

Confluence

Antra Sinha turns to yoga to stay fit and focused when she creates artwork that requires physical, mental and emotional one-pointedness.

Are we aware of our body? Our mind? Our inner self/soul/ spirit? Most of us are not. We may be aware of any one if not none. In some situations, we become aware, we realise that the body wants rest, the mind wants ambition to be fulfilled and the spirit, is numb. In other situations, the body is working out, the mind is dreaming about a space ride and the spirit's voice can't be heard.

Today, I'm an artist who works with clay. I try my best to be disciplined as I need to stay fit in my spirit, mind and body. Sri Aurobindo's^[1] Integral Yoga explains the five-fold education. Transformation is about being aware of the five aspects (physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual) of our being and training them intuitively to progress in harmony. With a partial understanding of these aspects of our being, the next important step is how to make them move towards one goal. If the body wants an apple, the mind lusts for ice cream and the spirit wants an incense stick for the altar, who is going to parent these three siblings to choose any one for the moment?

Here yoga helps. I was introduced to yoga at the age of ten at the Bihar School of Yoga in Dhanbad. There, I was immersed in the routine of prayer, yogic exercises, meditation, shramdan (social service), regular meals and rest. I think it was then that my spirit learnt that I could make a humble prayer without any ritual. I had the spark. I knew I could talk to



my spirit but it would very often go under covers, so I had to be careful.

At the studio, I plan to work on the wheel and make platters. I prepare and wedge, five times, eight kilos of clay. Then, I do a little stretch for my legs and sit on the kick wheel to make flat discs. Centering

the clay and staying focused on the earth that spins between my hands and working with its rhythm and movement, echoes my early morning asana practice. As I breathe into each posture, ground myself and listen to the universal self as it moves through the sun salutation, there is a fine balance between applying



The Mother ^[2]:

“Life is quite simple and easy if man’s mind did not introduce in it so many useless complications.”

enough but not too much pressure. I cannot force the clay, but must work with it to co-create the disc I envisage and the same applies to my gross and subtle body when I practice asanas.

My regularly irregular yoga practice prepares me for my work at the studio. Pranayama breathing and concentration exercises help organise my thoughts; Om uccharana increases my concentration; pavanmuktasana, chakrasana and surya namaskars tone my muscles to be ready to take any stress of work through the day. Yoga Nidra makes me aware of my body, connects body, mind and soul, heals the stresses from the past and prepares me for a productive day. Brahma pranayama resonates in me inside out and mahamrityumayemantrajapa aids my prayer for well-being of the self and the universe.

Once the disc is ready, I apply clay slip, and/or introduce a texture on the disc. After the outer surface is slightly dry, I stretch the disc to get the desired surface cracks and organic texture. The piece will then sit in the slump mould, lightly covered with some newspaper and then plastic for slow drying. The straight back position geared because of my yoga practice, the leg muscles prepared to kick for as long as needed to make a nice disc and the ability to say when it is done, or to come up with ideas for an interesting piece is the confluence of my art and yoga.

Twelve discs fit in the kiln, one on each shelf. Once they are bone dry, the kiln is loaded. The 15 kilo shelves have to be lifted and placed on posts. There have been times when my body is not ready to take on such work and I have harmed my back by pushing myself. Early morning, the next day, I begin the firing. At six am, I start feeding wood until the kiln temperature reaches 1300°C. It is usually a 16-hour process. I deal with a lot of heat and have to make decisions about effects that are glowing white in heat at the time. Here I surrender – my experience and presence of mind come to bear but the elements – fire, earth and air join the fray and together determine the final result.

Whether I am doing my own work or assisting my teacher, Ray Meeker,^[3] in loading and firing his monumental sculptures, yoga helps me concentrate, keep agile and manage involuntary twitches through the process, both physical and emotional. Even after an exhaustive day, I’m able to recuperate with a good night’s sleep and prepare myself for the following tough day at work.

I work hard to stay in complete harmony with all aspects of my life in order to continually work at my art. The confluence keeps growing. <<

Sri Aurobindo^[1] (1872 – 1950) was an Indian nationalist, freedom fighter, philosopher, yogi, guru and a spiritual reformer who introduced his visions on human progress and spiritual evolution.

The Mother ^[2] (1878 – 1973) also known as Mirra Alfassa was the spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo.

Ray Meeker^[3] is a ceramic artist, who along with his partner, Deborah Smith, established Golden Bridge Pottery (GBP) in Pondicherry in 1971.

