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COSMOS AND CONTEMPLATION

My soul longs for contemplation
But how can I achieve contemplation?
High contemplation is said to be objectless. True it is.
I too think. Because every object in its individuality
brings in form to reform the formless,
and because reality, its ultimacy, is devoid of all forms,
objectless contemplation seems to be the highest.
Yet the forms of the formless are there,
are everywhere, inviting us to contemplation.
This universe is full of names and forms.

In the beginning all this was only being.
Assuming name and form it became all.
Name and form he became, the nameless and formless.
Hence today, name and form are the medium
to take us to the nameless and formless.
The sages looked at the manifoldness,
but saw only the One that is real.
Saints contemplated the forms, but perceived only the formless.
In all creation of variety and beauty, form and charm,
the saints and sages saw the Beyond and the Boundless.
This was true contemplation.

Of the many forms the universe provides,
I choose five: water, wind, earth, fire and space.
These fundamental forms of the formless,
the so-called elements, constitute the cosmos.
give it charm along with form,
keep it going, reviving and reforming everything.
They are seedlings, so to say, of cosmic beauty,
as well as human contemplation. Hence meditations on elements.



 WATER

O water, you spring from mystery, you come with mystery
 you unveil to us mystery, yet shrouded in mystery you remain.
 Water was thought of as the first-born, the first visible element,
 the great womb that contained all creation. But where did water
 come from? Did the divine melt itself into water
 as the spontaneous outflow of the primordial?
 Hidden from man's searching mind
 water was there from the very beginning.

I went in search of water, the life-giving water,
 the life-promising water. I saw the mighty rivers
 Euphrates and Tigris watering God's Paradise.
 The first parents of humanity found themselves placed by Divinity
 beside the waters of Paradise. From then on mankind sought water-
 spots: ideal spots for human settlement.

Water is life-giving. She is the secret spring of life.
 The waters of the Nile brought life to mankind,
 so believed the Egyptians. The good mother/Osiris is she,
 still she flows gently and smoothly, still she gives life to
 many millions in Egypt. Civilization arose around waters
 were nurtured and flourished and made their
 contribution to humanity.

I saw the people of Indus, "the dark-skinned, snub-nosed
 people worshipping linga" on the banks of river Indus.
 Later when the Aryans vanquished them the conquerors prayed:
 'these waters be to us for drink; divine are they for aid and joy.
 May they impart to us health and strength'.

(Rg Veda, X. 9. 4)

And when the invading Aryans chased the prime settlers out of Indus
 where did they flee to? to the forest springs of Mid-India?
 Or to the waters of Kaveri in the south?

I saw Rome with innumerable domes of Christian
 churches and ancient temples, all watered by the
 gentle river Tiber. Though curbed and constrained by
 encroaching industrial civilization, Tiber, once mingled
 with Christian blood, still flows in this celestial city
 mothering many millions and numerous fountains.

Giantic was river Ganges, resplendent in the
 shining morning Sun. Thousands and thousands of devotees
 approach her in the early dawn, sprinkle her waters to
 the heavens in adoring and absorbing prayer.
 They all sing in one melody:
Om tat savitur rarenyam
 Om that divine Sun, we aspire.

As pearls from heaven reflecting the rays of rising sun
 these drops of water fall on the surface of Ganges,
 the great Mother who brings blessings for her people,
 from Mount Kailas, from the world of gods.

Then Varuna, the god of the waters took me to Rhine, the artery
 of Europe, Thames, the life-stream of London, Seine, the vein of Paris
 Everywhere I saw the same water, the same gentle flow of water,
 but mothering different people and giving birth to different cultures.

O mother water, you are truly great.
 Great still is your spirit of tolerance.
 To the dark-skinned people of Indus, to the fair-skinned Aryan invaders,
 to the emperor of Rome, to the Czars and soldiers of Russia,
 to all members of humanity, you are always the same mother,
 the same spirit of motherly love,
 your love knows no bounds, you make no discrimination.

You watch with same friendly eyes the Indians,
 the prime settlers of U.S., the incoming negroes and the
 immigrant whites—all the inhabitants of the United States.
 You are mother, the great sea of tenderness vast you flow,
 ever flow, with no distinction of colour and caste.
 You visit every one with even mind with tenderest love, ever kind.

