



KALIYUGA

The End in the Beginning

PROSE POEMS BY MUTHAL NAIDOO

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CONTENTS

Foreword	01	Democracy	23	Guma-Guma Gangs	48
RARE EARTH	03	Phoenix Unrisen	24	Rape Universal	49
Infinity	04	WAR	25	MEA CULPA	51
Ant Man	05	Holy Lands	26	Blindness	52
Karma	06	Outing Atheism	27	Unshackled	54
Being	07	The Soldier	28	Senior Citizen	55
Paradox	08	Ptsd	29	Nonkululeko	57
Creator	09	Child Soldiers	31	South African	59
The Apple	10	Child Prisoner	32	L'CHAIM	60
THE CHOICE	11	Whistleblower	34	Rawabi (The Hills)	62
Ambivalence	12	Gideon Levy	36	Gift of Laughter	63
The Struggle	13	Steve Biko	38	OSK	67
Love Not Fear	14	MJ & MD Naidoo	39	Hands that help	69
Fear Not Love	15	Ze Claudio And Maria	41	Hillbrow	71
Hellfire And Damnation	16	Horses Next?	43	Ballet Dancer	73
Feral Being	17	LOVE-HATE	44	West-Eastern Divan	74
CONQUEST	18	Pearl	45	My Father's House	75
Colonialism	19	Lingham	46	Women's Voices	76
Neo Colonialism	21	Gynophobia	47		

FOREWORD

Reincarnation is a fundamental concept in Hindu religious philosophy. It applies not only to individuals but to the whole of human existence. Human history, like the seasons, is envisioned as a movement of cycles within cycles of time. A kalpa, the major cycle, is 4.32 billion years and consists of a thousand mahayugas (maha-great, yuga-epoch). Each mahayuga consists of a cycle of four yugas: 1. Satyayuga/Krtayuga (The Golden Age of Wisdom and Truth), 2. Tretayuga (The Silver Age of Ritual), 3. Dvaparayuga (The Age of Doubt) and 4. Kaliyuga (The Age of Discord) that ends with a major battle between the forces of good and evil.

Hindu philosophers indicate the degree of morality of each yuga with reference to the bull – the symbol of dharma (morality). The number of its legs shows the moral status of the yuga. In the first epoch, Satyayuga, The Age of Wisdom and Truth, the bull stands on four legs – morality is at 100%. In Tretayuga, The Age of Ritual, the bull stands on three legs, morality is at 75%. In Dvaparayuga, The Age of Doubt, the bull has two legs, morality is at 50%. In Kaliyuga, The Age of Discord, the bull has one leg – morality is at 25%. It is a cycle of moral degeneration – a view of human

existence that reflects the continuous decline and need for renewal of morality.

According to Hindu belief, we are in Kaliyuga, the last and shortest epoch of a cycle, 432,000 years. It began in 3002 (B.C.E); so we are at the beginning of the epoch. Kaliyuga, an excessively materialistic age, is characterised by uncontrolled lust, anger, greed, pride and jealousy. Murder, rape, exploitation and corruption are rampant. It is the age of the demon Kali (pronounced kully meaning strife and discord), and is not a reference to the goddess, Kali, (pronounced kaalee, meaning Time).

The theory of the yugas demonstrates the propensity of the human mind to find patterns in the randomness of existence and thus give meaning to life. Kaliyuga, the title of this collection of poems, is used as a metaphor and represents my own loss of innocence. The poems are an attempt to probe the paradoxical nature of existence.

MN

RARE EARTH

EXPLOSION!
cataclysmic!
swirling dust, debris
spinning out solar discs,
and proto planets,
in cosmic collisions

violent birth
of embryonic earth
molten, sweltering,
in volcanic gas,
reeling
massive impacts
smashing
crust and mantle
fragments whirling
violent birth
of satellite moon

end of bombardment
the planet cools,
clouds form
Rain
oceans
stromatolites
releasing oxygen
drawing in
the atmospheric shield
to enclose and protect;
drawing in
the moon to regulate
tides and seasons –
rhythms for life

on a planet,
blue with water
green with trees;
Life!
the only known life
in all the universe

Life
in a food chain
a hierarchy of jaws
each one feeding
on the one below
human being on top
preying on the lot
survival of the fittest
a game of death
in life

Infinity

inside the head
enfolding
confined in convolutions
defined in hemispheres
mapped out
in routes of communication
infinity
in a mass of jelly
transmitting
signals that leap
across synapses
past Alpha Centauri
past Pluto
into other galaxies
to the back of beyond
to reach
from every direction
over and over
the beginning

the big bang
of the mind

Ant Man

They say
believe
do not question
all will be revealed

but man a child
preaching blind faith
opens one eye to look.
his doubts
lead him to proofs
proofs to discoveries
discoveries to more
as he climbs and climbs
onward and upward
ever higher
into the unknown

clouds part
to reveal more clouds
that open to universes
to suns and quasars
and Ant Man
dreaming giant dreams
taking giant steps
discovering more and more,
infinitesimally
finding infinity
the only absolute certainty

Karma

karma is action,
not its consequence
neither reward
nor punishment

consequence
flows from context
killing in society
punished
killing in war
rewarded
killing is action
like all action,
ambiguous

in the world
world of unknown
beginning and end
no certainty
of good or evil
in consequence
of any act

every act
a leap of faith
built on uncertainty
on tectonic plates
moving imperceptibly
to shake
the foundations of belief
that keep the earth rotating
within the limits
of our understanding

that is our destiny
to create certainties
constructed on
contingencies:
life in the unknown
the universe

Being

the human creature
incarcerated
in chaotic collusion
of light and dark
dichotomised
its strength called God
Satan, its weakness
interrogates
the accident of existence
and contrives
meaning for life

Paradox

Man the Maker
contemplating
the paradox of being
finite in infinity
created the Creator
to give himself a soul
to make him whole
turning mortality
into immortality
supernaturally

but the problem remains
of different domains
heaven and earth
not heaven on earth;
and the grim Reaper waits
anticipating our fates

Man the Maker,
manufacturer
in factories
and laboratories
of new parts for old
and potions untold
in fervent dedication
to total eradication
from the human state
the anomaly of mortality

but Man the Maker,
striving forever
remains forever
finite in infinity
with a beginning
and an ending
the paradox of being

