

Classic Poetry Series

**Shiv Kumar Batalvi**  
**- poems -**

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# Shiv Kumar Batalvi(23 July 1936 - 7 May 1973)

Shiv Kumar 'Batalvi' (Punjabi: ਸ਼ਿਵ ਕੁਮਾਰ ਬਟਾਲਵੀ) was a noted Punjabi language poet, who was most known for his romantic poetry, noted for its heightened passion, pathos, separation and lover's agony.

He became the youngest recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1967, given by Sahitya Akademi (India's National Academy of Letters), for his epic verse play based on the ancient legend of Puran Bhagat, Loona (1965), now considered a masterpiece in modern Punjabi literature, and which also created a new genre, of modern Punjabi kissa. Today, his poetry stands in equal footing, amongst that by stalwarts of modern Punjabi poetry, like Mohan Singh and Amrita Pritam, all of whom are popular on both sides of India-Pakistan border.

## <b> Biography </b>

Shiv Kumar was born in a Saraswat Brahmin family on 23 July 1936 (though a few documents related to him state October 7th, 1937 as his DOB), in village Bara Pind Lohtian, Shakargarh Tehsil, Sialkot District (now in Punjab province, Pakistan), to Pandit Krishan Gopal, village tehsildar in the revenue department, and Shanti Devi, a housewife.

In 1947, when he was just 11, his family moved to Batala Gurdaspur district after partition of India, where his father continued his work as a patwari and young Shiv received his primary education. Allegedly, he was a dreamy child, often vanishing for the duration of the day, to be found lying under trees by the riverbank close to the Mandir or Hindu temple outside the village, lost in a brown reverie. He appears to have been fascinated by local renditions of the Hindu Epic Ramayana, as well as wandering Minstrel singers, Snake Charmers & the like - which feature as metaphors in his poetry, giving it a uniquely rural flavor.

## <b> Education </b>

He completed his matriculation in 1953, from Punjab University, and enrolled in the . program at Baring Union Christian College, Batala, though before completing his degree he moved to S.N. College, Qadian, where he joined the Arts program more suited to his persona, though he left that too in the second year. Thereafter he joined a school at Baijnath, Himachal Pradesh to do a diploma in Civil Engineering, here again he left it in the middle. Next he studied for some time at Govt. Ripudaman College, Nabha.

## <b> Struggles With Conventional Matrimony </b>

He fell in love with the daughter of the noted Punjabi writer Gurbaksh Singh Preetlari who was married off to a UK citizen because of caste differences between the two. It was during this time that he turned increasingly to alcohol for solace, allegedly writing the poem : "Ajj Din Chhadeya Tere Rang Varga" [ "Today dawned colored like your complexion..." ] while standing outside a "Theka Sharab Desi" [Liquor Vend], waiting for it to open so he could buy his booze. He remained unlucky in love, and bereavement for love loss reflected intensely in his poetry. In early 1967, he got married, to a Brahmin girl, Aruna, of his parents & family's choosing. According to friends, he only agreed because she had a striking resemblance to his youthful love.

## <b> Youngest Recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award </b>

Later in life, his father got a job as patwari at Qadian, it was during this period, that he produced some of his best work. His first anthology of poems was published in 1960, titled Piran da Paraga (The Scarf of Sorrows), which became an instant success. In 1965, he became the youngest recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1967, for his magnum opus, a verse play Loona (1965). His poetry recitations, and singing his own verse, made him and his work even more popular amongst the masses.

Soon after his marriage, in 1968, he shifted to Chandigarh, where he joined the State Bank of India, as a PRO. In the following years, bad health plagued him, though he continued to write prolifically.

## <b> Personal Life </b>

On 5 February 1967 he married, Aruna, a Brahmin girl, from Kirri Mangyal, Gurdaspur district, and later the couple had two children, Meharban (1968) and Puja (1969).

## <b> Struggles With Conventional Life-Span </b>

His writings have always been open about his pronounced death wish, and he died at his father-in-law's residence, at Kirri Mangyal Pathankot, due to liver cirrhosis, a result of chronic alcoholism, at a young age of 35 years.

## <b> Legacy </b>

One of his anthologies, Alvida (Farewell) was published posthumously in 1974, by

the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. 'Shiv Kumar Batalvi Award' for Best Writer, is given each year.

<b> In Media </b>

Many of his poems were sung by Deedar Singh Pardesi. Jagjit Singh-Chitra Singh, and Surinder Kaur, have also sung many of his poems. Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's rendition of one of his poem "Maye ni Maye" is known for its soulfulness and imagery. In a recent album, Rabbi (2004), by Rabbi Shergill features, his poem, "Ishtihar". Punjabi folk singer, Hans Raj Hans also did a popular album, 'Gham', on the poetry of Shiv Kumar. In 2005, a compilation album was released, titled, Ek Kudi Jida Naa Mohabbat... 'Shiv Kumar Batalvi, with numbers sung by Mahendra Kapoor, Jagjit Singh and Asa Singh Mastana.

In 2004, Punjabi play titled Dardaan Da Darya based on the life of Shiv Kumar was performed at 'Punjab Kala Bhavan', Chandigarh.

# A Borrowed Song

Give me, O Lord  
A few more songs.  
My fire is dying,  
Give me a spark.  
At a very young age  
I exhausted every sorrow.  
For my youth  
Give me a fresh pain.

Give me a song, like youth itself,  
Beautiful, magical.  
Like the redness of a rising day  
That sparkles in a brimming lake.  
Like the first star of the evening  
That shines in a treeless desert.

