



THE BERRY IN THE HAND

Did you hear the anguished cry of this age,
O my dear, from my mouth?
Did you see the horrid image of this age,
O my dear, in my eyes?
Did you inhale the stink of this age,
From the air I breathed out?
Did your heart come to know the explosion of this age,
My dear, from my sinews?
And did you taste the bitterness of this age,
My dear, from my lips?

If you did, why should I keep
A secret of that terrible truth:
Once when I took your hand
In my hand and muttered,
'I take your hand for happiness' sake',
My body was all sweat, beloved.

I was afraid that fondling you with my dirty nails,
Not knowing what is happening,
I might leave a scratch on the tender petals
Of your life, so fresh as a flower!

I still have a drop of that sweat
As the jeweled crown of my soul force
Shining ever resplendent



In the dense insensate darkness of mine.
And but for this blessing
I would have had to say thus:
The man who once hooked you hand to his,
Saying, 'I take this hand,'
Armored with the stupidity
That beats the drum to declare,
He would make his, any gem or flower
However precious and however rare;
He who stands in front of you
Is but the ash of what has burnt a hundred times.
I don't have the skill now, darling,
To sing all the songs I sang then,
To tell all the jokes I told you then,
Even to smile as I had smiled then.
Today I see clearly
With eyes stilled by tears
This world like a berry held in hand.
I don't have the strength
To crush this simple fruit,
To crack it open
Or to gnaw it with my teeth.

True it is, with a single step
I might have measured this world,
Or drunk in one gulp
All the seas from my hollowed palm;
And yet, I alone know, beloved,



How grotesque has my body become
Having burnt in the red-hot sun,
Glowing without a night
In the grief of separation,
In the airless outer sky.

Do you know what makes me bold
In the field of faction, although I am mere ashes,
Your form and color and voice,
The scent of you soft hair,
The ever-fresh dawn that blooms
Every day in you, so full of divine glow,
Your fatigue, your tear-drop,
Your innocent mood of prayer as well.

(Translated by Ayyappa Paniker)