Creator

caught
in the polarising prism
of ambivalent disposition
rational-instinctual
humane-savage

man
created in his image
personification
of perfection
idealised projection
symbol of redemption
unequivocal
God above
embodiment of power
in unadulterated love
to ensure life forever
with a heavenly Father

saviour
to give man strength
to conquer natural bents
that prompt him to destroy
making arbitrary the joy
of living life in harmony

man
given to inordinate fear
his birth on a blue sphere
an anomaly, a mystery
Death
a finality
intolerable,
not to be endured
turned into a passport

but a visa into heaven
hard to obtain
requiring
as foreign exchange
the unnatural condition
unadulterated love

The Apple

Adam and Eve
 children having eaten
 of fruit forbidden
 eyes opened
 saw
 and left voluntarily
 the garden of infancy

 armed with knowledge:
 free will, free choice
 discovered the paradox:
 in every action
 an equal,
 opposite reaction
 choice
 not between
 no dichotomy
 good or evil

the lioness must kill
 to feed the little cubs;
 no choice no doubt
 blind submission
 to instinct, intuition

but Adam, Eve,
 open-eyed
 stand in doubt
 certainty denied
 must choose
 must always choose
 must roll the dice
 to win or lose

THE CHOICE

striving
within the purple heart
tearing
red and blue apart
struggle for dominance
control of sustenance;
declaring war;
dividing the flow,
red and blue
in separate channels
simultaneously
storming ventricles
drowning out
the beat of the heart,
to release
the satanic beast
human being
inhumane

striving
within the purple heart
keeping
red and blue in tandem,
one stream
through ventricles
one stream
in a system of channels
red turning to blue,
blue turning to red
continuous flow
of life sustained
in the steady rhythm
of contraction
in the heartbeat
of compassion
human being
humane

Ambivalence

not in us
harmonious clarity of
Nature's duality;
turning from the sun
into dark night
turning to the sun
to greet the light;
no opposition
in disposition
clear separation
in rotation
day or night

in us
interplay
of night and day,
kaleidoscopic patterns
mosaics of light and dark;
endless struggle
to untangle
day-night, Jekyll-Hyde

The Struggle

in community
private-public being
individuality- conformity
encompassing
manifold personality
many in the one
predictably unpredictable
making consistency
requirement of society
placing non-conformity,
under suspicious scrutiny
framing it simplistically
as godly or satanic;

individuality, diversity,
struggle for freedom
in interdependence;
struggle against
the condition of being:
“I am because we are”;
struggle against
conditional conformity
catalyst of individuality
paradox of being

Love Not Fear

Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment.

Mahatma Gandhi

words of wisdom
to inspire
not transform
only admire;
a moment of respect,
in daily commerce,
to honour a great soul,
proffering love
to make us whole

not for him
inferior power –
morality
embedded in authority
external control
of human volatility
coercive punishment
inherent
in the rule of law
legal intervention
of society
in individual privacy

for him
superior power
love,
embedded in integrity
trust
in common humanity
compassion, empathy,
love of neighbour
divine inspiration
driving the striving
for human perfection
rendering redundant
threat of punishment

but divine inspiration
extraordinary
floats free of you and me –
the mystical rewards
heaven, eternal love
too distant, too far above

Fear Not Love

“in the paradoxical sense the veiled threat of violence makes daily life non-violent.” [Alvin Toffler: *Power Shift*, 15]

veiled threat of violence
in all of jurisprudence:
in laws to regulate
tendencies to violate;
laws to restrain
brutality and abuse;
to save ourselves
from ourselves

fear of punishment
in law enforcement,
surveillance, control

fear of punishment
in religion and tradition
requiring conformity faithful
adherence
to ritual performance
to avoid
unending retribution
a life hereafter in perdition

jurisdiction
legal, religious, social
retribution formalised
impersonalised
in collective punishment
law and order administration
authorised official surrogate
mandated to perpetrate
violence to end violence

Hellfire And Damnation

God in Heaven,
 the Devil in Hell
 metaphoric existence
 far removed
 in space and time
 from earthly crime;
 intangible as in a dream;
 no power to redeem
 only in poetic imagination
 hellfire and damnation

punishment postponed
 to life hereafter
 beyond worldly experience
 beyond physical senses
 requiring collusion in belief
 from murderer and thief
 criminals who repudiate
 human effort to create
 security of community

hellfire and damnation
 punishment
 teleported to eternity
 lacking the force
 of earthly reality
 the physical pain
 of the club concrete
 smashing down
 the criminal deed;
 the living torture
 of incarceration
 in manacled word,
 thought, action

only in a prison cell
 damnation and hell

Feral Being

mountains of cells,
monuments to fear –
stark, austere
rising to incarcerate,
in total isolation
from civilization,
those we cannot tame

wild men, wild women
schooled in prison
in morality
must absorb in theory
what cannot be
in practicality
behind bars of captivity

wild men, wild women
in prison, forbidden
life's oxygen
free will, free choice
inhaling fetid fumes
frustration- distrust
adapt
to conditions
of imprisonment
and imbibe
new levels of depravity
masked by duplicity
in lifeless eyes,
chimpanzees in captivity,
waiting for the day
that they
will be uncaged

on release
from incarceration
singing hymns
of rehabilitation
they return,
with faith reinforced
in a life
of atavistic regression

CONQUEST

love conquers all
they say
credo of all who pray

but history
tells a different story
men of glory conquer
with superior power –
science and technology

thus the worldwide conquest
of native peoples east to west
living simply in small clans
fitting in with nature's plans
forced into sullen acceptance
of knowledge for deliverance
from nature's simplicity
to human ingenuity

those quick to learn,
nationalize, industrialize
advance
in power, wealth,
independence

those trapped
in simple tradition
nature's children
easily enslaved
doomed to remain
impoverished

knowledge of the world;
of how things work
pragmatic knowledge
necessary tool of liberation
from oppressive limitation

knowledge conquers all

Colonialism

knowledge and technology
from earliest times of history
fostered exploration, trade,
occupation of new territory

in the nineteenth century

EXPLOSION

in colonial domination
violent mass expropriation
tribal farmland annexation
enslaving native population
to industrial mass production

clans corralled,
forced into unity
without regard
to group identity
locked together forever
in ethnic enmity
Zulu-Khosa,
Hindu-Muslim,
Shia-Sunni,
joined helter-skelter
in nationalities –
labour for industry
and factories

subjugated people
hollowed out
empty vessels, receptacles
of foreign occupation-
acculturation,
worshipping their gods,
adopting their norms
speaking their tongues,
thinking their thoughts,
bowing to their superiority
relinquish authenticity,
concede inferiority,
and forever need
affirmation of validity

even after revolution
freed from control
no manumission
of the soul
the struggle turned
from liberty
to capitalist-socialist
democracy
relegating the majority
to factory-hands
with a vote
to validate
indigenous oligarchy
surrogate
of colonialist hegemony
rule of hollow men
and women
employing the power
of democracy

in uninhibited
self-serving degeneracy
to fill the void
of emasculation;
to escape
the devastation
of psychological rape

