

## Teacher as Mandala: Faith, Beauty and Knowing in Times of N/Rationalism

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The *key enigma* of the new millennium is the *multifarious capacity* of its nations to simplify the act of living. At its best as *zeitgeist*, this inscrutable faculty can transform our institutions into an intuitive cartoonist whose freeze-frame initiative may present to us in one shot, the nuanced movements of our many-splendoured world. The marvel of the cartoonist's simple line is its synchronized apprehension of nature and culture, idea and practice, aesthetics and politics, involution and evolution. The charged play of this graphic draws the told and untold stories of humanity into a single moment; the aesthetics of its two-dimensional display miraculously brings into the limited range of the witnessing eye the trans-local connections of multiple geographies. But how, and how often, does simplification create these wondrous effects? That question brings us to the *primary challenge* of our Age: the quantum task of aesthetically preparing the simplified line to represent life's coalescing acts.

### **New Millennium Caesars and Druid Getafix's Swaraj Potion**

When consummate, simplification is a double-edged sword. Small yet invincible on the one hand, it works like Goscinny and Underzo's Gauls, keen to have a good laugh at the expense of Caesar's exasperated centurions. A timeless illumination on the other, its Shakespearean genius inspires complex annotations and ever-renewing delight, rendering the clock of Caesar anachronistic. Through such transnational associations, simplification becomes enlightenment, a revelation of *lightness* – a weightless particle and a luminous wave at once. However, when unsuccessful, like the silly Roman legion on its delicate 50 BCE mission of patrolling the free-spirited western Armorica, simplification falls flat and becomes a mere line, quite forgettable usually, but at times worse – a ludicrous picture!

The aesthetics of Goscinny and Underzo's comic imaginary and Shakespeare's anachronistic clock should

warn us against the ghosts of Caesar in our times. That should also help us see why the enterprise to make and master complex devices of simplification has been the most thrilling adventure as well the gravest misadventure to which contemporary establishments of governance and nationalistic enterprises have subjected themselves.

The present modernity has been led into this false-Janus-faced project by a curious faith-knowledge dialectic, which gives no aesthetic room for a connecting imaginary. Even as it is consumed by the belief that human beings have today inherited a certain genius to apprehend the complexity of the Universe, it takes pride in its own hugely simplified re-presentations of that complexity and vainly positions these convenient constructions on an equal plane with the subtle natural phenomena. Ironically, concomitant with the avowed reliance of contemporary culture on its own knowledge and operative rationality is its inadvertent leap toward a blind faith in the scale of civilizational progress that it has inherited. The mammoth indulgence in its 'originality' does not help the current wave of humanity attain independence as it were, for, by its own unwitting admission, it is not its self-governance, but a multi-centric artistic, scientific and technological historicity that has spawned its modernity.

If a nation's exclusive confidence in its *reason* could be considered a *plane of experience*, by its own logical training, it would presuppose/bear/inherit/encounter its *faith* as an unverifiable term, a *plane of non-experience*. The *line* of human thought resulting from the *intersection* of the seemingly contradictory *planes* of experience and non-experience becomes a *linear mandala* ever-extending on either side. It is a perennial trap for all the conceited nations of the world, for, in one direction it heads towards a non-organic faith in the past that it defies in multiple ways, and in the other, it becomes an unfaithful quest for knowing with the aid of limited reason. In both cases, the beauty of inclusive living becomes the casualty.

The above mathematical description of the

experientially multi-dynamic tension between human *faith* and *knowing* as a linear mandala is an example of how our rationalistic – not rational – training diminishes phenomena by depicting them in adversative terms, delinked from the interconnecting faculty of *beauty*. But, if understood in the right spirit, these polar terms can offer a line of inquiry that serves as a/an vantage/entry point for one to witness/participate in the interrelated movements of human culture in our space-time.

The above dialectics of re-presentation draws our attention to a twin-feature of simplification: its associative methodology and its reductive composition. Again, the apparently polar processes of *association* – extension of an idea – and *reduction* – contraction of a vision – simultaneously embedded in simplification make it doubly enigmatic. Simplification, thus, becomes the last temptation of our era, as the Gaulish village is for Julius Caesar. It is a zero threshold that opens itself at once and equally on the sides of both glory and damnation. How to make a choice of survival on that uncertain line is the greatest test of our times. And, that is exactly why the aesthetic figure of the Gaulish Druid, the wise teacher, must draw our urgent attention and sustained interest, as we encounter newer Caesarian nations.

