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CERTAIN STORIES AS MY 'OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVES'

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"¹; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.

T.S. Eliot *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*.
1922.

In this Chapter I intend to tell you some stories which constitute, what T.S. Eliot calls "objective correlative". These are metaphors, valuable more for what they suggest than for what they say. Truth is often expressed best when done through fiction. Gustave Flaubert is right when he says: "Poetry is as exact a science as geometry". We have aptly called God 'Kavi' (poet). All these stories are well known. They are summarized as I remember them. I am indebted to their authors and narrators who have helped me in exploring my world through such objective-correlatives.

(i) Story of Two Frogs: Plight of our 'low arousal people'

"Now things every bit as wild as this are being received in silence every day. All strokes slip on the smoothness of a polished wall. All blows fall soundless on the softness of a padded cell." G.K. Chesterton

A society, which keeps on accepting aberrations and injustice over a long time, is most unfortunate. Massive strokes of injustice, when suddenly inflicted, lead to powerful reaction. But when they come in low doses, the victims keep on adjusting with them. This process of adjustment destroys the capacity to react to make their lot better. We cannot enjoy sojourn on a plateau: if we cannot go up, we must go down. This brings to my mind a story of two frogs which a naughty boy had caught for his macabre play. He hurled one into a pan of boiling water. The frog reacted with instant verve, and jumped out to fall with a thud on the green grass. So it survived. The second frog enjoyed the cool water. But the boy set firewood ablaze under the pan in which the frog rested with delight. The

water, which was cool and comfortable, was getting warmer and warmer. It felt that water was getting warmer, then inconvenient, and then inclement. The unlucky frog fritted away its energy in the process of adjusting with its circumstances as getting shaped. And then it died.

The tragedy that was wrought at Kurukshetra (as portrayed in the *Mahabharata*) could have been avoided if persons like Bhishma, Drone, and Kripacharya would have refused to keep on adjusting with the circumstances wrought by Duryodhana.

(ii) *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*

The way Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was arrested was described by Munshi Premchand in his famous story *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*.

Wajid Ali was the fifth King Oudh till its annexation to the empire of the East India Company Bahadur in 1856. The Nawab wrought his tragedy through a treaty with the Company entered into without understanding its implications. In fact, its content must have been beyond him to understand. He is said to have written a *bhairavi thumri* which I have loved most, especially when sung by my wife, Veena: "*Babul mora naihar chhootohi jaaya*", a song he is said to have composed.

Munshi Premchand's well-known story *Shatranj ke khiladi* ("The Chess Players") tells us about Wajid Ali and his men, and through their ways it reveals the decadence that had set in the Nawabi polity. Premchand tells us this in his felicitous Hindi which I translate:

Nawab Wazid Ali Shah was arrested, and the army was taking him to an unknown destination. There was not even a murmur in the town, no question of resorting to force (to save him). Not even a drop of blood had been shed. Oudh was annexed to the East India Company Bahadur. Till this date no independent country is known to have embraced servitude so calmly. Not a drop of blood was shed to drench soil to protect the country's independence. In such situations, how could servitude be avoided. The only thing that could be said about the Independence of such a country: "It is a wonder that it is free, no wonder if it loses it."

The Nawab's nobles were busy playing chess whilst they were losing every thing they should have valued. And the Nawab had turned narcissistic gazing himself in the goblet of wine and by being wholly lost in the sweet sound of dancing girls' ghunghroos. Wealth had been amassed through exploitation, so his people were alienated from him. He was unlucky not to have his image-builders, advertisers or hired management experts to render him acceptable in public perception. (How lucky are the present-day Wazid Alis in power in our world!) The people of Lucknow might have enjoyed listening to the marching music of the East India Company's band leading the ferocious legion in combat dress. This brings to mind what had happened during the times of King Charles I (1628). The Duke of Buckingham was killed. 'While the king wept in his palace, people drank to the health of the assassin in the streets; Buckingham had become a symbol of all that was wrong in the nation.'² You can try to understand what the playing of chess would mean if the protectors of a family remain busy playing chess in the outer portico when inside the house the robbers loot the house, and

ravish their women! You can enjoy reading about the Game of Chess in Middleton's *Women beware Women*, and the referential invocation to that 'Game of Chess' in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

