CHAPTER ONE

D.H. LAWRENCE AND THE AKAM

POETS: AN INTRODUCTION
The religious scripts have it to say that whenever the currents of universal life fail to flow in the psychic springs of man, whenever the seeds of degeneracy and dissolution start to take roots in him, God sends prophets and teachers to reestablish order and harmony. This is true in the realm of literature also. Great literary artists arise at a point of time when the conscious outlook of an epoch is beset with serious psychic ailments. They thrust upon themselves the responsibility of shaping the unconscious, psychic life of mankind. Their works represent both the crisis of the society and the way to the attainment of its healing. The case of D.H. Lawrence (1885 - 1930), a writer of the English Midlands is exactly the same. He is a seer, a guide, a teacher who has taken upon himself the responsibility of restoring the psychic equilibrium of the twentieth century, which he finds is marked by indirections and false attitudes.

While the religious prophets have tried to take us into the path of spiritual kingdom, Lawrence has brought to us the riches of here and now, the meaning and the joy of living in the body, sexual and procreative, on the earth. For him the salvation lies, not in the realization of the spirit, but in the realization of the mysteries of the phallic body.
Lawrence's literary career spanned over a period of twenty years. But during this comparatively brief period, that too amid the frequent deteriorations of health, in the absence of a stationary life and in an unfavourable atmosphere to his artistic and personal self, he has produced an amazingly rich variety of literary output. He is a poet, a novelist, a playwright, a story-teller, a literary and social critic, a historian, a letter-writer and a 'philosopher'. To his credit, there are ten full length novels and seven nouvelles, and more than fifty short stories. His poems come to more than one thousand pages and his critical and expository writing is much longer. Besides, he has written two semi-philosophical treatises, four travel books, four plays and a study of European history. There is another thousand pages of letters of varied interests, personal, literary, social and political. What astounds one is the fact that he had been writing on all these genres contemporaneously and that he had put the same amount of energy and interest into each genre.

In all these creations, Lawrence dealt with only one theme, which according to him, was of life-and-death significance to the whole of mankind: the emotional and intuitive aspects of human consciousness. He was perhaps the first artist in the whole of the English literary tradition to introduce this new mode of thematic expression in literature. He was convinced that the prevailing
atmosphere was not conducive to the natural flowering of the inner faculties of man. The moral disintegration of the times, the wilful sacrifice by the modern man of his primordial innocence and tenderness at the altar of economic and industrial civilization, and the cancerous contamination of the abstract, mentalized ways of thinking and feeling were extremely painful to Lawrence. He found our world a wasteland, and its men hollow, suffering from a sort of emotional neurosis as a result of the constant inhibitions and suppressions to which they had subjected their natural instincts. He was further pained to see the attitude of the orthodox theology in separating the body from the spirit by insisting that without surrendering and sacrificing the world of the flesh, one cannot enter the world of the spirit. And again, there was the attitude of the modern man towards sex, viewing it as a sort of toy or an instrument for the gratification of his lust for flesh. According to Lawrence, these were the causes behind the deep-rooted maladies that afflicted human relations. He was convinced that the survival of human civilization depended upon man's ability to resurrect all those values which directly issue from what he called "the deepest physical mind." In other words, a 'phallic regeneration' was the ultimate panacea that could save man from the horrors of contemporary life.

Such a conviction entailed many things. He had to launch a crusade against the values which were accepted in
the society. The following words of John Middleton Murry sum up the situation in which Lawrence was placed: "The things we prize are the things he would destroy; what is triumph to him is catastrophe to us. He is the outlaw of modern English literature; and he is the most interesting figure in it. But he must be shown no mercy." His literary convictions were by and large antithetical to the established norms and conventions. He was shockingly, devastatingly original in his conception of art and life. While his contemporaries were passionately faithful to the living tradition of the European literary consciousness, Lawrence tried to make a complete break with the past. For him, a work of art, in so far as it is great and original, cannot adhere to any set pattern of form, technique or craft. "... all rules of construction hold good only for novels which are copies of other novels. A book which is not a copy of other books has its own construction," he wrote. In this count, he condemned and charged almost all the major streams of the European letters. Most of the great literary personalities of Europe came under his fire: Euripides, Aristophanes, Rabelais, Moliere, Voltaire, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Fielding, Byron, Shelley, Keats,


2. LAH, p. 295.
Flaubert, Maupassant, Baudelaire, Whitman and Tolstoy. He found all of them guilty of formula-writing and of bringing in pedantry in art.  

He was equally disenchanted with the formal religions of the day. He felt "absolutely dead of Buddhism, either Nibbana or Nirvana, Kama or Karma," and his hatred of Christianity was more intense: "Christianity is an institution that really should be abolished. I don't want to hear of it, it wearies me." According to him, for Jesus physical resurrection was inconceivable, while for him it was a must. "Surpassing the Christian tenet" is one of the values that form the basis of his stories The Escaped Cook, Women Who Rode Away and The Man Who Died. In Aaron's Rod, there is the symbolic breaking of the Christmas tree. In The Plumed Serpent Lawrence creates a new religion, the religion of Quetzalcoatl which stands for the death of Christianity and the restoration of sensuality to its proper place.

