

THORNS AND AGONIES

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Poems by
K. V. Dominic



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Thorns and Agonies
(Poems)

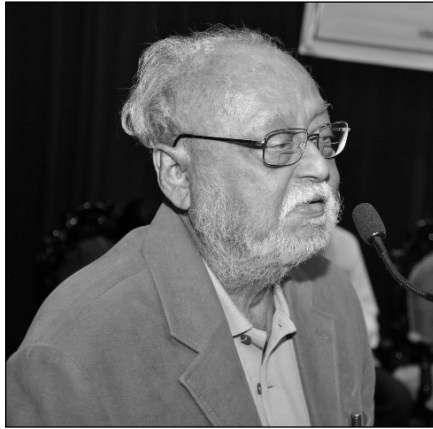
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Dedicated to



Jayanta Mahapatra (1928-2023)

Preface

Glad to share with you my 8th collection of poems in English. Besides my English poetry books, there are six more poetry books in Hindi, Bengali, French, Tamil, Gujarati and Malayalam, translated by renowned writers. This book contains 44 poems composed during the past three years. It took a longer duration to bring out this collection since I have been concentrating more on short fiction during the period. Unlike many other poets my poems are more objective than subjective, more intellectual than imaginary and emotive. Reason plays upper hand in my poems. I give more importance to content than style. Imparting good values and messages through poetry and short stories is my prime objective. Repetition is boring and finding out new topics and themes is challenging. That is one reason why I am not able to compose poems frequently.

The main themes and topics I have dealt with in this book are: tribute to Jayanta Mahapatra, Stephen Gill and Suderlal Bahuguna, addiction to religion, stray men and stray dogs, women empowerment, Nature and environmental concerns, corona virus, equity, Russia-Ukraine and Palestine-Israel wars, terrorism, mother's love and concern, concept of new year, religious cocoon, plight of elephants, communal riots, old age and death, legal discrimination, humanism etc.

This book is dedicated to Prof. Jayanta Mahapatra the greatest contemporary Indian English poet who departed us on 27th August 2023. He was like an elder brother to me, so loving and compassionate. His loss is irreplaceable to English poetry and Indian English literature. Pranaam to the great soul!

Before winding up let me express my deep gratitude to my dearest publisher and friend Sudarshan Kcherry jee for accepting this book for publication from his renowned publishing house, Authorspress.

K. V. Dominic

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Tribute to Jayanta Mahapatra

27th August 2023

Black day for Indian English poetry
Esteemed Jayanta Mahapatra jee
bade good bye to Indian literature
The bard from Odisha
sang all over India and abroad
for more than five decades
A pioneer to contemporary poets
No better model to budding writers
Humble, simple, gentle and compassionate
He was my eldest brother
and can't believe that he is no more

A physics professor, most intellectual
Fusion of reason and high imagination
Highly sensitive to burning issues
People's poet in every sense
Rooted to the land born and brought up
Never cared for awards or positions
though innumerable awards
and honours adorned him
Returned Padmasree to protest
against rising intolerance in India

Author of twenty seven books of poems
Jayanta jee remains a pole star
and will remain immortal
in readers' minds across the world



A child is born into religion here

A child is born into religion here
before it is dropped into mother earth's lap
Born in largest democratic country
liberty is denied before it is born
Religious myths inject confusion in tender minds
Its teachings contradict scientific truths
imparted in schools
An Indian child can only envy
its counterpart in the West

From birth to death
religion dangles like Damocles' sword
Rationalism trembles before
religious superstitions
Rationlists are stamped antisocial
Religion and caste play trump card
in social, political engagements
Play major role in selection
of MLAs and MPs
Thus they decide who should rule



A Stray Man with a Stray Dog

A stray man with a stray dog
stuck my eyes in my morning walk
along the long veranda
of municipal shopping complex
Monsoon showers prevent
me from walking outside
Got a little irritated
when he started smoking
sitting on the veranda
My anger melted into
deep compassion
seeing his hands shivering
frequently out of fits
Dog watches him lying nearby
Black beauty, neat and sweet!
Who says black is not beautiful?
Dog finds him as saviour
since he shares whatever he eats
Stray man and stray dog
No difference between them
Abominable to cruel society
I gave him hundred rupees
to appease his hunger
and that of his dog
He may not survive long but
Mother Earth will sustain his dog



Cause for Concern and Content

A dam aged one hundred and twenty eight*
Cause for concern and content
Incessant rain and rise of water level
Soothing shower for millions' minds on one side
But tsunami of fear for millions on other side
Man's creations on earth
prove constructive and destructive



* Reference to Mullaperiyar dam in Kerala, India.