Druid Getafix's magic potion is not a broth of superstition. Its secret recipe is passed down the line of druids, by word of mouth. It is brewed with great care from specific herbs and other raw material found around the village and the forests surrounding it. And, the villagers are never greedy for the power it brings – their Druid brews it only when there is a need. More than a mere stimulant, the potion is the essence of their organic governance practice, which upholds the balance of connections between nature and human culture, faith and knowing, aesthetics and politics. The local ecosystem and the land's orality play a major role in the life of this village, the amazing resistance of which frustrates Caesar's great empire. Their magic potion is the aesthetic symbol of a free country's assertion of its self-reliance as different from a Caesarian nation's political insistence on universalizing its ideology. It is a secret recipe that connects human faith and knowing in an organic mandala, a rare occurrence, indeed. The beautiful story of the active defence of the Gauls, under the guidance of their Druid and the influence of the magic potion, offers an inspiring lesson in Swaraj for anyone trying to uphold the independence of the local and the rights of the individual against the universalizing nationalism of new millennium Caesars. But, where do we find a druid who can hold an age-old secret against all odds and temptations, and still share its quantum benefits with a people in times of need?

### Un-order of Things in Times of N/Rationalism and the Irony of Socrates

Mainstream training in most contemporary fields is designed to universalise the idea of 'nation'. Its lessons stem from the historical documentation of the insecurities of the peoples of the world or the followers of different disciplines, and not their inherent strengths. Thus, every modern training programme tends to be a nationalistic project founded on a rationalistic anticipation of war, and contains constant reminders of being on guard. For the same reason, a n/rationalistic trainer does not allow her students to harbour any confidence or hope in beautiful trans-rational/anti-national phenomena like individual insights, people's heroes, beards of druids, spiritual calling, powers of brews, children, long-nosed stars, or enlightened stones. Insisting that the only way to win wars is by feeding the greatest limits of humanity such as envy, fear and hatred, the n/rationalistic trainer devises war strategies for every practical aspect of life, all of which ultimately contribute to reducing the world into neat polar taxonomies of 'self' and 'other' – bright and dark hemispheres, white and black races, male and female genders.

Foucault famously begins the preface to *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences* by citing a passage from Borges that allegedly borrows from a 'certain Chinese encyclopedia' that collapses 'our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other':

This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' in which it is written that 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies'. In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that.

It is interesting to look at the deconstructive continuity of a set of exchanges concerning this allegedly Chinese (un)taxonomy. These engagements too, like its object, follow no linear pattern of correspondence. The non-linear matrix of these responses to a playful attempt to collapse the dominant order of things has been collectively and ceaselessly formed by different thinkers, and hence could serve our thoughts about 'un-order' here.

To begin this discussion on non-linearity, let me try and draw into a single sentence, one level of circularity

emerging from a web of interactions concerning the above:

Foucault's preface to his 1966 French text, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, which evokes Borges' brief Spanish essay 'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins', also quotes and directly comments on the so-called Chinese encyclopaedia, *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*, which, according to Borges, German translator Franz Kuhn had discovered, though Borges himself questions the veracity of the Chinese quote elsewhere in his 1942 essay by referring to 'the unknown (or false) Chinese encyclopaedia writer' in response to the Universal language proposed by the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Anglican clergyman and a founder of the Royal Society, John Wilkins, in his 'An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language', the inspiration for which seems to have been partly from somewhat mistaken contemporary European accounts of the Chinese writing system.

The above one-sentence para re-presents the web of a set of thoughts related to the question of taxonomy, which takes us back and forth among various time zones, languages and perceptions, a few threads of which may be unraveled as below, as a first level demonstration of the complexity contained by/hidden within/opposed by categories as well as the linear structures of their descriptions:

- a. Foucault's intimate understanding of the ironical purpose of the Chinese (un)taxonomy and his twice-or-more-removed presentation of it in French.
- b. Borges' use (and fabrication?) of the Chinese (un) taxonomy in his brief Spanish essay to topple the complex polarizing processes of simplification and universalization that marked the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Enlightenment-afflicted?) European scholarship, which have continued to affect the mainstream Western thought as well as its worldwide circles of influence since then.
- c. Borges' near-credible attribution of the discovery of the Chinese (un)taxonomy to the German translator Franz Kuhn, which he himself simultaneously upsets by making an uncertain reference about the original Chinese writer.
- d. John Wilkins' endeavor to universalize language apparently for the benefit of diplomats, travellers, merchants and others who supposedly have expansive horizons, despite its best intentions, becomes problematic when one considers the effect of such universalization, made for and perpetuated by a certain class of people, on the diversity of local cultures and languages in the world.
- e. A string of possibilities ranging from the possible influence of a 17<sup>th</sup> century European (mis)reading,

possibly due to the rationalist – not determinedly rationalistic – perspective of Enlightenment, of the creative Chinese writing system on John Wilkins in his attempt to create a universal language, and how that possibility brings us further to the possible distorting effect of perspectives, possibly a still-prevailing impact of European Enlightenment.

Foucault and Borges consider the Chinese (un) taxonomy useful for their purpose of dismantling the simplified Western categories and representations of knowledge and faith. Their positioning of it takes us beyond our limited field of vision and gives us the keen insight that nothing really re-presents/represents anything. On removing the limited black and white perspective from the mediating role in these interactions, we get a *multicentric circular mandala* which seamlessly connects the timeless faith and intense knowing of the red, brown and yellow human beings with everything on earth, as evidenced in/by the moving speech of Chief Seattle in another context:

And when the last Red Man shall have perished, and the memory of my tribe shall have become a myth among the White Men, these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe, and when your children's children think themselves alone in the field, the store, the shop, upon the highway, or in the silence of the pathless woods, they will not be alone. In all the earth there is no place dedicated to solitude. At night when the streets of your cities and villages are silent and you think them deserted, they will throng with the returning hosts that once filled them and still love this beautiful land.

In such a circularity of the subject/object of engagement, beauties ranging from the allegedly Chinese (un) taxonomy to the speech attributed to Chief Seattle become their own pure representations. Their circular mandalas do not present any new system; they represent themselves in a profoundly aesthetic manner, beyond limited facts and figure, by pointing to the fallacy and futility of any attempt to categorize the world into exclusive areas of faith and knowing.

In our n/rationalistic times infested with technological pride and constructed beauty, *Faith*, an uncountable noun otherwise representing a cumulative emotion, undergoes a shift in usage. Built on a host of insecurities, modern nations – political coalitions, ideological corps, military bases and religious establishments – find it shameful to admit faith as a valid emotion unlike the indigenous people on earth who celebrate it. Our nations find tools and projection techniques to re-present and disseminate faith as knowledge. Thus disguised, 'faith' helps them universalise many generations of native

human experiences and extract from their plurality, homogenous light-and-sound projections to promote particular versions of nationhood. Logically, such a self-defying show anchored in a local past and projected into a global future can be nothing but a make-believe enterprise – it is at once false faith and false knowledge. As a virtual practice of competitive nation builders, it transfigures contemporary human existence into an incessantly shifting sensorial animation, wherein amplified sounds and larger-than-life holograms serve the rapidly changing searches of rationalistic cultures for thrilling and still more thrilling purposes. Entering this newfangled imaginary of faith, one finds a shift in the conventional function of signs, too. It is no longer humble representation – a reminder of the presence of an absent subject and not its substitute – but holography, which lets us forget the absence of the subject altogether, thereby arrogantly rendering its presence quite redundant. Simply put, *faith* has become a decadent game without or irrespective of subjects or objects, at once self-defying and self-indulgent. Faith in these times of n/rationalism is a term of falsity—its substance and representation have come to be the antithesis of beauty.

*Knowing*, a transitive verb otherwise progressing towards an object in good faith, represents a subjective pursuit. But in times of hollow faith promoting a particular mode of n/rationalism, its internal processes are modified by the vehicular devices offered by a fabricated contemporaneity, and not vice versa. Thus, in an ironical twist of objectives, instead of expanding and thus transforming the subject's horizon of understanding, *knowing* now limits the human enterprise into specialized fields of experience, wherein constructed functionalities overpower the aesthetics of spontaneous movement. On first appearance, this absence of beauty passes as 'focus'. For instance, in a linear, function-oriented world, tasteless nutrient tablets can quickly replace foods, for, the aesthetics of scent or taste or appearance or texture has no direct, assigned purpose in this order of things. At that level, there is a great deal of aggressive marketing of independent skills and distinctive powers in each field. But on a closer look, one finds that what is encouraged is not the universally beneficial intuitive genius, but a spectacular individualism in an extremely competitive context. In the latter mode, which is an endeavor to reach the target objects faster than the competitors, we increase the skill, speed and scale of specific functions and vehicles within particular occupational boundaries. And in order to be effective on this fast track, we shed all subtle aesthetic ceremonies and come out loud and clear. *Knowing* in our times thus becomes a function that uses time, and not a process played out in time. It thus

