

POETRY

Father, I Never Asked You Anything More

(a mini autobiographical poem)

K.V. Raghupathi

I

At eighteen, father
I wanted to be away from home
like Ulysses in search of knowledge.
I did not ask you more than this.
You granted my wish
despite six children around you
(I was the third
in between two brothers and a sister before me
and one brother and one sister after me)
I left and never looked back.

II

For five years, father
to confess the truth:
Learning became stifling,
thinking dampening,
acting oppressive.
living unmoving
in the muffled classrooms.

III

I listened to unassimilated inassimilable bland soporific lectures
passively like a trained animal
with no protest and questioning like a Socratic gadfly.
My doubts persisted
like chewing bubble gum on the floor

I realized it was futile to be explicit.
Life went by run-on-the-mill with no fragrance.

IV

Thereafter, I knew not what I should do.
You initiated me into competitive examinations
to fulfill your middle-class ambition.
You funded and your motivation like bioline¹
kindled your middle-class ambition in me too
and I sailed with you
but the result shattered your ambition
like a broken villa in a deluge.

V

Thereafter, you knew
you had fought over the conflicting letters of my selection
before the blinded woman with a pan on the pedestal
draining your pension packet for Socratic justice.
Hope drained like water on a sandstone.

VI

Meanwhile, faith in justice, I lost
I knew, one day you walked to my reading table in the library
and begged me to pursue the case like a hunting tiger
I unrelented, you walked away with glistening tears.
Father that was the end of my tryst with your middle-class ambition
that fell and broke into pieces
like an antiquated pot in a museum.

VII

Thereafter, father, you knew not
winter after winter, summer after summer
I read flinty philosophers of the West— Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, Gide, Russell...
close-packed philosophies of the East – the six orthodox schools²
three heterodox schools³ and three schools of metaphysical thought⁴
I conversed and debated with their spirits alive in black letters printed
-- all with the only halcyon desire to satiate my inner self.

But father, all that I built on the banks of my rumpled watery-mind
with the bricks of kneaded philosophies
yielded nothing.

VIII

Twenty-four summers and winters I wandered like a gypsy
flirting with yogis, swamis, saints, and philosophers
spending days in ashrams, reading esoteric writings
to heal my wrecked soul.
Father, I tell you, my learning began which I missed like a child in my early life.
I gained the treasure and I grew like a banyan tree
with roots of wisdom seeping into my veins and cells.
I was twice born, father, though I did not fulfill your middle-class ambition.

IX

To make my living
I strutted from school to school, college to college
all for a pittance and I never made riches, you knew
I turned to academia, father
I went to my teacher at the university
to consummate my dream.
But he asked my caste I knew not until then
I didn't fit in his shoes he said
I begged and ran behind his car for a mile
holding the form, he hated me, 'get lost'.

X

Then, truly, father, poetry sprang from the turmoil
and flowed like copious rainwater in a gutter.
You knew that gave me no returns, but only baby comfort
for I did not write about social issues
nor did I ever become sentimental.
I wrote what I meant beyond experience
that sounded oracular, delphic, and arcane
that irked philistines and academicians alike
who dismissed it as mere floss.
Nevertheless, poetry stayed with me
like a pet dog, my sole companion in distress.

XI

Father, I stayed with you in your last days
when you fell on a road divider in the rain
and broke your right shoulder bone.
And I never asked you anything more
than your love and I served you till your last breath.
But do you remember, you had thrown out my trunk
which you presented me forty summers ago
and I treasured it in my house
when I practiced yoga
for you had a bad thought of it
that I would become a *sanyasi*.
Father, I still loved you for this ill-motivated action.

XII

Father, I held your shivering mica hand
you knew not as you were semi-conscious
that shaped me warmly in my childhood.
I fought my surging tears
as memories dribbled from my brain cells.
Life in you was receding like black clouds over Tirumala Hills,
you didn't see me, recognize two doctors and a nurse
of course, your last son after me.
That was the last moment,
your eyelids dropped with your paling eyes,
tears running down your sunken cheeks.
Your hand that gripped me like a hawk's talons
released slowly, the last dregs struggled.
Your head dropped like the stag's from a panther's canine.
that was all, my tryst with you was over.
Father, only two things you hated most
are with me, yoga and poetry
that gave me no trade, but happiness.

