

DAY DAWNS WITH FRESH RESOLUTION

Once started the production of TSOCIS moved apace. Talent was limited but enthusiasm abundant; and India seemed the right place from which the songs could spread to reach every part of the Commonwealth. But the demands in India had to be satisfied first. In the villages there were tabla players galore, and we had already dealt with the matter in Tabla Wallah. There remained the bullock-cart drivers, vis-à-vis our conversation with Bimla Balla, and the Quwals or minstrels.

One of my earliest ambitions, as a boy in the Nilgiri Hills, was to drive a bullock-cart to the end of the drive leading into our house. A bullock-cart would arrive once a month to deliver logs. If the load happened to be heavy, the pulling power of two bulls would be required, which made the undertaking in the hands of an impetuous boy a hazardous business. And my mother was not easily persuaded. But the day was to come when I climbed aboard and took into my hands the reins from a smiling *Arikiaswamy*. He made it appear as though I alone was driving those splendid bulls, and he was my friend. What better title could there be for a song about the bullock-cart driver?

MY FRIEND

My Friend, we have met a thousand times,
And your image comes vividly to my mind.
With unaltering pace, patience personified,
You journey on content and I am left behind.
The creaking of your cart, the bumps, the grinding wheels,
The rhythmic foorfalls of your bulls portend
The tenor of an endless way,
Beneath your gentle hand my lonely friend.

My Friend, hark to the modern chase,
And its message demanding you give way,
In homage before the mood of passing time,
And end the thousand years that went before today.
The blinding scourge of dust, from traffic roaring by,

Provokes your anger, wins a kindly smile,
Comforting your bulls, now briskly coaxing,
You journey on forgiving for yet another mile.

My Friend, when heart and limbs are tired,
And your hopes lie stilled within your breast,
Lay aside your reins and put your trust in God,
And ask of Him the blessing of some rest.
The hurricane lamp swings, and beckons still,
Symbol of comfort, of hope and of light,
Scatter your doubts and fears forever,
Forever shining brightly through the night.

My Friend, it's time to say farewell,
We shall meet again, but parting I confess:
Of all the things you see and others miss.
I treasure most your memory, timelessness.

Qawals appear in various guises. First there are the humble street singers with drum and harmonium, tactically positioned outside the lesser restaurants and drinking houses, singing to customers as they come and go. Often rebuked for being a nuisance and driven away, they remain cheerful and stoical and move on singing their defiance. A step up the ladder, more affluent groups make their pitch outside the classier establishments and hotels, having come to a mutually beneficial accommodation with the management. The top *qawals* are invited to perform at the big houses on special occasions and come in larger groups: handsomely attired and handsomely rewarded.

My knowledge falls short of an understanding of the origins of the *Qawals*. Their songs are called Qawalis, or couplets, describing the prevailing scene, philosophic observations and pointed references to the master of the house (in flattering terms) his family and guests, *whose generous appreciation would ensure the continuity of the honoured profession of Qawals*. As custom demands, the deity is not excluded. The preamble is usually a solo performance, or sometimes a duet and the final couplet, containing the essence of the piece, is repeated in chorus vigorously to resounding

applause. It is also customary for guests to express their appreciation by discreetly placing a little money within reach of the principal *Qawal*. In their time, I suppose, the Irish and Scottish minstrels did much the same thing, moving around the countryside telling of battles fought, of defeats and victories, or lesser events of local interest, with the aid of a harp.

THE MINSTREL'S SONG

Come minstrel sing a happy song,
A song for every day;
Let your voice rise bold and clear
Evoke goodwill arouse good cheer
And wing them far away.
Mix wisdom with a merry wit
Let memory rest awhile,
Pitch the moral far ahead
Among the living not the dead,
Our willing hearts beguile.

Chorus:

As quickly does tomorrow come to drive away today,
Fears and doubts and misery belong to yesterday.
So dreamers dream your wondrous dreams
Take heed of what I say:
A life well lived forever is no more than just today.
The moral of this thought is not original, or mine,
Let's take a cup of kindness for the sake of *auld lang syne*.*

Minstrel, ponder well this point;
A seed once sown must grow,
So raise your harp and pluck a string
Release your voice and let it sing
A theme of long ago.
Don't let this moment pass unsung,
It warrants true your praise;

The summed total of such things
As beggars, sinners, saints and kings
Leads us to better days.
Chorus.

