

**WHAT I HAVE LEARNED—V**

# What Man Cannot Know

*A Distinguished Indian Philosopher-Statesman Writes on the Role of Mystery in Human Affairs*

By CHAKRAVARTI RAJAGOPALACHARI

**I** CAN put in a few words what I have learned from life:

Life is God's *leela*. This sanskrit word *leela* is not just "play," although it is generally so rendered in English. The Sanskrit word expresses what to us is the more important negative result of any attempt to unravel the mystery of life; namely, that we cannot make out the design though undoubtedly there is design, order, and law. The nearest approach to an explanation is that the great Master of the Universe amuses Himself, but we cannot unravel the mysteries of this highly organized divine play except that the inexorable law of *Karma* governs it—every action brings with it, inescapably and unfailingly, its results. I have also learned this: that the greatest happiness results from being good; that is, from following the moral law in spite of every seeming pain and privation associated with it.

I have also found that any attempt to define what is good is futile, because of the various results of every action. One man's good is almost invariably another man's pain or privation. Good can only be relatively determined. The teaching of the *Gita* of the Hindus contains the soundest advice, namely, do what is laid as duty on your shoulders in the context of each moment and do it unselfishly and surrendering yourself to God. One man's duty may differ from another's and what is good at one time may not be the right thing at another time. Unselfishness and unbroken reliance on God and faithful use of one's reasoning powers must decide what at each juncture, public or private, one's duty is. This is not Hinduism alone or the *Bhagavad-Gita* alone. It is the teaching of every great religion. But the *Gita* expatiates on it as if intimately dealing with a tough skeptic.

These being the lessons I have learnt

from life as well as from good books and the company of good men and women, what is my present personal summing-up of the world situation? It is at present a rather sad one—of disappointment and retarded hope.

**W**HEN the atomic bombs were exploded over Japan and World War II was brought to an end, I was among those who rejoiced but were also deeply alarmed. I rejoiced that the victory of the Allies and the defeat of Hitler, with his brutalities and terror, were steadily approaching; but when the actual end came in the way it did, it filled me with sadness and a terror unequalled by any-

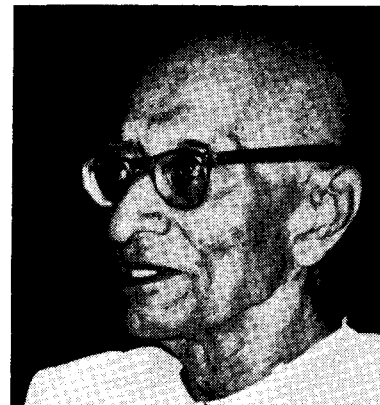
thing inflicted by Hitler and his satanic power.

I watched with dismay and grief the race in nuclear production that immediately followed. The world was in the grip of terror out of which it had to escape; but instead of doing what should end the terror, powerful nations went on adding to the danger and the terror.

A stage was reached when the new weapons of total annihilation no doubt served to prevent war, but they did this by adding to the danger in ever increasing measure, for if ever the poised balance of terror failed, war would arrive.

This form of peace soon resulted in the withdrawal of all the support against

EDITOR'S NOTE: The fifth article in the series, "What I Have Learned," is by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, one of the most respected political and philosophical figures in India today. A long-time leader in public affairs, he is currently a key member of the Swatantra Party, an important opposition group in the Rajya Sabha, or upper house of the legislature. From 1948 to 1950, the stormy formative years of the newly independent country, Mr. Rajagopalachari served as his nation's Governor-General—the culmination of more than two decades of work with the Indian National Congress, led by Mahatma Gandhi.



—Pictorial Parade.

**Chakravarti Rajagopalachari**

In addition to his involvement in public affairs (he was jailed five times for Congress activities), Mr. Rajagopalachari has written works reflecting his interest in philosophy and literature, including the books *Hinduism: Doctrine and Way of Life* and *Voice of the Uninvolved*. The ideals to which he has devoted his life are suggested in the Statement of Principles of the Swatantra Party. The party says it is "pledged to social justice and equality of opportunity for all people without distinction of religion, caste, occupation, or political affiliation. . . . [The] happiness of the people depends on individual initiative, on enterprise and energy. . . ."

injustice and aggression that the weaker nations had obtained from more powerful nation-friends. In the pre-atomic period, the more powerful nations gave help to their weaker friends; after the nuclear terror arrived, everyone was afraid of "escalation" of the defense of a weaker nation into a terrible world war.

