

Early Years in Mysore

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There is not much that I can remember very exciting about my early childhood. My brother (who was a couple of years older than me) and I spent our days mostly in or near the house. My father, Kadur Shamanna, was a sub-assistant surgeon in the medical service of the state of Mysore, posted in a taluq headquarters. We lived in a modest house across the street from my father's dispensary, which we could visit only occasionally, under the care of a servant. The dispensary was not by any means large and catered only for outpatients. But it constituted our entire concept of a "hospital". Apart from catching a glimpse of our father at work, the attraction for us was the large compound in which we could play without hindrance when the sun was not severe.

In those years, the early 1920s, there were no play schools even in towns bigger than the one in which we lived. My brother had been enrolled in the government primary school, which I was too young to attend. However my parents and grandmother had decided that I could not afford to delay education too long, and was taught the Kannada alphabet and numbers at home. My brother and I also had to learn the short prayers that were customarily recited in a Brahmin household. Some evenings, the compounder of my father's dispensary would come to tell us stories from the *Panchatantra*, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata*. He was a kindly old gentleman who added to his meagre salary through such means, or by officiating as a priest during the innumerable festivals that my parents were wont to observe. I also remember his staying on some evenings to teach my father how to play the violin. To our joy we were allowed to sit in on these sessions and perhaps our subconscious benefited from it. We have enjoyed listening to good music in later years, though neither of us studied it systematically.

As I came to recognise some years later, government officers enjoyed much authority and respect in those days. My father's responsibility, like those of his colleagues in other services, extended far beyond the town and the hospital, to all the villages and people in the *taluk* (subdivision of a district). Besides the daily routine of treating outpatients at the dispensary, he had to go round the town regularly, to visit the very sick in their houses or check on suspected cases of cholera and other communicable diseases. He had also to visit, on request or on his own, the many villages in the taluk, as doctor and public health officer. This was particularly frequent when there was an outbreak of an epidemic in the vicinity and people had to be immunised. Since he was on the payroll of the state government, he was not entitled to any fees for such visits; but it was apparently the custom those days for the beneficiaries to show their gratitude in some concrete form – gold or silver coins, a bag of rice, ragi or a basket of fruits, vegetables or coconuts, a pot of ghee or butter, at least a garland and a couple of limes. The more affluent of his patients sometimes brought a sari for my mother or a silver cup for the children on special occasions. We did not, of course, understand the ethics of this custom; but whenever my father went on a village visit or was

taken urgently by somebody to see a sick patient, we used to look forward to his returning with some goodies for the house.

Travel was not easy, nor the occasions for travel many. When he went on his Village visits or to the district headquarters to meet senior officers, he travelled by bus or bullock cart. Because of his official status, he was always accorded the special privilege of occupying the front seat to the left of the driver. Buses those days were not too many or well designed and tended invariably to be overcrowded. However, the front seat provided relief to at least two people and was much sought after by the passengers when it was not reserved for local VIPs. It was also considered appropriate for the bus to come to the house or to the dispensary to pick up my father before starting out on the journey. On the rare occasions when my father took the family out to the district headquarters for a visit or to Bangalore or Mysore, an entire row in the forward portion of the bus would be reserved for us. If those who were crowded into the less comfortable rear seats disliked this, they did not show it and, in any event, we were too young to be concerned about other people's rights and privileges. In retrospect, I believe in those days, everybody accepted such privileges for government servants as in some way natural. Kings and zamindars (landlords) had always taken whatever they liked, regardless of the rights or needs of others; this authority had continued under the Mughals and the British. Mysore was still a principality and for his subjects, the maharaja was the incarnation of divine authority; hence his "servants" enjoyed a special status.

Despite all economic and political changes since then, this attitude continues, especially among government officers at all levels. From *gram sevaks* (secretaries to village *panchayats*) to secretaries to the Government of India, and ministers and legislators, public functionaries have appropriated for themselves a variety of privileges which bear little relation to their needs or responsibilities. There is, of course, a greater awareness of the inequity implicit in this now, when government employees are paid very much more than in my father's days. But in those times of little education, much poverty and authoritarian regimes, even the thought of being discriminated against was foreign to most people. It was all their karma.

