Vairagya Natakam

Text in Devanagari with Translation and Notes

By SWAMMADHAVANANDA
VAIRĀGYA-ŚATAKAM
OF BHARTRHARI
The Hundred Verses on Renunciation

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PREFACE

The Vairāgya-Śatakam is one of the three series of hundred verses which have come down to us under the title of Subhāṣita-trīśati (lit. 'The happily worded three centuries') and associated with the name of the poet Bhartr hari. In some manuscripts, these verses exceed the number implied in the above name, but we have followed the authority of an edition published by the Nirmaya-sagar Press of Mumbai, which maintains the exact original number.

Tradition attributes the authorship of these verses to Bhartr hari, the elder brother of the most renowned King Vikramāditya of Ujjain. Controversy has not yet settled the point as to which Vikramāditya was the brother of the poet and when exactly he reigned at Ujjain.

The fact, it seems, that Bharthari belonged to a royal family and renounced the world later on in life to become a yogi, forms the most reliable nucleus round which growing, and sometimes conflicting, traditions have continued to gather. A cave is still pointed out near Ujjain, bearing his name, where Bharthari is said to have practised austerities. A book called the Nāthalilāmrita recording from hearsay stories about the celebrities of the
Nātha sect of yogis contains an account of Bhartṛhari's life in a loose, legendary style. But it is easy to make out that, when all clue to authenticity about the real facts of Bhartṛhari's life became lost to tradition, the memory of a career so stimulating to imagination was not allowed to go down so hopelessly denuded of facts, and the process of adding limbs and features to the stump of an older tradition naturally went on. Add to this process such floating legendary materials as the story about a gift made to one's beloved proving her infidelity by changing hands till it reached the donor again, or the miracles with which the then famous sect of yogis used to be credited and so on, and you hope to get a fairly good biography of Bhartrhari such as gradually gained currency in tradition.

The verses, composed—may be, with stray exceptions—by Bhartrhari himself, cannot be made to give any clue to his individual life, for his poetry seeks to create effect through style and sentiment too conventional to yield themselves to such use. But still his life-long lessons from experience and observation must have been reflected in their peculiar trend and emphasis in the movements of sentiment through the verses; and it may be possible for a reader of penetrative intellect to trace out from such nice shades the bare outline of a deeper life of hard-fought struggles and late-won victory. A nature, straightforward, possessed of noble faith in itself, unambitious of high distinction among men, but deeply susceptible to the beauties and charms of sentiment, seems to have been involved once in a tangle of sensual enjoyments too heavy to leave it the sustained strength for wielding the sceptre, till from a life of such weakness and consequent dependence, it gradually rose through reactions, deep and incisive, to a wonderfully enriched sense of worldly vanity and an effective strength of renunciation. The verses composed by Bhartrhari tend to present to view the background of such a nature still holding in control lower susceptibilities, once indulged, by the dawning possibilities of a life of yoga. And though it is difficult to ascertain how far this life of yoga had advanced behind the role of the poet representing different stages of wisdom, it is fairly presumptive that the poet's voice gradually merged in the silence of the highest spiritual realizations.

The hundred verses of the Vairāgya-Śatakam are divided into ten groups under the following ten headings: तुषाराकूटवाणिः, condemnation of desire; विस्थापनत्या गृहविविठनाः, futile efforts to give up sense-objects; ज्ञानोद्योगृषणाः, condemnation of the poverty of a supplicant attitude; बोगाशैर्यवर्तनम्, delineation of the evanescence of enjoyments; कलमहा-नुवर्तनम्, description of the working of Time, or the principle of change; यत्तदुपरितिर्दिक्षावर्तनम्, a comparison as to how a monk stands to a king; शंबोधननिर्बन्धनम्, control of mind by stimulating wisdom in it; नित्यानिष्ठस्वथुविचारः, discrimination of the immutable reality from the mutable; विवार्तनम्, worship of Śiva; अत्यूर्तवच्च, the way of life for an Avadhūta, or a realized ascetic characterized by the highest spiritual freedom.
With these few remarks of a prefatory nature, we send forth this English translation of an important poetical production of Medieval India into the world of modern readers. The translation has been made rather too closely literal, specially to suit the convenience of those readers who want to follow the original Sanskrit with its help.

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Vairāgya-Śatakam

1. All glory to Śiva, the Light of Knowledge, residing in the temple of the yogis' heart, who smites away (like the rising sun) the massive front of the endless night of ignorance overcasting human minds, in whose wake follow all auspiciousness and prosperity, who burnt up gay lust as a moth, as if in sport, and who appears beaming with the lambent rays of the crescent adorning his forehead—rays that look pleasing like soft half-blooming buds!

As is customary with Sanskrit poets, this opening verse is dedicatory (to Śiva in this instance), as forming an auspicious introduction.
2. Many are the inaccessible and perilous places I have travelled and yet obtained no riches; sacrificing proper dignity of birth and social position, in vain have I served the rich; like the crows have I fed myself, devoid of self-respect, at the house of others in the expectation of gain; and yet, oh! Desire, thou prompter of evil deeds, thou art waxing lustier and art not still satisfied.

3. The earth have I digged into in quest of precious minerals, and metals from rocks have I smelted; the ocean have I crossed, and the favour of kings have I diligently sought; nights have I spent on burning grounds with my mind occupied with mantras and worship; and not even a broken cowrie have I obtained; be satisfied, therefore, oh Desire!

4. In our servile attendance on the (wealthy) wicked, their shabby manners and talk we have somehow put up with; suppressing tears that welled up from our hearts, we have smiled out of vacant minds; obeisance we have made to dullards stultified by too much wealth; in what more fooleries wouldst thou have me dance, oh Desire, thou of ungratified yearning!

1. This forms a part of the mysterious rites to be gone through by those who invoke supernatural agencies for obtaining riches.
5. What have we not endeavoured to do, with our depraved conscience, for the sake of our prāṇas (five vital forces) which are unreliable and compared to water on the leaves of a lotus, since in the presence of the rich, with their minds stupefied by the pride of wealth, we have shamelessly committed the sin of recounting our own merits!

