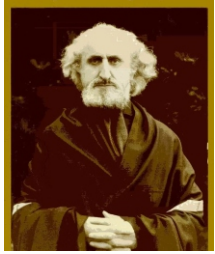




Sacred Art

Traditions emerge from the Infinite like flowers; they can no more be fabricated than the sacred art which is their witness and their proof.



Excerpt from :
Art from the Sacred to the Profane: East and West

Frithjof Schuon (18 June 1907 - 5 May 1998)

No art in itself is a human creation; but sacred art has this particularity, that its essential content is a revelation, that it manifests a properly sacramental form of heavenly reality, such as the icon of the Virgin and Child, painted by an angel, or by Saint Luke inspired by an angel, and such as the icon of the Holy Face which goes back to the Holy Shroud and to Saint Veronica; or such as the statue of Shiva dancing or the painted or carved images of the Buddhas, *Bodhisattvas*, and *Tārās*. To the same category—in the widest acceptance of the term—belong ritual psalmody in a sacred language—among others Sanskrit, Hebrew, and Arabic—and, in certain cases, the calligraphic copying—likewise ritual—of the sacred Books; architecture, or at least the decoration of sanctuaries, liturgical objects, and sacerdotal vestments are in general of a less direct order. It would be difficult to do justice in a few lines to all possible types of sacred expression, which comprises such diverse modes as recitation, writing, architecture, painting, sculpture, dance, the art of gestures, clothing.

Sacred art is first of all the visible and audible form of Revelation and then also its indispensable liturgical vesture. The form must be an adequate expression of its content; in no case should it contradict it, it cannot be abandoned to the arbitrary decisions of individuals, to their ignorance and their passions. But we must distinguish different degrees in sacred art, thus different levels of absoluteness or of relativity, and in addition we must take account of the relative character of form as such. The spiritual integrity of the form is a “categorical imperative” but this cannot prevent the formal order from being subject to certain vicissitudes; the fact that the masterpieces of sacred art are sublime expressions of the Spirit must not make us forget that, seen from the standpoint of this same Spirit, these works already appear, in their more ponderous exteriorizations, as concessions to the world. Indeed, when the Spirit has need of such a degree of exteriorization, it is already well on the way to being lost; exteriorization as such bears within itself the poison of outwardness, and so of exhaustion, fragility, and decrepitude; the masterpiece is as it were laden with regrets and is already a swan song; one sometimes has the impression that art—through the very surplus of its perfections—is there to make up for the absence of wisdom or of sanctity. The Desert Fathers had no need of colonnades and stained glass windows; but, on the other hand, those who today despise sacred art in the name of “pure spirit” are the very people who least understand it and have most need of it. Be this as it may, nothing noble can ever be lost: all the treasures of art and those of nature too are found again, in perfection and infinitely, in the divine Beatitude; a man who is fully conscious of this truth cannot fail to be detached from sensory crystallizations as such.

Objectively, the true function of sacred images is to represent symbolically and sacramentally a transcendent Reality, and subjectively, to permit the fixing of the mind upon this symbol in view of obtaining habitual concentration upon the Reality contemplated, something which can be conceived in devotional as well as in intellectual mode, or in both manners at once.

It is to be remembered that according to the Eastern Church the icon is not properly speaking a human work, but rather a manifestation of the heavenly Model itself. The icon has been compared to a window from earth to Heaven and from Heaven to earth; the gold background of the paintings reflects the celestial aura, the luminous substance that envelops deified beings and thus in certain respects rejoins the symbolism of the “light of Tabor.”

The first aim of sacred art is didactic, whether it be a pictorial catechism for the use of the unlettered or, on the contrary, a metaphysical or mystical doctrine suggested by symbols, which does not mean that the two things are separate. Sacerdotal art sets out to express a symbolism that is either simple or complex, and in so doing it transmits at the same time, and inevitably since its language is one of form, an influence of beauty, hence of joyous “expansion”; if it sought visible harmony for its own sake, it would fall into arbitrariness and into that individualistic and sterile impasse which is naturalism. The error of naturalism is not that it is blind to aesthetic qualities, certainly, but, in the first place, that it lacks sufficient reason insofar as it takes itself for an end in itself, or what amounts to the same thing, insofar as it attributes glory to the artist or to the sensible model alone; and secondly, that it violates the rules resulting from tradition on the one hand, and from the nature of things on the other.



Chenrezig (Shadakṣhari Avalokīteśvara) Mandala

On the plane of spiritual values no two things are more divergent than wisdom, which is inward, and art, which is outward; between them is all the distance separating essence and form. Yet “extremes meet” and nothing is closer to wisdom and sanctity than sacred art, or the liturgy, in the widest sense of these terms, which explains the value, in no way disproportionate, that traditional civilizations attach to these disciplines. The image of the Divine, including sacred calligraphy as well as anthropomorphic representations, is like the visible face of the Truth: in a language both direct and graduated, it renders transparent that which spirituality hides in the depths of hearts.

Side by side with their intrinsic qualities, the forms of art answer a strictly useful purpose. In order that spiritual influences may be able to manifest themselves without encumbrance, they have need of a formal setting which corresponds to them analogically and without which they cannot radiate, even if they remain always present. It is true that in the soul of a holy man they can shine in spite of everything, but not everyone is a saint, and a sanctuary is constructed to facilitate resonances of the spirit, not to oppose them.

Sacred art is made as a vehicle for spiritual presences, it is made at one and the

same time for God, for angels, and for man; profane art on the other hand exists only for man and by that very fact betrays him.

Sacred art helps man to find his own center, that kernel whose nature is to love God. Sacred art, of which a particular saint personally has no need, nonetheless exteriorizes his sanctity, or precisely that something which can make artistic exteriorization superfluous for that saint himself. Through art, this sanctity or wisdom has become miraculously tangible with all its human *materia* which virgin nature could not provide; in a sense, the dilating and refreshing virtue of nature is that of being not human but angelic. To say that one prefers the works of God to the works of man would be to simplify the problem unduly, given that in any art meriting the epithet “sacred” it is God who is the author; man is merely the instrument and what is human is merely the material.

If sacred art appeals to contemplative intelligence, it likewise appeals to normal human sensibility. This means that such art alone possesses a universal language, and that none is better fitted to appeal, not only to an elite, but also to the people at large. Let us remember, too, as far as the apparently childlike aspect of the traditional mentality is concerned, Christ’s injunction to be “as little children”

and “simple as doves,” words that, no matter what may be their spiritual meaning, also quite plainly refer to psychological realities. The Fathers of the eighth century, very different from those religious authorities of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries who betrayed Christian art by abandoning it to the impure passions of worldly men and the ignorant imagination of the profane, were fully conscious of the holiness of all the means of expression belonging to their religion. They stipulated, at the second council of Nicaea, that “art (the integral perfection of work) alone belongs to the painter, while ordinance (the choice of the subject) and disposition (the treatment of the subject from the symbolical as well as the technical or material points of view) belongs to the Fathers.”

It is important to understand, first of all, that the purpose of art is not *a priori* to induce aesthetic emotions, but to transmit, together with these, a more or less direct spiritual message, and thus suggestions emanating from, and leading back to, the liberating truth. Certainly art belongs by very definition to the formal order, and who says perfection of form, says beauty; to claim that art has nothing to do with beauty, on the pretext that its immediate end is spiritual, is as false as to affirm the contrary: that beauty is the exclusive end of the work of art. Beauty essentially implies a container and a content: as to the container, it is represented by conformity to the laws of harmony, or regularity of structure, whereas the content is a manifestation of “Being” or of “Knowledge” or again of “Beatitude” or more precisely a varied combination of the three elements; it is, moreover, these contents that determine *a priori* the container. To speak of beauty “pure and simple” with pejorative intent is a contradiction in terms since beauty cannot but manifest truth or an aspect or mode of it; if sensible harmony “delivers” after its own manner and under certain conditions, it is because it is truth.

Profane art, if it is not sacred art, is nonetheless not to be identified with anti-traditional art: it may perfectly well, on the one hand, respect at least the negative rules of universal art, and, on the other hand, assume a function analogous to sacerdotal art, even while being no doubt much less central than the latter; between sacerdotal and profane art there are, more over, intermediate modes. It should be added that in the case of the artist an initial subjective preoccupation with a particular aesthetic value—if the need arises—is in no wise opposed to the profound function of art nor consequently to the spiritual perfection of the work, for, all things being inter related, it goes without saying that aesthetic emotion may convey, as it did for Ramakrishna, a spiritual intuition or even a truth which the artist may not necessarily be conscious of, but which will be transmitted nonetheless.

If traditional art cannot be always and everywhere at a peak of attainment, this is not because of any principal insufficiency, but because of man’s intellectual and moral insufficiencies which cannot fail to become exteriorized in art as in his other activities.

If we start from the idea that perfect art can be recognized by three main criteria: nobility of content—this being a spiritual condition apart from which art has no right to exist—then exactness of symbolism or at least, in the case of profane works of art, harmony of composition, and finally purity of style or elegance of line and color, we can discern with the help of these criteria the qualities and defects of any work of art whether sacred or not. It goes without saying that some modern work may, as if by chance, possess these qualities; nonetheless it would be a mistake to see in this any justification of an art that is deprived of all positive principles; the exceptional qualities of such a work are in any case far from being characteristic of the art in question when viewed as a whole, but appear only incidentally under cover of the eclecticism which goes with anarchy. The existence of such works proves, however, that a legitimate profane art is conceivable in the West without any need to return purely and simply to the miniatures of the Middle Ages or to peasant painting, for a healthy state of soul and a normal treatment of materials always guarantee the rectitude of an art devoid of pretensions. It is the nature of things—on the spiritual and on the psychological as well as on the material and technical level—which demands that each of the constituent elements of art should fulfill certain elementary conditions, these being precisely the ones by which all traditional art is governed.

