



WATER AS DIVINE MIRROR IN THE POETRY OF DAUD KAMAL

El agua como espejo divino en la poesía de Daud Kamal

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Abstract

In the poetry of Daud Kamal (1935-1987), water figures as an image of mercy, as in the *Quran*, and as a mirror that reflects divine hidden presence. The rock pool evokes the memory of Gandhara and other foundational civilizations born in love and creative ferment. Conversely, the images of drought, heat, and dust symbolize a parched spiritual order. The river, a recurring archetypal image in Kamal's poetry, represents the fluid self that is subsumed into collective identity to become a poetic distillate of history.

Key words: Daud Kamal, water imagery, drought imagery, Pakistani poetry in English, Gandhara civilization, Islamic poetry.

Resumen

En la poesía de Daud Kamal (1935-1987), el agua figura como una imagen de misericordia, como en el Corán, y como un espejo que refleja la presencia divina oculta. El estanque evoca la memoria de Gandhara y otras civilizaciones fundamentales nacidas en el amor y el fermento creativo. Por el contrario, las imágenes de sequía, calor y polvo simbolizan un orden espiritual reseco. El río, una imagen arquetípica recurrente en la poesía de Kamal, representa el yo fluido que se subsume en la identidad colectiva para convertirse en un destilado poético de la historia.

Palabras clave: Daud Kamal, imágenes de agua, imágenes de sequía, poesía paquistaní en inglés, civilización de Gandhara, poesía islámica.

Drawing upon various spiritual traditions of the Indian subcontinent, Daud Kamal (1935-1987) expresses divine presence through syncretic water imagery that evokes a legacy of divine love. The ideas of mercy and water that are intertwined in the *Quran* (Lings 1991: 67) are also closely related in Kamal's poetry. Kamal uses the metaphors of the boat and river to convey the soul's pilgrimage through time. Through a language of water, Kamal, like his Sufi predecessors, transverses many cultures and religions. He revives the nearly forgotten heritage of the Gandhara civilization that thrived in the region of what is now northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan.

At the center of this civilization was Peshawar, the winter capital of Gandhara that was then known by its ancient name of Purushpura. The place name "Gandhara" had two possible meanings, the first being "fragrant lands" — from the words *Qand / Gand* ("fragrance") and *Har* (lands) — while the second being *Qand / Gand* — from the word *Kun* which means "well" or "pool" (Naveed 2015). The images of incense and a rock-pool evoke both meanings in this excerpt from "Pilgrimage":

[...]
 Embraced by his own separateness
 he hears a voice
 searching for him. The forest opens
 into a clearing and the smell of incense
 lingers on in the ruined temple. A group
 of peasants descend the stone steps
 with deliberate calm.
 Sacred fish
 in a rock-pool
 Old mirror webbed with cracks.
 (*Before the Carnations Wither*, 1995: 8)

Incense was used to mark the passage of time in ancient China. An ancestral voice draws the impersonal subject of this poem into another time and into a ruined temple with stone steps that represent spiritual ascension. The descent of the peasants on the steps represents their withdrawal from a sacred dimension of existence. Stone embodies the image of a lasting reality (Baring and Cashford 1993: 96). The rock-pool images a place where life, ideas, and cultures gestate, as in Peshawar Valley ringed by the Karakoram and Hindu Kush mountains. The "old mirror webbed with cracks" reflects a divine love that has undergone occultation in our time.

This hidden yet discernible aspect of the sacred also defines “Prayer-Beads”:

Under
the shade
of a willow tree
where the river bends
in a rock-pool
prayer-beads rise
to the surface
from the mouth
of an invisible
fish.
(*Before the Carnations Wither*, 1995: 9)

The willow tree is sacred to the moon and is related to rivers and endurance (De Vries 1974: 500). “Prayer-Beads” conveys a hierophany, namely that sacrality inheres in all forms of life and in the universe itself.