[According to the scriptures, self-glorification is tantamount even to the sin of suicide.]

श्रान्तं न श्रमया गृहोचितसुखं त्यतः न संतोषः
सोब्रा हुः सहश्रीतिवातपनक्लेशा न ततं तपः।
ध्यानं भित्तमहर्षिः नियमितप्रार्जी श्रांभोःऽपदं
तत्तकर्म कूटं यदेव मुनिमस्तेतः प्रतेयचित्ता: ।

6. We have forgiven, but not out of forgiveness (but out of our incapacity to right our wrongs); we have renounced the comforts of home life, but not out of contentment after satisfaction (but as an exile from home in quest of riches); though we have suffered inclemencies of weather, cold and heat so difficult to bear, still it is not religious austerities that we have undergone; with subdued vital forces, night and day have we brooded on money and not on the feet of Śiva; thus we have performed those very acts which the munis (saintly recluses) do perform, but of their good effects we have deprived ourselves.

भोगा न शुचा वयमेव भुक्ताः
स्तपो न ततं वयमेव तपः।

7. Worldly pleasures have not been enjoyed by us, but we ourselves have been devoted; no religious austerities have been performed, but we ourselves have become scorched; time is not gone (being ever present and infinite), but we ourselves are gone (because of approaching death). Desire is not reduced in force, though we ourselves are reduced to senility.

[Here there is an ironical pun on the participles भुक्ताः and तपः; the former being used both in the sense of ‘enjoyed’ and ‘eaten up’, and the latter both in the sense of (austerities) performed and ‘heated’. Similarly the participle जीर्णः means both ‘reduced in force’ and ‘stricken down with age’. The effect, of course, cannot be preserved in translation.]

वल्लभिपुरुषात्मकां परिलिपितान्तः शिरः।
गात्रणिः शिखिलायन्ते तुषारका तस्मात्ततः ॥

8. The face has been attacked with wrinkles, the head has been painted white with grey hair, the limbs are all enfeebled; but desire alone is rejuvenating.

निद्रात्मचा पुरुषबुधानीपिगलितः
समाना: स्वाधित् सपदि सुहदो जीवितसमा:।
शनीयश्त्रुधां धनतिमिरस्ले च नयने
अहो मूढः कायस्तदपि मरणापायचित्त:।

कालो न यातो वयमेव याता-
स्तृणा न जीर्णा वयमेव जीर्णः ॥

HUNDRED VERSES ON RENUNCIATION
11. I do not find the virtuous distinction produced (by ceremonial observances) through life after life to be conducive to well-being, for the sum of such virtuous merits when weighed in mind inspires fear in me. Enjoyments earned by great accession of merit, multiply so greatly in the case of people attached to them, only to bring them misery and peril!

[विपक: पुण्यान्त्यं ज्ञानविपरीतम् यो त्वम् स्वयमवस्तुः।

महत्त्वं: स्वयमवस्तुं त्वामन्त्रेत्योऽक्षरस्मृयु:।

स्वयमभूते विविधवेशणं विद्यति।]

12. The objects of enjoyment, even after staying with us for a long time, are sure to leave us sometime; then what difference does their privation in this way make to men, that they do not of their own accord discard them? If the
enjoyments leave us on their own initiative, i.e., if they tear themselves from us, they produce great affliction of the mind; but if men voluntarily renounce them, they conduce to the eternal bliss of self-possession.

13. Ah! It must be indeed a difficult feat which persons, with their minds purified by the discrimination arising from the knowledge of Brahman, accomplish, in that, free from desire, they wholly discard that wealth which has been actually bringing them enjoyment; whereas we fail to renounce enjoyments which are reaped by us as mere longings and which we never did realize in the past, nor do we realize now, nor can we count upon as lasting when obtained (in future).

14. Blessed are those who live in mountain caves meditating on Brahman, the Supreme Light, while birds devoid of fear perch on their laps and drink the tear-drops of bliss (that they shed in meditation); while our life is fast ebbing away in the excitement of revelry in palatial mansions or on the banks of refreshing pools or in pleasure-gardens, all created (and brooded over) merely by imagination.

15. For food, (I have) what begging brings and that too tasteless and once a day; for bed, the earth, and for attendant the body itself; for dress, (I have) a worn out blanket made up of a hundred patches! And still, alas! the desires do not leave me!

16. —Lumps of flesh (dual number). (become) golden jugs in (poets') comparison. —(seat of phlegm, saliva, etc. —is compared to the moon. —claiming likeness with the ele-
phant’s forehead. form deserving constant contempt has been magnified (in praise) by certain poets.

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Among sensual persons, Śiva is unique, sharing half His body with His beloved; and again, among the dispassionate, there is none superior to Him, unattached to the company of women; while the rest of mankind, smitten and stupefied by the irresistible, serpent-like poisoned arrows of Cupid, and brought under the infatuation of Love, can neither enjoy their desires nor renounce them at will.

This refers to the symbolic representation of Śiva and Gaurī in a single divided form.

On one side grows the hair in long and black curls, And on the other, corded like rope; One side is white with ashes, like the snow-mountains, The other golden as the light of the dawn. For He, the Lord, took a form, And that was a divided form, Half-woman and half-man.

Ordinary persons, when they give themselves up to enjoyments, lose all control and become slaves to them; so even when satiety comes, they cannot detach themselves from them, as the force of blind attachment has enslaved them. But Śiva, who has subdued His mind, is unaffected by them, as in His state of mental poise of yoga, pleasure and pain are the same to Him.

Without knowing its burning power the insect jumps into the glowing fire; the fish through ignorance eats the bait attached to the hook; whereas we, even though having full discernment, do not renounce the sensual desires, complicated as they are with manifold dangers. Alas, how inscrutable is the power of delusion!