concerns itself with the vertical dimension, a quarantined task indifferent to the horizontal interconnections its object may share with the rest of the world. At a point where walled sites of knowing miss their association with other human functions, this vertical axis reveals itself to be a directional antithesis as well as a thematic accomplice of the contemporary holographic faith that has lost touch with the idea of 'community' and the experience of 'beauty'.

Hence have our n/rationalisms been paradoxically marked by a virtual scheme of faith distending rapidly into a noisy spectacle as well as a reductive logic of knowing gradually diminishing into flavourless/senseless functions. The magnification of the fields of sight and sound coincident with the diminution of the fields of smell and taste has led us to witness the emergence of a co-agency of fatality, causing the loss of the subject's faith in seeking the true meaning of any object, and consequently the *beauty of the act of living*.

Now, what drastic consequence does the loss of this interface of *faith*, *meaning* and *beauty* hold for humankind that our n/rationalistic Age should even register its cost? Remarkably, it is the most pervasive of our senses, touch, which serves as the last bastion of this interconnection. Touch, with its unique faculty to be universal and local at once, makes us *feel* the retreat of faith, meaning and beauty from our lives. It alerts us of the barrenness of our relationships as well as the loneliness of our demonstrations, intimating us of the alienation of our existence from both the bounty of *love* and the intensity of *war*, for, love and war are the true testing grounds of faith, meaning, and beauty. If and when we let the intimation pass, that is a sure sign of our passing into perpetual numbness as a species, after which no n/rationalism holds any ground or water. That is exactly why our space-time needs a fearless teacher who, without caring about sounding naïve before its techo-intensive denizens or being killed by its n/rationalistic activists, can touch us with mere voice: 'Beware of the barrenness of a busy life'.

That is what Socrates did, and he was killed for doing so. The order of things in a *busy life* demands acting fast as per the system's diktats, while Socrates insisted that 'an unexamined life is not worth living'. He perpetuated un-order and upset the categories of the Athens of his times by telling his students: 'To find yourself, think for yourself'. And his students promptly thought for themselves, and a couple of them twice managed to overpower the supposedly democratic regime of Athens.

The irony of Socrates here is two-fold. First, he uses his individual reason to upset a certain n/rationalism, and yet is executed by the same nation that he topples. He shows the world that all nationalistic acts are not reasonable,

and helps his students see the huge distinction between living in a 'rational' way, and adopting the state of being 'rationalistic'. Rationalism is indeed the greatest threat to true reason. Being rational is a fundamental human faculty; while being 'rationalistic' is a mode of nation-building. The former is an individual capacity, and cannot be 'ism'ised. In the latter case, *reason* is falsely constructed as an 'ism' as per the instructions of a nation, which then employs its now-unthinking citizens in the busy task of perpetuating what it *thinks* is best for its unsurpassed reign over the rest of the world. It was this undemocratic order of thinking that Socrates' true reason questions and upsets, thus leading to a great un-order of things in Athens' celebrated democracy.

The nations of the world have never tolerated reasonable teachers; we have grown up on a number of crime stories involving the killing of teachers ranging from Jesus Christ to Mohandas Gandhi. Our nationalistic regimes, irrespective of their *faith*, are founded on insecurities and still continue to kill the learned and the wise who daringly invite them to open conversations. In India, the n/rationalistic enterprise recently killed a few teachers of reason: Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pandharinath Pansare, Malleshappa Madivalappa Kalburgi. In Bangladesh, in the name of another faith, a few free-voices have been silenced: Avijit Roy, Oyasiqur Rahman Babu, Anant Bijoy Das, Niloy Chatterjee Neel. And many more, we know of and do not know of, across the world, these days...

The second aspect of the irony of Socrates is that his killing has enabled him to live forever, and that is true of all the great teachers who have been killed, too. On the verge of annihilation, the leader of a wise people refers to their oppressor: 'Let him be just and deal kindly with my people, for, the dead are not powerless. Dead, did I say? There is no death, only a change of worlds'. This chief is the epitome of Socratic irony – he is right while sounding absurd – it is all the unassuming teachers who have survived their own death that have truly changed the world because they work through the un-order of surprising matrices, which the linear calculations of their n/rationalistic hunters shall never figure out.

