

**dispatch #3 from ralph
calcutta, december 31, 2005**

the second week in calcutta

DAY #12, Xmas, Sunday, December 25, 2005

Sisir Roy is a professor of physics at the Calcutta branch of the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI). He is a friend of Prasun Roy (no relation, many people and few last names in Bengal) who was instrumental in arranging this visit to India, as well as the preceding one in 2001. I met Sisir via email in connection with my talk at the Calcutta Math Society (Dispatch #2, Day #5). When we met in person last week we discovered we had many interests in common, especially, the study of consciousness. His wife Mala, also a physicist, came with us to the Math Society conference. They had invited me home for lunch, and today was the day. I was looking forward to more time with them, and also, a break from the constancy of the dietary regime of the RK Mission (breakfast = corn flakes, lunch = dinner = alu-gobi).

Sisir came to fetch me from the mission and we travelled by taxi to their home in the Southwest of Calcutta -- a relaxed residential district with individual homes, vacant lots, ponds and canals, and lots of dogs, cats, and cows. Their home turned out to be a sort of Taj Mahal in miniature, with white marble spiral stairs and many nice places to sit and discuss, which we did. Their daughter Neelanjana joined in, she lives at ISI and is doing very interesting human genome research at ISI regarding the aboriginal tribes of India, malaria susceptibility, and so on.

As for lunch, which was to be a demonstration of authentic Bengali vegetarian cooking, well, it was. It was permanently memorable, and I had to take many notes on the recipes. Most wonderful day, although I rather overate. The taxi home took an hour and a half, and of course I skipped dinner at the mission.

DAY #13, Monday, December 26, 2005

This was the day planned for a first informal visit to ISI. Sisir came for me in an ISI car and we took off for the institute, which is quite far away in the northern part of Calcutta. The ride, taking a little over an hour in the best of times, was (and remains) the most extreme example of the bumper-car

art I have encountered here. The ride alone was exhausting, while the driver seemed totally undaunted.

Arriving at the ISI campus, I found within the walls (amid total chaos outside) a serene landscape with palm trees, swimming ponds, and widely scattered very large buildings. Our destination, the Physics and Applied Math Unit (PAMU) was in the New Academic Building, so called, which is actually new and academic. Eight floors high, with elevators, central air conditioning, quite acceptable by modern American standards, PAMU is on the top floor, with a view over northern Calcutta -- through a bit of haze to be sure.

Sisir showed me my office, where I anticipated being able to work on a daily basis with my laptop connected to the internet through their high-speed connection. In fact, checking out the office and the connection was the main purpose of this visit. The arduous journey taking two plus hours for the round trip was already a deterrent to this plan, but now I discovered another.

I am unable to connect my laptop to the internet here, well, I will probably succeed eventually. But further, the office is small and crowded with furniture and other visitors. On the plus side, an excellent lunch is served nearby at the ISI Guest House. All in all, in comparison with my palatial digs at WBUT, which is much closer, this will be a fallback at best. After a poor lecture by a visiting mathematician, Sisir and I set out for the adventure travel to our homes.

Another day of discovery, another day behind with my email.

DAY #14, Tuesday, December 27, 2005

Today in Calcutta is yesterday in California, where it is now my grandson Gavin's birthday, the eighth I think, and the families are gathered at his house in Brentwood for dinner. I call on my American mobile phone, my precious Palm Treo organizer cum four-frequency world phone. It works, but at a cost of \$2.50 per minute. But so precious !!! I spoke with Gavin, who demonstrated his newly acquired whistle. Together, we whistled "Happy Birthday". Email is nice, by cell phone technology is dandy. I also spoke with my sons Peter and John, the latter explained how I can bust into the ISI network.

Long ago I promised to attend the certificate ceremony of the Jagadis

Bose National Science Talent Search (JBNSTS). In this program, college science students from all over West Bengal State compete annually with rigorous exams and projects. This year's top candidates will be awarded certificates this evening. Why I should be there I cannot guess. However, the director, Prof. Papiya Nandy, will be here shortly to pick me up for an introductory tour of the venue, the brand new JBNSTS building in the eastern part of Calcutta. She arrives in the JBNSTS car, everyone seems to travel this way, as only professional drivers can survive the road, and we proceed to the new building. It is unfinished but grand, lots of open spaces with open views and cooling by natural breezes. After tea and a tour, she asks me to "coordinate" the science program, which will follow the award ceremony. This means, I know all too well, cutting off the speakers who cannot manage to stop on their own when their time is up. She shows me a little bell that will give me the required powers for the job.

