

Classic Poetry Series

Govinda Krishna Chettur
- poems -

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Govinda Krishna Chettur(24 April 1898 - 03 March 1936)

Govinda Krishna Chettur was a famous Indian English Poet.

 Early Life

He was the oldest of the four sons of Mr. and Mrs. P. K. Krishna Menon. His brothers were K. K. Chettur, I. F. S., Ambassador of India to Japan and Belgium, Col. R. K. Chettur, an Army doctor and surgeon, and S. K. Chettur, I. C. S., India's representative to Malaysia in 1945 who retired as chief secretary of Tamil Nadu (Madras).

 Education

Govinda Krishna Chettur did his M.A. from Oxford University in 1918-21, during which time he was the president of the Oxford Majlis.

G. K. Chettur, arrived to study at New College, Oxford, in October 1918, just before the Armistice. He had been educated at Madras Christian College and his father, P. K. Krishna Menon, had been a Government Servant. Funding for his studies at Oxford were supplied by Sir C. Senkaramhair from Simla. He graduated with a Third in history in 1921.

Chettur was a member of the Lotus Club and the Oxford Majlis (he was President in Hilary Term, 1920) and was able to meet Rabindranath Tagore and W. B. Yeats through these societies. Yeats spoke to the Majlis in November 1919 on the poet Manmohan Ghose and Chettur obtained a photo of Yeats in his New College room. Chettur published his first anthology of poems in 1922 with a dedication to Yeats, and was inspired by Yeats to publish his memories of his students days. During his time in Oxford, Chettur met a number of other poets based in Oxford and Sarojini Naidu, who made frequent visits to Oxford. His publications were reviewed in the British Press.

During his student days, Chettur saw the play 'Tilly of Bloomsbury' by Ian Hay, where an Indian student was depicted as a humiliating figure. Chettur was so angry and offended by this portrayal that he wrote a letter to the Vice-Chancellor in complaint. Chettur was principal of the Government College in Mangalore from 1922 and continued to write and publish poetry in India.

After his Oxford years, he wrote, "Is it not possible for Universities in India to exercise a similar ennobling influence on students? Is it not possible to alter the conditions under which they exist, to render them as Indian in character, as Oxford is distinctively English? One wonders whether our Universities have always been the dry uninspiring official institutions that confront one today in India." Accordingly, he took up his assignment as Principal, Govt. College, Mangalore, in 1922 at only 24 years of age, the youngest Principal of a Govt. College. He first met his wife Subhadra at Queen Mary's College, Madras, from which she graduated in 1924. They were married in 1925 and had one daughter, Padmini.

 Literary Works

Among Chettur's poems, Sounds and Images is a double sonnet sequence written in 1921 during his last year's stay at Oxford. "The Last Enchantment" was dedicated to Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair, his uncle, and consists of Govinda Krishna's first impressions of Oxford, war days, and meetings with famous poets such as W. B. Yeats, Arther Symons, John Masefield, Rabindranath Tagore, and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, the nightingale of India, his personal friend and mentor.

His other works include The Temple Tank (1932) and The Shadow of God (1935), which was dedicated to the memory of his mother whom he loved dearly. She was well versed in both English and Sanskrit. The Ghost City (1932), a work of fiction, was dedicated to "Chocha," his pet name for his wife Subhadra, and also to his parents. His College Composition (1933), a wonderful book on grammar and structural English for college-age students, contains a wealth of information regarding the usage of the English language, correct use of words, sentence structure, and aids to essay-writing styles (graphic, elevated, humorous, etc.). Last, he edited Altars of Silence (1935), a collection of short articles on Shakespeare, Thomas Kempis, J. H. Newman, Seneca, and others that dealt with themes of meditation and prayer.

Beauty

How lovely the land lies beneath the moon!

Fairer a hundred times than Love or Life;
Fairer than Death, the end of mortal strife!
Now, langorous as lilies in the noon,
The very palms appear to sway and swoon
With this excess of loveliness; and the sea
Awaits, in patience, hushed, expectantly,
For what?-Ah, who may tell?-Or yet, how soon;
mortal beauty irreconcilable.

Changeless, yet ever changing mystery,
Holding at rare times all hearts in fee,
Subduing, sweet, and tantalising still,
What in thy glory may we here divine?
A hope-a longing-nay, a certain sign!