First there is sacred art in the strictest sense, as it appears in the Tabernacle of Moses, where God Himself prescribed both the form and the materials; then there is the sacred art which has been developed in conformity with a particular ethnic genius; and finally there are decorative aspects of sacred art in which the ethnic genius is more freely expressed, though always in conformity with a spirit that transcends it. Genius is nothing unless determined by a spiritual perspective.

The Valley of Bewilderment



Excerpt from :
The Conference Of The Birds

Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (1145 - 1221 A.D)

Next comes the Valley of Bewilderment,
A place of pain and gnawing discontent –
Each second you will sigh, and every breath
Will be a sword to make you long for death;
Blinded by grief, you will not recognize
The days and nights that pass before your eyes.
Blood drips from every hair and writes “Alas”
Beside the highway where the pilgrims pass;
In ice you fry, in fire you freeze – the Way
Is lost, with indecisive steps you stray –
The Unity you knew has gone; your soul
Is scattered and knows nothing of the Whole.
If someone asks: “What is your present state;
Is drunkenness or sober sense your fate,
And do you flourish now or fade away?”
The pilgrim will confess: “I cannot say;
I have no certain knowledge any more;
I doubt my doubt, doubt itself is unsure;
I love, but who is it for whom I sigh?
Not Moslem, yet not heathen; who am I?
My heart is empty, yet with love is full;
My own love is to me incredible.”

The story of the princess who loved a slave

A great king had a daughter whose fair face
Was like the full moon in its radiant grace,
She seemed a Joseph, and her dimpled chin
The well that lovely youth was hidden in –
Her face was like a paradise; her hair
Reduced a hundred hearts to love’s despair;
Her eyebrows were two bows bent back to shoot
The arrows of love’s passionate dispute;
The pointed lashes of her humid eyes
Were thorns strewn in the pathway of the wise;
The beauty of this sun deceived the train
Of stars attendant on the moon’s pale reign;
The rubies of her mouth were like a spell
To fascinate the angel Gabriel –
Beside her smile, her sweet, reviving breath,
The waters of eternal life seemed death;
Whoever saw her chin was lost and fell
Lamenting into love’s unfathomed well;
And those she glanced at sank without a sound –
What rope could reach the depths in which they
drowned?

It happened that a handsome slave was brought
To join the retinue that served at court,
A slave, but what a slave! Compared with him
The sun and moon looked overcast and dim.
He was uniquely beautiful – and when
He left the palace, women, children, men
Would crowd into the streets and market-place,
A hundred thousand wild to see his face.
One day the princess, by some fateful chance,
Caught sight of this surpassing elegante”,
And as she glimpsed his face she felt her heart,
Her intellect, her self-control depart –
Now reason fled and love usurped its reign;
Her sweet soul trembled in love’s bitter pain.
For days she meditated, struggled, strove,
But bowed at last before the force of love
And gave herself to longing, to the fire
Of passionate, insatiable desire.

Attendant on the daughter of the king
Were ten musicians, slave girls who could sing
Like nightingales – whose captivating charms
Would rival David’s when he sang the psalms.
The princess set aside her noble name
And whispered to these girls her secret shame
(When love has first appeared who can expect
The frenzied lover to be circumspect?),
Then said: “If I am honest with this slave
And tell my love, who knows how he’ll behave?
My honour’s lost if he should once discover
His princess wishes that she were his lover!
But if I can’t make my affection plain
I’ll die, I’ll waste away in secret pain;
I’ve read a hundred books on chastity
Must sleep with me and never know the truth –
If I can secretly achieve my goal

Love’s bliss will satisfy my thirsting soul.”
And still I burn – what good are they to me?
No, I must have him; this seductive youth
Her girls said: “Don’t despair; tonight we’ll bring
Your lover here and he won’t know a thing.”
One of them went to him – she simpered, smiled,
And O! how easily he was beguiled;
He took the drugged wine she’d prepared – he drank,
Then swooned – unconscious in her arms he sank,
And in that instant all her work was done;
He slept until the setting of the sun.
Night came and all was quiet as the grave;
Now, stealthily, the maidens brought this slave,
Wrapped in a blanket, to their mistress’ bed
And laid him down with jewels about his head.
Midnight: he opened his dazed, lovely eyes
And stared about him with a mute surprise –
The bed was massy gold; the chamber seemed
An earthly paradise that he had dreamed;
Two candles made of ambergris burnt there
And with their fainting fragrance filled the air;
The slave girls made such music that his soul
Seemed beckoned onward to some distant goal;
Wine passed from hand to hand; the
candles’ light
Flared like a sun to drive away the night.
But all the joys of this celestial place
Could not compare with her bewitching
face,
At which he stared as if struck
senseless, dumb,
Lost both to this world and the world to
come
His heart acknowledged love’s
supremacy;
His soul submitted to love’s ecstasy;
His eyes were fixed on hers, while to his
ears
The girls’ song seemed the music of the
spheres;
He smelt the burning candles’ ambergris;
His mouth burnt with the wine, then with
her kiss;
He could not look away, he could not speak,
But tears of eloquence coursed down his
cheek –
And she too wept, so that each kiss was graced
With salty sweetness mingled in one taste,
Or he would push aside her stubborn hair
And on her lovely eyes in wonder stare.
Thus, in each other’s arms, they passed the
night
Until, worn out by sensual delight,
By passion, by the vigil they had kept,
As dawn’s cool breeze awoke, the young
man slept.
Then, as he slept, they carried him once
more
And laid him gently on his own hard floor.

He woke, he slowly knew himself again
Astonishment, regret, grief’s aching pain
Swept over him (though what could grief achieve?
The scene had fled and it was vain to grieve).
He bared his body, ripped his tattered shirt,
Tore out his hair, besmeared his head with dirt
And when his friends asked what assailed his heart,
He cried: “How can I say? Where could I start?
No dreamer, no, no seer could ever see
What I saw in that drunken ecstasy;
No one in all the world has ever known
The bliss vouchsafed to me, to me alone
I cannot tell you what I saw; I saw
A stranger sight than any seen before.”
They said: “Try to remember what you’ve done,

And of a hundred joys describe just one.”
He answered: “Was it me who saw that face?
Or did some other stand there in my place?
I neither saw nor heard a thing, and yet
I saw and heard what no man could forget.”
A fool suggested: “It’s some dream you had
Some sleepy fantasy has sent you mad.”
He asked: “Was it a dream, or was it true?
Was I drunk or sober? I wish I knew

The world has never known a state like this,
This paradox beyond analysis,
Which haunts my soul with what I cannot find,
Which makes me speechless speak and seeing blind.
I saw perfection’s image, beauty’s queen,
A vision that no man has ever seen
(What is the sun before that face? – God knows
It is a mote, a speck that comes and goes!).
But did I see her? What more can I say?
Between this ‘yes’ and ‘no’ I’ve lost my way!”

The grieving mother and the sufi

Beside her daughter’s grave a mother grieved.
A sufi said: “This woman has perceived
The nature of her loss; her heart knows why
She comes to mourn, for whom-she has to cry –
She grieves, but knowledge makes her fortunate:
Consider now the sufi’s wretched state!
What daily, nightly vigils I must keep
And never know for whom it is I weep;
I mourn in the lonely darkness,
unaware



Whose absence is the cause of my despair.
Since she knows what has caused her agony,
She is a thousand times more blest than me
I have no notion of what makes me weep,
What prompts the painful vigils I must keep.
My heart is lost, and here I cannot find
That rope by which men
live, the rational mind
The key to thought is lost; to reach this far
Means to despair of who and what you are.
And yet it is to see within the soul
And at a stroke the meaning of the Whole.”

The man who had lost his key

A sufi heard a cry: “I’ve lost my key;
If it’s been found, please give it back to me –
My door’s locked fast; I wish to God I knew
How I could get back in. What can I do?”
The sufi said: “And why should you complain?
You know where this door is; if you remain
Outside it – even if it is shut fast –
Someone no doubt will open it at last.
You make this fuss for nothing; how much more

Should I complain, who’ve lost both key and door!”
But if this sufi presses on, he’ll find
The closed or open door which haunts his mind.
Men cannot understand the suns’ state,
That deep Bewilderment which is their fate.
To those who ask: “What can I do?” reply:
“Bid all that you have done till now goodbye!”
Once in the Valley of Bewilderment
The pilgrim suffers endless discontent,
Crying: “How long must I endure delay,
Uncertainty? When shall I see the Way?
When shall I know? O, when?” But knowledge here
Is turned again to indecisive fear;
Complaints become a grateful eulogy
And blasphemy is faith, faith blasphemy.

The old age of Sheikh Nasrabad

Sheikh Nasrabad made Mecca’s pilgrimage
Twice twenty times, yet this could not assuage
His yearning heart. This white-haired sheikh became
A pilgrim of the pagans’ sacred flame,
A naked beggar in whose heart their fire
Was mirrored by the blaze of his desire.
A passer-by said: “Shame on you, O sheikh,
Shame on these wretched orisons you make;
Have you performed the Moslems’ pilgrimage
To be an infidel in your old age?
This is mere childishness; such blasphemy
Can only bring the sufis infamy.

