal, en prakrutham vilikkunnu
Ninneppothiyumee velichathileykenne;
kothiykkunnu njaninnu ninmohavahni
Athilenn daahacchirakinteyattam kariykkoo.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Ela Pozhiyum Kaalam

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UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Enter His Kingdom

"Whore! " he kicked her
As she lay on the kitchen floor
And he knew well that
She only whored him.

The child on her bosom
Whined and wept aloud.
"Tell me, who fathered
This vermin of yours" he said.
And he knew the butterfly
Was his own blood.

The noose of her torn sari
Held tight on her neck
The other half still tied
To the roof beam above.

Then it dawned on him
Like the rain that poured
Over the river outside-
She heard nothing he said
And will never again.

That morning too, she had
Handed him a few notes
Left from her wages and said,
"Have tea and go to work! "
That morning too, he had
Ended up in the arrack shop.
Now he was back right from there
Hungry and his pockets empty.

A stone he picked up
And aimed at the sinner.
As the child cried again
he heard His words,
"Let no sinner cast the stone".

He tore the stone from his own hand

And threw it fast over the river sand
As His Kingdom rose from
Beneath the dark of his heart.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Feelings

Though he is far away, he's so close to me
That he can't hear me call him
Nor can his memories be erased

He made me cry of such happiness
That tears refused to flow
Nor could I hide them

Though he is just a dream, so real is he
That he cannot be just deleted
Nor could I make him my own

Though he is my life, so unknown is he
That I cannot confine him to my words
Nor can I indicate my feelings to you.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Flower Has A Life Of Her Own

Flower Has a Life of Her Own

From the point of view of science
Flower is a devise of the plant
To pass on its genes
To the next generation.

But it is not all.
Flower has a life of her own.
From the state of a cocooned bud,
She provides immense pleasure
To the eyes of the beholders.

And the fragrance
That makes the world
A better place to live.

Keeps a treasure
Of nectar for her guests.
No wonder,
For she is the offspring
Of Goddess of Spring.
Not just that!
She gives up her life
To provide a delicious gift
To the fellow beings
And progeny for the mother-plant.

Wow! What a fruitful life!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Gods Just Listen

Kerala, a little strip of land
Between the seas and the hills

A pinch of Amazon here
A little Congo there
A sprinkle of the Alps
A drop from Niagra...

Thrissur, its 'cultural capital'
Has its claim to fame
The Thrissur Pooram

Ilanji thara melam
A pandi melam ensemble
Set to adantha thalam
Mark of Thrissur Pooram

The largest ensemble
Of Percussion music in the world
Where Gods are just listeners

A hundred Chendas, the Kerala drums
They say it is an Asura vadyam
But how Gods love its music!

Seventy five elathalam
Again unique to Kerala
Accompany the drums

Twenty one kombu
Set the rhythm for the music
Embellish the drum-beats

Twenty one kurumkuzhal
Double-reeded and shrill
Play the anchor role

People dance
To the rhythm of drum beats

And Gods just listen
Oh! Don't they dance too?

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Her Velvety Hands

Our lips parted for a moment

Her velvety hands guided me

To her bosom taut

Sweet and fragrant.

A little grapefruit spoke

Of her love and longing

To my shivering palms

Through the nakedness

of her silent desires.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

I Am Obsessed With My Love For You

Some mistakes it is impossible to forget
There is someone haunting my memories
And love's so intoxicating like wine
Once it affects your heart
The joy never comes down.
I too would've enjoyed, my beloved,
The pleasure of your love
Had there been no pain
Of the separation from you.
I would have tried to pull on
Erasing all your memories
But my obsession with my love for you
Does not allow me.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

I Still Remember...

I still remember, those words of yours
I still remember, every one of our meetings
Who says, distance smothers memories?
I still remember, every moment I were with you.

It is just you who has changed with time
I still remember, all those nights of silence
Time just stopped when you come near me
I still remember how fast my heart beats.

What a breeze it was that comes to me with your love!
I still remember those cool evenings damp in a little rain
When I enjoyed immersing myself in your eyes
I still remember those nights when I were lost in your love.

Your presence filled the atmosphere with passion
I still remember how the cold nights kindled your desires!
Though separated, we feel no distance between our hearts
I still remember, all the love you showered on me.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

I Wish So Dearly

I Wish So Dearly

I had wished so dearly to meet him
He did come, for sure,
but never stopped to meet me.

It was my desire to meet him eye to eye
He did sit beside me, for sure,
but his eyes were on something else.

I had wished to talk to him
He did offer me a smile
But spoke no word to me.

I had wished to go for a walk with him
He did walk a little distance with me
But never took my hands in his.

I had wished to disclose my love to him
He did come close to me, for sure,
But his silence quelled my words.

I wish I could make him mine
He remained so close to me
But, the distance between us
Is on the increase.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

I Would Have Stopped You

Had I not fomented
The whirlwinds that rise in my heart
Had I been able to deny entry
To the lustful waves in my mind
I could have stopped your steps forward
If I were not subsumed in your love.

I could have escaped the restless nights
Would not have lost my days of comfort
Would not have lost sleep of my eyes
The heart's calm and happiness

If I were not having the comfort of your arms
My emotions would not have found its shore
I could have stopped your steps forward
If my heart was not blessed with your love.

I would have been denied the mirth of love
The joyous moments of my heart
And even the light of moon
In this darkest of nights

If you had not bestowed on me the pleasure of your eyes
My heart would have been denied the exhilarating light of love
I could have stopped your steps forward
If my heart was not helpless by the bond of your love.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

In A Silent Ache

Your love gnaws at my heart
And leaves it in a silent ache.
In a silent ache, my heart bleeds
Your memories ooze out
Into a little nothingness.

I know your condition, dearest,
O' my love, either is not different
Nights have become sleepless
Your choicest food has lost its taste
And hunger has left without a trace.

I can imagine, since met last
How lean have you become,
Like waning moon in Krishna paksha
And paler than the new moon rising at dawn
With your love for me, in his waxing crescent.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

It Is Life

These are the pages of my life
Some are frayed, some folded;
When the storms wreaked havoc
Often wrecked, yet survived
My life has got ensnarled;
On which intersection
Do I get it disentangled?
And my desires fulfilled?

□

I have a long way to go
The roads are not easy
And I do not know why
Weather changes so often

But, of hope I have a ray
That I'd be able some day
To achieve my destination
Search for which is still on.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Jalaa Do Mujhe

Tum me woh tej hai jo,
Khichta hai mujhe tumhari ore
Rok nahi pati main iss chahat ko...
Ye koi gunah to nahi, khawaish hai meri..

Tumse hi dil dhadkata hai mera
Aur paas aajati hun tumhare
Vivash hun main iss moh se chutne me
Har dhadkan khichti hai mujhe teri ore

Tum roshni main patanga hun
Jal jane do mujhe tumhare ujaale me
Kho dena chahti hum main apni pankhon ko
Tumhari roshni ke ujaale me
Iss raat ki bas yahi chahat hai meri.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Kaakka Paadumbol

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Uyare maracchillayil kaaNaam kaRukaRutthLLa kaakkaye
KaRNakathoramathu pads noodles
Ennalathin kaRuttha nottatthin maayajalam
pidicchu nirthunnuvo namme?
ThuRicchu nokkunoo-
Aaru naamennu chinthicchu pokunnuvo?

Marakkombilirikkum kaRuppe,
Enikkaay onnukoodi paadoo
KaRNarunthudam ninn gaanam..

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Karvarnane Thedi

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UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Kathakali

Exquisite poetry rendered
In music gripping the heart
And dance eloquent
Merge par excellence.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Kerala

Log batate isko utsav rooh ka
Kerala jahan tumhein jana zaroor hain
Shayad ek din main bhi jaaun is yatra pe
Aur is sundarta ko khojun mere dil se

Sadhana karun dhalte chai ke yeh baganom mein
Aisee shant bhumi jaham rehain hariyali panktiyon mein
Sagar ghoom ke aaum ek nauka mein
Jaham dubte suraj mann ko mugdh karein

Ek nauka ghar me baith mauj udhaun sagar ka
Nariyal ke pedon ka katar dekhum peechhe hat-te huye
Jangal ke raaston se ghoomte firte chalte jaaun
Dharti Ke yah garmeel jo jannat mein

Kinara samundar kajo behadaakarshaklagta hai
Main jald hi is yatra par jaun, aisa lagta hai
Aur is shaandar prakritik sundarta mein
Sochti hum, madhumaas dubaara manaum.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Khushee Dhoont Liya Mien Ne

Gham ke is khonsle mein
Jo kaante se hi sajaai hein
Khushee dhoont liya mein ne.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Kouwa, Aur Gaao Mere Liye.....

Kaali kouwa baithi hain oonchi daal pe
Gaati hain eh dam ghatiya
Lekin sunte sunte tum rah jaaye us mein nimagna...
Kaale moti jaise aankhom se
Woh nirnimesh khurkar tumhein dekkhti hain
Aur tum sochne lage, tum kaun ho

Door us daal par baithi kaali panjchi
Aur gaao mere liye tera kharaab bhadda yeh gaana.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Loneliness

Separated you are far from me
Together are just me and my loneliness

You have been just a dream
Reality is just me and my loneliness

This pain so severe, of separation from you
Shared just between me and my loneliness

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Love And Life

Life is a river
You cannot enter twice.
Love is another.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Love And Life's Mission

Love And Life's Mission

Life is a strange secret
Allows you a smile, often makes you cry too
Whenever moments of the past are revisited
A moment of joy, or leaves you silent in anguish

Strange are the ways of memories
Priceless are their effects on one's life
Life confounded, made normal by your memories
Which are now so distant from me, so close in the next minute.

In this dilemma, half my life has been spent
Life slipped away with time like sand from the palms
Night is spent and sleep avoids my eyes
Before we could meet, time has come for separation.

Love has filled the void in many-a-heart
The boundaries of birth and creed, it has erased
So, the world becomes a lovely garden of love
This is the mission the lovers have chosen for themselves

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Love Feels Deprived

It is when your silence starts to speak
That your love feels deprived

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Love Is Love No More

"Do you not love me anymore? " She asked.
"Why? " He was taken aback.
"I had added extra salt in the curry deliberately,
But you did not even shout at me" she said.

"Oh! I thought I'd be polite
To you for the day,
For it is your birthday today";,
He felt relieved.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Mani Moonatichuu, Raavinte Ardharajyathil

Chollatte njaan, enikkilla thellum
Gounam ninn bhrantha bhramangalil,
Ninn manassineppothiyumee allil
Ithiri vettamaavan kothikkunnu njaan

Kellpoo ninn mookamam aakrandanangal
Aarude manam mukarnnu nee thengunnuvo,
njaan thanneyakaneyathen-
nasicchu pokunnu njaan.

Raavinte ardharajyathil mani moonnatichu
Veentum kinaakantu ninne njaan
Ninne ariyunnathaay natikkunnathillennaal
Ninn kanneerithiri pakutthedutthotte njan...

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Masters Of Their Own Will

The white cotton clouds
Masters of their own will
Lighter than the faintest breeze
Trundle freely along the skies
Searching for the border of the horizons

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

May A Thousand Flowers Bloom

Good and bad are the two sides of a coin
There is a little devil in everybody
But our education culture and upbringing
May enable us to overcome his temptations.

Sure, heaven on earth is too farfetched
But earth is livable as the devil in us subdued.

Let us hope every child grows up
Learning to respect every other being
May all of us live a life worth emulating
By at least, our next generation
Try to eschew greed, lust and violence.

Heaven may not bloom on earth
But, may a thousand flowers bloom;
Devil may still raise his head here or there
But, let peace prevail and love light our lives;
We may not be able sate hunger of everyone
But may we feed at least one hungry soul.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Me, Myself

I just wander
In those narrow pathways
Leading to goal unknown.

I am a story yet untold
That God has left incomplete

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Messenger

'Arrest him and
Hack him to death,
For he has come to spy on us
On behalf of our enemies',
Cried Duryodhan.

And his brothers and the army
Rose with their arms drawn.
But arms and men froze, for
'You should not harm a messenger'.

But He, the messenger of life and death
With all the worlds at his command
Never is harmed by strife.
And of course,
He is not wounded by weapons
And not singed by fire
Nor drenched in water
And not dried by wind.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Monsoon Musings - 06 - Simran

Dawn

Little shower

Whispering her

Morning prayers

With the trees

Joining the chorus

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Monsoon Musings 01 - Monsoon Vagaries

Monsoon Vagaries

Yesterday

It rained as if

The skies were ripped apart.