(iii) Our 'Taj Mahal Economy'

I have called the present-day economic management the "Taj Mahal Economy". This heading may not appeal to the *amour propre* of the economists of Yale, Chicago or Cambridge. I would tell you how this expression 'Taj Mahal Economy' came to my mind. It came to my mind while studying the economic management of Emperor Shah Jahan who got constructed a mausoleum, the Taj Mahal, at Agra, to commemorate his love for his deceased wife Mumtaz Mahal. It is considered world-famous as "the jewel of Muslim art in India and one of the universally admired masterpieces of the world's heritage." Thousands of artisans and craftsmen sweated over more than two decades turning stones into an expanding metaphor of love, or exploitation (depending on how you look at it). The tomb was described by a poetic genius as "one tear-drop...upon the cheek of Time". This Taj was built when the Mughal prosperity was at its peak. The Great Mughals had reached its cultural acme, and had acquired renown world over which our historians tend to describe with passionate intensity, and ever waxing pride. The feudal lords and the denizens of the privileged classes rolled in luxury pretending a cultivated taste and rich aesthetic sensibility. It was again Shah Jahan who had built his Diwan-i-Khas with precious stones studded in the ceiling exhibiting the glitter of gold, and the shine of the choicest marble believing, as the inscription engraved on it says, that he was in the Eden of Bliss on the Earth:

Agar firdaus bar ru-yi zamin ast
Hamin ast, u hamin ast, u hamin ast.

But the best of times was also the worst of times. The commoners of the great Mughal Empire could eke out their living only by becoming the beasts of burden, or at best, mere serfs. It seems the Emperor, and his advisors, believed in something that reminds us of our present-day neoliberal economists' pet ideas compendiously called the 'trickle-down effect' theory. The Emperor's expenditure on the construction of the Taj Mahal was, perhaps, his response to help his people severely stricken by a terrific famine which had broken out in 1556-1557 in the neighbourhood of Agra, Biyana, and Badauni. Spending the State's resources over the construction of the Taj Mahal, or the Diwan-i-Khas, might have brought joy for the Emperor, and those chosen-people of his realm who needed some glamorous rendezvous, but for the rest of people that was a cruel joke cut with macabre taste. Whatever the artisans, craftsmen and the labourers earned, as daily wages, were lost in the expenditure on luxuries peddled out by the swarming sellers of drink, and lascivious *mujras*. The great poet Sumitranandan Pant wrote a poem on the 'Taj' where he said (to render it in English from Hindi):

What an amazing and celestial worship of Death,
Whilst the people remained despondent under gloom.

The poet was rightly shocked by that arrogant extravaganza mocking the poor of those days.

Shah Jahan knew their plight, but, like our present-day wielders of power, indulged in crystal gazing. He must have known that in 1556-1557 (and even thereafter), in the neighbourhood of Agra and Biyana, and Badauni, "men ate their own kind, and the appearance of the famished sufferers was so hideous that one could scarcely look upon them. The whole country was a desert, and no husbandman remained to till the ground". "The horrors of this calamity were so great that, as 'Abdul Hamid Lahori, the official historian of the reign of Shah Jahan, wrote : "men began to devour each other, and the flesh of a son was preferred to his love" [Majumdar, Raychaudhuri & Datta, *An Advanced History of India* p. 565]. A Dutch merchant, who witnessed the calamity, notes that "men lying in the street, not yet dead, were cut up by others, and men fed on living men, so that even in the streets, and still more on road journeys, men ran great danger of being murdered or eaten". Shah Jahan "opened a few soup-kitchens", distributed 1½ lacs of rupees in charity and remitted one-eleventh of the land-revenue assessment; but this could not suffice to mitigate the sufferings of the starving people.' [How close is this strategic response to what our Government has done to alleviate the suffering of the starving farmers in our country!] The nobles and the rich considered the sound of *ghungroos* as the very index of people's welfare. This state of affairs contemplates the classes of the exploiters and the exploited. This was the world in which, as William Blake says:

