"N FOR NOBODY"
Autobiography of an English Teacher

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I'm Nobody! who are you?
Are you Nobody too?

How dreary to be Somebody!
How public — Like a Frog!

Emily Dickinson

'N' for 'Nobody', said the young woman on the telephone at the Travel Agent's office in San Francisco—that was before the advent of computers in business: She was spelling out the letters in my name to the Reservation Desk. Did I really mean what I said when I apostrophized her, 'Be you my philosopher!' Why, then, do I keep mouthing 'Not Eros, but Ego is the maker of all civilization'? How much of the ego does even the saint surrender? Will it please him to know no one misses him? If not, why does he seek the solitude of the mountain tops? Is there an eternal tension (dialogue, yes) between 'to be' and 'not to be'? Questions which trouble a mystic or poets like Dante and T.S. Eliot. Writing this at Bellagio in Italy I felt impelled in my admiration for the figures of the Italian Renaissance, to re-read my Dante who dived into himself, into his hell, to remove the "soul's screen" before he could go beyond. Here before me is no great matter, and neither cause nor courage for soul-search what with the lower reaches of the mind having a hold on my time and attention. Wherefore the paradox, the enigma, of writing about oneself. And such knowledge, even pretensions to it, my only forgiveness for writing.

I am writing, apart from my urge to write, because well-meaning friends of mine in the profession have often flattered me saying that the history of English Studies in India since 1950 is inseparably linked with my years as teacher of English. Generous thought. In any case, a good excuse for wanting to
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look back on the years not so ‘wasted’ after all. But of what larger good were they? It is for others to judge. And perhaps for younger people with the benefit of hindsight to atone for the sins of their predecessors! But to me as to most of us in our times English has been an effective aid to thinking globally while choosing to live locally; and fighting for standards in literature has been in the words of F.R. Leavis, inseparable from fighting for standards in life. And immediately for me it has come to mean texture of living, consistent with the history and destiny of this country which instilled respect for disinterested action for the larger good and a gradual loosening, not denial, of bonds with the things of the world, including what goes by the name of position or power—enough to be convinced of the truth of

When half gods go
The gods arrive.

Dhvanyaloka, Mysore, March 1991          C.D. NARASIMHAIAH
(Begun at Villa Serbelloni
Bellagio, Lake Como (Italy)
April 1988)
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Village Boy Learns English: A Toiling Family’s Gift

I grew up in a small town called Closepet on the Bangalore-Mysore highway. In the fervour of national awakening, in the forties, Closepet became Ramanagaram, itself going back to the earlier Ramagiri, the hill, in whose shade the town took shape. Legend says that exiled Sri Rama rested on the hill wearied with wandering in the woods. And as Devi Sita felt thirsty, the valiant husband charged an arrow into the rock which opened to the gushing waters from the bowels of the earth below. And the fresh cool water formed into a pool with sturdy rocks holding it on the sides. It still glimmers in the sun while no one has dared to know its depth — an impious thought! But they do now know: Where Sri Rama stood the ground was hallowed and a temple rose from the prayers of pilgrims. There the Sapta Rishis, the seven Sages in resplendent rocks, still stand witness to the divine event, through geological ages, like Ahalya elsewhere awaiting, for aeons, the touch of Sri Rama’s foot to be quickened to a new life.

Look around from the top of the hill for other rock formations: a relaxed lion to the left licking its cub fondly and the turbaned village headman to the right holding his sway over the peasantry, while not far, close to the railway track, is a boulder precariously poised on a brother rock, as though a touch would tilt it and send it tumbling down. The ringed rocks with crevices have been a perennial source of hushed talk among cowboys and peasant women gathering fuel in the vacant land. A nephew of mine, then around 12, one day left home in a huff and as he sauntered along with boys of his age, got lost from the group at dusk fall, and was trapped in a crevice which he called a cave. At night — he still insists it was no delusion — a bear brought him on a green green leaf rasagaram of bananas and jackfruit drenched in sweet honey!
Not long ago David Lean, a film producer, lured by the rock formation around Ramangaram, did much violence to the mystery surrounding the hill by trying to shoot a film based on E.M. Forster’s over-praised novel, *A Passage to India*. The ugly holes which look like scars on the hill’s shining face just confirmed the ‘muddle’ of the Marbar caves in the novel. If only the temple priest had accompanied the cast he could still have helped them hear the auspicious *aum*, which Forster’s Adela mistook for the ominous boom, what with the wise Professor Godbole left behind. But then, not to have heard it the way she did would have meant the collapse of the novel, and therefore the film, half way through. A defeat to the Western man’s vision of Evil!

The film was adding a lie to history, itself a lie of the divine myth, as Colonel Close whose troops camped for the night at Ramagiri wanted it called Closepet in remembrance of his night’s stay. From Sri Rama’s hill-stop to Colonel Close’s military camp — what degeneracy of myth into a dry fact of history! And for me, dispossession from birth of my mythical identity. How little that high-minded Englishman, Macaulay, knew for all his talk of ‘the imperishable empire’ as he deplored Indian inability to tell one from the other, while the discerning among his countrymen today like history to aspire to the status of myth. Because myth and legend are truer than history. I hope I am more than a dubious gift of Macaulay’s English education, for I know for certain that both the East and the West have shaped me, such as I am.

My father’s credulousness of which I can recall endless anecdotes, led him to successive partnerships in pursuit of ludicrously small business enterprises with his cronies — he could be lured into any enterprise with a little exhortation. I am not sure I haven’t derived from him a part of it myself! He continued to maintain they were all good men but such was his karma that every association was a different kind of failure, until he was reduced to penury. A ramshackle house which he and his younger brother inherited from their father, was all my father could point to as his own. The novelist Mulk Raj Anand insisted on having a look at it while we were driving to Bangalore and at the very sight of it he said in my ear he had *grossly exaggerated* his humble origins! My father mortgaged
his share of the house for 300 rupees and found his way to Ajjanahalli, a small village of some sixty houses and more than 300 cattle in the interior of Cossipore Sub-division, there to scrape a living. That was in the early decades of the present century.

Both my parents were hard-working. And considering how lazy was everyone in that slumbering village, my father could not have found it hard to look after the family — my mother and two children, my sister ten years my elder, and has, in life as in death, meant more to me than my mother. Father set up a small shop (we are Bajjias, mainly shop-keepers by occupation) to cater for the needs of the village community which grew almost everything it needed and depended on barter for some very few articles of daily need which he lugged home from the town he had left behind. Ten miles on foot each way was nothing to him — straight in his dealings, he walked straight and stood bolt straight, with no lie in the heart and no sign of fat on the body, he continued to be my and my children’s pride till he died of age in his late eighties. Unlike my mother, I never heard him complain of his hardships which he took in his stride. A crushing load on his head to the fair and back, week after week, four miles each way, he accepted as an inescapable curse of barter economy. He used to take me to the weekly fair frequently and I would fight for my share of the load which, as the weight got me under after a few furlongs, I would manoeuvre to palm off to his ungrudging shoulders. ‘It won’t be long, son, before you grow up to relieve me of this drudgery’ — so saying, he would start reeling off episodes from the Ramayana, the same with which he was to keep my visiting colleagues at Professors Quarters in Mysore absorbed while I was getting ready. The Rama story stood him in good stead when on an impulse he would decide to walk alone to our Family Deity’s shrine at Savandurga (an unusually well-shaped monolithic 4000 ft hill of golden hue) where, he fervently felt, my ailing sister was sure to be cured. And his faith was rewarded. Visit over, he would walk back five miles in the dark, reciting verses in his rich voice from a dramatized folk version of the epic all the way. Its author, the village bard Chakrabhavi Ramanujacharya was to stay with us later at Professors Quarters as honoured guest — he was a veritable Valmiki to father. Father had played in the folk play the role of Hanuman that most
precious among precious stones in the epic's necklace', *Ramayana Mahamala Raina*.

I was to discover in the last years of his life father suddenly showed signs of depression — was it senility? — when I felt reassured that the *Ramayana* would restore him to health and sanity. At my instance my children persuaded him to read from the *Ramayana* passages which interested him. He was at first reluctant but warmed as the reading progressed, was even deeply involved and with repetition of the ritual — it acquired the sanctity of worship on several evenings in succession — yes, we found him whole again. Listening to the folk songs my mother and sister sung at the lighting of earthen lamps in the evening and in the small hours of the morning, while still in bed, nurtured the other half of my aesthetic life in childhood — many of these songs ended with a benediction that those who sing and those who listen are blessed with health, wealth and good children. *Prayojana* and *Purushartha*, the twin ends of art and literature, as I was to learn from M. Hiriyanna's books when I grew up.

When I was past five I was taken to school in the next village — two miles was walking distance even for school children in those days except that, not infrequently, I had to walk with a bunch of wayward boys for whom school was a refuge from slogging on the land or chores like gathering fuel while looking after the cattle. On days I had to walk alone through fields and fallow land with a couple of shallow brooks to wade through. I had been taught to muster courage with our Family Deity's name on the lips while passing by the village tank, widely believed to be haunted by the ghost of an unmarried girl who had slipped into it and lost her life. I had been put under the care of a stern-looking schoolmaster named Motghanhalli Venkatanna who, until only the other day brought his grandchildren to our house for odd services. But for his incessant smoking he could be called a pious man with clean habits. He dressed sparsely, but on days the inspector of schools was visiting on his BSA bicycle, he was proud to match it with his smooth parrot green coat on which, he boasted to his friends, a fly would slide down! He could sign his name in English — I am not sure he could name the letters, though. He conducted four classes by turns and when gossipping with his visitors
right in the centre of the small hall, he would give a glare to the inattentive ones and if they persisted, he brandished his twig menacingly to suggest they would soon be lined up to render accounts of their progress with the day's assignment. Everyday a veritable Judgement Day!

We stood shuddering what was in store for each of us, though I remember I had nothing to fear what with a loving father waking me up to the morning's second cock-crow to mind my day's lessons as he set out on his first round for the day to return home before sun-rise with his booty of fuel for the day's cooking, a pile of fresh plucked large green dining leaves, a handful of ember champak blossoms for my sister's plait of hair after the worship, and, with a little luck, one or two sweet smelling egg-shaped bela nuts which he was the first to collect under the Temple Tree. After they were duly displayed for our joy, he would gather me in his warm hug, seat me in his lap with his upper cloth wrapped round us — two in one. A wood panel of Picasso's painting reproduction in my study, of a forlorn father with sunken eyes and horny feet, looking on his plump little son biting an apple, himself the apple of the old man's eye, a former student's gift when I visited him at Oxford, is a constant reminder of that image to me.

I would read my lessons without effort and recite the poems with a flourish to impress my father—not that he could correct if I went wrong, his own education having taken him no further than what the First Form Primer could teach him. But I think he had uncanny understanding of how well or ill I had grasped the lesson before me in the dog-eared textbook. He had bought it for me against a bagful of "ragi" the region's staple food, with the excitement of one who had struck gold in a treasure hunt. How the free distribution of children's books by vote-catching ministers of Education today takes away the thrill of the unlettered parent walking with his child to the town-centre for the book which would launch the little fellow on a career of distant dreams, hopes, promises and prestige in the eyes of the small community which had written him off as good for nothing. And the reward in my case came sooner than expected as I learnt to read with feeling the "Ballad of the Sacred Cow", an unsurpassed Kannada classic, going back to a myth in Vishnudharmottara Purana. My grandmother would plead with me to read it whenever we
had women visitors, all of them reaching for their sari fringe to wipe the tears off the eye for the calf’s plight, the cow’s predicament and the tiger’s virtue. The family was to live out the sad story, except for the last part, in the cries of its orphans: my sister left behind (Murthy, my nephew, who grew up with us) followed by my aunt’s daughter; then, the other aunt’s daughter and now, my younger son Sanjay’s little one, Maitreyi, to help us keep our tears back. The wheel came full circle — from the book to the life and back into the book now. All my cerebral talk of the ‘human condition’ in the classroom sounds like so much gibberish in retrospect; compared with this life, this death, tested daily on the pulse of my own heart. And the inescapable acceptance:

Life and death were not
Till man made up the whole
Lock, stock and barrel
Out of his bitter soul

My father’s educational ambitions for me soared sky-high and he figured out that the only road which would take me to the promised land was English — learning — astonishing how the vision of Raja Rammohan Roy had crystallized as Yugadharma and adequately apprehended by my semi-literate father. My village school’s sole medium of instruction being the regional language, Kannada, Father must have turned in desperation to a recent arrival in the village, the son of the late shyanubhog, village accountant, now come to assume charge of his hereditary office and look after his family’s landed property. The kindly-looking Srikantiah with his jasmine white turban could well have been God’s own emissary for my father, because the only one who knew any English in that village, even if it be a smattering. I was soon put in his charge; this time, the barter was for human labour, mentioned in hushed accents: my mother had to wash the clothes of the teacher’s wife and their new-born babe! Srikantiah was looking for an ‘upper caste’ poor woman to do it. We were traders and considered slightly higher in the caste hierarchy than the tillers of land — by a strange sequence of events which sounds like a syllogism in logic, my caste claims Sri Krishnadeva Raya of Vijayanagar for an ancestor! While I have, invariably, taken pride in my being a Hindu it amuses me and embarrasses even more, to talk about my caste, for I do not
remember it to have played any role in my life except that it helped me to get a Backward Community scholarship in school and college and later add the ignominy of a wholly undeserved assistant professorship. But I am aware in retrospect I have neither favoured, nor discriminated against, anyone on grounds of caste, though I should hasten to confess it has always pleased me when someone from a backward family, caste, group or place has fought against odds and distinguished himself by dint of hard work and character. And while some few individuals, with vested interests, at least one of my bright students among them, now no more, may have imputed caste prejudices to me as a convenient camouflage for frustrations of an over-inflated ego, I gather others of their own respective castes have often defended me, to my critics' discomfiture. It isn't self-deception to say I have been abundantly blessed in this caste-ridden set-up by the regard and affection of a vast majority of students of all castes — I have at no time been much exercised on this and have gone on unconcerned.

I remember how my mother made faces when one day, she came to the baby's sheets and numerous small bits of foul-smelling cloth. My sister, a pitiful witness, had to contend against it herself if my mother took ill or was overcome with fatigue which was not uncommon. They both learnt to swallow their pride for my sake, the same that gave strength to their arms later as they put themselves to unending toil to buy things for the school-going, English-learning, darling boy — privileges which only the affluent could afford. My mother overcame her initial aversion to washing as she reminded herself Srikantiah maest/u's (teacher Srikantiah's) family were Telugu-speaking Brahmans and as private tutor he gave a good part of his evening to one boy — washing, she thought, was a small return to a Brahmin and her son's guru.

If no one else in the village came forward to learn English it was just that it was considered a privilege of the urban elite. The Kannada poet, Kuwempu, has, in the evening of his life, toned down his earlier ire against English with his acute realization that but for English education, he is believed to have said to a close associate, most of us should be carrying dung in some favoured household. A Hindi zealot who blazed the trail across the country was, I learn, seen standing in queue before an
English Convent School in Nagpur whose Principal whispered this in the ears of a Professor friend of mine who works on National Commissions, for such discreet use as he could put it to! But my friend could have deafened the Principal’s ears with more outrageous instances. The venerable gentleman, though vanquished, would argue still! He couldn’t help it, he insisted, if his son wanted his children to be put into an English school as he had plans of sending them abroad for higher education. Why should poor villagers bother as long as they had their accustomed toil to return to? The orthodox Brahmin of an earlier day had denied Sanskrit to women and masses of our people; today the politician seeks to rob us of our international heritage. And yet all our national leaders from Gandhi and Nehru to Rajendra Prasad and Morarji Desai—the last two, indefatigable champions of Hindi, have written their books and letters in English. Morarji Desai’s defence was he used English for intellectual purposes and Hindi (not Gujarati, be it noted!) for his emotional needs. One realizes a people who cease to care for their language and literature will soon feel alienated and become philistine. But by a quirk of Fate our history is both Indian and British and English today has come to play the role Sanskrit, our devajana vidya, did in the past with its devabhas ha, our greatest asset as a nation. Gandhi and Nehru were first introduced to the Bhagavad Gita and the Buddha story through Edwin Arnold’s Song Celestial and The Light of Asia. And those who knew English seldom wrote even private letters in their mother-tongue — things haven’t changed very much even today except in willed gestures.

To return to myself, I think I was making what Srikantiah maestiu thought was rapid progress with my English. I could, at seven, manage a letter of sorts in English, to a cousin in Bangalore, three years my elder, and knew, for his age, a fair amount of English. And we maintained steady correspondence with each other. News of family welfare was secondary — visiting relatives conveyed it by word of mouth. Display of English was all. I can’t say how appalling was our English, there being, mercifully, no evidence of it left for posterity.

One memorable experience of those days, however, has stayed with me for its sheer comicality. My mother’s younger sister who, like my sister at home, doted on me, was an
Village boy learns English: A Toiling Family’s Gift

asthmatic, and in popular usage the simple word ‘cough’ covered a wide range of bronchial ailments. If I could get that word, I knew I could manage the rest of the sentence, its syntax being similar in Kannada and Telugu. Srikantiah maestlu had loaned me a learner’s English-Kannada dictionary. And I launched on my research, starting with the letter A, running my meticulous eye through the double columns from right to left, first for the Kannada word and then back to English. No luck! Undaunted I moved on to B. The same, again. I had learnt the nursery rhyme, my teacher recited from time to time.

Try, try, try again

’T is a lesson you should learn

And was determined to put it to practice. What is learning for if it can’t support life? My father naively argued often. It was lucky I didn’t have to traverse far as I struck the gold with relatively little labour. I fitted it into my classic of early creativity,

How is cough to Little Mother?

I was thrilled, when decades later, I came across the coinage ‘Little Mother’ in Raja Rao’s Serpent and the Rope! The novel may have become doubly dear to me, for it imparted dignity to my boyhood’s mental adventure. If it was already there in an English translation of a great European novel, as someone said to prick my bubble, it made no difference to me, for I hadn’t seen it, and few in my circle have seen it even today; it was mine own! My grandchildren’s command of English at the lower primary stage causes endless embarrassment in retrospect, though. Which makes me want to ask ‘Why defer the teaching of English till after the IV primary when children can learn it through nursery rhymes and comic books effortlessly at the kindergarten along with their mother tongue and language of the region? Zealots of ‘structures’ and ‘graded vocabulary’, those kill joys, have quietly withdrawn into the backyard after children have proved them naive, but not without causing havoc to the cause of learning.

As can be imagined with a teacher who could himself barely read or write English, my learning desperately needed direction. In the first place there was no reading material in the village except for the English primer for beginners which Srikantiah maestlu got from the town. Beyond that, he had not known
anything nor is it fair to lay the blame at his doors. All his limited training was in the regional language; his profession as village accountant only confirmed the adequacy of his educational equipment. We had no chance to know of the existence of children's books. I remember I first read Alice in Wonderland and The Arabian Nights after I returned from Cambridge, because I had to buy them for my son, a boy of 7. Apart from 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' and 'Try, try, try again', which I first heard from my teacher's lips I hadn't come across any Nursery Rhymes. I have no doubt there was a library in Middle School as well as High School. The procedure was so cumbersome, that it discouraged anyone but the determined borrower, there being no library hour, as they call it today. And at home, what with duties by the shop I had to share with father I could hardly find the time for anything but required reading, required, that is, at school. I am not sure any teacher took us into the library and showed us around or talked about any treasure we should look for in the library. The private tuitions I had been giving from the age of 14 to 18 to affluent neighbours' children to scrape any additional income completed the sordid story, though I now realize I could have redeemed it if I was truly motivated. I must hasten to add motivations do not fall from above or spring from sterile sand: they need the right stimulus and fostering care.

I soon moved up to Bangalore and my parents with me to put me in Government Fort Middle School — a name which drew young Suktankar's silent sneer at Cambridge as this blue-eyed son of an I.C.S. officer asked what school did I go to. He dropped me as of no consequence and withdrew his offer to take me for a swim; he came from a Public School with P. capital, myself without it. Even convent schools, we hadn't heard of in those days. And when I knew of one later, the Good Shepherd's in Mysore, my paltry Professor's salary wouldn't let me send my elder son Srinath from the other end of the city. Convent schools taught snobbery, I said in self-justification!

My father set up a pan-bidi shop and unlike the village, life in Bangalore was hard going but he persevered till he saw me through school. In the first year of high school — false dates of birth were much in vogue in government circles to prolong official life, the coveted plums being at the top and one took time
to go up the ladder rung by rung — we were asked to submit the 'correct' date of birth, duly certified by a gazetted officer. My parents hadn't got my horoscope written at my birth but the headman of the caste had made a note of the day and time and he couldn't be reached now. Besides he was unlikely to have it after so many years. My father knew I was born on a Saturday in the year Raudri according to the Salivahana Calendar, a month after the Telugu New Year began. I was 13 then and would be 16 when I completed High School, and so warned by my cousin, the only other educated member of our inner circle, that unless I was 18 I wouldn't qualify for a government job. We inflated the age by two and determined May 9th 1919 would take care of it. Interestingly, May 9th came to acquire a special significance for me as that happened to be the day of my marriage, when still in college - V.L.D' Souza, later Vice-Chancellor of Mysore University, called it cradle marriage! The first Chief Minister of Mysore, K.C. Reddy, was curious to know my age as I must have looked absurdly young for a Professor and as I spoke of my 'official date of birth', he magnanimously advised me to make an application, because, he cited in support, they had changed Rangamalliah's date of birth. Rangamalliah was then a Deputy Commissioner and later ended his life by drowning in Kannambadi Lake with quite a few years of service ahead of him — the illusoriness of position and status towards the end of one's official career was driven home as I hardly began to climb the slippery hill of success. I had not made a show of my idealism to the Chief Minister when I told him I wouldn't mind retiring two years early. The truth was I was acutely alive to what people would think of me if I changed the date to my advantage at that point, as becoming a professor even at 31 was a minor miracle. With two years less, it would have been a joke. I had the best laugh of all when my friend Reuel Denny of Hawaii in his introductory remarks at the East West Center, amused my audience as he announced I was born 'sometime' in 1921! The month and the day still remain a guess.

With visions of a government job before me I followed in the footsteps of my cousin and took Accountancy and Book-keeping (that last refuge of the dud .... who aspire to no higher reaches of education) which, he maintained with a glow in his eyes, helped him to be Second Division Clerk! Some twenty years
later he graduated in Commerce by private study and retired from the Muzrai department in the grade of an Assistant Commissioner, while he had the intellectual potential to do as well as me, if not better. I did rather well in the S.S.L.C., certainly in the languages, and those who were close to us, chiefly the wealthy owner of the building opposite our shop, who had let me use one of his family rooms on the first floor for my study, thought I should continue my studies and not seek employment. With such support it was easy for me to prevail on Father to send me to the Intermediate College. A Backward Community Scholarship of Rs. 80 a year with tuition fee exempted, was a strong incentive. It only meant a few more years of slogging for the family. And then, all would be well! — a psychotherapy which Indians frequently administer to themselves, with no notion of Evil to combat.

I loved Literature — one of my chief regrets in life is I couldn't learn Sanskrit which I eagerly sought to learn in Middle School, not because I had anything like my present esteem for Sanskrit: the appreciation was patently beyond a semiliterate Sudra family, but its sheer scoring power in exams alerted me to the risk of losing my first place in the class to my competing rivals who invariably opted for Sanskrit. But the Pandit pooched the idea — from a stinking villager! I must confess I have constantly felt cheated of what in my opinion would have been my inestimable acquisition. I had my revenge later by giving all my three children 10 years of Sanskrit learning, with specialization in English, the language of prestige, though, ironically, V. Sitaramiah ("V.Si") who inspired me was a teacher of Kannada: as everyone knew he used more English than Kannada in his classes. I gather he had a good degree in Economics but was appointed Lecturer to 'modernize' the teaching of Kannada in which he should be said to have met with enormous success as by placing Kannada in the larger perspective of world's knowledge (for which he had an appetite) and university education in particular, "V.Si" had won respect for Kannada, till then a predominantly pandit's preserve in schools. The foundation for my love of English had been laid earlier by M. Venkobachar in the Middle School who insisted on the import of usage rather than the dead rules of grammar, but by no one so surely as by J. M. Narasimhalu of the Fort High
School, a rare idealist, mellowed by family buffetings, who spoke English with amazing facility but also impeccable precision and elegance. He inculcated in me a lasting love of literature, as if to assure me it was man's salvation on earth. His only passion, he once said in the class, with a quiet gravity which made him for that moment a disembodied abstraction, was to read all the magazines in the Public Library, as they arrived, still my despair, though as professor I was to realize a fraction of it, for, then, it was beyond my reach both because of the distance and because of my duties by the shop — I did all the 'wholesale' shopping (with no more than a few ten rupee notes!) in my spare time leaving Father to look after the shop. I have no doubt it instilled in me a measure of self-confidence and drive in matters of organization, if it left my mind impoverished.

The Intermediate exam, dreaded in those days as a dragon forbidding all entrance to the degree course, I passed without a scratch, and I didn't see any glory in it, though. The sciences were not for me; I scoffed at them as the lot of dry brains. Quite early, I had opted for the humbler Arts where, nevertheless, I believed the soul was schooled to the call of Destiny. Which, in my context, meant Maharaja's College and Mysore. Both had cast a spell on me from a distance. To go to live there, as I had discovered while on a visit with my father in my 9th year to watch the Dasara procession, was to slip into a magic casement opening on the long dreamt of fairy lands — life's fulfilment. The illuminated Palace with the gloriously decked Maharaja on the golden throne and the presiding Deity on the Hill nearby, the fragrant jasmine and the tender pan in the civilized main market, a making of its gentle poor, together answered to my dream of Devanagar, the City of God.
Mysore: Where Fabled Past is Lived Present

The Chamundi Hill: MYSORE's inescapable landmark

MYSORE, which literally means 'Buffalo Village', gets its name from the legendary demon Mahisha, vanquished by the goddess Chamundeswari, who now dwells in a temple on the hill of that name — the temple tower, a King's gesture to the goddess. If the hill radiates the primordial Energy grounded in spiritual principle, the quick-witted Tamil from Madras thinks the people who live at the foot of the hill are dense like the buffalo!

Ringed by the distant blue hills, the City is insulated not for long, one fears, from the mainstream of sick hurry and vulgar bustle of the Broad Gauge railway and the jet plane. The lights that sparkle along the contours of the Leviathan — like hill at night-fall intimate it is the hour of worship at the temple — with pipe, drum and cymbals. Auspiciousness is in the air. The Temple and the Maharaja's Palace, symbols of spiritual authority and temporal power, fused into one extricable whole, dominate the surrounding wilderness. The wilderness rises up to them, acquires order and shapeliness and inspires its like in the town that lies in its shadow.

Small wonder it is Mysore's most inescapable landmark. It's the first thing that strikes the visitor's eye and, once in the City, gives him a sense of spiritual well-being and when he leaves, the hill is the last to recede from sight. He comes a casual tourist, returns a pilgrim — he is under the spell of its temperate climate (when it is blazing hot in a large part of the country), the rather slow pace of life, and the gentle people despite the professional man's intrigues and pettinesses in the office. Held in its thrall he invents excuses to extend his stay and might well ask you to look out for a house or building site for his retirement. But you find its value goes up or comes down by how well or ill...
you can view the hill from there. The enticement begins with the long pillared corridors of the Railway Station, sustained, on the east, by the characteristic Mysore style of architecture — the hospital buildings, the Public Library, the Chamarajendra Technical Institute, the Devaraja Market (now marred by hideous signboards), the Palace and its offices on the left, the Lansdowne Building, the Banumaiah School, the Corporation offices and the Vanivilas market to the right; and in the far west, the Law Courts, the Maharaja's College, the Oriental Research Institute and the District Office with all doors and no windows, the Maharaja's High School, the Chamundi Guest House and Hotel Metropole, not to speak of the Jayalakshmi Vilas Mansion which now houses the Central Food Technological Research Institute. When he goes back, the sensitive visitor pines for this pictured beauty no less than for the colourful Brindavan Gardens, that magical handiwork of two illustrious Dewans of Mysore, Sir M. Visweswariah and Sir Mirza Ismail, both great by any standards.

The Bull, a Monolithic Wonder

When you drive him up to the hill's summit along the winding road, your guest invariably insists on seeing the far-famed Big Black Bull, so majestic and so tender that children are not awed by its immense size. But some there are who sit sipping bourbon-on-the-rocks in the Bar which was once a Palace, prattling of Picasso and Michelangelo, but have seen nothing of the monolithic wonder. May the Bull not wake and bellow, lest the world they inhabit be dissolved in the lava that erupts from the 3000 ft plateau on which the city stands! They make amends, though, when they pause for a while where the road takes a bend, so the soul can treasure the bounty of the colourful city below — all in one fetch. If it is Dasara time, the ten day festival which all India observes in October, every year, Mysore has the largest draw. Each ruling political party strives to do one better than its predecessors to match the vanished grandeur of the Maharaja's procession — it improves its image at the next election, so goes the gossip!

The Sun-Set Point and the Liquefaction of Clay

The city has grown from a mere 50,000 of 100 years ago to more than half a million today of whom the majority are Hindus, with
100 thousand Muslims and their numerous mosques sprinkled over all the city and a considerable number of Christians who have raised a Gothic Church for St. Philomena, a major tourist spot in Mysore. Ethnic groups have seldom witnessed friction; the harmony in which they live is the envy of larger metropolitan centres. A large part of Mysore City is in a bowl hidden behind gulmohars which, in rows, look like the flame of the forest in spring. And in summer, with a few showers, the Mysorean can talk lightly of the near-by hill station of Ooty with its frequent drought and hike in hotel tariff. Standing at my end of the city in the West — I call it sun-set point — I miss much of the town though not the glow of its lights at night. But I can take in eyefulls of the hill and the Lalitha Mahal Palace, a liquefaction of clay and lime in green and snowy white — its architectural perfection might well make it a rival of the City of God, the Devanagan which, if legend be true, its architect visited in his dreams. Did the indigenous architect, without a national or global reputation, know that building of that City anew is the task of civilization? How intimate are religion and art in their relationship! Rather, this was a culture when religion and art were two aspects of the same vision.

In the silence of the night I hear the lion roar from the zoo near Lalitha Mahal. Indeed, no place is farther than four miles in Mysore. Not infrequently do the men and women of my generation, unless England or America has softened them, realize the car is a curse, and scorn the city bus; and seek out that pride of old cities, seats of royalty, the horse-drawn tonga, which the noisy 3-wheeler has squeezed out; and in its absence, they would rather saunter along, greeting old acquaintances and making new friends. The city shrinks in size with each year of your residence — you know practically everyone that touches your daily life. Your loyalties pay dividends apart from the joy of human relationships and the benefactions they confer on the texture of your being.

Main Market, the Balm of Hurt Minds

The main market in the heart of the city is perhaps the most civilizing place, the balm of minds hurt by the intrigues of the university and such other institutions. I have never been cheated in the main market, I should say. A week's absence from Mysore
impoverishes me spiritually and I must visit the market to forge my links with the people and get back my psychic energy. When in Adelaide, I asked my Australian friends 'But, where are the people?' For, empty roads in their curveless straightness stared at us day after day until we found the shopping centre, with anonymity for our share, despite the frequent visits we made to the same shops. The fruit and vegetable vendors in the Mysore market know you and your family, your preferences and abhorrences. When on a festival day our daughter visits us and catches the eye of the woman squatting behind her profusion of greens and cucumbers, the tender pan and the queenly jasmine, she puts away her business and begins to make conversation with her—asks about her in-laws, her husband, her work and the lovely Mysore silk sari her parents must have presented for the Gowri festival, but discreetly withholds her comments for there is no attempt to pry into secrets nor love of gossip; my daughter knows it is just fellow-feeling.

All Success Illusory in the Mysore Context

I have lived for fifty years in Mysore and resisted temptations to success elsewhere; they have seemed illusory in the Mysore context. The vast vacant space around, the still unchanging skyline, the crimsoned East in the morning and the many splendid sunsets, the red, red gulmohurs, which eclipse the 'flame of the forest', the flights of parrots my wife never misses, the magnificent architecture of our public buildings (now interrupted by fanciful constructions, an evidence of foreign money that flows from the new rich, the brain-drain of Mysore) on either side of our broad roads in keeping with the dignity of the Palace, the moving panorama of rumbling bullock carts to which I wake morning after morning, the steady stream of peasantry, with the men smoking and talking to their cronies, the women chewing pan while sharing drab domestic discontents in their sing-song lingo to work off the tedium of the long walks to and from the city centre, reminding one of the neglected Boetian strain which arrogant Athens eclipsed—their sheer humanity has possessed my being. Poverty has hardly left a dent on their buoyant spirits: Old women love to lug basketfuls of dung cakes morning after morning to buy small presents for an older mother or a darling grand child out of the
Mysore: Where Fabled Past is Lived Present

precarious income they eke out. And their limbs are the envy of the affluent arthritic, clad in silk sarees and decked with diamond ear-rings.

Migrations of villagers into cities in search of employment have posed no problems to Mysore City, for while they work in the city they prefer to live in the villages around. They can crowd into the village bus for a mere 50 paise or jump into the engineering contractor’s trucks for a Ganesh bidi or a pleasantry. There is more enterprise in it than rolling in sleek motor cars with care-worn faces. The few villages on the edge of the old town have now become part of it — the whirligig of time has brought the upper castes and classes close to the doors of the pariah, the barber, the potter, the cobbler and the basket maker. The names have changed — Vonti Koppal becomes Vani Vilas Mohalla, Kannegowdan Koppal is Jayanagar today and Tonchikoppal is Kuvempunagar, named after a Kannada poet of the lofty verse who has falsified, by his affluence, the plight of the Greek poet:

Seven cities contend for Homer dead
Through which while living he begged his bread.
But the old residents doggedly keep their identity by telling you they are going to Mysore (the American’s 'downtown’) or returning from it, though in the process, something is lost, too. Where formerly they were the makers of culture with folk song, dance and music, they are today consumers of commercial cinema culture. A curse on it! Chaduranga, Bhyrappa and the two Ananthamurthis have, each in different ways, sought to redeem it, though. The unaging Venkatalakshamma has preserved the old rhythm while the incomparably more successful Veena Doraswamy Iyengar left it for good leaving young Nagaraj and Nagamani Srinath to take his place

Mercifully, however, even politicians have learnt to recognize Mysore’s graces and reassure you they will put factories away from the town, indeed the few factories we now have lie tucked away from the city proper. The spirit of the place tells! They grow nostalgic about Maharaja’s College, its humbling corridors, the legendary quadrangle and the Junior B.A. Hall resonating with memories of celebrities’ speeches they heard in the days of the National Movement, the playfields at the back, our counterpart of the legendary 'backs of Cambridge' along
the sluggish Cam, the Union Building modelled after the Cambridge Debating Society, once a beehive of activity, now coarsened by a co-operative society office housed in it, and the Kukkarahalli Lake along whose bund, as undergraduates, they walked and talked of their admired teachers and the few beauties in their class, with no reputation left in tact—every bush has a tale to tell of the calf loves they dreamt, wanting to propose, afraid to articulate. The occasional suicide by drowning isn’t for broken promise by lover or beloved, but for failure in a stupid pre-university examination! The peasant women swear the death is not the lone crocodile’s doing. But the voice of education killed this uncrowned king of the lake and with its death the lake has lost its mystery, though the romance imparted to it by the budding poets still pines in cold print.

An unrepentant monarchist, it is my pride that in a country of 660 princes, some with a large harem, some betting on race horses and taking credit for the tigers their forest officers shot, and some vacationing in far-off Riviera, the 400-year old royal family of Mysore has produced remarkable kings, one of whom, called by Mahatma Gandhi a Rajarshi, saint King, founded the Mysore University with Maharaja’s College as its nucleus for the Humanities and invited (Mysore was probably the least parochial State until the formation of linguistic states, the curse of political power game) a most outstanding scholar Sir Brajendranath Seal from Calcutta to be its Vice-Chancellor, who in turn went to the ends of the earth, Australia not excepted, to bring great teachers. Radhakrishnan, the country’s first President, taught Philosophy in the 150-year old Maharaja’s College and spoke his way to success, C.R. Reddy, A. R. Wadia, V.L. D’Souza with generations of students who swear by them; Lakshmipuram Srinivasa Char and M. Hiriyanna, impeccable in their scholarship as in their white Mysore turban, taught Sanskrit and wrote in English as did R. Sama Sastry who brought to light the 3000-year old Kautilya’s Arthasastra, the unruffled M.V. Gopalaswami, a student of McDougall, founded the Department of Psychology and designated the Radio Station Akashavani, the voice from the sky. M.N. Srinivas the distinguished Sociologist, who wrote the story of the ‘Remembered Village’ was a student in the thirties. A generation later came A.K. Ramanujan, who little knew he would be “Speaking of
Shiva” and translating Sanskara, both, in Indian English, while teaching Linguistics at Chicago, now the envy of Nobel Laureates for the fabulous money the McArthur Foundation Fellowship brought him. So did T.S. Satyan with a different medium, put Mysore on the photographic map of India and the world, while his contemporary, H.Y. Sharada Prasad has been content to remain incognito, quietly contributing to the making of history by two successive Prime Ministers. On the day he was sworn in Chief Minister K. Hanumanthiah brought to his old college, as to a mother, his entire Cabinet of Ministers, their shield for Maharaja’s College, before he began to blaze the trail across the whole country.

Its greatest Principal, J.C. Rollo, continued to get excited in his more than 30 years of retirement in England, the moment he saw a snippet in his Airmail edition of The Hindu, that Maharaja’s scored a point against Medical College, its near-rival in sports. W.G. Eagleton, who trained our sensibilities for poetry and gave a boost to Adult Education without knowing a word of Kannada, now lives in Malta and at 80, his heart throbs at the mention of Mysore — just the other day he asked for pictures of his room in Maharaja’s College.

I must mention two star-speakers of my day at Maharaja’s that home of Debating in South India: M.V. Rajgopal (since deceased after a good career in the IAS) and D.R. Krishnamurthy who now owns the ‘People’s Book House’ in Mysore. Rajgopal had sustained his debating skills even at Cambridge where he was on everyone’s lips when I went there in 1947. Which made me sad that Krishnamurthy, so sensitive to the nuances of the English language and lover of books with wide intellectual interests, did not pursue the academic career. His Leftist interests and love of independence may have impelled him to open a bookshop like a student of mine later, M. Satyanarayana Rao, whom P.J. Chester, Vice-Publisher of Oxford University Press, thought one of the best booksellers he had known in South India. Satya, as he is affectionately called, had the potential to become a notable publisher or, if he had cared, a parliamentarian of repute. A marked eye for details and a penchant for clear thinking and sweet reasonableness characterised his approach. But the ideal publisher was still Chidambaram of Kavyalaya Publications, who impressed the
visiting Directors of Rockefeller Foundation as a rare publisher. K.B. Ganapathi, a Coorg of high spirits and tremendous perseverance, has in recent times demonstrated that one could make a success of an Evening daily in English without being bizarre. His *Star of Mysore* is a paper I read more avidly than any national paper which the radio and the T.V. have anyhow conspired to rob of their oven-hotness!

**R.K. Narayan’s Malgudi**

R.K. Narayan delights in calling himself a product of Maharaja’s College rather than of Mysore University. The back benches of the Junior B.A. Hall were the making of the eminent novelist he since became. A friend of mine from Flinders University has prepared a map of Narayan’s Malgudi, the fictional name for Mysore, and placed Albert Mission School, the spreading banyan tree under which the astrologer practised his trade and that rascal Margayya learnt his banking, now my grandchild’s sole recognition of Mysore. Mr. Sampath of the novel is no other than dear Sampath or Cheluva Iyengar, the stimulus behind Mysore’s dramatic activity. I couldn’t have suspected until Narayan pointed out that miserable looking pest, whom all Mysore knows, was behind the romantic guru of *The Guide*, Raju, who made a throne of the stone slab he sat on.

The upstart postgraduate campus called Manasagangotri (meaning the genesis of the sacred Ganga), which mocks itself in its drab characterless buildings and proclaims from its disfigured walls what a university is not, ended the glory that was Maharaja’s College. And as you pass by in hushed steps, you hear the college sigh to itself ‘I remember, I remember’.

**Mysore’s Musicians**

But the Academia’s betrayals are redeemed by the people in the city: artisans, shop-keepers, students, teachers, administrators, their clerks and servants assemble as equals in their thousands and think little of having to sit, squat or stand in public squares to hear sophisticated complex ragas rendered by great musicians. They continued to evoke memories of their illustrious predecessors: composer Vasudevacharya, Veene
Seshanna and Violin Chowdiah whom the discriminating King honoured with Kashmir Shawl and diamond ring—have fled today but still a reminder of the glory which continues to challenge creativity and makes for periodical resurgence. The Ramakrishna Vidyasala, that can stand upto any famed and flattered public school, is a shade above, being headed by the saffron-clad monk Swami Sureshananda whose childlike smile radiates compassion and hidden learning.

Fabled Past

Living as I do on the outskirts of the city I can in moments of dislocation, still draw on the strength of a stable culture from the hill tribes who stray into Mysore at infrequent intervals. A nomadic tribe from Andhra Pradesh, called the Adivasis, attired in saffron robes, raised tuft of hair and vermilion mark on their face—may well have walked out of the pages of the Ramayana—comes to practise herbal medicine, provide quicker relief to longstanding ailments than Western medicine (frequently no more than a first-aid in an emergency and not unfairly termed by Gandhi, 'Black Magic') and before their quackery is discovered they have disappeared to less known places with handsome advances from their gullible patients—but, thank goodness, with no damage done to the body. Another tribe, the gypsies, not so colourful, swarms in once or twice a year with a clatter and a chatter, in a mixture of Marathi, Kannada and Urdu, pitches its tents on the outskirts of the city, where I live, is seen shuffling between the low-lying camp and the city for a couple of weeks and before you know, they fold their tents, pack their belongings into the jute sack, march to their next destination with a bundle on each head, a child on the shoulder and a dog behind. As they come so they depart, uneventfully, fearing no casualties, wanting no careers, and 'obeying absolute decree in casual simplicity'. How I envy them!

Ah, Mysore! that continues to conjure up in the present what in other cities is but a fabled past.
English Honours at Maharaja’s College

Its Great Teachers: Ranganna, Rollo, Eagleton

I knew I must pursue an Honours degree. But which? I was warned by everyone I met that English had no ‘future’. All my three children did English (and many of my better students who could have done at least as well in any other discipline, became — a few professors among them—teachers). I wished nothing else but teaching for a career for them with a ‘future’, politically more bleak than was predicted for me. However, reluctantly, I sought admission in Economics Honours, a prestigious subject in those days in Maharaja’s College, if only because of the few bright ones that passed the State Civil Service exams with distinction which gave them the best possible start in life. With my father’s ambition to see me an Amildar on horseback at his village gate to a reception of barber Venkataramana’s nagaswaram I acquiesced and went to the Professor of Economics — Maharaja’s College had a bevy of notable professors who took personal interest in their students and fostered talent — V.L.D’Souza, youngmen’s hope and old men’s trust. Rather partial to English, he offered to take me, he said, ‘not because of your marks in Economics ...’ It was my great good fortune that there was at that time a British Professor of English (a Scot of grateful memory), J.C Rollo, reputed to be a ‘tyrannical master of commas and semi-colons, who almost lived up to his reputation. He insisted on examining Intermediate General English (the ‘Third paper’, examinees’ nightmare) year after year, taking upon himself the formidable task of setting, valuing and moderating the results. In his dual role of Professor of English and Principal of the College, both of which I was to be later, Rollo had announced my name, unsought, in the English Honours list and sent for me to say I stood ‘a good chance of getting a Subject Scholarship’ — an English understatement for
a fact - which clinched the issue for me. He had rescued me from the Faustian deal I had nearly made with the Devil. Arthur Miller, the American playwright, recalls how as an undergraduate he went to attend a lecture by the Professor of Economics: The Professor could measure the giant's foot, but not look me in the eye! Economics, a moral science in Adam Smith's time, had degenerated into 'buyers market' and 'sellers market', though today some economists talk of the philosophy of economics. Anyhow, a prestigious scholarship and a white man's attention to a village boy were something to be excited over and be grateful for.

I was recipient of two scholarships, Subject and Backward, making a total of Rs. 22-8-0, which was more than a Primary School teacher's salary. My 4ft by 6 ft room in a poor locality cost me Rs. 1-8-0 a month and Rs. 7 for two wholesome meals in a private 'mess' behind the Vani Vilas Market, leaving me with enough for periodical visits to Vidyarthi Bhavan with 'Library Rudrappa' for a 'set dosa' and one-by-two ghee as well as coffee to match it — all for two annas between the two of us. I would occasionally send home some small sums of money to impress the family how well I was living, away from home. I wasn't all that well; my family was shocked to find me visibly weak upon which it was decided that my father, without an occupation, should come to stay with me and look after me. We shared the culinary activity and all that went with it. And while I pored over books in my little cabin, he lay on his back in the verandah in front of my room, reciting verses from his version of the \textit{Ramayana}.

I was lucky in my teachers, almost all of whom liked me and retained a good will for me for years. S.V. Ranganna, known for his prodigious learning and admirably simple, precise expression, was then Assistant Professor. He took to me and inculcated in me the habit of wide reading, which has fortunately lasted long, despite some administrative interruption as Principal of the college. Everything that could be said on a 'form' of literature 'period', 'movement', 'author', Ranganna had assiduously gathered into his numerous notebooks. Under his inspiration, when as Student Secretary of the Literary Club, I had to propose a vote of thanks at a lecture on 'Towards an idea of Beauty' by a new lecturer in the Department, K.
Venkataraman, a drop-out from Oxford (it seems he had to come back without completing his studies owing to the death of his father in Madras), I started my preparation a week or two in advance! There was Rudrappā to assist: he — a mere library attender, knew every book, every magazine article relevant to a topic in every major discipline — was much sought after by research scholars and had been my close friend and confidant, a role he retained for me in the heyday of my professorship at Maharaja’s. With what my classmate R.A. Raja, now living on the same street as I, three miles apart, thought was my phenomenal memory for anything I had read or written out, I knew I would be on sure ground if I could bring myself to conclude my vote of thanks of half-a-dozen sentences after the chairman’s remarks by Rollo that it was ‘in the fitness of a discourse on Beauty that Mr. Venkataraman left the indefinable undefined!’ Double-edged, someone remarked. I was hardly capable of any irony; it was said in dead earnest, intended as a tribute to the speaker. Obviously, I looked for a smart expression which one like Gandhi in London had disciplined himself to resist. It was rather more the play of words than what the words said. I just meant to impress how I could say something arresting — for a student secretary in first B.A. class, that is. Student secretaries at the Union level were by convention accomplished speakers and I thought I shouldn’t let down my subject. I don’t remember how I came out with what in my adolescence I considered a neat formulation but I was pleased with myself that hard work did tell after all—for so puerile a triumph. And the habit paid me dividends when as mere lecturer on probation in Central College, I was in demand by the students to speak or preside at their meetings. I knew beforehand how I would begin, build up the argument and conclude. And in course of time I learnt to give it an air of extemporaneity, smartly sandwiching some reference to what was said at the meeting by one or the other — though even that I had mentally worked out before I stood up to speak! Largely it was nervousness and the fear of using a foreign language that made for careful planning of the sequence of sentences. But it was essentially pursuit of success that made for the diligence. Rollo’s unsurpassed flair for teaching, imparting a sense of drama into his explications, be it poetry, drama or a dull composition class,
had taught me to take no chance on the platform. What he did spontaneously with years of teaching I sought to do the hardest way, the difference between a master and a novice!

What an admirable teacher of undergraduate English Rollo was! He did Composition with Juniors, wouldn’t trust anyone else on the Staff. Good riddance, they must have said; and Rollo was to say of their ilk later, ‘six teachers reported to duty this morning, none of them grammatically!’ This University Professor of English and Principal of the University’s only Arts College in the State of Mysore, corrected with meticulous care 200 compositions every term, made helpful marginal comments and did all he could to let us see our mistakes while he met us in small groups — a method and a commitment which no one else I know cared to cultivate. None of us could bring his devotion, hard work, his faith in the ends of education, above all, his indefatigable energy and liveliness in doing such a dull piece of work. He invariably taught Shakespeare in the second year, the reason why after all the damage politicians and teachers of English have wrought, most South Indian universities (Rollo had earlier taught in Madras and was well known in the South) still teach unabridged Shakespeare to undergraduates. And when Rollo taught Shakespeare there was ‘pin-drop silence’, an abhorred ‘Indianism’ as long as he was in India, but himself chose to use it, perhaps, in nostalgia for his Indian years in a formal essay he wrote at my request on ‘Teaching Shakespeare’ for publication in the Shakespeare number of *The Literary Criterion*.

I could hardly suspect, in spite of Goethe, that any European, a member of the ruling race particularly, could read Kalidasa’s *Sakuntala* (in translation) so movingly. Rollo’s eyes were moist as he came to the scene of Sakuntala’s departure from the hermitage. He didn’t know Sanskrit, and he was no Romantic. Actually he was well read in Greek and Latin, and Oxford completed his classical learning. He knew no ‘Practical Criticism’ — had not so much as mentioned I.A. Richards in all the three years we spent with him. But the solitary line he cited from Homer: ‘Dying, he remembered Argos’ helped us, undergraduates, to perceive the restraint, economy, the simple dignity and the suggestive power with which the classical spirit mediated a profoundly poignant experience of the Argive
soldier even as he must have been hoping for a family-reunion as the Trojan War was drawing to a close. Rollo's concise comment on the line was: To say more is to insult the imaginative reader. I must hasten to add, however, it was but seldom that Rollo went into such intricacies as though he was convinced that either such things were beyond undergraduates or that Indian students shouldn't concern themselves with higher criticism or, for that matter, modern poetry, for I am not sure that I heard T.S. Eliot's name mentioned in his classes. And some of us must have thought in our impudence he was innocent of modern trends in poetry and criticism. And so I was amazed to get a 5-page handwritten note from England in his late seventies expressing his qualified agreements and polite disagreements on seeing a popular radio talk of mine on *Four Quartets*, printed in *The Literary Criterion*.

His emphasis, as long as he was with us, was rather on correctness, grammar, usage, pronunciation, though as for the last one, his long residence in India had made him somewhat tolerant. But not when the departure was glaring. Presiding over a prestigious debate an exasperated Rollo sought to win attention to the word 'machine', repeatedly mispronounced by speaker after speaker as if it were 'mission'. Hardly had a brilliant young scientist from Bangalore begun his speech when Rollo cautioned him on the correct pronunciation of the word. Conscious of his self-respect, Ramachandra Rao (now known to be one of Mysore's distinguished scientists) retorted that English wasn't *his* language and if Mr. Rollo was outraged by 'our English' he would prefer to speak in his mother-tongue. By what he said and how he phrased his retort Rao had already scored a debating point against the Speaker! But British compromise wouldn't let Rao clinch the issue so unpleasantly. When Rao concluded his speech Rollo rose to give him high praise for his English and did it so handsomely and with such apparent sincerity that instead of one, there were two victors that moment! Compromise reminds me of what Rollo did on another occasion. W.G. Eagleton, Rollo's own choice from among many Cambridge men, had just arrived to be the second Professor in the College. One day, as he was discoursing on his special interest, phonetics, with Rollo in the Chair, I think, he corrected the popular Indian mispronunciation of bread-and-butter. To the
satisfaction of us all, including that of Eagleton, Rollo came out
with his formula: he would say bread-un-butter in the sitting
room but bread-and-butter in the kitchen: he had to be intel-
ligible to the unlettered butler!

Before any of his students took up a teaching position Rollo
would give him a sample lesson on such niceties in his room.
The pupils knew it was not easy to emulate the master but they
all tried hard to transmit his enthusiasm for the subject, as also
for any organizational work they were called upon to do. For
this remarkable teacher was a rare administrator as well. As
Principal of the University’s eldest college, the Maharaja’s, noth-
ing happened in the College without his knowledge, no student
could cut a class without inviting a memo from Rollo, no match
was played in the College grounds without Rollo’s watching it
under his inseparable umbrella, and cheering his team lustily.
This interest in the College sports he sustained long after he left
Mysore as sportsmen testified from the single-sentence
eaerogrammes they received from England. Individual
sportsmen found in Rollo their unfailing patron. Once a teacher
of Sanskrit from a mofussil college made a determined bid to
come to Maharaja’s College and, thanks to civilized vice-chan-
cellors, Rollo could oppose the move success fully, for the one
he was going to displace in Maharaja’s College played tennis
in addition to teaching Sanskrit which for Rollo, was a plus
point in a teacher! Almost like visiting the library regularly.

Actually we have never seen him do a thing simply because
it had to be done: he did it with zest, be it walking with his
dog, driving his car, playing tennis, or of course teaching and
administering the College. It was said that the dog he loved so
much for years went mad and the compassionate master shot
it and stayed away from College for almost a week while no
one in College knew why. And when he re-appeared he looked
ten years older, like when he wrote to an old colleague ‘Pachu
Maestru’ after his wife’s death a couple of years ago: ‘comfort-
able I am (in an old age home) but I can never more be happy
in this world’, and his last wish was a place next to her grave.
Students and teachers for whom Rollo was a veritable god think
that but for some silly over-subtle knots which Gandhi’s ‘Quit
India Movement’ showed up in our hearts we should have
erected a statue of gold for Rollo. Well, Rollo wasn’t the loser.
Besides, what poor substitute even a monument of gold for the
flame a true teacher has lit, there, in the foul rag-and-bone-shop
of the heart! The British, for all their imperialism, had produced
such remarkable men who redeemed a whole epoch of history.

Eagleton was in some ways the opposite of Rollo. He was a
Professor at 26 with a First Class Tripos from Cambridge. We
knew it because of his oblique reference to it in the course of
conversation over a cup of Tea at his place, that he fell from
the bicycle before the exam, which presaged (a Cambridge su-
perstition) a First Class in the coming exam! While on a visit to
the college for a public lecture (Sir) Shanmugam Chetty had a
dig at the British imperial penchant to keep the Irish (Eagleton
was of Irish origin) under the thumb, regardless of where he
was, in England or outside. That, we thought, was a portent of
the coming change; the freedom an Indian enjoyed to poke fun
at the white man in the days of the Raj. Both Rollo and Eagleton
joined in the general mirth, though. Shanmugam Chetty didn’t
know he had missed the chance of another joke on the tradi-
tional rivalry between Oxford and Cambridge, as Rollo, the
Oxonian couldn’t resist the superior claims of the man from ‘the
other place’ and may have taken a vicarious pride in having a
Cambridge First under him!

Eagleton fitted marvellously into the small classroom, want-
ing in the performing, persuasive powers of Rollo. He was
indeed unlike anyone we had known in the Indian set-up in
those days. His reading of a poem or a play was a rare ex-
perience. It made for a sense of participation. Indeed he
assigned roles among the seven of us in the class with himself
taking one from a Shakespeare scene we were reading. For him
the tone of voice seemed crucial — reading Trilling’s essay Sin-
cerity and Authenticity years after, in which he quotes
Fitzgerald’s ‘There was money in her voice’ as an example of
the authentic touch, I could see what Eagleton had done for us.
While reading Shakespeare’s Richard II he was curious to know
what we thought of old John of Gaunt’s speech celebrating,
This England, this demi-paradise, etc.
‘Fervent patriotism’, we all said in a chorus. ‘Patriotism! Not
Jingoism?’ his discriminating voice inquired. Not daring to ask
the meaning of the strange word in the class room I went to
the library to look up ‘jingoism’ in the Oxford Dictionary,
though even now I don’t see how any Indian student in 1 year of the Honours class could have come across it, let alone one from the other in a given passage. An interrogation of Eagleton’s did what tomes of scholarly books had failed to do — a training in the art of discrimination, a teacher’s primary function, especially if he was looking at a printed page as words organizing experience. For all his respect for Tillyard, whose student he was at Cambridge, Eagleton was the first to make us aware of Milton’s ‘egotistic sublime’ in the sonnet ‘Captain or Colonel’, we had admired most — at the mere mention of Milton’s name we would conjure up a constellation, ‘lovely asunder’, but nearly eclipsed by the two brightest among them: Milton sat next to Shakespeare as an equal. Without mentioning Leavis, probably a prejudice that the prevalent Cambridge ethos had instilled against him unawares — Eagleton would make a gentle pause, modulate his voice after the line ‘Spare the Muse’s bower’ and mumble in parenthesis with a mischievous twinkle in the eye, ‘because John Milton’s house was there, ooom!’ When he came to the English Metaphysicals and began to read Vaughan’s

I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
Eagleton was non pareil. Leavisian in his incisiveness without Leavis’s uncharitable dismissal of the lines: ‘If to Leavis a man who says this can say anything and get away, to Eagleton, Vaughan succeeded in making ‘apprehensions comprehensible’ I am not sure any dictionary could have helped us to distinguish between ‘apprehension’ and ‘comprehension’ at that stage. It was a linguistic feat and acutely intelligent — with intelligence at the tips of one’s fingers. Eagleton hadn’t read Shakespeare in vain. He knew almost every play inside out. Now he summoned the passage relating to lovers apprehending more than cool reason ever comprehended in A Mid-Summer Night’s Dream. How resourceful of Eagleton! His learning had passed through the conduits of imagination and become true knowledge.

It is sad it didn’t occur to any of us to record Eagleton’s reading of Dryden’s Ode, ‘Alexander’s Feast’ or ‘The Power of Music’, and ‘St. Cecilia’s Day’. Was it his training in phonetics or his resonant voice or his uniquely sensitive ear to music (he used to talk of Beethoven’s symphonies frequently, even played
them on the gramophone when we visited him at his residence) that evoked before us the concrete images of the various musical notes of the poems — the roll, the rise, the carol, the creation of Gerard Manley Hopkins or what Aurobindo elsewhere calls the 'clairaudient' quality of the English language. 'Hypnotic' was our naive response to his reading in those days! Such was his training that he could merely at the first reading of a poem, make a first-hand response to poetry, illuminating in the process many a dark corner. In the presence of such reading those stupendous volumes like Critical Approaches to English Poetry are so much dead wood in the lumber room. Solemn repetition of cliches like 'high watermark of English poetry' remained mouthful phrases and not shared experience. Hence Eagleton's insistence on keeping close to the text and not let criticism of scholars, regardless of how famous they were, take its place. It is a fact that criticism often made the text irrelevant — the traditional Indian practice invariably kept the text in view and the value of commentaries with their variety of interpretations tested with reference to the words in the text. Each new commentary sent the reader back to the text. But we had lost touch with it and placed criticism on a pedestal. The foreign language and the more foreign experience it sought to mediate no doubt contributed to the near substitution of scholarship for the original. This was not peculiar to India — it had its genesis in England as Eagleton's joke made abundantly clear in respect of Bradley:

Last night I dreamt Shakespeare's ghost
King Lear was for Civil Service post
Shakespeare answered badly
For he hadn't read Bradley!

Which, far from producing the intended effect, may even have lent additional support to the prevalent practice of placing Bradley above Shakespeare! 'There is no Shakespeare without Bradley' the argument ran. He became a classic of criticism.

A commonplace observation of Eagleton's, like 'The 18th century was the great age of Letter Writers' (for we had only heard of that great 'age of prose') sent me to the library to pull out Horace Walpole's substantial volumes of letters. And as I sat turning over the pages Eagleton, who had strayed into the Library, stood behind to damn me with faint praise, "My dear,
what are you doing? No man alive has read all these letters; only Saintsbury did, and Saintsbury is dead!"

What happened to Eagleton, I can't tell. Perhaps it is the darkening horizon for the British in India after independence. He didn't seem to retain either his interest in teaching or commitment to the students for long (though he never let himself down as long as he was teacher). To one like him, British withdrawal shouldn't have made a difference - he would have continued to enjoy the highest esteem of Indians in any set-up, with which he had a masterly acquaintance. The fact was he left the University to take up a UNESCO assignment within a few years of my leaving it with a Second Class Honours degree and the coveted Purna Krishna Rao Gold Medal which someone subsequently stole, leaving an empty case as the prized possession of my adolescence. My daughter, Ragini, made good the loss by winning the same prize 25 years later.

Some of my other teachers were B. S. Keshavan who had just returned after, we were told, 7 years' stay in London, a friendly, warm hearted and most compassionate man, thoughtlessly generous, to poor students especially. Keshavan had to wait until he went to Delhi, especially Calcutta, to distinguish himself as an eminent librarian and it is by librarians he is held in the highest esteem. But if literature did anything to refine the quality of a man's life, Keshavan exemplified it.

A.N. Murthy Rao was recognised even by undergraduates as a man of considerable literary sensibility and taught with distinction when he was inclined and for the rest he gave one the impression of being rather lazy. One now sees he hasn't written a single thing which can be called mediocre. His English and Kannada are of the highest standard but manifestations of his abilities were not available to us, students. It looked as though he had to pass his 50th year and even retire before his unquestioned abilities came to light.

I remember H.S. Subba Rao for a single memorable observation he made, though he was always a most conscientious teacher. He joined the University as Lecturer and retired as one. And when the students got up a farewell for him, he said he had no complaints, no grievance, and we could see he was genuinely free from bitterness. He said he should have paid for the privilege of teaching if the Lord God had endowed him with riches. I have treasured his words in the core of my heart.
I must not forget to mention two other idealists - V.A. Thiagarajan who, when he retired, straight went to join an Asram — to work out his salvation. And N. Nagesa Rao who occasionally drew our attention to the possibilities of cultivating in Kannada what English essayists like Charles Lamb have done — the mingling of pathos and humour, still an unrealized ambition in Kannada. He once told me that when he married he encouraged his wife to take interest in something outside her family as that would give a meaning to her life, if anything went wrong at home. And the “Vanita Sadana”, for which both husband and wife strove is a standing monument to that sage advice.

This account of Maharaja's College is hard to complete without mentioning that substantial looking, senior servant ‘Attendance Puttiah’, so called because he had been entrusted to deliver Attendance Registers to the classrooms. I am not sure he could read or write, none of the servants those days could, but Puttiah had developed a sixth sense which helped him to leave the right register in a classroom though there must have been some 50 of them at the time. He looked so dignified, at times almost imperious in his bearing with measured steps and tight lips that he commanded the respect of all of us. Vice-Chancellor D’Souza had a story to tell me when later as Principal of the College in my turn I went to recommend, unasked, Puttiah for a year's extension of service. ‘Not one year, but two, though I wish I had the powers to extend his service till death’, he observed in his deep appreciation.

It seems as Professor of Economics, D’Souza, one day, was in no mood to take his class and the boisterous students who may have numbered 15 were standing in the corridor, waiting for the professor to call them in. It was 5-10 minutes past the hour which went against the grain for Puttiah and he knocked on the door dutifully to deposit the register. But he did more than that: the Professor was gently asked, which was rebuke enough, if the students should be told to go, thus dropping a hint he better meet them. The reluctant professor was left with no alternative! I am afraid the anecdote has lost in the telling without D’Souza’s incomparable inflexional contours of the voice to suit the tale. But there was the Vice-Chancellor’s instant recognition of a servant’s high sense of duty and rare dignity in the discharge
of it. And my colleague Bharath Raj Singh whom Puttiah had
known as student, recalled how he, as professor, felt honoured
one day that Puttiah agreed to have a cup of coffee sent for him
while he ordered one for himself in his Professorial room.
I Become a Teacher of English:
Would be One in Life after Life!

With only two colleges in the former Princely State of Mysore teaching positions weren't easy to come by in the University and I had set my heart on teaching in the University. There was a wife to support and old parents, who had waited in hope for a whole decade, to care for. And my ailing sister with her husband (who didn't believe in working for a living) and her little son Murthy (since orphaned — at six years of age and grew up as a son in the family). Thanks to the good offices of a former teacher of mine, C. R. Ramachandra Rao, who had just retired from Intermediate College, Bangalore and himself doing part-time teaching in a Tutorial College, now Vijaya College, I began as part-time teacher on Rs. 25 a month, to coach failed students for the supplementary examinations. I waited, hoping, praying that better days were not far. But who would have thought that what I at one time fervently espoused as a boy, threatened to be my undoing! I remember as a boy of 9 when Gandhi came to our little town to open the Gandhi Bhavan, I took a vow to give up meat-eating and not utter a lie. The latter I couldn't sustain for long, but kept my vow of not eating meat till I was 26 when I was going to England — meat, I was told, was a must to fortify myself against the English cold. That Gandhi could abjure meat in that country didn't count with me. Perhaps I liked to go back to it because I liked it! Now I know that a fraction of Gandhi's strength of character could have kept me away from that coarse dish in diet, but I take comfort in the fact that for all his acknowledged refinement of sensibility, Jawaharlal Nehru couldn't abjure meat while he called it 'coarse'.

Gandhi gave his 'Quit India' call to the British in 1942. There were country-wide demonstrations with students in the forefront of the movement. My own students walked out of the class. To my lasting shame I persuaded the students to return
to classes and even quoted Tagore against Gandhi in support of my stand. To Gandhi’s passionate plea, “Let the poet bring his bucket of water, for India is a house on fire”, Tagore wrote a rejoinder which had earlier failed to impress me. And now it suited me to convince myself of the righteousness of Tagore’s stand and elaborate on his concern for the future of India when Independence came — India needed engineers, doctors, teachers and administrators. Where would they come from, if universities were closed? It didn’t work with volatile students. Far from returning to the classroom they wanted me to join them. “Come out, Sir, and lead us”, they shouted. To my ineffectual pleadings about the capacity of one so young to lead, came like an arrow Shakespeare’s line — from one of the failed students, to boot; “young in limbs, old in judgement” (old in cowardice, hypocrisy, rank opportunism, any one of the hundred derogatory terms could have been hurled at me, with justice, I knew in my heart). “Oh this Gandhi, couldn’t he have waited till I was settled!” I said to myself in sheer despair of getting my cherished lectureship. And yet hundreds of thousands had thought nothing of any sacrifice they were called upon to make. Ironically I had often exhorted myself during the National Movement with Wordsworth’s

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
But to be young was very heaven

Gandhi’s own stand that “even God dare not appear before a hungry man except in the form of food” now helped to boost my sagging morale somewhat. But I haven’t got over my sense of shame, after several decades: I had thought little of national honour on a sordid count. I was my own Judas. And my nemesis came when (Principal) C. R. Narayana Rao discovered that his previous evening’s compliment to me at his open-air durbars was for my mistaken identity: he had thought very well of me and been sorry that ‘the sacred thread’ to which he pointed on his shoulder, had come in my way of finding entry into the university! Understandably, he was angry that his brother should not have mentioned it to him.

My services were terminated forthwith with a month’s salary paid in advance. I was sorry I was the cause of my patron’s embarrassment and felt distressed that a person of Narayana Rao’s educational attainments and high office should not have
risen above popular prejudices. But, then, he was probably reacting against some personal wrong done to him or his kin by someone in those days of caste tensions in the job market. Ramachandra Rao, I later learnt, shared my hurt and was in a huff with his brother, though we were never to see each other after the ugly episode.

I was so depressed that when someone told me of an advertisement for Assistant Food Inspectors in the Rationing Office in Bangalore (a by-product of the War of 1939-45), I made a beeline to the Rationing Officer and begged him to give me any position: office clerk or bill writer, if not Assistant Food Inspector. The poor man, himself a former lecturer in Mathematics in the Central College, with a first class science degree, had been lured into the civil service: Regretting his own decision he counselled patience: Although he could give me the position of an Inspector while I asked for a lower post, he said he wouldn't like me to begin life that way. He directed me to N. Balakrishna, a lawyer by profession, then a most prominent non-official member of the University Council and known to be a champion of the Backward Classes. Contrary to my expectations, Balakrishna shouted at me for claiming a lectureship on the strength of a second class. That no one had a first, indeed, it was an unusual year if someone got anything better than what I had, in English, wouldn't occur to him, wouldn't convince him, what with his concern for standards — probably the only one I have known among public men pleading the cause of the educationally disabled. My pride had the better of my need and I decided to see him no more. I even left his office in a huff which this truly compassionate man couldn't have missed. But he was impersonal and stood his ground on principle. As Advocate he would throw a client out of his office if he discovered he had concealed the truth from the lawyer.

