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Towards Wisdom Everlasting

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K.V.Ragpathi has been writing poetry for the last three decades and has carved a niche for himself in Indian English Poetry. In his *Voice of the Valley*, a wanderer goes into a valley filled with mystic silence. Suddenly amazed he feels an immeasurable vastness and falls in a stupor. A short while later he hears a Voice which is bestowed with deep insight, intense power and absolute authority. The wanderer is Man befuddled, baffled, broken owing to ignorance, selfishness and a number of lapses and weaknesses. The voice of the valley recognizes the wanderer as a seeker of Truth. It answers the queries, questions and doubts and suggests solutions for self-created problems and illumines him for finding ways for the attainment of peace, joy and bliss. The poet records the dialogue between Man, the wanderer and the Voice in the valley. The dialogue is extensive, Man being in the darkness of ignorance and the Voice being extremely understanding, sympathetic and compassionate. As the dialogue goes on, the Voice in the valley recognizes the wanderer as a befuddled human going in quest of Truth and traveller for the acquisition of wisdom. Man goes on expressing his befuddlement and confusion. The Voice is well aware of the human condition and human weaknesses. The reader of this long poem would realize the sublimity of the Voice in its explication of human nature and behavior in detail trying slowly with compassion to uplift and ennoble Man by enlightening him to reach the condition of absolute contentment.

When the seeker asks the Voice to explain who it is, in a terse reply he is told that it is the root of death, the life of death, the root of life and the death of life. It tells Man that it is not the son of God, the Supreme God, the spokesperson or the prophet.

I am beyond your words and jargon

I am behind your created ideologies and systems

*I am beyond your invented gods and religions. (p.8)**

The most important aspect of this long poem is that it does not speak of either God or worship. What Man is advised briefly is to forget himself, disown and disclaim his body and mind. This leads Man to only reflect long in silence and confesses that he is bewildered and baffled by its profound revelation and is told:

The voice you hear is simply Nothing.

Look at this naked tree,

With no branches, leaves and fruits

That stands all alone in this Valley

Amidst many, many plants and trees big and small.

The others seem to be laughing at it for its bareness.

Yet, it stands alone.

It has its own blissful existence,

And it lives as much as the Great Existence wills it. (p.12)

Man is told by the Voice that his road is clear as day but it is only he who makes it dark as night. The Voice is Great Existence. Man is asked in kind advice to give whatever he has and surrender himself by his own will, completely, totally and fully. He must remain vulnerable, open unguarded and receptive. When once Man surrenders himself the Voice names him Bindura and goes on telling him all that there is to be learnt, understood and acted upon.

After listening to what the Voice spoke at length, Bindura is struck with wonder and says to the Voice that it speaks like God. Then he is told not to concern about who or what it is. He is told that he, the Voice is neither God nor No-God. It tells him point-blank that man is degenerated and debased in every sense; wretched and despondent but it is kind:

*To you this voice shall speak
Because, from the futility of worldly pursuits,
From the fugitive character of existence,
From the cosmic loneliness and despair,
From the inner discord
Of your pale and sterile experiences,
You seek an inner transcendence
For permanent anchorage
In the flux of things and sensations.*

... p.15

The Voice tells Bindura that it is the Happiness, it is the Truth, it is the Life and it is Deathless. It knows that Bindura is a hungry seeker not knowing that he himself is both the seeker and the sought. The Voice tells him that by seeking and asking, believing and following nothing can be achieved. All indiscriminate and desultory wanderings and movements must be stopped to know what he really seeks. To know that, he should only rest and become restless too. Only through restlessness should he rest. Only after that that which he seeks shall be at his feet. So saying the Voice wants to know what has induced him to forsake, quit the fascinations and temptations of the world and to wander aimlessly. At this point the seeker confesses that he has led a dishonourable and disgraceful life, indulging in lewd pleasures and excessive lasciviousness. His only desire now is to arrive at Supreme Knowledge. Now he wants not to be a root in the dark but a tree in the light.

