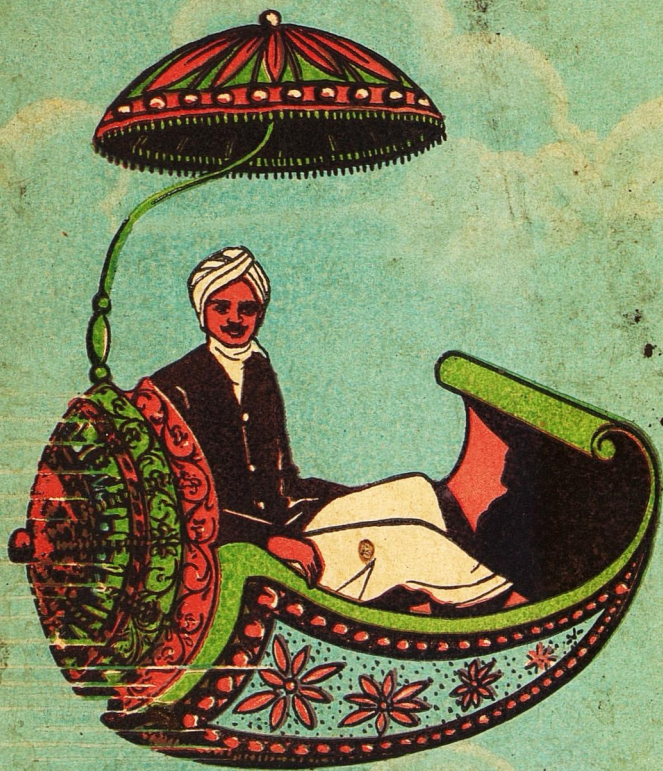


JNANARATHAM



C. SUBRAMANIA BHARATI

Tamilnadu Government's
Translation of Classics series: 6

JNANARATHAM

C. SUBRAMANIA BHARATI

Translator

Prof. P. MAHADEVAN



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PREFATORY NOTE

IT is mainly due to the happy inspiration of the Hon'ble Thiru M. G. Ramachandran, the Chief Minister of the Government of Tamil Nadu, that the Government of Tamil Nadu have decided to undertake the stupendous task of translating the great Classics of the world into Tamil and the great Tamil Classics into world languages. In fact, the Hon'ble Thiru C. Aranganayagam, the Education Minister to the Government of Tamil Nadu has declared more than once that the Government of Tamil Nadu is prepared to spend any amount in connection with this work of translation and publication. By an order dated 8-5-1978 the Government of Tamil Nadu has constituted an Expert Committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. Justice S. Maharajan with the following well-known scholars as members:

1. Thiru K. S. MAHADEVAN, the then Director of Tamil Development since replaced by his successor,

Dr. M. NANNAN.

2. Dr. S. V. SUBRAMANIAN, Director, International Institute of Tamil Studies.
3. Dr. C. BALASUBRAMANIAN, Head of the Department of Tamil Language, University of Madras.
4. Dr. C. R. SARMA, Regional Secretary, Sahitya Academy, Madras.

It is a fact well known to students of literary history that if the French language excels many other languages in its power of articulation, precision of expression and in its capacity for expressing different and delicate nuances of thought and feeling, it is mainly because of the work of thousands of dedicated scholars who, for nearly three centuries, continuously translated Greek, Latin, German, Spanish and Arabic Classics into the French language and enriched it. If the laudable project of the Government of Tamil Nadu is implemented properly and with gusto, the translations are bound to offer to the Tamils glimpses of a new world of vision and experience, and in the very process of translation, the translators will be amazed to find how the foreign Classics force the Tamil language to speak in new accents and add to Tamil a new dimension of expression.

The afflatus of foreign thinkers and poets, the creative breath of their inspirations is bound to further quicken and energise the Tamil language, which, as has been observed by Winslow, is, in its poetic form more polished and exact than Greek. The translations from the foreign Classics into Tamil are a wholesome mode of blood-transfusion which can impart a fresh vigour to the Tamil language and strengthen the seeds of its future creativity. With this hope we launch this series of translations.

S. MAHARAJAN

Chairman,

*Expert Committee for Translation
of Classics,*

Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras.

INTRODUCTION

SUBRAMANIA BHARATHI's Jnanaratham is a unique, creative and enchanting excursion into a world of fancy, metaphysics and mystic symbolism. It is written in engaging prose and the translation of it into English is a rewarding adventure.

Prof. P. Mahadevan, who was a distinguished professor of English and who was the Principal of the Madurai College at Madurai, several decades ago, serialized his translation of Jnanaratham in a weekly called 'The Sunday Times', which has since become defunct. Most of the Press Cuttings from 'The Sunday Times' have been preserved by Thiru P. N. Appusami, our grand-old man of letters and have been graciously handed over by him to our Expert Committee with a request to publish the same under this scheme. Some portions of the translations of Prof. P. Mahadevan were, however, missing and could not be traced in spite of our best efforts, with the result that at the instance of the Expert Committee for Translation of

Classics, I have had to make a good the deficiency by myself translating the relevant passages into English. Care has been taken to indicate the passages translated by me lest the infirmities therein should be attribute to Prof. P. Mahadevan.

Tmt. Rajammal Mahadevan, the wife, and Tmt. Sakunthala Padmanabhan, Tmt. Mythily Krishnaswami, Tmt. Teji Viswam and Miss. Tikku Mahadevan, the other heirs of the late Prof. P. Mahadevan hold the copy-right in the translation effected by Prof. P. Mahadevan. At my request, they have been kind enough to permit the Government of Tamil Nadu to publish the English translation of Prof. P. Mahadevan without receiving any remuneration therefor, their only request being that each of them be granted a complimentary copy of the published translation. The Expert Committee for Translation of Classics records, on behalf of the Government of Tamil Nadu, its appreciation of the generous gesture of the heirs of Prof. P. Mahadevan. I thank my colleagues of the Expert Committee for their unstinting co-operation in choosing the right books for translation, assigning the translations to the right type of translators and in the work of scruti-

nizing and making them ready for publication. The Expert Committee's thanks are due to Thiru R. Kulandaivelu, Managing Director of the Tamil Nadu Text-book Society and to his colleagues for the promptness with which they have completed the printing of this book.

S. MAHARAJAN,
Chairman.
Expert Committee for Translation
of Classics,
Government of Tamil Nadu Madras.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This was composed and published during the poet's exile in Pondicherry. The date of its composition may be placed somewhere in 1909-since an introduction to it by the author is dated 29th January, 1910. A later re-issue of it in 1935 had a preface from the pen of Sri C. Rajagopalachari. In the course of it he says : 'This work is an admirable sample of what can be achieved in modern Tamil prose by a man of genius!. Imaginative powers of noble puissance, glowing patriotic fervour high seriousness, a strain of humour that never palls are seen in harmonious combination in this work of Bharati. He is the gifted, darling-child of the Tamil Muse.

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OVERTURE

IT was evening, I was resting on the payal of a house in Veeraraghava Mudali Street, Triplicane, facing east. A delightful sea-breeze blew from the sea through the windows and filled the front room in which I was resting. The mingling of that breeze with the late evening sunlight produced upon me a lucidity and a joy, which I cannot describe. 'How nice I thought it would be if one could go for a sea bath just now, and then ride at ease in a horse-carriage promenading the entire stretch of the Marina, communing with the soulful strains of Kalidasa's *Sakunthalam* or pondering over the *sutras* of some Upanishad or other, and so to Adayar and back!' A pretty fancy, but how utterly beyond a poor man who found it hard enough to make both ends meet. Horse-carriage indeed! I derided myself for my foolish thought.

'Alas', I reflected, 'how depressing is this poverty!' It may prevent one from the enjoyment of enervating luxuries; but it is no less a foe to the enjoyment of legitimate pleasures as well. Then my alter ego, my better mind prodded me saying: 'Fool, why repine at an

imaginary privation, while God has enriched you with the priceless gift of a soaring imagination? Is it not of divine origin and infinite range? Can it not take you wheresoever you wish to go, and delight your mind with visions of surpassing loveliness? Instead of using this gift, why grovel on earth complaining of earthly wants?’

And straightaway, I bethought me of my mental resources. I ordered my mind to fit up, and make ready for my use the chariot of my imagination so that I might range at will.

Quick as thought, the chariot appeared before my mind’s eye. It was comely enough as chariots go, but was by no means the most perfect of its kind, for it had limitations derived from my nature and being. But it served my turn. In what follows I shall set down faithfully all the places I visited, the people with whom I conversed and the experiences that befell me.

CHAPTER I
UPASANTI LOKAM
(THE LAND FREE FROM CARE)

I GAVE directions to the chariot to take me to a spot free from sorrow. I marvelled at my stupidity in having failed, till then to make use of this chariot which had ever been ready at my disposal. How often had I not suffered torments like the fish caught in the angler's hook, and knowing no means of escape. Alas! What poisonous effect seizes us as we go through life! Worldly cares and crosses take a pitiless toll of our youth, looks, hopes, joys and beliefs. Eyes which sparkle with forward-looking thoughts begin to lack and lose lustre, the glow of youth and fresh complexion in the morning of our lives give place to darkening rings and corrugated brows and shrunken skin—all one to the havoc wrought by demoralising and unmanly cares. Even the voice which was musical suffers a change for the worse, for it has cracked and shivered into fragments which are hoarse. I, who stood foursquare and exulted in the pride of my youth, have become

debilitated with drooping shoulders and a sinking heart. The very circulation of the blood has become clotted and sluggish. Troubles like microbes have got into my constitution and are wearing it down silently and insidiously.

It is not the body alone that suffers; the mind, the intelligence and the higher perceptions also suffer a similar holocaust. A drowsy forgetfulness often overcomes me. The apt allusion, the seasonable reflection does not jump up when sought by the mind. The mind though cultivated, feels aghast at its own bankruptcy, like life-giving rains falling on desert sands. The mind has become a darkened pall which cannot be pierced through to outer charity; thoughts falter. Alas, what a legion of invisible foes have begun to plague me in this world! At last, shall I find an escape from them by making use of this mental chariot?

I bade Jnanaratham to transport me to a world free from all care. But the mind put in a caveat saying: 'It is not such a pleasant place as you imagine. A land free from care might be free from joy as well. Moreover, methinks there are other weighty considerations which I cannot specify at the moment. They dissuade me from undertaking this journey.'

At this I became impatient and exclaimed : 'Fie, weakminded, craven-hearted creature! How foolish you are when you obstruct my well-meant efforts to give you relief from the worries of this world and make you enjoy for a time at least the tranquilising joys of that other world.' But my persuasions had no immediate effect. I have an infatuation for this enchantress, my mind. This is not the occasion to relate how my infatuation for it arose. But in course of time the sense of my separateness from it began to wear thin; and I became lost in a bemused slavery to it. I longed to free it from its agonies, sorrows and tribulations, and so thought of lifting it into that world of peace and joy. Imagine, therefore, my consternation at its refusal to profit by my offer. The more I tried to persuade it to avail itself of the opportunity, the more it withdrew and opposed my suggestion. At last in desperation, I addressed it saying: 'O my mind, in this matter I shall ignore your wishes or aversions. I shall help you in spite of yourself.' And turning to the chariot, I urged it to proceed on its journey without further delay.

And lo, the next instant I alighted safe in Upasanti Lokam. The chariot came to a stop in front of the fortress surrounded by a high and

massive wall though the battlements of it were visible from a great distance, I expected that the gates would open automatically to enable me to enter it with ease. But the gates did not open. This amazed me as I did not think it possible for any place to be impervious to the entry of the human mind. Could there be such an impregnable or pure place, I wondered. As for the mind, it began to shudder a thousand times more than before. It was dumb struck. At the threshold of the fort, a sentry stood with a sword in hand. That sword was of a flaming red colour and seemed of such strength and sharpness as to shiver the Himalayas themselves into fragments with a single stroke of it. But it bore on its blade the legend: 'Wisdom,' in letters that dazzled the eyes. He turned to me and asked: 'Halt, who goes there?'

