[At the half yearly meeting of the Regional Grand Lodge of Southern India, on the 4 th September 2004, the author W.Bro. T.T.Kuruvilla Past Assistant Regional Grand Master delivered a brilliant lecture which held the audience spell bound. It was a well researched lecture, which won the appreciation of every brother present.

The Relevance of The Mark and Royal Arch Degrees to The Craft

Let me at the outset thank the RWRGM for giving me an opportunity to address this august gathering. Indeed, I consider it a great privilege and a unique honour. The task given to me is to explain the relevance of the Mark and Royal Arch Degrees to the Craft. Therefore my talk will be mainly directed to those MM's who have not yet progressed to the, so called, higher degrees and would request the senior brethren to bear with me.

The preamble to the Constitution of the GL of England says, "*Pure Ancient Masonry consists of the three degrees and no more, namely those of the EA, FC and MM including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch*". So, in England, at least, the RA is considered an integral part of Craft Masonry being the completion of the MM Degree. The situation is slightly different in Scotland. The Constitution of the GL of Scotland defines the three degrees of Masonry as those of the EA, Fellow-of-Craft (including the Mark) and the MM. In Scotland it is the Mark Degree that is considered as an essential part of Craft Masonry, it being the second part of the FC Degree.

This reflects the actual position that existed in Freemasonry in England during the 18th century. The Ancients GL recognized the Mark & RA as integral parts of Ancient Freemasonry and their Warrants authorised the daughter lodges to work the Mark and RA Degrees in Craft Lodges. The position was similar in Scotland and Ireland where Craft Lodges regularly worked the Mark and RA although these degrees were not formally recognized by the GLs. It was only the Moderns GL that had reservations about the RA and the other side degrees, but the records show that Moderns Lodges unofficially worked them and many Moderns Masons were exalted into the RA and advanced to the Mark Degree.

The significance of this is that at an important phase in the history of Freemasonry when operative Masonry was undergoing transformation to speculative masonry; when the Hiramic Degrees like the MM Degree, the Installation Ceremony, the Royal Arch and

the Mark Degrees, were developed and incorporated into the body of Freemasonry; when our symbols and philosophy were being embedded into the rituals; when the transition from a mainly lecture type of working to the modern ritual type working was taking place, the Mark and the Royal Arch were an integral part of the Craft System. These degrees evolved and developed together and there arose narrative, thematic and symbolic links between them and the Craft Degrees.

However at the beginning of the 19th century, for various political and historic reasons, which I do not want to go into, the three Grand Lodges in England decided to restrict Craft Masonry to the three Degrees. The Mark and the Royal Arch were removed to separate Grand Bodies. In Scotland and Ireland the Mark and the Royal Arch came under the jurisdiction of Supreme Grand Chapters. In England at the time of Union, although the Royal Arch was accommodated in Grand Chapter, the Mark was ignored and it was only in 1856 that the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons was formed to control this degree. This resulted in the Mark and Royal Arch being viewed as separate and distinct degrees. The Mark was now deemed the 4th degree in Masonry and was conferred only on MMs. Even when the Grand Lodge of Scotland resumed jurisdiction over the Mark Degree in 1860, there was an agreement with the Supreme Grand Chapter of Scotland, that the Mark Degree will only be conferred on MMs. However since the Mark and the Royal Arch were part of the Craft system during the formative period, the many narrative, symbolic and thematic links between them survived the separation. There are parts of the Craft Degrees that can only be understood if one has knowledge of the Mark and the Royal Arch Degrees. It is this aspect that I now wish to elaborate.

Let us first of all take the link between the Craft and the Royal Arch Degree. The narrative link between them is the secrets lost in the Third Degree were recovered in the Royal Arch. Therefore the Royal Arch is, in a sense, the completion of the MM Degree. However there are other thematic or symbolic links between the third degree and the RA. Let us take an example. When the WM raises the Candidate from the grave he tells him, "*it is thus all MMs are raised from a figurative death to a reunion with the former Companions of their toils".* If the raising is as per the narrative given in the Traditional History the WM should be raising the dead body of our Master Hiram from the temporary grave to be re-interred near the sanctum sanctorum. If this is the case then the words of the WM has no meaning or significance. Therefore the raising must be symbolic. To understand the symbolic significance of the raising one must look at the larger symbolism of the Third