Cause of my hand ache

Why do you radiate, my right hand,
ache unbearable, stealing my sleep?
Haven't I injected through your veins
words which helped hundreds of scholars,
teachers, students and writers?
Is it a nemesis of plants innumerable
for causing their death for my print books?
Or is it retribution of animal world
for pelting stones at snakes, stray dogs
reptiles, insects and birds in my childhood?



Cry not my daughter

Cry not my daughter
Wipe your tears
Your journey has only begun
Miles and miles to voyage alone
through tempestuous ocean of grief
Your tears can never
quench the desert minds

Cry not my daughter
when wolves snarl at you
This world is full of wolves and vultures
None is there to drive them away
Let lamb in you
rouse as lion
and charge at them
lest they tore you to pieces



Corona Virus, Nature's Defence

Corona virus
Nature's defence
on man's offence
Crown for man's crimes

Corona virus
Crown for man's greed
Reward for man's
assault on Nature

Corona virus
Nature's vaccine
for man's conceit
An indispensable dose
to teach him humility

Corona virus
Crown for man's cruelty
Alas, crown on man's corpse



Death is nothing but salvation

Why do people long for life after death?
Burst out of a selfish mind or selfless mind?
Thirst for continuity of present cozy life?
Or for a better world from the present hellish life?
If God is with us and aham brahmasmi
why should we seek better place or body?
Atma merges with Paramatma
One who leads a righteous life
and getting bliss through nishkama karma
never longs for a life after death
Death is nothing but salvation



Destined Like a Stray Dog

Dawn to dusk Daisy wanders in town
Begging for mercy of pedestrians and passengers
Selling lottery tickets at bus stops, markets,
queues at liquor shops, ration shops, ATM counters
A housewife compelled by pandemic
to wander like a stray dog
to feed a family of five

Coronavirus extinguished life of her
husband, an auto rickshaw driver
Her daylong labour can earn
just three hundred to four hundred rupees
She brings fortunes to many
but never gets one for her on unsold tickets



Equity must begin at home

Equity must begin at home
When parents long for a son
a daughter born faces displeasure
She faces segregation from childhood
She lives with isolation throughout her life
Only a few get higher education
Hence less employed in higher posts
She gets less wage for same labour he does
Very few get equal share of family property
Religion shows worst discrimination
She can't be priests and even
denied entry into God's abode
What a pity, she can't choose her own dress
whereas he wears whatever he likes!
He rules the world and
she has very little representation
in governments and lawmaking bodies
Unless he decides she can't be uplifted
LOVE your sisters and daughters
Then there will no more be discrimination



Even after 75 years*

Even after 75 years
India my country regains
largest democracy in the world
India remains 161
in freedom of expression
Literacy rate is 77.7 percent
Ranks only 132
in gender equality
Poverty ranking is 125
Ranking of democracy just 46
Yet India is the largest democracy in the world!

Top one percent in India
owned more than 41 percent of total wealth
50 percent of Indians have only
three percent of total wealth.
Yet India is the fifth economic power in the world!



* Based on the Mathrubhoomi report of 26th January 2024

Faces Mirroring Minds

How aching watching faces
of people thronged at waiting shed
Eyes could find not a single happy face
Faces disseminating sorrow
dejection, anger, contempt
anxiety, shame, awkwardness
sexual desire, boredom

Face of A is sad:
might be her husband
in hospital is seriously ill
B is angry – might be
his boss rebuked him for no reason



Faces who greet me on my morning walks

Waken by hymns from temples, churches and mosques
 I feed my cats and crows with rice and water
 And then read both English and Malayalam dailies
 After that I start my morning walk at 7am
 greeted by the 'good day!' bark of my Rocky