It was widely known that Balakrishna gave up Civil Service which held out promise of taking him to the highest official position for a bureaucrat in the State, held no salaried position except for a few years, late in life, as Judge of the High Court, amassed no wealth, nor advanced the interests of his own children or near relations but gave of his time and attention generously to public causes like Adult Education, Beggar Relief, Prohibition and fought ceaselessly for fairplay in public life, free
from hate or malice towards those he seemed to fight against for justice. Balakrishniya had apparently brought up the issue of men without jobs when there were jobs without men, at a meeting of the executive committee of the University and to reinforce the point, probably cited me as a case in point, for he told me later he didn't even remember my name. The vice-chancellor was British, looked more like a military colonel than a Professor which he was, but nowhere mentioned in the same breath with Rollo or McIntosh, also Scots. It was fortunate for the university administration that McAlpin had been blessed with a manager, K. S. Murthy, whose manner and method in official conduct was known to be very English, meant as a high compliment. Murthy, who later became a good friend of mine, sent me, treated me with utmost courtesy, got an application written on the spot and said I would be well advised to report immediately — the vacancy had been caused at the lowest rung by the retirement of (Professor) A. B. McIntosh from the Central College. A trivial coincidence like CDN took the place of ABM tickled my vanity. Besides I went to teach in a college where, as schoolboy, I remembered with embarrassment, I had slept for a couple of nights in the corridors, reluctant to wake up the relations I was staying with, so late in the evening. National leaders could draw crowds of young people at any time of the day or night which had generated a good deal of debating activity among students. Watching debates — I hadn't dared to participate in any — had become my favourite pastime even as a schoolboy. And political speeches sometimes entailed staying out till after 9 in the evening. It is not only what they said but how they used the language that attracted us to hear their speeches.

Even so, we couldn't compare ourselves with the West Indians who, years after, astonished me with their command of the English language in speech. Young undergraduates could speak in periods without their end forgetting the beginning and dovetail sentence into sentence to make a perfect argument. Not having heard such English in the halls of Oxbridge and the Ivy League universities of the United States or rather minimizing it in my new-born admiration for the colonial's command of the English language in speech and writing, I later wondered at an ACLALS Conference in Kingston, Jamaica why this achievement...
hadn't received the global publicity their Cricket had done. A sorry comment on the claims of the brain against the brawn! (Apologies to lovers of cricket!) But George Lamming, the novelist, thought young people in the West Indies paid to hear good speeches: it was their intellectual equivalent of cricket! They went to watch arguments in courts of law, which was true of India, too, in pre-Independence days, but only if the Government in power was involved or was indicted by a national leader! What is the secret of their success as speakers? I asked Lamming. His loaded answer was: The Bible. Do they know their Bible that well? Backwards! he asserted. Perhaps our sanskritists who know their texts by rote and the Telugu-Asukavi-s can be said to be some kind of Indian counterpart of the West Indian phenomenon. There is today a phenomenal levelling down in the art of speaking, after Independence, among our students. Presidents and Secretaries of student associations can't manage a smart speech at Welcome, Introduction or Vote of Thanks in our own languages, not to speak of English. Cerebral activity is at a low ebb — when the head defects, the body defects too! We, teachers have fallen and forfeited the right to comment on students. Something like this is engaging the attention of isolated American educationists. Allen Bloom's Closing of the American Mind, an anti-democratic book has, it seems, sold half a million copies in that great democracy. Will someone write such a book for India? Who will publish it and who will read it unless it be by a famous foreign visitor?

When some purist from the British Isles levelled charges against the 'derelict English' of the West Indians as a shocking departure from Standard English it was a young fellow's turn to assert at the Conference, 'The language I speak is standard to me!' Small wonder, one of them protested on the last day of the conference while I was in the Chair with William Walsh and someone else speaking at the session, "Is there no Asian voice we can hear at this Conference?" When my turn came at the end I was again amazed at their openness to correction, for in my plea for charity I cited in support successive ravages of invaders to India for a thousand years, climaxing in political subjection inflicted on a 5000-year old civilization by the British and yet Gandhi's advice to his followers as he was being taken
into the prison, was “not to look at the world with bloodshot eyes though the eyes of the world be red.” And with tongue in cheek I made bold to exhort, “let the West Indian islands throw across bridges of friendship to the rest of the world, for the world was in need of the healing touch. Such other mouthful phrases! Contrary to my fears that I might be shouted down these few remarks were lustily cheered by the predominantly black audience. An unsuspected bonus of my reference to West Indian English was a compliment by a white woman who lifted my preoccupation with the linguistic to one of freedom from racial hate and transcendence of the nation-state. For, as I came out of the hall, a well-bred aristocratic looking white woman walked towards me, put her bag and books aside and courtisied to me with “Sir, you spoke not only for India but for all mankind.” Feeling elated by the unexpected double success I asked who she was, she quietly announced: “I am the wife of the British High Commissioner, here.” By a strange coincidence I was to meet Lady Lamour 12 years after at a party in London during the Festival of India and was reminded of the incident. My vanity was tickled while the presence of curious strangers rendered an embarrassing recounting of the episode, necessary.

To resume my narrative after the self-regarding digression. I taught for five years — I can’t say I was a thunderous success, but wasn’t considered a bore, either. Actually I must say, I enjoyed considerable popularity for the first two or three years until there was talk of an assistant professorship for me and my colleague, Bharath Raj Singh in Mysore who had made a mark as an effective debitor as an undergraduate and later as a conspicuously successful teacher. But the higher positions were a concession to our social and educational backwardness, not to demonstrable academic achievement. There simply wasn’t any. In my case, I had a senior colleague called S. Krishnamurthy, a most successful teacher, himself an applicant for the post, but a friend with generous impulses, to whose persuasions I succumbed. He paid the fee for the application forms, got the blanks typed and insisted I sign. His stand was: “The Government’s policy being what it is and the advertisement announcing the University’s preference for candidates from backward communities, if you don’t apply, someone else will.” “I would,” he added, “rather my friend;” (that is myself)” get
I became a Teacher of English

it than some unknown entity". And I yielded, perhaps with some distant hope of which I wasn't conscious then, but not, I remember, without deep embarrassment, for I knew it was ludicrous for one so inexperienced in teaching and without any high academic attainment to think of a promotion which normally came in one's forties — I was 20 years too young. And Krishnamurthy was one of the first to express his satisfaction and his compliment was far from being formal when the selection came through. Eagleton very wisely recommended to the Government that it would be advisable to send us both to Cambridge on scholarship for two years' study. He believed that, in future, when higher positions fell vacant there wouldn't be qualified men to fill them; we would, if we were sent, acquire a grasp of colloquial English and make first-hand acquaintance with English social life, both essential to successful teaching of English.

I was more lured by the prospect of going to Cambridge than what I knew to be an unfair advantage gained by a side door entry, on extra-academic grounds — that is what the assistant professorship was. It may have been Government's policy but it caused considerable heartburn among older teachers that the University should have thought of ignoring them despite their years of service and rewarded promise of a minimal kind. Which set in motion a campaign against us, disproportionate to the concession, both because it had no precedent in the university and happened in, of all disciplines, English, which involved the general mass of students, in those days drawn largely from the educationally forward sections of society. The articulate section of the students with their well informed views on unfair dealings in higher seats of learning had recourse to catcalls, table thumping and organized blocking of classroom teaching — within the university, and outside, their leaders matched it by filling the daily columns of prominent provincial newspapers in English and Kannada with reports of staff correspondents, feature articles and editorials of "Injustice in the English Department". There were neither newspapers nor courageous leaders to give them an intelligent debate. Let me at once say it was not easily defensible, considering the period in which this happened. Which today would have passed, indeed does pass, largely unnoticed with increased appreciation of the
historical forces that had operated against large sections of society. Even so, simply put, it was lack of character that I didn't say No to it. After all it would have come to me almost unasked on my return from Cambridge. But what happened, then, was part of a larger revolt. 'Revolt of the Masses', — it is trite to say, is often an extreme reaction against the prolonged perpetuation of vested interests. Any explanation in justification of status quo must look like sophistry. But wise societies provide inner checks and counter-checks to guard against exploitation by vested interests. This had not been done or else there should not have been just two odd young men from backward sections in so large a department as English, in one of the country's older universities. The other departments were no better in this regard; if any, worse.

People's trustees and conscience-keepers indulged for centuries in thoughtless opportunism, developed vested interests, a shameless story of the "cultural elite" wanting to be "the governing elite" as in medieval Europe where, as T. S. Eliot remarks, the Catholic clergy abdicated their spiritual concerns and social responsibility (repeated today by the white minority in South Africa). It had its genesis in Greece and Rome both of which were civilizations of the top few, who kept masses of people at the bottom rung of the social and educational ladder. "The salt hath lost its savour." How true the trite remark that a people without a sense of history will soon come to grief! The Mandal Commission Report, which caused wide-spread commotion throughout the country is a case in point.

I gained little by hastening the promotion, for almost immediately after this, Bharath Raj Singh and I were going to Cambridge, though it is a fact this was made possible by an Englishman. Anyhow, what I failed to do my son Srinath learnt to practise — I constantly screwed him up and sought to inculcate in him some sort of stoicism in the face of wilful denial of what was his, ironically, by someone close to me — his revenge on the world for his personal frustration. Srinath had to wait when posts were vacant, and in a time of free-for-all, for his Readership for 18 years (he hopes it won't be that long to be Professor!) with M. A. degrees from Mysore and Leeds and a doctorate from an American university, plus not altogether incompetent publications in journals other than The Literary
Criterion. My daughter, Ragini with a consistently first class record, merit scholarship and gold medals, has fared worse — she hasn’t been found good enough to teach in the university, but she has been content to work in an undergraduate college. The law of compensation does work, after all! They are not alone, though, in this perverse set-up but I am now confining myself to my immediate relations, not even students and colleagues who have their own woes to tell. Quite a few of my students have paid the price for their connection with me. Srinath and Ragini have tried hard to conceal the relationship, wherever possible. And they have stood to gain! When recently he was in Europe on a fellowship, someone asked if he knew Closepet Narasimhaiah, Srinath was resourceful enough to say, ‘he was my professor’.

To speak, not cynically, but pragmatically, teachers’ children, even those slightly above the average or pretensions to it, are well advised to avoid the pursuits of their parents unless they are separated by great distances. Which is not easy. Also not easy is the cost of educating a child away from home.

A young woman teacher who came to sympathize with us in our bereavement of our younger son, Sanjay, mumbled amidst tears, ‘I had not thought even heartburns could kill—and such a life’. I have taught myself over the years not to soil the soul by being too queasy over any hurt caused to me or my near ones. But one monstrous incident has stuck and I better get it off my chest. One day I received by mail a printed Kannada poem (evidently torn off a book) with the caption “you have mingled with the soil, my son”, even as Sanjay was fighting for his life in the hospital in his last days. I could name the author among my colleagues, because widely known to be begetter of many an anonymous letter. It was meant to unnerve me.

Jealousy is not uncommon among friends, relations and colleagues in a profession when the good things of life have passed them by in favour of someone they know well. It seems you must assume it as an inescapable aspect of our fallen state, if you wish to protect yourself from leprosy of the soul. But the point of bringing it up here is to ask if human depravity can be so pitiless and naked in one who calls himself a teacher of literature? Black magic, which this colleague also practised against us was merciful, because not so cruel as the other.
Eagleton's recommendation gave an effective handle to the high-spirited non-official member of the University Council, N. Balakrishniya, who saw it through the executive body. I had by then come close to him generating the gossip that I was his son-in-law to which Balakrishniya’s reaction was: “I have four daughters’’, ask your wife to tell wagging tongues she is my fifth one. Actually, my own father-in-law was no better-off than us. But thanks to an enlightened Education Secretary, by no means a man from the Backward Community, who rose above the crowd’s babble, a recommendation went to Government: I be exempted from offering stamped surety by a solvent person before scholarship was awarded to me—a singular exemption I have known. The public commotion had made me quite bitter. And I was too touchy to approach anyone for surety. I would, if it came to that, rather forgo the scholarship than embarrass friends who weren’t too willing to stand surety. Balakrishniya’s sole ambition for me was tireless pursuit of learning and intellectual distinction, not a ‘career’ as the market place understands it. Sharing his values, and being convinced of the rightness of his stand, I had taught myself to go on without thought of the so-called advancement in life. Interestingly, he was the only one of my close friends and well-wishers who didn’t congratulate me on my elevation to the much coveted Principalship of Maharaja’s College. Balakrishniya thought I had fallen by this quick rise. He was dead right. Fortunately, I gave it up as easily as it came to me. That’s by the way.

As part of my overseas equipment I had in my naivete bought myself a hat which I promptly announced to Eagleton
who looked amused:

'No one wears a hat at Cambridge. It's not done!

'But I catch a cold'

'That's done!'\n
England, Oxbridge especially, lived by precedents. He cited in support an anecdote, to give credence to it. It seems the Circuit Judge of Ely who, as friend of the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, went to stay at the Master's Lodge when the Master was going out on vacation. He handed the guest the key to the Lodge at the entrance and made his departure. The master repeated the gesture year after year until it almost became an annual ceremony. Meanwhile mastership of the college had changed hands and the new Master took no notice of the visiting dignitary. The story went that the master was sued for violating the precedent. And the Judge won the case! It may well have been set afloat by Eagleton and his precedent-scorn ing friends but shouldn't fail to impress, when conversation tends to be dull!

The anecdote inaugurated for me, while still within Indian shores, my first-hand acquaintance with English language and English social background that Eagleton had spoken of. And who could do it better than Eagleton himself? The P & O boat I took was full of British families returning home. Although the 1939-45 war had concluded, the Indian National Movement made their prolonged presence in India necessary. I can't say the few I came to know somewhat on our 17-day voyage weren't resentful of Indian presence on the boat. Churchill had warned them, while the war was still on, that with the loss of India, England would be reduced to a third-rate power. And there would be a famine ready to greet them if they should come back. I rather admired the ordinary Englishman's general reticence, his sense of form. He wouldn't let even a child misbehave at the dining table. Not far from our table I saw a crying child taken out of the hall by the father, given a shake-up and warned to 'behave'. The child did control itself and behaved!

It was his friend, a journalist, who asked me when the boat made a brief halt near the Rock of Gibraltar, what I thought of it. He was pointing to the distant Rock. Not having adequate vocabulary for a repartee in conversation, I could only say 'Majestic'. Majestic! he scoffed: 'Symbolic of Spanish
To Cambridge on Damodardas Scholarship

impertinence”, he grunted. I knew Spain and France, one for the Spanish Armada, the other for Napoleon’s adventures, occupied a high place among Englishmen’s national prejudices. If history books had taught this in college, I had forgotten. What helped me take imaginative interest in it was Nehru’s Glimpses of World History, ‘better history and better English’. Tom Wintringham, to whom it was dedicated, went so far as to commend it to Indian children who wanted to learn English, rather than Gibbon or Macaulay. And his latest book The Discovery of India, published in 1946, my constant companion on the boat, which I was reading with pencil in hand, was my first serious introduction, as much to Indian history—academic approaches had made no impact — as to Nehru, the writer of English prose. Where others would be foaming at the mouth, Nehru looked at the British connection with India as a “friendly foreigner” did, never forgetting to make a distinction between the British as individuals and the British as rulers. Precisely what I needed in England to talk about India “to the British in their post-imperial mood, as crude denunciation of the British was common enough in our nationalistic fervour. Nehru, I thought, had steered clear of both servility and sycophancy.

It was a Friday when the boat arrived in Liverpool and the boat train brought us to London in the evening. Having spent a good part of my pocket allowance of a miserable £5 on the journey (an expensive cable from the sailing ship wishing my son Srinath happy returns on his 4th birthday, taking up a major share of it), I remember I had been left with just enough small change to engage a taxi to the Indian Students Hostel. I paid the exact fare and no tips, though I had been told by friends on the boat it was bad form not to do it. I heard a dry, well articulated, if ironic, “Thank you”, which almost died down on the driver’s lips. I soon began to discover the nuances of the acknowledgement depending on how well the beneficiary was treated! Going in, I asked for a room for the night, in a voice which nearly cringed. ‘Sorry, no vacancies’, was the crisp, business-like reply. “How heartless of this man to say No to his own countryman, a stranger in England, and going to Cambridge! Scores of Indians were coming to England and some of them to the hostel — but with prior notice, while I took vacancies for granted. There was no room. That was that! And I sat in the lounge waiting without hope. A Mysore medical
doctor, Basavaraj Urs, later Physician in the Mysore Medical College Hospital, who was talking in Kannada (never before had Kannada sounded so musical!) with someone, kindly let me use his sofa for a bed and I made myself as comfortable as I could on a half-starved stomach. Eleven pence was all I had been left with. Yet how much one could do with it in those days! A cup of coffee for three pence in the morning, a bus ride to India House in Aldwych for two-penny-a-penny, with a few coppers still jingling in the pocket as I strode fast to Coutts & Co., at Trafalgar Square where I was sent by the Education Secretary at the Indian High Commission just come into existence with Independence. My name announced and passport produced at the counter, brought out an assuring response:

"Yes, we have received advice to make you the payment. But you should bring a letter of authority from the Education Secretary!"

"I'll get it", I said excitedly.

We are closing at 12, said the man at the counter (banks were open in those days in the morning on Saturdays).

He looked at the watch, it was nearly 11 and he knew better than me I couldn't do it on foot. "Wait", he said; "Let me see if I can cut the tape". He telephoned India House to send him, first thing on Monday morning, a letter of authority with Saturday's date! It worked. Why is bureaucracy in India, said to be a British legacy, so wooden in comparison?

How would you like the stipend? Cheque? Draft? asked the good man.

"Neither, cash please". I must have sounded desperate. £120 a quarter with tuition fee paid by Government, was a lot of money since I had heard that before the war, people lived on £40 a year. Mulk Raj Anand claimed he lived merrily on £2 a week while in London in the 'twenties. I thanked the bank man profusely, came down the steps and hailed a taxi in high spirits and asked the driver to take me to the best restaurant in London! He smiled and said something in cockney which I couldn't divine. Once there, I couldn't recognize any familiar dish but for mallagatannie --- it was ditch water which the Tamil would have hurled back at the waiter if it had been served in a Madras cafe.
To Cambridge on Damodadas Scholarship

I arrive in Cambridge, Christ’s College, on the main road, with no nameboard. Not in consonance with timeless Cambridge (how it grieved me to see a signboard displayed in glaring red light at the top of the Maharaja’s College tower after I ceased to be its principal!) E. Staircase, Room No. 9 “Gentlemen (are) asked to sport the Oak on leaving their rooms unoccupied” Which caused a flutter among students as much for the phrasing as for the social change responsible for the warning. Cambridge was not alone. I learnt in Tokyo no one before the war locked the doors of their residences unless they were leaving the town, for a length of time. Mr and Mrs Bird, a misnomer for the heavy-weights, assigned to look after scholars on E. Staircase. Years after I had left Cambridge I took my son Srinath from Leeds to show him my old college. The E. Staircase had, under renovation, lost its number and other marks of identity and there was no trace of my room as I knew it or of Derek Wilkes’s below mine. Where was the mahogany plank in the Common Room which in my time displayed the roll-call of honour in letters of gold, of Milton Society’s Presidents over the years? Was it some well-planned conspiracy that Cambridge which boasted of celebrating antiquity, had committed a breach? Things fell to place — another illusion gone!

Eagleton wrote from Mysore to ask if I had noticed the Fellows Building at Christ’s, said to be the best specimen of Wren’s architecture. Which drew out from my cynical mathematician friend, Noel Hughes, a nasal “I suppose so, it always drips when it rains!” I only knew the Mulberry Tree in the garden behind, believed to have been planted by John Milton, because I was installed president of the Milton Society under the historic tree which alas! seems to be drying up like my other points of recognition, leaving only a memory of the catechism which the retiring president administered to me, his successor:

“Who is the chiefest of all English poets? “John Milton”. Do you believe that John Milton lived on the ‘M’ Staircase and planted the Mulberry Tree? “I do” What are the wisest of his lines?

The reply, “Then to the spicy nut-brown ale”, was an invitation to the new President’s room for a Sherry Party, at
which-an unusual gesture — Canon Raven, then Master of Christ’s and Vice-Chancellor of the University, chose to be present, perhaps because of his partiality for Indian students.

The next day we were to have Field Marshal Smutts in the College — he was a Christ’s man — who had come to Cambridge with Winston Churchill, both of them scheduled to receive honorary degrees of the University. Canon Raven reported to me next morning an interesting bit of conversation that ensued between the two celebrities:

Smutts: Winston, say what you will, Gandhi was a great man, he was truly spiritual.
Churchill: (obviously enjoying a dig at himself) Am I not spiritual? How many bishops have I not promoted?

Within a week or so of my arrival in Cambridge I came to know E. M. Forster, who had long been Fellow of King’s College, to which also belonged I. G. Patel, known to be a brilliant economist. King’s College had a holy association for me because of the Chapel attached to it. I think it is the chiming of the bells on Sunday mornings that evoked a religious mood in me which contributed to it. How very right is Raja Rao in thinking King’s Chapel was built, not by Kings and Nobles but by the prayers of pilgrims. As much to keep the conversation going with the soft-spoken, shy Forster as to know if he looked at it differently, I asked him over Tea at a friend’s place how he judged the stained glass windows. ‘I don’t know’, was his disarming reaction. I think he found the question naive and so left it at that. But he was truly modest, too. Once when some of us, Indian students went to invite him to speak at the Tagore society (of which the present Vice-President of India, Sankar Dayal Sharma told me in Guyana, recently he was Treasurer at that time) he pleaded with us he had nothing to say. We assured him he didn’t have to speak on Tagore. Which, of course, he knew, but the typical Indian persuasion which bordered on pestering, left him with no alternative and he came out with what was to us an incredible revelation: that “only two years ago” he had to prepare a lecture on Crabbe (the 18th C. poet) and so how could we expect him to make a speech “so soon after?” This was the man who, after the publication of A Passage to India in 1924, had virtually stopped writing — with half his life yet to be lived. Anyhow, Forster did come — to “repeat” his two-year-old talk on Crabbe. And we gratefully listened to it.
Is it he or Pethick Lawrence who was visiting Cambridge that remarked at a public meeting that Mrs Sarojini Naidu was the most beautiful woman he had seen? I think this was in answer (a discreet evasion) to a question asked in dead earnest by a naive Indian student as to what he thought of the poetry of the “Nightingale of India” — our sentimentalities and hyperbolic expressions and such other marks of loudness must have been objects of endless amusement and topics of lively conversation in private, among the British who generally kept a low profile, looked dull to conceal their brightness, employed the talking voice and eschewed over-statements. Actually as I used to tell my students back home: ‘Produce Helen of Troy before an Englishman, he might well react to her beauty with, “she isn’t too bad!”’ Did the Englishman conserve his powers in life to expend them on right things and through appropriate channels? Hence perhaps Marlowe’s ‘The face that launched a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium’ (Dr Faustus). I now realized how as leader of the Indian National Movement and later as Prime Minister, both calling for rousing speeches, Nehru had trained himself to employ the conversational tone, he records in his Autobiography, whether his audience consisted of twenty or ten thousand. He obviously exemplified George Santayana’s distinction: Aristocracies encourage conversation while Republics make for oratory. He had just been elected Prime Minister of Independent India and came to England in that capacity to attend the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ conference. Indian students, numbering nearly two hundred, came to London from all the British universities to greet the Prime Minister at the India House which proudly flew the National tricolour flag which made me feel flag-high and my heart flutter with it in a country in which, I said to myself, I should have crawled like a midget had I gone there a decade or two earlier. The man who helped most along with Gandhi to redeem “the tryst with Destiny” would be there. How would he look? What would he say? We were all agog with excitement. He was, in addition, the hero of my youth as Vivekananda of my boyhood.

Against the background of “At the midnight hour when the world sleeps, India wakes to a new life,” a mark of true eloquence, came the vicious rhetoric of the student leaders who
hailed him. “Sir, you are the first Prime Minister of India.” Apostrophizing once, it might have been tolerable but when repeated by student after student Nehru, understandably, showed signs of extreme irritation. He wouldn’t sit, he wouldn’t stand, such was the impatience, he was fuming. And when his turn came to speak, this is how it went as far as I can remember:

‘The whole world knows I am the first Prime Minister of India. What’s the use of your tickling my vanity and my tickling yours. There’s a job to be done at home. Let’s go back and do it. Achha! rasta chado (Make way for me)

and he walked out without ceremony. And the white heat on his face that moment was something I treasured — it was like transfusion of the blood our veins were most in need of. And it was different from the good humoured but otherwise astrin­gent assertion of Krishna Menon, our first High Commissioner in England, who was greeted by the Cambridge Majlis with self-regarding references like ‘Sir, we are the cultural ambassadors of India’ to which Krishna Menon’s hand motioned something close to a “shut-up”, as he corrected “There is one ambassador, and that is myself!” I have no doubt we asked for it. On another occasion ‘I rather admired Krishna Menon as he cut a British journalist to size when the latter sought to correct Menon’s English at a Press Conference in the London airport. “Don’t you dare to teach me English. I didn’t pick it up like you, I learnt it!’

It was not until several months after that I could discern the subtle shades of phrasing and tone of voice between the Anglo-Saxons and the Celts. All white men were at first Englishmen! Within a fortnight of my arrival in Cambridge I undertook a railway journey from London to Edinburgh to look up a friend from Mysore, M. Shadakshara Swamy, later to become professor of chemistry and principal of Central College, Bangalore. Enter­taining as I did the newcomer’s apprehension about strangers, especially because it was a night train, I tried to make conversation with the only other passenger in the compartment. But I hadn’t suspected that characteristic innocuous Indian prefatory question, “what part of England do you come from?” would let the stranger explode, “I am not English, I am a Scot, I am proud
of it!”, after which he let off a guffaw to suggest it was a sign of Gaelic abandon. I made bold to expatiate: “How come, you have allowed yourselves to be ruled by an English King?” “Chum! in the first place, the King is not English (I needed to brush up my history, for with James I British monarchy had acquired a Scottish dimension). And to reinforce his proud Scottish claim he narrated an anecdote: a young Scot went to London for a brief visit and when he returned, his friends gathered round him for a chat:

“Jack, what did you think of London?”
“London! Grand, grand city”
How did you like the English people?
“Well, all my dealings were with heads of firms and they were all Scots!”
“So you see”, said my companion, “What does it matter who rules Britain, so long as British business is in the hands of Scots?”

As our train touched Glasgow in the small hours of the morning I noticed my companion looking out of the window, ejaculating in hushed accents without turning towards me, but meant for my hearing:

‘Glasgow, Glasgow!’
What’s the matter? I asked.
‘Nothing at all. God blessed Glasgow with plenty of Scotch but the bl...y British government took it away?’
‘How?’
‘Taxes, Taxes!’

Term started. Cambridge resounded with activity. Youngmen and women were rushing on ramshackle cycles to lectures and tutorials. B. W. Downs, Senior Tutor at Christ’s was my Tutor but had no time for supervision. And I was sent, (a friend whispered I was the chosen one or I wouldn’t have been sent to Leavis) as some Christ’s men were, to F. R. Leavis of Downing, already a legend, and Downing, his college, a place of pilgrimage for visitors from overseas. I later learnt that unless a young man was cynical or stupid it was considered natural for him to aspire to the privilege of being Leavis’s pupil — who wouldn’t like to bask in the sunshine of a genius, which he had been to generations of young scholars before me and after. He
held a temporary fellowship for years, was Assistant Lecturer at 35, Junior Lecturer at 50 and admitted to the Faculty Board at 60, without a voice in Faculty appointments; and a Readership bestowed on him at 65, before retirement. He once wrote to me he didn't know what would happen to the family when he was retired from the University — on a small pension, though before long, he was to write again that 'several thousands of pounds are down and I don't know what to do with the money', thanks to the reprinting of Scrutiny by the Cambridge University Press, an act of expiation, it seemed, for the sins of the university against one of the greatest men in its history. As I wrote elsewhere, a professorship would have been a tame end to a tempestuous career. But how could he help his bitterness? As I gained a better perspective of the Cambridge literary ethos, I have often wondered if Cambridge minus Leavis would have meant much to me. Basil Willey, Tillyard, F. L. Lucas, Mrs Bennet, Potts, Bradbrook, all scholars who wrote learned academic books, but not teachers who made a difference to the students who came in contact with them. They didn't ignite the minds or touch the hearts.

As my supervisor I sought Leavis's advice on the lectures I should attend and as I mentioned Potts’s name I witnessed a fury in his voice: ‘Potts, fantastic! Potts, preposterous! Potts. Death!’ ‘My colleague, Bharathraj Singh, who went to Potts for tutorials intimated as much, as he repeated his teacher's banalities like: 'A good book ... is better than a bad book’ with a seemingly thoughtful silence enveloping his enigmatic expression (gift of a wrinkled skin) between the subject and the predicate. Tillyard seemed to be in control of the academic politics of the Department and Basil Willey, the only Professor in the English Faculty, must have felt, like his other colleagues, rebuked by the ever-rising popularity of this impertinent lecturer. It is also true that thanks to its age-old prestige men like Leavis do come upon the Cambridge scene from time to time. Nor will their work die soon — it will be seen in scattered pockets or generally assimilated into the mainstream without losing its identity altogether. I realize I am looking at him as an Indian but it couldn't have been very different for others whether English, American, European, Australian or Ceylonese. I had met a fair sample of scholars from these countries as they came
to sit at Leavis’s tutorials where the group was steadily expanding over the term. And he did much of the talking. Although some changes were noticed in a sporadic way, generally speaking, the fate of English Studies in the English-speaking countries themselves wasn’t radically different from what it was in England in the thirties and forties. How could they be when the fountain was muddy!

My Mental Bag from India

On looking back at the contents of the ‘mental bag’ I carried with me to Cambridge the first thing I must record is that I had not read Leavis, nor ever heard of him until 1947. And I must add that T. S. Eliot was no more than a name when I left the University in ‘42. I must hasten to add that this wasn’t peculiar to Mysore: such was the literary and academic milieu that the Indian youth of those days were brought up much too much on the Romantics and the eminent Victorians, both of whom we had been taught to admire — from afar. For one thing it must have suited the Indian mind of those days which was, it will not be wrong to say, obsessed with the national struggle for the liberation of the country from foreign domination. Ours was essentially a rhetorical or/and sentimental approach though not unaccompanied by some kind of idealism and a vague, if not blind, enthusiasm for the watchwords of the French Revolution and for the poets (more than for the poetry, though for them the one was indistinguishable from the other) whose imagination had been fired by the ideals of the French Revolution. It is well known that the Romantics’ love of nature, love of liberty for the individual, the nation and the fallen peoples, wherever they were found (“Men are we and must grieve when even the shade/of that which once was great has passed away”); their heroic or sentimental attitudes to life; and a kind of other-worldliness, all of which were central to their poetry — central, not in the sense that these were realized in poetry but directly stated and loudly espoused — evoked a sympathy and a vibration in the educated Indian of those days who, while he admired and imitated the social behaviour of the rulers, was fired by national aspirations but hadn’t been able to find the right idiom for the expression of his vaguely felt idealism and his love of liberty. For a time the Romantic poets he had read in school
and college supplied the need. Wasn't he told that Byron championed the cause of the Greeks? And by a process of extension the hero of Missolonghi naturally endeared himself to the Indians. Wordsworth was the poet of childhood, of simple men and women, of natural affections, of love of liberty and of sublime spiritual experience. As for Shelley, his self-pity, his rhetoric and his Promethean fervour, especially, not to speak of his spiritual aspirations, had an immediate impact on the Indian youth and it is significant that Shelley, like Hardy later, was the rage among both young and old, while Keats was read and admired for his 'art'.

Then came the eminent Victorians who but continued and carried forward the tradition of their predecessors and came closer to the Indian bosom than even the Romantics. Their criticism of contemporary English materialism, their demand for cultivation of the higher things of life and, in this respect, their, Matthew Arnold's, commendation to the Englishmen, of "the Indian virtue of detachment" reinforced self-confidence in the Indian, writhing under indignation, — that a nation of shopkeepers from a far-off island had imposed their rule of an ancient land with an immemorial culture, especially as they were encouraged by their own leaders of thought to feel that they were the salt of the earth and hub of the universe. Thus the Romantics and the Victorians met a vital need of the hour and it must have appeared ungrateful if not blasphemous to criticize those that gave them spiritual strength. Indeed, it never occurred to them that with such 'high seriousness' and profound 'thought content' there was anything in them to be found fault with, at all. After all, literature was read for the inspiration it gave — it must 'move' the readers — for its call to a good life.

This tradition took deep root and persisted, persisted long enough. It was against this background that Indians have, by and large, received their education at least during the past 100 years or so. With the national movement culminating in Gandhi's "Quit India" demand in 1942 the educated Indian found it more and more imperative to seek and cite the noble sentiments of the Romantic and Victorian poets and pamphleteers against the British politician who spoke the language that 'Shakespeare spake' and Milton writ' but betrayed
that precious heritage in his dealings with India. English poets became instruments to plague their own countrymen with!

Surely this was not the mood conducive to criticism or revaluation of literature. Why criticize or revalue when everything in the literature of the West was designed to advance the political, moral and spiritual interests of Indians? Not that they were aware of the poet's deficiencies, for they didn't just exercise their minds by way of local analysis of the poem; only the 'message' was abstracted from it. Besides, was it done in England itself, the home of English literature? Was it done by the few Englishmen who taught English in well-known Indian schools and colleges? They taught us to admire the beauty of the English language, that is, its diction, cadence, rhyme, blank verse, its varied literary forms like epic, ballad, lyric, sonnet, tragedy, comedy, satire, biography, novel; the Long Poem, the Short Story, the One-Act Play and their growth through the ages, their sudden emergence or their dramatic extinction etc., etc. This is the technical or the 'artistic' side, and the other, the 'thought content' in literature: Form and Content! When Shakespeare was read it was the 'plot construction', the 'study of characters' and the aphoristic expressions that came in for discussion. While the Englishman emphasized the 'form', the Indian teacher of English emphasized the 'content' though both spoke about both. They — I mean a majority of them, for there were exceptional men on either side — were pedantic and dilettante by turns.

As late as 1942 when T. S. Eliot had written his best poetry and wrought a revolution in English poetry and had been accepted as such even in conservative English universities (though, one suspects, they still resisted the pressure of some 'rebels' and 'conspirators' to include his poetry in the curriculum) the Indian student went to hear a University Extension lecture on the poetry of A.E. Housman as if a new star had just swum into the literary firmament. The lecture was by Amarnath Jha, Professor of English at Allahabad University, and said to be the doyen of English Studies in the North and presided over by a justly respected Englishman (Scot to be precise) J. C. Rollo in charge of the Department of English at Mysore University, known for its fairly high standards of English. Housman's simplicity, pastoralism, his classic grace and restraint were, if I can recall at this distance, the themes the Professor dwelt on.
The lecture didn't make an impact on us, students. But the president of the evening made up for it by his personal charm, humour and humanity. The previous day, at least, the Professor had spoken on "Literary Ideals" and famous lines of poetry were reeled off in scores and they found an echo in the hearts of hundreds of students and teachers to whom they had been cited before in classes. Anyway, they were repeated again in the presidential remarks by the Chairman, S. Radhakrishnan (later President of India) reputed for his eloquence and his astonishing memory, among other things. While this was the standard approach to literature in the classroom and on the public platforms, if one was fortunate in coming across a fresh arrival from England like Eagleton in Mysore, one occasionally heard of Donne being revived, Bradley outmoded, Saintsbury superseded, of a Tillyard who had made a novel approach to the study of Milton's poetry and I.A. Richards, known largely as the author of Basic English, cutting at the root of 'stock responses' though none of these things had been systematically demonstrated to the English Honours student and so had no reality or meaning, so much so they now have the aspect of a vague memory to the student of those days. This was perhaps the general pattern at the student level throughout the country in those days and there isn't any evidence to contradict this assumption at the teacher-level. And if it was there in a scattered way in a few eccentric individuals, it is clear it hadn't become common currency.

Rabindranath Tagore somewhere speaks of his having reacted against T. S. Eliot's influence as 'influenza' though he himself later came to translate his "Journey of the Magi" into Bengali. Even this reaction could not have been strongly felt (one suspects that Tagore had noticed Eliot's rising popularity during his visits abroad) for it hadn't become such a pervasive influence for a poet of national eminence to come to grips with. Whatever has happened by way of increasing attention to modern poetry must have been since Independence although one fails to see how. Perhaps it was a coincidence. Perhaps Independence occasioned fresh thinking among rebellious younger men and aspiring poets in Indian languages must have begun to search for new motifs and new modes of expression and experimentation, generally speaking. Perhaps also because
Eliot's acceptance in academic circles in the West coincided with the outbreak of the Second World War which interrupted the visit of the young Indian student for study abroad and the cessation of war in 1945 and the declaration of Independence a couple of years later might have released all the pent-up energy and thrown open fresh fields to the rising poet.

But this is true that English books came, not so immediately after publication, though for them to come, they must be asked for at this end! As (Professor) Ludowyk of Colombo University said 'Time past in Europe after the lapse of several years becomes time present in Ceylon!' It is true of India no less. As for ideas, they must have travelled at snail-speed and none of the literary periodicals worth the name reached us except perhaps Essays and Studies of the English Association which anyway had the look of a book to be kept by rather than of a periodical to be read at once; and The Times Literary Supplement which, one knows, spoke for the Establishment. I have tried in vain to find any reference to the Calendar of Modern Letters, The Criterion or Scrutiny in the catalogues of many university libraries, though surprisingly some stray numbers of Adelphi and Athenæum have found their way into some of them here and there. And if one does discover either Eliot's poetry or Leavis's criticism in Accession Registers of the late 'Thirties and 'Forties it is now clear their contents hadn't become a way of thinking, a habit of mind. Stated simply, their addition to the library didn't make any difference to the climate of opinion. They were there on the shelves, unknown and unborrowed or if known to the heads of departments, silently sneered at and not so much as mentioned in classes or seminars even by way of disagreement. I wouldn't pretend to think they have made much difference to many of us even today. Nor do I consider it an exclusively Indian vice.

For one gathers from the battles Scrutiny has fought that the general literary situation in English universities wasn't markedly different.

As for American books and periodicals the Atlantic was in the nature of a yawning gulf and they were in any case, hidden for the Indian behind the broad back of Great Britain. Modern French poetry and criticism which had done so much to change the course of English poetry and criticism in the early part of this century were a sealed book to the English educated Indian.
Thus outside the mainstream of Indo-English relations, the only two possible sources of vitality or influence — the New critics of America and Symbolist poets of France, both of whom had the potency to change the literary scene in India — were inaccessible to us. And the circle is complete. No, there is something more to be said. A quick glance at the English syllabuses of older Indian universities (Mysore was a possible exception with just a survey paper on Language) reveals — a shocking revelation — how they were, after the Oxford and London pattern (not that Cambridge syllabus could have saved us) heavily weighed with Old English and Middle English. And what is worse, the best men — there were quite a few — taught Anglo-Saxon and Middle English and like their forbears in Sanskrit in its decadent stages, they went into the investigation of grammatical subtleties and such other philological intricacies. For isn’t linguistic discipline a discipline of the mind, for which after all one receives higher education? No wonder that long after C. L. Wrenn had left India some South Indian universities should have still resisted any attempt to dilute the language syllabus!

In some universities where Language hadn’t made deep incursions, scholars dwelt on the ‘Stars in Shakespeare’ or expound Romantic and Victorian literary ideals and in spite of his tremendous prestige, Matthew Arnold’s criticism of the Romantics wasn’t accepted; rather, because of the prestige, turned down apologetically. But when Arnold propounded his dictum that genuine poetry is composed in the soul, not in the wits, as the poetry of Dryden and Pope was, it seems to have found ready favour with Indian teachers of English. This too must have suited the Indian temperament which set store by ‘inspiration’ in creative effort and looked upon poetry as essentially a matter of feeling and ‘emotion’ (‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’; ‘emotion recollected in tranquility’) rather than ‘thought’. No wonder that against this background the poetry of Hopkins or Eliot with their predominantly cerebral element and the New Criticism with its analytical method (of ‘murdering to dissect’) had not percolated among graduate students, let alone undergraduates.

Though Matthew Arnold commended ‘the Indian virtue of detachment’ in a critic, in India itself it wasn’t much of a virtue. Nor did Arnold’s contemporaries and immediate successors in
his own country see the object as in itself it really was. Criticism was either 'historical' or 'interpretative' and interpretation was invariably with reference to what the author must have meant. That 'intentions are nothing except as realized' must have sounded not merely strange but irreverent. That was to question the 'sincerity' of the poet. Going over previous years' question papers, I remember, Leavis came upon that last question, the refuge of tired examiners: 'Write on one of the following' and he picked on 'Sincerity in Literature'. To which his immediate reaction was, 'I should put it the other way: 'Insincerity in Literature', (a characteristic of his alert mind which had trained itself, to make essential discriminations, Vivechana, said to be the mark of a thinking mind in Indian intellectual tradition) for, sincerity isn't enough, you know — the way to hell is paved with sincere intentions! And so for Leavis, 'Insincerity', as that defeats its own end in a writer. How much trash it eliminated for me in literature! For to enjoy poetry was to appreciate it, that is, to look at it through the poet's own eyes or to look at it, not infrequently, wearing blinkers.

I.A. Richards at Mysore

I am speaking of Poetry largely while tracing the course of Criticism, for the Romantic poets had determined the course of literary criticism and later it was Eliot's poetry that won the attention for Criticism, rather than the other way around. Eliot himself wrote criticism in the 'Twenties and when Leavis acknowledges his debt to 'a certain poet and critic' it is obviously to Eliot. It was Eliot that first, in recent times, got a hearing for the Metaphysical poets, for the Jacobean Drama, and he that struck the first most significant discordant note on Milton (that Aurobindo had done it earlier in Future Poetry had not been known). But everyone knew his criticism was that of a practitioner and anyway it was in the nature of a by-product and not the main concern. I. A. Richards gave promise of making that in his Principles of Literary Criticism. But the promise was followed by disappointment when his Practical Criticism came out. It was not altogether disappointing, for Richards only reflected the anarchy of the times in reader response when he printed a wide variety of undergraduate responses to unseen passages of prose and verse. But it is sad that the critic, who
was also a teacher, didn't feel called upon to correct the tastes of his juvenile pupils by making qualifications, and reservations and, being vexed by their paltry performance, gave up literary criticism in despair and came to look upon his pioneering work in criticism as 'juvenile'.

I can't resist the temptation to relate his rare visit to Mysore with his wife in 1954, thanks to the British Council. He preferred not to lecture but read a poem — Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. Obviously meant to placate his Indian audience, I think, he spent a couple of minutes on the word 'still' in the opening line.

Thou, still unravished bride of quietness

'Still, still, still' — he hypnotized himself to be able to say it had the potency of mystic power of a Vedic hymn! The word had no relation for him whatever to the Urn's endurance through unknown centuries. And when he came to the last two lines he read them with a sure sense of drama, gave a pause at the end and sat down saying, 'in the presence of a poem like this judgement is presumptuous! As chairman of the meeting I had earlier introduced him as one of the gods of modern criticism which to me was a strongly held conviction despite Leavis's occasional diatribes at him. But that afternoon I was disappointed that he attempted neither local analysis (perhaps he thought it had been done so often by critics) nor the main thrust of the poem and I was waiting for him to throw some light on those vexed last lines over which so much ink had been spilt. Naturally I brought this up with William Walsh and D. J. Enright who visited Mysore 6 years after and spent nearly a week participating in seminars and had all the time in the world for much innocent gossip. Walsh had, I think, a whole section in one of his books on Keats and he thought Keats should have ended the 'Grecian' Ode with the line 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty' and omitted the last two lines:

'That's all ye know on earth
And all ye need to know'

since he obviously thought Keats was moralizing, not being content with what the poem had enacted so effectively. It was a question of reader-response: Suppose, I said to Walsh, you allow a little pause after 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty', withdraw
into yourself, reflect for a moment on the Urn's message, which comes like a revelation and intone the last two lines as if to verbalize your own personal realization of the impact of the line

Beauty is Truth etc

and come out reassuring yourself

'That's all ye know on earth'

as you are left with the poise of one who had found the 'still centre' or that state of tatastha tallinatha as we say in Sanskrit poetics and a pause again, to reconfirm the utter adequacy of the aphoristic statement as if to confirm to yourself 'after such illumination, there is nothing more to know'. A moment when poetry becomes a prophecy. Walsh seemed to see some merit in this reading and even offered to mention this in a footnote if he brought out another edition of his book.

To go back to Richards, since no one in the audience felt it proper to ask a question, make a comment or seek a clarification, I thought I should do it if only to impress on him we participated in the experience and all was not lost on an uneducated group of benighted Indians.

I started: Mr. Richards, if I may recall your own comments in your epoch-making book Principles of Literary Criticism, what 'impulses' are 'organised' in this poem? He stood up on one leg and raised his voice to say 'millions of impulses are released in the poem, how can I say which of them are organized?' 'Right. You also speak of value judgements. But you didn't care to make any?' An emphatic 'No' without comment!

As host I thought I shouldn't embarrass him any more.

I drove the couple to the justly famous Mysore Zoo, as he wished to visit it. He exclaimed, 'Grand' on seeing a huge cobra. I lost no time to recall to him D. H. Lawrence's poem "Snake" 'Great poem', was his comment, I was naughty, juvenile to be precise, and teased him in whisper with 'you are making a judgement'. 'Don't catch me like that!' he pleaded. I felt foolish. But he was in a mood for discussion and in despair I remarked at one stage, 'You know what happened to Tolstoy who repudiated in his last days all that he had said earlier. But today Tolstoy is remembered not for the repudiation but for what he repudiated!' I fear you should be prepared for some such verdict.
at the hands of posterity. And his visibly annoyed assertion was, ‘I don’t want to be judged by my juvenile work; you wait till my Speculative Instruments comes out. You will see what I mean’. The book came, and my disappointment still stands.

In the evening the couple came home for a meal and I had vowed myself not to talk intellectual things. But he brought it up himself as if, I think, to apologize to me for what must have looked like a glaring contradiction in his stand and said with a ring of confession ‘you know that experience of teaching poetry to undergraduates at Cambridge broke me’.

How did he teach Poetry? I was curious. His reply: I used to ask the students in my group to read the poem in front of them and express their reaction, which they did.

‘And you left it at that?’ ‘What else?’ I didn’t comment out of deference to his feelings. I was familiar with this practice having seen his Practical Criticism, that misnomer. What then is a teacher there for? What is his role as senior member of the group? can’t he express a gentle reservation if he thought the young student had gone wrong, according to his lights. All this without imposing his own views but leading him on to see there was another way of looking at it.

It should now be obvious it was thus left to F. R. Leavis and his collaborators to make it the Age of Leavis in Literary Criticism, as it is of T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence in Poetry and Fiction. It was fortunate for Criticism that Leavis didn’t have a salaried post till his middle thirties; that he was preceded by T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards and Middleton Murry who showed the way (but didn’t sustain it) to the kind of criticism in which he was to achieve distinction; that Downing College sheltered him, for he was not going to leave Downing for all the wealth of the East; that the Athenaeum, the Calendar of Modern Letters and the Nation, including the Criterion weren’t equal to the task of training the literary sensibility of the age; that Leavis was a teacher and editor of Scrutiny with devotion to literary studies, integrity, moral fervour, an extraordinary toughness in a crisis and courage to speak out — all of which, so rare in literary criticism since Dr. Johnson, have won for him a loyalty and collaboration never before known in English literary history.
Preparing to Encounter Leavis

Making Leavis the focal point of reference I soon read up several histories of English literature — old and new, well-known and less-known; large and concise, in all of which the pattern was more or less the same: the social, political and intellectual background; movements and influences; the life of the writer, his works and a few sentences or paragraphs about each of them and all the histories passing on received reputations in very general terms through sheer inertia. Consider a few examples in a recent history by a less-known writer, *English Literature: A Survey for Students*: "Milton is perhaps the first great literary personality of England": "he is the hero of all his works. Not a word of comment as to whether the poetry is the better or the worse for it! Again: "he was a poet of the ear rather than the eye". The historian doesn’t pause to discuss the merits and defects of such poetry. Even children have learnt to parrot these phrases. Then, a quotation from the "Nativity Ode" to say that here ‘Milton's learning is much in evidence'. What creative use is made of the learning or how it is organized into a pattern he doesn’t consider, thus giving the impression that mere evidence of learning in a poet is a virtue, as the hoarding of money is a virtue to the miser. And then: “the sheer magic of the sound of a catalogue of strange names”. Lydidas: “one of the most astonishing literary performances the world has ever seen”. What is a literary performance? and what are its values? The Piedmont sonnet: ‘Never had poetry known such eloquent indignation as that which Milton turned on the slaughterers in Piedmont’. Pride, where the critic should feel distressed that a poet, a Christian poet, calls for vengeance! But then he does it even in *Samson Agonistes*, again naively claimed as a ‘fitting epilogue to the career of a great poet’. Great poet! Is it Carlyle that said, “A poet without love is a physical and metaphysical impossibility”? Did Shakespeare write *King Lear* in vain for Milton?

This was later confirmed from *A Critical History of English Literature* by a don of Cambridge, David Daiches, whose book in two volumes of about 1800 pages sold very well in spite of its forbidding price and probably got a good Press. He claims to have devoted large sections of the book to authors like
Shakespeare and Milton. And yet what does one find in them? The same clichés, the same generalizations and the same summaries of plays and poems without ever touching the life of poetry. In all the sixty pages set apart for Milton there isn’t a single reference to the controversy that has raged about Milton in the 20th century and he writes as if nothing has happened.

Just look at the grand finale: “He may have thought his art unripe; but in fact this kind of poetic art could mature no further.” For once the critic is right! For Milton’s later poetry confirms the truth of this remark: the power of “Lycidas” hasn’t matured into better poetry in his last work where the bitterness of the blind poet, the inner unripeness, persists (“Samson hath quit himself like Samson... on his enemies, fully revenged”).

It’s enough to compare this with Shakespeare’s final testament of life: ‘The rarer action’s in virtue than in vengeance’. It is true these are utterances of the characters but none but the naive can miss the implicit endorsement of the poets in both the cases.

It was necessary to quote at length from two histories of English literature on the same poet to demonstrate fully how established reputations are difficult to disturb for the reason that the historian of literature has been a compiler of received reputations and what one historian does, the other repeats with additions and omissions of details while the heart of the matter remains the same. And yet all that has happened during the past fifty years in English poetry should have called for new assessments or revaluations in the literature of the past. As T. S. Eliot says, “What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them” (The Sacred Wood).

It is that which Leavis demonstrates in his classic of revaluation of the same title, which is better literary criticism and better literary history, immeasurably superior to those representatives of which we have considered in the foregoing paragraphs.

. Literary history 'could be successfully attempted only by a critic and would then be essential literary criticism,' insists Leavis.
Again: “They (histories of English poets) will have to be re-written at least with more consistency than they now possess, and with emphasis on a more vital conception of the nature of poetry than that which now underlies them.”

We have seen how when T. S. Eliot had written his best poetry we, in India, were still sticking to Old English and Middle English in the name of “mental discipline” and were swearing by Romantic and Victorian poets because of their capacity to ‘move’ us and help to escape from the harsh realities of life. And in Fiction we had no standards whatever. As Leavis quotes from Bateson, who claims to write a new ‘Essay in Literary History’, W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot were both omitted deliberately because the one is Irish, the other American, and the language they ‘maltreat with such masterly virtuosity is not exactly English but a dead language’. Also, Bateson’s claim that “A Shropshire Lad” has exactly those qualities of directness, concision and inevitability, that Hopkins’s style of art misses”. This was in the mid-thirties, and it is criticism such as this that had brought about a sterility in our literary studies. To Leavis these are symptomatic of critical ineptitude. His interests are more vital, more relevant to the present, the immediate present. Recording of received reputations by a literary historian in the name of scholarship is to Leavis “inimical to criticism, that is, to intelligence”. It is interesting that his Revaluation was written after his work on modern poetry. For he endeavours to see the poetry of the present as continuation and development, that is, as the most significant, contemporary life of tradition. And above all, he endeavours, where the poetry of the past is concerned, to realize to the full the implications of the truism that ‘its life is in the present or nowhere; it is alive in so far as it is alive for us’ (italics mine). He sets out the scope of his work in clear and unequivocal terms: “My aim does not comprise exhaustiveness; on the contrary it involves a strict economy. It is to give as clearly as can be given without misleading simplification the main lines of development in the English tradition — to give, as it were the essential structure”. The method is one of extension of the study of individual poets. For they live in the tradition as much as the tradition lives in them.

This approach, Leavis considers, is the true business of the critic which is to “perceive for himself, to make the finest and
sharpest relevant discriminations and to state his findings as responsibly, clearly and forcibly as possible”. Then even if he is wrong, says Leavis, he has forwarded the business of criticism — by the profitable discussion of literature.

I moved onto Leavis’s *New Bearings in English Poetry* which, considering his major interests in life and literature, he could not have failed to write. Indeed, that is his first book on English poetry. To Leavis, Literature matters because life matters. That is precisely what throws up the challenge to the critic in contemporary society. He opens his book with the observation: “Poetry matters little to the modern world. That is, very little of contemporary intelligence concerns itself with poetry”. As a teacher and as a critic he feels called upon to take note of it and do something about it. He settles to his task at once when he describes the contemporary situation as depressing for poetry. Why is it so? The causes are far in the 19th century when poetry, except for some notable efforts, was largely escapist and so lost its hold on life. The poet proudly declared himself “idle singer of an empty day looking before and after and pining for what is not.” And Leavis writes — and when he writes, literary criticism is indistinguishable from essential literary history: “The preconceptions coming down to us from the last century were established in the period of the great Romantics. ... it is largely in their being vague and undefined their power has lain.” That is, poetry and the intelligence of the age lose touch with each other and poetry has ceased to matter much. And yet poetry does matter when the “poet is more alive than other people, more alive in his own age. He is, as it were at the most conscious point of the race in his time.” Having reserved his discussion of the Romantics to a separate book, he deals with the immediate predecessors. Why did Tennyson fail? Because, says Leavis, he set out solemnly to wrestle with the ‘problems of the age’ but he did not expose himself freely to the rigours of the contemporary climate; and because his poetry belongs to the palace. In Leavis’s opinion Arnold also failed to give a new direction to poetry either as critic or as poet. It is a poetry of statement and not of enactment and so has no more value than copy-book maxims. About Browning, Leavis resorts to a frontal
attack when he wishes: had he been less robust and more sensitive and intelligent. How true when we read lines like:

God's in His Heaven
And all's right with the world.

It is this kind of 'robust optimism' which made the poet rather beefy and complacent that Leavis warns us against.

David Daiches writes in his *A Critical History of English Literature* about the Modern age: "The nearer he (the historian of literature) comes to his own time the scrappier and more arbitrary his account is bound to be. He is wisest to lay his pen in medias res." Yeats, Eliot, Dylan Thomas, Virginia Woolf, Joyce, D. H. Lawrence and H. G. Wells — get twenty pages together while Milton alone gets sixty. If this is what literary history can do, what, one asks, is the need for writing a new history? From this chaos of poets Leavis singles out Hopkins, Yeats, (of the later period), Pound (of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly") and T. S. Eliot to each of whom he gives considerable space by way of elucidating their important, representative poems and establishes the criterion of greatness, not against a set of specifications but as something felt and realized. Even significant modern poets like Edward Thomas, De la Mare and Wilfred Owen are considered and their significance established. And this task, to Leavis, is bound up with an equally important task of pulling down false gods from their pedestals: Modernist poets like the Sitwells, Spender, Dylan Thomas and a good bit of Auden adjudged important by current metropolitan values. And yet such is the plight of intelligence even in England, that a critic who made an assessment of contemporary literature for the B.B.C., one of the main agencies of transmission of British culture, writes, (to quote only two valuations) that Hardy is 'the father of modern English poetry' and that Auden is T. S. Eliot's 'successor' and for 'a while his supplanter'.

Similarly the English Novel: someone mentioned above, sums up, and himself represents, the critical chaos in contemporary England when he writes of English fiction: "Hardly a month passes by without something appearing which calls for serious attention".

As in *New Bearings*, in his *Great Tradition*, too, Leavis at once grasps the contemporary anarchy in the field of fiction: "The
field offers such insidious temptations to complacent confusions of judgment and to critical indolence'. He picks out Henry James, Conrad and D. H. Lawrence from this confusion and they necessitate a re-ordering of the tradition. That precisely is what Leavis undertakes to do in *The Great Tradition*: he has "constituted a coherent tradition and has thus made a large body of work easily available to understanding" (Trilling). His concern for serious standards takes him back to the origin and growth of fiction which he wants to 'establish challenging discriminations'. He knows his business and knows how to set about it. He wants to deal only 'with such fiction as belongs to literature'. In the 19th century itself one is confronted with Trollope, Charlotte Yonge, Mrs. Gaskell, Wilkie Collins, Charles Reade; Charles and Henry Kingsley, Marryat Shorthouse — all of them publicized as living classics. Leavis wisely leaves them out of his study, but says in a significant footnote that the only novelist who hasn’t been revived is Disraeli. While he disclaims any permanent currency for Disraeli, to Leavis he has "the interests of a supremely intelligent politician who has a sociologist’s understanding of civilization and its movement in his time". Lest it sound dogmatic, he tells us where to find these interests — exemplified in his books: in the trilogy, *Coningsby, Sybil and Townsend*. A footnote like this from an intelligent and responsible critic seems more helpful in reviving what needs to be revived and recovered from the past of English fiction than pages of information on Disraeli’s life and letters.

He starts distinguishing the major novelists who count in the same way as major poets. Leavis’s incisive mind makes an observation which is so useful to a literary historian: "That the eighteenth century which hadn’t much lively reading to choose from, but had much leisure should have found *Tom Jones* exhilarating is not surprising, nor is it that Scott and Coleridge should have been able to give the work superlative praise". ‘Standards are formed in comparison and what opportunities had they for that?’ Further he examines the grounds on which the reputation of *Tom Jones* is built. For its ‘perfect construction’! and Leavis’s comment is: "There can’t be subtlety of organization without richer matter to organize and subtler interests than Fielding has to offer". Then he deals with Fielding’s ‘range and variety’ for which he is so celebrated, with an irony which is
To Cambridge on Damodadas Scholarship

devote while devastating. "... it is true that some episodes take place in the country and some in the town, some in the churchyard and some in the inn, some on the high road and some in the bed-chamber and so on". Range and variety by themselves don't mean much to Leavis; it is in terms of the essential human interest they can offer that they matter and Fielding's attitudes and concern with human nature are simple and produce an effect of monotony, when exhibited at the length of an 'epic in prose'. As example of Leavis's disinterestedness one finds him recommending Joseph Andrews as proof of what Fielding could do. Again, the revaluation, not in terms of external action but of inward interest. "We all know that if one wants a more inward interest it is to Richardson we must go". He finds his support and sanction for it in an older critic known for his integrity and robustness, viz., Johnson who preferred Richardson to Fielding.

In his discussion of Jane Austen he sees through the conventional mind of Lord David Cecil (who had been an influential critic with academics all over) who calls George Eliot 'the first great modern novelist'. But Leavis understands 'influence' differently: "What one great original artist learns from another whose genius and problems are necessarily very different, is the hardest kind of 'influence' to define, even when we see it to have been of the profoundest importance." He quotes representative passages from both the novelists to show the nature of George Eliot's indebtedness to Jane Austen: it is Jane Austen's irony, "What she (George Eliot) found was readily assimilated to her own needs".

George Eliot is important not because of her Puritan background, as David Cecil thinks but because of her evangelical background, her 'radically reverent attitude towards life, a profound seriousness of the kind that is a first condition of any real intelligence...'. This is important to Leavis for 'James did go to school to George Eliot'. Hence Leavis's discussion of Daniel Deronda and Portrait of a Lady.

Now, why does Leavis include Henry James in the tradition? For "his registration of human consciousness is one of the classical creative achievements: it added something as only genius can". His entire study of James is an elucidation of this point.
How does Conrad find a place in the English tradition? Leavis says that his themes and interests demanded the concreteness and action — the dramatic energy of English. We might go further and say that Conrad chose to write in English for reasons that led him to become a British Master Mariner. The Merchant Service is a spiritual fact and a spiritual symbol.

Thackeray gets a passing mention and as for Meredith Leavis can just find the time to read his *Egoist* and no more. In his opinion 'it is a little comical that Hardy should have been considered representative of modern consciousness'. It is understandable why Leavis with his life-enhancing values treats the author of *Tess* that way. The standards that work against Hardy express themselves strongly in favour of Lawrence. To Leavis, D. H. Lawrence is the most daring innovator in 'form', 'method' and 'technique' and these are dictated by an urgent kind of interest in life. Indeed, I haven't anywhere else seen so much connected literary history, so much scholarship, so accurately, that is, so relevantly established and so many valuations and revaluations made acceptable; discriminations gone virtually unchallenged, — rather, given currency by critic after critic — all, in twenty-seven pages. That is a feat which only a critic of Leavis's equipment, insights, and clarity of mind and vigour of expression could do.

To the extent he has done this and to the extent teachers of literature succeed in winning the critical attention of their pupils to his merits as a critic our conventional histories of literature are rendered obsolete. One criticism is: Why did the author of *The Great Tradition* not make any reference to the great masters of fiction in France, Russia much less the rest of the world? Did his 'Englishness' fetter his mind? Does 'comparison' exclude writers of other ages and other countries.

All the same the old literary historians with their learned encyclopaedic surveys of literary theory, movements, influences and such other pedantry have been 'routed' 'out of the academy', by his 'challenging discriminations'. This, to me, remains Leavis's unique and most significant service to literature and literary criticism; and for India, perhaps the most important invisible import of recent times from England.

So much for my 'preparation' before I could actually set my eye on him. I can't say all this had sunk into my consciousness,
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because I didn’t have the time to digest what I read in haste and gathered from discussions with others in Cambridge — all in the course of two weeks or so. It certainly prepared me to understand the general cast of his mind, and not feel excluded from his discussions at tutorials.

I walked up to Downing College to meet Leavis. The man was his own history. And for me he summed up the portrait of an age with its ‘yes’ and ‘no’, and that nebulous area between Yes and No.

As I introduced myself before tutorials began for our small group, Leavis was gracious enough to remark in raised voice: ‘You know, I held my heart like this, (holding out his fist on the chest), like this, when Gandhi and Nehru were fighting for Indian freedom. Acquaintance deepened before term ended into warmth and personal concern which expressed itself in a handsome gesture to shift me to the Ph.D. programme, unsought: ‘You know, Indian students who come to do English here, prefer to work for a Ph.D. It seems your universities place a high premium on it’. Thank you, I said, and dashed off a quick note to my mentor, Eagleton, at Mysore, thinking he would be impressed by the high expectations Leavis must have implied by this gesture. Eagleton’s response was something to this effect: ‘The University has sent you to do the Tripos — he was a Tripos man himself and didn’t go in for the Ph.D. Very few did in those days. L. C. Knights didn’t. William Walsh didn’t. Enright didn’t. Ludowyk who came to Ceylon didn’t. Many of the lesser ones did! — because of the training it imparts to those who go out to teach; Ph. D. gives a handle to your name, yes, but you can do it after, if you so wish?’ Leavis couldn’t agree more, what with his deep prejudice against the academicism of which the Ph.D. was a misleading symbol.

A small advantage of pursuing a Ph.D. programme at Cambridge, I noticed, was the privilege to walk the streets at night without a gown. And I had to pay a price for violating the rules of the game in my statu pupillari. It was January 30th 1948, when Nehru broadcast in choked voice, ‘the light has gone out of the world and there is darkness everywhere’. I was returning from Bharath Raj Singh’s rooms after commiserating with each other, sometime around 10, with emptiness
everywhere and the weight of my huge Siberian overcoat, but without the gown on it. I had my first encounter with the Proctor and the two Bulldogs accompanying him. One of them came near me with a question in cookey which I couldn’t puzzle out. Then it was the Proctor’s turn to ask:

Are you a member of the University, Sir?
Yes, I am, my identity revealed
I am afraid you have to wear a gown

The gown, I had, and in my terrible depression I had rolled it and thrown on my shoulders. But reluctant to reveal the reason behind, I cooked up a lie which I guessed would sound plausible. I said I couldn’t wear it on the huge coat and would soon go in for a new one. Which was a fact. But he wouldn’t budge even after trying it on me.

“I quite see your point and sympathize with you. But come and see me at Pembroke College. Friday, 6 P.M.” I went in resentment at having to be treated like a wrong-doer. “Oh, yes, you are the Indian gentleman I met last week without the gown. And the polite nothing again: “I quite sympathize with you,” but the inexorable English insistence on discipline: “But I must be impartial, you know. 6sh. 8d please!” Fuming, I emptied all the small change on the table, keeping the crowns back in protest. And before I left, a parting kick: Next time you are seen without the gown — it will be 13sh and 4d — with a snigger and goodbye into the bargain.

I gather the proctorial system was tried in Osmania University, in India, and given up. As an English friend observed in good humour at another time: “You have the same laws as the British; we apply them, you don’t!” Hence the administrative chaos and the inescapable nepotism and corruption, I muttered to myself.

Anyhow, I was to remain without a Ph.D., for in Princeton Willard Thorp turned down my query if I could work towards a Ph.D. degree: What? an American Ph.D. after Cambridge Tripos! Surprised that any American should say that, but felt fortified that I could, after all, be without it. And after, it was too late, for it was my turn to supervise the Ph.D. programme at Mysore with Ranganna retired and Eagleton gone to take up a UNESCO assignment. My only credentials were headship of
the department together with my Cambridge - Princeton experience, both impressive paper qualifications in those days. The Ph. D. glamour had just begun in Indian Universities. Thanks to the still current 19th century conception of the University as a disseminator of knowledge, the other function, namely research, had taken a back seat — the War and the scientific research it entailed was the catalyst. It was at this time a younger teacher from Machilipattanam approached me to be his guide: his only ambition, he said, was that when he died it should be engraved on his tombstone, ‘Here lies Dr. R’. Motivation enough to excuse myself! I have since supervised more than a dozen Ph.D.’s in our own department, been officially recognized as Indian supervisor to a Ph.D. scholar working on the Indian literary scene at Cambridge and adjudicated around 60 dissertations, some of them from Australia, England, Singapore, Malaysia and the United States. I should add I seldom agreed to be examiner unless the thesis was in an area in which I had at least minimal expertise and I could profit by reading it. And the result of reading most Ph.D. dissertations is the gradual erosion of faith in Ph.D. degrees, largely because of inadequate preparation. But then, it is a vicious circle, for unless you work towards a degree, you don’t read in our set-up, where one could survive by counting the years of service. But it is the insistence as an essential requirement for promotion that has vitiated learning. More of it later.

Leavis’s Concern for Pupils

It was a Saturday morning in June 1949. I was still in bed nursing my aching body after strains of the Tripos examination — the nervous strain I had passed through before during the Final Honours exam in Mysore, recurring remorselessly at Cambridge as I lay musing if I had let myself down, let down B.W. Downs, who had thought well of me and predicted a First Class for me (in a written reference), to Eagleton at home, and above all, Leavis.

I heard a knock on the door
Oh, Mr. Bird, leave me alone, I want to be in bed a little longer, I wailed.
‘Narasimhaiah, it’s me’. A voice I knew! It pierced my bones.
Elated, confused, I took one leap to the door to find the great man standing before me — Leavis’s very first visit to me in all two years at Cambridge. ‘Dress up quickly and come to my room. There’s someone I like you to meet.’

