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Flight Of Time

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In a previous study, we analyzed the postulates of time, and its two different façades namely kūtasya-Nitya and Pravāh-Nitya (which suggest time in constant flux and also in the static mode as inertia), as described in Sanskrit dharmśāstriya discourses, duly substantiated by select Sanskrit and French literary texts.

In the present brief study, we analyze the same theme further. We divide this study into three parts. In part one, we will visualize the flight and apathy of time as described in a poetic composition entitled 'Le Lac' (of Romantic-age French poet, Alphonse de Lamartine [1790-1869 A.D.]). We will learn how 'Le Lac' depicts a poet's self-introspection in consonance with his fervent love and his agony to see the end of his pleasant days. We will refer to this poetry as a hallmark of the theme in question. 'Le Lac' displays the passing façade of time which jolted and agonized the poet deeply. This segment will invoke us to get acquainted with time's abstruse and mystic dimensions. To interpret this conscience in the second part of this study, we will refer to an epitome work entitled *Ibn 'Arabî-Time and Cosmology*, written by a renowned scholar of Physics, Cosmology, Philosophy, and mysticism in Islam, Mohammad Haz Yousef. We will learn the narratives of time and eternity from ontological and cosmological perspectives as defined in some ancient European doctrines and ethos, along with the cosmic doctrines of an ancient Islamic scholar of Sufi Cosmology, named Ibn- 'Arabî. In the third and final part, we will try to analyze in a nutshell, the tenets of time as discussed in the second part of the study. This study will teach us the objective of giving our mundane lofty meaning with our good *karma*.

I

The nostalgia of the past and love in 'Le Lac'

It is well within our purview that Alphonse de Lamartine expressed an intense upsurge of his profound emotions in his 10th poetic composition, 'Le Lac' (published in 1820 A.D.) of epitome recueil poétique entitled *Méditations poétiques*. In 'Le Lac', Lamartine expressed his profound grief and resentment vis-à-vis the cruel destiny that stifled him and forayed the pleasure of his love for his dying beloved Julia Charles. The poet yet expressed his profound desire to eternalize his transitory love. His lonely presence near the lake of Bourget makes him nostalgic for Julia's company that he used to relish there. As a living embodiment of the 'transmundane' love; 'Le Lac' became one of the best and most beautiful translations

of Romantic poetry. It is an immortal poetic composition. In a separate study, we will do a more in-depth interpretation of this beautiful poetic composition. In this segment of the study, we will briefly try to admire its pulsating and vibrant poetic beauty and joy in the following study.

In 'Le Lac', Lamartine listens to the voice of silence through the cadence and undulations of the Lake. He consequently opens up a dialogue with humanoid nature. He addresses the lake and complains about the phase of Pravāh-nitya kāl which separated him from his beloved Julia. The silence of the lake translates her deep pensive mood as if she were listening to his complaints:

« O temps! Suspends ton vol et vous heures propices/ Suspendez votre course! Laissez nous savourer les rapides délices / Des plus beaux de nos jours! » (Lagarde, A., Michard, L., 1970: 98).

A prakriti-puruṣ saṁvād (or a dialogue between man and nature) seems embedded in these lyrics. The poet is in deep self-introspection. He speaks among all mortals as an angel. He wants destiny to spare him to eternalize the experience of ecstasy in the realm of mundane love. She must deliver the miserable troubled souls who are more in need. He raises questions about the great human concern. He asks the lake why time deprived him of the pinnacle of joy. Why do human beings, the best creations of God have such a momentary ecstasy? Why the number of their beautiful days are so scanty?

« Mais je demande en vain quelques moments encore / Le temps m'échappe et fuit. Je dis à cette nuit « sois plus lente »; et l'aurore / Va dissiper la nuit ».

