(iv) My serious illness

On return to Cambridge, I started observing a discharge of blood in my urine (I can't remember whether I felt any pain). I decided to see a doctor. It was arranged that I should see a Urologist, Mr John (?) Withycombe (who was perhaps a Caius man). I told him it could not be any sexual disease – as I was a clean-living person. Perhaps I had picked up an infection from dirty water, etc. Mr Withycombe subjected me to some very painful examination – introducing an endoscope (?) through my penis to look at my kidneys. He told me that he believed I had kidneys infected with TB – probably of bovine origin. (In Pakistan, one often had un-boiled or inadequately boiled buffalo milk – and these animals were never vaccinated against contagious diseases, etc.) He told me to get admitted to Addenbrook's Hospital, without delay. My tutor was informed (Mr Ian McFarlane, later Professor of French at Queen's University, Edinburgh or was it Belfast?) – as was my supervisor at the Cavendish (Dr A. P. French). I was by then (early December 1954) living in Huntingdon Road (14 Priory Road?) in private digs. (The household was run by the wife, Mrs Robinson;

the husband, a meek policeman, often sat knitting socks in the kitchen. The landlady had been trying to get me to go out with her pretty – but rather vacuous – daughter Elizabeth, a hair-dresser. Eventually the girl married an Iranian, who was a friend of Javad Zahedy's – later to become (i.e. JZ) my great friend.) I left my luggage with Mrs Robinson – who on my discharge some 6 months later charged me at 2'6d per week for storage – and got booked in a general ward at Addenbrooke's. This was to be a great and highly enriching experience for me.

Mr Withycombe prescribed some recently discovered TB-controlling drugs (the illness used to be incurable before then) and probably gave me cortisone as a pain-killer. The ward had something like 25 patients – all male, if I remember rightly. A lot of pretty nurses were on duty. I was, I think, the only non-European patient – and so something of an odd-ball. It was the first time I could observe how the ordinary Englishman lived, from close quarters. Some of their habits I found to be off-putting (and I suppose vice-versa). For example I found that people were given a largish bowl of hot water – into which they dipped their face-towel and rubbed some soap into it. They would then wash both their face and clean their under-arms – all the time wringing the foul liquid back into the same bowl. Then they would dip their tooth-brush into the same mess, and brush their teeth, spitting back the frothy liquid into the bowl. We in the East had been brought up to use only running water for ablutions. You never used the recycled water for cleaning your mouth or your body. So, when I sat up in bed – I forgot to say that all this washing went on in people's own beds, for there probably weren't enough toilet facilities in the bathroom – the nurses would loudly shout to each other; half-a-dozen mugs and bowls for Durrani! Then I would spend the next half an hour (I suppose to general amusement) transferring used water from one bowl to another, pouring fresh warm water from one large bowl via one or more mugs and using cupped hands rather than face-towels to wash my face, my under-arms, etc., then brush my teeth and shave in the same finickity way.

One of my grouses was to be woken up at 6am to have our beds made or bed-sheets changed by the night-shift nurses. Then the day-shift nurses would arrive and insist on serving the breakfast at 7am – or even earlier: I have always been a night-owl and have regarded anything earlier than 9am to be intolerably early. It was also interesting to observe how the British made friends or talked to each other. On Sundays the priests would come – both Anglican/Protestant/Catholic. Next to my bed was an elderly Catholic man. I noticed that when the Anglican Chaplain came, the patient studiously put his Bible under his pillow, closed his eyes and feigned to be asleep. He told me it was sinful for him to hear all this heretic tittle-tattle from the Protestant priest. A young Polish chap a few beds away went through almost similar motions. Once, a Baptist priest came. I asked him what set his denomination apart from the other protestants. He said, you know we dunk the baby entirely

under water when we baptize it – whereas these Anglicans and others simply sprinkle holy water on the baby. I asked him what other earth-shaking differences the Baptists had from the rest of the Protestants. He could not give me any satisfactory answer.

