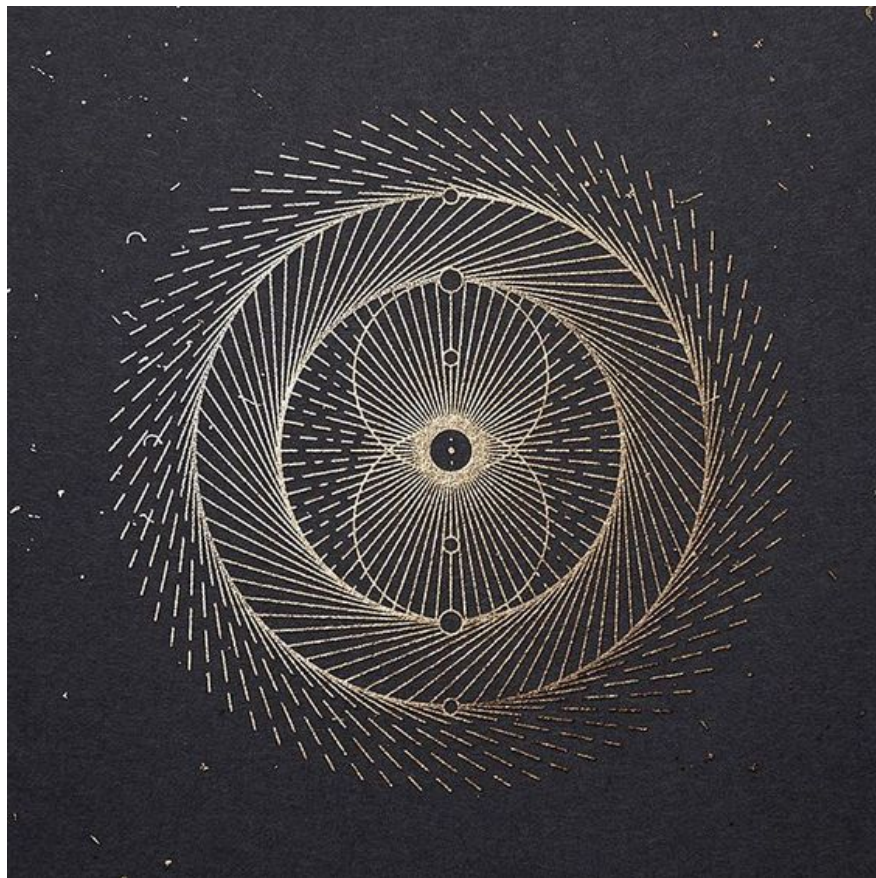


The Journey



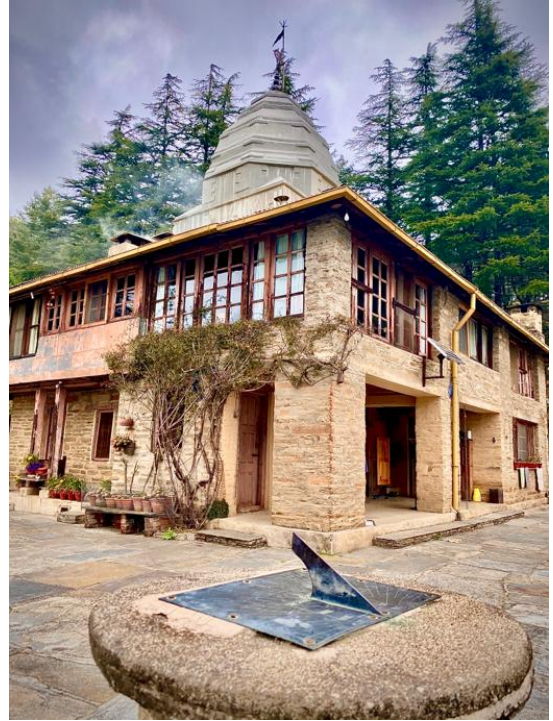
**A narrative by Kamla Pandey
based on dream landscapes and characters
that symbolize Everyman's inner search.**

Introduction

I wrote this piece during the twelve years my husband, Satish Pandey and I spent at Mirtola Ashram, when we were actively working with Ashishda – outwardly, as part of the life of the temple and ashram farm, with other members of the group, and inwardly, through dream interpretation, meditation practice, and group discussions and readings.

