

T. P. Kailasam

Tanjore Paramasiva Kailasam

The Burden

A Playlet of THE RAAMAAYANA

Personae:

BHARATA } Princes of Kosala
SATRUGHNA }

VASISHTHA } Priest to the Royal House
ANGA } Aged Chamberlains-at-court
VANGA } Other servitors at the Palace

Place:

A Corridor in the Palace

Period:

Ayodhya Kaanda of the RAAMAAYANA

Time:

Early Night

Place

"The King's Walk" : a corridor - Dim lit
[Enter : Bharata and Satrughna travel-begrimed]

Bharata: (rubbing his eyes with the backs of his hands) Oh, the dust! The blinding dust!... To watch the fleetest steeds in all the land sniff up that red ribbon of a road from uncle's here, did bring elation to my **heart**; but to mine eyes, the dust!, makes e'en the King's own walk seem dimly lit!

Satrughna: (apprehensively) "Seem dimly lit?" But Bharata, it **is** dim lit...I fear'd it would be so!

Bharata: You fear'd it? How?

Satrughna: Intent on steering fleetsome steeds through surging streets, **thine** eyes did miss what **mine** descried: 'Twas bleak and blear our way through Ayodhya; methought the people glared at us...their looks unwelcome, callous, cold! e'en condemning;...and here...our father's favourite walk all gloomy clammy! Bharata, I feel so strangely frightened!

Bharata: Affrighted! **You!** (laughing) Well art thou named Dread Satrughna! A terror to thine enemies without a doubt; but thou art ev'n a bigger one to thine own self! The people's glare forsooth! Perchance the rains have held off hereabout and grains are scare; bare stomachs lend but poor succur to muster smiles of welcome! Or mayhap the chase hath lur'd our Rama to the wilds and cozened poor Ayodhya's eyes of wonted feast!... But why... the King's Walk dimly lit? Perchance the King's away!...but where away?...He has not been away this

long long while...and then 'twas Indra;...I have it! 'Tis Sakra with his cousins rampant, raging...hath slyly snar'd the king to battle for him as once he did before of yore! You know the story?

Satrugghna: Aye. I've heard my elders tell of it; I've heard tell too 'twas our Little Queen-Mother Kaikeyee that with her daring sav'd the Devas from disaster!

Bharata: (in alarm)...**She** will be away too! With her beloved lord at battle, she would not lag behind; my mother cannot breathe beyond the king's side! And what of Rama? With his mighty arm a twitch to draw bow at the king's side, he would not laze at home nor would Mahendra let him, and, Lakshmana? But why let our fears father sombre thoughts; 'tis easily known...(aloud) **What ho! Without!**

Anga: (entering) Your Commands, Sire!

Bharata: (to Satrugghna) He takes me for the king! And to his age dimmed eyes, this gloom doth lend but poor succour. (to Anga) I'm Bharata, my lord!

Anga: I knew it Sire!

Bharata: 'Sire' again! His ears have gone too the way of his eyes...past sensing! Poor ancient! And yet I've heard tell, brother, that in his prime, his lordship had the straightest back of any that drew bow in the King's Guard! And at chase, his lordship could see farther, hear sharper than any that went hunt with the King! And now, 'tis this!' 'Tis a sin to grow old. Saumitri, one really must not!

Satrugghna: (smiling) But, Bharata, 'tis **Time's** edict that one **must** grow old if one **will** live long!

Anga: (stragglingly and incoherently) The King...my liege...is the Prince...is...