A sign, that of the living whole, we make
A part incorporate, however small;
A fragment of the passion that doth fall
In sudden splendour upon hill or lake:
A symbol, a remembrancer to awake
The sleeping godhead to a memory
Of what has been, and what again shall be,
And still the heart's intolerable ache.
Nay more; a pledge, renewed from hour to hour
In song, in love, in dream, in children's eyes;
Writ on the laughing heavens, the sorrowing sea;
Sealed on the morning face of every flower;
And, even as the rainbow in the skies,
A covenant of God's integrity.

Govinda Krishna Chettur

Beloved

You are the Rose of me,
In you have I lost myself utterly,
Your fragrance, as a breath from Paradise,
About me ever lies;
I crush you to my heart with subtlest ecstasy
And on your lips I live, and in your passionate eyes.

You are the Dream of me,
My visions many-footed flit and flee
Beneath the jewelled arches of Life's grace:
But through lone nights and days,
One form I follow, and mine eyes but see
The dear delightful wonder of your love-lit face.

You are the Greatness of me,
My thoughts are Beauty shaped exquisitely
To the rare pattern of your loveliness
Exceeding all excess:
And the strange magic of this mystery,
Steals weight from burdened hours, and woe from weariness.

Govinda Krishna Chettur

He And She

If absence makes the heart grow fonder,
Sweet, my love, I wish you gone;
For I shall love you better, yonder,
If absence makes the heart grow fonder.
Cheer up, sweet, what makes you ponder?
This is a truth I've hit upon:
If absence makes the heart grow fonder,
Sweet, my love, I wish you gone.

He's a fool who yearns to barter
The present for increase of bliss.
Love too often proves a Tartar,
He's a fool who yearns to barter,
And I've no mind to make a martyr,
While there's time, come, let us kiss.
He's a fool who yearns to barter
The present for increase of bliss.

Govinda Krishna Chettur

Lord Of Unnumbered Hopes

Lord of unnumbered hopes, unnumbered prayers,
Immaculate dream, unknown, unknowable
To mortal sense save dimly through the spell
Of earth's delights and quickening despairs,
Forgive what we have been, and what we are,
For that which in Time's fullness we shall be!
Thou art the Light, and in Thy shadow we
Move in our pathways like a growing star.

Make grow our comprehension till we see
Through life's bewildering complexity
The touch by which inscrutably is wrought
Thy will: and shape each word, each act, each thought,
Until we learn to read Thy will aright
And pass from shadow to Eternal Light.

Govinda Krishna Chettur

Mountains

"How shall I worship you, O mountains, mountains
I, in whose presence, seem a thing reborn,
Whose deep tree-shadowed vales and springing fountain.
Preserve the freshness of perpetual morn?
-he asks; "How of your quiet graciousness partake,
Your strength, your patience, your serenity?"
-he enquires. And gives his answer:
"Say nothing, nothing: caught up to the heart
Of this great silence, lay aside the rods
Of the world's chastisement, and kneel apart,
Remembering how wise those Rishis were,
Who for all beauty had a use most rare,
And now seem one with their commemorate gods."

Govinda Krishna Chettur

Prison

Comes, soon or late,
With pace unhurried, to the appointed door,
Slips in the key, draws back the bolts and bars,
And strong or steadfast, weak or passionate,
Glad or reluctant, we go forth once more,
To join the grave procession of the stars."

Govinda Krishna Chettur

Sounds And Images

You are the Rose of me,
In you have I lost myself utterly,
Your fragrance, as a breath from Paradise,
About me ever lies;
I crush you to my heart with subtlest ecstasy
And on your lips I live, and in your passionate eyes.

Govinda Krishna Chettur

The Net Of Memory

I cast the Net of Memory,
Man's torment and delight,
Over the level Sands of Youth
That lay serenely bright,
Their tranquil gold at times submerged
In the Spring Tides of Love's Delight.

The Net brought up, in silver gleams,
Forgotten truth and fancies fair:
Like opal shells, small happy facts
Within the Net entangled were
With the red coral of his lips,
The waving seaweed of his hair.

We were so young; he was so fair.

