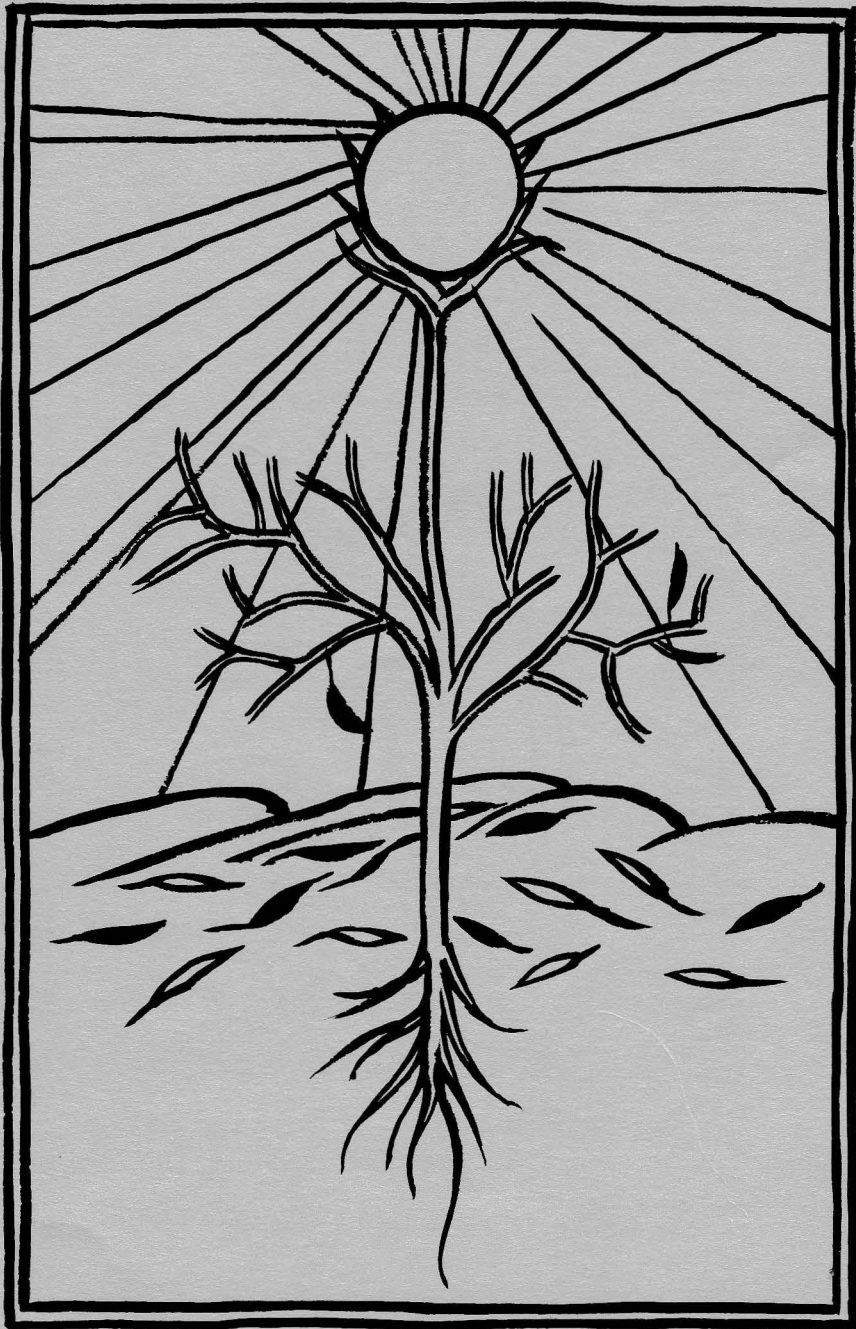


# GURUKULAM

VOLUME V • 1989

THIRD • FOURTH QUARTER



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# GURUKULAM

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITION

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# The Art of Writing

After staring for a long time at an empty sheet of paper which only seemed to reflect my mind, empty of pertinent thoughts, my gaze shifted to the misty grey horizon. The solitude and silence were comfortable and peaceful but the need to put words on paper kept me from settling in. As I gazed in the distance, an unusually tall Chinese man slowly approached the table where I sat. The robes he wore were beautifully embroidered like those I'd seen recently in an exhibit of ancient Chinese artifacts. Although he had a sword strapped to his waist, he carried a huge stack of old books, ink, calligraphy brushes and paper.

I watched in fascination as he laid everything out on the table, ready for writing. Before he sat down he introduced himself to me very formally as Lu Chi, from the Yangtze delta, in the service of the Wu Emperor of China. Then he opened book after book with reverence and familiarity, as though he was touching in with old and honored friends.

After reading for some time, he closed the books, then sat quietly, gazing off into the distance as I had been before he arrived. After a long time, he prepared his ink, picked up his brush and began to write. Sensing my desire to understand, he kindly translated:

*The poet stands at the center of the universe contemplating the Enigma. He draws sustenance from the masterpieces of the past. Studying the four seasons as they pass, he sighs. Seeing the interconnectedness of things, he knows the many ways of the world.*

He paused and I resumed staring in the distance, not wishing to break his concentration. I went on thinking about what he had written. Each of us, from the center of our own particular version of the universe, peers out in all directions, seeking to understand that which surrounds us and the role we are meant to

play in the on-going process of creation. Each person who writes does so in a context of those who have used language before. Whether one consciously chooses to follow a particular school, trend or tradition, or even if one purposely wishes to break away from the past and make a new path, the very words one must use as tools are linked to meanings and formal patterns which are part of a woven fabric of heritage passed on by one's parents and teachers.

Still, no matter what has come before, when one sits facing an empty piece of paper, one faces the Void. It is at once the ground of possibility, a never-exhausted source, as well as utter, inscrutable blankness. It is an intense experience of bi-polarity between the knower and the known, or more appropriately, the seeker and the Unknown.

While I had been absorbed in thought, Lu Chi had continued writing his graceful characters. When I again looked at him he smiled and, pointing to one section, again translated:

*The pleasure a writer knows is the pleasure all sages enjoy. Out of non-being, being is born; out of silence, the writer produces a song. In a single yard of silk, infinite space is found; language is a deluge from one small corner of the heart.*

Struck by the beauty of his images, I thought of how, as we look out, what we find often moves and inspires us. One word follows another to give shape to a vision, a question, a process. The Unknown remains ever-so, undiminished even though the sphere of knowing expands and pages are filled. The unanswered and unanswerable mysteries of life insure that humility attends the writer. As if understanding my thoughts, Lu Chi again translated a section in a voice that sounded like a song:

*The mind weaves elaborate tapestries with elegant many-colored foliage. The composition must move the heart*

like music from an instrument with many strings. There are no new ideas, only those which rhyme with certain classics. The shuttle has worked in my heart as it worked in the hearts of those who came before me. As a matter of honor, I must surrender the fruits of this labor.

When he spoke of honor, I remembered that he was wearing the garb and had the bearing of a noble warrior. The *Bhagavad Gita*, which is a dialogue between a warrior and a Guru/charioteer, also teaches that one's actions should not be motivated by the desire for the fruits of one's labor. Nobility of soul is nourished by action in which means and end are organically related through an intuitive method. Developing an insight which enables one to see one's own creativity as a piece of a vast tapestry of creation brings freedom from the desire for acclaim. Almost as if talking to himself, Lu Chi read,

*The wisdom found in a subtle mind may be laughed at by the public. The brilliant semi-precious jewels of popular fashion are like ordinary crops in the field. As infinite as space, good work joins earth to heaven.*

I was just thinking that good work is not always forthcoming, no matter how sincere one's intentions, when Lu chi continued:

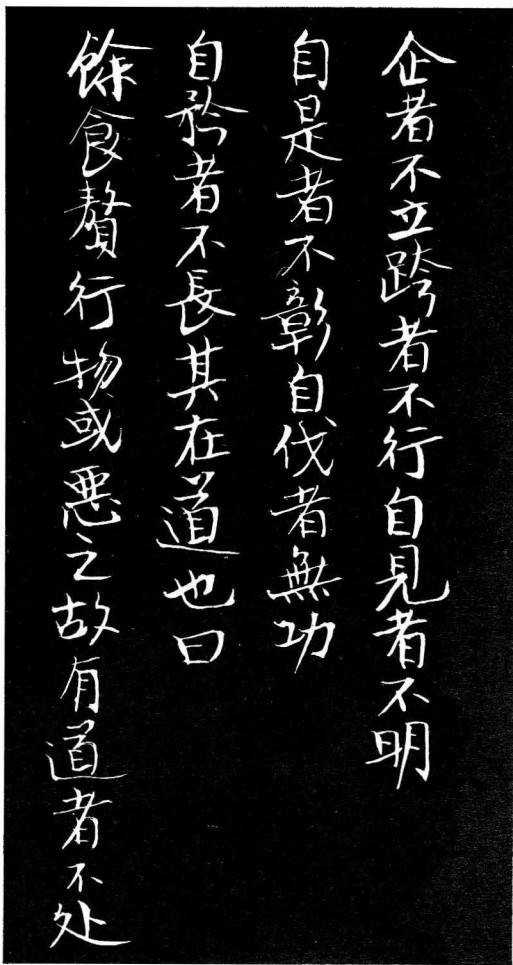
*The time comes when emotions strangle, though every stimulus wants response; there are times when the spirit freezes. The writer feels as dead as old wood, as dry as a riverbed in drought. He searches the depth of his soul for a spirit; he begs for a sign of life...The truth of the thing lies inside me, but no power on earth can force it. Time after time I search my heart in the struggle; sometimes the door slowly opens, and sometimes the door is bolted.*

I found it very easy to feel the state he described, having many times experienced the frustration of knocking at a door which refused to open. As I thought about the investment of time and energy the process of writing demands, Lu Chi finished his writing and began to gather

his things together. Just before taking leave, he spoke very seriously:

*Through letters there is no road too distant to travel; no idea too confusing to be ordered. It comes like rain from clouds; it renews the vital spirit. Inscribed on bronze and marble, it honors every virtue; it sings through flute and strings, and every day is made newer.*

Nancy Yeilding

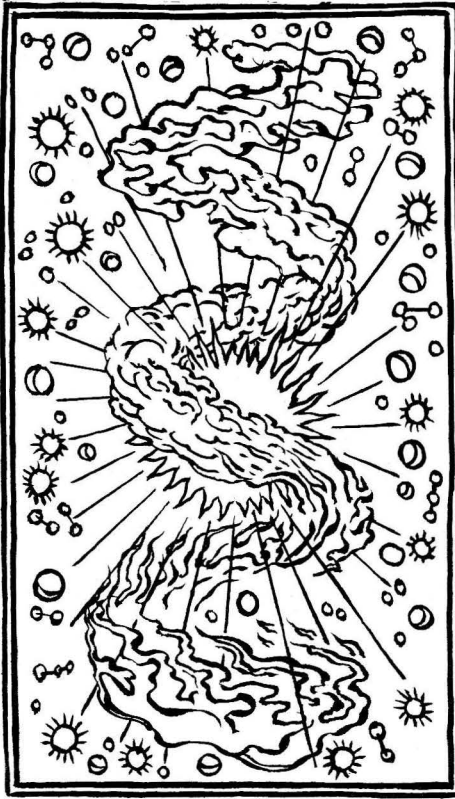


The words of Lu Chi (261 A.D.) come from the beautiful translation of his *Wen Fu*, *The Art of Writing*, made by Sam Hamill and published by Breitenbush Books in 1987.

# *Svānubhavagīti Śatakam:* Experiential Aesthetics and Imperiential Transcendence

by Narayana Guru

Translation and Commentary by  
Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati



*Verse 42*

With flaming fire, steaming water, earth dissolving,  
clouds of smoke arise into the sky  
and come roaring with musical vibration.  
This is in resonance with the rhythmic percussion  
of your anklets, O Lord of Dance.  
It is this divine music the scriptures are thirsting to hear.

The infinitude of space is a dancing ground. A million ballets are happening there all the time. Each group of dancers has a central figure like a sun surrounded by its planets and moons. This central dancer has multi-colored rays for his hands. With these beams all the other heavenly bodies whirling around the leader are tickled. Is he pulling them toward him or pushing them away? Some say this is an expanding universe. Others say it is contracting.

Each group is placed in its own electromagnetic field. In that field no one is allowed to be idle. All should dance; all should run around. Like the whirling sufi dervish, each body has to rotate and revolve. This whirling is not only required of heavenly bodies. Even the particles in them should ceaselessly dance.

Take the earth for instance. It has to dance its way through the cycles of seasons. Sometimes it dances naked, wearing only the mantle of mist and snow. Such is the dance of Winter. It is followed by the colorful dance of Spring. Every tree, shrub and herb is laden with flowers of brilliant colors and fascinating fragrance.

The earth has its biosphere with its various gaseous elements. The molecules of these gases are also great dancers. In their group dance, today they are in the North pole, tomorrow at the equator and the day after at the South pole. The great winds that are running their races around the earth are amorous. They play love-games with the ocean. They play with the waves of the Pacific, run over the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean and dance their finale in the Atlantic. They have other fields in which to dance too. They kick up the dust of the Sahara and create new designs of sand dunes in the Arabian deserts.

