

Memoir

C.D.N. And Me

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I remember precisely when I met C.D. Narasimhaiah for the first time. In summer 1970 I was at the erstwhile American Studies Research Centre, Hyderabad on their short-term fellowship to work on the Chicago Critics. After completing the term I went further South. On the way I met my class fellow in Eluru in West Godawari district. From there I went to Madras, then to Bangalore and finally to Mysore where I had prior appointment with C.D. Narasimhaiah.

C.D.N. (as he was popularly known) was familiar with my name, as I had published an essay on the Chicago Critics in his prestigious and widely circulated journal, *The Literary Criterion* in 1967. It was originally presented at the weekly meeting at the ASRC under the Chairmanship of the legendary Director, William Mulder in Summer 1967 during my first visit to the Centre. In my hour-long meeting with Narasimhaiah in the Department of English, Mysore University, I was most impressed by his humility. He enquired about my past academic engagements and my future plans. In a relaxed and peaceful atmosphere we talked over a cup of tea after which he walked with me to the gate of the campus.

When I received the British Council Scholarship and placement at Leeds University, I wrote to him about this new development. He wrote back saying that there was a possibility of our meeting at Leeds without telling me that he was likely to come to Leeds as a visiting professor. On reaching Leeds I went straight to the Hall of Residence where I was provided accommodation. Only a couple of days later I attended the Orientation course which was meant for all overseas students. There I ran into a student from Mysore who happened to be C.D. N.'s son, C.N. Srinath of exactly my age.

C.D.N. arrived at Leeds at the end of the first semester after completing his stint as a visiting professor at an American university. During the Christmas break he and his son came to India and then returned to Leeds at the beginning of the next semester when C.D.N. started lecturing. During his stay at Leeds I had umpteen occasions to interact with him on the campus as well as at his residence. Three of us were so often seen together that some called us, jokingly, Father, Son and the Holy Ghost. It was during this period that the facsimile of Eliot's magnum opus, *The Waste Land* was published edited by his widow Valerie Eliot with a long Introduction. Before C.D.N. left for the U.S. where he had another teaching assignment as visiting Professor, he asked me to write a review of the facsimile of *The Waste Land* for *The Literary Criterion*. As I was doing my doctoral research on T.S. Eliot, he thought I was the right person to do the review. He was about to leave for the U.S. So I asked him to give me at least a week's time to which he agreed and advised me to send the review through Srinath who was joining him in the

U.S. later.

I did write the review and sent it through Srinath. After reading the review he wrote praising everything about it, my style of writing, my arguments as well as my confidence in taking a stand against major scholars who were reviewing the facsimile in the pages of *The Times Literary Supplement* and other periodicals. Most reviewers were of the opinion that the published poem was a vast improvement on the manuscript which was submitted to Ezra Pound for his "Caesarean operation." On the contrary, I argued that the original text was different from the published poem and as such would have spawned a different literary taste by which it would have been judged. The problem with the prevailing response, I said, was that the manuscript was being judged by the taste created by the published poem. It seems that this argument appealed to Narasimhaiah and explained the praise that he showered on my review, which was published in *The Literary Criterion* and later included in my collection of essays, *Critical Speculations* under the title, "Pound, Eliot, and *The Waste Land*." After nearly three years I returned to India with a doctorate from Leeds.

I was in Delhi and C.D.N. came to Delhi frequently for meetings and academic engagements. On one such visit he came to my residence in Model Town and had lunch with me and my family. In 1975 I moved from Delhi to Allahabad where I joined the prestigious Allahabad University as a Reader. Whether I was in India or abroad, in Delhi or Allahabad, in Leeds or Buffalo we were in touch and shared information. I frequently visited Dhvanyaloka Centre for Indian Studies that he established in Mysore in 1979 after his superannuation from the University of Mysore. I was delighted to return to Dhvanyaloka in April 2019 after a gap of nearly two decades to receive the C.D.N. Memorial award and deliver the C.D.N. Memorial lecture. Dhavanyaloka was as C.D.N. left it, thanks to the efforts of his son, Srinath. I fondly remembered the days when C.D.N. used to extend to participants in seminars a very warm welcome and invite them to his residence in the evening for chat over a cup of coffee.

C.D.N. was an academic with a difference. He was not a dry academic with no human concern. On many an occasion I was impressed by his human touch. Once he, Srinath and I were lunching together in the cafeteria on the Leeds University campus. I knew that he was coming to India during the Christmas break alongwith Srinath and returning to Leeds for his teaching assignment in the next semester. In an unguarded moment I asked him if he could bring a sweater if my wife sent it to him. And pat came the reply: "yes, of course. Tell your wife to send it to my Mysore address." And he did bring it. On another occasion we were together at an international seminar organised by the U.S.I.S. in Mussoorie in September, 1974, which was only a couple of months after my return from England. He was talking to some senior Professors and I waited for him to become free. As I found him a little free I approached him. He asked me why I did not come to him earlier. When I told him the reason he said: "I care more for you. Let us go and catch a breath of fresh air." We walked and talked for quite sometime about things personal and academic.