What sheikh has followed this perverted way?
What is this pagan fire to which you pray?”
The sheikh said: “I have suffered from this flame,
Which burnt my clothes, my house, my noble name,
The harvest of my life, all that I knew,

My learning, wisdom, reputation too –
And what is left to me? – Bewilderment,
The knowledge of my burning discontent;
All thoughts of reputation soon depart
When such fierce conflagrations fire the heart.

In my despair I turn with equal hate
Both from the Ka’abah and this temple’s gate –
If this Bewilderment should come to you
Then you will grieve, as I am forced to do.”

A novice sees his dead master

A novice in whose heart the faith shone bright
Met with his teacher in a dream one night
And said: “I tremble in bewildered fear;
How is it, master, that I see you here?
My heart became a candle when you went,
A flame that flickers with astonishment;
I seek Truth’s secrets like a searching slave –
Explain to me your state beyond the grave!”
His teacher said: “I cannot understand –
Amazed, I gnaw the knuckles of my hand.
You say that you’re bewildered – in this pit
Bewilderment seems endless, infinite !
A hundred mountains would be less to me
Than one brief speck of such uncertainty I”

Parable

*Better an enemy with sense
Than a friend without it,
For with the words, “I’ll
kill a mosquito!”
A son, – both deaf and
dumb!
–Split his father’s skull!*



EDITORIAL

The coexistence of multiple perspectives continues to dislodge the absolute and totalizing meta discourses of our age. As different perspectives and approaches become available, the epistemological stance propagated with the advent of postcolonialism, and postmodernism reinstates the coexistence of no single way of knowing or speaking the truth. Today it is easy to reject the idea that no single universal narrative or grand theory can explain everything in its world view. This includes philosophic underpinnings of Plato, Hegel, Marx, Freud, Brahminic, or Quranic conceptuality etc.

According to Jean-Francois Lyotard, this postmodern perspective is characterized by a ‘incredulity towards metanarratives.’ This situation reaches its apogee with the loss of a sense of unity emphasised with the rise of diverse realities. The challenging situation of our age is its inability to reach a common understanding that has a universal ground representing the idea of the truth. Therefore, a question begs to be answered- Is it possible to imagine a transparent universality that fosters the emergence and growth of new particularities? What are the possibilities of a fluid relationship between a universality and emerging particularities? The determinate sense of ‘notion’, as Salvoj Zizek points, that is both universal in its abstraction and particular in its very sense of determination, beseeches to be dug from the archives of so called ‘enlightened’ conceptual understandings of our age.

While we comprehend the material manifestation of spatio-temporal reality, the idea of notion, as Zizek argues, gets solidified in its subjectification as a subject. The conditions of formation of a priori categories, therefore, necessitates the subjectification of such notions that binds the abstract idea of notion into solid material categories of subjects. For instance, we normally see the difference between disciplines (social sciences and natural sciences), and difference between civilizations and their cultures because of such processes of subjectification of our subjectified selves.

In this perplexed situation we engage with the idea of *Makrand* to foster an epistemic activity that can generate the possibilities to resolve these tensions. *Makrand* entails us into opening a discussion on how we can sustain both particular and universal positions at the same time, without subjectifying the subject into preset frameworks of categories. It seeks to unfold possible individual experiences that possess the potential to contain the universality of meaning within a transparent wholeness through which its particularities become vibrantly available. While considering the heterogeneous domains of philosophy, mythology, mysticism, aesthetics, science, sociology, and politics, we at Makrand envision a fluid relationship amongst these domains and look forward to unwinding the possibilities that remain fertile through a creative interaction and unfolding of an intellectually stimulating platform. We also seek a possibility to create a multidisciplinary intellectual space while undertaking a consistent interaction between the domains of social and natural sciences. We do not claim or endeavour to resolve the tension between the two domains, but to seek the liminal space for learning and living through their constant mediation while studying the impressions of such interactions on human consciousness. Simultaneously, we aim to publish the classical works of prominent thinkers, who have shaped the intellectual traditions across diverse spaces and times, as we continue to foster new works of contemporary thinkers of our age through our publications.

In conclusion it is worth mentioning that the coexistence of multiple disciplines, while not privileging one above another, shall require us to engage with one subject at a time and discover its mediation in other disciplines and cultures. This can be understood with the metaphor of a *Rangoli*, which is a mixture of distinct colours put together to make an aesthetical pattern of a design that does not entirely belong to any one colour; or is dominated by one in its whole design. Rather, each colour in *Rangoli* has its own vibrancy and value. And what we see, after all, is a work of art. This is what we seek to achieve through Makrand. Embellished with the beauty of each colour, we revisit these emerging perspectives with utmost openness and multitudinous of creative expressions and interpretations presented in each edition and every page. This newspaper seeks to be inclusive of different mode of knowledge and experience that in *Sikhi* terminology is a presentation of the *naam* experience.

- Amandeep Singh

Symbolic Flower



Excerpt from :
Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science

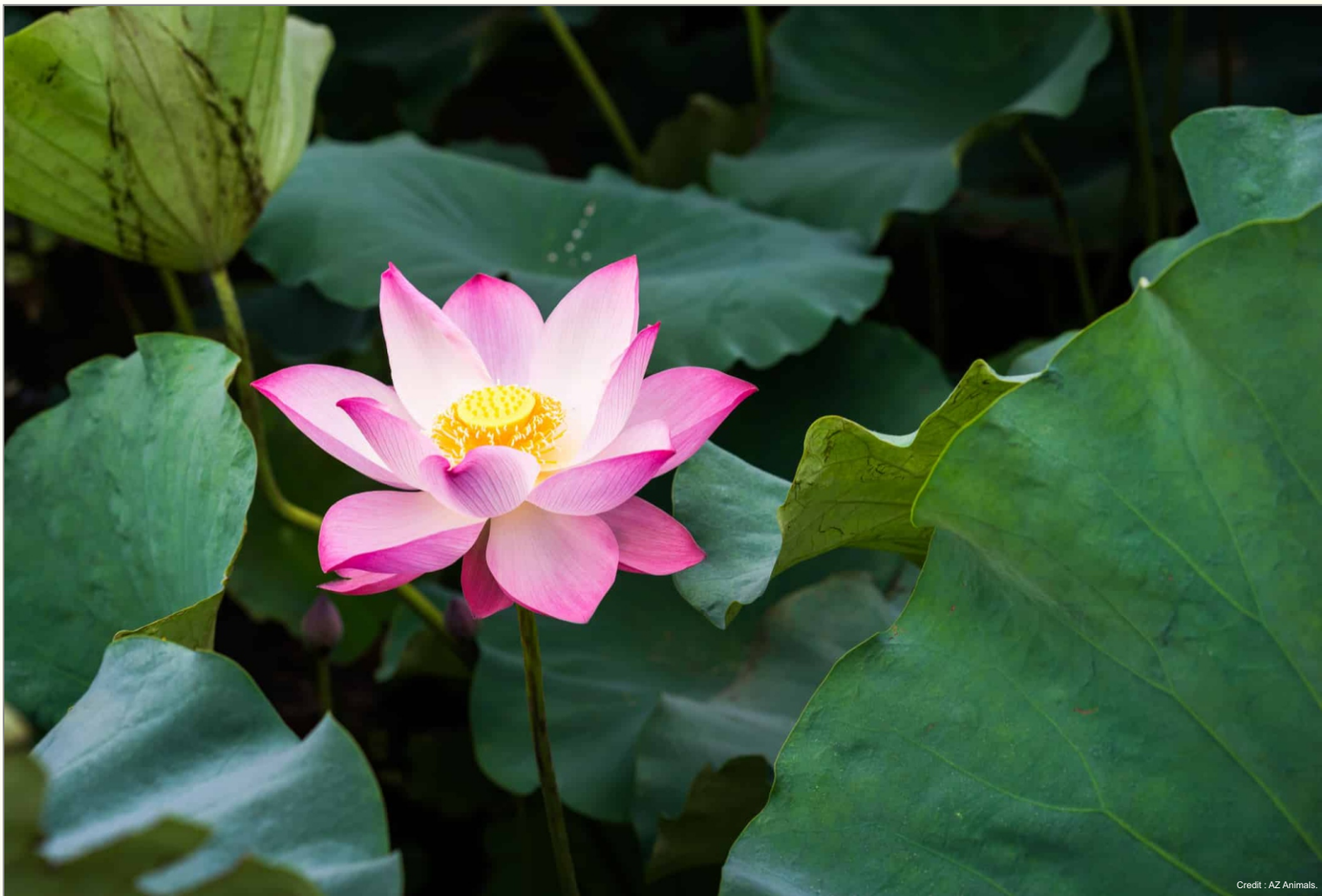
René Guénon (1886 - 1951 AD)

It is well known that the use of flowers in symbolism is widespread and that it is to be found in most traditions. It is also a very complex symbolism, and our intention here can only be to point out some of the more general meanings. It is obvious, in fact, that the sense of a floral symbol may vary at least in its secondary modalities, according to the particular flower taken as symbol, and also, as is generally the case in symbolism, that each flower can itself have a plurality of meanings, which may be bound up with each other by certain correspondences.

