

The Nature of God in the Philosophy of Sri Chinmoy

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Introduction

In his extensive writings Sri Chinmoy presents a comprehensive vision of God, creation, good and evil, the human person, spiritual practice or yoga, and the illumination of human nature. Drawing on traditional and modern Vedantic language and also forging his own vocabulary, he expounds a spirituality of dynamic transformation based on love of God and self-transcendence. Born Chinmoy Kumar Ghose in East Bengal in 1931, he became a resident of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1943 when still a child and lived there for twenty years before coming to the United States in 1964. During more than forty years of writing and teaching, musical composition and performance, painting, athletics, humanitarian programs and peace advocacy, he has become well known internationally, yet there is very little secondary literature on his works.¹ This article is intended to be one step towards filling this gap. What follows is a straightforward and unembroidered account of what Sri Chinmoy says on one philosophically fundamental topic: the nature of God. It is hoped that such a summary may serve as a reference and a point of departure for further analysis and interpretation. It is confined to the content of Sri Chinmoy's works themselves, as historical contextualization or comparison would require another treatment of at least equal length.

1. See, however, A. Walter Dorn, "The United Nations as a Spiritual Institution: The Vision and Commitment of Sri Chinmoy," *Interreligious Insight* 3.2 (April 2005): pp. 30-37; Kusumita P. Pedersen, "The Teachings of Sri Chinmoy: Values and Practices for Human Transformation," in Sachi G. Dastidar, ed., *Bengal Studies 1994: Essays on Economics, Society and Culture* (Old Westbury, New York: State University of New York at Old Westbury Foundation), 1996, pp. 228-235; Vidagdha Meredith Bennett, *Simplicity and Power: The Poetry of Sri Chinmoy 1971-1981* (New York: Aum Publications), 1991; Saudamini Siegrist, *The Writing of Devotion: Seven Textual Figures of the Beloved*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of English, New York University, 1999.

Sri Chinmoy regards philosophy and poetry as allied endeavors, and has said, “The philosopher is a poet in the mind. The poet is a philosopher in the heart.”² He himself prefers poetic expression, and has never been inclined to write a single formal exposition of his thought. The main points of his philosophy, understood here in the inclusive sense of the love of wisdom and search for knowledge of the ultimate, are found reiterated throughout his many writings in different genres.³ In his prose works, as in his poetry, his style is highly condensed and pithy, so that he often makes a series of important statements in a few paragraphs, and in lectures may do this in a structure which resembles a prose poem or a series of aphorisms. In his prose he sets forth a discursive and self-consistent account of who and what God is, and the relation of the human person to God. In his poetry he supplements these explanations, making many other points hardly to be found in his essays and talks. He articulates these additional points in a compressed and intuitive manner in his own distinctive poetic-philosophical idiom. This study will outline the main statements about God made in Sri Chinmoy’s prose writings and will also attempt to give an idea of how these statements are elaborated in his poetry. I will follow his usage in capitalization, spelling and other styles, and will rely on his own words as much as possible, providing ample quotation.

The Centrality of Relationship

For Sri Chinmoy God is the Source of all that is, the true self of each life as its soul,⁴ and the ultimate goal of our evolving personal and cosmic existence. God, whom he calls “The Supreme,” is the constant theme of all his works. It is difficult, however, if not impossible, to find in his writings statements “just about God” in God’s own Self, apart from God’s creation of the universe, God’s love for creation,

2. *Commentaries on the Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita* (New York: Aum Publications), 1996 [1971-72]), p. 16.

3. Sri Chinmoy’s writings comprise over 1,500 published works, including over 100,000 poems, hundreds of lectures and essays, aphorisms, and prayers as well as stories, plays, informal talks and answers to questions. Here references will be given only for works actually quoted. Unless otherwise indicated, the publisher of all of the works cited is Agni Press, New York.

4. Sri Chinmoy used the term “soul” as roughly equivalent to the Sanskrit *ātman* or *jīva* of Indian philosophy.

or the relation of human beings to God. Almost invariably he speaks of God in relationship to the individual human being, often in the first person, or of the relationship of God and humanity. While it is difficult to extricate his teaching on God from these other concerns with which it is intimately intertwined and interdependent, I will try to do so here though unavoidably touching upon other major themes of Sri Chinmoy's writings. God is generally referred to as "He," a locution Sri Chinmoy adopts when writing in English, while at the same time he affirms that God is Mother, Father and beyond gender as "impersonal" (this question is discussed in more detail below).