** used in the sense of lit. 'Old Long Ago' or 'Good Old Times.'*

Before turning to the rest of the Commonwealth, it is necessary to refer to the Queen's Silver Jubilee. Comex planned to celebrate this very special event in Ooty (in the Nilgiris) and Wells Cathedral in Somerset - seven thousand miles apart - in response to an invitation from the townspeople of Ooty, and the Bishop of Bath and Wells, John Bickersteth. As the vehicles - twelve in all - were silver, it seemed appropriate that the commemorative song should be *Silver Train*. Now Kamal Kant was a member of that expedition which was routed through Quetta in Pakistan, and here, a Brahman *tabla player (Kamal)* and a Franciscan priest (*Joshua Sterk*) became firm friends.

Nothing remarkable about that, but the circumstances are interesting. The Pakistani authorities had objected to an Indian entering Pakistan, let alone a Brahman. The matter had been raised with the highest authority for a decision which would take time and was most inconvenient. But when Joshua accompanied Kamal to the local magistrate's office and offered to stand surety for him, not only in Quetta but all the way to India, the rules were relaxed and all was smiles. Tea was taken, Kamal returned to join his 300 companions as a hero! It was this incident that prompted Joshua to suggest that there should be a Comex song entitled *There Must be a Reason*. The idea stuck in Kamal's mind and he pressed me to do something about it. But first, *Silver Train*:

SILVER TRAIN

Hear the engines roaring, as they drive the wheels a-rolling
And the radios crackle crisply on the air.
The light beams up and flashing brightly through the landscape passing,
And the horns alerted start to toot and blare,

Chorus:

Silver Train on lonely highway,
Silver train, silver train.

Silver Train on sun-parched desert
Silver train, silver train.
Silver Train on snow-capped mountains
Silver train, silver train.
Silver Train through flooding waters
Silver train, silver train.

Let it storm and let it thunder, there's a reason and no wonder,
For the devil's army marches in the night.
The rain will wash the blackness and the lightening light the darkness
Till the sun comes out to put the night to flight.

Chorus:

The miles have gone behind us, far away but still remind us
That some journeys have a beginning, but no end.
'Till that final destination, every man and every nation
Learns to call his wayside friend blessed friend.

Chorus:

THERE MUST BE A REASON

There must be a reason - and who can tell you why -
For men to be born, and for men to die;
A place and a purpose, which makes it all clear,
Where the end of the journey, is the end of doubt and fear.
For if there's no reason, it surely must seem -
This life is a nightmare, or at best a bad dream;
And a better tomorrow ever one day away,
But without that tomorrow there's no hope anyway.
So there must be a reason, and all we need know,
A day is a lifetime, nothing less, nothing more,

And fill all the hours with joy and with love,
And leave the rest of the matter to the Heavens above.

In retrospect, it is reassuring that five Prime Ministers, and the first Secretary General of the Commonwealth, should have expressed support for Comex in their different ways: Jawaharlal Nehru of India by inviting young men and women to organise a new consciousness in the Commonwealth - hence Comex 1; Tengku Abdul Rahman of Malaysia for welcoming the idea of Comex and promising to help in every way he could, and of course did; Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore for inviting Comex 4 to Singapore and then launching the island's own Comex to Britain; Margaret Thatcher for approving the master model of *The Green Pennant Awards* and helping to sponsor Comex to Africa; and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia who not only welcomed Comex to his country, but in some instances led the singing. He also encouraged his fellow heads of government to join him in setting in motion a tide of goodwill from the Zambezi to reach people all over the world. Botswana, Britain, Canada, Cyprus, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and of course Zambia responded - four more than had responded to Nehru's invitation eighteen years earlier. They all sang the Comex songs, which now included *Tiyende Pamodzi* meaning *Forward Together*. As Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Arnold Smith's backing was special: he wrote the foreword to *Together Unafraid* and became the patron of Comex in Canada

There is a story that went the rounds about the song *Tiyende Pamodze*: that it was composed in honour of Kaunda in the early days of his political career by a humble supporter who knew that Kaunda liked playing the guitar and singing. The original title was *Tiyende Kaunda* or *Forward with Kaunda*. The President changed Kaunda to Pamodzi meaning *together*. When Comex sang with him he included the word Comex thus adding another African song to the Comex repertoire:

TIYENDE PAMODZI

Tiyende Pamodzi ndim'tima umo,
Tiyende Pamodzi ndim'tima umo,
Tiyende Pamodzi ndim'tima umo,
Tiyende Pamodzi ndim'tima umo'
A yuthi tiye Limbo moyo,

A yuthi tiye. Limbo moyo,
tiyende pamodzi ndim'tima umo
A yuthi tiye Limbo moyo,
A yuthi tiye Limbo moyo,
tiyende pamodzi ndim'tima umo.

