

Vijay Where Have You Gone

The strings of the santoor lie loose,

The notebook bearing five-hundred compositions is covered with dust,

Where is the music that filled these rooms,

Where has the santoor maestro gone?

His absence was first withstood puritanically now it has begun to hurt,

Where has the captain gone, leaving a vast unfinished work,

Where has the man of inner harmony disappeared,

How do we give meaning to the vast chaos of human life?

While he lived in the ever so tumultuous world,

He never was a part it, he kept his muses away,

He followed an inner tune, he deferred to a different reason,

His double-life was a shield as well a way-shower.

Come back in the blossoming season of flowers,

Come back in the stirring season of rains,

Come back in the uplifting season of autumn,

Come back in the mysterious season of snows.

Suffern, New York, September 7, 2024

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Where Are You Art?

It was hard to believe when you left us,

A shock to our existences,

A joy-wrencher, a peace-snatcher.

For years you walked on earth with tough-feet,

And carried high-ambition,

But soft ways and words you used with the world.

Though in rough business,

Your concern for humanity never wavered,

Family was your prime focus.

You left a mark for us to look up to,

A way to emulate,

A memory to rekindle our souls.

Suffern, New York, February 23, 2024

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Kamal's Journey Against Time

She was a ray of light
Sourced by an unknown and unknowable fire within -
Unencumbered by surroundings and society,
She lit a room full of people by her
intense enigmatic smile
And imbued little things with sensitivity and style,
Today time gives proof that it was unable to dull her luster
And diminish her spirit.
Suffern, New York, February 31,
2015
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Note: This poem was written about my friend Kamal Singh, whom I first knew in 1964 in New York, during the World's Fair.

The Enigma of Bhajanji

We hardly knew you Bhajanji,

A year has passed since you unexpectedly left us,

A year of intense suffering and slow-burning pain.

We searched for you in the corners of the world and heavens,
But only in the recesses of our hearts and contours of our minds
We saw your smiles and songs well anchored.

While on earth you were an enigma hidden in a charm,
Your pains and joys were carefully wrapped up,
Only clue to your soul was in your music.

Wherever you are give us a smile from time to time,
As your absence has changed our rhythm and colors,
We are searching for new anchors and new meanings.

But you left the world of music in a better shape than before,
You bought harmony and intensity in its pursuit,
Joy and freedom in its absorption.

Suffern, New York, July 17, 2023

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The Marred Gift of God

It is something that the world remembers you after death,
But for a moment I would burn our love and reclaim my freedom,
As in our times it is a convenience not a dedication.

It is a wonder that God still has faith in humans,
For they have mutilated the grand design,
And changed living to a process than a phenomenon it is.

The sunrise still reveals the wonder of nature,
But the world runs by a dollar,
Our best hopes are materialistic.

Why have we surrendered to physicality,
Where have we lost the spirit of grand ideas,
Why isn't sacrifice the great bliss?

What was given to man and what he has done with it
Will remain forever a dagger in man's heart,
Our loss immeasurable.

Suffern, New York, November 13,2022

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Where Do We Find You Bhajan?

Where do we find you Bhajan,

In the shy Wullar waters of Sopore,

Or in the regal Nishat and Shalimar gardens?

Your carefully managed long tresses of hair,

Well groomed mustache and stylish kurta and pajama,

Created the image of a slick socialite or an actor just out of a performance.

What were your secrets Bhajan,

What were your heart aches and ecstasies,

What were your frustrations?

Your enigmatic smile revealed little,

That you had devoted your life to strings from five,
Long burning hours doused in perspiration.

Maybe your Kashmiri Dhun reveals a little,
Sopori Baaj some more,
But your mystery you have taken with you.

Suffern, New York, July 14, 2022

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Walking Toward the Sunset

There were times when some people thought
I was a pure specimen of life,
But such adulation was rare and far between,
Most of my life I was a mystery man.