The Voice is obviously impressed and assures the seeker that he would be enlightened. The seeker becomes more humble, more perceptive and more worshipful. The seeker can apprehend his own nature using his own discrimination and discernment by listening to the Voice:

The seeker is told that he has corrupted not only himself but all around. The Voice tells the seeker that its consciousness is the purest since it is the consciousness of the entire existence. The seeker asks the Voice for its compassion by freeing him from entanglement, of doubts and agony.

The seeker is explained the insignificance of 'self', of Man. Man is more a phenomena. A bundle of sensation, thoughts and emotions, dreams and fantasies, he is endowed with a profound interior and deeper reality. The Voice tells the seeker that all philosophical systems and theories are built on weak foundations. Man is a myth too. In spite of his inventions and discoveries, he is swayed by delusions and fantasies, hallucinations and delusions. It is said that birth is accidental, unexpected and unforeseen. Whatever has come into existence must die. Says the Voice:

Fear death, you shall be as insecure as anything else.
Love death, you shall be deathless.
Love death, your life shall bloom in thousand splendours.
Death is sorrow when 'self' is strong and everything.
Death is not sorrow when 'self' is extinct and nothing.
Death is from finite to infinite.
Death is as beautiful as life is.
 ... p. 29

As life is vast and infinite and creation is plenty splendid, he must be like things and beings in creation: like a tree, a rock, a butterfly, a flower, a wild stag, a squirrel, a rabbit, a hawk, a heron, a peacock, a dolphin, a mackerel and a beast. All these have no philosophies, no discoveries, no hatred and no illusions. Everything in creation is contented living in peace. Only Man is like one of the beads in suspended animation and hence, non-existence. When Man realizes that there can be never independent existence. One should become the whole existence. Once this is learnt or realized one would be a true creature in existence

Life in itself, the Voice tells Bindura, is a big dream through day and night and Man himself is a dream in it. In this world no one has relevance to anyone. Every man's consciousness is somebody else's consciousness too. Yet it exists in one who is not his own. Only when named, Man becomes conscious "I". So it is the first garb. From that he goes into innumerable garbs that inevitably clash with one another. The lesson is:

Destroy your name, be nameless
Remain as a common stone on the roadside, in nature.
 p.35

The seeker of Truth is advised to be like an unwanted child, get lost in nature. It is best to flow along with the flow to the point of nowhere to know what life in movement is. The Voice clearly explains Bindura how one must live:

You live without being aware of living.
You do everything without being conscious of doing.
You contemplate without being conscious of contemplation.
You meditate without being aware of meditation.
You attain wisdom without being aware of wisdom.
This should be the essence of your living.

... p.38

The Voice goes on speaking, hammering ideas preaching right action. It is not philosophy, God or religion. Every life is best with surrender, innocence and selflessness, as a bird, or an animal. Constant self-analysis needs to be done without learning it from outside but from within. Intellectual verbalization is useless. Bindura is told that existence is naked and open. It is wisdom to realize that doctrines, concepts, dogmas beliefs and theories are just peripheral, leading nowhere. Freedom lies in openness and secrecy is only bondage. Goals exist in the mind and one's creation is one's own obstruction. One is alone in the Valley where one matters only himself, the salubrious surroundings and nothing more.

Man's problem and the reason for his unhappiness is the 'I'. Reflecting on things and matters and the behavior and attitudes of others leads to his acquiring negative feelings. The Voice tells the seeker of Truth:

*Your happiness is misjudgment of your own sorrow.
Your sorrow is miscalculation of your own happiness*
... p. 42

The statements appear to be paradoxical or difficult to understand at the first reading. Man creates his own unhappiness by his own imperfect reflection. The Voice reveals that all existence is un-reflected and un-refracted. The seeker is asked to make his life a living with ignorance, innocence and gracelessness. Man sees everything outside but does not see what really needs to be seen in himself by looking within. After explaining what religion is not, the advice offered at length is simple if only the mind is free, a blank as it were. True religion is self discovery, the voyage of self-transcendence and self-fulfillment. The seeker is told:

*Happiness lies in experience of misery and sorrow
And happiness also lies in accepting
What has come to you with contentment
And not craving for what has not come to you*
... p.46

The voice explains next the Order of Nature.. Trying to alter nature is disorder. One has to accept everything as it is in the Order of Nature. There is external silence in every moment of one's living - that is the order. The final residue of all analytical thought lies on man himself. This concealed reveals itself if properly looked into. The real fulfillment and exaltation is not found in principle, ethics, ideal pursuit and rationalization of things.