He could have been a visitor from Mars. ‘Dr. Stevenson, Director of the Rockefeller Foundation; ‘Narasimhaiah, my pupil from India’. After this formal introduction, Leavis disappeared from his room, leaving the two of us there. The conversation was informal, meandering, no designs suspected, nevertheless covered a wide range of topics, but geared to no end, it seemed. Stevenson looked at his watch: 11.30. ‘Shall we go to the town and have lunch in some restaurant?’ asked the visitor graciously. We ambled along, talking while avoiding people on the pavement; withdrawing in the intervals, into myself, to break through the enigma all this entailed. Lunch over, we stepped out and as Stevenson said good-bye with an ambivalent, “Let’s hope we shall meet in one continent or the other”, the enigma, I thought, was resolved with these words of polite nothing! Seymour Betsky and his wife, Sarah, were at Cambridge on a Rockefeller Fellowship and had once or twice mentioned the possibility of my visit to the States on a Rockefeller Fellowship. It was all vague and in passing. Did Betsky mention it to Leavis? Did I muster courage at some stage to share with him my interest in a possible American visit? I have no clear recollection: Leavis must have nominated me for a Fellowship, or why should the exalted Director of a great foundation come to see an odd Indian? No applications, no nerve-racking interviews, in the characteristic Rockefeller Foundation way. Was Leavis’s reputation at stake, because of me? Fearing the worst, I didn’t summon the courage to call on Leavis to take leave of him and so left a note for him in the Porters’ Lodge at Downing college and left Cambridge for good — to wait for my boat to Bombay. It could be quite some weeks what with pressure on P. & O. boats in those days. The scholarship could take care of the waiting but what of the pining family of old parents and young wife with a 5 year old boy — all living on a paltry allowance of Rs. 50 a month. At last, the date of departure was announced. And meanwhile came a long cable — looked like a letter to me — redirected from Christ’s College Office. I rubbed my eyes to take a good look at the contents:
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Fellowship awarded for 10 months; Stipend for me, Allowance for wife and child and Airfare from Bombay to New York and back.

My first task was to call Leavis at Cambridge and announce the award of Fellowship and thank him for everything, because it was very largely his gift. He said he ‘knew it a fortnight ago’. Obviously he didn’t like me to feel obliged to him and so let it come from the proper source. How very different from the popular image of this man: ‘great detractor’, ‘nasty man’ ‘un­daunted champion’ of Eliot and Lawrence to an unappreciative world’ to Matthiessen, ‘Narrow, insular, and the very reverse of life-enhancing’ to F. L. Lucas, one of his Cambridge colleagues; and ‘perpetually on a war-footing’, to Kingsly Amis. But, he was, I should posit, ‘to wipe out the viciousness of a jealous mediocrity’ in Malcolm Bradbury’s words, ‘one of that very, very tiny handful of critics in our time who will take an essential and significant place in the great tradition of literary criticism which he did so much to make explicit and then urgently and actively to extend’. He put it with greater emotional intensity when we were together participating in a seminar at the East-West Center, Hawaii in 1974.

My Cambridge contemporaries

Before I conclude my account of Cambridge I must make some reference to my contemporaries at the University. Derek Wilkes, now a flourishing barrister in London and my only friend of Cambridge days with whom I have kept up contact, then a student at Christ’s, and like me, did English. He was in trouble with the Senior Tutor (B.W. Downs) once or twice. Derek, too lazy (now blessed with a wife who looks after him as women in traditional societies still do; and yet, she is a medical doctor) to bestow attention on little things, would empty his tea kettle in the wash basin causing frequent blocking which irritated Mr. and Mrs. Bird. Their entreaties made no dent on Derek. It was promptly reported to Downs, who sent for him to say there are ‘instances of students having been sent down for lesser offences’. And Downs knew Derek was no freshman from school; he had returned from war-service. But he was ir­repressible. And next time a callow youth, fresh from school, thought it fit to complain to the Tutor that Derek was engaged
in a conversation on Thursday evening with a visiting member of Parliament — to speak at the Labour Club, of which Derek was the enthusiastic chairman, — breaking the silence of the place, so congenial for serious study!

They were talking informally after the meeting and with his characteristic passion for causes in those days, it is possible Derek did raise his voice a few times. But he was not aware and so denied it. But the complainant persisted. And so a note from Downs to ‘Dear Derek’ that on verification he was convinced that he (Derek) did cause disturbance. But the characteristic Downsian wit and humour: “you are an energetic young man. Your movements and voice are louder than you imagine!”', were there to take the sting off. Derek has mellowed a great deal 40 years after and so even I whom he thought ‘infantile in politics’ at that time, could confidently discuss the political scene of the world with him. I find his passion for poetry undiminished, though. As we sit talking he reels off chunks from Shakespeare, Milton, Herbert, Vaughan, Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot. Eliot’s Selected Poems 1909-25 in hard cover with Derek’s name in it summons nostalgic memories for me. I do hope one day when he retires from actual practice as barrister, he will still write his much cherished book on ‘Law and Literature,’ that is, if he cares to divide his time between that and music — his singing in operas for private enjoyment is still a lively topic of conversation among his friends. Not Milton’s orotundities but Derek’s resonant voice (as was Eagleton’s at Mysore before I went to Cambridge) is to me the god-given organ voice of England. More than Law, Literature and Music Derek’s interest is still in conversation with close friends to whom he is loyal and can generate deep loyalties in them. I haven’t given up hopes of having him in Mysore with his wife, Anna, and giving him Mysore pan with betel nut, done in the proper way, for everytime he came to my room at Christ’s he would fling into his mouth some of it from my bottle and spit out the ‘gravel pieces’! And one day, missing the bottle in its place Derek asked for his ‘gravel pieces’. He had acquired a ‘taste’ for it!, he confessed.

Derek and I shared a common aversion to certain dishes in College and at the sight of such food we would signal to each other and charge into the Greek restaurant next to the college.
As he saw me help myself to a vitamin pill after food, in my early days at Cambridge Derek was curious to know what it was and I had to lecture him on the coming winter and my fortifying myself against it. He thought I was quite healthy and didn't need it. And when each held his ground I raised my voice to defend myself: 'Damn it all, I have paid for it'. 'You may have paid', continued Derek, 'but they are so scarce in England now. And there are people who need them more than you do'. A common enough example of the Englishman's social conscience and sense of fairness in ordinary dealings. How melodramatic our professions of spirituality and loka Kalyana!

Perhaps this is what irritated Acharya Kripalani, one of our tallest patriots who, long after Independence, declared publicly that he sometimes wished the British came back to rule us.

Another friend of those days, Christie Eliezer, a Sri Lankan of great promise and considerable achievement was Fellow at Christ's. It seems, whenever Dirac of Quantum Mechanics reputation went to teach in other countries, he would entrust his work to Christie, who had won all the scholarships and medals worth winning at Cambridge. I once asked him if Cambridge had declined over the centuries. His answer, meant half in jest (to tease his wife) was 'yes, because the Fellows marry these days!'. His wife, Ranee, who was like an elder sister to me and Bharath Raj Singh, had come to live with him. We looked forward to Ranee's Sunday lunches where we all joined, each to cook his special dish and in the absence of such expertise, cut a heap of onions!

I still remember a joke Christie shared with me relating to Canon Raven, Master of Christ's. It seems once on a railway journey, a stranger asked Raven, the theologian, about a brother of his: where is that great classicist? 'And your other brother, the natural scientist?' Raven may have modestly mumbled he had no 'brothers! He was sufficiently accomplished in each of them to have made a name for himself in all. Like Haldane, the classicist, becoming a renowned Life Science man towards the end of his life in which capacity he came to India to live — and die. Christie also narrated an anecdote to illustrate how Raven administered the College. A Fellowship fell vacant in the Natural Sciences. Raven had his eye on a brilliant young man
from London University while the other Fellows were opposed to his election because the Christ’s man who was on a temporary fellowship was found to be a harmonious member of the group! Raven’s persuasions failed and so he had to assert when he raised his voice to say, ‘Gentlemen, a harmonious group is not necessarily a distinguished one!’ And Raven had his way. Think of our pitiful vice-chancellors who invariably yield to political pressure groups — and for ignoble reasons.

A talk which I went to hear at Fitzwilliam Museum on Cambodian Art by someone who had a stint in diplomatic service in Indo-China held something of a warning for me. And not only me. Question time over I went close to the speaker to ask if any Indian he knew at the time did the kind of research he had done in the midst of his official duties. Yes, he remembered there was in the embassy a very intelligent Indian who used to eat hillocks of rice with curry into the scoop at the top and go to have his siesta under the banana tree! Compare ourselves — our top civil servants and men in the diplomatic corps — with the scores of British administrators in Indian Civil Service who, as effective officers, nevertheless found the time for some of the most scholarly pursuits relating to the Indian scene. Do we as a people talk it off what with disciplined habits could be channelized into works of scholarship? Consequently we let them write our history in art, literature, law, philosophy, status of women, even our modes of worship, the temples and the idols in them; and either accept their accounts wholesale or foam at the mouth without so much as writing effective rejoinders or well considered reviews.

And compare our fire-eating students with their counterparts at Cambridge. A friend of mine got a First in History Tripos and when I asked if he was going to take up research he said he wasn’t that first and so would go to teach in a school. No wonder their school education is the envy of our universities. Our undue emphasis on degrees and classes has often marginalised genuine merit — the threats our incompetent students hold out to examiners, their own teachers among them, instead of demanding better education, have brought down our students’ standing deplorably. But I am here trying to compare their conduct in public.
I remember once on Guy Fawkes Day (a pale counterpart of our Holi) undergraduates went on rampage such as roof climbing and setting ramshackle vehicles on fire. All in fun and merriment, except that year they were guilty of excesses. And an announcement promptly appeared on the Notice Board, something to this effect: It is hoped that 'undergraduates regret incidents on the Guy Fawke's Day no less than senior members of the University'. I learnt students collected enough money to compensate the damage. Obviously understatements elicited appropriate response: There are shared assumptions in an ordered society. But the most striking, for an Indian certainly, of them all was the notice relating to Tripos results before the formal official announcement-no, before the valuation of scripts had started!

"It is expected that, all going well, the following gentlemen (listed below) will proceed to the Convocation"

I guess, exams were conducted to determine the class but for a pass there was the cumulative record of the dinners eaten (the equivalent of attendance), the Tutorials attended and the recommendations made by Tutors spread over two years' impressions based on close acquaintance with their work. I was most amused to see examiners coming to the hall to collect answer scripts of this highest exam at Cambridge and carrying them home in the cycle-basket. At least I saw Leavis do it! Another time just before the exam, one of the lecturers, announced publicly on the last day of his lectures, he had set the paper on Literary Criticism and if anyone did badly he could write him (the examiner) a postcard! And no one was so fatuous as to take it seriously. Compare it with the kind of secrecy that goes with our exams and the travesty that follows.

Anyway, what happens to all those top students from our universities who get into the Indian Administrative and Foreign services, not to speak of Teaching in which so few, are keen anyway to push the frontiers of knowledge. In the universities of Oxbridge many of them chose to work in areas which seemed outlandish or of little consequence. But the life of the mind demanded utter devotion. And that they gave in abundance. B.W. Downs, the Senior Tutor at Christ's, a member of the English Faculty, by no means very distinguished as teacher of
English, practically gave all his time to Norwegian Studies and I knew it because of his book on Ibsen. Not a week did he miss going to London to work in the British Museum. And yet, as Senior Tutor, and later as Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge no detail concerning the College and the University was too small or unimportant for him.

One understands if bright men in the IAS do not measure up to the former I.C.S. men, what with a changed society they administer today leaving them with little leisure for pursuits of the mind. But my concern is with some of my own contemporaries in academic life who showed great promise but did not fulfill it in the manner expected of them: Damodar Thakur, who did English and went back to teach in Patna, published a collection of critical essays called *The Constant Pursuit* apparently inspired by Leavis’s *Common Pursuit* and as we were expecting it to generate more books of that order, became an educational administrator which sucked him up. Sad that one who knew his Sanskrit well enough to speak (as he did at a Mysore Seminar on Criticism) with an insider’s knowledge of Kuntaka’s *Vakroktijivitam*, the kind of scholarship which the country needed desperately from able teachers of English but remains unfulfilled as in that other fine scholar Bidu Bhusan Das, who did his B.Litt at Oxford at the same time as I was at Cambridge. Bidu kept up his wide reading and continued to give proof of his alert mind and fine sensibility for literature, but hardly anything beyond by way of systematic scholarly activity worthy of his abilities. But the most disappointing of all is Sita Chari, later Sita Narasimhan, who with her Star First in Tripos which paved the way for a Fellowship at Newnham, a rare privilege, nearly ended, I gather, as she began — she began, as supervisor of undergraduates and carried on for three decades or more with no known work of scholarship in print — which one had a right to expect from a person of her calibre. Among those who enriched the Indian scene by their contributions to journalism were B. C. Vergheese, M. V. Desai and Chanchal Sarkar, the last of whom has gone round the world on various assignments and internationally known for his important reports on sensitive issues. There was Mohit Sen who came to be a distinguished theoretician of the Communist Party of India; I.G. Patel, our senior contemporary, sometime Governor.
of the Reserve Bank of India and presently Director of the far­famed London School of Economics, a unique-honour for an Indian, but I am not sure if his peers in Economics think that he made a big difference to the Indian economic thought. One gathers his senior colleagues in Baroda made it difficult for this brilliant young teacher to pursue his learning and teaching in the Department, without tension. Does India stifle first-rate talent or were they not tough enough to absorb the widely acknowledged hazards of the Indian intellectual scene?
I was to return home from Cambridge with my moderate success in the Exam which Eagleton in his generosity thought was 'excellent' and Leavis soothed me by citing the case of L.C. Knights who got a second class after a Scottish M.A. and had long before, pointed to one of the 'elite' from India (Leavis's word for him) of a slightly earlier day who got a double First which he dismissed as of no consequence, for like most firsts, he didn't deserve it!' As if to make amends for the moderate success at the exam came the Rockefeller Fellowship, the first in Humanities, for all Asia, as the Deputy Director Gilpatric was to say later, in an obvious attempt to placate me in the presence of a distinguished group of Indians. Flushed with triumph in the context of the hullabaloo over the Assistant Professorship two years earlier, but assuming a modesty, I took care to speak of it in deliberate English understatement which, with two years' stay at Cambridge, had now become even a habit with me. With B. L. Manjunath as the new Vice-Chancellor and Eagleton for a friend and admirer, my study leave for a year's research at Harvard on 'Novelists as Critics' (with George Eliot, Henry James and D. H. Lawrence for close study,) was smooth sailing at the University Office — even without Balakrishniya who now felt reassured his stand in backing me wasn't dishonourable. As I began to make my travel arrangements, a second telegram from the Rockefeller Foundation said I was now placed at Princeton to let me take advantage of a prestigious international Seminar on Criticism sponsored by the Foundation. And I was advised to advance my visit by a week, as the Seminar commenced on September 19th, with 'wife to follow by boat'. I was now somewhat familiar with foreign travel but, with Bangalore for her farthest horizon, travel by
boat was ruled out for my wife and we both flew to New York, my first-ever air travel and for my wife, first-ever visit abroad though the years held more in store for both.

We were met by Betsy and Sarah at the airport and turned over to Chadbourne Gilpatric, the Deputy Director in charge of me at the Rockefeller Foundation. At lunch in a restaurant, our host ordered Manhattan for himself. And I surmised it would be discourteous not to follow suit! My Cambridge stay, if it didn’t succeed in initiating me into liquor, didn’t instil courage in me either, to say or do what was good for me. How very right was Gandhi when he observed Indians must learn to say No! He must have known how so many of us said Yes when we meant No! My wife wisely ordered tomato juice and was sipping it, while I emptied the glass of its spirituous contents, in one gulp — on an empty stomach. I thought I saw the worlds began to revolve: the solid chair I sat on, the elegant table with tempting dishes spread on it, the conversation which I knew not how it was drifting, were all poor supports. And water was no instant neutralizer. All I knew, very vaguely, was I was discrediting myself in the eyes of my sponsors. Did my host pretend not to notice or did I cleverly conceal my predicament? For, I think he was still talking — to my luck, did all the talking himself — as I was trying to put up a resistance against the enveloping inebriation. I registered as in a dream the monologue was moving from Leavis’s insistence on the ‘organic society’ (which for my host ‘had no meaning when Hollywood had come to stay’), to Princeton as member of the Ivy League and the coming seminar on Criticism sponsored by the Foundation and the names of America’s distinguished critics participating in it etc. etc.

Something worse than Manhattan was in store for me and my wife has yet to recover from the nauseating experience. Once in Princeton, Mrs Frankl, a Jewish lady, asked us both to a Sunday lunch and in her anxiety not to embarrass us she asked on the phone if we were vegetarians. ‘No, we eat everything that crawls and creeps except beef’ I pontificated, which of course she avoided. And when a second helping came I complimented her on the ‘delicious meat’. Which she promptly denied: ‘It isn’t meat, it is veal; we are very fond of it’. My wife would have brought out what she had eaten but mercifully her simple
vocabulary didn't include 'veal'. I was annoyed that my host, Jewish herself, shouldn't have known beef and veal belonged to the same caste, as we say in India, and shared the same antipathy among Hindus like pork and bacon among the orthodox Jews. The lexical meaning of the word and not what it stands for in a certain cultural context is the bane of scientific, empirical outlook. It's the death of Imagination.

We took delight in asking American friends for an Indian meal almost every other week-end though to my shame I must confess once or twice we did calculate that the dollars spent were the dollars badly wanted to take things home. And I began to despise myself for my double-thinking. Fortunately it was a passing thought and never became even a peripheral part of my disposition in life. Once Dean Brown came with his wife, enjoyed the meal except when my persuasion to have more went a little too far — by Western standards and he quipped 'I thought Indians were a non-violent people!' That didn't adversely affect his offer to confer an honorary degree on my wife for her cooking, but the rules of the University had made no provision to recognize such a civilized accomplishment! he added. Mrs Brown had something else to thank us for: their coming to us after the departure of the Indonesian boy who was staying with them for a fortnight under some exchange programme had induced in her nausea for rice but she now knew one could make a variety of dishes with rice. The Indonesian boy, it seems, couldn't eat anything but rice — rice for breakfast, rice for lunch and rice for dinner until rice started coming out of their ears and nostrils!

Princeton, predictably different from Cambridge, but very like it in its size, population, students on cycles, visitors with a leisurely pace — for an American town and the atmosphere the University radiated from the town-centre to make it a civilizing presence for the people living there, soon got into my bloodstream. Mysore, Cambridge, Princeton — each my heart's delight for the life of the mind and pursuit of excellence, generally. And have remained so over the years regardless of whatever other centres of learning were added to my experience. But there were differences, and nowhere so pronounced, to begin with, as in language. Bernard Shaw's 'one people divided by a common tongue', while exaggerated by
Shaw's penchant for effect didn't go unnoticed by an outsider - what the linguist calls 'departures from Standard English,' standard set by the British, that is!

As in Cambridge I lived intensely, here too - I had developed a virtual greed for betterment of the mind. I became a keen observer of my surroundings, looking rather for differences than affinities, where, I still think, lies the key to the growth of the mind and finer awareness and generosity of heart. My wife, an Indian woman, a rather rare sight on the streets of Princeton - Princeton was not New York, though within easy reach of it — provided a chance for innocent onlookers, fed on fibs by popular magazines, who were curious to know if it was common for Indian women to walk 3 feet behind their husbands. 'And for husbands to stop and frown, smile and patch up, not abandon!' I would soon add. How friendly and informal were people in a small town! Some stranger would suddenly stop his car and exuding warmth, ask us to 'hop in', as we went out sauntering to get some fresh air into the lungs and exercise for the limbs. 'Where are you bound?' I brought up a different name each time, to excuse ourselves. 'Oh, it only means a slight detour for me, but it's a pleasure'. The courtesies were the greater if we were seen walking with loads of provisions from Department Stores with 'milk-fed' chicken, a constant food item and if once in a blue moon I asked for lamb the man in charge would quip, 'Tired of chicken!' My wife, an austere vegetarian till then, came to acquire a reputation for polishing it impeccably.

A simple gesture was destined to have a lasting friendship. Mrs. Condell of the Rental Office at the University, one of the most charming women we have known, now a nun in her old age, evinced more than official interest in finding a proper flat for us at 76, Cedar Lane, off the main Nassau Street, within walking distance from the University but almost on the outskirts of this charming little town, and quiet but for the joyous shouts, leaps and laughter of children who loved to talk with my wife, asking curious questions about her sari, kumkum on the face ('dot busters' were unknown), bangles and nose-ring. The flat was unfurnished but better than that other, notified in bold letters as an '18th Century House', enough to scare prospective tenants away. The conveniences, or their want, confirmed the antiquity of the building in its upkeep! The general
American pride in tracing the genealogy of family names on parchment did not seem very evident in keeping the past alive in day-to-day living, but predictable in a society with emphasis on 'make it new'. Which at one time led the American youth to look upon history as 'bunk' and a dead-weight. And yet it is an American sociologist who is said to have coined the phrase 'going forward to the past'. Only an American Eliot could have insisted on the value of Tradition and what looked un-American when he added that 'individual talent' was but a catalyst which brought him close to the Indian mind, because to the Indian, the individual is but an instrument in divine hands — mimiti-tanvitra. In any case it was Eliot who in our times rescued Tradition from the dead wood of Convention and made it central core of the living organism. With the result, the Westernized Indian has now learnt to make concessions to his own past which he was disposed to reject as so much junk.

The McAlpins

A touching friendship had grown between Mrs Condell and Mrs McAlpin, a lady in every gesture, thought and word. If leisure is the basis of culture, there, in her house one noticed its making. Would the princes of the Renaissance have built those magnificent cathedrals, asks W.B. Yeats, if they had waited for public opinion? It is he again who seems convinced that aristocracies have made all civilization. All this was manifest for me in a minor way in the manner a truck pulled up in front of our flat with carpets, mattresses, chairs, tables, table lamps along with kitchenware — all we could wish for in affluent America. Evidently this was done at Mrs Condell’s mention of our unfurnished apartment. And on the eve of our departure at the end of the year, Mrs McAlpin telephoned to say that they should be left as they were and would be taken care of. Mrs McAlpin’s understatements and reluctance to verbalize much, a common enough American habit, brought her close to European aristocracy for me. My friend (Professor) Norman Pearson of Yale was aware of it like other sensitive intellectuals in the States as when he remarked ‘We, Americans are like children; it isn’t enough you love us, we must be told you love us!’
Invitation to Tea one afternoon at Mrs McAlpin's residence on Pretty Brook Road and we were of course collected by her and her husband (just deceased in his 90th year). Lovely surroundings, appropriate to the name of the road. 'Don't they inspire you to write? I mean: Do you write poetry?' I asked. 'No, I shall be happy if it expresses itself in human relationships,' said Mrs McAlpin. I liked the way she put it and said so. Promptly came a book by mail Poetry as a Means of Grace, in less than a week. That was a measure of the texture of her life. And the beginning of a series of book gifts from the University Book Store: 2, 3, 4, 5 at a time and the practice continued even after we returned to India. I couldn't have chosen the titles more meticulously — literary criticism by reputed and rising critics, philosophy, history etc. etc. And hardly any fiction. I was not surprised as I had taken a good look at her private library which could do credit to a college of considerable standing for advanced learning anywhere in the world, in its diversity as well as plenitude. Once or twice a year after our return would come those marvellous letters which we have been increasingly privileged to receive from her holiday resorts, written in her own hand, still firm in her eighties, commenting on the landscape and skyscape; the trees, the flowers, their changing colours and the human beings shaped by them. Or about the talks she attended in the University and if occasionally by an Indian, a brief account of him and once or twice the results of her enquiries about me. Some at least of those letters could go straight into the publishable journals of celebrities because of her keen observation, fine insights into life and a rare sense of values — with a slight emphasis on religion in the last few years as evidenced by her frequent reference to St. John.

Ten years after we left Princeton I was visiting Yale for a term and went for a brief stay with the McAlpines. There she was, the lady, standing on the railway platform, elegant as ever in her simplicity and spontaneous in her warmth and humanity — the years had made no difference either to her appearance or the richness of her inner life. The backnumbers of The Literary Criterion had been displayed as some kind of introduction to the guests who were coming to have a meal so I could meet them, some of them, she knew, were my old friends from the University. I noticed markings and marginal notes in some
issues: the quality of some articles, she said in her generosity, was superior to what she read in American periodicals.

The one person I most wanted to meet, R. P. Blackmur, had excused himself from the party as he was away from the country. R. P. as I always referred to him, was the kind of intellectual that made a striking difference to the general image of America as land of the 'divine average'. The paradox of America! That a country in whose universities the Ph.D. is like a union card should accommodate one without a Ph.D. and without, as I gathered, even a first degree, and without benefit of the British Public School education, either. But the American Earn and Learn scheme had educated him as no prestigious school or college could. That was, someone told me, the Harvard University Bookstore where he earned a living and nurtured the mind. America has not produced a more discriminating critic — it exemplified the limits (limitlessness?) of possibility in the New world. How did he rise to that position in a university and a department noted for its obviously very high standards? There was Williard Thorp, the co-editor with Spiller and Canby of the monumental Literary History of the United States — he was the Professor I had been working with because of his specialization in American Literature, my neighbour across the road, and for all his scholarship, an admirer of Leavis’s criticism which had no pretensions to scholarship, certainly not of the American kind, Germanic; Carlos Baker, author of the prestigious volumes on Fiction and G.E. Bentley, who like his legendary namesake in 18th century England, was a byword for thoroughness in matters of Shakespeare scholarship. Bentley knew all about quarto, folio, the variation in spelling, printing, names of printers, the quality of paper, performances of plays with places and dates, costumes and colours — anything you name in Shakespeare scholarship, but at no time strayed into value judgements about the plays themselves. In the midst of them all stood R. P. Blackmur, like a lighthouse. He would talk of T.S. Eliot’s ‘spilling blood for ink’ in Four Quatrains with himself doing it, in his critical writing. If one can achieve fame by means of a single article there was his Language as Gesture, also the title of a collection of essays. In the other, The Lion and the Honeycomb, there is that little noticed marvellous essay ‘Between the Numen and the Moha: Notes toward
a theory of Literature', pointing to an uncanny grasp of that difficult Indian concept Moha, which he only borrowed from a physicist friend who was 'learning Sanskrit for relaxation' while engaged in war effort — in the making of the atom bomb — which (Blackmur observes) itself was an illustration of mohā. His unalterably incisive formulation of the theory which in his modesty he calls 'Notes towards' will be seen to be most adequate to formulate as well as validate wide-ranging literary experiences from Valmiki and Homer to Shakespeare and Eliot. And as a theory, it can supersede in its brevity and amazing clarity, the endless succession of theories in the critical jungle of our times. How one wishes the Greek and the Indian sages had interacted (more thoroughly than Plotinus, the first of the Neo-Platonists did in isolation in the 1st century A.D.) and transmitted to posterity what Blackmur perceived two thousand years after. The Western world and therefore the rest of us would have been spared the damage done to our minds by Aristotle's poetics which, ironically, left out of consideration the mystery of the gods and its profundity enacted in Greek Tragedy itself. I have often reflected on that saying in Western intellectual circles: Every one is either a Platonist or an Aristotelian. How the West made a wrong choice in history in going the way of Aristotle!

Incensed by hopes of his possible visit to India which was not difficult to arrange if only he agreed, I once asked Blackmur if he had been to India. 'No, only to Delhi!' was his snap reply, a sign of his mercurial mind. How could such a one condescend to seek a degree? In sheer love of mischief — I was impertinent, I knew — I asked him why he shouldn't send a couple of his less known essays and acquire a D.Litt? 'Ooom! who is there to adjudicate them?' he cavilled. But who really is there to adjudicate! No sane man would agree to sit in judgement on them for the award of a degree. The question, simply, is unanswerable, for me. Blackmur is a distinctive American phenomenon — the same that made Harvard and Columbia invite that cyclonic monk, Vivekananda, with a pass degree from a Colonial University to a Professor's Chair in Philosophy; Ananda Coomaraswamy, a geologist without so much as a diploma in Art to be curator of the Boston Museum; and Eric Erickson to be professor of psychology at Harvard. I must not forget to mention that, Coomaraswamy, it seems, sought a position
in Benares Hindu University as art historian, and he wasn't even called for interview—he didn't have a degree in Art! Nor did the novelists Raja Rao and G.V. Desani who have been recipients of such an honour, one holder of a B.A. degree without knowledge of the rudiments of philosophy of the scholastic kind, the other, probably without a degree. It was a dynamic Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Texas who on reading *The Serpent and the Rope*, invited him from Paris for a lecture on Buddhism. From one to a series of lectures. Then an invitation for a year's Visiting Professorship on Buddhism in the Department of Philosophy. Which later led to a division of labours with G.V. Desani who lectured on the Hinayana School of Buddhist Philosophy while Raja Rao kept the Mahayana. Which gave the writers their much needed leisure for their writing and release them from the worry of making a living. Both Raja Rao and Desani have made a great impact on young Americans in relation to Buddhism, India and the mode of life each of them pursues—ordinarily beyond the reach of academic philosophers, their minds buzzing with syllabuses, courses and pre-ordained requirements and methods of teaching. This, clearly, is a tribute to the freedom American Chairmen of university departments enjoy and the respect they command from the Administration in making such things feasible.

Not having seen a single American Literary periodical at Cambridge I was taken in by so many in one row—*Hudson Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Yale Review*, *Sewanee Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Comparative Literature* etc. etc. Nor had I heard of an 'American Literature', lying concealed behind the broad back of English Literature, whose very claim to existence, (still entertaining illusions of its continued greatness, the British at first excluded English Literature loftily from their accounts of Commonwealth Literature) is now in threat, thanks to the emerging literatures of the world, and in English too. It seems efforts are now afoot to create chairs for both American and Commonwealth Literatures at Cambridge — truly the Atlantic is a century in terms of Time! Having chosen Henry James as one of my authors for research I wished to go back as far as I could to trace the origin and growth of American Fiction and so began to audit my friend Willard Thorp's seminars. And later shared with him my decision to drop my research project and read American Literature, beginning where I liked, choosing such
works as I chanced upon, in the attempt to trace the emergence of a National Literature in an erstwhile colony. My sponsors, the Rockefeller Foundation, responded imaginatively and Thorp wasn't opposed to it, though generally speaking, American academics, like their Indian counterparts in English departments, had delayed the establishment of American Literature as an academic discipline by at least 50 years — colonial hangover hadn't spared even their pioneering recklessness. Was it his recognition of its emergence that induced Leavis to mention in nominating me for Fellowship it was 'desirable' I should have 'some American experience' before I returned home, though Leavis was to speak lightly, later, of 'the famed and flattered' American critics who didn't know how to read the English classics. — I forget the provocation that drove him to put it so harshly.

With my new charter of freedom I began to read many of the major American poets, novelists and critics, thanks to a library abounding with books from everywhere, magazines and prominent daily newspapers, some of them from India too, piled up for the benefit of research scholars. A new country, a different people, an additional literature and unlike the one I had read for years, to talk about; high dreams, widening horizons, and youthful vigour to cope with the world of action. I was eager for action and wanted very much to return home, where, it seemed to my exalted opinion of myself, nothing happened in our universities! I decided to leave a month or two before the fellowship ended.

Two philosophers I had met contributed to this urge in me; one of them, Stace, a well-known Professor of Philosophy who knew his India and Ceylon by years of stay in Ceylon, one day startled me out of my wits when he suddenly remarked that he felt 'small' in my presence. I knew he wasn't senile, but he meant India, not me personally, of course, and the rest of the conversation after dinner at his place revealed he had been reading Aurobindo's *Life Divine*. Hard nut, he said, but worth the trouble of breaking. That was what he had been looking for, 'not that Radhakrishnan stuff', as he dismissed the great popularizer of Indian philosophy in the West. Could I help him get a place in the Ashram at Pondicherry? I was not only not conversant with Aurobindo's writing but was prejudiced after making vain efforts to grapple with *Life Divine* — Aurobindo
seemed, to my impatient youthfulness, to be saying the same things again and again without progression of thought or experience. I decided to re-read Aurobindo which for various reasons had to be deferred till the early sixties. The other philosopher, Eric Kahler, was author of a great book, *Man the Measure* which he had autographed for me, having bought my second-hand car before I left. My wife and I were driving him to the Registration Office in Trenton when I heard Kahler affecting a moan from behind: 'Kahler, you are a great man today, ya, ya, great man!'

Was he without a car at his age, in America?
And why buy this junk?
Did even that embarrass him?

It embarrassed me. I felt like abandoning the car and running away at that juncture. Why were we, why was I, feverishly after material things coming from a land of renunciation?

Is it because we had missed them for centuries and were now trying to grab them at sight? With how little, as my much admired Thoreau said and Gandhi demonstrated, man can live! My village background and poverty had already alienated me sufficiently from the elite at home. Precisely that had made for much striving, I knew. But striving for what? Success? Even so I can't say I was anywhere near Walter Pater's notion of success: to 'burn with a gem-like flame'. My itching for action was unabated when I left Princeton.

Since we were returning home via England, I had written to Leavis to ask if I could come to see him, especially as my wife wished to see Cambridge and have a look at the great man and his wife. An envelope marked 'Quick Delivery' was waiting for me at the Institute of Education Hostel in Russell Square, London. It was Leavis's hand, bold as his mind and large as his heart. A curious letter! While he and his wife would be pleased to see us, Leavis had warned me not to say a word in praise of America! The reference was to my mention of the tremendous reputation he enjoyed and the manner in which critic after critic at the Seminar (and after) spoke of his critical labours and his decline of American invitations. He was dead set against America; he wouldn't like his children 'to grow up there'. And so the message to me to 'run down America as much as you
can, I'll be delighted! Mrs Leavis's insistent entreaties to him to visit the States hadn't elicited any favourable response. I am not sure that American scholars, impressed by her very insightful reading of Hawthorne's work hadn't insidiously sought to influence Leavis through her. And here I was, his own pupil, an outsider to both England and America, presuming to give a first-hand account of his critical prestige in America and naively contributing to the 'creative quarrel' (Leavis's phrase in one of his letters to me) at home! As we materialized at his residence on a rainy day my wife was overwhelmed by his courtesies and kindnesses. And as I began my stage-acting under prompting from the director, my somersault with clumsy ifs and buts puzzled QDL. She wouldn't swallow it: she reminded me of my letters from Princeton!

I would make a poor actor, it was proved and so resigned myself to whatever she thought of me. Ultimately, the Leavises did visit America and their Lectures in America appeared jointly under their names. Leavis was unrepentant as, when I met him subsequently, he was to make an issue of the bad bread he had to eat in America. 'Americans don't know how to make bread, you know,' which he repeated twice! Is that why Lionel Trilling wouldn't see him? He had plans of going to Cambridge when we met at Roderick Marshall's place on Riverside Drive in New York. With his admiration for Leavis, elaborated in an article in The New Yorker, I naturally asked him if he would look up Leavis. 'No, I should be content to admire him from afar.' he said smilingly. I sought in vain to correct the popular prejudice against Leavis as 'a difficult man to get on with.' Trilling himself was genial socially, however ruthless at times in his criticism. Actually his opening sentence as our mutual friend, with whom I stayed, introduced me to him, was, 'There's something common between us.' Tickled I was, but it all sounded so enigmatic.

'Guess?'
'No progress?'
'Nothing common in our names?'
'Oh, the lion'

There was instant recognition but here was a 'lion' lying in wait, while the other had been acknowledged king of the forest!
Rockefeller Fellowship at Princeton

‘Do you write fiction?’
‘No’
‘Wise man!’ Who reads fiction?

My own wife doesn’t care to read my only novel! I start reading a novel; some interruption; and it will be a week or two or more before I go back to it and I have forgotten how it was going. What waste of time! I would rather read poetry! And listen to music if I want intense engagement.’

At the end of it all, predictably, he maintained it was only a passing thought; he would of course read fiction. It’s the ‘one bright book of life’, he might have quoted D. H. Lawrence approvingly. But was Trilling subconsciously reacting against the dilution of the Novel into futile ‘protests’ and mindless entertainment? Would he have said what he did if he was thinking of Cervantes whom he had praised so much as the progenitor of the concept of appearance and reality in European fiction or if the practitioner of the form was Tolstoy, on sighting whom from a distance as he was seated on a rock on the beach, Maxim Gorky muttered to himself, ‘I am not an orphan on this earth as long as this man is alive’.

Anyhow I couldn’t agree with him more, for I should still return to poetry, because, the Novel today does not answer to our traditional conception of a Kavya with rasa for its end, as in music. And unlike music there is the printed page of the poem to return to again and again and explore more than Thirteen Ways of looking at the poem, especially if it doesn’t yield its meaning all at once — ‘difficulty’ seemed to be a condition of good verse. I was however pleased with the conversation and more pleased to see a fine mind at play and friendly, handsome person. Two critics — Blackmur and Trilling, in that order, have stayed with me after I have forgotten the work of many others, Edmund Wilson had been dead, Ivor Winters was not always dependable.

Princeton did another great good to me: It made me aware of The Institute for Advanced Study which fostered in me vague dreams of Dhvanyaloka. I used to see Einstein walk along many a day with an umbrella in his hand, invariably accompanied by a younger man. He looked like a prophet of the Biblical days — indeed he did talk of the Hebrew prophets in his scientific work as he declared he wouldn’t, if there was a rebirth in store
for him, like to be born a scientist, but cobbler, carpenter, plumber, bricklayer, but no, not a scientist. Why did he, who was in the tradition of the Hebrew Patriarchs (or is it because?) not take a firm stand, when there was still time, on that crime against humanity, the atom bomb and what it did to Hiroshima and Nagasaki? It's hard to judge for an outsider to the political crisis that was brewing in Europe in the thirties. Neither he nor Oppenheimer, who could, nevertheless, compare the test-explosions of the bomb to Krishna's Viratarupa, are known to have pulled their might for good. And for me the question was: Would Jawaharlal Nehru have come all the way to Princeton from New York in 1949 to meet Einstein if he knew Einstein had been responsible for the bomb? For the Jefferson papers on display at the University Library were not presumably his chief attraction, though that gave me my first chance to meet, talk and be photographed with this man of destiny. But why did I feel inhibited to ask the photographer for a picture? No, I wasn't a V.S. Naipaul to think that to admire Gandhi and Nehru was self-limiting. It was in fact unconcealed pusillanimity on my part, for I didn't have the courage to let the Americans know that our admiration for Gandhi and Nehru bordered on hero-worship. I was to discover later that the American children living in Delhi during those momentous years of our Independence had, on the return, to be taken out by their parents from monument to monument on a re-orientation programme in Washington to disabuse their minds of the enthusiasm for Gandhi and Nehru, for not they, but Lincoln, Washington and Jefferson were their national heroes! National heroes acquire a symbolic value. I had been asked by the President of Princeton University as well as the Institute for Advanced Study to introduce the Indian students and scholars to the Prime Minister. He was talking in English and suddenly switched over to Hindi when I presented a Mathur. How did he know? Oh! everyone knows that Mathurs are from Allahabad! he quipped. How tenacious are associations of places and people that they should come up like the flash of an electric bulb at the mere touch of a switch!

It was then that I saw the most reticent looking Indira Gandhi who was 'comfortable' in the last standing row for a group photograph, when an ordinary Indian woman, my wife, was
 Rockefeller Fellowship at Princeton

asked to sit next to her father, the Prime Minister and his sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit, then our Ambassador in the States. How could such a withdrawing person, once on the political stage, do anything to stick to its centre? What strength a composed (willed?) expression concealed!

A few weeks later an elderly Professor of Mathematics, Eisenhower, very kindly offered to introduce us to Einstein if we could wait at entrance to the Concert Hall since he was coming to attend a concert on his 70th birth anniversary and Mrs McAlpin had taken care of the tickets. Introduction over, the great man asked in his Jewish accent if we didn’t find Princeton cold! And one or two more short polite sentences. But what is more remarkable for me was the enormous deference shown by an otherwise irreverent American audience numbering several hundreds in standing as one man to greet him with deafening applause — what happened to the ‘divine average’ of the American insisting on one-to-one relationship with the rest of mankind regardless of office or achievement? Einstein is said to have answered ‘character’ to a question, ‘What is the secret of your success in Science?’ I think the American audience was responding less to his achievement than to his ‘character’. Anyhow it was a memorable experience for me because I should like to think Emerson and Thoreau, not to mention Eliot later who have been an intimate part of my being were exemplars of ‘character’ — my outlook on life, such as it is, has been so largely shaped by them. And I shall not apologise for reproducing a good part of my essay on Transcendentalism which had earlier appeared in The Literary Criterion. If like W. B. Yeats I should be asked to choose a place for a month’s holiday (Yeats’s choice was Byzantium of the time after Plato closed his Academy and before Justinian opened his) I should like to spend it in New England looking on Emerson day after day and hearing him speak — if he was ‘eternal soliloquizer on mountain tops’ that wouldn’t bother me; and visiting Thoreau at Walden and talking with him as my soul-brother as he walked along the shores of the Pond like the Brahmin on the banks of the Ganga. It should interest my readers to know I am recently registered as a ‘Distant Member’ of the vigorous campaign for keeping ‘Walden ever wild’! It is that profound feeling that took me and my wife to visit Concord and Walden.
in 1950. Or I should have considered my year's stay in America incomplete and far from worthwhile. I have named the little pond in the front terrace of Dhvanyaloka after Walden as constant reminder of a rare life that has been linked in my imagination, with Gandhi's. When will the world see the like of them?

I Visit Concord — of Emerson and Thoreau

It was the month of May in 1950 when we drove from Princeton, New Jersey, to Concord, Massachusetts, rejoicing at the glow of the New England landscape in spring. What cared I if it was a ramshackle car, when the euphoria was on, for I felt like our countryfolk journeying to a temple on the hilltop. My gods were Emerson and Thoreau. And before I let myself loose in the Thoreau territory I knew I had to do obeisance to his mentor; hence to Emerson's first. The house still retained the radiance of his angelic presence; the very streets echoed his name and his winged words found their way to the bosom: he was still "the friend and aider" of those who wish to live in the spirit. Even the skies of Concord seemed to come close to the earth in a gesture of benediction.

As I wrote later: "If I had been a young man in the 1830s and living in New England and had not been fired by the new idealism that swept the east coast of America, I should think there was something very wrong with me. Even at this distance of time the very word Transcendentalism seems to have some magic about it and I catch myself intoning Wordsworth's line. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive...." "But unlike the French Revolution which inspired the young at first with what have today become empty political tags and subsequently left them disillusioned (as Napoleon overran Europe and sought to set up a dynasty of his own), the youthful idealism of New England in the 1830s rose in revolt against the rank materialism of the age.

A contemporary Transcendentalist described his reaction to his first encounter with Emerson:

Commercial Boston where honour is weighed in the public scales and justice reckoned by the dollars it brings, conservative Boston, the grave of the Revolution, wallowing in its wealth, yet grovelling for more...
preferring the accidents of man to Man himself — and amidst of all comes Emerson, graceful as Phoebus-Apollo, fearless and tranquil as the Sun.

Small wonder, then, that most educated homes in Calcutta soon had copies of Emerson’s prose and verse alongside Shakespeare’s plays. And not without a logical connection, such is the unpredictable movement of ideas. A far-sighted Bengali, Raja Rammohun Roy, caused a stir not only at home but in far-off Boston by his affirmations and denials: He defended the “Precepts of Jesus” and attacked the Christian missionaries as irrelevant to Asia. His “Brahmo Samaj” was a catalyst to angry young men like Emerson who were sick of the churches, sick of the preachers, and sick of institutionalized Christianity — for religion to them was an individual matter and called for utmost freedom of worship. Roy himself had resigned from the pulpit because of “conscientious scruples.”

The Christian Register, an outstanding Unitarian journal of New England, in December 1821 printed eight columns (including the entire front page) of the writings of Raja Rammohun Roy. Roy had written that “traditional dogma and ecclesiasticism is unintelligible to the nations of Asia”, but not so the teachings of Christ. This started a controversy in New England. It was then that his aunt Mary Moody Emerson recommended to young Ralph Waldo, still in school, the “sacred writings of the Hindus.” Emerson’s notions of Hinduism were far from complimentary at that time. In 1818 he had read in the inept Edinburgh Review an article on “The Religion and Character of the Hindus” which said that “the two distinguishing characteristics of the Hindu religion are the number and absurdity of its gods.” Its “cruelty and sentimentality” came in for particular attack. And Emerson, who looked at India through British eyes, was gullible enough to endorse the prejudice: “The Indian Pantheon is of the prodigious size; 330 million gods have in it their heaven or rather each their parlour in this immense ‘goddery.’”

In 1822, a year after he took his degree, Emerson wrote to his aunt: “I am curious to read your Hindoo mythologies. One is apt to lament over indolence and ignorance when he reads some of these sanguine students of the Eastern antiquities.” And a year later he is convinced that an abundance of fables “seems not to indicate any special quality of the mind, for though
Greece had many, stupid Indostan has more. Interestingly, Coleridge, whom, Emerson admired highly, had used the same epithet for “Indostan” in his *Aids to Reflection* and yet Coleridge had the reputation of being a seminal thinker of his age. But unlike Coleridge, the probing mind of Emerson was well aware of the paradox that “Romance is the mother of knowledge,” and his shift from one extreme to another exemplifying the truth of the age-old Hindu concept of *Virodamarga*—affirming truth by way of negation—is one of the interesting ironies of 19th-century intellectual history. After the change he wrote in his journal, “Europe is thy Father, bear him on your Atlantean shoulders, Asia is thy grandsire, Regenerate him!”

Finally, he was so impressed by the truth of the Vedas that he could say: “It contains every religious sentiment, all the grand ethics which visit in turn each noble and poetic mind. If I trust myself in the woods or in a boat upon the pond, nature makes a Brahmin of me, presently.” And Emerson was one of a galaxy of great writers such as Goethe in Germany, Romain Rolland in France and Matthew Arnold in England, who reacted favourably to India.

My object here is not to assess Emerson’s debt to India, which may well look like a cultural balance sheet, but to show how a creative mind can absorb disparate experience and produce something new out of it: “A fig tree,” he said, looking on a fig tree, “becomes beautiful”. Actually what he was looking for was “not instruction, but provocation” in the form of an idea, image, metaphor, myth, symbol, and in all cases, stimulus. Such is the nature of genius—to resist over-influence. In his own words: “Greatness is the fulfillment of a natural tendency in each man.”

It is by way of ambivalent references like “fable” and “romance” in respect of India that he seems to stumble upon the concept of “illusion” or maya (which he spells “maia”). It must be conceded too that Plato and the Neoplatonists had prepared his mind for the reception of Hindu thought. Not for nothing is it said that ancient Greece and India had more in common than Greece and modern Europe. Emerson spoke in a “Letter to Plato”, when he was only 21, of “Old Asia, nurse of man, bower of Gods.” He is reported to have written a poem called “Asia” which even his son, the editor of his works, was not able to lay his hands on. We know, however, that he called
his wife Lydia "Mine Asia." But consider how the sceptic and the hardheaded Yankee are ever-present in his explorations. His essay "Illusions" opens with the narration of an actual incident — his visit to the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky — and there begins to rationalize the seemingly irrational concept of illusion: "Life is a succession of riddles which must be lived to be understood. All is a riddle and the key to a riddle is another riddle... we wake from one dream to another... the pageant marches at all hours, with music, banner and badge." After enumerating many instances of life's illusions he surveys the thinking of the ancient world (illusion was yogadra in Indian myths and Proteus or Momus in Greek) and vindicates his faith in the supremacy of Indian thought: "The early Greek philosophers, Heraclitus and Zenophanes, measured their force on this problem of identity behind illusion. Diogenes of Apollonia said that unless the atoms were made of one stuff, they could never blend and act with one another. But the Hindoos in their sacred writings express their livestest feelings, both of the essential identity and illusion, which they conceive variety to be." And now a quotation from Vishnu Purana, renowned to be Puranaratna (the most precious of all legends): "The notions 'I am' and 'This is mine' which influence mankind are but delusions of the mother of the world. Dispel, O Lord of all creatures, the conceit of knowledge which proceeds from ignorance. Hence the main endeavor of man to be freed from fascination (maya)." The thought has come full circle (Emerson works in "circles," interestingly the title of one of his essays) and that which makes the circle has, for him, its beginning in illusion and the end in apprehension of reality. The elaboration of an idea is in the form of concentric circles, widening our horizon, intensifying awareness and returning reinforced in the rightness of the centre from which it has emanated.

There is no essay, no poem of Emerson's from "Over-Soul," "Fate," "Compensation," "Self-Reliance," "Divinity School Address," "Immortality," "Brahma," "Hamatreya," "Days," "Give All to Love" that cannot be related to this central concept of appearance and reality. His twin poems of Indian origin, at least in their titles, "Hamatreya" and "Brahma," seem to sum up his essential thinking, the first by means of enaction in popular terms and
the second by means of conceptual thinking. The name Hamatreya is either deliberate distortion or misreading of Maitreya, to whom Sage Parasara expatiates upon the name and nature of Vishnu at a place (Melkote near Mysore) which the sage chooses for its utmost holiness. And Maitreya came to have historical importance by his association with Ramanuja who expounded the philosophy of Visishtadvaita in the 12th century and opened the doors of the Vishnu temple to the 'untouchables'. The kings of Vishnupurana are transposed by Emerson into American democratic terms (hence the parabolic form) — which, incidentally, shows that a great poet neither imitates nor steals but takes the booty away like a conqueror. The names in the poem are those of his neighbours and acquaintances: Bulkeley, Hunt, Willard, Hosmer, Merian and Flint who Possessed the land... 
... walked amidst his farm
Saying 'tis mine, my children's and my name's
How sweet the West Wind sounds in my own trees!
How graceful climb those shadows on my hill!

In the next stanza the poet asks with disarming simplicity
Where are these men?

......
Earth laughs in flowers, to see her boastful boys
Earth-proud, proud of the earth which is not theirs
Who steer the plough, but cannot steer their feet.

Emerson retains the traditional, functional nature of art and literature in the last stanza. Parasara's "These were the verses, Maitreya, which Earth recited and by listening to which ambition fades away like snow before the sun", becomes in Emerson's poem

My avarice cooled
Like lust in the chill of the grave

How right was Emerson when he declared that he read the Orientals and remained Occidental! That is self-reliance, swadharma and in Gandhi's words "Let all the winds of all the lands blow about my house, but I refuse to be blown off my feet."

The same concept of illusion must help to place in perspective his other and better known poem "Brahma," which opens:
If the red slayer think he slays
Or if the slain think he is slain
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass and turn again.

Some thought the source of the poem was John Fletcher's "Hymn to Venus." But Emerson is emphatic: "The country of Unity...the seat of a philosophy of delighting in abstractions is Asia." And Roer's translation of Katha Upanishad should leave no one in doubt as to the source of "Brahma":

"If the slayer thinks I slay, if the slain thinks I am slain, then both of them do not know well. It (the Soul) does not slay nor is slain."

The poem is testimony to the quintessential wisdom of Vedanta, namely the absolute unity of man and nature about which Ananda Coomaraswamy has written so perceptively in his essay "What Has India Contributed to Human Welfare?" But the poem brought forth from the ill-informed and the casual reader smartly phrased parodies like:

If the gray tomcat think he sings
Or if the song think it be sung
He little knows who boot jacks flings
How many tricks I've flung.

In 1876 when his publishers decided to bring out a volume of Emerson's Selected Poems, they pleaded with him to omit "Brahma," because of the ridicule it brought forth. But like T. S. Eliot with "Shanti Shanti Shanti" in The Waste Land, Emerson insisted it be retained, whatever else they might omit.

In his essay on "Fate" Emerson suggests that "the Turk, the Arab, the Persian accepts fore-ordained Fate. But the Hindu under the Wheel (the Law of Karma) is as firm as the Greeks, because Nature is no sentimentalist, does not cosset or pamper us." He realizes that the way of Nature is a "little rude" but the Law of Karma, he thinks, is "a poetic attempt to lift the mountain of Fate, to reconcile distortion of race with liberty which led the Hindoos to say 'Fate is nothing but the deeds committed in a prior state of existence.' " Despite his son's death, Emerson could say after reading the Upanishadic story of Nachiketas, that the man who is "grounded in divine life will transcend suffering in a flight to a region where unto these
passionate clouds of sorrow cannot rise." In support of his stand, he recalls that to Plato the good was Absolute Reality and Evil unreal; and to St. Augustine the loss of God has received the name of Evil. Emerson would have been thrilled to know that to the Indian, Evil is in feverish haste to join God, for the way of the friend, mitra takes seven lives while the other, three lives.

Hence perhaps his exhortation in the essay on "Progress of Culture": "But if the works (of Greece and Rome) shall still survive and multiply, what shall we say of names more distant, or hidden through their very superiority to their coevals?" And he mentions among others "the Vedas, Institutes of Manu, the Puranas, the poems of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana".

And his interests were literary and human, not something else. He writes in his Journal: ‘I want not the metaphysics, but only the literature of them (the Hindus).’ The story of Nala and Dhamayanthi was nearer to his business and bosom than the ‘news in today’s Boston Journal’. ‘I am admonished and comforted, as I read. It all very nearly concerns me. We are elevated by beauty.’ Such is his final testament.

It is this spontaneous reaction to beauty and not high cerebration that characterized Emerson’s writing. The other Transcendentalists were no exception to it. Margaret Fuller urged Emerson (not that he needed her exhortation) to ‘forego these tedious, tedious attempts to learn the universe by thought alone’. Thoreau agreed with Carlyle when he said that the sign of health is unconsciousness — not to be aware of the mental processes is the way to realise the spontaneous life. To come back to Emerson: was he an eternal ‘soliloquizer on the mountain tops for, only the man, and the stars and earth are visible’? ‘Culture with us’, says Emerson, ‘ends in headache. Do not craze yourself with thinking but go about your business anywhere. Life is not intellectual or critical but sturdy’. This has led critics to accuse Emerson of having no system of thought and requiring the least intellectual preparation to read. And if he is still a representative American it is said (irresponsibly, no doubt) that it isn’t surprising in a country which isn’t mentally advanced! And to this charge may be added another: that Emerson’s Transcendentalism is shallow optimism — the optimism of one who had no idea of suffering, had not known the vale of tears. Did Emerson never suffer? If you look for
suffering we know he lost his son. But he tells us that the death of his son 'leaves no scar' and that true realization comes out of the 'costly price of sons and lovers'. Hence the trenchant generalization which shows his fine perspective: 'The only thing grief has taught me is to know how shallow it is'. How can there be suffering for one who has realized the unity of man and nature, unity underlying all appearances, for one who 'fears not poverty or social disgrace'? And for whom life and death are illusory? He says in his 'Brahma':

Far or forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear
And one to me are shame and fame.

This shouldn't lead us to the conclusion that Emerson's transcendentalism might have the wisdom of the sage but is without the compassion of the saint. Emerson says that a man who is grounded in divine life will transcend suffering in his firm faith

When half-gods go
The gods arrive.

Is this not what we learn from the Divine Comedy, King Lear and Faust? It is true Emerson skips an important stage, namely the dark night of the soul which these poets have so movingly portrayed. We don't see in him the 'vale of tears' — we don't know if it is hidden from us — but we know the soul is made for us to witness the final acceptance. Is this chilling idealism? Perhaps; but certainly not happy insensibility. As for that we know Emerson was actually pleased that he had 'a wife, a babe, a brother, country and poverty, like the ancient Greeks'.

It is important to remember that his heart throbbed and his whole being was thrilled at the sight of the stars. He might very well have said with Hopkins: 'Kiss my hand to the stars lovely asunder'. This is how he can communicate his joy and wonder at the sight of the stars:

'If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the City of God which had been shown. But every night come these envoys of beauty and light to the universe with their admonishing smile'.
While he responded to nature’s beauty he did not deify it like the Greeks nor did he try to ‘marry the mind to Nature and to put her under the mind’. He wanted his book to ‘smell of pines and resound with the hum of insects’.

Despite all that is said about Nature it is in Thoreau, rather than Emerson, that Nature pulsates with life. And to pass on from Emerson to Thoreau is to feel all over the body the cool crisp air of the mountain tops. But of that a little later. Like Emerson, Thoreau was a learned man too. He knew Greek, Latin, Mathematics and Natural Science. As for Indian books, although his interest in them commenced later than Emerson’s, he took to them as fervently as Emerson did. He looked upon them as a ‘royal gift’ and sent news of their arrival as of ‘the birth of a child’. Not a kill-joy for all his asceticism! To him, ‘one wise sentence (from the Vedas) is worth the State of Massachusetts many times over’. Again: ‘I cannot read a single sentence in the book of the Hindus without being elevated. It has such a rhythm as the winds of the desert, such a tide as the Ganges and seems as superior to criticism as the Himalath mountains’.

This pagan ‘suckled in a creed outworn’ sometimes compared himself to the Brahmin going to bathe in the Ganges, while at other times looked upon himself as a fellow-wanderer and survivor of Ulysses.

While Emerson and others preached, Thoreau alone wanted to test the Transcendental ideas on his pulse. He had a rare capacity to rationalize and make convincing what appeared to be impossible. He argued: ‘If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them’. The two basic tenets of his philosophy of life were that man should advance confidently in the direction of his dreams and that he should live a simple life. Thoreau says that ‘in proportion as he simplifies his life the laws of the universe will appear less complex and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty, poverty, nor weakness, weakness’. And this he affirms he learnt by his own ‘experiments’. Remember, the title of Gandhi’s autobiography is ‘My Experiments with Truth’. He learnt by ‘doing’ and hence, incidentally, his appeal to Gandhi, one might guess. When he theorised out of his own experience he could ‘elicit truth as at a flash’. ‘A man’, said he,
'thinks as well through his legs and arms as his brain'. It is this faith that made him exhort us to 'dwell as near as possible to the channel in which your life flows'. Almost Lawrentian in his blood-consciousness.

The (gold) rush to California and the attitude not merely of merchants but of philosophers and prophets, so called, in relation to it reflects, according to Thoreau, 'the greatest disgrace of mankind'. He asked: 'Did God direct us to do our living, digging where we never planted?' Little wonder that one who wanted to sell his clothes and keep his thoughts took up such a stand about modern man's over-mastering obsession. Thoreau wanted to earn his living by loving. While to the rest of the world Sunday was the Sabbath day, to Thoreau there was no need for man to work for six days. He would work for one day in the week and keep the other six days for joy and wonder.

Pearl Buck somewhere says it is nonsense to refer to the West as materialistic and the East as spiritual, for the basic difference is that while in the West a man takes up two jobs to pay his bills, in the East he will do with one and has fewer bills to pay. For he wishes to have more bodily comfort, more leisure, more time to himself and in this sense, says Miss Pearl Buck, he is even more materialistic. Very ingenious of Miss Pearl Buck! For one would have thought that this outlook is not born of the desire for bodily comfort but of an attitude to life, of being content with fewer things. That is precisely what Thoreau did and Gandhi repeated a 100 years later. How many things man can do without! Thoreau went alone to the Walden Pond and built a hut on its shores, completed it by stages according to the needs of the seasons and lived there for two years and two months.

It is interesting to recall that Yeats admired Thoreau, and his 'Lake Isle of Innisfree' with its lake water lapping on its shores and 'cabin' and 'bee-hive' and perfect 'peace'. Though reminiscent of Thoreau's life at Walden, Walden is emphatically no Innisfree. For Thoreau did not escape into the woods. Rather, he went to Walden to 'front the facts of life without the intervening barriers of society or possessions'. Also, he went there to acquaint himself with the forest well in time, not in the evening of life. He had many lives to live and going to the forest was just one, in any case. He believed that man 'flows unto God when the channel of purity is open'. The 'generative
energy' which makes us unclean when we are loose and dissipating invigorates and inspires us when we are continent, when we have that 'wise passiveness' which Wordsworth advocated. He must have thought it impertinent — anyway we know he was indignant that the villagers instead of going to the Pond to bathe or drink should be thinking to bring its waters, which should be as sacred as the Ganges at least, to the village in a pipe, to wash their dishes with! — 'to earn their Walden by the turning of a cock or drawing of a plug!'. Thoreau started growing beans but claimed that he needed them not for food so much but because they 'attached me to the earth and so I got strength like Antaeus'. Like Tagore after him (who although lived a relatively soft life), Thoreau also believed that man must be 'vitaly savage and mentally civilized'. Thoreau's purpose was to combine 'the hardness of the savage with the intellectualness of the civilized man'. He wanted to 'reason from hand to the head'.

Like the 17th century English Metaphysical poets with whom the Transcendentalists had fairly strong affinities it is interesting that even Emerson wanted great art to unite 'the solid with the ethereal': 'I tramp in the mire with wooden shoes whenever they force me into the clouds'. A happy combination of Saxon precision with Oriental soaring! Reading the 17th century writers Alcott was refreshed by the intimacy of thought and manner of speech of their day. He wanted to recover the 'animal spirit which once sparkled and pranked itself in the buxomness and proud motion of our mother-tongue'. 'What we have gained in elegance we have lost in thought and expression', he protested. To him the human body itself is the richest and raciest phrasebook. Lowell wanted that 'Yankee lingo', in the hope of escaping 'the faint perfume of musk which Mr. Tennyson has left behind him'. Emerson himself said that in good writing 'words become one with things'.

To come back to Thoreau. While the ancient Indian ideal prescribed retirement to the forest for contemplation after acquiring education and living a full life, Thoreau went to the forest to prepare for life. This is Vanaprasthashrama with a vengeance! 'To live like a philosopher', Thoreau argued, 'is not to live foolishly like other men but, wisely according to universal laws'. After inventing the technique by which the most perfect pencil
lead known in the country was produced he feared he was ‘on the threshold’ of what could become ‘good business’ in ten years’ time and gave it up. He knew of the corrupting influence of money, the fat that thickens the arteries and blocks the channels of life — the curse of affluent societies. That is why he lived a simple life. He had only three chairs in his house, one chair for solitude, two for friendship and three for society! In keeping with these furnishings, he thought it would be better if there were ‘but one inhabitant to a square mile . . . (for) the value of a man is not in his skin, that we should touch him’. Such a life will naturally obviate the use of machines — machines which will constrict rather than free the spirit of man.

Even in society Thoreau held that the citizen must not resign his conscience to the legislator. He himself wouldn’t accept majority rule. He asked: ‘Is it not possible that an individual may be right and a government wrong?’ Thus ‘Any man more right than his neighbours constitutes a majority of one already!’. Thoreau’s main purpose in life was that ‘man must achieve moral unity at the cost of civil disobedience’. This is sublime heroism. And we know how when Gandhi practised it in India it lifted us out of the trivialness and dust of politics into the region of truth and manhood and the man in the street felt strong enough to defy the government of a great Empire. That is what Gandhi meant by ‘spiritualising politics’. It is thus that we can explain Thoreau’s refusal to pay tax to a government which had done nothing for him and which, on the contrary, used that money to fight Mexican wars.

It will naturally be asked whether this ultra-individualism is practicable and as if to demonstrate its practicability some of the Transcendentalists lived on the Brook Farm and practised their ideas in a social context. There Ripley wished to combine the thinker and the worker, for he thought that ‘the separation cheated the worker of a natural right to cultural goods and deprived the literate classes of work which was needed to give their lives unity and completeness’. Viewed in a broader context this was an answer to the fragmentation of the whole man by the specialized requirements of modern society. Quite a healthy corrective to our thinking in modern Welfare States where special prosperity is the beatitude of man and ‘sacrifice the citizen to the State’ is the motto of governments. Hawthorne, also a
Transcendentalist in a way, nevertheless disapproved of idealising manual labour and it was, on the whole, more a failure than a success. Whether it was a success or a failure the experiment was an attempt to preserve the individual in society. Almost two hundred years after the Industrial Revolution we have not found an answer to this soul-killer; on the contrary the individual has become more of an automaton today than ever before. This is from the point of view of Man, but Nature too got her fair share at the hands of the Brookfarmers. That was part of the Transcendental philosophy — that man was not the centre of the universe. Needless to say that this ran counter to the Frontier conception which has dominated American thinking ever since the immigration of Europeans into that vast continent. The Brookfarmers didn’t see the need to subdue Nature. In spite of bitter struggles with sandy soil they are said to have been extraordinarily gentle in their dealings with birds, beasts and trees. Hunting was not permitted on the Farm. Wild animals walked about boldly without harm to themselves or to man. Even the birds which pillaged the grain were not grudged the seeds they took. It seems they planted extra rows of grain and good humouredly dismissed the problem!

Thoreau was amused at the popular misconception that if a man walked in the woods for love of them he would be called a loafer but if he cut the trees and left the forest bare he was regarded as a useful member of society. He liked to look upon himself as ‘partly leaves and vegetable mould himself’. It isn’t pathetic fallacy when he proclaims: ‘all nature would be affected and sun’s brightness fade and the winds would sigh-humanely and the clouds rain tears, and woods shed their leaves and put on mourning in midsummer, if any man should ever for a just cause grieve’. He was literally in communion with Nature. Once he lay down on the ice and looked through the hole caused by his axe which slipped down into the pond and he saw his axe swaying to and fro with the pulse of the pond. The lake was to him ‘a perfect forest mirror’, ‘the earth’s eye’, looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature. The trees standing ashore are ‘the slender eyelashes that fringe it and the wooden hills and cliffs around are its overhanging brows’. He doesn’t sound sentimental (any more than D. H. Lawrence in his poem, “Snake”) when he feels reluctant to hurl
a stone at the chestnut tree to remove a nut for the tree was a sentient being. 'You find Nature cold?' he asks 'To me she is warm'. So far as I know only Kalidasa in all world's literature has treated Nature with such feathery delicacy. It is pulsating and throbbing with life and Thoreau is very appropriately attracted to this Indian poet. And what a striking resemblance between the Transcendentalists and the ancient Indians - not merely Kalidasa but, way back, the authors of the Rig Veda.

May I ask you to indulge your speculation a bit and consider why the central Asian tribes who came to India in search of food and shelter after passing through the wild Himalayan regions, were moved by nature's grandeur and majesty and chanted hymns in praise of the Ganga, of the Gods that dwelt on the snowy peaks of the Himalayas and the other deities, Indra, Agni, Vayu, Varuna that were the very incarnation of natural elements. While the primitive man who came here in search of food and shelter sang with full-throated ease in joy and wonder at the bounty and majesty of Nature why, one feels like asking, did civilized man, who apparently went in search of freedom of worship, feel called upon to confront and subdue bird, beast, tree and fellow-man? And yet how does one explain the paradox in the American's observance of Thanksgiving for Nature's bounty? Modern man wants to wrest the secret from the bosom of Nature -- Nature, his foster-mother. And is it any wonder that Nature looks upon him as a step-child? If all this is wild speculation, read Frost and Eliot. And both, at all times, seem to favour man's return to nature for the salvation of his soul. That is exactly what Emerson, Thoreau and the Brook-farmers did and their prophecy has gone unheeded.

Is it because it is an obsolete ideal and utterly unworkable? Actually there are quite a few accounts of their impracticability and utopianism; and the liveliest account, of all, of the comic side of Transcendentalism is given by Louisa May Alcott, the daughter of Alcott — himself a prominent Transcendentalist. The following are a few of the paragraphs extracted from her unpublished romance, Silver Pitchers (Transcendental Wild Oats) now included in a booklet entitled Transcendentalism in revolt against Materialism in 'Studies in American Civilization' series:

'One youth, believing that language was of little consequence if the spirit was only right, startled newcomers by blandly
greeting them with "Good-morning, damn you", and other remarks of an equally mixed order. A second irrepressible being held that all the emotions of the soul should be freely expressed, and illustrated his theory by antics that would have sent him to a lunatic asylum, if, as an unregenerate wag said, he had not already been in one. When his spirit soared, he climbed trees and shouted; when doubt assailed him, he lay upon the floor and groaned lamentably. At joyful periods, he raced, leaped, and sang; when sad, he wept aloud; and when a great thought burst upon him in the watches of the night, he crowed like a joyous cockerel, to the great delight of the children and the great annoyance of the elders. One musical brother fiddled whenever so moved, sang sentimentally to the four little girls, and put a music-box on the wall when he hoed corn.

'Brother Pease ground away at his uncooked food, or browsed over the farm on sorrel, mint, green fruit, and new vegetables. Occasionally he took his walks abroad, arrily attired in an unbleached cotton poncho, which was the nearest approach to the primeval costume he was allowed to indulge in. At midsummer he retired to the wilderness, to try his plan where the woodchucks were without prejudices and huckleberry-bushes were hospitably full. A sunstroke unfortunately spoilt his plan, and he returned to semi-civilization a sadder and wiser man.'

