

INTRODUCTION

*The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
Life like a dome of many coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments.*

— Shelley in 'Adonais'

I have called my autobiographical Memoir 'On the Loom of Time' inspired by Goethe's following insightful lines:¹

At the whirring loom of Time unawed
I work the living mantle of God.

This 'On the Loom of Time' consists of three Books devoted to the three broad phases of my life, each with its characteristic name :

Book I: The Fragrant Years (from 1937- 1964)

Book II: A Cog in the Machine (from 1964-1998)

Book III: Illusion & Reality (from 1998-2014).

The Book I pertains to my halcyon years of my boyhood and adolescence. The Book II pertains to the years I spent as a cog in the vast machine of governance as a member of the Indian Revenue service when I bore with joy, often with tongue-tied patience and fortitude, the heat and burden of the Revenue Service. The Book III pertains to the phase from 1998 onwards when I dabbled, *pro bono publico*, in so many spheres. I conducted *pro bono publico* some important Public Interest Litigations before the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court of India; wrote a book under the title *Judicial Role in Globalised Economy*²; and set up the 'Bhagavad-Gita Swadhyaya Kendra' under the umbrella of 'Draupadi Devi-Gopi Kant Jha Charitable Trust'³ that I had founded at the 'Veenapani Bhawan' at Laherisarai. Over the years I heard certain stories from many knowledgeable persons, and I felt that some of these expressed metaphorically profound ideas on which, as the vigilant members of the Republic of India, we must ponder. In Chapter 25 of this Memoir, entitled "The Certain Stories as my 'Objective Correlatives'," I have tried to tell some of these.

II

My Memoir contains certain fragments of my life. It highlights certain events in which I participated in some measure, and the ideas which guided me to act,

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and on which I often reflected for light and delight. I have lived, thought and acted. I have seen in my life, as Krishna had seen in His life; “the play of the contingent and the unforeseen.”

I had my successes and failures for me to reflect on. I had moments to exult at the good things I experienced; I had moments of astonishment at my own actions. I have felt excoriating agony seeing how our country allowed herself to be turned into “one vast vision of imbecility”.

I have seen in the world a dance on the still centre: I have seen our brave new world illustrating copiously the syndrome of the fast changing technology but stagnant, if not decadent, morality. In this Memoir I intend to look back over the seven decades of my life. But on an overview of my life, I have felt amazed to see how my stars yoked together the contraries and contradictories in my life. I have felt life just a sparrow’s temporary sojourn in the space we call our world. The imagery of a sparrow’s sojourn is a powerful ‘objective correlative’⁴ to express what human life is. Lord Krishna considers it so (the *Bhagavadgita* II.28), and Lord Hailsham of St Marylebone has even called his autobiography *A Sparrow’s Flight*. I would revisit this profound imagery several times in this Memoir.

In a sense, this autobiographical Memoir is a potpourri of the petals gathered on the stream of Time. It deals with myriad events and many disjointed ideas. The journey of my life, like that of the Ganges, is from the Gangotri to the ocean, observing and participating in God’s *Lila*. I have gathered in this spectrum the varied rays refracted on my life’s many-coloured dome of glass. Whilst I have touched on a number of topics, and you might on good grounds consider this Memoir a mere collage of varied worth and effect, I hope you will discover that it is my observation-post that unites them all into a perspective, and creates a symphony. You would notice my assertive presence all through this book. As I have written this Memoir in different moods, and at different times, in the fast shifting contexts, you might find me sometimes a rocking horse dragging load on rough roads, but at times a Pegasus soaring high in the sky. But this has been my life, which I would try to portray with fidelity and utmost good faith.

I have often found myself in a plight which the great Tulsidas described thus in the *Ramcharitmanasa*:

भाग छोट अभिलाषु बड़ करूँ एक बिस्वास
पैहहि सुख सुनि सुजन सब खल करिहहिं उपहास

[With my dim luck, I crave a lot. The sympathetic amongst you will draw some delight; but those not so inclined would have many things to laugh at.]