Degree. The theme of the degree is old age and death. The first degree deals with infancy and youth, the second with growing into adulthood and acquiring skills and knowledge and the third degree deals with old age and death. That is the reason when the candidate enters the Lodge in the third degree it is in darkness and this darkness represents the darkness of death. In the darkened lodge he is instructed to take seven steps, "*the first three as if stepping over a grave and the other four ordinary walking steps".* These steps are symbolic. The first part represents the passing through the death experience, going from this world to the next. After passing through the death experience the candidate is told to take four normal walking steps. The only time that the candidate takes normal walking steps in any of the degrees in the Craft is after going through the death experience. This is to teach him that one attains one's true self, one's real self not in this world but in the next. After taking the steps, the Candidate is shown the Three Great Lights and he finds that both points of the C's that represents the soul or the spirit are now liberated from the S—which represents the body. This symbolizes the liberation of the soul from the body on death and gives us a clue to the symbolical meaning of the WM's action when he raises the Candidate from the grave – he is raising the eternal soul from the dead body. When we perceive the raising in this light, the words that the WM speaks assume significance. The first part – '*it is thus all MM's are raised from a figurative death'*, indicates that death is '*figurative*': only the physical body has perished but the "*vital and immortal principle*", the eternal soul or spirit is now liberated from the body on death. The second part – "*to a reunion with the former companions of their toils*". The use of the word '*companion*' here is very significant. It is a nomenclature used in the Royal Arch for members and its use in the Craft indicates that the soul on liberation from the body will now start on a journey into the Royal Arch where it will reunite with other souls of predeceased brethren. It is significant to note that the Candidate on admission to the Royal Arch continues to take normal walking steps that he first took in the Third Degree. These steps link the Craft and the Royal Arch. The Royal Arch depicts the journey of the soul liberated from the body on death as narrated in the Third Degree Therefore the Royal Arch can be seen as the completion of the Master Masons' experience.

Let us now consider the links between the Craft and the Mark Degrees. The Mark Degree was once considered as a second part of the Fellow Craft and therefore, was a qualifying degree for the MM. To understand many parts of the MM's Degree requires some knowledge of the Mark Degree. Let us take an example. It is commonly believed

that it was FCs, who conspired to extort the secrets from HA. This is not correct. It was not the FCs, but a different category. Our ritual states – "*Fifteen FC's of that superior class appointed to preside over the rest, finding that the work was nearly completed but that they were not in possession of the secrets of the third degree, conspired etc. etc…*" So it is '*fifteen FC's of that superior class appointed to preside over the rest*' who conspired to extort the secrets. Therefore, we see that a new class of supervisors is being created to preside over the FCs. The ritual goes on to give their names, "*the Menatschins or Prefects or more familiarly speaking the Overseers*" This category of supervisors were called Menatschins or Overseers. Besides this, no further information is available in the Craft about the role or function of this category of supervisors. To know about the different category of workers employed at the building of KS Temple, one must look to the Mark Degree that deals in great detail of how the work was organized. Let me now quote from the Mark Lecture. "*At the building of KS's Temple ….. there were 80,000 operatives employed, part of whom were hewers in the quarries of Zaradatha, and part builders of the Temple besides these there was a levy of 30,000 in the forests of Lebanon*" There were 110000 workers employed every day at the building of the Temple. It was an immense undertaking. In order to ensure an efficient administration and to prevent confusion and waste, HA divided this immense number into 1100 lodges of EA's and FC's. The FC's were the skilled artisans and EA's the helpers. Over each Lodge he appointed three supervisors called Menatschins, Overseers or Mark Masters. So there were 3300 of these Menatschins, Overseers or Mark Masters. They had their own organization. They were divided 100 lodges with 33 in each. It was this category of Supervisors - Menatschins, Overseers or Mark Masters that interacted with the top Management – with KS and HA, the Chief architect. The Mark Lectures states, " *once every sixth working day it was the custom for the Mark Masters to wait on the acting GM HA to receive the working plans, as well as the instructions for carrying on the work*". This indicates that there were weekly meetings between the chief architect and the supervisors, where the progress of the project would be reviewed and the necessary instructions and plans for the next weeks' work given out. The supervisors would pass on these instructions and plans to the workmen under their charge in the Lodges and set them to work. They would supervise the work and check the quality of the job. It should be noted that it was from this category of Menatschins, Overseers or Mark Masters that promotion to the rank of Master or MM was given. And it was some disgruntled elements of this category that conspired to extort the secrets from HA, which resulted in his death.

