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## ভারপ্রাপ্ত অধ্যাপকদের বক্তব্য

১৮১৭ খ্রিস্টাব্দে হিন্দু কলেজ রূপে আত্মপ্রকাশের পর থেকে আমাদের এই বিদ্যায়তন বঙ্গদেশে পাশ্চাত্য শিক্ষার সম্প্রসারণে এক মহতী ভূমিকা পালন করে এসেছে। দেশের এ অঞ্চলের ইতিহাসের যে পর্বটিকে বাংলার নবজাগরণ বলে চিহ্নিত করা হয় তার আলোচনার মধ্যেও বিদ্যায়তনটির সুকৃতির কথা শ্রদ্ধার সঙ্গে স্মরণ করা হয়। ১৯৯২-৯৩ সালে কলেজের ১৭৫তম বার্ষিকী উদ্‌যাপনের মধ্য দিয়ে এক গৌরবময় ঐতিহ্যের প্রতি আমাদের নিষ্ঠা নতুন করে উচ্চারিত হয়েছে।

প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজ পত্রিকা অবশ্য এতটা প্রাচীন নয়; তার যাত্রা শুরু হয়েছিল ১৯১৪-১৫ সালে। কিন্তু তখন থেকেই কলেজের বিতর্ক সভা ও রবীন্দ্র পরিষদের মতোই এটি কলেজের গর্বের বস্তু হয়ে উঠেছিল। দ্বিতীয় মহাযুদ্ধের কয়েক বছর এবং রাজনৈতিক আন্দোলনে উত্তাল ১৯৬৭-৬৮, ১৯৬৮-৬৯ এ দুটি বছর বাদ দিলে কলেজ পত্রিকার প্রকাশ মোটামুটি অব্যাহত থেকেছে। সাম্প্রতিক কালে অবশ্য পত্রিকায় প্রকাশিত প্রবন্ধ-গল্প-কবিতার মানের অবনমন ঘটছে এমন একটা অভিযোগ শোনা যায়। তবে কি প্রেসিডেন্সির ছাত্রছাত্রীরা পাঠ্যবিষয়ের বাইরে জীবনের বৈচিত্র্যময় ঘটনাপ্রবাহ নিয়ে ভাবনা-চিন্তা করে না বা ভাবনা-চিন্তার ক্ষমতা তারা হারিয়ে ফেলছে? না, ভাব প্রকাশের ক্ষমতা বা প্রকাশের আগ্রহ কমে যাচ্ছে?

যা হোক, এ বছর পত্রিকার ছাত্র-সম্পাদক ও প্রকাশন সচিব রচনার মান বজায় রাখার জন্য চেষ্টা করেছে। এ বিষয়ে তারা মাঝে মাঝে ভারপ্রাপ্ত অধ্যাপকদের পরামর্শও গ্রহণ করেছে। এর ফলে যদি পত্রিকার পাঠযোগ্যতা সামান্য পরিমাণেও বৃদ্ধি পেয়ে থাকে তবে আমরা সুখী হব।

এ বছর প্রেসিডেন্সির কিছু প্রাক্তন ছাত্রের জন্মশতবার্ষিকী পালিত হয়েছে বা হতে চলেছে যাঁরা উত্তর জীবনে খ্যাতনামা বিজ্ঞানী বা মনীষী হয়ে উঠেছিলেন। এঁদের মধ্যে অধ্যাপক সত্যেন্দ্রনাথ বসু, মেঘনাদ সাহা, প্রশান্তচন্দ্র মহলানবিশ, হেমচন্দ্র রায় চৌধুরী, সুনীতিকুমার চট্টোপাধ্যায় প্রমুখ কয়েকজনের নাম বিশেষভাবে উল্লেখ্য। আগামী সংখ্যার সম্পাদকরা এঁদের নিয়ে আলোচনা পত্রিকায় রাখতে সক্ষম হবে বলে আশা করছি।

ভোগবাদের প্রাবল্যে মানুষ একদিকে বলছে, 'নাগ্নে সুখমস্তি, ভূমৈব সুখম্', অন্যদিকে হিংসা, ঘৃণা, সাম্প্রদায়িকতার বিষবাস্প পৃথিবীকে মনুষ্যবাসের অযোগ্য করে তুলছে। কীভাবে জীবনের মহত্তর তাৎপর্য খুঁজে পাওয়া যায়, পৃথিবীকে আরও বাসযোগ্য করা যায় — এসব নানা বিষয়ে প্রেসিডেন্সির ছাত্রছাত্রীরা ভাবনা-চিন্তা করবে এবং কলেজ পত্রিকার পাতায় সে ভাবনা-চিন্তার প্রতিফলন ঘটবে এমন আশা নিয়েই আমাদের বক্তব্য শেষ করছি।

অশোক মুস্তাফি  
অতীন্দ্রমোহন গুণ

আবার ডিসেম্বর মাস।

কলেজ ম্যাগাজিন প্রকাশিত হচ্ছে, — প্রকাশকের কলম লেখার জন্য বসেছি .....

এখনও গভীর রাতে ক্লাস্ত, শীতার্ভ মানুষের নিশ্বাসে গত ডিসেম্বরের দাঙ্গার নিঃশব্দ চিৎকার.....

আর সদ্য অতীতে—

পাড়ায় পাড়ায় অসাম্প্রদায়িক পূজোর হৈ চৈ

হিন্দীবলয়ে ইলেকশান

কাশ্মীর আবার সংবাদ শিরোনামে

শিরোনাম কেড়েছে, আরও অনেক কিছুই —

নর্মদা, ওপেন মার্কেট, গ্লোবলাইজেশান, ফ্রি ট্রেড জোন ইত্যাকার আনন্দ সংবাদ....

আর

ঠাণ্ডা লড়াই-এর নতুন পক্ষদ্বয়, পেপসি — কোকাকোলা —

এমন কি সমাজকল্যাণে মাল্টিন্যাশনালদের বাড়িয়ে দেওয়া হাতও।

এইতো শুনলাম — গত ডিসেম্বরের মত এবারেও ভূকম্প-দুর্গতদের পাশে দাঁড়াচ্ছে কলেজের ছাত্র-ছাত্রীরা

— রক মিউজিক আর ফ্যাসান শো'র পসরা নিয়ে। আছি আমরা, আছি — প্রগতির পথেই!!

দেখ না আজকের হাইটেক-এর যুগের সঙ্গে তাল রেখে আমরাও কলেজ পত্রিকা ছাপাচ্ছি অফসেট-

এ। প্রতি কপির খরচ পড়ছে প্রায় ১৮ টাকা — কলেজের ১৭৫ বছরের ইতিহাসে প্র-থ-ম। ( দামটা জানালাম — এই আশায় যে গতবারের মত পত্রিকার কপি কলেজের লানে গড়াগড়ি যাবে না। )

কলেজ পত্রিকাকে কেন্দ্র করে উৎসাহের অভাব, — লেখা যোগাড়ের জন্য ভিক্ষাবৃত্তি — এসব উল্লেখ করা বাহুল্য। বলা ভালো যে, আমরা কিছু লেখা পেয়েছি — যারা সত্যিই কিছু বলতে বা লিখতে চায় — এখনো ! তাই সাজিয়ে তুলে ধরলাম — জানিনা মার্কেটে চলবে কিনা !

নাঃ ! লেখাটা কিছুতেই ঠিক প্রকাশনা-সচিবের কলমের মত হয়ে উঠছে না — ঠিক অবয়ব পাচ্ছে না কিছুতেই। কোন কিছুই কি অবয়ব পাচ্ছে — আজ, — আমাদের চারপাশে....

লাইনগুলো ভাঙছে -- শব্দগুলোও....

ডিসেম্বরের হিম কুয়াশা আবার ঢুকে পড়ছে, দরজা-জানলা দিয়ে....

বাইরে শিশিরে ভিজে গেছে ঘাস....

পাশের বাড়ীতে সদ্যোজাত শিশুর কান্না.....

সঞ্জয় চক্রবর্তী  
প্রকাশনা সচিব

## সম্পাদকীয়

ঘড়িটা আবার চলতে শুরু করেছে। শোনা গেছে যে ঘড়িটা চালু করতে বেশ কিছু টাকা খরচা হয়েছে। কলেজের বয়স হলো একশ-পঁচাত্তর, অতএব ঢালাও অনুষ্ঠানের আয়োজন করা হলো। রাষ্ট্রপতি এলেন, বড় বড় শিল্পীরা এলেন। আমরাও আহ্বাদে আটখানা হলাম। গর্বে বুক ফুলে উঠল। এই সব করতে গিয়ে কয়েক লক্ষ টাকা খরচা হলো। তা হোক টাকা তো জনগণের, আমরা ভেবে কি করবো? দাঙ্গায় প্রচুর ক্ষয়ক্ষতি হয়েছে কলেজের চারপাশের লোকদের, তাই বলে আমরা কি উৎসব বন্ধ করবো? অবশ্যই নয়। বহু লক্ষ টাকা থেকে এক লক্ষ টাকা অসহায় মানুষের সাহায্যার্থে কি আমাদের ব্যায় করা উচিত ছিল? অবশ্যই নয়। আমরা গজদস্তমিনারের বাসিন্দা। এইসব আলতু-ফালতু ব্যাপার নিয়ে আমাদের চিন্তা করা উচিত নয়।

কলেজের গ্রন্থাগারের অবস্থা দেখলে কলেজের রোগটি ধরা পড়ে। গ্রন্থাগারে বইয়ের অভাব নেই, কিন্তু ঠিক মত ক্যাটালগ নেই। কোন বইটি কনফাইনড, কোন বইটি পাওয়া যাবে তা বোঝার উপায় নেই। সকাল দশটায় বইয়ের জন্য স্লিপ জমা দিলে বই পাওয়া যাবে দুপুর একটার পরে। তাও ভাগ্য ভালো থাকলে। যথেষ্ট পরিমাণে আলো হাওয়া নেই। বিশেষ দিনের বিশেষ সময়ে এসে কার্ড না করলে কার্ড হবে না। অথচ টাকার অভাব নেই, লোকবলেরও অভাব নেই। অভাব শুধু আন্তরিকতার। ইচ্ছে করলেই গ্রন্থাগার দুটিকে সুন্দর ভাবে সাজিয়ে তোলা যায়, কতগুলো অদ্ভুত নিয়ম বদলে ফেলা যায়। কিন্তু বদলাবে কে? গ্রন্থাগার দুটি আমাদের কলেজের ঐতিহ্যের অঙ্গ, যারা কলেজকে ভালোবাসে তাদের দায়িত্ব নয় কি গ্রন্থাগারদুটিকে রক্ষা করার?

অনেক কষ্ট করে আমাদের কলেজের আরেক ঐতিহ্য, কলেজ ম্যাগাজিনটি বাঁচিয়ে রাখা গেল। শুধু তাই নয়, গত কয়েক বছরের পত্রিকার চেয়ে অনেক উন্নত মানের একটি পত্রিকা বার করা হলো। প্রথম প্রথম খুব বেশী লেখা না পেলেও পরে পেয়েছি। অবশ্য বিজ্ঞান-সংক্রান্ত লেখা একটাও পাওয়া যায় নি। বেশ কিছু বিজ্ঞাপনও জোগাড় করা গেছে। যারা বিজ্ঞাপন যোগাড় করেছে এবং যারা বিজ্ঞাপন দিয়েছেন তাঁদের ধন্যবাদ। ধন্যবাদ শাস্ত্রের ঘোষকে, যার সাহায্য ছাড়া বোধহয় শেষ পর্যন্ত পত্রিকাটি প্রকাশিত হতো না। নিজেদের মধ্যে অনেক তর্ক-বিতর্ক হয়েছে, তবু একটা লড়াকু মনোভাব ছিল, তাই শেষ পর্যন্ত পত্রিকাটি প্রকাশিত হলো। এই মনোভাবটা আশা করি ভবিষ্যতের ছাত্র-ছাত্রীদের মধ্যেও থাকবে। 'প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজ আজ অতীতের ছায়া' — এই অপমানের হাত থেকে মুক্তি পাওয়া অন্যথা সম্ভব নয়। ঘড়ির কাঁটা ঘুরছে। আশা করছি সময় এগিয়ে যাবে আলোর দিকে।

মেবরাজ ভট্টাচার্য



## **EDITORIAL**

What a long strange trip it has been : after traversing and stumbling across various obstacles, assorted deliberations, re-writing and re-editing, the Presidency College Magazine 92-93 has finally been published, or to be more precise – at the time of writing is going to be published.

It is strange that the college magazine of the premier educational institution of the country – and I speak in terms of history – has evoked such little enthusiasm on the part of its students, on whose behalf and for whom, it is published.

Presidency College, in its concrete manifestation ; which is not the monolith and its hallowed portals but its students, has become dated, somewhat jaded. Through its innards, the long musty corridors no longer flow new ideas or pertinent thought but simply passive, inert students without commitment for whom reality is embossed on T-shirt proclaiming 'PRESIDENCY'. But reality, all that is real in case of this college, cannot simply be painted on to a T-shirt. It cannot be cleaved apart from its geographical and periodic social milieu – Calcutta and its College Street. Reality in stark form is ensconced a step away from the college gate, in College Street : in its bookshops, beggars, traffic jams and processions even what with the lure of IIM's and IAS and the new avatar JNU withstanding. These are indeed turbulent times. Honesty, sincerity, secularism stalk the razors edge. Future meaningful life, I believe, is going to be in terms of these three years of culling knowledge, not pedantic, but of broadening of one's horizons and comprehension of relevant reality.

In this necessarily embittered editorial, I draw upon my hapless experience as the Editor of the Magazine to bring things into perspective and to criticize. The Presidency College Magazine is supposed to be an organic entity, a pastiche reflecting the views and ideas of 'elite' students : future teachers, scholars, bureaucrats, journalists, administrators et al. Open any old copy of the college magazine, notice the names of its contributors, and you will know.

I am confident enough to believe that we are justified to feel proud of being students of this college, the reason being that people still listen to us. Newspapers still report the reasons for, and the outcome of a general body meeting of the Union. We still matter, but for how long ?

It is time to take a stand, it is time to exorcize the zeitgeist. To stop this magnificent giant from eroding into the dust, a discontinuance of contrived affections, petulant traditions and anachronistic pretensions is necessary on part of the entire college community.

As the worried Editor of the College Magazine, I approach the present Union leadership with certain suggestions with regard to future publications. The College Magazine is not a transient annual event, that work on it be started at the instant of its publication. A Publication Committee should be formed at the time the new Union Council assumes leadership. Collection of articles and accumulation of funds should be an ongoing process, the responsibility of which should be vested in this committee so that at the end of the academic year a 'quality' magazine can be published. Participation of Professors as contributors in its truest sense would be most welcome.

I thank all the contributors to this magazine, and Saswata Ghosh, without whose help it would have been difficult to publish this Magazine.

I must thank the advertisers for their kind patronage which has permitted the Magazine 'to go off set', a first in its history.

**Pathikrit Sengupta**

## ***Past Editors & Secretaries***

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>EDITORS</b>	<b>SECRETARIES</b>
1914-15	Pramatha Nath Banerjee	Jogesh Chandra Chakravarti
1915-17	Mohit Kumar Sen Gupta	Prafulla Kumar Sircar
1917-18	Saroj Kumar Das	Ramaprasad Mukhopadhyay
1918-19	Amiya Kumar Sen	Mahmood Hasan
1919-20	Mahmood Hasan	Paran Chandra Gangooli
1920-21	Phiroze E. Dastoor	Shyama Prasad Mookerjee
1921-22	Shyama Prasad Mookerjee	Bimal Kumar Bhattacharya
	Barajakanta Guha	Uma Prasad Mookerjee
1922-23	Uma Prasad Mookerjee	Akshay Kumar Sarkar
1923-24	Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta	Bimala Prasad Mukherjee
1924-25	Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta	Bijoy Lal Lahiri
1925-26	Asit K. Mukherjee	
1926-27	Humayun Kabir	Lokesh Chandra Guha Roy
1927-28	Hirendranath Mukherjee	Sunit Kumar Indra
1928-29	Sunit Kumar Indra	Syed Mahbub Murshed
1929-30	Tarakanath Sen	Ajit Nath Roy
1930-31	Bhabatosh Dutta	Ajit Nath Roy
1931-32	Ajit Nath Roy	Nirmal Kumar Bhattacharjee
1932-33	Sachindra Kumar Majumdar	Nirmal Kumar Bhattacharjee
1933-34	Nikhilnath Chakravarty	Girindra Nath Chakravarti
1934-35	Ardhendu Bakshi	Suddir Kumar Ghosh
1935-36	Kalidas Lahiri	Prabhat Kumar Sircar
1936-37	Asok Mitra	Arun Kumar Chandra
1937-38	Bimal Chandra Sinha	Ram Chandra Mukherjee

1938-39	Pratap Chandra Sen Nirmal Chandra Sen Gupta	Abu Sayeed Chowdhury
1939-40	A. Q. M. Mahiuddin	Bimal Chandra Dutta
1940-41	Manilal Banerjee	Prabhat Prasun Modak
1941-42	Arun Banerjee	Golam Karim
1942-46	No Publication	
1947-48	Sudhindranath Gupta	Nirmal Kumar Sarkar
1948-49	Subir Kumar Sen	Bangendu Gangopadhyay
1949-50	Dilip Kumar Kar	Sourindra Mohan Chakravarti
1950-51	Kamal Kumar Ghatak	Manas Mukutmani
1951-52	Sipra Sarkar	Kalyan Kumar Das Gupta
1952-53	Arun Kumar Das Gupta	Jyotirmoy Pal Chaudhuri
1953-54	Ashin Ranjan Das Gupta	Pradip Das
1954-55	Sukhamoy Chakravarty	Pradip Ranjan Sarbadhikari
1955-56	Amiya Kumar Sen	Devendra Nath Banerjee
1956-57	Ashok Kumar Chatterjee	Subal Das Gupta
1957-58	Asoke Sanjay Guha	Debaki Nandan Mondal
1958-59	Ketaki Kushari	Tapan Kumar Lahiri
1959-60	Gayatri Chakravarty	Rupendra Majumdar
1960-61	Tapan Kumar Chakravarty	Ashim Chatterjee
1961-62	Gautam Chakravarty	Ajoy Kumar Banerjee
1962-63	Badal Mukherji Mihir Bhattacharya	Alok Kumar Mukherjee
1963-64	Pranab Kumar Chatterjee	Pritis Nandy
1964-65	Subhas Basu	Biswanath Maity
1965-66	No Publication	
1966-67	Sanjay Kshetry	Gautam Bhadra
1967-68	No Publication	
1968-69	Abhijit Sen	Rebanta Ghosh
1969-72	No Publication	

1972-73	Anup Kumar Sinha	Rudrangshu Mukherjee
1973-74	Rudrangshu Mukherjee	Swapan Chakravarty
1974-75	Swapan Chakravarty	Suranjan Das
1975-76	Shankar Nath Sen	
1976-77		No Publication
1977-78	Sugata Bose	Paramita Banerjee
	Gautam Basu	
1978-81		No Publication
1981-82	Debasis Banerjee	Banya Datta
	Somak Ray Chaudhury	
1982-83		No Publication
1983-84	Sudipta Sen	Subrata Sen
	Bishnupriya Ghosh	
1985-86	Brinda Bose	Chandreyee Niyogi
	Anjan Guhathakurta	
1986-87	Subha Mukherjee	Jayita Ghosh
	Apurba Saha	
1987-88		No Publication
1988-89	Anindya Dutta	
	Suddhasatwa Bandyopadhyay	Sanchita Bhowmick
1989-90	Abheek Barman	
	Amitendu Palit	Debashish Das
	Adrish Biswas	
1990-91		Pratik Mitra
	Jayanta Ray	
	Shiladitya Sarkar	Jt. Publication
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# VIETNAM : LOOK BACK IN ANGER

*When there are no more bombs,  
Shall you let me go up on earth again?  
Why do you keep asking; little one....  
I want to see the uncles and aunts I loved,  
Are they still fighting Mama?  
I want to see the yankee,  
Mama, does it look like a human being*

— A vietnamese soldier-poet.

## Prologue

**2**0 years ago from now that is about when most of us in the college were born, the last batch of the American soldiers left Da Nang and Saigon, Vietnam. The date was March 29, 1973.

Thus came to an end the most shameful, but also the most glorious chapter in the contemporary world history. A chapter characterised by barbaric and inhuman violence on an unprecedented scale, a war of attrition waged by the mightiest and the richest nation of the world against the people of a tiny country, — Vietnam.

But that March morning the American soldiers who were stepping into their ships and aircrafts, formed the last batch of a defeated army, totally vanquished. It was not Vietnam that was '**brought to its knees**' as was the much publicised American policy, it was USA, with all its economic, military and technological superiority that was brought to its knees by the people of that tiny country whose ultimate weapon was patriotism.

Today the global scenario is very differ-

*In this post-cold war era of unabashed U.S. imperialism, Sharan Ghatak, third year student of sociology, remembers Vietnam.*

ent from what it was 20 years ago. In the changed scenario U.S.A has already assumed the role of the 'peace-keeper' in the world, openly bullying other nations to total submission to its military, economic and technological hegemony. In such a situation, it is relevant and important to look back into the history of Vietnam. The lesson of Vietnam can provide courage to the people of those nations of the world who have to

stand up and retaliate against the American onslaught, sooner or later.

## The End of the French Colonial Rule in Indo-China

The people of Vietnam have a long history of struggle against foreign domination. Colonised by the French in the last century, the struggle of the Vietnamese reached a new height when the Communist Party of Vietnam was established in 1930. Among those who took the lead was Nguyen Tat Thanh, better known as Ho Chi Minh. A wave of peasant insurrections and workers strikes flared

up. Massive repression by France followed, including bombing raids.

During the second World War the struggle received a new impetus. In May 1941, Ho Chi Minh announced the formation of VietMinh, the league for the independence of Vietnam. The National Salvation Army was also formed during this time. Vietnam was under de-facto Japanese occupation at this time and Vietnamese communists waged a continuous guerrilla war against the Japanese occupation forces.

In March 1945, Japan ended the de-jure French rule and established Bao Dai as the emperor of Vietnam. But in a few months time, in August 1945, as Japan surrendered Ho Chi Minh declared independence. But within a short while, the British and the American actively collaborated to reinstall the colonial French rule in Vietnam. The people of Vietnam who had tasted independence for a short while, prepared themselves for another war. It was only after three decades of continuous struggle and bloodbath the Vietnamese finally gained independence.

The Second Indo-China War (1946-54) lasted for 9 years, culminating in Viet-Minh victory at Dien Bien Phu (May, 1954). At Dien Bien Phu, general Vo Nguyen Giap's peasant army defeated a contingent of 20,000 elite French paratroopers. The US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles generously offered nuclear weapons — for 'burning the red termites off' — to the French. The French Govt. declined as it would have wiped out their soldiers too. The news of Dien Bien Phu deeply traumatized the Western ruling class but in Paris Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir openly celebrated the Vietnamese victory.

In the Geneva Conference [July, 1954] ceasefire was declared. The country was temporarily divided into two military zones in

the north and south of 17 degrees parallel. The VietMinh was offered the north since they already controlled that area. In the south, it was decided that 'free general election by secret ballot' was to be held in July 1956, under the supervision of the International Control Commission to decide its future.

### **American Subversion Begins**

Covert American Subversion of the Geneva Agreement began simultaneously with final signing. The American policy makers knew that if free and fair elections were held then most of the people in the south would vote for the Vietminh. America was determined to prevent this. President Eisenhower openly declared as early as August 4, 1953 that U.S.A could not afford to lose the area because of the rich resources of tin and tungsten. Also, USA could not afford to let the whole Vietnamese people to vote for the communists, which was a certainty.

The man who was to play a crucial role in the American design was chosen years ago - Ngo Dinh Diem. A staunch anti-communist nationalist, Diem was taken to USA in 1952 and groomed for 3 years for this purpose. In 1954 he was sent back to Saigon in South Vietnam. His goal was not to allow any elections for reunification. Between 1955-56, with American help, Diem established his control over Saigon and rejected the Geneva Agreement about elections. In total disregard of the Geneva Accord, he declared the southern parts of Vietnam a republic and installed himself as the president of the country — after holding a sham election with the aid of American advisors. Out of 450,000 voters in Saigon, 605,025 voted for him!

### **Diem's Reign of Terror**

With direct American support, Diem unleashed a reign of terror in South Vietnam.



Guided by American military advisors, Diem's immediate task was to crush the 'red devils' once for all. Thousands of people were arrested tortured and killed. In this task Diem was ably aided by the landlords and their agents.

In 1957 Diem went to USA on a visit and was given a warm welcome by the Eisenhower administration. He was hailed as the Asian liberator by New York Times. Diem returned with promises of massive military aid.

In 1959, the National Liberation Front (NLF) was formed in South Vietnam against Diem and his sponsors. In no time they began to control the countryside — such was the love of the common people for them.

### Escalation Begins

The anti-people policy of the Diem Govt., its ruthless repression of the common people only strengthened the resolve of the people to fight for liberation. The NLF was spreading its influence in the urban areas also.

It is around this time the American involvement began to escalate as can be seen from this following table:

US Military Personnel in Vietnam	
Year	Number
1960	900
1961	3000
1962	11,000
1963	16,000
1964	23,000
1965	184,300
1966	362,000
1967	485,000
1968	535,100
1969	475,200
1970	334,600
1971	156,800
1972	24,200
March 29, 1973	0

[Source : The Vietnam Wars (1945-1990)- M.B. Young, NY, 1991].

The initial phase of escalation was initiated by the liberal and youthful President — J.F. Kennedy. Massive amount of armaments were given to Diem's army. The Americans were fully involved in the war now — 13000 miles away from Washington!

From the supposed American aim to suppress the revolution in South Vietnam, it became an all out war against the people of Vietnam, north and south. American military advisors and personnel started taking direct part in actions. Repression of the Vietnamese people started in an unprecedented scale. Under the 'hamlet programme', thousands of people were uprooted from their houses and installed in guarded areas.

People's agitation against Diem and Americans also began to escalate. So much so, that at one point of time Diem himself realized that he needed to change his policies. In August 1967 Diem agreed to a French proposal of peace that amounted to a virtual acceptance of the Geneva accord of 1954.

The American administration became panicky and realized that Diem's usefulness was over. On November 1, 1963 in a CIA sponsored coup of South Vietnamese army generals, Diem and his brother were killed. The CIA file for the killing, was cleared by President Kennedy himself as published documents now show. In a few days time Kennedy himself was assassinated and Lyndon B. Johnson took over as the President of USA. The escalation of the involvement of US military personnel began in an unprecedented scale. The bombing of North Vietnam started in 1964.

### A Genocide

The Americans, with the scar of Korea and Cuba still fresh in their mind did not want

to take any risk in Vietnam. An example was to be set — an example of how America can stop the socialist revolution anywhere in the world. The American forces got the message clearly. They would destroy the VietCong even at the cost of wiping the Vietnamese from the face of the earth.

In the Vietnamese war, America used every type of weapon from its lethal arsenal, save the nuclear arms. Vietnam became the testing ground for American weapons of mass destruction. Vietnam was bombed day and night. Napalm (a lethal incendiary bomb which burns everything on contact) was used indiscriminately; even civilian targets such as hospitals and schools were not spared. The horror of these bombing attacks is expressed in a poem by Bryan A. Floyd, himself an American veteran of the Vietnam war —

*....The jets would come in, low and terrible, sweeping down and screaming, in their first pass over the village. Then they would return, dropping their first bombs, that flattened the huts to rubble and debris. And then they would sweep back again and drop more bombs that blew the rubble and debris to dust ashes. And then the jets would come back once again in a last pass, this time to drop napalm that burned the dust and ashes to just nothing. Then the village that was not a village any more was our village.*

A soldier, private first class, Reginald 'Malik' Edwards revealed later on, that they were ordered to 'level' a village if even a single shot was fired from it towards their helicopter. Another soldier writing home, related an incident about how they launched grenades at a hut, full of children.

In addition to napalm, white phosphorus and cluster bombs were widely used by the American forces. White phosphorus bombs were more suitable to the American purposes than the napalm which could be scraped off

from the body. So polystyrene was added so that the flames stuck to the body burning the skin and flesh right down to the bones. It even burned under water. The cluster bombs, (the Vietnamese called it 'bombi' or 'mother bomb') exploded in the mid-air releasing 350 to 600 small bombs. When these hit the ground, each one exploded into thousands of metal pellets. Later, fiberglass pellets were introduced as they were invisible to the x-ray and thus harder and more painful to remove. It was not a war — it was a genocide!

