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ANANDA COOMARASWAMY
— A SHEAF OF ANECDOTES



by
S. DURAI RAJA SINGAM



A SHEAF OF ANECDOTES

HIGHLIGHTS ON ANANDA KENTISH COOMARASWAMY

— *The Personal Side*



Anecdotes from the life of a person are so many morsels of biographical titbits. They reveal the man and his way of life. Biography is full of details that enhance the loveable personality of Coomaraswamy.

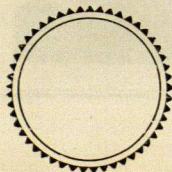
In a letter to the author, Dona Luisa Coomaraswamy expresses encouragement regarding the anecdotes:

I appreciate what you wish to do, and it is right that one should try this, but it isn't easy. I'll polish the ones you send and write a few that come to my mind, and yet these would have to be told in extremely well-chosen language or they should fall flat. I shall certainly send you several little stories. I am collecting a lot of little stories such as you might use.

One cannot help being anecdotal in writing about Coomaraswamy. He was just like the rest of us—except, of course, for his gift of talent. What follows are some Coomaraswamy titbits, some intimate glimpses worth telling. They are recorded as separate stories written in the first person by the individual contributors listed at the end under the caption KEY TO SOURCES. This method provides a unity which blurs the fact that there have been as many as sixty or more participants as contributors. Each story is separate, even though some are by the same author.

I wish to thank my friend Dr. Joseph T. Shipley for the Introduction he has written. Dr. Joseph T. Shipley is an internationally known author of twenty-eight books on literary criticism, language, and theatre. His *Guide to Great Plays* and his *Dictionary of World Literary Terms* are standard works in their fields. He is a past president (now secretary) of the New York Drama Critics Circle, an honorary member of the London Circle, and Honorary member of the London Critics Circle.

Dr. Joseph T. Shipley first met Coomaraswamy through Madam La Meri. She wrote an illustrated book on *The Gesture Language of the Indian Dance* to which Coomaraswamy wrote the Introduction. Coomaraswamy and Dr. Shipley took to one another at once; Dr. Shipley invited him to dinner, and both grew to be friends.

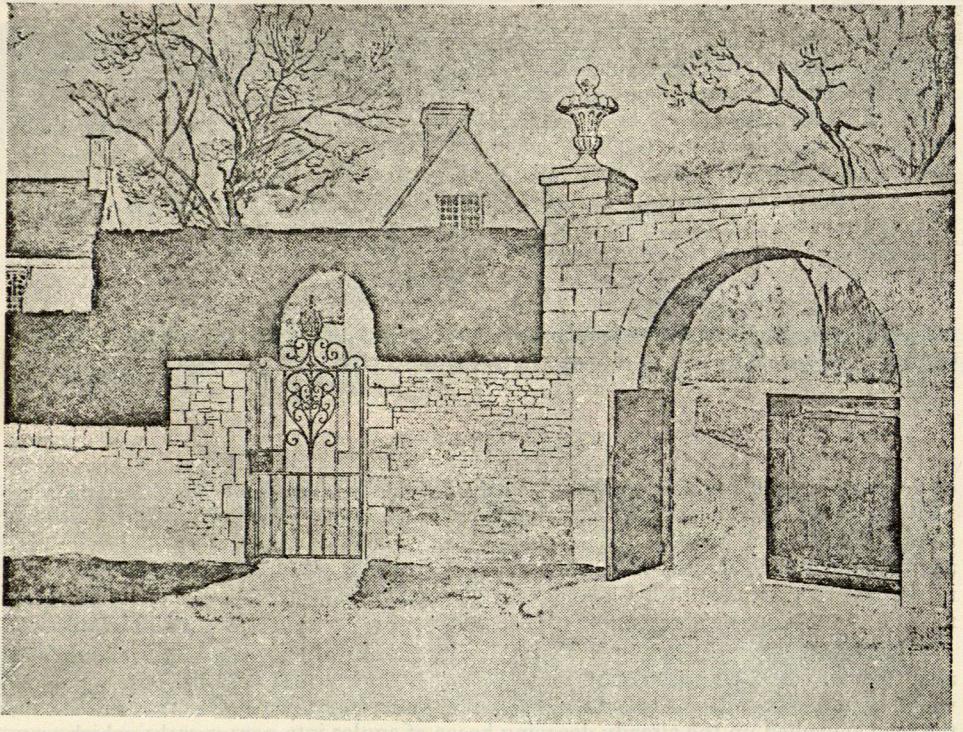


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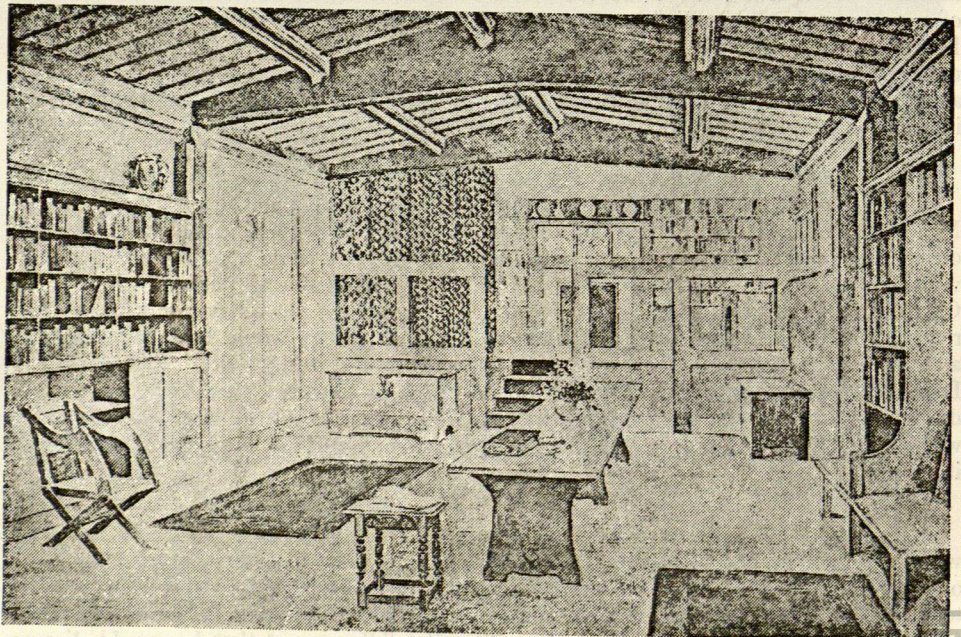


The National Chapel Buildings at Broad Campden



Norman Chapel, Broad Campden, Glos.: Entrance gates C. R. Ashbee, Architect
*Ananda Coomaraswamy's Home in 1908. Reproductions from the STUDIO, Year Book of
 Decorative Art, London p 289; p 229.*

The Norman Chapel Buildings at Broad Campden



Norman Chapel: The Library Restoration and Reconstruction by C. R. Ashbee, Architect



INTRODUCTION

JOSEPH T. SHIPLEY.

I find it clarifying to approach Ananda K. Coomaraswamy by way of two contrasting well-known men from neighboring lands, with whom I have also had close contacts.

Krishna Menon was the Ambassador of India to the United Nations, then the Indian Secretary of Defence. Perhaps because of English condescension, both in India and during his college years in England, so that he deemed himself treated as a second-class citizen, Krishna developed a hatred of the western, democratic world. Personally, he was gracious and hospitable. When I spent three months in India as a government guest, it was Krishna Menon who arranged my trip around the country. For my three-day trip north to the great new dam, he provided an interpreter-guide who was a Communist. (More prominent political figures, he similarly provided with a Communist entourage.) Our driver was an older, quiet Sikh. And early one morning when he and I were alone, the Sikh, who had surmised my sympathies, exclaimed: "They are bad, these people! They want only to get, and never give!" To Krishna Menon the world was a battlefield of passions and greeds, where nations struggled for domination.

In sharp contrast stood Ahmed Bokhari, Ambassador of Pakistan to the United Nations and then Under-Secretary for Information and Eastern Affairs with Dag Hammarskjöld.

Before Partition, Ahmed had been Principal of the University of the Punjab at Lahore. He was already famous as an essayist; he had translated some fifty modern plays, mainly English and American, for the University students to present; he often explained to me rhythms and tempo of Indian music, illustrating by playing the recorder; he died while we were working together on an English translation of the poems of Ghalib.

Ahmed was widely mourned; he was a force for peace in the world. He saw the world as a battlefield of ideals. He remarked to me once that he hoped the hordes of the East would attain some sense of the Western values before they acquired the Western technology. His eyes measured the world, though with compassion rather than passion, in terms of politics and power.



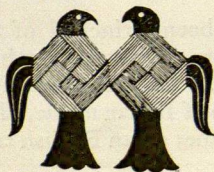
To Ananda Coomaraswamy, both these men would seem tangled in material, ephemeral concerns. Gentle with plants, affectionate with animals, respectful of humans, Ananda envisaged no battlefield but a common life on a shared planet. His quest was for universal truths, for the pervasive symbols in which all humanity clothed its basic beliefs and aspirations. The English poet Blake, for example, wrote:

I give you the end of a golden string,
Only wind it into a ball;
It will lead you in at heaven's gate
Built in Jerusalem's wall.

And Coomaraswamy tied this, through Dante, the Bible, Plato, and Homer, with Islamic, Hindu, and Chinese symbols; thus Chuang Tzu tells us that our life is suspended from God as if by a thread. Jerusalem, too, is not merely a city in the Near East, but also "Jerusalem the golden", a heavenly city of the "imagination"—as gold is not merely the element *Au* but "the recognized symbol of light, life, and immortality". It is through meditation upon such universal significance that man's deepest and highest values are illuminated—and that mankind will achieve its fullest and richest development. His journey home, to seek such ripening meditation, was canceled by Ananda's lamented death. His life provides a guideline for harmony and human fulfilment most of us can but follow from afar.

Ananda's presence in a room made itself felt before he spoke. When others spoke we waited for his opinion. He was fluent in talk about natural things, about simple things, about eternal things. Ephemeral concerns such as politics or international maladjustments, were of little concern to him, but often he would turn a remark in such a field to a more general, more basic, observation. I remember one occasion, when Israel and Palestine were being discussed, and someone referred to the Jews as "the chosen people." "So they call themselves", said Ananda. There was a moment's silence, then he went on; "The chosen people of the future can be no nation but an aristocracy of the whole world, in whom the vigour of European action will be united with the serenity of Asiatic thought". In such ways he would cap a casual conversation with a fundamental thought.

With all his many-faceted knowledge and his serene, all encompassing wisdom, Ananda was a winning and a friendly soul. This more personal aspect of his being is lighted by the anecdotes and observations the loving care of Durai Raja Singam has collected, which are here set forth as told by some of those who have been fortunate enough to share hours with the sage. They help to round out the picture of a man such as is rare in any generation, but through the ages remains as standard-bearer and guide to mankind's aspirations. In these brief recountings, too, you may discern the spiritual depths of Ananda Coomaraswamy.



Coomaraswamy was respected by the boys partly on account of his scholastic ability but not less by his prowess in kicking up his leg level with or above his head.

He had his ordinary share of "teasing" by his schoolmates based in part on his being of different nationality and colour, and to arouse his ire which could only be done in safety when out of reach of his arms and legs. This was only in his first years at school, when his temper was a very quick one.

A clear impression remains of his interest and proficiency in the Field Club excursions. Dr. Arthur Sibly led these to gravel beds where "Ammonites" or a similar insignificant term labelled our findings for the school science showcases—here and beside the local streams Ananda gleaned and gleamed.

He left school with the affectionate regard of his contemporaries who have followed his distinguished career with the greatest interest and little surprise. (39)

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I was closely associated with Coomaraswamy during my study at University College, London, preliminary to becoming a medical student. We worked at botany together, being greatly influenced by our professor, F.W. Oliver; we lived together during a good deal of this time.

At that time, Coomaraswamy was jollier and more carefree than I have ever known him before or since. One day when, for some reason, our tea appeared in a jug, he composed the following rhyme and sent it to the landlady:

We miss a teapot from our midst today
It's hidden in a cupboard far away,
Oh speed the time when chilly teas are o'er
And thou returnest (warranted to pour). (5)

Reading of Dr. Coomaraswamy's avowed intention of eventually retiring to a mountain solitude, I was reminded of the fact that he was a recluse even in his student days. It may interest his admirers to know something about his undergraduate period from one who was his contemporary for four or five years. Coomaraswamy entered University College, London, a couple of years after me, and I was interested to know that he was a son of the man who had so greatly impressed Moncton Milnes and his friends. But a seniority of two years is a formidable barrier in undergraduate life, and it was made insurmountable by Coomaraswamy's not coming out of his shell. We never got beyond a nodding acquaintance, with casual meetings in the corridors or in Sir William Ramsay's chemical laboratory. Coomaraswamy took no part in the social life of the College. He was never seen in the Men's Common Room to which students from all the faculties came to talk or to read the newspapers, or to play chess. He never attended the meetings of the Debating Society, or the Literary Society, or even the Philosophical Society. He never contributed to the students' magazine, the University College Gazette, which I edited for two years. He did not attend any of the College dances or dinners. He was glimpsed flitting along the corridors and stairways like a "transient and embarrassed phantom." Perhaps he could say with Erasmus that he was least alone when most alone: *nunquam minus so us quam solismus*. He passed the Inter Science in 1899 with honours in Botany. When he graduated B.Sc. in 1900, with first class honours in Botany and Geology, I had completely lost sight of him, as I worked in the hospital and went across to the College only for meetings of societies. (49).

A SHEAF OF ANECDOTES

In 1908, when I was staying with Coomaraswamy in his house outside Kandy, Ceylon, an antique dealer from whom he had bought old Kandyan articles had presented him with two huge vases of Birmingham workmanship. He thought them horrible and would not have them in the house but did not like to refuse the gift. So we arranged that I should dispose of them. I took them down the garden path to the fountain, under pretence of washing them, but dropped them on the ground, accidentally of course, and raised a howl of lamentation. He and his wife came running out and we buried the fragments in the garden. Coomaraswamy said jocularly, "Some day antiquarians will dig them up and wonder what period of art they represent." (6)

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Coomaraswamy once told me that he had been travelling on the train from Colombo, talking with a Sinhalese who was a stranger to him. The stranger said, "People say you are a rather clever fellow!" Coomaraswamy was much amused at this. (6)

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When I was acting as Coomaraswamy's secretary, I occasionally stayed with Ananda and Ethel in the Norman Chapel and enjoyed their hospitality. I also saw something of their domestic life when I was working in their house and garden as a draughtsman for their architect C.R. Ashbee. Then I sometimes joined them for tea on the terrace along the south wall of the old Chapel building. Here we talked freely. The mildly ascetic tendency he showed in his way of life is surely likely to have been strengthened in the last two decades of his life, when I never saw him, the period when he spent most of his time and energy upon studies and writings in religion and metaphysics.

He was a *very* light smoker. I never knew him to take any beverage that was at all alcoholic. But their ground of about $1\frac{1}{2}$ -2 acres included an orchard, the apples of which were harvested and the cider pressed in late autumn. As the cart came round, the man shovelled up the already decaying heaps of apples into porous sacks, which were then put under the press until the juice poured on into small barrels. I think it probable that Ananda drank some of this cider of their own growing.

He took a good deal of exercise, and was a fast walker. He took long walks alone. The grounds of the Chapel included a tennis court, where he played frequently with Ethel and with occasional visitors. He was a member of the hockey-team which was run by members of the Guild of Handicraft. In the winter, when we went over to the grounds of a noble land-owner a little way to the south he joined in the skating on a large lake. He skated with skill, and even with some style. He certainly enjoyed playing games, not only the athletic kinds mentioned, for which he had the aptitude and physique, but also for play-acting in our amateur theatricals, for which he had no talent but took an interest nonetheless. (36)

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Ananda certainly looked his best in Indian dress. Ethel looked very well indeed. More graceful and dignified in a *Sari*. They lived at Norman Chapel without a car or any means of local transport. This meant that they had to do a lot of walking: there was no shop or post office nearer than Chipping Garden—a mile distant from Broad Campden, or perhaps more. But in 1907 there were not yet many motorcars on the roads, which were very dusty, not yet macadamized. They would both have disliked a car as too, much of a machine, for their arts and crafts attitude to life. The garden at Broad Campden was too big for them to do much of the work themselves, but Ethel did most of the cultivation of their flowers. There was a beautiful, large pergola, made with brick pillars and oak beams overhead, which had various climbing roses all over it. (36)

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Ananda was not of a solemn *mien*—he had too much enjoyment of life for that. He was capable of gaiety, but I think it is true that he had an abiding sense of the gravity of human existence. And in conversation, his mind seemed to light up fully with interest and imagination, until the discussion was something beautiful or wonderful or of vital human importance. He had no "small talk"—except that he would discuss the view or the flowers in the garden or the food we were eating, like anyone else; but

frivolity of any kind either repelled or bored him. I would have to admit that he had also not much humour — that characteristic to which the English attach such enormous — I sometimes think abnormal — importance. (36)

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Coomaraswamy enjoyed field sports. He did not play cricket when I knew him, but he enjoyed lawn tennis (when laying out the garden at the Norman Chapel, he included a tennis court) and he also joined our Hockey Club at Campden in the winter of 1906-1907. At such games he often had an advantage on account of his long limbs and extensive reach, and considerable speed. We had resumed correspondence after an interval of several years in the late '30's and '40's. He was not a conscientious objector to military service, but he did not have to serve. He and his wife lived principally upon vegetable food.

