

# Kashi

eternal city of light

\*1\*

Drifting toward the light.  
borne on the swift currents of mother Ganga  
The wind, caught in our sails, pushes us  
toward tomorrow, closer to what we will become.  
Subtracting our moments from the sum,  
we leave our yesterdays behind  
dissolving in the wake.

\*2\*

In a time without a place  
a space without time blossoms  
and is born of nothing. The moment,  
blown into the face of the infinite,  
challenges the void.

\*3\*

One moment follows another.  
One drop of blood in the river of life.  
One bead of sweat on the immaterial brow.  
One tear pulled across the cheeks of time  
leaves its trail, even as it disappears.

\*4\*

To where? Like the rain that swells  
the mother Ganga, to the sea, merging  
with all the waters of the world.

Finally, to be lifted by the sun  
into the sky.

\*5\*

To drift across the horizon.  
Gathered by cliffs in high mountains,  
to fall again in rain and snow  
and move in mist and fog.

\*6\*

Frozen in ice, buried in layers of time,  
Sleeping for centuries only to thaw  
when awoken by the rain. We will flow again  
feeding the sacred rivers source.

The river runs its perpetual course,  
moving inexorably in ceaseless cycles,  
bringing us to the future through the present.

\*7\*

One moment follows another.  
One life leads to the next.  
In a time without space, a place without time  
remains unchanged, but changing nonetheless.

\*8\*

The moment is eternal.  
It sings in my yesterdays and tomorrows.  
It knows no voice but it is spontaneously song.  
Its melody lingers on, hanging like perfume  
in the warm night air; a drifting fragrance  
of winter jasmine borne on the wind  
for my personal delectation.

\*9\*

Kashi, a place without time  
in a time without space.  
So many have seen you, named you,  
and claimed you, yet you remain,  
eternal, city of light.

\*10\*

They have razed your temples  
leaving mosques where once they stood  
Aurangzabad and Shah Jahan  
laid siege to your holy places but they  
could not raze your heart.  
They called you Mohamadabad, yet  
you return as the holy city  
of sahmadi, mukti, and moksha.

\*11\*

They have always come to name you,  
thinking they can claim you, yet you always remain  
Kashi. Moksha Prakashika, Mahasmashan,  
Avimukta, Anandakanan, Anandarupa,  
Bhramavaddan, Kasinagara, Kasipura,  
Pushpavati, Surundhana, Dharmakshetra, Sivapuri,  
Sankarapuri, and Ramyanagar.  
The names all disappear from history,  
leaving only you the city of light, Kashi.

\*12\*

Divodasa, when you banished the gods from Kashi,  
Shiva cried as he departed. Brahma could not break  
your devotion. Your faithful sacrifice  
divulged the depths of your emotion.

\*13\*

Your undoing started when you followed Ganesh,  
in a dream, to Vishnu; who showed you  
the fleeting nature of all things.

Like the Buddha, a thousand years later,  
you gave up your royal riches to retire from life. Shiva  
rejoiced returning to his beloved city.

\*14\*

Even the Buddha's footsteps have been washed from  
the shores of the Ganga. The bones of his body were  
consecrated to your waters ages ago.

Like ashes on the banks of Manakarnika, picked over  
by scavengers, looking to glean bits of gold  
from the remnants of an earthly life.

\*15\*

Likewise, returned to the river, the cinders and the  
clay. Born of the dust after years we return  
to the dust of the day. From the moment of birth  
we all fall. Like the rain, the tears of the gods wend  
their meandering way, to the sea through the earth  
and the bay of Bengal.

\*16\*

Eternity nears, as today disappears and all  
the me in me fades away. Even as I pass another  
appears to answer the call. They take my place  
in the play, freed from my habits and fears,  
to experience life with their peers,  
each in their own particular way.

\*17\*

Yet nothing remains the same.  
They too turn gray, not even their tears will stay  
the inevitable reins of time.  
In the rules of the game,  
the punishment may fit the crime.  
The future will rearrange the same pieces  
in a different display. A new present  
remarkably familiar yet strange.  
In the silence after the tolling chime,  
one hears the only permanence in life is change.

\*18\*

Rising from the ashes of cremation  
a column of smoke, scattered by the wind,  
finds its destination in the sky.  
Carried by cosmic determination,  
we are born, we live and we die.  
Pinned on the Karmic wheel, from Creation,  
we move in a direction we cannot defy  
toward a reincarnation we cannot rescind.

\*19\*

Yet our spirit, skinned, soars  
devoid of mortal considerations.  
"Being", with all its material implications  
left behind, still must plumb the depths  
of our eternal cores with an original mind.

\*20\*

Pondering the consequences of our insignificant  
actions in the grand design and scheme.  
Wondering what purpose we may find to play  
in this life of a dream. Nothing ever quite  
the way it might seem.

\*21\*

Fumbling our way in a vanishing dream of a life,  
we age, growing deaf, dumb, and blind.  
The sharp knife of time cuts away,  
in the end taking the spirit, leaving behind  
only the clay. Mute, inconsequential  
but essential in its own way.

