

**KOPAN  
MAHADEVA**



**Vying for Greatness  
and  
Later  
Poems**

## BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

- 0 The Pearly Island & Other Poems (Out of Print)
- 0 The Pearly Island & Older Poems (New Edition) .....£ 3.75
- 0 Vying for Greatness & Later Poems (This Edition) .....£ 3.75
- 0 Kopan Mahadeva's Poems in Tamil .....£ 3.75
- 0 Three Stories from Sri Lanka .....£ 3.75

### As Editor

- 0 Broadside 1990 from the Cannon Poets (18 Poets) .....£ 2.75

### OBTAINABLE FROM:

CENTURY HOUSE,  
99-101, Sutton Road,  
Erdington,  
Birmingham, B23 5XA.  
(Telephone: 021-382 0109)

Orders will be received at the above address with an A/C Payee cheque in the Author's Name, including appropriate postage & packing charges ( 50p within U.K., and 75p for surface mail to all other countries PER BOOK). Each book of 50-60 pages weighs approximately 120 grammes.

*With compliments to Mr. & Mrs.  
Anton Balasingham.*

*C.H., 99-101, B235XA.*

*TEL: 0121-382 0109*

*Mmmmm  
10-12-99*

**KOPAN  
MAHADEVA**

**Vying for Greatness  
and  
Later Poems**

**1991**

Copyright © Kopan Mahadeva, 1991

All Rights Reserved

ISBN: 1-873265-02-6

Typeset at:

JUBILEE ARTS,  
84, High Street,  
West Bromwich,  
Birmingham,  
B70 6JW.

First Edition, 1991

Published by:

CENTURY HOUSE,  
99-101, Sutton Road,  
Erdington,  
Birmingham, B23 5XA;  
Telephone; 021- 382 0109.

## CONTENTS

page

Moods .....	5
An Own-Business-Not-Minding Tale .....	6
“The Black Man’s Smell” .....	7
Vying for Greatness .....	8
Winter Scenes .....	9
A Hidden Boon of the Sonic Boom .....	10
Sycamore, O Sycamore .....	10
Just Good neighbours .....	10
Shirkmen .....	11
The Man with An Appetite .....	11
Understanding Life .....	12
What She Said .....	12
Trinidad GuardianCalypso .....	14
Battle in Bed On A Caribbean Holiday .....	15
Feminine Beauty .....	15
Ode To An Old Age Pensioner Met on First Arrival in Britain .....	16
Acrostic for An Old Home .....	17
The Search .....	17
To A New Champion .....	18
The Wedded Bliss of Tom and Bess .....	19
November 1986 .....	20
Saturday Morning. ....	21
John Moat’s V-Day. ....	21
Trip With A Lispering Hostess .....	22
With Acknowledgements to Alf Tennyson .....	23
A Haiku for Gillian .....	23
Modern Man .....	24
Pinky Pearly Threesome .....	25
To A Pensive Pardner in Port-of-Spain .....	25
The Perfect Design and A Prayer .....	26
Strange Homes .....	26
Land-of-Pan’s Carnival. ....	27
To The Editor, on Tarty Dresses .....	28
Christmas Is .....	29
Hear, Hear .....	30
Winning Style .....	30

Hunts .....	31
From Chester Road to Hebden Bridge .....	32
An Evening in the Life of A Successful Man .....	34
31st October 1984 .....	35
Consolers .....	36
Ogden Nash's England Expects .....	36
Andrew Motion's £ 5000 Letter .....	36
Golden Anniversary Poem for the Dudleys .....	37
An Apology .....	37
Complacency Has Its Virtues .....	38
In Search of Inspiration .....	39
A Poetic Night .....	39
Say I'm Great, Dear .....	40
Kate Goes Mad Over Dates .....	41
Hindu Tamil Hymns of Yore .....	42
The Hindu Couple .....	43
Grandmother's Pet .....	44
Home-Coming .....	45
The Weight-Dropper .....	45
The Nuts .....	46
Poems in A Nutshell .....	46
To Rhyme is No Crime .....	46
Changing Me? .....	47
Hide, I Give You the Boot .....	47
The Way Harry Won His Day .....	48
Lessons in Living .....	49
Queues .....	50
Holland .....	51
Sweet Life-Supporters .....	51
Viewing Progress .....	52
Communication .....	53
Logic of the Skull .....	53
After A Snort of the Brand-Newest Drug .....	54
Health's Negative Bonus .....	54
Journey through Berkshire's Black Hole .....	55
The Managers' Code .....	56
Nostalgia Athletica .....	58
Heavenly Bliss .....	58
Poetic Parameters .....	59
Thursday's Child .....	60
Tastes Differ .....	60

## MOODS (1990)

Joy is a short-term flash  
in one's nerve nodes.

Sorrow is a broken tap  
which can be mended,  
but often melts itself  
when the water runs out.

Affection is tension  
and burning affliction  
sweetened by pretention.

Despair is a dead bird  
lying on its back  
with both hands pointing  
towards the sky.

Hope is a hovering rope  
Which suddenly appears  
before the ears  
of a drowning soul.

Anger is fire  
which flares fiercely  
if one feeds  
and fuels it.

Envy is a boomerang  
with poisoned fangs,  
which promptly returns  
to attack its source.

Humour is a soap bubble  
which could blow and bloom  
into one's life cells.

AN OWN-BUSINESS  
NOT-MINDING TALE

(1974)

A pet dog goes gay-walking on the left wing  
Of the Birmingham Bull Ring Pedestrian Crossing,  
Not worrying, never-minding, searching or hoping  
For finding his mistress missing from morning.  
He was enjoying walking, trotting and running,  
Freely from morning, not wearing his neck-ring,  
And now he is panting and airing while walking  
Along the Birmingham Bull Ring Pedestrian Crossing,  
Yet singing and swaying and winking and wagging  
And bubbling and blushing and grunting and growling  
And humming and hissing and jumping and jiggling,  
Thinking and dreaming and imagining he is king.  
A Longbridge limousine called Austing Outing  
Comes firing and farting and daring and darting,  
Roaring and rolling and wearing its steering,  
Taking a right turn into the Birmingham Bull Ring.  
It's now passing the previous pedestrian crossing  
Five links in front of the gay-walking dog-king,  
To whom the appearance of the aristocrat Austing  
Is challenging and annoying and threatening and frightening.  
So without thinking and blinking and wasting his timing  
He is starting the chasing of the Austing Outing,  
Barking and bellowing and cursing and howling,  
Almost to the point of catching the Austing.  
The man who is driving, on the dual-carriageway surfacing,  
Is suddenly seeing a glaring opening  
Appearing after the last week's raining,  
And is pressing the pedals of the system for braking.  
While the dog-king is busy contemplating  
Retarding behind the hot-bottomed Austing,  
It's exhausting system's protruding piping,  
He is finding himself unwittingly heading.



He is falling down rolling and shouting and screaming,  
While the car is carrying on slowing and screeching.  
His eyes are closing and consciousness fading,  
When he is hearing two new horns tooting.  
Then, his eyes are re-opening and reflex is working.  
He is rolling away to the edge of the paving,  
And is crawling and inching towards the curbing.  
The new car is passing him just missing hitting.  
The dog-king is lying with his head on the curbing,  
Struggling for breathing and sobbing and regretting  
For not going his way his own business minding,  
And is dropping his head on the paving, dying.

### **"THE BLACK MAN'S SMELL"**

(1990)

"A black man smells not like white humans  
but like hyaenas," said a South African  
gentleman to TV men: News Highlight  
of 25.2.1988.

There were three men, when that discovery  
was broadcast — one black, one brown and third, white —  
dear friends, enjoying beer. "Hey, that's not right;"  
blurted Mr. Black, " Bastard, isn't he,

"to say such things. What does his own carcass  
smell like at the exhaust. Racist skunk."  
Pacified Mr. Brown, " He did seem drunk  
When he said it. You're not, man. Let it pass."

They looked for their dear old friend Mr. White.  
They looked to the left, and then they looked right.  
Mr. White was not anywhere. Instead,  
They saw a man seated by them, all red!

## VYING FOR GREATNESS

(1989)

On a summer's Sunday afternoon  
I was snoozing in an easy chair  
Lulled by Erdington's enchanting air,  
Filled by my spouse's exotic spoon.

Rear crazy paving was my location  
Beside our tool-shed where I had swooned  
That pre-noon when the garden was pruned —  
Doors welcome-moded for ventilation.

After a while I heard some voices.  
I felt disturbed, but ears shot, sharpened.

