

## **I AM A STRANGER HERE**

### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

These poems have been written over a period of five decades. The first was written in March 1940 when I was a student in England, and the last one as recently as two months ago. They have been arranged in chronological order.

Some of these poems appeared in journals in the U.K. during the war, but it is impossible to trace them at this distance of time.

In view of the long time-span, there is naturally a change in the style of writing. But I hope the spirit animating them has been more or less constant. These poems represent my reaction to my environment and therefore may be considered as an emotional autobiography.

## I AM A STRANGER HERE

1

Our village, my entire world;  
The village tank, my ocean  
Where I sailed my little boats.  
And the village fair, held once a year  
My paradise on earth.

The school teacher, a God know-all;  
The temple priest, a God all-powerful;  
And the far-off city  
From where I got my new clothes,  
My distant heaven.

Every peasant's cottage, once my home,  
Every tree, a landmark;  
Every grown-up person, my friend,  
And every passing child, a playmate.  
But now, I am a stranger here.

They sent me to the city  
So that I might learn a foreign tongue,  
And be a pride to the village,  
I attended school and college,  
Learn new things, strange truths  
That made me unhappy.  
I read unusual books  
And took them seriously.  
I met strange people,  
They were different from me.  
Slowly, I became one of them.  
But my sentimental heart  
Was still longing for my village home.  
Now, I am back;  
But now, I am a stranger here.

The silent reminders of a dead past  
The fading initials on the tree trunk,  
The hole in the school desk  
For which I was punished.  
The stone in the corner,  
The wobby pillar still supporting  
The choultry roof-seem immortal.

Memory, I embrace you with all my heart,  
Shower all my love on you.  
You rise and greet me at every turn,  
You are my only friend here.

I walk down the village lane;  
The whitewashed temple stands  
In all its age-long dignity.  
But God has changed his abode.  
I do not feel his presence.

Many an open door  
Where smiling faces welcomed me  
Is now shut.  
The girls are shy and do not talk,  
The men are very polite,  
Because I am grown up  
And educated at college.

I pass the village school  
Where under stern discipline  
I had learnt the alphabet,  
But the children playing there  
Look at me with a suspicious eye  
And turn the other way.  
Because I am a stranger here.

In the cool shade of the banyan tree  
The villagers sit talking.  
The happy stream of conversation flows,

With eagerness, I join them.  
But now, they are solemn and serious,  
They enquire about my health,  
When I came to the village,  
And when I am returning to the city.

The evening draws to a close.  
I stand by the glittering waters  
Of the tank and watch the sun set.  
The peasants are returning  
After a hard day's toil.  
My mind goes back.  
I have watched the same scene before.  
It was just pleasant.

Now I ask myself-  
What is so beautiful in this?  
So beautiful, yet so tragic for me?  
I cannot tell;  
I am a stranger here.

It is night.  
In the verandah of the school,  
By the dim light of an oil lamp,  
The villagers gather to hear me.  
I speak to them about the city,  
Of the new things I had learnt.  
Of how our leaders are struggling  
To end the poverty of the village.

I tell them of great change  
All over the world,  
Of our own struggle  
And of our own change.  
They understand and cheer me.

But cheers are not what I ask;  
I want to be one of them;  
I want to be taken back to their fold.  
I pour my heart out to them.  
But they do not understand.  
I crave for their love in return,  
But applause is all I get.

I know they love me,  
They are proud of me  
And talk about me in my absence.  
It is I who have lost the way  
To the calm depths  
Of their simple hearts.  
And so, I am a stranger here.

The night is dark;  
In silence and alone  
I walk back to my village home.  
An invisible barrier has risen  
Between me and my village folk.  
A personal bond, broken.

What has happened?  
Why am I lonely among friends?  
What unsurmountable barrier in this?  
What has really happened?  
With darkness as my only guide,  
I wonder,  
Why am I a stranger here?

Days pass.  
The village is serene,  
Calm and peaceful.  
The people are happy and contented  
They neither lament nor grumble  
About their paltry existence.

The restlessness, the desire  
For newer things, the glamour  
Of light and colours and posters  
Have left them cold  
And left no trace.

But a storm rages  
In my troubled mind.  
Bricks of knowledge have been dropped  
Into the unknown depths of my heart-  
Bricks that have disturbed its stillness  
And set vibrating waves of thought  
In perpetual motion.

The storm rages;  
My soul is caught in a whirlpool  
Of restlessness that sends it  
Spinning with ever increasing fury,  
Breaking the bonds of hope  
And smashing the pillars of faith;  
For hope seems futile  
And faith, blind.

That is why I am unhappy;  
That is why I am a stranger here.

The gulf widens.  
I sit on this side  
And gaze longingly  
At the opposite bank  
Where the waters of life  
Are still undisturbed;  
Where I too was happy once.  
But now I can only gaze,  
And gaze again.

On my side is wind and rain,  
The raging storm and the open sea,  
The battleground of conflicting thoughts,  
The cross currents of emotions,  
An unending confusion.

And so I say farewell  
To my village home,  
So that I may dream from afar;  
Distance does not alter  
The vividness of my memory.  
Dreams are pleasant  
And memory beautiful  
When reality is not.

Because I am a stranger here.

A lonely wanderer, I walk through life  
Bonds of flesh and blood are far away  
In lands beyond the horizon,  
But memory rises like a solitary star  
And shines across the alien skies...