### Continuum of the Masters and the Matrix of Organic Play

That is how the masters survive – through and beyond death. Their mastery in the game of continuity makes them trans-local, and accessible to seekers from across time and space. On a zero threshold of uncertainty, when someone in another time and space seeks an un-ordered, un-ordering lesson of life, the masters transcend the n/

rationalistic chambers of their oppressors and allow themselves to be discovered in and for another Age. And, that is the line of convergence of the apparently opposite categories/planes of love and war, too, to which Sun Tzu, the great Chinese master who divulged the secret art of war to the King of Wu, gives voice: *The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.*

How would our busy, barren world settle down and fertilize itself for such a play of un-ordered free thinking? How would it prepare itself for a shuffle of its current categories and their n/rationalistic re-presentations? Is there a spontaneous way for our world to enter an aesthetic space-time that reclaims for it the interconnections of faith and meaning that it has lost? Can the human race reclaim its original urbanity for which it had left the unsettling jungle, come to the banks of the world's primal rivers, and contemplated the interconnections of diverse beings in the universe? In our non-urbane cities of barren busyness, how do we invoke the line of masters who can offer us an organic clue to re-urbanising ourselves?

The history of humanity has shown us over and over how a spiral of order reaches its decadence even as another spiral begins its un-ordered course. Our space-time, marked by its blind faith in the machines and systems it has created, and by the overwhelming flow of information that passes as knowledge, seems to have reached a depraved order of things. The signs of this corruption of faith and knowing are seen across the world in the form of separatist, n/rationalistic acts devoid of beauty—violence generated by fundamentalism, terrorism, communalism, racism, and many other isms perpetuated by various nations.

By being merely present in these times, we are unwittingly witnessing an emerging spiral of un-order, too, that will soon evolve into a model of the *organic urbane*. As it will be its own presentation as well as representation, the only way for one to participate in that movement is to begin by shifting one's own 'human' centre from the ecosystem of beings on earth. Now the 'human' is replaced with 'land' – the earth with its matrix of diverse languages and multiple environments of different beings.

The possibilities of education, livelihood, evolution and recreation that emerge from this web of interaction actively challenge the rigid order of things constructed by the n/rationalistic establishments, and are all replete with the un-order of free becoming – creativity, multi-centricity, continuity, transformativity. It defies the self-proclaimed supremacy of the present-day forms of technology and market over those of all other ages and peoples. Surpassing the bragging and violence of the contemporary n/rationalistic industries and competitive



# TERRA-SUTRA

## MODEL OF ORGANIC URBANISATION



THE LUMINOUS IDEA OF LIFE APPRECIATION

businesses, it reveals *technology* and *market* as universals that have at all times been accessible to humanity at large, as also other forms of life on earth, in adequate measures, across species, faiths, genders, classes, and all such limited categories.

The diagram given visualizes how such a circular mandala of engagement will lead to a radical restructuring of the current order of things. I first drew up this chakra for LILA, an organization as well as a veritable 'play' inspired by the Luminous Idea of Life Appreciation.\* It presents and represents a trans-local vision of organic governance for any people's movement seeking original urbanity in any space-time. The Terra-Sutra Model of Organic Urbanization is a simple-lined wheel that inspires the nuanced ways in which LILA continuously moves itself.

I present the terra-sutra model here merely to initiate a discussion on *teaching* as a crucial civilizational act, and *teacher* as a mandala of interactivity concerning creativity, multi-centricity, continuity, and transformativity. Teacher as mandala is the totality of the radically transformative un-order that may be revealed to an individual, through phases, events and people that mark various transitions. But to partake in that ceaselessly evolving, uncategorical knowing, we must first lend ourselves to the practical philosophers who can prepare us to enter the circle of the teacher. For instance, on learning the art of containing war from Sun Tzu, the significance of vigil from Chanakya, the power of patience from Marcus Aurelius, the way of prayer from St. Francis of Assisi, we may begin to appreciate that the linear road offered by our limited perspective is indeed a part of the circle that the guru mandala offers to reveal – that every small human step defying its self-made order is indeed a cosmic movement reflected in an individual's microsphere. It is the teacher as mandala that fulfills the quantum task of aesthetically preparing the simplified line of the human to represent the universe's coalescing acts.