Peculiar tongues, peculiar noises;  
I strangely, vaguely comprehended.

"I may be loose and contain some clay  
But always on top of wealth I stay.  
I am really swell and therefore called  
The great top-soil farm and garden mould."

That shrill note came from the garden side  
Preceding this from another site:

"I am so solid, set things to shape  
Though laid on shelves to stagnate and gape.  
I am indeed much greater, and called  
The casting, moulding factory mould."

That claim came from the direction of  
The open-doored shed's uppermost shelf.

“Quite unlike you two, I’m exclusive,  
Seen just as shapes of things creative.  
By world’s foremost artists I am called  
The one and only, shape and form mould.”

This bold and enchanting female voice  
Emerged from shelves of sculptures and toys.

“That makes me the greatest of moulds, friends!  
For, I’ve life. I grow. Your debate ends!!  
You would, of course, have heard; I am called  
The unbeatable food and fridge mould.”

That last voice and the loudest of all  
Reached my keen ears through the kitchen door.

I awoke with a start and rushed for  
My writing tools to record it all.

### WINTER SCENES (1991)

Fog and frost, fusing bulbs and fish-bone trees.  
One huge fridge-cum-freezer surrounding homes.  
Fuming breaths. Wool-coats, masks, gloves and bootees.  
Frozen plants and hedgerows frenzied by storms.  
Sleet and slush. Shiv’ring short days in shop sales.  
Lamp-trains on roads with trails of lead-filled smoke.  
Snow. Ice. Windshield mist. Skids. Crash. Break-down tales.  
Cold wind plays on woollies, a bloating joke.  
Gales-fed sweat houses make coughs, colds and flu.  
Housewives with brooms chase remnant autumn leaves.  
People eat and drink, stuck to homes like glue.  
Rain drums on windows. Pipe-play on chimneys.  
Hibernation in bags, night-caps, socks and quilts.  
“Good Morning”s in dark through dripping nose-slits.

**A HIDDEN BOON  
OF THE SONIC BOOM (1980)**

The Mabaan tribesman of remote Sudan,  
He will never face an acoustic doom.  
For, he cannot ever get overran,  
So scientists say, by the sonic boom.

Like you and me, the Mabaan, of course, is  
Prone to the natural presbycusis.  
But, on the contrary, since the Mabaans'  
Is an unrevolutionised clan —  
Industrially speaking, that is —  
The Mabaans will have no sociocusis.  
Their hearing sense will hence be more acute  
In old age. Useful asset. No dispute.

But when my own age does advance,  
I will not like to be like the Mabaans.  
For, when my grand wife grumbles at me,  
I won't hear, so we could always agree.

**SYCAMORE, O SYCAMORE (1984)**

Sycamore, O, Sycamore,  
I will like you so much more  
If only you would cease to grow  
Just outside our kitchen door.

**JUST GOOD NEIGHBOURS (1985)**

Daily, that pot rose  
Peeps through my neighbours windows  
And beams smiles at me.

## SHIRKMEN (1990)

Oh, I am so thrilled with them, the world's shirkmen,  
That, to sing their praise, I wring my pen.

When you call them to fix something you want,  
Sometimes they fix it. Quite often they don't.

They hit and push and bang and break and soil  
Everything else. Your O.K. things they spoil.

Anything they break, they seldom disclose,  
And fix without nuts and screws, which they lose.

They borrow your tools, but take them away.  
Their addresses, real names they never say.

They stall and extort with no sense of shame,  
And when things go wrong they just shun all blame.

Oh, I'm in love with our contra-workmen.  
Who said I crave for boring old craftsmen?

## THE MAN WITH AN APPETITE (1982)

(After a News Item of 1982 about Stojan Boscovic, a 36 year-old Yugoslav soldier, who was reported to have "had an irresistible appetite for swallowing unusual things" as listed in the Limerick)

There was once a soldier named Boscovic,  
Whom surgeons cut open when he fell sick.  
Out came spoons and forks,  
Keys, pencils and corks,  
Knives, nails, screws, and a big piece of fire-brick.

## UNDERSTANDING LIFE (1989)

Is life a virus to be weirdly fought,  
Man-eating misery born out of gloom,  
Antique treasure to be artfully sought  
Or a garland of jasmine's perfumed bloom?  
Is life all-found snooze in a five-star room,  
Or a roulette endlessly turning round,  
A four-million years' old and worn out broom,  
A palace where peace is perched underground,  
Or paradise on earth lost and/or found?  
Is life an orchard with piercing thorns,  
Carnival dance with gay costumes and sound,  
Or graveyard with roses only in stones?  
I've searched for an answer since age twenty;  
Hope I can find it even at ninety.

## WHAT SHE SAID (1990)

I strolled to the park at Cannon Hill,  
Run down, dejected, one Sunday eve  
After failing, again, to achieve  
My one-poem-a-week target and drill.

I walked till my wobbly legs yelled,  
And sat on a solitary seat.  
Behind me towered a flower tree,  
Fine-scented, flamboyant, in full heat.

Summer's breeze caressed, cooed and put me  
In two worlds simultaneously —  
Knew where I was, but still some elsewhere.  
Then...books in hand, a beauty came there.

Pleasant and perfumed, she broke the ice:  
"Sad, when others are jolly like mad?  
Like to unfurl your mental burdens?"  
I felt sneakingly scared; sought to rise.

"You're not in Japan, nor Redlightland  
But in England's big heart, Birmingham —  
Soon to be a poets' paradise.  
I am Miss Muse. Don't be so surprised!

"My lovers look for me everywhere,  
But I choose those to whom I appear  
And also the moments when I should.  
I am now here to make you feel good."

I already felt strong and treated,  
Gaping, glowing, in that genial air.  
Bright lights of hope spread around me where  
Dark haze and deadly laze had feasted.

"Where do you live? Can I too come there,  
Whenever I want to, please, Miss Muse?"

"Nope! I choose!! But I'll never refuse  
My favours to deserving lovers.

"As for where I live and how I work:  
I serve to soothe human passions,  
Have no fixed abodes nor modes of work,  
But can give certain indications.

"I'm active in spring, swing in summer,  
Same as most of you, living close, for you.  
Slow, I'm somewhat, when autumn's nearer;  
And unwind in winter, like all of you.  
Now, my time is up, mission's over;  
So, good bye, until some day later."

## TRINIDAD GUARDIAN CALYPSO (1984)

### CHORUS

It truly express. It tersely express.  
Never any news or views it supress.

(Chorus)

Dennis the Menace—he our darling true;  
Inside, them Brides are attractive too.

(Chorus)

Spicy Odd Spots lift our souls so high;  
Trinidad Dictionary set them fly.

(Chorus)

Editorials are really objective;  
The World News is nearly exhaustive.

(Chorus)

Medical, Scientific, Media Guides,  
And Cinema Write-ups are always prides.

(Chorus)

With Crosswords, Forecasts, Comics, all Sports,  
And She's Page, Exchange and Weather Reports,

(Chorus)

Faithful Conscience of Carib's custodian,  
Our fifty cents friend, The Trinidad Guardian.

(Chorus, twice).



**BATTLE IN BED**  
**ON A CARIBBEAN HOLIDAY**  
(1982)

Hey, you, hawk-like hovering hyptoniser,  
Aren't you in search of some way to enter?  
I do not at all mind the thing you wish,  
But promise you'll soon let me sleep, dear sis.

You know, I'm one who works from nine to nine  
And so at nights feel like a porcupine.

I could have slumbered in a secure net  
(About which, at such times, I always regret)  
Sensing you deplete steam and starve to death,  
Gasping for your last bit of god-damned breath.

But that was not the way to be, my girl.  
So, you may swiftly prepare to unfurl  
On my cheeks, nose, eye-lids, or my lips –  
Which are the only uncovered strips –  
And slowly suck your last bloody mouthful  
Of my densely daubed Phthlate, di-methyl...

**FEMININE BEAUTY**  
(1985)

Women folk,  
When they walk,  
If they rocked  
Their stalks,  
For him,  
There is beauty.

Women folk,  
When they talk,  
If he sensed  
Innocence,  
For him,  
There is beauty.

ODE TO AN OLD-AGE PENSIONER  
MET ON FIRST ARRIVAL IN BRITAIN (1961)

Bournville — breathing and basking in  
cocoa-fragrant air,  
With Brummies babbling chocolate-  
garbled English there,  
Cadbury's sanctum stilling seers  
to stand and stare —  
It was there that I met Bert Barton —  
the man so rare.