American soldiers were systematically taught that the 'gook' (G.I. Slang for the Vietnamese) were simply not human, so killing them was not murder but rather a form of pest-control. The general attitude of the American soldier is well summed up in a army marching cadence:

'I wanna go to Vietnam  
I wanna kill a Viet Cong  
With a knife or with a gun  
Either way it will be good fun....'

Probably the best example of the barbaric way America fought the war was the 'My Lai Massacre'. One day in March 1968, a platoon of American soldiers entered the village of My Lai, South Vietnam, and cold bloodedly killed the entire population of the village, raping the women before murdering them. The village was mostly inhabited by oldmen, women and children (since most of the young men were at war) and not a single shot was fired at the approaching platoon. The army systematically covered the whole thing up. Some soldiers later testified that the incidence was not unique but rather common place to the way America fought the war.

Despite all their military and technological superiority the Americans were fighting a losing battle. The NLF was gaining ground consistently, forcing the US army to a slow but steady retreat. The third world David was

winning over the mighty American Goliath. This eventually led to the American evacuation (1973) and ultimately the fall of Saigon (1975). Though lacking in arms and ammunition the Vietnamese had something which made them victorious — morale and patriotism. They were fighting for their own country, their own people where as the Americans were hired to fight. In Vietnam except some mercenaries and ‘Quislings’ the whole country rallied behind the Communist Party and its leader Ho Chi Minh. Herbert Aptheker, on a deputation to Vietnam, saw how the Vietnamese women ‘manned’ the factories and other essential services, while the men folk were fighting in the war. Tariq Ali, visiting Vietnam in 1967, writes how children (aged between 5 to 9) grumbled a lot to their teacher for not being allowed to help the militia.

### **War against the War**

The American invasion of Vietnam gave rise to a great protest movement against the war, across the world. The student community took to the streets and expressed their solidarity with the national liberation movement in Vietnam. From Calcutta to London, the streets resounded with slogans like ‘Tomar naam, amar naam, Vietnam, Vietnam’ and ‘Win, win, Ho Chi Minh’. Demonstrations, often quite violent, outside the US Embassies became commonplace. In Britain the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign was formed to promote public resistance against the US policy of war and to mobilize support for Vietnamese struggle. The American aggression in Vietnam was unanimously condemned by all the progressive forces in the world.

The anti-war movement was also gaining momentum in America itself. This is probably for the first time in its history, the general public of a country engaged in war, came up

so strongly against the war. In April 1967, at least 400,000 protesters led by the radical pacifist A.J. Muste marched on the streets of New York demonstrating against the war. On the same day 75,000 anti-war demonstrators marched in San Francisco. One feature of the New York march was the public burning of draft cards, (conscription cards) that began in Boston 1964. Throughout 1968, 1969 and 1970 raids against the draft boards multiplied. The present President of U.S.A. is also supposed to have participated in anti-war demonstrations during his stay at Oxford. Yet it is the same Bill Clinton who ordered the recent bombings in Iraq.

The black America revolted against the war. Martin Luther King Jr. declared that the war in Vietnam was damnig the soul of America and would continue to do so for as long as the United States ‘destroys the deepest hope of men the world over’. Radical black groups raised the slogan, ‘The VietCong never called us nigger’, calling the brotherhood to fight the real enemy. Tariq Ali writes about two black American G.I.s, both Vietnam veterans, sang a song, commonplace in America those days, at the Vietnam Congress in Berlin (1968) —

‘I ain’t gonna go to Vietnam  
Because Vietnam is where I am  
Hell no! I ain’t gonna go!  
Hell no! I ain’t gonna go!’

Muhammed Ali, World heavyweight boxing champion, refused to serve in this ‘white man’s war’ and was deprived of his championship by the World Boxing Association. In the fall of 1967, a booklet titled ‘Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority’, was published by a group of anti-war activists, inviting the ‘young men of america’ to refuse to serve in an ‘illegal, immoral and unconstitutional war’. The mightiest military power was being defeated both in the paddy fields of Vietnam and their homeland.

## **Peoples' Victory**

In January 1968, the NLF and the North Vietnamese army struck a stunning blow to the Americans and the South Vietnamese army. In a reverse escalation simultaneously attacked 5 of the 6 largest cities of South Vietnam, 36 of the 44 provincial capitals and a large number of district towns. The city of saigon, the US Embassy there, were all attacked in a Vieions counter offensive. In this offensive, known as the 'Tet Offensive' nearly 6000 US soldiers were killed in the city of Hue alone. The primary objective of the Tet offensive was to show the extent of the popular support that the NLF enjoyed.

*American reinforcement reached its peak during this period, but the end was nearing. In 1969, Ho Chi Minh died. The Americans and forces of the puppet South Vietnamese Govt. was being forced to a bloody retreat. In 1972 Hanoi (Capital of North Vietnam) launched the 'spring offensive'. The American administration was forced to concede that the war could not be won and thereby decided to quit Vietnam. In March 1973, the last American soldiers left Vietnam. Ultimately in april 1975, the victorious army of the NLF occupied Saigon forcing the puppet South Vietnamese regime to surrender. Finally, after*

decades of struggle, Vietnam was independent and unified.

## **Epilogue**

When Germany surrendered in 1945, at the end of the second World War, the allied forced tried the nazi war-criminals in Nuremburg. Many of them were executed and others sentenced to life imprisonment for their 'crimes against humanity'. But no such thing happended to those Americans who committed worse crimes against the Vietnamese. They went scot free. Is this what democracy and freedom stands for? The war in Vietnam revealed the bankruptcy and hypocrisy of the so called liberal democracies all over the world. I shall end with the of ten quoted, but seldom understood saying of George Santayana, 'those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it.' A rather pessimistic ending though!

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## ARTHUR – THE CONCEPT OF KINGSHIP

King Arthur occupies the place of honour in the national mythology of Britain. He is the exemplar of ideal kingship. Different works of literature about Arthur show the development in the concept of the ideal king. The change in this ideal can be seen if one considers the delineation of Arthur in three different works of literature. These are Sir Thomas Malory's prose romance *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485), Tennyson's twelve blank verse poems *Idylls of the King* (1885) and T.H. White's quartet of Arthurian novels *The Once and Future King* (1958).

*Morte d'Arthur* is a compilation of various French prose romances dealing with Arthurian legends. Writing in the latter half of fifteenth century against the backdrop of the War of the Roses and the gradual breakdown of medieval chivalry, Malory's perception of Arthur's age was shaped by these two concerns of his own age. Arthur preserves his country from civil war and frees it from Roman overlordship as well as establishing a stable order of chivalry and justice, as symbolized by his establishment of the Round Table.

Malory's romance is entitled 'The death of Arthur.' The brisk succession of wars, tournaments, quests and lovemaking lies within the framework of the personal tragedy of Arthur. Arthur's incest with his sister Morgause and his attempt to kill the son born of this union are directly responsible for his fate.

*Sayoni Basu, an ex-student of the English department, now in Oxford, in this article discusses the delineation of King Arthur in three different works of literature and shows how the change in the perception of Arthur reflected the change in the society itself.*

The presence of an unavoidable doom hovers over the romance. Merlin warns Arthur that his son Modred 'shall be the destruction of all this realm' and that 'Guenever was not wholesome for him to take to wife, for... Launcelot should love her and she him again'. The medieval belief in the unchangeability of one's destiny and the wheel of fortune is perhaps the reason for what seems to one the heroic Arthur's strangely passive

acceptance of his fate.

The multiple sources from which Malory derived his material combine to create certain internal contradictions in the character of Arthur. On the one hand 'the king had a deeming' about Guenever's adultery and is 'full loath thereto, that any noise should be upon Sir Launcelot and his queen.' On the other hand, after Launcelot is discovered in the queen's chamber and Gawaine counsels Arthur not to be 'overhasty' suggesting various innocent reasons to explain Launcelot's presence, Arthur is resolute in his decision to sentence Guenever to be burnt at stake. He resolves not to give the queen the chance to defend herself for Sir Launcelot 'trusteth so much upon his hands and his might that he doubteth no man, and therefore for my queen he shall fight never more for she shall have the law.' Guenever is accused of causing the death of thirteen knights and hence is to be punished. In actual fact, as Gawaine points

out, 'they are the causers of their death.' The traditional hero of the epic takes on the burden of the guilt of the community. Arthur casts Guenever as the sacrificial figure to prevent fulfilment of Gawaine's prediction that because of Arthur permitting Modred and Agravaire to carry out their plan 'the fellowship of the Round Table shall be disparply.' Saving the Round Table is more important to Arthur 'for queens I might have enow but such a fellowship of good knights shall never be together in no company.'

Arthur's dilemma, like Rama in the Ramayana, lies in the relationship of public life and private life. Rama has to agree to repeated tests of his wife's chastity after her captivity in Lanka because as a king he has to be responsive to his subjects' wishes. However, his personal role as her husband demands that he should defend her. Malory clearly distinguishes between public life and private life. Sir Launcelot, despite his adulterous love for the queen, is the 'best knight' in the world, as is shown by his curing Urre's wounds which only the best knight could have done. Similarly, in spite of the Launcelot-Guenever relationship, Launcelot can publicly assert that the queen is innocent after the Pope sends his bulls to make peace between Arthur and Launcelot. Arthur distinguishes between the two when he allows the queen to be tried, though personally convinced of her innocence, after Sir Mador accuses her of poisoning his kinsman and thus the stability of the kingdom is not threatened. When he allows personal emotions to shape his decisions, as in his sentencing Guenever to death without a trial, the kingdom begins to disintegrate. For Malory, kingship means sacrifice of personal emotions.

In *Idylls of the King* Tennyson gives Arthur the one additional virtue not mentioned by Malory — stainless chastity. He thus elimi-

nates the crucial element of the personal tragedy of Arthur. By writing twelve separate poems, which are episodic in nature, he tries to reduce the contradictions in the character of Arthur. Arthur is seen as more than a suppressor of anarchy. Before him there were petty kings waging perpetual war as well as invading 'heathen hosts.' The land belonged to 'wild dog and wolf and boar and beast' and 'wolflike men' who were worse than beasts. Among them Arthur 'for a space ... made a realm and reign'd.' In *The Coming of Arthur* he asserts confidently that 'the old order changeth yielding place to new' and he repeats this desolately in *The Passing of Arthur*. After Arthur's death lies the darkly indeterminate future, as suggested by the progressive darkening of vision within the poem. His civilization can only 'for a space' hold back the resurgence of bestiality, though there is an implicit reassurance in the structure of the poem which corresponds to the cycle of the seasons. The cyclic structure implies it will renew itself, thus reinforcing Merlin's prophecy that Arthur 'should come again/ To rule once more.'

Arthur's Round Table is no mere chivalric order, Tennyson emphasizes its moral quality. The 'knights have heard / That God hath told the King a secret word.' 'The King will follow Christ, and we the King.' Arthur is seen as the moral arbiter who derives his power from the Round Table : 'Arthur and his knighthood ... Were all one will and thro' that strength the King / Drew in all the petty kingdoms.' His authority is absolute, the knights giving him 'uttermost obedience.' They seek to form themselves in the image of Arthur 'from eye to eye thro' all their Order flash / A momentary likeness of the King.' The relation between the king and his knights is not merely that of overlord and vassal, they 'reverence the King, as if he were / Their

conscience, and their conscience as their King.'

Arthur possesses god-like attributes in both Christian and non-Christian terms. He exemplifies Christian virtues like mercy, charity and chastity. He is Christ-like in his supernatural origin, as described by Bellicent and the novice in Almesbury, and in the promise of his return. His mission is to redeem civilization 'I waged His wars.' He speaks in the voice of Christ in his mercy 'Lo, I forgive thee, as Eternal God / Forgives' and in his suffering 'My God, thou hast foresaken me in my death.' Descriptions like 'Sun in heaven' and 'great Sun of Glory' are reminiscent of nature gods and emphasize Arthur's super-human qualities and absolute power.

Tennyson suggests no conflict between public life and private life as the end of both is seen in moral terms. The belief in the divine right and divine functions of kings, discredited in the seventeenth century, is reasserted. Tennyson emphasizes internal godliness and conscience which the nineteenth century was substituting for the seventeenth century divinity. Arthur embodies the highest ideals of both public and private aspects of life. Tennyson's Arthur is reminiscent of Spenser's Prince Arthur in the Faerie Queene who embodies all moral qualities and whose marriage to Gloriana symbolizes the union of moral virtues to state power. Tennyson's fusion of public life and private life is emphasized by the knights oath to equate the King and their conscience. Tennyson visualizes the Round Table as a moral hegemony, analogous to Carlyle's concept of the hero class and Arnold's concept of the intellectual elite.

As there is no distinction between public life and private life, Guenever's act becomes a violation of personal relationships as well as a crime against the state which results in 'sword and fire, / Red ruin and the breaking up of laws.' As Arthur has no flaws, Guenever's

adultery is shown as even more unforgivable, a perversity of the will arising from inability to appreciate her husband. 'He is all fault who hath no fault at all.' Her falseness is emphasized by young Arthur's deep longing for her, it is only with her that he will have 'power on this dead world to make it live.' But the Romantic appeal of the heroic young king is lost as he takes on the aura of divinity and becomes the 'highest creature' but despite Guenever's repentant assertion, not the 'most human.' The Romantic graces are transferred to Launcelot.

While adhering closely to the story of Morte d'Arthur, in *The Once and Future King* T.H. White emphasizes Arthur's human qualities. Mighty strength and grandeur of stature are replaced by simple goodness and honest endeavour. Arthur is a kind of Everyman and the story describes his rites of passage to become a noble king. Credit for his achievement is given to Merlin who teaches him how to think. Merlin's capacity to see the future is symptomatic of the inevitability of fate. Knowing his destiny and guilty about his youthful errors but striving to be worthy of his position in life, Arthur fulfils the modern concept of a hero. He is 'a plain man who has done his best.'

White infuses psychological interest into Malory's story and analyses the motives behind every action. Malory celebrates chivalry and valour. Using his story White turns its values inside out into an anti-war diatribe. Arthur realises that living by force is wrong and constitutes the Round Table to harness Might for Right. Yet this is inadequate and the search for the Holy Grail is constituted to inculcate moral values to his knights. Malory's Arthur is grieved at the quest: 'Ye have nigh slain me with the avow (to find the Grail) ... for ye have bereft me of the fairest fellowship ... that ever were seen together in any realm.'

White's Arthur is delighted as the quest will lead to the individual salvation of his knights. Only a few do achieve moral values and Arthur conceives the idea of impersonal justice: 'Right as a criterion of its own ... which did not lean upon power.' It is because of his deep belief the idea of impersonal justice, which does not make exceptions for even the queen, that Modred can force him to condemn her to be burnt at stake. Arthur knows and sympathises with Guenever's love for Launcelot. He is delighted when Launcelot rescues her. Arthur himself is aware of the dichotomy between public duty and private feeling. By logical development of character White avoids the contradictions inherent in Malory's Arthur and adds greater depth to the character of the king.

Arthur is unable to resolve the conflict of public and private interests. He does not see this as an impersonal problem but as some-

thing he deserves for his incest and attempt to drown Modred, 'When I was young I did something which was not just, and from it has sprung the misery of my life. Do you think you can stop the consequences of a bad action by doing good ones afterwards? I don't. I have been trying to stopper it down with good actions ever since but it goes on in widening circles.' He is torn between personal loyalty as a husband and his dedication to the abstract ideal of justice and his concept of duty. He is forced to accept that no reconciliation of the two is possible.

Arthur is an ideal king, Christian knight and hero. How this ideal is delineated in a particular work of literature is indicative of the value system and intellectual convictions of the age in which this work is written. The representation of Arthur in the three works considered shows the changes in the concept of ideal ruler and ideal man.





# BEHIND THE BATON

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD OF THE CONDUCTOR

Before I start on my article I would like to stress that I have tried to exclude wherever possible technical terms, for this essay has no more ambition than to provide the reader with an interesting introduction to the world of the conductor.

Entering a music shop's classical section in Calcutta, the purchaser is likely to be confronted with EMI's double cassette set of Beethoven's 9th symphony. Written in bold print the box cover proudly (if somewhat forbiddingly!) advertises its contents :

Beethoven : Symphony No. 9<sup>1</sup>

The Philadelphia Orchestra  
Conducted by Claudio Abbado.

To a sampler of classical music the name of the composer — Beethoven and the piece — his 9th symphony (arguably his greatest work) would be the obvious criteria for his decision to purchase the set. He would not think too much of the fact that it is played by the Philadelphia Orchestra. The name of the conductor — Claudio Abbado — however, could provide substance for further thought. For example, why should the cover of a piece by Beethoven have such an impressive portrait of a certain 'Claudio Abbado'? Followed by how important is the conductor with reference to the composer? In the ensuing paragraphs I have attempted to answer these queries.

Before I proceed any further I wish to give the reader an idea (albeit a rough one) of the position of the various instruments of the orchestra along with the conductor's podium. (see chart in next page)

Many individual conductors, however,

*Indranil Poddar, a first year student of M.A. in Modern History, introduces us to the fascinating world of Western Classical Music and the vital role the conductor plays in it.*

modified this arrangement. A good example is the Philharmonia Orchestra of London under Otto Klemperer (from 1959 to 1973) which had its woodwinds brought forward and the violins divided on both sides.

My next step is to provide the reader with a definition of a 'conductor'. The Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians gives us the following defini-

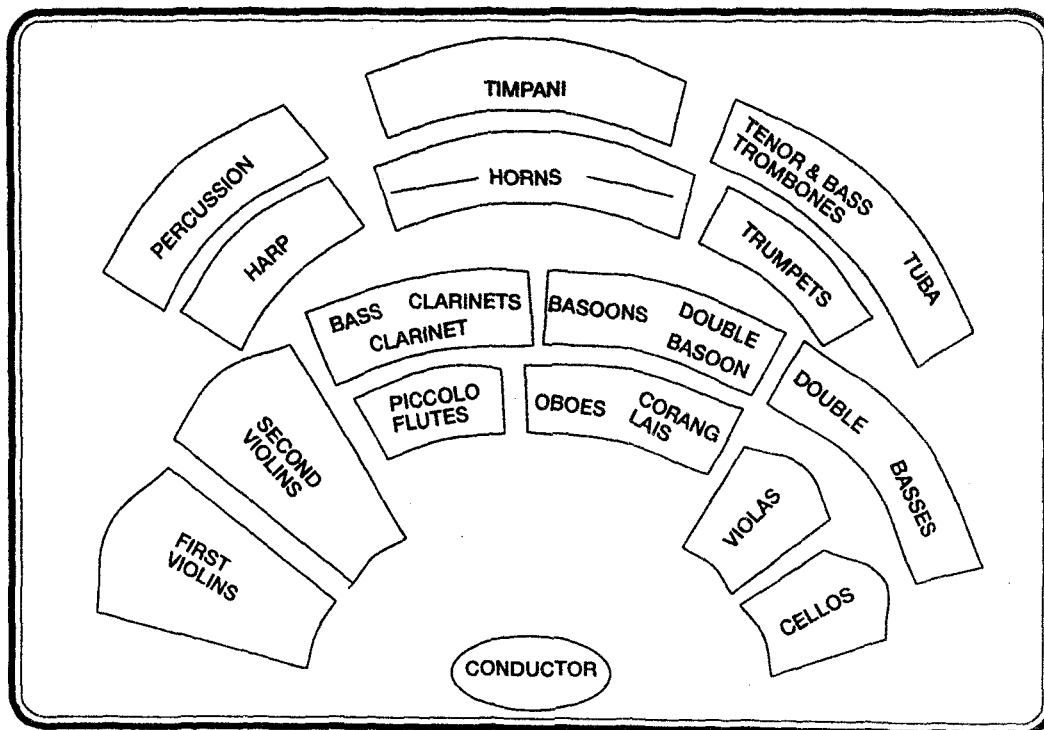
tion: 'The director of musical performance who by means of visible gestures tries to secure unanimity both of execution as well as interpretation.' The words 'unanimity both of execution and interpretation' here are extremely important. Until as late as 1820's the former aspect of conducting was considered the primary function of the conductor. Thus modern conducting is little more than a century old and though some sort of 'leading' was practiced previously it amounted to little more than the beating of time<sup>2</sup> to keep a body of musicians together. Although there is no definite evidence there must have been somebody beating time for a Greek choir. Horace must have been doing that for maidens and youths in Roman times, and no doubt there were some time beating among the troubadours (wandering minstrels) of the middle ages. From the Renaissance period onwards we find from paintings and sculptures the existence of a time-beater. He had several methods: waving of a handkerchief or a roll of paper or stamping down with a heavy staff. The 'audible' methods of time beating must have been rather disconcerting for the musicians and had their share of casualties. Ac-

According to a famous story Jean Baptiste Lully (1632-1687), court composer of Louis XIV, died after a particularly inspired performance when he accidentally stumped his time beating staff on his foot! Contemporary sources say that it went right through resulting in a fatal gangrenous wound.

For most of the 18th century few conductors worked together with the orchestra. One was the violinist who was in charge of the orchestra, the other, known as a conductor, was in charge of the rhythmic function from the key board<sup>3</sup>. This person set tempo (speed), orchestra and singers, beat time<sup>4</sup> with one or both hands when not busy providing melodies or harmonies and was expected to save the day when things went wrong. Naturally, with this division of command, confusion

commanding personality he would hold unquestioned authority. Johann Sebastian Bach, Handel, Gluck, Mozart and Haydn were all good conductors, the majority preferring to conduct from the keyboard. Infact, the genre of composer-conductor in this century foreshadowed events of the 19th century when most of the top conductors were composers and vice-versa, reaching its climax in Gustav Mahler (1860-1911).

Beethoven, who was the colossal giant with one foot in the classical world and the other in the Romantic, bridged the music of the two centuries but was for obvious reasons, a bad conductor. Due to his deafness Beethoven conducted 'within' his mind and after the first performance of the monumental 9th symphony he had to be 'shown' the



was a real danger. There were several striking exceptions, however, a strong minded composer would dictate terms to the orchestra. As a composer his musical credentials would have to be impeccable and if he had a

applause because the orchestra had finished playing while the composer was still conducting! As the contralto<sup>5</sup> Caroline Unger asked the maestro to turn around and receive the ovation the audience stood up with the

sudden realization that Beethoven could not hear a bar of the music played and the great master was appearing in public for the last time.

A contemporary of Beethoven, the composer Louis Spohr (1784-1859) is credited with the first use of a baton in a concert, having previously wielded a violin and a roll of paper. Both the paper roll and the baton had the advantage of silence in execution and 'why didn't we think of it before?' must have been the general reaction after the initial shock. This method proved so successful that Spohr wrote that since then no man was seen conducting from a piano and the triumph of the baton as a decisive time-beater was assured.

Spohr was followed by Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) and Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) among others, both of whom were excellent conductors, although with markedly different styles. Weber was a man of the theatre and most of his conducting was in the opera house. He was a hard taskmaster, demanding the highest standards in Prague and Dresden. Quiet and undemonstrative with a clear and precise beat, Weber reorganised the orchestra's position into something like the modern seating pattern. Mendelssohn's conducting had much the same characteristics as his music; a light but essentially classical touch of a firm person who believed in friendliness and teamwork. Unfortunately, both Weber and Mendelssohn did not enjoy long lives and it was left to Berlioz and Wagner to lay down the principles of conducting many of which are still valid.

By the middle of the 19th century conducting had come a long way from simple time beating. Words that are so common today, Solti's Wagner, Karajan's Beethoven, Toscanini's Brahms, came into vogue. The musical world began to accept the fact that there are more than one authentic way of interpreting music, each conductor's vision, being essentially his own view of the work and hence, unique.

In the late 19th century a new brigade of conductors appeared on the scene complementing the traditional composer-conductor. Hans von Bülow was probably the first of this breed, the virtuoso conductor, and during his lifetime (1830-1894) he trained several others to follow him, the most notable being Richard Strauss and Hans Richter (1843-1916). During his own lifetime Mahler's greatness as a conductor was unquestioned though most people thought his compositions a trifle neurotic to say the least. The purely interpretative conductors were beginning to dominate the scene by the turn of the century, Toscanini (1867-1957) being the greatest of them all. True, many of them like Felix Weingartner (1863-1942) and Otto Klemperer were also composers but they were exceptions and in any case their music has failed to establish itself in the permanent repertoire. From the time of von Bülow interpretative conducting has been on the rise and in this century has been raised to the level of a special art with a formal fundamental technique.

Now, fortified with a brief knowledge of the history of conducting I propose to guide the reader through the most important section of my essay, i.e. the art of modern conducting. Going back to the Groves Dictionary definition of the conductor, it is quite obvious that the fate of a particular piece of music lies in the hands of the conductor. His duty is to present to the listener the best aspects of the music, emphasizing its finer points, smoothing out the rough edges if any without spoiling the basic flow of music and keeping true (more or less) to the original 'text' In performing this Herculean task the conductor is concerned with three entities, namely the composer and his music, the particular ensemble of musicians (choral or orchestral) and his own character (both musical and general).

The composer is the first consideration of the conductor. As an interpreter he thoroughly studies the music of the composer :-

(a) He determines the mood of the music. This results from a combination of the rhythm,

melody, harmony, form, dynamics and general tone 'colour' of the composition.

(b) The style and the period in which the music was written is examined in detail along with a minute biography of the composer and comments of his contemporaries.

(c) He fathoms the real meaning and the emotional levels contained in the composition. After all, the composer's only means of communication is through a fixed set of symbols that can never convey fully the desires of the composer. The conductor thus, has to read between the lines.

(d) He studies and analyses the score, considering each phrase<sup>7</sup> and voice part<sup>8</sup> separately and in relation to other parts, thus determining where the composer has best expressed himself and where he has placed particular emphasis.

Most modern conductors have a wide repertoire and their study of the music of various composers enables them to widen their inventories still further. There is of course, an opportunistic idea behind this study. For example, many a music critic has groaned at the prospect of reviewing yet another Beethoven cycle of symphonies, with such an abundance of good performances readily available. Record companies are reluctant for the same reason. Unusual pieces, therefore, has much to recommend for themselves. The musicians and the conductor can go through them like great voyages of discovery and the music companies can show greater willingness to record these works with fair market prospects. Having given the reader this 'shrewd' insight I go on to the next concern of the conductor, the orchestra.

Dealing with the members of an orchestra, is an exacting art, for human relationships are always tricky. Sometimes there are in the orchestra, one of more conductor baiters who love to test the conductor. Franz Strauss, father of the composer Richard Strauss was a supreme example of this breed. Herr Strauss a horn player in the orchestra summed up his philosophy in these memorable words

: 'You conductors who are so proud of your power! When a new man faces the orchestra — from the way he walks up the steps of the podium and opens his score — before he even picks up his baton — we know whether he is the master or me!

Here, the personality and the musicianships of the conductor along with a keen psychological insight into the minds of the musicians enables him to bend them to his will. Prof. Raymond Elliott<sup>9</sup> has described the ideal conductor as a pleasant, patient yet firm person who inspires his musicians to give off their best. This is however, rarely the case. Many conductors are unpleasant people to work with, some of whom being downright sadistic. Handel, on one occasion grabbed the soprano Luzzoni and threatened to throw her out of the window (and we all know the height of baroque buildings to imagine the result) for refusing to sing an aria<sup>10</sup>. Gluck (1714-1787) was much worse. He made his players repeat passages endlessly until he was satisfied and on one occasion, as the story goes, brought down a double bass player and his instrument on the floor by creeping upon him and administering a vicious pinch to his calf.

Anyhow after establishing a basic rapport with the orchestra, the conductor confirms his fundamental problems. His first task is to sustain the interest of his players in music which is often over-familiar to them. He has to communicate to the players his own ideas about a particular piece of music and through rehearsals to contrive at a coherent expression. Sir Thomas Beecham was once rehearsing Tchaikovsky's 'Pathetique' symphony, a very familiar piece for his orchestra. He is supposed to have begun with 'Ah! the 'pathetique' let us see what me can do to cheer it up'. With such off the cuff remarks the conductor proceeded to work up the players to the concert level. It must be remembered that the members of the orchestra are after all human and repeated rehearsal will reduce actual performance to a drudgery.

Thus, during rehearsal, the conductor has to 'tune' the orchestra only so that it is 'fresh' and eager to take risks during actual performance.

Balancing the orchestra and others (the chorus and the soloists) is an important task for the conductor. The chorus in a performance is usually behind the orchestra and the soloists in front, adjacent to the conductor's podium. Only if he can distinguish each note and voice part is the conductor satisfied. Leopold Stokowski (principal conductor of the Philadelphia 1912-1938) used to get around this problem by initially having his assistant conduct during rehearsals while he judged the sound from the back of the hall.

