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## In the Footsteps of Yogesvara and Abhinanda<sup>1</sup>

### The Round of the Seasons

#### Spring

1

I tire of superstitions:  
the *asoka* blossoms only  
at the touch of the beloved's feet;  
the *bakula* must be splashed  
with rinsed wine from her mouth;  
the *tilaka* must be hugged  
and the amaranth should get a glance from her  
before leaf turns green  
or the petals colour.

I quicken into flower  
at the memory of your touch.

2

It is the season for illusions:  
night-mists turn to dawn-haze  
frost becomes dew, though sharp.  
The night-jar still coughs.  
The blackbird is heard sometimes  
but she hasn't been seen.  
The scent of the mango-blossom is there  
but not the mango-blossom.  
A bird alights on the leafing lotus bed  
thinking it is an island.  
Bathing on the *ghats*  
shawled in mist, she finds  
bees moving towards her breast-tips.

**Summer****1**

Kama, in this torrid summer  
let some things remain cool:  
her eyes, reflecting the waters  
the smell of jasmine in her hair,  
her body dripping with the cold river  
as she steps out on the *ghats*.  
Let only one thing burn, Kama,  
and that is her ardour.  
Let thoughts smoulder within the cool forehead.  
Let the cheeks be cold  
but the tongue within, all fire.

**2**

From the mountain's shoulder to its groin,  
from nether regions  
to the lip of the escarpment,  
forest fires rage simultaneously.  
Bark and bud crackle and rain down as ash.  
The trapped antelope does not know where to run  
as the four directions, wrapped in smoke,  
converge on him.  
Such is my fate, beloved,  
in the forest of your limbs  
under the black rain of your hair.

**Rains****1**

The rain gods betrayed us last night.  
The thunder woke her parents  
lightning showed her stealing from my door.  
Such a commotion there was  
that despite disturbance in the skies  
I heard wooden bolts unfastened  
on neighbour's doors,  
and women peeping out.  
The rain has stopped today  
but the village drips with her escapade.

**2**

They are all there  
the paddy-straw covered by a cotton rug  
the white smoke-tendrils  
uncoiling from an incense-stick  
the air outside sharp with drizzle  
the night sharp with the moorhen's joyous cries.  
Only my flank is empty  
Only the beloved isn't there.

**Autumn****1**

*Shrawan* has gone with its singed  
smell of lightning,  
and the jasmine flowers  
are not starred upon the trees  
but are a crescent upon her dried hair.  
Is lightning necessary  
for those smitten by lover's lightning?  
Is rain essential  
for those wet with each other?

**2**

The water lily bleached  
under a septembral sun.  
The paddy-straw crackling  
under the fires of their love.  
A bangle breaks, as her arms  
pummel his back.  
Who says lovers must move  
only to the beat of rain?

**Early Winter (Hemanta)****1**

It is a season for departures:  
the clouds have gone  
like wild geese from the lake.  
Lightning stirs now  
only in Yogesvara's verses;  
and the flood waters have left with the boatmen.  
Yet is it a season for arrivals:  
the lover comes to your door  
like the night heron.

**2**

She, who caught her  
stealing back at first light,  
said "there is mustard-flower  
on your back, be careful,  
it is getting to be winter.  
You may catch cold.  
The peasants who spend their nights  
with the scarecrows in the fields  
are already warming their hands  
on chaff fires."  
"You don't know the fires of our love"  
she answered.  
"For us it is still shrawan."

**Late Winter (Sisira)****1**

There was some coming and going  
 on the *machaan* that night,  
 during his vigil over sugar cane.  
 The wooden platform,  
 spread over a fieldbreak,  
 creaked and creaked, disturbing  
 the night owl on his perch  
 and the lapwing in its shrill concentrics.  
 He never shouted once  
 but wild boar kept away  
 from the phalanxed cane  
 while the stars wheeled round them.  
 His envious friends said later  
 that wild boar never came because  
 his *machaan* creaked through the night  
 with their love-making.

**2**

There was no din in the guava grove  
 except at first light when parrots  
 raised a curve-billed cacaphony  
 over half-bitten fruit.  
 He still slept soundly. The rope  
 tied to a can perched on a tree-fork  
 lay in his hand, gently-clutched,  
 as if it was a braid of her hair,  
 the one who had slipped from his string-bed  
 light as a dawn-breeze,  
 the colours of the east  
 streaking across her love-bitten face.

## NOTE

1. These poems are written in imitation of Sanskrit love poetry. Yogesvara and Abhinanda were both great exponents of sensuous love poetry.