It is significant to note that when the absence of Hiram is reported to KS, he "*selected fifteen trusty FC's and ordered them to make a diligent search after the person of our Master*". He '*selected fifteen trusty FC's'*. He did not select any one from the category of supervisors because he not sure how many of them were involved in the conspiracy to extort of secrets; to what extent the conspiracy had pervaded the category of superiors. He therefore selected a different category of workers, the FC's to search for the body of our Master and apprehend the culprits.

Let us take a final example. When the three ruffians demanded the secrets of a MM from HA, he told them " *those secrets were known but to three in the world and without the consent and co-operation of the other two, he neither could nor would divulge them."* When the death of HA is reported to KS he says, "*by his untimely death the genuine secrets of a MM were lost*". A question now arises; if the secrets were known to three how does the death of one cause the loss of the secrets. I am sure this is a doubt that would have crossed the minds of many brethren at one time or the other. No answer to this is found in the MM degree or in the Craft. One must look to the Mark Degree for an answer.

The Mark Degree deals with the building of an underground secret vault and the Key Stone of the Arch of the vault. In this secret vault

HA secreted or concealed the genuine secrets. Only the three GMs knew the access to this secret vault. They individually did not have the access but had to act jointly or 'co-operate' with each other, as the ritual says, in order to find the access. It was like the safe in some banks that have two keys – one with the Manager and the other with the cashier. Both will have to use their individual keys before the safe can be opened. Similarly the three GMs had to coordinate and co-operate with each other to get the access to the secret vault. So the death of one will cause the loss of access to the secret vault and thereby the secrets.

It is significant that when the substituted secrets are given we are told "*they should designate all MMs throughout the universe until time or circumstances should restore the genuine*" This implies that the genuine secrets are not permanently or irrevocably lost. They are only temporarily lost. They exist in the secret vault but the access to it is lost. If, in future, someone by chance or luck is able to find the secret vault, then the secrets will be recovered. This is precisely what happens in the RA. Three Sojourners or workmen employed to dig the foundations of the second temple accidentally find the

secret vault. They break into the vault by removing the keystone, which plays such an important role in the Mark Degree, and recover the secrets.

The secret vault and the Key Stone link the Mark to the RA. Thus the Craft, Mark and Royal Arch are all linked together to form one comprehensive whole. Unless one has knowledge of all these degrees one can neither fully understand the principles, philosophy or the teachings of masonry nor perceive the effulgent beauty that resides in Freemasonry.
Thank you.

W.Bro.T.T.Kuruvilla P.G.I.G., P.A.R.G.M is a P.M of Lodge Kottayam (No.245) and a prominent citizen of Kottayam, besides being an erudite Masonic Scholar. He has delivered several lectures on Freemasonry and is held in great veneration. His lecture posted here was delivered at the half yearly meeting of the Regional Grand Lodge held at Salem on 4 th September 2004 in the immediate distinguished presence of the M.W.Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of India and a packed hall with more than 850 brethren in attendance. The lecture was well received. The author was kind enough to permit us to post the same in this website. We are very thankful to him. We hope more of his articles will follow for the benefit of the brethren.

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Sai wrote on *Friday, September 24, 2004*:

Subject: New Article No.114

I had heard the lecture at the R.G.L.Meeting. I congratulate the author for the brilliant lecture and congratulate the webmaster for posting the lecture within a short time. Reading the lecture is refreshing and the posting the same in this website has made it possible to peruse the same leisurely and contemplate on the views of the author.We expect many more informative and erudite articles from the author and the other brethren endowed with great masonic wisdom. My appreciation to the author and the webmaster and I wish them well W.Bro.D.Seshaasai (P.M and P.Z)

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This is precisely what happens in the Royal Arch Degree. Three sojourners or workmen, employed to dig the foundations of the second Temple, accidentally find the secret vault. They break into the vault by removing the Keystone, which plays such an important role in the Mark Degree and recover the secrets.

The secret vault and the Keystone link the Mark Degree to the Royal Arch Degree. Thus the Craft, Mark and Royal Arch are all linked together to form one comprehensive whole. Unless one has knowledge of all these degrees one can neither fully understand the principles, philosophy or the teachings of Masonry, nor perceive the effulgent beauty that resides in Freemasonry. Thank You.

W.Bro. T.T. Kuruvilla P.G.I.G., P.A.R.G.M is a Past Master of Lodge Kottayam No 245. Grand Lodge of India. This lecture was delivered at the half year meeting of The Regional Grand Lodge held in Salem on the 4th of September 2004.