I bowed respectfully to him and said: 'I have come to have a peep into the World of Peace and then go back to my abode on earth.' He laughed at my words as if he found them funny. I was nettled and so asked him: 'Why do you laugh?' But for answer he redoubled his laughter.

My mind ever timid by nature was completely nonplussed by such a development. Mortified

and vexed I rejoined: 'Friend, won't you tell me in a word if I may go in or not. Please stop your laughter and answer me.' There upon he replied: 'You and the Upasanti Lokam are as poles apart.' And then added more gently; 'Excuse me, don't get angry. I laughed because you seem to think that the Upasanti Lokam is a kind of theatre where you could witness some *tamasha* and then go back home. Generally speaking, those who come to this world never go back from it. They come to stay,' he replied.

'That's alright,' I said, 'may I go in or not?'

'By all means go in; you are welcome. All living creatures can claim this as their motherland. I have no authority to prevent anyone from going in. But your mind which has not yet mastered itself nor learnt the secret of renunciation is apt to be burnt to ashes if it should go near the regions of fire.'

I recalled how, at the very outset, the mind had shown no disposition to enter the Upasanti Lokam and now stood quaking with fear like a tyrant before the Almighty Dharma Devata, and understood its objections at last as springing from its own unworthiness. I felt profound pity for it, and because of my love for it, I gave

up my longing to explore this new world without it. I, therefore, turned to the guard and asked him: 'Please advise me what I should do now.'

'Deluded mortal, know that there can be no peace unless the mind's egoism is first **killed** off. The mind is the prolific breeding ground of thoughts which are worse than demons. I see that you are still in thrall to that evil enchantress. When you are ripe you can come here of your own accord, freely and without fear. But for the present, retire.' The next moment I was engulfed in a darkness which blotted out the fortress, the sentry on duty and everything else. I again opened my eyes, and found myself back in my humble quarters in Veeraraghava Mudali Street, reclining on my cot and felt the breeze from the beach fanning my body.

The privilege of going to the Upasanti Lokam is not mine as yet. After all it will be a species of ungratitude to enjoy oneself after deserting the mind, my friend. I thought only of its broodings and tribulations have forgotten the great advantages it has conferred upon me. All I have in this world has been derived from the mind. It is worthy to be called God. Further we

are two in one and one in two—inextricably joined together, as no other pair of created things can be. Whatever the sins and penalties to which it may be exposed, I shall never willingly part with it or break with it. If Upasanti Lokam can be reached only after killing the mind, I for one shall give up my longing for it. I shall be content to stay without. Those who talk of the peace that passeth understanding are thought to be made of the stuff of Brahman; they are lauded as Maharishis. I wonder if they are fools or knaves!

This train of ideas seemed to please my mind greatly; for it heaved a sigh of great relief and seemed free from the jitters from which it suffered but recently. It became tranquil and at peace with itself. I too rejoiced thereat, and hugged to my bosom my mind as if it were my sweetheart.

CHAPTER II
GANDHARVA LOKAM
(WORLD OF JOY)

THE Next Day I asked my mind, 'Now where shall we go?'

It said, 'Why not we go to a world full of joy unadulterated by sorrow.'

'Well said,' I told my mind cheerfully and then, as before, I mounted my Jnanaratham and went to the Gandharva Lokam. I shall describe to the best of my capacity and as realistically as possible, the scenes that I saw and the pleasures that I enjoyed there. If a few of those enjoyments are considered by some of us to be opposed to the conventions respected by our people, let me not be taken to task on that account. I laugh to scorn at the homilies preached by the slaves in modern India, who say, 'This pleasure is against Dharma, that deed is against virtue.' The people of this land, though they are descendants of Maharishis and Goddesses are at the present time more barbarous than the most barbarous people of this world. Even beast-like people,

who roam naked through forests and islands, with bores in their ears, lips and noses and hanging chanks and rings from those bores, with tattoo marks all over their bodies, have freedom. That great possession has been lost by the people of this country. Education has become extinct in this land. Ninety out of hundred people, if asked to write 'அ' (ஆனை) would draw a trunk and an elephant (ஆனை). Our Sastras have become moth-eaten. Brahmans, who were the custodians of the spiritual treasury of our country, are, like field frogs, cacophonously shouting a few Mantras without understanding their meaning or their relevance. They have lost even the slightest vestige of Jnana. It is a notorious fact that Brahmans, who are descendants of Maharishis are working as cooks in the kitchen, eking out their livelihood by serving sinners and getting money out of them and by doing much more disgraceful things, innumerable. All the arts of this country have disappeared. Heroism is gone. Good things like courage, comfort and wealth have taken leave of us. With minds shrunk, bodies exhausted, without food to eat, with sunken eyes, the slaves of this country are leading a most pitiable life.

Friends, who read this book, will forgive me for the mistake of writing a few passages about the sorrowful land of India, while speaking about

Gandharva Lokam, the land of joy. In this land where Dharma has become non-existent, some may, I suspect, think that what I am going to write about Gandharva Lokam is something which it would be improper for me to write. I wish to say with all humility that I have made the above statements with a view to assert that these slaves have no authority to discriminate between Dharma and Adharma.

As soon as I reached Gandharva Lokam, I got Ananda without my knowing it. A most mellifluous musical voice was heard. It resembled the buzzing of female bees with their throats made of gold. No, no; it is not a proper simile. I am unable to comprehend a fit simile for a sound which sprayed a shower of music into my soul. I wondered, 'What is this sound, whence does it come!' My intellect could not find the answer. As for my eyes, they were in a trance. The buildings, palaces, temples, towers, dramatic theatres and all houses there were emitting a cool, sweet, golden light like the rays of the moon. Not only in these things but also in the earth and the stone and the floor and in all things, this light was merged with a light manifesting itself in a multi-coloured glory.

Dear Readers, have you ever, during the rainy season when there is no rain, sitting on the

sea-sands in the evening, while the sun is setting in the western horizon, seen the sun's rays lighting up the soft clouds in the east and the intervals of space between those clouds and the thousands of marvellous and soft permutations and combinations of light emerging therefrom!' In this slave country you would not have had frequent opportunities of getting lost in the beauties of Mother-nature. But would you not have seen the above described colourful scenes atleast once in your life? If you have seen them, I may be able to tell you about the nature of the Gandharva Lokam I saw, so that you may understand atleast a little of it. There also, I found a variety of colours which had a magnificent liquidity, but those colours were commingled with the fascinating magic of moon-light.

As I remained rejoicing in this light and in the sweet music for a moment, a Gandharva lass came in front of me, took my hand in hers and said, 'Come along, human youth, I will show you the novelties of our world.' I thought, that Lass's beauty would intoxicate me and I would swoon and fall down. However steadying my intellect a little, I looked at her and said, 'Before we can move from this place, I would like to put you a question and you must answer it.'

'Ask', she said, in a voice which resembled a golden Veena speaking in the language of Man.

'This sweet sound entrances me!' Where does it come from?' I asked. 'Look up', she said. I looked up and saw the moon in the blue sky, holding court majestically, surrounded by the stars.

'These are his rays,' she said.

'Are these the rays of the moon? What is the connection between the moon-light and the sweet music,' I asked.

'This sweet music is natural to the rays of the moon. It is clearly audible in this world. It will not be felt by the ear of the people living in your earth. But even there this music is perceptible to the ear of rare poets,' she said. I was surprised to hear this. Then I walked along with the lass.

'Fly,' she said.

I laughed uproariously and wondered, 'Do you want me to fly!' I saw that she had two wings which were made of ether and were as white as milk. May I try to describe a little of that lass, who at the very first sight made me faint. I shall somehow try.

A face which spreads out moon-light. Upon that face a crown of flowers, three fingers high. Two black eyes, which were fountains of intoxicating wine, in which the soul-bee sinks itself,

loses wings and reels. Teeth intended not for eating, but for being eaten.

*A figure that has not been disfigured by its milky wings. Hands which send a pleasurable electric current into the body of one who touches them. While speaking of the women of the earth, they say they have the features of the Gandharvas, How am I to describe this maids' beauty and features! Divine beauty, Divine features.**

'I see that though you are but a mortal, you have a sense of beauty alright,' she rallied me with an adorable, candour, 'come, do not fear, fly.'

'What's your name?' I asked.

'Don't be irrelevant, do as you're told! What do you want my name for?'

'But please, won't you tell me, unless it's forbidden.'

'Well, then, I'm called Parvata Kumari — Kumari for short, if you please!'

'Thank you, may I call you by your name?'

'What a question! What are names for? Of course you may.'

'In that case' Parvata Kumari, tell me how I can fly. I do not possess wings as you do!'

*The passages in Italics represent translation from the original rendered, at the instance of the Expert Committee, by Dr. Justice S. Maharajan, as Prof. P. Mahadevan's original translation thereof is missing.

‘When you first came, did you find me possessed of wings?’

‘I was so ravished with the beauty of your face and figure that I did not notice your wings. I saw them only when you spoke of flying.’

‘No flattery please — defer it to a future occasion, if necessary. Answer me — did you see my wings at first?’

‘No.’

‘Know then that in this world, desire begets fulfilment. Think that you wish to fly, and wings will sprout on you to gratify your wish.’

‘Well then, I want to fly.’

‘Next, look into my eyes and see your own likeness.’

In the glowing lucent rays of moon-light which flooded us all round, I looked into the liquid depths of her lovely eyes. Imagine my amazement when I saw myself transformed into the likeness of a Gandharva; it was the ideal figure of my dreams and visions,—the very picture of radiant health, robust, strong and smooth without a crease of age or care, of rare, supra-mortal essence without a shadow of the earth, and the personification of grace. But chiefly I was astounded to find a pair of milky-white smooth wings sprouting from my shoulders.

Overjoyed at the metamorphosis I had undergone, I looked upon her rapt. In a flash, she understood the drift of my thoughts, and said:

‘Hold, I think I made a mistake in asking you to look into mine eyes.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘Till now you behaved like a mortal and treated me as an ethereal maiden; now I am afraid you are going to claim kinship and parity with me!’

‘Lovely one, even if I should become God Almighty, I shall not cease from admiring you. Does it displease you to be treated as my equal?’

‘Not at all; very much the contrary!’

Thereupon our eyes mingled again, and we drank in each other without the need for exchanging any words. I next heard her exhorting me again to fly. I soon found myself sailing serenely in mid-air. I had no sensation of using my wings; so spontaneous and unfelt was any exertion in the attempt.

Presently I asked her, ‘where are we going — to your house?’

‘There is no such thing as mine and thine in this blessed land. This is the land of heart’s desire. Just as the fullness of knowledge leads to the realisation of the One-ness of all the Universe,

even so is there no consciousness of difference or separativeness in full enjoyment. Both are states of Advaita. Everbody owns and enjoys everything here. As for you, know that I am leading you to the Fragrant Palace by the sea-shore.'

'I marvel at your philosophy and expert distinction between the one and the many, sameness and difference; where did you study Vedanta?'

'To those who have savoured enjoyments at their most intense and know the happiness thereof, Vedanta comes most naturally, for it is indeed the crown of such experience. The man who talks of Advaita without having enjoyed happiness is a fraud. On earth there is a lot of such bogus Vedanta. With us however in this world, we grasp the seen and unseen with equal facility. Not far from here is situated the Upasanti Lokam. Know you not that the God of Supreme Enjoyment and the God of Supreme Yoga are one and the same — that Vishnu and Siva are but two aspects of the same Reality? However this is unseasonable time for a discourse on Philosophy or Metaphysics. Look below you.'