It was a very intense period of work – as one was, under the guru’s guidance, attempting to make a way through the jungle of one’s psyche to find – what? A core of inner certainty.

Even before we came to live permanently at the ashram, I had had recurrent numinous dreams (which we discussed with Ashishda on regular visits to the ashram and through letters). These were suffused with typical dreamlike, bizarre images, people, and events, seeking always to help one face and overcome inner compulsions. In addition, the Mirtola connection opened one up to contacts with inner guides – figures through which the teaching was given within the context of one’s personality’s landscapes. Many of Ashishda’s techniques for dream work and its relevance to the inner inquiry are described in his book *An Open Window*.



Bhagwati's Daughter

Evening crept in with all its shadows and the horizon gleamed with a crimson light. Priya was not surprised that it was already evening here though it was morning when she left home. She walked through the quiet, hilly region and found herself entering a narrow bazaar.

Men and women were like shadows here. They were of different nationalities and talked slowly, softly, ignoring her. She found it all very strange. Shops with glass walls were being cleaned and opened.

Sunlight was beginning to flood the marketplace. From one end of the bazaar she could see the darkness of the night retreating and the distant temple dome lit up by the spreading light. That was the place she wanted to reach, but would she find the way?

She saw a group of people carrying lots of luggage and hurrying towards the railway station and followed them. No one took any notice of her. They seemed to be crushed under the burden of their luggage. Something in their anatomy also struck her as odd – disproportionately large bellies, small mouths, and toes so shaped that it was difficult to say whether they were coming or going, and eyes singularly devoid of expression. 'The Flying Mail' steamed in and even before it came to a halt her shadowy companions started jumping into it. Priya did so too, but lost her black bag in the process.



Disoriented and full of panic, she looked around the empty compartment and noticed a fellow traveller dressed in pink sitting in a corner with her legs resting on a bedroll. She was a remarkably attractive person with dark, smiling eyes, full of amusement. Something about her completely reassured Priya. For the first time she felt she had met a real person and not merely a blurred, shadow-like form like the rest of the people there.

A stern voice asking for her ticket brought her back to reality; but she had lost her ticket with the bag. As she haltingly stammered an explanation, the kind Lady in Pink said to the ticket checker, 'She is Bhagwati's daughter.' 'Oh, so that is your ticket,' said the ticket checker with a smile. He then bowed to the lady, said, "Thanks for the tip, madam", and moved away. Priya was amazed and turned towards the lady to thank her but couldn't find the right words. The lady had by that time got up to go. She embraced Priya warmly and gave her three envelopes and a photograph of a girl in a pink frock. Before a bewildered Priya could ask her how she happened to know her mother's name and how that was her ticket, the lady disappeared into thin air .

Priya was now getting used to the strangeness of the place and people. The train stopped, but she knew that was not the place she wanted to go. However, a voice from behind asked her to get down. 'But I want to go somewhere else!' protested Priya. The tall person who had given the command said in his deep voice, 'Here it is not a question of your wishing, but of obeying their wishes.' 'But who are they?' she asked. 'They are the "Elders",' he whispered in her ear. 'The Magus at the temple is their Man.' With her usual stubbornness Priya said, 'Suppose I don't get down?' 'Then the train won't move,' he said, 'till you are thrown out.' 'But how will I reach my destination?' she asked angrily. 'New to this place?' asked the man. 'Well, here all roads, vehicles and people reach the same destination. Only the experience and the time taken varies.' The next thing she knew, she was pushed out of the train and it steamed away.