'Transcendental wild oats were sown that year, and the fame thereof has not yet ceased in the land; for futile as this crop seemed to outsiders, it bore an invisible harvest, worth much to those who planted in earnest. As none of the members of this particular community have ever recounted their experiences before a few of them may not be amiss, since the interest in these attempts have never died out and Fruitlands was the most ideal of all these castles in Spain.'

'A new dress was invented, since cotton, silk, and wool were forbidden as the product of slave-labour, worm-slaughter, and sheep-robery. Tunics and trousers of brown linen were the only wear. The women's skirts were longer, and their straw hatbrims wider than the men's, and this was the only difference. Some persecution lent a charm to the costume, and the long-haired, linen-clad reformers quite enjoyed the mild martyrdom they endured when they left home.'
‘Money was abjured, as the root of all evil. The produce of the land was to supply most of their wants, or be exchanged for the few things they could not grow. This idea had its inconveniences; but self-denial was the fashion, and it was surprising how many things one can do without. When they desired to travel, they walked, if possible, begged the loan of a vehicle, or boldly entered car or coach, and, stating their principles to the officials, took the consequences. Usually their dress, their earnest frankness, and gentle resolution won them a passage; but now and then they met with hard usage, and had the satisfaction of suffering for their principles.’

‘He had tried, but it was a failure. The world was not ready for Utopia yet, and those who attempted to found it only got laughed at for their pains. In other days, men could sell all and give to the poor, lead lives devoted to holiness and high thought, and, after the persecution was over, find themselves honoured as saints or martyrs. But in modern times these things are out of fashion. To live for one’s principles, at all costs, is a dangerous speculation and the failure of an ideal, no matter how human and noble, is harder for the world to forgive and forget than bank robbery or the grandswindles of corrupt politicians.’

Add to this other comic manifestations like the Presidents of banks framing mottoes from Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” on the walls of their offices! But the American banker and businessman cannot have forgotten that the author of “Self-Reliance” is the author of the “Over-Soul” as well and it should be a tribute to Emerson that the businessman who by his self-reliance makes a million dollars gives away half a million to building of a hospital or a library or to the victims of flood and famine in a far-off land. For both these strains have got into the American tradition. It would be a mistake to think that all that idealism, integrity of soul and purity of heart could fade away into nothingness. Actually Transcendentalism won all its points. Its reforming energies got into the anti-slave movement and call it pragmatism (William James paid a tribute to Emerson as ‘My beloved Master’) or altruism or by the simple name of fellow-feeling, modern America seems to one to have proved faithful to the trust not to quench the light. Like the Transcendentalists and to a much greater degree than they, we are also caught up
in a crisis of the spirit, a crisis that carries with it immense implications not merely for the American predicament but also for our modern mechanical societies. For, the predicament of America is, or soon will be, the predicament of the rest of the world — to be machine-ridden and materialistic. As F. R. Leavis reminds us again and again Marxism is not the only form of materialism that menaces us and in this country where the mass of the people have for centuries missed the good things of life and are apt to grab them when they get a chance we run the risk of becoming materialistic sooner than the Americans. Before it is too late an attempt should be made to rescue these Transcendentalists from the Rare Book Room and bring them to school and college curriculum, if only to remind ourselves of our own great heritage for, writers like Emerson and Thoreau have exemplified in their own lives that it is possible to live a good life even in a modern affluent society. And Gandhi has proved the efficacy of those ideas right before our eyes. Is it Marcus Aurelius who said that even in a palace life can be lived well?

And it is made easy by the way this lesson comes home to us. It is the most energetic and extensive upsurge of the mind of man in 19th century America. Some one said Concord in 1840 was an idyllic moment in American history. And moments like that can redeem the whole history of a nation. For then the spirit of man reached its full stature and although it glowed for a while and soon faded into the light of common day, we feel like casting a longing, lingering look at it and can draw inspiration from the personal urgency with which they spoke and preserve ourselves from inner shame. And in this sense that moment can redeem all mankind, not merely America. Such a moment, we know, came again in the first half of this century and caused the resurgence of a whole nation under Gandhi's leadership. Many fear it will go with Nehru. And so we would still do well to keep that great example before us always.

Matthew Arnold spoke for all of us when he said that Emerson was a friend and aider of those who live in the spirit. But to Professor Matthiessen 'such a judgement will not help us at all sixty years after'. Sixty years or six thousand years, as long as human nature remains the same, Emerson (and Thoreau) will continue to 'shine like a good deed in a naughty world'. And
to read him and Thoreau is always an exhilarating experience. Speaking for myself, were I given the choice I would rather be damned with Emerson than saved with Bacon; be lost in the woods with Thoreau and have the satisfaction of suffering for a principle than enjoy the fruits of a positive civilization with Dryden and Pope. For that makes all the difference between life and death.

If so, how sad this timeless India of the Boston Brahmins should have been allowed by its very guardians to decline. The study of writers like Emerson and T. S. Eliot can be a great opportunity for Western-educated Indians to forge contacts with their own heritage: If, to Eliot, the Gita is the “second greatest philosophical poem,” and to Emerson “it was the first of books, “it is as if an empire spoke to us. Nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered thus, disposed of the same questions that exercised us.”
I came back to India full of buoyancy and zest for life, for literature — and for quick change in our approach to both! B. L. Manjunath was still the Vice-Chancellor. "Are you interested in going to Mysore to act in Eagleton's place when he is away on other duty with the UNESCO?" asked the Vice-Chancellor. Nothing could have pleased me more. Eagleton in his great kindness had said reassuringly even before I left for Cambridge, "they will do it on my dead body" to my plea not to transfer me to mofussil places on my return. Now an unsought offer from a Vice-Chancellor who seemed geared to bring about radical changes in the academic life of the University. Mysore! Eagleton's place! And Eagleton's house which Principal M. V. Gopalaswamy asked me to occupy as I was staying away from my family! All looked like things one dreamt of, brought on a platter of gold by a good angel! A large bungalow on a 2 acre plot (opposite the Fire Brigade, Eagleton's 'unpaid bodyguard') to which I used to come to see him as student. And now with one third of Eagleton's salary (a special salary in pre-independence days to attract him to Mysore) how could I live in that house the way Eagleton did with Persian carpets, sofas with velvet cushions, and silk curtains? I had only two chairs — I wasn't Thoreau for whom one chair was meant for 'solitude' and two for 'company', but even he provided a third for 'society', and so used the large cabin trunks I had brought back from England, for society!

Mr first encounter with M. V. Gopalaswamy, the noted psychologist, then Principal of Maharaja's. He had been told of my interest in Modern Poetry. I was rattling away with the zeal of a convert on its immediate relevance for us. Hence the psychologist's test!
I don't care for Modern Poetry. You see, I go back home after the day's work and take an anthology of Poetry to relax myself and curious to see what was modern about the recent poetry. It leaves me unmoved and I throw it.

Poetry, even for him, was only a matter of emotions; you feed the intellect with History, Economics and Philosophy. And go to literature for emotional relief!

Didn't he know there were, as Eliot has said, 'precise emotions' and 'vague emotions', and that the former called for the same rigour as 'precise thought'? 

Would you wish the intellect to take a holiday when you are reading poetry? I asked. If so, I added with tongue in cheek, there are substitutes, alcohol for instance!

He was a very intelligent man, apart from being a psychologist of distinction. He looked convinced; at least didn't care to pursue it. One day he showed me two card board pieces, one in each hand, representing the figures of a man and a woman.

He held them apart for a while to comment;

You see, if they are apart for a while, they make for tension which can be creative; but if they stay apart too long, it may result in frustration.

And then he brought them together to say

They make a complete whole resulting in coalescence leading to fulfilment.

But if they are left there too long, they can become static! (he added) And so neither staying apart too long nor coming together too long is good for them!

Something like this which was intellectually satisfying. And I would seek him out on walks between the Maharaja's College and the Professors Quarters which vaguely resembled, for me, the Backs of Cambridge. Nothing beyond, though I fancied we could work towards that end. We would talk of wide-ranging things leaving our wives — male chauvinism — to watch the sunset, make conversation, and share their own interests.

Gopalaswamy claimed one day he could reduce all values to one scale. With my reading of I. A. Richards' Principles of Literary Criticism I asked if they could all be reduced to the qualitative
scale since I was wholly opposed to what Richards had said about the value of an experience consisting in the satisfaction or frustration of the number of appetencies. I do not think Gopalaswamy had the will to pursue his thesis though he affirmed its feasibility. He made no headway in Psychology apart from giving a prestige to the Department by his own presence. It seems he had made his name outside on the strength of a single essay on Laughter — he with his immobile face to write on Laughter! I said to myself before I knew him well, for he could laugh heartily; though it was like saying, 'Greta Garbo laughs!' He had started an experimental radio transmitter in his own residence which he called Akasavani, (Rallapalli Ananthakrishna Sharma, then in Maharaja’s College, is said to have supplied the name) On reaching the age of superannuation there was talk of re-employment. And Gopalaswamy brushed it aside with a cryptic “I don’t see the fun of working on half pay!” He wished to enjoy his retirement on a small pension. There was in Mysore at that time, as now not so often, another source of intellectual stimulus than the University. That was the All India Radio which I still believe can nurture young talent and one of my former high school teachers, A. M. Natesh (whose son Ratna was to become my student in English Honours and presently an influential Director of a National Institute of Speech and Hearing, after advanced training in communication in the United States) was the Assistant Director of the Radio Station in Mysore. He extended his patronage by asking me from time to time to broadcast on lighter topics (me with little sense of humour) like ‘My most memorable experience abroad’ or catchwords like ‘Golden Mean’ and serious ones like: “Why read Modern Poetry?” since I didn’t care to speak on Bernard Shaw, his preference. I tried in a 15 minutes’ talk to make out a case for Modern Poetry which meant I had to organize my freewheeling discourse of the classroom into a plausible, coherent argument for the general listener. That trained me to be brief, pertinent and above all limit myself ruthlessly to a time schedule. I denounced Milton as a prelude to winning a hearing for T. S. Eliot. The arguments were largely Leavis’s and I soon sought to make them my own, imparting a personal involvement and re-phrasing Leavis’s sentences. In other words, I tried to make it look original. It was my good
fortune I started with a group of bright students, a couple of them, certainly brighter than I was at their age, or perhaps even then. Which I accepted and rationalized: there won't be any progress if some at least of a teacher's students weren't brighter than himself and even made it an opportunity to elaborate the idea to dwell on the importance of a University, its functions, ideals, teachers and students, research and publication, so as to share one's views with one's fellows, which meant for me, first of all my own students, then the teachers in the Department and then the others, in an expanding circle in one's own university from where a teacher should reach out to the rest, in this case, other universities in India. I assumed in my euphoria Mysore was another Cambridge with myself walking in Leavis's footsteps.

Meanwhile Eagleton sent in his resignation, and I was absorbed into his place on the starting salary in the professor's scale, which was Rs. 400-25-700 in those days. Feeling secure in my place in the University and finding an opening on the Board of Studies I pleaded with Professor Ranganna, my head of Department, to include Modern Poetry and update the syllabus in fiction, drama and criticism because Indian Universities generally stopped with the Victorians. He sensed my enthusiasm and in his generosity encouraged me to go ahead. A nasty head of department, as I have seen many mean men in various places, could have thwarted my passion and even squeezed me out of the University resulting in virtual alienation from one's home, from oneself. Now I could send roots in Maharaja's and Mysore, both makers of my being in many ways.

I had given much thought at the time I joined Maharaja's College to the outstanding men who taught there — value of tradition — (Sir) Brajendranath Seal whom an enlightened Maharaja had brought from Calcutta to be its first full-time Vice-Chancellor like (later Sir) S. Radhakrishnan, (later Sir) C. R. Reddy, Radhakumud Mukherjee, J. M. Kumarappa, A. R. Wadia, K. B. Madhava, M. V. Gopalaswamy and M. Hiriyanna. Hardly any college or university (Mysore University was founded in 1916 as the fifth after Calcutta, Madras, Bombay and Allahabad) in the country could boast of such a galaxy of Professors at a time. I should ascribe it to the far-sightedness of Krishna Raja Wadiyar, then Maharaja of Mysore.
Of all professors Reddy enjoyed the highest esteem and loyalty of his pupils. One such was H. C. Dasappa, who, as a senior minister in the first Congress Government in Mysore, made a trip from London — for him a pilgrimage — to Cambridge (when I was there) to have a look at Reddy’s rooms in Trinity College and hear its pulse-beat. And with more than one like him staunchly loyal to him in the Cabinet, they passed a special ordinance to make the pro-chancellor’s office a salaried post and invited Reddy in his last years to fill it — which he did with supreme distinction. One of the jokes I had heard about Reddy as a young teacher was that he taught English and walking into the class one day with scanty preparation he explained ‘titmouse’ in a modern poem as a mouse! Next week, a nasty student, later to become Professor of Sanskrit (C. R. Narasimha Sastry) recalled to the teacher, ‘Sir, the Dictionary says titmouse is not a mouse but a bird! An unembarrassed Reddy’s reaction was: ‘Adjust!’

I had heard of C. R. Reddy and N. S. Subba Rao as First Class Tripos men from Cambridge. Reddy had made a name as an educationist on the national scene and written influential literary criticism in Telugu. My real grouse is against N. S. Subba Rao who has left behind practically no evidence of a mind (with which he was endowed, beyond a doubt) with a First class Tripos in Economics. Ironically he was remembered for many years as one of the most well dressed men who successfully rose to the top from being a Professor early enough to be Principal, Director of Public Instruction and Vice-Chancellor. A good career for one who, in those days, came from a village. A legend floated that his Tripos examination scripts, written in his fine hand, had been preserved in the British Museum! The compliment was as much to the calibre of his mind as to his handwriting. How reputations are formed and lend credence to the offices some people hold! I had heard much the same of quite a large number of Indians who returned with brilliant degrees and distinctions abroad and settled down to pursue careers which meant holding high positions, little more. It is of them that Nehru writes with contempt in his Autobiography that the parlour firebrands of his Cambridge days preferred to be staid and sober judges or administrators in the British I.C.S. steel-frame when they came back and showed no concern for
country or cause. Suppose, I wondered often, Gandhi and Nehru had followed suit? Where would the country get its leaders from? And isn't a coincidence leadership came from men who had not only received English education but educated in the better British Universities. I turned from the larger question of leadership to innovativeness in the field of English Literature. My mind tried to grapple with issues on a variety of fronts and here was something which concerned me intimately.

Immediately for me was what had happened in English Poetry, Fiction and Criticism, especially Poetry. Both because I was curious to look for parallels in our own set-up and more, seek stimulus for action in my own sphere as teacher of English. For we have it on record that when Eliot was a student at Harvard and young men like him aspired to writing poetry, he surveyed the British poetic scene. Swinburne was the last important poet. He had been dead; and his poetry more dead! Where would one find the stimulus? No where, he sighed. His feverish mind looked across the English Channel, to France and French Symbolists, who traced the genesis of their poetry to the two most influential essays of the American Poe: 'The Poetic Principle' and 'The Philosophy of Composition'. And he in turn got the stimulus from Coleridge. How ideas circulate! I thought of Marx as a striking example of the flow of ideas across national barriers: An Austrian who worked in the British Museum and wrote his \textit{Das Kapital} in German, came to light after his death — it took 50 years — neither in Germany nor England but in distant Russia, through an intellectual like Lenin who assumed leadership for the Revolution. Such is the vitality of ideas.

To return to Eliot. His fertile mind roamed over all the literatures of Europe: the dead Phoenician civilization, the not so dead classical civilization of Greece, and the still living civilization of the Indo-Gangetic Valley. He learnt Sanskrit and Pali, read Frazer and his pupil Jessie Weston, and helped to correct the anarchy of contemporary life (even as Shakespeare had done for the self-assertive Renaissance man by juxtaposing the message of medieval Christian ethic) by invoking the high ideals of the Vedas, Upanishads, the Gita and Buddha's \textit{Dhammapada} among others. This is in addition to going back to the roots of his own culture in the 17th century and its religious poetry.
Professor at Maharaja’s College

was thrilled to read that in his opinion the philosophers of Europe were like ‘school boys’ before the thinkers of India. There must be tremendous reserves of vitality in this culture, I felt reassured since a great poet of another culture thought so. I remembered Goethe and Schopenhauer among others. I was struck by the parallel in India when Gandhi and Nehru, even Nehru with his scientific education and agnosticism, felt compelled to revitalize their past as a basis for the edifice of a new India.

In Fiction, virtually dead after Hardy, it was lucky for England apart from the Irish Joyce (like the Irish Yeats and Synge in poetry and drama) that a miner’s son could make great fiction by his daring to exploit the ordinariness of humble life and infuse it with his blood consciousness, though one regrets he didn’t connect it with a spiritual centre. And yet he liked to affirm he was profoundly religious. It was Ireland’s turn to build up a National Movement in Theatre, out of its own nationalism, the peasantry and Irish mythology.

Where was Criticism in England after Johnson and Coleridge with almost a century separating them, if Matthew Arnold had not rescued it from the books, for it is a fact that it had been imprisoned in books with Johnson and Coleridge, especially the latter, as Johnson at least had functioned in a compact society in living, vital contact with the elite, making for a community of interests. It was really therefore the gift of Matthew Arnold whose importance Eliot minimised by calling him a ‘propagandist for Criticism rather than a critic’, which Coleridge, for instance, was; but without contact with the intellectual life of the universities and other disseminators of thought he wasn’t a pervasive influence. It was fortunate for criticism that Arnold was seized of the life around, that he looked to France, compared the English scene with the French and pointed to its failings; and spoke in a seminal way of the ‘Function of Criticism (in England) at the Present time’, in which, it should be noted, every word is loaded with meaning and a sense of urgency. And in poetry nothing was more urgent than to evaluate the work of his immediate predecessors, the Romantics. How one wishes he had extended it to his own contemporaries, to himself! He could have paved the way for the acceptance of Hopkins. If he didn’t have a Scrutiny, he was
its living substitute in that he was a teachers’ teacher — an inspector and the pupils he met as he travelled from school to school. If someone could dig into that life of Arnold and bring up evidence of that aspect of his work from diverse sources including the children’s children of those days, how much more seminal he would be for us today.

One finds a parallel, though of a different kind, in the work of I.A. Richards. How much of his critical thought must have percolated into the thinking of his pupils at Cambridge. It is a fact that Richards was behind F. R. Leavis and it is not unlikely, though the dates of publication can be misleading, that he was behind T. S. Eliot too, for if Principles of Literary Criticism came out in 1924, how much of it must have been in the air, the air charged with ideas of an influential teacher in a great university long before that publication, sending intimations to Eliot of the first seminal critical essay, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ published in 1917 — both the terms suggest possible debts to Richards, but it is foolhardy for an outsider who has no access to the sources, to seek to determine influences. It can be inferred, though, from Leavis’s handsome acknowledgement of his debt to Richards in the early days that there would be no Leavis without Richards.

He was an asset to Leavis. He had others; he had, foremost of all, Cambridge, which for him held possibilities of its ‘Athenian Function’ he later speaks of as the cream of youth that came to him and others who did not come to him and some others who would stop on the road to look on an ill-clad teacher riding a ramshackle bicycle that posed a perpetual challenge, (a mind like his needed it so desperately, for it made inevitable the ‘conspirators’! Precarious finances without a permanent position (yet another challenge,) the loyalties he could command from a small team, and above all Scrutiny as the most effective instrument for the world, of the change that was being brought into the classroom. Precisely what one could visualise as a distant possibility in the Mysore of the early fifties! At least I dreamt such dreams.

Review of Syllabus and Question Papers

In the first four years of my professorship, S. V. Ranganna was my head; he had been fond of me since my student days,
indeed, he set much hope by me, spoke well of me in public and was genuinely pleased with the way, he thought, I had acquitted myself since I left the University. But I must admit I didn’t confine my literary enthusiasm to the classroom. The inclusion of modern poetry and modern criticism, yet to take effect, induced in me thoughts of laying proper foundations in the teaching of earlier periods of literature which indeed I had done for two years. Lest they die in the classroom, I thought they should be linked to the examination. Besides, the question paper of this year would set its seal on the new modes of teaching in the coming year which I had initiated; and the students who had been taught by me knew what was expected of them. To do anything else was to spring a surprise on them! I took care to include soft options as well; and sent up a paper that must have looked outrageous. I set the papers all right but had no voice in finalizing them as, being too junior, I couldn’t expect to be member of the Board of Examiners. I was aware the old guard would be annoyed if not offended by my impertinent questions. The examiners were the stalwart English teachers of those days — Ayyappan Pillai and K. Swaminathan from Madras, G. C. Banerjee from Bombay, M. S. Duraiswami from Osmania and V. K. Gokak from Karnataka, later Director of CIEFL Hyderabad — were all Oxford educated and didn’t have much sympathy; they must have thought me either callow or an upstart, for the questions did carry implications of obtuse reading of the text or paraphrased versions of it in its place, the text thus becoming the first casualty in teaching and learning and by no means a literary experience to participate in, with little relevance to one’s own time and place (we were Indians reading a literature different from our own and of another age), and insistence on dead wood like biographical details, talking around the poem, its message or its philosophy without attention to the words on the printed page and what they were doing in the poem and therefore to the reader — this was common enough even in England. The guides and nutshells, those enemies of learning, which inundated the bazaar bookshops sufficed and they virtually meant elimination of prescribed texts, an unacknowledged truth — a self-deception. A couple of professors like V. Y. Kantak of Baroda, S. Ramaswami of Madras and K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar of Andhra University who were
members of the Establishment, but nevertheless used to write encouragingly from time to time. Looking at one of the letters Srinivasa Iyengar so kindly wrote by way of acknowledging an early issue of The Literary Criterion, I cannot say how it must have helped to pull me up from moments of depression. Iyengar writes, from his village in Tinnevally District in April 1954 and I reproduce excerpts:

"The latest issue of The Literary Criterion is the best yet, though now it ceases to be purely a Maharaja's College magazine. I still wish you could arrange to get the proofs read more carefully. But such cavilling apart, you have done a very fine job. I saw with gratification the notice in the "Mysindia". I do hope that under your energetic editorship the "New Criterion" will set a tone to academic thought in our country.

I learn that Professor Ranganna has retired and you will thus have (I hope) some 20 years [I had more than 25 years, in fact] to reshape the School of English at Mysore and make it one of the most vigorous and fruitful, not by Indian standards alone, but by absolute standards. If a good school of English cannot flourish in so Elysian a place as Mysore, we must give way to utter despair. I am looking forward to meeting you all again."

And I started my innovations with the question papers which I thought would open people's eyes to what was necessary and urgent. Questions like the following as I recall at this distance, were strikingly there:

1 a) 'Discuss 'Lycidas' as a pastoral elegy'
   Or
   b) 'Lycidas' as an indictment of the state of religion and of the poetry of the time'

2 c) 'Milton, thou should be living at this hour
       And lecturing to us at Cambridge'
Examine the implications of this sarcastic undergraduate remark in the light of Wordsworth's tribute to the poet of Paradise Lost.
   Or
   'Lycidas' represents the high water-mark of English Poetry'
   What does this oft-quoted critical claim mean to you?

3 a) Grey's 'Elegy written in a Country Churchyard' finds 'an echo in every bosom' (Johnson)
b) 'While the language of Grey’s Elegy is refined, the sentiments are crude' (T. S. Eliot).
Does Eliot’s observation represent an improvement on Johnson’s?

4 "Dryden’s Essay on Dramatic Poesy is no more than a critical document". Would you, in the light of this charge, concede an important place to Dryden in the critical thought of the 18th century?

5 (a) Write an essay on Shelley’s “Passion for reform” from your reading of ‘Ode to the West Wind’ or Prometheus Unbound.

(b) Shelley’s poetry distracts our attention from the poetry to the poet. What is your own view?

Or

(c) ‘Wordsworth states too much, sings too little’. Is this an unfair estimate of Wordsworth’s poetry?

6 (a) “Tennyson is the truest representative of his age.”
Does this claim help you to understand the nature of Tennyson’s poetry — its merits or limitations?

(b) Did Tennyson make a difference to his age either in having a finer awareness of it or the relevance of Poetry to life?

7 Examine the “robust optimism” of Browning’s poetry in the light of Leavis’s observation, “Had be been less robust!”

8 (a) “We gather fine impressions of the Oxford countryside from ‘The Scholar Gipsy’ and ‘Thyris’”

(b) “Arnold failed to come to grips with the problems of his age.”
Which of the two is a more rewarding line of inquiry to an understanding of Arnold’s poetry?

Clearly, some of the questions did cast a slur on the earlier approaches to poetry and its teaching. But it was inescapable if the object of teaching was the training of the mind and sensibility of the student. It had been dinned into their ears by me and class assignments had alerted them on the coming change. I should hasten to add admission to Honours in the ’fifties and for a large part of the next two decades, was strictly on merit.
and only the very best — they ranged from two to ten in any batch — even two posed a problem of identity to a shy professor like A. B. McIntosh who wasn't sure which of the two was Lalitha! (the other was K. Narasimha Murthy). We were seven when I did my Honours in the forties. The Kannada poet Gopalakrishna Adiga and T. S. Sanjeeva Rao, the journalist, were among my class fellows.

What happened at the Board I had no means of knowing. I must have come in for a good deal of banter at the hands of teachers of high standing from other universities. The questions I was keen on had been, predictably, dropped, keeping the soft options and new ones of the same kind added in place of those that were dropped. When the printed paper reached me it was a rude shock. It must have been disconcerting to the students as well, (since some at least wished to try their hand at them) though perhaps not to the same extent. But the papers as printed were in tune with the rest set by the others.

When the scripts came from the university for valuation I wrote back to say I couldn't value the scripts relating to an examination paper which wasn't mine except for two or three questions. In his magnanimity Professor Ranganna recommended to the University that I should be requested to 'reconsider' my stand and 'persuaded to value the scripts.' I wrote politely but firmly I could not. It was clear that this had given room (or misunderstanding between the head and the next man in the Department, though in other matters I took care not to do anything which would hurt Ranganna, indeed I went out of the way to show my courtesies and respect for a former teacher and present head. Next year or for two successive years I turned down the examinership to avoid recurrence of the unpleasantness.

That was the time I moved on to my next front — too many fronts at the same time! — a campaign for American Literature which, however, had to wait for almost a decade before intensive crusading began. The "Plea for the study of American Literature in Indian universities" in the second number of my journal invited much derision and gossip: Was there an 'American Literature'? Did it measure up to the great English Literature? Who are the significant writers? etc. etc. They would have harped on Sidney Smith's arrogant attack if they had come across: 'Who in the four corners of the globe reads an American book?"
But my 'plea' was read here and there and the *American Reporter*, which looked like a weekly in its format, reprinted the article serially in its successive numbers and even paid for it. What with its all-India circulation, thanks to its distribution by the U.S.I.S., it came to be well-known in university circles. The few letters of encouragement I received privately from a couple of far-seeing university heads boosted my morale — my only compensation for an expensive enterprise.

**Abridgement of Jawaharlal Nehru's**

*The Discovery of India*

In my capacity as the newest member of the Board of Studies, for no other reason than that I was professor and so had to be there, Publishers’ representatives began to approach me for prescription of their publications. On one such occasion I was visited by an Englishman, P. J. Chester, then Manager of the Madras branch of the Oxford University Press, who later rose to be its Vice-Publisher in London. Being English and well-educated, he didn’t seem eager to come to the business, but appeared to be interested in conversation, reminding me of my Cambridge days and I must have brought up my enthusiasm into the conversation. And before he rose to take leave of me with no mention of publications or prescriptions, he asked me if I had been engaged in writing something. One of the things which had taken possession of me since my first reading of Nehru’s *The Discovery of India* in 1947 was whether our youth in the colleges and universities knew their India and here was a book written by a perceptive Indian who had as early as 1928 brought out his *Letters from a Father to his Daughter*, a children’s classic which could be read with profit by children anywhere. At one stage, after my return from Princeton, it even occurred to me how wonderful it would be if someone could abridge it and could be made to reach the young. I shared this thought with Chester and also another proposition that if bad teaching of English poetry had to be corrected, there should be some kind of guide for supplementary reading among the prescriptions. Chester registered both and even offered to write to me about them. Weeks passed, perhaps half a year passed and no letter from him. I was too proud to remind him. And at last there was a communication about OUP’s interest in the abridgement.
of The Discovery but I had to submit (put it obliquely without suggesting any discourtesy) a sample abridgement of one or two chapters for their consideration. I had been offended by delayed correspondence and so deliberated on it for a day or two, during which I had taught myself that a mature approach had been called for. I swallowed my pride in my ambition and abridged the first section of 20 odd pages of the original (published by the Signet Press, Calcutta) full of my markings and marginal notes, and sent it to Madras. After several weeks there came a letter along with the printed Agreement and Jawaharlal Nehru's consent for the abridgement. The royalties were to be divided between the author of the original and myself, indicating a slightly larger percentage to him, as it would go to the Prime Minister's Flood Relief Fund. In my euphoria for the honour of being bracketed with the hero of my youth, the privilege of popularizing a great book on India which thanks to him, had engaged me intensely as I was reading it, and the prestige of being an 'author' of a publishing firm of that standing, I offered to take 5% allowing 10% to the Prime Minister's fund. Chester was pleased and I applied myself diligently to the task. I felt important as correspondence grew on meticulous details like the spelling of Indian terms, diacritical marks, and the correctness of the author's own dates or facts since it was all written in prison — for me it was an education, the kind of which hasn't come my way in respect of any of my other books (unless it be the constant correspondence from Mini Krishnan of Macmillan, a rare young editor for any publishing firm in India) considering that the making of a book takes three — the author, the publisher and, to an extent, the critic who wins attention to it.

When work was in progress on the abridgement, Chester happened to be in Mysore on business and came to see me when he explained the delay: the first time, because the publisher had to assess the market for the book and the second time, they had to wait for the Prime Minister's approval, having sent three samples of it done by different scholars including me. And Nehru ticked mine! When it saw the light of day with a short preface and a fairly long introduction by me, it was discovered with all their fastidious care, a mistake had crept in under biographical details: "birth of a daughter, Indira, 1919". Thank
goodness', wrote Chester, 'you made her two years younger!' The book was widely reviewed, one review from Ceylon comparing it with D. C. Somerville's abridgement of Toynbee's *A Study of History* (which I have yet to see!) — my only book to date which received uniformly favourable reviews! Of course there was so little of my own handiwork in it, but for a beginner it was all very satisfying. It was a popular prescription for undergraduate reading under General English in many of our universities. And sales extended to many book lovers outside the universities. (a new edition of it is brought out by OUP to mark the centenary of Nehru's birth along with another abridgement by me of his *Autobiography*). It brought me a fair amount of money by way of royalty and I felt confident *The Literary Criterion* which was supported out of a small income from examination work could be continued and even strengthened. That was only a hope, for I had to accept quite a few examiner-ships from other universities, in some years going up to 10, which I viewed as my sad lot — to support the journal. The remuneration was meagre (the world's lowest, I fear) especially since no university at that time had more than 10-15 candidates taking the M.A. exam. I liked the opportunity for the contact I could make with teachers of English elsewhere, for doing what I could to change the information-seeking question papers and pursue my missionizing activity in getting a hearing for T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis, Indian Writing in English, and American Literature. As years passed I realized the examination work would drain my energies, leaving little time for my own reading and writing. This was driven home in Kerala where I used to be perpetual chairman of the Board of Examiners and as post-graduate centres increased it became mandatory to move from place to place and with increase of scripts I found it hard to concentrate on the answers, often resulting in re-reading them especially in border cases between a pass and a class and in determining the ranking. It was a strain on the conscience too as it implied a moral responsibility for the future of young people. I think one year my marking was widely censured in the senate and the syndicate as unduly strict and my resignation from examinership must have come as relief to the Vice-Chancellor, a former professor of English and friend, who must have been greatly embarrassed.
I was amused at the inordinate secrecy that went with our examinations and in the attempt to break it I would go out of the way to tell my students in Honours and M.A. Classes whom I met in my own room, their number being small, that I was setting this or that paper and even point to the manuscript on the table as being incomplete or I was hard put to find questions which would test their capacity for thinking or original response etc. Contrary to fears, no one was so naive as to ask me for 'important' questions, or curious about marking. Never in all my more than 30 years of examining had I come across any questionable practice among my students or colleagues. But I stopped all examining except of my own university in my early forties, though I still keep the Ph.D. adjudication both because I can keep in touch with the literary scene and renew my contacts with my colleagues in other universities.

I Edit School Textbooks

Encouraged by the success of *India Rediscovered* local publishers began to approach me for school textbooks and under pressure bordering on pestering, because one publisher struck me as a good man, I agreed to edit a series of Readers for the three years of high school. I was told it would be enough if I lent my name; the rest of the work would be looked after by a competent high school teacher of considerable experience. And I didn't have to share the royalty; he would be satisfied with a small lumpsum payment to be decided later. I turned down both, because having agreed to undertake the work and give my name to it I wished to be an active collaborator, using the opportunity to introduce some new ideas to stimulate teachers and students even at the high school stage and include here and there some indication of the rise and fall in the reputations of authors and their works from which excerpts had been chosen and throw hints to the teacher on what we considered a rewarding literary or generally educational experience and thus provide stimulus to the teacher to reach out and read more. B. K. Satyabodachar's name occurred to me as a possibility. I had met him a couple of times as a fellow teacher of English and as father of a pupil of mine, Prema and later of another, Vedavathi. He had taught my brothers-in-law two decades ago.
and they thought very highly of him. Here was a good teacher and a good man to work with, though I should add it took a little persuasion and patience to make him see the relevance of all the crazy things I meant to include in the notes, considering the books were for high schools and he knew from first-hand experience it would be considered too ambitious. I argued it was precisely there that we should start laying the foundations.

We began work earnestly and everything went through harmoniously though I had to tone down my zeal for this or that in a few places which I didn’t mind out of deference to him. Besides he knew better what was appropriate for that stage.

The third book in the series (Sesame and Lily Readers) was prescribed for the School Final Examination of the State without having to resort to any underhand dealings — common enough in those days. The royalty which ran into quite a few thousands of rupees was divided equally between the two of us and while it helped to pay off my old debts incurred among close relatives when I was away at Cambridge — I dread to be in debt unless I am driven to the wall but I knew most other kinds of debts were often never repayable. I almost vowed never to write a textbook for money—easy money and quick returns for relatively small labour, it was the surest way to the Devil, I feared. Besides I began to develop faith in my capacity to earn money if I needed — ironically I was perpetually in need for good spending, for I loved to host and provide some little relief to my poorer relatives. However, the resolve regarding textbooks endured with me for almost three decades when I relaxed it in the eighties as much to return after 30 years to win attention to Nehru, as to keep Dhvanyaloka going which I had started from scratch, — with no government or institutional grants — I needed every coin I could save. My daughter, my co-editor for The Essential Nehru, turned over her full share of the royalty to Dhvanyaloka the day she received the cheque.

The 12-Books Scheme for Undergraduate General English

Thanks to the presence of an enlightened Vice-Chancellor, ironically a former professor of Chemistry, giving the lie to C. P. Snow’s scandalous theory of ‘two cultures’ I felt encouraged — nothing happens in our set-up without the blessings of the
man at the top — to try out a novel scheme of what went by
the name of "Twelve Books Scheme" for undergraduate study
under General English, a compulsory subject for all courses.
Shakespeare and an anthology of poetry were left intact for
detailed reading. The twelve books were for general reading,
chosen from current thought, but the criterion of selection was
they should be written in good, readable English. I wrote to
heads of departments in the college to suggest two titles from
their own discipline — a classic and a recent publication which
in their opinion must be read by every educated man to instil
a wide awareness of the life and the times. Except for one
delayed response, no one wrote back. I identified for the scheme
Russell's *Impact of Science on Society*, Toynbee's *The World and
the West* (which drew to his surprise several hundred students
to a lecture Professor Toynbee was giving at the Maharaja's Col­
lege on his visit to India with his wife) Sir James Jeans's *The
Mysterious Universe*, Spengler's *Decline of the West*, Radha­
krishnan's *Kalki* or the *Future of Civilization*, A. N. Whitehead's
*Aims of Education* among others. Which roused at once the ire
of English Teachers because they had been used for a whole
century to teaching Jane Austen, Dickens and Hardy; and,
worst, the scheme virtually closed the door on private tutors.
It was thought I was out to project my image by any means.
They were soon joined by members of the Kannada Faculty as
they thought I was hell-bent on thrusting English down the
throats of Kannadigas and destroy their language and culture.
I became a 'Kannada-hater' — Kannada was the language of
the region and with Telugu for my mother-tongue they had an
additional stick to beat me with. An irate colleague who thought
he was custodian of the language and its culture, issued a bel­
ligerent pamphlet titled 'Kannadigas, Awake'. It was widely
distributed. And it became the talk, not of the University or the
town, but the State with the University’s affiliated colleges scat­
tered over a wide area. He seemed interested to wage a holy
war — actually, if the Kannada faculty could do its counterpart
for their students I should have welcomed it, for while English
children in school were acquainted with the major works in
their own literature I failed to appreciate why our students in
college should be satisfied with an anthology of poetry, a play
and one or two fictional works in our own language. I knew
from experience my own teachers found it tedious to spread the teaching of one or two books over a whole year while they could be read at one sitting each.

Our intention was that a young man leaving the University should have some little awareness of the currents of modern thought and once initiated it would become a habit to be pursued wherever he functioned. The business of a University, I argued, was to initiate the young to knowledge and help them perceive the connections between academic disciplines and relate all of them to the life around with the necessary discriminations. While the students were advised to read all the books and they got guidance not only from teachers of English but others outside, in science, history, philosophy in the form of general lectures — they would not be at a disadvantage to answer the examination paper if they knew any five books as they were required to answer five questions taking at least one question from a book. The object was to make them read at least five of the 12 books. As a village boy who came up the hard way, not in spite of it, but because of it, I have steadfastly believed that higher education at least should by definition be elitist (most even today call it snobbery) in that you spare no effort to sharpen the mind, sensitize every aspect of your personality and ennoble the soul. Surely, these should not be the close preserve of the upper class, which is less in need of it than the rural poor.

The scheme was noticed in Delhi by the Ford Foundation which was ably served by its Educational Adviser, I think, a former professor from Chicago who either admired or was associated with Hutchins’s Great Books scheme. Champion Ward came to see me and offered Foundational assistance for the 12 books scheme — to buy multiple copies of the titles, to bring specialists to give general lectures on them, and employ an army of tutors to sit with small groups of undergraduates and play the middlemen. Meanwhile the Vice-Chancellorship had changed hands and the new Vice-Chancellor was almost hostile to it, only because of the additional burden imposed on the unwilling students; most of whom coming from the villages, already found it hard to cope with existing College English. But largely, he feared the then Chief Minister of the State, K.
Hanumanthiah, was averse to receiving American assistance. For what I knew, if he rejected any foreign assistance, K. Hanumanthiah would not have hesitated on accepting this — he loved knowledge, he himself favoured wide reading and original thinking. And it did not come from the American Government, or the clandestine CIA.

But to the Vice-Chancellor, it was raising the hornet’s nest as existing books provided adequate equipment for an undergraduate. And so why go in for fancy projects? Ward and I thought if Delhi could be moved to show interest in it, it might still work. With Humayun Kabir, an Oxford-educated former professor, then Minister for Education in Nehru’s Government, it didn’t sound impossible. And Kabir did write a letter to the Vice-Chancellor (copied to me) that the Ministry felt the University should go all out to give the 12 Books Scheme a trial, as it might serve as “a pilot project for the rest of India.” No, the rumblings in the university circles and mounting hostility of teachers of Kannada and English must have intimidated the Vice-Chancellor, and Kabir’s letter didn’t work. Champion Ward admitted failure of his mission. Frustrated like me, but not defeated, he concluded his letter with

I remain
Your bloody and unbowed ally

Champion Ward

The scheme was in vogue for two years, which meant two examinations and it looked like eternity considering the ugly manifestations against it, against me, as calculated to defeating the ends of Indian education!! And so forth. The examination results didn’t compare unfavourably with those of previous years. But some nephew of a politically powerful member of the University Executive Council who was nowhere near the passing mark, had failed. The demand for ‘grace marks’ grew which I somehow successfully averted. / In a later year the Vice-Chancellor himself with his bias against English openly encouraged people’s representatives on the executive body to demand grace marks for English. My cynicism made them even more resentful. After futile arguments back and forth it was decided at the Results Committee meeting to go ahead ignoring the Professor of English. I offered to dissent. The Vice-Chancellor,
a renowned Kannada poet, punned, 'you always descent, never ascent — not bad for one who was against English. "Joking apart, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, please note my dissent and I'll send a note explaining my stand," I asserted. The knowledgable Registrar cautioned the Vice-Chancellor that results could not be published unless unanimously approved or the Chancellor would hold them up.

'There will be delay in publication of results. The responsibility will be all yours' I was threatened.

'I will take full responsibility,' I said without sounding arrogant.

There was no grace mark and no delay. The results were announced forthwith. But it soon took an ugly turn. An official motion to drop 12 books scheme came up before the Academic Council. 'It hasn't come a day too soon' said the Principal of Mount Carmel College, a senior teacher of English herself, blessed with better students than any college in the University. But it did come in the way of efficient coaching — the books resisted all attempt at coaching! A high percentage of passes was the goal — it gave pride of place to a college. The ends of education left them untouched.

Some who came under the 12 books scheme still remember it with grateful thoughts for the opportunity it provided for wide reading, especially in a competitive society. Let me reproduce below reactions of a teacher who was initially opposed to the scheme.

"Literature as a Means of General Education
(The Mysore Experiment)
What a Teacher thinks of it?

O. K. Nambiar

It was argued — I catch myself as one of those who argued in this manner — that even with five books to teach both the teacher and the student had to work to the limit of their capacity and time. Where five books have failed twelve must prove doubly so, lamented some, forgetting the observed fact that the more candles there are the more light there would be. There was, however a small number who declared with a fervour and conviction that overwhelmed all opponents that the new scheme was the one thing necessary, Unum necessarium, to set right the defects of the old scheme. The catholicity of outlook,
the refinement of sensibilities, the development of judgement and taste, the quickening of the power of sympathy are among the recognised virtues of a study of literature.

It is a rich and refreshing experience for a student of physics to read the biography of Abraham Lincoln and for a student of Political Science to know that the discoveries of Louis Pasteur had probably saved him in his childhood.

"Here is an example of a question set for the examination of April 1953:

"With regard to The Roll Call of Honour, do you think Q's (Quiller Couch) tests are exhaustive? Can you suggest any other test and names of other heroes and the qualities for which they should be included in the Roll Call? Again, with reference to When Peacocks Called, what is Asoka's message and how is it relevant to the world today?"

Another Question in April 1953: 'Are you the wiser for reading the 12 Books? Give arguments for and against? Samples:

'even if I fail in the examination I am definitely the wiser'.

(The student did not fail)

Another: "I am against the 12 books scheme, not because I hate to read 12 books but the work I have to do in my optionals is heavy. If that is reduced I do not mind reading even 24 books. I wish to build up my own library..."

70% of the students were 'for' the 12 books scheme, 20% definitely against, and 10% undecided. But the university missed a great opportunity, one is sad to say.

This was the time when my defeat was somewhat offset by a confidential communication from the UPSC which approached me — I can’t guess at whose instance; whoever it was it could never have been one who had anything to do with English Studies in a university — to update the Special English Syllabus for examinations of the Indian Administrative Service — something intended as an improvement on the status quo. Much of it was accepted to my surprise. It didn't mean I enjoyed the confidence of the establishment; the UPSC was perhaps less of an establishment than the Government. But it was still near allied. I later came to be on their 'black list', I guess, for not toeing the line either of the head examiner, often the UPSC's 'safe man' — anyone can see by looking at a list of successive head examiners — or the office superintendents who wielded real
power for all their seemingly inconsequential roles. Once I had shocked a meeting of examiners for the Essay paper by awarding someone 135 marks out of 150. Without announcing my mark at the Examiners' meeting I read out the essay for their reactions. They all thought it 'good': 90, suggested one of the 20 or so examiners, most of whom were senior professors. As at an auction, I saw it go up to 100 and stopped with 105. It crossed the sacred 60%. What would a mind of that order get in another discipline? Why must teachers of English feel 60% is sacrosanct? Anyhow the others asked for my mark. They felt tickled, amused, embarrassed, scandalized by the figure.

Sarcasm was let loose. Why not 150? most of them asked in a chorus. I said "Quite right, I should have marked 150. But, somewhere, I thought, my own ignorance as an examiner should be reflected in the marking; I did feel inadequate to sit in judgement over the candidate's essay: it did not in any case lie in my small province. A first class mind must have been at work behind it. Presumably for a very young scientist (shouldn't have completed his 24th year) his awareness of the limitations of the scientific attitude was astonishing. I should have felt privileged to publish the essay straight away in my journal without any editorial maltreatment most infrequently called for in the publication of learned papers — the editor's pencil would have been impertinent. It is at moments like that I was convinced that not only students but a teacher too should be fortunate in his students — the kind that Professor Hardy was at Cambridge in having a Ramanujan on behalf of whom he wrote to the university asking for an additional teacher, for one teacher, himself, was too inadequate for so fertile a mind as Ramanujan's. And earlier, Newton's teacher who, it seems, recommended to the university that it was time young Newton (24?) took his place. But I have also envied a set-up in which I imagined a young aspirant to fame in poetry like T. S. Eliot went from Irving Babbit's lecture, to George Santayana's and Bertrand Russell's, with C. R. Lenman, the sanskritist, thrown in between, while Josiah Royce and F. H. Bradley were looming large on the horizon at Harvard of the first decade of the present century. I had thought conservative Britain was not responsive to innovations. But there was at least one notable exception. Not long ago, in the seventies, Leavis whom his colleagues
humiliated (not humiliation, but a crime) by electing him for a Readership on the eve of his retirement (the same who wouldn't either individually or collectively send his wife a message of sympathies on his death) had been invited by a redbrick university like York as Visiting Professor to teach what he liked, when he liked and whom he liked. Precisely the practice that prevailed in the Gurukulas in traditional India. I have somewhere read bright French youth went in search of Peter Abelard from city to city for fierce discussions. Does anyone remember Leavis's colleagues who were since raised to bad eminence as Professors with effortless ease after him? It was instructive to watch this retired Reader called upon to address a Conference of British Professors of English which met in York that year — thanks presumably to the good offices of the Vice-Chancellor and Professor of English (Brockbank) both of whom, I suspect, were Leavis's pupils. All the same it was sad to watch this visiting Professor call attention, to my embarrassment, to his "professorial rooms" twice or thrice when I visited him at York.

With all this, Leavis could still speak of the "Athenian function" of Cambridge etc. and we in India substitute scandals for their intellectual battles, however unfair to the individuals concerned, for the individual could still write a book and call it Nor Shall my Sword (rust). But here we are, especially endowed to lower our debates to dirt.

Tiff with Journalists

One year in my own university I had an interesting encounter with a local journalist who telephoned me rather late in the evening that he wanted to see me on urgent business. Would he see me next morning? No, I was going to Bangalore to attend the meeting of the Results Committee, he reminded me! It was a confidential matter, how did he know? Why keep them confidential, then? I had a guest for dinner. And so would he come to see me around 10 P.M. when my guest would have left? Frontal attack within seconds of his coming: 'You are slaughtering students', he shouted. I didn't know I was a butcher! I smiled. Joking apart, I have come to ask you to recommend 7 marks' grace — a ludicrous term for so graceless an activity. Why 7, why not more? "That will be some remedy for your numerous sins," he charged. I later verified some daughter of a Secretary
to the Government and son of a Minister also wanted seven marks for their wards. He said he had prepared 3 articles against me for his paper if I failed to comply. He had his representative at the meeting — in a colleague who put up a feeble fight for 7 marks!

Another journalist, this time, Editor of a more influential Kannada daily and close to the political elite including the Minister for Education (who was interested in bringing someone dear to him into the Department and squeeze me out) was hand in glove with a number of university teachers, many of whom liked to please him and he sought to use the paper to spread scandals by taking a romantic phrase, image, quotation, I might have used in my classes, totally out of context and weaving filthy stories from his feverish brain in “Letters to the Editor”, day after day (with no mention of it in any other paper) for nearly a month, over fictitious names. A committee with a retired judge was appointed at the instance of the Education Minister to go into the whole affair. The defender of public morality was summoned and when it was demanded of him to reveal the names and addresses of the letter writers he pleaded he ‘acted in good faith’. But a public man, not particularly well disposed to me but had some sort of admiration for me as teacher, it seems, sprang from his seat to hold the editor by the neck — a match for him! The ugly episode ended and I think I emerged stronger from it. A very civilized and an accomplished literary person took over the Editorship from him and has remained a friend and generous admirer, though of another daily now.

Looking back on the vicious campaign, I believe I couldn’t have helped it in the context of a provincial place in which I had achieved a fair measure of success within 3 or 4 years of my professorship in the relatively early years of my life with, as the gossip circulated, a whole future before me. My enemies couldn’t accuse me of incompetence, nepotism or corruption. And so they seized on vulnerable points that would catch in a society like ours — my easy access to students, and in particular young women among them, some of whom may possibly have invented excuses for seeing me. I must confess I didn’t ruthlessly keep them off: I was no plastered saint and didn’t pretend to be what I was not, but being keenly alive to the pervasive sanctimonious hypocrisy and the gossip it would have
generated, did indeed generate, I did my best not to transgress
the social norms. One couldn’t be too much on guard, though, where one’s own immediate students were concerned. In any
case this was something which, whatever turn it took sub-
sequently, must not have provided the ammunition at the time
that most lively and active student association called Mitra Mela
(of which I was President) was seized by the newspaper man
in the early Fifties to scandalize me. Mitra Mela had thrown up
some young people, men and women, full of life and talent for
creative activity including a monthly journal called Varsity
Times, (the name suggested by me in appreciation of that excel-
ment student paper Varsity at Cambridge) edited by V. S.
Raghavan who, with a mere first degree equipment of Mathe-
ematics and Statistics, worked his way to occupying high offices,
was my close student associate. His sharp intellect, tact, tremen-
dous energy, idealism and remarkable maturity for his age
opened to him the doors of the World Bank in Wash-
ington where he successfully carried out many global assignments in
various parts of the world. Among others were M. Satya-
narayana Rao, presently publisher, book seller and a notable
public man as well as V.K. Nataraj, a very intelligent, cultivated
person, a most accomplished speaker in English, marked out
for big things, but has been content to be mere Registrar of the
University. — the leading lights of the college in the early days
of my professorship. Among the women were two students of
conspicuous talent and fine promise, both professors of English
now: Meena Belliappa, and Vimala Rao.

Prescription of Indian Writing in English

I have no doubt that, generally, students, not only those doing
higher English, continued to show me the same regard and af-
fection when the newspaper indulged in its vicious campaign,
though it must have given tremendous secret satisfaction to the
older teachers who had not condoned, what they considered,
my rising popularity, which had made inroads into the domain
of their private tuitions. The prescription of Indian novels like
R. K. Narayan’s Swamy and Friends, The English Teacher or The
Guide and Raja Rao’s Kanthapura for undergraduate General
English with no secondary material on them on which our
teachers had been accustomed to lean heavily in their teaching
of Jane Austen, Dickens and Hardy, constant undergraduate prescriptions during the present century. And now they found the ground cut under their feet being compelled to do their own thinking and formulating their own reactions. The protest originated from teachers of English, for they enjoyed tremendous popularity with the students. Increased protests voiced through newspapers gave a handle to the anti-English elements one year in the Academic Council for the immediate withdrawal of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* on grounds of 'obscenity' and 'Indian English', while the English novelists wrote 'chaste English'! The Professor of English was asked for reactions which brought out the following letter from me:

To 

The Registrar  
University of Mysore  
MYSORE

Sir,  
Please refer to your letter of 8th January asking me to make a report on the alleged obscenity of *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao. All I can say is that I am not aware of any obscenity in the book, nor, I presume, is the Board of Studies in English. For if that were so the Board would obviously have not prescribed it for reading by young people in our colleges. Indeed, it should have been prescribed by competent authorities earlier. Speaking for myself, in a personal way, my son who is 20, teaches it presently to the I B.A. class in one of our colleges and my daughter 15, will read it next academic year and I am glad that my children have the privilege of handling a work of art of that order. But I am not making an argument of it, for I might well be an indifferent parent. And that is by the way.

Coming back to the novel, far from being obscene, it is acclaimed by competent critics in India and abroad as a minor classic. It is perhaps the only work of art I have known in any language which depicts so faithfully and movingly the manner in which Gandhi's movement of non-violent non-cooperation gathered momentum and gained significance as a mass movement in the 1930s. Raja Rao, while he can write English as one to the manner born, chose to write as an Indian for he is steeped...
in the time-honoured tradition of India and is in the distinguished line of writers of epics, of classical dramatists and Vachanakaras. And to call him obscene is to call into question much of our valued earlier and contemporary literature put freely into the hands of our boys and girls.

It is rather ironic that the term 'obscene' should have been used in respect of one whose moral and spiritual preoccupations have helped to place modern India on the literary map of the world and earn respect for it from such writers as E. M. Forster and Andre Malraux, whose moral sensibilities no one can question. But the present questioning in certain important places might injure the very cause we seek to promote, namely Creative Writing in English done by Indians depicting their valued tradition and the contemporary social milieu by making English accommodate something foreign to it. Here is a courageous undertaking which, if we threw away, history will not forgive us.

Yours truly,
C. D. Narasimhaiah

Ironically the newspaper which had aired the grievances against Kanthapura was the one to praise Raja Rao, the author of the controversial Kanthapura on its front page in bold lines across two columns on his receipt of Sahitya Akademi award for The Serpent and the Rope.

Language-Literature Debate

One of the still undying debates for which I have acquired considerable notoriety in British Council circles and Institutes of English, in particular that white elephant, the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, presided over for many years by, ironically, a dear friend, Ramesh Mohan, who collected some very able men and women who in their turn, regrettably, taught themselves to lend vigorous support to the disputed official goals of the Institute while they alone had the potential but not, I fear, the concern, to give the right lead in the teaching of English in the country, indeed in all Asia. My frequent airing of grievances at meetings of the Governing Council on the Institute's failure to discharge the functions for which it had been started were noted and politely passed over.
as of a black sheep, reminding me of my ineffectual outbursts at my own university’s meetings in certain other matters. The wheels of the official machinery which grind remorselessly and to no purpose, seem to be the only ones which emit no spark as they roll — a reflection, I fear, on the quality of the metal on which they roll. If only the teachers there had asked themselves honestly in their luminous moments whether they were working in answer to the real needs of the country in the context of its history and destiny they should have found the answer. Meanwhile what damage to the country and to themselves as leaders of thought in the most crucial sphere of the nation’s life — education!

The Language-Literature debate has, thanks to the ill-conceived reforms in the ‘methodology’ of teaching English by those who didn’t have an inwardness with Indian education or Indian culture exercised my mind at levels deeper than it seems to warrant to many of us. As a village boy who learnt English the hard way (there are no short-cuts, let it be said, to mastering the secrets of any art or science) and gained entry into a fast-changing world I became alive to the manifold benefits it had conferred on the Indian intellectual scene in the arts, sciences, technology, commerce, diplomacy and, generally, the education of the Indian mind which, thanks to what Vivekananda so long ago perceived as only a genius of his order could, that the Anglo-Saxons had given him a machinery in the English language and he would use it to broadcast the great truths of his land to the world and make them “run like fire” — a vivid poetic image, clearly beyond the pale of the petrified linguist.

With no access to children’s books I had been brought upon Vivekananda’s essays and speeches which by a lucky chance came my way early in life. Consequently I felt greatly defeated and depressed that we were throwing away an invaluable gift so thoughtlessly. What their great men had valued (Macaulay, primarily) as ‘the imperishable empire’ and received by Indians as ‘noble speech’ (Jawaharlal Nehru) and ‘gift of Goddess Saraswathi (C.R.) had now been reduced to the size of a pocket atlas by their descendants, who could only look at English in terms of ‘skills’, ‘tools’, ‘techniques’, ‘methods’ which, they convinced themselves, they were qualified to impart to Indians because they were born to it, not realizing that English, as we know it
today is mankind's heirloom, a creation of many people in many lands who have learnt to play with it as if it were their own language. Indeed, as an Englishman put it English has become a 'bar' to Englishmen themselves. That language learning is an imaginative pursuit like poetry, painting, music, dance, sculpture and that one should court the Muse, tease her and be teased in turn till one wins her over completely when they could hardly 'tell the dancer from the dance' or say, 'you are the music while the music lasts' — eludes ELT specialists. It is the great Indian poet, Kalidasa, who compared in Raghuvamsa the word and the meaning, Vagartha, to our primordial parents Parvathi and Parameswara. Separate them not!

The language 'experts' from the British Council had little difficulty in selling their language policy to the semi-literate politician and the ill-educated administrator in Delhi as they placated both by saying Indians had a great literature of their own and they didn't need Shakespeare and Milton; what they needed was the language to suit the needs of a changing society. It is the window on the world and their experts would teach that language. Predictably, it appealed to them: surface responded to surface.

Actually British Council's recent bulletins like Literature Alive and more especially Literature Matters must sound cathartic in the light of the Council's language policy of the past few decades. That is my justification for inserting my address to a Summer School of English in Mysore in 1966 which with the years may not have lost its edge, I flatter myself.
I am most grateful for the kindness of the authorities of the Summer Institute of English in asking me, in effect, to initiate a dialogue — that's how I look upon this opportunity — with younger English teachers. What, one may ask, are my credentials? I haven't learnt English at my mother's knee, nor could I afford the luxury of a public school. My speech habits were formed in a village school and today a good many of my students, I find, are also from village schools. But they all know I am teaching a language, not my own. I am not a specialist in Methodology of English teaching though I have pretensions to some knowledge of literature in the English language, that is, of the behaviour of words, the romance of words, the organization of words as a mode of concretization on the printed page of a creating organization of experiences, evoking certain responses in individuals and groups — which I take to be an essential equipment of a teacher of English. I am told by my linguist friends that I hold views very different from the current official views on English teaching. For my part, I wish to avoid if I can such terms as 'language' and 'literature' when I have to refer to English teaching. It is not because I am pusillanimous but because I wish to avoid confusion. I should therefore simply refer to our discipline as English Studies in School, College, or the University, for I confess I don't know where language ends or literature begins. But some in high official positions do think that for Indian boys and girls at least English literature cannot be taught and ought not to be taught unless they wish to specialize in English. It is their view that masses of students in school and college should only be taught 'language' and that, by means of 'new techniques'.

Now I submit: I think it is neither possible nor desirable; indeed, it is disastrous to the future of English teaching to
separate the two. I must also submit that the advocates of this separatist view, perhaps because of the unqualified official endorsement of their position (the chief sponsors of language teaching are the top officials at Delhi advised largely by the British Council and such other agencies) have, unfortunately, not cared to carry conviction to their teaching colleagues in the universities, colleges or schools; on the contrary, they have chosen to operate mainly through the administrative machinery at all levels. It will be intellectual vulgarity in me to claim infallibility for my stand or deny intellectual honesty to those that plead for what they call 'language' teaching in preference to 'literature.' I wish to repeat that the two sets of educators have not, so far as I know, sat round a table and sought corroboration, in a spirit of real concern for each other's points of view. I remember the Heads of University departments of English did meet in Kashmir on an invitation from the Central Institute of English and I remember with gratitude the opportunity we had of spending a week in the cool crisp air of the mountains when the rest of the country was in the grip of a heat wave. Beyond this, unfortunately, nothing came out of even the best intentions of the organizers, because the Professors simply could not have any sympathy for the standpoint taken by their hosts who, I am afraid, failed to put across their views convincingly. I remember one professor expressed his grave concern that a good scholar, teacher and poet (Y-K. Gokak) should be found heading the host institute and hoped they could wean him away from evil company (his wishes have since been fulfilled)! I am anxious that I should not be treated by the organizers of the Summer Institute as a hostile or be made to feel that I have walked into the enemy's camp. After all we who speak of 'language' and 'literature' cannot quarrel and differ one hundredth as much as, say, the Dwaitins and the Adwaitins in philosophy and yet most disinterested people know there is a case, a strong case for each of them. And the more challenging the one set is, the more resourceful becomes the other. My object is to see if by stating my case as strongly and, I hope, clearly and, may I also add, because of your intellectual tolerance, as uninhibitedly as possible, I may provoke in those that hold a different position from mine a correspondingly frank exposition of their views and then if both of us share the same concern for
the student who learns English, and have no axe to grind — I should not have fears of losing my professorship, or prestige as member of literary bodies, or profit as examiner in sister universities and public service commissions; and those others, not have any fears of being denied entry into lucrative teaching or inspecting posts or missing promotions or the chances of going abroad on a British Council scholarship or visitorship, and such other patronage, that is, if both of us can get out of our ego-centric predicaments, to use a philosophical phrase in a mundane context, and practise what Matthew Arnold calls the Indian virtue of detachment, a rare commodity in India itself — I do think it will be possible to minimize our differences and promote English Studies on right lines with the combined efforts of both of us which we are now frittering away without coming to brasstacks. May be, both of us have to meet half-way. If so, we shall, for after all, the interests of the young fellows we seek to educate are paramount; and what is no less important is that both of us would do well to pay heed to the verdict of history, for history is remorseless in its verdicts. Let it not be said of either of us by posterity that because of the 'linguistic' or 'literary' blinkers that we were wearing or because of our petty self-interests we threw away a great inheritance — English language and the literature in it are assuredly that. One of our wise men (C. Rajagopalachari) known all over as the most astute politician in India, called English "a gift of goddess Saraswathi." It is in that spirit that I beg leave to present my views before you, this morning.

Let me start with the more or less officially acknowledged objectives of English teaching: that we do not any more propose to use English in this country as extensively as we did before Independence and our aims in learning English are now quite clear and limited, namely, to acquire a knowledge of science and technology, to carry on trade and commerce with the rest of the world, and for purposes of diplomacy. Is this true? Let me for the sake of argument (for so runs the argument and it is only an argument, and the facts run counter to it) concede that in the humanities and social sciences we are the earth's first-born; that in them, at any given point of time we can switch over to an Indian language at all levels of education; and that we have overcome the unfortunate linguistic situation of India
by a waving of the magic wand; or, assure ourselves that in any case it is of no consequence whatever whether or not we keep abreast of the times in the arts and the social sciences so long as we take effective steps to secure rapid progress in science and technology. If so, we forget that we are seeking technological progress, not for its own sake but for the sake of human beings in a socio-economic-cultural context. It comes to this then: that we gear all English-teaching to acquiring a knowledge of science and technology both of which are available in English. This is tantamount to saying, please mark, that once this nation acquires a reasonable place in the world of science and technology English automatically withers away like the State in the Communist Manifesto (experience has shown that if anything has withered away it is the Manifesto, for the State is the one substantial thing that has survived). Put crudely, it means that our very existence as teachers of English depends upon the prolonged backwardness of India in science and technology.

There are at least two fallacies inherent in this objective: (a) that a foreign language (English in this case) is learnt by all school-going children for the sake of the science and technology in it, and (b) that all significant research in science and technology is available only in English. The fact is, English has been compulsory for all children in School, and for boys and girls in College, whether or not they pursue science. If it is only to learn science it follows quite logically that it should be taught only to scientists and even there only so much language as is essential to follow higher science which is in English as the English and Americans learn German for a year or two to read scientific journals. For, elementary science, even undergraduate science, is now taught in our regional languages in many of our universities. But the truth is, our boys and girls learn English for 10 to 12 years before they get their first degree in any discipline - science, arts or commerce. If in the face of facts any one should still harp on our limited objective of teaching English for scientific purposes etc., I submit this is scandalous luxury for a poor people like us especially when so few of those that learn English in our science colleges pursue higher research in science — they are not meant to, they cannot.

As for the next fallacy, that all higher science and technology is in the English language, even the most naive should now
know that Germany and, of late, Russia are close contenders to the throne of science, if not unchallenged masters. This is certainly true of the Russians who are invariably ahead of the Americans in space science — the British have been left far behind in the mad race for the moon and are nowhere in the picture. And so the arguments in favour of learning German or Russian, especially the latter should outweigh all others. The claim, that we are already in possession of 150 years of English to build upon is rendered ineffective by what the language specialists describe as our sterile and obsolete modes of English teaching. Besides, thanks to 'improved techniques' even German and Russian should now be learnt without tears. As for trade and commerce I should think that India has contacts with more non-English-speaking countries than English — and we shall win respect for our country at their hands by using one of 'our own' languages rather than English. As for trade with English-speaking countries the same argument holds good; if not, we can always train a team of translators. There is diplomacy left on the list of our objectives. Even here the British and the Americans are at a disadvantage in relation to some of the European nations. The Russians have shown that they make incomparably better diplomats than any others. Spending on Indians a fraction of what the Americans do the Russians have yet built up tremendous goodwill in India, more so because of the Tashkent agreement. But I shall not permit myself any comparison with the work of the English-speaking diplomats as, clearly, that is not my concern here. As against all these hypothetical arguments the facts stare us in the face: that we are teaching English for so long and want to teach it so well which is proof of our undeclared belief that without it we shall not be able to educate our children properly not merely in the sciences but in arts and commerce as well, nor administer justice, enforce law and order or even preserve the country's unity. We may not admit it but the fear that without English everything may collapse and that we may have to start from scratch again seems to loom large on the Indian horizon. A close and dispassionate examination of the issues involved should confirm my observation. But do we have the time or the inclination to sit and do some straight thinking even on so vital an issue?
It is against this background that ‘improved’ techniques in English teaching quite rightly acquire an importance in the popular mind and policy-making political circles. It is but fair, that they should demand their children be spared the useless junk and the needless effort and the wasteful years now allegedly given to learning English. The idea naturally appeals to the parents as well as the governments who are called upon to foot the bill and so they bless the new effort regardless of what the convention bound teacher of English says, privately. It will therefore be incumbent upon him, that is, the conventional teacher of English, to demonstrate that he is not prejudiced against the new techniques merely because of their novelty or because of his unwillingness or inability to make the necessary adjustments, and also that he is not hanging on to the past simply because of its impressive ancestry but because of its deep roots and because of its capacity to revitalise the present by making it meaningful even in the changed context, that is, he has to show that the traditional method has unsuspected possibilities for ordering the present in a significant way. After all we are all familiar with what is called going forward to the past. That is, one can only work in one’s own tradition, within the framework of one’s swadharma. A wise teacher knows that he has first of all to inform himself of the psychology of his students — not merely what he teaches but whom he teaches. He has to have an uncanny insight into the social and spiritual background of his pupils and the very mentality of the race that has produced them. Even medical men who prescribe for the ills of the body have now thought it necessary to go into the history of the individual patient and his family — the art of diagnosis demands it. For, not all patients react to drugs and surgery the same way. That is how new branches like cytology and psychotherapy have acquired importance in the medical faculties. Sociologists and anthropologists have warned us repeatedly against extending urban ways of living to the tribes however attractive they may appear to us. What is bread to the European may be a bitter pill to the Asian palate — by and large our people have not yet shaken off the view that only patients eat bread, I mean, the bread of the bakery. There is no question here of inferior or superior; it is simply a different way of living.
To come back to the central Indian tradition. Essentially, the Indian people, like, for example, the Celts of Ireland, and to a much larger degree than they, have a magnificent mythical imagination which flows in their bloodstream from grandfather to father to son. From the Upanishads to the Puranas, the Jataka tales, the Kathasaritasagara and the matchless stories-within-story as in the Mahabharata to the grandmother’s repertoire of folk stories and the village bard’s folk songs the Indian imagination is sustained by myths and legends and symbols. Please, for Heaven’s sake, do not judge the Indian calibre by the decadence which has over-taken us today. Enough of the damage done to the Indian intellect and imagination. It is time we stopped our endless, shameless mimicry: yesterday it was the British we mimicked, today it is the Americans, and tomorrow, perhaps, the Russians. Let me hasten to add I am no obscurantist; indeed I am often accused of being an iconoclast; I am keenly alive to history and it is my conviction that when a people withdraw into their shells and are wrapped up in conceit and are not responsive to external influences they perish, no less than when they let the roots dry up. I respond with all my being to that old text in the Rigveda which says ‘Let noble thoughts come to us from every direction.’ And so there is no danger of my asking you to bar all windows and doors against the light of day and the winds of heaven. My stand is simply that of Gandhi who liked all the winds of all the lands to blow over his house but he would refuse to be blown off his feet. The British and the Americans learn French and German, as the French and the Germans learn English, on their own terms. The most ludicrous figure I have seen on a university campus is the young Indian who affects American — he cuts his hair like an American, dresses like an American, walks with his briefcase like an American and, of course, rolls his ‘r’s like an American but his mind is not trained for any discussion of politics or religion or ideas, precisely where I would have liked him to have the familiar English or American, and of late, the Soviet leader’s kind of openness. Now, that is not the kind of Indian we should like to send out of our schools and colleges. The young man that goes out of our schools and colleges should be one who draws his sustenance from the deep reservoirs of the Indian psyche and absorbs and assimilates external influences not because they
are good for South Americans or Africans or even for the progressive Europeans, but because they are good for us, they suit the genius of the Indian people. What we borrow must stand the test of the Indian sun and of the North-East and the South-West monsoons. It has to be imparted to the child of the Indian peasant whose culture, if I may say so in all humility, is without a parallel. It is his magnificent mythical imagination that seems to distinguish him from others. Well, such is the ethos in which the Indian mind is cast. I won't pretend to think it is the right mould. But the irrational plays its part in life like the muddy waters of the Ganga which flow in our veins — *vyapinigruma ganga* — and if it has given meaning to countless millions and made their drab lives worth living I shall not throw it away for all the wealth of the world. I refuse to throw away even my superstitions unless I am offered a more meaningful substitute. Till then, I shall hug my superstitions rather than face emptiness.