We were flying up at a height of about a hundred feet from the ground, and saw spread below us the dwellings, the mansions, the music and dramatic halls in their wonderful variety. There was the inexpressible joy of flying; for the first time I realised how birds alone of all living things on earth are blessed creatures. Swimming in a sea or stream is also an exhilarating experience; but after a time it tires or palls. But flying in the air is the noblest and most unalloyed of joys. It was rendered more precious because of the companionship of the lovely maiden Parvata Kumari; I wished it would go on for ever. No wonder the Europeans have been inventing and using aeroplanes as a means of their highest pleasures. But as they are essentially materialistic in their outlook, they are unable to exploit them for purely pleasurable purposes. For, already they are dreaming of using them for purposes of war and destruction. It is a case of a good gift falling into the hands of bad or unworthy people. But let me not digress.

I have already said that when I first arrived in the world of the Gandharvas, I was both amazed and bemused by its witching atmosphere. Now that I had become acclimatized to it, nothing but a sense of pure and exhilarating joy remained.

My mind became crystal-clear, and in a panoramic view such as we get of the early morning with the sun rising in all its glory, so I saw the world spread out below me. My eyes were famished with such sights that if I should begin to describe them all, I would have to write endlessly. I shall however pick up here and there a few of my impressions and tell you about them.

A Ball-Game Described

On a spacious platform, groups of Gandharva children were playing with balls of flowers made of fragrant roses. A sprightly boy was shouting: 'You there Rasika, you aren't playing fair. You shouldn't pitch the ball at all sorts of angles, aiming it at me and not at my stick. It's body-line and I won't play with you any more!' At this the other youths laughed derisively at him. But leaving them, the first youth withdrew and with looks of mortification, slumped into a seat made of some rosy marble-like slab. The rest kept up their game amidst indescribable noise and good humour, engaging themselves in vigorous but pleasant scrimmage.

I turned to Parvata Kumari and asked her: 'Who is this sulking youth? He seems a spoilsport.'

‘He is my brother, his name is Chittaranjan. Though but a lad like others, he is the favourite of the God of Love; wherefore, instead of mixing with them and playing like them, he finds greater pleasure in exercising his imaginative faculties, composing songs and indulging in exquisite day-dreams. He is in love with that maiden Rasika. Look at him now deeply communing with himself. I shall call him here if you would care to hear his poetic utterance.’

Surprised and delighted, I said eagerly: ‘Of course, nothing would please me better’ Thereupon Parvata Kumari signalled to him to come up to us. In less than a second he spread out his wings and was by our side. She embraced him and said: ‘This is a visitor come to our world and see its glories. He is our guest.’ The boy then turned to me and said: ‘I bow unto you.’ For answer I seized him and hugging him gave him my blessings. I then shot a side-long glance at Parvata Kumari to remind her of the promised treat of poetry. She then turned to the boy and said: ‘Ranjan, let us hear the poem which was taking shape in your mind even now. Our friend here wants to hear you.’

The Poet Sings

The child hung back as is the way of children. I then said, to break the ice and give him self-

confidence: 'Come my child, don't be so shy; just speak up.'

At last in winsome words which sounded like the rustic dialect of earth, but which I was told was the language of the Gandharvas, he sang a song which had for its theme the quarrel he had with his sweetheart Rasika in the course of their ball-game. Need I have to say that he sang in a voice of ravishing sweetness? In what follows I have attempted to render the gist of his song in inadequate words of my own. I know it would be like trying to paint a picture of the Sun from direct observation.

Love's Conquest

To one who's parch'd with thirst
A passing, dark cloud-burst
Brings quick relief:—
But lo! another complains
Of unseasonable rains
 And pelting sleet
 Fiendish, fleet —
Plunging him in grief.
Likewise you take umbrage
At the flow'ry war I wage
 Under the banner of Love:—
Victorious he advances
Through my melting glances,
Enslaving us from above!

Love's Holiday

Chittaranjan soon after took leave of us. We spread our wings and ranged far afield. There was a sweet exhalation in the air which seemed the very soul of harmony. In all the dwellings we saw old and young, of both sexes, engaged in the enjoyment of multifarious pleasures. When I spent my days as a mere mortal, I never dreamt that there could be such vast scope for a life of pleasant sensations as I saw now in the Gandharva Lokam.

Presently Parvata Kumari drew my attention to a spot; but I could not make it out at once. I merely saw a huge mansion or hall of pleasance capable of thousand people. There was a huge crowd, but without any of those disturbances, dangers and crushings which we are familiar with here on earth. They seemed to maintain their ease, comfort and orderliness in spite of their numbers. It was funny to see the men making way for the women by flying up in the air to allow them to pass, and then to come down again! I marvelled at such disciplined and large crowds exchanging greetings, compliments and even embraces and kisses. Such suavity, such charm, decorum and such choice conversation — I cannot describe it all.

‘Parvata Kumari, what has brought this crowd together?’ I asked.

‘Do you see a pavilion there?’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you see the effigy of a parrot there, and some one riding on it? Who is it?’

‘Ah, I see; it is the God of Love.’

‘Know then we are celebrating today in his honour.’

A Statue for Love

The image of the God of Love which I saw there installed ravished my sight, and I asked her to tell me the artist that had executed such a marvellous piece of work.

‘Do you think we have no sculptors among us?’ Sudden flashed the thought in my mind that in Bharata’s land also there once flourished such beautiful art, but that now it was all ruined and lost. Unknowing I cried out: ‘How sad that even in the land of the Gandharvas, I cannot forget the down-trodden condition of my Motherland!’ Parvata Kumari replied to this gently and said: ‘You are still a mortal after all, though you are privileged to assume the form of a Gandharva for a space.’

I resumed: 'Are there many such works of art in your land?'

'Judge for yourself; for tomorrow I shall take you to our art-gallery not far from the Amrita Waterfalls.'

All along my eyes were riveted on the wonderful form of the God of Love installed below in the pavilion. But to rag her I told her that though its artist must be a superb workman, he seemed to have no idea of the earthly convention that the God of Love should not be given any shape at all.

'I marvel at your assurance in daring to criticise the art of our country! We have no other statues of the Love-God. Observe it intently; but you will never know the truth about it unless I tell it to you. It was not made of earth or crystal or marble. It was fashioned of pure ether. Mind-born Kama can only have such a transparent form and figure. He who fashioned it for you on earth, you hail as Deputy Brahma. Brahma's Kamadeva is part of the living essence. This form is instinct with 'the life-breath of art,' she concluded. Wonder followed so close on the heel of wonder that I was reduced to an almost silly repetition of that one word to convey some idea of the marvels that overwhelmed my sight there.

‘How is it that the statue of Manmatha is without that of his sweetheart Rati?’ I asked, ‘How can the one exist without the other?’

‘Ah, that’s one of our secrets, not to be divulged to a mere mortal,’ she replied apparently to tease me.

‘But you forget that I too am for the present a Gandharva, as you yourself reminded me but a little while ago.’

‘If so, you ought to know the reason why. But let that pass: Let us descend and observe all things at closer quarters. That would be better than talking from here.’

Accordingly, we descended and observed the progress of the festivities. On one side, the worship of Kama was going on; on the other, they were enacting his funeral until the point when by divine grace, he was again revived. All the details of the story were represented either in statuary or in paintings.

There was a representation of the Spring season which beat reality hollow. It was indeed spring-time in Gandharva Lokam. That was why the story of Kama was enacted by its dwellers. Thus it came about that Gandharva artists were seconded in their creative efforts by Nature itself in that world.

Lord Siva in Yoga

Koels roused to their sweetest songs, trees and shrubs and plants bursting with fragrant flowers, herds of deer frisking and gambolling in various groups, bees rifling the pollens which rendered the zephyrs fragrant and other typical scenes of a new year in the joys of rebirth were enacted with a verisimilitude, which seemed to improve on Truth itself. There in a hall constructed of the planks of the Devadaru wood, in the trance of Yoga, Siva himself was seated on a platform of crystal dazzling with the rays of the noon-day sun. The immobile figure one-pointing his thoughts and contemplating the tip of his nose was a statue though it looked wholly lifelike!

Kama's Mischief

In front of that figure, a fair maiden of surpassing loveliness and clearly of divine origin was offering her prayers and flowers to the seated figure. Her face showed that she was observing fasts as part of her austere worship of the Lord Siva. Behind her, the God of Love was found getting ready to bend his sugar-cane bow with the arrow primed with flowers aiming his shaft at the seated and silent figure. There was a breathlessness in the very atmosphere as if

it trembled for the consequences of Kama's audacity.

On another side, there was representation of the funeral rites of Kama himself.

With reverted face which showed terrible anger, Siva as the embodiment of the Supreme Truth itself was found there, opening his destructive 'Third Eye,' and unloosing a flood of fire in which the mortal body of Kama was completely destroyed. I saw the sight and trembled as if at the end of the world. Unknown to myself, I shook my hands free from the clasp of Parvatha Kumari.

'What, afraid of a picture or a statue?' she asked smiling. In spite of her reminder I could not overcome the strong illusion of reality the sight impressed on me. I also observed the figure of forlorn Rati, consort of Kama, mourning her widowed state as the body seemed in process of dissolution. I had commented on her absence from the temple of Kama. But here, she was, the very picture of desolation and pathos. My poor words are utterly inadequate to do justice to the puissant art of the Gandharva master who wrought that artistic marvel.

Kama Revived

Another picture arrested my attention at a different corner of the scene. I saw the scene of the bridals of Parvati and Paramesvara. They were two, yet only one-bodied. Rati comes and stands with bowed head before them. The relenting grace of Siva manifests itself in a gentle smile, and lo! Kama arises out of his ashes as if from sleep and, bowing to his benefactor, again bends his bow charged with flowery shafts at the couple before him. Parvati embraces her Lord.

Such were the many *tableau vivants* which enriched the temple of Kama at many points. The Gandharvas in their crowds moved about paying homage to the figures in many ways. Lovely maidens carrying the *Yazh* (Veena) played it to the accompaniment of their melting voices. Youths and maidens in pairs were engaged in singing and dancing and going round in a circle.

Aerial Tableaus

A man and maid stood gazing at each other and oblivious of all things else. The air became thick with groups of the Gandharva youths of both sexes imitating the movements of birds in flight, circling methodically and rhythmically without a hitch. Two other youths

with a standing maiden as axis moved up and down as if revolving round the rim of a wheel. They moved with perfect polarity between them. Two other maidens made circular movements to the right and left of her. Where the two circles came to touch each other, the maidens seemed to kiss each other and then to part again. The recurrent kiss kept time to the song which the maiden sang from the flute which she played upon. One thousand such groups formed a huge circle of picturesque harmony. Every half-hour the pattern would be changed and new motifs would be worked out.

‘It’s getting late; let’s go to the beach,’ said Parvata Kumari. But so ravished was I that I had no heart to leave the scene. But my guide was imperious and I followed her reluctantly.

At The Beach

Up we rose and flew until we came to the beach. There was an exquisite stir of emotions and sensations in me, and I felt a strange fragrance from the air steal into my heart. I guessed that we were near the palace exuding odoriferous smells to which Parvata Kumari had already referred. ‘Whence this marvellous fragrance and enchantment in the air?’ Before I could put this question as it formed itself in my mind, my companion guessed my thoughts and replied.

‘Know that this palace is constructed of stones made of musk and wood hewn and polished from the divine sandal trees. Know further that in the gardens surrounding the edifice, there bloom flowers such as mortals know nothing of on earth.’

We soon descended on the top-most storey of the Fragrant Palace. There were numerous other couples come to enjoy the witching sight and tonic air of the beach. We moved to a seat and there rested ourselves after our flight through space. I was surprised to feel that the seat was as soft as if stuffed with eider-down. It had a covering made of white silk which added to its smooth softness. As I reclined on it, I felt as if I was back in the arms of my mother when, as a child, she fondled me in her lap.

A Moonlight Scene

The sea lay in front, shot with a thousand fugitive gleams as the rays of the moon danced up and down the waves and cast a magic spell over the scene. The ships that rode at anchor appeared like mounds of white flowers heaped in the mass. Pleasure-boats shaped like swans floated gracefully here and there. Up in the sky, masses of white fleecy clouds were lighted up by the argent rays of the moon. Some of

he clouds were of goassamer thinness like at fisherman's net outspread, some like the ever-moving waves of the sea itself, others like the blown petals of flowers, and some were of the shape of the ships themselves sailing in the azure sky aloft.