Night is approaching my desert,  
Give me a star or two,  
Or let me sink, like the evening redness,  
Into the brimming lake.

Lord, life is unbearable without a companion,  
Unbearable without a song.  
We all know that life has to be lived,  
That pain has been sewn into it.  
Do the deer drink the water  
At every shore?  
Let the water at my shore  
Be washed away, undrunk.  
Or take back the songs  
That you let me write.

Lord, we should never extol beauty  
Which is empty of fire,  
Nor praise those eyes  
Whose tears lack salt.  
We should not sing a song bereft of pain,  
Or write a word devoid of fragrance.  
If my words are without fragrance

Tear them from the branch,  
Or give me another song,  
Like youth itself.

At a very young age  
I exhausted every sorrow.  
For my youth  
Give me a fresh pain.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# A Walk On A Moonlit Night

If I walk on a moonlit night,  
My shadow walks beside me,  
O my life.

Moonlight hides in every lane,  
Which lane should I take?  
O my life.

The night-scents are vigilant,  
And the wind is soothing,  
O my life.

I am ignorant about these rays of moonlight,  
Will I awaken one?  
O my life.

If I awaken a ray of moonlight,  
I will be branded a sinner,  
O my life.

So I walk in fear,  
Treading lightly,  
O my life.

Separation was put in our swaddling cloth,  
By our mothers,  
O my life.

Since the beginning, light has been our enemy,  
How can I let it touch my limbs?  
O my life.

If I come to you on a moonlit night,  
My shadow walks beside me,  
O my life.

Moonlight hides in every lane  
Which lane should I take?  
O my life.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi



# Butterflies

I catch butterflies,  
I catch butterflies.

From the beautiful  
Flower-scented garden  
Of life, I catch  
Golden-colored, blue,  
Shimmering and yellow ones!  
I think that if catch them all,  
From the entire forest.  
I will jab their butterfly wings  
To their shoulder.

But whenever I try to catch them,  
My heart begins to tremble  
Like a branch of henna  
That shivers in the breeze.  
And the butterfly takes flight.

Flowers of sin, like some black sun ,  
Bloom in my dreams  
Their perfume-sodden fragrance  
Spreading through each heartbeat.

A delicate, queenly butterfly  
Comes fluttering by,  
Delighted to see the flowers of sin,  
She alights, intoxicated.  
I, unaware, pluck all the flowers  
And put them into my cloth bag.

But when I start to leave  
The cloth tears,  
And the butterfly takes flight.

How foolish I was to think  
That I could catch a butterfly!

The cold winter of grief

Scorched my flowers of happiness.  
The green vine of hope  
Shed its healthy leaves.

Seeing this darkness,  
They slipped back to the valley, they returned,  
The red birds that had flown far to seek  
Their desires.

It is the evening of life  
Lotus-hearts lie asleep.  
The dew drops of my life  
Have spilled, some sipped  
Deliciously, by the butterflies.

As the night goes by,  
I think that day will surely dawn,  
That once again the sun will not err,  
Regarding darkness.

A milky lotus of the evening  
Will bloom upon this earth again.  
I hope that once again,  
In that perfumed garden  
I will be able to catch butterflies.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# High Mountains

The sun peeks out  
From behind the high mountains,  
Planting little seedling of light.  
It crushes the yellow sunshine  
Into small pieces,  
Making anklets for the mountain tops!

Ankle deep in the wind  
Flow perfumes,  
The birds fall asleep.  
Through a clump of green trees  
A water channel flows  
Piping a melody!

Seeing the blue lotus  
In the mirror- like water  
The drooping leaves weep.  
The wind has tied  
Tiny anklets around its feet,  
And stamps her heels as she walks!

Raindrops asleep  
On soft, tender shoots,  
Are lit by sunbeams.  
A tiny, golden bird  
Calls to the travelers  
With shrill whistles.

In the clear blue sky,  
A kite circles,  
Among the rays of light.  
A flower becomes a drinking station,  
As it offers droplets of sweet dew  
To the bees.

A butterfly is at the door -  
The maulsari spreads its fragrance generously,  
Like alms to a mendicant!  
In such a season,

In the name of your daughters,  
Cover my pain  
With a layer of sighs.

An old, tired ache  
Plays guessing games,  
On the paths of my sight.  
A sweet, moody separation  
Breaks over me,  
And eats into my bones.

Unearth a way that I can  
Meet my beloved,  
And relieve my longing for a glimpse of her.  
Bereft of our beloved,  
We infatuated ones,  
Are called insane.

There is no one here mother,  
Whom I can call my own,  
Who will share my pain.  
At such a time, without my beloved,  
I cannot spend a moment  
In your town.

The sun peeks out  
From behind the high mountains,  
Planting little seedling of light.  
Crushes the yellow sunshine  
Into small pieces  
To make anklets for the mountain tops!

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Ishtehaar

A girl whose name is Love  
Is lost.  
Simple, beautiful,  
She is lost.

Her beauty, ethereal  
Virtuous, like Mary,  
Her laughter, blossoms falling,  
Her gait, a poem.  
Tall as a cypress,  
Barely alight,  
Yet she undertands the language of a glance.  
It has been ages since she was lost  
Yet it feels like yesterday,  
It feels like today.  
It feels like now.

She was standing beside me just now,  
She is beside me no more.  
What deception is this? What trickery?  
I am bewildered.  
My eyes examine every passerby,  
Scanning their faces,  
Searching for that girl.