Neo Colonialism

colonial conquest
formerly
brute appropriation
land and resources
with enslavement
third world subjugation
to foreign domination
open, blatant, violent

colonial conquest
presently
at home and abroad,
subtle co-optation
secret wheeling-dealing
trade negotiation
de facto rule
of multi-national
corporation

knowledge-power
manipulation
money-power
kickback deployment
in puppet-power
government
for authorized rape
of natural resources
without occupational forces

no blatant enforcement
de facto control
through enticement
to first world
materialistic norms
commoditized,
mass produced
offered in tantalising
'free choice'
controlled
by the marketing voice
in supermarket
self-service facility,
and shopping mall
expediency –
mirage of democracy

consumerism
new myth
of democratic freedom
creating
the craving for novelty
in ever changing modality
designer cars, fashions,
drugs, prescriptions
mod-con release
from drudgery
Internet, I-phone
communication
rave, hip-hop, rap,
assimilation

acculturation
indiscernible
bloodless coup
imperceptible
in wholesale
consumption
binding the masses
to superficiality
mirage of democracy

mind and spirit
colonized
creating
through television eyes
dummies of ventriloquism
turned to opportunism
in enfranchised
democratic corruption

Democracy

in ancient Athens, city-state,
birthplace of democracy
small enough to accommodate
government of and by all
inclusively –
rule by male citizens,
exclusively!
women and slaves,
no voice, no choice

all are citizens
in the modern age
all with a vote,
universal suffrage,
give democratic consent
to representation
that mutates
into a ruling élite
pomp and circumstance

replete
red carpets and parades
praise singer accolades
army, navy, air force
in succession
march-past, fly-past
exhibition
the might
of the ruling class;
in its resumption
of majesty,
kissing babies,
but decreeing regally,
wielding
collective power
dictatorially
in full self-service
little accountability
sheltered behind

bureaucracy
wall of separation
in democracy
dividing
representative
from represented
government
from governed
consigning government
by the people
to a rubber-stamping vote

back to square one
power of the robber baron

Phoenix Unrisen

you know how it is
with us Phoenixes;
I go down in flames
and a new me rises
out of the ashes –
spontaneous combustion
with a resurrection!

ready to be reborn,
all fired up to become,
you know, young, cool,
hip and nobody's fool –
but it's not happening.
I'm not sparking

and I am
the sacred fire bird,
if you please!
emblem of hope
and renewal,
can you believe!
symbol of immortality!
I'm not kidding!

man
in the midst of poverty
I am the promise
of growth and prosperity!
but this place is dying
getting worse everyday
twenty years into democracy
and beggars
more than before.

if I don't get outa here,
I'll be mistaken
for a politician
but what do I do?
time's up
and no combustion!

to hell with spontaneity
somebody gimme a match!

WAR

demon spawn
of lust and greed
flying on metal wings
to feed
on earth's treasures
everywhere
creating, unleashing
terror
wearing the mask
of civilization
iconoclast
tearing down
creation
in every rapacious
martial plan
repudiating
the God of Man

unequivocally,
war is blasphemy
but war inevitably
is our destiny
we preach
love, peace,
benevolence;
practise
fear, distrust,
intolerance
and hiding
primitive instincts
under the veneer
of civilized behaviour
arm ourselves to the teeth

Holy Lands

blessed-cursed with oil
lands of strife and turmoil
among creeds fraternal
of the One God eternal

playthings of the cat cartel
in a rat-and-mouse game
cutting off one another's tails
deaf to one another's wails
running helter-skelter
killing one another
in mad intolerance
of ethnic-religious
difference

divided, conquered, blinded
mice run about on the ground
while cats ignoring frenzied
mouseketeering bands
work underground
siphoning black-gold
from their lands

keeping mice
defending shrines,
diverting them
from oil pipe lines
multi-national
corporate cats
prop up the rule
of rapacious rats
with rodent militias
for protection
to secure continuous
insurrection

for continuous
pipe-line production

those who seek to unite,
to stop endless strife
and nationalise
natural resources,
face the firing line
of feline forces;
branded terrorists,
madmen,
deposed, destroyed,
at the instigation
of fat rats
put in power
by fat cats

Outing Atheism

atheism is in the closet,
you bet!
under the guise of piety
millions, billions, trillions
most all of humankind
live closeted in unbelief

wearing hats, scarves,
carrying coconuts,
throwing bones,
bowing in prayer,
vowing to love
One they have placed
in earthly splendour
somewhere above

outside holy precincts,
they drop pretence,
not the guise,
to go in search
of that other
the true reflection
of themselves
scapegoat
for their imperfections,
to whom in reality
they dedicate
their greatest, proudest
triumph
their superlative
achievement –
Making War !
splendid destruction
euphoric desecration –

rape, manipulation,
torture, exploitation,
murder, annihilation –
ecstatic exhibition!
of repudiation
of the one
they call God.

after each killing spree
back on bended knee
they thank the Lord
for victory
His complicity
in their proclivity
for making war
for evermore

The Soldier

man
 now woman too
 reprogrammed
 turned into a uniform
 mechanized, robotised,
 free will anaesthetized,
 brain equipped
 with microchip
 to ensure
 total compliance
 to orders from above –
 not the god of love
 nor the god of submission
 – gods of benevolence
 missing in action –
 orders from Above:
 the Military High Command

man
 now woman too,
 undertake as their own
 vendettas of power
 nationalised,
 against an enemy
 nationalised,
 bodies of women, children
 rationalised
 collateral damage

man
 now woman too,
 freed of choice, accept
dulce et decorum est --
 'tis “sweet and right”
 to kill for your country:
 the credo that stokes
 the dogma of difference,
 making man
 now woman too
 willing instruments
 of war
 dying to serve

