

Sophistication in the Indian Dramatists

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ABSTRACT :-

IN the following essay I would like to present a few Indian plays in order to elucidate by examining their antiphonal illumination what constitutes the distinctive appeal and universal fascination of these works of art —what makes them, as we say, masterpieces of world literature. It has long seemed to me that, with certain notable exceptions, modern criticism, even with all the bright-edged tools placed at its regime by mythology, anthropology and psychology, sets too low a value on dramas both Eastern and Western. I refer more particularly to the chief dramas of Kalidasa (Shakuntala and Vikramorvasi), Bhavabhuti's Later Life of Rama, a mention of Shudraka's Little Clay Cart, a traditional Tamil drama on King Harishchandra as reset by Ranga Pillai and recast by Muthu Coomaraswami as Arichandra. All these plays are frequently referred to as masterworks lacune. They are great, but only in the sense of fairy tales beautifully adapted to the stage by masters of poetic and dramatic technique. They are great but hopelessly romantic as reports on real life. They are great, but childishly optimistic in barring tragedy (a defect to be forgiven, perhaps, in the Indians, whose rules of dramaturgy inhibited unhappy endings). They are great but silly in insisting on incredible restoration of life and reunions. They are great, but too narrowly and repetitiously confined to native scenes and feelings. In a word: great, but too naive to be taken seriously by sophisticated minds. Such a conclusion is more reticent than acute. In fact, it is intensely peripheral. The very terms in which it is seated render it impossible aesthetically, spiritually, even logically.

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The dramas under consideration are the maturest products of the most highly sophisticated minds the theatre has ever produced and can impress only like minds. 'Sophisticated' to be understood in the best sense of the word, i.e., as characterized by highly refined, not artificial or superficial, emotions; by wisdom donned playfully because it proceeds from profound inner equipoise. Sophistication in fact refers to deeply conscious, as aware as human beings have so far managed to be, of the contents of the human psyche. Such awareness includes a deeper insight of the roots of psychical life; of the growths which such roots may nourish; of the natural conditions which control the growth and fall of vital sap; of the apparently supernatural events which may help to bring full, even ideal, sapour. Psychologists often turn to literature for light on the activities of the psyche, most of which are said to volatilize with most men in unconscious state. It is possible that the dramatists about to be considered have at least as much perception to throw on this subterranean realm as Dostoyevsky himself. In the following discussion the Indian dramatists may exhibit considerable radiance

About life's indescribable mystery we know, to begin with, that the earliest origin myths related to the roots of life that have come down to us are still expedient to the human soul. Earth and woman, because of their incomprehensible procreative power, were blended into the image of a fertility considering them goddess or Great Mother who is imperishable. This female fertility demigod was presumed to be exhilarating imparting life to all things and making them happy. She also fought powers repugnant to life, healed, comforted, puffed, ideas, inspired action, and finally brought on death which could be considered in the light of the Goddess's creative business, a step toward new and richer life. Certain modern psychologists hold that this cardinal female deity of the ancient world lives on in us to this day as a repository of experience laid down over uncountable centuries. The school of Dr. Carl Jung opined this feminine image is the very linchpin of personality, whose primordials are pristine, inherited, unconscious and possibly universal. They call this radical dominating, omnipresent and ageless dynamo the Anima or the Soul. They think of the Anima as fundamental among several existences which have carried the human race safely through the manifold perils of prehistory and early history and which still, even when consciously rejected, mobilised to promote what these same psychologists call the psychic integration. By this they mean, a superlative kind of self-awareness which embraces not only conscious experience but, as far as they can be at all apprehended, the ancient contents of the psyche such as the Anima figure, using them to change self-centred modern egoism for what in India is called Atman-or Brahman consciousness. This integrated awareness makes the possessor to monitor his understanding as well as his actions. He becomes capable of producing order out of emotional chaos by psychically invigorated love, faith and work; out of intellectual chaos, by a psychically balanced perception of life as the eternal retrogression of all things from the condition of ever-recurring death. Such integration is the work of several archetypal