Govinda Krishna Chettur

The Shadow Of God

Lord of unnumbered hopes, unnumbered prayers,
Immaculate dream, unknown, unknowable
To mortal sense save dimly through the spell
Of earth's delights and quickening despairs,
Forgive what we have been, and what we are,
For that which in Time's fullness we shall be!
Thou art the Light, and in Thy shadow we
Move in our pathways like a growing star.
Make grow our comprehension till we see
Through life's bewildering complexity
The touch by which inscrutably is wrought
Thy will; and shape each word, each act, each thought,
Until we learn to read Thy will aright
And pass from shadow to Eternal Light'

Govinda Krishna Chettur

The Temple Tank

Here, by this pool, where herons stand and wait,
In quietness I cannot imitate:
Where Dawn and Sunset fling with reckless hand
A bounty that I cannot understand:
Where little things of fur and claw and scale,
With careless scorn put me beyond the pale,
And the rapt silence broken by their stir
Wraps closer round the restless worshipper;

Here, to this place of wonderment and peace,
With hurried steps, impatient, ill-at-ease,
I come to shed this ceaseless strife that mars
Even the beauty of the changeless stars:
And I return, undaunted, calm, and slow,
Careless of how I move, or where I go,
With benediction of this solitude,
Not understanding God, but - understood.

Note : A tank, 'In India, [is] A pool or lake, or an artificial reservoir or cistern, used for purposes of irrigation, and as a storage-place for drinking-water'

Govinda Krishna Chettur

The Triumph Of Love

Dearest, and yet more dear than I can tell
In these poor halting rhymes, when, word by word,
You spell the passion that your beauty stirred
Swiftly to flame, and holds me as a spell,
You will not think he writeth 'ill' or 'well',
Nor question make of the fond truths averred,
But Love, of that, by Love's self characterized,
A perfect understanding shall impel.
Therefore do I seek comfort in this wise:
That though my song have neither grace, nor wit,
Yet, of your tenderness, there shall arise
A lasting beauty in each line that's writ;
For it shall find a meaning in your eyes,
And hungry-hearted love shall perfect it.

I

Brave words we mouthed at parting, though your lips
Trembled a little palely as we kissed:
I said: 'Dear love, grey Time that ever strips
The glory from the rose shall go unmissed,
And nought shall change; our love shall be as fair
And proudly joyous as when first we met.'
You said: 'Mine own, true love knows no despair,
And we have loved, and we can never forget.'
I held you closely, whispering, 'Dearest one,
Take heart of God, for love is in God's keeping-'
And then 'twas time, and I must needs be gone,
And once we kissed, though both of us were weeping.
'Sweetheart-' you sobbed, but I had fled heart-broken,

And Love's last words, for love, were left unspoken.

II

These are the secret dreams of passionate youth:
To be so wise, that the dim after years
Shall hold no wisdom new, nor any fears,
For wisdom makes of fear a thing uncouth:
In the clear eye of Truth to be most pure,
To battle nobly with Joy's shining spears,

Know Sorrow to the uttermost of tears,
And Pain, and Passion's scourge, and Love's sweet lure.
Aye, this, in sum: to touch serenity,
Ascending to it by a hundred ways,
And Beauty's swift untiring ministry.
So, Love may gather when the shadows hover,
Proudly, a perfect dream of perfect days,
To fashion yet another perfect lover.

III

Because, one night my soul reached out and found
Yours, in the dim and visionary maze
Of dreams, and Love upon the starry ways:
Because, when, with heart bleeding and eyes bound,
I stumbled to your feet, you raised and crowned
My sorrowing with tears and tender praise:
Because, sometimes men dream of perfect days,
With Death's encircling arms about them wound:
Because of this, because of all of this,
Am I for ever dreaming of sweet hours,
As flowers dream anight of the wind's kiss:
For ever fashioning to Love's demands
This passionate joy, this wonder that is ours,
I that have yearned for the least touch of your hands.

IV

Wherefore, I make this song for you to sing,
Building of dreams and broken harmonies,
And shaping it to wondrous ecstasies,
And even though it be a little thing:
That so, may hurt be healed, or joy receive
The benediction of a God-like bliss,
And none of all our heart-beats beat amiss:
That so, we may arise purer and cleave
Unto the body of a deathless host,
And with new wisdom make more beautiful
The soul's desire: that so, the intimate rule
Of beauty may unto the uttermost,
Yield us, of passion, this all-perfect praise,
Ere the dark shadows fall upon our days.