Bert Barton — a Trojan with many  
talents was he,  
A descendant of the hardest core  
of Black Country;  
He played his parts perfectly —  
not just for fame or fee,  
But, instead, to satisfy himself  
conscientiously.

Besides impeccable English, Bert  
spoke languages three,  
They were the complex tongues of  
painting, plays and cookery;  
And, perforce, he was pensioned,  
frolic and family-free;  
Hence he'd made them his whole life  
and family — one and three.

Through Bert's pies, puddings, pictures,  
plays and poetry,  
I've enjoyed hours and hours of pleasure  
— endlessly,  
And now grieve since he bade good bye  
irretrievably  
To all those and to me — Bert,  
simple, sincere and friendly.

## ACROSTIC FOR AN OLD HOME

(1990)

Gaggles might have giggled up and down its nooks  
Once, but those days now lie deep, buried in books;  
Only the Council's cast-iron name boards yet remain,  
    Sembling rainbow bridges to severed yesterdays.  
    Erdington justly extols this oblique waist-belt  
    Mooring noisy Gravelly to peaceful Court Lane,  
Onyxed by an illumining church, big bowling square,  
    Open park, mill-yard for scented timber stacks,  
Repair shop for resigning cars, pub, and Patel's shelves.

Long have I lost my jaunts and jogs in its large green  
And side-walks shaded by sycamores and whitebeams.  
Nestled, we, there in nineteen seventy eight and nine  
Enwrapped in close-knit friendships, which I now invoke.

## THE SEARCH

(1989)

For two whole days I scanned the nooks  
    and nerve cells of my inner mind,  
    and then I looked up all the books  
    and other sources I could find;  
yet failed to get what I searched for.

    The second night, I died to sleep,  
    tired and slit-eyed at past midnight.  
    Then it started, my mind, to bleep,  
flashing green and yellow grinning light  
    when, lo, I saw that metaphor!

## TO A NEW CHAMPION

(02-07-88)

Wimbledon was watched by the world in awe  
when a new women's champion bloomed on screen;  
Still in teens but like a long-have-been,  
she had important lessons for us all to learn.

There was no brooding when a point she lost:  
no swear, stare, whimper or grimace,  
no signs of envy, greed, shame or blame  
but just playing on conserving her ergs and time—  
only her next move occupying the mind—  
with dedication and determination,  
strength and speed, drive and calm and grace,  
immune to impacts of eighty million eyes.

We saw the reigning queen lose her big crown  
in her favourite court of former years,  
not for lack of will, skill, strength or speed  
but by forgetting the UNFAILING ATTITUDE:

**ACTION IS THY DUTY, THE FRUIT NOT THY CONCERN,**

Krishna's whispered wisdom to war-lorn Arjun,  
worth being always remembered by fighters of sorts  
in all fields — the state, home, research...and sports.

New Champion, the whole world applauds  
your dutiful cool, concentration and charm –  
no arrogance, show-off, moaning or rejoicing—  
and therefore here's our blessing and warning:  
You'll sure be the Queen of Tennis so long as  
you don't develop any of such slippery spasms.

## THE WEDDED BLISS OF TOM AND BESS

(1975)

The thing you see ahead of you  
Is not a Jumbo from the zoo  
Nor a buffaloes or a bull  
Or rhinoceros grown up full.

It's only our dear old Tommy;  
He and, of course, his pumpkin tummy —  
A quarter ton of laziness,  
Doted on by his dear wife Bess.

Jobless, the man has always been,  
And those who Tom have known or seen  
Envy him but always mention  
Thrombosis or hypertension.

When Tom decides to get about,  
The poor chap has to inch it out.  
They do not like him in the bus,  
Because he blocks the corridors.

And, oversized for cabs or bike,  
He's got to stay at home or hike.  
Of the food brought from the dole,  
Tom spares Bess none, and eats them all.

But she does, somehow, find him more,  
And his gluttony provide for.  
With no kids to call hers or his,  
He's all hers, and she is his.

If that's their way to wedded bliss  
We should not, should we, jest like this?

## NOVEMBER: 1986

This November is sombre —  
more than the ones before.

I've been packed in a sack,  
both feet and hands tacked  
and even the lips, tight-sealed.

Feelings roam, somewhat free,  
and the spirit just keeps alight,  
but too weak to take up flight.

They themselves are curbed  
and utterly disturbed  
by lightlessness for sight.

With other irons still in fire,  
TOPLODONORRETIRE  
seems the first brick wall to clear.

Retire, yes. No, not to nap  
in dire inactivity,  
but to the lactescent lap  
of my love named Poetry.

God, light up my surroundings,  
bite off my bindings,  
wipe out my wall of bricks,  
to win over this November  
of Nineteen Eighty Six —  
so sad, severe, sore, sombre.

## SATURDAY MORNING

(1990)

My unaccomplished yesterday fires me out  
Of bed faster than I would have liked  
And here sit I, waving pen and taming thoughts  
To weave a sensible, memorable something  
With drawn-out words, this silent Saturday morn.

In a while the week's last gifts will peep  
Through my carved-out hole to the outer world  
Of shameless sales-centered superlatives  
Where one has to drain the brain to discover  
The hidden facts — to stay or slip out of traps.

But trapped am I, by choice, and hold the tiger's tail  
Of craving to create, to kindle no living soul  
But mine; Not those like me — word-weavers who strive  
To make lovely Their Things to claim Their Share of fame,  
And live oblivious to most other decencies in life.

It seems possible my tapestry is just for posterity's  
Mirth and, maybe, accrument of pounds of paper-notes  
By those I've never met, or dreamed of, nor could love...  
Thought-fox does drag out of dark cells, concealed conceit!  
The post arrives — to push and pin me down to the day.

## JOHN MOAT'S V-DAY: 27-07-84

Nick Stimson was won  
Thrice at the Bridge on Torridge  
With dead sticks — and skills.

**TRIP WITH A LISPING HOSTESS**  
(1987)

After a five-course meal at mid-day  
I went on a plane trip yesterday.

When I approach Gate-1 for boarding,  
A voice says, USE MATE-2 FOR HOARDING.

It was a hostess. Pretty, she looked.  
I was glad on her flight I'd been booked.  
Her lispy word-puzzles to correlate,  
Was indeed fun as I now relate.

I get in, find my seat, keep the bag  
I'd taken in hand, by me, and sag  
Into the seat when I hear her grunt,  
SAND BAGS ARE KEPT UNDER HEATS IN FRONT.

My pretty, pet hostess then bleated,  
PLEASE FATTEN YOUR HEAT BELT WHEN HEATED.

I lit a fag and started pulling.  
She blurted at me without smiling,  
NO SNOGGING WHEN SHAKING OFF OR LANDING.

When, some well known mountains, from my seat,  
I asked her if I could manage to sight,  
She said, THOSE OCCUPYING WINDOW HEATS  
CAN WELL PEE THE FOUNTAINS ON THEIR TIGHT.

Asked if the flight will be bumpy, she said,  
AIR SOCKETS ARE ASPECTED AHEAD;  
Asked when we would fly above the clouds,  
Answered, WE'RE NOW PLYING OVER THE CROWDS.



Then, to amuse more, by provoking her,  
For the site of light-switch, I enquire.  
She snaps, sensing I was a naive pest,  
THE HEIGHTS WITCH IS TIGHT ON YOUR ARM TEST.

Offering her a pound coin, I whine,  
"If I could have a gin I'd feel fine."  
She replies, handing a glass of wine,  
IN THIS PLIGHT WE DO NOT CHARGE FOR MINE.

There is a blast. We suddenly fling.  
But to my seat, with both hands, I cling.  
YOUR WIFE JACKET IS UNDER YOUR HEAT,  
On our way to water, Lispy greets!

**WITH ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS  
TO ALF TENNYSON  
(1985)**

Our's not to make reply,  
Our's not to reason why,  
Our's but to do and die  
Because we are small fry.

**A HAIKU FOR GILLIAN  
(1984)**

I am delighted.  
My sick son made a sundial.  
Stones, bean-stick, told time.

## MODERN MAN (1989)

Modern man is so mechanical,  
To nature, he is inimical.

As babe, he sucks off plastics and glass  
With artificials wrapped around his ass.  
As child he eats crisps, sweets, things from cans —  
Not even food cooked in pots and pans.  
So, grown up, when hungry or thirsty,  
He runs for packets and tins firstly.

Against what nature'd been intending  
Modern man spends lots of time sitting  
At work, in baths, loos, cars, when eating,  
Reading, writing, and TV viewing —  
Almost whole time except when sleeping.

