

**I REMEMBER....**

I remember the time I was a robe...  
When Greeks and Romans preferred robes;  
A special Greek body I adorned,  
He was a clear thinker, philosopher extra-ordinaire.

He used to call me "Armor" and chuckle,  
"But I'm not as hard-headed as you", I'd chide;  
He'll always win, with his ways with words,  
And all the world knew him as Socrates.

His passion for answering questions with questions,  
A certain "Socrates Method" it helped define,  
His concern wasn't for family welfare and fame,  
For welfare of souls was his prime aim;  
And his 'love of wisdom' would lay foundation,  
Western Philosophy it helped frame.

Once I was a mat that bore frail Siddhartha,  
During his long eight meditating years.  
I couldn't fathom his purpose, his goal, his vision,  
But sometimes I would drift into trance,  
And then experience bliss and serene peace.

At times I was tempted to squeal and yell,  
What with bearing his weight for long spells.  
But control I did my temper, hide my discontent,  
Lest I cause him needless distraction.

And when the great teacher preached to mendicants,  
I would join the chorus of the devout chants;  
I still remember some famous teachings:

"Be free of the past, be free of the future,  
Be free of the meantime, be transcendent.  
When your mind is completely liberated,  
You no longer undergo birth and old age"

"For those who are always courteous and respectful of elders,  
Four things increase: life, beauty, happiness and strength."

"Giving truth surpasses all giving;

The flavor of truth surpasses all flavors;  
The enjoyment of truth surpasses all enjoyments;  
The destruction of craving overcomes all misery.”

“There is no fire like lust, no chain like hate;  
There is no snare like folly, no torrent like craving.”

“Let us live most happily, possessing nothing;  
Let us feed on joy, like the radiant gods.”

“There is an unborn, an un-originated,  
An unmade, an uncompounded;  
Were there not, there would be no escape from  
The world of the born, the originated, the made, the compounded.”

I was the quill that guided Shakespeare’s writing,  
As he navigated through perilous waters,  
Of the Tempest and the wrath of Lady Macbeth.  
It’s all much ado about nothing, I’d quip,  
And show William what he liked to be or not to be,  
And help construct great oratory for Mark Anthony.

Oodles of new English words he would concoct,  
Offering to generations, to “use as you like it”.  
How well he understood human nature!  
King Lear, the shrew, the wicked Jew,  
Othello and all the many characters;  
But without me the quill, William couldn’t pen,  
Now it’s all a mist, a midsummer night’s dream.

When I was a palette of some artists grand,  
Vermeer, van Gogh, Varma and Rembrandt,  
Then I was in ecstasy, watch art take place.  
I constantly edged them on to ever higher levels,  
And strive for perfection, and naught else.

Museums and galleries adorn their works,  
For new generations to venerate, try and emulate.  
But there were some trying times, with Picassos and Dalys,  
With abstraction that well-nigh killed art.

Now that the insanity holds no sway,  
We can safely declare the joy of art is back to stay.

So once again, I can enjoy being a part of talent,  
Being a brush, an easel or again a palette.

I had equal joy being a violin,  
In the hands of a master, one Ludwig;  
But how he struggled to compose,  
Not for want of talent but handicap of deafness.  
To this day I couldn't explain how,  
He still managed, he met, nay beat the competition!

From Hayden, Handel, Bach and Schubert,  
With each new piece he soared abreast;  
Emperor, Fur Elise, and Moonlight sonata,  
Concertos in violin and piano and symphonies.

Oh! How I love his symphonies; all near perfect,  
Numbers six, nine, five and three, in that order;  
I bow my head in awe, how I wonder  
A deaf magician could compose these pieces!  
He was one genius, who needed no help,  
From me the humble violin in his lap.

I remember when I was a sandal,  
That carried the frail frame of Gandhi.  
Through speeches, walks and Satyagraha spells,  
And when he endured the many prison stays;  
I would shed tears, with the weight of his pain,  
But when freedom came joy was surely mine..