Today

The torrents of rain

Are held back in rein.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Monsoon Musings 02 - Me Too

Under cover of dark blankets
Are the skies above
Me too...

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Monsoon Musings 03 - Skies Smile Blue

Skies Smile Blue

Skies do smile in blue
But today she smiles
In all seven colours

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Monsoon Musings 04 - Chatter

Chatter

Outside the window

Rain goddess

Chatters loud.

In my drawing room

Suarez scores a goal

Against Sa Udi Arabia

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Monsoon Musings 05 - Prancing

Prancing here and there
Is the monsoon rain

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Monsoon Musings 07 - A Kiss So Violent

A torrent

A kiss of love, so violent

On the lips of earth.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Monsoon Musings 08 - Vows Of Love

A shower,
Basking in the embrace of earth, her lover,
with her quivering lips on his chest
Her body shivering against his,
whispers her vows of love
Direct to his heart.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Monsoon Musings 09- Midnight Shower

A midnight shower
Leans her face on my shoulders
And sobs.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Mother Of Emmet Till

Emmet Till

A little boy of fourteen
A little black boy of fourteen!
Now on his mutilated head
He wears a Yoruba crown.

The mother of Emmet Till
Decided, his last journey
Shall be in an open coffin
So the whole world would see
What they did unto him.

Emmet on his black skin bore
The sweat, hunger and pain
And the blood spilled by the workers
Of his clan, all mercilessly slain
In the cotton farms of Georgia
The tobacco fields of S. Carolina
The sugarcane fields of Louisiana,
Where black skin was a sin.

From every drop of his blood
There arose a thousand Emmets.
A Martin LutherKing
A Harriet Tubman.

But
Tallahatchie River still weeps
And her pale green eyes shed
Blood; cold black blood.*

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

My Long Wait

I have been waiting all along for you, dear
To wake me up from my slumber to reality.

I sit with my eyes to the road glued
Waiting to have a glimpse of you.

May I present my heart to you, dear, for I trust
To its love you'd respond some day.

I do take for truth every lie of yours, knowingly
Hoping you'd discern my truth some day.

I have become impatient waiting for you
To come and with all your love console me.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Naked As A New Born

Naked as a New Born

It is November

The Fall has just fallen on the roadside

And snow has started falling

From the tall maple deciduous sky.

I wish I were the orange brown leaf

That has lost its foothold on the birch.

But, lo, I am the tree

Bereft of all its abscissive leaves

Naked as a new born.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Neither

I saw you at the signal
Where my car had stopped
In the dress of a woman;
You walked swinging your hips
With a vulgar smile on your lips
From one car to the other
And stretched your hands.

Clapping in your peculiar style
You asked for money
As if it were your right
Your hoarse voice and manners
Telling me much of the unsaid.
I rolled back my shutters
And shook my head.
You didn't persist.

Those in the car next to mine
Could be your mother,
Father, brother, sister;
Would they recognize you?
What if?

You could be Bhagmati.
I could call you
By any other name.
But the stamp on you
Is the same:
An Outcast!

Contempt oozes out from you
In every move
For the khuda who created you
For this world
That condemned you
To the streets.

Who were the man and the woman

Who gave you birth
And threw you in the streets?
And you?
Neither!
Not man or woman!
Not even a human being.

Your eyes, I sense,
Betrayed your sorrow,
Distrust, diffidence
And extreme contempt
For yourself.

I took you for arrogant
And haughty-
But now I realized
You were neither!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

No Place Exists In The Universe By That Name

No place exists in the universe by that name

A little Chinese boy of seventeen
Jiang Jilian, he did sacrifice
His life for his dream cherished.
A bullet from an army gun pierced
His little heart, took his young life
The day after his seventeenth birthday.

His crime?
He stood for democracy,
What he believed was his right!
He fell to legalised terrorism
By the government machinery
He was one of the fourteen hundred odd
Young boys and girls died on the fateful day,
The third June Nineteen eightynine.

A drop in the ocean!
A mighty drop...

Liberated from the labyrinth of
Authoritarian autocracy
Called, look at the paradox, communism
By the People's Liberation Army-
army that liberates those in power
From the tearful voice of a few
Thousand young quivering lips.
Marx turned in his grave with eyes moist
And his heart bleeding red, I am sure.
Holocaust* repeated, Yet again.

The proud mother of young Jilian,
Ding Zilin, the Tiananmen Mother**
Tears dried, she does not cry anymore.
Her husband was committed to jail
Being Father of Jiang Jilian.

Anybody heard of Tiananmen Square?
Where on earth is it, by Mao Tse Tung?
No place in the universe by that name.***

*Reference to Nazi Germany. Holocaust in Greek, means "sacrifice by fire". The word is apt here, for "fire" it was, from guns.

** "Tiananmen Mother" is a movement of the relatives of the students who died in the Army firing of 03 June 1989.

***The Chinese Government even today refuses to acknowledge the massacre of 03 June 1989.

Aside:

I am carried away by Asterix comics, wherein, is said, the Gauls refused to acknowledge the existence of the place, Alesia, where Vercingetorix, the Gaulish chieftain surrendered before Caesar. Julius, that is. Pleaseread "Asterix and the Chieftain's Shield".

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Non-Violence

The teacher said to his disciple,
'How is it that you look so fresh
Even after grazing the cows □
in the forest for the entire day?
Have you cheated the calves
Of their milk again? '
The disciple said,
'Yesterday I fed on the cows' milk
After the calves had their fill.
And you forbid me, because
The calves would leave
more milk in the udder□
For me to sate my hunger,
And that's violence against them
Enough to stop me from entering
The doors of heaven.
Today I fed on the drops of milk spilled,
while calves had their fill.'

Guru said,
'You did it again!
The calves would spill more milk
For your stomach to fill.
And that is more violence
That would deprive you of your
Right to heaven again! '

'If that is violence, '
Said my daughter,
'What will happen to us
Who killed fowl for our lunch? '
'Nothing, dear!
The sin of killing the bird
Is washed away, as we eat its flesh.'

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Of Lies And Deaths

They have conspired
To annihilate me
Make me vanish
Without a trace.

Their saber found its target
My heart slashed open
When blood poured
And dyed me crimson
They hung me out
In the open bull-ring.
They were the matadors
Who guided the bull to me.
The vultures that picked up
The shreds of my flesh
Were them again.
And the talons
That tore into my heart
Were theirs too.
But the stain of blood remained
And spread everywhere
And left every soul
Contaminated.

They burned me at the stake.
They themselves were the stake
The embers and the smoke
And the flames that
Fed on my tallow.
But the ashes remained.
Swept by the wind
Of the whisper of my soul
It rained acid on every heart
And left them burning
Till this day.

The last of my deaths came
By poisoning.
They were the poison fangs

And the hood, the hiss
And the venom
That dyed me black
From head to the toes.
But Truth remained
Alive, bright and shining
So that they would
Swallow their lies
When the sun shines
Tomorrow.

I wish I could drink
From Lethe
And forget what
They have done unto me!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Padinjarinte Sangeetam

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UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Prometheus's Liver

(1)

Until Prometheus divulged the secret of Fire
Man was scared of the darkness of night
When the Nightlamp was not lit in the sky.

He was equally fearful of the wintry days
When in the cold nights the bone-chilling cold wind
Blew incessantly from the west.

Moon was no longer mere Nightlamp.
She was elevated to the godly benefactor
The provider of water, food, love and progeny.

She was also the heavenly lover of all seas.
Her benevolence to earthlings were abundant
Never turned her face away from them.

She was identified as the keeper of time.
Lunar calendars were all designed on her cycles,
Though days and hours were counted as sun rose or set.

With fire came light and warmth and taste of cooked food.
But man continued to wonder how, like Prometheus's liver,
Moon waned in a fortnight and waxed to her fullest in the next!

(2)

Then she was recognised as a mere satellite of earth,
Sharply disgraced from the esteemed Queen of Stars;
And they alleged, she has a not-so-fair facade
Which she always chose to hide from all.

She had to succumb to the might of man.
Like Mahabali, man (or Vaman?) set his foot on her head
And pushed her down from her abode among the stars
To Hades, and placed her there among the lesser mortals.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Recusal

He was after her
And she, helpless
Cried out to Him.

As usual,
He simply recused Himself.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Sarpasatram 1-Aswathamah

Aswathamah finished chanting ☐
the Brahmatsra mantra panting
Shot the arrow at the little blossom
Still unborn in Uttara's bosom.

He saw Arjuna rushing in
with Krishna on his heels
Shooting Brahmastra again
To defend his progeny.

Krishna stood stupefied: if the arrows
meet, an infernal fire will result
That would swallow the entire universe
So powerful is the Brahmastra.

'Withdraw it! ' shouted he at both
The warriors. Arjuna withdrew it
In a wink. But Aswathamah refused,
'I'm ready to face it, come what may'.

Krishna's prayers were granted
Brahma let the child live. The astra
recoiled at the shooter; inflicted
A wound that never heals.

Down came a curse from the skies
Crimson with blood, 'Aswathamah,
Your wound bleeding, you would
Live till all the worlds perish.'

Aswathamah remained unfazed
For he had seen both the worlds
Born to a Brahmin, his childhood
Was a life of acute deprivation

A childhood of perennial starvation
And days of extreme humiliation
Penance and prayers did him little
To console and sate his hunger

His father Drona, too un-brahmin like,
An adept archer, master of all divine astras,
Trained by Parasuram, was anointed
Guru of princes Pandavas and Kauravas.

Dronacharya earned respect of all; had
A life of repute in Hastinapura palace
Like father like son, he wisely chose
Friendship with Prince Duryodhan.

Duryodhan became the king; Pandavas
Exiled, declared war. Aswathamah,
Drona and the Great Karna on his side
The King thought himself invincible

Aswathamah, when the war came
Fought on the king's side valiantly.
Injured, on his death bed, the king
Appointed him commander of his army.

And what army! A handful of
Tired, injured, demoralized souls.
He led them to the enemy camp
Where the soldiers were asleep

After eighteen days of fight
And slew them all, including
All the sons of the Pandavas
And commander Dhrishtadyumna.

Then he aimed his brahmasta
At the unborn child of Abhimanyu
And Uttara, the only hope for
Pandavas. Their only progeny.

Rest is history.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Sarpasatram 2- Parikshith

After the Great War of Kurukshetra
The eldest of Pandavas Dharmaputra
As the emperor of Bharata he took over
With no one to question his reign.

□

Parikshith born to princess Uttara
And Abhimanyu, nephew of Yudhishtira
Abhimanyu was just boy of sixteen
Killed in the war, in a battle unfair.

Parikshith grew up to be a great archer
Under the tutelage of good teachers
Anointed king emperor by Pandavas
Who then proceeded on Vanaprastha.

Mrugaya, hunting in the wild
Was a kingly vice in he indulged.
Once, lost in the forest, entered
The hermitage of sage Sameeka.

Deep in his penance, Sameeka
Did not pay him respect. Irated
The king picked up a dead snake
And put it around the sage's neck.

Sage's son Shringi when returned
From travel, saw him in this state
Knowing what happened, cursed
The king that he'd die of venomous bite

By Takshaka, the king of snakes
Before sun set on the seventh day.
Takshaka was immediately roused
For he had an old score to settle.

Long back, when the forest Khandava
Selected as the site to build the capital
Of their new kingdom by the Pandavas
No choice, but to burn the forest et al

Takshaka's wife and children small
Lived in the cool shades of trees tall
Were not spared but burned to death
By Arjuna, grandfather of Parikshith.

When Parikshith heard of the curse
He could fear nothing worse
For he knew of Takshaka's vendetta
Against the entire Pandava Vamsam.

Fearing Takshaka, fearing death,
Shifted with his doctors best
To his palace in the waters midst
Under guard all day and night

It was the end of the day seventh
Sun was setting at the horizon west
The king was at his joyous best
Though overcome by hunger and thirst.

A little worm popped its head out
From the fruit the servant cut
For him to eat, he placed it on his neck
Laughed, 'Takshaka, bite me if you must! '

It was the snake-king without doubt
In a split second took his own shape
The king, his smile vanished
Ere Takshaka hit, of fear he died.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Sarpasatram 3- Janamejaya

Emperor Parikshith
Had married many a maiden.
Born to queen Iravati
Was his heir apparent, Janamejaya.

