

Samples from Very High and Very Low

G.V. Desani's column Very High and Very Low ... appeared almost 50 years ago in The Illustrated Weekly of India. Here are several sample columns:

Acharya Shri Uncommitted! Rendezvous for the Rites

February 26, 1967

(To *Panah mia*, from Bombay, *Salaams*). The first shock of the day was the door bell ringing. *Dragging* myself – had forgotten to switch it off – I opened the door and thereupon the following uncivil exchange took place. *Canvasser*: “Rice?” *Self*: “It’s illegal, damn you!” and I closed the door on him. There is a shortage of food in the country. I am against illegal dealings in food. Next, saw a photograph in the leading daily of President Sukarno of Indonesia, in shirt sleeves, *sans* the tunic, the baton, the medals, the cap! An unbelievable *reduction!* I had barely exclaimed “*What next!*” when the editor’s personal assistant rings up!

P.A.: “There is a postcard stamped ‘urgent’ and signed ‘Acharya Shri’. It says, ‘I can see you today at 2’ ...” (A Sion address, Bombay postal district, followed.) *Self*: “Does he give me a choice? This is proposed at very short notice!” *P.A.*: “He does not say. He adds on the reverse side of the card that he is staying in a buff house.” *Self (after a pause)*: “I’ll go.”

The last time Durai and I – with Raja – called on this fellow, at the editor’s suggestion, he had set himself up as an inmate of a classy lunatic asylum, you will remember. Following our ‘interview’ – without much help from him, I made a fool of myself, more or less – he sent me a card asking me to define ‘insanity’ for him. After that we haven’t had a word from him.

Now this card, and the fellow's out and uncommitted! (This city has more than its share of the insane, although this is no place for a lunatic to be lost in – you might not know one from another. I am slipping, mia. Poor phrasing. I have had a *most* trying day!)

Arrived at the Sion address at two minutes to two and the taxi dropped me outside the buff house. Now the scene.... First, visualize a triangle, mia, its apex pointing down: the technical terms for it would be a *Śakti trikona*, wouldn't it? Such a figure would be formed by three straight lines, the apex pointing down. Now, if you take away the top horizontal line, and imagine instead the front of the buff house, the two sloping lines radiating from the house front as made up of some 12 men standing still and facing one another – so forming the two lines. A veritable crowd!

When I parted company with the taxi – turned towards the door, I wanted to say, precisely, “I am looking for Archarya Shri. I have an appointment with him...” The lines of men standing were the barrier and I could not proceed to the door and say my piece. Instead, I turned to a solemn man in the line, the man nearest to me, and as I was about to ask him a question, he manipulated his forefinger to form a sign of interrogation, and pressed it on his upper lip – which gesture would be a solemn greeting (Sind/Punjab fashion) and he whispered to me to wait. Therefore, and hence, I stood there, in the line, exposed to the sun. It is 100 degrees Fahrenheit in the *shade* in Bombay. It seemed poor form to open the umbrella since everyone else in the line was without an umbrella.

Several people joined the lines of men now. A recent arrival walked between the lines and I thought it a good opportunity to get out of the sun and I followed him. But someone coming out of the buff house whispered to me, “*Shishya?*” Not being a *shishya*, a disciple, I said, lowering my tone, “Admirer.” “Please wait,” he whispered, folding his hands apologetically, and I was back in the guard of honor, and baking for another quarter of an hour or so. We were simply standing there, solemn and waiting, and only stirred if someone arrived and

joined us. I wanted to leave altogether but it was awkward.... Reached a point and I wanted to scream, what the devil are we waiting for? Why are we whispering?

At that stage, a small black ambulance arrived. What with the suspense and the sun – any moment a throbbing headache expected – and the parched throat, the ambulance alarmed me good and proper and I thought that I had arrived at an unfortunate hour indeed, and they had come for him, the poor devil, to take him away....

It was then that I took a below-the-belt punch of a surprise! Acharya Shri came out of the buff house, walked through the guards of honor lines, walked up to the driver of the ambulance, and whispered some instructions to him. He walked past me, nodding to me once, and by then I had little initiative left in me to demand of him an explanation and to pull him up about our appointment.... Wanted to ask him aside what the deuce was I doing standing in the sun, looking like a brass monkey, holding an umbrella in one hand, and the portable tape recorder in the other, looking no less solemn than the men to the left and right of me. I had walked into it, mia. How do I get out of it? That was the question....

To help you to appraise the situation better, here's some detail.... He was wearing a silk *dhoti*, *loongi*-wise, his chest bare. The chest was covered with abundant hair, curling hair with a good many silver curls, and he was wearing a gold chain – a man's ceremonial necklace – and it hung over the curling hair. By *any* standard, mia, the fellow looked *beautiful!* He had a muscular, an athletic body, and had all the subtle and exquisite supplements and complements which gave me a firm impression of *beauty*. It is over such virile blaze, or trifles, that women lose their heads and hearts altogether!

After a few minutes some 20 men emerged from the buff house – Acharya Shri among them – carrying a corpse on its traditional bamboo bed. *Without a sound or a sob*, it was deposited inside the ambulance. There were women inside the house, in fact several followed the corpse to the ambulance, as quiet as can be, no clamor at all, and their behavior struck me as

odd, almost hysterical, considering the noise, the weeping, the lamenting and moaning, that *always* follows such acts of God in India....