III

When I set out writing this autobiographical Memoir, my mind was distracted and wrenched by Ronald Duncan’s observations in his autobiography, *All Men are Islands*: “We settle down to write our life when we no longer know how to live it.” I wondered how to write about my life when its fabric was “still being woven on the roaring loom of time”. But I received light from the well-known *rubāiyāt* (quatrains) of Omar Khayyám. I felt what had gone belonged to the past, hence could be seen before my mind’s eye, and reflected upon.

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The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

Hume, the author of *Treatise On Human Nature* drew an account of his life only in eight pages with an initial caveat. "It is difficult for a man to speak long of himself without vanity; therefore, I shall be short." But I have spoken quite long about myself. It has its reasons. I have lived in several universes. My life has been, like Keats's, a mansion of many apartments, a web integrating various spheres. I have tried in this Memoir to gather the broken fragments of my past. I know I might have committed errors of judgment. That happens often in an autobiography. This is price of being a judge in one's own cause.

IV

As a student I had formed a habit of altering things to make them better, though often these pursuits were counterproductive and frustrating. Every time I read what I had written myself, I changed the text, often even ideas. So my quest at perfection kept me stranded without producing much. Now I have reached a point in my life where I cannot afford to do that. A couplet of a poet from Maharashtra, which Bal Gangadhar Tilak quoted in the Introduction to his immortal *Gita-Rahashya*, comes to mind:

यम सेना की विमल ध्वजा अब जरा दृष्टि में आती है
करती हुई युद्ध रोगों से देह हारती जाती है

[Old age, which is the spotless white banner carried by the
army of the attendants of Death, is already in sight!
And my body is exhausted in the struggle with diseases,
which are the advance guard of that army.]⁵

I have never considered my life a thing of my own. I am what the world has made me, shaped me. Even my individual talent is a part of the whole, my own creativity has drawn much from others' creations. I hold myself under debt not only to my parents but to all the humans, nay to all the creations, from the mosquitoes, which have kept me awake to write these lines, to the galaxies which provided me vistas to soar and roam. I recall what thirty years back, I had heard from my father-in-law : these lines from *aghazal*⁶ :

क्या राह में परिचय करूँ, राही हमारा नाम है
चलना हमारा काम है

[What should on our way I tell you about myself? I am just a wayfarer on my way.]

V

Writing this autobiographical Memoir began almost a decade back, precisely when I retired from the Indian Revenue Service in 1998. I felt greatly indebted to that service. I would have more to say about it in the Chapter on 'Retirement' in the Book II of the Memoir. I summed up my debt to it in the words like these:

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“It was the ethos of this Department which became for me a chrysalis. A village-bred and ‘mufassil-educated’ lad, who had studied English grammar on the mango-tree or at the mound of hay, and enjoyed tending his cows with pleasure infinite, was transformed from dross into gold (at least in his assessment.) His journey in life from literature to law has been through his days in the IRS.”

I have benefited from many others in writing this. I have acknowledged some, but I have failed in acknowledging most others. I hope you will forgive me for my lapses. While posted in Kolkata as a Commissioner of Income-tax, I had watched in Kumhartoli how the images of Goddess Durga were made. They brought clay from ponds, and hay and straw from the fields, created colours from vegetables, drew thoughts from the *Shastras*, and revealed in the images their religious and aesthetic sensibility: making the earthen images of Durga into the divine presence of the Goddess Herself.

VI

I hope you will find something of worth if you, whilst reading this Memoir, relive your past too. It hardly matters if our ideas differ, and perceptions vary. Such things get ultimately resolved in harmony. For me the writing of this Memoir has been a vast continuing cathartic experience. I am grateful to you that you have come to my parlour to see how I have lived and thought. I must thank you for sharing some moments with me to reflect on the cavalcade of events in which I have been both a participant and a witness: in fact, most often a participative witness:

अच्छा हुआ तुम मिल गए
कुछ रास्ता ही कट गया⁷

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Goethe in his Faust (R.Anstell’s Translation quoted by Arnold J. Toynbee in *A Study of History*, p. 632)
2. Published by 2005 by Wadhwa & Company, Nagpur
3. See at www.shivakantjha.org
4. Explained in Chapter 26
5. As translated by A.S. Sukthankar in his English translation of the *Gita Rahasya*.
6. Shri Hem Narayan Jha of village Gosaigoan in the district Bhagalpur
7. It is good we met on the way and waded through together for a while.