Just a young boy he was
When Parikshith was killed
The queen ruled over
Indraprastha until he came of age.

Right from childhood
His heart burned of an unstinted
Desire to avenge
His father's death by the snake king.

He knew how the rishi
Wanted to forgive his father
But Takshaka would not budge
He was at his wits edge.

'Just a venomous hiss
Could burn the world down,
What chance do I have? '
The king had thin grown.

Seeing his plight
His mother and her advisors
Thought, she might
Take on the enemy.

But, for her son
One was not enough
To eradicate the snakes
Was his resolve.

Someone vile
In his coterie suggested
A Sarpasatram
A yajna, for the very end.

Before the holy fire
Rishis'd chant the sarpamantra
So falling prey to the ire
But, the snakes can't resist.

They'd be drawn
By the powerful hymns
To the holy deadly fire
And die a fearful death.

His mother Queen Iravati
Advised him, 'Never get
Carried away by anger,
Anger brings disaster.

'Your father, the best
Example, is no more
Aswathamah lives on
But, a living example.

'Pray Lord Maheswara
To take away your anger
Let the snakes live, and
You live too, in peace.'

But young ears listen to
No advice. Sarpasatram it was.
Designed to eradicate snakes
Cruelty extreme it was.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -01

The Violation

It was getting dark
And Sage Parasaran had just left
Having sated of my body
The whole of which ached.

I was stark naked; My clothes
Lay by my side in shreds
How many times he violated me
I had lost count.

It was no longer my body
I looked at it and shuddered
As if seeing it for the first time
I felt impure.

I wished to hide from myself
And from the whole world.

I wanted to reach home!

Home? How do I face father!
Immobilized by pain and fear
Tears flowed down my face
Like Yamuna in Shrawan.

How do I reach home until dark
My clothes in just shreds
And body visibly bruised
From his lustful attack.

The day had begun
As pleasant as any other
Father asked me to man the ferry
Until he was back from fishing.

I had my first customer

A sage with graying beard
'I'm Parasaran' he said
'Take me to the other side'.

His eyes on the curves of my body
My clothes too little to cover it.
Though I was just twelve
I was used to ogling eyes.

'Matsyagandhi' he called me;
Of course, I stank of fish.
I lived fish and I breathed fish
For I was a fisherwoman.

From his eyes fondling my body
His hands took over.
My protests were of no avail;
He was much stronger.

He guided to boat to an isle
In the middle of Yamuna
Uninhabited,
But rich in flora and fauna.

He tore my clothes into shreds
Forced upon me and tore me apart
Repeatedly, not allowing me to have
Even a drop of water.

My cries nobody heard in the wild
Of the isolated little island.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -02

2. Father

Father had found a groom for me
Before I turned twelve;
To consummate the marriage
He needed a little gold.

That's why he took up the ferry job.

He had searched for me the whole day
Finding no trace, resigned
That Yamuna had snatched me
From his love.

I found him in a pool of tears
In the mud before our li'l hut.
My shredded clothes and
bruised body devastated him.

Hearing the name Parasaran
Whose anger could leave
The whole village in ashes,
He shuddered again.

He just took me in his arms
And wept like a baby.
What could he do
Against such power!

A month passed, I found myself
Carrying the seed of the sin.
Silently, he took me away
Far from all the gazing eyes.

He told our neighbours
We were on a pilgrimage
To appease the Gods
So they blessed my marriage.

Satyawati -03

3. The Island

Back in the same island
Where Parasaran took me
The rude shocking memories
Almost killed me.

But the entire island
Abounded in wild flowers
Like a rainbow of colors
And fragrance so sweet and dear.

Sweet songs of birds
It was spring round the year
Once we started our home
Dogs and cats came to live with us.

Clear waters in the little lagoon
Abounded in fish of all kinds
Which I took to watching
Made my days cheerful.

Above all father's love
And his care removed
All the harsh memories
And I enjoyed my tiny life.

How days passed, I didn't know.
I was looking forward to have my first born.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -04

4. Mother

Father used to leave home early morning
After completing all the household chores
Leaving me nothing to do all day long
I stitched tiny dresses for my little guest.

Father did everything to make me comfortable
The little hut we built was enough
To save us from rain, heat and cold
When seasons changed in cycles

All day he fished or searched for food
Rhizomes, flowers, leaves and fruit
Which he tasted first, and if harmless
Would prompt me eat every other minute.

Always father reminded me to eat
For I have to eat not just for me, but for two
He wanted me to be cheerful always
So my child stayed healthy.

He tried to keep me happy
Never to feel the absence of my mother
We lost her many years back
To a short illness; her memories remained.

Alone all day, I just thought of her:
Though wife of a fisherman
She never ate fish, though cooked it for us
A pure vegetarian, for what I knew.

Now sitting alone in this godly isle
I wondered why. She was no fisherwoman! ! !
For unlike mothers of my neighbours
She spoke chaste language and knew Sanskrit.

She had taught me read, write and recite

A few shlokas that I could as a little girl
"Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara", she said
Be truthful and tread the path of righteousness.

"Uddharet aatman aatmanam
Na aatmanam avasadayet
Aatmasya hi aatmano bandhu-
Raatmaiva ripuraatmana."

I just remembered this shloka,
Which she recited to me often-
'You should lead your soul to progress,
Greater heights by positive thoughts;

Never allow it to drown in a pall of gloom
For, you yourselves are your best friend
And you are your worst enemy as well
Negative energy brings in disaster for you.'

Tears welled in my eyes
I could hear my soul's cries.
I could feel her presence by my side
I wanted her aanchal for my face to hide.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -05

5. Krishna, the Dwaipayana

□

He was borne on the triodashi
The thirteenth day after full moon
At brahma muhurtam, before dawn
Under the gaze of the stars of heaven.

He was black as a monsoon cloud
Father called him Krishna, the black
I recalled the Sanskrit I knew,
Called him Dwaipayana, the island-born.

Days many had not when passed
Came sage Parashar like free-flowing wind
With a smile of appreciation to me
For the name, Krishna the Dwaipayana.

He took his son in his lap and said,
Of course, he is black and born on this isle
The name you gave him is most apt
But he'll have a third, would last for ever.

He would be a great sage and scholar
His works compilations and teachings
Veda Vyasa, the compiler of the Vedas.
His name would remain till the worlds last.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -06

6. Parashar

I hated him for what he did to me
Never wanted to see him again
Never to hear his voice again;
But he's here, no gain.

"I am taking him with me
So I can teach him all I can
Sure, he'll live without his mother
But I'll be his father mother n' Guru

"to read and write he will learn
Name and fame he would earn.
With you he would be just a fern
With no color, no fragrance."

Took him away, sage Parashar
His cries vanished beyond the horizons
I was left dumbstruck
Unable even to utter a loud cry.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -07

7. The Pilgrimage

The silent cries of my heart
Reverberated in the whole island
Even birds fell silent
Butterflies stayed away from flowers.

The fish in the lagoons stood me guard
Without winking an eye
As did my father, all day and night
But my eyes never dried, nor did his.

One sleepless night, he said
"We are leaving in the morn
On a pilgrimage, know not where
And when would we return"

That is what we did. Proceeded
To Hrisheekesh. Then to Badareenath,
Kidarnath, Kaleeghat, Varaanasi, Puri
Rameswara, Gokarn and what not.

When we finally we returned
I was able to forgive Parashar
In spite of all he did to us
And start my life afresh.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -08

8. The Vyaasa

Memories of my little Krishna
Haunted me all night and day
However did I try to keep them away;
I lived on, hoping to meet him some day.

But Parashar kept him away from me
Though regularly his news reached me
Made me happy, for by the age of six
He had mastered Sanskrit well

Was able to recite, interpret
And explain all the scriptures
He had already become
Far more famous than Parashar.

A child prodigy. I was a proud mother.

When he was still a child
I heard he was working wild
To compile the scriptures
Into heavy coherent Vedas.

Four compilations he made
Together called the Vedas
The scripts that were guides
To lead a life as Gods wished.

Rigveda, the book of hymns and verses
Yajurveda the collection of yajna mantras
Samaveda, the repertoire of singers
Atharvaveda spoke of rituals and medicines.

They called him Veda Vyasa
The Compiler of the Vedas
Revered by all, still a little child.
I wished to hear him recite.

I wanted to be worthy of him

A worthy mother of a revered sage
No more a fisherwoman!
Not any more!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -09

9. The Scripts

The Scripts said:

'Pita rakshati kaumare
Bharta rakshati youvvane
Putra rakshati vardhhakye
Na stree swatantryam arhati'

'Father cares for her in childhood
Husband takes care in her youth
In the old age, the son her serves
Every stage protection Woman deserves.'

Man is strong in his body
Scripts say he should protect her.
But life says, woman
Has to succumb to his designs.

Still what I suffered as a child!
Was I just a body, for man
To quench his lust, against my will?
Do I have no soul, no free will?

I was a little child by age
Never had known of the sage
Nor his evil intentions
Just respected his old age.

Did my father fail in his duty
To protect me as a child?
Should I blame him for my fate?
My love for him never did abate.

Who would protect me now
In my youth? and tomorrow
When I am old and weak?
Do I need care from man?

After all I have endured
To harsh realities endured
I am now convinced
I can live my life on my own.

I need no support, no protection
From a man, be it my son.
Knowledge is power. Quest
For knowledge, my new mission.

From my body, passions and desires
I set myself free!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -10

10. The Body

Another day is another lesson.

That evening, we had a visitor
A Special one, to me a suitor!
Maharaja Santanu of Hastinapura
The ruler of even our remote hamlet.

He had seen me bathing in the river
Followed me to the forest
Where I spent my day in penance
Or recited the scripts I knew.

So, now my body has another suitor.

Santanu was polite; He could
Take me by force if he so desired.
But he appealed to my father
For my hand in marriage.

Unsure of my response
Father did not consent the king.
"I need time", he said
"to discuss with her and the elders."

For a poor fisherwoman,
It was a great honour
To be asked in marriage
By the king of Hastinapura.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -11

11. Santanu, the Maharaja

□

When father started to speak
It was as if he knew my answer.
I was already well beyond
The temptations of worldly pleasures.

But then he tried to reason
'We cannot live in this country
After having refused the king
And earned his displeasure.

'Having said that, Santanu
Sure, was not a bad groom
True, he was married once
And has a grown up son.

'But, unlike many kings
He was a man of one woman
He had married Ganga, a lady
Of noble lineage, the Deva clan.

'After a quarrel, Ganga left him
Leaving their young son
Devabrata with him
But Santanu never married again.'

But I did not wish to have
The company of a man any more
Quite confident I were
To live a life of my own.

Santanu was at our doorstep
Next morning, once again-
Proof enough of his love for me
I was at loss for words to refuse him.

To my own astonishment
And of father, I blurted out

'I agree, but give me word that
Our son would succeed you as king'.

Shocked, the king almost fainted
For he loved Devabrata
His son, the crown prince
More than himself.

He called him Gangadutta,
Gift of Ganga,
So he remembered her
Every time he addressed their son.

I still remember the king
Leaving our hut, his head hung
With unsteady steps
Tears flowing incessantly.

I smiled myself
Having defeated the power
In its own game
For the first time ever.

Oblivious of his love for his son,
I thought he lost his balance,
Losing his game first time ever
As an avid hunter, which he was.

I never desired the kingdom,
Just wished to ward off his advances.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -12

12. Devabrata

Father was furious
Questioned my values
How could I even think
Of snatching the crown

Which rightfully belonged
To Prince Devabrata
I had no right to stake claim
For a son yet unborn.
I swore that I had no desire
For the kingdom; my words
Were to dissuade the king
From coming back to me.

Afternoon. In the forest
I sat lost in meditation.
I was startled by loud calls
Of my neighbour's daughter.

Father'd sent her to fetch me
For we had a guest, the prince
Crown Prince Devabrata
All alone, without his retinue.

He had noticed his father
Gloomy, lost in thought.
Santanu did not answer
His many questions.

From the minister who had
Accompanied the king
On his hunting expedition
He learned of the king's new passion.

And how he was downcast
On his return from our home.

Now, on hearing of my "demand"
From father, asked to meet me.

A handsome young man
Devabrata was my son's age.
"Mother", he said, "I agree
To all your desires; no regrets.