This led to a period of greatly increased activity by way of debate, discussion, and negotiation in the world forum. The United Nations Organization assumed great importance and seemed rapidly to approach the role of world government. The great book of Clark and Sohn, *World Peace Through World Law*, is a demonstration and a symbol of the hopes that the role of the U.N. raised during this period. It was a complete, very carefully drawn-up draft bill for the nations of the world to adopt, by which the U.N. would be transformed into an effective world authority acting under world law and there would be an end to war and the fear of war.

THE grant by the British Parliament of complete independence to India and Pakistan in 1947, followed immediately by similar withdrawal of all imperial power from Burma and Ceylon, was a great landmark in world history. The British Empire was peacefully liquidated by the British Parliament. This was a signal for the termination of colonialism throughout the world. America with its congenital bias against colonialism and Russia with its slogan of anti-imperialism both hurried to grant independence to numerous big and small nations spread over Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. The United Nations Organization admitted

all these new nations as units, all of them being equal to one another whether big or small, powerful or insignificant. This was an advantage, but it carried with it the great disadvantage of the organization's being overloaded with "have-not" units carrying no power behind them. Soon the United Nations Organization was infected not only by the old cold-war poison but also by a new poison distilled out of the old anti-imperialist feelings. Blocs began to be organized in the U.N. that blasted the hopes of its growing into an effective world authority under world law. Nationalism grew again into a dynamic force replacing the internationalism that had marked the end of the Second World War and had raised vast hopes in the minds of world statesmen. Today that internationalism and that great hope have both nearly disappeared. The powerful French President is the biggest symptom of this new nationalism. The polarization of the nations of the world into free and Communist tended to replace nationalism by a world outlook pulling either one way or the other. Each side hoped the other side's consolidation would break up as a result of nationalist forces. But what actually happened is that both sides underwent that change—and world consolidation has suffered badly as a result. The regenerated nationalism of the big nations of the world and the persistent anti-West feelings of the newly emancipated small nations have both become great roadblocks in the march to a world government. The goal appeared near enough some years ago but it has receded very far now.

And as a result of this setback, the old

cold war which seemed to be disappearing has got a fresh start. China is in the front line of this new phase of the cold war and Russia can but join her comrade—willingly or otherwise. The prospect for the world has become indeed bleak.

Let us, for some relief, go back to the divine *leela*. There could have been nothing conceivably more vicious than the slave trade, which planted a large number of Africans in the United States of America. The Negroes of America are no longer slaves but are a significant section of a free and great nation. Their present movement for full integration with the white majority is today a point of irritation—like the one within the oyster that makes the precious pearl. Similarly, this present irritation in the United States will lead to something great and precious—the breakdown of one of the most stupid of superstitions, that the color of the skin makes a real difference between man and man. The defects, intellectual or moral, in a Southern white person appear to many, if not most, white people in the U.S. as tolerable and remediable, but the same defects in a black man are felt by the same people to be intolerable and permanently associated with the skin pigment and therefore unchangeable. This is an attitude hard to cast out. Often one's intellect and reason would admit the attitude to be baseless, but sentiment persists against intellect. The prejudice disappears only when the pigment is outbalanced by talent, wealth, or enlightenment. Even where it is overcome, it is often only an external conquest, not a complete internal annulment.

THIS color superstition is not confined to white against Negro, but prevails throughout the world in some form or another. In India it takes the form of caste prejudice and in a higher value stupidly and openly set on a fair complexion. And this in a country where the races got hopelessly mixed up many thousands of years ago.

