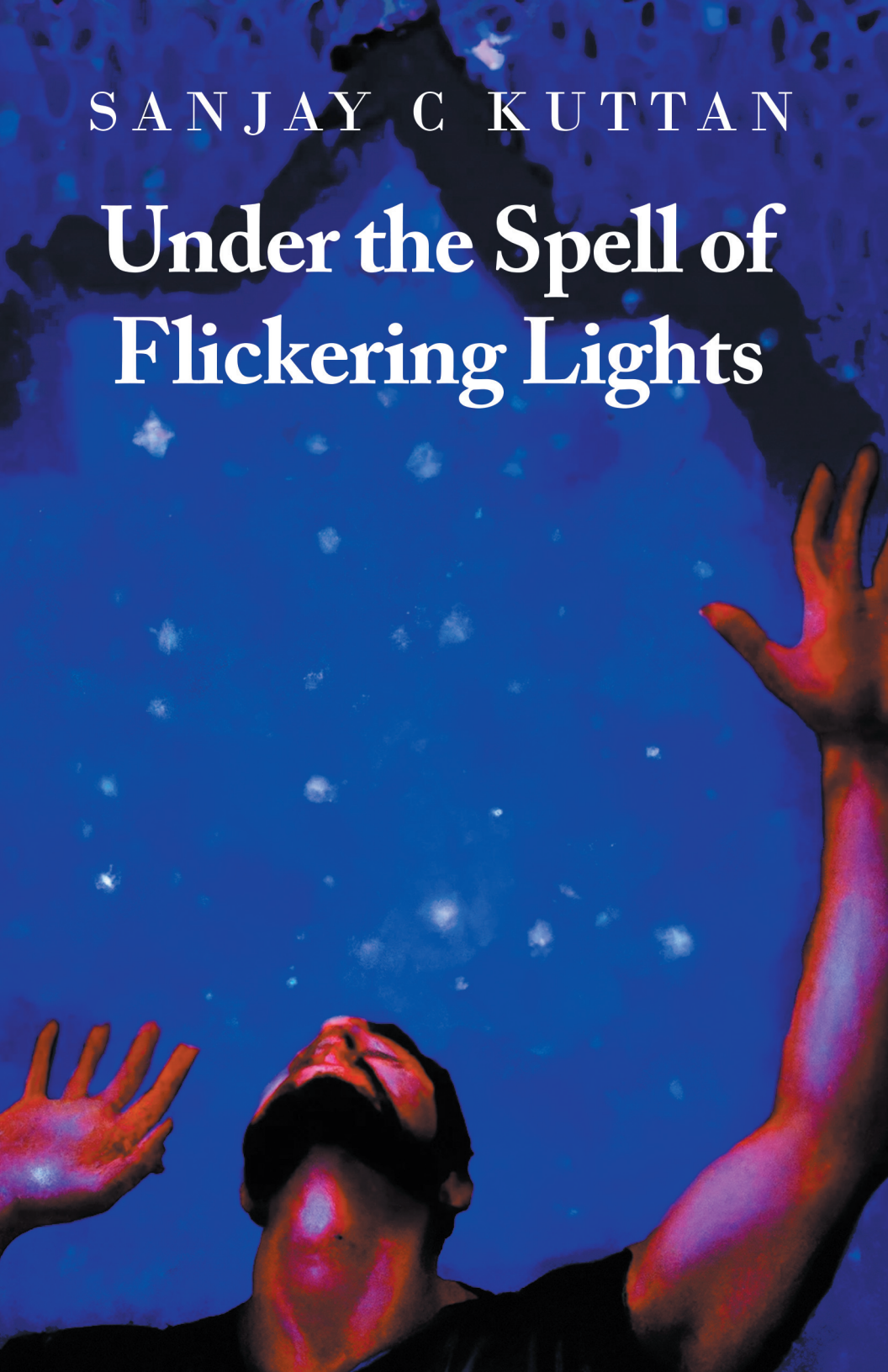


SANJAY C KUTTAN

Under the Spell of Flickering Lights



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SANJAY C KUTTAN



PARTRIDGE

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**In memory
of
Andrew Ong Hock Sing**

missing you
your passion for food, wine, and All Blacks rugby

missing you
your humour in ‘The Wolf and Bulldog
Chronicles – eating in Southeast Asia’;

missing you
your travel stories especially the brushes
with the spiritual world

missing you
at our breakfast rendezvous before work

missing you
our impromptu ‘talk cock sing song’ sessions

thanks for the memories bruh.

“EM-EYE-SEE ... KAY-EE-WY ... EM-O-YU-AS-EE”
he flicks the dining room light switch, off-on-off,
bidding us goodbye without advance notice.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this collection to my Lord
Jesus for his everlasting love,
grace and mercy and especially for His work at the Cross,
the greatest poem I experience every day of my life.
My two sons, Sachi and Kyran
for their unconditional love and helping me be a better father.
the love of my life and best friend Kuan,
for letting me be myself,
bringing out the best of me and completing me.
My mother, Rosaly,
for always believing in me and encouraging
me to be better than I thought possible.
My brother Sharaad,
whom I love more than he knows, for his presence in my life.
My late father, Capt. Chit Kuttan, Auntie Letha and Azizah
who have been present and praying for me,
and my family and friends
who have given a part of themselves to
make me the person I am,
the sum of all their love and laughter.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

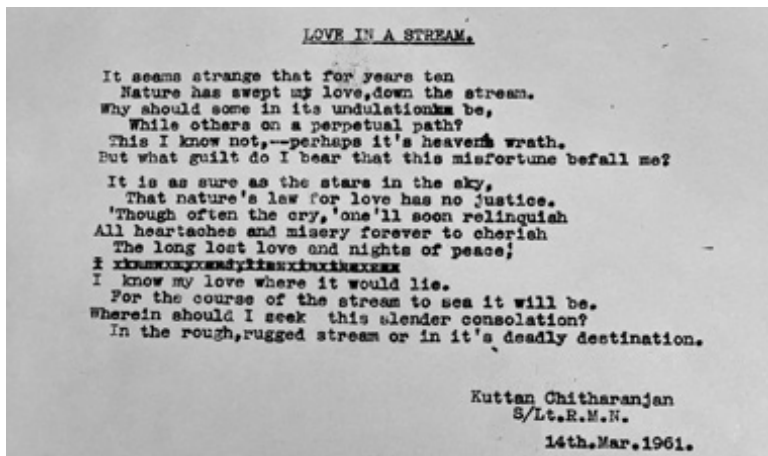
“A poet can only hope that one’s words, reaches across from one’s heart and soul, to resonate into another’s.”

“Under the spell of flickering lights” is my third anthology of poetry. The picture on the cover was generated with DALL-E 2, OpenAI’s new AI system that create realistic images and art from a description in natural language. My friend Lau Wah Yuen generated this cover using their system. The minute I saw this picture, from a selection of his attempts, it felt right for this book. The colours and the posture captured the title of the book in my mind’s eye.

The word ‘light’ is often associated with the natural agent that stimulates sight and makes things visible or used to express an emotion or mood. It is also used to describe the weight of the tangible and intangible, the state of realisation, understanding or even being.

Flickering light bulbs during my younger days meant voltage disruptions in the power system or connectivity issues with the energy source and the bulb. Flickering candle lights also meant a zephyr, no matter how gentle, would create moving shadows that either excited my imagination or thwarted my nightly industry. Flickering star lights and harbour lights on the other hand enchanted my senses and spirit.

I continue to be inspired by my mother, Rosaly, who at the age of 86 is still writing capturing her memories and reflections about her life and those around her with honesty, based on her memory and understanding. I was also aware that my father Capt Chitharanjan Kuttan also wrote poetry. I learnt of this when I was about to publish my first collection, 'Where Fires Rage' in 2009. He told me that he had written love poems but never got to show me the poems. He passed away on the morning of 19th of September 2011. My brother, Sharaad, whilst scrummaging through old files in our house at One Tree Hill in 2022, chanced upon two of father's poems written when he was in the Royal Malaysian Navy in 1961, before he met my mother around October 1962. He was a senior lieutenant then. He wrote two poems one day after another, 14th and 15th of March in 1961. I wonder who inspired the poem. He had typed it out. I guess in his position then he would have had access to a typewriter those days. I attach the picture of his poem in its original form below, typographical errors and all, but filled with emotions and he searches the right words to express his heart's voice.



Photograph by Sharaad Kuttan

THE DRIFT WOOD.

The day's task was over,
And the sun sank into slumber.
The beauty of it, at dusk to unfold,
Is a reward in bounty and a fortune to behold.
Yet amidst I stood,
My eyes bound and soul severed.

The whole world seemed bleak and black,
And knew not how, to hasten back.
Gazing at the swift, river flow by
I saw many a drift-wood, darting by
A dolorful sight it was to me,
For their plight was mine, they assured me

Their and was mine, far and unknown
To drift with destiny and all alone.

Kuttan Chitharanjan
S/Lt. R.M.N.
15th, Mar. 1961.

Photograph by Sharaad Kuttan

I wonder if Papa wrote anymore poems and if did, will we ever find them? They are probably stashed away in some box, nevertheless, I am sure he must have written a few more in his mind whilst out at sea in awe of the vast ocean and star lit dark skies. Furthermore, the challenges of defending Malaysia during Konfrantasi (1963 to 1966) would have distracted him as he was in the thick of the conflict against Indonesia, if not for country for sure for his two sons, born in 1964 and 1966.

This collection is grouped into five chapters, places my life has sojourned through every now and then.

1. Mandai Crematorium
2. Changi Airport
3. Mount Faber
4. Hooper Road Playground
5. Home@Aruan

These chosen sites in Singapore serves as the focal points where my poetry is contextualised within Singapore's urban back drop.

The pandemic has forced me to work from home like many around the world. This has necessitated my outward written expression of my heart and mind, especially in between emails, zoom meetings and reading reports. Holding on to my sanity each day. My consciousness of the world around me especially with the increased accessibility to social media and dealing with relationships strained by the absence of a human hug, feeds my creative soul. I find myself being inspired as I am exposed to sensitive situations, to the written words of other writers, to the turn of phrase heard during movies, all spawning a feeling that creeps up and sits next to me, waiting for me to act on.

You will find in here a collection of poems of three genres, Haiku, Tanka and free form poetry. Whilst my first, "Where Fires Rage" and second, "In One Breath", anthologies were respectively free form poetry and haiku exclusively, I have decided to compile, hopefully a worthy panoply of poems from these three different genres that adequately captures my reflections of the world I live in, that is relatable and enjoyable to you as the reader. I have also explored the Shahaai with photographs to add a dimension of expression and interpretation of my poetical works.

For the uninitiated, I have extracted the definitions from Merriam-Webster, of 'Haiku' and 'Tanka' and whilst there is some adherence to the rules, my deviations are best qualified with the prefix 'pseudo' to the name of this ancient art form. A peccadillo, forgivable I hope, if it captures your soul but for a moment, moves you to reflecting on your own experience and

in the off chance, to tears; making may day to say the least that we connected over space and time through a string of words.

Haiku: An unrhymed verse form of Japanese origin having three lines containing usually five, seven, and five syllables respectively, a poem in this form usually having a seasonal reference.

Tanka: An unrhymed Japanese verse form of five lines containing five, seven, five, seven, and seven syllables respectively.