By the time I was five, my father was transferred to a somewhat smaller station, a sub-taluq in the hilly tracts along the western part of the state. This was part of his service obligation, to complete a certain number of years in Malnad. His new posting was a hardship station, heavy with rainfall and malaria. The town was less than 16 kilometres to the west of the district headquarters, stretching ribbon-like along the road to the port town of Mangalore on the Arabian Sea. To the west of the town, scrub jungle progressively developed into lush forests and coffee plantations on the distant hill-slopes. My father's jurisdiction extended mostly towards villages in this direction.

My brother was soon to enter middle school and as there was only a primary school in the town, my father decided to send him to Bangalore. I was admitted to the local school, which was conveniently located across the street from our house. The headmaster of the school was a distant relation on my mother's side, which was both an advantage and a curse. He kept a constant eye on me when I was at school and often crossed over to our house on social visits. Though not a harsh man, he had a loud voice and I never could make out if he was asking me something or ordering me. I have only a few memories of those years in the primary school. I believe I was a good student and do not remember to have been punished in any manner. But I was frequently laid low with malaria as indeed all the others in the family or at school. Together with my small build, this debilitating disease seriously restricted my extra-curricular activities. Several of my friends would frequently venture into the forests around town, looking for fruits and berries of various kinds or hoping to catch a glimpse of some wild animal or bird. For the most part, they did it on the sly. I missed many such after-school jaunts, often because of malaria, but sometimes because my friends told me brutally that I could not cope. This sense of physical inadequacy has persisted over the years, and has been a significant cause of my inability to be aggressive even when I disapprove strongly of somebody or something.

During a little over three years in that town, my father took us a few times out on what were then long journeys by bus or train. Some of these were to the state's largest city, Bangalore, and others to Mysore, where the maharaja lived. I believe that our visits to Mangalore were later, since I can recall a little of the details of visits to the palace, which was awesome, and the zoo, which was a delight. During one of these visits, my father had to be hospitalised and the family had some anxious moments. This was the first time that I saw a real hospital, with numerous wards and scores of doctors and nurses scurrying around in their white aprons. But the journey that most often comes back to me is the pilgrimage to a holy place in the coastal district of South Kanara. I am not certain whether this came after my father's hospitalisation, by way of fulfilment of a vow taken by my grandmother or mother; but it clearly had the purpose of propitiating the serpent god Subramanya. We travelled by bus, crossing the Western Ghats on a road of steep gradients, hair-pin bends and glorious forest all around. Accidents on this road were quite common, especially during the monsoon when landslides and fog occurred rather suddenly. The great trees covering the steep hill sides along which the road traversed remains an evergreen memory, despite my being sick on the bus. Many years later, when my wife and I travelled by car up the ghats from the coastal side, the denudation that had occurred in the name of progress and development was sickening. The memory of the lush forest I had seen several decades ago came back to me – disturbing and yet oddly comforting.

The shrine where our family had to offer prayers was beautifully located beside a river. It had the reputation of being a “powerful” shrine, capable of harming those who entered without bathing in the river and discarding their work clothes. Along with my grandmother and parents, my sisters and I were also given a bath and taken into the temple in wet clothes. We did not mind it, for the weather was congenial and moreover, we were terrified that otherwise we would be attacked by cobras wherever we went. It was also obligatory for the worshippers to fast until the rituals were over and any special penance which they had vowed was done. On that day, my grandmother rolled on the ground from the main door of the temple to the sanctum sanctorum. I do not remember whether my mother and father also did so, but there were many other devotees doing so. There was a feast in the temple in which all those who had offered *puja* (ritual worship) were to participate. This was a special occasion; we were told that after the food was served, we had to refrain from eating until the lord of the temple, the king of cobras, passed along the aisle and entered his abode behind the idol. We did not see any cobra slide along where we sat, but we waited with considerable trepidation and were indeed relieved when it was announced a little later that the lord had indeed blessed us and reached home.