Under an alien roof, I walk,  
There are winds and clouds,  
Rain and hail and thunderstorms.  
The lone star grows dim and faint  
As time recedes beneath my feet.

But a living fire burns,  
The glowing fire of life  
That consumes everything;  
Unkindled, yet ever unceasing,  
It drives me on in quest of nothingness.  
I dare not disturb the leaping flames;  
Like dreams, they dark through the mind,  
But I can only perceive the sparks.  
I can but reveal  
The fragments of my dream.

I walk through a garden  
Of enchanted dreams,  
Through moonlit lands of gold,  
Where virgin buds unfold  
Their magical fragrance;  
Where the moon's cool beams  
Tread their light feet and dance  
Over the stillness of the lakes.

Along the rising paths I walk;  
On plots of green velvet I lie  
And watch the distant hills  
That always seem too far.



Of things far, far away I dream,  
Of things great and unattainable,  
Of things undefinable.

I build a pedestal out of my heart  
And decorate it with my youthful dreams.  
I place a Goddess on the throne  
And dare not leave her a moment alone.

Yet I walk on...  
Leaving the Goddess and the throne,  
Suffering all alone.  
My Goddess and my dreams are lost;  
The visions are forever past.

My mind is reflected in the magical mirror  
Of youthful imagination.  
Fanciful images rise till they reach  
The deluding feet of the Goddess of fame  
And shrink as the mirror turns,  
Until it is smashed against  
The rock of reality.

I am not awake,  
And the morning light is here.  
My mind is sad but clear.

I am awake and my heart is full,  
Ready to empty itself  
Into the nearest fountain.

I crave for the touch of unseen hands  
And long for unknown lips.  
Feminine charms attract me.  
Young blood boils with passion  
At the caress of soft white hands.

But it not enough;  
There is no bosom  
Where I can bury my tired soul,  
Where I can shed the silent tears  
Of love and longing.  
There is no fountain  
To empty the heart that is full.

Through great cities I walk;  
Cities with pride  
As their noblest monument.  
I have seen their monuments  
Blown to dust.

Alone, I walk.  
Alone amidst the throng  
Of crowding men with empty faces,  
Those dull grey masks  
That hides their thoughts  
And visions from the world  
And from themselves.

To them, I listen;  
To them, I talk  
Of films in town,  
Of planes coming down,  
The talks on the wireless,  
The gossip in the press.

But what do I know of them?  
What do they know of me?  
The vague mental struggles,  
The deep emotional yearnings  
And the fond dreams-  
To whom can I reveal these?  
And how can I?  
How can I reveal the secrets  
That I dare not admit  
Even to myself?

We talk, we listen,  
And we talk again.  
We meet, we disperse,  
And we meet again.  
We are afraid to be alone;  
Yet, who is more alone?

How can words penetrate the masks  
Or reveal what is behind them?  
Words, those minute searchers  
For flaws on the surface-  
They are but poor substitutes  
To explore the hidden secrets  
Of the heart.

Words, more words  
That act as camouflage  
For inner thoughts,  
For suppressed instincts,  
Seeking pride and glory  
In every uttered phrase.  
Those arrows, poisoned and invisible,  
Shot through ethereal space  
In waves, short, medium and long,  
Aimed at targets already drugged  
By many a former attack.

Words, sweet words  
That act as catalysts  
To the invariable ingredients  
Of good manners and hypocrisy,  
And produce all the requirements  
Of respectability.  
Even the strange emotion  
Of synthetic love, stripped  
Of all the natural warmth of feeling,  
Readymade and available  
For all occasions, switched

On or off as required,  
Limited by many an artificial bond  
Of caste, colour or creed.

Men sit by the silent streams  
Under the protecting trees of faith.  
They admire the skies  
With their eyes closed; listen  
To the music of the voiceless birds  
And breathe the air  
Of blissful contentment.  
"Probe not too closely  
Into the mysteries of the Universe,"  
They say, "less thou offend thy Maker."  
I only laugh and walk on.

My mind walks through desert tracks  
Of knowledge, endless paths  
That merge with the horizon.  
Here, there is no shade,  
No gentle breeze or cool stream;  
Only hot sand, hot air, hot skies,  
All burning with new ideas,  
And scorching every step that mind takes.

Graves of faded yesterdays  
Line the paths, yesterdays cold and dear,  
But their epitaphs sing their praise  
And memory fondly clings to them,  
While their ghosts obstruct the path.  
Who can escape their past?

Newton, Einstein,  
Darwin, Marx and Freud,  
These are the signposts  
And they seem to converge.

They tell me how everything happens;  
But I am still restless.  
I wonder why anything happens.

They tell me how;  
I wonder why.  
Alone I venture further on.

The paths grow wild,  
They are no longer well preserved  
Or marked by iron arguments.  
But thirsty for reality.  
And hungry for truth,  
I walk on into the wilderness  
In quest of nothingness.  
Only the eternal question  
Stares me in the face-  
The why and the wherefore of things.  
Here is the conflict  
Between the "how" and the "why"  
Beyond reason and emotion,  
Beyond faith and lack of faith,  
Beyond argument and belief,  
The conflict rages between mind and soul.  
Can the "how" explain the "Why"?  
Can the mind understand the soul?

But I am a scientist;  
I analyze and I rationalize.  
Human emotions are the chemicals  
That I use for my experiments.  
I analyze my own soul  
Into its thousand component parts  
And put them together again  
The tormented soul cries out in pity;  
But what pity is there  
In the lonely wilderness?

