

A RARE LULLABY

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Abstract

A lullaby, or cradle song is used as a sleep aid for infants. The lingual ululation which is an essential part of lullaby in almost all Indian languages is also not tagged on to what we presume as lullabies in Sanskrit. Lullaby also means लालनगीतम् बालसान्त्वनगीतम् and शिशुशमकगीतम्।

In *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, we have queen Madālasā, who used to sing a lullaby to three of her children while she nursed them. The milk of divine wisdom too was instilled into them while she rocked the cradle.

When the child cried, instead of diverting the child's attention with various objects she chose to introduce him to the Truth. And that truth is sung in the form of a sweet lullaby which is called Madālasā upadeśa. This paper examines the ethos of lullaby and how they formed an integral part of the journey from infancy to old age in the search for wisdom, both spiritual and metaphysical.

A lullaby, or cradle song is a soothing song or a piece of music, usually played for or sung to children and has existed since ancient times. The purposes of lullabies vary. In some societies they are used to pass down cultural knowledge or tradition. In addition, lullabies are often used for the developing of communication skills, indication of emotional intent, maintenance of infants' undivided attention, modulation of infants' arousal, and regulation of behavior. Perhaps one of the most important uses of lullabies is that it helps in soothing a child's cry, agitation and woes; it composes the child's mind, spreads calmness and puts the child to sleep forgetting all the troubles. oftentimes it has a soothing effect on the hearer whoever the hearer may be and whatever the age may be.

The sentiment *vātsalya* needs to be understood first as one of the most impressive vocal expressions of *matrōvātsalya* is the lullaby. Viśvanātha in his *Sāhityadarpaṇa* gives the expression to *vatsala* as

rasa acceptable because of its delectability and declares that it is acceptable to Bharatamuni (III.235):

अथ मुनीन्द्रसम्मतो वत्सलः -
स्फुटं चमत्कारितया वत्सलं च रसं विदुः ।
स्थायी वत्सलतास्त्रेहः पुत्राद्यालम्बनं मतम् ॥

The following verse from *Kṛṣṇa Karṇāmṛta*¹ of Līlāśuka encapsulates Yaśoda's mad affection for Bālakṛṣṇa which is a lovely pen picture of an affectionate mother fondling her pranksome child :

कालिन्दीपुलिनोदरेषु मुसली यावद्गतः
खेलितुं तावत्कार्परिकं पयः पिब हरे वर्धिष्यते ते शिखा ।
इत्थं बालतया प्रतारणपराः श्रुत्वा यशोदा गिरः
पायान्नस्वशिखां स्पृशन् प्रमुदितः क्षीरेऽर्धपीते हरिः ॥

The lilt and flow of the verse captures the exudation of *mātr̥vātsalya*. There are not many lullabies in Sanskrit. The reason, perhaps, is to be found in the regional elements that influence the lullabies. For a telling example of lullaby in Sanskrit, we can consider the *ślokas* from *Kṛṣṇavilāsakāvya*² of Sukumāra Kavi (15th C.A.D.) where Yaśodā is described as singing a sweet lullaby in order to put her child, Kṛṣṇa, to sleep when all the outside world has become silent .

In the verse below from the *Kṛṣṇa Karṇāmṛta*³ we find the age old practice of the elders narrating simple epic stories to the children eliciting their response with the sound 'hum'. This is only to make sure that they are no more wakeful.

रामो नाम बभूव हुं तदबलता सीतेति हुं तौ पितु-
र्वाचा पञ्चवटीतटे विहरस्तामाहरद्रावणः ।
निद्रार्थं जननीकथामिति हरेर्हुङ्कारतः शृण्वतः
सौमित्रे क्व धनुर्धनुर्धनुरिति व्यग्रागिरः पान्तु वः ॥

The lingual ululation which is an essential part of lullaby in almost all Indian languages is also not tagged on to what we presume as lullabies in Sanskrit. Lullaby also means लालनगीतम् बालसान्त्वनगीतम् and शिशुशमकगीतम्

In *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* there is this lullaby called Madālasā Upadeśa. The story is that Madalasa, wife of king Ṛtadvaja, was an enlightened Queen who gave birth to four children. When the child cried, instead of diverting the child's attention with various objects she chose to introduce him to the Truth. And that truth is sung in the

form of a sweet lullaby. She used to sing a lullaby to her children while she nursed them. The milk of divine wisdom too was instilled into them while she rocked the cradle.

