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POEMS OF SUBRAMANIA BHARATI

Prema Nandakumar



Poems of Subramania Bharati

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TO
NANDAKUMAR

POEMS

OF

SUBRAMANIA BHARATI

A Selection, in an English Verse Rendering,
with an Introduction and Notes

by

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

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PREFACE

This anthology, while it is fully representative of Subramania Bharati's opulent and variegated muse, nevertheless comprises only about one-fifth of the total canon. But if making the selection was not easy, the task of translating modern Tamil poetry into English verse has proved an exasperating experience. Should a translation be loose or close? Should it be in prose or verse? Stephen Spender says that "a poet's aim as a translator should not be absolute accuracy, but to return to the source of the poet's inspiration and to create a parallel poem in the English language." Serges Hughes remarks that a true translation is "a new creation inspired by a specific work of art, able to stand by itself alone, strong and harmonious in all its parts." But this, perhaps, applies only to a poet turning translator. I have been more modest, for my aim is to introduce Subramania Bharati—the greatest of modern Tamil poets, and their gallant pioneer and path-finder—to the variety of English-knowing people all over the world. A literal rendering may have its uses, for example in a students' edition of a classic, but for the Johnsonian 'common reader' who desires, not so much to construe word by word, but rather to get at the sense and feel of the original, a not too literal rendering might prove more helpful.

Stray pieces, long and short, from Bharati have been translated in the past into English verse by scholars like Rajaji, J.H. Cousins, A Srinivasa Raghavan, P.N. Appuswami, P. Mahadevan, R. Bangaruswami, P.S. Sundaram, Mrs. Ha. Ki. Valam and Mrs. Jesudasan; and my own *Bharati in English Verse*—the nucleus of the present work—appeared in 1958. But Bharati remains the despair of his translators. With a poet like him who handles so many metres, from the most popular to the most sophisticated, with such astonishing ease and assurance, and whose poems have been set to music and are being sung everyday a prose version was out of the question. On the other hand, the

genius of the English language would not permit anything like an exact rendering of idea, word and rhythm. The prudent translator is thus obliged to hedge—to negotiate carefully between the Scylla of a too literal version and the Charybdis of a too free rendering. As Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar puts it—

"Poetry by its very nature is untranslatable. Ideas can be translated from language to language, but poetry is the idea touched with the magic of phrase and incantatory music. Competent translation can, however, play the good broker between the poet and the reader, and surpassing the mere prose of statement can give intimations of the poet's sovereign utterance. Good translation can create trust, and it can stimulate interest."

This is what I have tried to do. And although I realise that I may not have always succeeded, I venture to hope that this work will at least help to prepare a world-wide audience for participation in the Subramania Bharati Birth Centenary Celebrations in 1982.

My thanks are due to Mr. M.L. Rosenthal of UNESCO, my father, Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, my mother, Srimati Padmasani and my brother, Prof. S. Ambirajan, for their counsel, encouragement and support; and to Sahitya Akademi, my publishers, and the Bharti Printers for the consideration and care with which they have produced this book.

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

Mother's Centre
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INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The poet whose works are introduced in the present volume was born at Ettayapuram in South India on 11 December 1882. He died at Triplicane in Madras on 12 September 1921. During this short span of 39 mortal years a revolution shook Tamil poetry, and while clutching the best in its tradition, it leapt forward into an age of ardour and simplicity, interrogation and modernity. In this it was stimulated by the heady breeze from the west and nurtured by the sovereign genius of Subramania Bharati.

It was the same period that also saw the cyclonic rise of the Nationalist Party on the Indian political scene, and witnessed too the lifting of the obscurantist shadows and marsh vapours that had long hung over the Indian social fabric and reduced it to a veritable area of darkness for the unprivileged women as well as the so-called 'untouchables'. During these tumultuous two or three decades that asked for heroic strength of will on the part of the would-be reformer, Subramania Bharati boldly stationed himself undaunted at the centre of the field of action and poured out his poems of patriotic idealism and visionary power, exhorting his countrymen to fight for their freedom, redeem the weak and the downtrodden, and take a proper pride in their native speech and their national heritage.

Subramania Bharati was particularly lucky to have belonged to the golden years of India's political and literary renaissance. It was an age of heroes in almost every walk of life. The dawning decade of the twentieth century was particularly significant, for the nation was then waking up at last from the trauma of the shock of foreign conquest and colonial rule. India began remembering again her hoary past, and there were the stirrings of a new resurgence everywhere. Here was a field for action that might well call forth and exhaust all one's creative faculties. And, as always through its three thousand years (or more) of vanguardship of human civilisation, the Spirit still remained the

nation's Ground of stability and strength. It was thus with an outlook basically spiritual that India's latter-day leaders launched their movements for the country's freedom and renaissance:

> Indian culture raised the crude animal life of desire, self-interest and satisfied propensity beyond its first intention to a noble self-exceeding and shapeliness by infusing into it the order and high aims of the Dharma. But its profounder characteristic aim—and in this it was unique—was to raise this nobler life too of the self-perfecting human being beyond its own intention to a mightiest self-exceeding and freedom. . . .*

It is not surprising therefore that the personal life and public role of awakened India's leaders were shaped alike by this native spiritual outlook. Politicians, educationists, social reformers, industrialists, men of letters—all wove the fabric of their lives on the loom of spirituality.

Subramania Bharati too made his mark as a patriot, journalist, social reformer and poet, but his confident hope was the deliverance of India and all mankind from their present ills and budget of discontents, and also the ultimate divinisation of human life upon the earth. His poetry is thus quintessentially spiritual, and this is true even of his earliest outpourings with their immediate patriotic impulsion.

In Bharati's formative years of boyhood and adolescence, patriotism was in the air and sudden revolutionary sparks flamed up here and there. British rule had doubtless given India some of the benefits of western civilisation: for example, a streamlined administration, a communications network and the beginnings of industrialisation for the mass-production of certain consumer needs; but alien rule had also weakened much of the nation's self-confidence, pride and vitality—and all this, aside from the blatant economic exploitation whose results anybody could see. More and more Indians, however, were to grow aware of their plight, and receive their first lessons in self-knowledge and self-respect from leaders such as Raja Rammohan Roy (social reformer), Dayanand Saraswati (religious reformer), Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (educationist), Bankim Chandra Chatterji (novelist), Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Ramalingaswami (spiritual ecs-

*Sri Aurobindo, *Foundations of Indian Culture* (1953), p. 121.

tatics) and Swami Vivekananda (Vedantic evangelist).

However, in all movements, the gracious flow is often the result of a sharp push given by violent unpredictable currents. The twentieth century opened to such a current, and India saw in action intrepid Nationalist leaders like Sri Aurobindo in Bengal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Western India and Subramania Bharati in Tamil Nad. Freedom was verily their birthright, and they were willing to sacrifice their all for winning the nation's emancipation; and they became eminent as men of letters, as leaders of thought. So varied and indubitable is their achievement that it is difficult to project the manifold facets as a unified picture. Deeply spiritual, they are best approached through their writings. Tilak is thus the great Karmayogi, the author of *Gita Rahasya*; Sri Aurobindo is the prophet of the future, the immortal bard of *Savitri*, and Subramania Bharati is the poet of the Tamil renaissance, who united in his best work the triune insights of Sanskrit, Tamil and English.

LIFE OF SUBRAMANIA BHARATI

The Tirunelveli District in Madras State (Tamil Nad), with the perennial Tambravarni flowing through it, has been famous in legend and history as the source and repository of Tamil culture. Even the minor principality of Ettayapuram could boast of a succession of local poets and musicians. For example, Kadigaimuthu Pulavar, the accomplished eighteenth-century poet, was befriended by Venkateswara Ettappa Naicker the *poligar* (chief) of Ettayapuram. The following century, however, was a period of decadence in the Ettayapuram Court, in this respect but sharing the fate of many princely houses in India at the time which had unfortunately degenerated into mere castles of indolence. To Ettayapuram nevertheless came in search of a living a studious and scholarly Brahmin, Chinnaswamy Iyer. He was well-versed in Tamil, yet he preferred to avoid the folly of decadent Tamil lyricism. He turned instead to technology, and succeeded in creating a vogue for modern machinery at Ettayapuram; and in 1880 he saw the beginnings of the first textile mill there.

Chinnaswamy Iyer's eldest born was Subramania, shortened into Subbayya. The birth caused great domestic joy; but before the boy was five years old, Chinnaswamy Iyer's wife, Lakshmi,

passed away. Subbayya had thus to spend most of his childhood and early boyhood with his maternal grandfather who introduced the boy even at that young age to the glories of Tamil poesy. In later years the poet was to offer loving homage in his autobiography to his beloved grand-father. At this time of loneliness caused by his mother's death and also his father's severity, the solitary Subbayya encountered his first love, the angel Poesy, and signed a life-long fealty with her:

As two birds in love
happy in a forest,
or gods and goddesses
in an amorous swoon,
not flawed by mundane joys
but joined in ecstasy,
I spent some blissful days
with that honey-sweet Being.

Soon the precocious boy began composing verses in Tamil, and Chinnaswamy Iyer was being congratulated by the people of Ettayapuram on his son's felicity of improvisation. Presently Subbayya was crowned with the title 'Bharati',[1] the name by which he was to be known henceforth. But Chinnaswamy Iyer himself was hardly pleased with these developments, for he felt convinced that a good English education alone could ensure a bright future for his son. Towards that end he sent Bharati to Tirunelveli for high school education.

Subramania Bharati was quick to learn and made due progress in the Hindu College at Tirunelveli. He was also initiated into the ineluctable charms of English poetry, especially Romantic poetry, although his commitment was to Tamil. He continued to revel in the infinitudes of Tamil poetry, and he often astonished his teachers and fellow-students with impromptu verses on various occasions. Even the choleric Tamil Pundit, Sivarama Pillai, once asked to be rebuffed by Bharati's pitiless tongue. Provoked by some play of wilful negligence and noticing Bharati sitting on the topmost bench of the gallery, the Pundit gave vent to his exploding annoyance:

'You are said to pour down verses like the dark clouds above. Since you are now perched above like a cloud, why don't you shower answers to my questions like Kalamegham (a famous Tamil poet who specialised in impromptu wit)?'

The youngster coolly replied:

'The learned Pundit has overlooked one simple, but well known, fact. The clouds (Kalamegham) burst into rain only at their own sweet will and pleasure, and not because of a Pundit's ruling.'

The point of the repartee is that 'Kalamegham' was the name of a poet as well as signified a dark cloud-cluster.

With his adolescent heart and awakened sensibility roaming at will (or lost) in the fields of Tamil poesy or enjoying the compositions of resourceful versifiers like Annamalai Reddiar and Padikkasu Pulavar, it was not surprising that Bharati played truant to the academic grind and was accordingly disqualified for the Matriculation examination. Returning to Ettayapuram in 1897, Bharati managed to secure a place in the Zamin service on his father's recommendation.

For Bharati, however, Zamin service merely meant playing the role of companion to the somewhat erratic Raja of Ettayapuram. There was the obvious difference in age; and the Raja's influence too wasn't good for the growing youth because of the decadent dilettantism of the ruler. Even so Bharati made the most of his employment, and found time to delve deep into Tamil poetry, mastering its difficult prosodic technique. As was the current custom, while yet fifteen, Bharati was married in 1897 to Chellammal, then only seven. Like the other companionship with the angel Poesy, this too was but another romantic exercise in companionship for the first few years of their holy wedded life.

Suddenly disaster struck the family, for Chinnaswamy Iyer died in 1898, and left his children and young widow practically penniless. While Bharati's stepmother went to her parents with her children, he went to Benares himself to stay with his aunt and uncle, Krishna Sivan. The romantic Bharati found this shift to the North a welcome change. He loved to row across the Ganga, and sing while rowing. He grew a beard too, which enhanced his personality. He duly enrolled himself at the Central Hindu College at Benares and passed the Entrance Examination of the Allahabad University, in the process mastering Sanskrit, Hindi and English in an incredibly short time. Already, when he returned to Ettayapuram from Allahabad, the new poetry—"at once radiantly autochthonous and bracingly modern", in Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's words—had been launched into the

world by the genius of this born poet warming up to the compulsions of the Time Spirit.

As yet, however, Bharati was but struggling for a good living. He had of course his place in the Ettayapuram Court, but he found it more and more irksome to play at companionship to the Raja. As an escape, Bharati worked for a while in 1904 as a Tamil Pundit at the Setupati High School at Madurai. Fortunately he impressed the formidable G. Subramania Iyer, the editor of the Madras Tamil daily paper *Swadesa Mitran*, during a chance meeting, and this brought Bharati to the southern metropolis in November 1904 as an assistant editor of the paper. This event was to have far-reaching consequences as it involved Bharati in extremist nationalist politics with all the predictable consequences of fame, hardship and exile. On the other hand, this active involvement in politics gave Bharati a new sweep of comprehension, and his journalistic writings acquired an edged power that set his readers' hearts aflame, while his poetic utterances now glowed with a steely strength and purity and shine, a sudden tempestuous outflow from the nationalist *mantra*, 'Bande Mataram!'

As assistant editor, Bharati had of course to do a lot of translation from English into Tamil, and other types of journalistic hackwork. But he was also too resilient to remain contentedly buried in the limbo of secondary journalism. His appointment as editor of the monthly journal, *Chakravarthini*, offered a free outlet for his more serious and more spontaneous efforts. One of the very first things he did was to publish a translation of Bankim Chandra's celebrated song 'Bande Mataram!' with an explanatory introduction. Presently Bharati became editor of *India*, the weekly paper of the Extremist Party launched by S. Tirumalachari in April 1906, and of *Bala Bharata*, an English weekly paper. Overnight as it were, Bharati the poet and social reformer became also the apostle of extremist nationalism. As he had a free hand in editing *India*, through its columns his revolutionary message reached the ends of Tamil Nad. Answering the challenge of his new vocation, Bharati's prose style grew wings of purpose and power, and his simplicity, directness and force were in sharp contrast to the flowery sugary over-statement that had hitherto been the stock-in-trade of prose practitioners. The cartoons in *India* too were inspired by Bharati and were like

dynamite thrown into the seething political arena.

In 1908, Madras stood in the forefront of India's fight for freedom. Bharati in Madras, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subramania Siva at Tuticorin, and others elsewhere kept the movement at fever-pitch. Surveying the developing events with anxiety, the Government acted with lightning rapidity. Pillai and Siva were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Bharati too was obviously a marked man, and it was thought he might be arrested any moment. His first published book of poems, *Songs of Freedom* (1908), was having an incendiary effect on the people's consciousness and political sensibility. The editorials in *India* were an eyesore to the Government, and a warrant was soon issued for the arrest of Bharati, its de-facto (though not declared) editor. On the advice of some of his colleagues and friends, Bharati decided to evade arrest, and escaped in time to Pondicherry, the French enclave not far from Madras in British India. Thanks to the initiative of Tirumalachari's brother, S. Srinivasachari, *India* too shifted to Pondicherry, and through its columns for two more years Bharati continued his battle with the British bureaucracy. Government at last banned the entry of the paper from Pondicherry to British India, and so it ceased publication in 1910. Infant mortality likewise overwhelmed other nationalist papers like *Vijaya*, *Bala Bharata*, *Karmayogi* and *Suryodaya*, with all of which Bharati had been closely associated.

When Bharati came to Pondicherry, he had already, young as he was, a manifold record of achievement to his credit. Within a period of four years of daily journalism and political involvement, he had come to be hailed as the poet of patriotism and prophet of nationalism. He was accepted as the leading poet of Tamil Nad, and his stirring songs were on the lips of children and elders alike—in schools, homes, processions and political rallies. As an electrifying political journalist, he was not only the fiery propagandist of the nationalist gospel, he was also the uncompromising critic of the alien bureaucracy as well as their allies in the 'moderate' party. Besides, Bharati was now respected by many (if also virulently denigrated by the orthodox) for his crusades against untouchability and other social abuses. The starting point, however, alike of his revolutionary fervour and his missionary zeal for social reform, was

doubtless his meeting Sister Nivedita[2] in 1906 at Calcutta, where Bharati had gone to attend the annual session of the Indian National Congress. In Nivedita he saw Mother Shakti herself, the emerging energising Power that ruled India and the world. Even as Ramakrishna with a mere touch and glance had released the imprisoned infinitudes in Vivekananda's unawakened spirit, so too Nivedita helped Bharati to wake up to his mission and to summon the inner spiritual resources to fulfil it. Bharati spontaneously offered obeisance to Nivedita, and he also dedicated the first two volumes of poetry (*Swadesa Gitangal* and *Janmabhoomi*) to her, for she had, "without words, in a split second, taught me the nature of true service to the Mother, and the greatness of sacrifice".

The early years at Pondicherry kept him busy with journalism, and he somehow faced with equanimity both domestic poverty and police serveillance. His editorials in *India* and *Vijaya* were as uncompromising as ever. Whatever the theme—be it even Art or Poetry—Bharati gave it a political slant and a revolutionary edge. While the seasoned patriots received lavish praise, the services of younger leaders like M.K. Gandhi were also duly applauded. But it was all too good to last, and by 1910 Bharati found himself without an occupation.

On 4 April 1910, however, a significant event occurred: Sri Aurobindo, poet, patriot and Yogi, landed in Pondicherry from Bengal. Towards the end of the year, another patriot, V.V.S. Iyer, also arrived as a political exile from India. Pondicherry was fast becoming the refuge of Indian patriots, and also the radiating centre of a new renaissance, offering a new hope for India and the World. Like Sri Aurobindo, V.V.S. Iyer was a scholar and a writer doubled with a patriot and a revolutionary. Bharati and Srinivasachari had frequent meetings with Sri Aurobindo, and the discussions were free and animated. The political situation in India was certainly in their thoughts, but their discussions actually ranged over a much wider expanse. Philosophy, religion, literature and Vedic studies were now as important as politics, and in consequence Bharati found his vision directed to fascinating new horizons. It was now that Bharati entered the richest period of his scholarly and creative activity. He translated some of the Vedic hymns, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, and of course the *Gita*. Thanks to Sri Auro-

bindo, Bharati entered into the spirit of Shakti-tattva, the identification of Shakti or the Divine Mother with the universal energising Creatrix. It was under the double influence of his Vedic studies and the Shakti-tattva that Bharati's poetic genius found triumphant self-expression in his prose poetry and in his *Panchali Sapatham*, *Kannan Pattu* and the Shakti poems.

But the preoccupation with social reform—especially the need to end 'caste' and 'untouchability'—remained. In an article in the *Commonweal* of 6 October 1916, Bharati raised his strident voice once again against the iniquitous rule of 'caste' in Hindu society. Two weeks later, C. Rajagopalachari (the future Governor-General of India, and one of Mahatma Gandhi's closest associates) referred to Bharati's "irrevocable and unmeasured" sacrifices for his country and his people, and added that, since going to Pondicherry, he had "been devoting himself entirely to National reform through Tamil poetry, wherein he had succeeded in combining simplicity of diction and the use of the living and spoken tongue with the beauty, purity and purposefulness of the early classics." And Rajagopalachari gave citations from Bharati's *Panchali Sapatham* and other poems which were reiterations of his views on 'caste' and other social abuses. For Bharati as for Rajaji, Nationalism without social reform was like the shell without the kernel.

Meantime in 1911, the murder of Mr. Ashe, Collector of Tirunelveli, at Maniyachi turned the suspicion of the Indian Government to the refugee patriots at Pondicherry, and all kinds of harassments followed, including attempts at abduction. It all proved abortive in the end, and Bharati stayed on in Pondicherry and struck the richest poetic veins of his career. Actually, while he was an extremist in Nationalist politics, he was no terrorist. In an unpublished article on the political situation in Madras, Bharati refers both to the bomb that killed Mrs. Pringle-Kennedy and her daughter in 1908 at Muzzaferpore, and the killing of Ashe at Maniyachi in 1911, and feels that such tragedies must "profoundly affect the heart of the devout Hindu". Like Sri Aurobindo himself, Bharati too was moving from revolutionary politics to Shakti-tattva and Vedantic humanism. Bharati worked at white heat during the whole of 1912, and composed besides the epyllion *Panchali Sapatham* and the song-sequence on Krishna, several other lyrics as also *Kuyil Pattu*, a

fantasy and fable without parallel in Tamil.

When the first world war erupted in 1914, while Bharati's financial difficulties increased, his admiration and sympathy was for embattled and presently overrun Belgium. He called Belgium "a gipsy girl confronting a forest tiger with a mere tray in hand", and he saluted the gallant little country with a memorable poem.

> Your military strength may be low,
> but your deeds are
> heaven-high!

Notwithstanding the bleak climate generated by the war, Bharati continued to write poems, and loyal friends like Parali S. Nellayappar and S. Srinivasachari managed to arrange for their publication in Madras.

Of his 10-year exile in Pondicherry, there is at this distance of time no need to be unduly sentimental. Bharati was not like other men; he was unconventional, he was impractical, he was generous to a fault, he was truly unique. While poverty and under-nourishment gnawed at his vitality, the high voltage of his sustained creative efforts made undue calls on his inner strength. Chellammal was a wonderful housewife, no doubt, but even she found it no easy task to keep the home fires burning.

But, then, there were compensations as well. Bharati had a singular human gift: he could inspire affection—even love on this side idolatry—in his close friends and near relations. V.V.S. Iyer was a pillar of support, a stimulant, a guardian-angel; and Sri Aurobindo was even more—a spell-binder, an inspiration, a veritable Krishna to this neophyte Arjuna. And there were dependable friends like Srinivasachari, Shanker Chetty and others. What more could Bharati ask for?

And yet the long years of exile were wearing him down, and whether it was because of a domestic quarrel or because he wished to end his exile and return to action, he crossed the border on 20 November 1918 and was promptly arrested near Cuddalore and lodged in jail. Influential friends like Annie Besant, C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, A. Rangaswamy Iyengar and others interceded on his behalf, and he was released less than a month later, and proceeded to Kadayam in Tirunelveli district, whither his wife and children had gone earlier. Kadayam was his wife's

place and proved a hospitable sanctuary to Bharati for the next two years. He was restless all the same, and paid brief visits to Ettayapuram, Karaikudi and other places. In March 1919, during a visit to Madras, Bharati met Mahatma Gandhi at the residence of Rajagopalachari, and there was a memorable flash of mutual recognition. For the rest he composed poetry, made frantic attempts to publish his writings, and chafed at his enforced inactivity.

Fortune seemed to smile on Bharati again, and he was invited in November 1920 to re-join *Swadesa Mitran* as assistant editor. Even from Pondicherry, he had been contributing occasionally to the paper, but this regular assignment was something of a godsend. Bharati was happy and active once more, for he had a ready outlet for his seasoned ruminations. Because of the salutary Pondicherry associations and realisations, Bharati now increasingly thought of the problems of life and death as a Vedantin. While thus the spiritual accent was unmistakable, there was however no flagging of his intellectual energy. It was the commencement of the Gandhi Age, and everybody was filled with expectancy. Admirers gathered round Bharati in the evenings, and he addressed numerous public meetings. And his writings made literary history in Tamil Nad.

But alas! this was only the brilliant after-glow of the setting sun. In July 1921, Bharati was involved in a casual tragic accident. The Triplicane Temple elephant, in a moment of rut, seized Bharati with its trunk and cast him on the ground rendering him unconscious, and although he was promptly rescued and given all medical assistance, the shock impaired his health seriously. He seemed to be recovering, but other complications intervened. On 11 September his condition took a turn for the worse, and he died past midnight in the early hours of 12 September. On the following day an editorial in the *Hindu* described Bharati as "an ardent nationalist, a great thinker, a shining speaker and a powerful writer."

While Bharati's poetic genius was recognised by the discriminating few from the very beginning, general acclaim came only years after his tragic death, especially after Independence. Bharati himself, although he achieved considerable fame as a political journalist and as the poet of patriotism, set much greater store on his pristine efforts in lyric and epic poetry, and of course he

was right. Had he not sung again and again of the Muse as his only Love, the angelic Beatrice to lead him past the Inferno and Purgatorio of terrestrial tribulations to the Paradiso of *kavy-anubhava* or sheer poetic enjoyment:

Offspring of the eternal Shakti
who brings a meaning
to our mundane lives!
Daughter of Kali, guard the right!
Hail, Empress of my home!

THE BHARATI CANON

Bharati's poetic career may be said to have begun when he was only eleven years old. The precocious boy seems to have had a fluent and felicitous tongue, and could imitate with ease contemporary poets like Chennikulam Annamalai Reddiar. Even so, Bharati's poetry was understandably imprisoned still in the constraints of old Tamil Prosody. It was characteristically the poetry of the latter-day decadence, delighting more in intellectual jugglery than in the communication of controlled emotion. The first time Bharati became aware of poetry other than his own Tamil heritage was when he went to Benares where popular Hindi poetry with its simplicity and directness of utterance and Bengali poetry with its dissolving musical cadences made an immediate impact on him. And, of course, suddenly the entire panoramic richness of English poetry—the Romantics in particular—opened before him.