Paraphrasing Marion Clarke's and Lori Zajkowski's insights:

Haiga: Is a style of Japanese painting that incorporates the aesthetics of haikai (an often-playful type of Japanese verse of prose cultivated in the later feudal ages). Haiga are typically painted by haiku poets (haijin), and often accompanied by a haiku poem. Like the poetic form is accompanied, Haiga was based on simple, yet often profound, observations of the everyday world. The tradition form of Haiga consisted of an ink brush painting, Haiku, and calligraphy.

Shahai: The photo Haiku (Shahai) is a modern alternative to Haiga, comprising a digitally captured image to which the poem is added. However, the production technique is where the difference ends between a Haiga and Shahai.

You will therefore find in here many photographs taken by my dear friend Lau Wah Yuen, along with those by Sachi Ren Kuttan, Kyran Ming Kuttan, Yip Wai Kuan, Sharaad Kuttan,

Siddique Mohammad Abdillah, Alice Thng, Young Chen, myself and two from Pixabay. Whilst on the surface some seem like an obvious juxtaposition to the theme of a chapter or poem, a deeper appreciation of the art of photography must not be underestimated when looking at a photograph where lighting, composition, focus, etcetera defines the skill and alertness of the photographer to capture the moment.

The photographs in this collection are not a mere digital record seen through the lens of a camera but captures in the form of a photograph what the artist aka photographer feels after reading the poems. Not everything is literal and hence each poem can have a different photo if read by the photographer in a different state of mind or by different photographers.

Unlike, 'Photo Haiku' or 'Shahai' where the haiku is written drawing inspiration from the photo, we have attempted in here 'Haiku Photo' where the Haiku inspires the pairing of a photo that captures the essence of the haiku. I am not sure if there is a term for it, but I guess it would be if anything a "pseudo-shahai" would be a start.

Essentially, juxtaposing pictures and words can be more powerful than either alone. Haiku photography is about harmonizing timeless images and poetry. It is an art. Creating a haiku challenges the artist to observe the immediate moment with care, just as photography does. As 'haijins' are drawn to haiku, photographers, in particular nature photographers, capture beautiful moments, wild and pristine. Street photographers too find vivid glimpses into psyche of human existence. So, we hope that the few examples within this collection can be an inspiration for creative collaboration between the poet and photographer or the poet's poem and the photograph.

My son, Sachi captured a photograph of an emerging full moon before the sun had fully set. We were on a scuba diving holiday on the Perhentian Islands in Malaysia, where Sachi was learning to dive from his uncle Chacko at Turtle Bay Divers. On seeing the shared photograph, I wrote the Haiku (see Haiku No. 36). This is the traditional *shahai* or photo haiku.

I hope my poetry and the photos bring comfort and context to your own existence. I hope my words resonate with your own experience. Conscious that we are constantly thrown back and forth between despair and happiness as we journey through life, coping with the hurt and the pleasure of just being alive. Like me, with respect to our changing environment, you too try to navigate pass our present circumstances especially when difficult and move on into the future with greater strength. I also hope my poetry provides for different levels of your consciousness for the natural environment, appreciating its subtleties that gives greater meaning to life.

Unlike the Haiku in “In One Breath”, I have decided to leave the Haiku and Tanka in this collection untitled. Hopefully allowing you more freedom to reflect on its meaning and not bias your reaction to my written word; therefore, giving way to your own interpretation and option to designate your own ‘title’, if necessary, to better appreciate and relate to the poem even by attaching a photo next to it.

FOREWORD

I approached *'Under the Spell of Flickering Lights'* with no expectation and so I was strangely surprised to find the collection very interesting. It revealed more about Sanjay than his earlier two volumes, *'Where Fires Rage'* and *'In One Breath'*.

To begin with, this collection presents certain aspects of Sanjay which I wasn't aware of. Being his mother does not necessarily give me a clue to who he is. I know him to be loyal boy with strong feelings for his friends, but the section 'Mandai Crematorium' gives a greater insight into himself. The preamble in prose gives a backdrop to his relationship with his long-time friend Andrew to whom the collection is in memory of. The titles of his long poems reveal his true feelings, 'Jumper', 'Beneath the Shifting Shadows', 'Gone too soon', 'Guilt' and 'Melancholy'.

The section 'Changi Airport' gives some wise words followed by some personal poems. Those poems contribute to our understanding of Sanjay and how he understands the world. They show his ability to see and understand the inner nature of things. In the long poem 'Ammama', he says, "never giving up and keeping an open mind/to the increasing demands of modernising society/ensuring a future for your children and theirs,"

This is followed by the section titled 'Mount Faber'. In this section he recounts the tragedy of The Eniwetok in 1983, an accident that occurred about 6pm on 29 January 1983. In his long poem, 'The green below me', he says "you speak to us/ in the gentleness of a zephyr/ every time these days/ with emphasis/ in the fury of hurricanes/ in catastrophic tones/ of debilitating droughts/ of freezing snowstorms."

The section, 'Hooper Road Playground', Sanjay says, "innocence is the purity of humanity filled with love without prejudice.". This idea of childhood innocence is captured in a haiku.

*Dancing on moonbeams
rhythmic starburst appears,
childhood toes twinkle.*

The final section is 'Home@Aruan', invites the reader to his private life. Much of which I knew in a vague sort of way. The historical details enhance the passing of some events. I remember the day when my brother James Puthucheary and Lim Chin Siong came over to the house of tea. There was a young lady lawyer who questioned the assessment of Lim Chin Siong. She now lives in Australia. I have seen the Madura bed and wondered its purpose. This section ends with a question in 'Shoelace Untied' he asks,

*"Or should I create my own,
lacing up my chosen shoe,
creating my rhythm in stride
or leave my shoelaces untied,*

In this volume, Sanjay not only shows his awareness of his own mental attitude and behaviour but also has the ability to fathom the psychology of the human mind and to provoke questions in the reader.

Dr Rosaly Puthucheary, *mother, teacher, poet, writer*

OF SANJAY KUTTAN'S 'UNDER THE SPELL OF FLICKERING LIGHTS'

I enjoy Sanjay's Haiku and Tanka the way I would enjoy miniature bone carvings or snuff bottle paintings. Each piece is filled with delicacy, craft, and focus. They are not sweeping panoramas, but small flickers of emotions and experiences captured in a disciplined frame of sparse precious words.

However, there are not only the Haiku and Tanka (divided into five sections named after landmarks and locations dear to the poet), between them are longer poems, which allow for a broader insight into the poet's mind. Through the entire journey, the collection covers the whole heart-warming quilt of a life tenderly, intensely, and emotionally lived – interwoven with joys, sorrows, appreciation, faith, loss and, above all, sensitive insights.

The first section, Mandai Crematorium, has some of my favourite pieces in this collection. It feels immediate and compelling, capturing the sad passing dear loved ones, and then the poet's own brush with mortality. The brevity of the form lends itself well to the sense that time is short, and that more needs to be said in less time. Overarching all the sad notes of losing, loss and the anticipation of loss, the reader is always

kept aware of the possibility of hope and a tacit surrender to a power that will guide and lift the tired soul.

'Beneath the shifting shade' simply captures the passing of time marked by the repetitious shifting of light and shadows that come and go, like the beat of the metronome, marking time through all the activities of our lives. In essence, this piece feels timeless yet it is filled with the urgency of time passing. It captures the soul of the section.

The sections Changi Airport, Mount Faber, and Hooper Road Playground function as lightning-rod signposts for clusters of ideas rather than being site-specific pieces.

Changi Airport symbolizes movement and change, as seen in Haikus 14, 15, 16, 18, 23, 27, 29 and Tanka 10. Mount Faber is the pivotal point from which the collection gets its title. It is an elevated hill, but it is more than that. It is a heightened viewpoint and insight. Thus, the pieces in this section capture triumphant moments, hopeful emergence, breathless expectation and sometimes a shadowy sense of foreboding and disappointment - see Haikus 38 to 53. The Tankas in this section grapples with the celestial and our wasting ecology. The Hooper Road Playground poems not only capture the lush beauty of a residential sanctuary but also ponder on the precious memories that this place evokes in the hearts and minds of long-term residents. The poems here may be less linked thematically, but there are nature poems and some current poems about the impact of the pandemic on the park, that makes for good reading.

The final section Home@Aruan literally brings the poet back to where his heart is. From injured birds to kampong

memories to whispered intimacies, this final sections breathe with a familiarity and comfort that welcomes the reader like an inviting doorway embracing a tired worker home from a frazzled day. The anthology ends on a triumphant note with the poet exclaiming to his loved ones and his home,

*“You are my love and my life
my everything my blessing.”*

Desmond Sim, *writer, screenwriter, film director*

PEEK-A-BOO REVIEWS

Prof Kirpal Singh, *writer and academic*

Sadness & Life: Poetry as Life

It is extremely hard to verbalise emotions. And yet this is precisely what happens in 'Under the spell of flickering lights'. Here are poems from the deep underneath of our being, at least this is how they reveal themselves to me as a reader who has, like the poet-writer, experienced many sides of life and living, from birth to death and the several in-betweens we vaguely term living, growing, experiencing, etc.

Let's take a look at an example of our poet's outpouring:

Haiku No. 7

*Silence meanders
in between and all around,
painful memories.*

I picked it quite randomly. It raised queries I am not able to adequately answer and so I thought it might be a good place to begin this short exegesis.

Exegesis has religious, spiritual associations and like all such we need to be sensitive lest we tread upon emotions so deep that memories eke out cleansing of spirit. The word 'cleansing' is here used most deliberately as I believe in these verses our poet is engaged in an honest process of cleansing.

When done properly, cleansing relieves, takes away sorrows and allows us some possibility of carrying on with our lives without too much hurtful intrusions. But if one were thoroughly honest,

all final cleansing of memories relived remain temporary and very seldom succeed in providing the rest and consolation that the writer needs.

*Beneath the shifting shade,
of the war memorial,
seeking protection,
building walls cemented by trust,
my loyalty is my currency.*

In his poem, ‘*Beneath the shifting shade*’ how, we might ask, does one’s loyalty also become one’s currency? Do we concede that such can only take place beneath shifting shades?

That last question is near-impossible to answer. Yes, there are bound to be responses, several, but which of these would most approximate the Truth encapsulated in the emotions revealed?

Perhaps in the final analysis only the writer can truthfully answer that final (and disturbing) question. It is interesting, however, that Haiku No. 11 seemingly teases us into a kind of somnambulant acceptance of life’s teasing compromises.

Haiku No. 11

*Enlightened by pain,
my sufferance is short lived,
with perseverance.*

It does not take too much scrutiny and thought to realise that sufferance short-lived with perseverance can so summarily be enlightened.

Haiku No. 18

*I feel like the seeds
waiting for the springtime rain,
to break through the dirt.*

Yes, it is true that often good comes out of bad and evil can sometimes be wise. But in our normal day-to-day living these surprises are rare, or if common, rarely captured and mulled over.

I shan't go into the intricacies of paradoxical statements here; suffice to acknowledge that the poet's reckonings can never be replicated one hundred per cent simply because we as readers can never be the poet himself; only approximate his multi-faceted and in-depth experiences, no matter how searing the sharing.

This sharing is profoundly moving, and the photographs provided compound feelings and thoughts. Maybe it is enough for us as readers to note and acknowledge that clearly some very deep experiential transformation has taken place or is in the process of taking place.

I must admit that in writing these words, I too, am avoiding precision because a response to words so rich with meanings (yes, in the plural) is never going to be complete. It's an on-going engagement, one that probably will only cease when we do.