"Please agree to be my mother
And save my father from his
Present predicament;
The kingdom is yours from now."

I answered spontaneously,
"No son, the kingdom is yours.
I do not want to be the queen
Let alone, the kingdom for my son."

I remember how he, at first,
Was astonished to hear me;
Which was replaced by reverence:
"Oh! My mother! " he sobbed.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -13

13. Bhisma

Devabrata could sense the earnestness
And truthfulness ringing in my voice
He prostrated at my feet saying,
"Mother, I had mistook you totally.

"I took you to be opportunistic
And greedy; but you are none.
You are kind and noble
A heart of gold, not feeble.

"Mother, I cannot take 'No' for your answer.
I want you to come with me as my mother.

"Though you have not asked for
In the name all gods, do I swear
Hereby, I relinquish the throne
In favour of your son unborn.

"The world may wonder, of what use
Are these words of mine, if I have sons
Who may stake claim on the crown
Against the progeny of yours.

"So, justice demands I should not marry
And have any sons. So do I swear.

"So do I swear, so that your children
And the generations to come after them
May rule over the country unhindered
Without any disturbance whatsoever.

"More, I would lead a life of celibacy
Dedicated to the cause of my nation;
I will not allow till my last breath
Misfortune to cast its shadow over it.

"This is my word, come what may! "

The skies acknowledged this pledge
By sending unprecedented lightning
And thunder. From the heavens
Flowers were showered on him,

"For this unprecedented courage
He shall be known as "Bhisma" hereafter."

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -14

14. Changing Life

The marriage was simple, ritualistic.
The palace was large, amazing
First time in my life, I had servants
And a firm roof over my head.

Santanu was eager to have me
In his bedroom. For many days,
He did not get out of my antapura
Never let me out of his arms strong.

The matters of governance
Devabrata took good care of
With the help of ministers.
Never disturbed the king.

Initial sarcasm of the servants about
"Fisherwoman feigning as queen";
Gave way for respect and reverence
For my conduct in just a few days.

Devabrata gave me all the respect
Due to a mother and the queen.

Nobody noticed how the time passed
I gave birth to two sons in so many years.
Chitrangad was just one year old
When Vichitravirya was born.

Our hearts were filled with joy
Seeing how Devabrata loved them.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -15

15. Bereaved

It was my suggestion, well taken
That Devabrata be anointed Crown Prince;
Entire nation woke up in a festive mood
But King was, for sure, the happiest.

To the utter astonishment of all
Devabrata refused the throne.
Only when king pursued
Did he reveal the story

Of the throne he had relinquished
The vow to celibacy he had made,
The incident I had forgotten long,
And he had disclosed to none.

The news was a shock so rude
From which the king never recovered.
And he left for his heavenly abode
Just in a matter of days.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -16

16. The Queen

□

The funeral rites were performed
By Devabrata with my sons in toe.
Santanu's ashes were consigned
To the holy waters of the Ganga.

The national mourning was over
I asked Devabrata to take charge
Of the nation, governance, as king.
I was in tears, he refused again.

“Mother, I have made the pledge
Not at your instance, you know well.
Sure, it was on my own volition;
Till end, I shall live for the nation.

The decision, you may think
Is severe and harsh on me,
But we should have no discord
In the ruling family. So I must.

Interest of the nation comes first!
Mother, I have to keep my word
Nothing in the world can change
My decision. I'd die before I do.

Now the throne is yours
I shall run the government
As you direct. I will wield
Arms to protect her borders.

A minister, if you desire
The commander, if need be.
I shall be the servant of the nation
But never shall I breach my oath.

Sure, the children are small
But in time, they will grow tall

May I arrange for your coronation
To you looks forward the nation.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -17

17. The Reign

It rained copiously in Shravan
Sun shined in the summer months
Crops were good and people happy
The gods were on my side.

Devabrata was always by my side
Helping me to run the government
Had raised and trained the army
So nobody dared to test our borders.

He took care of my sons' education
In politics, rajatantra and governance
Their training in warfare and weaponry
Their grooming as princes and rulers.

There were kings growing restless
At our strength and prosperity
Acceptance among our peers
And growing status and influence.

But before the might of our army,
Its renowned commander
The great warrior Devabrata
Not many dared to raise their heads.

Devabrata loved to live in peace
Live and let live was his policy

Even with sworn enemies, never fought
A war, unless we were attacked.

Those who challenged our borders
Succumbed to the might of our army
Ended up as our protectorates
Paying us ransom or simply annexed.

I was the proud queen of Hastinapura
More proud as mother of Devabrata
Revered by kings and princes
I enjoyed the fruit of success.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -18

18. Generations

The boys grew up
Handsome young men
Loved by one and all
As princes of Hastinapura.

Their elder brother
Devabrata, trained them
In arms. They grew up
As renowned warriors.

Revered by all girls around
Proud of their handsome bodies
As princes, they got everything
Without asking, even girls.

Not just the servant girls,
From the nobility too.
Childhood pranks, I thought
Smiled inside, feigned anger.

Always in the company
Of girls, even before me.
A little reverence shown
Only to jyestha, Devabrata.

I tried to bring order, but failed
Boys are boys. I wanted to speak
To Devabrata. Before I could,
But, the worst happened!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -19

19. Chitrangad

The princes had only seen girls
Too eager to lift their skirts
For or them. They chased
Every girl they set eyes on.

Chitrangad once met a girl
A Gandharva lady so charming
Angada was no ordinary girl
Refused his advances outright.

The prince, always revered by girls
Never had heard a "No" in his life
Tried to force himself upon her.
A trained warrior, she overpowered him.

Angada fled to her brother,
Severe fight ensued betwixt the men
Before Devabrata could reach
Chitrangad was defeated n' killed.

Even at this time of grief
Devabrata drew his sword
Against the killer in vengeance
It was a matter of honour too.

Angada came in between
"Fight me first, for it is for me,
That my brother killed yours."
She swore, her sword on his chest.

"I donot fight women", said Devabrata
"But, I do fight men", she retorted.
"Tell me, but why should I fight you? "
"He tried to rape ME", she was furious.

Devabrata respected women
Never hesitated to bow his head

Before this honorable lady
And asked to be forgiven.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -20

20. Vichitravirya

Devabrata now suggested
To anoint Vichitravirya
As crown prince an' entrust him
The responsibilities of a king

I was not comfortable
With the suggestion
Vichitravirya was still a child
And power may corrupt him

I did not want Devabrata taking orders from him.

But Devabrata was firm
Sure he would mend his ways.
He was now sixteen and 't was
Time to find him a bride.

No princess will agree
To marry him, unless
He was the heir apparent
Sure to be the king next.

With Devabrata present
They would have doubts
Who would take over from me
The reins of the nation.

Devabrata didn't mince words
Nor did he waste time.
Vichitravirya remained
Always under his wings.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -21

21. The Princesses of Kaashi

Varaanasi, also known as Kaashi
The capital of the empire of Kaashi
And abode of Lord Kaashi Viswanath
Was the centre of culture and religion.

It was the economic capital of Bharat
Exported silk, gold, precious stones
And fragrant rice to the entire world
Even to China, Persia and Roma.

The emperor was friends with
The rulers all over the world
He presided over Kaashi Vidyapeeth
That had students from across the oceans.

He had never acknowledged
The existence of Hastinapura
Even after Prince Devabrata had
Extended our borders up to his.

He had three beautiful daughters
All renowned scholars as well
Studied in the Kaashi Vidyapeeth
And adored by their loving father.

When Devabrata spoke of Kaashi,
I thought they were attacking us
But he spoke of the declaration
Of Swayamvaram of the princesses.

As immediate neighbor, strong
And powerful and growing in stature
We expected our crown prince
A definite invitee and assured candidate.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -22

22. An Invitation That Never Came

The invitation never came.

Our spies in Kaashi reported
That the emperor remarked
He had no daughters to be given
To the son of a fisherwoman.

It's a fact that I am a fisherwoman
I felt nothing. No need to react.
But Devabrata was furious
On the humiliation of Hastinapura.

The fury palpable on his face
Like a smoldering volcano
Frightened me. On the day of
Swayamvara, he simply vanished.

He returned a few hours later
As if right from a battlefield
In his chariot were the three princesses
Frightened like deer before a tiger.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -23

23. Abduction

Devabrata's valour and expertise
In archery were well-known.
This was the occasion when
He was tested out in the open.

He had challenged the emperor
Single handed, for a duel
For not inviting Vichitravirya
His brother, for the swayamvara.

A minister who spoke about
Fisherwoman feigning as queen
Was answered by his sword
Right before the emperor's eyes.

Eerie silence reigned in the palace
The entire coterie stood dumbfounded
Before they could wink their eyes
Bhisma started off with the princesses

His fierce arrows quelled the army
Of Kaashi, known for its numbers,
Gallantry and modern weapons,
Like wild fire burning down a forest.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -24

24. Amba, The Princess in Love

The princesses were named
Amba, Ambika and Ambalika.
They were so beautiful that
The prince's face lit up.

But Amba refused to alight
From the chariot, she was in love
With Prince Salvan and would
Only marry him, or die willingly.

She could not disclose her love
To her father, sure he would refuse
For Salvan was a prince, namesake
Of a little state, almost unknown.

She begged Devabrata to let her free
So, she could marry Prince Salvan.
Devabrata did not hesitate
To send her to Salvan, with all honor.

Disappointment was written
On the face of Vichitravirya-
Amba was the most beautiful
And famous for her knowledge.

Our astonishment knew no bounds
When she returned downcast
Having been turned down by Salvan
As she was abducted by Devabrata.

Vichitravirya looked at her longingly
But she didn't even turn to look at him;
She wanted Devabrata to marry her
For, he was the reason for her plight

And he was responsible to remedy it;
Refused again by Bhisma citing his vow

She accused him of behaving like a eunuch
Cursed him to death in the hands of one.

Devabrata remained unfazed!

She stormed out of the palace
In a fit of anger. It was heard
That she was doing penance
To be reborn, to slay Bhisma.

Fear gripped me;
But Devabrata didn't lose his calm!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -25

25. A Nation in Tears

Ambika and Ambalika
Gelled into our family.
Or did they? They had
Hardly any time for that.

Having tasted the pleasures
Of sex, never left the prince
Always demanded more
And he was more than willing

The prince was with one
Princess or the other or both
Never left the antapura
Even during the day-time

It was good for him
We just smiled inwardly,
Would stop chasing girls
And settle down in life

But, then over-indulgence
Started to take the toll on him
Pale he grew, and paler by the day
Like moon in krishnapaksha.

His wives but did not
Give up their demands
And he still wanted them
Soon he was terribly ill

The bhishaks diagnosed him
Of severe tuberculosis,
Result of over indulgence
His life was in immediate danger

Gloom pervaded the palace
And the entire nation

Best doctors from far and near
Were summoned to tend him.

All the treatments yielded
No result, his health
Deteriorated by the hour
Doctors lost their hope too.

Vichitravirya left this world
On an amavaasi day
It rained as if in Shrawan
And all eyes in the country too.

Life came to a standstill
For me; Devabrata too
Could not hold his tears;
Our dream was crumbling.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -26

26. The Progeny

The funeral rites were over
Conducted by Devabrata
I was back on the throne as queen
And he, the Commander-in-Chief.

I declared a year of mourning
Leaving us enough time to think.
I asked him to marry the princesses
I knew they desired him.

Whenever he was in Antapura
They had their longing eyes
Full of desire, always set on him
Like bees on honey blossoms.

I am sure that he was aware
Of their beautiful eyes on him.
Any man would accept the invitation
But he was well past that stage.

As expected, he refused.
I tried to invoke his vow
To protect the interest
Of the nation; the dynasty.

He just laughed it off.

Leaving all inhibitions
Of a mother, I asked him
To father them children
So, Puruvamsam survives.

It is provided in the scripts,
His vow notwithstanding, I reasoned.
But he answered unflinchingly,
His vow to celibacy stays.

Satyawati -27

27. The Hell Called 'Pum';

Scripts say, a person who dies childless
Shall not attain the heavenly abode
But languish in a hell called 'Pum',
A special one for the childless.

Children are the only power who can lift
Their parents from Pum to heaven.
Childless is cursed to the hell forever.
Hence a son is also called Putra.

