The Use and Relevance of Some Elements of Poetry in The Psalms of The Old Testament

A Thesis submitted to the University of North Bengal for the Ph. D. Degree in English

by
Muna Hallis

Department of English,
University of North Bengal,
Raja Rammohunpur, Darjeeling.
1995

Dedication

To - Jeremy, Maria and Sarah,
in the hope that they too may
learn, like the Psalmists, to
sing a song to God.

Contents

Acknowledgements

For a person with multiple roles — that of a mother, a wife, a daughter and a teacher, this work would not have been possible had it not been for all the support and encouragement given to me by my family, my friends and colleagues, acquaintances and all the rest of those who wished me well. With deep gratitude and in all sincerity, I thank them all.

Working on this thesis has been a great challenge. It called for odd hours and restrained ways of work. Much of the work had to be done after the three, little children were fed and put to sleep or at early dawn before they woke up. Every bit of time was very precious. Strength and Determination to complete this work, were derived from Prayer - my chief inspiration.

I feel it imperative to name individually and thank especially, those who have been instrumental in helping me to complete this work. I, therefore, gratefully thank the following:

Dr.B. K. Banerjee, Former Head, The Dept. of English, - University of North Bengal.	for supervising my work, for his generous and constant encouragement, for his hospitality and tremendous understanding.

Fr. A. Schlegel, S.J.
De Nobili College, Pune. - for his kindness and generosity in allowing me to make use of the library at De Nobili College, Pune.

Fr. W. Bourke, S.J.
St. Joseph's College
Darjeeling. - for the infectious happiness he exudes, and for all the material he provided me with.

Fr. Kehres, S.J.
De Nobili College, Pune. - for furnishing me with some important bibliographic information and for being so prompt and eager to help.

Mother M. Damien, IBVM
Principal,
Loreto College,
Darjeeling. - for her love and concern and for generously providing me with books from the college and convent libraries.

Prof. (Mrs.) Nomita Ghosal
Loreto College,
Darjeeling. - for her little-big acts of kindness and for leading me specifically to the pages of the Psalter when I was groping for a Biblical theme.

Fr. J. Pappadil, S.J.
Former Principal,
St. Joseph's College,
Darjeeling. - for his kindness in granting me a year's leave under the UGC Faculty Improvement Programme.

Dr. Viraf Minocher Dhalla,
Tata Consultancy Services,
Bombay. - for making his work, "Symbolism in Christianity" available to me.

Mr. Eric Reay,
Assembly of God School
Calcutta. - for helping me with the entry formalities at the National Library, Calcutta.

A great deal of strength and courage I have also derived from those closest to me. I thank my husband, Patrick, for reading and discussing my work, for prodding me onwards and more importantly, for teaching me to "hitch" my "wagon to a star". I thank my father for his blessings and constant prayers. I am grateful to him and to my mother for starting me with an education that mattered.

Mr. Udaya Mani Pradhan of Mani Printing House, Darjeeling, has so diligently and painstakingly, worked on the manuscripts to give them the present form. I thank him very especially and very sincerely.

I also wish to thank Fr. E. P. Burns, S.J., Hayden Hall, Darjeeling, Dr. S. L. Dutta, Development Officer, University of North Bengal, my colleagues at St. Joseph's College, namely, Mr. Shanty Chhetry, Senior Lecturer, Dr. Lalan Gupta and Mrs. Minakshi Chakravarty, for every possible help rendered.

Finally and most essentially, the greatest tribute must be paid to the Divine Psalmist Himself. Without His intervention, nothing is possible.

Muna Hallis,
Senior Lecturer,
St. Joseph's College,
Darjeeling.

December 1995

Abbreviations Used

Bible	–	The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and the New Testaments.
A. V.	–	The King James' Version of The Holy Bible, commonly known as 'The Authorised Version'.
RSV	–	The Revised Standard Version of The Holy Bible, Translated from the original languages being the version set forth A. D. 1611. Revised A. D. 1881 - 1885 and A. D. 1901. Compared with the most ancient authorities and revised A. D. 1946-1952.
ps. / pss.	–	psalm / psalms.

Introduction

This study attempts to delve deep into the rich and vast field of psalm-poetry and unearth certain significant poetical elements which to a great extent, I think, are the sustaining foundation stones of these very ancient religious songs. Therefore, this is not a pedantic, theological or historical approach to the psalms.

The psalms of the Old Testament, some of which existed from one thousand years before the Christian era, have withstood the onslaught of Time. In spite of numberless translations down the ages, these poems still come to us as alive and as pulsating with life as when King David or the lone shepherd-psalmist first breathed melody into them.

The reading of the psalms has been, though sometimes difficult, a very enriching and a very personal experience. This experience has led me to believe that there are five constituents of poetry in the psalms which may be largely responsible for these ancient poems acquiring a timeless significance and value of their own. These

five elements - "the five I's" as I term them - are:

1. Inspiration

2. Imagination - based largely on Memory of the past.

3. Incantation

4. Image: Simile and Metaphor

5. Intensity.

Each of these is dealt with as a separate chapter. But first, an overview.

The most important component of all great poetry is, Inspiration. Without inspiration, poetry falls short of its higher function: it ceases to be what Sri Aurobindo terms, the "mantra"[1] of the Soul. That certain spiritual prompting in the heart of man, that urge to create, to reveal, to gush forth and to articulate, must be inspiration.

The product of this is, Incarnation, the poetry of speech. Poetry thus inspired has power - the power to move.

The psalms, we know, were composed by men whose lives were less

complex than the modern man's; whose elemental bonds with Nature and her environment had not yet been severed and whose pastoral roots grew deep. They were men whose spiritual awareness was acutely sharp and they found God in every motion of their lives. In the sounds of silence, the voice of the Divine was heard and It incarnated as the poetry of the ever-living psalms. These poems of ancient Israel thus bear testimony to the fact that, "God hath spoken" (ps.62:11. Bible. AV. 628).

The second element of poetry which is crucial to the make-up of the psalms, is, Imagination. This is based largely on the memory of the past. Many times, the psalmist appeals to one's sense of the past and Memory becomes a force that manœuvres and controls the whole poetic imagination in these sacred songs:

> I will call to mind the deeds of the
> Lord;
> yea, I will remember thy wonders
> of old.
> I will meditate on all thy work,
> and muse on thy mighty deeds. (ps. 77:11-12. Bible.
> AV. p. 516).

No one is allowed to forget the goodness of God. The ancient poets are constantly stimulated by an awesome sense of history. The great Exodus experience, for instance, is heard and heard again. This is not only a historical event. It can become an experience totally personal as in periods of torment and infliction when faith shatters the chains of bondage to lead one into the "promised land". Hence the poet sings many times along the following lines:

> He divided the sea, and caused
> them to pass through; and he made
> the waters to stand as an heap.
> In the daytime also he led them
> with a cloud, and all the night with
> a light of fire. (ps. 78:13-14. Bible. AV. p. 637).

This Memory, therefore, has a powerful hold over the psalmists' imagination and as M.L Rosenthal points out, Memory is, "The brooding source, present in every mind, of the desire to hold on to every mind, of the desire to hold on to the full body of our lives, turning it around and around and meditating on it again and again. It is she, who, in poetry, moves the poet to an acutely

intimate recognition and excitement because a moment of experience has been recovered."[2] Chapter II deals with this aspect of Imagination.

Incantation, the third poetical constituent, is primal to primitive religious verse. The effect is magical, hypnotic, enchanting. In psalm 118, the poet sings in thanksgiving to the Lord because "He is good". The whole prayer is sounded in an incantatory mood with the constant emphasis on:

"His steadfast love endures for/ever."

This mode of repetition enhances rhythm, music and meaning. The magical effect is also produced by the use of arresting, value-packed words and phrases which are steeped in wisdom and profound meaning. An example of this is : "The fear of the Lord is the beginning/of wisdom;" (ps.111:10. Bible. RSV. 539). In chapter III, we focus on Incantation.

Chapter IV discusses yet another poetic element, a stronghold by which the psalms have long sustained themselves. This is, the

Image. Specific reference is made to the Simile and the Metaphor which the psalmists use abundantly. As there are a great many of such comparisons, only the more significant ones have been chosen and examined. The images ofGod, the Enemy and the Psalmist, are prominent in the poems and our discussion centres around them. This is not to suggest that the rest of the comparisons are not noteworthy. Consider psalm 19:4-5 (RSV. 482) where the singer-poet proclaims enthusiastically that God created and also the Sun:

> In them he has set a tent for the sun,
> which comes forth like a bridegroom
> leaving his chamber,
> and like a strong man runs its
> course with joy.

This is a simple and direct comparison, yet potent in its effectiveness. A whole new and compact experience is arrested in these dual comparisons. The Sun, we are accustomed to as being masculine. Even in Hebrew, it is so.[3] Thus the Sun is projected in all its fresh and vibrant energy, in all its power and agility. One's imagination triggers off a process of associations that make

up one's life and one is able to look upon the Sun, afresh, from the individual point of view. The psalms are replete with such blazing, visual pictures. Had the psalmist been less exuberant, even done away with apt images, he would not have, so effectively strung a chord in our hearts to produce that "music of awareness"[4] so very essential to life.

Yet another significant facet of these sacred songs, which is common to all good poetry is , Intensity. This is dealt with in the last chapter. The form of the psalms, being of the lyric, complements the truth that these poems reveal moments of great intensity, of great emotion, all bursting out in floods of anger, hate, fear, joy and gratitude. To the hearer, it is almost an urgent and impulsive communication of an experience that has to be lived to be understood. Take for example, psalm 57, a psalm of suffering, where David, hiding in a cave, from his persecutor, Saul, implores God to help him and save him from the snares of his treacherous enemies:

I lie in the midst of lions
that greedily devour the sons of
men;
their teeth are spears and arrows,
their tongues sharp swords. (ps. 57:4. Bible. RSV. 504)

These short lines convey a sense of great fear combined with feelings of profound distress and hate. The ordinary person can recognise easily these basic, human emotions, no matter how sophisticated he may be. "There is no 'make-believe' in these poems of the Old Testament."[5]. All experience stemmed from life lived primitively, simply and intuitively. Thus the poetic utterance is vigorous, sometimes abrupt and mostly forceful, passionate and intense. The psalms have arrested for all generations, significant familiar moments of life which, though common, are highly concentrated with a whole gamut of human emotions. The sacred poems, therefore, still find their relevance in today's world.

This is a general overview of what my research will cover. I am not a scholar of Hebrew nor an authority in the Bible and hence make no claims to historical, religious and archaelogical equipment.

No attempt has been made to add new information on the origin and background of the psalms. The focus is on the five literary components, "the five I's", from the vantage point of a layman. Very often, it requires a lay person to "explain" to the other layman, what it is all about. "It often happens that two schoolboys can solve difficulties in their work for one another better than the master can."[6].

Though at times difficult, the first journey through the psalms is perhaps travelled better singly and individually without much religious and historical over-load, so that one way wanderingly, make personal discoveries that would lead one to feel as the psalmist felt and to share in his impulsive outbursts concomitant with his encounters with the Divine. This is how the experience of the psalms become personal and very real for us.

***

Works Cited

1. Sri Aurobindo, "Poetry", Sri Aurobindo on Social Sciences and Humanities for the New Age: An Anthology, comp., Kewal Motwani, (Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1962) 88.

2. M. L. Rosenthal, Poetry and the Common Life, (New York: Oxford University P, 1974) 20.

3. Rudolf Frieling, Hidden Treasures in the Psalms, trans., Mabel Cotterell, (London: Christian Community Press, 1954) 47.

4. Rosenthal, 38.

5. John Hayes Gardiner, The Bible as Literature , (New York: Folcroft, 1978) 135

6. C. S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms , 1958, (London: Collins-Fontana, 1965) 9.

Chapter 1

Inspiration

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" (psalm 139:7. The Holy Bible. A. V. 669)

When History sometimes reawakens the past, we are wafted along into ancient Israel, into the palace of one great king, King David. We are told that the king used to hang a harp just above the place where he used to sit. Often, in the silence of a starry night, the cool zephyr disturbed the strings of the lyre thus producing a soft, magical tune which filled the air. Then, " . . . the poet-king was constrained to rise from his bed, and till the dawn flushed the eastern skies, he wedded words to the strain. The poetry of that tradition is condensed in the saying that the Book of Psalms contains the whole music of the heart of man, swept by the hand of the Maker." [1]

All great poetry is inspired and so with the psalms. Inspiration is the very soul of their being. Impressed upon these

lyrics is the ever fresh and ever vivid picture of the moral growth and struggle of every man, his triumphs and defeat, his instinctive striving towards the good and the ideal and his heart-felt despair in the face of failure. In spite of a vicissitudinous life, the psalmist learnt never to break his bonds with Divinity. He continued to converse with the Holy on a very personal and one to one level. Though he was many times prey to sin and temptation, hope was always in his heart. This was a sign that he could not flee from the spirit of God.

"When a human being is 'moved' by the 'holy' he cries aloud. The cry grows into ecstatic song, . . ."[2] This was the case with the psalmists of the Old Testament. They were divinely inspired in their songs.

The aim here is not to analyze or define in exact terms, the concept of Inspiration, for much ink has been used by scriptural scholars and philosophers, in the clarification of this idea. What is inspiration in exegetical terms[3], may not be true for the psychologist or even a person from another religious order.

Therefore, a good way of explaining the idea of "inspiration", is, to see how it works.

In an October evening of 1816, John Keats and his friend, Cowden Clarke, sat up till very late into the night, discussing and reading, Chapman's translation of Homer. They parted company that night, with the assurance that each would write his response to the poem. The next morning, Cowden found at his breakfast table, Keats's written reaction to Chapman. It was the now familiar sonnet: On First Looking into Chapman's Homer.[4]

Milton is another example. In moments of utter isolation and total blindness, he felt a strong prompting in his heart that bade him summon sometimes his daughter and at other times, his nephew Philip, to dictate to them, verbatim, ten lines or so, of

> ". . . Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
> of that forbidden tree . . . . " (Milton, Paradise Lost
> Book 1. lines 1-2.)

Milton's genius was fired by the story of the fall of Man and his ultimate redemption. His blindness led him to perceive more

clearly the vision of the inner world of the human soul. Shelley's evening walks at Leghorn with his wife, Mary, exposed him to the melodious "unpremeditated art" (Ode to a Skylark) of the skylark and it so inspired him that he too had to gush forth in a new song of his own.

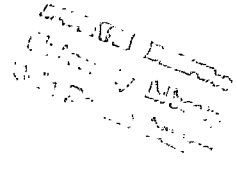
Of a poem which Browning wrote, the story goes that one day a lady friend visited the poet and queried as to what the meaning of the poem was. Without hesitation, Browning replied that at the time when the poem was being written, two people knew what the poem was about - and that was God and himself. But now, he went on, only one person knew the meaning of the poem and that was God. This anecdote shows the nature of the creative process, a process triggered off by the force of Inspiration. In the world of Literature, Science, Music, History etc, we are confronted with proofs of how a Divine Energy sparks off a flame in the soul of man that he is pushed forward almost impulsively to reveal and to create. In The Discovery of Poetry, P. H. B. Lyon explains in a style simple and clear, the workings of Inspiration. "Breathing upon", he calls

it and he likens it to two processes - first, the receiving and passing of messages between the sensory and motor nerves in the brain and secondly, to the wireless receiver and transmitter. No one can describe what happens at the point of contact.[5]

The psalmist lived in a milieu which was conducive to his being personally in touch with the Divine. Like a true poet, he had a greater sensibility to feel, to suffer and to rejoice. The poet in psalm 39:2-3 says:

> I was dumb with silence, I held
> my peace, <u>even</u> from good; and my
> sorrow was stirred.
> My heart was hot within me,
> while I was musing the fire burned:
> <u>then</u> spake I with my tongue, ...(<u>Bible</u> A.V. 617).

Between the keeping of silence ("I was dumb with silence") and the burning of the flame ("the fire burned"), something significant happens and thus the poet is compelled to speak "with my [his] tongue".



"I waited patiently for the Lord; / he inclined to me, and heard my / cry." (Bible. RSV. 495), sings the poet in psalm 40 and through the silence of patient awaiting, the lyricist attunes his antenna to the voice of the Lord. In this searching silence, he is inspired to listen and to hear. He remembers that God has brought him out of a "horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my [his] feet upon a rock," (ps. 40:2.Bible A.V. 617), and he proclaims in thanksgiving and in acknowledgment that God has

> . . . . put a new song in my mouth,
> a song of praise to our God.
> Many will see and fear,
> and put their trust in the Lord. (ps. 40:3 Bible. RSV. 495)

The psalmists were deeply and continually aware of God. The Lord was not just a distant or a vague concept formulated in the intellect of men. Their sentience drove them to listen to the voice of God because for them God was alive and "The voice of the Lord is [was] powerful," (ps.29:4Bible RSV. 487). This Divine voice

was heard, not once or twice, but again and again in Nature, in History and in Visions Mystical.

For these ancient Hebrew poets, Nature spoke with the voice of the Almighty:

> The heavens declare the glory
> of God; and the firmament
> sheweth his handywork.
> Day unto day uttereth speech,
> and night unto night sheweth know-
> ledge.
> There is no speech nor language,
> where their voice is not heard. (ps.19:1-3 Bible. AV. 606)

In psalm 29, there is another evidence:

> The voice of the Lord is upon
> the water: the God of glory thun-
> dereth: the Lord is upon many waters.
> The voice of the Lord is power-
> ful; the voice of the Lord is full of
> majesty.
> The voice of the Lord breaketh
> the cedars; yea, the Lord breaketh
> the cedars of Lebanon. (ps. 29:3-5. Bible. AV.611)

The psalmist, brooding perhaps, on the vastness, depth and

variety of nature, heard many a time the Lord speaking in the rush of the wind, in the patter of rain, in the rumble of thunder and the depths of his soul immersed into the harmony of the celestial music in Nature. The discovery of Nature as God's handiwork, is the beginning of prayer. To anyone who will pause awhile and listen to the sounds of Nature, will touch upon the Divine message. "We, too,", says Leonard Griffith," if we listened to the natural world about us, might hear its overtones speaking to the needs of our human situation. Sunset and dawn, winter and summer night will tell us that we live in an orderly dependable world and that behind it is a Creative Spirit ever intelligent and supremely loving. The receding waves on the seashore might tell us, as they told Job, that the God who sets boundaries for the ocean tides also sets boundaries for the destructive elements that beat on the shore of man's soul.[6]"

Many times, the psalms become songs of the historical past when God actively intervened in the lives of men. The poets refer constantly to the events of history through which they felt convinced that God spoke to the present. This knowledge, that God has helped them

before and will therefore always protect them, inspired the songs of the psalmists, like psalm 66: 5-6, for example:

> Come and see what God has done;
> he is terrible in his deeds among
> men.
> He turned the sea into dry land;
> men passed through the river on
> foot. (Bible. RSV. 508).