Man spoils his own original nature meddling with it. For that reason what is determined by man is not really predetermined. Similarly heaven and hell are purely subjective. The Voice makes this clear:

Your hell is nothing but your own making

*Of the enslavement of your own self, which is selfhood.
In consequence, you live in constant duality,
Which is agony.
... p.54*

Asceticism, the Voice tells Bindura, which frees him from all passions and impulses or instinctive action is real. It is not a way out of living, but it is a way into it in a meaningful manner. It makes one feel the whole of existence. Man has to understand and perceive that the individual's life has a meaning. Systems are creations of individuals grossly ambitious and insensitive. Bindura is taught that scarcity is unknown to Nature. Scarcity is in Man. Nature does not keep anything secret. Mystery is generated by lack of proper understanding. Ignorance in Man is caused because he is devoid of understanding of the purpose and meaning of knowledge.

The advice is extensive. It goes on:

*Bindura, desire what other men do not desire
And become a Sage.
Secure order from yourself,
Before you secure disorder from others.
Perform action for yourself,
Before indulging in activities for no goodness or happiness. p. 73*

The happy and convinced seeker tells the Voice that he has understood the teaching well with sobriety, calm and peace of mind.

*O, Voice Real, once I said to myself I wanted to know.
But I did not know what I wanted to know.
...
With (these) indiscriminate wanderings

I did not gain the knowledge which I so wanted.
These wanderings ended in me, with scant realization.
... p.76*

The seeker expresses gratitude to the Voice which has given him what kings and rulers could not have possessed through power and glory. He expresses gratitude and joy that what the Voice spoke pulsated not only through the stillness of the valley but in his entire being, thinking and feeling in the heart and the body. The wanderer received the only reliable, the only worthy message. The poet concludes:

With his eyes full of blissful tears in great abundance, he (the seeker) prostrated himself before the shining sun, kissed the Mother Earth, and resumed his endless pilgrimage towards the West. And as he left he dropped his name 'Bindura'. p.85

What the Voice speaks to the seeker is about Nature, not about the imperfect nature of the humans. Without speaking of God, Religion or any metaphysical formulations the Voice of the valley speaks of self-analysis, introspection and strengthening the inner self. In our sacred scriptural literatures *punarukti* (saying the same thing again and again is not a 'dosha', a lapse or a fault. Other sayings or teaching may abide question but things like these are free. The worth of the Voice is real and the principles are ever applicable.

Belief, culture and tradition are closely related concepts. Myth is something handed down the generations and millennia as beliefs in a large social body. Religion is belief in the existence of a power that is running the universe and faith is matter of unquestioning belief. All serious literature and writing is inspired by faith, belief and conviction. Raghupathi's *Voice of the Valley* belongs to that order without showing any effort to proselytize.

Wisdom of the Peepal Tree was published in 2003, nearly a decade ago. This has come out of the poet in the middle of the growth of his creative imagination where he has shown a distinctive quality of the process of maturation. *Wisdom of the Peepal Tree* has connotations that are prominently philosophical - spiritual. Knowledge and Wisdom are not the same. Knowledge relates to knowingness and wisdom goes several steps higher than mere knowingness. The relation is different and something akin to the relation between science and philosophy. Wisdom is *jnaana*, the capacity to go to a higher level of knowing and action.

Scholars, saints and sages and exegetes of spirituality have given long explanations of the Peepal Tree and its roots and leaves. Bhagavad Gita, our scripture, reveals the highest knowledge and the noblest of its application with the maturation of intuition generated or inspired by faith. We are given the sloka about divine intuition about the quality of wisdom giving the Banyan Tree called in Sanskrit Aswaththa.