PTSD

before military induction,
normal
not dysfunctional

normal
after boot camp exchange
societal straitjacket
norms-values
for flak jacket
aggression-discipline

normal
until unleashed
on killing fields
to real encounter,
real confrontation
in mirror images
of equal determination;

fear-risk-excitement –
heady cocktail injection –
and gladiators,
testosterone daredevils,
Evel Knievels,
leap into the arena,
to face
the many-headed hydra,
and the game begins

kill or be killed
rapid-fire ejaculation
into anonymity
again, again, again
death-rape
of all and sundry
orgasmic release
euphoric frenzy
roar of conquest
Tarzan
beating his breast,
survival of the fittest

returning home
to civilian dress,
to staid routine,
mere existence,
Adam-Eve,
eyes open wide
having gorged
on fruit forbidden
banished
from normality
having knowledge
in the blood
power of death
over life
stand to attention
in the garden
alert, at the ready
wearing
the medal of glory,
PTSD

Child Soldiers

with a sling,
childish instrument,
David brings down
roaring giant, Goliath,
and his deed echoes
down the ages
captured
in Michelangelo's
angelic image
merging power
in youthful beauty
child soldier-
Il Gigante

today David-Davida
in countries of Africa,
Middle and Far East,
little boy-girl beast
burdened with AK47

abused, brutalised
to abuse and brutalise
have no choice
know of no choice
unlike the heroic example
child soldier of the bible,
divinely guided,
who knew, understood
and chose to do

little David-Davida
once beloved children,
of themselves
beloved no longer,
returning home
to mother, father,
look with alien eyes
at all that once was
family and familiar

no memory
of loving embrace
touching to caress,
not to maim

they reach for security –
rifle, bandolier
no longer there
weapons
that gave them life
no longer there –
without strife what
is the purpose of life?

Child Prisoner

(Omar Khadr 2002)

flying through the air
 fireworks of deadly warfare,
 Afghani militants inside,
 US task force outside
 surrounding mud huts
 in Ayub Kheyl
 village compound
 tossed into hail –
 bullets, bombs,
 the furnace of battle;
 another explosion,
 blast of shrapnel
 into a boy's left eye
 dropping him to his knees,
 'oh, let me die'

rifle fire into his back
 flinging him
 onto a rubble heap
 next to a dead mujahid
 'oh, let me die'
 the boy, turned over,
 blood and pain,
 'kill me, kill me,
 kill me too'
 'oh no, no martyrdom
 for you,
 you killed a soldier,
 you must pay,
 and for all the dead
 of 9/11 day'

airlifted
 to Bagram Air Base
 the boy, fifteen,
 must face
 medical attention-
 interrogation-torture,
 wide range on offer:
 guard dog menace,
 sleep deprivation,
 sexual humiliation,
 shackling to ceilings,
 brutal beatings –
 to elicit information
 of Al Qaeda
 and enemy No. 1,
 Osama,
 whom he once met
 when he was ten

three months later
Guantanamo Bay
now sixteen
with adult status
to endure further
interrogation-torture:
dissection,
deconstruction
heavy metal
music persecution;
David,
without a sling,
confronting
the inveterate wrath
of mighty Goliath

ten years
in incarceration,
mature in limb,
a boy's capitulation
signs a confession
to recoup remains
of ruined youth
outside walls of captivity,
among friends and family
in Canada, home country –
promise of release,
will it be?

Whistle Blower

not a Hollywood plaster cast
 claiming to be iconoclast,
 Bradley Manning,
 the real thing,
 broke iconic codes
 of secrecy
 that maintain the might
 of the military

gentle human being,
 man of empathy
 humanitarian
 in the army –
 anomaly!
 man of compassion?
 in a killing profession?
 Gandhi, satyagrahi,
 with AK47?

failing basic training,
 not reading the sign
 went on to repeat,
 taking twice as long
 to complete

persevering, overcoming,
 then pursuing,
 outside combat duty,
 a backroom military
 operational speciality –
 intelligence analysis
 of classified information
 and recommendation
 of courses of action
 to those embedded
 in conflict situations

collating, processing
 endless statements
 significant acts
 of military engagement
 and counter-measures
 for conflict management
 became aware
 of relentless
 underhand manipulation,
 rules of engagement
 in abeyance,
 blood-lust rampant,
 slaughter of innocents

believing idealistically
in media exposure
to cure insanity,
he Wikileaked
the sins of war,
and now must pay,
apparently,
for breach of military
confidentiality;

in reality,
for naive acceptance
of military intervention
the means of spreading
democracy and civilization

Gideon Levy

sitting alone
on a low sea wall
behind him
rippling waves
swimming, surfing,
golden sand, sea shells,
sandcastles, beach balls,
fun and games,
laughter, gaiety
Tel Aviv carefree
behind a man
sitting in silence,
contemplating
the vagaries of existence

suddenly,
a crowd around him,
pointing, shouting,
“Traitor! Get out!
This is Israel! Arab, out!
Back to Palestine!
We don’t want peace
Show us an Arab –
One!
who loves Israelis!”

the man, a journalist,
whose pen
evokes such rage
and rejection
sits wryly regarding,
registering
sounds above him,
sounds they ignore,
sounds of choppers
flying over
to cross the border

they stare instead
at him; he who forces
under eyelids
images of oppression
in Palestine
recalling psychotic
Nazi obsession
satanic systematic
extermination

for holocaust survivors
genocide in Palestine
cannot compare
with Nazi death camp
degradation-despair

suddenly
in the midst of abuse
beside him
on either side,
other Israelis,
sitting in silence
confronting,
in this belligerence
fear in the DNA
fear of extermination

but Hitler
hiding his Jewish blood
no longer
now prevails
in Zionist Israel

Steve Biko

(September 1977)

looking for the devil
they saw a man
the image of God

saw
their reflections too
in forms so foul
they hauled him in
stripped him down,
cuffed his hands,
and locked him up,
naked, unwashed;

still they looked
and still they saw,
the image of God

in interrogation
five security officials
saw,
handcuffed,
chained to a grille,
a man,
the image of God,
and smashed his head,
damaged his brain
damaged his body
left him chained
soaking in urine
on the office floor

still they looked
and still they saw
the image of God

in the prison hospital
prison doctors
doing their best,
to reduce the man
to the image
in their minds,
erased the last
glimmer of life,

but couldn't erase
from the damaged head,
the swollen lip,
the naked, unwashed body,
the image of a man
holding fast unto death
his most potent weapon,
the independence
of his mind.