### Teacher as Critical Thinker Questioning the Decadence of Order

The gravest danger embedded in *order* is its propensity to inertia. The visionary teacher is the first to notice lethargy creeping into the body politic. To prevent a people from paralyzing in order, the teacher as critical thinker primarily engages her wards in rigorous physicality through activities ranging from martial arts through mediation to meditation. It may sound odd to say that a critical thinker begins her lessons with the body, but

\* For a detailed discussion on this, see Vision Manifesto on [www.lilafoundation.in](http://www.lilafoundation.in)

this master understands the continuity of the body, mind, intellect and consciousness. Her critical faculty points out the visible marks of self-indulgence in the body politic, and shakes it up to find a way to a renewed consciousness.

The lives of some of the teachers who walked different parts of the earth between the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE and 10<sup>th</sup> Century CE – Confucius, Socrates, Jesus of Nazareth, Muhammad, Shankara – would reveal a common feature. All of them tried to create an alternative to the decadent order of things in which they found themselves. Their methodologies gained immense following beyond their own time, while hardly any of them had a smooth passage through life – Confucius had to go on exile, Socrates was poisoned, Jesus was crucified, Muhammad had to face mockery and war, and though not much is known of Shankara's life, his death at the age of 33 points to an intensely lived life. For all of them, education meant a certain un-order of the status quo, a preparation for a radical alternative. After their time, across time and space, schools were established to spread their teachings. The corruption that has come over these spaces through time confirms that without the critically thinking teacher to un-order, the n/rationalistic order of things will overwhelm the world, and render it immobile. Perhaps, after the teacher as critical thinker has offered her decadent space-time an alternate aesthetics of faith and knowing, she too has to necessarily encounter the circularity of order wherein her own thoughts would be frozen into establishments, until the next teacher in her line arrives as critical thinker.

### Teacher as Creative Artist Playing the Phoenix

The teacher as creative artist is born from the great ashes of the critical thinkers, twice-dead – first at the hands of many a n/rationalistic regime, and then trapped within the schools set up in their names by their own followers. It is after the world had long been overwhelmed by its own misrepresentation of the counsel and intervention of the critical thinkers, slipped into the tunnel of ignorance, and consumed by the dark ages, that the teacher arrives again, playing the creative artist. For, it requires godlike imagination to restart creation. Thus do we encounter some outstanding gurus of creativity – Basava, Kabir, Mira, Nanak, Cervantes, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Da Vinci, Hieronymus Bosch, Mihshikinaahkwa the Little Turtle, Elias Boudinot – blossoming as in a spring of ardour across the globe, approximately from the beginning of the second millennium CE till the eve of the industrial revolution. As weaver, painter, scientist, military leader, dramatist, journalist, they together manifest the multicentricity of creativity, and the human genius for association and adaptation.

Thus does the Bhakti movement map the entire Indic space with a fervent song sung in multiple tones from the Tamil country to the Himalayas, from the western sea through the desert sands till the jewelled land in the north east. We hear the radically prayerful voice of the teacher as artist playing itself out, provoking, inspiring, arousing the peoples of this variegated land, and connecting her times with those gone past and those yet to come. Its artistic enterprise through centuries interlinks the divergent aesthetic courses of the many resident and invading cultures to create an astonishingly tolerant way of pluralistic living and co-habitation for all times.

Elsewhere, Aeneas Silvius rightfully laments that with the fall of Constantinople 'Homer and Plato have died a second death'. But as we have seen, creativity has to necessarily rise from the ash mountain and adapt to new circumstances – the refugees from Constantinople to Italy bring with them the ancient texts that then happen to inspire the expansive humanist investigation of ancient philosophy, and spark off a number of masterpieces in various fields.

In the Old West, following the 'Trail of Tears', a long, deadly march that killed over a third of the Cherokee, Elias Boudinot, the Native American writer and founder of *Cherokee Phoenix*, was labeled a traitor, and killed by factions of his own people who resisted relocation to the 'Indian Territory'. It had angered his rivals that Boudinot's 'Address to the Whites' had advocated acculturation of all Cherokee:

We have seen everywhere the poor aborigines melt away before the white population. I merely state the fact, without at all referring to the cause. We have seen, I say, one family after another, one tribe after another, nation after nation, pass away; until only a few solitary creatures are left to tell the sad story of extinction. Shall this precedent be followed? I ask you, shall red men live, or shall they be swept from the earth? With you and this public at large, the decision chiefly rests. Must they perish? Must they all, like the unfortunate Creeks, go down in sorrow to their grave? They hang upon your mercy as to a garment. Will you push them from you, or will you save them? Let humanity answer.