It is provided in the scripts
That if a man dies childless
A brother of the deceased
May father children with the widow

And such children shall be
Considered those of the deceased
Entitled to perform funeral rites
And save him from the hell.

This is what I had asked of Devabrata,
So our dynasty, Puruvamsam thrives,
Vichitravirya is saved from the hell
and Hastinapura shall have a ruler.

Refused by him, I lost all hopes
Resigned to the inevitable
I confined myself to the antapura
No more confident to face the world.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -28

28. End of the Tunnel

Krishna, the Dwaipayana,
My first-born, came one day
I know not how he divined
My anguish, unending tears.

In the deep forest in penance
Without taking food or water
For many long years on a go
He was a horrible sight.

Not having taken a bath for ages
Hair grown dirty with sweat and dust
His offensive smell announced him
Well before he entered the palace.

In him I found the answer
To all my prayers: he is my son
As Prince Vichitravirya was,
His half-brother like Devabrata.

"Ye shall father Vichitravirya's sons"
I commanded the Dwaipayana.
Consented he, "but I need a year
For my ablutions, so the progeny is the best".

But, I had no patience
And sages are like wind
Know not where they go
And when shall they return.

"It is now or Never", I decided.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -29

29. What Haste Yields

I sent Ambika to his chambers,
"Pray for a wise and strong son".
But she could not stand the sight
Of the sage, closed her eyes tight.

She never dared to open the eyes
During the coitus, scared as she was,
If not, she'd have closed her nose too.
To our utter dismay, her son was born blind.

Ambalika almost lost her senses
Scared to near death, she froze
As she entered his chambers
Her son was born weak and pale.

I had no choice, but to try again
Ambika could not gather herself
Even think of going to him once more
So sent her hand-maid instead.

She took it as a privilege and honor
To receive the great saint
And bear him a son; to her was born
A son, with intelligent, noble features.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -30

30. Seeds of Conflict

The young princes grew up
Under the tutelage of Bhishma;
He took it upon himself to train
The second generation as well.

Dhritarashtra, though blind,
Was intelligent and hard working
But nurtured a negative outlook
On everything in his life.

Ever since it was known that
A blind cannot be the king
His bitterness knew no bounds
And he stopped all training.

Pandu the younger prince
Was lazy and easy-going;
His weak body did not permit him
To practice archery and fencing.

He was inept in learning weaponry.

The maid named her son Vidur
He was calm, intelligent and scholarly
Learned scriptures and soon became
A great scholar and administrator.

Soon Pandu was anointed King
And Vidur, the Prime Minister
I was happy to retire as queen
In favour of my grandson.

We ignored the disappointment
On the face of Dhritarashtra.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -31

31. A War in the Family

After Pandu had died of consumption
Dhritarashtra took over as king
The denial of the throne to him
Now became a questionable issue.

No wonder the Dhartarashtrans
Tried to eliminate the Pandavas;
Between them grew distrust
Suspicion hatred and animosity.

All the wise words of Bhisma
And Vidura could do little
To quell the increasing conflict
Fear of impending war gripped us.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Satyawati -32

32. Vanaprastha- Retiring to the Forests

Retiring to the forests
Is a practice followed
In the old age by members
Of the royal family.

Some people welcome death
By totally abstaining from food
Living just on water alone,
While others await a natural death.

When I took the decision
Ambika and Ambalika confided
They had already decided
To join me on Vanaprastha.

Devabrata, Dhritarashtra
The ministers and citizens
Even the young princes
Wanted us to stay back.

Vidura, with his eyes moist
Accepted whole-heartedly
His mother having joined us
Asked his wife to accompany.

He was privy to the conflict
Betwixt the Dhartarashtrians
And the Pandavas; the fire
His wisdom could not douse.

Renouncing all royal comforts
Devoid of the coterie of servants
Living on roots, fruit and leaves
We now await the inevitable,

Totally distanced from this world
And the horrible war in the offing

Without disturbing the peace,
Sanity and sanctity of the forest.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Scarlet O'hara, Lover Of My Dreams

Scarlet O'Hara
Was the lover of my dreams
After I read the novel
"Gone with the wind".
She had the face
Of my classmate
To whom I dared not
To open my heart.

That was until
I watched the movie,
When Vivien Leigh gave her
A face and elegance
And a pair of sensuous eyes.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Seashore Comes Alive (Haiku)

Seashore comes alive
A breeze as if lost its way
Through the evening.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Separation

Let me say a few words just for your ears
If you pause a little, we could meet too

My life has come to a standstill, haunted by
My memories, since when I know not

You have left, singing to me a tune of love
Leaving me mad of my love for you.

One desire I still have, unquenched
My wish to be with you remains unfulfilled

I have wept in you love, how long
Many nights have I spent without sleep.

You are the cause of my tears and smile too
As if caused a fire in the water

I yearn to speak to you for a life time
But our meeting never could occur until now

My heart longs for you, couldn't it contain...
Despite best efforts, I couldn't forget you...

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

She Never Had A Sunday

(This is a small poem written years back for my daughter, when she was still a kid.)

'Why Sunday? '
My daughter asked.
'His work done, God rested
on the seventh day
and it was Sunday',
I concluded.

Sunday,
A week's work done
I rested in my armchair
A book in my hand.
In her study
She tried to convince
her mother, in vain.

Finally,
Exasperated
She asked me again
'Why Sunday? '
'Rest, dear,
A week's work done, ' I said.
'Just tell her that, '
She said, 'and let me play.'

I realised then, she, the mother,
Never had a Sunday!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Silence

Your silence expressed
All your emotions
Everything right from your heart
In words spoken by others.

It was your love that touched my heart
And changed my life
In the influence of time
My heart was helpless.

Always did I long to watch
The love that smiled on your lips
That filled my heart
With all the happiness of life.

I kept reading of you
In all my wake
Sleep eluded my nights
Still my days were beautiful.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Silly Season

1. Spring

Fragrance!
The darkest spell
Of the cold witch is over.
Nature plays Holi; gulal spreads.
Spring springs.

2. Summer

Parched sun
Heaves a sigh hot.
Last of the spring flowers
Have dried and withered long back
Sun strokes.

3. Autumn

Drizzling
All through the day.
Warns the lingering breeze,
"Gear up, the worst is yet coming"
The fall.

4. Winter

Cold winds,
Gloomy gray skies
Blandest of all seasons
Harbinger of all maladies
Blank verse.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Singed Hearts

Palmyra

The treasure trove
Of human creativity
that time has preserved.

A book of poetry
That Shelly and Keats
Could not pen.

A lovely Orchard
Of myriad flora
Shaped by minds
Extra ordinary
Garnished with
Colors and fragrance
And life
Yes, LIFE!

The grand colonnade
All those hearts
Singed in their own heat,

Temple of Baal
A thought drowned
In its own tears,

The Arch of Triumph
A teardrop turned vapour
Before it could hit the ground
In the sand dunes of hatred,

Diocletian Wall breaks down
Where End begins
And Beginning ends.

Do I see a smile faint,
behind the cloud
Of tears and blood.

Do I see hands strong
and hearts brave
undoing what is undone.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Solitude

Solitude

Sun suffers,

Clouds keep distance.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Sun Sets In The Morning

Dark are my nights.
As sun sets in the morning
Darker are my days.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Sunahsepha 1-Ashram

We lived in our ashram
On the slopes of Mount Bhrgutunga
Father Sage Rricheeka, mother
And just the three of us.

Father, by penance, attained
The coveted title of a bhahmarshi
And revered by even the king,
Such were the times of yore.

Jyeshta was favorite of father
Young Shunaka, to mother
And I, loved by all, had
The best of both the worlds.

Ashram is still alive in my mind
A small stream flowing behind
With enough water round the year,
As love and togetherness at home.

A little breeze a regular visitor
But was our peace never disturbed
Rain occasional. Summer was never
Too hot, nor the winter too cold.

Fragrance of flowers filled the air
Devadaaru and other medicinal trees
Rubbed their shoulders together
Shedding smell and spreading health.

Variety fruit, roots and tubers-
Food was abundant, so were guests
Known and unknown. Food we shared
With all hungry men and beasts.

Vedas, Vedaangas and Puraanas
Father taught us and trained us
To live a life of ebb
And flowed, peace prevailed.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Sunahsepha 2- Yajna, The Sacrifice

It was news when King Ambarish
Of Ayodhya, our ashram bordering,
Embarked upon a ritual sacrifice
To appease Gods, but Indra got scared.

.....If Gods were pleased of Ambarish
.....His throne was at stake.

It was a joke for us all
King lost the sacrificial animal
Said to be stolen by Indra
But nowhere to be seen.

What next? We asked father.

Protection of sacrificial animal
Bounden duty of the king. The loss
Would cost him his life, all his
Progeny and the land will perish.

The land will perish, unless
A suitable substitute arranged
Animal or man, enured with the right
Features marked in the scriptures.

Everybody laughed a heartfull
When I brayed as sacrificial animal
When stolen by Indra played by Sunaka
While Jyeshtha, the king feigned asleep.

It was heard, king had sent his men
Searching for animal for sacrifice
Across cities, villages and forests
offered a thousand cows in exchange.

News came daily, King Ambarish
And his men could not find a man
Or animal suitable for the sacrifice.
Father became restless and worried.

.....We could not guess why.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Sunahsepha 3- Yajna Pasu, The Sacrificial Animal

Soon we got the answer.
Unable to find a man or animal
The king entered the forests
Where only sages lived.

To our ashram came the king
With his full retinue in attendance
Father did not break his silence
Mother fainted in his arms.

Asked the king, 'you have three sons
All bearing the sacred marks
Written in the holy scriptures
that qualify them as yajnapasu.

Sell me one; exchange for a thousand cows
For the land will perish otherwise
I will be obliged to you for ever
And you shall earn a place in the heavens.'

In full tears father said, 'I have
No sons to sell, even if it were
For sacrifice In the altar of Gods
My heaven is where my family is.'

But king and his sages preached
Of his duty to the king and Gods
But nobody dared to ask, 'what about Your son,
O king, is he not suited for the sacrifice? '

Finally father said, 'my elder son
Is dear to me, whom I shall not sell'
Mother, provoked, spoke 'so is Sunaka
The youngest one, to me, shall not be sold.

.....That left me, the middle one.

I spoke, 'When in fear of danger, child
Looks for protection from parents.

When they disown, the king shall protect him.
Now, disowned by all, whom shall I appeal to? '

.....I did not want to die.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Sunahsepha 4- Unanswered Prayers

Sold, in exchange of a thousand cows
Soldiers took possession of me; kept
Under close guard, for fear of Indra
Flowing tears could melt no hearts.

None of my tearful prayers evoked
Any answer from Indra. Either they
Did not reach him, or he was
Reassured of his throne by now.

I remembered what mother had said, She
Had descended from Brahma, the Creator.
I wanted to propitiate Brahma Pitamaha
So, he may protect his progeny from death.

Nothing happened, though. Probably he had
No time for this little urchin, I thought.
Pushed by the soldiers, my legs gave way,
But the soulless soldiers dragged me away.

.....But I continued my prayers
.....For I just wanted to live.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Sunahsepha 5- Pushkara

By Evening, we reached Pushkara.
The soldiers halted by the side
Of the great lake, where Brahma
Bathed and sages lived in penance.

Hungry, tired and scared of impending death
I was tied down to a tree, unable
To move. Their teeth and talons bared
A hound of soldiers stood guard.

As night spread its chaadhar, they
lit a fire, started to dance, drinking
Madhira. Through my deliriums, I heard
The captain asking then to keep quiet.

'Sage Vishwamitra lives in penance nearby
Do not disturb his peace, or that
Will be the end of life for all of us'
And suddenly silence fell!

.....Vishwamitra, my matula!
.....My hopes were rekindled.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Sunahsepha 6- Mother

My matula Vishwamitra was a great sage
Famous for his power of penance, that
Could secure the heavens for Trisanku,
And for his temper, not tempered by his age.

I tried to release myself from the ropes
So I could reach him. The soldiers rushed to me
To stand in guard by my side, dashing all my hopes.
They kicked me on my face; but I felt no pain.

Suddenly it started raining, startling the soldiers,
So heavily as if the skies were ripped apart
Fire doused, plunging us into full darkness.
Fear gripped me; I feared I would die of fear.

Fingers of rain long and slender caressed me
Like my mother's. Now I cried my heart out
Tears flowed like Sindhu, mixed with rainwater.
Even in the extreme cold, I felt her warmth.