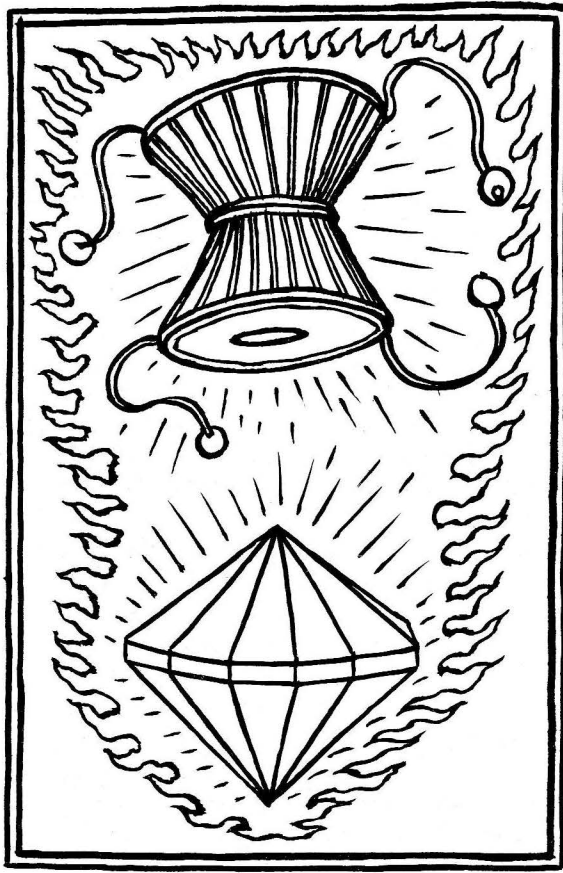
Rivers that flow to the East are perfectly balanced with rivers that flow to the West. The sun sends his silver chariots to the oceans to transport the distilled water of the seas to cool off around the snowy Alpine mountain peaks.

Somewhere in a corner of this blue/green earth stands a man wonder-struck with the variegations of cosmic dance. The blood that surges from his heart through his arteries runs into every capillary and returns to the same heart through his veins. The air that is breathed out nourishes plants and then crosses over far-off horizons to replenish the lungs of someone whom the original breather has never seen. The invisible gases leaving the green foliage of forests pass through the grateful lungs of some person and then once again enter the bodies of trees to provide them with bulky trunks.

Who can see all this? It is about this roaring cloud of creation this song is sung. Only the muses can listen to the inaudible melody of these songs. The King of Dances has millions of feet. The sun and the stars are his dancing feet. They are all fitted with anklets and studded with chiming bells. He also has invisible feet such as the molecules, atoms and sub-atomic particles. They are also fitted with dancer's anklets.

The cosmic effect of this song is praised by musicians as the music of the spheres. The scriptures of the wise borrow the eyes of great seers to see this exquisite dance so that they can poetically sing the glory of the melody of the divine anklet.





Verse 43

O divine call, the effulgence of a priceless ruby,  
 the bumble bee that comes flying upon hearing your call,  
 the fragrance that fills the sky,  
 the sweetness that is tasted in the beauty of your sheen,  
 O what a wonder - all these have turned into your ashes.

The silent wisdom teacher who represents the expounder of the supreme truth is called *Dakṣiṇā Mūrti* in India. *Dakṣiṇā Mūrti* is the teacher aspect of the Supreme Lord Śiva. There is a verse occurring in the *Guru Stotra* of *Viśvā Śara Tantra* as follows:

Beatitude of Supreme Excellence,  
 the best ever of the joyous and transcendent,  
 the indescribable Absolute, wisdom incarnate,  
 the transcender of all dualities,  
 comparable only to the sky,  
 The goal marked by the Upanishadic dictum, "That Thou Art."  
 The One, the Eternal, ever established in purity,  
 The eternal witness of cosmic intelligence

void of all transformations,  
bereft of the triple modalities of nature,  
such is the true Guru to whom I give my obeisance.

Happiness is of two kinds: the conditional happiness which comes from the enjoyment of relativistic objects of love and which the Upanishads call "the insignificant;" and the fullness of joy which is not comparable to anything and which is the value foundation of the Absolute. This supreme state of beatitude is Siva-intoxication.

Even when Siva is described as a transcender of duality, there is an indirect reference to the dual. The dual pair are the beautifier of the present, the past and the future and her counterpart, the destroyer of the present, the past and the future. The beautifying creatress is *Tri-pura Sundarī*. The destroyer of the three cities is *Tripura Antaka*.

Even though Lord Śiva is compared to the flawless infinitude of space, *ākāśa*, the quality of *ākāśa* is *nada*, the vibration of sound. It is from the pure vibration of sound that pitches and frequencies arise. There is an archetypal mythical figure of Śiva drumming and causing all the consonants to emerge from the drum. In resonance with ones own joyous expression the consonants become the vowels. Thus the spoken word, which alone is the basis of all thoughts, is believed to have come from Siva's small drum, the *damaru*.

When sound spreads itself into the seven tones, that also corresponds to the seven colors. The orchestration of sound is sometimes compared to the dance of a flaming sky. All possibilities ranging between the subtlest of the subtle sky to the concrete physical actualization of the earth are reigned over by the Supreme Mother. She comprises in her the entire spectrum that comes between the ultra-violet and the infra-red. Hence she glows with the brilliance of fluorescent magenta.

Thus in the transcender of duality, we have the dual aspects of the nominal and the formal. The nominal, or the originator of sound, is referred to here as the call of the divine voice. The formal, which is resplendent with the form and color of all bodies, is referred to as a ruby of supreme value. In the legendary figure of androgenous Śiva/Śakti, the left side is colorfully visible, and the right half is only nominally present.

When the word of God manifests in flesh and blood, each one is drawn to the other. There arises the desire to enjoy. The enjoyer in all is allegorically referred to as the honey-seeking bumble bee that is fascinated by the fragrant flowers of the grove of life. From the tiniest particle to the shimmering galaxy, everything is beautiful and therefore pleasing. That which pleases is *rāma*. We are easily drawn to what pleases us. The force of attraction is *kriṣṇa*. In this world of *rāma* and *kriṣṇa* all are bathed in the elixir of ecstasy.

A joy that is once enjoyed will never leave a person even when the physical object of enjoyment ceases to be. It continues in the subtle body of memory. Allegorically this is referred to in the Gita as the merging of a flower's fragrance in the wind that carries away the essence of a flower. The memory of the pleasurable embedded in one becomes a seed for continuing infatuation. The Guru refers to it as the conceptual consciousness which is permeated with the fragrance and taste of the enjoyed object. But the Supreme Lord is a transcender of the

triple modalities of nature.

In the *Saundarya Laharī* it is said that from a fine particle of dust from the supreme mother's feet, Brahma creates the cosmos. The cosmos of infinite variegation is said to be protected by the thousand heads of the snake of Vishnu. But Śiva gathers the entire universe in the palm of his hands and turns it to ashes. Thus everything created and seen ultimately becomes non-existent with the merciful touch of the grand destroyer.



*Verse 44*

Is it horrid darkness blowing horizontally  
as a typhoon of destruction?  
What is this strange being wandering with a  
billowing storm on his head?  
Who is this wrapped in an insensitive hide?

So many people glibly aspire for the highest of realization - a state of redemption here and now. Now think of this situation: you cannot get up from where you sit. What happened to your legs? Where has your mobility gone? It is such a great tragedy that you do not even understand what has happened. It would be a great relief if only you

could open your eyes and see where you were and what happened to you. But something dreadful has happened. All memory is gone. You cannot trace your identity.

Is this death? But you do not have any memory of a previous death. Of course, we desire to die when life is nothing but pain and misery and there is no ray of hope before us. Of course nature is willing to give us death when the worse comes to the worst. This sensory system of ours has only a limited scope to convey agitating nervous impulses to the brain. We have a device to save us from disaster. If the power supply line were to overload the electrical fittings of your house, the main fuse would blow out. When the fuse of the world blows out we have a cosmic dissolution. When the fuse of the organism blows, that is death. When the fuse of the sensory system blows, one faints or sinks into a coma. When such a tragedy happens all of a sudden, it is as if we are thrown into a depth of darkness where tormenting tornadoes strike out mercilessly.

There are dark moments in life when even the most confirmed atheist would want to have a god to pray to. The agnostic wants a miracle to happen. The supplicant in darkness looks for a pair of merciful eyes that can reciprocate with love and give an assurance of hope and protection. But where you look for eyes, you see only barren emptiness and darkness. Into the stormy world you look for the abating of the raging forces of destruction. The only sign you see is the apocalyptic veiling of disaster. The very God in whom one places one's trust is seen here heaping destruction upon destruction and mercilessly trampling on corpses. The river of mercy that was once showering the elixir of nourishment has also gone mad. It is flooding in all directions to cause the final deluge.

In the serene hours of morning and evening we sit in prayerful meditation and sonorously sing:

Lead me from untruth to truth;  
Lead me from darkness to light;  
Lead me from death to immortality.

But do you know what is termed here as untrue? The philosopher has a vocabulary which is different from the understanding of ordinary folks. This world where we get our food and drink, homes of comfort and protection, riches and security, relatives and friends - that is the world of the unreal from which you are seeking entry into the indistinguishable state where nothing can be seen or heard, touched or understood. Now do you still want to say that you want to escape an empirical world to get into a fantasized world of which you know nothing? This world illuminated by the sun and moon, the light on your table and the fire in your hearth, which you see with your eyes and touch with your hand - that is the world the mystic yogi calls *tamas* - darkness. Do you want to leave it behind and enter into an assumed world of light where the light of illumination and the witnessing of illumination are indistinct?

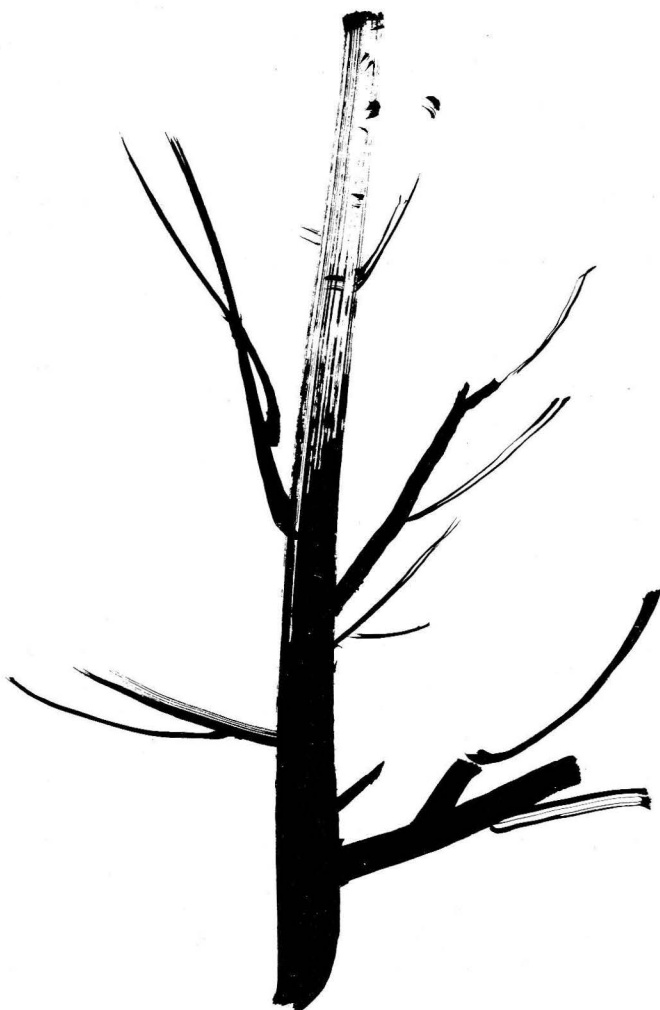
This very world where you wake up every day to your several pleasures, this world into which you came as an infant, lisped your first words as a baby, indulged in all the naughtiness of an adolescent, and



enjoyed the finest pleasures of youthful vigor - that is what the yogi describes as the world of death. Do you really want to leave it? What wonderful devices are your eyes. How many times have you filled your cups of vision with the wine of beauty? How many times have you gone into ecstasy listening to the melodies of music? Can you think of anything more covetable than a loving embrace, a soul-stirring kiss? Leaving that world behind, if you have to go into eternity tongueless, eyeless, mindless and of course friendless, in a state where company and aloneness make no difference, do you want to pray, "lead me from death to immortality?"

Have no illusion. There is no ready transference from death to immortality. First you have to die, die like a pig or a dog or a fly. Then alone are you offered the prospect of immortality. When such is your state, what do you see around you? Horrid darkness saturated in disaster. How can you impress your God and ask for mercy when his thousand eyes have not even the slightest look of caring, when he is wrapped in a dead elephant's hide which has no sensation? This is the super tragedy where you touch the rock bottom of negativity beyond which you can go no further.