The phenomenon of time in haste is at the very genesis of Pravāh-nitya kāl. Our ephemeral existence falls prey to the onslaught of time:

« Quoi! passés pour jamais? Quoi! tout entier perdus? »
Suddenly, the poet gives an Epicurean message to all mortals:

« Aimons donc, aimons donc de l'heure fugitive / Hâtons-nous, jouissons! / L'homme n'a point de port, le temps n'a point de rive; / Il coule et nous passons! »

He eventually beseeches the elements of natural rocks, mountains, valleys, fountains, caves, forests, and lakes that (barring human beings, paradoxically the best creation of God) stay for centuries; to place on record the memories of love:

« O lac! Rochers muets! Grottes! Forêts obscures! /Vous que le temps épargne ou qu'il peut rajeunir / Gardez de cette nuit, gardez belle nature / Au moins le souvenir! »

The profound resonance of karuṇ-rasa, embedded in these verses, reflects yet another typical fold of time as Kūṭasya-nitya which remains forever, static and unchanged. Poet's queries in symmetrical melodious rimes show a mundane and oxymoron reality. The lifeless elements of nature are static whereas our life, the most precious creations of God, is temporary.

The rampant pace of Pravāh-nitya kāl is well depicted in yet another poetic reflection of XXth century French poet Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918 A.D.). He expresses his agony of life more profoundly in his poetic composition entitled 'Le Pont Mirabeau':

« **Passent les jours passent les semaines / Ni temps passé ni les amours ne reviennent** » (Guillaume Apollinaire, 1913: 85-86).

Lamartine repents: Poets contemplate over life, alas passed worthless:

« **Je contemple ses biens dont je n'ai pas joui** ».

'Le Lac' translates profound repentance of the poet. He is disillusioned with the death of his precious days. The composition disseminates an implicit message to all mortals that they must understand the mystic dichotomy of their life and time. They must understand that nothing remains forever in the mundane world. Time devours everything. Kāl has no beginning or end; some consider it linear with infinite extension in the past and in the future. How do we yet define it? What are the postulates of Kāl? Is time real or imaginary? In the following segment of this study, we will try to get the answers to these questions.

II

Mohammad Haz Yousef makes an in-depth study on the mystic perspectives of Sufi cosmology and ontological doctrine of an ancient scholar of Islam, Ibn 'Arabī (1165-1240 A.D.), in his book entitled *Ibn 'Arabī-Time and Cosmology*. This revolutionary doctrine defines Ibn-Arabi's unique cosmological

model, Oneness of being, cosmic space-time purview, the concept of time in cosmic theology, and other phenomena in consonance with the dynamics of Metaphysics and modern science. Mohammad Haz Yousef decodes the occult and abstruse dimensions of Sufi Cosmology and *Quaran* through the prism and perspectives of modern science. In this segment, we will learn the implications of these tenets. At the very outset, we will get acquainted with the perspective of ancient Western traditions vis-à-vis the time. We will then try to decipher the concept of time as defined in Sufi Cosmology.

2.1 Time in Greek Philosophy

Mohammad Haz Yousef makes a systematic study of time in the ancient age. He says that in Greek mythology, time is referred to as the god Chronos who, just like Time, ate his sons one after the other, for fear of their capturing his kingdom. Another Greek philosopher Plato (428/427 or 424/423 – 348/347 BC) considered time to be created with the world. Plato visualized time as the circular motion of the heavens. Plato says: 'Be that as it may, Time came into being together with the Heaven, so that, as they were co-terminus. On the other hand, yet another great ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BC) believed that the world was created in time, which is an infinite and continuous extension. Aristotle finds no beginning of time which is a continuum of motion. Aristotle refers to heavenly spheres to define time. He considers time as imaginary because it is either past or future, and both do not exist, while the present is not part of the time because it has no extension.

Mohammad Haz Yousef further observes that Aristotle's notion of circular time (based on an eternal/uncreated universe) was later gainsaid by theologians like Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D) and Italian priest Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 A.D.). They insisted that human experience is a one-way journey from Genesis to Judgement, regardless of any recurring patterns or cycles in nature. Hence the flow of time must follow a linear motion with a definite beginning and end (Mohammad Haz Yousef, 2008:65-66, 71-72).

2.2 Time in earlier Islamic philosophy

Mohammad Haz Yousef makes further an in-depth quest on the concept of time in Sufi Cosmic doctrine. He appraises us that most of the Muslim philosophers were in general greatly influenced by their Hellenistic predecessors. They analyzed, either criticized, or adapted the Greek theories of time about the related issues raised by the Qur'an and Prophetic Hadith.