The criminal slave trade made for the ultimate coming into being of a great number of Africans who are as enlightened as the natives of Europe who lived and progressed in America. These enlightened Negroes have a great mission cut out for them after integration with their fellow citizens in the U.S. It will be the uplift of their cousins in Africa—uplift not in the superficial sense of political stir, but in the real sense of a rise of level in enlightened living. This would be a capital demonstration of good coming out of evil—in the not too distant future. And perhaps there will be exchange of good on both sides, for the black people of Africa have something valuable to give to their cousins in America, who have adopted American culture.

The evolution of human civilization



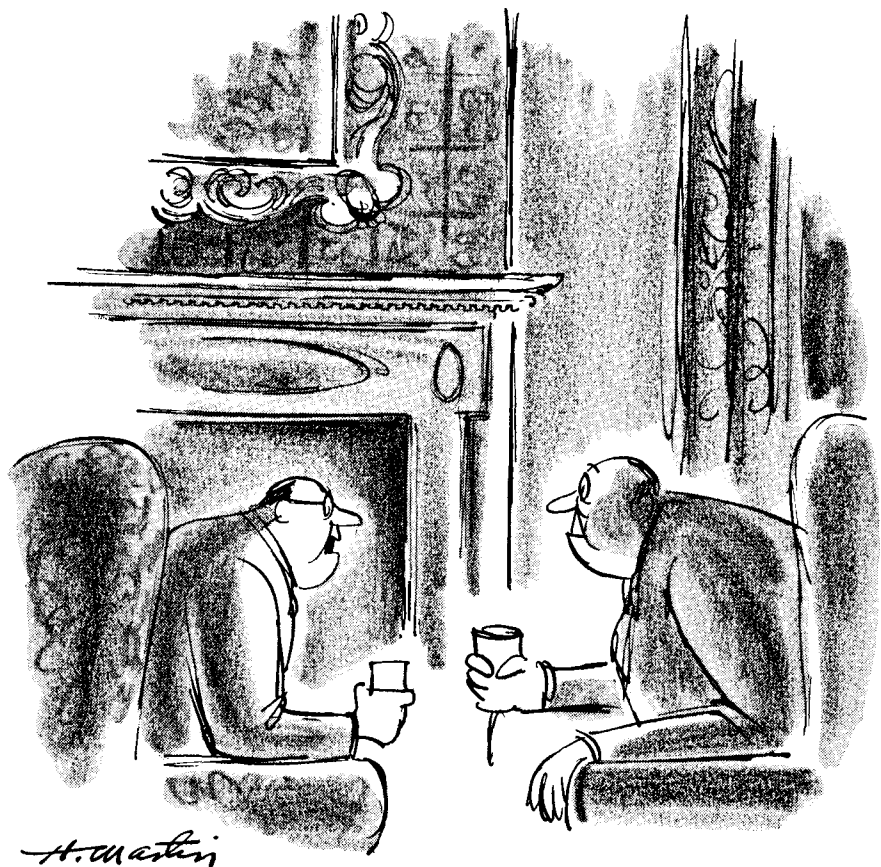
"Well then, if it's any easier, tell me where it doesn't hurt."



takes its course through what is obviously good and gentle as well as through oppression—through ambition and conquests as well as through the voluntary consolidation of groups of humans, and through their joint activities. What has been recorded in history as activities of ambitious and wicked leaders of men have all helped toward the evolution of what we now recognize as progress and civilization. The British occupation of India is a patent example of how good comes out of evil. It is not an exception. It is only one patent illustration of what has been going on in God's *leela* from time immemorial. The regions and the human groups now divided into separate nations as Ceylon, India, Pakistan, Burma, Tibet, Malaya, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Nagaland, and so on in Asia were all one vast region under Britain and could have entered the U.N. as one unit.