V

The years have dowered you with heavenly grace,
 And beauty fairer than is mortal's due,
 As though the gods had dreamt of some proud race
 In fashioning the wonder that is you,
 Compact of universal loveliness,
 And one swift cast into the broken night
 Set you amongst us thus, that Love might bless
 Himself and you for this thrice blessed sight.
 But no! Not ever thus! - Although you held
 Ten years ago, the promise of this noon,
 And he, that knew you then, this hour had spelled:
 As who, far gazing on the frail new moon,
 Glimpses, all suddenly, the shadowed whole,
 About the silvern arc an aureole.

VI

O how I love you, love you! - Who shall say
 It is not love but that most pitiful thing
 Misnamed of love: for such sweet passioning
 Have men ere now deserved immortal clay.
 I love the glory of your womanhood,
 And the slow passion of my smouldering verse
 To sudden and swift flame your beauty stirs:
 But now the shadow of this quietude
 Beats on the broken doors of misery:
 Nor song nor laughter shall there any more
 Rise from the heart of dream: these things are o'er:
 All but Love's guerdon of humility,
 And the lorn echo, in my heart, of things
 Beyond all utterance, that the twilight brings.

VII

The sparrows cease their chirping in the eaves,
 Deepens the hush, as the grey shadows fall,
 And the white moon's ray creeps upon the wall
 With tender tracery of windy leaves:
 Away upon the plain a dimness heaves,

For Night's old wizardry compelleth all:
Along remembered paths, the old stars crawl,
And o'er remembered love, the lover grieves.
What shall I think on dear, when the proud heart
Lies humbled in the dust of vain despair?-
How play this part that is all sorrow's part,
Who never knew that love should come to this?-
Who dreamed a dream most beautiful and fair,
Remembering pain of that last pitiful kiss!-

VIII

The sky is not more multitudinous
With hope, wanting the moon, than hungry Love,
That with insatiate longing, clamorous,
Filleth the stabbing gloom with dreams thereof,
Against the time, when, like the risen moon
Flooding the heavens with her pure pale tide
And yielding loveliness a lovelier boon,
Love, by fulfilment, shall be glorified.
For, when, like to the moon, thou shalt attain
The zenith of my heart's high altitude,
I shall forget the fever and the pain,
Forget the bitter and the sorrowful mood,
And in the heart of all-compassionate Time,
Kindle a flame that shall outlast all rhyme.

IX

Have I not loved you since the world began?
Aye: for your beauty and your gentleness
My lonely heart did suddenly possess,
With that unquiet, that sweet thrill which ran
And stirred to music the first lover's heart;
That makes a miracle of gladness wake
Again in blossom upon heath and brake,
Shaming each time, anew, man's careful art.
And so the wandering years shall bring to me
You, whom I loved and lost: as the rich pride
Of leaf and flower to the heart of spring
Returneth in its time continually:
Wherefore I shall not grieve; but patient-eyed

Await again Love's re-awakening.

X

It is the woman's soul of you I love,
With love beyond the perishing flesh of us,
Knowing that in swift moments perilous,
More than all passion known, here or above,
Such dream of beauty were of power enow,
To quell the spirit fiercely mutinous,
For love imperiously fashions thus,
And gathers seven-fold strength into a vow.
And so I shape my way unto the heart
Of all things pure and good, as to your feet,
Humble,-nay, proud, for sorrow's counterpart
Of this our love, that only your quick tears,
Fallen from pity, but by love made sweet,
May heal beyond the passion of the years.

XI

They know the impenetrable and dark ways
Of the world's sorrow, who have seen like me
The shadowed eyes of Beauty bound with pain,
Beauty that with the seasons comes again,
Yielding her meed of light, of gladsome praise:
And bud, nor blossom, nor the billowing sea,
Nor the slow fires of the starry train,
Hold the quick spells each owned in other days.
But you, O Love, have broken through the gloom,
Bringing the healing touch of Love's own art,
And I am risen on celestial wings,
Out of the horror of this ageless tomb,
Unto the holy beauty of your heart,
And glory of unutterable things.