As in “Prayer-Beads,” Kamal hints at surreptitious spirituality under oppressive orthodoxy in “Water-Carrier,” which conveys a devotion akin to that of the saints and poets who won converts to Islam through love and living example. The poem’s subject is dressed in rags, carrying a goatskin to deliver water:

[...]
Like all the rest
he waits his turn
at the municipal tap.
Killing time,
he tears off with his teeth
the skin of a sugarcane.
His bare feet know the backstreets
intimately – the way he knows
his straw mat after dark.
Twice a day delivering water
at the nearby mosque
and not a single prayer.
(*A Remote Beginning*, 1985: 31)

The final line of the poem undermines itself, for water delivery is a form of prayer. The tearing of the sugar cane skin adumbrates hidden sweetness and deep spiritual experience that annuls or “kills” profane time. The water carrier’s feel for the backstreets and his straw mat evince a sense of place and secret access to an oneiric world inaccessible through

the front entrance, that is to say, through orthodox institutional practices and performative, gestural religiosity. The water carrier who provides hidden sustenance to a mosque without outward manifestations of devotion projects Kamal's own relation to Islam, and memorializes the Prophet Mohammed's family who were massacred at Kerbala in 680 AD after being deprived of water.

In "A Ruined Monastery," water imagery conveys the camouflage and persistence of the sacred in the forms and rituals of everyday life:

Boulders
 huge as the elephants
 of Porus
 and, on the hill,
 a ruined monastery.
 When did the pilgrims
 stop coming?
 Waterfall
 and a ruptured pool
 [...]
 A dusty track
 dotted
 with cowdung.
 Every
 morning and evening,
 women from a nearby village
 come here
 to gossip
 and fill their
 earthen pots.
 (*Before the Carnations Wither*, 1995: 15)

Cows are sacred animals in Hinduism and Buddhism. The cow dung on the dusty track represents a residual trace of these repressed religions. The women who gather water undermine the premise in the question, "When did the pilgrims stop coming?", for they are pilgrims in disguise. The tall and majestic Porus ruled over a land between the Jhelum and Chenab rivers in the Punjab. His army of chariots and elephants was defeated by Alexander the Great's swift cavalry in 326 BC. Upon being captured, a wounded Porus was asked by Alexander how he wished to be treated. Porus replied, "As befits a king," upon which Alexander granted him the right to rule over his domains (Keay 2000: 72-73). The massive boulders exemplify rock that, in the words of J. E. Cirlot, symbolizes permanence and integrity, and whose cohesion gives it mystic significance

(Cirlot 1971: 274). Moreover, they reveal the survival of ancient rituals in the forms of everyday life — in this case, the villagers who trek to the ruined monastery for water.

During the Golden Age of Mahayana Buddhism (60-230 AD), kindness and concern for humanity became preeminent. Mahayana Buddhism was more inclusive than the austere, monastic Theravada Buddhism which was the other major branch of Buddhism (Armstrong 2006: 378). Under the aegis of the Kushan dynasty, over a thousand monasteries in the Taxila, Swat, and Peshawar Valley regions provided cultural and spiritual support to Gandharans (Samad 2011: 21, 99). Early Buddhist shrines had the shape of an egg or womb with an open aspect meant to invite pilgrim rituals (Smart 1996: 279-80). In the second century AD, the sacred texts of Mahayana Buddhism spread throughout Asia after Buddhist monks began translating them into Chinese. The Prophet Muhammad famously exhorted his followers to go to China in search of knowledge (Al-Suhrawardy 2001: 79), in other words, to learn from non-Islamic spiritual traditions. The Muslim invaders of the Indian subcontinent failed to heed his words. In the late twelfth century AD, the armies of Qutb-ud-din Aybak (1150-1210), founder of the Mamluk dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate, conquered the plains of the upper Ganges. One of Aybak's generals, Muhammad Bakhtiar, destroyed the Great Monastery of Nalanda, then the greatest center of learning in Asia, and murdered its inhabitants because the monastery's libraries did not have a copy of the *Quran*. Bakhtiar then destroyed the two remaining Great Monasteries at Somapura and Jagadalala (Allen 2012: 2-5).