Then there was the Anglican priest. He used to ask the patients whether anyone had the *News of the World*, which they had finished with – so that he could borrow it from them and do the crosswords in it; the nurses used to snigger behind his back and say he only wanted to read all those juicy sex-stories in that paper. Once I asked him whether I could receive the communion (and the Eucharist) – for I had been intrigued by these rituals, and wanted to find out how one felt if one partook of these. The Chaplain said he would have to consult with his superiors before he could give me an answer. I was disappointed when he told me the next week that this could not be permitted unless I became a believing Christian. Christmas came when I was there. This was the first time I had seen how traditional Christmas was celebrated. The whole ward was decorated with buntings and small light-bulbs, etc. Christmas songs – carols, etc. – were sung and other music played. On Christmas morning, nurses brought mistletoe and explained that one could kiss a girl by holding a mistletoe above her head. I eagerly did this – and got the first kiss of my life from one – or perhaps several – of the nurses. I also, deliberately, broke the Muslim taboo and had a small glass of sherry – which tasted very bitter to me. (See below for my new philosophy of life.) I made good friends with several of the nurses. I still remember the names of some of them: June, a Miss Mace, a Miss Edwards – and my favourite Audrey Briggs. This last was a small (5 foot), fresh-faced Yorkshire girl. The nurses only had their surnames on their lapel badges – not their Christian names. I had then recently seen the film A Roman Holiday – with the terribly pretty Audrey Hepburn playing the Princess (against Gregory Peck). I had liked the name Audrey. So I said to Miss Briggs: Let me hazard a guess at your Christian name. Is it Audrey by any chance? She said, who told you? And no-one had told me at all. It was an entirely intuitive guess. I don't think she believed me when I said no-one had told me: it was entirely a guess.

When I came out of the sanatorium a few months later, I invited all of them to a 'fantastic Mughal Curries Indian meal' at the Koh-i Noor restaurant in Cambridge. But I had probably made the invitation cards so overwhelming and insistent that it seemed to have put them off. In the event no-one came – I wrote again personally to Audrey Briggs and to the slim Miss Edwards; but still to no avail. Oh well! I was disappointed but did not feel crushed.

Back to the hospital. With so much time on my hands, I threw myself into a learning phase. I read a lot of books – especially on philosophy, Bertrand Russell *et al.* This made me look again at my religious beliefs. I came to the conclusion that most of these must be the result of brainwashing from a young age. So I became an agnostic – which I have remained all my life since then. I also taught myself French – by using a Teach Yourself series book on

French. Once or twice a week there were handicraft teaching sessions. I learnt to weave a wickerwork basket – and a tray, which I kept in my rooms for the next few years. I also learnt to make small leather-work stitched and sewn objects – e.g. a pretty purse with some yellow silken decorations that I produced.

Another lesson that I learnt during my six months in hospital (mid December 1954 to mid-February 1955 in Addenbrooke's at Cambridge, and mid-February to early June 1955 at the Papworth sanatorium 15 miles out of Cambridge) was to recognize the difference between selfless friends and fair-weather friends. While I was away from my digs in Priory Street, Cambridge, my room was rented by an Iranian called Javad Zahedy – whom I didn't know from Adam. He was a trainee engineer at the electronics (radio, etc.) firm Pye at Cambridge. When Mrs Robinson told him about me, he started visiting me at Addenbrooke's, regularly, once or twice a week. He was a man with a great sense of humour and told me many jokes and other anecdotes. He came from Isfahan (which Inge and I visited only in 2000 – one of the <u>most</u> beautiful cities of the world!). Zahedy told me that there was a Persian saying: اصفهان، نصف جهان است

[Isfahan is half-the-world]. To which the inhabitants of the nearby Shiraz would reply: How can that be – when Siraz is there! (i.e. Shiraz was <u>more than</u> half a world). Zahedy also knew a lot about Persian poetry and literature. I was astonished to learn that he knew some of Allamah Iqbal's Persian poetry by heart. Thus I remember that he quoted the following couplet of the Indo-Pakistani Poet-Philosopher:

زندگی، در صدف خویش گهر ساختن است
در دلِ شعله فرو رفتن و نه گداختن است

[Life is: to make a heart out of your own oyster, to go into the heart of the flame, and <u>not</u> to melt down.]

