

I REMEMBER....

I remember the time I was a robe...
As the preferred clothing of Greeks of old ;
A special Greek body did I adorn,
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.
With his ways with words, debates he’d tackle,
And accolades did Socrates win world-wide.

His passion for answering questions with questions,
A certain “Socrates Method” it helped define,
Concern for family welfare wasn’t his quest,
As welfare of souls was his prime aim.

And his ‘love of wisdom’ would lay foundation,
Western Philosophy, it helped frame.

During meditations and in solitude I bore,
The frail Siddhartha, as the mat below.
I couldn’t fathom his purpose, nor his goal,
But descend I would, at times into trance,
Experience then, bliss and peace serene.

At times I was tempted to squeal and yell,
What with bearing his weight for long spells;
Control my temper I did, and discontent I hid,
Thus, avoid needless distraction, I tried.

When Buddha in sermons, preached to mendicants,
I would join then 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,
 Through the perilous waters and high tide,
 Of the Tempest and Lady Macbeth's ire.
 “It's all much ado about nothing”, I'd jibe.

Show William what he'd like “to be or not to be”,
 And help construct great oratory for Mark Anthony.
 Oodles of new words did he conjure,
 Offering to generations, to use “as you like it”.

How well he understood human nature!
 The shrew, the wicked Jew, King Lear,
 The characters were etched, in his mind clear;
 But to pen, on me the quill, William would lean,
 Now it's all a mist, a midsummer night's dream.

I was a palette, of some artists grand,
 Vermeer, van Gogh, Varma and Rembrandt,
 Then in ecstasy, I watched art take place;
 As perfection they strove for, and to please.

In museums and galleries, interest they generate,
 In new generations to emulate and to venerate.
 But there were trying times, with Picassos and Dalis,
 With abstraction, art they well-nigh managed to kill.

Now that the insanity holds much less sway,
Safely may we declare, the joy of art is back to stay.
So once again enjoy I can, being a part of talent,
Being a brush, an easel or again a palette.

Joy was mine, and pain in like measure,
Sharing Ludwig's deafness and misery;
Struggle he did, with handicap of deafness,
To write and compose, not for want of finesse.

To this day how, I couldn't explain,
He managed and met, nay beat competition!

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

Oh! How I love his symphonies; all near perfect,
Numbers six, nine, five and three, in that order;
I bow my head in awe, and how I wonder,
A deaf magician could accomplish this feat!

But helping hand, from me the violin,
Sought not this genius, in composing.

I remember when I was Gandhi's sandals,
Through speeches, walks and Satyagraha spells,
And endure with dignity, the many jail times.
Tears I would shed, with the weight of his pain,
But when freedom came joy was surely mine.

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

The pearls of wisdom Gandhi espoused,
His sayings are many and guided his populace.



I enjoy perusing those from time to time;
Here for your enjoyment I'll jot some lines:

"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 all in sight,
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".
He would lapse, oft into drinking binges,
Bounce back he would, with vengeance.

Proud was I when Alexander built,
Then filled the August buildings with books,
Scholars and scientists of well-repute,
Then found their home and they flocked.

No land you conquer, raze and plunder,
With fondness would they ever remember,
As when you return, in solid lumber,
You pay back to those you conquer.

Once I was a proud shaft in Jesus' hand,
In his long walks through the desert land.
Gatherings from afar, came in droves to hear,
This humble, charismatic young preacher.

I remember well the miracles and parables;
Preaching to friends and foes, poor and rich,
Lessons in life with their eternal principles,
In my mind to this day they're etched.

Prostrate lay a woman in a scene, my favorite,
Gathered crowd intent on throwing stone.
But to sin-less among them, Jesus exhorted,
To throw the first stone; and there was none.

The prostitute was saved from throwers.
Sinner was let go, promising to sin no more.
Down my spine did this send shivers;
By fine example did Jesus win over.

When he was nailed, impaled and crucified,
With a crown of thorns and on his feet nails.
This story had been told and rehashed;
From many sources I heard, grisly details.

At that terrible hour, his time of need,
I wasn't there and guilt I feel in me deep!

Once I was a shining sword, I remember,
Of a fierce warrior, who would be Emperor.
On this fighter, accolades history showers,
For his humanity and wisdom, not for valor.

For he would use his heart not rapier,
To win people over without waging war.
And as a disciple, to the Buddha he turned,
The gentle religion's tenets, Ashoka spread.

Through India and then most of Asia,



Emissaries and teachers Ashoka sent.
Fondly do his subjects appreciate,
Even today, as in erstwhile India.

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

I fondly remember when I was a notebook,
Of an English genius; and notes I fervently took
On gravity, calculus, and motion had me spooked.

Mundane may be the events he sighted,
But to Newton insights were instant.
Like why apples fall and white light splits,
Into colors of rainbow resplendent.

In astronomy, math and physics, tall he stays,
The intimate strokes in my pages are still,
Classical notations for all students who will,
Delve into calculus and motion's laws.

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

When I was a student of a venerated teacher,
Doodling down in earnest, nuggets we hear,
Nuggets of "Confucius say", generations revere.

