



LILIES OF THE VALLEY



LILY SWARN

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by

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July 2017

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by **Lily Swarn**

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Prologue

Lilies of the Valley

There are some emotions that enrich our beings when they “flash upon the inward eye”, as Wordsworth would say. The essays in this book *Lilies of the Valley*, which is in your hands now are blossoms that germinated in my mind when it was aglow with the magic of the ambrosial hour. The dawn holds myriad promises in its flame colored veil as it descends from the heavens. This time has a mystical pull for me. Thoughts and reveries stream in on calm waves. Most of these are condensed bits of my own personal life mantras. They are laced with couplets and snatches of songs that I love reciting or humming. This bouquet is my offering to all those who love me.

*“Jhim Jhim varse Amrit Dhaara
Man peeve sunn Shabad bichaara”*

Gently ,drop by drop the stream of nectar trickles within
Mind drinks it in , hearing and reflecting on the word of the Shabad

- Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji

I wrote these words, sitting in an armchair in my late son’s room in the wee hours of the dawn. There was a hallowed aura in the air as if his spirit was watching and smiling benevolently. The strains of holy scriptures wafted in from the window. An odd cuckoo bird often called its mate plaintively from a lone mango tree. My early morning walks were a series of revelations and solitary rumination. The thoughts encapsulated here could just as much be yours as they are mine, I am sure of that.

Loss has an endearing way of ennobling the sufferer. My grief gave me simple insights which I had overlooked most of my life. I started believing in the little life mantras that I taught myself. I feel immense pleasure in sharing these precious little Laddoos (Indian sweets) with all of you. I think you will take away a little bit of me after reading each one of these pint sized musings.

I have peppered these small bundles with sayings, adages, songs or couplets in my native tongue. I have tried to translate those bits so that you may chew the cud of their Hindustani color. I leave you with these notes that are precious to me as they have endeared me to myself. Imagine a hill lad playing his flute in the hills and you are bound to relish these light, tongue in cheek soliloquies.

Maaye ni Mai kinnu aakhaan
Dard vichhode da haal ni
O mother, Who do I tell
this pain of Separation ..

Dukhan di roti, soolaan Da saalan
Aahan da Baalan Baal
Bread of sadness ,sauce of spikes
Make a fire of laments

- Shah Hussain

With deep respect in my heart I dedicate this collection to my mother, Baljit Wasu who went to her heavenly abode on Valentines Day 2016.



YOU CAN NOT HIDE LILY AMONG THE THORNS!

From the tears of Eve you are born and the milk of
Hera goddess you are grown,
You are the fleur de lis, a symbol of royalty,
O lily you signify light, life and perfection!
when Venus saw a lily such a pure milky beauty
the jealous Venus created an ugly pistil,
In its centre, marring the flower's charm but blessed it
with fertility and erotic distil!

To an expectant mother show her lily and rose,
if she likes rose the child will be a girl,
Like poetry and if she prefers lily a boy will be
there like prose is an old wives tale!
To gild refined gold, to paint the lily is wasteful
and ridiculous excess is true to tell,
Shakespeare would scold the lily for stealing its white-
ness from a lady's hand is a gale!

In the song of songs the lily blooms in valleys,
in the poems of poets as a pure white flower!
In waters of serene lakes and ponds water lilies
converse with moon with whispers of lover!
From a primordial water lily emerged Ra the Sun god,
who dispatched darkness into night!
As lotus it is dearer to the Pantheon of Hindu gods as
the symbol of energy centers and light!

From the tears of Eve you are born and the milk of
Hera goddess your fragrance grown,
You are the fleur de lis, a symbol of royalty,
O lily you can not be hidden by any dark thorn!

- Dr. LANKA SIVA RAMA PRASAD

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1. GOSSIP

Interestingly enough , gossip can be a fascinating subject by itself. Men are as guilty of indulging in this supposedly harmless sport as women. They merely add an aura of dignity to it with a sombre countenance while relaying the most bizarre and juicy news. George Harrison, called it the 'Devil's Radio'. 'The person who relays gossip is to be feared more than the gossip that he is relaying.

The only time one hates gossip is when it concerns one's own self. Sometimes it can be rather enlightening as it tells you things about yourself that you were not aware of! The sparkle and twinkle in a person's eyes when he is belittling or running down a fellow human is unparalleled. A gleam and glitter in the eyes and a conspiratorial whisper are the hallmarks of a gossip monger. There probably is a slight difference between malice of intent and mindless inane conversation "Have you heard the latest?", or "You will never believe what I am going to tell you," or the very dramatic Punjabi version... "*Hai main mar jaanva..., ohne te kithhe da nahi chhadeya*"! (I wish I were dead .She has shamed me so much that I can't show my face anywhere) A few years ago, it would be phrased thus. "*Haner pai gaya.... bura hi haal haiji*" (How awful that is ! It's truly disgusting!) I totally agree with Frank A Clarke's theory that "Gossip needn't be false to be evil-there's a lot of truth that shoudn't be passed around." "*Arre bhai hum to kuchh nahi jaante, humne toh udti udti suni hai*" (I have no clue about its authenticity. I have only heard it over the grapevine)

(12.5.201)

2. SMILES

“What sunshine is to flowers, smiles are to humanity. These are but trifles, to be sure; but scattered along life’s pathway, the good they do is inconceivable.” said Joseph Addison. When a kind heart scatters rich smiles in sad hearts, a fountain of warmth radiates. The proverbial ‘Lighting up’ of the visage, goes deep into the eyes when you long to croon,.. “*Kisi ki muskurahton pe ho nisar*”! (Be a sacrifice unto someone’s smile) The most glamorous curve on a woman is definitely her smile. Have you ever known stony faced, stiff necked women to be attractive? Perhaps you have, but maybe you were not taught to be “*Khideya mathha*” (blossoming countenance) by your wise grannies. Mother Teresa said “We shall never know all the good that a simple smile can do”. The mysterious smile that one breaks into when alone is perhaps the most natural and original, without any hint of artifice. The plastic smiles of celebrities must be making their cheeks hurt and their whitened teeth lose their shine. Nature teaches us that the sun will shine after every storm, therefore the lady in the Punjabi folk song sings “*Chittiyaan kapaah diyaan phuttiyaan, haada ni patt hare hare, aakh ni nanaane tere veer nu, kade taan bhaida hasseya kare*” (The cotton blooms are white and the leaves are green, O sister in law please ask your brother to laugh once in a while), The smile that glows through tears is the most attractive and a courageous smile is the most endearing., “*Muskuraata hua, haseen o jameel, ek chehra gulaab sa kuchh hai...*” (There is a smiling beautiful face that is like a rose).

(14.5.2015)

3. DAWN

“Lose an hour in the morning and you will spend all day looking for it,” said Mr. Whately. Dawn is the magical bewitched hour. The first light creeps up shyly like a blushing bride in her tomato-red finery. The sky slowly unfolds the good Lord’s brilliant hues and shades in mysterious bloody gashes. The soldier – sun who died, gasping in his own life blood last dusk, is breathing fire again. The bells from the temple ring cheerily, heralding the birth of a new day. The divine sound of bells tinkling merrily in the Temple and the azaan from the Mosque wake the faithful to prayer. The shabad kirtan from the Gurudwara, soothes me on my walk. “It’s a new day, it’s a new way, and I fly up to the sun. When the sun shines on the mountain and the night is on the run”, I hum the lyrics of the song we sang, in our halcyon days. The mauve of the jacaranda, the flaming orange of the gulmohar and the buttery cream of the jasmine vie for attention. The koel koochoos plaintively distracting me with her incessant pleas! *“Chali hai naseem-e -sehar dheere dheere, gulon par karegi asar dheere dheere, tumhari mohabbat mein hum mar mitenge, magar tum ko hogi khabar dheere dheere.”* (The morning breeze blows softly . It will show its effect on the flowers gradually. I will waste away in your love, but you will hear about it gradually)

The intoxicating morning breeze is like a potion which is a panacea. it revives even the most withered soul. It soars and rises with the beady eyed eagle and breaks into the ‘Giddha’ (the folk dance of Punjab performed by women on happy and festive occasions) *“Je mundeya meri tore vekhni, gadwa lai de chaandi da, lakk hile majaan jaandi da.”!* (if you want to watch my swaying gait, get me a silver pot and then see my style as I go to fill water).

(15.5.2015)

4. HYPOCRISY

“The true hypocrite is the one who ceases to perceive his deception, the one who lies with sincerity,” said Andre Gide. This sent several chills up my spine on this clammy, sticky monsoon noon. Not all those, who use holy water are saints. The affectation of piety, the sanctimoniousness of some beings can nauseate and choke an unsuspecting onlooker! Cruising along life’s *“bhool bhullayiaans”*, (mazes) how often have we been caught off-guard, by an innocent looking, holier-than-thou, Brutus clone? The two-faced, perfidious human who brutally shakes your faith in goodness over and over again? The wolves in sheep’s clothing are not a novelty. They lurk lasciviously in our own homes, often as kinsmen and brethren as *“Yeh toh apne hi hain”* (Oh these are our own)

Hypocrisy is attractively bubble-wrapped, in the halo of moral indignation. The art of hypocrisy is honed and cultivated by brandishing the sharp-edged swords of mendacity and beguilement. I wish we could all live with the advice that we give others. What fun it would be if there was no need to resort to pretense and fabrication? There would once again be the era of, *“Munda moh leya taveetaan wala, te damri da sakk mallke..”* (she seduced the boy who wore charms and amulets by rubbing a two penny worth of rose color on her lips). The fraudulent vibes can then go and hide themselves, shame facedly in mukry corners! *“Zindagi mein toh sabhi pyaar kiya karte hain, mai toh marr kar bhi merijaan tumhe chaahoonga”*, (Everyone loves you when they are alive but I will desire you even after I am dead) would once again resound in the polished corridors of Kalyug (The Age of Downfall. The fourth and final era of the spiritual evolution of mankind).

A luminosity is attached with genuineness and sincerity. *“Raat bhi hai kuchh bheegi bheegi, chand bhi hai kuchh madham madham, tum aao to aankhein khole, soyi hui payal ki chhamm chhamm..”* (The night is a tad wet, the moon is a bit dim. If only you would come. The sound of my sleeping anklets would then awaken and say Chham chham).

(4.8.2015)

5. COFFEE, TEA or ME

“Sleep is the symptom of caffeine deprivation’! Although I am an ardent devotee of a steaming cup of tea, it is difficult to ignore the sensual lure of a fragrant, aromatic cup of coffee either. At times, I almost feel guilty of sharing my affections between them. After all, they are both caffeine at the end of the day, aren’t they? A few centuries ago both petroleum and coffee had no value at all. Isn’t it shameful how one causes war and bitterness between nations and how the other, pompously has cafes made exclusively to pay homage at her altar?

The Western Hemisphere first showed me the willing enslavement, to this bitter, dark fluid. The morning begins with the heavenly whiffs of dependency floating up the stairs into happy nostrils, still under covers The willing slave, creeps down the stairs, and fills a cup of the inviting, black beauty. To my great awe, it goes down without sugar or milk. How ‘small town’ and old fashioned am I. The defenseless vulnerability of a coffee deprived human is visible in the huge, disposable Styrofoam glasses that each individual is seen carting around like a zombie, wherever he or she goes. The price of gourmet, branded coffee is astronomical to the extent of being ludicrous. Granted that it smells like freshly ground heaven and that it qualifies for the quaint epithet of “*Deja brew*” but does it have to orchestrate people’s mornings to it’s tune?

The pure flavour of coffee is now glamorized and corrupted with so many different flavours. Your poison could be caramel, hers could be hazelnut and he could ask for cinnamon or chocolate. The list is shamelessly long. T.S. Eliot had measured out his life in “coffee spoons” while most others feel that this hug in a mug restores the buzz. ‘Black as the devil, hot as hell; pure as an angel, sweet as love.’

One doting gent went so far as to say that if he were a woman he would wear coffee as a perfume. A bit much, if you ask me. The

assurance brimming forth from a decent cup of coffee is palpable. Although the calm serenity pervading, a lounge style, coffee café is heartening, give me the hustle bustle of an Indian Coffee House anytime, with the unbeatable aroma of freshly ground coffee beans befuddling the senses, right from the moment they hit the filter. One shot of the brew and you can talk nineteen to the dozen on politics and religion with a maniacal glint in your eyes, No need for crooning of moony ghazals like *“Tum aaye ho na shab e intezaar guzri hai, talaash mein hai seher, baar baar guzri hai.”* (Neither you came nor the endless evening of waiting passed. The dawn is still hunting. It passed by again and again)

5.8.2015

6. TREES

This quaint Welsh proverb rings in my mind, whenever I bite into a luscious, juicy apple. 'A seed hidden in the heart of an apple, is an orchard invisible.' The caressing, whispering, lullaby singing magnificent trees that were my closest friends in childhood still live in my mind's eye. The lime green, lacy, frothy and shimmering canopy of a freshly leafing Gulmohar, swaying seductively to the summer breeze is a leitmotif for so much in life. The gnarled and knotted trunks of ancient, rock-solid Banyan trees are silent testimony to the potent life force. Steeped in history and abuzz with folklore, the Banyan is sinister and ghostly on shadowy, eerie winter nights. The giddily dancing heart shaped leaves of the Peepul tree, remind you of the worshippers who light earthen lamps at their roots. Legends refer to the spirituality and reverence of this tree. Literature lovers can never shake away the fascinating spectacle of Birnam Wood moving, in Shakespeare's Macbeth.

How can we mutilate and murder 'God's alphabets' with which he writes his thoughts in shining green? Groves and thickets teeming with wildlife are like temples to be venerated, not desecrated. The cedars and pines, stand like sentinels on mountain ranges, promising an oxygenated life. The famous Punjabi poet Shiv Batalvi's dying verse "*Kuchh rukh mainu putt lagde ne, kuchh rukh lagde maanvaan..... kuchh rukh mere baabbe vaakan, pattar taanvaan taanvaan.* (Some trees look like my son and other like my mother. Some are like my grandfather with a leaf here and there) personifies trees, like no other and never fails to bring a lump to my throat.

