The Serpent of Paradise

Miodrag Djordjevi

The Face of the Betrothed

MIGUEL SERRANO

The Serpent of Paradise

THE STORY OF AN INDIAN PILGRIMAGE

Translated by
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RIDER & COMPANY
London

RIDER & COMPANY
178–202 Great Portland Street, London, W.1

AN IMPRINT OF THE  HUTCHINSON GROUP

London Melbourne Sydney
Auckland Bombay Toronto
Johannesburg New York

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First published 1963

This book has been set in Old Style type face. It has been printed in Great Britain by The Anchor Press, Ltd., in Tiptree, Essex, on Antique Wove paper.

TO THOSE WHO ONE DAY WILL TURN AGAIN
IN SEARCH OF THE SECRET FOOTPRINTS THAT LEAD
FROM THE ANDES TO THE HIMALAYAS

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A tree reaching up to heaven must
have roots reaching down to hell.

NIETZSCHE

PREFACE

The Serpent of Paradise concludes a trilogy of which *Neither by Land nor by Sea* (1950) and *Invitation to the Icefields* (1957) are the other two parts. Like these other books, it is an apparently disconnected narration of adventures and experiences. It has had to take this form because its only unifying feature is the design of a life that has not yet ended.

We, the people of Central and South America, who are usually, and incorrectly, called Latin Americans or Spanish Americans, do not really belong to the Western world, even though we frequently proclaim our adherence to it. The scenery of our continent and our natural characteristics are quite different from those of Europe or North America. On the other hand, we are not members of an Asian culture either. Nine years of residence in India and thousands of miles of travel in other parts of Asia have proved that to me beyond doubt. Instead, we are somewhere in between. Nevertheless, we must begin to direct our attention towards the East, and especially towards India, as in the past we have concentrated on Europe.

This will give us the balance we have so long been searching for. We Chileans, with a country stretching along three thousand miles of the Pacific, are in particular need of this balance, for *our* ocean is also the ocean of Japan, China and India.

The aboriginal peoples of South America seem to have had far more in common with Asia than we moderns have; indeed, there is a curious similarity between these two ancient civilizations. This primitive link gives Chileans and other South Americans a peculiar *rapport* with modern Asia. If a European were to dress and live like an Indian he would seem to be a traitor to his essential nature and heritage. A Chilean, however, can do so without the slightest violation of his character, since he is as much a part of the East as he is of the West.

Still, at bottom we are neither Eastern nor Western: we are but relative participants in each world. What we South Americans most desperately need, therefore, is to discover our true identity. The attainment of our true nature might easily mean the achievement of an earthly totality: incorporating both East and West, the South American may become something new and wholly unique—the total man.

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In the following pages the reader will encounter a number of terms dealing with the lost continent of Atlantis, many of which may cause confusion to the modern mind. Nevertheless, I must insist that these terms are used only in a symbolic sense in order to clarify spiritual matters; they do not refer to actual physical or geographical entities. The Atlantis I speak of has to do with a dream of the remote past out of the collective soul, of a lost totality and of a Paradise which may never have existed but whose image has continued to echo down the corridors of time for generations. That is to say, my Atlantis refers to an interior reality which is as real as the world about us.

Almora, India MIGUEL SERRANO

PART ONE

From the Andes to the Himalayas

I

THE SERPENT

BEFORE the serpent curled itself round the trunk of the Tree of Paradise it lived in the liquid depths beneath the roots of the tree. Then, like the spine of a man which rises up from the dark and sensitive regions of his waist towards the freely moving upper torso, the Serpent stretched itself up to the upper branches, where its pale, cold skin could be warmed by the sun. In the secret depths from which it emerged it enjoyed a type of elemental power and pleasure, but when it encountered the force of the sun it seemed to recoil and expand at the same time. The result was a conflict of light and darkness, for the force of the Serpent is both liquid and frozen; it poisons and it deifies. Some call the poison of the Serpent, God; others call it Immortality.

The Tree of Paradise also rises from the dark, watery depths which give moisture to the fruit when it ripens on the branches. The sun then dries this fruit, dissolving its bitterness and making it sweet. In the highest reaches of this tree may be found a spacious palace. And there, in the main chamber, two people meet and embrace. They have been searching for each other for a long time, and at last they have met. Their joy is so great that they weep for gladness, and each tear becomes a fruit of the tree. Who it is that enjoys that fruit no one can say, for it was made for eternity, and it contains the immortal poison of the Serpent.

When the Serpent swims beneath the surface of the phosphorescent sea it is one of many, for there are as many serpents as there are men on the earth. In a sense, however, the Serpent is but one force, though it takes many forms, like that of the Hydra or the Sea Monster, which sailors used to see in ancient times when they were entranced and their eyes were closed. For the Serpent is visible

only when the eyes are firmly shut, since at that time the third eye opens, and this eye alone is capable of perceiving the Serpent.

Many centuries ago, according to the legend, the Serpent came out of the sea and grew wings. Just as man's dorsal spine developed from its embryonic form, this Plumed Serpent grew in innocence and joy. It had started its journey towards the stars, and particularly the Morning Star, when suddenly it was overcome by the waters of the great Flood, which waters inundated the earth. On this occasion the Plumed Serpent did not drown, but it lost its wings.

Had these wings not been destroyed, the Serpent would surely have reached the Morning Star, and there in the spacious palace there would have been a meeting. The joy of that encounter could have been expressed only in tears, forming the fruit of eternity.

But what provoked the Flood? That is the great mystery.

This book is the story of a people and of the Serpent. These distant people, as vast in numbers as the serpents of the sea, have been submerged for ages in a tremendous adventure. They have allowed themselves to be bitten by the Serpent, and their adventure, which is at once mysteriously complex and divinely simple, is their search for eternity by means of poison. For this reason they have had little to do with the other peoples of the world. They are a race of old sailors who continue in the tradition of those who navigated before the coming of the Flood. They are also a mountain people who have preserved the secrets of the heights. In short, they have been touched by the gods.

And now I am with these people. I have walked with them along the dusty roads, carrying a stick to defend myself from the serpents that cross it. I have been on pilgrimages in the company of beggars and lepers. Snakes and vipers crawl in the dust alongside the road, but they will not harm us unless we step on them. Only then will they poison us, paralysing the rhythmic fire of our breathing and fatally thickening the liquid sun in our blood. But this will happen only if we step on them: if we speak to them, or sing to them or play Krishna's flute to them, the serpents will become our friends and they will dance with us.

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The man who has learned how to play Krishna's flute, or Shiva's flute—which is the lingam, or phallus, that is to say, the Serpent—need have no fear of the Serpent, for even if he is bitten the poison will not affect him. Since his blood will already contain the semen

of Shiva's spiritual phallus, it will be impervious to the fatal effects of the poison of the Serpent. Already impregnated by this eternal poison, it cannot be affected by temporary poison. This man is thus prepared for eternity: the Plumed Serpent is already in his blood and his human blood has been changed into a liquid sun by the blood of sacrifice that once flowed and still flows from the wound in the Saviour's side.

As the Serpent of Paradise rises from the liquid depths in which the Tree itself is rooted, so man too produces his physical sons from these dark and murky regions. These sons of the flesh are destined to die, but the sons of the spirit which are born during man's maturity are capable of reaching eternity by becoming the sons of death. When the ordinary serpent attains the sea of eternity it becomes a Plumed Serpent.

The man who has been bitten by Shiva's serpent and who knows how to play Krishna's flute has a fish swimming in his veins. This fish is a god who swims only in the blood of eternal dreamers.

By the time man has lived half of his life he must prepare to give birth to a son in the spirit; that is to say, to a son of death. This son can be born only by marrying the Serpent or by playing Shiva's phallus and Krishna's flute. And he alone can carry us over the sea of death. He will give us passage on his phosphorescent barge or will allow us to rest on the wings of the Plumed Serpent.

A man who has married this Serpent has a strange, other-worldly appearance. His face has the repose of one who has taken pleasure in being poisoned, and he reflects the calmness of death. He appears to be immersed in dreamy waters, where he swims with the fish of God. His eyes, though closed, emanate an indescribable joy, and there is the shadow of a smile on his lips; for it has been his privilege to descend to the dark roots of pleasure and to be able to return to a spiritual union. In the palace that rests on the top of the Tree of Paradise he has met someone for whom he has been waiting for a long time, and the joy of this encounter has made tears stream down his cheeks. The fruit formed from these tears are at once liquid and ice-like, and when they fall they make a noise like that of tinkling bells.

Yet the face of such a man always makes one shudder, for it is always deeply lined and harsh like a mountain crag. Indeed, I have seen such faces in the Andes.

This book, which is about a faraway people and a Serpent, is also a book about my own very special relations with the Serpent, ever since my childhood in Chile.

2

THE MEDITERRANEAN

THE Pillars of Hercules were now behind us, and behind them lay England. While I was crossing the Atlantic on the first stage of my journey I had as a fellow-passenger the English director of an Indian newspaper. He had boarded the ship at Nassau, but for the previous fifty years he had lived in India. There was nothing to distinguish him from the ordinary Englishman who never leaves his country. He had rigid habits: he always drank whisky in the late morning and in the afternoon, and on deck he always wore the same topcoat. I decided to ask him something about the country towards which I was heading, but all he said was that the rich Indians were a peculiar lot because at a certain stage in their lives they gave up all their wealth and retired to live in the forest. This fact didn't appear to interest him much, however. He had already retired himself and seemed determined to spend the rest of his days in the English manner to which he had grown so accustomed. For fifty years in India he had remained entirely faithful to the habits of his own country. His impermeability had given him a strong character and, of course, had made him a good Englishman.

In the meantime England had faded away in the distance, although, thanks to Gibraltar, she still made her presence felt in these southern regions. Yet England's control of the Mediterranean and the Gates of Hercules is essentially meaningless, for she has no business here or, more precisely, the Mediterranean has nothing to do with her. This sea belongs to the Golden Age of Virgil and the Argonauts. England, by contrast, belongs to the Age of Iron, or the Epoch of Kaliyuga.

An Iron Age needs an iron people, a people whose souls are tinged with grey and whose minds are used to fog. Only such a people could make a pact with the power of iron. In such an epoch,

a country like Spain, which had once controlled the Pillars of Hercules, was utterly without influence. In a grey era dominated by Kaliyuga, Spain had no choice but to lose, and she fulfilled her destiny by becoming the great loser.

Certainly it seems true that it is destiny which moves and controls peoples, whether for good or ill. Philip of Spain must have realized it when the elements rose against him, and his Invincible Armada was destroyed by tempests and storms. Had this event not occurred, history would have been quite different, and we would not now be enveloped in the Iron Age. It took England, with its mists and coal-mines, its machinery and its dreary pubs, and, above all, its organizational mind, to give adequate expression to the epoch of Kaliyuga.

A people capable of controlling an Iron Age simply had to be grey, and had to be able to accept sadness easily. Certainly few people have accepted unhappiness so stolidly and straightforwardly as the English have done. They have almost institutionalized it. Perhaps the Russians of today will reach the same state, but so far it is too early to tell, and, anyhow, the case differs in so far as the nature of England's soul is concerned. So far, the soul of England has survived, because she has really reached only the first stage in the triumph of the Iron Age. What follows will be much worse, because it will be so soulless. Called supertechnology, this will be the Age of the Atom and then the era of Kaliyuga will reach its zenith. At that point there will be nothing left to do but to disinfect the world entirely, to kill off all the microbes; including, of course, mankind, which has so far preserved the microbe of life. In this destruction England will also be affected, because, after all, England is not yet dead. There are microbes in her cities and villages, and there is dirt in the streets. Indeed, some London streets are as dirty as those of the sacred city of Banaras. So England still lives and has some spirit, for spirit is expressed in terms of light and darkness; it needs both the bright rays of the sun and the dirt that clings to mankind. Life has always meant these things, for when people try to cleanse themselves absolutely they die. They drown in their swimming pools, as did the ancient Romans and the Arabs in Spain.

But why go on thinking about these things? It is better to enjoy the clarity of the blue Mediterranean on a spring day. Deciding to isolate myself as much as possible from the rest of the passengers on board, I tried to commune with this extraordinary sea which has experienced so much and which, above all others in the world, is at once a well of golden memories and a living thoroughfare.

The Age of Iron finds kinship with the grey Atlantic, and iron

steamships conform well to it. The Mediterranean, on the other hand, is a sea set apart for triremes and sailing vessels. It is like an eternal adolescent which turns its back on present reality, preferring the glamour of its heritage.

Standing on deck, I was conscious of breathing the air of two different worlds, for the Mediterranean is the ancient connecting link between East and West. I also seemed to sense a subtle flower-like aroma coming from the gardens of another universe. These were the flowers of history which had grown over both Etruscan and Egyptian tombs. They evoked a dreamlike mystery and memory of the dozens of myths and legends which have passed along this narrow sea.

From the Egyptian shore a flock of black birds with thin, long necks suddenly appeared. They circled about and then flew away. These must be the same birds which for hundreds of generations had looked down upon kings and priests, stone-masons, porters and astrologers. The Pharaoh Akhnaton must have seen them, and his queen Nefertiti, whose neck was long like theirs, must also have observed them while she sang on the terrace of the City of the Horizon. I recalled a poem by Ludwig Milosz addressed to an Egyptian queen who must have been like Nefertiti:

'My thoughts are yours, Karomama, queen of ancient Egypt.
With your ungainly long legs and weak hands, you suffered . . .
You endured the strange diet of that desert country;
You lived in a palace decorated with strange figures.
They were already ancient when you came.
You, Karomama, with your exhausted eyes and tortured hair . . .
You who were born dead from the cradle of the ages. . . .'

On the other side of the ship I could just make out the distant outline of the island of Crete. Here was another country of enigmas, and the shadows cast by the ancient Greeks were still vibrant and golden. I remember how, as children in my own country, my friends and I used to dream of Greece. Even though the Mediterranean was then very far away from us, it was very much alive, and it was extraordinary to have felt so deeply the drama of a civilization that was neither ours nor particularly sympathetic with ours. As I looked towards Crete I tried to look on behalf of my childhood friends, many of whom were as dead as the ancient Greeks. Thinking they may have wanted to see Greece through my eyes, I concentrated and gazed intensely at the horizon. I realize that death is a heavy thing, and it is possible that nothing remains behind but shadows and

dreams. But I also believe that something of the dead is passed on to us and continues to live in us. It is this force or energy which forced me to look intensely, so that the ghosts of my friends could see through me what they had not been able to see when they were alive. I was determined to be faithful to this charge and to miss nothing, for I knew they would have done the same for me had our roles been reversed. Leaning on the ship's rail, I slowly and quietly repeated their names to the sea, knowing that from that moment onwards I would always have them in my company whenever I gazed at the waves. Overhead, the same flock of birds wheeled once again towards Egypt.

We were now in Easter week, and I imagined that the gentle breeze that came over the bows must have originated in the Sinai Desert. But then I realized this particular breeze could not have come from any physical region, for it was the wind of the Messiah, which blows down from the cross, and which is entirely animated by the personality of Christ. As it swept gently over the ship, I turned away and looked towards the land of my childhood. Childhood to me is personified in the name of the young Jesus. I was now approaching His land and the regions of His story. I knew that if I were to weep it would be for my mother and for all mothers. My own mother I hardly knew, but I realized that she had been blessed by Jesus, because mothers and children are both imbued with the spirit of Christ.

Years ago an Indian called Vivekananda sailed by these same shores. And as he passed by the island of Crete he had a strange dream in which someone told him that Jesus had never existed.

Thus, as we approached the eastern end of the Mediterranean, Jesus came to say good-bye. The gates of Suez separate His world from the other, for although these two are intimately connected, they are also alien. Christianity has its roots in the Orient, but it was in Europe that it made its greatest impression. The connecting link between the two was, of course, the Mediterranean. The Christianity of Christ was surely a desert revelation: it was hard and fantastic and had its origins in India. It was not what we now call Christianity and had no interest in becoming so. But, as it passed across the sea, it would seem that true Christianity was drowned in the Mediterranean, so that the wave which hit the Germanic and barbarian shore and exploded over Europe was quite different from the ripple that had started at the edge of the desert.

For the force that was generated in Europe was what might be called the dream of Eternal Love, and this luminous idea has flourished for over two thousand years without developing further

or going on beyond the glory inherent in the concept. Certainly it saved many people, but the expense was appalling. Christianity as we know it, then, took its form in the European Middle Ages, when it was engaged in overcoming the primitive instincts of a barbarous people, without realizing that those instincts represented a vital aspect of life itself. Christianity consisted of Gothic cathedrals, of Dante and Bach's cantatas and of the dream of Eternal Love. It built a world outside of this world and made a cult of death. Everything that was impeded or thwarted in this world found its outlet in dreams or in an imaginary world of the 'beyond'. The cult of the eternal feminine developed, and love became psychic.

If there is anything that fundamentally separates the East from the West it is this cult of Eternal Love. Whether it exists objectively or merely comes from a repression of the instincts I don't know, but in the East there is nothing like it, and love is never made a mystique nor is it individualized to the point of madness. Eternal Love seems to be a purely Christian and Western product, emerging perhaps from some ancient recess in the Germanic or Celtic soul where women once may have been thought to have possessed magical qualities. In the East there is no such hope—or illusion, as the Orientals would put it. The cult of Eternal Love is the road of the West.

We all participate in this concept, and it has received Christ's sanction. I certainly carried it with me as I travelled on towards the East: all I left behind was the atmosphere in which it could flourish. That was one reason why Jesus came to say good-bye, because He knew that everything dies in the regions towards which I was sailing. There even He dies.

This laborious construction of a mystique concerning some future life, whether in heaven or hell, and this dream of Eternal Love, which creates an anxiety like that of a man who stares endlessly at the horizon in hope of finding something, has also given birth to modern technology. Though many Christians may rail at it, technology is an inextricable part of their civilization, and the Atom Bomb is a Christian product. The Christian faith, which was originally an Eastern product, and one well suited to a people who had sublimated their instincts, was imposed on the barbarians of Europe by the Jews, who were themselves barbarians. The result was that their primitive instincts had no time to adjust themselves: they were forced into external actions, and the individual and the rational mind became all-important. The outcome of this process is simply the technology of today, which is an escape from the self and a desire to disinfect life. Technology is the ultimate product of the rational mind; it is a reflection of how far the ego can go.

In the Orient this process is called Kaliyuga, and the unfortunate thing is that Christianity and Kaliyuga are one and the same.

Yet Christ Himself was not responsible for what later happened. His image, and let there be no mistake about it, His image was one of the desert, of Asia, where the consciousness of the individual is lost.

What then is left? The one great patrimony of the Western world seems to be the individual sense of beauty. It takes many forms—the beauty of the drama, or the beauty of a gesture. Sometimes the very life of a man is a gesture, for he knows he has but one life to live and so he burns passionately from beginning to end. In the Orient such a gesture is impossible, for the Orient has five thousand lives. The West has only one.

Thus beauty seems to be the principle product of Christian life, for beauty can be discovered only by a man who has only one life to live, and who is anxious to miss nothing. Yet the beauty that emanates from this life is, after all, only a gesture: it would be foolish to believe that it was anything more than that.

3

THE DESERT

WHEN I went ashore at Port Said I found the streets filled with dozens of dogs, lying on the pavement. They were, of course, not aware of the significance of living in Port Said. Then I was accosted by dozens of people trying to sell things. They were insistent and undignified, but there was something agreeably childish in their attitude. It was as though their very attempt to fool me was a way of making life real to them. Afterwards, at a crossing, I noticed a small boy pulling a heavy cart. He had failed to see a policeman who was signalling him to stop, and so the policeman leapt at him, caught him by the neck and proceeded to beat him. Another man came up to help the policeman.

These were the same people who had crucified Christ.

Along the quayside, two men were busy insulting each other. To judge from the violence of their language they must have been saying terrible things. One of them, in particular, had eyes that really flashed in fury. I had read that the eyes could flash in a sinister fashion and here was proof of it.

Certainly there was something strange about Port Said, and it seemed as though some new force were once again beginning to move under the hot sands. There was certainly enough hot seasoning for some new dish on the table of history. For these were also the same people who had followed Christ.

When I returned to the ship I found all the passengers assembled on deck. They were watching a magician who wore a long striped gown and a fez. He would say, 'Galli, galli, galli,' and then would take a cluster of baby chickens from the shirt-front of one of the passengers. Another passenger found chicks in his pockets. It was clear that we were already in the mental zone of Sinbad the Sailor.

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The desert stretched away from both sides of the Suez Canal. Occasionally a British patrol would appear along the bank, and from time to time I would see an Egyptian squatting over a stone, like a bird. On the whole, however, the scene was empty: it was simply hot and asphyxiating—a combination of burning sands and humid atmosphere. This Egyptian heat seemed quite different from that of Panama or Ecuador. There the hot winds had always been like silken fingers caressing you when you felt faint, for the sensual tropics of Central and South America had never been affected by history. But at Suez the deep sky that arched over the Biblical desert was the heaven of the ancient Ethiopians; it was the same sky that had looked down on the Chaldean magicians, and on Moses and Mohammed.

On one side of the canal lay Egypt; on the other, Arabia. When night came, thousands of stars began to fall over Sinai and the Red Sea. It was almost impossible to believe that there could be so many stars. In the relative cool of the evening it seemed as though the heavens were drawing the hot winds of the desert up towards the stars. Here, surely, was the reason why the ancient prophets were maddened by God. The terrible Jehovah was so remote in the sky that arched over the desert that he represented nothing but an inscrutible mystery. Man, so cut off, had nothing but his own destiny to be concerned with. Here too was the source of man's anguish after his fall from grace, and here also the seed that produced Christ. For in the empty desert, God seemed to exist only in the smell of roots that grow along the Nile, or which flourish in the green oases. Here was evidence for monotheism. But dualism was forced on man by the stars, thus giving birth to man's cosmic despair, his sickness of life and his melancholy.

For this region is not truly Asia, and individualism is still very much alive here. Indeed, if the world can be likened to the body of a man (in the same way, according to Swedenborg, as heaven can be), then the desert is that part which exudes images that affect the heart. For this reason the ancient Egyptians could never have believed in reincarnation. Instead they considered the world a lonely and hostile region, the remnants merely of some vanished garden. For them eternity was something that had to be overcome or, at the least, to be endured as best one could manage. Thus no part of the world is more different from India than ancient Egypt. The mummy itself represents the terrible anxiety of the Egyptian to preserve his physical form. Having no certainty of ever returning to the lost garden, the Egyptian wanted to make sure that in his endless voyage in the dark vault he would have all the luxuries of a cruise in this world.

Nevertheless, the sky that arches over the desert is round, and thus anticipates the predominant form of Asia. Indeed, the Egyptian sky is a microcosm of two distinct worlds.

In the West everything exists in terms of the straight line, which is always projected towards the heights or towards the depths, towards heaven or hell. This line also stretches to the horizon, towards infinite anxiety and infinite glory. The East, on the other hand, is a product of the curved line that always comes back and returns to itself. The symbols of the West are Bach's fugues, cathedrals, cannons, torpedoes and the life of the 'beyond'—Eternal Love. These are straight or parallel lines that never meet in infinity. Eternal Love is thus at best an illusive concept, for its culmination can take place only in the stars. The aqueducts and highways of Rome, like most of the technological achievements of the modern era, were built in accordance with straight lines. Even the cross is formed by verticals.

The Orient, conversely, is symbolized in the curved line and finds its fullest expression in the rounded cupolas and domes of the mosques. The music of the East is also curved: it goes out, rises and turns back on itself. The crescent moon, the scimitar—even the shoes of the East are curved. Reincarnation is also a circular movement.

Where the West is extroverted, the East is subjective. Asia cannot therefore really be interested in physical conquest, for it knows that these conquests always turn back on themselves, following the logical curve. The triumphs of Islam followed this pattern, as did those of Attila and the Khans. Even Russia may be aware of this norm, for the domes of the Kremlin suggest that the soul of the Orient may also predominate there. Thus there is little danger of physical conquest from the East. The East conquers in quite a different way and relies on means that are subjective, internal and religious. Thus Russian communism will become dangerous only when it is transformed into a religion. It can be imposed only when it uses peaceful means, and only when it acquires eternal spiritual values. The Red Army, by contrast, is not especially fearsome, even though it is very large. For even if its hordes were to overflow the world like the sands of the desert blown by a furious simoon, they would always turn back on themselves, following the prescribed curve.

On the other hand, what is really dangerous is the West, with its military machine projected externally along straight lines which, by definition, deny the possibility of a return to its origins. With the cross as its emblem, the West is the aggressive and violent force, for the cross has become the hilt of the sword which fights

for lighted candles, the gospels and for the bells of another world. Essentially fundamentalist, it catechizes, and makes distinctions between sin and redemption. All these are symbols based on the inexorable straight line: the world is divided between light and shadow, white and black, good and evil.

When Hitler chose the swastika for his emblem he made a mistake, for the swastika is a cross that rotates, and the ends of its lines are bent. Its very shape enforces introspection. To fulfil his extrovert destiny, Hitler should have used the cross.

Perhaps, at the very end, when the night of history is about to begin, East and West may finally be able to shake hands, for by then the world will have come full circle. As at the beginning, when the cross was the swastika, and when the square was a circle, as depicted in Tibetan tankas, the world of opposites will have disappeared.

In the meantime, the East, the real Orient, is beyond polarization. There all tensions are dissolved in its immovable waters.

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Earlier in the evening I had watched the sun set over the Red Sea. It had been a progression of intense colours as though the gold and purple of the East had extended themselves to their utmost limits. The placid sea had responded with its blues and greens. Even the air seemed insinuating and legendary, like the setting of a story from the *Thousand and One Nights*. Along the deck of the ship the Indian sailors leaned against the rail and looked towards the horizon, their coloured turbans reflecting the light of the setting sun.

One of the passengers who then came out on deck was an Irish nun who was going to India. Her face was beautiful and clear, but at that hour it looked as white as death. As the evening came, and the faces of the men on deck grew darker, her face seemed to grow whiter.

On board ship there was also a group of Norwegian ship captains who were going to Australia in order to take command of a fleet of whalers bound for the Antarctic. We spoke of Deception Island and of its dead population, all of whom lie buried in a cemetery underneath the ice and the fog. I then decided to go down to my cabin to fetch them an image of the god Kon-tiki. This South American god gave his name to the raft on which a group of fearless Norwegians crossed the Pacific from Peru to Polynesia. The face of that god was painted with flaming colours; yet it had been carved by hands that were as white as those of the Irish nun.

I had carried the coloured face of the god Kon-tiki with me across many seas and oceans, and when I lifted it up to the passionate light of this Eastern sun its colours palpitated and throbbed.

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Aden is a volcanic land. It is said that Noah's ark first sailed from there. That is perhaps why the people of Aden still continue to build their houses as they have always done, as though they were expecting some new flood. In Aden you can almost feel the torment of Atlantis and the possibility of its return.

Outside of the town, not far from the crater of an enormous volcano, one can still find King Solomon's wells. The Queen of Sheba must have passed by this place, and the slow black races of Aden still walk along those ancient roads that for centuries have been cut in the cracked rock. An old tunnel for camels is still in use, and eleven miles distant from the city is the oasis of Sheikh Othman.

The camels of Aden are extremely circumspect, and balance themselves as they walk. They carry their necks high and turn up their noses at the world. Surely these animals were once the ancient serpents of the sea who are said to have existed before the continents took shape. When the sea withdrew the serpents were sleeping, and didn't realize that they had been left on dry land. Upon awakening, however, they soon understood that if they were to survive they had to turn into camels. This at least is one explanation of the long neck that stretches out and gazes anxiously at the departing sea. Although the camel is a creature of the desert, it always remembers the sea and dreams of it.

In the bazaar at Aden we were approached by dozens of children, begging for alms. One little girl pulled at my arm. Unfortunately I had no money with me, but as she was very insistent and peremptory, I gave her a little kiss. At this, she lowered her little arms and stood looking at me very seriously. She no longer begged for alms. Ever since she has remained with me as a memory of a sad-faced little girl.

4

THE SUN OF INDIA

By the time the ship had entered the Arabian Sea the colour of the water seemed to have changed. At dusk I looked once again at the setting sun, but it too seemed to be different, and to be weary and melancholy. Somehow it appeared to be old and tired, as though the centuries spent in lighting the paths of lepers and other unfortunates had exhausted it. The grey mists of early evening, rising over the sea of Araby, were like an antique veil that both comforted and extinguished the vibrant red essence it shrouded.

Having been told that we were to arrive at Bombay early in the morning, I decided to rise early to witness the scene. On deck everything was still dark, and the morning star was barely visible. Gradually, however, the dim outline of the mainland came into view, and as we approached the port the water grew muddy. Soon we were passing fishing boats with high, curved bows.

Altogether, the scene was far from cheerful, and I began to imagine that India itself would be as desolate as last night's sun had been. The very breeze coming off the mainland seemed sickly. Here was the dramatic moment the pilgrim from foreign parts so frequently experiences: yet the very act of entering the ancient waters of a totally alien and foreign universe made me feel slightly ill. The water merely reminded one of the vast expanse of time the world has endured. Thus, what should have been a dramatic moment was nothing more than the observation of an expressionless body of water. Discomfited, I began to think of the approaching day after docking in Bombay. Populating the empty scene before me, I imagined the beggars and penitents I would see walking along the quayside. The sun had already risen over the centre of India and I pictured men and women rising and bathing in the inland rivers, and others, farther to the east, already riding along the dusty roads

in their ox-carts and tongas. With nothing but empty actuality visible over the ship's bows, I desperately tried to make my approach seem personal and symbolic. Staring over the dim outline of the approaching continent, I tried to imagine the figure of a half-naked old man sitting and praying. That was my image of Mahatma Gandhi.

Already I had begun to understand that he represented the soul of India. He seemed to be the Christ of present-day India, but the Christianity and charity he preached was peculiarly adapted to his own country, and it seems to have been born in a world that had not yet experienced the Flood.

5

BOMBAY

THE summer heat was intense, and it was so humid that everything seemed to be sweating. But no, that was not entirely true: it was only I who was bothered by the heat. The Indians, many of whom wore long robes folded between their legs, didn't seem to notice it. Barefoot, and seated on benches with their legs curiously crossed as if unaware of the function of benches, they conversed and gossiped without worrying about the terrible heat. The positions they assumed seem humanly impossible, yet they squatted here and there along the streets without the slightest sign of discomfort. A group of bearded men in blue turbans, gathered together under a tree in the Kamala Nehru Park, had particularly attracted my attention, and I wondered why they wore woven capes and carried large swords.

As in Port Said there were many dogs about, but these dogs of Bombay were fewer in number and their main concern seemed to be to discover a spot of shade in which to rest. They appeared to be quite unaware of the significance of their living in India.

The smells of Bombay were quite unlike those of any other city I had ever visited. I had always characterized cities by their smells, and best-remembered places like London and Paris and Buenos Aires by their individual odours. And so the smells of India seemed particularly exotic to me. They almost made me a little sick and I felt that I must be dreaming. For where else could one find such ancient smells? They were like odours exhumed from some old trunk; they seemed to be a mixture of sandalwood, musk, betel, mango, sweat and of some other thing which I could not identify, but which seemed to come from within the very essence of the Indian, as though it were a product of their eyes, hands and legs. There were other smells as well: the odour of *dhotis* and saris, the

atmosphere of different times and places and, above all, of different dreams and thoughts.

While Bombay boiled like a kettle in that summer of 1953, these smells enveloped the whole city. In the commercial quarter of the town they were particularly concentrated. Here as elsewhere the men sat in peculiar positions. Along the sides of the streets there were hundreds of shops, hardly more than wooden stalls, abutting the walls of more solid buildings behind. The streets themselves were filled with people, while in each tiny stall there was a man or woman surrounded by his goods: some had bolts of silk and brocade, others sold grain or betel. All of them seemed to be able to use their feet as easily as their hands, and most of them were half naked. Here and there was a stall where a sort of yellow paste, dripping with sugar and grease, was being fried in large iron pots. From time to time a snatch of music would issue forth from one or other area of the stalls. It was a kind of shrieky female noise, like the sound of little girls singing in a classroom. This was the voice of the Orient, found everywhere from Egypt to China where it acquires a guttural and almost liturgical intonation. Walking through this quarter, I suddenly heard a startling voice rising and falling, growing loud and then again becoming soft and almost purring. I had never heard anything quite like it before: it was similar in some ways to Arab music and to the Flamenco, but at the same time was quite different. It seemed to be extremely elaborate, having its own form, flowing out over the street, repeating its cycles and variations but somehow always returning to its starting point. The voice was accompanied by a throbbing instrument like a primitive drum, beating in accordance with some elemental rhythmic pattern. Exotic in the bazaar of Bombay, it must cast a truly hypnotic spell over the villages in the interior.

On the other hand, it was obviously far too early for one to generalize or to judge. For all the people I saw appeared to be like beings from some other age or planet. Possibly they had something in common with the Incas or Mayas.

Altogether, these shadowy figures, clustered together in a street where houses were vying for stability with the roots of trees, and whose balconies were populated as much by monkeys as by human beings, made me think that I had entered a dream world: for where else could one find such shadows and such towering roofs, and streets crowded with cows and birds and men? I began to feel almost delirious and half-dreaming, to feel that somehow it was all familiar, and that somewhere I had lived through it all, in one way or other.

Bombay is famous for its Towers of Silence. These tall structures

were built by the Parsees, who are Zoroastrians who place their dead in high places so that the corpses may be devoured by vultures. The reason for this practice is that it enables the human substance to return most easily to its original form—air, earth and water. What has died out in Persia is thus still preserved in India, which is another indication that India is the attic of history. There the Old Adam still persists.

The Towers of Silence rise like the necks of cranes reaching for food. But no food ever goes down those necks, which are really more like outstretched hands offering sustenance to the skies.

. . . . .

That evening I took the night train to Delhi. At the first stop I left my air-conditioned compartment and went to the restaurant car. I was shown to a table where a plump Indian, wearing Gandhi's Khadar, was already sitting. Without any preliminaries this individual began to question me. Where did I come from? What was I doing in India? Did I like India? To all of these questions except the last I gave suitable answers, but what could I say of India, which I had hardly begun to see? My silence on this point did not seem to bother my dinner companion, however. He was one of those people who seem to ask questions simply for the sake of asking them: he was not genuinely interested.

Throughout the meal he had been eating with his fingers, entirely oblivious of the knives and forks put at his place. At the end of the meal he cleaned his hands on the napkin and asked for the bill for both our meals. I tried to pay, but he merely said that it had been his privilege to be my host for my first dinner in India. 'Welcome to Bharat!' he said.

6

THE SERPENT IS HERMAPHRODITIC

ACROSS from Bombay harbour lies the island of Elephanta with its famous cave, which was carved by Brahmans during the sixth century.

There is something about this cave which suggests that it must have been fashioned by supernatural architects. It can be reached only by climbing up through thick shrubbery, and it has four entrances, of which the principal one leads directly to one of the world's most sublime statues. This figure, the Trimurti, is a gigantic three-headed statue of Shiva carved out of the rear wall. Intended to represent the three aspects of Shiva—Shakti the wife, Kartikeya the son, and Shiva himself in his masculine aspect—it inevitably suggests the fundamental Trinity of Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. Here in one figure are Father, Son and Holy Ghost; Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis. Here is the Sun: at dawn, at noon and at dusk.

Each of the three heads looks in a different direction as if each were a god of one of the three dimensions. But what of the fourth dimension? Is it possible that in the wall of the cave there is a fourth head, about which nothing has ever been said? If so, this nameless head can be only implicit. To be explicit about it would be to miss its point entirely.

But let us look more closely at the three visible heads. Each looks in a particular direction but at no particular object, for the eyes of each are closed, and the god seems to be dreaming or meditating over something that is happening internally. They seem to be contemplating the ecstasy of Creation. These three forces—those of birth, preservation and destruction—are conscious; they seem to represent the intellect behind the shadowy substance of the world; for the world at best is only a reflection of the deep dreams of God.

In such a system, the fourth head must represent meditation. Like the invisible eye, it sees all the surface aspects of the world, but it also sees the grand design. With its eyes that see nothing the Trimurti sees everything; closed to the outside world, these eyes contemplate essences only. And the faces of these statues reflect a profound enjoyment of what is being contemplated.

Right beside the Trimurti is another figure of Shiva, this one a full figure. In the Hindu Trilogy Shiva is supposed to represent destruction; Brahma is the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver. Yet these classifications should not be too rigidly adhered to, for each god in his way represents all three. One is the All and the All is One. So Shiva also creates and preserves. As Nataraya, for example, he dances in the centre of the fire that destroys the worlds, but he does so only to make room for a new cycle of creation.

In this statue, Shiva appears as the complete god. No longer a divine form of particularities, he is a total god. Indeed he is both god and goddess, for this statue shows the god as being half male and half female. The female breast carved in the rock is a sign of the line between light and darkness in the god.

Thus as Shiva is androgynous, so god as a whole is hermaphroditic. A single sex would be impossible, for the closed eyes of the Trimurti are turned inward towards that palace where someone has found somebody else after an eternity of waiting. And the joy of this encounter is expressed in the faces of the Trimurti, with their quiet smiles of ineffable happiness. What they see and experience is the divine orgasm of a god that has at last become reunited with himself, and, finding himself again, he quietly creates. The son created is the world, and the world is the shadowy dream of the Hermaphrodite. The living son of this parent is the world of tri-dimensional reality as seen in the Trimurti. The fourth head is the son of death, representative of the fourth dimension and a harbinger of eternity.

But to reach this last stage, to climb up over the breast of the Hermaphrodite and to reach the Palace on top of the Tree, it is first necessary to descend to the roots where the Serpent sleeps in a coil.

This path is not easy. It is long and hard and requires Shiva as a guide. For Shiva is the teacher of teachers and is the lord of Yoga. Only through life—only when the Serpent is liberated at the foot of the Tree so that it may climb along that dorsal spine, sprouting its fiery wings—will an understanding of the mystery be possible. And only when man comes to accept his hermaphrodite character will he be able to contemplate eternity with calmness and joy.

That is the secret of Elephanta.

7

THE SERPENT AND I

BEFORE continuing this book, I think I should interrupt with a personal note.

This is a story of trips I have taken and of things I have seen and experienced. Although it is a sequel to my other books, *Neither by Land nor by Sea* and *Invitation to the Icefields*, it is really concerned with the same search. The object of all of these books has been to give some idea of the long journey I have embarked on, but which I shall probably never finish. In other parts of the world others may take similar journeys and may complete them. I am convinced that only through these travels can man find salvation on this tortured earth. If I have not been able to explain myself clearly, it is because it is impossible to do so. Indeed the very act of writing books is a violation of the rules of pilgrimage. Thus old and silent travellers will have to forgive me. I make these books, but I don't know why. Perhaps it is to help myself; perhaps it is merely from vanity. For vanity is man's peculiar attribute, and the artist is especially vain. Fearful of not achieving true immortality, he tries to gain ephemeral glory, and a name amongst his own people.

In order to be truthful, I can speak only of the things that I have seen and experienced. Yet I sometimes wonder whether my experiences can be of any use to anybody else. For some years, now, I have been living in India. Why I have been here and what I have been doing here is the subject of my narrative. But first I must go back to the first years of my childhood, in order to discover the pain and the glory that I carry with me.

I cannot, of course, explain everything. I can hope to understand only a portion of the mystery. No one can truly understand his own blood, or at least no one has yet probed to the real depths of his personality.

When we were children we lived in the countryside, up in the foothills of the Andes. We were taken care of by an old maidservant who had been present at my father's birth and who knew many of the old legends of our country. My mother used to talk with her about the eagles and the condors, especially those which had white necks and spots like snow on their wings. She also used to sing songs with a thin clear voice. That is really all I remember about her, for she died while still a young girl. I hardly knew her, but I am sure that she was my first love. One day, after she had died, my father took me by the hand and we walked into the country. There, in an opening between the poplars, he pointed towards the afternoon sky and said, 'Your mother is now living up there.'

For many years afterwards I could vividly recall the experiences of that day. And, in those same years, I would often go out on the roof of our house and would kneel down, with my hands crossed, and pray. I would look up into the sky, and in the fanciful forms of the clouds I would imagine that I could see my mother.

I did not cry when my mother died, nor later when my father died. But sometimes, even today, I wake up to find that there are dry tears on my face.

Some years after her death my brothers decided to move my mother to a new grave. When they opened the coffin they discovered that she was intact, and that she still had the golden hair of her youth. Although I was not present when they opened her tomb, I like to think that all through the years that she had been in her coffin she had been singing as she had sung in my early childhood.

I also remember the magnificent garden we had in the country. I would spend hours there gazing at the flowers and at the pigeons we kept in dove-cotes. When I walked amongst the flower beds I used to think that the flowers and plants talked to me. Although God was immaterial He was present in the flowers, and I felt united with Him through the flowers. At the time I could not have been more than five years old. Later I felt a different sensation and began to be conscious of my own personality. I began to feel apart from the rest of the people at our house. I observed the servants and the guests who came to visit, and I asked my mother and my old nanny if they ever felt the same apartness that I felt, or if they could feel the same sense of my personality that I felt.

In that acute loneliness of my childhood I subsequently found reason for the belief in the idea of reincarnation. Somewhere, somebody must have felt that same personality that I felt, and in the future someone will feel it again. And so I shall be living once again.

I remember the nights when my parents would go out and I

would have to stay alone in the big empty house, which echoed the moaning of the old trees outside. Vague feelings of terror would then creep over me. It was no mere fear of loneliness; it was a terror of the night and a fear of all that was outside of myself. It was a cosmic, primordial terror, and it still comes back to me sometimes during the night, like an echo from my childhood.

I also used to play with my sister in the wide corridors of our house. We were truly happy in our games; we were united in blood and brotherhood, and to this day we share these early feelings. Perhaps these memories are a clue that one day, in some faraway world, we will all be able to recover the love that originally united us.

Many of our games were supervised by our old nanny. Today there are few who know what nannies were. They were like angels who subdued their own feelings and transferred their love to the children of others. Certainly our nanny was like an angel. I can see her now, walking down the corridors of my childhood, carrying bouquets of violets or bringing me sweets on a silver tray for my birthday. Her name was Ama Pola, which means poppy. When she died she went alone, for during her lifetime I did not realize the immense sacrifice she had made. We buried her in our family tomb, together with our parents, and we covered her with a shawl and with one of her old capes. I have yet to find a bouquet of violets, like those she used to carry, to place beside her grave, for the violets of today do not have the same perfume they used to have.

Like my father's ancestors, who came to Chile centuries ago, I have always been thirsty for adventure and for travel. Yet I have also always had a strong feeling for my native country. I think I have told somewhere else the story of Pepita Paraná, my great-great-grandmother, who on the hills of Valparaiso embroidered swaddling clothes for her great-great-grandson. Nobody remembered them when I was born, but when my first son was born my grandmother took them out of an old trunk and gave them to me. They smelled of old apples, and when my great-aunt took my son in her arms she would sing, 'Little child, you have come back to us after a hundred and forty years; little child, you have almond eyes like the moon.'

My great-aunt was a strange woman. She spent most of her life out of the country, travelling about the world. From Africa she would send me postcards of camels, lions and of the Pyramids. It was she who first gave me the idea of adventure and of pilgrimages round the earth. She was also the first to tell me of India and to explain the theory of the transmigration of souls. Her universe was

made up of places. She told me that she had visited certain places in the world that were so familiar to her that she was sure she had been there before in some other life. When she described these places she seemed to transform herself into a being from some other age, and it seemed to me that I was no longer listening to my great-aunt but to a warrior, or a great lord of another era. Sometimes this sensation frightened me so much that I would run away from her room. Yet she was really my first *friend*. She did not love flowers nor did she believe in them. She said flowers were for the dead. For herself she was convinced she would never die. Thus we planted an orange tree by her tomb, believing that future passers by would enjoy the fruit of this tree, as others in the past had enjoyed her.

Yet the orange tree which we planted has never borne fruit. It is hard to tell what this means. Perhaps she has gone way beyond the blossoms and oranges of this world.

The stories my father told me about my mother, and my tendency to search for her in the clouds, made my childhood not merely religious, but mystical. I can still remember the smell of the candles, the lights in the chapel, the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the stars crossing the evening sky. This mystical pantheism was a paternal heritage, as important to me as the land, the mountains and the rivers of my youth, as important as the desire for adventure that came from my father's ancestors. My maternal heritage was quite different: since I hardly knew my mother, I can picture it only as a mass of shadowy clouds, with here and there a bright flash of light. Because of her early death my soul seems to have become irreparably separated from God. They look at each other across an abyss and seem only to find each other in the grace of Revelation and in a moment of joy which is soon lost and overcome by a continuing sense of original sin. The old houses still exist, with their old walls and patios of stone, with old furniture, old lamps, chandeliers and dust. Down in the cellars there are rusty iron chains, ghosts and bones. But nobody ever goes down there.

This mixed heritage is cold and bewildering. But the general pattern is that of grandfathers and great-grandfathers torn between renunciation and desire. They would abandon earthly love and then sink into the shadows of penitence. But their original desire would remain with them, like stigmata in the hands of Christ. Then when they were old they would shrink from the memory of their early desires, and wonder whether they had ever lived.

If I could tell the full story of these people I could square the circle. But the blood of ancestors still flows in the veins of the

present generation and old cousins call to one another, and nephews and nieces look for their uncles and aunts. Thus although I am myself, I am also my ancestors; and I realize how difficult it is to know whether my actions are my own or those of my forbears.

Yet more important in my life than the pull of blood or the influence of ancestors is the profound effect of the countryside of Chile on my spirit. The scenery of my country is tragic and mystical. It seems to represent those ancient generations who were separated for good from their ancestors in Europe and who found themselves in a distant and hostile climate, tormented by fear and wonder. For this was the world of South America, which had its roots not in the ancient customs of Europe but in the far more ancient mysteries of Atlantis. Through this connection with the submerged world, South America represents the primordial Serpent.

8

BURIED ALIVE

EVEN before I became an adolescent I began to have mysterious experiences. I used to feel a strange chilling sensation that travelled along my spine and reached up to my brain. Usually these experiences took place at night, when I went to bed. In that half world between consciousness and unconsciousness I would have the feeling that a switch had been turned which made me lose all control of myself. The objects in the room where I lay would lose their equilibrium, and my ordinary relationship to them would disappear. I could see myself moving and acting at a tremendous speed, and inside my head thousands of words would gush forth at an increasing tempo. I would feel dizzy and helpless, and the only way I could escape was to fall into a deep sleep. Then I would peacefully wake up, loving life and happily conscious of the crispness of the morning.

Shortly after these experiences I was overcome by a serious illness. In the delirium of my fever it seemed to me that I would rise from my bed, and walk towards the balcony that overlooked the street from the second floor. I would then turn round and look at my bed where I could see myself lying flat on my back. I would then jump from the balcony and fall onto a funeral car that was slowly advancing through the streets. In due course I recovered from my illness, but one night when I was going to sleep, or perhaps I was already partly asleep, I saw before me the face of a dark and bearded figure who was covered with furs, and who smiled at me in a familiar, ironic way. I woke up, violently trembling.

After that, the chilling sensation in my back became more and more persistent. Yet I could not talk about it with anyone. The phenomenon simply could not be expressed in ordinary language. I could not go to a doctor and tell him that invisible beings were

climbing up my spine or that my brain was full of thousands of words which were being uttered at a tremendous speed.

Then one day, at dawn, the door to my room opened, and a covered figure came and sat on the foot of my bed. I could feel the weight on the mattress. As I looked at it, its cloak seemed to be falling from its head, and it seemed to be trembling with vibrations. The room felt icy cold and I lay frozen in terror. I closed my eyes so as not to see the figure, but when I opened them again it was still there, turning its head so as to hide its face. I wanted to escape, but was paralysed. After that, although I never saw the figure again, I was often afflicted with the same feeling of immobility. It usually came at dawn, and I would feel an icy, burning vibration in my feet, which would rise along my spine and spread to the various parts of my body. These would then vibrate like bells from another world, and I would lie still on my bed, neither asleep nor able to wake up. Sometimes, in that state, I would see or sense the maid coming into the room with breakfast, leaving it on the night-table. With all my strength I would try to wake up or to move, but something inside would push me down towards regions of infinite shadows, towards a fearful nothingness, and I would feel as though I were on the verge of death.

When I finally came to I would find myself flat on my back, with my hands crossed. Then I would generally look out of the window and see the Morning Star. In the pre-dawn light, the sky would look like pale blue velvet, and the Morning Star like a fleck of gold. Ever since, I have associated the Morning Star with strange happenings, as though it were a kind of intermediary between this world and the atemporal world. Perhaps this star is the final haven of the dreamers of this world, those who are not fit for this technological earth.

