

The Eternal Truths of the Bhagavadgita - as taught by Dr. Sarvapelli Radhakrishnan

- Summarized by Suneel Bakhshi

In my continued readings of the Vedanta and the Bhagavad Gita, I realised only recently the link between Rabindranath Tagore, and Dr Sarvapelli Radhakrishnan, who I have long considered to be one of the greatest Indians, not only of our time but across the past centuries of recorded history. Tagore was perhaps Radhakrishnan's most influential Indian mentor, and he appreciated Tagore's emphasis on aesthetics as well as his appeal to intuition. Over some five decades, starting in 1914, Radhakrishnan had apparently repeatedly turned to Tagore's writings to support his own philosophical ideals.

Radhakrishnan's Bhagavad Gita

" All great doctrine, as it is repeated in the course of centuries, is coloured by the reflections of the age in which it appears and bears the imprint of the individual who restates it. Our times are different; our habits of thought, the mental background to which we relate our experience, are not quite the same as those of the classical commentators. The chief problem facing us today is the reconciliation of mankind. The Gita is especially suited for the purpose, as it attempts to reconcile varied and apparently antithetical forms of the religious consciousness, and emphasises the root conceptions of religion which are neither ancient nor modern but eternal, and belong to the very flesh of humanity, past, present and future. History poses our problems, and if we restate old principles in new ways, it is not because we will to do so, but because we must. Such a restatement of the truths of eternity in the accents of our times is the only way in which a great scripture can be of living value to mankind. "

From the above point of view, I have personally found Dr Radhakrishnan's insights to be not only profoundly enlightening, but also, powerful in their expression and in their framing of the deep thought underlying the Gita. I believe he had the power to truly deepen ones understanding of the infinite wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita, and my intent in this article is to try to provide the key extracts of this thinking in his introductory essay to his translation of the Gita. It is worth noting that Dr. Radhakrishnan says in the Preface to his book that " no translation of the Gita can bring out the dignity and grace of the original. Its melody and magic are difficult to recapture in another medium, as one can render the thought, but cannot fully convey the spirit. One cannot evoke in the reader the mood in which the thought was born and induce in him the ecstasy of the seer and the vision he beholds. " I can indeed vouch for this point too, as I continue to have the great continuing blessing of learning the Bhagavad Gita in Sanskrit from my teacher, Swami Nityasuddhananda of the Ramakrishna Mission in Kankhal, Haridwar, and can compare this experience with otherwise dry readings of the Gita in English. I add this point to suggest to readers that they should continue, should they have genuine interest in this field, to organise their affairs so they can learn the great language of Sanskrit.

Extract from " The Bhagavadgita, Introductory Essay, " by Dr. Radhakrishnan

IMPORTANCE OF THE WORK

" The Bhagavad-Gita is a popular poem which gives utterance to the aspirations of pilgrims of all sects who seek to tread the inner way to the city of God. We touch reality most deeply, where men struggle, fail and triumph. Millions of Hindus, for centuries, have found comfort in this great book which sets forth in precise and penetrating words the essential principles of a spiritual religion which are not contingent on ill-founded facts, unscientific dogmas or arbitrary fancies.

The Gita has exercised an influence that extended in early times to China and to Japan and latterly to the lands of the West. The two chief works of Mahayana Buddhism, " The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana " and " The Lotus of the True Law " are deeply indebted to the teaching of the Gita. The Gita bases its message of action on a philosophy of life. It requires us to know the meaning of life before we engage in action. It does not advocate a devotion to the practical to the disparagement of the dignity of thought. Its philosophy of the practical is a derivative from its philosophy of spirit, " Brahmyantargatakarmayogasastra. " The Bhagavadgita is both metaphysics and ethics, " brahmavidya " and " yogasastra ", the science of reality and the art of union with reality. Ethical action is derived from metaphysical realisation, and Shankaracharya urges us in his commentaries that the essential purpose of the Gita is to teach us a way out of bondage and not merely to enjoin action. "

ULTIMATE REALITY

" The Gita does not give any arguments in support of its metaphysical position, as only spiritual experience can provide us with proofs of the existence of Spirit. However, the Upanishads affirm the reality of a Supreme Brahman, one without a second, without attributes or determinations, who is identical with the deepest self of man. It is the pure subject whose existence cannot be ejected into the external or objective world, and so strictly speaking we cannot give any description of Brahman. The austerity of silence is the only way in which we can bring out the inadequacy of our halting descriptions and imperfect standards. The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad says : " Where everything indeed has become the Self itself, whom and by what should one think ? By what can we know the universal knower ? " We can only speak of It as the non-dual, advaita, that which is known when all dualities are resolved in the Supreme Identity.

The impersonality of the Absolute is not its whole significance. The Upanishads support Divine activity and participation in nature and give us a God who exceeds the mere infinite and the mere finite. The seers of the Upanishads look upon the world as meaningful. In the words of the Taaittiriya Upanishad, the Supreme is that " from which these beings are born, that by which they live and that into which, when departing, they enter. " In the Svetasvatara Upanishad, " He, who is one and without any colour, by the manifold wielding of His power, ordains many colours with a concealed purpose and into whom, in the beginning and the end, the universe dissolves, He is the God. May he endow us with an understanding which leads to good actions. " Again, " Thou art the woman, thou art the man; thou art the youth and also the maiden ; thou art an old man tottering with a stick, being born. Thou art facing all directions. " And again, " His form is not capable of being seen; with the eye no one sees Him. They who know Him thus

with the heart, with the mind, as abiding in the heart, become immortal. " He is a universal God who Himself is the universe which he includes within his own being. He is the light within us, " hradyaantar jyotih. " He is the Supreme whose shadow is life and death.

The Eternal Reality therefore not only supports existence but is also the active power in the world. God is both transcendent, dwelling in light inaccessible, and yet, " more intimate to the soul than the soul to itself. " The Supreme is at once the transcendental, the cosmic, and the individual reality. In its transcendental aspect, It is the pure self unaffected by any action or experience, detached, unconcerned. In Its dynamic cosmic aspect, It not only supports but governs the whole cosmic action and this very Self which is one in all and above all, is present in the individual.

If the universe consists of active choosing individuals who can be influenced but not controlled, for God is not a dictator, conflict is inevitable. To hold that the world consists of free spirits means that evil is possible and probable. The alternative to a mechanical world is a world of risk and adventure. If all tendencies to error, ugliness and evil are to be excluded, there can be no seeking of the true, the beautiful, and the good. If there is to be an active willing of these ideals of truth, beauty and goodness, then their opposites of error, ugliness and evil are not merely abstract possibilities, but positive tendencies which we have to resist. For the Gita, the world is the scene of an active struggle between good and evil in which God is deeply interested.

The emphasis of the Gita is on the Supreme as the personal God who creates the perceptible world by His nature (prakriti). He resides in the heart of every being. He stirs our hearts to devotion and grants our prayers. He is the source and sustainer of values. He enters into personal relations with us in worship and prayer. The personal Ishwara is responsible for the creation, preservation and dissolution of the universe. God is responsible for both the ideal plan and the concrete medium through which the ideal becomes the actual, the conceptual becomes the cosmic. The concretization of the conceptual plan requires a fullness of existence, an objectification in the medium of potential matter. While God's ideas are seeking for existence, the world of existence is striving for perfection. The Divine pattern and the potential matter, both these are derived from God, who is the beginning, the middle and the end, Brahma, Visnu, and Siva. God with his creative ideas is Brahma. God who pours out His love and works with a patience which is matched only by His love is Visnu, who is perpetually at work saving the world. When the conceptual becomes the cosmic, when heaven is established on earth, we have the fulfilment represented by Siva. God is at the same time wisdom, love and perfection. The three functions cannot be torn apart. Brahma, Visnu and Siva are fundamentally one though conceived in a threefold manner. The Gita is interested in the process of redeeming the world. So the aspect of Visnu is emphasised. Krishna represents the Visnu aspect of the Supreme.

Visnu is a familiar deity in the Rg. Veda. He is the great pervader, from vis, to pervade. He is the internal controller who pervades the entire universe. He gathers to Himself in an ever increasing measure the position and dignity of the Eternal Supreme. Taitteriya Upanishad says : " To Narayana we bring worship ; to Vasudeva our meditations and in this way may Visnu assist us. " Krishna, the teacher of the Gita, becomes identified with Visnu, the ancient Lord of the Sun, and Narayana, an ancient God of cosmic character and the goal or resting place of gods and men.