Sri Chinmoy's central concern for relationship is found even in the very few passages which come close to speaking of God "alone." Internal to God's own Being there is still relation and process: "Before God created the universe, He created Himself,"⁵ and "God originated Himself out of His own Silence."⁶ "God's secret is a beginningless Silence."⁷ "Silence" is the predicate of God in concrete, poetic language that is perhaps closest in meaning to the traditional Sanskrit term *nirguna* or "without qualities." In Sri Chinmoy's poetry "silence" is often paired with "sound," this dyad indicating the unmanifest transcendent and the manifest existent. God is virtually never spoken of apart from God's Self-revelation, God's creative action and the dynamic interplay of God's aspects or attributes. Thus it is declared in the sentences just quoted that there is Silence at the very beginning of the creative process of God; Silence is the source of the Source, so to speak. From this transcendent Source comes divine reality in its universal and interior dimension. "The universal Heart originated in God's Silence," Sri Chinmoy says. "When God was absolute Silence, inside this Silence something was growing...The universal Heart came into existence before God's sound-life came into existence. And where is the universal heart? It is deep inside us, where reality constantly grows."⁸ Moreover, "What is silence? Silence is that which alone bears the teeming vast. It upholds activity and inactivity in its own supreme

5. *The Vision of God's Dawn*, 1974, p. 31.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

7. *Everest-Aspiration*, 1978, p. 57.

8. *Canada Aspires, Canada Receives, Canada Achieves, Part 2*, 1974, p. 59.

delight.”⁹ Silence not only generates, but also sustains, both manifested and unmanifested being through God’s expressive or manifesting aspect of “Delight.”

Delight or Bliss (*ānanda*) occupies a special place in the divine ontology. It is the third term of the Vedantic formulation for Brahman, *saccidānanda* or Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. For Sri Chinmoy “Delight” is present at all “levels” of existence or “worlds” as the mode of divine dynamism and creative activity. In the following passages, this point is elaborated in a series of carefully crafted aphorisms.

Delight is the source of existence. Delight is the meaning of existence.
Delight is the language of Infinity, Eternity and Immortality.

Delight is the divine bridge between Peace and Power, between Light and Truth, between God’s unmanifested Dream and His manifested Reality.¹⁰

He adds that only through the experience of Delight can God be fully understood. In the following poem he clarifies the complementary roles of “Delight” and “Silence.”

What is the fount of my life?
Delight.

What is the fount of my love?
Delight.

What is the fount of my perfection?
Delight.

What is the fount of my God?
Silence.¹¹

Delight is the origin of “life,” which in Sri Chinmoy’s vocabulary has the sense of an integral reality encompassing several or all of the levels of existence. It is also the origin of “love,” or relationship, and of “perfection,” which is the actual achievement of integral transformation.

9. *Eternity’s Breath*, 1972, p. 39. In this passage “bears” has the sense of “holds up” or “carries.” Sri Chinmoy will characteristically use the phrase “gives birth to” if he wishes to indicate birth or generation.

10. *Eternity’s Breath*, 1972, p. 38.

11. *Europe-Blossoms* (Santurce, Puerto Rico: Aum Press), 1974, No. 512.

While God-as-Delight is the Source of all these, Its own “fount” or Source can only be named as “Silence.”

“God expresses Himself through Silence. God expands Himself through Light. God unites Himself with His Creation through Delight.”¹² This statement is a summary of the divine process of Self-revelation and creation. Since “Silence” is ontologically the “first” thing we can speak of when we speak of God, before God “expresses Himself through Silence” God is not yet even “Silence” but is something “before Silence” which we do not know and of which we cannot speak at all. After God’s very first expression as Silence, God continues the process of revealing God’s Self as God “expands Himself through Light” by envisioning and then bringing forth the universe. When creation has come into actual existence, God’s relation with it is that of “Delight.” God’s attributes of Light and Delight can be thought of as “formless form;” they are particular but still “formless” in the sense that they do not have limited shape and do not appear as “personal.”

In his poetry and aphorisms, Sri Chinmoy continually juxtaposes the nouns standing for God’s attributes in order to meditate upon their interrelation, as he does here:

Light is the birth of God.

Delight is the life of God.

Light is the smile of universal Oneness.

Delight is the smile of transcendental Perfection.

Light is what God has.

Delight is what God is.¹³

Not only these key nouns, but certain significant adjectives and verbs have specific senses which must be discerned in context. “Light is the birth of God” is similar in meaning to “God expands Himself through Light.” “Life,” as just mentioned, normally refers to an integral reality, while “smile” connotes an externalizing or “manifesting” reality, a kind of action moving outward. “Universal” refers to the entire manifested creation, while “transcendental” means beyond the creation. The phrase “transcendental Perfection” is complex, since

12. *The Garland of Nation-Souls: Complete Talks at the United Nations*, (Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications), 1995, p. 12.

13. *Commentaries on the Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita*, (New York: Aum Publications), 1996 [1971–72], p. 32.

“perfection,” as just noted, is most often used to refer to the end result of the ongoing transformation of all levels of existence which Sri Chinmoy calls “God-manifestation.” Here, however, the word seems to mean God’s own perfection before or above this process of transformation—God’s plenitude—with “Delight” as its dynamic aspect. Taken together, these six lines (each no more than seven words) express in an exceedingly concentrated way the overall point that Delight is both intrinsic to God’s transcendent Being and active, while Light belongs to the universal and manifested divine reality as it is moving outward or, as the word “Light” indicates, shining-forth or radiating.

