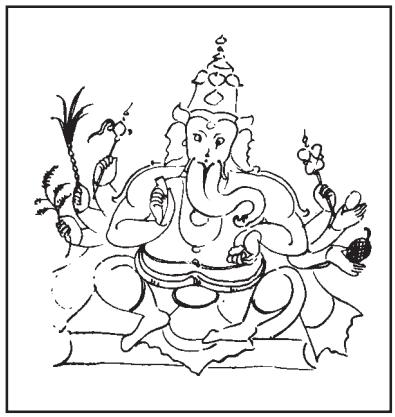

Bhartiya Chitta Manas and Kala

Dharmpal

(Tr. Jitendra Bajaj) Centre for Policy Studies, Madras, 1993, pp. 93

Review: Suresh Sharma

Dharampal has always chosen neglected and nearly forgotten details as apoint for historical reprise. One could say that there is nothing unusual in that. Any serious attempt at historical consideration is bound to involve sharper focus upon hitherto neglected or unknown details. But in relation to the recent past, that happens invariably as an exploration into details around some sequence of events recognised as salient to the making of the present. Recentness of the past is not grasped in terms of a particular duration. It expresses the perceived presence in the past of certain disposi-tions and forms that seem to palpably persist into the present.

The exceptional significance of Dharampal's work is to be seen in the kind of break from the prevalent struc-tures of historical attention they mark out. Consider for instance *Civil Dis-obedience and the Indian Tradition* (1971). At the time it was published the memory of Gandhiji and civil mobilisation on an immense scale was still very recent. But deep under, the feeling seems to have been that Gandhi's Satyagraha simply could not have happened in the absence of uniquely modern values like the sanc-tity of the individual, civic right and national freedom. Invocation of Satya and Ahimsa were seen at best as a happy instance of a clever use of na-tive metaphors for an essentially mod-ern project. Hence, the virtual exclusion in historical consideration of questions concerning possible links in the Indian past.

Another study published in the same year, *Indian Science and Technology in the 18th Century*, signifies an even more audacious break with entrenched notions concerning the limits of historical possibility in India. The key assertion in this work, never fully stated or rigorously worked out, was that in pre-modem India there existed quite another mode of think-ing and doing science. Dharampal pursues this question of distinctive fact and possibility inherent in Indian discourse and structures of living more directly in his work on *Education: The Beautiful Tree* (1983).

Unlike the previous work, *Bharatiya Chitta* is a direct statement of what Dharampal regards as his for-mative ground for historical reflec-tion. He begins by conceding the for-bidding force of varied details that established scholarship has sought to unravel and present. But it is a case, argues Dharampal, of misplaced en-ergy in the service of 'directionless scholarship'. For the utmost it suc-ceeds in doing is to secure for some 'remains' of what is believed to be a 'dead civilisation,' recognition as facts of 'contemporary relevance'. Infinitely worse, is the all too frequent tempta-tion to "drag in our Ancient Rishis to stand witness to our blind validation of western modernity'. The task Dharampal sets for himself belongs to a very different order. His search is for a 'conceptual framework' that would make authentic 'Indian aspirations seem viable' in the modern world. In the absence of such a framework all that is given to Indians is to 'indulge in demeaning imitation' of the West.

The searing uncertainty that such a task has to confront concerns the gravely flawed cognitive universe of English educated India. Dharampal knows that one cannot bypass them. For they have come to constitute the voice of legitimate cognition. Hardly anything has survived untouched by its ways of thinking and judgement. What has survived of traditional clas-sical scholarship is simply too little and severely fractured to be of much help. Hence the sheer futility, accord-ing to Dharampal, of attempting to clarify such a framework through 'high scholarship'

The method Dharampal adopts is unusual and important. Gandhi is pos-ited as the historical referent. But it is a referent with a definitive difference. Its validation lies beyond the historical process. The nature of Gandhi's intervention and its referents for validation are outlined in the context of Gandhi's return from South Africa. Three days after his return Gandhi felt impelled to voice the awful certainty that he felt 'more at home' among 'indentured Indians' than in the 'strange company' of admirers in Bombay.