XII

Linger, a little, where the gentle moon
Disposes to a sweet melancholy,
And gazing on the far unquiet sea
Of nameless silence, where the glittering noon

Of worlds unnumbered yields a marvellous boon
Of beauty to earth's shadowed canopy,
Ponder awhile upon this mystery:
Here are no fevered changes, late or soon,
Nor hate, nor lust, nor all-exacting pride:
Only the passion of a perfect plan
Controls infinity: and these abide
Beyond the sorrows of our mortal span:
While we, a wanton hour yield and pass,
Tumultuously, like shadows on the grass.

XIII

O love, my love, if only life could be
Less burdened with the burden of vain tears,
That through the far off silence of the years,
Have welled in sorrowing eyes continually,
And love for love's true sake make ministry
To sorrow's needs despite a thousand fears,
Then louder than a thousand chanticleers,
Might Love, each morn, declare this constancy!
For then would Love not be this pitiful thing
Of wanton sighs and endless moaning blent,
But clothed with beauty of eternal spring,
Should build all time, beyond Doubt's purpurate gleams,
Of praise and prayer a perfect argument:
And there were then the dreaming of great dreams.

XIV

Go look upon the mountains in the haze
Of a November morning: how they throw
To Heaven the mighty bulwarks of their woe,
Above the pitiful and wandering ways
Of dull mortality: come, tell their praise!
How steadfast are they, and how great of heart,
That with such wondrous patience play the part
Beyond the passion of our numbered days!
We that are here today are gone tomorrow,
Yet hide our faces for a nameless dread,
And make wild moaning for a ceaseless sorrow,
Knowing nor how, nor why, these things should be:

And till the end, endure uncomforted,
Fretting the heart of peace impatiently.

XV

O dear my heart, I would not have you do
This thing of all the things that love demands:
Love has no need of this, nor understands
These half-desires that pierce us through and through.
Think what a lovely dream we hold in lieu
Of the fond traffic of sweet amorous lands,
How mutely borne our pain, and how held hands
Beneath the moon and smiled, and bravely too!
For, where have nested the white birds of Fate
No sorrowing is, nor the grim fear of death:
For, there, the longings fierce, insatiate,
Of men are stilled, and the dim hours pass
As in an ecstasy with hushèd breath,
And, there, no shadows sweep along the grass.

XVI

Men peer beyond the wisdom of the wise
In vain pursuit, and an all-mastering urge
Impels them forward from life's dizzy verge
To pierce the incommunicable skies,
Which are the veil before their vanities,
Until upon them falls the white-hot scourge
That sears the brain: thenceforward, like the surge,
Blindly, they beat upon their memories.
Love, this were wisdom, ere the heart be spent,
In love's sweet prime all Beauty to adore:
Life were too brief for pain and languishment,
And Beauty's largesse shall all things amend.
Therefore, being wise, I'll love you more and more
Until of Love and Beauty there be end.

XVII

Sometimes, I linger, where the roses shed
Their faded fragrance on the evening air,
And flowers that were once most sweet, most fair,

Fall pale and withered on their pitiless bed:
Nor take I thought, in grief, that they lie dead,
 O'ermuch, o'erlong, knowing their beauty rare
 Lives perfectly in Love's most secret care,
More beautiful yet, and I am comforted
 And even though you be so far away,
 And all our sweet companioned ecstasies
A memory of pain, the far-flung sway
 Of your most dear enchantment fills mine eyes
 With dreams more exquisite than memories,
 Which love's fulfilment shall immortalise.

XVIII

Rejoice this day, for this day love is near,
 And sunlight gleaming slantwise on the grass,
 And hope and beauty of all things that pass
Yet come again with the returning year:
 They may not die, these things that once were ours;
 And love, not less, that liveth in the mind:
 Therefore all ills forget, all griefs that bind,
And all un wisdom of unhappy hours:
 Remembering only the great gift of bliss
 Love brought to us one shining summer morn,
 When on my lips you placed that shy sweet kiss:
 Wherefore we sing all time with passionate praise,
 Despite of pity and pain and tears forlorn,
 This loveliness and glory of our days.