The memory of such atrocities pervades “Crow” in which injustice is a historical constant. Here the monsoon rains are an instrument of time, a cosmic force that renews even as it destroys:

The crow
sharpens his beak
on a shrapnel bone.
He has tunnelled
through the black entrail
of innumerable nights
and smeared his shadow
on the saffron fields
of Kashmir.
Centuries ago,
he tore the flesh
of a Shudra girl

raped and murdered
 by a Brahmin priest.
 [...]

 What if he has excreted
 on the rock edicts of Asoka
 and the tall minarets of mosques?
 The monsoons
 will wash them
 clean.
 (*Recognitions*, 1979: 6)

The image of the crow is at once destructive and restorative (Archive 2010: 248), for these disquieting emissaries of death wipe the slate clean like the monsoons. The image of saffron recalls the color of the robes of Buddhist monks and therefore evokes the sacred. Saffron also evokes joy. In Urdu, there is an idiomatic expression addressed to someone who appears strangely euphoric: “Did you just pass through a saffron field?” Kamal alludes to Asoka, the ruler who governed India through moral persuasion and compassion around 2,250 years ago. Asoka’s rock edicts, fourteen of which survive throughout the Indian subcontinent, were in India’s first written script. The precepts contained therein abrogate the Brahmin caste system, protect living beings from slaughter or sacrifice, mandate medical care for both humans and animals and enjoin respect for parents and generosity to friends and family. The edicts address posterity: the fifth edict states that it had “been written on stone so that it might endure long and that my descendants might act in conformity with it” (Allen 2012: xi-xv, 406-409). Those descendants include the citizens of modern Pakistan, a country that has devolved into a kleptocracy where public school textbooks glorify conquerors and soldiers.

Through the medium of water, Kamal mourns the betrayal of the ethos of Gandhara, speaking for those whose voices have been stifled in the “the dumb throat of history” (“The day brightens slowly,” *Before the Carnations Wither*, 1995: 18). “Ancestral Breast Howl” opens with a man sewn up alive and hurled into a river from the ramparts of a fort:

[...]

 Thunder
 of freedom
 tunnels the long night –
 blood caresses blood.
 Web of water
 on rock –

fishnet thinner
than light –
ever-moving
ever-still.
(*Rivermist*, 1992: 100)

The paradoxical final lines (“ever-moving / ever-still”) evoke the violent truncation of ancestral memory which, though silenced, continues to reverberate through the pain of descendants whose ‘blood caresses blood.’

Kamal’s Rajput ancestry adds poignancy to this poem. In 1568, a Mughal army massacred more than twenty-five thousand Rajputs after the conquest of Chittorgarh Fort. Even worse brutality followed during Mughal emperor Aurangzeb’s forty-nine-year reign (1658-1707). As a prince, Aurangzeb subjugated two Deccan sultanates ruled by Shia rulers who were patrons of the arts and where Muslims and Hindu subjects co-existed peacefully, participating together in state governance. In pursuit of the Mughal throne, Aurangzeb murdered his three brothers including Prince Dara Shikoh, the rightful heir. Dara was a poet who translated the Upanishads into Persian, and who believed the spiritual essences of Hinduism and Islam to be compatible. Aurangzeb’s treachery and military skill overcame Dara’s brave Rajput warriors (Keay 2000: 338-41). In 1680, Aurangzeb sent his son Akbar to crush a Rajput revolt, but Akbar joined the revolt instead, only to be defeated. Aurangzeb destroyed thousands of temples and forcibly converted Hindus and Sikhs, putting to death approximately over four and half million people in the process. He banned music and ceased the patronage of scholars that had made the Mughal Empire a center of learning (White 2012: 233-235). Through violence, the Mughal empire grew rapidly under Aurangzeb but began to disintegrate after his death.