In his constant contrary effort  
To achieve greater comfort to live,  
To himself, he is not seen to give  
Much rest or relief of any sort.

Nature, always there and in plenty  
Is, to modern man, a luxury.  
He fights a timeless war against time  
And thus finds no time to reason or rhyme.

Most of his efforts are to barter  
Natural matter for new matter  
And create pollution all over.

He worries more, that he should earn more  
And more, and save more, and then some more  
So that one day he could relax and rest,  
And in that process, is laid to rest.

## **PINKY PEARLY THREESOME (1991)**

They unfurl their hues of bare and painted lips  
as a joined-up trio, rather than as a pair,  
whenever we encounter, in our TV lounge,  
and savour the sea-shell shapes of their curls.

Each has spiralled tender lips which kiss  
and cuddle, caress and tickle the closest ones  
as lots of lovers do, even in storms —  
on Mona Lisa green necks, all three of them —  
with a handful of glaring green-eyed cousins,  
clustered to make a bonded, breath-taking bunch.

My Love and I always relish the threesome,  
each time we see them, since our recent pearly day.

## **TO A PENSIVE PARDNER IN PORT-OF-SPAIN (1982)**

Keep your head up, man,  
The sky will not fall.  
Even when small, man,  
Trust you would be tall.  
Problems get solved, man,  
When you think they will.  
Do not forget, man,  
That nothing stays still.  
When you get stuck, man,  
Laugh like hell inside,  
Shut your mouth tight, man,  
And open mind wide.  
Sip some old rum, man,  
And jump up till you fall.  
When you get up, man,  
You'll have beaten all.

**THE PERFECT DESIGN  
AND A PRAYER  
(1989)**

An expert-made,  
well-designed structure  
fails altogether  
at the working end  
of its tenure.

Its components  
conjointly fall  
at the long belt's end  
of its whole,  
bomb-like, instantly.

The engineer  
who created us —  
that Skilled Designer —  
has manufactured  
trillions like us.

Let's therefore pray  
that when we do fall,  
We'd fail suddenly —  
in each part  
simultaneously!

**STRANGE HOMES (1991)**

Centepedes hide out in cracks of walls.  
Snakes live in sneaky underground holes.  
Scorpions reside in rots of trees.  
But bacteria pervade our deep-freeze!

## LAND-OF-PAN'S CARNIVAL

(1990)

From Dimanche Gras until the birth of Ash Wednesday  
Caribbean's Land-of-Pan enacts its Carnival parades  
When over million mixed souls revel in masquerade,  
Ecstacising on all its roads and savannas — every year.

Young and aged, poor and rich, male, female, senile and the sick  
From earth's old local races move their homes to streets those days,  
Self-synthesised into a single enormous orgasm,  
And sing and dance, jump and prance in various spirited ways.

World-wide visitors soak in that spectacle, wide-mouth-awed,  
Soon catch that mas fever and swing themselves instinctively  
To the bewitching, bone-shaking beat-blasts from shaped oil drums  
And to Land-of-Pan's calypsoes from the Monarchs and Mightyys.

Led by heavy-garbed and energised rival Kings and Queens,  
To steel-pan music march-dance competing masquerade bands  
Non-stop to Port-of-Spain's Park from all corners of the Land,  
With also calypso crown-seekers and their grass-roots-wit themes.

Past Queen's Park Savanna's oceanic stage of  
frame-propped ply-boards,  
For judgement, trot those bands of ten-thousands of costumed gods,  
Angels and imps, demons, the seasons and the elements,  
And all creatures and characters of hell, heaven and earth.

That climaxes those days of unceasing song, dance and mime,  
And the process will repeat itself till the end of time;  
For, wise Land-of-Panians know, even two days in heaven  
Are well worth the rest of the year spent in suffering and toil.

Land-of-Pan's Carnival is a fete of liberation —  
World's greatest festival — transcending verbal expression.  
It's a rite, ritual and celebration forged into one.  
IF DAT ISN'T PARADISE, MAN, DEN YOU SHOW I DA REAL ONE!

## TO THE EDITOR, ON TARTY DRESSES (1988)

(In Response to Sutton Coldfield Observer's News Item of 9-9-88)

Ma'am, you say girls who dress tarty-wise  
And women consuming too much booze  
Or using foul tongues, police advise,  
Are rapists' risks — and isn't that true?

Ma'am, they ought to know, our bobby boys.  
Them never lie nor use tricks nor ploys.  
Nothing but truths they ever do speaks.  
Don't they research on matters like these!

Ma'am, don't believe what some people say.  
Mostly, rapists are not friends or neigh-  
bours who're ushered into women's homes,  
'Cause that's not where rapists really roam.

Tarty dresses tempt own partners too,  
At home, Ma'am, and so does too much booze.  
Isn't it true that foul tongues provoke  
Sex battles of even married folks?

Them police mean well, Ma'am, though sometimes  
They have pet theories like "crooks are born,"  
Or polish old records to prove new crimes;  
But they do mean well, Ma'am, overall.

Ma'am, them rapists can be human too  
If their home folks, spouses love them true.  
Most satisfied could they be who will  
Marry and keep them, and treat them well.

Meanwhile, Ma'am, let those who fear such men  
Heed the wisdom of our police force  
And to or within sight of strange men,  
Not show off, be inviting nor provoke,

Stay home after dark, secure windows,  
And if they'd marry at all, Ma'am, then  
Find good men they like and seal-bind those  
Men with love, and not leap from men to men.

A word to those who praiseworthy work,  
Ma'am, to eradicate such evil shames  
Like rapes and sex-attacks on unwilling dames:  
Don't quarrel. Get together. Jointly work.

Ma'am, if such police advice is heeded  
No one's further counsel will be needed.  
All we will find are the most welcome rapes  
And sex attacks between spouses in shape.

- Erdington Bard

## CHRISTMAS IS...

(1990)

Christmas is a toy with which grown-ups play.  
Christmas is a pole vault from year to year.  
Christmas is jingle bells with tightened belts.  
Christmas is carnival in crowded high streets.  
Christmas is induced fuss and imagined fun.  
Christmas is the bridge between autumn and spring.  
Christmas is what hangs on threads from trees.  
Christmas is the thaw pot where tensions melt.  
Christmas is the eye piece for New Year's peep-lens.  
Christmas is glue and cement, and Big Ben.  
Christmas is rebirth of tired old souls.  
Christmas is excuse for extravagant indulgence.  
Christmas is patching-up-presents galore, and  
Christmas is when God wakes up for over-time.

## HEAR! HEAR!!

(1990)

### I

I can feel and hear it approaching. It's here, again.  
I can see its pointed teeth protruding past that bend.  
It'll soon be prowling before my propped up packing door.  
It will bite my toes, nibble at my numb ears and blow  
Piercing shocks and shivers down my shrunk and frozen frame.

Lord, I too am your son, and these fellows, tent-dwellers  
Lying around me are but my hell-sharing brothers;  
And your annual entry here on year-end's freezing breath  
Just brings one bright flare of lightning in which we are seen  
With our naked, vacant souls, facing recurrent death.

We hear of cards and cakes and gift-packs and clothes and drinks  
And turkeys, hymns and greetings and many other things.  
We've distant dreams of days when such words would move us too;  
But now, we're dumped as destitutes, specks of dirt, wriggling  
Worms hung by strangling, slow-yielding social spiders' webs.

### II

Hark, what do we hear? Our leader speaks. She is preaching  
Compassion for 'our deprived poor and hungry siblings.'  
She speaks from her o'er-heated home with hundred rooms,  
Talking for a wage of a wound hundred million pounds.  
We, three thousand doomed derelicts here, hear her. Hear! Hear!!

## WINNING STYLE

(1987)

The most certain style  
To pile your wins is to fight —  
Always with a smile.



## HUNTS (1991)

### I

One hundred chicken lose their chiffon heads  
While his farm-hands lie still-planted in beds.

Two moons later, at edge of despair  
He scrabbles through the shelves  
And cupboards beneath their stairs  
While his child earnestly delves  
Into his research on catapults.

Clatter of hooves on cobbles. Chatter of conspiring voices.  
War cries of hounds. Laugh-bursts of run-bent frontal horses.  
Horns blow their bellies out. "Where are they?" "Find them!"  
Glittering guns from straps and shoulders on galloping steeds  
Paint the air with fleeting, silvery brush-strokes.