complexes but mainly of the Anima, considered as the sovereign fountain of physical life and psychic strength. Happy those lands, it would seem, where the Great Mother (Isis, Ishtar in the past) has not been ruthlessly pushed into the psychic substratum but still flourishes as in the shapes of Durgā, Kali and Lakshmi (various aspects of this ineffable power in India). Those who reject the Great Mother archetype tend to project the unconscious content of the image on a human commissionary such as a relative or lover of doubtful worth and certain mortality. Psychologists of the school of Jung are always warning us that such unconscious projection is dangerous to mental balance, though probably inevitable since it constitutes a major part of the wonder of physical love.

The other image I would like to mention as valuable in elucidating the nature of the well-poised psyche and the emotional sophistication of the Sanskrit dramatists is generally known as the Child archetype. This figure, dazzling and diamond-like in its purity, innocence and impregnability, seems to reign over all convalescence from recurring breakdowns of vital power followed by occasional damage to the Anima. In order to function fully, the Anima, whether frustrated or not, seems to need the Child as a kind of Activator of the Way without whose help she cannot give vent to her creative drives. In the addled minds, the Anima and Child often seem to be lost together. In this situation, it is often the Child figure which proves more resilient. It reassembles itself first in the grief-stricken dreamer and restores the ability of the Anima to function efficiently once more. This Child archetype, which seems almost to demand a projection of its entity upon real children, often occurs in dreams as the dreamer's daughter or son, radiant, exotic, golden, invincible. It always points to opulent future for the soul or being, Jung himself tells us, a arbitor between heart- and brain-breaking opposites, an usherer of resurgence which makes a fresh and more abundant future possible, a saviour, a catalyst of the integration of the individually conscious (but often life-forsaking) aspects of the personality with the collectively unconscious (but usually life-affirming). The Child is the one who makes whole.' Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa as a baby floating confidently on a tender leaf over the dangerous ocean of uncreated life while he joyously sucks his toe is a famous vision of the archetypal Child.

According to Jung, "There is actually a kind of fluid interpenetration of all archetypal images inasmuch as all help to reconcile opposites, heal breaches between conscious and unconscious strivings, and bring wholeness to the personality. In spite, however, of their interwoven meanings they do form units which are accessible to intuition." Their pursuit is a living and lived myth whose origins and history can be readily traced in what we can discover of mankind's past. Old forms of the myth of the Mother and Child archetypes go back to Sati and Parvati in India. Here the Divine Child is actually the daughter of the Great Goddess and seems

to have symbolized the nature of flora and fauna which dies yet springs and germinates continually anew from the womb of earth. To our forefathers, however, in contrast to ourselves, this death of the vegetation as summer yearly passing into autumn and then into winter was not to be taken lightly. As earth itself, the Great Goddess, went into mourning, there was grief and desperation in the hearts of men, accompanied by every rite they could think of to resurrect the frozen Mother with her exploited or dissipated Child. In subsequent times, when the facts of paternity became better known and the fecundation of the earth by the deceased grains and flowers understood, the Child's sex was often converted to male. Thus when, in the historical era, these great deities of the earth became daimons of the soul-symbols of psychic activity as in modern India, the diamond Child (the babe who begets, rebegets or makes whole its parent) became prominent in intuition in either male or female form. So one of the most daring feats in all dramaturgy-the paternalistic Indians usually opted for a divine man child; and presented this figure on the stage.