When evening descends upon the bazaar  
And perfumes erupt at every corner,  
When restlessness and tiredness  
Collide with leisure,  
Isolated in that noise,  
Her absence eats at me.  
I see her  
Every moment I feel as though -  
Every day I feel as though -  
From this throng of people,  
From this crowd of odors,  
She will call out to me,  
I will recognize her,  
She will recognize me.

But from this flood of noise  
Nobody calls out to me,  
Nobody looks toward me.

But, I don't know why I feel  
Indistinctly, obscurely,  
Every day, through every crowd,  
As though her form moves past me  
But I am not able to see her.  
I am lost in her face  
And stay lost in it  
I keep dissolving in this grief.  
I keep melting in this grief.

I beg this girl, for my sake,  
I beg her for her own sake,  
I beg her for everyones sake  
I beg her for the sake of this world,  
I beg her for the sake of God,  
If somewhere she reads or hears this  
Whether she be alive or dying  
That she come and meet me once  
That she not stain my love.  
Else I will not be able to live,  
I will not be able to write a song.

A girl whose name is Love  
Is lost.  
Simple, beautiful,  
She is lost.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Jindu De Baageen

In the garden of life,  
Grows a sapling of pain,  
The deer of songs nibbles at it.  
The winds of seperation  
Blow through the night,  
A few leaves drop.

A few leaves drop,  
Mother, they drop,  
And sounds stir in the garden.  
If a few birds of breath  
Should fly away,  
The deer of songs is afraid.

But the birds of breath  
Will surely fly,  
Nothing can hold them back.  
Through the night  
In every direction  
They fly away.

Don't be afraid, deer of songs,  
The leaves of pain  
Do not always stay fresh.  
Though the saplings of pain  
So filled with perfume  
Sprout easily.

Don't forget that you possess  
The sac of musk,  
That you have a lot of pain,  
That your face  
Is beautiful  
And your words precious.

So keep on leaping  
And keep on jumping  
What you are doing is right.  
Around your neck

Lie garlands of sorrow,  
May more of them rain upon you!

In the garden of life  
Grows a sapling of pain,  
The deer of songs nibbles at it.  
The winds of seperation  
Blow through the night,  
A few leaves drop.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi



# Leaflet

A girl whose name is love, is missing, is missing  
Simple wisher, beautiful looking, is missing, is missing

Her looks are like that of fairies  
Her nature is like that of Mariam  
When she laughs, the flowers fall  
When she walks, she looks like a gazal  
She is tall like the sarroo tree  
But her age is hardly like that of fire  
But she can understand the talks of eyes  
She is missing since ages  
But it appears as yesterday's talk  
It appears as today's talk  
It appears as now's talk

Just now, she was standing with me  
Just now, she is not with me  
What is this deception, what is this stranding  
My thinking is very much surprised  
My eyes are searching the colour of  
Face of everybody coming or going  
And are searching that girl

At the dawn of evening when in market  
On the turns, fragrance starts appearing  
When idleness, lethargy and uneasiness  
Starts accumulating on the four-way crossings  
In this Noisy loneliness  
The absence of that girl eats me up  
The absence of that girl becomes apparent  
Every moment it appears to me  
Every day it appears to me  
In the celebrations and in the crowds  
In the accumulated fragrances  
She will call me  
I will recognize her  
She will recognize me  
But in this flood of noise  
Nobody calls me

Nobody looks towards me

But I don't know why I get the feeling  
But I don't know why I appear to see  
Every day in every crowd  
Her statue appears to be going  
But only I am not able to see her  
I remain lost in the face of  
That lost girl  
I keep on deteriorating in her sorrow  
I keep on depleting in her sorrow

I bind that girl with my oath  
I bind that girl with her oath  
I bind that girl with everybody's oath  
I bind that girl with world's oath  
I bind that girl with God's oath  
If she is somewhere reading or hearing  
If she's living or dying  
Once she should come and meet me  
She should not put a blot on my sincerity  
Otherwise I can not live  
I can not write any song

A girl whose name is love, is missing, is missing  
Simple wisher, beautiful looking, is missing, is missing.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Listen Mother

Listen, mother,  
My songs are eyes  
Stinging with grains of separation.  
In the middle of the night ,  
They wake and weep for dead friends.  
Mother, I cannot sleep.

Upon them I lay strips of moonlight  
Soaked in perfume,  
But the pain does not recede.  
I foment them  
With warm sighs  
Yet they turn on me ferociously.

I am still young,  
And need guidance myself.  
Who can advise him?  
Mother, would you tell him,  
To clench his lips when he weeps,  
Or the world will hear him cry.

Tell him, mother, to swallow the bread  
Of separation.  
He is fated to mourn.  
Tell him to lick the salty dew  
On the roses of sorrow,  
And stay strong.

Where are the snake handlers  
From whom I can beg for a shroud to cover me?  
Somebody give me a shroud that will fit!  
How can I wait like a jogi  
At the doorstep of these people  
Greedy for gold?

Listen, o my pain,  
Love is like a butterfly  
Pinned forever to a stake.  
It is like a bee,

From whom desire,  
Stays miles away.

Love is a palace  
Where, but for birds,  
Nothing else lives.  
Love is a hearth  
Where the bed of fulfillment,  
Is never laid.

Mother, tell him not to  
Call out the name of his dead friends  
So loudly in the middle of the night.  
When I am gone, I fear  
That this malicious world,  
Will say that my songs were evil.