As I was very young at the time I was naturally worried about what was happening to me. I had heard of catalepsy and of people being buried alive. I was afraid that one day that might happen to me, that I would be found paralysed on my bed and would be taken for dead. I seriously thought about consulting a doctor, but knew I could not explain my experiences.

All of these phenomena occurred entirely out of time. Even now, after so many years, I can feel them more acutely than the things that happened yesterday. They are something like stories having ramifications on different levels. There is daily life, or 'real' life, which may even be the life of thoughts and of dreams and of poetry; and then there is the life of another world, where one is an altogether different being amongst other beings. It is of course true

that these experiences happen only very infrequently. But they never blend or mix like the events of this world. Rather they accumulate, like a series of timeless memories which function as signals marking our destinies and the progress of our fates. Through them we know how far we have to go before overcoming death and gaining eternal life.

Sometimes it is necessary to choose between the temporal life and the atemporal life. But, since neither can be entirely overcome, the very act of choice may uncover the point of equilibrium between the two, in so far as it shows where one penetrates the other. Intuitively I feel that at the heart of one's being everything is ageless and unchanging. As I move towards an understanding of myself I will again find the friends of my earliest years, those invisible companions who were with me in the garden, and their ghosts will become more real than all of reality. They have not changed; they have kept their eternal youth.

In order to endure, I may have to move entirely into that sphere of atemporal reality. But to do so will require a devastating act of will. For neither life nor death will co-operate; each always tries to impose its own values.

9

WHEN THE DISCIPLE IS PREPARED THE MASTER APPEARS

IT WOULD take me a long time to explain how it was that I came into the presence of the Master. The old phrase gives the essence of the case: 'When the disciple is prepared, the Master appears.' That at least is what happened to me, although I don't yet know whether it was for good or for ill.

The Master's eyes are blue, and his manners are courtly and antique. When he speaks of life he speaks of an age that has long since passed away. Only when he dreams does he transcend time. In those moments he is surrounded by legendary warriors, carrying shields and shining swords. At heart, he himself is a warrior.

When I first met him I observed him clearly, and with a critical mind. But in fact I could not be too critical, for I was faced with the problem of being buried alive, which is a way of saying that I was faced with the problem of saving my life. I therefore began not with a statement but with a question. His reply was strange: he told me that I was neither sick nor abnormal. What had happened was that I had entered into relations with the Serpent.

Then the Master began to tell me about the Serpent. 'The Serpent,' he said, 'was coiled about the Tree of Paradise, as well as about the dorsal spine. . . . By some he is called Kundalini; by others the Astral Fire. . . .'

This message was not spoken; what the Master did was to sing.

I spent a year with the Master in hopes of being accepted. I was one of a group that surrounded this warrior: nearly all of us were men of action, not thinkers. The Order we formed was rumoured to have come from India, or perhaps from Tibet. It acted in accordance with signs only: its purpose was to concentrate on cosmic vibrations, and it acted in accordance with those rules of conduct

that emanated from the Ice Age, and which were then lost when the continent of Atlantis was submerged. An ancient Himalayan order was said to have preserved this pre-human wisdom and to have used it in its cosmic warfare. This order was not one of saints or of mystics, but of warriors who proposed to take eternity by assault. In a certain way this approach appealed to me.

Then the day came when the Master unsheathed his sword and touched my shoulder with it, while the others stood round me also holding their swords. Afterwards I was given the first sign, which was supposed to open the doors to another plane, releasing me from the bondage of my body. That night I traced the sign over my heart, and with my finger I drew a circle round it. At that time, and ever since when I have drawn the sign, I experienced the same vibrations I had known before, so that the sign seemed to be confirmed by invisible powers.

The Master had told me not to resist when the fainting spells occurred, but to give in to them. 'You will have to fight the Serpent without fear,' he said. 'You will have to crush the Serpent with the sign you now possess.' Thus, at the usual hour when my fainting spell occurred, I let myself go. My body seemed to turn to lead, and then, after a brief moment of nothingness, of total darkness and forgetfulness, I seemed to fall, revolving at an incredible speed down into a bottomless well. Finally I reached the bottom, which seemed like a region of hell, or an inferno. I did not remember to trace the sign, but gave myself up in total despair. Then, somehow, I seemed to rise, until I found myself in an empty region where I apparently floated. There I seemed entirely free and happy. But when I woke up again and found myself on my bed, that moment of indescribable peace was gone, and I felt that I was really buried alive in my own body.

Out of the window the Morning Star appeared, with its light shining from a different world.

Afterwards I wondered whether something had gone wrong. I tried to induce the same experience artificially, but the phenomenon would only come naturally. The Master interpreted the signs for me, but I never really understood them. I was looking for a guide as precise as a street map, and it was to be years before I overcame these rational desires. The mixture of the rational and the irrational is always dangerous. Even as a child, when I felt united with nature, I had always been conscious about it. And that very consciousness had prevented my attaining that *other reality*.

During my dawn fainting spells I would sometimes try to direct the process and to control its sequence. The result was always

catastrophic, however, for while part of me was in one realm the other part was in another, and the two always clashed violently. With my conscious ego awake in the middle of a dream, I would remain in a half-way or neutral state. The vibrations which had begun to rise from my feet would begin to distribute themselves about my body, but the terrible music would never reach my brain, because there I was conscious and trying to hold on to daily reality. And so I would be caught between two worlds, unable to experience either satisfactorily. All I could do was to hold myself there on my bed until the vibrations ceased.

Then I would begin by stretching out one arm, and then the other until I was able to sit on the edge of the bed. Finally, with great difficulty, I would begin to move my legs until I could stand up. I would then move forwards without ever looking back, because I knew if I did, *everything would be lost.* I would go to the door and open it; then I would cross the room and walk out on to my balcony and let myself fall from the second floor. I would also go and visit other people asleep in neighbouring rooms. These experiences occurred frequently, but they were never completely satisfactory. Nothing seemed entirely real, and I felt as though my development was being stultified. I lived alone, isolated in a world of ghosts and signs, noises and echoes. When the vibrations began I was prepared to face them, but always remained in a half-way state of torment.

Sometime later I was overcome by an even more startling sensation. The Master had given me a new sign, which was an indication that I had risen in the hierarchy of the Order. That night I traced this sign on my chest, and at dawn the vibrations began again, but this time they were so violent that I thought I could not survive them. My brain seemed to be infested with bloody thoughts, and I prepared for the end. Then, suddenly, a jug appeared in the air before me. Instinctively I put out my hands and poured its contents over my body. The fire of the vibrations instantly ceased.

Afterwards I asked myself what had happened. Who had put the water there? Who had come to my help at that moment? Was this a subjective phenomenon? I asked the Master, but he never explained it to me.

All these experiences occurred many years ago, but the results have never completely disappeared. My body continues in its course towards ultimate destruction, but I am always ready to embark into the world of illusion.

When I got married my wife slowly began to dispel these shadows, and to remove the noises and ghosts that had frightened her and which stood in the way of our earthly life. The Master never approved

of my marriage. The war he fought required merciless and solitary soldiers, adventurers who were ready to take up the sword and to loose themselves completely. My Master had always lived in this world of fantasy: he has dreamed extra-human things and he is the prisoner of gigantic myths. He is dear to me because he never had the mystic complacency of the mentally soft. For him adventures in the world beyond have always been acts of war, and there has never been a truce. The blood of the Conquistadores flows in his veins as it does in mine.

One day my Master called me to his private study. He was sitting with an open book on his knee. He asked me to approach, and pointed to a picture in this book which depicted a very high mountain with two lesser ones beside it. 'That is Mount Kailas,' he said. 'The main chapter of our Order lives there, somewhere in the interior of this mountain, in a cave. The mountain itself is in the Himalayas, not far from the frontier between Tibet and India. Near the mountain is a sacred lake called Manasarovar, and on the other side is the Tibetan village of Dahripu. Mount Kailas is sacred for both Hindus and Buddhists. According to the Hindus, Shiva and his wife Parvati live on top of the mountain.'

At that time the Master had begun to paint pictures of Mount Kailas all over the walls of his room. He thought he had discovered the definitive source of our Order, and he claimed that this place ruled over the spirit of the Orient and preserved the wisdom that had been forgotten in the West.

As I listened to the Master, I began to realize that if the truth was really kept in one place I should have to go and find it myself. I became more determined then ever to visit India.

10

THE MOUNTAIN

CHILE is a country of mountains. They cross the land, and hem it in. Starting from the South Pole, and from the mysterious Antarctic, they rise along the length of the country, distributing their force through earthquakes and volcanoes, so that the whole range of the Andes palpitates like no other mountains in the world. Thus the country itself seems to be living on the edge of existence. Caught between the sea and the mountains, it leads a delicate existence, and lives under the weight of a tragic destiny.

Perhaps there is a connection between mountains; perhaps the wisdom of one can be transferred to the other. The summits of the Andes are second only to those of the Himalayas.

The first Conquistador was aware of the strange light that emanated from the volcanic Andes. He was the first to describe this passionate wonder, and he also noticed that the first inhabitants of Chile lived in simple accord with these mountains and did not wish to adopt the civilized customs of the invaders. Thus, in Chile, the mountains are everything: they are the country's true inhabitants. Moreover, they seem to be the living representatives of those giants which preceded the humanity of today. Their snowy crests are like the heads of titans who had achieved immortality, surrounding themselves with the light that gives fire to the Serpent. Thus there is wisdom in the Andes as there is on Mount Kailas. I sometimes think that my Master's guides were not so much human beings as spirits of the mountains, or the titans living within them.

One morning, when I was only half awake, I looked out at the obscure mass of the Andes that rises in front of Santiago. And as I looked I imagined I could distinguish two gigantic images standing out against the black screen of the mountains. These were the titans

imprisoned in the rock and snow. One seemed to be raising its arms to heaven while the other was bent over, as though it was holding the weight of the ages. They were outlined with dark light and looked like ancient men. In Chile these titans have remained anonymous, whereas in India they would have been given individual names.

II

IS THERE A RELEASE FROM DEATH?

ALTHOUGH both my mother and father have died, they seem to survive in parts of myself. They exist like posthumous energies, as if some of their essence were still living in my blood. And when I go about the world I see with their eyes, so that I give them a vicarious existence. But one day I shall have to die, and then everything will be finished both for them and for me. For by then the living will no longer remember their dead. In an era of atomic power they will not have time to follow this useless old rite.

Yet the warrior cannot despair. He has to fight to the last, even though he has to do it against everybody else and even against himself and the feelings of his own heart. By inheritance and experience, I seem to embody the warrior spirit. Obsessed by adventure I can only go on until I can no longer see. I seem to have been born marked: the Serpent has bitten me and my blood has already been poisoned. Ever since birth I have been engaged in a battle with death. And I have found that there is only one way to win this battle: to come to grips with the concept of the Tree and the Serpent.

Therefore my search is simply to find the people who possess the means with which to cope with this terrible business. From what I had read, this ancient wisdom, or code, existed somewhere in India. For India has known the Serpent since its childhood. I therefore decided to take the great leap across the waters of the Flood, in order to find what there was to be discovered in a country that still seemed to exist near the prologue of history. I was therefore determined to leave my own country and the people of my own blood and to turn to the East. Yet in doing this I was merely following the

traditional path. To defeat death it has always been necessary to die first. And in order to overcome my own blood and heritage, I first had to pour it all out. I also had to leave my Master: to be crucified, I had to remove myself from the great figure of the Crucifixion.

12

DELHI

THE name the Indians give to their country is Bharata. Bharata was the son of a beautiful woman called Shakuntala, who was later to be the subject of a poem composed by Kalidasa. From the first Bharat came the great Bharatas whose epic battles were narrated in the Mahabharata and in the Bhagavad Gita. Bharata, which is really the spiritual fatherland of the Hindus, is not a nation but a continent. Just as the small principalities of medieval Europe were united by a common heritage and religion, so the different states of India have been held together by a subterranean thread of belief and worship of the same gods. If this common bond of Bharata were to be destroyed by rationalism and the spread of industrialism, it is doubtful whether any new bond could be found capable of unifying the continent. Certainly it is unlikely that technology alone could prevent India from following the path taken by Europe after the Enlightenment. The spirit of nationalism always destroys the soul of nations, and also destroys everything that is authentically national.

The English word 'India' comes from the Persian, and was picked up by the Greeks who invaded Bharata with Alexander when he crossed the Khyber Pass. The Persians were the first to have used the native term *Hindu* to refer to all of India. That word in Hindi means *river*, and thus Hindustan means country of rivers.

Delhi, the capital of India, is located at a strategic point in the northern part of the continent. From there it was generally possible to control the various arteries of the Khyber, the Hindu Kush and the Punjab, which were all customary routes of invasion. The Mogul Emperors also chose Delhi for their capital, and they so impressed the northern part of the country with their own civilization

that it is now extremely difficult to discover any architectural remnants of pre-Islamic India in the area.

In the vicinity of Delhi there are seven distinct sites for the ancient capital, corresponding to the seven periods of the Mohammedan invasion. Prior to the first, there was doubtless some kind of Hindu settlement in the area, but the buildings must all have been made of wood, since no remains have been found. Nevertheless, there is evidence in India of extraordinarily ancient civilizations: in the Indus Valley, for example, which is now in Pakistan, the ruins of the old cities of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa may still be seen.

All through its history India has been continually invaded. The great Gupta Empire, for example, which produced the dramatic poet Kalidasa and the frescoes at Ellora and Ajanta, and the extraordinary stone heads of the Buddha, was entirely destroyed in the fifth century by the Huns of Mihiragula. Later, in the seventh and eighth centuries, the Arabs invaded by way of Baluchistan and the Sindh. After them came Tamerlane. Yet none of these invaders was anxious to remain in India: they were apparently aware of the debilitating effect India might have on their own nationality and were probably fearful of what might happen to their descendants.

. . . . .

The present Old Delhi still preserves its Victorian flavour, with its railway station and its statue of the old queen, now dirtied by coal-dust and bird-stains. It also contains its Memorial and its cemeteries with tombstones and crosses, its university and churches, its old lepers and its tremendous misery.

New Delhi was built some time ago for the British Viceroy and the civil administration. These officials lived in houses surrounded by gardens, and were waited on by armies of bearers, sweepers and chowkidars, or night watchmen. Somehow New Delhi seems to represent the apogee of a mediocre bureaucracy, for it was occupied by people who came to India not to live amongst the people, but to surround themselves with comfort that would compensate for the harshness of the climate, or which they considered harsh in comparison to the fog of the British Isles. The Palace of the Viceroys, which is now the residence of the President of India, is called Rashtrapati Bhavan, and was the home of the last English Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten. It has a certain resemblance to St. Peter's in Rome, but this Vatican, built solely on a commercial basis, has not lasted as long as the other one.

Thus one must go to Old Delhi to sense the real romance of

India. There in a street called Chandni Chowk, which in Hindi means 'square of moonlight', one enters a fairy-tale atmosphere. As in a dream, crowds of vendors, cows, bicycles, saints and lepers pass along this street. Here and there exotic music emerges from the interior of the houses which border it, while in some of the side streets there are old palaces with silver porches. Life and death meet here in the midst of the noise, almost lost sight of in the horde of merchants and in the excrement that lines the pavement. On the edge of the street an immovable man sits in meditation; he searches for eternity in the perfume of spices and dung.

I came to this Delhi years ago and saw all these things. I looked at these sights in order to discover India's history, for India has a tremendous history, perhaps too much of it. But soon it became clear that in India history does not count: what is important is the legend. That is to say, it is not the third dimension that matters, but the fourth, or invisible, one. All cities have a spirit distinct from observable phenomena, and Delhi is no exception. In Delhi, however, it is more difficult to discover this spirit. This book will try to penetrate to the invisible India, which is the only real India, and which is the only aspect of India that is of any real interest.

If a man comes to India to see physical monuments, or to look at material things, or even to study the life of men in cities, he will be lost. He will not be able to understand India; moreover he will hate it, although he will not admit it. For the truth is that the physical India is not agreeable; it is neither beautiful nor authentic. Conversely, the invisible India is something of great beauty. But this India can be penetrated only by intuition and with a sense of mystery; one has to go round the physical and to be conscious of the play of emotions.

. . . . .

When I first arrived in India I established myself in New Delhi. It was summer-time and the heat was tremendous. The sun beat down mercilessly; indeed, the whole sky seemed to be on fire. Moreover, the dry heat seemed to annihilate life. The small black birds that I saw, standing on the roofs of houses with their beaks open, looked as though they were petrified. As the heat beat down, the air itself seemed to vibrate. Yet nothing was moving; to move would mean death. Everything was immobile, but everything was vibrating.

Nightfall brought no refreshing breeze; instead, the atmosphere remained heavy and charged with exhausting perfumes. The gardens were not cool, merely oppressive, and the odours they gave

forth were hypnotic and deadening. They would mix with the smell of the human beings and beasts outside in the street. There, on the sidewalk in front of my hotel, taxi drivers, hotel workers and merchants would stretch out on makeshift beds and prepare to face the starry night. Here and there was the sound of muffled conversation, but on the whole the night was silent and oppressive. Then suddenly, from across a distant field, you could hear the shriek of the hyenas who had begun to feast on some bit of abandoned flesh.

13

THE PIPE IS THE SERPENT

ALMOST immediately after my arrival I met the foreigner. He was a tall thin man, with very blue eyes, and was slightly bald. One night he invited me to visit him. We agreed to meet at my hotel, and then we walked together through streets which were already full of sleeping people. When at last we reached his apartment he left me for a moment, and then reappeared wearing a *mundu*, which is a flowing gown that is worn in the south of India. He was barefoot and naked from the waist up. He then invited me to take off my shoes and enter his bedroom. This was a small room, and the floor was covered by a big white sheet, over which cushions had been arranged. There was no other furniture. The foreigner then sat down and lit a small lamp. Beside him were a number of instruments: a long pipe covered with carvings, and a small red lacquer box. He opened this box and from it he took some opium, which he then rolled in small balls over the fire. His fingers moved with great skill, but his face looked anxious, as though he were a priest officiating at some ancient ritual. On his left hand he wore a ring embossed by a dark stone, which was engraved with verses from the Koran. As he worked, preparing the pellets, faint spirals of smoke rose from the fire, and a strange smell enveloped the room. The foreigner was concentrating so much he appeared to be in meditation. Then the door opened again, and a beautiful young woman silently came in through the darkness. Stretching herself out at the foreigner's feet, she looked like a svelte cat resting on a cushion. She was clearly an Indian from the south, for she had large eyes, loose hair and very fine hands. When she smiled she revealed tiny white teeth. The foreigner lowered his hand and caressed her head.

By now everything was ready. The pipe was prepared and two

pillows were made ready for us. The foreigner then inhaled deeply several times before passing the pipe to the woman. After a while he spoke. 'Indian opium is the best in the world; there is nothing like it anywhere else. That's why I live here.' He then nodded towards the woman and added: 'Also, of course, because of her. Some years ago I went back to Europe,' he continued. 'I wanted to see the Western world once again. Yet when I got there I discovered I couldn't stand it. And so I broke all the bonds that remained and came back here. It's not that I like India or the Indians; it's something quite different. It's hard to explain. Perhaps it's the atmosphere, which is something like this opium. It's the same wherever you go in India. If I lived in Europe I think I'd have to smoke more. But here it is not so necessary, since opium can be found everywhere.' Again he motioned towards the girl and added: 'She is also my opium. But she does not have the vice; she smokes it, but not because of need. She can leave it at any time.'

The young woman then smiled and stretched her long legs under her sari. The foreigner then continued. 'This opium comes from Afghanistan,' he said. 'There is a place there where four countries come together. These are China, Russia, Pakistan and India. That is where the opium caravans cross. They are as ancient as history and as full of risks and dreams.' He then passed the pipe to me. 'Wouldn't you like to try some?' he asked.

I felt very tired, somehow burnt up by the heat and atmosphere of the room. But I took the long pipe and looked at it. It was made with exquisite workmanship. Possibly it had come from Peking or Shanghai or Hong Kong. At the same time it was solid, and as manly as an instrument of war. As I began to inhale the smoke I imagined that I was about to face the essence of life. I wanted to melt into history and into mankind beyond history. Resting on my pillow, I gradually began to feel less tired. We continued to talk, passing the pipe from hand to hand. The foreigner then asked me if I thought that natural dreams were superior to those that came from opium. For him, everything existed in terms of oblivion. Pleasure for him was oblivion. He claimed that the mystics and saints found pleasure only in pain, and he wondered whether that pleasure was superior to the pleasure derived from opium.

By now, because of the pipe, I had grown beyond sensation. In fact, I was experiencing nothing. Yet I derived the greatest pleasure from the simple beauty of the scene before me, this man and this woman, wrapped in smoke. I was inexperienced and so could not know whether opium was superior to the mystic experience. But I felt that I could not transform myself into an opium-smoker, for I

knew that opium would always be an obstacle between the experience itself and me.

The foreigner then turned towards me and gently asked me if I would tell him about some of my own mystic experiences. 'I've never had any myself,' he said. 'That is why I smoke.' There was a hint of nostalgia in his voice.

Then I told him what I could remember of my past. As I talked, the woman opened her eyes wider and wider, and they seemed to reflect the lakes and jungles of the region from which she came. Yet she was not smoking. By now I too had stopped smoking, and had begun to feel a strange sense of union with this woman.

The foreigner continued to smile, but there was a touch of sadness in his eyes. He was caressing his pipe with his long fingers. This Chinese pipe was his Serpent, his only contact with this world which had physically repelled him. Through that Serpent he was able to touch the roots of the mystery latent in his lover. But she and I were completely lost. Nevertheless, I knew that nothing would ever come of it. We were pilgrims from other worlds.

Later when I returned to my hotel I walked along the same sidewalks, and found them still covered with sleeping people. They lay in total abandonment, wrapped in the heavy atmosphere of the night. They too were probably dreaming the same anguished dreams of men everywhere who are caught like bewitched prisoners in their own existence, vacillating between the world of actuality and the real world of eternity.

In the distance the hyenas shrieked as they had done for centuries.

14

LOST IN THE TEMPLE

THE millionaire Birla has built several monumental temples in the north of India. All of them are in very bad taste. In other countries, when a millionare gives his money to a church or distributes it to good works, he does so to salve his conscience. I am not sure if the same motivation exists in India, for here everything is different. The Birlas are a family of powerful merchants, yet one of them became a religious man and a protector of holy men, Yogis and pilgrims of all nationalities. Gandhi used to stay in his house in New Delhi. In fact it was there that he was assassinated.

The Birla temple is a monstrous architectural mass; the main buildings are painted in violent colours and are covered with carved figures, while the gardens are full of statues of animals and small towers and pavilions. On Sundays some people come to hear the music and to have picnics, while others sleep and pray. Thus it follows the old Oriental conception of a temple by being a palace, a dining-room and a place where you can sit and chat. Outside, crowds of vendors sell flowers and food, pamphlets and pictures. Inside, the children run about, swinging and praying. It is interesting to consider the mentality of the architect of this temple, not to mention the mentality of its founder, which seems at once to have been infantile and acute.

I have seen Birla walking through the gardens and the sanctuaries of his temple, anxious that everything should be in order and the floors kept clean. He is like a king in his palace. He wears a long *ashkan* over the flowing cloth of his *dhoti*. He also wears a turban and his face looks like an old ivory medallion.

One day when I went there I stopped in the central hall of the temple, beside the sanctuary of Rama and Sita. There I saw a curious dark-faced figure sitting cross-legged like a statue on top

of a marble pedestal. The body of this figure was covered with transparent veils, and its head was covered with a silk turban. Round its neck were garlands of flowers. The public would gather round it and deposit sweets, or small pieces of bread or fruit, at its feet. Now and then a fat old priest, whose job it was to take care of the Rama sanctuary, would shoo away the curious and would fan the face of the statue. Then I noticed that it was really a man who was sitting there with closed eyes, so immobile that his breathing was almost invisible. Finally someone approached him, touched his feet and said something to him. The statue then opened its eyes. Slowly the eyelids rose, and from inside a tired light looked out at the world. The mouth opened slightly, and a bright-pink tongue tried to moisten the lips. Then the fat Brahman priest put a jug of water between its teeth. A little bit later, when I looked again, the statue was talking animatedly, chattering in a southern tongue with the curious people who were around him. His face was wide and flat, and his eyes twinkled. I myself approached him, and gave him a reverent greeting. He looked at me with surprise, almost with disapproval, as if he wanted to say, 'You should not do that,' or 'That is not for you to do.' On his thick lips was a faint smile of complicity.

I then left the sanctuary and wandered on through corridors crowded with poor and dirty people. The walls were decorated with Buddhist swastikas and calendar scenes, representing events in the lives of the different gods of the Indian pantheon. One room contained a life-sized statue of Krishna, and a number of musicians who were singing. The public sat on the floor, in two separate groups. On one side were the women and on the other the men. Continuing on, I climbed to the upper galleries of the temple. Through the arcades I could see a new group of pilgrims arriving in the patio below. Several of the men had completely shaven heads, with only a small piece of hair hanging down their necks. These men were practically carrying another man in their arms. Slowly advancing, they finally and very carefully deposited him on the ground. Like them, he was half naked and had his head shaven, yet he looked very tall and strong. Then suddenly he began to have convulsions and to tremble violently. The others covered him with a cloak and squatted round him in patient silence.

I then went down to the wide gardens at the back of the temple and walked up to the last tower, which is built in imitation of the Dravidian towers of the south. I climbed its steps and looked at the dry shrubs and desolate plain that led off to the distance. I could hear a woman singing some melancholy song. Her voice was being

transmitted by the loudspeakers of the temple. Then I turned round and saw a small boy, who had been watching me all along without my noticing it. At most he was eight years old. He was wearing a long shirt that reached to his knees, and on his chest he had a medal or amulet made of some shiny metal. His hair was very curly and his eyes seemed tender and soft. He looked at me with curiosity, almost with insistence. I thought he wanted money as that little girl in Aden had, and I looked through my pockets. I offered him some annas, but the boy made no move to take them. He simply continued to stare at me, with his arms hanging by the side of his body. I did not dare to touch him.

I continued on my way, although from time to time I looked back. The boy went on looking at me. Then, when I reached the foot of the stairs, an idea entered my head and, practically running, I climbed up again. But the boy had disappeared. I ran around the other side of the temple and looked down the staircase there, but the boy had gone. I then climbed up into the interior of the temple, looking for him as I went. But the boy had vanished. Slowly, with a strange anguish oppressing me, I returned to the gardens and sat down on a bench, unable to take my eyes away from the tower. The melancholy voice of the woman continued to be broadcast from the loudspeakers, and I sat there, unable to get rid of the image of the childish face and pure eyes of that small boy. Hardly realizing it, I found myself weeping, and the tears rolled down my cheeks. Who was this child? I wondered. Why had his glance moved me so? Was it some son of mine? Or was it that old scene that had taken place two thousand years ago? Yes, lost in the temple, in a temple of the Orient . . . and, when I did not recognize him, it was I who was the lost one.

15

THE COW

MANY of the old customs of India have been dismissed by modern critics as superstitions. But to understand the laws that rule the Hindu organization it is necessary to remember that India has been, and continues to be, a theocracy. It may be the last and it is probably the only true one that has ever existed. You would have to go back to the early Middle Ages in Europe to find anything like it in the West. In India all the laws, even the most practical ones, have been instituted by the Brahmans, that is to say by the clergy, by religion. Because of this theocracy the clergy have had to be more practical than mystical, more political than spiritual. Thus they have legislated everything from birth to death, and have covered every aspect of daily life, including eating, bathing and making love. In India, therefore, everything has a double application. Everything has a spiritual as well as a physical basis. The spiritual does not suffer from its practical attachments, however; on the contrary, there is a metaphysical connection between the two. The cow is a case in point.

The institution of the sacred cow perhaps arose from sheer necessity, which required the protection of this useful and practical animal. In the Indian economy the cow was even more useful than the horse, because it could perform the latter's work with one advantage. In addition to pulling carts and ploughs, it could also give milk. At one time, this valuable beast almost became extinct, and for that reason it was declared sacred.

Having achieved this new status, the cow began to belong to the race of Abel. To kill the cow would mean to repeat the sin of Cain. In time the cow came to be an object of veneration. But this adoration took a practical form, as it always does in India. Thus the most sacred animal was also the most useful. Moreover, in addition to

giving milk, it could give something else. It became a vital symbol of history, and a vital symbol of theocracy. Indeed, it can be said without exaggeration that India would not be what it is without the cow. Gandhi had reason to exalt the cow, and today when Nehru says, without much conviction, I dare say, that an end should be put to the 'superstition of the sacred cow', and that the cow should be sacrificed to feed the people, great masses of Hindus rise in protest, initiating *satyagraha* with a zeal even greater than that which finally led to the expulsion of the British.

When you think of horseback riders you think of Attila and Genghis Khan, or of the Crusaders and the Conquistadores of America. But those who for centuries rode on the back of the cow, and who still do so, are the people of the Lord Buddha and of Gandhi.

The Indian cow is quite different from all other cows in the world. First of all, it has never had to bend its neck under the yoke. Instead it has a hump, which helps it endure the yoke and avoid humiliation. This hump is strange, because it makes the Indian cow look something like a camel. Recalling the legend concerning the transformation of the Serpent of the Sea into a camel, when it was abandoned on the sands of the desert, it may be that this cow is also the Serpent.

The relationship between the Indian people and the cow has always been very mixed. It is this same mixture which best represents life. The cow is sacred, and it is forbidden to kill her, with the result that the death penalties for killing a cow can be greater than those for killing a human being. Nevertheless, the cows are also tormented and tortured. I have seen drovers and carters pinching these animals in their more sensitive parts, twisting their tails in a criminal way and introducing sharp-pointed instruments into their rectums or into their vaginas. Yet, if a cow dies on the road, a Brahman may read portions of the Bhagavad Gita or parts of the Vedas, as though the dying animal were human. For in the wheel of reincarnation there is no real difference between man and cow. Neither one is superior to the other. The mind alone creates the idea of superiority. It has never been proved that even the smallest worm is inferior to a man before the eyes of the Supreme Intelligence. Everyone in his place fulfils his destiny and his role in the Hindu chain of being. This is the basis of the caste system. Thus the untouchable is not inferior to the Brahman or the prince; he is simply different. Each has his place, his own *dharma* and *karma*, with its own functions and entity. But everything changes. In another incarnation the untouchable may become a prince, and the Brahman may become a cow.

Everything appears to be mixed, but at the same time everything is well delineated and precise. This seeming paradox also applies to the cow. The cow is white in colour and provides pure milk, but the cow also produces excrement. Thus the cow is a symbol for the Universe as a whole, and in Hindu legends the cow's milk represents cosmic energy. For this reason the Brahman and his people drink the foamy milk of the terrestrial cow. But they don't stop there, since this cow is more than a mere animal. Thus, the Brahman and his people also drink the urine of the cow and even mix cow-dung with their daily food. At dawn they place their mouths near the sexual parts of the cow and drink the warm urine. This too is a symbolic act, for the cow's urine has universal significance. Life is milk and life is also urine. To believe anything else is to deceive oneself.

Only the meat of the cow is prohibited, since that would require the killing of the cow, which in turn would mean the destruction of the symbol. The Hindu is a pacifist because he respects the symbolic meaning of things. He is even afraid of killing a single thought.

For this reason the cow is certainly fortunate if she happens to be born in India. I have seen cows walking down the streets of Old Delhi as if they were the masters of the street. It is a wonderful sight, almost like a poem, to see how in the middle of this century of atomic energy and interplanetary travel there is still a country in the world where trucks and tanks and cars, and probably even aeroplanes, have to stop to give way to a cow. Nobody ever seems to know the owner of the cow; perhaps she just belongs to herself. She walks along majestically and unhurried, oblivious of others in the street. She doesn't even seem to belong to this era; her world is not this world of technology and mechanics. She passes by as though wrapped in a regal cloak like the Virgin or the Mother. She is the Virgin Mary, she is Kali and Durga, she is our own mother. She is thus a creature no man can harm, for she will suddenly turn and gaze at him with her deep and incredibly beautiful eyes. These are eyes which no human beings have ever had; they seem to reflect the depths of the soul and the breadth of the Universe. As modern man gradually loses this spirit of humanity, it becomes transferred to the eyes of the cow.

Sometimes the cows go about bedecked as though they were precious women. Their horns are painted bright colours, and the rest of their bodies are bedecked with ribbons and bells. Blue circles are also painted round their eyes, but the deep interior eyes always remain their own. I could spend whole days looking at those

eyes, until the peace they contain entered into me. That is why I am one of those who adore the cow and oppose its destruction. To kill the cow would mean to kill God. Then what would happen to the soul of India?

Old Delhi is a city of cows, and there they walk about freely. Expelled from the centre of New Delhi, they enjoy an easy life in the narrow streets and parks of the old city, and help to preserve its bewitching atmosphere and its greater spirituality.

Today I saw a woman running after a cow along the main artery of Old Delhi, close to the Civil Lines which used to separate British India from Indian India. The cow was walking slowly, and, as usual, was defecating. The woman picked up the still fuming dung and deposited it in a basket she carried on her head. The cow's excrement fell out on to her shoulders, got mixed up in her loose hair and covered her face and arms. Yet she did not stop, for the dung was valuable, and later she would use it as fuel or fertilizer, possibly even as material to build her house. The woman and the cow proceeded down the street under the morning sun of India as they had done for centuries.

16

MY GRANDFATHER'S RING

AT LENGTH I decided to settle in Old Delhi. The atmosphere there is less artificial than it is in the new city. The house I found contained three rooms and a small garden. The main room, which also served as my bedroom, was surrounded by windows through which the dense tropical vegetation, bananas and fig trees, could easily be seen. Outside, in the centre of the garden, there was a small mound, which was the tomb of an English major, killed during the mutiny of 1857. Adjacent to my garden was the old British Cemetery. Many a time I have walked there in communion with the Western soul which still survives in that old place. It is a poetical spot, with its old stone crosses and its dream of Eternal Love. Once I found a fragment of an old cross lying on the edge of a path in this graveyard. It was covered with moss, and so I took it and placed it on the tomb in my garden. In addition to the English major's tomb I had two other graves in my garden. Some time ago a beautiful bird crashed with great violence into the windows of my house, mistaking my room for an open area. I found it on the floor with its neck broken and its wings spread out. I buried it in the garden beside the grave of a small deer, who for some time had been my companion.

But my gayest visitors were the monkeys. They leaped about, destroying everything they touched. One day I left the door to my room open, and when I returned I found everything in complete disorder. A Damascus box had been reduced to dust, and my favourite book was later found completely destroyed on the roof of a neighbouring house. Doubtless this monkey-philosopher thought that the best way to assimilate the abstruse philosophy the book contained was to chew it up and eat it. In his next reincarnation he will probably be an erudite man.

It was impossible to make the watchman frighten away the

monkeys, for the monkey is also a sacred animal. He is the living image of Hanuman, who was the monkey king who helped Rama rescue his wife Sita from the claws of the demon Ravana. Hanuman led him to Ceylon and helped him cross over the Gulf of Mannar. Ever since that time the people of India have adored Hanuman, regarding him as a symbol of the conquest of the southern empire of the Dravidians, a people who were thought to resemble monkeys. Since one of these had helped Rama by betraying his brother, the demon, the descendants of the Aryan conquerors later rewarded him by deifying him.

There are millions of monkeys in India, but nobody ever kills them. In recent years they have been used for experiments with polio vaccine, but angry voices have been raised in Parliament demanding that an end be put to this practice. India could earn a good deal of money in this way, but the orthodox Hindu is not interested. In the same way, although there are crowds of beggars and lepers dying in the central parts of Delhi, no funds are ever raised to help them. Instead, a financial drive is instituted to help build a new asylum for sick cows. The Hindu is not interested in modifying the destiny or *karma* of these dying and miserable people, for they are not sacred like the monkey and the cow.

Near my house was a quarter exclusively inhabited by the untouchables. These people are called *harijans*, a word which means God's children, and they are employed as house-sweepers, latrine-cleaners and as washermen. I could often hear their songs coming from the open-air laundry, accompanied by the flat sound of wet clothes beaten against the stone.

Crossing the street, and passing through a park full of ruined mosques, one comes to the river. This is the Jumna, which is as sacred as the Ganges. When it overflows with the rains of the monsoon, it so endangers the villages along its banks that the inhabitants fill their caravans with their household goods and come to Old Delhi, where they camp in its old squares and streets. Meanwhile, on the surface of the turbulent river, float the corpses of dead animals and snakes. Water has always been able to pacify fire and drown the Serpent.

Along the *ghats* of the Jumna, the dead are burned to the accompaniment of floral tributes. There are also hundreds of small temples along the river banks, where the faithful congregate, and where trumpets and bells ring out to the creative power of the lingam, or phallus, of Shiva. Nearby there is also a stadium, where men glistening with oil and wearing loincloths engage in wrestling matches. At a little distance away there is also a small *ashram*, or convent,

dedicated to Krishna, the god of love and of music. On Sunday afternoons it becomes a meeting place for all sorts of men: merchants and pilgrims, beggars and saints. There they gather to sing to the god and to recount his legends and miracles. The music begins slowly, but its rhythm gradually increases until it becomes frenzied. It also has a hypnotic quality which makes the singers lose themselves in trances. I have heard extraordinary voices there, and through the years I have watched the expression on the faces of the men change as they were caught up in the music and entered the Collective Unconscious of the people. Their eyes became affected by a strange brilliance, and they seemed drunk with passion.

Except for a few people who come every Sunday, the public consists of an ever-changing band of vagabonds. The singing is also improvised. One day I saw a poor woman arise and prostrate herself before the image of the god, touching the floor with her head. Then she began to laugh and to cry. As the music continued, she almost seemed to leave the world, and she no longer laughed and cried alternately, but did both at once. Her face became transfigured, so that she looked like a dead person who had mysteriously managed to keep on living.

These Sunday rituals seemed to have an ancient heritage, and doubtless the Greeks of Homer's day had sung the stories of their heroes in much the same way. On one occasion I remember seeing an old man take up a small musical instrument that looked like an accordion and begin to sing. Soon he had ceased to be an old man, but had become transformed into the very god whose legend entranced the audience. He was singing about the childhood of Krishna, telling about his adventures with the *gopis* and about the times when he danced and played the flute. As the old man continued to sing, the others began to join in, and soon everyone present had caught something of his ecstasy. The biblical beard of the old man moved up and down as he sang, and it seemed as though the god Krishna himself was dancing before us.

The chief personage of this *ashram* is an extremely old man, and the people who come to the Sunday ceremonies even claim that he is well over a hundred years old. While that is unlikely, he is certainly very ancient, and he never wears more than a loincloth, even in the coldest winter months. He never attends the musical sessions, but always remains in his retreat, sitting with his legs crossed in meditation. Only on rare occasions have I seen him present amongst the singers, and then only when the music has reached its climax. Then he sits quietly, with his long hair neatly braided and with an expression of indestructible peace on his beautiful face. As the

singing reached its height, the participants began to throw rose-petals into the air in time with the music. Many fell near this old man, and it almost seemed as though they were throwing their petals at a living god. On several occasions I went to sit by this old man in his retreat, remaining with him in total silence, trying to 'listen' to his meditations and to meditate myself.

Old Delhi contains many secret things like this; it also has that phantasmagoric street of which I have already spoken: Chandni Chowk.

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Chandni Chowk is the vibrating commercial artery of Old Delhi. At all hours of the day multitudes move up and down its length, and in the evening it is illuminated by coloured lights. There one can see automobiles, horse-carts, trams, trucks, bicycles, tongas, rickshaws, pedestrians, soldiers, bands of musicians, processions, weddings, elephants, camels, cows, beggars and people dying in the street. It is a variegated and monstrous universe. The sidewalks are covered with the stalls of vendors, and the street itself is lined by flower shops, sweet shops, food shops, banks, antique shops, cinemas and temples. The richer merchants, dressed in white cloth, sit on the floor of their shops amongst brightly coloured saris, woven with gold and silver thread, which they hope will attract the attention of India's beautiful women.

In the Chandni Chowk there are two great temples, one belonging to the Jains, and the other to the Sikhs. The Jain religion is contemporaneous with Buddhism and is in some ways similar to it. When a member of the Jain sect walks along the street he keeps his eyes on the ground before him, so as not to walk on any living thing. He also covers his mouth with a cloth, like a doctor at an operation, so as not to inhale some tiny, invisible being. Sikhism is a much later religion, having been developed only in the last few hundred years. Its adherents do not believe in the gods of Hinduism, nor in its sacred books, the Vedas. Moreover, they do not accept the idea of caste, even though the founders of the religion had originally belonged to the warrior caste. The Jains and the Buddhists had also begun by denying the concept of caste, but eventually the former were forced to accept it. The Sikhs may be recognized by a number of distinctive characteristics which set them apart from other Indians. They never cut their hair or their beards, they wear turbans and they always wear iron bracelets on their right wrists. There are not many Sikhs, and most of them live in the north of

India, especially in the Punjab. In Delhi they seem to have taken over the taxis, so that one hardly ever finds a driver who is not a turbaned Sikh. On special occasions they wear uniforms, and carry swords, daggers and halberds. The essence of the Sikh religion is their belief in only one god, whom they adore with great devotion. Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak, who was its prophet, and who was much influenced by the great *bhakti* or devotional movement, which also produced Ramanuja and the poet Kabir. Primarily a religion, it has tried to sublimate the dangerous symbolism of the Serpent. Thus, despite their uniforms and daggers, the Sikhs represent a softening of the older and more manly types of Hinduism. Having some features in common with Mohammedanism and Christianity, the Sikh philosophy is essentially extrovert, and it is more concerned with outer than with inner evils.

At the door of their temple in the Chandni Chowk there is always a tall Sikh standing guard, in a blue turban and a blue cloak. In his right hand he holds a halberd and from his waist hangs a sword. To enter the temple, one first has to take off one's shoes and cover one's head. Inside, there is always music and song. Men and women circulate round the altar and the holy book written by Guru Nanak which is placed on it. An old priest with a white beard stands next to this book and fans it. He is surrounded by a group of musicians, who accompany his movements with traditional instruments. The faithful pass by and toss coins into an open hopper; in return they receive sweets and fruit. The entrance of the temple is always awash with water, for the pilgrims who come to this Sikh shrine like to take turns keeping the marble steps immaculately clean. Altogether, with the light, the colour and the music, the scene is like a tale from the *Thousand and One Nights*.

All along the Chandni Chowk there are hundreds of lateral streets leading away from it. These are so narrow that the balconies of the buildings on either side touch one another. Narrow staircases lead up into these buildings, and at night-time there is here and there a red light, and in general the atmosphere is redolent of opium, mystery and strange fevers. Such trees as there are are planted in the middle of the street, and their branches and their roots penetrate into the houses. Cows may be seen everywhere, entering and leaving the buildings, and as a result many of the porches are covered with urine and excrement. Then suddenly there will appear a porch elaborately carved in silver: it is part of an old palace that has been long abandoned. Farther along stands a Jain temple. There you can see a small child, covered with rubies and emeralds, being taken into this temple by his father, who is a

famous jeweller. Inside, the walls of the temple are covered with miniatures and heavy gold relics donated by the faithful. The atmosphere is heavy with incense, myrrh and sandalwood.

In another street, which is always crowded, nothing but Indian spices are sold. The spices are piled in open baskets in the stalls along the street, and the aroma of clove and pepper, of cinnamon, aliche and betel mixes strangely with the smell of the multitudes that pass along this narrow street.

From time to time, wedding processions may be seen in this quarter. The bridegroom rides on a horse decorated with brass ornaments and covered with flowers, and looks like the god Pan, wearing a turban and an old brocade cloak. He always rides with a small boy, and is accompanied by musicians and torch-bearers. At the head of the procession come dancers, performing sword-dances or else simulating fights with long sticks. The cortège itself stops frequently, and the musicians blow those sweet and sour melodies of the Orient which seem to typify all of India. It seems as though it will take years for the bridegroom to reach the bride's house, but nobody cares; it does not matter. This procession is a symbol of the voyage of a soul through numerous incarnations, going to meet another soul. Later—much later—the wedding will be celebrated by the Vedic fire, as the Aryan rite prescribes. The bride and groom will whirl around this fire, as the stars and earth have done for centuries. The passer-by is invited to form part of the procession, and even to attend the wedding and the feast. It does not matter whether or not he is a foreigner.

What is most attractive about this quarter is the colourfulness of the shops. In these, everything is sold: musical instruments, pictures of Krishna, Rama, Gandhi and Nehru. The colours are violent and coarse, but they never seem absurd. Indeed, everything seems to be in tune, and the flower shops are always surrounded by people. These shops contain garlands of jasmine and roses, which are worn by priests and used to decorate women's hair. They are also reverently placed on the shrine of Mahatma Gandhi, and come in many colours: yellow, orange, red, white and blue. The whole street is filled with the perfume of these flowers. In other places coloured pastes are sold, which are used to paint magic circles on holy places and on the thresholds of temples and houses. Sandalwood pastes are used to adorn the eyes and horns of cows, and to paint the little dot that appears on the women's foreheads. This point is located between the eyebrows, and represents the opening of the third eye, which is the eye of the Serpent.

The perfume shops are full of sandalwood sticks and of incenses,

which are burned in almost every building in Old Delhi. These shops also have boxes containing glass balls of perfume. There are dozens of Indian perfumes, but most of them do not please Westerners because of their penetrating and almost savage sweetness. These ancient perfumes are said to have been invented by the Mogul queen Nur Jehan, who was the wife of the Emperor Jehangir and who was known as the Light of the World. These shops also sell the red pastes which are used to paint the feet and hands of dancers; this same perfumed paste is used to paint the neck, the nipples and the sexual organs of brides. It is called *hinna*, and has a dark heavy smell that penetrates the senses and intoxicates the soul. It is especially recommended during the time of the monsoons. Those who use this perfume are said to overcome time, so that when they walk two steps in this world they take a third in the other. Thus, whoever makes love with this perfume can try everything without contaminating his soul, and his pleasure is tripled. It symbolizes the recognition of lovers who have known about each other from a great distance, and who, when finally they meet, have the power to close their eyes and reach for the fourth dimension.

In many streets there are shops giving off the smell of cooking. There passers-by can eat, squatting on the sidewalk. Sweet syrups and yellow sugars drip on the pavement, mixing with the chewed leaves of the betel which is spat everywhere, dirtying the walls and sidewalks with a redness that looks like the blood of tuberculosis.

There is also a special quarter for prostitutes, where these infected women live in rooms that look like narrow cages. There they wait for their clients, apparently impervious to the small children and filthy drapes which overfill their rooms.

Elsewhere there is a Mohammedan quarter, which was a flourishing place before the partition of India. The houses in the narrow streets of this section have intricately decorated porches, and their patios are sheathed with coloured tiles and marbles. This quarter is still occupied by rug-dealers, spreading their magnificent Kashmiri and Persian tapestries on the floor for the benefit of valued clients. Their women, of course, are never seen by strangers: they are in *purdah*, and they will go out into the street only if they are covered from head to foot, looking like resurrected mummies. They have a small netted opening through which they can look out, but otherwise they are completely enshrouded. Even in the terrible heat of summer they go about in this way. On occasion I have seen the face of one of these women who, in despair, had uncovered herself for an instant in order to breathe. She was exhausted and pale from the

heat, and her face was dirty. Her eyes alone were permitted to look out from the darkness within.

I have often gone to have lunch with these carpet-vendors and have remained talking with them, reclining on the rich tapestries and enjoying their Mohammedan meals, cooked in the style of Kashmir or Persia. Squatting cross-legged, I have spent hours savouring their Afghan tea and enjoying their hospitality. These astute merchants are great gentlemen.

Near the Red Fort in Old Delhi is a famous Indian restaurant called the Moti Mahal which means Palace of Pearls. Here the *tanduri* chicken is prepared. Cooked in a red sauce, it is sour and hot, and has a perfume which smells something like *hinna*. It is prepared by naked demons bending over holes in the floor. Dripping in its red sauce, the chicken is dropped into red-hot coals by enormous iron pincers. It is as though the chicken were being cooked in hell by the devil, only to return to the world after a visit to the underworld; then its flesh is soft and lazy, like that of any being who has lost his soul. Like most soulless things, these chickens are delicious and easy to digest. Altogether, the kitchen looks something like a medieval oven and has much in common with Dante's Inferno. Even during the intolerable heat of May and June, the cooks remain near their fires. Perhaps it is true that two negatives make a positive; at any rate, the devil would laugh at the heat of India. The orthodox Hindu, of course, never eats meat; he therefore abhors the *tanduri* chicken, which is a Mohammedan invention.