I closed my eyes tight and saw mother smiling
She was rocking me in the cradle of her heart
Her fingers feeding me my favorite dishes
And I, cozily ensconced in her warm embrace.

.....I forgot my fear and hunger.

I tugged at the ropes again; a li'l did I gain
A lightning flashed and I saw the knot easy
Free from the ropes, I saw a light flicker
Far away. That could be my uncle; I ran!

Were the soldiers after me? Or the footsteps
I heard were that of a jackal or a panther?
Now I knew no fear, my mother was with me
Lead kindly light, my mother's love with me!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Sunahsepha 7- Viswamitra

My mother's blessings were with me
Even Mahaakal would stay away!

I knew no fear now!
Only the flickering light afar
In my eyes. In my mind
I was still in the warm embrace
Of my mother, her kisses
Seemed to tell me
'Fast, my son, faster.
Your matula is waiting for you
No force in all the fourteen worlds
Can do you harm, once you reach him'

My intuitions were right, I was
Before my matula in no time
My body aching to the bones
Feet torn and sheared by stones
How I traversed the fearsome forest
On bare foot, I know not.
Bleeding, bruised of thorns
How long it took, I know not.
How my feet found the way,
I know not!

The old sage held me
In his long muscular arms
And I rested my feeble little body
On his broad chest, panting.

I heard his profound voice,
'Son, who are you?
What brings you here
In this deadly forest? '

It was the captain of the soldiers
reached after me who retorted
'he is yajnapasu of Lord Ambarisha;
Leave him to us, or our swords

Will speak, not our words.'
Matula raised his eyes to them
A flash of fire, and ashes
Remained where they stood.

I could just stammer, 'matula...'
To my utter surprise,
He recognized me now,
'Are you Satyavati's son?
What is your name? Don't be afraid.
Nobody can harm you here.'
His voice calm and composed
Soothed my eyes welled!

When I opened my eyes,
I found Lord Indra ascending
His golden chariot, bowing
To my matula, 'So be it, ' He said.
Varuna, the Lord of Oceans
Had already left, sated.

King was happy, as the Lords
Condescended to give him
All the benefits of the yajna.
All, including the gods, glad
And to escape the wrath of
Brahmarshi Viswamitra.

I was still in his arms.
A messenger was sent
To my grieving parents
To tell them the good news.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

The Canon Of Love

I am citizen
In a republic
Where
What love says
Is the canon.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

The Colours Of Life

The colours of life're so different
Somebody is happy with a little
Some are not content even in excess
Some resent their dear ones
Some live in pretensions.

Life is a strange game
Money plays the key role everywhere
Somebody loots his kith and kin
All the desires of the heart
Are broken to pieces like glass

Some are hungry, cry for crumbs of bread
While others sleep over money
Somebody is not happy even at home
Somebody happily sleeps on the road
I'm unable to fathom the intrigues of life
There is a new story wherever you turn.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

The Enigma That Is Life

Life is an enigma! Who knows what it is and why it is,
Where do we come from and where are we unto.
What happened yesterday is past, and remains a fact;
But we live only today, this very moment.

Whatever has passed till now we have been just spectators;
What about the future then? Is it that the world is for us
Or we have made what it is today?
Nothing is in our control. Or why should anything be?

Man comes to this world with his fists clenched,
Ready to grab anything he can lay his hands on.
But when he leaves, he leaves with his hands open
Leaving everything behind. Only his karma remains with him.

Geeta says, soul, The Aatman has no death nor birth;
Death is when the body is discarded as jeerna vastram
And soul goes on to mantle a new one, as we change dress.
Who are we? The body that dies or the immortal soul?

If life is enigmatic, so is love. Why do I love another being?
Is for my sake, or his? Why do I love one, but hate the other?
What do I get in return for my love? Or should I?
Is love a karma adequate? If yes, whom should I love?

*The Poet says, "love is the essence of everything on earth;
And the principle of love is the ultimate truth that governs life".
**Another claims, "love is the one religion that spreads life
Across the universe, the full moon spreading moonshine."

What is love? Is it the feeling of man to woman?
Or that of mother to her child or that you have for me?
How can we define all these different feelings of love?
How do we differentiate? Or who are we to differentiate?

Oh! Life's so complicated. But why is it so?
What is the purpose of our existence?
Why do we think? What does death portent?
Oh! Let us speak of life, not death. And of course, love.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

The Fire Inside

Man wandered the whole day in the scorching sun
In the forests and valleys in search of food
Suddenly he noticed the spreading darkness
Still his stomach filled only half, his stone mace at hand
Ran fast to the safety of a was cold and thought he,
maybe the fire is still alive in his cave, but quite further away.

Fear, no, dread warded off his sleep
He was still awake when moon slowly rose.
In the cold wintry night, he ran through the moonlight
To the warmth of his cave, where he had his fire live.
To his utter dismay, he found the cave occupied
Fear gripped him again, is it a tiger or a lion?

Without making a sound he entered the cave
And pounced upon the occupant,
Landing a heavy blow on it with his heavy mace
He landed on something soft and supple,
And it got up with a wild cry, trying to get away,
But he would not loosen his grip for his life.

In the faint moonlight and warmth of the dying embers,
he saw it was a woman. And it was a woman he longed for.
She fought to free herself from his firm strong arms
And then all on a sudden, she gave up and smiled at him
Her lips searching for his and he warming up to her.
Moon, not wanting to ogle at them, hid her face behind her veil.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

The Jasmine Vine And The Mango Tree ????????????????

?????????

My heart pounding
My Vanajyotsna in my arms,
I stood still, as Shakuntala
With tears in her lovely eyes
Came to bid me farewell.

The breeze had stopped
Not a leaf moved in the Ashram
'Twas as if even the tiny deer calf
Favourite of Shakuntala, Deergaapanga
Had forgotten to breath.

I still remember the day
When, as a tiny toddler,
Shakuntala planted me,
Just a little mango sapling
In the Aashram premises.

She always cared for me
We grew up together
I bore flowers for my playmate
To adorn her lovely earlobes
And honey-sweet fruit for her taste buds.

She planted in my shade a tiny jasmine shrub,
She called her Vanajyotsna
Declaring her my swayamvara vadhu.
But I dreamt of Shakuntala as bride
May be led by the remains of a past human birth.

Time passed, as flows a river, unstopped
Shakuntala has transformed from a lotus bud
Into to a fully blossomed flower.
She met Dusshantha, the king of Hastinapura,
They fell in love and got married.

Was I jealous or just worried for her

After the king left for his palace?
Now she is leaving the aashram to join him,
who had failed to keep his word
To send his coterie to fetch her.

Life in the aashram
has come to a standstill.
My grieving heart is consoled
And eyes wiped dry
By the moist lips of Vanajyotsna.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

The Maundering Moon

Like every child
I used to follow the moon
Maundering in the sky
And wonder what he's doing
All through the lonely nights
all alone in the skies
With all those fireflies
Winking around.

When I grew up
And left my home
And my loved ones
In search of a livelihood,
I started to sing
With Jagjit Singh,
"I have left my home,
But, in my place
The moon would have risen;
In his nightly abode
How lonely would he be feeling!
(Without me to keep him company) ! "

In the school
We had learned that
The moon would be
Older by over a second
By the time I see him.
But in the case of sun
It is eight minutes.
For, light travels at
three hundred thousand
Kilometres a second.

If only I could ride light!

My bus to the school
Traveled at forty kilometres an hour.
Very fast for those days
And the roads we had.

I wondered, if the bus were
To take us to the moon,
How long would it take?
We made the calculations:
It takes four hundred days!

Then came Luna Nine and Luna Ten
The unmanned Russian satellites
That softlanded on the moon
and sent us its photographs.

More news - newspapers
Suddenly were in high demand.
At home, we sat around the radio
With our ears glued to it.
Pele and Billie Jean King
Were pushed to the back seats.
In the school,
the science teacher
Gave us more information
On the Apollo lunar expeditions.
I had just turned twelve
When Apollo Eleven
Blasted off from Florida
Kennedy Space Center.
And four days later
Neil Armstrong set
His foot on the moon.

World was not the same
Thereafter. Nor was the moon.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

The Month Of May

The Month of May is the unkindest of all
Sun shines, but to lick you dry
A breeze pauses at the doorstep
'N' turns back with a smile so wry.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

The Swan And Me

Its touch so sensuous
Its eyes drawing me into itself
Its body snuggling in mine
Rousing a passion yet unknown

Slowly it dawned on me
He is no ordinary swan
He is no swan at all
Then what, nay, who is he?

His golden feathers
Gleaming eyes
And voice profound-
Did tell a story different...

His lips reaching up to my ears
Whispered, 'Leda, I'm Zeus!
May I take my own shape
So you'd believe...'

'No' I cried. How can I
The queen of Sparta
Be seen nude with a man
Be it Zeus himself!

And I wanted to fly
On his golden wings
Over Mount Olympus
I was already his...

(2)

The touch of his body
His lips on mine
Webbed feet on my navel

Mounting passion

I remember nothing
I lay in the poolside bath
Tired as a dead log
Unable to move a limb

But his mere thought
Roused me again
Kindled my passion
Longing for him yet again

(3)

My husband Tyndareus
The king of Sparta
Who'd not touched me
For the one month past

I went to his harem-
With many a concubine
Where he slept
All spent and tired

All those girls I threw out
For, through the night
I wanted to be alone
With him, till day broke

Never did I allow him sleep
Throughout the night
For my passion rose
Whenever I thought of Zeus

My hunger I wanted to sate
But I wanted to give him
A night to remember
So he'd never suspect

Whenever I longed
Zeus did come to me
Always as the swan

In the form I wanted him.

(4)

With swan I have slept
Not a human any longer?
For, two eggs I laid
And waited to hatch

The first one hatched
Out came twins both male
Reminded me of Zeus
I was sure, they were his

My heart longed for him
My body for his touch
Out came Zeus
To see his babies

The other egg hatched
I had another pair of twins
Were they borne to Zeus
Or me husband, the king?

(5)

But my desire was else
And he knew it well
His passionate hug
With his feathered arms

His lips searching mine
My body aching for his
I was his yet again
Never sated, never again.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

The Untouchable God

Bhattathiri was a happy man.

He has just been invited for "koottirippu"
To the niece of Maharaja of Thiruvithamkode
This definitely enhanced his status way above
All the high caste Brahmins of Malayalam;
May be, he would father the next Maharaja.

He stopped suddenly: did he hear a cry?

A little boy struggling against the flow of the stream
to reach for the shores. Having seen Patteri,
Raising his hands to him, the boy cried, "save me! ! ! "
Patteri recognised the boy as son of Chathan,
A Pulayan, untouchable in caste. He ignored the cries.

It was Monsoon season and he walked fast.
Next morning an insignificant news reached him,
Chathan Pulayan's son had drowned.
"Send some rice and a Rupee to Chathan", he ordered.

The year was a thousand and ninety nine.
His bride to be had just turned seventeen.
Renowned for her beauty and intelligence
She was an exponent in Carnatic and Hindustani Music,
And spoke Sanskrit and English fluently.

At Muziris Port Patteri was inspecting his new boat
Ready for his journey to the capital of Thiruvithamkode.
Patteri, a man of many women, started singing,
"Anganamar Moule, Baale....."

Suddenly, there arose loud shouts and cries
Patteri turned to see the boat being heaved to the skies
All his men adrift and the waters rushing to him
Before he could understand, he was swept offshore.
He now fathomed that he was drowning.

He thought he heard the cries of Chathan's son
Which he chose to ignore just a few days back,
Leaving the boy to die. His heart sank.
Before he was swallowed by the waters again
In the dim twilight, he fancied he saw a movement afar.

In his tiny little ramshackle hut,
Chathan tended his Thambran back to life.
When he regained, Patteri saw himself safe;
Tears welling up in his eyes Patteri folded his hands
Before his new untouchable god.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

The World Was Only Darker

They ordered,
Come along, Madame Hester,
Show your Scarlet Letter
In the market place.*

The world was only darker
For this woman's beauty,
The more lost for the infant
That she had borne.*

Has Hester sinned alone? *

She was just a sadhanam**
As if her name too was Tatrikkutty**.
The Smarthan** always is a man
Whether in Massachusetts or Thrissur.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

The Worm And The Angler

THE WORM AND THE ANGLER

They (the fish) are not as intelligent as we who kill them; although they are more noble and more able.- Earnest Hemingway in "Old Man and the Sea";.

