

Hesse in the Eastern Mythical matrix of the Ardhhanarisvara-Sakthi cult.

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Abstract: German novelist Hermann Hesse traced the purpose of his life by trying to find out the truth about art and spirituality. At a time when the world was caught between the two devastating world wars, he chose to concentrate on the East, especially on India from where he borrowed the idea of spiritual transformation of energy. This evolution of the energies forms a pattern in his novels, when they are read chronologically. The novels can therefore be mapped according to the Indian system of evolution of mankind; the spiritual evolution of man. Hesse's novels can be read through this motif, where the characters exhibit the dual tendency of the concept of the Ardhhanarisvara. What emerges is a frame work which encloses the European mind in the Eastern matrix of spirituality and progression. Europe provides the truths from psychoanalysis, and Hesse remains one of the first major writers to be psychoanalysed.

Key words: chakras, concept, male, journey, spirituality

I. Introduction

In the autobiographical work titled "Childhood of the Magician" (1923), Hermann Hesse confessed that it was his ambition, as a child, to become a magician. This ambition rose from dissatisfaction with the everyday reality that he saw around him. Hesse, the German writer lived during the time of Hitler and the world wars. He wanted to construct an ideology that would serve Europe to emerge from the spiritual crisis with which it was infected. He shared these ideals with other eminent thinkers of the time like Romain Rolland, Thomas Mann and Carl Jung with whom he discoursed on these topics. Hesse's foray into the so-called magical world, to create a world of the glass beads has often been viewed from a fairy tale point of view. The German term *Märchen* is widely used to refer to his style of writing, which is a broader term for the fairy tale. What this paper tries to bring out is that Hesse's intention was not limited to a fairy tale magic, though the transformation of energies on which he based his theory of art and spirituality can be termed the real magic which merges the dimensions of art and spirituality.

Hesse's connections with India begin three generations back when his grandfather Hermann Gundert decided to come to the South Indian state of Kerala as a missionary. Gundert after observing the pious practices of the Hindus changed from being a missionary into a full time academic. He learned Sanskrit and Malayalam and tried to decipher the ancient texts. Many of the ancient texts which were written in palm-leaves can only be found in Tübingen university now, and not in its place of origin, Kerala. On the other hand, Gundert's grandson started his life as a writer who wrote about the failed academic system of the time and turned into a missionary of sorts who was always journeying into the East. Hesse held the concept of the global citizen and vouched that patriotism was not above humanism, a characteristic which he emphasizes is Goethean. For this innocent way of thinking, which coincides with the Indian system of Ahimsa, Hesse and his friends were labelled traitors. His homeland Germany became so hostile that he left for Switzerland and remained there till the end of his life for around 25 years.

Hesse's novels, when read chronologically, form an interesting pattern which was mapped by the researcher. It was found that all his characters transformed in their respective novels, in accordance with the concept of the *Bildungsroman* or the *Kunstlerroman*. According to M.H. Abrams, the former signifies the novel of formation, where the protagonist evolves through a spiritual crisis. The latter, called artist-novel is a division of the former where the artist-protagonist realizes his artistic destiny in the journey undertaken. (132-133) Incidentally all his characters are artists who attain a level of perfection through their art and also climb up the rungs of the spiritual ladder. The characters did not stop their evolutionary journey at the end of the novel but carried it forth into the next novel. Thus it was possible to have a coherent reading of the entire series of novels starting from *Peter Camenzind* to *Glass Bead Game*, where the protagonist could be seen as an entity with remarkable similarities with the protagonists in the respective novels.

This linear pattern could be traced with the help of the philosophical system of thought garnered from Elizabeth Haich's *Sexual energy and Yoga*, where Haich connects the sexual drives in man to the spiritual attainment. Here the concept of God is taken as that of a perfect being identical to the Indian mythical concept

of the Ardhanarisvara. The achievement of godhead was possible only through identification and co-existence of the dual entities in each person. The Indian concept of Shiva is regarded as the ideal embodiment of yogic perfection, Shakthi as the feminine creative principle and Ardhanarisvara as the union of the dual principle of Shiva and Shakthi, the masculine and the feminine.