XIII

And the trunk box you loved most
jammed with memories –
decades of letters, envelopes stuck with all different kinds of stamps,
album of my yoga postures, old photos, blurry photos,
three full manuscripts and an incomplete manuscript
typed on Facit typewriter that was gifted to me by my maternal uncle

to flourish with my writings that fetched me no returns so far,
 notes scribbled on pieces of paper, now brittle
 two mementos.
 Now it lies in my new house I built on green fields
 in the silent hiss of space covered with a white loin cloth like a coffin.
 It is alive with me as I am alive.
 The box is so dear to my heart
 that I hardly said 'yes' to the scrap dealer.
 If doubted its existence, father
 you could walk into my house and see
 the centre stage of my life.

1. multi energy source vitamin tonic
2. the six orthodox systems are: *Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva Mimamsa and Vendanta*
3. the three heterodox systems: *Jaina, Buddhist and Carvaka*
4. the three schools: *Advaita, Dwaita and Vishista Dwaita*

About the Poet

A former academic, born in 1957 in a Telugu-speaking family in Andhra Pradesh, K.V. Raghupathi, holds a PhD in English Literature and writes in English. Poet, novelist, short story writer, book reviewer, and critic, he has so far published thirty books. His first passion is poetry. Began writing seriously in the early 1980s. Since then, he has published thirteen poetry collections, two novels, and two short story collections besides editing eight critical works and six books on Yoga spanning over four decades of a journey through writings. His poetry collections include *Desert Blooms* (1987), *Echoes Silent* (1988), *The Images of a Growing Dying City* (1989), *Small Reflections* (2000), *Samarpana* (2006), *Voice of the Valley* (2006, 2014), *Wisdom of the Peepal Tree* (2006, 2014) *Dispersed Symphonies* (2010), *Orphan and Other Poems* (2010), *Between Me and the Babe* (2014), *On and Beyond the Surface* (2018), *The Mountain is Calling...* (2018), and *Transition* (2022). His poetry is endowed with rich and dense philosophy, mystical/transcendental thoughts, romantic elements, and imagery comprising similes, metaphors, personifications, apostrophes, irony, climax, anti-climax, and

full of rhetoric and symbols. His two novels are *The Invalid* (2012) and *The Disappointed* (2014); his short fiction includes *The Untouchable Piglet* (2015) and *A Gay and a Straight Woman* (2017). His poems and short stories, besides thought-provoking and stimulating scholarly papers, have appeared in various newspapers like *The Hindu*, *The Statesman*, Print journals, and online journals. He taught in three universities: S.V. University, Tirupati (1997-2007), Yogi Vemana University, Kadapa (2007-2011), and Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvarur (2011-2019). He lives in Tirupati, AP and he can be reached at Email: drkvraghupathi9@gmail.com

He is a recipient of several awards for his creativity that include the Michael Madhusudhan Dutt Award, Kolkata in 2001, H.D.Thoreau Fellowship, Dhvanyaloka, Mysore in 2000, the best-chosen poet for 2003, Poetry Society of India, New Delhi Poetry Chain, Mumbai, Life Time Achievement Award, Chennai Poetry Circle, Chennai in 2010, and Rock Pebbles National Award for creativity, 2014, Bhubaneswar and Phrasal King Arbind Choudhary National Award for Poetry, Mahatma Gandhi Education and Welfare Society, Parbhani, Maharashtra, a citation of Brightest Honour for his distinguished contribution to Indian English Poetry by International Sufi Centre, Bangalore 2020, Panorama Golden Book Award for the book, *The Mountain is Calling...* (2022, World Capital Foundation); and two awards in Yoga, Best Yogic Publication of the Year Award, 2018, and Lifetime Achievement Award in Yoga, 2018, New Delhi.