Lottery ticket sellers are more my familiar faces
 More than fifteen found on road sides
 in a distance of just three kilometres
 From dawn to night they stand
 begging with tickets in their stretched hands
 Millions live on lottery business in Kerala
 Covid pandemic made millions jobless
 Many returned from the Gulf empty handed
 To sustain families, thousands flooded to roads
 Started tea shops, vegetable, fruit stalls in small tents
 Frequent lockdowns and loss in sales
 closed shops one by one within a few months
 Thus we find lottery sellers just like milestones
 Many are old and weak, men and women
 How do they stand entire day, a wonder to me
 How they long to sit and rest, I feel often
 But poverty keeps them standing biting pains
 I don't buy any tickets and test my luck
 Earlier bought a few on sympathy grounds
 If I show such sympathy now to those hapless ones
 several thousands I have to spend a day
 since minimum fifty sellers I come across everyday
 Fate is cruel to them for they never win
 prizes on those unsold tickets left in their hands

Beautiful Reshma born to wealthy parents
 runs a tea shop in a rented building
 She herself cooks and serves in small room
 Customers enter without masks
 She may contract covid any moment
 But she is destined to continue serving

to feed her children three living upstairs
Her husband deserted them and lives
happily with his concubine in the Gulf

Deaf and dumb Chandran sells tender coconuts
He has no kith and kin to show him love
His boss takes him very early morning
to climb on trees and fell coconut bunches
He gets just 400 rupees for his labour from dawn to dusk
Chandran is true son of Nature
Compared to his boss and vast majority humans
he never pollutes air with filthy words

Old Sankaran walks like snail
Pain of legs doomed his happy life
Lost his labour in building sector
None to care him and pulls on life
with what he gets by selling
littered cardboards and plastic bottles



Generative AI Creative writing

Quality of creative writing
varies from person to person
Vast majority goes to trash
Thousands of trees are butchered every day
Millions are spent for garbage publication
At last evolution descends as redemption
AI will delete all trash from world
It's manna showered from heaven
Generative AI, creation of super-intelligence
Despite absence of human emotion
let us welcome it wholeheartedly
for survival of the fittest is the law of Nature



Heaven-hell illusion

O Creator our Father
Enlighten our minds
Not to fall into religion's trap
Frightening with heaven-hell illusion



How can humans be so cruel?

How can humans be so cruel
Killing thousands of innocents

Kidnapping hundreds
Raping women and children
Torturing and starving

How can a Prime Minister be so cruel
Bombing to death
Twenty five thousand innocents
Several thousands burned and wounded
Majority children and women

How can a Prime Minister be so cruel
Fleeing millions from their houses
And even killing when they run for lives

How can a Prime Minister be so cruel
Bombing and killing
hundreds of innocent patients in hospitals

How can a Prime Minister be so cruel
Cutting supply of water, food, energy, medicine
And starving millions in nightmarish darkness

How can a Prime Minister be so cruel
Souls of thousands of children cry
Our lives had only just begun
What right has he to massacre us?
Curse on you PM
God will surely punish you



* Reference to Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

I am a Red Rose Bloomed for All

I am a red rose bloomed for all
Bloomed after thorny mounts
My sparkling hue and enticing fragrance
allure innumerable Romeos
Dancing round and round
Humming sweet love tunes
Tickle me with fond kisses

I am alarmed of villains
Iagos and even Dussasans
who will rape me and
cut my body to pieces
Some chop me by neck
and offer to the Creator
Or deck their dear's coffin

My charm is lost when old
Then none will come near me
Neither Romeos nor Dussasans
Discarded by all
I will return to earth
where I was born
I have least grief in departure
since I served my mission well



- * It is composed with an eco-feminist perspective – connecting earth and women together, how they are exploited by the society.

In Memory of Stephen Gill

God sent a white dove with long feathers on head
Flew over the world cooing mantras of peace
Reminded human beings futility of war
How millions of innocent children, women
farmers, labourers, animals and plants
lose their lives through devastating bombings
It flew to war torn areas where
'maniac messiahs' danced in ecstasy
over corpses of innocent masses.
Having failed in His mission
God called it back on 4th April 2022



Israel-Palestine cruelest war

Massive onslaught of Hamas on 7th October
 Killed more than fourteen hundred Israeli innocents
 Hundreds of unarmed civilian hostages
 including innocent women and children
 and captured Israeli soldiers taken to Gaza Strip
 No immediate provocation
 for such bloodthirsty massacre

