

Roots

Touching the ground on which I put the first shaky footsteps,
Seeing the majestic contours of the undulating skyline,
Which my eyes had never tired to range,
Back in Kashmir, I feel the echo of my genesis -
An expatriate's answered prayers.

Buried here lie the pristine years of my childhood,
When wonder turned into thought,
Desires into dreams,
The visions was uncluttered,
And conflict took root.

Does a man owe something to the land of his birth,
Or is it his insecurity that binds him to his roots?
Or is it all an alluring angle of the architecture of emotion,
Or simply an elemental pull to gravitate to one's origin?
If child is the father of man, then what is growing up all about?

Unblemished by the coarseness of life,
Unmarred by the waywardness of the world,
Reposed in the frozen perspective of time,
Still gleaming lie the first experiences of life:

The integrity of self,
The uniqueness of the individual and the brotherhood of mankind,
The uncomplicatedness in human relationships,
The simplicity of understanding,
The unquestioned joy of living,
The clarity of the way ahead,
Just being, not becoming.

We go back to the roots,
To replenish the vision and the spirit we have lost,
To regain our identity and reclaim our history,
To reset the balance between nature and mind,
To feel an element of the universal spacetime.

But the chilling vision shattered the trip down the childhood:
Kashmiris living the fossilized glory of their past,
Apathy their unshakable creed,
Cynicism the only energetic hope,
Living between tyranny and anarchy of political pendulum.

Walking down the desolate ruins of Srinagar's streets,
Shapeless stretches of thoughtless construction,
Chaotic services and nightmarish traffic,
Where time has frozen in the inner city,
And darkness envelopes the winter months.

Plundered, ravaged, and defiled through ages,
By its soulless bandit rulers,
Neglected eternally by its crass inhabitants,
To wither slowly in the irreversible arrow of time,
This bounteous gift of nature, Kashmir,
Moans in pains unnameable,
Its soul heaving with curse eternal
For its unworthy sons.

The clandestine evil schemes of 80's
Hatched in our neighbor country
Coalesced into one infernal insane fire in '89,
Destroying the finely woven culture of a millennia in the valley,
Disturbing the tranquility of a million years among the mountains.

A friend turned into a murderer,
A neighbor into an arsonist;
A community acquiesced to become an army.
An angelic valley became a death valley -
All in the name of God and religion.

We do not know where to begin anew -
Even, if we should begin at all,
To resume God's work,
To revive the spontaneous sparkling smile
On the faces of a thousand gloomy children,

To let the lotuses grow unperturbed.

We do not know what to do -
Our enemy's brutality has choked our spirit,
Their hatred has tormented our soul.
In one cataclysmic insanity
They have destroyed the Kashmir built by Gods.

But Kashmir always beckons me to homecoming,
A quivering echo of a distant thunder,
A withered glow on the horizon,
Remnant of a fire kindled a long time ago,
It will remain my tombstone.