The many and mighty acts of deliverance by which the Holy has vindicated his name in the past, gave the singers of these songs the confidence to encounter God. "God is confronted with former deeds in order to persuade him to do now, not what he is doing but what by contrast he had done earlier."[7]

In the momentous events of the past, witnessed by the fore-fathers from the time of Abraham, was founded Israel's arena of meeting with God. In the tides of historical motion, was seen the vital activity of the Divine, His fathomless love and sacredness. The revelation of God was first effected through His word. His word was accompanied by his actions in History:

a) He established a testimony in Jacob,
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our fathers
to teach to their childern; (ps. 78:5. Bible.RSV. 517)

b) He divided the sea and let them pass through it,
and made the waters stand like a heap. (ps.78:13. Bible . RSV. 517)

In the memory of men, was recorded God's saving acts:

" One generation shall laud thy works to another,
and shall declare thy mighty acts," (ps.145:4. Bible . RSV. 555)

(Memory, [of the historical experience], as the source of poetic Imagination, will be dealt in Chapter II).

Besides Nature and History, another powerful instrument of the voice of the Holy, was the innate soul of the psalmist himself. This made it possible for the singer-poet to commune with the Greator Poet, in contemplation and mystical visions. Claus Westermann, says in, The Living Psalms, that the psalms are, " unlike a modern poem,"

in that, they have not arisen from "the mind of an individual human being but from what has happened between this human being and God. The form of the psalm is rooted in this exchange between God and Man. The author of the psalm has not 'thought up' what he says in it.[8]" The whole poetic utterance is a creation which pours forth from a "certain spiritual excitement caused by a vision in the soul of which it is eager to deliver itself. The vision may be anything in Nature or God or man or the life of creatures or the life of things;..."[9]

The essential thing is that the soul of the poet saw into the deeper realities hidden from life's exterior. The poets of the Old Testament were "mystics of the desert"[10]. Father George A. Maloney, S. J., who has used this term, explains the concept of "mysticism" thus:

> . . . . being in touch with the 'really real.' Reality abides not in the changing, in the temporal, but in the unfathomable abyss where God speaks within the heart of man in silence. . . .[11]

With this unquenchable yearning to be one with Reality, the psalmists

cried out to "Yahweh", the God who was potently ever present in the affairs of men.

The psalmists were basically nomadic shepherds and they found constant recourse to a pastoral environment. Nature was all around them: wide open deserts, the great expansive sky, the rocky hills punctuated by cedars and palms and olives: the age-old trees. In such salubrious srroundings, they were of necessity, very well attuned to listen and to re-act to that celestial resonance that made them burst forth in joy or sorrow or fear or praise. Their hearts knew not the mundane: deep within, their own celestial fire lay dormant to be kindled into a burning flame whenever the breath of Poetry rushed by:

> A man cannot say ' I will compose poetry.' The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness.[12]

This very same idea is contained in, The Discovery of Poetry

where P. H. B. Lyon says that "The wind blows from without, but there must be an answering glow."[13]

The psalms were songs of such men with a profound inner vision and David was perhaps the greatest of them. The Holy Bible records in II Samuel, Chapter 23:2, the very words of David himself:

> "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue."

This is one great psalmist's acknowledgement of Divine Inspiration. Through the incantation of the sacred verses, the poets strove to rise higher into that spiritual plane which was the ideal merging ground with the Omnipresent. The incantations not only express a fact, nor do these chantings drug us to sleep. The refrains and repetitions transact and reactivate a certain magical power which enriches the human soul. It is like the chanting of the Vedas, the saying of the Rosary, which releases such power that the person can rise above the trivial, to look into the greater and nobler significance of being.

Many times, the writers of the psalms talk of waiting patiently for God in silence. This silence is not only the silence of the contemplative world. It is also the silence after a storm, after an upheaval which sometimes breaks down even the strong and upright. In this silence, the individual found his God, the rejuvenating power that stirred him to action. We are reminded here, of Wordsworth:

> " And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; . . ." (Wordsworth, Tintern Abbey , lines 93-95.).

Like the Romantics, the Hebrew poets of Israel were constantly led by a vision. They were convinced that this vision had a Divine source and they prayed out of a total relationship with God. "With the Psalmist, prayer was not a neon-marked emergency exit to be taken only in time of calamity when all the other exits are blocked. Communion with God was the normal habit of his life."[14] This idea is also discussed by Othmar Keel in his work, The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms. He compares the conceptual world of a biblical book with

that of the old Near Eastern iconography. In the Chapter entitled, "Attitudes of Prayer", Keel talks about Israel's constant encounters with God. In this context, he states, "Man's entire religious activity is ultimately directed towards no other end than seeing God again and ever again. (cf.ps.27:13, ps.63:2). The Sumerians of the early Dynastic Period II furnished their portrait effigies with over-sized eyes. These were emplaced before the images of the Gods so that no visible aspect of the divine splendour might elude them.[15]" He has an illustration of an image with wide-open eyes. These eyes project the idea of man's seeking for the appearance of God. Keeler quotes psalm 63:2: as illustration of this visual image:

> " So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary, beholding thy power and glory". (p.308)

Thus so far on how the poetry of the psalms was inspired.

***

Now, we come to the second part of our discussion on Inspiration — the effect, in our lives, of these inspirational poems. Having

been inspired, they inspire. This is the relevance of the psalms today.

The psalms have been the fountain of consolation, refreshment and nourishment to every traveller who wearies with the burden of Life's travels. In them there are no limitations to a particular age, country or creed. They mirror the motions of every human soul, with the regular heights and depths of fortune, uttering in exquisite speech familiar experience and thought of men. But these experiences come with an intensity, a depth, an elevation and a beauty born of truth and simplicity. Survivors of the march of time," . . . in modes of thought, in habits of life, in forms of expression, the Psalms, as devotional exercises, have sunk into our hearts; as sublime poetry, have fired our minds and stored our memories."[16] Poets, philosophers, scientists, leaders, religious thinkers, all have acknowledged the power and relevance of the psalms. Hymns have been composed, based on the treasures of the Psalter, not only in English but also in other languages.Even a modern pop group has made psalm 137, "By the Rivers of Babylon", come

alive to the rhythm of contemporary music. People of all nationalities and faith have been fascinated by the language, imagery and ideas contained in these poems. In missionary enterprises like the translations of the scriptures, the Book of Psalms is an unfailing choice. This book is well adapted to suit even the most pagan, mainly because Nature is projected in all its unity and wholeness, more than in its minute details. It is described as being glorious and magnificent not by itself but by the hand of God, the source of Life. Then again, the Psalter appeals very strongly to the basic, elemental but universal feelings of every man. This book replenishes in man that sense of awe before the Omnipresent. Prothero points out that the Gods in Homer's Olympus take just three steps and they have traversed the whole world.[17] But a more sublime idea is expressed by the Hebrew poet, in psalm 139, for example. The individual is overawed by the fact that the Lord is Omnipresent. He cannot hide from his Maker for He is everywhere - in heaven, on earth , in man's innermost being, in all forms of creation. God knows His human child thoroughly and well.

It may be well at this point, to turn to the pages of history, to look at some great men whose lives were made richer by the influence of these songs of Israel.[18] To begin with, there is the inspiring tale of St.Patrick of Ireland. In the distant past, the festival of Tara, on the plains of Breg, was held once in three years. All the kings of the land along with the commoners, gathered together around a huge pyre to be lit at a point of time. While thus waiting in the darkness of the night, the throng gathered there, suddenly witnessed a bright spark of fire in the horizon. King Laeghaire was furious as someone had disobeyed orders not to light any fire till the appointed time. The "sacrilegious wretch" was arrested and ordered to explain himself. Thus St. Patrick, the accused, stood before the royal and the common crowd to explain why he had lit a fire in the worship of God.Very gently but arrestingly, he spoke about God with such zeal and power that not only the people but Nature herself seemed still. He kept chanting psalm 20:7, "Some boast of chariots, and some horses; / but we boast of the name of the Lord our God.", and by the break of dawn, he had kindled in the heart of

everyone present there, a celestial fire.

Time moved on. The power of the psalms was felt in a wider gamut of life - in literature, in science, in secular and ecclesiatical events. It is said that the great Emperor Charlemagne, lived his life in accordance with the values taught by the divine poems. His favourite psalm was psalm 68 and he loved to be called "David" by his comrades. When he died at Aix-la-Chapelle, it was with the words of psalm 31:5 on his lips, "Into thine hand I commit my / spirit:".

Thomas A. Becket of Canterbury, prayed the same lines before he fell dead on the steps near the chapel of St. Benedict. In 1172, torn apart by guilt and grief, King Henry II went through a period of penance. He visited the cathedral where Becket was murdered and at the spot where he had fallen, he knelt down to unburden his load by reciting psalm 6 in the presence of a large gathering of monks:

> O Lord, rebuke me not in thine
> anger,neither chasten me in
> thy hot displeasure.

Have mercy upon me, O Lord;
for I am weak: O Lord, heal me;
for my bones are vexed: but
thou, O Lord, how long? (ps.6:1-3.Bible .AV. 600).

In Literature, we are inclined to think first of Chaucer who makes his Prioress begin her tale with a rendering of psalm 8:

'O Lord, our Lord, how marvellous Thy name,
Spread through the reaches of the earth!' said she;
'Nor only are Thy precious praise and fame
Found in the mouths of men of dignity,
For in the mouths of children, such may be
As suck the breast, the bounty of Thy ways
Can be declared in worship and in praise.

('The Prioress's Prologue'. The Canterbury Tales. lines 1-7)

William Langland also used the language of the psalms in The Vision of Piers Plowman. The poet writes: "The tools wherewith I labour and earn my bread are Paternosta, and my primer Placebo and Dirige, and sometimes my Psalter and my Seven Psalms."[19]

Francis Bacon studied and quoted these sacred poems. He was also a versifier of the psalms, (Certain Psalms Written in Sickness), and so were Thomas Wyatt, Spenser, Sidney, Queen Elizabeth I, James I, Fletcher and the great Shakespeare himself. In As You Like It, Adam makes a reference to psalm 147:9 when he says: "He that doth the ravens feed/ Yea, providently caters for the sparrow,/Be comfort to my age !". (Act 2 Scene 3). The King in Hamlet asks, "What if this cursed hand / Were thicker than itself with brother's blood, / Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens / To wash it white as snow ?" (3.3.), and we are reminded of psalm 51:7, "Purge me with hyssop, and I / shall be clean: wash me, and I shall / be whiter than snow." (Bible . AV. 623).

To the Puritans of the seveteenth century, the Psalter was an important book. Two finest products of this age, show ample proof of this in their writings. Milton is known to have translated into verse, psalms 104 and 126 at the tender age of fifteen. Later, in 1648 and in 1653, he translated psalms 80 to 88 and psalms 1 to 6. Paradise Lost contains certain points of reference to the Hebrew

verses. For instance,

" 'Open, ye everlasting gates,' they sung,
'Open, ye heavens, your living doors; let in
The Creator, from His work returned
Magnificent, His six days' work, a world.'" (Paradise Lost. 7.565-9).

These lines can be compared to psalm 24:7,9. (AV. 609):

Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
and be ye lift up, ye everlasting
doors; and the King of glory shall
come in. (Verse 7)
. . . . . .
Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
even lift them up, ye everlasting
doors; (Verse 9)

Oliver Cromwell, a towering figure during the Civil War, was fired by the spirit of these ancient songs. This was the force which propelled all his thoughts and actions especially during stormy times. He constantly turned to the poetry of these psalms in his private and public letters and in his addresses to the Parliament. A part of his letter to a cousin, Mrs. St.John, is quoted by Prothero:

"Truly, then, this I find, that He giveth springs in a dry, barren wilderness where no water is. I live , you know where - in Meshec, which they say signifies prolonging; in Kedar, which signifies blackness; yet the Lord forsaketh me not. Though He do prolong, yet He will, I trust, bring me to His tabernacle, to His resting-place"[20] This was based on psalm 120. All through his military career, Cromwell is believed to have found in the Psalter, a powerful and constant guide and protector. Before every move he made, especially during martial operations, he always equipped himself in single meditation on the scriptural poems. During the war with Ireland (1650), he replenished his army by summoning a brief respite to sing the lyrics of the shortest psalm, psalm 17.

Joseph Addison wrote about the poems in the Spectator. He made paraphrases of psalms 23 and 29. These essays are perhaps as familiar to the reader as is Sir Roger de Coverley.

John Hargreaves in his book, A Guide to Psalms, recounts the touching story of how William Cowper found strength and courage in the psalms. As a shy and hesitating schoolboy, he was frequently

bullied by an older boy who made his [cowper's] life miserable. So the little, motherless boy shared his suffering with God in the words of psalm 118, " I called upon the Lord in dis - / tress: the Lord answered me, . . ."[21] and found sustenance in them. Later on, he wrote the hymn, " O for a closer walk with God."[22]

Lord Byron loved these lyrics and as a child he had memorised many of the psalms including psalm 1 and psalm 23. The influence of the Psalter can also be seen in Wordworth, (The Excursion), Tennyson (Rizpah), and Arnold (Oberman Once More). Even the Brownings could not escape this magnetic power. In The Ring and the Book, Pompilia seems to make a refernce to psalm 11 in lines 991 - 996 and Elizabeth B. Browning writes in The Sleep:

> Of all the thoughts of God that are
> Borne inward into souls afar,
> Along the Psalmist's music deep,
> Now tell me if that any is
> For gift or grace surpassing this:
> 'He giveth His beloved - sleep? " (stanza I).

Ruskin and Carlyle were fascinated by the psalms. The former is said to have memorised many psalms and the latter always believed that the psalms were " the truest emblem ever given of a man's moral progress and warfare here below."[23]

History reveals that even men of science could not let these religious poems go unnoticed. Alexander von Humboldt, (1769-1859), the German traveller and scientist, gave a physical description of the universe in the Kosmos, and said of psalm 104, " . . . we are astonished to see within the compass of a poem of such dimension, the universe, the heavens and the earth, thus drawn with a few grand strokes".[24] In an age of unprecedented scientific probing into the cosmic mysteries, the Divine message comes loud and clear that the whole, vast universe is energised by a Force, mighty and unfathomable. "The heavens are telling the glory/of God; / and the firmament proclaim his/handiwork." (ps.19:1Bible . RSV. 481).

Though Science unfolds and explains many mysteries of the universe, the eternal question of whence, where and whither, are never satisfactorily answered and the fatigued mortal has sought

many times, solutions, in the yellowed pages of some ancient, treasured volume of the psalms.

***

We have, so far, peeked into the past to bring out instances to show the relevance of these inspirational lyrics. We turn our focus now, on the modern man, who seems more prone to fatigue and weariness, as there is no nourishment in "the waste land"[25]. In the name of civilization, modern man has traversed too far away from home. He has forgotten that ". . . trailing clouds of glory do we come / From God, who is our home:" (Wordsworth Immortality ode. lines 64-65). Many a time his soul yearns to retreat to a world of rest and repose:

> "O how I long to travel back
> And tread again that ancient track!" (Vaughan. The Retreate. lines 21-22)

The human mind is battered by myriad desires and ambitions and is beginning to sag from total exhaustion. Material excitement and

sensations fail to feed his impoverished spirit. He hungers, and in desperation he looks for satisfaction in illusions - drugs, alcohol and violence. Newspapers seem to see the seamier side of life: a government has fallen, countries are at war, an innocent person has been murdered, the environment is dying. There is enough to make one falter. When we begin to lose our bearings, we grope frantically for proper direction. It is then, that we should look for the road less taken, to lead us to the spiritual springs and quench our thirst with words such as of psalm 116:6:

> "The Lord preserveth the simple:
> I was brought low, and he helped
> me." (Bible. AV. 658)

God is the "rock" and "salvation" (ps.62), for searching souls and only in Him can one find rest and strength. Drowning in the mire of sin, man can still hope for Holy intervention to pull him out. He only has to cry out for help, "Lord, hear my voice!" (ps.129. RSV. 549), knowing that God is merciful:

If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark
iniquities,
Lord, who could stand ?
But there is forgiveness with thee,
that thou mayst be feared. (ps.130:3.Bible .
RSV. 549).

Some may not perceive of and comprehend the Divine too readily. To envisage and accept the Lord as the kind and caring shepherd (ps.23) may be a difficult proposition. They could well ask: "Is God a living God - a real live character in the drama of Life?" Sometimes when our personal life is in shambles, we are inclined to echo H. G. Wells who said of God that "He is an ever-absent help in time of trouble."[26] But perhaps the atheists and the nescient unknowingly know him in the depths of their hearts as Peace, Love, Happiness, "Shanti" ?

When we pray the psalms, we are stripped of all unrealities to stand naked before the Omnipresent. The ancient psalmist was in a way, a psychologist, for he knew of the cathartic effects of confessing our wrong-doings. In the psalms, we shout for mercy (ps. 57), we rave and rant against God in anger (ps. 58, 60), or we plead

from the deep pits of suffering, (ps. 116), or we ecstatically proclaim victory (ps. 18) over our problems. In short, we let lose all pent-up feelings and emotions. After the storm of forthright expression, we experience a calm that is the panacea for the frayed and rattled nerves. The psalms, being written with the ink of personal experience, find us in our human situation. They reveal to us the result of what happens when we bring the Holy to bear upon a particular event. The singers of Israel brought God into every experience of theirs: God and worship were integral to their living. This Sacred Energy, "Yahweh", gave them support, defence, consolation, encouragement. Hence the psalms were written as a response to man's experience of the activity of God and every man can identify himself with one of the old, Hebrew singer-poets.

In, The Psalms in Modern Life,[27] Sister Cecilia discusses fifty-three psalms to show how they are helpful in coping with the pressures of modern life. Here are some of them with the rubrics given by the author:

Psalm 1 - "Where Happiness is Found in the World Today" (p 51)

Psalm 31 -"The Joy of God's Forgiving Grace" (p 106)

Psalm 61 -"No True Rest Save in God" (p 89)

Psalm 92 -"Only in God Can the Soul Today Stand Sure" (p 71)

Psalm 120- "Divine Insurance for Life's Pilgrimage" (p 65)

Psalm 123-"Without God Life Would be too Perilous" (p 68)

Psalm 132-"Living Together in Love" (p 98)

Total immersion in mundane, workaday affairs will not help one to meditate upon these sacred poems and thus reach spiritual heights. Nor will it help to look upon the psalms in "cold abstract study" (Cecilia, 13). These psalms have to be taken as prayer: a direct and personal communication with God which requires the shedding of all pretences born of pride and materialism. The mere mortal must realise that there is a need to anchor himself to the Eternal Energy, without which, he is nothing. "In our prayer life we are always learning, always open to the winds of the spirit, ready to explore new ways of approaching the unapproachable and expressing the inexpressible . . . ".[28]

From each and every page of the Psalter, the Spirit of the Holy comes blowing across to all those who venture to encounter the poetry of the psalms. "It seems to me appropriate, almost inevitable, that when the great Imagination which in the beginning, for its own delight and for the delight of men and angels and (in their proper mode) of beasts, had invented and formed the whole world of nature, submitted to express Itself in human speech, that should sometimes be poetry. For poetry too is a little incarnation, giving body to what had been before invisible and inaudible."[29] David, Moses, Solomon and the rest of the ancient Hebrew poets were channels through which the Divine Inspiration concretized Itself. Thus the significance of Inspiration in the psalms of the Old Testament.

***

Works Cited

1. Rowland E. Prothero, The Psalms in Human Life, (n. p.: n. p., [c.1932]) 13.

2 Sigmund Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel's Worship trans., D. R. Ap-Thomas, 1962, Vol 1, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967) 8.

