

FROM THE EDITOR

DAY OF THE FALSE GOD

It was a medium-size town. The house I visited belonged to my friend's father, a retired judge. As we entered the venerable old man's room, I saw on his wall pictures of Mother Durga, Sri Krishna and Ganesha.

My friend's room was adorned by pictures of Swami Vivekananda, Tagore and Tilak.

It was by chance that I had a peep into his college-going son's room. The walls were splattered with pictures of popular film artistes, some of them in postures that cannot be called decent.

We know of three generations of gods in Roman mythology, of wars between them and the younger generations toppling the older ones. The older gods are crude; the younger gods are gentle—keeping with man's evolving capacity to appreciate better values.

But an opposite law seems to be in operation in India and perhaps in many other countries. There was a time when sages and seers were our heroes. In a later age patriots and great reformers took their place. They gave way to politicians. We flocked to them, sang of them as if they were our gods.

Now there are film and TV artistes. Their 'popularity' is phenomenal. Is it our love for art? None of our great musicians or artistes had become such attraction with crowds. The crazes for screen actors have nothing to do with love or respect for art. It is a fascination of a different kind, superficial and naive. The phenomenon matters little by itself. But its seriousness lies in the fact that it is a symptom of even educated people not cultivating deeper ideals in themselves, for such flimsy fascinations and any higher ideal cannot go together—generally speaking, just as aspiration for God and allegiance to false gods cannot go together.

The craze also assumes some seriousness in a larger perspective. There is an upheaval of falsehood under the banner of practically everything—politics, religion, *et al.* Since showmanship counts so much in all these spheres, what is wrong with showmanship proper claiming the lion's share of popularity? Nothing wrong in it, except that it proves how gullible we are. And, on second thoughts, there is hardly anything wrong in our being exposed in our gullibility either if that is a trait with us. We have to grow if we care to. That is important.

AND THE MIDDLE-BENCHERS

A distinguished writer expresses his fear that while truly creative writers and poets were not always in the popular forefront of the art world, they will suffer further because of the TV. It is true that many short stories are being screened, sponsored by different commercial houses. But the tendency is to choose such stories which can be easily handled. Thus who come to prominence are mediocre writers while the good ones remain ignored. An exceptionally good director may be a poor story writer. But his reputation built on screen will naturally put him in an advantageous position. He will produce his own stories and claim leadership in a field where he is a middle-bencher at best!

We appreciate the writer's agony. The only sensible consolation to him seems to be history. Popularity is dependent on many factors, not on one's merit alone. That has always been the case and that is the case now. One's proximity to the show-world, one's access to or influence over the power

that be, are undeniable factors for achieving popularity today, as a different set of factors served the purpose yesterday. This applies to India as much as to any other country—perhaps applies more to some countries. There is an amusing incident narrated by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai in *Indian Literature* (the bi-monthly published by the Sahitya Akademi), Jan-Feb '86 number. He led a delegation of Indian writers to a conference in Lativa. The delegates were required to issue a joint communique at the end of their session. A sentence in the draft said that India, Pakistan and

Bangladesh once formed a single nation. The Pakistani delegate shouted that "it was a wrong statement". He asserted that "India and Pakistan had fought all through in history and that the two countries had never been one!"

Now, could this gentleman have been chosen to represent his country because of his genius as a writer? Certainly not. He merited the selection because of his genius in historical studies!

Thus in every field.

However old and orthodox the statement might sound, the inner satisfaction of a creative writer, in the ultimate analysis, depends on his faithfulness to his own inspiration. Recognition by a few connoisseurs in matters of art is much more valuable than applause by multitudes. This was the case yesterday; this is the case today and this will be the case for a long time to come.

But a truly great writer will have his multitudes any way. They will be formed spread over ages to come after him.

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

THE MERCHANT, THE PARROT AND THE PSYCHOTHERAPIST

An Eastern merchant owned a parrot. One day the bird knocked over an oil flask. The merchant became very angry and hit the parrot on the back of the head. From that time on, the parrot, who had previously appeared to be very intelligent, could not talk anymore. He lost the feathers on his head and soon became bald. One day, as he was sitting on the bookshelf in his master's place of business, a baldheaded customer entered the shop. The sight of the man made the parrot very excited. Flapping his wings, he jumped around, squawked, and, to everyone's surprise, finally regained his speech and said, "Did you, too, knock down an oil flask and get hit on the back of the head so that you don't have any hair anymore?" This story (which originated in India) is a favourite with Nossrat Peseschkian, a psychotherapist living in West Germany who visits India from time to time in search of old tales, for they have in them great psychological truths, like this one in which we see how a sudden sense of fellow-feeling cures the parrot of his dumbness.

Stories have always been a weapon with the Indian mystics to fight ignorance. The world's first collection of fables, Vishnu Sharma's *Panchatantra*, had been narrated to set right the unruly minds of some princes. (See *Literary Panorama* in this issue.) Through the ages our tales must have served as preventives in innumerable cases where the minds would have run amok!

We are happy that a psychotherapist acknowledges the great value of the Oriental tales. We feel reaffirmed in our own philosophy behind our series *Fables and Parables for Adults*. In Our section BODY AND MIND in this issue we reproduce some of the stories Dr. Peseschkian has found so significant.