Israeli retaliatory strikes
 killed more than twenty six thousand
 Innocent Palestines within three months
 Thousands lie buried in rubbles
 Around one million people of Gaza
 Left their properties and houses
 Seeking refuge in the South
 Israel cut off food, water, electricity,
 and fuel supplies to Gaza
 Urged 1.1 million North Gazans
 To evacuate their homeland in 24 hours
 2.3 million helpless people cry for
 mercy and survival in South Gaza
 Israeli missiles and rockets blow off
 their hope of survival
 More than five hundred killed in hospital blast
 Several thousands of children were massacred
 Every fifteen minute a child was killed
 Refugees get just single meal a day in shelter homes
 Forced to drink filthy water
 resulting stomach upset and dysentery
 Sleepless nights in damned darkness
 Deafening explosions
 tremor the buildings
 and children shiver and shriek
 Children are the majority wounded
 Thousands lie with bandages in hospitals
 Many will die and those who survive
 will be bed-ridden for ever

They cry for their parents' presence
And loud shrieks echo the walls
when they know their parents are killed
They are destined to live with
trauma injected by war
Surgeries are done without anesthesia
Imagine the pain and screams of the patients
and the mental agonies of the doctors and nurses
Hospitals are closed one after another
Children dead and living
Ask the fighters and war mongers:
"What harm have we done?"
It echoes and bleeds every humane mind
Isn't this a war for revenge?
Revenge against whom?
Thousands of innocent civilians
who lost their lives, dear ones and properties?



Lamb Grows to Lion

How charming is the face of a little child!
Alluring like the rising sun!
Glowing like a lotus flower!
Toddlers' walks feasting to our eyes
Eyes long to meet them again and again
Crave to kiss and hug
Never wish for any physical change by growth
But none can stop time and changes
Childhood charm in a few
turns to horror when they mature
Like morning sun's luminous face
turns to dreadful radiant one at noon
How charming was Adolf Hitler¹ as child!
Every one was tempted to kiss him
But the lovable lamb grew to a ferocious lion!
Idi Amin² was cherub as a baby
But grew to a devilish monster in middle age



1 More than 11 million people were reported dead under Hitler's Rule. Hitler used to torture people till their death.

2 As President of Uganda, Idi Amin killed more than 5 lakhs people.

Latheef's Dreams

Coronavirus expelled Latheef from UAE
Latheef expelled coronavirus from entering him
Started farming pineapple in rented land
spending lakhs he earned in deserts
Dreamed of daughter's wedding pending late
Alas, prices shot down like lightening
drowning him in huge debt
Shattering dreams coronavirus locked
Latheef and his family beyond rescue



Laws are there which torture the poor

Loans worth Rs 76,600 crore of 220 defaulters
More than Rs. 100 crore each
State Bank of India has written off.
Rs 37,700 crore of 33 borrowers
with loans each of Rs 500 crore and more unrecoverable.
Loans worth Rs 27,024 crore of 94 borrowers
More than Rs. 100 crore each
Punjab National Bank has waived*

Whereas petty loans of one lakh or more
borrowed by poor farmers pledging their
only house and very little plot
are seized by banks shutting them out
in the name of SARFAESI Act.

Unlike deliberate defaulters
whose millions and billions are waived
cruel fate made poor farmers defaulters--
drought, flood, illness and loss of income.

Laws are there which torture the poor
but save the culprits.



* Based on the report of *National Herald* on 10 October 2019.
<https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/business/who-are-the-220-defaulters-whose-indian-rupee76600-cr-loans-have-been-written-off-by-sbi>

Leave me not my dearest darling

Leave me not my dearest darling
Stay with me a few more hours
Nidra Devi, my sweetest sweetheart
Hug me tight and kiss my eyes

None has such warm velvety lips
Day and night trillions long
and pray for your balmy kisses

With aching body and mind
millions in hospitals and houses
long for your soothing hug and kiss

Go my darling
Stroke them head to foot
Ease their pains and
kiss their eyes to deep sleep



Note: *Nidra Devi* is goddess of sleep

Mothers are always thus

Reminding me of daughter's birthday
My wife stated:
"Mothers are always thus."

