

Jude M. Antonyappan
The Way It IS
(Center for Social Action Through Spirituality
PO Box 601614, Sacramento, CA 95860, 2001, 223pp.).

Mary Byles in her book on the Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi, *The Lotus and the Spinning Wheel*, writes *‘There is a middle way between rushing in trying to effect reforms when still filled with feelings of innate hatred and ill-will and not trying to effect those reforms at all until such feelings have been killed. It will always be difficult to find that middle way, but if there is a gradual ending of one’s own desires and complete trust in a Power not self, the way will surely be found.’*

In the minds and hearts of millions there are strong thought forms of a world not based on fear or military might, of domination and hierarchy, but a world based on relations of equality, where women and men have an equal voice, where cultures are accepted for the contributions they bring to the common heritage of humanity, where borders do not divide, and nature is respected.

It is to those millions that Jude Antonyappan has dedicated her book so that spiritual growth may be united with social action. Jude Antonyappan has written an unusual book combining short stories written usually in the first person with sharp observations on the relationship between the personal, spiritual growth, and social action. She notes *“Movements that begin without personal transformation of the individuals are incapable of developing new ways of organizing people past the tired old patterns of struggles centered around class conflict, ethnic and religious conflict...Any action to rid the contemporary world of violence must be centered around creating possibilities for alienated individuals to transform their world view and their personal goal achievement processes in their given life contexts.”*

Trained in social welfare at the University of California-Berkeley, much of her professional life has been spent in India and Nepal. Her stories are set mostly in Asia and highlight the weight of unjust or no-longer useful social patterns. Although the settings are Asian — India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, — the exploitative economic structures and their impact upon the personality are universal, as is the need for individual growth and transformation. Some of the stories are set in violent conditions such as the insurgencies in Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Naxalite movements in India. Other stories are set in families and concern the potentially oppressive institutions of marriage and child rearing. As Antonyappan points out *“ The events that trigger the struggles for changes are different for each society. But there are more commonalities than differences in the ideologies that provide the energy for the struggles, the pattern of organizing, and the kind of leadership that leads these struggles, irrespective of the national differences of the people participating in the struggles. This is accentuated by the similarities in the shared disenfranchisement of people participating in the struggles and their consciousness that human societies are fundamentally organized for the benefit of the few at the cost of many.”*

In order to overcome disenfranchisement, there must be an organized effort for empowerment, but an empowerment that does not reproduce the existing injustices. *“Beginning a movement toward change is not that difficult. But sustaining it at the face of*

societal pressures and individual goal achievement is difficult. Overcoming such difficulty and defeating the oppression of the prevailing systems requires :

- a) a cadre of individuals willing to be transformed;*
- b) processes for transformation of those individuals from a fear, pride, and greed based code of behaviour to a mode of behaviour rooted in courage, unconditional sharing, humble inclusiveness, and faith in the value of collective well being.”*

A necessary first step, though difficult, is to see the spark of the Spirit in one’s opponent. As Antonyappan suggests “Value each human being for the inherent sacredness of life. Pause thoughtfully and spiritually before participating in any action, however greatly justified it may be, if it is known to hurt a single human life on earth... Examine your inner self and chart the process of personal transformation in order to realize your own inner direction and power. This is a pre-requirement for success in eliciting the cooperation of the perpetrators of injustice. Keep a regular journal of your progress.”

The struggle to change the injustices of societies can be long, though there are, at times, unexpected breakthroughs and shifts . Thus, one must always be sensitive to the flow of energy currents. There are also structures and institutions which, though lifeless, take a long time to crumble. One needs patience. As Jude Antonyappan advises *“When a struggle drags on, and when the hoped for changes elude you, don’t get desperate. Do not look for people to blame. Do not discredit the value of those in whom you aspired to bring about the change. Patience has always been and will continue to be a virtue.”*

René Wadlow



Drawing: Cecile Wadlow