

CHAPTER-IX

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Ours has been a modest attempt of following the career of the concept of imagination from Plato, through rationalism to romanticism. The classical rationalism distrusted the imagination and denied it any office to truth. It may be difficult to say if Plato's dialogue *Ion* celebrates the divine power of the poet, *Theia dinamis*, or gives a negative answer to the question, what does poetry tell us? There has been commentators who maintained that *Ion* is aimed not at poetry itself but only at the art of criticism. We must not forget that Shelley translated the *Ion*, and in his *Defence of Poetry*, he echoed the passage from the *Ion*, where it is stated that the poet utters what he does by a divine dispensation. As for the poet the *Phaedrus* contains a strong statement of his dependence on divine madness - in a passage (245) which may be looked on as reversing the opinion expressed in the *Ion*. But it is possible to point out places in the dialogues of Plato where he seems to treat poetic inspiration very respectfully. In the *Meno* (98-99), for instance, a useful kind of "right opinion" (rather than "knowledge") is conceded to "all poetic persons". and in the *Phaedrus*, although poets rank only sixth in a hierarchy of the elite (248), there is more than one hint that a philosopher is the better for a dash of madness. It is not too easy a job to try to harmonize all the statements in the dialogues of Plato.

We have considered *in extenso* Plato's mistrust of poetry expressed in the simplest and most practical terms in the passage on the "musical" education of the Guardians in Books II and III of the *Republic*. Here, and again, in Book X of the *Republic*, in a more metaphysical context we encounter his well-known objection to the moral effects of poetry. Poetry feeds and waters the passions, creating division and unsteadiness in the heart, or frivolous laughter, and producing the opposite of civic virtue. A passage of similar tenor in the *Laws* speaks of an ideal, civic minded poet, a safe one for composing patriotic songs. Plato speaks in the *Republic* (X, 607) that there is an ancient

quarrel between philosophy and poetry. The quarrel between the poet and the philosopher is the deep end of the quarrel between the poet and the moralist.

Mimesis is the centre of Plato's poetics. Certain poems, he observes in Book III, simply tell what happened, others actually imitate what happened - dramas, of course - and there are the most dangerous ones, because the most contagious. a man who is to play a serious part in life cannot afford to imitate any other kind of part. In any case the concept of imitation is markedly pejorative, and it is applied to poetry as if it were inseparable. All poetical imitations are inimical to the understanding. The tragic poet, Plato tells us, "is an imitator, and therefore, he is twice removed from the king and the truth". (*Republic*, 596-7).

Behind all these judgments there are Plato's epistemological views, expressed in terms of allegories. One is the allegory in Book VII of the cinematic cave in which men sitting on a bench with their backs to an opening and a great fire beyond, see only the shadows of a sort of passing puppet show cast on the wall before them. Such is our own experience of what we think of reality. The other passage is the more technically instructive figure of the "line", in Book VI, with its four ascending phases of knowledge. The lowest *eikasia*, or sensory imaging of the surface of things and their shadows, the second, *pistis* (faith), a kind of truthful apprehension of the solid yet mutable things of over world; the third, on the upper side of a major central division, *dianoia*, discursive understanding of mathematical or geometrical figures; and at the top, *noesis*, intuitive and true knowledge of permanent beings, the forms or ideas (*eide*). Both *dianoia* and *noesis* come under the generic head of *episteme* (knowledge), what Socrates found wanting in such poets as Homer. Both *eikasia* (the awareness of images, *eikones*) and *pistis* come under the generic head of *doxa* (mere opinion) and both refer to the world of becoming.

