

48. The Poet's role

Today we heard these poets reading out and explaining their compositions to us; it is a profitable experience to listen to them, for the poet is able to discover more than the ordinary thinker. The poet is called in the scriptures, *Kavi*, a word which also means, *Manthradrishta*---he who is able to visualise essential spiritual formulae in his intuitive moments. The Bhagavad Geetha describes the Lord as *Kavi*. The *kavi* or poet is aware of the past, the present and the future (*thri-kaala-jnaani*); he transcends time; he can dip into the past, roam in the present and peep into the future, for he has sharper vision than ordinary men. Hence he is called *sarvajna*, the all-knowing; *kraantha-darsi*, he who sees the step which has to be taken next, he who is always in advance of current opinion or attitudes.

The Lord is the poet and His poem is all this. Poets share the divine quality of knowing and recognising the next step. The Lord as *Kavi* is also *puraana*, (ancient, primeval). He is characterised also as *anushasithara*, the law-giver who lays down lines and limits. The responsibility of poets is very great, proportionate to the status given to them in the scriptures and in the Geetha. But instead of being *sarvajna* and *puraana* and *anushasithara*, they are satisfied with a scrap of knowledge, a superficial polish and the convenient and profitable role of tamely following the whims of the people.

The great poets of the past harped on the spiritual disciplines and the heights of spiritual realisation to which they led. They elevated and inspired spiritual adventure. Pichayya Shastri spoke in his poem on this aspect of Bhaaratheeya culture, this stream of spiritual aspiration that flows from the *Vedhas* and the *Upanishads*, down the *Puraanas*, the *Bhaagavatha*, *Raamaayana* and *Mahaabhaaratha*, in order to fertilise the divine urge in man.

Eternal problems that arouse man's enthusiasm

It was mentioned by some speakers that the western scholars revealed the grandeur and glory of the *Upanishads* to us. I do not appreciate our relying on scholars, however eminent, to explain to us the meaning and significance of our sacred scriptures; for, what can scholars know of the bliss of practising them? There is no use blaming the long years of rule by the West for the neglect of *Sanaathana Dharma*, as some others do. We must accept responsibility for this ourselves. The rulers did not induce us to give up our *dharma*. We did it out of our own false sense of values, out of our own weak faith.

Poems that deal with the fundamental problems of life and death, truth and delusion, virtue and vice will last for centuries and will help man in all climes; for, they harness man and harass man at all times. Problems of exterior living change and get changed. So when poems deal with them, they are short lived. *Prakrithi* and *Paramaathma* (creation and creator), are like the two halves of a bean; and seedling sprouts from between them.

The problems of adjustment that man has to make, when he struggles with creation to discover the creator, are also eternal problems that arouse the enthusiasm of man. External nature can be inhibited, negated; it ceases at a certain stage of *saadhana*, though no one can say when it began. It has no basic reality, though it has validity up to a certain stage. So, it cannot be dismissed from attention; nor can it be accepted as eternally valid. So it is neither true (*sathya*) nor false (*asathya*); hence, it is called *mithya*, something that is partly true (*sath*) and partly false (*asath*).

Poets are the pioneers who mark out the road for human progress along the lines of love and unity---love which binds them with all creation and unity of all beings in God.

Poets must regain their own health

One pernicious disease has now begun to infect writers and poets in all countries---the disease which scorns all that is ancient and well-tested by time, which carps and criticises all that is revered by others. Flimsy foppery, fiery cynicism---these are held to be 'modern' and modish. That is the literary fashion now. But,-it is doing great harm to the rising generation, for it perverts their tastes and degrades their ideals. He who adores the past is considered a coward, who has no courage to chalk out a new path for himself; he who indulges in some new antic is acclaimed as a genius. He gets a whole host of imitators. He who throws mud on established beliefs is a hero; he who tries to support them is a poltroon. Poets must try to escape from this disease. They must regain their own health and give health-giving stuff to the people.

They must not infect the people with their agitation and worry, their fears and doubts, their anxieties and superstitions. They must rid themselves of at least anger, for, writings steeped in anger are bound to be false and fear-creating.

Vishwaamithra was upset that, inspite of years of asceticism, his great rival, Vasishta, addressed him only as *Raajarishi*, and not by the coveted appellation, *Brahmarishi*; so, he crouched stealthily behind the seat of Vasishta one moonlight night, when he was teaching a group of disciples, determined to kill him with the sharp sword he had taken with him. He sat unseen amidst the bushes for a moment to listen to what Vasishta was telling them. What was his surprise when he heard Vasishta describing the charming moonlight and comparing it to the heart of Vishwaamithra, cool, bright, curative, heavenly, universal, all-pleasing! The sword fell from his grasp. He ran forward and prostrating at the feet of his rival, he held the feet. Vasishta recognised Vishwaamithra and accosting him, "O *Brahmarishi*, rise up", he lifted him on to his own seat.

A guide must free himself from hate and malice

Vasishta explained that he could not be styled *Brahmarishi*, so long as the ego persisted in him. When the swelling of the head disappeared and he fell at the feet of his rival, he became entitled for the honour he no longer coveted, and so deserved. He who aspires to be a guide of the people must first free himself of selfish propensities, of hate and malice. His words must be sweet to the ear and food to the spirit. They must be valued by all men as the panacea they need. If one is not capable of this high poetry, one must try to reach that height by purifying one's nature and clarifying one's outlook on this world and the next.

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*Do not contemplate on death; it is just an incident in life.
Contemplate on God, who is the master of all life; beware of Him
all through life.*

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