When Bharati returned to Ettayapuram the chalice of his creative energy was already full to the brim. He waxed eloquently about the Romantics, tried to imitate their style, established a 'Shelley Guild' and assumed the pseudonym of 'Shelley Dasan'. Although his first published poem is apparently shackled in the old straight-jacket of punditry, the content at least is Wordsworthian and speaks of love's memory grown more poignant in solitude. Bharati's next published poem reflects the convulsions that gripped India at the time of the first partition of Bengal[3] seventy years ago. Imagery and vocabulary have a fire-born freshness and glow, and there is no need anymore for an explicatory note! Bharati has now learned to speak to the people in their own living language:

Sweet Mother Bharat!
No more tears, smile!

Your guardian grace
has made us great.
A mother's heart thrills
when her children reap glory.
Bangla your child
shall grow on earth in fame.

Thus it was from 1905 onwards that Bharati wrought glorious simplicity of articulation with a marble's softness and transparency as well as solidity and strength. His editorial translation hack-work on *Swadesa Mitran* had surely someting to do with this transformation. The labour of translation had taught him fidelity to the thought of the original, precision in the use of words and even the value of understatement (English being famous for it) and austerity in literary expression, and Bharati was enabled to escape the floweriness, exaggerations and verbal and intellectual jugglery of much of the traditional poetry of the 18th and 19th centuries. While he wrote articles and critiques in Tamil bending the resources of the Tamil language to natural and even conversational prose, he also wrote poetry with an equal directness and force, as if he were indeed talking to a friendly group. Presently Bharati strayed from patriotic poety to other fields, but always with a slant towards the spiritual. His Pondicherry writings were of course entirely spiritual in impulsion. Bharati wrote ceaselessly on man, God and Nature; on the infernos in our minds and the glimpses of Eternity in our souls; on mortality and the life everlasting. Primarily a lyric poet, his songs are of divers hues and intensities of texture, but for the sake of convenience the total canon is usually divided as follows:

Part-I Patriotic Songs

1. Songs on Bharat Land.
2. Songs on Tamil Nad.
3. Freedom.
4. Songs on the Freedom Movement.
5. National Leaders.
6. Songs inspired by Freedom Movements in other countries.

Part-II Devotional Songs

1. Prayer Songs.
2. Songs of Knowledge (Jnana).

Part-III Miscellaneous Songs

1. Ethics.
2. Society.
3. Unclassified Songs.
4. Tributes.
5. Autobiographical.
6. Free Verse.

Part-IV Three Great Poems

1. *Kannan Pattu* (*The Krishna Songs*).
2. *Panchali Sapatham* (*Panchali's Vow*):
   Canto I: Duryodhana's Plot.
   Canto II: The Game of Dice.
   Canto III: Slavery.
   Canto IV: The Outrage on Draupadi.
   Canto V: Draupadi's Vow
3. *Kuyil Pattu* (*Kuyil's Song*).

A glance at the above table should show how Bharati's genius was essentially lyrical. He excelled in short sudden spurts of song, and he was almost allergic to long sustained narratives. He did not reject the living tradition in Tamil, but emancipated the poetry from dead-wood whether in vocabulary or prosody. While the English Romantics were a great inspiration to Bharati, it was from Walt Whitman, to whom he was introduced by Sri Aurobindo, that he learnt a boldness, freedom and forthrightness of utterance. If Whitman was the prophet of American democracy, Bharati would be the prophet of the new Indian Republic to be!

POET OF FREEDOM AND PATRIOTISM

The patriotic poetry of Bharati must needs take precedence in any survey of his poetry. It was as a 'freedom poet' that he won instant popularity and established rapport with the people of Tamil Nad. While doubtless this helped him to find a ready appreciative audience when he published his devotional and other poems, his vogue as the poet of freedom and patriotism has happily endured. It can hardly be disputed that Bharati's patriotic poetry has a permanent place in the saga of the Independence struggle, for the strident power of his songs alone woke up millions of Tamils from their slumber of sloth and

complacency. As Sarojini Naidu said in 1947, soon after the coming of Independence, it was Bharati who "kindled the souls of men and women by the million to a more passionate love of Freedom and a richer dedication to the service of the country."

The astonishing thing about these poems is that they are not 'dated' at all, although seventy years almost divide us from them. Everywhere Bharati transcends the mere 'now', and gathers in his sweep of imaginative vision all our yesterdays and the unborn tomorrows as well. To call these songs political or propagandist poetry is surely off the mark: freedom in Bharati's songs is an elemental thirst, a basic aspiration and a primary need of the human soul:

> When will this thirst for freedom slake?
> When will our love of slavery die?
> When will our Mother's fetters break?
> When will our tribulations cease?

Freedom for Bharati meant freedom for a living concept of India, not the inert geographical area. Bharat as the Mother was no mere metaphor, but an article of religious faith, an experiential reality. Bharati had a high opinion of Whitman, and felt not only attracted to his masculine verse without metre or rhyme, but also to its primordial force and precipitancy, and its urgent concern with the varieties of common humanity. Hadn't Whitman said in 'I hear America singing':

> I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
> Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be
> blithe and strong,
> The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam
> The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or
> leaves off work. . .

And so on,—the boatman, the shoemaker, the hatter, the woodcutter, the ploughboy, the mother, the young wife at work—each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else, the day what belongs to it, and the night what belongs to it alone. So too, in poem after poem, Bharati described the varied, vast, bounteous, land of India, and the many races that mingle to give its inhabitants a variegated complexity of accomplishments and character. For Bharati, India is Bharat the Mother who struggles, hopes, despairs and will ultimately master and transcend the current budget of limitations. This Mother is ageless, ever young; she is sworn to righteousness, and can attain the

poise of Yoga; she is a demoness in revenge, and a lover of poetry and music; she glows in freedom's image, and she is the lighthouse of the Spirit for the whole world. Bharati's vision dwells not alone in the broader outlines, but also, like Whitman's, on the personal and the particular. The warriors of Tamil Nad and Andhra, the valorous Rajputs, the indomitable Mahrattas, the self-sacrificing Tulus, these at their best have been half-divine. With such examples to inspire, endless indeed were the unfolding future possibilities, for brawn and brain would together create a great New India:

> Umbrellas and implements of farming:
> gunny bags strong and iron nails:
> quick-moving vehicles of all kinds:
> earth-shaking ships: we'll make them all!

And yet, before the people could turn to the task of creating such a new world, the country's freedom had to be won first. Freedom was the golden bough, it had to be grown by sacrificing—if need be—everything else. The thrilled delight of freedom raged in Bharati's blood, and through his songs he transmitted it to everybody. Freedom, then, had first to be fought for and won—then cherished and safeguarded with anxious care:

> We fed with the ghee of our thoughts
> this beautiful lamp
> in our soul's sanctuary;
> can we see it extinguished now?

The true patriot will not be daunted by difficulties and setbacks, but strive unmindful of the sacrifices demanded by the cause:

> Although divorced from the joys of the hearth
> and consigned to dungeons dark;
> although forced to exchange
> a time of cheer for days of gloom;
> although ten million troubles raged
> to consume me entire;
> Freedom! Mother! I shall not forget
> to worship you.

Bharati was not, of course, unmindful of the conditions that had to be established if freedom was to come and endure. But what he saw actually about him greatly depressed him: a country with hoary traditions, but infested with poisonous superstitions; a people endowed with native bravery, but now afflicted with

fear and *tamasic* indifference; a history of self-sacrifice and resignation, but lately disfigured by the play of avarice and pettiness; a land united by Nature from Himalaya in the North to Kumari in the South, but now fragmented by race, caste, creed and language. Bharati could hardly fail to castigate such falsity, such fear, such folly:

> The heart can stand this no more –
> look at these will-less folk,
> frightened, ah! there's nothing
> they do not fear.
> Imagining ghosts they cry –
> on this tree, in that tank!
> It's lurking here, they shout.
> Of their own fears they die of terror.

In many lyrics Bharati spoke scathingly of the reigning ills, and in 'Bharat the Past' his frustration and anger blaze forth against current disabilities and discontents, preversions and prevarications. On the other hand, 'Bharat Dying and Resurgent Bharat' is a paean in praise of the future citizen who will arise like the phoenix from the flames of the present:

> Come, come you with the shining eyes,
> come, come you with the steely heart;
> come, come you with honeyed speech,
> come, broad-shouldered Titan, come!

It was in some of the political leaders of his time—Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi and others—that Bharati saw clear glimpses of the race of future Indians with the glow of freedom in their eyes and the poise of wisdom in their lives. While lyrics in praise of Dadabhai Naoroji, Tilak, Lajpat Rai and Chidambaram Pillai bring out their patriotism and readiness for sacrifice, the advent of Mahatma Gandhi gives the poet the assurance of victory. Besides, in a pair of heroic poems, Bharati placed before his countrymen two shining examples of Indian manhood: Chatrapati Shivaji[4] and Guru Govind Singh.[5] In the former, Shivaji's powerful exhortation to his army is a call to action which is touched with universality, while the 'Guru Govind' poem is a veritable grammar of total loyalty and supreme self-sacrifice.

When Bharati was in Pondicherry, he came into fruitful contact with French poetry, and he admired in particular *La Marseillaise*, which he translated into Tamil verse. As a political

journalist, Bharati had to comment on freedom movements in foreign countries, and these interests were crystallised in the poems on Belgium and Russia, and the well-known poem on Mazzini's oath before the Association of Young Italy to free the country from alien rule. In fact, 'Mazzini's Oath' can be read as Bharati himself taking an oath to free his own motherland from the burden of British rule:

My wealth, body, soul itself
I cede to 'Youth Association'
founded for patriots
determined like myself.
Our *dharma* will unify
the motherland, make it free,
independent of others,
and a Republic now!. . . .
I shall make my people
realise for their good
unity is the sole means
to achieve our Goal;
righteousness the only way
to make victory endure.
I shall see that the alien
rules my land no more.

Foreign (Austrian) tyranny, disunity among the constituent Italian States, the fervour and tribulations of the exiled patriots, all struck responsive chords in the Indian situation, and Bharati's poem exploits the parallelism in a purposive way.

Certainly, Bharati's vision extended beyond Tamil Nad, and beyond the confines of India. While he was thus in no sense a parochial figure inspired by narrow loyalties of region or language, it was nevertheless inevitable that some of his finest songs should be in praise of his language and his homeland and his people. Rajaji (Rajagopalachari) has rightly remarked that Bharati was Agastya incarnate, who gave us Tamil afresh. If Sage Agastya of legend created Tamil long ages ago in the first instance, Bharati re-created it in the image of the modern world, and taught it a virile modern idiom. In just a few verses, Bharati memorably limns Tamil Nad and recalls her imperishable heritage:

As I think of my dear Tamil Nad,
sweet honey flows in my ears;
a new strength charges my breath
and I sing of my ancestral land. . .

Kaveri, Palar, the south Pennar,
the Vaigai, Tambravarni—
such perennial rivers make the land
an emerald landscape. . .
The Cape is in eternal trance
edging the blue seas;
from there to Venkata Hill
the spread of Tamil glory. . .
Her fame rose sky-high
with Valluvar's advent—
and the Epic of the Ankle
sets hearts aflame.

But with all this love for his land, people and culture, Bharati was no chauvinist, for Tamil was but one of the splendid instruments Mother Bharat used for her self-expression, and the land of the Tamils too was not more than an integral important part of Bharat's manifold puissance and majesty. In such a poem as 'Bharat our Land'—

The mighty Himavant is ours –
there's no equal anywhere on earth;
the generous Ganga is ours—
which other river can match her grace?

Bharati is engaged in projecting India as a whole before our consciousness, a unified vision of India in all her physical beauty and grandeur, and with all her intellectual and spiritual qualities and powers. This is the reason why Bharati's poetry becomes the authentic voice of India speaking to the whole world. For a pluralistic country like India so fatally prone to cultivate narrow loyalties based on religion, caste, sect, region or language, this projection of the physical, intellectual and spiritual power and personality of United India, is perhaps Bharati's greatest contribution as our poet of patriotism.

DEVOTIONAL POETRY

Bharati was a singer with many voices. There was the secular poet of patriotism, there was the devotional poet, there was the epic and dramatic poet, there was the spiritual explorer, and there was the pure poet of simple joys and familiar things—for example, of a ray of the moon, a sparrow's twitter or the swing of a rope. But next only to his patriotic poetry, it is for his devotional poems that Bharati is universally celebrated. These are about seventy in number, to which may be added the twenty-

five 'knowledge hymns'. Many of these have been set to music and popularised by accomplished musicians, and are now part of the popular culture of Tamil Nad.

Throughout his life, Bharati delighted in the Puranic lore of India, and he was an intense *bhakta* as well. He was conscious of the spirit in its divers manifestations and *vibhutis*. Avoiding mere bigotry, he sang melodiously the praises of Ganapati, Kartikeya, Rama and Krishna—as also of Allah and Jesus Christ. His most sustained devotional poem, however, is dedicated to the Manakkula Vinayakar at Pondicherry. It is the cry of a devotee in distress, which is at the same time the ecstatic thanksgiving of a soul whom no sorrow can daunt or overwhelm. This extraordinary poem is a garland strung with verses in four different metres—*venba*, *kalithurai*, *virutham* and *ahaval*—following one another in cycle after cycle. His fond praises of the deity are frequently interspersed with the lights of the higher knowledge, as under:

Duty be this:
self-control,
removing others' sorrows,
praying for others' welfare:
Praising that one God—
Vinayaka, Muruga with the lance,
Narayana, Siva austere—
and known elsewhere
as Allah, Jehovah.

Difficulties do not dampen his spirits, for Bharati sees his path clearly. "My work is poetry, service to the Motherland, and eternal vigilance", Bharati assures Vinayaka:

I have sought guidance
at your holy feet
to rule my heart,
and live in gladness
with sun-lit
Knowledge.

"Love is the greatest penance", says Bharati, and he almost laughs at the grinning fates:

No fear, no death by water:
no shame, no body's trembling;
no sin, no hiding:
we shall nothing fear.
Let the earth quake, yet fear not!
Let the sea boil and rise, be not afraid!

We shall fear none and nothing
nor place nor time.
The sky is here, and the moon too;
The sun, wind and water,
fire, earth, the moon and stars;
We have body, life and mind,
food for life and maids to love,
songs to hear, and the world to see,
And Ganapati's name to chant—
eternal these. . .

Apart from the Krishna songs in the sequence *Kannan Pattu*, Bharati wrote occasional verses on Krishna whom he characterised as the fount of knowledge, honey of life and the seed within:

When will you rid me
of this sense of insignificance?
How shall I grow one with you,
O Govinda,
only seeing you
in air, bird, trees,
clouds, fields,
the immense sky,
the deep ocean,
and on earth
and in my home?

The doubling of private poverty with his passionate love of freedom and poetry led Bharati to indite 'Three Loves' in which he evokes Saraswati, Lakshmi and Kali. He had fallen in love with Saraswati the goddess of knowledge as a child, and this love had taken entire possession of him:

Have I ever slackened?
Since that entranced meeting
I have been as one mad –
talking during the day,
dreaming at night –
All my thoughts in her!
Nothing dislodged this love
of Saraswati
till I was
twenty-three.

From twenty-three the cares of a householder involved Bharati in a game of hide-and-seek with Lakshmi the goddess of bounty. The poet seeks her company, and would gladly embrace her, but she keeps aloof with a tantalising smile! His freedom from both loves and hates was achieved only when he beyonded,

as it were, both Saraswati and Lakshmi and was vouchsafed a vision of the Divine Mother as Kali. As the supreme creatrix, Kali held Bharati's heart in thrall for the rest of his life.

The lyrics Bharati composed on Kali form a group by themselves. Indeed the Shakti idea pervades all his later work. As early as 1906, when he met Sister Nivedita in Calcutta, he had at a glance recognised in her the manifestation of Shakti. In his poetry, he may also have been influenced by Nivedita's vision as memorably described in her *Kali, the Mother:*

> But Kali comes closer to us than these. Others we admire; others we love; to Her we belong. Whether we know it or not, we are Her children, playing round Her knees. Life is but a game of hide-and-seek with Her, and if, in its course, we have the chance to touch Her feet, who can measure the shock of the divine energy that enters into us? Who can utter the rapture of our cry of 'Mother'?

During his early first creative spell at Madras when he was rapidly turning out patriotic songs, he also began equating India with Shakti herself:

> Where was the dread bow
> that laid low the Lanka hordes?
> It was our terrible Mother's —
> the Aryan Queen, Mother Bharat.

Shakti is the power we recognise behind the movements of history and dreams of mythology; and Shakti inspires our hopes and achievements, our dreams and visions. It was Her bow that destroyed Indrajit,[6] Her hand that wrote the Veda, Her shoulders that held the Gandiva.[7] In the years of his exile at Pondicherry, Bharati was initiated into the mystical tremendum of Shakti-tattva during his close association with Sri Aurobindo whose Yoga was based upon an absolute surrender to the Divine Mother. Bharati himself was to approach Her, now as Lakshmi, now as Saraswati, Kali, Gomati, Valli, Kannamma, Radha, or Muthumari, but behind the veil it was Shakti all the time. A whole passage is devoted to Her in Bharati's prose poems:

> In the flood of Shakti the Sun is a bubble.
> In the lake of Shakti the Sun is a blossom.
> Shakti is all-pervading, endless, limitless.

All the rainbow tints of her personality are explored by Bharati: She is lovable, gentle, auspicious, maternal; but at other times she is but a tease, she is an irritant, she assumes a terrible form.

She is also part of Nature, and part of ourselves. If She is long suffering like a Hindu woman, she can also upredictably turn into a volcanic force or avenging fury, like Panchali Draupadi in the Court. But why waste words on descriptions that are only *circulus in definiendo*?

Shakti—Mahashakti—Parashakti - Shivashakti: the names are powers and incantations and presences, and fill and charge all life and the universe. In the poem 'Shiva Shakti', Bharati writes:

Some describe You as Nature,
others see in You the elemental Five;
Some equate You with the primordial Force,
and some call You fire, wisdom, god.
O wondrous Mother mine,
'AUM' is all the homage
that we can offer to You!
Enlighten and bless us, Mother.

In another long poem 'Self-surrender to Shakti', Bharati offers hand, eye, ear, tongue, shoulders, feet, heart, mind, thought, all of himself—every limb, every faculty—to the service of Shakti. The mere utterance of the word 'Shakti' can be an auspicious spell and bring about a seachange.

I have faith in Veda that teaches
the Way of Faith. . .
O mind, only say 'Shakti',
and Shakti gives us
life here and hereafter,
guards us from fear
of shaft and fire,
poison and sickness.

All energy is the play of Shakti, and all life and knowledge flow from Her. 'Shakti-k-koothu' is a call to dance with Shakti's name on one's lips, for that will win the nectar of delight. What, after all, is Shakti? Bharati sees Her as a state of being, a condition of awakened consciousness:

Shakti is the sorrowless state,
vigilant wakefulness,
love's fruit,
male heroism;
Shakti is joy's fulfilment,
thought's glow,
the work on hand,
the crown of Realisation.

It is in such a state of grace that the poet affirms:

The incandescence of the stars above,
the high velocity of the winds,
the boundlessness of the space beyond,
the great joy in my heart—'tis all Her grace.

Shakti's omnipresence is reiterated in another poem also:

You manifest as all, O Kali,
everywhere you;
the bad and the good,
aren't they the divine's play?
The five elements, O Kali,
and the senses, all Yourself;
O Kali, you are knowledge
beyond the mind.

Bharati's Shakti poetry reaches the very acme of apocalyptic recordation in 'Oozhi-k-koothu'. Life, death and renewal, creation, destruction and resurrection, these cycles are part of Shakti's cosmic dance and drama of the play of manifestation. In this great poem, Bharati captures the *terribilita* of the Mother's dance, the terror and the glory of the world's destruction, which is the inevitable prelude to the resurrection. Word and rhythm coalesce to produce here a multi-dimensional effect. Mother Shakti's divine frenzy of cosmic destruction is arrested and spent only with the intervention of Shiva in his auspicious form. Together they now take up the task of rebuilding the world on new foundations.

But while the manifestations of Shakti may be manifold and even seemingly contrarious, the Mother is *one* and not many. The ultimate secret is Brahma-knowledge, not sectarian half-truths and sparks of controversy. Thus while the prayer-songs feed the hungering heart and soul, the knowledge-hymns turn the mind towards illumination so that the cloud of Illusion, the mists of Maya, may pass away. Here Bharati speaks almost in the Vedantic voice of Vivekananda:

Having vanquished the demon Fear,
and killed the reptile Lie,
we have embraced the Veda's path
that leads to Brahma-Knowledge.

The same Vedantic defiance of Death may be heard also here:

Life's Illusion!
You may confront me
with a million ills,
But you cannot face
my illumined mind.

Illusion!
When we're ready to die,
the sea itself is nothing.
And death is nothing,
for the body is false!

Bharati the poet of freedom and Bharati the laureate of the Spirit as Parashakti were really one and the same person. He was a patriot as well as universal man, the worshipper of Bharat the Mother as well as Parashakti the supreme world-creatrix. To win national freedom no less than to achieve the soul's liberation, the recipe was the same: banish fear, worship the Mother, serve her with single-minded devotion, and make total surrender to her.

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

Bharati's miscellaneous poems—in their quality as well as range—are a tribute to his vitality and his amazing versatility. Even in the days of his editorial work on a daily newspaper, he published poems to season his political journalism. His devotional heart and his Vedantic spirit were alike admirably attuned to the lyrical mode. Lisping in numbers was even otherwise as natural to him as young shoots appearing on a tree in spring. A view of the sea, a beggar singing a particular tune, a sparrow pecking at scattered grains of rice, a seascape seen in reflection from his daughter's description,—and at once Bharati would begin improvising a song in his melodious voice. Watching his children laboriously learning the Tamil alphabet, he felt impelled to compose his *Puthia Athisoodi*. The composition is a pocket-book of ethics, and Bharati deftly introduces his own views with sudden exhortations like 'Praise handicrafts!', 'Curse astrology!' and, 'Modernise scripture!' And in the following passage, Bharati underlines the unity of all religions:

Wearer of Athi leaves and the young moon,
the ash-smeared in an eternal trance;[8]
The dark-hued asleep on the ocean;[9]
Revealer of wisdom to Muhammed;
Father of Jesus. . .
Even thus different sects describe
that eternal One; its nature is
effulgent knowledge;
He who knows That is free from care;
may we praise that Grace

and gain immortal life.

Bharati's *Pappa Pattu*, written originally for his little daughter Shakuntala, is exhortation turned into song, and has now passed into the currency of common idiom. Bharati here gives a growing child a whole programme for the day—

Arise and read at dawn,
then sing devotional songs,
and play in the evening;
be this your routine, child!

He exhorts the child never to lie, and always to love all living things. Good thought and good speech are to be cultivated and Bharat the Mother is to be venerated and worshipped—

The land of the Vedas,
and of great warriors,
she's stainless Hindustan;
worship her as Mother!

Bharati's anger at the prevalence of the caste system flares up in some of the miscellaneous poems like 'Drum'. Women's emancipation was another subject that exercised his mind deeply. Being a devotee of Shakti, woman as woman evoked in Bharati feelings of admiration and wonder. After meeting Sister Nivedita in 1906, he scrupulously followed her commandment to treat woman as equal to man. He wrote widely and lectured ceaselessly on the subject, and in fact his bold attempts to put his theory into practice brought upon him a measure of ostracism. But unmindful of the frowns from the orthodox, Bharati went his own way and reaffirmed his faith over and over again:

Women's *dharma* destroys *adharma*,
let's dance in their Praise!

Bharati also greeted the 'future woman' as an emanation of Shiva, as the redeemer of mankind:

Hail, and sing her victory!
Sustain this flame, the modern girl,
to change this world for better days
and make us deathless all.
Mother Might has herself become
this glorious graceful maid,
to reveal Truth's avenues
and lead us to the Goal.

No mere amazon this, the future woman, for Love will be her main sustaining force:

'Hail holy Mother!' to the beat of the drum;
'Hail holy Mother!' to the flute's golden tune.

We shall sweep the blue firmament itself
in honour of a bright-eyed girl.

'A Dream' and 'Bharati 66' are two unfinished autobiographical narratives comprising 49 and 66 stanzas respectively, and making up a total of about 1000 lines. In these two poems, Bharati wears his heart upon his sleeve, exhibiting his warts, wounds and hurts; but the hero as poet too slowly swims to the view, and it is cumulatively a striking and even an inspiring—though also a tremblingly—human picture. In the first, Bharati speaks of his first love, Poesy and the situation is not unlike Dante's first meeting with Beatrice, so movingly and hauntingly described in *Vita Nuova*. It had been, for Bharati, a complete union like that of "two birds in the forest." The poet's run-away enthusiasm for ancient Tamil poetry was, however, frowned upon by his father who wanted his son to have a sound English education. But Bharati went to school in Tirunelveli only to please his father, and his heart was elsewhere. The narrative ends with his father's death, when clouds temporarily closed upon the family fortunes.