One of the chief meanings of floral symbolism is that which relates to the feminine or passive principle of manifestation. Prakriti or universal substance. In this respect, the flower is equivalent to a number of other symbols, among which the most important is the cup. Like the cup. the flower by its very form evokes the notion of 'receptacle', which Prakriti is as regards the influences emanating from Purusha, and one commonly speaks of the calyx [Le.. cup or chalice] of a flower. On the other hand, the blossoming of this same flower simultaneously represents the development of manifestation itself, considered as a production of Prakriti. This double sense is particularly clear in a case such as that of the lotus which, in the East, is the symbolic flower of flowers and which has the special characteristic of blooming on the surface of the water, and as we have explained elsewhere, this surface always represents the domain of a certain state of manifestation, or the

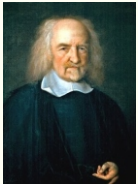
plane of reflection of the 'celestial Ray' which expresses the influence of Purusha exercised on this domain in order to realise the possibilities potentially contained therein. enveloped in the primordial indifferentiation of Prakriti.”

The above mentioned connection between flower and cup naturally brings to mind the symbolism of the Grail in the Western traditions. We have already seen that among the various objects traditionally associated with the Grail there is a lance which, in the Christian adaptation of the legend, Is the lance of the centurion Longinus that made, in the side of Christ, the



Credit: AZ Animals

Of Shame



Excerpt from :
The Whole Art of Rhetoric

Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679 AD)

SHAME is a perturbation of the mind arising from the apprehension of evil, past, present, or to come, to the prejudice of a man's own, or his friends' reputation.

The things therefore which men are ashamed of, are those actions which proceed from vice: as to throw away one's arms, to run away, signs of cowardliness. To deny that which is committed to one's trust, a sign of injustice. To have lain with whom, where, and when, we ought not, signs of intemperance. To make gain of small and base things; not to help with money whom and how much we ought; to receive help from meaner men; to ask money at use from such as one thinks will borrow of him; to borrow of him that expects payment of somewhat before lent; and to re-demand what one has lent, of him that one thinks will borrow more; and so to praise as one may be thought to ask; signs of wretchedness. To praise one to his face; to praise his virtues too much, and colour his vices; signs of flattery. To be unable to endure such labours as men endure that are elder, tenderer, greater in quality, and of less strength than he; signs of effeminacy. To

be beholden often to another; and to upbraid those that are beholden to him; signs of pusillanimity. To speak and promise much of one's self, more than is due; signs of arrogance. To



Credit: Rita Craps

want those things which one's equals, all or most of them, have attained to, is also a thing to be ashamed of. And to suffer things ignominious; as to serve about another's person, or to be employed in his base actions.

In actions of intemperance, whether willingly or unwillingly committed, there is shame; in actions of force, only when they are done unwillingly.

The men before whom we are ashamed, are such as we respect: namely, those that admire us. And those whom we desire should admire us. And those whom we admire. Those that contend with us for honour. Those whose opinion we contemn not. And therefore men are most ashamed in the presence: of old and well bred men. Of those we are always to live with. Of those that are not guilty of the same fault. Of

those that do not easily pardon. And of those that are apt to reveal our faults; such as are men injured, backbiters, scoffers, comic poets. And of those before whom we have had always good success. And of those who never asked anything of us before. And of such as desire our friendship. And of our familiars, that know none of our crimes. And of such as will reveal our faults to any of those that are named before.

But in the presence of such whose judgment most men despise, men are not ashamed. Therefore, we are ashamed also in the presence of those whom we reverence. And of those who are concerned in our own, or ancestors', or kinsfolk's, actions or misfortunes, if they be shameful. And of their

rivals. And of those that are to live with them that know their disgrace. The common opinions concerning impudence, are taken from the contrary of these.

The Objects of Love



Excerpt from :
The Art of Loving

Erich Fromm (1900 - 1980 AD)

Love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person ; it is an attitude, an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole, not toward one "object" of love. If a person loves only one other person and is indifferent to the rest of his fellow men, his love is not love but a symbiotic attachment, or an enlarged egotism. Yet, most people believe that love is constituted by the object, not by the faculty.

In fact, they even believe that it is a proof of the intensity of their love when they do not love anybody except the "loved" person. This is the same fallacy which we have already mentioned above. Because one does not see that love is an activity, a power of the soul, one believes that all that is necessary to find is the right object—and that everything goes by itself afterward. This attitude can be compared to that of a man who wants to paint but who, instead of learning the art, claims that he has just to wait for the right object, and that he will paint beautifully when he finds it.

If I truly love one person I love all persons, I love the world, I love life. If I can say to somebody else, "I love you," I must be able to say, "I love in you everybody, I love through you the world, I love in you also myself." Saying that love is an orientation which refers to all and not to one does not imply, however, the idea that there are no differences between various types of love, which depend on the kind of object which is loved.

Aspects of Art In Bengali Cinema



Excerpt from :
Speaking of Films

Satyajit Ray (1921 - 1992 AD)

If one is to speak on the artistic aspects of cinema, naturally one must also consider the commercial aspects of film-making. I am a little embarrassed to raise the subject of money at the very outset. But it is true that without that one object, there is no way forward in cinema. A gift of the age of machines, this particular mechanical craft has assumed such proportions in the world of commerce that it has become impossible to make a film without spending a great deal of money. The basic materials required—a camera and film—are expensive enough. In addition, there are the actors to think of, salaries of other workers and technicians, renting a studio, making costumes and building sets. Even when a film is finished, there is no respite since one must then pay for advertisements and publicity. Taking everything into account, even a simple and straightforward film would require an amount in excess of a hundred thousand rupees. Something on a more lavish scale would naturally mean a higher figure. It is this dependence on money that has forced art to join hands with business and industry.

An artist knows that he needs money to give his ideas a concrete shape; and a businessman knows that film-making is not something he can handle himself—that is the artist’s job. Each has accepted his dependence on the other. The businessman—or the producer—raises enough funds, and the artist—or the director—makes a film with the help of those funds and hands it over to the producer. The producer then presents it to the general public through available cinemas. Only if the public accepts the film enthusiastically—that is to say, if they buy enough tickets and go and see it—can the film have any financial success. If commercial success complements artistic excellence, so much the better. But there is no guarantee that if you have one, you will also have the other. Many good films are not popular; and popularity amongst the masses doesn’t always define artistic excellence. If that was the case, many of Tagore’s creations could not have been considered as good literature. In a country, where the spread of education is so limited, is it any wonder that connoisseurs of art should be few in number?



Satyajit Ray behind the camera with crew and assistant director Suhasini Mulay on location for The Middleman (1975).

Therefore, if a film is not commercially successful, its director need not think that he has failed as an artist.

However, a film’s financial loss may well be cause for alarm for the businessman, i.e. the producer. For him, a film is successful only when it has made money. He is not really concerned with whether or not his film contains any aesthetic values. His first and chief concern is whether or not it is doing well financially. Since the director is dependent on the same businessman, how can he possibly overlook the producer’s interests? A poet, a composer or an instrumentalist may have the freedom to work simply to satisfy their own creative urges, but not a film director. A director has to take care of the artistic as well as the commercial aspects of his work, bearing in mind the expectations of his audience. It would be most regrettable if art has to be abandoned in order to meet those expectations. However, there are numerous examples in the history of cinema where popular demand and art have merged quite compatibly. Charlie Chaplin’s films may be cited as examples. Of course,

such amalgamation between the two is not easy, nor is there any formula for it. But since there have been examples in the past, there is hope for the future.

It is this hope that inspires those who try to make artistic films within the confines placed by commercial considerations. The best examples of successful cinema have all been created within those confines. There is, of course, a certain class of film-makers whose sole purpose is just to make a living. Who am I to suggest that such a purpose in life is either wrong or ignoble? But such directors cannot be included in any discussion on the art of cinema, for creating art is not their aim at all.

Let us now get down to the crux of the matter. What is a ‘good film’? Does it simply mean a film with a good story? I have heard many people say so. But if that is true, why is there such a dearth of good films in Bengal? So many films are based on good stories by writers ranging from Valmiki and Vedvyas to the best writers in modern times! The stories, by themselves, cannot be faulted. So what is lacking in these films that rob them of artistic success? The truth is that every story has two aspects—its underlying message, and its language. These two elements make up a story. The art of telling a story lies in the style that is adopted. A good story may be spoilt if it is not told properly; and a very ordinary story may acquire striking artistic features simply from the way it is related. The art of cinema is similarly dependent on its language and the manner in which the story unfolds. Where the language is weak, the film is unable to earn artistic merit. This language used in cinema is a language of images. A director must learn it and master its grammar. Even when he has done that it is impossible for him to work alone and express his meaning through that language single-handedly. Regular film goers will have noticed that a long list of credits appears on the screen before a film begins. It shows that the art of cinema calls for a joint effort. A film can be made only when a number of people work together. Some of them may be artists, some are artisans, and some others are both. They may be divided into two categories. The first would be those who face the camera, i.e. those who take part in the acting. The second would comprise those who remain behind the camera, i.e. workers in the background—the scriptwriter, director, cameraman, sound engineer, art director, composer and editor. Once a story has been selected, the first job falls on the scriptwriter. He turns the story into a format suitable for cinema. His job involves writing, but that kind of writing has no literary merit—or, at least, if it doesn’t, it should not matter. The language in a script is only a written indication of the language that is adopted on the screen. The purpose of the script is to act as a ‘skeleton’. As in a play, a story in a script is divided into acts and scenes. But there is a system of changing angles and changing shots virtually in every scene. This is completely different from a play meant for the stage. Such a technique is used only in cinema. Unless one studies cinematic grammar, it is not possible to master that technique.