*Some are born to Sweet delight,
Some are Born to Endless Night.*

(iv) Sone ki Lanka

In ancient times, Ravana was a demonic person, and felt precisely as the demonic persons feel: "I am God myself. I am perfect and the mightiest. Every object exists only for my pleasure."³ He ruled the mighty *imperium* of Lanka where he had amassed wealth that he had looted from all the worlds. His capital was made of gold beautified with pearls and diamonds. Everything that could beautify it was there in plenty making it a thing of delight every moment it was seen. Its security was of the highest order, and the king was wholly invincible.

Tulsidas tells us in the *Ramcharitmanasa* that during His sojourn in the forest, Rama saw heaps of bones of the sages and saints. His kindness welled up, and he asked people around what had wrought their plight that way. He got a reply: "The demonic persons had eaten up the good residents of the forest (अस्थि समूह देखि रघुराया, पूछी मुनिन्ह लागि अति दया"). Ravana had got Lanka made by the divine architect Vishwakarma. Hanumanji, contemplating to enter Lanka in search of Sita, felt that Ravana's capital floated on the clouds. Ravana's aircraft had on it white mansions, water tanks with lotuses in plenty. It was called the *Puspakvimana*.

But Ravana's extractive imperialism did not last long. His city, with all its might and affluence, was destroyed by of Hanuman, a monkey who was working for Rama. Even the invincible Ravana was killed by Rama. None survived even to shed tears for the mighty demon.

David Korten, in his *Where Corporations Rule the World* tells us about a very suggestive episode: about the Cloud Minders in *The Star Trek: The Original Series*. It is an allegory with deep import.

“The Cloud Minders, episode 74 of the popular science fiction television series *Star Trek*, took place on the planet Ardana. First aired on Feb. 28, 1969, it depicted a planet whose rulers devoted their lives to the arts in a beautiful and peaceful city, Stratos, suspended high above the planet’s desolate surface. Down below, the inhabitants of the planet’s surface, the Troglytes, worked in misery and violence in the planet’s mines to earn the interplanetary exchange credits used to import from other planets the luxuries the rulers enjoyed on Stratos.”

The Troglytes, the suffering beasts of burden, worked extracting zenite. This mineral was valuable for the cloud-minders for augmentation of wealth, though the unprocessed zenite emitted gas which made the beasts of burden lose their mental capacity. But their capitalist exploiters had good time in their world built in the sky. How unfair it is to deprive the poor of essential entitlements, and then cast them off in the ashcan because they are deficient!

To suffer unjust sufferings, tongue-tied, is itself the worst of all sins.

(v) The three Indias

Three persons met in a conclave at the ‘swimming city’ in the Pacific to deliberate on the affairs of our world. They assembled in this ship. They were advertised in the media as the three flowers out to herald a new spring all around. One was with the highest Business Management doctorate from the world’s most prestigious university; the second was an economist flaunting gaudy academic distinctions; and the third had a distinguished career as a financier reigning with his wizardry the world of finance. Each of them claimed to work for the common people of the country. Each of them had easy access to the Government that claimed to work as the guardian of the people (*parens patriae*). The common people had a lot of expectations from them, they reposed a lot of faith in them. They never felt they could ever be deceived. This always happens when critical sense to discriminate between reality and illusion is lost. The persons in the conclave had a dexterous strategy. They seemed to work for common people, but served the ends of the present-day versions of the House of Medici (a 14th century political dynasty that had once ruled the world of finance), or the gang of the Zaharoffs (Sir Basil Zaharoff was an arms dealer and financier). They worshipped God but served Mammon. For them common people were no better than ‘beasts of burden’. They felt they sounded scholarly when they quoted Alexander Hamilton for whom the common people were merely ‘the great beast’.