Listen, o mother  
My songs are eyes  
Stinging with grains of separation.  
In the middle of the night ,  
They wake and weep for dead friends.  
Mother, I cannot sleep.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Maen Kal Naheen Rahina

Listen, O my life,  
I will not be here tomorrow.  
Tonight, let us clutch a song tightly,  
And claim its kiss.  
Listen, O my life  
I will not be here tomorrow.

The moonlight will not flower tomorrow,  
Nor will bloom the champak.  
Perfumes will not roam the garden  
With uncovered head.  
Nor like today  
Will yielding branches  
Bend to touch the earth,  
Listen, O my life  
I will not be here tomorrow.

The cranes will have scattered,  
Flown far away.  
By tomorrow, time, like a husband,  
Will have carried off my pain.  
No longer will flowers lie like jewels  
Around the throat  
Of the season tomorrow.  
Listen, O my life  
I will not be here tomorrow.

By daybreak the footprints on paths  
Will not be traceable.  
No longer will my songs sew a robe  
True to separation.  
Never will tears collect like this again,  
Beneath the shadows of the past.  
Listen, O my life  
I will not be here tomorrow.

Not, like today, will we sit together again  
You and I.  
Not, like this, will will the sun rise tomorrow,

Nor, like this, will it set.  
The bird of time  
Will have collected  
Every single grain of my breath.  
Listen, O my life.  
I will not be here tomorrow.  
Tonight let us clutch a song tightly  
And claim its kiss.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Menu Vida Karo

Bid me goodbye  
Lord,  
Bid me goodbye.  
Gift me a warm tear,  
Lay separation upon my palm,  
And bid me goodbye.

Circle pain around my head,  
With the sacred water of tears.  
Then distribute this water  
To every single lover in the world.  
And Lord, if a dropp remains,  
Gulp it yourself  
And bid me goodbye.

Lord, at this time of farewell,  
Let us declare the truth.  
It is only if we give away pearls  
That we receive separation.  
Lord, now that this clay is bereft of separation  
Set it free,  
And bid me goodbye.

My mother died in my milk-years,  
My father during childhood.  
My beloved died in the season of youth,  
And these cursed songs were born.  
Now, O Lord, I entreat you,  
Do not clutch my arm so tightly.  
Bid me goodbye.  
Gift me a warm tear,  
Lay separation upon my palm,  
And bid me goodbye

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# My Friend

My friend, it is my own sorrow  
That has destroyed me.  
It is a lie to think  
That your love had the strength to do it.  
I have no complaint against  
Heat or drought.  
My garden was destroyed  
By the dews of spring.

It is not the fault  
Of the black night.  
The ocean was defeated  
By its beloved moon.

Who is it that  
Blames death?  
A man is destroyed,  
By his birth.

The sun that rises  
Is certain to sink.  
He lies who says  
The west destroyed it.

Yes, one can be destroyed  
By grieving for dead friends,  
Though it is more likely the result,  
Of the display of that grief.

The enemy is not the murderer,  
I tell you.  
Shiv was killed  
By those who loved him.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi



# My Song

Do not sing  
My song.  
I must sing this song  
Myself,  
And then die.

This song is more soiled than the earth,  
As old as the sun,  
For many births I have had to live  
The weight of its words.  
No one else has the ability  
To bring voice to it.  
This song was born with me,  
And will die with me.  
I must sing this song  
Myself,  
And then die.

This song has a rare melody,  
It is filled with pain.  
It is like the shriek of cranes  
Heard from distant mountains in autumn.  
Or the clamor of birds in a forest,  
Heard in a chaste dawn.  
Or the sound of the wind flowing through high grasses  
Heard on a black night.  
I must sing this song  
Myself,  
And then die.

When I and my songs  
Both die,  
They who inhabit separation-houses  
Will seek out my grave.  
With one voice,  
They will declare,  
'Only a very few are fated  
To shoulder such pain.'

Do not sing  
This song of mine.  
I must sing this song  
Myself,  
And then die.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Noble Father

When the cotton flowers bloom,  
O noble father,  
Bring that season back for me,  
O noble father.

That was the season when I lost my song,  
Around its neck was the string of separation.  
On its face were boils of sorrow,  
Its eyes looked like the water of ruined wells.  
It had been a song, that when sung,  
Released the scent of musk.  
O noble father,  
Bring back that song for me.  
O noble father.

One day my song and I,  
In that enchanted season,  
Ploughed the earth of my heart,  
Sowed it with seeds of undefiled dreams.  
But no matter how many tears I poured,  
No flower bloomed.  
O noble father.  
Bring back one flower for me,  
O noble father.

What use your fertile lands  
If daughters wilt?  
What use your great lakes  
If the swans are thirsting?  
What use your ample wealth,  
Your granary of pearls,  
O noble father,  
If you cannot bring back the season,  
When the cotton flower blooms,  
O noble father.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# O Woe

O woe! The sky is thin, listless.  
O woe! The stars are withered, extinguished.  
O woe! The winds are still, dead.  
O woe! The world is inhabited by graves.  
O woe! Today, words have turned to stone.  
O woe! Again and again, my heart swells, bursts, melts.  
O woe! Do not ever become like me.  
O woe! The waters of love are poisonous,  
O woe! The road is long and harsh,  
O woe! And ankle deep in thorns.  
O woe! Here, you are robbed of everything .  
O woe! Even death is not for you.  
O woe! Today, the songs of love are bitter.  
O woe! But sweet is this poison, sweet.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Pepper Leaves

How can a moonless night  
Offer anything to the full moon?  
Why would a camel leave the desert,  
For the ocean?

Tell me, how can the henna of good fortune  
Color a hand,  
If fate crushes pepper leaves  
Upon ones palm?