He did his deeds with peaceful means,  
And showed the way to all who'd learn,  
Mandela, Wallessa and Martin Luther just to name,  
"Children of Gandhi", Time magazine would opine.

The pearls of wisdom Gandhi pronounced,  
Are many, and guided Indian populace.  
I enjoy perusing those from time to time;  
Here I'll jot down some for your enjoyment:

"An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind"

"Whatever you do will be insignificant,  
But it is important that you do it."

“Happiness is when what you think, what you say,  
And what you do are in harmony.”

“We must become the change we want to see in the world”

“I am prepared to die, but there is no cause for which  
I am prepared to kill.”

“The only tyrant I accept in this world is the still voice within.”

“The good man is the friend of all living things.”

“A man is the product of his thoughts;  
What he thinks, he becomes.”

“There is more to life than increasing its speed.”

I was the horse of a Macedonian Prince,  
Who set out to conquer and that he did,  
For, Persia’s Darius to India’s Porus,  
Laid down their swords in sound defeat.

I used to caution, “Have some humility,  
Your young age makes you forget your mortality”.  
Oft he would lapse into binge drinking,  
Only to bounce back with vigor renewed.

The most enjoyment I had was when,  
Alexander built a town in Egypt and named after him.  
For this would become the seat of learning, science and arts.  
No land conquered, razed and plundered,  
Would remember you with fondness as when you return,  
In solid structures, you pay back to those you vanquish.

When I was a shaft that Jesus used,  
In his long walks through desert landscape,  
And large gatherings would come to hear,  
This humble, charismatic young preacher.

I remember well the miracles, parables, lessons in life,  
He would teach friends and foes, rich and poor.

Prostrate lay a young woman in my favorite scene,

The gathered crowd intent on stone-throwing.  
And how he exhorted the sin-less among them,  
To throw the first stone and there was none;  
One by one they left; the prostitute was spared.  
He then told the sinner to go, sin no more.

I wasn't there when he was nailed and impaled,  
With a crown of thorns thrust on the scalp,  
This story had been told and retold,  
From the many sources I heard, grizzly details;  
At that terrible hour, his time of need,  
I wasn't there and I feel the guilt deep!

I remember the time I was a shining sword,  
Wielded by a warrior fierce, who would be Emperor.  
History showers accolades on this fighter,  
Not for valor but his humanity and wisdom;  
For he would use his heart not sword,  
To win people over without waging war.

As the Buddha's disciple and benefactor,  
Ashoka would spread this gentle religion's tenets,  
Through India and then most of Asia;  
He is fondly remembered by his people,  
Even now, as in erstwhile India.

He did lay to rest me, his friend of old,  
But from a distance I watched events unfold,  
As this enlightened ruler built pillars for edits,  
Hospitals, inns, water wells and roads,  
All across India and far abroad.

I fondly remember when I was a notebook,  
An English genius used to scribble over;  
That was how I deciphered and learnt,  
Matters of science of highest order.

Mundane events he observed,  
Would bring Newton instant insights,  
Like why apples fall and why white light splits,  
Into colors of rainbow resplendent.

He stands tall, a giant in astronomy, math and physics,

The intimate strokes in my pages are today still,  
Classical notations for all students who will,  
Delve into laws of motion and calculus.

There were days together we'd shed tears,  
During months of isolation this recluse endured,  
Many a time I said, though lackadaisically,  
"Why don't you relax, have fun like other youth",  
I didn't quite want him to leave me, though.

When I was a student of a venerated teacher,  
Eagerly we'd jot down, nuggets we heard,  
Nuggets dropped from the Chinese master's lips.  
This master thinker wove strings of pearls,  
More words of wisdom than any, bar none,  
Their meaning is as true today,  
As it must've been in his day.

I am at awe how a single mind could construct,  
These volumes of sayings dubbed "Confucius say";  
No wonder why these words guided generations,  
Kings and subjects and society in general.

The master wants to spell in his own words,  
So I'll stop and share goose bumps with you the reader.