Having achieved optimum balance, the conductor can now unfold to the listener the hidden beauties of both the music and the orchestra, the former through sympathetic interpretation and the latter by drawing attention to its vital living personality. This brings me to the last of his concerns; his own character — musical and otherwise.

The modern conductor is usually familiar with the instruments of the orchestra and very usually a virtuoso player himself. Sir Georg Solti, Viladimir Ashkenazy, Daniel Barenboim (all pianists); Pablo Casals and Mstislav Rostropovich (both cellists) and Sir Yehudi Menuhin and Neville Marriner (both violinists) are good examples. He is well versed in musical theory and history with a keen ear that distinguishes every note. His major weapon is the baton (the technique of which is beyond the scope of this essay) with which he indicates time. It is held in the right hand with the left controlling the dynamics of the sound produced by the ensemble. Its function is to illustrate *crescendo*<sup>11</sup> and *diminuendo*<sup>12</sup>, to shape phases, and to give leads to individuals or a group and if necessary to convey a warning or cancel a false entry.

Not every conductor uses a baton and stick technique is not all important. Hugh Maguire in 'Orchestra' is quoted as saying 'one looks at the conductor, the whole man.

The message comes from the balls of the feet, right through to the top of the head, not just what he does with his hands.' Toscanini and Beecham had remarkable eyes, musicians saying that each of them imagined the maestro was looking at him. Gustav Mahler was once asked as to why he never grew a beard and replied that as a conductor he could not allow any foliage to come between his players and his musical (facial!) expression.

Ultimately I would like to give Professor Elliott's definition of the conductor who (in one sentence) should be a musician a psychologist and an organiser possessing all of 'those personal qualities that pleasantly cause others to do his will.

As a short epilogue I would like to return to Beethoven's 9th symphony by Muti. One hopes in the future EMI and Music India will give us better interpretations from such acknowledged masters as Toscanini, Klemperer, Karajan, Bernstein and Giulini or 'pediod' performance by Hogwood or Harnoncourt. To use a familiar Hollywood parlance — 'It would be a whole new ball game.'

## NOTES

1. Beethoven's 9th symphony — My reasons for choosing this piece are two fold. (a) It happens to be a personal favourite and (b) It is readily available in the city.
2. Time — fundamental rhythmical patterns of music eg. a waltz ( $\frac{3}{4}$  time) = 3 4th notes to the bar.
3. Keyboard — the piano and its ancestors the harpsichord, clavichord etc.
4. Beethoven — Kept track of the music with the forte's (loud notes) shouting 'louder louder!' as they were the only notes he could hear.
5. Contralto — the lowest of the range of female voices.
6. Tempo- speeds
7. Phase — short section of composition into which the music whether vocal or instrumental seems naturally to form. It is thus an inexact term.
8. Voice parts — several strands of music in harmony with each other.
9. Professor Raymond Williams — Fundamentals of Music.
10. aria — Italian for air — lengthy and well developed vocal piece for soloist or group of soloists.
11. Crescendo — gradual increase in loudness

## THE CHARTER, THE DECLARATION AND THE GENDER QUESTION

The year 1975 should perhaps be reckoned as a memorable year since it happened to be the International Women's Year as well as the midpoint of the Second U.N. Development Decade. All governmental and private agencies the world over were urged by this august body to examine the extent to which women have

been 'integrated in the total development' of their own countries. The International Women's Year likewise has been characterised by a call for intensified action on the part of different nation-states to promote equality between men and women and to ensure at the same time full integration of their women-folk in the scheme of total national development. They have been requested to take cognizance of the importance of women's increasing contribution towards the development of the friendly states as much as cooperation among states and to ensure their involvement in the strengthening of world peace. All member-states and interested organisations have been asked to adopt suitable steps for the full realization of the rights of women and their advancement on the basis of the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

Article 8 of the U.N. Charter does away with all manner of sex discriminations in the matter of women participating in its principal and subsidiary organs. The U.N. however, was not slow to recognize the dismal fact that

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despite some progress having been achieved by states in the business of legal equality of women, discriminatory attitudes, belief and practices persist even now as a way of life over a large slice of the globe. In fact the International Women's Year has been observed to enthuse

states of the world to abolish all discriminatory laws and prejudices and to help women to realise their full potential. The international community could only hope to set a model, to be followed in this direction only if men and women with education and initiative rise to the challenge. As a matter of fact a new era for women has dawned for furthering the scope of their increasing participation in the job of development of their country and at once of creating a better world. It should, however, be conceded that quite a number of women—victims of age-old injustice and oppression—are largely unaware of the existence of all their rights in various parts of the world.

The U.N. to be sure, is solemnly committed to the goal of equal rights of men and women as per its proclamation in the U.N. Charter and Declaration of Human Rights. Through its numerous international instruments it has urged universal recognition of women's equal rights in law and fact as also exploring all possible ways of offering them equal opportunities for the exercise of their genuine rights upon its member-states. These

member-states have in their turn pledged universal respect for and observance of human rights without distinction of race, sex and religion.

The Commission on the Status of Women in 1970 recommended to the General Assembly a programme of concerted international action for the advancement of women and adoption of general objectives and setting minimum targets for phased national action in this regard. The General Assembly in its turn adopted a strategy to integrate women in its total development effort through the unanimous adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in November 1967, after four years of debate and drafting by the commission on the status of women. Such a Declaration was overdue in view of the fact that 'there continues to exist at present considerable discrimination against women for all the Charters and Declaration of Human Rights'.

The Preamble to the said declaration (a) reaffirms faith in the dignity and worth of human persons and in the equal rights of men and women, (b) views discrimination as incompatible with human dignity and welfare of the family and society, preventing female participation on equal terms with men, and finally reminds us about the great contributions made by women in social, economic and cultural life of people in the different countries of the world. The Preamble would seek to draw upon women's full services and talents for development work. It expresses the firm conviction that the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of the world peace all urgently require the maximum participation of both the sexes in all fields of activity. Article I of the Declaration looks upon discrimination against women as an offence against human dignity itself. Article II urges

nondiscrimination and equal legal rights of the sexes to be ensured through state constitutions and international instruments of the U.N. Article III stands for educating national opinion adequately towards the eradication of sex prejudice. Article IV ensures equal rights for women for voting in elections and referendums and holding public offices. Article V would accord the same right to women as men to acquire, change or retain nationality. Article VI speaks of equal marital status, free choice of spouse and equal legal property rights for women. It would prohibit child marriage and impress upon parents equal rights and duties in respect of children. It would not, however, speak of destroying the unity and harmony of the family as the unit of society. Article VII would like to do away with all previous discriminatory penal codes. Article VIII speaks of legislation to restrict all forms of traffic in women. Article IX would enjoin equal rights to education on both men and women. Article X envisages equal rights in the field of social and economic life whereas Article XI suggests timely implementation of the principles of the Charter and the Declaration of Human Rights on the part of all concerned states.

The Commission on the Status of Women, in order to achieve its broad objective, aims at spreading knowledge and understanding of the Declaration throughout the length and breadth of the world. It comes out with a call to those who are concerned for a speedy end to discriminatory laws and social norms.

It is useful to point out that the Commission on the status of Women at its eighth session in 1963 adopted a resolution which took account of 'the great importance of community development in stimulating the advancement of women.' The commission further requested the Secretary General of the U.N. to prepare a report on 'the participation

of women in community development and the possibility of increasing the scope and extent of their contribution.' Participation of women included involvement in programmes of education and training, of economic development, of raising the level of living and social service by women. Suggested ways in which community development could add to the status of women included those aimed at raising their civic, political, economic, professional and social status. Particular attention should be focussed on the role of women in relation to other members of the community. Formulation of the suitable policy at the national levels and appropriate action by government and non-government bodies are needed in order to ensure greater participation of women in meaningful community development. With this end in view we have to devise adequate programme for enlisting the support and cooperation of women in such programmes directed towards their home, educational opportunities, leadership possibilities, economic development and cultural participation.

However the fact remains that only a few of the existing international instruments on Human Rights of the U.N. seem to be binding upon all the states, though the world forum is committed to the idea that equality of political rights of women is a complement to the similar equality in their social and cultural rights. In spite of the fact that the Commission on Women Status receives yearly report of conditions of women in different countries of the world, some of the U.N. covenants have not been ratified by some of the countries as yet (India not excepted). The U.N. as a matter of fact sought to launch in 1968 a long-range programme for the advancement of women as an integral part of the Decade of Development with special emphasis on educational and employment opportunities of

women. It is interesting to observe in this connection that the Economic Charter of Human Rights has been adopted towards the close of 1974. The Declaration of Human Rights stipulates through article 16/1 that men and women are entitled to equal rights as to marriage and through article 23/2 that every one without discrimination has the right to equal pay for equal work. Article 8 of the Declaration reads, significantly enough—'every one has the right to an effective remedy for the competent national tribunal'—for trying out cases involving violation of rights given him, by law or the constitution. This stipulates unilateral reference to global tribunals as well as concerned national reference bodies of cases involving violation of Human Rights. This reinforces the case for constituting a regional court of Human Rights, say in Asia, as well.

The problem facing us is of closing the unfortunate gap between constitutional pledges and international instruments. The big question is what is the real and effective guarantee of the social rights of women in the relatively backward countries of the world and how to stabilise the universally accepted system of rights on the national plane. Really speaking the success of the U.N. efforts for improving the status of women will depend ultimately on the political atmosphere within the U.N. itself as much as on the relative effectiveness of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights as a whole. A great deal will also hinge on the degree of excellence of performance of the functional agencies of the U.N. as well as of other independent agencies in the matter of realising legitimate rights of women. There is also the imperative need for speedily incorporating clauses of the Declaration into the respective Municipal Laws. We have to think hard in the matter of educating the people of the world and facilitating proper communi-



education across the continents on this. Propagating the cause of women's rights through informal and private agencies effectively throughout the length and breadth of the universe is also called for. A thorough change of priorities at the national levels is moreover urgently needed if we mean to better the lot of women folk. It is a pity that full potentialities of national constitutions are not exploited today to approximate to the goal of Human Rights. We should realise that it is not quite possible to reinforce democratic movements in the world today without special efforts to draw the mass of women into it. The fight against social oppression of women and the efforts at improving their social status (excepting holding seminars and exhibitions) should go hand in hand and all in the interest of international peace and solidarity. In a world which has grown smaller in dimension, we cannot conceive of women's progress in isolation from world peace or the establishment of independence and socialism for all people.

The theoretical foundations for positive U.N. action in furtherance of the status of women all over the world could really be said to have been with the adoption of the U.N. charter itself, in Sanfransisco, as early as 1945. Of course it is true that there had been nothing like a final or acceptable agreement in the U.N. circular as regards some vexed questions, such as the definition and a scope of the rights of women. The U.N. Commission on Human Rights set up in 1946 with Mrs. Elanor Roosevelt as its chairperson, was therefore broadly committed to a programme which included as its chief aims (a) equal educational opportunities for women at all levels (b) equal employment opportunities for the womenfolk the world over. There were means to combine Women's responsibilities of the family with those of the profes-

sion. Since its inception the Commission undertook to work in a sustained manner to ensure increasing participation on the part of women in sphere of social and political activities in all countries mainly as a matter of duty. Actually a number of important international instruments have been created in quick succession on the recommendation of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights 1948 in order to do away with all kinds of irksome disabilities and odious discriminations that traditionally bedevilled the path of women in different parts of the world. The most recent instrument of some significance had been, of course, the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, approved by the General Assembly on November 7, 1967. Incidentally, the U.N.O. sought in 1968, in persuance of the UNESCO proposal accepted in 1966, an action-oriented effective programme for the advancement of women as an integral part of the Decade of Development.

It is interesting to observe in passing that 1974 was declared by the UNESCO possibly to focus world attention on the Women question vis-a-vis peace, development and equality as the 'International Women's year'. Of special significance to those who seem concerned is the Economic Charter of Human Rights which was adopted towards the close of this very year. It is thus only in the fitness of things that we should try to analyse in depth the role of the Declaration of Human Rights in relation to the status of Women. It is useful to keep track of the progress registered so far in this line since the setting up of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women in February, 1947. Women's rights are however bound up with the larger issue of human rights and this is the salutary lesson we learn from a study of U.N. endeavours in this direction so far.

It is interesting to point out that the preamble to the Declaration emphasises 'The recognition of the dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the World'. It also refers to 'equal rights of men and women' as also to the 'dignity and worth of the human person'. Articles I, II, III, VI, and VII guarantee together the enjoyment of civil rights including equal dignity, liberty, security of person and equality before law to all men and women. Articles IV and V, though negative ones, forbid that 'no person shall be held in slavery' and 'no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment'. Articles VIII and XXVIII constitute remedial clauses like reference to 'competent national tribunals' and 'the right to social and international orders in which rights and freedoms can be fully realised'. Regarding the inviolability of private families, Articles XII and XVI appear to be effective safeguarding clause. Regarding economic rights, Articles XVII and XXIII prohibit deprivation of property and ensure the right to work. Besides Article XXII guarantees the right to social security and Article XXV, the standard of living for the well being of the family as also the right to security in the event of widowhood, old age, sickness or disability. Article XXV states that 'all children whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social position'. Also Article XXVII of the same Declaration ensures freedom of participation for all in the cultural life of the community whereas Article XXVI promises the right to free education for everyone. Finally, Article 29 significantly enjoins on all men or women, 'duties to the community' through which alone full and free development of one's personality seems possible.

The United Nations had tried to ensure for

women folk their legitimate rights not merely through incorporating relevant provisions in the Charter and the Declaration, but also through enlisting the active assistance of a number of instrumentalities like U.N. Commission on Human Rights, different conventions, the UNESCO, the ILO and some other independent auxiliary agencies. Incidentally the I.L.O. today is in a position to render substantial assistance in the matter of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women in the economic sphere. Ensuring them a fair measure of social protection is, however, not deemed to be enough; at the moment; a vigorous process of socialisation of women, so it is felt keenly, should also be undertaken.

With regard to improving the status of women on a total scale mention must be made of the Convention for Recognition of the political Rights of Women ratified by a large proportion of governments set up by the General Assembly on December 20, 1952. In 1957, 29th January, the General Assembly adopted a Convention on the Nationality of Married Women — rather a ticklish issue, internationally speaking. It stipulated that women need not take the nationality of their husbands and in any case their nationality would not be affected either by divorce or their husbands changing their own. The U.N. convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age of Marriage, Registration of Marriage etc. adopted by the General Assembly was a significant one, in that it served as a way out for some of the most complicated familiar problems facing women in all parts of the globe. More than a mere casual reference should now be made to the Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children and of Women Fullage concluded at Geneva in September 1921 and subsequently amended on 12th November, 1947. The con-

vention on the Suppression of Traffic in persons and Exploitation of Prostitutes, adopted on the 21st March, 1950 urgently calls for a detailed and serious study in view of social disorganisation and exploitation on a wide scale. The universal moral rights of women have indeed become a matter of serious international action. The Human Rights aspect of Family Planning is a thing well worth deserving our interest at present as an allied document. We should rather do well to remember in this connection that in 1964 a seminar was organised in Rome on the Status of Wife under Family Laws and in 1963 this subject was discussed at length at Bogota. It is perhaps pertinent to observe that in January, 1957 a U.N. Sub-Convention considered typical cases of the rights of people out of wedlock. The U.N. resolution on the Soviet Spouses of Foreign Nationals passed by the General Assembly in 1948 was, it should be pointed out in essence, a human rights demand. This resolution had in view the basic object of preserving the essential rights of those spouses unable to leave the Soviet Union and their foreign husbands and wives.

## II

The conclusion that emerges inevitably from an analysis of the various conventions concluded by the U.N. and of some definite steps taken by it on matters relating to the meaningful freedom for women is that it concerns itself not merely with the political but also with the socio-cultural aspects of the problems concerning the fair sex. Evidently the U.N. seems committed to the idea that equality of political rights of women is the very pre-requisite for their equality in the sphere of social and cultural rights. The two have been generally recognised as complementary objectives to be pursued progressively by this world forum.

It is appropriate to mention in this connection that the Women's International Democratic Federation (born in Paris in 1946) at its Copenhagen Congress in 1953, formulated an earlier Declaration. It was a sort of rallying call for the suffering and struggling womenfolk in the world to establish their identities as human beings. This Declaration drew pointed attention of the delegates present to the grim fact that women happened to be the victims of a double exploitation—on the one hand, domestic drudgery and on the other labour in factories. It seems that the spontaneous adoption of such a Declaration on an unofficial level has its own distinct merits. This is not to belittle, however, the semi-legal impact the U.N. Declaration might have on the growing number of member-states in the world.

It is generally conceded by forward looking people that apart from holding seminars, conventions and exhibitions, the U.N. should dedicate this last quarter of the 20th Century to the cause of the emancipation of the human mind from false notions about sex, race, caste, colour, creed etc. Sexual differentiation, it should be remembered, transforms itself finally into an odious form of social classification. The failure of the recent Mexico conference is ascribed to the fact that primarily it is an upper-class affair. An in depth global campaign is thus necessary for harmonising and democratising public opinion in different countries in favour of fighting all forms of vested interests and exploitation. In fact we should realise that the whole issue is linked up with the conscious and positive elimination of colonisation and racialism. The principal means of bringing about harmony between the sexes and ensuring world peace at once is through effecting a human standard of living and a meaningful education—through building up of unity of action and under-

standing among all those concerned. Unless the proper objective climate is created by way of a removal of all kinds of political and economic restrictions on the initiative of women, the status due to women could never be adequately assured. What is needed now more than ever, appears to be a thorough rejection of a legalistic reformistic formal outlook on the part of people who really believe in Socialism, Democracy and Secularism. It is time indeed to understand that women's progress is not possible in isolation from the furtherance of world peace or the establishment of independence. For all people

women could gain their objective, particularly in today's political and economic conditions not simply by an 'anti-man' tirade but by building broader unity with organisations and forces fighting for democracy, peace and friendship among people the world over. It is worth our while to bear in mind one of Lenin's celebrated observations, in this connection : 'If women are not drawn into public work, into political life, if women are in kitchen environment it will be impossible to guarantee real freedom, it will be impossible to build even democracy, let alone socialism'.



## ELIOT'S PRUFROCK AND TAGORE'S THAKURDA

If the spirit of the age moves through the works of art, the early poems of T.S. Eliot are those works through which the spirit of his time moves. The American-born poet's success lies in his authentic picture of the society he finds himself in. Prufrock, Sweeney or Sosostriis are the typical products of this society. They are in the cul-de-sac. They are mostly anaemic. Courage has bade them farewell. They have lost the way of transcendence. Tagore starts right from this point where Eliot stops. In his dramatic masterpieces the Indian poet not only shows the horror and boredom, not only men and women 'sested in the sty of contentment' but way of salvation also. His Thakurda or Bisu Pagol stand contrasted with Eliotesque characters. They lead the way to heaven, hidden in this ugly society itself.

In one of his essays 'Baudlaire', Eliot says, 'so far we are human what we do must be either evil or good .... and it is better in a paradoxical way to do evil than to do nothing. At least, we exist' The characters of Eliot's early poems should be measured by this scale. Eliot picks up his remarkable and revolutionary character from the hundreds and thousands of Prufrocks he comes across everyday. A typical product of his society, Prufrock has lost the 'Courage to be.' He is acutely conscious of his middle aged appearance—

*Bidyut Banerjee, doing his M.A. in English, Compares Eliot and Tagore's attitude towards the time they lived in and finds Tagore capable of transcending the vicious circle of despair from which Eliot never escapes*

his baldness and thinness:

"Time to turn back and descend the stair

With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—He realizes that he lacks the necessary strength to force the moment to its crisis. Hence this recoil from decisive present action: 'so how should I presume?'

Tagore drew the picture of ever-present Thakurda well before Eliot arrived in this arena. In his dance dramas, such as *Achalayatan* (অচলায়তন)

*Falguni* (ফাল্গুনী) or *Sharodotsav* (শারদোৎসব) bonhomous Thakurda stands as an antithesis to the Eliotisque characters, discussed above. Unlike Prufrock he has learnt not to worry about age: as in *Sharodotsav* he says: 'তা দিক ওদের সাড়া পেলে আমার বয়সের হিসেব প্রায় পঞ্চাশ পঞ্চান্ন বছরের গরমিল হয়ে যায়।'

While Prufrock recoils fatally from real experience, Thakurda with a nose for noise jumps into the fray sans a second thought. In *Arupratan* (অরূপরতন) he shoulders the responsibility of awakening the youths: in his own words — 'নবীনকে ডাক দিতে বেরিয়েছি।' Again in *Achalayatan* he turns the table by firstly moulding Panchak — a pupil of this dead institution — in his own shape and secondly by breaking down at the tag end of the drama the wall of that dark house, as he proudly says: 'ভয় নেই পঞ্চক অচলায়তনে আর

সেই শান্তি দেখতে পারে না, আমি তার দ্বার ফুটো করে লড়াই-এর বোঝা হাওয়া এনে দিয়েছি।' Eliot's poems centres upon the want of this 'storm of strife' (লড়াই-এর বোঝোহাওয়া) : In his *The Hollow Men* we have some 'stuffed men, Leaning together, Headpiece filled with straw.' Their world is a dying world, doomed to extinction. Unlike Thakurda and his boys, who put their shoulders to the wheel to usher in a new era, those hollow men want to be left in their 'cactus land' — 'behaving as the wind behaves' — that is *acted upon* instead of acting.

## II

In his *Falguni*, Tagore brings a character namely Jibon Sardar. He sets the ball of the boys' enthusiasm rolling. They set out in quest of that old man, whom others are afraid of. In fact, Jibon Sardar is another facet of Thakurda, whose sole aim is to bring cheer to the dying ember. In *Sabuj Patra* (1914) Tagore wrote : 'এই লোকটার কাজ চালাইয়া লওয়া, পথ হইতে পথ, লক্ষ্য হইতে লক্ষ্য ... কেহ যে চূপ করিয়া বসিয়া থাকিবে সেটা তাহার অভিপ্রায় নয়।' With his help the boys break out the shackles of society with a meaningful song on their lips : 'ভাল মানুষ নইরে মোরা ভালমানুষ নই।' They claim themselves to be evil persons indulging in evil deeds. But this is not to be sneezed at either by Tagore or Eliot. This song exemplifies what Eliot says in his essay 'Baudlaire', quoted above.

## III

The characters we come across in *Prufrock*, *The Wasteland* or *The Hollow Men* are the living dead in the world of everyday life, seen through — as Mr. Cleanth Brooks puts it — Eliot's 'pessimistic spectacles'. The images of these poems are equally 'pessimistic'.

*Prufrock* begins with the references to 'ether' and 'patient'. The former is the deadener of man's volition, and the later is what *Prufrock* identifies himself with. In *The Waste Land* there are continual references to 'stony rubbish', which is 'cactus land' in *The Hollow Men*. The poet laments for the want of bird's song and water in 'What the Thunder Said' :

'If there were water

And no rock ...

If there were the sound of water only

Not the cicada.'

But in Tagore, the images of bird, rain or fountain share the same track with stone or desert image. In his dance dramas the images of stone and grass are ubiquitous. Though conventional, in his works they acquire a special significance. Here, grass and green leaf symbolize life ; while stone and desert — death, living death. As in *Achalayatan*, about Panchak — life and courage incarnate — Upacharya says : 'পাথরের মধ্যে কি ঘাস বেরোয় ! এমন ছেলে আমাদের আয়তনে কী করে সম্ভব হ'ল !'

Or Thakurda in *Arupratan* : 'ওরে, পাকা পাতাই তো ঝরবার সময় নতুন পাতাকে জাগিয়ে দিয়ে যায়।'

Again, the King in *Raktakarabi* (রক্তকরবী) says to Nandini, the damsel who leads the way to freedom at the fag end of the drama : 'আমি এক প্রকাণ্ড মরুভূমি — তোমার মত একটি ছোট ঘাসের দিকে হাত বাড়িয়ে বলছি, আমি তপ্ত, আমি রিক্ত, আমি ক্লান্ত।'

In Tagore's dramas, the images of rain and bird's song usher in a millennium — for which Eliot has to wait till *Marine* (1930). In *Achalayatan* Acharya says : 'ওই যে নেমে এল বৃষ্টি, পৃথিবীর কতদিনের পথ চাওয়া বৃষ্টি।'

Or, a boy in the same drama : 'পাখির ডাক এখান থেকেই শোনা যাচ্ছে।'

In one of his essays, *The plays of R.N.*

Tagore, Mr. Nirmal Mukherjea says : Tagore's 'symbols are vague ethereal, at times wooden ...' Whether this comment is tenable or not, let the readers judge.

In fact, Tagore never loses interest in life, neither in man. Far from being pessimistic, as Eliot is — according to Mr. Brooks — he is able to find heaven in the ugly society itself. As he says through his mouthpiece, Bisu Pagol, in *Raktakarabi* : 'নরকেও সুন্দর আছে । কিন্তু সুন্দরকে কেউ সেখানে বুঝতেই পারে না । নরকবাসীর সবচেয়ে বড়ো সাজা তাই ।'

In fact, Tagore sees heaven and hell as the two sides of the same coin. In one of his letters to Manoranjan Banerjea he wrote : 'Facts-এর দিকে দেখি জরা, মৃত্যু ; Truth-এর দিকে দেখি অক্ষয় জীবন, যৌবন ।' His Thakurda is endowed with the responsibility of making

us aware of this other side of the coin of life — almost the role of Lazarus which Prufrock recoils from.

Tagore's dramas (discussed above) are written between 1908-1914, the great creative period when Tagore was supposed to have been at the height of his powers ; as Mr. Ernest Ryes thinks — '(then) he was working with clarity of vision and complete self assurance.' And it is in this period when he draws the character of Thakurda with elan, who is — in Tagore's own words an abstract and brief chronicle of time. Through his eyes Tagore sees the dawn in the darkest hour. When Eliot only sees 'dry sterile thunder without rain' Tagore sees something more in it. He sees a silver lining. And, yes, it is at least a decade before Eliot.



## প্রসঙ্গ : প্রেসিডেন্সির সংস্কৃতি

এ বছরই উদ্ব্যাপিত হয়েছে প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজের ১৭৫ বছর পূর্তি-উৎসব। উৎসবে যোগদান করেছিলেন দেশের রাষ্ট্রপতি, তৎকালীন রাজ্যপাল, শিক্ষামন্ত্রীর মত রাষ্ট্রের সর্বোচ্চপদাসীনরা। এসেছিলেন বহু শিক্ষাব্রতী, বুদ্ধিজীবী যাদের মধ্যে ছিলেন বহু কবি, সাহিত্যিক, ঐতিহাসিক, বিজ্ঞানী, সাংবাদিক এবং আরো অনেক পণ্ডিত ব্যক্তি। এসেছিলেন বহু দেশব্রতী, রাজনৈতিক নেতৃবৃন্দ। এই সময়ে দেশের (বিশেষতঃ কলকাতা শহরের) বিভিন্ন পত্রপত্রিকায় প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজ নিয়ে অনেক সংবাদ লেখা হয়েছে। যেমন 'স্টেটসম্যান' সংবাদপত্রে সরকারের তরফ থেকে প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজকে দেওয়া অর্থের অনুদান বা money grant-এর সুবিশাল অঙ্ক অন্য সাধারণ কলেজের ক্ষুদ্র অনুদানের পাশে রেখে কড়া সমালোচনা করা হয়েছে। বলা হয়েছে যে রাজ্য সরকারের 'no college is superior to the others in the eyes of the govt.' এই নীতি এখানে অনুসরণ করা হয়নি। কিন্তু সবচেয়ে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ কথা এই যে প্রায় প্রতিটি সংবাদপত্রে একটি কথাই বারংবার প্রতিধ্বনিত হয়েছে, তা হল, 'Presidency college now is a shadow of the past'. প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজের বর্তমানকে অতীতের তুলনায় হেয় করার এই প্রবণতার চরম পরিণতি পরিলক্ষিত হয় উৎসবের প্রারম্ভে ১৪ই মার্চ তারিখে—যখন মণে ঘোষণাকারিনী মধুবন্তী মৈত্রের কণ্ঠে মাইক্রোফোনে সজোরে ধ্বনিত হয় ... 'though it is (Presidency College) now a shadow of the past...'