Thus, what our author here provides is a continuous exploring, a journey we cannot finish because it will remain incomplete so long as we are alive. And when we are no longer alive, will it matter?

Kirpal

Dr Anitha Devi Pillai, *poet, writer, translator, and an applied linguist* at the Nanyang Technological University

There is something magical about Sanjay Kuttan's '*Under the Spell of Flickering Lights*'. It is a collection of Haiku, Tanka and free-form poetry that will move you to tears as he opens up his heart and soul to the readers rather candidly about his life and his memories of places. And yet, it is a collection of work that will remind you of the glory and magic of life.

What makes this collection doubly special is how the rhythm of the sounds, the depth of his memories and the soul of the places of his life flicker across the pages of the book.

Some pages contain memories that are meant to be read aloud in celebration of life while others invite you to sit with him as he drowns in his past – and along with this prolific writer and his powerful writing – the reader drowns with him – in his writing.

Anitha

Dinesh Senan, author of “Inner Alignment: Authenticity, Leadership & Living your most powerful Life”

What's always struck me about Sanjay over the decades is his particular 'way in this world'. There's always been a unique lightness of his energetic being surrounding him. A kind of floating bundle of joy enveloping his keenly observational eye and perspicacity, whilst always carrying within him an extraordinary capacity to lift others' spirits to wonderful new heights. It's a blessing for all of us, therefore, that he has chosen to make the time to write his poems. Welcome to this, his third anthology, a new portal through which he engages his soul with ours. As before, a tone of delicate honesty and palpable vulnerability permeates these pages. One gets the sense also of a maturing of the voice. A practised hand growing more deft. The precision, especially, of his Haiku and Tanka being equivalent to the skilful artistry of a seasoned surgeon, cutting to the raw essence of the subject matter at hand.

As Sanjay carries us, journeying with him along diverse terrains, including funeral parlours and airports, we encounter the interplay of mind and soul, as he strives to find harmony across these two distinct realms. I'm sure you will enjoy the privilege of dipping your toes into this, his newest well of wit and wisdom, and before you do, I cannot resist tanka'ing the tanka'ist ...

*beautiful journeys
meanderings of his mind
sanjay c kuttan
steeped in this sanctum of words
his soul awaits engagement.*

Dinesh

Veera, the ‘plant whisperer’

Life, death, living in short paragraphs more meaningful than a long conversation is what I understand from reading Sanjay’s Haiku and Tanka. Sanjay introduced Haiku to me at a dinner. Concise and not wasteful with words, the meanings reveal themselves so clearly. I knew Andrew.

*Death came suddenly,
gazed on him from far above,
the ground his solace.*

We know what we know. The eddies felt through the poems ‘Guilt’ and speaks of our lost times in the poem ‘Gone too soon’.

The section on ‘Mandai Crematorium’ was painful and the pain is felt through the Haiku and Tanka. A collective of emotions and friendship lost. Grey granites hanging behind the casket is as cold as it gets...death is cold.

The journey through the section ‘Changi Airport’ and the middle classed privileged life of a son of a Captain, a deputy Port Master of the Port of Singapore and an ex-naval officer of the Royal Malaysian Navy.

In his poem ‘Ammama’... the journey into the past and memories of losing someone much loved. Pleasant and painful memories in a swirl. The Haiku of those moments of frenetic emotions in time. No breaks at all. Time stood still momentarily but with swirls of memories that cast so much in every 3 and 5 sentences that beguiles the length of time! White Saris are colourful if you spend some time to gaze at the stories that bleached it.

In the section 'Mount Faber' is a visual thrill. Air and water. The cable cars falling through the air into the water, a journey to death. Monsoon winds, language of rustling leaves (Psithurism), a high point of his life. Not physically but more metaphorically.

Haiku No. 64

*Between the foliage,
an enchanted world at peace
with psithurism*

The rustling of leaves that speak the language of the winds. Not many people know this language. The Haiku says it with clarity and good reverberation. Your ears picking up each decibel.

Tanka No. 16 implore and provoke a sense of nature high; you have to tilt your head to see what he sees!

Tanka No. 16

*Seeking Orion
for the Northern star, to know
where am I to go.
Distracted by wannabes
twinkling brightly everywhere.*

Nature's omnipresence! In his poem, 'The green below me' he has a sense of delusional regard for what was and is and the trees bear witness in his Tanka No. 14 to his sense of what could be and would be.

Tanka No. 14

*Buried underground
is a lifetime of wisdom,*

*flowing through the trees.
Yet we cut them down, risking
the lives of generations.*

The section ‘Hooper Road Playground’ is playful ... a ground for a menagerie of sounds of happiness and rankling of systemic issues we face day to day. A playground with purposeful memories of loss of a maid and the coconuts that she brought back to life even as she no longer exists.

In the section ‘Home@Aruan’, you find his Tanka below about Kuan, his colourful wife!

Tanka No. 23

*The magnificent
beauty of a transient
rainbow pales to yours,
You are my love and my life
my everything, my blessing.*

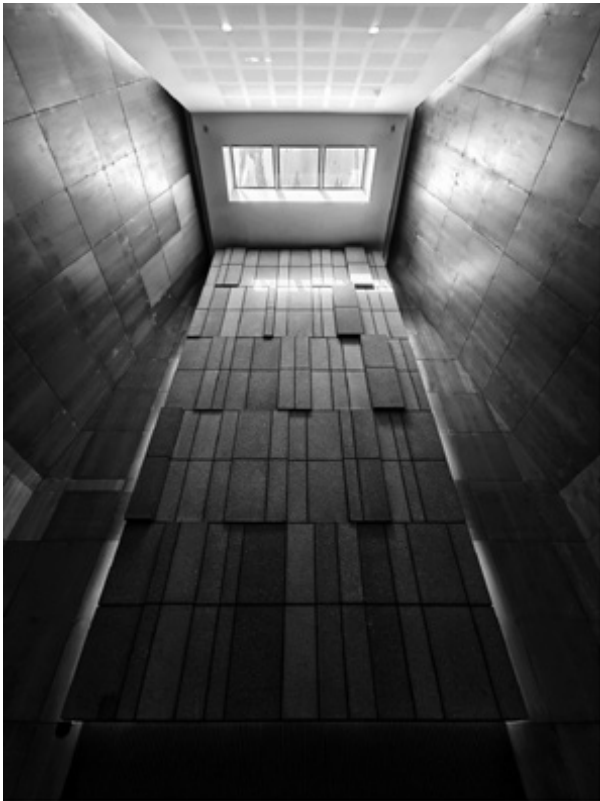
In his poems, ‘Tick Tock’ and ‘Old Scars’ are remnants of old memories of years gone by which have stood the test of time as with his wife and sons at Aruan.

This book is an exceedingly intellectual disclosure of Haiku and Tanka which needs to be imbibed in moderate inebriation to elicit the contextual elucidation of its innate sense of meaning by the poet. A class act of language heroics with a rhythm of meanings and words that would create imaginations of real history in a world of virtual reality!

Veera

Mandai Crematorium

Sometimes there is more said in silence
than the spoken word imparts,
if we only care to listen to these quiet revelations.



Photograph by Lau Wah Yuen, Back wall with sky light of funeral sanctuary,
Mandai Crematorium, 2022

Over the decades, I have lost both family and friends. Some to disease, some to accidents and some by their own hand. The trip to Mandai Crematorium has never been easy one, especially when it feels like a long ride from home even in a small country like Singapore. More so when driving there or on a chartered bus, one can't help but think about the person, the memories, the circumstances and all the questions that come with the demise, sudden or otherwise.

I recall during my teen years having to carry the coffin of my late granduncle Kaloo Ramakrishnan into the furnace as a pall bearer. He was a retired Superintendent of Police in the Singapore Police Force. The weight of his limp body within and the moment was not lost on me. This was in 1982, at Mount Vernon Crematorium that was the only government crematorium that reached capacity in the late 1970s and the need for a second crematorium arose. The government completed building the Mandai Crematorium in 1982 and by 2004 became to sole crematorium in Singapore, larger with more modern facilities including an automated coffin carrier to help carry the physical load of the coffin into furnace but never it's emotional.



Photograph by Sanjay Kuttan, Entrance of Mandai Crematorium & Columbarium, 2022

At Mount Vernon, one could only watch from outside the building the black smoke from the furnace chimney and weep amongst white frangipanis. Mount Vernon is now home to funeral parlours and these days in Mandai Crematorium, we watch the final passage of the loved one from an elevated air-conditioned viewing hall behind a glass window with an equally heavy heart, tears, and all. Although away from the heat of the furnace, the realisation of what fire does to a body once alive and loved is emotionally exhausting. As the large wooden doors close behind the automated trolley, and the comfort from friends and family, the process of healing begins where the focus is to distance death from the living and aid the recovering heart. Even the chimneys are not easily sighted unless one makes the effort to go around to the back of the building.

The funeral service hall where all the last words and rites are performed before the viewing hall, has a very high ceiling

with a glass roof window. The grey wall, uneven in its setting with rectangle granite looking slabs is set above a wooden door through which the coffin is rolled in by the crematorium staff of the undertaker. It forms an imposing backdrop that is hard to ignore as one looks up away from the coffin in full contemplation.

I often find myself trying to trace a path up the wall, like a rock climber, wondering if I could reach the top, as if to reach up to the spirit of my loved one watching and listening to the proceedings below. All these years I have never found one path that achieved that goal. Now reflecting on this mindless pre-occupation, I wonder if my efforts to find a solution was systematic enough to eliminate previous failed attempts. I think not. Guess we find ways to distract ourselves from the hurt, at best temporarily.

In 2005, I had a condition that wasn't easy to diagnose and resulted in an operation that whilst finally resolving the problem after the second operation within a week, it left me in a very critical condition. I was in the intensive care unit for days and in the ward for slightly more than a month, fighting to stay alive. During those nights under the influence of painkillers and other drugs, I spent a lot of time praying and having conversations with God. And many times, I felt that the Spirit of Death was very close by waiting for the opportune moment. I fought back, focusing on my wife Kuan, and my two boys Kyran and Sachi, with God's help. I went on to have 6 more operations after that with the last in 2015, essentially because the polypropylene mesh that replaced my now non-existent abdominal muscles kept tearing away from the tissue it was attached to. This was partly due to the additional weight I had gained but mainly due to my vigorous movements as a primary school rugby coach

when teaching the various skills to my young, eager, and ill-disciplined wards. I stopped coaching in 2014 to prepare for the 2015 operation and not risk anymore operations. I also found it incredulous since 2005, that people would make comments of my bulge, insinuating that I should lose weight eat less, drink less etcetera, to the point of being rude saying all this in public and at client meetings. They didn't know that I had an operation nor the fact that I was missing all my abdominal muscles which was replaced by a 10cm by 20 cm mesh. I never made my condition public, as I didn't want any pity and wanted to live life as normal as possible. So, it is my fault for not telling them about my condition. On the other hand, the gall of people to be critical of others just because they do not conform to their own idea of how they live their life, is in short, rude. I often took the chance to embarrass them, particularly those who by nature were arrogant, explaining my condition to them as a retort, only to see their faces disappear through their empty eye sockets; for the rest I told them in private and related the story of God's inspired love and perseverance. I can and should lose more weight no doubt but if it was that easy, the weight loss industry wouldn't be raking in billions of dollars. There are more stories I could share around this but will save it for another day. Having survived, one can't help having a different perspective of life, living and God, arising from this transformational journey especially in relation to work.