"I heard and I forget;  
I see and I remember:  
I do and I understand"

"If you enjoy what you do,  
You'll never work another day in your life."

"Waste begets self-will;  
Thrift begets meanness;  
But better be mean than self-willed."

"When not in office, discuss not politics"  
"Of such as are eager, but not straight;  
Shallow, but not simple;  
Dull but not truthful, I will know nothing."

"To go too far is as bad as to fall short"

"Feel kindly toward everyone,

But be intimate only with the virtuous.”

“What you do not wish done to yourself,  
Do not do to others.”

“The well-bred are dignified but not pompous;  
The ill-bred are pompous but not dignified.”

“Recognize that you know what you know;  
And that you are ignorant of what you do not know.”

“If there be righteousness in the heart,  
There will be beauty in the character.  
If there be beauty in the character,  
There will be harmony in the house.  
If there be harmony in the house,  
There will be order in the nation.  
If there be order in the nation,  
There will be peace in the world.”

“The superior man is modest in his speech,  
But exceeds in his actions.”

“Virtue is not left to stand alone,  
He who practices it will have neighbors.”

“Where-so-ever you go, go with all your heart.”

My stint as the sari of a saintly woman,  
In Calcutta was to me as much inspiration,  
As it did to most around the world;  
In all she did to lift the poorest of the poor,  
Mother Theresa lives on even today,  
In hearts and minds of Indians in millions.

She shines in history not as genius,  
But as icon of devotion and compassion;  
In caring for the destitute and hopeless,  
And the sick and forlorn she did so selfless.

Many a night, in solitude,  
The nun would shed silent tears, and sob;  
She'd describe the terrible sights she saw in her job,

And I'd join in, share her sorrow.

How she kept up her cheer I do not know,  
But day by night she kept on and on.  
One will be hard pressed to find another soul,  
With just as much compassion in their bones.

The distinct delight I had as albums,  
For not one but two naturalist geniuses;  
I remember with pride I became an instrument,  
In helping change the course of history.

In my pages lay gems dried and pressed,  
That these biologists collected and collated.  
"Survival of the fittest" and "natural selection",  
Ideas they proposed and form the foundation,  
In human thought a sheer revolution.

Alfred Wallace and Charles Darwin win my votes,  
And scientists and thinkers all vow,  
The conclusions they drew from astute observations,  
And inspired extrapolations they made,  
Remain masterpieces of human intuition.

Ideas that explain why creatures in caves and ocean depths,  
Lose eyesight but miss them naught;  
Why snakes slither but preserve in vestiges,  
Legs that they have use no more;  
Why spiders become dainty and blend,  
Candidly with their flowery abode;  
Why insects look just like twigs, leaves or bird droppings  
And all the myriad mimicry in nature we find.

Galapagos and East Asia became labs,  
For these pioneers with passion and flair.  
How they traveled across ages,  
And imagined time-dictated changes;  
The changes so minute and slow,  
People in generations scant perceive!

How birds lose wings and take to land,  
Likewise mammals glide, then take flight;  
Fish use fins to walk, 'fore they fashion legs,  
And then find land their destined home.

When mammals left land for ocean waters,  
Change their looks they did, but not their habits.  
One land mass has mammals with pouches,  
And some with fur, beaks and lay eggs!  
Finches find niches and change their beaks,  
So much, they scant resemble their forebears;  
Evolution doth work in mysterious ways!

I remember visiting a lofty monument,  
And reading these words inscribed in granite:

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth,  
On this continent, a new nation,  
Conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition,  
That all men are created equal....”

Before I could read more lines,  
A thundering voice pierced my ears:  
“Lad, where in this land do you hail from?”  
Startled, I looked and saw the statue stare.  
“But I didn’t know you breathed and talked!”  
“You are made of stone and steel” I added.

“Ah! That’s what I do most times,  
But in good company such as you bring,  
I find words, and I get a glimpse of modern times.”