Grief, like a cataract  
Descended right into my eyes.  
It is a terrible journey thru the valley of love  
How can I live my life like this?

Who takes care  
Of acacia flowers?  
Does the gardener prune  
A jujube bush?

My songs have turned bitter  
From eating berries of pain.  
Who can sing tender songs  
With a life that feels like death.

How could I cry out  
When I saw the blade move across love's neck?  
The butcher had thrust  
His silver knife into my throat.

The yearning to be with you  
Was my destruction.  
Such were the arrows of separation,  
Shot by the tyrannical rulers of love.

I gathered pebbles from your street  
And chewed them like boiled grain.  
I collected bits of straw  
And held them close.

Not one dropp could I drink,  
Of the pure water of love.  
It became infested with worms  
The moment it touched my lips.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Pinch Of Separation

My songs are like eyes  
That sting with the grains of separation.  
In the middle of the night ,  
They wake and weep for dead friends.  
Mother, I cannot sleep.

Soaked in perfume,  
But the pain does not recede.  
I foment them  
With warm sighs,  
Yet they turn on me ferociously.

And need guidance myself.  
Who can advise him?  
Mother, would you tell him,  
To clench his lips when he weeps,  
Or the world will hear him cry.

Tell him, mother, to swallow the bread  
Of separation.  
He is fated to mourn.  
Tell him to lick the salty dew  
On the roses of sorrow,  
And stay strong.

Who are the snake handlers  
From whom I can get another skin?  
Give me a cover for myself.  
How can I wait like a jogi  
At the doorstep of these people  
Greedy for gold?

Listen, o my pain,  
Love is that butterfly  
Which is pinned forever to a stake.  
Love is that bee,  
From whom desire,  
Stays miles away.

Love is that palace  
Where nothing lives  
Except for the birds.  
Love is that hearth  
Where the colored bed of fulfillment,  
Is never laid.

Mother, tell him not to  
Call out the name of his dead friends  
So loudly in the middle of the night.  
When I am gone, I fear  
That this malicious world,  
Will say that my songs were evil.

Mother, o mother  
My songs are like eyes  
That sting with the grains of separation.  
In the middle of the night ,  
They wake and weep for dead friends.  
Mother, I cannot sleep.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi



# Say Something

Say a word, say something  
O my dark beloved!  
Stir spring into my life!  
O my dark beloved!

If you stir spring into my life,  
I will become a doe.  
In the dense garden of your beauty  
I will forage for fragrance.  
If you shoot arrows of separation at me  
I, infatuated, will swoon!  
I will not drink, though you pour upon me  
Delicate, sweet words.

If you stir spring into my life,  
I will become moonlight.  
At midnight, in a sandalwood forest  
I will come to you.  
Heavy with perfume  
I will lay a bed for you.  
While you sleep, I will kiss you,  
And fall back, unbalanced.

If you stir spring into my life,  
I will become a cloud.  
Whatever road you walk  
Upon it I will shower myself.  
The wells of grief, I know, are deeper than life itself,  
I will fill them, neck high.  
These wells that have no rope,  
And no pail.

If you stir spring into my life,  
I will become a butterfly.  
The pollen of separation, more precious than wisdom  
I will distribute from door to door.  
The tree of separation is tinier than a nail  
But casts a shadow a million miles wide,  
This tree that grows peversely,

Right beside the heart.  
O my dark beloved!  
Stir spring into my life!  
O my dark beloved!

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Separation

People worship god.  
I worship this separation from you.  
It is worth Haj to a hundred Meccas,  
This separation from you.

People say I am as brilliant as the sun,  
They say I am famous.  
What a fire it has lit in me,  
This separation from you.

Behind me is my shadow,  
Ahead, is my darkness.  
I fear that it might leave me,  
This separation from you.

No taint of the body is in it,  
Nor litter of the mind,  
All has been winnowed out,  
By this separation from you.

When sorrow comes, bringing with it  
Loneliness and pain,  
I pull it close to me,  
This separation from you.

Sometimes it colors my words  
Sometimes it weaves through my songs,  
It has taught me great deal,  
This separation from you.

When sorrow, defeated, fell at my feet,  
Amazed at my fidelity,  
The world came out to see  
This separation from you.

Love earned me fame.  
People flocked to praise me.  
It wept in my embrace,  
This separation from you.

The world turned out to tell me,  
That I had been unwise.  
It sat me on a throne today  
This separation from you.

[Translated from 'BirhaRa' by Suman Kashyap]

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Separation, You Are King

Let us speak of separation,  
Separation is king.  
A body that does not feel separation,  
Is dead body.

We are all born in the house of separation,  
We are children of separation,  
We receive it, we swallow it,  
We are on this earth to bear it.

In the temple of separation each one of us  
Burns like incense,  
Without separation every odor of life  
Would perish.

From separation emerges  
This earth, this sky.  
From separation originates the sun  
And the days revolve.

I was supremely fortunate that this separation from you,  
Attached itself to me.  
Without it I would have been just a piece of clay  
In an empty graveyard.

Today all the world is mine  
And all the skies.  
Today every color sways  
In my courtyard.

Why, my soul, like a woman,  
Do you long for union?  
Do different directions  
Ever meet?

I must extract the very essence of fragrance,  
For I have been given the gift of separation,  
For the sake of this separation  
I would give up a hundred births.

Let us speak of separation,  
Separation is king.  
A body that does not feel separation,  
Is dead body.