Sinking feet in sighing grass and gasping swamp  
Work twice hard to keep up their pace and poise.  
Soothing rhythm of splashing water coaxes them  
Out somehow—possibly a psycho-sonical phenomenon.  
The fleeing thieves who had hid peep out just once.  
"We've found out where they are. What next?" "The obvious!"  
"Run, run you sons of vixens before our guns begin their fun."  
Bang, bang. Bang, bang, bang. "Ouch, ouch." "We've got them!"

### II

I too am a huntsman.  
I hunt sounds, catch images, trap ideas, fish in memory-ponds,  
Chase savoury word-beasts, and, when they move me to feelings  
To doing so, I cook them into a diversity of unplanned dishes  
In my secret bunkers of silent penance, in an air of serene peace.

Occasionally, I make some offerings  
To others. And I think I do perceive  
The signals that they like my things.

Most of man's life is but a desert,  
With thousands of mesmeric mirages,  
And barely few freshwater fountains.  
Yet, I'll go on hunting tirelessly in that desert —  
For fountains. I love and enjoy hunting. After all,  
In that sweet process, even if I do, I might spend  
Just one, otherwise lifeless, shapeless, transparent thing —  
My own time — with no harm done to anyone else.

I am a mental hunter. I'll go on living, to hunt.

### **FROM CHESTER ROAD TO HEBDEN BRIDGE** (1986)

Lumb Bank...Lumb Bank...Lumb Bank...Lumb Bank...  
pumped my heart faster, and yet faster  
for five long hours on icy irons  
from Chester Road to Hebden Bridge.

A poetry week in Eighty Four  
with pregnant hopes to explore some more.  
A tingling attack. Genesisitis!  
Boyhood scenes. Schools. Soothing rhymes—sadly missed.

“The seed that sprouted and begun  
in the Pearly Island in the sun  
is now a growing, blooming tree  
in the home of English poetry.  
From here and now, where, what and when?  
How should I henceforth use my pen?”  
The question marks were queer snakes  
with kinks and links and hidden breaks.  
“A rolling stone!,” some strange voice cried.  
“But no falling stone though,” I replied,  
“True, rolling stones gather no moss,  
But that does have its advantages.

“For, then, with no bars to progress,  
They could roll sooner to success.”

An instant was too long to wait  
to devour the much heard-of delights  
of the teds, johns, annes, toms and dicks,  
the philips, petes, jims, andys, nicks,  
and all of Arvon Muse's star picks.  
I longed to hear their masterpieces;  
to read distant letters, legacies,  
to re-examine the rook and crow,  
the knacks of potato digging to know,  
to find the secret of skeleton keys,  
to learn how to live in poets' societies,  
perceive sun-dials passing minutes,  
to review goings on in churches and at grass,  
to be convinced there's enough of green,  
to learn how conference of birds had been,  
to discover modern poetic tricks...  
and thus in Arvon's magnetic air to bask.

Hours ate my thoughts, but did take me there.

I soaked in that week of fun and feasts,  
of games and wines and varietal treats,  
heard, read, wrote poems of all types and shapes  
with time and space for even retreats.

The week in the end was many ears long;  
So much was discussed and so much heard,  
enjoyed, achieved, thresholds stretched,  
and ideas borne for a life-time's songs.

Home soon...home soon...home soon...home soon...  
pumped my heart slower, and yet slower  
for five short hours on warmed up irons  
from Hebden Bridge to Chester Road.

AN EVENING IN THE LIFE OF  
A SUCCESSFUL MAN (1981)

He climbs some far-off and forgotten mountains  
Scanning his papers spanning half a century  
Of afore and after his matrimony  
With severe and sustained vertebral pains.

Thought-leaches creep into his mind from behind  
As he surveys his many conquered terrains.  
What of the future? Does one exist — live or dead?  
His limbs revolt. Reminder that a rest is needed.

He turns the TV, to soothe his strains.  
It's the overdone news of Falklands again,  
With unending talks of unemployment.

Then a welcome change. Top of the pops.  
Soon a drab sketch, as dry as vodka:  
Men dressed as women, bursting inflated bras.  
Slapstick sitcom. Feels sorry for the chaps,  
Though pre-recorded giggles fill the gaps.

"Dinner's Ready" call from kitchen to eat while it is hot.  
Stoppily cooked, he feels but swallows with sleeping thoughts.

Son storms in, switches successive channels.  
Newscaster's finishing smile with his twisted lips.  
And, the weather man explains his satellite strips.  
Eyes close, heralding the end of a tedious day.

Then, she starts chattering in her characteristic way  
Bombarding his slumbering ears with accusations  
Devoid of justifications, reasons or sense.  
His actions are blamed as bad for their kids.  
He enters his innermost shells via eye-lids.

Their proud, loving father, world's best,  
Their solid and shady supporting tree,  
Each minute of his life thinking of them...  
Doing them wrong? What a shame!

Two smarting pearls soon mature. Sleep suddenly disappears  
For the man who had served the world for fifty years,  
Tom and tormented by a hundred million spears  
Arising from his intimate's incomprehensible mind,  
Stung by a tongue of the involuntary kind.

### 31ST OCTOBER 1984

The sights I see are vile and weird,  
Of Death in Fight for Freedom's name.  
Eight bullets in the frail old frame  
Of a trusting, graceful, gentle soul.

The scene: shrine of ancient Indus Valley  
Civilisation, with its noble tales.  
They claim they'd won her with the volley  
Of two trained and treacherous guns.

Here, in England, I watch some folk  
Jubilating, celebrating  
That cowardly murder, blatant sin  
Of their self-acclaimed kith and kin.

Man has matured, we proudly deem  
In humankind's recent history;  
But not quite enough, does it not seem,  
To live in love and harmony?

## CONSOLERS (1988)

Sealed jaws on paws, ears drooped,  
Heads to the ground inclined,  
Mistful eyes, all's-lost looks,  
Bring pity to one's my mind.

Peeping from heaped up furry mound,  
Pedigreed angels, black and brown,  
Worn and weathered, torn and tethered,  
Not demanding nor complaining.

George on left and Charles to the right,  
My sole consolers, day and night,  
The day I found you (Oxfam's grace!),  
That was my best of pensioned days.

On top of world I always feel,  
And super-strong, when both I see;  
So, I've never felt to mend you  
Nor would I ever want to.

## OGDEN NASH'S ENGLAND EXPECTS (1985)

The English are proud,  
But nice too. They have their ways.  
It's wise to know those.

## ANDREW MOTION'S £ 5000 LETTER (1984)

I read his letter.  
He then flew above, saw me,  
Jumped. They found his body.

**GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY POEM  
FOR THE DUDLEYS OF KNOWLE**  
(23-03-1990)

Norman's and Hilda's vessel of gold  
Is built up of sound values of old.  
Its roof is hoop-bound with seasoned love,  
And walls with English traditions wove.

Higher and higher their air-ship goes,  
Stronger and stabler its flight's course.

Engineer Norman's design it is,  
From Mid-West County's Solihull's Knowle —  
Brave Hilda being its pilot, sole.

Of Prof. Dudley, what would history say?  
He made Eng. Production grow and stay.

Well done, Hilda! Well done, Norman!  
Hands on the rudder, feet on the throttle.  
Fly on, fly on, though you've won life's battle!

**AN APOLOGY (1985)**

My Love, True One, Dear Muse,  
Forgive me for this, sad,  
Disappointing news.

Today, I have much less  
Time with you to spend  
Since, I am sorry, my yes-  
terday went with a friend.

## COMPLACENCY HAS ITS VIRTUES

(1981)

A pretty good swimmer was I, once — slow but confident.  
I could then have survived in water till the calves home went,  
Even in the middle of the Mediterranean.

Then, the idea dawned on me, “I must develop speed.”  
A fancy it was. Just that. There was no real need.  
I’ll now briefly narrate the story, pay attention,  
How that cursed thought caused my most recent frustration:

In time, I enrolled with the Erdington swimming pool  
Where the water was chlorinated, and not too cool.  
My visits were more frequenter than regular,  
And so, I soon became disasterously popular.  
Friends multiplied. Noddors self-transformed into my teachers  
And mauled me, daily, with the multitudinous factors  
Governing a swimmer’s movements, style, and speed of  
motion

Describing, in depth, the various strokes in creation —  
Each one with a full enthusiastic demonstration —  
The butterfly, the crawl, the back, the free-style and breast,  
The frog-leap and all the unheard of ones and the rest.

I practised, I plodded, planned and persevered day by day.  
I sweated. I dreamed, and left no stones unturned as they say,  
Consuming lots of the chlorinated stuff, by the way.