As a matter of fact, it is both natural and desirable that the director should write the script. But sometimes a director is unable to write dialogue suitable for cinema, so he has to turn to a writer. The language that is hinted at in the script then has to be expressed through the use of a camera. The images that the camera captures are joined to one another, and only then does the story in the film take a finite form. Everything that is described in the story—the heroine’s beauty, the hero’s virility, the greenery of the countryside, the congestion in a slum, buildings, roads and alleys, wars and battles—all of it has to be seen through the eyes of a camera. A camera can certainly see as much as the human eye, sometimes a bit

more. It has the ability and power to enlarge what is small, bring closer what is far, make an unattractive object look beautiful, and even turn day into night. That is why the camera is a director’s biggest weapon. But its use involves dos and don’ts, right and wrong.

Whatever helps in highlighting the mood or theme of the story has to be seen as being right, and possessing adequate aesthetic merit. If the camera produces some special effects that fall outside the basic needs of the story, it can have no bearing on a general evaluation of the whole film. If the cameraman lacks an aesthetic sense or a sense of drama, he cannot possibly meet the director’s requirements. His work remains limited to that of an artisan, and the language of the film is weakened in proportion to the cameraman’s own shortcomings. Sound recordist, art director, editor, composer—each has to understand the requirements of the director, so that the work they produce fits in with the director’s vision and the story finds its fullest expression. The success of a film lies very much in the success of these artists.

Let us consider the art director, for example. If he has to build a set to show the room where the hero lives, the appearance of that room, its size, its furniture, pictures on the wall, its neatness (or untidiness)—in other words, the total effect of that room must be consistent with that particular character in that particular film. If that is not the case, no matter how attractive the room is, or how well built, it cannot have any artistic significance. The same applies to acting. In Bengal, the tradition generally followed in acting belongs to the stage. On the screen, that kind of theatrical acting is not just unseemly, but also against all accepted norms of acting in films. The setting in a play does not reflect real life. A room with three walls on a stage is never acknowledged as a real room. That is why the speech or behaviour of characters on the stage cannot be the same as that of real people. No one even expects it to be so. But, in the realistic atmosphere created in cinema, theatrical overacting is most painful. However, it would be unfair to blame the actors for that. It is the director’s job to judge a story and the characters in it, and then decide what kind of acting is suitable for each. He must have the sense not only to make that judgement for himself, but also communicate to the actors exactly what is required. It is up to the director to ‘extract’ from the actors performances that meet his own requirements. The director is responsible, to a large extent, for both the strengths and weaknesses of a film, as well as its artistic successes and failures.

That is something the viewers and critics must remember when they evaluate a film. If the story isn’t good enough, the writer need not be blamed. Why did the director choose that story in the first place? If the acting is faulty, why did those faults escape the director? If the structure is weak, is that the fault of the editor, or was there a weakness in the basic structure of the script? Of course, in order to grasp where each mistake lies, one must be familiar with the systems and techniques used in cinema. Moreover, if a Bengali film is to be judged, one must also have a fair idea of the circumstances under which that film was made. There is no point in bemoaning the fact that bad films outnumber good ones. That is true of any work of art in any country in the world—and most certainly it applies to cinema. The truth is that, in the absence of a suitable artist, it is futile to expect the creation of great art.

Genuine talent is rare in any place, at any time. But in some foreign countries one may find the opportunity to study art; there are film schools where one may learn acting, direction or cinematography. It is possible there to see good films and analyse their language, grammar and style. Unfortunately, Bengal offers no such opportunity. There is no place where one may study cinema. In spite of that, one cannot help being proud of the success of Bengali films, the standard of acting and the expertise of their crew. I doubt whether, under similar circumstances, any other country would have achieved so much.



Jaswinder Singh

Barbie (2023), which premiered world-wide as a children’s fantasy movie, has apparently been received by the multitude of film critics as a feminist and revolutionary work that challenges the marginalization of women in a patriarchal society. However, I disagree with this view because I think the film actually reinforces the idea that male dominance is natural and inevitable. In this essay, I will explain why I think the Barbie movie is not a feminist work, but rather a conservative one. Moreover, the film’s trailer seems to appeal only to children, but that is perhaps misleading.

The film contrasts two realms: the fictional Barbie Land and the human world. Whereas, the formal symbolizes the *idealized* reality, the later represents the *actual* reality. However, both worlds penetrate each other.

To begin the analysis, we will first summarize the main events of the film. In the opening scenes we see a Barbie Land (symbolizing matriarchy), a world of beauty and joy, where Barbies (representing women) enjoy their lives with their friends, possessions, and activities. They have a diverse and inclusive society, where Barbies possesses all kinds of jobs from a doctor to a lawyer and to a president. Whereas in real world men seems to dominate the world in Barbie Land Barbies are independent and empowered and do not depend on Kens (representing men) for any means.

There is one protagonist Barbie among them who repeatedly refers to herself as ‘Stereotype Barbie’. She is one of the happiest Barbie. But one day, a sudden thought of death triggers some introspections in her mind. Later, she realizes that she has been malfunctioning. So, she goes to the see the Weird Barbie for a solution. Weird Barbie shows her two ways, from which she can choose only one. This scene resembles with the same scene shown in the *Matrix* (1999) where Morpheus offers two pills to Neo. One to escape or one to accept the illusion. However, neither Neo nor Barbie had any real choice. Their freedom has already been determined in the former by Matrix and in the later by Mattel (company who manufactures Barbie dolls).

The story continues with Barbie travelling to the real world to find a solution for her dilemma. On her journey one of Kens’ character secretly accompanies her. As they arrive in the real world, they draw the attention of public and some of the men starts commenting on them. Barbie says to them that she does not have genitals at all because she believes that in Barbie land (*ideal* real) the superiority of males over females is not because of their sex. However, Ken resists this view.

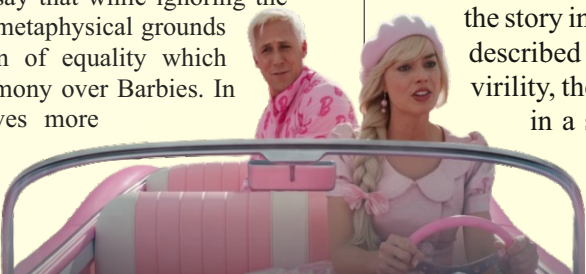
The film portrays Ken as a victim of Barbie’s oppression who must retain his patriarchal authority over her. Some of the instances employ the horse as a symbol of men’s (hyper)masculine power. But Ken had no prior knowledge about patriarchy until he enters the real world. In real world he finds women respecting and

obeying men. These expressions leads him to think the fundament question about ‘who’ he really is? Other Kens also get the historical knowledge of patriarchy from him when he returns to Barbie Land. In response they overthrow the existing rule of Barbies at Barbie Land. This scene can be seen as a reference to Plato’s allegory of the cave, which suggests that one must escape the cave (of illusions) to see the truth. For Kens, the cave is Barbie Land, where they are trapped by false consciousness. The escape of one of the Kens’ from Barbie Land reveals to all other Kens the fact how they had been dominated by Barbies for a long time. Through this scene, the film presumably shows how, in the real world, the patriarchy has been oppressed by feminist discourse. This can be viewed as the ideological stance of this movie, where it revitalizes the role of Kens in Barbie Land symbolizing the role of the men in the real world.

In the climax scenes, Barbie, learns that she has no value in the real world; however, she thought of herself as a superior doll in the fantasy worlds of many Children. She also realizes that she is only an imagination and does not exist for anyone in reality. After this, she returns to her world with two humans Gloria and her daughter Sasha. In Barbie Land she gets to know immediately that Kens have been ruling her world in her absence and all Barbies are now serving the Kens. After this realization Barbie puts herself in despair. She thinks of herself to be lost both in the real world as well as in the unreal or imaginative or idealistic world.

To resolve the tension between both Kens and Barbies, Gloria stands up in front of the oppressed Barbies and speaks with courage and conviction. She reminds them of their dignity and freedom and urges them to resist and reclaim what was rightfully theirs. This critique of ideology inadvertently adopts a biased stance. If we examine her speech, we see it as an ideological instruction to all Barbies and by extension to all women in the real world. Her discourse tells them to be moderate. Such as to practice her freedom, she needs not to be radical. She should not compete with a man to prove herself. Thus, she does not need to be forceful but to be true to herself. Her behaviour towards man should be that of equality. This discourse given by Gloria (a women of the real world) to Barbies (dolls representing women) perhaps justifies why a woman should play the role provided to her by the society?

However, we can argue that by invoking the metaphysical ideals of equality and solidarity, these proclamations ignore the ontological anguish of Barbies and, by extension, of women in the real world. To elaborate, we can say that while ignoring the existential pain of Barbies on the metaphysical grounds Kens’ ask for an abstract notion of equality which consequently construct their hegemony over Barbies. In this way Kens project themselves more ethical (on metaphysical grounds) and their act of domination over Barbies becomes natural that the film subtly conveys.





Excerpt from :
Non-things: Upheaval in the Lifeworld

Byung-Chul Han (South Korean Philosopher)

An analogue photo is a *thing*. We take great care to keep it safe, as we do with all things close to our heart. Because of its material nature, it is fragile and exposed to the processes of ageing and decay. It is born and dies: ‘like a living organism, it is born on the level of the sprouting silver grains, it flourishes a moment, then ages... Attacked by light, by humidity, it fades, weakens, vanishes.’ Analogue photography also embodies the transience of the referent. The photographed object inexorably recedes into the past. Photography *mourns*.