[Translated from 'Birha Tu Sultan' by Suman Kashyap]

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Sures De Marcia

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# The Accusation

My friend ,  
You have accused me  
Of stealing the color from a butterfly  
Of your town.  
I tore out of some garden, you say,  
A sapling of gulmohar  
And planted it  
In a desolate and barren cemetery.  
Just as the coral tree  
Has bitter roots,  
So, in my heart,  
Lies sin!  
I am degenerate, immoral,  
You have judged me to be vile!  
I am well acquainted with pain and have deliberately  
Made it my power.  
I am a bird of prey and do not care  
For the friendship of little birds.  
My colors are false,  
I am a dishonest dyer!  
The inky serpent of fame  
Lies around my neck  
And strikes, with my songs,  
Little heart-baskets!

My pain, like Ashwathaama's  
Is never-ending!  
You remind me that my body-room  
Will disintegrate soon enough.  
In exchange for fragrant songs  
I trade in wombs.  
I am, you write  
A very adolescent trader.

You say that a shadow  
Is a child of light.  
It is not the duty of a shadow  
To separate.  
The duty of a shadow is



Devotion to light.  
In light, to always be ahead,  
And to extinguish itself in light.

Even a bird can fly away  
If is miserable in its cage.  
But each day  
I catch and discard new birds.  
The reason I do this, you say, is that I covet just one thing,  
The sorrow in my soul.  
Because every song I sing,  
Is a song of sorrow.

You also write  
About one butterfly.  
The butterfly who spent a short time  
In my garden,  
The butterfly with a weakness for,  
Silver flowers,  
The butterfly who desired,  
Golden stars.

Her face was sweet,  
Like the moon in a desert.  
My songs  
Were very dear to her.  
You considered me  
A son of Saraswati,  
Today your opinion about me  
Is altered!

At the end you have written  
That I ought to be ashamed of myself!  
That I should drown myself  
In a tub of acid!  
I should take my sick self -  
Along with my songs -  
And leave the environs  
Of your town today!  
Society has no need  
Of my worthless sorrows!  
I should be fighting for

The rights of workers!  
I ought to disperse the color  
Of my beloved  
To the grain in the fields.  
I ought to take the sorrow of the world,  
And set it, like a jewel, in a ring of songs!

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# The Hawk

Mother! Mother!  
I befriended a hawk.  
A plume on his head  
Bells on his feet,  
He came pecking for grain.  
I was enamored!

His beauty  
Was sharp as sunlight.  
He was thirsty for perfumes.  
His color was the color of a rose,  
The son of a fair mother.  
I was enamored!

His eyes,  
Were an evening in springtime.  
His hair, a dark cloud.  
His lips,  
A rising autumn dawn.  
I was enamored!

His breath  
Was filled with flowers,  
Like a sandalwood garden.  
Spring danced thru his body  
So bathed was it in fragrances.  
I was enamored!.

In his words  
Blew the eastern breeze,  
Like the sound of a blackbird.  
His smile was the whiteness of a crane in the rice fields,  
Taking flight at the clap of a hand.  
I was enamored!.

I laid  
A bed of love  
In the moonlight.  
My body-sheet was stained

The instant he laid his foot on my bed.  
I was enamored!

The corners of my eyes,  
Hurt.  
A flood of tears engulfed me.  
All night long I tried to fathom  
How he did this to me.  
I was enamored!

Early in the morning  
I scrubbed and bathed my body  
With vaTana.  
But embers kept bursting out,  
And my hands flagged.  
I was enamored!

I crushed choori,  
He would not eat it.  
So I fed him the flesh of my heart.  
He took flight, such a flight did he take,  
That he never returned.  
I was enamored!

Mother! Mother!  
I befriended a hawk.  
A plume on his head  
Bells on his feet,  
He came pecking for grain.  
I was enamored!

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# The Night Of Sorrows

Either this sorrowful night is long  
Or my songs are interminable.  
This dreadful night does not end,  
Nor do my songs cease.

How deep are these lakes?  
No one has measured them.  
But they do not swell up in the rains,  
Nor dry up in drought.

There is something wrong with my bones,  
Set them on fire and they do not scorch.  
Sighs burn them,  
Grief scorches them.

These are the injuries of love.  
What cure, my friend, is possible?  
A touch hurts.  
A salve hurts.

The fair night belongs to the moon,  
To whom does a dark night belong?  
A moon does not hide among stars,  
Nor can stars be concealed in the moon.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# The Old House

It has been a while  
Since my self became displeased with me  
And left.

What remains with me  
Is just an empty shell  
And every wall of my home,  
Is overcast with sadness.

It has been a while  
Since my self became displeased with me  
And left.

And my home, since his departure  
Is grieving.

He often returned home  
Very late into the night.  
As soon as the sun rose,  
He would become fearful of the crevices in the walls.  
What thoughts leaped across his mind  
He would never say,  
But all day long  
He chased his shadow.

This fruitless wandering of his  
Often scared me.  
The wildness in his eyes  
Almost ate into the mirror  
And the cobwebs in that old house  
Stirred in this silence.

One day, during such a silence  
I showed him the walls of the house.  
The thought of those walls weeping in the sunlight  
Struck him deeply.  
I spoke to him about the walls without thinking,  
Because I lost for evermore  
His association with these walls.

Before he left the house that day  
He walked through every inch of it,

He embraced every coughing,  
Ailing brick in the house.  
And since that ill-omened day  
He never once returned home.