On the sidewalk outside this restaurant there are many snake-charmers. Playing their reedy flutes, they make the cobras sway their heads in dream-like rhythms. Sometimes there is a fight between a snake and a mongoose, which always attracts the curious, although the mongoose always wins. Catching the head of the cobra in its jaws, the mongoose simply holds on until a stream of blood begins to collect on the ground. The sight is a lesson for all of us who are engaged in similar struggles. For as the blood coils down on to the ground it takes the very form and shape of the snake. Then the snake-charmer wraps his collection of cobras round his neck, as if they were shawls or scarves, and moves on elsewhere.

This quarter is also famous for a strange group of beings who live there. Wearing feminine clothes, tight blouses or saris, they go about in groups of two or three. Their hair is loose, and they walk with a mincing step. The popular belief is that they are sexless, but the truth is that they are men. They are musicians, and carry drums and tambourines which they hang by ribbons from their necks; they also have flutes and bells. Some of them have false breasts,

whose shape is visible under their silk blouses. But nobody worries about them, and they go about freely; they attract a certain curiosity, and by many they are looked upon with reverence. It is hard to describe their eyes; they have something about them that is proud and cynical, in curious contrast to the soft, undulating movements of their arms and legs.

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Every year, at the end of October, the processions of Rama pass down the Chandni Chowk, in celebration of his victory over the demon Ravana. And in Delhi, as in every city of India, scenes from the Ramayana are presented in the town squares. These performances are accompanied by music and dances, and the movements of the actors are always slow and liturgical, as if they were re-enacting a legendary dream. These plays have much in common with the miracle plays of the Middle Ages in Europe. The old story is recounted to the accompaniment of ancient songs, and at the end of the great festivities, in the crowded squares of the cities, enormous effigies of Ravana and his followers are burned. This event is rather like the traditional burning of Judas.

In Old Delhi, and in Banaras, the Rama processions are particularly interesting. They consist of a number of floats, carrying Rama and Sita, Hanuman and his court of monkeys and Ravana and his soldiers. As the procession moves down the Chandni Chowk the ancient war is re-enacted, and arrows and spears are shot from float to float. In the sacred city of Banaras the Maharaja himself attends the dramatic presentation, mounted on his elephant. On a huge open-air stage the whole story, even including the voyage to Ceylon, is retold. Then the Maharaja appears on-stage in an open carriage, preceded by outriders and guards blowing trumpets. His dramatic arrival is also similar to the conclusion of the miracle plays, when Judas is judged and punished.

The procession along the Chandni Chowk is unbelievably gorgeous. First come dozens of elephants, bedecked with gold and silver ornaments and covered with rich brocades. Then come lamp-bearers, sword dancers, fakirs, jugglers and magicians singing incantations. The sidewalks along the street are crowded, and the balconies above are overflowing with people. Turbaned policemen walk along the side of the procession, carrying long sticks to keep order, but there is really no need for their presence, for the people are quiet and withdrawn. The actors who represent the gods are priestly, and they almost seem to have become divine. They wear

crowns of fruit, and are decorated with collars of vine leaves and jungle flowers. They have artificially arched eyebrows which make their eyes look deep set, and their faces are painted blue.

Then suddenly the fire dance begins. This dance is performed by young boys wearing artificial breasts, who are known as the hermaphrodite dancers. Their dance begins slowly and insinuatingly as they swing their busts and their hips, but gradually, as the rhythm of the great drums increases, they reach a state of frenzy. Their eyes sparkle, their naked feet hit the dusty asphalt and their metal bracelets tinkle. In their hands they have been carrying lighted torches, and when they enter their trance they push the fire into their mouths, they jump over it, they step on it, they embrace it and they eat it—all before the serene and quiet eyes of the spectators. These hermaphrodites have performed this since their childhood, and so they have long been accustomed to fire. Trained by their fellow-tribesmen, they have earned a good deal of respect and prestige from their dancing. But there is also something disturbing and sad about this spectacle, for these boys have not attained peace. The external fire they brandish is not capable of melting the opposites they represent. There is a great difference between the hermaphrodite god of Elephanta and the hermaphrodite boys of Chandni Chowk. Whereas the first has overcome his manhood, the latter have negated theirs.

I have often found myself in the midst of these processions that advance through the fabulous night, exuding these mysterious and lethal smells. And as I walked along with them I began to forget who I was, and I didn't care where I was going. Indeed, I began to doubt whether I would ever be able to return to my own country.

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Walking down these Indian streets is like entering a dream. Carts, trams and cyclists seem to exist on an astral plane, for none of these thousands of vehicles ever collide. Cyclists and rickshaws avoid each other by sudden movements, and everything is silent, as in a dream. I have sometimes wondered whether the scene before me was actually real, or whether it was some pale reflection of life on another planet. Sometimes I have felt an almost irresistible temptation to let myself be hit by one of these vehicles, for I was certain that it would pass through me without damaging me.

Misery has the same fantastic quality in India. The poverty that one sees in the Chandni Chowk or in the railway station of Old Delhi seems almost unreal. The medieval cities of Europe may have

known similar sights when they were attacked by the plague, but in the world today there is nothing like the misery of India. All along the street, beggars and sick and dying people wander into the traffic, and what is seen daily in Old Delhi surpasses the imagination. Totally naked men and women, lying on the pavement and covered with flies and ants, are utterly ignored by the priests and rich merchants who pass by in their elegant cars. Death and destruction is everywhere evident. Men mutilated by syphilis or leprosy go along the sidewalks, stepping in their own urine, and displaying their open red wounds. Some are deformed monsters, without faces or arms, and some have no legs. For several consecutive days I saw a woman crawling along the pavement to spend the night in the street not far from my house. She would talk to herself, hurl insults and strike out at phantoms. She was covered with rags, and every day she died a little more. In another section of Old Delhi, on the grass before the Red Fort, I saw a naked man lying on his back. He was black-skinned and had an erection; moreover, flies and small spiders were crawling over him. Yet only a little distance away, little boys and girls were whirling about and dancing.

At night-time the misery of India reaches its height. Men and women who no longer seem human sit in their own excrement, eat dead flesh and cluster together on the hard pavement. In the winter many of them freeze and die. It is like this in all the great cities of India, and in Calcutta it is much worse.

Yet the ordinary Hindu is quite indifferent to all this misery. Nobody helps anyone, and nobody seriously asks help from anyone else. The beggar asks for alms automatically, and he never says thank you. Here alone we see the philosophic basis for Hindu misery, that distinguishes it from that of other countries. For it is the beggar who does the favour by asking, since he offers the giver a chance to improve his destiny. Yet, at bottom, the Hindu doubts the propriety of saving those who are dying in the streets. It is not that he does not love these people; it is because he is not sure whether help is what the dying man wants or needs, since he has to fulfill his *karma* and endure his present incarnation. To interfere may be more dangerous than to let the dying man's destiny take its course. The concept of charity therefore does not belong in this ancient country; it flourishes only in young countries. Neither the beggar nor the dying man expects it. Their fate rests on the Wheel of Fortune, for tomorrow they will be rich, and today's rich man will be poor. Everything is relative; everything is illusory.

Thus I have never been able to get rid of the curious suspicion that the misery I see about me in India is almost comic, because it

is so exaggerated. Certainly this misery is not depraved; indeed it contains an element of religious joy. In other words, thanks to the religious concept of Hinduism, misery itself provides mental peace. Even those miserable people who writhe in urine by the latrines have a profound look of peace in their faces. This beautiful and spiritual look is the mark of a different race. It is the sign of a people who have lost everything, yet who have been saved by the gods.

The misery of my own country is a different matter. For when I think of the murder and alcoholism, and of the vagabond and homosexual children who wander the streets of Santiago, and of female beggars who have been raped a hundred times, I think that that misery is merely depraving: it has simply reduced mankind to a beastly level. And although the misery of Chile is not so great as that of India, it has saved no souls.

A complementary feature of this difference is that in India nobody is ever bored. The atmosphere of the streets is spiritual; it is almost cosmic, as if everything there was merely the reflection of another planet. There is flux and movement, but there is also peace, and this peace has not yet been lost.

One day I saw a man pulling a small cart, like those used by children in my country. This cart had wheels, and inside it was a small thing, a body without legs, nothing more than a naked bust with arms that stopped at the wrists. It was a woman. Her breasts were eaten by leprosy and so was a part of her face. Her hair was disorderly, and the colour of her skin was bluish-black, which is a sign of incurable leprosy. Nevertheless, she had deep and peaceful eyes, and when she passed by me she only smiled; she asked me for nothing. But that smile was so tremendous, and so feminine, that I confess I felt an attraction for that thing, that woman-thing. The essence of the feminine spirit was still there, untouched by the ravages of her leprosy. The man who was pulling the cart walked along insensibly, looking vaguely ahead. He too was bluish-black and clearly was touched by leprosy.

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Part way along the Chandni Chowk there is a small street, much like the others. This is the street of the silver merchants, full of shop windows displaying silver ornaments, bracelets and necklaces. This street leads to the great Friday Mosque, which contains the Book of the Prophet and his footprint. Part way along there is another shop called the Ivory Palace, where magnificent ornaments of all sorts may be bought. Here ivory is worked in accordance

with the old tradition, which is fast disappearing. Some of the pieces in this shop were begun two or three generations ago: started by the grandfather, they were finished by the grandson. Those who carved the ivory were paid only room and board.

Round the mosque there are dozens of shops and small streets, almost always filled with people. There are even small shops that sell only stolen goods, and in these thieves markets one can find old Persian, Indian and Mongol treasures covered with dust and moss. There are bronze and stone statues, wood-carvings, samovars and old miniatures whose colours have faded. Formerly these objects were sold for very low prices, but recently they have been discovered by antique dealers and tourists. Most of these shops are merely shacks or huts, and their owners keep most of their merchandise stored in the cellars of old houses in the neighbourhood. To go into these cellars in search of treasure is like entering the cave of Ali Baba.

Most interesting of all, however, are the antique shops. In the Chandni Chowk there is one which has been operated for years by a family of Indian jewellers. The father is an old man who from time to time goes on religious pilgrimages to distant parts of the country and who is a disciple of the Indian mystic, Ananda Mai. His sons run the shop, which is heavy with an atmosphere of burning sticks of incense and sandalwood, while in a corner somebody recites the *mantrams* and offers flowers to the elephant god Ganesha, who, as the son of Shiva, is the god of good luck. One of the sons will then spread a white sheet on the floor, and will bring forth emeralds and rubies, or old Mogul enamels, or daggers with jade handles and miniatures from Rajasthan. One can sit there, cross-legged, and touch old brocades, embroidered in gold and silver, and handle Kashmiri shawls which were made 400 years ago with wooden needles. It was in this shop that I had one of the great surprises of my life. For there I found my grandfather's ring.

My grandfather was a frail old man and had blue eyes, but what was most remarkable about him were his hands. He had long fingers and beautiful nails, and even now I can remember how they looked at the dinner table. On his left hand he always wore a golden ring, set with a deep-blue sapphire. A gold monogram of his initials was in turn set in this stone.

When my grandfather died my father used this ring for some time, but after a while I didn't see it any more. I had always thought that I would inherit this ring, because my grandfather's name and mine were the same. But in time the ring seemed to have become lost, although I never forgot it. And then one day, in this strange

Eastern country, in this antique shop along the Chandni Chowk, I found it. The sapphire was still there, but instead of being set in yellow gold, it was set in white. Moreover, the initials of my grandfather had been replaced by the syllable OM.

As I looked at the sapphire, I knew it was the same one I had known in my childhood. It was heart-shaped, and had probably first been used as an amulet. In India the sapphire is considered a dangerous stone, which may bring death. Consequently it should be used only by those who correspond to it astrologically. I did not know it then, but the blue sapphire is my birth-stone, for I was born at the beginning of September.

Sitting on the floor of the antique shop, I held the ring between my fingers for a long time, wondering who had owned it and who had carved the syllable OM on it. It was clear that the sapphire was very old. I then asked the jeweller to take it out of its white-gold mounting, and to place it in a yellow-gold setting, as it was when it had belonged to my grandfather. But when he tried to do so he broke the sapphire, just at the point where it most resembled the shape of a heart. The result was that it looked exactly as it had looked when I had known it as a child. Yet the jeweller was appalled by what he had done: he made a new mounting for me but did not want to charge me a penny for it, and he gave me the ring with special recommendations as to how to use it, because it carried the sacred syllable OM. In that way, I once again recovered my grandfather's ring. Altogether, this ring proved to be a most strange and suggestive symbol. Having only just arrived in India, I was suddenly able to realize a childhood dream. But, more than that, I found that the ring itself was an indication of the road I had to follow. I realized I had to go backward not only towards my grandfather, but also towards my forefathers before him, and ultimately towards the great Unnamed One, who is known as the Ancient of Days. And it was India which gave me this opportunity. The ring on my finger closed a circle whose existence I had long suspected.

17

MOTHER AND LOVER

FOR years I had heard of Ananda Mai, who is known as the Mother. Before coming to India, I had read of her life and had heard of her mystic powers. Her peacefulness and happiness are legendary, and it is said of her that she had completely overcome her individual ego and attained the mystic centre of existence.

One day, very early in the morning, I left for Dehra Dun, where Ananda Mai has one of her principal *ashrams*. In the summer-time the Mother goes either to Dehra Dun or to Almora, which is in the mountains. During the winter-time she lives in Banaras. Like Rabindranath Tagore, and like Rama Krishna and Vivekananda, she originally came from Bengal. In the June dawn the sun had barely risen, and it had a tremulous aura about it, as though it were separated from us by another zone of light. The road over which I was travelling, and the northern scenery about me, all seemed to be affected by this nightmarish, astral light. Caravans of men and camels were passing along the roads, and already the atmosphere had grown hot. Yet this heat did not come from the light; rather it seemed to antecede it, like the world before the coming of light. For, after all, light can also be cold. Thus the light was only important psychologically, and on that June day it was grey and sad. The heat, by contrast, was entirely external; it burned up the non-essentials until only the essentials remained. As a result I had the sensation not of walking over a road, but of going in search of the Mother by first searching my own soul. Nevertheless, the heat was fatiguing, and although I had closed my eyes as I approached Dehra Dun, in order to concentrate on the Mother, I could see only camels and caravans, animals and men. This external scenery kept on repeating itself in my mind, and although it was arid and vast

it also had a certain delicacy and fineness. There was nothing romantic or sentimental about it; it was too serious and transcendental for that.

Finally, after passing through a shady forest full of fig trees, I found myself near the *ashram* of the Mother. It was a house like any other house, and it stood beside the road that continues onward towards the Himalayan village of Musoori. The entrances of the house were garlanded with flowers, and from the interior came the sound of music, mainly of drums and wind instruments. Inside, people were singing, and crowds of other people were gathered in the vicinity outside. There were men wearing the saffron robes of beggars; some were half naked and had ascetic faces and brightly shining eyes. There were also groups of women who had gathered in separate areas. New visitors constantly came and went; they arrived bearing fruits and garlands, and they left with their hands pressed together and with their faces bowed.

Since it was so crowded, I decided not to try to enter the hall, but to look for a secluded place from which I could observe the proceedings. I went over to one side and sat by a young man who had a reddish beard, and hair that had grown down over his shoulders. He was very thin, and he watched the scene before him with half-closed eyes. The hall itself was full of people, and, while the chants were sung, rose-petals were thrown into the air and on to the seated figure of the Mother. As new groups of people entered, they knelt down and prostrated themselves at her feet, giving her fruit, flowers and other presents. She bent over to touch their heads, took the garlands and returned the fruit; and then the pilgrims went away, looking happy and refreshed.

The Mother was dressed in a white sari which contrasted sharply with her dark forearms, which were encircled with simple bracelets. Her black hair was tied tightly at her neck, and her deep eyes appeared to be large and dark. She smiled frequently, and when she spoke her voice sounded immensely attractive. Her laughter was musical, almost sensual in its tone. I then began to realize with a shock of surprise how profoundly feminine the Mother was. She seemed to be speaking of God in an astonishingly coquettish manner. I watched her discussing abstract themes with two Brahmans who had come to consult her, but she disarmed them with a smile in the middle of a sentence, and with a laugh between two syllogisms. What she was saying was serious and in accord with the Vedanta and with the sacred texts, but her accents and gestures were as seductive as any that I had seen in any woman. I wondered how old she was: sixty, seventy, thirty or twenty. It was impossible to

guess, for Ananda Mai seemed to be ageless. Inside the house it was terribly hot, and her disciples tried to refresh her with big fans made of matting. At length the Mother lifted her naked arms and loosened her hair so that it fell over her shoulders like a black cascade. Then for a moment she looked deeply at me. Her glance was so seductive that I felt a strong physical attraction to her. I tried hard to suppress this feeling, however, for I was afraid of committing a sacrilege, and was worried that she, with her hypersensitivity, might have felt the strength of my reaction. But perhaps the same thing happens to everyone, for when I looked at my bearded companion I noticed that he was glancing at me with a faint smile of complicity.

Then the Mother began to sing; and then, as suddenly, she stopped. She merely sat like an immobile statue, while everything around her gradually stopped moving. The drums, the wind instruments and the little silver bells all became silent. Even the disciples stopped fanning her. In the meantime the Mother simply sat there in the centre of the hall, with her legs crossed and her hair fallen over her shoulders. Her eyes were closed, and she began to look old. I found myself witnessing an astonishing transformation, for that woman, who only a moment before had been ageless and seductive, had stopped being a woman and had become sexless. I then looked at her hands: they were the same, for she was wearing the same simple bracelets and her hands seemed quiet and serene. But something fundamental had changed, and those hands were really no longer the same. Moreover, the hair hanging down to her shoulders was no longer a woman's hair, and her skin seemed to have become pallid and flat. Certainly it would have been impossible to feel attraction for that clump of hair and fingers, or for those hard, stony lips. For by then she had begun to look like the sphinx, and her face looked almost dead. Yet, at that very moment, an astonishing peacefulness began to spread over her face. The tenseness of the previous moment, which had been heightened by cross-currents of perfume and by love and passion, had now been resolved, and peace had taken its place. In that moment of quietness it was almost possible to hear the heartbeats of the multitudes assembled round about, and I myself could feel the peace that came from contemplating that stonelike face, which said nothing and which incited no passion. I was overwhelmed by a feeling of gratitude for the Mother, who had suddenly taken me away from the tortures of Samsara. Without having to turn my face, I realized that my neighbour had felt the same sensation.

How long this trance lasted was impossible to say, but at any

rate, after a faint tremor, the Mother returned to herself, and came back to earth. As she opened her eyes her pupils seemed to be still observing another sphere, but little by little they began to shine. Then the fans once again started to move, and the music also started up, chanting in praise for the return of the Mother, and for the return of her beautiful body. In a little while she would again start to spread the perfumes of Maya, and to instruct her disciples in the doctrine of Samsara. Yet, in less than an hour, I had accompanied her along that stony path, from the ocean of pain and pleasure to the nothingness of Nirvana, and then had returned to the next stage, brought there by the wheel of reincarnation. The Mother again began to laugh and to sing with her musical and agelessly feminine voice.

After a while the Mother retired, for it was meal-time in the *ashram*. My companion touched me on the shoulder, inviting me to follow him along some corridors, where a number of men and women were sitting in separate rows. He was not an Indian, but a Frenchman from Alsace. He told me that he had been at a number of *ashrams*, but that he had finally decided to stay with the Mother. He felt sure that he would be able to find peace there. When we sat down he taught me how to eat in the Indian way. On the floor there were banana-leaves, which had been washed in running water. Then a barefoot monk passed along the rows with a large container from which he scooped a mixture of rice and vegetables, called *dahal*, on to the leaves. There were no knives and forks: all eating was done with the hands. But only the right hand was used, as is prescribed in the Vedas. I was instructed to take the food between my fingers, to make a small ball of it and to push it into my mouth with my thumb. As a beginner, I found it difficult to eat on the floor with my legs crossed. Later on I joined a queue which led up to a place where another monk was pouring water over the hands of those who had just finished eating. A number of the pilgrims were gargling and rinsing out their mouths.

Since it was midday, the sun was mercilessly hot, and as a result most of the men withdrew into small cells, or rooms, where they took their rest. My new friend, the Frenchman, left me in one of these rooms, where I found that a place had been left for me on the floor. Taking off my shirt, I lay down and closed my eyes, hoping to sleep. I went off for a moment and had a brief dream about treetops. But then I woke up again because it was so hot. Later I began to feel groggy, and the hours seemed to pass in a nebulous fashion. Then, perhaps because of the hardness of the floor, I once again opened my eyes. By my side I found a man fanning me. His fan was made

of wet mats, and the breeze he made seemed to smell faintly of sandalwood. Over in a corner someone else was reciting prayers in Sanskrit. The man by my side had a broad face, and he smiled when he saw me open my eyes. On the other side I found an invalid, half lying on the floor. He began to speak to me and to tell me about an accident that he had suffered years ago. He had broken his back, and all the doctors he had consulted had told him that his case was hopeless. But the Mother had made him feel better. She had also told him that he was going to live. This man then strapped up his chest with belts, and had somone insert canes down his back so as to keep him erect.

I was then told that I would be received by the Mother at four o'clock. I therefore washed my face with cold water and went down the corridor towards a small room. The Frenchman was already there, and another young man wearing a *dhoti*, but with a bare torso, sat on the floor. The Mother was resting on a platform covered with a white sheet and pillows. Next to her was a very old woman with a shaven head, who was wearing a saffron-coloured gown. Her hands and feet were so small that she almost seemed to be a mummy. She was in fact Ananda Mai's mother.

I bowed in the ceremonial way I had seen others use, and placed a garland of flowers I had brought for her at her feet. The Mother smiled and gave me an apple. Ananda Mai can speak only Bengali and Hindi, and therefore she had a young man near her to act as interpreter. Her first words were:

'I saw you come in this morning. Did you notice? Yesterday afternoon I had been thinking of my brother, who died when I was only a small girl. He looked very much like you, and this morning, when I saw you, I thought you were my brother.'

I listened to these words with surprise, and those present looked at me and smiled. Then, moved by an impulse, I took a small bag made of golden brocade, which I had always carried over my breast, and placed it in her hands. This bag contained relics of a person already dead, and they were sacred to me. The Mother took my small bag carefully, almost as if she were somewhat afraid to. I then asked her if any life existed beyond this life, and whether it would be possible to join those who had already departed. She then looked at me quietly and answered, 'Such things are possible, in dreams. . . .'

I then rose to leave, taking the apple which the Mother had given me. The dark arm with which she extended the apple had been stretched out ever since the Garden of Eden, repeating the same old story, the same ancient lesson. For the Mother was also the Lover,

just as Eve was wife, mother and sister all at once. And the Serpent was coiled round that Tree.

It was late when I left, and a veil seemed to have fallen over the fig trees. I sank my teeth into the pale flesh of the apple, as though it were the breast of Maya.

As I did so I seemed to see the smiling face of the Mother's brother.

18

THE HIMALAYAN SNOWS

HAVING come that far, I decided to continue on to the north so that I could catch a glimpse of the Himalayas. After a few hours I reached the hill town of Musoorie, which had once been a summer resort for the British. The residential area was nicely wooded with pines and mountain cedars, but the houses were all abandoned and the great mansions were empty. It almost looked as though some giant whirlwind had destroyed the town, and the wind continued to whistle through the empty windows of the houses, and round the old porches which were rotting and decayed. This whirlwind came with India's independence.

I climbed to the top of the hill outside of the town in order to have a full view of the giant Himalayas. Spreading out for hundreds of miles in the distance, with their summits capped with snow, these mountains are to the Indians what Olympus is to the Greeks. As I gazed at these mountains I could not help thinking of those of my own land, the Cordillera of the Andes, which stretches along the whole length of the country. I began to feel that there must be some direct communication between these high peaks. Perhaps, one day, the gods of these Indian mountains will pass over the waters of the Pacific, and immigrate to the mountains of my country. When that happens there will be new winds of freedom.

After spending only a short time on the top of the hill I decided to go back down to the village below. Yet even that little hill was steep and the going was difficult. India doesn't seem to have gentle hills like those found at the base of the Andes; instead everything is steep and abrupt. Nevertheless, vegetation grows very high up into the mountains, and on the tops of many of the hills there are wooden huts, and many of the rocky caves are inhabited by hermits and saints. I had been told of one of these holy men, and therefore

decided to visit him. I found him at a little *ashram* belonging to the Rama Krishna Mission. He was a Dutchman who for many years had worn the saffron robe of holy pilgrims. During the winter he lived in Hardwar, where the main *ashram* of the Mission was located, but he spent the summer months in the mountains. His convent was a small refuge on the top of a hill, and there he lived with a handful of monks. He was a very old man with a bent back. When I arrived I found all the monks seated together on the floor, reading the Bhagavad Gita. They sang the text slowly and with beautifully modulated voices. Afterwards I joined the old man, and we sat together on a rock overlooking the valley. I don't remember what we spoke about, or whether we spoke of anything at all. He simply gave me the impression of enormous antiquity; his soul seemed to have gone away years ago, leaving his body empty and alone in this foreign land. His age also made a curious contrast to that of the Indians. An old Indian never seems to be afflicted with years, any more than a young Indian looks particularly young. But an old Westerner always looks old, even though he lives in India and is not attached to the life of this world. This difference is the price the Westerner pays for individuality, and for being a person.

19

THE GREAT EGO

FROM Musoorie I continued on to Rishikesh, passing through thick forests and groves of mango trees. Everywhere there were monkeys jumping about, and I noticed that the baby monkeys clung on to the bellies of their mothers as they climbed up the vines and branches of the trees. The roadway passed through gentle valleys until it reached Rishikesh, a village lying on the bank of the sacred Ganges, which in these northern parts is wide and clear. Rishikesh is a very small place, largely inhabited by pilgrims and *saddhus*. It is the point of departure for caravans of pilgrims going in search of holy places. It is also the gateway to Uttarkashi and Gangotri, which is the source from which the Ganges flows, and for Badrinath and Kedarnath, which are high mountains in the Himalayas, and considered to be the abode of Vishnu and Shiva. High up there in the snows, despite the freezing weather, there is always fire burning: it is an inextinguishable flame, representing the eternal wedding of Shiva and his consort.

Soon after arriving at Rishikesh I decided to visit the *ashram* belonging to the Swami Sivananda. I had heard that this man had travelled to Mount Kailas some years ago, and I had also heard many stories and rumours about him. Originally from the south, from Madras, he had once been a doctor in Malaya, but he renounced his family life and his profession in order to withdraw to the Himalayas. There he founded his *ashram* or monastery, which he called the Forest University or the Divine Life Society. He has lived in this place ever since, surrounded by his disciples and by the monkeys who play in the forest. His *ashram* has a gymnasium for physical yoga, a photographic laboratory, a press, a hospital, a maternity ward and a school. The rooms where the swami lives are in the lower

part of the building, near the river. On the other side of the river there is a modern temple called the Gita Bhavan, while further upstream, and also on the opposite shore, is a smaller and older temple, the Lashman Jhula.

It was still very early in the morning when I arrived, and along the roadside were many monks wearing their saffron robes. Some were covered with ashes and had their hair hardened with cow-dung, while others had their heads shaved. They were all going to the Ganges for their morning ablutions, and on the way they presented their beggars' bowls at the doors of houses. The approach to Sivananda's *ashram* consisted of a flight of stone steps, and even there, in the early-morning sun, the air was like that of an oven. Nevertheless, the staircase was crowded with monks and beggars and visitors who had come from other cities. One of these then stopped me and asked me in English whether I had ever seen the 'living God'. He was a man dressed in European style, and he was supporting himself by a staff. His eyes were good-humoured, but I realized that he meant nothing by his question. For I had learnt that the Indian often uses words not for their actual sense, but for their magical qualities. All words are *mantrams*. If words have a sacred context, and if they are derived from the holy legends, then the Indian merely has to repeat them twice; he then falls into a trance, no longer thinking, but only believing. By auto-suggestion, he hypnotizes himself with words that evoke the myth and awaken distant echoes in his soul. Thus, although this man did not literally believe in the 'living God', he had attained a certain divine conviction. Simply by repeating the phrase to me, and by hearing himself say it, he had been able to convince himself of the existence of the 'living God'. After a little while he might lose this conviction, but then he would repeat the *mantram* again. At the top of the steps I asked where I should go, and was shown to a cell overlooking some lower terraces. From there I was directed to ask for the Swami Sidananda, who is the *ashram*'s secretary.

I approached the door of the cell and knocked. Inside I could hear the sound of an interminable litany being repeated in Sanskrit at a great rate of speed. Then the door opened, and a young man appeared: he was barefoot, his head was shaven and he wore only a saffron skirt, which hung from his waist. Across his chest was stretched the white string which signified that he was a Brahman. His opening of the door had not made him interrupt his litany, however, for he continued to recite the holy words. Instead, he smiled and nodded his head insistently. I told him why I had come, and he then led me into a low room, where there were other young men like

himself sitting in a line. He asked me to wait there, since the Swami Sivananda would not be available for an hour or so.

As the morning sun rose the heat increased in intensity, and the atmosphere of the room grew heavy. Then, after what seemed to be a long time, people began to collect in the room, and at about eleven o'clock the Swami Sivananda appeared. He was a large man and, like the others, was naked except for his saffron skirt. His head was also shaven. He then sat down in an armchair and glanced in my direction. He had a gentlemanly bearing; his hands were well-formed, and his smile was portly and affable. We remained, however, in total silence: he asked me nothing, and I too said nothing. He simply smiled, and then, after a little while, he began to hum and to sing. His voice was beautiful and his song joyful. Then, some moments later, another swami entered, playing a chord instrument with which he accompanied Sivananda's song. When they finished Sivananda explained that the song was a yoga song of Divine Life. He then spoke of another type of yoga, capable of curing illnesses by means of the vibrations that rise from musical instruments or which emanate from the vocal chords. To demonstrate this power Sivananda then asked another yogi to sit down beside me. I was told to place my hands on the top of his shaven head. He then uttered a sound that vibrated precisely where my hand was, so that I could easily feel it. Afterwards, with another sound, he made the muscles of his forearm vibrate; then his biceps and his stomach. Yet another sound moved his ears. Finally he began to sing, and was accompanied by the Swami Sivananda.

In this way our interview concluded. Sivananda rose to leave, giving me a gracious bow. Although I had no way of knowing who he was, or what truth he claimed to profess, I felt that he was agreeable and that he was a great gentleman. This was his fundamental character. His whole bearing demonstrated this quality; moreover, he had sung me a song of joy.

Outside in the corridor I was approached by a young boy, who told me that his name was Agarwati, and that he had been assigned by Swami Sivananda to accompany me on a tour of the surroundings of the *ashram*. After leaving the building we walked together along the dusty road that led towards the bridge and the Lashman Jhula. This bridge was some distance away, and when we reached it we found a man wearing Tibetan clothes standing on it. He was staring fixedly at the river, talking to it and throwing bits of food into it. Apparently he had just received food from his begging, but before satisfying his own hunger he was giving a portion of it to the sacred Ganges. He also had an old book, from which he was reading to

the river. When he turned his face he revealed black fiery eyes and a pointed beard. He had probably just crossed over the high mountain-ranges from his own country, for his clothes seemed ill-suited to this lower region.

Continuing on our pilgrimage, we reached an *ashram* dedicated to Kali. There we found naked men who were covering themselves with ashes. They looked like savages from the stone age or inhabitants of some other planet, but they paid no attention to us. Agarwati then told me he wanted to take me to the Gita Bhawan and to show me the small temples along the way. He also said I should see the great banyan trees and the fig trees of Buddha, and the monkeys in the neighbouring jungles, because it was there that Swami Sivananda had meditated for years before founding the *ashram* of Divine Life. Agarwati also pointed out an old tree under which a holy man had lived for years; this man was reputed to have had great powers, but he had gone away to live in the mountains.

By that time the heat of the day had grown so oppressive that I had to take off my shirt. We plodded on slowly, and shortly after noon we finally reached the Gita Bhawan, which is an enormous modern temple. Agarwati had told me that he wanted me to see another swami who lived here, but who had originally come from the south. He occupied a subterranean cell in the basement of the monastery. Every year Gita Bhawan is visited by thousands of pilgrims. Its walls are covered with inscriptions and verses from the sacred texts; its floor is sheathed with marble, and it has a coloured dome on the roof. I examined it with care while Agarwati went to make inquiries about seeing the swami. When he returned he told me that the swami had been in a profound *samadhi* for several days, and that he had only just come out of it. Apparently his disciples and the Brahmans of the temple were just then attending to him in his subterranean cell, but he had agreed to receive me. Agarwati was very excited at this news and he explained that the swami spoke only in Tamil; he said he would find an interpreter, however, if I wished to ask him anything. He also told me that the swami's name was Sukhdevananda.

We took off our shoes and climbed down the narrow staircase that led to his cell. Down below it was cool and shadowy, and it took me some time to get used to the darkness, since the only light in the room came in from a high window. Gradually, however, I began to make out the form of a man sitting with his legs crossed on a small platform raised off the ground. He was surrounded by disciples who were massaging his arms and legs, while another kept placing wet cloths on his shaven head. The swami didn't move at all, and

his eyes were closed. The other people in the room were all reclining comfortably on the floor, and I sat down with them, close by the swami. The room seemed to be filled with a strange odour, which may have come from some over-ripe mangoes piled in a corner. Through the stone walls I could also hear the sound of water—the waves of the Ganges beating against the foundations outside. We were, in fact, under water, and it seemed as though the room was part of the submerged continent of Atlantis. The smell was that of the fruit of Atlantis, and the men were the priests of Avalon, the City of the Dead. The swami too emanated a strange odour, a mixture of death and of resurrection. Coming from a deep tomb beneath the waters, it also seemed to emerge from the Serpent beneath the Tree of Paradise. I began to realize how intoxicating the atmosphere of this cell was, and I knew that I too would have lost consciousness there, for I had already experienced what was happening to the swami. I had already been buried alive.

After a while the swami began to click his dry tongue; he opened his eyes and glanced up towards the light from the window overlooking the Ganges. Then he smiled faintly, as if moved by something in his memory. Agarwati turned to me to ask if I wanted to speak with the swami, since he had obtained an interpreter. I smiled and nodded my head. 'No . . . what is there to say?'

We then left and climbed up the long staircase that led to the outside world. We strolled over to the river bank, where we found a number of launches, and the Swami Sidananda accompanied by a group of pilgrims. The swami was just about to leave in order to take food to a colony of lepers. His head was covered with his saffron robe to protect it from the sun. Agarwati and I approached his boat, but he said nothing; he glanced at me only briefly. He seemed preoccupied and distant. I realized that I was watching an ancient scene: it had been enacted before by fishermen, and Sidananda was an Indian St. John.

We also took a launch, but only to return to the *ashram*. It was the first time I had ever crossed the Ganges. I put my hand into the water, so as to touch it, and let it flow between my fingers. As the sacred waters escaped through my fingers, I thought of the sacred qualities of life that escape us in the same way.

. . . . .

I had lunch on the floor of the *ashram*, eating as I had learned to do with my hands, and surrounded by monks and pilgrims. Afterwards Agarwati took me to his room, where he had spread a mat

out on the floor so that I could rest. He also left me one of his *dhotis*. Lying half naked, I tried to sleep, but, as in the *ashram* of the Mother, it was too hot. I felt exhausted, but all I could do was fall into a semi-conscious state from which I returned, some hours later, to find Agarwati watching over me. He told me that the secretary, Sidananda, was waiting for me to take tea with him in his cell.

I found Sidananda seated on the floor, surrounded by children and animals. Smiling, he asked them to leave, but the monkeys kept returning, or at least peeped through the door and the window. There was a pile of books in the room, and a number of sandalwood sticks burning in a bronze censer. I sat down near Sidananda, and he offered me tea and biscuits. 'You are different,' he said. 'You seem capable of living as we do, and that is why I wanted to invite you to take this modest tea with me.'

'Different?' I replied. 'I don't know. Sometimes I feel like abandoning everything in order to live alone in the mountains. I have always had this dream, and I even tried to do it, a long time ago.'

'It is not necessary to live in the mountains,' he said. 'The abandonment can be interior. Fifteen minutes a day are enough. Every morning sit down in your room, alone, and put your mind in a state of blankness. Forget everything; forget your name, your country, your family, everything. What you really are will remain with you. And after that fifteen-minute session you will be able to return to your work and your daily occupation in the world. But don't be bound to the fruit of your actions, or even to the actions themselves. These fifteen minutes of meditation will give you strength to live two lives, one beside the other. And then, one day, one of these two lives will gradually and naturally overpower the other; although it is not even necessary for that to happen, since the two lives will in effect have been together all along. All you really have to do is to overcome the ego.'

'The ego?' I asked. 'I'm not sure whether I want to overcome it or not; sometimes I want to recognize it and to experience it to its utmost.'

The young swami looked away, through the door, but he remained smiling. Outside, the monkeys were swinging in the trees.

We had been talking for some time. The Swami Sidananda had come from Madras, where he had received his doctorate in Economics; afterwards he decided to go to Rishikesh in order to devote himself to monastic life. I could not understand his intention, for he was

very different from his master, the Swami Sivananda. He was more ascetic and self-torturing, and I imagined that he was an expert in the science of Hatha yoga and Raja yoga. If the Swami Sivananda had ever been ascetic, he certainly was so no longer, for these were the words of the song he had sung: 'A little meditation, a little prayer, a little pleasure, a little pain, a little bit of everything.'

At Sidananda's suggestion we then went to visit the swami in his room at the river's edge. There we found him with his monks and with some visitors. One of the monks, a young man with Greek features, was bowed down before him, and with his black eyes with their long eyelashes, and with his straight profile, he looked like a classical figure. He was engaged in opening letters which he passed on to the swami, who then read them quickly before dictating some reply. When he saw me the swami signalled me to sit down beside him, and I imagined that the moment had arrived for my consultation with him, and I prepared to ask him what I had been wanting to ask all day.

'Would you tell me, Swamiji, something about the sacred Mount Kailas?'

'Why not?' he replied with a casual smile.

'When you were there, did you ever see a hermit, or a monastery inhabited by old Brahmans?'

He looked at me for a moment in silence before replying. 'Not exactly on Mount Kailas,' he said, 'but nearby, there are a number of monasteries, one for example called Nyandi or Nyandi Gompa. Then, of course, a great many pilgrims climb the foothills of the sacred mountain.'

'But is there nothing on the mountain itself?' I asked. 'Isn't there a cave there? My Master told me that his masters lived somewhere within this mountain. He said the mountain was perforated, and that a special light flooded the place.'

'There is nothing there,' Sivananda replied. 'Perhaps farther away on the other side. . . .'

I remembered the paintings of Mount Kailas that I had seen in my Master's house, as well as other paintings of the sacred mountain that I had seen. And I remembered that there was a mysterious shadow, not unlike the entrance of a cave. It could be seen on the Dirapuk side of the mountain.

Since it was late, the swami then invited me to go down with him to the Ganges. We sat together beside the river, and the swami dipped his toes in the water. Looking at the surface of the Ganges in the dusk of the late afternoon, I began to imagine that I could see the dome of a mountain reflected on the water, as if it were the

reflection of Mount Kailas mirrored in the sacred waters of Lake Manasarovar.

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It was night-time, and the assembly-hall of the *ashram* was already full. The musicians were playing, flower-petals were flying through the air and the whole room was enveloped with the smoke of perfumed incense. The monks were reciting verses from the Ramayana, and they seemed to be, like Homer's Greeks, singing the story of their heroes. But here the legend was divine and the life they sang of was the life of God. Moreover, in the centre of the room there was a living god. Reclining on a soft sofa, he was surrounded by the faithful who sat about him, enraptured and open-mouthed. They fanned him, and let flowers fall over him. They also threw fruit and coins at his thick, naked feet. They looked as though they wanted to bathe him in milk, like a Roman Emperor, and to envelop him in sweet fruits and caramels. From time to time this god would take an apple and toss it to one of his favourites, or to some faithful follower hidden in a corner, who would seize it with a mixture of humility and pride because he had been chosen by the god, and was preferred for the moment. This god also threw an apple at me. I caught it in the air and looked into his eyes, and there I noticed a sparkling of good humour and a certain complicity. Then, after a while, Sivananda got up, and taking a musical rattle made of metal sticks and bells, he began to dance and sing. The loose folds of his flesh wriggled as he moved about. But Sivananda had now moved beyond the immediate scene before him: he was living the Myth and was enacting his divine role.

I began to wonder what really was taking place. Was this merely an example of an enormously inflated ego? Certainly it would have been considered so amongst us. But what happens when there is no ego in our sense of the word? What is it that becomes inflated then?

At Rishikesh everything was so different that it would be superficial to judge it by our own values, and to say that this was merely an instance of outrageous vanity or pride. For the real essence of that scene in the *ashram* was goodness and ingenuousness. It seemed to be the act of a childlike and innocent soul trying to relive a myth, and to resurrect the real past of the gods.

Yet I really cannot speak with any certainty about this matter, and therefore I prefer not to judge it. For the fact is I really know nothing about it, absolutely nothing at all.

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Very early in the morning the disciples and visitors go to practise their Yoga gymnastics in the hall on top of a small hill. At that very hour, the young Swami Sidananda will probably be in profound meditation in his small cell. His eyes will be turned inwards, towards other worlds. On the other side of the river, the Swami Sukhdevananda may be revisiting the submerged Atlantis from which he had just returned when I visited him. All over India, along the roads and in the mountains, pilgrims are meditating and dreaming, and as they wash in the holy waters they invoke their gods. The Swami Sivananda is probably still asleep.

In the large hall on the top of the hill I watched the various *asanas*. Some of the yogis were able to pull in their stomachs so far that the line of their backbone was visible on the skin in front. Others were standing on their heads. These exercises make no sense if you consider them merely as physical gymnastics. Unlike Swedish exercises, they are not designed simply to develop muscles; rather they have psychical purposes. The point is to overcome the heaviness of the body and to reactivate the nervous or psychical centres in the various parts of the body. In all of these exercises, the mind takes a prominent role; the *asanas* have to be practised consciously, for they pursue an objective that is beyond the immediate physical world. Yet even those who don't practise these exercises with a full consciousness of their purpose can discover an imperceptible change in their personality. Quite unconsciously their vision of the world will become modified, and they will find a certain peace and serenity. The reason for this is that those exercises activate certain psychical centres which are ordinarily inactive or paralysed.

I left the hall and walked along a path that wound about the top of the hill. The sun had not yet risen, and there was only a hint of light from the distance. After a few minutes I came across a small white temple, built on top of a mound. A young man was sitting on the steps, and when he greeted me I realized that he was a European. He beckoned me to approach and then asked me whether I would like to meditate for a while in his temple. 'I have lived here all during my stay at the *ashram*,' he said, 'and I am waiting to be initiated by Sivananda.' He also told me that he was originally from Germany.

I accepted his offer and entered the temple. Inside the atmosphere was heavy and dank. I sat down on the floor with my legs crossed and closed my eyes, trying to concentrate on the space between my eyebrows. Imperceptibly I began to see the image of my old Master and to hear his instructions: 'Don't think at all but focus on the space between the eyebrows. To see through the

third eye, you have to squint and fix your gaze, but most of all you have to wait.' Then suddenly I heard the word Kailas, and saw the image of the mountain. At that I realized I could not continue my search by wholly internal means. I knew that I would have to pursue a physical pilgrimage along the dusty roads of the Himalayas.

When I got up I felt utterly exhausted. I walked slowly back to the *ashram*, where I found a number of workers engaged in putting up a statue of Swami Sivananda. I wondered what it would be like to have a statue erected to oneself in one's own lifetime.

The time for leaving had come, and Agarwati stood beside me on the road. Just then I noticed a man running along the road towards me. In spite of the heat, he was wearing Tibetan clothes and was carrying an umbrella. I recognized him as the same man whom I had seen throwing food into the waters of the Ganges and reciting verses over it. When he came up to me, he said: 'Last night I went to the river, and the stars spoke to me about you. They were reflected in the current of the water.' He looked at me fixedly. His eyes had the black intensity of madness, and his beard moved up and down in time with the heaving of his breath.

20

THE REJOICING MONSTERS

I KNEW that one day I would have to return to Rishikesh, since it was the gateway to the source of the Ganges, not to mention the regions round Gangotri and Uttarkashi, which is where the real yogis live. But first I had to go down to Hardwar, one of the seven sacred cities of India. It is located on the shores of the Ganges, and is visited by thousands of pilgrims who go there to swim in the river. It was already late when I arrived and the place was crowded, for it was a mehla day, which meant that thousands of pilgrims had congregated here. The docks and the steps along the river were crowded with people, and a small lagoon nearby was full of old men, children and women, who were bathing. Nearly all of them were fully dressed, and the saris sticking to the skins of the old women made them look like skeletons. The water was muddy, but the people put their heads under it and drank it; in all likelihood they also relieved themselves in it.

The streets were crowded with fakirs, some of whom were covered with ashes, while others had thorns sticking into their skin. One of them had a bluish arm pierced entirely through by a long nail. But what was most extraordinary were the monsters which here and there were placed in carts. One of these, I noticed, had a small childlike body. His feet were where his hands should have been, and for hands he had feet. Yet he also had an enormous head with a long flowing beard, and he spoke with a deep bass voice. Nearby I found another grotesque, with an enormous belly, squatting on the branch of a tree. Nightmarish as they were, all of these creatures kept pictures of themselves which they liked to show to passers-by. These self-portraits even seemed to exaggerate their ugliness and monstrosity, yet they seemed much amused by them

and laughed contagiously. Nearly always they were surrounded by a group of spectators also laughing uproariously.

In the centre of the town, where there were public baths and docks along the wide and majestic river, crowds of people were bathing. There too were dozens of temples, many of them filled with people singing. In the streets, cows and donkeys mingled with the crowd. From high balconies overlooking the river a number of boys were diving into the water. Elsewhere whole families walked into the river, holding hands. But nowhere was there the slightest evidence of natural joy: everything was silent and dreamlike, for everything was part of a ritual that had been repeated for centuries. Across the river the sun was slowly setting, and its rays tinged the surface of the water with a pink veneer. As I gazed at it I began to feel a strong desire to submerge myself under that surface.

To break the spell I decided to spend some time walking about the town. On the outskirts I discovered some small temples, most of them placed in groves containing huge, gnarled trees. Yet inevitably I found myself called back to the water, which at least had a certain freshness. There at the river's edge I saw a naked old man carrying a trident. The water was up to his waist, and he was repeating Sanskrit verses. As night was beginning to fall I decided to return to the dock. Many people were still there, singing and praying. For light they had the stars and a few torches, and they seemed to be carried away by an ecstasy of singing and chanting. Knowing that most of the pilgrims would simply spend the night there, sleeping on the ground, I planned to do so myself, and therefore looked for a place near the central section of the steps. When at last I found a place I discovered I had settled near an old priest, dressed in a saffron robe, who kept raising his arms to heaven and shaking small cymbals and bells. As he did so he sang in a very high voice and gazed up at the highest stars. There must have been little change between this man and the people who existed before the Flood, or between this man and the Incas or the Aztecs.

Slowly my eyes began to close, and I fell asleep. And amongst my dreams was one of an old man wearing a saffron-coloured cloak. I also dreamed of those diabolically joyful self-portraits.

21

WHEN THE FISH ENTERS THE AQUARIUM

THE similarity between the legend of Krishna and that of Christ has frequently been noticed. The names themselves are similar. Like Krishna, Christ was born of a virgin, and the idea of Mary's virginity may have been adopted from the Oriental legend. Both Krishna and Christ were born under tyrants, and both Herod and Kansa ordered the killing of all the children. Other similarities abound: each was born at midnight and had traits of character in common with the other. And when they died the heavens were full of signs of their passing.

At the same time, there are doubtless great differences between the two, and Krishna's myth is essentially pagan in its form. Probably what happened is that over the years each myth was influenced by the other, for in ancient times there was considerable commerce between India and the Middle East. In the first century A.D., for example, a number of early Christians visited the coast of Malabar in the south of India and there the apostle, St. Thomas, preached. It is even possible that the crafty Brahmans, hearing the story of Christ, incorporated parts of it into the legend of their own god. On the other hand, 300 years before the birth of Christ the story of Krishna had already been compiled in India, and had begun to influence the Essenes in the Middle East. There, indeed, the legend of a sacrificial god was already familiar, and the story of the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhnaton and his god of love had taken hold of the imagination of the world, for Akhnaton was sacrificed to the fury of the priests of Amon. All of these stories seem part of a universal Myth, and the legends of Osiris and Akhnaton, and those of the Christian Father and Son, and of Krishna and Adonis, have much in

common. Yet there is little purpose in searching for similarities between these legends or for influences of the one upon the other, for the Myth is always the same and revolves timelessly down through the ages. In certain eras it may appear to deepen or to become more subtle, but essentially it is always the same, and thus some have thought that it belongs more to the Universe than to something within man himself. But to search in the stars rather than on earth for its source is merely to engage in circular logic, for astrology merely projects human situations into the sky. Astrology is merely a picture of the drama that takes place within the collective mind of man, and it is not something that has been entirely replaced by the appearance of modern astronomy.