Desert Landscapes

All she could see was a long stretch of dust and sky and a few green groves of palm trees. The breeze was cool but Priya felt like a heap of bones, tired and lonely.

Then through a cloud of dust a camel driver came towards her. The camel seemed to have a full load of passengers already, but the driver stopped and the camel sat down for her to climb on. The only place for her was the hump and she



somehow managed to perch herself on it. The camel driver had the same sparkling eyes that she had seen before in the strange land and he pointed out the trees from which toddy was extracted and told them how date toffees with toddy were made. In her usual abrupt manner she asked the camel driver if he knew the ‘Secret of Secrets’. He nodded and smiled in affirmation and she got all confused and could ask no more. Meanwhile, everyone got busy with their own work. Priya found this group rather interesting and decided to stick with them. She started to help an old lady who was cooking, but her mind kept going back to the camel driver. She noticed that her childhood fear of camel rides and camel drivers seemed to have vanished. The others, it seemed, were not puzzled by the camel driver. One of them even looked at her intently and said, ‘Still thinking of the camel driver and the Lady in Pink? Well, they come and go. We have to get on with our jobs.’ And saying this, they all disappeared and she found herself alone again.

Suddenly, a storm arose. Sky and earth became a dusty mass. The shrill, piercing sound of the wind was deafening. Priya was frightened, unsure what to do. She heard a voice say, 'Kneel down or rise above it.' Not knowing how to rise above a storm, Priya knelt down till it blew over. The sky and the sand turned various hues of crimson and red, which turned into different shades of darkness.

The group appeared around her again. Lying under the canopy of stars, Priya ruminated about this new group. It was obvious to her that there was a world of difference between them and the group that she had met earlier. This lot had a purpose and a will of their own. She had an uncanny feeling that she had even met and known some of them before,

Unknowingly she drifted into deep slumber.

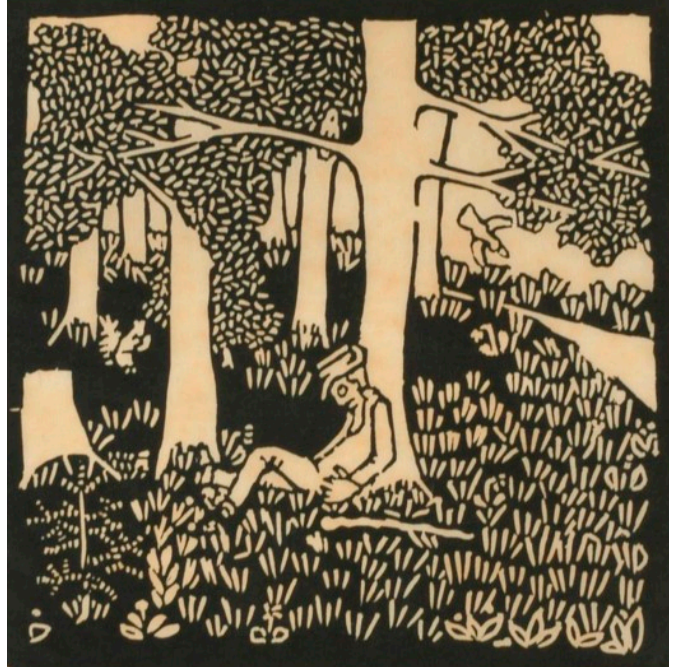
Further Meetings and Other Landscapes

When Priya woke up, she was alone again and felt unhappy and angry. There were tyre marks on the dirt road and she realised that she had missed the bus. Feeling piqued, she wondered whether those people were just selfish or had left her behind on purpose to force her to find her own way. 'Strange people,' she thought as she walked along the path. 'Just because I slept for a while they left without me. It seems that the law of this land is "keep awake while asleep".' She smiled to herself. Walking had made her hungry and she thought of her favourite dishes, which immediately floated before her in a colourful procession; but she could not eat them. She trudged on, weary and tired, not knowing exactly where she was going. The earlier romantic notion of this magic land was fading. Just then, she saw a man in a red kimono walking towards her. What struck Priya was that a photograph of the Lady in Pink was merrily hanging on a thin chain around his neck. She asked him if there was an eating place nearby

and he said, 'But I live by love alone' and walked past her. 'Funny people,' she thought. 'They live by their whims and desires. What will happen when they have lived through them? Will they find themselves stronger and happier or weak and shattered?'