3 Schlegel, A., Personal Interview, 13 January 1995.

4 P. H. B. Lyon, The Discovery of Poetry (London: Arnold, 1932) 198

5 Ibid 199.

6 Leonard Griffith, God in Man's Experience: The Activity of God in the Psalms, 1968, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970) 50

7 Claus Westermann, Praise and Lament in the Psalms, trans., Keith R. Crim & Richard N. Soulen, (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 215.

8 Claus Westermann, The Living Psalms, trans., J. R.

Porter, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989) 2.

9 Kewal Motwani, comp., Sri Aurobindo on Social Sciences and Humanities for the New Age, (Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1962) 91.

10 George A. Maloney, The Breath of the Mystic, (New Jersey: Dimension, 1974) 7.

11 Ibid, 17

12 Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry", Poets On Poetry , ed. Charles Norman, (New York: Collier, 1962) 180-211.

13 P. H. B. Lyon, 202.

14 Leonard Griffith, 120.

15 Othmar Keel, The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms, trans., Timothy J. Hallett, (New York: Crossroad-Seabury, 1978) 308.

16 Prothero, 17

17 Ibid, 51

18 Ibid, (for all historical references)

19 Ibid, 105

20 Ibid, 229

21 John Hargreaves, A Guide to Psalms, 1987 (London: SPCK, 1973; Delhi: ISPCK, 1992), 3.

22 Ibid, 22.

23 Prothero, 292

24 Ibid, 283-4

25 T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land and Other Poems, 1942 (London: Faber and Faber, 1965) 25.

26 Griffith, 15.

27 M. Cecilia, The Psalms in Modern Life, (Chicago: Regnery, 1960), 51.

28 Carlos G.Valles, Praying Together:Psalms for Contemplation , (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1989), XI.

29 C. S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms, 1958, (London: Collins-Fontana, 1965), 12.

Chapter II

Imagination - The Hand of Mnemosyne

> "The Imagination . . . is the mind's ambassador to infinitude."[1]

In the above statement, Lascelles Ambercrombie was making a specific reference to William Wordsworth, but what was true of the Romantic proponent, is also true of the singers of Israel, whose poetry sprung from the inner wells of a sensiblity that was in contact with the Divine Force.

This sensibility fashioned the Romantic expression, as with Blake who felt that Imagination had a divine source. A similar sensibility seems to be existant in the Old Testament poets who strove for, in their inner soul-visions, the Divine Harmony. Imagination, as a creative process therefore, and as the interpreter of this soul-vision was to a great extent based on that "brooding source"[2], Mnemosyne (Memory), from whence all poetry flowed.

Many of the psalmists who were priests and prophets seemed to have felt the imperative need to tell the Israelites that God was very much alive. Not that people were without faith. But History tells us that many times, faith in a living God wavered. This experience is easy to comprehend even more today.

According to E. W. Heaton, the reason for this once in a way loss of faith, was that before the Israelite Conquest, the religion of the Canaanites was well established in Palestine. Canaanite religion was based on the worship of Nature - very much like the early Vedic ritual of worshipping Nature Gods. The religion established by Moses, on the other hand, originate ". . . not from man's desire to be comfortable in and exploit the natural order, but from an act in which God had revealed his nature and sought man's response to his purpose. It rested, that is to say, on the authority of historical revelation."[3] Hence, these men of God who were writers of the psalms, were led by a missionary zeal to continually establish the authenticity of the one true God. Their poetic imagination was coloured by the memory of the past when God revealed Himself through

various events. In a way, this may be termed, "the collective memory" of a people - in this case, the Jews. On the other had, this "collective memory" has a catholicity of its own and on a broader scale can be called the collective memory of mankind. The spiritual History of man is the factual story of his trial, fall and salvation.

In its universality can be discerned the personal note. Each individual is an "accumulated self"[4] He is borne of the Past. When a poet seeks expression in poetry, he does so with borrowings of past experiences, language and style and when the psalmist thus sings his song, he brings to bear upón the present, his personal experiences along with the great experiences of the by-gone years of his community. The poetry of the psalms emerges from this memory.

What experiences did Mnemosyne, the Goddess of Memory, hold up for the poets of the Old Testament? On a personal level, it was the times when God made them to suffer in the hands of enemies, or poverty or affliction and then led them out of this realm of suffering, to give them shelter and refuge. First then, is the cry from the mire of suffering:

O Lord, my God, I call for
help by day;
I cry out in the night before thee,
Let my prayer come before thee.
incline thy ear to my cry!

For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.
I am reckoned among those who go
down to the Pit;
I am a man who has no strength,
like one foresaken among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom thou dost remember
no more,
for they are cut off from thy hand. (ps. 88:1-5. Bible . RSV. p. 523)

Then the song of praise and thanksgiving -

Make a joyful noise to God,
all the earth;
sing the glory of his name;
give to him glorious praise!
Say to God, "How terrible are thy
deeds!
So great is thy power that thy
enemies cringe before thee.
All the earth worships thee;

they sing praises to thee,
sing praises to thy name." (ps.66:1-4Bible .RSV.508).

Many times, it is the sheer ecstatic joy of wonderment at God's creation and an outburst of gratitude and thanksgiving. These personal upheavals and joyous experiences bring the psalmist closer to the Lord and when it becomes necessary to proclaim to all, the might and power of the Omnipresent, Memory leads one back to the great and wonderful deeds of the Lord, all witnessed by the forefathers from the time of Abraham. The poet invites one to walk down memory lane, not only alone but together as children of God:

Come and see what God has done;
he is terrible in his deeds among
men.
He turned the sea into dry land;
men passed through the river on
foot.
. . . . . .

For thou, O God, hast tested us;
thou hast tried us as silver is
tried.
Thou didst bring us into the net;

thou didst lay affliction on our
loins;
thou didst let men ride over our heads;
we went through fire and through
water;
yet thou hast brought us forth to a
spacious place. (ps. 66: 5, 10-12. Bible. RSV. 508).

God's mighty acts are the very foundation of Israel's history. It was natural, therefore, that the psalmist's imaginative sensibilities be built on these foundations.

The poems in the Psalter show how much poetry is present in the voices of the people of Israel. What the poets have to report, grows out of a world of experience shared with people of all conditions, people whose inward sense of life is of the same order as our own.

"When a man feels keenly about an event it is natural that he should talk about it in verse."[5] Thus, the miraculous events of the past became the touchstones of the lives of the people, indelible and not easy to forget. "As in Ps. 80, the event in which the community of God has experienced an earlier act of deliverance is an event set within the context of the 'primordial history' of

Israel, i.e., that series of events by which Israel first became a people. They are the events surrounding the Exodus and the settlement of the Promised Land: liberation from Egypt, deliverance from the Reed [sic] Sea, guidance and preservation in the wilderness, territorial expansion in the Promised Land, victory over enemies who endangered their new existence - in fact the exact same series of events included in the imagery of Ps. 80."[6]

Memory is crucial to these poems of the Old Testament for the following reasons:

1. to re-present History so as to reinstate faith in a living God. Thanksgiving, praise, awe and admonishment are involved in this process.

2. to bring into order, intense, profound experience, recollected and made into the experience of the Now with greater depth of meaning and significance.

3. to fulfil the hunger of curiosity through narration.

4. to keep memory alive as a sustaining reality so as not

to lose identity of a race and an individual.

1. The recollection of History includes the highlighting of dramatic moments when God has worked actively in the lives of men. Psalm 105, for example, uses a history of the promise to Abraham and the story of God's protection through the exodus:

> Remember the wonderful works that
> he has done,
> his miracles, and the judgments he
> uttered,
> O offspring of Abraham his servant,
> sons of Jacob, his chosen ones!
> He is the Lord our God;
> his judgments are in all the earth.
> He is mindful of his covenant for
> ever,
> of the word that he commanded,
> for a thousand generations,
> the covenant which he made with
> Abraham,
> his sworn promise to Isaac,
> which he confirmed to Jacob as a
> statute,
> to Israel as an everlasting covenant,
> saying, "To you I will give the land

of Canaan
as your portion for an inheritance." (ps. 105:5-11. Bible . RSV. 533).

The psalm continues to affirm the fact that the people have inherited the land for a purpose - to have a home where they can continue to adhere to the Divine Laws.

In psalm 136, the poet sings of the exodus, the wanderings in the desert, the taking over of Canaan and more importantly, of the beginnings. With constant emphasis on, " . . . his steadfast love endures for ever;" (RSV.551), the psalmist expresses the depths of Divine love grounded in the creation of the earth, the sky, the sun and the moon.

Claus Westermann says that in the book, Die Geschichtsmotive in den Alttestamentlichen Psalmen, the author, A. Lauha asks a question (which many of us do too): "Why do the psalms constantly return to the Mosaic period, and when doing so, why do they always lift up the same motifs while completely ignoring other events so heavily emphasized in the historical books ?' (p. 133)." To this

query, Lauha himself offers an answer with the help of the stance taken by Anton Jirkus in Die alteste Geschichte Israels in Rahman lehrhafter Darstellungen, (1917): " ' in Israel there existed a doctrinal statement incorporating historical events, i.e., a schema involving doctrine and preaching had been formulated in which the same historical material was continually repeated and which was used as a catechism' (Lauha, p. 133)." [8]

Thus we realise that the psalms in contemporary usage were to a certain extent didactic. They never failed to teach and prove to the children of Israel, the working power of God. Taken in the modern context too (as discussed in Chapter I), the psalms, invariably and with equal force, lay emphasis on the saving and healing power of the most High. The wanderings in the wilderness, reflect the frustrations and hopelessness of the human soul deep in misery and suffering leading to or resulting from complete loss of faith - ("because they had no faith in God,/ and did not trust his saving power.". ps. 78:22. Bible . RSV. p. 517). But the miracle of manna ("Yet he commanded the skies above, / and opened the doors of heaven;/

and he rained down upon them / manna to eat, / and gave them the grain of heaven.". Bible . RSV. p. 517), is one of the many miracles whereby the Omnipotent intervenes to save and redeem his child.

In spite of all this, Man forgets:

> They made a calf in Horeb
> and worshipped a molten image.
> They exchanged the glory of God
> for the image of an ox that eats
> grass.
> They forgot God, their Saviour,
> who had done great things in
> Egypt,. . . . (ps. 106:19-21.Bible . RSV. 535).

Mnemosyne, once again, lifts up her hand to lead the erring Human to his Creator:

> Our fathers, when they were in
> Egypt,
> did not consider thy wonderful
> works;
> They did not remember the abun-
> dance of thy steadfast love,
> but rebelled against the Most

High at the Red Sea.
Yet he saved them for his name's
sake,
that he might make known his
mighty power. (ps. 106:7-8. Bible . RSV. 535).

The psalmists, with reiterated descriptions of the past, thus attempts to bring hope to all those who will but listen to his song of God who is "the hope of all the ends of the earth,". (ps. 65:5. Bible . RSV. 508).

2. Memory organises the experiences of the past and brings them forward as profound experiences of the Now. The past is reinstated in order to bring about a future of hope. Only then can this ". . . history of divine care . . . guide us into new paths of liberation."[9] Memory has arrested from the "nunc flow" of time, moments, and through its poetry has made them eternal moments of today. This is why we are able to plunge into the experiences of the religious poets. The essence of their experience is the same for all ages to come. The relationship between God and Man determines spiritual values and such values know not definitions and

boundaries of time, cast or creed.

In the essay, "Social Experiences of the Saint-Poets"[10], R. C. Mishra discusses the Nirguna School of Hindi Poetry, (12th A. D. to 19th A. D.). While focussing on the various Saint-Poets of the time, he makes the following comment, which goes to show how spiritual values are universal and topical. The Saint-Poets echo the sentiments of the Israelite singer-poet:

> 'He who exists in every pore of the body is the real Rama, the real life, Immanent as he is, he has revealed to me the totality of my own consciousness.' (Saint poet Dedu Dayal. 1544-1603 A. D.)

or,

> 'In the presence of this divine-consciousness there is no room left for untruth, ignorance or narrowness, because there can be no darkness where the sun shines.' (Saint Sundera Das. 1596-1689 A. D.).

R. C. Mishra goes on further to state that "The poetic utterances which emanated from these ordinary personalities were extraordinary. They steered clear of the restrictions of time and space, country and creed. They upheld and promoted values which

nourished and revitalized the social ethos." (p. 41).

These experiences take on a new light when we consider a point - that " the past forces itself into the present precisely in its contrast to the present. What has happened is heard as the antithesis of what is happening . . . The contrast cannot be so described, for properly speaking it is a contrast between what God has done earlier and is now doing. We need to be aware of why the concept 'history' neither appears nor could appear in the Bible. It is simply that the consciousness of the One who is active in what is happening is still too strong. God is confronted with former deeds in order to persuade him to do now, not what he is doing but what by contrast he had done earlier.".[11] Not only men but God too is reminded of His own great deeds so that He might "recollect them", as it were and come to man's aid while he seeks for the exodus out of suffering, for the parting of the sea of obstacles, for the deliverance from the wilderness of trials and tribulations and for the coming into the promised land of peace and hope.

***

3. When the psalmists probe their memories to look into the past, their poetic mission becomes not just the recalling to us of familiar thoughts and scenes, but also the telling of strange and splendid things and the creation of new worlds. Stories of the Divine, of their ancestors and of miraculous events, fulfilled the imagination of those who sang or heard the psalms.

Curiosity, a process of development, also led men to probe into the past. Their discoveries made them narrate stories about the beginnings, about creation and the Creator. Like many instinctive likings, story-telling and listening is a taste Mankind will never lose. It is strongest with the young and the primitive, for they still live in conditions where there is ample scope for the feeding of one's imagination with factual stories of the past. Almost always, the "imagination rejects the vague and whimsical but is readily fired by (in fiction or out) by facts . . .".[12]

On these facts, Imagination creates new worlds of experience and sometimes new creations of this sort are more arresting as,

> "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
> Are sweeter:" (Keats, Ode on a Grecian Urn lines. 12-13.).

When the psalmist, therefore, narrates the stories of God and His people, we are bound to listen with a keen curiosity for,

> "It is in my heart that grown men are but as children in the matter of tales, and the oldest tale is the most beloved."[13]

Let us consider psalm 135 and imagine the poet reciting to a circle of simple, rural audience, whose upbringing has been with Nature:

> Whatever the Lord pleases he does,
> in heaven and on earth,
> in the seas and all deeps.
> He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth,
> who makes lightnings for the rain
> and brings forth the wind from his storehouses. (ps. 135:6-7. Bible . RSV. 550).

The story becomes more interesting when he begins to talk about God's intervention in the lives of the Israelites:

> He it was who smote the first-born of
> Egypt,
> both of man and of beast;
> who in thy midst, O Egypt,
> sent signs and wonders
> against Pharaoh and all his servants;
> who smote many nations
> and slew mighty kings,
> Sihon, king of the Amorites,
> and Og, king of Bashan,
> and all the kingdoms of Canaan,
> and gave their land as a heritage,
> a heritage to his people Israel. (ps. 135:8-12 Bible RSV. 550).

Whenever God intervenes, (as did Krishna in The Mahabharata), the course of events take on a more colourful tone and the inexplicable factor in this context is that men are drawn by some magnetic power to appreciate such phenomenon. The practical minded may scoff at this idea. "People with more caution than faith sometimes comfort themselves with the saying, 'Seeing is Believing'-

meaning that it is wrong to believe anything you cannot see. This is a doctrine of despair'."[14] They seem to be those whose Imagination has seen atrophy. Imagination is a potent weapon in the hands of men like the psalmists. With this weapon they brought to bear upon their songs, the "poetry of interpretation"[15], reflecting life as it is, even with all its disharmonious shades. Life in its totality finds a refuge in the minds and hearts of the psalmists and its story is kept safe and alive in the memories of these men.

4. Memory, in the psalms, is constantly kept alive through the exercise of Imagination. This is the sustaining reality of a people and a person. The poets keep rummaging the Mnemosynic closet, not only for reasons given earlier but also because the question of identity is at stake. To understand this, we take a look at ancient Israel. "Two principal kinds of religion competed for the allegiance of the ancient Israelites. . . . First there is the religion of the Canaanites, well-established in Palestine before the Israelite Conquest, elaborate in its ritual and thoroughly identified with the

interests and pursuits of an agricultural population. Secondly, there is the religion of Moses and the semi-nomads who came out of Egypt and settled in Palestine. This was the very antithesis of the religion they found on their arrival - austere, simply organised, cradled in a desert rather than a settled society, and, therefore, not in the least geared to the everyday life of men who tilled the soil."[16] As an aftermath of this, therefore, prophets and priests worked hard towards preserving the religion of Moses amidst the culture and tradition of Canaan.[17] The religious leaders made every effort to re-establish, first, the identity of the one, true God and second, the identity of His people. Heaton asserts that, "no less than a third of the population practised some form of Canaanite religion."[18] More than one alien form of worship was existant even in the Temple at Jerusalem. It is said that the prophet Ezekiel was "aghast" at the sun worship there.[19]

The psalmists, many of whom were religious teachers re-inforced their songs with narrations of the Divine Love in action, God's guidance and protection so that their people may know

themselves. In spite of all foreign influence, an official religion was kept alive in Israel. This religion insisted on the worship of the one God and the the psalms were, many of them, born of this worship. As long as Memory kept God alive, "Israel never ceased to be a distinctive people.".[20]

In their universal scope, the psalms lend identification not only to a race of people, the Jews, but also to Mankind. Memory, as the mother of poetry, touches the life of each individual and the history of Israel becomes one's own when accepted in the sense that the past is a mirror of a relationship ≠ between God and Man and between Man and his brethren. About two thousand five hundred years ago, the psalmist asked:

> "What is man, that thou art mindful of
> him, ? (ps. 8:4, Bible . RSV. 476).

The very same question is asked even today and in the answer is established the bond between the Creator and His Creation. This sort of relationship based on the unconditional love of the great King

and the selfish love of the mere mortal, is well expressed by Rabindranath Tagore in, Gitanjali where the beggar, (representative of Man) realises how miserly he has been and ultimately weeps wishing that he had ". . . had the heart to give thee [God] my all." Gitanjali. [No. 50.] lines 21-22.

A breakdown in this relationship becomes a cause for despair and frustration. When Memory no longer serves to identify the Self, Man begins to lose his bearings, his identity.

Taken from the level of psychology, M. L. Rosenthal states that Memory has the power to recover the past which has a life of its own and the psychological life is by and large "a matter of accumulating a sense of oneself over the years, against which we balance a sense of the present state of our awareness and the flashes of memory that recall to us who and where we have been in the past."[21]

The "accumulated self", (to borrow again a phrase of Rosenthal), can very often receive a "jolt" as it were, when Memory fails. This would lead to depression and disorders of the mind and spirit. "No malaise is more common than depression, whether in so

extreme a form or in the milder form . . . where the distress comes from a momentary disordering of the relation of present to past."[22]

If the psalms, therefore were not to continuously establish the identity of Man in relation to God, if memory could not recollect the past, Man would then lose meaning in existence. Many times, in the psalms of lament and suffering, the poet has cried out, forlorn and forsaken:

"I am weary with my moaning;" (ps. 6:6.Bible . RSV. 475)

or,

"O Lord, heal me, for my bones are
troubled.
My soul also is sorely troubled."(ps.6:2-4.Bible .
RSV.474.)