In that temple as in many others, Brahmins controlled not merely the puja procedures but everything else –for instance, who could worship and who could not or who could enter the inner precinct. Those belonging to other castes were not allowed into the inner court during the morning service, nor could they sit to eat alongside the Brahmins. None of this was, of course, part of my cognition at that time and as children we had no inkling of the enormous power of Brahmins in the community. We took it as part of the natural order that we were superior, purer than others and of a higher order. The astonishing part of it was that others also seemed to accept our assumption of this higher status. They did not allow it to spoil personal relationships, and never invited us to eat with them. Not only did they not object to eating in our house, but felt no hurt when they were served separately and even required to clean the place where they had eaten. But it was not long before all these things changed.

II

By the time my father was transferred to his next station, I had passed the third standard in the primary school. I had done well in the examinations and the headmaster recommended to my father that I be admitted to the first level in the middle school at the place to which we moved. With my father's position as the local doctor and my school record, this posed no major problem. But some of the teachers were not

pleased, nor were some of my classmates. There were also a couple of subjects with which I could not cope easily. When in the class tests held a few months later, I did poorly in these subjects, my class teacher made me stand up on the bench for public ridicule – as a punishment for claiming privileges beyond my capability. The teachers were obviously right in objecting to my jumping a year on the basis of what they considered an undue favour. But the hurt to me was great, and I recall with gratitude the kindness with which a few of my classmates treated me on that day. In the final examination that year, I topped the class in all but English composition, and the teachers who had upbraided me earlier were most appreciative, compensating for the bitterness caused earlier.

My father's tenure in that town was long enough for me to complete my high-school education. Those years were not only satisfying from the Viewpoint of academic progress but also exciting in many ways. The town was in an arid zone, and lay at the foot of a hill, which had been fortified in the past by a minor warlord. A large part of the fort surrounding the hill remained intact, though the fortifications and buildings on the hill had been ruined during one of the many wars between the rulers of old Mysore, the Bahmani kings, the Marathas and the European colonisers. The top part of the hill was a large rock massif, with a few narrow steps cut into it. Adjoining this hill were minor hillocks covered like the base of the hill with shrubs and tall grass. Besides a variety of berries and wild fruit, this scrub jungle reputedly abounded in cobras, minor game, poachers and bootleggers and other mysterious individuals practising strange and terrible things. Altogether, it was exciting for us to climb these hills in search of fruit or just for the fun of it. However, we were timid enough to get out of the woods well before nightfall, and avoided them altogether when the town was rife with rumours about a ferocious leopard Sighted in the vicinity.

Besides these forays, life within and outside school was also rich with new experiences. Till we left high school, all students had to study English and a second language, world geography, some Indian history, and the rudiments of physics, chemistry, biology, algebra, geometry and trigonometry. We had for the most part good teachers who knew their subjects well enough to inform us more than what was required in the syllabus. I remember being fascinated by the practical demonstrations in physics and chemistry, the novelty of algebraic operations, the mysteries of biology and not least by the vistas of English and Kannada literature that my teachers opened for us. It was still an age to learn and wonder rather than analyse and question. We were beginning to see that the world around us was immense, enormously variegated, and beautiful beyond compare. It was many years before I could see that there was also much cruelty and ugliness in this world of ours.

But for the moment, the sense of well-being dominated during class hours, and was enhanced later by the opportunities available on the playing fields. The school was not, of course, rich enough to provide a swimming pool or tennis courts. But thanks to a headmaster who was a sports enthusiast, there were enough facilities for all the students to play football, volleyball, badminton or cricket, or go for physical exercises in the gymnasium. Several of the teachers also participated in these activities, often to our amusement. My brother, who had come home from Bangalore and joined the high school, excelled at football and badminton. I was not much good at any, though I played all of them. By the time I left school, however, I had become a second string bowler in the cricket team and even travelled once to another town for an inter-school match.

While the school naturally dominated our lives, other experiences also accumulated. The town was the headquarters of a district sub-division; there were also the base-level civil and magistrate's courts, a full-fledged post and telegraph office, a police inspectorate, a sub-treasury and veterinary hospital, besides my father's dispensary. There were no banks, and I am not sure if there was a co-operative society, but there were a few substantial merchants and landlords who lent money. The town's elite corps of officers had formed a club, where they played tennis and card games in the evenings. The club was situated within the outer fort of the hill and remained pretty exclusive. Since my father was a member, we could go there

occasionally to scan newspapers. Sometime before I completed school, my brother and some of his friends decided to organise a football team, probably because of differences with the captain of the school team. The club authorities allowed this group to use a field abutting the club grounds and some of the club members came along to play with us occasionally.