সমসাময়িক কালে প্রেসিডেন্সি-সংস্কৃতি যে সত্যিই কিছু অংশে 'ডেকাডেন্ট' বা ক্ষীয়মান তা মানতেই হয়। আমি যখন প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজে গতবছর প্রথমবর্ষের ছাত্র হিসেবে ভর্তি হই তখন প্রথম কিছুদিন খুবই হতাশার মধ্যে কাটিয়েছিলাম। এই হতাশার কারণ ছিল প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজের ছাত্র-ছাত্রীবর্গের মধ্যে মননশীলতার চরম অভাব। প্রেসিডেন্সি যে আজও বিখ্যাত তার কারণ

আজকের প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজ কি অতীতের ছায়ামাত্র? — প্রেসিডেন্সির বর্তমান সাংস্কৃতিক আবহাওয়ার পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে আলোচনা, করছে ইতিহাস বিভাগের দ্বিতীয় বর্ষের ছাত্র — সুগত নন্দী।

শুধু ফি বছর পরীক্ষায় সুফল নয়, প্রেসিডেন্সিকে আজও অধিকাংশ শিক্ষিত মানুষ ভারতের জ্ঞানলাভ ও মননচর্চার শ্রেষ্ঠ কেন্দ্র বলে মনে করেন। অথচ এখন এই প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজের ছাত্রদের আলোচনা আবর্তিত হয় সমস্ত বস্তাপাচা হিন্দি ছবি, অর্থহীন পরচর্চা, দামী জামাকাপড়, বাজে গালগল্প আর বিকৃত হাস্যরসের পঙ্কিল আবর্তে। অধিকাংশ প্রেসিডেন্সিয়ানরা ইদামিংকালে বই পড়েন না বললেই চলে। যদিবা কেউ পড়েন

তাহলে দেখা যায় যে তাঁর প্রিয় বই মানেই সস্তা নোংরা মার্কিন গোয়েন্দাগল্প, অথবা তথাকথিত Best-seller list-এর অন্তর্গত বাজে মার্কিন লেখক লেখিকাদের জোর করে পাতা ভরানো অসহ উপন্যাস। এককালে যে কলেজের ছাত্রছাত্রীরা সুলেখক, সুসাংবাদিক এবং খ্যাতনামা দার্শনিকদের রচনা পাঠ করে রসগ্রহণ করেছেন আজকে সেই কলেজেই বুচির এমন অবনতি ঘটল কেমন করে!!!

পাঠ্যবিষয় বহির্ভূত জ্ঞানের চরম অভাব দর্শিত হয় প্রেসিডেন্সির বর্তমান তর্কিকদের মধ্যে। এখনকার তর্কিকেরা তর্ক করতে গেলে প্রায়ই বলেন 'বই পড়া কথা বলা না, তোমার জীবন থেকে উদাহরণ দেখাও'। ধরে নেওয়া যাক ভারতের অর্থনৈতিক দুর্দশার কথা আলোচনা করছে দুটি ছেলে। এই দুজন ছাত্রই বেশ অবস্থাপন্ন ঘরের ছেলে। তারা ভাল ছাত্র, দারিদ্র্যকে তারা জেনেছে সাংবাদিকের কলমের মাধ্যমে অথবা দূরদর্শনের পর্দায়। এবার এরা দুজন কিভাবে তাদের জীবন থেকে চরম দারিদ্র্যের উদাহরণ দেবে? বলাই বাহুল্য এইরকম উদাহরণ দেওয়া অসম্ভব বলেই আজকে প্রেসিডেন্সিতে তর্কের বিষয় জীবনমুখী নয়। এখন তর্ক হয় নানারকম হাস্যাস্পদ বিষয় নিয়ে যেমন 'do we need to have a positive approach towards life, if we want to do something?' যে কোন কাজে সাফল্য লাভ করতে গেলে positive approach বা ইতিবাচক মানসিকতার প্রয়োজন একথা তো একজন wretched pessimist গোছের লোকও জানে, এ নিয়ে



তর্ক করে সময় নষ্ট করার প্রয়োজন কি ?

এইসব ভয়ঙ্কর তর্কিকদের প্রসঙ্গ এলেই আরেকটি কথা মনে পড়ে যায় — প্রেসিডেন্সিয়ানদের অসহনীয় আত্মশ্লাঘা। প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজে যাঁরা পড়েন না তাঁরা তো মানুষই নন তাঁদের কাছে (তাঁদের প্রতি তাঁদের উক্তি of f--k! b-lls to them) কেননা এঁরা যে মুহূর্তে প্রেসিডেন্সিতে ভর্তি হয়েছেন সেদিন থেকে 'Presy is Presy always ahead' বলে উল্লসিত হয়েছেন। এই আত্মশ্লাঘা আজ আরও সংকীর্ণ মনোবৃত্তির উদয় ঘটিয়েছে এবং ধারণ করেছে ভয়াবহ রূপ। এই দান্তিক ছাত্রছাত্রীরা সহপাঠী এবং সহপাঠিনীদের তুচ্ছ, অপাংস্তেয়, হেয় বলে মনে করেন, তাঁদের সঙ্গে ভদ্র ভাবে কথা বলেন না, তাদের যথোচ্ছা উপেক্ষা করে আনন্দলাভ করেন, এবং তাঁদের সঙ্গে আরো নানাপ্রকার দুর্ব্যবহার করেন।

এইরকম অন্যায় দণ্ডের কুফল লক্ষ্য করা যায় ভাব আদানপ্রদানের দুঃসাধ্যতায়। এই রকম এক দান্তিক প্রেসিডেন্সিয়ানকে কুশল সম্ভাষণ করতে গিয়ে জনৈক প্রেসিডেন্সির ছাত্রীকে গ্রহণ করতে হয় উপেক্ষা এবং দুর্ব্যবহার। অনেক ক্ষেত্রেই দেখা যায় যে এই নাক-উঁচু প্রাণীরা ছাত্র হিসেবে অতি সাধারণ, এঁদের জ্ঞান নেই বলাই চলে এবং জানার ইচ্ছা বলে কোন পদার্থ এঁদের মধ্যে নেই। T. S. Eliot-এর মতে civility হল culture বা সংস্কৃতির একটি অংশ। ভাবতে দুঃখ হয় যে আজ প্রেসিডেন্সি-সংস্কৃতির ধারক এবং বাহক এই ভদ্রতাজ্ঞানবর্জিত অন্তঃসারশূন্য ছাত্রেরা। আসলে এঁরা হচ্ছেন Presidency-snobs।

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গতবছর অর্থনীতি বিভাগের সুপ্রতীম সরকার কলেজ পত্রিকায় 'অথ সংস্কৃতি কথা' নামক প্রবন্ধে লেখেন যে তথাকথিত সংস্কৃতিওয়ালাদের একটা দল আছে যাঁরা পাশ্চাত্য কোনকিছু পেলেই তাকে অপসংস্কৃতি বলে নিন্দা করেন। বলাই বাহুল্য আধুনিক বাংলা তথা ভারতীয় সংস্কৃতি গড়ে উঠেছে পাশ্চাত্য সংস্কৃতির প্রভাবে। এইসব পাশ্চাত্য-নিন্দুকেরা জানেন না যে তাঁদের নিজেদের মধ্যে পাশ্চাত্য প্রভাব কতো গভীর। কলেজে পাশ্চাত্যসঙ্গীত হওয়া মানেই অপসংস্কৃতি বলে নাক সিঁটকানর কোন মানে নেই। অবশ্য সুপ্রতীম সরকারকে অনুসরণ করে একথাও বলা উচিত যে পাশ্চাত্য বিনোদন যেন অশ্লীলতা না হয়ে ওঠে একথা

খেয়াল রাখতে হবে। শ্রী হীরেন্দ্রনাথ মুখোপাধ্যায় ১৭৫ বছর উৎসবে তাঁর বক্তৃতায় বলেন যে তিনি যৌবনে অপসংস্কৃতি বলে এমন রব শোনেননি, তিনি বলেন যে তাঁরা জানতেন সংস্কৃতির বিপরীতই হল অশ্লীলতা।

আরেক দল সংস্কৃতিওয়ালারা আছেন যাঁরা শুধু অপসংস্কৃতি অপসংস্কৃতি বলে কোনকিছুর নিন্দা করেই দায়িত্বের সমাপ্তি ঘোষণা করেন। এঁদের প্রতি আবেদন, এরা যেন নিন্দা করার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে এমন কিছু করেও দেখান যাকে সংস্কৃতি বলে উল্লেখ করা যায়। শুধুই সমালোচনার ওপর সমালোচনার ধোঁওয়া তোলা কোন মহৎ কাজ নয়।

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এখন জীবনবোধের প্রশ্নে প্রেসিডেন্সির ছাত্রছাত্রীরা নিশ্চুপ। প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজের ছাত্রদের কি কোন জীবনবোধ গড়ে উঠেছে না? একথা সত্যি যে জীবনবোধ না থাকলে কোন মানুষ সংস্কৃতিবান হতে পারে না। মাসকয়েক আগে প্রেসিডেন্সির এক ছাত্রের মুখে শোনা যায় তার জীবনবোধ, 'Be friendly to every body, but don't make friends.' আসলে ছাত্রটি এক কথায় শুধু সুবিধেবাদীই নন সুযোগবাদীও। তিনি আসলে চান বন্ধুর ছদ্মবেশে সবাইকেই খানিকটা ব্যবহার করতে এবং তারপর সরে পড়তে। এ-বিষয়ে পাঠক কি মনে করেন সেটা জানতে ইচ্ছা করে। উপরোক্ত ছাত্রটি যদি ভীষণ আবেগপ্রবণ জীবনযাত্রার বিরোধিতা করে থাকেন তাহলে আমি তাঁর সপক্ষে, কিন্তু উক্তিটির দিকে তাকিয়ে মনে হয় তিনি আবেগ প্রসঙ্গে কিছু বলতে অসফল হয়ে অমানবিকতার জয়গান করেছেন।

মনে পড়ে আরেকবার এক ব্যক্তির জীবনযাত্রার সপক্ষে আমার এক বন্ধু বলেন, 'Eat, drink and be happy, that was his way of life. So what's wrong in it?' এই বন্ধুটি অবশ্য যথেষ্ট মানবদরদী, উদারপন্থী কিন্তু জীবনের সাফল্য খুঁজতে গিয়ে ভ্রান্ত হয়েছেন। বহু ছাত্রছাত্রীর মত অবশেষে তিনিও বলেছেন যে নিজের সুখ বা material comfort-ই একমাত্র লক্ষ্য হওয়া কোন ভুল নয়। অর্থাৎ সমাজবদ্ধ অবস্থায় একটি দ্বীপের মতন মানুষ আরোই একা হতে চাইবে এবং গুছোতে চাইবে নিজের সুখের সরঞ্জাম আর শেষে এক বিজাতীয় সন্তোষকে জানবে লক্ষ্য বলে। বোঝা যায় যে — we Presidencians are sorrowfully running

out of ideas, আমরা সবাই ভুলে যাচ্ছি যে মনের গভীরে আমরা শুধু জানি — ‘মানুষের মানে চাই, চাই মানুষের মানে’। এই মানে না খুঁজে পেলে জীবন শুধুই হতাশা বলে মনে হয়, মনে হয় কোনো প্রাপ্তিই প্রাপ্তি নয়। এই মানেবিহীন জীবনের হতাশা বহু অর্থবান সফল লোককে ঠেলে দেয় আত্মহত্যার দিকে। চাই চিন্তার আগুন, সেই আগুনের তাপেই আবার শৃগাৰ্ড শৈত্য আর মিশকালো অন্ধকারে সজীব হয়ে নতুন বাঁচার মন্ত্র পাবে সমগ্র প্রেসিডেন্সিয়ানরা। কে জ্বালাবে সেই আগুন? দুঃখের সঙ্গে বলতে হয় যে আজ প্রেসিডেন্সির ছাত্রদের (শুধুই ছাত্রদের, কেননা ছাত্রীরা বলেছেন যে তাঁরা মহাসুখে আছেন, তাঁরা ওরকম খামোকা frustration-এর বুগী টুগী হতে যাবেন কেন?) মধ্যে একটা বড় অংশ মনের শাস্তি খুঁজে বেড়ায়। প্রত্যেকটা দিন আসে যেন দিনগত গানির জন্য। ঋজু ব্যক্তিত্বের প্রচণ্ড অভাবে, সমাজে ছড়াচ্ছে নোংরা ব্যাধিগুলি। এমন সময় চুপ করে বসে থেকে, দান্তিক ছাত্রদের অপমান সহ্য করে, প্রতিদিন একদল লোককে ‘ঘণা করে আর সম্মান করে’, প্রতিনিয়ত পরীক্ষায় সাফল্য আর চাকরি-চিন্তার ইঁদুর-দৌড়ে সামিল হয়ে এইসব ছাত্ররা আজ হতাশার শিকার। এরকম কঠিন সমস্যায় একটি বন্ধুও খুঁজে পাওয়া যায় না প্রেসিডেন্সি নামক মরুভূমিতে। আসলে সবাই তো ব্যস্ত আছে হয় পরীক্ষার পড়ায় কিম্বা হুল্লোড়বাজিতে। আর কলেজের মহাসুখী ছাত্রীরা — তাঁরা তো এই frustrated lot কে ঘণা করেন ...

এবারে একটি সহজ ছকের সাহায্যে বুঝতে চেষ্টা করা যাক সংস্কৃতির অবনতির কারণ

নিদারুণ একাকীত্ব	পরীক্ষা নিয়ে দুশ্চিন্তা ও নানাবিধ সমস্যা	পঠনের অভাব মননের অভাব
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এর ফলে সংস্কৃতির অবনতি	ideology-র অভাব	জীবনবোধহীনতা বা জীবনদর্শনবিহীনতা
		হতাশা

হতাশা থেকে মুক্তির ব্যর্থপ্রয়াস অধিকতর হতাশা

সাংস্কৃতিক যে কোন কাজে অনীহা,  
Culture slowly becomes a relic.

নিশ্চিত মৃত্যুর দিকে ঠেলে দেওয়া — এরকম ভাবে সামাজিক যন্ত্রণা বৃদ্ধি পুষে রাখবে প্রেসিডেন্সির ছাত্ররা? একথা কখনও মনে নেওয়া যায় না। মনে রাখতে হবে বারট্রান্ড রাসেল বলেছেন হতাশা কখনও শেষ কথা নয়, পৃথিবীর প্রতিটি ঘটনা, তুচ্ছাতিতুচ্ছ ঘটনা থেকে তুলে আনতে হবে বেঁচে থাকার মৌল, আসলে হতাশা হলে তার কারণ আবিষ্কার করবে, বুদ্ধি লোপ পেলেই আরো হতাশার সৃষ্টি হয়। তেমনই ‘প্রেসিডেন্সির সংস্কৃতি ক্ষীয়মান’, বলে যাঁরা হাত গুটিয়েছেন তাঁরা আসলে একপ্রকার কাপুরুষ। তাঁদের সাহস নেই এই অবনতির মুখ থেকে সংস্কৃতিকে বাঁচানোর, তাঁদের সাহস একমাত্র প্রেসিডেন্সির বর্তমান ছাত্রদের নিন্দা করায়। আসলে Decadence, Stagnation, Lack of Thought - provoking Ideas, Fear এইসব টার্ম এখন শুধু প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজের পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে ব্যবহার করলে ভুল হয়। এসব শব্দ ব্যবহার করতে হয় সমকালীন পৃথিবীর পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে। প্রেসিডেন্সি সংস্কৃতির অবক্ষয় সারা বিশ্বের সংস্কৃতির অবক্ষয়ের প্রতিবিম্ব মাত্র।

মাত্র কদিন আগে এক সহপাঠীর মুখে শুনলাম ‘ওসব Naxalite movement নিয়ে কেউ কিছু জিজ্ঞেস করলে দেব এমন ঝাড় ....we have long severed our roots in the past,’ আমি কখনই মনে করিনা নকশাল আন্দোলন প্রেসিডেন্সির উদ্ভুদ্ধ সফলতার প্রতীক, আমি নকশাল আন্দোলনের সমর্থক নই, তবে সে যুগের সঙ্গে সব সম্পর্ক ছিন্ন করে অন্ধ consumerism-এর ঝাড়াবাজি করা আমার কাছে কাম্য নয়। নকশাল আন্দোলনের তাণ্ডব শুধু দেখলে চলবে না দেখতে হবে তার আদর্শ ও প্রাণের উৎসাহের দিকও। জানতে হবে যে অন্ধ consumerism, বাজার অর্থনীতি, Declinist school of historians যেমন Paul Kennedy-র মতে, অনতিদূর ভবিষ্যতে সমগ্র বিশ্বের বিপর্যয় নিয়ে আসবে। এইসব তথাকথিত আধুনিক প্রবণতা যে ব্যর্থ নকশাল আন্দোলনের থেকে কত বেশী অসফল সে কথা প্রেসিডেন্সির ছাত্রদের বুঝতে হবে আজই।

অবশেষে বলতেই হবে যে কিছু কিছু, খুব ছিটেফোঁটা হলেও, সাংস্কৃতিক কার্যকলাপের প্রয়াস মরা গাছের দেশ প্রেসিডেন্সিতে লক্ষ্য করা যায়। এরকম প্রয়াস নিশ্চয়ই প্রশংসনীয় তবে আরো অনেক বেশী দরকার। গড়ে তোলা দরকার এই শূন্যতার বিরুদ্ধে লড়াই—সমকালীন প্রেসিডেন্সি আরো বেশী সংস্কৃতিশূন্য হয়ে পড়ার আগেই।

## PLANNING THROUGH POPULAR PARTICIPATION

The Nehruvian model of developmental planning initiated the planning process in Indian body politic. But the success rate of these plans remained far from the desired target. This was mainly due to the phenomenon of lack of popular participation in implementing different plans. As a result, the concept of plan does not carry much relevance to the commoners, for whom, it is actually directed and initiated. Numerous endeavour in this regard like, Five Year plan, Ganga Action plan, Family Planning Programme, are of no exception. Understanding this, the social scientists have come forward to initiate the concept of materialising developmental planning through the common people, a formulation known as 'Bottomup Planning'. Ganga Action plan is one such realm, where, this aspect should be highlighted for proper and meaningful implementation.

The impact of river Ganga on the overall socio-economic life of Indians is enormous. Ganga is a part of the history, heritage, culture, civilisation, religion and lifestyle of the people of this country. Its impact on the material life of Indians is immense, as a large chunk of the Indian populace is solely dependent on the river, as far as their life and livelihood is concerned. Apart from the river's emotional impact, it is generally considered

*The rather dismal performance of the planning process in India is the result of lack of popular participation, says Professor Samit Kar of the Department of Sociology. He suggests that the only way to make the Ganga Action Plan a success is to involve the people in the planning process.*

lifeline of our country. It drains an area of 861,404 square Km. accounting for over 40 percent of the irrigated areas and sustains 37 percent of the country. Appreciating this relevance of the river for the life of people of India, the Union Government set about to relieve the tremendous pressure to which the Ganga has been subjected over the years. Most of its water in the upper reaches is diverted into canals. Untreated sewage and industrial effluents are dumped into the river at

numerous places and the residues of pesticides and insecticides used in the farms are washed into it. The Government realized that the situation, already one of alarming proportions, has been further aggravated by deforestation, resulting in silting, floods and reduced navigational possibilities. Recognising the magnitude of this problem, and realising the importance of water quality as a cardinal element of river management, the Government of India, in February 1985 set up the Central Ganga Authority for the planning and execution of a timebound programme to prevent the pollution and erosion of the banks of the river. This holistic programme eventually came to be known as Ganga Action Plan (GAP) and was formally launched at Varanasi on 14 June 1986.

After over six years of formal launching of the Ganga Action plan, it is now necessary to assess the fruitfulness of this endeavour.

considering the huge expenditure already incurred. Suffice it to say, the plan is not paying the desired dividend as some very important avenues are not being given proper and desired attention. As a result, the need of the moment is to rethink the whole issue if proper return of the expenditure incurred is desired by the authorities concerned.

Before analysing the demerits of Ganga Action Plan, one should locate why the river assumed so much importance in the life of our countrymen.

**Relevance of River Ganga :** Firstly, the Ganga basin is home to more than 37 percent of the population of the country. Secondly, the Ganga basin waters and drains 8 states : Harayana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi. Thirdly, the Ganga basin is extensively cultivated. About 47 percent of the total irrigated area in the country is in the Ganga basin. Fourthly, a variety of crops are raised in the basin : rice, wheat, sugar cane, cotton and jute. Fifthly, more than three-fourths of the annual rainfall in the Ganga basin occurs in the four months from June to September. Sixthly, the Ganga has been a major source of communications since ancient times.

**Why Ganga Action Plan :** Considering the magnitude of the river's importance, the Government of India felt that level of pollution of the Ganga should be checked. But pollution is not the only problem faced by the river. Silting and erosion of the banks are equally serious problems and deserve urgent remedial action. The Government realised that in any river-quality management programme, the first step is to identify the sources of pollution. The Central Board for Prevention and Control of Water pollution identified such sources through its exhaustive study of the river basin published under

the 'River Basin Series' in 1981. This was the first scientific document which formed the basis for the Ganga Action Plan. The Centre for Study of Man and Environment (C.S.M.E.), located in Presidency College, Calcutta, prepared the document based on data collected by the West Bengal Pollution Control Board. Statistical analyses of water quality data were carried out by the Indian Statistical Institute (I.S.I.), Calcutta.

The Ganga Action Plan comprises 262 schemes estimated to cost about Rs. 260 crores. These include : construction of electric crematoria, sewage treatment plants, lowcost sanitation, building embankments, river quality monitoring, etc. But in the whole scheme of endeavour, the social aspects of the plan are utterly neglected. The work that is undertaken is generally civil and structural engineering in nature. The goal of Ganga Action Plan among others, is to enhance the dwelling standard of the people residing on the two banks and its adjoining areas of the river. But in the total endeavour, the task of involving the common people to make the plan a long-lasting, viable and penetrative one, is totally ignored.

**Why A Rethink is Needed :** Experts believe that in order to realise the cherished aims of the plan, motivational awareness should be imparted to the people residing on the two sides of the river, so that they can transform their lifestyle, behavioral pattern, taboos, values, ethos, preceptions, and the like, which may not be conducive for furthering the aims of the Plan. Social Scientists believe that unless this can be ensured, the Plan cannot achieve its target.

**What Is Needed :** For this, audio-visual training camps should be set up to impart training to the inhabitants dwelling on the two sides of the river. Local clubs, representatives of mass organisations and elected

bodies like, panchayat and municipalities, should be involved so that they can ensure that what they learned at the training camps are practiced by the people in their daily life. As most of the people are illiterate or semiliterate, visual exposure is the most effective medium to make people conscious about the evil-effects of siltation, erosion and pollution of the river Ganga. In many cases, it has been found that the behavioural pattern of the people is such that it serves to pollute the river water further through washing clothes, dumping garbage, defecation on the banks of the river, throwing animal carcasses and half-burnt and unburnt corpses into the river. etc. the people have developed a habit which needs to be cured and for this, social aspects of the Ganga Action Plan should be properly strengthened. It may be mentioned that the various Five Year Plans, which were undertaken one after another, have paid poor dividends. This was mainly due to the lack of involvement of the common people, and as a result, these plans remained mere governmental endeavours minus peoples' participation. These lacunae has also been noticed in

the case of Ganga Action Plan. It is now high time to involve the common people in the endeavour pertaining to Ganga Action Plan and thereby attach proper importance to the social aspects of the Plan so that it becomes more meaningful and effective.

**Importance of this Endeavour :**

Considering the miserable economic scenario of our country, it is imperative that the huge expenditure being incurred in the name of Ganga Action Plan pays richest possible dividend. And for this matter, rethinking on the implementational pattern of Ganga Action Plan is urgently needed. Suffice it to say, CSME has started such an endeavour in the North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal for the last one year and more, and has been able to draw wide applause from the concerned quarters for its new type of approach of "planning through popular participation". The Ministry of Environment and Forests, as well as, the Minister Shri Kamal Nath himself, has praised this effort – which is vowed to open up new chapters in the annals of developmental planning in India.



# 'I WILL ASK YOU TO TRY AGAIN WITH CLEAN HANDS'

Arkaprabha Deb interviewed by Benjamin Zachariah

Arkaprabha Deb joined Presidency College in 1958, graduated in physics in 1962 and completed his M. Sc. in Physics from Calcutta University in 1964. Thereafter he began post-graduate training at the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, which he had to give up when the then director B.D. Nag Choudhuri didn't allow him to work in the field of his choice — 'he thought I was a Commie' as he puts it. He then taught at Kalyani University from 1965 to 1967 when he joined the Indian Administrative Service.

His first response when I asked for an interview was 'Why me?' I have to confess I didn't know the answer to that one — I had come to him less with a clear idea of what I wanted to know than out of a sense of curiosity mingled with a certain awe. Apart from having been considered one of the more brilliant students of Physics in a department where the embarrassment of riches ensured that that accolade was not easily won, he was also the guiding spirit behind Presidency College's Left in the 1960's. Legend has it that it was he who spent a whole evening engineering Asim Chatterjee's crossover from the PCSO to the SF — it took a long time because কাঁকা was reluctant to join a group of people who did not believe in God. 'God is irrelevant. অর্কদা reportedly told him, 'the point is to change the world.'

We live in unrevolutionary times ; it is difficult for us to imagine a time when the engineering of a revolution could not only be conceived but almost achieved. We have perhaps learnt to pronounce 'Naxalbari' without the bitterness and anguish, fear and hatred, it still arouses in the generation preceding ours. The history of the movement has begun to be documented with the inevitable gaps and silences associated with the recording of events too powerful to be forgotten and too close to be recounted. To those whose living memory contains the events, reticence is the best self-defence. Arkaprabha Deb was there at the beginning of the beginning. He was elsewhere for the rest of the time. How far away was elsewhere? In 1943 if one were to have asked a Russian where he had been in 1917 he would probably have said 'Petrograd'. It was possible for him to say so with pride. In 1944, no German could have said he had been with Eugen Leviné in the Munich Soviet Republic.

I don't think I succeeded in answering his question in the course of the interview. In quiet, measured tones Arkaprabha Deb gave me the reasons why I wanted to interview him. What follows speaks for itself....

**Q :** *There are quite a few legends about you among your contemporaries ; the fact that you were the first in the college to know and understand Marx, and to be able to communicate his ideas to others.*

**A :** No, that's an exaggeration. Students senior to me were also Marxists, but the first student's Federation Union, i.e. the first communist union was formed by me. I was not certainly the first Marxist in Presidency College, I was only an epigone. There had been brilliant Marxists in the college before me but they didn't care to organize a movement. And legends, you know, are invented by friends.

**Q :** *How is it that earlier Marxists didn't care to organize ?*

**A :** Here my answer would be slightly rhetorical. My personal experience, in a metaphorical way was, what Arthur Koestler wrote in 'The God that Failed!' 'I saw my father hiding his frayed cuffs under the table. I saw swine being drowned while there were starving men to keep the prices up. That made me a rebel.'

To paraphrase Marx, a moribund society creates its neurotic gravediggers. I was one of those neurotic gravediggers. Now I am not a gravedigger but I continue to be neurotic. I suppose those brilliant persons who had been

Marxists earlier didn't have the personal experience of squalor which made me active as a rebel.

At that time — you'll laugh at me if I say so — I thought that society could be reorganized on a rational basis, as Trotsky said. I also believed, as Marx said, that men could be made authentically human. I don't believe that any more. Men cannot be made authentically human. Earlier there had been a theoretical sort of Marxism. People read the 'Civil War in France' or the 'Gotha Programme' or 'What is to be Done' by Lenin. What they read was confined to theory. In my case I had seen squalor.

**Q :** *Would you talk a little about your experiences?*

**A :** You see, I am a government servant. A public servant is not allowed any private opinions. So as far as particular incidents are concerned.....

**Q :** *You were supposed to have 'indoctrinated' a generation of Marxists — the term 'indoctrination' of course, has negative connotations.....*

**A :** No, No, I don't think it has a negative connotation. Every society — every literate society — has an ideology of the ruling class. And the repressed should have an ideology also, sabotaging the ideology of the ruling class. It is not really 'indoctrination'. You have only to tell a boy that the boy who comes by limousine does not care about you. His only advantage is that he was born in the elite. Your only disadvantage is that you were born in squalor. He sees it so easily that this kind of indoctrination needs no special effort.

**Q :** *The term 'Naxalite' which was used for the movement which grew up later, was used as term of derision.....*

**A :** No, you see — সেই সময়ে আমাদের গান

ছিল — আমাদের নয়, যাদের আমি Marxist তৈরি করেছিলাম — 'নকশাল থেকে শ্রীকাকুলামে/লাল আগুন, Yenani-এর আগুন।'

Naxalbari to them (I am a government servant, so I have no private opinion) was, what Yenani was to Mao-Tse-Tung.

**Q :** *What did you do after you left college?*

**A :** I taught in a university. Then I joined what is called the I.A.S. The exact word should be 'Indian Asinine Service'. So I joined this 'Indian Asinine Service.'

**Q :** *What were your experiences of teaching?*

**A :** Teaching I enjoyed thoroughly, and I think my students, all of them are doing very well these days — will not say I was a bad teacher.