Aurangzeb’s cruel legacy endures. Fundamentalists, purporting to restore Islamic culture to its supposedly original state, have turned Pakistan into a Salafi-haunted nightmare. Thousands of Shias, Christians, Ahmedis, and Hindus have been murdered in recent years by extremist Sunni groups such as Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. Spiritual dislocation, insecurity, and loss of cultural identity continue to feed the fears, anxieties, and meanness that spur the Taliban to demolish the Bamiyan statues in Afghanistan, the Daesh to destroy the ancient cities of Palmyra in Syria and Nimrud in Iraq, and Saudi monarchs to level shrines and historic sites.

Kamal's hitherto unpublished "Sentinel" opens with an epigraph from Alexander Gladkov: "Poet, keep watch, keep watch, / You must not all asleep – / You are eternity's hostage / In captivity to time." "Sentinel" leaps from the distant past to the present without transition or explanation, forcing the reader to engage history more deeply:

Within the besieged fortress
all the women jumped into the well
to save their honour.
But this happened centuries ago
and their screams live now
only in myths and history.
A bomb explodes in a cheap restaurant –
men have suddenly lost
Their appetite for living.
The entire city is burning –
priests have forgotten to pray
and the sky is too hot for vultures.

In his vigil over history, Kamal connects a centuries-old mass suicide of women in a besieged fort to present-day terrorism. The women in the burning fort, who seek final refuge in water from the soldiers of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, prefigure those trapped by the searing violence of our own times. The ellipsis in this poem transmits history's archetypal circularity and inaccessibility of meaning, illustrating Eliade's intuition that cyclic time becomes terrifying when is it desacralized (Eliade, *Sacred*, 1959: 107). History must repeat itself, for as Kamal observes in "Thirst," "History is a demented village-elder / to whom no one / pays any attention" (*Rivermist*, 1992: 77). "Sentinel" exemplifies Kamal's insight that, "all great literature is both in time and outside time" ("The Role of the Writer", 1974-1976: 43).

Kamal's images related to heat, such as those in "Sentinel," evoke a desiccated spiritual order. In "Absence Down a Dark Path," the cruelty of zealots induces thirst: "Someone whispers: they stoned / A new-born infant to death. / I call my son: / bring me a glass of water" (*Rivermist*, 1992: 104). Drought conveys a similar spiritual insufficiency in this excerpt from "Dragonflies":

[...] What
shall our children inherit?
Wine turning into
vinegar. Nothing
burns brighter than
dead grass.
(*Before the Carnations Wither*, 1995: 102)

The conditions for violence, connoted through the image of dead grass, persist in a country whose educational system breeds ignorance, whose economic system immiserates the already poor, and whose military intelligence agency murders activists.

In “The Sky’s Empty Paths,” water, void of divine light, has become a force that smothers and suffocates. The theme of the destruction of wisdom and spirituality underlies this poem in which a ruined monastery occupies a spatial and temporal background:

Gunshots rend the air
and a sandgrouse paints
the dew-bright morning stones
with blood. Consummate artist.
In the background the ruins
of an ancient Buddhist monastery.
[...]
Demolished moon,
the curved icicle of a trigger.
This is the season of hunting.
Visions of fern leaves
and rock-pools are irrelevant here.
The world we live in
is cruel and corrupt.
A dark sea closes in on us.
(*Before the Carnations Wither*, 1995: 43)

The moon, which represents cosmic memory (Nasr, 2007: 114), has degraded in this poem into the image of the curved icicle of a trigger — the chill touch of death. Like the images of water and the moon, art itself has become grotesque: a sandgrouse, shot by hunters, paints the stone with its spilled blood. A murderous sea corrodes that which ought to endure, to which the monastery ruins stand in mute testimony. Gone are the visions of the fern leaf, a symbol of sincerity and endurance that inspires reveries and prophecy (De Vries 1974: 180), and of the rock pool that retains water, the source of life and symbol of embryonic civilization.