And yet there is Plato the doctrine of *ananmesis*, a Wordsworthian other worldly recollection, which explains how we come to be possessed

at all of ideas more perfect than the things of our worldly experience. As for beautiful things, they are indeed beautiful "by reason of beauty", that is, by participating in the beautiful. Such is the line of thinking in the three dialogues, the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. Beauty is named as one among the perfections. However the discourse is ascetic rather than aesthetic. An honest reading of these and other passages in Plato can scarcely blink the fact that the imagination is all through profaned. The better part of the soul, Plato says in *Republic* (143b) trusts to measure and calculation. This side of Plato's theory is hyper-intellectual and even frigid, and hardly relevant to the nature of literature. But in the later dialogue, the *Philippus* there is a passage (51') which may be considered as a charter from antiquity for the theory of significant form in visual arts. Whatever may be said on the debit side, it must be admitted on the credit side that Plato has confronted the very difficult problem of the relation between formalism and illusionism in art, and in line with the austerity and subtlety of his mathematical view of reality, has expressed his mistrust of the realistic trends of his day and has cast a perennially influential vote in favour of some kind of visual formalism. If this part of his theorizing does not go far in telling us about the nature of poetry, at least it offers a prototype for theories of "stylization" or "detachment".

The German story about the imagination was different from the Greek. Kant's account of *judgment* was a decisive statement in the history of modern general aesthetics and at once exerted a strong influence upon literary aesthetics. On the one side, Kant had mapped the world of necessary physical events: conditioned by time and space, the spectacles of our sensory intuition, unified by imagination, ordered according to the categories of scientific understanding. On the other side, the free moral world of our choices, according to the categorical imperative. And then, after a while, the mediational concept of the aesthetic values, the beautiful and the sublime, both subjective. The beautiful was something higher than accidental and private of sense pleasure, had a universal claim on human recognition, and was a norm though not strictly definable, it was "without concept". It was a form of order with which nature was favoured by our own act of knowing, though

we looked on it, as something out there, in nature. Coleridge made this point in his "On Dejection". It was a "purposiveness without purpose". Our satisfaction in the presence of the beautiful was a feeling of unification, a harmonious interplay of sense and mind, a perfect freedom from scientific and utilitarian necessity. At the same time the beautiful was the symbol of the morally good. Kant asserted the autonomy of the aesthetic, distinguishing it from *pleasure*, from *emotion* and *interest*, and from didactic *knowledge*.

The development of the Kantian thesis went through Schopenhauer. It came to be argued that poetic words are the direct energy of spirit, they do not merely present meaning, they create it. Poetry is an "imitation" not of nature, but of the creating Godhead. The poet is a second creator, *poetes*, maker. And appropriately, Novalis wrote that poetry is a genuine absolute reality". The more poetical, the more true. But the Germans were conscious of their debts to the English. Goethe, in one of his conversations remarked, "Our own literature is chiefly the offspring of theirs". The English romanticism is thus something unique both in terms of expression and achievement.

The English romantics, Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats found in the imagination something of great importance, for each of them, it sustained a deeply considered theory of poetry. For them imagination is fundamental, they think that without it poetry is impossible. It is worth noticing that this belief in the imagination was part of the contemporary belief in the individual self. This emphasis on the imagination was strengthened by considerations both religious and metaphysical. Between John Locke and Newton it was assumed that in perception the mind is wholly passive, a mere recorder of impressions from without, "a lazy looker on an external world". The mechanistic explanation offered by Newton of the world paid scanty respect to the human self, and especially to its more instinctive though not less powerful, convictions. Locke was the target both of Blake and Coleridge. They reject his conception of the Universe and replace it by their own systems in which mind is the central point and governing factor. Because they were poets, they insist that the most vital activity of the mind is the

imagination. It is the very source of spiritual energy. The world of imagination is the world of eternity, says Blake. It is nothing less than God as He operates the human soul. For Coleridge, too, the imagination is of first importance, because it partakes of the creative activity of God.

For the English romantics the imagination stands in some essential relation to truth and reality. It is, they held, a divine faculty concerned with the central issues of being. For them imagination and insight are in fact inseparable. Insight both awakes the imagination to work and is in turn sharpened by it when it is at work. Coleridge had read Kant and Schelling and found in them much to support his views, his conviction that the world of spirit is the only reality. Blake summed up the romantic point of view. "One power alone makes a Poet : Imagination". Keats resembled Blake in his conviction that ultimate reality is to be found only in the imagination. He saw the imagination as a power which both creates and reveals, or rather reveals through creating. The works of the imagination not merely exist in their own right, but has a relation to ultimate reality through the light which they shed on it. How else can we understand his famous Ode on the Greekurn in *Ian* this? Coleridge gave much thought to the imagination and devoted to it some distinguished chapters of his *Biographia Literaria*. Wordsworth agreed with Coleridge in much that he said about the imagination, especially in the distinction between it and fancy. For him the imagination was the most important gift a poet can have. He arranged his own poems, calling them "Poems of the Imagination" as if to show what he meant by the term. The section thus named contains poems in which he united creative power and a special, visionary insight. He agreed with Coleridge that this activity resembles that of God.

