Dhyanyogi-ji

This House Is On Fire

Review by Margaret A. Harrell

In the late 19th century it was still possible in India to live a wandering life, in search of "Who am I?" and God. *This House is on Fire*, the authorized biography of Dhyanyogi Madhusudandas-ji, as told by Anandi Ma, recounts such a time, carrying his biography up to the late 20th century, when, at the age of approximately 117, he died. In Indian terms that would be "dropped the body." What is remarkable about this book is not only its very handsome layout and packaging, and the numerous black-and-white period-piece photos. What is more remarkable is the story itself. According to Dhyanyogi-ji, the Indian soil retains the traces of the subtle energy that was built up over centuries by the reclusive spiritual teachers living in the Himalayas and elsewhere. Therefore, while it does not have a society that focused primarily on technological advances like the West, it has historically had power of another kind.

This practice of meditating in the foothills or mountains resulted, according to this account, in the generation of such energy that if such an individual did come out into society, his or her gaze was almost too powerful to look upon. The Indian society itself, until relatively modern times, took it for granted that one of these gurus was more powerful than a King and could heal and bring about other results that in the West are thought impossible or called miracles. For instance, even into the later years of his life, Shri Dhyanyogi would have his disciples meditate together to end a drought, and successfully step out into rain at the end of their meditation time. Something else that is interesting in view of the plagues in the European West is

that in India the capacity was taken for granted, on the part of one of these powerful subtle energy teachers, to end an outbreak of disease. They were considered more powerful than the disease and could bring it to end in a region, at will. Again, the result would be set into the powerful subtle energies that existed in these regions, built up over centuries of meditation by the reclusive teachers. This is a part of history that I have never read about, in quite this way, in any other record. It was not only with regard to individual healing, but the healing of communities, by a single sage or saint, who drew upon the energy of traditions.

But making this book even more powerful is the relationship with his heir, Anandi-Ma. This part of the book is based on first-hand witnessing; witnesses are still alive. And very revealing photographs underscore the words. These photographs capture the child in meditation as she took the characteristics of various deities she merged with. That account—how Dhyanyogi-ji worked for four years to help her control the level of her energy—is in print in this much detail for the first time. Had she not been able to control the level of her energy, as it rose into her head, she would eventually have lost the ability to remain alive. Therefore, he had her accompanied at all times, often staying for hours at her side himself, including when she was in trance. Not only are the stories of these trances interesting in themselves, they bear the minuteness of detail that marks true record.

The way that India is presented in the book as having in its ground traces of the subtle energy of the reclusive saints that meditated in the foothills and walked the countryside, with no possessions, being fed in exchange for blessing, is an astonishing turn-around from the Western perspective that such abilities, as they were widely said to display, were not physically possible. For a soil to have something as tangible as a DNA, though called subtle energy traces, is a very different way of looking at a country's history. One wonders what kinds of energies might be in

other soils, with quite different histories—subtle energies marking the perspective of the inhabitants born into that territory. But this is subtle spiritual energy. Hopefully, subtle warring energies would not gain such a firm hold. Yet we speak of the "shadow" of a culture, and this is perhaps another way of expressing that—one, according to Dhyanyogi-ji, that is based soundly on science. The science being spoken of is the science of spiritual evolution. It is impossible to explain, except in terms of subtle energy. What is the relationship of subtle energy to physical energy? Starting here, we might get some sense of the foundation of this biography.

For years Dhyanyogi-ji walked over India barefoot, in freezing cold and blistering hot weathers, never killing an animal. The belief is in much of India, through experience, that the animals know when a human is "pure" and will not harm such a human being. Thus, cobras or tigers might be met and never become a threat. This habit of walking extended into his 90s, when he still walked so fast that almost no one could keep up with him. While bringing in the warmth, humor and humanity of a living being, the biography also is sprinkled with these stories of the *siddhis* (powers) that in the West are called, by some, paranormal. Perhaps when we have more histories from these cultures, we will understand them in other terms.

This book is highly recommended for its inspiration and the palpable energy presence. It is also recommended for lovingly recording a time which no longer exists, while there are still eyewitnesses. The time that no longer exists is that where such saints walked across the country, living in poverty, carrying only the power to bless. It is also a time in which the society sustained such an existence and those powers illustrated by such sages were supported by unquestioning belief. That belief itself was in the soil and reinforced the whole situation. No one walks for 30 years today, seeking "God-realization." Some still remain in the Himalayas. But this story is truly a relic, like the subtle energy in the soil. It is also time that we heard the Anandi Ma side of

the story, and the devotion of this great teacher, a Kundalini Maha Yoga master, to the person he chose for his heir: how they met, what she was like then as a child, her trances, her mergings with the Divine Mother, and the situation today. I don't believe we can be true historians if we only keep the records of what fits into the current Western "belief system." That would be self-perpetuating. The Native Americans called Blackfoot, for instance, have a physics that is in some ways contemporary, though part of their indigenous culture. In that culture, names change repeatedly, matching the observation of the Blackfoot that everything constantly changes. There are many profound teachings held inside the deep histories of different cultures, and to know the true "belief system" of the planet itself—those things that have reached a consensus and those where there is belief, even evidence, on different sides—we have to know these hard-to-find original records.

Here is an India as few outside the country, even today, know it. Few, in the West, understand what the spirituality of India has been about, which, though the country is not perfect (which the book says), carried, below the surface, these seeds of a past and present we could all benefit from reading of. Dhyanyogi felt it important to unite East and West, the traits mastered at both ends of the spectrum—that of the subtle energy in the East (its whole historic culture-supported gestalt) and that of the science-oriented, materialistic West, which supported action. But for this, you have to look beneath the surface. You have to go to where the subtle energy resides and is felt. This is opposite from what is required to fit in, in the West.

In the East the "goal" of spiritual evolution is to strip down beneath the surface of the apparent reality, to know the true possibility of life, to know "Who am I? and have the consciousness of the unity of all life. In having this God-consciousness, then, one is the manifestation of that consciousness, carrying its actions into the Earth, just as in the West there is

action of another sort, more physically motivated. But to know action that is the manifestation of having God-consciousness—to embody that in action—means that *cause* comes down to use of this subtle energy. So the whole Western approach is challenged. But in the West, as well, God is manifested. And so the task is inclusive.

Here is a true story illustrating a house on fire with spiritual energy, which, as the subtitle says, thereby has so much energy that it offers to others the invitation to come into the energy and "loot all you can." This recalls the statement "Give all ye have to the poor"—put in terms of giving all that one has, of one's energy, for there is energy to spare. According to reviews *This House Is On Fire* will rank with Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* as a priceless spiritual classic.