If trees had tongues, they might share many secrets of clandestine rendezvous', or they may choose to remain stoically silent. Who knows? How would Hindi film heroines have danced and sung in clingy chiffon saris if there were no trees? The lone yew tree in the graveyard often converses with the ghosts of the long passed-on churchgoers.

“Sehra ka ik darakht hun ,tanhaayion mein gum; aisa na apni zaat mein khoya kare koi..” (I am a lonesome tree of the deserts .No one should be so engrossed in themselves). The poetic reference to trees is indeed natural

“Ik darakht hai teri yaad ka jo murjhaayega na kabhi , meri aankhein jo paani isko roze deti hai.” (There is a tree of your memory that will never wither away for my eyes water it daily).

(7.8.2015)

7. RAQS

“Let your life lightly dance on the edges of time like dew on the tip of a leaf”, suggested Rabindranath Tagore. Dancing to life’s mercurial tunes can be your “*Baanye haathh ka khel*”, (the work of your left hand) if you love dancing. ‘Raqs,’ the mystic Persian word for dance, the language of the soul waiting to unwind in the hidden recesses of your being. Dance is actually lucid poetry which has sprouted arms and legs. The twirls, whirls and pirouettes lend wings to your fantasies

Cavorting and prancing, throwing all care to the winds in gay abandon, is like slowly edging closer to the cosmic dance. A baby learns to jiggle and wiggle its wee little body instinctively. The spiritual rhythm exists in each one of us. The seeds sprout in the drum beats and foot tappings of folk dances. Our ego dances a merry dance too! The “*raqs-e-anaa*” (dance of the ego) is not vastly different from the “*raqs e sharer*”, the dancing spark.

The Sufi dervishes whirled in meditative splendour, with their axis, constantly centered in one position while the wheel moves on it. If you have the air of a dervish inside you, you simply float over the traumatic tossing seas of life, oblivious to its stinging whiplashes. A light footed, swordsman in battle, was also a dancer of sorts. He fought to the beat of a rhythm, jumping, skipping and tossing up in the air like the “*Nihangs*” (an armed Sikh warrior order)’, at *Anandpur Sahib* (The Holy City of Bliss. Sacred to Sikhs)

Wedding festivities kick start with a wakeup call to the sleeping villagers to congregate for a dancing marathon. “*Shava ve jaago aayiya. Ni mai nacheen nacheen nacheen, ni mai agg vaango machaan, gidda paao kudiyo ni majaan sadiyo.... nach lao ni kudiyo khed lao ni kudiyo, hassna khedna reh jaoga, koi bujjadd jeha jatt lai jaoga.....*”. (Get up and dance the Giddha folk dance O you stylish girls. Dance now because soon a funny man will take you away after marriage.)

Sometimes, if you grow up in a house full of siblings, you learn to dance, while waiting for your turn, outside the rest room door gyrating in squeamish agony.. No kidding! I do know such a person .

The primal dance that permeates our beings is the dance of love. The peacocks know it, and so do the hornbills, albatrosses, the sea horses and the garden snails! The courtship dance is a spectacle honed to perfection by the birds of paradise. Bulle Shah, the Sufi saint says... *“Saanu qibla ton qaaba sohna yaar dissenda, saanu ghayal kar ke pher khabar na layyiaan, tere ishq nachaaya kar ke thhayya thhayya..... jhabde wahudi ve tabiba, nahi te main mar gayiaan.* (Its qibla, its Kaaba where lives my love. You never once asked about me after wounding me. Your love has made me dance like mad. Come, my healer. Forsaken, I am sad).

(8.8.2015)

8. THE “F” WORD

We live in a world where ‘fat’ is definitely an ‘f’ word!. The gaze that is turned towards a big built person could be scornful, pitying, disdainful or disgusted. Take your pick of pencil thin, reed-like ladies tottering in emaciated glory with gaunt cheeks and model-like, fleshless skeletons barely held together with tautly stretched skin on one hand. On the other hand are pleasantly plump, cheerfully chubby, Ajanta – Ellora inspired temple statuettes with the ample proportions of a ‘Khajuraho’ sculpture, come alive .

The cardiologists scream themselves hoarse, explaining to the ignorant multitudes that if it tastes good, spit it out. The medical industry goes laughing cheekily to their overflowing banks. Whether it is a bulimic, anorexic or a flabby obese human, those associated with diets and gymnasiums have their coffers overflowing. In some towns snobby, snooty dietitians, have a regular set of society butterflies whose only mortal fear is the adding on of an inch of flesh. I do agree with the lady who told me, that if nature had intended our skeletons to be visible, God would have put them on the outside of our bodies.

My personal battle with the body I loved, began rather young. The wedding day loomed ominously as the day of reckoning when svelte, bony cages were supposed to rule the roost. I panted and puffed, I swept and swabbed, I sweated and fasted till I emerged a leaner, different looking human. My pretty cheeks vanished, and the curves ditched me for another! It is so much more fun to throw one's weight around rather than bear the weight of drudgery. I wish I could have lived in the era of Peter Paul Reuben, the Flemish baroque painter, who believed in real women. Its a delight to see his paintings, depicting gorgeous, curvaceous creatures just like the good Lord intended them to be!

Apparently the days of “*Gaj gamini*” (The lady with the walk of a female elephant) are receding. A beer bellied, broad in the beam

gent can be a film star in India, but a real looking lady, is put on the shelf ,to dry out her tears. The first thing you lose in your diet, is your sense of humour. A hungry man is always “*Khaane ko parta hai!!*” (ready to bite). Portly, rotund people are warm, genial creatures. Let us be ‘them’ and let the others proclaim “I am allergic to food; every time I eat, it breaks out into fat.”*biwi moti uska bhi bada naam hai...* “(The man with the plump wife is also very famous) are the lyrics of a popular film song

In my state Punjab, they say “*Badi sohni! khaande peende ghar di’!*” (She is so pretty. Looks like she is from a well to do family) The endearments are generally “*makhan de pedeyo, malai de doneyo.*” (O my pat of butter,oh my pot of cream).*Haan tum bilkul vaisi ho jaisa maine socha thha.* Yes,(You are just as I had imagined you would be!)

10.8.2015

9. FIRE

The most tangible of all the mysteries that this universe has to offer, is 'fire'.. *aag, agni*. The flamboyant, blazing, orange tongues of leaping fire are actually celestial sparks, that you can peer into for hours, without being able to unravel their seething heart. The dynamism and zest in human hearts has the capacity to be a conflagration. On the other hand, a holocaust of fervent fanatics can paint a perfectly beautiful heaven into hell. A raging forest fire is a powerful force. It can be seen for miles, fuming and scalding whatever comes in its way while looking like a million bucks. Kindling even a small campfire can be tough if you lack the technique. The fire in our hearts, though has to be like molten lava, oozing out in a passionate arousal of rainbow dreams. "*Chulhe agg na ghadde de vich paani, chhaddeyaan di joon buri!*" (Bachelors have a tough life for there is no fire in their hearth and no water in their pot).

Man has always had the knack of playing with fire, whether its hearts or bullets. The thrill of looking up at the night sky, to see the fireworks, lighting up the firmament, with the "*Aatish baazi*", must have started with the Mughal emperor, Babar's first artillery fire in india. "*Ikk aag ka dariya hai, aur doob ke jaana hai*", (Love is an ocean of fire and to get across one must drown in it) was perhaps the most apt summing up of "*ishq*". (love) Fire mesmerizes and hypnotizes. Fire thrills and intrigues, making one forget that it has a burning and raging heart.

The irony is that ,though a tiny spark can become a smoking and throbbing fire , yet all fires go out eventually .Who can explain to a heart on fire to wear protective gear? Even gold has to prove its purity by the test of fire! Fire in the heart , often befuddles and bemuses the head with smoke .The same fire , both enlightens and consumes . The moth and the candle are ample testimony to this saga. "*Shama jis aag mein jalti hai numaish ke liye, hum ussi aag mein gumnaam se jal jaate hain.*" (We burn unknown in the same fire in which the candle burns to show off itself) and "*Bujh*

gayee ek aah mein shamme hayaat, mujh ko ek aah sard ne thhandi kiya...” (The candle of life was snuffed out with one sigh. I was struck down by one cold sigh)

“Zulmat kade mein mere shab e gham ka josh hai, ikk shamma hai daleel e sahar , so khaamosh hai”.

(In this my place of darkness there is this fervour and emotion of this night of grief. There is a candle which is a sign of the morning and that too is silent)

11.8.2015

10. CURIOSITY

“Curiosity is a willing, a proud, an eager confession of ignorance” said Rubinstein. Curiosity, the lust of the mind, thrives on its own aching urges. We do realize that umpteen people, saw the apple fall but Newton asked, why? When one is, all agog with a burning almost impertinent desire, to know something, one is the fabled cat, that curiosity killed. A scrutinizing, inquiring mind will always hunger for the what, when, why, where and how of people and things. *“Ni aji phir kithhe chali hain morni bannke morni bannke?”* (where are you going today all dolled up like a pea hen?) It could take myriad avatars though. The nosey, meddling neighbour who surreptitiously peers from behind curtains. The snoop, intrusive relative who puts on a genial smile and a concerned expression, while busily extracting secrets with a spade and a hoe, from a naive child. The genuinely concerned, well meaning friend, who wants to take away your pains and sorrows. The gossipy *“auntie ji”*, whose sole mission in life is news-mongering and purposefully doing the rounds with a banner of “Breaking news”, on her vicious face.

It is curiosity, though that makes the world go round. Einstein always told the world that he had no special talents, he was only passionately curious. The rapturous, wide eyed awe on a little child’s visage when he hears about the movement of the stars, the sun and the moon is priceless. Natural curiosity leads to new ideas, new jobs, new industries. Human curiosity is perhaps, the most potent, secret force in the world. Those who hate you or those who care for you will go to any extreme to know all about you, though for totally opposite reasons. The eavesdropper, the sightseer and the hacker are all curious cats, though hugely apart. A simmering itch to relinquish your ignorance will either take you far or push you into the doldrums *“Lekin yaar puchhan vich ki harz hai?”* (Oh well! What’s the harm in asking?) Even the gopis, who loved Krishna asked, *“Bataa de sakhi ri, kaun galli gayo shyam?”* (Tell me O friend, in which street has Krishna gone?)

“Bicycle chalai jaande ho, oh tuhaadi ki laggdi jeenu pichhe bithhai jaande ho?” (Who is that sitting pillion on your bicycle?) or even *“Hum aapke hain kaun?”*, (What is my relationship with you?.) smacks of curiosity! Right?” *Jaane woh kyon thhe, kaun thhe, aaye thhe kiske liye yahaan, woh jo fishaar-e-waqt mein, bojha sa ik dhho gaye?”*(Wonder who all those people were who came ,why they came and crossed this powerful time in the world with a heavy burden) *Hum ko kis ke gham ne maara, yeh kahaani phir sahi, kis ne toda dil hamaara, yeh kahaani phir sahi.* (As for me -let’s talk about whose separation and grief killed me ,some other time !)

13.8.2015

11. THE HALLOWED NIGHT

“I arise from dreams of thee ,
In the first sweet sleep of night
When the winds are breathing low,
And the stars are shining bright”... P B Shelley.

The hallowed night like a mysterious story told by a master wordsmith, keeps the wondrous awake. Its velvety, silky, star spangled texture holds promises, that whisper in the perfumed breezes of the ‘*motia*’ and ‘*chameli*.’ Like the rare black rose, dark and brooding, night, conspires with the moon, her hand maiden .She spins fairy tales for kids, murky plans for the devilish, love balms for the star struck and keeps it all under wraps. The romantic poets like Byron thought that night could not have been made for slumber. Its protective, motherly bosom hides the tears of many soaked pillows, the fears and phobias of many distraught humans, the “*Chaar dinaan da pyaar ve rabba , badi lambi judaai*”, (Love is short while separations are endless), genre of songs and the hopes and dreams of the tender years .

Nights are supposed to have magical properties that can convert the ordinary into special, with their wizardry and witchcraft. Ideas seem rosier, women look prettier and anything seems possible under the enveloping, comforting, black mantle of night. The benevolent moonlight , seeps into the nooks and crannies of hearts, diffusing a glimmering glow of enchantment.

The midsummer nights’ dreams are palpable and real .Souls, floating on the far off horizons of the other world, softly exchange their addresses and meet in the silent portals of night. The stars light the way, for a myriad dreams that go whooshing through the asteroids and planets on a journey of discovery. Night also frightens and terrifies the evil in men, even though it harbours the wicked and provides havens for the truly bizarre. It rakes up your soul and conscience

and shakes you up “*Raataan kaaliyaan, kalli nu darr aave*” (The nights are dark and I am terrified to be alone). The pitch black of a moonless night can make the wolves howl painfully in the jungles, baying like raw, oozing wounds of a grieving soul.

Strangely, the ethereal aura of night gives one visions of immortality. “*Chashm e nam muskuraati rahi raat bhar, aap ki yaad aati rahi raat bhar*” (moist eyes smiled all night long) ...”*Raat aankhon mein dhhali, palkon pe jugnu aaye; hum hawaaon ki tarah jaa ke usse chhoo aaye*”.... (All night my damp eyes kept smiling .Glow worms came on my eyelids, I went and touched her like the breeze) “*Umr jalwon mein bassar ho yeh zaroori toh nahi, har shab e gham ki sahar ho yeh zaroori toh nahi; neend toh dard ke bistar pe bhi aa sakti hai, unki aagosh mein sar ho yeh zaroori toh nahi.....*”. (its not necessary that all of life will be a bed of roses, and not every night will have a dawn. One can sleep on a bed of thorny pain, its not necessary that my head will be on your shoulder).

14.8.2015

12. TEARS

“Tears of joy are like the summer rain drops pierced by sunbeams”, a poetic gent once wrote. I wonder what makes these pearls so precious that they ignite the earth, wherever they fall. The inside of a tear drop is illumined by the essence of achingly compressed and suppressed molten emotions. The flood gates of the Bhakhra Nangal dam open. They are quite like the valve which the heaving heart opens, to let out the barrage of surging, roaring and bellowing breakers of pure grief.