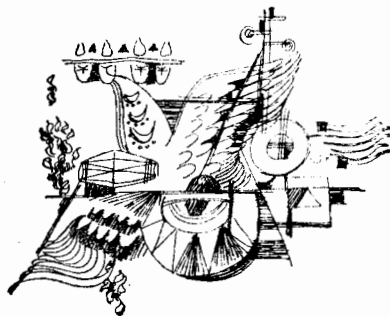
You foster, us, you wash us clean.
 Made pure by your cleansing springs you take us to the altar of
 the Holy One, the inexhaustible source of the waters of eternal life.
 You were there in Jordan, when the people of Palestine approached you
 with heavy hearts and minds sin-laden.
 You healed them, you washed them you became to them a source of
 solace and peace. You were there to witness that event, when the
 Son of man came to fulfil the covenant, humbled himself and took
 baptismal bath to save the world from God's fearful wrath.

Gently and softly you still flow washing away the sins of many millions
 in Ganges, in Kaveri, in Krishna, in Saraswati.
 You are the ritual water, the sacramental symbol of purification;
 the great resource that nourishes and purifies the
 body and soul at the same time.

Where can I gather you, where can I keep you safe?
 I need you every moment of my life.
 When will you wash my eyes clean with tears of repentance
 that freed from the web of confusion I may see the well of waters within?
 Deep, deep will I go till I reach that everlasting spring,
 that inexhaustible depth of water divine with no
 thought whatever of 'I' or 'mine'.
 From that fathomless depth well buried in my own vanishing self
 there flows the fountain of living waters the nectar of life immortal.

Tossed about in the sea of life tired and torn by tearing waves
 I come to you fountain deep that I may find my inner peace.

WIND



“Breath of the gods and life germ of the universe
 freely he wanders.

We bring him our homage, whose voice may be heard
 but whose form is not seen.”

(*Rg Veda*, X, 168, 3)

Water flows, wind wanders.
 But with the wandering of the wind vibrations of
 life entered into creation.
 Wind which speeds on air's pathways
 is the next element of our contemplation.

Gentle as the caressing touch of a loving friend the wind visited me.
 His touch was soft and soothing, cool and consoling.
 Wind is a dear companion, I felt.

On his golden chariot of winged steed he flies.
 Where he comes from, we do not know, where he goes to,
 we do not know.
 We can only feel him, not seeing; experience him, not holding.
 He is a free companion, swift comrade, of course, a invisible friend.
 With his unknown past and unseen future he is there, suddenly there,
 like a visitor ever present.
 He is simple presence, presence that beckons me,
 vibrates in me, awakens me and wafts me along.

He is not an idle visitor.
 He has something to convey, something to take along with him.
 As a counsellor, a comforter, he comes.
 But he has his mild and wild forms. In his mildness he is as
 gentle as Uma or Parvathi, or like the gentle Jesus of the manger,
 or any loving guardian angel. But he can be as wild as Kali or Durga,
 or as the Lord of the Last Judgement depicted by Michelangelo, a real
samhara-rudra, the destroyer.

But his visit refreshed me.
 Wind brings freshness to the body as Spirit brings renewal to the
 soul.
 With his enveloping wings he covered me and carried me
 along with him.
 I felt uprooted from the earth dismayed, not knowing whither
 he would take me.
 However in the nest of his sheltering wings I felt safe,
 though unsure where I was and where I was bound.
 I felt small, very small surrounded by this mighty power.
 I could not stop him, nor control the velocity of his speed.
 I could only give in, let myself be carried away.

treasure of breath is forever and undying; Only in his treasure-house there is life immortal.

Only he can blow in us the nectar of immortality.

“He who is abiding in the wind, yet different from the wind, whom the wind does not know, whose body the wind is, He is the Imperishable, the Immortal.

To him we offer oblation” (*Brhadaranyaka Up.* III. 7. 7).

“And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2. 2-4).



EARTH

Water flows and wind wanders; where shall man find a place to rest? And then said the Lord of waters: “Let the waters flow and earth appear”.

Though born of water and by wind covered earth is truly the mother loved, she provides the humans all they need, her love knows no bounds indeed.