They came to me as I was clean and harmless,
Curiosity was often rife
As how a strange person like me existed,
Or why he existed.

Love was given to me sporadically
As I could never surrender my aloofness,
I was a privileged specimen of some disorder,
A mystery shrouded in an enigma.

Ambition was my engine,
Achievement my goal,
But I did not want humans to judge it,
My ideal was the yardstick.

Heaven and hell were to me the same,
Twain they existed,
One was the prize,
Other its price.

The hardest thing was to live amidst materialists,
The day-to-day artists of existence,

The blind and the deaf,

The greedy and the selfish.

Life by itself does not give anything,

At best it can return you what you put in it,

It is your ideas of life that open the lockbox:

Your vision is everything.

What is love:

A relationship between the observer and the observed,

Held in reverence and grace,

Eternal compact without conditions.

Some of the journey of life is mindless:

Inanities thrown at us without reason,

Imaginations of the crass and benighted,

Dreams of the destitute and vulgar.

How to turn pain into elixir is the challenge of life,

There is no one we can complain to,

The almighty who designed human life,

Is soft on reason and long on imagination.

Stupid I have tolerated but insane I can't stand,
Life is a long journey of ignoring and compromise,
But the true principle of life is life itself,
Rest is a convenience or mere convention.

I have been victimized by the cheap labeling of the world,
By its false innuendos and vulgar narcissism,
Un-eclectic choices and brutal selfishness,
By a visionless journey and blind faith.

I have seen good ideas mutilated by expediencies,
Imagination crushed by practical solutions,
Good of the community dwarfed by the ambition of one,
Infinity reduced to a momentary thrill.

I have been crushed and beaten by the majority,
Humiliated and touselled by the powerful,
Jeered and lectured by the popular,
Laughed and maligned by the special.

But now I have gained the rest of my freedom,

I have come to the end of my journey,
My sunset beckons me,
I can only look forward and not turn my head.

Why is life so difficult,
It is not so as it comes from nature,
But has been made difficult by the world:
Culture, religion, politics, economics.

Life is a fairy tale but we make it into a project,
We squeeze its music out,
And turn it into an achievement machine,
Results and not reverberations.

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Ode To New Year

Why are we blindly welcoming the arrival of new year,
Weren't last few years our pained existence?

Does man have wisdom,
Or is he a natural phenomenon unguidable?

If man is susceptible to illusions
Then why not build a path with them?

Personal resolutions and planning
Are dousing of a grand fire.

Our fate was written in our evolution,
Search for happiness our greatest illusion.

New year is another year in a wrapper,
Don't squander it in wisdom but live it in your veins.

Suffern, New York, January 4, 2022

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Anupama's Heavenly Birthday

Her word was soft,

Her footsteps were softer,

Yet her presence was louder than others.

Today we grieve the friend we lost,

The light that was shut off,

The voice that is heard no more.

We find you now in the corridors of heart,

In the recesses of our shared memories,

In the solemn hopes of a better world.

Suffern, New York, Dec. 3, 2020

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Every Day Life is a Quest for the Unknown

Every day life is a quest for the ideas that will carry us happily to the other shore,
Every day our material existence is an anchor-line to our happiness and dreams.

Every morning a sleeping hope struggles to wake up,
To try out the theory that life produces what you sow in it.

Every day is a tumultuous exercise in the hope of creating happiness,
But some days end in despair as we may capture nothing tangible.

Every day we see the same tussle of ideas, idealists versus the realists,
Pessimists overpowering optimists, fact-checkers striking on dreamers.

Arguments on life deter us to enjoy it,
Why was it created in the first place, to what purpose?

A state of mind, like an action-drenched brain, stays on course,
Intensity with endurance is the vehicle of dreams.

In our times material well-being is considered endowed with happiness,
But we know most of the rich people are not happier, only more comfortable.

God made human beings from the atoms of dreams, love, and hopes,
Anything that destroys this ethereal fabric destroys life.

Suffern, New York, July 25, 2020

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