

17. The spider in the same web

FESTIVAL Days like this are marked out in the calendar, in order to waken the mind of man, which is apt to doze off in sloth or complaisance after some spurt of Saadhana. They are like alarm bells, which go off at intervals during the year, warning men of the journey ahead and the goal beyond the horizon. "*Thasmaath jaagratha jaagratha !*"---"therefore, be warned, be warned!" say the sages. Awake, arise, stop not until the goal is attained.

Man should not yield to thirst for the world's gifts; he should yearn for the gift of Grace. That yearning will impel Krishna to visualise Himself in order to quench the agony. Bharatheeya culture has emphasised the inner meaning of the scriptures, and the deeper significances of rites and ceremonies. It revels in symbolism, but, it has always encouraged seekers to rend the veil and learn the principle enshrined in the symbol. It has advised the reciters of the sacred *Vedhas* to recite the hymns with a full awareness of the meaning of the paeans and prayers.

We are today celebrating the Advent of Krishna. The *Avathaar* (Incarnation) in the Krishna Form has vast mysteries enshrined in it. Brindhaavan (the forest of Brindha) is the tangled jungle of life. The cows tended by Lord Krishna in Brindhaavan are none other than the humans that are helpless without His care and guidance. Gokula (the herds of cows) is the name given in the *Bhaagavatham* (Story of the Glory of the Lord) to the region where Krishna tended the cows. 'Go' means also the individual who is enclosed in the body. So, Gokula is the region inhabited by man. You know that in Thelugu, Geetha means a streak! And, in the *Upanishads* God is described as a "streak of lightning, flashing through a thick blue cloud;" Krishna is 'blue,' of the blue cloud; the *Vedhas* say, *neela thoyadha*; the *Bhaagavatham* says, *neela megha*. Both mean that He is as deep as the sky or the sea and so His colour is that of the sea and the sky!

Trace the Lord in your heart and hold fast

The streak mentioned in the *Vedhas* is the geetha, the true '*geetha*' of Krishna. The Gopees, the simple sincere cowherd maids of Gokula, sought Krishna within or behind every bush and bower, for He was fascinating them, but ever keeping Himself away! This is only another way of describing the search for the God that we know to be within us, who eludes our efforts to sink into that sweetness. Krishna is hiding in the recesses of your hearts; you have to trace Him there and hold fast. He runs away, but leaves footprints marked by the split milk on which He has trodden, in His hurry to be beyond our reach. Yes, the lesson is: recognise His Footprints in every thing of beauty, every act of goodness, every tear of gratitude, every sigh of compassion, and discover Him in the bower of your own heart, filled with the fragrance of Love and Light of Virtue.

When you have to be shown the moon, they say, "Look at the tip of that branch of that tree!" As if, the moon is right on the top of that branch! There is a long long way to go, to reach the moon; but, you can see it from afar, as a round disc emitting cool, comfortable light. So too, the *Bhaagavatham* and other epics and poems show the Lord and help you to see Him enough to arouse the keenness to approach Him nearer; that is all! Each book leads you from one stage to another, revealing more and more of the beneficence of God, until you are filled with insatiable yearning for Him. That yearning is its own reward; it will transform the Will of God into the Form you long to see. A rolling stone, it is said, gathers no moss; the stone that stays put is encrusted with moss. The mind that rolls from book to book, that delineates the charm of Divinity, cannot get encrusted with the moss of material desire.

The Lord has no favourites or foes

is not drawn into desire; He has no wants; He is full, free and ever content. He has no aversions or attractions. He has no bonds of kith or kin. One poet has sung, "O Krishna! O Gopaala! I do not count on your being kind to me, or being moved by my appeals for mercy. Don't I know that you killed with your own hands your maternal uncle? You killed the very nurse who came endearingly to you in order to feed you at her breast! With no iota of compassion towards the father of your dearest devotee, you tortured him and killed him while the son, Prahlada, was looking on! You approached Bali as if for alms, and when he gladly placed all he had at your feet, you trampled on his head and pressed him down into the nether regions! How can a heart that has no tenderness, melt at my misery?" Yes! the Lord is above all attachments; he has no favourites or foes. You decide the distance between Him and yourselves. *Moksha* is the stage when moha (attachment) attains *kshaya* (extinction). How, then, can the Grantor of *Moksha* be Himself abridged by attachment?

God has no will or want. He does not confer or withhold. He is the eternal witness. To put it in the language that you can understand, He is like the postman, who is not concerned with the contents of the letters that he hands over to the addresses; one letter might communicate victory, another, defeat; you receive what you have worked for. Do good and have good in return; be bad and accept the bad that comes back to you. That is the law, and there is really no help or hindrance.