The Real is the supracosmic, eternal, spaceless, timeless Brahman who supports this cosmic manifestation in space and time. He is the Universal Spirit, Paramatman, who ensouls the cosmic forms and movements. He is the Paramesvara who presides over the individual souls and movements of nature

and controls the cosmic becoming. He is also the Purusottama, the Supreme Person, whose dual nature is manifested in the evolution of the cosmos. He fills our being, illumines our understanding and sets in motion its hidden springs. He puts forth his active nature (svam prakrtim) and controls the souls who work out their destinies determined by their own natures. While all this is done by the Supreme through his native power exercised in this changing world, He has another aspect untouched by it all. He is the impersonal Absolute as well as the immanent will ; He is the uncaused cause, the unmoved creator. While dwelling in man and nature, the Supreme is greater than both. The boundless universe in an endless space and time rests in Him and not He in it. The God of the Gita cannot be identified with the cosmic process for He extends beyond it. While there is one reality that is ultimately perfect, everything that is concrete and actual is not equally perfect. "

KRISHNA, THE TEACHER

" The book is called Bhagavadgita because Krishna is known in the Bhagavata religion as Sri Bhagavan. The doctrine which he preaches is the Bhagavata creed. In the Gita, Krishna says that he is not expressing any new view but is only repeating what has been preached to him by Vivasvan and by Vivasvan to Manu and by Manu to Iksvaku. In the Gita Krishna is identified with the Supreme Lord, the unity that lies behind the manifold universe, the changeless truth behind appearances, transcendent over all and immanent in all. He is the manifested Lord, making it easy for mortals to know, for those who seek the Imperishable Brahman reach Him no doubt but after great toil. In the Gita, the author says : " Delivered from passion, fear and anger, absorbed in Me, taking refuge in Me, many purified by the austerity of wisdom have attained to My state of being. " Gita, Chapter IV, Shloka 10. The ego holds something other than itself, to which it should abandon itself. In this abandonment consists its transfiguration. A liberated soul uses his body as a vehicle for the manifestation of the Eternal. The divinity claimed by Krishna is the common reward of all earnest spiritual seekers. He is not a hero, who once trod the earth and has now left it, having spoken to his favourite friend and disciple, but is everywhere and in every one of us, as ready to speak to us now as He ever was to any one else. He is not a bygone personality but the indwelling spirit, an object for our spiritual consciousness.

God is never born in the ordinary sense. When any finite individual develops spiritual qualities and shows large insight and charity, he sits in judgement on the world and starts a spiritual and social upheaval and we say that God is born for the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil and the establishment of the kingdom of righteousness. As an individual, Krishna is one of millions of forms through which the Universal Spirit manifests itself. The avatara is the demonstration of man's spiritual resources and latent divinity. In the great souls we call incarnations, God who is responsible for the being and dignity of man has more wonderfully renewed it. Whenever by the abuse of freedom unrighteousness increases and the world gets stuck in a rut, He creates Himself to lift the world from out of its rut and set it on new tracks. Out of His love he is born again and again to renew the work of creation on a higher plane.

The theory of avatara is an eloquent expression of the law of the spiritual world. An avatara is a descent of God into man and not an ascent of man into God, which is the case with the liberated soul. Though every conscious being is such a descent, it is only a veiled manifestation. There is a distinction between the self-conscious being and the same shrouded in ignorance. The fact of descent or avatarana indicates that the Divine is not opposed to a full vital and physical manifestation. We can live in the physical body and yet possess the full truth of consciousness. Human nature is not a fetter but can become an instrument of divine life. Life and body with us, ordinary mortals, remain ignorant, imperfect and impotent means

of expression but they need not always be so. The Divine Consciousness uses these for Its purpose while the unfree human consciousness has not this absolute control, over the physical, vital and mental forces.

Though the Gita accepts the belief in avatara as the Divine limiting Himself for some purpose on earth, possessing in His limited form the fullness of knowledge, it also lays stress on the eternal avatara, the God in man, the Divine consciousness always present in the human being. The teacher, who is interested in the spiritual illumination of the human race, speaks from the depths of the Divine in him. Krishna's avatara is an illustration of the revelation of the Spirit in us, the Divine hidden in gloom. The glorious radiance arises from the blackest of black nights. In mysteries and revelations the night is rich. The presence of night does not make the existence of light less real. Indeed but for night there could be no human consciousness of light. The meaning of the birth of Krishna is the fact of redemption in the dark night. In the hour of calamity and enslavement the Saviour of the world is born.

Krishna is said to be born of Vasudeva and Devaki. When our sattva nature is purified, when the mirror of understanding is cleansed of the dust of desire, the light of pure consciousness is reflected in it. When all seems lost, light from heaven breaks, enriching our human life more than words can tell. A sudden flash, an inward illumination we have and life is seen as fresh and new. When the Divine birth takes place within us, the scales fall from our eyes, the bolts of the prison door open. The Lord abides in the heart of every creature and when the veil of that secret sanctuary is withdrawn, we hear the Divine voice, receive the Divine light, act in the Divine power. The embodied human consciousness in us is uplifted into the unborn eternal. The incarnation of Krishna is not so much the conversion of Godhead into flesh as the taking up of manhood into God.

The teacher slowly guides his pupil to attain the status which he has, "mama sadharmyam". The pupil, Arjuna, is the type of struggling soul who has not yet received the saving truth. He is fighting with the forces of darkness, falsehood, limitation, and mortality which bar the way to the higher world. When his whole being is bewildered, when he does not know the valid law of action, he takes refuge in his higher self, typified as Krishna, the world teacher, "jagadguru", and appeals for the grace of enlightenment. "I am thy disciple. Illumine my consciousness. Remove what is dark in me. Give me that which I have lost, a clear rule of action." Every individual is a pupil, an aspirant of perfection, a seeker of God and if he seeks earnestly, with faith, God the goal becomes God the guide. "

THE STATUS OF THE WORLD AND THE CONCEPT OF MAYA

"If the fundamental form of the Supreme is "nirguna", (quality less), and "acintya", (inconceivable), the world is an appearance which cannot be logically related to the Absolute. By It, it exists, it cannot be without It, though It causes nothing, determines nothing. While the world is dependent on Brahman, the latter is not dependent on it. This one-sided dependence and the logical inconceivability of the relation between the Ultimate Reality and the world are brought out by the word, "maya". The world is not essential being like Brahman; nor is it mere non-being. It cannot be defined as either being or non-being. Maya does not imply that the world is an illusion or is non-existent absolutely. The Gita does not uphold a metaphysical dualism; for the principle of non-being is dependent on being. Non-being is a necessary moment in reality for the unfolding of the Supreme. If the world is what it is, it is because of the tension. The world of time and change is ever striving to reach perfection. Non-being which is responsible for the imperfections is a necessary element in the world, for it is the material in which the ideas of God are actualised. When the whole world is delivered from bondage, when it is lifted

into incorruption, when it becomes completely illuminated, the purpose of the Supreme is realized and the world is restored to its origin in pure Being, above all distinctions.

Why is there non-being? Why is there the fall or the precipitation from absolute being to becoming? This is to ask why there is the world with its perpetual strife and non-being? Why is the world with its graduated hierarchy? We can only say, it is the nature of the Supreme to express Itself in this way. We cannot account for the fact of the world but can only construe its nature, which is a strife between being and non-being in the process of becoming. In the world of true becoming, "Samsara", we have the conflict between the two principles of being and non-being.

Maya is derived from the root, "ma", to form, to build, and originally meant the capacity to produce forms. The creative power by which God fashions the universe is sometimes called "yogamaya". Maya is sometimes said to be the force of delusion (moha). "Deluded by these threefold modes of nature (gunas), this whole world does not recognise Me who am above them and imperishable." Through the force of maya we have a bewildering partial consciousness which loses sight of the reality and lives in the world of phenomena. God's real being is veiled by the play of prakrti and its modes. We must shatter all forms, get behind the veil to find the reality. God seems to be the great deceiver as He creates the world and its sense objects and turns our senses outward. The glamour of the world casts its spell on us and we become slaves to its prizes. The world or samsara is fallen, enslaved, alienated and it is full of suffering, as alienation from inward being is suffering. When it is said "this divine maya of mine is hard to overcome", it means that we cannot easily pierce behind the universe and its activities. The world is not an illusion, though by regarding it as a mere mechanical determination of nature unrelated to God, we fail to perceive its Divine essence. It then becomes a source of delusion, and God seems to be enveloped in the immense cloak of maya. This relative unreality of the world is confirmed by the self-contradictory nature of the process of becoming. There is a struggle of opposites in the world of experience, and the real is above all opposites. "

THE INDIVIDUAL SELF

"Reality is, in its own nature, infinite, absolute, untrammelled, inalienably possessed of its own unity and bliss. In the cosmic process, dualities and oppositions which obscure the infinite undivided reality arise. In the terms of the Taittiriya Upanishad, the cosmic process has assumed the five stages of matter (anna), life (prana), mind (manas), intelligence (vijñana), and bliss (ananda). There is an inner direction given to things by reason of their participation in the creative onrush of life. The human being is at the fourth stage of vijñana or intelligence. He is not master of his acts. He is aware of the universal reality which is operating the whole scheme. He seems to know matter, life and mind. He has mastered, to a large extent, the material world, the vital existence and even the obscure workings of mentality but has not yet become the completely illumined consciousness. Progressive self-enlargement has been the impulse of nature. God's purpose for the world or the cosmic destiny for man is the realisation of the immortal aspiration through this mortal frame, the achievement of the Divine life in and through this physical frame and intellectual consciousness.