XIX

How many golden hours have we won
 From that grey leaden-fisted miser Time,
Rich with the suns, the odorous moons that spun,
 Across this perfect passion of our prime?
 Love makes no count! - Sufficient unto each
 Unmortal moment is the bliss thereof;
Tis grief that yearneth every way to reach
 Remembered rapture by remembered love.
 Love takes no count! - Forget the tale, fond lover,
 Today, the hours are freighted with pure gold;
 And when the golden days of love are over,
 And naught remains but as a story told,

With benediction of that grace sublime,
Life shall unfold love's page a second time.

XX

Silence, for sweet fulfilment: nay, but see,
There, on the margent of the westering tide,
Day pauses, now, upon his wearied stride,
And leans to Night's embrace impatiently.
Silence, for deep fulfilment: now shall be
Content. O hush! let not your murmurous pride
Revel against desire: let all things bide:
The hour is peace, and perfect harmony.
There is no stir upon the land or ocean,
The world is very quiet from this hill:
No whisper here of the great town that strives,
Roars in its highways, 'neath us, its commotion
Shaking the souls of many thousand lives.
But mount! From here, the world is very still.

XXI

I thought, God being so very far away,
Farther than I upon this little height,
He cannot see nor know our piteous plight,
Nor how we strive, nor how we fall astray,
But sets the sun and moon upon their way,
And lights the stars, and dreams that all is right
As I, even I, in this still shadow of night,
Might dream that down below no city lay.
Then cried I in mine anguish, 'Lord, not so,
But thus: as I, even I, though from the call
Of love be so remote, yet am all-wise,
So in proportion doth Thy knowledge go,
As God to man, and from the all-seeing skies
Knoweth all things, Thy love o'ershadowing all.'

XXII

Somewhere, the shadow sweeps upon its way
That shall our day engulf in darkest night:
Somewhere, the shadow of a dead delight

Creeps on our wondrous dreams of yesterday:
Somewhere, a glory fades into the gloom
Of nothingness: somewhere, new glories rise:
Between the shadowed and the burning skies
Man waits the hour of his passionate doom.
Love, when the shadows close upon our dreams
And hungry Night leans low upon Desire,
We that have passioned sweetly for this thing
Shall know no fear, knowing proud Death that seems
So fierce, shall pale before the undying fire
Of love made holy by our suffering.

XXIII

Who that has lived, and loved, and seen fair things,
And striven with darkness beating into day,
With spears dream-pointed, and climbed with wings
Above the tumult of the lesser way,
Shall speak thereafter slightingly of God?
They that have known this brief infinity
Are one with the immortals. They have trod
The floors of Heaven in Heavenly company,
Intoxicate with blessed harmonies.
So we, the proud inheritors of love,
Grown God-like in unmortal ecstasies,
Dream, God-like, of a day that love shall prove
Magnificently, in the after years,
Beyond the mortal touch of time or tears.

Govinda Krishna Chettur

To The Hills!

'Tis eight miles out, and eight miles in,
Just at the break of morn.
'Tis ice without and flame within,
To gain a kiss at dawn!

Far, where the Lilac Hills arise
Soft from the misty plain,
A lone, enchanted hollow lies
Where I at last draw rein.

Midwinter grips this lonely land,
This stony, treeless waste,
Where East, due East, across the sand,
We fly in fevered haste.

Pull up! the East will soon be red,
The wild duck westward fly,
And make above my anxious head,
Triangles in the sky.

Like wind we go; we both are still
So young ; all thanks to Fate!
(It cuts like knives, this air so chill,)
Dear God! if I am late!

Behind us, wrapped in mist and sleep
The Ruined City lies,
(Although we race, we seem to creep!)
While lighter grow the skies.

Eight miles out only, eight miles in,
Good going all the way;
But more and more the clouds begin
To redden into day.

And every snow-tipped peak grows pink
An iridescent gem!
My heart beats quick, with joy, to think
How I am nearing them!

As mile on mile behind us falls,
Till, Oh, delight! I see,
My Heart's Desire, who softly calls
Across the gloom to me.

The utter joy of that First Love
No later love has given,
When, while the skies grew light above,
We entered into Heaven.

Govinda Krishna Chettur