I spoke earlier of the mythical imagination of the Indian. It's probably true of all older civilizations but it is true of India in a special way. Poetry has been the very breath of its being. If speech was an art anywhere it was here. Panini, our greatest grammarian, I gather, was a first-class poet. Our most well-known mathematical treatise *Bhaskara Lilavathi* is written in resonant verse; our mathematical riddles are in verse. Our books of medicine are in verse; our mathematical riddles are in verse. Our most intellectual approach of Sankara and even their commentaries, and commentaries on commentaries, are all in verse. Our social reformers brought the wisdom of the Vedas and the Upanishads to the doors of the masses, in melodious verse. To this minute, the *kirtan* performer you can catch in any of the corners of crowded streets of Indian cities narrates to all classes of women and children, amidst the boom of motor horns and Radio Ceylon, the mythical stories of India's past in magnificent verse and even his elucidation in prose done in terms of the living present corresponds at its lowest level to the rhythms of modern English poetry. If ever you go to a village, stand near a primary school, you will even now hear the letters of the alphabet chanted by children and the multiples of two, three or twenty, when learnt by young boys and girls, whether in chorus or alone, remind you of Hopkins's 'the roll, the rise,
the carol, the creation’ — it is all in sprung rhythm. Those of you that have heard of Maheswara Sutra would know that the letters with their sounds were formed by Eswara’s rhythmic shaking of the damaruga in his hand. The alphabet is traditionally known in our country as Aksharalakshmi. The very air we breathe is suffused with poetry: the cowherd, the cartman, the fisherman that plies the boat—it is natural for them all to be singing. In India he is a beggar without self-respect and a specimen of the lost generation who only cringes before you and does not sing for alms; and if you fling a coin into his bowl it is not because, as is so often the case, the tender chord of your heart is touched by the song, but you want to shake the prosaic pest off your sight! The saintly Gandhi, for all his crispness of speech and the coldness of the lawyer’s trenchant logic, was moved to describe the cow as a ‘poem on pity’ and thus win the hearts of the Indian people for his campaign against cow-slaughter. And the most sophisticated of our modern statesmen, for all his Harrow and Cambridge background, for all his Marx and Lenin, and a crowded daily schedule, managed to find a little time to read English and American poetry before he retired at night. I dread to imagine what would have been his lot had he come under our new techniques of language teaching as a student of Chemistry, Botany and Geology in College. Today, it is he that speaks of language as ‘the poetic testament of the genius of a people’. I have seldom, if ever, heard him mouth formulated phrases; he once frowned on the Liberals for saying that ‘patriotism is not the monopoly of the Congress’ — he was annoyed presumably, not so much by the Liberals’ claim to patriotism but that they shouldn’t have been, as highly educated men, sensitive enough to “vary” the oft-repeated phrase, a bit. It is his poetic rather than the political susceptibilities that were hurt most. Consider his will, that legacy to the Indian people — its poetic prose seems to defy a majority of the structures we have listed and yet the Minister for Education wishes it to be included in the P.U.C. English text throughout the country, obviously for the “sheer beauty of its prose”, I say obviously because the beloved Lal Bahadur Shastri also spoke in English, very simple English but no one thinks of commending it to the attention of learners of English.
Reverting to Nehru, if the Indian people responded to this politician's speech as to the "flute of Shri Krishna" (it is again another politician B.G. Kher who made the comparison) the secret of it was the human idiom in which he spoke. Not for nothing did Tom Wintringham say: "Some of us in Britain who have read these Glimpses of World History, The Discovery of India and Nehru's Autobiography feel envious of India. And it is easy to see why. Our own past rulers taught despair and greed. Our present leaders take a tepid pride in persuading us to endure, without hope or aim great enough to stir us, some inconveniences. It is natural we should envy a nation led by a man aware of the whole world's agony, past and present, yet inspired by its possibility of infinite advance. Some of us if we felt our right equal to our need, would claim Nehru as a World's leader rather than a nation's." Precisely on the ground of his compassion for humanity expressed in a feeling language that Tom Wintringham recommended: "If in the future some Indian children are to learn English they will do well to insist that they are taught from these Glimpses rather than from Macaulay or from Gibbon."

It is obvious that Nehru, like any self-respecting creative artist has not always obliged us, teachers of English, by using "graded vocabulary" or "graded structures" in his Glimpses, so warmly commended by Wintringham to our boys and girls wanting to learn English. What shall we do, then? Shall we at the end of eight years of English-learning put selections from this great book in the hands of students or withhold these from them because, his prose is not according to our specifications? I do not know what others think but I should rather change our linguistic specifications to accommodate such a human document. After all, we cannot claim to do better with lessons written by experts who have assiduously taught the specifications and addressed themselves for well over five years to the task of preparing a book for P.U.C. class according to their own specifications. I mean that solitary document produced by the Central Institute of English at Hyderabad for preparatory students at college. I was particularly taken in by the promising first lesson where we are told that "many science-writers use the English language badly"; — and so boys and girls are warned not to "take this way of writing for yourself." If you
want to say "later", please use this word, instead of "on a subsequent occasion"; if you mean many, say many, not numerous.

When I turn with mixed reactions to this advice, on to the lessons that follow, lessons carefully prepared for the P.U.C. Arts students who must know some facts in elementary science I find such passages as the following abound in the book and I take them not from the same lesson but one example from each lesson:

PRESSURE

'The hydrogen is inflammable and strict precautions must be taken to minimise the danger of an explosion, which would occur if the hydrogen got ignited through some carelessness. If the balloon ascends too rapidly, an aperture at the top can be uncovered for a time, and some of the hydrogen can be liberated from the balloon. If the balloon descends, some of the load, e.g., some sand, may be ejected. So it is possible to maintain a steady height. Making a successful landing is a delicate operation; obviously most of the hydrogen originally enclosed in the balloon must be liberated, but the basket must not come into collision with the ground.'

I was very nearly reminded of that young lady from school who said to the old woman: 'Take an egg, make a perforation at the base and a corresponding one at the apex. Apply the lips to the aperture and by forcibly inhaling the breath the shell will be exhausted of its contents'. And the old woman who heard this remarked: 'It all speaks how folks do things nowadays. In our days we used to take an egg, make a hole, and suck it.'

MEASURING

'You will find somewhere two cubes of wood. You put one of these blocks of wood so that one edge cuts a convenient mark on the ruler, put the sphere to touch that side, then put the second block of wood gently onto the ruler so that the sphere is just held between the two cubes, remove the first cube and

* This and the following three extracts are taken from Preparatory General English Course for Colleges (Physical Sciences) prepared by the Central Institute of English, Hyderabad 1963. See also the twin document in Social Sciences.
the sphere and read the length indicated by the bottom edge of
the side of the second cube which touched the sphere. The dif­
ference between the original mark and the second one is the
diameter of the sphere.'

The Concise Oxford Dictionary explains diameter as a
straight line that passes from side to side of any body through
the centre. And if I had not seen the Oxford Dictionary I should
have been tempted to echo Dr. Johnson who protested against
the pomp and circumstance that went into describing a flea as
if it were an elephant!

PARASITES

'Big fleas have little fleas
Upon their backs to bite 'em;
And little fleas have lesser fleas,
And so ad infinitum'.

'As the host weakens, and supplies a smaller amount of
nourishment, the parasite constricts, that is, makes itself tight
around the host, and inserts more roots through its bark, so
accelerating the process of weakening until one stormy day the
wind lays the host-tree prostrate and the parasite perishes with
it.

'Some seeds have prickly hairs enabling them to adhere to
the coat of an adventitious passer-by.

'One interesting relationshp has the name commensal, which
means "sharing a tale", that is, living with and sharing the food
of another. A dog can find its own food if it has to, but prefers
a commensal existence."

The word 'commensal' despite our 2,500 word vocabulary!
The only sensible thing in the lesson is the epigraph of 4 lines
of verse which is so self-explanatory that the rest of the lesson
only serves to block comprehension.

BACTERIA

'It is easy to see that micro-organisms, bacteria and so on,
tend to be parasitic, to live and multiply in warm moist en­
vvironments where their food exists in solution, and it is easy to
see that the internal environment of animals and man is ideal
for them. However, there is a great diversity of analogous
environments, warm milk, sticky foodstuffs containing a lot of sugar, and so on.'

The whole thing reflects a foggy mind and one's first response to it is: words, words, words! And these words without clear thought naturally make no sense unless you guess at it.

One turns in disgust from such pedantic stuff again to Nehru who can speak to children of this beautiful world of ours, and who asks them if they have read fairy tales; and tells them that the world itself is a fairy tale, asks if they can tell a flower by its scent or a bird by its note. Did he have us, teachers, in view when he sent a message to the Children's Number of Shankar's Weekly wherein he talks of children: "They are wiser than their fathers and mothers. As they grow up, unfortunately their natural wisdom is often eclipsed by the teaching and behaviour of their elders. At school they learn many things which are no doubt useful but they gradually forget that the essential thing is to be human and kind and playful and to make life richer for ourselves and others. We live in a wonderful world that is full of beauty and charm and adventure. There is no end to the adventures that we can have if only we seek them with our eyes open. So many people seem to go about their life's business with their eyes shut. Indeed, they object to other people keeping their eyes open. Unable to play themselves, they dislike the play of others."

You will forgive me if I say that to me this passage in charming prose sounds like an appropriate comment as much on the linguist's absence of charm and grace in his prose as on some of the views I have heard in respect of English-teaching by those who should have known better. Like the elders Nehru speaks of, these specialists do not want poetry to be taught, do not of course want Shakespeare to be taught and do not want anything that smacks of feeling or emotion to be taught to Indian boys and girls. I humbly ask whether their job is to teach English or brain-wash the students. I gather from a book on The Psychology of I admit there are equally difficult sentences scattered in the books we prescribe for the P.U.C. course but, then, the excuse is we are obliged to make extracts from the already published material, while here in this work they have prepared each lesson presumably after careful research because we are told of the privileged research fellowships available in CIEFL.
"N for Nobody"

of Teaching Foreign Languages written by B.V. Belyaye, Professor of Methodology in Moscow University and introduced by an Oxford scholar, C.V. James who supports the Soviet Professor’s view when he says: ‘the teacher should make every effort to develop in his pupils the ability to think in the foreign languages and a feeling (italics mine) for the language studied’; and adds that his findings ‘though based on a study of Soviet schools have immediate relevance to British conditions’. Now, I had not thought that if feeling for a language was virtue and an essential requisite of language study in one country where we are repeatedly told that all feelings are frowned upon as bourgeois business and in another country where the people are celebrated for their relatively unemotional behaviour in public or in private, the Indian had become such a kill-joy as to shy away from feeling and poetry. I for one fail to appreciate this antagonism to the language of poetry or drama simply because they think it does not conform to the linguistic expert’s specifications.

As if to placate in this game the fanatic in the regional language whose complacent existence is daily threatened by the highest international literary standards ceaselessly pressed through English literature and literary criticism into the discriminating reader’s service, our boys and girls are told by British Council experts in English Teaching to read their own literatures if they seek literary graces or humanising qualities rather than look for them in English. This is poor tribute to English literature as to British scholarship. I am constrained to remark that this specialist has not known any literature, not even his own. It would be interesting to investigate the nature and extent of his literary background in his own language, for if he had cultivated a sensitivity to the evocative power of words in his own language, hundred to one, he would not have preached disaffection to the Indian for the emotive use of words in a foreign language. To invoke the Soviet writer again: ‘Since it is impossible to know a language without a feeling for it, a teacher must employ methods calculated to secure the earliest

* I must hasten to protest against any attempt at misinterpreting me to mean that I brand all champions of the regional language fanatics: I simply mean the fanatic, and no one else: he could be anywhere.
possible development of this feeling for language. For he contends that a pilot only flies an aeroplane well when he has the feel of the aeroplane even as a good footballer has the feel of the ball, and a swimmer the feel of the water. It seems Michelangelo quarried a stone for three months, brought it to his studio and lay naked on it to get the feel of it and discarded it merely on the promptings of his feeling that it wouldn't serve his purpose.

I should have thought that a living person thinks as well as feels and these two functions cannot be kept separate for long, and I suggest, ought not to be kept separate by a well integrated person. It is a very false position to claim to teach language only for comprehension unless you are teaching automatons or dumb people. For comprehension of a passage is most likely to be most impaired if you haven't exercised constantly all the faculties of hearing and reading the best that has been thought and said in the language. There is a very interesting story in the Vishnudharmottarapurana of a prince named Vajra who goes to Markandaya to learn pratimālakṣaṇa — appreciation of images — from him. Markandaya asks if he knows the laws of painting which would be necessary for an understanding of image-making or appreciating it. Vajra offers to learn, but he is soon told that he can't learn painting unless he knows the laws of dancing or dancing unless he knows the laws of instrumental music and to know instrumental music he would have to start with vocal music. Here is a beautiful example of an integrated view of life as well as art. The great masters of language-study, like great scientists, have always taken such a complete or total view of their discipline that they have always seen it not as an end in itself but as part of the larger scheme of things. It is the pseudo-linguist like the pseudo-scientist that wears the blinkers. Perhaps he dreads the deeps—a true linguistic discipline takes him beyond mere linguistics to the storm-centre of life itself—and so this linguist keeps safely to his little kingdom in the backwaters and like the chieftains of petty principalities he soon develops his vested interests and safety becomes his watchword. May he reign long over his back-of-beyond kingdom, so securely situated in the filthy mantled pool so long as he does not come in contact with living, kicking boys and girls who are out on an adventure of ideas! He is an unsafe
guide, indeed, he is a menace to the cause of education which seeks to fashion the complete man.

For, as I said earlier, language is not an end in itself for a boy or a girl to get lost in its mechanics.'' It was Sir William Jones, the pioneer in Comparative Philology that thought Hitopadesa a charming book wonderfully useful to a learner of Sanskrit language. My Sanskrit teacher started me on Valmiki Ramayana and I know some others have begun with Kalidasa's Raghuvamsa. It seems, a hard-boiled Fascist like Mussolini learnt English in order to be able to read The London Times. After all, what do we find in The London Times? The Englishman's quarrels with others: 'Out of our quarrels with others,' said W.B. Yeats, 'we make rhetoric; out of our quarrels with ourselves we make poetry'. I hope I would be forgiven for wanting to go a step further than Mussolini in desiring to learn English to have some insights into the soul of a great nation, rather, nations, as in any case I have to learn English for almost 10 years.

In the words of T.S. Eliot, 'the poetry of a people takes its life from the people's speech and in turn gives life to it, and represents its highest point of consciousness, its greatest power and its most delicate sensibility.' Mr. Eliot knew, if any one did, that it is a poet who can exploit the resources of a language, a poet who can make old words reveal new beauties. Whoever had thought that a tiger 'burns'? But after Blake says it we see its ferocity, its cruelty, the energy, the splendour and the power which are the tiger's distinguishing features, and all these a commonplace word like 'burn' is made to evoke.

To go back to Jones, it seems the manner in which Jones learnt Arabic at Cambridge was such that he was able, at the end of the First Term, to read the Arabian Nights in the original. Is it any wonder that his grammar of the Persian Language has been frequently reprinted? Arberry praises it for its great elegance and humanity and Edward Fitzgerald, the translator of Omar Khayyam, who knew what he was saying, wrote to his teacher: 'As to Jones' Grammar I have a sort of love for it. Instead of

* It is interesting that the AIR panel for Bangalore should have decided to pay more attention, so goes the newspaper report of this week, to the study and knowledge of the language rather than to the mechanics of language, though I should wait, and watch the actual implementation.
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such Dry-as-Dust scholars as usually make Grammar how much more than ever necessary it is to have men of poetic taste to do it, to make the thing as delightful as possible to learners'.

And yet, as though Jones wrote in vain, as though Panini never did exist, and as though we do not know that Grimm, the author of 'the great consonant shift' is also the author of the Fairy Tales, we try to crib and cahn the thought and imagination of young fellows by drilling in them structures as if they are wood or stone to drill holes into. When such formalism is present, says the Soviet Professor of Methodology, 'there can be no question of pupils mastering language as a practical means of communication'. I am appalled at the damage that deliberate drilling of structures can do to the creative imagination of the child. Otto Jespersen, no mean authority on 'the growth and structure of the English language' tells us in the concluding chapter of his little classic of its kind that 'the English language is opposed to any attempt to narrow life by police regulations and strict rules either of grammar or lexicon'.

I know of language experts who agree, that it is not a very desirable thing to do but that they are unfortunately forced to employ the techniques of language teaching in view of the backwardness of the student who must still receive some help in the reading of his science and technology. Here again there's no end of confusion and the one thing that assumes a brave clearness is, implicitly, an irrefutable argument for the continuance of the language expert! For, it is common knowledge that except for 10 per cent to 20 per cent of the students (and this percentage contributed by colleges which let in substandard students by the back door at black-marked rates ranging from 5 to 15 thousand rupees for every seat in engineering) the first 500 or 1,000 or 2,000 depending on the number of passes in any year, in the pre-university examination, by and large, seek admission to engineering and medical colleges. The next best goes to the science college and the polytechnics and the rest to the arts and social sciences. I would for sheer curiosity like you to take a glance at the English marks of students in science and engineering colleges and compare with those of arts and social sciences. Better English is still written by the science and engineering students and the highest percentage of passes is obtained, again, from these colleges. If a good English teacher has to teach First Year
class in a college he would still prefer to teach in a science or engineering college, because the brighter boys are largely there.
I know at least two principals of engineering colleges who have persistently demanded English textbooks with 'some good literary content,' as they put it, for the present prescriptions are, according to them, too elementary to hold their interest. And yet both these principals are engineers, one civil and the other mechanical. I know that English teachers of just average ability who were hailed as successful teachers in arts colleges have had rough time in science and engineering colleges. I gather, too, that it is difficult to do any composition work in these colleges either because the students feel that they are too good for it — such is the intellectual and emotional maturity of the students — or because, as the inferior among them argue, that it is not so necessary for mere scientists and engineers to make a fetish of correctness in language.

Now give these students good prose, good fiction, good drama, even good poetry; you will see they look upon it as an oasis in the midst of the all pervasive engineering or medicine or pure science. They learn better English and better values — so much needed in a predominantly scientific and technical age like ours.

In the face of this let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that new techniques are there only for the sake of the scientific and technological students and that these new techniques are meant especially for those among them who received all their education through the medium of the regional languages. Considering the calibre of these students I submit this is not even a half-truth, nay, it is less than a quarter-truth, for most of those found in science and engineering colleges would have gone to English-medium schools and if governments were so perverse as to deny English medium to such bright fellows they would have looked ahead (for a bright boy knows his mind and plans his future meticulously) and acquired a reasonable command of English by reading English newspapers and weekly magazines, by seeing English films, by listening to English cricket commentaries and such other broadcasts, and of course, by conversing in English whenever possible — his inflexible earnestness is admirable.
So, our new techniques are obviously not needed by bright boys and girls (those are found to be superfluous). Indeed, they develop contempt for education as such, thanks to these wooden methods. As for the average and less than average students in the arts and the social sciences, I am afraid, the new techniques are pitifully inadequate for those who are expected to read Plato, Aristotle, Mill, Bentham, Laski, Keynes, Russell, Whitehead, Toynbee, Marx and Freud, let alone the great poets, playwrights, novelists and literary critics of England and America. It is commonsense that he who needs to be taught simple structures and rules of syntax at the PUC and First Year University classes so that he may be able to read the great masters mentioned above, is wasting his time as well as the teacher's. For with the help of these structures he can't even read the day's newspaper. I consider the quality of reporting and feature writing in our good newspapers compares favourably with that of their counterparts in England, America or Australia — I know of no newspaper correspondent of any decent paper who can do his job tolerably well without reading some at least of the popular books which have hit the headlines in such disciplines as history, economics, political science and literature. He can't make a beginning as a journalist without some literary graces in his writing.

Let us stop paying lip-service to the backward student for whose sake all these devices have ostensibly been employed. In the first place, it is not true to speak of backward students, for we have not graded students in a class and have not yet begun to deal with various groups according to their needs. It is just impossible in the context of our crowded colleges, inadequate teachers, and a heavily loaded timetable. Besides, I hate to give a disproportionate amount of time to any one subject (English not excepted) in the curriculum when our object is to give the boy or girl some general education. The approach is most unrealistic and cannot be translated into action considering the rival claims of other subjects and the rightly jealous eyeing of other language teachers as any extra attention given to English is an attempt to lower their status. If a student is backward not merely in English, but in any subject for that matter, the thing to do is to give him additional help either directly or through subsidised agencies outside the college hours and enable him
to acquire minimum competence. If instead of wasting public funds on fanciful schemes which do not touch the fringe of the problem it may be rewarding to put into the hands of young students well written and well-produced but low-priced books and whet their appetite for reading. They must not be cheated into believing that they can pass exams without reading even one textbook during a whole course lasting a year or two. What is such a pass worth?

There is just one more claim of the language expert with which I wish to deal. It is repeatedly pointed out that the schools haven’t done their work in language and so the colleges have to remedy the defect. Well, let us not arrogate to ourselves all virtue especially when we have for so long failed to demonstrate the efficacy of our methods even experimentally. Is it our assumption that what the schools could not do in 6 to 8 years we could do in as many months? Besides, have schools failed only in English-Teaching and not in Chemistry or Mathematics? And yet I haven’t heard of PUC science teachers wanting to teach the rudiments of solids, liquids and gases or the first theorem of Euclid’s geometry. They take certain things for granted for education assumes a continuity. If so, why should the English teacher alone bear the Cross?

Granting for the sake of argument the schools haven’t done their work and we have to do the work of schools in the colleges, does it not devolve upon us as (more responsible) university teachers and higher bracket tax payers to tell the government from whose coffers both schools and colleges draw their funds: ‘you see, the schools haven’t taught any English for six years and so don’t let us duplicate the same work. We shall take over English-teaching from the schools and save the government a substantial expenditure, that is, if we are so conscious of our prestige as to have to operate at any cost at the college level. Probably, the trite saying “a stitch in time saves nine” would not be so trite so far as we are concerned. And yet as educated men we have contributed to the unconscionable waste of public funds which could have been better spent on bringing more land under cultivation, building thatched huts for the poor, giving at least one meal to the hungry and tending the sick by expanding medical facilities. Are we as intellectuals not afraid of the verdict of the government of a later day that
they have been let down by English teachers who failed to tender proper advice about English teaching? Of course, our advice has never been sought by governments where all decisions, whether in teaching English or writing history or changing the medium of instruction or even in wearing closed coat rather than the open collar with a tie—are taken at the highest political level. For otherwise we would not have spent vast sums of money, ours or the British Council's on the Snowball Campaign for training English teachers to be told at the end of it all by the most powerful South Indian Teachers' Association which met at Madras more than a year ago that the Structure method had to be discontinued as it could not deliver the goods. If the government had sought competent, disinterested academic advice they wouldn't be playing with the education of our children so callously—in the twenties it was one-year Entrance course followed by 3-year B.A.; in the thirties it was 2-year Intermediate followed by 2-year B.A.; and in the fifties back again to one-year P.U.C. followed by 3-year B.A. And now who knows what the Education Commission has on its anvil? Will no one ask why they started Multipurpose schools and the Regional colleges to train teachers for them if they were going to scrap Multipurpose schools so soon in favour of what they call Unipurpose schools? Why regional colleges then if the same work is done by the older arts, science and commerce colleges? Why First class M.A.s to teach English in any college with their literary knowledge ranging from Chaucer to Dylan Thomas when a good B.A. with compulsory English and a certificate from a Summer School would as well do?

The language experts do their duty conscientiously, but are they told that the training they are imparting has no relationship to the actual conditions in which they will be called upon to work? Assuming we have trained enough teachers of English, do we have the resources to split our classes of 80 to 100 into manageable tutorial groups? Do we have rooms? Do we have the time? Can we afford language laboratories? Do we have the courage to introduce internal assessment on a uniform basis in our thousands of high schools when we have been trying without success to give it a trial at the M.A. level even in small unitary universities? If not, for whom are we training the teachers? Can we change our textbooks so easily when even the
C.I.E. with its immense resources of money and men hasn’t
given us a model text for the P.U.C. after 7 years of its ex­
istence?

As a friend of England and America where it was my
privilege to spend nearly four of my adult years and develop
vast respect and admiration for their high standards of scholar­
ship and service abroad, I appeal to both their cultural agencies
to pause and ponder for a while if the remedy to English teach­
ing may not lie somewhere else. They can remove from the
bureaucratic mind the misconception that the new techniques
are not a shortcut to spectacular success. Perhaps the longest
route is still the shortest way home! One of their great men who
was responsible for introducing English language and English
education in this country cherished nothing small or ignoble
when he declared that it would be the happiest day in the his­
tory of the British Empire when they established in India the
imperishable empire of ideas, of laws, literature, science etc. Let
not his ambition be thwarted, his prophecy belied by the very
agencies which are called upon to fulfil his ambition. Our late
Prime Minister wrote in his Discovery of India: England came to
India, the England of Shakespeare and Milton and noble speech
and the England of imperialism and the Penal Code. Which of
these Englands came? Nehru doesn’t answer the question but
it is obvious that this man who read his Shakespeare and
English poetry till the end of his life knew which of the two
Englands has remained with us. Those Englishmen that were
in this country two years ago would have witnessed with what
enthusiasm and love Indians celebrated the Quater-centenary of
this playwright, Shakespeare who, more than any king or
emperor, truly presides over the Commonwealth of literature?
It hurts us therefore that Shakespeare should be so rudely let
down a hundred years after Carlyle had expressed his un­
equivocal preference for him over the Indian Empire. I refuse
to believe that we of today are made of such sordid stuff that
we can remain indifferent to accusations of doing things which
even Arnold’s Philistines did not dare nor for that matter the
irate Indian nationalists who fought bitterly against the British
government but still saved Shakespeare for their children.

"Let the language experts try all their techniques but why
try to keep out Shakespeare as if he were an outcaste? They
have the Children's Shakespeare, Shorter Shakespeare and Complete Shakespeare. They can do with these all that the linguists claim to do, and more—save English for our children, for by the way they teach English the life-blood has escaped, only the skeleton remains. But by using an easy Shakespeare they translate words into action, capture the tone of voice and idiom of a wide variety of characters of all professions and ages, in diverse situations and moods and thus make their students learn without much effort the turn of phrase and the run of sentence and paragraph—all, through the tempo of life Shakespeare has built up in play after play. What drilling (a plague on that word, for is the student wood or stone for the language expert to drill a hole into him?) more effective than the affirmative 'Our little life is rounded with a sleep'; the negative 'He has no children'; the interrogative 'To be or not to be?'; the exclamatory 'What fools these mortals be!' the imperative 'Lend me your ears' or 'Sir, hold your hand in benediction over me' or the superlative 'You are the best cut-throat', if you don't frown on the double superlative 'It is the most unkindest cut of all.' Each of these learnt in the context of lived and felt experience is worth a hundred Drilling Exercises the dull teacher of language had devised to drive home 'the skills', 'the tools' and 'the techniques' as if language is a matter of skills only and not of increasing understanding and refining sensibility. What this teacher has succeeded in driving home is the sad realisation—that thanks to him the poetry of the earth is dead and all charms have fled at his cold touch.

It is time that all men of good will woke up to the damage done to our children's education and protected them from these enemies of learning and life. 'What a perennial spring Shakespeare is for all teachers intent on learning and living! How he can help at all levels in training taste, teaching discrimination and refining the sensibility of boys, and girls! What admirable use the teacher can make of 'Friends, Romans, Countrymen' to put them on guard against demagogues that periodically disturb the public peace! Or of 'This precious stone set in the silver sea, this England, this demi-paradise' (in Richard II) lest they should confuse between patriotism and jingoism. Or of that egotistic sublime of the self-centred hero who appeals for pity after doing his worst
to an innocent young woman, “Think of me as one who loved not wisely but too well.”

“I shall not be so naive as to dwell on the infinite opportunities Shakespeare provides teachers with for civilising the rough and rude schoolboy by winning his compassion for the revengeful Jew, the self-righteous Puritan, the monarch-murderer, the treacherous friend, the ungrateful brother or daughter by telling them that ‘ripeness is all’!

“I shall take it for granted that no teacher worth the name will have neglected this important aspect of Shakespeare. And so I shall not for the present concern myself with philosophy, for philosophy dwells on the mountain tops and Shakespeare is very much a man of this world, of the earth, earthly. To me Shakespeare is the greatest gift of the English language which he helped to mould and enrich and make universal. How else did a Low German dialect become the universal language of science, arts, statesmanship, trade, commerce and a hundred odd things? And it is to this magic of the word, the word that in lesser hands than Shakespeare’s cracks, slips, slides and decays with imprecision that a teacher must constantly win the student’s attention. For in Shakespeare’s hands the word is the thing and the two are one and when they are fused in one, impossible things happen and generate unique experiences. Thanks to Shakespeare you can make the young fellow ‘dispute’ grief like a man but also ‘feel’ it like a man, with the word ‘feel’ piercing into his heart through the bower of his bones. So is the word ‘child’ which announcing its entrance through Egeus’s complaint to King Theseus against his daughter ‘my child

* Gandhiji who quite rightly demanded that Indian children be taught through their mother tongue, instead of English nevertheless remarked: “I must not be understood to decry English or its noble literature. The columns of the Harijan are sufficient evidence of my love of English. Do you know that the English language would be empty without the Bible? Three parts Bible and one part Shakespeare is the description of English language.”

To this may be added the relevant recommendation of the Radhakrishnan Commission on University Education: “Our students who are undergoing training in schools which will admit them either to a university or to a vocation must acquire sufficient mastery of English to give them access to the treasures of knowledge, and in the universities no student should be allowed to take a degree who does not acquire the ability to read with facility and understanding works of English authors.”
Hermia recurs in play after play with conspicuous absence of the thing it stands for in 'He has no children' until it appears in King Lear to lacerate the very entrails of the unyielding, uncompromising Cordelia when met by the inesciable, unforgiving old Lear who now believes 'this lady to be my child Cordelia'. The teacher can point to this behaviour of words, the spell they cast on us and thus win reverence for life through words.

"There are, of course, a hundred other things to do but what can be done is only hinted at in this paper. And to approach Shakespeare more or less in this way is to provide an armour against the cheap and the ignoble in life, not to speak of the positive good, the glory, that Shakespeare can confer on us as a king his kingdom on a beggar. For to have laughed with Falstaff and to have suffered with Lear and Cordelia is not only to know the joys of the earth but the secrets of the grave and the felicity of heaven."

If someone tells me as indeed someone did tell me at a University meeting a couple of months ago: Why Shakespeare for our students? I would tell him as I told this gentleman: because, Shakespeare made the English language what it is and I study English because of him and men like him; otherwise I would read German, Japanese or Russian or better still, open a teashop and make my living. I would rather campaign for scrapping English from our schools and colleges than let my children spend 10 of their most formative years to be able to repeat like parrots in their 17th year 'The cat sits on a mat' 'he comes home', 'this pencil is shorter than that' 'he eats his dinner—does he?' Does it matter very much to an Indian shopkeeper whether he says 'send me 2 bags rice' or 'send me 2 bags of rice'? The men who wrote 'There's daggers in his eyes', or 'Mista Kurtz, he dead,' or 'He, poor man, sahib, he have wife, he have children, don't report police', may have more impact on us than much else that young men and women are called upon to read. It is an Englishman, I think a William Hastie who, when reading Wordsworth's poetry with undergraduates in a Calcutta college, that was responsible for winning Vivekananda's attention to Sri Ramakrishna (who according to him answered to Wordsworth's description of 'our corporeal frame suspended and we become a living soul'). It is Wordsworth and Shelley and Scott that caused a literary renaissance in Bengal in the last
century; as it was T.S. Eliot’s destiny to win the educated Indian’s attention to the Upanishads and the Gita by his sensitive awareness of the music and the immemorial associations of the Ganga and the Himavant and those celebrated utterances in the Upanishad: Datta Dayadhvam Damyata. It is not the young man who majored in English but the boy or girl who read this great poet even in poor anthologies in the General English class that caused a new movement in modern poetry in the Indian languages. And so, let it not be said of us, English teachers of today, that we cheated the students of their destiny, and cheated the English language itself of a destiny, perhaps greater than that has so far been its. (1966)
An event of major significance for me and I hope in a small way for English Studies in the country was the founding of The Literary Criterion in 1952, within two years after I assumed Professorship in the university. It had been launched without any fanfare but for the ambitious, slightly rhetorical, manifesto. Dreamt in a big way, under the stimulus of T.S. Eliot's The Criterion and F.R. Leavis's Scrutiny, with credentials nowhere to be mentioned in the same breath and woefully lacking in resources of every kind The Literary Criterion took its birth in 1952 as a little magazine, not of a College, but of a Department in a College. sponsored by a low-paid teacher and a group of teenagers, then his students. The teacher was myself and the students, L. Suryaprasad (now in Bangalore University) and P. Srinivasa Rao (presently teaching in Temple University, Philadelphia). Within a year or two of its birth they both left the College to take up teaching posts and I have kept it going — not always, in the way we had wished but at no time, I hope, in a manner unworthy of its professed aims.

Looking back on its manifesto and considering the context — the place, the time, the teen-age group, the beggarly finances — in which it was drawn up, I have never ceased to amuse myself, if I could succeed in keeping my irritation at my own ineptitude under control. I was past thirty, it is true, when the journal was founded but I am not sure that I had the intellectual equipment of many in their twenties, among my own students today. The enthusiasm was there but the equipment was in question: it was, to put it mildly, a case of arrested growth. I have grown, to the extent I have, with my students and only I know how much I owe them, for the way the better ones among them threw up fresh challenges. Some of them had been with me for over a decade as teachers after passing from the university and I had to increase my own literary resourcefulness if I had to continue to command some reasonable respect from
them and not profane the high office of a professor in their eyes, though it is so easy to hold a professorship in our universities—I have often felt ashamed of myself when I realise that F.R. Leavis was elevated to a Readership at Cambridge towards the end of his official career. That was of course a strange case of victimization by a jealous mediocrity.

The personal confession is in the nature of an apology for the mediocre stuff I have myself contributed and allowed to print in the pages of *The Literary Criterion*, especially in its earlier numbers—a factor which troubled me greatly when Johnson Reprint Corporation of America approached me (with the Agreement drawn up for my signature and so an accomplished fact) for permission to reprint the back numbers of the journal. Is it worth reprinting except in selections? How easily we rush to press in our country! And how little we ask ourselves whether it makes an impact on those for whom it is written! While we lose the zest for life even before youth passes we nevertheless retain the excitement, in our middle age and old age, to see an article or book of ours in print. It was anyhow an abortive exercise and neither the publishers nor I took steps subsequently to reprint the back numbers. I hope they never will be.

It is still true that there is no consistently reliable criticism of books and articles in any periodical at least in English. It is so hard to find competent men to review a book. Those who can, will not review, dogged by diffidence or laziness, and those who must not, because they cannot, are still the ones that shamelessly appear in print week after week, month after month. If someone would care to make a survey of their connections with authors or the editors of papers and analyse a few random samples of reviews published in our weeklies and monthlies the revelations should be startling. It is also true that without lobbying a book is unlikely to get a favourable review (or so, it is generally acknowledged) any more than it will get a literary award or quite often, a malicious one not suppressed without friendly intervention; it is not the publication that is reviewed but the person: it does not reflect close reading but praised or censured indiscriminately.

It is in this atmosphere that *The Literary Criterion* has had to grow. But growth, even survival, would not have been possible if the picture I have drawn above had not been relieved by the
essential India, the India for which Jawaharlal Nehru laid lasting foundations and is still cherished by some at least of his followers in power, and the essential Mysore where fortunately the progressive and the reactionary elements can somehow still co-exist. It is thus that the journal has been able to survive without subsidies (it turned down an offer of help from a wealthy American foundation with which I had some connection earlier, because it asked for the “credentials” of its contributors which I asserted was better left to the Editor), without advertisements (except for stray ones), and without a proper distributor until in their generosity Popular Prakashan of Bombay and later Geetha Book House, Mysore, owned by a former student of mine placed their services at my disposal. No press, no publisher can take lasting interest in uneconomic propositions like a literary periodical published twice a year (it could not appear more often when we know that a journal like Scrutiny had to be wound up, among other reasons, for dearth of able contributors, in a country like England). Even so the help rendered by my former students, Sindhuvalli Anantha Murthy (who designed the jacket and its colour) M.Satyanarayana Rao, and V.S.Raghavan is most gratefully remembered. And remembered with no small gratitude is a gesture of V.L.D’Souza, then Principal (20 years, my senior) of Maharaja’s College and later Vice-Chancellor of the university. Less to flaunt D’Souza’s generous reference to me than to share my gratefulness and sense of admiration for his command of the English language for a teacher of Economics with a mere B.Com degree from London University, I cannot resist reproducing his letter to the university (of which he kindly sent me a copy adding in handwriting to “Prof.CDN: ‘An affectionate tribute’, V.L. D’Souza, 27.11.53) “The Literary Criterion has made literary history in India, for with two issues it has established itself and won the praise of the literary public. I have read some of the appreciative letters. Prof.Narasimhaiah who has launched this venture deserves every encouragement. He has struck a new note altogether in University teaching and the teaching of literature and students are responding vigorously to his leadership in new paths of literary appreciation and appraisal. The grafting of Cambridge
and Princeton on a hardy Mysore stock is bearing fruit and our University is the richer for it.

All these years, even in the best days of English teaching by English Professors we did not rise much above the ordinary but now with Prof. Narasimhaiah as the head I foresee new developments and new modes and new explorations in creative art and literature which will bring our University to the forefront of literary movements. The "Criterion" is an earnest and a proof of all this. To encourage it is to discharge a simple duty towards the creation of literary values. I am grateful for the opportunity I have of fostering this great work.

I beseech the University authorities to grant the modest request of Professor Narasimhaiah that he be permitted to collect a nominal and non-profit making subscription of Rs.2 per year. He has financed the first two issues, forgetting in his enthusiasm that a professor's salary cannot bear such extravagance. He will declare before the Magistrate that he is the Editor and Publisher of the Journal as soon as he gets the sanction of the University.

My contributors have been largely younger men in the universities, most of them in India and some from all over the globe. Some of them are now well-established scholars with an international reputation and some not known beyond the bounds of their universities, but the emphasis has always been on the latter and on Indian contributors, too. Scholars of standing, and those abroad have various openings and they can choose, not so the younger scholars, especially with the limited openings we have in India. I have tried their patience by not acknowledging contributions, by not informing them of the probable date of publication, by not sending the proofs while I am myself not an effective proof-reader, and cannot afford to employ a paid proof-reader. Mediocre material, poor printing, inferior paper with no distributor and hardly any subscribers for several years and costs of postage, an additional burden—these sum up the plight of the journal.

I had never kept accounts, at least in the first 20 years, of subscriptions received or copies sent. Instances are not few of copies not being delivered sometimes by postal bungling, (a postman had sold a few hundred copies of Vol.13 No.2 by weight) at other times by my own unbusiness-like ways; of invoices and receipts not being sent to institutions subject to
official audit; and persistent queries for backnumbers left unanswered, not deliberately but for want of time and clerical help. In the early years of the journal's life, I remember endorsing my otherwise much needed examination remuneration cheques to the printer because most copies were sent complimentary and it was a lucky year when adequate money was scraped to pay for postal stamps. Things have changed; perseverance and faith in the role of the journal have after all paid dividends, certainly in terms of satisfaction of the needs for which it was intended. Most universities and some colleges in India, some universities in Australia, America and elsewhere in the world including China, Russia and Latin America, subscribe to it though more could subscribe.

Recently the Indian Council for Cultural Relations chose 15 articles from as many contributors including myself for translation into various European and other languages because of their preoccupation with the Indian scene, and a fee of Rs.1000 for each was paid to the contributors while one of them, Nissim Ezekiel, advised the Council to donate it to Dhvanyaloka. The journal hasn't struggled in vain, I now feel assured.

Some special numbers of the journal on American Literature, Australian Literature, Canadian Literature, African writing and Indian writing in English apart from various seminar papers on seminal topics have been in frequent demand by post-graduate students and younger scholars pursuing research in our universities. I should point to these as some measure of the success of The Literary Criterion. Its success is largely in getting a hearing for an original point of view, for presenting the work of scholars and writers who have not been sufficiently well-known though they deserve better, for winning attention to literatures which have been slow to reach the intelligent public and for looking at literature from an Indian centre of response. It has, to date, published the work of approximately 500 scholars not to mention the numerous reviews—reviewing, its weak point, though. Its success in making discriminations and revaluations has understandably disturbed some and consequently it became the object of malicious attack by the affected. For instance B. Rajan who was Professor of English at Delhi University for a few years while practically all his adult life he had lived abroad wrote against it twice or thrice which proved my point and so my
All these things, when within limits, can be quite challenging so long as faith remains; and it must remain if one is convinced there is something worth doing, and that escaping from it, either by withdrawing into the private shell or by running away to a safe harbour in the West, is pusillanimous, I was convinced. It is in that faith that, for all the wear and tear it entailed, The Literary Criterion addressed itself periodically to expanding horizons. Its faith in the future of literary studies through the English language is continually reinforced by the quality of new writing in creative and critical fields. Our writers can still create first-class fiction and good poetry in English, and with increasing use of regional languages as media of instruction there is a greater need to improve the standards of English, so as to interpret good regional writing to the rest of the country and the world at large, and to draw attention to what is happening elsewhere especially in the English speaking countries. It is only compatible with our dignity and self-respect that we will have to make our own independent response to foreign literatures, the gift of one culture to another and not simply take over what their critics say. Not all of them have the intellectual calibre or the literary sensibility of the better Indian critic rooted in his own tradition and receptive to influences from abroad, and he will therefore abdicate his responsibility at his own peril and that of his country. Indeed, he may have something to say on literatures other than his own, and when said effectively, may not be without stimulus and challenge to the Western critic.

Two commendations from outside India are not altogether out of place as they are representative of the sympathy and understanding that kept the Editor going with its publication. J.C. Rollo, my former teacher at Mysore wrote from his retirement in Petworth, Sussex:

'Hearing that The Literary Criterion was about to celebrate its tenth anniversary, I have been going through, once more, my copies of some of the earliest issues. That it should be started was a marvel. Its continued existence is a miracle...When I said its survival was a miracle, I did not mean that it had the seeds of death in it: its vitality (imparted to it by editor and contributors) has saved it from the customary doom of the purely
literary periodical. This is fortunate indeed, because the journal is helpful to so many people. It enlarges the student’s scope beyond his curriculum: he desperately needs this. This effect spreads, too, to graduates, and not merely those who specialize in literature. There is a freshness and genuineness in the articles that may well stimulate the interest of even the most general reader...

J.C.Rollo

And Sola Pinto who after a brief visit to Mysore made it a point to keep in touch with the journal:

‘I have much pleasure in saluting The Literary Criterion on the occasion of its tenth anniversary and in sending my warmest congratulations to its distinguished editor, Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah. The Literary Criterion is a periodical of which India may well be proud. It has won for itself an international reputation for critical integrity, intellectual vitality and a progressive and enterprising editorial policy. I hope it will continue to flourish, as it not only provides an important focus for English Studies in India, but also makes a genuine and valuable contribution to the literary journalism of the Commonwealth and the English-speaking world.’

V.D.E.S.PINTO

(What follows is my reaction to B.Rajan’s provocation, in The Times of India weekly and The Times Literary Supplement.)

WHY THIS ANIMUS?

In the first ever essay he wrote, to my knowledge, on Indian Writing in English (in The Illustrated Weekly of India, May 26, 1963), B. Rajan remarked without any apparent animus (which becomes more pronounced in his two subsequent references):

‘What is peculiarly lacking in our literary situation is a basis of sensibility and impartial judgment, a critical climate which could provide what Arnold called the power of the moment, without which the power of the man must be frustrated. Virtually none of our literary periodicals can claim to be free of the passions of cliques, or the jungle warfare of literary rivalries. These strictures apply even to academic publications. Among the criteria which The Literary Criterion establishes, impartiality is the one that seems conspicuously absent; the point of view
which results is in some danger of becoming a point of prejudice.

How anyone can spin a whole article on Indian Writing in English without so much as making mention of a single Indian writer by name, or his work in poetry or fiction, is a feat of non-commitment in criticism. But the same writer chooses to confer on The Literary Criterion the exclusive honour of naming it if only to dismiss it peremptorily for its 'conspicuous' absence of 'impartiality'. His charge comes to this: Great literature according to Matthew Arnold whom Dr. Rajan invokes as pertinent to the Indian context, is the outcome of creative encounter of 'the power of the man' and 'the power of the moment'. Here for the first time is the power of the man, in this case, Dr. Rajan beyond a shadow of doubt, but there simply is no climate of criticism to applaud the appearance of the new star in the firmament of fiction. And a journal which, he must have thought (for he does concede that The Literary Criterion 'establishes' 'the criteria' of judgement), assiduously sought to win the attention of the discerning public to the precise nature of the achievement of such writers as Sri Aurobindo, Jawaharlal Nehru, R.K.Narayan, and Raja Rao should not have extended its concern to include a writer of Dr. Rajan's distinction, indeed that it should have allowed any one ('The Achievement of the Indo-Anglian Novelist' by Prema Nandakumar in The Literary Criterion, on 152-165 Vol.V,No.1) to make uncomplimentary references to his novels must be conspicuous by the absence of impartiality. Let me quote some of the sentences which must have annoyed Dr. Rajan: 'The main weakness of the novel (The Dark Dancer) lies in the uncertainty of its style, in the lack of consistency in its tone'. And Dr. Prema Nandakumar gives a few samples of Dr. Rajan's prose by way of illustration, and I shall be content with just one if only to spare myself and my readers embarrassment that anyone with this kind of equipment should have the temerity to write a novel on India and write it in English: 'and few women in India could honestly say that it was not among their secret ambitions to be punctured by Raman on the night of full moon'. Style, they say, reveals the writer and what it reveals here is the novelist's poor insight into Indian womanhood and Indian life; and the crude prose does the rest.
In The Literary Criterion, for Summer 1963 while writing on Raja Rao, an expatriate like Rajan, the present writer confesses to having committed the unforgivable offence of comparing Dr. Rajan with Raja Rao to the former’s disadvantage. The relevant remark runs as follows:

‘... the clash of cultures, religions, nationalities, and ideals is sympathetically and diagnostically portrayed by the novelist and more profoundly presented here (The Serpent and the Rope) than anywhere before whether by E.M. Forster... Kamala Markandaya, or Rajan who, like Raja Rao, had too long been in the West, but without his roots in the soil. But then, what you bring back depends on what you have taken with you. It is not knowledge that makes for it, but samskara. Little Mother, that finely idealised character in The Serpent and the Rope is made to say in her characteristically simple and unadorned way: ‘To learn English is easy, it may take only a few years. But to say Rama—Sita, Krishna—Govinda, it takes many lives’.

These, as far as I can remember, are the only two improprieties (unless Dr. Rajan holds against me that passing remark of mine in India Annual 1962, on his ‘insensibility’, and ‘a lack of sensitiveness to the English language—quite surprising in one who, like the hero of his novel, has too long been in the West!’), Dr. Rajan can accuse The Literary Criterion of committing against him. Is it possible, indeed, isn’t it preposterous that this legendary figure should not get at least as much attention as writers of much lesser breed with no Firsts at examinations, no Cambridge Fellowship, and no record of Foreign Service at the United Nations? And Dr. Rajan must have his revenge not merely on The Literary Criterion, but ‘on the whole pack of them’—his attack is implicitly directed against Indian writers who have received major attention in the journal. For Dr. Rajan they are not worth naming: they all are obviously beneath his notice. This surely isn’t a demonstration of the ‘impartiality’ he accuses The Literary Criterion of not practising. Why does Dr. Rajan not mention the name of a single Indian writer in an article devoted to Indian Writing in English? Is it the fear of commitment in critical terms? Is it perversity? Or, is it simply a matter of delicacy that one feels in writing about one’s kind which is to admit there are, there really can be, Indian writers who can be noticed by no less a man than Dr. Rajan; to
admit, too, that their claims to distinction have been conceded and commended to the public when obviously modesty and good taste forbid that he dwell on the equal or better claims of his own work in an article on Indian Writing in English, written by himself. No he hasn't suffered from any such inhibitions. Read, for instance his introduction to Focus Five on Modern American poetry, a volume which today no one but a chronicler of criticism on American poetry would take the trouble to look up. And yet such is his complacency that he can claim:

‘When Focus was first planned it was among our early intentions to devote a whole volume to modern American poetry. We wanted to do so because we thought the subject worth discussing; but we were surprised to discover that it had hardly been discussed. The result is that this number of Focus is the first book in its subject to be published in England and, apart from Horace Gregory’s recent “History”, almost the first of its kind to appear in America. This is not the first time Focus has played the pioneer and we should hardly be editorially human if we did not take some pride in making this announcement. But that pride is more than offset by regret at the state of criticism which makes the announcement possible’.

Notwithstanding this, I must confess I felt a little bad that The Literary Criterion should have been the cause of grievance in one who had done so well abroad, and so celebrated in the still surviving colonial imagination for using the English language in speech and writing with a marvellous facility, fluency and sophistication—the hallmark of distinction even among very highly educated people. I must confess, too, I was hoping—so I dallied with false surmise—that I or some one of the other contributors to The Literary Criterion might be soon called upon to atone for the hurt caused to Dr. Rajan if only he produced something which warranted any kind of adult attention. And it will be appreciated if The Literary Criterion couldn’t fulfil this wish so far, for what came from his pen was a college edition of Paradise Lost Books I and II and an indiscriminate compilation (in collaboration) of the Makers of Criticism, also for college students. Neither, need one say, had any justification for
appearance what with scores of better and less expensive editions of these texts that fill the bookshops, unless it be argued that they do not have such attractive covers to catch the youthful eye—a sorry inducement to book-buying—or that these two editions being brought out locally relieve, although to a small extent, pressure on the country's foreign exchange.

I have not yet seen his book on W.B. Yeats but the very organs of publicity which gave him space disproportionate to what he had to say have warmly commended it to the Sixth Formers. And yet Dr. Rajan bewails the state of criticism in an article, again, on Indian Writing in English, published in The Times Literary Supplement for September 1965 in which he ascribes 'much of the nonsense written about Indian English' to the 'lack of a critical milieu'. What, one asks, has Dr. Rajan done to improve the critical milieu? 'Has he himself written the kind of poetry or fiction which has the power to affect the critical milieu in any significant way? Has he initiated or quickened a process of dissemination of ideas which have permeated Indian society by their freshness, intelligence and vitality; or set, not by false prestige but by demonstrable means, a standard in the judgement of works of art beyond pontificating and calling names? Has he by any other means—evaluations and revaluations—helped to train the taste of the young so as to form a contemporary sensibility which is rooted in India's past and nourished by the literatures and critical practices of other lands? All these entail a lot of 'wear and tear' and Dr. Rajan can be depended upon to make the right choice—between the perilous path, and the primrose way dictated by a habit of mind which accommodates Milton, Eliot, Yeats, and the requirements of the Book of the Month Club, on a one-to-one basis. As for this, the less said the better since he has such exaggerated notions of himself. After lashing at Adib of The Times of India he turns his wrath to The Literary Criterion:

"At a more academic level, The Literary Criterion loyally wields the hatchet for Leavis, but its executions are accomplished with neither precision nor elegance'. This is reinforced by tiresome repetition of the same charge in a paper he had contributed to The Journal of Commonwealth Literature which, by the way, chooses to omit The Literary Criterion from its check list of Indian journals for reasons best known to its
Editors. This time, Dr. Rajan seems to be desperate and the attack is consequently virulent:

"The best known of these University publications is The Literary Criterion a periodical fervently pledged to Leavis and Lawrence. Leavis may be to our time what Arnold was to his, but Arnold was more blessed in the quality of his camp-followers. Little but pretentiousness can result from the applications of Scrutiny tenets without the informing force that once made those tenets vital. The critics of The Literary Criterion are not dishonest. They are simply insensitive. Leavis, one is sure, would regard this as a greater offence."

There is all the same, improvement in his attitude to Indian writing in these two articles of his—the second in The Times Literary Supplement better than the first in the Weekly, and the third in The Journal of Commonwealth Literature better than the second, in the sense that in these two contributions Dr. Rajan bestows his god-like smile on other writers and journals in India. Alone among writers, Raja Rao gets mentioned in the TLS article, though no one can fail to see why: The Literary Criterion had dwelt at length on what Dr. Rajan thinks is Raja Rao's Sanskritized English' to which The Literary Criterion reacted favourably while it objected to the 'Latinised English of Milton'. Both are in effect true. But what surprises one is Dr. Rajan's own support to Raja Rao's English. He quotes a passage from The Serpent and the Rope and even attempts a verbal analysis of it. But it is pertinent to ask how the snobbishness that made him in the Weekly turn away from Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao in 1963 as if they counted for nothing, now compelled him to sit up and take notice of Raja Rao. How did this come about if not through the critical milieu which promoted the discussion of The Serpent and the Rope and the undeservedly neglected earlier novel, Kanthapura in academic circles and cultivated drawing rooms which had formerly scorned them as works of a country cousin—the same critical milieu which accepted Raja Rao, and rejected Rajan as of less than marginal interest to the Indian literary scene despite his attempt to bracket himself with Raja Rao. It is of course different from the climate which elsewhere made Dr. Rajan's reputation. The milieu that Dr. Rajan runs down had no need, for a just assessor: of works of art, of either the writers' personal
antecedents, diplomats' forewords or recommendations from Book of the Month Clubs. Specifically, Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* impinged on the Indian literary consciousness on its own merits despite, let me say, the reluctance to accord it immediate recognition in high official and pseudo-cultivated circles.

It is time I took up Dr. Rajan's tactless reference to Leavis and Lawrence—tactless, because it revives interest in a forgotten episode to which I shall presently come back. Actually it is T.S. Eliot who has received incomparably more attention than Lawrence in the pages of *The Literary Criterion* but it doesn't suit Dr. Rajan's purpose to recognise this when he is bent on scandalising *The Literary Criterion*—he thinks he can do it better by associating the journal with two of the most controversial figures of the century, a novelist, and a critic. Let it be said at once, it is a privilege to acknowledge that the present writer, like some of the other contributors to *The Literary Criterion*, has received from Leavis 'orientations, particular illuminations, and critical ideas of general instrumental value, precisely the things that Leavis is indebted to Eliot for, and I have no cause for regret on that count. It is futile therefore for Dr. Rajan to seek to placate Dr. Leavis in the way he does when the world knows that Dr. Rajan is most unlikely to have nurtured kind thoughts of Eliot for so effectively silencing the voice of this literary critic by exposing his pretensions to inwardness with the language of English poetry. It is painful to have to recall Dr. Leavis's observations on Dr. Rajan's performance in *T.S. Eliot, by Several Hands*. But Dr. Rajan has left me with no choice and I shall only quote two passages from Leavis's essay:

'Dr. Rajan does not, one gathers, himself write as an Anglo-Catholic. In fact, he intimates, that he could, given room, correct Mr. Eliot authoritatively about Krishna. And one suspects that the qualification which enables him to do so may be attended with a disadvantage; for after all, the *Four Quartets* are extremely subtle and difficult, and demand for their critical appreciation not only good analytic powers, but as complete an inwardness with the English language as any poetry that was ever written. However that may be, in his essay we have the extreme instance of the divorce
of elucidation from criticism. This divorce is not the less apparent for his offering a good deal in the guise of critical and appreciative comment'.

And later in the essay:

But Dr. Rajan, as he indeed intimates, does nothing to extend Harding's account, or to explain the borrowed phrase, or to justify in any way the (unacknowledged) borrowing. His presumptive intention of explaining organization doesn't sufficiently control his commentary, as the large proportion of this which is devoted to a kind of Sitwellian quasi-creative pseudo-analysis betrays.

I shall not comment here on Dr. Rajan's authority to correct T.S. Eliot on the Krishna image in *Four Quartets* or his unacknowledged borrowings from Harding's essay. My object is different.

I only wish to remark that with memories of these bitter truths at the back of his mind, it was very thoughtful and generous of Dr. Rajan to have expressed concern for Leavis thanks to the work of his followers. Well, Dr. Leavis has no time to wipe the tears of this crocodile and he has known this game too long and too well to play into his hands. Hasn't Dr. Rajan seen in the very number of *The Literary Criterion* (winter 1960), which must have first called forth his ire an outstanding contribution by Leavis on the critical function, not reprinted from somewhere but first written for *The Literary Criterion* (the script of more than twenty pages in Leavis's own hand is one of my precious possessions)? And how fatuous therefore of Dr. Rajan to talk of 'camp-followers', 'pretentiousness', 'offence', and the like! If any thing offends Leavis it is this hypocrisy; and if anything offend the 'followers' it is not so much the name-calling as the cliches; it is, that one who aspires to fame as critic, poet, novelist, diplomat, teacher (and any others that must have died in the attempts at doing) by turns, shouldn't have felt the need to ignite the cliche but used the shop-soiled words that come ready to hand. It betrays the critic's ineptitude for his job, an incapacity for original impulse; and his cliches go the way of all cliches—they fail to evoke any response from the readers. It is precisely here that Dr Rajan had some chance of learning a few things from Leavis during his long stay at Cambridge. But
no, he was insulated from the very things that made for life. We shall not therefore feel crestfallen by his nasty references to *The Literary Criterion*'s debt to Leavis, for there is more enterprise (in the Yeatsian sense) in walking in the footsteps of a teacher and critic who has all his life espoused unpopular causes, not shifted his loyalties to suit the winds of change but instead, shown deep concern for life and literature for doing which he has paid a terrible price. Since Dr. Rajan can better understand finished and formulated phrases let me tell him that I would rather be 'camp-follower' of one who 'affects and releases' those he comes in contact with than be tied, for all the promise of a many splendoured future, to the apron-strings of another who, it didn't require a gifted undergraduate to say in those days, had been deadwood long before he was dead. But Dr. E.M.W. Tillyard controlled the academic politics of the English Faculty and Dr. Rajan made no mistakes in the choice of guide or subject. New wood to dead wood and both in course of time indistinguishable in the lumber-room. 

What do 'impartiality', 'sensitivity', 'elegance and precision' mean to Dr. Rajan who commends them for our consideration? Doesn't he see that his need of them is greater and will he at least now try to set his lands in order instead of pursuing sterile polemic? In any case, if the following passage which occurs in his essay on *Four Quartets* is an exemplification of his criteria of judgement in criticism (sensitivity, elegance and precision), 'the critics of *The Literary Criterion*', since Dr. Rajan himself concedes they are 'not dishonest', had better ask him to avidly turn over the pages of *Femina, Woman's Own* and the like, and not trouble himself to read *The Literary Criterion*, which cannot vie with him in achieving effects of this kind which form the general pattern of his critical writing:

>'The confidence of the poetry is superb. It disdains analogies. It will have nothing to do with snapshot imagery. The resonant pride of those polysyllables summons all fact to a defining judgement and then, as the sibilants slow its clash and recoil, and open vowels hush it to repose. Against that liberating assurance the verse speaks again melodious and human'.

Yes, so 'melodious' that I despair of this scholar ever saying anything meaningful.
"Young Principal of an Old College" and Resignation from Principalship

I became Principal of Maharaja's College when I was hardly 35. K.V. Puttappa (the poet Kuvempu) was appointed Vice-Chancellor as invariably every Principal in the past (except M.V. Gopalaswamy) was, unless he superannuated in the meantime. If Rollo didn't become Vice-Chancellor it was because the times had changed: "Indianize", was the slogan of national awakening -- the Vice-Chancellorship became a political appointment. In Puttappa's case it literally fell into his lap: He was the senior-most Professor in the university and honoured with an Academy award for his magnum opus in Kannada Ramayana-darshana. He was, in addition, member of a major caste which wielded political power and had only three years to go before he retired. It was the most appropriate thing to make him vice-chancellor.

Puttappa handed charge of the principalship of the college to me, being next to him in official hierarchy. And I was high up in seniority because most professors in the college including English retired in quick succession and it so happened that I was professor before anyone else -- vacancies occurred late in the other subjects except Political Science where the incumbent resigned because it was known that he was placed below me though he was appointed professor the same day but without teaching experience, while I had been in service for 7 years.

Meeting with Sir Mirza Ismail

I can't resist sharing a charming anecdote here. A.B. McIntosh was senior to Rollo and was Principal of the Central College in Bangalore. The government asked Rollo to be Acting Vice-Chancellor for a short period overlooking the other principal's claims,
perhaps because he was in Bangalore while the Vice-Chancellor's office was in Mysore and perhaps because too Rollo was dynamic and enjoyed besides, the friendship of the Dewan, Sir Mirza Ismail who, like a gentleman, wouldn't brook any insult, called on Sir Mirza, took off his hat, said 'Good Morning, Dewan' and with a short simple sentence, 'Dewan, I am afraid you have overlooked my claims for the Vice-Chancellorship. Good bye.' He put on his hat and walked into his car. That must have been crushing to a civilized man like Mirza Ismail. It seems in his attachment to Maharaja's College he once wrote to Rollo in retirement and enquired about me. And at Rollo's instance I went to see Sir Mirza in Bangalore. "Young Principal of an old college", was his greeting remark. I was treated to "Persian tea", "Egyptian dates" and "Turkish cigarettes" in succession and we talked for a while on the place of English in new India, the views of Nehru and Rajagopalachari on it and as conversation moved on to model houses, Sir Mirza exclaimed, 'one house is like another, how can you call them model houses?' It had reference to the Model House Colony the Mysore Municipality had created while every brick laid in Mysore during his regime as Dewan had a character and he took scrupulous care to continue the architectural heritage of Mysore. He looked at his watch; it was time for my meeting at the University.

How do you go? he enquired
I'll take a taxi
No, you don't get taxis here
I'll walk
You'll be late for the meeting

The car was there in the compound. He clapped for his chauffeur in the Moghul style. No luck. And he pleaded, 'I know driving, but haven't driven for years, and don't feel confident.' He wouldn't give up so easily; went round the bungalow, when the driver materialized, but his grandchild vied with me for the car to go to school. He pacified the child, opened the door, saw me in, slammed the door and told the driver in English, 'Take Mr. Narasimhaiah wherever he wants and wait till he dismisses you'.

Even this short meeting with a living legend which he was in the old princely State of Mysore demonstrated the legend had substantial basis.
I am amused in retrospect, as I was then, at the efforts made by various contenders for the Principalship, because of the prestige it carried and invariably paved the way for vice-chancellorship. A professor of Education in another institution claimed it because Education was once an academic discipline in Maharaja's College. Which meant he could only administer the College while there was only an honorarium of Rs. 100 a month for looking after the principal's duties. A professor of Mathematics from Central College contended he be posted to Maharaja's because Mathematics was still taught as a subsidiary subject in the Department of Statistics. But the most aggrieved person was the Professor of Psychology who had just become Professor -- it is true he had been teacher much longer than I was, had published papers in educational psychology, and at least 15 years older than I. One day he walked into the Principal's room ready for confrontation: 'What are my qualifications -- he was a D.Litt? - What are my credentials? What is my achievement? What's my reputation?' Unfortunately, these were not the basis for headship of the college. It had long been established by precedent that the senior-most professor, regardless of his competence, become the principal. In my embarrassment I could only ask him to make a representation to the University and I would forward it. He was pleased and in the next few minutes he came back with the document which I forwarded for ‘sympathetic consideration’. Even he looked discomfited, I think, at my gesture, though I must have the honesty to admit I did not view his paper-credentials with any favour, certainly with no admiration or respect but did what I did at that moment just to induce myself to function in a civilized way in an office hallowed by distinguished predecessors, for me mainly Rollo—I had known him as Principal having been a student of his.

The Tutorial System

It took a little more than a year to confirm me as Principal. I seized the opportunity to do what I could in the circumstances. Having spent two years at Cambridge I held the Tutorial system in high esteem. But it sounded ludicrous in our set-up with
100 teachers for as many as 1600-1800 Pass, Honours and M.A. students spread among more than a dozen departments. To start with, I arbitrarily allotted 15-16 students to each of the teachers. Which meant a student of Sanskrit could have been in the group of a Urdu teacher and a philosophy man with a teacher of statistics. But I argued even that meant every student knew one teacher well and every teacher knew 15 students: They were requested to meet their respective groups once a week over half a cup of coffee to be got from the college canteen against tickets. The extra curricular activities fee (Rs. 4 a year from each student) collected compulsorily according to university rules took care of this.

Interaction between the teacher and students and among the students themselves meant, to start with, knowing each other, exchange of pleasantries which slowly developed into exchange of thoughts and ideas on wide-ranging topics including serious discussion of burning problems of the day. I sought to strengthen the system by pleading with teachers to encourage a sense of participation in the life of the college. No student could go on long leave without the Tutor’s recommendation, could send his application for a fee concession or Scholarship without that, indeed his promotion to the next class (there were no ‘public exams’) without it. The Principal wouldn’t issue ‘Character’ certificates unless the Tutor recommended. It worked.

We teachers met once a month at Tea and Dinner alternatively which we could get in the fifties for a small contribution of two rupees. They were well attended despite the fact that at least 50% of the teachers were older in age than I and quite a few of them my own teachers in the same college. I couldn’t delude myself into thinking that I was accepted by all of them, for the older teachers had strong reservations, though they didn’t show their resentment openly. For Maharaja’s College was virtually half the university, the other half located in Central College, Bangalore, predominantly for the Sciences. I took advantage of their presence to promote important activities in the College. They didn’t grudge the co-operation. Perhaps because I solicited it and never gave the feeling I was the boss. The impression I sought to inculcate steadily was that someone had to be captain of a team and I happened to be that — circumstances had conspired in my favour, it had been obliquely made clear.
Young Principal of an Old College

With students at least I could claim unreserved popularity – I was nearer to them in age. They began to appreciate my interest in them and my concern. There were at least two major festive occasions in the year: Freshmen’s Day at the beginning of the year and the Tutorial Day before the year ended when they were treated to speeches by student leaders and guest-speakers and display of talent after sumptuous snacks, served free. It was their own money for which they got no visible return till then.

More: the spacious Union Hall (modelled after the Cambridge Union) was furnished with carpets, cane chairs, popular magazines, fine pictures displayed on the walls. It became their retreat for silent reading at night with standard reference books taken out of the Library and placed there for ‘consultation only’.