The lines broke up and I took the left turn, darting somewhat sharpish, to get out of it, and would have given a week's expense account for a rapid-fire taxi.... Some fellow's gone the way of all flesh, passed on, perished, paid a debt to nature, succumbed, *etc.*, none of *my* business, quite frankly ... and it was then that he approached me. I managed a mourner's apologetic, anemic smile of a sort, and noticed that he had a young women with him – placed her at a very attractive 30 – and he introduced her, quite simply, as, “Dr. Sundiri, my finance...” I mumbled – *mumbled* is right – “Dr. Sundiri ...” and – considering the assumed *ante*, the current, and the *post-mortem* proceedings – did not add the formal, “... I hope you will be very happy....”

Several cars now appeared as if from nowhere – must have been parked around the corner – followed by the family jeep. He held the door for me and – having failed in the manner described by me, *mia*, to wing my way out – I got into the jeep and Acharya Shri followed me. About 80 women of all ages, could have been more, and children, now came out of the buff house and stood with folded hands as we all drove off.

The little black ambulance leading, the caravan following, I endured more rough treatment in the jeep. The wind blowing as a typhoon, and our jeep accelerated, one's hair stood on edge and stayed on edge. I did not know who the deuce we were cremating, and what the blazes was *I* doing in a flying jeep, playing the mourner anyway! He had no business to waste my time like that! No business at all!

At the *shamshan* – crematorium – we were given – as a ‘charity’ – draughts of *dharmaoo* water to drink. In this city, you pay for water if it isn't *dharmaoo* – righteous, given away as charity. As a conditional satisfaction, *mia*, *thirst* from heat and the sun, the condition, and *quenching* it, along with a couple of aspirins, utter gratification – there is *nothing* to beat such simple pleasures! *Dharmaoo* water and aspirins!

Our party of about 100 divided itself into groups: the *karamakandis* – those who had things to do, the cremators – and *us*, the mourners. The mourners settled down in the shade, under the trees, for *gyana goshti* – the ancient Hindu topic, “the phenomena (*sansar*) is unreal, God (Rama and his name) alone is real (*sat*),” *etc.* (This posture lasts till you get back to the phenomena – to home and business. Then Rama and his name would seem ‘unreal’. The passing mood is called *shamshan vairagya*, temporary dispassion following a visit to a crematorium.)

The *karamakandis* – Shri among them – ignited the pyre and I remember only the brackish taste and the pungent odor of burning flesh, and logs of wood, sticks of sandal, coconuts – about 50 were addressed to the pyre as pious offerings by the *karamakandis* – camphor, incense, aromatic leaves, flowers, milk, *ghee*. The tincture of it all became quite mismated when they threw handfuls of a yellow powder – sulphur – into the flames. Helps combustion. Didn’t know sulphur was being used. It is a disgrace and a liberty with the ritual. And no poetry in it, of course.

After about two hours of it and the ceremonial breaking of the twigs and touching our tongues with bits of candy and some mango pickle and a little water – we symbolically broke our connection with the deceased and resumed eating and drinking as *per* before.... Declined his offer of a ride in the jeep, agreed to keep in touch, took a taxi.... Noticed that Chesty’s fine curls were powdered white with the drifting cremation ash and – verification by the bathroom mirror – so were my head, the eyebrows and the eyelashes. Made one feel like a ghoul!

It only remains to be added, *mia*, that the party that went heavenwards was a *sadhu*, holy man – hence no tears or laments. Not done. Was Dr. Sundiri’s folk’s *guru*. I find it a pattern of behavior among wealthy classes in Bombay to have a *guru* – to deal with the nagging feeling of guilt, in my way of thinking, rather than from a desire to be disciplined or be spiritually guided. He happened to be visiting Dr. Sundiri’s folk.... Unforeseen by Shri, had a heart attack, and, well, in

spite of the best efforts, *etc.* ... *(To Panah sahib):* Add here the Mark Twain quotation on death I have saved. Will do.)

Aftermath

Editor to American Exchange Student: For academic reasons, Bob, you might ask him if he has any respect for the dead.

A.E.S.: Pronto, Super!

(Long distance trunk call from Panah sahib to the sub-editor): I am sorry I am late. It took me so long to find the quotation because No. 1 is cleaning up. He complains the sahib does not allow him long enough in the library to dust and clean. Here is the quotation: "*Whosoever has lived long enough to find out what life is, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first great benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world.*"

Our Resident Idiot Balances Against Bores

March 4, 1967

Raja and I have been to tea with friend Durai, our Resident Idiot, who is visiting Bombay. We walked through narrow avenues, alleyways, of the farthest suburb of the city: marigolds growing to the left of us and marigolds growing to the right of us. It has rained here. And the earth is green and gravid. We are expecting fresh flowers. Very soon we shall be seeing all the rainbow colors burst forth, all the fragrant ones will *attar* our air. That's what happens during and after the rains.

(*To the Temporary Secretary*): "To work now. Switch her on!"

"It has been on."

"A minor favor, miss. If it is not too much to ask. A reminder, actually.... Our tape recorder is *her*. The transistorized portable is *it*. If this distinction is not observed, I am likely to be confused. We have two recorders, remember. *Her* is there. And the other is Haruko."

"Haruko?"

"A Japanese common name for a girl. It is a Japanese recorder. I think the name suits it."

"I shall remember."

"Thank you. Let's tape a few words on our friend Durai...."

"I am so glad that he was here and well. He has had prosperous parents. I am glad of that, too. Another poverty-stricken Indian married man would be another national and international liability. His wife's charming. Both are 30 – healthy, young, vigorous. Their baby girl is *such* a darling!

(*To T.S.*): "Did you see her three such *tiny* teeth?"

“I didn’t notice....”

“You are missing a great deal of beauty, if you don’t mind my saying so.”

