

## Rahul Sankrityayan: *Merī jīvan-yātrā* (1951)

Rahul Sankrityayan (1893–1963) was a prolific polymath, whose output of well over a hundred books covers biography, travelogue, literature, religion, history, politics and lexicography, in addition to an impressive amount of prose fiction: unsurprisingly, he is dubbed *mahāpaṇḍit*. He travelled widely; visits to communist countries converted his Congress socialism into fully-fledged communism in the late 1930s, and an extended stay in Ceylon led him to adopt the Buddhist faith in preference to the orthodox and Arya Samajist Hinduism to which he had adhered earlier.

Sankrityayan's autobiography, *Merī jīvan-yātrā*, fills five lengthy volumes. It is largely informally written, with vocabulary taken unselfconsciously from whichever register suits the subject-matter. Interest is sustained by a skilful weaving together of description and narrative, and although the casual admission 'I don't remember much about...' is a stock formula, the autobiography makes a fascinating and sensitive record of childhood in a village near Benares at the turn of the century. The reader is constantly reminded, as at the beginning of this passage, of the precariousness of life before the availability of modern medicine; and also of the great dynamism and complexity of tradition which underlies every aspect of a child's upbringing in Indian society.

The passage given here is from early in the first volume, and describes events of 1902, when the author was nine years old. Like most boys of his generation and social class, Rahul was given a broad educational grounding which included the study of Urdu as well as Sanskrit; this passage describes his tuition in Sanskrit at the hands of his uncle. The use of Sanskrit texts in the home is described alongside other details of domestic circumstances, and the first two paragraphs give a clear impression of the young boy's sense of reverential awe at his uncle's scholarly prowess: so great a pandit was he that he once went mad for a whole year with the weight of his learning. But Rahul was thrilled to be allowed to go with his uncle to enrol in his village *pāthśālā*, where teaching centred on the traditional study of Sanskrit grammatical texts. In the last two paragraphs Sankrityayan describes the school and recalls his desire to dedicate himself full-time to the study of Sanskrit, while noting the difficulties his uncle had in keeping students when the attractions of Benares were so close at hand.

The text is taken from *Merī jīvan-yātrā*, vol.I (Calcutta: Adhunik Pustak Bhavan, 1951), pp.20–21. Sankrityayan's fiction-writing is discussed briefly in Peter Gaeffke, *Hindi literature in the twentieth century* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1978), pp. 53–54. The Benares life-style which proved so tempting to the *pāthśālā* students is vividly described in Nita Kumar, *The artisans of Banaras: popular culture and identity, 1880-1986* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

कनैलाके हैजेमें हमारे घरका कोई नहीं मरा था, यह कह आये हैं । बीमारीके वक्त शायद 'आजी' ने शतचंडी (सौ बार चंडी) का पाठ माना था । आजकल वही पाठ चल रहा था । पाठ बांचनेवाले थे हमारे फूफा पंडित महादेव पांडे और उनके मौसेरे भाई महावीर तिवारी । महावीर तिवारी एक-एक अक्षर टटोल-टटोलकर पढ़ रहे थे, किन्तु फूफा फरफर पढ़ते जाते थे । उनके पास नसदानी रखी हुई थी, बीच-बीचमें वे नस लेते जा रहे थे । शामको नससे भरी रुमाल साफ़ की जाती थी । सबेरे पाठ समाप्त कर गरम दूधमें भिगोया घरके खुशबूदार धानका चूरा नाश्तेके लिए तैयार रहता । शायद उसके बाद फिर पाठ चलता । पाठ संस्कृतमें होता - चंडीपाठका भाषामें अर्थ नहीं किया जाता । दोपहरको भोजन, फिर विश्राम । शामको ३-४ बजे फूफा साहेब घरमें बुलाये जाते । फ़र्शपर एक ओर वह बैठते, और सामने बैठतीं मेरी मां, शायद चाची भी (उन्हें मैं काकी कहा करता), मेरी कोई बुआ, कुटुम्बकी भी शायद दो-तीन चाची-बुआ । दामादके स्वागतमें ऐसे गोष्ठी रखनेकी प्रथा है, इससे उसका मनोरंजन होता है । वात्सलापका विषय घरबारका हाल-चाल और कुछ हँसी-मजाक । फूफासे मैं बहुत जल्द हिल-मिल गया और एकाध बार उनकी इस गोष्ठीमें भी शामिल हुआ । सावन का पानी बरस चुका था, और कनैलाके ताल-तलैयों, तथा डबरों (पल्वलों) में पानी भरकर बह गया था । शामको फूफा साहेब दूर पूरब तरफ़ चले जाते, और वहीं शौच-स्नान करके लौटते ।