The second poem, 'Bharati 66', is more difficult to describe: it is rather in the nature of a spiritual self-exploration—a pilgrimage of the mind, a testament of the soul. From 1910 onwards, Bharati was increasingly concerned with the possibility of man's conquest of Death. In this preoccupation, he was but following the Tamil Siddha tradition highlighted by seer-poets like Tirumoolar and Pattinathar and, in more recent times, by Tayumanava and Ramalingaswami who are said to have achieved the transcendence of Death. The *siddha* poetry is usually cast in the form of a teacher's address to an initiate, and following this tradition, 'Bharati 66' is addressed to the poet's young friend, Kuvalai Kannan. At the outset the inquiring mind pauses to solve the problem of problems, Death. Isn't anger the originating cause of Death?

Death is conquered
when anger and desire cease;
first overcome anger;
no more mortality, then!

The fire of anger waxes in human beings because we fail in Knowledge and are imprisoned in the ego. But even more than Knowledge, there is need for Divine Grace. Patience and an unshakable faith in the Divine are the lessons Bharati reads in

the Puranic Prahlada myth:

'Speak out: Where is Hari your Lord?'
Thus growling asked Hiranya.
Good Prahlad his son answered:
'He's in the pillar, he's in a blade!'
Not an atom subsists, but the great God
Gives it leave; no substance here,
But Mahashakti is there. No pain, no worry,
Since all is only God.

Bharati also pays a magnificent tribute to his spiritual preceptors. Kullaswamiyar and other siddhas like Govindaswami and Yazhpanaswami. Faith in the Divine, freedom from fear, devotion and desirelessness—these could lead to immortality. But the desire for immortality should be preceded by a feeling of equality with woman, respect for her as mother, and also the right understanding attitude towards the various world religions. Buddhism, Zorastrianism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Hebraism, Taoism, Confucianism: these many religions had but a single core of spiritual sustenance:

I will give you the Word
at the heart of all the Faiths:
You are God, you are God, you are the Lord;
tatvamasi, tatvamasi, Thou art That!
It is the blanket of Ignorance
that denies you are this earth's God.
You are God; remove the obscuring veil
and say 'I am Shiva' ever and always.

PROSE POETRY

The prose poems of Bharati are in a class apart. They were certainly the result of his absorption in the Vedas in his Pondicherry days. Sri Aurobindo was then engaged in an intuitive or spiritual interpretation of the Vedic hymns, and Bharati, Srinivasachari and a few others used to spend their evenings listening to him. The Nature mysticism of the Riks (especially the hymns to Agni or the 'Mystic Fire') inspired Bharati to compose 'Let's make a Fire' and 'Sacrificial Fire.' The award of the Nobel Prize to Tagore followed by the immense vogue for the prose poems in the English *Gitanjali* was another inspiration to Bharati. As if a spring had been struck, suddenly prose poetry flowed freely from his pen. While lacking the formal discipline of metre and other embellishments of formal verse, these prose

poems of Bharati have nevertheless an energy of utterance and opulence of imagery that carry all before them. Grouped under six sub-headings—*Spectacle, Shakti, Wind, Ocean, Earth-Scene* and *Freedom*—the poems seem to hark back to the Veda, and sometimes to Whitman, and sometimes to Tagore, but in their total articulation they are characteristically of the Bharati vintage. *Spectacle* begins with an evocation of the all-pervasive world:

> The world is charged with sweetness.
> The sky is sweetly fashioned.
> The air is sweet.
> Fire, water, earth,
> all is sweet.

Then follows an evocation of the Sun:

> You are light, you are spark,
> you are the unravelling,
> you are the scene.
> Lightning, ruby, glowing fire, shooting flame—
> all these are your emanations.
> The eye is your home.

Bharati's deft interweaving of sun, dawn, lightning, fire and light under the Vedic inspiration gives his poems a rare freshness, beauty and power, and the cumulative effect has almost the quality of an incantation. And in *Shakti*, Bharati almost leaps like an Empedocles into the utmost mystery of things. Shakti is the primordial universal power dwelling in sun and flower, flood and lake; an eternal power barrierless and endless, exemplified in movement in immobility, poise in motion and in every spurt of action and in every exercise in concentration. Shakti is at once creator and preserver and destroyer, and she is the sure bringer of benevolent Grace.

The section, *Wind*, is another world of voices and meanings and tremendous silences. 'Wind'—'Vayu' of the Vedas—is the very life-breath of man, and 'wind' is also the originator of sandstorms and cyclones. Being on the whole a benefactor, he deserves a tidier welcome than he usually gets in human habitations with their filth and dirt:

> No slush across his path,
> nor odours foul,
> nor rotting bits;
> no dust,
> nor dirt of any kind

Comes the Air.
Let us clean his path
and sprinkle water,
Let us foster groves
and gardens
on his way.
Let us burn incense
on his path
May he come as medicine.
May he come as nectar,
Obeisance to Air.
He is Shakti's offspring.

In the next section, *Ocean*, Bharati gives spontaneous expression to the emotions that surged in him as he spent hours sitting on the Pondicherry beach. The concluding section, *Earth-Scene*, scintillates with fantasies like the parliament of birds. In one place the poet has a fling at the human mind:

Mind is the enemy within
and cuts at our roots.
Parasite Mind alone is the enemy.
Let us peck at it.
Let us tear it up.
Let us hunt it down.

There is also a meeting of the parliament of gods which probes the mystery of human unhappiness:

Long ages ago, the cloudy dark Satan destroyed
all the good we had designed for Man.
'The gods are powerless, the demons are mighty.
Dharma is impotent, strong is adharma.
Truth is mere rubbish, mighty is falsehood.
Joy wilts, sorrow triumphs.'
Thus was evil born on earth.
Mankind was perplexed: the inspired word
of Viswamitra, Vasishta, Kasyapa
and other godly seers disappeared.
The deceptive gospels prospered.
Man thirsted for the Ganga, and found a mirage.

The gods then decide to help mankind to redeem itself by sending a forerunner, a child of the dawn. Appropriately enough, the prose poems conclude with this youth, Vasupati, singing of the new age, and of the great awakening to come:

A regiment to destroy
the demon Fear,
A delight that feeds

on the honey, Art:
Come, moonlight, come!

KANNAN PATTU (The Krishna Songs)

Kannan Pattu, consisting of a sequence of twenty-three lyrics, was published in 1917. An orchestration of many notes, the collection is an eloquent witness to Bharati's romantic imagination. Here he sings of Krishna as friend, mother, father, valet, king, child, teacher, boy, lover, lady love,—and God. The Tamil Vaishnava mystics, the Alwars, often sounded many variations on the perennial theme of Krishna as child and as lover; Bharati's splendid improvisations are but an extension of the Alwar tradition. His identification with the Krishna myth was indeed absolute, and he rings the changes in Krishna's roles with a singular and compelling facility, and in the result the songs strike responsive chords in our hearts at once. As Bharati himself wrote although in a different context:

> He who creates literature that cannot be understood by the common reader, shrouds that power by a jet-black stuff. He does not drape the power with pearl white cloth. The life of literature lies in clarity and truth. Only that writing which has this life can be described as inspired.

Bharati's songs—not least, the Krishna songs—certainly reach the bull's eye like an arrow from the Gandiva, and this was partly the reason that he was able to engineer the renaissance in modern Tamil poetry.

These Krishna songs are, of course, a variegated musical feast. Some are humorous, some are sublime. The song 'Krishna —My Mother' has its own poignancy, for Bharati's mother had died when he was a mere boy and he needs must feel the loss throughout his adult years. Of this particular song, Bharati has left a prose rendering in English, which is itself a piece of poetry. Bharati conceives of Krishna as a divine mother who hugs her child "with her arms of ethereal space" and places him "on her lap of earth". Then she tells the child tales without number:

> And some of the tales I call by the name of pleasures, evolutions, victories. Yet others come to me as pains, defeats and falls; stories, all these, that my Mother recounts to suit my various moods and stages, lovingly told, ever entrancing.

Krishna the Mother gives him also toys—the moon, the sun, the

stars, rivers and hills. For play-mates, there are birds, beasts and fishes. And groves and gardens too, and nice things to eat, and a whole tale of raptures. Nay more:

> And, endless sciences and arts she has ordained and, nobler than all these divine wisdom—for my serious hours.
>
> But when the lighter mood is on me and I would fain laugh and be merry, many are the jokes she has planned to amuse me with: the lies of priests, the comic feats of kings, the hypocrisies of age and the silly cares of youth.

Likewise, Krishna as father, Krishna as valet, Krishna as student or as teacher, all are boldly conceived, while 'Krishna—My child' is a sheer lyrical cry of fantasy and love.

These fascinating diverse disguises of the Lord in his terrestrial play lead up to the utterly marvellous 'Krishna—My Beloved', which is verily the saga of the soul's seeking and finding of the Divine. The following lines describe a moment of distraction:

> Forgotten is the face beloved—
> ah! my friend! dare I say this?
> The heart has not forgotten the love—
> yet how could the mind forget the face? –
> The bee forgetting honey,
> the flower forgetting light,
> the field forgetting the sky—
> can such things be on the earth?

But these pangs are exceeded at the moment of reunion, and there will be no more partings then!

Krishna viewed as the very quintessence of womanhood is one more facet of the multifoliate Divine. And Bharati sings as one who has daily experienced this Divine omnipresence:

> In the heaving sea I saw your face,
> and in the azure sky;
> in that thick foam I saw your face,
> and in these tiny bubbles;
> searching every inch of cloud,
> I found your face alone.
> Hearing running laughter at my back,
> pushed aside your hands
> and turned behind and saw your face.

In yet another poem, 'In Each Other's Arms', the precipitant rhythm of the original is somehow retained in Bharati's own English verse translation:

As life to Pulse, and Gold to rings,
As star to planet, soul to things,
So Krishna, Love, art thou to me,
Thou, the Force, I, Victory;—
And all the joys of Heaven and Earth
In thee, O Krishna, have their birth,
Eternal glory, endless Might,
Heart of Mine, O Light, O Light!

The whole fantastic series ends with a poem on the mystery and fulfilment of *atmasamarpana*, total self-surrender to the Divine:

Mother, as we know not the right from wrong,
Instal the right and drive wrong away!
I take refuge in you,
Krishna my mother.

In his foreword to the second edition of *Kannan Pattu*, V.V.S. Iyer traced the evolution of Bharati's Krishna-consciousness. At the time of the political awakening around 1905, the vision that kindled the poet's imagination was the Lord of the *Gita* who exhorted Arjuna not to shrink from the impending struggle. Bharati's very first volume, *Janmabhoomi*, included this prayer to the Lord:

Brave warrior! Aryan Lord!
Thou destroyer of the demon-race!
Where is your *dharma*? Isn't yours the duty
To revive us, and chase Fear away?

Later on, however, responding to the vicissitudes of his chequered career as also the inspirations of his Vedic studies, Bharati was able to glimpse the many facets of Krishna. And the scintillating effect made by each of the songs in *Kannan Pattu* on the hearers has been very well brought out by Iyer:

> Those who had, in the peaceful evenings on the beach, bathed in the entrancing moonlight that transformed the blue sea into a milky ocean, and heard the poet singing in his rich voice his new songs with the pride of imagination and creative enthusiasm,—those would hold each song in the book as a priceless jewel.

PANCHALI SAPATHAM (Panchali's Vow)

Bharati was primarily a lyric poet; whether it was because he had no sustained spells of leisure or because he lacked the stamina or the calm of mind to structure on a vast scale, he wrote no epic, although he managed to turn out hundreds of lyrics.

However, during those difficult days in 1912 when his political journalism had no publishing avenues due to repression by Government, Bharati had at last time enough to attempt a major work. With an unerring instinct, he took his theme from the *Mahabharata*. In fact, he described his *Panchali Sapatham* as no more than a translation of the relevant episodes in the ancient national epic. But this is true only upto a point, for the main moves in *Panchali Sapatham* are indeed derived from Vyasa: the game of dice, Vikarna's righteous stand, the outrage on Draupadi, Bhima's explosive anger and Arjuna's mollifying reply. With a sure sense of the dynamics of epic action, Bharati chose this sequence of events culminating in the terrible vow of Draupadi as the proper theme of a poem of epic magnitude in modern Tamil. Referring to his ambitious attempt to scale epic heights on the wings of the everyday rhythms of contemporary Tamil speech, Bharati wrote in the preface to the first part published in 1912 (the second part was published posthumously in 1924):

> Simple phrases, simple style, easily received prosody, the rhythms liked by the common man: he who creates an epic with these attributes gives our mother tongue, Tamil, a fresh lease of life. It should be written in such a way that all the Tamils with even a smattering of literary training and knowledge could grasp the meaning, and at the same time the writing must not degenerate from the level of poetry.
>
> It is a mighty job, and my talents are few. I publish this effort only because of my love and devotion to Tamil. Not as an exemplar, but as a pathfinder.

Despite this commendable modesty, Bharati's poem did place before the Tamils a truly shining example of a modern epic in *Panchali Sapatham*. It has remained popular for over half a century, and has even been dramatised on the stage with resounding success.

On the face of it, *Panchali Sapatham* appears to be a series of balladic narratives swaying to a variety of metres around a nightmarish central crisis. Bharati himself has said that these rhythmic patterns helped him to project the epic action with effective ease. But *Panchali Sapatham* has also a conscious epic structure, with attendant attributes like the conference of the gods, the conference of the heroes, and the conference of the anti-heroes. The language of the poem too is of a piece with its theme: there is

no sugariness or anaemic simplicity. Instead, the words have often the rumble of thunder and the blinding glare of lightning reflecting the shifting moods and situations. An impressive epic dignity quickly builds up in the contours of modern Tamil speech, and there are also cascades of similes all along the heady climb of the action. Like hill-ranges one beyond the other, there are five *sargas* (Cantos) with their sub-divisions and seventy-three lyric clusters, and together they make an impressive integral whole.

Draupadi and Duryodhana are the protagonists of the epic. The other characters—Sakuni, Karna and the Kurus behind Duryodhana, Vikarna and the Pandavas behind Draupadi—have but secondary roles. Duryodhana is the son of Darkness, which is rendered concrete in the blind Dhritarashtra; and Draupadi is the daughter of Light, symbolised in the fire-sacrifice of Drupada her father which occasioned her birth. Duryodhana's cardinal sin is envy, and the immitigable hatred that is born of such envy. He has everything, yet feels a pauper because the Pandavas live and thrive, and are loved and respected. Bharati develops this epic simile to limn the mental state of Duryodhana:

> As when fire from earth's deep centre
> boils and makes way to the crust
> and its great heat melts the rocky hill
> and the lava streams away:
> The volcanic envy in his heart
> erupted in his mind and soul,
> All strength and manliness melted,
> valour and honour were lost:
> And like a weak ill-treated woman,
> or a lost whimpering child,
> he became nought by feeding
> on the poison of envious thoughts.

Duryodhana's main force of envy centres itself in Draupadi the Pandava Queen. Hadn't she once laughed at his discomfiture in the Pandava Court? While Dhritarashtra would laugh away this laughter of a close relation, Duryodhana couldn't be so easily reconciled to the slight. The Pandavas must be destroyed; nothing else would satisfy Duryodhana! He accordingly takes counsel with his uncle, Sakuni, who insinuates that since by fair means the Pandavas may not be vanquished, foul means—a game of dice—should be tried. Duryodhana jumps at the idea, and

though reluctant at first, the aged Dhritarashtra agrees to send Vidura to Indraprastha to invite King Yudhishtira to Hastinapura to engage in a friendly game of dice. And so the battle is joined between the forces of Darkness and Light.

In the earlier, and over a greater, part of the poem, while Duryodhana bristles in haughty conversation with his father and the other Kurus, Draupadi speaks not a word. But she accompanies the Pandavas to Hastinapura, and the fateful dicing begins. With Sakuni's help, Duryodhana wins every time, and Yudhishthira loses his kingdom, his brothers, and even himself. He suddenly realises he has lost everything. But egged on by evil incarnate Sakuni, Yudhishtira agrees to stake Draupadi herself as a pawn to try a final skirmish with fate:

Would one kill a dear child
to get leather for sandals?
For the dicing between princes,
should Panchali be the Pawn?
The stakes agreed upon,
the evil uncle called
for the casting of the dice;
and the false ones rolled as willed.

The Kurus are elated, and the hellish scene is now enacted. Duryodhana puffs with evil and orders that Draupadi, now his slave, should be forcibly dragged to the Court. When wicked Duhshasana lays violent hands on Draupadi, not a kshatriya hand is raised in her defence. The Pandavas stand petrified, for what are they now but slaves? The blind old King, Dhritarashtra, the venerable elders including Bhishma himself, all desist from crossing Duryodhana's path. When the two protagonists, Draupadi and Duryodhana, meet at last in his Court as Victor and Slave, this climactic moment for him is also the beginning of his end. In Bharati's epic, from now on there is a decisive change in their roles. We hear Duryodhana speak no more, he apparently can find words no more, and becomes seized with a sullen graveyard silence. It is as though he were progressively shrinking before Draupadi's personality of light and fire, as though he were being irresistibly eaten up by her blaze of glory, and as though the process of his doomed disintegration had indeed begun. On the other hand, Draupadi, who had been silent hitherto, now steadily rises in stature, although seemingly in desperate straits, and dwarfs everybody around her in the Court. When on her appeal-

ing to him Bhishma talks vaguely of the sanctions of *dharma*, Draupadi turns fiercely on him to expose his casuistries. Presently follows Bhima's attack on Yudhishthira, culminating in the threat that he would burn the hand that had diced and lost everything. After Arjuna's remonstrations that contain Bhima's agitations, from the Kurus' side Vikarna rises to voice his protest against the infamous proceedings. It is Karna's role now to snub Vikarna and libel Draupadi. And so the incredible scene unrolls before us; Draupadi is a trapped and defiant creature surrounded by a hundred wild beasts; she is woman disgraced by perfidious Man. Generosity and justice have turned tail, *dharma* has been invoked in vain, heroism is but a villain in disguise, and elementary humanity is a thing of nought. When all ordinary supports crumble before her, Draupadi wakes up at last to her helplessness as she is being forcibly unrobed by machiavellian Duhshasana, and it is then that she invokes supernatural aid in a single tremendous act of self-exceeding faith. Like the Gajendra[10] who appealed to Vishnu for succour when the crocodile had him in its vicious grip, Draupadi too makes a pointed—if seemingly despairing—appeal to God, to Krishna: and wonder of wonders, her prayer is heard, and she is saved indeed. Alike in her plight of total helplessness and in this moment of divine rescue and transfiguration, it is Draupadi who dominates the scene, and the rest are as nothing, less than nothing. She fills the entire spaces of the imperious Assembly Hall of the Kurus, and after fiercely resentful Bhima and Arjuna have spoken vowing to slay all the Kurus and Karna respectively, Draupadi speaks out too, no mere woman or queen now, but a phantom of fatality, avengeful fury, a mighty elemental force:

> Devi Draupadi said—
> 'In Parashakti's name I take vow:
> not till the fiend Duhshasana's red blood
> mingles with demon Duryodhana's,
> and I smear my tresses with their blood
> and then bathe and wash it all away—
> not till then will I gather again
> these my tresses unloosened and wild!'

The change from violence and vituperation to sepulchral silence on Duryodhana's part and from womanly silence to fiery speech and irrevocable vow-taking on Draupadi's gives the epic an hour-glass pattern of action and counter-action. There is

Duryodhana, synonymous with darkness and *adharma*; when he is reduced to oblivion, there rises Draupadi, symbolising light and the return of *dharma*. Two mighty opposites strive, but the vessel of Divine Grace wins the struggle, and takes the vow that pronounces the doom of the Kurus.

Apart from the main symbol of Light and Righteousness defeating Darkness and Duplicity, Bharati also invests Draupadi with a manifold significance. Her sorrows symbolise the heritage of the tribulations of all the generations of woman: woman as wife and as mother. She is instrumental in destroying the Kuru hordes—but alas, at what fearful cost! Again, Draupadi is particularly the symbol of Indian womanhood trying to free itself from centuries of oppression and obscurantism. By sleight of hand, Bharati projects the wrongs done to Draupadi as wrongs done to Indian womanhood in general. In Draupadi's lone and ultimately triumphant fight for survival, Bharati was no doubt predicting the re-making of the Indian woman with her backwardness and resignation in the mould of Mother Shakti, or Woman as Power. As the poet of patriotism, again, Bharati saw in Draupadi the very image of Mother India, enslaved and oppressed, but resolute and defiant still. Perhaps Bharati had by 1912 come to the conclusion that neither the earlier politics of polite debate nor any terrorist action would wrest freedom for the nation. Only when Draupadi desists from her agonising self-pity and wrathful rejoinders and trusts herself entirely to the Divine, it is only then that succour comes to her and her enemies are overcome by defeat.

Finally, Draupadi is also Mahashakti symbolising with a unique effectiveness Bharati's personal mysticism. Draupadi the seeming victim of the Kurus' perfidy is really Parashakti in human form. When Draupadi is pawned in the game of dice, shock of dismay rocks the heavens, and only Shakti receives a new lease of life. There is, then, the immediate shift to the Assembly Hall, with Duryodhana crowing in triumph and decreeing the outrage on Draupadi. For the rest, having sowed the wind, he needs must reap the consequent whirlwind.

KUYIL PATTU (Kuyil's Song)

Kuyil Pattu is a narrative poem in 9 parts, totalling about 750 lines. It may be conveniently described as a fable in the Indian

tradition, for the principal character is a 'Kuyil' (the Indian nightingale), and two of the other characters are a monkey and a bull. It is also a dream-sequence, for the poet assures us that it had come as a day-dream to him, and at the time of dreaming it had come clothed with more than ordinary reality. Like Keats in his *Ode to a Nightingale* Bharati too was apparently both enlightened and exhausted by his extraordinary experience.

Kuyil Pattu is certainly the most original and intriguing—and perhaps also the most sheerly enjoyable—of Bharati's poetic compositions. Of course it has none of the spiritual fervour and glow of *Kannan Pattu* nor the high seriousness and explosive power of *Panchali Sapatham*. But it is shot through and through with the *joie de vivre* of terrestrial existence, and manages to lift the reader to the high heavens of thoughtful laughter.

The story is easily told. One morning the poet finds himself in a luxurious garden, and there are neither birds nor bird-catchers. Only a solitary *Kuyil*, perched on a branch, sings a moving song in full-throated abandon. While the song of the kuyil, although tuneful in numbers, is in no recognisable human language, the poet's responsive heart seizes the true spirit of the kuyil's cry and its 'ku-ku-ku' becomes a three-fold repetition of one meaningful word after another; and so he transcribes the song as a poem in ten three-line stanzas—one of the most daring and astonishing of Bharati's poetical effusions. In each span, two contrasting words are linked purposively to produce whole spirals of meaning:

> Love, oh love without end
> and love failing,
> Death, but death for ever. . .
> Divine the poetic voice:
> but when poetry fails,
> only the dross of the earth. . .

When the song ends, the poet asks the kuyil the reason for her elegiac tune drenched in such sad-sweet ecstasy. "I seek love—or death!" says the kuyil, and ask the poet to meet her on the fourth day. The very next day, however, when he returns to the garden to see her again, he finds her shamelessly flirting with a monkey! The poet makes a wild movement to kill the monkey, but both bird and beast escape his wrath, and just disappear. The hapless disillusioned poet spends a wretched night, for alas!—in defiance of love and commonsense—he is in love with the

kuyil and feels utterly cheated as well. The next day he again makes a bee-line to the garden, as if under a fateful compulsion, and this time he finds the kuyil flirting no less shamelessly with a bull. Once more the poet makes a dash for the intruding rival with the same exasperating result, and the poet returns home depressed and disconsolate.

On the fourth day, the poet goes to the garden, not so much to keep his original appointment with the kuyil, but to be revenged on her wantonness and perfidy. The sight of the kuyil, however, softens him a little. The bird siezes the opportunity to tell the poet the story of her previous life. She had been a hill-chieftain's daughter, and her hand had been sought in marriage by her cousin Madan (meaning Bull). Her parents, however, had, wanted her to marry Kurangan (meaning Monkey). But she, Kuyili, lost her heart to a Chera prince, and while they were together, Madan and Kurangan had made a murderous attack on her lover, and all three had died. A sage had told Kuyili all this, and assured her that her beloved prince was now born as the poet. At this the delighted poet makes a gesture as if he would sieze her in a fond embrace, but suddenly the spell breaks, and the poet holds in his hands, not the bird, but a lovely woman of flawless beauty. But this rapture too is very short-lived. There is a sudden jerk of consciousness, and the poet wakes up, and realises that he has only been day-dreaming, and there lie about him only the frayed mat, the crumpled papers, and the other usual ingredients of an impecunious writer's study.