There is of course one difference between them. For Wordsworth the imagination must be subservient to the external world, because the world is not dead but living, it has a soul distinct from the soul of man. Nature was the source of his inspiration and he could not deny it an existence at least as powerful as man's. He preferred to give a new dignity to the world and to insist that insight is itself rational. Blake would not have said so, or done that.

Shelley's mind moved in a way unlike that of his fellow Romantics. He was no less attached to the imagination and gave it no less a place in his theory of poetry. He calls poetry "the expression of the Imagination". In his *Defence of Poetry* he controverted the old disparaging view of the imagination by claiming that the poet has a special kind of knowledge. The poet, for Shelley, is also a seer, he "participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one".

What is more worth noticing is that Shelley took Plato's theory of knowledge and applied it to beauty. For him the Ideal Forms are a basis not so much of knowing as of that exalted insight which is ours in the presence of beautiful things. The poet's task is to uncover this absolute real in its visible examples and to interpret them through it. Shelley tried to grasp the whole of things in its essential unity.

Shelley is peculiar for the hold which abstract ideas had on him. Such ideas abound in Wordsworth and may be found in Keats. But Shelley seems first to have formed his ideas and then to have interpreted experience through them. Among the chief springs of his creative activity were ideas, remote and impersonal. But they had for him a peculiarly vivid appeal. He was enough of a philosopher not merely to enjoy ideas for their own sake but to make them a starting-point for bold speculations and wild adventure. Most of his longer poems seem to have been inspired by some great abstract idea which moved him to express it as fully as he could. For him the creations of the mind were perhaps more real than the sensible world.

Keats' special approach to experience was through the imagination. Works of art, seduced Keats from the ordinary life of thought into the extraordinary life of the imagination. "Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought/As doth eternity." The message of Keats' Ode on the Greek urn, a work of art, is that "there is nothing real but the beautiful and nothing beautiful but the real". Keats uses "truth" to mean "reality". "What the Imagination seizes as Beauty", wrote Keats in a letter, "must be truth". Beauty, was for him, a "regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth". This is what Keats said in connexion with his writing of *Endymion*.

All the great romantics agreed on one vital point: that the creative imagination is closely connected with a peculiar insight into an unseen order behind visible things. This belief contributed to the theory and practice of their poetry. Poetry arising out of such a belief is marked by a visionary insight into a superior order of being. There are two points in the romantic thesis; (a) that the imagination should be related to truth and reality, and (b) that the presence of eternity could be felt in visible things. Blake's apperception of the universe, eternity and the face of tHeaven in an hour, a grain of sand and a flower is highly significant of the romantic's position in life.

When we look to Rabindranath Tagore we notice a remarkable phenomenon. Tagore know the romantics as his kin, and he can appropriately be considered as the logical conclusion of the romantic thesis on the role and function of the imagination in human life. He was equally concerned with a mystery which belongs to the imagination, but unlike, as with the romantics, but also to faith. Tagore ontology is carved by the imagination, which he considered to be the most distinctively human of our faculties. Reality, Tagore argued in *The Religion of Man*, manifests itself against the emotional background of our life. The imagination is a "luminous" and projective power of the mind, and creates visions that are felt and known to be "more real" than the finite actualities of our pragmatic existence.

Tagore, at the beginning of his poetical career, thought that beauty is a final quality of reality, revealed through visible things. There is in Tagore the haunting idea and presence of a Beyond, a keen sense of wonder and the delight and exaltation it brings, and the belief that in catching the fleeting moments of joy (and also pain) it opens to an eternal world. Tagore's art has been described as the constant music of the overpassing of the borders.