Neither the school nor the officer's club organised any cultural activities and we fell back on the town for this need. Two temples, one of Shiva and the other of Vishnu, dominated the town centre. Besides special worship during the many festivals observed by Hindus, there were events like *harikathas* (stories on religious themes) and *bhajan* (devotional music) parties which we could attend. Even more special than these were the touring circuses and dramatic troupes, which came to the town at least once every year, complete with their tents, performing animals, stage settings and above all, electricity generators and rows of colourful lights. As usual, all senior officers were special invitees to these shows. My father enjoyed such diversions and took us with him. These performances were a source of both enjoyment and education for us. A good bit of my knowledge of Indian mythology, romantic literature and ancient history was garnered from these recitations, harikathas and dramatic shows.

As I have mentioned earlier, my grandmother and parents were deeply religious. Observance of festivals and visits to the temples were frequent and we were expected to accompany them regardless of our interests or feelings. Many of these were also social gatherings, during which there was mass eating or Singing. Most gatherings at home were limited to members of one's own caste, in our case, Brahmins. However, there were some functions in which everybody participated-car festivals, Muharram, the annual *jatra* (folk theatre) and *Navarathri* festivities. Along the roads traversed by temple cars and *tazias* (representations of the tombs of Hasan and Hussain, the grandsons of the Prophet, carried in processions for various Islamic festivities), offerings were made by all communities. Even my grandmother offered prayers at a Muslim *darga* (shrine of a Sufi saint) during the Muharram festivities and when my mother organised a special display of decorated dolls during Navarathri, it was an open house for everybody. The annual *jatra* was something else. It was a combination of sacrificial offerings to the village deity and a large-scale fair. The latter was great fun with acrobats, magicians and numerous stalls selling clothes, pots and pans, oddments needed for farms or 13 cattle, bangles of all kinds, fruits and vegetables and a variety of eatables and drinks. The ritual part of these jatras was, however, quite terrifying. These were mostly after sundown, accompanied by an incessant beating of drums and cymbals. The priests looked fierce in their yellow and red robes, paint and matted locks. Goats and chicken were sacrificed before the idol, which looked fierce, and devotees often broke into dance. The jatra reached a frenzied climax with the beheading of a sacrificial buffalo, fire walking by devotees in a semi-trance, the thunder of drums, breathless waiting for the deity's word of satisfaction, acrobatics on a high beam and revellers high on drugs and toddy. As the entire ritual centred on propitiating evil spirits, we were terrified for days thereafter and avoided going anywhere near the jatra grounds, lest some unsatisfied ghoulish gobble us up.

By the time my father was transferred again, I had completed my high school and was ready to enter college. Luckily for me, he was posted to the big government hospital in Mysore, in which he had been a patient some years earlier. Unlike in other places where he was the chief medical officer, he was part of the junior staff of general practitioners in this hospital, servicing the outpatient department or doing duty in the wards. He was assigned one of the staff quarters within the hospital area, which though adequate was a far cry from the big houses and numerous perquisites to which we had become accustomed in the smaller towns. But all this was outweighed by the excitement of living in a city and joining the university.

III

This was a transition in more ways than one. The years in high school had opened up several vistas and generated new interests – literature and mythology, mathematics, cricket and, to some extent, history and economics. But I was still very much a frog in the well, happy in the limited environment of a privileged

youngster in a small town. There was little awareness of the dimensions of society around me, its rigidities and limitations, its excellences and injustices. Though the late 1920s and early 1930s were years of momentous happenings in India's freedom struggle, I was barely aware of it all. Of course I had heard of Gandhi and had even read occasionally about his fasts and imprisonments. When I was still a middle-school student, some of the political activists in the town had marched in a procession to the school and urged us to come out in protest against something or the other. But I had no idea what it was all about. The doings of the Indian National Congress and its leaders were not familiar to me since they were not talked about either in school or at home. Whatever was happening was in the British provinces – outside the state of Mysore, where we owed allegiance to the maharaja and his government. Moreover, we had been trained at school to appreciate the greatness of the British Empire “on which the sun never sets”. England was rich, mighty and the world leader in many respects. We were led to believe that its literature was the best, its universities the greatest temples of learning, it was unbeatable in cricket (until Don Bradman came along) and its people superior to others in everyway. The only opportunity I had of reading newspapers was when my father brought them home from the club once in a while. I have also the feeling that because of his campaign for free admission of *harijans* (the lower castes) to Hindu temples, Gandhi had lost respect in most Brahmin households and ours was no exception.