Admittedly, *Kuyil Pattu* is but a piece of fantasy. Perhaps it comes within the category of the Chaucerian enigmatic dream that teases us with its ambiguities and spirals of suggestion and challenges a rational interpretation; and indeed, as part of the whole whimsicality, Bharati himself throws such a challenge:

> I realised that garden, kuyil, love,
> the fable too were the emanation
> of my resourceful and scheming fancy
> fed by the beauteous evening.
> Although a fictional tale, O wise poets,
> could my story yield on closer study
> a deep philosophical meaning,
> won't you explain what it is indeed?

Taking up the challenge, one critic, P.M. Sundaram, interprets

the dream in terms of the Saiva concept of pati-pasu-pasam. The prince-poet is the Lord (pati), and kuyil is the soul (pasu); but before the soul can be united with the Lord, it has to shatter various illusive attachments (pasam). We may also see in the poem an Indian variation of the Western fable of Beauty and the Beast. Bharati, a romantic at heart, an admirer of Shelley and Keats, could certainly have toyed with such a fantasy in a movement of poetic exuberance. Or we may agree with K.P. Rajagopalan that the poem is simply a paean of Love:

> The kuyil is love, and love is immortal so long as it holds no commerce with life, but when it limits itself by wedding life, joy, must turn to sorrow.

Rajagopalan compares the image of love (the kuyil) that vanishes at the touch of reality to the figures in Keats's *Grecian Urn*:

> Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
> Though winning near the goal - yet, do not grieve;
> She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
> For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair.

Fable, romance, or dream-poem, *Kuyil Pattu* remains the reality, for its sensuous evocative poetry with its play of light and colour is yet to be surpassed—or even equalled—in any modern Tamil poem.

PROSE WRITINGS

Bharati's phenomenal fame as a poet has thrown his undoubted achievements as a writer of prose into the background. In fact, he was one of the first Tamils to release the language from the constraints of archaic usage and set it on the high road of simplicity, directness and clarity. Having begun his literary career as a translator of English articles into intelligible Tamil, he tried to use his mother tongue too with all the emotional nuances and intellectual resilence of the best modern prose in English, and his writing went direct to the mind and heart of the people. This magic of direct communication gave his essays, fables, short stories, conversational pieces and other writings a power and stamp of their own.

Jnana Ratham is rightly considered Bharati's prose masterpiece. It is an account of his imaginative wanderings in the 'Chariot of Knowledge'. He cannot enter the land of Upashanti (No-

worry), since his friend Mind accompanies him; but Gandharva Loka (the Land of Joy) is open to him. It is the dream-world Elysium, and Bharati's language glows with twilight's magic colours. Satya Loka or the Land of Truth is a spacious plateau of Light. There is then, this "too, too sullied" earth itself, and while wandering here, he encounters soul-killing worries. Then, after a trial by fire, he enters Dharma Loka (the Land of Righteousness) where the Lord of Dharma almost looks like Bal Gangadhar Tilak. It is, however, the Sage Kanva who offers to the narrator this piece of advice:

> It needs a greater heroism to kill Ignorance than to kill unrighteousness. The duty of Kshatriyas and Vaisyas is to guard people from physical harm. The Kshatriya guards dharma. The Brahmin guards knowledge. The Brahmin must have limitless strength, a limitless *tejas*. He must be purposive and heroic. The hosts of ignorance are illimitable. The spring of ignorance defies any drying up. The roots of ignorance are very deep. It is not easy to destroy the hosts, dry that spring and uproot that poison tree.

But the traveller cannot linger long in these heavens of the Ideal, for restlessness returns, and he finds himself back in his terrestrial home with its unsavoury surroundings and pettifogging worries. *Jnana Ratham* is quite a remarkable piece of writing, and is Bharati's version of a pilgrim's progress, with rather an anti-climax.

Bharati's autobiographical *Chinna Sankaran Kathai* and the novel *Chandrikayin Kathai* are both unfinished. While the former throws light on his Ettayapuram days, the latter revolves round the motif of widow-remarriage. It was a bold theme for his time, and two great social reformers—Viresalingam Pantulu and G. Subramania Iyer—are actually introduced into the narrative. Visalakshi the child-widow of the novel marries Viswanatha Sarma, an erstwhile *sannyasin*. But the novel being incomplete, it is difficult to imagine how Bharati intended the child Chandrikai, of whom we only get an unforgettable glimpse, to grow into girlhood and womanhood and work out her destiny.

In stories like 'Swarna Kumari', 'Kottaya Swami' and 'Chandra Theevu' and in conversational pieces like 'Tharasu', and 'Summa', Bharati's fancy, imagination and intellect find varied play. 'Navatantra Kathaigal', based on the *Panchatantra*,

introduces us to characters like the snake girl Rose, the clever Mani Iyer, the lion-king Viravarma and the donkey Rasikasiromani. Viveka Sastri sums up the moral of the stories as follows:

> *Bhakti* to God always bears fruit. But this adoration must be accompanied by understanding. The faith of the ignorant has no potency. One must ask for right knowledge first, when saluting God. Common sense is the starting point of all riches.

Bharati's Tamil translation of the *Gita* has become something of a classic in its own right. Bharati wrote also a luminous foreword to bring out the Gita's gospel of surrender and its plea for 'renunciation-in-action'. Neither asceticism nor illusion, but 'common-sense', offers the clue to the understanding of the *Gita*. It is lack of common sense that inflates the human ego and stands in the way of the larger love that should bind humanity. Such true love would mean identification with all and the soul's liberation from the sense of separativity and consequent misery.

Among Bharati's other translations may be mentioned the *Samadhi Padha* of Patanjali, the *Kena Upanishad*, and select Vedic hymns. It was the Veda that sowed the seed for the wish-yielding tree of India's eternal religion or Sanatana Dharma. The Riks are mantric poetry, for they were composed in the plenitude of true "seeing".

> As we read the poetry of the Rig Vedic sages, honey flows into our being: our knowledge is seized by a sudden frenzy.

Bharati chose for translation the hymns to the Vedic divinities: Indra, Agni, Mitra, Vayu, Aditi, Vak and the Aswins. Bharati's notes on these divinities bring out their true nature. "The life of literature", says Bharati, "lies in clarity and truth. Only the Word endowed with such life is known as Vak which is touched with divine Grace". The Veda's supreme merit is that it is at once Truth-seeing and Truth-communication through the uniquely potent rhythmic Word—the *mantra*.

ENGLISH WRITINGS

While no survey of Bharati's writings can really be exhaustive, for a considerable portion is still scattered in old magazines under divers assumed names, this Introduction will be incomplete without a reference to his English writings, in prose as

well as in verse. While he was not very enthusiastic about English when his father compelled him to go to school at Tirunelveli, it was a very different matter when Bharati returned to English at Benares. The Romantic poets were the "charmed magic casements" that opened his eyes to new horizons and filled him with wonder and infinite surmise; and he now read Shelley in English, Victor Hugo in French and Geothe in translation. Bharati assumed the nom-de-plume 'Shelley Dasan', and was also to establish a 'Shelleyan Guild' at Ettayapuram.

During the days of his assistant editorship on the *Swadesa Mitran*, he did translations from the English into Tamil, and in due course he began writing in English. These articles were duly published in *New India*, the *Commonweal* and *Arya*. Like his Tamil, Bharati's English too has native power as well as conversational ease. Some of these contributions, in prose as well as verse, have been collected in two volumes: *Essays and Other Prose Fragments* and *Agni and Other Poems and Translations*. In their Foreword, C.R. Reddy and K.S. Venkataramani have made this right assessment of Bharati's English writings:

> When a poetic soul like Bharati's, happy beyond dream in his own mother-tongue, turns to an alien language for the aching joy of self-expression, it is no surprise to find that the art becomes laden with a more serious thought. For the highest aim of self-expression even in art is after all self-realisation.

Of the poems in English, 'Time—a Vision' is a brilliantly evocative piece in which man is seen swimming against the tides of time to attain his goal:

> I was a mighty current with a breaking, maddening,
> terrible speed,
> Like that of the flaming forces that leap though the wilds
> of the mind.
> I saw it was Time.
> Then hands came down to lead us; and we swam divinely on
> Against the mad career of this Doom in a torrent's form.
> Onward, onward, onward, higher and still higher
> Precipice growing on precipice, further, dizzier than ever. . .

'Peace' written during Christmas 1916, has almost a Biblical severity and simplicity and beauty:

> My arms were of steel, of fire.
> But once I fought against God. I raised my head
> like a tower.
> My arms were of steel, of fire.

My pride was great, for folly hath pride.
And I hurt the weak for pleasure.
I preached that woman was a slave.
For I knew brother man was the same.
I cast small stones at birds, for joy of breaking wings.
I deemed it no stealth to steal from the shrine,
For I deemed that this God was but stone.
But no, but no.
This God is real, for He smote at pride.
And the proverb says: – The fear of God is
the beginning of wisdom.

The verse renderings from the devotional poetry of Nammalwar, Andal and Arunagiri[11] are equally satisfying.

Bharati's prose writings in English reveal his astonishing range of interests. Thus, for example, of Siddha literature:

But here, in India, we have a yogic literature which, in spite of many interpolations and mediaeval accretions still contains the most scientific and rational treatment of the question of consciously accelerating human evolution. . . . Firmly established in Mauna (the silence internal), fearless of death, disease and the devil, serene in the strength of God, and happy in the knowledge of immortality, resplendent in his energy, irresistible in his action, tireless in labour, and full-souled in service, the siddha lives amidst men, a representative of the will Divine, a veritable messenger from Heaven, protector of men, loving, elevating, immortalising.

Essays like 'Blunting the Imagination', 'The Crime of Caste', 'The Place of Woman' and 'Love and Marriage' come straight from Bharati's heart. But whatever the subject, there is an immediate vitality in the articulation which is well sustained by the hard bone-structure of the argument. Thus, on 'Free Speech', Bharati is uncompromising:

Free speech is the truest ally of every sensible Government. When you stifle men's voices, you embitter and harden their hearts. And this world is based on the mind: 'Thoughts are things'.

An old Indian writer says that the wise king should care more for the respect of a hundred thoughtful men than the blind allegiance of a million fools. And the first condition for any sort of state to be respected is to permit free speech in all things and to all parties.

Such, then, is the extraordinary range and variety and power—

God's plenty, in fact—that we find in the Bharati Canon. His all too brief life was chequered in the extreme: disappointments, privations and ailments dogged his footsteps: his long exile in Pondicherry was in many ways galling to him: the condition of the country and the people caused him endless agony and exasperation: his financial worries were chronic, and not easily to be shaken off. But there were compensations too: the trust and love of relations and friends, the consciousness of mission, the unfaltering vision of the future. His head was ever unbowed, his faith in his vocation as writer and poet was unwavering, and his consecration to the Mother—to Parashakti—was absolute. And he died as he had lived, the hero as patriot and poet, and the great poet was doubled with the true *bhakta*. But when he died, he had already given his name to a whole Age and imparted to it the fervour and hope and puissance and dynamism of the New Life. And it is gratifying that the great Age of Bharati has overflowed to the present day.

Vande Mataram[1]

We'll bow to the Mother,
Bharat the Mother.

No more caste or creed:
born in Bharat,
Brahmin and others
Mother's children all.
We'll bow to the Mother.

Aren't the lowliest of the low
the sharers of our life?
Shall we deem them aliens
who'll injure our interests?
We'll bow to the Mother.

Here flourish a thousand castes,
but no room for foreigners.
The Mother's children may quarrel,
yet they are brothers.
We'll bow to the Mother.

What is life without unity?
Division only spells ruin.
If we hold fast to this truth,
what more can we need?
We'll bow to the Mother.

Whatever may befall us,
we'll equally share it.
Thirty crores[2] shall thrive—
or all suffer defeat.
We'll bow to the Mother.

Ashamed of subjection,
the toil, shame and blister,
now shall we end it all
and sing in chorus
We'll bow to the Mother.

Bharat Our Land

The mighty Himavant[3] is ours—
there's no equal anywhere on earth.
The generous Ganga[4] is ours—
which other river can match her grace?
The sacred Upanishads are ours—
what scriptures else to name with them?
This sunny golden land is ours—
she's peerless, let's praise her!

Gallant warriors have lived here,
many a sage has sanctified this land.
The divinest music has been heard here,
and here all auspicious things are found.
Here Brahma-knowledge[5] has taken root,
and the Buddha preached his *dhamma* here.
Of hoary antiquity is Bharat,
she's peerless, let's praise her!

Danger shall not scare us any longer,
and poverty shall not sear our souls.
Self-interest shan't drive us to meanness,
and cowardly indifference shall cease for ever.
Here our land o'erflows with milk and honey,
and perennial is the supply of fruit and corn.
Ours is the famed Aryan land of Bharat:
she's peerless, let's praise her!

Salutation to Bharat

This, this is the land that saw
father and mother live and thrive.
This is the land where countless ancestors
lived their hoary lives and died.
Thoughts a thousand grew
and flourished in this land.
In remembrance of it all
may I not praise my land?
Let me sing time and again
Mother, I bow to you.
Mother, I bow to you.

This, this is the land that gave us
birth and suck and the light of knowledge.
This is the land where our mothers
lisped their first words and grew in wisdom.
Here in their pure virgin girlhood
they danced and sang in abandon.
Here too in river or tank
they cooled their lustrous bodies.
In their memory I sing:
Mother, I bow to you.
Mother, I bow to you.

This, this is the land where, as young women,
our mothers married and reared their hearths.
'twas here, here they knew the rapture
of motherhood, the pride of children.
Here the people's greatness soared high above
in a prodigal spread of temples;
and when they ceased to be, the gentle dust
mingled with the holy mother earth.
In commemoration may I sing:
Mother, I bow to you.
Mother, I bow to you.

Jaya Bharata

Mother, we bow to you!
Victorious Mother,
we bow to you.

Jai Hind! Jai Bharat!
Victory to Bharat!
Victory to Bharat!
Victory! Victory!
Mother, we bow

Men, women, gods
of Aryavarta[6]
sing in chorus
the exultant chant
Mother, we bow

Anguished in mind,
shrivelled in body,
the patriots still
cry from the depths
Mother, we bow

Be victory ours
or defeat and death,
we stand united
and raise the chant
Mother, we bow

Bharati, Mother Bharat, Rise!

The day has dawned: our penances have borne fruit,
and the dark night-shades are gone.
The bright golden rays seek everywhere—
and Knowledge, resplendent Sun, stands revealed.
Thousands are we your servants all,
crowding and waiting to make obeisance to you.

Still, still are you asleep, O Mother,
'tis strange! Rise, Mother mine!

The birds chirp, the drums resound,
the peal of freedom surges far and wide.
Hearken! the silvery trumpets blow!
See the people line up the streets!
Versed in the Vedas, the Brahmins pure
stand reciting your auspicious Name.
Life of my life! Nectarean essence!
Rise, O rise, Mother mine!

We see in the sky the light of the Sun,
we seek on earth the light of your eyes.
We have brought our hearts' efflorescence
to place at your jewelled feet.
The Scriptures are yours: and yours too the gift
of a million *mantric* words, O Mother.
You've wielded the spear and scared the demons away
purest of all, rise, Mother mine!

Do you not know our soul's yearning
to see the light of your eyes divine?
Golden-hued Mother! Darling daughter
of snow-crested Himavant!
How long shall we wait, what penances perform,
ere your grace descends to our midst?
Is it right that you should be slumbering yet?
Life of my life! Rise, Mother mine!

But Mother, knowest you not your child?
Can the mother sleep when the child awakes her?
Is there mother's heart unmoved by the cries of the child?
Mother! Great Bharat's Queen!
Do you not know that in eighteen languages sweet
we sing your praises in manifold ways?
Come, come, and give us the blessings of your reign!
Rise, O rise, Mother mine!

Phoenix

(Bharat Dying, and Resurgent Bharat)

I

You weak-shouldered mannikin, away, away,
you with the shrunken heart, away, away;
you of the listless face, away, away,
you with lack-lustre eyes, away, away.

You whose voice has lost its ring, away, away,
you whose skin has lost its shine, away, away,
you frightened chicken-heart, away, away,
you slave for ever, away, away.

Would you live degraded here,
a dog's life? Away, away!
Afraid of auspicious speech? Away, away!
Shameless beggar, away, away!

Would you deem as truth, and extol
all yesterdays' lies? Away, away!
Would you mistaking brand as a lie
the triumphant Truth? Away, away!

You'd learn, not the mother's speech,
but divers languages strange: away, away!
You'd talk of a hundred tomes,—not
profit from one true Book! Away, away.

Would you argue, advancing the casuist's
five hundred arguments? Away, away.
Must you build mire-sunk toy-houses,
reeking of filth? Away, away.

Do you prate of a hundred castes,
yet fail in the duties of any? Away, away.
Do you quote a hundred laws,
And genuflect for a pice? Away, away.

You purveyor of evil who recoil
when the blow returns, away, away.
You the gathered filth that obscures
our rarest gem, away, away.

II

Come, come, you with the shining eyes,
come, come, you with the steely heart;
come, come, you with the honeyed speech,
come, broad-shouldered Titan, come!

Come, come with a crystalline mind,
come, come to purge meanness here;
come, come to commiserate the poor,
come, come with the lion-gait!

Come, come to honour writings pure
as the only scriptures true;
come, come, you hater of lies
to checkmate falsehood's wiles.

Come, come with auspicious thoughts,
come, come with blameless limbs;
come, come to inhabit our land
and end the ancient curse.

Come, come you of Bharat resurgent,
come, come, you unequalled in prowess, come;
come, come as the Sun that rises
over a darkened land.

Come, come to restore in our midst
the lost glories of our land;
come, come to witness every virtue grow
and help to foster it here.

Come, come, with victory in your grasp,
come, come, modest in speech;

come, come, full-grown to manhood,
come, come, you of immaculate face.

Come, come, and translate thought into deed,
come, come, whose will is equal to desire;
come, come, take up the Herculean task
of forging the unity of our land.

In Praise of Tamil

Of languages
known to us, none
as sweet as Tamil.
Viewed as but slaves
or animals
by the world.
only the name 'Tamil'
redeems us.
Is it right?
Honey-sweet Tamil
should resound
o'er the earth.

Among poets of fame,
none like Kamban,
Valluvar, Ilango,[8]
anywhere on earth.
No self-praise this,
but the truth.
Yet are we dumb, deaf
and blind.
Listen!
For an assured future,
let Tamil ring again
in every street.

The hour's need: both
translation of

learned tomes,
and new creations
of deathless fame
in Tamil.
No more prattling
among ourselves
of past glory;
but compel world critics
acclaim our
poetic gems.

Words glow with life
when the truth-flame
shines in the heart.
As arts and poesy,
like rivers in spate,
rush forth,
the blind who wallowed
in ignorance
shall wake up.
The taste of sweet Tamil
can give on earth
the joy divine.

Freedom

We fostered this tree, Lord,
not with water, but tears.
Have we the heart now
to see it wither?

We fed with the ghee of our thoughts
this beautiful lamp
in our soul's sanctuary.
Can we see it extinguished now?

We secured this jewel
after a thousand years

of wearisome waiting.
Shall we lose it now?

Didn't the sages say
Righteousness must win?
Aren't past sufferings
of self-forged Karma[9] enough?

See'st not in our prisons
our revered leaders,
our Samsons at the mills,
suffering torments?

See'st not thousands
with frustrated hearts
feel perplexed in the extreme
like eyeless men?

See'st not youth
tortured by separation
from spouse and children
and running to seed?

Having lost your priceless gifts
we grovel in woe.
Who else but you can help
to recover what is lost?

Yours the grace that gave us
The bliss of freedom.
Would you have it taken away
by heartless usurpers?

Can life exist, O Lord,
were rains to fail?
Were freedom denied to us,
what, then, shall we do?

Giver of all gifts
when we are bare of deceit,

have you not seen
our blameless heart?

Is it for nought we torture
our body and soul?
Is it a pose that we
lament and writhe?

I ask what is within the gift of your grace,
and for service to you alone.
Can you not grant it, then,
pitying my plight?

Are our supplications
new to you?
Didn't our ancestors receive
all good things from you?

If eternal be your Rule
and the reign of Dharma,
ere it be too late indeed,
this gift of freedom give!

Thirst for Freedom

When will this thirst for freedom slake?
When will our love of slavery die?
When will our Mother's fetters break?
When will our tribulations cease?

Lord! Architect of the Bharat war,[10]
and sustainer of Aryan life!
Lead, lead us, to victory!
Is it right we remain slaves?

Are famine and disease alone our share?
For whom, then, are the laurels and fruits?
Would you abandon us, your suppliants?
Could the mother cast her child aside?

Brave Warrior! Aryan Lord!
Destroyer of the demon-race,
Where's your dharma? Isn't yours the duty
to revive us, and chase Fear away?

Ode to Freedom

Although divorced from the joys of the hearth
and consigned to dungeons dark;
although forced to exchange
a time of cheer for days of gloom;
although ten million troubles rage
to consume me entire;
Freedom! Mother! I shall not forget
to worship you.

Although incomparably rich
and widely learned and truly wise;
although eminently placed
and universally known;
although the darling of a friendly fate,—
what are men without freedom's breath?
When Your grace fails them, Mother,
men are corpses, no more.

A nation unlit by freedom,
can it be a nation indeed?
Can it harbour a soul? Can knowledge
prosper? Can industry thrive?
What hope for poetry,
the learned arts, or scripture?
Aren't they verily sinners all
that haven't tasted your milk, O Mother?

Mother, giver of deathless fame,
pitiable they that haven't your grace.
Disease claims them, and they die;
they know not the fruits of work;

wallowing in the crooked paths of life
they reap but curses and shame;
ignorant of a blameless life,
they have no happiness even in dreams.

To Mahatma Gandhi

In all the wide wide world,
this my Bharat land
lost freedom's breath
and lived degraded,
miserable and poor.
Now you are come, master,
to liberate us.
Long live Gandhi, my master!

An infallible plan you forged
that we be rich and free
having shed this slavery,
rear new life, and learn;
reap wisdom's harvest,
and boldly march ahead.
First among the sons of earth,
Undying fame is thine!

How shall we praise you?
as one whose choicest herbs
healed the cobra bite?
As one who held the hill as cover?[11]
You have outlined a plan
that's new, infallible,
to end this raging fever
of dire and dark subjection.

Dear as one's life to hold
the engineer of one's woes;
to know that all is God
and we are all His children;

Master! you have dared to harness
this prepotent moral force
to the murderous, strife-ridden
political fray.

You have firmly rejected
the violent terrorist's ways;
You've shown the nobler path
your soldiers should tread.
Only *satyagraha*[12] can wrest
freedom from slavery.
Let all earth forget war
and learn the ways of peace.

Guru Govind

I

Vikram: seventeen fifty-six.

In Anandpur lived
Guru Govind Singh
nectar of the brave
teacher, Lord of Hosts
warrior-source of Punjab's lions
ocean of knowledge, melodious poet,
magic-craftsman whose sword
could stay the falling heavens,—
Princely saviour of the world!

On that blest day when
orchards in fruition
gardens of smiling flowers
and tracts of green sward
chirped as if to bid welcome
"May your coming hither
prove auspicious!"
his disciples came together

to hear the Guru of growing fame.

"What will he say?
What new message?
What fresh duty will be imposed
to sweeten our lives
seven times seven?"
Thus thinking, shining like gods,
eager they stood before their Lord.

II

Suddenly on the royal platform
Stood a figure, luminous
in youth, strength and splendour.
His eyes blew divine flame.
A halo helmeted his head.
In his upraised arm, a sharp sword
belching fire, terrible to behold.
Like a horde of lions immobilised
before a magician from above,
seeing him, the numberless men
fell silent, and bowed their heads.

Heralded by the flashing sword,
the Son of God opened his lips
to unveil his inmost thoughts.
and volcanic the words erupted:

"I wish to plunge this sword
Into the heart of man;
Dharma thirsts for sacrificial blood.
Devotees! who amongst you dares
to bare his heart and spill red blood
and slake the Mother's thirst?"
Shaken for a moment, the disciples
had no words on their tongues.
A moment of total silence.
Then from amongst those assembled
a hero issued out and said:

"Gem of Gurus! I shall die by sword
to quench Dharma's thirst.
Thy blessing! Accept my offering!"

The saintly Guru smiled, and took him
into the temple, and
out of it presently flowed
a stream of blood seen by all.
Look! the Guru comes out smiling,
having made the sacrifice.
Standing there like flash of lightning,
holding the blood-stained sword
the great Guru spoke these words:

"I wish to plunge this blade again
into a living heart. The Mother wants
another sacrifice. Devotees!
Is there one more among you who'd slake
Kali's thirst with blood?"

A second hero advanced to meet
the challenge. Taking him inside,
the Guru made the sacrifice.
As the blood flowed, the people shivered.

And thus the Guru gave his calls
and totalled sacrifices five.

III

Men do not rise to greatness
through reasoned knowledge alone:
the truly great are those
that bare their breasts
to the blade's thirst and die;
they've found the Ultimate.
From a million devotees
'twas to pick out these blessed few
that the Guru, Lord of Grace,
had devised this strategem.