When I was transferred to Papworth, he continued to cycle ~17 miles each way from his home to come and see me at the sanatorium. We continued to be close friends for years to come – and he was one of the two (or three?) witnesses at our wedding in December 1962 (19/12); at the Registry, St. Giles, Oxford). He also married a German girl, Barbara, and had, I think, 2 sons and a daughter (Cyrus – Kurush – Duriush – and I think Yasmin. I forget the other boy's name). They went back to Tehran in the early or mid-1970's (we did once visit his ornate house in 1974, with gold-plated faucets, bath-tub appointments and telephone) – but unfortunately, we lost touch with him immediately after the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979. (He was a close relative of one of Shah's close allies, General Zahedy – so may have

perished in the revolution.) When Inge and I were in Isfahan in 2000, I rang up several families listed in the telephone directory under the name Zahedy – but no-one knew him.

Another person who regularly visited me – always on Sundays, on way back from his church – was a Caius physicist, Arthur Baker, whom I hardly knew before then. I was touched by his Christian charity. I remember his telling me that his father was a postman. In Pakistan, anyone at a prestigious educational institute would either never disclose such a lowly position of his father's – or claim that he was the Postmaster General of Lahore. Arthur also gave me some Penguin books to read. (My tutor, Mr McFarlane, and supervisor Dr A. P. French also paid me a few visits and gave me books.)

Some of those who never visited me in hospital were my Pakistani friends. One of these I remember was Mujeeb-ur Rahman Khan – whom I had helped prepare for his CSP exam interview in scientific fields. He belonged to a lot of clubs and societies – United Nations, the Majlis, Pak Students' Soc., Cambridge University Union. When I came out of hospital some 6 months later, he met me somewhere in Cambridge, and showed me his diary. He said, you can see how busy I have been – every day I have had two or three appointments. This was true – but I thought to myself: if he wanted to, could he not have added one or two further engagements to see me, over 6 months? I decided that he was a false friend – not one in need. (He was, later, at Oxford, too, during my time there, doing something or other at Magdalen College – and asked me to help him date a minor Princess from an Indian (Muslim) State, by putting in a good word for him (which I did). He later married the daughter of the Chief Secretary of Punjab in 1963, when he invited me to his wedding where President Ayub Khan was the Guest of Honour. Mujeeb came to grief soon thereafter – and committed suicide after some sex scandal.)

My Uncle Farooq also came from Manchester more than once to visit me at hospital. He advised me to keep the news of my illness from my Mother – who was likely to become very worried if she got wind of it.

(v) My operation et seq.

After a couple of months of treatment with anti-tubercular drugs, the date of my kidney operation was fixed for 25th January 1955. The operation was to be performed by my consultant surgeon, Mr Withicombe (of Caius?). He had told me that it would be a major operation, in which one of my kidneys (the left one) would be removed. But, he said: You are a young man (I had just turned 25 on 8th December 1954) – so I expect you will make a good recovery and your second kidney will take over the job of both. (He has proved right so far; touch wood, after nearly 54 years.) On the appointed day, I was wheeled into the operating theatre, clad in white overalls, my tummy, etc., were shaved, and I was given a general

anaesthetic – chloroform, or more likely morphine, etc. I remember that I did not feel afraid. If I do not wake up after the operation, so be it, I thought.

The operation lasted some 4 hours. I came to in a bed in my ward. I had a lot of stitches – both in my back (in the region where the kidney used to be) and also in front - as the tube going to the urethra (or whatever) had been cut off and clipped. I was OK in general, but felt intense pain when I exerted myself to sneeze or cough or to urinate. But I remember thinking that pain is also a worthwhile experience. I should try to feel it in full measure! I was, also, very nauseated because of the anaesthetic. A couple of weeks later, when the stitches were taken out, I felt a good deal of pain again – but I was on the mend, anyway.