They thought of three Indias. One India, called ‘India Incorporated’, of the *nouveau riche*, the high net worth individuals, the most successful looters, the most successful crooks, the MNCs, and creatures of the similar stuff. Mammon is their guide and Lucre is their love. They need a country on this planet because some stellar world is yet to be discovered or explored. They feel that all others beyond their circle are mere commodities to be turned into the grist of the mill of their greed. They feel the world exists for them. Not to say of a Government, even God exists to promote their welfare. The Second and the third Indias exist in the spheres away from the first, separated by the thickest smog ever seen. These two

constitute Bharat, itself vivisected into two realms, one working for the first India as their workers, lobbyists, advertisers and cheerleaders and the other destined to exist bound on the wheel of fire. Some of these have before them inviting carrots for which any donkey is accustomed to bray, and move towards. The Third India is the Bharat of ordinary mortals whose destiny makes them either to become the instruments to run the market, or to become raw materials for creation of new products, or to become what the lawyers say *res commercium*.

Justifying their ideas they drew on the wisdom of J.B. Priestley who discovered four Englands in his *English Journey* (1934). He discovered four Englands:⁵ (i) the traditional England rich with wealth; (ii) the "bleak England of harsh industrial towns," and (iii) the "England of dole", a subdivision of England No. 2." and (iv) the enterprising England of the 20th century.

But the delight of the experts in the conclave found no bounds, when a professor from a prestigious Business School, getting salary in lakhs, and lakhs pointed out that there existed precedents even in 'the best of all times'. Even Benjamin Disraeli, who worked to make Victoria the Empress of India in the 19th century, had witnessed two Englands:

"Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, are not governed by the same laws... the Rich and the Poor."⁶

(vi) The Sparrow's Delight

It is said that once upon a time a huge forest caught fire. Flames leaped out in all directions. Vertical convection carried flames up to spread around the wood burning with furious fire to turn the forest into embers. Beings, who dwelt in the forest, were getting scorched, and burnt. There was no exit available to them from the wildfire except through Death. Outside the forest stood a huge crowd not knowing how to respond to the challenge thus posed. They were just onlookers gazing at what was happening. Some thanked God as they had escaped that horrid destiny; others bewailed the lack of resources to fight against the raging fire, still others stood just inhaling and exhaling air, virtually an inert clod existing without relevance to themselves, or to the world.

But there was a sparrow which was seen frequently, flying from somewhere, above or near the burning forest to drop a few drops of water that its beak could hold. To other birds, hovering around, its effort was foredoomed: hence utterly futile. Besides, it was running the risk of itself getting burnt. But it had certain mission; it had a sense of duty. I had written, in Chapter 4 ('Portrait of My Mother') about the sparrow's prayer. It was this very sparrow at work, doing its duty for the weal of all. It was not interested in the ultimate outcome. It had perceived its duty with detachment; and was doing that.

The story goes that an eagle came near the tiny sparrow and asked it; "Why all this, when your efforts could make no difference? Why, then this exercise in futility?"

The sparrow replied; "I know what you say, and what you say is right. Perhaps, all my endeavours might go in vain. But I am not concerned with what

might happen despite my efforts. I have a simple wish. I do not wish to be noted in the history of the universe as one who was a silent onlooker when the forest was in flame. I would do whatever is good. The existence demands that duty be done.

One of our great poets has aptly said :

अवकाश असीम सुखों से आकाश तरंग बनाना
हंसता सा छायापथ में नक्षत्र समाज दिखाना.
नीचे विपुला धरणी है दुख भार वहन सी करती
अपने खारे आंसू से करुणा सागर को भरती.

[They have plenty of time to build waves of joy in the sky, and to deceive others with the mirage of all the stars crafted in the shadows they have mirthfully created. They can go ahead doing so whilst, down below, this Earth keeps shedding tears experiencing agonies without end.]

(vii) Extraordinary Popular Delusions and Madness

An overview of the history from the 16th century to date shows that the art and craft of fraud are deficient in inventiveness: they repeat the same script of their craft time and time again. Its plagiaristic repetitiveness goes most often unnoticed because human memory is proverbially short. This point was forcefully driven home to us by John Kenneth Galbraith in *The Age of Uncertainty* (1977) where he said:

“The man who is admired for the ingenuity of his larceny is almost always rediscovering some earlier form of fraud. The basic forms are all known, have all been practiced. The manners of capitalism improve. The morals may not.”