From the very beginning C.D.N. wanted to do something different from what others had done. His launching of *The Literary Criterion* in 1952 was the first step in that direction, and his establishing Dhvanyaloka in 1979 marked his long and arduous journey on the academic and critical path. Unlike other academics in English who took interest in Western literature only C.D.N. interested himself in both Western and Oriental literature in English, but more in the literature of the East. Before him English literature was the central concern of teachers and researchers in English. This was evident from the M.A. (English) syllabus of most

Indian Universities. The first Indian scholar in English to gain international recognition was B.Rajan who taught and wrote about canonical English writers like Milton, Yeats, and Eliot. This explains why my first book, *Nature Imagery of The major Romantic Poets* (1965) was dedicated to him. The next Indian scholar in English who won international acclaim was A.N. Kaul who taught at Yale University and later at the University of Delhi: His doctoral thesis published under the title, *The American Vision* received rave reviews and also won a prize. At the same time as A.N. Kaul, K.B. Vaid was engaged in doctoral research in American literature at Harvard University and his doctoral thesis was published under the title, *Technique in The Tales of Henry James* by Harvard University Press. Despite the presence of these two eminent academics in the field of American studies our M.A. (English) syllabus was based only on English literature. I did my Masters in English in 1964 and nothing of American literature was prescribed for us. Admirable efforts were made by the United States Educational Foundation in India (USEFI) to popularize American literature in Indian Universities by organizing seminars to which both senior and junior academics were invited. C.D.N. Played the pivotal role in introducing American literature in Indian Universities. He directed two prestigious seminars sponsored by the USEFI, one on "Indian Response to American Literature" (1967) and the other on "Asian Response to American literature. (1970) The papers and proceedings of the seminars were published in two prestigious volumes edited by C.D. Narasimhaiah.

C.D.N. was moving in two different directions at the same time. On the one hand he made efforts to induct into Indian syllabus in English marginalized American literature and on the other, he focused on Indian Writing in English which was given short shrift in the very country of its original. Although the first landmark study in Indian writing in English was Meenakshi Mukherjee's *Twice-Born Fiction* (1971) and the first edition of K.R. Srinivas Iyengar's stupendous *Indian Writing in English* was published much earlier in 1962, it was C.D.N. who emerged as the crusader for Indian writing in English. He gave a series of lectures on Indian literature in English at Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Simla which were published in book-form under the title *The Sword and the Sickle* (1967). He gave not just a historical but an evaluative account of Indian writing in English and popularized this burgeoning area of English studies through his General Editorship of the series on Indian Writers in English published by Arnold-Heinemann. Even a renowned writer in English, Salman Rushdie calls him "a redoubtable C.D. Narasimhaiah" in his Introduction to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing*. C.D.N. idealized Raja Rao, placed R.K. Narayan next to him and Mulk Raja Anand came third in his assessment. He dismissed Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy but praised Amitav Ghosh.

Besides American literature and Indian Writing in English C.D.N. inducted into M.A. (English) syllabus Commonwealth literature from Oceanian and African countries. He was the General Editor of the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Commonwealth Literature* and editor of a volume of Commonwealth Poetry. No wonder, he was made the President of ACLALS (Association of Commonwealth Language and Literature Studies) for a period of three years during which two international conferences were held in India, in New Delhi to be precise to which I was also invited. During this period he edited the official organ of the Association, *ACLALS Bulletin* in which he published one of my essays.

No doubt we had some differences of opinion in our response to literature, but the difference of opinion, if expressed in proper language and with due respect contributes significantly to the literary debate and understanding. This is the basis of seminars and conferences held at national and international level, where multiple and often conflicting

views are expressed by participants. C.D.N. made Indian culture, which is rooted in Indian religion, the basis of his response to literature. As a pluralist I was willing to accept critical tools from any source, Western or Indian. This, I thought, was more in conformity with the time in which we lived. We are living in a world which has become a global village, and therefore we cannot afford to go native in our response to literature. My argument throughout my long critical journey has been that every critic, whether it is Coleridge or Anandavardhana, T.S. Eliot or Sri Aurobindo must be subjected to critical examination and evaluation before acceptance. This applies also to creative writers. Despite this difference we always got on well and appreciated each other's work. His personality is very well reflected in his children, Srinath and Ragini who are carrying out the rich legacy of their revered father.