Flushed in exultation at countless
others like those five
ready still for sacrifice,
the Guru led out of the temple
the five warrior gems
who the faithful thought were in heaven
having died in sacrificial blood-bath.
They raised a lusty shout
and gazed at the five again and again.
Hail! the crest-jewel Guru!
Hail! the splendid lion-heart!

That avatar of Grace smiled
like the flaming sun,
embraced and blessed those five,
and spoke words like ocean's roar:

"Dear ones! know you not
Kali and Mother India are one!
'twas an illusion caused you fright
when I went in to sacrifice the five.
Would I kill one of you with my own hands?
Five times I hid the dear ones
to mount this fearful test and know
that you are patriots pure of heart.
Look, the five slain are here!
This test has blazed your glory.
My heart is light, gone my worries!"

IV

This ordeal by Guru Govind
Was the origin of the *Khalsa*[13].
The Way of the Illumined Select.
The first five were the Khalsa
as defined by the sainted Guru.

Ancient Bharat's people
had lost nor spirit nor manliness.
That a whole people could be brave

the Guru showed the world.
In days of yore, Krishna's epiphany
rang with superconscient speech
as witness to Bharat's immortality.
The Mother is forever young and strong
to sally forth in her self-defence.

Like the creator who out of five elements
Built the world, shining Khalsa too
was founded with five warriors.
Dharma prospered, tyrant Might
trembled, Goddess Freedom smiled.

V

Vikram: seventeen fifty-six

In the convened assembly
Guru Govind on the regal throne
a sight for the gods:
The noble sage, around him the five!
He robed and garlanded them
and kept them by his side,
dear as his eyes to him:

"Look! the first Khalsa
to guard our land and righteousness!"

From a nearby stream he poured
water into an iron cup
and stirred it with his sword
and gave his blessing.
His mind and senses in a trance
he spoke the vow: Goddess Victory
stepped into the assembly.
The sword that stirred the cup invoked
the warrior-mood of Bharat's men.
The whole gathering felt the thrill.
The Guru sprinkled holy water on the five
and touched their eyes with Grace.

VI

A new life began for Bharat
The disciples all took *diksha*
in sign of consecration,
and the Guru said: 'Dear ones!
Nectar is the *diksha* you've taken.
Rare grace, for whosoever gains this
has won immortality.
Hearken to me as I unfold
the imperatives of Dharma.
God is one, and all are brothers,
equal, human, all born free.
Batter down differences, disciples!
Separation is death! Let dividers
into a thousand castes perish.
You belong to the only brave caste
that guards *dharma*, truth, liberty,
and is the enemy of tyranny.
You're the strong caste with unshorn head,
the pledge of the iron band,
the austere undergarment and the sword.
No king for you, God is your king.
The Rule of Law is the only Law,
and wrong doing, your enemy.
Never belittle *dharma*
nor suffer *adharma*.
Long may you live with fame
serving the country's good!"

With this blessing, he ceased.
His disciples praised him, and raised
the great shout of victory.
Guru Govind's flag fluttered
high above: the world cheered
the beginning of the end
of Aurangzeb's reign.

Lokamanya Tilak[14]

May the name of Tilak
live for ever:
may tyranny fail
and crash for ever.

May the peal of freedom
ring on all sides:
and hell-like slavery
decline and die.

May truth-beguiling darkness
scatter away:
may fear in its endless forms
ever cease to be.

He built a fortress strong,
Education its name;
around it dug a moat,
a stream of Thought.

He reared a temple too,
clear Speech, its name;
and on it unfurled
our Freedom's flag.

He is the bark that shall
take us across the sea of sorrow;
he is the magic wand that shall
exorcise the devils of defeat.

He is the love-fed honey-dripping
bud of our Renaissance;
he is the symbol and security
of our reviving nationhood.

Greetings to Belgium
(1914)

Fallen, for your honour!
The enemy grew large
through ugly terror;
you couldn't endure!
Like a gipsy-girl facing
tiger with tray in hand,
your strength is mean,
but great the deeds.

Fallen, by aggression!
Enemy's oceanic hordes
forced surrender;
but soared your thoughts!
You made certain
of the heavens-of fame;
you stood up to guard
the human rights.

Fallen, for noble ends!
The oppressor King's
military might
waxed so high.
But you wouldn't give up
driven by fear;
resisting the attack
you nobly fought.

Fallen, in heroic stand!
When the hills tumbled,
you wouldn't retreat
for safety's sake.
Meeting the challenge you thought
the reptile a worm—
and therake's progress
halted.

Fallen, for being brave!
The enemy's army moved

driven by pride, and raged
like disease.
You wouldn't surrender:
What use evasion
or submission?
You cried halt!

You had no fear
of disaster
while they came
like waves
and would overrun
your noble land.
Yet you affirmed:
"Fame! not life!"

Whither was the enemy
marching in his pride?
But why that wanton
intrusion?
Damaging his war array
you stood up bold,
and would root out
that pride!

The Veda tells the world:
whate'er is offered
in the sacrificial fire,
returns as gold and fame.
Likewise wartime sacrifices
in heroic Dharma's name
must phoenix-like rise
gloriously.

When the lamp is shattered,
ev'n a golden palace
sinks in the dark
till sunrise.
Come measureless grief:
but the hearts are
like adamant.
Sorrowless the brave!

Muruga My Lord[1]

Come on the peacock
with burnished lance:
merit, worth, fame, penance,
ability, wealth, firmness—
their giving is Thine.

Here are the imprisoned devotees:
liberate them!
You're the end of the endless scriptures
and you're the divine destroyer
of the demons.

Spirit of the Vedas! Come!
O heroism, O flame!
O javelin that dries up
the sea of worries
of the woebegone.

O my friend that inherits
the heavens of the ideal!
my homage! blazing warrior
that erupts fierily
to destroy ills.

Adorned with the shiny spear
you sit in the Temple of Light,
on the lap of Mother Grace;
come on earth to grant
the New Life.

Teacher! Child of the Supreme!
Fire blazing in the cave!

give us work and the fruits thereof.
Chief of immortals,
my homage!

The Lord's Bounty

Many a joy have you devised, O Lord!
Many a joy, O Lord, O Lord!

Through the play of consciousness in matter
you have designed this wonderful universe:
these myriad multi-coloured worlds
you have structured in terms of beauty.
Many a joy have you devised, O Lord

High above the worlds of our seeing
you have reared the Temple of Bliss:
and you have taught us too the way to scale it
relying on the love divine.
Many a joy have you devised, O Lord

A Stringed Lute

Having tuned aright a stringed lute,
shall we cast it on a rubbish heap to rot?
Listen, Mother Might! You've given me life
and lit this lamp of Reason.
A burden, this, to earth unless
my thoughts can be turned to deeds.
Vouchsafe me this power of action
to achieve my country's good.

I asked for a body swift like an ejected ball,
a body that's the willing slave of mind;
I asked for a stainless heart,
a life with ceaseless glow;

I asked for the gift of song in praise of you
were fire itself to burn my skin.
And I asked for an unflinching mind—
what holds you back from giving these?

Maha Shakti

Finding her glistening in the moonlight,
I took sudden refuge in her;
I've subdued the senses at last,
and demolished vain Desire.

She said: "Serve me and thrive,
and mind not the fruits of action".
she has chased all sorrows away
and wedded me to joy.

The incandescence of the stars above,
the high velocity of the winds,
the boundlessness of the space beyond,
the great joy in my heart—'tis all Her Grace.

Song to Kali

You manifest as all, O Kali,
everywhere you;
the bad and the good,
aren't they the divine's play?
The five elements, O Kali,
and the senses, all yourself;
O Kali, you are knowledge
beyond the mind.

You areindeed joy, O Kali,
you have entered me.
Without you, then, O Kali,

how can I be?
You have given me love, O Kali,
and manliness too;
you have expelled sadness, O Kali,
and my worries ended.

In Time of the Breaking of the Worlds[2]

As the worlds mightily clash
and crash in resounding thunder,
as blood-dripping demon-spirits
sing in glee amid the general ruin,
to the beat and the tune, O Mother,
you leap in ecstatic dance!
Dread Mahakali!
Chamundi! Gangali!
Mother, Mother,
you've drawn me
to see you dance.

As the five cardinal essences
mingle and merge as one,
at this too vanishes at last
in Shakti's measureless deeps,
at the mind itself melts
and burns to nothingness in the Flame
then you dance wildly
emitting fierce fire!
Mother, Mother,
you've drawn me
to see you dance.

As the ruined wastes spread
fear and confusion,
as the destroying demon-gangs
retreat and retire,
as the Prophetess of Doom
cries 'Ha, Ha' aloud,

then you roar wildly,
you dance madly!
Mother, Mother,
you've drawn me
to see you dance.

When the demon-hosts clash
hitting head against head,
When the knocking and the breaking
beat the rhythmic time,
when the sparks from your eyes
reach the ends of the earth,
then is the doomed hour
of universal death!
Mother, Mother,
you've drawn me
to see you dance.

When Time and the three Worlds
have been cast in a ruinous heap,
when the frenzy has ceased
and a lone splendour has awakened,
then auspicious Shiva appears
to quench your terrible thirst.
Only now you smile and treat with Him
the blissful Dance of Life!
Mother, Mother,
you've drawn me
to see you dance.

To a Parrot

Let's be happy, bird,
come whatever may;
daily work apace
and bow to the Mother.

'tis Nature's law, we know,
that if we labour hard,
we shall reap the right reward.
Why sorrow then?

Love is the solvent
of tiredness and fear
and all painful thoughts.
Love shall not die.

Meditating on the Sun,
we'll tread the *dharmic* way;
for a thousand years, bird,
let's live a blissful life.

When we offer stainless love
to the Lord Muruga,
how O beautiful bird
can sorrow dare assail us?

Krishna the Omnipresent

I see your complexion, Krishna,
in the crow's dark feathers.

I see the divine green, O Krishna,
in the leaves of all the trees.

'tis your music, Krishna, that I hear
in all the sounds of the world.

And I thrill with your touch, Krishna,
when my finger feels the flame.

Jesus Christ

'My Lord expired on the Cross
and ascended in three days'.
Beloved Mary Magdalene
saw this happen.
Friends! here's the esoteric sense.
The gods will enter us
and guard us from all ills
if we transcend pride.

Mary Magdalene is Love,
Jesus the Soul.
The outer evil destroyed,
the good life sprouts.
She praised the radiance
in that golden face.
That was the love of Magdalene,
ah, what joy!

If Sense is bound to the Cross of Truth
and crucified on the thorn austerity,
Jesus of the strengthened soul
will rise as the boundless sky.
Magdalene is Eternal Feminine,
Jesus Christ is deathless *dharma*,
Draw we close to the symbol:
look, an inner meaning glows.

Victory

Fear not, my heart!
Victory is sure.

Freedom shall be ours
here and now.
The mighty Mother lodges in my heart,
and *bhakti*[3] shall bear nectarean fruit.
Fear not, my heart!

High are the shoulders, mountain-like,
and they carry the Mother's golden feet.
Here are passions, thoughts and deeds,
and *dharma* is here, and Shakti too.
Fear not, my heart!

There's brain enough to amass wealth,
and divine strength to face all ills.
Labour shall prove wondrous fruitful,
and Muruga will expel all sorrow.
Fear not, my heart!

Rowing across this sea of storms
in the boat of the Mother's grace,
let's turn back on pain at the other shore
and fall at the Mother's feet.
Fear not, my heart!

Beat the Drum!

Beat! Beat the drum!
Beat the drum of victory!

Having vanquished the demon Fear,
and killed the reptile Lie,
we have embraced the Veda's path
that leads to Brahma-Knowledge.
Beat! Beat the drum!

Having bathed in the Sun's bright rays
and basked in the light of Truth,
we've scared away the spectre Death
that takes so heavy a toll of life.
Beat! Beat the drum!

The crow and the sparrow are of us,
the sea and the mountain are of us,
'tis ourselves everywhere we see,
and the heart dances with delight.
Beat! Beat the drum!

The Sparrow

O may you escape all shackles
and revel in liberty
like this
sprightly sparrow!

Roam about in endless space,
swim across the whirling air,
drink the measureless wine of the light
that flows for ever from the azure sky!
O may you escape

Happily twittering and making love,
building a nest beyond danger's reach,
guarding the fledgeling hatched from the egg
and giving it feed and fulsome care
O may you escape

Gather and feast on the remnant corn
from backyards and harvested fields:
then tell strange stories and sing and rest—
and rise again at dawn with a song!
O may you escape

Aspirations

(1)

A brave heart
sweet speech
good thoughts
ripe fruit
quick dividends
dreams fulfilled
wealth and happiness
and fame on earth

(2)

Clear vision
willed action
woman free
a fecund land
the Lord's grace
Truth triumphant
a new heaven
a new earth

To Death

Death! I spurn you as a piece of weed!
Come here! Let me crush you—Ha, ha!

I meditate on the Veda singers,
Velayudha[4] guards the fort of my mind.
Do you forget what befell the crocodile
when Gajendra invoked the Lord?
Death! I spurn you

Failed you not when Markhandeya,[5]
fleeing from you, sought Shiva's refuge?
A thousand miles away, I order you!
I confront you as Hari[6], himself!
Death! I spurn you

Deception? Truth?

What stands, walks, flies—
are such phenomena
only dreams,
illusions?
What we hear, learn, think—
must we dismiss them
as vain fancies,
airy nothings?

Skies, sunlight, trees—
are they all
a mirage, or
a falsehood?
Since the past is past,
as dead reverie,
am I a dream too
and the world a lie?

Time's unending flow,
and scenic memories,
the beauty—all false?
and Nature itself!
Since the mighty forest tree
grows out of a seed,
are gardens
not real?

If what's seen vanishes,
what's unseen reappears.
It is no idle lie
decreed by fate.
What we see is reality
What's unseen is unsure.
What's seen is *shakti*.
World-Existence is deathless.

The Dead Past

Stumble not, fools! into the pit—
the preying destroying remembrance
of things past and done with—
nor with the agony of vain regrets:
the Past will not return!

Rather grapple to your heart the thought
that you have but today accomplished
the baptism of another birth.
Eat and play and live the happy life:
the Past and all its evil will cease for ever!

The Damozel Mind

Maiden Mind! Listen.
Clinging to one thing
you swing to another;
as I ask you to hold on to the good,
you slink away disgusted;
when I order you to skip an idea,
you grasp it the more tightly;
and you cling to the past
with dogged persistence.

Novelty makes you afraid:
you love new things and newer,
yet you shrink behind.
As the bee to the honey,
you return to ancient things—
then grumble again:
"Where's the new creation?
Everywhere the old rules!"
As the crow to the corpse,
you are drawn to the garbage
that rots and dies.

Likewise
loving me ever, and
guarding my soul:
my sensitive organs
my seeing eye, you are
that make me share
the earth's movement!

Giving joy, and swooning in it,
and committing blunders
in search of happiness:
guarding and cherishing it,
and destroying sorrow:
running after pleasure,
sinking in gloom:
yourself unknowing
but scouring the universe,
hungering to see
the Supreme One who is
within you all the time.

Ah, when asked to look somewhere,
your eyes roam elsewhere;
knowing all partial laws
you know not the law of laws
nor the meaning
behind the laws.

Maiden Mind! Listen!
I do not know
how to live with you.
And yet I want aways
your company.
I shall try to make you grow
and strive for realisation.
The Supreme whom I have seen—
but you have not—
claims my daily homage,
and through That
you too may be redeemed.

Sound the Tocsin

No more terrors of caste:
the world thrives on love.
Let's help one another, and
raise the commonwealth.

The Lord who sustains all
gave knowledge to women;
yet some intruding fools
messed up everything.

Who would blind one of the eyes
and welcome loss of sight?
Foster woman's enligtenment
to rid the world's ignorance.

Knaves prate of diverse gods
and generate hatred;
God is the one Supreme
that pervades all.

The Brahmins salute the Fire,
the Muslims daily pray,
the Christians go to Church
and bow to the Cross.

It is God's omnipresence
all these worship;
He is One—where's, then,
the need for the debate?

A white cat has been living
in our house;

when it kittened a litter,
each a different shade!

One was an ashy kitten,
another was wholly black;
a third was snaky-sheened,
the fourth was milky-white.

A pack of different colours,
equal otherwise;
was one hue superior,
and lowly another?

While their colours may vary,
people are the same;
whether in thoughts or deeds
there's much in common.

Beat the drum announcing
people's equality;
beat the drum denouncing
caste-creed divisions!

Sound the tocsin affirming
the glory of love,
the razing of barriers,
and the end of all ills.

Glory of Womanhood

Let us rejoice in praise of womanhood,
let us dance to the cry of 'Victory to Woman!—
for woman is the sanctified union
of the mother's fame and the spouse's name.

We shall rejoice in praise of wedded love,
we shall dance in honour of lovers' bliss;

and as woman is the solvent of sorrow,
her heroic sons shall hail her 'Holy Mother'!

'tis mother's milk that gives us strength,
while the wife's kind words reap our harvest of fame.
As woman's blessedness blasts all evil,
let us rejoice with linked hands.

Could man's valour defend woman's grace,
we would then face neither want nor defeat.
As the eyelids enclose and sustain the eye,
woman and man must cherish holy wedded love.

Woman is the heady wine we shall taste
and make the earth tremble with our might.
We shall dance to the chime of flute and drum
and lose our hearts in ecstasy.

Blow the conch! Dance in joy!
For woman is sweeter than life itself.
She's the protectress of life, and creatrix too;
she's the life of our life, and the soul of sweetness.

'Hail holy Mother'! we make obeisance;
and we sing our darling's praises to her ear.
We shall canter across a hundred hills
in the service of a slender-waisted girl.

'Hail holy Mother!' to the beat of the drum;
'Hail holy Mother!' to the flute's golden tune
We shall sweep the blue firmament itself
in honour of a bright-eyed girl.

We shall willingly swallow coals of fire
to serve the divine hand that fed us;
and although her hands resist us as we kiss,
we shall sing in praise of the chosen spouse.

Moonlight, Star and Wind

A joyous frenzy seizes us
as we drink the nectarean wine,
the splendid concoction
of moonlight, star and wind.
Let us allow our mind-bird
to roam the world over;
we'll not wonder if we hear
the bee's hum in a jackfruit.

O mind! roam about to join
the far star-cluster
and enjoy the sweetness
dripping from them!
The heart's rich granary
that treasures in joy
the starry skies above
and the radiant moon.

Must you grovel in the slush
like a dirty pig?
Rather sweep the blue across
in search of victory!
Let the mind, like an aeroplane,
speed across space—
not like a slow-moving wagon
linger behind.

Like the wind that rattles along
the leaves of coconut palms,
our heart would ride you, mind,
as a careering horse.
O wind who can gently convey
the chirping of the birds,
must you also bring along
lightning and thunder?

It's the Wind God who transmits strains
auspicious for the earth;

and reproducing their music,
we shall lave in delight.
The jingling of the bells, the barking
of the dogs behind,
the beggar's despairing appeal
for a mouthful of food;

The noise of doors being shut,
of conches blowing in the East,
of people in loud argument,
of the cries of children:
the varied sounds the wind carries
are not to be reckoned.
O mind! look up at the moon's bright rays
and drink the honey of delight!

A Spark of Fire

I chanced upon a spark of fire, a fireling!
I lodged it at the hollow
of a forest tree:
the forest was reduced to ashes!

Ha ha! Ha ha!

Is there 'big' or 'small',
'age' or 'youth'
in fire's power
to destroy?

The Word

Invite you, O gods?
Would you come down
if invoked in Tamil
to slake our thirst?
No other refuge!

Does the mere sounding of AUM—
charge it with power?
Would our ills vanish
and our consciousness
grow in clarity?

If I sing 'May Truth blaze forth!',
would your grace descend?
Could we compel the reign
of the life divine
through a *mantric* word?

'We shall kindle a fire
in our heart!'—does this sound
potent enough?
Will it make an eagle of a fly
and end our sorrow?

The downpour from above
gives us abundant joy.
Turn forests into homes—
and rooting out sorrow,
end the encircling gloom!

Show knowledge ascendant—
no pettiness of heart!
Give us the seeing eye,
and yoke our endeavours
to creative tasks.

A lightning growth in our talents,
a quickening of the flood

of life; nectar-like food:
the crown of glory
to our deeds!

The spark divine shall guard us
and dispel the mists around;
all we touch be alchemised
as gold—no fear of death
any longer!

Chant for strength and puissance:
welcome wholeheartedly
the Phoenix generation.
Smite evil with your hai ds
and end my heart's sorrow.

We'll worship the Fire daily
and invoke ambrosia;
we'll chant the scriptures in Tamil
and confidently claim
the guerdon of glory.

Chandramati

Little baby dear, my
eye's darling, Chandramati:
O long-desired wine,
O welcome moonlight to my eyes!
There lies hid the fabled gem
in the cobra's hood:
you wax in your flame of joy
in my troubled heart.

What need for empty words:
victorious womanhood!
intriguing mystery!
my heart's desire!
Like one lost in a flood

and out of his depth,
I'm lost in thought of you,
surpassing Light!

I see in the ocean
your long winding tresses;
I see in the moon
your beautiful face;
I see in the world's expanse
the light of your mind;
I see in the march of time
the glow of your Love.

Light and Darkness

The Sun's light all over the skies;
the Sun's light on all the hills;
over the wavy watery seas,
on the earth and above the trees,
in the woods and on the banks,
the Sun's light everywhere!
Ah, why then this darkness
in the human heart alone?

Just when the flood of light moves
like a vast sweep of brightness,
and the ocean of light, and typhoon-light,
and light the goddess eternal
surrounds this world entire,
one lonely heart alone
gathers the darkness of envy
and beats on: what a shame!

Light like the nectar of fresh blossoms,
Light praised by numberless birds,
Light in whose effulgence earth,
water, and wind embrace in joy,
such Light overflows the world;

and yet this despicable heart beats
in the miserable darkness
filled with countless evils.

The lights smile on the lake-waters;
the mountains laugh in their loveliness;
lightning spreads golden brightness
among the dark rain-laden clouds.
And yet a poor heart sits drooping
though it has learned the scriptures
and heard about the Vedic clue
to the heart of bliss.

Tayumanava[1]

You willed to live for ever,
a symbol of sweet Tamil.
You are young even today,
deathless like Tamil.
You knew that the One is That,
and That is utter Bliss.
Part of the undying heavens,
abide with our transience too!

To Nivedita

Nivedita, mother,
Temple consecrated to Love,
Sun dispelling my soul's darkness,
rain to the parched land of our lives,
helper of the helpless and lost,
O you offering to Grace,
O you divine spark of Truth,
my salutations to you.

To Abhedananda[2]

Blameless and perfect in his knowledge
of Veda and the rich rare Upanishads,
transfigured by the splendorous Light
which is the Bliss of Brahman,
and endowed with gifts exceptional,
he adventured into a land
where darkness reigns at noon
to radiate the light of Truth.

The One remains,
all living things are its shadow-forms;
'tis the surest folly
to call Him *thine* or *mine*;
still the five senses cloud the mind
and deny the Truth.
But you have proved their victor,
O knight-errant of the Spirit!

As if great Shankara,[3] flaming minister,
whose fame reached up to the sky,
as if Shankara himself had returned
to revisit this hoary land,
there came Vivekananda the shining Light
and when it withdrew,
you came forward to make good the loss,
and continue his healing among men.

Purest of saints, Abhedananda,
the light of whose darling feet
fell upon this blessed city,[4]
you whose penance is like the cloud
with its promise of showers,
cherishing in our hearts the grace of your love,
we try to pierce the veils of Maya[5]
and reach the altar of Truth.

Autobiographical (1)

Father's death enveloped me in gloom.
There was none to shield me from fear.
Neither clarity of mind nor strength
of body, nor any will power!
My expensive education proved
useless utterly. Alas;
There was no way out, it seemed.
Why was I born in this hapless land?

This wide world is no more than a dream;
the life of humanity—*insects*
who eat, fight, sleep and die!—
is a mere dream; of what use
my feeling sore on *these happenings*?
Vain is all remembrance of past!
He that fondly dwells on mortal things
will surely be destroyed.

For those who have no knowledge, nor practise
renunciation—only sorrow!
No vain regrets about the past.
When I responded to the call
of Poesy, 'twas like angling
for the stars in the heavens.
Mother! prime mover of everything!
guard me with your Grace.

Crystalline thought, a steely will,
a heart flooded with love,
a total *lordship of the senses*,
a mind thirsting for Grace
and poised on the Way of Works:
give me these, O Lord!
the ineffable, inapprehensible
and boundless only One.

Autobiographical (2)

There was a dilapidated house
in the adjoining deserted plot.
The great Yogi[6] saw me with his inner eye,
then glanced at the crumbling wall and the Sun
and at its reflection in the water.
"Understand?" he asked; "Yes" I replied.
He sped away happy, even as I found
a root of the Vedantic tree.

Let me explain to the world the message
conveyed through gestures by the Saint:
"With proper discipline of your life,
you must live as the mud, the wall.
Then will you see God in your heart
like the brilliant Sun inside the well.
All talking is in vain; knowledge comes
with experiential bliss".