The image of the rock pool evokes the gestation of civilization founded in love in Kamal’s “An Arch of Stars”:

[...]
Hope is a torn banner,
barely visible
through all this travelling dust.
But should luck lead you

To the pool,
 You'll find an arch of stars,
 Those bare simplicities:
 her eyes, two hands that
 meet beneath the water's chill.
 (*Before the Carnations Wither*, 1995: 56)

The arch represents initiation into a higher spiritual state, and its stars convey the sense of divine light as well as distant ideals and possibilities (Cooper 1978: 14; De Vries 1974: 440). Water is a mirror, and the image of the eyes in the pool conveys the insight of Paul Claudel that “water is the gaze of the earth, its instrument for looking at *time*” (qtd. in Bachelard 1942: 31).

The cosmic love energy of the pool reappears in veiled guise in this excerpt from “He and She”:

Though they are not animals
 nor is their room a cage,
 they think they can
 drown their fears
 in the hot liquidities
 of love.
 Hallucination of white gold
 on distant mountains --
 the savage drumming of rain
 on tin-roofs.
 Lightning rips the night
 over and over again.
 Lanes turn into muddy torrents.
 Her beauty has burnt his eyes
 but he imagines
 he sees her still
 as a silver hulk
 in the folds of an impossible sea.
 [...]
 Ruminant walls muffle
 their moans.
 (*Before the Carnations Wither*, 1995: 21)

In the tradition of Sufi poetry, “He and She” eroticizes the divine. The “liquidities of love” recreate the image of the pool which is framed first by “ruminant walls” and then by the rock of “distant mountains” with their “hallucination of white gold.” The backgrounds of the gilded images in Buddhist iconography were meant to reflect divine light; gold was called “mineral light” in India (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1996: 439). The image

of gold in this poem sensualizes the memory of Gandhara with its traditions of learning and religious pluralism.

The “silver hulk” in “He and She” evokes the moon boat, a common trope in Islamic and Asian poetry that traces a spiritual journey. This archetypal image, like that of the beloved as a lost garden, can be found in the *qasida* or ode from pre-Islamic Arabic times (Sells 1999: 90). The boat journey marks the end of a dark, cyclical existence in “Estuary”: “The swallow make loops / in the air – / vanishing black necklaces... The silted hulk / of a wrecked boat” (*Before the Carnations Wither*, 1995: 82). The vanishing black necklaces trace a soul freed from the hangman’s noose of everyday existence. Swallows metaphorically connote spiritual awakening and freedom, for they anticipate the end of a journey as sailors approach a port or island.

In “Passing Through” water imagery suggests imminent mercy or deliverance, much as it does in the *Quran*:

Cloudy autumn sky –
 a gust of chilly wind
 threatening rain.
 [...]
 The streets are full.
 Only the birdcage
 hanging from the branch
 of a fig-tree
 is empty. Under it
 a bearded scribe
 (Solomon come back to life)
 dips his pen into an inkwell
 and with a flourish
 begins a letter
 for a woman
 whose back is turned toward me.
 [...]
 (*A Selection of Verse 39*)

Kamal only provides a bare outline of a story, leaving us to envision the many possibilities therein. Who is passing through in this poem? Is it the scribe who, moving from village to village to ply his trade, is glimpsed as he writes for the woman? Is it the woman with the hidden face that represents her denied or incipient personhood? Is it the poet persona who observes the street scene, perhaps from a car or train window? Do the readers pass through this poem as they imagine what brought the scribe

and the woman together? Does Kamal pass through the minds of his readers as a spectral presence to revisit the scene? Or does the divine presence transfigure this scene as it passes through? For the woman's unseen face hints at the veiled presence of the Beloved.

Two Quranic allusions situate "Passing Through" within the tradition of Islamic mystical poetry. First, a Solomonic scribe is writing a letter under a fig-tree from which hangs an empty cage. The Surah titled *The Ants* relates that Solomon could speak the language of birds (27: 15-16) whose migration might be understood metaphorically as souls in evolution. The empty birdcage suggests that the woman seated before the scribe has just escaped bondage. Second, the fig-tree (from which the birdcage hangs) recalls the Surah *The Fig* that promises reward for those who do righteous deeds. This image, which also recalls the Bodhi Tree, the fig-tree under which the Buddha achieved enlightenment, conveys the continuity and interrelation of the religions of the Indian subcontinent. In an interview, Kamal said that he wanted his poetry "to move towards greater introspection, allusiveness, compression at the deeper level [and] suggest a sense of awe, mystery, and something strange" ("Interview" *The Nation*, 1987: iv). "Passing Through" achieves all this while affirming the emancipatory and sacred nature of the act of writing.