In astrology, the zodiacal sign of Aries is the Ram. In terms of world history, Aries represents the first era; it is the sign of the Aryans, of the Golden Fleece, of Rama, of Zoroaster and of the Persian king Cyrus; and it is the age of Abraham and of Noah. In short, it is the age before the Flood; it represents the primeval home, man's primitive fatherland, the place first left by the Eternal Pilgrim who, with all of his people, set out across the sands of the deserts in search of a Promised Land in the southern region. Aries is the sun that rises over the mountains and sets in the sea. Aries was the old home that was lost, and man has not yet found anything wholly satisfactory to replace it. He has found a different home called Pisces, whose zodiacal image is that of a fish, but it is not the same thing. His voyage to his present home has nevertheless been long and arduous, and it has involved many psychological changes. The old law of the first pilgrims was a law of fire, and was essentially a representation of the Father. Its image, moreover, was that of the fire of Sacrifice. But with the coming of the Son the image changed and took the form of the swastika, while the new law was that of a sacrifice accepted by love. This new epoch of Pisces more or less began when the Brahmans began to codify the Mahabharata, transforming Rama into Krishna, just as Adonis, Dionysus and Pan found expression in Christ. All of these qualities of the soul needed expression, and their astrological form was merely a reflection of the Collective Unconscious. In the West the fish of Pisces have nevertheless taken a different form from that of the East. There, they lie athwart one another, taking the shape of a cross, whereas in India two fish rotate in a circle, each nearly catching the tail of the other. Thus the Indian cross is a swastika, and the Christ of India is not so dramatically divided, nor so agonizedly polarized, as is the Christ of the West. The European Christ is, therefore, the Christ of absolutes: absolute good and absolute light. Everything terrestrial and

everything that lies in the shadows belongs to Christ's opposite, the Devil. Krishna, on the other hand, is something like the god Pan, and he incorporates not only light and good, but shadows and evil. Everything in India follows this same pattern; everything is mixed, but without transition, and every saint is something of a sinner, and every sinner has something of the saint in him. Thus, in India, all of life is accepted simultaneously, because in India the fish of Pisces rotate in a circle, and the Indian cross is a swastika.

The Christ of Atlantis must also have been like this Indian Christ, and certainly the Christ of America, to judge at least from Quetzalcuatl and Bochica, was also like this. Thus the pattern always repeats itself, for every Christ is born as a fish and dies as a lamb, ultimately to be resurrected as a dove.

Jesus Christ himself was literally reborn in the water when he was baptized by John, and when he was submerged in the river he must have found that mysterious 'thing' that had been lost in the Flood. At any rate, his baptism was a rebirth. In this way, as Christ became the food of the Eucharist, he also became the bait with which the monstrous Serpent or Leviathan was caught: Christ, the Plumed Serpent which destroyed the Serpent of hell. When he was first plunged under the waters of Jordan by John, he must have had a premonition of that future assignation and of the tremendous battle that was yet to come, perhaps even foreseeing that the Plumed Serpent would ultimately be transformed into a dove. He may even have had a vision of that epoch which is yet to come, called Aquarius. Then at last the pattern will be concluded: the world will have moved from Aries and the fiery law of the Father, through Pisces with its emphasis on the Son and divine forgiveness, until it finally reaches Aquarius, the epoch of the Holy Ghost and eternal resurrection.

Yet, even though the Son will ultimately be resurrected as a dove in Aquarius, it is important to remember that he was born as a fish, and was intimately connected with man in his life on earth. Christ himself must have been aware of this, for his first disciples were fishermen—fishers of souls. Although in later centuries Christianity was to lose this human, physical touch, it has survived in India down through the ages. Thus Krishna was born and lived by a river, and he struggled with the Serpent in the river. Nevertheless, this same serpent may also be found in the mountains, as on Mount Kailas, and in the Andes, but there it becomes a fiery serpent. Thus, strange as it may be, it is the Serpent which makes fire and water one and the same. For even in the bottom of the river, this fire may be found which transforms human destiny, as Christ himself discovered. It is

that apparently unnatural fire, which causes rebirth and the promise of an ultimate existence beyond death. Yet the discovery of this fire, whether in the river or in the mountains, is not unnatural; rather it is a wholesale acceptance of all of nature. Indeed, it emphasizes a natural balance and interdependence, for the destructive fire of the Serpent could have been extinguished only by the Flood, because the water recognized its fundamental kinship with the fire. Thus the water in the baptismal fonts of churches can be really holy only when it is impregnated by the fire of heaven.

In the West the idea that the soul is always pure has given rise to divided personalities, and to the idea of sin. It has also caused Westerners to stress individuality. The general result has been an emphasis on rationalism, which in turn produced technology and contemporary science, and these, when all is said and done, seem to be the principal products of protestant Christianity. The surest symbol for this concept is the shape of the cross itself, with its rigid straight lines and its essential division of spheres. One direction alone is permitted. When the Child was born, the Star of the East showed the way, and the three kings were the first of thousands to follow it. The very division of the world into polar regions substantiates this concept. Not only is each pole itself a cross, in so far as it divides the world into quarters, but it also constitutes a separate entity. The North Pole is the primeval region of evil; it is the source of devastating and destructive winds. The North Pole is also magnetic and attracts physical bodies; hence it was there that gods like Osiris were physically destroyed. The South Pole, by contrast, represents the region of the soul, but it too is divisive. When many years ago I went to the Antarctic, I went to fight with the Angel of the Ices, but when I arrived there I found a cross. This cross indicated the four directions of my soul, but I have realized that only since coming to India.

This polarization of the world and the long shadow that the cross has thrown over it cannot possibly give man his unity, for of necessity he will have to choose one side or the other. Resurrection is possible only if one travels to both poles and accepts them both. The truly resurrected figure will then look more like Krishna than like Christ, or at the least he will have more in common with the Christ of Atlantis than with the Christ of Golgotha. For the Christ of Atlantis will not turn his back on the earth but will play with the *gopis* in the waters of life, and he will represent totality—light and shadow simultaneously together. This truly resurrected figure will be hermaphroditic, so that the *gopis* will be able to play in his heart and not in the hard world outside.

But now, high up in the sky, the dark stars are rotating round the poles. They are like pilgrims accompanying the coffin of a sacrificial victim. It is they perhaps who have killed Osiris and Orpheus, Krishna and Christ. They have devoured him and are now weeping: they have consumed their own son, but they did not know what they were doing since they were caught up in an ecstasy of love. Even the Isis who searched for the remains of her husband is not sure that it was not herself who cut him into many pieces and scattered him abroad. Nobody knows the answer to that, and no one would ever reveal it if he knew.

When the bacchantes ran through the jungle, drunk with divine love, they carried gods inside them. But as they ran about, falling over the grass, they gave themselves easily to anyone who came along—to a shepherd boy or even, perhaps, to their own sons. They were in ecstasy when they gave themselves, however, and for that reason they never knew what they had done. Then, in a while, they found themselves pregnant and gave birth to a child. There can have been only one father for that child, and that was the god who was already inside them.

And as for the shepherd boy, he will, for ever afterwards, be in search of something that cannot be found in this world. For having taken a bacchante in an ecstasy of love, he will never be able to satiate himself with the body of a mortal woman. Having touched the eternal fire of the Serpent, he will find only death in this world.

Later those bacchantes or virgins consumed their own sons, thinking they were eating a lamb. And now they go about in black, and are the sad stars that whirl about the poles, like sisters beside a coffin.

Then, suddenly, the Morning Star rises. This is the star of love and the star that represents the Son. Its deep light is disquieting because it represents the victim who voluntarily sacrificed himself for love and who gave his body for eternal life and resurrection. But this star is no longer a Him, nor is it a Her. Rather it is a dual star, uniting both poles for ever on top of the Tree of Paradise. It is coloured by the blood of a Redeemer who was poisoned by the Serpent and who has the fish of God swimming in his blood.

But of course this event has not yet taken place. Perhaps it will come in the epoch of Aquarius, which follows Pisces and represents the moment when the fish enter the aquarium. But this event will not take place casually or easily. This will be the final destruction of the present world and will be the Last Judgment. Its approach is already visible, and according to the Indians it will come at the conclusion of the Iron Epoch, which is called Kaliyuga. The new era will

be that of Kalki, who is the final incarnation of Vishnu, riding the White Horse.

Aquarius may also be the epoch of the third person of the Trinity—the Holy Ghost. Little is known of this mysterious third person: all we know is that it has the shape of a dove and speaks with tongues of fire. It is curious that while the Father and the Son have human characteristics, this third being lacks them. The Church has done little to develop this symbol, and perhaps it is afraid to do so. It may merely mean the reincorporation of the animal nature that is negated in Pisces, except that in this new era the animal will have wings. At that point the Plumed Serpent may once again rise, and man may achieve his totality and his control over light and shadow. Surely the Holy Ghost must mean the deification of man, and this resurrection will not only be of the spirit but also of the flesh. From the deep waters of a new Flood, which may be an inundation by fire, the Plumed Serpent will finally emerge as a dove and will represent man at his highest and most complete form.

22

HOLY PLACES

THE night of the eighth of Badhrom, which is at the beginning of August, is the night when Krishna was born, and at that time the Birla Temple in New Delhi is always full of people. I myself decided to visit it that night, and when I arrived I found thousands of people crowded together near the entrance and stretching along the marble steps that lead up to the temple. The grounds and statuary were illuminated by coloured lights, and all along the way policemen, wearing turbans and carrying long sticks, were trying to keep order amongst the human river that overflowed the place, ascending and descending the stairs, moving round the towers and marble elephants towards the central hall of the temple which contained the image of Krishna. The scene was magical, but in the month of Badhrom the heat was suffocating.

Finally with great difficulty, and feeling more dead than alive, I reached the entrance to the central hall. The procession pressed forward slowly from the left and passed into the room, which was full of people, all of whom seemed delirious as they sang about the exploits of the god and waited for the coming of midnight. One of the walls was covered with mirrors and these seemed to double the size of the scene. Upon reaching the statue of Krishna in the central part of the hall, the faithful would kneel down and throw rose-petals and coins, sweets and fruit towards it. This image was a life-sized statue of Krishna, carved from coloured marble. When my part of the procession reached the centre of the hall I suddenly felt myself being grabbed by one of the priests of the temple, who pulled me aside and then pushed me into the centre of a circle of singers. There I finally found a place to sit down and crossed my legs. Everyone was singing and following the direction of one man. The song often changed in pace and style, but there was never any awkwardness

or hesitation between the various parts. Many of the singers had drums which they beat, while others had metal instruments or bells attached to sticks. As always, the rhythm was hypnotic and passionate. Usually the song would begin slowly and softly, like those wailing chants of Andalusia, but then little by little they would pick up speed, until they finally reached a convulsive conclusion. Everyone in the place was singing. Near me was a young father with his small son, and both were singing happily. The child had a marvellously tender voice. After a little his father got up and, taking some metal sticks, he jumped up and down with them for nearly an hour. Soon he was bathed in sweat and appeared to be in agony. I was afraid he was going to die of a heart attack. The atmosphere inside the hall was like an oven, and from time to time men carrying large fans would move through the sections trying to give relief to the masses assembled on the floor, but their fanning did little good. The little boy near me sang as though he were Krishna himself, and the smoke of sandalwood was mixed with the vapour that rose from the convulsing singers. Soon I found myself singing and clapping my hands to the rhythm. Without knowing why I closed my eyes and began to repeat that undulating phrase: '*Hari Krishna, Hari Rama, Hari Krishna, Hari Krishna, Hari Rama. . . .*'

Then suddenly I felt something hit me, and noticed a number of men falling to the ground not far from where I was. It was as though a cyclone had passed through us. What it was was a man with long hair and painted eyebrows who had been possessed by the god, and who had begun to perform his ritual. He took off his shirt and his trousers, and, standing half naked before the statue of Krishna, he began to twist and dance. The crowd began to shout joyfully and to sing louder, and the rhythm of their singing grew faster and faster. The man bent his body from side to side, and then, with his hands on his hips, he began to weave about as though he were dancing a samba. His dance was utterly profane and was accompanied by guttural sounds which he made in his throat. As he danced before Krishna he seemed to be possessed by the blue god, and he gave himself to that god as though he were a woman. He jumped about in contortions and uttered wails of pleasure and pain. The crowd shouted with him and kept time with his animal rhythm. He had become a man who was no longer a man; he was both more than a man and less than one.

And so the music and dancing continued until midnight, which was the hour when the blue god was born. It was as though these masses of the faithful had acted as midwives, pushing and pulling their god into the world.

With the arrival of midnight, the scene was transformed into what it must have been in the month of Badhrom thousands and thousands of years ago. We were all standing with the palms of our hands together, and with eyes closed, and we all sang softly and sweetly together and there were tears in our eyes. For this was the greatest happiness; the blue god had once again been born; he had been resurrected in the soul and would dance again during the coming year like a sun over a paradise of flowers.

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Every year this same cosmic drama is repeated all over India. In open-air theatres and in the temple courtyards, the school-children all become Krishna at least for one night, and all of India follows the famous story and legend, for it is a personal legend and represents the essence of the Indian people.

One year I decided to go to Mathura, Krishna's own city, in order to see how the anniversary of his birth was celebrated there. Since Mathura is not far from Delhi, I was but one of thousands of others who had taken this pilgrimage from the capital. Arriving before noon, I went to visit the museum, which is well known for the treasures from the Gupta epoch which it contains, and while I was there I was given a flower by an old man, and some children sang for me. Afterwards I went to take rest in the temple. It was crowded with beggars and sick people and the faithful who had come there to eat and sleep, for a temple in India is always a house. As usual, there was a mixed lot inside, and there was plenty of dirt; but at the same time there was also a certain freshness, as if, in some dark corner of the temple, the tropical vegetation outside had been epitomized in a purer essence within. As always in Hindu temples you had the feeling that there was some invisible river of the clearest water flowing down from the altar: this river seems to flow through all of the baroque temples of India.

But my real reason for going to Mathura was to see the real river, the Jumna, by which Krishna played as a child. It was in this portion of the river that the serpent Kali-Naga lived, and it was there that Krishna fought his great battle. The village of Gokul was nearby, and many of the faithful took pilgrimages there. I myself decided to go to Vrindavana, however, where the child-god had danced with the *gopis*. It was already late afternoon when I started, and by the time I had got half-way there, night fell. My companion was a Sikh with a black beard, and I suggested to him that we sleep along the way under the stars. He agreed and we lay down

by the side of the road, he meanwhile unbuckling his sword and sticking it into the ground. There were a number of other pilgrims nearby, and several camels were taking their rest under a neighbouring tree. From time to time I could hear a woman coughing and moaning. But gradually, as I gazed up into the sky, I began to lose myself in the stars, and I soon began to experience a sensation which I used to have as a child—that of not lying with my back along the surface of the ground, but of hanging from its surface. I began to feel that the sky was not above me but below me, and that I could easily slip away and fall into it. This was precisely the feeling of vertigo and terror I had felt as a child. It was the sensation of falling endlessly into a bottomless pit, and on that particular night I had the feeling that I was falling into the dark-blue colour of Krishna himself.

Then suddenly I felt something cold on my face. At first I thought it was a snake, but it was only a small frog that had jumped on me. I did not move, however, because I was still half lost in the stars. The Sikh had already fallen asleep by his sword, the woman was still coughing and moaning at a little distance away and I could hear the heavy breathing of the camels. Gradually I too began to fall asleep, feeling that the stars were really within me. I fell more and more deeply into a 'Krishna'.

At dawn, when I awoke, I found myself covered with dew. It was warm with the morning sun, however, and the camels had already started along the dusty road to Vrindavana. The Sikh and I got up and prepared to follow them. When we finally reached the city, we went directly to the gardens of Vrindavana and decided to spend most of the day there. These gardens of course were new, but it seemed probable that the legendary ones had also been located in the same place. At any rate, they had legendary qualities, and were filled with fantastic peacocks and shrieking monkeys. Moreover, as in the past, the gardens seemed to be full of milkmaids and shepherdesses looking for some kind of Krishna amongst the flowers and fig trees. Most anxious of all of these was Radha, who was the strange lover of the blue god. For Radha had already married: she was the wife of a shepherd. Yet Krishna made her his favourite and fused himself with her in the centre of the dance, finally accompanying her to the top of the Tree of Paradise, where, as one, they became the Morning Star or the star of Him-Her. Here is a real part of India's strange mystery, for although Radha had a husband she realized that her true lover was not this husband, but the wild blue dancer, who, with his flute, was like the great god Pan. Yet there is also something real and human about this relationship, for few know

who their real husbands or wives are. Every man has his Radha, and every woman her blue god. And that final fusion into the star of Him-Her does not take place until they have met and danced their mystic steps, in which one remains immobile in the centre while at the same time whirling vertiginously about.

There is of course something illicit about this love: it is not the love of ordinary life, nor does it fit the Code of Manu. Rather it is an ideal love, at the margin of existence and beyond the 'works and days of hands'. It is a fusion beyond the immediate, which first took place in the ancient jungles and gardens of Brindaban. Late at night, far away from her husband and from her daily chores, Radha took part in a mad dance that led to an ecstatic union of the eternal feminine with the eternal masculine. Afterwards she returned from the garden to her house and took up her usual role as faithful wife to the shepherd, and there she decided to remain until she heard the call again. There is a strange inexplicable mystery in all of this, and in the end it is even possible that the husband was proud that his wife had slept with a god and given birth to a god. Here, in short, is the mystery of all divine love: it is illicit and incestuous; that is, it requires utter destruction before the final union can take place.

Walking down the narrow side streets of the city, I finally returned to the river. Then I saw a number of huge tortoises resting on the bank and floating in the stream. These were the tortoises of Brahma and of Vishnu, who dominated the first epoch of the world —Satya Yuga—in which man lived until he was 4000 years old. Vishnu at that time took the form of a tortoise, in order to go down to the bottom of the sea to find the mysterious 'thing' that had been lost in the Flood. There, at the bottom of the Sea of Milk, he agitated the waters and raised up a mountain—Mount Kailas. Then the gods and demons wrapped the serpent Vasuki round about him, and then, splitting the serpent lengthwise, they tied the ends together with a piece of rope. With this longer serpent they once again began to agitate the sea until they discovered the mysterious thing that had been lost in the Flood. Finally it appeared, taking the form of Amrita, the water of life, and also Rambha, who was a marvellous nymph. We may also consider this lost thing to have been Radha, but inevitably it was also Visha, or poison.

23

THE MORNING STAR

As I approached I was afraid, for fear I would be disappointed. When you hear the beauty of a thing praised by many others you are always afraid of being disillusioned. I myself certainly felt that way when I stood before the Pyramids and the Sphinx. But it was now early evening, and wearing an Indian gown of white *kadhi* I entered the precincts of the Taj Mahal. First there was a stone archway, then a long corridor leading to a second archway, which in turn led to the main gateway of the enclosure. Then, suddenly, the whole vision was revealed. Nothing that preceded it had led up to it; rather it was like a sudden blow, not unlike the sensation I had experienced when, waking at dawn in the Antarctic, I had my first glimpse of immense snowfields and mountains of white ice.

The Taj Mahal itself was some distance from the inner gate of the courtyard, and seemed to float above the ground like a phantom. With nightfall, and the gradual rising of the moon, it glowed in a soft unearthly light. There was also a long pool which, stretching from the gateway to the foot of the building itself, darkly reflected the shimmering light.

There was no noise whatever: a few Hindus glided along the path that led up to that presence, but I remained without moving. At the end of the long causeway the Taj Mahal appeared like something out of a dream. It was completely white and had four wings which seemed to be moving. It looked almost alive and as though it wanted to speak, and, in its birdlike form, it seemed to reveal its essence. Built by men who were ultimately condemned to blindness, it seemed to represent an ever-burning light, and reminded me of the soul of one I had not seen since my childhood. It was like a white star in the sky, and unconsciously I began to move in its direction,

as though I were gliding towards another world. In the moonlight it emitted a cool, soft current, which seems to come from another world. Before approaching too close, I stopped to rest, however, because it seemed wrong to rush up to it. Again I gazed up at this monument, and from a different angle it seemed to reveal another aspect of its personality. A single star was slowly rising above it, and in the moonlight the white dome became tinged with blue. The precious stones set into the base of the dome were glistening faintly in the light. Then I started up again, knowing that I could not put off the encounter for ever.

In a short time I found myself at the foot of the steps, and there I paused to rest with a group of other pilgrims who were also gazing at the dreamy walls of the building. They seemed to be looking at it with a happy smile of recognition, as though they had returned to their childhood, or as though they were prodigals who had at last returned to their home. But the real reason that they and I had paused was simply that we were not yet ready to enter into the heart of the building. First we had to put our thoughts in order, for only a short time before we had all of us been on the dusty road coming from Agra. And now, suddenly, all of that had become transformed: the sky and the moon had been realized in a third-dimensional miracle.

Slowly climbing the steps to the terrace of the Taj Mahal I began to touch its walls and to smile, and without realizing it I began to talk to myself. No one was surprised, for they were all doing it themselves. Sitting by a lamp at the edge of the terrace, a man was singing about the happy conclusion of life and of the birth of angels. At the top of the stairs I was given a pair of cotton slippers to wear on the marble surface, and I half thought that they would give me the power of flight, so that I could rise to heaven. The entrance to the tomb was a huge marble arch, decorated with jewels and precious stones, and all about it the words of God were inlaid in coloured marble. These were the words of the Koran, but they also seemed to be those of Jesus Christ and of Krishna. Before entering, I held back and looked at these verses, and I seemed to understand them perfectly.

When I finally entered the central chamber I felt as though I were looking into my own heart. There was a dim lamp in the corner, which threw a shaft of light on the tomb of Mustaj-Mahal, the adored wife of Shah Jehan, whose own tomb lay beside hers. Here at last the two were united in the tomb of Him-Her, which I could sense in the innermost part of my heart. In this marble jewel the two lovers, who had been looking for each other for such a long time, had

finally met. And the Taj Mahal, with its marbled dome, was the Palace on top of the Tree of Life.

. . . . .

Years ago in my own country, when I woke up from my extraordinary dreams, I used to see the Morning Star rise over the mountain. I felt that its soft light was sending me a signal and trying to comfort me. Its light always came in waves, filling me with an indescribable feeling: it was like a sign from another world having some occult significance. Some strange centre in me always responded to that caressing light, but that time I never really understood what it meant.

Now, however, I know that the Morning Star is the star of Him-Her, and that it represents the mystery of the Cave of Elephanta and also that of the tombs in the Taj Mahal. There, beyond the life of this world, and beyond death, the Him has finally been reunited with Her. That a man in Agra could construct in marble the very essence of that star, and that he could capture it even for an instant, is an astonishing and frightening achievement.

. . . . .

Shah Jehan built the white-marble Taj Mahal on the edge of the River Jumna, and when it is seen from a distance, over the water, it almost looks like a scene in Venice. He had planned to build his own tomb out of black marble on the other side of the river, and there was to have been a silver bridge connecting the two. But before he could begin construction of the second building he was seized by his son Aurangzeb, on the grounds that he was squandering the income of the Empire. He was then imprisoned in the Red Fort, and there on the wall of his room he placed a mirror-like jewel in which he could see the reflection of the Taj Mahal rising in the distance. In this jewel the Taj took on a blue colour, and it was while looking at this reflection of the tomb of his beloved wife that Shah Jehan died.

What this act means is hard to know. It is possible that the divided soul of Islam, like that of Christianity, also dreams of an eternal, psychic love, enduring beyond death. On the other hand, it is possible that these Moslem tombs merely represent a frantic attempt to overcome death and to make the ego eternal. These seem to have been the motives of the Pharaohs of Egypt, and they may also have been those of Moslem India.

But these questions can never be really answered, because there

is a difference between what Shah Jehan intended to do and what he actually accomplished. He had planned to build his own black Taj on the other side of the river, but the myth or legend acted independently of him. That exotic Indian myth had got him in the first place to build the Taj Mahal, but it prevented him, at one blow, from completing his plans. Its motive perhaps was simply to insure that He and She would be together for eternity in the centre of their white-marble star.

The Taj Mahal, seen through the dark jewel Shah Jehan placed on the wall of his room, has the same blue colour of the god Krishna who, in his cosmic dance, was united with his favourite lover in the centre of the circle, at once immobile and swirling in space. Perhaps that very jewel was the piece which had been lost in the Flood; it also had the blue colour of Krishna and the same shimmering colour of the Morning Star, which is the star of Him-Her.

When a miracle of art like the Taj Mahal is produced on the earth it seems to be surrounded by a strange aura, and a strange light emanates from it as it often does from the paintings of Leonardo. This aura seems to suggest something eternal, something surpassing terrestrial time. Everything else in the world may pass away—the caves of Ellora and Ajanta, the Pyramids and the Valley of the Kings—but the Taj Mahal will not disappear. Almost alone, it will survive because it is protected by the light of a star which eternally reproduces itself. Few monuments in the world can exist in this cosmic light, but the Taj Mahal can because it has a form appropriate to it.

Perhaps in the near future, while travelling between the planets, a man will recognize in one of the stars the Taj Mahal of Agra. He will see it there, rotating and whirling about for all eternity in the shape of a star, and he will see that its form has squared the circle of the infinite. He will also realize that this star, with its two tombs inside, represents the highest achievement of all mankind, which has wanted to fuse the Him and the Her in one single beat. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Tagore said that the Taj Mahal 'was a marble tear falling along the cheek of Time'.

24

THE BIRD THAT SINGS OVER THE RUINS

I ALSO went to see the Taj Mahal at dawn. In truth, I did not actually have to go, for I slept there all night, nearby on the grass. As the first rays of the sun began to shine over the horizon I walked about the grounds, gazing at the Taj Mahal from various angles. Its white dome was tinged with pink, and the inlaid stones and precious jewels glistened in the morning light. In its total form it is a squared circle, for the central structure with its rounded dome rises from a large square platform. At the four extremes of this terrace rise graceful minarets. The two at the front of the platform are placed slightly more widely apart than those in the rear, and this arrangement gives the tomb a certain depth of perspective when seen from the main gate. Still, what is most interesting is its form, which is that of a circle in the centre of a square, for that is the form of the sacred *mandala*.

When the philosopher Keyserling saw it, at the beginning of this century, he said that 'the soul of the Taj Mahal, like the structure itself, is windowless'. Yet the Taj had to be built in that way, for a *mandala* has only one entrance and no windows. Moreover, that one doorway is always difficult to find, because it is secret. If it had windows, then thieves could enter in the night and rob the treasures within.

. . . . .

At Fatehpur Sikri a bird sings over the ruins. He begins at dawn and continues singing until noon, and his cry is monotonous and deadly. This bird is usually not visible, for he hides in the grass outside of the ruined walls of the old city or conceals himself in a cupola high over the roofs of the Great Mogul's palace.

At noon in Fatehpur Sikri everything seems to be paralysed by the heat, and the air shimmers with the red light of the sandstone. The stones of these palaces and pavilions represent the attempt of a philosopher-king to understand the ephemeral and to use the intellect as a means of glimpsing eternity. Yet his attempt was vain, for over the symmetry of the asymmetric, and over the equilibrium of the irregular, the bird still utters his monotonous, deathlike note, and terrestrial time is triumphant.

There is no dodging the lesson of Fatehpur Sikri with its proof of the ultimate futility of conscious intellectual effort. For despite the quality of the aspiration and the size of the intellect, all was doomed to failure. Conscious thought will not uncover the secret entrance of the *mandala* or reveal the door to the Palace at the top of the Tree of Paradise. Other means are needed for that discovery, and we first have to find the blue Serpent which still lives inside of us. This is the original serpent that was coiled round the Tree in Paradise before the birth of Eve.

Something of this image is reflected in the Taj Mahal, which is a *mandala* without windows. The Serpent has already entered that building, and for that reason the Taj Mahal is eternal. Although the particular building in Agra may one day crumble to dust, it will be created again somewhere else.

25

FATIGUE

ONCE again I had returned to my room in Old Delhi, but this time I felt a strange malaise. I was particularly bothered by smells, and I had lost my appetite. The very sight of a mango made me feel sick, and all I wanted to do was to lie down. I would therefore stretch out on my bed for hours at a time, trying not to hear the noise of the shrieking monkeys outside and never so much as glancing out of the window.

I soon realized that I had caught a fever. At night I couldn't sleep, and if I dozed off for a moment I would wake up shaking all over and bathed in sweat. I knew I was sick, but had no idea what was really wrong. My Sikh servant suggested that I see an *ayurvedic* doctor, who practises the traditional medicine of the country, but I did nothing about it. The feeling of exhaustion and discomfort increased, and after a while I began to feel a repulsion for all my Indian experiences. The sweat and sickly smells, the dust in the roads, the memory of sick people and beggars all began to overwhelm me, and I wanted to run away.

Then, at last, I was visited by a doctor. He sat by my bed without saying a word, and then after a while he left. Apparently he had been coming for almost a week without my realizing it. Sometimes he would speak to me, but more often he remained silent. He was not an *ayurvedic* doctor, but a modern allopath trained in India. One day he began to question me.

'Have you seen the temples of Khajuraho,' he asked, 'with their sexual sculpturings? I have studied some psychology, and it seems to me that those sculptures are very interesting. They represent the whole Tantric method, through which control of the mind is attained in the middle of sexual pleasure. . . .'

I could hear only a portion of what he was saying, but he kept on talking.

'Let's not bother with your illness,' he continued, 'but let it cure itself. In time we will know what has caused it. But now tell me something of your internal experiences. Have you been to Khajuraho? When you are better I will give you a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita which was written from a more scientific point of view; and I will also give you something about Raja yoga or Kundalini yoga, which was written by Dr. Vasant G. Rele. Those old gods of Khajuraho made much of the Kundalini. Today it would be called the libido, I suppose. . . .'

'The Serpent,' I exclaimed. 'The Serpent of Krishna, the flute of Krishna. . . .'

After the doctor left the fever rose again, and during the night I had dozens of nightmares. I could see serpents with thousands of heads, and each head was that of the doctor speaking to me about the Bhagavad Gita, but the sounds came out rapidly and disjointedly, as though they were being spoken into a dictating machine. There was also a typist sitting in the room who was taking it all down, and the clack of her typewriter beat in my head. When I woke up my temples were throbbing, and my head felt as though it were about to split in two.

Later in the day I saw the Sikh sitting in the corner of the room. He kept his eyes on me, for he was anxious about my health. Then the untouchable, whose job it was to sweep floors, came into the room and began to raise up great clouds of dust which choked me.

With that, I realized I could not go on any longer. I realized too that this crisis had been caused by something inside of me. It was perhaps a result of the tension that had been built up by the intrusion of scepticism into my long and seemingly endless pilgrimage.

Once again the doctor had arrived, and when he sat by my bed he said: 'I know what it is. It's malaria.'

The very precision of his diagnosis made me doubt him, and I began to worry. But then I remembered Sivananda, the fat swami whom I had seen dancing and singing at Rishikesh by the River Ganges, and who was worshipped like a Chinese Buddha. Suddenly inspired, I decided to send him a message telling him that I was sick, and asking him to think of me. Then, when I had done so, I forgot all about it, and for days the fever continued. At one time I saw a monkey looking in through the window. He made signs and grimaces, and I sat up a little to look at him. I stared directly into his eyes, but could not find the least sign of comprehension there. A dog or cat, or even one of the lizards hanging on the wall, would have under-

stood me better. It then struck me as being very unlikely that man was descended from the monkey, and I had the feeling that the monkey realized this most of all. It seems much more probable that we are descended from dogs; I at least have always felt that dogs were my brothers. They never say anything, but they always seem to understand us. The dog has been man's companion for a long time in history, and unlike the horse, who was replaced by the machine, the dog will never become obsolete, for he touches a chord in man that no other being reaches. The Indians, however, have never understood this relationship, and it is probable that their gods, and their monkey-gods like Hanuman, do not want them to. For when I looked into the face of the monkey at the window I realized how little the gods care about us. In reality we have nothing in common with them. But since dogs have never been gods, they are happy to stay with us and defend us. In the god-like world of India, however, the dog has no place at all.

At night, when the doctor came, I pointed out a lizard who had joined another on a beam that stretched across the ceiling. 'Khajuraho!' I said with a smile. The lizards are very acrobatic creatures, but sometimes they fall from the beam on to the floor, and then they make a flat noise like someone slapping his stomach.

Later on, when I had closed my eyes. I began to sense the presence of a large shadow, as though it were a face pressed close to my own. Then in a flash, I realized that this was the face of Swami Sivananda, who had come to visit me. I did not open my eyes, however; rather I let that shadow protect me from the fever and shield me from the noisy laughter of the monkeys. Then, little by little, I grew calm and fell asleep.

On the following day I felt strangely better. My fever had left me and I began to sit up and walk about my room. Then, in two days' time, I received a message from the Swami Sivananda telling me that he had received my letter and that he had ordered prayers and meditations for my health. He must have been sending the message just when I experienced the presence of the protective shadow in my room. At any rate, this event is in keeping with the spirit of India. Sivananda is certainly disconcerting, in so far as he has allowed himself to be deified during his own lifetime and has published so many propaganda films and pamphlets about himself. These are unattractive actions and make one sceptical about him. In the end, however, they don't seem to matter, and I for one no longer care whether the swami is honest or not. He probably does not live a saintly life: he probably does not meditate or scarcely does so; certainly he likes good food and he likes to have a good time.

Yet none of this behaviour worries me in the least, for it takes place entirely on the surface. Underneath that enormous mountain of a body, however, there is the heart of a gentleman. Like everything else in India, Sivananda is a combination of opposites: he is both king and gluttonous bishop.

It is undeniable that conscious thought and intuition frequently contradict each other, or at least operate on different planes. For this reason there was no need for me to return to Rishikesh to see Sivananda, because I had already seen him once and for all. Nevertheless, I am sure that it was his visionary appearance which brought my recovery. With his letter he sent me some red powder made of sandalwood to put on my forehead, and he also sent me some leaves gathered in the Himalayas. I put a little of the sandalwood between my eyebrows and also lit a few sticks, which soon began to perfume the room. I no longer felt bothered by the smell.

With the lessening of the fever, I fully expected the doctor to say that I was cured of malaria. Be that as it may, convalescence was something to look forward to, for it was a return to life, and a time of hope. Gradually I continued to get better, and then one day I was visited by a man wearing an astrakhan hat and dressed like a Mohammedan. He told me, however, that he was a Hindu, and that he had come to teach me Hindi and Sanskrit. But when he heard that I had been ill and that I was convalescing, he gave up his predatory manner and quietly sat down on the floor, crossing his legs.

'You should leave Delhi,' he said, 'and get away from this infernal heat.'

'Yes,' I answered. 'I am planning to go to Musoori or perhaps to Simla or Almora. I am particularly interested in Almora because it is supposed to be the gateway to Mount Kailas.'

For a moment he continued to look at me without speaking. Then he said: 'You can't go there now, and anyhow Kailas is in China. What you ought to do instead is go to Kashmir. From there you can travel to Amarnath, which is a holy place of pilgrimage for the Hindus, and which is where you can see the caves which contain Shiva's ice lingam.'

'Yes,' I said. 'Back to the ice. . . .'

That, then, was the thing to do: to visit Shiva in his snowbound abode at Amarnath. There I would try to discover his secret and to penetrate the mystery. Already I felt stronger, and the hope of new adventure filled me with joy. I went over to the desk in the corner of my room in Old Delhi and took out my maps of the Himalayas.

26

THE TOMB OF JESUS

THE trans-Himalayan zone includes the Hindu Kush, the Karakoram, the Kuenlun and the Kailas, which are ranges of mountains which stretch like waves in the sea. But the name *Himalaya*, which means 'abode of the snows', is more properly applied to the great summits that extend from the western borders of China to Kumaon, Kashmir and finally Nanga Parbat at the other end. The highest of these mountains, and they are the highest in the world, are found in Nepal. The lesser ranges in the trans-Himalayan belt are relatively lower, although the second highest of all of these mountains, K-2, is in Karakoram. Altogether, these immense giants, considered the abodes of the gods, stretch from China to the Valley of the Indus, terminating in the immense peak called Nanga Parbat.

Undoubtedly the most solitary of all the summits is K-2 in Karakoram. It rises from the centre of a desert, and looks like an angel hovering over the steppes. The nearest village to it is a full six days' journey away. It is something like the solitary Nanga Parbat, but the white light emanating from its peak is even more beautiful. Yet it is hard to be too exact in comparing these mountains, for there are a number of magnificent peaks, like Rakaposhi, which are almost unknown. Others, like those in Pamir, can be seen only from Turkestan.

The extraordinary height of the Himalayas is due to their granitic composition, which has enabled them to maintain their height while the lesser foothills have suffered from erosion. Moreover, the central axis of the range as a whole is also made of granite. Great forces working on material especially susceptible to geological thrust have caused the creation of extraordinarily high peaks. These very summits have been able to preserve their height because of the thick mantle of ice and snow, which shields them from the disin-

tegrating elements in the atmosphere such as sudden rains and varying temperatures. These have caused the lower zones, which have no snow, to erode quickly. It is believed that the Himalayas were formed by great masses of granite being thrust up through the weaker surface-crust from the centre of the planet. No one knows whether they have reached their maximum height or whether they are still increasing in height. There is one theory which claims that, since the Himalayas are a comparatively new formation, they may possibly be affected by a still active internal thrust.

For thousands of years these summits existed in solitude, and there was no sign of any other kind of life until a million years ago. At that time Kashmir, which lies to the south of these gigantic mountains, was almost entirely under water. Indeed, most of the north-west part of the Indian sub-continent was an enormous lake, bounded in at the south by a stretch of land that connected India with Africa. Then, about three hundred thousand years ago, man must have first appeared in Kashmir. How he came into being is, of course, an enormous mystery, but life probably began at some place where the sea and the land met, and when the hot rays of the sun gave substance to the slime of the sea. There the Universe must first have expressed its hidden energy, combining those elements of nature that had earlier been expressed only by the sky and the land, and by heaven and hell.

In the meantime the immense peaks of the Himalayas continued their solitary existence down through the centuries, experiencing a silence that today can be found only in the Gobi Desert and in the barren wastes of the Antarctic. But the gods must have spoken, if only in the language of silence, for hundreds of centuries later men were to go to the Himalayas in order to hear their voices. From the very beginning, both the primitive tribes of India and the Aryan invaders looked upon these mountains as the gods of India, and so they have remained, so that Kanchenjunga, Annapurna, Nanga Parbat and Mount Kailas, which is also known as Mount Meru, all have definite personalities. While there are other candidates for the honour, it is probable that if the Ark in fact touched ground anywhere it did so first on one of these mountains. In all likelihood it landed on the summit of Mount Kailas, for that is the sacred abode of Shiva and of his wife Parvati.

. . . . .

At last, having passed through long valleys and crossed over mountain ranges, I arrived in the central valley of Kashmir and

reached the city of Srinagar. The country reminded me of my own homeland; it was a landscape of valleys surrounded by blue mountains and of lakes bordered by tall trees. In these lakes and canals the Serpent Naga was once adored, and revealed the magic formula which saved a whole world from the waters of the Flood. But that secret has long been lost, and today Kashmir is dominated by the spirit of Islam. Even so, I had been told that behind the Shalimar gardens, perhaps not far from the place where Shiva revealed the Sutras of the Trika philosophy to the wise man, Vasupgupta, I could find the house of the Swami Laxmanju. Like his ancestors, this young swami had chosen to live in an idyllic place and to spend his time studying Trika philosophy, which is a special product of Kashmirian shiraism.

One afternoon, shortly after my arrival, I decided to go and see him. I found him living on the top floor of a wooden house, and to reach his room it was necessary to climb an outdoor staircase. He was dressed in a long tunic, but his feet were bare and his head shaven. He looked very young, but his dark eyes seemed to be able to penetrate the afternoon shadows.

We sat down opposite each other, cross-legged on a white sheet that was spread over the floor. Round about I noticed a number of books and writing implements, and in the corner some sandalwood sticks were burning. Outside some dogs were barking, and in the distance the mountain shepherds were calling their sheep. For a long time we remained sitting in silence, and then I asked him this question:

'How is it possible to adhere to monism and at the same time to recognize the many forms of reality? Is it not possible that creation has affected the Absolute? If this is so, why does the Absolute manifest itself at all? Why did Paramashiva, the Perfect One, the number zero, feel a necessity to create the world?'

The swami shook his head and closed his eyes before answering. 'Abhinava anticipated this objection by saying: "We cannot ask why a thing does something, because the thing it does is a part of its own nature; it is part of its intrinsic constitution. Thus the ultimate nature of a thing cannot be questioned. It is absurd to ask why fire burns or why water quenches thirst or why cold freezes. It is simply in their nature to do so; thus it was in the nature of Paramashiva to reveal himself. As to whether the created world may modify the Absolute and destroy its eternal nature, this is not possible because the very things created in all their multiplicity still remain within the Absolute, just as the waves remain a part of the sea. You cannot say that the ocean is modified by the movement of

its waves or tides. They rise and fall, but the ocean remains constant. So Paramashiva is not affected by creation. Paramashiva alone exists independently and unconditionally: the perceptible forms are all dependent and conditional; they are finite and cannot compete with the Absolute." '

After quoting Abhinava, the Swami Laxmanju lapsed into silence. I watched him, wondering what he was thinking and whether he himself believed what he had quoted. Where the Trika justifies the creation of the world, the Vedanta remains silent and makes no attempt at an explanation; it simply denies reality and calls it Illusion. The Vedanta does not explain the mystery or the concept of original nothingness. The Trika, on the other hand, uses images and comparisons with the ocean in its explanation, and these comparisons are dear to the soul and climate of India.

I then made this statement to the swami: 'There is nothing more dangerous than the image, than a comparison with the visible to explain the invisible. Such comparisons seem so certain and exact that I am sure they are unreliable and uncertain. I am very sceptical of the image; I have little confidence in what seems to be true. . . .'

The swami remained silent, and in the shadows his head moved imperceptibly, swaying slightly from side to side.

. . . . .

I decided to stay on a small houseboat on Dahal Lake where I had found a solitary place near a large growth of lotus-flowers, which extended across the water to a nearby island. A *shikara*, which is like a Venetian gondola, came with the houseboat, and I used it from time to time to go into Srinagar. But for the most part I stayed quietly on my houseboat. It was elaborately carved, and inside it had comfortable furniture and floors covered with Persian, Afghan and Turkish carpets and soft cushions. The houseboat was tied to a tip of land covered with flowers, and occasionally I could hear small children or farmers passing by.

In the late afternoon I would sit out on deck watching the night as it began to cover the blue hills around the lake, which reminded me of a lake in the south of Chile. Beyond those hills was Ladakh, and farther away Tibet and the steppes of Central Asia. Here was the beginning of the Himalayan region that leads to Kailas and to the enchanted cave of Amarnath which contains Shiva's icy lingam.

Gradually the sun sank behind the mountains, tinting the lake and the lotuses with red. A *shikara* garlanded with bright flowers glided smoothly by, and I could hear the boatman and his son

singing. Their strange, clear voices rose in Oriental cadences, and I realized that after all I was not in my own country. Our voices are either very high or very low; they do not undulate like slow canals once frequented by the Serpent.

With the coming of nightfall I gradually fell asleep lying on the cushions. Between dreams I imagined that I heard the sound of an extraordinary flute growing louder and louder. I opened my eyes, but the sound of the flute did not cease; instead it continued and increased, and I supposed that it must be some shepherd walking along the tip of land where the houseboat was tied up. The sounds he made did not, however, seem actual or real. They seemed to come from some distant period of time, and I was reminded of the god Pan who played in ancient Greece. The melody was extraordinarily intimate and insinuating. I had heard many Indian flutes playing in the dark night in Old Delhi, and I had heard the music of the snake-charmers; but this Kashmiri flute seemed to sound across the abyss from pagan times, and from the classical regions of Greece and Crete. Perhaps the flute-player I heard was a god who had crossed the plains of Central Asia, through Iskandaria, and who had climbed over the snowy summits of Karakoram and the Khyber Pass in order to find this quiet lake with its perfumed lotus-blossoms.

Then I suddenly remembered a dream of more than twenty years ago. In that dream I was in a distant island of my own country, called Chiloe, and towards me a cart was advancing and bumping along the road. The ground was covered with ferns and there were immense trees round about. Then, when the cart approached, I saw that it contained a small boy wearing a fur cap. He was playing a flute, and when he passed by he smiled in a special way. His deep eyes penetrated me as if they wanted to tell me something that I already knew.

Thus it was the same in the north as it had been in the south. And as the music of the flute gradually faded, I proved to myself again, there in Kashmir, that my life had been marked by guide-posts that appear not in time but in dreams only.

. . . . .

While there are tales of Christ's childhood and of his visit to the temple, there is virtually no information concerning his life during his young manhood. Nobody knows what he did or where he lived until he was thirty, the year when he began his preaching. There is a legend, however, that says that he was in Kashir, the original name for Kashmir. *Ka* means 'the same as' or 'equal to' and *shir* means

Syria. Manuscripts in the Sharda language, which is derived from Sanskrit, seem to bear close relationship to the biblical story. According to this Kashmiri legend, Jesus came to Kashir and studied under holy men, who taught him mysterious signs. These had been preserved intact in the high mountains which had not been inundated by the Flood. Amongst these may have been the science of Nila, the king of the serpents. Later Jesus returned to the Middle East and he then began to preach amongst the ignorant masses of Israel the mystical truths he had learned in Kashir. To impress and to convert them, he often used the powers he had acquired through the practice of Yoga, and these were then referred to as miracles. Then in due course Jesus was crucified, but he did not die on the cross. Instead, he was removed by some Essene brothers, restored to good health and sent back to Kashir, where he lived with his masters until his natural death.

There is some evidence which suggests that this legend is Islamic in origin, but it is probably even older. In ancient times there was much traffic between India and the Middle East, and it is very likely that the stories and myths of India were carried across the desert into the Holy Land. Certainly the myth of the crucifixion of a redeemer is of enormous antiquity, and the concept of the equality of all men had already been preached by Buddha and was carried into Kashmir by King Ashoka long before Jesus began to preach to the fishermen.

A number of investigations have also been made concerning a tomb which is to be found in Srinagar, and which is said to be the tomb of Jesus. It is possible, of course, that this is merely the tomb of an old Islamic saint or of a Sufi master, for there is nothing really precise in these speculations. I myself have seen this tomb, although very few people know about it and it is difficult to find. The section of Srinagar where it is located is called Rozaball and it is in a street which I think is called Khanyar.

It was evening when I first arrived at the tomb, and in the light of the sunset the faces of the men and children in the street looked almost sacred. They looked like people of ancient times; possibly they were related to one of the lost tribes of Israel that are said to have immigrated to India. The children were wearing long shirts and primitive jewels, and their eyes were very bright. The building containing the tomb was just at the corner of a square. Taking off my shoes, I entered and found a very old tomb surrounded by a filigree stone fence which protected it, while to one side there was the shape of a footprint cut into the stone. It is said to be the footprint of Yousa-Asaf, and according to the legend, Yousa-Asaf is Jesus.

On the wall of the building hangs an inscription, and below it a translation from the Sharda into English. This inscription reads:

'YOUSA-ASAF (KHANYA, SRINAGAR)

'The description written below is copied from a book kept in Astana.

'When he wrote the short description of the place called Sved Nazair-Udin-Mir, Khanyara of Wakiat-Kashmiri, the famous historian of Kashmir called Khaja Mohammed Azan Dechmarij, declared the following: All the people say that there was a prophet who came to Kashmir a long time ago. That time was called the time of the prophets. In another part of this short description, entitled Wakiati-Kashmir, the historian says: One of the main princes who came to Kashmir and who prayed here a great deal, night and day, was Yousa-Asaf. His tomb is located near Aunzimed, in Khanya Mutwa Nazair-Ud-mir Rozaball Khanyar.'

As I knelt to pray, I felt as though I were kneeling in Christ's tomb in Jerusalem. And in its way it seemed curiously more authentic than anything in Israel. For it was certainly more silent and more solemn than any of the sacred places which have subsequently been profaned by trade and by the rivalries between Christian sects. Moreover, it was placed in a setting alive with the image of the past—the old faces of the lost tribes, with their deep eyes and sharp profiles.

When the women reached the tomb they did not find him. Jesus was gone, perhaps resurrected in Kashmir. Afterwards, he appeared to the disciples. Perhaps this appearance was the projection of his mind over others, making use of the science he had learned in Kashmir. At any rate, he thus gave further impulse to the primeval Myth of the crucified redeemer, which in turn gave birth in Europe to the fantastic dream of Eternal Love.