**Q :** *Why did you stop?*

**A :** I stopped — well that's really a personal question. The point is that whatever is personal is also political. At that time I was associated with the broad spectrum of the student movement. I found that the line of individual annihilation would lead to not only incarceration but a lot of physical torture. And I don't have the physical courage not to spill the beans. I thought that would be some sort of treachery.

**Q :** *So when you were teaching, you were associated with the movement?*

**A :** I have told you no personal questions. Ask no questions, you shall be told no lies.

**Q :** *Was it difficult to be a member of the IAS when most of your friends were on the other side of the establishment?*

**A :** Yes, it was difficult. It was emotionally painful. Not only friends but boys whom I had drawn into the fold of Marxism....

*Q : How is it possible to reconcile active political campaigning with, say, family life?*

A : The point is there is quite a lot of misunderstanding about this. Marx's basic assumption was that it is your being which determines your consciousness, not your consciousness which determines your being. Politics is only an epiphenomenon. Everything is political. The objective is to move society from a stage where everything is political to one where nothing is political. 'The State will wither away' simply means that this society, where everything is political (because it is determined by the mode of production and the relations of production) can be transformed into a society where nothing will be political. Today the personal also is political. Today we are all either cogs in the wheel of repression or victims of repression. To paraphrase Marx, there will be a time when the contradictions between the mode of production and the relations of production will reach the stage where society will no longer be able to hold them; the integument will burst asunder and the expropriator will be expropriated.

*Q : Do you think that Marx envisaged a stage where the withering away of the state was actually achieved and nothing would be political, or did he set it up as an impetus for change?*

A : No, not at all, unfortunately these days people only read Marx's post-1848 writing. Read the younger Marx : the human essence is not in individual qualities, it is determined by production relations. 'Man will become authentically human' — it's almost a limp cliché now.

*Q : Why is it a limp cliché?*

A : You see, thieves, thugs, are quoting this and making money.

The ideology has failed to be implemented by a set of crooks. The ideology fell into the hands of men — whose hands were not clean. Parvus (the socialist theoretician) made a lot of money on the Berlin-Baghdad railway. After the revolution, Parvus said to Lenin, 'I want to join the Revolution'. Lenin said, 'Parvus, you have a brilliant mind, but the revolution needs clean hands, which you don't have.'

*Q : Looking back, how would you explain the failure of Marxism in India?*

A : India as a federal state is centrally ruled by non-Marxist parties. Powers relating to the basic tenets of Marxism — property rights — are vested in the central government therefore a communist cabinet in one or two particular states cannot implement even the basic tenets of Marxism — the abolition of private property.

If private property continues to exist the party that calls itself communist cannot transcend the relations of production engendered by private property.

I wouldn't say that Marxism has failed. I only object to these social-democratic parties being called Marxist.

*Q : The Soviet Union seems to have failed to meet the aspirations of those who felt it was a viable alternative to capitalism. Sifting through the Soviet experience of 70-odd years many people now make the distinction between Stalinism and socialism. How far do you think Stalin was committed to socialism for its own sake, rather than as far as it suited his own purposes?*

A : To say that Stalin didn't believe in socialism would be egregious. But the civil war and collectivisation perhaps made him decide that ruthlessness was necessary to safeguard socialism. He may have done things



which we denigrate today. In my senescence I have an uneasy feeling that the basic assumption that men could be made human is not true. We are evil.

It is true that had Trotsky been around things could have been different. But history has its own conundrums. Giordano Bruno, like Trotsky, opted for martyrdom. Galileo did not. It is an irony of history that because of this comfort-loving and greedy Galileo, mankind has discovered a lot of physical laws that are called theoretical physics. It is stupid to make a historical judgement based on hindsight. Stalin after all saved the republic. In that sense he was a historical necessity.

It is difficult to believe that such an ascetic, spartan person acted for self-interest. Svetlana Alliluyeva (Stalin's daughter) said that as a child she had no toys to play with ...

**Q :** *About China's programme of modernisation ...*

**A :** China has taken the road of capitalism. All that the leadership wants to preserve is their own personal and political power. So the Chinese system is now a capitalist market economy with the state machinery being controlled by an elite. Such an arrangement has nothing to do with Marxism.

**Q :** *Francis Fukuyama has written that the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union ...*

**A :** ... means the end of history. This is rather silly, to say the least. History is about how men live, love, struggle, suffer and die. The end of the Cold War has meant neither the end of squalor nor the end of the obscene opulence of a very small minority. This contradiction will certainly reach a stage at which the present social order will be unable to resolve it.

Try again. You are my son's age. I will ask you to try again. With clean hands.



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**PRIYALI GHOSH** *IIIrd yr. English*

**TWENTIETH CENTURY BALLAD**

O look at the Sun, dear Mother, Mother,  
With its heart of fire so bright.  
Why that's just a gaseous mass, dear heart,  
Now tell me, what's the speed of light?

But look at the Moon, dear Mother, Mother,  
Laughing in her silver nightgown.  
The Moon is a satellite of the earth, dear  
heart,  
That circles the sun around.

I saw a firefly high up there Mother,  
But my hand, it couldn't quite reach .  
Now that's a star, another gaseous body,  
I wonder, in your school, what do they teach?

The sea he came to me last night, Mother,  
Mother,  
And he whispered a secret true.  
Whatever can you mean, you foolish little  
thing,  
Be quiet or I'll take a rod to you.

Ah, but I'm your own dear child, O Mother,  
Mother,  
Your heart's tender with love for me.  
Why it's only my hormones do that, dear  
heart,  
The doctor explained it most cleverly.

My heart is heavy, dear Mother, Mother,  
I weep for you in fear.  
Grey around you and grey before  
Swallowing your soul so drear.

I see your bars, dear Mother, Mother,  
And the chains you clasp so tight.  
It's joy and sadness wear the same face,  
And the people march in the night.

I see the dried up wells of love,  
And the blind, blind darkened eyes,  
And the lost screams of the circling vultures  
As you look through the new sun rise.

You rave in your fever, my daughter,  
Your cheek lies thin and white.  
Don't cry for me, my mother dear,  
I'm going with the sea of light.

They'll not catch me now, O Mother, Mother,  
I'll be a sun you'll never see.  
They'll dissect my molecular structure,  
But they 'll never, no, they'll never find me.  
When the purple moon sang

**FLASHES**

Stars fingers touched, a tangled web  
Grass talking to stones  
And the tide began to ebb.  
Water was hard and still,  
Screams into screams into screams  
In the huge mountain sparkling black  
Soul burying deep her dreams  
Petals soft snake was crying  
But laughter came bubbling slow,  
Shadows lay down and died  
Heart saw the red pain glow  
Apples were red, apples were strong  
Water greened and drifted away  
She picked up her skirts and she ran  
She ran from everyday  
Moon threw up her hands  
Footprints in clouds shone  
Sunlight slid along the floor  
Stood up slow, the staring dawn.

NANDINI MUKHOPADHYAY *ex-student English*

**TRIVIAL PURSUIT (Presi Style)**

*14th December '92 In College —*

'Hi' 'Lovely seeing you',  
'No trouble I hoped...'  
'Nah -- Sat at home and moped'  
'No trouble' 'not me'  
'Didn't it sound like Diwali ?'  
'Did you get the B.B.C.'  
'Usual classes' 'thank goodness'  
'I'm sick of this mess'  
'Can we catch a movie  
this afternoon ?'  
'Folks at home may, worry'  
'Yeah, its too soon'  
'A shame', 'but an internal affair'  
'How can they point a finger ?'  
'Come on, there's a class now'  
'Did you practise how  
to scan', 'no' (obviously)  
(that's a joke; no ? Sorry)'  
'Is poetry relevant  
to contemporary society'  
'Subject for essay, lacking originality'  
'Has anything new happened  
in the past thousand  
years' 'same old love and  
Hate and lust' 'Medieval reasons  
For nuclear treasons...'  
'Not a bad line'  
'Don't pinch it, mine'  
General laughter.  
'Seriously yaar,  
In a world of murder  
Can poetry be relevant ?'  
'Please understand  
Nothing is'  
'What' bout peace ?'  
'There's coffee in the canteen'

'Lets go' 'haven't been in  
There for ages'  
And we  
Proceeded to exchange views,  
And plan peace marches  
And clean up self images  
Tarnished at home  
When things were truly fearsome  
And we felt rather lonesome  
Under the onslaught of news.  
'No ?'

REEMA SEN *ex student, English*

**FINDING FUTURES**

Finding futures in a face  
Luscious eyes - lissom grace  
Finding futures on the notice board  
Finding futures underscored  
Finding futures in clamouring queues  
Or long drawn empty avenues  
Finding futures piling high  
Stake a number, reach the sky  
Finding futures in envelopes  
Grimms' tales, Television soaps  
Immaculate empty corridors  
The mock turtles love — needing more  
Finding futures in yesterday's song  
A mescaline dream, or an obtuse wrong  
Finding futures speeding away  
A spot of glory, a cracked up day  
Finding futures in Dali's clocks  
Cracked tea cups, worn out socks  
Finding futures in a baby's eye  
A trembling smile, a fragile lie  
A silent scream as passion pales  
Finding futures in painted nails.

MADHUBAN MITRA *IIIrd yr. English*

**This Our 'Make-Break' selves**

I need eyes to light me to my self  
In the milkman's eyes, I come to be.  
The night dissolves me —  
Throwing me round  
With the dead lamp, the flowered quilt,  
Distills me, into handfuls of darkness.  
I become the lamp, the quilt.  
Writhing in agony on the lilac dawn  
I hear the milkman at the door,  
I wait to be born.

The name I rub off  
(Out of) my shoes, each night  
On the door-mat,  
Rises shroud-like in the dim light,  
Possesses me. The milkman's change  
Ringing in my hands,  
I move widow-wise  
Eyes across the air-shaft  
Greet this coming to life.  
The lamp, the quilt, shed  
Their dark-identity, dissociate  
In the hot sun, float—  
Hiding my darkness in them,  
Dusty, in a shaft of light.

I come to life  
In the cold acquittal  
Of the day-maid's eyes,  
She must be aware of  
My nightly-joints  
Or, why does she hasten her self  
After dusk ?

The mirror volleying my darkness  
Across the bed at night,  
Innocently hands back my day-light self,  
The Rays, Mundras, Chatterjees,  
Ghosh', Alis, Mitras, Devs,  
Recognize this shrouded 'me'  
At the market, the movie-hall, the glade.  
Tacitly admitting my coming to life  
With the jostlings in the crowded bus,  
The conductor hands me the change.

The college with its vibrant life  
Piecing my self-sparks  
Into a bright being,  
Glowings with fleeting life.

The chewed-off self of the day  
Is a decline in identity—  
The tracings back to the dark inanimate  
Lamp, quilt, and the mirror volleying dark-  
ness,  
The door-mat with the rubbed-off name.  
The eyes that gave me life  
Retreat into their own secrets,  
Their lamps, and mirrors and nameless selves.

This juggling, endless and vain,  
The night grinding the finite shrouds  
To dust, on door-mats—  
To dust, swirling in shafts of light,  
The day scatters  
The intense being-s of the night.

TINA COLAH *III yr History*

**Rejection**

Rejection.  
Pain, like a searing arrow  
Sweeps through,  
And I am caught in the eternal darkness of  
the everlasting hollow void  
Which is that bottomless pit—  
My heart.

PARVEZ SHARMA *IIIrd yr. English*

**'INTO THE DUSTBIN OF ETERNITY'**

The fingers of a mind grope  
in the darkness of triviality.  
Thoughts die,  
often prematurely  
The poetry of life perishes  
unwilling,  
to be bound by form.  
Existence is supreme—  
Let the impotent silence scream.  
The promise of youth, like  
the thirsty flower, wilts.

শান্তনু চক্রবর্তী তৃতীয় বর্ষ ইতিহাস  
হাঁটা

কখনো হেঁটেছ তুমি, এই পথ ধরে।  
একা একা হাঁটা নয়, লেকের পথ ধরে,  
নয় কাঁধে ব্যাগ ঝুলিয়ে কলেজ স্ট্রীটের পথে পথে।

হাঁটা মানে সত্যিকারের হাঁটা,  
জনগণের সাথে পায়ে পা মিলিয়ে  
মানুষ কি আজ হাঁটতে ভুলে গেছে ?

পথ তো তারা হাঁটছে অনন্তকাল থেকে।  
পথ হেঁটেছে তারা Moses-এর সঙ্গে  
এমনকি ইদানিং কালে গান্ধীর সঙ্গেও।  
পথ তো তারা হাঁটছে অনন্তকাল ধরে।

কিন্তু কখনো কি মানুষ পেরেছে  
পায়ের চাপে জমি দাবিয়ে দিতে !

অক্ষর চট্টোপাধ্যায় রসায়ন, দ্বিতীয় বর্ষ  
নিদ্রাভঙ্গ

সময়ের ট্রেনটা ধরার জন্য,  
জীবনের প্রভাবে,  
বসে ছিলাম এক অখ্যাতনামা স্টেশনে।  
তাকে দেখলাম,  
সে পাশে এসে বসলো,  
কিছু কথাবার্তা ;  
তারপর কখন যে তার কোলে মাথা রেখে—  
ঘুমিয়ে পড়েছিলাম,  
খেয়াল নেই।  
বোধহয় ভেবেছিলাম,  
সে বলবে 'ওঠো !'  
ট্রেন এসে গেছে।'  
যথাসময়ে ট্রেন এলো,  
এবং স্টেশন ছেড়ে চলেও গেলো  
আমায় একলা ফেলে।

জীবনের অপরাহ্নে হলো নিদ্রাভঙ্গ,  
একটা শব্দ কিছুর স্পর্শে।  
দেখি, সে নেই !

খালি বেগে শুয়ে আছি।  
আর 'আরেক' তাকে দেখি উল্টো দিকের প্ল্যাটফর্মে,  
আরেকটা বেগে,  
'আরেক' আমার সঙ্গে,  
সেখানে তখনো প্রভাত।

রাজশ্রী মুখোপাধ্যায় মাতকোত্তর প্রথম বর্ষ ইতিহাস  
সুকিয়া পোখরির পথে

শ্রান্ত হিমেল হাওয়া ;  
দু'একটা বরফের ফোঁটা ;  
নির্জনে একা বয় শ্রোতস্বতী।  
পাহাড়ী পথে শায়িত অশ্বের পদচিহ্ন  
সবুজ আর্দ্র মসের গালিচায় স্থির।  
চারপাশে শুধু নিস্তরুতারই অস্তিত্ব  
মারো মারো পাতার মত্বা ঘোষণাই বরং কিছু বেমানান।  
নয়তো জরাভারে নুইয়ে পড়া লামার সাথে  
তিব্বতী লেপচার পাড়ুরতা, অথবা  
গরম কফির ফ্লাস্ক, চিপ্‌স আর পেপ্সির  
সাথে কিছু ছেঁড়াখোঁড়া কথোপকথন  
— সবকিছু কেমন নির্বিরোধে মেলে  
আর নিশ্চল জীপের আগ্রাসী আলোয়  
ধরা দেয় — নিঃশব্দেই !

পারমিতা সেন দ্বিতীয় বর্ষ, রাশিবিজ্ঞান  
সীমানার শেষে

জীবন কি এভাবেই ফুরাবে,  
রঙিন ফানুস কিছু উড়িয়ে—  
স্বপ্নেরা বিফলতা কুড়াবে,  
মৃত্যুতে যাবে সব জুড়িয়ে ॥

সীমানা বিহীন যত চিন্তা,  
ক্ষয় করে যায় যারা জীবনটা ;  
আসল প্রেম যে যায় দূরে,  
সময়কে ব্যর্থতায় পুড়িয়ে ॥

জীবন কি হবে সেই বৃত্তে ?  
যেখানে জীবনটাই মিথ্যে।



কত প্রতিশ্রুতি আর দেবে আমাকে  
থেমে আছে এইখানে থামাতে ;  
স্মৃতি যে চিরদিনই রয়ে যাবে তার  
দেব সব খুশিমত গড়িয়ে ॥

**অর্জুনদেব সেনশর্মা** তৃতীয় বর্ষ, বাংলা  
প্রশ্ন

আমের বাজার জামের বাজার  
পচছে খোসা স্তূপের মতন  
তারই মাঝে মূর্তি ধরে  
সকল পাপের লব্ধ জ্যোতি  
আসলে এক ছন্নমতি

এর'মই এক নোংরা মতন  
জলের উপর নীলচে মাছি  
পদ্মফুলের বোঁটায় কাঁটা  
মাছির তাড়ায় কাঁটাই কীসব  
আসলে এক ছন্নমতি

প্রাঙ্গণে ঐ নাচের তালে  
লালন ফকির কোথায় তুমি  
দেখবে বরং এস চেয়ে  
পৌত্র পৌত্রী সুবোধ অতি  
আসলে এক ছন্নমতি

রাতের ধোঁয়ায় তাজমহলে  
গোমেদমণি বিমিয়ে পড়ে  
খেলা তখন নিভিয়ে দেব  
শ্যামল মায়া ডেকেই চলে  
আসলে কী ছন্নমতি ৷

**শীর্ষেন্দু শেখর গায়ের** দ্বিতীয় বর্ষ পদার্থবিদ্যা

**ইন্টারভিউ**

যেদিন আমার চাকরীর প্রথম ইন্টারভিউ এল  
শীতের গোধূলি — আবীরের আভায় রঙিন কিন্তু  
বিষণ্ণ ধূসর আকাশের দিকে  
তাকালাম, বুক ভরে নিলাম খুশীর তৃপ্তির নিঃশ্বাস ;  
চিঠিটাকে দুবার চুমু খেয়ে ছুটে গেলাম, বস্তির মুখের  
চায়ের দোকানে ।

সংগ্রামী অভিনন্দন জানাল বন্ধুরা, উদার আমাকে  
এক কাপ নোনতা লাল গরম জলের বিনিময়ে !  
দিলাম প্রতিশ্রুতি তাদেরকে ডুলে না যাওয়ার, তারপর  
ছুটে এলাম শেষ শয্যায় শায়িত বাবার বিছানায় !  
চারিদিকে ভীড় করল ছোট ভাইবোনেরা  
তাদের ছোট্ট মনের সবটুকু উষ্ণতা সাথে নিয়ে, শতচ্ছিন্ন  
জীর্ণ কাপড়টাকে  
কোনমতে গায়ে জড়িয়ে হেঁসেল থেকে বেরিয়ে এলেন  
মা ;  
হাতে চিরন্তন অভাবের তালিকা, কিন্তু আজকের সুর  
অন্য  
হয়তো বা অনাগত অনাস্বাদিত এক ভবিষ্যতের  
কল্পনায় ।

দীর্ঘ রাতের প্রতীক্ষার শেষে ফুটল ভোরের আলো,  
বেরিয়ে পড়লাম ঘর থেকে, সর্বদেহে হিমেল হাওয়ার  
পরশ—

একটু অন্যরকম সেদিনের থেকে, যেদিন রাতে বাড়ী  
ফিরে

শুনেছিলাম বাবার কারখানা লকআউটের কথা ; মনে  
পড়ল

সেই দিনটিকে, যেদিন বাড়ীওয়ালা, পাড়ার মস্তানদের  
দিয়ে

আমাদের টেনে হিঁচড়ে বার করে দিয়েছিল বাড়ীর  
বাইরে ।

সিলিংফ্যান থেকে ঝুলন্ত দিদির বীভৎস মুখ মনে পড়ল,  
পণের টাকা যোগাড় না হওয়ায় যার বিয়ের সাথ অং  
মেটেনি,

চোখ ভরে এল ছোট ভাইটার কথা ভেবে ; যাকে বাঁচাতে  
পারিনি—

অপুষ্টির রক্তশূন্যতার করাল গ্রাস থেকে । চোয়াল শক্ত  
হয়ে এল

উষ্ণ নিঃশ্বাসের তালে তালে—এবার প্রস্তুতির পালা  
২৭ বছরের জীবনের চরমতম পরীক্ষার । বায়ু থেকে  
বেরোলো

বাবার পুরোনো একজোড়া জুতো, জোগাড় হল ঘড়ি  
আর টাই ।

শেষবার নিজেই আয়নায় দেখে, দুবুদু বুকে  
মা ভাই বোনদের কম্পমান হৃদয়কে পিছনে ফেলে,  
আমি

এগিয়ে চললাম-পকেটে বন্ধুদের চাঁদা করে তোলা  
ট্যান্ডিভাড়া।

‘কাম্ ইন’ — জোরালো গলার আওয়াজ আমাকে চমকে  
দিলো !

ঝকঝকে অভিজাত্যে মোড়া টেবিল, চেয়ার আর  
আসবাবের পাশে

বেমানান হয়ে, ঢুকে পড়লাম বিবাদীবাগের বিশাল  
বাড়ীটায়

বারোতলার একটা খুপরি ঘরে—

‘হোয়াটস ইওর নেম্ ?’ —দেখলাম প্রশ্নকর্তাকে ;

পরনে সাফারী স্যুট, চোখে সোনার চশমা, মাথায় অল্প  
চুল,

তেলে চিক্চিকে আধবোজা দুটো চোখ ক্লান্ত—

বাড়িয়ে দিলাম বি-কম্, এম্-কম্, ক্যারেক্টার আর  
খেলার

যত সার্টিফিকেট ছিল, কিছু অবুঝ একখানা হাত  
সেগুলোকে দূরে সরিয়ে দিয়ে 555-এর ছাই ঝাড়লো  
শ্বেত পাথরের অ্যাসট্রেতে। একবারের জন্য খুললো  
আধবোজা দুটো চোখ, ইঙ্গিত করলো পাশের সিল্কের  
পাঞ্জাবীকে,

‘প্লে বয়’ থেকে মুখ না তুলেই তিনি প্রশ্ন করলেন,

‘এনি রেকমেন্ডেশান্ ?’ —বোকার মত ঘাড় নাড়লাম,  
প্রশ্নকর্তা

মুখ তুলে, ভাবলেশহীন ভাবে, ভুরু একটুও না কঁচকে  
চোখের পাতা একচুলও না কাঁপিয়ে, দুঃখপ্রকাশের সুরে  
বললেন ‘অলরাইট জেন্টলম্যান্ —সী যু লেটার’  
যার মানেটা আমার জানা ছিল।

হঠাৎ হাত পা ঠান্ডা হয়ে এল, যেন বন্ধ হয়ে এল  
নিঃশ্বাস—

কোনমতে সার্টিফিকেটগুলো তুলে নিয়ে, কোন নমস্কার  
না জানিয়ে ; দৌড়ে বেরিয়ে আসতে গিয়ে

ধাক্কা খেলাম একটা চেয়ারে। পড়ে যেতে যেতে,  
ক্ষণিকের জন্য কাঁপতে থাকা একটা কাঁচের আয়নায়—

দেখলাম বেঁকেচুরে যেতে থাকা নিজের মুখ  
দাঁত বসে যাওয়া ঠোঁটের নোনতা স্বাদ, দিদির মায়ের,  
ভাইটার

ভাসাভাসা মুখ আমাকে ফিরিয়ে নিয়ে গেল প্রস্তরযুগে !  
হাতের কাগজগুলো দুমড়ে মুচড়ে সাফারী স্যুটের মুখের  
উপর

হুঁড়ে দিয়ে, প্রচণ্ড ঘৃষিতে ছিটকে ফেললাম  
বিলিতি কাঁচের রঙ বদলানো ফুলদানীটাকে ;  
দেওয়াল থেকে ফরাসী বিপ্লবের অয়েল পেন্টিংটা উপড়ে  
এনে,

থুথু ছিটিয়ে দিলাম পাশের রাষ্ট্রনায়কদের ছবিতে ;  
জাপানী ওয়ালব্লকে সুরেলা আওয়াজে বারোটা বাজার  
সাথে

সাফারী স্যুটের বেল বাজিয়ে দারোয়ানদের ডাকার  
আওয়াজ !

তারপর উর্দিপরা কয়েকজন লোক যখন আমাকে  
টেনে হিঁচড়ে বার করে নিয়ে যাচ্ছিল, তখন  
ক্ষণিকের জন্য পিছন থেকে ভেসে এলো দুটো গালাগাল  
‘সন্ অফ এ বীচ’ আর ‘আনকালচার্ড ব্রন্ট’  
বাইরে, উজ্জ্বল সূর্যালোকে আলোকিত, ব্যস্ত বিবাদীবাগের  
রাস্তায় দাঁড়িয়ে—

একদৃষ্টে তাকিয়ে রইলাম একটা পুরোনো ল্যাম্পপোস্টের  
দিকে,

যেখানে সরকার বাহাদুরের বাঁধা মাইনের ইলেকট্রিসিয়ান  
হাতের লাঠি দিয়ে খুঁচিয়ে ভেঙে দিচ্ছিল  
একটা মা-কাকের বহুকষ্টে তিলতিল করে বানানো বাসা।  
আর কাকটার কা-কা আর্তনাদে চোখ জলে ভরে ওঠার  
বদলে

আমার বিধবস্ত মুখে ফুটে উঠল হাসি, জীবন ও বাস্তবকে  
চোখের সামনে অবহেলায় প্রতিবিশিত হতে দেখে—  
যার মধ্যে লীন হয়েছিল আমার জীবনের  
প্রথম ও শেষ চাকরীর ইন্টারভিউ-এর ইতিহাস।



**Short Stories**

ছোটগল্প

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## অপরাজেয়

শীর্ষ রায় তৃতীয় বর্ষ রাশিবিজ্ঞান

ফস করে দেশলাই ধরিয়ে, লঠনটা জ্বালিয়ে নিল রতন। এখন রাত অনেক। সমস্ত এলাকাটা অন্ধকারে ডুবে যেন এক প্রাণহীন দৈত্যের মতো পড়ে আছে। মাঝে মাঝে দু-একটা শিয়াল কি কুকুর ডেকে উঠেছিল, এখন তাও শোনা যায় না। রোজই রাতের বেলায় এইরকম সময়ে — বিশেষতঃ কাজে বেরনোর আগে দরজার গোড়ায় বসে একটা বিড়ি ধরিয়ে রতন রাত্রির শব্দ শোনে। তারপর ঘরে গিয়ে তৈরী হয়ে নেয়। আজ হাতে আরও কিছুটা সময় আছে হাতঘড়িটার দিকে তাকিয়ে দেখে নেয় রতন। গঙ্গাও নড়ে চড়ে উঠে বসে বিছানায়। বিছানা মানে একটা পায়া ভাঙা চৌকী। ইট দিয়ে ঠেকনা দেওয়া। লঠনের আলোয় রতন গঙ্গার মুখের দিকে তাকিয়ে থাকে— হাসে। মিশকালো রঙের, শ্রাবণ মাসের নদীর মতো শরীর। উপছে পড়ছে। যেন এই বন্যা হবে। চাষার মেয়ে। বছর তিনেক আগে পদ্মবটী থেকে জোর করে রতন তুলে নিয়ে এসেছিল। তারপর থেকে রয়ে গেছে।

তিনবছর আগের সেই দিনটা এখনও ভোলেনি গঙ্গা। সন্ধ্যা হয়ে এসেছিল। জংলা পথ ধরে ঘরে ফিরছিল গঙ্গা। এমন সময়ে আঁধারের ভেতর থেকে দুজন শক্ত পুরুষ ওর উপর বাঁপিয়ে পড়ে। চীৎকার করারও সুযোগ দেয় না। মুখের উপর হাত চাপা দিয়ে গাড়ীতে তুলে, গাড়ী ছুটিয়ে দেয় অন্ধকারে। গঙ্গার বাপ মা দাদারা প্রথমে চিস্তিত হলেও পরে ও ব্যাপারে আর মাথা ঘামায়নি। খোঁজও করেনি কোথাও। যেন এমনটাই হবে, সবাই জানত। আর তার জন্য শ্রুতও ছিল। অনেকক্ষণ গাড়ী চলার পর ওরা থামে। গঙ্গাকে দুজন মিলে হিঁচড়ে নিয়ে গিয়ে একটা অন্ধকার ঘরে বন্ধ করে রাখে। ভয়ে আতঙ্কে গঙ্গার মুখে কথা সরে না। ভোরের দিকে দরজা খুলে যায়। ভিতরে আসে একজন পুরুষ। লম্বা, শক্ত সমর্থ। মুখটা বোকা যায় না। গঙ্গার নাকে মদের তীব্র গন্ধ এসে লাগে — ‘আমার নাম রতন। আমি তোকে রাখব। পালাতে গেলে মরবি।’ এইটুকু বলে আবার দরজা বন্ধ করে চলে যায়। প্রথম কটা দিন নিদারুণ আতঙ্কে কাটানোর পর গঙ্গার মন একটু একটু আভাস পেল মানুষটা বুনো— কিন্তু জানোয়ার নয়।

একটু যেন বাউড়ুলে! আর পকুই এর পোকা ক্রমে রতনের প্রতি গঙ্গার একটা আলগা টান জন্মে গেল। সেই টান কখন যে ভালোবাসায় বদলে গেল টেরও পেল না গঙ্গা। মইদুল বলে গঙ্গার জন্যই রতনের মতিগতি ফিরেছে। মদটা যদিও এখনও সমানে চালায়। মাঝে মাঝে গঙ্গা রতন দুজনেই। একসঙ্গে।

রতন কখনও শাস্ত্রমতে বিয়ে করার কথা ভাবেওনি আর করেওনি। গঙ্গাও অভিযোগ করেনি কোনদিন। দুজনে মিলে একথানা থেকে ভাত খেয়েছে, এক বালিশে মাথা গুঁজে শুয়েছে। শীতের রাতে একে অন্যের শরীরের গুম নিয়েছে—এক সঙ্গে জীবনের মুখোমুখি হয়েছে। মোটকথা এক সঙ্গে টিকে গিয়েছে। গত বছরে যখন রতন তিনমাসের জন্য জেলে গেছিল, যাবার আগে গঙ্গা চোখের কোনে জল নিয়ে বলেছিল — ‘ফিরে আসবি তো? তুই ছাড়া আমার আর কেউ নেই রে।’ গঙ্গাকে বুকের মধ্যে টেনে নিয়ে রতন বলেছিল— ‘আসব রে পাগলী আসব। এসে তোকে বিয়ে করতে হবে না!’ শুনে গঙ্গা বলেছিল— ‘সতি!’ ব্যাস্ ওই একবারই এই কথা উঠেছিল। তিনমাস পর রতন ফিরে আসার খুশীতে দুজনেই সেই কথা ভুলে গেছিল।

‘ফ্যালফ্যাল করে কি দেখছিস? কাজে যাবার ইচ্ছা নাই বুঝি?’