And then what a dazzling array of stars in their groups and combinations! They seemed like diamonds scattered in the empyrean, enthral-ling to the eye. In the wide expanses of the heavens, the mind like the honey-bee found infinite scope for drinking of the sweetness of light blossoming like countless flowers. All this vast glory was born out of the impact of infinite space on infinite Mind — a blaze of inexhaustible effulgence.

Magic Spell

The Gandharva couples on pleasure bent were putting off in dainty boats and disporting themselves in a variety of delectable ways. Some sang, some played on musical instruments, others danced,—all in rhythmic co-operation with the rise and fall of the waves all around. An unbroken undertone of sound emanated from the rays of the moon as if from the buzzing of a golden bee. The gentle breeze of the sea caressed the curls on the forehead of Parvata Kumari.

I realised that though I had become a Gandharva in outward form, my heart continued to remain human and found itself unequal to the enjoyment of such concentrated and rarefied pleasures. My faculties became benumbed, my mind drowsed. Like a wisp of foam I drifted trembling in that sea of bliss. Like a speck of dust, I wandered here and there in that joyous whirlwind. What fragrance, what harmony, what sights! I think I went on babbling incoherently to Parvata Kumari. The mind intoxicated by such joy let loose the tongue, and like a wild horse wandered whither it listed. But the joys never palled or brought the sadness of satiation with them. Rather, instead of consciously enjoying pleasurable sensations, the joys took hold of me and made me their thrall. Even as I was talking to her, I became completely self-forgetful.....

The Glory of Sunrise

I came to, again a little later. It was early morning — the dawn of a new day. In the distance where the earth and sky met, a nimbus of light, a halo of glory came to birth and shape. The entire east was flooded with a surging sea of flaming red. The clouds appeared, like islands that had been set fire to in that deluge of flame.

I am inclined to think that clouds have human instincts; they seemed determined to choke off the light of the sun with its power to change their dark nature and infuse light into them!

‘Live in mutual love,’ ‘Siva is Love’ — were the lessons that Christ, the great Jewish Muni sought to teach to his people, and thus lighten their darkened souls with the light of divine love. Such a great soul — an ornament to his race itself — endured a cruel fate at the hands of his own countrymen. They killed his body, but they did not kill his spirit or his message which still flourishes in the world. He suffered on the Cross for the sake of Dharma, for the sake of his abounding Love for mankind. That Cross on which he suffered is human depravity, jealousy and exploitation which make the poor suffer miseries in this world. With all these simple but helpless people, Christ lives for ever.

The sight of those darkened clouds lighted up here and there by the rays of the rising sun brought to my mind the nature of the Pharisees and Scribes among the Jews. Just for a second as in a flash of lightning! But by and by, that wonderful blaze of light began to ascend into the sky. The rays of the risen sun flashed and blazed like arrows made of diamonds, piercing

into the darkness of the skies and causing havoc among the clouds, scattering them, cutting them down, abolishing them, like a mighty conquerer delivering the world from the grip of shadows and darkness. The whole of the Universe rejoiced at the liberation. And the Gandharva maidens sang songs in *Bhupalam* praising the Sun as the Gayatri of the Vedas.

Near a Waterfall

‘Come, let’s go to the waterfalls for a bathe,’ said the adored maiden who had appeared as my guide in that world. We soon went to the spot. The waterfall came down from a good height in two laps tumbling into pools, and then gushing out in foamy flakes down to the ground. Poets have compared the sight to sunset and many other sights in Nature. I however feel that such comparisons are inadequate. The heavens, the sea and the Ramayana are, according to our ancients, fit only to be compared to themselves—they are so unique; even so I consider a waterfall as an incomparable marvel of Nature. Others had preceded us and were enjoying their bath in wonderfully playful ways. Recalling what I saw from my present mundane memories of that vision, I am seized by an inhibition which prevents me from describing faithfully what I saw. Among men

there are those who are pure and blameless in speech or writing; but the same thing cannot be said of thought or deed.....!

Clothed in Nature

The falling waters flowed in a multitude of streams and rivulets on all sides, skirting round mounds or leaping over crags. Lovely youthful couples circled over the waterfall perched on the rocks, plunged into the waters and then flew up again, and again indulging in the exhilarating sport. To the pure all thoughts are also pure, even as the evil-minded think only of unclean thoughts. In the land of the Gandharvas, evil in thought, word or deed being unknown, there was no affectation, false modesty or pruriency, and their naked, unclothed condition seemed as natural to them as our clothes are to us. How can one describe such a ravishing scene...!

Truth and Beauty

Having disported ourselves in the springs long enough, we next proceeded to a near-by temple where we found many pious devotees offering their worship with flowers to their guardian spirits. The dwellers in Gandharva Lokam, though gifted painters, sculptors and artists have built some temples in which there

are no statuary or sculpture at all. On the crests of such buildings, the symbol 'OM' is blazoned as in a lighted torch. Only in temples intended for congregational worship or group entertainment were found specimens of sculpture of marvellous workmanship and finish. The former were intended for private, individual communion and for mental or spiritual tranquillity to be cultivated through mental concentration. 'There is a close relationship between Bhoga and Yoga; for, from Gandharva Lokam is but a step to the Santi Lokam,' said Parvata Kumari, and I began to glimpse, bit by bit, the truth of that statement. He who is athirst for beauty invariably finds his longing for truth also gratified. For it was a sage who declared: 'Truth is Beauty, Beauty Truth.'

Favourite Deity

As I followed Parvata Kumari into one of these temples, I asked her: 'Parvata Kumari, tell me who is your favourite deity whom you are going to worship now?' 'My favourite is Madana, the God of Love; my mind shall dwell upon him. You may likewise think of and worship your favourite God,' she replied.

'You are my favourite Goddess, and I would worship you alone,' I told her.

'Well and good,' she cried gaily. Presently she added: 'Friend, your God is whatever is acceptable to you. God assumes the shape through which you seek to worship him. For what is God? It is the manifested shape, it is the unsullied thought, it is the ultimate Truth, it is Beauty.'

How Our Ideal Paves Us

How true! For in the world of men, when we say that the ideal man is Rama, Rama becomes the God of our search. We forget our petty limitations and, lost in the flood of ecstasy, come nearer to our ideal. I felt convinced that if I chose Parvata Kumari for my ideal, she would become the means of my salvation and deliverance. When as in the legend of Kalidasa, he became infatuated with a courtesan, did he not find supreme vision through her liberating him from that thralldom? So there is a profound truth in such single minded devotion to an ideal.

Parvata Kumari chose a quiet spot inside the temple and adopting the pose of a Yogini went into a trance in which the heavens themselves seemed to be reflected in her eyes as she began repeating in fervid accents the mantra: 'Om Namo Brahmane!' Facing her, I too decided to concentrate on my favourite deity, and adopt-

ing a like pose and bending my faculties to a single purpose began repeating: 'Om Namo Kumaryai!' Soon I too was lost in the ecstatic contemplation of my Goddess in my inner vision.

Goddess Becomes Human

Presently she concluded her devotions and gave me a signal to get up. Out we flew in the air drinking our fill of the lucent rays of the the morning sun and reached the temple of art. But alas, I cannot describe it adequately. 'Come,' I said, 'we spent yesterday seeing the sights of nature; to-day we shall study the works of art. This morning we saw the waterfalls. What wonderful skies we have here; look where, in the distance the top of a hill seems to kiss the skies themselves, how lovely! But I forget the glories of your artistic treasures. Come.' Parvata Kumari laughed mischievously, provocatively. I was emboldened to say : 'Kumari, if you smile at me like that, I shall not deem you my favourite deity; instead, I shall kiss you, so beware!'

Snatches a Kiss!

At this she redoubled her laughter, whereupon I promptly carried out my threat. For a second she looked at me with angry eyes. I explained a little timidly: 'I warned you in

advance; and when you laughed again, it seemed almost as if you asked for it.'

'You don't understand; the reason for my anger is something different. In our world, devoted youths kiss their beloved maidens not on the cheeks, but on.....' She faltered. I was not slow to take the hint, and rectified the omission by punishing her with a kiss on her lips.

Art vs. Nature

She burst into loud laughter again and said: 'You silly, this is the Temple of Art.' I stood dumb-founded. 'Surely you are pulling my leg,' I replied.

'No, I am speaking the truth. Formerly our great artist-designer Ramanath established this sylvan scene. No wonder that this forest is often mistaken by Gandharvas themselves for a natural creation,' she replied.

Gandharva Sculpture

We next repaired to that hall of statuary. On one side were ranged sculptures of living creatures of bewildering variety and range excepting those which could be seen only under a microscope. I am neither an adept in nor much given

to the study of zoology; and hence was not much interested in this section. On the other side, I saw a series of statues of the Gandharva species of both sexes. Eagerly I began to study them for a simple reason. Lovely forms of men and women have a power of attraction which no other objects in creation have. Even inanimate objects distinguished by a symmetrical or harmonious shape have a power to move us and rouse our sense of beauty to rapturous expression. How much more irresistible then would be the appeal of the human form divine further enriched by the play of mind or intelligence or soul!

Human vs. Celestial

I have ever delighted in the contemplation of the beauty of the human form. On earth, we can never hope to find among living creatures the perfect figure of male or female such as the sculptor can only imagine and body forth through his art. The reason for this defect is that among men the virtues of purity and serenity in their absolute state are not found. However attractive a man or woman may be to look at, you may also find soon enough some defect or flaw in them arising from their moral or spiritual limitations. As the inner spirit peeps through our bodies, it disfigures them to the

extent that it is itself defective. Further in my native land, men have fallen a prey to further ravages like famine, disease and slavery which have added to their physical and spiritual ugliness.

Our Artists of Old

Alas, these things have become the rule in Bharat land, though there may be exception to it. Our mighty artists of old, gifted sculptors and painters have given us examples of ideal statuary which should serve to remind us of perfect grace and beauty in relation to the human form. Our early poets have, through their descriptions also, helped to familiarise us with the elements of aesthetics for all time. These memorials of our ancient art, now gathered and kept in our museums, ought therefore to be cherished by us; should they disappear, ours would indeed be an irreparable loss. For, they alone remind us now of what the imagination of men can conceive, and his hand execute, in recapturing the ideal inventions of genius. They alone can enthuse young aspirants to keep up the traditions of artistic creation and workmanship. Should they be neglected or destroyed, we would indeed become blinded and impoverished utterly.

Defect of Gandharva Art

When I saw the statues in the Gandharva Hall of sculpture, I was not as much thrilled as when I formerly saw the memorial raised in honour of the God of Love. I soon found out the reason for it. The Gandharva artists excelled only in the representation of divine figures. As regards the reproduction of Gandharva figures, although they revealed technical mastery and mechanical perfection, they did not bring out the element of inspiration or creative zeal of the artists. For, they merely reproduced what they saw. Such faithful reproduction can never aspire to the level of high art.

Secret of the Appeal of Greek Art

For instance, what is the secret of the undying glory of Greek sculpture? The masters who fashioned them were surrounded only by ordinary fallible humanity. But they pressed into their aid their imagination which fashioned for the delectation of their inner eye forms of entrancing and inexhaustible loveliness which they tried to reflect in their handiwork. That is why we hail them as inspired and creative artists. In the Gandharva Lokam, however, the denizens represented perfection of loveliness or grace or beauty, each in a particular aspect, which left

no room for the further play of fancy or imagination. They were therefore reduced to the level of copyists when they were engaged in painting themselves and their community as they were. What they could not reproduce was the individual touch which would distinguish the play of the divine spark from object to object. I beheld the living grace of Parvata Kumari who was by my side, and found not a single statue reproducing such living grace, though the representation of beauty reached a high average.