... If you want to know what an exceptional fellow Durai is.... He has never once minded being called our Resident Idiot. Always laughed about it. He hasn’t the nauseating inferiority complex of some people, which makes them such compulsive throw-their-weight-around types. “We are *somebody* too....”, “... our shops”, “... our managers”, “... our cars”, “our ...” Such chop suey!

The type never fails to show the teeth at any kind of a mishap or misfortune to others; a physical deformity or disease: to a cripple slipping on a wet pavement, he says: “*Ho! Ho! Well done, baba!*” His woman comments on a reported robbery with violence – a girl robbed of her jewelry on a lonely Bombay beach – “*Who* told you to go there, *ha! ha!*” Concerning a bankruptcy of a rival, his son, registering a mock surprise, says, “*Merchant squatting? hee! hee!*” The type’s pleased to call these reactions a *sense of humor*. (He has no word or words in his own language for *sense of humor*. Faced with a similar problem, a writer, I see, has adapted and rendered in Hindi “sex” as “*sax*”: “*Saxivarjita*” is Hindi for *sexual* taboo.)

A *sense of humor*, if anything, is an *attitude*, surely. Durai has it. He can see himself with a measure of detachment; and, therefore, can laugh at himself.

The type? While always ready to laugh at anybody’s adversity, he considers himself – and his hen, the chicks, and the shavings from the family tree – *as above*, and any criticism *intolerable!*

The human fool, as a phenomenon, is an imperfect manifestation. Obviously. At the other pole, you have the perfect manifestation, the genius, pure intelligence or near enough. (I would rather not cite, name, specify perfect manifestation. It might start some people arguing.) In between there is the common horde, the *folk*, the *janata*. A deadly sort,

in that crowd, is the Indian genus of the bore. (Friend Durai is not a *bore*. We should avoid him if he were a *bore*.)

The *bore* I am thinking of lives through nearly half a century and does not know better. He does not know that it might not be quite good *form* for his woman to pick her nose in the presence of guests. He does not know ... is insensitive to noise. The women of his household yell in the most unbecoming manner imaginable – they can't hear one another speak, as the radio is on at the full – and the man himself, from a sickening inferiority complex, cannot lower his own voice. And in the presence of his guests – in this case, European salesmen and American trade representatives, who hold their feelings entirely in check, as the *yogis* and hermits do, and might wager their souls even for an 'order' – he indulges as follows: attends to his *post-dining* ablutions, bending into the wash-basin, which is in the dining room, with style and polish, and *refinement*: noisily draws the rheum from the nostrils, spits into the basin, slopping and spouting water from the mouth as a gargoyle, laves the tonsils area, expels air out of the bronchia, coughs out the lymph and phlegm and sundry matters, massages the gums and teeth with the flat of his forefinger, irrigates the nose – this being his *yoga* practice for the day, the *jala neti*: "It is very good for you..." he says, and (turns towards the Bank Manager's wife, an American, who mumbles, "Very interesting...") – soaps the curry stains and the pickle off his fingers, and finally gargles the works, setting a wholesome example to the wife, the three B.Com.'s present, and his sons and a son-in-law, the guests and their women. (The wash basin in the dining room is a status symbol, a *must*, as is the Western style closet. The *paramā pujā* – the severely revered – forefathers and mothers never had it so good.)

The *bore* I am reminded of does not know better than to talk of constipation – his, the wife's, anybody's, or as the general state of – at a formal gathering: and to wear a classy *dhoti*, especially at weddings. (Diaphanous? *Rather!* Exposing his treasures? *Why not!* What is more, we can *afford* it! The very best Ahmedabad! That's where this quality stuff comes from!) He does not know better than to ask, in mixed company – another

formal occasion, by the way – where the *sanctum sanctorum* is (wherein, incidentally, all the *post*-dining actions cited above may be freely and carefreely performed, although less noisily), and with a cordial smile, gives the hostess the reason for the request: “Urine!” He does not know better than to enlighten his European and American guests with, “It is the Hindu woman who *serves!* Your lady only wants good time!” And it is past him to imagine that the people whom he might be wanting to impress *could* be laughing behind his back if the woman of his household – age approaching 30, 40 – address their mother as “Mummy!” or assume the nursery manner, and shout “Tata!” when seeing off the guests.

The point is that the man does not know that there is anything unseemly or *wrong* at all in his behavior or with his household or with his color schemes and decorations – except when it is all tailor-made, the handloom textiles of the architect and the interior decorator’s devising. The reading matter – the film magazines – and the complementary calendars on the walls further reveal his class. If he *knew*, he might mend his ways: and he might not expose himself to ridicule, and as often. Now, suppose, risking unpleasantness – from the very kindest motives – you *tell* him!

Being an imperfect manifestation – that is putting it as charitably as one can – he *fights* you all the way. Justifies himself. Rationalizes. It is the Indian way.... *And he* has a grievance. He *fed* you, fussed over you, and being the scum you are, what do you do? – you abuse his hospitality. That is what you do. You ‘spy’ on him, and his family, take his salt and jeer at him! Call this *gratitude*? Is that what we get for being kind? Is this the *profit*? (The fellow’s always looking for *profit* – except profiting from helpful advice or keen but kind criticism. He does *bhakti*, too, daily, and is devoted to God, for his benefit, *profit*.)