When son is a little late to come back home
Tension mounds in mother's bosom
Mothers are always thus

When daughter's marriage is delayed
Mother loses her peace of mind
Mothers are always thus

When meal is insufficient
She sacrifices hers and serves to others
Mothers are always thus

When child is sick and bedridden
Mother can't rest or sleep
Mothers are always thus



Mother's Cries

"Hang my son!" mother cried
He has raped a child
Going to her school

"Save my child" mother cried
He fell into a bore-well
While playing with his friends

"Proud to be his mom" mother cried
Sacrificed his life for freedom
Fighting against the British



Nature Retorts

The more you blast rocks and hills
Nature is bound to retort
blasting more clouds over you
resulting in landslides and floods



New year is born in minds

happy new year
is born in our minds.
change is internal not external
sun has no change
earth has no change
tick ticks are same
only calendar and diary change
one gets happiness
in making others happy.
when you ignite
rays of hope in others
new year is born.
no happy new year
for millions in war-torn
Palestine and Ukraine.
no happy new days
for billions starving in Africa.
feeding hungry mouths
showers heavenly bliss.
when you wipe tears of others
your mind blossoms with joy.
when you kindle smiles on faces
of your parents, spouse,
children, siblings, friends
neighbours and even enemies
a happy new year is born.



Old age and death

old age and death
man always worried
animals least affected
fortunate are those
depart not bedridden
creator calls back animals
merry as they are sent
why He tortures man?
reason so simple
man alone defies Him



Pranam to you Sunderlal Bahuguna!

“Why do you scream, trees?
Why don’t you cook and eat?” Sun asked
“Why don’t you sleep to my lullaby?” evening breeze asked
“How can we eat when our savior is lost?
How can we sleep when our beloved father
who hugs us is dead?” trees wailed
“Many of us would have been dead
had he not been alive
When thousands of humans die everyday
for want of sustaining oxygen
we have been feeding millions selflessly
least caring our own health and wellbeing
Dear coronavirus, why didn’t you spare him
who always fought for us Nature and environment?”
“He was our savior too” birds cried
“Pranam to you, Sunderlal Bahuguna!”



Religious Cocoon

I long to come out of my cocoon
Cocoon made of steel threads
Not my own make
Made by my forefathers
How long can I bear this suffocation?
Suffocation in this religious cocoon
Majority of humans
are born into such religious cocoons
Gandhi's words echo –
God has no religion
And nothing but truth is God

Much is there in a name
Can I change my name to
non humans' or plants'
that have no religion?



Russia-Ukraine Unending War

Russia-Ukraine unending war
Nearly two years passed
No sign of ceasefire
More than ten thousand innocent civilians killed
Nearly four lakh soldiers sacrificed their lives
What harm have they done?
Price for being innocent and patriotic?
Millions have lost their houses and properties
Several millions have fled to the neighbouring countries
And starve in refugees camps
The war has drowned world economy
When will this bloody business stop?
Who will bell the cat?
What for is UNO?
Where have gone the harbingers of peace?
When one tries to prove its might
other tries hard to resist and survive
Isn't it a weapon business?
Weapons are to be used or they will get rusty.
Is might is right rule of the day?



Screams of my Countrymen

Covid pandemic embraces
More than three lakhs of my countrymen
And strangles like Dritarashtra
three thousand and more everyday

cries for help from everywhere
kins of patients running frantically
to fill oxygen cylinders
sights of people young and old
falling suddenly on roads
for want of breath
hospitals are all full, no beds,
no oxygen, no ventilators
dead bodies waiting for cremation
for hours and hours

below three percent of my countrymen
are fully vaccinated
when will it complete three hundred million?



Spider's Kingdom

Spider Ma, how much you labour for us
to rear and protect from mighty giant enemies!
They invade and tear your territory to pieces
for no reasons at all
Still you protect us hiding somewhere,
but not surrendering
You too play your role in balancing Nature
Strike a concordant note in the universal symphony
But might is right here and world dances to its tune.