When the mouth is parched with thirst, man takes some cold refreshing (or sweetened) drink; when suffering from hunger he swallows boiled rice made delicious with meat and the like; when set on fire by lust, he fast embraces his wife; so happiness is but remedying these diseases (of hunger, thirst and lust); and behold, how man (i.e., his sense) is upset in its quest!

The main point to be understood is that worldly happiness is but the temporary remedy we...
constantly seek for all the diseases with which worldly life is beset. When this relative and fugitive nature of happiness becomes apparent to us, we naturally give up running after it, to seek permanent peace in renunciation.

20. Possessed of tall mansions, of sons esteemed by the learned, of untold wealth, of a beloved wife of beneficence, and of youthful age, and thinking this world to be permanent, men deluded by ignorance run into this prison-house of worldliness; whereas blessed indeed is he who, considering the impermanence of the same world, renounces it.

21. If one had an occasion to see one’s wife suffering without food and sore aggrieved at the constant sight of hungry crying children with piteous looks pulling at her worn-out clothes, what self-respecting man would for the mere sake of his own petty stomach utter ‘give me’ (i.e., become a supplicant for favour) in a voice faltering and sticking at the throat for fear of his prayer being refused?

22. The pit of our stomach so hard to fill is the root indeed of no small undoing; it is ingenious in severing the vital knots, as it were, of our fond self-respect; it is like the bright moonlight shining on the lotus (that species which blooms only in the sun) of highly estimable virtues; it is the hatchet that hews down the luxuriant creepers of our great modesty.

23. For the sake of filling the cavity of the stomach when hungry, a man of self-respect would wander from door to door with an earthen begging bowl (in hand) having its edge covered with white cloth, away in extensive woodlands or holy places, the outskirts of which are grey all over with the smoke of sacrificial fires tended by Brähmanas versed in ritualistic niceties, and thus preserve the prāṇas, rather than live (like) a beggar from day to day among those who are socially equals.
[It should be remembered that living on alms for a man of true renunciation is held in high esteem in India, for no social merit can be higher than giving up the world for the sake of the national ideal of spirituality. Woodlands—where recluses live. Covered, etc.—this seems to have been the custom, to prevent the food from being seen by passers-by.]

24. Ah! is it that those Himalayan solitudes, cooled by the spray of minute bits of Ganga’s waves and abounding in beautiful rocky flats such as are the haunts of the Vidyādhāras, are all engulfed in destruction, that men in disgrace hang on others for their maintenance?

[कण और शीरक have much the same sense. For कण some read हिम, meaning cold.

The Vidyādhāras are unearthly beings with super-human skill in arts, specially music.]

किं कन्दः कन्दरः प्रलयमुपगता निर्जीरा वा गिरिच्छ:
प्रध्वस्ता वा तस्ब्ध: सरसफलस्यतो वचनलिन्यं शाखाः:
बीक्षन्ते यन्मुक्खानि प्रसभ्यगतप्रश्रयाणानि खलानां
हु: खाप्तस्वल्पवित्तस्मायवनवशार्जर्तिंभूलतानि । ॥ २५।।

25. Or is it that herbs and roots have all disappeared from caves, and streams have gone away from hillsides, or that branches of trees bearing luscious fruits and yielding barks are all destroyed, that the faces of wretches, perfectly devoid of good breeding, are found to have their eyebrows dancing like creepers in the wind of an arrogance which their scanty earning eked out with hardship engenders in them?

पुण्यमूललोकोस्था प्रणयिनीं जृति कुरुवधानुः
भूषाय्यं नवपत्लवैकृष्णखसलितः यावो वनम् ।
शुद्राणामिवेकमूहमनसं वनेष्याणां सदा
वित्त्वाग्धिविकारविलयगिरानामापि न श्रूयते ॥ २६।।

26. Therefore, now, accepting fruits and roots, ordained as sacred, for the most enjoyable means of maintenance, and (so also) the earth (laid on) with verdant leafy twigs for your bed, oh, rise, let us repair to the forest, where even the name is not heard of the ignoble rich whose minds are stultified by indiscretion and whose speech is constantly delirious with the maladies of wealth.

फलं स्वच्छालम्बं प्रतिवन्मखेंद्रं स्थितिस्तुः
पवः स्थाने स्थाने शिष्ठ्यमिरुं पुण्यसरिताम् ।
मृदुस्पर्श्यं शाखा सुनितलितलपल्लवमथी
सहने सन्तापं तदपि धनिना द्वारि कृषणा: ॥ २७।।

27. Though fruits from trees are easily obtainable at will in every forest, though there is cool refreshing drink
in holy streams at various places and soft bed made of
tender twigs and creepers, still (alas!) men aggrieved with
lucre undergo sorrows at the doors of the rich.

28. Reposing on a bed of stone within a mountain cave,
during intervals of meditation, (well) may I recollect with
an inward smile the days of those afflicted through their
petitions before the rich, or of those grown mean through
their minds being content with seeking enjoyments.

[If this verse is read differently with वर्तनेतां वाताव्र्यः भावां च
for वर्तनेतां वाताव्र्यः भावां and for वाताव्र्यः the idea becomes, in the words of Mr. Telang: ‘The
suppliant of the rich thinks the days too long as he has to suffer
the trouble of constant entreaties often unsuccessful; the person
engaged in the pursuit of worldly objects thinks time too short;
he has never enough of it to compass all his numerous ends.
On the other hand the philosopher laughs at both for their
delusions.’ In this case ये in lines 1 and 2 refer to days, and for
पर्यावरणम् in line 2 we have to read पर्यावरणम् too.]

29. The felicity of those, whom contentment unceasingly makes happy, is not interrupted, while cravings
of those of greedy and confounded minds are never quenched. Such being the case, for whom did the Creator
create the Meru, representing inconceivable wealth, but confining to itself the glorious potency of its gold? I would
not covet it.