While not disputing that a certain *immature type* – a neurotic type cannot accept a correction without smarting and having his or her feelings hurt, *reward* (praise) and *punishment* (blame) are the only means known to one to teach, to educate, to reform,

to make complete (perfect). But this fellow, with his peculiar mentality, cannot bear to suffer a *loss*. He *invested* in you. He did not do this from charity – if that were possible, he might spare a thought or a *paisa* piece for the starving and the destitute – or for the love of God – he had already offered and set aside a quarter of a *chapati*, a portion of his daily bread, and equitably met *that* obligation – or for any love at all. He *invested* in you because he wanted your entire approval and *allegiance*. If the foreign relations men of a state want your entire approval, and *allegiance*, to my certain knowledge, there is a hard currency procedure about it. This fellow does it with his home cooking, petty cash, and *khushamad* – sham welcoming, sycophancy, flattery, the Oriental carpet-spreading for your honorable feet, boot-licking, cunning, faking, make-believe....

Durai is not at all like that. Panah said to me, “He was very happy to see you. He kept telling his wife, ‘Maestro is coming!’ He was so excited.”

(*To T.S.*): “The important thing to do is to play his baby girl on our little Harukosan. I did get her cooing. And there is the lovely birdsong in the background. You know why babies are such wonderful people? They are *clean* – in the sense of being innocent, guileless, unsullied. Just like saints – after they have got over their pains, hurts, struggles, and after they have done with sinning and seen God....”

Note: B.Com is Bachelor of Commerce, the most sought after degree for his sons and sons-in-law by the fellow I have written about.

Paradise, Paradise! "...thou Paradise of exiles, Italy!"

March 25, 1967

(To *Panah sahib*, from Bombay 26, *salaams*).... So I said, over the phone to that nitwit, Pribhijot Aylmalani ... as recorded on our portable....

“... As I was saying, Miss A. ... I took advantage of the stop-over facility again and got off the plane to visit the Italiano Lakeland.... Well, after I made a note to look up just what is *ora-scusi*, she’s the wind, direction S.E. to S.W. blowing in Northern Italy, I deferentially quote the late maestro Norman Douglas – and a dip in the *lago* – the lake – the lunch was a memorable *ravioli* and meat balls. The *cameriere* announced trout – *frutta di lago*, I bet you miss the Indus Sindhuri *palo* fish in Bombay! – and also certain Italiano specialties for dinner. After feeding on the said trout, and the specialties, *via Navene*, and avoiding the fork to Desenzene, we drove to Riva, which is put forward as *La perla del Garda*. (“What is that?”) ... The pearl of the *lago* – lake Garda.

“Arrived at Piazza 3 November and I hesitated if I buy or not buy a key-holder shaped as a camera. Not buy. Currency shortage. Deficit financing. (You there at Finance Ministry in New Delhi, *pujyā* Finance Minister Morarji Desai! You all right? *Thik hai?*) Declined the offered Havana. Used to smoke 60 or so cigarettes a day for *years* ... never touch the stuff, and no cigars.... A pause at Piazza Italia, an *espresso* in cut glass, and we drove through the tunnel and the trees. The laurel and lemon trees abound by the hotel terraces too. And between the gentle lapping of the waters of the lake, and reflections of the lights, I overheard a man in a boat singing – the theme of *amore*. Local custom if you are courting. Sounded sad to me. (‘Why?’)

“Next morning, I was determined to *watch*. Keep thought on the *self*. Be mindful of the *self*. All who aim at perfection, must watch the devil (*self*), so someone has said or I have said....

'Psst!' the English boy hissed, to attract my attention. A small wren! If a wren, it is a member of the bird family *stellini*, Norman Douglas says, and weighs 5 to 9 grams. Anyway, this was a *little* bird and *very* happy to have seen it. I thanked the English boy.... If you want a haircut, *signor*, the cameriere said to me, go past the former residence of the Capitalo del Lago – now the municipal office – on your way to the Scaligeri Castle, near enough, and the Goethe notice on the wall, and there is the barber shop. Goethe, the poet, visited here once, you understand ('I understand.')

"At about noon, we made for Verona. Among its attractions is a monument to Durante – the poet Alighieri Dante, a possible ancestor of Jimmy Durante. Exiled by Florence, the said lord of left canto was given refuge in Verona by one Bortolomeo Della Scala. Other *turista* sights to see are the alleged tomb of Juliet Capulet and *consequential* Veronese art and architecture. They have hereabouts a Piazza called Bra – not the shortened version of *brassiere*, pardon, but a form of Latin *pratum*, a meadow.

"Well, on our way, I saw very many olives. On the fringe of the lake, there were the loveliest oleanders. The trees and flowers are so *vivid* in this light. Exiled from Italy, *the Paradise of exiles*, as Shelley said, I want to remember, for *years* to come, these trees, and to mention them, and *often*, and the hyacinth too. The air was so warm and clean and everything *beautiful*. This kind of a sudden encounter with beauty makes one feel exiled from the earth, to say nothing of Italy, and yearn to fly, fly with wings, over the seas, the oceans, and to whatever is beyond, and to *dream*... A party of young people drive past us on motorcycles, their girls are beating toy drums at us as a greeting, interrupting my spacious and vasty dream....

"... Inspired, I decided I must *think* – contemplate – think of *infinite* space, and of *infinite* time.... Something I read in an ancient unpublished manuscript and I remembered it.... 'To *shrink time into a circle and to be outside the circle*' and so to know all, *all*, you understand! ('How should I understand? I don't know it!')

“We’ll m’dear Miss A., the Italian-like *Signor* Rossini – is *gay*. He likes decorated *strada*: decorates his highways and roads with ads, and more ads, the petrol – *la benzina* – ads leading.... And he likes his opera. In the city of Verona, the citizenry inherit a Roman amphitheater. In the restored interior of the said amphitheater, some 24,000 opera lovers – *signors* and *signoras* – can be seated. The Roman acoustics are so good that *elettrico* microphones and the amplifiers are unnecessary....