If I had a learned tome with me,
I may explain everything.
But that true teacher of knowledge,
dwarfish Kullaswamy, revealed
Reality through symbols:
the infinite sky, and the love
infinite of dear women, guide us
through this wide wide world.

Another day: that Seer
of divine pity stood smilingly
in front with an immense bundle
of dirty old clothes on his back.
I asked him in wonder:
"Master! what's this? Why do you
act like one stark mad
carrying a cloth bundle?. Explain!"

The noble one smiled and answered:
"But I carry this only outside,

while you have a secret bundle
of waste matter in your heart!"
I grasped the import of his words.
Sustaining ancient falsehoods
humanity grows its ills.
Let's sing of the soul's freedom!

The past will not return, O fools!
Do not lose yourself in sorrow
of viperous memories of the past.
No more talk of the past: hold on to the faith
"We are born anew today!"
Live in happiness enjoying the world.
What use if you"ll not hear me
but must repeat past follies?

Brainless humanity, alas!
Would you still cry for the past?
Watch how the fresh breeze brings
thoughts and life for ever new.
Deluded, you suffer equating
the Karmic cycle with the soul.
Surrender to beneficent Shakti
and live in self-forgetfulness.

The deeds of the past will not touch me.
"I am Krishna, I am Kumara,
I'm new, I'm divine, I've no sorrow.
I'm born this very moment!"
Those with such godly self-confidence,
such men are known as Siddhas.
They've leapt to the mountain-top of Dharma;
they'll know no destruction.

A thousand works they've achieved,
yet they're not caught by the Karmic bond.

They've received the art from Shiva
the frenzied Consort of Shakti.
Having dispelled the darkness of the past,
they move about as fire on earth.
You too, my friend, give up desire, engage
in works, and reap immortality.

Kannamma My Child

My fledgeling Kannamma!
Riches infinite!
You came to redeem me
and greaten my fame.

My nectar-fruit, my child!
my speaking image of gold
dancing in front of me
for my love's embrace!

As you come running,
my heart exults.
When you play around
my soul enclasps you.

As I hug you, my pride
waxes sky-high;
when people praise you,
I'm duly thrilled.

When I kiss you, wine-fed
frenzy is mine;
when my arms hold you,
I grow mad indeed.

When your face reddens,
I am worried;
when you knit your brows,
my heart flutters.

When your eyes shed tears,
my pained heart bleeds!
Aren't you light of my life?
My life is thine.

Your baby prattlings
end my sorrows.
With flower-like laughter
you melt my hardness.

Where's the tale of old
as sweet as you?
Where's divine bounty
equalling yours?

No precious gem like you
to adorn my breast;
nor rarest wealth like you
for my well-being.

Krishna My Beloved

Like the worm in the fishing-rod,
like a flame in the wind,
my heart in anguish throbbed
for an endless term.
Like a caged parrot
I sorrowed alone.
Even the sweetest things
turned bitter to taste.

Lonely as I lay on my bed,
dear friend,
the sight even of my mother
caused some distaste.
Wonderful chatterer though you are,
dear friend,
I spurned your company
like disease.

Nor food nor sleep was welcome,
dear friend;
nor scent of sweet flowers did

prove winsome.
Nor strength of mind was mine—
only confusion;
not for a second even
my heart had peace.

Milk itself turned sour,
dear friend,
and my bed a spread of thorns;
the prattle of the parrot
jarred in my ears;
the physicians all
gave me up for lost; and
astrology blamed the stars.

Once as I dreamt
in my sleep,
an utter stranger
touched my heart.
As I woke up with a start,
he had disappeared;
only then did my heart
tingle with joy.

I thrilled to my roots,
dear friend;
good health returned,
my dwelling-place
wore a fresh happy look,
and I loved one and all.
Fear fled far away,
and beauty came to me.

As I lived again in thought
the magic touch, the softness,
the body thrilled anew
and a novel peace was mine.
I wondered in my mind
who He might have been:
Lo! the divine form of Krishna
stood before my eyes.

Kannamma My Love

Are those flame-bright eyes, Kannamma!
the Sun and the Moon?
Does the dark eye-ball, Kannamma!
reflect the inky skies?
Are the woven diamonds gleaming
on the raven silk robe
the star-clusters above
at the middle of the night?

Is the lovely smile on your lips
the shine of fresh blossoms?
Are the waves of the blue sea
your heart-beats indeed?
The sweetness of your voice is heard
in the nightingale.
Youthful darling girl, Kannamma!
I love you to distraction.

You speak of Sastraic sanctions:
what need of them here?
No scriptural texts control
love's ecstatic play.
Let the formal wedding come later
for our elders' sake—
must I wait for aeons?—
here's a kiss for you!

Krishna My Guardian

No other refuge in the world !—
hankering, tottering,
here's an outcaste
come for asylum.
My burden at your feet, Lord!

Shower the grace of health
destroying sorrow,
sickness and aches.
I shall sing your praises
and obey your orders, Lord!

I shall beat the drum everywhere
hymning your grace.
resounding your name
in all directions, and
spreading your fame, Lord!

Among farmers and the field-hands
I've grown prosperous;
loving the great Name
as Krishna's slave,
I come in for praise, Lord!

I guard the forests and fields;
mine alone the job
to graze your cattle;
judge of my worth
after testing me, Lord.

Try me as a gardener
to dig the earth
and nurture the plants;
should I mess up things,
punish me firmly, Lord!

My wife and children have to live
on the food I earn;
I have to help
dependent neighbours;
I need work to do, Lord!

Buy me a strip of loincloth
for my daily wear;
and for others' pressing need
I must ask for
some more cloth, Lord!

This cottage with nine doors[1]
is environed
by sinister spirits;
I suffer—with magic chants
drive them away, Lord!

Fashion for me a fool-proof Path
so that all such demons,
thieves and ghosts may
fear my presence
and keep away, O Lord!

Krishna My Divine Mother

I take refuge in you, Krishna my Mother,
I take refuge in you.

That I may be never obsessed
by greed for gold or fame or power
I take refuge.

Slavery and fear have camped in my heart:
for slaying and dispelling them.
I take refuge.

That I may cease to strive for selfish ends
and serve you instead, seeking bliss,
I take refuge.

Nor trouble nor tiredness nor defeat's mine:
to tread the right path and foster *dharma*
I take refuge

Kannamma, as we know not the right from wrong,
instal the right and eject the wrong away!
I take refuge.

Invocations

(1) To Brahma[1]

The elders chant as AUM
what checkmates fate and ends evil,
erases sorrow
and brings all good.
Having neither name nor form,
it eludes the mind.
It alone is Existence,
Knowledge and Bliss.

I meditate on this pure Being
they name as Brahman:
so may I be graced with knowledge.
devotion and dedication,
and be charged with Mother's might
for the death of ignorance,
and the building of this Tamil poem
to abide for ever.

(2) To Saraswati

She's enthroned on the white lotus,
shining in enduring fame;
in her hand a tuneful lute
emitting grace-laden notes.
In my green youth she came
to guard, and bless my pen—
so I could sing in sweet Tamil
oceanic ambrosial verse.

The Vedas her eyes, made lovelier
by exegetic collyrium;[2]
the light of Knowledge her forehead,
and Thought her cascading hair.
Bold logic and debate
bedeck her ears;
choicest wisdom is her scent,
and the Sastra her mouth.

Imagination her honeyed lips,
poesy her jewelled breasts;
sculpture and the arts
her great handiwork;
and her twin rhythmic feet
the tongues of noble poets
with mastery of the Word
and the tuning craft.

I take refuge in Saraswati,
giver of grace in Art.
She's the answer to my penance,
eternal like earth her name.
May the Goddess bless me
to re-tell in Tamil verse
the tale of renowed Draupadi
the Pandava Queen.

The Stratagem

Dhritarashtra's Reply

(Duryodhana and his uncle Sakuni plan to invite Yudhishtira (Dharma) to a game of dice, with a view to dispossessing him of his Kingdom. When Sakuni broaches this proposal to the Kuru King. Dhritarashtra, he makes the following reply.)

Thus spoke Sakuni, straining
his exuberant fancy.
Angry Dhritarashtra fumed
as he grasped the secret meaning:

"Like a malignant ghost have you come
to destroy my son.
Can grass dare the mighty flood?
Can we defeat the puissant Princes?

"Can there be enmity among brothers?
or hatred among relations?
Aren't they dear to us? In the past
Duryodhana contrived a thousand plots.
By the Lord Krishna's grace
and their own valour and bearing,
they escaped without hurt always
and their fame spread everywhere.

"From his very childhood, my madcap son
has caused them untold hardships.
These have given us a bad name.
Did any good result?
Are they insignificant enemies?
Have they known defeat from any?
Enough of your foolish tales
and tortuous casuistries!

"You speak of the 'Aryan Way'.
Come, show me the text that speaks
of a mud pot swallowing
a mountain. Like the Sun
they grow kingly, the Pandava Brothers.
They deem me their father,
offer obeisance to me,
and take my counsel.

"They have forgotten completely
his evil designs of the past,
even like the lion that laughs
at the frog that would devour it.
Although they deem him their friend,
you'll stir hatred between them
unmindful of their prowess:
how small your mind!

"Must you go out to antagonise
what's verily a source of help?
How specious is your argument
that they slighted us in the past!
Duryodhana was lost in confusion
and danced as one drunk indeed:
what harm if the lovely sister
laughed in carefree mirth?

"Doesn't even a mother laugh
when her child slips down?
Is it so great a sin if friends
have a laugh at us?
The itch for self-laceration
finds a reason anywhere!
But why waste idle words?
A thousand tasks await you.

"Since his very early years
he has tried to injure them.
And yet, because he is my son,
they gave him precedence
and entrusted a bag of gold
to be spent at his will.
Did they not honour him thus
before the assembled Kings?

"You complain of the offering made
to Lord Krishna first.
Should we not honour our guests?
Must we snap it all ourselves?
Related as we are as brothers,
they didn't consider us guests.
This was why they honoured Krishna
as the principal guest.

"It was on noble Bhishma's counsel
they honoured Krishna so.
If you call this transgresslon,
it sullies not them!

And do you know who Krishna is?
None in the great world's royalty
can equal a dust-particle of his feet.
You had better think on this.

"The knowledgeable say:
The Supreme Being, Narayana,
who is in slumber of Yoga
on the thousand-hooded
Serpent of Knowledge afloat
on the milky ocean—
He of the lotus eyes has indeed
taken this mortal form.

"To reject egoistic desire,
and to deem others as oneself;
to live in the vast silences beyond
past, present and future;
to achieve true skill in works,
and defend the living with love;
to melt with compulsive ruth
even when one must kill!

"The wise attain this inner poise
after a thousand years' penance.
But if one inherits such grace at birth,
then is he truly divine
and the world must hail him so.
But what use telling you this?
Of what avail speaking of Krishna to you—
like reciting scripture to ghosts!"

Duryodhana's Reply

(The King's pleadings and admonitions have no effect on Duryodhana, who is determined to have his own way.)

Listening to his father's words,
broad-shouldered Duryodhana said:
"You won't hear me when I repeat
I have come for no argument.
This is what I have come for.
Since the Pandavas will respond only
to you, if you won't invite them,
I will now die in your presence.

"It is people with no brains
who learn all the laws and rules,
but like a ladle in the honey-pot
they cannot help themselves.
You elevate as scripture
Vidura's words alone.
While he loves the absent Pandavas,
he hates our sight itself.

"Should the Leader be a puppet,
what hope for his people?
King Dhritarashtra's clan
can hardly make good.
Wealth and fame being transient,
they must be sought every day.
Only simpletons sleep in peace
dreaming of the present.

"Don't you know of the predicament
of Kings who live content
with the little wealth they have?
Aliens destroy them in a trice.
Easy life is no royal wisdom;
for Kings must aim at great increase.
A King's sole unforgivable sin—
to tire of worsting others!

"To win laurels is our duty:
what's wrong in that?
Is it wise to speculate here
of right and wrong?
Aren't the elders agreed
that ends justify the means?
The Army's not the only armament:
whatever destroys is armament.

"You say they are our relations.
No one deems birth and form
the indices of enemies and friends.
Enmity surges, not because
of outer causes, nor
of weights and measures.
Enmity erupts from resentment
and the force of rivalry.

"Those Kings who won't destroy their enemies
will themselves be swallowed by the earth.
As our fortunes steadily decline,
the Pandavas soar in fame.
If you think nothing of all this
and grow careless, like the plague
these our enemies will wax in strength
and destroy our people.

"You are firmly set against war,
and others too may decry it.
I realise it will be difficult
to beat the Pandavas openly.
But our past good deeds have given us
this uncle dear as life itself.
He'll surely win their land through dicing,
since Dharma also loves the game.

"How can you be happy, O King,
viewing the enemy's wealth?
What use idle words to put out
this smoking heart of mine?

Let's laugh at those who laughed at us!
And if the Pandavas are our kin,
no sorrow need overwhelm them:
they could prosper as our vassals.

"If you will only invite them,
we would all be saved;
if you won't, you know me well enough
have I ever made an empty threat?
Right before you I shall cut my head
and die at your feet.
And now I speak no untruth!"
Hearing this, the King felt helpless.

Dhritarashtra's Assent

"Who on earth can battle", he said,
"against an edict of fate?
The wise Vidura had detailed
all this well in advance.
Sinister treacheries will crowd round
and destroy our royal house.
You are engineering the plot,
and it must run its own course.

"It is nothing but fate, O son—
what else is there to say!
Has Death itself come befriending you
in the guise of this evil fellow?
Do not unduly agitate yourself;
I shall invite them as you want.
Go back to your royal chambers"
Tear-laden, he sent his son away.

Losing Draupadi

(In response to Dhritarashtra's invitation, Yudhishtira and his brothers—Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva—and their Queen, Draupadi, arrive in the Kuru Court. In the ensuing Game of Dice, Yudhishtira loses everything, including the freedom of himself and his brothers. At last, succumbing to Sakuni's evil suggestion, Yudhishtira wagers Draupadi herself.)

In this Court of Sinners is placed
the soul's beloved, Draupadi:
the fruit of Panchala's good deeds,
this nectar in a human form,
this image of magnificence,
this light of fancy, life and grace:
this auspicious Queen,
this wealth unparalleled:

This divinely flowering creeper
whose steps are musical,
this lightning-statured lady,
this sweet dream of love and beauty
shaped into a woman, and
this sheer home of joy,
she is wagered in the false game of dice
in the Court of the Kurus.

Like offering sacificial food
to a low-caste dog,
or welcoming a ghost to inhabit
a golden mansion,
or crowning a mere owl
with a costly gem,
Dharma made his Queen a pawn,
and nobody questioned him.

Would one kill a dear child
to get leather for sandals?
For the dicing between princes,
should Panchali be the pawn?

The stakes agreed upon,
the evil uncle called
for the casting of the dice; and
the false ones rolled as willed.

The Kurus' Elation

As the pack of wolves dance in glee,
the directions tremble;
and beating their twin shoulders
they wildly prance about.
"Dharma is rightly served", they cry;
"Ohe, well done!" they shout.
They grin and exult fiendishly:
"Let's embrace, Duryodhana!"

"Raise high the dear uncle!"
Garlands overwhelm Sakuni
"Wealth and vast property
are not a great thing.
This wealth of luxurious lust
this woman is ours now.
Indeed, our uncle is a god!"
"All hail, Duryodhana!"

Duryodhana Speaks

Duryodhana stands up and cries
hugging his uncle:
"You have ended my sorrows,
and my shame is erased.
Ah, she laughed at me *then*, uncle;
you've now made her my slave.
I shan't forget ever, uncle!
How can I requite you?

"You've fulfilled my desire, uncle,
you've upheld my spirit.
We'll worship you, uncle,
and bring burnt offerings.
The long resentment is over,
and we thrive again.
I can't express myself, uncle,
a great joy wells up in me".

Speaking thus on and on,
Duryodhana jumps about.
Like a hill let loose
he prances around.
The Court is seized with confusion
beyond human understanding.
How can I report in song
all that took place then?

The Chaos Unleashed by Unrighteousness as Duryodhana Calls for Draupadi's Presence in the Court

As righteousness came to nought, truth turned false,
austerities lost their high potency,
the fire of fear blazed inside the gods,
seers in meditation grew faint,
scriptures became meaningless cacophony,
the notes of music lost their native rhythm,
the immortals shed their lustre,
the occult denizens of space went mad,
the Creator himself grew dumb;
the goddess of Learning failed in clarity,
Vishnu the dark-hued gave up his Yogic trance
and sank in the slumber of inconscience,
the beautiful goddess of Wealth
lost her rosy hue and grew dark of face,
Shiva's *tapas* became a mental swoon—

only youthful Uma, Mahakali the Strong,
the original Shakti with her dire trident,
the Mahamaya that destroys Illusion,
and delights in ghosts, corpses and killing,
whose ominous attendants are sickness,
sorrow, murder and extinction,
this Bright Queen served always by Black Death
moving on his dark buffalo,
the shining goddess with her train
of wealth, fame, learning and largesse:
the Creatrix and the Destroyer,
the sum of all the changing forms,
the epitome of the eternal flux
ever changing and re-changing—
the original Shakti herself, her heart
hardened, the face of the blinding Sun-God
grew dark . . .

Duryodhana to Vidura

That imbecile, Duryodhana,
ignoble prince with heart of darkness,
turned sharply to Vidura and spoke thus
to the venerable elder:
"Get away, Vidura! Why are you speechless?
She with the arching forehead, lovely lady,
once the darling child of Panchala's King,
and now the fair slave we have won today,
go, go to her and tell her all:
'Your brother-in-law, your Lord, is in the Court
and summons you to serve him!'
Tell her this and bring her here".

Vidura's Reply

As Duryodhana spoke scaldingly,
the aged Vidura exploded:
"Fool! unaware of the creeping disaster
you have said things you should never have
Like the spotted deer that dares the tiger,
like the frog that encounters a snake,
you are kindling the wrath of the Five.
You speak shamefully of the divine Queen.
And yet, even now, I speak words
meant only for your good alone.
Tomorrow the Pandavas will surely
avenge this, and my son, you'll be a corpse.
But what impels you to self-destruction?
Haven't you heard of Vena's ending[3]—
Vena who laboured to injure the good
was himself destroyed like a worm,
Is it right to speak harshly to others?
O son! such hot words must pierce the breast.
Those prone to evil are facile enough
with speech, but the victims cannot forget.
Insulting words cause hell to the injured,
and consume the coming generations.
I've done, Kauravas! I can do no more.
Deceitful gain can give no joy.
If urged by greed you resort to wrong,
a terrible shocking calamity will occur.
Bow to the Pandavas, return their wealth,
and tell them in all humility:
'Lords! ignorance drove us on, forgive!'
Allow them to return to their city.
This the sole way of redemption;
reject it, and Bharat war will explode
and destruction must o'ertake you".

Summons to Draupadi

Churlish Duryodhana, on hearing this,
thundered: "Get you gone, idiot!
Cursing us has become your pastime.
But who cares for you in this Court?
Ha, Charioteer! hence, and return
with the Pandavan Queen, telling her
'The Emperor of India orders her!' "
The Charioteer sped away, and
in grief-stricken voice bowed to Draupadi:
"Mother! Guardian of Right! salutations;
Because of terrible fate, Yudhishtira
played the dice game with uncle Sakuni.
He lost all his wealth, land and brothers,
and his own freedom as well.
Then at last he wagered even you.
I dare not speak: alas, he lost you too.
In that courtly assemblage, our King
now bids you to be present".
As he said this, Draupadi flared up:
"Whose words you speak? Is it tradition
for women of the warrior clan
to enter a Hall of Gamesters?
Who is he that orders me about?"
The Charioteer answered, "Duryodhana".
"Then find out and tell me how it happened.
Did my noble lord first lose me,
or, after losing himself, wagered me
to the devilish Sakuni?
Find this out in the Court".

When the Charioteer went away,
she sat in silence all alone
with a troubled heart, her eyes streaming,
fear knocking within, her lustre fading
as a child frightened by a ghost.
The Charioteer hastened to the Court
and said: "Lord! I bowed to the Queen
and requested her to come. 'Did he

lose me first and then himself ?
Or did he lose himself first and then myself?'
She wanted to know. And so I've returned"
The noble Pandavas sat silent, pained.
The rest of Bharat's war lords
sat silent too, stricken dumb.

Duryodhana Speaks

With a throbbing heart, his anger mounting.
Duryodhana stormed at him:
"What are these juvenile tales?
Don't you know my power?
Bring her to tell her tales here—
she with the dark killer-eyes!
My heart's desire is to hear her own
trembling words before this Court.

"Let her question to her heart's desire,
and let her have all her say.
But first let her come here to this
Court of assembled Kings.
She is no caged bird, is she?
What 'shame' for a wife shared by five?
Before I do something rash in anger,
drag that silky-haired beauty here.

"When you say the King commands her,
how dare she question you?
I shall cut you to pieces—
return, and bring her here!"
The Charioteer repeated these words
to her, and stood with bowed head.
In a surge of sorrow she wondered
why she should be summoned thus.

"After losing himself, the King
had no right to wager me.

Having been enslaved by the game,
by which law could he play again?
He's reduced to a slave, while I'm still
daughter of royal Drupada.
Once he dwindled into a slave,
what right had he to a wife?

"Are there no righteous men
in the Court of the Kuru King?
Even before the King declines,
do the Sastras suffer eclipse?
Fame-emblazoned preceptors
and learned imperial Kings
sat dumb when true wealth was lost.
Would they allow my honour too to die?

"We have seen in this world
joy and sorrow chase each other;
yet should our rulers find their joy
in the scuttling of justice?
And, for all their love and penance,
must Brahmins applaud it?
Go again, and state my question,
and return with the answer".

At the Pandavan Queen's firmness,
what could the Charioteer do?
"Let them kill me", he mused;
"without a proper answer to her
I shan't come here again".
Having thus boldly resolved,
he went back to the Court
and made full report.

He said too the Queen was in her
monthly isolation.
Wouldn't Duryodhana's heart melt? No!
The Charioteer saw but helplessness
in the faces of the Pandavas;
and in that great Court, none had

the courage to stop the Kuru Prince
from his determined evil course.

He now thundered at the Charioteer
frothing words of fire:
"Go back and tell her what we desire.
In seven seconds she should be here,
else I shall crush you to death".
As Duryodhana spoke thus to him.
the Charioteer took no heed
but turned to the assembly:

"What harm have I ever done
to the angry King? Were I to go
a hundred times, the Queen
would still turn me back to you.
Send one word of assurance to her,
and I shall call her at once.
While I'm here to obey the King,
how can I force the Queen?"

The snake-bannered King heard
what the Charioteer said:
"Ah, she obeys not the Charioteer:
this fellow is afraid of Bhima
and stands visibly trembling.
I shall deal with him later.
Brother Duhshasana! Go at once
and drag hither the golden girl."

Draupadi's Vow

Duhshasana

Hearing this, Duhshasana sprang up
and commended his brother.
Now for this man's character!
In evil out-topping Duryodhana,
he's an illiterate ruffian.
Wine and meat are his quenchless desires.
While strangers fear his presence,
his own men deem him a demon.

He has no wise discernment,
but he's a tiger-strong boor;
his pride keeps him always headstrong—
whether drunk or sober.
He is sold entirely to evil,
and is ignorant of the Divine.
He lusts after pleasure, and sins,
and is the enemy of the good.

This fellow thinks himself Lord
of the whole world, yet submits
readily to his elder brother
and never disobeys him.
This monster, blind to all grace,
heard his brother say:
"Drag hither the golden maid!"
and he grunted assent and rose.

He reached the glittering palace
where lived the Pandava Queen.
He saw that spotless woman
standing in deep sorrow, alone.
She drew back suddenly, feeling unclean.
"Hey, where do you fly?" he shouted.
Viewing that horrid barbarian,
she faced him fearlessly.

Draupadi and Duhshasana

"The Pandavas are gods on the earth,
I'm their Queen, and Drupada's daughter.
None has forgotten this in my presence,
brother, till this luckless day.
You have lost all self-control, brother,
and speak unseasonably.
Give me your message and depart".
So said the lovely woman.

"No more, no more you're the Pandava Queen,
nor the famed Panchala's daughter.
Now are you the slave of my brother
who is Earth's Emperor.
In the dicing in our Great Hall,
Dharma staked you as a wager
with our uncle, Sakuni, and
lost you in the game.

"Since the losing of the wager
Duryodhana is your master,
and he'd have me bring you to the Hall
where the Kings are gathered.
This then, is my commission.
No more words! Come with me.
I'm not prepared to hear what you said
to the unmanly Charioteer."

Draupadi's Plight

Thus Duhshasana, and Draupadi said:
"Hear this, brother, I am unclean,
and I'm not suitably dressed either.
This is not the time to invite me
to a splendid assembly of Kings.
Is it, I ask, fair for royalty
to enslave a sister through dicing

and render her helpless, and torture her?
Return and explain this to your brother".