The drama of death and resurrection rules over Barthes's theory of photography, which can be read as a paean to analogue photography. As a fragile thing, a photograph is destined to die, but at the same time photography is a medium of resurrection. It captures the rays of light coming from its referent and preserves them on silver grains. It does not just bring back memories of the dead. By letting them come *alive* again, it also makes possible an *experience of presence*. Photography is an ‘ectoplasm’, a magic ‘emanation of *past reality*’, a mysterious alchemy of immortality: ‘the loved body is immortalized by the mediation of a precious metal, silver (monument and luxury); to which we might add the notion that this metal, like all the metals of Alchemy, is alive’. Photography is the umbilical cord that connects the beholder to the loved body beyond its death. It achieves the loved body’s resurrection and saves it from death. Thus, photography ‘has something to do with resurrection’.

Barthes's *Camera Lucida* is the result of a profound work of mourning. The author invokes, with great intensity, his dead mother. Of a photograph of his mother that is not reproduced in the book (*it is conspicuous by its absence*), he writes: ‘Hence the Winter Garden Photograph, however pale, is for me the treasury of rays which emanated from my mother as a child, from her hair, her skin, her dress, her gaze, *on that day*. Barthes capitalizes ‘Photograph’, as if it were a formula for redemption, even a code word for resurrection.

The experience of the fragility of human life, which is intensified by photography, creates a need for redemption. Agamben thus also links photography to the idea of resurrection, calling photography a ‘prophecy of the glorious body’. The subject of a photograph emits a ‘mute address’, a ‘demand for redemption’:

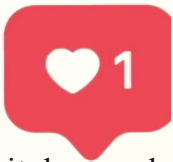
“the subject shown in the photo demands something of us.... Even if the person photographed is completely forgotten today, even if his or her name has been erased forever from human memory or, indeed, precisely because of this that person and that face demand their name; they demand not to be forgotten.”

The *angel of photography* continually renews the promise of resurrection. It is the angel of recollection and redemption. It lifts us above the fragility of life.

Analogue photography transfers the traces of light coming from the object, via the negative, on to paper. The analogue photograph is an *image of light*. The light is reborn in the darkroom: the darkroom is in fact a *bright room*. The digital medium, by contrast, transforms the rays of light into data, that is, into numeric relations. Data is *without light*. It is neither *bright nor dark*. Data interrupts the *light* of life. The digital medium interrupts the magic relation in which the object is connected to photography via the light. An ‘analogue’ is something that is similar. Chemistry is an analogue of light. The rays of light coming from an object are preserved in silver grains. There is, by contrast, no similarity between light and numbers. The digital medium *translates* light into data. In this process, the light is lost. In digital photography, alchemy gives way to mathematics. It disenchant's photography.

Analogue photography is a ‘certificate of presence’.

Selfies



It testifies to the ‘That-has-been’. It is in *love with reality*:

“The only thing that interests me about a photograph is the fact that it shows something that exists, that I see in it no more and no less than *so this actually exists!*”. If the ‘That-has-been’ is the truth of photography, digital photography is *pure illusion*. Digital photography is *not an emanation but an elimination of the referent*. Digital photography does not have an intense, libidinal attachment to the object. It does not immerse itself in the object, does not fall in love with it. It does not *call upon* it, does not enter into a *dialogue* with it. It is not based on a singular, unique, irrevocable encounter with the object. The seeing itself is delegated to the apparatus. The possibilities of digital post-processing weaken the connection with the referent. They make it impossible to abandon *oneself to reality*. Decoupled from the referent, the photograph becomes self-referential. Artificial intelligence generates a new, expanded reality that does not exist, a hyper-reality that no longer corresponds to reality, to a real referent. Digital photography is hyper-real.

As a medium of recollection, analogue photography tells a story, a destiny. It is surrounded by a *novel-like* horizon:

“The date belongs to the



Credit: Axel Fabry

photograph... because it makes me lift my head, allows me to compute life, death, the inexorable extinction of the generations: it is *possible* that Ernest, a schoolboy photographed in 1931 by Kertész, is still alive today (but where? how? What a novel!).”

Digital photography is not *novel-like* but episodic. Smartphones create a kind of photography with an altogether different temporality, one without temporal depth, without novel-like breadth, a photograph without destiny or recollection, that is, an *instantaneous photography*.

Walter Benjamin pointed out that, in photography, exhibition value increasingly pushes aside cult value. Cult value, however, does not withdraw without offering some resistance. The ‘human countenance’ is its last ‘entrenchment’. Thus, the portrait is at the centre of early photography. Cult value lives on in the ‘cult of remembrance of dead or absent loved ones’. The ‘fleeting expression of a human face’ creates the aura that gives photography its ‘melancholic and incomparable beauty’.

The human countenance is today again conquering photography--in the form of the selfie. The selfie turns the countenance into a *face*, which is

then exhibited on digital platforms such as Facebook.

Unlike the analogue portrait, the selfie is bursting at the seams with exhibition value. Cult value disappears altogether. A selfie is an exhibited face without aura. It lacks ‘melancholic’ beauty. It is characterized by *digital cheerfulness*.

The essence of the selfie is not exhausted by narcissism alone. What is novel about the selfie concerns its *status of being*. A selfie is not a *thing*; it is *information*, a *non-thing*. Non-things supplant things: this is also true of photography. The smartphone makes *photographic things* disappear. The validity of selfies, as information, is limited to digital communication. Along with photographic things, recollection, destiny and history are also disappearing.

Barthes's photograph of his mother is a thing, even a thing close to his heart. It is a pure expression of her as a person. She *is* the mother. On this photograph, the mother is present *as a thing*. The photograph *embodies* her presence. As a thing close to the heart, the photograph remains outside of communication. Exhibition would destroy it. That is the exact reason why Barthes does not reproduce the photograph in his book, despite incessantly talking

other sorts of photos that people take with smartphones are treated like information. They no longer have anything thing-like about them. Their status of being differs fundamentally from that of analogue photographs. The analogue photograph is more a monument than a snapshot.

Snapchat represents the culmination of *instantaneous digital communication*. It embodies the time of the digital in its purest form. *The moment is all that counts*. A Snapchat ‘story’ is not a story in the proper sense. It is not narrative but additive--no more than a list of snapshots. Digital time disintegrates into a mere sequence of point-like presences. It has no *narrative continuity*. It thus transforms life itself into something fleeting. Digital objects do not permit any *lingering*. In this way, they differ from things.

Selfies are characterized by playfulness, and digital communication generally has something playful about it. Communication becomes a playground for *phono sapiens*. *Phono sapiens* is more *homo ludens* than *homo faber*. Visual communication through digital photography is far better suited to playing and acting than is written communication.

As selfies are primarily messages, they have a tendency to be over-expressive. Extreme postures are common. There are no mute selfies. Analogue portraits, by contrast, are usually *quiet*. They do not demand one’s attention. This *quietness* is precisely what gives them their expressive force. Selfies are loud, but poor in genuine expression. Because of the exaggerated postures affected, the subjects look like masks. The fact that visual digital communication has taken hold of the human face is not without consequence. The face has taken on the *form of a commodity*. As Benjamin would say, the face has irrevocably lost its *aura*.

Analogue portraits are a kind of *still life*. They are meant to express the *person* they depict. When we are in front of a camera, we are therefore very eager to make sure that the picture corresponds to us. We want the picture to approximate our inner picture of ourselves, so we feel our way towards this inner picture. We pause. We turn inwards. For this reason, analogue portraits often have an air of seriousness. The postures adopted are restrained. Selfies, by contrast, do not testify to the person. The use of standardized facial expressions, such as ‘duckface’, precludes any attempt at personal expression. With tongue stretched out and one eye closed, each of us looks the same. We *play to the gallery*, that is, we *stage* ourselves in different postures and roles.

The selfie announces the disappearance of the kind of human being who is burdened by destiny and history. It expresses a form of life that devotes itself playfully to the moment. *Selfies do not mourn*. Death and transience are fundamentally alien to the selfie. *Funeral selfies*-- I am thinking of those selfies taken at funerals in which people smile happily at the camera, next to a coffin -- reflect an absence of mourning. A grinning *I am* is projected at death. This we might call the digital *work of mourning*.

Haiku

“There in midnight water,
waveless, windless
The old boat’s swamped
with moonlight.”

- Dogen

Why Sport is a Spiritual Experience - And Failure Can Help



Richard Hutch

Author of
Sport As a Spiritual Practice: Mastery, Failure, and Transcendence In The Life Of Athletes (2010)



space into “sacred” moments and places. Such regular and repeated experiences lift athletes and fans alike beyond everyday concerns.

Clearly, most team sports elicit a sanctity between the players and their fans. However, there is more to connect sport and religion than transcending daily life. If we focus less on team sports and more on sport as an individual challenge, personal faith appears on the horizon. Sport is a call to spiritual adventure.

Thousands of the faithful will flock to the Australian leg of the Moto Grand Prix on Phillip Island tomorrow (October 20, 2016), for three days of high-octane racing. The outcome of the overall Grand Prix was essentially decided last Sunday, when Spaniard Marx Marquez won the Japanese Grand Prix with a decisive 77 points. Yet the fans will gather to cheer on their favourites and watch some world-class racing.

Motorbike riders, like the sprinter and the cross-country runner, the lone mountain climber and the hang glider, are individual athletes. They are not caught up in the collective excitement of team sports that mimic the pomp and ceremony of high religious rites.

The individual faces the possibility of success or failure alone, usually deep within the self.

Will I increase my personal best time, runners may ask. If I eventually make it to the top of the mountain, will I be able to return to base camp safely, a climber wonders.

In effect, an athlete puts his or her life on the line, at least as a rehearsal of victory and personal renewal and its polar opposite, namely, physical and emotional failure. These represent variations on the all-encompassing theme of human existence writ large: to live and be reborn whilst hurtling inexorably toward death.