In the wake of Aristotle's theory, philosophers like Ibn Sînâ and Al-Fârâbî also visualized the circular motion of time. Physician and Neoplatonist Al-Râzî agreed with Plato's notion of time as a 'moving form of eternity'. He rebutted Aristotle's view of the unreality of time. Many other schools of Islamic thought have speculated on the issue of time. Mohammad Haz Yousef observes that Ibn-Arabî explored, many time-related terms (year as 'sana'/ 'âm', month as 'shahr', day as 'yawm'/ 'nahâr', night as 'layl', the First as 'al-awwal', the Last as 'al-âkhir' and the Age as al-dahr) quite often in *Quran* (Mohammad Haz Yousef, 2008:67-70). Mohammad Yousef makes further observations of studies that Ibn 'Arabî's perception of time. He says that Ibn Arabî visualized the same relation of time to the mortal world as eternity about Allah. In his major book *Al-Futûhât Al-Makkiyya* Ibn 'Arabî perceived that eternity does not exist on its own, so time *vis-à-vis* the entire cosmos is also imaginary, devoid of its separate physical/non-physical entity. It is merely a mind's tool to chronologically arrange events and the motion of the heavenly spheres and physical objects. 'Time' in the usual common sense is a tool used by our perception to classify the events or motion of objects chronologically; it would not have any meaning without motion or change. This is why we do not feel time while we are asleep; we have to look for some kind of a standard reference motion (the Sun, the Moon, the stars, or a watch) to realize how much time has elapsed since we went into a deep sleep. Time, therefore, has no real absolute meaning; it is only used relative to something to describe its state of existence (Mohammad Haz Yousef, 2008:92-93).

Ibn 'Arabî distinguished between two formats of time: 'natural time' and 'para-natural time', 'physical time', and 'spiritual time'. He also explains that the origin of this ultimately imaginary time is from the two forces of the soul: the active force and the intellective force. The main idea behind Ibn 'Arabî's mysterious conceptions here is his controversial theory of the oneness of being (Mohammad Haz Yousef, 2008:78-97). He discerned the time of the Lord as a 'servant' and the time of the servant as the Lord (al-rabb). Servant calls Lord by this name. He would not be called 'Lord' if there are no servants to worship Him; likewise, the servant deserves his name by (his relation to) the Lord. Or in Ibn 'Arabî's own words: 'The time of the father is the son, and time of the son is the father':

'I am Your presence and You are my presence.' (Mohammad Haz Yousef, 2008:89).

2.3 God's Will to Create the Universe

Ibn Arabî discerned the entire universe as the manifestation of the Absolute, All-Sufficient 'al-ghanî' Allah's desire/will ('irâda'), wish ('mashî'a'), and knowledge ('ilm'). He said that Allah 'is the One ('al-Wâhid'), the Unique ('al-Ahad), Allah the one on Whom all depend (al-Samad); He is the final cause of all Jagat-prapañc. Therefore, the existence of the world came about by Allah either for Himself or for 'other' than Himself. Ibn 'Arabî further explained the dichotomy of the creation of the universe, as said in *Quran* that the world ceases to exist instantly and intrinsically the next moment right after its creation, and then it is re-created again and again. In this way, Allah creates and re-creates the entire cosmos ab-infinity. Ibn 'Arabî reiterates the creation of the universe in two folds, the 'visible' and 'invisible', described in the *Quran*. This creation named three distinctive ontological 'levels' such as 'alam al-mulk' or 'alam al-shahâda', which is the visible world; 'alam al-malakût, which is the realm of meanings; and 'alam al-jabarût, which is the all-encompassing realm of the divine imagination ('barzakh') (Mohammad Haz Yousef, 2008:96-97). We have discussed these realms of consciousness along with others such as 'alam-e-Hahut', 'alam-e-Lahut', 'alam-e-Yahut', 'alam-e-Jabarut', 'alam-e-Nasut' in a separate study on Sufi Cosmology.