The characters of Hesse were found to have this dual element. In Jungian terms, they could be termed anima and animus. Thus Hesse's life which was a strict Pietist one slowly moved towards the Eastern ideal of a godhead which combined the male and female elements, a concept which was and is still not acceptable to the Western Christian notions. Hesse almost did away with God the father, so much so that in *Demian* he brings in Abraxas, the god who is half male and female, evil and good. (100) The concept of sexuality which is under curtains in the Christian world is brought out into the open by Hesse and his characters evolve along a process of sexual growth and identification.

Hesse could relate the events in his life to the characters that he created, and this was easily done because of the psychoanalysis that he underwent with Dr. B Lang, a student of Carl Jung. Thus the evolutionary movement of the characters from the first novel till the end could be termed the creative consciousness of the writer Hesse. This reciprocal relationship between the life of Hesse and his characters have been carefully detailed from two biographies on Hesse, *The Pilgrim of Crisis* by Ralph Freedman and Hugo Ball's biography-*Hermann Hesse: Sein Leben und sein Werk*. The levels of transformation of the sexual energy into spiritual creative energy can be traced according to the movement of the kundalini along the chakras. The chakra stages are delineated as follows: The first and lowest chakra is the Muladhara and it symbolizes the negative pole. It rests in the coccyx. The second chakra is the Svadisthana and is situated in the nerve plexus above the genital organs. The third chakra is the Manipura which is in the solar plexus. The fourth chakra is the Anahata and it is in the nerve centre of the heart. The fifth chakra is the Vishuddha and it is in the nerve centre of the thyroid gland. The sixth chakra is the Adjna and it is in the centre of the forehead between the eyebrows. The seventh chakra is the Sahasrara and this is symbolic of the positive pole. It is in the uppermost part of the skull.

The different characters of Hesse can be located along the respective chakras in their journey towards evolution. This was possible because Hesse was completely honest with himself, unearthing his unconscious through psychoanalysis. He was acutely conscious of a particular temperament which was working out his destiny and he related it thus: "As I see it, I have an unusual sensitivity that makes me more prone to certain experiences. My mission is to endure them and then articulate them in my work" (Hesse letters 113).

The first character Peter Camenzind could be supposedly in the *Muladhara chakra* the first stage in the seven stages of chakras. The next character Hans in *Prodigy* goes up to the next chakra and the succeeding characters progress along the upward movement of the chakras. The final stage is the Sahasrara, the highest stage of evolution and the state of enlightenment.

Thus the developing character, the evolving X exists in a progressively transforming matrix which comprises of the harmonious union of the positive and the negative. The masculine and the feminine elements must coexist side by side and retain their polarities in a harmonious manner, so as to evolve side by side. These contraries cannot merge in one another since then the whole play would be over and the creative matrix lost. The scene in the last part of *Journey* is one where the protagonist H.H. observes the wax figurine which is composed of two figures, one flowing into and forming the other. (92) The two figures correspond in one level to H.H. and his alter ego, in the second level to the artist and the character and in the third level to the feminine and masculine principle, which join in the eternal dance of creation. Hence the *Journey to the East* presents the final scene in the so-called journey of the character, where H.H. the protagonist looks back at his life and tries to read it. The end of the novel coincides with the symbol of the Ardhanarisvara and seemed to suggest the end of the game itself. When Hesse composed the *Glass Bead Game* in the time span of almost a decade, he had already reached the stage of a sage and was past the evolutionary stages under discussion here. Hence though chronologically *Glass Bead Game* is the last novel of Hesse, the analysis of the progression stages can be said to end with *Journey*.

The Ardhanarisvara myth has to be understood in detail before Hesse's characters can be placed in its evolving matrix. *Ardhanarisvara* has its parallels in the Chinese concept of *yin/yang*, in the Jungian concept of the *syzygy*. On the physical level it means the union of male and female; on a biological level this manifests as the hermaphrodite; on the spiritual level, this manifests as a sexless being, one who is not split by contraries, one in whom the polarities have unified. (Kramrisch 100) *Ardhanarisvara* is neither man, nor woman, but man-woman, thereby, defying all compartmentalisations and refusing conformity to a particular gender. This myth forms the core of the Indian Hindu belief of *Shiva* worship.