Bharata: (impatiently) Nay! 'tis dotage dulls his senses and we but waste our time! (aloud) Forgive us, m'lord but we would to our royal brother Rama... (attempts to walk past Anga)

Anga: (feebly attempting to restrain Bharata) Nay, Sire!...the King...the Prince...the Princess...Heavens...I can...no...more! (falls forward)

Bharata: (catching him in his arms) Poor ancient! He will brush aside his king's behest to forbear from work and rest his limbs sore tried in the service of the Estate. Why, he has fainted dead away! Help, Saumitri ... (The brothers carry him to a couch)...gently...(they lay him on it: Bharata in a loud voice) **What ho! Without! More lights ho! This gloom is maddening!** (Enter a number of courtiers: also servants bearing lamps and torches, with Vanga at their head. Bharata pointing to the couch) Look to his lordship, my lords!

Vanga: (approaching the couch) Aye, Sire!

Bharata: "Sire" again! Am I awake or are we all possessed? What does it all mean, Saumitri?

Satrugghna: I do not know, Bharata, I cannot tell; but I feel, it all portends some disaster that has befallen us!

Bharata: Disaster! The Gods forbid! (to Vanga) How doth his lordship, my lord?

Vanga: (approaching) But poorly, Sire! We have but ill hopes of his lordship's mending, and fear his scant breath portends his fast-approaching last!

Bharata: Poor ancient! Send for his kin; and the physicians too! (approaching the couch seats himself by the prone man; running his hand gently over the old man's brow, in a soothing tone) How is it with thee, my lord!?

Anga: (Opening his eyes which have a blear far-away look in them) Oh! That I the hoariest in all Ayodhya, that I should have lived to see what I have seen and

not died ere the king died! Oh, that I should have lived to see the great king's death, the princes banished! God...punish...the wicked...queen!

Bharata: (aloud, in alarm) What **horror** is this?

Anga: (looking at Bharata with intelligent eyes) The boy king! (Laying his hand on the prince's head) Forgive me, sire; as child and boy, as youth and man, all your life I've known Your Majesty. The kingship's trust, Ayodhya's weal were ne'er in safer hands. And blessing you, I die my liege. May God forgive the thoughtless queen whose only sin was nature 'cited love of dam for son! (falls back dead)

Bharata: (reverently closing the dead eyes, stands up;... in dignified tones) My lords, his lordship of Anga's valiant and upright soul hath found its well-earned rest at last? (to Vanga) His lordship's kin arrived yet? (some one exits) Saumitri, our king father will sorely miss his tried friend and thane! But, what of his ranting? 'Twas no less; you heard it all: he called me boy-king! And did speak of a great king that died; a banished prince: his mother wicked with "nature 'cited love of dam for son!" What king? When died? And wherefore the banishment of the prince her son if the queen the mother loved him? And whence again the "wickedness" of love of dam for son if "nature 'cited?"...I've heard tell brother, that as the **soul** parts company with its ancient henchman the **body**, the **mind** in its final flutter conjures up lights and sights free of sway of reason and rakes up and spreads out in **new** shapes scenes of **old** happenings buried deep 'neath the ken of **sane** remembrance; Perhaps in his lordship's long-lived life, the horrors of the happenings of some royal house, left a wound so deep and so poorly healed, the cicatrice broke anew at his last breath and swayed his tongue! Why! **you**, my lord of Vanga, his lordship's co eval, peer in rank, comrade in arms and friend of youth and prime, **you** of any here should wot if aught of sense or truth there was in his lordship's last mutterings!? Was there ever a king died in his lordship's life time? (Vanga drops his eyes) Why! Whence this silence? Was I not understood? Speak, my lord, I charge thee!

Vanga: (in distracted tone...aside) The Gods help me! (aloud) Aye. Sire, there was a king that died during his lordship of Anga's lifetime!

Bharata: There was!?! "Great King" he called him; was he, this king that died, as great as our dread Lord? Could not be! And what of a prince banished? And a wicked queen mother too; what of her? (Vanga and the other courtiers, with heaving bosoms look away; Bharata astonished at their behaviour laughs sardonically) Without a doubt, brother mine, they are all possessed! (turning round, notices Satrughna, a prey to his own premonitions, has buried his face in his hands) What!? You too!? What ails thee, Saumitri? (approaching him, shakes him gently) Come man, come!