It is well said. Shakespeare borrowed all his plots for his plays, but he turned them into things of beauty ever new : hence they are never stale. Charles Mackay in his *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and Madness* (1841) tells us about the technique of mega frauds illustrated in certain financial/money manias in the three chapters of his book : ‘Money Mania’, ‘the South-Sea Bubble’; and ‘the Tulip mania’. Michael Lewis considered Mackay, an economist as high in stature, as Adam Smith, Ricardo and Keynes. The bubbles, evidencing greedy financial manias, pertain to the South Sea Company. These show how the murk of greed helped produce a breed of financial fraudsters. Defoe described the craft of greed with an amazing succinctness:

Some in clandestine companies combine;
Erect new stocks to trade beyond the line;
With air and empty names beguile the town,
And raise new credits first, then cry ‘em down;
Divide the empty nothing into shares,
And set the crowd together by the ears

How graphic are the words in the concluding two lines in the context of the computer generated money under the present-day rouse financial system.

In the ‘Mississippi Scheme’, Charles Mackay draws an account of a powerful financial bubble which emerged from the collective pursuits of the bankers,

speculators, economic adventurers and crooks. The circulation of more money, and the emergence of the extractive and exploitative gladiators, created certain oasis of wealth in the French society, and fostered the flame of wrath till the ancient regime itself turned into ashes when the great French Revolution broke out.

The South-Sea Company was incorporated under the Act of the British Parliament with a view to restoring public credit, which was in bad shape. Reports and rumours were assiduously manufactured so that the masses could be turned into herds to be easily driven to the traps so dexterously made with an active assistance of many ministers, members of Parliament, high dignitaries and many others shaping public policies, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer. "Visions of boundless wealth floated before the fascinated eyes of the people in the two most celebrated countries of Europe." "It seemed at that time as if the whole nation had turned stock-jobbers." "Every fool aspired to be a knave." And some unknown adventurer set up a company: "A company for carrying on an undertaking of great advantage, but nobody to know what it is."

In the 'Tulipomania', desires for tulips were created, and made wide spread by adopting a strategy, analogous to that of the present-day commercial world, by creating and manipulating demands and desires. Prices went up and down, and the speculative profits were reaped. The 'tulipomania' got transmuted through some magic wand into 'finmania' (financial mania). All this not only swindled common people, it ruined even the *crème de la crème* (the high and exalted persons of the society).

(viii) Dance on the hood of the most venomous snake

I heard about Kaliya Nag, the most poisonous of all serpents who lived in the river Yamuna making water around so poisonous that humans or birds could not even go near it to quench their thirst. What was for all had been wrongfully appropriated by this looter turned polluter. Krishna compelled it to surrender and leave the river for the weal of all. Krishna danced, playing his *baansuri* on its hood with numerous heads. Kaliya realised its folly, and left the place after expressing its gratitude for the Benefactor of All. Dhenukasura served the obdurate and extractive imperialist King Kamsa. It was this ferocious donkey that showed grossest monstrosity towards all who went to the forest seeking food for survival. The abominable creature implemented the cruel Kamsa's edict excluding all others from the wealth that Nature provided for the benefit of all. This tyranny of exclusion, which the imperialists and the exploiters are accustomed to practice, prevented the humble folk from accessing the natural resources. But this greed-driven tyranny came to a dismal end when Dhenukasura was hurled into air by Balarama. When he fell down, the creature was dead. The great Bhisma told Yudhishthira, to say in the words of poet 'Dinkar':

है सबको अधिकार मृत्तिका पोषक-रस पीने का,
विविध अभावों से अशंक हो कर जग में जीने का

(Everyone has the inherent right to live on the earth's resources: Everyone has the right to live without the distresses of wants)

(ix) *Kalaye tasme namah* ('कालाये तस्मै नमः' O the Supreme Force, salutation to thee)