Tioloke Limpopo ndim'tima umo,
Tioloke Limpopo ndim'tima umo,
Tioloke Limpopo ndim'tima umo,
Tioloke Limpopo, ndim'tima umo,
Co-mex tiye Limbo moyo,
Co-mex tiye Limbo moyo
- tioloke Limpopo ndim'tima umo.
Co-mex tiye Limbo moyo,
Co-mex tiye' Limbo moyo
- tioloke Limpopo ndim'tima umo.

Before setting foot on African soil, we had already dedicated - if that is the right word - *Faith, Hope and Charity* to Africa. The Heritage Singers of Zambia, all of whom had been nominated to join Comex in India, recorded it, together with *Tiyende Pamodzi*, in support of their participation. That little record, with just two songs, was released for sale in Lusaka.

FAITH HOPE AND CHARITY

Day dawns with fresh resolution,
Sifting hope from the ash of yesterday,
Offering again the occasion
To laugh, to sing, to dance, to pray.
Hope fades with evening shadows,
Victim to life's decay
As pleading, wailing, tears unavailing -
The body journeys on to meet its clay.

Give us faith; give us hope; give us charity.

Faith lives guardian of tomorrow,
And life itself will never end,
Till outliving life and all that thrives upon it -
Man comes to see in God his friend.
Swept forward on perilous wings of fortune,
To gamble on the battlefields of chance,
What hope is there of faith surviving,
When death looks out from every glance,

Give us faith; give us hope; give us charity.

Charity glows through the blinding darkness,
Anchored in life's stormy seas,
A golden straw for clutching fingers,
The healing touch to painful reveries.
A last reprieve from chains of anguish,
A way through jungles of despair,
A kindly voice to whisper softly -
The elixir of life still fills the air.

Give us faith; give us hope; give us charity.

One of the most remarkable features of Comex in Africa was the spontaneous singing of children. Every entertainment was attended by hundreds of them, and as news spread about the Comex songs, some of the words were printed in the local newspapers, and there was no question of having to encourage audience participation. One had to concede that they sang the songs better than Comex. It was an inspiring experience and encouraged the inclusion of a piece of action exclusively for children with which I hope to end this story. Kaunda was right: the language of Africa is the language of song.

The Comex presence in Zambia had to be marked by a special song, and we adopted the theme from the notion *of setting in motion a tide of goodwill from the Zambezi to reach people all over the world*. The title presented no problem:

RIVER OF DESTINY

A stranger on the river I asked some passers by
What they called the river and they looked up in surprise:
Have you not a notion, do your eyes not see
Reflections in the water of the river of destiny?

Chorus:

Yes, everyone has a river of destiny:
Searching for nirvana somewhere in a timeless sea,
Murmuring ageless mantras as they course along their way,
To ward off evil spirits - so the jolly pundits say,
Yes, everyone has a river of destiny:
From the sacred Ganges to the singing Zambezi,
Forever moving onward, yet forever standing still,
A paradox to comprehend - perhaps one day we will.

The sun rose to the surface, a ball of crimson flame,
The world renewed its struggles in a never-ending game,
While etched upon the landscape, as far as eye could see,
Pilgrims bowed in homage by the river of destiny.

Chorus:

Praying for peace tomorrow, forgiveness for today,
Deliverance from the fears that never go away:
Until the final battle, and cries of victory
Resound across the waters of the river of destiny.

Chorus:

When summer turns to autumn, and winter turns to spring,
Wild winds blow defiance and storm bells start to ring:
For fishermen to return from the perils of the sea
And contemplate their labours on the river of destiny.

Chorus:

The day had long departed, the night owl sang its song,
Deep in the darkened waters the stars now brightly shone,
And then I heard a whisper that made all clear to me:
Living is forever on the river of destiny.

Chorus:

A difficult song to sing, but the Africans would make short work of that, and it was time now to turn to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore and Barbados in the order in which they appeared on the Comex map. Canada was straight forward enough, after all Canadians in large numbers were already singing the Comex songs, and the rest of us had learnt to sing *O Canada*; but to put down a marker for the largest country in the Commonwealth it was incumbent on the leader to think big and come up with something special. Well, India is a land of dreams, and nothing is impossible there.

We had become used to expressions such as *'have a nice day'* and *'no problem'* and to this was now added - whether by accident or intent I can't remember - a casual *another day* meaning some other time when a matter of little consequence had to be put off - which happened quite often. Thus the seed of a song was sown.

ANOTHER DAY

Another day, another dream come true,
For everyone; for me and you:
The sun will shine,
The clouds will drift away,
You dream, my love, is the dawn of each new day.