Tagore's concept of the imagination is best understood as creativity or freedom. And thus understood, the imagination lies in the heart of his philosophical anthropology. Man, he said, is an "angel of surplus". All that the phrase implies that human essence is to be always looked

for in man's transcendence of facts into a world of values, which he himself creates. But the values are subjective, they belong to "the universal man". Civilization, history and creativity are all strung for Tagore in one great continuum. Towards the end of his life he suggested that it is not Beauty, but Truth, which is the end of art. The suggestion is a long way from the romantic credo. He always converted, Keats' thesis "Beauty is truth" as "Truth is beauty". the shift of accent is significant for romanticism. No romantic would have undergone the travails of life to compose these lines as Tagore did, weeks before he breathed his last. This is poetry at poetry's limit.

On Ruparayan's bank
 I awoke
 and knew the world
 was no dream.
 In blood's alphabet
 I saw my countenance
 I knew myself
 in blow on blow received,
 in pain on pain.
 Truth is hard,
 and I loved the hard:
 it never deceives.
 This life's penance of suffering unto death,
 to gain truth's terrible price
 to clear all debts in death.*

This "terrible beauty" is the final achievement of Tagore's romanticism.

* Translated by Ketaki Kushari Dyson.

Appendix : The Indian Theory of Imagination

THE DOCTRINE OF PRATIBHĀ: TOWARDS AN INDIAN THEORY OF IMAGINATION

A sense of an inadequacy of intellectual powers often strikes us as a problem in the history of philosophic thought in India. This 'inadequacy' verily points to the necessity of a distinct extraordinary faculty that can explicate the phenomena beyond the range of our normal intellectual powers. Herein comes the doctrine of *Pratibhā* (somewhere called *Prajna* which offers a solution to this crisis of 'inadequacy'. The writers on Sanskrit aesthetics later adopted this term.

The word *Pratibhā* literally means a flash of light, a revelation and is usually found in literature in the sense of wisdom characterized by immediacy and freshness. It might be called the supersensuous and supra-rational apperception, grasping faith directly. It thus achieves a value both as a faculty and as an act in Indian Philosophy as Intuition and imagination have in some of the Western systems.

The word is used in two distinct but allied senses :

a) It indicates a kind of knowledge which is not sense-born nor of the nature of an inference. It cannot be the ordinary clairvoyance and telepathy : it is the supreme wisdom of the saint.

b) The term can also stand for the Highest Divinity (Agamic literature) and also understood as Principle of Intelligence. In other words *Pratibhā* otherwise known as *para Samvit* or *Citi Śakti* means, in the Agama especially in the *Tripura* and *Trika* sections of it, the power of self-revelation or self-illumination of the Supreme Spirit, with which it is essentially and eternally identical. The employment of the word in the sense of 'guru' (as in Abhinava gupta, *Tantrasāra*) comes under this head.

This supersensuous knowledge that comes from *Pratibhā* has the prominent feature of immediacy and intense clarity. It is transcendental, unshackled from the limitation of time and space. This higher knowledge

dispenses the need of sense organs and the rational faculty. It reveals the past and the future as in a single flash, and also the absent and the remote. Everything is lit by its light and is eternal.

Despite its sparing use in the Vedantic literature, the doctrine of *Pratibhā* has certainly found acceptance. In the ninth *anuvāka* of his *Vārttika* on the *Taittirīya Upanishad* (the only instance in which the term *Pratibhā* is found in Vedānta) Suresvara mentions it by name (*pratibhajana*) and calls it *ārṣa*. What is implied in the transcendent knowledge which is the characteristic of ṛsis or seers; a knowledge that can only come to the seeking soul who by the power of prolonged meditation and sustained chanting of mantras tears off the veil of Maya and enters into conscious communion with the Supreme Being.