It is no wonder that Lawrence was misunderstood, misrepresented and even maligned, that for most of his time he remained isolated and unfriended. There were occasions, not infrequent, when he was "at the dead end of my money." His fourth novel, The Rainbow, which is now accepted as one of the best classics of the world, was banned and he was

[4.] Ibid., p. 334
[5.] Ibid., p. 462
charged with immoral tendencies. But great prophets and seers have their eyes more on the universal life than on the exigencies of a given space and time. Lawrence went on, unrelentingly, with the spirit of a martyr, and more intensely portrayed in his later works those aspects for which The Rainbow was banned. And he died in his forty-fourth year, in a foreign land, with little recognition from the world of either his extraordinary imaginative gifts or the life-bringing quality of his message. We have proved that we would not give great minds their due during their lifetime. We can best sum up Lawrence's life and mission with the following remarks of G.H. Neville: Lawrence's is a "voluntary martyrdom or self-immolation, having something analogous to the case of the scientist who studies, say, leprosy among lepers for the ultimate good of the human race. But be that as it may, it is probable that the findings of Lawrence, rightly understood and properly taught and applied, may eventually prove of infinitely greater service to mankind than is the individual work of any of those science-martyrs."  

The classical age of the Tamils, called the Cankam period, spans over a period of nearly six centuries before and after the beginning of the Christian era (roughly between 300 BC and 300 AD). This age is to the Tamil literature...  

what the Elizabethan period is to the English literature. During this period was born the great grammatical treatise Tolkāppiyam which contains not only the time-honoured theories of language, but also a comprehensive set of literary codes for the guidance of the creative artists. The creative works of this age have come to us in the form of two anthologies called Eṭṭutokai and Pattuppāṭṭu.

The former consists of eight separate anthologies namely Nārinnai, Kuruntokai, Aṅkurumūru, Patiruppattu, Pariṇāṭal Kalitokai, Akanānūru and Purānānūru. Pattuppāṭṭu includes ten long idylls: Tirumurukāruppattai, Purunārarruppattai, Cirupānruppattai, Perumpanāruppattai, Mullaippattu, Maturaiikkānai, Meṭunalmvaṭai, Kuruncippattu, Paṭṭinappālai and Malaiippattukatam. The subject matter of these works has been classified into two broad categories, Akam and Puram, the former dealing with the intuitive emotional experience of mankind and latter with the extrinsic life of man, his experience in the world. Akanānūru, Nārinnai, Kuruntokai, Aṅkurumūru and Kalitokai in their entirety, and eight poems out of twenty two in Pariṇāṭal and four idylls in Pattuppāṭṭu come under the Akam classification. Of the total of 2381 poems in the canikam poetic oeuvre, 1862 poems, composed by a lustrous galaxy of 378 poets, belong to the Akam category.
The Akam poetry occupies a unique place in the history of world literature in many respects. Perhaps, in no other language is available such a large corpus of poems on a single theme, composed in adherence to a set of pre-determined codes. These poems are a vivid exemplification of the fact that one could achieve great heights in imaginative writing even if fettered by certain prescriptions and prohibitions. Besides, these conventions are meant to give these poems a sense of universality and timelessness. One such convention is that the characters of питинай, men and women, should not be mentioned by any individual name, real or imaginary; they should be called by the names of the region like патан, турайван etc, or by the name of their profession like улаван, улatti etc, or by their sex like атаван, нами etc, or by the demonstrative pronouns аван, авал etc. Such a convention implies that the Akam poet should not pin down his characters to time and place. It also reveals the ancient Tamil's anxiety and care to create a cosmic poetry, with cosmic men and women as characters, who could live the rhythm and joy of cosmic life. Another unique feature of these poems is that they deal only with the alive and the living. An anthropological myth of life permeates every poem. Each poem seems to celebrate the joy and delight of the created universe. They are the living portraits of universal health and vitality, giving quintessential expression to the
gushing delight of creation. That which is dead and gone
is of no interest to the Akam poets; nor do they care
about the supernatural. Such a conception might have been
the offspring of their conviction that the subject matter
of such a timeless thing as poetry should not be death and
supernatural, the unliving and the uncreative, and that
great poetry should be that which generates life, relives
and recreates the splendour and the music of life, at the
living moment. Each poem in the Akam corpus is in the form
of a dramatic monologue, a self-contained whole, spoken by
a particular character in a particular context, and yet
all these poems constitute an organic œuvre. Again, each
poem is a living blend of three components mutarpporul
(geographical space and time), Karupporul (objects of
environment) and uripporul (emotional experience of the lovers).
The first two components represent the world of nature, and the
last represents human life. The drama of the human emotional
life, the central aspect of these poems, is enacted with the
world of nature as a live background.

The Akam poets are the great emotional realists in
the Tamil literary tradition, just as Lawrence is in the
English tradition. The universe represented in the Akam poems
is a sexual universe just as it is so in Lawrence. It seems
that for both Lawrence and the Akam poets the only subject
worth writing about is human sexual love. They seem to have
conceived of the blood-connectedness between a man and a woman as the pivot of human progress and the basis of the harmony in human relations. As they see it, the sexual love is a means by which one could not only save oneself from the despair and monotony of the day-to-day existence, but also get oneself nearer to the Creator.

As such, it is natural that they have portrayed sex in such a way that it appears the most beautiful, the most wonderful, and yet the most civilizing thing on the earth. To participate in their glorious vision of the passionall connectedness between man and woman is for us a rebirth of our real self, a self that lives in constant awareness of the real meaning and significance of life on this earth.