Perhaps if we were to open this tomb in Kashmir we would also find it empty. For Yousa may have gone to be crucified again in another universe, his mission on this earth having failed. At any rate, his science of the Serpent of Atlantis was not understood here, any more than the myth of the crucified redeemer was.

27

THE SWAMI OF ASHAHABAL

In the forest not far from the gardens of Ashahabal, on the way to Pelgham, there lives a swami called Ashokananda. He is also called Babaji. I decided to go and see him to ask him about the mysterious *ashram* of the Himalayas, hoping he would be able to give me some sign that would permit me to reach my goal and to meet the masters of my Master. The swami of Ashahabal had travelled through the Himalayas all the way to Kalimpong and Sikkim, even staying for a while in Gangtok, which is the capital of Sikkim.

On the night before I visited him, I found myself once again on my houseboat, reclining on the cushions and listening to the soft murmur of the breeze which passed through the open window, and hearing the faint paddling of oars and the song of a boatman. Just as I was about to fall asleep, I thought of the swami whom I had not yet met. They had told me that he was a great admirer of Jesus. In that semi-conscious state which precedes real sleep, I imagined that I was talking with him, and I asked him this question: 'Do you think that Jesus really existed, or do you believe he was merely a myth?'

Then, in my half-dream world, I answered myself, as though I were the swami: 'Just as we have the right to doubt of his existence, so Jesus had the right not to exist.'

This answer seemed so extraordinary that I woke up. I had uttered the question before falling asleep, but the answer had come when I was sleeping. I wondered whether the swami was responsible, but then I realized that neither he nor I had spoken. Perhaps the reply had come from that region where the two of us are one, where we are nobody, or where we are with Jesus.

Although it was a fair day, the road was dusty and the gardens

were full of noisy people. They were dressed in colours of all descriptions—red turbans, dark fezzes, karakul fur capes, astrakhans, yellow tunics for the women, jewels and heavy bracelets. It was almost impossible to pass through the crowds.

The place where the swami lives is solitary and remote, and it was necessary to cross over several ravines before reaching it. From time to time I paused to look at the outline of the mountains and pine forests that surrounded me. Thousands of wild flowers covered the ground and perfumed the air. Finally I came to a simple entrance, over which was placed the inscription, 'Shri Ramakrishna Mahasammelan, Ashram-Naghdandi-Ashahabal.'

I passed through this gateway, descended a ravine and then climbed a short slope which led to a number of buildings. A little distance beyond, on a flat stretch of ground, there was an immense tree under which a strange immobile figure was sitting on some mattresses. I approached slowly and sat down to observe. The figure was surrounded by a number of half-savage and naked persons with long hair like lions' manes, hardened with cow-dung and coloured with saffron. Their bodies were covered with ashes, and I presumed they were disciples of the immobile figure.

I continued to watch this man as he meditated. He had an extravagant beauty and was an almost exact reproduction of Christ as painted by El Greco. He was very thin, had a cloak hanging over his shoulders and his hair fell in two fine tresses down his back. He had a classical profile with high cheekbones and enormous dark eyes, which were open but unmoving. He looked as though he were gazing over the tops of a clump of pine trees which were swaying in the wind. His hands meanwhile lay listlessly in his lap. The expression in this man's eyes was astonishing; his gaze was fixed and open, but he looked like a dead man. And then I realized that, although he seemed to be staring intently over the tops of the trees, he in fact saw absolutely nothing. I experienced the same horrible feeling I had felt at Rishikesh when I had watched the Swami Sukhdevananda emerging from his trance. There was the same submerged atmosphere of the tomb, and of an open sarcophagus containing the bodies of the living dead as they walk through zones beyond this world. The same smell of legendary fruit; and the same smell of death and of grave-clothes. Suddenly I remembered my dream, and I shuddered when I thought that Christ may have been like this when he was taken out of his tomb and taken over the deserts to ancient Kashir.

The air was heavy, and the disciples tried to refresh him with fans made of peacock-feathers. Then I heard a weak sigh emerge from that figure, and his eyes began to look as though they were

opening for the first time, although in fact they had not yet closed. Then, at length, he looked in my direction, so that I could see his eyes straight on. His glance seemed to go straight through me and to carry with it a feeling of unconsolable sadness, mixed with a touch of tenderness and compassion. This lasted for only an instant, but I felt deeply touched. But at the same time I felt confused and repelled by this atmosphere of decreptitude and physical decomposition.

With an effort, I pulled myself together and then noticed that a faint smile had appeared on the face of the swami of Ashahabal. Then I heard him asking me to approach and speak. He was now almost completely out of his trance, and could pay attention to visitors or pilgrims. I told him of the dream I had had the night before. He glanced steadily over the top of the pine trees, but this time there was intelligence in his eyes, but all he said was, 'There are some who believe in dreams.'

The disciples remained silent. We all seemed to be completely alone, for no one else came, and evening was approaching. I breathed deeply, smelling the air perfumed by wild flowers and the resin of the pines, and once again spoke.

'You've been to the high Himalayas,' I said. 'Could you tell me if you have ever come across some secret monastery, one of those Siddha-Ashrams which are mentioned in the old texts? I have come from a faraway country in search of the monastery in which these old sciences and powers are preserved. I think such a place exists, but I do not know the way. Could you direct me?'

The swami took a long time in answering, as if he doubted my motives. Finally he began to speak again, and his voice was very soft.

'Your dream is curious. As I said, there are people who believe in dreams. In Banaras there is a famous writer and thinker called Gopinath Kaviraj; in one of his books he mentions a very ancient and mysterious institution called the Jnana Ganj. I think that Gopinath Kaviraj's master was initiated in one of those secret *ashrams* in the Himalayas. Perhaps you had better go and see him and ask him about it. You had better go to Banaras.'

28

THE CAVE

BEFORE taking the swami of Ashahabal's advice to visit Gopinath Kaviraj, I wanted to go up north to the high Himalayas, especially to Amarnath, which was where the sanctuary of Shiva's lingam was located. That was why I had gone to Kashmir in the first place.

For a guide I chose Kamala, a tall Moslem with an aquiline profile and with intelligent and sympathetic eyes. We agreed to go by way of Pahalgam, a town thirty miles from Srinagar and the usual point of departure of pilgrimages to Amarnath. The first night out I slept in a tent very like one Babar and Genghis Khan must have used. It was set up by the edge of the river, and very early in the morning I arose and inspected the ponies and the other components of my caravan. The *Lalarogam*, or man whose job it was to tend the ponies, was called Mohandu; Abdullah was the name of the young boy who helped him, while Abdalgani, who had a devilish face, was put in charge of provisions. In addition to his duties as guide, Kamala also served as cook.

It was still dark when we left Pahalgam, and the mountains and forests that surrounded us were invisible. Our first stop was Chandanwari, which was seven miles distant, but we did not reach it until nearly noon. Instead of resting there, we decided to push on so that we could stay that night by Lake Sheshnag, which was another six miles farther on. The road grew continually steeper and more difficult. Sometimes I rode on my pony, but more often I walked like most of the Hindu pilgrims who were moving along this road with their walking-sticks and their foreheads painted with marks indicating that they were followers of Shiva. There were whole families, including women and children, and the old people were carried in a kind of palanquin called a *dandi*. The scene seemed almost biblical.

At one point I noticed a group of Mohammedans climbing an enormous rock by the edge of the river; the men would gain a foothold by grasping the branches of some low bushes and then they would help their numerous women and children along. These men all wore turbans and long cloaks of many colours, while their women had their faces veiled. The wind, which was very strong, would blow their garments, and as they clambered up the difficult path the bracelets on their hands and feet would tinkle musically. Some walked barefoot, but most of them wore thick shoes with pointed toes that curled up. My companions and I had the same kind, and we also had *pulas*, which are hooks for use in climbing the ice. The beards of the Moslem men flapped in the wind, as did their garments, but before reaching Sheshnag they had all left us; they of course were not going to Amarnath, which was the goal of the Hindu pilgrims.

It is thought that Shankaracharya built all these places of pilgrimage in India, which stretch all over the sub-continent from the Himalayas down to Cape Comorin. Perhaps he believed that the act of making pilgrimages would give India a certain religious and political unity. At any rate, year after year, the Hindus from the north travel down to the south and bathe in the waters of the three ancient seas which meet at Cape Comorin, while the Dravidians of the south go all the way up to the Himalayan snows in search of the sanctuaries of Shiva and Vishnu. With no common language, and split by deep political rivalries, India is unified only through the Hindu social system and religion. What will happen when the technological revolution completes its work of dissolving this old theocratic system no one knows. The great question is whether any new element as powerful as the ancient spiritual tradition of Hinduism can be found which will keep the various states of India unified under the surface.

As we continued our climb upward, the river fell in increasingly steep cataracts as it forced itself through great slabs of ice. Whenever I took a drink from the river, using my cork hat for the purpose, I noticed how much colder the water had become. At length we reached a very steep precipice, which had to be climbed by following a zigzagging path that passed through the pine forest. This place was called Pissu Shati. In the Himalayas vegetation is found at great heights, unlike the Andes which are almost completely barren. The atmosphere of the Himalayas is also far less rarefied than that of the Andes.

Nevertheless, the climbing was extremely difficult. I proceeded on foot at a very slow pace, hardly aware of the dramatic scenery or of the River Lidder 2000 feet below. By this time we had climbed

from an altitude of 900 feet to 12,000 feet, and the horses had to stop almost at each step. At long last we reached the summit and found it covered with small light-blue flowers, which looked like butterflies in the afternoon sun.

Already the shadows had grown long, and the area at the top was occupied by a number of pilgrims who had decided to stop for the night. Standing on a rock at the edge of the abyss there was a monk in a saffron robe, who was leaning on his stick and gazing at the colours of the sunset. He was absorbed, praying or perhaps dreaming, and the wind made his body sway like a leaf.

Finally, after dark, we reached Sheshnag Lake. It was entirely barren of vegetation, for we were now at an altitude of 13,000 feet and felt very much aware of the ice-fields that surrounded us. There was a kind of camp at the edge of the lake, and I could just make out the outline of some tents and could hear the noise of some bells and the braying of some mules. From time to time I could also hear the sound of men insistently repeating their prayers in loud voices. Their language was totally strange, and I was sure that I had never heard it before.

By the light of a fire, my companions put up my tent, and Kamala began to cook. While waiting, I walked over to the edge of the lake to watch the moon rise over the mountains. For a long time nothing happened, but finally the pale-silver light, rising over the icy peaks, fell over the lake. Watching it, I suddenly felt stunned. I had seen this very scene before at the farthest extreme of the world, in the Antarctic. There the lake was the same—an isolated oasis amongst ice-fields. This moon shone gently and silently down on the glaciers which surrounded the lake, and the icy mountain-tops seemed to emanate that same remote aura of eternity and of death that I had known before. It seemed to envelop the whole scene before me, caressing it with some extra-human love, and making it enticingly attractive. Nevertheless the same great mystery remained. For why had I come to those strange heights? Who had urged me to walk along the icy paths? The water of the lake remained still and quiet—utterly uninstructive—as it reflected the unearthly light of the moon.

At last I returned to my tent. Round about me the pilgrims were singing their old songs of the valleys to the south and of the deserts of Central India. They had to be brave to sing in these dead heights, where they had only the icy Olympian gods for an audience.

. . . . .

I woke up at four o'clock in the morning. It was completely dark and the moon had set, but it was time to begin the last stage of the journey to the Amarnath cave. The wind was cold and penetrating, and I pulled my blanket tightly round me. Kamala then told me that he was going to remain behind, and so my new guide was the 'pony-walla' Mohandu who, along with Abdalgani and the young boy Abdullah, made up the party. The first two or three hours of our journey were completed in total darkness, but by about seven o'clock the first rays of the sun had begun to appear over the hills. These hills were now utterly barren and devoid of vegetation, and from time to time I noticed a small hairy animal with round eyes who, when he looked at us, would emit a sharp whistle. This animal was the marmot. As the sun rose the air became warm, and I was finally able to remove my blanket, although I continued to wear my astrakhan-fur cap. Just before noon we arrived at a kind of plateau, which contained a number of springs. Most pilgrims and caravans stop and spend the night here before continuing on the next day, but I wanted to press on towards the high mountains. Nevertheless, we rested for a few moments to give the ponies some water to drink, and I noticed a group of barefooted mountain women coming toward us from the opposite direction. With their weatherbeaten faces, they looked tired, but their eyes were full of curiosity. At length the child Abdullah approached one of the horses and kissed him on his forehead. After that, we moved on at a gallop, because we had to reach Amarnath by the early afternoon.

Soon we reached the highest point in our journey, the Mahagunus Pass, which is at an altitude of some 15,000 feet. Here the ponies had to walk slowly, for the climbing was very difficult. We found another group of mountain women clustered together by some rocks at the side of the path, and they too looked at us with curiosity. Abdalgani then gave me a small onion, which he told me was good for the heights. He did not realize that I was used to mountaineering in the Andes.

The worst part of the journey, however, still lay ahead. As we continued on, the path became increasingly steep and narrow, and at one point it skirted the side of a high peak, leaving a sheer drop of several thousand feet on the other side. Here Mohandu stopped the ponies and signalled me to dismount, for it was impossible to continue on horseback along this path. From there on we had to go on foot, and the climb itself was frightening. I avoided looking over the abyss for fear of vertigo, and I knew that the slightest mis-step might mean my death. Then I suddenly saw a group of men descending in the opposite direction. They had long beards and red robes

and they carried walking-sticks. They came down so rapidly that it looked as though they were skipping over the surface of the ground, and their foreheads were painted with horizontal white lines, which denoted their membership in the cult of Shiva. I have no idea how they got by me, for the path was wide enough for only one person. But somehow they did. They skirted along the edge of the precipice, and as they went by I noticed that their eyes looked glazed or fixed. Moreover, they seemed immensely joyful: they were returning from Amarnath, and as they descended from the mountain they chanted the thousand-and-one Sanskrit names of God.

Finally, with one last effort, we turned the last corner and emerged on the other side of the mountain. From here on, we had to cross glacial fields. The ice glistened in the sun, and the air was thin and pure. After a little while we encountered another strange person, evidently a swami; he had a curly beard and wore a saffron-coloured robe. When he saw that I was having difficulty walking across the glacier, he got up and accompanied me without saying a word. Directly ahead of us was the face of the mountain which we were approaching. After a while I saw something that looked like a shadow on the side of this mountain: it was the cave of Amarnath, the legendary sanctuary of Shiva. As we gradually drew near, the air seemed to be full of thousands of minute vibrations, as though a thousand invisible bells were ringing. And then I noticed some birds which looked like doves: they flitted in and out of the mouth of the cave and then finally came out towards us as if they were welcoming us. In the meantime I too had begun to feel light, as though the burden of my weight had fallen from me. In the bright sunlight the white snow seemed to be alive, and the *mantrams* which the holy man at my side had begun to recite seemed to vibrate across the open spaces.

At the entrance of the cave were a number of Shiva-ite Brahmans, whose duty it was to guard the ice lingam and to preserve the great secret of this cult. I gave them a respectful greeting and then passed into the sanctuary itself. The floor was covered with flower-petals, and the air was thick with the smoke of incense and sandalwood. In the centre rose a giant white stalagmite, which looked like a column of fire which had suddenly been frozen. It represented the phallus of Shiva, emerging from the feminine organ, or *yoni*, of Shiva's wife, Parvati. But the image of this cave celebrated more than mere sexuality, or even creation. It did indeed represent these forces, but it also represented the Absolute, for, despite its creative activity, the creative force maintained its deathless integrity. The lingam of Shiva has remained erect in the *yoni* of his wife for endless

ages, and the two have constituted a unity as old as the sacred mountain which encloses them.

Thus the same mystery of the Elephanta cave in the harbour of Bombay has been repeated in an icy cave in the Himalayas. For there, in the main chamber of the Palace on top of the Tree of Life, two people have met and embraced. They have been searching for each other for a long time, but at last they have met. Their joy is so great that they weep for gladness and their tears become the stalactites or snow-petals in the cave of Amarnath.

Standing in the middle of the cave, I began to murmur ancient words which must have been sleeping within me but which seem to come to life only in the face of primordial symbols. I had begun to murmur in a similar way when, years ago, I stood in the snow-fields of the Antarctic.

One of the priests of the temple then touched my head with sandalwood and drew three parallel lines, which symbolize the the cult of Shiva, on my forehead. I turned and started to leave the cave, but on the way out I met an individual covered with furs, who suddenly took me by the arm in a feverish way and cried out: 'Kailas! Kailas!' He then pointed towards the wall of stone that enclosed the ravine, indicating that beyond it lay the trans-Himalayan plateaus and Tibet.

Like everything else that happened there, the action of this man was extraordinary. Yet it also seemed appropriate to the setting. I wondered whether the cave inhabited by the masters of my Master would be like the one at Amarnath, and I imagined that it too was illumined by an icy light—by the white sun of the tremendous god who creates and destroys without changing himself, and who loves and hates without the slightest sign of emotion.

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The Ice Lingam of Amarnath is said to change size in accordance with the waning and waxing of the moon. At the time of the full moon this icy phallus reaches its greatest erection; then the gigantic stalagmite begins to rise within the dark interior of the cave, attempting to reach the roof, as if it were attaining the limit of its own universe and filling the closed dome of its own creation. Then the cold flame vibrates in the heart of the ice and in the silence, as it has done for thousands of years, ever since the mountains rose and the waters receded from the face of the earth.

There is nothing deeper or more subtle than ice, which is after all a conflict of elements, and which has a mysterious flame alight

at its centre. To reach this white centre is to die and to be reborn in complete tranquillity. It is on this concept that the whole structure of Hinduism rests, and it is thus symbolized in the Himalayas and in the Ice Lingam which lies at its vortex.

The Lingam or phallus represents both the creative and destructive power of the Hindu god, Shiva. The Shiva temples in India always face towards the west because Shiva means the setting sun and the approaching night. Shiva always works at night, and his colour is that of ashes. In India all the gods are married, and their wives represent the feminine aspect, or the negative pole of creation. Thus the *yoni*, which is the vagina of Shiva's wife Parvati, is worshipped and adored all over India; and, from the Himalayas down to the peninsula in the south, it is revered along with Shiva's lingam in each of the principal temples. Yet despite this apparent duality, Shiva and Parvati are really one; all the Hindu gods are hermaphroditic, like the statue in the cave of Elephanta.

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I proceeded slowly on my way like a solitary pilgrim. The task was wearisome, and I seemed to feel the weight of centuries on my shoulders, especially since I was by no means sure that I believed in anything. Thus I continued onwards, simply because my feet kept moving, and simply because I seemed to be forced to continue, having come such a great distance from the ices of the Antarctic and still not having reached the heights of Mount Kailas. The path was lonely and terrifying, and I could only imagine how many had taken it before me and fallen along the way. Anyhow, I continued onwards, carrying within my own head the eyes of those who had died before me, especially those of a dead girl. Thus I went on, not entirely alone, but with my comrades from a distant land, hoping finally to reach the top of the Tree of Life and to reunite myself again with my dead friends and with my own soul.

I knew that I would have to find that centre, that Siddha-Ashram of the frozen peaks, in the central part of my own heart and in the frozen flames that burn there. For then and only then would I be able to learn the science which would allow me to pass from the brain into that empty area that hovers over the skull, and only then would I be able to make the great leap. Yet not even the signs given me by my Master had been able to help me achieve this goal. For when the Serpent activated the flowers of the soul, and when the tremendous vibrations of its petals reached my head, something always detained it there, some impenetrable

obstacle which prevented the Serpent from reaching the emptiness at the top of the Tree or disappearing into the cave to melt with its eternal lover. The flowers did not yield their perfume; the son of death had not yet been born; and the lingam and the sword had not yet been nailed over the tomb.

29

THE CHRIST OF ATLANTIS

EARLY on in this book I made the point that what counts in India is not history but legend, for in India everything is imprecise, and the millenia are shrouded with fog. Thus all attempts to find the truth are soon directed towards the mythical mind of India. Indeed, this seems to be generally true in the Orient. True essences are found only in the roots of the facts and not in the facts themselves. Nevertheless, the Indian is also a realist and is extremely practical, and he acts in this way because his myth is more real than reality itself. For a thing to be real it has to be mythical. In order to be really important, Christ must never have existed. The Indian will not accept the fact of Christ or the historical Christ, but he will accept what lies behind the fact.

Thus to write an authentic book on India and to say something important or fundamental, especially when so many books have already been published, it is necessary to take the legend or myth more seriously than history. For, in truth, the factual history of India is almost wholly unknown. Nobody really knows anything about Mohenjo-Daro or about its founders; no one really knows whether they were foreigners who came as invaders or whether they had been there for centuries. Moreover, their advanced systems of irrigation and their commercial methods have nothing to do with the Indian temperament, which we have come to know in historical times. Whether the people of the Indus Valley first came from Iran or from Anatolia no one knows; all that is known on a serious level is that there was a god. He appears in the seal showing Shiva and his bull, Nandi. Historically, no one knows whether Shiva and Nandi originated there or were brought to the Indus Valley from abroad, and no one really knows where the Dravidians or the Aryans came from, or when they arrived. Some historians like to explain the

success of the Aryan invasions by the discovery and domestication of the horse. But there is no certainty in any of these theories.

And so I too have permitted myself to dream; I have mixed facts with legend because I believe there is more truth in the Myth than in statistics or in the pretentious assertions of archaeologists, anthropologists and geologists. Almost anything claimed by an anthropologist can be swept away by a discovery, and usually it is some very casual discovery—a new skeleton which proves that man existed for millions of years in some part of the earth. And the solemn professions maintained by the geologists can be easily made absurd by a single seismic shock, which causes an island to disappear or brings another to the surface after millions of years under water. Moreover, the deciphering of the inscriptions at Mohenjo-Daro, or of the Speaking Tablets of Easter Island, may easily refute the claims of earlier archaeologists. Science itself can destroy scientific data, for with the development of space travel it may soon be possible to project on a screen the light of a star, or the light that the earth itself makes while it travels through space, so that through an observation of this light we may have a precise idea of how the cosmos was created. Through astral flight we may also come to know life in other worlds, and we may see in other planets that the history of the earth is repeated there, and that the cosmos is a series or system of infinite mirrors. Thus the story of the crucifixion, for example, may truly prove to be a cosmic myth.

Kneeling at the tomb of Yousa-Asaf in Kashmir, I prayed as though I were praying before the real tomb of Jesus. I knew that he was not there, that he could not be there and that in all likelihood he had never been there, and I began to realize that perhaps he had never been in Jerusalem either, or in any other place.

I have already mentioned the legend which claims that the ten lost tribes of Israel came to India. Originally, there were twelve tribes, two of which were those of Judah, and the descendents of these are now known as the Jews. No one really knows what happened to the other ten, and it is possible that they were assimilated in the north-east portion of Africa, where there are still some tribes who preserve the traditions of the Old Testament; or they may have gone to Abyssinia, where the Emperor Haile Selassie claims descent from King David and also from the Queen of Sheba. In any event, it seems to be true that the only known descendants of the lost tribes of Israel are the Bene Israeli, or Sons of Israel, who live in Bombay. The census of 1951 said that out of the total population of 357,000,000 on the sub-continent, there were only 25,801 Jews. These Indian Jews have never shared the qualities

that have characterized Jewish merchants in other parts of the world, and for that reason, perhaps, there is no anti-semitism of any kind in India.

The first group of Jews to arrive in India in large numbers appeared in the year A.D. 70, after the second destruction of the Temple. They landed in the south-west part of India in what is now Kerala. This region, bordering on the Arabian Sea, was the legendary Ofir from which King Solomon procured his ivory, sandalwood, peacocks and monkeys. Solomon's temple was adorned with sandalwood from Malabar, and Israeli and Arab merchants frequently travelled to India on business.

A second wave of Jews arrived in India during the fourth century A.D., and the last came during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These were called the Seffardi Jews, and they had escaped from the Spanish Inquisition and had crossed the deserts of Iraq and Yemen. Many of them established themselves in Calcutta, but a number of these left in 1947, when the state of Israel was founded, because they had never been able to assimilate themselves into the Bengali middle class. Subsequently some of these returned to India, while others went to Australia, England and to the United States. The Jews of Calcutta have never learned to speak Bengali well, but the Jews in Bombay speak Maharati, and those in Cochin and Kerala know Malayalam.

When the Jews first arrived in Kerala nearly 2000 years ago, they went to Thiruvanchikulam, the capital of the ancient Perumal emperors, which is today known as Cranganore. They were received in audience by the emperor, who gave them land near a southern village called Parur, and there they built houses and synagogues. Three hundred years later the emperor gave Joseph Rabban, who was the chief of the Jewish community, the title of Srinadan-Moplah and made him a noble of his court. Generally speaking, the Jews were called Anjuvarnar, which means the fifth caste in addition to the four castes of Hinduism. Nevertheless, the emperor's order creating Rabban's title was engraved on a copper plate according to custom, and was written in Vattezhuthu, the ancient popular script in the region south of Tanjore.

In Cochin, in the state of Kerala, there are two Jewish communities who live in separate streets and who have separate synagogues. These two communities are known as the white Jews and the black Jews. The black are doubtless those who arrived after the destruction of the Temple and who were given land near Parur. They wear the indigenous dress of the country and are as dark in colour as the Dravidians, so that it is almost impossible to distinguish

them. The white, on the other hand, are those who arrived in later centuries; they dress in the Western manner, and their houses are built in the Dutch style of the seventeenth century, and even their synagogues have Dutch candelabra. The Dutch, like the Portuguese before them, had been settled in Cochin for some time.

There is virtually no intercourse between these two groups of Jews, and the whites tend to look down on the blacks; they claim that the blacks did not in fact appear after the destruction of the Temple. If their assertion is correct, then it would be necessary to explain their Judaism in some other way. If they were in fact natives of India, who were converted to the Jewish religion, they would be very interesting, since Judaism is not generally speaking a religion which can be adopted freely. Like Brahmanism, Judaism has its roots in the blood of the people of Israel. In the same way, Brahmanism is based on the Brahmanic caste, and no one who does not belong to this caste or to the Kshatriya or to the Vaishya caste can be a Hindu. For this reason, neither of these religions has been interested in missionary work.

The white Jews of India have never been able to assimilate themselves completely, and they have never been able to exert much influence on the national community, as they have done in nearly every other country to which they have gone. The difficulty they encountered in India was simply that Hinduism had precisely the same basis of race and of theocracy as Judaism had. As a result, it was a closed circle, and the Jews were unable to penetrate it.

There is yet another theory, which holds that the Jewish race originated in India centuries ago. According to this idea, the Jews were members of the Dravidian race. Like the gypsies, who belonged to a lower caste of Hinduism, it is thought that they departed from India and migrated towards the West. The extraordinary persistence of the Jewish community as a community may have had its basis in the Hindu caste system. Like the gypsies, they do not ordinarily mix with other peoples, and the reason may be their subconscious memory of the caste system in the country of their origin. The return of the Jewish communities to India in later centuries may thus be likened to the pilgrimage of the Parsees, who came back almost by instinct in search of their roots.

This theory ties in with the legend that Jesus Christ also came to live in India after he was lost in the Temple at the age of about thirteen. As has already been noted, this legend asserts that Jesus spent seventeen years in India, finally returning to the country of his birth to preach the doctrine of salvation and to assert that he was the Son of God. This idea of being an incarnation of God had been

common in India for centuries, and thus such a declaration as that of Jesus would have surprised no one in India. Vishnu, Shiva, Rama, Krishna and Buddha had all been reincarnations or *avatars* of the Only God, and even today some say that a living god may be found in Shivanada's *ashram*, in Rishikesh.

Christ belonged to the sect of the Essenes, of which John the Baptist was also a member. John baptized Christ in a river of Israel, and the ceremony employed was very similar to that which is performed to this day amongst the Hindus, when they take their ablutions in the sacred rivers of India.

A further aspect of this legend claims the existence of a book in a Lamasery or convent near Himis on the frontier of Tibet and India. This book is said to describe the life of Jesus in India. A part of this book is supposed to have been written by Jesus, and to contain an explanation of his doctrine. The book as a whole is supposed to contain fourteen chapters and 244 *slokas*. The story of Jesus is also related in a curious manuscript called Nath Namavali, which is preserved amongst the Saddhus of Yoga Nath, in the Vindhya range of mountains. This text asserts that Jesus, or Ishainath, which is the name-word in the text, came to India at the age of fourteen, and that, after sixteen long years of concentration, he came to understand that Shiva was the great god. After this he returned to his own country and began his preaching. Soon, however, his brutish and materialistic countrymen conspired against him and had him crucified. After the crucifixion, or perhaps even before it, Ishainath entered *samadhi*, or a profound trance, by means of Yoga. Seeing him thus, the Jews presumed he was dead and buried him in a tomb. At that very moment, however, one of his *gurus*, or teachers, the great Chetan Nath, happened to be engaged in profound meditation in the lower reaches of the Himalayas, and he saw in a vision the tortures which Ishainath was undergoing. He therefore made his body lighter than air and passed over to the land of Israel. The day of his arrival was marked with thunder and lightning, for the gods were angry and the whole world trembled. When Chetan Nath arrived he took the body of Ishainath from the tomb and woke him from his *samadhi*, and later led him off to the sacred land of the Aryans. The account continues with the assertion that Ishainath then established an *ashram* in the lower regions of the Himalayas, perhaps in Kashmir, and that he established the cult of the Lingam and the yoni there. Finally, at the age of forty-nine, Ishainath willingly gave up his body, having gained control over it through Yoga.

In the 'Song of the Yogi', which the Natha Yogis sing, there are

also references to Jesus and to John the Baptist. Some of the words of the song are these:

'My friend, to what country did Ishai go, and to what country went John?
My friend, where is the *guru* of the *gurus*, and where is your mind resting?
My friend, Ishai has gone towards Arabia, John towards Egypt.
My friend, Ishai is the *guru* of my *gurus*. The mind of the yogi rests only in the Yogi.'

In this strange document Jesus is called Ishai Nath, whereas the word Jesus or Jeshua is Hebrew. The same word in Greek is Issoas and in the Indian tongue it is Eeshai or Isha, which means god.

There is also a verse in the Puranas which reads: 'Having found the sacred image of Eeshai [God] in my heart, my name will be established on the earth as Eesha Mashi [the Messiah].' Today, when Jesus Christ is referred to by Christians who speak Hindi and Urdu in India, he is known as Eesha Mashi. The Tamil name for Christ is Kesava Krishna.

The word Essene seems to have no very precise etymology. The Essenes, however, were similar to the yogis of India, and they hoped to obtain divine union and the 'gift of the spirit' through solitary meditation in remote places. The word Essene could have evolved from a foreign pronunciation of the Indian word Eeshani. Eeshan is Shiva and Eeshani is one who adores Eeshan or Shiva.

Thus Jesus is both Shiva and Krishna, and since Shiva and Krishna are one and the same, the Father and the Son are also the same. Jesus, Shiva, the Christ of Atlantis, the Serpent of Paradise, the Plumed Serpent which will return as Quetzalcoatl from the bottom of the sea—all of these are one. And so it is that Jesus is the Master of my masters, as the song of the Natha Yogis puts it; it is he that I have been searching for so desperately ever since my childhood in the mountains and in the ices: Jesus, the Christ of Atlantis.

. . . . .

This legend of Christ is entirely mythical. It originated in India, and from there it spread to the West, where it was condensed and stratified under the influence of a different mentality. In India the Myth is still fluid and living, but in the West it has become rigid

and indeed brittle, so that if man is not capable of revitalizing the Myth, and of breaking the arthritic hold of dogma on it, everything will be lost. Christianity, with its doctrine of the incarnated God and the mystery of the resurrection, is on the verge of extinction unless man begins to look at it in a new light, more in keeping with the times. To do so he will have to return to the fountainhead, which is not in Jerusalem or in Rome, but in India and, by extension, in Atlantis. What has to be overcome is the emphasis on the historical Jesus; what is important is the Myth, for it can be applied to all of us. The Christ that was resurrected from the tomb has to be ourselves; it is we who must undergo the experience, so as to be born again like the Brahmans of India, who are known as the 'twice-born'. This mystical Christ cannot have had any historical existence, for he is the symbolic Christ of Atlantis and also the Christ of South America and of my own country, Chile. He exists in all ancient lands which have high mountains and which may never have been inundated by the Flood. He exists in all lands which still emanate a divine light and which still tremble with a memory of past glory.

. . . . .

The next epoch will be that of the Holy Ghost; it will be the era of the man-god, of a man who has wings, of the man who is resurrected physically and who is accompanied by his animal. This is the epoch of the resurrection of the flesh; no one will enter heaven without his physical body.

In India, each god has his own beast of burden. That of Shiva is the bull, whose name is Nandi; that of Vishnu is Garuda, who is a half man, half bird: while that of Kartikeya, the son, is the peacock. Brahma also has his beast of burden, the tortoise.

Thus this new heaven will be available to vegetables and minerals as well; wood will enter with the cross, and gold and jade and mercury will also be welcome.

There has been some mention of Atlantis in these pages so that it is time its meaning be explained. Atlantis is the remote past; it is the prologue of man's history, a timeless time, itself having no history. It is the dream of Paradise; it is the justification of all myths and of all dreams and memories. What it suggests is that there was once a time when men were gods; there was once happiness and a total existence; there was once an island or an oasis where a lover and his beloved lived together. There is really no geographical location for Atlantis; it is simply a place over the waters, located in a spaceless space, in a squared circle; it is the cavity which exists

between the brain and the skull which is a living void.

Thus the concept of Atlantis must first be internal; afterwards it may possibly be externalized, as everything else can be. The reason for this is that what is inside is outside, and Atlantis is the totality of both. Because of this, metals, plants and animals are only symbols which represent forces in the body of man, which is after all a microcosm, exactly reflecting the macrocosm; man is the image of God or is even God himself. In Atlantis, which is also Paradise, animals lived in peace with man; they were his friends because they were inside and not outside of man, and the same was true of metals and plants. Thus they were the emblematic signs of the zodiac. In every corner of heaven, which is itself the reflection of the body of a man, there was an animal, a vegetable or a mineral representing a particular type of consciousness which was a 'friend' of man. Each of these was at peace with man, and the animals of the earth were also pacific. But when man lost his totality, the animals and the plants and minerals went their separate ways and turned themselves into his enemies. The tiger then devoured, the lion roared, and only the dog remained by man in his solitary pilgrimage. This act of partition was the immolation of the body of the son. It was the immeasurable tragedy of the sinking of Atlantis and the loss of Paradise.

So long as man is divided, living outside of totality or unity, he is born under the influence of a particular constellation and is dominated by a particular animal which may be his servant or his enemy. The effect of the epoch of the Holy Ghost, or of the Great Resurrection, will be to reincorporate all of these animals, vegetables and minerals with man, without negating any of them. This will be the epoch of Him-Her, when, at last, the dog, the tree and the stone will be reunited and reincorporated in the totality of the Christ of Atlantis.

30

THE VIEW FROM WITHOUT

ONCE I dreamt that I had died, and I found myself sitting on a road, with my legs crossed in the lotus position. I was trying to concentrate and to meditate, fixing my eyes on the space between the eyebrows. Although I made a great effort, I was unable to succeed. Then a figure passed along the road and stopped to look at me. It smiled and said: 'Why do you want to do that if you are dead? What you are doing can be done only in the life that you have just left—within the body. Now you must concentrate outwardly; you must look at the body from without.'

This dream made a great impression on me, and for a long time I thought about it and tried to guess its meaning.

In order to understand something about this mystery and so to pull back a little the veil which separates us from that greatest of all unknowns—death—it is necessary to consider Yoga and use some of its allegorical and mystical language. There are seven *chakras*—lotuses or centres of psychic force and consciousness—located along an invisible spine in the subtle body. Each has its colour, letters, symbolic animal and god. Thus Muladhara Chakra at the base of the spine is a yellow lotus with four opened petals. Around it the Serpent Kundalini is coiled three and a half times.

Psychic channels, called *nadis*, run through the subtle body, the most important being Pingala, Ida and Sushumna. Sushumna runs along the spinal cord whereas Ida and Pingala are located to its left and right. These *nadis* and *chakras* have a more subtle and spiritual meaning than expressions like nerves, ganglia and plexuses.

Sushumna is the path along which the Serpent Kundalini progresses like a sleeping beauty of the forest. Once Ida and Pingala merge, and their wedding is blessed by Sushumna in the temple of the Manipura Chakra at the navel, all three are united, thus allowing

Kundalini the Serpent to reach the Ajna Chakra, which is the space between the eyes. This *chakra* has only two petals and it is there that the Eternal Lover lives who is capable of helping us reach heaven. There Dante would have met Beatrice, and there she awaits us. Wearing a white robe, she leads us by the hand up the last steps that separate us from heaven; she leads us towards the throne, towards the coronary *chakra* which is called Sunya or emptiness. This *chakra* is the Brother of Silence, Sunya-Bhai, the Hermaphrodite. It has a thousand petals and contains all of the letters there are and all of the *mantrams*. In short, it is OM. To reach this final stage is an almost impossible task, and many years ago I nearly died in attempting it. Perhaps then the help of the Eternal Lover was missing.

Whoever attains the Great Emptiness by reaching the mysterious cavity that is said to lie between the brain and the skull, whoever overcomes rational consciousness and moves to a point nearer the Collective Unconscious, has a halo round his head or a protruberance like that of Buddha, or horns like Michelangelo's Moses. When this final stage is reached, then perhaps the Eternal Lover will retire, leaving only unity or a great emptiness like Nirvana.

A mysterious aspect of this whole process is that although the Serpent Kundalini climbs up the spine, it only stretches one-half of its length, while the other half remains coiled round the base. Thus, it is like the Libido, which is at once active and in repose. It is both alive and dead, creating and dissolving at the same time. In the same way those who have attained liberation continue to be active in the world, and the Buddha who reached Nirvana was still an influence on earth.

The symbolism of Yoga aims at totality; it incorporates everything, including the earth and the sky, the animals and the gods. It is a picture of the Universe. Consider, for example, the symbolism of Pingala, that narrow channel which is located on the right side of the backbone. It is considered to be red, since that is the colour of the sun, and it is masculine. Ida, which lies to the left of the column, has a pale colour like the moon, and is feminine. Together, Pingala and Ida constitute Kala, or Time. Sushumna, which is the channel running up the centre of the spine, destroys Kala or Time, because Sushumna represents the secret path towards timelessness. Pingala is also the River Jumna, while Ida is the Ganges and Sushumna the River Sarasvati, these three being the sacred rivers of India. They are also the three ancient seas which meet in the extreme south of India at Cape Comorin, where Kanya Kumari, the Virgin Princess, sleeps. These three, accompanied by a mysterious

fourth, proceed across the body of India, uniting the Arabian Sea, the Sea of Bengal and the Indian Ocean with Mount Kailas in the Himalayas, where the god Shiva lives. This mountain represents the coronary *chakra* or Sunya. Thus altogether, like the body of a man, the map of India shows erect temples at both extremes.

Intuitively I had grasped something of this extraordinary parallelism many years ago, when I travelled down the whole length of my country to the Antarctic. At that time, I felt I was making a pilgrimage within my own body and my soul, and the southernmost city of Chile, Punta Arenas, seemed to represent the Muladhara Chakra. Both physically and spiritually it was necessary to go there first before proceeding onward to the Antarctic, and to the empty ice-fields where the white light shone. The straits and canals in the south of Chile seemed to represent the *nadis*, Pingala, Ida and Sushumna, and the ship on which I was sailing was Kundalini, the Serpent.

Although this intuitive symbolism has existed in India as a science for thousands of years, I was able to understand it only vaguely while I was in Chile. Then it came to me as part of the drama of my own soul, and like a painful attempt to gain redemption for myself and for my countrymen. In contemporary psychology this phenomenon of similarity is called 'transference' or 'transposition', and experiments in alchemy have also been studied from this psychological point of view. The results, which have been known in India for centuries, show that all of these experiments are nothing more than pure esoteric symbolism. We are locked in at all sides; everything to us is anthropomorphic: we are totality.

As dream-images are sometimes created by physical actions such as digestion or the functionings of the kidney and the liver, so religious images and the archetype of the Collective Unconscious may be a reflection of a psychical physiology, or of a vegetative life in the soul corresponding to *chakras*, plexuses, *nadis* and so on. Thus the gods live within our bodies; they are phenomena occupying different places and performing different functions. The angels work within our kidneys in much the same way as they do in the most distant galaxies in the heavens. The animals of the forest also reside within us as forces or instincts. They are in our *chakras*.

The most terrifying aspect of this concept is that while we live we occupy a body, which in turn is a miniature of the body of the Universe. We are cells in a cosmic body, and at the same time we are microcosms. The result is a game of endless mirrors, and the Universe is like that Chinese box-trick in which a whole series of little boxes are contained one within the other.

The stars are the *chakras* of the macrocosm; the Milky Way is Sushumna, Ida and Pingala. Kundalini passes through the skies like the Serpent of Creation. The worlds of the sky are psychical and physical emanations of the body of the cosmic Christ, whereas man is Christ incarnated. While we live, we exist within a small body, which in turn is within a larger, the Universe. Thus space travel corresponds to the movement of a small cell passing from the kidney to the heart. Whereas a mental trip to the sun or the moon, such as is taken by the yogis of India or by my Master in Chile, is both a psychical trip from one *chakra* to another, and a psychical trip through the constellations. Yet, in either case, the voyage always has to remain within the great mental body. Like those Tibetan *tankas*, which show the Wheel of Life located within the belly of a demon, we are locked in the Universe, and the Universe in turn is within us, each of us at the same time having an objective unity. Perhaps death will be an escape from this prison, a departure as much from the small body as from the large, so that we will be able to contemplate the Demon from without.

It is impossible to say more, for no explanatory words exist. Indeed, these conjectures already verge on madness. While we live we are nostalgic about heaven; once dead, we will probably be nostalgic about the body and consider that physical existence was heaven. Perhaps we shall return reincarnated; perhaps not. Nobody knows whether death is a total dissolution; no one has seen the dark side of the moon. All we know is that death is a departure from physical life. The condition of the two is that of essential oppositeness, and as a result there is no possible communication between those who are dead and those who are alive, for each is concentrating in a different direction: those who are alive look inward, whereas the dead look outward.

The only possible clue to the mystery seems to be that ancient science of Atlantis, Yoga, which allows the Serpent to uncoil at one extreme and to remain simultaneously coiled in the other. It is a process of being alive and dead at the same time, of looking inward and also outward; it unites the Ego and the Self. That is the only possible path, a narrow pass over the mountains which has been lost to man for centuries.

31

THE CITY OF THE ETERNAL WEDDING

FROM the cave of Amarnath in Kashmir, I decided to continue my pilgrimage to Banaras as the Swami of Ashahabal had advised. But before going there I decided to visit the temples at Khajuraho, because I believed that they would be attuned to the meditations I had already begun.

The temples of Khajuraho are famous all over the world for their erotic sculpture, and are considered one of the highest expressions of the medieval renaissance in India. Khajuraho was founded by the Chandela kings who came from Rajasthan, and who conquered what are now the United Provinces in central India. The city flourished in particular between the years 950 and 1050.

Prior to that time Indian art had reached its highest point during the Gupta period of the fifth century, when India became united for the first time after the death of Ashoka. There is nothing quite like Gupta art. Somehow the sculptors of that epoch were able to express the mystery of primary forces; they were almost like gods. The stone heads of the Buddhas reflect an infinite pity and a serene acceptance of pain; they express the extraordinary attitude of one who has entered Nirvana at one end of a cord, while remaining voluntarily tied to the earth at the other. The sculpture at Khajuraho, by contrast, seems to have an almost decadent refinement. The carved bodies seem to have been formed by a wind blowing from some other universe, from an almost devilish paradise, and their naturalness seems to have been achieved by some forbidden magic. There is nothing like them anywhere else in the world. These figures are not naturalistic, but they are almost painfully attractive.

The earliest temples of India were almost devoid of sculpture, and in primitive Buddhism the image, called Murti, was prohibited. But by the time of the Gupta period it had returned with great

forcefulness. This image is Maya or the Universe, and it is a symbolic expression of the thought of God. The anonymous sculptors who created these carvings intuitively seemed to understand this thought, and during this golden period many statues of this kind were carved all over India. In the western part they may be found at Ellora and at Elephanta, in the south at Belur and Halebid, and along the eastern shore at Bhubaneshwar, Puri and Konarak.

Who these sculptors were, no one knows, but they seem to have been almost demi-gods. Even their number is unknown, yet the astonishing thing is that the faces and forms are always the same, in thousands upon thousands of sculptures in many different places. All of these artists seem to have followed a precise canon of art, and they seem to have accepted a uniform concept of sign and gesture, such as is found in Indian dancing. Moreover, they really seem to have known the secret of creation. They knew that the Mother, Shakti, one day awoke and looked at herself in a mirror, and then in a second and then in a third until the world was created.

Whereas Shakti, the Mother, is the ultimate model of all the statues, the model of the temples themselves is Mount Kailas. All the temples of south and central India attempt to reproduce the shape of the mountain. The temple also has the shape of the body of a man, and the circular disc, at the top of the dome, is the halo or coronary *chakra* over the head. Moreover, the form of the temple is always identical. On the outer walls there are always hundreds of images, reflecting war, life, death, love, procreation—in a word, Maya or Illusion. But inside, in the most secret shrines, Shiva meditates as a Lingam. As has already been explained, the Lingam symbolizes ecstatic concentration; it is the erect dorsal spine, along which the fire of the Serpent rises towards Samadhi. The interior Self or god remains unchanged in a profound dream, unaffected by what goes on externally, by its own creation which is reflected in the images on the outer walls of the temple.

Foreigners who visit Khajuraho usually cannot understand it. It is naturally difficult for a Western Christian to appreciate a religious temple decorated wholly with erotic figures. Frequently these visitors are scandalized; they depart full of righteous indignation and write angry articles condemning Indian morality. In the past the Mohammedans were also offended, and with gunfire and hammers they destroyed many of the temples. For it must be remembered that this great period of art was interrupted by the Moslem invasion, although it was actually another Rajput king who brought the Chandela dynasty of Khajuraho to an end.

Khajuraho was built in a beautiful place, in the midst of forests

surrounded by low mountains, with a river passing through the centre. Yet all of the palaces that were built there have now disappeared, as have some eighty temples. Only seven have survived. Much of the sculpture of the destroyed temples was scattered in a great radius around the area, and many villagers have struck their ploughs against a dark stone which turned out to be a beautiful statue of Shiva and his wife Parvati, affectionately loving each other. These villagers often took these statues to their huts, cleaned them up a little and, after anointing them with red sandalwood paste, made them into household gods.

In the most splendid days of Khajuraho the temples were attended by Devadasis, or sacred dancers, who were in fact prostitutes, or courtesans of the gods. These Devadasis were imported from all over India, and were selected for the beauty of their faces and figures. Most of them came from Rajasthan. They were then carefully trained in the art of divine love, and they were initiated into the cult, so they could help in the supreme ecstasy and perfection of the Brahmacharis, or chaste disciples. Possibly they also served as models for the anonymous artists who carved the faces and bodies of Parvati. When I think of them I am reminded of another place on the top of a mountain, which was also perhaps saved from the Flood, and where the Virgins of the Sun went after the capture of Cuzco by Pizarro. That place is Macchu Picchu.

When I arrived at Khajuraho I spent a whole day walking about the temples and looking at the statuary. All the postures of carnal love are reproduced here. Everywhere the female is fervent in love; she is wholly enveloped in the supreme passion, engaged in giving herself away. She searches for her lover, taking his head into her hands, enveloping him with her thighs and bending and swinging her body. On her face is an expression of complete ecstasy, for she is engaged in making him wise and in perfecting him, while her body and her soul are totally lost in the act of giving, or perhaps in the nameless pleasure. Other women help the central couple; these are the servents or contributing forces. The male lover incorporates them in the circle of his enjoyment, and with both hands he caresses them while at the same time he takes possession of his divine consort. But, strangely enough, the faces of the servants who are helping the couple, and who support the female so that she may maintain her acrobatic posture, are inscrutable and serene as though they were taking part in a rite or masque. Although they are caressed, and even at times caress themselves, their faces reflect nothing but service and devotion. Moreover, the face of the male lover expresses not desire, but total absence. He is shown as though he were dreaming,

while only one part of him remains sustaining his lover, giving her protection and infinite tenderness. He appreciates her sacrifice and the pain she endures for his cause; he appreciates the technique which she has perfected in order to liberate him. She has wholly descended to the human level, to the level of flesh, for service and for maternity. Thus she is the creation or the world. He meanwhile is beyond her, he is beyond everything at the other end of the cord; and he loves her with an infinite tenderness for he loves her as himself. The male lover is at once ubiquitous and surrounded; he is immobile and abandoned; he holds his lover between his arms and penetrates her. He incorporates her within himself, but at the same time he always keeps her without.