But when he remembers God as, "the helper of the fatherless" (ps. 10:14. RSV. 477) and the fact that the Divine Father made Man in His image, he is filled with great joy and a sense of belonging:

Yet thou hast made him little less
than God,
and dost crown him with glory and
honour.

Thou hast given him dominion over
the works of thy hands;
thou has put all things under his
feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the
sea,
whatever passes along the paths of
the sea. (ps. 8:5-8. Bible . RSV. 476).

Good and bad experiences become a force that reveals when Memory knocks. We become a part of what we once were:

"I am a part of all that I have met;
. . . . . .
. . . that which we are, we are;" (Tennyson. Ulysses. lines 18-67).

In the psalms, there is a sharing of memories which brings about a "kindred revelation".[23] It evokes a situation where there is sympathy with the poet who remembers. Thus Memory becomes another instrument for communion. She brings the hearers of these "songs", into sympathy with the poets thus revealing their experiences. In the process we have also "remembered" and "seen" how God kept his

covenant with His children and how involved He is in the build-up of their lives.

Very often, the re-experiencing of a past state achieves a colouring of the realm of dreams. The intoning of these verses vibrate the subconscious part of Memory and thus the composers of these poems were perhaps, many times, prompted to fall into a reverie-like condition where they had visions of mystical content. "In all of us there lives a man who is visited by dreams, who has been intensely inspired by idealism, be it momentary, whose attention suddenly wavers at the remembrance of a former life, who is intoxicated by the vision of future. Some have him badly, some in a lesser degree. One of the functions of stimulating literature is to satisfy this dreamer in all of us."[24] The only point of difference here would be that "remembrance of a former life", would not detract in the case of the psalmist. It would be the starting point of a vision of hope.

For the Israelites, therefore, preserving the past, is crucial to their finding themselves as God's chosen people and to their

growth as a nation. In his essay, "What is Nation-Soul?" Sri Aurobindo asseverates that "the primal law and purpose" of an individual and a nation is to seek at "self-formulation, - to find itself,"because it is "a living power of the Eternal Truth, a self-manifesting spirit."[25] This may be true of the ancient Hebrew poets.

The pressure of memory is, thus most powerfully felt in the poetic imagination of the psalmists of Israel and its relevance cannot be underscored.

***

Works Cited

1. Lascelles Abercrombie, The Idea of Great Poetry (London: Secker, 1926). 108.

2. M. L. Rosenthal, Poetry and the Common Life (New York: Oxford University, 1974), 20.

3. E. W. Heaton, Everyday Life in Old Testament Times 1956, (London: B. T. Batsford, 1966) 211-213.

4. Rosenthal, 23.

5. E. M. W. Tillyard, Poetry Direct and Oblique, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1956) 16.

6. Claus Westermann, Praise and Lament in the Psalms, trans., Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen, (Atlanta: John ~~Konx~~ Knox Press, 1981) 219.

7. Ibid, 228.

8. Ibid, 228-9

9. J. David Pleins, The Psalms: Songs of Tragedy, Hope and Justice , (New York: Orbis, 1993) 152.

10. R. C. Mishra, "Social Experience of the Saint-Poets" , Indian Literature, vol. 27, No. 2, (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, March-April 1984) 39-55.

11. Claus Westermann, Praise and Lament in the Psalms, trans, Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen, (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 215.

12. " The Large Youthful Appetite for Magic and Fantasy ", The British Imagination: A Critical Survey from The Times Literary Supplement, (London: Cassell, 1961) 68-75.

13. Rudyard Kipling, "Life's Handicap", qtd. in P. H. B. Lyon, The Discovery of Poetry (London: Arnold, 1932) 32.

14. P. H. B. Lyon, 28.

15. Lascelles Abercrombie, The Idea of Great Poetry (London: Secker, 1926) 11.

16. E. W. Heaton, Everyday Life in Old Testament Times, 1956, (London: B. T. Batsford, 1966) 211.

17. Ibid, 213.

18. Ibid, 231.

19. Ibid, 231-232.

20. Ibid, 233.

21. M. L. Rosenthal, Poetry and the Common Life (New York: Oxford University P, 1974) 22.

22. Ibid, 23.

23. Ibid, 25.

24. Abul Bashar, "A Green Thought in a Green Shade", Telegraph, (Calcutta) 11 Nov 1994.

25. Sri Aurobindo, "What is Nation-Soul ?",Sri Aurobindo on Social Sciences and Humanities for the New Age: An Anthology comp., Kewal Motwani, (Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1962) 125-127.

Chapter III

Incantation

Primitive song, worship and ritual, have as one of the integral components, the technique of Incantation. Since poetry also grew out of ancient song, it too is not without this element. Before we discuss the use of Incantation in the psalms, it would be relevant to define the term so as to isolate its significance in the context of these holy poems.

"Incantation" the word, stirs up many associations. Imagination may turn to focus on medieval legends of knights in shiny armour and beautiful damsels in distress with wizards and witches mouthing incantatory spells. Imagination may lead us to the jungles of Africa where the tribal thumps his tom-tom while his brave compatriots chant as they tread an endless war-dance. Imagination may take us to Vedic times where the brahmin meditates before the "agni" (fire), chanting a "mantra" (chant), such as the "OM" and thus

chanting, he is lifted up to a higher plane of spiritual awareness. Whatever the case may be, two factors are to be noted in Incantation:

(a) that it is a kind of a charm with great potency:

"[use of] magical formula; spell, charm."[1]

(b) that it makes use of rhythmic repetition.

In ritualistic worship, incantation takes the form of constant repetition of words or sentences. The priest intones the main prayer while the congregation joins in, in the refrain. In songs too, incantation could take the form of a refrain or chorus. In poetry, especially with the simpler forms, incantatory effect can be produced by the repetition of single words, phrases or sentences. The following could serve as examples:

(a) What was he doing, the great god Pan , (emphasis added),
Down in the reeds by the river ?
. . . . . .
He tore out a reed, the great god Pan , (emphasis added),
From the deep cool bed of the river:
. . . . . .
High on the shore sat the great god Pan , (emphasis added)
While turbidly flow'd the river;

(Browning, E. B. A Musical Instrument . verses 1-3)

(b) This is the weather the cuckoo likes,
And so do I; (emphasis added.)
. . . . . .
This is the weather the shepherd shuns,
And so do I; (emphasis added.).
(Hardy, Thomas. Weathers . lines 1 - 2;
10 - 11).

(c) And the silent isle imbowers
The Lady of Shalott (emphasis added.)
. . . . . .

Or is she known in all the land,
The Lady of Shalott . (emphasis added.)
(Tennyson. The Lady of Shalott . verses 2 and 3)

In many poems, incantation assumes greater proportions of a refrain as in The Stolen Child by W. B. Yeats, where the verse-repetition has a lilting, haunting, hypnotic tune:

Come away, O human child !
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than
you can understand.

This explicit form of incantation diminishes and becomes merged subtly with the rhythm, or, totally absent, in many modern poems.

When we look at the poetry of the psalms, we do not always discern a simple, single formula that is incantation. There is no constant intoning of a "mantra" - like charm that grasps the mind into an enchanted spell. It is not as though the psalmist utters a simple charm like the magical, "abracadabra" and "hey presto !", we are all spell-bound. Incantation, in these treasured songs of Israel, takes on a deeper and a more ingenious tone.

It would be well to consider here, Lascelles Abercrombie's definition of incantation. Incantation, he says, is, " . . . the power of using words so as to produce in us a sort of enchantment: This power not merely charms and delights but kindles our minds into unusual vitality . . . ". He goes on to explain the fact that this vitality helps the mind to be in a state of enchantment, making it "exquisitely aware both of things and of the connections of things." But of this experience of being enchanted, Abercrombie says, ". . . we do not require an absolute enchantment in every phrase we read,

even in the finest poetry. The poets have an art of making us expect the magical phrase; and when it comes, it casts its enchantment over the whole surrounding . . . " [2] (p. 18)

The poet, through incantation, does not merely recount a fact. More than its description, he is, with this device, able to re-create the experience of the fact so that we are able to live the experience.

One reason why incantation is important to the psalmist is that the "Psalms were made to be repeated by heart, not read.".[3]

Having emerged from ancient Israel's public worship, these poems, as a form of prayer were, oral in form. This form of prayer is common to most religions of the east. "Most of the psalms were sung and prayed along before being written down. They were first committed to writing in the process of the growth of the whole collection . . . when we say that the psalms were formed in Israel's worship, we mean a worship which at that time was the heartbeat of the whole community. Israel could no more exist without worship

than worship could exist without Israel. The function of this worship can best be understood as like the veins which link the heart with the whole body, conveying the life-force, which went out from worship into the people's ordinary life . . . ".[4] Thus the participation of the lay people in ritualistic prayer may of necessity have demanded an expression that was facile and easy to grasp. The incantatory method made the psalms not only easier to remember and recite but also simpler to comprehend when ideas are emphasised through balance of sentences (parallelism). We are told that " . . . the proper pronunciation of Hebrew is simply unknown . . ." and that ". . . the discovery and description of this verse system is a task beyond human ability.".[5] We will, therefore ask, how incantation is still discernable in the translated versions. We are aware that in translations and vernacular renditions, many elements of the poetry of the psalms are lost - like assonance, alliteration and metre, for instance. But the incantatory effect of the psalms do not rest with these only. A major part of the effect is produced by the method of repetition - repetition not only of

sounds, single words and phrases but also of whole verse-structures generally called, "parallelismus membronum" or "parallelism".[6] Parallelism is to Hebrew poetry, what rhyme and meter are for traditional English poetry.

The Hebrews, we are told, were fond of repetition.[7] They believed that anything worth telling was worth telling again and again. This is true, not only of the Hebrews but of all simple, basic, human, people with simple, basic, human sensibilities. As Marjorie Boulton in The Anatomy of Poetry,[8] says, we have a tendency to repeat ourselves when we are very happy or angry or distressed. The psalmist too goes through all these rhythmic upheavals of joy and sorrow. Sometimes, in the fullness of joy, he praises the name of God again and again:

> Bless the Lord, O my soul;
> and all that is within me,
> bless his holy name !
> Bless the Lord, O my soul,
> and forget not all his benefits,
> who forgives all your iniquity,
> who heals all your diseases,
> who redeems your life from the Pit,

who crowns you with steadfast love
and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as
you live
so that your youth is renewed like
the eagle's. (ps. 103:1-5, Bible . RSV, 531).

At othertimes, the psalmist suffers in anger and shouts out to God:

Thou hast made us turn back from
the foe;
and our enemies have gotten spoil.
Thou hast made us like sheep for
slaughter,
and hast scattered us among the
nations.
Thou hast sold thy people for a trifle,
demanding no high price for them. (emphasis added)
(ps. 44:10-12. Bible . RSV. 497)

The litany goes on along this line with the constant repetition of "Thou hast . . . ". This psalm illustrates the idea of how the poet produces an incantatory vibration that resounds past the physical to the realms of the spiritual so that the Soul eventually

picks up the harmonious resonance. In this particular psalm, unit 1 is repeated in unit 2. This is what we know as synonymous parallelism. In the subsequent units, this idea about the goodness of God is expanded and illustrated to form the synthetic or complementary parallelism. There is also a third type of parallelism. When the thoughts of the first part is reversed, the structure is normally termed, the antithetic parallelism.[9] An example of the latter is found is psalm 37:21-22:

> The wicked borrows, and cannot pay
> back,
> but the righteous is generous and
> gives;
> for those blessed by the Lord shall
> possess the land,
> but those cursed by him shall be
> cut off. (Bible . RSV. 493)

Here, the contrast-balance of ideas helps to emphasise the point on the necessity of being righteous.

Besides the repeating of verse-structures, the psalmist very

often repeats a word, a phrase or a sentence. For example:

> Let Israel say,
> "His steadfast love endures for
> ever."
> Let the house of Aaron say,
> "His steadfast love endures for
> ever."
> Let those who fear the Lord say,
> "His steadfast love endures for
> ever." (ps. 118:2-4. Bible . RSV. 541.).

The repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of successive verses is termed, "anaphora" while "epiphora" is the repetition of the same word or words at the end of successive verses.[10]

To explain in detail the device of parallelism, is to tread well-worn paths as scholars have already done much spade work on this. Claus Westermann talks about the "parallelism of members" and compares this to the "runners of a rocking chair."[11] Edward J. Kissane, explains parallelism in terms of "clause" - verses, each containing two, three or four "tonic accents".[12] These clauses,

he explains, are "sense divisions" where each verse is interconnected to form a group which develops a certain phase of the poet's thoughts. In The Psalms: Songs of Tragedy, Hope and Justice, David Pleins identifies the different types of parallelism as "bicola" (couplets), "colon" (the balancing line in the couplet), "tricola" (3 colons) and "quartrains".[13] Norman Snaith, in, The Hymns of the Temple, discusses the poetry of the psalms with a reference to T. H. Robinson's, Poetry and the Poets of the Old Testament. (1947, pp 11-46) [the title of Robinson's work is recorded thus.] Borrowing a remark of Robinson's, Snaith writes:

> "Every verse must consist of at least two "members",
> the second of which must, more or less completely,
> satisfy the expectation raised by the first."[14] (p. 21).

A similar idea, according to Clyde S. Kilby, in Poetry and Life: An Introduction to Poetry, is expressed by Professor Richard Mouton, who felt ". . . that in Hebrew poetry of the highest rhythmic beauty the effect depends neither on rhyme nor on meter, but, "Like the swing

of a pendulum to and fro, like the tramp of an army marching in step, the versification of the Bible moves with a rhythm of parallel lines."[15] In all, we get a fairly clear picture of what parallelism is all about. The aim of this study is not to define it further but to analyse how this device is a form of incantation in the holy psalms and to what purpose this technique is used. Thus we leave the technical aspect of these repetitions to dwell more intensively on the magical power released by these repetitive chants.

Any form of repetition, simple or sophisticated, plays a significant role in existance: the rotation and revolution of the earth, the moon and the planets, the patterned change of seasons and time, the evolution of life from birth, growth and death, the surging in and out of ocean tides, the harmonic law in all creation, the rhythmic flow of joy and grief. The progress of life depends on this rhythm of harmony. From the very infanthood, Man has responded to this rhythm of repetition as when he was rocked to sleep in his mother's arms, or when he first identified his parents as, "da-da", "pa-pa", and "ma-ma", "am-ma", his furry pet as "bow-wow", and his

miniature train as "chug-chug" or "puff-puff". Thus the rhythmic and incantatory ritual of prayer, of communication, should not dull or disrupt. Its effect is the opposite.

The practice of chanting is often considered a "primitive" practice. We tend to think of "primitive" in somewhat a derogatory sense - the ignorant, the unillumined. It would be more relevant to consider this: that in the primitive condition of being is a greater awareness of all things in creation. The psalmist, in this way was not oblivious of cosmic time as well as the cosmic spirit and by the incantation of his verses, he strove to reawaken his brethren's Souls and tune it to a greater Harmony.

Israel's many hymns, according to Sigmund Mowinckel, belong to the cultic festivals.[16] In this form of congregational worship, those assembled together could experience and never forget God's presence through repetitive recounting of His great deeds.

"... the mainly brief psalms so easily impress themselves on the worshippers' minds that, with regular recital, they take root of

themselves in the memory and do not need to be learned, as we say, 'by heart'. In this manner they were able to be transmitted from generation to generation."[17]

In the repetitive chanting of the psalms, the following needs were addressed and fulfilled:

1. The need to establish God as a<u>living</u> , <u>acting</u> and a <u>mighty</u> Presence, through constant emphasis on His wondrous works.
2. The need to re-create the psalmist's experience of the Holy in his life, so that we, too, can live in and be witness to that experience.
3. The need to participate together in worship (as cultic performances.).
4. The need to exercise our primal, human sensibilities- love, justice, compassion, gratitude, joy - which would

otherwise fall into a state of atrophy. [An idea, parallel to this, is contained in Thomas De Quincey's essay, on the functions of Literature: "Were it not that human sensibilities are ventilated and continually called out into exercise by the great phenomena of infancy ..... or of literature as it recombines these elements in the mimicries of poetry, romance, etc., it is certain that, like any animal power or muscular energy falling into disuse, all such sensibilities would gradually drop and dwindle." [18]]

And then, we have the final and perhaps the most important need:

5. the need to sometimes transcend the worldly - with all its mundane trivialities - to rise above all else and be at peace with oneself and all the rest. The music of incantation is able to do this: to lift the soul up to the tune of Harmony.

Incantation, therefore, has a magical and hypnotic effect. It makes use of repetition to release a power within. Saying the rosary

with continuous appeals of, "Hail Mary", or turning the prayer-wheel, or chanting the "Gayatri Mantra", or the singing of "bhajans", are all akin to the psalmist's mode of chanting thus:

> O give thanks to the Lord,
> for he is good,
> for his steadfast love endures for
> ever.
> O give thanks to the God of gods,
> for his steadfast love endures for
> ever.
> O give thanks to Lord of lords,
> for his steadfast love endures for
> ever; . . . (ps. 136:1-3. Bible . RSV. 551.).

"The repetitive and intensifying style of Hebrew poetry surrounds and continually immerses the hearer or singer in the issues of the text, as Bonhoeffer notes:

> "'This form . . . encourages us not to allow the prayer to be cut off prematurely, and it invites us to pray together with one another. That which seems to be unnecessary repetition to us, who are inclined to pray too hurriedly, is actually proper

> immersion and concentration in prayer. It is at the same time the sign that many, indeed all believers, pray with different words yet with one and the same word. . . ' " .[19]

***

We have dwelt much on repetition as a main form of incantation. This is not all. To recall Abercrombie's phrase, incantation is, and I would say, the other aspect of it, is, ". . . the power of using words . . ." (or phrase or concepts), ". . . so as to produce in us a sort of enchantment . . . "[20] With regard to the psalms, it is not the power of "words" alone, but of phrases and sentences that together communicate a thought, a fact, an experience that lend the magical lustre of enchantment to the whole texture of the poem. To dwell on single words is not the motive here, as these poems have been subject to various translations and though the meaning remains more or less the same, the impact of one word may vary in degree from the impact of its synonym.

There may be various occasions for the poet's incantation but

the purpose is always the same - to produce a state of enchantment. It may be a moment of sensation only, or a moment compact with feeling, sensation, emotion amalgamated, but always, it is an individual, unique and exquisite moment of truth.