It is these archetypes of the Divine Child and its Anima Mother which fascinate our authors to the point of preoccupation. They are always presented on the stage as a significant figure more or less completely projected as the wife and child or children of a king. In Kalidasa's India, kings were themselves considered somewhat superhuman and held to enjoy deep personal relations with the Soil-Soul Mother and her Vital Vegetation Child. As such they were, in fact, practically archetypes themselves, or rather, men in search of archetypal illustrating live of what is often called the Hero. In Jungian lingo, heroic adventures are those which integrate the personality. The Hero is one who has successfully endured agonizing (once ritual) tests in order to assimilate and build into his own psyche the birth bestowing, vitality-supplementing Mother and Child. The description of rites and rituals gives us some idea of the Hero's trials and tribulations, which formed consistent actions to find and restore the lost Goddess and the Princess of Vegetation. To mention a few examples from the Medieval East, which is claimed to be the home of civilizations. At one time it seems, the king actually sacrificed himself to the napoo Goddess in order to strengthen her with the name of his sacrificed blood. Probably the shedding of blood or tears constituted a specific reason. In other words the king dies a symbolic death. To elaborate the meaning of the myth with the term suitably transposed in context with exasperated human psyche is - If the life force strikes numb, the fruits of creations are exploited away, if the agony comes, can the restoration or resurrection of dilapidated but enduring and endeavouring spirit be behind? In fact, seasonal exfoliation, suffering, sacrifice and final resurrection have been understood for centuries as states or activities of the human soul. Such is, in all likelihood, the origin of the living myth of the Anima, the Child and the Hero. This living myth, that is, one we live and survive by, illustrates that the individual psyche, periodically

stricken or self-stricken by error, sin, grief and despair, can recuperate from its own living tissue the immemorial images of life and growth needed to preside over a rebirth of creative energy. And so, as Keats asks, we miscall grief, a bale and heartbreak, death, then why to grudge? So in this sense, the poet's question is of the utmost psychological sophistication.

The ancient myth or ritual pattern which underpins them is easily detectable in the plays of Ancient Indian Dramatists. In all of the Sanskrit ones, a king or his equivalent, whether through a gross error, due to terrible accident or due to the ostensible malignity of enemies, loses his spouse or lover: Dushyanta, *Shakuntala*: Pururavas (in Kalidasa's *Vikramorvasi*) Urvashi; Charudatta (the merchant king of *The Little Clay Cart*), Vasantasena (at first, a courtesan); Rama (in Bhavabhuti's *Later Life of Rama*), Sita; and *Harshichandra* (in the Tamil play of that name), Chandramati. In not a few of these cases, the suffering queen is either a goddess like Sita (the 'furrow-found' child of Prithivi or Mother Earth); a demigoddess or heavenly immortal like Urvashi and Shakuntala (daughter of Urvashi's sister-apsara Menaka); a seasonal goddess like Vasantasena (whose name means 'bannered army of springtime'). Each and all burn and endure with more than human sufferings. Separated from his wife for whatever reason, the hero suffers, often for years, an unendurable death-in-life, all the channels of joy and action clogged up. He haunts graves, drags over his pointless existence in a twilit underworld of ghostly memories or nightmare shapes of horror. At the vertex of all these suffering kings is Bhava- bhuti's Rama. For protracted, unadulterated pain at separation from his Anima as portrayed in delirium in the second and third acts of the play, he has perhaps no equal in the world's literature.

In the Sanskrit plays, the son of Shakuntala and the twins of Sita are in womb at the time when their mothers are belied and banished—are unmistakably lost with and because of the loss of the mothers—while Urvashi's wondrous child is concealed from his father to avert a curse. The sons in *The Little Clay Cart* and *Harishchandra* are small children when they are lost sight of at the time of the disappearance of Chandramati and Vasantasena. All these children, like their mothers, are portrayed as possessing divine characteristics. When recovered, they are young people who rebeget their fathers (Rama), heal their mad griefs (Dushyanta), save them from destruction (Charudatta), make them once more whole (Everyman).

And when the children reappear to the parent they discern as visions of light, miracles of gem-like radiance. We see the wondrous conflict in which Rama first meets his long-lost twins, Lava and Kusa. Described mostly by divine souls, the boys' shining chivalry unfolds to the rhythmic clash of armour under a steadily pouring barrage of fire and flowers. Rama begins to recover from his trance of grief and in the last act of his *Later Life* is revisited entirely by finding

in the hermitage where the boys were reared. Sita herself, child of Prithivi and friend of Ganga. In a play-within-a-play Rama is shown how, immersed in Ganga's sacred stream and supported by these deities of land and water, Sita gave birth to the twins. Not only is Rama reborn but the whole tracking creation, beasts, birds, serpents, saints, demons and gods, along with him and resiliates.