The terrifying mystery expressed in these images seems to reflect the intuitive consciousness or Collective Unconscious of the whole people. Nevertheless, India has already forgotten their meaning. Damaged as much by Moslem conquest as by Christian missionaries, these statues are now a cause of shame to many modern Indians. Yet they are her greatest glory. For sex was sacred; like everything in India, it was symbolic.

The whole world may be conceived of at Khajuraho, except that here the final stages are emphasized. When Krishna said, 'I am the desire, the lust which procreates,' this statement represented the first creation. The Father coupling with his Wife produced a Son, the world. This union (Maithuna) was sexual, but the sex of the world, considered as illusion, is the furthest reflection of the original act. It is the last of the series of mirrors. The statues at Khajuraho, which are representations in stone of Tantric thought, represent the attempt to return towards the union of the Self and the Ego. It does not use sex to procreate, but to destroy creation and to dissolve Maya. It is a forbidden, sterile love; it is diabolic and magical. It is love without love.

On the temples of Khajuraho there are no statues of children, for the product of the love portrayed here is not a son of the flesh, but the son of death. The product of this love is a lotus flower; it is an ark which allows man to pass over the terrifying waters of death.

To understand the statuary at Khajuraho, one must also know the Kamasutra, a book of Indian love, and one must realize that it was written by a wise Brahman who was a mystic, and whose principal aim was to make men better and wiser. The message of this book is that whoever searches for liberation of the soul must realize that he cannot leave behind secret desires and morbid curiosities, for everything depends on the mind and on motives. What is important is the meaning. Thus a cannibal cannot be

considered an assassin. The supreme path is always along the razor's edge.

At its height, Khajuraho was a sophisticated and almost super-civilized city. As a result, the kind of love that is portrayed on the walls of its temples is likely to have been essentially aristocratic and selective, something like a religious initiation for a minority. Such stratification, however, means little in India, for status is temporary and fluctuating. For example, King Ashoka became a monk, and to this day rich merchants frequently give up all their goods and become mendicants and vagabonds or retire to the jungles as anchorites. Thus hedonism in India has not quite the same dangers it has for others, for at any moment it can be cast off at will, like a stone thrown into a pond.

The men who practised the secret love at Khajuraho had to be well versed in various arts: they had to know how to decorate the bodies of their lovers, they had to know all about jewels and food and they had to be experts in their appreciation of femininity. The women, in turn, were trained from adolescence in the mystical art of love. Their training was quite different from that of a geisha, however, for their art was essentially religious. The woman was not taught to satisfy man physically, but to touch his intimate centres, or *chakras*, and to impel him towards the Self. Thus the woman taught man to abandon her physically and to incorporate her spiritually within himself, so that he married not a woman but his own soul.

Although this religious art had an ancient heritage, coming from an unknown past, in Khajuraho it reappeared as a reaction against the devotional or *bhakti* tendency which had invaded India. It was in fact Tantrism with its accompanying Kaula and Kapalika cults. Kaula is the same as Shakti, the Serpent, and her opposite is Akula, or Shiva. The union of these two produced Inkaula, or the Hermaphrodite. The rite which produced this result was called Kola-marga. Kapalika was a much more secret cult than Kaula. It probably involved human sacrifice and also the eating of the flesh and blood of the victim. Those who followed this cult lived secretly with their initiated women, who were called yoginis. The most ancient temple at Khajuraho is dedicated to sixty-four of these yoginis, and is called Chausath-Yogini. The members of the Kapalika cult went about covered with ashes and with their heads shaven, except for a piece of hair which hung down at the back of their necks. They also wore jewels in their ears and around their necks, and they carried a skull in one hand and a staff in the other. The Kapalikas believed that the centre of the individual, or of the Self, was located in the

yoni, or sex, of a woman. By meditating on it, they believed they could attain liberation. They simply considered that all men were Shiva and all women Parvati. This cult is considered to be very ancient, and its rites were practised long before the arrival of the Chandela kings.

The compiler of these Tantric practices in the seventh and eighth centuries was a king called Indrabhatti, who in his work describes his initiation through a carnal act called Maithuna in Sanskrit. His daughter, the beautiful Laksminkara Devi, was said to be one of the most advanced and enthusiastic members of this aristocratic cult of sexual love.

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It is always important to remember that this rite was essentially a forbidden love, *contra nature*, for in it everything is contrary to the apparent purpose of creation. It has nothing to do with the procreation of the race. Yet Krishna himself, the blue god—that Pan of India or Christ of Atlantis—gave precedence to the act: he loved a married woman and he danced with her in a jungle within a circle surrounded by *gopis* or servants who were the shepherdesses of Gokul. The secret wedding that took place in the gardens of Brindaban was the same as the Tantric Maithuna.

Such magic love has to be antisocial and illegitimate; moreover, it is sterile since it is only internally procreative.

Marriage as an institution was not considered advisable for a Tantric hero, whether he was a yogi or yogini, unless perhaps he was used to living a double life.

This mystery is expressed in a sublime way on the walls of the temples of Khajuraho, especially in the expression of the figures who love each other in a way that is at once frenzied and static.

The Tantric hero is forbidden to practise love passionately or compulsively. This is a rule permitted only to the woman, since she is the active participant and because she represents the feminine aspect of the universe and the creative side of Shiva himself. She is Shakti or Kundalini. Shakti is in fact the creator of the world, or it is at least through her that God creates the world. Shakti is both the Demiurge and Maya or Illusion, since Illusion is the multiplicity of forms. God creates the world because of love, or rather out of his love for his Shakti or his active catalyst. Love is always an illusion or a dream; and so God does not really participate in creation. Instead, he remains untouched and immobile. This concept is represented again and again in the images of Khajuraho.

This metaphysical concept of woman playing the active role while man plays the passive is not usually found in the imperfect human world, yet it represents a fundamental religious concept. Indeed, it may be archetypal, for originally it was accepted amongst the primitive matriarchies, and it may one day take its place in the world again. At any rate, in the Tantras as in alchemy, woman is reincorporated into divine life. This action represents the triumph of mother worship over father worship. The Mother is a goddess, coming from Mohenjo-Daro and Dravidian time, has played a major role in India where she has been called Shakti, Uma, Parvati, Kali, Durga and Tara. In these goddesses, the early mystery of the female is rediscovered and revalued, and this transcendent feminine quality is reaffirmed in the essence of attraction, which fascinates and deceives and which is now understood on the metaphysical level. The feminine principle involves death and resurrection as does nature, but it is also implies reincarnation. The masculine, on the other hand, which is represented by father worship, is hard and cruel and provides no access for return. This was the religion of the Aryans, but even they must have known the magic cult of the woman when they lived in the northern oases. They simply forgot it on their long pilgrimage southward.

The Tantras see Shakti, or the Mother, in everything; they consider her to be the pillar of both the macrocosm and the microcosm. Thus liberation can only be achieved through contact with woman in this world, by means of a sexual pilgrimage.

In Tantric yoga, women first have to be recognized externally and then accepted as the only possible means of attaining unity. Thus marriage with woman is the first step, but it must always be a magical marriage.

32

THE WEDDING

In all of this it must not be forgotten that what is important is the symbolic meaning or metaphor. Although written language and sculptured images may appear to be heavily overladen with sex, they are so only in appearance. This is certainly true of the Song of Songs, and when the Roman Catholics interpreted this poem of ecstatic love as the love of Christ for his Church, they were surely correct in doing so, for man is always limited in his expression. The yogi in a trance and an individual suffering an attack of epilepsy may look alike; but they are worlds apart. Thus what counts is only the deepest meaning. St. Theresa of Avila, in her *Moradas*, was overcome with an almost sensual love when she married her beloved Christ, who was nothing more than her own soul, or her masculine counterpart. St. John of the Cross also has recounted the pilgrimage in which he pursued the lover in the dark night of the soul. Symbolically, novice nuns are married to Christ. Thus, on its highest plane, when it is practised amongst the more sophisticated members of the cult, the Tantric ceremony was only a symbolic act, for Maithuna occurs only within the body of the man.

The human body is considered to contain two essential elements: Shiva, or the static principle, and Shakti, the dynamic principle. Shiva, who is masculine, resided in the empty space which is found between the brain and the skull, and which is called Sunya. Shakti, which is feminine, is the Serpent, Kundalini, which is coiled round the base of the Tree in the Muladhara Chakra. The right side of the body is considered to be masculine and it contains Pingala or the sun; the left is feminine and holds Ida, or the moon.

Thus Maithuna really represents the union of opposites within the same body. The union of Shiva and Shakti, of Ida and Pingala, or Kundalini with the Atman, and also of Christ with the soul or

of Christ with his church. There are several weddings in one, and opposites are progressively united. First breathing is married with the Manipura Chakra and finally Shakti with Shiva, which is Dante with Beatrice or the Ego with the Self, the union of the masculine and feminine within the same individual. The progression is always towards the single unit; multiplicities give way to union. The progression is the reverse of the act of creation; the images of the mirrors are reversed. Shakti and Shiva, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, in the end become one person. By the union of these opposites, totality is achieved and the Hermaphrodite is produced. And on top of the Tree of Life the source of eternal life and eternal youth is found. There the mind and vision become one, and particular organs lose their identity. This is the achievement of Sunya, or Emptiness; it is the Brother of Silence or the Nirvana of the Buddhists. According to the Tantric cult of Mahayana Buddhism, this Emptiness is Compassion, and for that reason the Boddhisattva Avalokitesvara entered Nirvana only at one extreme of the cord, and he always remained bound to the world by the other. This union of opposites, perhaps, has the form and sound of the syllable OM. When extremes are united each fulfils the desires of the other.

This wedding with oneself is a marriage with the Serpent. Once the rites are fulfilled the body grows wings, and the soul is covered with a tunic. This is the shirt of Nessus, which allows us to go on living after death. It allows us to enter the state of continued consciousness even after the physical body ceases to exist. Thus the wedding is also a resurrection; it is the birth of a new Adam and the recovery of Atlantis. There, in Sunya, the original sin is redeemed.

In India Tantrism has led to excesses, and to orgies and aberrations. Such a development was probably inevitable in this dangerous and complicated symbolism; nevertheless, the Tantrism of the Left Hand asserts that the road to liberation excludes nothing. It claims that self-denial and asceticism are absurd, since the Supreme Emptiness achieved in Sunya produces the same results, only more satisfactorily. Yet the Tantric method is the most difficult of all, for it demands continual vigilance over all parts of existence. Nevertheless, it alone allows us to achieve the hardness of a diamond while at the same time remaining as soft as lambswool.

33

THE FACE OF THE BETROTHED

WHOEVER has achieved this mystical marriage has a face of dark stone. Slightly inclined, with the eyelids half closed, the face seems to be looking at what is happening within his head; it seems to be listening to the echoing steps of the sleep-walking Virgin who has come up from the depths and who is proceeding along secret corridors, passing old tombs and palaces along the way. The lips of this face are slightly open, revealing a faint smile which seems to be a mixture of pleasure and pain, or of shadow and light. These opposites are like alternating thoughts which follow each other in a circle within the head. Thus, as he makes love to the person within himself, he kisses himself as he kisses her, and that action is reflected on his face which is at once divine and sensual. One side of his face is dark and reflects the twilight of death; the other side is alive. His is a face of a being who has penetrated the mystery of death, and, having been bitten by the Serpent, his face reflects the poison. This division into light and darkness also reflects the paradoxical birth of the son of death, who is also the son of eternity. With its half-opened eyes, this face seems to look through all experience, and it reflects, amongst other things, the joyful pain of the cross and the triumph of death seen retrospectively. This face also seems to understand the very act of creation; it sees the children leaving the father, and simultaneously experiences their joyful return. It is a face of a being who first descended into the earth at the roots of the Tree and to the hell beneath it, and who then followed a seemingly endless pilgrimage until finally he climbed to the top of the Tree of Life and met there, in the Hall of the Palace, that person for whom he has been searching for such a long time. And the happiness

of their encounter produced tears, which are the fruit of the Tree of Life.

Two stony tears fall along the cheek of this married figure. One belongs to him, the other to her. This hermaphrodite stone face was sculpted more than a thousand years ago in the city of Khajuraho.

34

THE MOONSTONE

THE moonstone is the third eye which opens in the Ajna Chakra, in the space between the eyebrows, in order to permit that stony face to observe his own wedding and to discover, in the sandy deserts of the world, the footprint of his Beloved. This third eye is a marvellous crystal, and is like a milky flower with lotus-petals. It also seems to be like a bird which has spread its wings; it is both the Bird of Paradise and the Dove of the Holy Ghost.

With the opening of this third eye, which is always a voluntary act, the epoch of the Father and of the Son comes to an end, and the era of the Holy Ghost, or of the man who has gained wings, is introduced. This is the epoch of Aquarius, in which the moonstone is found beneath the waters of the South Pole.

But the Holy Ghost also performs through other signs, as in the tongues of fire which one day broke out over the heads of the apostles in order to open their third eyes and to give them vision. In this way the Holy Ghost is also Kundalini, the serpentine fire which sleeps at the base of the Tree of Life. From its root in hell, it slowly rises and spreads its wings in the space between our eyebrows, becoming a Plumed Serpent or a dove, and making the third eye cause tears to flow from the other eyes, because it has seen the long pilgrimage, and, through the crystal of the moonstone, has been able to observe its own death and wedding.

35

THE MYSTERIES

INDIA is introverted and projects its spirituality inward, whereas the Christian West is extroverted and sees salvation outside of the individual. For the West, marriage, death and resurrection are all external. Love too is always external; the lover is met in the street or in a square; at any rate, at some place outside of the individual. Love then becomes a dialogue between two persons, and the lover is external just as God is. Modern science, with its space travel, emphasizes the externality of the Western world-view. By contrast, the Oriental always travels internally.

Yet, true in some ways as these generalizations are, they lose some of their force when one comes to realize how the pendulum swings. For what is outside is always inside, and vice versa. The individual is the microcosm, and the Universe is a succession of infinite mirrors. For this reason a physical wedding must take place; the Beloved must be possessed in a physical, Tantric manner, also the Beloved must die a physical death, and the long anguish waiting for her resurrection must be endured.

Beatrice had to exist externally in body and soul, and Dante loved her in that form. Then, when she died, Dante incorporated her into his own soul; he had to drink his bitter chalice to its dregs in order to discover the depths of his passion and the solitary mysteries capable of leading him one day from the depths of hell to heaven.

A similar thing must have happened to the disciples of Jesus. Perhaps the physical crucifixion had to take place; a man had to die and, in the moment before nothingness, he had to shout out, 'Father, why hast thou forsaken me?' Then, and then only, were the disciples, who had loved him so much, able to incorporate him into their own souls in order to relive the hard passion, and to prolong his life in the Myth.

Human pain is also divine pain; and for that reason what is needed most is loyalty to our own dead. This loyalty will enable us to be resurrected along with those who have died. In the resurrection of Christ we are all resurrected, as we also are in the resurrection of the Beloved.

As I go about the world I carry within my heart the body of my Beloved. I often look at her eyes and at her golden hair; I also lend her my own eyes so that she may be able to look out at the world. And when she is finally resurrected within my soul, then I will be able to look out through her eyes. I will then have three or four eyes, and will have become resurrected along with her.

These then are the mysteries; one must know the totality of fundamental facts, and one must know the multiple directions in which they vibrate and radiate outwards, repeating the explosion of creation. For what is inside is also outside, and thus we must go outside of ourselves in order to penetrate ourselves and to know ourselves. Only in this way can the full intensity of the drama be realized.

The key word in this process is love. We must love our Beloved as ourselves; love our neighbours as ourselves, and love God as ourselves. We must also love ourselves as God.

In order to understand and to officiate in these great mysteries, we shall have to realize both ends of the cosmic pendulum, and travel with it from one side of the Universe to the other, going outward and inward, knowing life and death, so as to be able to avoid catastrophe and to merit eternal life.

Atlantis has sunk; Christ has been crucified; the Beloved has died. Thus the stone face of Khajuraho weeps. But there is also a sword which represents a difficult and terrifying science, which may be capable of changing the fatal succession of events. This sword awaits us at the bottom of the tomb, and we must exchange our own bodies for it. The name of the tomb is Sunya or the Brother of Silence.

36

THE SONG OF THE SUFI

CONTINUING on my pilgrimage to Banaras, I stopped in Kampur in order to visit the Sufi master, Sri Radha Mohan. The word Sufi means soft or smooth, like lambswool. In the evenings this master usually walks in the gardens of his house, carrying a rosary in his hands and murmuring prayers and *mantrams*. His friends often come to pray with him or to meditate with him. In moments of silence he closes his eyes, as if to suggest that he is almost in a trance, or that his unspoken words come from unattainable depths in the subconscious.

In the evening, with the moon casting shadows through the mango trees, Sri Radha Mohan lay down on his cot in the garden and called me to him. He signalled me to sit down opposite him, so that, as he explained, the vibrations of his heart could reach me. Then he began to sing softly in a deep voice. His song was a tender lament, full of nostalgia and suitable to the moonlight in the evening. It told of a shepherd who was looking for Krishna and who, after passing through many valleys and over mountain passes, one day entered a house, asking for food. At that very moment Krishna himself passed along the road. Later on the shepherd heard how he had missed the encounter, and he uttered this sad lament: 'I have lost my heart along the way, and have never found it again.'

37

THE GREAT KUMBH MELA OF ALLAHABAD

AT CERTAIN intervals of time, when the stars combine in a certain way, the people of India foregather at the city of Allahabad in order to bathe at the place where the River Jumna joins the Ganges and disappears in it. At this place, the two rivers are married, as Ida and Pingala are in the spine. Both rivers come from celestial abodes, the Ganges having its source at Mount Kailas in the great head of Shiva. Yet there is another river which attends the wedding of these two others at the Sangham, or junction, at Allahabad. This is the River Saraswati, which no one has ever seen, and it is the invisible Sushumna or even perhaps Kundalini. Saraswati thus confirms the wedding, transforming it into a trinity of Shiva, Parvati and Kartikeya.

For this festival, caravans come from every corner of India. The roads are clogged with pilgrims, who come on foot or in carts, and on camels and elephants. Many others come by train or aeroplane. Altogether, when I was there, there were four million souls who had gathered in the city of Allahabad. Here and there along the river's edge, tall iron towers were erected from which the crowd could be watched and its movements controlled. Finding myself in the midst of this immense crowd, I felt like a straw in the wind; I was lost, yet I was moved by an indefinable feeling of respect for the immense forces which were united there. After a little while I saw the President of India arrive, and, in the company of holy men, beggars and other miserable people, enter naked into the water where the three rivers meet. He was anointed, and moved slowly and reverently. Then came Nehru, dressed in white. He slowly approached the river's edge, looking vaguely and absently at the current of the sacred

river which seemed to be taking everything along with it, even himself. I watched him as he barely touched the water with the tips of his fingers and then dabbed his forehead with it. Like myself, he seemed to be partly involved in this ceremony and in many other ways to be very remote from it. I could understand his feelings and the painfulness of his action.

Nevertheless, I decided that I would bathe in the waters later on in the day. In the meantime I was just one individual jostled in a crowd of thousands. Soon a procession of Saddhus approached the river bank. These Saddhus, or holy men, were naked; their bodies were covered with ashes, and their faces were painted green. Their chief, or *guru*, rode on an enormous elephant, whose feet were hobbled by chains and who therefore advanced jerkily, trying to balance himself. From time to time he raised his trunk and snorted. The *guru*, who was completely naked, and who represented Shiva in the procession, was covered with an unbelievable mixture of coloured pastes, saffron and excrement. He was preceded by dancers carrying swords and striking angry blows at the air before them. Following them marched a band of musicians playing drums and flutes, while behind came fakirs rolling on beds of thorns or walking along with their tongues and arms pierced by nails. The procession concluded with more elephants who, in spite of their awkward movements, never brushed against these men. Something within them seemed to tell them not to.

Just then, at the height of this great *mela*, or gathering of unbelievable persons, disaster struck. Somewhere, for some reason no one could explain, someone had taken fright, and like a forest fire the terror had spread. Someone else had fallen in this moment of panic and others tripped over him and also fell on to the ground. Almost immediately the whole multitude went mad, and hundreds were stepped on and trampled in the dust. In a matter of minutes the Kumbh Mela of Allahabad had witnessed an unexplainable panic, a collective terror and the pointless death of hundreds. All around me lay wounded in improvised carts, the dying and those who were already dead. There were old men and children, young girls and old women. An old woman passed by, crying for protection; she had lost all her people, and since she came from the extreme south of India she knew no one in Allahabad. But nobody made a move. Everyone was simply stunned and blinded, not knowing what to say or think, and not knowing why this tragedy had occurred. After a while, however, calmness gradually returned, for these are a people made for suffering and misfortunes. Thus they were able to tell themselves that it was all for the best, for those who

had died on that day and in that place would be blessed by the sacred rivers and by the conjunction of the stars in the heavens.

At noon I decided to visit the Camp of the Yogis and Saddhus. Here all the well-known *gurus* of India, accompanied by their followers and disciples, had gathered. They were like an army of magicians and saints living in tents. Many were already in a state of trance, looking as though they were dead, or as if they had been resurrected into a timeless time. The atmosphere was thick with the smell of burning incense, and the area was crowded with thousands of curious and reverent people. These swamis and yogis had met to pray and to repeat the *mantrams*; they were praying for those who had died in the Kumbh Mela and for those who had passed before them. I was told that amongst the *gurus* were Ananda Mai, the Mother, and that Shivananda was also expected and that the Swami Laxmanju was coming from Kashmir. But I saw none of them there.

After leaving the encampment, I decided to take a boat and to submerge myself into the waters of the river. But along the way I was approached by a naked Saddhu, who stopped me. He was a young man with sad eyes, and he held on to me by the arm. 'Why is there no justice in the world?' he asked. I looked at him closely and then realized that he was weeping. His question apparently referred to those who had died earlier in the day.

I didn't know what to reply, and so all I said was, 'How can you expect to find justice in Kaliyuga?'

He remained on the edge of the shore, watching my boat leave, and in the silence his tears kept rolling down his cheeks. Finally he left and lost himself in the crowd.

Then, in the conjunction of the visible Ganges and Jumna and the invisible Saraswati, I took off my clothes and submerged myself under the water. As I went deeper and deeper I felt I was approaching the Wedding and meeting of John the Baptist and Jesus—for Jesus was then transformed into Christ.

38

THE HOLY CITY OF BANARAS

BUT it is in Kasi, or Banaras, that bathing in the sacred waters really reaches its apogee. For centuries the Hindus of India have been seduced by the image of the river, which is so like life itself. No two people ever swim in precisely the same mixture of water, but the river remains; it has a name and a unity. Thus the question which the Hindu puts to himself when he submerges in the river is whether, like the river, he also has a unity or identity. Like the river, we are never the same; we are formed by hundreds of different streams, by an infinity of egos; nevertheless, there is always something which gives us the illusion of wholeness, and that is the name. The Hindu, however, is even doubtful about the permanence of the name, for he is already partly dissolved in the waters.

At sunrise, multitudes of the faithful go down to the *gats* of the Ganges. Passing down through the narrow streets of the old city, they reach the wide staircases that descend into the grey water of the river. Along the steps the Brahmans sell rosaries and recite prayers. Where the steps descend into the water, the faithful walk into the river, half naked or with robes that billow about them. The women do not take off their saris, with the result that they cling to their bodies as they submerge into the water. The ritual of bathing is very complicated. First some water is taken between the hands, which is then allowed to slip between the fingers while the individual murmurs ancient Sanskrit prayers and formulas. The head is then dipped into the water several times; and then the whole body becomes covered. Everyone gargles and drinks the water. It must be remembered that this dark fluid is full of mud and urine, and the remains of those who have died. Some soak themselves profusely, while others simply sit with crossed legs, half submerged in the water, and meditate. Yet others dive into the stream and swim

vigorously in it. There are many boats about, usually going upstream and full of children and tourists. Sometimes something floats by that looks like a tree-trunk, bobbing or revolving on the surface of the water. It is not in fact a tree-trunk, but a corpse which is being swept towards the sea, and which has to cross all of Mother India if it is not first eaten by the freshwater fish who inhabit the sacred river. Such a corpse means that the dead person was a leper, for in India the corpses of lepers are never burned but are thrown into the waters of the river.

All along the shores there are funeral pyres for the burning of the dead. Those who have died are brought there by their relations or friends. First the corpse is bathed in the river, and then the Brahman repeats a few *mantrams*. The body is then placed on a pyre of sandalwood or of ordinary wood, and then the fire is lit. The relatives or friends stand around, occasionally poking the ashes to make sure that the corpse is entirely consumed. This ritual usually takes place at early dawn or at dusk, and then the river bank is illumined by hundreds of these fires.

All along the river bank, and in the steep and narrow streets of the city, there are hundreds of temples. These are consecrated to every conceivable god; one for example is dedicated to the goddess of smallpox. There is also a Nepalese temple, covered with erotic figures carved in wood; and there is another dedicated to Kali, in which animals are sacrificed and where blood runs down the marble floor, while dozens of monkeys jump and shriek on the roof. In one small street, which is so narrow that two people cannot pass abreast, there is a small opening in a wall through which can be seen the interior of a temple where the Lingam is dripping with oil, milk and the juice of fruits. Female hands devoutly wash it and pour syrup and perfume over it. At a little distance away, the sound of incessant drum-beats accompanied by prayers and laments may be heard. This is the House of the Widows, which is inhabited by women who have no future in this world. Since they have not fulfilled the rite of Sati, as women used to do centuries ago, that is, since they have not joined their husbands on the funeral pyre, they are now considered to be dead and have to implore the charity of the passer-by and to live out their agonized existence in this nightmare city.

The streets of Banaras have nothing to do with the terrestrial world; they are virtually indescribable, and escape comparison with anything else. They are at once horrifying and seductive, repulsive and fascinating. Whoever has walked through the streets of Banaras with open eyes and an open mind must be aware that he has observed a truly grandiose sight. These streets reflect the

misery of creation and also the great triumph of spirit over misery. Charity and inhumanity, pity and horror, the petty and the cosmic, all pass along the streets of Banaras. Moreover, there is a tremendous noisy laughter with which everything vibrates, and which seems to say, 'Look upon this farce, this pain and misery and grandeur, and laugh, because none of it really exists; we are all comedians playing a great comedy called Maya.'

There is also a good deal of magic and illusion in Banaras. It is something like that of Chandni Chowk in Old Delhi, but here it is the quintessence of religiousness. For the misery and sickness which precede death in Banaras are part of the religious pattern of India. Thus these dying lepers and monsters gaze about them with illumined eyes and peaceful faces; they smile because they are convinced that they are playing their divine role well. Normally a difficult role, it is made easy for them when they accept it as part of the great comedy.

Turbaned dwarfs with twisted legs sit in the street, smiling with eyes full of a fundamental complicity. Passing by them comes another man who is naked and daubed with blue paste. He rises from the ground and throws himself forward with a lurch; then, rising again, he repeats the action. In this way he will finally reach the sacred river, although there are many blocks still ahead of him. For a whole morning I was followed by a small child who kept touching my feet. It was impossible for me to get rid of him, because whenever I gave him money he simply asked me for more.

All along these narrow streets, which are shaded by enormous trees, monkeys play and leap about, and cows solemnly pass by. Everyone has to wait for the cows to move, since they have a kind of perpetual right of way. The streets are also lined with hundreds of shops and stalls, for Banaras is the centre of the silk industry; and the saris of Banaras, with their gold embroideries, are marvels of Indian artisanship and are famous all over the world. There are also, along the river's edge, dozens of luxurious palaces which have been built by the Maharajas of the various kingdoms of ancient India. The open porches of these palaces have been dedicated by the Maharajas to the use of the people from their district when they visit Banaras. Thus here, as elsewhere, the promiscuous life of India is emphasized. For in India everything is done in common, and the Indian is always surrounded by people. He lives, loves, eats, sleeps and dies communally and therefore he has had to preserve an inward, spiritual privacy. Virtually every Maharaja or rich Indian merchant has built a palace in Banaras, but these are all on one side of the river; on the other side, completely alone, is the palace of the Maharaja of Banaras, who does not belong to the

Kshatriya caste but to the Brahmanic caste, for, according to popular belief, he is the direct descendant of Shiva on earth. The young Maharaja is a modest and cultured person. He is particularly interested in comparative religion and in the pre-Columbian civilizations of America—the Mayas, the Aztecs and the Incas. He believes that there once was a bond between America and India and that this connection should be investigated.

Banaras is one of the most sacred cities of all of India; it is the Vatican of Hinduism. But to understand it one must also think of it as a Lourdes or Jerusalem, where pilgrims and the incurably diseased gather to await a miracle so that they may die in peace. Yet, in spite of its sacred history, there are few famous Hindu temples or buildings in Banaras, since most of them were destroyed by the Moslems centuries ago. Thus Aurangzeb erected a mosque over the ruins of a Hindu temple. But the Moslems could not destroy the river or change its course. And the spirit of the river is what is most characteristic of Banaras, and indeed of Hinduism itself. Thus Banaras is, amongst other things, famous for its ancient university, which is attended by scholars from all over India, and for its mystics and yogis, who attain *samadhi* or *kaivalya*, which is an even more profound trance. Moreover, Banaras was where Tulsidas translated the Ramayana into Hindi and the Rishi Vatsyayana wrote the Kamasutra.

But more than anything else, people come to Banaras to die by its sacred waters, for the Hindu who dies there expects to liberate himself from his *karma*, or at least to reach a superior incarnation in the next life. This belief explains the illumined faces and the happy eyes of those who have overcome the pain of the flesh and the misery of the world. They have already passed through the curtain of filth and horror and live spiritually in a world of divine light—amongst the pearls and diamonds of a happy future. No other country but India has achieved this vision. India is a country of martyrs; it is made for suffering; yet behind this apparent misery lies a vision which has been able to transform a whole people, as only a very few Western saints have been transformed. This is the vision of India, which sees the world not as a matter of daily events and of pain and pleasure, but as a reflection of a total universal purpose. Yet the rulers of modern India, with their Oxford and Cambridge educations, are ashamed of Banaras. They deny the divinity of the city, and they try to transform India into a great machine factory, which may be externally clean and neat, but which is rotten inside. Already modern India has begun to reek like the rest of the world; its soul has begun to decompose, and it is being

attacked by a leprosy which is worse than anything seen in Banaras. This is the leprosy of modernism, of the industrial revolution, and of atheism and rationalism.

The curtain of dirt and misery which is found in Banaras hides diamonds and pearls; it is a penitential mask. The iron curtain of Kaliyuga, on the contrary, with its hygiene, birth-control and its cities of asphalt and cement, hides the rottenness of the soul and the decay of the spirit. In short, it hides nothingness. When I was in Banaras my guide told me, 'Religion is at odds with hygiene, and it probably always has been.' Banaras may be losing out before the modern age, but Banaras still is a symbol capable of saving the world: it tells us loudly that men still have the right even to be miserable.

All of Banaras is affected by the idea of *karma* and of reincarnation. *Karma* is the spiritual law of cause and effect: the actions of today produce effects in the next incarnation. For the Buddhist this is a perfectly mechanical law, whereas for the Vedanta philosophers it is a kind of judgment. Their view is that Brahma-Isvara, which is that aspect of Brahma that is concerned with creation, weighs and computes the action of an individual being, so as to establish his *karma* in his subsequent incarnation. The word *karma* means 'act', and some Vedanta scholars believe there is a collective *karma* operating within a particular *kalpa*, or period of time. In this way, each individual action would affect the whole of humanity. This concept has something in common with the idea of a collective payment for original sin, which requires that all men must pay equally for the sins of their fathers. This concept also implies that the prayer of an innocent child can save the world.

For the laws of *karma* to be fulfilled, so that a final liberation may be attained, a Great Wheel is required: the small Wheel of Life is not enough. What are really required are five thousand wheels; an individual must live five thousand lives. It is this concept which fundamentally divides the Western world from India. Although I am able to convince myself intellectually that reincarnation takes place, for it certainly seems likely, I realize that it is one thing to believe rationally and another to be convinced of an idea inwardly. Thus, even though I say that I believe in reincarnation, my soul and my blood will not accept the idea. At heart, the Christians can have only one life and no more. The modern Indian, by contrast, may claim that he does not believe in reincarnation, but at the root of his being he is committed to five thousand lives, and this concept will rise to his consciousness at crucial moments, especially at the crisis of death.

If we think of the implications of these two ideas, we will

discover the real basis for the gulf which separates even those of us who live in South America from India. This basis is the fundamentally different attitude taken towards time by the Westerner and the Indian. An Indian saint does not have to act as though he were a saint through and through. Saintly in some things, he can also be something of a sinner. The sinner, in turn, can be something of a saint. What this means is that there is no need to rush, there is no need for a sudden and definite conversion. There is plenty of time—there are five thousand lives—in which to reach the ultimate goal. The West, on the other hand, is always troubled by a feeling of urgency. The Western saint is always a complete saint, and one of the worst things one can say of a Westerner is that he is a hypocrite. But hypocrisy does not exist in India; people may seem to be hypocritical, but the concept has no meaning to them. Thus the Western man is whatever he is to the core; everything that he does is defined and dramatized, and individuality is everything. In India the complete opposite obtains: the Indian may have thousands of individual lives, but, because of this plenitude, none of them counts for much. The Indian does not love or hate, he does not live or die. He merely glides like a river towards eternity. His individuality is dissolved a thousand times on the sandalwood pyres, and he melts into the infinite forms of Maya or Illusion.

The Westerners want to make themselves eternal as individuals. The Hindu, on the other hand, wants to save himself from eternity: he fears that eternity will be something like an unending insomnia. Yet this concept is relatively modern, for the ancient magicians and Siddhas of India once tried to make themselves eternal like an icy sphinx or as a sword.

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It was in Banaras that the Buddha preached for the first time 2500 years ago. The Sermon of Banaras, which he preached at Sarnath, is comparable to the Sermon on the Mount of Jesus. As a result, the Buddha gained his first disciples, or *samanas*, there. On one morning during my stay in Banaras I went out to Sarnath, to see the great *stupa* and the famous Bo tree. This tree was grown from a sprig taken from another tree, which had been planted in Ceylon by a brother of King Ashoka in 350 B.C.; and that tree in turn had come from the sprig of a tree at Bodhgaya, under which the Buddha had meditated. Before leaving I took a leaf from this tree and preserved it.

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On the following morning I decided to visit the Pandit Gopi Nath Kabiraj, who was the real object of my trip to Banaras. I found that he lived in an old two-storey house, placed in the centre of an abandoned garden. When I arrived I gave my name to a servant, and then was directed to climb a narrow stairway up to the attic which was occupied by the Pandit. He received me sitting on a white sheet, and he was naked to the waist. Across his chest was stretched the white cord of the Brahman, and round about him were scattered books and papers. Gopi Nath Kabiraj was a famous Sanskritist, and a former professor at Banaras University. He has written many important works amongst which are *Visuddhananda Prasanga, Surya Vijnana,* and *Yogi Raja drisaja Visuddhananda.* In one of these works he speaks of his Master and of a very secret society located in the Himalayas, and called Jna Jna ganj. By the more orthodox, Gopi Nath Kabiraj is considered a renegade, or a man of fantasies, who has been led astray by pre-Aryan illusions, many of which are contrary to strict Brahmanism.

As I stood before him I noticed his strong features; he had large and intelligent eyes, and his beard, like his hair, was turning white. He signalled me to sit down on the sheet, and seemed somewhat impatient to hear what I had to say. I then told him that a swami from Kashmir, whom he did not know, had told me to come and see him in hopes that he could give me some useful information. Gopi Nath Kabiraj nodded and waited for me to continue.

'I come from very far away,' I said. 'From the Andes of South America, and I have come here in search of the masters of my Chilean Master. I am searching for an old secret society which is hidden somewhere in the Himalayas.'

A brief light seemed to glitter in the eyes of the Pandit, which seemed to suggest that he thought I was yet another madman in search of illusion. But the Pandit did not say anything of that sort; instead he handed me an open book and showed me a photograph.

'Yes, that all exists,' he said. 'And, as you say, it is somewhere in the Himalayas. Look at this.' He then showed me the photograph of a man with a long beard, who was covered with a cloak.

'This yogi is eight hundred years old and he lives somewhere in the Himalayas, in one of those secret *ashrams* which you are looking for—in a Siddha-Ashram.'

I then smiled, for this seemed too much even for me, but the Pandit continued: 'Don't laugh. I have seen these men often: they come to visit me in their ethereal bodies, and very interesting things can happen. Some time ago, in 1940 or 1941, a magazine called *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society* published an article

by a German, who had travelled to Tibet and who had undergone very interesting experiences in connection with these occult societies.'

I then asked the Pandit how I could find this magazine, and he suggested that I visit Professor B. L. Atreya at the University of Banaras. He also told me about another book concerning the secret societies of the Himalayas and written in the Gujarati language. It was called *Brahmanda no Bheta.*

Gopi Nath Kabiraj then closed his eyes and swayed gently from side to side. Finally he spoke again. 'Well, do come back to see me. In the meantime, however, you should visit a friend of mine who is a great astrologer and whose name is Sudhir Ranjau Bhaduri. He lives right here in Banaras, in a place called Ramapura. Before seeing you again, I would like to know more about you through your horoscope. Sudhir Ranjau Bhaduri will prepare one for you. So go and see him first and then come back here.'

That same afternoon I took a small tonga, or cart, which was pulled by an ancient horse, and went out under the rain of the monsoon through narrow streets and curious byways until I finally reached the house where the astrologer, Sudhir Ranjau Bhaduri, lived. For a long time I knocked at the door, but finally I heard steps within and the door creaked open. A stout Negro, with a huge key-ring hanging from his waist, asked me what I was looking for and then, apparently knowing my business, he signalled me to enter, and guided me past piles of wood and machinery collected in a storage-room. He then led me up a narrow staircase to the room of Sudhir Ranjau Bhaduri.

I entered the room and found the astrologer to be a very sweet old man, with a very thin body and face. With him was a young child who turned out to be his grandson. His name was Gopal. The astrologer told me he knew who I was and why I had come, for Gopi Nath Kabiraj had sent him a message. He therefore skipped the preliminaries and simply said: 'I am not going to give you a horoscope, because you don't need one. I will tell you, however, that you should stop looking outside for what is already within you. Inwardly you already possess Mount Kailas and can find there the masters of your Master.'

We remained sitting in silence, as the afternoon shadows gathered in the upper room of this house in the sacred city of Banaras. Gopal, the grandson, lay stretched out on the floor, and the astrologer caressed his head for a moment and then almost seemed to wink at him.

'I think we ought to tell our friend of a technique by which he

can learn more about what is inside him, don't you think?' Gopal nodded his head approvingly, and the astrologer continued:

'This technique is called *shambhuvi*, which means Shiva. It has also been used by the Buddhists. For one week you should walk with a slight weight on your head, placed slightly towards the back of the skull. You can use a stone or any other object. Then for the second week you remove the weight, but open and shut your eyes very slightly several times. Then in the third week sit down, without doing anything or thinking about anything, with your eyes closed. Then you simply wait. Do this every day for three weeks before going to sleep.'

In this way my interview with the astrologer ended. When I left I felt that I had met a superior being and that I had encountered the soul of a very good and very wise man. I can still see him sitting with his grandson in the shadowy upper room of the house in Banaras. He has now been dead for many years, and I never saw him again.

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I then went back to visit Gopi Nath Kabiraj, but could not converse with him, since he was practising his day of silence. I told him, however, about my visit to the astrologer and about the practices or techniques he had suggested I follow. The Pandit clapped his hands with applause. He then wrote on a piece of paper the following message: *Go to visit the Swami Bhumananda, who lives in the Kalikashram at Kamakhya, which is near Gauhati on the road to Assam. He will be able to give you a good deal of useful information, because his own teacher was initiated at a secret Siddha-Ashram in the Himalayas.*

Before leaving Banaras I decided to visit my friend, the Frenchman, who was living in the *ashram* which is kept there by the Mother, Ananda Mai. It was a beautiful place, built on the river's edge, and it had a medical dispensary for the poor in its precincts. When I arrived I found the extraordinary Ananda Mai sitting in a room, surrounded by flowers and musicians. Soon, however, she rose and walked towards a small door in the rear. Just before she disappeared she turned back for a moment, and looked intensely at me. Her look seemed to suggest everything—a sea of life and of death and of love. Then she was gone, but the whiteness of her cloak seemed to remain before me, and I knew that I would dream of her that night.

I then went down to see my friend in his subterranean cell.

He was sitting half naked, and was as exhausted as I was by the sticky heat of the monsoon season. There was nothing in his room except a small photograph of the Mother, Ananda Mai. I noticed that over the photograph was stretched a thin black line, and I approached it to look at it. Then I noticed that this line was a hair, and I glanced at my friend.

'It belonged to the Mother,' he said, blushing.

We sat together for a long time in silence. It had been over a year since we had first met at Dehra Dun. I looked at him and again noticed how thin he was, and then he told me that the Mother had suggested that he go for two years to her *ashram* in Almora, and to stay there in total silence. He then added: 'But life is so heavy! Only death will bring us peace.'

We then rose and walked out on to one of the terraces of the *ashram* which overlooks the Ganges, and we watched the water go by as it had done for centuries and ages, coming from its spring in the head of Shiva and passing towards the sea and the infinite. Yet, though seemingly the same, this river was never the same; the logs and animals and corpses that passed along on its surface marked the rhythm and breath of India, always the same and always different.

We both stared at it for a long time.

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THE VALLEY OF THE GODS

I HAD written to the Swami Bhumananda, asking whether I might visit him and talk to him about his teacher, and the secret *ashrams* of the Himalayas. But while waiting for his answer I decided to go to the Kulu Valley, or the Valley of the Gods, to rest for a little while and to concentrate. I knew that the region was very beautiful and little visited, for it was well within the range of the Himalayas and its roads were steep and difficult.

The Kulu Valley is inhabited by an ancient race which probably first came from Rajasthan. The Aryan features of this race are very marked, and the Gadhis, who are nomadic shepherds living in the high mountains, look like ancient Greeks. They wear long cloaks of white wool, and a kind of skirt that hangs over their naked legs. These garments are held in place by thick cords, which they tie round their waists.

After climbing up an extraordinarily steep road, I finally reached the Rathang Pass, which is at a height of 13,500 feet. Beyond that pass lay Lahouli and Spiti which are on the borders of Ladakh and Tibet, and inhabited by lamas. The scenery at the top of the pass was very like that of the high Tibetan plateaus. It was also extremely cold, and the wind was blowing so intensely that I joined a group of Gadhis and took refuge with them within a circle of sheep and ponies. They gave me some food to eat, and then afterwards they descended on the other side of the pass. I remained behind alone, gazing at the blue mountains in the distance, and the light as it changed over the glaciers. It seemed to me as though I were in a land where shadows walked barefoot over the snows.

The wind at those heights is so severe that it can easily cause frightening illusions, and I therefore decided to walk back down to my cottage before nightfall. The path was very steep and rough,

and I had to climb over and around boulders along the way. It was extremely difficult to move, and I had to exercise great care. But then, as I was slowly inching along, I suddenly heard an acute whistle, and at the top of the chasm I saw a figure moving with incredible speed. Soon he came down and passed by me, jumping from rock to rock. As I watched him I perceived that he hardly even touched the rocks, while all the time he emitted his piercing whistle. He seemed to be a kind of lama, or monk, but I couldn't really tell because he disappeared from sight so quickly. I sat down on a rock, sure that I had been a victim of an hallucination. Then I found a stone tablet, half buried in the snow, on which Tibetan pilgrims had inscribed: '*Om mani padme hum.*'

The Kulu Valley is called the Valley of the Gods because each village in this region worships a different god, or Rishi. In the village of Manali I once saw one of these gods, the Rishi Manu, undergoing a great punishment because he had not been able to bring the rains necessary for the growing of rice. A great procession was formed, and the wooden image of Rishi Manu was placed inside an ancient temple located in the forest outside the town, and dedicated to the goddess Kali, who is the Devouress. This temple contained a black stone, like an altar, and it was so stained that it is probable that human sacrifices were once performed there. The priest or 'interpreter' of the god, who had led him to this temple, remained outside and then, to the frantic beat of drums, he began to dance and leap about. Dressed in a rough cloak, to protect himself from the cold night air, he soon fell into a trance, trembling like a leaf and foaming at the mouth. This was considered an assurance that it would soon rain.

On the following day the rains fell all over the town of Manali.

Many strange people live in this town. An Anglo-Indian major has lived there for a long time, married over the years to a number of different native women. By now, however, he has grown old and is somewhat ill. He is attended by a Saddhu, who is a man who has renounced the world, and who wears a saffron-coloured robe. This Saddhu brings the major various herbs which he has gathered on the mountains, and small pieces of paper on which he writes *mantrams*. The major is a convert to Hinduism, and he keeps images of Indian gods in his room. I have heard him reading at night to a small child and a native woman, who sleep with him in the same room. He reads English stories, which he translates into the language of the region. One evening I was passing by his house, and, noticing that the blinds of a window were open, I glanced inside and saw a naked

woman who was drying her arms and legs with a towel. She was singing softly, and I thought that she must be the major's wife. Then the next day I found this young girl in the mountains, shepherding a flock of sheep and wearing a red kerchief on her head.

All the women of this region wear bright colours, and have deep-set eyes. During the summer nights they gather in the forest, and play flutes and beat drums. But most of the time these young shepherdesses are off alone on the mountainside, tending their flock and gazing towards the distant summits and glaciers.

One day when I was climbing an extremely steep slope, as most are in the Himalayas, I found myself in a very awkward position, holding on to a root with one hand while my feet lost traction in the crumbling earth. I was on the side of a steep precipice, and, since I had no idea how to move, I began to wait for a miracle to happen. And in due course this miracle came in the form of a gentle shepherdess, who had seen me and who had glided across to me to help. She gave me her hand and I did not let go of it until we reached a safe place. She had guided me with precision along the steep face of the cliff, all the time laughing gaily. Her red kerchief blew in the wind, and from time to time I could see her bare legs as we climbed. When we stopped I saw her deep joyful eyes, inviting me to an adventure more exciting still and even more dangerous, right there on the steep slope among the wild pines which grew at the edge of the precipice.

I imagine she is still there, saving lives from one chasm in order to drown them in the chasm of her eyes.

When I returned to my cabin it was already dark. I sat down on a small sofa and crossed my legs in the lotus position. It had been a very long time since I had practised this discipline, but I made the sign over my heart and tried to concentrate on the space between the eyebrows. At first my mind was so filled with ideas and images, endlessly passing by, that I merely felt bewilderment. Then for a short while I managed to dominate these images and to produce a vacuum, and to reach that emptiness which allowed the icy feeling gradually to climb up my spine. Soon the spirals began to grow and multiply, and I began to feel that I was losing shape and form, and that I was moving back and forth like a pendulum. And, just at that moment, I had an inspiration. I wanted to jump, or to leap towards the outside and to imagine myself out there, standing by the door, before it was too late. I managed this leap, and then realized that I had discovered the key to the great process for which I had been searching for so long. In effect, I saw myself from outside; I felt myself at last out of my body. And in a second I was in

a mountain temple, lying on a dark sacrificial stone with someone who was preparing to immolate me. I resisted violently, and with a dry shock I returned to my body sitting on the sofa in my mountain hut.

I passed my hand over my forehead, and could feel the cold perspiration. I remained there for I do not know how long; then I drank some water and went out into the night. I breathed deeply in the cold night air, and saw that the glaciers were shining with a pale light.

I realized that after so many years of trying I had finally found the key. At last. And I also understood that this discovery had forced me to make a decision; it made me analyse myself in order to determine my future. Standing there in the cold night air, I then decided that I should never use that key again: I would never again open the door to that mystery. Intuition told me that if I were to follow that path I would have to renounce my personality for ever. I realized that this path required a loss of humanity and an impoverishment of the soul, and I knew that I could not and should not follow it. For I knew I would have to give up immediate experience and instinct; I would have to sacrifice self-knowledge and my heritage, as well as my intellect. Before taking that plunge, I knew that I would first have to experience all those things to the full and to 'put my house in order'; otherwise it would be an empty and desert-like gesture. The temptation was great, but in the end I decided not to try to be more than a man. I wanted to be a man and nothing else; I wanted to know my limits and my smallness, and to give life to everything within me. I remembered that the magicians and mystics of old did not destroy their desires, for they realized that renunciation was often mere deception. The desires, that are apparently sublimated, frequently return in different forms, tormenting through dreams and visions. I knew then that my path could not be one of renunciation but of experience; I had to live everything with a child-like purity of spirit and without any feeling of guilt. Such a path did not imply self-satisfaction, however; on the contrary it encouraged one to be alert for the possibility of passing over the razor's edge at the appropriate time, and not to be stuck, isolated, on the side of its steep slope. In short, one had to climb up from the rice-roots and to grow like the Tree of Paradise. One had to flourish.