In "Exile," water preserves memory, taking the form of tea. In this poem, the exile, cast adrift as the last of his kind, experiences the chronologies of past and future as the topographies of motherland and exile:

They call him mad
but he's the only one
to understand
the trees and beasts
in his old Bokhara rug.
There, in the midst
of everything,
a polished samovar,
its delicate aroma
of fine green tea.
Reflections rippling
of his absent friends.
Meanwhile outside, the men
are laying traps in snow.
Freed from his sodden boots,
he thinks for hours
of hired assassins
closing on their mark.
(*Before the Carnations Wither*, 1995: 68)

This poem expresses a sense of entrapment in a disjunctive modernity. In a dynamic interaction with the past, reflections of friends ripple in the sea in which they are submerged. The hired assassins represent cultural erasure at its crudest, namely, the murder of those who embody memory and dignity. They also hint at the destructive effect of capitalism on culture. As the assassins close in, the exile recreates the aura of another age with the ceremony of tea. Weighed down with the waters of despair in his sodden boots, the exile still communes with friends and a lost world. His leisure and slow deliberation defy the lethal and relentless acceleration of modernity, at once a final act of affirmation and a premonition of death.

The creations in the rug in “Exile” are more than visions of beauty; they recount the stories and myths of a people that connect the exile to a living universe. The samovar in which the exile prepares his last tea returns us to a time in Persia, Russia, and Central Asia when artisans created objects that were at once useful, beautiful and durable. The detail of the polished samovar shows how objects glow in the presence of remembrance and love. In his 1906 classic *The Book of Tea*, Okakura Kazuko describes the cult of tea that evolved from Zen ritual as “a worship of the Imperfect [...] founded on the adoration of the beautiful” and as a “moral geometry [that] defines our sense of proportion to the universe” (Kazuko, 1906: 3-4, 35).

An archetypal image in Kamal’s poetry, the river, reflects our ever-changing selves, for as Gaston Bachelard observes, “[w]ater is truly the transitory element... [a] being dedicated to water is a being in flux” (Bachelard 1942: 6). Kamal was drawn into the history and poetry of other ages. In his “Rain in the Moss,” the river symbolizes this drift into collective memory: “I yearn for the river’s broad sweep – its total embrace” (*A Remote Beginning*, 1985: 41). The river imagery in the epigraph of Kamal’s “Cleavage” (*Before the Carnations Wither*, 1995: 37) is taken from the verses of Pablo Neruda: “I wished to swim in the most ample lives, the widest estuaries.” The epigraph expresses the need to merge into other dimensions, into the spiritual and intellectual currents that preserve collective life.

Kamal exemplifies the kind of poet who, in the words of Bachelard, “discovers enduring water, unchanging, reborn, which stamps its image with an indelible mark and is an organ of the world, the nourishment of flowing phenomena, the vegetating and polishing element, the embodiment

of tears” (Bachelard 1942: 11). Through the medium of water, Kamal engages in an extended love dialogue, as in “Kingfisher,” in which waves or ripples express the divine:

The future
 curves on another shore.
 Tongues of water
 cradle our startled dreams.
 Moss-grown stepping-stones.
 The stars burn fiercely.
 They tell us what we are.
 (*Kingfisher*, 2006: 171)

The image of the stars speaks to our paradoxical transience and immortality. The stepping-stones, which connote spiritual ascendance and endurance, are covered with moss, a symbol of growth and fertility.