She is also professor of physics at Jadavpur University (JU) about which I have heard much but know nothing, and offers me a five-minute tour of her department, which is on the way back from JBNSTS to the RK Mission. Like ISI, this is a rather nice campus with open spaces, palm trees, cows, students, and all the usual. Nothing like UC Berkeley, but perhaps the equivalent Bengali style. I find I am getting used to this. Upstairs in the physics department, several of her advanced graduate students are waiting to present short talks on their works. This takes longer than five minutes, but is highly interesting. Novel projects in areas totally unknown to me -- like structure of porcelain, pores in biological cell membranes -- well done and clearly explained. Finally, back at the ranch for a short rest.

And at 4 pm, Atin and Pritha Das (husband and wife) arrive for an appointment. She is a professor of math, he is a school teacher of physics, both with PhDs from A. B. Roy of JU Physics, and an organizer of the WBUT workshop last week. In fact, Pritha attended the workshop, and asked very astute questions after each presentation. After discussing many questions of chaos and complexity, Atin interviewed me for the Complexity Digest (online journal edited by my old friend Gottfried Mayer-Kress) using a video camera the size of a pin head -- he is evidently a gadget head -- and along the way he learned that I was having trouble accessing the internet. This outraged him, and he vowed to solve the problem. We made a date for the following day to work on the cell phone to laptop interconnection problem.

After another very brief rest, off to JBNSTS in the company car for the award ceremony, I shared the car with "a young woman with white hair" who turned to be Anjali Mookerjee, retired dean and professor of environmental science at JNU Delhi, and now involved in the Research Department of the RK Mission. She told me of some of the work going on at RKM -- courses in Indology, PhD research, post-graduate visitors, and so on. I mentioned that I was interested in Indology.

The evening event went off quite well. I had to nearly tackle the last speaker to bring the affair to an end. This was rather difficult as for one thing, his talk was extremely interesting, and for another, he was the VC (that is, #1 boss) of JU. Now I could see why I was drafted into the job, as I could escape back to the New World with impunity.

By now it was way too late for alu-gobi at the RK Mission, so I accepted Prof. Nandy's invitation for dinner. The company driver drove us to a restaurant that was over-the-top-camp, Bengali style, with antique auto parts plastered into the walls and life-size photos of Bollywood stars in odd postures. The north Indian vegetarian dishes were outstanding. And home and to bed around 10 pm. Well, it is tough work but somebody has to do it.

DAY #15, Wednesday, December 28, 2005

A bad hair day at the office at WBUT. Difficult drive there with Prof. Bhomick discussing population explosion and democracy in India. On arrival at WBUT, the internet was down, then it came up but my laptop just would not connect, then it connected but the line was too slow to work, then the power went out. I came home early.

DAY #16, Thursday, December 29, 2005

This was the day of my first lecture at ISI. Sisir picked me up in the ISI car. What a long and hair-raising ride. On arrival, ISI was as serene as ever, but we got the news of the terror attack in Bangalore, at IISc, the very institute where i will be visiting at end January. Much consternation, I panic. I emailed IISc that i probably will not come. My lecture was to include a short video, key to the talk, but my NTSC cassette would not play in their PAL player. Just before the lecture we discover that rats had attacked the insulation in the ceiling, and built nests in the air ducts, which has blown gray pop corn balls all over the lecture hall. Could happen

anywhere, my house in Santa Cruz for example has been stripped of all of its insulation by mice. After the mandatory power failure all was ready. AS I got up to speak I had a fainting spell due to diarrhea dehydration, but I stumble through it without freaking and the lecture -- on morphogenesis -- was a success.

DAY #17, Friday, December 30, 2005

An amazing day of work in the office at WBUT. Relatively easy drive there with Prof. Bhomick discussing global climate warming. My laptop connected effortlessly to the internet, which provided record speed. Caught up all emails. Dispatched dispatch #2. Downloaded two urgently needed monster files. Had an excellent sandwich for lunch.