An elderly man was sitting under a tree with a white shawl wrapped around his shoulders.

The calm look in his eyes encouraged her to approach him. 'Tired of walking?' he asked with a twinkle in his eyes. Priya nodded. 'But why did you choose this tiresome path on which you cannot get anywhere, only get lost?' he said. 'Go home and live happily ever after. What is here is there too, you know that.' He got up to go and Priya followed him, touched by his detached affection and concern.



Together they walked into a village fair. Priya picked up a colourful pouch but when she started paying for it, the man at the counter said, 'This currency is not acceptable here. In any case, you have paid for it by choosing it.' And he turned away to attend to other customers. Priya was nonplussed and decided to move on.

These strange happenings and especially the meeting with the Lady in Pink and the camel driver, had raised her spirits and the acquisition of that colourful little pouch added to her elation. In this state of exhilaration, she came upon a taxi which people were getting into for a joy ride. She also got in. The

taxi flew through the air. Though not soaring very high, it moved well above the tree tops. The scenery outside was weird and enchanting. The landscape was divided into plots, each with different scenery. In one there were hills and valleys, another had thick forests and rivers, then were desert stretches with palm groves and caravans of camels. In yet another she saw high, rocky mountains and heard the roar of waterfalls. She was spellbound and emerged from her trance only when she was asked to get out of the car. Stepping out, she found herself standing on a seashore looking out at a vast expanse of water. Priya went towards a steamer which was ready to sail.

The ship was full of people of different nationalities. In a corner she saw the same group of people who had been with the camel driver. She was amused to see that they appeared to be more interested in their dreams and souls, of which they talked incessantly, than anything else.

Priya wandered into the VIP room of the steamer which had walls of sparkling glass. She looked out at the sea. The ship passed by a submerged city of monuments. The sheer unknown width and depth of the waters caused a queer feeling in the pit of her stomach. Standing in that empty room, Priya suddenly felt that she was being watched, though there was no one there. She was very uncomfortable and felt relieved to step down onto terra firma when the ship anchored at a city.

It was a neatly laid out hill city with narrow winding roads bordered with flowering hedges. The steepest of these roads was the most attractive and she started walking up it as if hypnotised. She came to a wicket gate barring the entrance to a castle which could be seen in the distance. She opened the gate and its creaking broke the quiet of the place and echoed strongly within her. It also broke the hypnotic spell and she ran back down the path in panic, but not before looking back once to read the signboard: 'Castle of the Inner Ruler'.

Shaken by that experience, Priya walked on. She saw a tall man walking across a lawn bordered with yellow lotuses and tried to catch up with him, but he did not turn around or stop. Just to establish some sort of contact, Priya said aloud, 'Though the place is picturesque, it looks empty.' He muttered as if to himself, 'Just because you cannot see anyone, you believe that no one is around.' Priya dared not say anything after that. He seemed to be a man from a different world. In her dreamy state, she stumbled over a stone and that brought tears to her eyes. To her surprise when she wiped away her tears her vision became clearer and she looked around with greater alertness. A plump middle-aged man with a bald head and drooping moustache caught her eye. He was making decorative pieces out of some broken glass toys for a small girl, who was standing near him. Priya was struck by his affection for the child. He looked up and Priya found his eyes so full of tenderness that her own eyes filled with tears.