The glow of such magical moments has its source in the emotive use of phrases and sentences often bearing significant and valuable contextual meaning. At this point, it seems necessary to recall V. K. Chari's essay, "The Language of poetry", where an attempt is made to inquire into the differentia of poetic language and the function of language in poetry. In this context, he writes: "Sanskrit poeticians have grappled with the question of what is the soul or essence of poetry (kavyātmā), and offered diverse definitions that the poetic essence consists in Rasa or relish, in Alankāra (ornaments or poetic figures), in Riti or Style understood as a special arrangement or combination of words, in Vakrokti or a striking mode of speech based on 'double entendre', in Dhvani or suggestiveness. Nearly all these theories assume that there is a special poetic use of language, and that poetic language possesses certain distinct virtues . . . . In spite of their varying emphases,

the Sanskrit poeticians, on the whole, are agreed on the point that suggestion is the chief element in the arousal of the peculiar poetic delight." (pp. 14-15).[21]

In the psalms, this poetic delight springs from the conceptual use of language. "A lot of good poetry everywhere has contained large generalizations on life; delight in the contemplation of universals, has been an important element in the poetry of all ages."[22] Such statements, whether direct and simple or referential, have had that potent power to bring about a state of enchantment. When, for instance, the psalmist utters in thankful realisation, "This is the day which the Lord has made;/Let us rejoice and be glad in it" (ps. 118:24.Bible . RSV. 542.), we are swept into a revelation of a Universal truth that gets lost often times in this hectic world of ours. This is the power which prods us to faith and belief. This is that magnetic utterance which acquires an intensity of expression which is more than informative. It comes with the same directness and intensity as a line from Milton, for instance: "The mind is its own place and in itself/ can make a Heaven of Hell and a Hell of Heaven." (Paradise Lost. 1. lines 254-5.)

Another powerful instance is born in the following:

> "Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;" (ps.37:7. Bible . RSV.492. emphasis added)
>
> and in,
>
> "But the meek shall possess the land," (ps. 37:11. Bible . RSV. 492.).

The concept of being "still" in the first line is highly evocative and heightens our awareness of all that is around us. The imperative statement commands us to listen, a thing we rarely do because it is the negation of the ego, the "I". The second line with the impact of "meek" and "possess", the paradoxical content re-empahsises the importance of humility and selflessness.

In psalm 9:18, the music of hope and confidence rings out in the idea of :

> For the needy shall not always be forgotten,
> and the hope of the poor shall not perish for ever. (Bible . RSV. 476.)

and in moments of aching and stumbling, the psalmist tells us as he did hundreds of years ago, to "cast your [our] burden on the Lord/

and he will sustain you." (ps. 55:22.Bible . RSV. 503.) These are powerful statements that reassure, potent elixirs that lift up. Even out of context, most of them do not lose their charm. A few more instances may be considered here:

Psalm 111:10 - "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" (Bible . RSV. 539.)

Psalm 12:6 - The promises of the Lord are
promises that are pure,
silver refined in a furnace on the ground,
purified seven times. (Bible .RSV. 478.).

Psalm 42:1 - As a hart longs
for flowing streams,
so longs my soul
for thee, O God. (Bible .RSV. 496.).

Psalm 57:1 - in the shadow of thy wings I will take refuge,
till the storms of destruction pass by. (Bible .RSV. 504.).

Psalm 50:11 - "I know all the birds of the air,
and all that moves in the field is mine," (Bible .RSV. 500.)

Psalm 50:23 - "He who brings thanks giving as his sacrifice honours me;" (Bible .RSV. 501.)

Psalm 51:17 - The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;" (Bible .RSV. 501.)

These sayings, despite their seemingly simple character, become more powerfully stimulating once taken in the context of the whole poem. With life's ups and down that we go through, it is not too difficult to identify with the experience of the psalmist. When this happens, these lines become all the more potent. They draw us into a moment, compact with truth.

"The poet uses words not merely to make declarations, statements of fact. This is usually the last thing that concerns him. He seeks above all to put words together in such a way that they exercise a mysterious and vital reactivity among themselves, and so release their secret content of associations to produce in the reader an experience that enriches the depths of his spirit in a manner quite unique."[23]

Thus we see that Incantation is one element of poetry that has

an effective role to play in the psalms of the Old Testament. We have noted how it is based on, first, the use of repetition and second, on the uses of words as an emotive and conceptual power. These words are "value-words", (Emphasis added.) words which represent ". . . concepts and feelings universally regarded as valuable,"[24]

Like most good poetry, the psalms cannot do without this power of incantation - the power to hold us spellbound in universal truths. Through the incantation of the verses, the voice of these ancient poet-singers, is kept alive so that it may be heard again and again, ever more audibly.

***

Works Cited

1. The New Oxford Illustrated Dictionary, 1978, 4th ed., (Sydney: Bay Books; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), 843.

2. Lascelles Abercrombie, The Idea of Great Poetry, 3rd Impression, (London: Secker, 1926), 18.

3. Mary Perkins Ryan, Key to the Psalms, (Chicago: Fides Publishers Assn., 1957), 181.

4. Claus Westerman, The Living Psalms, trans., J. R. Porter, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 4.

5. R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer and Roland Murphy. eds. The Jerome Biblical Commentary: The Old Testament, Vol. I, 1968, (Bangalore: Theological Publications of India, 1972), 240.

6. Claus Westermann, The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message, trans., Ralph D. Gehrke, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 21.

7. Mary Perkins Ryan, Key to the Psalms, (Chicago: Fides Publishers Assn., 1957), 181.

8. Marjorie Boulton, The Anatomy of Poetry, 1953, (London:

Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968),73.

9. Claus Westermann, trans., Ralph D. Gehrke,The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 21.

10. Peter F. Ellis, The Men and the Message of the Old Testament , (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1963), 115.

11. Claus Westermann, The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message , trans., Ralph D. Gehrke, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 21.

12. Edward J. Kissane, The Book of Psalms , Vol I, (Dublin: Brown & Nolan, 1953), 38.

13. J. David Pleins, The Psalms: Songs of Tragedy, Hope and Justice , (New York: Orbis, 1993), 6-7.

14. Norman Snaith, The Hymns of the Temple , (London: SCM, 1957), ~~22~~ 21.

15. Clyde S. Kilby, Poetry and Life: An Introduction to Poetry, (New York: Odyssey, 1953), 184.

16. Sigmund Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel's Worship , trans., D. R. Ap - Thomas, Vol I, 1962, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell,

1967), 8.

17. Claus Westermann, The Living Psalms , trans., J. R. Porter, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 19.

18. Thomas De Quincey, "Literature", Several Essays , ed., G. F. J. Cumberlege, 2nd. edition. (Calcutta: Oxford UP, 1990), 83-88.

19. J. David Pleins, The Psalms: Songs of Tragedy, Hope and Justice , (New York: Orbis, 1993), 8-9.

20. Lascelles Abercrombie, The Idea of Great Poetry , 3rd. Impression, (London: Secker, 1926), 18.

21. V. K. Chari, "The Language of Poetry", Indian Journal of English Studies , IV. 1. (1963): 11-23.

22. Ibid 15.

23. Thomas Merton, Bread in the Wilderness, (London: Hollis & Carter, 1954), 45.

24. V. K. Chari, "The Language of Poetry", Indian Journal of English Studies , IV. 1. (1963) :17.

Chapter IV

Image:
Some Significant Comparisons, based on the Simile and the Metaphor.

Image-making, founded on simple, direct comparisons, is almost a pivotal, poetic process in the psalms. The ancient singer is prolific with the use of the simile and the metaphor. The cause of this may be discovered in the primitive and elemental nature of the poets and their compositions and also in the ulterior purpose behind their expressions. This idea is made more explicit as this chapter unfolds. This is the first aim.

Another aim of this chapter is to focus on, select and comment on some comparisons based only on the simile and the metaphor of interesting signification. Through this discusssion, we hope to detect their relevance to these valuable poems.

We can see that the psalms abound in a plethora of similes and metaphors. From the very first psalm, where the poet talks about the upright as being "like a tree planted by streams of water", we

travel through the realms of the Psalter, meeting the wicked who are "like chaff which the wind drives away" (ps.1), the enemy who is "like a lion" (ps. 7) that gnaws and rends, or, like the "howling" and "prowling" "dogs" (ps.59). The persecution of the righteous by the ungodly is strongly emphasised by such comparisons. That is not all. The evildoers seem to be plotting against the psalmists and laying traps such as the "pits" (ps. 28) or the "net" (ps.25), to ensnare him. Many times, the psalmist himself has sinned and the burden of guilt is too great. His strength fails then and his "bones" "waste away" (ps. 31) and he becomes "like a broken vessel" (ps. 31). But God has not forgotten him. The estranged find "refuge in the shadow of thy [God's] wings" (ps 36), support and inspiration in the "rock" (ps 28), the "fortress" (ps.62), the "stronghold" (ps.27), and the "shepherd" (ps.23), who is the Lord. These are some instances of how the poets of Israel expressed themselves.

"How imagery comes to the poet, how it is 'carried alive into the heart by passion' is, ultimately, too mysterious a process to analyze. It brings us back at once to the problem of creation in

general. Under the influence of the creative ferment the consciousness of the poet seizes associations - or is seized by them, for the process of association is always partly unconscious and poetry is the union of the mental and emotional excitement of the experience with the imagery which leaps to meet it, and which must be already in the memory of the poet."[1]

Building pictures by comparing and associating when, ". . . what is presented to the physical eye is off-centre."[2], is a technique of expression not confined to poetry alone. Neither is this method of communication limited to the literati. Such poetic processes happen even to the "humblest" of men - the illiterate, the primitive, the rustic, the "coolie" and even the child. All of them represent in greater "purity", the being called, Man. Thus when we meet a farmer in the busty, who, swelling with pride informs that his oranges are "as sweet as honey!", or that his son was born the year "the mangoes grew to be almost as big as water-melons!", then, we, not minding the hyperbole, respond with a sense of pleasure born of an understanding of the actualized experience. We have only to

look around with eyes that see and ears that hear to realise that this particular "poetic process goes on incessantly in the minds of people who would never believe it,. . . "[3] The coolie talks of his load being "as heavy as stones", the old traveller finds it difficult to climb the hill which is "as steep as his nose", (cf. Nepali equivalent: "Naakh Justo Ukaalo".), the starving beggar is "a stick of skin and bones" and the servant realises that his "saheb" will "roar like a lion!", if he reports late to work. All this may be complemented with gesticulations, sometimes exaggerated, to mean, "this big", "that far", "so much" and so forth.

Even a child needs the language of comparison for a more concrete and simpler understanding of ideas. This is a conviction drawn from the personal experience of hectically conducting the growth of three, very curious children, who, many times, attempt to comprehend this world through definite, precise formualations. "Is the number twenty, as big as this room?", "Was Snow-White as pretty as me?", "Can a bear run as fast as dada?", and so the world of the simile and metaphor is constantly kept alive.

As we climb higher up in the social strata, we may not be as basic and as explicit with our terms of comparison, but the use is still discernable. Very often, we choose to "hammer home" a point on an issue which may remain as "dead as a dodo" if we are "quiet as a mouse". Depending on how well the point is taken, our hopes "soar like an eagle" or become a "collapsing balloon". We are constantly speaking the language of simile and metaphor. In an attempt to communicate an experience "alive", we are groping for tangible visualizations and from the vast treasure house of past experiences and memories, we sketch out an image best suited to concretize the present experience. Through feeling and association, an image is set beside another image. We feel a likeness, direct or subtle, between objects and situations which to a scientific mind may not appear congruous.

" 'Every human mind," writes Shelley in his Essay on Christianity, 'has what Lord Bacon calls it idola specus, peculiar images which reside in the inner cave of thought.' "[4]

Whenever there is a need to express vividly and vitally, the

human mind has sought recourse to the depths of our beings to search for and project meanings. "Our minds search for the inner-depths of ourselves, we absorb the outside world into those depths as naturally as infants try to put whatever is before them into their mouths . . . all experience is an invasion of ourselves . . . But whatever enters is transformed by an inner process that assimilates it into our own natures just as the body assimilates food. Everything we experience is given human and personal meaning by means of this process, and in turn project images into the outer world again that reflect both what we experienced originally and what we have made of it because of the pressure of our own memories and needs and personalities."[5]

In the world of today, however, too often we find ourselves using comparisons without meaning. We "laugh like anything" or "play like fun"[6] or "shout like nobody's business" and so forth. If we are to follow Eliot's stance that modern poetry should of necessity be complex because it reflects a chaotic age, then our speech sometimes could be a projection of a barren spirit. This is more

reason why we turn appreciatingly to the psalms.

The ancient Israelite singer-poets, either consciously or unconsciously, worked with a motive - to make their utterance one of directness, vividness, accuracy and enrichment. But they had to explain the inexplicable - profound, spiritual arousals and intense, emotional turbulences. These situations had to be simplified and made comprehensible and hence the psalmists, having been divinely inspired, took to familiar, simplified pictures of birds and beasts, water and sand, rock and hill, pits and nets, pots and vessels, all borrowed from the landscape of routine everyday life.

In The Sweet Singer of Israel, C. C. Martindale, S. J. asserts that to look into "the Hebrew state of mind", one has to start with "the small picturesque sentences that occur most unconsciously in the Psalms."[7] As examples of these "small picturesque sentences" he lists, among others, some phrases and sentences of metaphorical interest - "solid rock" (ps. 26:6), "waters of refreshment" (ps.22:2), "snatched as a lion does" (ps. 7:3, ps, 16:12, ps. 9:29),

"He dug a hole . . . "(ps. 7:15), "like a bird . . . " (ps. 124:7), "devours my people like bread" (ps. 14:4).

The Hebrew mind, it seems, was simple and untarnished by the complexities and variety of modern civilization. This was probably why, he could project images, so rudimentary, that a direct metaphor or a simile could encompass them. Take for an instance, the concept of God. He did not have to analyse or theologise in philosophical or psychological terms, as many of us of the modern, "learned" age are wont to do. A great deal of time is spent in defining God and because our heads are full of knowledge, we forget to contact the library of the Soul. But the psalmist knew his God: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I / shall not want; … " (ps. 23:1 Bible . RSV. 484).

This clear picture of God as a shepherd , has great warmth and significance. The word, "shepherd", is a condensation of all the attributes of God - loving, kind, protecting, caring, feeding. Being nomadic and leading pastoral lives, the Israelites did not find the image of the good shepherd too difficult to visualize. A shepherd is not only one who cares and looks after his sheep. He

is also the ". . . one who bears in himself the spirit of a community. The great leaders of mankind were called in ancient times, "shepherds", because they did not egotiscally shut themselves up in a private life of their own . . ., but let the destiny of others live in their hearts. One who met such a "shepherd" had the feeling: I am not coming to someone who is a stranger, but to myself. What is best and most individual in me is at home in him."[8] This portrait of God has a universal colour. In the Gospel of St. John, (10:10) Jesus Christ refers to himself as the True, Good Shepherd, who, unlike the other hireling shepherds, does not flee when he sees a wolf coming. In this context, Christ says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."[9] The shepherd is "the giver of life", ("Jeevan-data", "Rakhwala", in Hinduism), - a universal concept. Though the "shepherd" by itself may be a fast-fading image - the quality it represents, has topical interest. (See also ps. 78:52, 70, &71)

In psalm 18:2, we take another look at God:

"The Lord is my <u>rock</u> , and my
<u>fortress</u> , and my deliverer,

> my God, my rock , in whom I take
> refuge,
> my shield , and the horn of my
> salvation, my stronghold . (emphasis added.).
> (ps. 18;1-2. Bible . RSV.480.).

The comparison of God to a "rock" occurs very many times in the psalms. (Psalms: 28, 31, 61, 62, 71, 78, 92, 94, 95, 144). He is also the "fortress" (pss. 31, 59, 62, 71, 144), a "stronghold" (pss. 27, 94, 144), and a "shield" (pss. 5, 7, 18, 28, 33, 59, 76, 84, 89, 91, 115, 144). In psalm 18, the Lord is referred to as "the horn of my salvation", while psalms 36, 55, 57, 61, 91, speak of God's enfolding, protecting and sheltering "wings". When His people sin against him, He can be an angry God. His "Jealous wrath burn[s] like fire" (ps. 79:5), and "as fire consumes the forest / as the flame sets the mountains/ablaze," (ps. 83:14.Bible . RSV. 521), the fire of His anger terrifies the sinners. But the Lord keeps His covenant with His people. His promises are "silver-refined in a furnace on the / ground/purified seven times.", (ps. 12:6 Bible . RSV. 478).

These are the significant comparisons made with a view to

defining and making real, the conception of the Divine. The images are built quite naturally in the minds of a people who have lived in "a mountainous semi-arid country . . . [and who are] . . . constantly engaged in guerilla warfare and battles with their neighbours and with enemies among their own countrymen. The life of King David, in particular, provides a vivid commentary on these images. How often he was forced to seek refuge in caves, on rocky heights . . . how constantly he needed all the weapons known to his times !"[10] The concept of a "rock", a "fortress", a "stronghold", is therefore not steeped in vagueness and abstractions - these were then and are today, still, symbols of invincibility and impregnability. Besides having reference to the natural environment, the picture of God is also built on images drawn from the military arena. Although it is mostly the enemy who is accredited with the "bow and the arrow" (cf. pss. 37, 38, 44, 57, 76, 78), it is almost always God who is "a shield". "The Assyrian reliefs show archers operating from the cover of enormous shields, which sometimes curved over the soldier's head to make a kind of canopy. Such bulky contraptions

required the services of a shield-bearer, although, as they were made of plaited osiers, their weight was not necessarily very great. It is just possible that the Hebrew term for a 'large shield' refers to this Assyrian type. . . "[11]

Because of the largeness and the protective ability of the shield, it seemed most natural for the psalmist to talk about God in comparison to this weapon. Fortresses and walls were integral to their living as the cities in Old Testament times were always built with surrounding walls and fortifications.

Then we have the image of God's tender, loving, protecting "wings", a metaphor which can be discerned quite often in the poems. (Pss. 36, 55, 59, 61, 91). These wings are over-arched above Man's head. They envelope him and whenever he falls or is persecuted, he regains new vigour from this caring touch. (Ps. 91:4). This metaphor of wings could trigger off a vision of a soaring eagle - strong and powerful, yet tender and gentle in all its feathery softness. The eagle also "denotes wisdom and sublimity. The eagle being the swiftest, strongest and boldest of birds, is equivalent

of the lion among animals."[12]

Fire and brimstone evoke a bold picture of God's vengeful ire. (Pss. 21, 78, 79, 83, 102). During war-time, fire was used as a powerful and dangerous weapon, especially when there was a siege. Flaming torches were hurled over the walls and a favourite manouvre was to dig trenches at the base, stack up the masonry with timber and then set fire to the wood. The walls would collapse into these trenches.[13] "Fire is an ambivalent symbol representing both destruction and regeneration."[14] In the psalms, it symbolises more, the flaming power of God - especially in its destructive capacity.

These are, therefore, the prominent images of God. The Shepherd, the rock, the stronghold, the shield (or buckler) and the bird. The angry God is present too but not as often as the compassionate God. In psalm 18, He has been called "the horn of my salvation", because the horns of a wild animal, besides being an adornment, was also a weapon. The horn symbolised power and honour.[15]

Psalm 27 begins with the proclamation: "The Lord is my light". This is a universal image of God. All religions, accept this, along with the symbols of the sun and the halo. "The enlightening power of the Divine light which penetrates the 'darkness of unknowing.' Light, in itself formless, gives form, and consequently meaning, to that which emerges from the dark, formless void (Gen, 1: 1-2). Man seeks 'Illumination' in his own lifetime, . . . In the words of St.Paul, '. . . The Lord comes , who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.' (1 Cor. 4: 5)."[16] The image of the light is therefore, very important in our understanding of the psalms.