MJ & MD Naidoo

think of MJ
and you see
his big smile,
hear
his spluttering laugh,
see him standing,
arms open wide
ready to embrace
the whole human race.

from a home ruled
by a dictator-father,
contrary to psychiatry
that the abused
turn to abusing,
he turned to loving

¹Natal Indian Congress

MD his inspirational
elder brother,
having rejected God
and father
learned early,
in home and country
ruled by tyranny,
to stand up for his rights –
the ruling passion of his life

following where MD led
into the Communist Party
into the NIC¹
Passive Resistance
Defiance
planning escape routes
for comrades on the run –
MJ garnered the gamut
of the fight for human rights

when MD went to prison,
five years on the Island,
on release into exile,
MJ took up
reins of leadership

activist at university
and in the community;
at the head
of every movement
rejecting ploys
of government
to co-opt leaders
of the revolution
when comrades
seemed to falter,
he held fast
to non-collaboration,
opposing racial elections

separate racial-councils
and Tri-Cameral
puppet-government

after each term in prison,
after he and five others
had holed up
in the USA Embassy
to protest RSA tyranny,
he emerged as ever,
wearing his big smile,
joking, laughing,
arms open wide,
ready to embrace
the whole human race.

but in the race for power
he was just a loser;
believing in
the Freedom Charter
he had not anticipated
the vicious scramble
for position
even before '94

his total commitment
to principle
clearly an impediment
comrades and family
finding him
an embarrassment
and after '94,
of no further use,
left him
to live and die alone

and when he died
his legacy of integrity,
cremated with his body
scattered with his ashes,
was a commodity
of no use in a country
where ubuntu
had become nothing more
than an empty metaphor

Ze Claudio & Maria

she
on the back of the bike,
the first shot
through her to him,
the second fired
to finish him off;
his body dragged
into the bush
her body dumped
in scrub nearby;
an ear cut off
each greying head
to signify successful
execution
of another
contractual obligation.

Ze Claudio, seventy-three,
Maria, partner in bravery,
lived on a plot of land
somewhere in Amazonia
Ze Claudio and Maria,
sentinels both,
guardians
of the green realm,
subjects both
of “Her Majesty,”
Queen of the Forest,
ancient brazil nut tree,
reaching high
to touch the sky,
bestowing blessings
benevolent
of life-sustaining systems
on all of creation

her protectors gone,
gunned down by men,
enslaved forever
to the needs of power,
she stands exposed
to worshippers
of Mammon,
rapacious ranchers
flattening forests
sowing cattle,
for world consumption
that consumes the world.

corpulent cattlemen,
dispensing death,
assassins of the future
assassins of the planet
assassins of the only life
known to us in the vast
expanding universe

corpulent cattlemen
close their preying eyes
to their own
impending ending

Horses Next?

homo sapiens,
wise man
waiting
near the water pan
watching
in broad daylight
the rhino
ambling in his sight
along its chosen track
same way forward
same way back
creature of habit
easy target
near-sighted animal
no chance of survival

wise man
curator of all the land
following his plan,
gouges out
the coveted horn
leaving a carcass
mutilated, torn

wise man
logical, rational
finds his virility
in the penile form
suggestive shape
of the rhino horn
inciting decimation
of rhino population

wise man
with a plan,
when rhino are history
as soon will be
still has sources
for his sexuality
hair, nails, hooves
keratin
same as rhino horn
in composition

without the rhino's
horny nose
wise man must nibble
on his own hair and toes
– or are his eyes
on horses' hooves?

LOVE-HATE

in every relationship
love in unity
hate in duality
I am because
We are together
separate, different
trying to stand
balanced in love
alone

love:
on its own
cloying sweetness
transforming soon
to diabetic hate
leaving you and me
out of sync
and separate

a drop of hate
in a cup of love
to savour sweetness
joins you and me
in our individuality
two in one
paradox of being

Pearl

secure inside her shell
unquestioning,
undemanding,
a shadow,
content to follow
blindfolded,
wherever he led,
into his dreams,
his desires
believing them
her own
until unexpectedly,
his foot came down
to shatter the shell
and end
the mindless
tagging behind

and the shell
fell about her
in piercing shards,
stabbing her heart
tearing out
a bloody consciousness
from the womb
of her nothingness,
leaving her,
a mewling, puking babe
lying abandoned
in her afterbirth

howling, screaming,
tearing out
from her vocal chords
a separate voice,
gouging out
from her eyes

a separate vision,
she saw his dreams
for what they were,
her own personal
nightmare
her absence
in a life vicarious

then she discovered
limbs that moved
of their own volition
in their own direction
and she stopped following
and moved ahead to find
a woman
of independent mind
powerful, strong,
dreaming her own dreams
in existential Being.

Lingam

the same sex organ
to intimate
both love and hate:
love in consecration
hate in desecration.

the same sex organ,
prototype
of knife and gun,
weapon of hate,
used to violate
women and children
in war, out of war;
rapist conqueror
emasculated soul
sating his virility
in their fragility

Man of Hate,
in wanton domination
raider-robber-despoiler

the same sex organ
prototype
of tube and pipe
reaching in
injecting love and life,
merging into one,
two lives,
seeking together
in each other,
in the joy
of their conjoining,
the promised land,
euphoric revelation,
ultimate fulfilment
of Total Being

Man of Love
in joyous consummation
giver and creator.