One finds *Ardhanarisvara* pervading the whole cosmos. Each atom containing, in itself, the opposing forces of attraction; the positive proton attracted by the negative power wielding electron. Thus *Ardhanarisvara* on the micro level manifests as proton and its polar electron. On a macro level, it manifests as the fusion of the contraries which is the male -female polarity within each person:

The protons are like Shiva; they remain still at the center, attracting the electrons to themselves passively. The electrons, forms of Shakti, whirl incessantly about the nucleus trying desperately to reunite with the protons. Shakti is dynamic because it is She who emanates; She moves outward and then tries to move back, like the protons. The neutrons represent what happens when Shiva and Shakti reunite. (Svoboda *Left* 112-113)

The *Ardhanarisvara* is supposed to be one part *Shiva*, the male form and *Shiva* the female form. The *Ardhanarisvara* reigns on the uppermost part of the skull, the seventh chakra, the level of realization achieved by the yogi. "In order to manifest Sadashiva the Kundalini must be made to rise fully, because the highest manifestation of Shiva in the human being is in the head, the highest part of the body" (Svoboda *Kun* 69). This is the seat of the positive pole, the seventh *chakra*, called the *sahasrara* and "through the activation of this brain centre man attains divine all-consciousness (Haich 42)." Hence, *Ardhanarisvara* symbolizes the ultimate in realization by a human being which is possible in his physical being: the union of the two poles; the male and female in oneself. In the physical body which maintains only one of the two sexes, this union of the two poles is physically impossible.

But the metaphysical realization of being a whole in oneself can provide the ineffable bliss, of rising above the constraints of gender and sexuality, of thus being above the societal norms, since gender and sexuality form its core rules. Thus, from an ideological point of view, *Ardhanarisvara*, a metaphysical level of realization attainable through following the yogic path of discipline and transforming the sexual energy into spiritual frequencies, affirms the independent state of man. In Hesse's novels, right from the start, this feminine element identifies itself with its polar opposite, the male characteristic. Thus the *syzygy*, the divine father-mother element, works on an abstract level right from *Peter Camenzind* onwards. The male protagonists in his novels are able to identify the schism in their selves and are on a progressive wave of transformation of energies which would reveal to them their other halves, the longed for Princess Fatima, the *anima* of Jung, the passionate Maria who could have been Hesse's mother, who becomes the ultimate symbol of womanhood- the Madonna of Goldmund.

In *Peter Camenzind*, the woman manifests as the power in nature, as a mild form of Shakti; she raves as the Fohn which is later identified with the sexual energy of the protagonist. (2) In *Prodigy*, the next stage of Hans, his counterpart Heilner takes up the feminine elements, forming the *Ardhanarisvara* base, and Shakti manifests at its lowest level; the sexual urge. (100) In *Gertrude*, the artist has already transformed his energies from the Muladhara; the first and lowermost chakra upwards to the next level, the Svadisthana; the second chakra and the protagonist is split into the distinct polarities of feminine Kuhn and masculine Muoth. (42) Gertrude is the manifestation of Shakti herself, bringing together Kuhn and Muoth in an unending play of the opposites, which manifests as the creative and destructive power of art. Gertrude becomes Hesse's first elaborate portrayal of woman as completely identifying with the Indian idea of the *Kundalini*: "Your ego is nothing but your Kundalini Shakti, your own personal fragment of Adya. All during life your ego tries to find Her mate, Her controller—Lord Shiva—and because we have forgotten the truth we find evidence of Shiva in other people, and convince ourselves that we have located what we have been searching for" (*Left* 100).

Gertrude is the spiritualizing power in Kuhn driving the energies up from the Muladhara chakra, while she is the same serpent which coils as three and a half rings to the base of the spinal cord in Muoth, who debases his spiritual artistic powers by draining energy downwards. The female is identified here as the power which manifests as Shakti, the counterpart of Shiva in the frame work of the *Ardhanarisvara*. The next protagonist Veraguth is a combination of Kuhn and Muoth, and the evolution of the artist and the transformation of his energies is the driving factor behind the facade of the marriage of the artist. The question of whether the artist is capable of expending his energies in a marriage, when they are meant for spiritual creative powers is raised through *Rosshalde*. (53)