And on and on, as the seasons go their way
Be sure, my love, they're coming back one day.
All else may fail;
But this at least is true,
The dawn of each new day is a dream come true.

Stand high, my love, and all your hopes renew,
Reach for the stars, and they'll belong to you.

And the world will smile
As sweet winds kiss your brow,
And you'll know my love, that the time to dream is now.

Australia and New Zealand are far away. Malaysia and Singapore nearer to hand. We had tried playing around with a song that might do for Malaysia and Singapore coupling '*No problem la bole juga,*' (no problem we can do it) with '*Yew ye wan swee*' (friendship forever) taken from a sign outside the University of Singapore. It was not popular, so we dropped the idea and fell back on singing a song that fitted the bill admirably as an introduction to any Comex entertainment, '*Let's Sing a Song,*' with whatever else was on offer, and the Malay song, '*Rasa Sayang,*' meaning '*Thoughts of Love*'. More about that later.

LET'S SING A SONG

Chorus:

Let's sing a song, what shall we sing?
The birds and the bees and the flowers in spring.
Let's sing a song, what shall we sing?
The moon and the stars and everything.
Let's all sing it together,
The weak hand in hand with the strong.
Let's all sing it together,
The choice of a sword or a song

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush
The idea is a thousand years old.
So a heart that is warm, the riddle might add,
Is worth more than one that is cold.
Extending the moral and widening the theme,
A smile is worth many wise frowns,
As judges, politicians, parsons and kings
Achieve less in their labours than clowns.

Chorus:

Cheery words, laughter, kind thoughts and deeds,
Are worth more than the opposite kind;
But they need reinforcing with something more fluid
Than the spirit that flows from the mind.
Deeds are worth more than words galore,
Action is decision and thought.
But the bird in the riddle is the word in the middle,
And one that can never be bought.

Chorus:

The business about clowns always struck a jolly note, and the song was popular, without giving offence to any judges, politicians or parsons that happened to be in the audience. As to kings, there were not many of them about, and even if there had been one could always rely on a royal sense of humour. But to return to *Rasa Sayang*: what better prompt than a song to carry the spirit of Comex to Australia and New Zealand! '*On Wings of Love*' it had to be. And while India can claim primacy for the inspiration, a little credit must also go to our friends in Malaysia and Singapore.

ON WINGS OF LOVE

On wings of love
I'll fly to peace when night shades fall,
On wings of love.
On wings of love
I'll reach the heights each time you call,
On wings of love.
On wings of love
I'll ride the storms that rage without,
On wings of love.
On wings of love
I'll make my bow when time runs out.
On wings of love (repeat).

On wings of love
I'll make my way towards the stars,
On wings of love.
On wings of love
I'll build a life of golden hours,
On wings of love.
On wings of love
I'll need no guide to find the way,
On wings of love.
On wings of love
I'll move a little every day,
On wings of love (repeat).
On wings of love
I'll touch the sunbeams as I go,
On wings of love.
On wings of love
I'll stop at every place I know,
On wings of love.
On wings of love
I'll reach the goal at rainbow's end,
On wings of love.
On wings of love
I'll make a thousand million friends,
On wings of love (repeat).

(The thousand million friends refers to the Commonwealth at that time; but the current total is probably more like fifteen hundred million.)

My thoughts now turned to Barbados. Tucked away off the eastern seaboard of the Caribbean, this little jewel of a country joined the Commonwealth in 1966, and currently claims Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as Head of State. It has a population of about 270,000 - about half of Edinburgh. And although West Indians based in Britain have taken part in Comex, notably as part of the Manchester contingent, the Government of Barbados

fielded its own mini contingent before Comex 12 embarked on *ocean to ocean* in Canada. That brave initiative had to be acknowledged with a song and it came about like this: Comex was invited to stage an entertainment in London at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East and chose to repeat a successful musical performed everywhere in India: from the Nilgiris to the Himalayas. The title and theme song of the musical was **Kenaki**; and in order to honour the presence of West Indians among our ranks we thought to incorporate a steel band. Oil drums hammered into shape like giant bowls is not the sort of artefact one would expect to produce the sound of jingling bells and angels having a jolly time.. The performers were a single family and friends living in South London, and to my unaccustomed ear they were nothing short of brilliant. They did their business in style, and wherever they are today I salute them. Happily our American star, Mary of Minneapolis, whom the reader has met in earlier pages, was present and eager to sing.