I am indebted to Ananda for some of my earliest and best guidance in philosophic studies. In this connection, I would like to mention that he gave me the English edition of a little *Introduction to Philosophy* by Professor Paul Deussen of the German University of Vienn. Coomaraswamy knew him personally and he and Ethel had visited him at Vienn. Deussen did much to introduce the study of Indian metaphysics to Indian students. (36)

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In those days it was an annual event for the men of the Guild of Handicraft to produce a play in the little Town Hall. Coomaraswamy joined in our amateur theatricals which we got up rather elaborately at Campden, to the great delight of all the men and boys working at C.R. Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft. In January, 1908, the Guild produced four performances in our Campden Town Hall—Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire—Dekker's "The Shoemaker's Holiday." Coomaraswamy played the part of Lincoln, and C.R. Ashbee, the Lord Mayor of London. Both of them opened the play with a brief dialogue. They were an impressive pair in their Elizabethan costumes, both being fine and large, tall figures and distinguished in appearance. But the only thing to say about Coomaraswamy's talent for stage-playing is that he hadn't any. He could of course present a striking appearance; but he could not convincingly speak and behave as if he were someone else. He had no histrionic art at all. I do not think he enjoyed play-acting. (36)

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Ethel, who was first an art school teacher as well as a musician of the London Royal Academy of Music, had interests in arts and crafts which helped to develop Coomaraswamy's early attraction to these. So it was natural that his Indian patriotism and his attitude to the *Swaraj* movement of the early 1900's should be strongly coloured by craft-idealism, with deep disbelief in mechanical Industrialism; and I wonder if Mahatma Gandhi's advocacy of handwork was not perhaps largely due to Coomaraswamy's early propaganda in this direction.

Coomaraswamy did once meet the man who was the greatest literary celebrity of his time, the playwright and critic George Bernard Shaw. This was on the occasion when Shaw had been invited to give a lecture at the Art Workers' Guild in their premises in Queen Square, Bloomsbury, London. I was present, with C.R. Ashbee and several other members of the Guild of Handicraft of Chipping Campden.

Shaw lectured on the distinctive values of individual manufacture by hand, which he commended from a utilitarian point of view. Coomaraswamy spoke, agreeing with one or two things that Shaw had said, and showing how they were observed in the practice of Indian Art. Here he spoke of the Indian traditions by which some forms and patterns had become stylised and preserved from generation to generation. More than one or two persons in the audience thought that such conventions must be destructive of all the originality, spontaneity and progress which are necessary, or at least supremely desirable in the production of all works of art, and though it was a reason why (as we thought) Indian Art was inferior to that of some other great cultures, Coomaraswamy replied to this by asking: "Do you not, however find it a good thing to preserve many conventions, customs and traditional forms—indeed, do you not perform again and again the 'classic' works of the great masters, for instance, music and poetry and the drama?"

ANANDA COOMARASWAMY, THE BRIDGE BUILDER

"Oh, yes" was the answer given to this, "a pianist, for example, may play the same prelude by Bach which musicians have played again and again for centuries, but the performer is not restricted or inhibited by this; there is still latitude for individual spontaneous rendering—an interpretation—of the work of the original composer. And what the performer contributes in this way, can, of course, be either good or bad." "Just so," said Coomaraswamy. "And in Indian art or craft similarly, the sculptor making a traditional metal statue of *Nataraja*, or the weaver or embroiderer working out a traditional textile motif or pattern, still has a certain freedom and latitude in his interpretation, or version, of the traditional forms, but on the same terms as—and not more than—your pianist has freedom in his individual expression of that which Bach wrote in his *Preludes* and which has been preserved for posterity." The lecture-meeting mentioned here must have been shortly before or soon after World War of 1914–1918. (36)

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Dr. Coomaraswamy came to India and the art school in 1906-1907. He used to dress like an Indian—"Pa-Jama," "Kurta" with a white turban on his head. I met him first in this dress. It seemed to me most amazing—two silver bangles on his hand and two earrings in his ears, with a little beard under his lips. Thus a great scholar came—an art critic. At that time he sailed back to England, travelling across India.

The second time he came, he lodged at the house of Abanibabu. For about three months he stayed with that family—it was some time in 1910. There he became like a member of the family; like Gagan, Samar and Aban, Coomaraswamy became another brother. Eating, sleeping, walking—all sorts of get-togethership in a body. With them he smoked from the same "gargara" (the hubble-bubble). So great was the intimacy. Coomaraswamy had nice curled hair—long and tawny. Abanibabu made a portrait of Coomaraswamy. The picture was printed in *Prabasi*. (55)

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There were five sketch books of old artists—Mughal erotic pictures. Showing them to me, Coomaraswamy said, "Make copies." I was very puritan at that time. I felt shy, but he repeatedly requested copies, and I made them.

Thus Coomaraswamy and I used to pass on our middays, looking at the library of Abanindranath.

Gagan, Samar, and Aban sat together to dinner, and Coomaraswamy was with them. The mother of Abaninbabu entertained them, sitting near by on a small stool with a betel-pot in her hand. The maid servant stood aside. There were frequent requests, "have this," and continuous orders by the mother to the maid servant, "bring this, serve that," Coomaraswamy chewed betel-roll and smoked the *gargara*. What the other brothers did, he did also the same thing.

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and Coomaraswamy were complementary to each other. Their photograph—Coomaraswamy seated and Tagore standing by his side was printed in the *Prabasi* (1318), p. 111) and the *Modern Review* (1911). That year Tagore crossed fifty, and it was on his birthday that a reception was given when Coomaraswamy translated a poem of Tagore's into English.

Coomaraswamy was invited to the position of Curator in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. He had many articles and books on art, and he wrote numerous articles of outstanding excellence in various magazines such as the *Dawn* and the *Modern Review* of Calcutta.

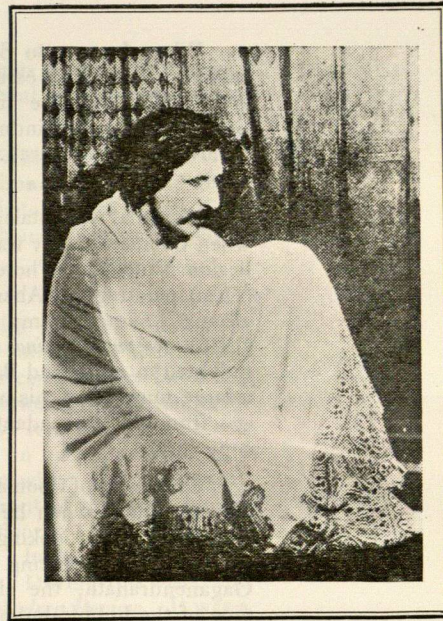
Edmund Rowland, Gooneratne J.P. and Gate Mudaliyar, Ceylon Secretary of the Pali Text Society, London, gave Coomaraswamy, at his request, the "Rupamala," an ancient Sanskrit manuscript, copying their various verses with an English translation. Coomaraswamy presented this bound, typed copy of 152 pages to his eminent friend Abanindranath Tagore.

Abaninbabu wrote in his own hand the main verses in Bengali script along with their English translation on one side of the left-hand blank pages, up to the first twenty pages of the book. He made corrections at places on the main copy. The "Rupamala" was one of the books from which Abaninbabu gave his students (like me) ideas and descriptions of forms of Gods and Goddesses for their drawings and paintings. Many pen-markings of his teachery remain in the manuscript.



ca 1911

Coomaraswamy was tall, of fair complexion, with a fine nose, long brownish hair curling down, a small moustache and a small beard beneath the lips. The face had a glow of his brilliance. In his manners, life and thoughts Coomaraswamy was a perfect symbol of true Indian ideals. He usually wore a pyjama, a loose overcoat, or a *chapkan* and a white turban tied around his head, two silver bangles in his arms and earrings. This is how Coomaraswamy is depicted in the portraits made by three artists Asit Kumar Haldar, Abanindranath and Gaganendranath. Of these three, the one painted by Gaganendranath is the most famous.—D. K. Deb Barman.



ca 1911

THE ROOPAMALA

*The
Rupa Māla*

*In Sanskrit verse
with an English Translation*

*by
Edmund Rowland Goneratne
J.P. & Gate Mithalaya
Secretary in Charge of the
London Nāṭya Sāhitya Society*

*Made at the request of
Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy D.C.S.*

Title page

Śiva Nāṭhah

3. Sumu khat trinayanam cāpi Kiriṭaga kuṇḍalam
Akṣhamālā caturbāhu sūlam pāsāṇca cūṇavam
4. Varadā bhaya hastameca vyāghra caima dharāṇṭam
Sankha varṇa vrusha bhāṇidam śiva nāṭasya
lakṣaṇam.

The God Śiva
A pleasant face with three eyes, a bow
and an arrow, a garland of serpents
earrings, a rosary, four hands
a trisula, a rope, a spear to which
is thrust a deer, hands illustrative
of victory and courage, a vestment
of tiger skin, and a car of a white
bull

Page 3

When I came to Santiniketan, I inherited the manuscript. It carried the most valuable, perfect and essential ideas for making pictures of Gods and Goddesses in Indian art. It has immense historical value as an account of Hindu religion in Ceylon. It is only due to the kindness of Dr. Coomaraswamy that a copy of this rare manuscript is now at Visva-Bharati. (55)

Nandalal was cataloging the paintings in the family library of Abanindranath Tagore when Coomaraswamy was there. Coomaraswamy used to look at those paintings sitting beside Nandalal. There were some albums of Rajput (Jaipur Kandra) and Mughal (Desi) paintings in Abaninbabu's library—those were very rare things. From these albums Coomaraswamy published some volumes—*Indian Drawings*, *Mughal Paintings* (1910), *Rajput Paintings* (1916). In a foreword, Coomaraswamy wrote, "I am greatly indebted to my friend Babu Gaganendranath Tagore for the opportunity of reproducing a large number of his valuable sketches and drawings which he obtained a few years ago from the descendants of hereditary artists of Patna." He also published a few copy books.

On the eve of Coomaraswamy's 70th birthday, Nandalal made a sketch from memory of one midday when he was cataloging in the studio room of Abaninbabu; Coomaraswamy was busy looking and discussing art; and the three Tagores—Samarendranath, with open book, dozing in an easy chair; Abanindranath, snoring, lying prostrate; and Gaganendranath, the elder brother, reading and smoking a "satka" (the long snake pipe of the hubble-bubble).

Nandalal recollected the time very vividly. He painted "Sati" offering herself on the pyre of her husband. Coomaraswamy was delighted with his "Siva-Sati," and asked, "What is its philosophy?" Nandalal answered, "Born as a son of a Hindu, I painted a well-known God, 'Siva-Sati'; I do not know what its philosophy is. I know only its story—'Sati' offered herself at the time of 'Daksa-Jaina.' I have done it from that story. I know not any philosophy whatsoever." It was Coomaraswamy himself and Sister Nivedita who explained the real philosophy of the picture. (48)

The poet Rabindranath Tagore came to London about 1909 or 1910, and a performance was given of a play that he had written in support of the Indian Nationalist cause. To this performance I went with Coomaraswamy, and he introduced me to the venerable poet whom I remember very well on that occasion, though I regret that I cannot now recall what he said then, nearly 70 years ago. Coomaraswamy also introduced me to his poetry, which was already circulating in England; and I remember the Doctor reading a passage to me and comparing the spirit of it to something in the work of the English poet Wordsworth. (36)

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore brought Coomaraswamy with him sometime in 1909 to stay with us students at the Brahmavidya Ashram for about a week. Although I was young, I was already interested in art and I had a camera given to me by my father. I took some photographs of Coomaraswamy and Gurudev together but unfortunately these photographs have been stolen with some other art collections in 1942. Gurudev showed me several books on Indian Art by Coomaraswamy. He is indeed a fine collector and a great scholar. I remember vividly while taking the photographs, the spotless white turban on his head; he was a very handsome looking gentleman always in his white *kurtas*. He was then staying in the first floor of Gurudev's house in Santiniketan as he was a special guest. He prayed and meditated almost all the time. One evening Gurudev and his cousin Dinendranath Tagore and about ten or twelve students organised a musical programme for Coomaraswamy, and someone started playing Gurudev's songs on the harmonium. Coomaraswamy was shocked at this ugly harmonium and shouted, "Stop, stop that harmonium!" It appears he disliked this instrument. Thereafter, Dinendranath arranged for Indian string instruments like the *sitar* and *esraj* to be played as accompaniment to Gurudev's music and Coomaraswamy was very happy then. He used to enjoy his meals with Gurudev and hardly went outside the *ashram*, mostly walking

around the garden of the *ashram*. He loved to hear Gurudev's songs during the mornings and evenings. I was amazed to find all his movements beautiful, artistic and noble; I still remember them vividly.

Later, Coomaraswamy went to Jorasanko with Gurudev Rabindranath, staying at No. 5 Dwarkanath Tagore Street as a special guest of Ganganendranath, Samarendranath and the famous artist Abanindranath Tagore. Among many visitors were Sister Nivedita, Surendranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Sir John Woodroffe and Professor William Rothenstein. (34).

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I saw Coomaraswamy only once, and did not talk with him as I was then only a boy. I do not remember the date, but most probably it was somewhere about 1912 when I was a student at Santiniketan, where eminent scholars came to stay for a few days with the poet Tagore. I remember him as a fair complexioned gentleman with a slight moustache, wearing a long coat and white turban. I also remember his tie and tight breeches (*churidar pajama*). He had a very large mole on his right chin. He was tall and dignified. We were all entertained by a magician while Coomaraswamy was at Santiniketan. We all sat on the spacious ground in front of the guest house, while the poet and his guest sat on the verandah of the first floor. I still remember an item. A cock was brought back to life and it came out from a basket. The poet and our guest turned their faces when the butchery was going on. During this visit, the poet and Coomaraswamy were photographed together for the *Modern Review*. It was a beautiful photograph of the two great personalities. Coomaraswamy also stayed with Abanindranath Tagore in Calcutta, and my master Nandalal Bose told me that many artists were eager to show their pictures to him. (35)

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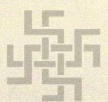
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It was in 1908 that I had made the acquaintance of Coomaraswamy at my place, Masulipatam. He was then making a tour in India and I was advised by certain friends to invite him. He had delivered two or three lectures on *Swadeshi* and Indian Art. I invited him and saw before me a tall man with trousers, slippers without socks, and a long coat, roughly made, not of the Bond Street or Oxford Street tailoring but hanging loose on his legs and shoulders and with a huge lace turban on hair three inches long. He wanted to dress in the Indian way. In appearance he was clearly an Englishman but the turban belied this estimate. On enquiry, he was good enough to say that his mother was English and his father a Tamilian of Ceylon and when in the afternoon he unfolded the pages of his "Medieval Sinhalese Art," what a delight it was! A new world and vista opened out before our vision and the ancient culture and arts and painting and sculpture all passed before the mind's eye in a rich panoply. I placed an order for a copy at once and got it sometime late for Rs 56. It remained a source of inspiration for years afterwards. For the first time we were introduced then to what was called hand-made paper on which he chose to print his books and next he introduced us to his essays on nationalism where in every subject connected with the resuscitation of Indian culture was dealt with in convincing and inspiring language.

While we were all at lunch, squatting on the floor, sitting on wooden planks, he was eating on a plantain leaf taking his food with his fingers; they would not act and he could not direct his fingers to the mouth. Yet he was labouring hard to get through the process if only to copy the Indian ways. While eating his food he asked me whether I was breaking the rules and sitting with him in a line out of mere bravado or out of a sincere conviction in regard to the abolition of caste. He further asked me whether I was permitted by my religion and society to have commensality with him, and if not whether I was doing so out of conviction or out of bravado. He did not countenance any "don't care masterism." At the same time he urged that we should observe *Swadeshi* for a long time to come only for the sake of *Swadeshi*. His idea was that the pendulum should veer round to the other end for a time before it reassumed its normal, perpendicular position.