*(Continued in next issue.)*



# Kaṭha Upaniṣad

Translation and Commentary by

Muni Narayana Prasad

XXII

*Knowing the Self to be  
the bodiless abiding in  
bodies which have no  
existence of their own,  
the most adorable and  
all-pervading, the wise  
one does not grieve.*

We can understand the nature of steel by examining a nail clipper made from steel. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* says that in the same way, in and through the individuated self experience, one can see for oneself the nature and content of the Absolute Self. A nail clipper has a definite form which could be called a body. Its content is steel which has no form or body of its own. In that sense, we could say that steel is bodiless but embodied as a nail clipper, a knife and so on.

Pure knowledge also has no form of its own. When we see an object or hear a sound, formless knowledge is formulated into a perceptual knowledge. Each item of perceptual knowledge is an embodiment of pure knowledge. The specific items of knowledge which are only configurations of bodiless knowledge could be called the subtle body (*sukshma śarīra*). There is also the experience of events happening and corresponding objects existing outside. This experience could be treated as the gross body (*sthula śarīra*)

of knowledge. Thus, the subtle and the gross bodies are only two different formulations or horizontalized versions of the same formless knowledge. Here the epithet bodiless (*aśarīram*) is to be understood as that Being of knowledge which has not become subjected to becoming or horizontalization.

It is easy to change the form of a nail clipper by heating it and pounding upon it. That shows that that particular form has no existence of its own. But the steel that exists in the form of a nail clipper cannot be made into a different basic material. In the same manner, ultimate Truth cannot be transformed into something else. Whatever may be its form, whether internal or external, subtle or gross, conceptual or perceptual, no experience can be anything other than knowledge. That is why it is said here, "The bodiless abiding in bodies which have no existence of their own."

In *mantra* twenty we saw how the Self could be considered as great (*mahat*) as opposed to its smallness. It can be called *mahat* in another sense as well. The word *mahat* is derived from the root *mah* which means to adore, so *mahat* means the adorable. The human mind always has the tendency to adore that which is ununderstandable and indescribable and at the same time that which makes its own existence meaningful. The rare human beings who are aware of that indescribable Truth are also adored. The adherents of religions believe that God is the most adorable, while atheists adore the proponents of their outlook with the same fervour. Everywhere knowledge is

adored, and knowledge pure and simple is nothing but the Self. When we say that the Self or Knowledge is all-pervading (*vibhu*), the first impression that we get is that of spatial pervasiveness. When we conceive of something with all-inclusive spatial pervasiveness, where does that space exist? The only possible answer is that it is in knowledge. Thus, the all-pervasiveness of knowledge has a dimension beyond that of spatiality.

It was indicated in the last *mantra* that one who has really found out the secret of Self-knowledge realizes that what he is in search of is nothing but his own Self. Such a one does not see anything apart from oneself. Suffering, fear, or other things that render life out of balance are always caused by the feeling that there is something "out there" that causes the pain and suffering. If there is nothing else other than the Self, there is no cause for fear and suffering. Thus, awareness enables one to boldly face everything that happens as part of the functional dynamism of the Real. Thus life becomes fully stabilized and neutralized, not affected by the oscillation between what is usually called happiness and suffering. Such a one is to be called a *dhira*, or one fully stabilized in understanding.

XXIII

*This Self is not attainable by instruction, nor by intellect, nor by lengthy hearing (of scriptures); This is attainable by that seeker who chooses it for oneself. To such a one the Self reveals its own form.*

Narayana Guru defines the phenomenal world thus: "A thousand names, a thousand concepts, and emerging impendingly therefrom, a thousand objects, constitute the phenomenal world."

In the usual sense, this world is understood to be the sum total of the countless external objects. But if we take a close look, we see that all the ideas and images that are formed in the mind and also the names used to express these ideas and images are also essential parts of the world that we experience. Our ideations, reasonings and communications are all part of the ceaseless flux which is the essential nature of the world. What is the true substance that exists as the ground for all these phenomenal happenings? That has already been stated in *mantra* fifteen to be the meaning content of the monosyllable *AUM*.

This Truth, represented by the syllable *AUM*, is stated to not be realizable by instruction, reasoning or by learning scriptures. But at the same time the Taittiriya Upanisad says, "One should not deflect from self learning and instruction (*swadhāya* and *pravācana*). Śāṅkara in his *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* categorically says that "one who is learned and intelligent and proficient in intuitive knowledge" is alone qualified to attain wisdom. The present *mantra* may sound like a contradiction of these words which come from an Upanisad and from a *mantra* of the same caliber. The word *pravācana* means discourse with enquiry into the meaning content of the Self as the aim. *Pravācana* or instructive discourse only helps to clear the way for the enquirer to realize the Truth behind the phenomenal becoming and to see himself as not apart from it. Such instruction is beneficial only to those who are endowed with creative intelligence (*medhavī*). But neither the creative intelligence nor instructive discourses nor the learning of the scriptures reveal to the seeker the Reality represented by the syllable *Aum* as the meaning content of the Self. This attainment is gained only by one who chooses Reality for oneself, just like choosing in marriage

or choosing a boon, as Nachiketas has done in the present context.

Such a choosing is done, not for the mere understanding, but to make it part and parcel of one's existence and essence, to make life meaningful. Together the chooser and the chosen will have one living meaning. When a man chooses a wife she becomes his "better half." But when one chooses the Self for oneself, it becomes the whole of the meaning of oneself. Here the Self is the chooser and the chosen too. This choosing of the Self unveils the form of the Self just like a wife unveils herself before her husband. The fact that Nachiketas chose the wisdom of the Self as his third boon makes this *mantra* more meaningful and sweet for poetic rumination.

#### XXIV

*Neither he who has not  
refrained from evil deeds,  
nor he who has not  
made all his activities  
one-pointed in ultimate  
aim, nor he who is not  
calmed down in mind  
can attain This (Self)  
through proper  
understanding.*

There has to be a norm to decide which deed is good and which is evil. It could be said that any deed which does not conform to the unity of the Self is evil. One who sees the Self in everything and everything in the Self, is not able to do a deed which is dear to one and causes suffering to another. The root cause of evil deeds is seeing someone as different from oneself and thus giving priority to the interests of one over those of another.

This kind of outlook is caused by lack of proper understanding which is called *avidyā* (nescience) in Vedanta. It is this wisdom that dissuades one from evil deeds. In the present *mantra* it is stated that those who do not refrain from evil deeds do not attain wisdom. Thus a question arises, "Does the one who has refrained from evil deeds attain wisdom or does one who has attained wisdom refrain from evil deeds?" In fact, there is no cause and effect relationship between the two. They have a dialectical bipolarity so that one cannot be true in the absence of the other. So it is stated here that those who do not refrain from evil deeds by nature do not attain the wisdom of the Absolute Self.

Evil committed deliberately and evil committed due to ignorance have to be distinguished. Those who do evil deeds due to ignorance could be corrected by being led to the heights of knowledge from the mire of ignorance. But it is impossible to save one from ignorance if he has no desire to know the truth and to shun the unreal and choose the real. To such a one the attainment of the Self as understood here never becomes accomplished.

Even when we are able to discriminate between right and wrong, we slip into errors when tempted by our mind and senses. Imagination is the function of mind and it is fluttering in nature. It is not a conviction of value that guides the functioning of the mind, but momentary pleasures. Imagination drags us from one interest to another, moment after moment.

The senses are always there, subservient to the mind. It is possible to guide our imaginations with an ultimate aim in view if we have a goal in life and a will strong enough to stick on to it. Such a re-orientation of the mind renders it stable, and then we could say that the function of the mind is normalized. The stabilization and normalization of the mind is to be helped by the withdrawal of the senses from momentary pleasures and channelizing them to the visualization of the endless possibilities of becoming, which lie dormant in the Self. This could be con-



sidered as a kind of interiorization of the senses. Narayana Guru stresses a two-sided normalization when he says, "With the five senses drawn in and prostrating again and again, one should learn." In the present *mantra* the same is pointed out with the words, "Neither he who has not made his activities one-pointed in ultimate aim, nor he who has not calmed down in mind, can attain this."

XXV

*He for whom aptitude  
for knowledge (brahma)  
and aptitude for activity  
(kṣāstra) are staple foods,  
with death for sauce,  
who knows where He is?*

When a child is born it has to grow to its maturity. To grow it needs nourishment. The nourishing food should be tasty also. This world is looked upon by Vedantins as the phenomenal becoming manifested in and by the Ultimate Truth.

This truth is nothing but the Self or the unconditioned and unformulated consciousness. Thus what we call the world is only an appearance of the ceaseless process of becoming constituted of the emergence and remergence of specific entities. The ancient seers of India have classified the colorations (*varna*) of the mind or the functional consciousness into four categories, viz., *brāhmaṇa* (yearning for knowledge as the distinguishing characteristic), *kṣātriya* (desire for activity and giving protection as the chief characteristic), *vaiśya* (acquiring wealth by

doing business and farming being the mark of this category) and *śūdra* (doing service to others as the distinguishing mark). While the former two colorations of mind lead to freedom, the latter lead to bondage. So the nourishing staple food for the aspirant is to be provided by the former two colorations of the mind.

Sauces make staple food enjoyable and variety makes life worth living. Life is made full of variety and freshness by the phenomena of birth and death. So these phenomena are considered here as the sauce which makes the food of life enjoyable. But the case of death alone is mentioned here only because the teaching of this Upaniṣad is centered around the problem of death. Birth always goes with death as its opposite pole.

This *mantra* concludes the second *Valli* of the Upaniṣad by instructing Nachiketas how to make himself aware of the meaning content of the syllable *AUM* in living terms as that which is beyond the righteous and the unrighteous (*dharma* and *adharma*), what is performed and not performed (*kṛta* and *akṛta*) and past and future. This *mantra* also opens up the door to the next *Valli* which deals with how this world and every specific entity in it have to be seen as the elaborate unfoldment of the syllable *AUM*. If we ask whether the Self is to be understood as the vital life principle in individual beings or as the conscious functional dynamism of the entire universe, it is not possible to answer positively either way because no one knows where, how and why the Self exists. So it is asked here, "Who knows where He is?" In fact, it is this mystery that makes life and the Self an experience of wonder. The wonder of anything is lost when we come to know just what it is, how it is, and why it is.

(Continued in next issue.)

Non-attachment is the faith in oneness.

Attachment is the fear of detachment.

There is no fear in non-attachment.

Nitya Suktam

# The Science of Harmonious Union

## Commentary on Patañjali's *Yoga Śāstra*

### Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati

Sutra II:5

*anityāśuci duḥkhānātmasu  
nitya śuci dukhātmaḥyātir avidyā*

*anitya*: the non-eternal  
*aśuci*: the impure  
*duḥkha*: the painful,  
the miserable, the evil  
*anātmān*: the non-Self  
*nitya*: the eternal  
*śuci*: the pure  
*sukha*: the pleasurable  
*ātmān*: the Self  
*khyātih*: taking to be, supposing  
*avidyā*: nescience

Nescience is taking the non-eternal, impure, painful and the non-Self to be eternal, pure, pleasurable and the Self.

The most important discovery of modern science is that the stuff of the world is constituted of matter, and its primeval form is of a substance which can be described both as a particle as well as a wave. The science dealing with the mechanical pulsation of that energy form is quantum wave mechanics. One of the exponents of quantum mechanics was Erwin Schrodinger. In his famous book, *Mind and Matter*, he calls this world a construct of percepts, concepts and relationships which is put together in a very private corner of this world, a brain concealed in a skull. When we take into consideration the awareness of the individu-

al and the impressions registered in that awareness we have already referred to two thirds of what we may call the Supreme Truth. What remains is the concept of God, *īśvara*. In the first section of Patañjali's aphorisms, *īśvara* was equated with *praṇava*, AUM. *Praṇava* is said to have four limbs: the gross, the subtle, the causal and the transcendental; or, to put it another way: the wakeful, the dream, the deep sleep and the ground of consciousness on which the triple states of consciousness are superimposed. That ground is pure existence which is self-luminous and the source of all values. Because of the altering states of consciousness, pure existence is obliterated by existential entities with phenomenal appearances. Knowledge becomes conditional and values relativistic. It is this transmuted phenomenality that is referred to here as nescience. It is experienced in the time-space continuum with name, form and mass which have existence only in relationship with individuated consciousness.

We are warned at the very outset of our search that every individual is subjected to a four-fold erroneous vision. The fleeting is looked upon as eternal. That which is conducive to bringing misery is seen as pleasure-giving. The impure or conditioned is seen as pure or unconditioned. The non-Self is mistaken for the Self. The very reasoning and cogitating faculty on which a person depends for discerning truth is vitiated by its own im-

perfections. Immanuel Kant puts it this way: he equates the individual with a person imprisoned in a castle from which he can look out only through stained glass windows. Albert Einstein gives the analogy of a clock which cannot be opened. All the workings of the clock can only be presumed with shrewd guesses. Such is the mystery of the phenomenality of the world to which we are exposed.