The Sixteen Rupee Meals

What may have contributed to their faith in my headship were a few other innovations like the following: Some 200 students ate two sumptuous meals in the precincts of the college at Rs. 16 a month. I would invariably inspect the kitchen and the service every evening after my tennis. And as many as 50% of the students in the college, which meant approximately more than 500, could get for a mere signing of their names in a register, some kind of mid-day meal free. The University used to make a small grant thanks to which the practice was to start the scheme just before Christmas vacation and terminate it before the end of January, for want of funds. I said to myself hunger couldn’t wait till December. Thanks to a very co-operative colleague in the English department, M.N.Ramaswamy and a student of mine B. Varma, known for his quiet efficiency, both of them, then in charge of the National Cadet Corps, the Bishop of Mysore diverted to the College a good proportion of the milk powder which came under the CARE programme.

My busy brain seized on another experiment:

Being a shop-keeper’s son it occurred to me the booksellers were making large profits by paying just 6½% official discount on the books supplied to the University Library of which I was ex-officio chairman. A meeting of the city’s booksellers had been called in the Principal’s office. The purpose was explained and
my plea for doubling the discount at first met with stiff resistance. I held out a threat that if they didn't appreciate the objective behind it I could get the books directly from the publishers and distributors in Bombay and elsewhere, but it was not for me to kill the trade of a town I loved. They reluctantly agreed. A college co-operative society had been formed and the booksellers who sent their books directly to the library were supposed to have gone through the college co-operative society which passed the bills and forwarded them to the Finance Office at the University for payment. The profits measured up to many thousands a year. What could one not do with so much money? Some students couldn't pay examination fee; some needed medical attention; a few had no money to pay their railway fare to go back home. A committee was formed with one of my former teachers, D.L. Narasimhachar, who had been a professor of Kannada and this kindly man was free to use his discretion and extend such help as he thought fit to any student who, in his opinion, was in real need.

Creation of a Terraced Garden

In my enthusiasm which disregarded annoying procedural hurdles I would do things which once invited a communication from the Registrar under direction of the Vice-Chancellor as to on what authority I got the open space in front of the college fenced or started the '16 Rupee' Meals scheme. Students, teachers, servants and vendors used to cut across the open space and scores of ugly footpaths had disfigured the front and the building contractors' lorries emptied the debris and stray cattle were seen grazing all over, surely defeating the original object of the planners under a monarch who paid personal attention to small details and had the college built at considerable distance from the main road -- both to make the building on a higher level impressive and of course to protect it from noise.

With co-operation from many friends in high placed positions in the state administration I managed to have the several acres in front of the college fenced in with the help of students engaged in National Service -- they would go out in vacations in search of places for their service. One year I got them to cut the entire area into 4-5 terraces and the rest was the contribution of the Department of Horticulture under an able
officer, an acquaintance of mine. All I had spent was a few hundred rupees for which I had not obtained sanction from the University as it was assumed small pieces of work could be undertaken by the Principal and paid out of the contingency grant but the Finance Officer promptly objected to it because it was not ‘duly authorized’. And as I preferred to pay from my pocket his conscience was stricken and, unasked, a cheque was sent to me which could have eliminated unpleasant correspondence over a small sum of money, if done in due course. The fencing didn’t keep the cattle away, though, for I couldn’t afford a gate to the garden. One late evening I drove to the college for a surprise check as I had noticed cowdung on the lawns. Yes, cattle were grazing on the few patches of lush green grass grown on the neatly cut terrace. The watchmen knew the owner living within walking distance from the college, but as neighbour, he was reluctant to accompany me in the car. I made a beeline to his residence and noticed a flickering earthen lamp. On hearing the carhorn a lady came out and at my request woke up her husband sleeping on the verandah in front. I had been told the man was a perpetual offender as he would let the cattle graze late in the evening and come to collect them before sunrise. I remember, I held him by the shoulders and shook him vigorously with a warning never to do it again. It worked! I forgot for the moment he could have lifted me bodily and thrown me out. There were others stronger and so I asked the watchmen to tie up the cows which strayed in. Which they did, but not without adding to my troubles. One of the cows so tied up yielded a calf in the middle of the night and became the watchman’s responsibility to take charge of it, understandably, not without calling curses on the principal. Anyhow, there was no malice in it.

Restriction of Admissions

I hadn’t realized I provided yet another stick to the Vice-Chancellor, though (or is it because?) I had improved my own image in the eyes of the students and the public of Mysore for giving a new look to the College. Anyhow, all this concerned the social side of college life. And in all this I had on the whole a free hand. But what of the administration of the College? I undertook to limit admissions to the college from 1600 to 1000
over a period of 3-5 years. The University Grants Commission recommended the figure and even announced a few inducements. Somewhere in a newspaper I read 100-year old colleges would be given an outright grant of one lakh of rupees each and so promptly wrote a short letter of two sentences to the Commission and the money came. The Chairman, C.D.Deshmukh (who, as the Deputy Director of the Rockefeller Foundation put it to me, would be considered distinguished in any age, in any country) paid an official visit to the College and I was not slow or modest in making it known to him how for the asking the College got a lakh of rupees. 'So, Sir, we mean what we say', he said, pleased with the efficiency with which his office worked. Without any prior notice, he announced his decision to have a taste of the '16 rupee' meal served to the students and on the same aluminium plate, too, except that in consideration for his fastidious tastes I arranged to have a small, green banana leaf placed on it. The meal was genuinely commended.

If the College and I went up in his opinion I was most certainly subject to the ire of senior teachers and university authorities who had scores to settle with me. Restriction of admissions had unsuspected repercussions apart from keeping out less than mediocre students, almost every one of whom looked upon studying there as a sign of prestige. And those loud mouths were precisely the ones that would form ‘public opinion’. To be kept out of their much coveted college was to quell their pipe dreams. A senior cabinet minister of the first Congress Government after Independence whom I knew in a vague sort of way one day telephoned for a seat for his ward. I assumed in my voice a becoming deference to the man -- he commanded it by his sharp mind and dignified behaviour, both rare traits of his tribe in governments after, and pleaded with him that I had to fix a higher minimum than usual to arrest crowding and consequent lowering of standards.

He was surprised that I should adopt that stance for admission to a mere pass course. His nominee was nowhere near the minimum -- with his 36%. He argued I shouldn't expect a boy of his caste, (Kuruba, shepherd) to fare better. I mumbled my sympathy for him but didn't relax the stand. He brought in a personal factor in commendation -- the applicant was his
son-in-law's brother. In that case, I said, he would do well to join some other college -- I suggested a private college and I would take him on transfer if he showed some little improvement in term-end exam. The Minister was audibly angry: he said he would have to raise the matter on the floor of the Legislature which, wise man that he was, he wouldn't do.

It wasn't given to other public men to bring his kind of forbearance or maturity where vested interests were in question. A Member of the Legislative Council banged his telephone when he found me unhelpful -- even when he made a long distance call. Yet another former Minister, known for his toughness of dealing with officials, pleaded on behalf of a wealthy young man of his caste whom I had deprived of his Backward Community Scholarship, awarded on misrepresentation of facts. The young man did admit he had all the property the anonymous source revealed but argued that it was a sign of prestige in his place to be recipient of a government scholarship and so he wouldn't forfeit it. He could have been dismissed from the college for making false claims but I chose a soft option, because of his frankness and so asked him to give it up voluntarily.

In my absence, away from the country, the Professor of Persian, Arabic and Urdu, next in seniority to me, in charge of the college, had permitted a student who had put in less than the required minimum of attendance to qualify himself to take the class examination and he obtained incredibly high marking in every subject. Just when the results had to be announced I returned to resume my Principalship and I gathered from office clerks his high marks did no credit to him or to his examiners whose palms had been greased, as they said. I withheld his result for 'shortage of attendance' which led him to appeal to the High Court with a writ to instruct the Principal to announce the result. I was well within my powers to detain him for shortage of attendance as he had to fulfil the requirements of 'progress, attendance and good conduct'.

I gathered from first-hand sources that the Chief Justice had noted on the file that he wouldn't sit on the Bench as the petitioner was a relation of his and the brother-judge while agreeing with the Principal's contention, nevertheless thought that since the candidate had been permitted by the Acting Principal to take the examination and he had indeed passed the
examination he should as a special case be promoted to the next higher class. The sad part of it was that another student with better claims (he was in the sanatorium with a lung ailment and needed half the concession shown to the other for shortage of attendance) had to be detained in the same class, because he didn't seek justice in a court of law like the other student. That was that. And my recommendation to the university to extend the court decision to the other student on moral grounds didn't work. And so the student staged a public fast in front of the college and won a large following for his demand. I took care to have him examined by a doctor at intervals and when suddenly he showed signs of weakness the students went in a procession to the residence of the Vice-Chancellor who announced on the phone an emergency meeting of principals to declare that no student need be detained for want of attendance!

At the next meeting of the Executive Committee of the university a non-official member asked the chairman to demand an explanation from the Principal why the fasting student had not been removed to the hospital. I maintained (with raised voice) that in the absence of standing rules in such a contingency 'the Principal in his wisdom decided not to send him to the hospital lest a trouble which was localized, might spread and disturb the peace of the whole town.' I have not ceased to congratulate myself on my presence of mind in advancing on the spot an argument which 'closed' the discussion at the meeting!

Grievances Against Principal

The next Vice-Chancellor, a former colleague, my junior in the official hierarchy, but much older, missed no opportunity to flatter me in public -- I was to him, 'prince-pal, a prince among pals!' -- joined the disgruntled in a clandestine campaign, indeed asked an older colleague of mine to bring him some 100 anonymous letters in different hands over as many signatures and later inspired a member of the executive council, a public man, known to have a grievance against me for refusing to appoint a II class M.A. for the post of lecturer in the College, (there was no need for the appointment on grounds of work and if someone had to be appointed there were much better qualified men) in defiance of an official communication from the university -- to demand the appointment of a committee to inquire
into my misdeeds in respect of admissions, award of scholar­ships, promotions to the next higher class and conduct of university exams on holidays etc. etc. Grievances against me were mounting in influential circles, that is, I sent in my resig­nation from Principalship of the college.

It wasn't in reaction against the appointment of the Commit­tee that I took this unprecedented step in the history of the university though that was the immediate provocation, for in less than a year of my taking over as Principal I ran into a much esteemed professor from Allahabad, S.C. Deb of hallowed memory at the All-India English Teachers' Conference in Dhar­wad. Deb, whom I had met only once before, had heard of my 'elevation' to the Principalship and made a point of talking about it with undertones of irony. He wished to meet me for a few minutes on the last day of the conference and I should remind him before I left. On the last day it was not I that sought him out but it was his turn to take me out to a lonely corner and start the conversation:

'Norashingiah, have you heard of R.P. Paranjape?

Yes, of course (I think he was in the news at the time for a book of his, 86 and Not out)

As a bright young man he was teaching in Deccan College, Poona on Rs. 75 (?) a month when in recognition of his brilliance he was sent to Cambridge on a Scholarship. He distinguished himself as Wrangler - he was first in first that year in Math­ematics and it was world news. When he came back, said Deb, he received a personal invitation from the Governor-General of India to join his secretariat on Rs. 1500/- a month, a fabulous starting salary for anyone in those days. It was of course tempt­ing to Paranjape. He deliberated over it for a day or two and declined the offer, because he had given his word to teach in Deccan College for X years (on an absurd salary). What did he lose, Norasingiah? he became vice-chancellor of two univer­sities, Minister of Education and Indian High Commissioner in Australia. And saved his soul, added Deb.

As if it didn't go home to me Deb moved on to another anec­dote. It seems a young Indian went to Cambridge to work for a doctorate with Pigou, the economist. His work over, he decided to return home, but expressed a wish to see old Marshall,
was bad form to cut classes at frequent intervals since I was conscious of hurting my image in my students' eyes. I wouldn't, if I could help, attend a meeting unless it was a week-end or holiday or was of sufficient importance to justify my absence. If I didn't have a virtue, I used to say to myself, I must assume one for the young fellows' sake. They were going to be teachers, most of them at least. My better students had been warned by me from time to time not to aspire to administrative posts. I think Mysore University has sent in very few to IAS from English. Years after, as I was driving on a main road my car stopped because petrol didn't flow. A young man going on scooter brought his vehicle to a grinding halt, tinkered with some part of the engine, sucked the petrol and spat it out. All was well. I thanked him profusely. On looking closely I suspected he was our student but couldn't remember the name what with strength of the M.A. class going up to 30 or more in subsequent years. He was my student, he owned, but wouldn't come to see me although he had been a young administrator in Mysore in the IAS cadre, because he reminded me, I was against my students being lured into it!

I think it was the month of August in 1962. I was re-reading Thoreau's Walden, which I used to do every 2 or 3 years for my own salvation. I remember when I chanced on Thoreau's remark, "Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts" I felt cool all over on that humid August night. It was 2 o'clock in the morning before I finished the book. I woke up with the crack of dawn with a grim determination to send in my resignation from the Principalship, but showed no sign of it to anyone at home. My Secretary, Krishnamurthy, refused to type it and then came the office superintendent, an elderly person, and tried to prevail on me against it but, finally, the brief note got typed and was sent across to the Vice-Chancellor's residence, 2 minutes' walk from the College. In less than an hour a communication was received that my resignation was 'accepted subject to the approval of the University Council'.

The Vice-Chancellor was waiting for it, I hadn't realized. He was hell-bent on getting an extension of his term -- a special term it was for him for 2 years only while a 3-year period was the custom. What he wanted was a regular 3-year term at the end of his 2 year period. It seems (I had no knowledge of it,
while he had his own channels of intelligence). The cabinet had reached an understanding that the Vice-Chancellor should be asked to hand over charge to the senior-most professor (without naming me, as the Chief Minister possibly had other names before him). But on the day the Cabinet was to take the decision the two ministers, both of whom had watched me as non-official members of the Executive Council of the University and had meant to sponsor me, were confronted with the hard fact -- of my resignation which newspapers had flashed on their front pages. The two ministers looked at each other signifying a let-down by me and allowed the matter to lie over. This was revealed to me by one of them months after as I casually ran into him at a guest-house in Mysore. While he didn't tell me, my own inference was they wanted the then Vice-Chancellor to go as he had been hand-in-glove with a caste clique, dead opposed to the two ministers in question! It was all for the good, I now like to think, because it would have been disastrous to be Vice-Chancellor at 40: it was bad enough to be Professor at 29, and Principal at 35.

I notified my resignation to the College and added in courtesy to my successor that I hoped teachers and students would extend to the new Principal the regard and consideration which was my privilege to receive at their hands. It was around 1.30 in the afternoon and I came out of the room to go home for lunch as had been my custom. I tried in vain to pacify the students as some of them lay down on the ground in front of the car. The weak battery rendered my attempt to start the engine futile. Two of my colleagues (one of them later became vice-chancellor of a sister university) close to me during all these days, intervened, gave the car a push and let me go home.

My father was the one to feel most disappointed because he had viewed my education (for which he strove with determination, not to speak of the sacrifice the entire family made) as a gate-way to positions of importance and therefore, power. While his disappointment was shared by the rest of the family they seemed ready to reconcile themselves to the loss as they were vaguely convinced I should do what I valued. I had my siesta and went to play tennis in the college grounds in the evening. There was visible surprise among teachers and students. The afternoon had witnessed an ugly incident. As I left home for
lunch, the students marched in their hundreds to the Vice-Chancellor's residence opposite the College and tried to man-handle him when his shy wife begged them to leave him alone if they had any consideration for a woman. They withdrew and agitated in front of his residence with slogan-shouting and effigy burning. This went on for more than a fortnight and newspapers published letters and write-ups in commendation of my services to the College and one or two of them even wrote brief editorials. To my surprise even the Kannada daily which had scandalized me added its feeble share of reluctant praise to the chorus!

I appeared before the Committee which the Vice-Chancellor had packed with those he knew almost every one of whom had some grouse or the other against me and if no grouse, I had roused sufficient jealousy and the chairman was a former Minister for Home in the Karnataka Government known to be a 'tough guy', who had earlier intervened in vain on behalf of his ward who had been deprived of a scholarship on false claims. The committee didn't seem to be serious in its proceedings -- they knew they should co-operate with the Vice-Chancellor in justifying his acceptance of my resignation. A series of puerile questions came forth which I thought beneath my dignity to answer and at one stage when my patience had been tried I had recourse to the offensive and put it to the chairman:

"Surely, you know the story of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (he was quite an intelligent person and I knew it wouldn't be wasted on him). Scholars have variously interpreted it as Adam's fault or Eve's fault. No, it was neither, not even the Serpent's fault, but the Apple's fault!" So saying I left them in no doubt that I had enough of them and so stood up to say 'Good bye, please permit me to withdraw'. And walked out.

If personal jealousies led to lowering the status of a century-old college in Mysore it gave me some little relief to find compensation for it in some other part of the country. As member of the UGC visiting committee for Utkal University I had occasion to visit the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack and was surprised to find English literary periodicals which few university libraries could boast of. Like Maharaja's, the Ravenshaw College had completed its 100 years and had distinguished itself as a centre of higher learning in a backward state. In the
discussions which the Committee had with the then Chief Minis-
ter, Biju Patnaik, whose concern for education had brought him
unasked to the residence of Vice-Chancellor Parija (Patnaik's
teacher) — against the Mysore background, I suggested that the
University would do well to keep Ravenshaw College and retain
at least one P.G. Department, say English, for the reasons I as-
signed. Patnaik at once jumped at it. "Yes, keep it. It was my
college and my father's college" — an instance of doing the right
thing for wrong reasons! And the Vice-Chancellor's plea that
orders had been passed to transfer the English Department to
the Post-graduate campus in Bhubaneswar pulled no weight in
his favour as the Chief Minister asserted, 'The orders are not
God-made, I shall take them back. Retain the College in the
University and let the English Department stay in it.' I hear
Ravenshaw is today one of the few autonomous colleges on par
with the University itself. Speaking in detachment, Maharaja's
had better claims for autonomy and could have set an example
to the crumbling post-graduate campus, decadent before it was 25!

Instances of some sort of independent stand like this, I took
from time to time, may have weighed with the Chairman of the
UGC, D.S. Kothari, that distinguished scientist from Rajasthan,
(who presumably wished to arm himself with disinterested
opinion which his critics could not use against him in respect
of an institution like Banashtali Vidyapeeth which had acquired
a prestige) announced a committee representing different dis-
ciplines, with me as Chairman to assess its work and submit a
report to the UGC about its fitness for autonomy.

Things went wrong from the time we set foot till we left the
place. The first Chief Minister of Rajasthan was its chairman,
one of his ministers in wilderness its Vice-President, with his
son and daughter-in-law holding other influential offices. I was
ushered into the Chairman's office and finding him lying on his
back on a divan, I stood at the threshold to be shown the cour-
tesy to a visitor he expected. But he must have still cherished
his memories of having been once Chief Minister of the State
with petitioners coming to see him for favours. As I obstinately
stayed put at the door, he lifted his heavy body slowly and sat
on the divan. And bestowing his look on me, said, (I think),
'Aayee.' Perhaps he meant 'come in' but he might well have
said its opposite. And so I felt obliged to ask him in English to
repeat it. 'So, you don’t know Hindee. Sit down, sit down', he said, showing a chair. Meanwhile the other members of the Committee joined in. On being introduced to them he knew he could speak to them all in his sweet tongue (the phrase carries an association for me: years after I was travelling in train with a gentleman who said he was vice-principal of a college in Haryana, and he could speak good English. But he was reluctant as he said 'I wish I could talk to you in my sweet language'.

'Do you now see', I observed, 'why people in the South are resentful of Hindi'. An Englishman in your position, much as he is proud of his language, which is acknowledged to be the foremost international language, would have said, 'I wish I could speak to you in your sweet language'. That’s a way of showing courtesy and consideration to the other - a sure sign of culture'. We were together for nearly 20 hours on the train but he wouldn’t condescend to speak to me after). Indeed, the former Chief Minister ignored me and started speaking in Hindi with the others. After two or three minutes of his insulting behaviour I said to my colleagues that I ‘would wait in the van and they could join me when they chose. They came after more than 45 minutes to say that I did the right thing in walking out, because he was very rude to them. They deserved it, having chosen to stay on! At one point he said, it seems, ‘Do you mean to say I care for your opinion? I'll go to the Prime Minister straight and get what I want’. With that they rose and came to the van. With all that, I resisted the temptation to drop my adjectives and substitute strong ones in the report. In a huff he seemed to have decided to take the first flight to Delhi as we saw him at the airport. Kothari accepted our report in toto. The Vidyapeeth didn’t get its autonomous status from the UGC - at least that year, though the picture may have changed subsequently.

I do not regret the decision. Suffice to mention a stray case from my personal knowledge. I met a young woman in the corridors who said she was in the final M.A. class, Economics. Where was she from? From Delhi. Why did she come there? She couldn’t get a seat in any of the Delhi colleges. Could she name the titles of 2-3 books she had read after she joined the M.A. course? Blank. The names of one or two journals? She pointed to a cupboard containing 10-15 copies of a single title written by a Banerjee or Mukherjee, those enemies of learning.
They were bazaar notes, miscalled Textbooks. I came out into the large hall to find rows of distinguished looking periodicals. The English section was one of the best in the country, because there was a good scholar who was professor at the time. I suppose it was true of Economics too. But what did they make of their resources?

I noticed a glider outside. It was meant to train young women in gliding. Affluent families sent their daughters for reasons not particularly academic. I glanced through the posh Visitors' Book in which I found the signatures of the country's President and the Prime Minister.

It's possible it was not a bad institution. But the men in charge, innocent of education, could bring it down. It's my hope this was a passing phase in its life.

My resignation coincided with news of a welcome gesture. That afternoon as I went home after the resignation there was a communication from the Central Sahitya Akademi appointing me a Member of the Akademi's English Advisory Committee which I would have now treated as of no consequence and considered a trifle but in my deflated state, rather thought as a mark of recognition. I later learnt from Krishna Kripalani, the Akademi's Secretary as I thanked him in his office, I shouldn't thank him but thank 'the great man' -- it seems my name was sponsored by Jawaharlal Nehru, who was then the Akademi's Chairman. I guess he had seen my book on him (Jawaharlal Nehru: A Study of his Writings and Speeches, a copy of which I took with me to Delhi to present it personally to him when he came to preside over the Fulbright Foundation Alumni Conference. But I felt inhibited. I thought it would be undignifying to draw attention to oneself at a public meeting and abandoned it. And so handed the copy to Olive Reddick, the Foundation's Director and by then a good friend, to pass it on to the Prime Minister on my behalf -- seated on the dais at the other end of the large hall with a few hundred Fulbright alumni in front of him. "I haven't seen it before", the mike carried the exclamation across but only I knew what it meant. And Chester Bowles, the American Ambassador, seated next to him. A couple of years before I had received a kind note from Jawaharlal Nehru acknowledging the receipt of an offprint on his 'Occasional Writings' edited by V.K.Krishna Menon, under the title Unity of
India and other Essays. Which overwhelmed me, because of the shabby manner (while I of course meant no discourtesy — how could I to one of the greatest men of the world!) I had packed it: I folded the offprint, used no envelope but wrapped it with a piece of paper and addressed it to the Private Secretary to the Prime Minister scribbling in a corner of the cover page 'Please forward this to the Prime Minister if you think he has the time for stuff like this!' In less than a fortnight I received a sealed cover from the Prime Minister’s office in handsome acknowledgement by Jawaharlal Nehru himself.

While I felt flattered by his letter I suppressed my strong wish to meet him. He was Prime Minister of India and truly I couldn’t have anything to claim his time and attention. It was nothing but curiosity, even if it disguised my wish to treasure a memory that prompted me to meet him, whenever I was in Delhi in those days — I went there on business almost every month. I didn’t seriously think of calling on him, though I knew I wouldn’t have minded standing in the sun or pouring rain to catch a glimpse of the man if his car would pass that way. Once on an impulse I did call Seshan, his Personal Secretary, to ask if he could make an appointment for me to see him. He immediately identified me and said I could see him the next morning, as on that day he had gone to Agra and would return only in the evening. I felt so relieved that I had done my duty and if the Prime Minister wasn’t available, it wasn’t my fault! I had been booked on the morning flight to Bangalore the next day. That was in the early sixties. That was my first and last attempt to contact Jawaharlal Nehru except that in August 1963 I was visiting the University of Queensland for a term and had chosen to speak on Nehru’s Literary Sensibility — a public lecture by me before I started teaching. I recall I was leaving on August 31st and so wrote to the Prime Minister’s Secretary it would be a good gesture if I could present to the University one or two autographed works of his, say An Autobiography and The Discovery of India and since I had given him very short notice I requested the books be flown to Brisbane if they couldn’t be sent to Mysore before August 31st. What amazed me was the Prime Minister had autographed the two works (a new copy of The Discovery and his own used copy of An Autobiography) dated 26th of August, the day he accepted Morarji Desai’s resignation.
Young Principal of an Old College

from the Council of Ministers under the Kamraj Plan. Desai was perhaps the one man who aspired, after the passing away of Vallabbhai Patel, to be Prime Minister. Dropping so important a person from the Government must have posed problems to the Prime Minister and caused mental strain. And that he should have thought of showing this courtesy to a mere academic, in the midst of a political crisis was, I thought, a tribute to his sense of values.

K.M. Panikkar, the Vice-Chancellor

K.M. Panikkar, the historian and diplomat, had taken over as Vice-Chancellor and he was a presence to reckon with. Teachers and students were overawed by his presence. I had gathered from the UGC Secretary that he had thought kindly of me even before coming to Mysore — he had read my articles on Raja Rao which he mentioned to me at my first meeting with him. 'I am still unconvinced of his importance as a novelist' he remarked and I later learnt Raja Rao was no unqualified admirer of Panikkar, either — that was an understatement! I thought there must have been an old feud going back to his conversations with Parisians. But there was no malice in him, for he used to make occasional enquiries of Rao and once on my mentioning that Rao was 'right now in India', he suggested, 'Why don't you get him to Mysore for some talk'? I was in no mood to take advantage of his generous offer knowing he had expressed himself adversely. I said he usually came on his own to stay with me and so I saw no reason why the University should spend on him.

One day Panikkar telephoned me to say that I should help him 'resolve the tangle in the English Department'. A colleague who had applied for the position of Reader in the newly sanctioned UGC scheme had been selected and since I was outside the charmed circle, perhaps there was wishful thinking I could be eliminated from headship of the newly created post-graduate department, which, because of me, continued to be in Maharaja's College, the only post-graduate department left after all the others had moved out. And this posed a problem to the Vice-Chancellor who rose above petty considerations.

As I went to see him he put it to me in a voice of real concern:
'I see you haven't applied for the Professorship in your department' and soon added, 'of course you shouldn't apply. Have you any objection if the university invited you to occupy the Chair?'

Why would I object? I have been Professor and now you are giving me a higher salary to do what I have been doing for a whole decade. C.D. Deshmukh, Chairman of the UGC had made the same gesture when he visited the College and true to his word he authorized the Vice-Chancellor, in writing, from Delhi to invite me as a special case to be Professor in the new scheme. But the rules of the University had the force of divine dispensation and no one could go against them — not even the Chairman of the UGC which had sanctioned the post. My masters had meant to discipline the rebel and make him behave. Suffice to mention but one instance: I was once asked as Professor of English to 'translate' into Kannada the names of candidates proceeding to the Convocation; I showed the impudent communication its proper place — the WPB. And that was the end of it. When at a meeting of the Selection Committee I sat there in my capacity as Acting Dean P.E. Dastur, the expert from Delhi University, put it to the Vice-Chancellor, K.V. Puttappa, that I should be 'invited' to be professor to which the Vice-Chancellor's polite answer was they couldn't discuss it in my presence; besides I had not applied. And an annoyed Dastur said in a rage 'we should go to the ends of the earth to get the right man and you reject one right in front of us. He turned to me to say in raised voice 'Narasimhaiah, would you consider my place in Delhi University, since I am retiring? I shall speak to Rao (V.K.R.V. Rao then Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University) 'Thank you let's leave it at that, I am quite happy here', I said.

And now here was a new Vice-Chancellor who was inclined to invite me to be Professor on the 'maximum salary in the Professor's grade'. And I gave my grateful assent. The bureaucrat put him wise as next day the Registrar, politely flouted the oral instruction of the Vice-Chancellor and issued the formal orders appointing me professor 'subject to the condition' that I 'appear before the Selection Committee which shall be competent to make the appointment!' I went to the Vice-Chancellor in a fury but held myself with effort and asked if this was the kind of communication he had wished his Registrar
to send me. He said, 'he is only a teacher of chemistry', I'll call him, you dictate the order'. Embarrassed, I withdrew and left the Vice-Chancellor to deal with it in any way he cared. I thought I should have nothing to do with it. Besides, I was soon going to Australia to take up a Visiting assignment at the University of Queensland, on the invitation of the Council of Vice-Chancellors of the Australian Commonwealth. The invitation was meant for an Asian, my predecessor being V.K.R.V.Rao, the economist. I valued the opportunity because it meant I could promote Indian English Literature abroad and know a new literature created in an erstwhile colony of Great Britain.

It was neither his 'English' nor his desire to adhere to the rules but a pettiness which the 'rules' disguised. Even Panikkar was proved unequal to the local machinations. Anyhow his term as Vice-Chancellor came to a sudden end with his unexpected death. He had suffered a heart-attack before he came to Mysore. His former friends and acquaintances, among whom was Vijayalakshmi Pandit, would drive all the way from Bangalore to look him up. One day Amiya Chakravarthy, then Professor at Harvard University was visiting him when Panikkar was not at all well, but insisted on being present when his friend was speaking. I was in the audience after my tennis. Panikkar looked at me a couple of times intently and I fatuously turned away wanting to avoid embarrassment. Then he motioned to me and as I went to him on the dais he whispered, 'I think I have a heart-attack, you take the Chair'. I tried to help him get down the platform but he shook my hand off - he didn't like to draw the attention of the audience—and walked out supporting himself on his walking stick, got into the car for his driver to discover he had been dead before they reached the hospital.

K.L. Shrimali as Vice-Chancellor

He was Vice-Chancellor for hardly six months, otherwise a stranger in Mysore except that his reputation had preceded him but was probably the most highly esteemed Vice-Chancellor after Brajendranath Seal. The University, indeed, the entire city, was thrown into grief, the students spontaneously formed themselves into a procession to follow the body to the crematorium along the main streets of the city. K.L.Shrimali, who succeeded him was Minister for Education in Delhi before he came here
as Vice-Chancellor and was on the whole associated with the cause of Education in his own state of Rajasthan. He would saunter into the post-graduate department now housed in an architecturally characterless building on the new campus. The one compensation for me for leaving the glorious surroundings of Maharaja's College was that from the department's window I could get a fine view of the Chamundi Hill and the Kukkarahalli Lake in front I have always loved to look on, especially thanks to the optical illusion, which brought them close to each other while at least 5-6 miles separate them. The new campus with a royal mansion built in the midst of a 300 acre plot which the poet Kuvempu called Manasagangotri mocks itself though it was the right thing to create from the point of view of the much needed attention to post-graduate education. But I am not sure the motivation was pure--suffice to say here was another instance of the right thing done for the wrong reasons.

Shrimali came to the Department one day to ask if I could write one line to say I should like to be considered for the post of professor. I said if I could write one line I could as well make an application. It was a protest against the treatment meted out to the academic for sordid reasons and the sad part of it was everyone except my lone self submitted to it by making fresh applications for the posts they had occupied for a number of years the ritual had to be gone through. Well, Shrimali managed it on his own but not without being questioned in the Senate for violating the rules. I sent in my resignation to save him embarrassment but he wrote back to say it had all been done with propriety and I didn't have to press my resignation.

The result, however, was I who had been the senior-most professor in the University now found myself at the bottom rung of the official ladder of the professoriate and that didn't worry me since I aspired after no administrative position. I was outside the vortex of university politics having left it to those who had all the time for it to fill in their annual reports with names of committees headed by them in the university etc. etc. while their academic work continued to be "in progress" year after year. I was happy with my students, with the library next to the Humanities Block, and the variety of visitors with whom I could have conversation, and could get my two meals for the little work I did. Besides Mysore had cast a spell on me. My annual report, if it wasn't blank, reported 'nothing worth mentioning'.

"N for Nobody"
My campaign to win attention to American Literature had been wholly rewarded with almost every University in the country offering it at the post-graduate level and it now slowly made way for another 'cause', this time the Commonwealth Literature, to a conference of which I had an invitation to go to the University of Queensland where five years before I had gone to teach Indian Writing in English and learn Australian Literature. My interest soon extended to embrace other literatures of the Commonwealth and we even introduced a 'paper' on a composite course in it as an alternative to European Classics in Translation. Soon I discovered the interest of younger scholars which began with Indian Writing in English, moved onto Commonwealth Literature but not without crowding the area of American Literature for which I had striven for a decade.

The American aspect of my work received additional impetus after my return from Yale.
Fulbright Lectureship at Yale University

If the English Teachers' Conference at Dharwad induced introspection in me about my wasted years, the conference of a subsequent year which met at Hyderabad held an unsuspected surprise for me. As I made my observations on the English syllabus and returned to resume my seat an elderly American woman greeted me with a smile and asked if she could have a word with me. We went out and after a generous reference to my work she abruptly asked if I was interested in teaching in one of the American universities.

'Thank you'. But how soon?

'Now, now' was her characteristic impatient reply. A slip of a woman, mostly on crutches or in the wheel chair with advanced arthritis, Olive Reddick had the competence to govern a colony in the days of the Raj. She made India her home, teaching at Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow for a number of years before she was made Director of the United States Educational Foundation, easily its greatest Director to date. She had the vision and the practical sense to translate it to action: she knew every professor of English in the country by name and vice-chancellors by name and if someone wanted dependable confidential reports about them they couldn't have done better than seek her help! When I returned from Princeton in 1950 I had entertained no notions of going back and I was very involved with my own teaching, writing and trying hard to changing the English teaching scene somewhat. To a sarcastic question of Pro-Chancellor, C.R.Reddy's, on being introduced to him, if I was the type that settled down to work here or report and apply for long leave to get back to the States, I remember I was visibly angry and told him bluntly the question had no relevance to me. And now, seven years had passed, and I found my work absorbing enough
not to entertain notions of advancing my interests overseas. Besides, I was member of an important committee charged with the task of restructuring the University by handing over the numerous colleges to Government so as to focus on post-graduate teaching and research. And so I had to be reticent in my response to so generous an offer made by Olive Reddick. I told her of my commitments and asked for time while expressing gratitude. I could choose my time, she said, and added ‘there’s a snag, you have to make an application’. Wholly opposed to the idea of seeking preferments I politely declined the offer, to which her reaction was: ‘I can’t understand you, people. In my country even Nobel Laureates apply, if they have to. ‘yes, if they have to, ‘I repeated with a cynical smile. The message went home to the lady who said in a tone of resignation: ‘Let’s hope our paths will meet’ and parted. That was on the last day of December 1957 and in February ‘58 I received a sheaf of printed forms from the U.S. Educational Foundation, to fill in the blanks where necessary (a good part of the work had been done at the other end) and attest my signature where indicated in pencil. I just laid it by, wanting to think over it at leisure. A couple of weeks must have passed when I received a telegram to return the forms with my signature. Stick to my rigid stand or relax? Self-interest dictated ‘Respond to unsought gifts gracefully’. And it was done.

I asked for Yale (having had a taste of the Ivy League at Princeton) from among 4-5 universities listed for me by Olive Reddick. It was a Fellowship with a Visiting Lecturer’s status.

T.S. Eliot: Was it a Man or a Vision?

After having finished a major part of my year’s teaching at Mysore I left for Yale in the mid-January of 1959 to spend a term (the Fulbright grant had been made for a year) by annexing the summer vacation, thus losing less than 2 months of teaching at home. I had heard a great deal about the two luxury boats, “Queen Elizabeth” and “Queen Mary” plying across the Atlantic in those days. I chose to fly to London and from there take “Queen Elizabeth” to New York. On the boat was someone (later, author of T.S.Eliot: Yours Affectionately) who shared my enthusiasm for Eliot, indeed, had met Eliot several times as he came to visit his mother. It seems this modest man invariably
preferred to sit obscurely and not be noticed (his destiny wouldn’t co-operate, though) and so chose a stool in a corner when he came to attend a Tea party. And as the embarrassed hostess could not help noticing it, but feeling helpless in her vain attempts to shift him to a relatively comfortable seat she could only mumble now and then, ‘I hope you aren’t too uncomfortable, Mr. Eliot’. And, with repetition of the apology Eliot yielded, but not without having a dig: ‘Madam, you have succeeded in making me uncomfortable!’ While I had by then taught his poetry and drama and criticism, enough to assure him on this side idolatry I hadn’t come across such piauant anecdotes. And here was one who knew him personally and so asked ‘What kind of man is he?’ (to which in identical terms Leavis 10 years earlier had said ‘An awfully good man’, not without the Leavisian sting: Look at the pathetic way he agrees to write forewords to all kinds of books’) “You know he is right now on this boat”, said my acquaintance. And as I looked intrigued, he went to his cabin and brought me the Passengers’ list. Eliot and his wife were travelling First Class and it was an exclusive part of the boat. At once I took the ship’s stationery and wrote out a note to ask if I could see him for a minute or two if only to ‘treasure a memory’. What with my reading (‘devouring’ may be the right word) him, teaching him and writing on him with admiration, I failed to realize in my euphoria that here was the world’s idol who in a country contemptuous of eggheads had, it seems, drawn more than 10 thousand people to see him receive the Freedom of the City of Austen, Texas where the great man, with his unbeatable sense of humour, not only wore the Eleven Gallon hat at the ceremony but let it stay on his head all the way to the airport!

He was the world’s singular literary celebrity, a titular deity. And to vary the Chinese saying (‘a great man is a national calamity’) a bit, an international calamity. Everyone aspired to write the Eliot kind of poetry; indeed, in my own part of the country, as poet Gopalakrishna Adiga had written his much applauded poem *Himgiriya Kindara* under stimulus of *The Waste Land*, his admirers went so far as to shower praises like ‘Eliot must appear simple before Adiga’ or ‘there is nothing in Eliot which bears comparison’ with this poem or that, which was tantamount to saying: while he wrote the Eliot kind of poetry,
his poetry was better than Eliot's! But the unappreciative world was not ripe enough for that kind of poetry and so let Eliot rule the roost for the time being. I must hasten to add I am not being so mean as to try and minimize Adiga's distinction as a major poet of our time in Kannada. It is just that my focus is on Eliot.

Why, that distinguished statesman, an acknowledged intellectual, Dag Hamarskjold - so goes the apocryphal story - a bachelor for many years, began courting a lady and as he discovered she didn't care for Eliot's poetry, broke the engagement. In the context of this universal adulation what would he care for my wanting to 'treasure a memory'? Of course, the much expected reply didn't materialize. And there was only one more day to go before the boat touched the shore.

In my discomfiture I set out the next Sunday morning to relax a little roaming around the boat crazily, when I suddenly set my eye on the titian, though his face looked slightly puffed and back bent with age and ill-health. I hid myself from his view to spare him embarrassment - I was the only Indian around and he couldn't have failed to associate the pest with the author of the note. He waited at entrance to the ship's Chapel to collect his wife who was trailing behind. Standing at the broad open door I saw him kneel in prayer while his wife looked on him as if she saw in him the God he adored. I have treasured that picture in my bosom. And as I read in an interview after his death I realized why she, nearly 40 years younger, strove so long (remotely reminding an Indian of Parvati becoming an aparne) to be his wife and has remained one in death as in life.

The man, the work and the response it has received are all of a piece. I don't know of any poet in our brutal times who lived like him in the spirit and wrote from its depths to impinge on a whole age, regardless of country or religion. Eliot's triumphs, it seems, at least on one occasion, are beyond Shakespeare's reach as we see his Becket sum up that soaring in inexorable words. Macbeth's ambition for the Scottish throne looked pitifully earthy while who but Eliot could have shown his superiority as he let out his soul's wailing:

'Who are you tempting me with my own desires'-- desire of what is beyond the bank and shoal of time.
Fulbright Lectureship at Yale University

Eliot had gone farther to transcend the Archbishop’s still lingering Moha, for he had received intimations of the higher Reality reflected, in his other play, The Cocktail Party with its Indian association for me. More than a decade after my visit to Yale I happened to hold a Fellowship at Madison, Wisconsin where I spoke to the English Faculty on Eliot’s Indian affinities. Which led me to point to Celia’s dilemma before the psychiatrist as to whether she should marry or stay in single blessedness—which is better? There is no better or worse, he said: take whichever path you like, each path prescribes its own obligations and not until you arrive at the destination would you know what it is to have taken either path.

The talk was presided over by the Chairman, Charles Scott and as I went to dinner that evening at the residence of Joe Wiesenforth, both professors Catholics, Joe reported what transpired after I left the Department in the afternoon. One Catholic said to the other, ‘Joe, what would Father x have said had the young woman approached him for guidance in so crucial a matter? And himself answered, ‘My daughter, come and receive thy sacrament’. Implicitly, Eliot, the Anglo-Catholic, nevertheless endorsed the essential Indian stand reflected in Krishna’s response to Arjuna’s dilemma in the Gita. The advice was not prescriptive, but, if one may say so, permissive, made abundantly clear in Four Quartets.

Not fare well
But fare forward, voyagers

the distilled wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita – the reason why Eliot may have observed in his generosity in After Strange Gods that the philosophers of Europe looked like schoolboys compared with the thinkers of India.

After two days in New York I went to Yale to present my credentials at the English Faculty. And to my ineffable joy, a letter, most unexpected, was waiting for me from T.S. Eliot – with the ship’s writing paper and envelope and my address handwritten, care of the English Faculty - beginning:

“My dear Mr. Narasimhaiah” (this endearment to a total stranger) and apologizing for his inability to see me as he was ill and was going to Bahamas with his wife for change of air, but I should see him at 24, Russell Sq. London if I went back
to India via England. And concluded by wishing me 'a success­ful year at Yale'.

I should like to think that, in fact, I got more than I wished for -- if, that is, I think of that gift of remembrance, my memory treasured, of watching him pray at the Chapel. And I wouldn't have liked to impose myself on him even if I did route my return journey via England. Melville's Pacific with its dark depths had held me in its thrall though I had to be content with watching it from the air.

Fellow of Silliman College: Cleanth Brooks, Wimsatt and Norman Pearson

I was Fellow of Silliman College, with the privilege of dining at the High Table, which I looked on with envy as undergraduate at Christ's College, Cambridge. Cleanth Brooks whom I had met briefly 10 years before and now came to know well, was professor in the faculty. I liked the warmth and gentleness of his personality but would it sound ungrateful if I remarked I don't remember in all his criticism anything igniting a single dead fact. My younger son Sanjay once acutely remarked something of Brooks's explications of poetry looked like refined variations of 'made-easies' by Mukherjees and Banerjees who inundate the Indian bookshops. Sounds uncharitable, but I could not have successfully disputed it. All the same, hardly a day passed without our seeing each other and when once I didn't see him for 3-4 days at a stretch I discovered on reading The New York Times that Brooks had gone to inaugurate the Centenary celebration of the publication of The Leaves of Grass in Washington -- a rare event with collocation of names like 'Whitman', 'centenary' 'Leaves of Grass', Washington, Cleanth Brooks and one had a right to expect something which made news in critical circles, certainly something to be grateful for to the New Critic. Indeed, in my impertinence, I put it as rudely as that though I made it sound like a friendly teasing as I asked him 'What did you say?' His response was tame: 'Well, the same old things', he said smilingly. Why associate, then, with such an event? That reminded me of a real non-event at Silliman College, within a few days of my arrival in Yale. Brooks asked me if I had met his friend Wimsatt: 'Look for the tallest man in your college', he said. Yes, I had met him at Dinner in the College Hall, but Brooks's
mention brought back to mind a forgotten controversy between Wimsatt and Ananda Coomaraswamy on 'Intentional Fallacy'. I was therefore doubly interested in attending his talk at Sil­liman on '60 Portraits of Alexander Pope'.

It seems he was preparing at the instance of a publishing firm a selection of Pope's poems for undergraduates and general readers and was looking for an impressive picture of Pope for the frontispiece. Which engaged him in an elaborate exploration. His American instinct wouldn't let the labour go unrequited and so turned it into an illustrated talk with projector and slides. It's possible he had seen shades of meanness in a face that the puny body and gloating mind at his victims' discomfitures could not conceal! In any case, I am not sure he said anything that evening which I could take home. Perhaps my deep seated prejudice against Pope wouldn't let me open up. I didn't feel apologetic over my thoughts. Pope's diminutive size actually invited comparison with Norman Pearson, (a hunch back col­league of Brooks and Wimsatt) who was a legend at Yale in those days for his sheer humanity -- in circumstances which should have embittered him towards mankind. One story among the many I had heard was of a short-listed Japanese applicant for a scholarship to Yale and Pearson, who sat on the Committee paid up the equivalent of the scholarship and let the unsuspecting student come to Yale on 'Scholarship'. I have failed to figure out how this was arranged but I wouldn't doubt the story. Nevertheless I still retain a linguistic grouse against this God's own good man that he asked me to 'step out' even as I was trying to catch his eye to withdraw from his room as I suspected a possible private telephone call. How right was Gandhi in his formulation that English was spoken in England, studied in India and abused in America. - and this without ever visiting America. Why Gandhi? Pearson's own celebrated countryman, Mark Twain, has left on record in his Following the Equator that while Indians who spoke Babu English had an ex­cuse what with their many languages, the Americans had 'but one language' and that one they didn't know how to speak. Another professor at Wisconsin who drove me home for a meal asked me to 'get out' before he put his car in the garage!

While at Yale I was down with a severe flu and had to be taken in an ambulance to the University Infirmary, the only time
I entered a hospital. I was well looked after by an elderly nurse who one day initiated conversation with me on the nature of my work at Yale. I was lecturing on Indian Thought in American Literature; and Modern English Poetry, both for casual students who came to audit the courses. While I was holding forth on Symbolism in Modern English Poetry an undergraduate, a physics man, posed an interesting question: 'Would you say Isaac Newton was no poet just because he didn't write poetry?' His stand was: Newton was so fascinated by the fall of the apple that he couldn't give expression to his wonder except in symbols. How is your modern poetry different? he teased.

I couldn't dismiss him as trying to be clever having been familiar with the quality of his mind, which to me was rare among American undergraduates, but I was in Yale! which, nevertheless, suffered in comparison with Madras University for the Physics Professor, Morgan, at least, who one day told me he had just finished reading a Ph.D. dissertation from Madras and it was worth 4 Ph.Ds from Yale. I think he was overgenerous in the presence of an Indian. Anyhow the young man's observation made Yale go up in my estimation. Being so impressed by him I was curious to know his family background; he said he was 'the son of a foreman' and didn't have 'the dignity of a slum-dweller'. Did he know he lent much dignity to his class and his country that moment by an unusual turn of phrase which, for me, created what it conveyed? Indeed, he did better than the much flattered Philip Larkin, the English Poet who, bemoaning the loss of the Empire in his poem "Going, Going", drives himself to despair over an England which, for him, had become the 'slum' of Europe. How little he knew it was precisely a poet's responsibility to induce introspection at such moments: transfuse the poem's blood as an antipodean poet, A.D. Hope had done.

Another surprise was in store for me—in the infirmary as I told my nurse that I was also interested in researching on an interesting movement in New England of the mid-19th century. She supplied the term: oh, the transcendentalists! Yes, which of them in particular? And sent me back to that firebrand, Margaret Fuller who was editing the Transcendentalist journal, The Dial, which Yale had preserved in the rare book room. She was no ordinary nurse, she had a Ph.D. in Sociology, her husband...
was professor of Mathematics and since the children had grown up she was inclined to take up some social work which brought her to the infirmary. I asked the good lady what happened to Transcendentalism. 'How can idealism die or disappear?' she quipped. The streak is quite pronounced in William James and manifested again in the Beats of San Francisco bay. Too well informed for a nurse as all these aspects came up in our talk. I wish I could tell her then of the visit of two young Americans to Stratford-on-Avon, where anyone with the name of Shakespeare is accepted as a houseguest at one hotel. One of the two youths was a Shakespeare and he occupied the bard's room. What would the other do? Looked frustrated! The proprietor, it seems, pointed to another room where Gandhi stayed. Would he occupy that room? A fight ensued between friends for the Gandhi room. Which they resolved in the Gandhian way -- of sleeping by turns for part of the night in the two rooms. Gandhi's soul must have been pleased that he didn't usurp the honour due to Shakespeare. The world is in need of examples, they count.

I was curious to see it all myself and so went to see Allen Ginsberg in San Francisco; he was then the rage among the American youth. Why do the beats wear blue jeans? I asked Ginsberg, 'You don', write poetry with your clothes' he rebuffed. And as if to have a dig at the man who did (he meant the well-dressed Eliot of whom I had talked with him in superlative terms) he observed, he arrested the growth of English poetry by at least 30 years. He seemed quite consistent, I thought, for when I next saw him in Benares a few years after and asked the mellowed poet 'What are you doing here?' Allen's reply was 'living'. How? 'Sit on the Ghats watching the river flow while sharing rice and curry with the sadhus who were glad to pass the hookah to him for a puff.' Did he know the language? 'Yes, we understand each other', Semiotics. His Indian Journals reflect lived experience.

My term at Yale coincided with the visit for a lecture on Indian philosophy of Jayachamarajendra Wadiyar, the Maharaja of Mysore whom I had come to know quite well. While the University had arranged to put him up at a good hotel he, generally so attentive to keeping the dignity that went with royalty, seemed ready to suspend it, and insisted on staying
with me, when I had to approach the Master's wife at Stiliman College who kindly put him up in the Guest Suite.

Yale has another association for me, a funny one-in retrospect, that is. Once I spent a major part of the night working on my essay on Nehru's *The Discovery of India* as I had taken with me my other essays on Nehru's works in the hope of finding a publisher. That had almost come through thanks to the intervention of my friend Norman Pearson who put me in touch with Richard Marsh, Nehru's American publisher, John Day & Co. It was nearly 4 in the morning when I completed my work lying in bed and put it by on the bedstead along with my precious copy of *The Discovery* published by Signet Press in Calcutta on handmade paper, which I had earlier carried to Cambridge to read on the boat where it was my constant companion. I had used the same copy later for my abridgement of *The Discovery* by Oxford University Press. And lay down to scrape some sleep. At 8 or so I rushed out of the room after washing to eat my breakfast in hall and when I came back to the room the bed had been made and the WPB cleared of its contents - my copy of *The Discovery* and the 30 page essay in manuscript had dropped into it by my inadvertent movement of the hand. My illiterate servant at home would in her deference to learning have rescued the book, but to the American maid it had been presumably discarded and so it must find its destination: The curse of literacy!

When the book, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Study of his Writings and Speeches* did finally come out with F.R. Leavis for my dedicatee I must say I found my reward. He wrote back to say he read a good part of the book and was 'impressed' by the 'admirable command of expression' and the 'poise' in my approach. Indeed, he went so far as to say that it was 'a magnificent testimonial Cambridge English might point to in India'. I am not sure, though, I have sustained the 'poise' what with the numerous provocations I have been faced with in my subsequent dealings with pretentious writing. But my comfort is Leavis would not have been disappointed at it: if reports of comments friends brought from him from time to time, be true.
American Literature in India:
A Retrospect

It will be correct to say I stumbled on American literature while at Princeton.

I undertook to spend my year there working on 'Novelists as Critics', among whom was Henry James who, naturally, led me on to explore the American Novel from the Colonial times. Not being obliged to work for a degree, I soon abandoned my original topic of research and got involved in the desultory reading of American Literature because it interested me at once as being different from English Literature, different especially from the predominantly socio-moral concerns of the world of Jane Austen and the poets of the Augustan Age, not much in favour among Indian students of English.

Our emergent nationhood must have roused my inquisitiveness as to how in the wake of its Independence, America shaped a national literature: made possible a succession of gifted minds and masterpieces: Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville, Emily Dickinson, Henry James, T.S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens (Hawthorne, Faulkner, Hemingway had only a marginal interest for me). These writers, I thought, were nearer to my bosom and business—a teacher's business, that is, to win attention to the best efforts of the human mind. Most of them appeared somewhat close to us, Indians (their Indian affinities were well-known) and unlike the English writers who were, if one may vary Wordsworth a little, too much with us than in Wordsworth's time. However, the juxtaposition of two literatures, one like our own, the other unlike our own, the like to reinforce our faith in our own literature, the unlike to provide correctives, struck me as an interesting point to start the study of comparative literature, for without comparison, it is trite to say, there are simply no standards.

It was lucky for England that her conquerors, notwithstanding a crude adventurer like Clive, had brought in their bag copies of Shakespeare.
Milton, the Romantics and, later, the eminent Victorians, all of whom had come to have a tremendous hold on the Indian mind. An imaginative American (were it not incongruous for such a one), had he been bent on establishing an Empire on the Indian soil after those palmy days of European expansion, simply needed to flood the pavements of Indian cities with works of the American idealists cited above: they would have invited an incomparably more intimate engagement with Indian sensibility. If victorious (I almost said, gladiatorial) Rome fell prostrate before vanquished Greece, India should have been found to be more vulnerable to American Literature thanks to its predilections for the metaphysical and the individualistic.

But in British India nothing mattered, nothing had a value unless it came via England. Imperial England, inebriate of a Golden Age behind and basking in 'the spacious times' of another Queen, couldn't have seen merit in anyone, anything outside its seawalls – beyond was barbarity! The Empire, I have said elsewhere, was a menace to the growth of the English mind. America, on the other hand, was ill-served by its academics in this respect. Emerson's inspirational speeches and essays, if they fired the imagination of his contemporaries, must have sounded like 'eternal soliloquising on the mountain top' to the American academic of a generation later -- his English education, like the Indian's, had petrified his mind. The academic neglect of American Literature, presumably, as not meriting independent study as compared with English Literature, seems unpardonable to an Indian today and attempts to make amends for it were in the nature of a delayed realization. A whole century had passed since the first flowering of New England!

The War of 1939-45, however, proved to be a catalyst. It quickened the American pulse and may have prompted the politician to seize the opportunity to project the image of 'The Great Society' in erstwhile English colonies-- the vacuum was inviting. But in India the great society of its writers had been sought even before. Longfellow and Whittier were read by Indian boys and girls in school and Emerson had found his place next to Shakespeare in educated homes. In any case, these isolated authors didn't make American Literature --the term was a misnomer! And my 'plea' rocked the academic boat here and there and invited more than its share of sarcasm and derision.
But for my obstinate refusal to roll my ‘r’s, frown on ‘o.k.’ and my lofty disdain of American pursuit of success, jealousy, that green-eyed monster, should have ascribed impious motives to my zeal for American Literature as an academic discipline! Thanks to a far-seeing Vice-Chancellor, the move was afoot to include it in Honours and M.A. Syllabus. Various bodies of the Mysore University talked it out in the early fifties and it was left hanging in mid-air.

The Fulbright Foundation had just been set up and with a dynamic woman like Olive Reddick as its head, nothing seemed impossible ---her devotion to India was genuine and no Indian administrator would question her bonafides, surely not D.S. Reddi, the Vice-Chancellor of Osmania University. Where Mysore got stuck in procedural wrangles, Osmania had made good. And with William Mulder’s personal charm, respect for traditional India and uncanny persuasiveness on the platform, the inauguration of American Literature in India was complete.

A group of Indian and American scholars, the redoubtable Robert Spiller among them, who had met at Mussoorie for a Workshop in American Literature took, what then appeared to us, a grandiose decision to establish an American Studies Research Centre -- the locale turned out to be Hyderabad, largely because, I think, Vice-Chancellor Reddi offered a site near which the Centre now stands. I registered a feeble protest-- a lone protest by a mere professor against the weight of real decision-makers! I still think it shouldn’t have been located there (I like Hyderabad!) --its heat in summer months, the best time of the year for scholars to visit the Centre, is forbidding.

The USEFI organized seminars and workshops throughout the country -- in hill stations and prominent university centres, which attracted younger teachers of English from all over the country. If Reddick eventually retired, there was a steady, self-effacing Program Officer, P.D. Sayal, at USEFI who set up sure channels of communication with Vice-Chancellors, heads of departments of English and young teachers, each of whom he knew by name. It was my privilege to be involved in almost everyone of the USEFI seminars-- it was a measure of their generosity that none of the participants openly expressed any reservation about my credentials for the role: without formal training in American Literature, without a Ph.D. and no learned
publications, apart from occasional papers of dubious merit. I began to talk ceaselessly of an operative Indian sensibility in our response to American Literature — German and French criticism of Shakespeare had demonstrated the validity of its counterpart. In any case, one could have sensed the gradual emergence of an Indian consciousness among Kashmiris, Keralites, Punjabs, Gujaratis, Bengalis and South Indians jostling together periodically. The presence of the American scholar (it mattered not if for every Spiller there were dozens of the ‘divine average’!) presenting an insider’s view of his literature helped in numerous ways.

Scores of younger Indians had unprecedented opportunities to visit the United States for study and research under the Exchange programme. And their return with American degrees and Germanic thoroughness in scholarship coincided with the expansion of their own departments and the starting of new universities where they now found considerable openings. They were looked up to by their aspiring students for supervision of their research. Papers were published at home and abroad and collections of seminar contributions ensued. Research in English departments started in a big way thanks to our new-born interest in American Literature.

It was little realized then that America had ushered in the 20th century, at a time when we had almost reached a dead-end with Hardy, Tennyson and Browning and desperately needed breakthrough. Yeats was glistening on the Bengali horizon, less for himself than for his services to Tagore of the English Gitanjali; the Americanness of T.S. Eliot was still in doubt what with the overwhelming impact of F.R. Leavis’s criticism of his poetry which almost remained silent on Eliot’s American sensibility. But Eliot’s Indian affinities telescoped their emphatic presence in the Transcendentalists of the previous century. By and large, we kept close to American — some, inflated — reputations of its own authors: Frost (rather than Wallace Stevens) was on everybody’s lips; Hemingway was the rage; Melville’s dark depths, O’Neill’s profound effects on the stage, Emily Dickinson’s metaphysical audacity and Henry James’s international pursuit of the ideal society absorbed our attention almost to the total exclusion of the English scene, but for the scattered attention E.M. Forster claimed for A Passage to India. Kipling
had not counted for much, because we had been taught by British critics to look at him as an imperialist - that he knew his India infinitely better than Forster didn't seem to matter to the Indian scholar thanks to the latter's Liberal pronouncements. And D.H. Lawrence was slow to arrive. The time couldn't have been more propitious for the forging of American literary reputations.

Indian academics began to master the nuances of American scholarship as they began to address themselves to regional studies - the Agrarian South, the Wild West, the New England Flowering—the Black, Jewish and women writers, the New Critics, the Chicago Critics and a succession of experiments in Criticism backed by a sophisticated study of Linguistics, another discipline which America with its slogan of 'make it new' relentlessly commended to our omnivorous appetite for Western 'Progress,' which had left us far behind, as we frequently lamented.

But it was not until William Mulder assumed headship of the American Studies Research Centre with his total and unsurpassed dedication (a debt hard to pay to this great friend of India to strengthen its holdings in primary and secondary sources) made himself personally available to our eager-eyed young scholars for consultation and guidance that the American Studies Research Centre began to be the natural haunt of those that chose to work in the area. He was assisted by another dedicated spirit, Dorothy Clark, Librarian for long, who trained the present staff to ensure continuity of a good job well done.

The visitor's attention is drawn to The Library of American Civilization, 20,000 volumes in microfilm, books about cowboys, salons and stage coaches; Area Studies; ethnic writers, women writers; books by radicals and conservatives; books on English Literature, on Indian Writing in English; and some 500 periodicals.

Suddenly the eye catches a strange title like Karl Marx on the Civil War with characteristic observations like: Lincoln, 'an ordinary man', a 'plebian' whom the American electoral system 'bore to the summit,' Marx and Alec Tocqueville earlier, earn their importance for students of the American scene primarily because they looked at America with other than American eyes—an example which, alas, the Indian scholar seldom emulated.
But it needed minds of that order! Anyhow a book (like that) was worth having in the Library, as observed by a young Librarian of the British Museum in a different context, if it was borrowed once in hundred years. Marx here has joined the galaxy of men like Tocqueville. Strange bedfellows! But both, salutary examples inspiring resistance to the 'melting pot'!

Indian Ph.D. and M.Phil dissertations in American studies invariably acknowledge their debt to the Centre for use of the primary and secondary material, the impressive bibliographies, the learned footnotes, one more than what the other man working in the area has listed, the backnumbers of periodicals, and above all, for the personal contacts they could make with other scholars, among them, the Academic Associate, invariably a younger Indian scholar of high promise. I looked in vain amidst this opulence for the like of A.N. Kaul's *The American Vision*, a work of rare scholarship by an Indian on the American scene. If the book didn't relate itself to Indian society or thought and point to further fruitful inquiries, it's a pity that no one felt challenged to embark on it.

And so the question of questions remains: Did all these opportunities for familiarizing with the complexities of American life and literature make a difference to Indian scholarship? There hardly was an author, area, movement, approach, handled by an American scholar and not visited and revisited by his Indian counterpart. Apart from polite personal letters and occasional honour of a mention in learned bibliographies, did our peers in America read our work with respect for opening up a new line of inquiry, for pointing to a new dimension, which is the gift of one culture to another? Or dismiss it as an American Professor engaged in writing a book on T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* did 'those carbon copies' of Matthiessen and R.I. Blackmur? Was the Professor wrong in looking for what a brilliant Buddhist scholar like Nagarjuna could offer on the concept of Time or flux two thousand years ago, independently of Heraclitus? And how the doctrine of ceaseless but disinterested Action in the *Gita* was different from the characteristic American pursuit of restless activity and so serve as a salutary call to re-examine the whole question of ends and means in American life? In its absence it was not only the American scholar who did not receive any help from the only source which was best qualified to
interpret the concepts of Time and Action in *Four Quartets* but even the Indian reader too must have been cheated of the full benefit of this great poem. If the two approaches were now different, did the two cultures meet at some point of time in human history as Coomaraswamy insists that ancient Greece has more in common with modern India than with modern Europe? Rather than seek to strike cultural balance sheets between Emerson's 'Hamatreya' and *Vishnupurana* or Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and the *Vedanta*, Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, a futile exercise, the Western reader would feel better rewarded to be shown how Indian philosophical thought has been transmuted into terms of art by these writers and why the matrix of a different culture made for a different manifestation.

Again, in comparing Whitman and Subramanya Bharati, was it the American poet's experiment with verse that effected a breakthrough in Bharati's poetry? Whitman's declamation, orotundity and cataloguing were more easily taken over by later poets in his own country than his oceanic sweep and granite strength. The Indian scholar steeped in his Rasa- Dhvani theory should probe deeper than enthuse over surface similarities and put the Anglo-American reader wise on the oft-repeated charge of a lack of 'the vision of Evil,' a crucial component of Western poetics. Emerson's 'shame and fame are one,' 'Shadow and sunlight are the same' are not the affirmations of a glib optimist, but of one who, on his own admission, grew up in the 'house of pain,' and had achieved wholeness. It is time the Indian scholar reminded the West of its obvious contradictions in asserting Resurrection as the supreme event of Christ's life and not being able to get away from it accepting, as it did in practice, Crucifixion as the central fact of Christianity, because, possibly, it gave credence, on the theological plane, to the concept of 'Original Sin' and on the empirical, to the primacy of historical truth over the timeless.

I gather someone from Kerala has done a thesis titled 'O'Neill and the Perilous Sea.' I should be interested to see in what different ways the sea flows into the veins of poets and novelists in American and Keralite studies and affects their metabolism. What is the sea symbol of in either case? A thesis on the theme of 'loneliness' in American fiction has appropriately invoked J.
Krisnamurthi's 'Aloneness' for comparison. One hopes the treatment is as rewarding as the title is promising. There are, I see, at least two dissertations linking American and English thematic aspects: Nature as viewed by Wordsworth and Frost; and Emily Dickinson and the Metaphysical tradition. In each case, the Indian scholar is an outsider to both the traditions. But from the Vedic hymns, the Ramayana and Kalidasa's poetry and drama until recently Indian poets have lived in the lap of nature: plants, flowers and animals have been the stuff of our poetry making the life of Man an inseparable unit of Creation with them. Now, does that poetry sound sentimental and become pathetic fallacy, in the context of Wordsworth and Frost who seek nature, less for understanding the unity of creation than as an escape from the boredom of life? Is there an answer in our poetry to Huxley's speculation, 'Wordsworth in the Tropics'? Similarly does 'metaphysical' suggest different dimensions in the Anglo-American poets, on the one hand and, on the other, the Indian Bhakti poetry of the 12th century, and later?

I can't pretend to an intimate acquaintance with the nature of treatment of the American material by Indian research scholars except for a couple of dozen theses, presumably a cross section of Indian scholarship, I have been called upon to adjudicate over the past two decades. The Indian scholars' tendency is invariably to look at American poets, playwrights and novelists as insiders, which we are not, and learn to place too much reliance on American scholarship and be often guilty of making a rehash of it. And in all cases inhibit exploration of what it does to Indian life and literature and make new connections with American material and American experience which in turn should make for larger perspectives and fresh insights, to the American reader himself -- the kind of thing that Arthur Christy and Frederick Ivy Carpenter have done in the world of scholarship or what a critic of R.P. Blackmur's incomparable greatness does with a stray Indian philosophical concept like Moha in his undeservedly neglected essay, "Between the Numen and the Moha: Towards a Theory of Literature" in his collection The Lion and the Honeycomb. Blackmur got the Sanskrit word from a physicist engaged in war-work and calls the atom bomb 'a labour of Moha', 'our unenlightened and unimpeded behaviour,' the damned spot that will not out,
when we are deprived of harmony, wholeness, radiance.' Here to me are the equivalents of the better known Indian criteria of \textit{vidya} and \textit{avidya}, knowledge and ignorance, which can help to organize the experience of classics of world literature like Dante, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Goethe, Proust, Yeats, Eliot to the understanding of whom Blackmur brings in his wisdom the Latin Numen and the Sanskrit Moha. I envy an American scholar who despite his protest that he only came to Delhi, not to India, and without the rudiments of Sanskrit, without specialized scholastic training, without even that `union card' of a Ph.D., could grasp the full implications of a difficult concept like Moha, use it in a context least suspected, and innovate a theory of literature which in its subtle and profound understanding marks a phenomenal growth, a leap, not only from the simplistic Aristotelian Poetic but the lush jungle of critical approaches of the past 50 years, everyone of which has found its votaries in India but none of which has, demonstrably, brought us one inch nearer the life of the work of art --the function of responsible criticism.

If American studies can send the Indian scholar back to school, to return well equipped with awareness of his own country's history, philosophy, literature and culture, one can look forward to a more rewarding two-way traffic. Meanwhile there is only personal regret for a lost opportunity!

The emergence of Commonwealth literature on the Indian academic scene after the advent, indeed establishment of American literature in post-graduate English syllabuses of our universities, has imparted an edge to the question of reader-response in literary criticism. It all started with my first visit to Australia in 1963 to lecture on Indian writing in English at the University of Queensland, for while I taught my own literature I was attracted to Australian writing which was struggling for its own identity in the context of the global importance of English Literature.
Visit to Australia:
Beginning of my interest in
Commonwealth Literature

I

What kind of image did Australia present to an Indian? A reader of a popular weekly or monthly magazine might very well describe it as an old continent which came late into history; a land which was for ages inhabited by Stone Age men who have since been exterminated or driven into the interior by white men who, to start with, were English convicts who 'left their country for the country's good,' then joined by free settlers and gold diggers; a virgin land well developed into a prosperous nation by the new settlers who have now come to own extensive sheep farms and apple orchards and export a rare quality of wool and apples; and have lots of fun swimming and surfing near their sunny beaches when they are not playing cricket in Melbourne.

