

Man has launched himself into the outer space of universe, but he remains an utter stranger to the inner space of consciousness. To have scientific power without a spiritual insight is a dangerous proposition. If science is not linked with spirituality, then the future of humanity would be dark and dismal. The vibhatsya rasa evoked here is remarkable:

It's a dying world:

Guns, bombs, rockets, blasts, and blood.

A 'great' century! (63)

The constituents of human are arranged in this hierarchal sequence: *indriyāhi*, *manaḥ*, *buddhiḥ*, *ātmā*. It is only when the former dissolves into later, therewith there ensues the entry into the *Brahma*.

Yoga and *praanaayam*,

Total belief and surrender

The world is yours. (57)

Indian artistic forms owe their genesis to Spirituality and are intended to conduct man to the gateway of the Good through the shady avenue of the beautiful. Nature is a reflection of the God's power and through his poems he shows how God can create or destroy something. He repeatedly turns to nature, finding there a truth and value which had been lost sight of by rational man. He begins with various passions of love, hate, greed and violence, represented by different colours:

Love is a movie,

Silent, but full of colours:

Seen in dark, together. (13)

and concludes with white in the last section Nature:

Colourful nature

Everything covered with snow.

White is beautiful. (71)

Any physical entity may be contaminated with something that may be impure. But this white is as pure, spotless and free from defects and blemishes as Brahman. Brahman is pure Consciousness. The self is Brahman. The poet speaks of music in nature only in last section, before this he had focussed on all other four senses.

The dancing sand dunes

And the singing stones and rocks.

How sweet the music!(69)

Poetry allows reflection on the human condition and way of life so that insightful judgments can be made through contemplation. It purifies the mind and lifts the spirit, and aims at the cultivation of a better individual through aesthetic experience. This experience usually features some form of catharsis and results in exalted activities designed to attain the highest possible form of life. Poet Shiromani offers all the eight *rasas* to his readers to relish and finally ends with *śānta rasa*. *Rasa* is realized as

the self loses its egoistic, pragmatic aspect and assumes an impersonal contemplative attitude. As the contemplative self is free from all craving, striving and external necessity, it is blissful. These haiku are thus a study of beauty, beauty in nature and life. Their greatness is as much due to its aesthetic richness as to the philosophy enunciated in it. Poet effortlessly succeeds in stirring his readers' hearts. His body of poetry is just the means of reaching the soul of poetry. The poet invites the reader to enter into the poem, experience it, and come to his/her own conclusion. The greatness of this collection is as much due to its aesthetic richness as to the philosophy enunciated in it.

I conclude this paper with my lines:

Poets
In their hearts sublime
Rests the essence of life,
rasa, amṛta or soma!
The churners immortal
From the limitless expanse
of waters chaotic
Formless and overwhelming
Comes, the ordered, processed
And words refined.
Poetry is *śrī*

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In Dialogue with Prof. K.V. Raghupathi

- P.V. Laxmi Prasad

K.V. Raghupathi has published twelve books which include nine books in English verse: *Desert Blooms* (1987), *Echoes Silent* (1988), *The Images of a Growing Dying City* (1989), *Small Reflections* (2000), *Voice of the Valley* (2003), *Wisdom of the Peepal Tree* (2003), *Samarpana* (2006), *Dispersed Symphonies* (2010) and *Orphan and Other Poems* (2010); two critical books: *Emerson's Orientalism* (2007) and *Brave New Wave: 21 Indian English Poets* (2009); and two books on Yoga: *Yoga for Peace* (2006) and *Yoga and Zen* (2007). He is the recipient of several awards that include Michael Madhusudhan Dutt Award, Kolkata in 2001, H.D. Thoreau Fellowship, Dhvanyaloka, Mysore in 2000 and the best chosen poet for 2003, Poetry Society of India, New Delhi.

PRASAD: *Please tell us your academics.*

RAGHUPATHI: As my father was a Railway employee, I had my school education in different places in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. I did my post graduation in English Literature in S.V. University, Tirupati in 1979. Thereafter I completed my M.Phil. from the same university in 1982 and received Ph.D. for my thesis on EMERSON in 1997 from the same university. I also hold PG diploma in English language teaching from EFLU, Hyderabad. My interests varied after I attained thirty. I plunged into philosophy and spirituality, and my interest in it has grown ever since. I took to yoga in 1985 –Patanjali's tradition as well as Hatha yoga tradition. Since then I have published several articles in several cultural journals such as *Vedanta Kesari*, *Prabhudha Bharata*, *Saptagiri* and others; and two books on yoga: *Yoga For Peace* and *Yoga And Zen: A Monograph*. I have sustained this interest; I am a regular practitioner of yoga. It has become an integral part of my living. In my forties, I took interest in classical music, especially, *karnatic* music. I was a keen listener in my early days; later I was introduced to the practical music and I learnt *veena* with the help of a friend who happens to be a teacher in music. This is my third passion. My first passion is literature, my second is philosophy and spirituality and the third is music.