In early 1981, after spending our annual family Christmas in Petaling Jaya hosted by my uncle James and aunt Mavis, I was shocked to hear that my grandmother was in hospital and the prognosis wasn't very good. Having spent most of my childhood with my grandmother I was quite determined I wanted to be next to her when and if she passed on. Essentially over the

years being with her, affectionately addressed as Ammama, had been in an out of hospital, but she always came out strong. However, somehow this time, it felt different. I knew in my heart that she wasn't going to make it, so I asked my dad to help me get to Petaling Jaya. He borrowed his friend's car and we drove through the night from Singapore to Petaling Jaya. There wasn't much of the North South Highway then. My grandmother passed on in Malaysia on the 14th of January 1981. She was buried in a graveyard in Petaling Jaya, lined by trees along the perimeter. I recall, birds chirping in the trees and wondered now, as they witnessed so many burials over the years, their response hearing the cries of mourners as the coffin was lowered. These two Tanka tries to get a sense of it, specifically in the first line.

Tanka

Birds have stopped singing,
sensing sadness in the air,
as you are lowered.

Mother Nature welcomes you,
rejuvenating her world.

Tanka

Birds singing despite
sensing sadness in the air,
as you are lowered.

Mother Nature welcomes you,
rejuvenating her world.

At my funeral I hope to be remembered as someone whose faith inspired him to love unconditionally, to be courageous to accept

all definitions of love with an open heart and to stand up for those who deserved to experience the full measure of love.

My mind is always trying to help my heart make sense of my existence in my world that I am privy to. Experience is served up as great fodder for creative writing. Death, whether close to us, or afar, triggers the mind to send 'flickering lights' of memories, pictures, and emotions, that tries to cast a spell to numb the ensuing heartache. Otherwise, to distract the heart for a while as I bid goodbye to all my departed loved ones, be them family or friends; or slowly become numb to the plights of those further away, over time.

Haiku No. 1 (Pseudo-Shahai)



The candle's burden,
the gift of enlightenment,
self-immolation.



‘Pseudo-Shahai’ in collaboration with Lau Wah Yuen

Haiku No. 2



A blood thirsty knife
unsheathed, quenching desires,
spirits rest within.

Haiku No. 3



Eddies from my palm,
triggering my lonely tears,
as I wave goodbye.

Haiku No. 4



At the edge of death,
my life flashes by, each night,
I count my blessings.

Haiku No. 5



Her mind desires,
someone else in the mirror,
starving perfection.

Jumper



Despite every effort,
you are unable to resist
the charm of gravity,
to find relief
from the weight of existence.

Free-falling sojourn
of weightlessness,
the inevitable path
to everlasting rest,
into the arms of death.

Haiku No. 6



Hopes and dreams boxed up,
six feet of forgotten depth,
where life's breathing ends.

Haiku No. 7



Silence meanders
in between and all around
painful memories.

Haiku No. 8



Eye of the needle
guides the thread to reunite
those torn asunder.

Haiku No. 9



Heaven liberates,
freewill now without questions,
predictable life.

Beneath the shifting shade



Beneath the shifting shade,
of the 'like' button,
seeking anonymity,
coming to terms with social media,
my apathy is my strength.

Beneath the shifting shade,
of passing monsoon clouds,
seeking comfort,
riding the rollercoaster of life,
my past is my assurance.

Beneath the shifting shade,
of the war memorial,
seeking protection,
building walls cemented by trust,
my loyalty is my currency.

Beneath the shifting shade,
of the banyan tree,
seeking inspiration,
observing my changing world,
my consciousness is my conscience.

Beneath the shifting shade,
of the church steeple,
seeking respite,
from the shadows that follow me,
my faith is my refuge.

Beneath the shifting shade,
of the rising Phoenix,
seeking hope,
with the passage of time,
all things will pass;

though some will return,
life goes on, even in death
as memories live forever
in mourning hearts;

kneeling at the gravestone
where flowers lie
beneath its shifting shade,
as the sun rises, sets and rises,

again, again and again.

Haiku No. 10 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Wreaths accompany
our love's sojourn through the fire,
broken hearts at peace.



‘Pseudo-Shahai’ in collaboration with Lau Wah Yuen, Furnace chimneys at Mandai Crematorium, 2022

Haiku No. 11



Enlightened by pain,
my sufferance is short lived,
with perseverance.

Haiku No. 12



Absence creates voids,
whilst some holes cannot be filled,
graveyards bury dreams.

Haiku No. 13



For all their glory,
extraordinary men,
lie in green abodes.

Gone too soon



You accelerated your timeline
to the finish line,
 taking a distressing short cut
 succumbing to gravity,
 rendering your burdens weightless.
 ending our youthful charge,
 of playing the game of life,
 to grow older together.
 leaving us to complete life,
 wanting of your presence,
 pining for your brotherhood.
 ripping our hearts from yours,
 as tears coalesce into,
 streams of missed opportunities.
 leaving us pondering ours,
 to extend quality of friendship,
 to cherish with purpose and care.

rushing the inevitable,
as we will slowly bide ours,
savouring the shared memories.
 controlling its pace,
 though we choose to embrace
 it's rhythm, rhyme and reason.
 leaving us unexpectedly,
 shocking our very being,
 you have gone too soon.

Tanka No. 1



Birds singing gentler,
sensing sadness in the air,
as you are lowered.
Mother Nature welcomes you,
rejuvenating her world.

Tanka No. 2



Surrendering life,
by throwing in the towel
before the time bell.

As premature death torments,
fond memories surface hurt.

Tanka No. 3 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Anniversary,
reminder of emptiness,
happiness, through time.
Recurring celebration,
Life conquers adversity.



'Pseudo-Shahai' by Sanjay C Kuttan, Wedding ring in juxtaposition with coffin place inside funeral sanctuary at Mandai Crematorium, 2022

Guilt



Your death tests my spirit,
my resolve to liberate the chains
of what if's, could have's
searching for closure.

Guilt creeps into my psyche,
insomnia cages my tiring mind.
keeping me unreasonably alert
pining for the second coming.

Guilt, wanting of purpose,
thief of all joy and peace,
living a life with love
and uplifting memories.

Guilt, sojourning inescapably
through our hearts
a rite of passage
to heal and honour the dead.

Tanka No. 4 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Ghosts of memories
haunt every crevice within
every broken heart.
 keeping the sadness alive,
 tears have forgotten to laugh.



‘Pseudo-Shahai’ in collaboration with Lau Wah Yuen, Mandai columbarium, 2022

Tanka No. 5



A silent disease,
rips out dreams from a scrapbook,
as courage succumbs.
 Debris, from a shattered love,
 lifetime of shared memories.

Tanka No. 6



A void left by grief
no dimensions of measure
in space nor in time
 save the weight of existence
 succumbing to gravity.

Melancholy



Your pain is not the same as mine.
My heart aches, cut by unkind words,
over the edge falling, no parachute,
no one, no daddy to catch me
except for a scythe bearing Father Time.

My misery seeks indulging company
of listening ears and hearing tears,
leaning on friendly shoulders
falling asleep where warmth endures
a motherly bosom, a sanctuary.

Our melancholic reprise though loud,
stirs no one outside our bleeding hearts,
falling on deaf ears and wry smiles
every drop of silence tears us apart,
even as lightning rips laden clouds.

Tanka No. 7



Epitaph engraved,
heart scars deeper than granite
a tombstone's lighthouse.
the fallen asleep below
never to be forgotten.

Tanka No. 8 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Waves and shifting sands,
footprints betray the absence
of a life once lived.
 slow diminishing echo,
 a soul resigned to be lost.



'Pseudo-Shahai' in collaboration with Lau Wah Yuen

Tanka No. 9 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Living in the grey,
philosophies, faith, beliefs
keeps the dead alive,
in our minds, our hearts, our shelves
tears sprinkled on memories.

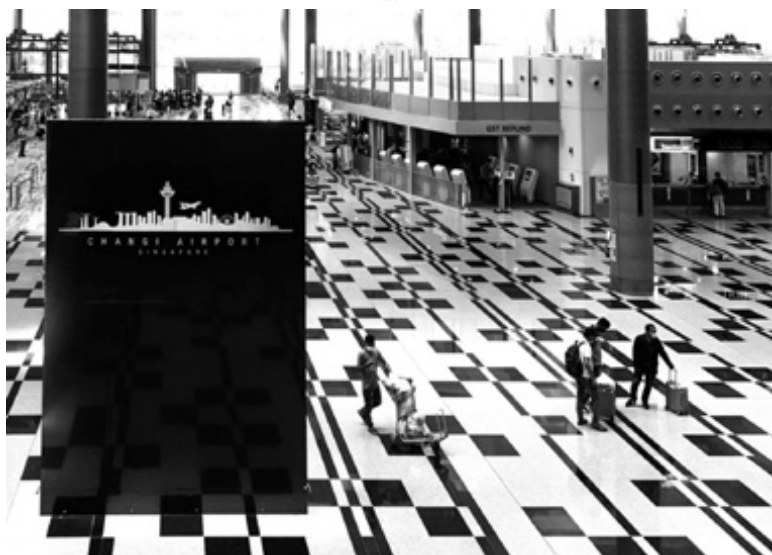


‘Pseudo-Shahai’ by Sanjay C Kuttan, Photograph by Sanjay C Kuttan, Dec 2017, View of Auckland from Waiheke Island, New Zealand

Changi Airport

We can only uncover the secrets of the beauty
of the world beyond ours when we open
our hearts, our minds, and our soul.

X



Photograph by Lau Wah Yuen, Terminal 3 Changi Airport, 2022

When I was growing up in Malaysia, I often wondered about the world beyond my homeland. Even Singapore, whilst nearby and was undoubtedly another country didn't feel like international travel. It felt like it was part of the Johor Baru, my hometown, part of the neighbourhood. Historically it was. Close ties exist between the Johor Sultanate and Singapore's Government till today. Johor Baru is the southernmost city of peninsular Malaysia, the capital of the state for Johor and where the causeway, other than families, connect the two nations.

My first trip on a plane must have been around 1976 when I accompanied Ammama to travel up country for our family annual Christmas party in Petaling Jaya. My brother Sharaad and I were living with in Johor Baru with her. Petaling Jaya is just short of 400km north of Johor Baru. Those days, we didn't have any highways, so the journey by road, depending on the confidence of one's speed demon within, could take about 10 to 14 hours. This includes stops for food, relief, and rest. Flying then was about an hour or so, and with waiting time and getting to the airport could take 4-5 hours. Our flight was a propeller plane, a Fokker F27 Friendship if memory serves me well, and I recall being both nervous and excited about the impending trip. I would not fly again after that, not for any reason other than affordability, until I graduated from the National University of Singapore in early 1988. This trip was my first, and only, backpacking trip to Europe with my brother and friend N. Srinivasan.

We departed from Changi Airport flying on the wings of my parent's generosity. Changi airport has developed over the decades, since it's early humble beginning at Paya Lebar, as an international aviation hub. It is home to a multi-award-winning airline, Singapore Airlines, with the reputation of having the

most modern facilities and efficient processes. The transit area is akin to a large shopping and entertainment mall. Bright lights along the wide high ceiling hallways with decorations throughout the year makes for a wonderland experience. Flickering fairy lights during Christmas, Hari Raya, Deepavali, Chinese New Year adorn different structures representing the various culture. The sheer efficiency of the airport makes coming home well appreciated especially after travelling for days and coping with the inefficiencies elsewhere.