Is it true? is it fair? is it a complete picture? But this is the average magazine reader's picture of Australia and the popular image still persists though thanks to India's increasing participation in the Commonwealth and the Colombo Plan some of the younger Indian scientists go, as a third or fourth preference, to the emerging Australian universities for an odd term or so, come back and circulate stories of Australia's 'enormous economic progress' widely visible in their half dozen cities on 'the edge of vast empty spaces'; their 'well-equipped scientific laboratories,' their 'increasing interest in India' despite the White Australian policy, their 'preference for the American way of life and money-making' with 'little or no interest in art, literature and philosophy save for sporadic contributions to Impressionistic and Abstract painting.'
We have seen that the immigrants were first English convicts, then free settlers and gold diggers. Even so the population of Australia, in 1851 was only 4,05,000. But gold was the making of Australia, for immigrants came from all over Europe in pursuit of gold lured by legends of men 'shoeing their horses with gold, using ten-pound notes to light their pipes and drinking champagne by the gallon.' Thoreau might have described the gold-rush to California as the greatest disgrace of mankind, for it was to him most unethical that they went to reap where they had not sown. But human nature is incontrovertible whether it is America or Australia. And to Australia men of all nationalities, and types came, it seems, at the rate of 1,00,000 per year. Again, as in America, they shed their nationalities as easily as the snake its skin. Such was the power of the spirit of place. One plausible explanation is that Australia was founded after the Industrial Revolution when conditions of the working class in England were by our present day standards horrible, almost inhuman. Men, women and children were punished and convicted and sent out of the country for ridiculously small offences. But such is the irony of history that the convict 'sent out for snaring a rabbit' soon became the Founding Father of Australia. Why not? He had the sense to see through the hypocrisy and cant of the social system at home and this gave him higher ethical values. The convict's champion described the English social system:

The law locks up the man or woman
Who steals the goose from off the Common
But leaves the greater villain loose
Who steals the Common from the goose.

The convict of the day before yesterday has today become 'the noble Bushman'. Charles Darwin, not by any means its unqualified admirer, yet wrote in 1866, on visiting Australia, praising it for transforming 'vagabonds most useless in one hemisphere into active citizens of another and then giving birth to a new and splendid country -- a grand centre of civilization'. To Judith Wright, the leading Australian poet of today the situation recalls the manner in which the Hebrews trekked from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. For the Australians do not continue to be 'second-hand Europeans' but a people who have seized
the chance to forge a new consciousness out of their old conditions.

While in America successive waves of immigration were probably responsible for them to seek 'the better country farther out' Australia was fortunately free from such pressures and consequently 'the frontier' did not dominate the Australian consciousness as it did the American. That may to some extent at least account for the absence of an extreme form of individualism but on the contrary made 'mateship' a great virtue. Or is it that the convicts have in any case a higher code of ethics than those who make a fetish of freedom of worship? The fact is that while in mental calibre 'mateship' may perpetuate mediocrity, euphemistically called 'the divine average' it can nevertheless, provide a potent solution to modern man's predicament of self-centredness. For truly in Australia while every man feels better off no one is allowed to feel better than the other and that makes a difference to the human personality. No wonder that a visiting V.I.P. is made to feel he has committed a breach of social etiquette if instead of sitting beside the driver in a car, he chooses to sit alone in the back lodging it over all. Perhaps there is something in the delightful legend, current through the country, of a Prime Minister, Mr. Chiefly, owing part of his popularity to such gestures of equality as walking a mile on the high road to find rescue for a flat tyre while the driver was sitting smoking in the car. The Prime Minister lost the toss to the driver to decide as to who should go! As if to prove the legend true the Premier of Queensland, one of the largest States in Australia, was seen taking his stand unobtrusively (there were fewer chairs than men) in a corner of the University hall at a party of predominantly academic men gathered in honour of a foreign dignitary, the Maharaja of Mysore, visiting the University to receive an honorary degree. While this might have surprised an Indian Professor accustomed to pampering of the ubiquitous politician for no other reason than fear of consequences, the Australian professors took this in their natural stride. There was no fanfare when the Premier came (he came almost unseen) and when he moved about meeting people no one lussed around him while there was, of course, no discourtesy on any one's part to an invitee. Only he was one of the fifty or so invitees. Australia is a strange
country where the proletariat have helped to set the pace for the capitalistic economy, but the working class resents authority. The Australians may not even care to exercise their vote if it weren't compulsory to do so. Call it 'the divine average 'or' proletariat insolence,' it's a fact that in Australia, if anywhere in the world, 'a man's a man for all that', for where else in all the world do we miss porters at railway stations and bus-stands?

It might sound strange but it is true I hadn't seen a policeman for the first 10 to 15 days of my stay at Brisbane. Perhaps it was just an accident but there isn't much evidence of the police or, for that matter, of any authority restricting the liberties of the citizen. The working class has no animus against the upper class for they know that if they work more they could earn more. But they would not barter away their leisure for any material possession, for they value leisure though it is another matter as to what they do with it! It is important however to remember that their social superiors spend their leisure in the same way: read the same – rather mediocre – newspapers; they all see the same TV; listen to the same radio; spend their week-ends on the same beach sitting in the sun after a joyous plunge in the cool waters of the Pacific.

Even during the week-days the Australian is quite relaxed, more relaxed than his counterpart in England or America: 'Relax' is the watchword, go where you will, in Australia. Significant that one can say America and Asia have met in Australia which has struck the mean between the American craze for speed and the notorious lethargy of Asia. The Australian never runs about like frightened sheep nor lazes like the tortoise but manages to get so much done in a seemingly effortless way. All the same there is unconscious admiration for American affluence, though when their attention is drawn to their imitation of the American way of life the Australians would resent it.

There is striking similarity between the American and the Australian situations: in size; in the importance of the eastern sea-board; the western plains; the gold-rushes; the high standard of material comfort; and freedom from the past, though while the Americans at least can now speak of an American Tradition, Australians can have a dig at themselves when they say that in their country last year's habit becomes this year's
custom and three years' habit is of course tradition! In any case the resemblance ends here. For Australia has no Chicago, neither the colour-conscious South nor the wild West and no myths about worship of the woman by man (I can never bring myself to think that Judith Wright's "Woman to Man" could have been written by an American woman), and no easy mixing of the sexes and hardly any display of the erotic in public places—a refreshing contrast to America. But Australian social virtues were formed in Victorian England and have since been strengthened by the same sun that keeps men and women apart in the neighbouring South-East Asian countries. Things are changing, though.

While the besetting sin of America, socially speaking, is its extreme individualism (in a land of extreme conformity) which, their political analysts think, is a contributory factor in the increasing violence that one witnesses in American society today, the Australian 'mateship' which begets mutual trust and makes society 'cohere' has been an inestimable virtue, for when extended to embrace the organised workers' unions it made for widespread social consciousness and a touching hospitality of the kind numerous foreign visitors like me have had the privilege of enjoying. I haven't seen Russia and I don't know how the workers live there but from what I have seen of the working class elsewhere, so far as freedom and life's furniture matter, Australia may very well be said to be the paradise of the working class. Small wonder they had their Labour Government as early as 1904.

There is one thing for which an Indian should find Australia a country more worth visiting than England or America and that is while both in England and America, behind the kid-glove of politeness the sensitive Asian visitor will often discern the red claw of condescension born of "kultur" and wealth (though civilized individuals in both countries fight hard against this complex)—England because she was India's ruler for two centuries and America because she has been our money-lender and donor of PL 480 funds and relatively easy giver of university degrees—hard facts which we in India daily help to strengthen despite our successive Five Year Plans. Australia is for the present at any rate fortunately free from any feeling of "better
than thou' and so sends the visitor back with his dignity and self-respect in tact.

I cannot resist narrating an amusing encounter I had with an elderly English lady, the wife of a visiting head of a British scientific foundation, both of whom were my companions in a tourist bus in northern Australia. Perhaps she started with the presumption that an Indian educationist had no business to be in Australia (while all the world journeyed to English universities). But that was not so unforgivable as the fact I had gone to Australia to lecture on Indian literature in English. For her first reaction was one of amusement tinged with contempt: 'what do the Australians want that for?' And I, even I, whose mental make-up is considerably English, I who make my living by professing to teach English literature and have always admired and continue to admire the English and English education in a way I do few others-- had to be deliberately derisive in my tone and in sheer self-defence attempt to put her wise with, 'For weightier reasons, madam, than for learning English literature!' It is hardly necessary for me to add I regret the discomfiture I must have thus caused to the lady. For she was a very well-meaning person but could hardly free herself from the complacency of her class and the notorious (though now fast-dying) English insularity which refuses to see merit outside that precious isle set in the silver sea. Be that as it may, my hosts in Australia (a large number of Englishmen among them, did see some merit in the Indian contribution to English and to other branches of knowledge as is manifest in the appointment of several Indians on the staffs of the better Australian universities. Is it because Australia, while racially and linguistically belongs with England and America (they consider it the last outpost of English-speaking culture), geographically her fortunes are bound up with the South-East Asian countries? Although it is absurd to make much of geography in an age of jets and rockets it nevertheless tells on a country's trade, commerce and, in a vital way, on foreign relations as was seen in the widespread distress caused in Australia by President Sukarno's attitude to Malaysia.

Possibly, there is an unconscious link in the dark depths of their beings with South-East Asia because of the aborigines. After all, these aborigines, the original inhabitants of the land,
may have migrated from South India and Ceylon though researches have yet to confirm this. I gathered while visiting one of the universities that an Australian zoologist was working on the bones of the Dingo (a ferocious dog which looks no different from the domesticated dog) hoping to find clues to the confirmation of the guess that the aborigine with whom came the Dingo did originally belong to South India and Ceylon. Is it mere coincidence that the Tamil wife of the Sri Lankan Ambassador to Australia, told me, one of the aboriginal tribes to this day used the Tamil word _thanni_ for water? I observed earlier that in Australia the Stone Age man and his civilized descendant from Europe have met. Perhaps not ‘met’, for the white man has committed a ‘bloodless murder’ of the aborigine, but here is more evidence of real attrition of the heart for what has happened to the primitive man than in America. For one thing the land has so many aborigines surviving to this day—some 75,000 of them, not all of them full-blooded, though. The poets and painters of Australia have helped to sensitize the rest of the society to the aborigine’s plight and rouse its conscience, not always by idealizing him but by treating him generously and imaginatively. Would it be unfair to surmise that the white man has only reciprocated the aborigine’s decency? For unlike the Red Indian the aborigine didn’t put up a fight against the colonist; he just withdrew into the outbacks there to wander free as the wind till he would perish in his pride. But what cares he as long as he can recall his ‘dreamtime’ and be at peace with himself and the rest of the universe? Not for him to protest like Caliban:

_This island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother;_

nor to take revenge:

‘You taught me language; and the profit on’t
Is, I know how to curse’

But actually, of late, some rumblings are heard from the more sensitive and conscious among them. A half-blooded aboriginal poetess of Noonuccal tribe, Kathe Walker, writes in a poem:

_No more gammon,
If you have to teach the light,
Teach us first to read and write._
In less than a few months Walker’s collection of poems seems to have been reprinted several times, so well were the poems received. The point is that the aborigine hasn’t been allowed to languish in the desert and the forest though he hasn’t always been assimilated into ‘civilization.’ I am not sure it is R.L. Stevenson who remarked in respect of the impact of European civilization on the Polynesians:

‘Where there have been fewest changes, important or unimportant, good or bad the race survives. Where there have been most changes, there it perishes: experience shows that change of habits among natives can be bloodier than a bombardment.’

Does America exemplify the truth of the second category mentioned by Stevenson? As early as 1836 when the colony of South Australia was founded the Governor’s Proclamation promised full protection to the native inhabitants. Accordingly reserves have been established and mission stations have been founded. But it seems the aborigine suffered disease and death of the organic community in which everyone was tied to every other by ‘indissoluble bonds.’ Their beautiful organization suffered disintegration and the aborigine has lost his religion and culture.

Perhaps in the encounter of cultures it is inevitable that the weaker should go down as the Etruscans lost to Romans and the Red Indians to the European colonists in America. Where a people have a ‘staying’ capacity, brute strength and even superior technology may not be of much avail in the long run as in the case of politically subject India itself; so too of the Indians who have gone all over the world and settled there for generations. I was for example astonished at the Indianess of young Fiji Indian students in Australian universities, despite the fact they have never seen India nor have they any illusions of getting a warm welcome in the country they love so much. Earlier, Greece lost to Rome but victorious Rome fell prostrate at the feet of vanquished Greece. Why go so far when we are told that in New Zealand the Polynesians have still survived with their culture in tact.

It is in the light of this heart-rending experience which is a hard fact of history that one has to view the white Australian policy, which by the way was widely discussed and resented in
the University Commonrooms, on public platforms and in the daily Press of Australia. That is on grounds of our common humanity and it redounds to Australia’s credit. But the American experience and recent happenings in England must be full of ominous forebodings even to the most sympathetic Australian. The Chinese who swarmed the goldfields of Australia have given quite a shake-up in the past though it is good to know the magnanimous among Australians think ‘there’s many worse than a Chinaman.’

To come back to the aborigine. In these days of poets and painters exploiting ‘the usable past’ the aborigine with his dark preoccupations offers unparalleled opportunities to the Australian writer. His simplicity of nature, his magico-religious art which was not an accomplishment but a basic function and his being a part of the natural world can all be wonderful sources of nourishment to our uprooted suburban civilization with its ‘mere complexities of fury and mire’. Much depends on the artist’s vision: the aborigine might be used as the ‘noble savage’ and by extension as the ‘nobie bushman’ in the attempt to evoke Australian ‘atmosphere’ but may not form an organic part of the work of art which therefore becomes phoney. Even aboriginal names like Wooloomooloo and Indooroopilly which while jaw-breaking may, when applied to streets and villages, sound pleasantly musical but may not evoke aboriginal atmosphere being, again, phoney.

III

Like the attempt to grapple with the aborigines the effort to come to grips with an unhumanized landscape seems to hold for artists ‘that shock of recognition long gone in Europe.’ Here is a country twice as big as India and Pakistan put together but whose population is just over 20 million, which is half the population of the former State of Mysore, but much of it living in the five teeming cities on the edge of the Dead Heart. Its shores are washed by the Pacific—the Pacific which our late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru thought was ‘likely to take the place of the Atlantic in the future as a nerve-centre of the world.’ Such is the dark challenge of the ancient continents to the white foam. Now Australia too is a dark continent and there is something primeval about the landscape ‘so aboriginal, out
of our ken, and it hangs back so aloof.' The woods which spread as far as the eye can see are 'inexpressibly sad' and inscrutable; and the green lush of the cultivated lawns brings home the contrast with the grey and colourless bush behind. It is not description of the landscape in art and literature that makes their writers and writing Australian but capturing the spirit that dwells in it as does D.H. Lawrence in his *Kangaroo*— those gum trees which to Lawrence were like the 'dead limbs thrown up' giving rise to 'strange, old feelings in the soul,' 'old non-human feelings'— not green thoughts in a green shade. Even the dusk which settles down is to Lawrence 'thick' and 'aboriginal.'

Is this then the dominant note of Australian scenery? Marcus Clarke has answered: 'that which is the dominant note of Poe's poetry -- weird melancholy. The Australian forests are funereal, secret, stern. No tender sentiment is nourished in the shade.' Poet after poet has given the lie to the latter half of Clarke's statement, though the secretly sad landscape has had considerable influence on them all and helped to build up the Australian character as the snow-covered Himalayas, the full-flowing rivers north of the Vindhyas, the warm sun, the wind and the rain as 'word of, worded by' the Creator induced humility in the Aryan invaders who felt grateful and chanted hymns to the gods who they believed, dwell in these elements of nature. And those hymns have moulded Indian sensibility through the ages. As has been said before, the spirit of the place counts: the natural environment affects you whether you live in harmony with it or find it challenging. It is thus that a people who imbibe the spirit of the place develop a certain 'idiom of thought different from others and peculiar to their own.'

**IV**

How did this happen? The country became aware of itself and had begun to seek its own means of expression for its own way of life. They may speak English but it is English as the language of the Americans is English. It is spoken with a difference of pace and pitch. The language has its own overtones of meaning and as A.D. Hope says its literature can only be judged in the frame of reference to this language. For it has developed its own vocabulary of the 'Bush', the 'outbacks' and even in the cities there is a leisurely tone about it as in the
pronunciation of simple words like ‘No’ (which has none of the English finality or crispness about it but a drawl which makes it sound ‘Neow) and ‘To-day’ (as in ‘You came to daf)? to which a visitor feels like replying anxiously ‘no, not to die but to live’. But the drawl is born of the leisure-loving Australian habit. And so one finds every shade of pronunciation and of intonation and syntax born of new conditions of life and new experiences. That explains, to mention only a few instances, the ‘feminine sensitiveness’ of Lawson, the renowned short story writer; the ‘masculine strength’ of Joseph Furphy, the author of Such is Life; the ‘tortured syntax’ of Patrick White who sets out to explore the nature of suffering; and Xavier Herbert, the author of Capricornia who confesses to having ‘sinned against syntax’. It is precisely these that have given a distinctiveness to the writers. And yet I heard an Australian teacher of English in one of the universities I visited whisper: ‘There is no novelist in Australia of the order of R.K. Narayan or Raja Rao.’ In his opinion the Indian writer of English has found in the novel a more adequate medium of expression than his Australian counterpart. What would he have said after the Nobel Prize justly come to Patrick-White!

V

Well, the Australian critic, even the better type of critic, has unfortunately developed a complex which is probably a sensitive reaction against hysterical nationalism which sees no merit in a work of art unless it upheld Australian virtues. But that is probably better for the health of the mind than senseless adoration of everything Australian. Fortunately as a result of extreme self-awareness and awareness of world standards, there is developing a strong critical tradition in Australian universities as is seen in critical works which have met with favour and great praise in all the English knowing countries of the world.

The distinctive Australian spirit which ‘struck root and grew deep and strong’ in the 1890s ‘slowed down and its vital stream often went underground.’ It became Jingiworobak!

Geoffrey Dutton enumerated in the Preface to his widely used compilation of essays on Australian Literature (Pelican, 1964) the teething troubles of Australian Literature as an academic discipline. It seems the professor of English who was invited to
inaugurate the Commonwealth Literature Fund, while thankful for providing funds, complained that the sponsors omitted to provide him with any literature and so wished to speak on D.H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo*. And yet there was enough in 19th century Australian writing to draw attention to, not as outstanding achievement but as what laid the enduring literary foundations of Australia. Ironically, Dutton himself was taken in by the 'majestic mainstream' of English literature when he apologised so late in the day that 'the novelist or poet who may mean a lot to Australians and Australian literary history may well be a pigmy alongside Fielding or Wordsworth'. Dutton would have done well to take the cue from the author of *The Great Tradition* to convince himself that his hero had in effect long been dubbed a 'pigmy' in his own home. As for Wordsworth, if one hadn't accustomed one's tongue and ear for decades to the 'egotistic sublime' by constant rolling of some of his mouthful lines in the much anthologized poems and learnt not to respond to received reputations, one should have no difficulty in rating that incomparably less known colonial poet, Shaw Neilson, higher than the High-Priest of Nature, in respect of a few chosen poems, that is, for no one is so perverse as to claim Neilson greater than Wordsworth in every poem of his. While Wordsworth forces his own valuation on the reader in the assertion (Keats knew better when he said that poetry did not support or dispute but whispered among neighbours): 'It's my faith that every flower enjoys the air it breathes,' Shaw Neilson sees it as a concrete, immediately felt presence when he gives 'love-talk' to the 'little blue flower of the Spring' which is 'my own, of my own folk'— the 'But' behind 'you are my own, of my own folk' suggests a sense of belonging in the context of the preceding 'hot happy sound of the shearing, the rude heavy scent of the wool.' Lines like 'His love's eyes in the violet, her sweetness in the rose,' 'her lips shall move as the flowers move to see the winds go by,' 'The eldest thought was a forest song and the singer was a tree', enact the living, pulsating partnership between Man and Nature and so comes home to me more than the assertive 'faith' 'that every flower enjoys the air it breathes.' In Neilson one instantly senses the flower breathes — and that's that.

Nature, in Neilson, is not something to escape to, rather, it is the other way, for if ever he goes to 'Stony Town,' his girl
will go with him ‘with the heat-wave in her hair,’ ‘the scent of
love and cinnamon dust shaken out of her head’ ‘as a velvet­
bird with a quickstep on her tongue.’ Such joy as he has scraped
from the landscape serves the poet as a springboard of action
in the Stony Town which ‘will not pity the eye of youth.’

If for a T.S. Eliot the rhythms of modern poetry are condi­
tioned by the internal combustion engine, for this little known
(certainly outside Australia) antipodean contemporary who
composed on the horseback) ‘in the bush it is different : one
walks on the grass or a soft track; walking he would sing over
the lines to get the bumps out.’ It is remarkable how the
rhythms of bush ballads (‘the good breath of the ballad’) and
convict songs have flowed into formal poetry in Australia and
given it a continuity stretching into the present. Is Les Murray
thinking of this kind of poetry when he uses the terms ‘Boetian’
and ‘Athenian’ as metaphors for vernacular and metropolitan
poetries? (See his perceptive talk printed in Kunapipi Vol. 2 No.
1). Classical allusions, says Les Murray, when passed through
a Virgilian filter did not interfere with Dante's deeply Boetian
purpose of creating a vernacular poetry capable of handling
sublime matters. For him Whitman is a Boetian poet and thanks
to him one can today talk of a distinctive American poetry. With
the collapse of Romanticism the English poet didn't chart out
a new course for his poetry: If the Romantic poet didn’t, as Eliot
observed, ‘know enough,’ his successors, the Victorian poets,
were content to ‘ruminate.’ Interestingly the Australian Brennan
could read the writing on the wall and, even before T.S. Eliot
aspired to the ‘symphonic forms’ of Baudelaire who, he thought,
was ‘pursuing an ideal which should be the consummation of
all desire.’ Not all the Australian poets emulated the example
of Brennan, but they all did something different, sometimes
even better: they exploited the strength of the native element.

History is full of instances of a culture revitalizing itself after
crisis, both by reaching out to fresh influences abroad and by
looking back to the sources of its own culture-- the kind of thing
Gerard Manloy Hopkins did in England when he exploited the
‘sprung rhythm’ of Caedman and Cynewulf in Old English and
created major poetry out of his deeply felt religious experience.
This he did precisely when his far-famed contemporary Ten­
nynson was ‘ruminating’ and Swinburne had brought English
poetry to a dead end. If only criticism had identified Hopkins's strength (Robert Bridges, his friend, was ill-equipped for it) and demonstrated its rich possibilities for the future of English poetry! What happened in India is just as deplorable. Indians who wrote poetry in their own languages fell for the Romantics: the idealism of British Romantic poets must have been enticing to the dispossessed Indian. And he wrote the Romantic kind of poetry. Not the Romanticism of Blake or Coleridge, but its softer variation as in Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron, which persisted until England heard the voice of T.S. Eliot, for values had to be routed through England, or they were no values.

It is here an Indian reader of Australian poetry (as of the American earlier) feels a certain envy. He will see how the 'protest' songs of the convicts and the bush chanties of miners and stockmen came to have their impact on the later poetry. The tropical sky, the hard soil and the bleak landscape must have been inhospitable to the poetry of the Romantics. Add to these the dislocation of the seasons which rendered the Romantic images and metaphors irrelevant in the new context. The dispossession of the Aborigines by the white man induced introspection in a better poet like Judith Wright. She wrote in her 'Nigger's Leap: New England'

Did we not know their blood channelled our rivers and
the black dust our crops ate was their dust
O all men are one man at last

One regrets, though, the facile conclusion in the last line in so distinguished a poet, eager, as it were, to effect a quick reconciliation. One wishes the 'at last' had earned its way. But genuine poet that she is, she strikes a different, that is, salutary, note in 'Bora Ring':

The song is gone; the dance
is secret with dancers in the earth
the ritual useless and the tribal story
lost in an alien tale.

Here is the 'chastening truth' which The Times Literary Supplement would have done well to contemplate for its own, and England's salvation rather than preach to the Australians from its precarious pedestal when it spoke of the 'steak-fed, sports-fixated' Australian.
One is therefore particularly disturbed that a poet of A.D. Hope's established excellence should have despaired, although two decades ago, (See his 'A Note on the Ballads', L.C. 1964) as he posed the hypothetical question: 'Imagine the problem of a young poet like Charles Harpur in New South Wales in the year 1837 had he had the genius and the impulsion of a Keats at the same age. Either he must write a second-hand poem about a bird he had never heard, for he was born and lived all his life in Australia or he must write about the Australian equivalent of the nightingale.' The truth is Harpur did not have the genius of a Keats and so Hope's fears were unfounded. The poet who had the 'genius', could not, would not, feel lost merely because he was removed from 'the setting of the English countryside, the context (of) the whole tradition of European life and thought, its climate that of an old established and aristocratic sensibility.' No, none of these considerations weighed with the poet of 'The Death of the Bird'. The material was there, the engaging sensibility and the hard-earned native strength were there and lo! creation resulted: one of the most moving poems of our age.

The mind of an Indian reader of the little poem is telescoped to a similar experience the legendary author of Ramayana had. As Valmiki was watching two birds, lost in love-making, a hunter's arrow killed the male bird leaving its mate distraught in its grief. Such was the sage's empathy for the tiny thing that his soka (sorrow) was transmuted into sloka (song) which became an archetype of great beauty and tenderness (karuna) permeating the consciousness of the Indian people and those of South Asia, uniting at once the 'elite' and 'lumpe letariat.' Now the absence of an aristocratic sensibility, the tradition of European life and thought and the English countryside must have been a silent challenge to the poet; in any case turned out to be a blessing. The Keats poem, an offspring of these components, for all its richness has, as I have had occasion to remark elsewhere (See A.D. Hope: Poetry of Shocked Sensibility, ACLALS Bulletin, 4th Series No.4) a corresponding limitation in terms of its reader appeal while the Hope poem is 'joy in widest commonalty spread.' Contrary to the Aristotelian canon, 'the fall of the sparrow', this poet has demonstrated, if it did not convulse a kingdom, could touch the hearts of our common humanity.
everywhere. I have never ceased to wonder how this poet, 
owing his stimulus ostensibly to Augustan poetry, could achieve 
the serenity of:

And the great earth, with neither grief nor malice
Receives the tiny burden of her death

Indeed, in a succession of poems drawing on material which 
has passed, unnoticed. I have at least one poem in mind: "Mos-
chus Moschiferus."

True to the possible origins of his nutritive impulse the poem 
begins on an epic note:

In the high jungle where Assam meets Tibet
The small kastura, most archaic of deer,

And as the reader comes to the last lines:
Divine Cecilia, there is no more to say
Of all who praised the power of music, few
Knew of these things. In honour of your day
Accept this song I too have made for you.

the entrails fall into the hands, as we say in India. He has given 
us 'the tears of things,' and spared us his 'own tears,' a Virgilian 
canon.

Mr. Hope has generously permitted me to quote his then un-
published poem which he wrote after his last visit to India in 
1977.

Salabhanjika

Salabhanjika, inmate of my house,
You have hung for years over the kitchen sink,
Cut from some brochure about Indian art.
My wife, my niece, to fortify their vows
Against the insidious lures of meat and drink
Pinned you, voluptuous, by their diet chart.

My own response to your delightful frame,
Those generous breasts, the bold haunch, the full thighs
And rapt face—did it seem to dream or brood?
—Has naturally been not quite the same:
Symbols of plenty to my masculine eyes,
Abundance and promise, grace and plenitude,
And mystery: India, from which you sprung,
Its arts, its past and its unnumbered gods
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Was at that time to me almost unknown.
I saw you as a woman, enchanting, young,
And did not know by what improbable odds
My kitchen harboured your smile of ageless stone.

I used to think of you, in my ignorance,
One of those lovers who endlessly embrace
At Konarak on its Temple of the Sun,
In every erotic posture known to man's
Power to create supple and sensual grace;
At other times I saw you as a lone
Dancer at some maharajah's court.
The Nizam, with a connoisseur's cool glance
Followed the fluid ecstasy of the nautch,
Appraising the pearl his boundless wealth had bought,
Ignoring the exquisite artistry of the dance
In contemplation of his coming debauch.
Mere fancies! Now I have visited your land,
viewed you and your voluptuous sisterhood
And know you for a goddess of the trees.
Yours is no dancer's pose. As the trees stand
True to the zenith and draw up their green blood,
The classic stance of Hindu dryads,
But older than all Hindu gods, as old
As the first worshippers on that continent,
You stand, straight torso, weight upon one foot,
The other drawn back and poised to withhold
Its touch, the arms uplifted, the knee bent...
The legend was: one kick against the root
Made the tree blossom from contact with the heel
Of any beautiful woman, but blossom more
Caressed by such a spirit of the wood,
Since all trees have a deep desire to feel
A woman's touch and will give all their store
Of nectar, colour, fragrance if they should.
The legend charms me, I do not think it true;
And yet I long to put it to the test.
Now I am old and, in my season of fruit,
Shrivelled by drought, I too would turn to you,
If by contact with foot or lip or breast
‘N for Nobody’

My buds might burst or water drench my root.
Bring me, Salabhanjika, what your smile
Portends, that miracle of late blossoming.
But, till that moment comes which sets all free,
Pause, let me feel my new sap rise awhile;
Then, flood me with that providential spring,
Touch, tend and make me flower, I am that tree.

--A.D. Hope
1979

The Salabhanjika is a common enough image among our temple treasures. It is said poets go in search of material. But here was material waiting, according to traditional belief, for that propitious moment when a woman of radiant beauty, frozen in stone, has cast her spell on the great lover, a revelation to the seer in him. Critics talk of Mr. Hope’s sexual preoccupation but fail to see what sex is doing in his poems: it is not there for its own sake: he is far too distinguished for it. Woman here touches the poet at more than one level and at every level each liberates the other. We are here in the debt of a great poet who gave us eyes to see and brought inert stone to life, and in the process made ‘throb’ of a dull pulse beat-- one of those eventless millions-- when an evanescent moment had glimpsed eternity itself. At such a touch of the foot it was that the Asoka tree blossomed into a glory, and in this case, poetry into pure flame.

Will Larkins, Tom Gunn and Ted Hugheses, whom Imperial prestige has thrust on our attention, say like Ezra Pound (when Eliot burst on the Anglo-American literary scene): ‘It is time we shut our shops?’ It is usual to talk of Mr. Hope’s satire, irony, wit. Yes, it is wit, but not the wit of a Carew or Herrick: it is what Leavis would have called the ‘focussing sharpness of illuminating intelligence’, like his compassion, invariably held in check by the precision of language and the carefully cultivated voice which knows what-- the low key--will suffice.

If Hope is associated in our minds with the Augustan Age he should still remind one of the peculiar times of Addison and Steele which made a Bunyan possible, even as the Age of Pope and Johnson surprised the world with the phenomenon of Blake. If as Eliot feared language, that social instrument, mustn’t be in a perpetual state of revolution then the individual sensibility of a poet like Hope can still give us great poetry without
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having to alter the language. But the demands made on that sensibility have to be higher and more exacting than those made on a poet who is called upon to alter expression only: There is nothing more challenging to civilized man in the West today than the crime of war. Like his senior contemporaries, Yeats and Eliot, Hope has responded to the challenge from the depths of his profound humanity: He ‘sweetened’ the brutal mouth of song. We see in ‘Pyramid or the House of Ascent,’ the operative irony which he almost always employs to point to the perils of vanity no less than of pusillanimity and make his choice unequivocally between building and destroying;

He tells the naked truth:

If you lack slaves make war

For, however you disguise your actions or language, the motivating force behind wars boils down to this ‘brave clearness’:

the essence of the measure of things is man

and I of men.

It is Hope’s supreme distinction that he does not sigh for the Golden Age or the organic society: He is aware they are gone and gone for good and so sees his work as one of reconciling technological man to his changed situation by healing the tissues of his spirit. Hope knows more than any other poet writing in the English language today that ‘only the transfusion of the poem’s blood’ can ‘save them bleeding from that civilization’:

Of strengthening those powers that fence the failing heart intemperate will and incorruptible pride

It is often lamented that poetry has ceased to matter in the modern world; if so, it is because of the kind of poet who has missed his vocation. This poet goes all out to pull his weight on the side of the good. He has the courage to exhort ‘those are builders who put aside consideration and stood alone’ such as a Gandhi knew when he claimed that non-violence is the weapon of the brave; and that the Rishis who discovered the law of non-violence were greater geniuses than Newton.... greater warriors than Wellington.

I must turn from poetry for a quick over-all view of Australia that it not only had no Emerson and Thoreau but none of the
great names in fiction to compare with Melville, Mark Twain, Faulkner, and Hemingway. It is said too that its fiction hasn’t had any impact on the world outside, while Fenimore Cooper influenced Balzac, Faulkner influenced recent French fiction. And *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Innocents Abroad* are read everywhere. But those who deplore the paucity of great literature in Australia ignore altogether the subtle links that exist between a country’s political power and its literary prestige beyond its own frontiers. A situation which sees Jane Austen, George Eliot, Dickens and Lawrence and, as a concession, Henry James because of his links with England as the masters of fiction, leaves out the great Russian Novel and thinks nothing of what happened in the erstwhile British colonies, is a challenge as much to the critic of literature as to those in charge of education of the young in institutions of higher learning, not to speak of those who wield political power. Consequently no discussion of the literary image of England or America is possible in terms of literature only. Put differently, perhaps bluntly, the immense prestige of the British Empire and the almost unrivalled global role of America in international affairs have helped to build up their literary reputation internationally. One is anxious to add that while political prestige alone cannot project the literary image of a country (Communist Russia and China are examples) it is not altogether irrelevant to bring in considerations of political power into discussions of international literary reputations. So seen, it must be clear to the most naive among readers why Australian literature today is at a disadvantage overseas and when this image is reflected back home it can demoralize the Australians themselves.

It is an accident of history and not widely recognized even in India that the Australian-born novelist John George Lang, about whom Ruskin Bond the Anglo-Indian writer (who lives in the hill station, Mussoorie where Lang was buried) has written that Lang was sent to Cambridge for his studies and was expelled for his Botany Bay tricks — believed to have been ‘the writing of blasphemous litanies.’ It seems he was ignored by the ‘exclusives’ when he set up his Law office in Sydney and so he came to India to practise Law and eventually became the prosperous proprietor of a newspaper in Calcutta. The story goes that Lord Bentinck who as Governor General is credited
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with the abolition of Sati had contemplated certain interesting compensations for his noble services to India! He meant, according to Lang, to pull down the Taj and sell the marble or use it for building purposes. Lang writes:

He (Bentinck) thought it was very impolitic to allow gorgeous edifices to stand—these monuments to folly, extravagance and superstition which served none but the worst prejudices leading the natives to draw prejudicial comparisons between the simple and economic structures of the British and these stupendous and costly erections of the Moghul emperors.*

While Lang was critical of Hindu festivals he thought ‘Hindooism will never become extinct so long as this world lasts.’ He also admired the Indian ‘matter-of-fact acceptance of death.’ He writes:

‘They have not that dread of death that Europeans have, but almost invariably meet their fate without exhibiting the faintest fear’.

What is of interest to Indian as well as Australian readers here is that protest against what Joseph Furphy later calls ‘petrified injustice’ of the British should have been expressed by the first Australian-born novelist on Indian soil. Lang wrote novels on Sydney and at least two novels on the Indian scene, *The Weatherbys* (1818) and *Ex-wife* (1819) and a travelogue, *Wanderings in India and other Sketches of Life in Hindoostan* (1859). Charles Dickens is said to have printed large excerpts from the travelogue in his *Household Words*.

While little is known of the quality of Lang’s Australian novels, the first important Australian novelist whose ‘masculine strength’ is now commonplace lives by his *Such is Life*. It is obviously not a great novel but if as A.D. Hope thinks one can speak of a national literature only in terms of succession of masterpieces Furphy’s *Such is Life* has a claim to be the first of such masterpieces. Chris Wallace Crabbe has written (L.C. 1964) *Such is Life* is an Australian classic held in the warmest affection as a monument to the pastoral life of the late 19th century, as

* I am indebted to G.S. Amur of Marathwada University for this and the following quotations from Lang.
a repository of characteristic Australian humour and as a charming manifesto of antipodean socialism.

But it is that other novelist of the 19th century, Henry Handel Richardson who wrote a truly poignant novel *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, that firmly laid the foundations of the Australian Novel.

Dealing with the crucial years of Australia’s ‘gold rush’ Richardson makes clear the meaning of the emigrant image. Dorothy Green’s assessment is incisive: ‘Mahony and mankind look for “home” in the wrong place, in the fleeting and the perishable instead of in the Absolute.’ As if to underline this concern we have in Brennan, a poet who dreamt of poetry as ‘history of all mankind’s dream of the Absolute.’ Such a concern had its relevance not only for Richardson’s age and society, it has a compelling validity and appeal for our coarse lives today everywhere. Clearly this concern is different from the socio-moral concern of a Jane Austen and George Eliot and gives a metaphysical turn to the Australian novel as it reaches its maturity in the hands of Patrick White. Richardson, like Brennan, had turned to Europe for stimulus rather than to England and with Flaubert, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky for her models, her metaphysical concerns must not surprise us. However, her final testament:

The rich and kindly earth of his adopted country absorbed his perishable body as the country itself never contrived to make its own his wayward migrant spirit.

finds its supreme fulfilment in Patrick White. In *Voss*, his notable achievement, we see the country does ‘contrive’ to make the Ahab-like spirit of Voss its own. Voss, the survivors agree, has not died in vain. And Laura who found the country intractable at first could now put her head on the ugliest rock and find her rest there. Appropriately, Patrick White borrows for the epigraph of his first novel, *Happy Valley* the words of Gandhi: ‘When man is truly humbled, when he has learnt that he is not God, then he is nearest to being so’. Patrick White may have known, too, that Gandhi put a high premium on suffering as the law of life: The seed suffers for the sake of the tree and the mother suffers for the sake of the child. He has said elsewhere: ‘No country, said Gandhi, has ever risen without being purified
through the fire of suffering; the purer the suffering, the greater the progress.'

The truth of it doesn't come to the novelist in a flash, but is earned the hard way after Voss has explored the relationship of man to man and has known 'torture in the country of the mind', Keats's 'vale of tears'. That Patrick White was alive to the spirit of Gandhi's message and the tradition that nurtured it and surfaced it in individuals becomes clear when we see that so-called writer of countryhouse comedy, R.K. Narayan, make his sweet-vendor remark in respect of his misguided son: 'A dose of prison life is not bad. It may be just what he needs now.' In Raja Rao's Kanthapura, not only individuals but a whole village was razed unrecognizably: 'There was neither man nor mosquito' left in Kanthapura at the end of it all and it is precisely thus that Gandhi meets his end: a 'terrible beauty is born'; and Nehru's 'tryst with destiny' is redeemed.

The conventional values of Australian society regarding mateship and human solidarity have no place in White's work. He wanted 'to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the beauty which alone could make bearable the lives of such people and incidentally my own life since my return (from England)'. And yet the same novelist had been distressed at 'the material ugliness which does not raise a quiver from the average nerves'. 'This desire to 'raise a quiver from average nerves,' and raise men to 'perception of the infinite' permeates every novel of his as it does Raja Rao's novels in succession. Indeed, comparisons of White and Raja Rao can be very fruitful and rewarding research. That it does not remain at the level of the hero is clear as we see the transformation that has come upon Jackie who has severed Voss's head. The pariah, the outcaste, the nigger, has become the seer, the prophet. And Jackie passes into Alf Duboo of Riders in the Chariot:

'Because he had grown physically incapable of hating, his capacity for wonder led him to embrace objects he had refused to contemplate until now...Everything finally was a source of wonder, not to say love.'

White has turned the innocent and the guilty, the black and the white in his new image of man and sees the future of Australia and the future of man in a contemplation of the
Absolute which the aboriginal man, tucked away from 'the lush jungle of modern thought,' knew so well. Jack Healy has remarked (see his essay in Awakened Conscience Delhi 1978):

there is a generosity that marks the highest point in the European consciousness of the aboriginal in Australian Literature. For it was customary for the white man to think that he knew all the answers whereas White's characters discover their answers were wrong. In so doing the novelist brings to his work more than a Shakespearean understanding and wisdom. That the Blackman in America and the Aborigine in Australia have been the cause of this awakening are pointers to a strikingly fresh conception of the novel since the novel of social density has been imprisoned in the socio-moral universe of the Englishman and reached a saturation point. It will be seen that social reality is after all a part of the larger Reality which life is.

Even Randolph Stow who, living away from his own country like his own character Rob in Merry-Go-Round appears to think that 'familics and countries are biological accidents' and having 'grown up' he wants to go on 'my own' and is interestingly preoccupied with the metaphysical dimensions of Time and Place. Rob in the novel discovers what Chris Tiffin calls the 'inexorable irreplaceability of each moment spent': (Awakened Conscience; see also Helen Tiffin, in the same Volume).

He was thinking of time and change, of how one morning when he must have been quite small he had discovered time lying on the grass with his eyes closed against the sun. He was counting to himself. He could count up to sixty and thought: That is a minute. Then he thought. It will never be that minute again. It will never be today again. Never.

It will be seen from this perfunctory consideration that here are poets and novelists who despite the 'steak-fed fatuity' of the society around them have created works of art which, to repeat Patrick White, do 'raise a quiver in the average nerves.' A Carlyle could turn to Emerson, his great contemporary across the Atlantic: 'Why don't you come and help us, then? England has need of you.' It is today the privilege of a Convict Settlement
to do what Emerson could, not in the same way, though, and not so spectacularly, but subtly. They have fashioned myths for our times or rather as Hope would say:

These myths will not fit us ready made
It’s the meaning of the poet’s trade
To recreate the fables and revive
In men the energies by which they live.

And ‘fabling,’ he thinks, ‘I can tell it as best I can.’

The archetypal patterns of the Buddha, Christ and Gandhi need to be re-enacted in terms of each place and time and in the idiom of every people. That Australia has done it in works which can be counted as its masterpieces of fiction and poetry that deserve re-validation from the rest of the world is a tribute to what is cynically described as that ‘Anglo-Celtic vacuum of the South Seas.’

My visits to the Universities of Queensland and Flinders held in store for me, friendships which have endured for years except for the passing away of Cecil Hadgraft, now of cherished memory. The Tiffins, Chris and Helen, have been my mainstay in organizing Commonwealth Literature Workshops at Dhvanyaloka. From time to time they have sent many gift parcels of books — not only books — and themselves visited, quite often at their cost, to serve as resource personnel, as much for Australian, as for other literatures like the Canadian and the Caribbean. Chris has been able to lure into the Centre’s labyrinth such valued friends as Doug Killam from Canada and Anna Rutherford from Denmark. Ken Goodwin of Queensland and Syd Harrex at Flinders have helped Dhvanyaloka quietly in numerous ways. A succession of Australia’s ambassadors in India, and their officers, have placed Dhvanyaloka in their debt. More Australian writers and academics, now my personal friends, have come to Dhvanyaloka than from anywhere else — its fertile eucalyptus and the blue jacaranda must have been a special link with Australia, now almost my second country — by right of friendly reciprocities.
Ex-Colonial Goes to Teach
Post-Colonial Literature at the University of Leeds:
A look at Contemporary English Scene

For the first time in twenty years (after I left Cambridge) I had a chance to take some kind of close look at the British literary and academic scene thanks to an opportunity afforded by the English School of the University of Leeds to teach Commonwealth Literature. From the time Professor Derry Jeffares sent me the invitation by cable followed by a personal note in his own hand the visit was characterized by an enviable informality: I submitted no biodata filled no forms, gave no references—all that one can go by in an Indian university while in an American University these are rituals meant to go on the files. And yet Jeffares himself, I couldn’t be said to have really known— I had met him but once at a Commonwealth Literature Conference, his brain-child, at the University of Queensland in Australia in 1968. I mention this to suggest how flexible is the working of British Universities where the rigours of bureaucracy, so much in evidence in the civil service, do not operate or are at a minimum. I must remark in parenthesis that but for a similar relaxation of rules by the Conference Board for International Exchange of Scholars, my American hosts, it shouldn’t have been possible for me to spend a semester in each of the universities of Wisconsin and Texas sandwiching between them a visit to the University of Utah at Salt Lake City as guest of the English Department, thus finding some compensation for a rather long absence from my own University.

While the older universities of Oxford, Cambridge and London change slowly, today no less than in the last century, here
in Leeds is a provincial university which is rather more in the mainstream of world thought. I can only speak for the English School in which, apart from the main body of English Literature, there is provision for Old English, Middle English, Modern English Usage, Linguistics, American Literature and Commonwealth Literature for the last of which writers and scholars are brought by turns from the Commonwealth countries of Africa, Australia, Canada, India and the Caribbean region. My immediate predecessor was a distinguished novelist from Guyana and my successor a Vice-Chancellor, formerly professor of English from a Canadian University. Leeds is probably the first university to have a chair for Commonwealth Literature, its first occupant being William Walsh, a notable teacher and critic, who had been Professor and Dean of the widely known Faculty of Education to which he was appointed some fifteen years ago because the University was keen on having a teacher of literature for the Chair of Education. It will interest Indian readers to note that William Walsh’s first interest in Commonwealth Literature coincides with his visit to India in 1960. Among others are A C Cawley, Jeffares himself, John Spencer and Arthur Ravenscroft (who visited Dhanyaloka to participate in a workshop for Commonwealth Literature in 1983, a very affectionate friend who died in 1988). He was a South African white who didn’t want his children to grow up in that country. They had all taught at one or more of the Australian, African, American, European and Indian universities at various times, an invaluable experience for a university teacher. Add to these Derek Halroyd, one-time BBC correspondent in India now heading the University Television Service. (His wife is author of a good book on Indian Music.) One can see on the campus students from Australia, Fiji, Canada and Pakistan, the last one a privilege denied to both sides thanks to our strained relations. England’s entry into the European Common Market in ’73 will bring to its universities at least fifty scholars on British Council grants. Whether French will have to yield its pride of place to English in Europe isn’t moot point considering the widespread study of English in European Universities. The recent formation of the European Association of Commonwealth Literature at the Conference of CWL in Leeds in May this year, so well attended by European scholars is a pointer to Indian universities still
unsettled on the linguistic issue. A matter of immediate concern to our academics and publishers is the poor distribution of Indian books even in England, let alone Europe. Except for R.K. Narayan who is the most available author in bookshops Indian authors suffer gross neglect, a neglect which has helped to bring African and West Indian writing to the forefront during the past few years. The grievance has been slightly offset by the re-issue of Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable, Coolie and Private Life of an Indian Prince largely by the efforts of Saros Cowasjee, and Desani’s All about H. Hatter in hard cover and, soon, in paperback. The projected publication of Raja Rao’s Short Stories by Oxford University Press in Three Crowns Library which has to date published a hundred books on Africa is but the beginning of a new interest in him after the unexpected success of The Serpent and the Rope. It is hoped there will soon be an English edition of his Cat and Shakespeare, an ironic comment on the delayed interest in the book in Shakespeare’s own country.

The study of Commonwealth Literature in English and European universities must not fail to receive stimulus from such scholarly and critical works as A Manifold Voice by William Walsh, The Chosen Tongue by Gerald Moore, Literature in Action by M.C. Bradbrook, the Penguin Companion to World Literature by David Ditches and a second book on CWL by Walsh, now in press, all in the nature of a tribute to the creativity of the Commonwealth countries in the English language and mark a continuation of the reciprocity set in motion by an earlier breed of scholars—English Orientalists like William Jones, Charles Wilkins, H.H. Wilson, Ralph Griffith and Colebrooke, apart from the indefatigable Max Muller who did his life’s work in Oxford. And yet this is about one Commonwealth country.

But if anyone thinks this represents the whole of British intellectual attitude towards the benighted peoples of Asia and Africa I should call attention to the tone of dissent in the voices of John Wain who was convinced (like David McCutchion of fond memory, who questioned Indians’ credentials to create in English, while he did not hesitate to praise their creative potential in their own languages, a stance dictated by his insufficient awareness of the one Indian language he thought he knew) that Indians’ use of English as lingua franca made creativity in it difficult; forgetting that because of too much familiarity the Irish
playwright Beckett preferred to write in French rather than his native English (and win laurels in it too); and Kingsley Amis who talked of 'obtruded oddities' in construction and style in the West Indian novel in English—all of which makes one sometimes wonder if there has truly been a shift of sensibility from the days of Macaulay who, while he sometimes thought in a big way, could nevertheless indulge in baby-talk about the past of India:

'(its) history abounding with Kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty thousand years long, geography made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter...absurd metaphysics, absurd physics, absurd theology'.

An attitude by which England made its own culture 'self-contained and self-sealed' and Matthew Arnold's plea for the study of 'Eastern antiquity' went unheeded. Still, England being what she is, has remarkable capacity for self-regeneration as is evident in the thinking, for instance, of John Holloway's surprisingly well-informed presentation of Indian influence on English poetry in his *Widening Horizons*; of L.C.Knights' admiring reference to the critical concept of *dhvani*, though he seems to misunderstand Ananda Coomaraswamy's comment on it altogether (in his essay on 'King Lear as Metaphor' in the collection *Myth and Symbol*); and M.C.Bradbrook's unqualified endorsement of Abhinavagupta in her latest *Literature in Action*—all three, I now see, are professors of English in one university, Cambridge. It revives one's faith in England and makes one hope that if the frontiers of geography are won and lost the conquest of the mind can still pose a challenge and reproach. Here is true maturity which can unerringly discriminate between mere avant garde and timeless wisdom. With the result, Graham Greene, Wains, Amises, Burgesses and Snows have long ceased to be rivals to the front-rank foreigners. Indeed, V.S. Naipaul is admitted by responsible English reviewers as the best writer of English prose in the British Isles today, reminding one of the whirligig of time that had its revenge on Sidney Smith's rhetorical question: who, in the four corners of the globe, reads an American book? For the truth is, England doesn't have the counterparts of even Nabakov, Salinger, Saul Bellow and Fitzgerald, themselves struggling for places of honour once
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filled by top-ranking writers like Faulkner and Hemingway. Peter Porter, the Australian expatriate poet, spoke the bitter truth when he remarked that England does not today have a writer with an international pull, a name to conjure with at conferences, someone whose name will guarantee a full house. Anthony Burgess, himself a modern English novelist (living away, -like Robert Graves in Spain--from his own country) has, in his revised edition of the Student's Guide to Contemporary Fiction taken care to include the recent work of American novelists like Mailer and Nabakov still awaiting admittance into the scholars' and the critics' domain, but has nevertheless ignored the later work of his own compatriots -- Claude Simon, Angus Wilson, Kingsley Amis, Iris Murdoch and John Wain. No wonder D.H. Lawrence was provoked to ask for 'surgery or the bomb' for the English novel. For he bemoaned the parting of philosophy and fiction like a nagging married couple as a result of which the novel went sloppy and philosophy abstract dry. After all, he added, Plato's Dialogues are queer little novels. What weight can one attach, in the face of this, to John Wain's claim that the 'English novelists like English actors, have brought their art to a very high degree of finish and skill'. Yes, 'finish and skill' is all there is to it, as true of fiction as of drama and poetry. Routledge and Kegan Paul's advertisement in TLS under 'God help the English Novel' inviting serious fiction manuscripts for publication is no mere joke but a pathetic admission of creative impoverishment.

Turn to Drama. Harold Pinter is a name that turns up frequently in literary conversation. But what has he done to bestow a few minutes' attention on him? Has Poetry fared better? When did England last have a great poet? Tennyson is at his best respectable, at his worst beefy, complacent, dreadfully boring to the 20th century reader. Yeats is after all Irish and since Auden came back to England to an Oxford fellowship, Eliot's joke about his Englishness--'whichever (English or American) is Auden I suppose, I am the other'--has lost its ambivalence and the British can no longer count on the royalist, classicist Anglo-catholic in their discomfiture. Neither the Oxford Poetry Chair, the Clark Lectures, nor the devotion of research workers seems to have helped very much to focus attention on Robert Graves or Edmund Blunden; and without these aids it must be worse
for Phillip Larkin, Ted Hughes and Tom Gunn. Has poetry come to a dead-end, then, with T.S. Eliot? or is England in no mood for poetry as one of England's well-known living poets argued with me? What of the so-called Liverpool poets -- 'a small, spontaneous distinctive poetry movement?' Is it a by-product of the milieu that won distinction for Liverpool in football? Significantly a local millionaire who made his fortune from football pools has also financed a biennial competition in painting for more than fifteen years now. And such poetry as Mitchell, Pat- ten, Lande Horowitz have composed is largely for public delivery and is broadcast on Radio Four which represents BBC's lowbrow Programme. It may well prove to be the counterpart of the Beat poetry produced in San Francisco in the fifties and sixties and which caused a world-wide stir less by its poetic merit than by the attitudinizing which characterized its youthful authors and adolescent admirers. This is the reason why a reviewer damned the Liverpool poets with faint praise when he claimed that like the Liverpool painting their poetry too, appears a good deal more enticing and less parochial to foreigners who wish to know about contemporary 'English' writers.

And if a 'foreigner' occasionally belongs to a category which looks for good English (not English)poetry, there he is, face to face with a proliferation of the great unread: Skilton, Rochester, Young, and others much less known—the more less known the better for a doctoral dissertation like the one on The Compleat Anger for a D.Phil in English from Oxford which resulted in a lectureship for the recipient in an older university. It is possible, though, between the scholar, the editor, the publisher (the 'onlie begetter' in this case), the reviewer (so much the better if he is also a poet himself as in the present case) and the organs of publicity that some forgotten minor poet can win disproportionate attention resulting in a possible revision of the history of English poetry. I have in mind a book of predigested material on Rochester in the Critical Heritage series reviewed by Peter Porter who wrote admiringly of the book by a living author that here was a 'singular and special talent', 'a genius' who 'died of old age at 33', 'the earliest wit and the most sudden saint', 'one of the most important and central poets' in English literature; indeed 'the greatest exponent of a particularly English sort of poetry' who despite his 'loose' heroic couplets is 'closer
to Pope than is Dryden. Now a historical basis for the high praise: the finding of modern parallels when imitating the classics is Rochester's invention which Pope copied—the reason why Pope acknowledges Garth, Wycherly and Dryden and dismisses Rochester as 'a holiday writer'! His appeal today? In songs Rochester's genius is 'the most suitable by virtue of its economy and limpidity'. What obscured his memory then? His notorious obscenity and attacks on kings and counsellors. And the moral: Love and satire are revenged upon by posterity for the high popularity they once enjoyed. Everything in the review is astutely calculated to projecting a splendid image of a 'great' name unjustly forgotten. And seldom was a contemporary estimate used so successfully (for the strategy must work after the revaluation of Milton by Dr. Leavis here: 'one man reads Milton, forty Rochester'. One more instance of a desperate attempt to preserve English identity is a review article in Encounter by Elizabeth Jennings who claimed E.M. Forster's A Passage to India as 'almost certainly the greatest novel of the century' which must owe its superlative tone to the support lent by Dr. Leavis in ascribing to it the status of a 'minor classic', an enthusiasm which might well be a result of the prevalent mood of the late thirties and forties when Nazi-Fascist threats to freedom, to civilized existence itself, induced self-introspection in sensitive Englishmen whose hearts warmed to liberal ideas of the Bloomsbury group. For one is not sure that Leavis today cares to endorse anything approximating to his earlier verdict on this much over-rated novel.

Is this a portent of the times that you must fight for mere survival? or, did the cosmopolites of power drag the cosmopolites of culture down with them? Did England lose 'the imperishable empire' of ideas, of literature and art much earlier than 1947? Or has England always been destined to mediate between the extreme reaches of experience and play a middling role in art, science, literature, and political thought—a question forced upon us when we look at the world's galaxy of the past hundred years: Nietzsche, Marx, Lenin, Gandhi, Einstein, Picasso, Freud, the French Symbolists, Joyce, Yeats and Eliot. D.H. Lawrence seems a solitary exception.

The one who today redeems the situation is not a poet or novelist but a lonely literary critic. And against his pre-eminence
as of Lawrence's in an earlier generation there are still some rumblings in certain quarters, though in recent years a consensus is fast emerging as has been revealed by the series of studies conducted by the TLS on the State of English in British Universities.

The TLS series helped to bring to the surface some interesting questions and facts which have an immediate relevance to the Indian situation. The TLS correspondent framed questions like: what is the function of an English School? Does it continue to exert the civilizing influence it once did? And the questionnaire was sent to fifty-odd professors of English. But what is it that made the questionnaire necessary? It is certain disturbing symptoms as noted by the paper: the English dons writing treatises on Tamil-Motown, and students turning up in their admiring hundreds to listen to the verse of Brian Patten, a pop-poet, the illiteracies of the underground press, the cliches in student papers, the uncritical deference shown to continental thinkers: and incidents like the following which dramatize the unedifying spectacle: it seems a vacancy for a junior post in a red-brick university drew eighty applications, a majority of them from candidates of impeccable credentials, surpassing, one gathers, those of many incumbents. And the consequent nervous, suspicious, defensive attitudes struck by the establishment to the questionnaire. What it also brought out was the nature of the syllabus, the students' fitness to profit by its study and, more often, their grievances against it and so forth. Broadly, it focussed attention on the relevance of Anglo-Saxon and the importance of training the critical intelligence of the student in ways demonstrated by Leavis at Cambridge and reflected in his books of criticism on fiction and poetry.

Almost without an exception the students' objection in all the universities visited by the TLS's special correspondent was to Anglo-Saxon or as he put it, 'the live issue was the dead language'. They all thought, except when it came to scoring in exams, that the time spent on it wasn't worth the trouble. Which made them favour modern literature and in certain universities, what is in American academic circles called the 'area studies', a favourite at Sussex. Cambridge which not long ago ended the study of English Literature with Tennyson in poetry and George Eliot in fiction, provides for a Novel paper for the English Tripos
which theoretically offers opportunities to 'wander into foreign languages', go as far back as Cervantes and read a contemporary African, Australian, Caribbean, or Indian novelist. These 'generous boundaries' one gathers, suggest a departure from the 'practical criticism' approach to literature which called for 'close reading of the text' for which Cambridge was noted. 'In other words', concluded the report, 'Dr. Leavis really has retired'.

The memorandum (quoted by TLS) which Professor F. C. Knights sent out to members of the English faculty expressing his concern on the students' performance in that paper deepens one's fears for English studies in which Cambridge once gave the lead:

Very few candidates showed a sense of responding to words as such; or felt that a particular use of words invited a kind of response other than that of paraphrase. I was disappointed to find so few candidates having anything at all to say about diction, grammar, syntax, prosody, structure as bearing upon the life of the poems. Mostly they wrote as though 'Practical criticism' contained no further possibilities than those embodied in paraphrase and general rumination.

Criticism, one readily concedes, is far from being 'paraphrase' or 'general rumination'. But is it, as Mr. Knights suggests, just a matter of 'diction', grammar, syntax, prosody, structure as bearing upon the life of the poems? Surely 'the life of the poem' includes far more than these. Again, while Knights expresses himself in favour of 'retaining' the Criticism paper he would want good criticism to be 'exploration' rather than a 'demonstration'. It is obvious he hasn't helped in clarifying the confusion what with his subversive designs to replace the Leavisian approach to literature with his own brand—the words 'exploration' and 'demonstration' seem to confirm my suspicion when we remember that the title of one of Knights's books is *Explorations* and the word that recurs in Leavis's criticism is 'demonstration'. For Leavis demonstration is a social activity because it is a mode of sharing the critic's response to a work of art with his fellows and the uninitiated as to how the poet or novelist has 'realized' what he 'intended'. Exploration may of course achieve the same result but what one wants to know
is: what is wrong with demonstration? Which shows how pathetic are the attempts of Leavis's successors to minimize the magnitude of his influence. I said 'successors', for Graham Hough and John Holloway also join in the attacks. Holloway has pronounced: 'A generation ago, thirty or forty years ago, English at Cambridge was the most progressive and forward looking anywhere. Over the past fifteen years they have been living on capital more than I like'. Who are 'they'? And is one to assume that he (not only he) is being rewarded with a professorship for 'living on capital'? Where formerly there was one professorship there are now at least four in the English faculty at Cambridge.

No less shocking is a remark of George Steiner's whose otherwise regrettable exclusion by the English faculty may not after all be without justification:

It should not be possible to leave the University with an English degree and not knowing what a phoneme or a semantic structure is.

On this point surely there will not be 'consensus'--the word is his. There was no consensus when Leavis was at the height of his fame at Cambridge; and there is very unlikely to be any as long as there is a call to 'challenging discriminations' of the kind Leavis demanded. And the present consensus at Cambridge, such as it is, is oriented to undoing the good Leavis did, and not striving to establish standards in the judgement of literature. Which is to admit that Cambridge has lost the leadership and it is nowhere else in sight in the British Isles.

It is fortunate that though Leavis has retired from Cambridge he is far from being the spent force that men in retirement so often become: Nor shall My Sword is no rhetoric for his collection of critical essays now in press; and so is his renewed interest in Blake as even more relevant to the crisis of our time than Eliot because of what Leavis terms as Blake's sense of human responsibility. Such was the theme of his lecture on Blake at the Conference of English Professors which met last April in the old city of York where now a new university has come up. Professor Brockbank who introduced the speaker struck the right note when he remarked that among the giants who awakened slumbering Albion Blake would surely have counted
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Dr. Leavis. The irony of it came home to an outsider like me when I discovered that the main speaker at the Conference was the only Reader at a conference of Professors—for that is what Leavis was at the time he retired from Cambridge, having been elevated to that exalted position in his sixty-fifth year by this ancient University which before long founded professorships for others slightly less known, (as they might like to think) and had denied it to one who was destined to be bracketed with the great ones of British intellectual history. Yet in our own time Cambridge itself came to mean for students of English literature but one man. What gave edge to the occasion was that Leavis was known to be repeating the lecture on Blake which he originally gave at Bristol, a year before. And here was this retired Reader at an age approaching 80 standing behind the lectern for full ninety minutes in which he enforced his justification for reading Blake while his audience of professors listened to him with rapt attention. And quite some, of those assembled there, left York soon after his address.

For me (and my son who, having seen a packed hall of students and teachers at Leavis's talk in Leeds, might have walked every mile from Leeds to be in his presence) the day had other richer rewards. We went to see him again in May, this time also at 3 in the afteroon. Receiving us with his old-world courtesy Leavis overwhelmed and surprised the young man who had, from a reading of his critical writings, imagined Leavis to be the severest man under the sun. Severe and tough he no doubt found the venerable man while climbing the flights of stairs skipping a step each time!—and on reaching the top he walked past without visible strain through the labyrinth of Langwith College where he had his rooms as visiting professor for the year, gave us the comfortable chairs, and himself sat on the windowsill with the sun on him, because he liked it. What was he doing at York? Visiting the University for two days in the week with the freedom to choose his own students, hours, authors, works unhampered by tests and examinations. Anything else with one of Leavis's stature would be absurd. And there are precedents. I looked up Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy by Michael Polanyi, a book Leavis mentioned more than once in the course of our four-hour meeting and was amazed that Polanyi was Professor of Physical Chemistry at the
University of Manchester and for nine years when this book on
Philosophy was in preparation he was almost exclusively work­
ing on it and exempted from all lecturing. Wittgenstein, another
name that cropped up several times, was an aeronautical en­
gineer before he was Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge and,
as Leavis remarked, he was a genius as Bertrand Russell was
not.

What extraordinary mobility for European intellectuals--
Austrian, Hungarian, Czech, German -- and more extraordinary,
that British and American universities should be free to house
them, care for them and tolerate their idiosyncrasies -- because
as a former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Poona, himself
a scholar of repute, said with a rare courage that if a University
did not find a place for these eccentrics where will they go, and
more, what a blow to the cause of learning. It is still possible
for British universities to have outstanding academics as Vice-
Chancellors, and where they are not, there are in that country
enough politicians who are intellectuals almost certainly, nobly
alive to the life of the mind. Leeds right now has a Vice-Chan­
cello who was Cabinet Minister in the previous government
and decided not to contest the election but to withdraw for a
while into the cloistered halls. Another member of the former
British Cabinet is Master of a great College in Cambridge. And
when either of them speaks--they have trained themselves not
to let the language of politics blunt discriminatory response--
one hardly suspects they have had anything to do with the
rough and tumble of politics as once it happened when Lord
Boyle gave an illustrated talk on Music (he was Music critic of
some note even before he became Minister) to the English As-
association at Leeds. He began with a quotation from a less known
review of Leavis's in Scrutiny on the Sonnets of Wordsworth to
enforce his position on certain musical compositions. His
familiarity with poetry and literary criticism turned one's
thoughts to Vice-Chancellors elsewhere whose sole title to the
place is a unique capacity to intrigue on a scale which would
shame the politicians of the market place. How interchangeable
are the corridors of power and of learning today, while we as-
associated the one with 'trick' and 'dodge' and the other with 'a
man in his wholeness wholly thinking' (all Lawrence's phrases
in his poem on 'Thought').
Well, this was and has always been Leavis's utmost concern as teacher-how in these days when power resides in the politician, to ensure that our civilization does not suffer inroads, indeed, to stand up to the corrosive forces in society. This he would say is the function of the University: to become a focus of humane consciousness and train through literature especially a non-specialist kind of intelligence. A quarter of a century-between the time I was his pupil at Cambridge when he had already become a legend for precisely the kind of thing I am endeavouring to enforce, and today when he has been in retirement for almost a decade now-has made no difference to his integrity, courage and concern for standards in literature and life. Truly, a teacher never retires, no one with a concern for life and awareness of 'human responsibility' retires. Admireable the way Leavis who, as long as he was teacher at Cambridge, seldom stirred out, has of late, been travelling, for him, incessantly, visiting universities in America, Holland, Spain, Italy, Finland, and Northern Ireland. And he writes, latterly, on Russian fiction, Italian poetry (he knows Italian and French almost as an insider) and now talks of the importance of a knowledge of philosophy for a student of literature since it can lead forward to literary criticism even as the latter can lead one back to philosophy. What of a knowledge of Indian philosophy? 'It's a question of time, there are limitations, you know. In any case so much of European thought goes back to Eastern origins'. And yet with a becoming, and for Leavis as the world knows him, unbelievable humility, he used expressions like 'I was a slow starter', 'one narrows as one grows old, you know', or when attention was drawn to a seeming contradiction in his position, 'one matures, you know'--a mellowness which became very evident as he took us round the campus pointing now to the Venetian architecture of a building across the stream and now, on the other side of the road, to a gas plant designed like a mushroom; and suddenly on his eye catching a duck with its little ones around in the stream below the bridge, stopped to remark with a touching tenderness in his voice: 'they are so charming, but there's something poignant about the duck. How many chicks? One, two, three...nine, ten. If one or two are left behind the mother won't notice, you know'. I forget what he said after, for I withdrew into the silence this beautiful sentiment had generated.
in me. And when we came to the college gate, it was 7.30 and
the last bus was leaving at 7.33. I'll tell you what. The bus stop
isn't too far. Come, I'll show it. So saying he at once got into
his stride and my reputation for fast walking was very near
jeopardy: I discovered I could just manage to keep pace with
him. When we had still more than a furlong to walk he sighted
the bus—there, where the road took a bend—and began to run.
Lest I felt embarrassed he said with a gleam in his eye that he
was a runner in his college days, indeed he just missed going
to the Olympics because of the war. He little knew, then, he had
other races to run and other shields to win. And this running
to reach us to the bus was to me symbolic of his life's work, of
the human responsibility he was insisting upon that afternoon.
And as the bus started I heard: 'Look me up when you are
next in England'. (All quotations from memory.)