Women are supposed to wear their tears like jewels, shining like mirrors in their ocean-like eyes. Diving in their fathomless depths can either be a treasure hunt, almost like the enthusiastic boyish divers of the Benares ghats or a traumatically tragic, senseless abyss of stagnant, putrid waters. Unapologetic crying, is a blessing, otherwise we would be stony hearted automations. Pathhar ke sanam! (Statues of stone)

Tears water our “aatmaas”, (souls) like the monsoons quench the parched, dusty and yearning plains of the Indo - Gangetic plain. A whimpering sob or a howling wail, both are watered by the bursting, brimming rivers of Punjab. The curses and sighs of many a legendary Shirin-Farhaad, Heer - Ranjha Sohni -Mahiwal, and Sassi-Punnu can be heard in the deafening rapids and waterfalls of the Jhelum and Satluj, of Ravi, Chenab and Beas. The hills ring and echo, with the plaintive sounds of “*Kapde dhonvaan naale rovaan kunjooa...*” (I cry as I wash clothes)” *Chhappdi vich amb tarda oye ais judaai naalon, rabb paida hi naa karda*. “(The mango floats in the pond, if only instead of this separation from my beloved, I had not been born)”

Strangely, both sweat and tears are salty. One wrenches the body and the other wrings the soul! The wisest thing that I heard from my rather astute granny, was that tears clear the eyes so that

we are not blinded by the dust and grime which is rampant in this world!

“Raggon mein daudate phirne ke hum nahi qaayal, jab aankh se hi na tapka toh phir lahu kya hai... (We need not be obliged to race through the veins. Until it drips through the eyes, it cannot be blood)

“Yun toh har shaam umeedon mein guzar jaati hai ,aaj kuchh baat hai jo shaam pe rona aaya; kabhi taqdeer ka maatam kabhi duniya ka gilla, manzil e ishq mein har gaam pe rona aaya. (Generally each evening passed in hope but today there is something amiss for I cried as soon as it was dusk. Sometimes I weep at my fate and at others I have complaints against the world .I cried at every step of my journey to the destination of love)

16.8.2015

13. HUGS

“A hug is a smile with arms, a laugh with a stronger grip”, thought Terri Guillemets.

It sounds like a huge Christmas cake_walking up to you and smothering you with love. Growing up in a country where public displays or physical shows of affection were not considered a great idea, its interesting to see how easily this generation has adapted, to the overwhelming power of hugs. A mama’s bear hug is in another league altogether. There is no hurt, physical or emotional which does not react to the healing and soothing power of an enveloping pair of arms, cocooning you in a safe and secure haven. Reassuring vibes miraculously transmit when you are cradled by human arms. I would guess that eternal memories of a baby’s shielded and guarded place in a mother’s womb, beckon and call. A cranky, fidgety baby calms down when it is swaddled in a warm blanket, that mimics a pair of arms. A hug is a human bandage for any ache or hurt ...’*Dard e dil, dard e jigar*”. (Aches of heart)

The cool, coiffured, perfumed and manicured mamas somehow are a step behind the large, padded, cooing and singing, loud voiced grannies who could make all woes vanish with a gigantic, bone crushing hug. We are reminded often that you can’t wrap love in a box but you can wrap a person in a hug .Easy breezy !The mental visual of a little girl running into her daddy’s arms when he comes back from work is a strong reiteration of the need for a strong pair of arms, that silently proclaim “*Mai hoon na*”! (I am there for you) How often we hear of friends telling us, that since I cannot be there physically, I am hugging you with my prayers. The encircling, protective sheath of love transmits positivity when someone holds you close and enfolds you in their arms. A cuddle or a squeeze is a quiet, wordless bond to cherish and harbor the other in safe waters.

People can clasp and embrace with a mere glance or a single word. The big fat 'japphie', (embrace) is the most therapeutic of all medicines. It's the steroid of all drugs and its side effects last a lifetime! A nestled, nuzzled, coddled child makes for a confident, emotionally secure adult. Enshrining a beloved with reverence is the ultimate honour you can bestow on them. The walls of your heart can hug the best for that is where you can keep your beloved safe for as long as you live, and perhaps forever after ? *"Kabhi yun bhi aa meri aagosh mein ke meri nazar ko khabar na ho; tujhe bhoolne ki dua karoon, aur meri dua mein asar na ho .."*. (Come into my arms quietly so that even my eyes don't behold you. I may pray to God that I should forget you but my prayers should go unanswered)

"Dekhiye paatein hain ushshaaq buton se kya faiz ? ik birahman ne kaha hai, ke yeh saal achha hai."

(Let us see what rewards lovers receive from these idols .One soothsayer has said that this year is going to be good).

(18.8.2015)

14. TEMPTATION

Who can forget the charm of the luscious, pale lemon guavas dangling alluringly from across the wall? The irresistible, compelling, impulsive itch to jump over to the neighbor's garden. The seductive enticement of forbidden fruit is possibly hiding in our DNA, thanks to father Adam. Opportunity may knock only once but temptation leans on the door bell. It rattles our wise thinking, well disciplined brains. All our "Hail Marys, "*Mool mantars*", "*Kalmas*", "*Hanuman chaalisaas* ", make valiant attempts to bring us to our senses but the devil rears his ugly, grotesque head repeatedly. His garb is enticing. He simpers and fawns; he smiles and flatters; he lures and tantalizes; he coaxes and snares. Ah, the Temptation Devil, is well trained. This guy knows his business like the back of his hand.

We are oft warned to yield to temptation, as it may never pass our way again. Well, it seems alright to indulge in that melt-in-the-mouth '*Gelaavati kebaab*' (a soft kebab famous from Tunde Kebab in Lucknow) once in a while but woe be to the one who is planning sacrilege. The come-hither looks, the magnetism, the drawing power of temptation, makes one a willing slave to its spell. Who wants life, when death beckons with that dripping charisma? Benjamin Franklin felt, "If passion drives you, let reason hold the reins". Oh come on, Benj! I like the guy who said, he could resist everything, except temptation. "*Theeva mundri da thheva, saari umar karaan main teri seva, ni khwaabaan vich aan waaliye.*" (I will always take care of you, you who come into my dreams) goes a popular song.

We may often slink away shame facedly, from temptation but we do leave our mailing address. This glorious world is brimming over with so many 'naymatein' (blessings) Perhaps that is why, we had the concept of a 'Self Control Bell' in school. The two minute brush with our own little devils when we were supposed to stand

straight without fidgeting and talking seemed like a lifetime. A sneaky lick of the orange bar (ice candy) gave us away since it coloured our tongues .A furtively exchanged book , a juicy piece of gossip. Hai!

“Par karun kya yunhi taskeen zara hoti hai, aarzu ik taraf dil se juda hoti hai; jis ne dekhi ho woh chitwan koi uss se poochhe, nigah-e-naaz ki taaseer bhi kya hoti hai”.

(What should I do if my desires are calmed only by looking at her. Only those who have seen her beautiful countenance will understand the effect of the glance of love)

“Tu falatuuno - arastu hai, tu zohra parviin, tere qabze mein hai garduun, teri thhokar mein zameen,haan uthha, jald uthha, paaye muqqaddar se jabiin, main bhi rukne ka nahiin, waqt bhi rukne ka nahiin....” “Kaifi Azmi

(You are Aristotle’s philosophy, Venus, Pleiades’s
You control the sky, the earth at your feet
Yes, raise your forehead from the feet of fate
I too am not going to pause nor will time)

19.8.2015

15. SOUL WEAR

“Be careless in your dress if you will, but keep a tidy soul,” Mark Twain suggested. Obviously, not many of us truly heard him. The multi million dollar industry that churns out clothes the world over, is ample proof of the constantly changing sensibilities and trends that we humans cling to. The fashion gurus have us eating out of their hands, like dumb sheep. We follow where we are led while they smirk in their palatial manors in Europe’s fashion capitals. The desire to look ‘with it’, can lead to many a crazy appearance on the hyped “Red carpet”. Gushing teenagers, oooh and aaah at an under clad lady, as she strikes a pose. The price one has to pay for being a celebrity. Not a hair out of place, tottering on seven inch high heels, smiling a dentist bestowed, dazzling white and wide smile, while her corset tightened insides protest painfully.

How envious one should be of the carefree, fetching lasses on the hill sides romping in the meadows with their simple yet becoming traditional apparel. They wear the smile of innocence pure and divine. Their beautiful soul overflows out of their angelic eyes and enraptures you. No piece of designer clothing can match the fragrance of her pristine aura, as she sashays down the Lord’s red carpet of verdant green, daisy strewn valleys. ... “*Ni Chambe diye band kalliye, tainu jehde vele rabb ne banaaya, sochaan vich aap pai gaya, dooja chand kiddron chadh aaya?*” (O lovely bud from the Chamba hills, the Lord himself wondered from where this moon had arisen, after creating you!) “*Nakk tere vich laung te macchli, mathhe chamke tikka, tere muhre chann ambraan da lagge fikka fikka*” (Your nose is adorned with a nose pin and a nose ring. A Tikka ornament beautifies your forehead. Even the moon in the sky pales in your comparison)

The chunky, rustic jewelry of the nomads and gypsies of the deserts, accessorizes their sweeping, voluminous skirts, perfectly. Designers, keep returning to their roots and are inspired by the painstakingly embroidered, trousseaus of rural women... The

“Phulkaaris” of Punjab, the mirror work of Rajasthan, the breathtaking variety of the stitches of the Rann of Kutchh, the fine needle work and aari work of Kashmir, the resham ki zardozi of the Mughal era, the kaamdaani, the chikan, the tepchi, of Lucknow’s back alleys! What a treasure trove, of tradition, we possess. We will always get it right, if we let ourselves remain rooted in our culture and traditions ...”*Khoob purdah hai ke chilman se lagge baithhe hain, saaf chhupte bhi nahi , saamne aate bhi nahi.*

(Strange is the concealment in sitting abreast of the blind .Neither revealing nor hiding entirely)

“Zeest se tang ho aaye Daagh toh jeete kyun ho .jaan pyaari bhi nahi jaan se jaate bhi nahi “

(O Daagh if you are fed up with life then why are you alive? Life isn’t dear to you and you don’t quit living either).

20.8.2015

16. SKIP IT !!

“Be a rebel against gravity: skip!!” J I Aadams, was right! Skipping is the closest you can get to flying. Hey, did you skip, people? The skipping rope was the most bonding as well as liberating sport for school girls. I still remember the cackles of hysterical laughter and the rush of blood to the brain as one leaped and cavorted in the air, while two friends precariously though rhythmically swung the rope. It probably was one of the earliest lessons in”Taal!The beat to which one jumped, sometimes, in formations of two or more, was heady and exhilarating. Quaint songs would often accompany the bobbing and bouncing. With outdoor sport almost vanishing in courtyards and compounds, it seems a dismal time to talk about the heavenly virtues of skipping, to young kids. It did get one close to bliss. Free as a bird, each step an achievement and the encouragement of well meaning friends.

It was, of course the training area for skipping classes, lectures, meals, duties, meetings, and even promises. We had become adept at skipping so much more than the skipping rope, as we grew our worldly wings in the fascinating drama of life. A friend once mentioned, that it would be so much fun if we could skip politics and religion and head straight for compassion. Now, our battles are how to skip the advertisements and commercials between our favourite soap opera while muttering obscenities, under our breath.

We need to skip the butter chicken and go for a hike into the hills. We need to skip that argument with whoever and smile at them instead. We need to skip the anger and pour out love instead. Skipping is truly oxygen for the soul, yet, perhaps I had not learned my lessons well. The scampering and capering of childhood is often showing up, as playing truant, from the nobler aspects of life. Skipping charity for gluttony. Skipping humility for narcissism. Skipping love for lust. “*Laara lappa laara lappa layi rakhda, addi tappa addi tappa layi rakhda....*” The skip and dance of life must go on”*aaj kall paaon zameen par nahi padte mere, bolo dekha hai kabhi tumne mujhe uddte hue...*”. (Tell me, have you seen me flying in the sky? My feet are not touching the ground)

21.8.2015

17. IT'S MY FACE!!

‘I’ve never seen a smiling face that was not beautiful’, is an oft heard remark. A face is given to you by the good Lord. Well, you never really had anything to do with it. It carries within its few inches, the traits, features and expressions of your ancestors, etched out clearly. Your nose may proclaim your Greek lineage and your forehead your sociological caste. Your determined chin may give away your Roman beginnings and the slant of your eyebrow your Turkish genes. Since we never had much say, in the house we were born into, similarly we never chose our faces. The little tell-tale mirror that gives out our inner most secrets to the on-lookers. The frown lines that speak of troubles and travails; of nights you have lain awake, yearning for something. The blood shot eyes, that would have been dreamy, if they were not gazing fixedly, at some already dead, dead-line. The sunken cheeks that tell sagas of emaciation and want. The smile lines that show a jovial, cheerful, disposition. The jowly chin folds that are remnants of debauchery.

A face is a visiting card, your own personalized trade mark, your unique memory bank. It remains etched in people’s memories, if it’s striking. The penetrating, bewitching, all seeing x-ray gaze that can see right into your soul. The face people will remember, the name might get lost under the reams of files, tossed hap hazard in our overused brains “*Maine tumhe pehle bhi kahin dekha hai*”, (Haven’t I seen you somewhere before ?) is not merely, a cheesy pick up line. It could be true! Your soul antennae crackle and buzz when you meet a soul mate on life’s high seas. There is pin drop silence in the recesses of your heart, while you wait to get back the breath that was knocked out of your innermost being. Who faces the brunt of these onslaughts? The faces of course! The punching bag of emotions -of hate, greed, covetousness, jealousy, pining, anger, disdain or pure unadulterated love. Its all there, in the open pages of your face ...the “*Vibheeshan*”, (the one who lets out secrets) of your world.

