

Episteme: an online interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary & multi-cultural journal

Bharat College of Arts and Commerce, Badlapur, MMR, India

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FOR RAINY DAYS

By Sunil Kaushal

The smoke from your cigarette
Seeps into the essence
of my being
to curl out as the fragrance
of your presence
there beside me
when I miss you most
late, very late
into the night
when it is embraced in the arms
of early morning
and I delight.
A new day to begin-
so I can hear
your voice again
for which I stayed awake the whole night
memorizing it's music
for rainy days
when you are far away
and I bide time
listening to the melody
of your voice

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trying to find you
in the music close to your heart
imagining I'm understanding you better
day by day
but getting no further than that day
long, long ago
on a hot summer's day
when I sipped the dregs
from the glass
you drank from
leaving me thirsty
yet drunk forever.

I CARVED MY OWN PATH

As I walked through the heart
of the mountain called 'Karma'
'Life' called out to me
And so did 'Dharma'
"Be careful before you tread
a path few dare step on
for the going is rough
and may prove very tough.

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Where many have failed
for their loads were heavy
you too may falter
with your gait unsteady.”

Brushing ‘doubts’ aside
I kept walking the talk
and talking aloud
throughout the walk
to the ones behind me.
First stragglers a few
and then a few old ones
and some that were new.

The serpentine stream
Followed where’re I went
the going was rough
and soon I too was spent.

Recalling life’s words and
how challenged I had felt,

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picking my staff

I gathered my mantle;

head held high,

and a smile so gentle,

crushing the snow

under feet that were frozen

for just a little yonder

I could see victory at the horizon.

Looking back I saw

my followers were few

many had succumbed to sleet

and the blizzards that blew

The few that followed

were tired as well

and soon would lag behind

I surely could tell.

I walked faster now

With a tear in my eye

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As I carved my own path

And bid them goodbye.

OH ! SACRED CITY OF KASHI

What a glorious sun rose that day!

With stars in my kohled eyes

and hands henna dyed

glowing in gold, radiant in red

demure and shy,

to a rose strewn bed,

your arms to protect me and your name

a family to belong to

as into this home I came.

Today when death knocks on the very same door

and winds of fate have blown

ostracized, cursed, unlucky for all

out of my home I am thrown.

My red raiment they rent to bits

to light your funeral pyre

my vermilion they smear



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to lend color
and fan the flames of fire .
my broken bangles tinkle as they fall
or is it the temple
calling me with it's prayer call?
Obedient to dictates, blind as can be,
they desert me on the ghats
to die in Kashi
The steep climb begins
Of eking livelihood
in dirt stained streets
lost, heartbroken, alone I stood.
On the face of society
a foul blot I've become,
most wounding was
being left there
by my own daughters and sons .

Oh !yousef styled guardians of my life
how you've fenced me in
as I sink into oblivion, drenched in drudgery,
captive in this tenement so gritty ,

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living in ghettos filthy and ghastly.

Widowhood, oppressive and cruel in its sway

no lesser than 'sati,' will burn me

till one day I fade away.

No festival religious, no neighbors nor friends

not even human company

Into which I can blend.

That's when I wonder

Do I even exist?

If I'm a 'child woman'

The least said the better

They rape me,

And even turn me into a beggar

Their acid tongues lash out orders

as for a handful of rice

I prostrate before God and so many others.

Endless hours of hymn chanting

my stomach empty still

as I fall asleep with prayers

having had my fill.

If I'm young and have a pretty face

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My fate is worse than death
Under their .unrelenting gaze
When I'm old and my flesh is wasted
even my shadow will shun
my body all twisted.
The life I'd taken decades to create
in a flash is destroyed
by the ones I procreate.
I stop resisting for I know only giving,
they cripple and hound me out
for I still carry on living.
Buffeted by life and blown around
I live on pavements, desolate ghats
or just the bare ground.
Cowering under newspapers or plastic sheets
shivering and chilled in rain and sleet.
If ever I manage to find a roof
there'll be tens of us living
in one decrepit room.
I can cover my head
With half a torn sheet
But my head freezes so

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when I warm my frozen feet.

Waiting for death even,
to myself seems like cruelty
for it promises to stretch
into decades of inhumanity .
as I still keep hoping
my son will come to light the fire
when I will forgive all
as he encircles my funeral pyre.
Oh ! Sacred city of Kashi !