Also, in the Tāntrika literature the doctrine of *Pratibhā* has found elaborate discussion. The doctrine of *vāk* literally meaning 'Speech' plays an important part in Tantrika literature and also in the *Vaiyākaraṇa* and indeed the study of *Pratibhā* is really the study of the *Vāk*. In *Vaiyākaraṇa* the supreme Reality is conceived in term of *Śabda* or *Vāk*. So, the difference between *Śabda Brahman* and *Para Brahman* do not seem to exist for the *Vaiyākaraṇa*. To him, the two represent the two aspects of the same supreme *Śabda*. In fact there is no essential difference between *Pasyanti* and *Para* in *Vaiyākaraṇa* or between *Para Vāk* and *Parama Śiva* in *Āgama*. But a difference in the character of *Vāk* between the two systems cannot be denied. *Vāk* according to *Āgama* is the supreme power of *Parama Śiva* - a power that is real and distinguishable whereby the Divine self knows itself and enjoys itself eternally without restraints and limitations. It can also refer to the will of the Absolute and the personality of the Impersonal.

The *Āgamas* speak of it under various aspects viz. *Vimānsa* (Word, Logos), *Sphunatta* (Self-illumination) *Aisvaraya* (Lordship), *Svātantrya* (Freedom) and *Parahanta* (Supreme personality). This *Vāk* relates to the primary object viz. Pure light or *Cit* or Absolute Unity or to the Contingent object viz. the Universe (*Viśva*). But the usual classification of *Vāk* is four-fold. The *Parā* seems to stand really for that aspect of the *Vāk* when it is one with *Parama Śiva* and is transcendent. The *Paśyanti*

The state of *manas* can be at rest or in motion. When *manas* is motionless we arrive at two states. In one the consciousness will be in total abeyance until it emerges again, along with the renewal of motion in *manas*, under a vital impulse acting from beyond. This is the state known as *susupti* (dreamless sleep). The second state is called *yoga* or *samādhī*, in which consciousness far from subsiding is exalted into an extraordinary clarity of immediate intuition. Time, Space and other limitations, having vanished, the *manas* stands face to face, as it were, not only with the pure self but with the realities of all things. This vision is *Pratibhā* or *Ārsajnana*.

Jayanta in *Nyayamanjari* distinguishes between two kinds of intuition - one that arises in the manner of a sudden flash even in the life of an ordinary individual (usually female) at some rare lucid moment and the other which appears when the mind has gone through a process of regular discipline and purification by Yoga. Jayanta would restrict the use of the term *Pratibhā* to the former kind of intuition alone.

So *Pratibhā* needs to be differentiated from sense-perception and other forms of inferior knowledge. *Pratibhā* remains a single act and sustains itself in a continuum with no break in its unity. With the dissolution of unity, *Pratibhā* disappears as well being superseded by the ordinary life with its chains of successive and mutually exclusive mental states. Thus understood *Pratibhā* would seem to be an approximation to the wisdom of the supreme-being. It is distinguished from the divine wisdom only in this that it is a product which the *manas* brings occasionally into existence through a certain process of self immobilization, whereas the latter is eternal and stands eternally adjourned to Him in which the necessity of an organ is one of question.

In the Jaina philosophy the higher perception or intuition holds the preponderance. This intuitive experience is said to be two-fold. (i) relative and imperfect (*vikala*) and (ii) absolute and perfect (*Sakala*). In the first case the intuition is known as *avadhijnana* when its object is a physical substance and the *manah paryāya* when it discerns the thoughts of another mind and in the second case it is exalted into the supreme level and is called *Kevalajnana* or *Kevaladarśana*. Both *avadhijnana* and

Kevalajnana are free from the obstruction of time and space and this *Kevalajnana* and *darsana* are the synonyms of *Pratibhā*. So according to Jaina philosophy omniscience or the possession of the faculty of Absolute knowledge and supreme vision is an eternal property (being also the essence) of the soul which it has apparently lost or allowed to be obscured under the influence of a beginningless senses of karmas, here known as a veil of knowledge and vision. In the Buddhist philosophical literature, the term *Pratibhā* is not generally found but the word *Prajnā* is most frequent. It is asserted that the ultimate Truth (*paramanthatya*) the realisation of which is an essential condition for freedom from pain, is not amenable to any of the human sources of knowledge to the senses or even to reason but it reveals itself in the light of supreme wisdom which arises from contemplation and quietude (*samādhi*). Contemplation is declared to be the only means for gaining *Prajnā* i.e. knowledge of things as they are in themselves as distinguished from what they appear to us. The *Prajnā* is sometimes conceived as an eye (*Prajnacakṣus*) what is said to develop itself when the mind is purified by *samādhi*. In fact the different stages of *prajna* are found represented by corresponding supernatural eyes viz. (i) *dharmacakṣus* (ii) *divyacakṣus* (iii) *Prajnacakṣus* (iv) *buddhacakṣus*. The word *dharmacakṣu* is the spiritual insight. This eye is characterized as a faculty of true knowledge, undisturbed by *rajas* (*virajan*) and free from obscurity (*vitamalan*).