Ambrosial Fruits and Drinks

We next went to our dinner. Being a world that neither suffered from hunger nor from surfeit, I imagined that I could get food there that would treat the palate to undreamt of delights. Arrived at an arbour in a pleasant garden which was filled with creepers and was caressingly cool, Parvata Kumari called: 'Ranjana, Ranjana!' Her younger brother Chittaranjan came out from a distance. 'Bring us both our food.' He went back laughing pleasantly. He returned soon with a companion, both of whom held in their hands, golden plates which they placed on the marble table in front of us. With eager expectation I looked at the contents, and found them to be fruits of all varieties, nothing

but fruits. Parvata Kumari who seemed gifted with an uncanny knack of reading my thoughts said to me:

‘Friend, we here in Gandharva Lokam are not gluttons or gourmets. We know that the tongue is the enemy of all the other four senses. Those who are enslaved by food, are disqualified to savour the more exquisite pleasures which can be derived from the other senses of sight, hearing, touch etc. Here we eat to live, and not merely to eat. Still, you will find the savour of these fruits neither common nor the same. Taste one and find out for yourself.’

She proved right; they were both useful to overcome hunger and enjoyable in new ways. We next had cups of wine served before us by the same attendants. But I did not touch them.

The Cup That Cheered

‘Parvata Kumari looked me up and down. ‘I don’t drink,’ I replied defensively.

‘You are not in the world of mortals,’ she reminded me.

‘What with the purer atmosphere of your ravishing country, its brightness and coolness, and you for a companion,—I have more than

I deserve. I do not need the intoxication of wine to dull my enjoyment of the scenes here.'

But Parvata Kumari bore down my puritanical objections and soon I emptied the cup that tempted me in front. It gave an edge to my already heightened sense of joy.

This joy is a kind of delirium which in its excess results in producing its opposite, namely ice-cold temperatures and death. So too on top of joy sits sorrow enthroned. But I felt none of this in that world which was filled with unalloyed joy. I lived thus for many days in a dream in which I now recollect that either time seemed to fly past with tremendous speed compressing aeons in seconds or spreading out seconds to eternity of uninterrupted happiness.

The Thorn in the Rose

The days succeeded one another, and Parvata Kumari had become my beloved, my sweetheart, my very life-source. Of the frustrations, the fever and fret of mortal life, I had not even the faintest touch or trace in my outlook there. But oddly enough, the mind felt no contentment with its lot; something seemed to be lacking to make the felicity perfect. Even the glories of the Gandharva world seemed pale into the light of common day; the first fine careless rapture

had spent itself out. Nature's beauties in moonlit skies still held the heart in thrall, but the ungrateful senses seemed to break away and go in search of something always. Why, even Parvata Kumari had somehow lost the glamour and appeal she had for me at first !

One morning, I found myself alone and fell into a reverie. 'How strange that even in this land of unmixed happiness, my mind is not fully happy or at ease! Joys abound here no doubt; but the repeated and mechanical experiences of them do not seem to pall on the natives. How can they be at once free from longing and fully satisfied? Is this the defect or glory of mankind that we alone seem condemned to be ever dissatisfied or frustrated?'

Just then Parvata Kumari sailed in from the blue and sat by my side. As usual, she read my thoughts like a book, and spoke to me as follows out of the fullness of her superior knowledge :

'Friend, I see that you are amazed at the monotony of our existence here. Was it any different from or better than this with you, dwellers on earth? Death overtakes them on earth whether at eighteen or at eighty. The food that you eat in your childhood you also

eat in your second-childhood, and yet with what gusto and novelty do we not take that food day after day? Note besides how the wretches in your world are prepared to lie, cheat and betray others for the sake of securing for themselves food, shelter and clothing. Why, they are even prepared to sell themselves or kill others to gain their petty objects! If the poor are contemptible in these shameful ways, the rich exploit others shamelessly. You pity the former and cannot but hate the latter. But note this, how all of them keep on doing the same things over and over again!

Where Human Life Excels That of the Celestials

‘In our World there is no fraud, falseshood or pretension or hypocrisy. Nor do we suffer from the evil consequences of such vices. And we know no death. However I do not blame you for feeling dissatisfied with yourself even amidst all these glories of this land. For, in one respect your lot is superior to ours. For, you are blessed with the immortal cravings of the indestrutible soul; its characteristic is a divine discontent, with things as they are which is the hallmark of idealism. Amidst the ceaseless flux of things, your consistency and devotion to

a far-off goal is unshaken and irresistible. This may not be true of the majority of your kind on earth; but it is the mark of the choice minority among you. The Gods have to take on a human shape if they are to feel the exhilaration of freedom. Only earth can boast of such rare souls as Buddha, Sukha, Janaka, Krishna and Jesus and others. Such men cannot be born amidst us in this land. Bound by the shackles of a golden Maya, we cannot feel discontented with our lot. You see life in the raw and so feel easily roused against its cruelties and stupidities. — I mean the best of you.

‘You may well feel surprise that I, a woman, fit perhaps only to be fondled and kissed should talk such high philosophy to you, expounding the mystery of renunciation or sanyasa. Know that we in this world are blessed with minds which are clear and sparkling like water; but we find it hard to practise what we know or can preach. The human state is necessary for that experience.’

What amazed me about her was not the versatile eloquence but her reversion to simple womanly charm and grace at the end of it all. There was a look of candid innocence in her eyes which gazed on me like those of a deer in a hermitage.

‘You minx,’ I muttered, ‘let the old forfeit be ordered’ — I begged her eagerly. ‘You are not my beloved, but an old rishi masquerading like a girl.’ ‘All is one,’ she replied, ‘go to.’

Nevertheless I caught her in my arms and hung on her lips in an access of self-forgetful rapture for some endless seconds.

CHAPTER III

SATYA LOKAM

THE FOLLOWING DAY I left for Satya Lokam. There I beheld the land bathed in a flood of light more glorious than that of the Sun and spreading its rays which were purer. But, strange to say, there was no Sun in the heavens. In the centre of that world I however saw a wondrous figure seated. It was from the face of that figure that the rays of light kept issuing. They reached up to the heavens in endless and pellucid waves. I directed my chariot to all parts of that country, and saw its people going about their tasks with purposeful aim. Some I beheld pressing onwards toiling and sweating; some like me were moving about in their own chariots. Others seemed endowed with wings of their own, and flew at great speed. I saw the faces of many like new-blown flowers, while others seemed dejected and tired. Some there were who shot up from nowhere and, finding the brightness of the light too strong for their feeble eyes, closed them with their hands and disappeared. I came to know that the last category of people

were mortals like me who found the world too good for their faculties and who, therefore, fled from it as unworthy of it.

Unworthy People

Many seemed like Gods. They went about happily, disporting themselves and free from all care. It was only men like me who brought into that world the cares and anxieties of their mundane existence. I felt transformed when in the Gandharva Lokam, no such change came over me physically in this world. Presently a figure with a huge paunch and wearing a gold bracelet on his arm approached, and raising a piteous cry went away as quickly. Another came with his wife and children; and the woman looking round, thus spoke to her man: 'What on earth made you bring us here? What is there here to see? Neither fairs nor bazaars, neither temple nor tank, neither sights nor shows. Nothing at all! I see people running about demented. I cannot stay here for even a minute; come, let us go back to our original home.' That woman was rude, coarse, huge and ugly. The man entreated saying: 'Let's stay just a little more and see this marvellous ray of light; be patient.' 'Ray indeed, rubbish, I call it, let's get along at once' she bawled. Unable to withstand her bullying, he unwillingly left the place with her and disappeared.

Quack Authors

I next beheld another bringing with him in a carriage eight bundles. Unlike others, he approached me and spoke to me as follows: 'Look here, mister; I have a precious collection of manuscripts; would you make your choice and buy them of me?' But even as he was talking to me, I noted with amazement the bundles taking fire and being burnt down. I drew his attention to it saying, 'Behold the fate of your priceless collection!' He then raised a hue and cry and speaking ill of Satya Lokam, beat a hasty retreat from it.

Those in Quest of Truth

I also noticed other groups of men — those lacking strength of will, those who had fallen a prey to their own cravings and lower instincts, the humbugs and hypocrites who professed a love of truth without practising it, who came and went like shadows in a dream. But for the solitary man already referred to, none of them cared to speak to me. For our progress in education, we need company; for it provides us with contacts and clashes of mind with mind through which alone we gain knowledge. But I now realised that the quest of truth has to be undertaken in solitude and singly. Company is most inhospitable to it. Having discovered truth

for ourselves, we may then disclose it to others; indeed it is our duty to do so. But the beginning of this quest must be in solitude.

The reason for this is that if you take a companion with you, you are apt to engage in controversies with him which may distract your mind or unhinge your views. Instead of clarity you may labour under confusion; and truth frees and lightens the mind. Further a joint venture with another may lead to divided aims and contradictory purposes which are fatal to the pursuit of truth. Both may be seduced by a false notion of compromise between a true and untrue proposition, and agreeing on a *via media* end up by straying farther and farther from the truth.

No Compromise in the Search for It

Such a compromise would be fatal to the cause of truth. When there are two paths, it does not always follow that both would lead us to the same goal. Even pursuing a wrong path would be preferable; for, it would wake you up to your mistake after you have journeyed along it for a time. You can then retrace your steps and go by the right path. But the way of compromise would lead to a blind alley or nothingness. Sages speak of Equality or Oneness which it is not my intention to attack. They

do not adopt the methods of crude compromise. Wherefore I found the dwellers of Satya Lokam avoiding vain talk and sterile argument. I followed them and avoided disturbing others with my talk.

I was not interested in examining the rays of light that lighted that world. I was eager to go close to the celestial figure seated in the middle of that world. A voice from the air fell on my ears saying: 'Behold the central figure to be Brahman; that is the very authentic form of Truth itself. No one can hope to reach it easily or at once. Guided by one ray of light emanating from it, and moving ever so slowly like atomies, be content to hasten slowly. A single forward jump will wreck your chariot beyond repair. So he warned!'

Truth Many-Coloured Though One

Being naturally of an indolent nature, the idea of pursuing any of the infinite rays of the light that flowed round me in all directions did not appeal to me. 'Well then,' I thought, 'let me defer further consideration of the mysteries of Brahman. I would rather go round and see this new world of Truth,' and accordingly directed my chariot on an aerial survey of the region.

After proceeding a little distance, I beheld an orb of light which was coloured differently. The air seemed full of this new colour; but even more strange to tell, as I continued my journey, the colours changed imperceptibly and delighted me with their unimaginable differences. As I was pondering on what this phenomenon could mean, I realised the mystery underlying them. It was that though Truth was one and indivisible, it had a way of manifesting itself with endless differences.

At last I arrived at the entrance to the northern gates of the new world. From there, I beheld the divine form of Brahman face to face. I was however eager to be assured if it was the same face that I had seen earlier on arriving at the world of Satya. It was then that I became aware of a further marvel associated with it. Its brightness increased with the increased concentration with which I beheld it. Soon my eyes became weary with the blindness of intense gazing, and I turned away for relief.

What the Voice Said

A voice from the circumambient air again spoke up distinctly saying: 'Mortal, know that Truth would appear simple and clear enough at the beginning. But the more you study it

or concentrate on it, the more confusing it becomes. But undeterred by such inconvenience, if you should persist in following the course of even a single ray, there would be relief for your mind and your eyes at the same time. At last, Truth would manifest itself to you as clear and precise as an object which you can hold in your hand.'

It was then that I became eager to follow the trail of one of the many rays that branched away from the figure of Brahman; but again my indolence proved too strong for my desire. 'Alas' I cried, 'cursed be my sluggishness and inertia. It has always been my deadly foe; for even in the course of my life on earth, it was this fatal flaw that prevented my efforts to achieve wealth and fame. Now though I thank my stars that I am free from such petty ambitions, I feel how laziness has not yet left me even in the world of Truth.'