Gynophobia

(September 1977)

lingam, Sivalingam
symbol of creation
Sivan, symbol of life,

Kali,
his terrifying wife
symbol of death,
in a garland of skulls
blood-sucking tongue
hung
from black, fearsome face
misogynistic
view of femininity
perpetuated
for all eternity

symbol of male paranoia
fear of female power:
gag her, shackle her,
hide her,
in swaddling clothes,
cover her;
protect men from the hex
of her overpowering sex

fear of emasculation
in women's liberation
the penis shrivels
castration creeps
through mind and spirit

rape
psychotic weapon of control
viagra for the castrated soul

Guma-Guma Gangs

dream of freedom
driving flight
across a river
escape from Zimbabwe
into the new democracy
and over razor wire
into Guma-Guma country
on the banks of the grey,
green, greasy Limpopo
and the defiling touch
of groping fingers
clutching at crotches
dream of freedom
gang raped
robbed
murdered
escape from Mugabe
to Guma-Guma country
land of lost humanity

from horror to horror
the heart of darkness

Rape Universal

four-letter word
for brutalising sex
physical violation
blood, mutilation
piercing our eyes
with shame, horror,
at the act of love
turned to torture;

act essential for all life
perverted
all are sullied, all defiled
all protest- demonstrate
against the depravity
against their vulnerability
against the hordes of men
for whom the penis
is a weapon

but eyes wide shut,
and in silence,
we give ourselves
to raping violence
everywhere,
every minute
every day
pervasive rape,
persuasive rape
rape of the mind,
rape of the soul
by those to whom
we give control

they smile at us
from television sets,
catching us
in their commercial nets,
conditioning us
to getting and spending;
and in co-operation
with big businesses,
assist in the economic
rape of masses

politicians
with smiling promises
once elected,
forget their pledges
in the race to rake in
the takings of power
gang-rape
of the trusting voter

rapists of the upper-world
multi-national forces
plunder natural resources
decimate whale, elephant,
deforest in wild abandon
shutting down
earth's thermostat

rapists in the underworld,
abducting, trafficking
men, women, children use,
abuse and abandon

war
rapist signature
of power perversion
foreign domination
consolidation in
soldier-militia-terrorist
rape-subjugation
of women and children

nurtured
in all aspects of culture,
rabid rapists
in every sector
rape – prime feature
of any country's history –
making history,
a record
of rape and murder

penile rape
blatant expression
of truth in repression

MEA CULPA

robbery, rape, homicide,
progeny of the major crime
toleration of abject poverty
people in slum conditions
beggars on city pavements

I look away
in shameful admission
of complicity
in this oppression:
informal settlements
makeshift dwellings,
people eking out a living;
those with beggarly wage
among those with nothing
privileged
preyed upon
in desperation's rage;

I do not see
that daily violence,
do not hear
intimidation
in that silence
do not speak
of that hazardous
existence
in poverty's brute
aggression

far removed
from that struggle
locked behind
bars and alarms
hoping never
to encounter
the horror
of the robber-
rapist-murderer,

offspring
of inhumane conditions
created by my indifference
my callous collusion
leaving responsibility
for others
to the metaphorical
Good Samaritan

concern solely
for my own security
indicts me of crimes
against humanity

Blindness

my mother was
 all that I am not;
 beautiful, well-dressed,
 proper,
 excellent cook,
 fastidious housekeeper,

 no arguments ever
 with my father,
 loved my brothers
 and little sister,
 but didn't know
 what to do with me,
 ragamuffin
 conning my way quietly
 giving her many
 moments of anxiety

even before
 de facto apartheid
 became the law
 people of Indian origin
 being other
 despised, unwelcome
 intruders,
 addressed always
 in terms derogatory
 the men called Sammy,
 the women, Mary,
 distortions of terms
 of Hindu divinity

one day
 in the white CBD,
 with me in tow,
 dressed decently,
 mother, in and out
 department stores –
 watched-followed
 on all shop floors –
 in search of sewing stuff
 to finish a garment's
 collar and cuffs,
 (sewing machine
 in those old days
 common household
 item always)

mother approached
a blonde assistant
no self-service
then in place
choice of goods
in searching gaze
shop assistant
as in market stall
cashier, counter-
manager over all

walking to the counter
mother's subservient
demeanour
evoked the scornful

snort of authority
and before she
could make inquiry
the saleswoman
snapped impatiently
“Yes, what you want Mary?”

stabbed in the heart
my poor mother turned
and walked right out
the pain in her eyes

pulling me about
blind
to mother's humanity
– even worse
her own inhumanity –
that assistant
who could not see
saw only
a lowly coolie.

Unshackled

my forebears,
 labourers from India,
 brought to Black-is-Ugly
 South Africa,
 the same notion,
 embedded fast
 in their culture of caste,
 where it fit as in a jigsaw
 being black and ugly,
 I took on
 criminal identity
 street urchin,
 shameless, stealthy,
 little thief

and running about,
 I once saw
 brown body burnished gold
 a young half-naked knight
 caught in a shaft of sunlight
 and stood
 fixated, enthralled,
 sensations flowing
 in the blood
 beyond the reach
 of ugliness
 carnal claims
 on consciousness

that I learned
 to repudiate
 to claim
 an independent state
 and exploring
 mental capacity
 learned
 and understood
 my lucky escape
 from slavery
 traditional notions
 of womanhood

Senior Citizen

people look at me
and already see
the corpse that I
someday will be
old, cold, dead
and gone to hell

hell's bells,
I'm perfectly well
free and full of energy
going about the business
of Being
-- all they ever see
snow on my head,
"why aren't you dead?"

but golden oldies
bent on making
more than the most
of their journey's ending,
throw off
all traditional notions
all misconceptions
of being
senior citizens

some dance, sing
and have a fling;
some sail the seven seas
on voyages of discovery
some serenely
stay at home
gathering honey
from honeycombs

but patronising people say
"ah, keeping busy, I see"
as they relegate
a real relish for life
to a meaningless shuffle
to a final resting place.

but oldsters watching
youngsters dancing
inside institutions
see puppets on a string,
shuffling
to another's tune

while all the old
and able
having slipped
bonds of servitude
make of Winter
joyful Spring,
and for the first time
have time
to pursue dreams
put on hold while
they were young
and on a string.

now dancing
to their own tunes
they are engaged
in the only true
life adventure
the search for
authentic being

Nonkululeko

(Freedom)

over seventy
and still
the perfect helper
cleaning and creating
order in my disorder
allowing me moments
of pristine pleasure
that do not last
as I go about
displacing, disrupting
all she puts together
for my comfort,
my well-being.