Patanjali, in most unequivocal terms, expresses his belief that the past and the future are essentially existent. That they are not usually *seen* is due to some defect in the seer and not to their non-existence. In fact the Buddha was verily omniscient in the sense that nothing stood in the way of his knowledge to that whenever he wanted to know any object he used to reflect upon it (*avajjitva*) and at once the object revealed itself to his mind. It is the mysterious power of the Buddha Eye that it can penetrate into any time. Nothing can obstruct its vision. Asvaghosa's *Buddhicarita* has an intense description of the Divine Eye which Buddha is said to have gained in course of contemplation during the second watch of the memorable night of his overthrow of *Mana*. By that wonderful faculty of vision, he saw the entire knowledge of the world (universe), as if reflected in a clear mirror. It is a vision that is free from all limitation, temporal as well as spatial.

Also the word Pratibhā occurs several times in *Mahābhārata*. It is conveyed in the same sense in which we find it used in the Yoga system of Patanjali. In *Śivapurāna* the term Pratibha is explained as to be the faultless illumination of things subtle, hidden, remote, past and future. In the *Kādambarī* find the word *Divya cakṣus*, instead of Pratibha in use. The sage Jabāli is described there as possessed of this faculty by which he was able to 'see' the entire universe (even the past and the future). He acquired the power of omniscience through the gradual removal of impurities from his mind by means of constantly practised penances. The eleventh chapter of the *Gīta* contains the classical example of the working of this faculty. Lord Krishna graciously awakened this faculty in Arjuna for a short time on the eve of that memorable event, the battle of Kurukṣetra (*divyam dadam ta cakṣuh pasya me yogam aisvaram*, Chap I, verse 8). It enabled him to have a glimpse of the Supreme vision. It was the vision of many in one.

The fact remains that every man is gifted with a mind, a possibility of omniscience. With the gradual expurgation of contaminations that beset his mind man finds everything getting revealed to him and grows an access to the supersensuous objects. It is the steady extirpation of *tamaṣ* by the active *rajas* from *sattva* whereby a state is reached that is pure steady and luminous. This is *cittasuddhi* or *sattvasuddhi* which is invariably followed by the emanation of Prajnā. The self-cleaning owes to the rousing of the Kundalini or the serpentine power in man. It is the combination of *Jnāna Sakti* and *Kriyā Sakti* of God existing in a latent form in every man. The awakening of Kundalini is the actualisation of the infinite latent power. It is an arduous process receiving assistance from without. An inflow of spiritual energy and the infusion of energy is called *Kṛpā* (grace) or *Saktipāta* in Tantrik literature which is dynamic and acts fast in burning up veiling karmas improving thereby the possibilities of the soul. Consequent upon the purging of the soul comes the light of *Prajnā* (*Prajnājyoti*) or Pratibhā in the manner of a luminous Eye. This is the 'Divine Eye' (*Divvyacakshu*) or the third eye of Siva, otherwise known as the Eye of Wisdom (*Prajnacakṣu*) or the Eye of Ṛṣi (*Āṛṣacakṣu*). Thus with the light of Pratibhā, the Yogin is blessed with a vision that makes him hear the sweet and all-obliterating Divine Harmony. In his elevated station nothing is said to exist between him and the rest of the universe and his whole life

is than one continuous *Brahmavihāra*. Being thus hailed as the saviour of humanity he can participate in the government of the world or may live in eternal or blissful communion with the Lord. He is the Ideal of Perfect Humanity and exudes light and joy that sprinkles cool water on the fires of human misery. The world stands to profit by the strength of his guidance and the glow of his inspiration.

Tagore worked his ideas about the luminous imagination out art against the traditional background of the concept of *Pratibhā* as it developed through the different schools of Indian thought.