But neighing loudly that grim monster
closed upon grief-stricken Panchali
and seized her by her ravishing tresses.
As the wounded Pandavan Queen screamed
and fell down in a swoon, the demon
trailed her by her swaying dark hair.
On the way the people saw this horror
and sighed at the great injustice.
No comment on such coward citizens
who didn't venture to resist and batter
that dispicable beast, and convey
the injured woman back to her chambers.
Ha, they stood whimpering like forest trees!
What is the use of such womanly tears?
As that beautiful fruit of Drupada's penance
was dragged into the villainous Court,
with her hair all awry, she stood distraught,
and loudly bewailed her wretched fate.

Draupadi demands Justice

She wept: "Is it but destiny, my lords?
With due ceremony you married me
turning to Arundati,[4] and with Fire
for witness; now see me wholly disgraced!"
Great Arjuna and strong Bhima glanced
at Dharma for some clue to action.
But Dharma stood immobile with bowed head.
Now Draupadi sighed and cried: "In this Hall
there are learned ones who know the law,
and seers who have piled up sacrifices.
But is none righteously indignant?
Alas, my guardian lords have become slaves.
Where, then, shall I arraign my enemies?
You, Duhshasana, with an eclipsed mind

you have dragged me here, and speak shamefully.
Yet there is none to stop your villainy.
What shall I do?" she wailed distractedly and
at the Five she hurled fiery glances.
Viewing them ranged like dumb lustreless slaves,
wild Duhshasana screamed, "Slave-woman!"
Karna laughed in glee, Sakuni applauded.
The courtiers comfortably filled their chairs.
Then the worthy and aged Bhishma spoke:

What Bhishma Said

"Dharma has wagered and lost you in the game.
Of what earthly use is vain argument?
Sakuni, being skilled in dice, O lady,
quite got the better of your Lord.
You now plead that he did wrong to have laid you
as a wager in the game. O nobly born!
Perhaps what you say would have been upheld
in the days of the great Vedic Seers.
But alas, that was in the distant past.
In days of yore the sexes were equal.
But times have changed, woman's inferior.
A wife's now sold or gifted like cattle.
Today's dharma sanctions a woman's sale.
The law affirms that your husband owns you,
even though he may be enslaved himself.
The very stones would shiver to see
the deeds of the unrighteous here—
and beasts would not care to watch them!
Yet Shastra and custom seem to be ranged
alike against you. While I have spoken thus,
impotent am I to halt this evil".
The revered Bhishma hung his head down,
and the gentle lady made reply:

Draupadi's Rejoinder

"Bravely and learnedly spoken, Sir!
When treacherous Ravana, having
carried and lodged Sita in his garden,
called his ministers and law-givers
and boasted of the big deed he had done,
these same wiseacre advisers declared:
'You have accomplished the properest thing,
for it will square with *dharmic* requirements!'
When a demon king misrules the land,
needs must the Shastras feed on garbage!
Was it well done to trick my guileless King
to play at dice? Wasn't this Dicing Hall
a predetermined act of treachery
meant to cheat and deprive us of our realm?
O you that have also sisters and wives,
isn't this a crime against all womankind?
Purblind, would you all be damned for ever?
Pity my plight!" with hands held together
she wept and trembled like a stricken doe.
Watching the Queen weeping thus with her tresses
trailing on the dust, Duhshasana
spouted forth the most vitriolic words.

With her hair dishevelled, crying
piteously, Draupadi stands:
bestial Duhshasana
drags her by the hair anew.
Watching this spectral agony,
Bhima's anger bursts its bounds.
In sorrow he spoke these words
to Dharma—hear them!

What Bhima Said

"There are servant-maids, brother,
in the homes of gamblers;
yet no maid is laid out
as a wager there.

"Not by nocturnal brigandage,
nor by treachery, brother,
but by our valorous deeds
in sanguinary wars

"Have you won the title
'Emperor of Kings!'
In but a fleeting moment
you've lost everything.

"Our kingdom you threw away:
we bore it, brother;
our freedom you gambled away:
we bore it too.

"Drupada's darling girl—
Dhrishtadyumna's sister—
you have diced and lost her
as slave-maid to these.

"We shall bear it no longer:
bring a torch, Sahadev!
His hand that played the losing stakes,
we'll burn the hand away."

What Arjuna Said

Thus Bhima to Sahadeva, but
Arjuna checked him here:
"Are these from your heart, Bhima?
What words—and spoken where!
In whose presence? You said 'twas sin
to lose Draupada's daughter in the game.
The fire of anger smokes your intellect,
and you spoke in bad temper.

"*Dharma* is oft defeated by deceit,
yet *dharma* shall triumph in the end.
Fate has enacted this drama
to teach us lessons in deportment.
We'll know our duty by and by—
today we're bound, let's bear it with patience.
Times must change, and *dharma* must conquer.
And there's my mighty bow, Gandiva".

What Vikarna Said[5]

Bhima bowed to Yudhishtira.
Then Vikarna spoke in the Hall:
"Grandsire's reply to the Queen
doesn't satisfy. He is wrong—
he says that women are cattle
and can be put to any use
by their husbands. He said the Vedic life
is past, and only this new code prevails.

"But who would ever sell his wife?
Have you heard of this wonder
when Queens are diced and lost?
What was meant for courtesans alone
is now the universal law!
But were it the law indeed,
it cannot pass for fair usage, for
even servants aren't pawns in a game.

"Having gamed away his own person,
has a husband wife or home?
Does a slave have possessions?
Thus asks the Queen of Womanhood.
O Kings! may be games are fun,
yet would you not speak out
when lawless deeds are done?
Grandsire! Is it right?"

Hearing Vikarna thus speak out,
up rose some Kings and shouted:
"Sakuni's evil is opprobrious!"
"The world must condemn this infamy!"
"You may have jealousies, Kings, but
dishonour not the Queen!"
"Such evil will be avenged when blood flows
as russet sky on the battlefield!"

Karna's Outburst

Hearing Vikarna's words,
bowman Karna says:
"Shut up, small fellow!
must you spout verbiage
of the sort unspoken as improper
by these many Kings
assembled in this Hall?
Indiscreet ignoramus!

"Struck by a woman's tears
you speak like a callow youth.
You talk stalely at random.
You say sin will claim us
since we have won her as a slave.
Shameless impatient youngster!
Do you think you can get at justice
with your impartial pose?

"Slaves have no right at all
even to wear their breast-cloth.
Nor is this woman noble
who consorts with the Five.
Hey! servant! come!
Remove the upper garments
from the Pandavas—
and also the woman's clothing."

The Five heard the words, and
before the slaves could come,
they uncovered their breasts to the awe
of all the world.
The doe-eyed Draupadi
shining in the light of knowledge
wondered at her fate and joined hands
in fervent prayer.

Draupadi's Prayer to Krishna

Duhshasana rose, and fell to the task
of disrobing mother Draupadi:
Vidura screamed 'Oh Gods!'
and swooned on the ground.
When as one demented
the fiend began the outrage,
she forgot the earth, sought the inner Light,
and united with the Supreme.

"Krishna! Oh Hari!" she screamed,
"I seek asylum in you;
Once you pitied the Elephant
and saved him from the Crocodile,
dark-complexioned Lord! another time
you danced on serpent Kalinga's hood,[6]
Hari, home of bountiful grace
and essence of Holy Writ!

"Krishna, you held the discus once
and wielded the Sarnga bow,[7]
you are the Word and its Meaning,
you are the Child tasting sweet rice,
you are creator of Brahma himself,
you are the annihilator of sorrows,
and the refuge of your devotees,
and the saviour of the worthy!

"You are the sky within the sky, the element
of the elements, earth, air, water, fire;
it is you who lights up the hearts
of sages in deep meditation;
it is you who fondly holds the hand
of your Consort Lakshmi
whose dwelling is in the lotus
that blooms in the forest pond!

"You the first of all beginnings,
you the shore and centre of knowledge,
you the light of all lights,
you who rides on the Garuda
who soars high in the sky,
Krishna, the flame of truth
and rich immaculate grace,
hear me, save me!

"Once Hiranya barked at Prahlad[8] his son
and furiously kicked the pillar:
'What! Is He *here*? You braggart!
Show me if your Lord is here!'
Did you not then manifest yourself
and tear strong Hiranya's limbs?
I too have worshipped you in trust,
save my honour here!

"Beloved Lord! oh vast sea of grace!
You of the marvellous utterance
that sways the lord of speech
Oh! nectar of heaven

that once stole the Gopi's butter,;[9]
you resplendent light, Krishna,
save me from this outrage,
this crime of the Kurus!

'O Krishna, my mind's radiance and joy,
ever do you preserve the world from wrong;
O Hari, my Lord, I seek refuge, Hari,
at your lotus feet!"
Like the woes of liars,
the fame of the wise,
like woman's pity,
like the waves of the troubled sea:

Even as, when people praise the Mother,
the tide of their fortunes surges more and more,
as Duhshasana dared the outrage,
there came robe after robe
by the grace of the Lord;
they came without end,
clothes of colours how many,
and clothes innumerable!

Silks with golden hues,
robes new, for ever new,
grew and clasped Draupadi
as she stood with folded hands.
The clothes became a heap
and bore stern witness
to the power of Hari's name.
Tired Duhshasana sank upon the floor.

The gods showered flowers on her:
Victory! Victory to the Mother!
Springing up with intense relief,
aged Bhishma praised the Lord;
the assembled kings raised the shout:
'Hail! all hail to Shakti!'
Only the snake-bannered Kuru[10]
hung down his head in shame.

Bhima's Vow

Bhima speaks to whom it may concern:
"In the name of the gods and Parashakti:
in the name of the lotus-born's feet
the Lord who revealed the scriptures:
in the name of Lord Krishna's feet
the Lord consort of Lakshmi:
in the name of Shiva's feet, the Lord
who burned cupid by a fiery glance.

"In their names I take this vow:
This unmanly Duryodhana
wanted our Queen, the pure fire,
to sit upon his lap.
By my strength I shall kill
this cur Duryodhana in battle
in the presence of princes
by smashing his thighs.

"His brother Duhshasana's shoulders
will I tear apart, and
I shall drink his blood as wine.
Oh men! you'll see this happen.
But these words are not mine,
for they come from Parashakti.
Mother Divine! let this
surely come about."

Arjuna's Vow

Arjuna then speaks to them:
"I shall kill Karna in battle.
In the name of the blessed feet
of Vishnu incarnate, my friend Krishna:
in the name of my Queen's
dark eyes; in my bow's name;
O world! You will watch wonders
on the terrible battlefield."

Panchali's Vow

Devi Draupadi said:
"In Parashakti's name I take this vow:
Not till the fiend Duhshasana's red blood
mingles with demon Duryodhana's,
and I smear my tresses with their blood
and then bathe and wash it all away—
not till then will I gather again
these my tresses unloosened and wild!"

The gods said: "So be it."
"So be it" resounded the skies.
The earth shook and rumbled,
and a whirlwind tore through the world.
The five elements bore witness
that Dharma is alone Lord of the earth.
Our tale has now raced to the end:
May this world prosper and be happy.

The Kuyil

Reflecting the rays of the Rising Sun
the blue ocean glistens like a jewel
near a flame; a transfiguring brightness
beautifies it, and its hastening waves
sing the scriptures, and would gladly embrace
the shores of southern Pondicherry,
the nursery of ancient Tamil.

To the city's north, a fair mango grove;
bird-catchers from all over the globe
come here to down the luchless winged ones.
One early morning in that shady grove,
happily free from such bird-shooters,
a female Kuyil swung on a branch
singing a sweet song to enrapture
the male kuyils who felt excited
at the music set their hearts on fire,
while the forest birds gathered in groups
and listened, forgetting their daily work.
The very air grew nectarean
as if a bright sweetness was spread everywhere.
And as if a divine damsel had assumed
her form, the kuyil sang entrancingly.

This is what I saw in a day-dream,
that rare other sight which greets the poets
when their imagination removes them
from the world of everyday action.
Listening to the song of the kuyil
in that enchanting garden, I thought:
"Cannot my body become a kuyil?
At once I would join this kuyil maid
and live happily ever after.

Oh let my life be burst in the kuyil's song!"
For the gods themselves would have never heard
such music that I was *vouchsafed* that day.
In the ku-ku-ku sounds of the kuyil
I inferred appropriate meanings.
I shall now transcribe their gist to you.
But how to imitate that wondrous voice?

Kuyil's Song

Love, oh love without end:
and love failing,
death, but death for ever.

Light, everlasting light:
and light failing,
darkness unending.

Joy, joy for always:
and joy failing,
misery, O misery.

Music, oh sweet the music:
and when music fails,
only cacophony.

Beat the rhythm, beat the rhythm:
and when rhythm fails,
mere confusion.

Divine the poetic voice:
but when poetry fails,
just the dross of the earth.

Welcome earthly fame:
but a slip once made,
infamy for ever.

Stand steadfast, firm:
and when you waver,
crumble in the dust.

O bliss of lovers' union:
but when the partner leaves,
only pine for ever.

O rich melodious flute!
but when it cracks,
alas, cast it away.

The Kuyil narrates her Past Life

"My God! my precious! my life!
Listen to what I say before you go.
Sometime back I was quite lost in thought
sitting on a branch of a forest tree
in the high Podigai mountain range,
A Seer came there, and I bowed to him
in reverence. As he blessed me, I said:
'Learned Saint, I seem to be fated
for this demeaning life of a bird.
And yet I am a stranger to my race,
for I understand human languages.
Why have I such a sharp consciousness?
As I begged him to clear the mystery,
he kindly answered: 'Listen, O kuyil!
In your preceding life you were born
the daughter of Veeran Muruga,
the hunter-chief of killer-foresters
who resided on a hill to the south
of the prosperous Chera country.
As you grew into sensuous girlhood,
there was no equal in beauty to you
in all the three lands of the Tamils.
Among the foresters was a cousin,
Madan, who was struck by Cupid's arrows

when he once saw your captivating walk.
Hoping to wed you, he daily came
with offerings of gold, flower, honey.
As his thoughts were centered in you alone
you agreed, although you did not love him.
Only you couldn't bear his misery.
Meanwhile your beauty became quite famous.
A hunter chieftain of Tenmalai, rich,
heroic, and famous for his exploits,
Mottai Puliyan by name, wished his son,
Nettai Kurangan, to marry you.
To your father Puliyan said: "I wish
my son could obtain your daughter's hand."
Your fond father felt greatly overjoyed,
and the wedding was to be but twelve days hence.
Madan now learnt that within a fortnight
you'd be carried away by a stranger.
Frustrated, he came to you in anger,
and only out of pity you told him:
"No more fury, Mada: even were I
forced at last to wed Nettai Kurangan
and pass my days under his roof,
in three brief months shall I do such mischief
returning the wedding necklace to him—
and I'll marry you before the year's out.
My words are true indeed, believe me."
Not love but pity made you speak those words.
(In your previous birth, good woman,
you were known as Chinna Kuyili.)
Some days went by, and you, Kuyili girl,
you were playing with some of your friends
like lightning-creepers in the forest.
Now came there the Chera prince a-hunting
and saw you dancing with the girls.
It was sudden love at first sight for him,
and for you too, your desire o'erflowing.
He saw you straight, and you glanced at him.
In that rare moment your souls commingled.
Your companions, when they saw the stranger,
disappeared at once, and then the Prince said:

"I am the son of the Chera King.
Love-child of the famous hunter chief,
I know the joy of being a man today.
I love you!" At this you made reply
controlling the love flooding your heart:
"My lord! Five hundred ravishing damsels
live in your palace. They are lasses
unparalleled! learned! musical!
Live with them in cloying happiness.
I would have no King for spouse. I'm only
the obscure child of the forest hunter.
Would ever a lion desire a rabbit?
Kings do not marry poor hunters' daughters.
We are used to being loving wives; not
courtesans in royal palaces.
I humbly bow to you. Good-bye . . .
But what shall I do? My friends are nowhere!"
As you stood there thus wholly confused,
the King's son saw through your camouflage
and seized you in a passionate embrace.
You wriggled as if to withdraw, but where's
the law for the love-mad? He kissed again:
"You are the sole girl in world for me.
O gold, O jewel, O nectar, O joy!
you are my beloved wife, my queen,
my darling helpmate, and my goddess.
I shan't think of another, why doubt me?
Come let's go to your residence now:
I shall tell your people of my desire
and marry you under the Vedic rites."
He held your right hand sealing his promise,
and delighted, you grew ecstatic.
Your shyness was instantly washed away
by the sudden oceanic surge of joy.
Reality slumbered as you went deep
into a luxuriant dream, and you held
the Prince in a most ardent embrace
and were ready to kiss his lips. The Prince,
like the bee near honey, like the iron
drawn by a magnet, held you firmly

and went on kissing . . . Nettai Kurangan
had just then returned from his travels
and learnt of your sojourn in the forest.
Coming there to meet you, he saw the scene:
"What, in broad daylight! Horror of horrors!
Not married yet—and still this shamelessness!
She has injured my honour greatly,
and this, even before the marriage:
ah, already she has an affair!"
His heart on fire, Nettai Kurangan
stood as if he was rooted to the post.
Madan too heard that Kurangan had come
and had gone in search of Kuyili.
With sweat pouring down, and his eyes ablaze,
Madan hurried to the forest bower.
The son of Tenmalai's chief didn't see him,
nor did Madan see the majestic form
of Nettai Kurangan; but both espied
the maiden Kuyili clasping a stranger youth.
Madan was maddened, and Kurangan as well.
But the King's son and the beautiful maid
were lost in bliss, and didn't open their eyes.
In that joy of their souls' communion
their four eyes remained abstractedly closed.
Viewing that picture with their souls aflame,
four other eyes were spewing out fire.
At last Madan with his sharp sword unsheathed
rushed forward to kill the Chera Prince.
Kurangan too made a similar move.
Receiving the two strokes, with lightning speed
the Prince drew his sword and killed both of them
and fell down exhausted on the earth.
You were distraught, and set him on your lap
and lamented your fate with streaming tears.
The Prince your Lord opened his eyes and said:
"Dear one, I'm dying. In a few moments
I will be no more. Of what use are tears?
There's no sorrow in death; and we shall be
born again, and I shall love you again,
and we will live in happy union.

My darling, there shall be other births,
and I shall surely live with you once more."
With this he expired, a smile on his lips.
Because of these untoward happenings
you were born a kuyil in this birth.
Your lord has now come to the southern land
skirted by the sea; he will see you here,
and hear your sweet music. With memory
reviving, he will love you as before.'

Thus the saint from southern Podigai.
And having heard all, I made this answer:
'My lord, I am only a kuyil bird,
but my soul's mate is now human born.
We might love, perhaps, but how marry?
Were, then, the Prince's last words in vain?
The saint's smile was meant to reassure me:
'You fool, when you were born as the child
of a hunter in the Vindhyan forests,
Madan and Kurangan met you as ghosts
while on their eerie round of travels.
Afraid that you might meet the Prince again
they have made you a kuyil, and are still
shadowing you. Don't you understand?
O remorseless fate! 'Should the dead torture
those happily alive? Must these phantoms
change my form itself and persecute me?
Alas, what shall I do if I meet
my Lord, and they injure him again?
Is there really no way out, O seer?'
And then the saint made reply: 'Kuyil girl,
when the Prince stands wholly rapt in music
in the forests of the southern country,
the ghosts will fashion such fantasies
that will make your lover suspect you again.
And see for yourself what follows after.
But now it's time for my prayers.' And he
vanished. Alas, how will you take this all?
O princely noble man! Give me love,
or if you must, kill me with your hands!"
So saying the bird dropped into my hands.

Could I murder this sweet little thing?
Even ghosts take pity on little girls.
Should I succumb to a ghostly stratagem?
Could love grow faint because of jealousy?
Who will not be moved by the confessions
of a girl in love? With a surge of joy
I gently stroked the kuyil and kissed it . . .
But the kuyil now vanished in a trice.
A wonder passing strange! O miracle!
Nectar from the sea of love! A realm
of light and glimpse of perfect womanhood!
A maid stood there with radiant delight,
her eyes cast down; she looked at me and bowed.
Lord, to limn her beauties in homely speech!
The man-devouring wonder of her eyes!
How can I forget the moonbeam dance
that flitted across her pearl-white teeth?
Like a lightning-creeper on the earth she stood
with perfection gleaming in her form,
her stance, her gait. That rarest honey-sweet girl,
ah! how she stood there most ravishingly!
All I can say to the learned and wise:
Mixing the juice of poesy and the essence of verse,
seasoning with nectar and congealing with love—
even so Brahma fashioned this angel.
Seized by a supreme rapture I took her
and kissed her passionately on her lips.
In this loving swoon a few moments passed.
Suddenly garden and kuyil vanished.
I fell down, as everything blacked out.
Reviving at last, I saw around me
old manuscripts, pens, newspaper bundles,
the old mat—and I knew I was at home.
I realised that garden, kuyil, love,
the tale too, were an emanation
of my resourceful and scheming fancy
fed by the beauteous evening.
Although a fictional tale, O wise poets,
could my story yield on closer study
a deep philosophical meaning,
won't you explain what it is indeed?

Joy

I

The world is charged with sweetness.
The sky is sweetly fashioned.
The air is sweet.
Fire, water, earth,
all is sweet.
The sun is beneficent, the moon is beneficent.
The stars in the sky are wondrous beautiful.
Sweet is rain, lightning, thunder.
Sweet is ocean, mountain, forest.
Rivers are joy-giving.
Ore, tree, plant, creeper,
Flower, fruit,
all give joy.
Bird, insect, animal,
all, all good creatures are.
Fishes and the denizens of the deep are good.
Men are very good too.
Male and female are alike good.
Childhood is blessed.
Sweet is youth, and age is sweet.
Welcome life, and welcome, death!

II

Our bodies are good: the senses are sweet.
Life has its fragrant flavour.
Mind is honey. Knowledge is honey. Feeling is nectarean.
Feeling is nectar.
Feeling is God.

III

Mind is God. Will is God. Life is God.
Forest, mountain, water-falls, river,
sea, earth, water, air,
fire, sky,
the sun, moon, the stars of the sky,
all—all are Divine.
Ore, trees, plants,
animals, birds, creatures that crawl.
fishes that swim, human beings—
all are nectarean.

IV

This world is one.
Male, female, mortal, immortal,
snake, bird, air, sea,
life, death—everything is one.
The sun, the wall, bee, water-fall,
flute, emerald—everything is one.
Joy, sorrow, music,
washerman, the sparrow,
lightning, cotton
all these are one.
The fool, the poet,
iron, grasshopper
—these are one being.
Vedas, sea-fish, storm, jasmine blossoms—
these are the varied forms of the same.
All that are, are one thing, One.
The name of this 'one' is 'self'
'Self' is God.
'Self' is ambrosial, immortal.

V

Let all lives attain joy.
May all bodies be rid of ills.
Feel all senses becoming 'one'.

Hail the 'self'!
May nectar be a joy for ever.

VI

Praise we the Gods.
May the Gods attain joy.
May they abide.
May they be victorious.
Oh Gods!
Stay for ever; achieve joy for ever.
Live always; pour your grace always.
Protect all things.
Oh you Gods!
All good to you.
Eat us; be our food;
eat the earth; be food to the earth.
Oh you Gods!
All good to you.
Fostering is sweet; being protected is also sweet.
Destroying is good; to be destroyed is also good.
Eating is good; to be eaten is also good.
Taste is good, life is good, good, good.

VII

Senses, may you thrive.
You are one, you are light.
You are one, you are many.
You are friendship, you are enmity.
That which *is*, and *is not*, is also you.
You are knowledge and ignorance.
You are both good and bad.
You are nectar, you are taste.
You are good, you are joy.

Sun

I

What gives light? What is eternally young?
Who is he that heats? Whose the happiness?
Who gives the rains? Whose the eye?
Who gives life?
Who gives fame? Whose right is fame?
How will knowledge flame?
Which is the temple of the God of Knowledge?
The Sun.
That is good.

II

You are light, you are flame, you are explication,
you are the scene.
Lightning, ruby, glowing fire, kindled flame—
these are your off-shoots.
The eye is your house.
Fame, courage—these are your play.
Knowledge is your sign. You are the sign of
knowledge.
You burn! You exhibit! All good to you.
You bestow life, you are giver of body.
You foster, you kill.
You give water, you blow the wind; all good to you.

III

Sweet is the red glow of morn.
Prosper the Dawn, who smiles like the flowers.
We worship the Dawn.
She is prosperity.
She causes the waking up,
she induces clarity,
she gives life, she gives will,
she gives beauty, she gives poetry.
Salute the dawn.

She is honey. The bee of consciousness aspires
for her.
She is nectar.
She does not die. She mingles with strength.
Only strength mingles with beauty;
sweetness is grand.
She follows as manifold the northern mountains.
Smiling she roams the earth beneath the sky.
Glory to her laughter.
To the south she comes, a wonder, because of
her love.
Is not the *one* sweeter than the manifold?
The morn is good. We praise it.