The Divine dwells in the inmost being of man and cannot be extinguished. It is the inner light, the concealed witness, which endures and is imperishable from birth to birth, untouched by death, decay corruption. It is the principle of the jiva, the psychic person which changes and grows from life to life. The matter, life and mind that fill the world are in us as well. We partake of the forces that work in the outer world. Our intellectual nature produces self-consciousness; it leads to the

emergence of the human individual from its original solidarity with nature. The security which he derives from the instinctive adherence to the group is lost and has to be regained at a higher level without the elimination of his personality. By the integration of his self, his unity with the world has to be achieved in a spontaneity of love and unselfish work. By developing our inner spiritual nature, we gain a new kind of relatedness to the world and grow into the freedom, where the integrity of the self is not compromised. We then become aware of ourselves as active creative individuals, living, not by the discipline of external authority but by the inward rule of free devotion to truth.

The problem facing man is the integration of his personality, the development of a divine existence in which the spiritual principle has the mastery over all the powers of soul and body. This integral life is created by the spirit. After describing the whole philosophy of life, the teacher asks Arjuna to do as he chooses. The whole teaching of the Gita requires man to choose the good and realise it by conscious effort. There are, however, many impediments to this freedom of choice.

Man is a complex multi-dimensional being, including within him different elements of matter, life, consciousness, intelligence and the divine spark. When we subdue the senses and keep them under control, the flame of spirit burns bright and clear "like a lamp in a windless place." The light of consciousness stands in its own nature and the empirical self with its shifting tides of experience is controlled by buddhi in which is reflected the light of consciousness. We cease to belong to that which is moved about and are no more helpless tools of nature. Through struggle and suffering, man can pass from his freedom to choose good or evil to the higher freedom that abides in the steadfastly chosen good. When we make our individual being one with the Supreme, we rise above nature with its three modes, become "trigunatita", freed from the bonds of the world."

YOGA - SASTRA

"Every system of Indian philosophic thought gives us a practical way of teaching the supreme ideal. Though we begin with thought, our aim is to go beyond thought to the decisive experience. Man's whole nature needs overhauling. The Bhagavadgita gives us not only a metaphysics (brahmavidya) but also a discipline (yogasastra). Derived from the root, yuj, to bind together, yoga means binding one's psychic powers, balancing and enhancing them. By yoking together and harnessing our energies by the most intense concentration of personality, we force the passage from the narrow ego to the transcendent personality. The spirit tears itself away from its prison house, stands out of it and reaches its own innermost being.

Man has a haunting sense of the vanity, the transience and the precariousness of all human happiness. Those who live on the surface of life may not feel the distress, the laceration of spirit, and may not feel any urge to seek their true good. They are human animals (purusapasu), and like animals they are born, they grow, they mate and leave offspring and pass away. But those who realise their dignity as men are acutely aware of the discord and seek a principle of harmony and peace.

Arjuna typifies the representative human soul seeking to reach perfection and peace. When he is assailed by doubt, denial, hatred of life and black despair, he can escape from them only if God lays His hand on him. If the divine truth which is free of access to all mankind, is attained only by a few, it shows that only a few are willing to pay the price for it. The sense of insufficiency, of barrenness and dust, is due to the working of the Perfection, the mystery that lurks in the heart of creation. The invisible impulse to seek God produces the agony that inspires heroic idealism and human fulfilment. The image of God in us expresses itself in the infinite capacity for self-transcendence."

JNANA OR SAVING WISDOM

"How is the goal of perfection to be attained? Samsara is historical becoming. It is the temporal procession of changes from one state into the next. What keeps the world going is action or karma. If the world is nothing but ebb and flow, continual becoming, it is due to action. At the human level action is caused by desire or attachment, kama. The root cause of desire is avidya or ignorance of the nature of things. The roots of desire lie in the ignorant belief in the individual's self-sufficiency, in the attribution of reality and permanence to it. So long as ignorance persists, it is not possible to escape from the vicious cycle of becoming. We cannot cure desires by fresh desires; we cannot cure action by more action. The eternal cannot be gained by that which is temporal. Vidya or wisdom is the means of liberation from the chain of avidya-kama-karma.

Wisdom is not to be confused with theoretical learning or correct beliefs, for ignorance is not intellectual error. It is spiritual blindness. To remove it, the mind, inconstant and unstable, must be steadied so as to reflect the wisdom from above. According to Advaita Vedanta, this wisdom is always present. It is not a thing to be acquired; it has only to be revealed. Utter silence of the mind and the will, an emptying of the ego produces illumination, wisdom, the light by which we grow into our true being. Jnana and ajnana, wisdom and ignorance are opposed as light and darkness. When wisdom dawns, ignorance dies and the evil is cut off at the root. The liberated soul conquers the world. There is nothing to conquer or create. Action no more binds, and we live in the Supreme."

THE WAY OF KNOWLEDGE : JNANA - MARGA

"We can reach the goal of perfection, attain the saving truth in three ways, by a knowledge of Reality (jnana), or adoration and love (bhakti) of the Supreme Person or by the subjection of the will to the Divine purpose (karma). These are distinguished on account of the distribution of emphasis on the theoretical, emotional and practical aspects. People are of different types, reflective, emotional or active but they are not exclusively so. At the end, knowledge, love and action mingle together. God himself is sat, cit and ananda, reality, truth and bliss. To those seeking knowledge, He is Eternal Light, clear and radiant as the sun at noonday, in which is no darkness; to those struggling for virtue, He is Eternal Righteousness, steadfast and impartial; and to those emotionally inclined, he is Eternal Love and Beauty of Holiness. Even as God combines in Himself these features, man aims at the integral life of spirit. Cognition, will and feeling, though logically distinguishable, are not really separable in the concrete life and unity of mind. They are different aspects of the one movement of the soul.

For knowing the truth, we require a conversion of the soul, the development of spiritual wisdom. Arjuna could not see the truth with his naked eyes and so was granted the divine sight. Ascent to higher levels of being, losing oneself to find the higher self can be achieved through jijnasa or disinterested passion for knowledge. It lifts man out of his narrow limits and makes him forget his self in contemplation of the universal principles of existence. Knowledge pursued for the sake of power or fame does not take us far. It must be sought for attaining truth.

Metaphysical knowledge is transformed into realisation by means of yoga or the method of concentration. From the earliest times, yoga has been employed to describe practices and experiences of a special kind which have been later adapted to the teachings of the different methods, jnana, bhakti, and karma. Each of them uses the practices of dhyanyoga or the way of meditation. Yoga is the suppression of the activities of the mind, according to Patanjali. It is by a mighty exercise of will that we can achieve this suppression of the clamour of ideas and of the rabble of desires. By ceaseless action the yogi is called upon to achieve control."

THE WAY OF DEVOTION : BHAKTI MARG

“ Bhakti or devotion is a relationship of trust and love to a personal God. Worship of the unmanifested (avyaktopasana) is difficult for ordinary human beings. The sacrifice of love is not as difficult as the tuning of the will to the Divine purpose or ascetic discipline or the strenuous effort of concentration and thinking.

The origin of the way of devotion is hidden in the mists of long ago, starting with the praises and prayers of the Rg. Veda. The Supreme is not a God who sleeps in serene abstraction while hearts heavy laden cry out for help, but a saving God of love believed and experienced as such by the devotee. “ This is my word of promise, that He who loveth me shall not perish. ”

Bhakti is derived from the root, bhaj, to serve, and means service to the Lord. Narada defines it as an intense love for God. It is surrender in trusting appropriation of the grace of the Lord. The devotee directs his whole being to God. Adoration is the essence of religion. and the devotee has a sense of utter humility. Bhakti, in the Bhagavadgita, is an utter self-giving to the Transcendent. It is to believe in God, to love Him, to be devoted to Him, to enter into Him. It is its own reward. ”

THE WAY OF ACTION : KARMA MARG

“ The Gita opens with a problem. Arjuna refuses to fight and raises difficulties. To convert him is the purpose of the Gita. It raises the question whether action or renunciation of action is better and concludes that action is better. The teacher does not adopt the solution of dismissing the world as an illusion and action as a snare. He recommends the full active life of man in the world with the inner life anchored in the Eternal Spirit. The Gita is therefore a mandate for action. It explains what a man ought to do not merely as a social being but as an individual with a spiritual destiny. It is incorrect to think that Hindu thought strained excessively after the unattainable and was guilty of indifference to the problems of the world. We cannot lose ourselves in inner piety when the poor die at our doors, naked and hungry. The Gita asks us to live in the world and to save it.

The binding quality of an action does not lie in its mere performance but in the motive or desire that prompts it. Renunciation refers, not to the act itself, but to the frame of mind behind the act. Renunciation means absence of desire. So long as action is based on false premises, it binds the individual soul. If our life is based on ignorance, however altruistic our conduct may be, it will be binding. The Gita advocates detachment from desire and not cessation from work.