Only shafts of heat  
From the Sun who burns too near  
The eyes are blinded,  
The flesh is gnawed,  
The bones turn to ashes  
And the blood turns pale  
By the frustration of desires.  
But the struggle goes on

In this land of nothingness,  
In silence and alone,  
I face my Self.

Its garments have been stripped  
One after another  
Since it started on its journey,  
The colourful robes  
Were left by the riverside;  
The last shreds that kept it covered  
Were lost at the last signpost.

Now I tear off that final facial mask  
And behold my soul.  
Physical nakedness, one can bear.  
But who can bear  
The nakedness of the soul?

Its face is different;  
Its voice is strange;  
Its words are meaningless  
Yet vital. It is the soul  
That has driven me onwards;  
It is the source of energy;  
It is the glowing fire of life  
Whose sparks I could glimpse  
From a long way off.

Here are the two fires-  
The fire within that drives me on  
And the heat without that consumes me.  
The longing to know why  
And the reasons how;  
The individual and the universal;  
They submerge.

The sparks are dead,  
But the larger fire burns.  
The fragments are gone,  
But the dream lives on.

Roused by every wind that fans the fire,  
Moved by every passionate wish  
Yet unmoved within,  
Taking part in every folly  
Yet strangely apart,  
Impatient of those who walk sluggishly  
Along the paths I have trodden,  
Yet sure that they will follow,  
I wait at my journey's end.

I wait for the heat to subside;  
I wait for the evening breeze;  
I wait for the red Sun to set,  
For sudden darkness to spread  
And shut for ever  
The tired eyelids of the mind.

Let me take you on a journey  
From the centre of the city,  
Past the square's proud monuments,  
Past the crowded streets and pavements,  
Streets where you can park your fate  
On odd but not on even date;  
Past the narrow one-way street  
Where the codes of morals greet,  
Where once you go you can't retreat;  
Shops where thoughts are sold in retail  
Simplified in every detail;  
Past the bus stops, past the tram stops  
Past your mental commas, full stops;  
Rules of do's and don'ts and what-not's,  
Rivals all, entangled knots;  
Past the bills, notice boards, sign posts,  
Guides, timetables, mind's controllers  
All proclaiming Man's violent boasts;  
All confirming his inborn ghosts...

Past the corporation houses,  
Smoking chimneys, loving spouses;  
Past the crowded urban parks  
And the short suburban walks;  
Past the fields and watered lands,  
Where your mind is grown by hands.  
Let me take you over the bridge  
Across the deep dividing gulf,  
Past the ever vigilant guards;  
Let me take you round the corner  
Of that last and final turning  
Where the conscious lights are warning,  
And the powers of reason fading,  
All the laws, self tries evading.



Ruling of conduct and persuasions,  
All the morals indignations,  
Scorched away by fiery passions;  
Only passions, passions burning-  
Let me take you past the turning....

Here's a land where wants are grown  
Irrespective of seeds sown.  
Here the soil is rich and fertile-  
Spread with suppressed memories, rich  
Desires roused to a high pitch,  
And forgotten instincts which  
Form the surface and the ditch.

Here there is no crowded throng,  
No difference between right and wrong.  
Here nobody plays the game,  
No rules to make or mend or blame  
And no feelings of guilt or shame.  
None can paint its hues of magic  
And changing views with tones of logic.  
None can stand its crude demands  
Nor fully break its powerful bonds.  
None can probe its secret caves  
Nor bring to light how it behaves.  
All your thoughts and motives take  
Their roots in this unconscious state,  
All your signs are tinted here,  
Scarlet ones are done in fear.  
All your laws and rules of strife  
In this land receive their life.

Time, the farmer, ploughs the ground.  
He turns the soil round and round,  
Mixing hunger, sex with rage;  
Every furrow makes an age;  
Every furrow takes an age;  
Though it only takes a page  
In history, it marks a stage.

Poisonous plants and flowers appear  
Side by side and far and near,  
Buried passions in disguise  
Of love and hate, like twins arise.  
Flowers of love for their own part  
Sublime to fruits of music, art,  
While the bitter fruits of hate  
Leave the scars on human fate,  
Instincts of self-preservation  
Blossom out in war-like fashion.  
Seeds of fear for the unknown  
Into the trees of faith have grown.  
Watch these products as they grow  
Into the conscious lands they flow.

They cross the bridge in robes of reason,  
But change them during every season.  
They enrich the barren lands  
And build cities in desert sands.  
They create the moral laws  
And legal pegs to hang their flaws.  
They stud the streets with traffic lights  
But rouse the mind in all its flights.  
All they seek is satisfaction  
Of the various wants, through action.  
All your mental conflicts, deeds  
Conform to these unconscious needs.

The architecture of your mind,  
The city streets, the alleys blind,  
Religious paths that wind and wind,  
Monuments that seem permanent,  
Pillars of faith dine in cement,  
Distant clouds of hanging dreams,  
Ruined walls by flowing streams,  
Forests wild by far-off hills-  
This is the world, the globe of self,  
Ever changing yet unchanging,

Virgin minds their thoughts exchanging,  
Stubborn stone, your conscience ranging,  
Round and round the wants are racing,  
Outside this world a void is facing.  
Which soul dares to break its casing?