One motorbike rider has spoken of his sport as a “dance” that fuses together time and space:

the attraction of riding comes from achieving total presence on the bike. At these moments, the past only contains the last few curves, the future exists just as far ahead as I can see, and the present consists of me, the motorcycle and the road.

Sometimes sports people confront death in a literal sense. Base jumper Omer Mei-Dan leaps from fixed structures like tall buildings, with only seconds to safely open his parachute.

He said in an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, *I like being afraid, I like the fear, I enjoy it ... In BASE jumping, every small thing dictates life or death. It makes me feel vibrant.* Knowing when to rejoice is one thing, but wisely knowing when to give up trying is another. Such is the journey of faith, the grist of a human spiritual life. Being Buddhist, Christian, Muslim or any other kind of religious practitioner is, from this point of view, somewhat beside the point.

Athletes move toward their own spiritual confession without the usual trappings associated with traditional religions or religious practice. This kind of faith, based on vitalising experiences of spirituality, is thoroughly secular. Despite Mei-Dan’s close brushes with death, he does not appeal to a higher power:

No prayers will come out of this mouth ... I’m more atheist than anything else.

Sport can increase spiritual awareness in so far as athletes embrace the tension between renewal and failure from moment to moment, which makes sport a ritual activity. Rituals are highly significant for both athletes and fans. Valentino Rossi, one of the most successful motorcycle racers of all time, famously starts every race by kneeling beside his bike and “talking” to her.

But rituals are not only about personal ceremonies. Risk-taking deepens and intensifies the experience, creating a ritual encounter with the power of life and death at each “bend” of bike and rider into the turns of the course. Record-breaking performances and “personal bests” are one thing. However, in times of heightened awareness – what’s called being “in the zone” – spiritual insight is possible, a transcendent perspective on life itself.

Great religious leaders have shown us how to address the tension between renewal and failure in all experience, especially when personal stakes are high:

Jesus “played the game” of reckoning with mortality and went to his cross a failure. However, the cross itself has become a source of Christian renewal or resurrection.

The Buddha also struggled to come to grips with his failure to find contentment and happiness. Only when he gave up his quest for these things and embraced suffering as the intractable nature of existence did he, paradoxically, find spiritual renewal in enlightenment, or nirvana.

And Muhammad was at first anguished by self-doubt and poor self-esteem, feeling like a failure in life. However, he then accepted himself as he was and, again by a paradox, found spiritual renewal when he fully submitted his life selflessly to his god, Allah.

Ritual, coming to terms with failure and suffering, and facing one’s own mortality create faith and transcendent experiences. Religion does not have a monopoly on these experiences – under the right circumstances, sport can become a powerful secular spiritual practice.

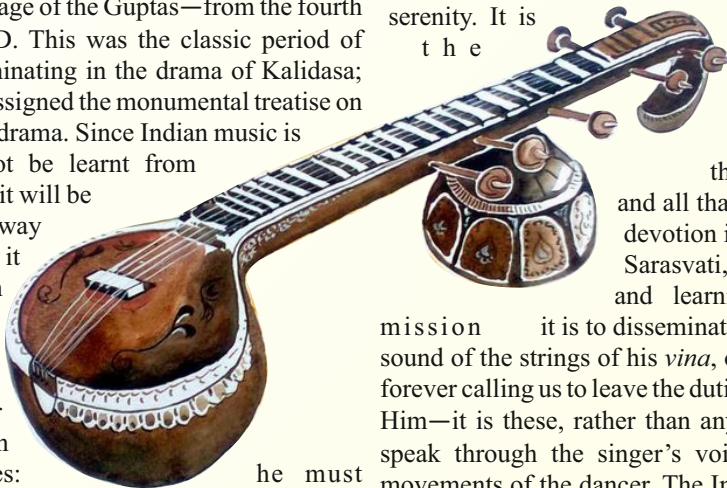
Music



Excerpt from :
The Wisdom of Ananda Coomaraswamy: Reflections on Indian Art, Life, and Religion

Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877 - 1947 AD)

Music has been a cultivated art in India for at least three thousand years. The chant is an essential element of Vedic ritual; and the references in later Vedic literature, the scriptures of Buddhism, and the Brahmanical epics show that it was already highly developed as a secular art in centuries preceding the beginning of the Christian era. Its zenith may perhaps be assigned to the Imperial age of the Guptas—from the fourth to the sixth century A.D. This was the classic period of Sanskrit literature, culminating in the drama of Kalidasa; and to the same time is assigned the monumental treatise on the theory of music and drama. Since Indian music is not written, and cannot be learnt from books, except in theory, it will be understood that the only way for a foreigner to learn it must be to establish between himself and his Indian teachers that special relationship of disciple and master which belongs to Indian education in all its phases: he must enter into the inner spirit and must adopt many of the outer conventions of Indian life, and his study must continue until he can improvise the songs under Indian conditions and to the satisfaction of Indian professional listeners. He must possess not only the imagination of an artist, but also a vivid memory and an ear sensitive to microtonal inflections. India has, besides the *tambura*, many solo instruments. By far the most important of these is the *vina*. This classic instrument, which ranks with the violin of Europe and the koto of Japan, and second only to the voice in sensitive response, differs chiefly from the *tambura* in having frets, the notes being made with the left



hand and the strings plucked with the right. The delicate nuances of microtonal grace are obtained by deflection of the strings, whole passages being played in this manner solely be a lateral movement of the left hand, without a fresh plucking. While the only difficulty in playing the *tambura* is to maintain an even rhythm independently of the song, the *vina* presents all the difficulties of technique that can be imagined, and it is said that at least twelve years are required to attain proficiency.

The *vina* is the classic solo instrument of Hindu culture, carried always by Sarasvati, goddess of learning and science, and by the *rishi* Narada and by various *raginis*. This Indian music is essentially impersonal; it reflects an emotion and an experience which are deeper and wider and older than the emotion or wisdom of any single individual. Its sorrow is without tears, its joy without exultation, and it is passionate without any loss of serenity. It is in the deepest sense of words all-human. But when the Indian prophet speaks of inspiration, it is to say that the *Vedas* are eternal, and all that the poet achieves by his devotion is to hear, to see: it is then Sarasvati, the goddess of speech and learning, or Narada, whose mission it is to disseminate occult knowledge in the sound of the strings of his *vina*, or Krishna, whose flute is forever calling us to leave the duties of the world and follow Him—it is these, rather than any human individual, who speak through the singer’s voice, and are seen in the movements of the dancer. The Indian singer is a poet, and the poet a singer. The dominant subject matter of the songs is human or divine love in all its aspects, or the direct praise of God, and the words are always sincere and passionate. The more essentially the singer is a musician, however, the more the words are regarded merely as the vehicle of the music: in art-song the words are always brief, voicing a mood rather than telling any story, and they are used to support the music with little regard to their own logic—precisely as the representative element in a modern painting merely serves as the basis for an organization of pure form or color.

death was standing there. Slowly, little by little, I lifted the cloth, until a small, small light escaped from under it to fall upon— to fall upon that vulture eye! It was open — wide, wide open, and my anger increased as it looked straight at me. I could not see the old man’s face. Only that eye, that hard blue eye, and the blood in my body became like ice.

Have I not told you that my hearing had become unusually strong? Now I could hear a quick, low, soft sound, like the sound of a clock heard through a wall. It was the beating of the old man’s heart. I tried to stand quietly. But the sound grew louder. The old man’s fear must have been great indeed. And as the sound grew louder my anger became greater and more painful. But it was more than anger. In the quiet night, in the dark silence of the bedroom my anger became fear — for the heart was beating so loudly that I was sure some one must hear. The time had come! I rushed into the room, crying, “Die! Die!” The old man gave a loud cry of fear as I fell upon him and held the bedcovers tightly over his head. Still his heart was beating; but I smiled as I felt that success was near. For many minutes that heart continued to beat; but at last the beating stopped. The old man was dead. I took away the bedcovers and held my ear over his heart. There was no sound. Yes. He was dead! Dead as a stone. His eye would trouble me no more!

So I am mad, you say? You should have seen how careful I was to put the body where no one could find it. First I cut off the head, then the arms and the legs. I was careful not to let a single drop of blood fall on the floor. I pulled up three of the boards that formed the floor, and put the pieces of the body there. Then I put the boards down again, carefully, so carefully that no human eye could see that they had been moved.

As I finished this work I heard that someone was at the door. It was now four o’clock in the morning, but still dark. I had no fear, however, as I went down to

open the door. Three men were at the door, three officers of the police. One of the neighbours had heard the old man’s cry and had called the police; these three had come to ask questions and to search the house.

I asked the policemen to come in. The cry, I said, was my own, in a dream. The old man, I said, was away; he had gone to visit a friend in the country. I took them through the whole house, telling them to search it all, to search well. I led them finally into the old man’s bed- room. As if playing a game with them I asked them to sit down and talk for a while.

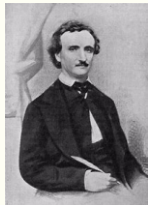
My easy, quiet manner made the policemen believe my story. So they sat talking with me in a friendly way. But although I answered them in the same way, I soon wished that they would go. My head hurt and there was a strange sound in my ears. I talked more, and faster. The sound became clearer. And still they sat and talked.

Suddenly I knew that the sound was not in my ears, it was not just inside my head. At that moment I must have become quite white. I talked still faster and louder. And the sound, too, became louder. It was a quick, low, soft sound, like the sound of a clock heard through a wall, a sound I knew well. Louder it became, and louder. Why did the men not go? Louder, louder. I stood up and walked quickly around the room. I pushed my chair across the floor to make more noise, to cover that terrible sound. I talked even louder. And still the men sat and talked, and smiled. Was it possible that they could not hear??