Samkara says : “ Liberation is accomplished by wisdom but wisdom does not spring without the purification of the heart. Therefore, for the purification of the heart one should perform all acts of speech, mind and body, prescribed in the sutras and the smritis, dedicating them to the Supreme Lord. ” Work done in such a spirit becomes a yajna or sacrifice. Sacrifice is a making sacred to the Divine. It is not deprivation or self-immolation but a spontaneous self-giving, a surrender to a greater consciousness of which we are a limitation. By such a surrender, the mind becomes purified of its impurities and shares the power and knowledge of the Divine. Action performed in the spirit of a yajna or sacrifice ceases to be a source of bondage.

The Bhagavadgita gives us a religion by which the rule of karma, the natural order of deed and consequence, can be transcended. There is no element of caprice or arbitrary interference of a transcendent purpose within the natural order. The teacher of the Gita recognises a realm of reality where karma does not operate and if we establish our relations with it, we are free in our deepest being. The chain of karma can be broken here and now, within the flux of the empirical world. We become masters of karma by developing detachment and faith in God.

The Gita attracts all those souls who have a relish for

action and adventure. Action is for self-fulfilment. We must find out the truth of our own highest and innermost existence and live it and not follow any outer standard. Our svadharma, outward life, and svabhava, inner being, must answer to each other. Only then will action be free, easy and spontaneous. Karmayoga is an alternative method of approach to the goal of life according to the Gita and culminates in wisdom. ”

THE GOAL

“ The Gita insists on the unity of the life of spirit which cannot be resolved into philosophic wisdom, devoted love or strenuous action. We may climb the mountain by different paths but the view from the summit is identical for all. Yoga, which has for its phases, knowledge and meditation, love and service is the ancient road that leads from darkness to light, from death to immortality. The main emphasis of the Gita is the transformation of our whole nature into the immortal law and power of the Divine. The freed soul is inspired by Divine knowledge and moved by the Divine will. Anyone who attains this transcendent condition is a yogin, a realised soul, a jitatman, a disciplined and harmonised being for whom the Eternal is always present. He attains a rhythm expressed in the ecstasy of joy, the illumination of knowledge and the intensity of energy. His whole nature is subdued to the universal vision, is wrought to splendour and irradiated by spiritual light. The dialectic development cannot stop until the whole world is liberated from ignorance and evil. The world is to move forward to its ideal and those who are lost in ignorance and bewilderment are to be redeemed by the effort and example, the illumination of the freed. Anchored in the timeless foundation of our spiritual existence, the freed soul, the eternal individual works for the jivaloka; while possessing individuality of body, life and mind he yet retains the universality of spirit.

As to what happens if and when the cosmic process reaches its fulfilment, when universal redemption takes place, it is difficult for us to say. The Supreme, which is infinite possibility, may take another possibility for expression. When the purpose of the cosmos is reached, when the kingdom of God is established, when it is on earth as it is in heaven, when all individuals acquire the wisdom of spirit and are superior to the levels of being in which birth and death take place, then this cosmic process is taken over into that which is beyond all manifestations. ”

I would like to close this extract of Dr Radhakrishnan's introduction to the Gita by his interpretation of the very first words of the first shloka, of the first chapter of the Gita.

THE QUESTION

“ The question : Dhrtarastra uvaca (Dhrtarastra said)

1. Dharmakstre Kuruksetre

(In the field of righteousness, the field of the Kurus)...

The world is dharmaksetra, the battleground for a moral struggle. The decisive issue lies in the hearts of men where the battles are fought daily and hourly. The ascent from earth to heaven, from suffering to spirit, is through the path of dharma. The world is dharmaksetra, the nursery of saints where the sacred flame of spirit is never permitted to go out. It is said to be karmabhumi where we work out our karma and fulfil the purpose of soul-making. The aim of the Gita is not so much to teach a theory as to enforce practice, dharma. The Gita does not teach a mysticism that concerns itself with man's inner being alone. Instead of rejecting the duties and relationships of life as an illusion, it accepts them as opportunities for the realisation of spiritual freedom. Life is offered to us so we may transfigure it completely. ” ■

LAZINESS AGAIN

- Sougata Mallik

As I looked outside, the landscape now replenished with green pasture, beautiful flowers, fresh air blowing – I just wondered to myself, how the year has gone by so quick. Narendra Modi has completed 2 years as Prime Minister of India, Malala Yousef and Kailash Satyarthi continue with their outstanding activities as Nobel Peace Prize winners, talented young man Neeraj Ghaywan justly wins Debut Directorial award, the latest India Budget 2016-17 announced Rs. 19,000 crore reserved under the “Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana” (PMGSY) to connect all villages with roads.....the year has been good in many respects.

A thought dawned on me – what have I done this year or how has it been for me? January 1, 2016 when the fireworks were ushering a brand new year, I had promised myself to be more focused and organized in areas that pertain outside my professional job and the regular household chores – that is to catch up on pending work, contact friends, meet relatives, organize photos in family album and so forth were in my agenda. Eight months rolled by... how much have I done? Almost nothing! I find my concentration working in level of minutes. Every time I get to some work, I need a break. I started on a makeover / cleaning project in the house, worked for about 2.5 hours and took a 4 hours break – and God, I enjoyed the break time! There's more to my laziness. Take for example, calling up friends. I wait till the last minute and then seek on excuse that is it too late to call, be it a local call or calling abroad.

My social networks are at a minimum. Facebook and LinkedIn is all I have to connect to the world. Friends and relatives get startled when they hear I do not have WhatsApp account. Not that I cannot create one, but I don't feel the need. I contribute this to my laziness again. Say for Facebook – I refresh it once or twice a month and read only postings that come on front screen of my cell phone. Ashamed I am to admit that I have missed many friends' birthdays, anniversaries, their kids going to College, graduation etc. Often I am the last person to wish them well and that too sometimes later than the actual date. Kind friends and relatives I have, that they bear with this indolence of mine.

Talking of laziness, I think it runs in my family. Jethu (my father's older brother) was a man of arts – reciting, acting, singing skills adorned him profusely. Since childhood I have held awe in his deep, heavy voice recitation of the poem, “Kaalaa Pahar”. The immense emotion and vociferous voice gave me shudders as he chanted Kavi Najrul Islam's “Khomma koro Hajrat”. But what is astounding is that all these great feats of art were rendered while he lazily lay in bed! Not that he was sick. It's just the laziness that fetched him solace in sleeping and resting for long stretches of time. Now that I think, had he rendered the song “Din Dhal Jaaye” from film Guide while standing up, maybe his talents could have got him some fame.

Technology laziness is also something not to be ignored. It runs in me, as it runs in my family. People who know me well also know how sparingly savvy I am in technology matters. For individuals of my age or our generation, we have not grown up with computers – we had to imbibe it later in life. I remember how learning computers was a scuffle. But I had no choice. It had to be accomplished especially per the requirements of everyday life, professional and personal necessity. But anything beyond that requirement was not my cup of tea. I was and am still too lazy to learn the advanced technology or to experiment on the various windows of technical knowledge that have

opened up. Till today, I will rather read a book or newspaper than try to get the information on Internet. Besides personal preference of reading which I try to advocate in my defense...I also admit it is personal laziness.

This lethargy runs in my family too. My aunt, Aruna pishi has come up many times in my writings or I should say whatever I scribble and jot on paper. Aruna pishi is a fascinating character, the typical housewife figure – a short, plump, round lady with her definitive method of interacting with people, but always possessing a golden heart that has never yet tarnished. On my last visit to India I wanted to give her a present. It was a hard choice. Aruna pishi is not fancy of clothes or accessories. Restaurant outings will not qualify. Her amazing culinary skills will never match with any food cooked elsewhere. She is a TV addict, but really not a book lover. Modern stories do not appeal to her as did yesteryear classics. After much speculation it flashed on me that she complains of foot pain to climb up stairs and attend phone calls. Why not I gift her with a cell phone? After much persuasion I could take Aruna pishi to the Electronics shop. While signing the contract for cell phone, she looked at me as though I was conspiring internationally into a much illicit pact. When the phone rang, she petrified - like it is a bomb ticking to explode. I heard later, the cell phone has been switched off since then and placed under her pillow permanently. She has lazily avoided using it while refusing to operate a cell phone.

Catching up with friends and relatives was on my new year agenda. I had been lazy with this for a long time. I must fulfill it now. Hopped into the car, crossed Canada-USA borders and set sail to meet relatives belonging to the American branch of our family tree, the relatives who have migrated 4 decades back. This trip was more to appease the common grumble I have heard: “Tui ekhon kache thakish Toronto te, othocho ashish na” (You now live close by in Toronto, but you rarely come here). The cordiality they offered was not only enviable but an honour for me. I was taken care of by everyone, fed well, kept well. We were excited with the reunion, but it also acted as an eye opener for me. My uncle was administering his hospitality while lying constantly on a cushioned, rocking chair. He swayed himself on the chair extravagantly while keeping an affectionate eye if the big chunk of hilsa fish has been offered to me, if I prefer lamb curry or chicken curry for dinner, if the sweet dish for me has been purchased from the best shop in town etc. I was overwhelmed with his hospitality, but also had an instant flash thought. It dawned upon me that the sudden emerging sluggishness I have been experiencing recently is a manifestation of my genetic records! Like my uncle, I too dream of spending time on riveted chair, the comfortable cushioned kind which I still haven't bought for myself.

