

FORMS OF THE FORMLESS

An editor with one of India's leading newspapers once said to me that in Mumbai, one just needed to throw a stone and it would land in a guru's house. Although an exaggeration, the sentiment was perhaps valid for all of India. It doesn't stop just at gurus – psychics, astrologers, tarot readers, face readers, numerologists, shadow readers, palmists, you name it... our streets, lanes and by-lanes are full of spiritual and paranormal activity. I wonder if one can ever encounter such a variety anywhere else in the world.

It was while working on my mother's first book that I soon found myself being propelled into this intriguing new world – a world in which I encountered many spiritually gifted beings. I met them through a series of astoundingly synchronistic events. Somehow our paths crossed. I never sought out anyone as such but in spite of that the finding 'happened'. I would meet them through family and friends and, more often than not, through strangers. Initially, I had to be dragged to such meetings. I simply had no conscious interest in meeting them. But destiny had charted a different course for me, just as it was destined that I would be publishing spiritual books even though I had no interest in them at that time. It was only

THE EXTREMITY OF GOD'S WILL

When I was twelve years old and my family was holidaying in Mussoorie, my mother picked up a statue of Joan of Arc from an antique shop. It was a beautiful, white porcelain statue that looked at least a couple of hundred years old. It depicted Joan tied with ropes to a stake, standing on a pile of logs, clasping a gold-painted cross to her chest. It was quite a baffling image for my young mind – why was such a young, innocent looking girl tied up like this to be burnt? What a contradiction it was. I remember wondering why someone was tied up for praying to God.

My mother told me that Joan was a saint who was considered a witch by some, and that's why she was burnt at the stake. I simply couldn't get my head around that. When I thought of her as a witch, I was afraid. When I thought of her as a saint, I was elated. Which version should I believe? So I used to love her at times and I used to fear her at other times. As I grew older, I read up more and more on Joan and it became a fascinating obsession of sorts, especially as I used to meet her every day in my living room! As I learnt more about Joan, my heart ached for the injustice that was meted out to her.

NOTHING AND THE CENTAUR

The centaur had been my childhood companion. He was present throughout those years. He was huge, gigantic actually, perhaps more than thirty feet high. His skin was a shimmering, ethereal blue. He used to watch over me every night, while I slept in my bed by the window. I just had to open my eyes and there he would be, suspended high up in the sky. From that vantage point, he was the king of all that he surveyed. Every night, before going to sleep, I would look up at him, fascinated by this majestic creature who appeared to be striding across the starry night sky. I rested in the comfort of knowing that he was always there while I slept.

The centaur was no fantasy; he was my reality.

My centaur was unique; although his stance was one of full gallop, he stayed fixed in this one spot. Even though he roamed the galaxies, he never left his place in the sky, outside my window. He just stood poised – slowly rotating 360 degrees in one place. I would watch him turn round and round, in slow motion. He was like the earth rotating on its axis – we know that it spins at a tremendous speed but no one can sense its movement.

THE ETERNAL ECHO

I have been an admirer of surrealist artist Salvador Dalí's work since my teenage years. I felt an instant connection with his paintings and would constantly gaze at them in the many coffee table books of his I had purchased or was gifted over the years. I was transfixed by his visual imagery – melting watches, burning giraffes, figures with chests of drawers coming out of them. Dalí was an eccentric genius, although some considered him to be nothing more than a brilliant draughtsman. I saw him as an eccentric genius who also happened to be a brilliant draughtsman. Dalí had single-handedly changed Sigmund Freud's attitude to surrealism. "This young Spaniard, with his ingenious fanatical eyes and his undoubtedly technically perfect mastership, has suggested to me a different estimate," Freud had once remarked.

One of Dalí's most striking paintings is *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*.

There have been several versions of the legend of Narcissus, narrated and interpreted by writers, poets, philosophers and artists. In Greek mythology, Narcissus is a handsome young man renowned throughout the land for his striking good looks. But he consistently disdains those

CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE FENIX

The phoenix is a mythical bird believed to have a lifespan of five hundred years. When it nears the end of its long life, it builds a nest, sits in it, and then self-ignites; enacting what seems like a spontaneous combustion. Both the phoenix and its nest go up in a blaze of glory and are reduced to ashes. From these ashes, a young phoenix is born, to live again for another complete lifespan. The young phoenix embalms the ashes of its old self in an egg and flies with it to the Egyptian city of Heliopolis – the Sun City – where it places it in the temple of the Sun.

The phoenix is considered an emanation of sunlight. It is a symbol of immortality through resurrection.

The end is the beginning.

It was a regular Wednesday. I came home from work, around 7 p.m. My mother walked in a bit later, and put a bag full of incense sticks on the table in my bedroom. She said it was a birthday gift for me from Alan whom she had met at the meditation she just attended.

After a while, I called up The Oberoi Hotel where he was staying to thank him. Strangely, the phone lines just kept ringing and I was unable to get through.