After a year and a half had passed, I took stock, one day,  
To find that though in weight, girth and confusion I had  
grown,  
In all the desired attributes I had got really worn.

Thus, abruptly, I abandoned my attempts at swimming —  
Sans spirit, sans confidence, former skill, and everything.



## IN SEARCH OF INSPIRATION

(1984)

I dashed off to Totleigh's bridge on Torridge  
in search of poetic inspiration.

Who are these temptresses between my pen and paper?

Humming leaves from surrounding summer trees,  
Gentle breeze soothingly staving heat,  
The majestic, twin-span mild-steel truss,  
Cows and farm houses on sloping hills,  
Birds and blooms, moos and roars, varied scents...  
of Devon's countryside all around me.

Say, does inspiration come from inside or out?

## A POETIC NIGHT

(1982)

In the middle of a mid-summer's night,  
awaking with poetic passion alight  
and wishing to be engaged enjoyably,  
when one resolves to write some poetry,  
finds pen and paper, and an easy chair,  
sits, warms his thoughts, but soon slumbers there  
and slowly creeps again back into bed,  
makes magnificent poems in the mind instead —  
better than the best he had elsewhere read —  
and does, in the morning, jerkingly rise,  
so disappointingly to realise  
that he had not managed to memorise  
even a note of his nocturnal delights,  
is it not sad? Does it seem right,  
this pathetic end to a poetic night?

## SAY I'M GREAT, DEAR (1982)

In life,  
My only real, unquenched craving  
Is to  
Be told by you, My Darling,  
That I  
Am Great!

I work,  
Day by day by day by day  
And then  
Night by night by night by night  
Just for  
That quest.

Won't you  
Please open your tight-lipped mouth  
And say,  
"In the East, West, North and South,  
You're the  
Greatest!"

Darling,  
The only person on earth  
Who can  
Boost my bloated ego's girth  
And make  
Me work;

Dearest,  
You cannot falsify Freud!  
Sweet-heart,  
My motivator and guide,  
Help me  
Score more.

You know  
I've achieved some things, so far,  
But do  
Lust to do very much more  
For one  
And all —

For you,  
And me and the family,  
And for  
The world and society —  
Before  
I flop.

Therefore,  
My other half, the better part,  
Let us  
Impart, to life, a new start.  
PLEASE SAY  
I'M GREAT.

## **KATE GOES MAD OVER DATES** (1983)

There was once a young girl called Kate  
Who was so much fond of the date  
That daily she went out and ate  
And all-out she went for the date.  
Going on at that hectic rate,  
What do you think she found, poor Kate?  
Very soon dear old Katie found  
What she lost in many a pound,  
Before some weeks and months had gone,  
She doubled in quarter and stone.

**HINDU TAMIL HYMNS OF YORE  
IN PRAISE OF LORD SIVA  
(Translations, 1989)**

**I: Saint Thirugnaanasampanthar**

His ears are studded. He rides an ox,  
Wearing pure white moon on His locks.

With jungle cemetery's ash on His  
Forehead and limbs, He's my heart-thief.  
Seerkaarzi's Siva, He rescued from grief  
Even great Vishnu and gave him hands  
To pray to Him. Greatest He stands.

**II. Saint Suntharamoorthy**

O, great Lord of golden complexion,  
Thou weareth at waist, a tiger's skin  
And, above Thy radiant red hair,  
Glaring crescent moon Thou graceth.  
Lord, priceless pearl of Marlzapaadi,  
Whom else but Thee can indigent  
Me, think of or ask for a grant?

**III. Saint Thirunaavukkarasu**

O, beauteous, my treasure, honey sweet,  
Lively light of those in heaven's retreat,  
The white brightly glow in the midst of it,  
My flesh, blood, mind, my soul and thought  
In my mind, The One who gives all we want,  
My eys, eye's black lens, its image within,  
O, Lord of Aavaduthurai Shrine,  
Save me from any future ails of mine.

#### **IV: Saint Suntharamoorthy**

Nothing else does my mind entreat  
But unceasing memory of Thine feet.  
Several births have I passed through;  
Now reached that birthless state true.  
Lauded for ever by learned folk, Village  
Seerkarzi's people Thou saved from plague.  
Even if, perchance, I forget Thee,  
My tongue will promptly sing with glee:  
**LORD SIVA, TO THEE ALL GLORY BE!**

#### **V. Saint Manickavaasagar**

Lord of the vast Universe and Earth,  
King of the holy and orderly Heaven  
And of the Thirupperunthurai Sojourn,  
Whom can I accuse, to whom to mourn  
If you're not graceful and let me reach Thee.  
See, I no more live in this world of sin-seas,  
And I've no other wish, so, please call me.

#### **VI: Saint Thirugnaanasampanthar**

Benoalent He is, and not a bit noxious.  
His mode of mobility, a White Ox is.  
As part of Him lives Uma, His powerful Spouse.  
With undiminishing majesty and magnificence  
In Mount Chiraappalli's temple He sojourns.  
By chanting His name and singing His praise  
My mind does acquire deep cool and peace.

#### **THE HINDU COUPLE (1988)**

She is his Goddess.  
He is her Lord, and much more —  
Never any less.

## GRANDMOTHER'S PET

(1975)

Our grandmother's pet was a pariah-dog  
Who was dirtier than the dirtiest hog.  
He wagged at people he didn't know  
And barked at home folks very much more.  
Being a cantankerous canine cad,  
Once, in his stupidity he did sway  
Our tame cow to toss him ten feet away.  
And when Maddy landed with a thump  
On the nearest half-cut coconut stump,  
He had on his hind legs such a bump  
That it looked like an African camel's hump.  
Often, when gay, he laughs and sings  
Which, to the house, his dog-friends brings.  
His toilet was our sweetest mango tree,  
And he ate cock feathers with lots of glee.  
When we lit even a little cracker  
He ran for miles like a champion tracker.  
He soon gets friendly with many a thief  
And begs them for dried fish and beef.  
Only in the kitchen would he eat  
Where Grandma gives him a grandiose seat,  
Serves him with the best of bones and meat  
And as her dearest grandchild did him treat.  
He strayed from home for many a day  
When we were told he was out at play.  
His pitch-black skin was heaven for ticks  
And flees which he with friendship licks.  
Since his appearance umpteen years ago  
He never would have had a bath, oh no!  
But we dared not ever criticise Bheem  
For our Grandma'd get angry to the brim.

## HOME-COMING (1988)

We had her letter this morn.  
She is to fly to London  
On Sunday, visit someone  
And then come home...

Home, with a punky head!  
No, was normal when she left.

That's all she said.  
That's all she said  
In the room that was left in her  
Loony, spoony, cartoony card.

Of course, not. I'm not being hard.  
Why, shouldn't I feel shy  
For my teenage offspring?

That's right — twenteen,  
What she has been  
For some years now —  
Just twenteen.

Oh, how much I wish  
She be re-normalish!

Rather than to return home  
In punky Yankee neo-form  
Can't she find a way of,  
Say, first bumping me off?

## THE WEIGHT-DROPPER (1989)

She lights up the world  
With the sunshine of her smile  
And giggles of gold.

## THE NUTS

(1984)

The Notional Union of Teachers  
Is NUT as even I, a child can see.  
In which case, all those boring preachers  
Must, logically, full-fledged NUTs be.

My brother, however, says he prefers  
To name that union of misses and sirs  
As the Society of Torturers.

Often they get the urge to use the cane  
On you but, sadly, these days they cannot.  
Instead they drive you completely insane  
By teaching well selected trash and rot,  
And keeping you indoors — sun, snow or rain.

Oh, my disgust, disappointment and pain!  
The NUTs must all be Thatchered or slain!!

## POEMS IN A NUTSHELL (1985)

Cute little carpets  
Of feelings, memories, thoughts  
Woven with choice words.

## TO RHYME IS NO CRIME (1987)

Longer a poem,  
The greater, I feel, it would  
Need some form of rhyme.



## CHANGING ME? (1983)

Whatever has happened to me today?  
Am I the same me of yesterday —  
Full of anger, frothing wild, mad,  
Impatient, insomniac, swearing and sad?

Suddenly, this morning, a change befell me  
When my arch adversary smiled at me.

Was it an accident? Was he serious?  
Am I to treat it as a truce between us?  
Have I won? Or, was it him? Or both?  
Maybe tomorrow, I'll know the truth.

## HIDE, I GIVE YOU THE BOOT (1985)

So, now you appear —  
Too late I fear,  
Pair of let-downs, you!