4

Mother, you will never read this.  
I write in a language you do not know.  
And when I speak,  
My words seem strange to you.

Mother, you have faith.  
Peace is the keynote of your world.  
You gave me happiness,  
Quietness and contentment.  
I lived in the joy of ignorance.

Mother, this world of mine  
Is a cruel governess.  
She hurls invisible things at me.  
We call them ideas  
They come in an avalanche  
In which happiness is drowned,  
Contentment replaced  
By an uneasy restlessness,  
And questioning and doubt float above.  
She has given me wisdom without joy,

Mother,  
Perhaps you do not understand.  
You cannot;  
At least, forgive me.

5

Liquid pearls are dropping  
On the glassy surface  
Of the silent pool  
And are dispersed.

Ever widening ripples  
Merge with the fringe of darkness  
Like waves on a midnight sea.

Into the black waters  
Of sorrow fall these tears  
Like rain on the midnight sea.

But deep within the caverns  
A silent stillness reigns,  
Of darkness unexplored,  
Of sorrow undisturbed,  
Like the depths of the midnight sea.

Do not think of me as a beggar,  
I do not come to you, begging for your love.  
I will not beg even from the Gods  
Had they the power to give.  
Do not give me the warmth of your body  
As you would give a worn-out garment  
To a child shivering in the cold.

Give me freely what you long to give;  
Then, I will take you into my world  
And fill your heart with rapturous dreams.

Do not think of me as a merchant,  
I do not come to you bargaining for your love.  
No convention of commerce  
Is an adequate seal for our agreement.  
No comparison, a suitable measure  
For the exchange of hearts' gifts.

Do not think of me as a tyrant God  
Demanding your sacrifice  
At the altar of love. Let not sacrifice  
But exchange of heart's desires  
Be the foundation of our bond.  
For, even as I take, I give.  
Even as I consume, I yield.

Give me only what you have power to give;  
Then, I will take you into my world  
And share with you the treasures of my heart.

Here, let me lie by the fringe of darkness  
And think of you, my love,  
By the slanting face of a wooded hill  
Thrusting its chin into the pebbled beach,  
Near the unused forest tract,  
Through the silent quiver of a summer night,  
Through shortened darkness, let me lie;  
And think of you, my love.

Here let me stretch my wearied limbs,  
Watch the incoming tide embrace  
The frayed edge of the broken coast.  
Shut my eyes, tired from the heat of the day,  
Feel the coolness of the midnight breeze  
And think of you, my love.

Here let me lie in depths of darkness  
And think of you, my love.  
Here let me sleep till pale blue morning  
Breaks beyond the brow of the sea,  
Awake in the flood of the virgin light  
And think of you, my love.

One summer evening, there we stood  
Amid the mountain shadows,  
In the fading twilight, on the dry grass  
Of the vanishing meadows.

Your hand pressed against mine; your gaze  
You could not hide,  
The soft caress, the compelling touch  
Detained me by your side.

One summer evening, we two parted;  
What fond dreams were ours!  
What secret thoughts, what hopes,  
What regrets were ours!

Drifting alone, I found you in the storm  
Of troubled waters, where strong waves  
Of passion broke against the sails  
Of my rudderless boat.

Drifting alone, I met you in the sea  
Whose waters were stirred with new ideas,  
Strong currents dragged me on to you,  
Aimless, helpless, I came.

Drifting alone, we met.  
Together we searched for new life  
And hoped that the violence of the seas  
Would toss up new hopes into the air  
For us to catch.  
In vain.

Drifting alone, bravely we sailed  
To the gulf where no man-made laws  
Of navigation hold,  
Where all hearts are smashed  
Against invisible rocks,  
All lives drowned.

Drifting alone, we found  
The gulf that unites  
Is also the gulf that divides,  
The gulf of death  
Is also the source of life.  
Drifting alone.



Drained by a hundred suppressed feelings  
Your heart is dry. An empty glass,  
Only its edge is used to sharpen  
The keenness of your intellect.

A curtain of uncertain darkness  
Covers your face and hides the light  
Reflected in your eyes. Society  
Makes you feel ashamed of feeling.

You drink from artificial glasses  
Filled with emotions standardized  
By Man and Machine. Life is fast,  
Too fast even to fill your glasses.

The million living cells, each throbbing,  
Your flesh and nerves, pulsating blood,  
The transmitters of life are dying;  
Only the sterile intellect  
Issues her bald statements of death.



The frail soul that trembles  
To face the coming storm,  
The mind that ever grumbles  
In spite of all the calm.

The heaving heart that craves,  
Craves and pleads in vain;  
The wounded pride that braves,  
Braves in all its pain.

Deaf to the voice that prays,  
Heedless of tears shed,  
Blind to the life that lays  
Its bosom bare in dread.

In answer mute, with threads  
Of woe and joy, she weaves  
Life's pattern as it spreads,  
In vain the bosom heaves.

Here ends the unbroken coast of concrete  
Washed by the tides of men  
Who come, to forget themselves,  
To find escape from tumult in greater tumult;

Here ends the severe line of distinction  
Between the land and the sea  
Drawn by tubular, greenish Rails.

Here the bay curves inward,  
Invading the land with each incoming tide,  
Invading, proclaiming its temporary sway.  
But retreating as the wind changes.

Here is no human tide to wash the lonely shore  
And the land slips slowly  
Beneath the sea, making  
Distinction vague, creating  
A no man's-land of pebbled shore.