When in the afternoon he addressed a large audience, he laid the foundations well and truly, of Indian nationalism in so far as South India was concerned. While the



new spirit which was generated by the partition of Bengal (October 16, 1905) created the first great upheaval in the whole of India, the forces so liberated required to be canalised along constructive channels and this piece of task which was by no means easy was left to be achieved by Coomaraswamy. Later on whenever we saw his name in the press or his writings briefly reported from abroad, they were treasured up invariably as sources of added inspiration and instrument of guidance to the nascent nationalism of India.

We were in correspondence with each other. He also bought some *palangpos* and some hand printed curtains for which Masulipatam is specially noted and introduced these to some of his friends in England who used to give orders for them. I remember having sent about that time several consignments to an Englishman who had been mentioned by him in London. He erected an art consciousness in the country which helped to make the Indian renaissance quicker in its process and more complete in its substance. This is all that I know about Coomaraswamy. I do not know any other Andhras who knew him better or at least as well as myself. He was not then known to anybody in Andhra Desa. I alone had invited him. Years rolled by when information reached us that the learned Doctor was employed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and was carrying on unobtrusively his service to India. (37)

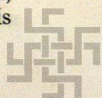
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Coomaraswamy still remains the greatest figure in the sphere of Indian art history and criticism. He could conjure up the essence of a work of art or of a school of painting or sculpture in a few sentences, while others required several paragraphs to convey the same ideas and nowhere so effectively. Terseness seems to have been characteristic of him. When he revisited India he was invited to tea by the well-known Bombay collector, the late B.N. Treasurywala whose fine collection was acquired after his death by the National Museum, New Delhi. Treasurywala was extremely keen to show the learned Doctor his collection and though Coomaraswamy was not at all effusive he also seemed interested to see it. But all Treasurywala's anxious queries suggesting dates and provenance for various bronzes and paintings the Doctor would not be drawn into saying anything beyond giving cryptic answers such as "may be," "possible," "doubtful" and so forth. If an object was not important, I noticed he would hardly give it a glance and even if Treasurywala waxed eloquent about it the Doctor did not seem to be paying attention. As soon as he came across anything that was really good, one could observe that he was deeply interested, even though he examined the object without comment. Treasurywala did most of the talking and Coomaraswamy apparently listened, but most of the time he seemed lost in his own thoughts. I was young and did not dare to open my mouth. The Doctor ignored my presence after I was introduced, and I am sure he would have ignored Treasurywala also had he not been his host. He was, however, good enough to autograph all copies of his publications possessed by Treasurywala.

The well-known collector of Mughal painting, the late A.C. Ardeshir, also invited him to see his collection. I was not present but Ardeshir once told me that when he showed him a palm leaf manuscript, apparently from Ceylon, about the importance of which Ardeshir was not clear, nor about its date and provenance, the Doctor looked at it carefully and then curtly replied to Ardeshir's questions. "It should not be with you." He could not be drawn into any further discussions. (33)

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When as a young student just out from college I wrote my first paper on art with relevant Sanskrit references as footnotes and it was published, Coomaraswamy and K.P. Jayaswal were the very first from whom I received letters of appreciation and guidance. Unaware of where to get at me they addressed their letters to the journal that published the paper. I wondered how Coomaraswamy could find time to write in his own beautiful hand such a long letter going into every detail in the paper. But subsequent letters, books and offprints that he started sending me revealed to me that great men of his stature have not only a large heart but a grand way of accomplishing everything they do. It only illustrates Coomaraswamy's inherent human qualities of affection, kindly service and guidance, even towards the humblest, the least of a legion in his field of knowledge. (47)



A SHEAF OF ANECDOTES

The Pahari school of Indian painting flourished in the Western Himalayas and particularly in some of the Punjab Hill States. Pahari painting is Rajput painting of the Himalayan valleys and hills. As such, what Ananda Coomaraswamy long ago wrote about Rajput painting is equally true of Pahari painting.: "It is an art of ideas and feelings: and in this respect it contrasts most markedly with the work of Persian and Moghul artists which is almost exclusively pre-occupied with secular themes, and in the latter case with portraiture."

The researches of the great pioneer in the field, Ananda Coomaraswamy, and of succeeding workers, have considerably enlarged knowledge of Pahari painting. A very much clearer picture of the Pahari school has emerged now than was possible for Coomaraswamy to give in his famous book *Rajput Painting* or even in his later work, the *Catalogue of Rajput Paintings* in the Boston Museum. The original division by Coomaraswamy of Pahari painting into two schools, namely Kangra and Jammu, appeared to me after on-the-spot investigations to be untenable.

Coomaraswamy, with that large-hearted generosity which was so characteristic of him, on reading my paper on Basohli art in *Rupam*, immediately wrote to me, "Your paper is the most important contribution to the subject of Rajput painting since my book '*Rajput Painting*' appeared." (41)

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Coomaraswamy wanted me to get an expert nautch to do the *apinayam* and the *gandhara* dances—very complicated dances in which the artiste's whole body, fingers and eyes adopt artful poses, gesticulations and dances all at the same time to express the whole devotional prayer of the *bakhta* to his Deity. This expression with appropriate music evokes in the mind of any pilgrim a feeling of ecstasy raising him to the astral plane. Fortunately there was a much esteemed nautch young woman living not very far from my clinic.

I met Coomaraswamy at the station. He was tall and looked young. He had his long hair clipped to reach his shoulders. His face was full and beamed with learning. He had a curved walking-stick. We greeted each other warmly. We had no car and drove home in a horse-drawn cart.

We reached my clinic. I lived on the upper storey. We had coffee with fruits and Indian cakes. On the way to the clinic I had been thinking to myself how I was going to divine the type of food he ate. I apologetically asked him about the type of diet he liked. He said, "Of course, our Indian diet." I was greatly relieved. We arranged a menu for dinner and for breakfast and lunch.

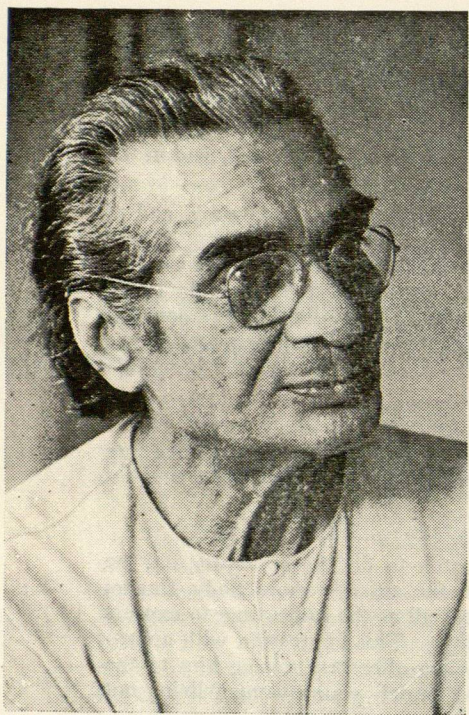
Looking at the large verandah and balcony where we had our tea, he said it was a most suitable place for the artiste to perform her dances and they had to be done in the open sun as otherwise the cinemovie camera would not record well. The performance was arranged for the following morning.

My attorney-friend, Mr. Narasimhan, told Coomaraswamy about the city's ancient history and gave him the whole story like a history scholar. As one of the aims of Coomaraswamy's journey to South India was to study the changes when the Pallava rulers governed this historical city, he was very pleased.

When we were sleeping that night, I felt disturbed when I felt someone holding my foot and rubbing it. I got up and to my great surprise I saw it was Coomaraswamy. He smilingly and apologetically said, "I am sorry I disturbed your sleep. I thought I would rub some citronella oil at the feet to keep away the mosquitoes." He rubbed the other foot too, in spite of my protests, and slept. I mention this incident to show that for great men such kind considerate acts are a born nature.

Next morning the dance artiste Sinnakkanni arrived with her teacher and started her performance in the hot sun. Poor woman! She was sweating. Now and then Coomaraswamy would stop her to ask the meaning of a gesticulation. Neither she nor her teacher could answer at one point when he asked the meaning of her pointing her three fingertips to her eye. Visibly annoyed, he explained the meaning of the gesture as a narrative in the silence of a devotee pining for the grace of the three-eyed Lord





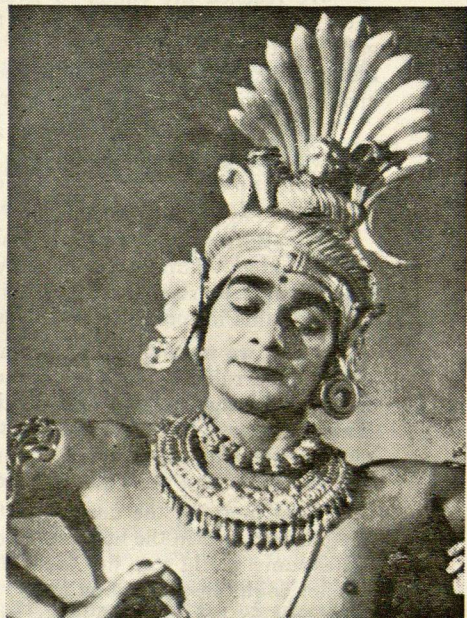
In Paris in 1931 I met Uday Shankar; and in him saw for the first time the living dance of India. I begged him to teach me, but, although we became good friends, he refused me, saying he did not teach. But he gave to me his own copy of the *Mirror of Gesture* by Coomaraswamy.

"Here is my teacher," he said, "Let him be yours."

And so it was. I studied long the two books, and at last I created my first Indian dance. I showed it to Shankar to approve or reject. This dance I took to India with me, performing it in Madras, in Bombay, in Calcutta, in many smaller cities between these capitals. And everywhere it was enthusiastically accepted.

— La Meri

Uday Shankar, the best exponent of the Hindu Dance says, "Coomaraswamy never missed my show in Boston"



Uday Shankar as Siva and Krishna



Siva. The three fingertips placed on the eye meant *Tri Natra*, three-eyed god. The pining of the devotee was shown in such illustrative postures and movements of every limb and the eyes matching his thoughts.

The dance performance took place for two days. In the afternoons and early mornings we went out shooting pictures of the ruins. On the fourth evening, he made a short speech on invitation just before he had to leave to catch the train to Bombay. He wrote to me on his way to the north of India and sent me a copy of *The Dance of Siva*, his beautiful publication.

Thus, the Lord Shiva brought me in contact with this very great scholar who came to the forefront in Ceylon after his death—"The memories of the great liveth after them." (14)

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I remember that it was in 1922-1923 when I met Coomaraswamy for the first time in Boston. I was then travelling with the Company of Anna Pavlova, the great Russian ballerina. I used to partner her in two ballets, "Radha Krishna" and "Hindu Wedding," which I arranged for her. During this period, I distinctly remember Coomaraswamy presenting me a book, *The Mirror of Gesture*, being translated by him into English from *Abhinaya Darpana* (in Sanskrit). After leaving Pavlova, I went back to London where I had to go through very bad days almost without money. I then borrowed some money and moved to Paris in search of a job. I met many people there, but none of them had consideration for my association with Pavlova; they were rather interested in our Indian dancing. Though I had to struggle hard for my existence, I was not disheartened and decided to start from the bottom. Even an attic in a cheap hotel in Paris was costly for me then. Anyway, I went on trying to earn my bread by giving a few lessons here and there. One night at about 11.00 or 11.30, I came back to my attic, tired and hungry after the day's toil. I had to satisfy my hunger with some bread swallowed with water. I then went to bed but could not sleep as my head was haunted with thoughts and worries. Suddenly I remembered the book, *The Mirror of Gesture*, and I took it out of my trunk. Leaning on my cot, I went through the book, turning pages until my eyes stopped and stared at the art plate of the famous statue of the "Nataraja." I was very much absorbed in it; it was not merely a pose but I could find many movements in the statue—I was almost in trance. I started doing the movements I could imagine, but could not proceed since the floor of my attic was very weak. Somehow I managed to hire a place where I tried out movements and created the dance of "Shiva." Later on I created many other dances such as "Tandava," "Galasura," "Bhashlasura," "Kirat Arluna," etc. the source of which was the statue of the "Nataraja." That night was memorable to me. Naturally, Coomaraswamy was always in my thoughts. I am grateful to him, I presented this same book to La Meri in 1931 in Paris. (30)

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I met Coomaraswamy again in Boston in the year 1933. I was on tour in the United States with my own Company of Indian dancers and musicians. I will not forget that evening when Coomaraswamy came back stage after my dance, "Shiva". I remember he was very much impressed witnessing the dance, and he embraced me and said, "It is really wonderful, I wish you good luck, go on with your mission." In reply, I said, "You are responsible for this," "But how?" he asked me. I then reminded him of his presenting me his book, *The Mirror of Gesture*, and told him the story of how the *Shiva* dance was born and came to life on the stage out of an art plate of the *Nataraja*. I could feel the expression of confidence in the smile on his face, as if he could foresee my success in the future. I give below a paper comment during my show in Boston:

What is the reason of that spell? In the dance, Shiva—the destroyer of Vishnu—the preserver of Kamadeva—the God of Love, he mimes the great dramatic moments in the lines of his own, the Gods of immemorial India. Sir Ananda Coomaraswamy (Curator of Indian Antiquities in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the greatest authority outside of India on such things) has written, "The essential meaning of the dance of Shiva is triple. First: it is the image of his rhythmic play as the source of all movements



in the Universe; second: the object of this dance is the deliverance of innumerable human souls from the snare of illusion; third: the place of the dance, Chidambaram, the centre of the Universe is our heart." How does the great Uday Shankar react to all this chorus of acclaim which greets him everywhere he goes.

— Leo Rabety, *Boston Sunday Post*, March 19, 1933 (30)

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During our stay in Boston, I had lunch with Coomaraswamy and his wife at their residence. Miss Simkie, then my dance partner, was with me. Coomaraswamy made a humour saying, "Here you are Mr. Shanker—oh no, Lord Shiva."—at the lunch table. After a pause, he made a very thoughtful comment, saying, "I hope your dance will take the world by storm in the future, as yours is creative." This is all that I remember about him. (30)

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If there was any touch of the bibliophile in "the Doctor" (and I would hazard a strong guess that there was) then he must have experienced a certain satisfaction that evening (and on subsequent occasions) at my outspoken admiration and enthusiasm for his personal library. Never before (or since) have I explored a library from which trivia, the superficial, and the second-rate had been so completely eliminated. And it was on this occasion that he called my attention to George MacDonald's *Phantastes* and the prose romances of William Morris, notably *The Well and the World's End*. Readers familiar with those books may appreciate, to some degree, my subsequent gratitude upon perusing those overly neglected masterpieces. (42)

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The room was dominated by an inscription in the superb Roman handwriting of Eric Gill:

EX DIVINA PULCHRITUDINE ESSE OMNIUM DERIVATUR

..... The being of all things is derived from the divine beauty—words of Saint Thomas Aquinas. (43)

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In Paris in 1931 I meet Uday Shankar; and in him saw for the first time the living dance of India. I begged him to teach me, but, although we became good friends, he refused me, saying that he did not teach. But he gave to me his own copy of the *Mirror of Gesture*.

"Here is my teacher," he said, "Let him be yours."

And so it was. I studied long the two books, and at last I created my first Indian dance. I showed it to Shankar to approve or reject. This dance I took to India with me, performing it in Madras, in Bombay, in Calcutta, and in many smaller cities between these capitals. And everywhere it was enthusiastically accepted. The *Evening News of India* wrote: "The ubiquitous sari of the South Indian dancing girl, with bells on her feet and golden waist band to match and hair plaited to a finish in pucca *devadasi* style are scenes to conjure with. (18)

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A SHEAF OF ANECDOTES

Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy, was my chief adviser and a teacher who encouraged and helped me to write on art and its history. He was also a kind and benevolent friend. He was always a source of inspiration for any writings, research efforts and publications on Indian art. I obtained unlimited help, advice and guidance from him when editing *Rupam*. On several occasions he cabled congratulations direct from Boston on reading my articles published in various journals. Undoubtedly such encouragement and best wishes from such an illustrious person helped to make my career safe and secure. Such help and advice are hardly forthcoming nowadays. We used to correspond regularly but his letters were always concise and businesslike. Here is an example of one of his longer letters:-

Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston, Mass.
Jan. 3, 1926

Dear Gangoly.

Many thanks for the Vasanta Vilasa photo.

I have no doubt you are right about the Chandi Banon Agastya.

Your article on erotic sculpture is a very valuable contribution but I would not call it (final) because I think its presence in Indian art is deeply rooted in Indian culture as a whole, in other words a variety of motives explains its presence.

I am sorry I could not myself do the Hamza Romance. I did so much work last winter that I find it necessary to do as little as possible for the present.