God’s Attributes: The Plenitude of Being

Sri Chinmoy’s “model” of God is that of a plenitude of being encompassing countless divine attributes. While he has said that “God is infinite, and His attributes are infinite,”¹⁴ he speaks most often of a few attributes or “qualities” in addition to Silence, Light and Delight. Prominent among these is Consciousness (*cit*) the second term of *saccidānanda*.¹⁵ “Who is God? God is an Infinite Consciousness. He is also the self-illuminating Light.”¹⁶ Like Delight, Consciousness is present at all levels of existence, and more completely since it reaches down even to the lowest planes. It is able to hold a full range of different qualities, and is also dynamic.

“[I]t is the divine consciousness that connects earth with Heaven... Consciousness is only one. It houses silence and it houses power. When it houses silence, at that time it houses its true form. When it houses power, at that time it manifests its inner reality... Its nature is to expand constantly... In the divine consciousness there is always a goal, and this goal is always transcending itself.”¹⁷

14. *Everest-Aspiration*, 1978, p. 97.

15. An interesting question is whether God’s attributes as Consciousness, Light-Truth and Delight could be construed as trinitarian, if this were to be understood as origin, logos and relationship. It is not immediately evident whether such a formulation would correspond to Eternity-Infinity-Immortality/*saccidānanda* (or more precisely *cit-sat-ānanda*) where the latter would be an alternate description of the divine nature. It would seem that each of the three embraces both a “silence-aspect” and a “sound-aspect.”

16. *Yoga and the Spiritual Life* (New York: Tower Publications), 1970, p. 15.

17. *The Summits of God-life: Samadhi and Siddhi*, 1974, pp. 1–2, 4.

Other most commonly mentioned attributes are God's Truth (which has the sense of Reality, not propositional truth), God's Peace, and God's Power. The following poem meditates on the interrelation of some of these meaning-laden nouns, using "ecstasy" as the experiential mediator that establishes their relationships.

What is Peace?
Fulfilment-ecstasy.

What is Light?
Truth-ecstasy.

What is Delight?
Love-ecstasy.

What is Perfection?
God-ecstasy.¹⁸

The poem can be read to mean: when one attains fulfilment, the ecstasy one experiences is Peace; when one attains Truth and Love, one will experience the ecstasies which are Light and Delight. As often happens with Sri Chinmoy's poetry, the final stanza gives an unexpected twist which challenges the reader: when one attains God, one will also attain the ecstasy which is Perfection.

Three divine attributes also often mentioned are "Infinity," "Eternity" and "Immortality," generally found as a triad standing for the entirety of God's Being. As indicated by the following passage, these three correspond to Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. Almost always in Sri Chinmoy's writings this correspondence is expressed implicitly, but here it is explicit:

The Secret Supreme is the Supreme Himself. He can be seen. He can be felt. He can be realised. When He is seen, He is Existence. When He is felt, He is Consciousness. When He is realised, He is Delight. In His embodiment of Existence, He is Eternal. In His revelation of Consciousness, He is Infinite. In His manifestation of Delight, He is Immortal.¹⁹

18. *Europe-Blossoms* (Santurce: Puerto Rico: Aum Press) 1973, No. 61.

19. *Eastern Light for the Western Mind*, 1972, p. 38. Also in collected university lectures, *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind, Part 2*, 2004, p. 49.

We notice again the constant concern for relationship, as these three aspects of the Supreme are introduced in terms of how they are known. The verbs “seen,” “felt” and “realised” are a progressive sequence indicating that initially the human person “sees” God as eternal Existence or Reality, subsequently “feels” God as infinite Consciousness, a more intimate experience, and finally “realises” God as immortal Delight. We know from elsewhere in Sri Chinmoy’s writings that “realisation” indicates a culminating knowledge which is attained through spiritual practice or yoga, and is a permanent state of conscious oneness with God, the Reality that is realised. In God’s own Being He “embodies” or realises Existence, reveals Consciousness, and manifests Delight in a sequence corresponding to the knowledge attained by the human person.

In another passage pairing each of these three nouns with a key verb, the sequence is different from that in the passage just cited. Here Sri Chinmoy says, “Infinity means the realising, and the realised, and the eternally realising God. Eternity means the revealing, and the revealed, and the eternally revealing God. Immortality means the fulfilling, and the fulfilled, and the eternally fulfilling God.”²⁰ Since “realisation” is knowing through identification or “embodiment” (a term Sri Chinmoy uses only in this specific sense) here he seems to be saying that God realises, is identified with or embodies God’s own Self. Following this, “revealing” takes place as a kind of coming-forth, appearing or being shown in creation, and finally “fulfilling” takes place not only as God’s enjoyment of Delight in God’s own Being, but also as God’s fulfillment in God’s own creation as it evolves towards its perfection—“God unites Himself with His Creation through Delight.” A schematized summation of this passage might suggest that for Sri Chinmoy the “Infinite Consciousness” (*cit*) is ontologically prior to “Eternal Existence” (*sat*), so the position of the first two terms of *saccidānanda* are reversed. “Immortality” and “Delight” together, or as one, are linked to Love, which “fulfils,” and continue to occupy the third position. But as the three summit attributes of God are inseparable, any attempt to prioritize them must in the end be artificial. There may be no settled priority or anteriority, but rather an interplay of “aspects” of God which are plural yet one or non-different.