Activity Is the Law of Life

But my repinings and tears were of no avail. We cannot escape from the results of our deeds, for we reap as we sow. The Universe which is under the sway of Dharma Devata ensures that justice is meted out to all, correct to the smallest scruple, no one getting more or less than he

strictly deserves. Having permitted my love of ease to get the better of me, I now find it not so easy to get rid of it. The good things of the earthly existence may not be permanent or inspiring; but even the achievement of them has been prevented by this slackness of my nature. I therefore deserve to be punished for it. Renunciation to be sincere or enduring must come after achievement; that is not true renunciation which is the result of impotence or incompetence. Poets have ever admired those of heroic stuff who have been the architects of their fate. It is the fool who, not realising the value of wealth and hoards or hides it, that is justly worthy of condemnation. It is irrelevant in this context to go into the question of whether the man who has wealth puts it to good or bad uses. That is a different matter which has to be considered separately. The mark of the wise man is that he is able to size up the limitations of wealth, and turns away from it after proving his mettle in the acquisition of it. Sages and poets have ever condemned the man who has become a slave of wealth in the course of his attempts to amass it.

‘Yes, indeed, laziness is the unpardonable sin, the lazy man is fit for nothing but contempt. The Universe is bent to our will by perseverance

and dogged determination. Inertia is the gateway to our moral and spiritual death; it is the handmaid of the Goddess of All Misery, misfortune and penury, her children are the myrmidons of death itself.'

Thus I pondered for a time, and then shock myself up with a new determination. 'I must get over this stupefaction of mind and sluggishness of limbs, I must not allow my thoughts to become diffused, divided and dejected. Down with this laziness, and may I dedicate myself to the pursuit of Truth for the rest of my life!'

Longing for Gandharva Lokam

As if in answer to this new resolve of mine, my mind replied: 'How happy I was in the Gandharva Lokam! Why do I not feel so here? How foolish of me to have become satiated with it so soon! Come, let us go back to that untrammelled world of joy filled with music, dance, the glories of sky, nature and art, of ravishing scenes, unfading flowers, lovely women. What has this world of rays to give us to equal those precious gifts?' Again my mind on hearing this advice wavered for a moment. But the kindly fates so ordained, doubtless because of my own meritorious past, that a new determination and courage seized me.

The Mind Is a Good Servant but Bad Master

'I have found you out at last, my deceptive mind! You are the insidious foe of my enduring happiness, the plausible guide to my miseries. Behold I shall destroy you this very moment'—and I raised my hand as it to choke it to death. The mind cried out in panic like one about to be murdered. Then the voice again spoke up and said : 'Foolish mortal, desist from a fruitless attempt, for the mind is indestructible. You are not yet ripe for parting company with it. Till then it will be ever with you. Further, have you forgot how you started on your present quest merely for diversion? How can you hope to discover Truth in such a frame of mind? Give up the foolish thought that you can repeat here the pleasant experiences of Gandarva Lokam. Know that you have been more fortunate than many others whose chariots have been driven out from here ignominiously. You are atleast allowed to stay on because of some saving grace in you.

'Know further that no one can reach this world who has not traversed slowly or painfully all the previous worlds of existence namely those of Bhu, Bhuvā, Sva, Maha, Jana and Tapa. Being a gifted poet, you have been exempted

from the earlier courses. Proceed from here to the world of Dharma and profit by what you see there. Then you will better appreciate the significance of your experiences of the Satya Lokam which have now confused or distracted you. The mind will obey you and guide you through out the world of Dharma. Return here again thereafter, and many things which now baffle your understanding would then become plain to you.'

I felt myself in a whirl, and became unconscious for a brief space. When I opened my eyes again, I was surprised to find myself in my lodgings in Triplicane, address as already notified at the beginning! Beside me were a few newspapers, my pen and *pan supari* all as usual—my invariable companions.

CHAPTER IV

MUNDANE WORLD

I HAD a splitting headache. Getting out of bed, I went eastwards crossing two or three lanes until I came to a tenement in a God forsaken street where I had a rented portion. May I describe it for the reader's delectation as a foil to the glories of the Gandharva world already unfolded to him? Let me pause a while and ponder over the amenities which this terrestrial World offers us!

In the fore-part of the house in which I lodged, there was a small square from which branch out rooms on two or three sides. The house itself faced west. To the south of the square was a small open court-yard which was flanked by rooms on opposite sides. Another small landing adjacent to it led up to the first floor in which there were two rooms. Between these two halves of the building there lay behind and in common to both in the southern back-yard a well as well as a water-tap. In that back portion I lived with my wife, children, my aunt, my younger sister-in-law and brother. In

the front portion lived a Madhva — Raoji, the landlord with a much bigger family. He sweated his days out in some office in the postal department. His body was plastered over with the marks of his faith in sandal paste. Their numbers tallied with the number of his progeny. His wife was again *enceinte*. He also reared a cow which was tethered to the front courtyard inside the house. He had of course his own quota of dependent relations hanging on to him.

I had the advantage of rooms of the first floor since they gave me the benefit of some fresh breeze now and then. The Raoji crowd had not even that benefit. The terrors of the mosquitoes which began with the dark were indescribable. I rarely ever slept. The good Raoji suffered from asthma, and so kept up his coughing with spasmodic regularity. His children would be caterwauling also by turns. The pregnant and distracted mistress of the house would wake up fitfully and inveighing against her husband or her children or her Gods in the Canarese language would relapse into sleep.

If such was the Iliad of the Raoji's woes, my own budget of them was even more variegated.

That reminds me. I've lost the thread of my narrative. Wasn't I returning from Veeraghaba Mudali Street? On the way, I had to negotiate many dangerous and noxious spots; to wit, the plying of jutkas, the coaches of the more opulent, the dust that was kicked up in the streets, the noise and confusion, the stench of the drains, and the establishment of the Raoji in the front portion where lay the risk of treading underfoot one or the other of the numerous children of that worthy man.

Safe from these perils, I arrived at last at the security and silence of my upstairs room. It was a multi-purpose spot where I worked and slept and held court with my cronies and transacted a thousand other items of business. I called out to my wife to come up, and when she responded with the languid query: 'Well?' I replied: 'Can't bear this headache; get me a pepper plaster.' 'I see it is the same chronic infliction on me to drudge for you. Whether you suffer from headache really or not, I suffer from it figuratively. By the by, the milk woman has been dunning for her dues; the Raoji's wife has hinted that the house-rent is over-due; it appears that the Raoji sent word to you even yesterday. May I also remind you of your promise to give me money enough to buy a bracelet

for the child? As for me, countless have been your broken promises.'

She eked out this formidable list with other *etceteras* which on being totalled up mentally indicated that nothing less than a sum of three lakhs of rupees would answer to our present commitments. Finally came her *coup de grace*. 'Every-street loafer gets the benefit of your largess; but you frown at me when I mention the barest needs of the family. At this rate what would be in store for us at last? Pauperdom, pure and simple,' she concluded with that lugubrious benediction.

'Wonderful, I've got rid of my headache; thank you very much. You may now go down!' I told her, in my most sympathetic and genial tone.

'Yes,' she flared up again, 'it is indeed tiresome to talk to one's wife. But if it were any Tom, Dick or Harry, how you will hold forth until you get hoarse in the throat! Even a single word from me puts you out.' It was her idea of placating or humouring me.

It was only some days after this domestic causerie that I began to toy with the idea of undertaking a journey to Dharma Lokam. The

mundane world is too big for easy grasp or summary. I can only touch upon its scenes, sights and events with due local colour only here and there. A verbatim transcription of this world would swell to the size of a multiple Mahabharata; I shall therefore content myself with shooting a few representative scenes from it.

The Vale of Tears

20th: The child is running a temperature. The wife complains of ear-ache. My own trouble is an excess of bile which makes my mind go round in a whirl.

21st: Last day for the payment of the school fees of my younger brother. Forgot to raise the amount from the office; the young hopeful has declined to go to school without his fees. In view of my nationalist fervour and Swadeshi zeal, C.I.D. men are always on the prowl about my haunts. They are said to have informed my brother that one of my best friends and a devoted worker in the national cause is to be shortly clapped into jail. This auspicious news naturally inspired me not a little!

Family Woes

22nd: There has been a passage at arms between the wife and my aunt; it has led to their

estrangement. Both have brought me their tale of woes against each other. But they seem to agree in denouncing or deploring my political aberrations. What is to me as the breath of my nostrils is wrong, perverse and vain in their view. They are fully convinced that all my family and other troubles already suffered and yet to suffer are due to my political activities. My aunt is more categoric about these things than even my wife. I had a sort of an itching feeling in the nostrils, and wondered if it could be the beginning of some malignant attack, and suffered anticipatory torments. In spite of attempts to divert the mind from such hypochondria, it seemed to have a fatal fascination for such fears.

Misery All-round

23rd: An over-dose of lime in the *paan supaari* has caused a burning sensation in the mouth and tongue and palate. Could not even rinse the mouth with water, it chafed so. My habitual low vitality due to over-work was aggravated by enforced starvation as a result of my inability to swallow my food. I became more dejected, downcast and glum. And so on, and so on.....

Not a day passes without its bringing its own budget of woes. Fie on this wretched world! Hardly fit for men with their higher faculties to live in. Only tortoises and jackals should flourish in it! It is the arena of unrelieved evil or misery, a storehouse of melancholy meannesses and pettinesses, in short, hell. It would be a sin to behold any mortal who is at all satisfied with the way of this world.'

Public Life

I have mentioned a few illustrative details from my personal life and activities and ideas. Let me now furnish abstract and brief chronicles of my friends, associates and times. There is the S.....Sangam in Triplicane; it is a fraternity of patriots. Its chief peculiarity is that it has no patriot on its rolls, although it is called by such a high-sounding name. Some of my cronies and myself were its moving spirits and we conducted its activities, though what the latter exactly were is more than I can say. No wonder that association came to nothing.

I am a slave to idleness; my friends are all in thrall to vinegar flavoured, cooked rice. Some few are slaves to cash. A *paisa* would bring them down to their knees in abject adoration and unconditional surrender.

Demagogues

But hear any one of them holdforth on public issues, what he says would be found blood-curdling. The most eloquent of us was 'Panatthondaradippodi Alwar.' Another would make the heavens themselves his bow. A third would offer to make a rope of sand. Another firebrand foresaw that if we only kept up our tempo of Swadeshi propaganda, the English traders and shopkeepers would find their occupation gone in six months, and would pack up and depart without even a formal farewell. Said another: 'Syamji Krishna Varma has adumbrated a ten-year plan for the achievement of Swaraj. My own calculations clearly indicate that the ideal could be achieved within six years.' A frog-like individual corrected smartly by saying: 'Say rather in six months!'

Self-Seekers

P..... Alwar is a prominent member of our Association. All such talk would send him into the seventh heaven of delight. Once he was blessed with the support of some powerful deity which came to him and said: 'I shall guarantee the dawn of your Swarajya with the rise of tomorrow's Sun. Go thou at once and bring me an offering of one *varaahan*.' But

his reply was: 'O Goddess Supreme, I salute you—Om! Para Sakti, Ambika *etcetera*. What adequate return can we make for such grace on your part? We are indeed ready to dedicate in your service our body, our resources and our soul and spirit. But anent the demand for a *varaahan* of cash; I have a submission to make. Be pleased to hear it. Swarajya is a matter of common, national import; money for that purpose should be raised by public subscription. It is not, cannot be one man's job. I shall bring up your demand for consideration at the next meeting of our association and pass a suitable resolution on it. Please pay me another visit next week, and till then, *Vande Maataram*! Thus he would get out of awkward corners with the utmost suavity.

Whited Sepulchers

Heavens, what a world is this! Of the earth earthy! Fraud chicanery, endless care and worry. No virtue or pith or marrow in it all. Like moths eating into the inside of a bamboo pole. Every one blames his neighbour for his failings, each thinks that if only he had a free hand, things could be shaped much better and quicker. Saying that others are undependable, he himself proves a cheat. All mankind is subject to one irredeemable ill — the love of money.