Yours sincerely,
A.K. Coomaraswamy

All his letters were handwritten and he never used a typewriter to produce a lengthy letter. (51)

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I first came in contact with him in 1908. He had just published his first book, *Medieval Sinhalese Art*. On reading this book I wondered that he had only written about Ceylonese art but had not mentioned about the source of this art, the great Indian art and culture. Dr. Coomaraswamy was in England at that time. In a letter I expressed my reservations. Within a few weeks a monograph arrived on 19th May, 1908, entitled 'Aims of Indian Art.' I had never before seen such a brilliant interpretation of the basis of Indian art. I was utterly charmed and delighted. The monograph evoked considerable interest amongst the knowledgeable circles all over the world. Barely three months later, Coomaraswamy—the future historian of Indian art—was to cause reverberations at the Oriental Congress Conference Hall at Copenhagen by his enunciation of the basic qualities and the aims of Indian art. There he read a paper denouncing the European archaeologists' theory on the importance of the Greek influence on Indian sculpture. This essay helped to change the opinion of European scholars and channelled their views into a new and correct way of understanding. It was from this time that some European scholars started to enquire and explore the origin and aims of the art of India with a fresh unbiased attitude. Foremost amongst them were William Cohn and Barthold Laufer. In December, 1908, Dr. Coomaraswamy delivered a revolutionary talk on Eastern culture, mainly on Ceylonese civilisation, at the Tenth Annual Ceylonese Dinner in London. This was later published in the *Ceylon National Review* in the Feb. -June issue of 1909+ (51)

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+ He (Coomaraswamy) was not used to that sort of a dinner. He led a simple life. He was a vegetarian and he did not drink, and this was the first after-dinner speech he had made. What was the purpose for which they (Coomaraswamy) and his wife came to England seeking education? The majority came over to study Law or Medicine, or some branch of Science, and their studies were usually conducted from a utilitarian point of view. He had not heard of anyone coming to study in those branches which were imaginative. No one in Ceylon in the 19th century had produced anything of any importance in art or music. But the things judged by posterity were not the means of making material progress but additions to the intellectual possessions of mankind.

He found that those who were now known as "educated" in Ceylon were nothing more than strangers in their own land. It was no credit to them, it was nothing to be proud

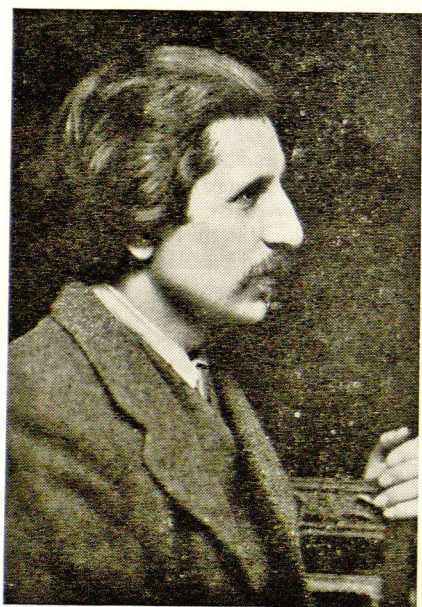




ca 1926



ca 1930



ca 1915



ca 1926

A SHEAF OF ANECDOTES

Some may not be aware that Dr. Coomaraswamy's father was Ceylonese but his mother was an English girl. So racially his ancestors were Indian Tamils, subsequently permanent settlers in Ceylon. As such, his love for India on the one hand and the awareness of the problems of Ceylon on other, are but natural although Dr. Coomaraswamy was brought up and educated in England. Up till now Dr. Coomaraswamy had not set foot on India and we still had not met. He was busy with his research in London along with a new breed of scholars. The impact of the Indian National Movement was at last to reach his ears. He gave a new impetus to the movement through many lectures and essays. Leaving aside his European dress and habits, he put on local Tamil attire complete with shawl and turban and devoted himself fully to the national cause. His writings and talks soon made him a renowned leader of the Swadeshi struggle. During this period, Dr. Coomaraswamy stayed at Calcutta for a considerable period of time. Under the aegis of the Dawn Society and National Council of Education, he gave a series of lectures on nationalism, national education and Indian art. These talks seemed to have opened up a new vista of India's past glories. One of his illustrated talks on Indian art was presided over by the late Vedanta Chintamani Hirendranath Dutta. He highly praised Coomaraswamy on his talk and remarked: "Dr. Coomaraswamy in this short hour of his address has taken me to ethereal heights of Indian Culture in which I have gasped for breath I have never before had the opportunity to listen to a more profound and educative talk."

I happened to be the (slide) projectionist at this meeting. The lecture was an object lesson in how to deliver an illustrative talk. A few years, later, in my first lecture delivered at the Indian Museum on Gandhara art, I was to follow his methods. On his very first visit to India, Coomaraswamy started on a tour of the various cultural centres of the country. Son of an English lady, brought up and educated in England, Coomaraswamy, completely Indian in mind and in dress, went round temples, stupas, monasteries and archeological sites with the greatest devotion. He was able to collect numerous art materials, photographs and cine pictures for his future research on Indian art. With the help of these collections, soon after his return to England, he published two books, *Indian Drawings* and *Thirty Indian Songs*. Based on correct scientific methods, these books gave the public the opportunity to judge for themselves the magnificence of the art of India. With the publication of his next two books, *Selected Examples of Indian Art* and *Visvakarma* the number of admirers of Indian art increased greatly. (51)

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I had the honour to invite Coomaraswamy to India in 1910, on the occasion of the exhibition held in Uttar Pradesh at Allahabad. From the various paintings and archeological materials that Coomaraswamy collected on this tour, Maharaja Manindra Chandra on the advice of Radhakumud Mukerji, bought two paintings and bronze statues. I selected the articles for the Maharaja, who later donated them to the Sahitya Parishad of Calcutta.

Later Coomaraswamy agreed to present all his collections to the Indian public on the proviso that these have to be housed in a suitable exhibition hall to be built at Varanasi, the ancient cultural centre of India. Unfortunately for India, this generous offer was not taken up at that time. Carrying his priceless treasure, he went from door to door of the rich: begging for donations to build the exhibition hall. His appeal was published in the newspapers and through pamphlets. But his request for the preser-

of that the returning student was as ignorant of Ceylon history and civilisation as the young Civil Servant who went out fresh from this country. What was the secret of the past glories of the Sinhalese and Tamil civilisation in Ceylon?

"The secret of the overflowing life of Ceylon was that originally it was part of India; that was the key to the whole of their civilisation. India was the teacher of the whole East. They could not fulfil their duty by mere references to the glories of the past, or by assimilating the features of Western life. They would not even gain the respect of the West by doing that.

They should take a real intelligent interest in the Nationalist movement in India which was one aspect of a great force which was acting through the world."

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Coomaraswamy's first visit to India was in 1901 — S.D.R.S.



vation of the collections was not heeded by the then patriots and political leaders of the country. Today, this failure to retain our own heritage, remains as a disgrace on us. In the end, Coomaraswamy had to take all his collections to England. With the help of the numerous paintings that he had collected, Coomaraswamy published another masterpiece, *Rajput Paintings* (Oxford University Press, 1916). Written in two volumes, Coomaraswamy tried to show in this book, the close relationship that exists between Hindu religion and the medieval paintings. He explained how the now little known aspects and teachings of the Gita—not recognised earlier by such authorities on Indian paintings as Sridhar Swamy — has been explicitly drawn in these paintings by the illiterate village painters of Rajputana. From this aspect, these Rajput paintings becomes essential visual aids in the study of Vaishnavite and Saivite philosophy. After “Rajput Painting” was published, his priceless and rare collections were purchased at a high price by the Boston Museum. For the suitable display of this collection the trustees of the Boston Museum opened a separate section of Indian art and in April, 1917, appointed Dr. Coomaraswamy himself as its curator of this new section. Dr. Coomaraswamy spent the rest of his life at Boston. By his efforts and untiring zeal, the collection was gradually enriched and added on until it was to become one of the finest and greatest collection of Indian art, not to be seen anywhere else in the world.

There is no doubt that the unscrupulous traders and foreign rulers caused great material poverty by sucking the country dry, but the transshipment abroad of these priceless art treasures made the country poor intellectually as well. Indian scholars were henceforth prevented from getting a complete picture of the wonder that was Indian art and we have lost for ever the best and greatest accumulation of Indian art.

Thus the loss of this treasure of ancient Indian heritage is an unfortunate incidence of greatest national importance. On the other hand, this great collection, by drawing the attention of the world's foremost art connoisseurs and critics, has carved out a prominent and honourable place for Indian art, amongst the world's greatest civilisations.

Dr. Coomaraswamy published four illustrated catalogues of the valuable collection at the Boston Museum. Scholars of Indian art should be thankful to these volumes for providing help and guidance in their research work. Such excellent meritorious work has never been compiled before.

He has shown deep knowledge and fine understanding in the philosophical interpretation of Indian iconography medieval paintings. None before him studied the ancient works of art in such detail and depth. It will not be an overstatement to say that his knowledge in this field was unlimited. Many Sanskrit technical words used for the description of rules and guidelines for the making of icons and for paintings had been incomprehensible to modern scholars from disuse. By discovering the correct meaning and usage of the long forgotten writings, Coomaraswamy was able to explain both the theoretical as well as the practical basis of ancient Indian art and sculpture. We see his deep scholastic efforts in the successful translation of chapters like—‘Sukra Neetisar’, ‘Silparatna’, ‘Vishnu Dharmattar’ and ‘Abhilas Chintamani’ etc. In his search for the basic pathos of Indian art, his intellectual power is expressed in these three essays—‘Indirect (Paroksha)’ ‘Indication (Abhash)’ ‘Ornamentation (Alam-kara)’ It becomes obvious from these three essays that Coomaraswamy was an ideal art expert, linguist and a philosopher of the highest class, all rolled in one. He had mastery over many Indian and foreign languages. In his essays he has fluently quoted from original writings in Greek, Latin, Italian, French and German scholars. On the other hand, he was well versed in Sanskrit, Pali, Hindi, Persian and Urdu. It can be safely said that his knowledge of Sanskrit and Pali was equal to any Indian or European masters.

During the last decade of his life, he was deeply immersed in the study of Vedic literature. He has contributed considerably to the understanding of Vedic Literature by comparative discourses on Vedic, Puranic, Greek and pre-historic writings. His essays like ‘Studies on the nature of Gods and Demos (*aura* and *asura*)’ and ‘New gateway to Vedic discourses’ are the results of his extensive knowledge and expertise in Vedic thoughts. He often used to send writings and essays based on his researches, for publication in *Rupam*. For this honour, I, as the editor, was most grateful to him. (51)

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A SHEAF OF ANECDOTES

Probably it is not so well known that when Coomaraswamy came to Calcutta for the second time, he expressed interest to receive initiation (*mantra*) from a Bengalee Guru. Gangan Babu tried hard but none of the gurus at Bhatpara agreed to come forward. Finally Coomaraswamy was admitted to the Vishnu sect by a Vaishnava spiritual leader (*guru*). Coomaraswamy gave him one hundred rupees as an offering. Later on he named his two sons Narada and Rama. In a letter to me he once expressed his wish to spend his last days at Haridwar. His wish however was not fulfilled. (51)

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Dr. Coomaraswamy was, in his dress, manners, thoughts and mental make-up the ideal Indian manhood personified. He was tall, fair in complexion, with a sharp nose wearing a turban over his shoulder length hair and with a slightly hairy face which showed his genius. I have seen this great man in this appearance. He also had close friendship with the Tagore brothers. When in Calcutta, he had often joined in the gathering of learned men at the south verandah. Such a moment had been made immortal by Nandalal on one of his line drawings and can be witnessed even today. (51)

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I was at a party in New York a few years ago where Radhakrishnan and A.K.C. and Sir R.K. Shanmugam Chetty were present. It was a brilliant conversation. I was a listener. (38)

* * *

In the year 1910, I, as a boy of eight, accompanied my father, Sri V. Krishnaswami Aiyer, who had then become a Judge of the Madras High Court, but who as a seasoned Congressman was invited to be present at the Congress held at Allahabad. It was then I visited with my father the Art section exhibition as a part of the Congress *pandal*. I then beheld the tall attractive figure of the Doctor clothed in a long coat, with an *angavastram* laced, and a lace-turban. He struck me as being very handsome. Even then his name had become much recognised for its eminence in the encouragement of Swadeshi and Handicrafts of India. My father purchased the Portfolio as the one published by him and it is still with me. (54).

* * *

While in Boston one day I met the late Eric Schroeder, who was a great friend of Coomaraswamy, at a party. I had been the Keeper at M.F.A. for about a year and when I was introduced to Schroeder he looked me up and down for a few seconds and said, "So you are the man". Then for the next quarter of an hour, in front of a large gathering he went into a rapturous eulogy about Coomaraswamy, saying that he was the greatest man Schroeder had ever had the privilege to meet in his life. The second experience was at the first board meeting of the Tibetan Foundation in New York. Wesley Needham, who is probably in his fifties and is the well known Tibetologist at Yale, walked across the room, came up to me, bent down and was about to touch my feet. Embarrassed, I recoiled, as I did not know him. He then introduced himself and said he was doing this to the memory of Coomaraswamy, as I was occupying the same chair in the Boston Museum. (3)

* * *

"I have a rule against lending my books, primarily because mine is a reference library, containing only books I am apt to need at any time. In your case I break it." Letter, dated 22.11.1939. (8)

* * *



Once at tea with Mrs. Coomaraswamy, she spoke of her husband. "He gets along beautifully with simple people. Unlearned people, I mean. Those whose minds have been unclouded by the folklore of our so-called Western culture. They understand him perfectly." Coomaraswamy walked in. "Ananda," cried his wife, startled. "Home so early?" He said, "I made up my mind that I had enough of that museum for today." His wife was concerned about his health because, "it is usually so hard to get him to leave the museum." But he told us, "There are times when a person dislikes that which he likes most. I have had enough of the museum for today. Is there no tea for me?"

Coomaraswamy's wife looked up from the tea urn and grinned at me when he turned to me and asked, "Do you like fishing?" "Not a bit," I replied. He said, "I find fishing to be the most wonderful of all mental exercises. I like to catch the fish, too." Then followed an hour's chat about the joys of fishing. Suddenly he was gone. No farewell. "The Doctor has an idea," Mrs. Coomaraswamy explained. "He is always like that."

Once I heard Coomaraswamy lecture in Boston. His talk was straightforward, not technical, and enjoyable. The scholars in the audience and the fairly large gathering of Indians hung on his every word. One day I read in a magazine that he was listed among the ten great living American essayists. (24)

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When I went to work as a volunteer in the Boston Museum, Coomaraswamy's cautious gestures of hospitality when I was introduced—the finding of a place for my table, the offering of cigarettes, and the willingness of a man who was obviously and really busy to talk and help—made me at home with him. Thus, began a ten years' friendship. Our days at the Museum were strenuously spent, for he was pouring out articles in the full spate of his matured metaphysical understanding. He read on at night, and worked in the early morning. Behind a long table drifted deep with journals, books, and papers his labour proceeded.

The most vivid impression of his physique can be had of an anecdote: he was once walking along Commonwealth Avenue with his dog of some slender long-haired breed, an Afghan or a Saluki, when he heard the voice of one of the many to whom unconventionality is offensive, demanding sarcastically at his back: "Which is which?"

His only normal breaks from work were conversations with his visitors or the sharing of some good incident. I would hear his voice interrupt me with "Listen to this..." He would regale me with some incandescent sentence which had caught his mind. One intolerably hot muggy afternoon summer, we were trying to work but our brains were steamed. Suddenly he stood up and muttered: "This is no good", then slinking into the Asiatic Department safe, he lay down, drew up his knees, and fell asleep.

One day at lunch we were going at it hammer and tongs, Coomaraswamy maintaining the essentially metaphysical character of artistic production and I asserting the frequent and significant predominance of moral and natural motive, he citing texts and



I adducing works and circumstances, he pointing out the continuity in all traditional cultures of metaphysical reference in symbols, I challenging him to explain on any such grounds so characteristic a form as for instance the panegyric in Mediaeval Persia. Our table-companions at last found a spokesman in the Director of the Museum. "I don't want to hurry you," he said politely, "but when you two have *quite* finished splitting that *particular* hair, will you take time out to pass me the salt?"