“You enter the amphi, and see things! What Roman arches! These now house several *toiletta*. It is from these *toiletta* that real Roman lions used to emerge for Augustus Caesar’s sport, and help themselves to a Christian soul, the audience pointing thumbs to the sky or the earth, as the case might be, and nary a care for the march of civilization, the surge of *vino* and the swell of macaroni! (No shortage of macaroni or prohibition of *vino* in this, the land of the luscious grape, music, love, violence and *temperament*!)

“Looking again at the arches, in awe, I said to the host for the evening, ‘Si. It’s a *solemn* thought, *signor*, that real lions could issue from these *toiletta*, and confront a homo individual, of necessity visiting one of these *toiletta*!’ He commented the *eminente Indiano signor* is *molto divertente*! Which is to say dam’ funny! (He was giggling, *si*.)

“In the amphi, Miss A., the *bello* stage was set, meanwhile. In the same row with us were sitting several flashy, over-dressed, over-brilliantined, after-shave lotioned, Milano-turned *mezzo-signors* ... hm ... *pseudo-gents*. A girl was marching up and down, between the rows, yelling, but a few inches farther from one’s ears, ‘*Il programma, cinquanta lire!*’ I can’t stand noise, you understand. (‘I understand.’)

The 24,000-strong audience then lighted the candles. An old Italiano custom. Found it terrifying. Was suffering from a potent wave of anxiety over the theme of fire insurance. What if the amphi caught fire? Near enough 10,000 candles were lit!

“Then the 24,000 started *hissing*! Everyone was *shh*...ing everyone else, *shh! shh!* ... and, in the process, making more

noise than the fellow *shhed*! It was the nearest thing to a brawl! *Mobocracy!* The *shh.. shhing* started largo-legatowise, increased in volume *acceletando*, and ended up *prestisso-staccato*, and it started all over again! *shh ... shh....* There were, too, yells of '*Attenzione! Ascolti! Ferma!*' – which means, approximately, 'Shut up!', and 'Stop it!' – and the girl kept on insisting too, '*Il programma, cinquanta lire!*' ... *cinquanta lire!*'

"It was *insufferable!* I and my companion, quite frankly, were of the *cognoscenti*. The *cognoscenti* comprehend art. The *cognoscenti* have art-intellect. The *bourgeoisie* do not comprehend art. The *bourgeoisie* have no art-intellect. The *bourgeoisie* make *noise!*

"*Piano*, boys! That's what I wanted to tell 'em. *Silence! La musica* must be contemplated! Art must be *surrendered to*, *signori! Piano! Peace!*

"Meanwhile – mercifully – the maestro arrived on the stage, *toned the aria, prima! prima!* And do-re-me had the better of 'em.

"The house went down completely with shattering yells – *Bravo! Bravo!* – when an overdressed *signor* addressed the stage Maria Louise – she weighed a modest ton or two – on the mamma-theme, with *Madre! Madre!* a call to, and a nostalgia for, so I thought, the prime mother, the *Magnus Mater*, the *Madre*, the *matushri*, you understand ... the basic hen of 'em all, though the object of his passionate outburst, his call and nostalgia, was on the stage – the said two-ton *Madre* Maria Louise – there, and facing him, putting up with the fellow's spirited singing. (End, *Act I*.)

"By the end of *Act II* – after the *Madre* was sent to jail, and after she addressed an *aria* to the there nostalgic *signor*, with *Grazie!* which was followed by the loudest '*Bravo!*' '*Bravo!*' yet yelled by the 24,000 – it was *avanti* for me!

"Violence had been done to the nerves, Miss A. The opera had not been enjoyed, Miss A. The music wasted, Miss A. If it had

been one *signor*, easy to knock the daylights out of him.
Possibly. Possibly. But 24,000 of 'em, rowing!

“In Verona, to get even, they spit on the walls of the amphi...
(*Spitting*, in Italian, is *sputare*, Miss A.)”

... Ye'll tak' the high road, an' I'll tak' the low road,
An' I'll be in Scotland before 'ye ... (refrain) Loch Lomand!

March 11, 1967

(*To Panah mia*, from Bombay, *salaams*.) I have moved over to the suburb – among other reasons – to escape the telephone.... Too many callers. Too many invitations to dinners. There's a food shortage in the country but the anti-social element – climbers, status-asserters – has too much bread, butter, rice, spice, meat, curry.... Now give ear to the following excerpt from a palaver over the telephone with Miss Pribhijot Aylmalani, as recorded on our portable....

“... As I was saying, Miss Aylmalani, people *need* excitement, action. I don't. (Miss A.: ‘You sure?’) I am for *inaction*, more or less. Fact is, I am over-stimulated by things I hear and see. I admit it ... I met an exiled Scot in Bombay once. He burst into poetry talking of the *faraway* country and of Loch Lomand. I don't succumb to propaganda easily. Been done too often. And Robert Burns had worked on me before I met this Scot.... *Ye banks and braes o' bonny Doon, / How can ye bloom sae fresh banks and braes o' bonny Doon, / How can ye chant, ye little birds, And sae weary fu' o' care?* Burns sang, too.... *The sweetest hours that I e'er spent, / Are spent among the lassies, O!* A sensualist, obviously. Do you know these lines, Miss A.? (‘How should I know those lines? I am not clever like you!’)

“Well, this Scot I met in Bombay.... His obvious sincerity impressed me, you understand. So I took advantage of the stop-over facility offered by *bak'shish* air ride and got off at Glasgow. It was cold enough to freeze your wits, you understand. (‘I understand.’) I went to Waterloo Street for the bus to Balloch. I asked the bus inspector if I had five minutes for a cup of tea to warm up. He said there was a bus running every five minutes.