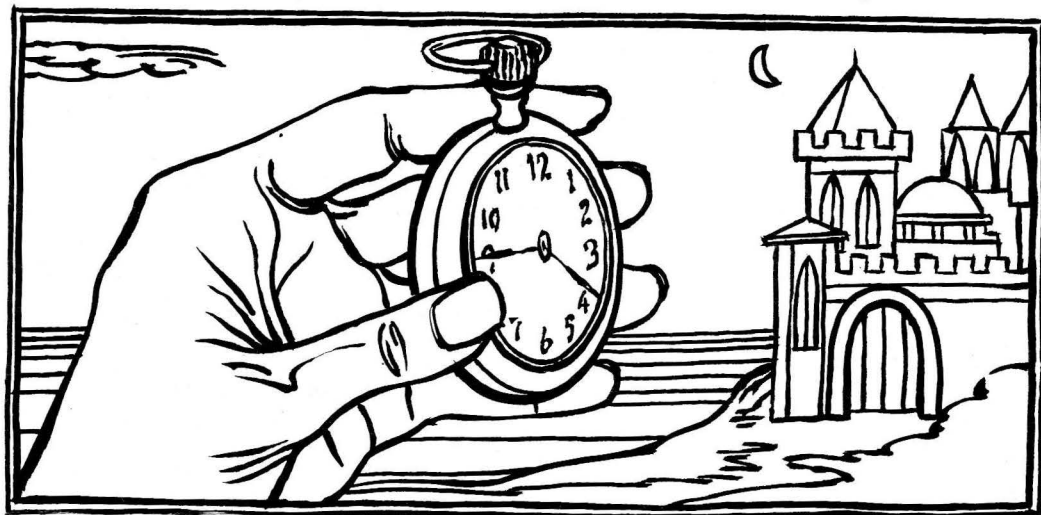
1. *Nitya/anitya*. On hearing the term *nitya* or eternal, we tend to think of an entity which is infinite, both temporally and spatially, something without beginning or end, frontierless. But let us consider the glow worm which can be seen at night. It flickers; its glow does not last for even a second. Yet poets from the very dawn of human civilization have adored the glow worm. Its glow is momentary but its reputation is eternal. The sense of wonder is so pronounced in every glow that it can certainly symbolize the Self-luminous glow of our own consciousness. From this example, it is evident that it is difficult to discern the eternal from the fleeting. Flowers that bloom in the morning may droop in the evening. That does not make a flower less adorable. The flower in all its glory represents the beautiful. A square meal can make a person forget his hunger. That does not stop man from cultivating his farms and working hard to secure his bread. All human beings, from the moment of birth to their cessation from physical existence,

are haunted by the fear of hunger. Thus hunger is at once fleeting and perennial. A yogi tries to make every approaching moment the most real moment of his life, and he is also concerned that it should be so all through his life and even several millions of lives if there is such a contingency for him to accept.

2. *Sukham/duḥkham*. Consciousness oscillates between sensations that are pleasurable and those that are pain-giving. Pain and pleasure are agitations of the nervous system. When the agitation is moderate, it is accepted as pleasure. When it increases or decreases, it is termed as pain. Even moderate agitation is not what is meant by *sukham*.

Even when a person is fully awake, and is functioning positively, he or she is oblivious of 10,000 functions happening in his or her very body. In those happenings there is no agitation. They are perfectly harmonious. But when one of our organs such as the spleen, heart, brain, or kidney even slightly mal-functions, we become very conscious of that faculty and describe our experience as painful.

It seems man excels in his ability to cultivate masochistic tendencies. When he smokes for the first time, it is far from being pleasurable. But he cultivates pleasure in torturing himself with agitation. Thus every so-called pleasure, when closely looked at, is a pain cultivated as a specialized form of pleasure. When masochism is complemented with



sadism, personal agitations and disturbances are shared with ones community and it is even eulogized as "culture." Insanity bubbles up for the first time in a person when he becomes conscious of his ego as an isolated existential being and wants to declare vehemently to the world, "This is mine!" When a person is completely steeped in his ego thrust the society cannot tolerate him any more so they put him away in an asylum or a jail.

3. *Śuci/aśuci*. Even the very expounders of the *Yoga Aphorisms* are confused in defining purity. As an example of the impure they call the readers' attention to women because they have saliva in their mouths, blood in their blood vessels, dirt in their intestines, menstrual blood in their wombs, mucous in their decaying membranes, and secretions in their glands. It seems that these medieval scholars have no sense of propriety. They are not only wrong in their assumptions but also cruel in their discrimination. Blood in the heart or blood vessels is not dirt but the most precious vital fluid. If the membranes of the skin, muscles, and other parts of the body did not turn into mucous, the body could never maintain its cleanliness. Saliva, bile and all such digestive juices are precious to all human beings for the maintenance of life. Where a thing is relevant it is not impure. Purity is to be maintained in the world by assessing the appropriateness of a thing and is not to be mixed up with social pre-

judices. It is not impure to have hair on the head or saliva in the mouth but it is certainly impure to have hair in the mouth and saliva on the head. Even memory, when it is misplaced, becomes dirt. A word said at the wrong time can be very destructive but when it is appropriate is a pearl of wisdom. Those who want to maintain purity should look for relevancy and appropriateness.

4. *Ātman/anātman*. Discerning the Self is as difficult as discerning the eternal. As long as an individual lives in a body and has to maintain bodily function with socially approved programs of action, conditionings, from autonomous reflex actions to biologic habits of all kinds, are to be accepted as part of ones life. Only when one ultimately gains total absorption in the transcendence of Self will one cease to experience the reality of the conditioned self.

#### *Exercise:*

Sit quiet with your eyes closed. Imagine there are others who are also not seeing or hearing anything. In your mind, try to describe your experience on the presumption that nothing has any name or form to describe.

After ten minutes, think you are dissolved away in an infinite consciousness as if you have no body, senses or individuated consciousness. Leave it when you cannot remain in the quiet of your consciousness.





## Sutra II:6

*dr̥g darśana śaktyor  
ekātmatevāsmītā*

*dr̥g*: consciousness (*purusa*)  
*darśana*: cognition (*buddhi*)  
*śaktyoh*: of (both of these) powers  
*ekātma*: identity, blending together  
*iva*: as if  
*asmītā*: ego

Ego (*asmītā*) is the identity or blending together as it were of the power of consciousness (*puruṣa*) with the power of cognition (*buddhi*).

In Western psychology the theory of perception is given as an external stimulus coming in the form of energy to which the receptive system of the central nervous system responds. In Indian psychology two poles are marked. From these poles two different kinds of energies are emitted; perception implies a confection of external energy coming from the object of perception and psychic energy coming from the perceiving agent. For example, the visual perception of an object is possible only when the object is illuminated by an external light. The perceiver is conceived to be the Self which is going out to meet the external object through the sense organs, in the present case, the eyes. The awareness which is the intrinsic quality of the Self and emanates from it is symbolically described as the light of the perceiver. The light which is reflected from the object of perception becomes the light of the object. When these two meet, the visual properties of the object are accepted as a mold for the psychic energy of the perceiver to transform itself and consequently perception arises.

The Indian psychologist holds the view that every object is perceived where it physically and temporally exists in the matrix of nature. Thus spirit and nature are counterparts of a binary system in which both aspects are of equal importance. One example given is of the sun reflecting in a mirror. The mirror by itself

cannot produce a sun but when it is held against the sun, it is capable of producing an image which has the qualities of the sun such as radiating heat and light.

The four-fold inner organ conceived by the Indian psychologist consists of an interrogative aspect, a faculty of recall to present all the associated exhibits which are helpful to identify the perceived object, a faculty of discernment, and affective dynamics. For these to manifest, nature's provisions have to be present, such as the five elements (earth, water, fire, air and space) and the triple modalities (the sublime, the kinetic and the inertial). If these are all taken away from a person, no inner organ will function. Still, the inner organ is not merely a physico-chemical and psycho-biologic apparatus. It has to have a spirit or self animating it, like the sun reflecting in a mirror. If there are a million mirrors the sun will reflect in all with different degrees of clarity and intensity. Similarly, the one spirit that is of the nature of awareness manifests in countless millions of organisms. Wherever there is a coming together of the Self and nature, there is the likelihood of ego being presented. In the morning when the sun shines it can be seen mirrored in all the dewdrops. If every dewdrop were endowed with a consciousness so it could say "I am," that would be the same as all individuated beings identifying the central locus of their consciousness as "I am." It is not the social ego that is referred to here but the simple dialectical fact of the one Real appearing to be many. It is not a phenomenal appearance but an existential multitude in which each entity has an existential validity for a short span of time.

### Exercise:

Try to define nature and distinguish it from spirit. Examine your own psychosomatic system and its presiding consciousness. Remove one by one everything you can identify as belonging to nature. In the same manner, try to identify every aspect in you which you can attribute to the Self. See if any residue is left over.



Sutra II: 7

*sukhānuśayī rāgaḥ*

*sukha*: pleasure

*anuśayī*: accompanying

*rāgaḥ*: is attraction

That attraction which accompanies pleasure is *rāga*.

The basic concept of the Indian psychologist, particularly of the Yoga-Vedanta school, is that there is only one existence in which everything finds its validity. There is only one knowledge and each piece-meal knowledge is an instance of the modification of that one knowledge. There is only one primordial value which is manifesting as all separate and distinct values. The human psycho-physical organism is so structured that it can take only one item of existence, one modulation of knowledge and one impression of value at a time. As in a kaleidoscope, attention can be shifted from one item to another in very quick succession.

There is an intriguing mystery implied in the most simple reflection such as in a mirror. When a person looks at his or her image in a mirror, the left side is seen as the right side and vice versa, but the top remains at the top and the bottom at the bottom. If a person looking in a

mirror wants to see the left side of his face he has to look at the right side of the mirror. We are so familiar with the phenomenality of reflection that we make an instantaneous correction in our erroneous vision. A similar anomaly happens in the process of individuation. Universal existence, wholesome knowledge and the ground of value become fragmented and thereafter one sees only the existence of this thing or that. Form is like a tyrant. It dictates the individuality of things. Existence, subsistence and value change into a spectrum which has several shades of validity in its existence, its truthful correspondence and its value appreciation. Thus the agent of perception is thrown into a quandry and everything he experiences is a challenge to him. When sunlight falls on a dewdrop, it glitters with all seven colors of the spectrum. What is seen as indigo this moment can change into emerald green or ruby-red in the next. Thus there come flickering ideas of likes and dislikes. The dewdrop is only water. Similarly, when a value is projected on an object, it is very likely that the object is seen as precious. The perceiver does not recognize the fact that all three items - existence, subsistence and value - are self-projected.

When one's interest is catapulted by basic instincts like erotics, the intellect becomes very much assailed by the thirst of the ego. The beautiful and melodious voice of one's spouse, the joy that comes from fondling and kissing - all these look absolutely valid. But the slightest misunderstanding that arises between the mates can at once transform beauty into ugliness, a melodious voice into a harsh one. Touch can be a cause of nervous affliction. From this it is evident that the object by itself has no intrinsic value. It is in an attitude. Happiness comes when maximum harmony is established between the object and the perceiver. In Yoga, the nature of consciousness on such occasions is said to be sublime, *sattva*. The sublime causes an affliction which is of the nature of an indomitable affectiveness. Affectiveness causes attachment.

One likes to have a repetitive experience of the same, each time with added vigor and a variation in the form so that monotony may not dampen ones interest.

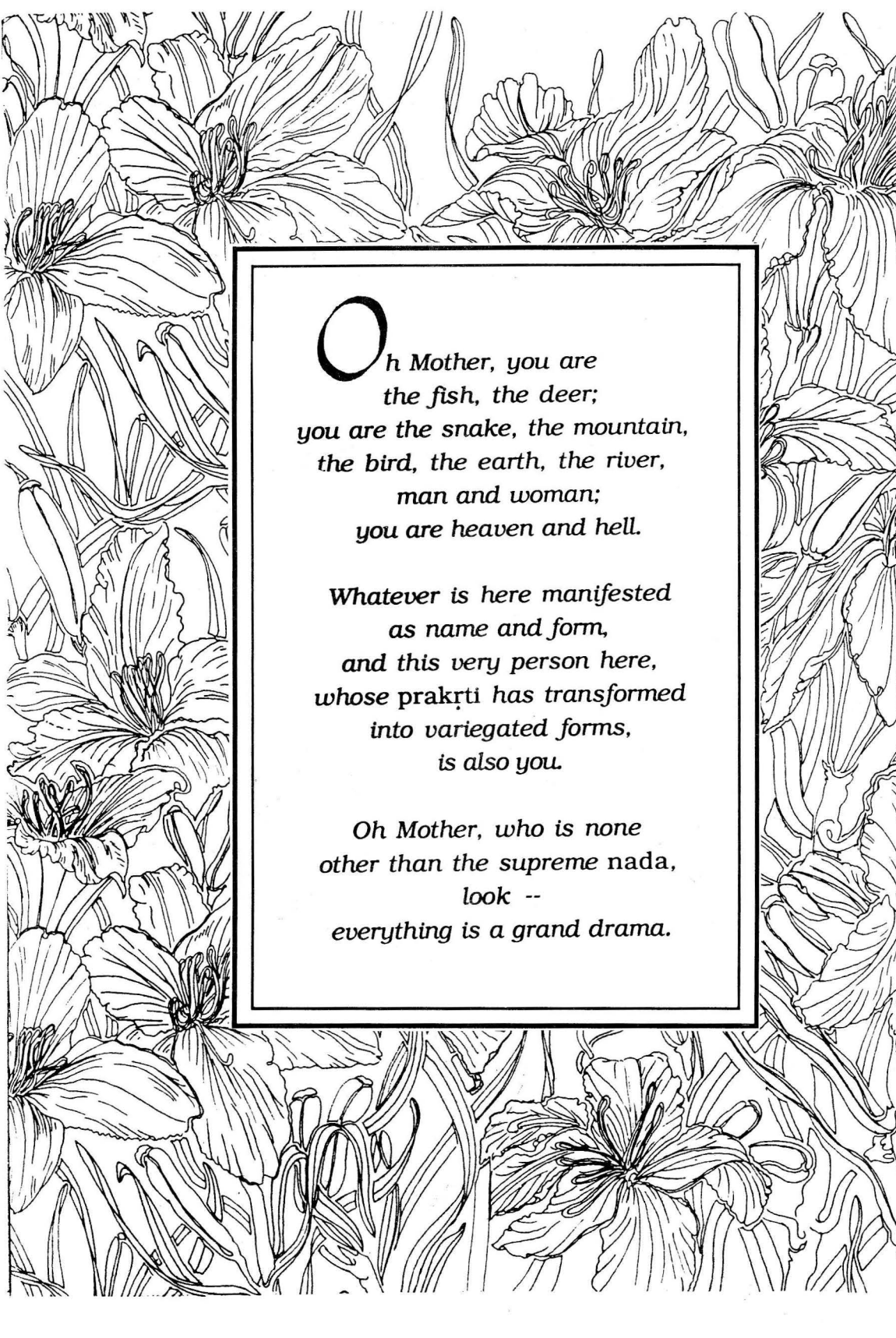
*Exercise:*

Listen to some very enjoyable music. Think of its affective quality, such as its melody, rhythm and nuances, as projected by the peculiarity of your perceptual apparatus. Bring it back to your own self