Satrughna: (agonised in face and voice) Bharata, do you not yet understand!?

Bharata: U n d e r s t a n d ?...what?

Satrughna: The...king...that...died...!

Bharata: What, he that his lordship spoke of? Why, what of him?

Satrughna: Why...Bharata...'tis...'tis...!!!

Bharata: (the horror and suffering on Satrughna's face sets Bharata thinking and sudden as a thunderclap, the truth bursts on his mind; in tones of frenzied despair and anger) What **he**?...(With limbs taut, and clenched fists defiantly challenging the room) **Not he?** 'Tis a **lie!** **A fiendish...God...** (in helpless resignation)...'Tis the **truth!** (collapses on the back of the couch where the

dead man lies;...in the agonised voice of a stricken fawn and with face buried in his hands) My...king!...My father!... Never to look on thy loved face again! Never to look into thy loving eyes again! Never to hear thy kindly voice a g a i n!

- Satrughna: (approaching, touches him in the nape of his neck; in a voice blended of sympathy and protest) Bharata, remember who you are!
- Bharata: (reiterating dazedly) "Remember...who...I...am? Who...I..." (with an effort...aloud to Vanga) Is his holiness the Sage Vasishtha in the Palace ?
- Vanga: Aye, Sire!
- Bharata: (plaintively) Then, bespeak for me, my lord, that Bharata, numb'd in limb and mind, hungers for sight and touch of His Holiness' feet, **here!** And (raising his voice with effort, to the courtiers) We would be alone I (all the retinue leave noiselessly by the right egress from the corridor, while Vanga leaves by the left.)
[Bharata with superhuman effort is controlling his emotions, glaring widely at the left ingress to the corridor. The moment the sage Vasishtha enters, one bound of hysterical frenzy lands him near the Rishi.]
- Bharata: (in almost threatening notes) Could you not...you, the greatest of the great ones of the earth...could you not have sav'd him...and...saving him...sav'd us all too!!? (collapses at the Rishi's feet; Satrughna brushing away his fast-falling tears, places a chair immediately behind the sage)
- Vasishtha: (seats himself, the princes still prone at his feet; in a dispassionate voice charg'd with a soupcon of admonition) It is not in my heart to chide thee, child! But this helplessness of thine, belies thy sex, thy learning, thy blood, thy lineage and prepares thee but ill for thy man's task of bearing the burden that fate path placed on thee, the greatest of the **Raaghavas!** (laying his hand gently on Bharata's head) Calamities like these, aye, greater than these are sent us but to try our strength, of body and mind, of heart and soul !
- Bharata: (like a cobra stricken to death, limply raises its hood for the last time, raises his head, his welling eyes meeting the Rishi's; in a voice fraught with heart-rending agony) Try **us?** Try us great one? Try our strength of **heart and mind and soul?** But, why, great one, why, the trial of this one humble soul spell a great people's grief? He meant as much to millions and more as to me! Why? Why? Why? (collapses at the Rishi's feet)*

Curtain Drops Slowly

* This playlet grew into a second scene **a la** most of the other creations of Kailasam

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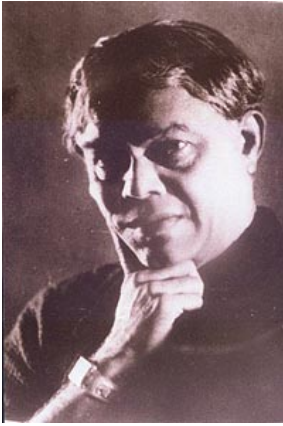
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*These scenes and words you'll see and hear,
I've seen and heard before,
As king or priest, poltroon, or peer,
Somewhere... Somewhen of yore!*

T. P. Kailasam (1884-1946) was a prominent playwright, writer and poet in Kannada and English. This page is dedicated to his writings in English.



Kailasam

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