she, creator
of my humanity,
dependent on me
for my humanity,
humbles me
with genuine charity

how easy for me
maintenance
of a semblance
of humanity;
intruder into a former
white suburb,
named formerly,
for a famed architect
of race supremacy
who determined
that she,
Nonkululeko, would be
Roslina to live in poverty,

but he didn't succeed;
true – she cannot read
will never have
a bank account
never drive a car
true – he denied her
status beyond a level
well below her
competence,
the intelligence in her eyes
her enquiring mind
her perceptiveness

I look at her
and marvel,
her strength of will;
in the midst
of desperation
human degradation
bombarded constantly
by criminal activity
how does she
maintain her sanity
her moral integrity?
would I, could I
have overcome
as she has done?

no, Verwoerd
did not succeed;
secure in ubuntu,
she is free
Nonkululeko
she will always be

South African

despite the attempt
to lock identity
in stereotypes
of race-ethnicity
apartheid simultaneously
created ambiguity
double-consciousness
of the colonized mind
through imposition
of European culture
on home-grown tradition

moving between
one and the other,
I grew up knowing
I was other;
but in multi-
cultural diversity
everyone is other
with independent capacity
to pick and choose
who she will be

and I chose
a non-racial identity

while some adhere
to separation
in fixed cultural
custom and tradition
my perception
of my otherness
and the otherness
of others
helps me find
the wisdom
of other minds
of people
of all kinds

now I see
unity in diversity
and I am free

L'CHAIM

choosing life
in the midst of strife

not suicide-bombing
death in martyrdom
violent devastation

not satyagraha
turning truth into a sword
in non-violent opposition
to violence and oppression
enduring abuse,
violation, incarceration
“loving and blessing those
who curse and hate you,
praying for those
who spitefully use you”
demonstrating
moral superiority
enraging those
of lesser integrity

all enemies
confronted thus
sensing righteous
condemnation
retaliate in sadistic fury –
Mahatma Gandhi
assassinated
Martin Luther King
assassinated
Albert Luthuli
killed accidentally

better by far
existential therapy
Viktor Frankl's discovery
in concentration camp
austerity
no confrontation
violent or nonviolent
no adulation of immolation,
no masochistic submission
to maltreatment
no suicidal exposure
to inimical brutality

existential therapy
turning in
to self-sustaining activity
building
in the midst of
diabolical oppression
positive images of
creative self-expression
and reviving
in life-giving ingenuity

Rawabi (The Hills)

phoenix rising

Palestine reviving

Rawabi

born of human ingenuity

the will of Bashar Masri

bringer of glad tidings

life not strife

creator, promoter

turning inimical difference

to cooperative coherence

building together

alongside one another

a pragmatic community

of compassionate humanity

Rawabi

creative resistance

monumental

therapy existential

for concentration camp

survival

Gift Of Laughter

getting the nod
from sponsor angels
three wise men
race off to Bethlehem
not Melchior, Caspar,
Balthazar
not from the East,
but the West
not following a star –
testing cars

three television kings,
madcap Englishmen,
modern Magi,
funning with a fable,
travel in
second-hand
two-seater
convertible-camels
much lower than
hump-backed models

with the wisdom-fun
of inventive minds
they set off
to encounter
all landmines of
dour Middle Eastern
dogged readiness
to bump one another off
in righteousness

following the route
the Magi took
no star GPS divine
as in the holy book
just the spur
of creative humour
turning all and sundry
to comic opportunity

in a maze of borders
closed by bigotry,
travelling roundabout
to get in and out;
from Iraq to Iran-no-entry,
back to Iraq into Turkey;
through Syria
to Iran-no-entry,
back to Iraq into Turkey
and a Kurdish insurgency

racing through the night,
in bucking camel-cars,
away from bloody-minded
holy terror
native to the area
they make it to a safe hotel,
where One and Two
tinker secretly
with camel-car three,
realigning vocal chords
to make it bleat
loudly off-key –
payback for Three’s
gleeful efficiency

next morning
on the road again
into Syria again,
greetings of laughter
Syrian fans
roar of hilarity
bursting over borders
broadcasting the presence
of three wise men
in Arab land
jeopardising
further jolly journeying:
entry into Israeli territory
from surrounding
Arab country
– forbidden absolutely

forced to resort
to subterfuge
three wise men
hide identities
in disguise of camels:
one a Bedouin tent
another an army vehicle,
the third, a Joseph coat,
car of many colours;

thusly camouflaged
abandoning
highway and byway
for no way
fearlessly, spiritedly
finding their own way
in darkness
over Syrian desert
bumpity-bump way

driving into ditches
and sand traps,
hauling and pulling
in the dark,
they knock
second wise car man
flat on his back
with a bump on his head
and then a mirage –
no, no a miracle! –
an ambulance!
and he's off to hospital

end of blind man's buff
in the desert
to risk of recognition
on paved highway
and change of strategy
for anonymity:
from disguise of camels
to disguise of men

three wise car men,
transgendered, hidden
in black burqas,
chaste, traditional women
driving refractory camels,
diving under hoods,
changing spark plugs,
changing wheels,
enter Eretz Israel
incognito
and proceed
to the holy grotto

doffing sectarian
women's wear
for secular male
top western gear
and bearing gifts:
a GOLD-relief medallion,
FRANKINCENSE-shampoo,
and updated 21st century
MYRRH–Nintendo DSi,
they are your conventional
occidental Magi

they find Mary, Joseph,
shepherds, goats, sheep,
traditional nativity props
that they complete
beneath the broad beam
of a large klieg light

having come all faithful,
joyful and triumphant,
they look around
in the silent night,
holy night,
and away in a manger,
no crib for a bed,
what do they see?
nothing could be stranger!
a baby Stig in the manger!