India at that time, in the words of Dharampal, seemed 'beyond redress through mere human efforts'. Time was thus 'ripe' for 'another divine intervention'. With the return of Gandhiji from South Africa, India came the closest it has ever in our times, to

a 'miracle'. Almost nyer-night, 'mute acceptance' of 'slavery as the fate of India' vanished. The decisive proposition in the argument is that recognition of the worth and significance of Gandhiji's interven-tion came from a cognitive realm al-most untouched by the modem-colo-nial onslaught. That realm holds the key to coherence aafjblife for fildia as a civilizational entity. For its response to the historical process is in reference to a deep civilizational disposition that subsists beyond that process: Bharifiya Chitta, Manas and Kala.

Dharampal's statement is imbued with a sense of deep irony. His defini-tive concern is the survival of India as a civilizational force in the modern world. The cardinal orientation of this force is indicated in three exceedingly insightful propositions. One, it unfolds on a cyclical and infinite scale of time (Kala) in which ultimate perfection is posited in undifferentiatedorigins. Two, differentiation and complexity comprise the very substance of civilization. Three, the quest for perfection in undifferentiated origins imparts to the individual a unique sense of sovereignty. But the argument falters grievously in that it fails to even indicate the intellectual requirements for a meaningful contact with the modern historical process.

Clearly, invocation of Gandhi isworse than inadequate. For what is invoked is a historic precedent. Besides, to represent Gandhi's intervention as essentially in the likeness of divine intercession, could be dangerous in the extreme. It tends to reduce a profound philosophical-civilizational possibility into the mere assertion of political-historical effectiveness. It forecloses the conceptual space for meaningful self-reflection and self critique. This kind of reductionism alone can perhaps explain the strident assertion in Jitendra Bajaj's preface, that the destruction of the masjid in Ayodhya marks the reawakening of a grand civilizational force. It is an assertion that can have no place in the quest to renew the immemorial rhythm of our civilization. ❐

Wholesome Nutrition

for

Mind, Body and Microflora

Yamuna Lingappa and B. T. Lingappa

Review: Kiran Kapoor

Wholesome Nutrition is a wonderful reference book for those interested in maintaining a lacto-vegetarian diet. It explains the workings of the human body, the evolution and effects of diet, and the philosophy of nutrition in simple language for non-scientists.

The book is a result of 40 years of personal inquiry by the authors into a "basis for the optimal human diet." This inquiry grew out of their need to make critical choices about their families own nutrition after the couple began raising a family in America. Should they follow American medical advice or follow the their own traditional Indian diet? The information they uncovered in the process of settling this question for themselves is contained in *Wholesome Nutrition*. They discovered that "dietary practices in America are not based on solid physiological principles, but are, '...a happenstance related to... affluence." For nearly 35 years the Lingappas have been "questioning and searching moderately and cautiously, without embracing fads or rituals but paying careful attention to nutritional science." They write:

"We have utilized a legacy of 4,000 years of cultural practice, investigated its credibility in the nutritional literature, practiced it in the American environment in our own family, for a full generation, and demonstrated its viability with the general American public at Annapurna Restaurant the restaurant run by the Lingappas in Worcester Mass, where they prepare food according to their nutritional philosophy]."

One of the best qualities of *Wholesome Nutrition* is that it is organised in an easy-to-use manner. Each chapter begins with an abstract that allows the reader to gain an overview of the material covered in the chapter.

In addition to abstracts the book has a variety of illustrative charts and includes an appendix which summarises key concepts presented in the text. There is also a useful section of questions and answers such as"should a woman'sdiet differ from a man's?" A section which contains recipes of Udipi cuisine will also be helpful to the reader who wishes to implement the principles found in this book. ❐