DO IT IN STYLE

The windmill is turning and the harvest is ripe,
Birds will be mating as spring bursts with life,
Flowers will be blooming and strangers will smile,
If you wave as you're passing and do it in style:
Chorus: Do it in style, do it in style,
If you wave as you're passing, and do it in style.

Depress-ed and weary and the pressures won't stop,
The party is over and the curtain won't drop,
It's a struggle to finish yet another hard mile,
But do it my friend, and do it in style:
Chorus: Do it in style, do it in style,
Do it, my friend, and do it in style.

The rain keeps on raining and the sun will not shine,
The beer's turned to bitter and you can't afford wine,
Progress is bewildered and limping awhile,
The cure is to gamble and do it in style:
Chorus: Do it in style, do it in style,
The cure is to gamble and do it in style.

The carts are in front and the horses behind,
Burnt up with aggression the world is unkind,
Two courses of action your senses beguile,
Choose the bolder with courage and do it in style:
Chorus: Do it in style, do it in style,
Choose the bolder with courage and do it in style,

Hope springs eternal to the end of the ride,
With your gloves in your hand and your hat on one side,
Whistling a tune and your thinking facile,
Cock a snook at the pundits and do it in style:
Chorus: Do it in style, do it in style,
Cock a snook at the pundits and do it in style.

While talking about Mary, it may be remembered from the Inauguration that she had taken to singing another song we had dedicated to the Croatian postman, Nikola Vrbos, called *Life is Empty without Love*. Many happy conversations with him prompted the song - though I don't believe he ever sang it himself. A cheerful, optimistic man, his commitment to the idea of crossing the barriers that divide people was absolutely authentic. This may have had a lot to do with his own experiences among ordinary people living with war in a Communist country; and it was for this reason perhaps that he was determined that his daughter, Nena, should find a place on the Cambridge contingent. I have written extensively about Nikola and include this brief extract.

'Nikola has done more for the reputation of his native Croatia than many of his countrymen basking in the comfort of more exalted occupations who regularly imbibe the wine of his labours though know little about the processes immortalised in that single cry: "Zivjeli!" ' One guest or fifty, usually invited, often not, can be assured of the kind of welcome that inspires this story in the hope that it may one day do justice to the personality and character of a great man; great, that is, by the universal standards of hard work, generosity, humour and enthusiasm. Instant hospitality comes as naturally to Nikola as getting up in the morning or saying his prayers before going to bed. Countless battalions of bees guard his household and they have not mutinied once since taking up residence

over fifty years ago. His bare arms and balding head present a natural playground for his bees when working among them, and he has never been stung. But let a stranger approach unannounced and it would be time to call for an ambulance!"

He loved singing and would often break into a popular lullaby *Tiha Noci* which we soon learnt to sing with him. Alas, he is no more, but should *The Story of Comex in Song* be recorded, I am sure he will hear it in heaven.

LIFE IS EMPTY WITHOUT LOVE

To think, unable to express your thoughts;
To dream, and never see a dream come true;
To feel, and have to stifle all your feelings;
To know frustration and its allied anguish too.
To laugh; and hear no sound or echo;
To weep, and find you weep alone;
To hope, and watch your hopes all turn to ashes;
To discover loneliness in your own home.
To ask, and have each wish rejected,
To seek, and never, ever, find;
To pray without your prayers being answered;
To see with eyes that might as well be blind.
To stand firm before each pressing challenge;
To have the will - never to give in;
To know defeat, having pitched your might against it;
To submerge the final virtue into sin.
To want to die, afraid to go on living;
To shed all faith in heaven above;
To try and try and try, forever failing;
To discover: life is empty without love.

Mary always sang the song beautifully; but somewhere in the shadows of her mind, the mystical presence of Nikola was perhaps urging a more optimistic version. He liked the song, but his sense of humour would have treated it differently.

*To think, **and able** to express your thoughts;*
*To dream, and **often see** a dream come true;*
*To feel, **without stifling** all your feelings;*
*To **brook** frustration, and its allied anguish too.*
*To laugh, and hear **the** sound and echo;*
*To weep, and find **you're not** alone;*
*To hope, and watch your hopes **return from** ashes;*
*To discover **all the world** in your own home*
*To ask and have each wish **accepted**;*
*To seek, and never **fail to** find;*
*To pray, and **know** your prayers **will be** answered;*
*To see with eyes that **are no longer** blind.*
To stand firm before each pressing challenge;
To have the will never to give in;
*To **scorn** defeat, and pitch your might against it;*
*To **retrieve** the final virtue, **out of** sin.*
*To want to **live, and pray** to go on living;*
*To **keep** all faith in heaven above;*
*To try and try and try, **and never** failing*
To discover life is empty -without love.