When you picked me up from the dirt
I writhed and tried to wriggle out
For my life.
I felt the vile heart that throbbed
On the ugly fingers that held me-
Your heart!
It was dirtier than the dirt I lived in
Fouler than the fowl-beaks
I escaped till day
Crueler than the crow-beaks
That would feed on my flesh.

Not even in my dreams
Had I seen a hook
Much less, one that would impale me,
For, none who ascended the cross, nay, hook
Came back to tell the tale of the crooks.
Life is just another tale
By another name!

My slightly flesh
Would not your hunger sate
So I am here on the hook a bait
For the fish to come and bite.
I would attract only smaller fry
Bigger sharks need better baits.

The fish that would swallow me
And end up on your dining table
Knows quite well that
I do not belong to its waters
And its regular food
But never guess I am a bait
May not notice the hook, the line

And the vile hands holding control.
It would be too late
When the sharpness of the hook
Meets its flesh
And pulls it out
Of its own waters
Writhing, gasping for a wisp of air
In the abundant air
That would snatch its life away.

In the excruciating pain□
And the suffocating full open air
It would definitely forget
To curse you, the line and the hook.
But the curse on me
Is for generations to come.

Its guts you remove
Would include my little flesh
May be still alive
Would feed the crows and the fowl.
But they would never know
My bleeding heart, life impaled
Your forked tongue
And crooked fangs.
Life is just another game
By another name!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

What Heart Desires

You are so far away from me, yet so close
Quite emotional, but you speak no word
You retain a smile, despite an aching heart
Know not what my heart desires.

Under the cover of your memories
Let me sleep on a bed of dreams
And often weep in your memory
Know not what my heart desires.

Colorless are my days
Without the hues of your love for me
Often getting lost in your memories
I get dissolved yourself
Know not what my heart desires.

I do rise sometimes in the sky
Just like the birds who fly
Often I desire the cool shade
Of your caring arms
Know not what my heart desires.

I smile now, now do I cry
As if in a freezing night
I snuggle in the fog of my memories
Know not what my heart desires.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

What Wave Does Not Tell The Shore

Wave does not tell the shore anything.

She knows pretty well
That she will be annihilated
In his lustful embrace;
Yet she flows to the shore
With open arms
And trembling lips
Her watery nakedness
Her transparent emotions.

In his arms she forgets
the momentousness
Of the union.
About the next wave
Coming after her.
No longer she is aware of
The sea
That is the cause of her existence
And the winds
That kindled her passion.

Now
Now she departs
With twinkling tearful eyes,
Her lovely fingers
Leaves his chest unwillingly,
Shore searches for her
In the sand
As her smile* disappears
Over the waters,
He has to be contented
With the orphans of the sea**
She has left under his care.

Notes:

*Her Smile: The effervescence appearing on the surface of the sea when the wave retreats

**Orphans of the Sea: The fish, crabs, shell-fish etc. left on the shore when the

wave retreats.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

What We Gain

We only gain from life
What we give unto others.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

When I Remember You

I have left reading books
But spend my days re-living your memories;

I have stopped getting drenched in rain
Now I just get immersed in your love; ☐

I have stopped staying awake in the night
Would love to sleep dreaming of you;

I have broken my silence, so that
I would talk to you in your pictures;

I have stopped shedding tears
For I find happiness in your smile;

I do no longer enjoy looking at myself in the mirror
But, just look into your eyes to find me there;

I would not languish in my life, but
Would live on waiting for you;

I would definitely smile sometimes
Would not mind crying when I need to.

I would walk down sometimes
The solitary lane in your memory.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

When Shadows Reappear

In the darkness of my nights
Shadows seek shelter.

When darkness descends
On my heart
Shadows of the past
Reappear.

An edifice crumbles
When light and shade play
Behind the black curtains
Of my nights.
A city on fire
Words spew fire
Hearts on fire
A nation on fire!

The Shadow of the Beast
Reappears.

When night withdraws
Shadows of the dreams reappear
And I wake into their cacophony.

Dawn dawns hesitantly
Much later.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

When You Are Not With Me

When you are not with me, nothing makes me feel good
No face worth noticing, and I feel nothing is real
What I have been telling you, you may not like at all
When you are not with me, nothing makes me feel good.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Where Words Weigh Heavy

My heart heavy with the weight
Of unuttered words. The sore lips
Refuse to move on.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Words Untold

You are far from me, but
I find you so close always.
I know you understand that
You are incomplete without me.

To erase me from your memory
Is just impossible for you, but
I know, you consider it
Imperative to forget me.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Yayati 1- Life After Death

(1)

Caught red-handed!

After Sharmishta told Shukra
That I fathered her child
I had nothing more to say.

I had cheated his daughter
My wife, Devayani!
No father would tolerate.
I stood before him
My head bowed
Not out of any feeling of guilt.

(2)

Sharmishta had attracted me
On the day I saw her first
As personal maid to Devayani.
Much more attractive-
After all she was the princess
And Devayani, daughter of Aacharya.

(3)

Shukraacharya raged and ranted
'In lust, you went astray
To father a child with the maid.
No, I would not allow you die-
Now you would turn a thousand years old
And live another thousand years.'

He, the Aacharya. His curse could burn
All the fourteen worlds into ashes
In a split second. What of me!
Instantly, turned gray even my eye- brows
Barely able to stand erect
Let alone turned scaly.

(4)

Who would sleep with me
Though I am King emperor?
And I wanted to enjoy life.
I fell at Aacharya's feet
Weeping like a baby who lost
his favourite toy; Begging pardon.

Shukra kicked at my crowned head
'Get Lost', he shouted.
I, the King Emperor lay on the floor
Before him, for eons. Wept.
Finally, when he got up to leave
muttered something, inaudible.

I look at my elderly minister
'Sire, you can exchange your old-age
With a youth who would accept it.
That is what the Aacharya said'.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Yayati 2- Kacha, The Outcast

(5)

When I left Devayani weeping
My heart broke; She said
she would die if I left.
I was already dead. Many times.

.....But I had duties to my tribe.

(6)

Suras lived under constant fear
Of Mrutasanjeevani Mantra
That Shukra possessed.

He never advised the mantra
To any disciple,
Because if he did, he would
Lose its charm for ever.

Every asura killed by us
Got up and fought us again
When Shukra chanted the mantra
And sprinkled holy water on him.

.....We feared extinction.

(7)

Then they decided to send me
To Shukra to learn the mantra.
I was proud being the Chosen One.
Indra whispered to me,
'Son, It is dangerous;
Asuras would harm you,
When they know who you are.
Use your charm on Devayani
So that her love saves you

From all evil.'

(8)

I didn't have much to do
For Devayani fell for me
The moment we met.
That was after Shukraacharya
Enrolled me as his disciple
Knowing who I am. I never lied.

.....A true Acharya never refused
A disciple of worth.
He taught me everything
But not Mrutasanjeevani.
And I would not leave
Without getting the Mantra.

(9)

True to Indra's warning
Asuras killed me, minced my body
And fed to wolves. But Devayani's
Tears and Shukra's mantra
Brought me back to life.
Many, many times over.

(10)

At last, they burned by body
Ashes mixed in the wine
and served to Shukra.
Devayani's tears gave me life
But I was in Shukra's body-
If I were to live, he dies.

Finally he consented
And advised me the Mantra
While still inside his body:
My life's purpose achieved.
I came out, invoked the mantra
To give life to the acharya.

Thus mantra was tested
Confirmed that I have mastered it
And Shukra has lost it for ever.

.....Asuras were now vulnerable.

(11)

Time had come for me to leave
To my own clan. The Devas
Were waiting for me proudly.

Devayani wept. Her frail body
Every inch of which bore
Marks of my lips, quivered.

.....But I had no choice.

(12)

Asuras had lost the next war
Even before it started.
I used the mantra once or twice.

(13)

Soon Devas decided, as Shukra had
Borne me in his body, I am his 'son',
An asura. They threw me out
As my father stood helpless.
Now I am not a Sura nor Asura.
The mantra is no more of any use.

.....I lost my love and my life.

(14)

I wander outside the deva world
But not in the asura world.
Nor am I to enter Human World.

I am an outcast
And cast out in the sea
with no shores!
The curse of love denied!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Yayati 3- Devayani

(15)

After the battle was won,
And the Suras defeated
Vrushaparva knelt before father.

.....Vrushaparva, the asura king.

Sharmishta was my playmate
But I, daughter of Shukraacharya
Earned more respect from the girls.

.....For, Kings knelt before him.

(16)

Then came Kacha, the handsome,
Father took him as his disciple
And I was happy for him.

Father said, he was son of
Brihaspati, the aacharya of Devas.
'What do I teach him
That his father cannot! '

(17)

I yearned to be with him always
Wander in the meadows with him
Listen to his wise little words,
Bore him by my chattering
On how kings and emperors
Bowed before my father.
Or simply sit looking into
His ocean-blue eyes till I fainted.

(18)

Kacha was learning fast

Father said, he's almost done with
I feared he would leave soon
His assignment completed.

.....I did not want him to leave, Ever.

(19)

Then came the storm.
The king asked father
To throw him out. For,
He was son of the Devaguru
And has come to us
To steal Mrutasanjeevani.

Father's anger knew no bounds.
For it is the Guru's prerogative
To chose his disciple.

(20)

Now asuras tried to eliminate him.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Yayati 4- Shukraacharya

(21)

I did an unending penance
To appease the heartless gods
'cause that was all I could,
When I looked at my innocent
Little daughter Devayani.
The merciless gods called back
Her mother, when she was borne.

..... I became both mother and father to her.

(22)

I denounced death. So
I secured Mrutasanjeevani,
The mantra that could give
Life back to the dead.
If only I could secure it
Before my wife left me!

(23)

I was anointed Aacharya
As my mantra became handy for them,
For asuras were at war with suras
And repeatedly defeated.

Now suras were retreating
Defeated, dwindling in number,
While asuras continued to live
Even after death.

..... I was the most revered in all the fourteen worlds.

(24)

Devayani had grown up
Into a lovely damsel of fourteen

And played with the princess.

(25)

Then came Kacha,
Son of Brihaspati
The Acharya of Suras,
To be my disciple
Learn the Vedas and Vidya,
And I refused none, who's worthy.

Kacha proved worthy
A very keen disciple-
Worthiest of all, gobbled all
I had to offer. In no time.

I loved him. Devayani loved him-
I could see it in her eyes.
But his eyes revealed nothing
Even when he played with Devayani.

(26)

Then the king asked me
To expel him, for he has come
To cheat us of Mritasanjeevani.
I didn't bide, I never refused Vidya.

So, they killed, minced the body
To pieces and fed to wolves.
I could not bear to see
My little one in tears!
The power of Mrutasanjeevani
Brought him back to life!

..... Asuras were furious.

They killed him again 'n' again
And I gave him life back every time.
They played every trick on me.
Finally, Kacha's body was burned
And the ashes served to me with wine.

A vice pays back with a catastrophe.

When I chanted the mantra
And called him to life,
giving in to Devayani's tears,
He responded from my stomach.

Again, on Devayani's pleas
Advised him Mrutasanjeevani
While still inside had
To take my life to come out

..... And gave it back gratefully.

(27)

I had lost the mantra for ever.
Fell from grace. Denounced by asuras.
But all was for my Devayani.

(28)

But Kacha left us without a trace
A sorrowing Devayani broke my heart.
When Suras attacked again,
Defeat was ours, sans mantra.
Everybody blamed me
Called me deceiver, spy of suras.

I could take all the blame
For my Little One. And she
clung to me, understandingly.

Apart from Kacha's disappearance,
The vibes of her friends
Tortured her s in tears.

..... My heart sank with her.

(29)

I was exultant, when Emperor Yayati

Took her hand, after he rescued her
From the ditch, where the princess
Had pushed her in. All was well.

No! Devayani wanted the princess
As her maid. And fearing my wrath
The king agreed with tears, nay, blood
Pouring from his eyes. For His Daughter.
I knew, this was not for humble
In your success was what I taught.

.....But I never said NO to my L'I One.

(30)

Now I am here, in the palace
Of Hastinapura. Devayani is
In tears Again. Her husband had
Cheated her to father children
With Princess Sharmishta.
The Queen Empress humiliated.

