

Before the year was out, K was to undergo another psychic experience, while he was in India. On 21 February 1980, at Ojai, he dictated an account of it to Mary, who had not accompanied him to India that winter, referring to himself in the third person:

K went from Brockwood to India on 1 November 1979. He went after a few days in Madras straight to Rishi Valley. For a long time he had been awakening in the middle of the night with that peculiar meditation which has been pursuing him for very many years. This has been a normal thing in his life. It is not a conscious, deliberate pursuit of meditation or an unconscious desire to achieve something. It is very clearly uninvited and unsought. He has been adroitly watchful of thought making a memory of these meditations. And so each meditation has a quality of something new and fresh in it. There is a sense of accumulating drive, unsought and uninvited. Sometimes it is so intense that there is pain in the head, sometimes a sense of vast emptiness with fathomless energy. Sometimes he wakes up with laughter and measureless joy. These peculiar meditations, which naturally were unpremeditated, grew with intensity. Only on the days he traveled or arrived late in the evening did they stop; or when he had to wake early and travel.

With the arrival in Rishi Valley in the middle of November 1979 the momentum increased and one night in the strange stillness of that part of the world, with the silence undisturbed by the hoot of the owls, he woke up to find something totally different and new. The movement had reached the source of all energy.

This must in no way be confused with, or even thought of, as god or the highest principle, the Brahman, which are the projections of the human mind out of fear or longing, the unyielding desire for total security. It is none of those things. Desire cannot possibly reach it, words cannot fathom it, nor can the string of thought wind itself around it. One may ask with what assurance do you state that it is the source of all energy? One can only reply with complete humility that it is so.

All the time that K was in India until the end of January 1980 every night he would wake up with this sense of the absolute. It is not a state, a thing that is static, fixed, immovable. The whole universe is in it, measureless to man. When he returned to Ojai in February 1980, after the body had somewhat rested, there was the perception that there was nothing beyond this. This is the ultimate, the beginning and the ending and the absolute. There is only a sense of incredible vastness and immense beauty.

(Life and death of Krishnamurti – Mary Lutyens. Pg: 167-168).

Charity, Pinnacle of Excellence

Sir

It was heartening to read the letters on Charity (THE HINDU, Nov. 28). I am reminded of the reproduction of a painting I came across in the 1908 edition of BIBBY'S ANNUAL — a London publication. The painting was done by G.F. Watts R.A., on the suggestion of the late Carmen Sylva, the poetess Queen of Roumania for illustrating a medieval inscription which reads

What I spent, I had!

What I saved, I Lost!!

What I gave, I Have!!!

In the painting a dead knight lies on his bier, his form sufficiently revealed to suggest the mystery of death without its physical horror. Badges of honour and learning and symbols of wealth and pleasure lie strewn around his feet indicating that the knight, was one who had warmed both hands before the fire of life. All these things were once his. But what does he own now? At death comes a stocktaking says the footnote to the painting. "Much that he once prized has no value in that balance sheet. What he spent he had there and then; it went, but still he had the satisfaction of it. What he saved he leaves behind; not only money that might have been wisely used, but chances missed, opportunities neglected, good deeds intended but put off; these are irrevocably lost. He sees now the difference between wanting to take and wanting to give, for he owns only what he gave — the spirit of faithful service, his love and devotion, the noble deed and kindly word, the sacrifice for the good of others, the earnest effort to leave the world better than he found it. These have nourished and developed his soul and this it is he takes with him; the rest are vanities."