I had been puzzled by some of Coomaraswamy's inconsistencies, as for example his unashamed pleasure in what he called his fan mail as opposed to his belief in the anonymity of the craftsman. One day we had gone out to lunch and he produced a letter from his pocketbook. "I would like you to read this," he said; "in a way, it's a very personal letter; but I'd like you to read it." And he passed over a sheet covered with the strong and delicate handwriting of Eric Gill. I read the message, an expression of the English craftsman's love and gratitude, a testimony of kindred. Whether it was intended as an indirect rebuke to me I hardly know; but I felt the embarrassment of rebuke. My betters thought better of my friend than I did. (25)

At the end of one summer, my wife and I went up to stay with the Sage, as we called Coomaraswamy, in his forest house near the Canadian border of Maine. We parked our car at the foot of the steep ascent and walked up a rough road through trees to the knoll on which it stood, humped and black, with faint yellow light in the windows. Our knocking roused footsteps, and Coomaraswamy opened the door, a wilder silhouette than we expected, very rough in the jacket, very baggy in the knickerbockers, his long shanks ending in boots like boats. His handshake was always accompanied by a curious raising and shrinking of the shoulders. Behind him in the room half-lit appeared the timbers of an open roof, with an old pair of trousers hung up in the gloom like a regimental banner in the nave of a church. A table near the door with tools and fishing tackle; a battered axe by the fireplace; and in the far corner the curtains of a great bed partly drawn. My prowling revealed much in the way of implements for dealing with rocks and wood, with flowers and fishes, little in the way of art beyond a gramophone, and an admonitory poverty of books. The last he proceeded, when questioned, mumblingly to explain, with some little apparent distaste; and then he led the way to the kitchen, where he set about making supper.

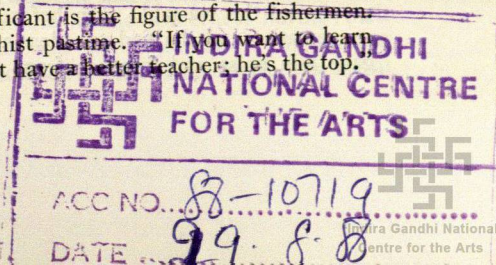
This kitchen was the scene of high old times. Coomaraswamy used to throw fuel into the stove in the attitude of one who, only too conscious that he was playing with fire, expected it to spit back at him; but he was expert in what cookery he did. The staple of our diet was "Aunt Jemima" pancakes.

There was in the cupboard the remains of a bottle of Apricot Brandy, laid in some time before, and probably for medicinal use; our host did not care for alcohol, which gave him a headache. But on the last night of our visit we were clearing things up, since Coomaraswamy was going to drive back to Boston with us. It was felt that the hilarious festivities of the kitchen should have a climax, and the bottle be finished. After supper, accordingly, it was uncorked and poured; we raised our glasses and drank. I could hardly believe my palate. All alcohol had long been evaporated, and what remained was precisely the juice of canned apricots. I looked at the others. My wife evidently tasted what was wrong—she looked amused and disappointed. But not so the Sage who, catching but misinterpreting my astonished gaze, raised his eyebrows in grave appreciation and murmured in a voice of awe, "Very smooth!"

He had an affection for plants and made homes for them; he had made a large rock-garden in Maine with his own hands, and had a quite elaborate garden at his Needham house. He did not pose in them, but worked doggedly, pulling a new-grown weed or making some rough place smooth with his likeable fingers.

His forest house in Maine was very simple, and there was no bath. "When it becomes unbearable," he explained, "we go down to the lake."

Of all personal images perhaps the most significant is the figure of the fishermen. Coomaraswamy was expert in this rather un-Buddhist pastime. "If you want to learn to fish," his Maine neighbours agreed, "you couldn't have a better teacher; he's the top."



He used the best English tackle, from Hardy's, and possessed a great variety of flies though he regarded the gaudier confections with some contempt. The wily and patient process of his fishing really began in the neighbourhood of the proposed pond; and then he would sit hour after hour in his boat, or stand upon the shore, quiet as the incarnate destiny of all fishes; hour after hour his line would whistle forth and drop on the water as he waited, the breeze stirring the long hair beneath a weatherbeaten hat speckled with flies.

On the last afternoon of the season, with his usual patience, Coomaraswamy cast on and on, the late sun gilding his thin brown cheek as it gilded the faded woods behind him. At last he landed his fish—a young and foolish trout too small to keep. The fisherman, wet his hand, took him off the hook, and looked at him with a face in which the formidable expression of his fishing had altered to gentleness. For a moment or two he seemed to enjoy the little creature's all-seeing stare and golden side, then tossed him back to his element, and watched the bright ripples of his track as he made for deep water. "Well," he said, "that's the end of the year."

Once the Coomaraswamys took my wife to a flower-show. Coomaraswamy was at this time greatly interested in cacti. He had a winter garden in his conservatory of those armored plants. My wife told me how he kept leading her back as if by accident to the stall where cacti were sold until at last she succumbed and bought one. On me he plied the same cunning of reiterated temptation, persistently diverting my interest in the beauty or history or human works to what was scriptural in them. (25)

* * *

I went from Cleveland to Boston to call on Ananda Coomaraswamy because I knew his books and his reputation. I had undertaken to write a briefer—than usual—version of the *Bhagavad Gita*, because I wished my friends and western people in general to know the beauty and wisdom I found there. Dr. Coomaraswamy said at first: "Another *Gita*?" When he saw that I was illustrating it, not as an authoritative historian but as an American woman, reflecting its beauty, he said there was a place for it and encouraged me in many ways. He said the version I was working from, (from the *Devanagiri*), was the translation by *pundits* set to the task by Mrs. Annie Besant. It was a literal translation I had and I edited it to make it easily read by Americans without distorting its meaning. It was checked over by Dr. Coomaraswamy on his point, with one minor change suggested. We talked for hours although he was weak and ill. Of certain things in the environment of Boston he said, "This civilization is running down rapidly." He wanted to return to India to live in strict simplicity. Shortly before he died his wife told me they were closing out their home here to go to India for the elemental life he wanted. I felt that in his book *Am I My Brother's Keeper?*, published just then that his distrust of all machines and contemporary life was the sad outlook of a man ill and weak and discouraged. He watered the houseplants every day and had light connections with the Museum of Fine Arts although he went there almost everyday. He had a constant contact with four doctors. He went to New York to speak on the radio and was in great demand as a sponsor and speaker. I learned from him, and from other sources of synthesising the purposes of Christianity and of Eastern religions. He was in conflict with Dr. Walter Clark who represented an attitude of analysis of the differences. When I first met him, he asked me intently what I knew of Christianity, feeling that Christianity was the credential necessary to the study of the *Bhagavad Gita*. He believed that "Christian" peoples are too ignorant of Christianity. He showed me a large circle of books about him on the floor in his study. The book he said he had worked on for twenty years, to be published posthumously was one to relate Vedantic and Christian cultures. (46)

* * *

When Coomaraswamy first came to my house on Beacon Hill many years ago, he towered above the other guests physically, intellectually and spiritually. As he joined us around the tea-table even before he uttered a word his mere presence uplifted the conversation and clarified our ideas as ozone vivifies the atmosphere. An inner serenity gave him poise and freedom from self-consciousness whether he remained silent and

aloof or entered with dignified deliberation into a lively discussion. When he spoke, it was usually in reply to a question. Once he explained his silence by remarking that in the East it was not customary to talk except to further a definite interchange of opinion. (29)

When Coomaraswamy applied for a ration card during the period gasoline was rationed (the war years), he signed himself "Dr." Without any inquiry being made it was assured that he was a medical man and so received a more generous gasoline allowance than usual, a clerical oversight which amused him greatly. (12)

Once I asked Coomaraswamy to explain the implications of his obvious erudition in the literature of the Roman Catholic Church and his sympathy with its doctrine. His article on "The Mediaeval Theory of Beauty" had struck me as the best of its kind. I could not be sure whether Coomaraswamy had become an avowed son of the Church or whether his easy leaps from Christian Scriptures to Hindu to Islamic to Greek and Egyptian simply signified his research of profound analogies. With unforgettable swiftness and a humorous glance he turned and said, "I am not a Churchman, I am too catholic to be a Catholic." I have never found anything to equal the self-portrait. (11)

When I was Curator of the Bush Collection of Religion and Culture at Columbia, Coomaraswamy sent me his own photographs to have slides made for our collection—a most generous act! And so we had a magnificent collection of slides of the great religious art of India. During this time I had a fruitful correspondence with him, and he wrote articles and book reviews for our "Review of Religion" of which I was Managing Editor. When I was in Boston I visited him in the Museum and attended his course of Indian Art at the Metropolitan Museum. So I felt I knew him as a friend. (10)

Coomaraswamy once said, "When the curtain goes up, it is too late to create a masterpiece." Isn't that delicious! And how very true. Every masterpiece is the product of long training and discipline—it is not produced casually, on the spur of the moment! (10)

When I first met Coomaraswamy in 1946, he asked me in the course of conversation whether I had read his *Why Exhibit Works of Art?*. When I answered negatively he took some pains to tell me exactly how I could procure a copy in the event that it was unobtainable in the bookstores. This amounted to a command, which I found somewhat disconcerting, as I had gone to see him about important matters like metaphysics and mythology, and not the—for me at least—over specialized and stuffy world of art museums and aesthetic cults.

And yet when I dutifully bought the book and started reading, the experience was one of intellectual transformation that showed me how very right his advice had been, and how narrowly the ground that was covered tied in with metaphysics and mythology.

For I only then came to realize that the shapes a civilization takes mirror the revelation—or lack of one—on which it is founded; and it sufficed for me to compare our modern world with traditional cultures to understand that the sense of the sacred had to penetrate into every form and mode of existence and not simply remain on the level of doctrinal expression and comprehension—that the Sacrifice, in short, is to "make sacred," which must extend from the highest rituals and artistic achievements down even to the least human act and artefact. (44)

Coomaraswamy had a penchant for discomfiting skeptical Western intellectuals with tales of the miraculous when he sensed in his audience an innate prejudice on the subject. But for those who accepted without bias what he had to report, whether about *saddhus* halting trains in India, or woodsmen in the Maine wilderness having their wounds healed by native "blood-staunching," he was always careful to explain that while the possibility of the miraculous has to be admitted as an article of faith, one has at

the same time the right to reserve judgement regarding the authenticity of any isolated phenomenon that may be reported. (44)

At least once in every lifetime we meet an unforgettable person. The one that I have in mind is my late neighbour Coomaraswamy. Our mutual interest in plants and gardening perhaps was a basis on which our acquaintance flourished. No plant or vine or flower was too insignificant for his care and attention. Even the lowly weed was allowed to flourish if it had blossomed bravely for its symmetry and design. Any unusual or beautiful flower in his conservatory brought me an invitation to tea to share its beauty. (4).

Another mutual interest I shared with Coomaraswamy was his young son. He was an appealing youngster of eight when we first met. Another interest was his dog, a beautiful cocker spaniel. At one time he called me by telephone and an anxious voice asked me kindly not to feed his dog, who had not been well; at another time it was the small boy who should not receive sweets. Naturally I was glad to cooperate with this kind and gentle soul, whose every thought was for the welfare of his household. (4)

One evening Coomaraswamy was present at a home party given by one of my colleagues at Boston University. As usual we were all having various drinks, but Coomaraswamy was drinking only Coca-Cola. Noticing that his glass was empty our host asked him if he would have some more. He replied, "No, thank you I only take one Coca-Cola when I am going to drive an automobile." (16)

A stranger, arriving one afternoon at the Museum and seeing his table covered with books and papers and the large amount of work in progress, apologised profusely for interrupting Coomaraswamy's writing. Coomaraswamy courteously denied he was in any way inconvenienced. He explained that he was like a carpenter and could pick up his work just as easily as a carpenter picks up his hammer. No other comparison has seemed to me better to express his capacity as a professional writer. (17)

Many years ago a friend came to ask Ananda, "There is an Englishman visiting here who should like very much to come and see you, but he wrote a bad review of one of your books many years ago. He is wondering if you can remember him, and if you might wish to have him call." To this Ananda replied. "I certainly should like him to come if he wishes to—I do not remember, and besides I pay no attention to such things, and anyway say to him, "Did you know anyone who didn't make a mistake sometimes?" (1)

A European scholar came to visit and was ill at ease with English and so could not converse with complete freedom. After trying French, German, etc., without success, the scholar explained that he came from an island with only a few hundred thousand inhabitants, so very few people could speak his language. Coomaraswamy asked, "What is the name of that island?" "Iceland," the scholar replied. "Very well, we shall converse in Icelandic." And they did. (2)

Once a brilliant young classics scholar sat next to Coomaraswamy at dinner. On learning that he was reading classics, Coomaraswamy began to converse with him in Latin. One should think that the young scholar that evening did not quite enjoy his dinner. (3)

If a student, not in his own field of works, was struggling to make sense of distracting ends, questioned Coomaraswamy, he gave his fullest, sparing no pains, most generously—all the material he could excavate from his own books or the museum library, sometimes copying out references and giving chapter and verse for the smallest request. (1)





ca 1929



ca 1946



Dr. Ananda. Coomaraswamy (right) photographed with Dr. Murray Fowler.

Black Toby (in the picture) was a fine dog of a champion line registered with the American Kennel Club, intelligent and A.K.C. was very fond of him. It was given to the Doctor by a colleague at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.
— Miss Ardelia Riply Hal.

Coomaraswamy told me that after a lecture he had given in a city museum (perhaps in Worcester, Mass.) he was standing in a large interior courtyard the floor of which was tessellated. An enthusiastic listener came up to him and expressed her admiration at the enormous extent of his knowledge. "Madam," he replied, "it is true that I know a great many things. But it is also true that what I know, compared to all the things that I might know, is as one of these tiny tesserae beneath our feet and the total number of them in this hall." (7)

In the mid-1940's, Coomaraswamy was invited to Newport for the midwinter feast of workshop people (The John Stevens Shop) and friends. We used to set up a rough table for about 20 people in the upstairs workroom, and we had a festive meal with interesting talk. One time I had placed in the middle of the table a piece of pink India print and two small potted Azaleas, which had been given to my mother for Christmas. Coomaraswamy was not too well and did not eat very much, but he was a charming guest, and I think he quietly enjoyed the cheerful noises of the younger people. He gave us a talk on justice, outlining reasons why he preferred the word "justice" to "righteousness" as used in different translations of the Greek *dikaioσύνη* in the Bible. I don't know if this paper was ever published. At one point, I saw him reach for a pitcher on the table and pour some water in both of the thirsty little flower pots. The gesture was beautiful. He cared for the small blossoming bushes, and he wanted them to have their share in the rejoicing of the festival meal. (8)

I met Coomaraswamy once and found him charming. He, Mr. Graham Carey and Mr. J. Howard Benson were all visiting the Portsmouth Primary School about 1929-30-31. The school had just completed a new building, St. Bennets—a dormitory. Mr. Benson had carved the cornerstone which was laid in the usual fashion. This brought comment from Coomaraswamy and Mr. Carey as to what cornerstone meant in the Biblical world—was it at the base or was it the headstone at the top? The good Doctor wrote an article which later appeared in *Speculum*, the magazine of the Mediaeva Academy of America. (9)

Ananda never took time out to idle. His fishing, gardening and carpentry, all of which he did remarkably well, were further forms of his discipline.

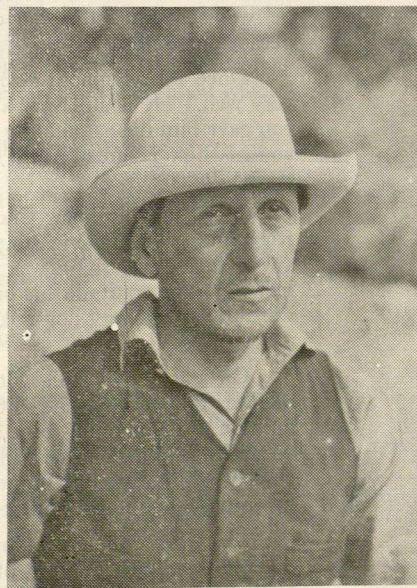
His writings were in the simplest language possible if one takes into account the ideas treated, bringing to mind the great simplicity of the Sanskrit in the *Gita*. To be sure, one cannot expect to read serious work without some preparation.

On one occasion the Doctor and a friend, a professor of English tried to parse one of his sentences, taken out of its context, to see whether it could have been written better or more simply. They tried various ways without satisfaction; they had to resolve that "not a comma could come out," and they let it be.

I was impressed by the little paper the Doctor wasted, as compared with me; I was always rewriting my pages, and I commented on how infrequently I emptied his basket, to which he replied; "You, too, will learn, the first decades are the hardest, after that use the 'cut and paste' method." He would cut the typed lines and paste them together in the proper order, thus eliminating a great deal of copy work. He wrote notes in long hand, all other writing was done on the typewriter, more often than not, the first outline was the final copy.