**I** REMEMBER when India was legally released from Britain and the question before us was whether to be completely isolated from the United Kingdom or to remain in the Commonwealth as one of its units recognizing the British sovereign's symbolic status as head of the Commonwealth. Jawaharlal Nehru, no doubt under the subtle influence of Earl Mountbatten, told me that he was inclined to remain in the Commonwealth, because, as he put it to me, it is good for world peace and progress that nations come together rather than be isolated, and the Commonwealth was a big consolidated reality, which we should keep and nurse rather than break up. His inclination was a pleasant surprise to the rest of us and it became a great decision that moved the incorrigible imperialist Winston Churchill to tears of joy. Projecting our thoughts from this point, we can imagine that it would have been better for the world if other imperial consolidations that had been brought into being through ambition, fraud, or force had not been hastily dissolved but, rather, exploited for the ultimate good of humanity. Again, we cannot dive into the inscrutable play of the Divine Master but must submit and do our relative duties honestly, and reverently strive to take humanity forward in spite of all the difficulties and contrary forces. Internationalism has in great part unfortunately yielded again to reinvigorated nationalism. The spirit of resistance, anger, and hatred generated in the struggles for liberty persist even after liberation when such feelings have no place or meaning. All this and other difficulties have to be overcome and will be overcome because the good is stronger than the evil, and truth must prevail over error, however seemingly more energetic evil and error may appear to be for a time.

America should not lose interest or



*"By George, why don't we write Batman a letter?"*

faith in the U.N. or develop a feeling of antagonism to it. What now appear to be setbacks may indeed turn out to be just what was necessary to prevent some greater evil. Let us struggle and God will ultimately help us. His *leela* is no doubt complicated and inscrutable. There is much apparent evil that we cannot explain on the basis of a just and merciful all-powerful guardian of the human species. But what we have experienced is enough to prove Him to be good and omnipotent. Let us strive, therefore, with faith in the ultimate result. Let us cultivate serenity and patience and let us act our parts justly in His great and unending play, at each moment doing our duties to one another and to society and humanity as a whole; and even further, by doing our duty to all living beings. Endowed with the wonderful endowment of the human mind, we have duties toward all the living beings on earth, with whom we are really one and indivisible.

**B**RISK trade is developing between the Western nations and Soviet Russia and her allies, and is operating as a catalyst to dissolve the cold war attitudes. This is a development promising much good, especially when the selling is accompanied by long credit terms.

We can see the difficulties and complications in the administration of a small welfare state. We see the same difficul-

ties multiplied tenfold in the large nation-states. We can do no good without inflicting pain on someone or other. Infinitely more complicated must be the divine administration of the whole planet on any welfare plan! If we extend our thoughts beyond human pain and pleasure and admit that the all-merciful Supreme Master's charge includes also living beings other than man, the complications increase more than a million-fold.

The pain and destruction we inflict on sentient beings to find out and practice methods to relieve human pain and human hunger and wants is immeasurable. Indeed, we are even led to conclude that there is no way of creating pleasure without creating an equal quantum of pain. These thoughts take us back to the inscrutability of the ways of the Master who governs this vast universe of which our planet and the human population on it is an infinitesimal part. Closing our eyes to the dizzy heights of the universe and concentrating our imagination on the problems of man only on this planet, do we not see, as plainly as anything can be made plain, that all our difficulties arise out of disobedience of the moral law? This moral law is not absolute but relative and flexible to suit every context. There can be no solution for unhappiness except by firm re-establishment of this moral law. And this is

*(Continued on page 74)*

# JAMES AGEE— “STRANGE AND WONDERFUL”

By T. S. MATTHEWS

I KNEW James Agee only from working with him—which is perhaps not a bad way of getting to know someone. When I first met him he was a semidomesticated poet writing for *Fortune*. I was editing the six “cultural” departments on *Time*: a job something like being feature editor on a newspaper. I needed a man to write the art page and I had heard strange and wonderful things about Agee, so I went to see Russell Davenport, *Fortune*’s managing editor.

Davenport admitted that Agee was “a problem” that *Fortune* had not been able to solve, and that he might do better elsewhere. But on *Time*, that Procrustean chopping block? Did I know what sort of writer Agee was? No, not really; but I’d heard that he was an original, a captive poet, and I was looking for someone like that to write about art. How much space, Davenport wanted to know, would *Time* allot to art for one week’s issue? “In a good week,” I admitted, possibly three columns. Davenport laughed long and mirthlessly. He informed me that when Agee wrote a piece for *Fortune* he would turn in 10,000 to 30,000 words, and always felt cramped for space.