OSK

in the midst of war
of faiths, love and peace,
drone attacks, bombings

in the midst of war
capitalist and socialist
rape of women, children

in the midst of war
Orchestre Symphonique
Kimbanguiste!

finding in Beethoven,
a native African,
bringing peace,
love, harmony,
sermon in song,
Ode to Joy
of the Ninth symphony:
*“Your magic reunites
What custom strictly
divides
All men become brothers”*

in the midst of war
on poverty, hunger,
lack of decent shelter,
symphony orchestra
making miracles
music
from another place
and time
music
opening all
to god within,
moving all
beyond
prejudice and hate

Simon Kimbangu,
inspiration
behind the mission
died in prison
for divesting God
of European dress,
putting Him
in African garb,
giving Him
an African face
and finding
in his own son,
the Christ reborn,
declaring
May twenty-fifth
Congolese Kimbanguiste
Christmas day
free from Mammon

and Santa Clause
a day to celebrate
in worship of the Lord.

people of his church,
musicians of God by night
vendors in the street by day,
building
'cellos and piccolos from
scratch and from scrap,
transcend
mundane circumstance
in search
of spiritual sustenance

after work each day
carrying instruments
over puddles and potholes
making their way
to rehearsals
to endless hours
of pious dedication
in pursuit of musical
perfection
under the baton
of pastor-conductor,
Armand Diangienda
founder of the orchestra
formerly a pilot
now flying higher
on wings of song
*“And when I sing,
I am myself entirely.”*

Hands That Help

'Narayana'
one of God's
many names
'hrudaya'-heart,
'alaya' -temple,
Narayana Hrudayalaya
Hospital: God's
Compassionate Home
hospital-temple
in Bangalore,
Karnataka, southern India
where work is worship,
worship work
*"hands that help better
than lips that pray"*²
mantra of the heart
of surgeon of the heart,

Devi Prasad Shetty,
founder of this facility
based on the necessity
of providing for all
who live in poverty

all patients,
rich and poor alike,
enter God's
Compassionate Home
assured of help
from willing hands
working round the clock
to ensure
no one is turned away
who cannot pay;

and all the poor
find in pious hands
loving care,
at costs they can bear –
preservation
of human dignity
reverence of God
in all humanity

all the rich who
come here too,
for divine help
in serving hands
are in service too;
their patronage
factored
in service-packages
created to alleviate
the burden of the poor;
and in this place
of devout healing,
tangible loving,
rich patients,
giving and receiving,
obtain a double blessing

Devi Prasad Shetty,
doctor to his mentor,
learned this from her:
*“Prayer in action is love,
love in action is service.”*
Mother Teresa’s
compassionate wisdom
guides the pragmatism
of his compassion

Prasad,
his middle name,
in the Vedas of old,
“the state of mind
expressed in
spontaneous generosity”;

“prasad”,
in common understanding –
the offering to God,
a gift of food,
consecrated,
holy communion,
blessed in the giving,
receiving and sharing;

Prasad
name prophetic,
determining a destiny:
the spontaneous sharing
of his humanity

Hillbrow

human angels hover
on compassionate wings,
over Hillbrow, sinking
into stinking degradation

once bohemian,
pulsating, vibrant,
pristine, enterprising,
affluent,
until they set
Mandela free,
to rob it
of apartheid security
sending residents
of long standing
flying out in panic,
leaving empty
nests for cuckoo birds
flying in

from the north,
flying from
war, corruption,
poverty, decadence
flying to
Hillbrow, promise
of abundance

cuckoo birds
flocking in
find slum-drug lords
of their own kind,
controlling nesting
and their rights:
no lifts, no lights,
darkness
up fifty flights
and more;
rubbish, filth

on every floor
no water,
no sewage disposal,
no refuse removal
pervasive smell
of hell

nesting cuckoo birds,
aliens here,
must rise
to challenges
more austere
than those
left behind in fear
and in this place,
alone, insecure,
must abandon fear
to endure,
in the darkness

of decay
and find their own
unaided way;

the will to survive
unleashes
defiant self-reliance;
perverse human
acceptance
of being
in the universe

human angels,
warming to the fire
in this endeavour
descend
with magic wands –
know-how, finance,
plans
to build community
restore dignity,
and, like Lazarus,
Hillbrow
begins to rise again

Ballet Dancer

body in motion
beauty personified
powerful, assured, fluid
movement full of grace
perfection in form
finely chiselled
sculpting space
in interlocking shapes
lifting the earth-bound
out of the mundane

Carlos Acosta, Cuban
pauper turned Prince
bestowing on humanity
the reality of heaven

West-Eastern Divan

two men, *
 from opposing worlds,
 turn duelling into a duet
 a dialogue of philosophy
 in sounds
 of musical harmony,
 bringing together
 mortal enemies
 melting jingoistic obsession
 in symphonic cooperation

sounds of harmony
 flowing from hands
 playing together
 in conjugal creativity
 open the heart
 to listening
 silencing divisive words
 shutting down

the rationalising mind
 the warring ego
 the savage breast

embraced in pure sound
 all differences forgotten
 listening men and women
 listening to one another
 as they play together
 in perfect collaboration
 transform into seraphim
 and together find
 the One God within

the performance over
 ears that listened
 now deafened
 the orchestra
 no longer holding together
 the shouting begins again
 walls go up again
 Arab-Israeli division again

until they come together again
 as one again under the baton
 in the West-Eastern Divan
 Orchestra playing symphonies
 in search of its own humanity
 in Israeli-Palestinian unity

[* The two men: Edward Said, philosopher, Palestinian, Daniel Barenboim, musician, Israeli]

My Father's House

early
in the first millennium
a man on a donkey
rode to the temple
in Jerusalem
where he found
a market place
filled with traders
fleecing the poor

how dare they
desecrate
the house of God;

he overturned
their tables
whipped them
and they fled

early
in the third millennium
a man in Johannesburg
opened his church
turned it
into a haven
for the homeless

how dare he
desecrate
the house of God
the congregation
fled

Central Methodist Church
home to the poor
vendors in the vestibule
tables of goods
small earnings
small survival

Paul Verryn, shepherd
of this immigrant flock,
follower of the Jew
who rode to the temple
in Jerusalem
two thousand years ago

“though he was rich,
yet he
for their sakes
became poor,
that they
through his poverty
might be
rich.”

Women's Voices

men
dogs of war
armed, dangerous
turned out
to guns, weapons
power to destroy

women
prisoners of war
turned in
to the womb of life
away from strife
power to create

and music pours
from women's voices
rising
in the midst of strife
to assert life
creation
even in
incarceration
the human spirit
triumphant!

from days of antiquity
quest for immortality
mathematical equation
endlessly seeking solution

so we postulate
as we incinerate
a soul incarnate
that we separate
for life forever
in the hereafter
transmigration to another plane
so we do not die in vain
but waken to eternity