Be lost, get away.  
I'm on my way.  
With you two I'm through.

For hours I searched, to  
Go with you to  
Meet my love at two.

But since you two hid,  
For twenty quid  
I've bought two new shoes.

## THE WAY HARRY WON HIS DAY (1984)

Doctor Harry was a quiet and soft-spoken person.  
He whispered even when he uttered the most  
Indisputable facts like  $2 + 2 = 4$  or that the sun  
Rises always in the east and sets in the west.

But colleague Doctor George was differently made.  
He was a lawyer cum politician, mostly self-made.  
Once George decided where on the damned bread  
It was desired the butter should be spread,  
He'd argue in decibels and bangs from every direction  
And with fire-rockets from each conceivable position  
And vantage point until, unlimately, he won.

One day an argument arose at our Faculty  
Meeting where both these men, undoubtedly  
Honest and well-meaning men, were dons —  
Harry, head of engineering and Georgie  
Leader of a new branch of technology.

Harry had submitted a proposal as head  
Of his group which was by George unsupported —  
Merely as a conscientious member of the Faculty.  
Harry placed his case, as it raised its head  
On the agenda, which George formally opposed.  
Harry argued with arrays of umpteen facts  
But George countered with contrary facts.

Dean Doctor Desmond tried in all ways  
To make defiant General Georgie sway  
But failed badly. George persisted more,  
And more loud and vehement than before.  
Harry defended — soft but insistent  
But George was unyielding and persistent,  
In his own stand, until Harry finally whispered,

“The department concerned is my very own.  
As its Head, you have heard my proposal based on  
My humble experience and my humbler opinion,”  
And sat down, followed by silence for eons.

The Dean, Don Desmond thought and thought and thought.

With no other way, he put it to vote.  
George lost, but gave in with grace — perhaps planned  
To hack it at the next stage of approval,  
Needed to implement Harry’s proposal.

But George opposed not Harry again, nor any other  
Member, at any meeting or time thereafter.

## LESSONS IN LIVING (1990)

My uncle was a doctor of the Ayurvedic kind  
Who taught me, as a boy, ten maxims to mind.

“The tastiest tonics for health are not other drinks but  
Mugs of water,” he pumped into me, morning noon and night.  
“Pass motions somehow,” that master said, “once or twice a day;  
Thus flush your system, of several ailments straightaway.  
Even when you’re served with the most delicious dish,  
Eat only three-quarters full, though against your wish.  
Don’t hop into bed just after meals. Walk six hundred feet,  
And thereby treat yourself to deep and peaceful sleep.  
Off to bed when sick or sleepy – any time of the day.  
Do trust in God, and pray at least two times a day.  
Switch Sundays off for one-day’s rest, frolic, games and fun.  
Work hard, but keep worries off bed, once your best’s done.  
Take a dose of strong purgative once a year without fail.  
Drive out of home, dirt, flees and germs beyond any trail.”

I have carried uncle’s commandments through my life and find  
I’m a doctors’ deadwood — with no disease of any known kind.

## QUEUES (1984)

Queues, queues, queues behind queues —  
Oh, I am really sick of queues.  
I dislike them queues, just like you.  
I wish without them we could do.

In one day I stand in twenty-odd queues,  
And that's why I hate them queues:  
At dawn I join the queue for the loo  
With kids, and at breakfast there's one too.

Out on the road is the traffic queue;  
And for parking there's another queue.  
For the lift at office I stand in a queue.  
Later, for coffee there's queuing too.

Lunch is by queue, and then, after two  
Forms the queue for Coffee-Number-Two.  
I go to the library. There's a queue;  
And then, one for the boss. What can I do?

A work-mate and I once thought through  
A route for my home, easier and new,  
But the very next day our plans fell through  
Because we were in a bigger traffic queue.

On my way home, for petrol, I've to queue,  
And at Co-op, I wait in the bread queue.  
At their cashier's there's another queue,  
And with the wife, for theatre, I join a queue.

We go to the pub to forget them queues  
But for drinks, we still have to queue.  
Even at death I'll face a cemetery queue,  
And that's why like you I hate them queues.

## HOLLAND

(1988)

Eternal battle-ground. Enemy, the sea.  
North sea at home, and world's every ocean,  
Many times tamed by this maritime nation  
With perseverance and determination.

Her lips swell with tulips, lap's full of wind-mills.  
Into her great Delta, long Rhine of yore spills.  
Netherlands — motherland decked by endless dykes,  
And Amsterdam ribboned by canals and bykes;

World renowned Rotterdam, a largest in ports;  
Central Hague — playing administrative roles.  
Growing for ever, devouring the wild sea,  
These are all sweet Holland, famous and free.

## SWEET LIFE-SUPPORTERS

(1985)

I have never  
Found water  
Sweeter  
Than after  
A score  
Or more  
Drinks of  
The other,  
Stronger,  
Hotter,  
Scot-ter  
Life-giver.

## VIEWING PROGRESS (1984)

Here they go again. I'm glad to see them in motion.  
I enjoy watching their movement, progress, action,  
Activity. They are all the same in one sense,  
They all move steadily, briskly, with grace,  
Decisively, purposefully — each to own goal.  
Yet they fall into differing groups as well.  
Some proceed from left to right, and the rest  
Vice versa. They are alike, yet diverse  
In other ways too. Some are big, some small,  
Some medium. In modernistic parlance, one may call  
Them in sizes as maxis, midis and minis.  
Some are foreign, but most are British-born.  
Some are white, some brown, some black, some yellow,  
Some of other hues too. Some are fat, some slim,  
But most are well looked after, carefully kept,  
And made-up and polished to be smart and brisk and fit.  
I see them through our window, through our nylon net.  
I admire their outlines—various shapes, yet in unity,  
Each with own identity, moving fast, all adorable.  
All towards their goals, they pass me.  
I hear a range of refined sounds from them,  
Yet alike. They are individualistic, yet conform  
To one another. They are made thus, the same way,  
Not by God, it can't be true, but by ordinary men and women.  
They move the same way — just float and flee in moments.  
I love to just sit and watch them move, passing by,  
Every day, at nine and five, and sometimes at other times,  
Going to work, coming back, returning, re-returning,  
Processioning to shops, supermarkets, pubs, and again,  
Some this way and some that, up and down,  
Each going own way, and yet on the same way.  
They seem to work together, all as one,  
United in diversity, towards prosperity  
Towards progress, purposefully moving on.

## COMMUNICATION

(1988)

She asked if he could take her to her digs by car.  
He readily agreed, for she was his daughter come home.  
He waited. She waited. He waited and she too was waiting.  
He waited in the study seated before his monochrome.  
She was in the lounge, in front of the colour TV watching  
Something she really cared for not, he later felt.  
Suddenly she got up, picked her bags and left  
Banging the door and bellowing 'bye' to the gate-posts.  
He caught her in the queue at the bus station  
And took her to her destination, still puzzled  
As to what went wrong with their communication.

## LOGIC OF THE SKULL (1988)

Wheresoever their faces go,  
Like sun and shadow, there I go.

But why, pray, will someone say,  
For days and days and weeks you see  
Some people just don't bother with me,  
But pamper their faces hourly?

Don't you think, and please do not flinch,  
They're unwise, and will pay the price,  
For being unfair to me and Hair?

If their face is index of their mind,  
I and my Hair divulge their kind.

Hence, I advise, they will do well  
When washing face to groom their skull.

**AFTER A SNORT OF THE  
BRAND-NEWEST DRUG (1990)**

He groped with his nose  
In old Shakespeare's prose  
And heard with his mouth  
The cold from the south.

He smelt with his hands,  
A gypsy girl's dance  
And with saw-toothed tongues  
Drank mynah bird's songs.

He ate with sharp ears,  
Seven warrior's spears  
And felt in his nails,  
Travails of Tamils.

He twiddled his toes  
And vanquished his foes  
And sailed on one knee  
To sweet eternity.

He spent ten minutes  
With such one-off treats...  
And stopped his heart beat  
As his very last feat.

**HEALTH'S NEGATIVE BONUS (1983)**

Men, when all are well,  
Enjoy together. When sick,  
Each, alone, suffers hell.



## JOURNEY THROUGH BERKSHIRE'S BLACK HOLE (1985)

Here comes Berkshire's Black Hole —  
But it's a balck hole with a conscience.

It has twin-exits, and everyone knows it.  
We all know to where they lead. We go in  
And come out daily. We do so twice in  
The same day—some a bit afraid, yet we enjoy it.