Returned at 3 pm from WBUT to the RKM, the drive easier than usual (or am I getting used to this mayhem?) and lay down for a brief rest. Within minutes the phone rang, and someone at the front desk said Swami Prabhananada was calling, and asked if I would speak with him. This name rang a bell, and I said OK. He connected us, and the Swami asked if I had time to meet, and being free just then, I said of course. He said he was nearby, and the man from the front desk would conduct me to him. This man came to my room to get me, led me across the garden into the front wing of the fortress, into the executive wing. Without any further ado I was seated at the large desk of Swami Prabhananda, the secretary of the RKM Institute of Culture. He was all in orange with perhaps a touch of red, including the ski cap. All smiles, he said he had heard about me from several sources. Anjali Mukherjee turned out to be one of them. The others might be "upstairs" for all I know.

The Swami explained that they have a Research Department. Its head, also in orange robes, then appeared in the chair on my right. This department had organized a series of three conferences on Consciousness, Swami said, the third of which was to start in two weeks. The proceedings of the first two had already been published. I said I would love to see them. He produced them from under the desk and presented them to me as a gift. The upcoming conference was under the direction of Prof. Sen Sharma. Its program would combine scientists, philosophers, and people of experience, such as yogis, sufi masters, Tibetan lamas, and so on.

At this moment, Prof. Sen Sharma sat down in the chair to my left. A short

man of about my age, he is the world expert on Kashmiri Shaivism, which is the subject that has been high on my agenda since 1972. It is the only branch of Indian philosophy that has a doctrine of vibration, which they call Spanda (pronounced spund). I was reeling, actually dizzy, by this time.

The Swami said they would be delighted if I would give a talk on Chaos and Consciousness in the upcoming conference, and I agreed without thinking what I might have to say. I said I had been discussing this topic with my friend Sisir Roy of ISI, and was developing some new ideas. Swami said they knew Sisir, and he had a paper in the first volume of proceedings.

Then we exited, and Dr. Sen Sharma and Swami Sarvabhutananda, the chief of research, took me upstairs to the Research Department, where we sat in Sen Sharma's office and discussed Tantrism and Shaivism. I was shown a stack of books, translations of the Spanda literature into English. One of them, by Mark Dyczkowski (pronounced dis-cow-ski), I own and had read recently. I was given free reign of the Research Library where these books were kept, and research students would help me find whatever I needed. I walked home in a daze, thunderstruck with the synchronicity of this new development, so similar to my recruitment into Neemkaroli Baba's satsang in 1972.

Never too late to finish overdue homework.

DAY #16, Saturday, December 31, 2005

A day off. I read the first of the two volumes of proceedings of the RKM conferences, *Philosophy and Science: An Exploratory Approach to Consciousness*, of February 2002. The welcome address was by Swami Prabhananda, whom I had just met. The keynote address was by Karl Pribram, whom I had seen very recently in Mexicali, and I imagined him sitting in my very room at the RKM guest house four years ago. My new pal, Sisir Roy, was among the 24 participants, as was my new guide for Kashmiri Shaivism, Debabrata Sen Sharma.

My review of this volume is relegated to a separate document, as it is rather long. But it may be of interest, as within it, the occult reason for my present visit to India is revealed to me for the first time. Of course, I am here overtly as a missionary of chaos, a vector for the revision of school

math curricula, and Fulbright emissary of my home country, California. But the covert program, it now appears, is the resumption of my work on the mathematics of the world soul, or cosmic consciousness, begun in my first visit to India of 1972.

In any case, following my reading of this heavy book, at 1:30 pm, I climbed the three flights to the Research Department to begin my study of Kashmiri Shaivism, with a reading of the English translation of the Spanda karicaqs by Jaideva Singh. Alas, it was shut tight. Returning at 3 pm, I found it open, but was refused admission. No matter, as Dr. Sen Sharma had not yet arrived. At 3:45 pm he called from his office upstairs, and I climbed yet a third time to see him. Briefly we discussed my main question on the communication between the individual soul (atman) and the world soul (paramitasiva), he then showed me a cubical where I could sit and study anytime during open hours, introduced me to his teacher, an obviously distinguished and very special octogenarian, and instructed the librarian to bring me any books I wanted. Is this cool or what?

Then it was time to depart for dinner at the home of Atin and Pritha Das, a young chaos couple I had met through WBUT, and New Year's Eve. Very nice evening. It is such a privilege to be brought right into the home and extended family of like-minded people in a foreign culture. Even a taste of the many Bengali vegetables stuffed me to the max. Let's face it, there are triple the number of vegetables in India than we can find in the supermarkets of the USA.

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