[कतन्त्र कृत्तिकृत्तिकृत्तिकृत्ति तथा—The idea is that Meru, the (fabled)
mountain of gold, serves no useful purpose to anybody, and
so I would not go in for it (न मे रोचते): because those that are
contented feel quite happy without possessing it, and those
that hanker after wealth never feel satisfied howsoever big
might be their acquisitions. स्वात्त्विक्षेत समाहितमहिमा—Its gold
serves only to glorify itself, but not to satisfy the greedy.]

30. The great yogis describe food which begging brings
as follows: it does not humiliate (vide verse no. 23); it is an
independent pleasure (i.e., not dependent on the pleasure
of earning money, fulfilling social duty, etc.); it is in all
respects free from any anxious fear (i.e., about one’s
expenditure, foodstores, etc.); it destroys wicked pride,
egotism and impatience; it eradicates the manifold evils
of worldly existence; it is easily available anywhere any
day without efforts; it is the beloved of the holy men; it is
a purification by itself; it is like the inexhaustible feeding-house of Śiva, access to which none can prevent.

31. In enjoyment, there is the fear of disease; in social position, the fear of falling-off; in wealth, the fear of (hostile) kings; in honour, the fear of humiliation; in power, the fear of enemies; in beauty, the fear of old age; in scriptural erudition, the fear of opponents; in virtue, the fear of traducers; in body, the fear of death. All the things of this world pertaining to man are attended with fear; renunciation alone stands for fearlessness.

32. Birth is preyed upon (lit. attacked) by death; brilliant youth by old age; contentment by greed; happiness of self-control by the wiles of gay women; virtues by jealousy of men; forest tracts by beasts of prey; kings by the wicked (in counsel); and powers even are vitiated by their evanescence; what on earth is not seized upon by something else?

33. Health of men is destroyed (lit. rooted out) by hundreds of varied ailments of body and mind; wherever there is Lakshmi (the goddess of prosperity), there perils find an open access; death sure annexes to itself, rendering impotent very soon, whatever is born again and again. Then what is created as stable by the absolute Creator?

34. Enjoyments are unstable like the breaking of high billows, life is liable to speedy dissolution; the buoyancy of youthful happiness centred in our objects of love lasts for few days. Understanding that the whole world is unsubstantial, ye wise teachers of men with minds intent on benefiting mankind (by living exemplary lives), put forth your energies (for attaining the highest beatitude).

33. Health of men is destroyed (lit. rooted out) by hundreds of varied ailments of body and mind; wherever there is Lakshmi (the goddess of prosperity), there perils find an open access; death sure annexes to itself, rendering impotent very soon, whatever is born again and again. Then what is created as stable by the absolute Creator?
35. Enjoyments of embodied beings are fleeting like the quick play of lightning within a mass of clouds; life is as insecure as a drop of water attached to the edge of a lotus-leaf and dispersed by the wind; the desires of youth are unsteady; realizing these quickly, let the wise firmly fix their minds in yoga, easily attainable by patience and equanimity.

36. Life is changing like a big wave, beauty of youth abides for a few days; earthly possessions are as transient as thought; the whole series of our enjoyments are like (occasional) flashes of lightning during the monsoons; the embrace round the neck given by our beloved ones lingers only for a while. To cross the ocean (of the fear) of the world, attach your mind to Brahman.

37. In the womb man lies within impure matter in discomfort with limbs cramped; in youth enjoyment is tainted with the intense suffering of mental distraction arising from separation from our beloved; even old age (is undesirable), being the object of contemptible laughter from women. (Then) oh men, say if there is a particle of happiness in the world.

[The idea is that none of the stages of life, beginning from the embryo, are worth living, as they are attended with serious drawbacks.]
39. Manifold and transitory in nature are the enjoyments and of such is this world made up. So what for would you wander about here, O men? Cease exerting yourselves (for them); and if you put faith in our word, on its Supreme Foundation (lit. abode) concentrate your mind, purified by quelling hope with its hundred meshes, and freed from its liability to create desire.

[कामोत्पत्तिवशात्—(We accept this reading as found in the edition we translate from, but we do not follow the meaning given of it by the commentator Budhendra. He makes the expression qualify the verb 'concentrate', explaining काम as अनुग्रह, or love. His meaning thus becomes: swayed by the development of love or bhakti)—Literally, (turned) away from the sway (वस) of the rise of desires.

Enjoyments are transitory individually and inexhaustible collectively, so we are in a never-ending wild-goose chase which brings in turns stimulation and grief. Desire produces this terrible entanglement, and hope keeps it on. Therefore don’t exert yourself for these enjoyments, but, freeing your mind from hope and desire, set it high on its supreme goal. This is the argument.

Another reading seems to be कामोत्पत्तिवशात् which means—'attainable by uprooting desires.'

40. There is one Enjoyment and one alone, lasting, immutable, and supreme, of which the taste renders tasteless the greatest possessions, such as the sovereignty of the three worlds, and established in which a Brahmā, Indra, or the gods (i.e., their positions) appear like particles of grass. Do not, oh sadhu, set your heart on any ephemeral enjoyment other than that.

41. That lovely city, that grand monarch, and that circle of feudatory kings at his side, that cabinet of shrewd counsellors of his and those beauties with moon like faces, that group of wayward princes, those court-minstrels and their songs of praise—under whose power all this fleeted away and became objects of memory, to that Kāla (time or the principle of change) salutation!

[उद्दृत्तः—Another reading is उद्रिक्त, which means 'haughty'.]
42. Where in some home (or, a square in the case of a checkerboard) there once were many, there is now one, and where there was one or many successively, there is none at the end (of the game)—this is the process in which expert Kāla plays (his game) on the checkerboard of this world with living beings as the pieces to be moved, and casting the two dice of day and night.

43. Daily, with the rising and setting of the sun, life shortens, and time (i.e., its flight) is not felt on account of affairs heavily burdened with manifold activities. Neither is fear produced at beholding birth, death, old age, and sufferings. (Alas), the world has become mad by drinking the stupefying wine of delusion.