She wanted revenge. And revenge it was.
My curse turned the emperor old.
A thousand years old!
His hair gray and skin scaly.

His tears, again melted my heart, again.
Yielded: You can get back your youth
If anybody gives it to you willingly
And accepts your wrinkles.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Yayati 5- Sharmishta

(31)

Finally, I had my revenge!

Today I am the queen-mother
Mother of Puru, King Emperor
The youngest emperor ever
Adorned the throne of Hastinapura.

(32)

I was borne the princess
Daughter of the asura king.
Life was a bed of roses
Until we attacked devas
Father wanting to conquer
All the fourteen worlds.

Defeat did not deter him
Attacked again; repelled again.

Hope returned with Acharya
Who had with him daughter Devayani
And mantra Mrutasanjeevani
That gave life back to the dead.

(33)

Father bowed before Acharya
And I, before the proud Devayani.
Why name her Devayani?
She wanted to be called Deva
I refused, for Devas were
Our sworn enemies.
When we played, she always
Was the queen and I the dasi.

.....But, said father, I could not weep
.....For princesses keep their nose up.

(34)

We started winning the wars
With Aacharaya and his mantra
Awaited the final kill
So father crowns himself
The King of Devalok. First step
To the crown of the universe.

(35)

Then came Kacha, the handsome
Son of the aacharya of Devas
And enrolled with Aacharya.
He made friends with Devayani
And she needed me no longer;
They were in love!

Rumours had it that Kacha came
To steal Mrutasanjeevani.
Father wanted him ousted;
Refused, he had him killed
But Aacharya gave him life
Back, again and again.

Finally his ashes were fed
To Aacharya with wine.
So he was advised the mantra
So, both could live.
And, the mantra in his bag
Kacha left us for good.

(36)

Devayani grieving for his lover
Fell from grace, subdued.
My pleasure knew no bounds.

Next battle we fought sans mantra
We were defeated. Dreams shattered.

Everybody grieved with father.

(37)

One weak moment, overwhelmed by anger
I pushed Devayani into a ditch and fled.
When I was called to her presence
Emperor Yayati had her hands in his
And she ordered me to go with her
As her maid. I cried in vain.

(38)

Yayati's palace in Hastinapura,
I had noticed lust in his eyes
Whenever I crossed his path.
His longing eyes followed me
Everywhere. I had my vengeance
When I had him in my quarters.

I concealed Puru from Devayani
Until he was fourteen, when her
Probing eyes found his truth.
My son, grandson of Asura King
Son of King destined
To be borne in a dasi's quarters.

.....I wanted him the next King Emperor
.....In vain, I knew. Still...

(39)

Irate, Acharya cursed the emperor
To be a thousand years d
of his youth, right before my eyes.
Acharya yielded finally to his
beseeches: he could trade his wrinkles
For youth, with anybody willing.

Eerie silence followed.
Barely able to stand erect
The emperor looked longingly

At every young face in the court.
Before he could wink his eyes
Everybody fled. Left alone
In the court, he quivered
And Devayani laughed aloud.

(40)

Into the deadly silence
Entered Yadu, the first born,
The Crown Prince, Son of Devayani.
Said Yayati, 'Give me your youth
And the throne is yours'.
Taken aback, the youth said
'I want to enjoy my life;
The throne is anyway mine.'

'No, it's mine. It is his
Who gives me his youth and accepts
my wrinkles', Cried the emperor.

(41)

Puru lead me into this melee.
Before his failing eyes could
Recognize us, emperor heard
'Father, my youth is yours
And I don't want the throne.'
There stood the emperor
In all his youth; my fourteen
Year-old child gray and wrinkled.

.....I felt proud of my son!

Yayati relinquished the throne
And made him accept it.

.....Suddenly it dawned on me,
.....I was the Queen-Mother.

I had the last laugh,
Or did I?

(42)

Still, whenever I set my eyes
On my little son,
Just fourteen years old,
Now as old as the seas, my heart
Broke. An ocean of tears
Welled up in my mind.
But queen-mother should not weep.

And I have to run the empire
For my son was a novice.

(43)

Still,
When I was alone in my anthapura
I wept my heart out, for my son.
Yayati's searching hands on me,
That I wanted all over my body
still youthful, made me now quiver
in disgust. For my heart filled
With the images of my son gray to his
Eye-lids; wrinkled as Aashadh skies.

It broke my heart to see him
Shunned by the sweet little damsels
His erstwhile playmates.

.....Still, I should not weep
.....For I was the Queen-Mother!

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Yayati 6 - Yadu

(44)

When I look back from here
I realise, I have erred.

Not in refusing the throne;
But declining to relinquish
My youth for my father.

The scriptures had taught me
Otherwise!

(45)

The throne was never mine.
I was old enough to decipher
The murmurs that lingered in
The corridors of the palace
Linking my name with that of
Kacha, the son of Brihaspati.

I am sure father knew the fact
But was gracious enough, not to
mention even to mother. He loved
Me more than even his sons.
Whatever I have is his; nothing
Mine. His was everything.

(46)

And Puru gave up everything
In return for nothing;
Proved the legitimate son.
Exchanged his youth for
the wrinkles father bore.
And refused the throne.

This moment he was young
Just turning fourteen

The next, old as the skies
Almost unable to stand erect.

Father nearly fell on his feet
To make him accept the empire.

And without hesitation,
He shared it with me.
So I became king too.

(47)

Prophets said 'you would
The favour to Puru return
Generations later, when
A noble descendant of yours
Will save from disaster
His progeny, the Puruvamsham.'

I wish it comes true, so
I can pay back at least
A fraction of my debt
Not just to Puru, but father too.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Yayati 7- The Epilogue

(48)

The Legacy
Of Yayati lingers on.

(49)

Santhanu, his descendant, had
Ganga of divine birth, as his wife
To them was born Devavrata
Who grew up as a handsome prince.

When Ganga left him,
Santhanu fell for Satyavati
A girl born to a fisherman
Already mother of Vyasa
By sage Parasara, and denied
Devavrata his rightful throne.

Such is lust.

(50)

Chitrangada born to Satyavati
Died young, fighting for vanity.
His brother married two damsels
Died of consumption, young
leaving no issues, but young widows
who bore children by Vyasa,
Pandu was born frail and weak
Dhritarashtra, the elder, blind.

Dhritarashtra fathered sons
A hundred. Pandu died young.
His wives had sons-the Pandavas-
Born to men they chose.
Pandavas staked claim on the crown
Rightfully of their cousins.

(51)

Fierce war ensued.

The entire world divided in two
Took sides and fought one another
All Dhritarashtrians were killed
And the Pandavas won the war
Only women and children remained
And the elderly Pandavas.

Such is the outcome of lust.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Yudhishthira's Ashwamedham 01

(1) Abhimanyu

After the Great War of Kurukshetra
Was won by the Pandavas,
The righteous Yudhishthira
Ascended the throne of Indraprastha.

Pandavas tried to relegate to the past
The harsh memories of friends, allies
Kith and kin killed in the war
Many of them by unfair means.

The war had snatched the lives of
All their sons, almost their entire progeny
But for the yet unborn child of Uttara
And Abhimanyu, the slain son of Arjuna.

Slain!
After Abhimanyu, who has just turned sixteen,
Wreaked havoc in the Kaurava army
Their Commanders joined hands to attack him
And killed him in gross violation of the war codes.

Pandavas could not forget how the young warrior
Had breached the Kaurava's Padmavyuha to barge in
And how Drona, Kripa, Karna and Jayadratha
Attacked him together, disarmed him and killed him.

Whenever she thought of his valor and fighting skills
Even Uttara, widowed at the age of fourteen,
Felt immensely proud and held her head high
Though blinded by incessant flow of tears.

In the all-pervading gloom, the Pandavas realised
That they too had committed their share
Of unfairness in the war and code violations:
"So, whom do we grudge? Why do we complain? "

This realisation lead them to deep remorse.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Yudhishtira's Ashwamedham 02

(2) Dhritarashtra

After the war had ended,
Dhritarashtra lived in peace
So everybody was given to believe;
But, with life, he was never at ease.

Life was a bitter pill for him to swallow.

Born with no light in his eyes
Was he denied his rightful throne
Had to swallow the pain when Pandu,
his brother, was anointed the King.

He lived a life of self-induced
Solitude, always felt humiliated
Living at the mercy of the King
Unacceptable to his self respect.

He felt humiliation complete when
The bride Bhishma had found for him
Decided: like her husband-to-be
she would lead a life sans light too.

Now again he had the same feeling
Of humiliation gnawing at his heart:
He was living on the charity
Of the new King, Yudhishtira.

More than everything, the absolute loneliness
Failed him: he had lost in the war
All his hundred sons and his son-in-law
Apart from all his grandchildren.

The victorious Pandavas led by Yudhishtira
Paid a visit to him, seeking his blessings
Before Yudhishtira had his Abhishek as King
And Dhritarashtra did not hesitate to wish him well.

But, when Bhimasena was announced
He could not control his emotions,
For it was Bhimsena himself, who had killed
All his hundred sons, by his own hands.

When he welcomed Bhim into his arms,
Krishna stopped him and pushed in an iron statue
In the musala-like arms of Dhritarashtra strong
The statue broke into powder in seconds.

Much to the chagrin of all those present
Trying to conceal his glee, but unsuccessfully,
feigning that the death of Bhim was just an accident
He started to wail, but who would believe him!

Krishna now pushed Bheemasena to him
Saying, "O' Dhritarashtra! I knew your designs
And so, what you've broken into dust
Is, but a statue of Bhimasena cast in iron.

"There is no cause for your sorrow
But, definitely mend your ways
And live a life of peace and prayer
So, the doors of heaven open for you."

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Yudhishthira's Ashwamedham 03

(3)Vaanaprastha

Krishna's words struck like lightning
Dhritarashtra devoutly turned ascetic
Spending more and more time on prayers
And penance, and food frugal by the day.

Slowly, he discerned that his love
For his son and his failure to renounce greed
and guide Duryodhana on the right path
Were the root causes of the malady.

Once he understood this well
He found the ultimate peace of mind;
His animosity towards the Pandavas
Gave way to unqualified love.

His wife followed suit too. And so did
Pritha, the mother of the Pandavas.
Yudhishthira invited rishis and ascetics
To guide to them on spiritual matters.

Over time, all of them were so detached
From the worldly pleasures that it was no news
when they announced their decision
To proceed to the forests on Vaanaprastha.

The entire palace was ready for it.

UNNIKRISHNAN E S

Yudhishthira's Ashwamedham 04

(4)The Remorse

The Pandavas could not bear
The eerie silence and vast void
that filled the palace expansive
Devoid of any male members.

Middle-aged they were, still they felt
Orphaned as their mother Pritha too
Had left them on Vaanaprastha
With King Dhritarashtra and his queen.

They hardly spoke to each other
The cohesive force that held them together,
Pritha, their mother was now living
in the forests, awaiting the inevitable end.

But brothers they were; the gnawing solitude
Made them think about the utter futility
Of the war they waged, that brought
Nothing but total disaster to the world.

In the process, they had to kill or cause to kill
Their own grandfather Bheeshma,
The aacharyas, brothers and sons,
friends and jnathees to ascend the throne.

Their own brother, Pritha's eldest son Karna
Was killed by Arjuna, war codes going for a toss.
Their cousins, the Kauravas all the hundred
Were killed, leaving no one, by Bhimasena.

Every household in the entire Bharatvarsh
Had lost one male member at least, in the war,
Leaving destitute millions of elderly and women
Many more as widows and children, orphans.

“The cause was our greed uncompromising!

Was it justified? ", they started to introspect;
Could they justify their claim on the throne
Going by the succession norms prevalent?

This lead to remorse acute and unqualified
And they felt an urgency for requital
In their moments of remorse deep
Krishna's visit came as an invaluable solace.

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*Macbeth by Shakespeare says "Macbeth will be safe until Great Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane Hill."

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UNNIKRISHNAN E S

?????????..... - Poem By Girija Ksk: A Translation

(This is a crude translation of the beautiful poem
?????????..... by Girija KSK)

Just one look
And spring wakes up smiling.
Just one word
And rain wraps you up in a loving embrace.

This minute, melancholy feelings
smothers you.
The next, in the exuberance
Of a soulful dream
You are entranced.

Love hugs and holds you
Tight as all the seasons
Rain, spring, fall and winter
Simultaneously.

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