When our son was about twelve years old he came upon science and skepticism, he said to his father: "Now that I know something about science I cannot believe in God." Ananda assured him, "A little knowledge is a very dangerous thing. Far greater minds than yours balk at this, you do not *have* to believe. God is something that is attained only by the most lucid intellects—and that, after incredible effort. You do not hear much about it: such people keep silence. *Crede ut intelligas* (believe that you may understand); *intellige ut credas* (understand that you may believe); and *crede et intelligas* (believe and you will understand)." (1)





"He had the lanky grace of a cowboy. He loved fishing and was a very good cook. Also a good photographer. He once cooked me a curry that was so hot that the top of my head hit the ceiling"

— Mrs. Margaret Marcus

Some years after his death, Coomaraswamy's widow, Dona Luisa, showed me a little Japanese tea pot of cast iron, and told me the following story:

Many years ago, Coomaraswamy and his wife were living in England. One afternoon a young Japanese couple came to pay their respects to the great Orientalist. He did not catch their name. They produced a little tea pot, wrapped carelessly up in a bit of newspaper. Someone must have shown a little surprise at the incongruity of the wrapping, for the young callers explained that they had been informed that the English disliked the ostentation of commercial packaging, and they had been advised to make their gift in the most unceremonious way possible. "Just wrap your present up in a bit of newspaper," their adviser had said. The young Japanese may have connected this advice with certain attitudes of rusticity in the Tea Ceremony. However this may be, they made their offering to the great Englishman who had done so much to make Eastern and Western customs intelligible to one another. Having done this, they bowed and took their leave. When Coomaraswamy came to examine the tea pot in detail and had counted the number of petals in the chrysanthemum flowers with which it was decorated in low relief, he realised who their visitors had been. Only members of the Royal Family are allowed to use the golden flower with that special number of petals. The tea pot had been a gift from a Prince and Princess of the blood royal. (7)

Ananda today bought a dog. It is a Saluki. It has a much better pedigree than any other dog now in America or may be anywhere—anyway on the sign of the dog's kennel is declared in democratic English, "The only dog to enter the Arab's tent." We have christened the same Shak. I made almost no protest at the extravagance but for it I feel a real joy and at the dog show I sat through a whippet race. Ananda asked me how I felt and I had to confess." (1)

Coomaraswamy showed his love of creatures in his attitudes about his dogs. At one time he had a beautiful, a svelte Saluki, a breed often in Persian and Indian paintings, elegant in shape and noted for its speed. When Coomaraswamy lived on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston in an apartment, he had a dog that delighted him, but he was concerned that the dog needed more exercise than he could get there safely because of traffic.

Once P.E. Dumont wrote to Coomaraswamy, "Our little dog Sukha is going on very well. He is still very shy, but he is very affectionate. We will never forget that you gave him his name (July 29, 1939)." Later he wrote, "Our little dog Sukha sends you his best regards (April 14, 1942)." (27)

All of us who knew Coomaraswamy have poignant memories of his kindness, his friendliness, his moving simplicity as well as profundity. On short acquaintance, our awe before his learning was not lessened but was soon tempered by affection. I remember with gratitude his pains in answering my slightest question, but I recall with warmth his talking "dog-talk" to my Scottish terrier. (16)

On reaching Boston, I telephoned the Museum of Fine Arts for Coomaraswamy but was told that he had not come to the Museum that day because of a slight indisposition. On phoning him at his residence, I found him apologetic because he was not feeling well. He was kind enough to suggest that we go for a drive and have a discussion in his car, if I "promised to ask no biographical details," for Coomaraswamy was one of the most modest of men.

I had met Coomaraswamy once before when he delivered a most learned lecture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art to an admiring but lost audience. On seeing him, I was first impressed by his slim and stately figure of six feet and two inches, a crop of flowering white hair, a clear olive complexion, a prominent nose, and a short grey beard—a combination of Mahatma Gandhi and Bernard Shaw. (38)

Coomaraswamy was more than six feet tall, handsome and distinguished. He

had the lanky grace of a cowboy, loved fishing and photography and was a very good cook. Once he cooked me a curry that was so hot that the top of my head hit the ceiling. When he prepared a curry there was nothing to beat it. He invited me to dinner and served a curry which he made, saying, "From what you know of Indian custom you must know that men can cook, as it is true in other countries as well, better than most women. Witness the old story of Nala and Damayanti where it is clear that the wife could recognise her husband's cooking as distinct from that of others because of its unique flavour." (20)

Coomaraswamy was a civilised human—of course he liked music of all kinds, including Hill-Billy (country music). He had all kinds of recording instruments and would have had a T.V. set if they were then available. He had a moving picture projector and movies he had made himself with his own camera of the No-Dance in Japan and of Ceylonese and Indian Dances. He also had a radio, of course.

He once wrote to me, "I am so looking forward to playing you some marvellous records of European mediaeval music (ending with Bach and Palestrina), including many Gregorian chants—these things are moving and touching beyond words. Also some magnificent Java and Bali records. I can't get any Chinese ones. I have no one who takes any interest in more than the *surface* of art." (20)

Coomaraswamy could talk with interest about anything. While in New York for several days, we had dinner together twice. With my Italian husband he even enjoyed discussions (and arguments) about the preparation of savoury dishes. (18)

During his stay in New York, Coomaraswamy and I had a joint radio broadcast. My own speech I had forwarded to him for his approval and corrections. He spoke first, and when my turn came the man in the control booth gave me the signal that time was running out. What to do? I dared not cut or change my speech since it had been approved by the Maestro. Never has a speech been given so fast! When the record was played back to us, both Coomaraswamy and I collapsed in helpless laughter, for I sounded just like an irritated Donald Duck. (18)

Coomaraswamy was a man of deep human understanding. In my few but precious memories of him, I can believe that he found in his multi-faceted nature a segment which would match and respond to my own.

I knew him when the years had whitened his hair to a halo and somewhat stooped the shoulders of his spare body. We met in Pearl Buck's New York office and were introduced by that great lady's secretary, who promptly left us alone in the room. I was in such awe of the Doctor that I was unable to do more than mumble a few phrases about the weather. He answered in monosyllables, then, after a strained silence said, "And tell me, how do you manage to do the *sundari* neck movement?"

Somewhat startled, I told him and then saw the twinkle in his eyes behind the spectacles, and we both laughed. So quickly had he understood that nothing puts me at my ease as quickly as laughter. And how infinitely kind a gesture to make!

That afternoon we were to address a gathering of teachers and when the time came for questions from the audience, the first question asked me was "How do you do that horizontal neck movement?" As I answered, I glanced at the Doctor and saw him chuckling at our own private joke.

Inestimably dear to me is the knowledge that he understood my deep dedication to Indian dance and took the trouble to move down to my level and, however briefly be my friend. (18)

Every time I saw Coomaraswamy, I felt his youthfulness. He used to drop me a note of his impending trip from Boston, or call me over the phone when he reached New York; then I would hear him taking the stairs as lightly as an adolescent, and in a moment would feel the firm and genial clasp of his outstretched hand. We would walk.

to the restaurant together; that is, for all my fifteen years less toll of life, I had to quicken my step a bit to keep pace with him. There was in his lively gait, please note, no slightest hint of haste. He was impelled by a bouyancy as natural as the lift of the winds across the bush-tufted sand dunes by the white-crested sea of his Massachusetts. I mention this immediate and abounding physical quality because the same youthfulness pervaded his inner spirit. The mind that Coomaraswamy turned upon life was insatiate, roving like a bee to suck the essence of every blossom of thought or fancy. (26)

Sometimes the titles of Coomaraswamy's books or articles puzzle the reader. It is not easy to guess what it contains. When he lectured to the American Association of Museums in 1941, on "Why Exhibit Works of Art?" he shocked them by virtue of his title alone. He titled an article in French, "Beauty, Light and Sound (Beaute, Lumiere et Son)." To the English edition of *Am I My Brother's Keeper?* he suggested the title, *Divide and Mis-Rule!* It was later published as *The Bugbear of Literacy*. (27)

I first learned about the bombing of Pearl Harbour by the Japanese from Coomaraswamy. Close to noon on that fateful day, Coomaraswamy and his wife appeared at our door in their automobile. He said that they did not have time to get out but had merely stopped by to tell us that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbour and destroyed much of the U.S. fleet. (16)

One time I asked Coomaraswamy if he could tell me what *nirvana* was like (that was before I knew as much about Buddhism as I do now). He said, "I can best do that by telling you a story. A girl had just been married and the morning after the wedding night some girl friends asked her, 'What was it like?'. Now," said Coomaraswamy, "*nirvana* is like that!" (16)

I had taken a friend of mine to visit Coomaraswamy at his home in Needham. At the time he was working on his paper on Sagittarius and on learning that my friend's profession was in physical education, Coomaraswamy asked her if she knew anything about archery. She replied that she did and had taken part in that sport. Whereupon they got into a lively discussion about archery and before long Coomaraswamy said, "Wait a minute," and galloped (that is the best way to describe his rapid, loose-limbed stride) upstairs to his library. Soon he came down with five books, spread them out on the floor all opened to various pages, and begun to point to passages in them saying, "See, what he says, that is what you said. And see, what this one says," and so on. The humorous aspect of all this was that no two of the books were in the same language, none were in English, and only one was in a common European tongue that my friend could read. I was much amused at this blithe assumption that any educated person would, of course, be as familiar with many tongues as he was. My poor friend was quite nonplussed. I do not remember what all the languages were but one was Latin and one was Greek. (16)

I shall never forget those weeks in the summer of 1938 which it was my good fortune to spend as Dr. and Mrs. Coomaraswamy's guest in their camp in the woods of Maine. It was a unique experience, after roaming through the immense forests, to sit in that lonely and rustic home, high up on a hill, listening to my host's tales of their life in India and discussing with them questions of mythology and of traditional metaphysical lore. Somehow, the situation reminded me a little of the atmosphere in which the Upanishads must have been born. Although by nature and principle inclined to silence and restraint, Coomaraswamy, like the religious teachers of ancient times, felt the urge to communicate his ideas. "Nobody will ever stop me from talking metaphysics," he once told a mutual friend. To Coomaraswamy, life and knowledge were one. He regarded the myths and cosmological conceptions of India and of the whole world as the symbolic expressions of India and of the whole world as the symbolic expressions of a primeval and universal wisdom. "I am a traditionalist," he used to say. (32)

As a traditionalist, Coomaraswamy had a strong feeling for the meaningfulness and importance of liturgy. "If I were a Catholic," he once told me, "I would participate in church festivals and sacred rituals all the year round. (32)

When I was a graduate student at Harvard, some thirty-five years ago, I wrote a long research paper about the probable meanings behind a symbol often used on the ancient Chinese bronzes, called the T'ao-t'ieh. My professor the late Benjamin Rowland, was much interested in my findings, and he suggested that I should also show it to Dr. Coomaraswamy, whom he greatly admired. He told me that the Doctor had a special fondness for Chinese ritual bronzes.

I took the paper to Coomaraswamy, in his study room at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Some days later, I went back to collect it, since it was my only copy. He handed it back to me with some polite words of thanks; then he gave me a very piercing look from under his shaggy eyebrows, and remarked, "You have begun well, and someday you will know what this *really* means!"

At that time, I still had the strong self-confidence of youth increased by having travelled and resided in Asia for several years, and I felt that I had rather well solved the old problem of the meanings behind the T'ao-t'ieh; so I took his remarks as being strong criticism and felt that I had been rebuffed.

Now, many years later, I feel I can understand his intended compliment. I realise that my researches at that time had only brought me to a lesser gate at the beginning of the Path to Wisdom. With the training gained from Dr. Coomaraswamy, some directly or by way of his writings, but more especially through the guidance of his ardent disciple Ben Rowland, I gradually learned the difference between knowledge and Wisdom. I try to urge my students, in their turn, to set out upon the Path, a Journey which, as Coomaraswamy stated or implied in so many of his writings, holds the true meaning and the goal of human life. (22)

I arrived in New York in 1927, for a first visit from Germany. About this time. Nasli Heeramanek, the art dealer, arrived from Paris also for the first time. We went together to dine in a Hindu restaurant, talking about plans to include a trip to Boston. I was going to visit Coomaraswamy, whom I knew only through correspondence. While we were eating, a group of people came in, including a tall man, looking like nobody in this world. There was something about him which could only be about that great man from Boston. I got my courage together, walked over to the table, and—not speaking any English yet—asked in French, "Are you Dr. Coomaraswamy?" Sure enough, it was he. (15)

In 1935, one day coming from California, I arrived at the Boston Museum by car—unannounced. The driver of the car was a husky young German, athletic and earthy looking. We went to Coomaraswamy who told us that his wife was in India and that we had to stay with him at the house on Bacon Street, where Bill, a young student took care of cleaning and cooking. We were to have supper with him. Then he pointed his finger to the German athlete and said, "And *you* go after supper with Bill to the movies, because nobody can stop me from talking metaphysics." The frightened youngsters went. (15).

In 1929, the art dealer Nasli Heeramanek was forced to have an auction. It was held at the American Art Association in New York. "I was full of bright ideas and nerve in those days," he said. "I got Coomaraswamy to give a lecture on Indian art at the auction before it started because nobody knew anything about Indian art then." In 1934, Heeramanek, a young girl who worked for him in the gallery and I loaded up about \$15,000 worth of sculpture and paintings and ancient palm-leaf manuscripts into an open Ford touring car and, eager but with the art uninsured, we set out for Boston and Coomaraswamy. He bought an Indian sculpture for the Museum. We had tea at the Coomaraswamy's, and Mrs. Coomaraswamy, a South American photographer



ANANDA COOMARASWAMY, THE BRIDGE BUILDER

who fancied herself as something of a mystic (even the photographs were soft-focus). presided. Coomaraswamy was a long man with a philosopher's head and a serious mien. There was a moment when his wife was babbling along and said, "I wonder how I will be reincarnated!" Her husband got up and left the room." (31)

* * *

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy was the wisest man I have known. His wisdom, however, was not an immediately apparent characteristic of the man. It welled, slowly, through conversations, which often grew into monologues, as his ideas caught hold of him and carried him thought beyond thought. What was at once noticeable, every time we met and to anybody, was the live energy, the quick pulse of life, that swept him along. Whenever he came down from Boston to New York, we would meet, usually for lunch, he often coming to my office to call for me. Down the steps and along the street his buoyant step and natural but quick gait would keep us scurrying beside him. He was alert, he was eager, he was keenly observant of all the facets of existence.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy brought the ancient wisdom of the East to the Western world. But he did more. He brought into harmony the two great traditions, the Oriental, and the Graeco-Catholic. He looked into the core of ideas, and found threads that linked them. His tall, lean frame, his eyes that could be bright with outward view or deep with inward vision, his quick, decisive step, his talk that seemed always without hesitation to find the most fit word, score into my memory a true seer of our time. (26)

* * *

I remember one story in particular recounted by Mrs. Coomaraswamy. It seems that an American student was talking with AKC; the student was apparently following his own self-designed path of spiritual development, and he asked AKC rather patronisingly about his *sadhana*, going on to say that he (the student) spent an hour a day in meditation. AKC is said to have remarked that he supposed it would not hurt him (referring to himself) to spend half an hour a day in meditation.

Mrs. Coomaraswamy also remarked several times AKC's parsimony in correspondence at least in personal correspondence. A sentence or two on a postcard in his extremely minuscule script was all that anyone was likely to get from AKC. (50)

* * *

My first knowledge of Dr. Coomaraswamy came about 1925 while a Harvard undergraduate from buying *The Dance of Siva: Fourteen Indian Essays*, which had been reprinted in 1924 by The Sunwise Turn, Inc., in New York City. The book as a whole fascinated me, especially the chapter on Indian music, whose illustrations led me both to the Indian galleries of the Museum of Fine Arts and to Dr. Coomaraswamy's *Rajput Painting* of 1916. I was at that time a student of Professor A. Kingsley Porter working on Romanesque art, and considerably interested in mediaeval music. Through Kingsley Porter, I became acquainted with the eleventh century capitals from the apse of the destroyed monastic church of Cluny in Burgundy that personify the modes of Gregorian music. So the Rajput paintings that represented the modes of Indian music had a particular attraction for me, and I sought out Dr. Coomaraswamy in his office at the museum. He received me in a kindly way and talked to me about Indian music. I remember a concert in the lecture hall of the Museum of Fine Arts where he introduced to the audience his former wife, Ratan Devi, who sang the modal songs that were personified in some of the Rajput Paintings.