PHOENIX FLIGHT

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*The **Phoenix** emerges in every woman when she awakens to the reality of life as the feminine. Woman is the soul for whom many have prejudiced abhorrence even prior to conception, opposing the very life force pulsating within that beautiful creation. If she survives, she is expected to nurture life itself without any right to speak or act. My writings are born out of the stilled voice of many a woman. When the truth unfolds in her consciousness and freedom seems within her grasp, that voice gives vent to frenzied emotions. These speak of suppression and oppression transformed into resurrection, deathlike existence into a fragrant blooming of womanhood and stifled screams of agony echoing to become the united voice of my many sisters, daughters, and mothers who choose to rise as the Phoenix out of the ashes of yesterday's woman.*

PHOENIX FLIGHT

Has the time come when she must kill her,
choking all that reeks of her weak, obsessed mind,
infested with crawling maggots of longing
that sap her of all strength?
Should she disown her mangled corpse,
rotting in the wilderness called 'womanhood'?
Having suffered it all
in fulfilling needs of the flesh
now turn towards her bruised soul;
re-mould the decaying remains,
and carve a new vision
of the woman of substance
who yearns not to hear, from other lips
tender words of love and caring.



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Instead , within herself be so fulfilled
as to sublimate her very existence.

Crucified a million times,
burnt at the stake as many times,
reduced to ashes,
she grows new wings.

A brave new world
she resolves to create
within herself
where she will not seek answers
from those who have none
where she will not be judged
as black or brown
young or old
where her caste
shall not be the stumbling stone
to trip her hurried steps
trying to catch up with life
fleeing from her grasp.
Glorified, liberated, empowered at long last
free of fetters, severed shackles ,broken bonds
woman the giver of life, love
abundance and prosperity;
the goddess showering her infinite wealth
free to soar,soar,soar
on her phoenix flight

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RAVEN TO SILVER

Fading photographs and a faded flower,
ribbon tied letters that
held her still in their strange power .
Opening the box, heart shaped and satin lined
she shed a tear
on the letter he'd last signed.
as his fragrance softly wafted about
nostalgic memories crowded in
as painful emotions tumbled out.
She shuddered as a gust of wind blew
showering her with leaves
of every color and hue.
Yellow and brown, even burnished gold
with age of living
rich with colors both bright and bold.
In wanton abandon they had painted the sky,
having lived every season,
old and shriveled now bidding goodbye



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fall to the ground where they now belong,

the lap of earth

nurturing in gratitude, making it strong .

Closing her eyes, she saw new light

of changes creeping on

slowly from raven and then

to silvery white her hair had turned.

The heart had not

grown any wiser, no lessons having learned

as she still yearned for times to turn around

loved ones to return

buried long ago under the ground.

The wind whispered many a wisdom filled word

weathered cheeks it caressed.

Slowly understanding the tree she'd heard,

“Life is love in an ever flowing stream

love and be alive

don't keep living still in a dream.

Now that all has changed, every age, every clime

leaving memories so dear

let go of pain, now has come the time”.

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As the tree taught her life's bitter truth

Thanking it she cried,

“But I love him still as I did in our youth”.

Head bowed, knees bent, buried box, pain and all,

praying for the strength

from One who gives to big and small.

She felt new warmth embraced in His mantle

in her life's winter

feeling His reassuring touch so gentle.

(In this poem every alternate line rhymes while the middle lines are of four words)

Promo Message

A nostalgic poem of reminiscing in the autumn of life, bringing alive old memories. While the aging process goes on one clings to youth while nature reaches out to the soul to teach lessons of living in freedom.

TAG WORDS

Autumn of life, love letters, memories of youth, ageing, letting go and moving on, autumn leaves, box of old letters and dried flowers, nostalgia

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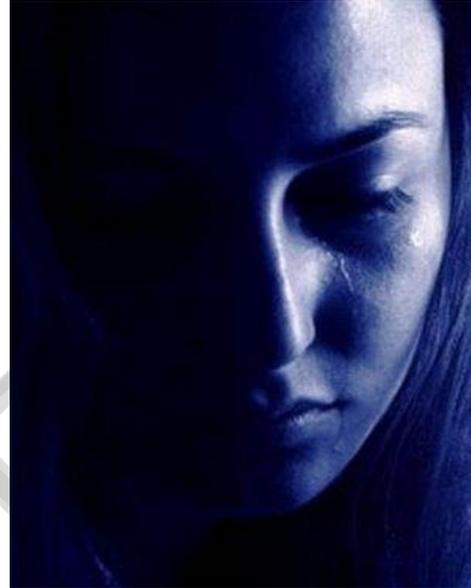
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UNREQUITED LOVE