The Lord is also the "King of Kings" and He "sits enthroned over the / flood; the Lord sits enthroned as King / for ever." (ps. 29:10, Bible . RSV. 487). He is, thus, the monarch of the spiritual and of the temporal.

Living in partly mountainous terrain, the poets of the Old Testament looked around them and saw the hills tell them of God. It was easy to identify the majesty and stability of these mountains,

with the might and glory of God:

> As the mountains are round about
> Jerusalem,
> so the Lord is round about his
> people,
> from this time forth and for ever-
> more. (ps. 125:2. Bible . RSV. 548)

When the psalms speak of mountains praising "Yahweh", (ps. 89:12), or melting "like wax" (ps. 97:5) before Him, we comprehend the idea of the Creator's superiority in greatness.

We turn from these ardent portrayals of God, to the portrait of the enemy . In the drama of the psalms, three characters must be given due prominence. They are - God, the Enemy and the Psalmist. So vital a role does the enemy play that most of the psalmist's sorrow stems from a fear of being persecuted constantly by the wicked. "Whoever the enemies are, they haunt the psalter."[17] This is the enemy, the evil-doer, who has been compared to a "lion" (Pss. 7, 10, 17, 22, 34, 35, 57, 58, 91), a "bull" (ps. 22:12) or a "unicorn", "wild oxen" (ps. 22:21), a being with "horns" (ps.75:4) , a "serpent"

and an "adder" (ps.58:4), (ps. 140), "water" which vanishes (ps. 58:7), the "snail which dissolves into slime" (ps. 58:8), the howling and prowling "dogs" (ps. 59:6). The wicked have tongues like "a sharp razor" (ps. 52:2). their speech is "smoother than butter" (ps. 55:21), "their teeth are spears and arrows,/ their tongues sharp swords" (ps. 54:4), and many times they have surrounded the psalmist "like bees" (ps. 118:12). So forceful and telling a rendering that we feel bound to stay a great distance from such "plotters of iniquity". The note of optimism comes in when the psalmist realises the transitoriness of evil in the face of Divine intervention. The wicked will wither "like a dream" (pss, 73, 78, 90). From the variety of animal comparisons, we select first, the most emphasised - the lion - image. For some of us, the lion projects strength, might and ferocity as in Hinduism, where the Goddess Durga for instance, in all her potent power rides astride a fierce, roaring lion. The psalmists recognised this aspect of the lion's strength but he saw it, quite often, from another angle too- from the point of view of the lion also having destructive powers. "From the most ancient

times, demons have been portrayed in the form of 'lions' . . . The adversaries of the psalmists are repeatedly compared to lions (Ps. 7:2). Like lions, they lie in ambush . . . , then suddenly fall upon the unsuspecting victim (Pss. 10: 9-10; 17:12;) . .. The lion was feared, and therefore demons were endowed with its features; but the lion was also admired, as evidenced by its appearance in the decoration of combs and seals. The lion often served to represent victorious power.. . ..."[18]. C. C. Martindale asserts: "The Psalms are full of references to being 'snatched, as a lion does (e. g. Ps. vii 3; xvi 12, ix 29, etc, etc): but these 'lions' are definitely the Psalmist's enemies, and you collect the picture of rocky roads where in any shadow an enemy may be lurking - enemies, moreover, who have the habit of digging holes in the path and above all of tying cords across it so that in the dusk, the travellers should be tripped and easily set upon. Nothing delighted the caustic humour of the Hebrew more than to see his enemies fall into the pit they had dug for *him* . . . ".[19]

Once in a way, the poet alludes to other animals like the bull

and the stray dogs. Like the lion, the bull has an ambiguous nature: it is powerful but aggressive. Hence certain aspects of the powers of the bull were also attributed to a number of demons. The pariah dogs were often considered by the Hebrews to have an affinity with ungodly spirits, though hunting dogs were valued in Palestine at the beginning of the second millennium B. C.[20] E. W. Heaton, however, is of this opinion: "The Assyrians and the Egyptians used hounds in the chase, but this possibility must be excluded for the Israelites, since all the Old Testament references to dogs suggest only the despicable and vagrant scavenger.".[21]

The slithering serpent, more often than not, revives (especially for the Christian), the memory of the fall of Man and is therefore looked upon as the "embodiment of primeval evil".[22] Insidious, insinuating, subtle, sly and venomous, the wicked enemy, of whom the psalmist protests strongly about, finds himself projected in the image of poisonous vipers. Like the lion, the serpent is a symbol of contradictory forces. In Egypt, the monarchs wore head crowns often twisted in the shape of a serpent which was

regarded as a saviour God. (It may be noted here that "Nag" among the Hindus is also a deity.). The psalms, however, concentrate on the dangerous venom of the serpent, thus reminding us that it is one of the most feared of all animals. With such harmful surroundings, the poet is led to pleading and crying out to God:

> Deliver me, O Lord, from
> evil men;
> preserve me from violent men,
> who plan evil things in their heart,
> and stir up wars continually.
> They make their tongue sharp as a
> serpent's
> and under their lips is the poison
> of vipers." (ps. 140:1-3. Bible . RSV. 553).

(see also ps. 64:3 Bible . RSV. 507)

Clarity, simplicity and familiarity make the psalmists' comparisons assume the tone of universality. The reference to animals, (lion, bull, hart, mule, dogs, serpents,), is a reference to "known" images, for neither of these animals are too unfamiliar as the dodo or the dinosaur.

God, the Enemy and then, finally, the multifaceted picture of

the Man himself. (The speaker in the poems.). Life exposes the psalmist to the ebb and flow of joy and grief and its waves sometimes lift him to heights of ecstasy and at other times to depths of suffering. Whenever the poet is miserable, he expresses himself thus:

1) "But I am a worm, and no man;" (ps. 22:6 Bible . RSV. 483)

2) "I become like those who go down
to the Pit." (ps. 28:1. Bible . RSV. 486)

3) "I have become like a broken vessel." (ps.31:12 Bible . RSV. 488)

4) "Be not like a horse or a mule, without
understanding," (ps. 32:9. Bible . RSV. 489).

5) Many bulls encompass me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround
me;
they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax,
it is melted within my breast;

my strength is dried up like a pot-
sherd, ... (ps. 22:12-15.Bible . RSV. 483)

6) "Keep me as the apple of the eye;" (ps. 17:8.Bible . RSV. 479)

When fortune is kinder, when the Lord remembers and in the calm after the turbulent storm, the poet's expression is:

1) But I have calmed and quieted my
soul,
like a child quieted at it mother's
breast;
like a child that is quieted is my
soul. (ps. 131:2. Bible . RSV. 549).

2) "The righteous flourish like the palm
tree,
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon." (ps.92:12Bible .
RSV. 502)

3). "But I am like a green olive tree in
the house of God." (ps. 52:8.Bible . RSV. 502)

4). "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the sons of one's youth.
Happy is the man who has
his quiver full of them!" (ps. 127:4-5.Bible .
RSV. 548)

5). "Those who trust in the Lord
are like Mount Zion, " (ps. 125:1.Bible . RSV. 548)

(See also pss. 128:3, 144:12, RSV, for more comparisons - "like a fruitful vine", "like olive shoots" and "like corner pillars".)

Amidst such expressive variety, prominent, in terms of significance and relevance, are the images of the tree, the vine, the pit, the net and the broken vessel.

The righteous are like the upright tree, such as the olive, the palm or the cedar (though in ps. 37, the wicked is compared to the cedar - may be, the reference is to the "strength" of the tree). Besides being the characteristic features of the countryside, the trees represent an important aspect of Nature and Life. "It was Tagore who said a tree is an eternal traveller. Not only that, it is also 'the silent foster mother of all life on earth,' who leads 'all living creatures on the road of time'.".[23]

Like the big, strong tree, the godly stands firm and tall, notwithstanding storms of trials and tribulations and bearing sole witness through the past, the present and hopefully the future, to

the multitudinous acts in the drama of civilization. As an "eternal traveller", the tree is a powerful component of life: a force without which there is not only aesthetic or environmental loss, but also a soul-felt barrenness. Thus the tree-image is a powerful one.

Another Nature comparison is one of the vine. It is said that when the Israelites first came to Palestine, among the first things which impressed them was the vine-plants.[24] After they settled down in the new land, they adopted the Canaanite agricultural preference for growing large crops of grapes. The season of grape-gathering was an important occasion for every Israelite. No wonder then, when the psalmist wants to express the idea of fruitfulness and prosperity, he thinks of the vine. In psalm 80, the vine becomes a symbol of God's chosen people whom he led out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses. ("Thou didst bring a vine out of / Egypt." ps. 80:8.Bible . RSV 520). As the vine which climbs upwards and flourishes, the Israelites also grew into a nation.

From the happy pictures of the tree and the vine, we shift our attention to mournful pictures of the psalmist's misery. The

enemies are set to ensnare him with "nets" or "pits" and if he has already been trapped, he beseeches God to "draw him up" and save him from the "depths". If God has intervened as saviour, then, the psalmist rejoices, for the wicked fall in their own traps and "as smoke is driven away" and "as wax melts before fire", they "perish before God;".

In the psalms and much of wisdom literature, there is a tendency to view things in a clear-cut manner. An instance of this is the way the psalmist looks at the guilty party as being completely evil. There was no compassion for the wicked who had sinned against Man and God. Therefore, it was natural that such men be imprisoned in pits or prisons like dark holes and cisterns. These deep, dark holes became symbols of the conception of Sheol (Death). To the suppliant, his deliverance seems like being drawn up out of a precipitous shaft-tomb.

Nets and snares, probably images based on the chase, play a frequent role in the life of the suffering psalmist. "Even though hunting was not so highly organized in Israel as it was in Assyria, and even though it was not the sport of Kings, it is difficult to

believe, on general grounds, that the men (and particularly the young men) of Palestine were never infected by the excitement of the chase."[25] Various kinds of traps were used in the hunt, even for fowling. The net is a symbol of ". . . the binding snares of the world. . . . "[26]

Distress and great suffering make the poet, "become like a broken vessel" (ps. 31:12.Bible . RSV. 488) , and he is weak, wasting and sore. His very bones seem to waste away. This is a sorrowful portrait of one who is lost and broken. The "broken vessel" culls up a scene of God,the potter and Man,the clay. What the loving hands have formed, now lies in pieces: it is only the Divine Potter who can pick up the pieces again and make the vessel whole. A very common picture is this, drawn from the rudimentary, industrial life of the Hebrew. Pottery was an important occupation for the contemporaries of the psalmist as is evidenced from the fact that ". . . digging in Palestine has unearthed pottery as old as any known in the world."[27]

Though the image of the 'broken vessel" is not used too often

in the poems, this seems nonetheless to be an apt representative of Man's broken spirit. This phrase, part of an influential simile, is more effective, more comprehensible and more aesthetic than the stark, gloomier and less pleasant pictures of falling into dark, miry pits, of bones "(burning) like a furnace" (ps. 102:3) and of the flesh becoming weak and infected with sores.

Various are the similes and metaphors that come into play in the hands of the psalmist. He continues to juggle with, among others, images of the vulture, the owl (ps. 102), and other birds (pss, 11, 50, 74, 102, 103), the hart (ps. 42), the tent (ps 61), the widow (pss. 94, 109), beasts and sheep (pss. 73,74, 95, 100, 119), the dew (ps. 110), the womb (ps. 110), bread (pss. 14, 53, 102) and the moth (ps. 39).

The content of these poems would lose half its interest and meaning had not the poets interwoven within the fabric, the pattern of vivid, bold images, more remarkable in their straightforward simplicity. And because our life is so much an exquisite texture of finely interwoven images formed of comparisons, we respond, quite

spontaneously, to the way the Hebrew poet constructs his comparative pictures. "Images are our readiest instruments for abstracting concepts from the tumbling stream of actual impression . . . They are our spontaneous embodiments of general ideas . . . Image making is, then, the mode of our untutored thinking."[28] The psalms, as we have discovered, depend largely on the technique of image building on the simile and the metaphor, to communicate the message and experience, more vividly and afresh. Every instance when we enter into such poetic scenes as:

"From the womb of the morning
like dew your youth will come to
you." (ps. 110:3 Bible . RSV 539)

or,

His eyes stealthily watch for the hap-
less,
he lurks in secret like a lion in his
covert; (ps. 10;8-9. Bible . RSV. 477)

or,

"As a hart longs
for flowing streams,

so longs my soul
for thee, O God." (ps. 42:1.Bible . RSV. 496),

we come to the enthralling realisation that there is more magic in the simple metaphor and the simile than one dreams of. Herein lies their importance to the psalms.

***

Works Cited

1. Elizabeth Drew, Discovering Poetry , (New York: Norton, 1962), 150.

2 Clifford Leech, "Dramatic Imagery: Some Comments on its Range and Availability.", Critical Essays on English Literature, ed., V. S. Seturaman, (Madras: Orient Longmans, 1965), 215.

3. M. L. Rosenthal, Poetry and the Common Life, (New York: Oxford UP, 1974),5.

4. S. R. Swaminathan, "The Wind and the Leaf", Critical Essays on English Literature, ed., V. S. Seturaman, (Madras: Orient Longmans, 1965), 57.

5. M. L. Rosenthal, Poetry and the Common Life, (New York: Oxford UP, 1974), 68.

6. P. H. B. Lyon, The Discovery of Poetry, (London: Arnold, 1932), 167.

7. C. C. Martindale, The Sweet Singer of Israel, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946), 1-5.

8. Rudolf Frieling, Hidden Treasures in the Psalms, trans., Mabel Cotterell, (London: Christian Community Press, 1954), 142.

9. Ibid, 142.

10. Mary Perkins Ryan, Key to the Psalms , (Chicago: Fides Publishers Assn., 1957), 16-17.

11. E. W Heaton, Everyday Life in Old Testament Times, 1956, 4th ed., (London: B. T. Batsford, 1966), 149.

12. Viraf Minocher Dhalla, Symbolism in Christianity , (Bombay: n. p., n. d.,)30.

13. E. W. Heaton, Everyday Life in Old Testament Times, 1956, 4th ed., (London: B. T. Batsford, 1966), 159.

14. Viraf Minocher Dhalla, Symbolism in Christianity , (Bombay: n.p., n. d.,),29.

15. Mary Perkins Ryan, Key to the Psalms , (Chicago: Fides Publishers Assn., 1957). 59.

16. Viraf Minocher Dhalla, Symbolism in Christianity (Bombay: n.p., n.d.,), 45.

17. Sean B. Kelleher, The Psalms Explained; An Introduction to Biblical Prayer, 2nd. ed., (Bangalore: Asian Trading ,1978), 38.

18. Othmar Keel, The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms, trans., Timothy J. Hallett, (New York: Seabury, 1978), 85-86.

19. C. C. Martindale, The Sweet Singer of Israel, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1946) 4-5.

20. Othmar Keel, The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms, trans., Timothy J. Hallett, (New York: Seabury, 1978),87.

21. E. W. Heaton, Everyday Life in Old Testament Times, 4th ed., (London: B. T. Batsford, 1966), 114

22. Othmar Keel, The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms, trans., Timothy J. Hallett, (New York: Seabury, 1978), 87.

23. Abul Bashar, "A Green Thought in a Green Shade", Telegraph, Calcutta 11 Nov 1995:8.

24. E. W. Heaton, Everyday Life in Old Testament Times, 1956, 4th ed., (London: B. T. Batsford, 1966), 103.

25. Ibid, 114.

26. Viraf Minocher Dhalla, Symbolism in Christianity , (Bombay: n. p., n. d.,) 35.

27. E. W. Heaton, Everyday Life in Old Testament Times, 1956, 4th ed., (London: B. T. Batsford, 1966), 129.

28. Suzanne Langor, "Philosophy in a New Key", qtd. in, Interpretation of Literature and Advanced Rhetoric, (Hyderabad: C.I.E.F.L., [c. 1988]), 5.

***

Chapter V

Intensity

There are many points in time when the poet of Israel is completely mastered by his primitive emotions that he cannot keep silent but must shout out, spontaneously and directly, no matter, how simple, from the pressing burden of joy, gratitude, love or pain. These ancient poems, lyrical cries, come with tremendous intensity and force that we are overwhelmed by the flood of emotions that sometimes even shock, especially when we encounter the "cursings"[1] psalms. Like all creative artists, the psalmists remain close to instinctual drives and their poetic expression is not just prettified and polished speech. The psalmist is the "true interpreter of the human spirit"[2] and is concerned with the exposure of what happens in the soul of Man. He traverses the whole range of that inner world of human emotions - emotions which become universal in ecstasy and happiness, grief and sorrow, anger and envy, fear and apprehension, praise and thanksgiving.

In the Psalter, the human speaks to the Divine with a voice charged with such great emotional power, that one can quite readily assume that this close "wrestling" encounters, emanate from a long-standing, long-growing relationship between Man and his Maker. The psalmist, therefore, is not hesitant to stand forthright before the Lord and shake Him to arousal: "Answer me when I call, O God / Of my right !" (ps. 4:1. Bible . RSV. 474). There is no shying away from the Omniscient. Claus Westermann says in The Living Psalms, that the reason why these holy poems have "survived" and remained alive "for hundreds of years," is, the fact that, "in them there has been preserved a way of calling on God which is spontaneous and direct and by means of which man can speak to God as he really thinks and feels."[3] A similar idea is expressed by Leonard Griffith, who finds it easy to identify himself with the psalmist and say, "This is exactly how I feel. This is what I want to say to God".[4] The psalmist confronts God as a total human being with all his failings and his thoughts and feelings are inveterate and authentic, springing from the deep wells of the human spirit. What seems to matter more is

not what goes on in the external world but what happens in the mind and the soul. The real happenings in the Israelite's life does not seem to be the mere falling into a trap laid by the enemy or becoming sore and inflicted and then forgetting about them, but the<u>actual</u> experiencing of grief, fear, love, gratitude and happiness. Emotional upheavals of such sort cannot be outdated and hence we become sharers in the psalmist's life. We can feel along with him and explore the whole range of that inner world of human sensibilities.

Besides treating of universal themes: the climaxes in human life (such as unlimited joy and profound grief), the poems communicate, against this backdrop, the poet's mental and spiritual predicaments, so emphatically and so clearly that it is difficult not to be affected by them. Intensity of feeling, of emotion, of experience, lends beauty to the make-up of any work of art and therefore is also important for the psalms.

The following facts allow for the presence, in the Psalter, of this element of Intensity:

1. The spirit of complete abandon, surrender and faith in God. No doubt, this faith wavers at times but not for long. The supplications and invocations are deep-rooted and of gut-level.

2. A simplicity of thought and expression, even in the recurrence of exaggerations.

3. Though the images are sometimes hyperbolic, we must not confuse this with extravagance. The psalmist does not use "woolly" and extravagant language. His speech is direct, spontaneous, accurate and vivid. It comes across to us as real and genuine.

4. Cast in the lyrical mode, the psalms are brief (except for ps. 119, the longest one). Brevity also enhances and can be a sign of an intensity of emotion.

We shall proceed towards the psalms with these factors in view and discover how they facilitate the expression of that tremendous surge of human feelings, which must at crucial times in life, burst through its dam and inundate the embankment to touch the lives of

others all around.