“Why did you let our nation into civil war descend?”  
Asked naïve me, as if he could’ve helped;  
He had a tortured look, and he said:  
Nay, murmured: “that is what I agonized over, lad”;  
“A good answer to that question... I wish I had”.

“But history credits me with emancipation;  
You don’t see slaves nor slave masters.  
Segregation is a thing of the past,  
And I see blacks running for President.”

By now people around were curious and some asked,  
“Who are you talking to? Are you going crazy?”  
I said “Don’t you hear the President?”  
I quickly realized, private was my conversation,  
Meant only for my ears, the chosen one.  
I waited, until all were gone and then asked:  
“Who do you think did best since you were President?”

“Oh! I think the two Roosevelts, and may be Clinton,  
Despite his problems, Clinton meant well”.

“How about our current Bush? What’s his score?”  
Lincoln heaved a sigh, betraying teary eyes,  
“See around the globe our prestige decline?  
Do you think another President would have dealt this one?  
Would diplomacy be the last choice with another one?”

He continued: “Kid, when you become President,  
Remember these words: Diplomacy first,  
Wars are not choices in the real world,  
And Democracy shan’t be thrust on any populace”.

I left the monument with a heavy heart;  
I thought to myself: “My country, my dear,  
How I wish Lincoln were our President, here today!”

Aryabhata I was my hero in Astronomy in all of history,  
And in fields of Math and Physics, a sheer forgotten genius;  
I know, because I was a dry palm leaf he used,  
When he wrote “Aryabhatiya”, his grand treatise.

Arithmetic, Algebra, Plane and Spherical Trigonometry,  
There were no nooks of mathematics he mastered not.  
Calculations of pi, areas of triangles and circles,  
Power systems dealing with large numbers, and decimals,  
He delved deep into all of math’s disciplines.

Without counsel of calculators and computers,  
In his head he measured earth’s circumference;  
He saw heavens revolve around us and inferred,  
The earth’s unerring rotation on its axis;  
Thus dispelled the notion of earth as center of universe.

The elliptical orbits of planets were explained,  
So also why our moon and sun eclipse;  
He did it all a millennia before those credited with them.  
If this Indian genius were alive now,  
Nobel Prizes aplenty he’d surely own!

Of all incarnations I've been through,  
Most fulfilling is the most recent;  
As it ushered in a new revolution,  
The computer age and the Internet.

I was the keyboard some pioneers used,  
Luminaries like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs;  
Before the advent of touch screen and "mice",  
I served them faithfully, help construct computer age.

'Hardware' and 'software', 'dial-up' and 'broadband',  
PCs, Macs, Laptops, Tablet PCs and Palm Pilots;  
How we've seen these come and become,  
Every day items, we can't do without;  
Good bye we bade to typewriters and typists.  
Now the power of computing and much more,  
Are packed in cell phones that multi-task.

All the world's knowledge and collective wisdom,  
Reside in a certain "cyber"space,  
"Internet" is a pet name, "world wide web" is another,  
In whatever name, this truly is one to behold.

Search engines, URLs, websites, dot coms galore,  
Emails, text messaging, chat rooms and video conferencing.  
I doubt if we have scratched the surface,  
Of true potential of this magical medium.

More new words have entered English Dictionary,  
Thanks to this computer age and its young adherents.  
"Pishing", "Google-search", "Key word search",  
Are but some, but new words continue to parade;  
The energy of computer technology is boundless.

Mega companies have been born and flourish,  
Google, eBay, Amazon.com, Yahoo to name some,  
Websites in Millions and Libraries of knowledge,  
You want to search a topic, just click and enter.

Such is the power of this new medium,  
However equal potential this has for evil;  
As nameless, faceless, characters lurk,  
To cheat, rob, misguide and corrupt.

I had pleaded with Jobs and Gates,  
I knew there will ne'er again secrets left,  
Once you post an item on the 'net'  
It's there like an open book for all to eye.

We've seen devastation 'viruses', 'worms'  
'Trojans' and all other incarnations of evil bring.  
Yet, for good or bad this revolution is here to last,  
To make it work is the job for us all.