फूफा महादेव पंडितके बारेमें मैंने कितनी ही बातें सुनी थीं। वह बहुत भारी पंडित हैं - इतने भारी, जितने कि आसपास दस-बीस कोस में कोई नहीं । बहुत विद्या पढ़ जानेके कारण ही वह एक बार साल भर पागल रहे । उस वक्त तो मुझे विश्वास होता था, जैसे बहुत खानेसे भोजनका अजीर्ण होता है, उसी तरह बहुत पढ़ जाने से विद्याका अजीर्ण होता है, किन्तु यह संस्कृत पढ़नेवालोंको ही । शतचंडी पाठ समाप्त होनेमें शायद एक मास लगा । उसके बाद जब फूफा अपने गांव बछवल जाने लगे, तो मुझे भी लेते गये । शायद घरवालोंसे उन्होंने संस्कृत पढ़ानेकी स्वीकृति भी ले ली थी । कनैलासे बछवल ३ मीलसे अधिक दूर नहीं है । मैं फूफाके साथ उनकी घोड़ीपर चढ़ा । रास्तेमें मैंगई नदी में काफ़ी पानी था । मुझे कन्धेपर चढ़ाकर पार किया गया । . . .

फूफा महादेव पंडित संस्कृत व्याकरणके प्रौढ़ विद्वान् थे । उन्होंने महाभाष्यान्त व्याकरण पढ़ा था, और पढ़े ग्रंथ बहुत कंठस्थ थे । उनके पास काफ़ी खेत और अन्न-धन था, अतएव उनके लिये अपनी विद्याका और कोई उपयोग आवश्यक न था । वे वहीं अपने द्वारपर विद्यार्थियोंको संस्कृत पढ़ाया करते । ज्यादातर विद्यार्थी सारस्वत चद्रिका, मुहूर्तचिन्तामणिके होते थे, किन्तु कितने ही सिद्धान्तकौमुदी भी पढ़ते थे । फूफा जी आसपासके गांवोंसे विद्यार्थियोंको "मुठिया" अन्न मिलनेका प्रबंध भी करा देते थे, किन्तु जहाँ आधी चौथाई सिद्धान्तकौमुदी समाप्त हुई, कि विद्यार्थी बनारस दौड़ जाते । बनारसका नजदीक रहना महादेव पंडितकी पाठशालाकी उन्नतिमें भारी बाधा थी ।

सप्ताह बीतते-बीतते फूफा ने मुझे भी सारस्वत पढ़ाना शुरू कर दिया "नत्त्वा सरस्वतीं देवीं" और आगेका पन्ना भी मैंने कंठस्थ कर डाला । स्मरणशक्ति मेरी बहुत तीव्र थी, फूफा चाहते थे कि मैं संस्कृत पढ़ूं । मैं सोचता हूँ — काश ! मैं फूफाके यहां पढ़नेको छोड़ दिया जाता । संस्कृत खूब पढ़ता । ग्रंथ सारे कंठस्थ होते, क्योंकि अभी यह धारणा मुझे नहीं हुई थी, कि रटना बुरी चीज है ।

1 *kanaileke*: in this passage, ppn. are regularly attached directly to nouns as well as pronouns, though hereafter are shown separately in the notes. Kanaila is in the Ajamgarh district of U.P., to the North-East of Benares.

1 *yah kah āye haiṅ*: 'this we (= 'I') have already said'.

2 *ājī*: the nickname for Sankrityayan's *dādī* (paternal grandmother). Other relations referred to in the passage are 3 *phūphā* 'husband of paternal aunt'; 3 *mauserā bhāī* 'maternal aunt's son'; 10 *cācī/kācī* 'paternal uncle's wife'; 11 *buā* 'father's sister'; 11 *dāmād* 'son-in-law, bridegroom'; and cf. 11 *do-tīn cācī-buā* 'a few miscellaneous aunts'.

2 *śatcaṅḍī... kā pāṭh mānā thā*: 'had sanctioned a recitation of the *Śatcaṅḍī*' — a S text eulogizing the goddess Candi (Durga), here recited as a protection against the cholera epidemic. A *pāṭh* often extends over several days or weeks (cf. 21 *ek mās lagā*), with a succession of readers.

4 *ṭaṭol-ṭaṭolkar paṛh rahe the*: 'was groping his way along the text': the emphasis of the repeated verb stem is further underlined by use of the continuous tense, here in contrast with the modal imperfective of *phūphā pharphar paṛh jāte the*, 'Uncle would race through it'.

5 *bīc-bīc meṅ ve nas lete jā rahe the*: 'from time to time he was taking snuff': *lete jā* stresses the repetitiveness of the action.