One of the legends about him on *Fortune* was that he had been assigned to write a piece on Brooklyn. He wrote one, was dissatisfied with it, wrote another, and handed them both in. Neither one was acceptable, and the job was passed on to another staff writer. So great was this writer’s reverence for Agee that he took one sentence from the unusable manuscripts and put it at the head of his own finished piece—as it might have been a quotation from Walt Whitman: “*Brooklyn is one of those terrifying mileages of the world.*—James Agee.”

And this story about him is not a legend: what happened when he was assigned to do a report on Southern sharecroppers. He and Walker Evans,

the photographer, went South and literally disappeared for several months. The finished piece, when Agee handed it in, was of a length and scope unparalleled even for Agee. The editors tried chopping it in bits, to run serially: no go. They tried to edit it: impossible. At last, and reluctantly—for it was an accurate, profound, and vivid report on the life of sharecroppers (besides being a most disturbing reflection on the whole human condition)—the editors handed the manuscript back to Agee and Evans, saying doubtfully that perhaps it might be a book. It was, though when Houghton Mifflin published it, under the title *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the book drew extremely respectful reviews and sold extremely few copies. Its word-of-mouth reputation remained so high, however, that after Agee’s death the book was republished.

In spite of Davenport’s skepticism, Agee came to *Time* to write the art page. He usually worked at night, and often all night, so that for months no one on the staff except myself and the man who shared an office with him, and also his nocturnal working habit, even knew what he looked like. He didn’t look much like a *Time* writer. His usual costume was a baggy corduroy suit and a tieless black shirt, and he almost always needed a shave. He was tall and gangly and resembled the daguerreotypes of Lincoln as a young man. In Greenwich Village (so I was told), where he lived, he could be a tireless, exhausting, all-night talker; but in my dealings with him at the office he said little or nothing, listened intently and understood instantaneously everything I was groping to say.

Agee didn’t stay long in the art page. Not because he wasn’t good at it—he had an extraordinary generosity of feeling for any effort that wasn’t phony and an instant perception of anything that was—but because he was soon in such demand elsewhere. For a while he did book reviews. It was his review of a book of Mary McCarthy’s that caused a quarrel between me and Edmund Wilson, who was then married to Miss McCarthy. Agee’s review, besides being a criticism of the book, was a judgment on its author—and I agreed with his judgment.

One of Agee’s enthusiasms was for the



—Walker Evans.

**James Agee—eloquent writer-poet impossible to edit.**

cinema, and when he moved into the job of cinema reviewer for *Time*, he found himself as a journalist. He was certainly the best film critic *Time* has ever had, and I think some of his writing that went into those pages was first-rate. Later, because he felt cramped within the limits of *Time*, it was agreed that he could also review movies for the *Nation*. His *Nation* reviews were printed exactly as he wrote them. Perhaps I was biased, but I thought his *Time* reviews were better. I never edited his copy except by cutting, which it sometimes needed, and it was easy to cut.

In an ordinary week (if there ever was such a thing) Agee could usually get his work done on time; but when he had to write a “cover story”—*Time*’s weekly feature, at least seven columns long—it was an anxious seven days for all concerned. Agee had done a brilliant cover story on Laurence Olivier’s first Shakespeare film, *Henry V*, and he was to do another on Olivier’s *Hamlet*. Agee’s copy on *Hamlet* should have gone to press on Saturday night, but I didn’t get it till Sunday. There were always some points to talk over in a story of that length, and while we were talking Agee must have got the impression that I was disappointed in the job he had done. I was, a little: the story was well above *Time*’s standard but not quite up to Agee’s. Still, it was a more than respectable piece of work, and there was no time left to make more than minor changes.

Next morning Agee arrived at the office almost as soon as I did—hours before his usual time—and laid on my desk a manuscript in his tiny neat handwriting. He had rewritten the whole cover story from stem to stern! Having

T. S. Matthews is a former editor of *Time* and author of several books, including *Name and Address* and *The Sugar Pill*.