Moving in rhythm in infinite space she makes for man nights and days. Small though among planets known, except moon her daughter lone, she alone with life adorn, the globe; none else is yet known.

Her bounty is open to all, with no exception to tiny and tall, to mighty and weak, to wise and weak; she is always there with no resistance.

Rivers are her arms of tender love, mountains her spirit
of transcendence, hard as rock, mild as milk she is a
stream of strength and warmth, a store-house of hidden
wealth, yet to be explored by men of strength.

Dressed in green when she comes; comfort she gives to
admiring eyes; shades to our bodies she provides and
harbours all on her surface wide.

Untold wealth you treasure for mankind: metals, minerals
and stones precious as diamonds, jewels and gold
and the common salt from days of old.

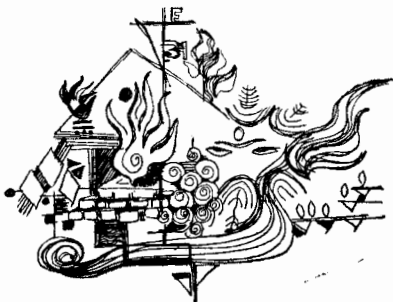
You preserve energy for mankind in tiniest atoms of every
kind; safe you kept them for us, ever kind until pride
arose in man's curious mind.

Man made weapons, deadliest ever, splitting atoms,
releasing power-tide, yet he dares to say: 'to
preserve our daily peace! What next will man say
with such ease!'

Mountains, meadows and forests you keep, shoals of fish
in waters deep, solid and stainless you are ever
pure, unless tarnished, alas, by men impure.

You are rich in rhythmic order, a mother, full of love
and ardour, seasons are steps in your cosmic dance,
days and months foot-prints of your great advance.

Dressed in green vegetation, decked with priceless
pearls, wet with morning you look pretty like a lady
fragrant from her morning bath. Yet you are trodden
by human feet, those you provide where withal to live.



FIRE

Unaware of your origin admiring your rising flames
 I contemplate you, O fire. On heaven and earth
 you reign with your power, O great vivifier.

'Born of water' so we are told by ancient seers,
 in days of old. Were you born from that igniting friction
 of wave and wind, of air and water?
 Like a flame alive you spring heaven wards,
 Like a flashing light you stoop, downwards
 You are splendour, you are bright.
 You are thunder, you are might.

The primordial symbol of Godhead you became, a creative
 heat you were there in that primal source, the one without
 a second. As ascetic ardour you were there in the
 inner cave of every silent monk.

I am in search of that sacred fire which caused awakening
 in Buddha, unquenchable zeal for God in the prophet Elias,
 total renunciation in Francis of Assisi, *ahimsa*-filled
 fight for truth in Gandhi, descending tongues of flame on
 the apostles and unbounded sea of love in Jesus of Nazareth.
 O fire, you are the priest. With your heavenward flames
 sacrificer, par excellence, with your fiery tongues ever
 burning, you consume all offerings of mankind.

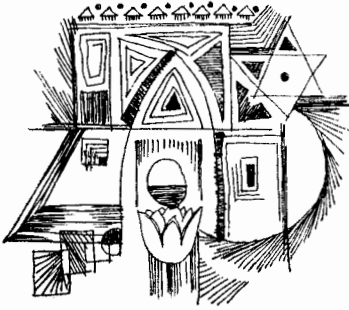
You are the friend supreme, around you gathered
 are vedic people at the time of *sandhya* at the
 meeting moment of heaven and earth. They remember
 their friends, and offer prayers to you, the friend of friends.

You are eternal *purohita*, the one placed always in front
 of all. As lighted lamp all human assembles you adorn,
 None dare push you behind the curtain drawn
 Yes, fire is God's nearest kin. It is his creative heat,
 royal ardour, blazing splendour. With his visible flame,
 visible in flying flames, He carries our minds to the Light
 Divine. With his consuming nature he bears us to the
 transforming power of the Spirit. With his inherent warmth
 He reminds us of the eternal warmth of Divine Love.

You mortal man, where do you seek this fire, fire which is your courage and companion, everlasting light and undying life?