and think how much more melodious is your inner appreciation than the music you appreciate. The same can be done by watching a sunrise or sunset in which the beauty you admire can be seen as intrinsically identifiable with your appreciative sense of color, form and picturesque beauty. Thus, all the experiences of the senses can be summoned back to the central core of your own consciousness.

*(Continued in next issue.)*



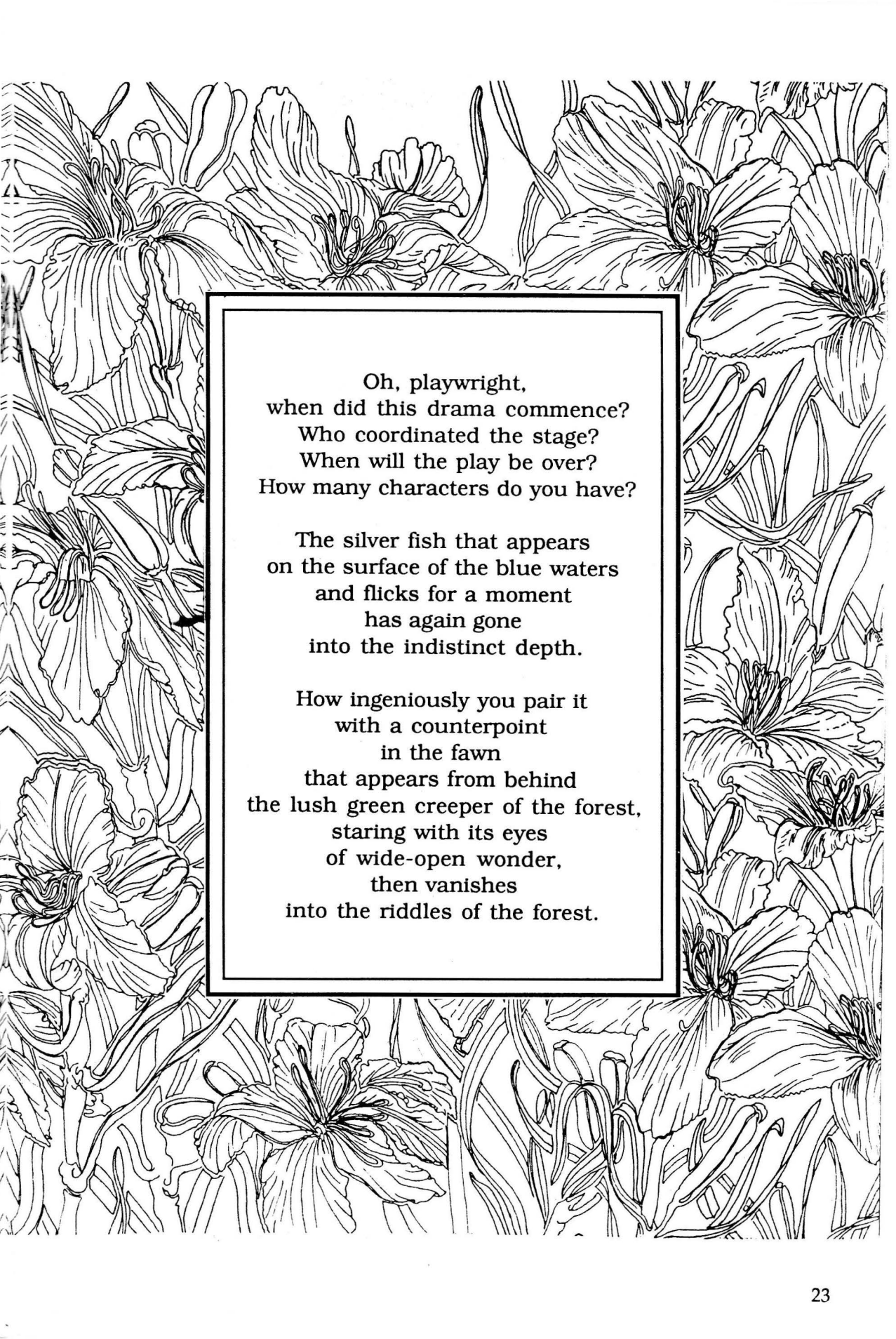


**O**h Mother, you are  
the fish, the deer;  
you are the snake, the mountain,  
the bird, the earth, the river,  
man and woman;  
you are heaven and hell.

Whatever is here manifested  
as name and form,  
and this very person here,  
whose prakṛti has transformed  
into variegated forms,  
is also you.

Oh Mother, who is none  
other than the supreme nada,  
look --  
everything is a grand drama.





Oh, playwright,  
when did this drama commence?  
Who coordinated the stage?  
When will the play be over?  
How many characters do you have?

The silver fish that appears  
on the surface of the blue waters  
and flicks for a moment  
has again gone  
into the indistinct depth.

How ingeniously you pair it  
with a counterpoint  
in the fawn  
that appears from behind  
the lush green creeper of the forest,  
staring with its eyes  
of wide-open wonder,  
then vanishes  
into the riddles of the forest.



# The Human Figure In Painting:

## An Interview With Suellen Johnson Larkin

### Deborah Buchanan

Suellen Larkin is a practicing painter and art teacher in the Pacific Northwest (U.S.A.). Contrary to many contemporary art trends, her work concentrates on the human figure. This includes both portraiture and full-scale drawings.

Q: When did the human figure first begin to appear in your work?

A: When I was a young child. I remember making up people, creating figures in drawings, using either watercolor or ink. I would make pictures drawn from imagination or directly observed from nature and would give them to friends and neighbors.

Q: At that time did you prefer to focus on the figure?

A: Yes. I liked the idea of fantasy, of placing figures in different environments, having them do things I would like to do.

Q: So drawing figures was a way for you to explore your own desires?

A: Figures were a way to express myself. And I remember mostly drawing young girls, looking as I wanted to look, as wish fulfillment. I often drew my figures dancing.

Q: People have often used figures, even those that are ostensibly just realistic, to express their ideas.

A: Yes, figures have been used to repre-

sent a personal ideal or a cultural ideal.

My father left our family when I was thirteen, and my art began to be the field where many of my psychological processes (as I see it now, not then) were worked out. My family was not particularly verbally communicative, and the figures that evolved in my art were means to think through events in my life without having to talk about them. Figure drawing was a way of communication. Sometimes I would draw people, sometimes animals, in spaces that would imply ideas or emotions.

Painting was also a way of dealing with the sensual world. I liked to make things beautiful. I loved my work and I made drawings as gifts. It was a way of reaching out to people.

Later on I heard the art critic, Lucy Lippard, give a lecture on art, and she said that many young women begin drawing at the same time I did, early teens, and that it is a way of dealing with puberty, dealing with the issues of becoming a woman. She showed slides of other young girls' drawings - many were just like mine from that time; especially similar were the representations of doors and windows.

Q: When did you first start to do portraits, not just general human figures?

A: At 13 or so, I did a drawing of a friend of my parents, an adult woman who was elegant and sophisticated. She was a person I hated: she was the woman with whom my father left. I did a schematic



## **Dancing Girl**

age 4 or 5



## **Jay, Katherine & I**

age 17

drawing, exaggerated by emotional perceptions, almost as if exorcising her from my life.

At this time I also worked portraits into representations of nature. An example was a family portrait I did when I was sixteen. I drew an enormous coleus plant with our family positioned on it: my mother's portrait at the center, my different brothers and sister on various leaves, my father out on an extended branch. Later I cut up the painting, keeping everyone as a separate portrait.

One other portrait from then: my older brother, an artist, had been commissioned to paint a portrait of my uncle. I thought, "I'll do one too." Mine was somewhat surreal, with butterflies all over my uncle. He hated it! But I thought my painting had much more life than my brother's, it wasn't stiff and formal.

Q: So you were often intermingling your drawings of objects in the natural world and your portraits of people?

A: Yes. Until I went to art school my portraits contained a lot of fantasy and surrealism.

Q: What were your experiences in art school? Did you continue to paint the figure?

A: In art school each year I had to take figure drawing. I liked it better than anything. It was watching movement and learning about form. I liked being in the physical presence of my subject, what I was working on, not a fantasy but a concrete person. I didn't like the pure design classes as well. I wanted to make images that involved some kind of a story.

Q: Did figure drawing have an important part in the curriculum in art school?

A: Yes, but I think that for most people it was an exercise or discipline, like practicing scales in music. It was what you did to stay in shape. I would say that a very low percentage of the students ended

up using the figure in their work. At that time my relationship to drawing the figure was ambivalent. I didn't consciously think I was going to work with it. Yet, most of my art studies seemed external and unimportant to me, and the one factor that kept me in school was my drawing or painting the figure.

Then in the summer of 1978 I went to Europe, and as I studied the paintings in the museums I began to see how important the figure was - is - in art and it gave me confidence that yes, the figure and portraiture are important. In art school, in the American art scene, those artists who were serious, who were important, were into abstract, conceptual painting.

There were so many influences from that summer! Michaelangelo, Bellini, Albrecht Dürer (The Four Apostles in particular), Caravaggio, Goya, Egon Schiele, Klimt. And Paul Klee and Mark Rothko: they are abstract painters but there was such a purity to their work, like music; they captured harmony.

After that trip I came back to school and went to sit in the room where I was to do my thesis. I had intended to do a thesis in calligraphy but I couldn't sit still. Then I began to bring in my friends and draw them. I didn't realize actually that I was doing portraits: I was just drawing the figure. At first I only used charcoal, but then I started to use color, teaching myself how to use soft pastels.

Up until that time, I had been a normal, average art student. But when I started to concentrate on the figure, I also started to get more and more attention from both other students and the faculty. I began realizing what I really wanted to do. And at the end of that year I received many of the class awards.

At that time I was in a relationship that encouraged anger in me. It was an anger that helped me to become more forthright, more honest. I didn't necessarily want to do flattering or pleasant portraits. It was almost as if I was dissecting my subjects. Yet, still people would open up to me, reveal themselves as they sat.

Q: Why did people reveal themselves to you? Why do you think they opened up?

A: This was the first time I had had a one-on-one relationship with the model, and I loved it. They could feel that love.

I was so focused on my work that I was more like a disinterested party. I wasn't threatening to them, but asking questions that allowed them to open up, respond naturally.

Only one person was threatened, a professor who a lot of students had caricatured. He was nervous about another portrait. At the time he was writing a book on totems, and I ended up, after many false starts, doing a portrait of him with his wife below, supporting him, holding him like a totem.

Another factor that helped me with portraits had been my experience with my mother and her friends. After my father left us, my mother had many different people over to our house - interesting, wild, all sorts. She was going through therapy at the time as well. And after the people had left, she and I would sit and discuss them, their traits and personalities. That gave me the experience of observing and analyzing people.

Q: Do you have a particular approach to drawing a figure, a place where you start with most people?

A: Grace comes to mind, how much a gesture can imply. One gesture can imply so many other things. And when I say grace, I don't mean just a pretty pose. Grace can be something with tension. Gesture comes from the core line. That is the initial line or lines in a drawing that move through the center of the figure. The gesture for each figure is unique. It is similar to recognizing someone from far away by their movements.

So, in drawing, the slight movement from the neck to the shoulder to the hip to toes is crucial and unique for each person. It involves proportion but is more, it is not just geometry. The figure, drawing it, is fluid geometry.