I am not sure that the decision I took that evening in the Valley of the Gods was a correct one; it may merely have been the justification of supreme weakness. Yet I was also weighed down by my hope of reaching Mount Kailas in search of the mysterious

Order, and of that secret monastery where I would be able to find the masters of my Master.

That night I had a strange dream. I was standing near a garden wall, over which the branches of some trees were extended. I shook one of these branches and some small white fruit fell down. These suddenly turned into small animals or insects, which scuttled off towards the house. I followed them, and soon found myself within the house towards which they were approaching. I then put my arm out of the window, grabbed two of these small insects and took them into a room, where I left them. Somehow I understood that they did not want to remain there and that they were astonished at my attitude. One of them escaped under the door which led out of the house. I then secured the door closely, so that the other one could not escape. It then reproached me mutely for having separated it from its mate. When I woke up I remembered the revulsion I had felt when I had pulled those two insects or animals into the room.

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SEARCHING THROUGH THE HIMALAYAS

MEANWHILE the Swami Bhumananda had written to me saying that he was waiting for me to come to see him, and that he would tell me all he could about the secret *ashram* where his teacher had been initiated. I therefore went down to Calcutta in order to proceed on that trip. But when I got there I realized that the roads were impassable. The monsoon rains had inundated the country for miles around. The Brahmaputra had overflowed, and for days on end the monsoon skies were heavy and ominous. There is no sight more extraordinary than these skies, especially at sunset, for then they are painted with almost impossible colours: gold and purple and emerald. The rays of the sun which pierced through the flowing clouds, colouring their edges, seemed like the faces of some gods looking down from heaven.

I soon grew bored with my delay in Calcutta, and became restless to visit other parts. Ever since I had left my Master in Chile, and had begun to follow my own path, I had travelled widely, half realizing that these trips were partly taken to satisfy my thirst for adventure. Ever since my childhood I had been excited by strange places and people, and I had been particularly fascinated by the memoirs of English travellers who had gone into the Himalayas in the nineteenth century. I had also read of the expeditions of Sven Hedin, and in later years I had read of the Germans who had escaped during the last war from India into Tibet. I had also read about the Tibetan expeditions of the Italian professor, Tucci, and the accounts of Fosco Maraini, who had accompanied him on the road to Sikkim. In my house in Delhi I had also had long conversations with Professor Tucci. Thus Sikkim, which borders Tibet and which is ruled by a noble family of Lhasa, always seemed to me to be an enchanted

country. I had long thought of the Maharaja and of his princesses as though they were figures from fairy-tales. In Maraini's book there is a photograph of one of those beautiful Sikkim princesses, dressed in Tibetan furs. Beneath the photograph Maraini had written: *Am I foolish if I think that a lama must be handsome if I am to believe in him?*

Delayed then in Calcutta, and spurred by these old memories and desires for adventure, I decided to go first to Sikkim before continuing on to see the swami. And almost immediately I was in a legendary world, about which I had read and dreamed. It was late at night, and I was seated by the old Maharaja and two of his princesses in the palace. The Princess Pehma Shoke approached with a slow step and handed me a small glass, which was full of some kind of liquor. She then said, 'Gambé!' which is a Chinese word meaning that one should empty the glass in one gulp. As the evening wore on I made many 'Gambés' with this legendary princess, and with the old Maharaja and his son, Prince George. All of them were dressed in ceremonial robes of Chinese brocade, which were embroidered with Buddhist swastikas. The effect of the drink soon began to tell, and everything began to whirl about. The husband of one of the princesses sang a Tibetan opera which was full of sharp guttural sounds. Then we began to dance some sort of circular liturgical step. On one side of me was the Maharaja, whose hand was like old ivory, while my other hand grasped the transparent jade hand of the Princess. At last it was all over, and I went to bed so intoxicated with that devilish alcohol that I felt I was dying. At the side of my bed were the young Prince George and the jade princess. She put her hand on my forehead and for a moment I felt better, but almost immediately afterwards I sank into unconsciousness.

Eventually I woke up, not knowing what time it was. The ceiling of the room was whirling about, and I felt sick and dizzy. Then after a while someone came in to invite me to go on an expedition to the Tibetan border. I was told that the expedition was being arranged to meet the Maharajkumar, or Crown Prince, of Sikkim, who was returning from a visit to the Dalai Lama in Lhasa. Since the word Tibet has always had a magical effect on me, I got up with a supreme effort.

The clear cold air of the Himalayas restored me a good deal, and soon I was capable of appreciating the day's pageantry. In an open pavilion by the side of the road, as it came over the pass, the Maharaja and his family, dressed in furs, awaited the arrival of the eldest son. In due course the Crown Prince arrived, with a long caravan filled with presents, from Tibet. All along the way, which was

frequently very narrow, old men with patriarchal beards and Mongolian features prostrated themselves in the dust, touching the ground with their foreheads. Other caravans arrived, and as the royal procession returned to the city it stopped along the way, at tents and under archways, to exchange the white ceremonial scarves and to drink tea with the other lords of the country.

These scenes were repeated all evening long in the palace at Gangtok, which is the capital of Sikkim. The Crown Prince was a very intelligent man, and we spoke about Lhasa. He told me all about the Dalai Lama and the court at Potala, which at that time had already been surrounded by Chinese troops. Later in the evening the old Maharaja invited me up to the second floor of his palace, where he showed me a Great Wheel of Life and also some of his own paintings. The old Maharaja had painted all of his life, but only one subject, one picture, with which he had been experimenting all through the years. It was a picture of a snowy mountain and the lake, and in its way it was another wheel of life.

During the evening I also had a conversation with Prince George. I discovered that he had been educated at Oxford, and I asked him if he had also gone to Eton. He replied that he had not been admitted there because he came from a 'brown continent'. I looked at him with surprise and anguish, and noticed the pain in his smile. After that, I could not continue the conversation, because I had nothing to say. This declaration was a kind of abyss between us, and I imagined what a dramatic event it must have been for this young prince, who is a god in the Himalayas, and who is used to having bearded patriarchs kneel before him, to have been looked upon as an inferior simply because of the colour of his skin. The wound that this cruel act must have opened in his soul will never close, and all I can hope is that the little jade princess will never be so badly hurt as was the ivory prince.

41

THE GATE OF TIBET

FROM Gangtok I went to Kalimpong, which is the great gateway to Tibet. Through here pass hundreds of caravans loaded with merchandise, and the streets are full of Tibetans who carry daggers at their waist and prayer-wheels in their hands. They are a joyful and strong people, wearing fur caps and long canvas cloaks. The hills outside of the town are covered with small flags bearing religious images, which are placed there so that their prayers may be wafted off to the mountains by the winds. Everywhere this religious spirit is present, and the phrase, '*Om mane padme hum*', is heard everywhere, and the prayer-wheels both in temples and houses are kept in continuous movement, either by the faithful or by streams of water.

Kalimpong is also where Prince Peter, of Greece and Denmark, lives. He is an explorer and anthropologist who is particularly interested in Tibetan studies, and he is investigating the remains of matriarchy in this region. He lives in a villa surmounted by a flagpole bearing his royal arms, and is famous for the orchids he grows. His wife is a Russian woman, who wears dark glasses and who hardly ever speaks. Prince Peter showed me some Tibetan necklaces which were made from human vertebrae; he also gave me the address of Professor George Roerich, son of the Russian painter, Nicholas Roerich, who emigrated from Russia with his family during the revolution. He built his house in the Kulu Valley and was converted to Buddhism. His son, Professor Roerich, is a Buddhist scholar famous for his Tibetan studies. His translation of the *Blue Annals*, and his studies of Tibetan painting, are known all over the world. He lives in Kalimpong with his mother who, as often happens with White Russians, has highly developed psychical powers.

One evening I visited Professor Roerich and took tea with him

in his study. His face has a Mongolian cast, and he has a small pointed beard. He reminded me of Count Keyserling, and we spoke of him for some time. Roerich knows him well and admires him. He told me that one of the count's sons lives in Calcutta, studying philosophy. I also asked Roerich about Tibet, and about the experiences that country had just undergone. He admitted the country was going through hard times, but claimed that it was preferable for Tibet to fall under Chinese influence than under American influence. He said that the Chinese are a practical and positive people, and that they are not interested in religion. As a consequence, he believed that the religious spirit of Tibet would not be changed. If, on the other hand, the 'American way of life' were to arrive, then everything would be lost and the spirit of the country would be completely altered.

Roerich must have been referring to the old China, or to one which may yet return. Certainly the China of the present day has acted very differently in respect to Tibet.

While we were being served tea, I tried to ask Professor Roerich about the secret *ashrams* of the Himalayas, and told him something about my search. To my great surprise, he then said: 'Yes, these *ashrams* certainly exist. I have investigated them, and, since I know Tibetan and Sanskrit very well, I have found mention, in the texts, of four secret *ashrams*. One near Shigatse, another near Mount Everest, a third near Mount Kailas and a fourth in Tholingmath. These are the Siddha-Ashrams to which you refer. I don't believe that Madame Blavatsky lied when she said that she had been to one of these Tibetan Siddha-Ashrams. Some people claim that Blavatsky, who was the founder of Theosophy, had never been in Tibet, but in several memoirs of English military officials, who travelled in this region during her lifetime, there is mention of various meetings with a Russian woman who was travelling through the desolate Tibetan plateaus accompanied only by native servants.'

42

THE PANTHER'S EYES

SINCE the roads and passes of this far northern country were blocked by landslides and Chinese troops, I decided to go down to the south of India, stopping first at Orissa and Madras. In Madras I had the address of Swami Janardana, who is the spiritual leader of an organization that has many followers in Chile. It is called Suddha Dharma Mandalam. Janardana believes in the Siddha-Ashrams, and he believes that the new Messiah, called Bhagavan Mitra Deva, lives in a secret place somewhere in the Himalayas.

But first I decided to investigate the ancient land called Orissa, which is inhabited by people who practise ancient rites, and where Tantrism is kept alive along the jungle coasts. Having first gone to Puri, I decided to walk all night along the beach that leads to the ruins of the Konarak temple. From time to time I grew so tired that I wanted to lie down, but every time my native guide warned me not to, telling me of the danger of serpents and of the tigers of Bengal. I therefore continued on, half naked and sweating profusely. Occasionally, as we passed through a village, someone would take a cutlass and slash into one of the big coconuts, so that I could drink its milk. The monsoon had blocked all the roads between Puri and Konarak, and that is why I walked along the beach. All through this starless night I could hear the sound of drums and of songs coming from the jungle.

I was utterly exhausted by the time I reached Konarak, and could barely crawl about the huge stone Temple of the Sun. This temple, like some of those at Khajuraho, is covered with Tantric sculptures and is designed to represent an immense chariot. All along its base are huge stone wheels, and it is pulled towards the rising sun by stone horses. Within the chariot is the internal sun, and its progression towards the east, coupled with the Tantric

sculptures, represents the fusion of Him with Her, the fusion of the extremes of the cord which are always separated from each other. But the statue of the sun, Surya, which used to stand in the centre of this gigantic stone chariot of Konarak, or Black Pagoda, has been lost or destroyed.

Since I hadn't the strength to return on foot along the jungle-lined beach, I hired a small cart with its own charioteer, who directed the water buffaloes along the beach, back to Puri. There, on the water's edge, I decided to take a small cottage and to remain for a number of days. Swimming naked in the warm sea, I soon regained my composure and was happy again. It was different from swimming in rivers, for, in India, river-bathing is always ceremonial or sacramental. In Allahabad and in Banaras, I should have liked to plunge into the waters and to have swum energetically back and forth across the river, enjoying the happy exercise and feeling the blood still young in the veins. But such an act was never possible, for in the river there was always St. John the Baptist or the Dove of Transfiguration lying in wait. Thus liturgy has ruined the happiness of a people, and has destroyed its animal energy. There is, of course, a different energy, which represents a joy quite different from the primitive kind I enjoy in the sea. This is an old and legendary force which is intimately mixed with the blood of the spirit.

From time to time I noticed a number of wooden boats, sailing by the beach. They had curved keels and were very high out of the water, so that they almost looked like Noah's Ark or like those boats I had seen in Aden. They were propelled by long oars similar to those used in the ancient galleys. One day I swam up to one of them, and the fisherman inside handed me an oar to help me climb in. This I did, and together we went out to sea to fish. All of the fishermen had dark skins, and one of them had monstrously swollen legs because of elephantiasis. Even out on the ocean, I could smell the strange odour that is peculiar to the inhabitants of Orissa; it is somewhat acid, but it is mixed also with sandalwood, betel, resin and sea-water.

Later, when we came back, I stood up and dived into the Sea of Bengal, descending to its depths and then swimming fast to the shore. When I reached the shallow water I saw a face near me, which kept appearing and disappearing between the waves. I stopped and floated for a moment in order to watch it. Then it too became stationary and floated very near to me. There were two enormous staring eyes and a head covered with black, lustrous hair. This face which stared so hypnotically was that of a native woman who was swimming all by herself in the sea. Underneath the water I could see

the dark shadow of her naked body. As I walked up on to the beach I saw that the face was still there, looking at me fixedly.

By now it had grown dark, and I walked barefoot to my cottage, which overlooked the sea. I closed the door and the windows to keep out the malarial mosquitoes. My bed had a mosquito-netting over it, but I never liked to sleep under it. Just then I heard a noise by the door, something like the scratching of an animal. I walked over to it and opened it suddenly. There in front of me was the naked woman who had been staring at me in the sea.

Without saying a word, but continuing to stare, she came into the centre of the room. I don't know whether I closed the door or whether it closed by itself. We stood staring at each other fixedly, and breathing sharply. She was dark, and her feet were covered with mud. She wore heavy silver and copper rings on her arms and her ankles, and she had others hanging from her ears and one which pierced her fine thin nose. Her forearms were tattooed with strange symbols. There was nothing negroid about her, however; and her lips were perfect. Her damp hair fell over her shoulders, and I could see that her white teeth were regular and strong. But what was most striking about her were her two terrible eyes and her heavy eyelids, which were like the wings of birds. From these eyes came a stare which enveloped all the room, and seemed to devour me.

Very slowly, without making a noise, the woman approached me. She took hold of one of my hands and placed it over her naked breast, next to her heart. Her breast was as hard as if it were made of stone, and her nipple almost seemed to cut my hand as though it were the point of a lance. She breathed hard, and exuded a vapour full of intoxicating perfume. She had that sour and black smell of the race of Atlantis: the smell was something like tea or alcohol, a mixture of betel with wet jungle-leaves. It was also the smell of a wild animal, something like a sheep or a water buffalo, but above all like a panther.

As I did not do anything, she went over to the bed and lay down on it, under the mosquito-netting. I could see her muddy feet and her long fine fingers. The bracelets she wore seemed like the chains of a slave. She took hold of the head of the bed with her two hands and began to breathe excitedly, while all the time she continued to stare at me. Then she began to move her body in a rhythmic cadence which increased in tempo.

As I stood there, I came to realize that I was in the presence of the ancient savage female. Her behaviour was not animalistic or primitive; rather it was the product of a people who have been altered by history and by liturgy; it was the behaviour of a race which has

known the Serpent. I realized that what this woman wanted to do was to initiate me into the rites of a magic and fatal love, which had its source in the roots beneath the rice, and which was also as precious as a blue sapphire or as the feather of a peacock's tail.

The whole room was enveloped in the boiling clouds of her body and impregnated with her terrestrial and ethereal odour. I approached her, and all that night I lay there with a statue from the Black Pagoda of Konarak; she was also a siren, or one of the mad and sacred bacchantes who had danced in the garden of Vrindavana.

43

THE SWAMI JANARDANA

IT IS certainly suggestive that the Society of Suddha Dharma Mandalam has so many followers in Chile; indeed it has more there than anywhere else in the world, even including India, where it is relatively unknown. This esoteric organization, like Theosophy, is based on a divine hierarchy of Teachers and Siddhas, whose task it is to direct the destinies of mankind and man's spiritual evolution. This hierarchy is said to have been constituted by the Supreme Guru, Bhagavan Sri Narayana, 12,000 years ago. According to the Pandit Janardana, that would be only 1000 years before the great Mahabharata war. Information concerning this event may be found in Suddha literature, and there are also references in the Upanishads to the Suddha Dharma, especially in the Adhytmopanishad. The present hierarchy consists of thirty-two Siddhas presided over by Bhagavan himself, who is also known as Kumara, Dakshinamurti and Sri Yoga Devi. These high beings, and those who follow them in sequence, watch over the temporal and spiritual evolution of humanity in the present era of Kaliyuga, and their centre, or Siddha-Ashram, is located in a secret place in the Himalayas which is variously known as Uttara-Badari, Ari-Badari and Yoga-Badari. But it was only in 1915, when this hierarchy was reformed under the name of Suddha Dharma Mandalam, that its existence was revealed to humanity through Sir Subrahmania Iyer.

Prior to that time, the principles and practices of this very old philosophy, written in Sanskrit, had been preserved in secret archives in the Himalayas. These were then edited by the erudite Pandit K. T. Sreenivasacharya. The present chief of the Order is the Pandit Janardana of Madras.

The functioning of the hierarchy has been explained by Janardana in his assertion that each epoch has its own *avatar*, or

incarnation, of the divinity who, in this case, is Bhagavan Sri Narayana or, in reality, Vishnu. If there were no *avatars*, then men would have no one to guide them and would succumb to their demonic or 'asuric' condition, which usually predominates. At any rate, the Amsavatar, or Messiah of our epoch, has already appeared, and is called Bhagavan Sri Mitra Deva. His divine birth took place on the 16th of January 1919, that is to say on a Thursday of the full moon, in the month of Pusha in the year of Kalayukti. He was born to the wife of a member of the *kshatriya* caste in Maharashtra, which is a district of Bombay. The father of this divine creature died very soon afterwards, and one of the high personages of the Mandalam hierarchy took the child and his mother under his protection. A circle of assistants, called Mitra Brinda, was then established round the Messiah in order to help him in his work when he acted publicly to change the course of humanity and to save mankind. For the moment, this Messiah lives in a secret *ashram* in the Himalayas, and from time to time he appears to members of the circle and to the chiefs of the Suddha Dharma Mandalam. He has certainly been seen by Sri Janardana, and perhaps by some Chilean disciples.

Nevertheless, the passage of time will have to be dealt with. Bhagavan Sri Mitra Deva was born in 1919, which means he is forty-four years old and therefore only two years younger than I am. In short, he is no longer very young. Meanwhile the world seems to be approaching the abyss of atomic destruction, pushed there by that 'asuric' condition which he has come to fight. Possibly Bhagavan Mitra Deva will appear only internally, changing man's inner heart, but Sri Janardana claims that he will reveal himself physically, in order to change the material destiny of man in a definite way.

It is strange that this religious sect, which is so little known in India, has so many followers in Chile. Doubtless the secret Himalayan *ashram* awakens echoes in the soul of a people who have long dreamed of the legendary City of the Caesars. Moreover, its similarity to Theosophy has made it more acceptable to us than the abstractions of Vedanta or the ascetic practices of Yoga, for Theosophy under Annie Besant had enjoyed a considerable vogue in Chile. Finally, my own search for the secret *ashram* in the Himalayas, near Mount Kailas, suggests in a purely objective fashion that the same legendary dream which motivates India may also affect Chile, and indeed all of South America.

But the Theosophists, like the disciples of Suddha Dharma Mandalam in Chile, have damaged the purity of the Oriental idea by adding Christian and Western traits. For example, the director

of the Suddha Dharma Mandalam in Santiago goes about wearing an impressive cape and carrying a staff, as though he were a Crusader or a Templar or even a Rosicrucian. In short, he looks like a bishop or a patriarch of a Byzantine church. Naturally such behaviour has nothing to do with the East or with India, with its Yoga and its diffuse and impersonal spirit. Yet, even in India, movements like Suddha Dharma Mandalam have been affected by Westernism. This movement in particular has a dreamy quality, quite unlike that which is usually found amongst the Indians. Nevertheless, this is an area about which it is difficult to be precise, and the assertions of Sri Janardana, in particular, are characterized by an Oriental vagueness in exposition and an absence of logical and rational thinking. This may be due to the tendency of the Indians to think different sorts of thoughts from those commonly found in the West. At times I almost think that the Indian does not think with his head any more than he speaks from his throat; his thinking seems to come from his heart, or at least from the solar plexus or from the Muladhara Chakra. For this reason, the Hindu does not discuss or explain; he merely preaches. Whenever a Hindu speaks, he speaks as a Brahman or as a priest, even though he may not belong to this caste. He is never a philosopher, even though he pretends to be one, let alone a logician. He is always a preacher.

After settling in at my hotel in Madras I went to look for the house of the Swami Janardana. It took a long time to find, and I had to search through narrow streets, crowded and bustling with people. At length I discovered it, however, in the rear of a small patio, which was awash with dirty water and occupied by a fat woman squatting over some brass pots which she was cleaning. I presumed that she was the wife of Janardana; at any rate, she pointed towards a narrow staircase, which led up to a terrace where the swami was seated at a table. I followed her directions and found a man with a powerful yet agreeable face, who greeted me with a Western handshake. He was dressed in white, as is the custom in the south of India. When he heard that I was from Chile he brightened visibly, for, not surprisingly, he had a great sympathy for our country. For my part, I also felt a considerable attraction for this person who had for so long tried to connect these two distant regions of the world. In short, there was very little of the common man in this Madrasi swami; he was quite different from his countrymen.

This difference was soon demonstrated in what he said.

'Those who talk about dissolving the individual ego in Brahma do not know what they are talking about,' he said. 'In this world our only weapon is the intellect. Indeed, I will go farther and say that

spiritual truths can be understood only by an intellect that has become pure. You may say that this idea is modernistic, but in fact it originated in the teachings of Sanatana Dharma twelve thousand years ago. The Yoga that is known popularly in the West, and which aims at a dissolution of the individual ego in a superior ego, is merely the Yoga of Patanjali, which was popularized by Swami Vivekananda. The true Yoga, however, is Suddha-Yoga, which antedates Patanjali. This Yoga is quite different from the later type, for true Hindu philosophy does not aim at the dissolution of the individual nor the abolition of reason. On the contrary, it tries to find divinity within the heart and to make life divine. It is therefore concerned with the transference of the personality centre from one point to another, and with the location of those centres. This is very difficult to do, since these centres are at the same time located in a particular place and generally influential over the whole being. Moreover, since the very idea that personality emanates from these centres is hypothetical, I cannot accept the analogy which is occasionally used to illustrate the evolution or change of personality in an individual, and which uses the symbol of the worm and the butterfly and the idea of passing from the one into the other. For, in fact, the metamorphosis may be in quite another direction. In short, I believe in the Individualized Spirit.'

As I listened to the swami I realized how similar his views were to those Dr. Jung had expressed to me in his house near Zürich. Jung had also used the image of the circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere, but he had applied it to the Self. He had also wished to establish a dialogue between the individual ego and the transcendent Self in order to produce a totality or a total man. On several occasions Jung, who was both doctor and magician, and at bottom a gnostic and heir of Master Eckhard, had told me of his talks with Hindu mystics in India, and especially of his questioning of their ideas about the dissolution of the ego. 'If Ramakrishna or Ramana Maharishi had been able to dissolve their egos totally in *samadhi*, there would have been nobody left to experience it or to register it so as to have a conscious idea of that state,' he said. What Dr. Jung meant was that, in true *samadhi*, the ego would have to be totally submerged and would disappear in the Collective Unconscious. He did not believe that such a thing could happen during a man's life.

I told the Swami Janardana about Jung's ideas, but he did not seem especially interested. Lacking the discursive mind and clear vision of a Dr. Jung, he seemed to prefer dreaming about his Messiah and the mysterious city in the Himalayas to this discussion. I must

confess that I found his manner somewhat trying, for while it is true that we are looking for much the same sort of thing, I conduct my search with a greater sense of humour, and recognize that I am propelled in part by a spirit of adventure. Moreover, I realize that my experiences in the internal world are subjective phenomena, and I do not pretend to establish them as laws. I simply register them as undeniable and practical facts. On the other hand, I don't want to deny anything of life or to avoid total experience, for in both my soul and mind I am submerged in the world. I don't know where I am going, and therefore I embrace everything with a hundred arms as Shiva did; I don't know where I shall end up, but I imagine that one day a particular road will dominate over the others, and I shall have to follow it. In any case, I am not looking for happiness or peace—quite the contrary.

Towards the end of my visit the Swami Janardana showed me some gramophone records that had been sent to him from Chile by his disciples. They were recordings of *mantrams*, sung by Chilean voices. The swami made me listen to them and told me that he thought they were very good. Then he asked me to enter a small meditation-room. On the walls were images and paintings of Hindu gods like the almanacs of the early years of the century. There were also some incense-sticks burning.

Before I left I asked the swami this question: 'Where is the secret place where Bhagavan Mitra Deva lives?'

'Near Badrinath,' he replied. 'To be precise, in western Badrinath.'

He then smiled faintly.

'I will go there,' I said.

When he said good-bye to me, Janardana did not put his hands together in the *namashkar* of Dravidian India, but, like a European, waved his hand in a vague gesture of farewell.

44

THE ROAD OF THE SUPERMAN

MY NEXT stop was Pondicherry. But first I went to Kanchipuram, which is a city famous for its ancient temples. There I had lunch with a man who was in charge of a Standard Vacuum petrol station. He went with me to see the temples, and showed me a mango tree on the principal terrace of a particular temple. He pointed to it and said: 'My wife and I came here to ask Vishnu to give us a daughter. Vishnu granted our prayers and, as a sign of his grace and power, the girl was born with a mark on her arm in the shape of a mango.'

For many years Pondicherry was a French colony, and as a consequence was quite different from the rest of India. The governor was a Napoleonic Frenchman by the name of M. Menard who, when he received guests in the government palace, had them announced by barefoot servants dressed in red, who pounded the floor with long silver staffs as they called out the visitors' names. In those days Pondicherry was full of agitation for liberation from France. Yet it was a charming place: it had the advantages of being a free port and it had excellent food, typical of a French provincial city.

The *ashram* of Sri Aurobindo may still be seen there. This seer led a most interesting and curious life, although there is a good deal of mystery surrounding his last years at Pondicherry. In his youth Aurobindo Ghose fought for the independence of his country. Originally a Bengali from Calcutta, like Ramakrishna, Rabindranath Tagore and Ananda Mai, he escaped to the south in order to avoid being imprisoned again by the British. In Pondicherry he was given asylum by the French, and there he dedicated himself to the spiritual life and was transformed from a revolutionary into an ascetic. Then he met a strange Frenchwoman of Jewish origin who is now known as the Mother, but who was then married to a Frenchman. Before long this woman deserted her husband so that she could follow

Sri Aurobindo and build the magnificent *ashram* that bears his name. After that, Sri Aurobindo more or less disappeared from sight. He installed himself on the second floor of the *ashram* and came down only once a year to receive the admirers who had come to see him. Then he would sit in an armchair as if it were a throne, and would look at them without saying a word. Tagore also visited him; the two men sat face to face for a long time without saying a word. These two old men, with their long white beards, must have looked like two Old Testament prophets. Sri Aurobindo also wrote books, noted for their clear, beautiful style. The Chilean poetess, Gabriela Mistral, proposed him for the Nobel Prize, which she had won on a previous occasion.

In the early years, while Sri Aurobindo kept out of the public eye, the Mother devoted her remarkable energies to the building of the *ashram*. She seemed to be developing a cult to him, and would take advantage of his continued silence. Indeed, some say that Sri Aurobindo was her prisoner. There are even stories that Sri Aurobindo died and that he was replaced by another man. The young Aurobindo was a dark-skinned Bengali, but the venerable old man who was shown only once a year, and who never spoke, was nearly white.

If that is true it would be a fantastic story; but what I think may have happened is even more extraordinary. I believe that a mythical story was incarnated in two human beings, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In the acting out of this myth, it was she who was active and who built the *ashram*, or terrestrial world. He, on the other hand, remained silent on the second storey, acting in quite another sphere. Thus she seems to have been Shakti, Maya and, above all, Kali.

The mystical role he played is hard to identify, for it was coloured by his personal views. He believed for example that man was simply a link in a chain of evolution that would ultimately lead towards the Superman. The difference between his idea of the Superman and that of Nietzsche was that Sri Aurobindo's superman is closer to Rilke's Angel than to a Leader whose source of strength lies in nature itself. This difference might disappear, however, once all barriers are crossed.

Sri Aurobindo used to affirm that man did not become a superman involuntarily or naturally, but through his will and the freedom of his spirit. Man was capable, he said, of forming a new physical vessel in which he could be incarnated as a superman. When asked how man could achieve this, Sri Aurobindo would answer, 'Through Yoga, which is the science which involves relations with the Serpent, Kundalini.'

Thus Sri Aurobindo may have retired to his cell on the second floor of the *ashram* in order to create this new vehicle of the Superman, because there no one would ever see him or know what was happening to him. Hence the physical changes: the whitening of his skin and his similarity to a biblical Jehovah. Yet, at the same time, his mind seems to have decayed. So, at the end, he was not an intellectual Jehovah, but an archetypal Zero or Old Man of the Days. He had nothing to do with the Mother's activities on the lower floor and with her creation of the *ashram*. In one sense she was able to do with him what she wanted to, but in another she could not move him or affect him at all, because he was living entirely within another sphere. He had become nothing.

No one knows whether this is what happened, or whether Sri Aurobindo simply walked too narrow a path and failed to cross the razor's edge. Yet his adventure is intriguing, especially since it was so little to do with the era of Kaliyuga. For here was a man who seems to have given himself entirely over to the creation of a new body so that the terrible Angel, an almost devilish Superman, might be achieved. And his method was Yoga and the science of the Serpent, which he had been able to practise well because, like himself, it has its roots in Bengal.

Yet it must be emphasized that this is mere speculation, for absolutely nothing is really known about Sri Aurobindo's adventure. Indeed, there is yet another theory, according to which the Mother, who is an expert in black magic and who knows cabbalistic formulas, robbed him of his powers and energies, incorporating them in herself and leaving him an empty shell, or living corpse.

At any rate, the activities of the *ashram* today are a mixture of Yoga, technology and Western sport. I have seen processions of young people of both sexes, wearing uniforms and shorts, marching in the stadium and along the beaches of Pondicherry, singing songs of the Divine Life and practising *asanas*, which they combine with wrestling and Greek sports. This is considered an ideal life for future humanity and a style appropriate to a society of supermen.

Every morning at sunrise, all the young men and women of the *ashram* gather in a large patio in front of the main building. Then, after a while, a window opens high up, and a very old figure wearing a gauze dress appears. This figure looks down on the young men and women and then quietly withdraws. That is all that happens, and no one says a world. This is the Glance of the Mother, which occurs simultaneously with the rising of the sun.

Later on, just before noon, groups of faithful disciples and visitors enter the *ashram*. They form a long queue, which extends from the

courtyard to a central room containing an empty throne, beside which are some young girls holding trays of flowers. Then the Mother comes in, supported by her disciples. She seems to be the image of all history. Her profile is aquiline, and on her head she wears a white silk cap, from which is suspended a gold ring which dangles on her forehead. She also wears wide white trousers. When I looked on her face I was sure I had seen the image of the Eternal Return, of all the beings and things within the Great Wheel of Life. Her face seemed to contain all of mineral, vegetable, animal and human life mixed together. There was also something inhuman in it: the face of the Mother also reflected cats and fish, robbers and saints.

After seating herself on the throne she began to distribute flowers, one by one. She took them from the trays held by the young girls and gave them to the pilgrims who had come to see her. The ceremony was conducted in total silence: visitors reverently accepted the flowers, and the Mother said nothing.

Outside, in the garden of the *ashram*, is Sri Aurobindo's tomb. Since he was a yogi, he was not cremated, but buried. Usually there are a number of disciples and visitors clustered about it in meditation. When I approached it I could not help wondering whether, if the tomb were opened, it would reveal a sword, or only worms.

45

RAMANA MAHARISHI

FROM Pondicherry I travelled down to Madurai, which is farther to the south. One night I went to the great Meenakshi temple, which is one of the largest in all of India. Meenakshi is the name used for Parvati in Madurai, and the temple is dedicated to her. Dressed as a Hindu, I observed the ceremony in which the gods are put to bed. In the central sanctuary a group of Brahmans were beating drums and blowing long, trumpet-like horns, while others distributed sweets and milk. Leaning against an old carved column in that atmosphere, thick with the smoke of sandalwood, I then watched the Brahmans change the clothes of Meenakshi and of Shiva, her husband. First the Brahmans took off the day-clothes with which the statues were dressed, then they fanned, bathed and fed them, and finally placed nightgowns over them. The two idols were then left alone to go to sleep in their sanctuary, and to begin their divine love in the secret chamber.

Not far from Madurai is Thiruvannamalai, with its Arunachala hill. At the base of this small hill one of the greatest yogis, or saints, of modern India, Ramana Maharishi, lived and died. Like Ramakrishna, he also died of cancer. I decided to visit his *ashram* and to see his tomb, for, like Sri Aurobindo, he was not cremated. When I first entered the precincts of the *ashram* I was struck by its peaceful atmosphere. After walking about for a while, I entered the central hall of the *ashram*. One of the first things I found was the sofa Ramana Maharishi had used during his lifetime. On the wall behind it was a coloured photograph, which was so realistic that it looked as though this famous saint were actually present. Ramana Maharishi was particularly honoured in India, because he was supposed to have achieved a permanent union of the ego with the Self. He therefore lived and died in public, for when a yogi reaches

that state he no longer has to practise mental concentration or meditation; he simply lets himself go and floats in a state of grace. What Ramana Maharishi had achieved was the Vedantic concept of fusion of the Atman with Brahman; this is called Jivanmukti, or liberation in life. Thus he used to say to those who lamented his inevitable death: 'Why do you weep? I am not leaving; I am here and will always be here; I am incorporated in yourselves.' Ramana Maharishi had already become the Atman; he was the Collective Being. This is the ideal of Vedanta; the overcoming of divisions and the union in the Absolute One.

I rested for a while in the central hall, absorbing the peaceful atmosphere of the place. Then a swami came up to guide me around the precincts. I visited a school of young Brahmans—a group of young boys naked to the waist, with shaven heads, chanting hundreds of Vedic verses and Sanskrit *mantrams*. They seemed to be caught up in the rhythmic music, and sang with one hypnotic voice as their ancestors had done for generations.

I was then shown some of the relics of the Maharishi. I held his staff in my hand and felt moved, since the saint's hands had also held it. Then, to my great surprise, I was taken into a small room where I was reverently shown a dark square box. It turned out to be the W.C. which Ramana Maharishi had used during his last years. On its cover a stick of sandalwood was burning. At first I was rather offended and displeased at the idea of their preserving this item, but as I looked at the pious faces, gazing reverently and tenderly at this holy teacher's W.C., I began to understand something of the real nature of homage expressed by this extraordinary people. For in India there are no divisions: everything is natural and has its place in the cosmos. The natural functions of a man are as sacred and as deserving of respect as his ideas are. What comes from below is as much a part of a man as what comes from above; and from a universal point of view, which is always that of the Indian, there is no difference between them. Ideas and excrement are both products of man and, in turn, products of the divine plan of nature. Thus an Indian saint can deliver a holy sermon while he is defecating, and the sanctity of his words is not lessened by his physical act. Moreover, there need be no secrecy nor hypocrisy for, as I have already observed, everything is done in public in India. It is very likely that some of the greatest pages of Western literature were inspired and elaborated while their authors were on the W.C., but, if this fact were publicized, these authors would lose a good deal of their prestige. In India, on the other hand, it would make no difference, for what matters there is the total result of a man's

actions. There man is not separated from nature, but is intimately connected with animals and monkeys and with rivers and trees. Thus the Hindu is easily overcome by emotion before objects of nature: for him, a waterfall is as mysterious and as deserving of love and admiration as are the physical functionings of the body or of the intellect. As a result the Hindu gods are materializations of natural forces which have been sublimated by the Collective Soul; and their temples spread over the ground like jungle foliage, and are covered with divine idols which swarm over them like a cloud of insects. In every way the Hindu is connected with the cosmos—through his mythology, his catholicism and the richness of the Collective Unconscious, which he lives and interprets every hour of the day. For this reason the Hindu needs no diversion to keep him from becoming bored. Whoever is wrapped in the Collective Unconscious cannot become bored, any more than the flowers or the mountains are bored. Only those who have become separated from nature and who have lost touch with the cosmos feel restless. The Hinayana Buddhist probably suffers from these feelings, for his religion, like Protestantism, is disconnected from nature. Hinduism, on the contrary, is catholic; it is crowded with gods, masculine and feminine saints and natural powers, which have become anthropomorphized.

In this fact lies the almost invincible force of the Hindu, for, almost alone in the world, he is still entirely in rapport with nature and accepts it in all of its forms. His country has been often invaded, but in the long run it triumphs, enveloping the invaders like a jungle or an ocean. The Hindu is like a sword which bends but never breaks. He will disappear only when the earth disappears.

For this reason, probably no one is so well fitted to survive an atomic war as is the Hindu. Urban civilization and city life are still foreign to him; his civilization is one of jungles and mountains. Even a house is foreign to him: it is merely something which protects him from the monsoons, but it has no meaning or character. Thus the Hindu is quite incapable of decorating the interior of a house, since he does not understand its spirit. In large cities like Bombay and Calcutta the Hindu lives, sleeps and dies on the sidewalk. In short, he is destroyed by the city just as the aborigines of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego were annihilated when they were forced to wear clothes. Thus an atomic catastrophe, aimed at the destruction of cities, would find the Hindu completely prepared; indeed, it would almost make him happy. For India, except for a few modern cities, is a country of small villages. It is a great civilized nature, or a great civilization of nature.

46

MEANINGLESS FACES

NOWHERE but in India can one see faces so ancient that they seem to belong to history. The faces which are only imagined when reading the Bible or Homer, come to life in India. Faces with deep-cut features and patriarchal beards; eyes as black as coal and long, curved eyelashes, which elsewhere seem to have disappeared from the earth. Living devils and classical gods are frequently found in the streets; here is a Persian, there an Acadian or someone who has survived from the Flood. The dusty roads of India are crowded with ancient figures wrapped in tunics; they look like biblical figures, and Indian villages are full of figures from Nazareth.

If any one of these faces were to belong to a man from the West, he would immediately be looked upon as an extraordinary being. The reason for this is that, in the West, the face is considered to be an emanation of a man's inner personality. In the West, faces do not grow by themselves. Thus a heavily lined forehead and thick eyebrows suggest a man of demonic powers, and a patriarchal beard and a distant look indicate a man who had experienced all the torments of human life before gaining peace. But in India there is no parallel between the face and the internal being. There the face seems to exist by itself, and there is as much variety and extraordinary development amongst Indian faces as there is amongst the immense butterflies that are encountered in the jungles.

It would be entirely pointless to try to correlate these extraordinary faces with an internal, individual personality, for nature is not a person. It is only a mask covering the collective mind.

This peculiarity may explain many features of Indian life: the absence of manners in India, the absence of individualized forms, and the inability to sense external space and perspective. The Indian has no sense of beauty in its Apollonean aspect. Neither his manners

nor his gestures, nor even his dress, is attractive to the Westerner. His sense of beauty is entirely tied to the natural beauty of the forest or the river. He is unable to appreciate, and he cares nothing for, abstract forms. He will remain utterly unmoved before the beauties of Florence. On the other hand, he will be fascinated by a waterfall, for he is intuitively and traditionally aware that the flowing of the water represents his own being.

In years of looking at Hindu architecture and painting, I rarely found anything capable of moving me aesthetically. Indeed, I usually found myself irritated by its profusion of colour and forms. Yet I recognized that everything that I saw was archetypal; one temple was the same as another; one swami like another; and each saintly man like all the other saintly men.

47

SWAMI KRISHNA MENON

THE next swami I went to visit was Krishna Menon, who lived in Trivandrum, a city on the Malabar Coast, first visited by the Portuguese centuries ago. Like Janardana, Krishna Menon had followers in South America, especially in the Argentine, but the difference between them was that Krishna Menon was a pure Vedantist.

As I travelled towards Trivandrum I kept remembering the dead girl, with whose memory I had been overcome earlier while on the ship crossing the Mediterranean. Remembering her, I again thought of that strange process that leads to the mystical wedding of the soul, and I wondered whether I still wanted to leave that narrow path and to examine the shadows along the way. But then I realized that perhaps she was waiting for me, as Beatrice had waited for Dante, in order to give me her hand to help me climb towards the top of the Tree of Life, where I could remain forever united with her.

I was sitting with Krishna Menon on the second floor of his comfortable *ashram* when I asked him this question: 'Do you believe in existence after death? Do the dead continue to live in some form, and can we meet them?'

Krishna Menon hesitated for an instant and then replied: 'Vedanta tells us that life is an illusion and that the individual ego is also an illusion. How then can death exist, if life does not exist?'

Then, after a moment's pause, he continued, 'To attain salvation, which is the peace that comes with knowledge, one must first experience the company of wise men.' Krishna Menon, who had once been an assistant chief of police, had encountered his *guru* in Calcutta only once, but that had been enough for him.

I then told him about my experiences in the inner world, and about

my 'vibrations' and my feeling of being separated from my body. He told me that I had experienced these things because I had probably practised Yoga in a previous incarnation. He had also practised it in the beginning, but had given it up.

I have often found it curious that Vedantist philosophers and saints, who are otherwise absolute monists, always have a strong belief in reincarnation. For them, everything is illusion, but reincarnation and the individual *karma* persist, apparently apart from illusion. Thus I am told that I am suffering from the consequences of having practised Yoga in a previous life. Yet the only one who can activate Jivanmukti and overcome illusion is a yogi.

Swami Krishna Menon also had to deal with his *karma*, for he was suffering from pains in his legs and had to undergo the traditional Ayurvedic medical treatment of massages and herb-compresses, and he had to retire from public life in order to complete this treatment. But that was many years ago, and now Krishna Menon is dead. He was a rather short man of a pleasant and affable disposition, and he was very articulate. He reminded me of a Chilean friend of mine.

48

CAPE COMORIN

THE Malabar Coast is very beautiful, especially at the time of the monsoons which bring out the deep green colour of the vegetation, which is not unlike that of Ceylon, with palm trees and coconuts and sandy beaches. The people and villages of the district are very clean, as they always are in Dravidian India. The coast itself is famous in history, for it was here that the ships of King Solomon came, and it was here that the legendary Ophir was located. St. Thomas the Apostle came here, as did the Jews after the destruction of the Temple. The Portuguese also landed on this coast, and indeed it was they who coined the word caste to describe the division they observed in Hindu society. The word caste really was a Western term, used in reference to the segregation of cattle. Some vulgar Portuguese sailor applied it in the fifteenth century to the Hindus, and thus it has passed down through history. The Indian term for caste was *varna*, which means colour.

Along the way I stopped to look at a palace, which seemed almost Chinese or Nepalese in style. Curiously enough, it also reminded me of a Chilean country house. I entered this house and examined its main hall where presumably the king, or prince, had held court with his women. All over the walls were frescoes depicting episodes in the life of Krishna. He was shown making love with the *gopis* and with Radha, and round about him were monkeys and horses and many other animals, also engaged in making love. Presumably they were there so that the prince could imitate their postures. In the palace there was also a bed made of wood which was thought to have medicinal properties. It had been given to the prince by the Portuguese when he had been ill, and he doubtless had laid on it hoping to overcome his ailment.

Later on I made a detour from the main road in order to visit

the Courtallam waterfall, which is used by the Hindus for ceremonial baths. Hundreds of men, women and children go there and stand under the falling waters; they gather there like moths round a candle and grow ecstatic before this symbol of nature's power. I also decided to bathe there, and when I entered the water I could feel my body react to the electrical shock of that liquid mass.

It was late afternoon by the time I reached Cape Comorin, at the very foot of India. From there Rama had crossed over to Ceylon with the monkey Hanuman, to rescue his wife, Sita, and from there the Aryans had embarked on their conquest of Ceylon. In their invasion they had been helped by a Dravidian chieftain from the south of India, who had thus played in historical fact the role Hanuman had played in legend.

Cape Comorin marks the juncture of three great seas: the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Sea of Bengal. I sat on the rock and looked out over the waters as the brilliant red sun coloured the sea. Holding my head in my hands, I thought of the way in which so many of these legendary actions were disappearing from the world. The very scenes which I have been observing and describing in this narrative will shortly become nothing more than a dead legend when the new India of the industrial revolution and of the Five-Year Plans rises over the ruins of the past. By then, engines and aeroplanes and bridges will have completely overshadowed the supernatural powers of Hanuman, who centuries ago had flown from Cape Comorin to Ceylon. Moreover, the atomic era with its interplanetary travel will make my trip to the Antarctic or to the Himalayas seem petty and insignificant, and my account of these adventures will be as out of fashion as are the stories of nineteenth-century travellers at the present time. As the present generation looks back upon the explorations of English soldiers who rode on horseback across the desert as naive tales of adventure, so the generations that will come will consider the exotic beings and strange sceneries which are found on this small planet to be of no consequence. They will be even less interested in expeditions across the deserts of the soul.

Yet even though I may seem backward-looking and antiquated to the young men of today, I believe I should present this account of what I have seen and felt, because I think it will be of some use to generations far in the future. My mission is to preserve the treasure and the legacy of the past in order to be a link in the chain of generations which will persist, in spite of the black night that is approaching. This book is written, therefore, not for my immediate contemporaries, but for those few people who in some future generation may want to search again for the secret footprints which connect

the Andes with the Himalayas, even though at that future time they may find nothing in India or in my own country which in the least resembles what I have recounted here. But these external facts are not important, for the true sense of my adventure and of all my trips is purely interior. We always travel inwardly, even though we visit other planets.

This book is for those who once again will want to pass beyond the poles.

As I look at what I have written, I realize that I have been retrogressive in my story and in my soul. For that reason I will be really understood only in years to come. I am so ancient that I can only belong to the future.

49

THE RIVER

LIKE a river I have descended from the head of Shiva in the cave of Amarnath and passed across the burning plains of central India. I have let myself go, unresisting, and I am passing through the rain, the light and the shadow. As I drift along I encounter the dead and the alive, corpses of animals and of snakes, of lepers and even of gods. In this brown flood I have drifted towards the sea, towards the southernmost extreme of India, where the land ends and where three ancient seas are joined together.

From the heights of the Himalayas I have descended to Cape Comorin, to the Muladhara Chakra, and I have found that there were temples at both extremes. I have come from the sanctuary of Shiva at Amarnath to Cape Comorin and the temple of Kanya Kumari who is the Virgin Princess, the Sleeping Beauty and the Serpent Kundalini.

We may find these temples within our own bodies, because everything in the body is sacred. We should erect temples in every part of our bodies to the gods which reside there: we should deny nothing. On the contrary, we should unite everything and live in every part; we should become priests of our own rites and of our own lives, and we should live our lives with a sense of liturgy and cult, and be Brahmans in our own temples. We must once again rediscover ourselves, and be like the men of Atlantis. To do so we must become thousands of years old, and we will then project ourselves thousands of years into the future.

We must do all this because, as Swedenborg said, the Universe has the shape of a man's body, and what is below is also above; what is in Anda, or the cosmos, may also be found in Pinda, or man. For this reason this trip, like all trips, is at once interior and exterior.

. . . . .

I watched the dawn break over Cape Comorin in the company of a group of wailing untouchables, and of a half-naked woman scratching her wounds. The rising sun shone over all of us in our miseries, and it also glistened on the walls of the temple to Kanya Kumari, the Virgin Princess.

Then I bathed in those sacred waters, along with the fishermen and the pilgrims who had come from distant places. I entered the waters of those three ancient seas as though I were entering a sacred river.

50

KRISHNAMURTI

KRISHNAMURTI is the Messiah whom Annie Besant, the founder of the Theosophical School at Adyar, proclaimed for our era. He may be considered the Bhagavan Mitra Deva of Theosophy. My own belief is that Annie Besant chose him as the Messiah because of his extraordinary beauty. No one in India, except possibly Nehru, has a more beautiful face than Krishnamurti has.