In Kalidasa's plays the kings' sons by supernal women first appear to them when they are distractedly searching for their vanished mothers. Youthful impetuous and demanding, the sons nevertheless move in the celestial aura, of unearthly beauty and power, and make persistent efforts to ensure the return of their divine Mother. Life calls to Life's Source, wife who appears with literally streaming breasts and is ultimately reunited to the peccant husband. But now the mortal king (Dushyanta or Pururavas), rejoined to the Anima (Shakuntala or Urvashi) by the Child (Bharata, the All-Tamer or Ayush, the Arch-bowman), becomes himself the archetype of the reforged personality, the integrated Hero. Kalidasa at this point announces what may sound like a worn-out tag of sentimentality but is, in fact, a deep truth: that a Mother, Father, and Child—the trite family group—are, when profoundly perceived, literally a Divine Trinity form regalia of endless blessing on the world.

Sophistication in art is characterized by profound knowledge, more or less conscious on the part of the artist, of the whole content of the human psyche (mind and soul). In case of logic interpretation of these contents, whether collective (the part which is the powerful deposit of ancestral experience) or individual (the comparatively small amount of differentiation achieved by each person), the psyche may be discussed in the light of essence or philosophy. Otherwise, psychic contents can be communicated from person to person only by the symbolic images and figures of speech conventional in poetry or prose which approximates to the poetic condition. In fact it is poetry, and poetry alone, which is able and prominent to communicate truths worth apprehending. The poet is able to do, when he speaks from the mind richly stored with atavistic memories of rites and myths which originally expressed man's apprehension of truth and through his sense of awe and reverence, as he elucidates the half-benevolent, half-perilous mysteries of the world in which he found himself. The mysterious forces among which he moved he felt as numinous, as gods, and hastened to put himself under the protection of the nourishing earth, personified as a protective Mother who sometimes administered rebuffs of pain but only for her children's ultimate or unforeseeable good. He was also personified, perhaps later, the offspring of earth, including trees and flowers as well as edible roots and grain, as the valiant child of Mother, the Child who frequently opens her womb for our sustenance and pleasure, gives us to eat and drink of its blood and body, and from time to time sacrifices its life, descending into the dark

underworld in order to be reborn for our preservation. As already said that this vegetation deity, as well as the earth itself, was probably conceived as female (Parvati) and thus the oldest entity or gods to administer the health and preservation of the human race were women-figures, the discovered artifacts of which far antedate those of men. Thus the fertility or rebirth rites seem always to have centred around Sita and her sons who were residing in the hermitage and the sons initiative to meet Ram. The lost is found, the agony is ended.' Here are the oldest sources, the images which still control our mental health and sustains mental balanced.

When rain or water as another power involved in the fertility process was acknowledged, it was also, originally, under the control of a goddess, as it is still shown to be in the modern folk arts of Thailand where a dancing woman wields the lightning sparkler. Later, to reiterate, a male figure often replaced the vegetation goddess, and another male set himself up as a divine father, taking away the little girl's dangerous rain-toy. Thus perhaps the divine family, Mother- Father-Child, came into being but definitely at the expense of the father, who lost his child annually to the Underworld and could recover her or him only after months of tearful libations to the statue-frozen earth. As enacted in the Mysteries, supposed by sympathetic magic to hurry up or guarantee the vegetable resurrection, a real king, in patriarchal times, often played the rain-god role opposite a priestess or queen who represented the holy mother and another who took the role of the lost child. Thus the King, if not himself killed to hasten the natural process, was ritually imprisoned in darkness, scourged to tears and other- wise tortured. However, success always rewarded agony and winter's sadness was always driven from the burgeoning earth. In some such way as this a rhythmic pattern was set going in the human mind which sustains us still and is perhaps the deepest truth by which we live. Substitute emotional pain for physical privation, as was done at least as early as the Dionysian and Orphic Mystery rites, and the drama of the real-life family, so often fraught with grief and pain, tends by an inner necessity traceable to forgotten faiths and ghostly memories to unfold toward some kind of reunion and even triumph.