‘হ্যারে গঙ্গা। আজ থাক। আজ আর ভালো লাগছে না। শরীলটা দুর্বল। আজ বরং তোর সঙ্গে একটু রঙ্গ করি।’

‘মরণ! রঙ্গ করবি তো খাবি কি? কাল সকালে যখন পেটে টান পড়বে তখন বুঝবি রঙ্গ লপচপানির সময়ে মনে থাকে না’—বলে গঙ্গা চটপট বিছানা ছেড়ে উঠে কাপড়টা শক্ত করে বেঁধে নিল। বাঁশের মাচার উপর থেকে দুটো বস্তা নামিয়ে আনল। রতন তখনও উদাস হয়ে গঙ্গার দিকে তাকিয়ে। আরেকবার বলতে যাচ্ছিল যে আজ বরং থাক। কাল সে দেখা যাবে’ খন। এমন সময়ে মনে পড়ল মালগাড়ীটা কালকে সকালেই ছেড়ে দেবে। মইদুল খবর পাঠিয়েছে। এইবারে অটেল দুধসাদা চিনি যাচ্ছে। চিনির এখন বাজার ভালো। তার উপরে মইদুল ব্রীজের তলায় দাঁড়িয়ে থাকবে বলেছে। এমনিতে

এখানে কাজ করে রতন তার দলবল নিয়ে। পুলিশের সঙ্গেও হিসেব ছিল। মুশকিল হল বদলিটা হয়ে। নতুন যেটা এসেছে, তার সঙ্গে হিসেব এখনও জমেনি। তার ওপর এ শালা নাকি পুরো একের নম্বরের মক্ষিচুষ। পোটেকশন ছাড়া এ্যাকশনে নামবে না বলে রতনের দলবল এখন ফাঁকা। খালি ও আর মইদুল। আর কিছু না ভেবে চটপট জামাটা গায়ে দিয়ে নিল। ঘরের পিছনের দাওয়ায় পুরনো কাঠের বাস্কাটার ভিতর থেকে যন্ত্রপাতি আর মইদুলের দেওয়া নতুন ভোজালীটা বার করে নিল। বস্তায় ভরে নিয়ে গঙ্গাকে বলল— ‘চল মাগী, কাল তোকে দেখে নেব।’

রাতের অন্ধকারে গায়ে গা লাগিয়ে এক নারী আর এক পুরুষ বেরিয়ে পড়ল। বাড়ীর পিছনের মাঠ পেরিয়ে ডাইনে গেলেই ব্রীজ। তার তলা দিয়ে রেললাইন চলে গেছে। লাইন ধরে কিছুদূর গেলেই মালগাড়ির বিশ্রাম নেওয়ার জায়গা করা। নলবটী স্টেশনের গায়ে। আজ আকাশে অনেক তারার ঝকঝক। অন্ধকার সঁয়াতসঁয়াতে শিশির ভেজা কালো মাঠের মধ্যে দিয়ে দুজনে এগিয়ে চলল। প্রথম প্রথম গঙ্গা জানত না রতন কি করে। রতন বলত রাতে ও বাজারে টোকিদারীর কাজ করে। কিন্তু একদিন সন্দেহ হতে গঙ্গা রতনের পিছু নিয়ে সব জানতে পেরে যায়। রতনকে বলাতে রাগে ফেটে পড়ে রতন। মারতে মারতে গঙ্গাকে অজ্ঞান করে দেয়। ভেবেছিল বুঝি মরেই গেছে। মইদুলই এক হাকিমকে নিয়ে এসে দেখায়। দু রাত পর জ্ঞান ফেরে গঙ্গার। এই দুটি রাত রতনের জীবনের সবচাইতে ভয়ানক রাত। জ্ঞান ফেরার পর কান্নায় ভেঙে পড়ে দুজনেই। সেদিনের পর থেকে আজ অবধি যতবার রতন কাজে গেছে, বেশীর ভাগ সময়েই তার সঙ্গী হয়েছে গঙ্গা, দলের আপত্তি সত্ত্বেও। আর মইদুল মিঞা তো আছেই। সেই ছোটবেলা থেকে। যেদিন থেকে রতনের পকেটমারীর লাইনে হাতখড়ি। কার্তিক ওস্তাদের দুই শিষ্য— রতন আর মইদুল। এই পনের বছরের লড়াই এ একটিবারও মইদুল রতনের বিপদে মুখ ফিরিয়ে নেয় নি। পাশে দাঁড়িয়েছে মায়ের পেটের ভাইয়ের মতন। দলবদল হয়েছে বারবার। মইদুল বদলায় নি। পকেটমারী ছেড়ে ওয়াগান ভাঙার লাইনে আসার মতলব মইদুলেরই। কর্মক্ষেত্র হিসেবে বেছে নিয়েছে এই নির্জন নলবটীর ওয়াগান ইয়ার্ড। মইদুলের কথায় — ‘গব্বা ভস্কানোর এর চাইতে ভালো জায়গা জগতেও নেই। মাত্র কজন পুলিশ টহলদার। সবকিছু হিসেব মতো।

মাসে দুটো কাজ পেলেই ভাগবাটরা করে রতনের

চলে যায়। গত একমাস কিস্যু হয় নি। তার উপরে রতনের বেহিসেবী চাল। কোনমতে হীরালালের কাছে ধার করে চলেছে। তাও রোজ খাবার জোটেনি। পেটে বড় টান। একা থাকলে কোন রকমে চালিয়ে নিত রতন। সঙ্গে রয়েছে এই খোদার খাসী মাগী। তাই আর বসে থাকা যায় না। মইদুলের খবর—আজ পাহারা জোরদার। চারজন রাইফেলধারী পালা করে পাহারা দিচ্ছে। গত দুদিন কেটে গেছে ওদের গতিবিধি পরখ করে নিতে। ঠিক তিনটের সময়ে পালা বদল হয়। তাই তার আগের ঘন্টাতে কাজ সাড়াটাই বুদ্ধিমানের কাজ। পাহারা দেবার শেষ ঘন্টাতেই পাহারাদারদের নজর শিথিল হয়ে পড়ে। তখনি দাঁও সবচেয়ে বড় সুযোগ।

কারও কারও রাতের গভীরতার সঙ্গে হৃদয়েরও গভীরতা বাড়ে। যেমন রতনের। আজকের রাতের গঙ্গা দুবলা-পাতলা রতনকে কি যেন করে দেয়। মাঠের মাঝে থমকে দাঁড়ায় রতন। বৃকে জাপটে ধরে গঙ্গাকে। তার বনা হাত আর মুখ চড়াও হয় গঙ্গার শরীরে। অসফুট গোঙানির স্বরে গালাগাল দিয়ে ওঠে গঙ্গা —‘হারামির বাচ্চা, ছাড় বলচি।’

মন চায় না, শরীর চায় না কিন্তু তবুও নিজের মনকে বেঁধে নিয়ে রতন চলতে শুরু করে। গঙ্গা কিছুটা নরম হয়ে বলে—‘এইবারে তোকে একটা খোকা দেব দেখিস ‘খন।’ মনে মনে রতন হাসে। গঙ্গার দিকে তাকিয়ে মুখ ভ্যাঙচায়। খিলখিল করে হেসে ওঠে গঙ্গা। বলে—‘আঃরে মা, ঠিক যেন কেউটে সাপ।’

রাত কেটে এগিয়ে চলে দুজন ব্রীজের দিকে। ধারে ধারে কুয়াশার পোষাক কেটে ব্রীজ অবয়ব নেয়। পথ চলতে চলতে মনে হয় বুঝি ব্রীজটাই শামুকের মতো ধীর পদক্ষেপে এগিয়ে আসছে ওদের দিকে। মইদুলকে দেখা যায়। হাত নাড়ে রতন। মইদুলও হাত নেড়ে জবাব দেয়। এই পৌষের শীতেও মইদুলের গা আদুড়। শুধু একটা খাটো প্যান্ট পড়া। হাতে একটা বস্তা। বস্তার ভিতরে প্রাণরক্ষার সরঞ্জাম। অনেক ঝড় ঝাপটা বয়ে যাওয়া মুখে চিন্তার রেখা।—‘বড় দেবী করে ফেললি যে রতনা। বললাম মাঝরাতের পরই চলে আয়।’ দেখ দিকি ভাবী মাত্র একঘণ্টা বাদে পাহারা বদল হবে। ‘রতন শুধু বলে — ‘চল জলদি। গব্বা মিলেছে তো।’ মইদুল জবাব দেয় দুটো চিনেছে। তার মধ্যে যে কোন একটা। রেললাইনে নেমে পড়ে তিনজন। দূরে অন্ধকারের স্তূপের মতো দেখা যায় মালগাড়ির সারি। তার মধ্যে অন্ধকারে, ওদের জন্য অপেক্ষা করে সারি সারি বস্তায় ভরা দুধসাদা চিনি — মিষ্টি, মিহি চিনি।

—‘আজকে চারজন আছে। এখন দুটো টহল মারছে। দুটো কেতরে ঘুমোচ্ছে। আমি দেখে এসেছি। তিনটির পর বদল হবে।’— বলে মইদুল। মালগাড়ীটার একশ গজের মধ্যে থামে। মইদুল আর গঙ্গাকে দাঁড়াতে বলে রতন এগিয়ে যায়। এদিকটা দেখে হাতের ইশারা করে ওদের। ওরাও এগিয়ে এসে জড়ো হয়।

—‘কোনটাতে?’ বলে রতন। মইদুল কিছুটা এগিয়ে যায়। ইশারা করে। রাতের অন্ধকারে মিশে তিনটে মানুষ হামাগুড়ি দিয়ে এগিয়ে যায় তাদের লক্ষ্যে। দূর থেকে হিন্দুস্থানী গানের আবছা অগোছালো সুর শোনা যায়।—‘এ শালা পুলিশ কুস্তাগুলো। মাল গিলে মাতলামো করছে’ বলে গঙ্গা। ওরা থেমে যায়। এখান থেকে পুলিশ ক্যাম্প দেখা যায়। আগুন জ্বলছে। দু-তিনজনের শরীর আগুন ঘিরে থাকতে দেখা যায়। ওয়্যাগান ইয়ার্ড-এর শেষ প্রান্তে। এখান থেকে অন্ততঃ তিন-চারশ গজ। মইদুল ওয়্যাগান দুটো দেখিয়ে দেয়। বস্তা থেকে যন্ত্রপাতি বার করে রতন আর মইদুল দুটো ওয়্যাগানে কাজে লেগে যায়। গঙ্গা লাইনের মাঝে শুয়ে পড়ে নজর রাখে। ওদের পটুহাতের কাজে নামমাত্র শব্দ হয়। সবকিছু ঠিকই চলতে থাকে। ওদের দিকে ছোট টর্চ মেরে দেখে নেয় রতন। আড়াইটে। আর পনের মিনিটের মধ্যেই খুলে ফেলতে হবে। শব্দ না করে কাজ করতে সময় বেশী লাগে। পৃথিবীর আর সবকিছু ভুলে যায় রতন। তার কাছে সেই মুহূর্তে জীবনের একটাই উদ্দেশ্য হয়ে দাঁড়ায় পনের মিনিটের মধ্যে ওয়্যাগান ভাঙা। যে করেই হোক। মইদুলের শরীরটা আবছা দেখা যায়। গঙ্গাকে দেখা যায় না। তন্ময় হয়ে মইদুল আর রতন শৈল্পিক উৎকর্ষে তাদের কাজ করে যায়। আকাশের তারাগুলো আর চোখে পড়ে না, হারিয়ে যায় ক্রমশঃ। রেললাইনের দুপাশে ঝোপড়ার ভেতর থেকে কিসের যেন একটা শব্দ কানে লাগে। কি পোকাকো জানে। মালগাড়ীর অপর প্রান্ত থেকে দুই মাতাল রাইফেলধারীর বেসুরো গলা ভেসে আসে। শীতের তীব্রতা বাড়তে থাকে। কুয়াশা যেন আরও ঘন হতে থাকে। বিশ ত্রিশ গজ দূরে কাউকে ঠাহর করা যায় না। রাত্তিরের নিজস্ব শব্দ আর গন্ধে চারিদিক ঝিম ধরানো নেশায় ডুবে থাকে। তিনজন মানুষ তন্ময় হয়ে থাকে নিজেদের কাজে। মালগাড়ীর ভিতর অসংখ্য বস্তায় গাদা ধবধবে শিমুলতুলোর মতো মিহি চিনি পড়ে থাকে।

এক একটা মিনিট কেটে যায়। গঙ্গার কাছে এক একটা মিনিট এক এক বছরের মতো লাগে। অজানা আশঙ্কায় বুক কাঁপে। কান তটস্থ হয়ে থাকে বুট জুতোর

শব্দের জন্য। চোখ তীক্ষ্ণ হয় টর্চের আলোর ঝলকানি আবিষ্কার করার জন্য। স্নায়ু টানটান হয়ে ওঠে প্রতিটি মুহূর্তের পদধ্বনির সঙ্গে সঙ্গে। এই রোমাঞ্চকর অনুভূতি গঙ্গা রসিয়ে রসিয়ে উপভোগ করে। পরিণতির কথা ভাবে না। ভাবে না একবার ধরা পড়লে জীবনের কোন স্রোতে সে আর তার সাথী ভেসে যাবে। এই মুহূর্তের জন্য বেঁচে থাকে গঙ্গা। এই মুহূর্তে যা ঘটমান তাই ওর কাছে সব। অতীত নয়। ভবিষ্যৎ নয়। শুধু বর্তমান। কঠিন রুঢ় বাস্তব। তারই মধ্যে রোমাঞ্চ খুঁজে পায় গঙ্গা। ভালোবাসা পায়, প্রেরণা পায়—বাঁচিয়ে রাখে রতনের মতো মানুষকে। রেললাইন থেকে একটা পচা গন্ধ গঙ্গার নাকে এসে লাগে। ঠিক মাটির গন্ধ না। চাষার মেয়ে মাটির গন্ধ চিনতে কখনো ভুল করে না। নাক প্রায় বন্ধ করে শুষে থাকে। সঁগাতসঁগাতে মাটির থেকে ঠান্ডা ওঠে। শরীর ঠান্ডায় অবশ হয়ে পড়ে। পায়ের উপর দিয়ে কি যেন চলে যায়। দাঁতে দাঁত চেপে শুষে থাকে গঙ্গা। নড়ে না। কোন শব্দ করে না। মালগাড়ীর চাকার ফাঁকে ফাঁকে চলে তার নজর। নাঃ সব ঠিক আছে। রতন আর মইদুল ভাই তাড়াতাড়ি হাত চালালেই, খালাস। এবারে ভালো দাঁও মারতে পারলে—মইদুলকে একদিন বাড়িতে ডেকে খাওয়াবে বলেছে গঙ্গা। পাঁঠার মাংস আর ভাত। মইদুল ঘড়ির দিকে তাকায়। দশ মিনিট বাকি তিনটে বাজতে। ঘাড় ঘুরিয়ে রতনকে দেখার চেষ্টা করে, হালকা ছায়া দেখতে পায়। একটানা পরিশ্রমের ফলে এই শীতের রাতেও তার খালি গা ঘামে চক্‌চক্‌ করে। ভাঙতে এখনও অন্ততঃ দশ মিনিট সময় লাগবে। কি করবে ভেবে উঠতে পারেনা। আবার কাজ চালিয়ে যায়। যা হবার দেখা যাবে ‘খন। রতনের ওয়্যাগান খুলে আসে। ভিতরে ঢুকে যায় রতন। ফাঁকা। কোথাও একটা ছেঁড়া বস্তাও নেই। মনে মনে গালাগাল করে নেমে আসে। মইদুলের কাছে হেঁটে যায়।

—‘আমারটা মাইরী ফাঁকা। এইটেতেই আছে তালে। দে যস্তর দে।’ এই বলে দুজনেই কাজে লেগে পড়ে একসঙ্গে। কিছুক্ষণের মধ্যেই খুলে আসে। খোলামাত্র মিষ্টি গন্ধ এসে নাকে লাগে। রতন পিছিয়ে যায় গঙ্গাকে ডাকতে। ইশারা করে। কিন্তু গঙ্গা নড়ে না, স্থির হয়ে শুষে থাকে। যেন কি শুনছে-কি দেখছে। রতনের খেয়াল হয় এখন তিনটে বাজতে চলেছে। হিন্দুস্থানী গান আর কানে আসে না। একটানা রাত্তিরে নিশ্বাস শোনা যায়, কালনাগিনী সাপের মতো হিস্‌ হিস্‌, হিস্‌ হিস্‌। গঙ্গা ত্রস্তগতিতে উঠে আসে ফিসফিস করে বলে—‘শালারা আসতেছে। চারজনায় একসাথে।’ রতন

দৌড়ে মইদুলকে ডাকতে যায়। মইদুল ততক্ষণে ওয়্যাগানের ভিতর ঢুকে একটা বিড়ি ধরিয়ে, মাল সরাতে ব্যস্ত। গঙ্গা রতনকে ধরে নেয়। আজ যে পালালে চলবে না। আবার কবে গাড়ী আসবে কে জানে। দীর্ঘ একমাস প্রায় অর্ধাহারে কাটানোর পর আর যে সবুর সয় না। আজ খালি হাতে ফেরা চলবে না। ওদিকে টর্চের আলোর চমকানি দেখতে পায় রতন। গঙ্গার দিকে তাকায়। গঙ্গার মুখে দৃঢ় প্রত্যয়ের ছাপ। ভাবার সময় নেই।

—‘পারবি?’ রতন জিজ্ঞাসা করে।

—‘হ্যাঁ পারব। তুই মাল সর। সকালে ভিটেয় দেখা হবে ‘খন।’ এই বলে গঙ্গা দ্রুতগতিতে টর্চের আলোগুলির দিকে চলে যায়। রতন ফিরে আসে ওয়্যাগানে। মইদুলকে বলে সব ঠিকঠাক। তাড়াতাড়ি হাত চালা। দূর থেকে কি হাসি-মস্করার আওয়াজ শোনা যায়। রতনের বুকের মধ্যে শেলের মত বেঁধে। মুখে কিছু বলে না। অন্ধকারে তার দুচোখ দিয়ে নেমে আসে জলের ধারা। হাত চলে মেশিনের মতো। বস্তা ফুটো করে টর্চের আলোয় দেখে নেয়। দেখতে দেখতে দু-বস্তা ভর্তি শাদা চিনি দুজনে মিলে টেনে হিঁচড়ে নামায়। উপরে উঠে আরও দু-বস্তা নামিয়ে নেয়। চোখের সামনে এত মাল, আর নিজেদের অসহায়তার কথা ভেবে আফসোস করে মইদুল। দুজন মিলে রেল লাইন ধরে টানতে টানতে নিয়ে চলে কতগুলো। বারবার পিছন ফিরে দেখে। পুলিশ ক্যাম্পের স্তিমমান আগুন অনেক দূরে বলে মনে হয়। আরও দূরে নলবটী স্টেশন এখন কুয়াশায় ঢাকা। লাইন ধরে টেনে নিয়ে যেতে দুজনেই হিমসিম খেয়ে যায়। ঘামে চকচক করে মইদুলের শরীর। হঠাৎ খেয়াল হয় গঙ্গার কথা।

—‘ভাবীজানকে দেখি না কেন?’—জিজ্ঞাসা করে।

—‘ঘরে চলে গেছে।’ রতন জবাব দেয়। মইদুলের বিশ্বাস হয় না।

—‘সত্যি করে বল রতন’—কঠোর স্বরে জিজ্ঞাসা করে আবার। রতন জবাব দেয় না। মইদুলের জিজ্ঞাসা শেষে মিনতিতে এসে ঠেকে। রতনের জবাব শুধুমাত্র তার অব্যবহিত চোখের জল। মইদুল অস্ফুট স্বরে বলে ওঠে—‘হায় আল্লাহ!’ লাইনের উপর বসে পড়ে।

পাগলের মতো নিজের মাথা চাপড়াতে থাকে। রতনের বাঁকানিতে সম্বিত ফিরে পায়। আবার কোনমতে মাল টানতে শুরু করে। রাত ভোর হতে থাকে। ব্রীজের তলাতেই আস্তানা। ওখানেই আসে হীরালালের লরি। আস্তানায় পৌঁছে ঘাম মোছে দুজন। নিষ্পলক দৃষ্টিতে তাকিয়ে থাকে মাটির দিকে। হীরালালের লরি এখনো বেপাজ। অন্যদিন এমন হয় না। রতন উঠে পড়ে।

—‘হীরালাল এলে হিসেব করে নিবি। কোন দরাদরি নয়। যা বলব দিতে হবে।’ ইম্পাত কর্তিন স্বরে বলে রতন। হাঁটতে শুরু করে ঘরের দিক। অন্ধকার থেকে প্রভাতের দিকে হাঁটতে শুরু করে একজন পরাজিত মানুষ। ধীর পদক্ষেপে।

মালগাড়ীর ওয়্যাগানের ভিতর ক্লাস্ত, অবসন্ন, রক্তাক্ত দেহটাকে জড়ো করে কোনমতে উঠে বসে গঙ্গা। মুখে তার ম্লান হাসি। কাপড়টাকে গায়ে জড়িয়ে নেয়। দুটো শুরোরের বাচ্চা পড়ে পড়ে ঘুমোয়। আর দুটো কোথায় কে জানে। ভোরের আলোয় পা রাখে গঙ্গা—পবিত্র হিমালয় থেকে নেমে আসার মতো, মালগাড়ীর অন্ধকার থেকে নেমে আসে। মুখে ঠাণ্ডা হাওয়ার বাপটা লাগে। কেঁপে ওঠে শরীর। যন্ত্রণায় হাঁটতে কষ্ট হয়। পরোয়া করে না। রতনের মুখটা চোখের সামনে ভেসে ওঠে। মনটা নেচে ওঠে। তাড়াতাড়ি ঘরের দিকে পা চালানোর চেষ্টা করে। আকাশ লাল হয়ে আসে। যে পথ দিয়ে এসেছিল, সে পথ নেয় না। অন্য আর এক ঘুরপথ ধরে। ঘরের সামনে এসে এক পলক থমকে দাঁড়ায় গঙ্গা। ঘরের দরজা বন্ধ। কই রতন তো তার জন্য দাঁড়ায় বসে অপেক্ষা করছে না। ওরা পেরেছে তো? রতন ওকে ঘরে তুলবে তো? এই প্রশ্নগুলো এক মুহূর্তের জন্য মনে উঁকি দেয়। মনেই হেসে উড়িয়ে দেয়। দরজা ঠেলে ঘরে ঢোকে গঙ্গা। মিষ্টি মদের গন্ধ ভোরের আকাশে মেশে। গঙ্গায় পায় কি যেন ঠেকে। খালি মদের বোতল। অজানা এক ভয় গঙ্গাকে শঙ্কিত করে তোলে। চেষ্টা করে ওঠে — ‘রতন’। জবাব পায় না। খোলা দরজার মধ্য দিয়ে সূর্যের প্রথম আলো ঘরে প্রবেশ করে। গঙ্গা দেখতে পায় চৌকীর উপর কুকড়ে শুয়ে আছে একটি ঘুমন্ত শিশু। তার রতন।





## Coming Through

by Pathikrit Sen Gupta *Ex-student, Political Science*

**T**here are miles of crucified sidewalk, yet  
to walk

Like Musical instruments ; Abandoned  
In a lush green field  
Dark clouds and the swirling sky above :  
parts of your feelings.  
Pure conversion of life into art seems true  
My cut glass interior, I realize  
cannot harmonize  
with the whimsical tunes  
*of warped musical instruments left out in  
the rain*

seeking solace,  
of a lost tune  
which can wipe away blood.

**I**n the hours of darkness, that before dawn,  
Marsilius made resolutions shaped dreams.  
In the evening, humming fading twilight tunes,  
built sand castles. Late at night, the unbridled  
arrogance of the sea staked its claim upon  
these miniature edifices. His resolutions too,  
dissolved in the nascent mist which swirled  
with the ebb and flow of the tide. It was  
precisely at this time, the midnight hour,  
when the world slept, that Marsilius, stripped  
of self respect lacking decisiveness and di-  
rection sat on the shores of his own private  
ocean and fell in tune with the world. Ashamed  
that it should be this way, feeling little re-  
spect for his rubber soul. Yet, something  
remained. A pussiant perfume pervaded the  
air. Resilient and resurgent, in harmony with  
the hour, when his existence proved fathom-

able as he sat on shifting sands on the brink of  
the vast ocean.

**T**he Revolution. Personal and Political. A  
struggle between the moral and immoral.  
Predefined, atavistic perceptions of honesty  
and nobility clouded judgement, honed con-  
fusion. Stolid afternoons crawling on the  
sunburnt tarred roads of the city induced an  
acute lethargy. Within self, an insistent spark  
called for action, demanded blood to quench  
its thirst. But then .... there had been blood.  
*All over his footsteps, all across his tracks.*

A choice remained. Perhaps if he stood  
with faceless millions in Esplanade East and  
fell satisfied that he had just been able to  
usher in an era of peace, tranquility, prosper-  
ity and honesty that afternoon his craving  
could be fulfilled. Or perhaps, if he posed  
with pen and paper and drowned himself in a  
mirage of self concieved aesthetic productiv-  
ity, it would suffice. Conviction, he realised  
was essential. A blind faith to steer him past  
desolation. East of it perhaps. 'East of deso-  
lation', it did have a nice ring to it.

What was to be believed ? Human gods  
strutted across the land, with pompous breaths  
and hordes of puppies which snapped and  
snarled amongst themselves for bread crumbs.  
Human gods cut ribbons, broke domes, dis-  
carded history, destroyed the future. Defined  
and defied the goodness of god.

The goodness of god ? 'What was god?',  
he asked himself something of cosmic sig-  
nificance, omnipresent, inherent and inert.  
An organistic manifestation of the goodness  
of the human creed, floating silently, pa-  
tiently, remotely, somewhere there in space.

Yet the death of children by snipers bullets and the sight of withered bodies, the deliverance of two milk bottles to his doorstep every morning and the existence of the neighbourhood pepsi-fountain defied logic.

**T**he Revolution lay cradled in its mothers arms. Breathed lightly, stirred gently but was yet to open its eyes.

**S**omewhere in the world a new Hitler appeared. Silver hair, bulldog face. Raved and ranted with his people, demanded and decreed. Begged for money from the rich. Gold plated the taps of his shower.

**T**here was something different that night. Something in the air ..... made the mind yearn for more, to develop thought, provide answers. Marsilius heard the colour of his dreams as he struck a match to light his cigarette. The glow from the dancing flame bathed his face and was soothing to his eyes. And then ..... there was music, drifting, deep and slow, at times spritely, vivacious and light. Dragon clouds floated in the night sky. The stars were in bloom, fireflies and dreams ..... Summer had arrived.