1. The poet of the Old Testament is very much a product of the liturgical tradition.[5] Israel's relationship with God was considered to be founded on the covenant whereby God had promised to take care of his people. Various events of salvation in the course of History (see chapter II), proved again and again that God was an active, living and loving God. The psalmist knew this and so, his heart always yearns for the one God who rescues and protects. "My soul thirsts for God, / for the living God.", (ps. 42:2. Bible . RSV. 496), cries the poet, oppressed and sorrow-laden, and in moments of divine delay, his faith may dwindle but it never dies. Persistent is his supplication, deep is his groaning: "I am weary with my moaning;", (ps. 6:6. Bible . RSV. 475), ". . . my bones are troubled." (ps. 6:2. Bible . RSV. 474) and at the point of total despair he must question his Maker:

> "My God, my God, why hast
> thou forsaken me ?" (ps. 22:1. Bible . RSV. 483)

Such is life's one moment of intensity where the soul, tormented, beaten and groping, must look upwards and know that the Lord still is. Like the child who looks in confidence to his father, the psalmist too looks at the divine and says, "Hope in God;". (ps. 43:5. Bible . RSV. 497). This is a short but a forceful maxim.

C. M. Bowra, in his, Primitive Song, states that primitive man, "When he comes to song, . . . is usually straightfoward, (sic), even when he deals with religious or ritual matters, which are in their very nature recalcitrant."[6] The psalmist too, like the primitive man, is direct in speech and adopts a very clear cut attitude.

Throughout the crises-psalms, we notice a sense of great weariness. Two factors lie responsible. First of all, the psalmist has sinned and therefore is guilt-ridden, ("Turn not thy servant away in anger," ps. 27:9. Bible . RSV. 486), and secondly, he is physically and spiritually inflicted with wounds and sores and his enemies are hounding him all around, waiting to tear him to pieces, ("My wounds grow foul and fester / because of my foolishness," ps. 38:5.Bible . RSV. 493), ("For my loins are filled with burning, / and there is

no soundness in my / flesh." ps. 38:7. Bible . RSV. 494), and ("Those who seek my life lay their / snares," ps. 38:12. Bible . RSV. 494.). In such a situation, the person is not only helpless and pleading but is sometimes angry too:

> Rouse thyself ! why sleepest thou, O
> Lord?
> Awake ! Do not cast us off for ever !
> Why dost thou hide thy face ?
> Why dost thou forget our affliction
> and oppression ? (ps. 44:23. Bible . RSV. 496.)

This is a bold and powerful call, reminiscent of Satan's speech to his fallen angels to "Awake" and "arise." (Milton, Paradise Lost 1 lines 330). A series of queries pour forth in an overflowing current of emotion though the speaker seems to be giving vent to his ire, there is an inherent faith that the Holy will deliver them for the sake of His "steadfast love" (ps. 118:2. Bible . RSV. 541). This is one of many other ardent calls whereby the poet implores the Lord, fervently, to save him (ps. 54:1. Bible . RSV. 502), to hear his prayer (ps 55:1. Bible . RSV. 503), to be merciful (ps. 57:1.

Bible . RSV. 504), or, to deliver him from his misery. (ps. 55:4. Bible . RSV. 503).

Such frantic calls are more than often punctuated by sudden outbursts of personal yearning for vengeance. The poet appeals to God's "judgement" (ps. 67:4. Bible . RSV. 509) in the hope that punishment may be meted out to the unrighteous. Engulfed in rage, the psalmist cries:

> On the wicked he will rain coals of
> fire and brimstone;
> a scorching wind shall be the
> portion of their cup.(ps. 11:6.Bible .RSV.477).

At the outset, this may seem an intolerant view and the psalmist may be charged with having a "persecution complex"[7]. But we must remember, however, that the psalmist is a basic person and a poet who thinks and feels intensely. This sensitivity is responsible for his being, sometimes, almost consumed by the fire of hatred. "In some of the Psalms the spirit of hatred which strikes us in the face is like the heat from a furnace mouth."[8]. Though we are horrified at the psalmist's intense reactions to injury, we marvel at his

childlike frankness. There is no disguise in his expression. He says exactly what he feels:

> Let their own table before them be-
> come a snare;
> let their sacrificial feasts be a trap.
> Let their eyes be darkened, so that
> they cannot see; (ps. 69:22-23. Bible . RSV. 511)

Psalms 109 and 137 are two of the many poems which are vehicles of the psalmists' extreme anger. Here, the "devilish" nature of a human being is brought out in the bitter curses towards his enemies. This does not mean that the Israelite poets actually did carry out their threats. Because of so much wisdom contained elsewhere in these poems we are more prone to believe that discretion must have got the better of them and they normally stopped at giving vent to their pent-up emotions.

A large part of the Old Testament mentions the oppression of the poor by the rich and though we cannot really identify the enemies, they frequent the Psalter as liars, thieves, mockers, murderers and non-believers. The psalmists refer to them constantly. The poets

of Isreal were not "saints", in the sense that they could rise above it all. They were thoroughly human, capable of every range of normal feelings and it seems apparent that only extreme pressure of cruelty and injustice could have produced by a "natural law,"[9] such seething hatred.

Without any shame or self-consciousness, the poet expresses profusely his resentment towards the enemy. But a point may be emphasised here. Though he is unrestrained in his cursings, the psalmist is not an Iago, a Machiavellian. He lacks cunning and maliciousness even though his hatred is of great magnitude. In psalm 4:4, he advises: "Be angry, but sin not;" (Bible . RSV. 474) and in psalm 37:8, (both the psalms being accredited to David), a greater tolerance is preached: "Refrain from anger, and forsake / wrath !". (Bible . RSV. 492). These seem moments of peace and acceptance which normally follow a storm. At other times, however, the great deluge of angry feelings towards the enemy is let lose:

> May his days be few;
> may another seize his goods !

May his children be fatherless,
and his wife a widow ! (ps. 109. Bible . RSV. 538).

Such is the intense, naked force of the psalmist's wrath. In this context, C. S. Lewis observes: " I did not of course think that this was because the ancient Hebrews had no conventions or restraints. Ancient and oriental cultures are in many ways more conventional, more ceremonious, and more courteous than our own. But their restraints came in different places. Hatred did not need to be disguised for the sake of social decorum or for fear anyone would accuse you of a neurosis. We therefore see it in its 'wild' or natural condition."[10] Lewis goes on to point out that the milieu in which the psalmists lived was one of violence and savagery. This could have, no doubt, aggravated the situation, not allowing for any form of subtlety.

Another reason why the psalmist seems so angry is that, being very close to God, he seriously believed what was right and denounced all that was evil. Hence even when he himself has sinned, he suffers immeasurably. He is deeply wounded, not only because a personal

wrong has been done to him but because these wrongs are hateful to God:

> For thou art not a God who delights
> in wickedness;
> evil may not sojourn with thee.
> The boastful may not stand before
> thy eyes;
> thou hatest all evil doers. (ps.5:4-5. Bible .RSV. 474)

In the case of him being a sinner, his conscience torments him and will not rest: "for I am lonely and afflicted." (ps. 25:16. RSV. 485) and he becomes a miserable "worm" (ps. 22:6. RSV. 483). In moments of isolating pain, the poet seeks the altar of God in worship. Worship becomes more meaningful in the hour of great emotional crisis. The sufferer seems to be aware that worship is, ". . . the reservoir from which we can draw our greatest strength to cope and keep going."[11] Hence, the psalmist so ardently invokes God. Intimacy and closeness mark this relationship between God and Man. As one who confides in a trusted King, the psalmist unburdens himself, shorn of all masks, stripped of any awkwardness, before his

Creator.

Intensity of emotion vibrates even through the psalms of praise and thanksgiving. These psalms, which seem to be more poetical than the psalms of lament, expose the poet's immense capacity to feel joy and gratitude. Praise and eulogy, almost a surfeit of it at times, come spontaneously to the psalmist. The reasons for this may be many. We look at two. First of all, in the very act of praising, the poet found a certain sense of happiness and satisfaction. Secondly, having known profound suffering, the worth of deliverance is realised double fold. Psalm 150 is a short and spontaneous overflow of such emotion:

> Praise him with trumpet sound;
> praise him with lute and harp !
> Praise him with timbrel and dance;
> praise him with strings and pipe !
> Praise him with sounding cymbals;
> praise him with loud clashing cymbals ! (Bible . RSV. 558).

Praise of such kind gushes forth in many of the psalms as brief shouts of boundless joy. The Hebrew poets surely felt less

restraints than we, who live with modern complexities, do. There was a certain openness in all that they felt and did. Feelings were not to be suppressed: whether of joy or sorrow. Honesty and directness led them on and there was no "holding back" when the experience of a moment reached its peak. Thus, David, seized by the force of overpowering ecstasy, could dance before the sacred Ark:[12]

> He danced with such abandon that one of his wives (presumably a more modern, though not a better type than he) thought he was making a fool of himself. David didn't care whether he was making a fool of himself or not. He was rejoicing in the Lord.[13]

This kind of impromtu, ecstatic delight in the Lord was shared by all the psalmists. Their hearts would burst in jubilation and they were compelled to "Make a joyful noise to God," (ps. 66:1. Bible . RSV. 508) and to, "lift up a song to him who rides / upon the clouds;" (ps. 68:4. Bible . RSV. 509). Amidst the music of the harp and the lyre, they would declare the wonder and glory of God. (see as

example, ps. 65:5-13). Sister M. Cecilia, in, The Psalms in Modern Life ,[14] remarks that God himself inspires such childlike joy in the hearts of those who are untarnished and free. It is this childlike attitude that sets alight the hearts of the poets of Israel and therefore they can sing in fullness of joy and dance, as David did, in gay abandon.

2. The Greeks, it seems were logical and highly analytical people. The Jews were not. Their minds were not crammed with reason and abstractions. They were simple people. For instance, God to them was, simply put, one:

> who forgives all your iniquity,
> who heals all your diseases,
> who redeems your life from the Pit,
> who crowns you with stadfast love
> and mercy,
> who satisfies you with good as long as
> you live (ps. 103:3-5. Bible . RSV. 531)

As discussed in the chapter on Incantation, many of these poets were prophets and priests. They may have realsed that to reach out

and touch Humanity, they must of necessity be simple. We notice that the less simple a poet is in his expression, the more detached he is from the rhythm of ordinary life. "The lyric deals with passion and emotion in their simplicity . . . "[15] and the poet has to stand close to familiar things. There is no gainsaying the fact that sometimes poetry does demand richer utterance as with Shakespeare for example. P. B. Lyon asserts that even in the zenith of an action, the Bard of Avon could resort to simple expression. His great tragic heroes like, Hamlet and Brutus, for example, all die with words that are simple.[16] Yet, these words were intense and powerful. When Macbeth was told that the queen was dead, his sorrow, fathoms deep, can only be expressed in a single, clear statement:

"She should have died hereafter;". (Macbeth. 5. 5. 17).

The agony and wreck felt by Satan when he first treads the dismal soil of hell is communicated thus:

> "Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,"
> Said then the lost archangel, this the seat
> That we must change for heav'n, this mournful gloom

For that celestial light? (Milton.Paradise Lost 1. lines 242-245)

When the hour of death strikes for Faustus, the restless fear and anguish of his soul spurts out in expressions simple yet moving with great intensity:

> "My God, my God, look not so fierce on me !
> Adders and serpents, let me breathe a while!"
>
> (Marlowe, Christopher.The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus. 5. 3. 120-121.)

Even in a difficult poem like Shelley's Ode to the West Wind, there is a certain simplicity of expression in such emotion-packed lines as:

> "Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
> I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed !"
> (4. 11-12)

Such cries of anguish are many times heard in the seemingly ordinary lines as: "Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord !" (ps. 130: 1. Bible . RSV. 549), or, "Deep calls to deep at the thunder of thy

cataracts; / all thy waves and thy billows / have gone over me." (ps. 42:7. Bible . RSV. 496). Being simple, does not detract from the effective communication of a moment of Intensity. The poet is still able to impress upon us a plethoric wealth of emotions.

The psalms have been, to some extent, shaped by the social and economic conditions and the needs which they create in men. The needs of the Israelites were simple. Leading lives as semi-nomads and farmers, close to the soil, they were basic people who had no need of any form of complexity. The songs of the psalmists project this truth.

3. In a moment of intense feeling, to wax eloquent seems incongrous. Extravagance and "woolliness" cannot be poetical.

In psalm 104, one of the most poetical of poems, God's creation is described with images that are elemental and familiar. Exclamatory lauds pour forth with vehement unrestraint:

Thou art clothed with honour and

majesty,
who coverest thyself with light as
with a garment,
who hast stretched out the heavens
like a tent,
who hast laid the beams of thy
chambers on the waters,
who makest the clouds thy chariot,
who ridest on the wings of the
wind,
who makest the winds thy messengers,
fire and flame thy ministers. (ps. 104:1-4. Bible .
RSV. 532)

The psalmist continues to praise the Creator while being overwhelmed and wonder-struck: "O Lord, how manifold are thy works !" (ps. 104:24. Bible . RSV. 533).

It may be argued that in some instances, the psalmist shows a remarkable propensity to exaggerate, to "blow things out of proportion". Focus on psalm, 57:4 where the enemies are compared to lions who "greedily devour the sons of men; / their teeth are (being) spears and arrows, / their tongues sharp swords." (Bible . RSV. 505) and psalm 5:9 where the enemy's throat is an open sepulchre," (Bible . RSV. 474). Even God comes under hyperbolic

discussion such as:

> But God will break you down for
> ever;
> he will snatch and tear you from
> your tent; (ps. 52:5. Bible . RSV. 502)

(see also pss. 7:12, 21:9, 83:14-15.).

In these exaggerations, we are able to discern that the Jewish singer-poets were essentially basic people whose language is tempered by an imagination which is vivid. Furthermore, the aptness and accuracy of these descriptions cannot be undermined. To hold the attention of the congregation, the psalmist needs to be exact yet exuberant, vibrant, not verbose. With his fellowmen who were mostly shepherds learned in the ways of nature, he must speak with their tongue. Therefore, when immense joy, for instance, arrests him, he must speak of the sun and the moon and the stars with such a powerful and forceful feeling, that we too are filled with a sense of wonderment:

> Praise him, sun and moon,
> praise him, all you shining stars!
> Praise him, you highest heavens,
> and you waters above the heavens ! (ps. 148: 3-4.
> Bible . RSV. 557).

There are many other psalms which serve as examples of unrestrained praise which is simple yet beautiful. In this ability to feel and express so intensely, lies, perhaps, the secret of the psalmists' happiness.

In the wisdom psalms, the poet is "toned down" and not as effusive as he is in the suffering psalms or in the psalms of praise. But through the wisdom psalms, the poet is still able to convey a richness and passion of each moment of life that has been lived. In all, they are proofs of having lived an experience totally and intensely. Wisdom, therefore, seems to be the moving force in many of the psalmists' expression. ~~With a~~ Keeping in view ~~to~~ Abercrombie's definition of wisdom, we can perhaps understand how this is so: "wisdom is an energy pouring into the world from beyond it, vivifying it and disposing it: 'more moving than any motion'."[17] (see pss. 37, 127:2, 37:11, 1:3, 12:6).

From this point, we move to the next factor which helps to bring in the element of intensity in the psalms: Brevity.

4. The holy poems originated as primitive songs and being lyrical

in nature they are , condensed and brief. (ps. 119 is an exception). The psalmist, like the primitive man who C. M. Bowra talks about in his, Primitive Song , ". . . is capable of seeing and feeling something very sharply and vividly for a short time. The very intensity of the moment brings it home to him in its essential peculiarity and stamps it on his consciousness. He recals it not in tranquillity but in passion and excitment, and when he turns it into song, he lives through it again, just because it has never left him."[18] The singer-poet of Israel, generally, keeps to one theme: the relationship between Man and the Divine. It is the recurrent drama of the good versus the evil. This drama is the amalgamation of signigicant moments, all crowded with deep, emotional feelings. In a way, the psalmist is tied down in scope. But this is to the poet's advantage as concentration on a single theme can effectively bring about an immediacy of reaction. Volumes of emotions are campacted and compressed into these lyrics and in articulation, they become, such outbursts which ". . .are of necessity brief."[19] The cause of it all, the slow filling in of passion, the chewing "over and over the cud of some injury,"[20] may have taken awhile. All that

has been simmering, must finally boil over in extreme pressure and in great "heat". A human cry of great magnitude is not always a sustained, eloquent and a long cry. It may be singly expressed with a mournful, "Oh!" or an ecstatic, "Bravo!". It can be deeply founded; a gut-level outcry. While discussing the psalms as being composed of units of independent prayer, Claus Westermann, in, The Living Psalms says, ". . . (and to cry 'O God!' can constitute a self-contained prayer). . . "[21] This, in a sense, touches upon the idea of compactness in brevity.

Psalm 117 is the shortest poem in the Book of Psalms. It does not, however, fail to effectively communicate a strong surge of ecstasy that flows from the knowledge of God's great, unperishable and steadfast love. Being so invigorated by this spirit of praise, the ancient poet exhorts "all peoples" and "all nations" to praise the Lord:

> Praise the Lord, all nations!
> Extol him, all peoples!
> For great is his steadfast love toward us;
> and the faithfulness of the Lord endures for ever.
> Praise the Lord! (ps. 117. Bible . RSV. 541).

It is from an experience of deep gratitude and thanksgiving, that genuine acclamation, such as this , can gush forth and infect those who come near it.

As prayers, the psalms aim at establishing a relationship and hence, the psalmist uses the the shortest possible means. "The occasion is distilled to its essence, and though the result is very short and simple, it has, none the less, reserves of power in its very restraint."[22]

A good deal of emotions are, therefore, condensed into these short lyrics, just as the Metaphysicals did in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Whereas the poetry of Donne and his followers was concise and replete with learning, (therefore being difficult at times), the poetry of ancient Israel was brief and replete with intense, personal emotion. The psalms are, hence, enriched melodies that were churned out from the tears and anguish of defeat and oppression and the joys and jubilation of triumph and deliverance.

The sudden starkness of expression brings with it an effect of

overwhelming passion, also because the psalms do not spring primarily from an idea but from an event. The experiences of many different people have been given vivid expression in these poetic creations. Even as effective media of worship the experience factor is significant. Many a tormented cry of the psalmist, for example, stems directly from a real situation of distress. Actual happenings which occurred in the life of a human person, were the source of much inspiration for the psalmists. These events, ". . . took place in harvest fields or on battlefields, in the wilderness or in homes, on sickbeds or in the street . . . "[23]

Experiences based on factual situations, therefore become all the more absorbing and intensifying. The psalms are still living and vibrant today, still ringing with intensity because it is the song of life. This element of poetry, intensity, must still support the psalms or else how should we see life lived thousands of years ago, " . . . in manifold environments between the sea and the mountains, life lived in common with trees, animals, and fields,. . . . ",[24] life lived in its totality ? From this distance, it is a pleasure to meet the psalmists of old.

***

Works Cited

1. C. S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms, 1958, 4th impression (London: Collins Fontana, 1965) 23-33.

2. P. H. B. Lyon, The Discovery of Poetry, (London: Arnold, 1932) 67

3. Claus Westermann, The Living Psalms, trans. J. R. Porter, (n. p. : T & T Clark 1989) 16

4. Leonard Griffith, God in Man's Experience: The Activity of God in the Psalms, 1968, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970) 10.