We visited Ross Island near Andaman & Nicobar Islands. After seeing parts of it, we relaxed at the seashore enjoying a cup of coffee. Our mind explored the past of that place, as its present had nothing to show except ruins and destruction. Till World War II, it was a flourishing town of great strategic importance to the British. During that War, that place was destroyed on account of the Japanese invasion. In her low mellifluous voice, my wife sang Bhartrihari's well-known Sanskrit lines of the *Varagya-Satkam*. The great poet sings how great kings bit dust, how kingdoms were lost, how exquisite beauty of the damsels of delight withered, how the mighty ones writhed in dust, how the scholars sank into foolishness. Wealth and power never prevent the bites of time.

What we saw there brought to my mind the well-known episode mentioned in the 'Vanaparva' of the great *Mahabharata*. Yudhisthira and his four brothers along with Draupadi were roaming in a forest. In order to quench their thirst, the brothers of Yudhisthira went to fetch water. When they did not return for long, Yudhisthira went in search of his brothers. He reached the lake where he found his brothers lying dead on land. Yudhisthira heard some voice advising him to answer certain questions before touching water, otherwise he too would meet the same fate his brothers had met. Yudhisthira agreed to answer the questions He satisfied the questioner. Of all the questions that Yudhisthira answered, the most important (and relevant for us) question ran thus:

"Who is happy? What is the most amazing? What is the right path?
What is the subject matter of the cosmic debate?"

Yudhisthira said: "One, who is not under debt, and is not toiling in foreign lands but gets something to eat even at the intervals of five or six days, is 'happy'. What is most amazing is the fact that whilst people see how everyday persons keep on dying, they wish to live for all time amassing wealth and power. Summing up his answers to all the questions posed, Yudhisthira explained the very course of creation, saying: अस्मिन् महामोहमये कटाहे, सूर्याग्निना रात्रिदिवेन्धनेन, which suggests what Shakespeare suggested through his well-known line: 'where wasteful Time debateth with Decay'. This is an existential irony.

Those ideas led me recall what I had read in my college days: the several instances strewn in history illustrating 'the conceit of this inconstant stay'. It is not possible here to tell you their stories though they are infinitely interesting and greatly illuminating. I would tell you only what happened to them. History shows how rich and technologically advanced societies have met their ruins. H.A. Davies tells us in his *An Outline History of the World*

"All the great nomadic races of history seem to have this in common —that they appear when civilization seems to be growing effete, clogged up, as it were by too much wealth and luxury. . . . It was so with Semitic invaders of ancient Sumeria, with the Arabs who conquered Persia and shook the Eastern Europe to its foundations, and with the Mongol, who under their great leader Janghiz Khan, in the early part of the thirteenth century achieved their conquests with an ease and thoroughness which astounded the world."

The Great Egyptian civilization was destroyed because of its untamed affluence which invited the desert tribes to penetrate into that golden realm to turn that into trash, to be showcased only as fossils in what Malraux called 'the Imaginary Museum' in which the glories of the past are lodged merely to be forgotten.

Paul Kennedy, after observing the history, as choreographed by Time, very insightfully said: "If this, indeed, is the pattern of history, one is tempted to paraphrase Shaw's deadly serious quip and say: 'Rome fell; Babylon fell; Scarsdale's turn will come.'"

(x) Bali questions Rama: The doctrine of Basic Structure in the *Ramayana* and the *Qur'an*

In course of a lecture I delivered at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, I explained the Doctrine of the Basic Structure of our Constitution in the light of our Supreme Court's decision in *Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala* (1973), One of my listeners drew my attention to the *Ramayana*. In the *Valmikiya Ramayana* (*the Kishkindhakan*), Bali severely criticized Lord Rama's conduct in striking him with an arrow from a thick hide of foliage. In his comprehensive reply to assuage the dying soul, Rama explained His duty as the supreme wielder of public power. He said (my translation from the original Sanskrit text):

I have acted the way the Shatras have counselled.
If the king does not punish the derelicts,
He cannot but undergo the consequence of his sinful act.