Will you climb the steep hill,  
With a determined will,  
Ignore all the warnings,  
And take all perilous turnings?

If so, let me be your guide.

Will you tread on the bones,  
And walk through laughing skulls  
Of your predecessors,  
Dead, embracing the rocks?

If so, let me be your guide.

Will you pitch your tent  
On the perilous slopes,  
And fly your gallant flag  
Of multi-coloured hopes?

If so, let me be your guide.

Will you penetrate the fog  
That hides the frozen heights,  
With the torch of wisdom  
That repeatedly fails?

If so, let me be your guide.

Will you reach the summit  
And fly through sailing clouds?  
Will you gaze at the stars  
Or stretch your hands to Mars?

If so, let me be your guide.

The burning sun,  
White heat, raw and fierce,  
Beating the earth with fearful intensity,  
Piercing the thick foliage of green trees,  
Spreading Nature's camouflage  
Of light and shadow.

The shade. Cool,  
Soft, gentle and pleasant,  
Wiping the sweat from every tired brow,  
The wanderer's haven,  
The oasis of the road-side.

Dust, red dust,  
Suspended in hot air,  
And occupying the entire space.

The landscape, bare and brown,  
Wavy meadows,  
Only cut by running telegraph wires;  
Steep mountains far away  
Peeping from below the horizon.

Grass, but not green.  
Scorched by the pouring rays  
Into yellowish brown,  
Half-dead, yet alive,  
Longing and waiting  
For the summer showers.

Winds, sweeping winds  
From across the seas and lands,  
Full and fast and furious,  
Burdened by clouds, dark and dense,  
Pregnant with heavy rain;  
Sailing majestically  
To release their watery load.

Rain in torrents  
Lashing in all the tropical fury,  
The fearful deluge,  
The moving sea of water  
Creating scattered islands  
Of mud walls and thatched roofs.

The violent forces of Nature  
Are spent and tired out.  
The battle is over; peace restored.  
The sun-not so intense-shy but shining  
Tries to hide his blushing face  
Among pale clouds  
That kiss the brows of far-off hills.

The dust settles down;  
The grass feels fresh and soft,  
And a mild southern breeze  
Shakes away the remaining water drops  
From the leaves of the trees.  
The fresh, strong smell of tropical rain  
Pervades the evening air.

My new-born lungs received their breath of life  
From rising winds that graze these barren fields;  
My eyes first cast their vacant, childish glance  
On life and all its varied storm and strife,  
Among these men who plot their way through life.  
My skin pigmented by the torrid sun,  
The winds, the lands, the silent mass of men-  
All these have shaped my life.....

A brown dagger with a snow-clad hilt  
Thrust deep into the heart of tropical seas;  
A burning crust of beloved earth,  
Combed by watery veins that drain her breast.

The land, the space, extending openness;  
Unvaried heat, the floating quilts  
Of feathery blue; majestic streams  
Descending from the hills to give men life;  
The fields where harvest bends  
Her grain-rich head towards the earth,  
And Nature with her changing moods.

The land of men sun-tanned for centuries,  
And women with a glow of sparkling fire;  
Their dreams, their simple joys;  
Their hopes and griefs,  
Along the narrow margin of their existence.

Their life-a surging inward flow,  
Vibrating music throbbing in their veins  
With age succeeding age;  
Their fight against unbending fate  
And things stronger than fate-  
The man-made circumstance.



The land of Gods who rule our destinies  
And men who claim to know them;  
Of unseen powers beyond our life and death,  
Of the trees of faith that blossomed in their day  
And bore rich fruit, but since withered,  
Clutching the earth with their dead roots.....

A land of a great and glorious past,  
A past abode of hundred burning fires  
That shed their divine light on the minds of men,  
Now filled with blackened cinders,  
Soot and smoke

Her ancient glory trashed, learning dead;  
Only the phantoms proudly walk the land;  
Only the symbols live, their meaning dead.  
And formless ghosts of ancient wisdom haunt  
The minds of men in crude, distorted shapes.

Men pinned their blinded faith in holy Gods,  
They looked to the heavens above for divine hope,  
Towards the distant stars for their guidance;  
But always had to turn to Mother Earth-  
The bare, brown soil, for their livelihood.

Those mute and powerful Gods have let them down,  
The heavens above have failed to grant their wish,  
The silent stars that wink their lustrous eyes  
At earthly folly do not seem to care.  
And Mother Earth-once loving and fruitful,  
Is now a barren patch.

The social ills that still remain,  
Accusing us, our past, like warning fingers  
Raised against an unborn future;  
The myriad homes where hunger reigns  
And ignorance proclaims her away.....

But tomorrow always comes and brings with her  
The dawn of hope; the morning light  
Dispels the gloom; the veil of mist  
That hangs across the minds of men  
Is pierced by the virgin light.  
And the men begin to move.

Look, a new fire has arisen  
Out of the old cinders.  
Stale causes, dressed  
In topical clothes, leading up  
To fresh arguments of iron.

The leaping fire spreads  
Across this tired and ancient land,  
Rapidly extending its boundaries,  
Embracing all, respecting none  
Within its domain;  
Distributing cruel justice  
Equally in all directions.

Here is the agony of a passing age;  
Ghosts of the past rising from the flames,  
Phantoms strutting across the nation's stage;  
Distorted theories casting their shadows,  
It is the deathly embrace  
Of separated twins.