However, Gandhi's voyage to London for the Round Table Conference in 1931 left a deep impression on me and his doings there were one of the few non-sports items that I followed, though I understood little of its purpose or political content. It was uplifting to see him totally at ease wherever he went, relaxed and utterly confident. It was also a revelation for those of my generation that despite his steadfast refusal to toe the British line or wear a suit, Gandhi was greatly respected even in Europe. During those days, I frequently went to the officer's club for cricket news in the *Hindu*. I soon found myself reading about Gandhi, Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, C Rajagopalachari and other national leaders. Following Gandhi's arrest on his return to India, the civil disobedience movement gathered momentum and it was impossible not to become aware of the ruthless *lathi* charges and firing by the police all over India.

It was only after we shifted to Mysore that I got to know more about the how and why of these happenings. As soon as I joined the Intermediate College, I had access to the much bigger libraries of the college and the university. I had access also to the reading facilities at the university students' union which subscribed to a number of English newspapers and magazines. More important than these were the exposures to politically aware teachers and other older persons, some of whom had been *satyagrahis* (practitioners of non-violent resistance) in adjoining British provinces. One of the more important of such contacts for me was an older cousin of mine named K Ramaswami, who, though an engineering student in Bangalore, was an ardent follower of Gandhi and the national movement. It was in his father's house that my brother had stayed after joining college in Mysore, until my father's transfer there. This cousin was an excellent public speaker and debater, a bibliophile and a political activist. It was through his constant encouragement that my brother and I learnt a great deal more about the freedom movement. Besides Gandhi's autobiography, I became an avid reader of the *Harijan* and other publications that emanated from Gandhian or Congress sources which my cousin often lent me.

Other differences between school and college emerged. It was a considerable distance to the university and Mysore was too small to afford a city bus service. After a while both my brother and I acquired bicycles. We were also given pocket money for snacks and other incidental expenses. Besides cricket and outdoor games, facilities were provided in the university union building for table tennis, carom, chess and draughts. There was also a radio, which only designated individuals could operate in the evening. The radio was devoted almost entirely to listening to cricket scores and commentaries until Mussolini invaded Abyssinia and war news gained importance.

In addition to the union, there were numerous student associations organised for specific subjects as also others like the Rover Scouts Group and the drama society, which any student could join. Office bearers

had to be elected each year for the union as well as for these associations. While elections for the union secretary's position were hotly contested, for most others, the head of the department or the senior staff member in charge would name a secretary at the first meeting, and soon enough, I was named secretary of the economics society of the college. Involvement in such activities inevitably extended the time I spent away from home and helped enlarge the range of my interests. Additionally, one had to supplement whatever was taught in the classroom with extensive reading outside; more time was devoted each year for library work and group discussions with or without faculty members. Between the union and other student associations, a number of debates and lectures by distinguished visitors were organised every term. In the six years I spent in the university, the visitors included vice-chancellors and eminent professors from other universities, distinguished men of letters, political leaders, editors and artists.

A few years before I completed my graduate course in economics, my father was transferred from Mysore to a small town east of Bangalore. I moved into the college hostel, which was in several ways a new learning experience. However, I missed my family which had given me a sense of belonging and my character. It had given me a feel for austerity, tolerance and the capacity to enjoy simple pleasures. I had developed an ear for music and a taste for Kannada and English literature largely due to my elder brother, who owned a bookshop.