The face that could launch a thousand ships, or acquire a million followers is much more than its genetic features. It is a blueprint of a life lived in its many splendoured hues, some silvery as “*Poornima*” (Full moon night), others dark as “*Amaavasya*” (Moonless night). Some people, never lose their beauty, however old they get. They merely move it from their faces into their hearts .A sleeping beauty might evoke love, because of her innocent, child like vulnerability but the rumbling, bumbling grandma’s wide grin that radiates across her benign face, is just as mesmerizing. The power of a silver framed face is as mighty as a “*Chaand si mehbooba ho meri , kab aisa maine socha thha...*” (I had never imagined I would have a beloved as exquisite as the moon) “*Mai nigaahain tere chehre se hataaon kaise, lut gaye hosh toh phir hosh mein aaon kaise*” (How can I pull away my gaze from your face. How can I get back my senses after losing them)

“*Mere chehre pe ghazal kehti gayin, sher kehti hui aankhen usski*” (Her couplet reciting eyes kept writing ghazals on my face).

22.8.2015

18. THE PAST

“The past is strapped to our backs. We do not have to see it; We can always feel it “.McLaughlin, wisely said. Of course! if we carry it like the stony weight of food, water and essentials that soldiers carry in their back packs at war, we could well become commandos.Tough, supple, agile and hawk -eyed. The albatross will not kill us with its load, instead it will feed us, inspire us and motivate us. Since the past is not like a glossy, ribbon tied package which we can put aside on the top shelf of our over stuffed closet, we might as well learn to make peace with it. A “Hey, hope you’re doing good’, relationship with days of yore should suffice. The past is never ever where we think we left it. It has a sinister way of mysteriously creeping up behind your back , when you least expect it .This might be’ Mr Past’s ‘, idea of a joke but it can knock your socks off with surprise bounty packages.Even though we are supposedly products of our pasts , why be its prisoners ? “*Beete hue lamhon ki kasak saathh toh hogi*”! (the twinge of sadness from the past will always be with us)

The best, robust Punjabi attitude is perhaps a wistful and gently indulgent glance at the past “*Jaa ve beqadraa, tu saadi qadar na jaani, ve teri jeeve jawaani*” (Go on you ungrateful person. May your youth live long) It is only our deeply ingrained mistrust of our future, that makes it difficult to let go of the smiling, shadowy, sepia tinted calls of the past.

“*Aye ishq na chhed aa akay hamme, hum bhoole huon ko yaad na kar, pehley hi bahot nashaad hain hum, tu aur hamme nashaad na karhar waqt tassavur kar kar ke, sharmaaye hue se rehte hain, kumhlaaye hue phoolon ki tarah, kumhlaaye hue se rehte hain, pamal na kar, beydad na kar.....aye ishq hamme barbaad na kar.*”

(O love do not destroy me. Don’t bother me ,do not visit the forgotten ones. I am already unhappy enough. Don’t make me unhappier still. All the time I think of you I feel shy. I feel like wilted flowers whenever I look at them .Don’t oppress me, don’t destroy me. O love, do not destroy me.)

25.8.2015

19. BEYOND LOGIC

“Common sense, however hard it tries, cannot avoid being surprised from time to time”, was explained by the wise Bertrand Russel. There is so much in this miraculous world that completely defies logic. There are simply no explanations for a myriad emotions that actually lead you instinctively and accurately to the right destinations. The flocks of migratory birds with their razor sharp navigating abilities, mocks the theory of these feathered friends being “Bird brained” . They reach warmer climes thousands of miles away from their homes. Humans are constantly driven by an insatiable hunger for the irrational. Is it because there are many answers that ‘logic’, does not possess?

People cannot be always logical like binary computers who can analyze exact information. They are instead at a silent war with hearts that have ‘Chemical lochas’, (chemical turmoil) with some befuddled, foggy logic. The “*Laila ko dekhna hai toh Manju ki aankh se dekho...*”, (If you want to see Laila look at her from the eyes of Majnu, her lover) kind of thinking. There are people, who will bet their lives on lame horses. The kind of heart that says “*Oh ji tussi dil mangde ho, assi te jaan vi dain layi tayyar haan*” (O you ask for my heart? I am willing to lay my life for you) There is so much in the realm of thinking that is way beyond logical reasoning. Where understanding stops, where “*dimaag ka dahi*”, (the yoghurt of the brain) has started curdling. Where the moon, the tides, the stars hold tight sway over your fortunes. The things we do at the irrational bidding of the heart .An invisible silken skein of thread that tugs at our heartstrings.

Therefore it is only the beginning of wisdom, not its end. It is far wiser to be without logic than to be without feeling. You may buy yourself a Ferrari, but lose the most precious thing, that your heart truly treasures., which is often not a flashy car. That you do for ap-

pearances and style. The illogical heart has no style or fashion sense. It is a poor old fool.

“Ek umr se hoon lazzat-e-girya se bhi mehroom, aye raahat-e-jaan mujh ko rulaane ke liye aa.; ‘ab tak dil-e-khushfeham ko tujhh se hain ummeedein, yeh aakhri shammein bhi bujhaane ke liye aa...”. (Too long have I been deprived of the pathos of longing. Come my love if only to make me weep again. Till now my hopeful heart keeps some expectations from you. Come, if only to blow off these last candles of hope.)

31.8.2015

20. MOUSTACHES

“Hitler ruined that moustache for everybody. It’s an interesting mustache and now nobody can wear it “. Yes, he sure did. Ever since that first ‘Milk moustache’, that we got as toddlers as we gulped down our glasses of milk, obediently to the count of ten. It was an exciting sight to spy a creamy, ivory coloured line on top of our lips. We felt like little gentlemen. Moustaches did not seem that much of a big deal as one grew up in a Sikh household. There was always the surprise element though .

In the earliest days, a well pomaded and groomed moustache was supposed to be twirled up into a fine curl, making the owner look rather stylishly menacing! The full bodied whisker like moustache was endearing, as it generally belonged to ones genial grandfather. The practice of putting up ones hand, to roll the moustache , to show dare devilry and courage was common. If a lesser mortal tried to show one down, then the prestige of the moustache was at stake. The English have a proverb that says a man without a moustache is like a cup of tea without sugar!

Among the thirteen major types of moustaches , mostly acquiring their name and fame after some luminary, are the Chevron, the Dali, the English, the Fu Manchu, The Handle bar, the Horse shoe, look like what they take after. The Imperial is fascinating. You must check out the image. It has a beard flying high along with it. The Lampshade and the Painters brush look common enough. The Pencil, the Toothbrush and the Pyramid keep coming back in new avatars. The Walrus, of course takes the cake. If one was to take a trip in the deserts of Rajasthan one would never stop gaping in awestruck wonder at the royal look of the ‘Rajputi shaan o shaukat’. (pride and style of the Rajput community).

It really is not strange that facial hair are synonymous with masculinity and bravado. Hirsute men are back in fashion, so to say - splashed across billboards as models and movie stars. “*Jethh mere*

diyaan aidiyaan muchhaan., do do guttaan karda". (My brother in law has such long moustaches that he can make two braids out of them.)

I would swear by a real man any time, hairy or not, When it comes to "*Dhanno teri izzat ka sawaal hai*" then a "*muchhmunda*", (one with a shaven mustache, jokingly) might do too. The naughty Punjabi folk songs reverbrate "*Laung teriyaan muchhaan vich gummeya, main saari raat toldi rahi*". (My nose stud got lost in your moustaches . I spent the night hunting for it)

I do know that a lot of the lush ,shiny mustaches of holy men are a result of their wiping, their ghee (clarified butter) soaked hands, after eating a generous helping of "*Karraah parshad*", (holy food made out of whole wheat flour, sugar and clarified butter) on their beard and moustaches)

4.9.2015

21. NOISY DESPERATION

“Nowadays most men lead lives of noisy desperation”, said James Thurber. Alas, the blissful silence is eluding us. We are in a hellish shrieking and shouting marathon of our own making. Silence is supposed to be a source of strength yet we badger our ears and minds with cacophonous sounds ripping apart our souls and tearing our sanity to shreds. Quietude of the brain brings in a soothing hush and tranquility which is sadly, running away from us on noisy, squeaky shoes. We do not know how to understand the eloquence of silence. We are ready instead to muffle and deaden sounds of wisdom. We suppress and smother the voice of warning that tells us to slow down and take a deep breath. We let the babble and tumult of life constantly drum our weary ears, with a bellowing of sound and fury.

We no longer wake up to the sound of the mantras, Gurbaani(holy scriptures)orAzaan(sound of Muezzin calling the devout to prayer). We mute them with our worldly pillows of foam. The alarm clocks wake us up to a world of crazy, boisterous messages on cell phones. The television blares insane unmelodious, “songs”, of violence and alcohol induced pandemonium. Where is there any place for silence in the traffic of our overflowing streets?

Mother Teresa said “We need silence to be able to touch souls’. Growing up in the angry-bird world of changing channels at our whims and fancies, how can we nurture our souls in peace and quiet? We, who feel lost in a silent room? We, who seek assurances from fellow weaklings who tell flattering lies? Those who don’t give a d..n? We who are steeped in our own brains and their steaming, squawking, hullabaloo?

Shiv Batalvi one of my favourite poets wrote “*mai chup di maun boli sikh reha haan, mai chup da geet har sapne di akhh vich likhh reha haan*”. (I am learning the silent language of silence. I am

writing the song of silence in the eyes of each dream) The silent hills often beckon with their promise of freedom from clamour and rackets. On a lighter note, silence is a great tool, when you have no answers .It is also the deadly pause a la Dilip Kumar. It terrifies the one who is waiting, for the next word.Never under estimate the power of silence .It is unnerving and authoritative.

Firaq said it well... "*Yeh sukoot- e -naaz, yeh dil ki raggon ka tootna, khamoshi mein kuchh shikast e saaz ki baatein karo*"

(This silence of grace, this breaking of the veins of my heart
In this silence let's talk about the defeat of music)

or Iqbal's .."khamosh, ae dil, bhari mehfil mein chilaana nahi achha,adab pehla qareena hai , mohabbat ke qareenon mein.'..

(Silent O heart! It's not nice to cry in public
Respect is the first step in the etiquette of love)

18.9.2015

22. PATHBREAKERS

“Be neither a conformist or a rebel, for they are really the same thing. Find your own path and stay on it”, advised Paul Vixie. Truly, what we think is our nature is actually a force of habit. Habits have a tenacious hold on us. A conformist will toe the line with misery in his heart, pain in his eyes, living a life of a docile sheep in the herd. One amongst many who get tossed and hurt by the sheer force and power of the huge herd. To conform to already trodden paths and be wary and traumatized of your own unique identity is a squashing and subjugating of your own beacon light, your personal trade mark, your own rubber stamp. No one can ever be ‘you’, for your DNA is peerless and matchless. You are the creator’s wonder. Why do you want to be cowering and hiding like a shy bride in the shadow of the luminaries? Why should your lamp be a flickering candle in the vast ocean of light? How would the village woman have ever seen the city, unless she had beseeched “*chandigarh kothhi paa de, pindaan vich urdi dhhoor ve*”. (Build me a house in the modern city of Chandigarh . There is a lot of dust in the village) You are the sun, you are the moon. You are a spectacular, many splendoured thing, created with its own powerful, potent ‘self’. There is absolutely no need to strive to push yourself to fit into an established and comfortable mould. You should create your own design and be fearlessly ‘you’. Genres and labels are for things, not for us glorious humans. Why should you bear any atrocity because it is custom? Why should you follow any fashion because it is ‘in’? Well, I often hear myself tell myself, “Oh come on, get a life !!!” We need to tell our children to doubt, to ask, to probe, to investigate, to be suspicious. Let’s not be dead fish and go with the flow. Let us be courageous enough to risk being tagged as a “crackpot”, than be looked down upon as a “conformist”. Morality does not test integrity, it tests conformity. The Japanese proverb warns. ‘If you believe everything you read, you better not read’. The untrodden path is full of mystery and suspense. A Hindi celluloid potboiler.

“Aye mere humnasheen chal kahin aur chal, iss chaman mein abb apna guzara nahiin...”

(O my companion, let’s go somewhere else. Its tough to manage in this garden any longer)

19.9.2015

23. TRUTH

“There are two ways of telling the complete truth -anonymously and posthumously”. So well thought! I do believe, that truth has a nasty habit of staring you in the face, when you least expect it. The resounding slap that truth swings on your unsuspecting cheek, leaves lashes and deep perforations of dismay and humiliation. If the truth is not a bitter pill to swallow then it casts a diffused amber halo of charm and beauty, around the one whose ears tinkle to the beat of its anklets! Truth is one giant mountain peak, that glistens and glows in the wintry icy storms of life. It is the towering beacon light of the lighthouse, that stands firm amidst the huge breakers of sea water, tossing and splashing its fury on it. Truth may be hidden under gilded sheets of gold or beneath cast iron vaults, yet it finds a creek and wriggles out, resilient and sturdy with a ram rod straight back bone .

Truth rules! It is the final word, on the ‘*Kora kaagaz*’ (blank paper) of life. You may deny your feelings till the cows come home, but true emotions will spill over your new, white shirt and colour it bloody red while you squirm in flushed embarrassment. Truth fears no questions, bringing with itself huge measures of absolution.

Honesty may not always pay but dishonesty always costs. What needs to be dreaded is a half truth , for you never know which half you have heard!... “*Tu sach dass khaan ve jogi, milan hosi ke na hosi, sajjan milsi ke na milsi...*” (O tell me honestly, dear yogi, will we ever meet?) The sun may hide for a while, but it is not going anywhere. It will come right back, shining and heating up your life, like truth.

I firmly believe it is made of very strong stuff. Truth will prevail, come what may. Even if people will be wary of saying it aloud, the truth remains.

“Ho na ho yeh koi sach bolne waala hai Qateel jis ke haathon mein kalam , paaon mein zanjeerein hain..”