Thought and conception  
Dried of all true vitality;  
Static in a wooden framework  
Of fossilized ideas.  
Stable structures, so majestic,  
Institutions that seemed powerful-  
These are the things that burn.

It is decayed and dying age  
That burns, it is the sins of the past  
Consuming the present.

Fire,  
Fire, the destroyer,  
Fire, the consumer,  
Fire, the preserver.

Destroying the past,  
Rolling, spreading, ravaging,  
Obliterating by burning fury  
What heart refuses to forget,  
Tearing up from the face of the earth  
The lingering shades of memory,  
Convulsing the hearts of nations.

Destroying the past,  
Agonizing the present,  
Laying the course for the future.

Destroying the past,  
Consuming the waste, the outworn,  
Eating up the dead matter,  
Turning the smile of spring  
Into the greyness of desolation.

Consuming the waste,  
Yet preserving  
That which which is indestructible-  
Preserving, purifying  
By reducing to the molten state  
The hard core, increasing  
The agitation of its molecules,  
Cleansing by the ordeal, accelerating  
Progress along the path of Time  
By change-yet preserving life.

Fire the by-product  
In the endless strife,  
In the conflict of human forces  
Brought into contact,  
Revolving along a blazing trail,  
Producing sparks at first, setting  
Alight the human fuel, spontaneous,  
Dynamic, stretching its sway  
Into a violent mass of conflagration.

Kindled by restless souls,  
Stirred to action, roused  
From cinders smoldering  
Under suppressed passion,  
Fanned by the winds of discontent.  
As old as Man himself,  
Invented by his will to survive,  
Still practiced, though means  
Have changed, practiced, modified  
Perfected as an art; aided,  
Glorified, worshipped,  
Yet uncontrolled by Man.

Fire,  
Exploding the inert masses,  
Releasing their latent energy  
For action, their elemental urge  
For fulfillment.

Fire,  
Nature's guard against Nature's evil,  
The accessory of Man, the terror  
Of his folly, the self-imposed ordeal  
Of right and wrong.

Persistently, the music haunts my brain,  
Knocking on memory's door-  
A ghost without shape or form,  
Surviving the past, yet unwilling to rest.

The music haunts my brain  
In my wakefulness, and in my sleep  
My dreams; and yet,  
I cannot sing.

No instrument can play this tune,  
No voice can sing the words.  
Jumbled notes and noises,  
Clamouring voices of far-off days  
Echoing in the hidden depths  
Of what has gone before;  
There is no tune  
To the music in my heart.

The ear can only listen  
But cannot reproduce.  
The eye can only see.  
The heart can only feel, but none  
Can unlisten, unseen or unfeel,  
None can undo that  
Which has gone before.

Mind is but a broken mirror  
Of what has gone before,  
Each piece producing its own image  
In its own angle, reflecting truly,  
But producing only  
A heap of broken images.

It is no aid to remember  
Or to forget, only to register  
What has gone before.  
Only to record and to learn.

What has been seen or heard or felt  
Will never be forgotten;  
While the brain is haunted  
By the music of the past,  
What has been once will never cease to be;  
There is no death to what has gone before.

For the past lives in the present  
And the present in the future;  
Fire destroys the past, yet preserves  
The ashes and creates the future.  
It consumes and it contributes  
Linking the dead past  
With the unborn future, linking  
Receding memory  
With approaching desire  
Through life and time.

Time does not stand still  
To anyone but the dead.  
All things in life change, grow  
And are changed by time.  
There is no escape from growth  
And change. Only death confers  
Immunity from time and change.  
Only death confers immortality.

The earth is tired.  
Giving all, taking nothing  
In return, receiving only  
The sharp thrust of the plough.  
Feeling the acute pain of parting  
And separation; bleeding  
Even at the touch of friendly hands.

Ravaged by Time and ignorant hands,  
The earth no longer yields.  
Ravages of Time, only time can heal;  
And the ills of ignorance,  
Only wisdom can cure.  
And the pain of parting-  
The scars of our handiwork-  
Only patience can obliterate.

The earth is tired;  
Creeds turned stale  
Are planted in the upturned soil,  
But do not take root.  
Artificial manures  
To rejuvenate the soil  
Are of no avail,  
For the earth is tired.

And there is no rain;  
Other plants have failed to thrive  
Out of the barren soil.  
Only the cactus grows here and there  
Raising its twisted, thorny head,  
Shaped in cruelty, raising  
New problems for the bewildered.  
The earth is dry; stony.  
The sun drops his quantum of heat  
On her uneven face.



In vain, the spade thrust  
Into the heart  
Of unresponsive ground.

The earth is dry,  
Unyielding to Man's embrace.  
In vain, the seed is sown  
On the barren soil;  
Only her lips are parted  
With thirst.  
The earth is dry, parched.  
Cracked and waiting.

To quench her thirst.  
The farmer sheds  
His forehead sweat;  
The soldier sheds his blood;  
The poet-his tears.

But the earth is made no richer  
By mixing it with blood;  
Nor is it made purer  
By washing it with tears.  
Blood and tears are wasted  
On the soil; it should be tended,  
Loved and nurtured,  
And the ravages mended,  
Before it can yield.

After long struggle  
Freedom has come to us;  
The fetters are broken,  
The limbs free to move,  
The minds free to act-  
Each free to act in his own way,  
In his own plane;  
Each living in his own world.