The first thing is the whole figure, finding the simplest aspect or gesture of that figure. Don't complicate it with details or personality or color (you are moving too fast then). Start with the basics, with a looser line. Then after the initial gesture I like to think of structure; it is adding form to movement. It is defining form with shapes and creating planes and volume. The gesture moves to broader ideas. particular anatomy comes in slowly. But initially the gesture doesn't have absolutely accurate proportions.

Q: This applies both to figure drawing and portraiture?

A: I have found that portraiture is extended figure drawing, and that when I start a portrait I start, again, with a gesture. This idea of gesture or movement or life is one of the most important parts of what I want to convey, both in painting and in teaching painting.

Q: Could you say that there is an essence of a person, within a line, that you would like to show?

A: Yes, you could.

Q: With each person I paint, the lines smoother or more jagged, but whatever the movement it comes from that first gesture. I am trying to feel the essence of that person without superficial details. In my work, I focus on people's spirit, and that is there in figure drawing and in portraits.

In my painting now I look for more peace in the person I draw than I did previously. I want to see a sense of hope where I didn't before. Before I wanted to penetrate, and almost excavate, who that person was. Now when I paint a person I like seeing them involved with something they love, something in themselves.

Q: Many years ago I saw a collection of portraits by Modigliani. The first ones were very realistic, true to the look of the

person and quite detailed. Over the years the portraits became more "sketchy," less precise. It was as if he were concentrating less on the outer details and more on an idea or vision of the person.

A: I find myself doing that more now. I find I'm not as interested in a personality but in the character of being human. I want to focus on more simple things and in a less harsh and critical way.

Q: In your recent show a large series of paintings shows figures, anonymous and non-specific ones, in various landscapes. Is there a particular theme you are working on in these?

A: This goes back to my interest in figures and movement in space, in working with dancers. There is more classicism in my work now, in this series, but not that of an ideal figure. The situations of my paintings are more ambiguous, where the action or meaning are not exactly clear but there are movements that imply ideas.

Touch and communication are important to me, how a figure is integrated with others in space.

Coming back to Klee and Rothko, I really want a fine sense of color and of light in my painting which will unify the form and expression.

Also I want to incorporate the Indian idea of *mudra*, hand gestures that symbolize and suggest but not in an exact classical fashion. We all have so many deep movements that we don't know about or are not even aware of. I am interested in trying to elucidate those. And movement has a color and a mood, not necessarily a natural color.

Finally, back to a very early influence on my art: William Blake. I'm not so much interested in his figures per se, but again it is the gesture he captures. There is a celebration in his drawings and a wonderful sense how the narrative and the poetry show up in his pictures. There's a quietness and innocence in them.

In contrast, Klee and Rothko make quietness with the tension of passion. ♦



**Elizabeth Holding a Brown Egg**

1989



# *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*

## An Introduction to the Treasure-trove of Myths and Symbols, Poetry and Psychology in the Two Great Indian Epics

Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati

We have two sources of knowledge. One is where the empirical world speaks to us through our sensations and what we learn by experience. Hence this world is called *veda*, 'that which makes things known', and also *vedanīyam*, 'the knowable'. The other source of knowledge should properly be called 'the wisdom of revelation'. Just as the eye cannot see itself, pure knowledge does not have any knower to know because in the purity of the Absolute the knower and the known are the same. Therefore supreme wisdom is to be revealed through similes and allegories. Allegorical revelation mainly uses poetry as its medium while science is the interpreter for empirical experience. Thus the two sources of knowledge are science and poetry.

The meeting place of science and poetry is philosophy. When the scientist goes beyond physics he becomes a metaphysician. When the poet is assailed with the irrefutable facts of life he takes cognizance of the physical world. Hence a philosopher, like Janus or Gaṇeśa, has two faces, one looking outward and the other looking inward. He uses the external world to symbolize the internal truth. These two worlds are known respectively as the transactional world and the world of transcendence.

Two of the greatest poets of India happen to come from the lowest strata of the social matrix. One was a hunter and the other the son of a fisherwoman. They were richly endowed with common sense

as well as being messengers of the Absolute. Their two great works are the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. There is nothing as rich as the works of these two great masterminds. In this study we want to throw light on the ciphers of basic myths and symbols and the science of deciphering the symbols of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*.

Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* commences with a casual incident which is at once symbolic and is also meant to be a moving dynamic in the readers mind to which the reader should turn again and again to understand the transformation of nature into an all transcending realization of the Absolute. The great seer loved nature. One day when he was walking on the banks of the river Tāmasa he saw a pair of egrets wooing each other. They were so loveful and joyous that the seer felt a great love for them. At that moment a hunter, who was also watching the birds, shot an arrow at the male bird. It came crashing to the ground and lay there bleeding. Seeing this the female was filled with great anguish and she flew around her male companion crying piteously. From a worldly point of view the hunter did not do anything uncommon.

The world order is such that one feeds on another. The hunter, who was probably hungry, saw a bird at a convenient place where he could shoot. He did it unmindful of the love situation in which the birds were sharing the most precious moment of their lives. Lower passions can

blind a person and make him oblivious to all other values.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* is told as a sequential development of this incident of spiritual blindness. It presents before us the unalloyed love of Rāma and Sita and how a vulgar man in his blinding jealousy hurled a poisonous arrow of slander at Śrī Rāma. Rāma's character was assassinated which led to the anguish and suffering of Sita to the very last moment of her life on earth.

The narrator of the story was also once a hunter who lived a life of easy virtue. He joined a group of bandits and became a terror to all those who passed through the mountain ravines which he frequented. By divine grace he came to realize the futility of such a life and did years of penance on a solitary hill. As he sat motionless, ants built their hill over him. Being thus concealed from the world, he sat still meditating on the Self that was animating all. Finally he emerged from the anthill as a great seer. Anthill in Sanskrit is called *vālmīkam*. As he emerged from the anthill, he is called Vālmīki. In all of us there is a natural man, a 'Mowgli', who is blind to all higher values. Through pain this natural man is tempered and transformed into a divine person. This is the theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The hunter who is shooting down the egrets and the seer who regrets it are not two. One is the lower self and the other is the higher self. Both belong to the same person. Such is the beauty of the book we are given to decipher.

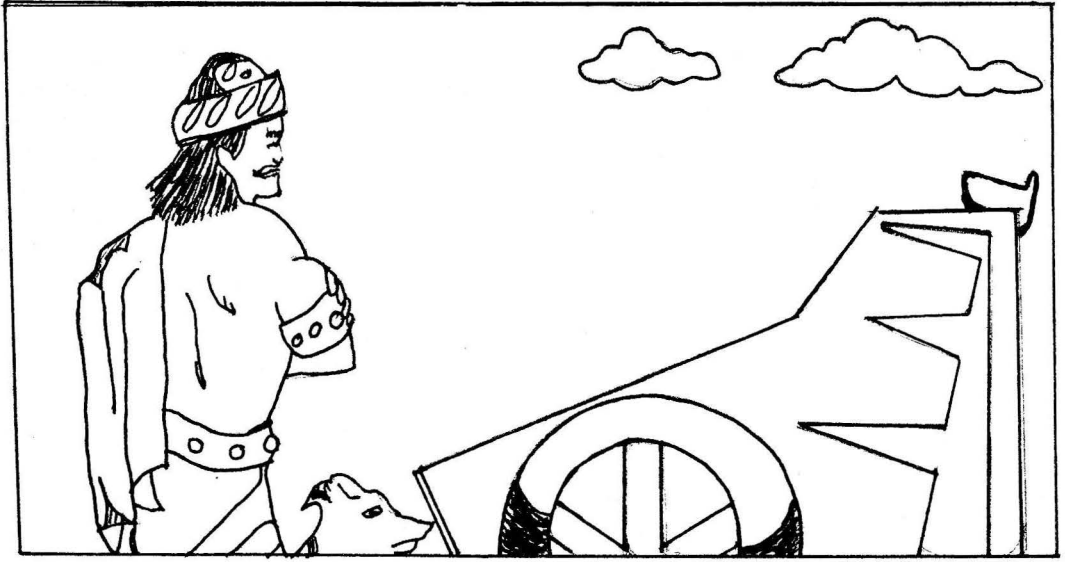
From the beginning of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to the very end we see how thoughtless people torture humanity when they are motivated by their immediate need, greed or passion. We also see an unbroken stream of compassion, love and a sense of justice held out as a value vision that enhances the dignity of humanity. The interfusing of the good and the bad, of love and hatred, is accepted as a profound truth of life. This same truth is epitomized in the story of the hunter and elaborated in the story of Rāma and Sita. What is mirrored in the dew drop can be

seen in the entire cosmos. This great power of poetry to reflect the supreme truth of life fills us with a great sense of wonder. The object of our wonder is none other than the adorable Absolute. This rare ability of poetry makes the bard more reliable than the scientist and consequently the eternal savior of mankind.

The *Pausya Parva* (section III) of the opening chapter, *Adi Parva*, of the *Mahābhārata* begins with the following account:

Janamejaya, the son of Parikṣit, was along with his three brothers Śrutasena, Ugrasena and Bheemasena, attending his long sacrifice on the plains of Kurukṣetra.

As they were sitting in the sacrifice, there arrived at the spot an offspring of Saramā, the celestial bitch. Janamejaya's brothers flung stones at the pup. The pup ran away to its mother crying in pain. On seeing him Saramā asked why he was crying. The pup told his mother that he was beaten for no crime. The little dog insisted that he never touched the sacrificial butter with his tongue and had not even cast a look upon it. On hearing this his mother Saramā felt distressed. She went to the place where Janamejaya sat with his brothers and addressed him in anger saying, "This my son has committed no fault. He has not even looked at your sacrificial butter, but you have beaten him. Great evil will therefore come upon you." This made Janamejaya very dejected. He thought that he could avert the curse by appointing a very learned priest who knew how to expiate sins. He went in search of such a priest and finally came in touch with the great ṛṣi Śrutaśrava who had a very ascetic son called Somaśrava. Janamejaya requested the ṛṣi to allow Somaśrava to be his priest. The ṛṣi revealed that his son was born of a female snake that had drunk his semen. Somaśrava would be able to absolve the king from all offences but he had one particular habit, he would grant any brāhmaṇa whatever he begged of him. If the king could put up with this nature of Somaśrava he could take him.



At the very opening of the *Mahābhārata* the symbols of a dog and a snake come. In the last chapter of the *Mahābhārata* there is again a reference to a dog and snake. There is no religious mythology which is free of the symbols of dogs and snakes. Although in a country like India a dog is considered to be an unholy beast, in certain myths the holiest of the holy *Vedas* (scriptures) are identified with dogs that follow in the footsteps of a realized master. Datatraya is presented as an ascetic followed everywhere by four dogs, in which case the dogs are none other than *Ṛk*, *Sāma*, *Yajur*, and *Athārva Vedas*. At the very end of the *Mahābhārata* a heavenly chariot comes to take Yudhishthira to heaven. Just when Yudhishthira was about to enter into the golden chariot a dog which was following him stepped into it. Immediately a voice of protestation came from the heavens that the dog would not be permitted to enter heaven. On hearing this, Yudhishthira refused to enter the chariot saying that he did not want to go where his dog was not allowed. This firm resolve of Yudhishthira pleased the dog very much and he revealed himself to be Yudhishthira's father Dharmarāja. The last dog, which actually is the first dog, was shown justice by the king, but injustice was meted out to Saramā's son by Janamejaya, the great-grandson of the Pandavas. The whole story of the *Mahābhārata*

is given like a loop beginning with a dog and ending with a dog. Those who fail to understand the golden thread going through this myth of the dog will not be fully benefited by the story of the *Mahābhārata*.

The *Rāmāyana* of Vālmikī begins with the presentation of a model person in whom all the higher values are manifested. Vālmikī's intention was to present a number of models to mankind, such as a good father, a good mother, a good son, a good brother, a good husband, a good wife, a good king, a good minister, a good friend, a good Guru, and even a good enemy. Both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* excel in presenting type psychology of a very elaborate order. At the same time they are also quite aware that human beings are mortals whose paths will be beset by many unforeseeable forces of which some can be favorable and many can be unfavorable. Both Vālmikī and Vyāsa looked upon life as one, as the manifestation of divine creativity, divine sustenance, and final dissolution in the divine. For that reason they saw the organic relationships between the five elements, the sky and earth, the sun, moon and starry heavens, and the countless beings that spring up from the womb of the earth. They treated even apparently lifeless things such as mountains and rivers and oceans as aspects of a universal person. Poetically they attributed

spirits to mountains and rivers, the vegetative world, animals and birds, and considered all forms of life as kith and kin. Thus, they had to some extent an idealistic view of life, and yet were not too romantic to ignore the biologic, instinctive and psychological laws that govern all forms of life. They did not give treatises on any particular branch of science, but presented in an allegoric manner the holistic story of our good earth and its animation.