In 1927 I began to go to Spain, where I spent the better part of nine years. I only returned permanently to Boston in 1946 when I became Director and Librarian of the Boston Athenaeum (a post from which I retired in February 1973). This was, unfortunately, only a year before Dr. Coomaraswamy's death. A few times in that last year I encountered him in the staff dining room at the Museum of Fine Arts, where he was a striking figure at table. By then he was far removed from the ordinary routine of curatorial business and chiefly absorbed in his philosophical speculation and writing. Having no legitimate reason to intrude upon his time, I did not do so, although I always

hoped that I might have some occasion to see him. His death in 1947 ended these hopes (56)

* * *

Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy was one of the most learned men of his time. He was a deep student of the philosophy and theology of both East and West, but did not labour to acquire wisdom for its own sake but chiefly for the making of both East and West understand how much they had in common. He was thus essentially a bridge builder, a pontifex, and the bridges that he built spanned both space and time. It is characteristic of him that he noticed a correspondence between the Biblical parable of the Stone Rejected and an Indian myth.

Sudhamma, who personifies Perfect Virtue, is the architect of a house, as in Proverbs 9-1 we read "Wisdom has built herself a house." Sudhamma is planning the Celestial Palace, a place of refreshment and rest. In advance she has prepared a frame of hard, seasoned wood, for green wood will not suffice. It is the roof plate upon which the rafters are to rest, to which they will all slope up, meet together, and form the roof's peak. "As the four wings of an army are related to its king, environing him and relying on him as their head", so will be the beams of this roof. Sudhamma offers this roof plate to the carpenters. They, having never seen anything like it, and being ignorant of its purpose, and in addition wishing to have the full credit of the building for themselves, refuse her offer. She, however, over-rides them, and contrary to their will the roof plate becomes the crown of the edifice.

Commenting on the resemblance between the two stories, Dr. Coomaraswamy went on to ask what architectural form lay behind the Biblical parable. Of the two possibilities—the key block of a Roman dome and the cope stone of an Egyptian pyramid—he judged the latter more likely. He also pointed out the significance of the decapitated pyramid, which all of us have seen on the back of a one dollar bill.

It only remains to mention a small church in Vermont, the builders of which attempted to materialize the story that Dr. Coomaraswamy's learning had uncovered. In the year 1953 a black granite pyramidal stone, polished to a mirror-like surface, was set at the peak of the pyramidal roof of this building. Some years later, the phenomenon recorded by the telephotograph shown (on a page in this book) was first observed. This occurrence is repeated every year on midsummer day at 4:20 P.M. daylight saving time unless the sun is veiled by clouds. Dr. Coomaraswamy did not live to see this building nor to hear of the phenomenon that his learning had made possible.

On the longest day in the year the created sun thus manifests the glory of the Creator, by means of an analogy older than the pyramids.

An analogy which originated in the experience of ancient builders, and was borrowed from them by prophets and poets, has returned again to the use of architects. May they deal with it in a manner proportionate to its dignity. (7)

* * *

Ananda said over and over that he did not want the New York dinner. It was too much trouble; not the man but the work ought to be recognised. When I told him that a person serves the purpose of representing an idea, in the sense that an icon represents the signal for one who has not yet learned to do without signs, he consented; but he grumbled and asked, "Isn't it your business to know how to get me out of such things?" Two Dinners were arranged to celebrate Coomaraswamy's Seventieth Birthday—one at Boston and the other in New York. The one at New York was not held as Coomaraswamy died on September 9th, 1947. (1)

* * *

Coomaraswamy always felt a strong link with his homeland. I remember with what happiness and pride on one of the last days of his life he displayed the many newspaper clippings with tributes for his seventieth birthday which had just arrived from Ceylon. One of his last official acts was the raising of the Indian flag at a meeting for Indian students marking the Indian declaration of independence. He wished to impress upon his countrymen the necessity to "be themselves." Over and beyond the satisfaction that he must have felt at the appreciation of his work in India, Coomaraswamy had come to feel more and more the necessity to seek and know from experience his



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 FOR THE ARTS



ca 1900



ca 1909



spiritual home. Only a short time before his death he announced his plans for a return to India, a homecoming. (28)

An incident a few days before Ananda's death: For the first time this morning I looked up and saw over his door a sign I had not seen before: "Do not delay." (1)

It is a veritable irony of fate, for it was in Ananda's mind to retire from his post at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and live near the Himalayas for the rest of his life in a mode approximating as far as possible to the *vanaprastha* (forest-dwelling) of traditional India. When someone tried to discourage him, he said, "We are not going to India for our health. This *astamgamana* (home-coming) is like the home-coming of the salmon to its source. Does the salmon consider the obstacles and the distance of the trip or the hazard of the leap from one waterfall to another? I hope the time will come soon when I can change from the active to the contemplative way of life, for I have in mind to experience by faith what I have been led to by logic." (1)

I was at the home of Dr. Coomaraswamy on the day of his death. He had been up in his room all morning working on a book he was finishing. About 11 a.m., he came down to the front lawn where Mrs. Coomaraswamy and I were trimming the shrubbery.

"I wish I were 10 years younger," he said watching the work.

"Well sometimes I wish I were too," I said, hoping to cheer him up with a jolly word. (I had just turned 31).

He came on down into the garden and talked a while about pleasant things while watching a large bull frog in the gold fish pool. He asked me if I had finished a book he had loaned me. Soon he left us and went around to the garden back of the house.

Mrs. Coomaraswamy and I set my paintings out against the car and she called the Doctor. He came round from the back of the house and up to the car saying "I feel dizzy headed." He sat down on the ground with Mrs. Coomaraswamy's help. Then he lay back and lost consciousness. In a few minutes I thought he was dead, for he never moved or regained consciousness. In the meantime, we were rushing around getting water to throw in his face, trying to call an ambulance, a doctor and doing everything we could think of doing.

When the ambulance and a doctor arrived about ten minutes later, the doctor said that Dr. Coomaraswamy was dead of a heart attack and that there was nothing we could have done to save him.

I could hardly believe what I knew was true. He was the first person I ever saw die. What a simple process death is, I thought, and how natural. It is no more than lying down to sleep when you are tired.

I knew I had seen the passing of a great man. It seemed a shame that I should be chosen to see it, who had known him for so short a while, whose knowledge of him and his work was so lacking. There were many I knew, who could much more appreciate the magnitude of such an event. It was an honor, which through no merit of mine, I was given.

Dr. Coomaraswamy was the first world-wide scholar I have known. His immense learning awed me. His intimate acquaintance with literary works of all cultures rather startled me. His humility, fair mindedness and the ease with which I could talk with him seemed amazing in the face of his vast scholarship.

Besides his learning and his humility there is one other quality of which I must speak. That is his physical grace. He was very tall and thin but straight and he moved with an extraordinary gracefulness. The raising of a hand in gesture was, while not in the least dramatic or studied, somehow beautiful. Perhaps it was the naturalness of his movement. Perhaps it was the reflection of the serenity of his soul. I don't know; I only know I saw it and would like to see it again. It is so rare a thing. (40t

When I met Mr. Coomaraswamy for the first time at his home, we had a long conver-

sation about the essential nearness of certain parts of Indian philosophy with the mysticism of the German medieval mystic master, Meister Eckardt. This was natural because I myself was born and brought up in Germany. I would like to mention his love for many little things which, according to our superficial belief, may not interest a great mind. For instance, he showed me at length the flowers he had cultivated in his garden and on his porch and spoke about them as about real friends. He also pointed at some Indian utensils and I did not feel any difference in his speaking about these tools from his speaking about profound philosophical problems. I believe that his philosophy was a kind of pantheism which lead him to feel the Universal Spirit in everything he saw. There was, if I am correct, only one criterion by which he distinguished the valuable from the valueless, namely whether a thing or an idea was still connected with the totality and simplicity of nature, or whether it was artificial. If the latter was the case, he could even become intolerant, so that some of his colleagues in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts had difficulty in understanding why he did not appreciate great masterpieces of Western painters whom the Western nations admire so greatly. You find his sense for the Genuine also in his language; he was a lover and admirer of words, the roots of which were significant of the great phenomena of life and he liked to follow the history of these words through various nations and historical periods.

It is one of my most vivid impressions which I will never forget when he and I spoke at the Indian Liberation Day. When he unfurled the flag, his hands trembled with excitement. When, after the celebration, I shook his hand and said to him: "This must be the day of fulfilment for you, Doctor", he could only nod his head. (45)

There is something unanalysable in every great man. He impresses us with his presence even when he is silent. The inner being of his personality does not need all the activity through which minor persons have to assert themselves. Thus, when I remember Ananda Coomarasawamy, I do not think so much of his conversations, precious though they were to me; I just remember *him*. However, since language cannot describe the undecipherable, I may briefly relate to you two occasions where we met through the medium of conversation.

When the first time I saw him and his wife at their home, he asked me about the German mystic Master Eckhart. "I am not asking you," he said, "because you were brought up in Germany, though this certainly helps you to appreciate the beauty of his language. I am asking you because I feel you understand his spirit, and through this spirit we will also understand each other, about whatever we may speak. Two men may have been born at the same place; yet, they have nothing in common. The community of men is not geographical. Nothing is more dangerous than men meeting at the same place without the same mind, nothing more beautiful than the meeting of minds which have become independent of the limits of space."

After we both had addressed the Indian students at the Harvard celebration of Indian freedom, he was extremely tired. The excitement and the unusual heat of the day had exhausted his already weakening body. But he came over to me to shake my hand. "I have tried to explain," so he said, "the symbolism of the new Indian national emblems. I am proud of a nation whose flags are not nationalistic, but point at man's relation to the cosmos. But you were right in your emphasis that Indian freedom, though the result of a long and heroic struggle, is at the same time also a beginning. When man begins to be free, he has his greatest task still before him. The test is what he will make of it. And the whole world's future will depend on India's right use of her freedom." (45)

While at the Boston Museum, Coomarasawamy worked with another person who through he was a great scholar in his own field was not up to understanding Coomarasawamy's intellect. These two lunched in the same restaurant, but intellectually they inhabited different worlds. Coomarasawamy, some remarked lived in a different latitude and longitude. A scholar-friend of Coomarasawamy's once quipped that the officer was so unaware of the value of Coomarasawamy that he didn't even know the great man's telephone number. I recall a meeting between the two at which I was present, where they argued, the officer complaining that Coomarasawamy was prejudiced



against the art of the Renaissance (21)

Regarding the Flag Day Festival in Boston on August 15th, 1947. I was at that time very anxious about Ananda's holding out well. I hardly know what happened, I was watching, for him lest I should have to "take over" as I had to do in other instances when lectures already scheduled and unavoidable had to be given. All I can add is that afterwards some of the boys came to me and told me that they had been thrilled to have Ananda's points brought home so pertinently. Some were hurt thinking that a festive occasion was no time to "correct the Indians," to which our reply was, "This is the appointed time!" In the Biblical phrase and again in the common-place parlance, "there is no time like the present."

One of these bright lads wrote a letter to the local paper making his protests and it was published. One of the professors present who came to dinner with us a few days later was very indignant about the matter and was very anxious that Ananda might be angry about it too. He thought it was outrageous that the paper should print it, that the boy should write it, and perhaps above all that Ananda wouldn't get angry!

The good man, with best of intentions, wanted justice. He took me aside and showed me the printed letter and asked what he ought to do about it, and ought he to bring it up among the young men who come to his home from time to time. I urged him not to mention it at all, that it wasn't in the least important to Ananda or to the students, and that the author of the letter had the satisfaction of seeing his name in print and now the issue was closed. But he brought it up again after dinner. Ananda tried to ignore it, change the subject, anything but not to suppress him too much for there was no need to hurt his feelings. When he had to, he said he took such matters lightly — he had long been accustomed to letters of protest from Indians all over the world, and another didn't especially matter. Presently the good man insisted how unbecoming of the youth, on such an occasion, etc., Again, no comment from Ananda. It was more than our friend could bear until Ananda said to him, in his inimitable, quiet voice, "For forty years young Indians have been writing letters of protest to the newspapers. In the early years when one is childish, one shouts one's protests; when one grows up and comes to one's senses, one says the same thing I am saying. What I can't understand is why the young do not complain more bitterly, considering how much they are being robbed of." (1)

One finds amusing reading in some of the letters Coomaraswamy received. There is the case of a gentleman from Nepal writing to him. Mistaking him for a doctor of medicine and hearing of his worldwide fame, the writer implores Coomaraswamy to send him a cure for elephantiasis from which his sister suffered. He also asked him for the addresses of stamp dealers. (13)

Perhaps one of the most endearing features of Ananda Coomaraswamy was that even though every minute of his day was packed with work, he found time to reply to a letter from even the humblest of his correspondents. My eldest son was only 14 when he wrote to Coomaraswamy, yet he was not disappointed in his attempt. He received a note specially for him from "Papa's" great *guru*—not only does the great *guru* reply to the letter of a small boy but, being himself a "papa," tells the things that would interest a small boy and be of use to him.

Vaddukoddai, Jaffna.

4.1.47

Revered Teacher,

Father tells me charming stories about your greatness as a lover of God through Religion. From all his accounts of your work as a seeker after Truth, I have begun to look up to you as a great teacher of children. Born and brought up in Malaya far away from my ancestral home in Lanka, I shall esteem it a blessing from you if you would be graciously pleased to write to me a few letters to give me lessons that would make of me worthy of the name that my father has given me.

Hoping fully that you would send me your kindly light to lead me on. I subscribe myself respectfully.

Yours in service,
Gandhi-ki-jai-Singam.

My Dear Gandhikijai,

I received your note of 20.11.46 safely and I suppose you have been expecting to hear from me. But you have no idea how busy I am—I don't have time to attend even to my own affairs, much less to answer all my letters. We get up at 6 and work at our typewriters till 10, then go to the Museum where we work till 4.30, then home and work again from about 7.30-9.30 and even so things get done very slowly! In the summer I have to work in the garden, too; and you know, we don't have servants here to help but do everything in the house ourselves.

Our son Rama Ponnambalam (age 17) has been learning Tibetan and is on his way to spend two years in Sikhim, with Marco Pallis (I am sure you must have read his book, *Peaks and Lamas*).

I just sent your father a report of the conference at Kenyon College which will interest him. Later on the speeches will be printed.

My advice to you is to know Tamil and Sanskrit and read all you can. I wonder if you expect to go the University, Ceylon, later on! You know, we see many Indian students here, but most of them are engineers, and quite ignorant about their own country which seems very queer to Americans. It is quite true that Western civilisation is an "organised barbarism," but some of these mechanically-minded Indian students are not much more than disorganised barbarians, and I hope you won't be like them. Anyhow, whatever you do, do something well.

With love and best wishes from
Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.

One personal reminiscence may not unfitly add to this account. When my youngest son was born I named him after Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. The congratulatory message he sent me and the letter I received from his wife Dona Luisa about how he reacted to my changing his middle name of Kentish to "Krishna" form one of the most treasured memories of my household. This is what he wrote on that historic day of August 15, 1947 (Indian Independence Day).

August 15, 1947

Dear Durai Raja Singam,

Congratulations on the birth of another son! And I appreciate that you have given him my name.

A.K. Coomaraswamy
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass., U.S.A.

Dona Luisa Coomaraswamy wrote, "Ananda was very grateful to you; changing his name from Kentish to Krishna. This was a token he smiled about and really loved. Dr. Ananda K.—your Krishna, he adored—Coomaraswamy." (21)

The *Evening News of India* wrote: The ubiquitous sari of the South Indian dancing

girl, with bells on her feet and golden waist band to match and hair plaited to a finish in pucca *devadasai* style are scenes to conjure with.

No wonder this number drew repeated encores from the audience, and the artist was forced to repeat it. *Lasyanathana* is a popular nautch theme and the rendering of the gavili by the orchestra with *mridanga* effect was good. The orchestration and synchronization were complete when the artist completed the number to the *tha-thi-nga-ed na-thom* finish."

Returning from studies in India, I wrote a small book on the gesture language of the dance. I should not have dared to approach *gurudev* Coomaraswamy; but the one who made the photos for my book journeyed to Boston with the manuscript... and the great one agreed to write an Introduction! This brought about a correspondence between us, his end of it conducted entirely by means of cryptic postcards—everyone of which I have cherished. He looked over (and corrected) my entire manuscript. He would not have linked his name with any work he did not thoroughly know; he respected too much the land and the art he represented.

I shall never forget my fear the first time he saw me perform dances of India! There is no one whose opinion I value so highly, since I knew him to be a completely objective critic. (18).

Coomaraswamy loved a philosophical argument, but it was rather his keen perception in the use of words which made him a stimulating conversationalist. The naturalness with which he could pass from the mediaeval or oriental point of view to the mode often became an incentive to thought. One day he remarked that "vacation" no longer had its original meaning. Once it designated a holiday or Holy Day, while now it suggests merely a period of idleness. Distinctions in connotation caused him to observe broad social changes which were anything but progressive from the Doctor's point of view.