IV

Contrary to my expectations, I found that a good master's degree was not adequate to secure a worthwhile job in the Mysore state or elsewhere. By the time I was out of college, in all of south India as well as Maharashtra, being a Brahmin had nearly become a disqualification for government service. I could only secure a minor job at the taluk level. After a year's trial, I decided to quit and try my fortune elsewhere. Around that time, M N Srinivas (who later became an internationally renowned social anthropologist) literally forced me to shift to Bombay University's School of Economics and Sociology (USES). My parents were at first loath to send me but later agreed, though reluctantly. When I set out to Bombay in October 1943, I had no idea what I would do to maintain myself. However, when I registered for my PhD degree at the USES, the director, C N Vakil not only agreed to accept me but gave me a "studentship" of about Rs 30 a month for the rest of the academic year. Besides this immediate relief, he also found me a job in one of the local colleges to teach undergraduate courses in economics and commercial geography. Apparently, my luck had turned. The years I spent as a student in Bombay (1943-47) were in many ways tremendously beneficial. The USES had a fine library with a rich collection of books and journals and I was so immersed in serious research on questions relating to national income generation and distribution, especially the latter aspect.

My student life in Bombay was very different from that in Mysore. With my earnings I could afford to shift to the university hostel, which was within walking distance of the downtown campus, sharing a room with Srinivas. When I was not lecturing in one of the local colleges, we usually walked down to the school after breakfast and settled down for day-long reading, meeting faculty members and discussing all manner of things with fellow researchers. Each of us had a table in a common room to do our reading and writing. We could borrow books and journals from the library and keep them for as long as we needed. These were all exciting facilities for me and my avidity for study knew no bounds. It was in the USES that I first met I G Patel and B V Krishnamurthi. Their paths and mine were to cross many times in later years.

The period 1943 to 1947 was also one of historical changes in the country. Just before I went to Bombay, the Indian National Congress had assembled there and passed the famous "Quit India" resolution. The British government retaliated by arresting all the Congress leaders, including Gandhi. Protest meetings and huge processions took place in the country each day and, inevitably, the police sought to prevent these popular demonstrations. It was impossible to avoid joining the protests, especially after Gandhi

began a fast unto death in prison. The university was in turmoil and we could hardly stay indoors. A couple of times, I narrowly missed being arrested and beaten up by the police. It was by then clear that the popular uprising all over the country was unyielding and there could only be one conclusion.

The civil disobedience movement went on without let or laxity until all the leaders were released and the British government started serious negotiations for India's independence in 1944. Bombay's attention then had been diverted by a great fire, which started in one of the cargo ships berthed in the harbour and spread rapidly to the docks, warehouses and surrounding city areas. Life was totally disrupted for almost a month as the fire spread from one area to another and engaged the attention of both the people and the provincial government. But as the fire died down, peoples' resistance resumed. Bombay's labour in textile mills and workshops, public facilities and railways, ship construction and dockworkers, students and teachers all went on a strike. To crown it all, seamen and officers of the Indian navy virtually mutinied. Sardar Patel (who later became India's Home Minister) had to fly down from Delhi and persuade them to wait until the negotiations with the viceroy were complete. But when an agreement was finally reached and India attained freedom from colonial rule in August 1947, the country was partitioned with gruesome consequences which have yet to be remedied.

Several changes had also occurred meanwhile in my personal affairs. Vakil, who had been appointed economic adviser to the newly set up department of planning and development in the Government of India, took me along with him as his research officer, which gave me a first taste of British bureaucratic culture. We were soon back in Bombay, pursuing our usual interests. A little later, I was appointed a lecturer in the USES in a leave vacancy, which among others meant that I had to vacate my room in the university hostel as I ceased to be a student.

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By sheer coincidence, a silver lining appeared on the dark clouds. During my short tenure in the planning and development department, I had been persuaded by Vakil to apply for one of the many scholarships offered by the Government of India for advanced research in the UK and the US. This materialised in the summer of 1947 and admission was secured in the London School of Economics (LSE).

Between my return to Bombay from Delhi and my departure for London, two events of life-long importance and pleasure happened. First and foremost, I got married to a second cousin of mine, Madhura, with whose family my father had close relations and whom I had got to know when, as a temporary teacher in the local college, I lived in her father's house for some months. We had thus an opportunity to know each other, though not intimately. The wedding was in May 1947 at her father's place. Within weeks, I had to leave for Bombay to prepare for my voyage to London and we could not really spend much time together. Nor could I take her with me to London as my scholarship was barely adequate for my keep. We thus had no alternative to pursuing our studies separately, thousands of miles away from each other. It was only after my return to India to work for the Planning Commission in Delhi that we could set up house together.