44. Seeing even the same night to be ever following the same day, in vain do creatures run on (their worldly course) perseveringly and busy with various activities set agoing secretly, i.e., by individual mental resolves. Alas, through infatuation we do not feel ashamed at being thus befooled by this saṁsāra (life) with occupations in which the same particulars repeat themselves!

[The idea is: How profoundly deluded by desire we live! For never growing old itself, it makes all things look fresh and new, otherwise no worldly pursuit has any real novelty. They are as stale as the uniform appearance of day and night following each other.]

45. The feet of the Lord have not been meditated upon (by me) in due form for the sake of doing away with this saṁsāra or worldly bondage. Neither has dharma (merit through performance of religious duties) been earned, such as is strong to knock open the gates of heaven. We have simply proved to be hatchets, as it were, to cut down the garden of our mother's youth, i.e., we have simply made our mother age through giving birth to us. That is the only result we find worthy of mention.
46. नामस्तत्वं त्रियेत्तत्व । आलोचना।—The proper scholarship for a cultured man, such as enables one to defeat hosts of disputants, has not been acquired. खरीण्वरीः।—By the point of the sword strong to knock down the capacious temples of elephants, fame has not been carried to heaven. ताल्लूङ्।—Useless has youth passed away like a lamp in a deserted house.

47. विद्या नाधिष्ठिता कलक्रियात्त्वम् च नोपार्जितं। शुभ्राश्वास्य सराहितेः वनस्पतिः संपादिताः।—Knowledge free from defect has not been mastered; कलक्रियात्त्वम् means ‘free from doctrines incapable of proof.’ चित्रं च।—Riches neither have been earned. शुभ्राश्वास्य।—Services to parents have not been rendered with single-mindedness. कालोऽयं।—Like crows, all the time has been passed in greediness for food, i.e., maintenance obtainable from others.

[These three stanzas (Nos. 45, 46, 47) strike a rather anomalous note. Here the poet personates a man whose life has been, like the lamp burning in a deserted abode, a thorough failure. Such a man is looking back on his youthful years of unmitigated worthlessness. But are the reflections he is making here typical of those who are at the threshold of true renunciation? By no means are they typical. The poet here simply takes up a particular case of an aspirant after renunciation which may serve his poetical purposes best. This aspirant has had in his youth no taste of glory either as a pious man, a dutiful son, a scholarly student, a brave warrior, or a lover of women. He appears to lament here that none of the fourfold aim of human life (धर्मं, religious merit; अर्थं, wealth; कामं, fulfilment of desires; and मिथ्या, liberation) has been pursued by him in the past with the slightest success. Perhaps he means that that is best calculated to impress on his mind the vanity of all the ends of a householder’s life. But this impression of vanity and consequent non-attachment may very well come, and come with perhaps greater completeness, to men who had the ability to succeed in life, and such men may not at all look back with any lingering regret on enjoyments they are going to leave behind, whether their harvest had been actually reaped by them or not. There is even some inconsistency in the ring of regret running through these stanzas. But the poet is here more concerned with dramatic effect than psychological precision.]

वष्णु येव जातात्त्विक्षरितिः एव खलु ते। सम्य च।—संबूञ्ज: स्मृतिविषयं तेषां प्रति गमिताः।—वजातुल्यपायर्यः सिकन्तलंदीतीर्तरुम्भः।

48. एथा जोमेस्यद्वितियसमाप्तिः।—a simpler reading is विरिष्णिततः।
49. The life of man (as ordained) is limited to one hundred years; half of it is spent in night, and out of the other half one half again is passed in childhood and old age; and the rest which has its illness, bereavements, and troubles is spent in serving (others). What happiness can there be for mortals in a life (again) which is even more uncertain than the ripples (on the surface) of water?

50. Now a child for a while and then a youth of erotic ways, a destitute now for a while and then very wealthy, just like an actor, man makes at the end of his role—when diseased in all limbs by age and wrinkled all over the body—his exit behind the scene that veils the abode of Yama (death).

51. Thou art a king; we too are elevated through self-assurance about our wisdom acquired from our preceptor whom we served. Thou art celebrated through thy possessions; our fame is spread abroad in all quarters by learned men. Thus a great difference there is between us both, made by honour and riches. If thou art cold towards us, we too are perfectly indifferent towards thee.

[The sloka is addressed by a yati (one who has renounced the world) to a king. The yati wants to inform the king of the vanity of his possessions, and so is declaring that a yati is greater than the king. For the king is rich in wealth only, but he is rich in wisdom which should command even the respect of a king.

For another reading is मानद नातिरु ज नातिरु which may be rendered thus—'not much difference, O proud (king)'.]

52. Thou exercisest kingly power over riches, we do the same over words (i.e., ideas or scriptures) in all their senses. Thou art a hero (in battle), while we have never-failing skill in methods of subduing the pride of disputants. It is the rich who serve thee, while, intent on learning (higher truths), men serve us to have all imperfections of mind destroyed. If thou hast no regard for me, well, O king, I have absolutely none for thee.
53. Here we are satisfied with the bark of trees and thou with rich garments; (and yet) our contentment is alike, (so) the distinction makes no difference. Poor indeed is he whose desires are boundless. If the mind be contended, who is rich and who poor?

[One who is satisfied with what little he possesses is as good as the rich.]

54. Fruits for food, tasteful water for drink, bare ground to lie upon, barks of trees for clothing, are sufficient for us. I cannot bring myself to approve of the misbehaviour of evil men whose senses are led astray by drinking the wine of newly acquired wealth.

55. Let us eat the food we have begged; let the sky be our clothing; let us lie down on the surface of the earth; what have we to do with the rich?

[आशा—the four quarters.]

56. Who are we to go to see a king—not dancers, court-jesters, or singers, nor experts in (learned) disputes with others in a court, nor youthful court mistresses! (That is, we have absolutely no business to go to a king.)