PRASAD: *What is your favourite area of literary writing?*

RAGHUPATHI: I wrote poetry all these years. This is not my favourite area, but this is my interest. In the beginning after penning some poetry, I wrote three novels for which I desperately tried for a publisher. As I could not get a suitable publisher, I abandoned all efforts. These three are yet to see the lime light. As my efforts became vain, I have stuck to writing poetry.

PRASAD: You are more a critic than a poet. How do you substantiate?

RAGHUPATHI: Somehow this dimension has emerged in my personality. But I don't claim myself to be an extraordinary one. I believe in the idea that a writer can be a good critic. The other side of argument is a good critic can also be a writer. I don't believe in the idea that the writer's job is only to write, and the critic's job is only to criticize. Such compartmentalization is an unhealthy practice. In the west, if you look at it, you will find, several poets practiced the art of criticism for centuries. T.S. Eliot has called such criticism as workshop criticism. What is wrong in being a critic while practicing creativity? Some believe that these two are like two poles, they never meet each other. Such perception is wrong. I don't know how much I am a critic, how much I am a poet. It is difficult to say. People like you have to tell.

PRASAD: How do you define poetry?

RAGHUPATHI: First of all, poetry is most indefinable because it is elusive although several poets have attempted to define it. No definition has ever been comprehensive. Yet for me when I write, I find it a sort of transcendental experience. But I would set three essential qualities for poetry: 1. A good poet should avoid using clichés, slangs, etc. as these would mar the poetic sensibilities. "Proper words in their proper place" to quote Swift, or the words of S.T. Coleridge "the best words in their best order" should be the guiding principle. 2. Imagery is hallmark of good poetry. This imagery should not be outworn or out fashioned. Poets should explore new imagery that should be striking, for which the poet requires a good sense of observation. 3. A good poem should have both feeling and thought. The blend will create life in it. I have never attempted to define it because it is a feeling. You know feelings are indefinable. Therefore, when a poem is read, its feelings and emotions have to be caught.

PRASAD: Is Wordsworth's definition of poetry(emotions recollected in tranquility) relevant today?

RAGHUPATHI: I don't think writing poetry is a spontaneous overflow of feelings. We need certainly tranquil mind to write – a mind freed from both internal and external disturbances. In fact, creativity is a peace time activity. Writing poetry, as Kushwant Singh says, does not require scholarship. But for me it is an intense contemplative act, not merely a concentrated act as T.S. Eliot says.

PRASAD: You are the recipient of Thoreau Fellowship from Dhvanyaloka, Mysore. What can you say about your association with late C.D.Narasimaiah?

RAGHUPATHI: C.D. Narasimiah was a giant in literature. I have great reverence and admiration for his scholarship, commitment, dedication to literature and above all his sacrificing nature for the cause of promotion of literature. Such breed is rarely seen now. He was instrumental in

introducing Indian Writing in English in several universities in 1970s and championing the cause of commonwealth literature. He was not only a scholar but a critic. I was humbled when I was picked up for the fellowship to lead a life of Thoreau on the campus. During my stay I came close to him and had several interactions. I learnt a lot from him. It was a rewarding experience for me, and I cherish.

PRASAD: It is said that East and West are intertwined. Is Indian poetry intertwined in western poetry?

RAGHUPATHI: Poetry has no barriers. For that, literature has no frontiers though each literature flourishes within the matrix of culture. The western literature has profoundly influenced the eastern literature – its philosophical and literary movements, its techniques, etc. Indian poetry in English has acquired recognition in the world of literatures. It has emerged as a variety like African poetry, Caribbean poetry, Australian poetry etc. There is a wild charge that Indian poetry in English has not rooted in its culture. This is not true. If you look at the corpus of writings of our poets both in the past and in the present, we discern as Bruce King says, “Indian English poetry has moved increasingly nearer to its environment and the cultures in which the poets live or were raised.”

PRASAD: Recently you have come out with a comparative paper on Tagore and Aurobindo. What similarities and dissimilarities have you found as a critic of merit?

RAGHUPATHI: It is difficult to discuss these here. The paper has been published in e-journal, Muse India, as well as in Professor Rajakamal Shiromani's (Patna) newly started journal. These two were great mystics; and their pronouncements on aesthetics are different. But in both we see a beautiful synthesis of the east and the west. In Sri Aurobindo aesthetics has acquired spiritual character. When he defines poetry as “Mantra of the Real”, it hits all the nuances of modern writing of poetry. Yet Tagore's *Gitanjali* appropriates this definition. Both *Gitanjali* and *Savitri* are incomparable. It is unethical to draw any similarities and dissimilarities. But I would say, in *Gitanjali*, though Tagore tastes the blissful experience of God, he remains an outsider; whereas in *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo plunges deep into the profundity of spiritual experience. Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics is characterized by profound yogic experiences. It certainly opens up new horizons though it is difficult to agree with him that all future poetry will be essentially spiritual and the product of super-conscious mind. Though there are differences, the fact is that their poetics has enriched the Indian poetic tradition which started with Bharata and culminated in Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. I must say that poets with spiritual realization and vision can express the highest.