20. *My Lord’s Secret’s Revealed* (New York: Herder and Herder), 1971, p. 78.

God as “Formless”/“Impersonal” and “With Form”/“Personal”

Sri Chinmoy uses the terms “formless” and “form” as equivalent to “impersonal” and “personal” and not to mean “without” and “with” qualities or attributes. The “formless” can be spoken of as having “attributes” which, to be exact, are “impersonal attributes.” He consistently states that God is both with form and formless, both personal and impersonal, saying “The Highest is beyond personal and impersonal but, at the same time, He embodies both. The Highest is formless, and at the same time He is with form. If we have to state what He is, we have to say that He is both, and again, that He is beyond both.”²¹ Moreover, “A true lover of God is he who believes in God’s existence as both personal and impersonal”²² so that neither aspect is to be excluded from recognition. Sri Chinmoy virtually always discusses these two aspects of God as they pertain to the individual aspirant’s own experience, or sought-for experience, of the Supreme. “God can be seen with form, with personal attributes, and He can be seen without form, with impersonal attributes.”²³ Each individual can and should “define” God as he or she wishes, and will also seek to realise God according to his or her disposition (the aspect of God she or he receives “joy” from or “is fond of”). Indeed, God will appear to the devotee in the particular form that he or she wants.²⁴ At the same time, Sri Chinmoy stresses that although it is easier to begin by approaching God as personal and “with form” every aspirant will ultimately realise both aspects.

God can be seen, felt and realised as a personal being, more luminous, infinitely more beautiful than a human being. And again, we can experience God as an infinite expanse of Light, Bliss, Power or any divine quality. Each individual will realise God in both the personal and the impersonal aspect. But if we think of God in His personal aspect first it is easier, because right now we are in the finite. If we can imagine God as a person, then from the form we can go to the formless aspect.²⁵

21. *Fifty Freedom-Boats to One Golden Shore, Part 3*, 1974, p. 74.

22. *Earth-Bound Journey and Heaven-Bound Journey*, 1975, p. 1. Also in *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind, Part 2*, 2004, p. 437.

23. *Canada Aspires, Canada Receives, Canada Achieves, Part 2*, 1974, p. 23.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

25. *Fifty Freedom-Boats to One Golden Shore, Part 2*, 1974, p. 98.

Two of his more recent poems underscore the point:

Without becoming one
With the Form of the Supreme,
We cannot enter into
The formless Supreme.

The Supreme with Form
Has to be seen, felt
And realised
Before we discover
The formless Supreme.²⁶

This sequence might make it appear that since knowledge of the formless aspect of God comes later and thus seems to be more difficult or “advanced,” it is also “higher” and more true, a more authentic experience of God. But Sri Chinmoy emphasises that the truest realisation of God is not when the “formless” aspect supersedes the aspect “with form,” but rather that the most complete or “integral” and therefore truest realisation is attained when one has a free access to *both* aspects.

On one occasion Sri Chinmoy responded with special intensity to the suggestion that the formless is “higher” and affirmed that, if anything, God “with form” is more important for a certain particular reason that is at the heart of his understanding of God and the world. He was asked, “It seems to me that at the start of the spiritual path we see God with form, and that as we grow into oneness He starts to lose His Form. Is this true?” His answer, excerpted here, is crucially important for understanding his vision as a whole.

It is our own mental conception that the formless is something superior to the form. We feel that before the creation, the Supreme was formless and only later he took a form to come to us...We feel that something beyond the body or form is vaster. True, it is vaster, but it is a mistake if we say that the formless is more meaningful than the form. The idea that the higher we go, the more we are in touch with the formless is not true. When we go higher it need not be towards the formless. It can be toward the supremely divine [personal] God with form, who possesses boundless Affection, boundless Love, boundless Concern—everything in infinite measure. We can go beyond the form of the mind, but not beyond the supreme Form.

26. *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 12*, 1999, No. 13,478 and No. 13,479.

He continues,

You can touch any part of the form to enter the formless. If in that way you can feel the form and the formless as equally important, then you will realise God sooner... Again, I wish to tell you that it is a mistake to feel that the formless is superior to the form. They are equally important... At times if one wants to get joy from the formless, he can. If one wants to get joy from the form, he can. But I wish to say that *even after you have realised the Highest Absolute you will get more joy from the form because you care for manifestation. The spiritual seekers who cry for the manifestation of the Divine on earth will get abundant joy, much more joy, from the Absolute with form than from the Absolute without form* [emphasis added].²⁷

The great importance of this passage is not only in Sri Chinmoy's repeated emphasis on the equal value for human persons of God "with form" and God "without form," but also and even more in the explicit connection he makes between valuing God's personal aspect and the mission of "God-manifestation" or "the manifestation of the divine on earth."