“Seemed incredible. I had doubt if ever I would be seeing Loch Lomond. And he said a bus was running to that very spot every few minutes! Life is full of surprises! (‘You sure?’)

“I walked into a café. A man facing me at the table stretched his hand towards me. I shook it. No choice, Miss A. I asked him if he lived in Glasgow.

“He did and didn’t. Actually, Glasgow was his *mother port*. He spoke poor English and with a Scottish accent. I asked him to tell me something of himself.

“He wrote down his name in my notebook. A Pole. A sailor. I suggested that I call him Jetzek Wencheslaus ... easier and simpler to pronounce... He joined a Polish ship in Glasgow once. That is why he said Glasgow was his *mother port*. He had visited Bombay many times. He spent the last Christmas in Bombay. For reasons of his own, he liked Indians ‘too much’. That is why he wanted to shake hands with me.

“He asked me questions. I told him why I had stopped over at Glasgow. ‘The airline offered a group of writers a free trip to Europe and one American city. I got off here ... I want to see Loch Lomond.’

“He finished his coffee. Then he entrusted to me his leather overcoat. He said he was free and not doing anything particular. He said, ‘You wait for me, no?’ ‘I don’t mind,’ I said. ‘There are plenty of buses to Balloch.’

“I waited till he returned for his overcoat. I found a copy of the *Gas Times* on the table. There is a paper called that, did you know! (‘I don’t go to Glasgow. How should I know?’)

“Well, Miss A., he returned, and dressed as an airman, I thought: complete with heavy gloves and an impressive leather helmet. He had a spare outfit. Oily zippered over-trousers, too, and goggles, too. He suggested I wear those.

“A surprising development.... (‘I should think so!’) ... Quite. He said he was going to drive me to Loch Lomond. It was very cold up there.

“ ‘High?’ I asked, in strictly mountaineering terms. ‘*Hi!*’ he said affably. No option. He was so friendly. I asked the café manageress if and where could I dress up for the heights. I was going to Loch Lomond. She suggested the stairs. Stairs it was.

“I don’t think I am quite the excessively self-conscious type. I had a feeling though that I looked a sight, walking awkwardly in the streets of Glasgow, in that outfit, Jetzek and I attracted attention. No rude remarks, mind you, although a good many youngsters did see us walking down Renfield Street, down Sauchiehall Street ... and we stopped outside a garage. It was then that he brought the thing out. He *dragged* it out of the garage.

“I am not fussy, Miss A. (‘You sure?’) but I am very reluctant about it – absolutely no talent for it – and altogether avoid *cycling*. I tried a bicycle once. To save time, you know ... suffered a fall and left it at that. My neurotic – almost hysteric – preoccupation with dignity, you understand.... If anything, a motorcycle is worse than a bicycle, although I had never ridden one before.

“ ‘Don’t you drive a car?’ I asked him. ‘Motor bike, plenty good. Plenty excitement!’ he said.

“My argument that excitement is something to be *avoided* – any sort of an *intense* action, in fact – did not help. He was too highly strung ... tuned up. We were going to Loch Lomond riding on this thing. I was to sit at the back. What was I to do with my hands? ‘Sit like you sit on a *cheer*,’ he said.

“The other thing I was supposed to do – apart from sitting as if I were seated on a chair – was this: should I find him swaying to the left, I was to throw my weight on the right, and the other way round. They call it *balancing*.

“Out of Glasgow and the suburbs, Jetzek came into his own. He didn’t spare my feelings or anyone else’s on the road. He raced anyone at all. Ours was the better machine, real *power*, he pointed out proudly, over the shoulder, minimum cruising speed 60....

“Well, seeing the Clyde Side, the Kilpatrick Hills, and what all Scottish beauty that lies between Glasgow and Loch Lomond, at times racing at 70, 80 and over miles an hour, is no joke if you are minding the *balance* all the time, throwing your weight about left or right and *vice versa*.

After about 20 minutes of it, I realized that I never in all my life had suffered such a state. The last World War was a child’s play. I was in it. It was the immediate suspense, the immediate super-action and the immediate excitement of *this* experience that made all the difference. The blast from the bombs could compare with the furious felons I encountered. I hadn’t reached the stage when one doesn’t care one way or other about what happens to one.

“We reached a point about half way to Balloch and he invited me to have some tea. I had difficulty in grasping what he was saying. The ears wouldn’t cooperate. Temporary deafness, you know. I had to be led into the tea room of the hotel. Couldn’t move my fingers inside the leather gloves. Holding on to some square inches of a motorcycle seat for all you are worth, in that cold, is no joke.... (‘Yes.’)

“With the aid of a pot of tea, and the fire in the hotel lounge, I got my ears and limbs working again. It was then that Jetzek Wencheslaus proposed that we press on and proceed to Balloch before it gets dark. He would show me Loch Lomond.

“I suggested if we did not go to Balloch and see Loch Lomond – and stayed near the fire a bit longer – would he mind very much? Suppose we got back to Glasgow before it gets dark?

“Jetzek laughed aloud as I suppose Polish sailors do. It was a hearty, very loud, and a good-natured laugh. ‘You mad man?’ he asked. ‘Do you mind?’ I asked.

“ ‘You no want to see Loch Lomond? Och, vy for you cum with me?’ ‘Plenty excitement,’ I said.

“We returned to Glasgow. It was a trial, though we weren’t racing. I tried to press some money on him. He wouldn’t hear

of it. He shook me by the hand and said that he had enjoyed *eet...*”

Pribhijot’s one of the Acharya Shri’s girl Dr. Sundiri’s friends, Panah sahib. Although not exactly the Indian version of the feather-brained dumb blonde, she’s nevertheless a nitwit. But she’s interested in things. I have recorded quite a few conversations with her....