**L**ooked into the sky. The vastness scared me. A sea of azure blue and the clouds hitting invisible reefs, hidden obstacles and transforming themselves into a myriad fetid bubbles like foam : so high.

And as you, the real you, caress the sky, rub the tips of your fingers gently over the soaring silhouettes, the thunder moans in contentment. A deep roar, of confidence, of satisfaction, gathers momentum, deepens, travels the path etched out by the mad glint in your eyes. Penetrating obstacles, tearing barriers, travels through to the limits of your mind. Rebounding and echoing through all the gaps, all the crevasses in your knowledge and in your memories. The echo swirls with the mist in your mind, searching every nook

and corner, every twist and plane, till it again finds you. Alone, sitting on a pebble staring into the sky, sitting on a pebble staring into the sky, staring, just staring .....

**M**arsilius climbed on stage, snatched away the microphone from the thin frail man who held it. 'The prophet lies', he screamed 'The prophet', smiled weakly and signalled frantically for someone to drag away the intruder. Marsilius felt someone approach from behind. A hand reached out to grasp his. He swirled around and flung a punch, a full blow to his assailent's mouth. A look of surprise filled the mans face, questioning the severity and the savageness of the action. Suddenly blood splurged out. The look of surprise deteriorated into complex convoluted muscles of agony. He sank to his knees, clasping his face with both his hands. Blood flowed through his fingers, ran down his hand, soaked his shirt, some formed drops on the floor. The crowd roared. Marsilius just stood there, on stage, calm and impassive, a hand outstretched holding the mike, looking down at the man bent double by his feet. The moments drew on, as if hours. The man shivered uncontrollably.

A hand went round his throat, someone caught his arms. He did not resist. As they carried him away he kept looking at the man who still held his face in his hands, either in extreme pain or extreme sorrow. He was kicked and beaten backstage.

**I**t was carnival time in the city. The schools and colleges had long closed. Children made elaborate plans, marking the countdown in their exercise books.

A grotesque splash of gawdy colours suddenly invaded his world. Raunchy film tunes tore into his ears, made mockery of the solitude and privacy of his world. Various manifestations of the goddess found place at streetcorners and parks. Money was spent, as

if there were to be no tomorrow.

And the music never stopped. Little children in pickled colours with little apple motifs, water bottles slung over their shoulders, men in bold stripes and pungent shades, women in rustling new sarees with a hint of gold trudged along the streets. The nights seemed endless.

It all ended as suddenly as it had begun. Fairgrounds deserted, littered with empty cigarette packets, icecream sticks and paper. The children lost their new play house's just when they were getting used to them.

The nights were growing longer and the days shorter.

A gentle chill wafted through the city. Touching hearts, tainting life. The days were warm, clear blue skies, circus clouds. Afternoons spent lazing on the college field. Splintered sunlight left a sprinkling of golden warmth enmeshed in his hair. The day grew

old, evening fell rapidly in hushed tones. The street lamps awoke and in street corners and teastalls gathered shawl draped, long haired youths with their hands crossed across their chests and their legs shaking in time to some unconcious rhythm as they discussed cricket scores.

Late at night, Marsilius sat by his window. Mescal dreams drifted with a winter night's wind through the fog, in the haze, tiptoed across the sidewalk under the diffused light of sodium vapour lamps.

Marsilius sat at his window, looking out onto the lonely street while the world slept, huddled under the warmth of its winter shroud.

The Revolution lay cradled in its mothers arms. Breathed lightly, stirred gently. The warmth of its mothers bosom and the tender rocking motion of her arms had cocooned it to sleep.



## ময়না-তদন্ত

সুমনা সান্যাল দ্বিতীয় বর্ষ বাংলা

ভোরবেলা ঘুমটা ভেঙে যেতেই নিতাই মণ্ডল ধড়ফড় করে উঠে বসল। ময়নার মা এর মধ্যেই আগুন দিয়ে দিয়েছে, মেঝেতে ছেলেমেয়েরা ঘুমিয়ে আছে। নিতাই গায়ে চাদরটা ভালো করে জড়িয়ে বাইরে এসে দাঁড়ালো, কুয়াশামাখা ভোরবেলায় বস্তিটাকে যেন অন্যরকম মনে হয়।

সব চুপচাপ। নিতাই গাডুটা নিয়ে ঘাটে গেল।

‘এই ময়না উঠ-উঠ’। মায়ের ধাক্কায় ময়না উঠে বসলো। মনে পড়লো আজ তার যাবার কথা কলকাতায়। ময়না বাইরে এসে দাঁড়ালো।

‘বাবুদের বাড়ীর কাপড়খান পইর্যা যাস, কতসব বাবুরা আসতিছেন আইজ।’

ময়না মায়ের দিকে তাকালো, ময়লা কাপড় পরা, রোগা, হাড় বের করা চেহারা মায়ের, সামনের দাঁতদুটো উঁচু। রোজ লালগোলা প্যাসেঞ্জারে চাল নিয়ে শিয়ালদায় যায় মা। চাল বেচে। অবশ্য মা একা না। এই বস্তির শেফালী, রেবা, কমলার মায়েরাও যায়। খালি বালতিদুটো নিয়ে কমলাদের ঘরের সামনে দিয়েই ময়না কলতলায় গেল। কলতলায় আস্তে আস্তে ভীড় জমছে। ময়নার খারাপ লাগছিল। কেন যে এত তাড়াতাড়ি ঘুম ভাঙে সবার। সবাই যেন ওর দিকেই তাকিয়ে আছে হাঁ করে। শেফালি, রেবা, কমলারাও ময়নার সঙ্গে কথা বলছে না। ময়না জানে ওদের বাড়ী থেকেই বারণ আছে। এই তিনমাসে ময়না যেন এ বস্তির নায়িকা হয়ে গেছে। এমনকি বস্তি থেকে বাইরে গেলেও লোকে তাকে দেখলেই কানাকানি করে।

‘এই ময়না, তোরা কখন যাবি রে?’ টুলুর মা জিজ্ঞেস করল। ময়না চোখ নীচু করে ‘নটার গাড়ীতে’ বলেই ঘরে উঠে এল, বাবা এবার খেতে বসবে। ময়না ঘর থেকে শাড়ী, জামা, শেষ হয়ে আসা একটুকরো সাবান নিয়ে পুকুরে গেল, আজ একটু সাজতে হবে তাকে।

ঠিক এভাবেই ময়না সাজতো যখন স্বপ্ন দেখতো

বাপীদার জন্যে। উকিলবাবুর ছেলে বাপীদা। সবাই বলে একদম মিঠুনের মতো দেখতে। এ পাড়ার সব মেয়ে বাপীদার নাম শুনলে চলে পড়ে। বাপীদা ভালো চাকরী করে। স্কুটার চালিয়ে ঘুরে বেড়ায়। ময়না যখন প্রথম উকিলবাবুদের বাড়ী কাজ করতে চুকেছিল, তখন দিনের মধ্যে একবার বাপীদাকে না দেখলে মন খারাপ হয়ে যেতো ওর। শেফালীদের সঙ্গে রোজ বাপীদা গল্প করতো। শেফালী অবশ্য বলতো বাপীদার সঙ্গে ভাব আছে ওপাড়ার কৃষ্ণাদির। খুব ঢলাঢলি। ময়না বিশ্বাস করেনি। যা হিংসুটে শেফালীটা!

প্রথম প্রথম বাপীদা তার দিকে তাকাতোই না, কথাও বলতো না, একদিন সন্ধ্যাবেলা কাজ সেরে বাড়ী ফেরবার সময় হঠাৎই বাপীদার সামনে পড়ে গিয়েছিল ও। বাপীদা বলেছিল ‘এই চিয়া, না ময়না—আমাকে এক কাপ চা করে দে তো।’

ময়না প্রথমে কিছু বুঝতেই পারে নি। তারপর বুঝতে পেরে প্রায় উড়ে চলে গিয়েছিল রান্নাঘরে। তার জীবনে এর থেকে বেশী বোধহয় কিছু চাইবার ছিল না। বাপীদা বলেছিল ‘তুই তো খুব সুন্দর। এরকম নোংরা কাপড় পরে থাকবি না, বুঝেছিস? আর মাথার উকুন সারাবি।’

ময়না ঘাড় নেড়েছিল। বাপীদা তাকে একটা শাড়ী কিনে দিয়েছিল। ময়না তারপর থেকে সাবান মেখে স্নান করতো, বিকেলে সেই শাড়ী পরে সেজেগুজে কাজে আসতো। ময়না স্বপ্ন দেখতো। ময়নার মাথার উকুন বাছতে বাছতে স্বপ্ন দেখতো ময়নার মা’ও।

ভিজ়ে কাপড়ে ঘরে উঠে এল ময়না। ঘরে চুকে সে ভিজ়ে শাড়ী ছাড়ল। এই খোলা বুকে কতদিন যে বাপীদা..... ঘরের মধ্যেও ময়নার গায়ে কাঁটা দিল।

নিতাই মণ্ডল দাওয়ায় বসে একটা বিড়ি ধরালো। কিছুক্ষণ পরেই ময়নাকে নিয়ে ট্রেনে উঠবে সে। মিটিঙ-এ যাবে মেয়েকে নিয়ে। বাবুরা বারবার বলে দিয়েছেন। ‘কইলকেতার কুথায় যাবে গো?’ ময়নার মা জিজ্ঞেস

করলো। বিরক্ত হোল নিতাই। 'বিরিগেডে যাব। নাম শুনছ ?'

'বি-রি-গে-ড ?'

'হ। এখন চুপ দাও দিকি।'

'আমার ভয় করতিছে।'

'ক্যান ? ভয়ডা কিসের ?'

ময়নার মা ডুকরে কেঁদে উঠল। 'কি কপাল কইরাই আইছিল মাইয়াডা। অর বিয়া দিমু ক্যামনে।'

নিতাই চীৎকার করে উঠল। 'চুপ দে হারামজাদী, চুপ দে।'

ময়নার মা উঠে গেল কাঁদতে কাঁদতে। নিতাই-এর মাথায় রাজ্যের চিন্তা। তিনদিন আগেই পাড়ার নেতা ঘোষবাবু এসে একগোছা টাকা দিয়েছেন তাকে, শুলেছেন মেয়েকে নিয়ে মিটিঙ-এ যেতে। সবাই শুনবে ময়নার কথা। তাকে দেখবে। নইলে এই অন্যায়ের কথা সবাই জানবে কি করে ? নিতাই অবশ্য বলেছিল — 'সকলে অরে দ্যাখলে অর বিয়া দিমু ক্যামনে ?'

ঘোষবাবু আশ্বস্ত করেছেন তাকে। টাকায় সব হয়। পার্টি থেকে টাকা দেওয়া হবে ময়নার বিয়ের জন্যে। নিতাই উঠে পড়ল।

এই প্রথম ময়না কলকাতায় যাচ্ছে। বাপীদাই তাকে নিয়ে যাবে বলেছিল। হোল না। ময়না ঘর বাঁধার স্বপ্ন দেখেছিল। বাপীদা কাজ করতে বেরিয়ে যাবে, ময়না রান্না করবে, ফুটফুটে ছেলেটাকে নাওয়াবে, খাওয়াবে, ঘুম পাড়াবে, রাতে বাপীদার খাওয়ার কাছে বসে থাকবে আরো কত কি ! ময়না জানতো এ স্বপ্ন সত্যি হলে বস্তির সবাই তাকে হিংসা করবে। মাঝে মাঝেই বাপীদা তার শরীর ছুঁতে চাইতো। ময়না ভয় পেতো। সেদিন ছিল বস্তির রাত। ময়না কাজ করছিল। বাপীদা ঘরে ঢুকলো, নেশা করেছিল। বাড়ীতে সেদিন কেউ ছিল না। বাপীদা জড়ানো গলায় ময়নাকে ডেকেছিল — 'এই শোন।' ময়না কাছে গেলে বাপীদা তাকে জোর করে মেঝেতে শুইয়ে ফেলে একটানে ব্লাউজ ছিঁড়ে দিয়েছিল। তার খোলা বুকে মুখ রেখে বলেছিল — 'তুই খুব সুন্দর, আমার ময়নাপাখী।' ময়না কোনরকমে নিজেকে ছাড়িয়ে প্রাণপণে ছুটেছিল রেললাইন ধরে। হেঁচট খেয়ে পড়ে গিয়েছিল। শাড়ী ছিন্নভিন্ন। আর তারপরই কোথা থেকে তিনজন লোক তাকে টেনে নিয়ে গিয়েছিল

ধানক্ষেতে। অসহ্য যন্ত্রণা তখন ময়নার শরীরে। অক্ষকার নেমেছিল দুই চোখে, আর অজ্ঞান হতে হতে বুঝতে পারছিল রক্ত নেমে আসছে শরীর থেকে। ধানক্ষেতে চাপ চাপ রক্ত।

পরদিন সমস্ত পাড়া ভেঙে পড়েছিল তাদের বস্তিতে। একই আলোচনা। 'ছিঁড়ে খেয়েছে গো মেয়েটাকে', 'নষ্ট হয়ে গেল নিতাই-এর বেটি।' উকিলবাবু তিনমাসের মাইনে দিয়ে তাকে কাজ থেকে ছাড়িয়ে দিয়েছিলেন। ময়নার মা কামাকাটি করেছিল। উকিলবাবু বলেছিলেন — 'আমি কোন ঝামেলায় জড়াতে চাই না, এসব পার্টির দলাদলির ব্যাপার। এর মধ্যে আমি নেই।' বাপীদাও আর আসে নি। শেফালীর কাছে শূনেছিল বাপীদা বলেছে — 'এসব মেয়েদের এই হয়। বস্তির মেয়ে, সাজগোজের বাহার কতো ! আমায় দেখলেও ঢলে পড়তো। নষ্ট মেয়ে একটা।'

তারও পরে শূনেছিল — বাপীদার বিয়ের পাকা দেখা হয়ে গেছে। কৃষ্ণাদির সঙ্গেই বিয়ে হবে। ময়না ভাবে সেদিন বাপীদাকে শরীরটা ছুঁতে দিলেই ভালো হোত। ময়না গো চেয়েছিল বাপীদাই তাকে..... বাপীদার আগে এই লোকগুলো তাকে ঐটো করে দিল। বাপীদার বউ আসছে .... বাড়ীতে রঙ করা হচ্ছে ..... বাপীদা ..... বাপীদা ..... কতদিন দেখা হয় না.... ময়না চোখে আঁচল চাপা দিল।

ব্রিগেডে আজ লক্ষ লক্ষ লোক। নিতাই ধাক্কা খেতে খেতে এগিয়ে চললো। বাবুরা বারবার বলে দিয়েছিলেন সামনে এসে বসতে। তাঁরা ডাকলেই ময়নাকে উঠে যেতে হবে তাঁদের কাছে। কোনরকমে সামনের সারিতে এসে বসলো নিতাই আর ময়না। ততক্ষণে বক্তৃতা শুরু হয়ে গেছে, নিতাই দেখলো ঘোষবাবু বসে আছেন চেয়ারে। ফিসফিস করে ময়নাকে বললো নিতাই 'টুকুন বাসেই ডাকব তোরে।'

মাইক গমগম করে উঠল — 'বন্ধুগণ আপনারা জানেন, সমস্ত রাজ্যে আজ আমরা অত্যাচারিত। নির্বাচনে কারচুপি থেকে শুরু করে অনেক অত্যাচার তারা অসহায় মানুষের ওপর চালাচ্ছে। সারা রাজ্যে খুন, ধর্ষণের সংখ্যা কত বেড়ে গেছে তার একটা হিসাব আমরা আপনাদের দেব।' এর মধ্যেই ময়নার সঙ্গে আলাপ হয়েছে একটা মেয়ের — 'জবা।' কেন্দুয়া গ্রাম থেকে এসেছে। তার বাবার হাত কেটে দিয়েছে অন্য

পাটির ছেলেরা। জবার বাবাকেও আজ এখানে দেখানো হবে।

‘বন্ধুগণ, এবার আমরা আপনাদের সামনে নিয়ে আসছি হরিদেবপুর গ্রামের একটি মেয়েকে। তাকে জন্তুর মতো ধর্ষণ করেছে ঐ পাটির ছেলেরা। ময়না মঙল, তুমি উঠে এস।’ ময়না আস্তে আস্তে মণ্ডের ওপর উঠে মাথা নীচু করে দাঁড়ালো। ঘোষবাবু তার পিঠে হাত বুলিয়ে বললেন — ‘কোন ভয় নেই, সবাইকে বলো সেদিন কি হয়েছিল।’ মাইক এগিয়ে দিলেন তার সামনে। ময়না কিছুই না বলে হঠাৎ কেঁদে উঠলো। নিতাইকে একজন জিজ্ঞেস করলো — ‘তোমার মেয়ে নাকি?’

— ‘আইজ্ঞা হ।’

পেছনে বসা কয়েকটা ছেলের মধ্যে একজন বললো ‘কি মাল মাইরী! বডিটা দেখেছিস?’

নিতাই দেখলো ময়না কাঁদছে। ঘোষবাবু তার হাত তুলে ধরে বললেন — ‘দেখুন, ভালো করে দেখুন আপনারা।’

পেছন থেকে আর একটা ছেলে বললো — ‘নেমে এসো মাইরী, ভালো করে দেখি।’

ঘোষবাবু বললেন — ‘মেয়েটি যে এত অত্যাচারেও বেঁচে আছে এটাই তো আশ্চর্যের।’

নিতাই-এর হঠাৎ মনে হোল বাবু ঠিক বললেন না। ময়না বেঁচে নেই। লক্ষ লক্ষ লোভী চোখের সামনে

এইমাত্র মরে গেছে। ঘোষবাবুর যে হাত ময়নার পিঠে, ঘাড়ের ঘুরে বেড়াচ্ছে সে হাত যেন মাংস খুবলে নিতে চায় ময়নার শরীর থেকে। সবাই যেন চোখ দিয়ে চাটছে ময়নাকে।

ঘোষবাবু বললেন — ‘ময়নার ব্যাপারে তদন্ত চাই আমরা।’ নিতাই দেখতে পাচ্ছে ময়নার গায়ে কিছু নেই। একেবারে উদোম হয়ে গেছে মেয়েটা।

নিতাই হঠাৎ বিকট চীৎকার করে মণ্ডে উঠে পড়লো। ঘোষবাবুর পা জড়িয়ে ধরে কাঁদতে কাঁদতে বললো — ‘মাইয়াডারে ছাইড়া দ্যান গো বাবু। উ যে উদোম হয়ে গ্যাছে গো।’

ঘোষবাবু শশব্যস্তে বলে উঠলেন — ‘ঠিক আছে, ঠিক আছে। এখানে চীৎকার কোর না। নেমে যাও।’

ময়নার হাত ধরে নেমে আসতে গিয়ে নিতাই শুনলো আর একজন বাবু ঘোষবাবুকে বললেন — ‘লোকটা তো পাগল। আপনাকে দিয়ে যদি কোন কাজ হয়। দিল তো সব ভেসে? কোথেকে যে এইসব পাগল ছাগল জোটান.... যতসব!’

ময়নাকে নিয়ে নিতাই যখন রাস্তায় নামলো তখন মণ্ডে জবার হাতকাটা বাবা তার কাটা হাত দেখাচ্ছে। হাড় জিরজিরে লোকটাকে ছেড়ে সবাই তখন ব্যস্ত সঙ্গে আনা খাবারের পুঁটুলী খুলতে।

নিতাই জোরে জোরে পা চালালো।



## দ্বিতীয় বোতাম এবং

মৃগাল কাণ্ড দ্বিতীয় বর্ষ গণিত

বোতামটার ওপর আজ অনেক আক্রমণ হয়েছে। অনেকক্ষণ ধরে। প্রায় পঁয়তাল্লিশ মিনিট। কলারের দিক থেকে হিসেব করলে যে বোতামটা দ্বিতীয়, সেই আপাত-নিরীহ, শাদা রংয়ের, প্লাস্টিকের বোতামটার ওপর। শার্ট খোলার সময়, যেহেতু আমি আজ অন্দি কোনদিন টাই পরি নি, ওই বোতামটাতেই হাত চলে যায় প্রথমে। এখন তাই রাত্রি দশটা বত্রিশে, ঘরে ঢুকে শার্ট খুলতে গিয়ে হাত পড়ল ওই বোতামটাতেই, আলগা হয়ে খুলে এল বোতামটা আর তখনই একঝলক পরিচ্ছন্ন, নির্মল বাতাসের মত আজকের সন্ধ্যাটা ঝাপটা দিয়ে গেল চোখে-মুখে। বোতামটা হাতে নিয়ে দাঁড়িয়ে রইলাম পাকা উন্নববই সেকেণ্ড!

শেষ যেদিন গিয়েছিলাম, তারিখটা পঁচিশে ডিসেম্বর বলেই যে মনে আছে, তা নয়। সেদিনও অবশ্যই ভালো কেটেছিল সন্ধ্যাটা, তবে আজকের মত কী?

আজ ১৪ই ফেব্রুয়ারী, রবিবার। একান দিনেই কত অন্তরকম, কত নতুন যে মনে হচ্ছিল!

মাস আটেক আগে, নার্সিংহোমে প্রথম যেদিন দেখতে গিয়েছিলাম ওকে, অপূর্ব দেখাচ্ছিল। কেঁদে উঠেছিল একবার। কাঁদলে ওকে আরও সুন্দর দেখায়। তবে আজ অন্দি কোনদিন বলিনি সেকথা, কারণ আমি জানি, মিমি বুঝবে না। কিছুতেই বুঝবে না। মিমি! বাপ-মার দেওয়া পোষাকী নাম অবশ্য আছে একটা — শূচিস্মিতা। স্বাভাবিকভাবেই আমি কোনদিন ডাকি নি ওই নামে। সেই প্রথম দিন থেকে মিমি, মিমি। কেন জানি না, প্রথম দেখার পরই আমার মনে হয়েছিল, এ মেয়ের আর কোন নাম হতে পারে না। মিমি। শুধু মিমি।

মিমির চোখ দুটো দেখলে, নির্দিধায় সবকিছু ভুলে যাওয়া যায়। এমনিতে ও ছটফট করে সবসময়, কিন্তু যখন এক দৃষ্টে তাকিয়ে থাকে — কোন পাপ নেই,

জটিলতা নেই, রহস্য নেই, শুধু দিগন্তজোড়া কোঁকুহল। হঠাৎ হঠাৎ হেসে ওঠে মিমি। এ হাসি মিমির নিজস্ব, একান্ত নিজস্ব। এ হাসির কী কোন মানে আছে? আমি স্পষ্ট দেখেছি, মিমির এই হাসি, ওর দৃষ্টির এই স্বচ্ছ — তচ্ছিন্নতা নেই, চাপল্য নেই, প্রগল্ভতা নেই — কেমন যেন শুধু নিজের কারণে হেসে ওঠা। এর মানে শুধু ও-ই জানে। তাও জানে কী? আমি জিজ্ঞাসা করিনি কোনদিন। জানি, উত্তর পাব না।

আজ সন্ধ্যায় মিমি একটা আকাশী রংয়ের পোষাক পরেছিল।

আজ সন্ধ্যায় মিমি ঘুমোচ্ছিল, পাশে শুয়েছিল একটা বড়সড় টেভি বিয়ার, যেটা আমিই ওকে আগের দিন দিয়েছিলাম।

আজ সন্ধ্যায় মিমিকে আমিই ঘুম থেকে তুলি।

আজ সন্ধ্যায় মিমিকে ঘুম থেকে তুলে আমি বুকে জাপটে ধরি। মিমি তখন কাঁদছিল।

আজ সন্ধ্যায় মিমির চোখের জল আর কাজল মিলেমিশে গিয়েছিল। বিছানায় মিমি বড্ড বেশী ছটফট করে। আমি চিৎ হয়ে শুয়ে পড়ে মিমিকে সটান তুলে নিই বকের ওপর। খানিকক্ষণ একদৃষ্টে আমার মুখের দিকে তাকিয়ে থাকে মিমি, তারপর থাবা বসায় কলার থেকে চার আঙুল নীচের দ্বিতীয় বোতামে।

একদৃষ্টে বোতামটার দিকে তাকিয়ে থাকে মিমি। নখ দিয়ে আঁচড়ায় অনেকক্ষণ। বোতামটা খুলে আনার চেষ্টা করে যেন। তারপর দাঁত বসায়। বোতাম ঘরের চারপাশটা মিমির লালায় ভিজে ওঠে।

শেষ পর্যন্ত বোতামটাকে পুরোপুরি ভুলে আনতে না পেরে মিমি, আমার সহোদরা দিদির সাড়ে আটমাসের কন্যাসন্তান, আমার একমাত্র ভাগ্নীটি ডুকরে কেঁদে ওঠে। আমি আবার বুকে জাপটে, আদর করে, গান গেয়ে তার কান্না থামাই, ঘুম পাড়াই এবং দিদির বাড়ী থেকে বেরোবার আগে ঘুমন্ত মিমির কপালে একটি ছোট্ট চুমো ঐকো আসতে তুলি না।

# FATHER AND SON

Debraj Bhattacharya *1st Yr. M.A. Modern History*

## (I)

Meanwhile in former East Germany several towns witnessed violent neo-nazi demonstrations ..... serious clashes with the Police ..... about twenty-four dead and fifty injured .... the scenes were reminiscent of the dark days of Germany under Hitler's rule.....' The news reader on TV continued her report in a dull mechanical tone.

'Father, who's Hitler?' Soumyo asked. Bidyut wasn't listening to the news attentively partly because he was busy eating his dinner and partly because he did not need to. He was after all an expert on Nazism. He knew everything that could be known on the topic, including its recent resurrection in Germany. Although he was by profession a professor of Indian Economic History, yet, Nazism has been his special preoccupation since childhood. More than half of his library was devoted to the subject.

The rather awkward question took Bidyut a little by surprise. But he felt happy that at last his son was showing some interest in his field of study. He wanted to start a lecture immediately, but stopped. Mallika never liked anyone to think about anything in the dining table except the dinner. Mallika died when Soumyo was born. But still nothing happens in the house which she didn't like. 'Finish off your dinner, and then come to my study.' Bidyut told his son.

## (II)

Bidyut gave a brief introduction on Hitler to his son. Soumyo listened quietly, his eyes intense, palm of his left hand in his check.

'You can take a look at this book.' said Bidyut as he pulled out an album on Hitler.' There are lots of pictures in it, you can see how Hitler looked like, how some of his close friends looked like, here's a picture of a famous rally at Nuremberg, here's the typical nazi salute, here's the swastika ....' Bidyut said as he showed the pictures to his ten year old son. Soumyo took the album and slowly thumbed through the pages. He stopped at a photograph of Hitler giving a speech, his eyes intense, his face agitated, his fist in the air, Soumyo closed the book.

'Do you have any other book on Hitler?' he asked. 'Yes', said Bidyut with a smile. 'But you can't understand them now. When you become older you will be able to read them' he told his son in a polite tone so as not to destroy his enthusiasm. Soumyo didn't say anything. He surveyed the books on the shelves. Then he turned towards his father and asked, 'Can I take this book?' pointing towards the album. 'Yes, ofcourse,' Bidyut said, 'but take care, its very costly.' Soumyo's face brightened. He turned towards the door. He walked a few steps and abruptly stopped and turned back. 'What do these books say about Hitler, was he a good man or a bad man?' he asked. The question was too simplistic for Bidyut. But realizing that his son wouldn't understand a complicated answer. 'Bad man, bad man.' he said Soumyo thought something for a while. Then he asked, 'What do you think?' Bidyut said 'I think so too, although he was not the only one.' Soumyo didn't say any-



thing, turned around and left the room.

### (III)

Bidyut was pleased, if not delighted with his son's inquisitiveness. Every father wants his son to pick up his field of study and Bidyut was no exception. He, however, didn't pick up his father's obsession — Botany. Bidyut's father never succeeded in appreciating Bidyut's interest in the Third Reich. 'Why are you wasting your time and money on a bunch of monsters?' he would ask. Bidyut usually found the question rather offensive, but when he could keep his cool he would reply, 'In order to prevent history from repeating itself.' His father never argued any further, but Bidyut understood that he was never convinced. This disappointed him but not disheartened.

It all started with William Shirer's 'Rise and Fall of the Third Reich', almost thirty years ago. Then gradually he became obsessed with the subject, he read everything on the subject that he could get hold of, but always keeping the Indian context in mind, always looking for the germs of nazism in India, writing articles in various magazines and journals, giving lectures and attending seminars. In the process Bidyut Sengupta became an authority on the subject. And also in the process his library kept expanding. Each book in his library was a small part of his heart. He derived his inspiration from them. And, ofcourse, from Mallika.