Reintegration had been going well so far between me and my extended family – indulging in culinary, watching DVD-s in home theatre, reminiscing of yesteryear family anecdotes etc. But when it came to the subjective discussions, all we did was hunch on family laziness and engage in languid keys. Our scenarios were completely different. I understand there could be no universal or exact answers. My relatives migrated to North American in 1970-s directly from India, I migrated in 2000-s from an epitome Far East country, Japan. Back in their time USA was still struggling to solve their internal problem like Cold War, racial segregation and were not as receptive to foreign people or new culture as they are now. India too

at that time was economically stagnant and chasing a good life in India was hardly an option. Our survival abroad now is based on intelligence and hard work. Multi culturalism has swept so far that few things are alien now. There are so many IT professionals in America today hailing from Southern India that my cousin from Moraga Bay Area, California had once jokingly said it can also be called Moragapuram. New Jersey is taken over by so many Indians that some grocery stores even sell Neem toothpaste. In North America, if you purchase house in a locality where Indian nationals predominate, you can have samosa-chai every evening and listen to bhajans in the weekends. This can be considered feasibility, comfort or perks while in foreign land. We all like to enjoy the bliss of being in a first world country while getting easy accessibility to multicultural language, customs and commodities. But what is laziness is to reside in America, drink beer while watching Football on TV and crib that India cannot improve because of the culture there. That's exactly what my uncle carried on in between conversations. Very sluggishly he put forth negative comments regarding India's development, infrastructure etc. The easier choice is when we are able to criticize. The harder choice will be to take a rather big pay cut, a lifestyle change and move to work in India. Me and my families in America have all been lazy, and had not taken that harder plunge in life.

I had few off-days from work, with the grand coverage of statutory holidays and lieu days that fell harmoniously together in 2016 calendar. How I enjoy these rare opportunities of short vacation and 'me-time' as I call it. It's grandeur when you can wake up late, not rush to work, enjoy unstructured lunch that doesn't have to fit in a lunch box, watch endless television programs.... Needless to mention, I have been lazy-ing throughout the time. But I had promised myself to organize family photos in albums, folders. I must keep up with that resolution too.

I sat with an array of photographs that commemorated birthdays, graduations, special events, trips, vacations and so much more of life. The small pieces of snapshots were a breath of fresh air. It recapped me of the times I had forgotten about, of the happy silly moments in life, the mesmerizing destinations of the earth we have been fortunate enough to traverse and lots more. I decided to distribute them in order of subject, category and date. How impressed I was with myself. Painstakingly I

kept separating pictures according to the set criteria. But not for long.....Very soon I needed breaks, wanted to shorten the process, tried to find simplified means to organize etc etc. After few weeks and months I realized I had cropped the photo organizing process to such modus operandi, that there were hardly enough pictures in the set criteria. No one knows behind-the-scene development - yet the range of subjects, time period in the album impressed many people. But when I flipped it over in my spare time, I sighed! Had I not been so lazy, I could have created a wonderful family album which would have been much to my satisfaction.

It's almost the end of summer. The weather has started to affirm change of season. Winter will be approaching soon. It will mark the end of a year. But I have so much left to accomplish still. The kitchen needs a makeover, the summer bedding-comforters require that special wash, many errands that I had pushed away hitherto have to be completed, so many friends are still to be contacted or paid a visit.....and the list goes on. With the onset of winter it will be a fresh season to gain momentum and thrust for work. But I also know, after an undersized, industrious phase of activity I will complain of backache, cold weather, short winter days, too busy at job – and halt the progress of work that I was following. At the end it will all sum up to my laziness and I will revolve around the same insolence over and over again.

But despite all this, I also believe in optimism and hope. As the saying goes 'every cloud has a silver lining' or 'work well begun is half done' – I also trust that regardless of my laziness, someday I will be able to finish the unfinished, complete the incomplete and accomplish all work that I had left pending.

As I looked at the calendar, the year-end festivities of Thanksgiving, Durga Puja, Diwali are approaching. It establishes that 2016 will end soon. So all that was of this year will be packed in a past envelope. The new year will usher in and like always will rush through in high speed. And what will I do? I will wake up each day, fence through the daily routine of chores, drive 60 kilometers to work, battle through a full time employment, gasp for off-days to catch up on sleep and brush aside unfinished work on to a pending list. My laziness will once more creep in stealthily.

Yet, I will make my promise – come next year, I will be proactive again!! ■

Serendipity

- Piali Bose

Sikha called the other day, "You Girl? Kick butting-ly alive or whimpering somewhere in the shadows?" Didn't know what to make of it.. this girl has a strange way of taking you by surprise..her silly jokes and the immediate laughter will irritate you at no length but amazing insight, really..to know what exactly is going on somewhere. I said..whimpering, "but can't find the shadows". Another bout of laughter..why..have you become an apparition? What about your own? Incurable, I say to myself. Here i am trying to find my lost shadow and there she has to make light of it! Gosh! I nearly got that word.. LIGHT..so light it is..ask her to focus on me and might cast a shadow just behind..get lost in my past and the present will become tomorrow again.

I blink in surprise and try to dwarf down my sudden elation of "about to make a discovery!" So what was the hypothesis? I have found the shadow, and so how do i go about finding a way to get lost in it! Don't want to share it with Sikha (she will make use of it and might earn a bonus somewhere..in some silly banter that she indulges in her usual randomness). Just have her extradict the LIGHT..the idea of making it light,the idea of throwing light and the thought of showing light..she can't be using up all the "lighteousness!!"

Engage again in the conversation..this time with a curious indignation but try not to be visible (as it is I have lost my shadow). So? I have lost my shadow, become an apparition, please let me not become a ghost of myself? Sikha lets go somewhere..tell me, she smirks..what about Mallick Bazar? Mallick Bazar? you mean the chor market near Park circus? I say. "Absolutely? Don't You know, they sell everything..from mean chappals to fancy shadows..in all colours and shapes."

But, I dont want to buy a shadow..I say exasperated..I wanted to get into one!! Why do you seem to miss the point always and meander off track? I whispered now, see, "this is between us, don't want to sound impetus, just don't want to go some chor bazar type market..take me to some fancy shop which actually sells the thing..you see I want it to be guaranteed and authentic!" Could hear the throttled laughter in her voice.. did I say something outrageously funny or was it the same habit of making everything sound so silly. I mumbled suspiciously (did not want to annoy her..not at the least now..) she was the only hope. Sikha cleared her voice, thought for a moment and then came up with the most brilliant idea (first time I held her in regard.. hugh!).What about the cemetery? Although it seemed quite near Mullick Bazar, the idea appealed..righto.. the place, where people leave their shadows behind and take the light with them (thought of the numerous horror movies. Sadhana..the lady with the lamp..white and light in hand..or simply a diya in wilderness!) Sikha assuredly asserted... horrific, authentic and life time guaranteed.. It was slowly becoming a bit unbelievable,the girl actually agreeing with me and also identifying with my problem (guess she actually feigns all those smiles always..in reality she is also chasing some lost dream). I seemed SO satisfied in my discovery...the bhoot (past) always

in search of a light (the future)..thus leaving behind the shadow for search of another..we do CAST our shadows. DON'T WE? So we make and also leave behind. I think I was understanding the source of light. The enlightening moment.

Thought of not sharing the discovery..what might she understand in her shallowness?

I started making LIGHT of it..Cemetery? Why because ghosts have a shelter and an address? Makes sense..I smiled but I need castaway shadows of those who have gone beyond.. not with addresses..they can claim back..I joked. She seemed to understand and agreed..after all, those gone beyond,always have this extreme desire to go back, come back..

Good lord..is she becoming serious? (what if she drops the idea?). Said,no, listen, the idea of a shadow possessing an address appeals to me..at least you know whose you are donning for the moment. Like changing personalities and hip-hopping in a fancy dress party! Now I seem to understand the shadow sequence of Goopi Gayen Bagha Bayen. Must have been so relevant..after all the revered Ray had made it (superficial me ,nodded in appreciation, everytime the movie was filmed). So, Sikha asked..did Goopi Bhagha don the shadow? "Yes of course they did",I said.. "Shadow of a chappal, shadow of a food, shadow of clothes..what matters to whom they belonged, they served a singular purpose of satisfaction!"