Photograph by Lau Wah Yuen, Jewel and Control Tower, Changi Airport, 2022

I would often fly whilst working with ExxonMobil and then with McKinsey & Company over a period of 16 years. Almost weekly for years and with such the intensity covering both regional and occasionally Europe and the United States of America (USA). I enjoyed my trips to Europe, not only because they were shorter flights compared to the USA, but I found frontline Americans at the Embassy were less welcoming of foreigners even it was for business. I came across a very rude American embassy staff in Singapore then. I recall well the interrogation I received even when I had a letter from my company Exxon stating the purpose of my business trip. The officer accused me of faking the company letter and suggested that I couldn't have been employed by Exxon. Frankly, I was quite happy not to travel that long distance with jet lag and all, and so when I showed little interest to obtaining the visa and informed the officer that I would inform my management and my US colleagues about his comments, after which he decided to give it to me. Go figure.



Photograph by Lau Wah Yuen, Terminal 1, Changi Airport, 2022

To date I have travelled to more than 30 cities across the globe, which is not much when compared to a seasoned traveller, but it isn't something to sniff at either as traveling goes. My charming presence is however missing from some countries or continents completely, like Canada, South and Central America, Africa, Antarctica and the Arctic. I wouldn't brand myself as a hardcore traveller, but I am thankful for the opportunities. These trips often exposed me to realities faced by other communities beyond my personal safe space. Social injustices and the threats war seem to be more evident beyond the shores of Singapore. As a keen observer of the plight of my fellow human beings I am often lulled into complacency or distracted by the enchanting experience of the four seasons. Long flights provided the opportunity to have time for reflection as I usually found it difficult to sleep. So, a glass of wine would keep my thoughts company if an in-flight movie didn't.

After my time at the Firm, my subsequent jobs didn't have a heavy travel schedule. The advancements of telecommunication services created more opportunities to lower cost of travelling and engagement. We travelled only when necessary. Personal travel did pick up with increasing affordability, where 'foodie' and 'Hong Kong 7's rugby' trips with friends predominated. The last foodie trip to Hong Kong happened in January 2020, just before the pandemic explosion and has kept me at home and away from using Changi Airport services for travel to date.

The flickering lights of home below as the plane approaches Changi airport is always mesmerising albeit a privilege only to behold when seated by the window. Depending on the route, the wind direction and assigned runway, one can either see the brightly lit petrochemical plant of Southern Johor, the townships on Pulau Batam, Pulau Karimun or Pulau Bintan

Under the Spell of Flickering Lights

of Indonesia's Riau province or the ship lights at the Singapore anchorages and the city skyline.



Photograph by Alice Thng, Changi Airport with ships in the Eastern Anchorage, Aug 2022



Photograph by Young Chen, Singapore East Coast and ships in the Eastern Anchorage, Aug 2022



Photograph by Young Chen, Batam, Indonesia, Aug 2022



Photograph by Young Chen, Petrochemical Complex, Johor, Aug 2022

The bright island city state is now called home. A warm fuzzy feeling from a sense of belonging and acceptance. A sense of safety, and familiarity that soothes my tiring spirit after extended travels in foreign lands cannot be understated despite its flaws because no Nation is perfect after all.

Under the Spell of Flickering Lights

Changi Airport has been an important doorway for me to see the world beyond my personal space but also an important conduit for me to reflect on the scenes of beauty, calm and distress that I have witnessed.

Haiku No. 14 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Warm air of springtime,
teardrops shed from icicles,
with winter passing.



‘Pseudo-Shahai’ in collaboration with Lau Wah Yuen,

Haiku No. 15



Trees disrobe their leaves,
anticipating winter,
frost bite charms their bark.

Haiku No. 16



Cherry Blossoms bloom,
placing smiles on every heart,
as birds build their nests.

Haiku No. 17 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Missing my blanket,
cold misery of winter
toothless, dreaming spring.



‘Pseduo-Shahai’ in collaboration with Lau Wah Yuen

Haiku No. 18



I feel like the seeds
waiting for the springtime rain,
to break through the dirt.

Ammama



Your white saree,
in a superstitious society
paints a ghostly apparition
for those living in darkness
for many living in faith
and enlightenment
you cut an angelic figure
steeped in tradition
as you ignore your changing world
holding on to the security
of generations of mothers
and mother's mothers
of the motherland.

Your self-esteem not dented
by your steadfast adherence
to your mother tongue
and like all languages
if founded on love,
communicates clearly
to the hearts of men,
even those misguided hardened hearts
filled with evil desires,
succumb to your broken diction

of a foreign language,
a life is saved, generations exist.

You, stood steadfast
in the face of hopelessness,
never giving up
and keeping an open mind
to the increasing demands
of a modernising society,
ensuring a future for
your children and theirs,
and they have honoured you,
to take inspiration from you
and rise above the dark clouds
and constantly focus on the sun
and enjoy the rainbow after the rain,
making the best of life's curve balls.

Haiku No. 19



Fear of loneliness,
finds the river embracing
the raging ocean.

Haiku No. 20 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Patience thru poor odds
maketh-the-man the minute
luck favours his hand.

Haiku No. 21



Staying safe indoors,
indiscriminate bullets
strike walls, hearts, and minds.

Haiku No. 22



Innocence ignored,
hateful prejudice torture,
cats exhaust nine lives.

Haiku No. 23



Mercury rising,
ant colony exodus,
homes in jeopardy.

I am air



Maya, I am indeed air
but caught in a balloon
surrounded by myriad hues, like
eyes, filled with
red, green, and blue;
skin, white and shades of
black, brown, and yellow.

Maya, I rise
but differently
not just because of my hue;
unjust, but also
because of the strings
attached to me
weighs me down, as

my colourful history is strung in hostage by
privileged majority with
prejudices and insecurities.

Haiku No. 24 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Supplies for the poor,
twisted barbed wires protect,
social quagmire.



‘Pseudo-Shahai’ in collaboration with Lau Wah Yuen

Haiku No. 25



Spacecraft blocks the sky
other worlds being sun fed,
aliens look for work.

Haiku No. 26 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Morning spring sunrise
warm sleepy nomadic dew,
leaving leafy beds.



‘Pseudo-Shahai’ by Sanjay C Kuttan, Hills in the state of Terengganu, Malaysia, Aug 2022.

Haiku No. 27



Sunrise inspires,
Morning Glory in full bloom,
butterflies awake.

War & Peace



The war has ended,
no more deaths within ruins,
and cries of despair.

Peace ushers in hope,
rebirth of communities
embracing with love.

Vengeance lurks behind
painful memories waiting
to strike for those wronged.

Brutality from hate
filling every consciousness,
injures, draining souls.

Forgiveness can heal,
but revenge is an opium,
threatening ceasefires.

Tension will arise
as tit-for-tats escalates
till the brink of war.

The cries of despair
echo the death within ruins,
the war has begun.

Haiku No. 28



In this day and age,
Humanity held hostage
by small mindednesses.

Haiku No. 29



A wave whisper words,
yearning greets tearful goodbyes,
palms sway side to side.

Haiku No. 30



Summertime joyride,
windscreens down, wind in my hair,
clouds loafing along.

Haiku No. 31



Wishes are bullets,
killing, blessing, and saving,
lives beyond borders.

Haiku No. 32



Calm lake mirrors peace
dissonance from skipping stones,
soul's self-reflection.

Half mast



Out of a pandemic
into a war
desperately battling an indiscriminate foe.

Ego fragile by greed
spreading mayhem
over livelihoods where peace had once sowed.

Graveyard of veterans
gifted their blood
spilt over history into a chalice mould.

Naivety and courage
takes centre stage
facing an arsenal of cowardice souls.

Double standards exposed
past and present
prejudicial stench assails the indisposed.

Silence beckons
victory and defeat
life in rubbles, champagne served cold.

Flags at half mast
remembrance,
dreams remain too distant to hold.

Haiku No. 33



Hear the mockingbird,
mimicking has its purpose,
gentle reminders.

Haiku No. 34



Indiscriminate
misery haunts happiness,
regardless of wealth.

Haiku No. 35



Waves in a seashell,
hypnotising beachcombers
seeking solitude.

Haiku No. 36 (Shahai)



Eager to show off
full moon shines before sunset
even clouds oblige.



Shahai or Photo Haiku by Sanjay C Kuttan, Photograph by Sachi Ren Kuttan, Aug 2022, Perhentian Islands, Malaysia.

Haiku No. 37 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Waves crash serene shores,
silence is a privilege
taken for granted.



Pseudo-Shahai by Sanjay C Kuttan, Photograph by Yip Wai Kuan, Perhentian Island, Malaysia, Aug 2022.

Time, take a break



Time, don't you ever stop to rest,
to take a break by the still water of a lake?
Is the second coming the only moment to pause,
and before that is there any other cause?

Time, take a break, to still the momentum
and find the quiet of a sanctum,
not to rewind to remanence
but to halt and think,

if I need an extra grain of salt?
If you stop for me, will I be left behind
in the chariot race against another's time?
Will my rhythm cease,

only to follow another's generational beat,
or rediscover a reinvigorated pace
re-entering and winning in no time
despite the heat of the race.

Time, take a break,
not for me to pontificate
over the trivial, over hot beverage
or even over a drop of red;

All just a waste of time and when lost,
just foolishness wishes the clock hands rewinds
on the dashboard of a time machine,
or to oblige my sight with 20/20 vision

as I look into a rear-view mirror
only to see fast disappearing passing milestones
as relentless time drives further on and away
from my last hooray.

Time, take a break
So, thoughts can be gathered,
and for words to conspire
not to imprison in the mere form of sentences

but to liberate, to move the soul to tear,
to kick start the heart,
to pump the legs to action
to twitch my lips to say,

all I wanted to say
but never did
despite all the time I had
captured around my wrist.

Time, take a break,
So, I can see, as I hover over my destiny
and observe, the streets ahead of me
and behind me,

the junctions and sidewalks along my way
seemingly hyperbolic in its path
a function of many ifs' and buts',
where maybes'

don't increase my intellect
but numbs my decisiveness
I am lost in motion,
needing a reprieve.

Time, take a break,
that my efforts have space
to ruminate and pivot
towards the arrow on a weather vane

as it points towards change
where the moon and winds
collaborate to tug the sea
birthing restless waves

to bring fresh news from a far
dressed in white laces reaching the shores
for those needing uplifting
from daily chores.

Tanka No. 10



The autumn leaf falls,
gravity her companion
since they met in spring.

Twirling around whilst falling,
gravity courts another.

Tanka No. 11



I am colour blind,
missing the rainbow above
and the autumn leaves,
my eyes sense diversity,
its beauty through smiling eyes.

Tanka No. 12



Contemplating life,
zephyr caresses, eyes closed,
fearing the unknown.

Dandelions wave goodbye,
wondering about its fate.

Mount Faber

Everyone has their own mountain to climb
and when we conquer its peak, we must never
forget the helping hands along the way.



Photograph by Lau Wah Yuen, Mount Faber, North-east view of the city,
2022

Mount Faber's name has always intrigued me, as is it not the highest peak in Singapore, the honour goes to Bukit Timah Hill at 163 m above sea level. Bukit Timah is located closer to the middle of Singapore surrounded by a Nature reserve, reservoirs, and condominiums. 'Bukit' means hill in the Malay language.