\*22\*

We are fashioned into new vessels.  
Holding the moment as it is born.  
We bind our souls to each new day,  
and so are reborn, for it is the will and the way.

\*23\*

The brief life of a dream  
leads us into morning and tomorrow.  
We awake just as a new dawn begins,  
so too will my coming incarnation.  
The brief dream of a life, once again,  
passes into forever, returning renewed;  
to see the universe with innocent eyes,  
and fill with wonder at each new day.

KASHI  
eternal city of light-II

1

The melodies continue.  
A raga raging at the edges of our consciousness,  
ineluctable, and intangible,  
yet pulsating through our very being.

2

Bird songs counterpoint prayers and temple gongs.  
The singing shuffle of anklet bells  
as they pass on, diminishing into silence and dawn.

3

India with its accretion of time  
its hours of endlessness  
which never arrive. Forever becoming  
a phantom future of promises,  
prepared to assemble itself soon,  
but which never occurs.

4

Winter in Varanasi;  
mornings of uncertainty and fog,  
afternoons of sun and heat,  
nights of cold and yet of lust.

5

Washing saris in the swift river,  
drying them in a billowing wind,  
the silk dances, fluttering like a butterfly  
blown by warm breezes.

6

Time knows no limit  
or recognizes the parameters placed on it.  
It moves like the Ganga from then into now.  
The ice of millenniums past  
melts into the source.  
The snow, which fell when Buddha walked  
upon the land, feeds the river today,  
running its course towards tomorrow.

7

Rising and falling, pulled  
by the same inexorable force that drives it to the sea.  
A few particles evaporate, freed by the sun  
to soar into the sky,  
condensing into drifting clouds  
which take on the shapes of our imagination.

8

They drift over the earth, some even returning  
to the mountains of their birth to fall  
in hail, sleet, and snow.  
Gathering in branches of trees, a mist  
that freezes into impossibly  
delicate trceries of frost.  
A moment of snow flowering  
in the mountain pines.

9

Beauty is in the eye which perceives it.  
We are all caught in the samsara  
which is nirvana now.  
Here, where the Void takes on form,  
order arises out of confusion,  
and the One becomes the multitude.

10

Time and space are woven inextricably  
in the passionate embrace of the temporal  
and corporeal. The ecstatic dance  
of Shiva and Parvati.

The merging of lingam and yoni.  
The generation of egg and seed leads beyond  
the lovers brief coupling, to a life of love  
remembered in emotional mutterings,  
whispered by their children at their eulogies.

11

Outstretched hands holding brass vessels  
filled with sacred water and human spirit.  
We are no more or less,  
temporary vehicles for our souls to reside in;  
Corpses we inhabit until we are released  
by fire and water, merging once again  
in the sky and river to become  
One.

12

Hidden in the morning mists,  
I find standing proudly with staff in hand,  
the ancient river man as he plies his trade.  
The syncopated rhythms of his oars  
as they dance upon the water,  
punctuated by birds singing in the mists.  
The moment, precisely because it is so fleeting,  
becomes immortal.

13

The Absolute and the zero,  
infinity born in the mind of Shiva,  
the coupling of nothing and everything:  
Complexity on the edges of chaos.

14

Varanasi, you are a fire  
which burns away the material  
leaving only the spirit.  
A flame which purifies.  
A cremation of one life to enter another.  
You consume the carnal,  
in the ashes of our bodies residue only the soul  
glistens and gleams.  
Varanasi you are a mantra for a universe  
in a land filled with visions and dreams.

15

Untouchables, combing the ashes for the golden  
adornments of our past life, unknowingly  
return the jewel to Mother Ganga. Constantly  
becoming new, the present is perpetuated  
in the miraculous cycles of life and death.

16

The water courses  
through our bodies and the land.  
Our soul, released  
from the burdens and baggage of time,  
returns to take on another form and live  
through another time, in a place without end.

17

Where does the river flow and from where?  
From here to there, and from there to here.  
The city of light is illuminated from within.  
It's temporary residents radiant  
from their pujas performed for Shiva.

18

It is the luminous heart which opens  
in reverence to you.  
The faithful and the faithless  
share the same ghats and gillies.  
Here, where the Buddha slept  
and the zero was born,  
Ananta (infinity) arises spontaneously.

19

The Madhya Loka beckons,  
the middle path, caught between  
the world of the Gods and the world of men.  
A realm of compromise and equivocation,  
halfway into the future  
caught in the past.

20

One with God,  
the union of Shiva and Parvati  
has resulted in their progeny,  
which go forth and multiply,  
inhabiting the earth.  
Divinity continues  
in their children's children.

21

We see filtered through an earthly veil  
caught between the world we know  
and the world we want to believe.  
Destiny written on the forehead and the wind  
by the hand of God?

22

In truth, there is no salvation  
except in eternal incarnation.

There is no bondage,  
therefor no release from bondage.  
Everything is merely becoming.

23

Only the endless cycle,  
Omnipresent Ananta,  
Samsara is Nirvana,  
Nirvana is Samsara;  
without beginning or end;  
in a time without a place,  
in a place without a time.