What is "God-manifestation"? We have already seen and employed the terms "manifest" and "unmanifest" as meaning something like "appearing," "created," "with form" and their opposites. It is now necessary to say that for Sri Chinmoy "manifestation"—a word of immense ethical importance for him—is different from "revelation" because it is a further stage of the concreteness of transformation. In this transformation, "divine qualities" are not only revealed to, but are also assimilated by, the created world in an evolutionary process of which conscious human aspiration is the most recent outcome. Sri Chinmoy has compared "realisation" of God to possessing a mango (a traditional symbol of spiritual attainment), "revelation" to taking out the mango and showing it to someone, and "manifestation" to sharing it with others so that they eat it and digest it.²⁸ The purpose of God's creation, as he states constantly, is this very God-manifestation. For human beings, it is a God-ordained task calling for acceptance of the world and work in the world for the benefit of all. Because God-manifestation is so central to his entire philosophy, Sri Chinmoy's strong statement that those who care for God's manifestation in the world must also care for God's personal aspect casts abundant light

27. *God-Life: Is It a Far Cry?*, 1974, pp. 39–44.

28. *The Summits of God-Life: Samadhi and Siddhi*, 1974, pp. 127–128.

on why throughout his writings he is radically theistic, always emphasizing the personal as well as the relational nature of God.

God as Infinite and as Finite

The same general point is taken up using slightly different language when Sri Chinmoy discusses the nature of God as both infinite and as finite.

When God created Himself, He created Himself in two aspects: the Infinite and the finite. When you think of the finite, you think of form, and when you think of the infinite, you think there is no form. Yet inside the finite is the message of the Infinite; in the finite is first the revelation and then the manifestation of the Infinite. . . .

The Formless is necessary to realise the Highest, the Ultimate, the Infinite, and the form is necessary to reveal and manifest the Highest and the Inmost in an intimate way. That which is infinite in consciousness can be seen only in the formless form. Again, it can house itself in form. That is why the heart can hold Infinity inside itself.²⁹

The interiority of the heart is at a mysterious boundary between the infinite and the finite, and is said to house the soul, which is a “representative” of the infinite Divine. He explicitly connects God’s Omnipotence with God’s Omnipresence, God’s Power with God’s capacity to become immanent in creation, saying, “God, being infinite, can also be finite. Otherwise, He is not infinite. He is omnipotent because He can be in the atom and at the same time in the vast universe.”³⁰ Elaborating on this point, he says,

God is infinite Consciousness, infinite Bliss, yet He can also assume a finite form. He is infinite, He is finite, and at the same time He transcends both the Infinite and the finite. He is life, He is death, yet again, He is beyond both life and death. . . . God is boundless and in the field of manifestation He takes all forms. . . . He is as vast as the universe but because He is in everything, God can also be finite. God is omnipotent. Where is His omnipotence if He cannot become a small child, a tiny insect or an atom? . . .

29. *The Vision of God’s Dawn*, 1974, pp. 15–16.

30. *Yoga and the Spiritual Life* (New York: Tower Publications), 1970, p. 98.

Just because God is omnipotent, He can do anything He wants to do. . . . He can be vast, He can be infinitesimal.

Finite and Infinite, according to our outer understanding, are opposites of each other. But in God's Eye they are one. . . . The finite wants to reach the Absolute, the Highest, which is the Infinite. The Infinite wants to manifest itself in and through the finite. Then the game is Complete. Otherwise it will be only a one-sided game. There will be no true Joy, no achievement or fulfilment. In and through the finite, the Infinite is singing its song of unity. In and through the Infinite, the finite is singing its song of multiplicity.³¹

The very purpose of creation and of the world's existence, is the increase of joy and perfection: God-manifestation through the ongoing Cosmic Play or Game (*līlā*). Sri Chinmoy does not refer to the world as an "illusion" and invariably stresses acceptance of the world and love for the world. Spiritual practice or yoga thus necessarily includes service in the form of work that will expedite the world process of God-manifestation and growth into greater and greater perfection and fulfilment.

God's Self-Transcendence

A distinctive feature of Sri Chinmoy's understanding of God is his affirmation that God is always transcending God's own Being. The process of expansion in the created world has its source in the transcendent plane. "In form the cosmic Consciousness manifests itself by circumscribing itself. In the formless the cosmic Consciousness transcends itself by expanding and enlarging itself."³² Sri Chinmoy often refers to God as "the ever-transcending Beyond"³³ and declares that "God the Infinite constantly transcends His own Infinity, God the Eternal constantly transcends His own Eternity and God the Immortal constantly transcends His own Immortality."³⁴ Using the traditional Vedantic term for the Absolute, he says, "Brahman, the infinite Consciousness, is always in the process of transcending the

31. *The Vision of God's Dawn*, 1974, pp. 9–11.

32. *Commentaries on the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita* (New York: Aum Publications), 1996 [1971–72], p. 60.

33. This phrase occurs from his early writings through the present.

34. *Eastern Light for the Western Mind*, 1972, p. 98. Also in *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind, Part 2*, 2004, p. 129.

limitless expanse of the Beyond. Brahman's Infinity, Eternity and Immortality are ever-evolving."³⁵ The apparent illogic of saying that Infinity can increase is only perceived on the mental level, while the heart is able to embrace the divine paradox of the increase of Infinity: "[T]he mind goes on trying to bind that which cannot be bound. But when you use the heart, you realise that something can be infinite, and at the same time, it can transcend itself."³⁶

It is thus possible to say that God in God's full Being can go beyond God's nature as Truth (Reality or *sat*) or put more exactly, God's Truth can go beyond itself to become a new Truth.