सा वै मदालसा पुत्रं बालमुत्तानशायिनम् ।

उल्लापनच्छलेनाह रुदमानमविस्वरम् ॥⁴

The mother is said to be ‘Madālasā’ which literally means one who has won over *ālasa* or laziness. One may take it to be the Mother Śruti teaching all of us.

शुद्धोऽसि रे तात न तेऽस्ति नाम कृतं च ते कल्पनयाधुनैव ।

पञ्चात्मकं देहमिदं न तेऽस्ति नैवास्य त्वं रोदिषि कस्य हेतोः ॥⁵

Gently and coaxingly the mother introduces the child to self inquiry. Its a child so the introduction should be very gentle. She says “Oh Child, You are Pure”. The mother says “You do not have a name”! Usually mother introduces the child to a name, here the enlightened mother is first telling the child “You are not a name”! And then she says “A name is only a temporary superimposition: a *kalpana*, imagination”. Madālasā says “you are not of the body and the body is not of you”. The body is left where it is. Its made up of what? Its made up of the *pañca-bhūtas* like earth, water, fire, air, space none of which are cognitive. What a simple and straight teaching! and yet with such child-like simplicity.

न वा भवान्नोदिति वै स्वजन्मा शब्दोऽयमासाद्य महीशसूनुम् ।

विकल्प्यमाना विविधा गुणास्तेऽगुणाश्च भौताः सकलेन्द्रियेषु ॥⁶

In the above verse the mother sweetly introduces the child to itself through its own crying. She says “You feel bad and cry, please tell me who is it that is crying?” The body is nothing more than these 5 elements. When in the presence of Awareness, it appears as if “alive”. When it cannot “Express” the awareness, its no more than a log of wood. *Viveka* here is to recognize that even when the body is alive, its no more than *jaḍa*. The body has no “cry” of its own! And Awareness never cries!

She says in the following verse that all the beings extremely feeble acquire their growth by help of the elements and by taking food and that the self has no growth or decay:

भूतानि भूतैः परिदुर्बलानि वृद्धिं समायान्ति यथेह पुंसः ।

अन्नाम्बुदानादिभिरेव कस्य न तेऽस्ति वृद्धिर्न च तेऽस्ति हानिः ॥⁷

If there is a lump of clay, we add more clay and it becomes

a larger lump of clay. We take away a little clay and the lump becomes smaller. That is what the Mother compares the growth and decay of this body to.

Further the queen sings – “You are in the body which is like a jacket that gets worn out day by day. Do not have the wrong notion that you are the body. This body is like a jacket that you are tied to, for the frutification of the good and bad *karmas*”:

त्वं कञ्चुके शीर्यमाणे निजेऽस्मिस्तस्मिन्स्वदेहे मूढतां मा ब्रजेथाः ।

शुभाशुभैः कर्माभिर्देहमेतन्मदादिमूढैः कञ्चुकस्ते पिनद्धः ॥⁸

To stop identifying with this body is very important. Saints like Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa used the word “this” for the body, rather than “me”. The point is to recognize that this body is like a vehicle for us. We sit in the vehicle and travel in this world, the vehicle is always distinct from us. If the vehicle breaks down, our movement is restricted but “we are not affected”! This body is a byproduct of our *karmas*. When a particular body is given, certain enjoyments become possible and certain troubles also come along with it. So a body is given to us by God based upon the kind of *prārabdha karma* that is enfolding.

She further adds, the father, the son, the mother, the wife the relatives are nothing. One should not relate too much importance to this collection of elements:

तातेति किञ्चित्तनयेति किञ्चिदम्बेति किञ्चिद्वयितेति किञ्चित् ।

ममेति किञ्चिन्न ममेति किञ्चिद् भौत संङ्गं बहुधा मा लपेथाः ॥⁹

What applies to name also applies to the various “relations” like father, mother, brother, son, wife, daughter etc. They are all words with a lot of emotions, ideas etc.:

दुःखानि दुःखोपशमाय भोगान् सुखाय जानाति विमूढचेताः ।

तान्येव दुःखानि पुनः सुखानि जानात्यविद्वान् सुविमूढचेताः ॥¹⁰

The deluded think that by indulging in the objects that appear to create comfortable situations [*i.e., sukha*], they will become happy and unhappiness will be gone. But the wise can see that the same objects become sources of discomfort when one indulges in them for long! Its also delusion to think that by replacing the objects of discomfort with objects of comfort we gain happiness. The happiness quotient of a person is determined by the ability of the person to remain as Self.