It is the most potent of all the devils, and it works havoc with the aid of hireling desire employed by it. Senseless, immoderate, inordinate desire! For the privilege of combining desire with taste, and of enjoying both in due harmony and proportion, commend me to the Gandharvas. Perception is the tool of the Satya Lokam.....

Besides these, there are other aspects of mundane life and thought upon which I desired to paint and expatiate at length. But then it struck me that to deal with the ways of an unprofitable world at any length is itself an unprofitable proceeding; and so shall desist from such an enterprise!

CHAPTER V

DHARMA LOKAM

y Guide

SOME DAYS later, I got into my mind's chariot and wended my way to Dharma Lokam. I thought that I could range in this world free and unconfined as I did in the Gandharva Lokam. But as I was about to alight from my chariot in the new world, a young man of singular appearance accosted me. He had a handsome, unclouded face, soft and wide-seeing eyes, a dark but luxuriant and curled beard; he had on his right hand a bundle of cadjan leaves. 'Stay where you are, and do not get down; instead I shall get in with you and shall show you the lions of this place. Such are the orders of the Dharma Devata.'

Figure of Austerity

At sight of him I was both impressed and abashed. He reassured me in some mysterious fashion, and I felt confident that in his company and under his guidance, I would be delighted and edified. As he came up and took

his seat by my side, I surveyed him once again and could not but admire the smooth contours of his seemingly eternal youthful body. There was an exquisite symmetry and proportion in the various limbs of his body which seemed devised by the Goddess of Mathematics Herself. A rare lustre emanated from all over him; but it had not that intoxicating or self-forgetful quality which I had experienced in the Gandharva Lokam. It was the sheen of nature itself such as we see in tree or bush or bud or flower. I prostrated myself at his feet in speechless awe. He blessed me saying: 'May you do Dharma at all times!'

The World of Dharma

He then proceeded to introduce himself to me: 'Son, know me to be the embodiment of austerity or penance. My role in this World is to act as a guide to new-comers. I shall show each man the operation of that Dharma in which he is interested. From the smallest worm to the biggest whale, each has its allotted Dharma to perform. From the smallest atom to the planets and stellar systems beyond our imagination, every part of the created Universe has its own allotted function or role to fulfil. Furthermore, in one and the same object, the scope of

Dharma undergoes change according to changing conditions of time, place and circumstance. If you wish to observe all these, you would find ten thousand years not enough to complete a round. Therefore, be wise and indicate only those duties in which alone you are interested; these I shall exemplify or illustrate for you. For the rest, nothing prevents you from having a general bird's-eye view of the entire scene here.' I thereupon replied: 'Let me know as much as possible about the Dharma of the Brahmans and of Kshatriyas; these alone interest me.'

Temple of Dharma

'Very good, follow me; let us first pay our devoirs to the God of Dharma in his temple.'

Even before I could see what lay in our path, I was transported within the twinkling of an eye to a magnificent and spacious edifice in pure, white, crystal-clear marble. I followed close on the heels of the youthful sage who alighted from the car at the back. As we entered the temple, we heard the solemn sounds of many voices chanting: 'Victory to the King of Dharma, Victory to the Lord Yama, to the Lord Vivaswan, like to the Sun in his effulgence, Victory to the terrible one as well as the gentlest of deities!' My mind quaked in fear; my limbs

trembled. I was bathed in perspiration. I said to my guide in faltering tones: 'Wise one, whither are you leading me?'

'To the presence of Yama.'

'Why, O, why?' I cried in panic.

The sage turned to me and composed me by passing his hands over me; with his unclouded and serene looks he reassured me and said: 'Fear not; Dharma which protects us all is not to be feared.' At those words, I felt greatly relieved. But the next moment, I fell down unconscious. Then I saw as in a trance some strange things.

Hell Described

What dreadful dreams or visions! Huge, slimy, wriggling worms surrounded me as if to swallow me up. Alas, I had fallen into the deepest hell of dreadful torments, doubtless, as punishment for my past wicked deeds. I had indeed heard how, in hell, people would be burnt alive, or their limbs cut to pieces or racked by a thousand torments and engines. But what I experienced was far more gruesome; the filth and stench amidst which I found myself were unbearable. Heavens! it was retribution for having thought of ill things and wished for evil for on earth.

'Alas, I had not realised these truths in those far-off unregenerate days when I allowed my mind to run amok. All around me were steeped in the same stink of unclean thoughts, aspirations and wishes and it was their association that had brought me to this pass. 'O save me,' I cried in my agony.

Horrers of Hell

'Behold there, many others of my acquaintances experiencing like horrors with me! Some avert their face, abashed at being recognised by me, and seek a shelter behind the horns of a tortoise-like aquatic creature. Some weep loudly. I shudder at the groups of molluses, crabs, cockroaches, lizards, all of repulsive and bloated sizes. What unclean creatures, what loathsome and noxious surroundings, suffocating then and sickening to recall to memory now!

Fellow mortals, shun unclean thoughts; I implore you out of my love for you. I then cried unable to bear those torments: 'O God, enough of this, burn me out in the fierce fire of extinction so that I may be free from these torments. I swear that I shall never more entertain one impure thought!'

Prey to Diseases

Let me recall another experience. I found myself in another spot where I became a prey to all the diseases to which flesh is heir. Leprosy, syphilis, elephantiasis, paralysis, and many other kinds of ailment which are the result of pampering the body in this world. 'Bemused mortals be warned by me; all these torments are the result of indulging the cravings of the body. Know that pleasures must be paid for, and thus grimly!'

After some time, some evil spirits took hold of me and cast me into a blazing fire. I who had at first thought that even fire would be preferable, now made frantic attempts to free myself from the clutches of those demons. I struggled with my hands, feet, teeth to free myself from being thrown into the pit of blazing fire. But they proved stronger than I. They gave me a series of fire-baths, as it were, by plunging me into a number of such fiery pits. Then I felt my limbs severed and cut to pieces and hung up like the bodies of animals in meat stalls. Though dismembered, I still howled my entreaties to sages, saints and the Gods themselves to come and save me.....

Suddenly I again came to myself and saw the sage by my side beholding me compassionately.

He gave my face a douche of cool, reviving water; he stood me by his side, and supporting me with his hands, said with tears streaming from his eye: "Son, peace unto you; happiness will soon attend you. The fruits of action transmitted through all eternity have to be enjoyed and suffered. Forget what you have seen and endured, for it is futile to repine over the past, nay it's unmanly. I shall hereafter lead you by the right path. Say after me: 'Hail to the King of Dharma, Victory to Him!'"

I repeated: 'Victory to the King of Dharma!'

The Throne of Dharma

Then my guide took me by a long winding path which seemed to draw endless circles until he led me to the Hall of Audience of the King of Dharma. It was all built of gleaming marble—floor, walls, pillars and the throne itself was studded with diamonds. At the foot of the throne, effigies of snakes, and tigers made of gold lay crushed. There were no galleries or higher storeys above the hall. It was open to the sky which shone in its distant, unclouded blue, and formed a natural canopy over it.

The rays of the Sun fell directly on the crown of the King and seemed to set fire to it with a riot of dazzling brightnesses. They were cool

for a wonder, and I guessed that it must be so because the God of Dharma is the son of Surya, the Lord of Day. Fire does not burn fire! Straight in front of Dharma Rajah seated on his throne, there appeared a flashing, bejewelled sword suspended in the air. It symbolised the power of Dharma and its shield and support. Its function was to punish those who dared to transgress the injunctions of Dharma, even more strange to state, if Dharma should itself fall short of its ideal, the sword will punish it no less!

Dharma Described

I next watched the face of the King of Dharma seated on the throne. I was struck, by its fugitive resemblance to that of Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Slight as it was, it left an indelible impression on me. Dharma being also the embodiment of time, the ravages which Time works on others could make no impression on him. His body was of a golden hue, and seemed made of the essence of adamant metals melted into one; the spirit that informed him was that of Maha Sakti itself. Over and above, the light of ineffable Grace radiated from his eyes. Justice was pitiless, I had often had to complain in my ignorance. Its heart was

as hard as the diamonds with which its seat was studded, I believed. Now I knew that it was a wrong notion. Justice is impartial and free from frailty. It is the harmonious blend of wisdom and grace.

The sage put me in front of the King as if to help me catch his eye. 'Welcome' he said with a gracious smile, and uttered the mystic 'OM.' But even before he opened his lips, I fell at his feet and paid my homage to him. I drenched his divine feet with my tears. Then I stood up again with bowed head before him.

Dharma addressed me next saying: 'All thy sins are forgiven, thy imperfections have been destroyed. I shall set you on the road to the realisation of your perfection. You will no more be tormented by the frailties of the flesh or attracted by petty things. Your egotism will be destroyed. You will be better able to control and direct your mind yourself in right directions. Your guide will show you all else that you desire to see. May you prosper!' I bowed to him again and withdrew from his presence.

An Ashram Home

My guide next led me to a dense forest. Not far from it there were about a score of little cottages forming a small village. Around

each thatched cottage was a lovely garden. The dwellings were no huddled close together. Elegant, hygienically built and capable of promoting humility in the dwellers, these houses shone as models of their kind. The surroundings were clean and free from all evil smells and sights. The guide took me to the best of those houses. Inside there was a Brahman with broad shoulders, a shining, serene and intelligent face, wide eyes and a snow-white beard. In front of him were seated five or six disciples engaged in hearing his discourse. After welcoming us, the teacher told his pupils: 'Children, enough of studies for the day. You may go now.'

Castes and their Functions

But I begged him to conduct his class without minding me, as I was not anxious to disturb his normal routine. But the sage replied: 'No, no; it was time for me to close for the day, and not because of your coming. In the Dharma Lokam there are no obstacles in the path of each performing his duty.'

My guide then addressed the teacher saying: 'Kanvacharya, what was the subject of your discourse to the disciples?'

Sage Kanva replied: 'Mathematics.'

‘Last time I was here, you were teaching sculpture, weren’t you?’

‘Yes, the other batch were of the working class; now I am dealing with Brahmans and Kshatriyas.’

I exclaimed to myself admiringly: ‘Ocean of all lore; encyclopedia of all arts and science!’

The sage who heard me quickly replied deprecatingly: ‘O no, I’m nothing of the kind. Beyond the Vedanta and Dharma Sastras, I have only studied sculpture and mathematics. I teach only these to students according to their own options. That is my duty.’

My Interview

It was then that my guide introduced me to the sage and said: ‘Our visitor is desirous of knowing all about Brahman Dharma, and so I have brought him to you.’

At this Kanvacharya replied with a smile : ‘You are yourself the fountain of all Sastras, and so you abash me by praising me beyond my deserts. However, as desired by you, I shall answer his questions to the best of my knowledge.’

I who had been containing my avid curiosity till then felt glad to hear these words, and so

proceeded at once to ask him questions as counsel do of witnesses in a Court of Law, with this difference, however, that I was modest, humble, earnest and zealous in the pursuit of Truth. Cheerfully, unfalteringly and with supreme clarity, he answered my questions and enlightened me on many points.

Is Caste Based On Birth?

Let me record a few sample questions and answers here for the benefit of the reader.

‘Is a Brahman only born, or can he acquire Brahmanhood by his efforts?’

‘At birth all men are partakers of mere animality. By training and exertion, they develop their qualities multifariously under the stress of the actions they engage in. The Lord has said in the Gita: ‘I have divided mankind into four classes on the basis of their qualities and functions.’

‘Is this rule operative in life now?’

‘Yes; my father was a Kshatriya. I am a Brahman. Of my twelve sons, I have selected only one to undergo the training of a Brahman. The rest of them have chosen their training in accordance with their aptitudes and inclinations and have become members of all the other varnas.’

‘On earth, this system of Varnashrama Dharma obtains only in Bharata Varsha, and it is not in accordance with what you have stated just now.’