By the time I left for London many changes had occurred in the family. My father had again been posted in Mysore, and three of my six sisters had been married. The household at that time consisted of my aged grandmother, my parents, my brother Narayana Swamy and his wife, besides my young sisters and an even younger brother Srinivas. My brother's bookshop was some distance away from home but within easy reach of the colleges and high schools. It had also become a meeting place for the local intelligentsia, especially Kannada literati of the younger generation. Narayana Swamy had been deeply engaged in translating Gandhian writings into Kannada. It was in his bookshop that I gathered my literary legacy.

V

I left for London in late August 1947, soon after India's first Independence Day on a British steamer which had not yet been reconverted to civilian use. Some 90 of us going abroad for higher studies were billeted in a deck house built for transporting troops to theatres of war, with rows of three-tiered bunks and common baths. The cabins on the decks were occupied by British civilian and military officers who were returning home after their India stint. Though we could wander around freely on the decks, we were not altogether welcome in lounges or the main dining hall. The deck-house we occupied was obviously meant for subalterns of the British army who could not mix freely with captains and above or with British members of the Indian Civil Service (ICS). However, the library and sports deck were part of the common space for all passengers. We had sailed during the monsoon, when the Arabian Sea was very rough and wet and it was not until we were in the Suez Canal that deck-sports became possible. But the library which consisted mostly of light reading was open all the time and many of us spent our waking hours there or in the few covered enclosures on the upper decks. We docked in London after about a fortnight and took the special train to St Pancras station where we were received by a couple of India House officials who helped us reach wherever we were housed. I was taken to a hostel for Indian students in Kensington Gardens Square run by the University of London. I lived there until my return to India.

My first week in London was spent on arrangements for living in the hostel for a long time. Virtually everything was in short supply in post-war Britain and strictly rationed. I was advised by the hostel authorities to obtain the essential documents for registration as a student, secure ration books, and open a bank account. With some assistance, I found my way to the Indian High Commissioner's office (India House) for the entitlement to the LSE. Armed with these, I could quickly secure from the ration book of "points", which were to be surrendered with each purchase of milk, foodstuff, clothes, chocolates, tobacco and so on. While meat and eggs were rationed, fish, fruits and vegetables were not – but for that reason, tended to be expensive. Likewise, though one could buy lunches and dinners in restaurants, they did not come cheap and could be had only occasionally. The next few days I spent getting to know the local bus and train routes as well as the shops and eating places in the vicinity.

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The two and a half years I spent in London were not hard, despite the rationing of food and the limited funds at my disposal. At the LSE, I soon got to know British and other students who were well off and could afford to invite me to their homes or take me out for lunches at expensive restaurants, concerts and plays. Most of them, especially the Canadians, Americans and South Africans, lived well and entertained frequently. These were also occasions for them to know more about India, its politics and economics, besides Indian society and culture. Not that I was an expert on any of these, but their knowledge of these matters was limited or deeply influenced by British versions of India, and they were eager to speculate on which way "Independent India" would go. Some of the political students (like Pierre Trudeau, who later become the Canadian Prime Minister) were aware of Prime Minister Nehru's leanings towards socialist programmes, as well as Gandhi's preference for rural reconstruction, and they strongly believed that India was more likely to move towards the Soviet model rather than the US one. These *addas* (informal exchanges) went on for hours, with much consumption of beer, cigarettes and good food.

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Returning to India after an absence of almost three years was something of a shock. London was populous but organised; in contrast, Bombay seemed very crowded and confusing. Tickets for train journeys had become difficult to obtain and it was only through the intervention of a senior official of the railway company that I could secure one to go to Bangalore. Even so, I reached a day later than expected, much to the disappointment of my wife and others who had gathered the previous evening at the station. So was I

by the delay. When I went home to Mysore with my wife, they were happy to see me but it took some time for us to feel easy with one another. Needless to say, I was greatly relieved to see them in reasonable health and spirits. I was not in a hurry to report to the Government of India, as my wife and I were seeing each other after nearly three years and we could not have enough of each other. I also took time off to see my professor and others in the economics department of the old college. ❖

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