

In Karnataka in South India, there is a temple village where I love to stay for months at a time, walking the streets in my light cotton saris. A protected nature sanctuary surrounds the area and the river Sauparnika, full of the purest healing herbs and leaves, flows through the little village. Few westerners go there and even fewer stay for more than a day or two, and the pilgrims to the temple are always curious to know personal details of any stranger! In the inner sanctum of the temple is a vigraha (image) of the Devi, the Divine Mother, Mookambika, (Face of Grace), installed by Shankaracharya, long ago. She wears an enormous emerald on her breast and a smaller image of her is carried in procession daily in the temple and at times in the streets surrounding the temple. Artists from many parts of India children, and ordinary people go to offer their music, singing and dancing in front of the Devi in the form of Saraswati.

Champaka flowers are a deliciously sweet smelling golden flower which is made into garlands for offering in the temple

Suresha is a dear friend, one of the temple priests. The family bull walks into the family house several times a day for company when he feels lonely!

Sauparnika, Kollur, 18-11-2001

---For all those curious pilgrims who stop me with questions in the streets and temple of Kollur

Love Flowering

Do not ask whence I come!
I have not come and I will never go!
Ask me rather did I touch the white Siva moon last night
And did I fall into the eyes of Suresha's bull
Drowning in love flowering in innocence

Do not ask my country of birth!
I forget this ancient story!
Ask me rather in which field grow the velvet champaka flowers
I bring to the temple for Mookambika's delight
Breathing the fragrance of love blossoming in innocence

Do not ask where I am going!
Imagining some magical, far off land!
Ask me rather do I sing in the Saraswati mandir
The ever new, ever free story of life,
Dancing the wild rhythm of love in innocence

Do not ask how many days I am here!
Walking the dusty streets of Kollur!
Ask me rather do I bathe in Sauparnika stream
Enjoying the music of laughter of children
Playing in the cool shade of innocence

Do not ask where is my place!
I am always simply here in the heart!
Ask me rather how I become pink roses in black hair
Dissolving in waves of swirling soft petals
Drinking the nectar of love in innocence

Do not ask how long will I stay here!
Curious about my journey, when will I be gone!
Ask me rather about resting on a cool terrace in Darmapeetha
A rain of golden light falling in the stillness
Softly filling this new garden of innocence

Do not ask did I sleep last night!
This child does not sleep for wonder!
Ask rather did I sit on my balcony beneath blossoms of stars
Watching orange pink morning rise over Kudachadri
Listening to the birds singing in the dawn of innocence

Do not ask when I will go to my home!
Here is my home, here and now and always new!
Ask me rather how I enjoy creamy smooth buttermilk,
Ripe yellow bananas, golden dates and tender coconut kai,
Tasting the sweetness of love bursting in innocence

Do not ask what is your name!
This house has no owner!
Ask me rather did I sit dreaming in the inner temple this morning
Gazing into the emerald heart of Ma
Lotuses of fire blazing in emptiness