So we met..last sunday..movie like, under the drizzling sky, wet and curious. Coffee was my choice but finally we disagreed to agree on Arsalan's Biryani..and then Sikha (whom I would have rather avoided to dine on some other day), took me on a detour to Park Street (said this was necessary after a dine as also a paan). Sarang, Satwik, Rozelle..what? Saree shops? no way? Oh come on..This was serious, the shadow stuff. The mannequin meanwhile had adorned the feathery light white jamewar and before long I had bought two..one for me and one for my shadowy mate (Sikha that is!) The Saree happened before the shadow and then a movie at Crown cinemas (never heard of it before) in between numerous mindless phone calls that she received and enjoyed speaking every moment. (uncountable boy friends, I presumed with disdain) Was getting desperate. Where was my refuge? when was it to happen? How could this podgy women, with flaky skin seem so sure of herself everytime she speaks..where did she hide her light or maybe she was actually into someone's shadow.

Sikha held my hand,crossed the road,led me to the entrance of the cemetery,looked at me and then confidently blurted.."YOU see,my shadow is calling me..I have to attend.. go back and then forth again..she will be waiting at the school gates..mighty upset at not being on time."

I stood, transfixed..did not know whether to follow, or to lead myself to my destination..

Sikha had found her shadow and in it her light..would I, mine? ■

Leicester City and the Power of Miracles

- Shoubhik Pal

The English Premier League is considered to be the most competitive league in the world. In recent seasons, almost 4 or 5 teams are tipped to challenge for the title every season. We have seen some grandstand finishes in recent years, (Manchester City scoring 2 late goals in 4 minutes to beat Queen's Park Rangers 3-2 on the last matchday and lifting the trophy at their rivals Manchester United's expense being the most dramatic ending) but the 2015-16 season saw something the EPL had never witnessed before.

The season ended with the most unlikely of winners claiming the title. Before the season began, the odds of Leicester City winning the title were higher than socialite Kim Kardashian becoming the President of the United States. The unbelievable fact about Leicester's unprecedented title victory was that everyone had expected them to get relegated the season before. They began April 2015 in 20th place, accumulating only 19 points from 29 games and 7 points away from safety. This was their first season back in the top flight after a long time, leading many people to write them off even before the season ended. What happened after that was a minor miracle. From the last 9 games of the season, they won 7 games and drew 1, obtaining 22 points from a possible 27 and finishing 14th at the end of the season. The manager to navigate them to this extraordinary achievement was Nigel Pearson. However, during the off-season, he was sacked for a series of controversial incidents. Step forward Claudio 'The Tinkerman' Ranieri.

While Ranieri possessed a lot of experience in coaching various teams in various countries, it did not seem like an inspired hiring at the time. The Tinkerman's last job as manager of the Greece national football team ended in ignominy, as he was sacked after losing to minnows Faroe Islands, a country with a population of just 46,000. Many considered Ranieri's replacement of Pearson to be a case of twiddling thumbs with regards to the owners, as Pearson had just navigated them to safety with the unlikeliest of runs to end the season. What happened within the next 12 months of Ranieri's hiring will be written in Premier League folklore.

The situation was ripe for an upset in the 2015-16 season as a new television rights deal before the beginning of the season meant that all the clubs in the league had a major addition to their budget. This led to many mid-table clubs procuring high quality players (the key example being the wonderful Dimitri Payet's move to West Ham). Despite this, no one had given Leicester a chance. Ranieri barely made any eye-grabbing buys in the summer, with key squad player Shinji Okazaki the most prominent one. The relatively unknown N'Golo Kante did not raise any eyebrows when he was bought for 5.6 million pounds, yet ended up being on the PFA Team of the Year after consistent and imperious displays in the middle of the park. Instead, Ranieri looked inwards to his existing squad to find heroes. Along with Kante, the two main architects to their title victory were Riyad Mahrez and Jamie Vardy. Mahrez was bought from French second division side Le Havre in January 2014, and had barely dented the first team of Leicester before Ranieri unlocked his unique gifts. He ended the season as the PFA Player of the Year, becoming the first African to win the award. (in a league where African legends like Yaya Toure and Didier Drogba wreaked havoc) Jamie Vardy was playing non-league football as recently as 2010. Within 6 years, he had moved from non-league football to being one of the deadliest

marksmen in the Premier League. It was as meteoric a rise you could imagine. These unlikely heroes formed the backbone for Leicester's equally unlikely title challenge.

Leicester ended up being runaway winners, with runners-up Arsenal finishing 10 points below their staggering 81 points. This was a season where all the title contenders had flattered to deceive. Defending champions Chelsea had a rotten season, leading manager Jose Mourinho to be sacked midway through after the London club was inexplicably in the relegation zone in December. Ironically, losing to Leicester City was the last straw for the venerable Portuguese manager, his sacking being confirmed just days later. Juggernauts Manchester City started well, but lost steam as key injuries piled up. This led to them dropping points against clubs they normally expect to steamroll. Liverpool paid the price for keeping the faith in Brendan Rodgers and then sacking him 6 games into the season, with exciting replacement Jurgen Klopp not having enough time to imprint his signature style for them to pull off a title challenge. North London clubs Arsenal and Tottenham pushed Leicester the hardest, but they also suffered from lapses in concentration in key points during the race. What Leicester did well throughout the season was pick up points against clubs you should be beating if you are challenging for the title. None of the other top clubs were able to do this. It was wonderful seeing Leicester settle into the role of contenders. In the beginning of the season, the tactic was to outscore the opponents and a clean sheet was rarely on the cards. Instead, they depended on the attacking talents of Mahrez and Vardy to get them over the line in games. Much of the fanfare in the first half of the season revolved around Vardy breaking the legendary Ruud van Nistelrooy's record of 10 consecutive goal-scoring games in the Premiership. What made breaking the record special was that he did it against van Nistelrooy's old club, Manchester United. After the turn of the year, Leicester suddenly turned into a defensive juggernaut. 1-0 victories were usually the staple as they settled into a title challenger that did everything in their power to obtain those 3 points every game.

Leicester's unlikely victory propelled other clubs to believe anything is possible if you go into every game looking for a victory. Their achievement was nothing short of a miracle. They did not retool the rulebook as much as they ripped it up and wrote another one out of scratch. It gives a lot of optimism and uncertainty into looking forward to the coming season. Will Leicester retain their title? Will one of the traditional juggernauts reclaim their throne in the pinnacle of English football? Or, more exciting, will another team pull a 'Leicester' and forge history yet again? ■



The Origins of Indian Tea

- Sumon Bhowmik

Long before the commercial production of tea started in India in the late 1830s, the tea plant was growing wild in the jungles of north east.

Assam In 1598, Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, a Dutch traveler, noted in a book about his adventures that the Indians ate leaves as a vegetable with garlic and oil and also boiled the leaves to make a brew.

In 1788, the British botanist, Joseph Banks, reported to the British East India Company that the climate in certain British-controlled parts of north-east India was ideal for tea growing. However, he seems to have missed the fact that the plant was native to Bengal and suggested transplanting tea bushes from China. But, his idea was ignored.

In 1823 and 1831, Robert Bruce and his brother Charles, an employee of the East India Company, confirmed that the tea plant was indeed a native to the Assam area, and sent seeds and specimen plants to officials at the newly established Botanical Gardens in Calcutta. But again, nothing was done - perhaps because the East India Company had a monopoly on the trading of tea from China and, as they were doing very nicely, probably saw no reason to spend time and money elsewhere.

But in 1833, everything changed. The company lost its monopoly and suddenly woke up to the fact that India might prove a profitable alternative. A committee was set up, Charles Bruce was given the task of establishing the first nurseries, and the secretary of the committee was sent off to China to collect 80,000 tea seeds. Because they were still not sure that the tea plant really was indigenous to India, committee members insisted on importing the Chinese variety.

The seeds were planted in the Botanical Gardens in Calcutta, and nurtured until they were sturdy enough to travel 1,000 miles to the newly prepared tea gardens. Meanwhile, up in Assam, Charles Bruce and the other pioneers were clearing suitable areas of land on which to develop plantations, pruning existing tea trees to encourage new growth, and experimenting with the freshly plucked leaves from the native bushes to manufacture black tea. Bruce had recruited two tea-makers from China and, with their help, he steadily learnt the secrets of successful tea production.

The conditions were incredibly harsh. The area was remote and hostile, cold in winter and steamy hot in summer. Tigers, leopards, and wolves constantly threatened the lives of the workers, and the primitive settlements of the tea workers were subject to regular raids by local hill tribes.

But, they persevered, and gradually the jungle was opened up, the best tea tracts cultivated under the light shade of surrounding trees, and new seedlings planted to fill gaps and create true tea gardens.

Ironically, the native plants flourished, while the Chinese seedlings struggled to survive in the intense Assam heat. It was eventually decided to make subsequent plantings with seedlings from the native tea bush. The first twelve chests of manufactured tea to be made from indigenous Assam leaf were shipped to London in 1838 and were sold at the London auctions. The East India Company wrote to Assam to say that the tea had been well received by some "houses of character", and there was a similar response to the next shipment; some buyers declaring it "excellent".