Contemporary Comment

Nirad C. Chaudhuri sahib – referring to the late *pujyā* Nehru’s statement – ordering an attack on the Chinese in the Northern frontier – made on October 12, 1962, says in the leading daily “... *I find the actual irresponsibility was more astonishing, almost criminal. The order to attack had been canceled the previous night and Nehru was making a false statement to the people of India*” (that the Chinese were going to be attacked by Indian armed forces). He adds, “... *It is impossible to describe it as anything but a falsehood.*”

About the country’s utter unpreparedness to rush the Chinese, he says of *pujyā* V.K. Krishna Menon, “... prime responsibility ... must be borne by the then-Defense minister,” (who, he says earlier) “... left for New York to perform before the U.N.”

Them’s hard words Chaudhuri *babu!* ‘*liar!*’ ‘*performer!*’

Will *pujyā* Mrs. Gandhi defend her late *pujyā* father, *pujyā* Pundit Nehru?

Will *pujyā* Krishna Menon endorse and countenance his own posture?

Will someone *please* sue someone?

Zurich Connection – Post-election News

March 18, 1967

(*To Panah Sahib*, from Bombay 50, *salaams*.) ... Give ear to the following account based on a palaver over the phone with Miss Pribhijot Aylmalani, as recorded by our Japanese portable:

“... As I was saying, Miss A., I took advantage of the stop-over facility again, and got off the plane.... Now the last time I was in Zurich, it was wintry, and *ahem* – pardon me coughing – I stayed at an ever so homely elderly Zurich spinsters’ strictly temperance hotel. Absolutely no alcohol allowed. Otherwise the elderly spinsters make your stay as pleasant as it is possible to make, and at *most* reasonable, almost Y.M.C.A. rates.... They had satin quilts on the beds – so full and fluffy – that one had such quaint dreams! I dreamed I was an Arab and two camels were sleeping on me! (‘You sure?’)

“This time I entered the city from a different route. The need to economize ... currency restrictions ... the Reserve Bank of India won’t convert *rupees*.... Arriving in Zurich we passed the streets paved with gold (*ha, ha!*), and the watch shops where the Swiss give away samples to the tourists (*ha! ha!*), and reached a still cheaper hotel close to *la gare*. Pardon the fractured French, the station....

“Well, the first thing I did after occupying the room was to examine the double doors and windows for *noise*. Can’t stand *noise*. I locked up the lot and there wasn’t much train traffic being heard. I am sensitive to *noise*, you understand. Can’t stand it, you understand. (‘I understand.’)

“In the evening, I was out again in the streets paved with gold (*ha! ha!*). It’s a seller’s market, Miss A. You drop the gold, they pick it. I stopped for two ices, leered at the shop windows – *fab!* But no funds, pelf, if you follow. After the egg on

spaghetti – saving on the ready – I went to bed with a chocolate bar.

“I was dreaming of the Russian winters – the room was so hot, centrally-heated, and no *noise* or fresh air allowed – then things began to happen. Didn’t know that the *most* reasonably rated top floor room happened to be right under the water supply works of the hotel. *Brother!* Didn’t know what a lot of people need what a lot of water at night! Hour after hour, the tanks went on paying out, Niagaras of it! And the bleats, bumps, burps, the ever so urgent explosions!

“... And when, early in the morning, I opened the double windows for a breather, the morning *pranayama* – the deep-breathing routine – the iron and steel of the station was clanging full blast, plus the smoke, the steam, and I hastily shut the window, and respectfully recalled the spinsters’ hotel and their cozy quilts, though it costs a little more.

“It was with red eyes, therefore, that I awaited the sole agent for lunch. It is incredible, coming to think of it, that in all my years I *never* got to know the sole agent of the typewriter I have used for years and years! This fellow whom I was to meet shortly in the flesh is the Indian agent, settled in Bombay.

“*Disappointing!* There was nothing whatever to distinguish him from any other Indian man of commerce, visiting Zurich on a mission of commerce, and paying for your lunch, except possibly his angular Mrs., a French colonial from Algeria, and after the handshakes all round – ‘*Sava!*’ – in the course of which this papery, reedy, specimen of starving and diet-happy women folks, pressed one’s fingers a trifle hard – French cordiality, you understand ... we walked around the hotel, avoided the traffic, and sat down in a café, to await the Professor with his Madame, my Zurich contact. His subject’s zymurgy, precisely the last word in the great O.E. Dictionary, as is ‘A’ its first – a fermentation expert. Sitting in the café and waiting seemed like sitting on a suspected beehive. Don’t ask me why! (‘I am not asking!’)... Couldn’t tell you if you did, Miss A.

“Shook hands with the Professor ... and his Madame, and presently, the sole agent dropped a hint. He had asked me to lunch – not my contacts. Currency shortage. The foreign exchange situation being what it is.... He could stand us a millionaire’s repast in Bombay, but in Zurich, frankly, no francs, and he appended to his hint, ‘... *pardonnez-moi.*’ I was about to suggest that we do the Oriental barter act – *exchange* gifts – but by that time the lunch was ordered – it was on the zymurgy expert – and the conversation was most animated – *sarcasm*, if you follow me! *The Sole Agent* (politely polite): ‘*Merci bien!*’ *Prof.:* ‘*Monsieur!*’ *The Sole Agent’s Mrs.* (apropos of everything): ‘*ma grand-mere...*’ – her grandmother, a case of grandmother fixation – following it with ‘*très jolie!*’ – how jolly, in French, that is.