My figment weaves
a cocoon
trying to enclose
you too
Not having found you
I try
to find answers to questions
which I
have at last become aware of.
for you,
my beloved, have become the question of
my life
as I try to strike a bargain
asking not
for what never can be mine
for asking
or for the begging
as I
try to part forever
without turning
the searing red hot knife



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of separation

into my own entrails,

when I

succumb to the temptation

of wallowing

in the luxury of self pity.

My eyes

stung with the smoke of self doubt

stop dreaming

all dreams having died today.

I wish

This flood of grief would

deluge all

purging my sick world of

false hopes

of snatching you from the

cruel clutches

of fate to make you

my destiny;

for neither life nor you

have answers

to my questions. When

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and if
someone finds them
I will
be as old as the hills.

WISTFUL MEMORIES

Not the touch of your breath
but the thought of your breath
on my flesh
arouses tingling joys
that tinkling with joyful mirth
betray lost youth
struggling to remain
hidden between dawn and dusk
edged with moments of wistful memories
thick with the age of time.

WILD ABANDON

Today, as in days long gone by,
my manicured garden bore forth
white jasmines
their fragrance stirring unnamed desires
in the hearts of strangers

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as I adorned my hair.

But the insipid white of purity

left me unstirred

till you grazed your hand

plucking and tucking a wild rose instead,

splashing red

in the serene silvery moonlight,

to fire my love

with tempestuous desires

of forbidden passions

when you crushed me to your breast,

leaving me breathless

as you mingled

once again with the crowd.

WHY !O !WHY !

Why !O !why is it

that one kind word

from you,

wrenches at my heart

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and draws
floods of tears
than all the harsh ones hurled
over the years
by the world
at large.

WOMAN TO MAN

Who are you to me?
Often I ask myself
Friend or lover
father, son,
twin or brother?
Perhaps, bits of all
to make that one whole
that makes me whole.
One to whom
I keep reverting for answers
To life's questions
Big or small.

This half life of mine
gains meaning,
when every moment
I live and pine

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searching for you
losing sleep and myself
gaining images only of you.
Now here, now there
needlessly including you
whether you do or do not care.

Then spending tormenting, chilling,
sleepless nights of introspection
Finding only one answer-
that for you
woman means only a reflection
of your own love-
just a fleeting deception.

Friend or lover,
father, son,
twin or brother,
whoever you be-
Some where along the cycles
of birth after birth
a part of the SELF parted
as I came to earth.

How I kept wandering,
searching in vain
searching for the half
that raises me to infinity

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birthing again and again
yearning since eternity;
which in you, I now realise
else, why would I
ache and sigh with teary eyes
seeing you despairing or in pain,
or rejoice in your successes and gain
or want to shower you
with the wealth of love.

In you seeking answers to life's questions
even as you go looking for answers
to your life's questions
in your own way
with your own answers
while I wait and pray.

EPISSTEME

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YOUR EMPTY CHAIR

Do you ever see me sitting there

The way I see you

Daily in your empty chair?

Slouching, relaxing,

Leaning back,

Long legs stretching,

Reaching where I sat.

Your hands working

many a way

running often

through your hair.

Did you ever see me

Sitting alone

Catching sunbeams

Chilled to the bone

Feeling the touch

of your warm presence

With the cold fingers

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of your absence

As I yearn for days

Now, forever flown.

Bio:

Dr. Sunil Kaushal is a retired gynaecologist turned writer and loves everything about life. She has a passion for writing shorts stories, poetry and articles. Besides writing, she is an accomplished actor, having done a number of stage plays, TV and radio programs. She is associated with Mother Theresa's home and other charitable institutes also. As Lioness club President in 1982, she was awarded 'Best Lioness President' Asia. She has also been chairperson of a number of socially committed organizations for many years. Having been on the Advisory Committees of Doordarshan and All India Radio, she brought about a number of changes for Women and Children's Welfare.

Sufi, Indian Classical music and Gurbani are what you would catch her listening to when she is not writing or blogging. You can catch this 70 year old on her blog-

<http://sunilkaushal44.blogspot.in>