(This one is definitely someone who speaks the truth O Qateel, for he has a pen in his hand and chains on his feet”)

22.9.2015

24. DESTINY

“On a windswept hill
by a billowing sea,
my destiny sits and waits for me”

These ominous words of Robert Brault make me wonder if there is anything at all that is ever in our hands? Ducking behind the fast paced balls flung by the hurricanes of this world, never did anyone, an iota of good. Standing firm like a pole star and facing the full barrage of brickbats along with the showering of petals is the only option. Destiny has a huge bag, overflowing with thrilling gifts, wrapped in silken strands. The decorative wrapping material may be fate’s cruel joke on gullible humans. Ironically when we are gloriously oblivious of a surprise packet, it arrives, on satin slippers without even a breath of a sound. Emanating from the cruel waves of the sea, glowing like the ‘Aurora’ in the North Pole! Acceptance of the goodies that destiny doles out to us is as important as loving the people, that destiny planted at the doorstep of our heart. If we fall in love with our fate, it will never let us down, for ‘Kismet’ is a loyal, devoted lady. She knows how to keep beside you through the trials and tribulations of simply being alive. If we are going to be doomed, let not the stars have the last laugh. Let us, instead give them a good fight, a robust kick in the shin. *“Naseeb saade likhe rabb ne kachi pencil naal”* (Our destinies are written with a fragile pencil that breaks after writing)

Let us challenge the planets and the stars, pretending to decide our fates, while revolving in the firmament to a fair battle on horseback in the arena of life. A defeatist attitude perfectly suits Miss Destiny. She grins from ear to ear and scoffs at our puny, midget like existence where we are always in awe, always petrified of the *“Na jaane ab kya hoga?”* (God alone knows what will happen next?) Fortune, karma, providence are merely names and by now we know that names are man-made. No decree can be truly predestined. There must surely be some scope to wriggle out of a tiny opening

and squeeze out our thudding hearts to throb to the rhythm of life.
Fate also loves the fearless.

Alas, after having spewed venom at fate during this whole tirade, I bow silently and respectfully to fate because my favourite Sufi, the great Hafiz told me “The place you are right now , God circled on a map for you” Oh. I am fortune’s fool”, as Shakespeare said in Romeo and Juliet. I am willing to dance, to whichever tune, life plays on its melodious “Saarangi”. (a stringed instrument) The music will always be special for me, because God is the musician. To my believing ears, chance and coincidence are revered words.

“Kuchh pathhron mein phool khil jaate hain, kuchh anjaane bhi apne ban jaate hain ,kuchh laashon ko kafan naseeb nahi hota ,toh kuchh laashon pe taj mahal ban jaate hain..”.

(Some stones have flowers growing out of them
and Some strangers become one’s own
Some dead bodies have no shroud while others have
Taj Mahal built over them)

24.9.2015

25. PRAYERS

“Certain thoughts are prayers. There are moments, when, whatever be the attitude of the body, the soul is on its knees.” This brilliant thought by Victor Hugo, moves me like no other. How often do our souls, silently beseech and beg for something that we really crave for, with “Shiddat?”(passion) The stance and posture of the souls is truly miraculous. If there is no heart in your words then the lord, might think twice. Seek the lord when in trouble, seek the lord midst your care; seek the lord when you are happy. seek him everywhere...” went a childhood hymn. When we bow to the wonders of the universe, it bows back many folds, reverberating the Lord’s name inside our hollow hearts. We need to pray for tough hides and tender hearts.

Baba Bulle Shah, the Sufi saint advised, “*Je tu rabb nu manauna, pehle yaar nu mana, rabb mann jaanda yaar nu manauna aukha hai....*” (if you want to appease God first appease your beloved. It’s easy for God to listen to you but it’s tough to please the one you love) *Mulla maar na bolariyaan, saanu apna yaar manaavan de.....* (Oh holy man do not shout out loud. Let me cajole my beloved) “*Oh waat makke di kyon paave, jehde yaar nu takkeyaan hajj hove*” (Why would he go on pilgrimage to Mecca when by merely looking at his beloved he would have performed Haj.) Prayer is indeed the purest incense of the soul.

A thanksgiving prayer is the most powerful communication, that we can ever have, with the supreme power. Even if there is, one truly loving heart throbbing for you, somewhere in this whole universe, your world is complete. The gift of life, is to be smiled through with gratitude and not with scowls of disgruntlement and frowning frowns of discontentment. Let us be joyous, for all that we have, without doing a crass business deal with our master. He is no village grocer. Prayer is our greatest and most potent power ...“Sab kuchh khuda se maang liya ek tujh ko maang kar, uthhte nahin hain haathh mere, iss dua ke baad”.

(I have asked for everything from God after asking for you ...My hands do not rise up in prayer after this).

25.9.2015

26. DISEASES OF THE SOUL

“Diseases of the soul are more dangerous and more numerous than those of the body’, proclaimed Cicero, perhaps with good reason. It is established that germs kill slower than a sad soul. Alas, most children could tell their mothers that they would definitely eat their green vegetables if they smelled like butter chicken. To the hordes of Bacchus lovers, streams of liquor, may be manna from heavens and a homely glass of buttermilk, something that tribesmen drank. Well, to each his own.

A cheerless disposition and a complaining temperament, never helped heal an ailing body. It's rare to expect radiant smiles from a person with a nagging pain, yet if he wades through this slush of ill health, no swamp can ever bog him down.

I know a gentleman, who has long crossed his ninetieth birthday, but is as cheerful as a lark. His blithe phone calls to me brighten up my day, as he recites his favourite poetry and shares from his huge repertoire of jokes. He absolutely blows me away with his zest and exuberance for life. As I put down the phone, I ruminate on my own stupid fears and miserable niggling worries. Uncle Bajaj, makes me terribly ashamed of my silly thoughts. The gentleman proudly told me that he has a new battery placed in his heart pace maker. He laughingly mentioned that therefore by calculation he will be still around till he is ninety nine and a half. His booming voice and infectious laughter, reiterate my faith in life.

Cicero is proved correct daily as I see ladies with psychosomatic illnesses and phobias “*Hai hai ni Mai te maran wali haan kudiyo. Hai mere kaleje vich peed hai .koi paani pila de .*” (Oh dear I am about to die any minute, Oh Lord ! There’s a pain in my heart. Pray give me a drink of water someone.) These are hypochondriacs in full form .All these utterings with melodramatic swooning acts and much rolling of the eyes. Half of being healthy is the desire for robust health. An internal jogging can easily be achieved with robust laughter .

What is truly in a state of deplorable health is our society. It is sick and getting worse ,It needs a shot of some panacea.

Meanwhile– “*Unke dekhe se jo aa jaati hai chëhre pe raunaq woh samajhte hain ke beemaar ka haal Achha hai*” (“When my face lights up into a smile at your sight, people think that the man is recovering from his illness !”)

27. WINTER WOES

'It is the life of the crystal, the architect of the flake, the fire of the frost, the soul of the sunbeam', said John Burroughs of the winter sunshine. Its a welcome sight in the hills. The incandescence sets ablaze the shivering, trembling white mantle that shrouds everything. Winter is special to me, as it hoards, all my memories, of languorous vacations spent in the still gasp worthy environs of Shimla. The tall wall of the Himalayas in the backdrop looks almost peeled of greenery, as it were. Stark and naked, revealing their bone structure as the layers of vegetation fall away, shamelessly. The evergreens remain resplendent, proclaiming to the world that not all things change. Thank God for them, for they allow one to keep the faith alive through the sombre, lonesome season. Some friends do last a lifetime like the rock solid cedars. They don't just drop away, like pestilence stricken multitudes!

Perhaps winter was actually sent by the Lord to allow humans, to sit around the hearth and ruminate while they hibernated. Not true for the modern world at all. The magical snow blowers and the terrific heating systems in homes and cars, have done away with the drudgery. Its just a steaming mug of coffee that completes the perfect thanksgiving picture. The cinnamon aroma of brewing coffee that has invaded the corridors of modern life is invigorating and reassuring. There really is no need to drown in a vale of grief when the sun turns his haughty face away. Life is so much more, than the icy tentacles of a bullying winter. It is snowballs and apple cider. It is pumpkin lanterns and rosy cheeks. It is over clothed babies and turkey suppers. It is grandpas stories and granny's knitting needles. It is eggnog and the artistic branches of a barren tree, waiting to sprout its first leaf in spring. When trees hold summer's secrets deep within their hearts, the enigma of winter intensifies like the smouldering in her eyes. Sagas untold are far more intriguing than the brash sun dresses of summer beaches! Happy winter dear ones..

2.11.2015

28. THE INFERNO

A law unto itself

Do I love you because you are beautiful ,
Or are you beautiful because I love you ?.. Cinderella

This is not for people, who say, -Forget love, i'd rather fall in chocolate! Its for those, who let the misty rains of love fall softly not flood the river. The perennial, gnawing, heart hammering hunger for love is the lot of human kind. Its a need like no other. The realization that you can go without food and water for a whole day, but definitely not without a single gesture of love lights up your insides. Love was Gods' plan when he made man, since God's divine nature is love. Mark Overby put it simpy, "Love is much like a wild rose, beautiful and calm, but willing to draw blood in its defense." It is surely sweet tyranny for the torments are willingly endured by those who love!

When one gets into the habit of endlessly forgiving even when the thoughts are eminently murderous, it means that love has set up house in your unsuspecting heart. Since love is a law unto itself, there are no rules that apply at all. There can be no self help books or 'Learn to love in twenty days', kind of cocky, smart best sellers.Its the wick that burns constantly, brightening the flame that it lights. It needs selfless, humble, bowing down at the altar that demands sacrifice of the highest order. Winds can only snuff out pretty, frothy candles. The bonfire of true love blazes stronger into an inferno with the chilling winds. The strangest thing is that even though we choose the people we like, love chooses us! We have no say in the matter at all. Like a gifted sleuth, it sniffs us out!!

A great example is the lady who sings, as she mops the floor, after her beloved has walked on it with muddy barn boots!! Well, if you are sensible about love, beware, for you are then, incapable of love!

4.11.2015

29. SENSITIVITY

it is quite an absorbing thing, to see sensitive people's emotional responses. Their emotional thermostats seem to have broken down. There is intensity in each feeling. Anger, love, hate. There is no middle path. It's all a thorny garland of extremes. Highly sensitive persons are like a pulsating piece of heart, sponging in all that is around with acute accuracy. They can sense the leaf drop in the grass and spy a blink of a beloved's eye. They can hear the wind whisper in the willows as effortlessly as they can hear another's heart wrenching in pain. The constant state of heightened awareness is disturbing to put it mildly. A magnified spectacle of life's Shakespearean dramatics can surely be unnerving. There are magnificent tirades against life and bouts of uncontrollable anger. Flaming, passionate outpourings of immeasurable love. Vengeful, hate spewing rhetoric. A conglomerate of fascinating feelings of despondency, excitability, vehemence, perturbation, zeal and empathy. A huge Titanic collage of oozing, seething lava in gut-corroding shades. "*Tera millina khushi ki baat sahi, tujh se mil kar udaas rehta hoon*" (Meeting you gives me great joy; But having met you I turn despondent again) The inexplicable fervor and commotion, in the cauldron of a sensitive soul, is always on boil. A spilling over of agony and ecstasy "*Tere ni qaraaran mainu pattya, dass main ki pyaar vichon khattya?*".. (I am broken with your false promises. Tell me how did I benefit from loving you?)

How can I forget, the sensitive poet, who died young? The tormented verses of Shiv kumar Batalvi "*Kinni beeti te kinni baaki hai, mainu eho hisaab lai bathha.*".. (How much life is spent and how much is left. Shiv was caught up in this arithmetic.)

9.6.2015

30. YOUR NAME

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet”. It’s all very well for the bard to have explained this simple equation but the modern world lays great emphasis on the packaging and presentation of everything. It believes in fancy, exotic labels on each facade, even human. Alas! names have the ugly habit of compartmentalizing our lives into air tight, claustrophobic containers. The faiths we are born to by queer quirks of ‘Kismat’, instantly create an electric fence around our individual identities. Rituals and cultural pressures grapple and tug at our ‘naming’, or baptizing, if you will. It is often hilarious and embarrassing when a rather well fed, robust creature responds to the fond “*Oye chhotu*”, *idhar aao*” (Come here, you little fellow)

Our generation had a zillion unsuspecting, innocent babies, christened Babli, Baby, Guddi, Kaku, Kuku, Tinku or Lovely by their doting mamas. Yes, Shakespeare, there is a lot in a name, apparently. One is saddled with the baggage of scornful disdain and cruel ribbing by ruthless and incorrigibly cheeky classmates, who mutilate and dissect one’s ‘*Pyar ka naam*’ (name you call someone with love). Punjab also has its share of Jarnails (Generals) and Karnails, (Colonels) while the eastern plains throw up enough, RamAasre (Depending on Ram) and RamBharose, to fill a continent. Some hallucinating humans resort to ‘*Nom de plumes*’ to escape into sublime anonymity.

Let’s face it, an illustrious and distinguished sounding name never hurt anyone. On the other hand a dreary, unimpressive one cheated many a gorgeous human out of his rightful share of fortune. Of course, I would beg to differ for I would have liked Dilip kumar, even if he remained Yusuf. Faces may be altered surgically but it’s an instinctive response to answer automatically when one’s name is called out. There is a lot said about, “*Apni zindagi ki har sham tere nam kar doon, teri hi aankhon ka jaam tere nam kar doon*” (let me offer you each evening of my life. Let me bequeath the intoxication of your own eyes in your name) Well, it better be a superb name as it will follow you to your grave and beyond.

10.6.2015

31. LOVE

When someone loves you , the way they talk about you is different . You feel safe and comfortable” said Jess C Scott. Wonder if you agree? The sound and tone are different. Of course, it varies with who cares for whom, when and why. A tender fourteen year old, with a massive, heart – squeezing crush on a school teacher, would accompany his Adam’s- apple croak, with a moony spaniel - eyed, gaze, of utter adoration. The cocky Casanova, from across the street would attach a Devanand swagger to his well- practiced, deep baritone. The roadside Romeo has evolved into a techno-savvy dude, who sends virtual whistles your way.