In the next stage, Sinclair brings forth Shakti as 'magical incantation.' Eva the universal mother image, the archetypal mother image makes her first appearance here. Here the concept of Abraxas or *Ardhanarisvara* appears as such in concrete form in another magical character Demian. Eva, the mother, the Shakti initiates Sinclair into the mysteries of the *Ardhanarisvara* and helps him realize this metaphysical idea of the *syzygy*. The transmigration at the end into Demian is the realization of the unification of the opposites in one self. (184) This was significant in the case of Hesse since he was then undergoing psychoanalytic sessions with Dr. Lang. Hesse was an early convert to the ideas of the psychologists and the notions of mystics to believe that it is possible to transform unconscious material into conscious matter. It is not surprising that he subscribed to the method of raising the conscious mind to a higher level of consciousness:

Anyone who has learnt in psychological work how to make unconscious material conscious will already know something about the method of raising the conscious mind to a higher level of consciousness. The patient who has been cured of a neurosis by psychotherapy is thus better able to develop his consciousness than an average person for whom the idea of growing awareness is somewhat foreign. (Haich *preface* 17)

Hence the psychoanalytic lessons of Lang helped Hesse in the evolutionary front, and psychologically as well as artistically the results were being employed by Hesse.

In Sinclair, the energies progress from the Svadisthana, the fifth chakra to the Manipura, the third *chakra*. Sinclair succeeds in transmuting the physical energies into a metaphysical stratum, where he becomes one with the universal mother Eva, who is at once his mother and lover. This mysterious thread is carried on to its beautiful culmination in Goldmund. From the Manipura the energies travel upward to that of the Anahata; the fourth chakra where Siddhartha takes logical decisions. In his journey, the spiritualist evolves into the consciousness of the Vishuddha; the fifth chakra, with the ferryman Vasudeva, who combines in him a father figure and friend, whom Hesse might have longed to have. Shakti here dons the role of sexual energy which has to be satiated through the role of Kamala, the courtesan. Govinda is the other in the pair of the Ardhanarisvara, forming a shadow for Siddhartha, and turning up again at the end in receiving the taoistic kiss from the enlightened Siddhartha. (149) Hesse had experienced a severe block while writing *Siddhartha*, since he could not convey what he had, till then, not experienced. The transformation of energies till the *Anahata chakra* must have been a tremendous strain for the author and after *Siddhartha* the climax, the energies travel down to the *Muladhara* in *Steppenwolf*. Whether this retraction of the *Kundalini*, the spinal serpent happens in the physical plane or in the abstract-spatial level in the Magic Mirror of *Steppenwolf* worried Hesse's readers. They could not digest that the one who composed *Siddhartha*, the spiritual guide, could stoop to the level of the *Steppenwolf*.

But Hesse confirmed that he or any man was not just one half. In a letter written in 1922 to Dr. Erich Oppenheim under whom he was to be treated, Hesse says: "I'm not at all the saint, or even the person, you see in me; when I unleash my temperament, I can be a real monster, a Satan" (letters115). The character of *Steppenwolf* stands testimony to this. At least the energies retrace their origin in the abstract plane, since the whole action in *Steppenwolf* takes place through the Magic Mirror. The reflections perform the task which was impossible for their real selves to perform. This was characteristic of Hesse, since he was used to observing in himself, the after effects of his passions as is evident from the letters. He says that "I like observing myself in action, the wise author of *Siddhartha* dancing the fox-trot and pressing his women against him (135)."

Hesse was a self-conscious individual always alert to register the movements of his energies, and there was no risk involved in the transformation of energies once consciousness was maintained. Those elements of betrayal were played out by Harry Haller in *Steppenwolf*. He succeeds in finding his *anima*, Hermine and does not integrate with her. For integration with one's *anima* was not possible on a physical level, and whenever sexual union imitated this union of the gods, it led to betrayal and, as a consequence, Hermine has to be murdered. (209)

II. Conclusion

Thus the characters of Hesse can be traced along the Indian chakra system of evolution. Each character of Hesse plays the dual role of the man-woman concept, or another character pairs with the main character to give rise to this effect. This identification of the dual element was basic to identifying with the Shiva concept and the Indian philosophic system. In several letters Hesse has also talked about yoga and meditation and how the way of the East was the one worth striving for. Thus this European engaged himself with the ideas of the East and transformed his life and his writings based on the Eastern philosophical construct.

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