Truth has no existence without God. God is the very breath of Truth. Truth and God are one, indivisible. On the one hand, Truth is another name for God. On the other hand, Truth cannot exist without God, whereas God can at each moment transcend Truth—earthly truth and heavenly truth, earthbound truth and heavenward truth. Even His own Transcendental Truth God can transcend at His own sweet Will. Although we can safely say that God and Truth are one, God alone has the power to transcend all truths, even The Truth itself.³⁷

It is God's unlimited freedom that makes this perpetual divine transcendence possible, just as God's omnipotence makes possible the manifestation of the Infinite in the finite.

God has learned from Self-transcendence that His own Light and Delight are constantly increasing. . . . God has learned from Self-transcendence the message of His own Freedom. Each time He transcends Himself, God increases His Freedom-Power. When He uses His Freedom-Power in Heaven, it is His Vision-Power. . . . And when He uses His Freedom-Power here on earth, it is His Compassion-Power.³⁸

God's unbounded freedom serves the evolving expression of God's Goodness and Compassion. In the following passage, the ceaseless divine change is a movement of progress and transformation, as the different aspects of the Divine not only expand in their

35. *My Ivy League Leaves*, 1972, p. 12. Also in *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind, Part 2*, 2004, p. 4.

36. *God and the Cosmic Game*, 1977, pp. 3–6.

37. *Eastern Light for the Western Mind*, 1972, pp. 57–58. Also in *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind, Part 1*, 2003, p. 304.

38. *God and the Cosmic Game*, 1977, pp. 3–6.

own transcendental realm but also are increasingly “manifested” in the phenomenal world. Sri Chinmoy stresses this aspect of divine creativity on the universal cosmic level in answering the question of a theologian with an interest in process theology, who asked him, “Does God change?”³⁹

God is constantly changing, sleeplessly changing. From the finite He is going to the Infinite. Again at His sweet Will, from the Infinite He is coming into the finite. . . .

On the one hand, God is changeless and deathless. On the other hand, He is in the process of constant change, constant self-creation and self-immolation. Creation and dissolution take their turn in exactly the same way that day and night interchange.

When we ordinary human beings change something, we are not sure that the change is going to be an improvement. Change in and of itself does not necessarily mean improvement. But when God changes something, He changes Himself in and through that thing, always for progress and true satisfaction.⁴⁰

God’s Self-transcendence takes place in two ways. God’s own transcendent Reality can go beyond Itself, God’s Infinity can “increase,” God’s Truth can become a new Truth. Also, God evolves in and through the creation: He becomes the finite and then progresses through positive change in the infinite forms He has assumed in the created world.

Names, Aspects and Images

Sri Chinmoy often speaks of God as “The Supreme.” He cherishes this term as one expressing special intimacy with God as personal, “The Beloved Supreme,” but also prefers it because for him it conveys the sense of God’s Self-transcendence which is central to his vision of God. He says,

[A]lthough God and the Supreme are one, there is a subtle distinction between the two. The highest Supreme is different from what we call “God.” When we speak of God-realisation, here “God” is synonymous with the Supreme. But usually when we say “God,” we feel that He embodies a height which is static. . . . He has reached His height and stopped. He does not have a constantly

39. John Berthrong..

40. *Professor-Children: God’s Reality-Fruits*, 1997, pp. 11–12.

evolving Consciousness; He is something finished. But when we say “Supreme,” we are speaking of the Supreme Lord who not only reaches the absolute Highest, but always goes beyond, beyond and transcends the Beyond. There is a constant upward movement.⁴¹

On very rare occasions he has used the term “emptiness” or “void” to refer to the Supreme. In one of his earliest collections of essays, we find this brief mention: “We can expect Him to make us understand everything, everything in nothing and nothing in everything, the Full in the Void and the Void in the Full,”⁴² suggesting that the *śūnya* and the *pūrṇa* are aspects of one another. This is confirmed in two Bengali songs, one of which says “O emptiness, vast emptiness, /Inside you is the satisfaction of completeness” (*Śūnya tumi mahā śūnya/pūrṇa tomār antare*)⁴³ and the other, “Inside emptiness/Fullness abides” (*Śūnya bākke birāje pūrṇa*).⁴⁴ A recent poem makes the same statement: “In Eternity’s emptiness/Abides/Infinity’s fulness.”⁴⁵

Concerning the gender of God, Sri Chinmoy is consistently clear that God is unlimited in this respect as in all others. God is indeed “He” but also and equally “She.” In a Bengali song he says to the Supreme, “In one form, You are my Father and Mother eternal” (*Ekādhāre tumi janaka jānānī*).⁴⁶ Two early short lyrics put it this way:

God is a Man.
I love His Face.
His blue-gold Love,
My heaven-bound race.

God is a Woman.
I am Her doll.
She is my Love.
She is my All.