[The बिट is generally a parasite of a prince.]

57. In ancient times (the kingdom of) this world was created by some large-hearted monarchs; by some was it sustained (i.e., ruled) and by others was it conquered and given away like straw. Even now, some heroes enjoy the fourteen divisions of the world. For what then is this feverish pride of men having sovereignty over a few towns only?

[चतुर्दशा पुन्नानि—The fourteen divisions of the world, that is, the entire created universe.]
58. What high dignity, alas, is there for kings in gaining that earth which has never for a moment been left unenjoyed by hundreds of rulers! The stupid owners of even a shred of the limb of a fraction of its fraction (i.e., of the most minute particle) feel delighted, whereas, on the contrary, they ought to grieve!

59. It (the earth) is but a lump of clay circled by a ring of water! Even the whole of it is but a particle. Hosts of kings, having partitioned it after fighting hundreds of battles, enjoy it. What is so strange if these very poor insignificant persons may or do give (some parts of it)? But downright shame on those mean fellows who would beg bits of coin from even them!

60. That man is indeed born (truly great) whose white skull (after death) is placed by (Śiva) the enemy of Madana (Cupid) high on the head as an ornament; (and) what is (worth) this rising fever of exceeding pride in men, who are nowadays adored by some people with minds intent on the preservation of their lives!

[The great Śiva is called Kapāli; Kapāla meaning ‘skull’. The popular belief is that He puts on His head the skull of a hero whose wonderful life lived on earth merits this distinction.]
to secure’, and the verb विशिष्ठ is would have its primary sense of ‘entering into’. स्वयंमुदिततिलथितारमणिमुण्डुणु would then mean ‘having the virtue of a philosopher’s stone developed of itself in thee’—i.e., प्रार्थित, one of the eight yogic powers. विशिष्ट: we prefer to render as ‘free from the company of others’—a state opposed to what is implied when we have to depend on others for gratifying our desires.

62. Why dost thou, my mind, wander about in vain? Rest (thyself) somewhere. Whatever happens in a particular way, happens so by itself, and not otherwise. So not thinking over the past, nor resolving about the future, I realize enjoyments that come without engaging my thoughts.

63. Desist, O heart, from the troublesome labyrinth of sense-objects; take the path of (highest) good which is capable of bringing about in a moment the destruction of endless troubles; get thee to the state of thy Atman; give up thy stream-like agitated flux; be calm now and never again seek transient worldly attachments.

64. Clear off delusion and earn devotion to Him whose crown is begemmed with the crescent. Oh my mind, accept attachment to some spot on the banks of the celestial river (Gaṅgā). What reliability is there on waves or bubbles, flashes of lightning or (smiles of) fortune, in tongues of flame, serpents, or hosts of friends?

65. O my mind, never for a while earnestly think of the frail goddess of fortune, whose business is to sell herself away while moving in her haunt, namely, the wrinkle of a king’s brow (i.e., the bargain is struck by the smile or the frown of kings). Let us clothe ourselves in ragged garments, and entering the doors of houses in the streets of Vārāṇasi, wait for the alms to be placed in the receptacle of our hands.
66. If there are songs (going on) before you, sweet (skilful) poets from the South by your side and the tinkling of the moving bracelets of female waiters with waving chowries in their hands, then lavishly attach thyself to the enjoyment of worldly happiness. If otherwise, O my mind, then plunge into the absolute type of meditation.

[निर्विकल्प समाधि— the deepest concentration losing all separate consciousness of the knower, the known, and the knowing. चामर is the bushy tail of a yak used as a fan, being one of the insignia of royalty.]

The argument in this śloka is that if you can find only enjoyment everywhere, you may enjoy, but really such enjoyment cannot be found in this world of misery. All worldly pleasures are transient and limited. For in the next śloka we find that the author is preaching the uselessness of the fulfilment of worldly desires.

67. Though embodied beings may obtain that prosperity from which all desires are milked, what then? What if their feet be placed on the heads of their enemies? Or what if their wealth brings friends, or if their bodies endure till the end of the creative cycle?

68. When there is devotion for Śiva, as also fear of birth and death in the heart, no attachment for family, no excitement of sexual passions—when there is the solitude of forest depths unsullied by the company (of worldly men), and there is renunciation—what better, then, is to be wished for?

69. What avails all this agitating over the unreal? Meditate, therefore, on that supreme, infinite, ageless, effulgent Brahman, in the light of which all such enjoyments as the sovereignty of the world appear as the desires of pitiable men!
70. Being thus agitated, O mind, thou (now) descendest into the nether regions, (now) soarest up beyond the skies, and wanderest all around the four quarters. Why, even by mistake, thou dost not once concentrate on that Brahman, of the nature of Self and bereft of all imperfections, whereby you may attain supreme bliss!

[आत्मानिनम्—means 'belonging to Self,' as the real state of Self is Brahman. The other reading, आतमालीनम्, would mean, 'submerged in Self,' being its substance or reality.]

71. What are worth the Vedas, the Smrtis, the readings from the Purānas, the vast śāstras, or the mazes of ceremonials, which give us, as their fruits, a resting-place in heaven, (which is, as it were,) a village (interspersed) with huts! All else is but the bargaining of traders except that one way which admits one into the state of supreme bliss in one’s Self, and which is like the (final) destructive fire to consume the evolving mass of worldly miseries.

[The śāstras, by which are meant here logic, grammar, etc., and the six systems of philosophy, are said to be vast because...]

72. Seeing that, when set all over with the fires of cyclic destruction the stately mountain Meru topples down, the seas which are the abode of numerous sharks and aquatic animals are dried up, and the earth (itself) comes to an end, though held firm by the feet of mountains, what to speak of this body, which is as unsteady as the tip of the ear of a young elephant!

[श्रमिन्धर—According to Hindu mythology the mountains are regarded as the supporters of the earth.