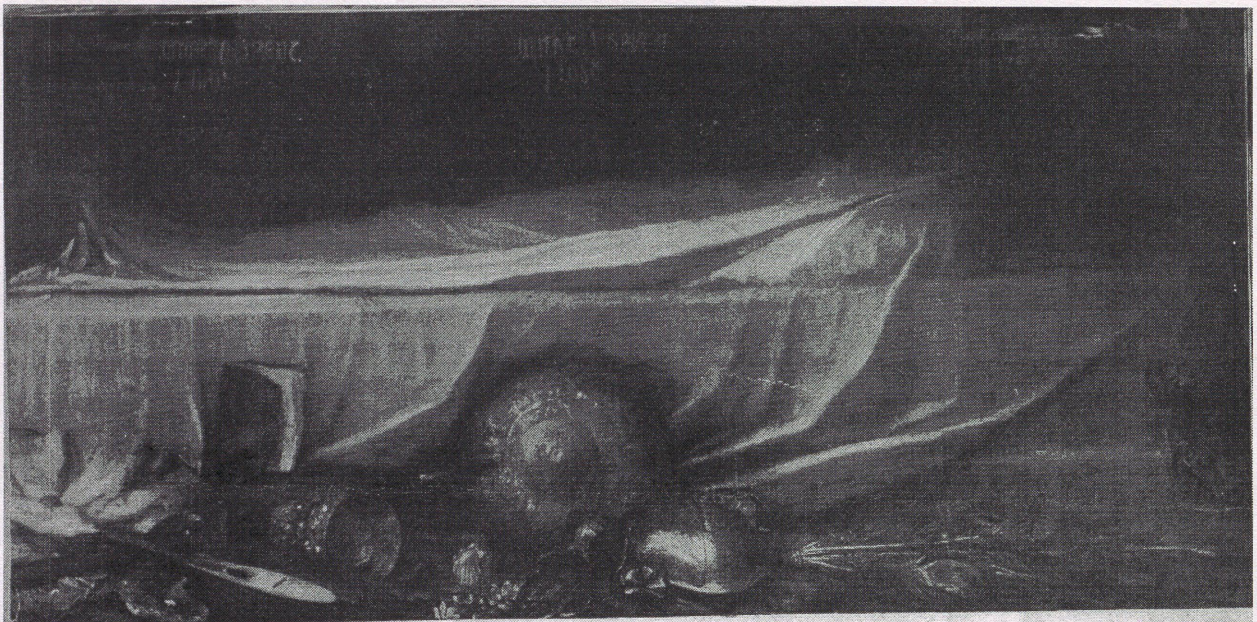
I feel that this medieval inscription brings out the multi-dimensional nature and the unique excellence of charity. Masters of spirituality all the world over have equated charity with disinterested love. As so tellingly pointed out by the learned scholar, Sri Thenmozhiar, charity is not to be considered synonymous with "alms giving." Aldous Huxley attributes this blurring of the true meaning of charity to "a kind of unfortunate philological accident" and goes on to point out in his book *The Perennial Philosophy* that "charity is love and love is the most perfect of human emotions." Its distinguishing marks are disinterested love, selflessness and humility. St. Paul brings out the full meaning of charity when he says in his epistle to the Corinthians :

"And though I bestow all my goods to feed THE POOR and though I give my body to be burned and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" and concludes his epistle saying "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity."

Charity, therefore, is spiritual activity par excellence. Its sterling merit lies in the fact that it is both the means and the end.

Madras

S. Rangaswami



From the painting by G. F. Watts, R.A.]

"SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI."

[Photo.—Frederick Hollyer.

From the painting by G.F. Watts, R.A.

Photo - Frederick Hollyer.

"SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI"

"WHAT I SPENT, I HAD ! WHAT I SAVED, I LOST !
WHAT I GAVE, I HAVE !"

It is said that the late Carmen Sylva, the poetess Queen of Roumania, suggested to Watts this illustration of a noble medieval inscription. The lines themselves exist in various forms, one of the best-known versions being the epitaph of the Good Earl of Courtenay in St. George's Church, Doncaster. A dead knight lies on his bier, his form sufficiently revealed to suggest the mystery of death without its physical horror. The symbols at his feet indicate one who had warmed both hands before the fire of life. Badges of honour and learning, tokens of wealth and pleasure : there they lie. All these things were once his ; BUT WHAT DOES HE NOW OWN ? At death comes a stocktaking ; and much that once he prized has no value in that balance - sheet. What he spent he had there and then, it went, but still he had the satisfaction of it. What he saved he leaves behind; not only money that might have been wisely used, but chances missed, opportunities neglected, good deeds intended but put off; these are irrevocably lost. He sees now the difference between wanting to take and wanting to give, for he only owns now what he gave—the spirit of faithful service, his love and devotion, the noble deed and kindly world, the sacrifice for the good of others, the earnest effort to leave the world better than he found it. These have nourished and developed his soul and this it is he takes with him : the rest are vanities.

February 28, 2001

S. Rangaswami - The Naturalist : A Tribute

It gives me much pleasure to pay tribute to Mr. Rangaswami and his many decades of selfless work at the Rishi Valley Education Centre. Mr. Rangaswami's tall ramrod-straight figure, binoculars strung around his neck, a familiar sight on campus, is emblematic of inspired humanity. He is now eighty years old, but looks much younger — a living example of Salim Ali's observation that those who watch birds need not age.