‘It’s wrong to imagine that Varnashrama is found only in India; it is of universal validity. But unfortunately, it is in Bharata Varsha alone that the Dharma has become perverted and mis-applied. In ancient times, Varnashrama in India was as I have described it. In proof of this, look into the entire body of ancient Hindu literature, from the Vedas through the Upanishads to Itihasas and Puranas. What the Lord laid down in the Gita is actually being demonstrated in all other countries of the world now. The present fallen condition of Bharata Land — its poverty, ignorance, disease and servitude — is due to its betrayal of its ancient Dharma.’

The Function of the Brahman

‘Please teach me the Dharma of the Brahman class.’

‘Very good, but I shall make it brief. The Brahman class is the custodian and trustee of the community’s knowledge and wisdom. You may call them Farmers of Culture. Their duty is to master the lore of the ages in all subjects

according to their abilities and impart it to others according to their powers of grasp and assimilation. They should not vend their knowledge, but must give it freely. It is the duty of the beneficiaries to keep the teachers free from want and hunger. More is not expected by them and should not be given. May I remind you what Sage Yajnavalkya said long ago? He who studies to store paddy for the morrow's needs is disqualified from becoming a Brahman.'

'All the ills of mind spring from ignorance; it therefore becomes the duty of the Brahman to abolish this ignorance in men by his labours. This is the high talk assigned to the Brahman. If the toiling and working classes should forget their chief duty or prove unfaithful to it, then it becomes the responsibility of the Brahman to lead them back to a realisation of their lapses, so that they could resume their legitimate avocations. If the Dharma of Vysias should suffer eclipse, then the duty of the Brahman would be to rehabilitate them in like manner by teaching them all about their special Dharma. On the other hand, the duties of the Brahman and Kshatriya should never suffer any decline. For it is they that support the rest. If they fail, then society itself is destroyed.'

The sage continued: 'In times of grave national crisis, we should not isolate ourselves from others in the name of our *swadharma*. All must do the work nearest to their hand, and not justify inaction by appealing to Text-book maxims. When the house is on fire, all have to bend their energies in putting out the fire, each to the measure of his or her capacity. In the Kali Yuga caste or colour distinctions have no validity, but are a delusion and a snare.

'You wished to know about Bharata Varsha. It is still in the era of Kali. In a few generations, Kali's time would be up; and the world's great age will begin anew. Krita Yuga will come round again. Then you will find here the true distinctions between the different castes. The present artificial and unnatural distinctions would then go.

'In the metaphysical view, only he will be deemed a Brahman who knows that everything is absolute or Brahman. This great truth is beautifully brought out in the Upanishad entitled '*Vajrasoochika*.' A wide and thorough knowledge of the classics, ability to expound the truths contained in them, guiding and helping the different functions of society to be properly discharged by those trained for them, complete

detachment from the lures of the wordly life — these in brief are the distinguishing characteristics of the Brahman; they comprehend the whole duty of Brahmans.'

His discourse thus concluded, the teacher suddenly got up and went out of the hut. He returned and informed us that it was time for the performance of vespers. All the three of us then moved out to the outskirts of the village, beyond a cluster of trees to where a small stream was flowing. The blaze of the setting Sun was half lost in the clouds of the western horizon. The clouds appeared as if they were on fire in little islets across the sky. Nature appeared in one of her daily transfigurations of amazing beauty. We finished our bath and the other two took their seats at a distance from each other plunged in the contemplation of Brahman. As for myself I seized upon the mystic syllable to commune with the spirit of Shanti.

Prayers finished, we returned to the dwelling of Kanva Rishi. My guide and I then wished to say a few word of thanks to the teacher before we bade farewell to him. But Kanva Muni replied: 'It's night-fall, and I beg of you both to spend the night with me as my guest in my dwelling.'

I then recalled the words which he had earlier uttered to the effect that he who 'stored food for the morrow would not be deemed a Brahman,' and so presumed that Kanva must be poor and resourceless. I therefore excused myself with a view to save our host from embarrassment saying: 'It's alright, permit us to go; thank you for your invitation though.'

The wise-one read my thoughts like a book. 'Brother' he replied, 'know that where Dharma is, no poverty can be found. Do not worry about it but stay on for the night.'

I felt abashed and ill at ease. The two sages exchanged a knowing smile. Finally it was agreed that we should spend the night with the sage in the hut.

As we sat in the parlour of the hut on a piece of matting, I felt my soul flooded by a sense of peace which was more intense and satisfying than that which I experienced when I was in the Gandharva Lokam the company of Parvata Kumari. The two others soon became absorbed in discussions of Vedantic topics. The sage illuminated his discourses with memorable sayings. By and by, his wife also came and sat beside us to hear his exposition.

Kanva's spouse reminded me of such legendary and honoured figures like Maitreyi and others referred to in the Vedas. Chastity, clarity of mind, modesty, intelligence, and compassion seemed like children playing about her. Their respective natures shone through their activities — dynamically in the man and passively in the woman.

A little later, the son of Kanva came and sat beside his mother. When I saw him clad in the garb of an anchorite, I felt a surge of pity overcome me. He ought, I thought, to be a prince charming dallying with the ravishing beauties of the harem in royal pleasantries. Or he would have graced the leadership of a troop of young heroes all clad in martial attire. He seemed more like the morning Sun advancing with his thousand rays forming themselves out before him in a blaze of glory. What an irony that such manly grace and youthful beauty should be hidden under the barks and leaves of trees, eating of the fruits and roots of the earth, drinking of mountain tarns to slake his thirst and devoting his time to the study of crabbed texts and dry philosophy! I had no doubt that the choice of this youth out of the sage's twelve sons for the life of an ascetic was most infelicitous.

As I was thinking thus, the sages came to the end of their discourse and discussions. Again Sage Kanva read my thoughts like an open book, and decided to explain to me the reasons which prompted him to choose this youth for the life and duties of the Brahman in preference to the eleven others. Turning to his son, he asked him: 'Child, in Astrology — the science of heavenly bodies, not the predictive branch of it which claims to tell whither a straying buffalo had gone and hidden itself — you have had your practical work gone through for the day. Go and observe the positions of the planets and stars in the heavens.' The boy heard him and left us at once.

The father did not wish that his son should hear himself discussed or praised, and so sent him away.

'Ignorance is a more invincible foe than even iniquity or unrighteousness. The latter is comparatively easier. All the ailments and disabilities which people suffer physically can be overcome by the labours of workers and merchants, for between them they provide the creature — comforts of life. The Kshatriya protects Dharma, while knowledge is cherished by the Brahman. The ideal Brahman needs infinite heroism, must equip himself with in-

exhaustible and unfading light, strength of mind and determined purpose. The cohorts of ignorance are as legion; it springs eternal. Its roots go to the supporting heads of Adisesha himself. To vanquish these ghosts, to dry up its springs, to cut that tree at its deepest roots are no ordinary tasks.

‘Note that in the mighty struggle of the Mahabharata, Krishna had a harder job to do than Arjuna, and Vyasa had an assignment as onerous as that of Lord Krishna.’

On these and allied topics the talk ranged freely for some more time. We then had light refreshments, and then went to sleep for the night. Early the next morning the Muni and I finished our morning ablutions and prayers and proceeded to the dwelling of a Kshatriya named Satyaraman. The host came out to welcome us and led us to a separate hall where we were made quite at home. The Muni then gently opened up the topic of myself. At this Satyaraman laughed gaily until his broad martial shoulders shook. ‘Pardon me’, he said, ‘I am but a soldier, and my duty is to protect. I have not the capacity to enlighten any one. Further there in the ranks of the army at the command of Dharma Raja are many better-qualified

generals and officers to speak than I. I must admit my inferiority and unworthiness although it gratifies me to think that you should have chosen me for the honour.'

He then turned to me and said: 'Please ask any questions, and I shall endeavour to answer them to best of my ability.'

'May I know what is the basic virtue of the Kshatriya—that which serves as the matrix of all his other virtues?'

At this, eyes of the host sparkled with a new light, and seemed as though about to give the answer in revealing glances. I was seized by an anticipatory thrill. I drank his wisdom with all my faculties stretched to their utmost in reverential concentration, like that of the disciple at the feet of his master.

'Friend, you want to know the parent of all martial virtues? — the *fons et origo* Kshatriya effort and endeavour? Know it in brief to be 'war'; It is as the breath of his nostrils; it is his life-principle. The moment he gives it up, he becomes a craven. Thereafter he is a piece of wood, a corpse, a falsehood unworthy of even opprobrious epithets. Know, friend, that I am not fit to initiate you into the mysteries of Vedanta. Learn from our friend here, the sage,

how Adharma or unrighteousness first arose and grew. I may however tell you one thing. Adharma ever stands before us. Why do you think? Because it cries to be killed by us, to be split in twin by the axe of Dharma which we wield in our hands.'

'Iniquities have an unending blood-progeny. They grow the more they are destroyed. Therefore it is that the duty of a Kshatriya is to be ever engaged in destroying them. Behold how the Sun kills darkness everyday. Know that Surya is the first, primordial Kshatriya of the Universe. We are his progeny.'

'So you see how the Dharma of the Kshatria consists in the eradication of all unrighteousness. It follows therefore that our duty to equip ourselves for this task becomes self-evident.'

'What', I wondered somewhat confused, 'was the point of destroying that which seems indestructible?' Hesitantly, I put the question to Satyaraman, and swiftly he replied: 'A typically ignorant question! Know you not that man cannot exist even for a moment without partaking of some actions or other? You have to do it willy-nilly. That being granted, which

would you prefer, to do it consciously, purposefully like the Sun or blindly, passively like the straw that eddies in the flood? What elaborate care do we not give to this dirty body of ours, cleaning it endlessly. Do you consider it, futile or superfluous? Have you ever decided to stop bathing, because of its repetitive or inconclusive character? If you are so particular to cherish the easily perishable body, how much more eager should you be to cherish the immortal soul?

‘Know besides that Adharma is the stuff on which Dharma feeds and thrives. So it is that Dharma will flourish only as Adharma flourishes. When Dharma loses its occupation, it will also languish and die.’

I had not the privilege of dwelling long enough in Dharma Lokam. The Muni took me to many other spots in it after our encounter with Satyaraman. The fault was mine. For just as a man suffers from indigestion after having eaten some undesirable food, and suffers from the effects of it, so too my mind was troubled and rendered ill at ease by some thoughts which were not in consonance with the atmosphere of Dharma Lokam.

Some days later, I found myself alone, the sage having gone elsewhere on some other business. The effect of preordained Karma! For my mind slyly sneaked into thoughts of Parvata Kumari, for I saw her winsome figure standing before my mind's eye. 'Alas,' I exclaimed to myself with a sigh, 'what heavenly times I then had in her company!' Methought that the seductive figure of that maiden came closer to me. Instinctively I went forward to embrace it in my arms. I pressed her close and sought her lips in a delirium of intoxication. Suddenly I heard the crash as of a world or two colliding and falling. Panic seized me and I fell down unconscious...

When I opened my eyes again, I beheld my old Triplicane quarters with some friends standing round me fanning me and trying to look sympathetic. 'What's the matter?' I asked somewhat bewildered. 'Why, you cried out in your sleep as if you had seen all the devils. We saw you huddled and unconscious. We gave you first aid, and have just brought you round,' they replied.

'Alas!' I cried sadly, 'even death would have been preferable, but I have now forsaken Dharma!'

தமிழ்நாட்டு அரசின் சிறப்பிலக்கிய
மொழிபெயர்ப்பு வெளியீடு

1. சோவியத்துக் கவிஞர் நூற்றுவர்
2. சிவானந்த நடனம்
3. தீர்க்கதரிசி
4. The squirrel in the Court-Yard
5. The Ten Decads (Patirruppattu)
6. Jnanaratham

தமிழ்நாட்டுப் பாடநூல் நிறுவனம்

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