His answer covers a whole Canto of the *Valmikiya Ramayana*. Shri Rama considered Himself bound by the fundamental norms of Rights and Duties as set forth in *Manusmriti*. Under our tradition even God can be questioned. In *shloka* 35, he told Bali: "No need to get anguished. You have been fatally struck only in accordance with *dharma*. We are all bound by the prescriptions of the *shastras*." *Dharma* means, bereft of all details, the discharge of one's essential duties whatever be one's assignment.

This story tells us that under our tradition even God can be questioned. God was severely questioned by Job in the 'Book of Job' in the Old Testament of the *Bible*. But God's answer was in an imperious tone telling Job that he could not comprehend the ways of God. In the *Ramayana*, the questioning of the highest authority is appreciated, and the Lord answers even the charges framed against Him.

(xi) Bindumati

Bindumati carried on, in the Ashokan times, the ancient profession in the city of Patna, on the bank of the Ganges. Once upon a time, as the story goes, Patna was flooded with the Ganges waters, and people were undergoing deep distress. Efforts of Ashoka and all his people to stem the scourge bore no fruit, and the king was totally nonplussed. He stood near the waters in drooping mood with all his hope lost. At that point of time, Bindumati sought an audience with the Emperor Ashoka. She was a well-known dancing girl whose art and beauty had become proverbial. She drew near the Emperor, and sought his permission to try for the public weal: all that she could do. The Emperor was amazed, but he felt

that every subject of the kingdom had right (and duty) to work for the fellow subjects' welfare, especially when the King had found all his efforts bearing no fruits. The Emperor allowed her to do whatever she could do. She touched the Ganges, and silently prayed; "Mother, if all my years I have done my duty, whatever my destiny has bidden me to do, with sincerity, good faith, skill and commitment, I pray to thee to restrain thy wrath so that the flood recedes saving the land and its beings." It is said that all those who stood near the swirling and angry river saw the waters receding fast; and soon the furious flood had receded.

(xii) HOPE

The common people of our country seem to work day and night with 'Hope', otherwise life would become for them an unbearable burden. Homer, in his *Odyssey*, tells us about Penelope's web. Penelope spent her long years alone, whilst her husband Odysseus was busy conducting the Trojan War. She whiled away her tedium, and kept her numerous suitors at bay through certain device. She underwent great drudgery just hoping that someday she would get an opportunity to get united with her husband. At long last, her HOPE stood fulfilled.

Penelope's story brings to mind the story that I read, and re-read, with joy in Bertrand Russell's *The Impact of Science on Society*. Here mankind's plight is compared with the position of a man "climbing a difficult and dangerous precipice, at the summit of which there is a plateau of delicious mountain meadows" With every step upwards, his fall, if he does fall, becomes more and more terrible. His critical conditions are graphically portrayed by Russell: 'At last, there is only one more step to be taken, but the climber does not know this, because he cannot see beyond the jutting rocks at his head. His exhaustion is so complete that he wants nothing but rest. If he lets go, he will find rest in death. Hope calls: "one more effort – perhaps it will be the last effort needed." Irony retorts: "Silly fellow! Haven't you been listening to hope all this time, and see where it has landed you?" ...Does the exhausted climber make one more effort, or does he let himself sink into the abyss? In a few years, those of us who are still alive will know the answer.'⁷

Concluding his *Modern Democracies* (Vol. II p. 670), Lord Bryce perceptively observed:

"Hope, often disappointed but always renewed, is the anchor by which the ship that carries democracy and its fortunes will have to ride out this latest storm as it has ridden out many storms before."

HOPE must survive: *hum ho 'nge' kammyab ek din* (we would surely succeed some day).

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Objective correlative: "the artistic technique of representing or evoking a particular emotion by means of symbols which become indicative of that emotion and are associated with it." *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*
- 2 *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* 15th ed. Vo. 29, p. 57
- 3 *The Bhagavad-Gita* (XVI. 14)
- 4 Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony and Survival* p. 5
- 5 A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* p. 301
- 6 Nehru, *Glimpses of World History* 403
- 7 Quoted in Russell, *Autobiography* p. 527