Mohammad Haz Yousef further submits that Ibn 'Arabî gives special importance to the cosmic 'Week', and says that the seven cosmic week-Days are unique and not alike. *Quran* says that the creation of the cosmos continues for five days. At the end of the day, Saturday 'al-sabt' is considered the 'Day of eternity'. Ibn 'Arabî's view of the re-creation principle and his theory of the oneness of being distinguishes between two kinds of time: physical or natural time '*zaman tabî'i*' and spiritual/para-natural time '*zaman fawq-tabî'i*' (Mohammad Haz Yousef, 2008: 92).

III The reflection of Western Philosophers/Ibn ‘Arabî’s concept of time in ‘Le Lac’

At the very outset, we anticipate the format of linear motion of time more logically in ‘Le Lac’. Theologians Saint Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas’s perception of time reflect in ‘Le Lac’. We learned earlier that they insisted on human experiences as a one-way journey from Genesis to Judgement, regardless of any recurring patterns or cycles in nature. Hence the flow of time must follow a linear motion with a definite beginning and end. Lamartine also describes his nostalgia for the passing of his beautiful days in suggestive linear motion of time that affects the journey of his life. In this context, we insist that the circular motion of time may merely be an apparent short-sighted reality/illusion, but in the long run, it displays a comprehensive, cumulative momentum of a flat linear motion.

We also learned that Aristotle believed the world to be created in an infinite and continuous extension of time. Aristotle finds no beginning of time which is a continuum of motion. Lamartine also addresses the elements of nature by saying that these elements will remain forever in continuously changing form. Ibn ‘Arabî’ reiterated the version of *Quaran* that Allah creates and re-creates his universe.

Lamartine’s agony of ‘la fuite du temps’ translates into Ibn ‘Arabî’s perception of imaginary or ‘unreal’ time. Ibn ‘Arabî visualized the relation of time to the mortal world same as eternity about Allah. We learned earlier that in *Al-Futûhât Al-Makkiyya*, Ibn ‘Arabî perceived that eternity does not exist on its own, so time *vis-à-vis* the entire cosmos is also imaginary, devoid of its separate physical/non-physical entity. We have observed earlier that Aristotle considered time as imaginary because it is either past or future, and both do not exist, while the present has no extension. This was precisely the agony of the wounded heart poet. Lamartine also mourns to observe the mundane reality which becomes ‘anitya’, transitory from being ‘nitya’ in the present moment of reality, with every passing moment. Poet cannot withhold it. Poet complains about his destiny about this gross injustice to human beings, hence to the Divinity. As sand slips out of the fist, the poet’s world/time passes out of his hands. Man cannot change this dichotomy of precious human life. He can simply vouch for the experience of his beautiful days go by and express his remorse to have wasted his life. In another poem entitled ‘L’Automne’, Lamartine submits:

**‘L’air est si parfumé! la lumière est si pure!
Aux regards d’un mourant le soleil est si beau!’**

The poetic sentiments suggest that time is imaginary as reflected in the rime, ‘**tout entire perdu**’. Only real remains, something that is unreal/imaginary vanishes in due course of time. The other elements of ‘kâenât’ created by Allah remain.

These verses speak volumes of the worth of these precious lofty days. Poetic compositions such as ‘Le Lac’, based on the theme discussed in this article intend to educate us implicitly on the didactics of life in a tone of ‘Mitra sammit’, even as ‘Kântā sammit’, ‘Dev sammit’, three updeś as described in Sanskrit poetics. We must do good karma, and tapa to ascend to a higher plateau of consciousness to try to give our life meaning. We must try to know the unknown, we must try to see the unseen, and we must try to learn and read the unread message.

In this brief article, we tried to study the postulates of time and its harsh reality with regard to the mortal world. Great theologians, visionaries, ascetics, and Sufies tried to educate us from time to time on the importance of time and our golden days.

Suggested Reading

Lamartine, A.D., *Méditations poétiques*, Librairie de Charles Gosselin, Paris, 1928.

Lagarde & Michard, *XIX^{ème} siècle*, Collection Littéraire, Bordas, Paris, 1970.

Yousef, M.H., *Ibn ‘Arabî – Time and Cosmology*, Taylor & Francis Group, Routledge, London, 2008.