*uurdhva moolam athah shakham asvaththam praahur avyayam
chandaanmsi yasya parNaani yas tam vedasa veda vit*

Bhakti Vedanta Srila Swami Prabhu Paada explains: The Supreme Personality of Godhead said : It is said that there is an imperishable banyan tree that has its roots upward and its branches down and whose leaves are the Vedic hymns. One who knows this tree knows the knowledge of the Vedas. Buddha got enlightenment under the Bodhi, the Peepal Tree which has great power of giving wisdom and enlightenment

When the poet sits under the tree, the leaves rustle making a voice with a magic spell of preaching, the act of illumination. The sense of realization begins first with revealing the points of weakness, a kind of diagnosis before the treatment. The preaching begins: the seeker is avid to learn being taught by the knowing, wise one.

*You're strung by your own thoughts that wander
Like bees in an empty land without honey.
The only disease that is incurable by any medicine
Is your restless bewildered mind.
The healing lies nowhere
But in your tiny palms that hold water*

*Full of your own reflections.p.10***

What is of importance is looking deep into one's own self, self-examination, self analysis and self-effacement. The tree goes on speaking taking the poet into higher regions of thought about actuality and existence. All lapses are in the person and all treatment again is in one's own hands. Only the realization has to be achieved with effort. Knowing the faults must be the starting point. One should realize one's own insignificance, insufficiency and inordinate pride. The tree asks man to take refuge in his own self. The fault is in one's scepticism. The advice is to remain like a banyan tree on the cliff without falling.

Accepting death, hatred, humiliation, disorder, unfavourable inimical situations and conditions, bondage and happiness alone can give what gives essential peace and joy. Birds and beasts need to be followed for they have no selfishness, pride or arrogance. A condor, a falcon, a kiwi are great examples for man to behave like. But humility is to be learnt, acquired and practiced all the way along.

All sobs and all weeping and grief are just irrelevant, unnecessary and wasteful. Agony, despair and despondence would never be of any avail. The riddle rooted inside has to be removed by self-effort alone.

*Why all this cry?
These weepings, these sobbings,
these copious tears
For whom and for what?
Of what use are these fears of your own future?
Why all this agony?
Why all this despair?
Why all this despondency?
The riddle is rooted in you
Solve it by losing everything.p.16*

....

The wakeful man needs none to awaken him. It is piquantly stated that the faults, lapses and deficiencies are all within. Suffering, silence and copious tears for imperfections and inadequacies are enough to achieve benediction and bliss.

*Nothing awakens you
To religious consciousness, like suffering,
Your sorrow comes from your burning heart for the great.
When it is full with the froth of your tears
Your prayer is answered in silence.
When you wax, you will burn like a candle and glow
And you are as serene
As still waters in the secluded forests p.18*

And then, the grace is within, within one's self if only one learns to look within with deep thinking and contemplation. Insincerity, vanity, deceit and cunning always lead one to fall. Man often tosses between the opposites. It is this that causes tension, pain and loss of strength. One bad quality leads to another resulting from loss of self-control and knowledge of good and evil. Insults and humiliations come because of the dilemmas, because of lack of grit on things with conviction and confidence, owing to lack of faith in righteousness and virtue. Absence of meditation and contemplation on principles, virtues and righteousness spells ruin and leads to

degeneration in many ways. Learning self-control, forbearance and forgiveness give strength of character making existence joyful and meaningful.

*Humiliation is the boy's play
Meditation is the man's living.
When you cannot sense and feel a simple injury,
You can never withstand temptation and mortification.
Your forgetfulness lies in your forgiveness.p.21*

The poet brings in birds, animals, rivers, lakes and the sea to drive home his idea. Firmness of one's feet is essential. The hawk having a claw stands firmly. Grip is also essential and the mind must be under man's grip and control. Desires have a tendency to entice and slowly eat away the individual's virtue and worth.

*Stand on your feet, firm like the taloned hawk;
Turn your face to the setting sun
Behind the mountain-like cloud;
Look down at the earth
That is not quiet like the morning sky.
When you grip nothing in your hands
You are unmolested by your own enticing desires.p.22*

Steadfastness is the quality that makes a man respectable. Wobblers are people whose behavior reduces their credibility and worth. The lotus leaf in the pond does not wobble even if there are ripples in the water.

The Manasarovar is the widest, most sublime lake amidst the Himalayas, very near Parama Shiva's abode Kailash. It never dries up. A bath in the lake is believed to give the ultimate bliss, salvation and freedom from the cycle of birth and death. The Ganges is the most sacred river believed to be the cleanser of every thing and everybody. The poet's mention of these sacred water bodies is indicative of the holiness of the peepal, the teacher, preacher and saviour of mankind.