PRASAD: What is literary criticism? How can you measure literary criticism in terms of evaluation of any branch of literature?

RAGHUPATHI: Literary criticism is nearly as old as literature. What is it? It is understanding and appreciating literature. There can be no

separation between the two. Plato and Aristotle made a sustained and systematic inquiry into the nature of art and its modes of existence. Now it has taken an independent discipline; emerged as literature of literature. A number of theories have been formulated in the later half of the twentieth century. With these theories criticism has emerged as a science. Now literature has to be studied along with it. Or else, no reading of literature is complete. Perhaps with the knowledge of criticism and theories a reader can refine himself/herself with fine sensibilities.

PRASAD: T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" projects that 21st century is the century of despair, disappointment and disillusionment. How do you rationalize the comment in the context of happenings in the world now?

RAGHUPATHI: It is not merely a century of "despair, disappointment and disillusionment". This perception is one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is, it is an age of "opportunities, challenges, hope and faith". It offers us umpteen opportunities to grow progress and prosper not only in material fields but in spiritual. Flux is the principle of life. Nothing is constant. The more despair, disappointment and disillusionment with material world will drive man to the other extreme, being spiritual. It is in that sense one must read his lines; and not completely in pessimistic sense. Plus it is an age of hope and faith. The more destruction of our environment and ourselves leads us to hope and faith. It is only on these two virtues that man survives and this planet lasts. That is my faith and hope.

PRASAD: You did your research on Emerson's Orientalism. What is Emerson's outlook towards India?

RAGHUPATHI: Emerson's outlook of India is catholic and positive. Scholars, indologists, writers and artists of Europe and America turned to India for rich, infallible wisdom and spiritual guidance during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The seeds were sown by Sir William Jones, and other indologists such Charles Wilkins, Thomas Colebrook and others followed. Swami Vivekananda fertilized the seeds of Indian wisdom to grow on the western soil. Thus India's greatness was known to the west. I believe in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy that the whole of world will turn to India for spiritual solace and guidance.

PRASAD: You are known to practice yoga. You have published two books on yoga as well. How is yoga relevant to Indian society?

RAGHUPATHI: India is a land of yoga. Several hundreds of yogis, saints, and sages were born here and they carried the torch of spirituality. There is no doubt about it. How relevant it is today not only to Indian society but to the entire humanity is known only to the real practitioners and those who really live in it. First of all there are several wrong notions centered on yoga. One notion is it is wrongly identified with Hindu religion. Another is it should be taken up by those who have passed the *grihasta* phase of life. Yet another is it is difficult to practice because it

involves severe discipline. These and other petty notions have to be first dispelled from our mind. It is a holistic spiritual science; it has been proved. But in the recent times, it has been reduced to a mockery, mere acrobatic exercises. It is viewed only from the health point. In fact, the word 'health' is misleading. It is misunderstood only from the physical plane. Certainly it is not. It has to be viewed and understood from the holistic point. It aims at both physical and mental, and spiritual as well.

PRASAD: It is said that every human being is fallible. Everybody makes mistakes and corrects them. Have you ever made such mistakes? How are they impacted on your life?

RAGHUPATHI: Man is not infallible. In fact man learns from mistakes. I may have committed several mistakes, but from the falls I have learnt how to be poised. This is what yoga has taught me. But certain U turns have taken place in my life. These have happened naturally and they have changed the destiny of my life. Sometimes I am compelled to believe in the theory of pre-destination.

PRASAD: Literary awards in India are conferred on the basis of community, region and religion. How far is the allegation true about?

RAGHUPATHI: It is partly true. There is bound to be some corruption. Even the Nobel committee in Sweden has come under severe criticism for being partial and prejudicial. Several writers of high merit have escaped Nobel prizes. It does not mean that such writers have lost any relevance. But I should say that a true artist should never live and create for the sake of recognition, fame and awards. There were writers in the past who were recognized after their death. What ultimately matters is the work and not the artist as a person or an individual.

PRASAD: Where would you like to place Indian English poetry?

RAGHUPATHI: I don't think Indian poetry in English is inferior to any other continental poetry. It has acquired distinction. Still, I say, the poets have to work hard to root themselves in the native soil. Our ethos and mythological lore are rich. Our culture is complex and striking. Poets should be aware of this fact.

PRASAD: Would you like to be compared with the great stalwarts like Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Michael Madhusudan Dutt?

RAGHUPATHI: I am greatly humbled by your comparison. I am nothing before them.

PRASAD: As a critic who would you overrate as the best of English critics?

RAGHUPATHI: There are several critics who have created new trends. Each one has contributed something to the growth of literary criticism. I would rate Coleridge, T.S.Eliot, William Empson, Dr. I.A.Richards, Jacques Derreda, Michael Foucault, Roland Barthes and others as major contributors to the literary criticism. But with T.S.Eliot a new turn has taken shape in literary criticism in the twentieth century. I am greatly