

RAMANA MAHARISHI AS A POET

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Professor K.Swaminathan states that Ramana Maharishi belongs to the line of sages from the Upanishadic sages. This includes the Buddha and Sankara. They taught the Jnana Marga or the path of knowledge (3). After eleven centuries of bhakti, Sri Ramana Maharishi stood like a rock in Juana. Like Sankara, Sri Ramana wrote hymns in praise of Arunachala also several bhakti hymns. Tiruchuzhi near Madurai, where Sri Ramana was born was sacred to Lord Siva. The place was celebrated by saints like Sundaramurti and Manikkavachakar. Sri Ramana realized the self in Madurai. It was the seat of the Tamil Sangam. It is also the sacred spot of Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundaeswarar. At the Virupaksha period in his life, the five hymns to Sri Arunachala written by Sri Ramana are of absorbing interest to students of mysticism. They also exhibit the command over the language and prosody of Tamil.

The first hymn is titled *Akshara Mana Malai* ("Marital Garland of Letters") It was composed during a single *giripradakshina* (circumambulation of the Hill) in response to a request from a devotee. His devotees wanted a new song to sing while begging for food. It has 108 verses. It is a moving religious lyric. Professor K.Swaminathan stated, "Its 108 brief verses are among the most moving religious lyrics in Tamil and deservedly popular, because of the clarity and charm, the vigour and warmth, with which they present the emending dialogue between the awakened soul and the eternal self." (67). There is also erotic symbolism in many of the verses. They describe the maidens' love for union with the world. Hence the title "Marital Garland". Swaminathan further states, "But the play of imagery, sensuous and striking, is far-ranging and uninhibited. The Hill, as the Self-supreme, is variously but always involved also as Mother, Father, Guru, Sun, Moon, Ocean and Ramana! One could see from these shifting figures that the emotion is nothing personal for autobiographical but the vicarious expansion of intense longing for the reunion of all selves with the self". (67-68).

Here a few gems from the hymn:

Like Sundara and Azhagu,

May you and I be one

And indivisible

O Arunachala (Verse 2)

If now (after abducting me) you fail
To embrace me is this manliness,
O Arunachala? (Verse 9)

Import of the Syllable Aum,
Uncomparable, unsurpassed,
Who can truly know you,
Arunachala? (Verse 13)

Strip me naked, and then re-robe me
With the splendour of your grace,
O Arunachala. (Verse 30)

Before your fire burns me to ashes
Rain down on me your shower of grace,
O Arunachala (Verse 55)

Fruit rotten and decayed is worthless.
Best taste and eat it when just ripe,
O Arunachala (Verse 61)

How is it such greatness you've attained
By union with the poor and humble,
Arunachala? (Verse 83)

In the Heart's vast empty space
Where there is neither night nor day,
Come, let us rejoice,
O Arunachala (Verse 91)

As shown in water, meets let me
In you whose form is love itself
Dissolve as love,
O Arunachala (Verse 101)

(Translation – K.Swaminathan, 68-69).

Nava Mani Malai is another poem written by Bhagawan Ramana Maharishi. *Nava Mani Malai* (Necklace of Nine Gems") unites mythology with philosophy:

He is the ever unmoving one.
 Yet in the temple-hall (of Thillai)
 His dance of bliss He dances
 Before the mother moveless there.
 Now that power is withdrawn within
 His Form were novels, solemn, still
 As Aruna till He soars.

There are two other hymns of Ramana Maharishi, the Padikam (eleven stanzas) and the Ashtakam (Eight Stanzas). In Padikam, the singer is a deer, caught in a net, a frog clinging to the lotus-stalk. The Ashtakam articulates a sage speaking about his experiences. The Padikam depicts an intense yearning for God, and the Ashtakam is a description by the Master about his spiritual experiences. The fifth hymn is *Arunachala Pancharatnam*. It was composed in Sanskrit in 1917. It was translated into Tamil venbas by Ramana Maharishi in 1922. In 1917, Karyakantha Ganapathi Muni requested the Maharishi to write a Sanskrit poem in the Arya metre. The Maharishi produced five stanzas in perfect Sanskrit:

Ocean of Nectar, full of grace,
 O self-supreme, O Mount of Light,
 Whose spreading rays engulf all things,
 Shine as the Sun which makes
 The heart-lotus blossom fair.

As on a screen a wondrous picture,
 On you, a fair moment is all this world
 Formed and sustained and then withdrawn
 Ever as "!" in the heart, you dance
 Hence are you called the Heart.
 He whose pure mind turned inward searches
 Whence this "I" arises knows
 The self aright and merges in you
 Aruna Hill,
 As a river in the sea. (K Swaminathan, 72)

These verses give us the gist of the teaching of Bhagawan Ramana Maharishi. The self is depicted as the mountain on which the world-picture is projected by Maya. The method of self-enquiry is also shown, in which the Sadhaka and the Siddha disappear and the self alone

remains. The poem also states that once the ego is annihilated one swims in the sea of bliss which is our true nature.

In *Dipa-Darsan*, the Maharishi wrote:

Giving up the thought "I am the body" mind fixed in heart and inward-turned, knowing the sole, true joy of being – This is the seeing of the Light hit on the hill-top at the centre of the Earth. (Trans Swaminathan, 73)

Dilip Kumar Roy wrote, “Sri Ramana Maharishi stands out as one of the breathtaking beacons to the Harbour for which we all yearn – from Prince to Pauper – incessantly on the bursting bubbles of our ever-foaming ego”. (83) The Bhakti hymns of Bhagawan Ramana Maharishi stand testimony to the Himalayan heights of spirituality that he reached.

References:

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 - Swaminathan, K: Ramana Maharishi, New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1975.
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