No! They heard! I was certain of it. They knew! Now it was they who were playing a game with me. I was suffering more than I could bear, from their smiles, and from that sound. Louder, louder, louder! Suddenly I could bear it no longer. I pointed at the boards and cried, “Yes! Yes, I killed him. Pull up the boards and you shall see! I killed him. But why does his heart not stop beating?! Why does it not stop!?”



The Tell - Tale Heart



Excerpt from :
Edgar Allan Poe:Storyteller

Edgar Allan Poe (1809 - 1849 AD)

It’s true! yes, I have been ill,very ill. But why do you say that I have lost control of my mind, why do you say that I am mad? Can you not see that I have full control of my mind? Is it not clear that I am not mad? Indeed, the illness only made my mind, my feelings, my senses stronger, more powerful. My sense of hearing especially became more powerful. I could hear sounds I had never heard before. I heard sounds from heaven; and I heard sounds from hell!

Listen! Listen, and I will tell you how it happened. You will see, you will hear how healthy my mind is. It is impossible to say how the idea first entered my head. There was no reason for what I did. I did not hate the old man; I even loved him. He had never hurt me. I did not want his money. I think it was his eye. His eye was like the eye of a vulture, the eye of one of those terrible birds that watch and wait while an animal dies, and then fall upon the dead body and pull it to pieces to eat it. When the old man looked at me with his vulture eye a cold feeling went up and down my back; even my blood became cold. And so, I finally decided I had to kill the old man and close that eye forever!

So you think that I am mad? A madman cannot plan. But you should have seen me. During all of that week I was as friendly to the old man as I could be, and warm, and loving

Every night about twelve o’clock I slowly opened his door. And when the door was opened wide enough I put my hand in, and then my head. In my hand I held a light covered over with a cloth so that no light showed. And I stood there quietly. Then, carefully, I lifted the cloth, just a little, so that a single, thin, small light fell across that eye. For seven nights I did this, seven long nights, every night at midnight. Always the eye was closed, so it was impossible for me to do the work. For it was not the old man I felt I had to kill; it was the eye, his Evil Eye.

And every morning I went to his room, and with a warm, friendly voice I asked him how he had slept. He could not guess that every night, just at twelve, I looked in at him as he slept.

The eighth night I was more than usually careful as I opened the door. The hands of a clock move more quickly than did my hand. Never before had I felt so strongly my own power; I was now sure of success.

The old man was lying there not dreaming that I was at his door. Suddenly he moved in his bed. You may think I became afraid. But no. The darkness in his room was thick and black. I knew he could not see the opening of the door. I continued to push the door, slowly, softly. I put in my head. I put in my hand, with the covered light. Suddenly the old man sat straight up in bed and cried, “Who’s there?!”

I stood quite still. For a whole hour I did not move. Nor did I hear him again lie down in his bed. He just sat there, listening. Then I heard a sound, a low cry of fear which escaped from the old man. Now I knew that he was sitting up in his bed, filled with fear; I knew that he knew that I was there. He did not see me there. He could not hear me there. He felt me there. Now he knew that



Amandeep Singh

White man of East

For long you softly treaded the path ahead
And then paved the way for many to conquest
You gave a song to countless uncouth rhymes
Cheering the gloomy souls of slogging toils

In your deep eyes of faith
Rests a vision of a road ahead
And men marched in pure silence
Searching earth and heaven for a yondering lull

As you hold many hands and teach many fingers
Writing with a mighty pen on canvas of time
A hundred tales of unhonored dead
Were born again with a single touch

Discovering new meanings, from the heaps of grave
This grand entrance into the door of time
You welcomed a true culture of soul
Getting full reading in the being of pure

You taught the world a sense of moderation
And to rely more on sense of reason
Instilling a deep trust of adventure
This great episode of self-wonder

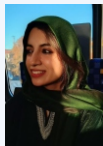
The age has come of its age
As the soul stives for a vacuum of space
As reason is losing its mighty sense
Blood is turning pale, watering its thick content.

A fresh breath, a pure color
The ocean strives for depth, a silence of its freshest rest.
A touch of sky that lifts the ocean
The autonomy now yearns for its submission

Maryada, they call in East
Holds the brimming life without spilling essence
This new morning, as always bright
Fills my sky in a thousand light.

This inexhaustible expanse of reason
and a never-ending calculation.
Craves a recluse in lap of religion
Fetches a timeless sense of self

A seed is born as a petals is shed
This is the law of creation and a dream eternal
For creating a new universe, a new sun and new dawn
For life is both spoken and remains unsaid
This self of east in the form of west.
Awaits a swan from the Sarovar of blessed.



Tabis Nabi

My friend's old home

I'm writing this narrative after seven years of the event,
and this is when I first fell upon her room.

Once trudging along Jhelum,
she spoke of her home and grandmother,
She said they are old,
yet they embraced every little creature,
From ants to humans and humans to divine.
All concorded to live, and in oneness.
I, in my head pictured an image of
What is it to live in archives and legacy.
Alas! I was lost into the abyss of thoughts and
the conversation died.

On Jan 20, for the love of old;
for the love of her old pain, I went to see.
her two old windows; and her grandmother
Who had become our 'not present, but present' companions.

The wooden door, that led to these windows
had countless fissures,
Yet I saw it standing rock straight.
It had blue oil paint living in scales and the adamant wood
wanted to live with the same nakedness as oil did.
I reckon both were in continuous war to win over.
Up there the door chain attending quietly to the silent war
perhaps smiled to me, to welcome.
Some doors have spirits, they allow spaces inside them
grow and knock down the shackles.
This door too had an old spirit.
It led to her emancipation,
And it led to my arrival in her world of freedom.
I was welcomed by all of them though.
She'd often speak of the sunshine that would fall on the
mud shelves fixed to windows.

Free Love

MY love must be as free
As is the eagle's wing,
Hovering o'er land and sea
And every thing.
I must not dim my eye
In thy saloon,
I must not leave my sky
And nightly moon.

Be not the fowler's net
Which stays my flight,
And craftily is set
T' allure the sight,

But be the favoring gale
That bears me on,
And still doth fill my sail
When thou art gone.

I cannot leave my sky
For thy caprice,
True love would soar as high
As heaven is.

The eagle would not brook
Her mate thus won,
Who trained his eye to look
Beneath the sun.

~ Henry D. Thoreau

Credit: Rahul Jaiswal

This day, when I happened to be a bystander
To watch the same space,
I felt conscious of its symmetry.
It had a being that could hold sorrows.

She never unveiled, why she'd sit there for hours.
And today I knew the reason.
She loved this corner, and I was Romeo in process.
Because I have this habit to fall for sorrows.

Incomprehensible,
however the shelf lived a surreal being in her presence.
She sat on the shelf facing the window,
How could sun spare her, she was unconsumed of sin
It slit her left brow into two halves,
leaving a tip of it dipped in the darkness.
I could never tell her, of how grace- laden,
her pale face looked.

What do I remember now
is the simple moment of past,
I do not know whether I was searching for something
Or trying to get away from it all.



Komalpreet Singh

Sometimes

Sometimes I feel a strong connection
Between us
Sometimes it feels like there is nothing
Waving ... is it?

But something not of me
But of life
Of oceans of infinitude

Sometimes I feel you in me
And often I feel an absence of myself

Who made me empty?
No-thing!
Some-thing
In-comprehensible

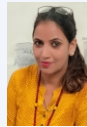
Just like feelings
From which words afraid
Misinterpret them

And there is
Barren
Me
Lost
Sometimes
Somewhere
Always

Finds you in midst of this...
And lost again
Unable to hold the very moment

Regrets remain
Sometimes hold me
Sometimes left me in storm
Storm of emotions
Chaotic

Mind
Uncentered
Lies in all directions
Sometimes... No-mind... No-me... No-thing!
Often... chaos...



Jaswinder Sirat

The Day

Punjabi to English translation: Ambrish

The day
Limp & slimy
Like canned fruit
Is passing on

Ensconced in the silence
Of white-washed walls
I watch the odorless fruit
Slowly change color
Like a chameleon

Cutting open the can
The sharp tin
Cut my fingertip
A bit

Now
The color of the fruit is red.
Was it a sign
To put on hold
My contrived smile?

How silent the world
around the rotating cutter!
How far away
From syrup!

Only
A miscellany
of creepy-crawlies!

The Earth

Bit of Ice

A weeny bit of
Melting ice
Floats in the tumbler

By the bank of the canal
Descends a sad evening
Through the drying fluidity

A ghost adorns a man's apparel
Runs for miles
For the X-ray of his feet

The sand grains float
Till water's demise

Water looks for ice
For it's own annihilation

I close my eyes –
Death is taking shape
The pyramids are crumbling

The tumbler on the table
Is now empty

The bird has flown away



Visalam

Anatomy

Thoughts inside a cranial vault,
Feelings behind a ribcage
How could you be at fault
If all you feel is a burning rage?

The world's weight on your shoulders,
Like Sisyphus, forever rolling a boulder
Powering through pain and disease
Avoiding the last straw
That'd bring you to your knees

It's the voices in your head,
Not the ones your ears hear
That have you mislead
And magnify your fears

It's not all dark,
It's not all lies
Set out and seek the truth
With your own two eyes

As you try to find your feet,
On your way, you'll meet some ifs and buts
Remember, you know what you're made of
You know it...
You know it in your bones...
You know it in your gut.