Now whenever someone kills himself  
Across a railroad,  
Or a group of monks with shaven head  
Walks through the town,  
Or a Naxalite  
Slays somebody -  
The walls of my home  
Become feverish.  
The ailing bricks of this old house  
Shiver.  
The ailing bricks of this old house  
Have faith  
That wherever he is, in whatever condition  
He is blameless.  
He is not displeased with the house,  
He is just displeased with the walls of the house.

It has been a while  
Since my self became displeased with me  
And left.  
What remains with me  
Is an empty shell,  
That is the companion  
Of the dying walls of this old house.

[Translated from 'BuDHa Ghar' by Suman Kashyap]

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# The Pan Of Sorrows

I will give you the grain of tears,  
Roast my sorrows in your pan,  
O, tender of the fire.

Tender of the fire, branch of magnolia,  
Roast my sorrows in your pan.

I am late already,  
The shadows are fading,  
The cattle have returned,  
From the forest.  
The birds have raised their clamor.  
Roast my sorrows in your pan,  
Tender of the fire.

Hurry, be quick,  
I have far to go,  
To the place  
Where my companions have gone.  
I have heard the road to that town is difficult  
Roast my sorrows in your pan.  
Tender of the fire.

When my turn comes,  
Your bale of kindling is damp.  
Why has your earthen pan  
Become flaccid?  
What has gone wrong with your fire?  
Roast my sorrows in your pan.  
Tender of the fire.

Mine is just a handful of grains,  
Roast them, and let me go on my way,  
Don't leave them raw,  
Roast them well.  
I beg you, bring an end to this wrangling,  
Roast my sorrows in your pan.  
Tender of the fire.



The wind has dropped,  
Its mournful weeping ended.  
A sweet heat  
Is rising in the stars.  
My breaths are like a marriage procession  
Whose bridegroom is displeased.  
Roast my sorrows in your pan.  
O tender of the fire.

Tender of the fire, branch of magnolia,  
Roast my sorrows in your pan.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# The Poor Man

Today this poor man  
Begs you once again,  
For one more tragedy,  
For the sake of his pen.

It has been an age  
Since I have drunk of sorrow,  
Stir tears into pain,  
Make it twice as fierce.

This blank sheet of paper  
Watches me silently,  
A caravan of poems  
Is lost in a desert of words.

I want to walk  
With the ache of the thorn in my foot,  
Whatever be the distance, my friend,  
From sorrow to the grave.

Even pain has turned its back upon me.  
Come back! says Shiv,  
You have been my tale  
For a long, long time!

[Translated from 'Aj Fer Dil Gareeb Da' by Suman Kashyap]

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# The Request

The sun that you stole  
Was mine.  
The house that you threw into darkness,  
Was mine.

The sunshine that smiles in your home, is mine.  
My life is bleak without it,  
The odor of my grief is heavy on it,  
It was mine yesterday and is mine today.

It is I, bereft of light, who am its father.  
It is my fire that is embedded in its limbs.  
The smell of my sun is in it,  
The sun that was stolen from me in broad daylight.

But you cannot be blamed for this theft.  
The sun has been stolen in every era.  
An afternoon has always died,  
Weeping for the sun.

I, lightless, beamless, have a request,  
I, a faithless father, stand at your door.  
Let me place a sun upon your forehead,  
And beg you for my sunlight.

I, who died long ago, beg you to bestow this on me.  
Never utter my name again in the sunlight.  
If ever some ray asks a question, remain silent,  
Or call me a 'black sun' and let it go.

This is the request of a father of sunlight.  
From this day, on my sunshine is dead to me  
Along with the sun it is yours now,  
Wherever it smiles, is the home of its father.

The sun that you stole  
Was mine.  
The house that you threw into darkness,  
Was mine.

[Translated from 'Arjoi' by Suman Kashyap]

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# To Be A Bird

I wish that I could be a bird  
That I could fly, that I could sing,  
That I could touch untouchable peaks,  
That I could forget the roads of the world,  
And never return.

I would bath luxuriously  
Drinking long sips of water.  
By the shore of a great lake,  
I would sing a halting song.  
I would go into a flowering wilderness  
Gulp the perfume laden winds.  
I would warm in a tight embrace,  
The peaks of mountains,  
Deadened by centuries of freezing cold.  
I wish that I could be a bird.

My nest would be among the mulberry trees,  
On in the caper, the mesquite or the cypress.  
When the cold east wind blew  
The jewelled branches would bend  
As if playing, swaying  
With their hair flying in the wind.  
One day there would be a storm  
And all the twigs would all scatter.  
Nestless, homeless, I would become,  
For the rest of my life I would drink the nectar of sorrow  
And live my life in its intoxication.  
I wish that I could be a bird.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Trees

Some trees look like sons to me.  
Some like mothers.  
Some are daughters, brides,  
A few like brothers.  
Some are like my grandfather,  
Sparsely leafed.  
Some like my grandmother  
Who threw choori to the crows.  
Some trees are like the friends  
I used to kiss and embrace.  
One is my beloved  
Sweet. Painful.  
There are trees I would like  
To throw on my shoulder playfully,  
There are trees I would like  
To kiss and then die.  
The trees sway together  
When strong winds blow.  
I wish I could render  
Their verdant, leafy language.  
I wish that I could  
Return as a tree  
And if you wanted to listen to my song  
I would sing it in the trees.  
The trees are like my mother,  
May their shade live forever.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Turbaned On

Like a branch of the pomegranate tree,  
We lie here, swaying slowly, o turbaned one.  
Turbaned one, black of heart,  
Swaying slowly, o turbaned one.

Like the eyes of a wild deer,  
Burning in the forest, o turbaned one.  
Turbaned one, black of heart,  
Burning in the forest, o turbaned one.