Mount Faber is in the Bukit Merah area of the central region of Singapore. Standing at 106 m above sea level, it was originally known as Telok Blangah Hill. It was renamed Mount Faber in July 1845 after Charles Edward Faber of the Madras Engineers, who built a narrow winding road to the summit for the new signal station and flagstaff. Mount Faber was thereafter also referred to as Bukit Bendera (Flag Hill).



Photograph by Sanjay C Kuttan, Mount Faber, Southern view of the sea, 2022

Located in the southern part of Singapore, it is closer to the Straits of Singapore and therefore has a vantage point looking out to the sea. One can see the island of Batam on a clear

day, and on a clear night, one can see flickering lights in the distance caused by the layers of air between the two islands across the straits. The space between, the straits, is also lighted by ships passing each other moving between the anchorages in the eastern and western sides of Singapore. Some just pass by without stopping. Many do stop.



Photograph by Sanjay C Kuttan, Mount Faber, Tanjong Pagar Container Terminal, and Singapore Cruise Centre in the distance, 2022

One can also see the bright lights of the port terminal and the occasional dramatic bright flares of the petrochemical plants on the right when standing at the top of the mount on purpose-built viewing platforms.

Mount Faber also host one end of the Cable Car system that transports people from the mount over to the island of Sentosa, previously known as ‘Pulau Belakang Mati’, in Malay it literally means “Island of Death Behind”. According to Yeo Tze Yang

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stories about Bugis pirates plundering, looting and killing the inhabitants of the island and Japanese soldiers slaughtering locals on its beaches during the Japanese occupation from 1942-1945 surround the origins of the name.

When traversing the length of the cable car journey one can see a few large ‘black and white’ bungalows surrounded by heavy foliage covering the sides of the Mount Faber. The Cable Car today has flickering lights noticeable in the night. I do recall that during Christmas the cable car terminal on Mount Faber was turned into a fairy land with fairy lights. This cable car system also got a lot of attention in 1978 when a popular TV show Hawaii Five O starring Jack Lord decided to use the system for one of their episodes. It captured everyone’s attention to see Singapore on American TV in which the villain swung along the cableway.



Photograph by Lau Wah Yuen, Mount Faber, Cable Car station during maintenance, 2022



Photograph by Sanjay C Kuttan, Cable Car station during maintenance, 2022

The Singapore cable car system was also the site of the tragedy of The Eniwetok in 1983. It was a fatal accident that occurred at about 6 p.m. on 29 January 1983, when the derrick of the Eniwetok, a Panamanian-registered oil rig, passed under the aerial ropeway and struck the cable that stretched over the waterway between the Jardine Steps Station and the Sentosa Station. Two cabins plunged 55 metres (180 ft) into the sea, killing seven people. The oil rig was being towed away from Keppel Wharf when it became entangled in the cable and caused it to snap. It also left thirteen people trapped in four other cabins between Mount Faber and Sentosa. There was a massive rescue operation to retrieve those trapped in the dangling cable cars. Overall, the entire rescue mission took three and a half hours in darkness and high wind conditions. It was headed by Philip Yeo, then Second Permanent Secretary (Defence). The overall

operation was directed by Colonel Lee Hsien Loong, currently Prime Minister of Singapore.

My late father who was then Deputy Port Master of the Port of Singapore Authority was away in Malaysia on holiday in Frasers Hill had to cut short his trip and return to Singapore. His absence during the unfortunate incident saved his job as a few senior officers at the authority were 'asked' to resign when the inquiry into the incident had completed its report.

I also had fond memories of Jardine Steps. It was also where one would board pilot boats or launches. We used to go to Raffles Lighthouse for the weekend on the President's Launch. Papa was able to secure its services sometimes, else it was the usual passenger boats, regardless the trip to Lighthouse was always exciting and overnight stay at the lighthouse was magical. Being out at sea with little interference from city lights, one can see the stars and the constellations so clearly. My father would educate me on the basics of astronomy, like Orion's Belt and locating the North Star. The rotating beams of the lighthouse were equally mesmerising, watching them come round at fixed intervals and trying to see how far the beam stretched out to sea was essentially a child's playground. The island was in its natural state those days, walking on its rocky 'beach' and discovering seashells and driftwood was always an expedition and a half.



Kuttan family photograph, Weekend at Raffles Lighthouse, circa 1974

The northerly face of Mount Faber is very different. On the right, one can see a sea of public housing estates, essentially vertical homes of about 10-12 storeys high, with the central business district skyscrapers in the distant. The corridor lights from every floor are often complemented with decorated apartment windows lined with flickering lights during the festive seasons which is usually occurs almost throughout the year.



Photograph by Lau Wah Yuen, Mount Faber, City View, 2022

The view from both faces of Mount Faber has always been enchanting. One can also see the dark monsoon clouds arriving from Sumatra in the west, slowly engulfing the distant horizon as it sweeps towards the eastern parts of the island. You can see

the rain boundaries below the grey clouds, where it begins and ends. The rain looks like thin hair growing out from the base of a darkened cloud. The thicker the 'hair' the heavier the storm. It usually looks like a dark grey curtain when it gets intense.

One can also gaze at the stars in the universe above and sense the limits of humanity's existence in relation to the infinite space that surrounded us or the finiteness of the foliage below and the reality of our existence.

Haiku No. 38



A dangling cocoon,
metamorphosis of hope,
flowers primed to serve.

Haiku No. 39



A forest quiet,
mourning distant destruction,
awaiting its own.

Haiku No. 40



Fighting gravity,
hopeful the rising hot air,
finds my parachute.

Haiku No. 41



Monsoon wind whispers,
beneath the roar of thunder,
climate change is here.

Haiku No. 42



Bees hover and tease,
flowers seeking attention,
ignoring sad weeds.

Haiku No. 43



Breathing in the air
crossing oceans and mountains,
connecting us all.

Love lost



The ripple on the calm lake
echoes my teardrop.

Sitting on edge at the jetty
reminiscing the shooting star
we witnessed years ago
across a star lit night sky
making a wish
then closing our eyes
holding each other,
keeping warm.

Our souls hoping
as we whispered, "I love you".

my wish never ever came true
and wonder if yours ever did too.

Haiku No. 44



The rising draft lifts
a falling leaf, to witness
a world never seen.

Haiku No. 45



The mountain frustrates
each conquering traverse steps,
peak beneath my feet.

Haiku No. 46



Sun brightens Moon's face,
as Sun rise, Moon disappears,
unrequited love.

Haiku No. 47



Night sky is starless,
moon sun in absentia,
storm clouds surprise dawn.

Haiku No. 48



Thunder approaches,
wind blows through leafy towers,
castrating silence.

Haiku No. 49 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Ailing earth dreaming,
distant moon watching over
missing beauty sleep.



'Pseudo-Shahai' by Sanjay C Kuttan, Photograph by Sanjay C Kuttan, Singapore 2022.

Thirst



In the mirage of a desert oasis
in the blue ocean of salt water
in the storm of acid rain
in the tropical jungle of concrete cities
my soul thirsts;
seeing prefabricated walls,
cold without the warmth of a hand
inspiring a chisel and hammer;
seeing pale faces,
a castrated society exsanguinated
of a new-born's courage;
seeing the rivers of Life,
desiccated of "yin" and "yang"
balancing streams of existence,
I thirsts,
for tears
to overfill my soul
and burst the dams
fortified by fears.

Haiku No. 50



Asymmetrical
reflections, ripples disturb
calm surface tension.

Haiku No. 51



East monsoon wind blows,
kites flying freely westward,
cultured strings attached.

Haiku No. 52



Distant stars on stage
unveiled by the night's darkness
at sunset's encore.

Haiku No. 53



At the pinnacle
my flag of honour planted,
this mountain, conquered.

Haiku No. 54 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Sitting in between,
memories passed, future dreams,
sunset's enigma.



‘Pseudo-Shahai’ by Sanjay C Kuttan, Photograph by Sanjay C Kuttan, Sunset, Waiheke Island, New Zealand, Dec 2017.

The green below me



Mother Nature,
always omnipresent,
controversially omniscient.

you feed us
not only at the dining table
more so barefooted as
we walk in the garden
run along the beach
climb every mountain
sit beneath a tree.

you spoke to us
in the gentleness of a zephyr
but these days
with emphasis,
in the fury of hurricanes
in catastrophic tones
of debilitating droughts
of freezing snow storms.

you enchant us
with colourful self portraits
stills and motion,
with panoramic landscapes,

accompanied with the melodies
of mating calls and it's timbre
with infinite reverberations
to move the uninspired heart.

Tanka No. 13



I stood on the Moon,
for mankind to view our home,
blue marble in space.

Ego's insignificance,
vastness of the Universe.

Tanka No. 14 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Buried underground
is a lifetime of wisdom,
flowing through the trees.

Yet we cut them down, risking
the lives of generations.



‘Pseudo-Shahai’ by Sanjay C Kuttan, Kampung Java Road, Singapore, 2013.

Tanka No. 15



The world watches her
with colourful peacock eyes
blue green with envy.

No witnesses of her trials
and tribulations of love.

Tanka No. 16



Seeking Orion
for the Northern star, to know
where am I to go.

Distracted by wannabes
twinkling brightly everywhere.

Tanka No. 17 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Moon outshines the stars
just above the mountain ridge,
where shooting stars land.

Constellations everywhere,
Darkness surrounds as stars die.



‘Pseudo-Shahai’ by Sanjay C Kuttan, Photograph by Kyran Ming Kuttan, Moonlight over Pulau Perhentian Besar, Malaysia, Aug 2022.

Hooper Road Playground

We have but one childhood to live out and for a limited time. Let's not lose it nor deprive each another of it, for its innocence is filled with the purity of love without prejudice.



Photograph by Lau Wah Yuen, Hooper Road Playground, 2022

Hooper Road was named after William Edward Hooper who joined the Municipality in 1885 as Registrar of Vehicles holding the office until his retirement. It is currently flanked by Hooper Road, Jalan Aruan and backyard of houses along Makepeace Road. A small green enclave lost in time and yet in the middle of a current modern city.

The playground has about 30 coconut trees and when they were laden with coconuts the National Parks agency would arrange for contractors to harvest them to prevent coconuts falling on people's head. I have been here for 30 years and never heard of any accident despite the playground being heavily used by both children and adults. Maybe the signage "Beware of falling coconuts" did its job well. The neighbourhood beneficiaries would have coconut water and flesh for weeks to come.



Photograph by Lau Wah Yuen, Hooper Road Playground, 2022

The old wheelbarrow my grandaunt left behind when we bought over the house, would prove to be very useful in collecting the coconuts. Over the years the contractors became savvier and took majority of the harvested coconuts for themselves leaving a small allocation to all those who asked politely.

Almost a decade ago some of the coconut trees started dying. We reported it to the National Parks agency, and they came and inspected the trees. They said that the rhinoceros beetle was killing the trees and they needed to be chopped down. So they cleared the park of 12 ailing trees in 2014. My then domestic help, Sawiyem Munarji, who worked with us for 18 years went around the park and placed sprouting coconuts into the cavity left behind by the fallen trees. She passed on a few years ago due to kidney failure whilst back in Indonesia after returning home at the end of her employment contract. Today, a new generation of trees are growing healthily keeping the coconuts trees as a constant feature of Hooper Road Playground. They are half as tall as the older ones. Yem still lives through these trees she had given life to.

Photograph by Sanjay C Kuttan, Hooper Road Playground, short coconut trees planted by Sawiyem Munarji, 2022.