5 *nas se bhārī rūmāl*: not as unpleasant as it sounds, since a *rūmāl* (823e) is not used for actually blowing the nose!

6 *ghar ke khusbūdār dhān kā cūrā*: 'fragrant home-grown rice-flour'. *dhān* 'rice in the husk' is distinguished from *cāval* 'husked rice' and *bhāt* 'cooked rice'.

8 *caṅḍīpāṭh kā bhāṣā meṅ arth nahīn kiyā jātā*: 'the *Caṅḍī* recitation was not translated into the vernacular'; the ritual function of the *pāṭh* depends upon the untranslatable power of the S verses themselves.

9 *ghar meṅ*: 'into the [private inner part of] the house'.

11 *dāmād ke svāgat meṅ aīsī goṣṭhī rakhne kī prathā hai*: 'it is the custom to arrange such a session to welcome a bridegroom' — implying that the *pāṭh*, though seriously undertaken, has a relaxed and festive mood.

12 *vārttālāp kā viṣay... :* ellipsis of the verb generalizes the context, no tense being stated.

12 *hāl-cāl*: 'condition and manner', i.e. 'how things were going'.

14 *sāvan kā pānī*: 'the [monsoon] rain of the month Savan' (July–August).

14 *tāl-talaiyōṅ, tathā ḍabroṅ (palvalōṅ) meṅ: talaiyā* is a diminutive of *tāl* 'pond'; S *palval* glosses HU *ḍabrā* 'pool, puddle'.

16 *śauc-snān*: lit. 'purification by evacuation, and washing', a euphemism similar to 'ablutions' (though more concerned with ritual purity).

17 *kitnī hī bāteṅ*: the sense is rhetorical, 'so many things'; cf. 30 *kitne hī* 'many [people]'.

18 *itne bhārī, jitne kī āspās das-bīs kos meṅ koī nahīn*: 'so prodigious that there was no-one like him for many a league around'.

18 *bahut vidyā paṛh jāne ke kāraṅ hī*: 'simply as a result of wading through so much learning'.

21 *saṅskṛt paṛhnevāloṅ ko hī*: 'only in the case of S scholars'.

22 *bachval jāne lage*: 'set out for Bachwal' — *phūphā*'s village.

22 *mujhe bhī lete gae*: 'went taking me with him', i.e. 'took me along'.

24 *maṅgaī nadī*: 'the river Mangai'; in such a *tatpuruṣa* compound (625b), the specific name precedes the class noun: cf. *hindī bhāṣā* etc.

26 *mahābhāṣyānt*: the *Mahābhāṣya* is the 'Great Commentary' of Patanjali (second century B.C.) on the grammatical exegesis of Panini (fourth century B.C.); suff. *ant* (622), here in sandhi (611), means 'the whole of, the entire work'.

27 *kaṅṭhasth*: learning by heart is the time-honoured method by which the continuance of Hindu textual tradition is maintained.

- 27 *ann-dhan*: 'grain and wealth', i.e. general prosperity (524).
- 28 *apni vidyā kā aur koī upyog āvaśyak na thā*: 'no other utilization of his knowledge was necessary', i.e. he was not dependent upon the usual ceremonial functions of the pandit for a regular income.
- 28 *apne dvār par*: 'at his house' (lit. 'doorway').
- 29 *sārasvatacandrikā, muhūrtacintāmaṇi*: the titles of S texts.
- 30 *siddhāntakaumudī*: a seventeenth century exegesis of Paninian grammar.
- 31 *muṭhiyā*: apparently a variety of grain, though (as the inverted commas suggest) this is not a widely known term.
- 31 *jahān ādhī cauthāi siddhāntakaumudī samāpt hui, ki vidyārthi banāras daur jāte*: 'no sooner had a half or quarter of the *Siddhāntakaumudī* been completed than all the students would run off to Benares'. The cj. *ki* stands in correlation to *jahān* 'at the point (that)'.  
 33 *banāras kā najdik rahnā... bhārī bādhē thī*: as the subject is nominal m. *rahnā*, verbal agreement with the predicate f. *bādhē* is irregular.
- 34 *saptāh*: a S synonym for its P cognate *haftā*, '7 days, week'.
- 34 *nattvā sarasvatīm devīm*: a S dedicatory invocation to Sarasvati, goddess of learning, of the kind typically found at the beginning of a Hindu text.
- 35 *āge kā pannā bhī mainne kaṅthasth kar ḍālā*: modal *ḍālnā* gives the throw-away sense of an impulsive action — 'for good measure I learnt the next page by heart too'.
- 35 *smaraṅśakti merī*: the inversion implies the sense 'As for my memory'.
- 36 *phūphā cāhte the ki main saṅskṛt parhūn*: i.e. full-time, or formally.