How about the men in your life who truly care? The brothers, fathers, classmates, the aashiques (lovers)? They speak to the woman with irritation, anger, proprietorial authority, alternating with sugary, honey dew, gelato flavored, syrupy, love soaked words. *“Mujhe jaan na kaho meri jaan”*(Don’t call me your life, O my life) kind of sound. Yet your name always sounds special, with some loving, ragging, utterly banal sounding *“Pyar ka nam”* (love name) either preceding or following it. *“Oye khoteya”*, (hey donkey) is just an example. He does like you more than a donkey, but such is love

“Mittraan ne aij billo nachna, tere na te bolliyaan pa ke”!! (Your friends will dance to the sounds of your name) *“Khuda kare ke mohabbat mein woh makaam aye, mere labon pe hamesha sanam ka nam aaye”*. (I pray to God for such a time in my love for you that always the name of my beloved comes to my lips)

10.6.2015

32. BARREN LIFE

“Beware the barrenness of a busy life.” said Socrates long long ago. So this is why he was a truly wise gent. How tightly packed our daily grind is-mundane, monotonous, tedious and repetitive. Oh all right, I get the fact, that man is a creature of habit. All that is very well but when are we going to pause long enough to realize the futile, forlorn dejection that a so called “full” life can bring? The tiresome ho-hum of living each moment rigidly by the clock, can deaden a perfectly angelic soul and make it uninteresting and listless. Being busy, can make one an automaton. An accurately wound up robot but certainly not human “Oye why are my slippers not here today? Why is my tea still not on the table?” Ominous questions like these are the death knell of a laughing, cheerful human. It is the harbinger of a grumpy, frowning, tightly wound up, deadpan countenance and a fuming brain. Definitely not a great guy to know. *Hai rabba*, (O Lord) a deadening routine may seem perfect, yet it wearies out a gushing spirit and wrings out the life force. “*Natch lai patola ban ke, ni pher kadd nachengi*” (Dance like a doll. When will you dance otherwise?) The drudgery saps the glimmer from our eyes. We need to shake ourselves up. It is imperative to earn a living, but just as important to gaze fondly at the tulips and smell the proverbial coffee! “*tum ne jo meri kabr par aa kar yun muskura diya , bijli chamak kar gir padi, saara kafan jala diya., yahaan bhi sataane aa gaye, kis ne pattaa bataa diya?*” (You came to my grave and smiled. The shroud burnt to a cinder. Why did you come to torment me here as well. Who told you this address?) An irksome regimen, following a predictable pattern may be reassuring but “*Yeh jeena bhi koi jeena hai laloo?*” (Is this a life at all)? Even a canine’s life is more intriguing.

11.6.2015

33. JEALOUSY

Jealousy, the slimy green eyed horror, is much maligned since it first reared its ugly head in some unknown bosom. It earned many epithets and slurs for itself -the jaundice of the soul, the dragon which slays love, the grave of affection, a mental cancer. Ugggh!! not one good word for “Jealousy” When the burning, red hot embers of envy, singe and scald a loving heart, it's inviting torment for itself. When the simmering and seething slowly become a raging forest fire in the hills, then one is doomed. The envious, are blindly consumed, by their own passions and fears of mediocrity, that they rust away slowly in the downpour of their agonized comparisons. I often think of Shakespeare’s Cassius. “Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look ; he thinks too much; such men are dangerous.” When the Cassiuses of this world, see anyone striding the world like a Colossus, they wither and shrivel up like autumn leaves. The craving and hankering may take on a spiteful and malicious avatar. *“Usski jurrat kaise hui, mujh se behtar hone ki?uski yeh majaal?”* (How did he dare to be better than me)?

Isn't it wondrous that one can be the moon and still be jealous of the stars? One has heard of maniacal ,acid attacks on pretty damsels by spurned lovers. It is indeed a devilish emotion, which eats up reason. It can annihilate a perfectly divine association. *“Tum agar mujhko na chaho toh koi baat nahi , tum kisi aur ko chaahogi toh mushkil hogi..”* (it's alright if you don't desire me but it will not be good if you desire another man) Though, jealousy begins in self doubt and low self esteem, it metamorphoses into a snarling, blood curdling vicious dog. No more do the yearning and pining hearts bless like this lady does *“ja ve bekadra tu saadi kadar na jaani; teri jeeve jawani”*.(Go away you who did not realize my worth. May your youth have a long life)Alas there are no antidotes for the ugly green hue of jealousy.

13.6.2015

34. FATHER

I do believe George Herbert when he says that one father is more than a hundred school masters. Often, the broad shouldered, booming voiced, gruff sounding presence of the most important man in one's life is conveniently side-lined. The sweat, grind and toil of a lifetime of earning and providing for a family, somehow gets taken for granted. The nights a father has worried himself to sleep, over the school trip that his kid is panting for. The new woolen socks that have to be bought for the school uniform, as the hand knitted ones look down market! The mirror encrusted, silk kurta, (tunic) for which the daughter is preening and twirling. The music coaching classes which have to be paid for. Who knows or even remembers what all the worthy gent has struggled for. The numerous rides to school and back, precariously perched, on his two wheeler as a doting primary school student. The fear of a yelling and shouting from his incensed heart, at the shameful scores in the maths class test!

My father gave me the gift of believing in me. The endless hours of spelling new words, and reciting Urdu poetry by rote. The loud guffaws as he mimicked the sound, of fighting cats with his fists cuffed to his mouth. The sitting at Sukhna lake, with feet dangling in the water, armed with a bucketful of 'langda' (a delicious flavorful variety) mangoes!

The Ann Daata (the bread earner) who is my father, is a unique gentleman. Sturdy and positive. Even as his frail body, holds a walking stick and his hearing fails him, his smile is genial. His body may no longer be brawny and sinewy, but his will and determination are feisty and hard as nails. Thank you dad for being the plucky, resilient gentleman you are. You who taught me to fear no man. Wordsworth, I agree with you when you say "Father, to God himself we cannot give a holier name. "Your fervent and staunch zeal for life, leave me wordless. "He did not tell me how to live; he lived ; and let me watch him do it ." I salute your spirit, my hero and role model. *Aakhir hain toh aap mere bhi baap!* (After all you are my dad)

14.6.2015

35. POWER

Frederick the Great, realized that the crown is merely a hat, that lets in the rain. Yet from times immemorial, power hungry wolves have preyed upon the weak to appease their thirst for dominance. The inebriated feeling of being high that one gets from command, control and dominion, is unique. It is like a shot of adrenaline, pumped into your whole being. A death like grip on the teeming millions. It is the result of thriving on the sentiments of fawning and boot licking crowds of humans. The irony is that power doesn't corrupt people, people corrupt power.

Abraham Lincoln hit the nail on the head by suggesting that, "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power." "I have the power", yelled He Man, sitting astride his high horse, literally and metaphorically. Alas, pride comes before a fall. Sovereignty and puffed-up feathers must not be pals. Eminence and snooty, nose -in- the -air attitudes are not the perfect recipe for happiness. He who wishes to be obeyed, must know how to command. Power that thrives on subjugation and terror is only a demand. It can never be commanded, like respect!! "*Oye tu karda hain ke tainu chhittar maaraan*", (Hey will you do what you are told to or should I boot you?) or "*Haddiyaan bhann daanga*" (I will break your bones) the "*Baahuballis*" (strong men) of Eastern Uttar Pradesh love to say, "*Ek kantaap doonga kaan ke niche, naani yaad aa jaayegi*". (I will give you one tight slap beneath your ear and you will see the stars.)

I think we often tend to confuse power with greatness! They are rather far apart. Lao tzu, opines, "Mastering others is strength. Mastering yourself is true power. "The power of love can let you hold sway over the universe. A willing slave is one who can move mountains, for a glance. How about ushering in a love revolution, instead of the many summits and conferences to establish predominance ." *Pyaar de bhulekhe kinne sohne sohne kha gaye , door door jaande jaande nede nede aa gaye.....*". (We were so smitten by the misunderstandings of love that instead of going far away from each other we came closer) "*Mohabbat ka asar hoga , galat fehmi mein matt rehna , woh badlega chalein apni , galat fehmi mein matt rehna*". (Do not be under any misapprehension. Love will leave its mark. He will change his moves just you wait and see)

15.6.2015

36. GENIUS

There is no great genius without a mixture of madness, thought Aristotle. What seems like madness is perhaps a bid to escape the shackles, chains and bonds, the 'laxman rekha' of hum drum, societal norms. The moony, love struck poet with blood shot eyes, the rakish tilted hat of a seeming Casanova, the bewildered, wide mouthed wonder of an accidental inventor or the ingenuity of a genius mind is far above, what we ordinary mortals can perceive. Their razor sharp brains are fired by courage and they fear no man. We need to revere those who let their pens roam freely on paper, whizzing past boundaries. Their wizardry proclaimed that there were galaxies and other worlds beyond us. They treaded where angels feared to enter. Hold these geniuses close to your hearts .Their free spirits can peer into the world beyond.

A genius could be that introvert bespectacled school boy trudging to school stooping under the weight of his satchel. The lady in a homely cotton saree with her hair pulled tightly into a severe bun could be the next Nobel Prize winner. Geniuses need not be apparent until their fragrance perfumes the desert air. They are exotic flowers that grow anywhere.

Allow them their streak of madness for

*“Junoon mein Shauk ki gehraaiyon se darta raha
Mai Apni Zaat ki sachaiyon Se darta raha “*

(I was terrified of the desires in my madness
For I was afraid of my own truths in my madness)

17.6.2015

37. TRUST

“Trust is the first step to love” says, Munshi Premchand. I have to trust the gentleman who wrote ‘a masterpiece like Gaban’. Alas, the only way to find out if someone is trustworthy, is to trust them. There are no shortcuts, apparently. I would think that trusting one’s own intuition, is the first leap into the world of ‘bharosa (faith)’ “Queerly though, we often have more faith in another’s ability than in our own, even though the adage says “*Doosre ka paisa aur apni akal*”, (Another’s Wealth and one’s own intelligence always seem more!) “Never trust a man, who when left alone with a tea cosy, doesn’t try it on” warns Billy Conneley. Sometimes, weirdly enough, we can blindly have faith in and trust complete strangers as if some inbuilt antennae have picked up the signals of long past birth cycles. The cool -sounding word, “*Etmaad*”, in Urdu language seems trust worthy in itself.

Somehow, I find it tough to rely on pristine white, angelic humans. Their invisible halo disturbs me, as if someone has drawn it around their head in jest. The person with frailties and foibles endears me. I could trust him with my life. Hey people, didn’t you simply love those tear jerking, melodramatic films where a sniffing, sobbing lady was being told, “*Main tumhaare liye apni jaan de doonga, meri jaan?*” (I can give up my life for you, O my life.)) We love those who love us, so perhaps we trust those who trust us.

Hunches are files stashed away below our conscience levels. They never lie. Why be crazy enough to have expectations of faith from “*Jo nahi jaante wafaa kya hai?*” (those who do not know what loyalty is) I do firmly believe ‘that, “*Kuchh toh majbooriyaan rahi hongi; yunhi koi bewafaa nahi hota*”.. (There must have been some compulsions .No one is faithless without a good reason)

18.6.2015

38. MONSOON

The Arabic word 'Mausam', gave birth to the flamboyant, Indian Monsoon..Heralded with much fanfare and intense waiting rituals, it appears like a long lost friend, attired in wispy, collyrium colored '*surmayi*' (like antimony) clouds. The reverberating drumming and clapping of distant thunder is like the African tribals warning of imminent danger. Alas, the danger lurks in the soul wringing "*thumris*" and "*daadras*". (genres of semi classical Indian music) *Koyaliya matt kar pukar*, (O cuckoo bird do not call out) Ghir ayi kali ghata ghanghor, (The dark clouds have gathered) and the dripping, squelching poetry of Kalidas', 'Meghdoot'. Poets, in any case are those who stand outside in the rain, hoping to be struck by lightening!

The tantalizing, raggedly torn, streak of lightening, blazes across skies like a venomous serpent, waiting to strike the ancient Peepul and Banyan trees in the corner. They languorously unwind from their stupor like Rip Van Winkle. The creepers and vines, shyly hugging the doorpost, through the cruel summer months, wistfully gaze at the sky and sprout, delicate green, tendrils. The naughty schoolboy jumps with mischievous glee in the puddles, spattering his white shirt with muddy splotches. The corn-on-the-cob, beckons with open arms and blonde tresses. Monsoons in India are as if the mighty musician, Tansen has tuned his strings with the raaga 'Megh Malhar (the Hindustani classical raaga, named after Megh meaning cloud .Legend says that it is powerful enough to bring on rain where it is sung)

The vexed sailors and fishermen, curse the rain for which poor farmers and shepherds beseech the Lord. The parched, forlorn earth dances a merry jig as the "*Sondhi si khushboo*", (scent of wet earth) spreads its magic around... "*Ve kanniyaan ch mai bhijj gayi, tainu milan aayi sardaara*"! (I got drenched in the drizzle as I came for my rendezvous with you O Sikh gentleman)

I really did not want to mention what I am about to but I truly abhor the open gutters and drains, that overflow on our roads in the monsoons..They rob my fantasy of a perfect season. The springs and brooks of the mountains with the mist rolling in from the valley can just about compensate for the mini floods in precarious city streets .The Hindi films homage to the rains -the white clad, soaked to the skin damsel seems pedestrian when compared to the majesty of the rainbow, dripping jewels in the fiery evening sky.

20.6.2015

39. LOVE

Ishq aur mushq kade na chhupde, te chaahe lakh chhuppaaiye. (it is impossible to try and hide love and perfume however hard one tries) There is no artifice or disguise that can for long conceal love where it exists or try and simulate it where it does not. Reams have been penned about this uncontrollable passion. A heady combination of serotonin and adrenaline, pumped into an unsuspecting carrier of the mystical love virus, beaming out shimmering rays to the universe at large. The only other competitor is the tell-tale whiff of fragrance, whether it is from the heavenly perfumed, 'motia' (jasmine) creeper in your mom's backyard or the singeing, burning, stink of the milk overflowing

A tender being, ecstatically savouring the first teen infatuation is oblivious of the fact that his adulation and obeisance at the feet of the hallowed object of desire is glistening glaringly. It is apparent in the deep crimson blush creeping up his budding beard. Ah, the innocence of true love, pure and pristine. It is throbbing to a divine beat, under the hawk-eyed scrutiny of the moral police. The sensitive, caring nature of 'mature', love, as it is funnily referred to, is almost holy in its innate character. It is healing and uplifting. It reverberates and resonates to a primal dance. "*Tere khushboo me basse khat main jalaata kaise, pyaar mein doobe hue khat main jalaata kaise?*" (How could I burn the letters perfumed in your scent? How could I burn the letters drowned in your love?) This heartfelt submission of unadulterated albeit old-fashioned love, also flaunts itself surreptitiously.

