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Father, I Never Asked You Anything More
(a mini autobiographical poem)

Dr. K. V. Raghupathi

I

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

II

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

III

I listened to unassimilated, inassimilable bland soporific lectures
passively like a trained animal
with no protest and questioning like Socratic gadfly.
My doubts persisted
like chewing bubble gum on the floor
I realized it was futile to be explicit.
Life went by like run-on-the mill with no fragrance.

IV

Thereafter, I knew not what I should do
You initiated me into competitive examinations
to fulfill your middle class ambition.

You funded and your motivation like bioline¹
kindled your middle class ambition in me too
and I sailed with you
but the result shattered your ambition
like a broken villa in a deluge.

V

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

VI

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

VII

Thereafter, father, you knew not
winter after winter, summer after summer
I read flinty philosophers of the west– Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, Gide, Russell...
Close-packed philosophies of the east – the six orthodox schools²
three heterodox schools³ and three schools of metaphysical thought⁴
I conversed and debated with their spirits alive in black letters printed
-- all with the only halcyon desire to satiate my inner self.
But father, all that I built on the banks of my rumpled watery-mind
with the bricks of kneaded philosophies
yielded nothing.

VIII

Twenty four summers and winters I wandered like a gipsy
flirting with yogis, swamijis, saints and philosophers
spending days in ashrams, reading esoteric writings
to heal my wrecked soul.
Father, I tell you, my learning began which I missed like a child in my early life.

I gained the treasure and I grew like a banyan tree
with roots of wisdom seeping in my veins and cells.
I was twice born, father, though I did not fulfil your middle class ambition.

IX

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

X

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

XI

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

Father, I still loved you for this ill motivated action.

XII

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

XIII

And the trunk box you loved most
jammed with memories –
decades of letters, envelopes stuck with all different kinds of stamps,
album of my yoga postures, old photos, blurry photos,
three full manuscripts and an incomplete manuscript
typed on Facet typewriter that was gifted to me by my maternal uncle
to flourish with my writings that fetched me no returns so far,
notes scribbled on pieces of paper, now brittle
two mementoes.
Now it lies in my new house I built on green fields
in the silent hiss of space covered with a white loin cloth like a coffin.
It is alive with me as I am alive.
The box is so dear to my heart
that I hardly said 'yes' to scrap dealer.
If doubted its existence, father
you could walk into my house and see
the centre stage of my life.

1. multi energy source vitamin tonic

2. the six orthodox systems are: Nyaya, Vaishesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva Mimamsa and Vendanta
3. the three heterodox systems: Jainism, Buddhist and Carvaka
4. the three schools: Advaita, Dvaita and Vishista Dvaita