

19. Colour on canvas

THERE is only one God and He is Omnipresent. True, But to concentrate on the Omnipresent, some fixed point or preliminary form is needed. And to conceive of the Divine as present everywhere at all times, the mind of man is to be clarified and purified by means of certain psychological processes called *saadhanas* (spiritual efforts). This is the reason why not only among the followers of Hinduism but also among Christians and Buddhists, regular rituals are prescribed for the worship of idols of God. Cynics question the validity of this type of adoration and say that will only confirm faith in a superstition. "Can God be a stone or a piece of paper?" they ask. This attitude is not correct. By adhering to the traditionally laid down ritual worship, many aspirants have attained the vision of the Omnipresent and stayed in that Incommunicable Bliss.

In fact, *puuja* (formal worship, at regular hours, with the recitation of hymns and songs) is the very first step in the spiritual pilgrimage. Many seekers have undoubtedly achieved an awareness of God by years of asceticism among jungle caves. But, starting early with *puuja* and continuing with scrupulous care, the rites of *archana*, *bhajana* and *aaradhana* (offering of flowers with repetition of God's Name, singing His glory and adoring Him as a living presence) are more fruitful and satisfying.

We realise that God is in the icon also

Meerabai, Sakkubai,-Suurdhaas, Kabeerdaas, Shankaraachaarya and many other saints and realised souls have proved in their lives that the time, attention and energy spent, in these religious practices is well spent. By *aaradhana* only were they able to visualise the Divine in the specific form which they used as the instrument.

The entire English literature is made up of permutations and combinations of the 26 letters of the alphabet. *Puuja* (ritual worship), *japa* (recitation of holy Names), *archana* (offering of flowers with God's Names) and *aaradhana* (Divine service) are the letters of the spiritual alphabet. The collection of the various items necessary for worship (lamps, camphor, flowers, plates, cups, a bell and the book) needs hours-long concentration on the Divine. *The puuja* itself may take another hour or two of concentrated and purificatory attention, and the performer rises up after the recitation and-meditation, a stronger and steadier pilgrim on the path.

The Omnipresent is not absent in the icon or the picture. We do not reduce God and shut Him up in a stone image; we affirm and realise that He is in the icon also. We raise the image to the dimensions of the absolute; we expand the picture far beyond its frame and through the processes of *saadhana* we become aware that the picture, too, can be made a tool for the mind to escape from its limitations.

Offer *Puuja* with a purified heart

When the Mahaaraaja of Alwar (in Rajasthan) argued before Swaami Vivekaanandha that God can never be perceived in a picture drawn by an artist, Vivekaanandha called upon the prime minister who was standing reverently by, to get the Mahaaraaja's portrait down from the wall and asked him to spit on it! He said, "You need not hesitate. The Mahaaraaja says that it is just a blotch of colours on a bit of canvas and that it should not be confused with His Majesty."

The sixteen modes of worship laid down in the *Shaasthras* (sciences of spirituality) to make the aspirant aware that he is in the very presence and that every gesture and movement of his has to be motivated by devotion and dedication, ensure the purification of the mind of man from ego and all its brood of blemishes. This is *chiththa suddhi*--the cleansing of all levels of one's consciousness.

The basic *chiththa* (inner consciousness) has to be freed from down-pulling impulses. Of what good is it to cook a rare and costly dish in a vessel contaminated by dirt? Of what good is it to plant a precious seed in rocky soil? *Puuja* or *archana* offered without a purified heart is sheer waste of time. But even a short sincere session of *puuja* spent in Divine Awareness yields much fruit. Thiruththondar, a Thamil saint, confessed that he had engaged himself in worship of the Lord's idol in order to cleanse his mind.

The material and the Form are inseparable, but the seeker must dwell on the Form which he desires to be manifested in all Its Glory, rather than on the material. He must dwell long and deep over the thought that Go is found through every particle in the universe, free from any limitations of space and time.

Great devotees have no identity of their own

Ceaseless effort is necessary to gain and possess *chiththa suddhi*, One has to be ever in *sathsang* (holy company) and in activities devoted to the service of God in all human forms. In the Geetha one can notice Krishna addressing Arjuna as '*Kurunandhana*.' The usual meaning given by scholars to this appellation is, "the scion of the *Kuru* clan," though it has a much more profound lesson to teach mankind. *Kuru*, in Samskrith, means 'do,' and *nandhana* means, 'he who takes delight in.' Hence Krishna, by addressing Arjuna as *Kuru nandhana*, was appreciating the retrans-formation in him from inaction to action, for Arjuna was one who took delight in being active. For most of you Sunday is a holiday, a day in which you delight. But for Arjuna, the day which He could devote to God's work was indeed a 'Holy Day.'

You must have heard the common people in India believe that when the thunder is threatening overhead, the simultaneous recitation of Arjuna's nine names keep a bolt from falling on them. This is proof of the power that not only the Names of God but also those of His devoted adherents---ever pure and ever in contact with the Absolute---have over the elements. That is the reason why *aaraadhana* (worship of the Presence) is offered even to great devotees like Thyagaraja and Kabeer. They have no identity of their own, having become one with the limitless through the worship of the limited.

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It is running after vishaya vaasana---attachment to sense objects---that produces all this discontent. That vaasana, that type of desire, has no end.

Once you become a slave to the senses, they will not leave hold of you until your death. It is an unquenchable thirst. But I call you to Me and even grant worldly boons, so that you may turn Godward.

No Avathaara has done like this before, going among the people, the masses, the millions, and counselling them, guiding them,

consoling them, uplifting them, directing them along the path of Sathya, Dharma, Shaanthy and Prema (truth, Virtue, Peace and Love).

Sri Sathya Sai