Having established a successful industry in Assam's

Brahmaputra valley, with factories and housing settlements, the Assam Tea Company began to expand into other districts of north-east India. Cultivation started around the town of Darjeeling in the foothills of the Himalayas in the mid-1850s. By 1857, between 60 and 70 acres were under tea and, whereas the Chinese variety of the tea plant had not liked the conditions in Assam, here at elevations of 2,500 to 6,000 feet, it grew well. The company pushed on into Terai and Dooars and even into the remote Kangra valley, 800 miles west of Darjeeling.

In the south-western tip of the country, experimental plantings had been made in 1835, while the first nurseries were being established in Assam. By the mid-1850s, tea was growing successfully alongside coffee. The climate of the Nilgiri Hills, or Blue Mountains, seemed to suit the plant, and the area under tea steadily expanded.

In 1853, India exported 183.4 tons of tea. By 1870, that figure had increased to 6,700 tons and by 1885, 35,274 tons. Today, India is one of the world's largest producers of tea with 13,000 gardens and a workforce of more than 2 million workers. ■



Cultural Musings – How to Explain the Bengali Ento

- Brajeshwar Banerjee

There are some words in every language that are difficult to translate into others. Often the reason for that difficulty lies in the cultural connotations surrounding the word or concept. A good example in Japanese is “*yoroshiku*”. “Treat me well” is a commonly seen translation but that does not really convey much meaning to someone who is not familiar with the social context of its use in Japanese.

A concept in Bengali that is similarly difficult to translate or convey is “*ento*” (এঁটো) shortened from the word “*uchhisto*” originating from the Sanskrit word “*amrista*”.

At its simplest, *ento* refers to partly eaten food which is known as *mukher ento* (মুখের এঁটো) or *ento* relating to the mouth. It is unacceptable to be offering *ento* food to gods, guests, elders, or others senior in the social hierarchy, although it may be acceptable to share such food amongst siblings or friends (rules may vary depending on the household, and so checking with mum is recommended).

Ento typically conjures in many people’s minds the image of leftovers of a meal on a plate called *pater ento* (পাতের এঁটো). Although not exhaustive, there could be other kinds of *ento* too such as *bhater ento* (ভাতের এঁটো) relating to rice, *machher ento* (মাছের এঁটো) relating to fish, *sager ento* (সাগের এঁটো) relating to leafy greens, *payesher ento* (পায়েশের এঁটো) relating to rice milk pudding and even *ento* relating to son-in-laws or *jamaiyer ento* (জামাইয়ের এঁটো). Various rules and conventions govern each kind of *ento*.

Ento sag or greens and *ento payesh* or rice milk pudding cannot be shared even amongst siblings and friends (typically these are thrown away or fed to animals) and food left on a plate by a man cannot be consumed by his parents-in-law as it is *jamaiyer ento* although there is no restriction on his wife eating it. There appears to be no equivalent *ento* governing daughter-in-laws. The fish *ento* appears to be a subset of a broader concept of *aansh* (আঁশ) which captures all non-vegetarian food items and so *aansh* or *ento* treatment is often applied to meat and eggs besides fish. In some households the concept is extended to cover onion, garlic and even red pulses (মুগের ডাল).

Ento is not limited to food items only. *Ento* applies to the utensils used for making or consuming the food and also to the place around it. *Ento* food on a plate makes the plate *ento*. If a spoon was used to eat the food you have an *ento* spoon. If food is eaten with hands, the hand becomes *ento*. Water drunk out of a glass creates an *ento* glass. Similarly you can get *ento* tea cups, bottles, and so on.

Some people wish to avoid creating an *ento* glass (or bottle), especially when drinking water. They choose to practice and master the art of pouring the water out of the glass directly into their mouths by holding the glass above their mouths, but without their lips or tongue touching the edge of the glass, and at the same time making sure to not choke on the water or spill any on their clothes – a practice referred to as drinking *algoche* (আলগোছে). Sounds a bit like Spanish or Italian, doesn’t it?

Ento also has electricity like properties in that it



contaminates what it touches. So, if an *ento* plate, spoon or hand happens to be placed touching a clean set of plates (or other utensils) those become *ento* too by contact. The floor where an *ento* plate is placed is judged to be *ento* as well. In the old days when rice was cooked on coal braziers made of clay (উনুন) the braziers were considered as being *bhater ento*. The *ento* could be removed by giving the brazier a fresh wipe of clay (a small container with clay, water and a piece of cloth for applying the mixture was kept in most kitchens). A piece of cow dung cake (ঘুঁটে ভাঙা) was often added to the clay-water mixture to enhance the purifying potency.

Ento can generally be removed by washing (in case of utensils or hand) or wiping (in case of floors, etc). But complications can arise in the context of urban living. If an *ento* plate is on a dining table that has a table cloth or a center cloth or flowers on it, do all of these become *ento* as well? If you kept fish in the freezer, does it make the entire fridge or its other contents *ento*? Would your electric rice cooker ever be non-*ento*? Like many deep questions, no clear answer is available for many of these and so every person must find answers to the best of his/her ability and draw the line as they see fit.

If all of that seems overly complicated, help is at hand – if you are in doubt about the not-so-obvious types of *ento*, sprinkling some Ganges water, assuming you can get it, can banish that pesky *ento* at once and ensure instant purification.

So now if someone asks you to translate *ento* - *yoroshiku* ! ■

Strange Obsession

- Tapan Das

"The mad professor is always obsessed with his pea-plants in his small kitchen garden," the students remarked sarcastically. "He never allows us to enjoy the green peas in his kitchen garden nor does he eat them himself; we should teach him a lesson," they added. Mr. Bob Cotton was a well-known professor of English in a small college in Pragjyotishpur, in the Northeast India. He lived there with his wife, Jassi, a Sardarni by birth, who was devoted to her "Cotton Sahib". After retirement, they decided to spend the rest of their lives in their rented cottage near the mighty Brahmaputra river at Kamrup.

Mr. Cotton was an impressively well-built personality, with a hawk-beaked nose, and almost resembled a Sumo wrestler. His sharp eyes beamed through his spectacles, ever keen to find naughty students, and was always waiting to vent his acid tongue to demand the usual respect he expected as a professor. But after retirement, he was a transformed man. Perhaps the acid tongue in him sobered quite a bit after he retired. The professor and Jassi alias Jaswinder Kaur, made a lovely couple, almost as if two religions were co-existing peacefully. While one had the Bible in his hand, the other had the Guru Granth Sahib. Bob Cotton was a good story-teller. He used to dramatize stories, which Jassi enjoyed. There was no dearth of stories in their life. The professor's story-telling was always convincing. He enjoyed Indian spicy food, which Jassi prepared, especially the "green pea masala", "pea stuffed kulcha" and "peas pulao". He also liked "sarso da sag" and "makki da roti" but "peas" were like Heaven to him. Cleaning utensils was another chore which he did not allow Jassi to perform. Most of the time, he would take up the role of the dishwasher. Jassi would lovingly call him "my firangee dishwasher".

People say that after they had lost their only son Paul, they had become very lonely. However, no one had ever seen Paul. When he was not obsessed with his pea-plants in the kitchen garden, he would watch the students of the nearby hostel playing basketball or volleyball on the nearby ground.

During Christmas, the couple invited all the students of the hostel, and distributed a particular sweet-cum-chocolate known as "butter-fudge", especially imported from England. This chocolate was their Paul's favourite. Mr. Cotton used to place orders at the Farrah's Sweet Shop in London, so that they could get the parcel well before Christmas. John Farrahs Harrogate, London sent the parcels to him with unfailing regularity.

Sometimes, Mr. Cotton would turn into a beast when he found students stealing peas from his garden. He would never allow anybody to even look at the plants. The day the students played mischief with the pea-plants, he would go berserk and beat anyone who would come near him. Only Jassi could cool him down. He would break down and cry like a child near the portrait of his late son Paul. Addressing the hostel students, she would plead, "Please take any other fruit or vegetable from the garden but for Wahe Guru's sake, don't hurt him by stealing the peas."

People had not seen his son Paul. Paul, presumably, was his son by his first wife in England. He did not like to discuss his son at any point of time and kept a close secrecy about it. Anything planted by the professor grew up so well that people would talk about his father, Sir Benjamin Cotton who came to India with his family to take charge of the tea plantations in Assam. Sir Benjamin was a tea planter par excellence. After completing his studies, young Cotton went back to the UK

for some time for higher studies. The unfortunate death of his father, mother, and sister from malaria compelled the young Cotton to return to India. He did not like the tea plantation job. He was fond, rather, of academics. While his father liked the green valleys of Kamrup and Darjeeling, and considered them the best for the plantation of tea, young Cotton was drawn towards books and gardening. He took up a teaching job.

His colleagues were bewildered by his obsession with the pea-plants but did not dare ask him why. "He is a sheer mad man," quipped one of his colleagues, "I don't agree," retorted another colleague. "The way he explains the use of sound in phonetics, is simply amazing," countered James.