Next was a shoe shop. A very fiery man was at the counter. He threw most of the customers out, but not before giving them a piece of his mind. He told one man, 'Go and get your corns cut, they are too many.' To a well dressed man he said, 'No good being greedy. Your pair looks old and comfortable.' Priya did not dare to go in and walked on in her old comfortable shoes.

She came across a shop with a signboard, 'The Books'. Hoping to find something interesting to read, she went in. It was crowded. The faces looked familiar and to her surprise they were the same group of people that she had met on the ship. She was about to pick up a book, when she heard footsteps coming down the wooden staircase. Everyone rushed to meet the man who came down. He looked overjoyed to see them and embraced each one. Then he turned towards Priya and looked at her with clear blue eyes as if asking who she was. She remembered the envelopes that the Lady in Pink had given her. She pulled one out and in the process, the photograph dropped out and the tall man in the ochre robe picked it up. His face beamed; he looked at it as if it was a photograph of a long-lost friend. Then he looked up

at her. Priya felt as if she was bursting with joy. This meeting with the tall man changed something in her and she walked out of the shop feeling like a queen.

The aroma of fried noodles attracted her to a nearby 'chaikhana'. There was no place to sit, so she went up to the man at the counter, who looked Chinese, with a thin face and a sparse, straggly beard. He wore a broad-brimmed hat. By now Priya had learnt the magic of those envelopes and so she handed him one of them. He opened it, read the letter and looked up at her with smiling dark eyes. She sat at a nearby table and overheard him telling the man sitting next to her, 'Don't waste time looking for nuts and chocolates.' Priya felt as if the remark was meant for her. She hurried out and started walking up the hill.



The Final Journey

Priya followed a lonely path through an oak forest. The shadows of the trees were lengthening in the setting sun. She walked for some distance till she reached a three-storeyed house, the ground floor of which was a tea shop. She climbed the narrow wooden staircase to the first floor. A man at the door there looked at her from head to foot and asked, 'You on the way to the Temple?' Priya nodded. He welcomed her and she found herself in a gallery with rooms on the right side and a glass wall on the left. At the end of the gallery was a huge sitting room with carpets and a heavy, old-style sofa. One wall was of glass and looked upon the mountains. The room was full of photographs of men and

women whose faces seemed strangely familiar to her. She sat on the corner sofa waiting for someone to come.

After some time, the man came in again. He was friendly and apologetic for having kept her waiting. He ordered some tea and told Priya that his wife would be coming down soon. He was full of questions about her journey but Priya could only manage a brief, 'Tiring'. After a while, the mistress of the house entered the room and greeted Priya with a warm embrace. Priya told her that she was on her way to the Temple. At this, she smiled and asked if Priya had their permission to come. The plural did not sound odd to Priya and she heard herself saying after a brief pause, 'Yes, I have a letter of introduction for them.' The lady wanted to know who had given her the letter but Priya decided to keep her secret. After a short chat, the lady looked at her watch and asked Priya to relax while she attended to her household chores.

Left alone in that room, Priya tried to calm down. She did not realise that she had fallen asleep till she was woken up by a small girl who asked her to go to the garden to pluck flowers. 'I offer flowers to them every morning,' she said simply, pointing to the photographs in the room. Priya walked with her down the path. They stopped near a rose bush which was shaped like a sitting woman. It had pale pink roses near the bottom, the middle ones were deep pink and the top few were yellow Banksia roses. Someone had very carefully grafted them one above the other. They were picking the roses when she noticed a hut opposite which had two doors side by side. A pretty young woman went in one door and from the other an old woman came out. Priya was engrossed with the scene. She felt herself to be the rose bush, the young girl and the old woman at the same time. The little girl tugged at her sari and broke the spell.