Mr Rangaswami's range of interests is very wide: teaching children about nature, admonishing their parents against the use of plastics, bending over to remove the parthenium weed, planting trees, working with gardeners, creating compost pits, conducting systematic surveys of local flora and fauna, ministering to a flycatcher's broken wing, devouring works on philosophy and nature, writing books and letters to the editors of newspaper, lecturing to diverse audiences and drawing eminent naturalists to the School — all these come within the compass of his vision. But it is birds that stand at the centre of that vision.

According to Mr. Rangaswami's frequently repeated statements, it is in Rishi Valley, located in the rugged and drought-prone region of Rayalseema, that his dream, of a green world filled with bird song, found fulfilment. A touch of magic has always attended this naturalist's relationship with birds — a Paradise Flycatcher, with its white beribboned tail flitting through the trees, heralded his entry into the Valley. It was flying, Mr Rangaswami clearly recalls, from the office into the ravine near Palm House. He first came to Rishi Valley in 1973 to take on administrative duties as Bursar, having sought premature retirement from the Air Force. He spent five years devoting six days of every week to accounts and administration then, on weekends, he would shed his Bursar's hat and, with a crowd of students in tow, set out looking for his bipedal friends. In that inhospitable landscape, he methodically listed almost 90 species of birds in their favoured haunts. He also presided over water conservation programmes, strategically locating small ponds and tanks for thirsty birds to drink from in the summer, and planting *peepals* for them to roost on and nectar-bearing *erithryna* especially for the hair-crested drongos. When he departed from Rishi Valley in 1977, he left behind a legacy of flowering trees and a band of students with an intimate knowledge of the flora and fauna of the region.

I became closely associated with Mr. Rangaswami in 1990, when, after an absence of almost 12 years, he returned to the Valley. He came this time without any specific designation, but with a well-defined purpose — to create an officially recognized sanctuary for birds, and to continue his field ornithology work along scientific lines. His survey indicated that the number of species in the Valley had more than doubled — earlier years of conservation seemed to have paid off. (The most recent bird count taken in January of 2001 stands at 201). In 1994, Mr. Rangaswami celebrated these events with a book, *Birds of Rishi Valley and Renewal of Their Habitats*. Richly illustrated, with photographs by his friend and co-author S. Sridhar, the book won favourable reviews in many leading newspapers and journals. Harry Miller called some of the prose magical, *Sanctuary Asia* magazine prominently featured a chapter of the book and Mahesh Rangarajan of the *Nehru*

Memorial Library in New Delhi described the writing as '... vintage natural history, reminiscent of the late M. Krishnan.'

In April 1997, Mr. Rangaswami's established a Department of Bird Studies as part of Rishi Valley School. In order to create a permanent presence for the department, he upgraded it to its present status, an Institute of Bird Studies and Natural History. The Institute, which lists the eminent ornithologist Dr. V. Santaram on its faculty, draws visiting naturalists from different parts of the country to the valley, and engages in conservation activities. Mr. Rangaswami extended the range of the Institute's activities still further by creating an ambitious Home Study Course on ornithology. He single-handedly wrote out all 24 out of the 26 chapters of this course in two months, in a period of feverish creativity. When the designing of this course and production of the study material presented additional problems, he switched roles and became an assiduous fundraiser. The funds he collected now support a scholarship scheme for prospective students, which include housewives, senior citizens, and school-going children, as well as underprivileged members of society from almost every state in India. Mr. Rangaswami plans to conduct training courses in ecological restoration, bird identification in the field and bird census surveys in the summer, when students are out of school and college. 'He is a role model to all of us,' writes Professor M. S. Swaminathan of Mr. Rangaswami's work

Mr. Rangaswami's presence at Rishi Valley School has enriched the lives of the students and teachers. He has made us aware of a source of beauty that we might otherwise not have seen or heard. He has taught us to care for the natural world. His achievements stem from his dedication to wisdom, to beauty and to the well-being of all living things. The comment of another great naturalist, Roger Tory Peterson's may help to explain the passion of Rangaswami's life work: "If we are to save the birds, we have to make as many people as possible aware of the threats to their survival.... We must save the birds, and in saving them, we will save the earth."

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