Even in discussions of art theory which often took place in the museum dining-room it was hard to correlate one's own field of interest with his theories which concerned all of art. But what was surprising was the consistency of his theory and taste, even in fields where he did not possess any specific knowledge. In the whole range of Chinese art he felt that the bronzes of the Shang and Chou periods were the most monumental products of this culture. Despite the glories of Sung painting, he was moved most by the primitive ritualistic work of unknown, or at least arguable, meaning. He enjoyed this type of art not because it conformed to his ideas but because this was an art which his attitude made enjoyable. (62)

One thing which Coomaraswamy emphasized to me with respect to the English pronunciation of Buddhism which I have practised since then is that the prevalent English and American sounding of the word *Buddhism* is wrong, namely *Booh¹ dism*; it should be *Buh* with the *h* silent as you have it in *But*. (67)

Coomaraswamy once said that Chandidas could get to God by devotion to his washer-woman beloved. We might have to concede to Leonardo, the ultimate visions in his Madonnas and to Picasso in his three women of Avignon. "I assume the forms desired by my worshippers", says Krishna in the *Gita*.

Coomaraswamy once quoted that to me in a mood of benevolence. (60)

When I first saw him at the Boston Museum I was deeply impressed by this Indian whose eyes had a mystical expression and whose personality seemed so much like that of an Indian sage. It was only after meeting him I discovered all that he was. I remembered the first book of his which I had read, "The Gospel of the Buddha". This book was a favourite of mine because I felt he understood the Buddha and it was not a book of analysis, facts and figures which ultimately destroys. I felt inspired to read

his other books not only because of the impression created by this book but because Coomaraswamy seemed to be sensitive to the deep truths of our art and ancient wisdom.

All great people discover something new, not necessarily new to the world but to them and to succeeding ages, a new experience. This experience comes as a revelation and therefore, its presentation becomes vivid and important to others. It is this discovery of the real that is so wonderful. It may be in a new philosophical expression or in poetry, or it may be in the creative beauty of dance or music. It all depends on the mission for which a person is born. To discover this, an insight or intuition is of tremendous importance. Ananda Coomaraswamy's contribution seems to me to point out to people what the normal eyes cannot see. Again and again a voice is heard that says. "Do not be carried away by mere superficialities. Do not imitate. Do not throw away what is precious in your own environment for we may never regain it" This to me was the voice of Ananda Coomaraswamy. (63)

When Nandalal Bose painted the great figure of an unbearded Shiva in the *Tandavanrya* pose, he had to face much adverse criticism in Bengal. In the mind of the general people of the country Shiva was imagined as the Shiva seen in *Yatas* (popular dramas). Sister Nivedita and Dr. Coomaraswamy came up with high praise for the novel imagination of Nandalal's Shiva figure and pointed out its artistic excellence and spiritual significance. Coomaraswamy's erudition was not simply confined to the study and criticism of art. With the Indian people he dedicated himself in the cult of nationalism. In those days the country received him as one of the torch bearers of the ideals of Indian nationalism. His ideal was the life of the Vedic *rsis* of ancient India. disclosed to his friends his desire to retire in his old age to solitude in the Himalayas. While in Abanbabu's house, he is said to have expressed his wish to be initiated by a *guru* of Bengal. Gaganbabu tried his best to find one *guru*, but none agreed to perform such an act. Ultimately he was initiated in *Visnumantra* by a *Vaishnava guru*. (58)

Ananda's son (by Dona Luisa) Rama, heart surgeon at a hospital in Greenwich, Connecticut, revealed to me Coomaraswamy, the filmmaker. I cursed myself as I carried the heavy 16 mm projector across the overbridge at the Greenwich railway station. It was so heavy that I could hardly walk. Rama was busy throughout the day and yet so anxious to help that he had given me an appointment for the night. After dinner at the beautifully sited local club, his wife Bernadette took leave of us, and Rama and I settled down to an all-night session of talking, identifying and dating innumerable photographs and seeing Ananda K. Coomaraswamy's films. The first one was on a bullfight in Spain, shot sometime in the late 'twenties. I sat up. There was nothing amateurish about the tones, or about the way the camera was moved. Everything had been shot from one point of view—the spectator's fixed seat—but the excitement of the event had been captured so well that one did not feel the sameness. Another was on the geishas of Japan. This one had detailed subtitles describing the function of the geisha and explaining the meaning of her actions. There was another which Coomaraswamy had shot in South India, in which aged *devdasis* demonstrated *mudras* from Bharata Natyam. And then there were many of Ananda himself vacationing in Maine, where he went every year. Some of these showed a fine feeling for landscape. I particularly remember a long-lasting beautiful shot of a horse swimming. (65)

A.D. 1910. Sometime in the month of Falgun (Feb.-March) of this year, the famous art critic Coomaraswamy came to visit Santiniketan. The last few years of Ananda Coomaraswamy were spent in the United States; but during the early part of the "Swadeshi" era, many writings of this young art critic helped in the expression of the beauty and uniqueness of Indian arts and crafts. The first English translation of Tagore's poems was published with the assistance of Coomaraswamy. Of the poems that Ajit Kumar Sen translated in England, "Sisu" and Janmakatha", together with



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Rabindranath's own translation of "Vidaya" were published in the *Modern Review* of 1911. (March and April) with Coomaraswamy as the co-author. These were the first publications of the poet's writings outside Bengal. Before this, "Hungry Stones" translated by Pannalal Bose was published in the same journal in March, 1910. From 1907 onwards, nearly every issue of the *Modern Review*, Calcutta, had some article or other from the pen of Ananda Coomaraswamy. (58)

Ananda Coomaraswamy undoubtedly gave an effective turn to the genius of young Gopalakrishnayya, and supplied him with a good deal of knowledge on Indian art, literature and philosophy: and soon Gopala became his co-worker and assistant. The teacher and pupil gradually worked together on Rajput paintings, Ajanta Frescoes, Abhinaya Darpanam, and so forth. And in his letter dated 29.10.1915, the Doctor wrote to Gopala: "I very much hope we shall have the opportunity to work together sooner or later for your assistance would be a great advantage to me."

In the letters to his friends in India, Gopalakrishnayya had nothing but praise for his teacher. He refers to him in one letter. "He is not a moralist. Oh! he is a great man. No wonder he has such a wide European reputation." Other letters include the following passages: "Dr. Coomaraswamy has no doubt to some extent repaired the loss sustained by me in losing you." "My sojourn here does immense good in every way. Dr. Coomaraswamy works so incessantly, so regularly and is making me follow his way." "He is leaving this country for America where the Harvard and other varities invited him to deliver lectures on Indian art and philosophy. He will be leaving in January."

Gopalakrishnayya himself faithfully kept up his discipleship even after his return to India and perhaps in the only letter he wrote to the Doctor from India, in 1925, he addressed him as his "Esteemed Guruji," and asked for an *asirvadam*. (57)

Sri Mutu Coomaraswamy was also a remarkable man. I remember seeing a picture of him (the one in your book with a turban) in Dr. A.K.C.'s house near Boston; Coomaraswamy never said much, however, about his father. In those days Rama was a little boy who hid behind the couch the guests were sitting on, in order to be present without being seen. I often went to the Coomaraswamys with Graham Carey and occasionally with Ben Rowland who was one of my professors at Harvard. A.K.C. was a *upaguru* for me. Through him I came to know the writings of Rene Guenon, and this in turn led in a round-about way to the writings of F. Schuon. It was Zimmer who first called A.K.C.'s attention to Guenon's works; Zimmer told me so himself in a conversation I had with him after a lecture he gave at the Fogg Museum at Harvard in the late 1930's. (68)

Coomaraswamy had many admirers. A Director of educational work in a Museum of Art wrote:

I hope you have no objection to "fan letters." I have read and reread your brilliant article "The Philosophy of Mediaeval and Oriental Art" in *Zalmoxis*. It is superbly organized—I wish that all of our writers on the subject of works of art, as well as our practitioners, might read it: it should have wide publicity. The least I can do is to express my admiration of the essay.

On another occasion he wrote:

How very good of you to send me your "Introduction to the Art of Eastern Asia." The other day Langdon Warner was praising when he learned that I had not read it he promised to send me a copy. Warner said that he had read it three times, each time finding something new. This having been his experience, I am sure that I shall read it many times, each time with greater enjoyment.

Again, many thanks. (21)



Once Dona Luisa Coomaraswamy wrote to me, "the Boston Museum and its directors and trustees because of their intellectual independence and profound understanding and sympathy made it possible for him to work at his chosen vocation and live the way he wished to live. They gave him the freedom to carry on his research." He was devoted to colleagues. That he neglected curatorial work is not true for this is based on false stories planted by some one who did not like him for some reason or other, of trivial mind or by those who never called him by his first name.

A large American museum like the Boston Museum or the Metropolitan Museum in New York City have a large staff to carry on the routine activities of the museum, recording all objects entering and leaving a museum; registering all accessions by a Registrar and his office, numbering the items for the permanent record or inventory; describing the object from information provided that such an object would be arriving, all of which was done automatically. A Museum Curator holds a very high position, comparable to a full professor in a university. When Coomaraswamy was made a Fellow for Research, he was not expected to do more than just that. He never did any of the museum chores, which some presume he should be doing as well. The demands of the Museum on a Fellow are minimal. The Doctor's work demanded great research and study for which many have commended him. Once the eminent scholar the late Dr. Langdon Warner jocularly remarked: "As a matter of fact I doubt that George Harold Edgell (the Director) knows so much as even the telephone number of AKC. He hasn't any idea where Coomy+ gets off mentally or spiritually." The Director, a specialist in Italian painting wouldn't even know where Coomaraswamy's longitude and latitude was.

Coomaraswamy wrote much more than his colleagues. Like other departments, the Indian and Persian objects were completely documented by Coomaraswamy with catalogues that were works of reference in themselves of the whole field within which the object lay, giving its history, iconography, philosophy, myths, costume, literature behind the whole field of Rajput painting, essays on the phases of Indian religion essential to the understanding of objects in the galleries.

Coomaraswamy spent his days working at his typewriter. How else could he have written two or more books a year and an article a month, not to mention reviews?

Besides this, Coomaraswamy had a number of subjects he was interested in to pursue in the articles he sent to learned publications. How is one to pack all this variety into "a day in the life of Coomaraswamy at the Boston Museum"

To sum up a day at the Museum of Coomaraswamy's, as Fellow for Research — arrival at his vast office line with books, a huge working table, between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. — lunch at 1 p.m., leaving at 4.30 p.m. — hours between devoted to arduous research and writing, few visitors and occasional lectures. He had no secretary except for an assistant. Coomaraswamy and his only assistant were both hardworking. Having agreed on the basic plans his assistant never asked him, "Should I do this or that," but he always said, "Yes".

When Coomaraswamy was Head of the Indian and Muhamadan Division, the Collections were on the Second Floor: Corridor to the left of the Rotunda. The exhibits were classified into these main divisions:

A1. Early Indian Art. Prehistoric pottery, sculpture, jewelry, bronzes, and seal-amulets from the Indus Valley. Terracotta figurines, prehistoric to Gupta. Early Buddhist sculpture from Bharhut, Sanci, Mathura, and Amaravati. Fragment of a Buddhist fresco from Ajanta. Indian coins.

A2. Indian Painting and Manuscripts. Rajput, Mughal, and Nepalese. Bronze Indian and Nepalese. Indian Jewelry.

+ Coomy was how some of the Doctor's friends called him.



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A3. Mediaeval Indian Sculpture. Sculpture from Gandhara, Java, Cambodi, and Siam.

A4-6. Muhammadan Art. Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Persian calligraphy, miniatures, and manuscripts. Turkish miniatures. Islamic Pottery, glass and sculpture. Sasanian and Persian silver. Metalwork in bronze. Near Eastern arms and armor.

A7. Persian rugs.

First Floor: Corridor to left of Huntington Avenue Entrance.

A34. Art of the Ancient Near East. Prehistoric pottery from Iran. Prehistoric, Sumerian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Achaemenid Persian sculpture and cylinder seals. Bronzes from Lusistan.

A35. Indian Textiles and Rugs.

BIBLIOGRAPHIES OF INDIAN ART, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, 1925.
54 pages; price, \$2.50

This publication has been issued in connection with the Catalogue of Indian Art, and contains lists of the more important books and articles on Indian Art, classified under the divisions of Sculpture, Painting (Buddhist, Jaina, Hindu, and Mughal), Textiles, and Minor Arts.

CATALOGUE OF THE INDIAN COLLECTIONS, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.
The Indian collections of the Museum are especially rich in Rajput and Mughal paintings, Nepalese paintings, illustrated Jaina manuscripts, Nepalese and Sinhalese bronzes, Indian colonial sculpture, textiles, and jewelry. The five parts already published are as follows:

- I. General Introduction (1923), viii + 54 pages.
- II. Sculpture, 150 pages, 86 plates (220 illustrations) The two parts bound together.
- III. (Indefinitely deferred.)
- IV. Jaina Paintings and Manuscripts (1924), 74 pages, 39 plates (184 illustrations.)
- V. Rajput Painting (1926), 276 pages, 132 plates, 1 color plate (265 illustrations.)
- VI. Mughal Paintings (1940), 114 pages, 74 plates, 1 color plate (145 illustrations.)

Did this amount to neglect of curatorial duties, a criticism as one colleague made? (21)

* * *

When Tagore and Coomaraswamy parted in 1930, never to meet again, they quietly looked at each other and offered the Indian salutation with joined palms. Shortly after his parting Tagore told me that he considered the *Dance of Shiva* to be one of the noblest creations in world literature. This I will not forget. (69)

* * *



A SHEAF OF ANECDOTES

Dr. Coomaraswamy was one of the great minds of our time. With such prodigious energy and industry that few could approach, combined with insight, judgment and imagination, he broke through barrier after barrier, educated thousands of people with capacity for leadership, and through them has affected the lives of millions. He has been one of the major prophets of our time, and there is no one to take his place. We personally have lost a friend very greatly prized.

I remember when I saw Dr. Coomaraswamy first—in 1914 I think it was—as magnificent a figure of a man that one would ever see, with an impressive mind and a wonderful spirit shining through his grace and vigor. There is hardly anything he ever wrote that I didn't agree with ardently. His general program was mine also—I, in a small way, of organization activity and of general proclamation, a sort of purveyor of the rich spiritual and intellectual ore which he mined from unknown depths but which were essential to the welfare of our time. (70)

All those who have been in touch with this extraordinary man, ought to write their recollections so as to keep alive and honour his memory.

— *William Hartner to Durai Raja Singam.*

“All that is happening in our time must be told and re-told”, said Goethe. “There have been excellent men in the world and there will be more. It is our duty to write and speak of them This is the Communion of Saints in which we believe”.



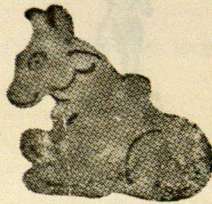
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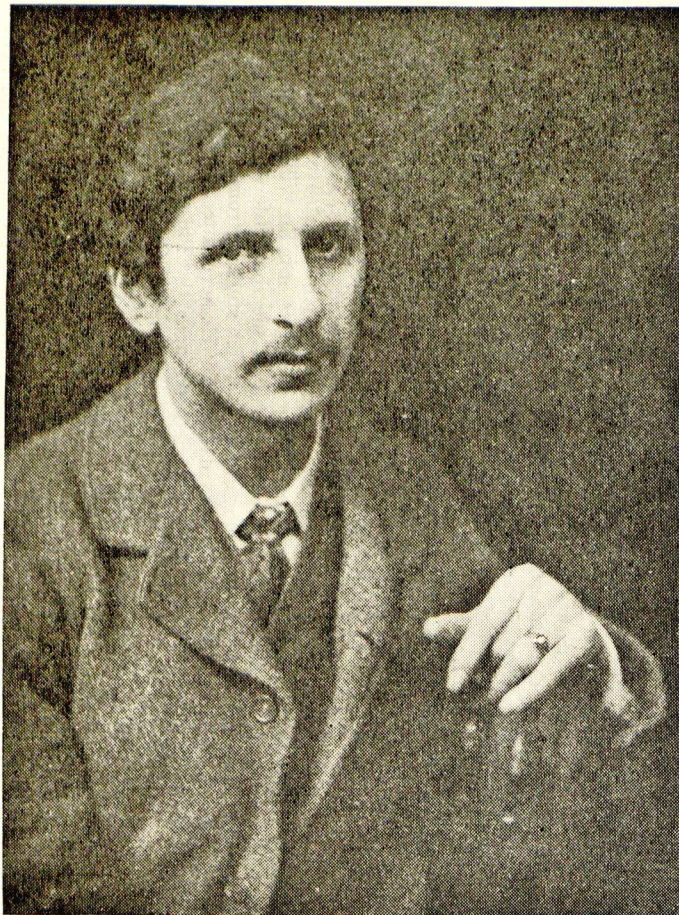


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Ananda Coomaraswamy
ca 1900



Ethel Coomaraswamy
ca 1905