This has always been so true that mankind everywhere, all through the centuries, condescended the existence of Supreme Power-That-Makes-for- Good, a Benevolent Providence, behind the often agonizing phenomena of existence, and in all the plays we have been considering this power, more or less, abstractly conceived and appearing quite prominently. Thus the reverence paid to the early goddesses and somewhat later gods was a little transferred to one Omniscient Power but with the same allegiance, whether at conscious or at unconscious level, to the great images of healing, reconciliation. and renewed activity represented by the Mother and Child. At the conscious level certain of the so-called monotheistic religions retained a divine trinity of Father, Son and. Mother. In drama, of course, the divine aura that protrudes the

archetypes is somewhat abated, for they must appear on stage as mere queens, princes, and princesses (a fact less true for the Indian dramatists since they stick closer to traditional mythic material). Thus, an benign god is, so to speak, put in charge of the archetypal figures in all the great plays before us. This Purpose-behind-the Veil-not to speak of enhances the psychological impact of these dramas. Religion will be nothing if there is not a vivid apprehension (here communicated by the playwrights to the audience) of a Power (from without, from within ?) which guides, nourishes and armours the health of the human mind.

Traditionally two deities presided over the Indian stage: Indra, in whose honour a maypole, with all the seasonal adjuvant of that beflagged tree, was raised at one corner of the stage, and Shiva (or some other temporary representative of the One), whose blessing was invoked on the audience. By Shiva's will Indra, usually, conducts the action from joy to misery and back to joy presides over the 'eternal return' to springtime instantiated in the cycle of the seasons and just as inevitably in the unfolding of the soul. Indian ideas of karma and metempsychosis called for this return, whether in the past or present life; Indian dramatic rules called for it by the end of every play in order to satisfy the audience's sense of fitness. This demanding sense of fitness may be called religio-aesthetic in nature since it advocates the cycle of unity, separation and reunion as religiously ordained, cyclically inevitable, psychologically natural, and intensely gratifying to an aesthetic demand for balance, poise, equilibrium. Thus Indian mythology, aesthetics, theology and psychological insight coalesced in viewing tragedy in the incomplete, distorted, unlovely and untrue... From being the chief breeder of tragedy, the domestic circle was made the very focus of Indian dramatic providence, its fate · being put, as with the Indian plays, in the benevolent' hands of Ultimate Reality. Kalidasa's great plays, *Harichandra*, and most of the other Indian dramas are brought to a joyful conclusion by Indra acting for the Power-behind-the scenes, which in Vikramorvasi is supplicated not as Siva but, in Sri Aurobindo's translation, as that

Sole Being, who the upper and under world
Pervading overpasses, whom alone
The name of God describes, here applicable
And pregnant-crippled else of force-(may He),
Easily by work and faith and love
Attainable, ordain your heavenly weal.

The Indian confreres across the centuries, that life must not have a stop. In their deep and rounded percipience, it is the Indians, not Sophocles and the Greeks, who saw life steadily and saw it whole—who are psychologically sophisticated.

Kalidas at the acme of his power to create life and beauty in the seventeenth century and Shudraka (if this was the real name of the third-century author of *The Little Clay Cart*) could think of no mottos more (symbolically) suitable for their masterpieces than these blessings :

Earth's increase, foison plenty,
Barns and garners never empty,
Vines with clust'ring bunches growing,
Plants with goodly burthen bowing;
Spring come to you at the farthest
In the very end of harvest ! and
May kine yield streaming milk, the earth her grain,
And may the heaven never-failing rain,
And winds waft happiness to all that breathes,
And all that lives, live free from every pain...
May kings in justice' ways be ever led,
And earth, submissive, bend her grateful head."

In the end it can be said of Indian dramatists that they were more intimate than most mortals with everything, from unconscious devotion to mythic memories to conscious intuition of psychic truth, that makes for balance, serenity, health, wholeness—that is, true sophistication.

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