Do you seek him in the flickering flames of the altar lamps? in the fiery spirals of Naciketa-sacrifice? in the thundering light of Mount Sinai? in the consuming flames of Abel's sacrifice? in the fiery tongues of Christ's apostles?

This is the mystery of all mysteries which I will now tell you: The fire is within you, you are his very flame. *tat tvam asi.*



SPACE

On and on the searching space-craft went with a computerized goal afar. And still there was space beyond, beyond the star-lit sky, beyond the milky way, beyond all the planets, mankind has ever known.

Is space a mystery, a fiction, a fabric of mind to place our planets, all of their kind? Fabulous, far beyond all stretch of human thought; In reality nil; yet housing all you will.

With my searching eyes drawn outward I see space, that enormous shroud of nothingness enfolding me from all around, enveloping the earth with no end; Being and nothing, that mysterious thing.

What is man and his sense of distance in a world of space, the measure infinite. Truly space takes us to the ineffable, the fathomless shore of the other world.

In space then the ultimate boundary man can traverse
 Ere he begins with Spirit to converse? Or will mortal
 man ever disclose another world of space
 well buried in his own interior self.

When I closed my eyes and contemplated with my inner eyes
 drawn inward, I got a glimpse of that endless space, deep,
 deep, deep down in my own depth. Inexhaustible it was
 as space outside and no space-craft can take man thither.
 No man-made missile, no science invention, no world of wealth,
 nor prowess of health. The Word alone will take man there;
 the Word that was uttered before space began and abides in
 inner space than in outer one; yet alas!
 man seeks Him in outer space not in inner one.

Rhythm was there when the Word uttered itself out
 and set the globes in their proper space, so that you
 can count the days, months and seasons, all watching
 the rhythm of planets, ever moving in unending space.
 The man of science, how did he land on moon?
 The rhythm took him there, the rhythm which duly gives
 us day and night. What is than rhythm of moment in
 inner space? Is it what the people call *dharma*,
 justice or righteousness?

“Space, verily, is greater than radiance. For in space are
 the sun and the moon, lightning, the stars and fire. Through
 space one calls, through space one hears, through space one
 replies. In space one delights or one does not delight. In space
 one is born and onto space one is born. Meditate on space”

(*Ch. Up. VII. 12. 1*).

II

IN PRAISE OF SILENCE

(Silence as Prayer)

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1. In the still of a dreary evening,
 Some dream music took me to the terrace,

There I sat gazing at the setting sun,
Feeling His pulse in the trees around.

The silence of nature spoke to my deepest self
Of her Maker and His only Word:
And the silent rhythm of nature sang
Of His simple rhythm flowing within me.

In the stillness of my heart I heard:
"Man needs silence to turn to his true self,
To hear the silence of God everywhere,
And to stand before His Silent love."

In silence man meets his true self,
In silence he hears his other self,
In silence he loves deeply,
And in silence he forgives spontaneously.

2. The clock struck the midnight hour
Breaking the dead silence of the night.
The shrill notes woke me up
To lie and listen to the sound of silence

Soon faded the resounding tick-tocks
Leaving me alone to the soft voice
That whispered in my ears:
"Silence is wisdom."

The selfsame sentence
Turned me to the Proverb:
"Even a fool who keeps silence
Is considered wise."

3. Amidst the thunder
And barks of the midnight dog,
I hear the silent steps of silence.
The enchantress of the night.

Here she comes in white robe,
Glittering in the moonlight,

With glowing cheeks and rosy lips,
Like an angel of the silent Night.

And she stands before me
Her peace starts flows into my self,
Unveiling the hidden treasures
Of the innermost recesses of the mind.

4. Here's a winter to my journey
As I shut my ears to the sound
And turn to worldly pleasures
Which make the trail dry and dark.

But, here's spring to my walk
As I listen to the Sound,
And my tired self stretches out
To embrace the Self with joyful haste.

5. The journey was begun
In the midst of noise,
The twitter of sparrows
And the whispers of women.

But, when I turned to you
And my senses were silenced,
I felt your life-breath
Flowing within my whole being.

Then, in the inward stillness,
In the interior castle of my self,
I met silence, the tranquilizer
Of the mind and body.