There were times when I have had my minor irritations with
England, as indeed with my own country. But this England of
Leavis, like that of the language, literature and the values he
has commended to us came home to me, this time with renewed
affirmation. I knew, had always known, that like most of my
English-educated countrymen, an important part of my make-
up was English and that was intellectual, but I had hardly
realized that I had emotional ties too. The rich grassiness of
rural England, its cathedrals, its little market towns, the cul-
tivated landscape, the English understatement, those
dependable friendships, the human decency and maturity that
greets you everywhere had engaged my mind, (as though I had
left England just the other day) as the plane landed in London
and I heard in the lounge Arthur Ravenscroft's message relayed
to me from Leeds to look out for him at the airport. And on
the eve of leaving Leeds after five months during which I had
gone back to old haunts, met old friends, shared old jokes, I felt
how rich and gracious this England always was. And I remem-
ered Raja Rao:

...there would be good government on earth, and decen-
cy and a certain nobility of human behaviour and all
because England was. That I, an Indian who disliked
British rule, should feel this only revealed how England
was recovering her spiritual destiny...
I asked earlier if England had been destined to play a middling role in the realm of the mind and the spirit, but if one realizes that so much of our daily life, even of the very best and rarest individuals, is but lived on that plane where, in the world, where, is England’s equal? Where else in the world do you find those mid-brow magazines churned out week after week: The Observer, The Listener, The Times Literary Supplement, The Times Educational Supplement, The Spectator, The New Statesman and The Sunday Times all of which an adult intellectual can read with attention, and even appear in without condescension. Where else could critical journals like The Criterion and Scrutiny have functioned with such distinction and exerted such lasting influence? One reads today of the Criterion lunches on Thursdays Eliot and his associates arranged in London which elsewhere might soon have degenerated into eating and gossipping places. The bills were paid by patrons and not by editors. Eliot would ‘never contemplate editing it in order to make it pay its way’. The guest, it seemed, ‘should be a person who either has been, will be, or might be useful in one way or another to The Criterion’. As for Scrutiny, one man planned it all in his room, carried it out, and kept it going for more than 20 years without finances, without secretarial help from a foundation or university, because he felt impelled to ‘advance the business of criticism’. There is such abundance of talent in one city, one University, that if it came to that the British can function in the modern world almost independently of outside help.

Which must induce introspection in the Indian university man, thinking himself doomed to be a parasite on the West. (1971)
While I had been making brief visits abroad -- to U.S.A., Australia and England I was very much in Mysore and the political clique in the University felt rebuked by my presence.

Shrimati's term as Vice-Chancellor came to an end and he was succeeded by a professor who obliged his predecessor's Private Secretary (a cousin of the then Chief Minister of Karnataka) by appointing him Registrar of the University, well calculated to serve as a smooth, brief transition before he became Vice-Chancellor himself after his 3-year term as Registrar -- an event which made history for any university in India. This was one better than what a sister university had done by appointing a Lecturer (after being rejected for a Readership) pro-vice-chancellor after a stint as Dean of Student Welfare. He had a Ph.D., though of dubious distinction, but would not matter in a set-up where the Vice-Chancellor need not provide academic leadership which in any case is not only not wanted but frowned upon as inconvenient by most teachers, but, here, in this case, the Vice-Chancellor had been removed from Lectureship for want of what came to be considered minimum qualification for a Lecturer. He was otherwise a very pleasant person, intelligent, sociable, and most generous in spending on others. But I do wish for his own sake and for that of the University he had not aspired to be Vice-Chancellor even in a set-up where any deficiency is accepted, however grudgingly. It was not that other Vice-Chancellors before or after him did what he could not do, but it set a singularly glaring precedent for the office of Vice-
Chancellor by taking away the last vestige of academic require-
ment, however meaningless it may have become.

It was true he felt piqued by my presence in the university
or anywhere around as I shall have occasion to say more. The
post-graduate departments used to be closed for trivial reasons
as it was feared any small stirring might snowball and make
his position vulnerable. On one such occasion a group of
younger teachers asked me to join them to observe a token
demonstration against this vicious practice, the next morning in
front of the University administrative office which brought to
my residence that evening a number of professors to dissuade
me from such a glaring extreme step. I readily concede, as I did
then, it was a bizarre approach for me and I yielded to entreaties
from friends who exhorted me in the name of academic stand-
ards etc. I had to tell the professors I was party to a decision
taken collectively and so advised them to meet the group the
next morning at the administrative building. One of them, who
knew me well and knew like the rest of them, their intervention
could not be defended, admitted to me privately ‘Students
would spit on us if we appeared on the scene there’. But they
had to do the master’s bidding. A professor, now no more, said
to his colleagues that he would be prepared to accept his own
attender as Vice-Chancellor if such a thing should happen. Com-
ment is superfluous in the face of such rank opportunism and
callous unconcern for the things one lives by.

The token demonstration was for a day and it predictably
invited the Chief Minister’s attention -- his family relationship
to the Vice-Chancellor may well have given an edge to a public
concern in which I figured prominently as misleading the
young.

I released to the Press the following reply since the Chief
Minister had singled me out for disapproval:
I find myself in a Whirlpool of Politics

C. D. NARASIMHAIAH
Professor of English
University of Mysore
Mysore, 21 October, 1977

To
The Honorable Chief Minister
Government of Karnataka
Vidhana Saudha, Bangalore

Esteemed Chief Minister,

I have seen in the morning's papers of 20 October reports attributing to you the following observations regarding the disquiet on Mysore University Campus:

1. It is unfortunate that a senior Professor like me should be demonstrating against the University administration since you are convinced there is no 'wonderful cause' which must agitate the minds of students or teachers.

2. Students should not be misled by one or two teachers like me, since 'thousands of students' resent the demonstration.

3. Poor students lose classes and scholarships while I shall get my salary.

4. What will I do if someone should say, I am not wanted as Professor?

5. The demonstration will boomerang on me.

I thank you, Sir, for the courteous reference you make to my senior status, if for nothing else. May I presume to make a few remarks in response to those of yours?

One reads in the numerous reports of our education commissions flattering references to the University as a community of teachers and students, no doubt, in addition to the administrators. But in practice, the students, by and large, continue to be at the receiving end while we teachers are content to teach except when, from time to time, we display black badges, go in procession and demonstrate in public for monetary benefits - the last, not altogether unjustly, frowned on as unbecoming of University teachers. Especially so, when we remain indifferent to vital academic and social issues which we as senior partners,
should give serious thought to. It is here teachers observing dharna on the lawns of the University come into the picture.

The students of Manasagangotri had raised, as appeared to us, certain bonafide issues and their requests not receiving the attention due to them, chose to go on hunger-strike risking their young lives when, according to them, they were left with no alternative. (I hasten to add I have articulated my strong personal reservations on hunger-strikes). As if this were not enough colleges and post-graduate departments were closed indefinitely for several weeks while we drew our salaries to sit idle and students paid their fees to face impending exams and an uncertain future. What were the teachers to do when students, quite rightly, cast amused, sarcastic and, not infrequently, contemptuous glances at their complacent teachers?

It is at this stage that the teachers felt impelled to come out and appeal to the Chancellor to see normal class work was resumed and a judicial enquiry instituted. This, we thought, was fair to all concerned -- to the Vice-Chancellor, against whom charges were hurled, to the teachers who were accused of instigating students and to the students themselves, what with their post-graduate status, and claims to independent thinking and judgement. So much for the 'wonderful cause' which you were pleased to dismiss, I fear, in your understandable impatience at disturbing reports of strikes and dharnas.

In this agitation therefore there are no leaders or followers but only cumulative thinking which crystallized into some sort of disquiet. And if, as you think, 'thousands of students' resent the action of the teachers I am afraid it sounds contradictory to say in the same breath they are 'taken in' by one or two teachers like me. Simply put, this was not fair either to the students or the teachers engaged, however imperfectly, in the life of the mind.

I am afraid I admit to drawing my salary in this troubled period as I have nothing else to live on; indeed, I shall continue to do so long as I do my duty by the University.

I thank you, Sir, for your concern for me if someone should say I am not wanted as Professor. I wish to submit and in unequivocal language, that if the students I teach should so much as whisper to me or my employers that I am not wanted, please believe me, I shall not wait for the Syndicate or Senate to throw
I find myself in a Whirlpool of Politics

me out; I shall, that moment, walk out of the University. I promise I stand by it.

Lastly, that colourful word 'boomerang' which you used to warn me. Sir, I have, during my adult years tried, as best I can, to learn the lesson that every individual must accept the consequences of his actions. And 'boomerang' I have seen in its place of origin, Australia, is a light, wooden weapon used by the simple aborigines who believed in a just order until 'the second-hand Europeans pullulated timidly on the edge of alien shores', when the gun powder rendered it obsolete and it became a mere dictionary word.

May I, esteemed Chief Minister, appeal to you as ruler of a new age which has set much store by 'temporal power', but as descendant of our possible common ancestor from South India, help to recover the aboriginal simplicity and faith in a just order deeply grounded in 'spiritual authority', for that is what 'boomerang', in effect, means to me, and I hope, to you.

I beg to remain, Esteemed Chief Minister,

Yours very truly,

C. D. Narasimhaiah

My only strength at this time, as always, was the goodwill of the community of students, a few teachers in the University and a large number of well meaning, but hardly daring, academics in the colleges.

Meanwhile there was change of vice-chancellorship. A former Principal of a prestigious College of Engineering in Madras with a fine intellectual calibre, which I regret he has not cared to put to worthy use, took over as Vice-Chancellor when I had hardly a couple of months to go in the University before superannuation. If he didn't feel equal to withdrawing his predecessor's letter for acquisition of my land for what he called the future expansion of the University, he was gracious enough to write me (a mere stranger) a letter which I have kept with me as proof of a Vice-Chancellor's sense of form and civilized attention to even the routine things that happen in his university. Here is the copy of his letter.
Dear Professor Narasimhaiah,

At the University of Mysore we have just concluded the academic session of 1978-79. On contemplating the 1979-80 session that will commence soon, I am saddened to think that you will not be with us to continue your distinguished academic leadership of the Department of English, consequent on your recent retirement. I feel personally weakened by your absence so soon after my association with the University.

However, you have served this University and embellished its image as a centre of scholarship throughout your career spanning several decades. You have moulded the life of generations of students whose admiration and reverence for you as a scholar and teacher is very easily seen. Your many colleagues and admirers find it difficult to reconcile to the thought that the academic corridors of this University will no more be enriched by your distinguished presence daily.

It is sad that we have such inadequate processes and means to express our appreciation and gratitude to men like you who have been to our young people such outstanding models both in regard to scholarship and personal life. Let me, therefore, merely say on behalf of the University and on my personal behalf that your life-long service to the cause of education, your exemplary service to English literature and to this University, the warmth and humanity of your personal relationships with all, are greatly valued and lasting legacies, that you have left behind.

In thanking you most sincerely for these, may I also express the hope that you will find new and other ways to continue your association with the University. I wish you many years of good health and active work even as you are formally retired from University service.

With warm personal regards,

Yours sincerely,

K. S. Hegde
Vice-Chancellor Hegde’s letter naturally brought me considerable comfort. But I had not thought the teachers of the University would mobilize a collective public expression of their consideration for a retiring colleague. The organizers, chiefly Prabhushankar, a professor of Kannada Literature, too, assured me they wouldn’t do more than circulate a letter announcing a farewell meeting in my honour and those who were willing might join in by paying for a subscription dinner. I was deeply touched to see at the meeting even those who I thought had said harsh things about me. If I had entertained ill feelings towards them, they made me realize that evening they could conduct themselves in a big way and the fault was all mine. I felt inexpressibly humble.

If that was so with the mass of teachers with most of whom I only had nodding acquaintance, my own students and colleagues (most of the latter my former students in the Department), had many silken ties with me; we had shared many things in common. I met each of the two M.A. Classes almost every day unless I was away from the University which I saw to it, was minimal. And both teachers, almost everyone of them, and students assembled at Literary Club meetings on Wednesday afternoons which had acquired some kind of sanctity for us though it was essentially the students’ business. We drank coffee, heard the papers read, disagreed, raised our voices and lost our tempers -- there was a ‘terrible beauty’ about it all -- myself, the worst offender among them! They gave me what looked like a tearful send-off when after high Tea, the teachers accompanied me home with a set of reclining elegant cane chairs which look new after 12 years’ good use by visitors, that is. For it is not given to me to ‘recline’: To vary George Herbert a little: “God ordered work, ordained not rest!” At another farewell meeting later, former students joined in to present me with a handsome purse, as well as pretty shawls for my wife and myself. That meeting was presided over by my former teacher in retirement, S. V. Ranganna, who made me sink into the earth by recalling an anecdote of a great teacher in the gurukula system being carried in a palanquin by his pupils as an expression of their regard for him; and Ranganna added, very tenderly -- meant to be his benediction for me, -- he would lend a hand if I should be found in that position. The tribute
was obviously to the speaker, not to me, though I thought it the greatest moment of my life.

Annual get-together of teachers and students on the lawns of our bungalow built for white sahibs when the University was founded, brightened our lives, as the house wore a festive look and exuded much bonhomie. I have heard some students wouldn't go back home for the night -- there was extension of the gaiety and gossip in the playgrounds behind the college and the Professors Quarters and when they had exhausted themselves, slipped into one of the university buildings to scrape a little sleep for the rest of the night. I shouldn't have known of it if after such a night I had not been driving a visiting professor from another university to the Railway Station for an early morning train -- a scattered group lazily emerged from the university library with their crumpled clothes, dishevelled hair, and the much missed sleep writ large in their eyes.

Among my students was a coffee planter's son, (now a leading poultry owning farmer and Rotarian Governor) who had just become a teacher in the Department after his M. A. First and Ph. D. with qualities of leadership exemplified by his competent teaching, capacity for team work among senior colleagues and a general mature outlook. He and his young wife, an ideal Indian woman, came to tell me his parents were coming to see me the next day. It turned out they were coming, not to invite their son's retiring teacher to Tea as I had assumed but to hand in a cheque of Rs. 10,000 to put it to such use as I chose. It depressed me for many days that soon after he should have left the Department against the sage advice of his mother who was, in consonance with our tradition, more proud of his learning than all their immense wealth. She was mistaken in her thinking only I could dissuade him from that decision. I have not overcome my regret for all his protestations.

My Handicaps for a Teacher of English

I had on the whole met with a measure of success as teacher of English, though I cannot say I have always answered to Walter Pater's description of it as 'burn with a gem-like flame' (I warmed to these words thinking them to be Keats's) though I hypnotized myself from time to time I had many luminous and ecstatic moments in teaching. As a matter of fact, I started...
I find myself in a Whirlpool of Politics

with numerous handicaps, chiefly my upbringing in a backward family and village community which, in retrospect, I shall not wish were different, as they made for striving and gave me besides, a sense of belonging to the still living organic community -- which for one like Leavis, in his milieu was dream of a bygone age. Then, I am not sure it was not a mistake to be professor at 29, which took away from me the privilege of anonymity when I could have added to the riches of my mind by extensive reading and writing -- writing returned with rejection slips! though, paradoxically, there were compensations -- it gave me an early start and a long span of professorial life. I had no knowledge of Sanskrit, my chief regret in life, nor reading in our own literature, except of a very perfunctory kind. I didn’t learn Latin, so very basic to a successful teaching of English; didn’t know French and German nor their literatures except in a sporadic way, for English Literature is after all a part of the great European heritage. And I didn’t know, for an Indian, the literatures of Asia, chiefly Chinese. It was fortunate that at Cambridge I could make a systematic study of Western philosophical thought under “English Moralists”. My gaps were considerable in the world of scholarship, chiefly the arts and cultures of the old world except for such anthropological studies as T. S. Eliot’s work sent me to. I am pleased, though, that nothing I read either in depth or skimmed through, I have thrown away, thanks to my free wheeling mode of teaching in the classroom which helped to amalgamate diverse experiences -- I would pick up anything and try to make, as A. N. Whitehead has insisted, connections -- only connect! -- in the interest of a truly educated imagination. I tried to place everything in larger perspectives to see the significance of things in which, interestingly, the writings of A. K. Coomaraswamy and Jawaharlal Nehru were a great help in my early youth.

Gifts of Mysore

It was my good fortune that I found myself in the prime of my life in the princely capital of Mysore, which gave an exposure to Indian philosophy, Sanskrit learning, music and the arts along with a genuine respect for the modern West.

I felt even after my return from Cambridge there was no idea, however revolutionary, in the intellectual and cultural spheres,
I could not try with hopes of success in Mysore. For one thing, I found myself in tune with the spirit of the place -- with its rare combination of the folk and the aristocratic elements. These had crystallized into a single beautiful rich tradition one could appeal to without straining after it. As for students, I couldn't have wished for anything better -- at no time have I regretted a sense of intellectual deficiency or indifference in their company as the curse of a provincial set-up. As for fresh challenges, they came as much from serious inquiries into our own rich past as from Western books and magazines, as well as visiting scholars -- the best of them from England and America seemed to think they couldn't skip Mysore without a sense of intellectual and cultural incompleteness. And my own visits abroad, numbering more than 50 (I hadn't realized it until recently when my family, keenly alive to my periodic absences, went over it all -- on one occasion, on my return from Australia, my aging father pleaded with moist eyes to go 'nowhere hereafter'). It was my good luck that I had opportunities of visiting and revisiting every State in my own country including far-flung Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, the North East Frontier Province, Manipur and Nagaland, and their representative universities -- to speak or examine Ph.D. candidates, sit on selection committees to appoint teachers or on visiting UGC committees for various kinds of assessments which gave me unrivalled opportunities to get to know teachers of all ages, and pick on the promising ones to invite them either for a seminar or a contribution to *The Literary Criterion*. Occasionally I even made contacts with students at the post-graduate level when they came for workshops. But I invariably thought, thanks to the great example of Leavis and his counterparts in my own tradition, it was important that a teacher intent on serious work should send roots in one place, but reach out and bring the riches of the wide world to share with his own students and colleagues. Retirement from the University has made no difference to my life except that I don't have to contend against Vice-Chancellors but can in all matters, live more purposefully.
Dhvanyaloka Struggles to Take Shape

"In dreams begin responsibilities"

W.B. Yeats

While I dreamt of Dhvanyaloka in the shades of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, watching in bated breath the legendary figure of Einstein walk out of it evening after evening with an umbrella in his hand looking like the prophet of a bygone age, I hardly realised in my zeal what even a poet did, 'In dreams begin responsibilities', or, as my dear Thoreau said of building castles in the air: 'that's where they should be built; start laying the foundations from below'. It is lucky for me that while I should have been pleased to be Vice-Chancellor of Mysore University -- no other, never! -- it was thwarted, for I could then spurn any temptation as an obstacle to translating my life's dream. And the biggest temptation came from a source I valued most, for Indira Gandhi was no mere prime minister: she was Nehru's daughter and his very name caused inexplicable sensations in me: he had the touch of a hero and a saint, of Viswamitra and Vasishtha, for me; it is he that had said 'thought without action is abortive'! And so when she sent for me from Delhi to say she was 'keen' I should take over Jawaharlal Nehru's papers and write his biography, I said at once I would 'walk every mile from Mysore'. But soon came her paralysing sentence:

'It means that in the first instance you should come to Delhi for 5 years'

'No, madam, I am afraid I can't do that'

I am still surprised at the firmness with which I could say that to a Prime Minister's call and in respect of something I should have loved to do. But to leave Mysore! And to give up teaching, the breath of my nostrils! And to abandon my long-cherished
dream of a centre for Research! No, it would be betrayal. She seemed reconciled to the idea of my functioning from Mysore: I assured her I wanted no allowances but only some secretarial help. She thought these were 'matters of detail and could be looked into'. After a few pleasantries regarding 'dowrie' and 'capitation fee' in my part of the country came a searching question:

'What do young people feel?'
'About what, madam?'
'Oh, you know, things in general'
'There is expectation in the air, but I hope (I had a local grouse against the State Government) our people won't be let down for a second time!' She looked grim and asked seriously 'Tell me what are your interests apart from writing books'? May be, I invited that question upon myself by the oblique political tone of my answer. But I didn't like the reference to the writing of books as if it were an occupation of less consequence than public life. Anyhow, I said with a finality:

'No madam, I have no political ambitions!'

I had reasons to suspect her question carried a political implication. The conversation ended and I was advised to contact Haksar, the I.C.S. man, her Private Secretary, a very intelligent person with whom I had extended conversation on a variety of things including Tagore's *Gitanjali* which he defended as the work of a poet whose powers as translator were ebbing, not realizing Tagore was then in the prime of his life. I had a Tea engagement that afternoon with Karan Singh (the Secretary of the Nehru Memorial Fund) and his colleagues T. N. Dhar, Ramesh Thapar and Padmaja Naidu (the poet Sarojini Naidu's daughter) and someone else I now forget. Padmaja Naidu screamed at the mention of my working away in distant Mysore: 'I don't allow a single paper of Panditji taken out of this building'.

Tea over, I felt free to ask Karan Singh's leave to withdraw since there was no point in continuing the conversation after that outburst! I stood my ground and when they thought me obstinate, Karan Singh asked, as a last resort, for one or two names they could consider for the job. I said I could think of
none, but in principle, I said, if they were thinking of a historian he should have some literary sensibility and if he was a man of letters it was important he should have a sense of history, as I presumed Nehru conceived history as literature and enacted it so.

'Where is he?' asked Karan Singh

'It is not for me,' I mumbled and took leave of them.

I had not thought Padmaja Naidu's voice would prevail before the all-powerful Indira Gandhi, for apparently, as if to make amends for the abortive exercise of what, I can't guess, Indira Gandhi must have advised the President to appoint me Director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study at Simla. The place was vacant and I was Visiting Professor for a year when Nihar Ranjan Ray was its Director. I was asked by the President's Secretary to send my biodata and indicate my consent to be Director of the Institute. By then the thought of establishing Dhvanyaloka had taken firm root in my mind. And so while I wrote back expressing gratitude I was firm in letting him know I could not consider the offer at least for the next few years, which, for me, was a polite way of declining it.

Ten years earlier, at R.K. Narayan's instance, I had gone out looking for land at the opposite end of where I now live, 5 miles away, near Lalitha Mahal, only because he said he had bought an acre of land for as little as Rs. 5000. My vague enquiries which had spread by word of mouth brought to my house a former student of Maharaja's, T. Boriah - we had only smiled at each other -- the son of a peasant (who, when the time came for his son to marry, let the young man know he was free to marry whom he liked but his only advice was to look out for an enlightened family which, for him, meant those who rose above material considerations) who came to ask if it was true I was interested in buying land to put up a 'library'. I said 'yes, something like that'. He brought me to the site on which stands Dhvanyaloka now, pointed to the land of 3 acres which he wished to buy, split into small sites and make money. But if I wished to buy it he would forego the benefit and help me get it. How much? I asked. 'Don't bother about the price; do you like the place?' 'Without a doubt', was my anxious reply. He said, Rs. 3000 an acre, but he would have it reduced by Rs. 200,
for me. All I could muster immediately was a Rs. 1000 and the rest Boriah took care to make good on promise of payment by me later. Buying such a coveted piece of land in the vicinity of the university not for a song, as they say but for a mere ‘smile’, turned out to be as simple as buying a bicycle, compared that is, with what was in store for me.

The revenue land had to be alienated for educational purpose. An IAS officer, (himself, son of a very distinguished civilian of the former Princely State) my contemporary in college who did Physics in Bangalore while I was at Mysore reading English and had only heard of me, but as he came to know of the harassment by vested interests, took care to acquaint himself with the facts, without our ever meeting each other, or my bringing it to his notice. He arranged to get an application from me through subordinate officers in Mysore, built up the record, had it alienated and didn’t forget to have the Alienation fee refunded to me. I could only go to thank him when hurdles had all been effectively removed. While he was a Bangalorean he envied the serenity of Mysore and very much wanted my Centre to come up. It could thrive here, as nowhere else, he felt.

Vice-Chancellor Hegde’s gesture, the spontaneous turn out of the teachers in large numbers at the farewell dinner and even the retirement of the previous Vice-Chancellor presaged no smooth transit in my plans for further progress. The former Vice-Chancellor’s brother, as influential member of the City Improvement Trust Board, used his power to prevent me from erecting the present building in which Dhvanyaloka is housed. The previous Vice-Chancellor had written to the Trust Board that the land was required by the University for its future expansion and I should not therefore be permitted to go ahead with my plans for creating a research centre. And yet there is, 12 years after, plenty of vacant land where unauthorised houses are mushrooming! One brother as head of the University, another brother in the Trust Board and both, inferentially, drawing power from the Chief Minister, their cousin – all three together proved a formidable barrier for a political orphan. I appealed to the Education Minister, with no luck. I turned to the Governor-Chancellor who, I hoped, as former member of the Indian Civil Service, would be fair to me. My letter and
reminders elicited no response. They must have assessed the situation and chose discretion for their share.

In sheer desperation I made it known to those concerned I would, in the absence of a building, sit under the spreading silk cotton tree on the road-side to meet visitors and scholars who came for consultation and rouse the conscience of the people of Mysore who, I hoped, would make an issue of it. The City Improvement Trust Board, then presided over by another younger senior I.A.S. Officer, drawn from Assam (he later met his tragic end as he was drowned while swimming in a pond in Hyderabad) who was aware of the obstacles in my way to establish the Centre, decided to place the subject on the agenda at a meeting of the Board: and had it, indeed, approved right under the nose of the known ‘enemy’? And as the structure was coming up, it seems the member of the Board in question stopped his car on the road in front of the Centre and shouted to the two officials accompanying him to have it demolished at once. Impotent rage! they knew. Nothing happened. But I must in fairness add neither he nor his vice-chancellor brother was vicious. They were only annoyed I (a mere professor) didn’t extend my hand of friendship to one holding the exalted office of vice-chancellor. The truth is I wasn’t pleased with it and I couldn’t be hypocritical, though the entire episode looks like a huff in retrospect as it has left the soul in tact -- most certainly so as the former vice-chancellor was gracious enough to send me a very moving letter of sympathies on the passing away of my younger son, of whom he was truly fond.

My colleagues became the founding members of Dhvanyaloka. The aims and objectives were approved by them. They signed the document for registration of the Centre. It was vaguely meant to be a virtual extension of the Department, in any case, not its competitor, as a lone jealous colleague (a former student!) looked at it in his vaulting ambition, not realizing there was plenty of room even in a small place like Mysore for two, even twenty or more. What is vast space for when one can’t fill a minute corner of it worthily? Well, I must resist the temptation to indulge the nasty mood lest I taint myself -- suffer from leprosy of the soul, I almost said, while I ought to get it out for my own wholeness. Generally speaking, most of my colleagues
are seen at most events of the Centre and I find it very satisfying to have them around.

As I started excavating the land for construction after the favourable decision of the Trust Board an engineering contractor came on his own to offer his services as according to him that was a way of paying his debt: the benefit of listening to my general lectures while he was student of the Engineering College. There and then, I gratefully left everything in Damodar’s competent hands asking my younger son Sanjay to assist him.

The little I had saved from my two visits to the University of Texas for a term each time failed to meet even half the cost of the building and I had to lay my hand on a corner site which a former chairman of the Trust Board had allotted to me for a small sum of Rs. 4000. As I telephoned to thank him for the site for which I had made no application his response was ‘CDN, I know who needs a site, keep it, you can pay in easy instalments’. He was right on who ‘needed’ the site! A teacher of Sanskrit had sold his site in Dharwad on his taking up a position in Mysore and came to ask if I would sell the site to him. No sordid business transaction, but grateful acceptance of what he could give -- he had Rs. 16,000, the value of his site sold at Dharwad. I couldn’t care less if I had cheated myself as most people around thought: it went to a Sanskritist -- a soul-brother. Add this to my former students’ purse of more than Rs. 12,000. All went in to construction of the building. But my calculation took singularly little notice of what in fact it entailed.

As a last resort I set my greedy eye on my site in Bangalore -- I had been truly tricked into the bargain and become its owner. While at one time, a former student’s husband was the Chairman of the Bangalore Trust Board I had spurned his offer of a site, because I knew I didn’t intend to retire in Bangalore. His successor, whom I didn’t know at all, was approached by a friend of his, actually for a site for his son-in-law, a dear colleague of mine, and aware of my indifference to acquisition of properties, one day insisted on my filling an application form for a site which my son, who had just been appointed lecturer in Bangalore, would thank me for, as he put it. I signed the application on the understanding my responsibility ended with it except that I agreed to pay its cost. He did succeed and as luck would have it, I received from my Delhi publisher a cheque
for royalty on a book I edited, namely *Asian Response to American Literature* which took care of the cost of the site. With a loan I had raised from the University my son, then a 20 year old, with absolutely no notions of what it entailed to build a house, went into the construction. -- I took singularly little interest in it beyond passing on the money to him. A novice who had just emerged from a Polytechnic with a Diploma in Civil Engineering had his practical training at our expense! The maestri was blind in both the eyes having met with an accident, but was said to have reliable masons working for him. It was an out-house and considered enough for a start for a young couple of the middle class, that we are. I was very annoyed over its planning, but it was too late: the construction had come to the roof level when I saw it first on my way to the Bangalore airport before I flew to Delhi. Srinath was still a bachelor and found it serve his basic needs. But I had meant the entire site for him and he hoped to put up the main building when he had the means.

I felt obliged to take back from Srinath the site with its small house which brought me 50 times the money I had invested and that came in handy to build more rooms for scholars and a residence to ourselves. But that meant denial of the only piece of property I could give my son when he needed it. He was glad to part with it, as he knew we needed it more.

Meanwhile, at Mulk Raj Anand's instance a young architect, Sharayu Sawant, just returned from England after 14 years' self-exile, came all the way from Nasik, surveyed the land and gave me a plan which I passed on to the Engineer -- he used it very imaginatively. As I accompanied her to the Railway Station to buy her a ticket to Nasik, 'Don't insult me,' was her gentle rebuke. How would I pay her debt?

The Deputy Director of Horticulture, Krishnappa Gowda, (thanks to Chaduranga, the distinguished Kannada novelist, my contemporary in Maharaja's College, who was invariably the main link in all the services rendered by various good men) was out with his bald head under the summer sun, had the land cut into terraces on days he didn't have work, brought the saplings of flowering shrubs and trees and got them planted at appropriate places, all under his own supervision. A former student of mine, when I started teaching in Bangalore, came
with a lorry-load of coconut saplings from Arasikere, a renowned coconut centre, to fill half the land with them as I wished them to take care of the maintenance of the buildings in future.

Asirvadam, a one-time head of the famous Technological Institute here and very knowledgeable in matters of furniture, designed the tables and the chairs for the seminar room. But there was no money to buy the wood! My family had collected some silverware, our only possession in the absence of gold, in times when silver was cheaper than copper today! It fetched enough money for the wood from the timberyard, owned by a former student of Maharaja's -- benefits of living in a small town! From the wilderness without bird or bush, miraculously rose a building in less than five months with a large hall for the library and seminars, a living room and another for worship, cooking and eating. Three rooms in all!

'Give comfort root-room' said the poet, and here was more for me, God's plenty. I felt thrilled to see my dream come true with enough 'room' for everything we could do with our limited resources.

In the interval Government of India had made a grant of Rs. 1,00,000 for an open air theatre and as part of the matching, I could produce Shivkantappa's Rs. 10,000, an equal amount from Obert C. Tanner, a professor of philosophy at the University of Utah and a successful businessman who sent a cheque for $1000 at the instance of my friend William Mulder of the same university and the rest came from various sources who preferred not to be mentioned. The theatre had two large rooms behind and its two green rooms were eventually converted into living rooms for visiting resident scholars. There was a watchman's shed which served as another room and a car garage which was quickly transformed into a dining room for the residents. The family dining table and chairs, lying unused ever since we left the Professors Quarters, could now be installed in it.

Now the building was there with my personal library of more than 10,000 volumes in English, American and Commonwealth literatures, plus the backnumbers of a few internationally known journals, not to speak of some 50 current periodicals, received either with compliments or in exchange for The Literary Criterion. The seminar hall has 22 chairs with tables suitably
arranged to facilitate intimate talking. For at no seminar will there be more than 25 active participants though there can be at least 50 observers occupying folding steel chairs. We have seldom felt the need to think of a larger hall, not when a Nobel Laureate—William Golding—came, though when Rajiv Gandhi visited as Prime Minister of India, we had to meet under a shamiana.

The first two or three years were precarious for the Centre when seminars were to be a major item of the activities. For every seminar we held I had to write personal letters to professors and vice-chancellors, friendly disposed to me, to depute the teachers I identified (only once the Vice-Chancellor of Kashmir University protested at first he couldn’t send the man I asked for, but eventually came round) and surprisingly found them very responsive: one of the invitees, a senior professor from Hyderabad, as I brought up the question of travel costs, very kindly remarked he would roll on his belly to come to Dhvanyaloka! another from Kerala was no less generous as he observed ‘one doesn’t expect to be paid to go on pilgrimage’! And so on. One Vice-Chancellor of a Central University told me he saw my name and made his university Corporate Member. Three years later, as I met him at the Hyderabad Airport his comment was: What! there were no more communications after the first! and on mentioning a forthcoming seminar, a second contribution of Rs. 5,000 came in promptly. He insists on making yet another grant! Yet another Vice-Chancellor, a former student, made his university Corporate Member with no appeals, no, not so much as a hint. A third one, distinguished teacher of English and writer, followed suit. And now the number stands at 12, with more than 100 Life Members spread over the whole world.

I have always thought there is plenty of money even in a poor country like India. What is required is a cause which works! To my surprise someone, never known before, came forward to make a feature on Dhvanyaloka for the national hook-up of Television in the series ‘A Face in the Crowd’ There was now a ‘cause’ too which dailies and weeklies and monthlies took up -- to my embarrassment, enough to say: No more!
Ford Foundation Makes a Handsome Grant

It is then that someone from the Ford Foundation, Delhi wrote they had heard of the Centre’s “innovative programmes” and one of them would like to visit the Centre. A very well informed officer, an able Indian woman, came: we sat in our sagging sofa in the library, talked for more than an hour and when she suggested, “Shall we have a tour of the complex?” I felt amused, for there was nothing more to see except for vacant spaces all-round and a coconut grove behind. She was very understanding and left it at that. How very different it was when I applied for affiliation, to my own University which I had served for 35 years! Even the vice-chancellor who had written me such a moving letter on my superannuation had now been effectively advised by the new head of department to neutralize it. No, it turned out to be my nutrition—self-reliance! That is by the way. Not having a proper place at home to give her a meal I took her to Hotel Dasprakash for a ‘Tali Meal’ in a crowded hall and all I spent was less than Rs. 10 on each.

Before the year was out in 1983 a cheque for $ 50,000 and a supplementary grant of $25,000 was received by the Centre to cover seminars, workshops, visits of writers, translators and scholars, 6-8 at a time, to interact with each other for a minimum of 30 days in the hope of generating a current of fresh and invigorating ideas which legitimately belonged to the universities. But to say the universities have failed the country is not to presume the Centre hoped to make a success of it. It is just that the Centre had been fortunately free from bureaucratic procedures and pettinesses of a jealous mediocrity; everything centred on one individual who had reasonable contact with universities in and outside the country, had fair acquaintance with the state of English studies in India and had, according to his lights, a goal before him. It was obvious the benefits were intended for the universities, but I believed the Centre could serve their interests best by not being a part of the university system.

At first I meant (I am still hoping) to collect the country’s eminent writers and scholars especially those in retirement and therefore disposed to come, not only in English but in Sanskrit and our other literatures with an occasional philosopher, historian, sociologist, even scientist, for brief periods of 4-6 weeks
at a time and bring younger scholars engaged in research in corresponding areas to interact with them for a week or so. It is true they have their own supervisors but it is understood the supervisors would themselves wish to encourage their wards to be exposed to ideas, views and voices other than their own -- they should afford that luxury where the life of the mind is in question; it makes for mutual growth, for I recalled it was precisely how I tried to expose my own students to a large variety of visiting teachers and scholars.

I was painfully aware it was an exceptional scholar or researcher, which meant hardly any, who related his study of English or American or any other literature to the Indian context. But for his Indian name and references to Indian sources in Acknowledgement the thesis gave no indication whatever of an Indian mind grappling with a problem in front of him/her. The inadequacies of Indian University Libraries was a cliche in every foreword to a Ph.D. dissertation! If art and literature are for the good of the reader one has a right to ask: what did the reader think of what he read or how it affected him, that is, did it make a difference to him in his own (Indian, and at the present) context?

I recall a dissertation on Contemporary English Drama by a young woman who had submitted it for a Ph.D. degree of a neighbouring university. She pleaded in defence of her deficiencies, paucity of books and periodicals in the area under study. That was not all. She hadn’t read a single review of a play or its performance in a theatre; she hadn’t, of course, watched any contemporary play performed on the stage and had no notions of dramatic problems in the writing or the production. Not only she, her supervisor’s limitations were even more glaring in the absence of direction the dissertation betrayed. Did the Research Committee consider the credentials of the guide, the availability of materials, the suitability of the candidate for such an undertaking? I had commented on these among others and advised it be thoroughly revised for resubmission -- downright rejection, I thought, would be unfair considering certain merits in her favour.

The convener of the Examination Board was Geoffrey Bul-lough, then Professor of English at London University. He had sent in his report, grudgingly recommending the award of a
degree in view of a difficult undertaking by someone who could not be expected to have sufficient appreciation of the task before her. Assuming that the other examiner, who was myself, would send a favourable report, but subject to it, he had recommended the award of the degree. On reading my delayed report, he wrote to the University withdrawing his recommendation and endorsing my advice for revision. He was generous enough to send me a copy of it accompanied by a personal note to forward my report as well as his revised one to the University Grants Commission in Delhi for possible circulation among Indian universities. As an insider I knew nothing would come out of it and didn’t act on his advice. But I was truly sorry for the poor candidate for this let-down by an Indian examiner when the external examiner was inclined to be concessive -- most of them invariably are concessive, which contributes to lowering of our standards.

To recall but one other instance to reinforce the state of our research. I once sat on a committee at the Benares Hindu University to select a Reader. There were seven Ph.D.’s and a lone M.A. had staked his claims for it, though in my opinion, he was probably the best of them all. Of the seven Ph.D.’s one seemed to have fair credentials for the post. His guide was a sound scholar, with an Oxford degree and had accumulated to his credit many years of teaching and research experience at Allahabad. The two examiners were FAC Wilson and A.G. Stock, than whom one could not think of anyone more qualified to adjudicate it. The candidate had armed himself with copies of their thumping testimonials. The topic of research was ‘W.B. Yeats’s theory of Poetry’. The Vice-Chancellor’s opening question was: Do poets have theories of poetry? After some plausible answer, the candidate was passed on to the experts. He had gift of the gab that one was likely to be taken in by it. But if as in this case, it persisted without any substance, it could call for resentment. And it did, when my turn came. And I chose to divert him from the general to the particular so he couldn’t wax eloquent.

I took the cue from his own claim that he had taken 7 years to work at the thesis so I had reasons to believe he knew his author well enough, especially since it was a poet and a poet like Yeats whom one wouldn’t be tired of re-reading, I suggested
he take any three poems of Yeats, say, one from the early period, one from the middle period and one from the last phase and show how his theory of poetry had been exemplified in the poems. The candidate began to hum and haw where earlier he was very fluent. I helped him to choose the titles: “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”, “The Tower” and the two “Byzantium” poems. Did he see any echoes of Tennyson’s “Lotos Eaters” in the first? “Don’t remember”. How did “The Tower” build up? “I forget.” Which of the two Byzantium poems did he prefer and why? “I don’t exactly remember”. A stereotype I was fairly familiar with. ‘Don’t exactly remember’ is a euphemism for virgin innocence! The candidate broke down. And we left it at that.

The Vice-Chancellor decided to re-advertise the post as he turned down my recommendation (supported by the two others) that if he wished to fill the post he could consider the solitary M.A. without research experience. The Vice-Chancellor reminded us that as former judge he felt he should also appear to do justice, so could not turn down the 7 Ph.D.s. I had asked the Yeats man to wait for me outside. It came out from my conversation with him that he was familiar with all the Yeats criticism while he had read the poems ‘once’ and so couldn’t remember the details. I found him quite intelligent, had a sense of English and could with effort profit greatly and so advised him not to apply for any post for the next 6 months, but buy himself a copy of the Collected Poems of Yeats and read the poems line by line and his own thesis back and forth until he could see what he had missed out in his earlier reading. Which he very obligingly promised. But the next I heard was he had been appointed Reader with 3 increments in a fairly prestigious institution. The rest is silence, I consoled myself in my helplessness.

It was against this background that I insisted on a Viva and satisfactory defence of the thesis regardless of how well one had done in the dissertation. This was an opportunity provided to me by the UGC in a report I had been asked to make in the year of my superannuation on Teaching and Research in English in our Universities. Even so, our viva is a very tame affair compared to the orals of American universities. Vague generalization is generally the bane of our education and in the reading of literature it took the form of summaries, paraphrases and messages which took no account of the life of the work of
art and the way it organized itself on the printed page – these have shown up again and again. The text suffers the first casualty in the treatment. The English Romantics had set the seal on our approach to works of art, not our traditional close attention to the work that one sees in our great Sanskrit commentaries or Bhashyas.

If the younger research scholar at the Ph.D. level was found wanting in one respect, it shouldn't surprise one to see his seniors fared no better, at more crucial points. Once a scholar eminently well-read in English, American, Sanskrit and Telugu literatures very kindly asked me to write a foreword to his book on Coleridge. I felt honoured because of the possible connections I thought he could make in a book like that, he was so well qualified to do. It looked as though he had deliberately excluded all reference to Indian thought and the literary scene! Both he and the Western reader of Coleridge missed a rare opportunity of knowing how someone from another culture looked at so fertile a mind as Coleridge's which was tantamount to a gift of one culture to another. Precisely how the Germans placed the British under a debt for investing Shakespeare with a literary and philosophical dimension while for the British themselves he was a mere entertainer and drew large audiences to the Globe Theatre. Good to remember, it seems, there were at the Schiller Bicentenary in Germany there were 600 more performances of Shakespeare than of Schiller!

What is Dhvanyaloka?

Dhvanyaloka is the name of a critical treatise of the early 9th century by a Kashmiri scholar named Anandavardhana and represents the highest point in the critical thinking of India. Dhvani is still looked upon by the discriminating critic as the most adequate criterion with which to mediate art experience. Coming as it does after a thousand years of continuous vigorous critical activity by such poeticians as Bharata, Bhamaha, Vamana, Dandin and Kuntaka, (not to speak of the rishis before them), with each of them propounding his own approach to literature but no one forgetting the supreme end of a work of art, namely rasa, acknowledged to be the soul of a work, it stands in contrast to the New Critics of America with their monistic thinking.
Dhvanyaloka Struggles to Take Shape

Susan Langer spoke with conviction that all the pleasures of heaven and earth are not equal to a tithe of what rasa promises.

I peel and portion
A tangerine, spit the pips
And feel the drunkenness of things

(Louis McNiece)

It is sakala prayojana maunibhutam ananda, the origin or cause of every kind of usefulness or as Paul Valery was to say it has a nutritive value while providing for the sensation of sweetness in tasting.

Dhvani in Sanskrit literally means sound; but as Ananda Coomaraswamy observes, it should be looked upon as sounding, for a great work of art once read, heard or seen, continues to resonate in the deep heart's core:

The song in my heart I bore
Long after it was heard no more.

According to Anandavardhana it isn't enough if a work of art evokes rasa: it should do so through dhvani, while his predecessors thought in terms of metaphor, image, style, and obliqueness in language. Hence the rasa-dhvani theory as put forward by his successor Abhinavagupta in the 10th century -- realize rasa through dhvani—is by general acknowledgement India's greatest contribution to the world of Poetics, but not adequately appreciated, thanks to our philosophical preoccupations which Western orientalists highlighted to its regrettable exclusion, because it could only come from the insiders.

The concept was already implicit for me while the journal, The Literary Criterion, was founded in 1952. Hence the name ‘Dhvanyaloka’ to The Literary Criterion Centre. It sounds like a place name which now it is and suggests at the same time its goal -- of wanting to look at all literature and the arts, whether Indian or any other, from the rasa-dhvani standpoint.

If it is argued that it is no longer valid or, obsolete in a changed context, it raises the counter-question: what of Aristotle and his legacy, the products of a different culture and not of today? Besides, Indian genius through the ages has gone on absorbing the vital elements in its past while keeping pace with the changing present in contact with the Western world. There is much truth in the observation that if our Vedic ancestors
should come back to take a look at their progeny today they will at once recognize beneath diverse accretions which Indian society has collected, certain timeless values which have invariably endured. India is a 'palimpsest' in Jawaharlal Nehru's words. Remove the accretions with a babul thorn, said Raja Rao -- and in a novel too.

This has acquired an urgency what with our determined bid, in such spheres of life as science, technology, medicine, and the law, to return to the usable past, recover the vital elements we have lost touch with and revitalize it to serve a present need—understandable in a milieu which has put its faith not in the linear but the cyclical view of history. A public man like Jawaharlal Nehru, caught in the tumble and dust of political life in the days of the National Movement, and talking of the 'Burden of the Past' and harping on the 'Scientific attitude' to life felt impelled to write The Discovery of India, for without an appreciation of the past he could not assess where to start and what to look for in order to forge ahead. For history is not a series of accidental happenings, since they are seen to fall into a pattern of timeless moments. In response to a journalist's question what was it he most liked to do while in India on a brief visit, Malraux, the French writer, stunningly remarked, 'Have a conversation with Sankara!' Earlier, Emerson who started sceptically in relation to India, came to think, as an article of faith, that the story of Nala and Dhamayanti had acquired for him greater urgency than the morning's newspaper. And T.S. Eliot the poet who, more than anyone in the modern times, did as much to impress on the world the value of Tradition as flowing through the veins from Homer down to present day, nevertheless admits to having been lost in the mazes of Patanjali and unequivocally announces that the philosophers of Europe look like schoolboys before the thinkers of India. Not only his poetry but his critical theory too shows how profoundly he was influenced by Indian thought and sensibility. Indeed, in his essay on the "Function of Criticism", he observes that his essay stops at the frontiers of metaphysics. Presumably, critical analysis of poetry whose concern is with the objective correlative sadhanakarana of the poet's state of mind as present in the black marks on the white paper, has to pierce through the appearance maya before it apprehends reality. This view of poetry is of a
piece with what governs the poet's creative process. For Eliot it is the expression of Impersonality, nishkamakarma or disinterested action, and therefore not just a poet's concern but everyman's business in life.

Despite such possible debt to Indian sources Eliot was still firm in his faith that he didn't wish to cease to be an American or a European -- for sentimental as well as practical reasons. Which in Indian terms means swadharma. V. S. Naipaul who spoke lightly on swadharma in India: A Wounded Civilization has, in his mature years, which alas! came too late for so brilliant a man, perceived its presence in his A Million Mutinees! How truly, said a young French woman of Algerian descent, 'you, Indians, may let down India, but India will not let you down!'

Now what Dhvanyaloka is at pains to impress is simply an affirmation of swadharma, as exemplified in Gandhi's stand: Let all the winds of all the lands blow over my house, but I shall refuse to be blown off my feet. Especially so, because what its poetics upholds is precisely what its thinkers, our fathers, the pathfinders, who laid the foundations of this country's culture, essentially Rishis, seers or poets apprehended: God Himself as Raso vai saha, rasa personified. Poetry was rasaananda aesthetic bliss, twin brother to brhmananda bliss of heaven. The term enjoyment distorts and trivializes poetic experience, for the experience is beyond joy and sorrow sukha-dukkha as in the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata or in a play like King Lear. That is rasa-dhvani. All great literature, be it Vyasa's Bhagavad Gita, Dante's Divine Comedy, Dostoevsky's Brothers Karamazov, Shakespeare's King Lear, Goethe's Faust, the great Odes of Keats, Tolstoy's War and Peace, or T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, answers to this view of poetry and all great literature, be it in verse or prose, is Kavya. I hasten to add it is not necessary that everyone should look at literature that way. It is my way and makes instant meaning to me in the context of my world view. This is, again, in keeping with the essential Hindu view of life and Reality.

How pathetic and how utterly irrelevant that we should be prattling of 'Catharsis', 'Original Sin' 'Vision of Evil' 'Delight and Instruction' as the ends of literature, "Modernism and postmodernism", "Structuralism and post-structuralism" and "Deconstruction"!

My constant plea is: It is not in keeping with the self-respect of a mature people to import European quarrels if you must have pretensions to intellectual activity; get back to the days
when our thinkers from the days of the Upanishads to Buddha, Sankara, Ramanuja and Chaitanya walked on foot to distant centres of learning, there to discuss and disagree and generate new ideas. If modern writing cannot be judged in terms of Rasa- Dhvani, it means our literature has dried up and become either dull or trivial. The urgent need is to try and make it matter to the society for which it is created, if not to the world at large. What is its prayojana immediate usefulness or purusharthika ultimate or transcendental value? F. R. Leavis truly observed: if poetry does not matter to the modern world it is because of the kind of poet who has failed his calling. It is thus seen that a return to traditional Criticism can save our literature itself by revitalizing it.

A glance at some of Dhvanyaloka's publications of the past 10 years should give an indication of future possibilities:

Landscape in Literature; The Rise of the Indian Novel; Protest Literature; Women in Fiction and Fiction by Women; Towards the Idea of a National Literature; Impact of Buddha on World Literature; A Common Poetic for Indian Literatures; Bhakti Poetry in India; Caste in Indian Literature; Problems of Response in Commonwealth Literature; Glimpses of Canadian Literature; Identity of Text and Reader Response; Problems of Translation; Kipling's India; African Literature Comes of Age; T. S. Eliot and the Indian Literary Scene; Indian and Western Poetics at Work.

To these may be added my personal efforts in such books of criticism as Moving Frontiers of English Studies in India, The Function of Criticism in India and The Indian Critical Scene in each of which my endeavour has been to win attention to the urgent task before the Indian critic of literature, especially western literature -- (a) relate it to the Indian context; and (b) if feasible, employ traditional Indian critical concepts to mediate art experience.

It is worth asking if, that is, we have the courage to face the results of such a survey, whether there are enough Indian scholars or critics to count on the fingers of one hand during the century and a half when we have been reading western literatures, who have written anything on a British or American writer which their own readers can sit up and take notice of and feel grateful for. Derivativeness is writ large or what Tagore called picking up rags and bones at others' dustbins.
"Is This the Promised End?"

(Kent in King Lear, Act V, Sc. iii)

The Problem of Human Relationships

Being vexed by the problem of human relationships with the passing away of my younger son, Sanjay, Tummy for me, my virtual collaborator in shaping the building of Dhvanyaloka, I felt impelled to write this section to conclude my autobiographical account. But I didn’t have the courage or clarity of mind to verbalize the emotional mess I was in and so largely to divert myself somewhat I tried to go over those precious links that bound us, each to each.

I was 19 when I married, still a student in the B.A. Honours class, my wife was 14. Her maternal uncle, virtual guardian of their poor family, whom I regarded as a rare type of human being, came to see my father with the proposal of marriage. I felt rudely shaken and made my ineffectual protests to my father, who, however, was talked into saying Yes, because he couldn’t bring himself to say No to someone who was nobility personified. And I acquiesced for the same reason. That is in 1940; the marriage was, in fact, an engagement for all its public celebration. I didn’t invite nor inform anyone of my acquaintance as I felt it was just a shade less ludicrous than cradle marriage! Anyhow my wife came into our family two years after when I left the University with a degree, waiting to be employed in answer to pressing needs of day-to-day living.

My sister, who had toiled long with my parents to keep me in school and college, had teased me that she should be the recipient of my first month’s salary but died of child-birth at the age of 29 in less than a fortnight of my employment as Lecturer in the University.

Our first child we called Srinath, after the renowned Telugu poet, and our second was a daughter, Ragini, meant to be a tribute to my first love, music. It made us happy that a boy and
a girl answered to the newest standards of family planning and
didn’t wish for more. It was an ideal home! Husband and wife
with fond parents in their old age to reap the small benefits of
their toils and two lovely grand-children to dote on. With my
sister’s son Murthy, it was a trinity. Happiness exuded from
every corner, for a village boy, educated at Cambridge, with a
year at Princeton, and returned home to be professor, living in
a bungalow built for the white sahibs. And a series of small
successes to attend my modest efforts climaxing in my appoint­
ment at 35 as the youngest principal of the University’s
century-old college, with promise of becoming Vice-Chancellor,
all going well.

It was then when I felt flushed with success that another son
was added to the compact family. ‘How very like his father!’
everyone remarked. Which tickled my ego. ‘How the baby is
all ears to the flutter of the chirping birds’ wings at the window;
or the railway whistle as the train passed behind our house. He
is sure to be a musician or at least a discriminating lover of
music! (And true to it, without a scratch of formal training, he
could simulate at 15 the famed Balamurali Krishna’s voice and
later nearly decided to give up English M.A. for music.) How
inward-looking are his large luminous eyes! Call him Sanjay, I
said, let him be his father’s eye in his old age, like his great
forbear of that name in the Mahabharata. What agility in the little
fellow’s limbs; and how resplendent in his looks! thought the
sister who neglected her much loved toys to play with the live
one, instead. He was the most photographed child in the family
what with his photogenic face.

As schooling started he would stand shyly behind the door
to take leave of me when I would abruptly leave the visitors in
the middle of a sentence to press a kiss on his crimson cheek
and look on till brother and sister got into the school bus. ‘It’s
hard to conduct this dynamo home!’ grumbled the sister when
they missed the bus. Returning home, he would pull the chair
from behind her, as she prepared to settle on a straight backed
chair! He struck us as assertive in comparison with ‘the irritat­
ing calm’ of his reticent brother who in his love for him was
more indulgent than any of us. Tummy began to show streaks
of irreverence for things we considered sacrosanct. But not so
simple to stick a label on so colourful a character, for while he
abhorred coffee or tea he could devour a tumblerful of strong coffee when his Sanskrit teacher’s wife handed him one. Bad form, to say No! Or when we went to see a semi-moron cousin of mine, a clerk in the Taluk Office, and appeared casual in our words and dealings with him, Tummy would prostrate at his feet with genuine regard -- as if to admonish us silently. If on the death anniversary of his much loved robust grandfather, the rest of the family helped itself to some coffee or tender coconut, he, the youngest, would fast in an act of piety to the dead, for a major part of the day -- though he would compensate for it before long by successfully bidding at an idli-eating competition with his friends! Once when I frowned on him as he reversed the car -- which he learnt to drive at 14 -- and struck a stone, he shot back: he had no eyes on the back of his head! And as I intoned my sense of hurt, he, then a grown up young man, stopped the car and cried copiously. When he saw an epileptic on the road with wayfarers watching him, afraid to touch, Tummy lifted him with both his hands and brought him to the footpath for rest under the tree. He turned out to be a fake but Tummy wouldn’t allow that to affect his generosity with the money he could lay his hand on in his pocket. What a paradox, this boy!

My wife and I were away in America when he took the pre-university examination and not finding his register number on the notice board at the Director’s office in Bangalore, journeyed to Mysore to enquire at his College. It was confirmed. He had the presence of mind to come home, cook quick snacks and returned after sumptuous helping to Bangalore, breezed into the Director’s office, when they were about to close for the day, impressed on the Director (to whom he was too proud to disclose my relationship) it could be a cruel error and would he look into It? Lo! it turned out he had passed with a First Class. The Director’s apologies and congratulations came as a blessing into the bargain and he pocketed it with assumed modesty, he said. He had histrionic talent in abundance. Actually he played Macbeth’s role when we were away in Adelaide to which he sent a paper clipping carrying the caption ‘Sanjay Steals the Show, as Macbeth!’ But the best part of the gift surfaced in inner circles of the family and close friends. He was the only one who took liberties with me -- engagingly.
In my pride I said to myself he was evidently marked for big things in life. A first class in B.A. qualified him for a Subject Scholarship as well as a National Scholarship. He chose the latter in M.A. both because it carried prestige and more money. Another first was in store for him in M.A. which meant instant appointment as Lecturer in the college where he did his P.U.C. He picked up a quarrel with the head of Department for refusing to dictate notes -- he would, he argued, employ all the means at his disposal to communicate with the students but not be an enemy of learning! Word spread around about the young lecturer's stern stand and fellow teachers would sometimes sit or stand unseen to watch him teach. I fear I sound partial, but not altogether.

He wouldn't subscribe to the general approbation of Hermann Hesse on Siddartha in the novel of that name and wrote a paper which I could publish in The Literary Criterion without much editorial annoyance. And yet another paper on Arun Joshi's novel The Last Labyrinth, again, a minority stand. Both publications together with his 'capacity to sustain his stand' may have encouraged the visiting experts from the North to recommend his appointment in the Post-graduate department I had retired from after 30 years' teaching (with Srinath sent away to Bangalore, myself having denied him a place in the Department I was head of) despite the then Department Head's note of dissent. For a beginner, he soon made his mark as a teacher of Poetry, my own soft spot. Which led me to build my hopes on him as someone to watch in the coming years. His turn came sooner than expected. He went to Australia on a Rotary Exchange Programme and came back to leave for England in the next few months on a Commonwealth Scholarship at the University of Leeds. Luck for him meant a capacity to exploit accidents! My friends, his teachers there, were apparently impressed by his more than average cast of mind and thought he was good enough to register for research which I discouraged as I preferred him to teach for a while and read widely before he proceeded to research.

My wife and I visited him, while I was returning from Trinidad after attending a seminar. He had finished his exams and had acquired a second-hand Mercedes Benz cutting severely on his expenses, intent on the long-planned purchase -- a
"Is this the Promise End?"

luxury I couldn't afford with all my visits abroad, he teased. He took us around a large part of Yorkshire and I had my first perfect holiday without having to read or write. And he parted with the car with no regrets -- call it a taxi, he argued. It was then that he shared with us news of his hospitalization for a day when an Indian doctor who kept him under watch for six hours only administered a harmless Jelusit as antidote to his stomachache and sent him home. The symptom was cured but the malady persisted. Such, I fear, is aliopathy, which Gandhi compared to Black Magic.

He, his wife and child as well as my wife and myself flew back together. Within 3 months of his return came the second attack when he was hospitalized for a month and the doctors announced 'providential recovery'. But soon he resumed his thoughtless food habits. He took ill on his wedding day -- a happy event for him, since he married the girl he loved, his own classmate, right under his obtuse father-teacher's nose! The only right thing for his bagful of blunders -- I teased. His daughter, Maitreyi, was his heart's delight but lest he sound sentimental he would feign an inflexional contour in his voice, proper to a folk-saying: 'whatever you say, a son is a son!' though, earlier, he would not hesitate to tell his sister, 'the sons are a disappointment to father', as I complimented Ragini on her diligent habits.

Nevertheless, when we proposed to apportion the left-over money from the sale-proceeds of the Bangalore site after investing on additions to Dhvaayaloka without taking Ragini into account, 'Just because she is a daughter? Barbaric! was his comment in self-accusation. That resulted in a car for her and her husband, in buying which he explored half of Coorg! A loving bond had developed between them and Tummy -- not having children, they looked on him as their hope in old age. Their visit as well as Srinath's from Bangalore was an event he looked forward to, each time. He held an unbeaten record for playing carrom with them! He was the centre of attraction for the entire family. Visitors who met him for only a few minutes carried distinct memories of what he said or did and made tender references to the warmth of his personality. While he kept his end up with the elite and employed high-sounding phrases in discussions, his heart was with the peasants and low paid workers
around and he spoke to them in their lingo and made them feel at home in his company -- for all his education, they thought. I feared that some day he might contest the elections what with his rising popularity and become a politician -- a dirty word for me! He was indeed considered a leader of the Mysore branch of the Students Federation of India. His strategy to project his organization's image took the form of stopping unawares people on the footpath and polishing their shoes with a flourish—in return for small change which they dropped into a sealed tin hundi. Tummy could be relied on to invent such monkey pranks to ensure credibility for his cause! The term would have sounded blasphemous in his ears. What are pranks to others were a serious matter to him, at least as far as the monkey was concerned. While he was very fond of cows, horses, dogs and rabbits -- he meant to rear a deer and a peacock at Dhvanyaloka -- he envied the monkey most. He used to say, if there were rebirth, he would love to be born a monkey as he admired its remarkable agility, and, in the context of the Ramayana, its diverse learning in various branches of knowledge as well as its unparalleled devotion to the master who invited Hanuman for a sahakhojana eating together, at the end of the epic -- in fact, Hanuman's devotion Bhakti is a by-word in master-servant relationships among common people unlike that other spirit of the air, Ariel, in The Tempest who constantly reminded Prospero: 'Master, my freedom' and the offended master would count his blessings on him! The assertive youth was aware that for all his cerebral approach to God, jnanamarga the great Sankara came to put his faith finally in bhakti himself embodying both.

It seems the police held SFI, leaders in the station for a good part of the night for some excess against the university administration, but he wouldn't forget to send a friend home to keep my scared wife company, with me away from the country. I was greatly amused at the way he could give up the interests he had so assiduously cultivated as someone throws away old clothes, when new ones were in the offing. Indeed, on his return from England he got half dozen shirts made, hung them in a row in his newly bought steel wardrobe but suddenly imagining attention to sartorial elegance was unbecoming of a university teacher, let the wardrobe recede and resolved to have a separate
study and started building his own library with proper book-racks. The shirts as he hung them still stand and look on us pleadingly.

So does all Dhvanyaloka. He was seven when we bought the land and seventeen when water was struck in the wilderness. With his brother and sister living away from us, Tummy, the youngest, became my constant companion at work. He walked with me, two miles each way, evening after evening, when we watered the plants, now tall, true and looking sentinel-like along the sides. And talked our way home animatedly unfolding each other’s dreams for Dhvanyaloka.

When the time came to raise the edifice his penchant for action found its full vent. Architect, engineer, and the maestri with his man-power, all gravitated to him. He was the stimulus behind each — cajoling, coaxing, shouting, but sharing, by turns. He soon mastered the intricacies of working with stone, sand, brick and lime; would set out at crack of dawn, whirl on scooter the nooks and corners of Mysore in search of materials and come back before the workers arrived. If the lorry didn’t turn up on time he would hop on the bullock cart with twig in hand and towel around the head.

Every curve, contour and slope in the roof, height of door, depth of window and width of gate, locale for rockery and pond, hedge, shrub and creeper was best left to him or referred for his assent.

When seminars, workshops and stage shows got going he was again their dynamo though he had reserved his undoubted gifts of mind for his students in the Department. Out of his scholarship-savings in England he had acquired things for the Theatre with his eye on the promotion of indigenous arts, one of the Centre’s twin-objectives. The unused gadgets present a sorry sight with no one trained to use them in Tummy’s absence.

His brother with wife and children, and the sister with her psychologist husband are invariably present at Dhvanyaloka seminars and workshops to fill the void, looking upon work for the centre as loving tribute to his memory — grateful in life and death. His brother’s daughter, Ganga, who was most drawn to him had decided to take a transfer from Bangalore, only to wait in vain for him to come back from the hospital. She reciprocates his affection by her touching attachment to his wife and
daughter, with all three giving of their time and attention un­
grudgingly to all that Tummy would have done to make visiting
scholars feel at home at Dhvanyaloka.

As he was being taken on stretcher to the operation theatre
in a Mysore hospital for suspected appendicitis, such was his
curiosity, that he asked me to note how large it had grown. The
surgeon came out with a pale face. Did he have the help of a
co-surgeon, if not a team of doctors? Are those the privileges
of high-placed patients only? There was just a passing hint that
the post-operation period won't be smooth. Why did they waste
a whole month before asking us to shift him to some hospital
elsewhere? Was I smug when a former pupil, now living in
Leeds, asked me to fly him to a hospital there while I could
stay with them? It never occurred to me that we could take
what in knowledgeable circles is called 'a second opinion'. Did
I think there is 'no contingency in Nature'? Were things pre-or-
dained? I am no fatalist, but I am not too sure if man's Karma
does not dog his steps and cloud his thinking when he is not
in communion with a higher power, if there is one. The Ayur-
vedic Pandit who had once examined Tummy told me, long
after the tragedy, those born in Simhalagru were obstinate.
Tummy was defiant and took little care of himself in his dietary
habits: he would hold forth with conviction: it's better to live
life like a spendthrift and disappear when the time came than
waste it like a miser. Once I remember I glared disapprovingly
at his plate on which he had piled spiced and greasy dishes
which were taboo for him after his last recovery; he abandoned
the food in protest and went to bed.

Lying prostrate in his hospital room, he shouted at my
'sentimental' reluctance to leave for Calcutta for 3 days for some
Endowment Lecture. And insisted on my dictating a telegram
about my going, though within minutes I wired again to ignore
it preferring to sit by his bedside and keep him company. He
showed interest in such diverse things as image worship; art
experience, future of universities and so forth. He seemed to
recover a little while the infection was spreading in the intes­
tines. And his brave front was deceptive -- even his doctors
used to be surprised. He couldn't get any sleep at night but
there was calm acceptance on his face in the morning. I wonder
what thoughts crossed his mind. Was he troubled by anxieties
of his survival, his young wife's predicament, or his 4-year-old child's future and of us, his old parents, for he wouldn't let us have a shutter for our room next to his as he thought he should reach us when required, without wasting a fraction of a second. Did he think of the future of Dhvanyaloka in shaping whose buildings he had a major share? With Srinath away in Bangalore, I had naturally assumed he would be there to keep it going, with other high-minded people around -- he could inspire good-will in them by his transparent selflessness. Life, said someone, is what happens when you plan differently!

On the day he was to be shifted to the 'Intensive Care Unit -- how little we knew of it? -- he warmed to the beating blue in clear space from the open verandah of his room and muttered how few people watched the lovely sky and the sailing clouds. And there in I.C.U. at the end of his ten days of tortured existence he tried to listen to music but soon looked tired. I pleaded with the doctors to release him from that glass cage and send him back to his room so we could sit and talk with him hoping, psychologically, it could make a difference to his state of mind. He developed alarming signs of sinking towards the evening. I tried to adjust his pillows when he said, 'Jayashree', meaning she knew how to do it. With this last utterance on his lips he looked me in the eye and breathed his last.

I thought stoically of the hundreds who left their dear ones that night. Cold comfort! Dazed, we accompanied the body to Mysore in a nightmare drive to the house he largely helped to build but lived in so briefly. Friends and former students kept a steady stream to have a last look at him, with one of my students saying to me, 'We are your children, too'. And as the body was enveloped in flames I uttered for him the words of Bhartrihari:

O mother earth and father air
O friend fire, great kinsman water
O brother ether -- to you all
In final parting I make obeisance
Through your long association
Have the right deeds been performed

Now I merge in the Supreme Brahman
His vital frame and raging mind behind which lurked a melting heart was all ashes now. I looked back: the large mellowed sun in the golden West was straining
to be time’s vast
Womb of all, home of all, hearse of all, night.

Did the gods, the loved ones prayed to, look on and take no part? Betrayed, I agonized, ‘Is this the promised end?’

The next morning, a former colleague who came to offer his sympathies recollected for me the poignant episode of Abhimanyu, that marvellous boy in the Mahabharata, the last hope of the Pandava clan. As the heart-broken Arjuna wailed before his mentor, Sri Krishna conducted him to the Other World, where indeed he saw his son and as he rushed to hug him, the young man gave him a cold look, as if to suggest

Who are you?

The silken ties that held him together had snapped. Illusion! All’s illusion! Are human relationships no more than biological accidents? I don’t know. But I do know we feel Tummy’s presence in the many associations memory mercifully brings up so often. Soon the very being dies into him, recovers for the nonce and vows to go on. Go on, we must.

And there, where all-family’s darling boy walked in full-blooded vigour, rises from his remains the ember-champak. Nature, have mercy and spare a like-fate for it! Illusion, again!

We pass from one illusion to another. And the pageant marches on!
charaiveti, charaiveti

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1. Family photograph taken in 1983
2. Author in Final Honours class at Maharaja's College, with J.C. Rollo in the Centre.
3. Justice N. Balakrishniya

5. F.R. Leavis and R.D. Leavis engaged in 'Creative Quarrel'
6. David H. McAlpin and Sally Sage McAlpin
7. As Professor with the students, reading poetry
8. Olive Reddick presenting author's book on Nehru to the Prime Minister
9. Author as principal of Maharaja's College with the Maharaja of Mysore addressing students and teachers
10. Author with Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and William Mulder with wife
11. Tea before the McAlpin lecture at Dhvanyaloka
12. Author's younger son Sanjay trying to feed a Kangaroo while on a visit to Australia
13. When Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Dhvanyaloka to address a Conference on Jawaharlal Nehru 1989