It was the 24th of December. The professor was, as usual, in his shorts and was watering his garden. The pea-plants grew so well that he was very happy as if he could see his son laughing. After that, he headed towards the hostel to invite students for Christmas celebrations the next morning. Some students were at his place till late at night to help him decorate the Christmas tree. A new portrait of Paul was put up in the drawing room. Even the portrait of Guru Nanak was cleaned and put into place. The students were timidly eyeing the packed boxes of the tasty "butter-fudge" which had already arrived from London.

That night on Christmas eve, Mr. and Mrs. Cotton kissed each other and decided to retire to bed. Mr. Cotton wanted to sleep in the drawing room so that he could keep an eye on his kitchen garden. "If only our Paul was with us we would have gone back to our old cottage in London," lamented the old professor. Jassi was silent. She had decided to wake up first in the morning and wish her husband a merry Christmas.

It was morning. Jassi tiptoed eagerly towards the drawing-room keen on surprising Mr. Cotton. But alas! Mr. Cotton was not in his bed. She peeped into the garden. He should surely be there! But what a sight! Was something wrong? She wanted to be the first to wish Mr. Cotton a merry Christmas, but there were people all around him! She ran to the garden and found Mr. Cotton lying on the ground with his eyes open. All the pea-plants had been uprooted! Mr. Cotton's garden was totally ransacked! Oh Lord, how could this happen! She quickly touched the forehead of Mr. Cotton. But his body was very cold. She now understood what had happened. Mr. Cotton was no more. "Wahe Guru, don't be so unkind," she cried. "Don't leave me alone, Cotton Sahib" cried Jassi. "What if the pea plants were Paul's favourite? These boys are also like Paul. Forgive them."

The crowd now guessed the reason for the professor's obsession. Green peas were Paul's favourite! Paul presumably had sent this special variety of seed from the UK before he died.

People say that after that perhaps Jassi did not live long either. Her forefathers were Sikh soldiers brought by the Mughals to Kamrup.

The people of the North East and Professor Cotton's students did not ever forget their old professor and his obsession with pea-plants. We can see the great Cotton Institute standing in its majestic grandeur reminding us of Professor Cotton even today.

Kamrup, like the rest of the Northeastern region, attracts plenty of foreign tourists. It was great news when people came to know that Professor Cotton's youngest brother, Sir William from Trinity College, London, was planning to visit the

Northeast along with a group of other British tourists to pay their homage to some of their relatives who were British soldiers of the Second World War. Their memories were preserved in the war memorials in Nagaland and Manipur.

Sir William Cotton decided to visit his brother's grave too. The visit coincided with the annual day celebrations of Cotton Institute, where his brother had taught. A grand function was organized with Sir William as the chief guest.

Speakers spoke about Professor Cotton, and his strange obsession with the pea-plants and his son Paul. But Sir William was disturbed! His eyes were glued to the two portraits in the corner. His brother's portrait was recognizable but what about the other portrait? It was familiar but he could not be sure. People said it was Paul's but who the hell was Paul? His brother was not married when he left the UK. Then suddenly, he got it! It was his (Sir William's) own photograph which he had sent to his brother from London!

He had to spill the beans: "Ladies and gentlemen, you are committing a huge blunder. Mr. Cotton, my elder brother, did not have a child at all. And the portrait standing over there is my own portrait which I sent to him." The whole crowd stood stunned. He added, "Let me tell you, I did like the story that you have all said about his son Paul, and also about his obsession with pea-plants. But the fact is, my brother was very fond of green peas. When he was a child, he did not allow us to even share any dish made from green peas. It was a strange obsession, almost a disease. He would do anything to have green peas. In many of his letters he had written how he managed to save the pea-plants from the students and boarders. In fact he resorted to this drama to enjoy the green peas all by himself. He died of a cardiac arrest but the story that you all have narrated, though interesting, I am afraid I am unable to digest." The crowd sat struck. As Sir William was getting down from the dais and walking towards his vehicle, there was mirth in the air, and suddenly, he could see some commotion

near the gate. An old lady was forcing her way towards Sir William and she was holding a turban-clad young white man. "Mr. William!! Can you guess? Can you recognise me or this young man?" she asked. In the meantime, the organizers had rightly guessed what was happening. They cordoned off the area. Sir William, taken aback at first, calmed down. His thought process ended with a small flash on his face. How could he not recognize the familiar face, familiar nose! He asked the lady. "If I am not mistaken, am I speaking to Mrs. Jaswinder Cotton? And if my answer is right, the young man should be Cotton Junior." The smile on the lady's face was enough for Sir William to react. He put his step forward and hugged the young white sardar. He said, "You look exactly like my brother but how come we did not know?" He paused a bit, tears rolling down his cheek. "Yes, it was our fault we did not keep in touch with you and Bob was to be blamed too." The old lady took Sir William by his hand and asked him to sit on a nearby chair. "Yes! We had sent him to Canada, where my eldest sister lived." "He is Jeetpaul Cotton; we call him Paul," she added. "People do not know much about our son as Bob did not want that. His family thought he had become a priest. He wanted to keep it a secret as he married me against the wishes of his uncles and brothers in London," said the old lady. "I was also in Canada. We came here last week so that we could participate in his death anniversary function. On reaching India, we got the news from the newspapers yesterday that you would be the chief guest for this function. That is why we are here," she said. The reunion was worth witnessing. The crowd was happy to see the young white sardar, whose father Sir Cotton, was a well-known professor of English.

People say Paul and his mother went back to England and stayed with his uncle. It was also believed that Paul married a local tea planter's daughter, Junemoni, whom his mother had selected. Both were in the teaching profession in England and they were a happy family. ■

Disclaimer: Strictly fiction. Resemblance to names and places could be just by coincidence.

THE MEASURE OF BEAUTY

- Soumitra Talukder

The svelte stood before the mirror lost in the conscious of her beauty,
The delicate features of her soigne' reverberated in enchantment of her image,
The angelic face had the luster of ebony; the eyes carried the suppressed rage,
Her delicate fingers had the slender of an artist, her aura the lure of magi.
He had come in silence soft on his steps, as if not to disturb her trance,
As she noticed him through her slated eyes, she asked in melody of her voice,
Tell me of my allure, has it stolen the peace of your mind in the passé'
He replied, indeed dear, the best of my endurance as I watch your reflections,
Had there been no limit of civility, I would have gone but insane.
Tell me oh Prince, am I the most beauteous female in the world..!
The Prince smiled and replied, Oh Princess, had I been in the spell of your beauty,
Beyond the realm of truth, I would have agreed,
But ask the child who clings to his mother for every support of life,
Ask the beloved brother as whom he adores the most but his sister,
There is the mad lover who would he adulate but than his grace in lover,
Oh my Princess, the meaning of beauty is but in the domain of heart in its fervor.
And the Princess embraced the Prince in a feel of joy as it was never before.....!

A Dream...

- Udita Ghosh

A dream is like a crystal
Making a miracle of light
That seemed to merely fall,
Now flashing in sight,
Filling up your eyes
On a joyful moonlit night.

A dream is like a crystal,
Upon contact with ground
Shattered into thousands of pieces,
And the unmistakable sound
Of a dream breaking
In the heart does resound.

A festival to renew

- Dipankar Dasgupta

From every corner of the land
They bring their families and friend
It is a time for prayers and devotion
And this has been, for long, a trend

There is color and beauty everywhere
Faces beaming with eagerness and joy
Relationships resurrected and renewed
For some, a time and place to be coy

Mantras read to the beating drum
Fragrance and smoke fill the space
The embodiment of power and Shakti
Showering on all blessings and grace

Some devote their time to the divine
Coming early to soak in the sublime
As each auspicious day progresses
The sound and colour reaches prime

I sit in the corner gazing at her beauty
The world around me appearing small
The strength of her gaze uplifts my soul
A renewed feeling, there is hope after all

I think of those who have toiled hard
To make these few days special for all
Somewhere deep down the heart feels sad
Why is human ego making some so small?

I ask for forgiveness before I pose
Why is the world such a complex place
Give us Shakti Ma to cleanse our soul
So ego disappears without a trace

Autumn in Japan

- By Srujani Mohanty

The maple leaves mapped our palms,
its penta whorls delicate to touch
the fancy hues
rust, crimson, gold, green awaiting turn....

The fairyland spelt magic,
Maples lined on both sides, shone
in afternoon glint, Mt Fuji
towering over
Lake Kawaguchiko, gaunt and severe

The snow atop it amid swirling
clouds, hovering, breezy maples
murmur and float, catching
the sniff of winter

As evening befall, illumination
marks the Maple corridor,
surreal, oranges and reds
flaming to tongue the dusky skies

Shivers and the cold smote
but the wanderlust craves
more of the autumnal wizardry
Fringing the lake, the trees lure

Tokyo's Genkos peep from
every street, the divine glow
from golden tops touching the
azure blue roof of skies....

God's Own Country, with
four seasons stellar,
to captivate the myriad
souls with enrapturing beauty

Nihon, Thou beckoned us,
The Isles, blessed by the Rising Sun,
the beatific chimera remains.....
not to be awakened ever!