IV

You burn. You give pain.
You give thirst, you tire us.
You give hunger.
These are sweet.
You empty the sea-water. You do give sweet rain.
You light up a lamp in the skies.
You eat darkness.
All good to you.

V

O Sun, what have you done to the darkness?
Did you drive it away? Kill it? Gobble it up?
Did you hide it by kissing it with your rays?
Is darkness your enemy?
Is darkness your food?
Is it your love?
Was it dark because it couldn't see you
all through the night?
Having perceived you, did it take your light
and mingle with you?
Are you both the same mother's children?
Did your mother order you two to protect
the world by turns?

Have you no death? Are you immortal?
I praise you two.
O Sun, I praise you.

VI

O light, who are you?
Daughter of the Sun?
No. You are the Sun's life, his soul.
We praise you in the Sun.
The Sun is the body; you are its life-spark.
When were you born, O Light?
Who made you?
O light, what are you?
What is your nature?
Are you wisdom's daughter? But wisdom sleeps.
Perhaps you are its clarity.
Perhaps you are the form of knowledge.
O light, for how long have you befriended the sky?
And wherefore this love of it?
How do you completely merge in it?
She who made you all is a magician.
She is the enchanter, the bewitcher.
We praise her.
Prosper, O Light!

VII

O Sun!
How does light stay in you?
Do you but spit it?
Does it eat you?
Besides, are you nothing without it?
The wick becomes air and emits glow.
How are the wind and the flame related?
We know that wind's form is the wick.
Perhaps air is the form of light.
Light, you are sweet.

VIII

How are light and heat related?
When heated, light appears.
We worship heat.
Heat is light's mother, the primeval form
of light.
Heat, you too are fire.
Fire is the courageous God.
Fire is the Sun.
Fire's nature is light.
Let fire burn.
We pour ghee into it.
Let fire burn.
We pour meat into it.
Let fire burn.
We pour warm blood into it.
Let fire burn.
We do sacrifice to it.
Let fire burn.
The fire of righteousness, the fire of knowledge,
the fire of life, the fire of austerity,
the fire of sacrifice,
the fire of anger, the fire of enmity, the fire
of atrocity—
we worship all these.
We protect all these.
We rule all these.
O fire, you are our life's companion.
We praise you.
Like yours, may our lives give heat and flame
for a hundred years.
O fire, even as yours, may our hearts be aflame.
O fire, even as you, may our knowledge burn.
O fire, we praise you in the Sun.
O Sun-God, we praise you.
Your light is good. Your action is good.
You are good.

IX

The god of light has married the damsel sky.
Sweet is their companionship.
The Wind-God perceived this.
Wind is strong.
He wanted to join the sky.
Sky did not like him as much as she did the god of light.
This Wind-God is publicising his self-importance.
The sky and the earth mingled as two lives.
The Wind-God became jealous.
He is squirming with no peace of mind.
He hisses, beats, smoulders.
He shouts, circles, trembles.
He runs, springs up, and is vexed with uncertainty.
The light and the sky, mingling in space, laugh.
The Wind-God is powerful.
His fame is large. That fame is good.
But the sky and the light are greater than he.
They joy eternally mingling in space.
They are victorious.
O Sun, you are the Light-God.
The sky-damsel loves you well.
Your companionship is sweet.
Prosper you two!

X

O Sun, the things that see you are charged with light.
Earth, Moon, Venus, Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, Uranus, Neptune,
and likewise hundreds of satellites,
all these smile in light when teased by your rays.
Like sparks shooting from a torch
they say these are emanations from the Sun.
The thief Time met these.
Their lustre was dimmed.
Not darkened: only dimmed in their lustre.

There is nought in this world which has no light.
Darkness only means lessened light.
Girls like Venus circle round the Sun.
These spend their love on their father.
They revolve steadily and correctly bound by his magic.
They will never step out of the frontiers of his power.
He is always keeping watch over them.
These roll round to be drenched in his face's light.
These would catch his light in flower, water and air.
The Sun is a great God. Life will appear wherever his hands pass.
The flower likes him.
The leaves have attained perfection in his beauty.
Water, earth and air enjoy him.
The sky will hold him.
The other gods will serve him.
Let us sing his praise.
Sweet is his fame.

XI

Poets, sentient beings, lives manifold, supernatural beings, powers, come all of you.
Come, let us praise the Sun.
He is our protector.
He gives rain.
Rain is good.
We praise the Rain God.
The Sun shows wonders.
He transforms sea water into air and draws it upwards.
He orders air to be re-transformed into water.
The rains come down sweetly.
The rain sings.
It is a musical instrument with millions of wires.
Diamond blades of nectar fall from the Heavens.

The earth-maiden's thirst is assuaged; she becomes cool.
Coolness grows from heat, and heat out of coolness.
Because all are one.
Heat is penance. Coolness is austerity.
Heat is male. Coolness is female.
Heat is powerful. Coolness is sweet.
Is not female better than the male?
We praise the Heat-God.
Welcome the Heat-God!

XII

We praise heat.
Sun, O God of heat, the hillock of light!
Lord of the fish-like eyes that appear in the world of the body which belongs to the immortal soul,
O love who are the father of the earth-maid,
O spring of strength, rain of light, ocean of life,
O light that was given to the gypsy Might by the hunter Siva to protect the field of the world,
O cover of light that is used by the thief Lord Krishna to mask his face of knowledge,
O Sun, we praise you.
Rain is your daughter, earth is also your daughter;
Air, sea and fire are your children.
The outer space is your beloved.
Thunder and lightning are your play.
You are the Lord of the immortals.
We praise you.
All the immortals are one.
All that is seen, is their form.
All that is thought, is their life.
Their mother is immortal.
Immortality is God. Immortality is the True Light.
That is the Soul.
We praise it.
It is good to speak of the Sun's fame.

XIII

Ra inours. Wind whizzes. Thunder smoulders.
Lightning flashes.
O poets, let us sing about lightning, come.
Lightning is a play of the God of Light—
a vision of the God of Light.
The *yavanas*[1] worshipped it and were vouchsafed
light.
We worship lightning.
May it enlighten us.
The cloud-children drop lightning-flowers.
There is no place without light's power.
So it is with all the immortals.
In the dark stone, white sand, green leaf, red
blossom, blue sky,
air, water—everywhere electricity is dormant.
We praise it.
May lightning be born in our eyes.
May lightning rush into our heart.
May lightning appear in our right hand.
May our songs be electrified.
May our words have electric force.
Lightning will destroy the weak;
and will add strength to the powerful.
May it increase our strength.
Light, lightning, flame, effulgence, Sun, Moon,
the planets in the sky, the stars—
we praise all that have light.
We praise all.
We praise the Sun.

Wind

I

Ocean's middle. A lonely ship.
Stormy weather as if the skies are angry.
The waves are rolling confusingly arrayed.
They beat and break; destroy!
The ship sways.
'tis raised in a moment.
It has struck a rock.
Dead!
Two hundred lives lost.
Before the end they experienced the end of the world.
Deluge will be like this.
The world will be a sheet of water; fiery water.
Might will become air.
Shiva will be wild
The world will look as one.
That would be like Might.
Behind her Shiva will stand.
Only the air moves the loose ropes; and he pours life into them.
It is air that stirs the storm in water,
raises lightning in the sky,
makes fire of water, makes water of fire,
transforms water into atom and atom into water, and creates confusion.
Air ends this world.
Air saves life.
May he protect us.
"*Namaste Vayo, tvameva pratyaksham Brahmasi.*"[2]

II

The ear is air's receptacle.
Air stands sentinel in Siva's ears.
Siva cannot hear but for the air.
The air has no ears.

He is deaf.
Will one who has ears shout like this?
Will one with ears thus bring together the clouds
and make thunder for the sake of play?
Will one with ears play by muddying the ocean?
We worship air, sound, strength.

III

Desert sand
Sand
Sand
Level sand for miles on all four sides
In evening time

a merchant caravan ride on their camels
across the sand
In a tempestuous whirl
a moment's hell buries the merchant host
in the sand
The air can be ruthless
Rudra-fierce
terrific in sound
catastrophic in result.

Praise we the air.

IV

The Puranas hail Bhima and Hanuman[8] as
children of the air.
The Vedas assert that all animate beings are
air's progeny.
Life is air.
Life is form, air its force.
Mother earth lives.
Her breath is earth's air.
Air is life; he destroys lives.
Air is life; there's no death for life.
The smaller life merges with the Supreme.
There is no death.

The universe is life's base.
Birth, growth, change, death—all are life's
handiwork.
Praise we life.

V

Welcome, O Air!
Bearing pollen, come with the sweet scent that
pleases the heart.
Brush on the leaves and waves,
and bring us the essence of life.
Come, O Air.
Blow to lengthen our life-flame
and make it glow with right.
Do not snuff it off by desiccating power.
Do not blow fiercely and smother life.
Slowly, steadily, blow for long.
We sing to you.
We praise you.
We worship you.

VI

Mark the tiny ant
Oh how tiny.
Yet it has hands, legs, mouth, belly
all the anatomical parts in their place

Whose handiwork?
Mahashakti's.

The tiny limbs labour with precision:
the ant eats, sleeps, mates, breeds
runs, gathers, fights, defends the State.

The air it breathes is the source of all.
the air is Mahashakti's means for playing
the game of Life.
Praise we the air.

That is courage in knowledge.
Likes turn to hates in the heart.
Stays as spirit in life.
We know its works in the outer world,
and yet we know not.
Praise the Wind-God.

Ocean

I

The sea circulates air.
How is it that the water in earth's crevices
is not spilled, when the earth goes round?
Mother Might's edict.
She protects us from the sea hurtling over
our heads.
May Her name abide.
Tha ocean is a big lake; a large tank; a vast well.
Does the well fall on us? No!
Does the ocean overwhelm us? No!
It is Parashakti's edict.
She charged the mud with magnetism.
That steadies things.
The hill does not come upon us.
Nor the ocean.
Tha towns are not confounded.
The world gathers unity from all.
All this is Her grace.
We praise Her grace.

II

Wind rushes from the hot fields to the cool land.
In its flight, it brings the clouds.
The air that comes to us thus is from the sea-
side.
O wind, bring us life-giving rains

from the living ocean.
We burn incense to you.
O Varuna, O Indra, salutations!
Grant us now abundant rains.
Our limbs are parched.
Because of excessive heat our children and cattle are ill.
Change this.
The sultry days are unbearable.
But the mind soars above.
The birds are famished and defiantly seek refuge in holes.
For several days, the evenings are cloudy.
Because of the cloudy weather there is no air, the leaves stay still, and it is sultry beyond reckoning.
After a while giant winds chase away the clouds.
Thus are we disappointed.
O Indra, Varuna, Aryama, Bhaga, Mitra,[4]
I pray for your grace.
Let rains come, for slaking our thirst,
and for the world's joy.

Freedom
(a Play)

Scene One

Place: the Heavens.
Time: end of the Iron Age.
Dramatis personae: Indra, Vayu, Agni, Light (Surya), Soma, the Twins (Aswins), Maruts, Vasus, Tvashta, Viswadeva, etc.

INDRA: May you prosper, my friends.
THE REST: O friend, may you prosper.
INDRA: Brahma has given us a job.
THE REST: What may it be?

INDRA: 'Let the bonds that bind earth's child
burst into smithereens'

AGNI: Praise the Father! Prosper mankind!

THE REST: Long live the Father, long live the One Supreme.
Long live Truth, may earth rise in glory.
May evil die, and skill grow!

LIGHT: He who appeared as Truth,
Knowledge and Bliss, who did
many things, who gathers all good,
He the Supreme, the Father of Beings,
the Mother of Beings, the Lord of Beings,
the helpmeet of all beings, the life of all lives,
the spirit of all lives, having seen Him in knowledge,
we will observe his law well.

INDRA: Good, friends let us drink nectar.

THE REST: Nectar is good. Yes. We will drink nectar.

(all drink nectar)

INDRA: Strong every day.

VAYU: New every day.

AGNI: Never-ending speed.

TWINS: Unchanging Joy.

MARUTS Youth for ever.

LIGHT: Clarity every day.

AGNI: The soma juice strained by mortals.
and this divine nectar are of a like taste.

INDRA: O mortals of the earth,
you will ask for joy,
forget what you had asked for,
do many jobs, and get weak in consequence.
If wishes could come true
you will ask for the gobbling up of the seven worlds.
Meanwhile forget again!
Daily did you join us as friends,
nectarean words mingle with soma milk.
Did the foreigners give you pain?
Aaah! forgetful Satan, O demon,

Vrithra, Hunter that forgets Light,
Despicable worm, vermin,
O pain, O fear, O night, O slaves,
O demon that shows many forms,
O base snake that shows different forms,
O destruction that confuses variously,
Ha, ha, you are fallen,
all of you are down.
O demons, if only you leave
the temple of knowledge that is man,
a golden age will recommence.
Long ages ago, the cloudy dark Satan destroyed
all the good we had designed for Man.
"The gods are powerless, the demons are
mighty.
Dharma is impotent, strong is *Adharma*.
Truth is mere rubbish, mighty is falsehood.
Joy wilts, sorrow triumphs."
Thus was evil born on earth.
Mankind was perplexed: the inspired word
Of Viswamitra, Vasishtha, Kasyapa
and other godly seers disappeared.
The deceptive gospels prospered.
Dark smoke covered the True Word.
Austerity decreased: plots increased.
Always the poor mortals hankered after joy,
and died in the desire.
Man thirsted for the Ganga, and found a
mirage.
He hoped for nectar and drank but poison.
Ye eeh!
So the demons are clearly powerful!
. . . .
But hasten the direction of fate!
May man evolve higher by mind's courage.

LIGHT: Mankind can still come to good
if through one pathfinder's exertions
they can destroy this errant and deluded life,
and make life invade eternity.
Mankind is one; it is unified

in heart, life and work.

FIRE: In Bharat land, in Pandya country,
mid the Brahmins that have lost their Truth
lives a youth by name Vasupati.
Drooping in shoulders, sunk in sorrow,
battling daily with poverty
he still knows not the correct Path
nor does he believe in God.
He was caught in the meshes of Doubt.
Let us see him, he will save the earth.

AIR: I gave life: let him succeed by life.

INDRA: I give mental power. Long live Vasupati!

SUN: I have joined illumination
to his knowledge; live long.

GODS: We chant *mantras*: truth is God.
Absence of sorrow is Realisation.
Joy is nectar: *dharma* is fruitful works.
Fear is hell; let's burn it.
Have faith in good; do good.
Son, Vasupati, remove bondage,
do penance and save the world.

SCENE TWO

Vedapuri in Pandya Country. Seashore; Vasupati is looking at moonlight, alone. Vasupati sings:

Come, moonlight, come!
treasure of the skies, come;
ocean growing on the silvery isle, come;
you the light-flash of the sky-nymph,
come, moonlight, come!

Showering nectar on the earth,
infusing joy into human sight,
crystallising mundane life
into blissful forms,
come, moonlight, come!

If thou desirest joy,
look, look at the skies;
see, the sky's light's upon the ground:
isn't sadness a matter of folly?
come, moonlight, come!

A regiment to destroy
the demon Fear,
a delight that feeds
on the honey of Art,
come, moonlight, come!

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. 'Bharati': Goddess of Learning.
2. Sister Nivedita (1869-1911) was an Irish lady by name Margaret E. Noble, who became a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, the Founder of the Ramakrishna Mission. 'Nivedita' (meaning the Dedicated) was the name she assumed on joining the Ramakrishna Order. Her publications include *Kali the Mother*, *The Master as I Saw Him* and *The Web of Indian Life*.
3. 'Partition of Bengal': the handiwork of Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India; the 'Partition' sought to divide the unwieldy Bengal of those days into two manageable provinces.
4. 'Chatrapati Shivaji': the principal antagonist of the Mughal Emperor Aurangazeb, Shivaji established Hindu supremacy over Western India.
5. 'Guru Govind Singh': the last of the Sikh Teachers, Guru Govind gave a pronounced military character to the Sikh religion in order to contain Muslim domination and consolidate the Sikh and Hindu kingdoms.
6. 'Indrajit': a valorous son of Ravana the adversary of Rama in the *Ramayana*.
7. 'Gandiva': the famed bow of Arjuna.
8. 'the ash-smeared in an eternal trance': Shiva.
9. 'the dark-hued asleep on the ocean': Vishnu, who is asleep in his passive state on the bed of the Infinite floating on the ocean of Existence.
10. 'Gajendra' : a royal elephant devoted to Lord Vishnu who worshipped him everyday with lotuses. One day as he was gathering lotuses in a pond, a crocodile caught hold of one of his legs. Unable to extricate himself, Gajendra made a despairing appeal to the Lord of the Beginnings (Adimoola or Vishnu), who instantly came to his devotee's rescue and killed the crocodile with his discus.
11. Three famous Tamil mystic and devotional poets.

POEMS ON FREEDOM AND PARTIOTISM

1. 'Vande Mataram': literally 'Mother, we bow to you'. This was the first line of a poem in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Bengali novel,

Ananda Math, but it was only during the Partition of Bengal agitation that the poem acquired a national vogue. In the words of Sri Aurobindo: "The *mantra* had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism. The Mother had revealed herself . . . A great nation which has had that vision can never again bend its neck in subjection to the yoke of a conqueror."

2. 'thirty crores' : i.e. 300 millions, which was the population of Un divided India when Bharati wrote the poem.
3,4. 'Himavant, Ganga': more poetically evocative than the anglicised forms 'Himalayas and Ganges'. cf. T.S. *Eliot* —

> "Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
> Waited for rain, while the black clouds
> Gathered far distant, over Himavant."

5. 'Brahma-Knowledge': knowledge or experience of Brahman, the Supreme Reality according to Hindu philosophy.
6. 'Aryavarta': the land of the Aryas, i e. Bharat.
7. 'darling daughter': Parvati, the Consort of God Shiva, is the daughter of Himavant. Here, by describing Bharat (India) as Himavant's daughter, the poet equates Mother India with Divine Shakti.
8. 'Kamban': 12th century Tamil poet who wrote the epic *Ramavataram*.
'Valluvar': 7th century Tamil author of *Tirukkural*, a compendium of moral wisdom.
'Ilango': 9th century Tamil poet who indited *Silappadhikaram*, or, *The Lay of the Anklet*.
9. 'self-forged Karma': the Hindu theory of moral causation which holds that as one sows in one birth, one shall reap in that or a subsequent birth. Karma and Rebirth thus go together. As Sri Aurobindo puts it, "If we believe that the soul is repeatedly born in the body, we must believe also that there is some link between the lives that preceded and the lives that follow, and that the past of the soul has an effect on its future; and that is the spiritual essence of the law of Karma.'
10. 'Architect of the Bharat War': the reference is to Lord Krishna.
11. 'healed the Cobra bite' : Mahatma Gandhi is here compared to legendary deliverers like Garuda and Krishna. Garuda the divine bird brought the herbs to revive Rama and Lakshmana, and Krishna held up the hill Govardhan to shield his followers from the wrath of Indra.
12. 'satyagraha': the name given by Gandhi for his non-violent non-co-operation movement.
13. 'Khalsa' : the military wing of the Sikh religion organised by Guru Govind. Members of this faith are expected to have on their person an austere undergarment, a sword, a comb, and an iron band. They are aslo expected to keep their hair unshorn.
14. 'Bal Gangadhar Tilak' (1857-1920): One of the Titans of the nationalist movement, was referred to as 'The Father of Indian Unrest'

by Sir Valentine Chirol, but he was really one of the great architects of Indian independence.

DEVOTIONAL POEMS AND KNOWLEDGE HYMNS

1. 'Muruga' : one of the popular deities of the Hindu Pantheon, he is described as the beautiful and heroic son of Shiva and Parvati. Muruga is also known by other names such as Kartikeya, Subramania and Kumara.
2. 'In Time of the Breaking of the Worlds' : literally the title should be 'Dance of Destruction' (*Oozhi-k-koothu*), but I have given the above title, taking my cue from Thomas Hardy. The idea of the poem is evidently that the Divine Mother in her terrible aspect (Mahakali) mangles and dances over the worlds in supreme self-forgetful frenzy, till at last she softens at the approach of Shiva in his auspicious form, and they unite to re-create the worlds once again. This poem may be compared with Swami Vivekananda's 'Kali the Mother' —

   "Scattering plagues and sorrows,
   Dancing mad with joy,
   Come, Mother, come!
   For Terror is thy name,
   Death is thy breath,
   And every shaking step
   Destroys a world for e'er . . . "
3. 'bhakti": or 'devotion'. Bhakti is one of the three classical Hindu pathways to Realisation, the others being *Jnana* (the Way of Knowledge) and *Karma* (the Way of Works).
4. 'Velayudha' : the spear of Subramania.
5. 'Markhandeya': a 16-year-old boy who escaped from Yama the God of Death by taking refuge in God Shiva, who accepted him and made him one of the immortals.
6. 'Hari": Lord Vishnu, one of the Hindu Trinity, the others being Brahma and Shiva. Actually, Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu symbolise the Supreme's powers as Creator, Destroyer and Preserver respectively.

ON MAN, NATURE AND GOD

1. 'Tayumanava': 17th century mystic who composed a large number of verses celebrated for their musical quality. The simplicity of diction and lilting rhythms of his poems blazed a new era in Tamil devotional literature.
2. 'Swami Abhedananda': a great monk of the Ramakrishna Order who helped to spread his Master's message in the United States of America.

3. 'Shankara', the reference is to the great Vedantic Teacher who propounded Advaita or the Monistic philosophy.
4. 'this blessed city': Madras.
5. 'Maya': the doctrine of Illusion.
6. 'the great Yogi': Kullaswamy, who initiated Bharati into spiritual truths.

THE KRISHNA SONGS

1. 'cottage with nine doors': the reference is to the human body itself.

PANCHALI'S VOW

1. 'Brahma': God of Creation, one of the Hindu Trinity.
2. 'exegetic collyrium': Subramania Bharati says: "This means, one who has put the dark collyrium of exegesis (*Bhashyas*) on her eyes that are the Vedas (the Source Books of Knowledge). Collyrium enhances the beauty of the eyes, and protects them too. But if applied in excess, the eyes will look ugly and the eyesight may be impaired. (Has this not happened in our land?) As Saraswati is the Goddess of Knowledge, her eyes are described as those of the Knowledge of the Spirit (the Vedas)."
3. 'Vena': A descendant of the legendary Swayambhuva Manu. When he became king, Vena prohibited worship and sacrifices to the Gods. As he refused to listen to the counsel of the sages and was bent upon causing confusion, he was destroyed by the sages.
4. 'Arundati': the morning star personified as the wife of Rishi Vasishtha. She is regarded as a perfect wife and is invoked by the bridegroom in the Hindu wedding ceremony.
5. 'Vikarna': younger brother of Duryodhana, the only one of the 100 Kurus who was not sold over to Darkness.
6. 'Kalinga': the serpent that was subjugated by Krishna when he was a mere child.
7. 'Sarnga bow': one of the weapons of Lord Vishnu.
8. 'Hiranya . . . Prahlad': the story of Prahlad who defied his atheist father, King Hiranya, is told in the *Bhagavata*. Vishnu appears as half-man and half-lion, kills Hiranya, and gives peace and protection to Prahlad. Gajendra and Prahlad are among the great Bhaktas or god-intoxicated souls who have inspired countless generations of Hindus.
9. 'Gopi's butter': as a child it was part of Krishna's 'divine play' (*leela*) to 'steal' the butter churned out by the Gopis, i.e. cowherdesses.
10. 'snake-bannered Kuru': Duryodhana.

PROSE POEMS

1. 'yavanas': the Greeks.
2. 'Namaste Vayo . . . ': "Salutations to the Wind! You are the visible sign of Brahman."
3. 'Bhima and Hanuman': in Hindu mythology, they are described as the sons of the Wind-God. Both are famous for their physical prowess and great exploits.
4. 'Indra, Varuna, Aryama . . . ': Vedic deities.

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Nandakumar, Prema; *Bharati* (2nd. Edn., Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1981).

Padmanabhan, R.A. (Ed.): *Bharatiyar Kavinayam*: Essays on Bharati's Poetry (Vanathi Pathippagam, Madras, 1982)

Parthasarathy, Dr. J.: *Bharati's Longer Poems* (Bharati Tamil Sangham, Calcutta, 1982)

Ramachandran, T.N.: *The Garland Wrought of Fourfold Gems on Vinayaka* (1979); *The Song of the Kuyil* (1980); *Krishanjali* Parts One and Two (1980); *The Oath of Draupadi* (1982); (The above four English Translations from Bharati are Published by T.R.N. Memorial Library, Thanjavur)

Subramanian, Dr. S.V.: *Bharatiyar Vazhkai Kolgaigal* ('Bharati's Concept of Life'), International Institute of Tamil Studies, Madras—113, 1982.

Visvanathan, Seeni (Ed.): *Mahakavi Bharati Noorpeyar Kovai* (A Bibliography of Bharatiana), Vanavil Prachuram, Madras, 1981.

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