5. Sean B. Kelleher, The Psalms Explained, 1974, 2nd. ed., (Banaglore: Asian Trading, 1978) 37.

6. C. M. Bowra, Primitive Song , (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1962) 87.

7. Sean B. Kelleher, The Psalms Explained, 1974, 2nd. ed., (Banaglore: Asian Trading, 1978) 33.

8. C. S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms, 1958, (London: Collins Fontana, 1965) 23.

9 Ibid, 27.

10. Ibid, 25.

11. John David Pleins, The Psalms: Songs of Tragedy, Hope and Justice , (New York: Orbis, 1993) 29-30.

12. "1 Chronicles 15:29," The Holy Bible: Authorised Version (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, n. p.) 473.

13. C. S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms , 1958, 4th Impression, (London: Collins Fontana, 1965) 42.

14. M. Cecilia, The Psalms in Modern Life, (Chicago: Regnery, 1960) 62-63.

15. Felix E. Schelling, The English Lyric, (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1913) 2.

16. P. H. B. Lyon, The Discovery of Poetry, (London: Arnold, 1932) 183.

17. Lascelles Abercrombie, The Idea of Great Poetry, (London: Secker, 1926) 121.

18. C. M. Bowra, Primitive Song , (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1962) 103.

19. P. H. B. Lyon, The Discovery of Poetry, (London: Arnold, 1932) 94.

20. C. S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms , 1958, 4th Impression, (London: Collins Fontana, 1965) 26.

21. Claus Westermann, The Living Psalms, trans. J. R. Porter, (n. p.: T&T Clark, 1989) 13.

22. C. M. Bowra, Primitive Song, (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1962) 267.

23. Claus Westermann, The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message , trans. Ralph D. Gehrke, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980) 14.

24. Ibid, 24.

Conclusion

The exploration must, for the time being, end here. With the discovery of the five poetical elements in the psalms, we can rightfully ascertain two facts: that the psalms are precious and that the psalms will always remain alive for all generations to come. As long as every human soul does not cease to aspire, to seek, to value permanent verities, which in the final analysis, is the total summation of life, these ancient poems will be treasured.

It may be well to consider a point here. The actual beauty of the psalms, we must confess, is not always in the beginning, readily and too immediately discerned by some. It takes time. John Hargreaves, in his preface to, A Guide to Psalms, says, "No one ever disliked the psalms more than I did for the first thirty years of my life ! They seemed impossible to understand. Many of them were so un-Christian. People sang them so mournfully. Or so it seemed to me. Then I joined the staff of a theological college and to my dismay was asked to conduct a course on the Psalms. But my

dismay did not last. Before very long I had discovered . . . how precious the Psalms are. To our surprise we found not only that they were great songs and poems of faith in God, but they had been written out of experiences and in situations such as we ourselves knew well."[1]

In The Sweet Singer of Israel , C. C. Martindale opines that the psalms may be obscure sometimes but if one could ". . . have one's imagination somewhat in the state of the author's own imagination- . . . . " [2], then the beauty of the poems will be revealed to us.

In the initial stages, we may have floundered, been somewhat perlexed and perhaps a little confused. But this is not to undermine their value, one has to "grow" with the psalms to discover and realise their intrinsic, hidden worth.

My meeting with the psalmists took place one Christmas, during childhood. A gift from "Santa" to my elder sister, was the authorised version of The Holy Bible . Sometimes, at prayer time, a psalm was read aloud, very little was comprehended, much was forgotten, till occasion prompted the next reading. But, it may

have been then that the seed of curiosity was first planted.

We must realise that the Book of Psalms is worthy of exploration - not only for scholars and for Christians, but also for every other ordinary person, irrespective of caste and creed. There must surely be many more treasures yet undiscovered within the pages of the Psalter; there must be ample opportunities to know the psalmists even better and to learn new and fresh lessons from their songs of faith and forthrightness. In the meantime, the search must go on.

> "When old age shall this generation waste,
> Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
> Than ours, a friend to man, . . ." (Keats. Ode On a Grecian Urn 5. 6-8).

***

Works Cited

1. John Hargreaves, preface, A Guide to Psalms, (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1992) vi.

2. C. C. Martindale, The Sweet Singer of Israel, 1940, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946) 1.

Bibliography

Primary Source:

The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments. Revised Standard Version. New York: Collins, 1978.

The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments. King James Version. London: British and Foreign Bible Society, n. d.

The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments . American Standard Version. New York: Nelson, 1901

The Bible. Revised Standard Version: Illustrated by Horace Knowles. 1967. n. p. : The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1979.

The New English Bible. n. p.: Oxford UP; n. P. : Cambridge UP, 1970.

The Holy Bible: With a Preface by the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. London: Washbourne, n d.

The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ with Psalms and Proverbs: The Authorized (King James) Version 1968, n.p. : Gideons International, 1977.

The Shorter Knox Bible. Trans., Ronald A Knox. Ed. Leonard Johnston. 1958. London: Burns & Oats; Toronto: Macmillan, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962.

Good News Bible: Today's English Version Bangalore: Bible Society of India, 1977.

Secondary Source:

Abercrombie, Lascelles. The Idea of Great Poetry. London: Secker, 1926.

Abrams, M. H. The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Tradition. New York: Norton, 1958.

Anders-Richards, Donald. The Drama of the Psalms. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1968.

Anderson, G. W. The New Clarendon Bible. Old Testament Vol I: The History and Religion of Israel. London: Oxford UP, 1966.

Baily, John. Poets and Poetry: Being Articles Reprinted from The Literary Supplement of "The Times". Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911.

Barden, Garrett, trans. Language and Belief. Dublin: Gill Macmillan, 1972.

Bennet, Joan. Four Metaphysical Poets. Calcutta: Rupa, 1978.

Berry, Donald K. The Psalms and Their Readers: Interpretive Strategies for Psalm 18. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993.

Boulton, Marjorie. The Anatomy of Poetry. 1953. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968.

Bowra, C. M. Primitive Song. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962.

Brooke, Stopford A. Theology in the English Poets. 5th. ed. London: Kegan Paul, 1880.

Brooke, Cleanth and Robert Penn Warren. Understanding Poetry.

New York: Holt, 1959.

Brown, R, J. Fitzmyer and Roland Murphy, eds. The Jerome Biblical Commentary: The Old Testament. 2 Vols. 1968. Bangalore: Theological Publications of India, 1972.

Burns, Oates and Washbourne. The Book of Psalms in Latin and English With Canticles Used in the Divine Office. London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1947.

Buckley, Vincent. Poetry and Morality: Studies on the Criticism of Mathew Arnold T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis. London: Chatto and Windus, 1959.

Cecilia, M. The Psalms in Modern Life. Chicago: Regnery, 1960.

Chambers, Arthur. Man and the Spiritual World as Disclosed by the Bible. 33rd. ed. London: Gay and Hancock, 1919.

Comfort, Philip Wesley. The Complete Guide to Bible Versions. Illinois: Living-Tyndale, 1991.

Craghan, John F. Psalms For All Seasons. Collegeville: Liturgical, 1993.

Craven, Toni. The Book of Psalms. Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992.

Cumberlege, G. F. J. ed. Several Essays. 1927. 2nd. ed. Calcutta: Oxford UP, 1952.

Dahood, M. Psalms I: 1-50: The Anchor Bible New York: Doubleday, 1966.

Dodd, C. H. The Authority of the Bible . 1929. London: Collins - Fontana, 1960.

Drew, Elizabeth. Discovering Poetry . New York: Norton, 1962.

Drijvers, P. The Psalms: Their Structure and Meaning. Freiburg: Herder, 1965.

Edmunds, E. W. Shelley and His Poetry. 1911. London: Harrap, 1930.

Eliot, T. S. Selected Essays . 1932. 2nd. ed. London: Faber & Faber, 1949.

Eliot, T. S. The Waste Land and Other Poems. 1940 London: Faber & Faber, 1962.

Ellis, Peter F. The Men and the Message of the Old Testament.

Collegeville: Liturgical, 1963.

Fallon, Michael Francis. Shorter Poems by Catholics. London: Catholic Record, 1930.

Fargues, Marie. The Old Testament: Selections, Narrative and Commentary. Trans. Patrick Hepburn Scott. 1960. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1962.

Frieling, Rudolf. Hidden Treasures in the Psalms. Trans. Mabel Cotterell. London: Christian Community Press, 1954.

Fry, Northorp. The Great Code : The Bible and Literature. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982.

Gardiner, John Hayes. The Bible as Literature. New York: Folcroft, 1978.

Gelin, Albert. The Psalms are Our Prayers. Trans. Michael J. Bell. Collegeville: Liturgical, 1964.

Gelineau, Joseph. The Psalms: A New Translation. 1963. London: Collins - Fontana, 1966.

George, Augustin. Praying the Psalms . Trans. Richard X. Redmond. Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, n. d.

Gillingham, S. E. The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994.

Griffith, Leonard. God in Man's Experience: The Activity of God in the Psalms . 1968. London. Hodder & Stoughton, 1970.

Gunkel, Hermann. The Psalms: A Form - Critical Introduction. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967.

Guthrie, D., J. A. Motyer, A. M. Stibbs and D. J. Wiseman, eds. The New Bible Commentary Revised. 1953. 3rd. ed. London: Inter Varsity Press, 1970.

Guthrie, Harvey H. Israel's Sacred Songs: Study of Dominant Themes New York: Seabury, 1966.

Hamlyn Publishers Group. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare 1958. London: Hamlyn Publishers Group, 1971.

Hargreaves, John. A Guide to Psalms . 1987. Delhi: ISPCK, 1992.

Hawkes, Terence. Metaphor: The Critical Idiom. 1972. London: Methuen, 1980.

Heaton, E. W. Everyday Life in Old Testament Times. 1956. London: Batsford, 1966.

Holladay, W. L. The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.

Holman, C. Hugh .A Handbook to Literature. 1936. New York: Odyssey, 1960.

Hudson, William Henry. An Introduction to the Study of Literature 1910. 2nd. ed. London: Harrap, 1970.

Hugh, Evelyn. The School of Charity and the Mystery of Sacrifice New York: Longmans, Green, 1956.

Hughs, A. M. D. Introduction. Shelley Poetry and Prose. 1931. London: Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1952.

Jasper, David. The New Testament and the Literary Imagination. n. p.: Macmillan, 1987.

Johnston, Leonard. A History of Israel. London: Sheed and Ward,

1964.

Keel, Othmar. The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms. Trans. Timothy J. Hallett. New York: Seabury, 1978.

Keel, Othmar. The Song of Songs . Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994.

Kelleher, Sean B. The Psalms Explained. 1974. 2nd. ed. Bangalore: Asian Trading, 1978.

Kilby, Clyde S. Poetry and Life: An Introduction to Poetry. New York: Odyssey, 1953.

Kirkpatrick, A. The Book of Psalms . n. p.: Cambridge University Press, 1898.

Kissane, E. J. The Book of Psalms . Vol 1. Dublin: Brown and Nolan, 1953.

Knowles, Vernon. The Experience of Poetry. London: Newnes, n. d.

Lewis, C. S. Reflections on the Psalms. 1958. London: Secker, 1965.

Lucas, F. L. Style . 1955. 3rd. ed. London: Cassell, 1956.

Lyon, P. H. B. The Discovery of Poetry. 1930. London: Arnold, 1932.

Mackenzie, R. A. F. Old Testament Reading Guide: The Psalms - A Selection . Collegeville: Liturgical, 1967.

Maloney, George. The Breath of the Mystic . Denville: Dimension, 1974.

Marlowe, Christopher. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus. Ed. R. Lall. 1974. 3rd. ed. New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 1978.

Martindale, C. C. The Sweet Singer of Israel. London: Sheed and Ward, 1946.

Mays, James L. Psalms . Louisville: John Knox, 1994.

McCann, J. Clinton. A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms of Torah . Nashville: Abingdon, 1993.

Merton, Thomas. Praying the Psalms. Collegeville: Liturgical, 1956.

Merton, Thomas. The Bread in the Wilderness . London: Hollis and Carter, 1954.

Milton, John. Paradise Lost: Books I and II Ed. M. Macmillan, 1887.

Basingstoke : Macmillan, 1971.

Monroe, Magaret T. The Old Testament and Our Times: A Short Reading Course with Subjects for Discussion. London: Longmans, Green, 1960.

Motwani, Kewal, Comp. Sri Aurobindo on Social Sciences and Humanities for the New Age: An Anthology. Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1962.

Mowinckel, Sigmund. The Psalms in Israel's Worship. Trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas. Vol. 1. 1962. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967.

Murphy, Roland E. The Psalms Are Yours . New York: Paulist, 1993.

Nicholson, D. H. S. and A. H. E. Lee, Comp. The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse: XIII - XX Centuries 1917. Oxford: Clarendon, 1969.

Norman, Charles, ed. Poets On Poetry . New York: Collier, 1962.

Oesterley, W. O. E. A Fresh Approach to the Psalms . New York: Scribners, 1937.

Oxford University Press. Fifteen Poets . Oxford: Clarendon, 1941;

Calcutta: Oxford UP, 1985.

Perrine, Lawrence. Sound and Sense . 1956. 5th. ed. New York: Harcourt,1977.

Pinion, F. B., ed. Shorter Narrative Poems. 1941. 2nd ed. London: Arnold, 1964.

Pleins, J. David. The Psalms: Songs of Tragedy, Hope and Justice. New York: Orbis, 1993.

Prabhananda and Christopher Isherwood, trans.Bhagavad-Gita: The Song of God . Madras: Sri RamaKrishna Math, 1982.

Prothero, Rowland E. The Psalms in Human Life. n. p.:n.p., n. d.

Rakhit, Montoo. As You Like It: Arden Assessed. New Delhi: Frank Brothers, 1994.

Reeves, James. Teaching Poetry . 1958. London: Heinemann, 1967.

Rhymer, Joseph. The Beginnings of a People: A Way Through the Old Testament . London: Sheed and Ward, 1967.

Richards, I. A. Coleridge On Imagination. 1934. 2nd. ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955.

Richards, I. A. Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment 1929. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

Rosenthal, M. L. Poetry and the Common Life. New York: Oxford UP, 1974.

Rowley, H. H. The Modern Reader's Bible Atlas. London: Reflection-Giant Association Press, 1960.

Ryan, Mary Perkins. Key to the Psalms . Chicago: Fides Publishers, 1957.

Sabourin, Leopold. The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning. 2 Vols. Bangalore: Theological Publications of India, 1971.

Seturaman, V. S., ed. Critical Essays On English Literature. Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1965.

Schelling, Felix E. The English Lyric . Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1913.

Scott, A. F. Poetry and Appreciation. 1939. 2nd. ed. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1971.

Shepherd, Massey H. The Psalms in Christian Worship: A Practical Guide . Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976.

Shumaker, Wayne. An Approach to Poetry . Ed. Maynard Mack. New Jersey: Prentice, 1965.

Skelton, Robin. The Poetic Pattern . 1956. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957.

Smith, P. G. and J. F. Wilkins, comp. The Sheldon Book of Verse: Book IV . 1959. London: Oxford UP, 1963.

Snaith, Norman. Hymns of the Temple . London: SCM, 1951.

Thomas, R. S., ed. The Penguin Book of Religious Verse. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963.

Tillyard, E. M. W. Poetry Direct and Oblique. London: Chatto and Windus, 1956.

Times Publishing Company.The British Imagination: A Critical Survey from The Times Literary Supplement. London: Cassell, 1961.

Untermeyer, Louis,ed. The Albatross Book of Living Verse: English and American Poetry from the Thirteenth Century to the Present

Day. London: Collins, n. d.

Valles, Carlos G. Praying Together: Psalms for Contemplation. Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1989.

Vermes, G. The Dead Sea Scrolls in English. 1963. 2nd. ed. 1975. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977.

Walsh, Chad. Doors into Poetry, 2nd. ed. New Jersey: Prentice, 1970.

Walsh, William. The Use of Imagination: Educational Thought and the Literary Mind . London: Chatto and Windus, 1959.

Wegener, C. S. 6,000 Yrs. of the Bible. Trans. Magaret Shenfield. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963.

Weiser, Artur. The Psalms: A Commentary . Trans. H. Hartwell. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962.

Westermann, Claus. The Living Psalms . Trans. J. R. Porter. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989.

Westermann, Claus. The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message. Trans. Ralph D. Gehrke . Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980.

Westermann, Claus. Praise and Lament in the Psalms. Trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen. Atlanta: John Knox, 1981.

Journals, Periodicals, Newspapers, Broadcasts and Interviews :

"A Presentation of Psalm 57." Recollections on the Psalms . Vatican Radio, Vatican City. 5 Dec. 1995.

Bashar, Abul, "A Green Thought in a Green Shade" Telegraph 11Nov 1994, late city ed,: 8.

Biswas, Ranjita. "Nurture Through Nature". Telegraph 5 June 1995, late city ed. : 14.

Catholic Biblical Association. "The Writings: Psalms" Old Testament Abstracts 16 (1993): 83-91, 315-322.

Catholic Biblical Association. "The Writings: Psalms" Old Testament Abstracts 17 (1994): 107-117, 327-337, 573-586.

Catholic Biblical Association. "The Writings: Psalms" Old Testament Abstracts 18 (1995): 78-84, 321-326.

Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages.

"Imagery I". Interpretation of Literature and Advanced Rhetoric . [c. 1988]: 1-5.

Chakravarti, Nirendranath. "Translation Falsifies Most of What is Important in Literature" Telegraph 31 Mar 1995, late city ed. :1.

Chari, V. K. "The Language of Poetry". Indian Journal of English Studies 4. 1. (1964): 11-24.

Dhalla, Viraf Minocher. "Symbolism in Christianity". Bombay: n. p. [n.d.]: 1-71.

D'Rozario, Caroline. "Divine Words". Rev. of Divine Words by R. H. Lesser. Herald . 14-20 Apr 1995: 16.

Giese, Ronald L. "Strophic Hebrew Verse as Free Verse". Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 61. (1994): 29-38.

Howard, Virgil. "Psalm 104". Interpretation 46 (1992): 176-80.

Kimelman, Reuvan, "Psalm 145: Theme, Structure, and Impact" Journal of Biblical Literature 113. (1994): 37-58.

Kotoky, P. "On the Poetics of Sri Aurobindo".Indian Journal of English Studies , 12. (1971): 96-102.

Mishra, R. C. "Social Experience of the Saint-Poets".Indian Literature . 27.2. (1984): 39-55.

McCann, J. Clinton. "The Psalms as Instruction".Interpretation 46 (1992): 117-28.

Pyne, Ganesh. "The Beseeching Moon, the Beckoning Pyre".Telegraph 31 Mar 1995, late city ed.: 8.

Sarna, Nahum M. "Understanding the Book of Psalms: Songs of the Heart". Bible Review 9 (1993): 32-43.

Sequeira, Judith. "Psalms Made Alive !" Rev. of Divine Words by R. H. Lesser. Herald June 30-6 July 1995:12.

Schlegel, A. Personal Interview. 13 January 1995.

Smith, Michael A. "Psalms 42 and 130: Hope for the Hopeless" Review Expositor 91 (1994): 77-80.

Ward, Kevin. "The Other Day - 66".Herald 24-30 Mar 1995: 2.