The whole of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is written with the compassionate frame of mind of the most loving of human beings, Vālmikī. No person endowed with sensibility can read any chapter of the *Rāmāyaṇa* without profusely shedding tears, their soul deeply touched. Most utterances of Vālmikī have an ennobling effect. After reading even a few verses one feels as if one has become light in one's heart, pure in one's mind and inspired in one's aspirations. This is how the first chapter named *Bala Kanda* begins:

*The great tapasvi (ascetic), Vālmikī, with great reverence once asked the best among contemplatives, Narada, who knew clearly the purpose of the Vedas and who was always immersed in the wisdom of scriptures, the following question: "Who in this world is the most virtuous among humans? Who knows the law that governs the life of beings and who is vigorous to uphold that law? Who in this world is grateful to the caring? Who bestows his services for the benefit of others? Whose words always reflect the clearest presentation of truth? Who can be considered most reliable in his pledges and promises? Who has a clear perspective of the course of history and who, without exaggeration, adheres to traditionally honored values? Who always looks for the spiritual beneficence of others and acts in accordance with it? In whom burns the undaunted and steady flame of pure wisdom? Who is able to carry out his intentions with dexterity? Who is ever devoted to keep everyone around him in a state of rejoicing? Who is that precious one who sees his Self as*

*manifesting as this world and whose mind is never clouded with the smoke of anger? Who is like the sun to others? Who will always appreciate the virtues and abilities of others and without even the least distraction by jealousy will help others to grow even richer in their finer virtues? Who is so uncompromising that no one would ever dare to tempt him with corrupt means? It is about such a person I would like to hear and my desire to know is great."*

*On hearing this request of Vālmikī, Narada considered in his mind all whom he came across in the vast realm of time and space. As Narada was endowed with transparency of vision, nothing was hidden from him. Then he said, "Oh best among contemplatives, the virtues you have enumerated here are many and rare.*

*It is almost impossible to find all these virtues harmoniously blended in one person. However, there is one person to whom all these virtues can be attributed. He is Śrī Rama who happened to be born in the royal dynasty of Ikṣvaku."*

If a poet is also meant to be a teacher, Vālmikī has done an excellent job in setting a model for presenting an adorable hero for his epic poem. Good poetry should be such that even the opening verses transport us into the realm of the most sublime. We do not know the historic truth in calling Vālmikī the first poet, but undoubtedly we can honor him as the foremost among poets who has an astounding power to lead us to the purest heart of poetry.

The beauty of epics and ancient legends is that they maintain the view that nothing happens all of a sudden. The beginning of life is not known. Then a certain person is identified as a patriarch and a whole lineage of people are mentioned. In that lineage some illustrious person is highlighted. In the *Adi Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* the lineage of Bhṛigu is given. Bhṛigu was a great saint and was born of the lotus of Viṣṇu's navel. Bhṛigu had a son called Chyavana. Chyavana's virtuous son was Pramati and Pramati had a son named Ruru. Ru-



ru's mother was Kṛtaci, a celestial dancer, and his wife was Pramatdvara from who was born Sunaka. Sunaka was exceedingly virtuous in many ways. He was a great ascetic, proficient in law and well informed of all the Vedas.

When Ugraśravas was giving this story on the lineage of Bhrigu, the ascetics who were listening asked why Bhrigu's son was called Chyavana. Ugraśravas then gave the story:

Bhrigu had a wife called Puloma who was full of virtue. One day when she was big with the child of Bhrigu he left her alone to go and do his morning ablutions. When he was away from home a rakṣasa (demon) came there. When the rakṣasa saw the beautiful Puloma he could not control his passion. Puloma, not suspecting the evil intention of the rakṣasa, received him as a guest and gave him roots and fruits. The rakṣasa, on realizing that she was alone, decided to run away with her. But Puloma was not absolutely alone. The sacrificial fire was burning and the fire was none other than agni, who witnesses the karma of people. When Puloma had been a small girl her father had offered her to the rakṣasa, but afterwards, when she came of age, she was married to Bhrigu with all the proper rituals. The rakṣasa asked fire to tell him whose wife she truly was. The rakṣasa wanted fire, who is the mouth of all the gods, to tell him whether Puloma

belonged to him or to Bhrigu. When the rakṣasa asked this question fire became afraid and refused to speak. Then the rakṣasa said, "O fire, you reside in all creatures, witnessing their merits and demerits, so how can you refuse to answer my question?" Fire did not know what to say. There was truth in what the rakṣasa said, but Bhrigu was a great saint who could curse. So fire said, "This Puloma was indeed first chosen by thee, but you did not take her by holy rites of invocation. She was given to Bhrigu with proper rites." When the rakṣasa heard the final verdict of fire he changed into a boar and carried Puloma away with great speed. Then the child of Bhrigu lying in her womb became enraged with violence and dropped out of the womb. For that reason he is called Chyavana. When Chyavana came out radiant like a sun, the rakṣasa was consumed by his flames. When Puloma cried in distress, her tears made a lake from which a river began. The river was called Vadhusara. When Bhrigu asked Puloma who had identified her, she revealed the role played by agni. Bhrigu became very enraged and cursed agni, "Thou shalt eat of all!"

This story of how incidental truth becomes opposed to ones regard for virtue is well knitted into an enigma. The more one thinks about the paradoxical pair of right and wrong the more one understands the deceptive phenomenality of māya.





No value of life can shine by itself without encountering its own negative shadow.

In spite of all her virtues Puloma was victimized and humiliated because of her enchanting beauty. In spite of Bhrigu being the son of Brahma he shared the lower passions of the *rakṣasa*. For no fault of Chyavana adversity came upon him and he was aborted from his mother's womb. Although the *rakṣasa* knew right from wrong and wanted to be truthful before the all-witnessing fire, his lower passions overpowered him and brought death to him. The all-witnessing fire, in spite of his neutrality, was filled with fear that he may offend Bhrigu and be cursed and so instead of giving a clean statement of truth made his pronouncement in such a way that he was doing justice to the letter of truth rather than to its spirit. In spite of all his caution he was cursed. Such is the mastermind of the great writer Vyāsa that he shows that any bit of the phenomenal world, when examined, can show how the tissues of truth and untruth are so closely knitted in it. When one gives the story of the world, it has to be the story of the world and not a sheer ideal which we can fancifully imagine. Such is the excellence of the *Mahābhārata* story that every myth or parable in it reveals to us the warp and woof of this world.

The birth of a poem or rather the first poem is given in the *Bala Kanda* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The description of it is a beautiful subject to ponder over lyrical literature. Like an artist who first paints a base and background for presenting his picture, an atmosphere is created with the suggestion of a gently flowing river winding its way through a jungle. Into this scene there comes the best among contemplatives, Vālmiki, and his disciple, Bharadvaja. The serenity of the forest and the calm river of crystal clear water reflecting the dark shadows of the tall trees which stand silently on either bank makes them pace slowly. Finally they come to a stop as if they have forgotten where they were going. This distraction which comes to the mind is a necessary

condition to withdraw oneself from the transactions of life and move into the subjective world of imagination where alone one can experience one's communion with the Muses. To understand any epic we should ourselves change into natural poets.

Although Vālmiki is about to present a great epic he does not begin with any bombast. He chooses simple words to describe simple things, but every word chosen in his presentation has a charm of its own. He addresses his disciple and says:

Oh Bharadvaja, look!  
Here flows the holy river  
with its crystal clear water.  
It reminds one of the mind of a  
pure soul who rejoices in his thoughts.

What Vālmiki recited spontaneously with eyes moist and cracking voice are the first spoken words of the epic. We should examine them with the poetic backdrop given for their presentation. That will reveal to us some of the basic considerations of a poet. It will also initiate us into the secret core of poetry. The poetic exultation which inspires a person to sing as a bard is not like the pragmatic state of mind of a person entering into a program of action with a view of achieving an objective result. Like the visitation of a glorious dream coming from the depth of the unconscious, the sheen of poetry fills ones inside with a serene effulgence in which the amorphous unconscious is accepted as shade which contrasts the beauty of meaningful words. Like the light and sound experienced in the dream without the use of the crutches of eyes and ears, the fountain of words that surges up in the inspired mind of the poet is a song sung by the Self to please itself. All physical faculties are extraneous to this miraculous event which a poet witnesses. If an artist happens to see an exquisite form he will want to immortalize the vision by transferring it from a fleeting moment to the eternity of a canvas by making his skill articulate in a vivid language of beauty. Such is the ea-



gerness of a poet also when he is granted the visions of his soul.

The world of suggestion is greater than the world itself. The magical symbols of language have that rare ability to create word images with the tonality of a few arbitrarily conceived sounds. As Wordsworth laments, "Getting and spending we lay waste our powers." We have no time to stand and stare. It is from such a hurried life of pragmatic feverishness that we should turn away to enter into the mystery of poetic imagination. The turmoil of our outward consciousness has to settle into an inner quietude to listen to the sweet silvery voice of poetry. This is not only true of the poet but also of the critic who wants to be admitted to

the secrets of a poet's vision. If we are desirous of knowing the mind of a poet, there is no one more ideal to choose than Vālmiki. Much before the sun rises, the pole star heralds the dawn. Even so, before the presentation of Rama's story, the poet wants to stir the inner most depth of our minds so that our sensibility is raised to a pitch where it is easy for us to reciprocate the finest vibrations that ensue from the love-filled soul of Vālmiki.

He begins the second canto of *Bala Kanda* by calling our attention to an auspicious moment:

*sa muhurtam gate tasmin  
devalokam munistāta  
jagāma tāmasatiram  
jahnāvyastuavidurātaḥ*

The auspicious moment given here is masterfully conceived to mark both the vertical parameter and the horizontal parameter which can give a structural symmetry to the very first vision to which we are introduced in the *Rāmāyana*. Two seers are given in the verse. One is the divine bard Narada whose presence is noumenal. He is not bound by any physical barrier. His transparency of vision is such that he is always in pure duration, unaffected by cleavages of time like the past, the present and the future. The second seer was born and brought up in the most common circumstances to which a natural man of India belongs. He is a seer of the cosmos (*brahmarīṣi*). This is Vālmiki himself. The auspicious moment suggested here marks the departure of the divine bard to the celestial regions, while the bard of the phenomenal world stands on the banks of the Tāmasa river as if he is specially commissioned to preside over the events of the phenomenal world.

The poet presents two rivers. One is Jahnavi, or Ganges, and the other Tāmasa. Then he says Tāmasa is not far from

Jahnavi. Ganges is a river that descends from the most high and disappears in the netherlands after greening the earth. It is thus a boundless river. But Tāmasa is a river of the here and now. In their essential features the rivers are not too far from each other. The vertically descending Ganges and the horizontally flowing Tāmasa convey to us certain secrets which the poet uses as the two axes of his scheme of correlation.

The relation and closeness between Ganga and Tāmasa is the same as of the hunter, who is going to be shortly presented, and Vālmiki who also hails from the same class of men. The hunter symbolizes the natural man. The characteristic of the natural man is the claim of necessity on him. Transcending necessity and filling the place of hankering with compassion is the whole theme of religion. The spiritual transformation envisaged is to be shown with the contrast of the hunter blinded with his dire need and the enlightened soul whose compassion showers on all for all eternity.

(Continued in next issue.)



# *If Then Now What*

*Snow*

*As far as the eye can see  
A sparkling, glittering Blue, White*

*Blue sky*

*meeting a horizontal White line  
and where the two meet  
Chaing Chaing*

*Sound but no sound*

*Breath but no breath  
Alive yet Dead  
Two though One*

*Sunlight shining through ice pointing down  
Water falls*

*One drop  
At  
A  
Time*

*A black, bony limb juts through the white  
blanket and points at an odd angle  
towards the small bird  
and the small bird, startled,  
flies to another bony limb  
also pointing at an odd angle*

*Flight of the bird is silent  
Sky meeting Snow  
Is  
Not*

*Steve Weckel*

# A Second Look At Listening

Scott Teitsworth

My last article focused on the importance of concentration in musical appreciation, with the caliber of the music itself being downplayed. I proposed that whatever sounds are attractive to the individual are the best for bringing him into a heightened awareness of the object of interest. However, a science of music was developed in India which gives quite a bit of weight to the side of the musical performance. There it is maintained that the musical experience consists of more than listening to sounds: it involves the content and value of the communication between the musician and the audience. In order to have a more complete picture of the process of listening, we should cover at least a rudimentary introduction to this aspect of musical theory.

The essential scheme is quite simple, although the ramifications are complex. *Nāda*, the unmanifested, primordial sound underlies *śabda*, perceptible sound. A specific sound is called *śruti*, and what is heard is *sphōṭa*. The *sphōṭa* explodes into meaning, *artha*, in the listener, leaving an impression, *samskāra*. So the impressions, *samskāra*, proceed from the unmanifest *nāda* by way of physical sounds such as words and music. *Gītām*, singing, is considered the finest embodiment of *nāda*. It is representative of the whole art of music, including *vadyam*, instrumental music, and *natyam*, dancing.

Clearly, *nāda* has a central importance within the Indian scheme of music. Kallinatha adds an important point: "Nāda, which is synonymous with *parā vāk*, being the energy of Brahman, is inseparably close to it and therefore propitiation of *nāda* leads to the attainment

of Brahman as one desirous of obtaining the lustre of a jewel attains the jewel along with it." Although Kallinatha is speaking only of the performer here, the implication is that the more one is affiliated with the spirit of the music the more of that spirit that can be conveyed to the audience as well.