युगान्तर—The cosmic conflagration at the end of a cycle.]
74. Seeing the grey hairs on the head of a man, emblematic of discomfiture by old age, youthful women at once fly away from him, as if from a Chandala's (the untouchable in caste) well whereon is placed a structure of bones!

If it be taken to qualify the former, it would mean: this framework of bones (meaning the old man).

It was a custom in former times with the Chandalas to line their well with bones for ornamentation.

75. As long as this body is free from disease and decrepitude, as long as senility is far off, as long as the powers of the senses are unaffected and life is not decaying, so long, wise persons should put forth mighty exertions for the sake of their supreme good, for when the house is on fire what avails setting about digging a well (for water)?

76. Shall we live by the celestial river practising austerities, or shall we amiably serve (our) wives graced by virtues? Shall we drink of the currents of scriptural literature, or of the nectar of diverse poetical literature? Man having the longevity of a few twinklings of the eye, we do not know which (of these) to undertake!

77. These rulers of the world have minds restless like a horse and (therefore) are difficult to please, while we are ambitious with minds pitched on vast gain; age steals away bodily strength and death cuts short this dear life. Ah! friend, nothing is good for the wise in this world excepting the practice of austerities!
78. When honour has faded, wealth has become ruined, those who sue for favours have departed in disappointment, friends have dwindled away, retainers have left, and youth has gradually decayed, there remains only one thing proper for the wise—residence somewhere in a grove on the side of a valley of the Himalayas whose rocks are purified by the waters of the Gaṅgā.

[तुलक्षणा—The Gaṅgā is so called on account of the myth that ṛṣi Jahnu drank it up and then disgorged it through his ear or thigh, when in its course towards the Bay of Bengal after its descent from the heavens it overflowed the sacrificial platform of the ṛṣi. Examination of the traditional place where the ṛṣi is supposed to have lived in ancient times, suggests the likelihood of the course of the river being obstructed by an extensive eminence with pervious soil and of its delayed emergence on the other side.]

रम्याकरित्रिच्चक्ष्यवक्ती रम्य वनान: स्याली
रम्य साधुसामान्यमागसुखं काव्येषु रम्यं: कथा: ।
कोपोपििहिताश्यविन्दुतं रम्यं प्रयायवा मुखं
सर्व रम्यमनिन्यतामुपाते चित्ते न किंविवेचन: ॥११७९॥

79. Delightful are the rays of the moon, delightful the grassy plots in the outskirts of the forest, delightful are the pleasure of wise men’s society, delightful the narratives in poetical literature, and delightful the face of the beloved swimming in the tear-drops of (feigned) anger. Everything is charming, but nothing is so when the mind is possessed by the evanescence of things.

80. Is not a palace pleasant to dwell in? Is not music with its accompaniments agreeable to listen to? Is not the society of women, dear as life itself, very pleasing? Yet, wise men have gone away to the forest, regarding these things as unstable as the shadow of a lamp’s flame flickering through the puff of the wings of a deluded moth.

[श्रीन्त also means ‘hovering’.]

आसंसारालिधुषुपायं चित्तवात तात तादु—
इन्द्रायास्माकं निम्नपदवीं श्रीन्तमार्गं गतो वा ।
योजये धरे विषयकारिणीगृहस्तासमान—
श्रीवस्मान: करणकारिण: संयोगानायलीलाम् ॥११८१॥

81. Oh dear! In our quest through the three worlds from the very beginning of their creation, none such has come within sight or hearing, that can play the part of a controlling trap for the elephant of his mind when maddened by the mysterious, deep-rooted infatuation for the female elephant of sense-object.

[श्रीवस्मा is an elephant-trap. Another reading is आलान which means ‘a tying post for an elephant’.

श्रीवस्मा—‘of the maddened’.]
82. This freedom to wander about, this food to which no meanness attaches, the company of holy men, the cultivation of Vedic wisdom, of which (unlike other vows) the only fruit is spiritual peace, the mind also restrained in its movements towards external things—to such a consummation, I know not after lifelong reflection, what noble austerities may lead!

[Upasam is the cessation of the illusions, and so of the worries, of the world. This is said to be the only fruit borne by the pursuit of this vow, namely, śrutam, or study of Vedic wisdom, other vows being ordained to bear fruits in the form of worldly prosperity.]

83. Desires have worn off in our heart. Alas! Youth has also passed away from the body. The virtues have proved barren for want of appreciative admirers. The powerful, all-destroying, unrelenting Death is fast hastening in! What is to be done? Ah me! I see there is no other refuge left except the feet of the Destroyer of Cupid.

[Madanatāk—Śiva is so called in allusion to His having turned the god Cupid to ashes on the eve of His marriage with Gauri.]

84. I make no difference in substance between Śiva, the Lord of the universe and Viṣṇu, the inmost Self of the universe. But still my devotion is (attached) to the One in whose crest there is the crescent moon.

[This śloka has been brought forward by the poet as a doubt may arise in the mind from the preceding śloka where the poet says that Śiva is the only Lord to take refuge in. Here the poet says that really there is no difference between Śiva and Viṣṇu, but he is by nature attached to Śiva. This is what is called Iṣṭanistā, or the devotion to one’s own ideal.]

The word Janāśman has been variously derived, the verb meaning both ‘destroying’ and ‘protecting’. If the former meaning be taken, then the word would mean ‘slayer of the Janas’ (demons living in the sea.)

Janadānna—This word has been variously interpreted:
(1) ‘the inmost Self of the universe’, (2) ‘One who is the knower of all inner things in the universe’, (3) ‘One who is the Self of
all in the universe', or it may mean, (4) ‘in whose Self is the whole universe’.

85. Sitting in a peaceful posture, during nights when all sounds are stilled into silence, somewhere on the banks of the heavenly river which shines with the white glow of the bright-diffused moonlight, and fearful of the miseries of birth and death, crying aloud ‘Śiva, Śiva, Śiva,’ ah! when shall we attain that ecstasy which is characterized by copious tears of joy held in internal control!