The room they came back to was littered with toys and books. She wanted to go out to the verandah, but the old rickety door was tied with string. The lady of the house invited her to come upstairs. In the tea room, Priya saw many new faces. ‘They must be either going to or coming back from the Temple,’ she thought. They were talking animatedly of the people at the Temple and also of their dreams, psychic experiences and ghosts, which aroused Priya’s curiosity. She decided to leave for the Temple without delay.

It was a full moon night and the narrow path through the thick forest was speckled with light and shade. The sudden screeching of an owl made her jump and she became aware of the deep silence. She turned a corner and came upon a tall, well built, white woman in a dark grey woollen skirt and a white blouse with ruffles. Her curly grey hair gleamed in the moonlight. She smiled strangely and with a gesture of her head asked Priya to follow her. Like a somnambulist Priya followed her to a two-storeyed house right above the road. The house had glass walls and each floor had three rooms. Big paintings were hung on the walls as if for an exhibition. The atmosphere was eerie. Her guide had, meanwhile, disappeared and she was alone.

Priya made an effort to look at the paintings. The first one was captioned ‘Footprints on the Sand of Time’. The next was a huge painting of three women including the one who had met her in the jungle. As she looked at them, they came to life and Priya realised with a sense of horror that she was trapped in the house with ghosts. She ran out but at the gate, the woman who had walked out of the painting stopped her.



She was now dressed in a man's attire. 'This is my house and I have lived here for many years. Now I want to sell it, will you buy it?' she said and disappeared. Priya panicked and ran back till she reached the house at the periphery. People were still there in the tea room, discussing ghosts. They fell silent when she entered. Then the host said, 'We were worrying about you. Wherever have you been at this time of the night?' Priya told them about her weird experience. They exchanged meaningful glances and tried to reassure her by saying that anyone who wants to go to the Temple has to pass through some such experience. Had a similar experience made them all turn back to the house at the periphery, wondered Priya.

Tired out by her walk in the jungle and the experience in the house peopled with ghosts, Priya spent an uneasy night and in the morning, to her surprise, she found the place deserted. She could not even find the host to say goodbye to. Downstairs, the tea-shop was running as usual. When she asked about the people upstairs, they only smiled and said, 'No one lives there, only sometimes travellers spend a night.'

When Priya set off again up the path it seemed to disappear in the midst of thickets and bushes. She had to summon all her will power to go on. Soon she reached a small, neat cluster of houses. Since she had decided she would not enter a house, when she felt tired she just sat under a tree to rest. She heard people weeping and crying in a house nearby. Someone had died. It made her feel depressed; she always found it difficult to accept death. Just then she heard her name being called from the window of the house opposite. Priya was struck by the dark, sparkling eyes of the person. Wasn't it the Lady in Pink whom she had met in the train earlier? The lady came out to meet Priya. She looked ravishing, dressed in a pink Banarasi silk sari with gold embroidery. She invited Priya to go to a birthday party with her. Priya felt that she could implicitly trust the lady and she accepted.

The Lady in Pink and Priya entered the courtyard of a house. There was a ladder there, hanging down from the sky. They both began to climb up. Priya was a little scared, but they soon reached the clouds, somewhere midway between the sky and the earth. It was a neat village complete with a Temple of its own. The houses were made of a cloudy, translucent material. The name of the village was 'Cloudy Vale'. They entered house number three which was full of young, fresh-looking people. The birthday girl looked rather new to the place, but everyone embraced and welcomed her. The table was full of food but no one was eating. The birthday girl soon felt at home and started looking for her own friends and relatives. The Lady in Pink turned around and said to Priya, 'Look, death is another birth here.' Priya was amazed. The birthday girl soon seemed to fall asleep and everyone left her in peace.

Priya came down with the lady and it occurred to her that she was the right person to ask about the way to the Temple. Before she could say a word, the lady turned to her, threw her head back and started laughing. 'Oh, the Temple; it is a state of Mind and Heart,' she said and disappeared.