God is also, as “impersonal,” beyond gender. One may feel more affinity to one or another “aspect” of God, but all are real. Indeed, there is no need to confine oneself to a single way of imaging and experiencing God, and one is free to name God in any way and in all the ways one

41. *The Vision of God’s Dawn*, 1974, p. 40.

42. *Yoga and the Spiritual Life* (New York: Tower Publications), 1970, p. 22.

43. *Pole-Star Promise-Light, Part 2*, 1975, p. 23. Sri Chinmoy’s own translation.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

45. *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 8*, 1998, No. 7,060.

46. *My Flute*, 1972, p. 55. Bengali in *The Garden of Love-Light, Songbook One*, 1974, p. 12.

wishes. In ordinary human life, “We have to express our emotion to an individual in a particular way. But when we deal with God it is totally different. God is our father, mother, brother, sister, brother, friend; He is everything. We can have all relationships with God. With Him there is no bondage.”⁴⁷

It is perhaps significant that in Bengali, the third personal pronoun *se* can mean either “he” or “she,” and when writing in Bengali Sri Chinmoy just as often speaks of God as “Mother” as “Father.” Altogether it may be said that Sri Chinmoy’s use of “He” for God is neither strong nor exclusive. To some extent the masculine pronoun has served as an accommodation made to those still unaccustomed to the feminine, with the aim of effective communication, as he explained when questions were asked about this in the mid-1970s:

God is both masculine and feminine. The Christ always called God the Father, so the term “Father” is more commonly used in the Western world. In the East, we quite often speak of the Supreme Goddess. But when I am with Westerners, I use the term which is more familiar to you, because I feel that it will be easier for me to share my experiences with you that way. Nevertheless, God is both masculine and feminine. Again, God is neither masculine nor feminine, but transcendental. He is what He eternally is: He is His Vision and His Reality. This Reality embodies both masculine and feminine and also transcends both.⁴⁸

Indeed, he states unequivocally:

God is at once our father and our mother, our divine Father and our divine Mother. In the West, God the Father is prominent, while in the East, in India especially, God the Mother comes first. . . . Both East and West are perfectly right. When we realise God the Father, we are bound to see God the Mother within Him. When we realise God the Mother, we will unmistakably see God the Father within Her.⁴⁹

He associates God as Father with Wisdom, Light, and Vastness and God as Mother with Love, Compassion, and Concern.⁵⁰ While saying that, “God is at once our Father and our Mother. As Father

47. *The Seeker’s Universe* (New York: Sri Chinmoy Lighthouse), 1972, pp. 6–7.

48. *Fifty Freedom-Boats to One Golden Shore, Part 4*, 1974, p. 90–91.

49. *Fifty Freedom-Boats to One Golden Shore, Part 6*, 1975, p. 24. See also *Earth-Bound Journey and Heaven-Bound Journey*, 1975, pp. 54–55.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 27–28.

He observes, as Mother, He creates,⁵¹ only in early lectures has he made reference to the traditional terms *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*.⁵² While accepting the names for the Supreme of the various theistic traditions of India, and commenting that “The gods are the divinely individualised branches of the all-sheltering and all-protecting Tree, the Supreme,”⁵³ he very rarely uses these names except in his Bengali songs, where they are frequent.

God’s Eye, God’s Heart and God’s Feet

In his current poetry⁵⁴ Sri Chinmoy makes extensive use of three images for God’s “aspects”: God’s Eye, God’s Heart and God’s Feet. While these terms have been present in his work from the beginning, he has now adopted them as primary in the sense that they are used more than other terms, though references to God’s Face, God’s Smile, God’s Breath and God’s Arms and Hands also occur. Here only a preliminary reflection on the meaning of these terms can be offered, giving some sense of how they are employed to disclose the divine Being through the reader’s intuitive apprehension.

The ontology of God’s Eye and God’s Heart is stated explicitly in two poems: “When I look at God’s Eye,/ I clearly see/ That His Eye is transcendental,” and “When I feel God’s Heart,/ I unmistakably feel/ That His heart is universal.”⁵⁵ “God’s Eye” is the power of Vision or seeing, and corresponds to the transcendent Source of existence: “Eternity’s Silence-Eye/Gives birth/To Infinity’s sound-life.”⁵⁶ As mentioned above, the dimensions of “God’s Heart,” preceding the world of “sound-multiplicity,” are universality and interiority. What of “God’s Feet”? In an early lecture, Sri Chinmoy says, “In Heaven we see

51. *Yōga and the Spiritual Life* (New York: Tower Publications), 1970, p. 25.

52. See the commentary on the Bhagavad Gita in *Commentaries on the Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita*, 1999 [1971–72]), pp. 218–222, *Eternity’s Breath*, 1972, 21 and 38, and *The Vision of God’s Dawn*, 1974, pp. 21–23.

53. *Eternity’s Breath*, 1972, p.22, see also *Yōga and the Spiritual Life* (New York: Tower Publications), 1970, p. 78, “. . . these gods and goddesses are simply different manifestations of the Sole Absolute. Each deity embodies a particular aspect or quality of the Supreme.”

54. Mainly the series now in progress, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees*, Parts 1–46 and continuing, 1998 through the present. I am grateful to Kakali Atkin for help with references in this section.