Uncle Farooq came to see me the day after my operation. He sent a telegram to my Father – or Sajjad, who was then living with our parents in Lahore – to say that all had gone well with Saeed's operation. Unfortunately, when the telegraph arrived, neither of the intended recipients was at home. Women in the East used to get very anxious if ever telegrams arrived: there was bound to be bad news. One of my younger brothers was at home: Tariq, I think. Mother asked him to read the telegraph and translate it to her. She nearly fainted on hearing the news – for she had been kept entirely in the dark about the whole affair. She was fearful that the telegram may have concealed much worse news. Maybe I was dying – or already dead; or at the least that I had lost my sexuality (this after she had discovered that a kidney had been removed). She insisted that I must come to Pakistan so that she could see me alive and well with her own eyes. That is why I took the flight to Karachi in December 1955 – before my 26th birthday on 8/12/55, so as to get a student's concession on the flight ticket – as mentioned earlier.

At the Papworth Sanatorium I spent nearly 4 months recuperating and building up my strength. I had a lot of free time – to read, sleep and take short walks. I did extensive reading – English literature and philosophy – continued with my French 'Teach Yourself' book, wrote poetry and some prose in Urdu – as well as long letters home – chatted with the nurses (not as pretty as those at Addenbrooke's), and had a lot to eat (and learnt to break some of my dietary taboos). My tutor – and the Master, Sir James Chadwick – in the meantime arranged my scholarship period to be extended by six months, and to be given a small ex-gratia allowance while I was hospitalized (where everything, including food, was free – as of course was all medicament under the NHS).

(vi) A new life at Cambridge

I came back to Cambridge, in June 1955, a changed man. One of my first acts was to try to invite some of the nurses that I had befriended at Addenbrooke's to come to a great Moghul Curries Banquet at the Koh-i-Noor restaurant in or near Trinity Street. None came. I think my over-enthusiastic and clumsy approach probably put them off. Also, those days, the ratio

of girls:boys among the undergraduates was 1:8. So young nurses were very popular with University students – and hence a little 'self-regarding'. I became rather frustrated at having no girlfriends – whereas most students had plenty of girls around them. (I think cultural barrier was also a cause for this deprivation. A good friend of mine from Lahore days, whose father was a very strict *maulvi* (cleric), called Yahya, actually had a nervous breakdown because of his sexual inhibitions – and had to be sent back to Pakistan). But more of this later.

A more important change was the change of my supervisor and my field of research. On return, I found that my supervisor Dr A (Anthony) P French – who had an American wife – had been offered a Professorship at some American university (New York? North Carolina?), and would soon be leaving. He had been rather dissatisfied with my progress in research before my illness – and was thinking of asking me to sit some sort of exam or test paper. This idea had, however, been abandoned because of my hospitalization. I remember that I went to the railway station to say good-bye to him and his wife as they travelled to London. I had taken an elaborate bath, put on some finery, and had liberally sprinkled 'An Evening in Paris' perfume on my clothes (or face) – as was our wont in my Lahore college days. I found that I was the only student to come to say good-bye. (I had expected the entire research group and other undergraduates, etc., would have come to say adieu to their professor.) I was late. There were only 5 minutes before the train pulled off. I remember Mrs French looking rather peculiarly at me and shrinking away a little bit; perhaps she thought – with all that perfume – I was one of those 'queer' ones (as gays were then called). Anyway, Dr French was kind, and thanked me warmly for taking the trouble to come to say good-bye to them.

A digression. Sometime earlier, perhaps in the summer of 1954, I had actively wondered whether I should change my field of research from Physics to Archaeology. I could perhaps use my knowledge of Persian and Arabic to study Islamic archaeology, where I would have an advantage over the English students with ancient oriental manuscripts and books of history, etc. I had attended lectures given by Professor Mellowan (husband of Agatha Christie); and Mrs van Heusen, talked to the Islamic historian, Dr Dunlop; Mr Ian Stephens, the historian of Pakistan and India – at King's, and had read Sir Mortimer Wheeler's book, 5000 years of Pakistan – he was the doyen of all archaeologists in Britain, and I used to see him on the TV doing a lot of brilliant discussion programmes. I subsequently went to see him in London at Burlington House or wherever. After listening to me, he had remarked: You will make the grade, my boy. But I advise you to stick to Physics – and apply Physics to archaeology later on. I took his advice – and later did apply thermoluminescence and Fission Track Dating techniques to archaeological materials, with

Colin (later Lord) Renfrew, and Martin (later Professor) Aitken (FRS) at the Oxford Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art.