The Raajasik and Saathwik Mahaathmas

Raavana is a *Mahaathma* (great person); Thaataki, described as an ogress, is also a *mahaathma*! That is to say, they had superhuman prowess and mysterious powers. All are Divine; God is the inner motivator of everyone. They are *mahaathmas* not only in the sense that all are *mahaathmas*: They are *Raajasik Mahaathmas*, enslaved by their emotions and passions, quick to hate and slow to forget the slights inflicted on them. Raama and Lakshmana are *Saathwik Mahaathmas*, embodiments of the prowess and powers that righteousness and virtue can endow.

A red-hot iron hammer can be hammered into shape by a cold iron hammer. So too, a person red hot with emotion and passion can be hammered by the hammer that knows no heat of anger or hate. That is the reason Raama was able to defeat Raavana and destroy him. Why? The very word *Sathwa* means strength, power, vigour, vitality. For, virtue is power, good-ness is power. A person is angry because he is weak; he is a bully, because he is a coward; he utters lies, because he is sure he deserves to be punished and he is too weak to welcome it gladly!

The human baby, born as innocence in *Dharmakshethra* (in the realm of *Dharma*), in the fullness of Sathawaguna, gathers, as the years roll by, the moss of *Rajas* and *Thamas*, and lands itself in the conflict-ridden area of Kurukshethra. That is the story of *Mahaabhaaratha* in each life. Kurukshethra is a battlefield between Maamakaah (our people) and *Paandavaah* (the fair people). That is what the very first *shloka* of the Geetha announces! What does this really mean? On one side stand the *Raajasik* (passionate) and *Thaamasik* (impure) impulses fed by the sense of mine and our; on the other side stand the *Saathwik*, fair, spotless attributes of love, forbearance, truth and righteousness which are Divine and fostered by God. The combat between the two forces---the down-dragging and the uplifting---knows no armistice. The daily bath ensures cleanliness, the daily battle keeps the evil foes at arm's length beyond capacity to harm.

World is same for the insect and the human being

It is said that during the Kurukshethra battle which lasted for 18 days, Vyaasa had his mind torn with contrition, for the contestants were both of his lineage. So, he could not cast his eyes on the fratricidal carnage! One day, he was so overcome by remorse that he hastened beyond the blood-soaked plain, where another day's holocaust was about to begin. Hurrying along, he saw a spider scurrying forward on the ground! "Why so fast?" inquired the sage; the spider ran off the road, climbed up an ant-hill by its side and from that eminence, it replied, "Know you not that the war chariot of Arjuna is about to pass this way! If I am caught under its wheels, I am down." Vyaasa laughed at this reply; he said, "No eye gets wet when you die! The world suffers no loss when you are killed! You leave no vacuum when you disappear!" The spider was touched to the quick by this insult. It was shaking with rage. It ejaculated, "How is that? You are a bloated sage! You feel that if you die it will be a great loss, whereas I will not be missed at all. I too have wife and children whom I love. I too have a home and a store of food. I too cling to life with as much tenacity as you folk. I have hunger, thirst, grief, pain, joy, delight and the agony of separation from kith and kin. The world is as much in me and for me, as in and for human beings and others."

Vyaasa hung his head and moved on in silence, muttering the line, "*Saamaanyam ethath pasubhir naraani*"--for man and beast, these things are common." But, he told himself, "Enquiry into the Ultimate, yearning for beauty, truth and goodness, awareness of the underlying unity, these attributes of Wisdom are the unique treasures of mankind," and went his way.

Krishna is in the bower and the battlefield

Through this wisdom, man can see the indwelling God in the spider and in every being that exists within the bounds of space. The receptacle may be different, but the Divine content is the same. The taste of sea water will be saline whether you test a truck-load, a bowlful, a potful, or a sip or a drop on the tongue! The taste of the Divine can be experienced in the atom or the cosmos, the friend as well as the foe, the virus and the Universe. This is the Realisation, the Liberation, the Illumination, the Revelation! "*Sarvam Vishnumayam jagath* (the world is God filled)." This sphere of change is surcharged with the Omnipresent Divine. Sage Thyaagaraaja sang, "O Seethaaraama! Out of your infinite compassion, you shine in the ant and in the Trinity!" Krishna is in the bower and the battlefield, blowing the conch or playing on bewitching flute, wielding whip and wheel, the unseen force behind every thought, word and deed of man everywhere at all times.

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