यानं क्षितौ यानगतश्च देहं देहेऽपि चान्यः पुरुषो निविष्टः ।

ममत्वबुद्धिर्न तथा यथा स्वे देहेऽतिमात्रं वत मूढतैषा ॥¹¹

The vehicle that moves on the ground is different from the person in it, similarly this body is also different from the person who is inside! The owner of the body is different from the body! Ah how foolish it is to think I am the body! This is the last verse of the Madālasā *upadeśa*.

The body has no sense of “I AM” and it does not feel owned by me. Only, I drag the reactions and feelings of the body onto myself or collide with those states and create problems. This is the essential teaching of Madālasā *upadeśa*:

“You are Not the Body and Body is not You. Remain as the Nameless Awareness and there can be no mental conflicts with what ever happens ! Thus be Free, Just Be”.

The queen thus sang lullaby to her three sons, who leaving the kingdom and parents behind, went to the forest for performing penance. When the fourth son was born, as the queen was about to instruct him in the same manner, the king stopped her from doing so and requested her to instruct the duties of a Kṣatriya which may lead to his well-being both in this world and in the next. Thus the fourth son named Alarka was initiated into the *pravṛtti mārga*.

तेनैवमुक्ता सा साध्वी वरनारी मदालसा ।
 अलर्कं नाम् तनयं प्रोवाचोल्लापवादिनि ॥
 पुत्र वर्धस्व मे भर्तुर्मनो नंदय कर्मभिः ।
 ऐहिकामुष्मिकफलं तत्सम्यक्परिपालय ॥
 मित्राणामुपकाराय दुर्हृदां नाशनाय च ॥¹²

CONCLUSION :

शुद्धोऽसि बुद्धोऽसि निरञ्जनोऽसि संसारमाया परिवर्जितोऽसि ।
 संसारस्वप्नं त्यज मोहनिद्रां मदामसोल्लपमुवाच पुत्रम् ॥

As queen Madālasā also sang while rocking the cradle:

“You are all-pure, enlightened and immaculate. Give up this sleep of delusion which makes you give value to that which has no value, to endow it with a sense of reality through ignorance. This is the darkness of the slumber of non-awareness.”

That is the call we have to respond to. It is the call of the Upaniṣads. We shall ever shine as a centre of radiant and dynamic Divine-consciousness. Let us awaken from the delusionary slumber and perceive the Divinity. We can, then, make our lives an expression of our Divinity.

ENDNOTES :

1. *Kṛṣṇa Karṇāmṛtam*, II. 60
2. *Kṛṣṇavilāsakāvya*, III. 44, 46 :
कुन्दत्विषस्तालफलप्रकाशाः तापिञ्छवर्णास्तरुणार्कभासः ।
प्रभूतदुग्धा नवनीतवत्यो गावस्सहस्रं तनय त्वदीयाः ॥
सरसिरुहवने गतेऽपि निद्रां कथमिव ते नयनाम्बुजे विनिद्रे ।
श्रुतिपरिचयशालिनो हि कर्म स्वजननिषेवितमेव संश्रयन्ते ॥
3. *Kṛṣṇa Karṇāmṛta*, v. 71
4. *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāna*, 23.10
5. *ibid.*, 23.11
6. *ibid.*, 23.12
7. *ibid.*, 23.13
8. *ibid.*, 23.14
9. *ibid.*, 23.15
10. *ibid.*, 23.16
11. *ibid.*, 23.18-9
12. *ibid.*, 23.54-5

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3. *Śrīkṛṣṇavilāsam* of Sukumāra Kavi, Higginbothams Ltd., Madras, 1982
4. *Journal of Oriental Research*, Vol. 87, The Kuppaswami Sastri Research Institute, Chennai, 2015