Now, there is no peg to hang  
Our excuses, no one to blame, abuse  
Or criticize; no faith to sustain  
The weak, no hope to urge the slave  
No faith in Man....

For we are alone,  
Each is a unit in himself,  
Each is a cell, throbbing, gnawing,  
Turning, each is a world in himself-  
Each is a world  
With private worlds to win.

For the bonds are broken  
And we are still to find  
A common denominator;  
For the old ones are gone  
And the new ones, still to come.

Standing between two worlds,  
Between the past-clinging  
Like a mistress overthrown-  
And the future-mysterious,  
Like a new love still to blossom.  
The past, receding from memory,  
And the future, creeping slowly on us.

Standing between two worlds,  
We are afraid.  
Ashamed of the past, yet  
Justifying it and reluctant to part,  
Afraid of the future, afraid  
Of what is in store,  
We live eternally in the present.  
We live in the hour, in the second,  
In the fleeting moment of pain  
And unholy desire.

But pity is not in store,  
Only the relentless march of logic...

Standing between two worlds,  
We are in two minds-turning  
Now towards the east and now  
Towards the west-trying in vain  
To reconcile the irreconcilable;  
Action and reaction neutralizing  
Each other, leaving behind  
Only a precipitate of bitterness.

Between the world of regimented thought  
And the confusion of free speech,  
Moving in pre-ordained grooves  
Towards a predestined future,  
We seem lost.

This is the brief period  
Of crossing the no-man's land  
Where all is uncertain.  
The brief period of twilight,  
The misty light before the dawn  
When figures are moving shadows  
And trees are standing ghosts;  
When we are awake,  
But not fully aware.

Between the receding darkness  
Of a passing night and the bright glare  
Of the morning sun, we are lost.  
Divergent changing light  
Plays tricks on our vision, creating  
Alternately, mirages of hope  
And frustration.

Impatience marks our action,  
Short cuts that lead nowhere  
Seem attractive from a distance.  
Reason and logic are still  
A long way off; or perhaps  
A long way behind.  
But cause and effect,  
The inevitable march of events,  
Move from crisis to crisis.

Confused and bewildered,  
We know not where to turn.  
Some enter the flimsy shells  
Of isolation and despair that offer  
No protection or comfort,  
And long for the days  
That are dead and gone.

Some exist in the muddy pools  
Of stagnation where thought stands still  
From generation to generation,  
Where nothing changes except time  
And that too reluctantly.

Others live in the rushing torrents  
Of rapid change, tossed about  
From dogma to dogma, knocked about  
Between the hidden rocks  
Of obstruction and conflict,  
For ever moving, changing, revolving

In the whirlpools of hope and desire  
But not progressing.

Some thrive on the shifting sands  
Of opportunism, turning  
With each succeeding wind  
Turning, twisting, defecting.  
Between these extremes, we oscillate,  
Each swing of the pendulum  
Creating new tensions, creating  
New problems for the bewildered.

“To what end is all this?  
To what end?”

The road to Utopia is lined  
With bombs and guns.  
Blowing up trains,  
Looting banks,  
Setting fire to houses;  
Incomprehensible is the horror  
Of the Ultimate,  
The blossoming  
Of the mushroom cloud  
Will not bring you spring flowers  
Or love and laughter.

The bullet does not issue  
From the barrel of a gun;  
Nor does the grenade explode  
By the pulling of a pin;  
The trigger and the pin  
Are pulled by the hatred  
In the minds of power-crazy men.

“To what end is all this?  
To what end?”

“I am the terrorist  
You fear and dread;  
I have a price  
Upon my head.  
I am the robber,  
Murderer and thief;  
My death will bring you  
All relief.”

“But I am like God,  
I am everywhere.  
They can't find me  
Anywhere.  
They search for me in vain;  
They know me only  
Through my gunshot's pain.”

“To gain your ends,  
You go to gaol;  
But you are soon  
Out on bail,  
You shout slogans  
When you fail,  
You hurt people  
Through many a word,  
I merely use my sword.”

“Death comes to you  
As an honoured guest;  
He will give you  
Eternal rest.  
For my glory,  
You will die.  
But I am wanted,  
I must fly.”

Yes, Death came calling

Without a doubt:

But I was lucky,

I was out.

He came to us when we were lost  
In the wilderness of desolation  
And despair, when a new world  
Had overtaken us and left us  
In the old; our faith had turned  
Into blind belief, continuity  
Was fossilized into iron conformity,  
And change was heresy.  
Minds and limbs were paralysed  
By fear of the unknown  
And the superior might of alien rule  
Flourished unchallenged.

Each of us in his own cocoon  
Of flimsy protection waited and hoped  
That the wind of change  
Would pass us by and leave us  
Untouched.  
We waited and shivered  
As the wind penetrated  
Every corner of our minds and hearts.

When we knew not where to turn,  
He showed us the way; from fear,  
He led us to courage; from  
Vacillation to resolution; from  
Hatred and frustration to love  
And aspiration; from a sense  
Of shame to self-respect; from  
A thousand broken bits of humanity.  
He built a Nation.  
But we have travelled far  
From the days when we turned  
The spinning wheel and felt proud  
Of our loin-cloth.



He moulded common clay  
And produced heroes;  
But his handiwork soon fell apart  
And clay disintegrated into dust.  
Only the mould is left behind  
Making hollow noises,  
Echoing his words in the emptiness  
Of a new and different world.