The importance of meaningful sounds producing impressions in the listener is the reason why the quality of the music itself really does matter. Violent, ugly music will produce negative impressions. Beautiful music produces positive impressions. Truly inspired music can produce impressions that transcend the positive and negative to become liberating influences. As Narayana Guru says in Verse 52 of *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, "The sky will glow as radiant sound—on that day, all visible configurations will become extinct in that; thereafter the sound that completes the three-petaled awareness becomes silent and self-luminous." The degree of attention on the part of the listener decides to what extent he is affected by the music. In general, the greater the attention the fewer are the blockages to an inner appreciation.

The relationship between the performer and the audience is activated by *prāṇa*. *Prāṇa* is similar to an electromagnetic field surrounding the body, although it is animated from the central core, and it can be excited by other *prāṇa* just as electromagnetic fields interact. In fact, in listening to recorded music, the stimulation of *prāṇa* is occasioned by an actual electromagnetic field rather than the performer's own *prāṇa*. In *The Psychodynamics of Prāṇava*, Guru Nitya describes the role of *prāṇa*: "...When a word



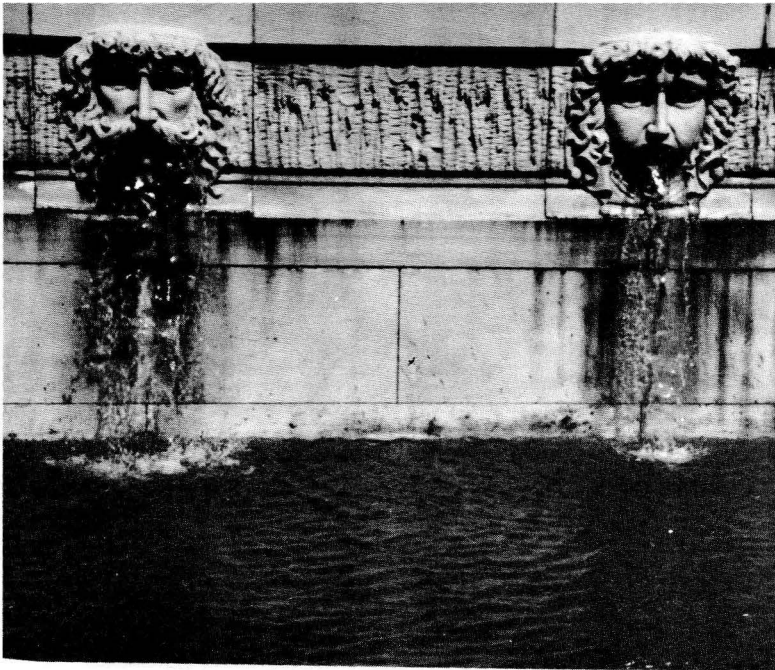
is to be articulated, *prāna* becomes its dynamic energy carrier. With the phonetics it effects, meaning evolves. The meaning is *ṛk*. The intonation of the sound can be such that it attains musical quality, *sāma*. Here the praise is not spoken but sung in a delightful manner. The delightful body of the word is generated by *prāṇa*....*Prāṇa* receives the word content and transforms it into melodious musical expression. Here not only the word and its musical expression are united, but the listener also is transported to a state of ecstasy...." (p.7)

Similarly, *rasam*, or the enjoyment of music, is succinctly described in the same work (pp.37-38): "The affectivity of *rasam* is like a circulatory function which combines the external and internal....*Rasa* does not reside just in our minds or in the object. It is like an all-pervading presence of the highest form of beauty." In this way the sympathetic listener is drawn directly into the value expression of the music.

The performer must have dived

deeply into the essence of music in order for the listener's psyche to be affected to the highest degree. Musical training should therefore include an exploration of the Source. Unfortunately, standard methods stress the exact repetition of notes at the expense of inner expression. This can severely inhibit the production of glowing, ecstatic music.

Guru Nitya was recently lecturing a group of Indian performers. He spoke of how most Indian musicians sit in a class of 50 or 60 students. The stern and strict teacher comes in and shows them the *rāga* to be done. While they wait their turn they are all the time worrying about whether they can do it right, what the teacher will think, whether their classmates will do it better. Already there is a neurosis in the student's fear of performing it exactly in front of so many others. They often cannot get over this in their whole lives. In the way they sit rigidly and sing their songs they are like marble statues with water pouring out of their mouths.



Marble Statues, Marble House,  
Newport, Rhode Island

This unhealthy situation is even more reinforced in the West by critics and fellow musicians who resemble hyenas waiting for their prey to stumble so they can rip it to pieces. The emphasis is predominantly on technical aspects, the exactness of performance. Yet audiences respond to the spirit being communicated. They can sense a "dry" performance. The musician's familiarity with the soul of music, *nāda*, is the factor which differentiates a stirring performance from a stilted one.

Such rigidity among trained performers has produced an antitrend in the West of music based almost solely on the performer's personality and lack of conventionality. Often the most crude sentiments are poured on the listeners, who revel in them and shout them back. Popular live performances have become a theater for wallowing in the obvious, and the music only stimulates the powerful flow of repressed emotions.

The ideal is to have a well-developed technique in concert with a

harmonious spiritual flow between the participants. Then the aftermath of listening will be light, energy and bliss, rather than depletion.

Recently, I attended the 1989 Gurukula Music Festival in Fernhill. Many of the performers there were living proof of the value of a spiritual ideal in the musical context. India continues to be a major fountain-source of inner values shared through music. To sit in intimate surroundings, in close proximity to the many fine musicians, seemed the perfect way to experience both the beautiful sounds and their ineffable wellspring. Performers and listeners alike participated in the presentation of "the highest form of beauty," which could not be localized in any way in regard to inner and outer spatialization. An independent beingness was in place, and while the various bodies came and went, it did not. Within that beingness it was clear that many people still knew how to "make" music, and many people knew just how to listen to it ♠



**Saint Tyāgarāja**  
Musician-Composer of South India

# Book Review

## Thomas Palakeel



### **Writers At Work:**

***The Paris Review Interviews, Seventh Series*, Ed. George Plimpton, New York, Viking, 1986.**

For an aspiring writer growing up in India, each new volume of the *Paris Review* interviews were like extended visits with writers like Hemingway, Saul Bellow, Celine, Thurber, Robbe-Grillet. The visits always took place in the writers' workshop; I got to examine the fine tools my literary heroes used to carve out elaborate figures. Early on I was interested in the charms of a writer's life, and then I wanted to obtain the secret techniques with which the writers blew life into their creations. Somewhere in the dialogues, the writers often confided secrets about the art and craft and revelation of their writing.

The seventh volume in the series begins with an introduction by John Updike who sees the life and art of the thirteen writers interviewed in it as testimonials to the intrinsic worth and beauty of this unique human activity in an age when so many people have lost sight of it. Updike says that an artist of any sort is a privileged person, allowed to stand apart from some of the daily grind, and supposed to be closer to the gods, to have access to the divine source of tribal well-being.

Indeed, all the writers included hold on to a certain sense of divine vocation. Some of them were even led, mysteriously, to become writers. Asked about his first stirrings, John Barth said thus; "It seems to happen later in the lives of American writers than Europeans. American boys and girls don't grow up think-

ing, "I'm going to be a writer," the way we are told Flaubert did; at about twelve, he decided he would be a great French writer, and by George, he turned out to be one.... Nearly every writer I know was going to be something else, and then found himself writing by a kind of passionate default. In my case I was going to be a musician... After I had written a novel's worth of bad pages, I understood that while I was not doing it well, that was the thing I was going to do."

For Milan Kundera, a novel is a meditation on existence, seen through imaginary characters. Philip Roth says that he wants to possess his readers while they are reading his work. He thinks the best readers come to fiction to be free of all the noise in the world that tries to sell, control, persuade; the readers desire to set loose in them the consciousness that's otherwise conditioned and hemmed in by all that isn't fiction. Raymond Carver sees good fiction as bringing of the news from one world to the other; "That end is good in and of itself.... It just has to be there for the fierce pleasure we take in doing it, and the different kind of pleasure that's taken in reading something that's durable and made to last, as well as beautiful in and of itself." Edna O'Brien suddenly started writing her first novel when she happened to listen to Arthur Mizener lecture on Hemingway; she had just arrived in London, leaving her slavish childhood in Ireland. She reflects on her turning point: "I had no literary education, but a fervid religious one. So I went to the lecture, and it was like a thunderbolt--Saul of Tarsus on his horse! Mizener read out the first paragraph of *A Farewell to Arms* and I

couldn't believe it-- this totally uncluttered, precise, true prose which was also very moving and lyrical. I can say that the two things came together then: my being ready for the revelation and my urgency to write. The novel wrote itself, so to speak, in a few weeks."

The writers interviewed in this volume certainly live by the written word; the source and resource of their lives is the act of creation. Towards the end of his life, Arthur Koestler was nourished by just looking at his thirty books printed in forty-two languages. Asked whether there came a point when he stopped doubting about his life and philosophy, Koestler said; "When a writer loses his uncertainties, he loses his humility--then he's finished. He'll just go on writing the same book like an idiot."

The interviewer asked again; "Looking at that wall of books, are you searching for an answer?" In response Koestler narrated an anecdote about the astronomer Sir Thomas Gold lecturing on the Big Bang Theory: "There was a very old lady at one of the lectures who says, 'Mister, I've got a much better theory about the universe. There's a huge tortoise with a thin covering of earth on its back--that's the universe.' And Tommy Gold says, 'But what is the tortoise standing on?' And she says, 'On a much bigger tortoise, of course. It's no use arguing, Mister. It's tortoises all the way down.' That just about sums it up. The cosmological quest--an infinite series of recessions. Ha!"

One way or other, the writing career has been a transforming experience to writers like Raymond Carver, Milan Kundera, and Philip Larkin. The late Carver grew up very poor in Yakima, Washington; a son of an alcoholic blue collar laborer, he managed to pull himself out of a nightmarish existence to write some of the most intense American short stories of this decade. He lived his

last days celebrating life, making up for the lost years of his alcoholic past. Asked whether he was religious, Carver replied, "No, but I have to believe in miracles and the resurrection. No question about that. Every day that I wake up, I'm glad to wake up. That's why I like to wake up early. In my drinking days I would sleep until noon or whatever, I would wake up with the shakes. I can't change anything now. I can't afford to regret... I have to live in the present."

None of the writers in this book advocates writing with a message. They say things like "Leave the message to Western Union." "An author should not have to deliver messages, because he is not a postman." They don't advocate decadence, either. In this context, the playwright Eugene Ionesco says that the function of literature is to entertain people. Then he recants his statement: "But that is not important. Yet, to introduce people to a different world, to encounter the miracle of being, that's important....Two of my translators, a Romanian and a German, were dying of cancer when they were translating *Exit the King*. They told me that they were going to die, and the play helped them. Alas, it does not help me, since I am not reconciled to the idea of death, of man's mortality. So you see, I am contradicting myself a little by saying that literature can be significant. People who don't read are brutes. It is better to write than to make war, isn't it?" Later he says, "My work has been essentially a dialogue with death, asking him "Why? Why?" So only death can silence me. Only death can close my lips."

All the writers here agree about the overwhelming power of literature upon the writer as well as the reader. William Maxwell, the novelist and *New Yorker* editor, says that he would have been deprived of everything he loved if he hadn't been a writer. "It would have been awful, awful," he concluded. ♦

*To me, the greatest pleasure of writing is not what it's about,  
but the inner music that the words make -- Truman Capote*

# East-West University Report and Narayana Gurukula News



Guru Nitya has been traveling in Kerala, holding seminars and giving talks which are being enthusiastically attended and widely reported in the press. His topics have included classes on the Bhagavad Gita and educational psychology, as well as new looks at government and other social institutions.

He has also completed his Malayalam commentary on the Gita, a project that has taken twenty years and four volumes. His birthday was celebrated in Calicut with the release of his Malayalam version of *Love and Devotion*, a study of the mystical poetry of St. John of the Cross and Jayadeva.

Narayana Gurukula, Fernhill, is planning an exchange program with the institution of Professor Emmanuel Petrakis from Athens. Having heard about the teachings of the Gurukula, Prof. Petrakis is enthusiastic to arrange a program with the Gurukula, possibly in conjunction with Mithraniketan Rural University in

Kerala.

Muni Narayana Prasad is now at the Geetha Ashram, Ba, Fiji, where he is publishing articles and giving classes to explain the inner meaning and the philosophical background of the rituals that have been preserved by second and third generation Indian families there.

The World Government coordinator, Garry Davis, has started a new office in Tokyo where planning is underway for a World Government Constitutional Convention which will be convened in Christchurch, New Zealand, in September of 1990.

The first Narayana Gurukula book to be printed at East-West University Press, USA, is now available. An excerpt from this beautiful rendering of Narayana Guru's *Janani Nava Ratna Manjari*, A Bouquet of Verses to the Supreme Mother, is given on pages 22-23 of this issue. Copies are available from Island Gurukula Aranya and Fernhill Gurukula. ❖



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Guru Puja, Island Gurukula Aranya, 1989

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The Search for a Norm in Western Thought  
Vedanta Revalued and Restated  
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The Bhagavad Gita  
Neither This Nor That But...AUM  
Love and Devotion  
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