Priya now decided that not only would she not enter any house, but would not even talk to people on the way. With great determination she started walking again. She could hear a river flowing in all its fury and the valley was full of the sound of its music. In the distance she saw villages and huts with their thatched roofs and mud walls. She particularly noticed a three-storeyed house with smoke curling out of the chimney. How like her grandmother's house it was with the rose creepers, the constant murmur of the stream and the mango grove. Maybe they are playing the same games we played, she thought. Those were the days of contentment. A part of her wanted to rush in, back to her near and dear ones, but she resisted and with difficulty walked on. Her journey was beginning to lose its enchantment. If what the Lady in Pink had said was true, then where was she going? And why? Her depression crept back and her legs started aching. She tried to tell herself that the best way of setting aside these doubts was to go and look for the place and the magician. She intensely wished to have

another vision of the Temple. Her favourite line, 'The desire of something afar from the sphere of our sorrows' came back to her. Oppressed by such thoughts she sat down under a tree and soon fell asleep.

When she woke up she found herself walking on a narrow path through an oak forest which led to an iron gate. It creaked as she opened it. She walked along a stream and through an exquisite flower garden that led to a perfectly symmetrical 'samadhi', a memorial to great beings. And here it was: the Temple, the one that had been calling out to her for so long. Filled with joy,



she stood there for some time looking at the Temple dome which rose majestically into the sky, then floated around the place and came to a sundial. Before it was a stretch of dark waters extending to eternity. Somewhere in the middle was a row of lights as if of sailing ships. She became aware of a presence and saw a tall man watching her. Without hesitation she floated towards him and presented him with the last of the three envelopes. For some time he stood transfixed, looking at it as if lost in a world of his own. Priya could not take her eyes from his glowing face.

After that the only thing that she remembered was that she was drawn into his arms as if by a magnetic force. She had no idea how long this experience lasted and when it came to an end. Sitting alone under the tree, for the first time she did not feel lonely. She was only aware of a bursting feeling within which seemed to have enveloped not only her but everything around her. She felt as if she was aware of the totality of the scene at once, as if the whole place was rising up in a whirlwind to meet the sky and the sky in its turn had come down to fill the empty spaces.

Full of joy, Priya started back on the homeward journey.

Afterword

Based on my dreams, Ashishda advised that this story be written in a spontaneous way, without adding too many rational connections, and I followed his advice. A large part of it is from dream content, but not all. It emerged as a story of the middle regions and dream worlds, with many motifs deriving from the dream images.

The traveller finds herself with different groups of people, some seem to be on the same journey, others signify the strange dark alleys of one's mind and how one can be distracted away from the path for years, indeed for lifetimes. She passes through many of the geographical landscapes of the planet, deserts, forests, mountains, all signifying a stage of life, perhaps?

Dreams are threaded together loosely into the narrative of Priya's 'Journey' – through the characteristic positives and negatives of her personality, but seeking a way out to the presence of the teachers of wisdom, attracted by their overflowing love and compassion.

For ease of reading, I separated the text into the following broad sub-heads which the dreams addressed:

'Bhagwati's daughter'

This phrase appeared in one of the dreams as 'my ticket' to the inner worlds. Bhagwati was my mother's name and her way was that of family, nurturing, food, and affection imparted through these.

This perhaps is what I brought to the table for my search, which could be 'my ticket' – not really any other types of 'achievements' – intellectual, physical, or spiritual.

Desert Landscapes

A recurring theme in the dreams is seeking something more than the rewards of outer life – which seem like a desert in comparison to the inward awareness with which the teachers glow.

Further Meetings and Other Landscapes

The meetings with guides and mentors in many forms, are qualitatively different from the dream characters which are the ghosts of the psyche – personification of one's repressed personality features. Both occur in the story but are clearly different in their workings.

The Final Journey

Recognizing and finding the guru and the inner Mirtola (which, in the gurus' words, is really 'a state of mind and heart', but for us at the time was also the physical Mirtola Ashram in India).