Anyway, my immediate point is that I had also gone and called on Mr Glyn Daniel in his rooms at St Johns. (He, too, took part in TV quiz programmes such as 'Animal, Vegetable or Mineral'). There, too, I had gone looking rather dishy (I think) in a dark blue blazer, thick, wavy black hair (powdered face?), and reeking of an Evening in Paris. Glyn Daniel was, I later learnt, a well-known gay man (those days very hush, hush). He obviously thought I, too, was a 'queer' – and made some suggestive approaches during the interview. This effectively put me off him as well as archaeology.

A second digression. The mention of Ian Stephens reminds me of a second, quite different incident. He was a King's College man – and many people later said he, too, was a homosexual; but that is not the point of my story.

Soon after arriving at Cambridge. I had seen at the bookshop (Heffers? Or the one just opposite Caius; Bowes & Bowes?) Ian Stephens' book, The Horned Moon – about Pakistan with beautiful pictures of the Himalayas, Karakoram, Chitral, Swat, Dir, etc. I had bought a copy and read it avidly. A month or two thereafter, a letter arrived at the Caius Porter's Lodge – a letter (aerogramme) with Pakistani stamps and sender's address. It was addressed to: Mr. I. N. Steopan Esq., Can Can College, Camraj, London. The Head Porter had requested me to help decipher the recipient. I found that the sender's name was given as some…Khan. I immediately realized that it must be the Pathan driver who had been mentioned by Mr Stephens in his book and whose picture, too, he had given there. It was also obvious that the name of the addressee was meant to be: Ian Stephens. The letter had already been to Queen's College (for Can Can) and marked: not known here. Next, it had come to Caius College. I told the porters it was obviously meant for King's College, which I knew was where Mr Stephens was then a Fellow, and working as a Bursar. I volunteered to take the letter to him at King's in person.

The next day I went to Kings to see Mr Ian Stephens. He was, I think, living in the white building looking on to the Backs, and by the side of the Kings College Chapel (where, I think, Peter Avery has been living now for the last 20 years – and who, sadly, died 10 days ago: A good scholar of Persian) – probably called the Adam's Building? Anyway, his secretary, in the ante-room, asked me to take a chair and wait till Mr Stephens was free. Fiver or six minutes later, she said: I should knock at the door now. I continued to wait in my chair. After another 30 or 40 seconds, she repeated: I should knock at the door; he is free now. I said: why don't you knock on the door, then, as you say? I had not understood the elliptic English mode of speech which meant: If I were you, I should knock at the door. She explained this; I knocked, and went in. Mr Stephens was most gracious and a very kind, warm-hearted person. He later had a great influence on my life – and all my Iqbalian

research is owed to his prompting me to look into Iqbal's date of birth. But that must come later – it cannot be compressed into a digression. What can be so compressed is another anecdote or two regarding peculiarities of English speech.

Third digression Once, when I was standing by the junior common room of Caius, opposite the staircase leading to the (Dining) Hall of the College – I saw my Tutor, Mr Ian McFarlane. It was winter and quite dark at 7:30 pm. He was going to the Hall for dinner. I said: "Good Night, Sir" (for it was night-time). He said, "Good evening, Durrani". I made a mental note. About an hour or so later, I again saw him, this time coming down the stairs, after dinner. I chirped: "Good evening, Sir". He replied: "Good night, Durrani" – and hurried away. I was rather perplexed.

Fourth digression Geoff Dearnley (at the Cavendish) said: It is not a very nice day, today, is it? I replied: "Yes" – meaning, I agree with you: it is not a nice day. He said: Oh, you think it is quite a nice day then. I said: No – I mean yes, it is not a nice day. (I remember, my friend Zafar Ismail used to tease his English friends, whenever it was drizzling, by saying: Oh, what a fine day! For, on the subcontinent, we consider the weather is to be really fine and dandy when it rains on a hot summer's day.) Once, when Geoff Dearnley had been bicycling in the countryside, and was probably feeling very proud of his suntan, I said: "Geoff you look so nicely red in your face!" He felt rather put down, I noticed, by my remark.
So these are the peculiarities of an alien culture!