The "ittar" (perfume of rose) like aroma of love, perfumes the palm of whoever brushes with it. Its sweet-scented, bouquet can never be washed off, like Lady Macbeth's blood-stained hand. Its imprints are "*Pucca rang*".. (permanent colour) enshrined in the beloved's heart, till eternity.. "*Khuda kare ke qayaamat ho, aur*

woh aaye.” (I pray to God that it is the day of reckoning and that she comes) Therefore, tread softly on this sacrosanct territory of loving beings who cry tears of blood “Raggon mein daurte phirne ke hum nahi qaayal,jab aankh hi se na tapka toh phir laho kya hai?” (I am not impressed by it running about in the veins .If it can't drip from the eyes of the lover,what good will that blood be ?) Beware of Bulle Shah's warning.. “Beshak mandir masjid todo, Bulle Shah ve kehnda, par pyaar bhara dil kade na toro, is dil vich dilbar rehnda”!!!.(You may destroy temples and mosques says Bulle Shah but never break a heart filled with love because the beloved lives inside it.)

1.6.2015

40. JUDGING OTHERS

“If you judge people, you have no time to love them,.” explained Mother Teresa. How easy it is to judge others. It could merely be, the disdain in our eyes, for the loud and gaudy decor of another’s home, the sniggering giggle at the neighbor’s affectations, the turned-up nose at the snacks offered at the concert, the superior stance at a family discussion, the wide eyed wonder at a weaker student’s grades. Are we the Lord Almighty? Who do we imagine we are? Who gave us the right to decide how to lead another’s life? We glance furtively and suspiciously at people’s intentions, desperately seeking ulterior motives and innuendoes into their comments or remarks. The way a woman dresses up is for us, a perfect way to immediately brand and slot her into a rigid compartment, that our petty, feudal, narrow -minded heart is capable of!. *“Haaw ni hai, aidi uchi sandal paa ke aayi si ..kitte digg dagg jaandi”* (What high heeled sandals she was wearing! Suppose she had fallen down or something ?) or *“aji jane deeeye,inke pass toh na aqal hai aur na hi sharm o haya...”*. (Oh, let them be! They have neither any brains nor any shame)

We know how unforgiving, judgmental minds can be. They can tear reputations to shreds, without batting an eyelid. They can completely annihilate someone’s efforts and raze them to the ground, trampling and mauling, as viciously and vengefully as I hunt out and crush the cockroaches in the loft! Alas, people who are judgmental are often times, subconsciously expressing their own insecurities. It is so much easier to try and put ourselves in another human’s shoes and walk a mile. We would be startled out of our wits. Since our baggage is different, so must our lifestyle be. The nuns at school taught us “if you point a finger at your neighbor, there are three more pointing back at you!

3.6.2015

41. KINDNESS

Forget injuries, never forget kindness, said Confucius. Who can ever forget, the little acts of helpfulness that dotted our lives. Mama's sweet kiss, on a grazed and bleeding knee as we romped home from school, took away the hurt and pain in a whisker. The tenderness and patient indulgence, of a bear-like hug from the patriarch, cheered up our play weary little lives. The thrill of a surprise treat, of a Chocolate bar from the ice cream vendor at the Sukhna lake, the pat on the back from our favorite teacher made us super men for that moment. A gracious word of praise on a grumpy, bad hair day "*Aha, this color really suits you*", could get the stars back in our home-work infested life.

The "*Anand ki phulljhariyaan*", (sparklers of joy) could crop up anywhere, "Hand writing hai ke moti piroye hain! (Is this your hand writing or a string of pearls?) Why lie? The last one I never ever heard, as my scrawl was atrocious and illegible. Magnanimity and benevolence could mean a bite out of your best friend's heavenly smelling tiffin-box, in those days of simple joys. A game of "Staappu", a fiercely competitive, hop scotch, meant the world. If someone let you win, by turning a blind eye to your blatant cheating, was your bosom pal till eternity. Alas, as one grew, thoughtfulness and consideration took on startling hues. Lending your newly acquired books to those, not so lucky, was a big deal... "*Yaar, promise do din mein lauta doongi, I swear to God*" (I promise to return them in two days time).

Now its hearts we beseech for, and hugs, that are fake and artificial. It's smiles, we are on the look out for. Competing for attention with the little god forsaken, cell phone, is a daily war. Kindness has evolved along with Darwin's chimpanzees! The melodious words for graciousness are soothing on their own.... "*Inaayat*", "*Meherbaani*". (*Gratitude*). "*Ghairon pe karam, apnon pe sitam, ae jaan e wafaa, yeh zulm na kar.*" (Benevolence towards others and tyranny towards your own. O dearly beloved do not do such atrocities) Kindness kills too if we believe this Punjabi folk song ..."*Teriyaan mohabbtaan ne maar sutteyya, dass ki karaan?*" (Your kindness has killed me, tell me what should I do?)

4.6.2015

42. GREEN

When I walk past a fresh, tiny, lime green curl of a still-asleep sapling, my faith in the future of the human race is reinvented. "Green is the prime color of the world and that from which its loveliness arises" said Pedro de la Barca. Have you seen the beauty of the lone green pine, swaying fearlessly in maniacal storms? The pine stays green in winter too, like wisdom in hardship. The myriad hues and shades of green can leave one gasping. The Lord's palette is mind boggling. The ones I love are the happy shades of moss and lichen clinging bravely to any surface, wet or slippery. Their bright, smiling green reminds me that a bit of happiness can grow amidst the most lowly of places. Grassy slopes of the Himachali and Kashmiri valleys. Vast expanses of undulating green, like Gulmarg and Khajjiar are verdant and lush. Restful to the eyes with the slyly hidden wild lilies of the valley, daisies and daffodils. Ah, I have to stand gaping "For oft when on my couch I lie, in vacant or in pensive mood; they flash upon that inward eye, which is the bliss of solitude. "The olive green, I am, of course, married to being an army wife. The khakhi, the military green, the leaf designed camouflage, which is lovingly called, jungli dress, in some Indian regiments! Khakhi, I do not even consider green. It is drab and fashionably dull.

Other hot greens for me are the soothing sea-green, grape green, bottle gourd green and the mystical mehndi or henna green .A lot like the "moong ki dal" (moong lentil)green. The memory of a brilliant dazzling hue of green that I wore as a teenager for a cousin's wedding, leaps repeatedly into my mind's eye. I remember, reveling in the tinkle of my matching bright green, glass bangles. The Benarasi silk comes in the most exotic, rich and royal shades of green. Well, I do grow green with envy at times at the sight of the oh so well heeled and coiffured ladies around me. Some green -horns can be great at their jobs and green fingers are not bestowed to all and sundry.How many of us can decode the different names of green .I can barely manage to decipher the pretty apple green, bottle green , avocado, and asparagus. That's about it. No more.

I do worry because I don't know what Caribbean, Castleton, cadmium, citron, Dartmouth, beryl, absinthe, amazon, celadon, cyan green, are all about. On a spicy note , the green chilly is cute too. I sign off by swearing to the heart warming green in my national flag though the grass is greener on the other side of the fence! Alas greener pastures always beckon. *"Hari thhi man bhari thhi, raja Ji ke baagh mein doshaala ohde khadi thhi."* (She was green and her heart was full. She was standing in the King's garden wearing a shawl). The answer to that riddle is corn on the cob but I have yet to find the name for the muddy green of a slimy toad I know.

5.6.2015

43. THE SABBATH DAY

The whole idea of the Sabbath day, the seventh day of the Hebrew calendar week, as commanded by God, is the holy day of rest. It is believed that God too, rested from creation on Sunday. Well, in the good old days, one wore one's Sunday best, dented and painted one's exterior and hoped to wash off the blurring grime of sin, in whatever place of worship we were destined to visit, as ordained by our birth. The memory of family outings, which were eagerly looked forward to, lingers vividly. A cane picnic basket with interesting goodies stacked up, a cotton floor rug, the humble "durrie", to be spread amidst sylvan surroundings, in the pine scented hills, near Koti or Jabli in the Shivalik hills. I remember looking rapturously at the heritage train like a toy train, that chugged up the Shimla hills, laboriously. Romance was simple, unwounded and uncomplicated. There was no pressure to look up the latest eating paradises in town, or gawk foolishly into show windows, in soulless malls, with over dressed people out on a holiday. The great outdoors beckoned and there was no such thing as watching a soap opera on some television channel.

Ah, the romance in the air was palpable. People communicated in "*Nazron ki bhaasha*", (language of glances) We could hear the unspoken words of our loved ones. There was no "*maara maari*", (rushing around) to meet deadlines or to reach a destination, swearing under one's breath at the maddening traffic snarls. The easy pace, of a huge Sunday brunch with family, all aglow with the juices of mangoes and watermelons, oozing onto one's life like benediction. There are no "*kasme vaade*", (oaths and promises) or promises in blood, to meet behind the banyan tree or the village well on "*itvaar*". (Sunday) Now It is only an impersonal message, typed out, into the whole wide web! "*Gaddi chaldi hai kande kande, agge mahiya nitt milda, hun milda hai sunday sunday...*" (The train moves along the edges. My beloved used to meet me every day. Now he only meets me on Sundays)

7.6.2015

44. WHAT YOU HAVE LEFT

“Oh my friend, its not what they take away from you that counts. Its what you do with what you have left”, said H Humphrey. After having lived, a bit over half a century, in this awe inspiring creation, called the world, I do feel that there are exactly as many occasions, as you wish to celebrate. The first whiff of your beloved’s perfume as she or he wriggles sideways, into your dreams, unannounced. The splatter of gigantic, coin sized rain drops on the slate and red tiled roofs in the hills. The hypnotic pull of the bridal finery displayed by the setting sun, beckoning from behind the mist; The toothless grin of the vegetable vendor who greets you with warmth in the bustling market place; The crinkle eyed, short sighted, peering of your aging father at your reunion pictures. My list of happy moments is endless.

Ugly, mean and unhappy thoughts begin to etch and engrave themselves on your face. You may have a lop sided mouth and a wobbly nose, a double chin and Dracula inspired teeth but if you have warm, beautiful thoughts, they will illumine the space around you like sunbeams on a cloudy day.

It takes almost the same energy, to be genial or miserable. You only need to choose between frown lines and smile lines. When Abe Lincoln did not like a man, he said “I must get to know him better”. If we see something honourable and pleasurable in whatever we do, it automatically becomes valuable. Let’s be grateful for our throbbing pulse, our thudding hearts and our nights waking up to mornings. The waves used to frighten me until I learnt to surf. Its thrilling to ride that frightening apparition. I know!

It is so easy to make a sullen, dour face and forget that shipwrecks do have lifeboats. Besides, don’t forget you can always sing away the blues! I would love to catch the contagious attitude of the urchin who kicks stones and whistles at the kerb. How about being wonderstruck at the velvety petals of the magnolia, instead of

being perturbed by the mosquitoes in the puddle? How can you remain hopelessly in love with spring, when it has to change into summer? Be the person that people sing this for... *“Kal chaudvin ki raat thhi, shab bhar raha charcha tera...”* (It was full moon night yesterday. All evening the discussion revolved around you).

One could even hum with Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *‘Tum aaye ho na shab e - intezaar guzri hai, talaash mein hai sahar, baar baar guzri hai.....junoon mein jitni bhi guzri bakar guzri hai Agarcheh dil pe kharaabi hazaar guzri hai..’* (You haven’t come, nor has the night of waiting passed. The dawn is in search of something. It has passed by again and again. Whatever time is spent in frenzy is well spent. Even if the heart has taken a thousand mishaps ..)

13.11.2015

45. HATRED

“If you hate a person, you hate something in him that is part of yourself. What isn’t part of ourselves doesn’t disturb us”, explained the remarkable Hermann Hesse. Hatred, that wicked ball that bounces, could well have been a boomerang. Eating away, corroding and, wasting away the vessel in which it is stored. It is deadly stuff! Hatred is often misguided love and houses within its venomous soul, the cinders of affections. Strangely, its the fighting of some personal demons that is making another spew poison in our direction. It really has nothing at all to do with us. Perhaps that is why we wonder, why one human loves us and another hates us. Our own guilt is misguided. It’s not about who we are at all. The easiest way would be to hate the whole world! That would put an end to discrimination.

Hate is a safe armour for most humans. They wear it with a stubborn, mad glint in their confused, hurting hearts. Once you throw out hate from the place it is housed, pain takes its place quickly. Its a game of musical chairs. The sacrifices one undergoes to hate, are many. We give up sleep, health, peace of mind and a whole lot of love, in order to hate. How much easier it would be to simply embrace the whole of mankind in a cricket team like huddle of love. Remember, “Love was God's plan, when he made man, God’s divine nature is love. Born of God's love we must love him”.

Its impossible to love the Lord if we are busy going green in the face at his creations. Socrates, the wise man, who was the wisest of them all warned, “From the deepest desires often come the deadliest hate”. If given a choice, always choose love for hate is a heavy burden. It's bound to break your back. Since jealousy is hate and love compounded, it is dangerous. It takes away the sweet taste of success. Hating eyes will follow you up the fame hill, mean and vicious like groping fingers.

If at all we want to desperately hate something, let us hate war. That heartless, maiming, crushing, debilitating witch that

annihilates compassion along with cities. War, that rears up its ugly head, like a slithering king cobra spreading its hood over the beautiful visage of this unbelievable universe.

Let us all then, be like that love -sodden lady, who looks adoringly at her beloved and says "I hate you ", while every cell of her being screams "I love you " .

"Mohabbat, adavat, wafa, berukhi, kiraye ke ghar thhe, badalte rahe. lipat kar chiraagon se woh so gaye , jo phoolon pe karvat badalte rahe..."