55. *Op cit.*, Part 31, 2003, Nos. 30,270 and 30, 271.

56. *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees*, Part 4, 1998, No. 3,238.

God's Eye. On earth we see God's Feet. With God's Eye we enter into His world of silence. With His feet we follow Him into the world of sound. In the world of silence we see God as the many in the One. In the world of sound we see God as the One in the many."⁵⁷ It could be suggested that "God's Feet" correspond to the dimension of incarnation, though no poem I have found states this in so many words. In any case, "God's Feet" surely represent in some way the concrete particularity of the Divine, as the poems show the divine Feet preeminently to be the place of personal encounter and relationship, one that is ever accessible to humanity. All three are linked to the divine Compassion. God's "Compassion-Heart" and God's "Compassion-Feet" both occur, yet it is God's Eye that is much more often referred to in this way, as "God's Compassion-Eye." "God's Forgiveness-Heart" is frequent, with the apparent understanding that "forgiveness" is more active and individualized than "compassion."

As we seek to discern the meanings of the three images, we find that "God's Eye" is spoken of in the language of agency. It is transcendent yet omnipresent, travelling everywhere and seeing all. "I know not where/My Lord's Compassion-Eye/ Is unavailable,"⁵⁸ Sri Chinmoy says. "I clearly see/That my Lord's Compassion-Eye/ Is closer than my own breath,"⁵⁹ yet It remains unfathomable. God's Eye constantly acts: It beckons, blesses, claims, teaches, guides, employs, scolds, cradles, intervenes and protects. It would seem to stand not only for God's power of Vision, but to be connected to "God's Will" which is also spoken of simply as such. For "God's Heart," in contrast, Sri Chinmoy uses spatial language. It is a place into which we can go and remain: most often God's "Heart-Garden," but also God's Heart-Home, Heart-Nest, Heart-Palace, Heart-Guesthouse, Heart-Cottage, Heart-Ocean, even Heart-School. Having entered this place, within it we sing, play, dance and are spontaneously transformed. While God's Eye is more closely associated with divine Justice, God's Heart offers unconditional forgiveness. "Nobody can ever close/ The door/ Of God's Heart-Home."⁶⁰ References to God's "Justice-Eye" can be found, but there is no such phrase as "God's Justice-Heart." God's

57. *Earth-Bound Journey and Heaven-Bound Journey*, 1975, p. 1. Also in *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind, Part 2*, 2004, p. 437.

58. *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 7*, 1998, No. 6,017.

59. *Ibid.*, Part 6, No. 6,306.

60. *Ibid.*, Part 4, 1998, No. 3,204.

Feet are also spoken of as a place, but rather than “entering into” their reality, the human person goes to them and forms a relationship with the Supreme by placing at God’s Feet his or her “very existence.” God’s Feet are the place of surrender. In placing oneself at God’s Feet, the poems say, one has reached a pivotal moment of transformation through self-offering: “My Lord,/ Now that I have embraced Your Feet/ With all the devotion/ That You have bestowed upon me/ Over the years, /I feel that I am completely liberated/ From the snare of earthly desires.”⁶¹ One arrives and sits at God’s Feet, then remains and lives there. One looks at, touches, embraces, shed tears over and eventually “devours the Dust” of God’s Feet in a culminating and continuing realisation of intimacy and oneness.

Conclusion

The God spoken of by Sri Chinmoy is a God of infinite plenitude and limitless self-transcendence. This God is a Mystery, the unknowable God who originates God’s own Being out of God’s Silence and in boundless freedom and dynamism is unceasingly transcending God’s Self to attain a new Reality. The Supreme is without form, is with form, and is beyond both form and formlessness; the Supreme is “He” and is “She,” is also both, and is beyond gender. While certain attributes of God such as Delight, Light, Consciousness, and Compassion are central, there is no end to God’s qualities, the fulness of which is always increasing. God’s creativity and dynamism of transcendence are directed to integral perfection, the manifestation of the positive and fulfilling divine qualities at all levels of existence. Perfection is not a fixed goal, but goes beyond itself so that this transformation, too, is endless and ever-transcending.

In apparent paradox, it is God’s Infinity that makes God intimately knowable to finite living beings, including ourselves. It is just because God is boundlessly free and powerful that God can limit God’s Being and become finite in, and as, God’s creation. At the same time that God is infinite and unknowable, God is also everywhere present and accessible. Those who seek God, each according to his or her own disposition, find that God approaches them and is known by them in the way or ways for which each person has an affinity. The many-sided divine availability is a demonstration of God’s Love and Compassion

61. *Ibid.*, Part 2, 1998, No. 1,076.

for God's creation, and is also one of the ways in which God's limitless and ever-expanding nature expresses itself in the continuing cosmic process of God-manifestation. Sri Chinmoy stresses the personal aspect of God, or God with form, not only because this aspect is more accessible to human persons, but also because it is to the world, to the realm of form, that God-manifestation belongs. This self-transcending transformation towards perfection is an ethical commitment essential to his philosophy as a whole. It is also at the heart of his vision of the nature of God.

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