*That knowledge which springs from your heart
Never goes dry like the perennial Manasarovar.
When it is awakened by a desire of the deep quest
It is perennial like the Ganges
Follow the flow and sail with it
Until it is one with the Cosmic Flow
And never again gets stuck in the valleys and gorges.p.24*

Depending on the right things is a matter of one's discretion coming from judgment and wisdom. Reliability of things, individuals and actions may make or mar one's actions. The mind is undependable for it is rarely stable, flying in all directions making man worthless. The heart must rely on people and ideas that make a person achieve his goals and fulfill his aspirations. Here is another bird brought in which flies high in the sky over blue waters.

The highest quality in a human being is to be compassionate and humane. Selflessness, self-effacement and limitless concern and compassion for all around takes man to the sublime regions. Love, forgiveness and mercy make existence meaningful. Man is only a part of divine creation

which is extensive with birds, animals, rivers, lakes, seas and mountains. The poet brings in all as can be seen in the lines quoted,

The peepal teaches renunciation for those who seek guidance for acquiring wisdom. Gautama Buddha got enlightenment by total renunciation and surrender. Covetousness is not the quality of a worthy man. Nothing comes out of covetousness in the ultimate context. What needs to be renounced is the quest for happiness by acts not really worthy. There are so many things renounced by wise persons.

*Renounce happiness
You shall attain true happiness.
Renounce salvation
... ..
Rear not and nurture not in fears and cravings.
For, hell and heaven are made for idiots and fools
Covet nothing, you shall possess everything,
Covet everything, you shall possess nothing. p.7*

Rejection and surrender of all possessions leads to real joy. It is not a paradox. It is truth. It is the way to attain the condition of blissfulness. Even silence communicates as the mountain does. It communicates a resolve to stand sturdy and strong with absolute equanimity. Its silence is its treasure of which it is not proud.

Thirst for possession first and later tiresome and sometimes hateful behaviour for its protection lead ultimately to grief. The poet gives the example of the sky not protecting the clouds on Autumn. The sky does not possess anything and for that reason it is high. It is above all having everything under it. Real joy and absolute bliss are there in being untouched by darkness, the darkness of the mind. This darkness is ignorance and lack of discrimination and judgment.

*O Traveller, sweet Traveller
I have given what has been much hated
By humanity in the empirical world,
What has been untouched
By the dark rays of the human mind
What has been untouched
By unrighteousness.p.29*

This is what the peepal tree says in conclusion to its preaching the ways to attain the joy of attaining wisdom. Fear is darkness and the transient dazzling glory of light. Both need not be feared or sought after Wisdom lies in following the peepal's words of wisdom.

Slowly I got up and made my way to my cabin in Dhvanyaloka. As I rambled, I often turned my back and looked at the huge mysterious tree that gave me profound revelations. There was no longing in my heart. It was dropped, rather it vanished. My heart was clear like the glassy Walden Pond. On the other, it was filled with satisfaction. No doubt lingered in it, like the bee after sucking honey.p.30

Joy comes when there is no longing. The water in the pond is clear and clean. It is cleansing too wiping away filth in wrong and useless thought and action. No doubts linger in it and no heat bothers it. It reflects the blue sky. It just sucks bliss as a bee sucks honey. The bee is ever pleasant for us - giving us both sweetness and light.

Raghupathi's work is a deft blend of the ancient Indic tradition of acquiring wisdom with devotion, faith and selflessness and the modern way of giving expression to ideas that illumine what is dark and raising and supporting what is low. This could be done only by a scholar rich in his knowledge of literature of the East and the West. Faith basically is the same all over the world which considers nature as a model and an ideal. Birds, animals, lakes, rivers and mountains, are always brought in as models for insightful action and behaviour. The peepal tree's wisdom is age old with no trace of pretence or exaggeration. Raghupathi's poems are remembered long by serious thinkers.

*Page numbers refer to *Voice of the Valley*

*Page numbers refer to *Wisdom of the Peepal Tree*

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