(Love, Malice, loyalty, indifference were all rented houses there kept changing

Those who couldn't sleep on flowers, wrapped themselves around lamps and slept

17.11.2015

46. REVERIES

The idle seashore of the mind is the perfect soil, for reveries to thrive on. Day dreams flourish and blossom, changing the resplendent colours of their waves, to suit our fertile imaginations. Nothing can beat the pure procrastination of sitting on a chair and taking a whirlwind tour, of the lands of your own private Xanadu. No Kublai Khan dare interfere in your sweet reverie. I know of friends who go to church to daydream about God, happily missing out on all the preachings. There is much to be said, about going deep sea snorkeling into a world of make believe, where you are your own director and producer; The financiers can jolly well take a hike. You have to listen to W H Davies as he urges you, 'No time to stand beneath the boughs /and stare as long as sheep or cows', or else, you haven't lived.

People have dreamt up a whole day or a novel or even the perfect woman, while gazing vacantly into space.

This God person has to be a marvel! What a luxury to be able to block out ignominy, misery, want, penury, jealousy, bitterness, or self pity, by tuning off from reality and whizzing off to the land of bliss. It is the easiest form of instant nirvana! No chakra alignment or African voodoo is needed here. Not even a remote button. It is all in the grey cells, merrily doing the tango, in your walnut shaped brain.

Day dreaming is like a mental sweeping and swabbing. The slate can be polished and wiped with the cool cotton swabs of your illusions and the chimera of your personal mirages! Fantasies are therapeutic! You don't need a psychiatrist to tell you that.

Who doesn't remember looking out of the classroom window, past the dense leaves of the mango tree, far away into the horizon? Your blue tunic school uniform, dowdy and lackluster, changing miraculously, into SrIdevi's clinging chiffons? A day dream may be an evasion, but everything truly starts as someone's reverie. Just look at the possibilities!

"khwabb ho tum ya koi haqiqat , kaun ho tum batlaao?"

(Are you a dream or reality, tell me please.)

14.11.2015

47. WHO AM I?

“One may understand the cosmos, but never the ego; The self is more distant than any star.”... G K Chesterton, never spoke a truer word .Being lost is the prerequisite to being found.You have to flounder along the blind alleys of life, in order to search for the right path. The path that is yours and yours alone. The fact that you realize that there is some place like “home”, means that you will try and find its existence. The hankering, for that unknown harbour, to moor your tossing and turning boat. Sometimes the infamous “quality time” with one’s self is the key to self knowledge. We are so busy meddling in the world’s business that life passes us by, softly and slyly. Life’s shoes have rubber soles; When the laughter lines vie for attention with your worry lines , you know that it’s almost time for pack up and you did not even live.

Often, we endure a monotonous existence because we do not want to make an informed decision. Its so much easier to float like a leaf in the brook.Yes, the same brook which said “For men may come and men may go, but i go on forever” How right Lord Tennyson was “I chatter chatter as I flow, to join the brimming river”. How much sound and fury we infuse into our lives, as we go along.

The change that we seek in ourselves, may be an arduous task, If we try to be both our own marble and sculptor. The deep sea dive that we take into the depths of our own heart, will be the voyage of a lifetime. Sometimes its easier to meet your bitterest enemy in a battlefield than to look your own heart in the eye. What lurks in the hidden portals of our own hearts, needs to be seen. Lao Tzu, aptly proclaimed “He who knows others is learned; he who knows himself is wise.” Well, I do know for sure that I am dim witted, for I scarcely know myself!

“Pathhar mujhe kehta hai mera chaahne waala / main mome hoon ussne mujhe kabhi chhoo kar nahi dekha....aankhon mein raha dil mein uttar kar nahin dekha....”

(The one who desires me thinks I am a stone. I am wax, he has never touched me and seen

He stayed in my eyes never stepping down into my heart)

18.11. 2015

48. BLISSFUL SOLITUDE

“In a soulmate, we find not company but a completed solitude” says Robert Braut. Though the human language uses ‘loneliness’ to reveal a hidden pain and ‘solitude’ for expressing the glory of being alone, it is a requirement for the health of our souls. Its like a yogic posture for souls. The murky, whirlpools never mirror ourselves clearly. We need the calm serene waters of the Pangong Tso, (Pyonyang lake) in the Himalayas, residing in our hearts to show up our real selves. The honking and beeping sounds of our huffed and puffed up life, need to be silenced for some time in the day. A veritable pulling out of the plug, so to say. The cacophony kills the smiling, soaring spirit. It shackles us in vice like tentacles of a constant chorus of sounds and sights.

The solitude of the soul is inebriating. It washes out the daily grime and grind from its countenance and makes it squeaky clean once again, ready for a fresh onslaught of “life”. The hidden springs in our heart, give a fresh lease of life. In fact, we are the least alone in our solitude “*Bheed hai qayamat ki aur hum akele hain..zindagi ki raahon mein ranj o gham ke mele hain..*” (we are alone in this huge crowd. There are fairs of sorrows and troubles in these pathways of life.) That is the terrifying bit. The feeling of being totally alone and bereft, in a room full of people. Crowds may surge around you but the heart is a hermit. It is like an island in a tsunami ridden ocean.

I love what Marcel Proust said of some rooms in his house where the air was “saturated with the bouquet of silence”. For me the bewitching hour is the caressing, healing, perfumed hour of dawn. The “*amrit vela*”, ambrosial in its properties! The only true, loyal companion that we will ever have from birth to death is ourselves, so its wise to make friends with ourselves and be at peace with our niggardly, avaricious passions.

Let us, then, retreat to the best hermitage, the most exclusive spa in the world. The quiet portals of our own being.

It really is not necessary to listen to sad songs or poetry a la “*Jab bhi aati hai teri yaad kabhi shaam ke baad, aur badh jaati hai afsurda dilli shaam ke baad ...*”

(Whenever I remember you after dusk, the depression increases in my heart after dusk)

19.11. 2015

49. AURORA

'Aurora Muses amica,' -They say that dawn is a friend of the muses. As Aurora's tears turn into morning dew and glisten on the cheeks of the earth, the world stretches its limbs and yawns. Rumi, phrases it delicately "The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you. Don't go back to sleep." It is a holy, ambrosial hour, drenched in the blessings of hymns and divinity. The temple bells start tinkling as the devout, walk into the Mandir to offer their homage. The Azaan rises to touch the vaults of the sky, calling the faithful to prayer. Gurbani spreads its magical aura from the gurdwaras. Dawn 's silence, allows you to inhale scents that vanish, in the hustle bustle of the busy day ,and to see sights that you may pass by ,in your preoccupation with the drudgery of existing!

Like the early bird that gets the worm, humans receive the rare benediction of peaceful, solitary thoughts, where they rediscover their relationship with nature. The claustrophobic, concrete jungle, with which we surround ourselves, steals our connection to the marvels of creation. The stealthy perfume of wild flowers, lie waiting for our unsuspecting hearts at dawn .Victor Hugo thought that there is an unspeakable dawn in a happy old age! As you get up with the first chirp and twitter in the Peepul tree, you know that life is a miracle and the bloody burst of colour never means that a throat is slashed in the horizon. It always heralds the tidings of a fresh lease of life. It reiterates the continuity of the life force .

"aisi bhi koi shaam hai jis ki sahar na ho?"

(is there any such evening which is not followed by dawn ?)

Chali hai naseem e sahar dheere dheere, gulon par karegi asar dheere dheere....'

(The morning breeze has started blowing softly. It will gradually show its affect on the flowers)

23.11.2015

50. GIFT THYSELF !!

“The only gift is a portion of thyself” said R W Emerson... You really haven't given much to another, if you haven't given a bit of yourself. It could be your valuable minutes, from your chock-a-block, ledger of life or a smile when the clouds are ominous

Gifts from the universe are tumbling down, like Jack and Jill. We only need to untie the ribbons. Sometimes, gifts from heaven come disguised and camouflaged, so cleverly, that our mean little hearts don't look beyond the packaging .After all “gift wrapping”, is now an art to be acquired and even a competition to be fought.

Giftng is now nauseatingly over the top. It is a refined form of greasing palms and bribing. The cheerful looking baskets and hampers, that do the rounds every festive season, in my motherland look suspiciously brash and weighty. The flamboyant presentation is meant to overawe and to entrance the receiver into lowering his eyes as well as his scruples. The Indian sweet meats may have made way for international-looking chocolates and the ubiquitous juice packs, may have made way for exotic wines and exquisite hand crafted artisan desserts, but the soul is receding into murky corners. Its just a flash without fire.

The flowers are synthetic too, like the ridiculously over priced perfume. The smile, that a tiny mountain flower could get on the blushing visage of that special lass in your life, is irreplaceable. No amount of fake hugs and air kisses can bring a glow, to the impeccably made up face of the girl of your dreams. However large be the rock that you might have bought her, if you don't care enough to indulge her once in a while, its a waste of your greedy money. Bulging wallets could buy you sugary phrases and hired affections, but your pristine intentions, will be the gifts of a lifetime.

Love is, above all, the gift of oneself! A cheesy line like this one, never goes wrong “*Dene ko toh hum tumhe chand bhi de dein, magar chand ko chand ka tohfa nahi dete!*” (I could even bring you the moon my love, but how can one present the moon to the moon?) or even “*uss ne kaha kaun sa tohfa mai tumhe doon? Maine kaha wohi shaam jo ab takk udhaar hai!*” (He asked me what gift he should present me with and I replied, Oh , the same evening that you still owe me!)

6.11.2015

Epilogue

Lilies of the Valley

As I look at my outpourings in this book, it is like taking a furtive and surreptitious peep into my own psyche. The one that I had somehow lost touch with in this maddeningly plastic existence. So attuned was I to mechanical routine motions that writing seemed like the only mode of communication that is honest to one's own self .

Words that come pell mell out of the core of the being are truthful.

The strains of my favourite ghazal haunt me as I bow to the powerful pull of the cosmos .That pull which brings me surprise gifts of humans and opportunities galore!

*Woh naye gile woh shikaaytein woh mazze mazze ki hikaaytein
Woh Har ik baat pe roothhna tumhe yaad ho ke na yaad ho*

(Momin)

Those new resentments, those complaints,
those light hearted and fun stories
That being displeased at everything
You might remember or you might not ..

Drumming out my feelings in transparent sheaths of mirror images in prose gives me immense satisfaction even though my current passion is poetry .

Whenever I write something about my father it's a special emotional connect . The essay that is titled " Father " is my attempt at saluting his steely will power beneath a frail body . I hope to write about my relationship with him in a book soon . A novel perhaps ?

Do let me hear your feedback once you've read these essays. Hoping to bring you more chunks of my being soon .

I profusely thank Dr. Prasad for his encouragement and prodding to let this book see the light of day .

Till then it should suffice to say -

“I have good reason to be content
For thank God I can read and perhaps understand
Shakespeare to his depths”

(John Keats)

With all my love,
Lily Swarn

Biography



Lily Swarn won the Reuel International Prize for Poetry 2016 and was recognised by the World Union of Poets as Global Poet of Peace and Universal Love., World Institute of Peace conferred the title of Global Icon of Peace on her in Nigeria. Lily has been awarded the Virtuoso Award by Philosophique Poetica. A post graduate in English from Panjab university she has taught in the prestigious Sacred Heart College, Dalhousie. A gold medalist for Best All Around Student from the Government College for Girls Chandigarh, Lily has two University Colours from Panjab University. One for Dramatics as ‘Best actress’ and the other for excellence in Histrionics. She was the editor of the college magazine and also wrote middles for newspapers! She won accolades for recitation of self composed poetry too. Poetry as passion blossomed after her young son’s sudden demise in 2013. She writes with a poignant touch in English, Hindi and Urdu .Her weekly columns Cantonment Calling and History Mystery of Food are highly popular . Lily’s poems can be read in numerous national and International anthologies and have recently been translated into Italian too. She is widely read in the internationally famous, Poem Kubili and The Garden of Poetry and Prose magazine. Our Poetry Archive, monthly web journal included her work in the contemporary Poets of Asia edition. Her work has been recognised as explosive, outstanding and powerful by different poetry groups and they often turn their spotlight on it. A featured poet in Pentasi B Friendship poetry, she has been invited to attend the International poetry meet. Her poetry has also found a place in the e zine, Incredible Women of India and in the Learning and Creativity Magazine. Lily’s prose makes an appearance in the Australia based EZine, The Mind Creative. Lily Swarn’s column History mystery of Food is published each Wednesday in the international web magazine Different Truths.com. Her series “Cantonment Calling” in the same magazine won her exceptional readership world wide.

This year she was awarded a trophy for being a ‘Woman of Substance’. Her FB page in memory of her late son Gobind Shahbaaz Singh has tremendous following. ‘A versatile genius’ is the title she got in her school, Carmel Convent. Lily has been a radio show host in North Carolina USA and anchored prominent stage shows both in the civil and army arenas due to her proficiency in English, Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi. Frequently invited as a guest for her views on the 24hour multilingual radio broadcaster, Sher e Punjab radio aired from Vancouver, Lily was recently interviewed by the Red River Radio “Tales from the pages” show in the United States

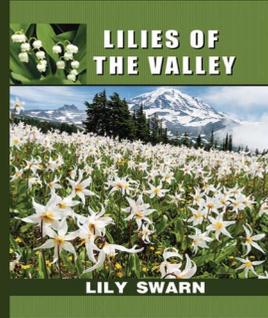
Married to an army veteran, she lives in Chandigarh,

You can find her writings in these books -

1. Contemporary major women poets of India
2. The Virtual Reality
3. Colours of Refuge
A multilingual book whose proceeds go to refugees
4. Bouquet of verse
5. Love poems
6. Roses and Rhymes
7. Revista Letrare ATUNIS
Poems translated into Italian
8. A Galaxy of Distinguished Poets and Emerging Contemporary Voices
9. Regular column for web magazine Different Truths read all over the world
10. Recently published book 'A Trellis of Ecstasy'.



LILIES OF THE VALLEY



There are some emotions that enrich our beings when they “flash upon the inward eye”, as Wordsworth would say. The essays in this book *Lilies of the Valley*, which is in your hands now are blossoms that germinated in my mind when it was aglow with the magic of the ambrosial hour. The dawn holds myriad promises in its flame coloured veil as it descends from the heavens. This time has a mystical pull for me. Thoughts and reveries stream in on calm waves. Most of these are condensed bits of my own personal life mantras. They are laced with couplets and snatches of songs that I love reciting or humming. This bouquet is my offering to all those who love me.

-LILY SWARN