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Dear Colleagues and Friends!

Let me first of all convey to you the cordial fraternal greetings of the International Association of Sanskrit Studies which is the parent body of the World Sanskrit Conference. We, the votaries of Sanskrit, are indeed very happy to have this opportunity to assemble for our scholastic deliberations — and, may I add, social communion — in a country and under the auspices of an Institute, which have had quite a long and distinguished tradition of Sanskrit and Indological studies. Whatever the other excellences of the Netherlands — and, verily, they are many — the Sanskritists of today cherish the Netherlands primarily as the country of Professor Gonda and Professor Kuiper. To our profound joy, Professor Kuiper, to whom I take this opportunity of conveying our respectful felicitations on his having completed eighty years of age only last month, is amongst us this morning.

Friends! What I am going to say this morning would hardly deserve the pretentious designation of «Inaugural Address». At best it might bear the title: «Something in general and nothing in particular». For, all that I am going to do now is to place before you a few random ideas which have occurred to me in the course of my recent reading and lucubration.

I knew T.S. Eliot as a gifted English poet, but I was not aware of his acute and penetrating evaluation of ancient Indian literature and tradition. One may not agree with all that he has to say in that regard, but one can ill afford either to ignore or to underestimate it. Sanskrit, according to Eliot, is not only a very highly developed language, but it is a distinct way of thought. He declares that India is truly great because she has already given something of the highest value to the world, namely, the message that without spiritual knowledge man is an incomplete thing. Coming from a person who had studied under such stalwarts as Bertrand Russell, Henri Bergson, and R.G. Collingwood and who had devoted his career to a dauntless defence of the European tradition, this declaration derives a special significance. Eliot frankly acknowledges that two assiduous years spent in the study of Sanskrit under Charles Rockwell Lanman and a year in the mazes of Patanjali's metaphysics under the guidance of James Wood left him in a state of enlightened mystification. He further says that a good half of the effort at understanding what the Indian philosophers were after — and their subtleties made most of the great European philosophers look like schoolboys — lay in trying to erase from his mind all the categories and kinds of distinction common to European philosophy from the time of the Greeks. His previous and concomitant study of European philosophy, he admits, was hardly better than an obstacle. Continuing, Eliot observes that the influence of Brahmanical and Buddhist ideology upon Europe, as in the case of Schopenhauer, Hartmann, and Deussen, had largely been through romantic misunderstanding. He says: My only hope of really penetrating to the heart of the mystery that was Indian philosophy would lie in forgetting how to think and feel as an American or a European, which (he slyly adds), for practical as well as sentimental reasons, I did not wish to do. Eliot's estimate of Indian philosophy is that it is a soteriological enterprise. It is an attempt to attain enlightenment or epistemological salvation. This soteriological purpose was, verily, what Eliot admired most about Indian philosophy, and its absence what he liked least about the Western philosophical tradition. There were, of course, critics who regarded Eliot's Indic interests as evidence of his overall decadence. He was also accused of a kind of Hindu Dadaism.

None the less, I do believe that Eliot's views deserve to be duly respected, if not as *siddhānta*, at least as a sound *pūrvapakṣa*.

It used to be complained, surely not always quite justifiably, that, for two hundred years, orientalist have filled libraries with descriptions of Asia as seen by a West which, during this period, had, in the main, been either missionary-polemical or secular-positivistic. One fact, which had been deleteriously overlooked, was that Asia was essentially more traditional than the West. Tradition, no less than truth, is considered to be sacred in India, China, and Japan. But it is by no means correct to identify tradition as simply another 'ism' or school among others in the modern world. As one perceptive orientalist has pointed out, tradition can only present itself as an alternative to the modern world. Tradition, according to him, means truths or principles of a divine origin revealed or unveiled to mankind. Only, it uses the contemporary medium to present its eternal message in a language which the present-day world can comprehend. In a sense, orthodoxy may be said to represent but a coherent traditional system. It is pointed out that all the voices which speak within a tradition, even when they appear to oppose one another, have to be regarded as facets of the Truth. Tradition is thus perceived as a unity in diversity.

A critical study of the history of religions has been receiving growing attention in recent humanistic studies. Happily, it is also recognized that, in dealing with Indian religions, their original Sanskrit sources need to be adequately exploited. In the history of religions, as conceived by an eminent authority in that discipline, one does not simply describe particular religious phenomena; rather one looks for possibly universal dispositions among the religious attitudes of people of all epochs. It is elsewhere suggested that the «traditional» solutions to the multiplicity of religious forms is found in the doctrine of the transcendent unity of religions. At the same time, it is also pointed out that no man has ever climbed to the higher stages of the spiritual life, who has not been a believer in a particular religion or at least a particular philosophy.

In this very context I am reminded of Paul Hacker's concept of inclusivism, which that scholar regards as a central and defining characteristic of Indian thought. According to Hacker,

inclusivism consists in claiming for, and thus including in, one's own religion what really belongs to an alien religious ideology. This tendency, Hacker says, is prominently observable among the protagonists of Neo-Hinduism like Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan, who see Hinduism as the point of union of all religions. It is, however, doubtful whether inclusivism, as understood by Hacker, can at all be regarded as a trait exclusively of Indian mentality. It is rather a characteristic of human nature, at a higher level, to account for diverse definitions of reality in terms of concepts belonging to one's own world of thought. Any way, Hacker's thesis may be regarded as a convenient starting point for a re-examination and a rational juxtaposition of concepts like tolerance, eclecticism, syncreticism, etc.

