Guriji’s Visit to Bristol 1987

Guruji came to visit Bristol for the day on Sunday 30th August 1987. It was not his first visit. He used to teach quite frequently in Bath, usually at Keswick Hall on his visits to England in the 1960s and demonstrated on at least one occasion in The Anson Rooms at The University of Bristol in 1973.

On this occasion the visit was planned purely as a recreational visit. I had moved to the area from Oxford in 1980 and as part of the arrangements for Guruji’s visit in 1987 Silva Mehta asked me if we could arrange a visit to Bristol that particular weekend. From the start we were clear that we did not want to ask him to teach or to do any demonstrations given the demands already being made on him with his schedule and that he would be invited as a guest to the city to be welcomed by practitioners of his teaching in the city and around.

The organisation for the day was largely carried out by Sheri Eggleton, a local teacher and myself and involved around 100 ticketed guests, mostly pupils, to welcome Guruji and his entourage from London. Amongst the group accompanying Guruji were Silva Mehta, Shyam Mehta, Mira Mehta and Genie Hammond from London and Birjoo Mehta and Jawahar Bangera from Mumbai.

The late 1980s saw the development of the video age and although no one we knew actually owned a video camera (hardly anyone did in 1987 remarkable as it may seem to today’s audience) one was hired and used throughout the day by Tom Parke. It was a fairly hefty, cumbersome and shoulder held piece of apparatus. The end product was a video of the day’s events and years later a conversion to DVD enabled it to be donated to the RIMYI archives. The one snag with Tom’s cameramanship was that he was not close enough to Guruji during his speech at lunch and Guruji’s words, though memorable, concerning the role that Yoga could play in response to the United Nations declarations on world health, were virtually inaudible on the video. I would mention that I said to Guruji that he was not expected to make a speech but he did nevertheless saying “I like to talk.”

After meeting Guruji and his companions at Bristol Parkway railway station one group was taken to Bob and Kathy Welham’s house in Bristol and the rest of us went for a tour round Inmos, at that time a cutting edge technological centre on the outskirts of Bristol where I taught weekly yoga classes. Guy Harriman, a pupil who worked at Inmos arranged and conducted the visit and showed Guruji examples of computer generated hi-tech imagery at the very forefront of what was possible in those days just in advance of and effectively raising the curtain for the “tech-revolution” of the 1990s and beyond. Guruji admitted to Guy that he knew “nothing at all” about computers. Birjoo and Jawahar clearly did although everyone enjoyed the visit.

Fortunately the overcast weather cleared and the lunch and recreation at Goldney Hall in Bristol http://www.bristol.ac.uk/goldney a university property, was in sunny conditions. The food was provided by a local Gujarati vegetarian restaurant and its proprietor Mr. Lakhani which was very favourably received. The grounds of Goldney Hall contained a tall tower with staircase which Guruji climbed and balanced on the battlements overlooking the gardens far below and the hills in the distance.

After lunch as many as wished to come accompanied Guruji and his companions on a narrow boat tour of the Dock area in Bristol aboard The Redshank. Guruji took an interest in cricket and I remember discussing the game with him on the way down to the docks around the topic of Pakistan’s dominance in world cricket at the time. At lunch we had presented him with the gift of a cricket jersey of the type he would sometimes wear when in colder countries outside India.



Although the dock area of Bristol has nowadays been transformed into a multi-million pound tourist and entertainment centre in the late 1980s it was still in transition from the old industrial era when shipbuilding was an important local industry and the dock area was clearly a relic of the past.

Following the boat trip a group went for tea at 64 Kingsdown Parade in Bristol at the home of Sheri Eggleton and Charles Grant. It may come as a surprise to some readers but in those days it was very difficult and almost impossible to obtain strawberries out of season and the end of August was out of season. We had been tipped off that Guruji was very partial to strawberries and cream and much effort was put into somehow obtaining supplies, eventually and fortunately successful. Together with cream, not difficult to find, the strawberry tea made for a very enjoyable end to the day. Typically Guruji conducted an impromptu class for teacher Liz Keeble to help her with handstand and he advised her she had to discover the “strings in her elbows” if she was to work unaided. She was aged 67 at the time and is still very much alive and practising today at the age of 95.

After tea it was time to take our revered Guruji and his companions back to the railway station at Temple Meads for the journey back to London. After our farewell waves, he was gone on his journey back.

Richard Agar Ward.