We again see the image of the wet stones that draw us to our divine origin in this excerpt from “Anniversary”:

Cascading back
 to the source
 over a difficult terrain
 but the heart remembers.
 Wet stones
 conscious of their lineage -
 the chopped-up moon
 in paddy-fields.
 (*Before the Carnations Wither*, 1995: 93)

The image of the chopped-up moon has the power of invocation, for as Jacques Ellul tells us, “prayer holds together the shattered fragments of the creation” (Ellul 2012: 177).

Water imagery expresses a state of peace and insight in “Occasionally a Beautiful Yellow Spotted Fish Appears....” Moving through temporal and spatial planes like a pilgrim in search of lost love, Kamal anchors his elegiac sense of dislocation in memories of Mughal civilization to find transhistorical meaning in the deepest recesses of his being:

Empty pavillions, no trace of imperial footprints
 on the grass. And the garden, refreshed by rain,
 rejoices, dying forever in a sunburnt land.
 I’m half-asleep (the back of my shoulder
 a convenient bookrest for my son)
 and dreaming once more of you.

Far away are the cypresses, cascades,
 ancient brick parterres and a remorseless moon.
 Last night again you called to me
 as though you were drowning and I saw you
 more vividly than Jehangir saw his poppy seed
 go down to the bottom of the pool.
 [...]
 (*Before the Carnations Wither*, 1995: 63)

The poem's epigraph, taken from the memoirs of Mughal emperor Akbar, flows from the poem's title: "...and whenever this occurs, the year is reckoned a fortunate one. It appeared about this time, and caused great joy" *The Akbar Nama*, 1589. Akbar took his plunge into enlightenment at Achebal, a rest place built by Nur Jehan, Akbar's daughter-in-law and wife of prince Jehangir. Pupul Jayakar describes this exquisite *serai* on the road from Lahore to Srinagar:

For hundreds of years, pilgrims had come to this sacred site because of the healing properties of the spring water, though myths of the *yakshis*, water and tree spirits who guarded the spring, had long disappeared. Nur Jehan had built a walled garden around the spring, enclosing an area planted with chinar and poplar trees. At one point in the enclosed area the spring that gushed torrentially from the earth fell as a sheet of water to lower levels of the garden. The huge branches of the chinar trees spread across the falling waters. Below the fall were pools and fountains, and channels had been laid to carry the water to distant parts of the garden. The channels were so planned that the ray of the sun created rainbows as they caught the spray of waterfall and fountain. (Jayakar, 1986: 214)

"The fountain in the center of the Islamic garden," Emma Clark explains, "represents the ever-flowing waters of the Spirit, constantly renewing the soul" (Clark 2011: 84). In this poem, Kamal speaks to the divine presence seen in water and dreams.

"Occasionally a Beautiful Yellow Spotted Fish Appears...." concludes in *satori*:

My son stirs in sleep. His comic book
 plunges me down into the abyss. I'm wide awake.
 No more, it seems, than a recurring nightmare –
 all too familiar by now, not taken seriously.
 The swallows go on dipping their wings
 in the waterfall.
 (*Before the Carnations Wither*, 1995: 64)

These moments of peace with his son are a temporary respite from the clockwork of the daily grind. The comic book of his sleeping son mirrors

the ongoing follies of humankind. The poet falls through various time planes of profane existence to arrive at a spiritual port of call symbolized by the swallows and their touch of water. This poem in particular exemplifies Northrop Frye's dictum that "if both poetry and religion are functioning properly, their interpenetration will take care of itself" (Frye 2009: 410).

In an interview, Kamal when asked how he made a poem, responded, "How do I then make a poem? The word "make" is I think a bit too mechanical; it implies a carefully conscious process, even fabrication. Perhaps I am a clay vessel in a drought-stricken land waiting for rain. Or to change the metaphor, fishing by obstinate isles" ("Interview," *Journal of the English Literary Club*, 1984-85: 72). The image of the clay water vessel connotes one who brings, in a spiritual sense, succor and relief to the people of Pakistan and beyond. In this capacity, Kamal enacts these lines of one of his favorite poets, Philip Larkin: "And I should raise in the east / A glass of water / Where any-angled light / Would congregate endlessly" (Larkin 2004: "Water" 91).

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