Now something about Vedic literature, which I claim to be my special field of study. It was once averred — and it has been recently reiterated — that Vedic poets composed their songs purely for the sake of art — that they devoted themselves mainly to the worship of Beauty. It was argued that the five verbs which were usually employed in connection with the poetic craft, namely, *kṛ*, *takṣ*, *bhar* (*vac*, *brū*, *īr*), *jan*, and *srj*, clearly substantiated such an assumption. The theory of the ritualistic character of the Ṛgvedic *mantras* propounded, among others, by Bergaigne, who contended that the mythology and the cult of the Veda were so interdependent that one could not be explained without the help of the other, has to be abandoned in view of what the *Ṛgveda*-poets have themselves stated. The Vedic poet, who was conscious of his deliberate literary effort (as suggested by such statements as *saktum iva titāinā punantah*), regarded himself primarily as a poet who had profound imagination and a direct vision of the True and the Real. He was, indeed, a *vipra* — a person possessed by inspired frenzy. If at all, it was the compiler of the *Samhitā* of the *Ṛgveda* who had ritualism in view. The Ṛgvedic *mantras*, as such, can be best interpreted without reference to ritual.

Rājaśekhara, the author of the *Kāvyaṁīmānsā*, who belonged to the first quarter of the 10th century A.D., is believed to have been the first literary critic to advocate the study of the Veda as artistic poetry. Dharmasūri, the author of the *Sāhityaratnākara*, gives a number of instances of the absence of *Kāvya*doṣas and the

presence of *Kāvya-guṇas* in the *Veda*. It is even suggested that a technical theory of poetry, more or less similar to the one of the Greek theorists, must have been conceived by the ancient Indian poets and poeticians, perhaps by way of a *vedāṅga* which is now lost. The poetical embellishments in the *Ṛgveda* did not possess any magico-religious significance; they served a purely aesthetic — and by no means any utilitarian — purpose. It is, for instance, pointed out that the repetitions in the *Ṛgveda*, which are supposed to have a magico-religious import, are just basic factors of literary creation. They may also be indicative of the limited word-stock of the Vedic poets or of their tendency to imitate earlier poets.

As against this, a strong plea was once made — and I find that it has been revived with greater urgency in recent times — for rescuing the *Ṛgveda* from its exclusively aesthetic or ritualistic bondage. It is argued that the Vedic Ṛsis were not mere poets nor mechanical sacerdotalists. As claimed by the Indian tradition itself, they were the enlightened receivers and transmitters of a divine revelation of the highest reality. Their utterances are believed to be emanating from their *dhī* or intuitional grasp of eternal truths. The need is, therefore, emphasized for the recognition of the *adhyātmavid* school of Vedic exegesis and for the readjustment of our canons of research in the light of it. Coomaraswamy has, indeed, gone to the extent of affirming that, for the understanding of the *Ṛgveda*, knowledge of Sanskrit and Indian tradition, however profound, is not sufficient; a wide study of the mystics of different parts of the world, from the point of view of a universal tradition, will bring about a greater appreciation of that *Veda*. The interpretation of the *Veda* in terms of the doctrines of the various *vidyās*, or approaches to cosmological formulations, is, it is pointed out, an urgent desideratum. Rather dogmatically, the *Ṛgveda* is characterized as an essentially mystic and symbolic literature. It is said to be permeated with symbols calling forth to the mind of the early Aryans the pattern of universal life of which he and his psyche formed an integral part.

I, for one, however, think that an attempt to fit in the *Ṛgveda*, which is marked by a sustained ideological evolution and admixture, into any one single fixed interpretational pattern is bound to prove a futile exercise. The traditional multilevel approach,

namely, *adhyātma*, *ādhibhautika*, *ādhidāivika*, etc., certainly exhibits great wisdom and discernment. One may also be reminded that, in ancient Indian thought, the poetic, the ritualistic, and the mystic, are charmingly blended together. The metaphors in the *R̥gveda* and the *bandhutā* of the *Brāhmaṇas* spring from the same urge of the Vedic poet-priest to realize the correspondence between the individual life-process and the cosmic phenomena. Yajña or ethical interdependence is the governing principle of all life. It is further rightly claimed that in sacred literature poetic form is an aesthetic necessity of mystical, cosmogonic, or magical content — that rhythm is the way in which the ‘atemporal’ expresses itself in the ‘temporal’. It is perhaps in this context that one speaks of the dichotomy between the ‘dialectique’ of the West and the ‘rhythmique’ of the East.

Friends! I must now stop here. I should, however, like to clinch these my ramblings by stating that the work that is being presently done in the field of Sanskrit and allied studies certainly inspires hope for a bright and fruitful future. It also confirms the confidence which I had expressed at our first Conference held in New Delhi, in 1973, through a stanza attributed to the Ādikavi Vālmīki, which I had slightly modified for the occasion:

*Yāvat sthāsyaṅti girayaḥ saritaś ca mahītale /  
tāvat Saṁskṛtavidyeyam lokeṣu pracariṣyati //.*

“As long as mountains continue to stand and rivers continue to flow upon the surface of the earth, so long shall Sanskrit studies endure among the people”.