“I was working out the cost of the lunch.... Same here, Miss A., no francs, otherwise who’s leaving the ever so homely Zurich spinsters’ hotel for the *gare*. Meanwhile French fries were being passed round with the spaghetti. We had declined the steaks to keep the bill light.... Meanwhile ... *The Sole Agent:* ‘*Merci bien!*’ – he thanked us again – his *Mrs.* – continuing – ‘*ma grand-mere....*’ *Self:* -- interrupting ‘... some chips for mud-ham?’ *Mrs.* – feebly fishing a chip with a fork and feebly forcing it into her mouth – ‘*Très jolie!*’

“It was *dragging*, I can tell you. After the third beer – the drinks too were on the zymurgy expert, he is in demand by French, Italian and German winemakers – his *Frau* – correction, didn’t know she was German – asked me, ‘You believe in *der* dreamings?’ ‘Coming to think of it,’ I said, ‘I dreamt last night the Irish President asking me to inspect a guard of honor.’ ‘It is *zo* interesting!’ she said. ‘Nothing much really,’ I said. ‘A line of men with naked swords were in the guard. I failed to see the whites of their eyes, six-footers – seemed like the Irish Guards. I said to the Captain, “Schiller says, ‘*Ach, wie glücklich sind die Toten!*’ ” The Captain said *mit* apology, “Schiller says, ‘*Ach! Die welt ist sterdenden so süss!*’ ” ’ *The Sole Agent’s Mrs.* (laughing): ‘*Très jolie!*’

“We walked to my hotel and the sole agent invited everyone for a holiday in Bombay, plenty curry and *khana*, and the fermented stuff (*laugh*), and the Professor’s *Frau* said the Indians are *zo* interesting, and the *Sole Agent* said, ‘*Merci bien!*’ and his *Mrs.* said the lunch was *très bon*, and we shook hands, in the course of which she pressed one’s fingers a trifle hard, French cordiality, you follow. ‘Funny,’ I said to the *Frau*, ‘*ahimsa*, non-violence, and all that, and I dreamed of the fighting Irish, and swords and soldiers!’ ‘You *Indisch* gentlemen *zo* interesting!’ ‘Thank you for the repast and the beer, anyway.’ ‘*Bitte*,’ the *Professor* said, protesting. ‘We enjoy!’ And we all shook hands again.”

Post-election news, Panah mia. Here are a few items:

Where to mine for diamonds? An Asst. Collector of Customs, Bombay, recently recovered the remainder of the contraband – total estimated value of the diamonds Rs. 20,000,000 – in the commode of an Indian Moscow-bound Boeing.

Wrong approach? Two candidates for election to the Legislative Assembly from Bombay South did not do so well. One of the two, Sri M.V. Mulchandani, approached the voters with, “*No party, no propaganda, no polling agents, no cards, no canvassing, no money-waste.*” His motto was, “*Citizen, know thou democracy and thou wilt know the country and its welfare!*” On the posters plastered all over the city, he followed with a phrase, that might well do for a J. Krishnamurti axiom: “*Endeavor of everyone should be the total transformation of the entire idle, inactive, ambitious and possessive mind into a creative, fearless and free mind.*”

Sri K.T. Mirchandani (*alias* ‘Bhagwas’ or Lord), his *symbol* the Lion, committed himself to providing for the voter, “*Food, clothing, medical aid and instantaneous justice.*” He stood for “*Houses for all, no permit, free trade and education, less litigation and legislation, telephone in each and every house without pagri.*” Sri Mirchandani offered this revolutionary or utopian program – no *pagri!* – not only for all Indian citizens and his South Bombay voters but for “... *every human being.*”

The failure of these two idealists to be elected to the Assembly is a sorry commentary on the times, mia.

“... It is only a madcap who *will aspire to become a minister today*,” said *pujyā* C. Rajagopalachari, former Chief Minister and governor General of India. A newsman, quizzing *pujyā* K. Kamaraj, the present president of the ruling Congress Party, asked, “Will the cabinet effectively meet the challenges before the country?” *Sri Kamaraj*: “*Why do you ask?*” Newsman: “Have you given your blessing to the cabinet?” “*Yes.*” Newsman: “Before or after its formation?” *Pujyā K. Kamaraj*: “*That I do not know.*”

Sri Tenneti Vishwanathan, the defeated candidate for Speakership of the Legislative Assembly, said of *pujyā* Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, the successful candidate, “... *Some are born with a silver spoon in the mouth.*” “*You,*” he added addressing Sri N. Sanjiva Reddy, “... *are born with an office in your mouth.*” Thank you, Sri Tenneti Vishwanathan, for this ... er ... observation... much obliged.

Notes

Used to know a woman who sported a doctor’s diploma from Budapest, Art. She had no professional status as a teacher but she was in the habit of referring to any professor as ‘colleague’. She was also in the habit of quoting Schiller to me – so often that I acquired a habit of asking, and asking often, “What does Schiller say?” In our text, Schiller says, “*Ah! The world is so sweet to the dying!*” (I quoted.) And Schiller says, “*Ah! How happy are the dead.*” (the Captain quoted). The poetry is in the German and in “*Ach!*” “*Ach, mein Gott!*”

Dr. Johnson said – you might find this relevant to dying and death – “When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.”

Pagri. Premium. In Bombay, you cannot get into a rent-controlled flat or buy or sell a price-controlled piece of land without paying or earning *pagri*. Literally, turban. You crown a buyer or a seller with a new turban (*pagri*). This candidate

promised “... no *pagri*.” They didn’t vote for him: they didn’t believe him.

(Note: In addition to minor editing, the text has been Americanized.)

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