We go through Berkshire's black hole, every day  
In a big python's belly. There's no other way.

Though for seconds our heart beats do stall,  
We all know it as a safe black hole.  
It's very narrow, with just enough  
Room for our snake to wriggle through  
With millimeters to spare. I swear it's true.

Our struggling snake hisses and gasps  
Every time we approach the black hole.

We sometimes wonder if there's some chance we  
May not return one day — go elsewhere  
Such as to infinity, eternity.

I, for one, won't mind if it happens some day  
Since I'm tired of this tedious journey of life —  
With endless mundane chores and strife  
And no apparent achievement for days.

And so, our python's puffs and pants are, to me  
Discouraging and encouraging simultaneously,  
When, carrying thousands in her belly, to the city  
She squeezes through Berkshire's Black Hole, daily.

## THE MANAGERS' CODE (1978)

(Based on British Institute of Management's Code of Best Practice)

Friends, let's master this, The Modern Managers' Code,  
Wherever in the world be our varied abode,  
And be we Engineers, Executives or Chairmen,  
Accountants, Directors, Administrators or Foremen  
Of companies, co-operatives, corporations  
Or other private or public organizations:

We must observe and obey the laws of the land  
Not merely as seen but as their spirits stand.  
Never should we exploit our exalted offices  
For personal gains though our pay may not suffice us.  
Uphold we should always the respect, reputation  
Of ourselves, colleagues and our dignified profession.  
We should not bite more than we could competently chew  
But should that materialise through our misjudgement true  
We should know when it's wise to call for expertise.  
To customers, consumers, providers of supplies,  
Other than to our employees and establishment,  
We must always strive for obligation-fulfilment.  
Shun we might, showered praise for our successful projects,  
But our responsibilities we just cannot reject  
For failures of ourselves and for our followers subject.  
Our knowledge should be kept constantly up-to-date.  
Even our rivals we should never denigrate.  
When public affairs need professional assistance  
We must volunteer and serve without any hesitance,  
With merit, integrity, no malice or repentance.  
Our opinions must be objective and reliable,  
And proposals fair to all, practical and flexible.  
Let's with conscience, honesty, loyalty, commitment  
Pursue the policies of our establishment.  
We should plan and review onward programmes and objectives,  
For ourselves, our employees and for all executives,  
And expend all efforts for our enterprise's success  
Rather than for self-centred, own advancement or riches.

We must always, around us, promote and cultivate  
 Good communications and a conducive climate  
 For interchange of ideas and innovations private.  
 Our personal interests in official goals must be  
 Promptly disclosed, but we should never disclose any  
 Internal information — which is not our property.  
 We must protect our employers' plant and material,  
 And minimise wastage, through means which are optimal.  
 Statements we make should be clear and well qualified,  
 And personnel misunderstandings must be purified.  
 Decisions by us should be dispassionately taken,  
 After judicious assessments are undertaken  
 With the facts, all evidence and expert knowledge brought in.  
 We must ensure the welfare of all those working for us,  
 And ourselves firstly follow our disciplinary orders  
 (Thus setting examples for others to emulate us),  
 Enlighten employees on duties and authority  
 And the range of their varied responsibility,  
 As well as train them for associate higher duties —  
 Even our positions — promoting potentialities.  
 In all our actions we must respect human dignity,  
 Motivate self-improvement, encourage impunity,  
 And in our daily dealings, demonstrate humanity.  
 Our contracts should be clear, suffer from no omissions,  
 And eliminate corruptions, palm-oils and violations.  
 We should never delay decisions concerning others,  
 But if for good reasons delayed, must inform them on tethers.  
 Unsafe, defective goods should at no time be delivered.  
 Any after-sales agreements must always be honoured.  
 Delivery promises should be punctually followed,  
 And mass media should never be misleadingly used,  
 With untruthfulness into ads or sales data diffused.  
 Resources at command should be optimally employed,  
 And quality of rural life should be constantly conserved.  
 Cultural, moral standards must all be maintained  
 And national interests, policies always kept in mind.

This, dear brothers, is the Code of Managers erect,  
 Which we must learn, and should follow — and never forget.

## NOSTALGIA ATHLETICA (1991)

The best bud in the bunch was he, the boy,  
Just twelve. Books were his bedmates and joy.

Then matured in his meditative mind  
A craving, in sports, some success to find.

His school's sports day, in six months, came.  
He vied with his weak skills at every game  
And finally found the foremost event  
Where he could deliver his deepest dent.

High jump, it was, in the junior's group.  
He yeamingly joined the Yellow House troupe  
And with now-old-fashioned scissors style  
Knocked the five-foot bar in furious toil.

His teachers cheered and class-mates jeered  
But the boy, in the end, won a third place,  
Proving his skills with the only such prize  
He'd ever procured, in sports, to pride.

Now, the real climax. He carried the prize home  
With such joy as he'd conquered Rome.  
His guardian-uncle, too discipline-bent  
Gave a mem'able hiding for getting home late.

## HEAVENLY BLISS (1986)

The sun's their real bliss  
Though the tropics do not  
Realise that it is.

## POETIC PARAMETERS (1991)

To me, good poetry should not be a riddle  
Nor fiddle nor muddle nor doodle nor huddle.  
It could be a puddle but a patterned puddle.

I believe rhyme does make poetry more sublime —  
Though need not rhyme always, could breach in the middle,  
Or rhyme inside or, just sometimes, not rhyme at all.

All good poetry, to my mind, must carry substance,  
Should have a message, meaning, feeling, coherance,  
Tell a story, not be boring, exude glory,  
Be memorable, mem'risable, not gory.

I believe that poetry is for the people —  
Not for the poets, except when they are people.  
Poetry of my kind should not be Piccasoic,  
Making one wonder from which end to devour it.

Sound poetry is loudly readable, sounds right,  
Does not glaringly exhibit the writer's might,  
Flows, glows, is mellow—not rigid, tight, bound, sink aground,  
Too personal, mysterious, or evoke fright  
In people, off the noble art of poetry,  
To hate and avoid it as crack-pot's sorcery.

Poetry should appeal to most human senses  
And surpass cultural boundaries and such fences.  
Good poetry is the thread of life, God's best gift  
To unify mankind and eradicate rifts.

These are my own views on what poetry should be.  
Some of you would have other thoughts about it.  
As for mine, if it's verse, worse or good poetry,  
You're invited, as judge, to assess and applaud it.

## THURSDAY'S CHILD

(1980)

I, I, I  
try, try, try  
to fly high  
up the sky.

I, I, I  
do realise,  
that the sky  
is too high.

Why, why, why  
should I, I  
find the sky  
so much high?

Some men say,  
that's because  
my birthday  
was Thursday.

## TASTES DIFFER

(1987)

For one who drinks Scotch,  
Beer tastes queer, gin is like brine,  
And cocktail, hotchpotch.

## POET'S PROFILE

Kopan Mahadeva was born in Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) in 1934 and, after a four-year ground-work in ancestral Tamil, studied in English primary and secondary schools before entering the University of Ceylon in Colombo to read engineering. He graduated with Honours in 1955 and served in Ceylon's Public Works Department as a Chartered Engineer, and Army's Volunteer Engineers' Regiment as a Lieutenant for six years, before coming over to Britain in 1961 to join the University of Birmingham.



He was awarded his MSc (Engineering Production and Management) in 1962 and a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) in Engineering Production in 1964, following which he continued at Birmingham University as a Nuffield Research Fellow and Lecturer till 1965.

After a year as a self-employed Industrial Consultant in U.K., he served as Director of UNDP's Ceylon Small Industry Service Institute, Velona, and stayed on in his country of birth for eleven more years as Chairman and Executive Director of MITE Organization, Colombo, before returning to the staff of the University of Birmingham from 1978 to 1980. He then took up the Chair of Production Engineering and Management at the University of the West Indies in St Augustine, Trinidad till 1984 when he re-joined his family in Birmingham for good, and is now an Industrial & Management Consultant with his office in Erdington, and a Visiting Professor in Manufacturing Engineering at the Birmingham Polytechnic.

Kopan Mahadeva has been writing both 'poetry for pleasure' and 'poetry with purpose' from adolescence, mostly in English, and sometimes in Tamil, and has been publishing his poems in a relaxed and casual way until now. He has decided to devote more of his time to writing poetry and fiction from now onwards.

He is married to a medical practitioner, and has four children—three daughters and a son—all of whom share his interest in poetry and fiction, and form his immediate circle of critics.

**KOPAN  
MAHADEVA**



**Vying for Greatness  
and  
Later  
Poems**