He helped to break the chains  
Of alien rule, but we could not break  
The chains that bound our hearts  
To a dead past. The soulless hand  
Of habit guides our thoughts, regulates  
Our actions, dictates the terms  
Under which we shall live.

For a tyrant's iron chains  
Were not for him, not  
The golden logic of a scientist's mind,  
Nor the heady liquor  
Of a conqueror's promise.  
Our brains were not washed  
Nor our minds bound  
To a slavery of words. He  
Bound us to him with a garland  
Of flowers.  
But with our our weak and willful minds,  
We pulled out the petals  
One by one  
And smelt their fragrance.

Now, only the stalks are left  
Irritating our minds  
And embarrassing our postures.  
But we have no courage  
To throw away the garland  
Of empty stalks, no courage

To proclaim our faithlessness;  
And we cling to the faded stalks  
Just as we cling to a forgotten past.

He taught us universal love,  
But we cannot extend our sympathies  
Beyond our narrow world  
Of lust and self-interest.  
Our own universe is small,  
Bound by the smallness  
Of our individual minds, fenced in  
By the limitations of our past,  
By our desires for the future.

He taught us universal love  
But we can only love  
A few at a time, and that too  
Imperfectly. A selfless love  
Was what he gave us. We took it  
And changed to corrupt, illicit love.

He sought to convert  
Private virtue into public good;  
But for us, public virtue  
Is a means of private gain.  
We have named streets after him  
In every town. The dust of our feet,  
The din of our conflict, the sound  
Of our voices, and the blood  
Of our brothers, mingle  
With the silent reverence of his name.  
We call him to bear witness  
To the deeds we perform in his name;  
Honoured, revered, worshipped,  
But not followed,  
He stands in every city square,  
With his head bowed in shame.

I have no more tears to shed,  
For this is the beginning of the end;  
My eyes are dry, tired  
With weeping and with keeping vigil  
Without sleeping, dreaming  
And longing for the promised age  
That never came.

Marching towards the promised land  
Of our dreams, with nothing to guide us  
But the freedom of choice,  
Each took the easy road of his own choosing,  
Each of us made his own decision of short-cuts,  
Following the lines of least resistance,  
Each in a labyrinth of easy profit  
And quick success.

The promised land has become  
The power of numbers, enumerated  
By the mere counting of heads;  
To rise on the pyramid  
Of other men's shoulders;  
To pressurize others  
To bend to our will.  
Not heeding the voice of reason  
The freedom of choice has become  
The clamour of demands;  
Pity the leadership  
That let it happen.

The time that was given,  
The allotted span, the promised years  
Have run their course.  
Now there is nothing left, only  
The fragments of past hopes  
From a shattered mirror that reflects

Only the bitterness of memory  
And desire.

The time has run out, and now  
We wait for the inevitable;  
For the sum total of all our deeds  
To fructify; for the present  
Is the result of the past;  
For every action has  
An equal and opposite reaction;  
For the forces resolve themselves  
Again and again; what we see today  
Is the resultant of what was yesterday.  
Cause and effect succeed each other  
With clockwork precision. The wheels  
Of destiny move relentlessly for us  
To enjoy the fruits of our own inheritance.

Come, my friend, let us make a bed  
Out of these dead leaves of autumn  
And rest.

Fleeting from flower to flower,  
Smelling their sweet fragrance;  
Hopping from tree to tree,  
Nestling in their tender leaves;  
All our lives, we have flirted  
With attractive ideas  
That blossomed in our garden.

Now, the trees are bare;  
The flowers are all gone,  
And the leaves have turned yellow;  
Only the naked stalks protrude.  
Like grey skeletons  
Thrusting from the earth.

We have passed through every phase of love;  
From the day we met, from the first word  
That caused a stir, creating  
A new excitement, providing  
A new interest in life.  
Young love blossomed out of a dull past  
Like spring flowers, thrusting  
From the wintry earth; wafting  
A new fragrance, filling our hearts  
With a new sensation.

Eyes communicated without the aid  
Of words and phrases; the gentle  
Touch was a sacred rite  
Performed with care and devotion.  
The entwined fingers, the pressure  
Of toes under the desk,

Sent secret messages of love  
And laughter. Yes,  
Bright were the colours  
That were previously drab;  
The smile of strangers more pleasant,  
The gardens more lovely, even the tears  
Were free from salty bitterness.

Summer brought its own white heat  
Of passion with violence and turmoil  
When our souls mingled,  
Melted and fused into one;  
Yet with separate identities  
Struggling hard for recognition  
Of each individual self.

Love blossomed into action;  
Hope turned to aspiration,  
And knowledge to resolution;  
The torch of freedom  
Beaconed us from a far;  
We shone in the reflected glory  
Of its brilliance and followed it  
Like moths towards a flame.  
We embraced the world  
And were happy in our love.

But summer passed all too quickly  
And we were too blind to notice the change,  
Too busy in our love of the Universe,  
And with each other;  
And our task, still undone.

Now, we are old, and tired,  
And waiting; and the world  
Is strange with new faces  
Which we do not recognise.  
And it is winter, a winter

Cold and hard and frosty;  
And we are alone, and look longingly  
At a dead and buried past.

Come, my friend, let us make a bed  
Out of these dead leaves of autumn  
And rest.

Come.