Once Mallika asked him, 'What would you do if one day you came back from college and saw Adlof Hitler waiting for you in the drawing room?' Bidyut smiled and replied, 'Oh! like the perfect host I would say, what would you like to have, tea or coffee?' That was a month before they got married.

Then, after five years, one fine morning all of a sudden Mallika died. Bidyut realized

that he had to stay alive — he had a son to take care of and perhaps another fifty papers to write. His old aunt came and took charge of the kitchen as well as the child. Although Bidyut realized that his son was missing his mother, yet he could never get married again. He could not even think about it. Mallika was there around him all the time, when Soumyo became slightly older, ready for school, Bidyut realized that it would be best for him if he went to a boarding school, although that certainly would make his father very lonely. But Bidyut managed to have enough strength to cope with it. He immersed himself in his study, but when Soumyo came back during the holidays he felt a lot younger. They would play carrom together, go to the zoo or occasionally even play football. And occasionally they went to see Bidyut's old aunt who had decided to spent his last days in Santiniketan.

Bidyut wondered how Mallika would have reacted to Soumyo's sudden inquisitiveness on Hitler. Probably she would have pretended to be extremely angry, and then with a gentle smile would have shown her approval. Bidyut missed her smile.

### (IV)

Soumyo went to his room, threw himself on the bed and opened the book once again. Hitler's mother ..... 'What did she find in the rotten scum Alois?' .... Hitler's half sister Angela ..... His school ..... He loved to play cowboy and Indians by the Danube meadows .... August Kubizek — 'Gustl' .... They loved to stroll along the landstrasse .... cheering the declaration of the first world war .... Iron Cross ..... His room in the landsberg prison where he wrote Mein Kampf ..... Goring ..... Hess .... Hindenburg ..... Rohm ..... Brown shirts ..... Rally at Nuremburg ..... Chamberlain — 'What a fool!' ..... Anschluss .....

Speech to the new SA cadets after the invasion of Russia — 'Managed to stitch the button right in time ..... Paris ..... Blondi ..... His trousers after the blast ..... His x-ray report ..... His wedding certificate ..... Eva Braun .....

The images were becoming clearer and clearer. Soumyo closed the book. He didn't need to see it anymore. A small teardrop rolled down his eyes. The windows of the dark room were opening one by one and rays of light came from all directions ..... the photographs all of a sudden sprang to life in front of his eyes.

He jumped off the bed, went to his father's study, took out the book he was looking for and proceeded towards the kitchen.

#### (V)

The acrid smoke woke up Bidyut. He put on his glasses (he was blind without them), switched on the light and tried to figure out from where the smoke was coming. He came outside his room and realized that the smoke was coming from his study. His heart beat doubled.

His books were on fire. And in the adjoining verandah stood his son. Or was he? A cold shiver ran down Bidyut's spine. The body was his son's all right, but whose were

the eyes? Bidyut has seen those eyes before, in thousands of photographs and films. Soumyo stood there tightly holding on to the photo album in one hand and Mein Kampf in the other. The eyes were bright, very bright, brighter than the fire in the room. The eyes surveyed Bidyut for a moment and then he said with a slightly comic smile 'I am back.' And before Bidyut could absorb the shock his son ran towards him and gave him a sharp push. Bidyut fell on the floor, his glasses came off his eyes. Soumyo kicked the glasses to another corner of the room, opened the door, closed it behind him, went to his room and fell asleep.

Bidyut felt a sharp pain in his heart, and died even before the fire could consume him.

#### (VI)

No one understood why Bidyut Sengupta committed suicide. His old aunt cried and cried, for Bidyut certainly, but even more for his poor son. She didn't know how to console him. He was so shocked that he didn't even cry. After sometime he went back to his boarding school.

Bidyut's old aunt, however, at last stopped worrying about Soumyo when she received a letter from him informing her that he has won the first prize in an elocution contest.



# JOURNEY

Benjamin Zachariah *1st yr. Modern History*

Where do we go from here, Comrade?' Zoltan stared into the outer darkness as the stars faded into the dawn sky. Zildjan made no reply as he relentlessly chewed on the toothpick of Creation. The journey had begun in October with great hope and enthusiasm and an Irish terrier named Gandhi. But now the dog was dead, October was far behind and they had run out of Diet pepsi.

The two friends were heading west-wards in search of that essential something of the spirit which seems to be beyond the fading remnants of the resting iron sky. They dreamed of reaching the Beyond where angels sang under festive awnings and people feasted under a big M. But the dream had soured like fresh cream left in a stable. Now it seemed that they would have to turn back.

The sun rose from beneath her sheets and slid seductively out of her night garb. Gently drowning the day in her sweet odours. Zildjan contemplatively stirred the brown earth with a broken plectrum and said nothing.

The road back was infinitely more depressing in the morning sunlight than it had been when they first felt it's comforting opulence under Reebok Soles in those great October days. What had then seemed a glorious path to tread was now only a reminder of the orange peels and apple-cores of their futile search. The beer cans of their ideals were twisted and crumpled beyond recognition, leaving even the brand name unrecognisable.

They were going back. Back to where it all began on another October day, in red and green. With blood and a little man with a pointed beard. It was not for them to judge.

The journey was over. The pale line of consciousness was gently dissolving leaving behind an undefined border of caramel. They no longer recognised the difference. Night's curtain threw its shadow over the blanket of existence.

## II

The other day I rediscovered one of my old scribbles at the bottom of my drawer. I hadn't been through it for a couple of years and rummaging around in it produced the repeated joy of sentiments reborn and feeling resurrected. The gentle warmth of nostalgia hidden in inconsequential trifles which a more systematic person might long ago have thrown away.

Re-reading the half page of clumsy typing (I had then just acquired my mother's old type writer — it had been my aunt's before that) I began to feel quite pleased with myself. It seemed to gently but firmly put forward my credentials as a prophet of sorts. The story was a whimsical fantasy, a testing of early process with words. I now gave it the benefit of my own interpretation to make it seem even more prophetic. The parable of juxtaposed began as a premonition of chaos, a chaos which swiftly materialised and decided to stay on. I wrote of a journey abandoned, a turning back, a loss of direction, confusion. The travellers in search of a new October had lost the old one. One October is very much like another, unless you know what you are looking for.

It was written in the infancy of my politi-

cal consciousness when I had just encountered the word 'Marxist' as a term of disparagement used against my arguments by the professor of the Jesuit-run college I attended. I was not yet aware that the use of the term absolved respectable people from the need to reply to or refute an argument so labelled. I discovered, though, that I wasn't universally considered 'Marxist'. I remember being asked by another professor 'why are you so cynical' I didn't think of myself as a cynical person so it took me a few moments before I answered that cynicism was 'the only functional ethical theory' which sounded good and I discovered later that I had for the first time stated a general principle when called upon to do so. I grew quite fond of the rhythm and accents of this little phrase.

The trouble was that I was a romantic. For me cynicism was no more a functional ethical theory than Zionism was for Adolf Hitler. I carried the phrase around with me for a while, but it ceased to function as a creed before it had begun. I was beginning to discover my politics in my profound aversion to the Reader's Digest and an admiration for Bob Dylan.

That same year I discovered Karl Marx. The authoritative precise and well directed anger of this bearded Old Testament figure stirred my imagination. My everyday observations were set out by him in an ordered whole; he explained what I saw, he had seen it before me and I began to believe in his future — or at least some form of it. In London that summer I posed reverently before the best-maintained grave in Highgate Cemetery, my apologetic stoop spoiling the picture. We had a long walk across Hamstead

Heath that day, and I sat down on a crumbling tombstone, a grave or two away in the row opposite. The name on it was Herbert Spencer, the man whose triumphal exaltation of victorian optimism and arrogance in his survival of the fittest mantra had provided the war cry for successive generation's participation in the class war from above. The spokesman of the European bourgeoisie's finest hour lay almost side by side with the prophet of its destruction, and the latter had proved the fitter to survive. No one came to Highgate Cemetery looking for Spencer's grave. I had found it by accident.

### III

All this might seem now to be wishful thinking. That year there was no bread in Soviet Union. But there was a Soviet Union. It may have been a parody of the Soviet Union as it was conceived. But human beings seem to be rather good at parody and even better at cruelty. We have not come to the end of the unfinished parable; parables are out of fashion anyway. The men of wisdom and the men of power (who are actually the same men) are telling us now that the old bearded prophet has been banished to the dustbin of history.

But 'History does nothing, it possesses no immense wealth, fights no battles. It is rather man, real living man, who does everything, who possesses and fights'. The bearded man still speaks from the dustbin. And he may well find an audience. for there are still very many real living men and women whose poverty forces them to rummage in dustbins.



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## The Cambridge Approach to Indian Nationalism

The essence of the approach that C.A. Bayly has adopted to study the political developments in Allahabad is embodied in the writings of other historians of the Cambridge school of Indian history also. This view holds that the rise and growth of the 'national movement' or sub-continental politics stemmed from the structures and dynamics of local politics. Local politics comprised networks of patron-client relationships in which the patron exercised control in the neighbourhood or mohulla level through a variety of social and economic controls. With the government intervening in wider areas of Indian society, these groups were subject to pressure and forced to interact more extensively with the government through a series of new institutions which were created to facilitate administration and recruit collaborators — municipalities, district boards etc. This stimulated the growth of alliances transcending the purely local or mohulla level and the competing factionalism of these networks gradually attained a provincial dimension. Similarly, provincial politics responded to identical stimuli from the colonial government to produce the fabric of national politics. Underlying this approach was the assumption that the constitutional initiatives undertaken from time to time had been the chief spur to sub-continental political activity and that the direction and volume of this activity had been determined by the inspirations and ambitions of interest groups who have sought to exploit every constitutional advance to fulfil their short-

*Is Indian nationalism the result of factional conflicts between the local politicians, as the Cambridge school historians would have us believe? Sidharta Dasgupta, ex-student of the history department, now in J.N.U., discusses this question while reviewing C. A. Bayly's. The Local Roots of Indian Politics : Allahabad 1880-1920*

term objectives at the expense of others. Ideological convictions, linguistic or cultural traditions and ethnic or class identities are at best only of peripheral interest.

C.A. Bayly studies the growth of local political traditions in Allahabad during 1880-1920 within this larger matrix. The book, however does not concern itself exclusively with the politics of the cluster of townships that made up the Allahabad Municipality but rather goes on to depict the trend of public

life in Northern India in general and the United Provinces in particular during the last decades of the 19th and the early decades of the 20th century. Allahabad has been chosen as a focus of study because it brings out in sharp relief the contours of local political systems and the influence of local notables which are the basic tools and units of analysis utilised in this book.

Bayly starts by giving a general outline of the administration and the judicial and educational systems of late 19th century Allahabad. Bayly believed that the most important factor working in favour of the colonial government in controlling local dissidence was that administrative patronage (or the lack of it) fuelled political activity; such an approach would necessarily involve a detailed examination of the administrative structure. The growth in the volume of litigation also had important political implications as the pleaders constituted an important strand in the political leadership of the province. As for education, not only was the Allahabad Uni-

iversity senate an important representative forum for political aspirants, but the university itself acted as a focus of discussion among the educated.

From here the focus of the study shifts to the locus of power at the mohalla or neighbourhood level. The author tried to assess the role of both the local neighbourhood leaderships and the town leadership. At the neighbourhood level, leadership was often provided by indigeneous groups or corporate bodies both of a religious and a secular character. These groups or bodies often worked through the patronage of banking and trading magnates who formed alliances across the neighbourhoods and provided leadership to the towns. The traditional Mughal service gentry families and the landholding classes also competed for power and influence with these commercial magnates and sought to project their provincial contacts and connections back to the locality through religious patronage and property ownership. At the beginning of the period under study, a new class had emerged in the form of the Westernized, largely English-educated Indians. These were late entrants in the quest for power and patronage. But Bayly's study shows how the power of the old town, 'notable,' declined throughout the later decades of the 19th and the early decades of the 20th century and how these liberal professional classes gradually attained eminence. One reason for this was the gradually widening area of political activity as the government conceded larger powers to local self-governing bodies as well as to provincial legislative assemblies. Local notables had derived their former importance from their status as intermediaries between neighbourhood dissidents and local representatives of authority. Now this role had been usurped by the professional or the publicist (who had by now liberated himself from the patronage of the notable). With their access to regional associations and the organs of the Congress, these men could forge links between locality, region and prov-

ince and bring neighbourhood dissidences into direct contact with the larger national movement thereby undermining the position of the local notable. To a certain extent this process had been facilitated by the greater urbanization and commercialisation of Allahabad with new immigrant entrepreneurial groups setting themselves up. Financial and administrative devolution to the municipalities also aided this process.

At another level Bayly tries to examine the evolution and growth of local interest groups which he believed formed a central feature of political life in Allahabad in the period under study. These interest groups had been formed to extend and protect local interests and had developed somewhat independently of local factional politics. Neither did they represent an attempt by the provincial politicians to project their power back into the localities. Bayly distinguishes these groups as having more 'sectional, regional and local aims' than the Congress and holds that these groups merged into the Congress organisation in certain periods. According to him these represented the peaks and troughs of Congress activism and organisation. Their attitude towards the Congress would be influenced by their attitude towards and relationship with the colonial authorities as well as by the fissures and dissidences within the movements of social reform and revival from which these were generated. It is here that Bayly's analysis runs into serious difficulties for he has not cared to explain why these movements would be willing to merge themselves with the Congress or seek a broader constituency. Merely to say that these groups joined the Congress because they were frustrated in their design to secure recognition and power does not help when we remember the risk of physical harm and economic ruin courted by participants of mass movements against colonial power. And if protection and patronage was what they were seriously seeking, it would have made more sense for these interest groups to align themselves with the liber-



als and moderates who actively collaborated with the colonial government.

The Cambridge School approach is at its weakest when it seeks to uncover the motives of the masses who took to the streets under the Congress banner and challenged the Raj in series of confrontations during the early decades of the 20th century culminating with the massive Civil Disobedience Movement and the Khilafat agitation. Bayly's thesis that the Khilafat agitation was largely the result of the replacement of the classes which had traditionally provided leadership to the Muslim communities by younger, professional radicals does not explain the participation of the masses. Even if we accept that the intensity and direction of political activity were decided merely by the short-term objectives of the 'elites', the realisation that the sources of patronage were limited and that only a microscopic minority were equipped with the necessary skills for officeholding should have deterred the masses from directing their agitations to those points of the administrative structure where patronage and executive power had gathered. If material self-interest was the sole motive, then the objective should rather have been to destroy the institutions of colonial authority so that fresh power structures could accommodate the wider political aspirations of divergent groups and classes. More importantly, the end of the period under study witnessed a marked tendency on the part of the government to centralise executive power in its own hands and render the elective element in the municipalities and provincial legislatures politically impotent. Even under dyarchy, Indian ministers remained subordinate to appointed British officers and the provincial government could withdraw grants from municipalities at will. This should logically have led to a curtailment of enthusiasm for political activities, but this

period actually witnessed a mass surge in political activity. If as Bayly contends, 'The more spectacular non-cooperation, Khilafat and peasant's movement were squalls which temporarily blew the political leaders of course' one is tempted to ask what was the course that was being steered. Even if we accept that the constitutional initiatives undertaken by the government were the basic stimuli to political action, Bayly's approach does not explain why the elite leaderships would jockey for power and status in the short-term in a structure which had little to offer to the masses, and thus risk losing their credibility in the long run. Indeed, it does not even explain how they retained their hold over their masses when they did. As later researches show, levels of public enthusiasm and commitment to the Congress fell off whenever their leaders lobbied for the 'loaves and fishes' of office. The undisputed leaders of the nationalist movement at later stage-Nehru and Gandhi never had the slightest interest in officeholding and a large number of nationalists participated in elections only to strengthen their organisations and demonstrate their strength.

While Bayly's work is valuable because it emphasizes the value of networks as strands of continuities in a period of political change the pre-occupation with this aspect to the virtual exclusion of all other factors needed greater historical justification. This attempt to see the political developments under the Raj as solely a response to constitutional innovations to the exclusion of other tensions and forces, particularly colonial economic exploitation is an unsatisfactory analytical tool. The author's preoccupation with 'politics' as opposed to 'nationalism' fails to explain the fact that the largest sacrifices in the freedom struggle were made by those who had the least to gain from Independence.



## ON 'NOSTALGIA'

There was this enterprising guy in college who used to sell t-shirt with 'Presidency' written across it. It made excellent business-sense ; we, Presidencians, who (have been made to) believe that we are among the Chosen Few, studying, as we do, in what is supposed to be the best college in the city ('if not in the country'), like to stand out in the crowd. And apart from wearing T-shirts

with 'Presidency' written on them, there are not too many ways to impress upon your fellow-commuters on public-buses and the people on the streets and in the restaurants and the movies that you are from Presidency, are there? And you do need to flaunt it, don't you? It's more likely that most people don't give a shit—why should they?—but there are scores of proud owners wallowing in happy self-delusions and strutting around in that piece of rag.

The T-shirt, predictably, was a big hit in college, and I believe there will be quite a few narcissists and exhibitionists in the college who would be willing to buy 'Nostalgia' as well; paying Rs. 120 to bask in the glory reflected off the eighteen famous faces featured on the cover of the 175th Anniversary Volume is, I believe, no big deal. Of course, one could buy it for other reasons — for an account of the history of the college, which was pretty well-chronicled, or for the mostly-hackneyed-but-sometimes-interesting nostalgia-trips of the land's cultural-academic-po-

*Kunal Biswas, an exstudent of the Political Science department, reviews 'Nostalgia's and finds it 'no big deal'.*

litical glitteratti who were associated with the college, for instance, or as a souvenir — but those of us who were not drunk when we thunderingly applauded the Principal when he said something as embarrassingly absurd as 'Presidency is Bengal, Bengal is presidency' during the 175th Anniversary 'function' would, I suspect, buy it for the same reason as one buys the Presidency T-shirt for.

If the 175th Anniversary Volume was an exercise designed to titilate the Presidency ego, it was a job very well done. Although, of course, after the entire line-up of our glorious alumni has been dealt with, we are told that 'investing the alma-mater with a near-mystic halo is also a form of self-glorification.' (p. 224)

After the alumni-induced high, we are taken on a long, meandering, introspective trip; we are told just what exactly is wrong with us Presidencians-of-today and why and —worse—what we should be doing to set things right. In the process, we are told just about everything we would want to know about our college. Who, for instance, wouldn't like to know that the 'female students' of the Department of Zoology 'almost always' wear salwar-kameez and those in the English Department wear salwar-kameez 'less frequently'. Valuable piece of information, that; now, if any of you guys are feeling horny and have a fetish for legs, you know what to do—hang out around the English Department and hope

it is one of those 'less frequent' days.

And, after regaling us with a whole table-load of information regarding who-wears-what, we are told that, we 'should not fail to correlate the socio-economic relevance of dressing patterns to the class of students of the individual departments.' (p. 241) Only four pages, the same people who had rendered that advice — a sickeningly holier-than-thou bunch calling itself 'The Survey Guild' — had found it 'perplexing' that 'many of the students view these superficial aspects of dress and manners to be an index of values and other more serious things.' Confusing, isn't it?

Interspersed with philosophical observations and moral prescriptions, the survey-report made interesting-reading. Check this one out, it is really profound :

It is no longer love which makes the world go round, it is money. (p. 246)

Or this :

The Indian women's attitude towards sex must change — sex is not a painful obligation that she owes to the man she loves. (p. 249)

Ergo, sex is fun. I got a sneaking suspicion that this particular prescription is the product of the embittered mind of someone who had not been 'obliged' by some heartless 'Lady Presidency'. (By the way, interesting term, that.)

Extremely profound, too, are the quotes chosen to begin certain chapters with — one couldn't have chosen, for instance, something more appropriately esoteric than 'Yo Ho Ho and a bottle of Rum' for the section on alcoholism and drug-addiction in college.

And then there was the brilliant 'And God created women' opening in the chapter titled 'Presidency's Second Sex'. (That 'second sex' label, by the way, is sure to please the 17.63% of the women students who actually enjoy a male-dominated society.)

One can't help marvelling at the way the members of the Survey Guild kept getting shocked and amazed and distressed about everything—shocked at the 'cultural insularity' of the students of the Bengali Department, dismayed at the 'appalling' low level of drug-awareness among Presidencians, shocked that most Presidencians are ignorant of the Indian cultural scene, distressed at the fact that only 30.86% of the students know that the dome on top of the main building was originally an observatory, amazed that 84.14% of the students — hopeless ignoramuses, all — could not say how many water-coolers are there in the college, dismayed that we are merely 'interested in the vulgar activity of living life', shocked that we spend our time 'gossiping like lazy housewives' and so on. In fact, the only thing that seemed to have 'heartened' them was the fact that 'the parental educational status' had 'improved considerably compared to the last survey' — now, ain't that something that should make us Presidencians proud?

The other day, a friend of mine who had bought 'Nostalgia' told me excitedly, 'Did you know Rabindranath studied in our college? Only for a day, but still...' No, I didn't. Now that I do, tra-la-la-la-la!



## Grasping at the past : History, Mythology and 'Nostalgia'

Nostalgia' - 'a sentimental yearning for the past', as the O.E.D. so aptly puts it, — is both the basis and the title for the '175th Anniversary Volume' that has sold so well. The book, in its alternative or descriptive title, claims to be 'An Illustrated History of Hindu-Presidency College.' One suspects that the strange compound name came into existence essentially to provide the excuse to celebrate an anniversary, but there seems to be little point in saying that now, after the festivities are over and done with, and we have all partaken of its delights.

To return to the book itself — nostalgia is a poor basis for a history, and a cursory glance at the contents is enough to show that the history part is sustained for only the first forty-two pages, and then abandoned. The rest of the book comprises mainly anecdotes and reminiscences, of and/or by various renowned Presidencians we have all, or should have all, heard of — apart from the long statistical section. Surely this cannot claim to be a history of the College. Not even the most consciously archaic or generous view of what constitutes a history can grant the use of the term to a collection of tales best told to one's grandchildren, if one has any.

One of the irresistible urges of all Presidencians, which they probably share with anyone else who can claim a part of an age-old tradition as his or her own, is the

*"One of the irresistible urges of all Presidencians, which they probably share with anyone else who can claim a part of an age old tradition as his one her own, is the tendency to mythologise", says Bengamin Zachariah,*

tendency to mythologise. In our case, and particularly on the occasion of an anniversary, this degenerates into an often absurd ancestor-worship, verging on idolatry. This increases in proportion to the distance in time from the men and events described. It would appear that the virtue of self-criticism in the Presidencian emerges only in his own time; the past acquires an aura of sanctity, and contradictions are either covered up or remain unmentioned.

However, as long as the book makes no claim to historical scholarship, all this is not only forgivable, but rather pleasant. An anniversary is a time for celebration, and a self-congratulatory tone enters even into Subodh Chandra Sengupta's account of the College's past (reprinted from the Centenary Volume; the forty-two pages which comprise the strictly historical section contain no original work, only reprints.) The only piece of historical importance, and of the highest quality, is the excerpt from John Berwick's Ph.D. dissertation to the University of Sydney - what exactly it was about, we are not told, and perhaps it would be quite meaningless to say something conclusive about it without reading the whole thesis. But the advantage of an outsider's viewpoint is immediately clear; he provides an excellent account of the educational ambience of an age, from around the time the College came into being (as Hindu College) until the 1870s. The piece

contains some gems, such as the comment on Keshab Chandra Sen's description of his first love in his memoirs:

'His description is unusual in that the writers of most autobiographies of this and later periods simply seem to acquire wives and children without any emotional disturbance...'

Most of the contributors to this volume are rather good writers, lending the charm of the narrator to the most commonplace of events. It is this charm which will most likely make it the source of a great many more of the anecdotes which float around as part of the College folklore. The suspicion that many of the stories have suffered in accuracy cannot, however, be dispelled. Saugata Roy's account of the College in the mid-1960s, for instance, makes pleasant reading in the tradition of the old school-stories which British public-schoolboys used to be so fond of before they switched to rugby songs and pornography in a less innocent age. The only problem is, we are not British public-schoolboys, and he is writing of an age not quite so innocent. The tone of the article is at times quite annoying, and full of polemical tricks which in a better writer would be less visible - 'indoctrinated into Marxism', 'Hindu Hostel became an armed fortress for Naxalites', and so on. Stylistically speaking these outbursts of bile are unwarranted intrusions into an account that pretends to good-humoured liberal tolerance.

The mythologisation process is seen hard at work in the late '60s, a period of its history the College has far from come to terms with yet. The conflicts are so alive that the fear of Red devils still haunts the minds of the student movement's erstwhile opponents; and a prominent position in this mythology is occupied by the Hindu Hostel. A case in point is Rajat Kanta Roy's memoirs. His account of a debate on politics in the course of which he

entered Hindu Hostel despite possible danger to his life, and faced, instead of the civilised debate he expected, the tragic blow of abuse directed at his father (who was Home Secretary) is a splendid tale of a heroic and principled, if quixotic, stand. In the light of other contemporary (non-'communist') testimonies, the dangers of the situation seem to have been more imagined than real, and the antipathy he experienced more personal than ideological.

It appears that the peculiar fate of the intellectual in an erstwhile colony was to play out the Cold War game in miniature - although there seem, fortunately enough, to have been enough people who resisted the temptation to oversimplify their Weltanschauung to a simple good-versus-evil equation. It is a pity Ashim Chatterjee, has consciously confined himself to personal reminiscences, because had he taken the Anniversary Volume's claim to being a history seriously, he might have been able to provide a different perspective, which would at least have helped neutralise some myths with counter-myths. Nevertheless, he is a marvellous and compelling writer, and his contribution is one of the high points of the book.

Since the book comprises mostly personal essays it provides a number of interesting and often revealing personal glimpses - Asok Mitra's confession that he had for a while had Fascist sympathies, Dipak Benerjee's description of the, 'Do you follow that' stakes (read his excellent piece to de-cipher that reference), Aparna Sen's incomplete B.A. (she got married). Dilipda, appropriately, has the privilege of the last word. Future generations who are denied his inestimable assistance cannot begin to understand the esteem in which we hold him.

Several among the more famous

Presidencians have been interviewed, since they probably hadn't the time to write an article. The interviewers somewhat formularised set of questions was quite disappointing, and led to the interesting situation of a verbal tussle with Satyajit Ray while trying to get him to say the obligatory nice things about the important influence the College had had on his life and work — which he succeeded in not saying. Principal Amal Mukhopadhyay was also interviewed, placing him in illustrious company; the interview illustrates how smoothly this remarkable man accomplished his transition from teacher to civil servant.

The statistical section presents an alarming picture of the present Presidencian as an insular, ill-informed, somewhat stupid, complacent, conformist who rides around in his (or more frequently, her) father's car and wants to grow up and be rich. The only thing in the above list which isn't negative is probably being rich, but it can hardly, by any standard, be considered a virtue in itself. A significant percentage, if the survey is to be believed, believe in the continuance or revival of caste distinction and arranged marriage, and most women are against abortion rights. The sexual revolution has by and large reached Presidency in a confused and distorted form, if it has at all, and women are unaware of their post-feminism rights and status. Or so we are told.

It is tempting to ignore the results of this dismal survey, claiming a distorted sample or the invalidity of statistics as a science, or something like that, but the ostrich approach is unviable. The surveyors have done an excellent job within their limitations, and remarkably, the section reads rather well. But more alarmingly, the results of the survey are

quite visible to the naked eye, or if you prefer it, the naked intellect. Personally, I shall be extremely glad if I can claim to be an absolutely atypical Presidencian, or take refuge in the fact that I was not part of the sample group.

The question one may, of course, ask, is whether all the virtues one traditionally associates with Presidency College and are now vanishing, are at all relevant to our age. Some, perhaps, are not—they are the luxuries allowed to a world of greater leisure. A student of English need not be able to speak Sanskrit like a member of the Gupta court. But a minimum of intellectual alertness is a demand made of any college student, indeed, any human being, and we seem to be in danger of losing even that. Of course, the survey is already three years old, so perhaps things have marginally improved. But it doesn't yet show up on the naked-eye test.

On the basis of this book, Presidency College appears to be in the final stages of decay. Averages are deceptive, and the occasional brilliant student might always slip in and out almost undetected. The tragedy gains in intensity when one realises that Presidency is still probably the best college in Eastern India. In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.

But it remains true that behind all the mythology and self-exaltation involved in the Presidency ethos, there was a core of intellectual excellence on which to build it all. The need to excavate the glories of the past is never so great as when the present is bleak and the future uncertain. Without this core, we can only continue through inertia of motion, await or create the next anniversary and comfort ourselves with another dose of nostalgia.



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