Looking back, the playground was home to many flickering lights. During the Mooncake festival in particular, we would witness a sea of lanterns floating in the dark across the park suspended from the outstretched arms of chatty children filled with excitement. I have also witnessed funerals of our dear neighbours. They would set up large white tentages to shelter the coffin and those who came to pay their respect. The grieving family would often request to run a water hose from my tap which was near the fence adjacent to the park, for the purpose of either cooking or washing. Whilst we were always happy to supply without any compensation, they would give a token sum to cover the cost of the additional water usage. Once I also witnessed an elaborate staging for a marriage proposal. Tea lights on the grass created a path towards a lighted archway and the words 'Marry Me' was created with fairy lights. Sweet. The occasional firefly sighting and the stars which become visible after the path lights go out at midnight, reminds me of the calm this plot of nature brings to this neighbourhood. Bird watchers with their cameras confirm the status of Hooper Road playground as a sanctuary for not only nature but also for the residents who are aware of its place in their hearts.

The pandemic quietened the park for a while. In the early days, people were less concerned about getting infected and would still gather in the park with their children not believing the seriousness of the fast spreading COVID19 virus. Even with signs and red and white barriers tapes, many would push them aside. Finally the authorities had no choice but to run a barricade of bright orange netting round the perimeter of the park. A waste of resources to counter stubborn disobedience of a few individuals. After falling silent for months the noise came back to the playground and it is great to hear children's laughter

again. Hoping that the mooncake festival in 2022, will bring back the floating lanterns.



Photograph by Sanjay C Kuttan, Hooper Road Playground during COVID19 Pandemic, 12th April 2020

The playground has also been used by the media industry. The opening scene of the television sitcom 'Phua Chu Kang' shows the younger Phua Chu Kang and his brother, Anthony, and a very young Rosie playing in the park. The shots were in black and white and filmed on location at Hooper Road Playground under the coconut trees with the back of the houses along Makepeace Road in view. We have also had the presence of lingerie models filming on set in the park amongst the coconut

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trees. This attracted a lot of attention from many quarters in the neighbourhood. We have had the privilege to watch the playground transform and host many stories from people that entered the grounds over the past 30 years.

Haiku No. 55



A chameleon,
watching a divided world,
being one with the tree.

Haiku No. 56



The playground alive
awhile with children's laughter,
parental fears killed.

Haiku No. 57



Green shoot emerges
bearing the burden of life
wrestling gravity.

Haiku No. 58



A seed sits and waits
buried deep beneath the dirt,
pining for the rains.

Haiku No. 59



Love is pushed away
when the kite string is reeled in
without some relief.

Wisdom



Listen to the audible words
and the silence of the unsaid,
to the note filled tunes
and the melody between them,
to the energising beat
and the rhythm of their pauses.
Listen to the stillness of being
between the noise of not,
to the dreams at night
between the realities of day,
to the truth of courage
between the fear of cowardice.

Listen carefully
as truth lies
amongst the uncommon,
living on the periphery
pushed out and away
by prejudices
by ignorance
by tradition
by convenience
by indifference
even by the silence of wisdom.

Haiku No. 60 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Grey clouds above me,
my soul yearns for cleansing rain,
before the rainbow.



‘Pseudo-Shahai’ by Sanjay C Kuttan, Photograph by Siddique Mohammad Abdillah, Aug 2022, Perhentian Island, Malaysia

Haiku No. 61



Dancing on moonbeams,
rhythmic starburst appears,
childhood toes twinkle.

Haiku No. 62



Misunderstood snake,
a tempter causing the fall,
created by God.

Haiku No. 63



Monsoon-soaked lawn stage
a full ensemble of toads,
conversations drowned.

Haiku No. 64 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Between the foliage,
an enchanted world at peace
with psithurism.



'Pseudo-Shahai' by Sanjay C Kuttan, Photograph by Sanjay C Kuttan

Losers do win



When they wipe away their bloody tears
When they smile at the face of fear
When they hold their heads up high
When they dream of the winner's sky.

When they ignore excuses from the shelves
When they begin to discover more themselves
When they learn from the burn of mistakes
When they grow through lessons success makes

When they return to battle with angelic spirit
When their self-esteem rises out of the pit
When they dig deep within and inspire others
When they return to the fire stronger than ever.

Haiku No. 65



Monsoon wind fury,
stranded at home and in bed,
a good book beckons.

Haiku No. 66



When tongues are asleep,
all unrighteousness prevails,
chainsaws run amok.

Haiku No. 67 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Orphaned by the wind,
detached to proliferate,
Dandelion's life.



'Pseudo-Shahai' in collaboration with Lau Wah Yuen, Photograph from Pixabay

Haiku No. 68 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Full moon enchants us
through generations of burnt
lanterns and mooncakes.



‘Pseudo-Shahai’ in collaboration with Lau Wah Yuen, Photograph from Pixabay

Haiku No. 69



On the highway's edge
counting headlights that blind me,
stars seem easier.

Missing the noise



The playground is empty,
as the virus takes a joy ride
on the carousel, see-saw and swing.

The 'kuali' and the ladle
stops their cantankerous tango,
no more mouth-watering 'wok-hei'.

The standing ovation is muted,
the artist unmasked, missing the cat calls,
and appreciative smiles.

The hustle and bustle,
of patrons at Hawker centres,
quietened by one meter markings.

The chatter at the dinner table,
relegated to monosyllables,
as the distracting phone dominates.

The early morning crow reverie
silenced by the shotgun,
culling them down to a single tweet.

The chorus of frogs after the rain,
extend their intermission, as
drought drinks from their pond.

The voice of alternative views,
seeking a better life for all,
silenced by unconstitutional power.

Tanka - No. 18



As young shoots open,
mini parasols erect,
and ants rest in the shadows,
a sojourn ending each day
when the sun decides to rest.

Tanka - No. 19



Assimilation,
conforming to your culture
mine's lost forever.
 Only memories remain,
 photos, friends, and recipes.

Tanka - No. 20



Disability,
mind limits the physical,
falling leaves wind glide.
 Just not to merely survive,
 but to truly live, always.

Home@Aruan

If the home isn't a sanctuary for all, where
love prevails, joy thrives, peace lives
and God's spirit and wisdom nurtures,
then the heart is homeless.



Photograph by Lau Wah Yuen, Shadow of Sanjay C Kuttan at Jalan Aruan, Singapore, Jul 2022.

As a young boy when I visited Singapore from Johor Baru to spend the weekend with my father, after my parent's divorce, we would very often end up on Hooper Road. Mainly to visit my dad's friend and their much older children. One was a jockey if I recall, and he had many horse figurines that my brother, Sharaad, loved. Their house faced the Hooper Road Playground, and I could see my granduncle's, Mr Kaloo Ramakrishnan, house i.e., 19 Jalan Aruan about fifty meters away. The house fence ran along one side of the playground and was on the right of the Hooper Road residence. My granduncle was the Acting Deputy Superintendent of Police in the Singapore Police Force at one point in his career. My grandaunt Auntie Lucy, his second wife, was a nurse whilst my aunt Kim, his daughter, was a playwright with Theatreworks. Kim lives in England now. Decades later I would buy this house from my grandaunt Lucy when I got married as my grandaunt wanted to move to England to stay with her daughter. So the timing was perfect and we were blessed. The terrace duplex house was built in 1959 by one of neighbour's father and my granduncle was the first occupant then. He was given first rights of purchase by the developer a year later which he accepted. Kuan and I have been here ever since 1991 the year we were married.

We have lived here at home for more than three decades over which time we have compiled an album of fond memories. Whilst, we have had dear family and friends over for food and drinks and got to know many new friends, we met some giants of our Nation in our home. Lim Chin Siong, James Puthuchearay (my uncle) and a motley crew of ex-ISA detainees. It wasn't an illegal gathering at all, but a reunion of old comrades, catching, not dwelling too much on the past but more about the present. Just seeing each other and genuine concern about each other and

how each other was coping under the circumstances that they found themselves. There is much truth in the adage “History is written by the victors” and as frustrating as that might be, the reality is, it can’t be changed and if ever, only by the victors sense of right and wrong.

Our other fond memory of home happened in 2006, when Kuan and I renewed our wedding vows on our 15th wedding anniversary. We had a small gathering at home of very close friends in the afternoon and the ceremony was overseen by our Church pastor, Pastor Daniel who has since retired. We remained close friends till today. It was important as Kuan and I had not been married in Church in 1991 because we were not members of a Church, and the rules forbid the clergy to marry off a couple if they were not members of a Church, even though we both were Christians. More significantly after my near death experience in 2005, renewing our vows was very special. This is because during that ordeal, I realised that I married one of God’s angels. We held the ceremony outside on the patio in front of the water feature, now replaced with an outdoor bar affectionately named “Bar Guan Hin”. The name was assigned from the “Guan Hin” Chinese sign board hanging on the back wall of the bar. In September 2019, before the pandemic struck, we built an out outdoor bar on the patio and wooden frame to support a large collection of staghorn ferns that Kuan had developed a passion for. This set up unwittingly became a sanctuary of sorts during the extended ‘working-from-home’ mandates and limits on the number of home visitors. In the evenings we would place the deck chairs out, and as the sun set with its rays finding its way through the staghorn leaves, it provided a quiet repose. With the arrival of nightfall, one would feel at peace with starlit skies above and greenery all around. We

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are blessed indeed with our little sanctuary and we count our blessings especially during such difficult times.

Our patio overlooks the Hooper Road Playground and with luscious foliage it is difficult for outsiders to look in but easy for me to look out. The *Madura* bed on the wooden decked portion of the patio provides for a good resting spot, a spot for observation, contemplation and relaxation. Sometimes, with a book in hand, a glass of wine, and sometimes with my note book penning my thoughts, but most of the time with nothing except my thoughts, my sleepy head on a pillow and my back resting on the smooth cool old wood of the *Madura* bed.



Photograph by Sanjay C Kuttan, deck view of 19 Jalan Aruan, 2022

The pandemic has forced me to work from home. After avoiding it for almost 30 months, it finally caught up with me. The Antigen Rapid Test (ART) confirmed my fevers, body aches and general fatigue that I was COVID19 positive. On the morning of Friday the 5th of August 2022, I tested negative with much relief as we headed out that evening to the Perhentian Islands for a much needed holiday. Even if I was still positive, the prevailing rules was that from the 7th day onwards one could still go out, and Malaysia had just lifted the need for ‘mysejahtera’ registration on the 1st August 2022 for all travellers.



Photograph by Sanjay C Kuttan, Antigen Rapid Test, Saturday 30th Jul 2022 and Friday 5th Aug 2022

The thirty months of limited interaction and isolation found me seeking solace in my own outward written expression emanating from my heart and mind, especially in between emails, zoom meetings and reading reports. My consciousness of the world around me especially with the increased accessibility to social media and dealing with relationships strained by the absence of a human hug, feeds my creative soul. I find myself being inspired as I am exposed to sensitive situations, to the written words of other writers, to turn of phrases heard during movies followed by a sensation that creeps up and sits next to me, waiting for me to act upon.

Over the years, my wife and I have encouraged our two sons to understand the world better. We have tried to impart these lessons through positive role modelling. One area that

we are fairly committed to is the establishments of LGBTQ+ community's right to equality in society. This has been borne out of having close relationships with friends and family within the community. We have experienced first-hand some of the struggles they have gone through and we have made sure our two sons are aware of these issues and the arguments put forward by both religious and non-religious segments of society.