Note: The poem is dedicated to brothers and sisters of Ukraine

Stray Dogs and Stray Men

“Take it” beggar shared his meal
with stray dog, his companion
“What difference is between us?
Stray dog and stray man
Covid pandemic hit us worst
Society at last shows compassion
We are served from community kitchen
Though they don’t care you, I am bound
We are here and society is responsible
Mother earth loves all her children
And she cooks food for all
But mighty selfish sons enter kitchen
and kick out innocent ones from dining
Coronavirus now teach them lessons
Being a human I will also suffer
But mother earth will protect you
and all other beings except man.”



Sun started weeping

'Almighty Sun, source of our life,
why are you so merciless
to your children so harmless?'
Plants and animals wailed.
'We have no water
and will die any moment.
Man deserves your punishment
and suffers well with pandemic.
Kindly heed to our cries, Lord!'
Blazing Sun started weeping;
Weeping turned to incessant cry
and it started raining and raining.



Taming of Elephants

Elephant largest animal on land
becomes slave to small creature Man
Trapped from wild it is celled in narrow cages
Legs bound fast with ropes and chains
Beaten and frightened with fire and crackers
Deprived of food, water and sleep
poor creature stands on feet for several days
Tamer then gives it water
and loosens ropes and chains
Elephant now learns
it is no more a free animal
To survive without pain
slavery to man is essential
After this first stage caged elephant
is brought to pool
with a tamed elephant on either side
Mahout is allowed to sit on its back
Using sharp hook, knife and stick
he teaches it to obey ten to thirty commands
Thus the helpless creature
becomes man's slave forever

What for all these cruelty?
Which deity is pleased
at this atrocious worship?
Cruelty thy name is man!



The real saviour

Those who seek abstract heaven
and abstract saviour,
come to Malappacherry* village
You will find real heaven
and saviour there
Sheela is the real saviour
Saving 140 helpless poor people
deserted by the cruel society
She with her two children
continues her handicapped
husband's heavenly mission
His departure from the world
didn't weaken or dissuade her mind
to desert the wretched ones.



* Malappacherry village is in Kasaragod District, Kerala, India. Based on the report in the Mathrubhumi daily, 23rd October 2023.

War Victims

“Doctor, where are my legs?
Why have you cut them off?
How can I walk?
I want to play with my friends
Give me back my legs, doctor”
Screamed a pretty girl aged ten
lying helpless in Al Shifa Hospital, Gaza
“We’ll give you new legs, daughter
Israel bombs have burned your legs”
“What can I do with artificial legs?
Kindly take me to my house, doctor
I want to meet my mom and dad”
“We’ll take you sure after a few days”
Doctor wept and sighed
How can she be told
her parents are killed
and house is demolished by bomb?
“What harm have I done to Israel?”
“You have done no harm to them
And millions of your countrymen
are innocent, but Israel feels no guilt
in bombing your houses and
killing and burning several thousands.
Pray to God to dissuade them
from bombing this hospital.”



When your little finger is burning...

Mother India,
when your little finger (Manipur)
is burning and bleeding
it's your entire body and mind
terribly suffering and bleeding
You can never rest and sleep
till it's cured and functions normal
Your body guard sons
vowed to protect you
failed to save you from tempestuous fire
They are indifferent
and inefficient in
quenching the burning fire
even after three long months
When your helpless daughters
were raped and paraded nude
where were your body guards?
Mother India,
how much you suffer now
humiliated before the global family!



Whose India – of rich or poor?

Just ten percent people of India possess
seventy seven percent of national wealth
Yet this largest democracy boasts of
fifth wealthiest economic power of the world

Over twelve lakhs beautiful houses
remain unoccupied in Kerala
Owners are all settled cozy abroad
Their agricultural lands turn wild
Whereas several thousands live in
huts, slums, rented houses
and even homeless on streets



Wood peckers

Wood peckers peck with all might
day after day and build nest
Lays eggs, hatch, feed chicks
Fly away with family merrily

Lazy parrots occupy wood peckers' nest
with little shame or guilt in encroach
Live happily, breed and fly away with family

Wood peckers in society
work hard selflessly for all
where parrots lead luxurious life
looting fruits of hard earned labour



You are cheated worse than children

Sweetie, lo the moon!
How beautiful it is!
I shall take you there
if you finish this dish
Parents cheat their
innocent children thus

You are cheated
worse than your children
Religions exploit
your ignorance
Loot your wealth
and offer you
immortal life after death
in blissful HEAVEN
None knows where