The pearls of wisdom this master strung,
More words of wisdom than any, bar none,
Their meaning is as true today,
As it must've been in his day.

The master wants to spell in his style,
So stop I must and goose bumps I share,
With you the reader:

“I hear 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 Nation;
Mother Theresa still lives on as an icon.

She shines in history not for brain nor brawn,
But as icon of devotion and compassion;
In caring for the destitute and the hopeless,
And the sick and forlorn she did so selfless.

So many nights, she would sob,
In solitude, silent tears we'd shed;
With the terrible sights she saw in her job,
And I'd join in, her sorrow I shared.

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

Delight I did as albums for a naturalist duo,
I remember with pride how I became a tool,
In helping come to their just conclusions,
In human thoughts a sheer revolution.

In my pages lay gems dried and flattened,
That these biologists collected and collated.
“Survival of the fittest” and “natural selection”,
Ideas that became the Theory of evolution.

Alfred Wallace and Charles Darwin win my wow,
The world over, scientists, thinkers now avow,
Conclusions from observations that they drew,
Masterpieces of human intuition they continue.

Explain why creatures in caves and ocean depths,
Lose eyesight but dead eyes they retain;
Why snakes preserve in vestiges, legs,

But by slithering, locomotion they maintain.

Why spiders become dainty and hide,
Candidly within their flowery abode;
Why insects mimic twigs, leaves or droppings of birds;
And all the myriad mimicry that in nature abound.

Galapagos and East Asia it became clear,
For these pioneers with passion and flair.
How they traveled through ages,
And imagined time-dictated changes.

The changes so minute and slow,
Changes in generations scant show!
Yet, imagine they did and concluded,
They reveled in nature's abundant clout.

How birds lose wings and take to solid terrain,
Likewise mammals glide, then take flight;
Fish use fins to walk, before legs they fashion,
And then find land their destined habitat.

When mammals left land for ocean waters,
Their looks they changed, but not their habits.
Mammals with pouches, a land mass harbors,
Bearing beaks, lay eggs and sporting fur!

Finches find niches and change their beaks,
So much, family resemblance all they break.
Evolution doth work in mysterious ways!
And in me the book, the evidence lay.

I remember visiting a lofty monument,
Inscribed in granite, these words I found:

“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 of the tale,
A thundering voice pierced mine ears:
“Lad, from where in this land do you hail?”
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 of modern times I get a glimpse.”

“Why did you let our nation into civil war descend?”
Asked naïve me, as if he could’ve helped;
Sporting a tortured look, 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 and no more slave masters.
Gone too are also, days of segregation,
And I see blacks running for President.”

By now curious were people and some asked,
“Who are you talking to? Are you going crazy?”
I said “Don’t you hear the President?”
Quickly did I realize, 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 Bill,
Despite his problems, Clinton meant well”.

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

He continued: “Kid, when you become President,
Remember these words: Diplomacy always first,
In the real world, choose not war but try peace
And Democracy shan’t be thrust on any populace”.

Leaving the monument with a heavy heart,
I thought to myself: “My country, my dear,
I wish Lincoln were President, now and here!”

Aryabhata I was my hero in Math and Physics,
And in the field of astronomy, a sheer genius;
I know, because I was the dry palm leaf he used,
“Aryabhatiya” his grand treatise, on me inscribed.

Algebra, Plane and Spherical Trigonometry,
No nooks of mathematics he mastered not.
Tall he does stand in India’s illustrious past;
A source of pride for Indians past and present.

Calculations of pi, areas of triangles and circles,
Power systems for large numbers, and decimals,
Above all, the place values system he devised;
Delve he did 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,
Rotation of earth on its axis, predictable, unerring.

The elliptical orbits of planets were explained,
So also why our moon and sun eclipse;
He did these a millennium before Europeans.
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 though;
As a new revolution it helped foment,
The computer age and the Internet.

I was the keyboard some pioneers prized,
Luminaries like Steve Jobs and Bill Gates;
Before the advent of touch screen and “mice”,
Faithfully I served, help construct computer craze.

‘Hardware’ and ‘software’, ‘dial-up’ and ‘broadband’,
PCs, Macs, Laptops, iPods, iPhones and iPads;
How we’ve seen these come and grandstand,
And become every day items and then fads.

To typewriters and typists, good-bye we bade;
To print-shops and photo-developers also we did.
Power to compute today whatever we ask,
Are packed in cell phones that multi-task.

In a “cyber space” reside all knowledge,
On a touch screen you tap or, a keyboard.
“Internet” is a pet name, and “world wide web”:
In whatever name, this truly is one to behold.

Search engines, URLs, web-sites, and dot coms,
Emails, “texting”, chat rooms and video conferencing.
Barely have we scratched the surface,
Of true potential of this medium’s magic.

More new words have entered English Dictionary,
“Pfishing”, “Google-search”, “Key word search”,
Are but some, but new words continue to parade;
Boundless is the energy this technology possesses.

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 hide,
To cheat, rob, misguide and corrupt like devil.

I had pleaded with Jobs and Gates,
We had to say, to secrets good-bye.
Once you post an item on the ‘net’
It’s 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,
The job for us is to care like off-spring.