[Hundred Verses on Renunciation]

86. Giving away all possessions, with a heart filled with tender compassion, remembering the course of destiny which ends so ruefully in this world and, as the only refuge for us, meditating on the feet of Hara (i.e., Śiva), O! we shall spend, in the holy forest, nights aglow with the beams of the full autumnal moon.

87. When shall I pass the days like a moment, residing on the banks of the celestial river in Vārānasi, clad in a kaupīna (loin-cloth) and with folded hands raised to the forehead, crying out—‘Oh Lord of Gauri, the Slayer of Tripura, the Giver of all good, the Three-eyed, have mercy!’

88. Having bathed in the waters of the Gāṅgā and worshipped Thee, O Lord, with unblemished fruits and flowers and having concentrated my mind, by my stony bed within the mountain cave, on the object of my meditation—blissful in the Self alone, living on fruits, and devoted to the guru’s words—when shall I, O Thou Enemy of Cupid, through Thy grace become released from the grief which has arisen from my serving the man of prosperity?
'With the sign of a shark in the feet', said to be a sign of uncommon prosperity according to the science of divination by bodily signs."

89. O Śiva, when shall I, living alone, free from desires, peaceful in mind, with only the hand to eat from and the four quarters for garment (i.e., naked), be able to root out all kāma?

90. Those who have only their hand to eat from, who are contented with begged food, pure by itself, who repose themselves anywhere (i.e., require no house or bed), who constantly regard the universe like almost a blade of grass, who even before giving up the body experience the uninterrupted Supreme Bliss—for such yogis indeed the path which is easy of access by Śiva’s grace becomes attainable. (The path, that is to say, of mokṣa or supreme liberation.)

91. If there is a kaupina (even) worn out and shredded a hundred times and a wrapper also of the same condition, if one is free from all disquieting thought, if food there is, obtained unconditionally from begging, and sleep on a cremation ground or in the forest, if one wanders alone without any let or hindrance, if the mind is always calm, and if one is steadfast in the festive joy of yoga, what is then worth the rulership of the three worlds?

92. Can this universe, which is but a mere reflection, engender greed in wise men? The ocean surely does not become agitated by the movement of a little fish.
93. O Mother Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth), serve (thou) someone else; do not long for me. Those who desire enjoyment are subject to thee, but what art thou to us who are free from desires? Now we wish to live upon food articles obtained from begging and placed, (conformably to its) being sanctified, in a receptacle of paläśa leaves pieced together on the spot.

[The paläśa vessels are enjoined in the Smṛtis as purifying the food kept in them.]

94. The earth is his vast bed, the arms his ample pillow, the sky is his canopy, the genial breeze his fan, the autumnal moon is his lamp, and rejoicing in the company of abnegation as his wife, the sage lies down happily and peacefully, like a monarch of undiminished glory.

95. There lives the real ascetic who feeds himself on alms, unattached to the society of men, always free in his efforts (i.e., without obligation or restraint from outside) and pursuing a path of indifference as regards what to give up or what to take; his worn out garment is made up of rags cast away in streets, and his seat is a blanket received by chance; he is devoid of pride and egoism and he is concerned only in enjoying the happiness arising from the control of mind.

96. When accosted by people who loquaciously express doubt and surmise, such as, 'Is he a Chandāla, or a twice born, or a Śudra, or an ascetic, or perhaps some supreme yogī with his mind full of the discrimination of Reality,' the yogis themselves go their way, neither pleased nor displeased in mind.

[Hundred Verses on Renunciation]
97. (If) for serpents (even) air has been provided by the Creator as food obtainable without killing or toiling; (ii) beasts are contented with feeding on grass-sprouts and lying on ground; for men (also) with intelligence strong enough to lead across the ocean of transmigratory existence, some such livelihood has been created; and those who seek this have all their gunas invariably brought to their final dissolution.

When the gunas—sattva, rajas, and tamas—are finally reduced to the inactivity of equipoise, the yogi reaches beyond māyā.

The last line may also be interpreted differently—'But in rummaging for it all one's virtues are apt to come to an end.'

98. Will those happy days come to me when on the bank of the Ganga, sitting in the lotus-posture on a piece of stone in the Himalayas, I shall fall into the yoga-nidrā (i.e., lose all consciousness in samādhi or perfect concentration) resulting from a regular practice of the contemplation of Brahman, and when old antelopes having nothing to fear, will rub their limbs against my body!

[Patraḥ samānasya—lit. lotus-seat; sitting cross-legged so that the soles of the feet protrude above along the thighs.]

99. With the hand serving as sacred cup, with begged food that comes through wandering and never runs short, with the ten quarters as their ample garment and the earth as a fixed, spacious bed—blessed are they who, having forsaken the manifold worldly associations which an attitude of want breeds, and self-contented with a heart fully matured through their acceptance of absolute seclusion, root out all karma (i.e., the chain of cause and effect which grows on as action and desire in life follow each other).

[Drityātikārikārṇaḥ—we prefer to take as: 'the many forms of contact with the world which result from the poverty of an attitude of seeking worldly objects'.]

100. O Earth, my mother! O Wind, my father! O Fire, my friend! O Water, my good relative! O sky, my brother! Having cast away infatuation with its wonderful power,
by means of an amplitude of pure knowledge resplendent with merits developed through my association with you all, I now merge in Supreme Brahman.

[The terms of familiarity and endearment used of the five elements are appropriate in view of the final point of blissful parting to which the yogi has been carried through those subtle tattvas or essences of the five elements which characterize intermediate stages of yogic practice.]

इति वैराग्यशतकं सम्पूर्णम्
Here ends the Vairagya-Śatakam.
VAIRAGYA Satakam

This treatise contains the hundred verses on renunciation by Bhartrihari, the great poet and elder brother of the most renowned King Vikramaditya of Ujjain. The poetical beauty of this work makes it indispensable to all lovers of literature.