Like boats left at the shore,  
We lie here, sinking slowly, o turbaned one.  
Turbaned one, black of heart,  
Sinking slowly, o turbaned one.

Like lumps of sugar candy,  
We lie here, dissolving slowly, o turbaned one.  
Turbaned one, black of heart,  
Dissolving slowly, o turbaned one.

Like logs of black sandalwood,  
We lie here, smoldering slowly, o turbaned one.  
Turbaned one, black of heart,  
Smoldering slowly, o turbaned one.

[Translated from 'Cheere Vaaliya' by Suman Kashyap]

Like a house with walls of unbaked brick,  
We are crumbling slowly, o turbaned one.  
Turbaned one, black of heart,  
Crumbling slowly, o turbaned one.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Umara De Sarvar

From this life-pond, o my song  
Fill your beak  
With the water of my existence.  
It will not stay until tomorrow -  
The radiance of pain,  
Or the swans of grief.  
Fill your beak today.

Listen ,o my song,  
Life-ponds are deceptive,  
They dry up in a flash.  
The water of existence  
Turns ashen and sour  
Though you wish it would not happen.  
Do not blame me tomorrow  
Do not be angry tomorrow,  
Fill your beak today.

I am told that the swans of grief  
Are greedy.  
When a heart dies, they sing.  
They gather tears in the season of separation,  
Gather them and fly.  
They fly away, such a flight do they take,  
They never return home.  
Fill your beak today.

O my song,  
If you fill your beak,  
I will wrap it in gold,  
I will become your slave,  
I will become your shadow.  
I beg you,  
Do not, like me  
Die thirsting,  
Fill your beak today.

From this life-pond, o my song  
Fill your beak



With the water of my existence.  
It will not stay until tomorrow -  
The radiance of pain,  
Or the swans of grief.  
Fill your beak today.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Vidhva Rut

O mother,  
Tell me mother!  
What should I do  
In this widowed season?  
Tell me  
What should I do  
In this season of loss?

The trees are leafless in this season,  
Without fragrance.  
The sun of my happiness has no warmth,  
In this season.  
But even more bitter  
Is my youth that is widowed,  
Tell me,  
What should I do  
With this bitter youth?

My pain has let its hair grow out  
In this season  
It has worn the milky white clothes of sorrow,  
Kept the fast, not sung a song.  
Tell me  
Where can I drown myself,  
In this season?  
What should I do  
In this widowed season?

O mother!  
To whom can I attach myself in this season?  
Who can I touch with these contaminated limbs?  
At whose righteous door can I plant this sapling?  
O woe!  
What flowers can I shower upon it?  
Mother,  
Tell me mother  
O mother,  
Tell me mother!  
What should I do

In this widowed season?  
Tell me  
What should I do  
In this season of loss?

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Where Perfumed Rivers Flow

Where perfumed rivers flow,  
Is the home of my beloved.  
Where passing breezes halt,  
Is the home of my beloved.

Where dawn arrives on bare toes,  
Where night paints henna-beams on feet,  
Where fragrance bathes in moonlight,  
Is the home of my beloved.

Where rays of light roam nakedly,  
In green forests of sandalwood.  
Where the flame seeks the lamp,  
Is the home of my beloved.

Where sunsets sleep on wide waters,  
And the deer leap.  
Where tears fall for no reason,  
Is the home of my beloved.

Where the farmer sleeps hungry,  
Even though the wheat is the color of my beloved,  
Where the wealthy ones lie in hiding,  
Is the home of my beloved.

Where perfumed rivers flow,  
Is the home of my beloved.  
Where passing breezes halt,  
Is the home of my beloved.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Why Ask

Why ask about the condition of fakirs like us?  
We are water, separated from its river,  
Emerged from a tear,  
Melancholy, distressed.

Of course I knew that a painting is just  
A whimsy of colors-  
But when I entered the emporium of love,  
I paid a price.

Countless bodies did I find,  
But not one mind did I meet.  
This was written in my fate,  
In the four lines of my palm.

My destiny was my rival.  
I could never find a way to escape it.  
I did not leave Jhang, I did not pierce my ears,  
And a crowd of Heers crossed my path.

People listen to my songs,  
But call me a heretic,  
Because I named pain my kaaba,  
And sorrow, my god.

On occasion, in gatherings of great people  
I have spoken sharply.  
Perhaps I was arrogant about my love,  
Perhaps I felt I had a claim upon pain.

You call yourself a wise man,  
I say I am a lover.  
Let us leave it to the people to decide  
To whom they will give the esteem of a pir.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# Words

Yesterday, I was collecting words.

One was up there, sitting in the bo tree,  
Another was in the banyan.  
One was wandering in my street,  
Another was lying in the earthen jar.  
A green word lay in the fields,  
A black one was eating flesh.  
A blue word was flying  
With a grain of the sun in its beak.  
Every single thing in this world looks like a word to me.  
The words of eyes,  
The words of hands.  
But I do not understand words I hear from a mouth.  
I can only read words.  
I can only read words.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi

# You Left

You left,  
And grief cast its pall over me.  
My pain condensed into a dropp  
And rose into my eye.

For a great distance  
My sight kissed your footprints,  
Until the trail  
Was swallowed by the dust of the road.

Before you left,  
There was the bloom of your youth,  
I turned around after you left  
And every flower had wilted.

Since that day  
I stopped speaking, I could not see.  
My tongue was silenced  
My sight turned to stone.

The pain that you gifted  
To love,  
Was the pain finally  
That consumed 'Shiv'.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi