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MIND over matter. That is the question that has intrigued people over a period longer than most psychology buffs would probably care to remember. Is it really possible for Man to use the power of the mind to effect changes — for better or for worse — in the physical world? Does the mind possess such powers at all?

Most people probably try not to think about it, while the more sceptical ones would no doubt dismiss the possibility out of hand.

There are, however, those who do not regard the question as a question at all. To them, mind over matter is in fact the answer. And their number is a growing one.

That is certainly the case in the industrialised, advanced West where new ideas are eagerly sought, and scientific facts emerge from what used to be regarded as mere speculation.

In recent years though, more and more people in developing countries such as Bangladesh, seem to be taking a keen interest in what has come to be known as mind control.

Take Mahee Quazi for instance.

Formerly a fighter pilot, then a computer engineer, a Bengalee now living in Britain, he is not only a proponent of a particular school of mind control, he is also an instructor or guru of Isometric U.K., which teaches the Silva Method of mind control.

This school gets its name from its founder, a Mexican-American electronics technician named Jose Silva. To Silva, who now owns a major electronics firm in south Texas, and heads a huge world-wide organisation called the Silva Mind Control International Inc., the whole idea of mind over matter is a natural or earthly one.

Followers of Jose Silva say that nothing miraculous or supernatural is involved in their method, and that it is a simple matter of being able to, or being trained to, control one's own mind and use its power.

This question of utilizing power of the mind is, of course, not a new one, nor an extraordinary proposition. After all, Man has learnt to train his body to perform stupendous tasks, at a high level of efficiency, so why not the mind?

"Nobody has seen the mind. It is a shapeless thing which everyone possesses. When you can't see the mind, how do you control it and put it to use?" asks Mahee Quazi while talking to the Daily Star.

"Since you can't identify the mind, you have to find the physical organ which has the

Miracles of the Mind

Man is possessed with mind. The Silva Method helps to develop the power of the mind to effect changes. This however, requires appropriate training and exercise. Mahee Quazi, a renowned instructor of the Silva Method, residing in UK, talks to the Daily Star about the miracles the mind can achieve.

by Sabir Mustafa

closest connection with it. And that is the brain", Quazi elaborates while attempting to answer his own question.

According to conclusions drawn by Jose Silva, when Man is most tranquil then the electricity that is created in the brain has a low frequency, and

hurry and under stress or strain. So, stress goes up, frequency goes up and efficiency goes down.

Quazi, however, does not view stress to be undesirable. "Who is not under stress? And why is stress so bad?", he asks. "We all need some kind

Rather like an airline or air force pilot having to do a lot of hours in a simulator before flying an actual aircraft, Quazi the former fighter pilot says matter-of-factly.

The Silva Method does not involve any physical movement, as the entire course of



Mahee Quazi (right) hands over a Silva/Isometric graduation certificate to a course participant.

he is most productive in that condition.

"That means we have to try and pacify our minds or reach a tranquil stage when the frequency of the brain is lower. The more we can relax ourselves, the lower the frequency", Quazi explains.

With tranquility one is able to exert control and, Quazi believes, with such control of one's own self, one's behaviour towards others is also likely to be a controlled and peaceful one.

Following from that, Silva has evolved a course which is designed to train people to relax and gain control of their minds.

The problem lies with the hectic pace which people seem to be trying to progress, without adequate mental preparation. Whenever people try to achieve anything in life, Quazi says, they get into a

state of tension or stress to keep us intact and in the physical shape we are. It is distress which we do not want. We want Uttrass, which is positive, but because we haven't learnt to take control of ourselves in any given circumstance, we get into distress".

The solution, says Quazi, lies in relaxation and mental exercises. The Silva Method is all about how to relax and exercise the mind.

"We try to imagine and visualise and create the environment, the condition that we wish to have in the physical world. This is a logical step, because nothing in the world is ever created without thought or imagination", he emphasises, adding that "it is a scientific fact that before anything happens in the physical dimension, it has to happen in the mental dimension first".

mental exercises is done sitting down. The idea is not to go into a trance or freak-out, but to relax, visualise and imagine.

If that sounds easy, then it is because Quazi believes it to be so. Why? Quazi, again matter-of-factly emphasises what he thinks to be the foundation of the Silva approach: that all men and women have the ability to use the power of the mind by gaining control, provided they are given the appropriate training and exercises.

What can one do with mind control, apart from being in a relaxed frame of mind? In reply Quazi narrates a little story: "Few weeks back I heard about a man who was told by doctors that he needed a heart by-pass operation. Later, some Silva graduates went to work on him, purely using the power of the mind. When the

day of the operation came, doctors were stunned by the pre-operation X-ray, which showed that the by-pass had been done automatically. That is the power of the mind".

Quazi is well-aware such stories may not be easily acceptable as facts to many people. Some may describe them as coincidences rather than the result of a deliberate use of mind-power.

"OK, call them coincidences, or miracles or whatever... If there are one thousand such coincidences in the world every year, should anyone have any objection?", asks Quazi.

Methods of mind control are nothing new, and there are various other approaches to it, with the Indian Yoga being possibly the best-known across the world.

However, Quazi refuses to be drawn into comparison with other methods, saying that since he has no practical experience of Yoga or any other method, it would not be appropriate for him to pass judgment.

In Bangladesh Quazi's Isometric U.K. runs a four-day, 36-hour course every three months or so. Isometric Bangladesh is Quazi's own company which is associated with the world-wide Silva organisation.

So far 250 have "graduated" in the Silva Method in Dhaka, since the courses began about a year ago. That number does not sound like a lot in a city of seven million. But at Taka 6,000 per course, it is probably not designed to be a mass market venture either.

Quazi hopes some of the "graduates" will be able to qualify as instructors of the Silva Method and expand the number of courses in Bangladesh.

He believes the course is likely to become more popular, because there is a definite requirement for it in Bangladesh, particularly in Dhaka.

Finally, the inevitable question: what is it like?

To that, Quazi poses a counter-question: "I have never tasted what honey tastes like. Give me an idea. Do you think you can really tell me what honey tastes like?"

"No matter how good you are with language, no matter how vast your vocabulary is, I have no doubt you will never be able to make me understand the taste of honey in words. But you can bring me spoonful of honey, put it on my tongue and you won't have to tell me anything at all. The honey itself will tell me its taste."

"Life is like that. You have to experience it to know what it is like", Mahee Quazi, apparently content with his own personal world, says.

Islam the Second Biggest Religion in France

With a community of 3 million, Islam is the second biggest religion in France after Catholicism. Paradoxically, the law of the separation of the Church and the State, that is to say the principle of secularism, allows the Muslim religion to develop freely in France.

Joseph Olivier

MAGHREBIAN Islam has the highest number of followers in France, assessed at 800,000 Algerians, 500,000 Moroccans, 200,000 Tunisians and 700,000 French Muslims. These include Muslim repatriates from Algeria and second generation immigrants.

The number of Muslims from Black Africa is estimated at 150,000, from Turkey at 150,000 and from Yugoslavia at 70,000. Then there are those from the Near and Middle East, as well as from Asia. There are also about 40,000 converted French people.

The Islam community is thus a vast mosaic of nationalities and ethnic groups, but also of dogmas and rites, although the Sunnites form the large majority. However, it offers its members an increasingly asserted cultural and moral reference.

Claims for an Islamic identity appeared in France in the mid-70s "with many immigrants of Muslim origin" becoming aware that they were involved in an unavoidable process of sedentarisation in France" (Gilles Kepel, "Les Banlieues de l'Islam", publ. by Le Seuil).

Indeed, in 1974, the economic crisis, which was a consequence of the oil shock, forced the government to suspend the influx of immigrant labour. The unexpected result of this decision was that it

prompted a number of Maghreb immigrants to stay in France, for fear of not being able to come back later, and to bring their families over in the legal framework of the French policy of keeping families together, which had not been suppressed.

While the presence of these people was viewed as temporary and the myth of returning to their countries lasted, Islam remained linked to their countries. When immigrants began to become sedentary in France, Islam became part of the French scene.

The big mosque in Paris was built after the First World War, but prayer rooms only began to multiply in the 70s, in single workers' hostels, in social housing and in factories. Renault set the example in 1976.

Then mosques opened in Mantes-la-Jolie (1981), in two working-class districts of Paris, in the suburbs (Nanterre), in Roubaix and in Marseille. In Every, a new town in the Paris area, a mosque and a Catholic cathedral were built at the same time. Plans for a big mosque were put forward in Lyons and in Marseille. At present, France has about a thousand places of worship.

The law on the separation of the Church and the State

bans the latter from financing or deciding on the construction of a place of worship. So, it is the local authorities which give permission and Muslim associations which raise the money needed for building.

With the opening of religious centres, bookshops and ritual butchers', the presence of Islam can be seen in daily life. School dinners and staff canteens offer alternatives to ham. The written press, radio and television no longer ignore Ramadan and thanks to local radio, the Muslim community also has its stations on FM.

But the diversity within this community is detrimental to its cohesion. The variety in the national origins reproduce the political differences which sometimes oppose the states, not to mention the problems of cohabitation between Algerians and the repatriate Muslims from Algeria. The 800 associations which cater to most of the Islamic trends were unable to agree on electing a representative for the French state.

So, with a view to setting up a dialogue, Pierre Joxe, the Minister of Internal Affairs at the time, created the Council of Reflection on Islam in France, composed of 15 members representing the big trends within the Muslim community. Six elders were initially elected, who co-opted nine other people.



The West African immigrants find a place of security in France. Here they are seen seated, getting ready for prayers. — Photo: Sygma

The Impact of Buddha in Unforgettable Prints

Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy in collaboration with the Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO put on show the Travelling Reproduction Exhibition entitled "The image of the Buddha" Jan 28— Feb 10. Here is a review by Fayza Haq.

Buddhism and Buddha from before. Our local museums and art exhibition displays could do well to take tips in the manner in which the captions were attached methodically and adequately with each display. The photographers in the country could also learn about some angles of picture taking from the expose.

The image of the Buddha reproduction exhibition at the Shilpakala Academy showed both Buddhism and Buddha's teachings — the life history of Buddha as Siddhartha (about

563 B.C.), before he obtained Buddhahood (enlightenment) and his life as Buddha. It was explained that every Buddhist art was purely symbolic and it is only from about the 1st century A.D. onwards that Buddha was seen as a human form. The early symbolic art stood

for only four great incidents in the life of Buddha — his birth, enlightenment, first sermon and death. Later, when the presentation of the Buddha became accepted in the human form, more events of his life were delineated in Buddhist art, in order to depict his teachings.

A young viewer would have been fascinated to learn that the Mauryan Emperor Asoka (3rd century B.C.) encouraged the spread of Buddhism throughout the Mauryan empire which today comprises India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Even under the Kushana emperors, one was informed, Buddhism flourished through the Central Asian region. Later, the enthusiasm of the Buddhist

monks carried the faith to eastern and South East Asia, one learnt. As the Buddhist faith travelled over the expanse of the Subcontinent and overseas, it became diffused and adopted different syncretic forms.

The new idea of the Bodhisattava (Buddha to be) became even more important in the Mahayana form of Buddhism which found favour in North Asia and the Bodhisattavas, such as Avalokitesvara and Manjari, put greater importance on the personality, one gathers.

However, in South Asia, the older form of Buddhism known as Hinayana or Theravada continued to keep its foothold. Finally it culminated into the

cult of the Buddha's personality in the Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lanka and South East Asia, one learnt further.

As Buddhism spread from one country to another as history progressed, Buddhist art gathered the local styles of different Asian countries and has thus given an artistic legacy whose charm lies in its diversity.

Among the photographic delineation of Buddhist art was a piece — "Abhisika" (consecration). The enlightenment was represented by the "Bodhi" (knowledge) tree, which has been traditionally taken to enshrine the highest knowledge and is hence sacred in character. This was in blue and yellow ochre. On the

right was Buddha's nativity represented by Mahayana. In the centre was Buddha's enlightenment shown by the "Bodhi" tree. On top was the "great complete extinction" (Mahaparinivana) shown by a stupa.

In the life stories that were presented, the entry of Buddha into his mother's womb was presented by a white elephant. After the childbirth, the presence of the child from the first birth was suggested by an umbrella and a fly whisk, suspended in a tree. The empty throne under the tree represented the unshakable determination to seek the truth. Footstools with two footprints were also often.

In one of the most absorbing depictions was Queen Mahayana's dream from Sikri, N.W.F.P., Pakistan, at present at the Lahore Museum. It was 19 by 26 cm., and the queen was shown lying side-lying in bed, guarded by her sister, dreaming of pregnancy, symbolised by an elephant.

A poster with Buddha's three life scenes were in symbols. The first was a greenish white limestone image, 90 cm., from the 3rd century, in greenish-white stone. It had the bath scene, the middle bath scene on a pedestal and seven steps representing seven tiny footprints on the bathcloth.

The delineation of a stupa from Madhya Pradesh, India from the 2nd century B.C. was in red stone, from the Indian Museum in Calcutta and it showed devotees worshipping a stupa.

Something that almost every viewer was acquainted with was the "Seated Buddha" in the "Abhya" or reassurance pose. It was from Katra, Uttar Pradesh, India from 2nd century A.D., in red stone, 69 cm, presently at the Archaeological

Museum at Mathura. This representation in human form reflected a later tendency in Indian art when deities were for the first time given a human form in the first century B.C. Earlier it was impossible to think of a human form of Buddha.

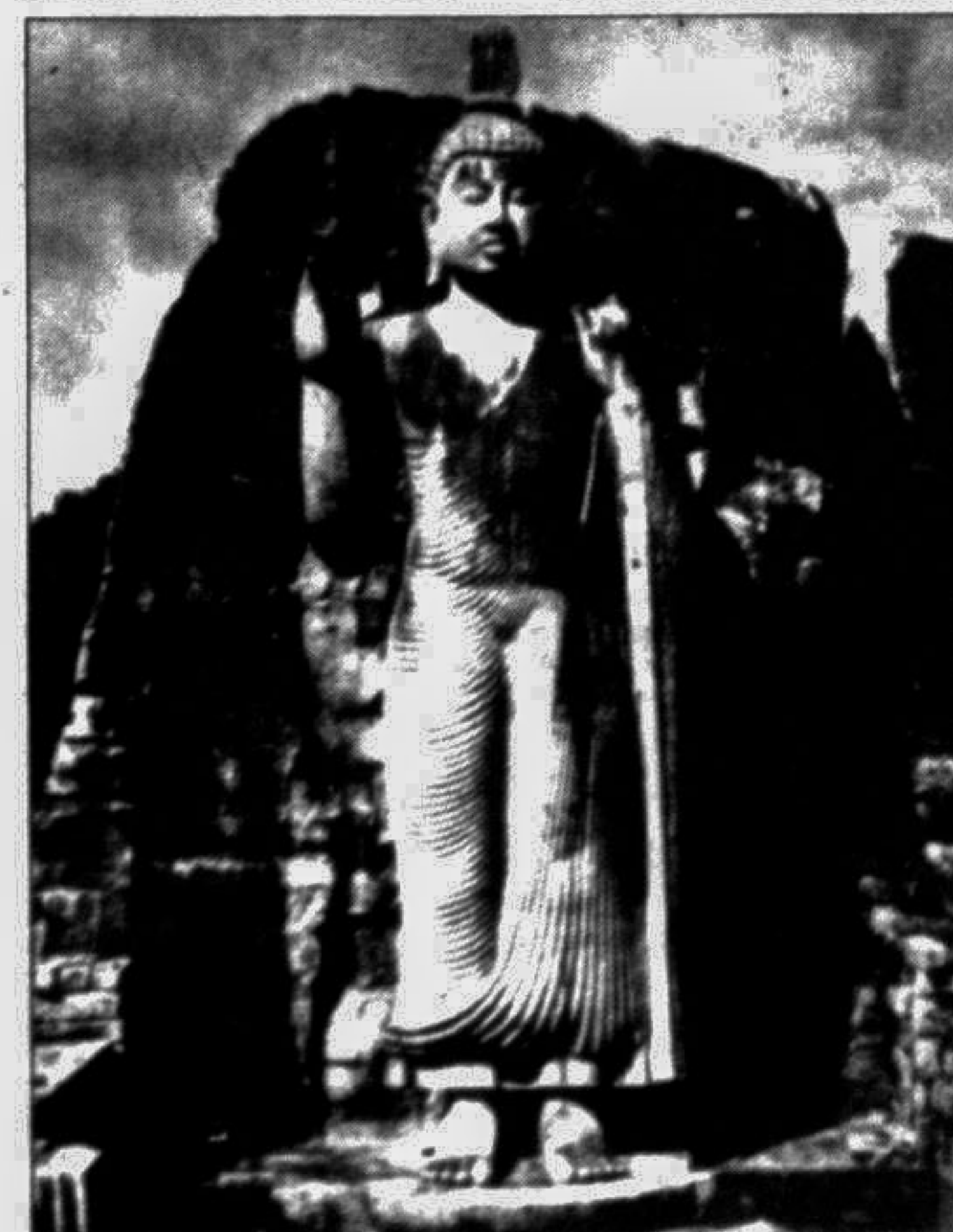
Perhaps most well-known and most admired was the picture of the "Fasting Buddha" — image from Sikri, N.W.F.P., Pakistan, in blue schist; 83 cm from the 2nd century A.D., now at Lahore Museum. The ascetic practising austerity before enlightenment in the adamant pose was a masterpiece of the human anatomy. For a Buddhist viewer as well as anyone else this had tremendous impact.

From Sri Lanka came the "Toluviat" of the 6th century A.D. It was a serene seated figure of Buddha, hands in a meditating pose, with silken robe covering only the left shoulder.

From the same country came the colossal standing Buddha in gold print. This was a rock-cut sculpture 11.85m, in height 8th century A.D. This tall massive Buddha was in typical Sri Lankan medieval style, with the right hand raised in the pose of benediction. The face had thick lips and curly hair, which one finds so common among many Sri Lankan people today.

The Burmese meditating Buddha was from Khin Ba Mound. It was in gold and from the 5th to the 6th century. Seated cross-legged, there was a lion and aquatic monsters on each side. From another Khin Ba Mound was the gilt and silver 5th to 6th century A.D. Buddha statue now at the Hinawza Museum.

As I mentioned earlier, from Uzbekistan, Central Asia, now found at the Hermitage, Leningrad was the frieze on the Buddhist theme. There was also the head of Buddha from Tadzhik, Central Asia, now found at the Institute of



The Buddha image from Sri Lanka



Visitors at the Expo.

Even though all that one could see were photographs and not actual statues, replicas or even pottery fragments, yet the posters had done a good job and provided adequate information. It would have been an educational experience for someone who studied history even till the bachelor's degree, and was aware of ancient world history.

One was simply not bored or fatigued going through each and every poster and the detailed captions that went with the delineation of the monasteries, statues and artifacts. I know of individuals who went twice to survey the exhibition, knowing full well details of