It is sad, and unfair to demand that a people change their habits and their habitat for reasons external to their own pursuit – but, isn't it indeed from the ashes of Boudinot's poignant words that the red people today wing out alive and share their story with the world at large? This insider-outsider was perhaps that rare phoenix which combined in himself the un-orders of both the twice-dead critical thinker as well as the creative artist rising from the former's ashes.

### Teacher as Freedom Fighter in the Wake of Industrial

### Bondage

Following the flowering of creativity during the Renaissance, the Enlightenment project had already prepared the world for the last ceremonies of the teacher as creative artist with a trusting, coalescing abandon – with Descartes insisting early enough that 'If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt, as far as possible, all things'. So, the n/rationalistic industries that began to enslave human time from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were sure to arrive via Europe. The world was beginning to be seized by a great ideological warfare, and the political as well as socio-economic polarization of the capitalist and the labourer, the scientist and the artist, was complete in the wake of the industrial revolution. The questions of domestic comfort, occupational security, societal recognition and participation in global affairs had gained prominence over simple singing and dancing and lovemaking. And then, some wise teachers all along had to see the danger of where it was all going, and relentlessly warn the people and even remind them of the fine principles of the nearly lost art of living. And hence we have, through the last two centuries, a host of teachers arriving in our midst as freedom fighters – Abraham Lincoln, Chief Seattle, Sree Narayana Guru, Albert Einstein, Isadora Duncan, Anne Frank, Helen Keller, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela – emancipating people, disciplines and faculties from the oppressive sway of n/rationalisms. Like the critical thinkers, many of them, especially those who directly dealt in politics, were killed. But in the loneliest and most depressing of our times, we still remember their fervent speeches, long marches, philosophical expositions, diaries, campaigns, poetry and song, dance that emerge right from the solar plexus... Their continuity helps us evolve from mere humans into greater beings capable of sharing themselves with the universe at large.

### Teacher as Enlightened Leader Winning the Game of Mirrors

Twenty-first century, at a zero degree threshold of choices, seems to have formed an endlessly linear mandala at the intersection of the planes of false faith and unfaithful knowing, dividing humanity into fields of the 'self' and that of the 'other'. As seen, this polarized logic feeds on the insecurities of nations and caters to competitiveness, and the taxonomy it creates places major hazards on understanding love and war in their mutual connectedness. That is when, from beyond the lines of freedom fighters, creative artists and critical thinkers, the Buddha emerges as the primordial teacher, an enlightened leader, and pronounces: 'Holding on



to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned'. And, one instantly comes to see that there is no external agency that stands between one and one's victory – it is one's own mirror image that one is fighting; it can be destroyed only by harming oneself, and it can be won, only by winning oneself. That shifts the perspective: the line of uncertainty, in a *kshana* or moment, curves itself into a circular mandala of faith, meaning and beauty.

The secret to win the game of mirrors is to end the battle with oneself and relax. On the transformative road of re-creation, one might find kinship rejuvenating one's spirit rather than disturbing one's privacy, rituals enlightening one about one's integral role in the community. Then, liberation might come to the human subject as a *rasanubhava*, an aesthetic experience, of knowing and believing at once, the difference between *soonyam* and *poornam*, here and now.

Of all the geometrical visions of space-time that has ever occurred to human consciousness, the figure of the circle

seems the most challenging. It is its own representation and allows all other geometrical ideas and forms to be contained within it, as in the Sri Chakra. Hence has the circular mandala been always mystified, as it extracts of and reveals to the human its own rarest as well as the most latent gift: *the ability to risk the comfort of familiar forms and formats*. For, partaking in the circle's promise of fullness presupposes a churning, a re-formation of the limited line of perspective to become any form as it were. The circle demands the surrender of the exclusionary linearity of one's affliction of comfort. It is at that point of turning that the illumined figure of the teacher emerges from *round the corner* of one's own curving perspective. And, now *vidya* and *avidya* do not appear as opposites, but two points of knowing in the circular journey of the tree that has to evolve into a seed, again. Perhaps, the circle that represents its own nothingness as well as fullness is the clue to the guru mandala that our holographic age must wait for.