We attended PinkDot11 in 2019 with my friends and my elder son, as the younger one was away on a school trip. Being explicit of our position on this matter resulted in my Church asking me step down from all leadership positions within the Church when influential members of the church chanced upon the interviews in the media during the PinkDot event. Whilst the Church pastors understood my perspective i.e., it is not about disagreeing with the Word of God in the Bible, but it was the interpretation of the Word by men and women, coupled with the differing views within the Christian community about the use of the word homosexuality in modern day Bibles. A word which only entered the English vocabulary in the late nineteenth century, has been used and taken the intent of the original text out of context. I believe at least. However, the pressure from the congregational leadership forced their hand. I didn't fight back. My cell-group despite having differing views, supported and continues to stand by me until today. I am blessed. We can all have different views, a learning to stand by them is just part of life.

The mood and messaging in 2019 was really about repealing Section 377A of the penal code, and it was justifiable as the law was discriminatory and was used to justify emotional bullying, by those who were detractors or ignorant of the plight of LGBTQ+ individuals. There was solidarity amongst those

who were present,. The message “Repeal 377A’ was created by choreographing the position of stronger lighting within a sea of lights. By 2019, eleven PinkDot events had been organised, with more attendees each passing year. In the beginning anyone and any company could attend and sponsor the event. However, a few years later, the Government imposed restrictions to non-Singaporeans participating and non-local companies sponsoring. Undeterred the organisers pressed forward and Singaporeans and local companies stepped up. Defying sceptics the ‘Gay Dollar’ was significant, and Singaporeans were willing to step up and support.



PinkDot11 event in Hong Lim Park, 2019, Photographer Ore Huiying

After the hiatus of the COVID19 pandemic, we attended PinkDot14 as sponsors, with both my sons, our dear friends and their children. I am proud of my boys for having made their own decision to support their friends and family who belong to the LGBTQ+ community. We never forced them to join us.



Photograph of our family and like-hearted like-minded dear friends at PinkDot14 in 2022

The mood coming out of the pandemic was that of solidarity with the Nation. We all witnessed the fly past of the helicopter with the Singapore Flag. National day rehearsal but a befitting coincidence. We all stood in solidarity watching the flag fly by singing the National anthem. This time the message to Singapore was ‘Majulah’, choreographed by positioning massive white umbrellas.

‘Majulah’, a Malay word that means ‘onward’, encapsulating the hopes and spirit as a nation. A rallying call for Singaporeans to strive for a better future, and grow from strength to strength, especially as we emerge for the pandemic. Malay is our National language after all. The word a perfect reminder of making sure no Singaporean is left behind as we progress as a nation.



Pink Dot14 event held in Hong Lim Park in 2022, Photographer “unknown”



On the 22nd of August 2022, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that his government has decided to repeal Section 377A of the penal code albeit with safeguards on the definition of marriage to be enshrined in the constitution.

This decision is important for Singapore as it has allowed the healing process to begin especially within families that grapple on the illegality of LGBTQ+ sexual orientation of their children,

by parents and grandparents from different generations. It is now legal or rather it is not illegal. But another debate is rearing its ugly head. The definition of family. The qualification for marriage.

Everyone wants the right to love anyone even though they hail from different cultures, with different skin colour, religion, language, race. The hearts' pulse can't be defined by labels. Peace and love in an united and happy family is everyone's desire for their lives. A resilient family is based on love and respect between individuals, and not so much about their sexual preferences.

Our home at Jalan Aruan, continues to be a safe space for my children and our friends. Whilst we are not any more special compared to others, we are held together by the love of our Lord Jesus, who commanded us to love one another as He has continued to love us. He loves us unconditionally so we should try to do the same, however challenging as it may be. This is my faith, my belief. I try. Haiku No. 99's accompanying photo i.e., pseudo-Shahai, was inspired during my morning prayers. I take much comfort.

Haiku No. 70



I dance to embrace
rhythm and sound with each step,
filling space and time.

Haiku No. 71



Imperfect moments
strung together into a
perfect pearl neck-life.

Haiku No. 72



I found my courage
in the stranglehold of fear,
to embrace freedom.

Haiku No. 73



I heard the zephyr
flipping the page of my book
as words blew my mind.

Haiku No. 74



Unlit fireplace
beckons romantic moments,
Kashmir inspires.

Haiku No. 75



Life is being kept
apart by prejudices,
history dictates fate.

Haiku No. 76



We perpetuate
separation of lovers,
traditions cage us.

Haiku No. 77



The love bridge straddles
the chasm of indifference,
filling emptiness.

Haiku No. 78



Given name at birth,
deed poll killed its existence,
new fruit on the tree.

Haiku No. 79



Namesakes validate
common association,
predestined future.

Tick-tock



Clocks exist to keep time
in its rhythm
in its pace
within dimensions defining
my personal space
my measured place,

a perimeter
within which I co-exist
with other clocks
keeping time
in different rhythms
an all familiar tick-tock pace

varying in purpose
of personal race,
residing in palaces
where, digital analogue
clocks exist
giving existence a face.

Haiku No. 80



When I am with you
all my darkness disappears,
your embracing light.

Haiku No. 81



Lullaby of rain,
drowning into blissful sleep,
deaf to noisy streets.

Haiku No. 82



Descendants journeyed
through foreign homes overseas,
their heart is now home.

Haiku No. 83



Vicarious journey,
origami aeroplanes,
neighbourhood unveiled.

Haiku No. 84



Writing love letters
on aerograms give me hope
my heart will reach yours.

Haiku No. 85



Dislocating time
asleep in my sanctuary,
rejuvenating.

Haiku No. 86



Me being present,
in the lives of my loved ones,
defines my full life.

Haiku No. 87



Betrayed faith slaughters
love unconditionally,
abandoned dogs' cry.

Haiku No. 88



Old story book found
dog eared where my mind ventured
and my soul lingers.

Haiku No. 89 (Pseudo-Shahai)



Raindrops on awning,
rhythms from kampung living
tugs at my heart strings.



‘Pseudo-Shahai’ in collaboration with Lau Wah Yuen, Photograph by Lau Wah Yuen of Bar Guan Hin at 19 Jalan Aruan, 2022

Old Scars



I feel the old scars
crisscrossing within my heart,
my pain that remains

from the gentle touch of your
fingers on my fingertips;

on
my eye brow,
my nose,
my wet lips,
my heightened senses.

I feel the old scars
rising from my tender skin
the memory stays
unable to leave my side
your presence shadows my life;

with
the aroma of your nape,
the melody of your voice,
the sight of your silhouette,
the memory of our love.

I feel the old scars
marking where we were once joined
but made asunder,

a rift so wide the threads of
everlasting love unwound,

by
hate and prejudice,
betrayal and loneliness,
disenchantment,
abandonment.

Haiku No. 90



Gravity tugging,
keeping my ego grounded,
the albatross glides.

Haiku No. 91



Neighbour rang doorbell,
injured bird cusped in his hands
its fate in our eyes.

Haiku No. 92



Sun rises each day,
glare in eyes betray all lies,
tears expose the truth.

Haiku No. 93



Sundial exposé,
light and shadows fixing time,
beguiles destiny.

Haiku No. 94 (Pseudo-Shahai)



The nose knows better,
passion begets discernment,
pleasure trapped in grapes.



‘Pseudo-Shanghai’ in collaboration with Lau Wah Yuen, 2022, Photograph by Lau Wah Yuen at Bar Guan Hin@Aruan, Jul 2022.

Haiku No. 95



The stone in my shoe
hurts my sole with every step,
keeping me conscious.

Haiku No. 96



Farmer bonds with earth,
an amputated spirit
restored by young shoots.

Haiku No. 97



My breath, a zephyr,
creates eddies in your ear
whispering love words.

Haiku No. 98



Dreams keep us awake,
to wish on the shooting star
and make them come true.

Haiku No. 99 (Pseudo-Shahai)



God gifted His love,
LGBTQ+ me,
without prejudice.



‘Pseudo-Shahai’ by Sanjay C Kuttan, Photograph by Sanjay C Kuttan, Aug 2022

Shoelaces untied



I am contemplating,
wish the world could see me now,
standing at the minds edge
where the stars don't shine

I am anticipating,
musicians are poised to start
standing on the wooden stage
where coloured spot lights blind

Keeping my dreams alive
shoelaces stay untied
changing shoes to stay in stride
with the rhythm from outside.

I am celebrating,
champagne ne'er stops overflowing
standing in unlocked cages,
where freedom remains sublime

I am recuperating,
my room is my sanctuary
standing on my framed image,
where my ego was never mine.

Keeping my dreams alive
shoelaces stay untied
changing shoes to stay in stride
with the rhythm from outside.

Or should I create my own
lacing up my chosen shoe
creating my rhythm in stride
or leave my shoelaces untied.

My shoelaces stay untied
before I lace my chosen shoe
Step in and step up in stride
Keeping my dreams alive

Keeping my dreams alive
Keeping my dreams alive

Tanka No. 21



Old knives in drawers,
witnessed culinary art,
portions of discourse.

Sadness through tearful laughter,
sharpened with witty banter.

Tanka No. 22



Beneath restless feet,
living earth lie with dead leaves
uncovered footpath.

Inevitable journey,
predestined choices await.

Tanka No. 23



The magnificent
beauty of a transient
rainbow pales to yours,
 You are my love and my life
 my everything my blessing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sanjay Kuttan was born in Johor Baru, Malaysia in 1964. He started writing at the age of 15 after being inspired by the publication of his mother, Rosaly Puthucheary's first collection of poems, *Pillow Your Dreams*. He moved to Singapore in 1980 and studied at St Joseph's Institution. As an undergraduate at the National University of Singapore, he had his first opportunity to have his poetry published. He completed his PhD in Pharmacology at the same university.

He spent much of his working life travelling whilst being employed by ExxonMobil and subsequently McKinsey & Company. He currently works as the Chief Technology Officer of the Global Centre for Maritime Decarbonisation after almost 3 years as Executive Director of the Singapore Maritime Institute before which he was also working for the Energy Market Authority (Singapore), DNVGL and the Nanyang Technological University.

In the late 90's he linked up with Stazja McFadyen, editor and publisher of the Austin Poets at Large weekly e-newsletter. Thanks to the internet, Sanjay's poetry was able to reach a larger audience. Encouraged by Stazja, he continued to write and was published locally as well as abroad in various publications.

He published his first anthology of poetry in 2009, “Where Fires Rage” by Straits Times Press, now in its third re-print by Partridge Publishing. This was after more than a decade of his poems appearing in anthologies such as “In Our Own Words – A Generation Defining Itself” Vol 3 (2005) and Vol 8 (2009), “World Healing Book” (2004), “Singa No. 30” (2000), “Bad News Bigolo – Love Edition” (1998) and e-zines Like MAP of Austin Poetry (US) @ www.austinmetro.com, The Poets Porch (US) @ www.poetsporch.com; Comrade Ezine (UK/US) @ www.comrade.org.uk, The Writers Hood (US) @ www.writershood.com, and Pachamamapress (US) @ www.pachamamapress.com.

His short story “Dying Alone” was published in *Balik Kampung Vol 3C* (2016) by Books Actually, and more recently, “From a Simple heart” published in *Letters to my Son* by Marshall Cavendish (2020) and “*In One Breath – an anthology of pseudohaiku*” published by Partridge Publishing (2021).

He lives in Singapore with his wife Yip Wai Kuan and two sons Kyran Ming Kuttan and Sachi Ren Kuttan.