There can have been no more terrible destiny than that of being chosen as a Messiah by the Theosophists. This traumatic experience has made him react against all teachers and *gurus*, and against all types of imposition. Yet Krishnamurti has been an extraordinarily valuable example to the world because he has resisted the supreme temptation of power and wealth, and he has renounced all that might have been due him as a Messiah. He has continually resisted the adoration of psychopaths, most of whom were rich and idle, the sort of people who go about the world, anxious to throw themselves at the feet of the first semi-divine figure they encounter.

Almost all of Krishnamurti's acts have of necessity been negative and renunciatory. He dissolved the Order of the Star in Holland, he publicly declared that he was not a Messiah and he became the mortal enemy of all teachers and *gurus* of all schools and traditions, and of all philosophies and religions. He has gone about the world demolishing everything and rebelling against everything; he has been like a destructive Shiva, performing his great dance in order to prepare a new creative vacuum. In a sense, when Krishnamurti renounced his role as Messiah, he transformed himself into the true Messiah of our time.

I remember my first meeting with him. It took place just before I came to India. I was on an aeroplane between Paris and London and

was reading a book by Krishnamurti, hoping to find some peace and some release from the memories I was leaving behind.

Later on, when I was walking down an empty London street, I saw a bareheaded man coming towards me along the same pavement. I had never seen Krishnamurti before, but I recognized him immediately. We both stopped and grasped each other by the hand. That was all. Years afterwards, when I encountered him again in India, he said he perfectly remembered our meeting in England.

It is said of Krishnamurti that when he wrote his book, *At the Feet of the Master*, which was during the period when he believed in his *guru* and when he was devoted to Maitreya, his face became so beautiful that it seemed almost divine. This suggests that he was naturally made for love, for surrender and for obedience. But then he cut himself off from these things and concentrated on following the intellectual path, which is hard and merciless. In Hindu terminology, it might be said that, although he was essentially a Bhakti-Yogi, he tried to transform himself into a Jnana-Yogi. In short, he forced his own nature. Yet it is by no means altogether certain that this change was caused by his childhood trauma.

It is an extraordinary sight to observe Krishnamurti in public. Seated on a podium facing an enormous audience, he dresses as a Hindu and wears an immaculately white *kadhi*. His hair is also white, but there are dark lines on his face which suggest anguish and the mark of the Serpent. When he speaks he utters enormous thoughts, which seem to have an eternal truth and which fit into a grand design. His eyes are half closed, and his eyelids are like the stark branches of a tree, silhouetted against a desolate winter dawn. This is what he says:

'There is no Master, there are no sacred books and there is no tradition. Nobody can teach anybody anything. Nobody should listen to anyone else; there is no sense in following.'

I am quoting from memory various phrases which I have never forgotten, and which I heard him speak in public lectures in New Delhi.

'The Unconscious and the Conscious exist only in the world of symbols, yet one has to understand them in order to pass to the beyond. The mind has to pass to the beyond, and the achievement of this state completely silences the mind. But this is not a state that can be developed, since it is instantaneous and is produced only momentarily, without any transition or continuity of feeling. In the same way, neither love nor humility can be developed or cultivated.

'The thought creates the thinker; without thought there is no thinker. Yet thought is merely memory or remembrance of the past.

One has to free oneself from thoughts and from symbols in order to cease being a thinker.

'The mind cannot function without the brain, but the mind creates the brain.

'The man who wants to make his life eternal, or his love, or his soul, is like a man who builds a small hut on the edge of the river and who refuses to jump into the current of life, which has no end and no beginning. Life has no beginning or end, and neither has the mind. Only if the mind is liberated from thought and memory, and from accepted ideas, can it reach that state which has no beginning or end and which represents the eternal.

'It is all right to look or to contemplate, but to practise concentration of the mind is simply to impose limitations. To repeat *mantrams* or to practice Yoga or other formulas or disciplines, is simply to put the mind to sleep. It is easier to take a tranquillizer, and certainly its effect is less costly, and quicker. But who knows how to look today? Who knows how to contemplate? People look, but they see nothing. Who has seen the sky during the monsoon? Who has seen a big tree growing up against the sky? Who has seen a boyish expression on the face of a man?'

When Krishnamurti speaks in this way, he talks like one who has achieved illumination. He talks so beautifully, and his words have so much poetical creativeness, that a poet could not help weeping for the beauty of his expression. Here are some more things he said:

'And who listens any more, who listens to his son or to his wife or to his friend? Listening is also an art, and one should also listen to the position of one's own body and to attitudes and gestures, which are the music that life itself makes and which circulates round about us.

'Respectability is a sign of mediocrity. To love, or even to kill, is to put oneself wholly into an action and to gain an eternity in the present tense. The notion of fear arises because we are not total: a bit of us lives in the past, and a part of us in the future. We are divided because we do not live in the present but live in memory and live in the future. The fear of death is not born of death, but is born out of these time-zones in which we are not really existing. Fear comes especially from memory. We fear death because we remember having seen somebody die, and because we think that we will also have to die. But whoever lives in the present cannot fear death, because he has put himself totally in the act of living. Thus, even when he dies, he will have no fear of death, since in the very act of dying he will have gained totality, perhaps for the first time

in his life. This dying person will respond totally to the request; he will give himself entirely, with all of his life, to death. To die like this is an act of love. Indeed, one becomes more in death. For death is beautiful and poetic; it is absolutely different from life, it is the unknown and the unexpected; it is full of possibilities and it is unlike anything that is known in life. For this alone it should be loved. Moreover, it is the end of time. The person who wants to make his ego endure, who wants to perpetuate the "I was", the "I am" and the "I will be", will have a sad death. But the man who thinks without the encumbrance of memory, and who hears and sees in the present, is capable of living in an atemporal sphere which has no beginning or end. Life has no beginning or end, and neither has death.'

As I listened to Krishnamurti I wondered whether the day would come when I could begin to love death and to desire it. For most people death takes the form of someone who is beloved. For many it has had the form of Jesus Christ, and for many others that of the Virgin or of the Mother. For myself, I doubt whether I shall want to die until I feel death coming in the form of a golden girl or a white flower. Then I will jump into that flower, and that will be death.

Krishnamurti continued:

'Not one of the fundamental problems of life has an answer or a solution. The answer or solution can only be found in the recognition that it has no solution; it is found only in the acceptance and appreciation of the insolubility of the problem. So it is with life and with death.'

When I returned from the south of India I met Krishnamurti in Delhi. I heard him give his lectures and sermons, and I also observed him in discussions when he lost control of himself and shouted like a child. On one occasion I met him alone in his house. He was standing in a small room whose windows gave on to the garden, and I asked him this question:

'Is the act of murder, or the commission of some crime, as pure an act as that of loving?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'but only in so far as that action leaves no trace on the mind, only in so far as the mind remains untouched by it. For all actions should take place in that way. Indeed, love should leave no traces once it has been lived, or, like a crime, committed.'

I then asked him whether he ever read, and he said that he did not. And as to his dreams, he replied:

'I dream only when I have eaten something heavy. Normally I do not dream because *I look* at the world. When a man looks, with both his conscious and unconscious being, he leaves nothing left over for dreams and for the night-time. Then he simply rests.'

I once told Dr. Jung about this conversation with Krishnamurti, and he commented on it by saying that there were also scientists and inventors who put so much of themselves into their experiments that they had nothing left over with which to dream, or at least they thought they did not dream. Then one day they would suddenly change, and start dreaming again.

I then asked Krishnamurti: 'But what does it mean *to look*? How does one look?'

'Like this,' he said. And then he began to look intensely at a flower in a vase that was resting on a table. As I watched him I began to feel that he was emptying himself, and that a kind of atmosphere had grown round him and that flower, and that something was being subtracted from both the flower and himself, meeting perhaps in some other place, but certainly not there.

Then Krishnamurti looked at my hands. As he did so I began to think that I should never get them back, because he had taken them away. Then he smiled with his incredibly beautiful smile.

I then asked him this question: 'You say that one does not have to follow a master and that one shouldn't either teach or learn. Then why do you preach and why do you speak?'

He seemed to be taken by surprise, but he answered in this way: 'I give my thoughts as a flower gives its perfume. The flower cannot help exuding perfume.'

'Tell me,' I said, 'don't you get tired?'

'Yes, a little.'

I then wondered whether the flower grows tired as it exudes its perfume.

We then went out into the garden to take tea. For himself, Krishnamurti drank only some hot water, mixed with honey and lemon. A cat came by underneath the table and Krishnamurti called to it, but the cat continued on its way. As I watched him sitting there, I began to have a great feeling of sympathy for him, for he is an extraordinarily brave man. In short, Krishnamurti is one of the great men of our times. His thought, although he denies it, has its roots in Vedanta philosophy and is in some ways like Zen Buddhism. Nevertheless, it suffers from the expository weakness common with all Oriental thinking, so that when his thoughts are written down they appear to be feeble. Yet Krishnamurti is also a preaching Brahman. He contradicts himself when he preaches that a man should not preach. Yet he does not see this contradiction, for the Indian never sees it, even in politics. Moreover, he does not care, for his thoughts are not rational: they come from other zones.

For some time now Krishnamurti has not been well, probably

because he has come to a wall which he cannot penetrate. As he once found it necessary to renounce his role as Messiah, so he will probably have to make a new renunciation in order to be able to advance, or even to keep on living. He preaches the total abandonment of conventionality; he accepts love and crime, but he himself lives as a traditional Indian from the south; he is a vegetarian who takes honey and hot water and who lives like an ascetic, entirely in accordance with the established pattern of a *guru,* or teacher. I don't know whether he has ever loved in his life, but I am certain that he has never committed a crime.

Now to be able to advance and to flourish, like the rose in his room, he will have to renounce his lectures, or he will have to love or to kill, or he will have to stop being the Messiah which in spite of himself he still is. He will have to become a total man and to descend to the ways of man. In short, it is time for a second renunciation.

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HYSTERIA?

ONCE again I returned to Old Delhi in order to meet a Chilean friend who was a doctor, and who was passing through India on his way back from Russia. One evening we had a long talk. My friend, who was pacing up and down the room, began by saying that, above all, we had to keep our minds clear. 'We South Americans do not belong to this world,' he said. 'Nor to the civilization of Western Christianity. We are neither native Americans nor Europeans: we are somewhere in the middle. That is perhaps why we can see more clearly than others do. But, first of all, we must understand that the civilization of Western Christianity is definitely dying. There is a good deal of evidence for this in the attraction that is felt for the Orient, since the search for the exotic and for Orientalism is always found in decadent cultures. Another sign is the admiration for primitivism and for nature. For civilization is always an artificial structure, built in opposition to nature. Here in Asia I see primitivism in everything, or, if you prefer, antiquity. We South Americans don't really belong to this world but, since we have pretended for such a long time to be Europeans, it is now convenient for us to turn a little towards the Orient in order to balance ourselves.'

He stopped for a moment before continuing:

'The most important thing to remember, I think, is that civilization is a triumph over nature. It is a gesture or a rite. It is also something like the pain that can still be felt in a limb that has been amputated. Since you have lived in India for so long, you probably don't think of it in this way. But that is not what I want to talk to you about; I want to tell you about my speciality, psychiatry, and about what I have seen in Russia. There they are extending Pavloff's theory of conditioned reflexes. They don't believe in what the psycho-analysts have called the unconscious, nor do they put much

stock in psychic complexes. On the contrary, they attribute mental diseases mainly to environment. If a worker develops symptoms of neurosis or mental exhaustion, his environment is examined and his fellow-workers are questioned, in order to discover the cause of his trouble. The extreme solution is to have him moved to another factory. Such treatment as there is is largely based on drugs.'

My friend stopped pacing and stood near me, with his hands in his pockets.

'Obviously this method is inadequate, especially since it cannot avoid philosophical questions. But once the weakness of the method is admitted, the problem still remains what to do next. I am certainly not a spiritualist, and I cannot believe that certain physical senses persist after death. In Bombay I visited a modern school of Yoga where the heartbeats of a man were measured while he was in a trance, and where electrocardiograms and encephalograms were made while he was in *samadhi*. What principally impressed me about these experiments were the inadequacy of the means, the hypotheses, and the results.'

I then interrupted my friend.

'You may be interested in a conversation I had some time ago with Dr. Jung. We were talking about death, and he said: "If the mind can function independently of the brain, it will then function at the margin of time and space. And if the mind finds itself out of time and space, it will then be incorruptible." I then asked Dr. Jung if he had some proof of how the mind works at the margin of time, and he told me that during the war he had seen men who had received bullet-wounds in the brain, and whose brain functions as a consequence were paralysed, who were nevertheless still capable of dreaming. Jung would then ask himself, "What is it that dreams?" Then he continued: "A child has no precise or concrete identity; his ego is distributed all over his body. Yet a child can dream personal dreams which affect him all the rest of his life. Again, what is this thing that dreams?" Dr. Jung also told me that he had seen certain phenomena materialize before him, and that he had watched mediums move objects without physically touching them.'

'I am very sceptical about all of this,' my friend replied. 'Suggestion, hypothesis! That may have been nothing more than some electrical phenomenon, like the radio or the photo-electric cell, which, when blocked, automatically opens a door. It certainly has little to do with after-life. Have you really thought seriously about some of these cases, which are reported here in India, of children who remember their previous lives? I am told that a psychiatrist and a world-famed neurologist are coming to study these cases. One

of them concerns a little girl, four years old, who says she remembers the exact place where she had previously been married. Moreover, she was able to provide details of her house and the peculiarities of her husband. Her assertions seem to have been proved by the testimony of her former husband, who is still alive although he is a very old man. Personally, I don't believe that this proves anything, because I have always noticed that these phenomena of metempsychosis are found only in India. That is to say, they are found only in a country which already believes in reincarnation. It may merely be a collective suggestion, or the pressure of the collective mind upon the ultra-sensitive spirit of a child, which is usually very receptive. Again, it's like the radio. Such things frequently occur in connection with ideas that are not yet formulated, or with inventions. These too are doubtless products of the collective mind, which only a genius or an inventor can make concrete. But again, such phenomena usually take place only when the psychic atmosphere or the mental climate is appropriate to them.'

'Perhaps you are right,' I said. 'Like you, I don't believe that these phenomena either increase or lessen the mystery of death. For I think of death as being something like the ability to look at one's own body from outside. We are all locked in a big body without any possibility of escape, as in those Wheels of Life.'

I rose and showed my friend a Tibetan *tanka* which hung on the wall of my room. It showed a Wheel of Life placed in the belly of a ferocious demon. I pointed out the concentric circles of this wheel.

'Dying is perhaps simply a movement from one part of the circle to another,' I said. 'Or, equally possibly, it may be an awakening. For, after all, all these things of which we have been talking, and of which Dr. Jung spoke, are nothing more than working hypotheses. We will never know the essences; all we know is that the world comes through to us at the last through our senses, and our entirely personal reactions to it. I, for example, am not even sure that the world will continue to exist after I die. How can it go on, for, after all, it is "my world"? Consider, for example, the most recent physical and mathematical theories, which are entirely hypothetical and abstract. Yet what they produce is the Atom Bomb. Thus we must ask whether the atom and the bomb really exist, or whether they exist only in the mind of man. If that is so, what is important is the idea and the mind which creates things. Nature imitating art. Thus perhaps the Indians are best equipped to deal with the problems that arise from the bomb, for Indian philosophy has always upheld this thesis. It has always maintained that what really counts is the creative will: the word, the idea or the magic sign.'

'There may be something in what you say,' my friend replied, 'for I am particularly concerned with the science of Yoga. The men who developed that science in ancient times must have known something that we have lost. But how could they have known, thousands of years ago, the exact location of the plexuses? If they were right about that they may easily have been right about the other things, about the third eye, for example, and the empty space they claim exists between the brain and the skull, and which may control functions about which we know nothing.'

We then spoke about many other things, but before the end of our conversation I decided to tell my friend about my own intimate experiences, about the vibrations and the feeling of separation from the body which I had experienced. I had done this before with other scientists, even with Dr. Jung, and I tried to express myself as clearly as possible. My friend listened patiently to my long narration, and when I had finished he sat down opposite me and looked at me in a curious way. After a long silence, he finally spoke.

'You know,' he said, 'these are hysterical phenomena. Of course hysteria is only a word. But in the past did you ever suffer some grave illness, or some accident, or something like that?'

For a long time I sat quietly, trying to think and to remember. And I realized that I had had such an experience.

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THE BROTHER OF SILENCE

It was during the night when the door of my room slowly opened. A shaft of moonlight played on the floor, and outside I could see the treetops moving in the breeze. Then a shadowy figure entered silently and sat down in a corner. He was a strange monk, accompanied by a small dog, and he was wearing a Tibetan silk tunic and an enormous turban. A kind of rucksack hung from one of his shoulders, and he held a pilgrim's staff in his hand.

He had sat down quietly, according to the custom of the country, and for a long time we looked at each other in silence. I noticed that he had blue eyes, and that his pale face seemed untouched with age. Then I began to sense what he was saying.

'My name is Sunya Bhai, the Brother of Emptiness or the Brother of Silence. I live in the high country, in Almora, which is the gateway between Himavath and Mount Kailas. I have lived there for many years, and my friend is the Abominable Snowman and, above all, silence. There is nothing like the silence of the Himalayan mountains, nothing like it in all the world. Men talk and speak, but the truth is found only in silence. Recently you have talked a great deal, and you have been wrong in doing so. That is why I have come to teach you the language of silence, and to listen to your silence. I am not interested in what men can say with words; I am interested only in what they can say with their silence. You must realize that men who talk well, and who utter beautiful speeches, usually have a very bad silence. What is really important is silence, for it is a preparation for the Great Silence.'

'Yes,' I replied, 'I have talked a great deal lately, and have spoken haphazardly and pointlessly. Therefore I promise that I will keep silent until I come to see you in Almora. But do you think the Abominable Snowman will let me through, so that I can visit you?'

'That depends on whether you learn the lesson of silence and the language of silence. You are nearing fulfillment. I can assure you of that, for suffering is the best teacher, and you have suffered. Do you know how to get to my place? It is there, up there. . . .'

And Sunya Bhai, instead of pointing outside, up towards the Himalayas, directed his pilgrim's staff towards my own head.

We had talked for a long time, but only in silence, or in the language of silence.

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THE PILGRIMAGE TO BADRINATH

In a final attempt to find the secret Siddha-Ashram in the Himalayas, I decided to go to Badrinath. Up there, in the high Himalayas, there is a temple to Vishnu which is visited annually by Hindus from all over India. Janardana had told me that his Messiah, Bhagavan Mitra Deva, lived in western Badrinath, and I imagined that if I asked some of the pilgrims or travellers I met along the way I might find what I was looking for. It was the best I could do, because the road to Mount Kailas had been blocked by the Chinese troops ever since their invasion of Tibet. I considered this trip to be my last attempt in a pilgrimage that had already been very long, and which had stretched from the Andes to the Himalayas, and from the ices of the Antarctic to the high mountains of Himavath.

I believe that I am the only foreigner, and certainly the only Chilean, in recent years who has travelled in this area and crossed the so-called Inner Line of the Himalayas, which had been established by the British and which is still preserved by the Indians for military purposes. It was perhaps for this reason that a special agent of the Intelligence Service was put at my disposal. His name was Nailwal, and he was a member of the Brahmanic caste. I believe he was assigned to me not only to help and guide me, but to observe my actions. Nailwal brought his own cook with him, who was also a Brahman, because he was orthodox and could not eat anything cooked by members of another caste.

Our first stop, after leaving Rishikesh, was Kirtinagar, and there we met Indrapalsingh, a young police officer of the area, who accompanied us for some distance. Along the way he had an accident, catching his finger between two rocks. It bled profusely, but he did not make the least complaint or even make a gesture. I asked him whether it didn't hurt, and he looked at me very seriously and said

that it was nothing for him, because he was a member of the warrior caste, a member of a martial race.

That night we slept in a place called Srinagar. It was very hot, and we slept in the open air outside our hut. Before dawn I could hear Nailwal saying his prayers and reverently repeating his *mantrams*.

From there to Pipalkoti we accompanied the caravan of Sri Bagchi, who was a Bengali Brahman and deputy magistrate of Pauri, which is the capital of the district. Pipalkoti was decorated with flower arches, and the deputy magistrate was welcomed with ceremonial music. There we decided to stay the night, and were relieved that it was not so hot as it had been below. At the hostel we met a young man who was also travelling through the mountains, in search of his native gods. Although born in the district, he had been educated in England and was an officer in the Indian Navy. He was now returning to his native traditions. On the following morning we met a group of mountaineers, returning after their attempt to climb Mount Trisool. They had lost one of their companions in the attempt, a young man called Chakravarti.

The people of the region seemed very poor. The valleys were barren, and there was little vegetation or farming in the summer, let alone in the winter, when the valleys were covered with snow. On the road between Pipalkoti and our next stop, Gulapkoti, we encountered the caravan of Raj Matha of Terigarwal, the Maharani of the district. We met her by a small hut where she had dismounted from her horse to take a cup of tea. She was an extraordinary woman, very religious and sensitive. Until 1953 she had lived in *purdah*, that is to say, she had lived in private apartments behind blinds and bars, and was seen by no one except her husband, the Raja, and her children and servants. In that year, however, her husband had died, and from that time onward she had led an entirely different kind of life. Elected to Parliament, she represented the whole district and constantly travelled through the mountains so as to visit her subjects, who are today her electors, in order to find out their problems and needs. The people of the district look upon her as their queen and mother. The Raj Matha told me that she had loved her husband very much, and she spoke nostalgically about life in *purdah*, 'where,' as she said, 'everything was gentle, and time passed like a river, allowing one to realize oneself in its stillness'. She travelled every year to Badrinath and Kedarnath, and she told me about the Valley of Flowers, which is off the main route. She said it was full of thousands of beautiful flowers of all colours, growing almost next to the snowfields. She also told me that a foreign woman had

lived there for many years in a cottage she had built by herself. Finally she had died there, amongst the flowers.

I said good-bye to the Raj Matha, and we continued our climb, finally reaching a pass that bordered a river. There we found a temple dedicated to Garuda, the man-bird or vehicle of the god Vishnu. The place was called Garur Ganga, and pilgrims always stopped there to bathe in the waters. Since only Garuda could give us permission to pass, or take us to Vishnu, we took some small stones from the bottom of the river and offered them with some money in the temple. These small stones are also useful for defence against the poisonous snakes which often dart out from the side of the road.

From there we continued our ascent towards Jochimath, which was our next stop along the way. Frequently we met pilgrims along the road, or others returning from the mountains. I was dressed in an Indian costume so as not to call attention to myself. The pilgrims we met were extraordinary; they wore robes of many different bright colours, and their faces were always marked by signs of resignation or illumination. There were old men, women and children; one young mother, who was very beautiful and who wore a long, saffron robe, carried her small child on her shoulders, while she supported herself with a staff. Her feet were bare, but her face and her hands revealed refinement and aristocracy. Later we met an old man who was being carried in a *dandi*, or litter. The number of his servants indicated that he was a rich merchant. Then I saw a young man who was walking with great difficulty, hobbling along with a staff. One of his legs was swollen and discoloured. Nailwal made inquiries of him, and found that he had suffered an accident along the way. Nevertheless, he continued his pilgrimage; his eyes were shining and he ignored his pain.

Here and there along the route are placed *dharmasalas*, which are a type of rustic hostel built for the pilgrims. They provide certain kinds of merchandise, and men and women fall asleep under their roofs. At one of the *dharmasalas* Nailwal's cook bought some food for his master. I ate some of the tinned goods I had brought with me and which had proved so heavy to carry, and also some vegetables and *chapati* which I bought at the *dharmasala*. I ate alone at the edge of the cliff, because Nailwal was forbidden by his orthodox Brahmanism to share food with me. In Gulapkoti, when we were staying at the hostel, he even went to the extent of placing my chair so that it faced one wall, while he himself faced the opposite side of the room. In this way we ate back to back. Nailwal behaved in this way because of his orthodox belief that the glance of a foreigner, or of

a man from another caste, is strong enough to affect a Brahman's food, and to poison its spiritual benefit. Nailwal explained that food was very important, because it went directly to the blood and from there to the soul. He said that it therefore had to be cooked with love, and with pure hands and pure thought, preferably by one's wife or one's mother. He explained that the ritual of eating was prescribed in the Vedas, and he begged me not to be offended by his attitude.

That night we reached Jochimath, which was the most important stop along the route. Its name is a corruption of the Sanskrit word Geothir Math. Geothir means *light* and Math *monastery*. Hence it means the Monastery of Light or, more precisely, Monastery of Enlightenment. The place was given its name by Shankaracharya because it was there that he obtained enlightenment while he was climbing towards Badrinath. Shankaracharya, of whom mention has already been made, was one of the great Pandits of India. Born in the south, he began, in the eighth century A.D., the great reform movement of Hinduism, which was in a sense a counter-reformation against Buddhism. Practically speaking, he was the creator of Advaita Vedanta, which is an extremely monistic philosophy. He also inaugurated the custom of pilgrimages in India which, by encouraging men to travel from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin and vice versa, consolidated India's spiritual unity. Since that time, masses of pilgrims have moved across the face of India, as they used to do in the Middle Ages, when men from all over Europe travelled to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Europe's Romanesque architecture and pilgrim's songs find their counterpart in the stone carvings and sacred hymns of India.

In recent years, however, pilgrimages to Badrinath have changed in character. Now this holy place is visited by even greater masses of people, who are afraid that the region may soon be invaded by the Chinese. Moreover, the road has been improved a good deal since the time of my visit, and it is no longer a difficult task to reach Badrinath. I dare say that Badrinath will be destroyed by the jeep and the road even before the Chinese reach it, or perhaps they will do it together. But when I went there I had to prepare a whole mountaineering expedition, and instead of going by the easy road, we had to climb up across the highest passes and make our way across deep ravines. All along I had hoped to find out something about the land of the immortal Siddhas and their magic *ashrams*, and I asked many pilgrims, young and old, whom we met along the road, if they could give me any information. Nailwal was not sympathetic about my conversations with these pilgrims, and it is very probable that he

was growing suspicious of me. He would try every means to keep these extraordinary beings away from me, and he tried to surround me by a wall and to isolate me. Nevertheless, in the end I almost always broke through this wall, and finally Nailwal gave up.

As we continued our ascent we heard a sound that was repeated with greater and greater urgency. It was the sound of men shouting, '*Jai Badri Vishal!*—Glory to the Lord Vishnu, the Creator of Life!' Whenever a pilgrim passed us he would shout, and we would answer him and repeat '*Jai Badri Vishal!*' As we moved towards the highest land, this shout was repeated in every throat with increasing intensity.

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That night in Jochimath I visited the monastery of Shankaracharya, and found all the monks gathered together in a spacious central hall, which was lighted by torches. There were also some Saddhus and pilgrims, who were on the way to Badrinath. I joined the circle of these monks and began to listen to the chief Brahman, who was telling an anecdote from the life of Shankaracharya. He told of the time when that great wise man had taken part in a dialectical tournament and how he had defeated all his opponents. A woman had then approached him and asked him about sex, and he said that he could not answer her because he had had no experience of it. He then asked her for six months, so that he could prepare his answer. Using the powers of Yoga, he then separated his subtle body and made it enter into the body of a dying king, so that it could come to know the intense sexual life the old king had experienced during his lifetime. Finally, at the end of six months, Shankaracharya returned and gave his answer to the woman.

After the chief Brahman told his anecdote, all of the others present made short speeches in turn. When it came time for a young man sitting next to me, who was covered with a heavy blanket, he began to tell of his experiences with abrupt gestures, and in an inarticulate manner. But as he spoke my attention redoubled, for I realized that he was telling of my own experiences. This is what he said:

'Just before morning came, I was overcome by a fainting spell. And then I felt vibrations passing through me until I finally became immobile. Then only with the greatest effort could I begin to move and to escape those vibrations. I did this by trying to get out of myself, out of my own body. Perhaps somebody else had entered into my body in the manner of the story you, Swamiji, told us about

the great *guru*, Shankaracharyaji. Finally I was able to overcome this feeling through *tapas* and *pujas*, and through penitence, prayer and the following of an ascetic life. I made many pilgrimages to sanctuaries and monasteries, and now it has been a long time since that has happened to me.'

I was tempted to ask this man if he had not suffered some great illness or an accident, and I wished my friend the Chilean doctor had been with me then.

. . . . .

The next morning we arose at dawn in order to go to a cave in the vicinity, which was inhabited by a completely naked yogi. When we got there we saw thick smoke coming out of the cave, and we could just make out a few hairy and dishevelled beings who were covered with ashes and carrying tridents. These were the disciples of the saintly yogi within, and they asked me to pass through. Bending low, and covering my mouth with a handkerchief so as not to choke with the smoke, I entered the cave and found at the back an immobile, shadowy figure. Gradually my eyes grew accustomed to the smoke and darkness, and I was able to make out a figure with long black hair and whiskers, who was covered with soot and ashes and whose fingernails and toenails were so long that they looked like talons. He was completely naked and sitting in the lotus posture. His eyes were wide open and fixed as though they were dead, and they did not move even once, although the atmosphere was thick with the smoke of burning grass and sandalwood. I looked into his eyes and even passed my hand back and forth in front of them, but nothing happened. They were completely static, and I am sure they would not have moved, and that he would not even have felt it, if a fly or a spider had landed on his pupils. His face had no expression or indication of age, but I was told that he was 180 years old. I tried to stay as long as I could within that smoky cave, but soon the humidity and the shadows became too oppressive and I had to leave.

From Jochimath we continued our climb up towards Pandukechwar. At one point along the road, Nailwal stopped to show me a hanging bridge which stretched across a ravine. He pointed to the other side where the path wound up over a ledge and disappeared. He said that it was the path that led to the Valley of Flowers, and told me of the thousands of marvellous flowers that grew there.

I looked at it and thought seriously of following it. The foreign woman who lived and died there may well have known the great

secret and the path towards the immortals. But Nailwal told me that it was still too early for the flowers.

Pandukechwar was the most beautiful place we had encountered in our climb. In the evening I stood outside our hut and looked at the snowy mountains which were already visible around us, and at the river which passed through a ravine down below. The mountains were painted with intense colours, and I began to think that I might be able to discover in these deep glacial hues the brightly coloured domes of the eternal city for which I had been searching. There surely I would find those wise Siddhas who have preserved the ancient knowledge, and who have kept the chain intact that leads from the past into the future.

As night fell, the stars began to come out, and I thought the Evening Star looked so expectant that it wanted to say something. I stayed out under the sky for a long time, but at last the icy winds began to go through me like knives, and I had to go inside.

. . . . .

I fell asleep by the side of the fire inside the hut. Clouds of white fog drifted by, swirling into impenetrable thickness and then evaporating into a thin mist. I found myself on a narrow rope-bridge, hanging over a ravine. I knew I had to cross it, but as I looked down at the icy current roaring below, I began to feel dizzy. The pendulum movement of the swaying bridge increased my feeling of vertigo, but finally I reached the other side, and stood on the path that led up the hillside. This path, however, continued to sway as the bridge had done, and I realized that I would have to adapt myself to that rhythmical movement if I was to go on at all, moving on as if I were in a dance, or caught in the movement of some great invisible pendulum. 'Here are the vibrations again,' I thought. The path continued up the hillside, but as I climbed I began to feel curiously light, so that by the time I reach the top I was walking almost without touching the ground. Then I looked downwards and found a beautiful valley covered with flowers of many colours. I rushed towards it, anxious to dive amongst those flowers and to lie down in their midst. I ran down the hill into that valley, singing a song which my sister and I had sung in our childhood. Almost immediately I was standing amongst the flowers, but when I looked at them carefully I realized that they were really precious emeralds, rubies, sapphires and turquoises. Birds and bees with wings of blue stone flew lazily about, landing here and there on the flower-buds. I felt extraordinarily happy, and stopped to gaze at them as I had done when I was a

child in our garden in Chile. I soon lost myself entirely in this silent world, and it seemed to me that I could hear the very sound of the emerald flowers as they burst into bloom, and that I could feel ruby liquid flowing under the earth. I also felt I could talk with the birds and the bees with their jewelled wings. I remained there for a long time, resting my head in my hands, and then someone touched my shoulder softly. I looked up and I saw a face that I thought I recognized. It was framed in golden curls and the look that came from its half-closed eyes filled me with a feeling of almost superhuman tenderness. It was a silent glance of understanding and friendship, and of supreme loyalty beyond all barriers. Suddenly I realized that there were tears streaming down my cheeks. Then she extended her hand to take mine, and a soft, perfumed odour rose along my fingers and enveloped me. I got up and we walked together between the flowers, which changed their colours as we moved along. She looked at me with ineffable joy and then she spoke. 'I died here,' she said. I looked at her sharply and asked her how that could be, since I remembered her dying in our own faraway country.

'This is our true country,' she replied, 'and the garden we see here exists everywhere. It is the same as the garden of our childhood: I was there, and you loved me as I love you.'

We paused for a moment, and then she said: 'Let us rest here for a moment. Would you like me to recite a poem? I wrote it before I died, just a little before. . . . But what am I saying? What I mean is that I wrote the poem just before I really began to live in your soul. This is how it goes:

Little bird
Singing in my window,
Thank you, little bird,
For the lovely morning.

'Do you like that? I have another as well, but it is a little sad at the beginning. It goes like this:

The soul is weaving melancholy
And sadness in its net.
A dead cloud of memory darkens the sky,
And the leaves fall painfully from their boughs,
Twisted by the wind of futility.
The soul whirls through darkness
Gyrating against itself.

Then a spark is born
And the warm flame dispels the clouds.
On the silent mountain-top
The fiery lilies of eternal love begin to bloom.

She then pointed towards the snowy peaks that enclosed the valley and said: 'One day, we shall go there together. But in the time being we must make the fiery lilies bloom. Let us take care of our love, for it is the most beautiful thing that we have, you in your life and I in my death. Promise me that you will go on no more pilgrimages within your soul; promise me that from now on you will live only with me. Never let go of my hand again.'

I promised, and then she spoke once again: 'The time has come when we must separate again, but first I am going to teach you how to look at the flowers.'

The flowers were now no longer made of emeralds and rubies, but were real flowers, as were the birds and the bees which flew about them. We stopped by a rose-bush and she said: 'Look at those roses: can you see the way that they are moving? They move that way because they know that you are looking at them and they are replying. You may say that it is only a soft breeze, but don't you realize that the rose itself may be a flower that is woven by wind, and as God breathed His breath of life into His creation, so the rose may be a breath of wind that has taken form? Thus the wind moves because it has heard you and is returning your greeting.' She then reached out her hand and touched the rose and said: 'Look how soft it is: it is like the skin of a child or of a woman. Caress it as if you were caressing me.'

After a moment she spoke again, and her words were solemn: 'But time goes on: the roses open, and then one by one their petals fall. They fall to the earth, blending with one another. I know about it, because I also have died. Yet if a flower has received your glance, then it will die in a state of grace and in a state of love. The flower will die as a bride.'

Then she pointed at another rose-bush and said: 'But look at these: they have not opened, but have remained as tight little buds clustered along the branch. Their petals have never been brushed by the wind. And when they die they fall to the earth as though they were stones. No one knows why they are so different, and why they have this particular fate. They last longer than the others do, but they never open and never give forth perfume. They may have some secret which permits them to endure, and perhaps that secret is preserved here in this valley. But you will have to choose between

these roses, between these two roads. You cannot take both; you will have to decide. Now I think I have taught you how to look at roses.'

As she was talking, I knew that she was preparing to leave; I sensed it in her gestures and in her attitude. And then suddenly I realized that she was far away, and I ran after her shouting. 'Listen to me,' I cried. 'Listen to me. In every flower that I have looked into since you died, and in every face that I have loved and have caressed like a rose, in all of these I have found only you there, at the heart, like an unquiet wind from another world.'

My voice echoed and came back to me from the mountain-tops; it was repeated again and again up towards the icy heights, and the high valleys where the fiery lilies bloomed.

. . . . .

We left very early in the morning, for we were already at the last stage of our pilgrimage. By noon we had arrived at Vishnu Pryar, which is a place where two rivers join together. The junction marked the Inner Line of the Himalayas, and the long lines of pilgrims were carefully scrutinized by the police as they crossed over. Once again I met the man whose leg was badly swollen; he was hardly able to crawl, but his eyes expressed an ecstatic joy. He was singing and calling out in a loud voice, '*Jai Badri Vishal!*' I was moved by pity and admiration, and when I passed by him I also called out, '*Jai Badri Vishal!*'

Then, after a little while, we were approached by a young man with a pointed beard. He was wearing a fur cap on his head and had a scarf wrapped around his neck. He was also carrying a rucksack, and looked more like a student than a pilgrim. He began to talk, and he told me that he came from Gangotri, which is near the source of the Ganges, deep in the Himalayas. He had crossed over from Kedarnath, which is a sanctuary to Shiva built on the other side. He said his name was Om Satchidanand Hari, and that he had originally come from Maharashtra. I should have liked to have talked longer with him, but we were interrupted by Nailwal, who pushed poor Om Satchidanand Hari away from us as though he were a dog.

Nailwal then explained why he had acted in this way. 'You cannot trust these people,' he said. 'Among these thousands of Saddhus there are many who are crooks, escaped criminals or just hypocrites and idlers who wear the saffron robe of the mendicant monk in order to live off other people and to avoid working. What India needs are workers and soldiers, not these parasites. For every honest Saddhu there are a thousand fake ones.

'Some time ago, when I was in service up here in the mountains, I met one of these fake holy men. He had come to our house, and my wife gave him something to eat at the door. Later on, she discovered that he had stolen her watch and several rupees. Eventually I found out that he was a criminal and a fugitive from justice. Then there was the case of a famous yogi who came to Badrinath some years ago. He installed himself at the entrance of a cave, and remained there for a long time. He wouldn't move, even if it snowed or rained. Gradually the faithful began to visit him and give him food. This man had his extravagances, but they were generally accepted since he was supposed to be a holy man. Then one day he overreached himself. He had asked for mother's milk, that is to say, for woman's milk, maintaining that it was the only food he could consume. Some devout women brought him their milk in big bowls, but this so-called holy man refused it and said that he had to take the milk directly from the women's breasts. When I heard about this I went to have a talk with this Saddhu. When I asked him about the incident he denied nothing, but simply accepted it, adding that it was a mystery which I could not understand. I got him out of Badrinath without any scandal.' Nailwal then told me about some *ashrams* in the lower Himalayas where the monks live off the credulity of the people and where they have a very good time. 'To make up for their misdeeds,' he said, 'they treat us, the agents of the Intelligence Service and of the District Police, with exquisite courtesy; they praise us and overwhelm us with presents. I understand you know some of those *ashrams* at Rishikesh,' he added.

As we continued on during the morning, I kept thinking about that swami who had insisted on drinking woman's milk directly from the mother's breast. It could well be, I said to myself, that Nailwal had not understood, and that none of us is able to understand. In order to reach the top of the Tree or the summit of Badrinath, the roots have to go very deep. In such an adventure, the meaning of everything changes. Anybody can go to Badrinath, and I imagine that Nailwal has been there many times. But there is a difference between going there physically and understanding why one is going there.

The climb became increasingly difficult, and we soon noticed that the river below us was partly frozen. The sky was a cloudless deep blue, and the air was so thin that I began to grow lightheaded, as though I were dreaming. Many caravans passed us by, and it seemed to me that the pilgrims had come from another universe; their open eyes shone like diamonds and their frosty beards fluttered in the wind like the holy pennants we had seen below. Then we noticed a

very old woman who was being carried on a *dandi*. Her head lolled back and forth like a pendulum with the climbing movement. She seemed to be in agony, and the men who were carrying her tried to hurry up towards the top of the pass from which Badrinath might be seen. They wanted to get her there before she died, so that she might be blessed and so that her last breath might be received by Badri or Vishnu, who is the god of preservation. Behind us came the man with the swollen leg, and I knew that by then it must have become gangrenous. He was supporting himself on his staff with both hands, yet he seemed utterly oblivious of his surroundings: he was entirely impregnated by the cool air of another universe. I decided to stop and wait for him, because I wanted to reach the pass in his company. As I stood by the side of the road, I then saw another man approaching, who was wearing a glistening white cloak. He was half walking and stumbling, and it was obvious that he was totally exhausted. As he passed by, I could see his dark face and Nazarene beard, and the exhaustion with which his face was marked. He glanced at me for an instant, and with a supreme effort he smiled faintly. In that brief look, all of human understanding and pain and divine grandeur seemed to be concentrated. He carried no staff, but had a book in one hand. With his other he held on to the rocky ledge at the edge of the path and slowly pulled himself along. I wanted to support him, and to help him carry his cross, but I knew that in his shadowy smile he had asked me not to. He wanted to climb up alone to God.

By this time the beautiful mother who was carrying her son on her back had also arrived. She was singing with a soft voice, but her beautiful feet were wounded and bleeding: they had been destroyed by the rocks and the ice along the way. Her small son looked about him and slowly repeated his mother's name. He was probably very cold and hungry.

Then finally we arrived at the top of the pass, and from every throat came a long screaming shout, which was at once a song and an invocation, and which represented the cry of all humanity at the end of its long hard pilgrimage: '*Jai Badri Vishal! Jai Badri Vishal!*

From the top of this high pass we could see Badrinath below us, and, at the side of a gigantic mountain, the Vishnu temple. I was holding my companion in my arms, the man with the gangrenous legs, for he had become my brother. And while the powerful wind bent us over without conquering us, we both shouted towards the heights: '*Jai Badri Vishal!*'

. . . . .

The great mountain we saw before us was called Nilkanta, and it is one of the most beautiful in all of the Himalayas. Nilkanta means 'Blue Point in the Throat of Shiva'. It was at this point in his throat that the great god of destruction and Yoga blocked the spread of the Serpent's poison, and ever afterwards it was marked on his throat with a black spot. There are two great sanctuaries built at the base of Mount Nilkanta. Badrinath, which we were approaching, was a shrine devoted to Vishnu, while Kedarnath, round the other side of the mountain, was devoted to Shiva.

The image which may be found today within the temple at Badrinath is said to be very old. The Swami Janardana, in Madras, asserts that it was placed there 12,000 years ago by the Supreme Chief of the Great Hierarchy, and that is probably why he believes that the secret abode of the new Messiah, Bhagavan Mitra Deva, who is Vishnu himself, is found in this vicinity. The word *badri* means Vishnu, and *nath*, temple. Nevertheless, some claim that the Badrinath idol is a primitive Buddhist image of the Mahayana sect.

It is said that the Chinese have discovered a pass which leads directly from Tibet to Badrinath. For centuries this pass was either neglected or unknown, but it served, and may still serve, as a secret means of communication between the two regions, and also between the two Himalayan sanctuaries of Badrinath and Kedarnath. In ancient times Badrinath and Kedarnath were supposed to be closely connected to each other, even though they were on opposite sides of Mount Nilkanta. The same Brahman could officiate in both sanctuaries and was able to travel between one and the other within a few hours. Subsequently, according to the legend, the sins of men provoked a division between the two sanctuaries, so that today it requires many weeks to travel from one to another. Ida and Pingala have been separated, and no rite can be performed simultaneously at the two *nadis*. The secret paths of communication have been lost.

In the evening after our arrival we went to visit the Badrinath temple. Nailwal suggested that I distribute money amongst the beggars and the poor, who had gathered in the streets all the way up to the steps of the temple. The porch of the temple was occupied by many people who spent the summer there, and even in the winter, when everything is covered with snow, a number of yogis remain on, or live in some nearby cave. A little food is kept for them in the ice, and there they remain in meditation, generally without any clothes at all and without lighting a fire.

A little farther away, on the other side of the temple, were a number of hot sulphuric springs. When I went to look at them I saw a swami arrive, who was carrying a musical instrument. He took

off all his clothes and entered the steaming springs. He was the well-known Swami Pearvatikar Beena, who had maintained a total silence for six years. He only plays his *beena*, which is a stringed instrument, and from time to time he pronounces the names of God and the syllable OM.

From there, Nailwal took me to visit another swami who lived in a high cave, half-way up a sheer precipice. He remains there throughout the pilgrimage season which, at the time I saw him, was well advanced. His name was Swami Parnamad Addhoot Maharaj, and he sat with his legs crossed in the lotus position on a pile of straw. By his side he kept a pot of ink and a sheet of paper, and when I asked him why he did that, he told me that he used them to write down his dreams.

'Dreams,' he said, 'prove that another life exists besides this one, and they also prove that life itself is a dream. Usually the most painful dreams seem to be the most real, but then when we wake up we realize that what we experienced was nothing more than a dream, and so we are relieved and happy. The same is true of life, for when we die we shall realize that we have been dreaming, and that our sufferings were not real. We will wake up and be happy in death. Another quality of dreams should also be remembered, and that is that dreams usually make no sense; they are often absurd and the themes are disconnected. But the truth is that life is much the same. Thus it is entirely vain to try to give it some meaning or to direct it. Life is only a little less absurd and disconnected than a dream. The same pattern may continue in death, and it may prove to be only a little less absurd and disconnected than life. Everything is repeated as in a series of mirrors.'

After he had spoken, the swami began to nod his head back and forth, and he said nothing more. I myself began to feel cold, for my thin clothing was from the south of India and I was not able, as Swami Parnamad Addhoot Maharaj was, to produce internal heat.

We then went down by a path cut into the face of the rock, which eventually led us back to the temple. I sat down on the steps and found myself in the company of beggars and sick men, saints and bandits, assassins, magicians and poets. Nailwal finally left me alone, for as an honest man, and as a profoundly religious Brahman, he had to fulfil his rites in the temple. As I sat on the steps I saw the young man whom we had met along the road, and who had been brushed aside by Nailwal. He came up to me and began to tell me, in an inspired manner, about Gangotri and the sources of the Ganges, and he also told me about the saints and real magicians that he had

known there. He then took me by the hand and told me about Kabir, the poet of medieval India. Gazing towards snowy mountains, he recited one of Kabir's poems:

I laugh when I hear
That the fish in the fountain are thirsty.
Don't you know, brother,
That reality is found in your home,
And that when you make a pilgrimage
From forest to forest without aim,
You gain nothing at all . . .
Even if you go from Banaras to Madurai?
For unless you find your soul,
The world will always be illusion for you.
Where is the place
That can quench the thirst of the soul?
Be strong and travel in your body
For only there will your steps be firm.
Consider it well, O my heart,
And stay away from any other place.

The shadows of the temple at Badrinath began to merge with the darkness of the night, and little by little the stars began to brighten the sky.

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The road back down from Badrinath was easy, for the slope was relatively gentle. When we reached the intersection where the road from the temple of Vishnu crossed the road to the sanctuary of Shiva at Kedarnath, we encountered a caravan of people from Gujerat. Their leader was a man about eighty years old, who ordered us to stop by blowing a tremendous horn. He then stepped forward and told us that he was an Ayurvedic doctor and also a homeopath from Baroda. He also told us that his caravan had come from Kedarnath and that they had brought the fire of Trijuginarain with them all the way from there. They kept this fire alight in a great brazier by constantly feeding it new fuel, and they intended to take it back with them to their own country. The old man explained that the fire had originally been lit in Kedarnath thousands and thousands of years ago in celebration of the wedding of Shiva and Parvati, and that since that time it had never been allowed to go out. With tears in his eyes, the turbaned doctor then touched me

on the forehead with ashes produced by this flame and he said, 'Within three months all your sins will have been consumed by this fire, and you will be able to realize your greatest hopes and aspirations.' He then blew his Olympian horn again, and the caravan began to move.

I remained by the side of the road, thinking how similar that fire was to the moonstone burning in the place between the eyes. For a long time I thought about it, and then I began to formulate a prayer: 'O lord of Yoga, O Christ of Atlantis, make this marriage fire bless my own wedding, and make it unite the two sanctuaries of Mount Nilkanta, which are also in my spine, and which have been separated by my sins, so that I may be able to officiate simultaneously in both temples, on the same day and under the same sun. May the fire of Trijuginarain help me to grow wings like the Serpent, so that I may reach the Morning Star, the star of Him-Her!'

. . . . .

As a result of our long pilgrimage together, Nailwal and I had become friends. He told me that he did not want me to leave the Himalayas without visiting his house in Pauri and meeting his wife and small child. We therefore went down to that beautiful mountain town, which is remarkable for the immense view of the mountains which can be obtained from there. I was deeply moved by the welcome given me by Nailwal and his family. An orthodox Brahman, he served me special food which had been prepared by his wife. He himself did not eat, but sat by my side with a happy expression on his face and began to speak.

'Life for a Karmayogi, like me, consists in fulfilling one's duty, one's *dharma*. That is enough, for the rest will be done by God, who sees everything. I have now come to believe that it is absurd not to eat with a foreigner or to receive him in your house. I am happy that you are here, that you are being served by my wife and that you are eating lunch under my roof. After all, all men are brothers, and all of us have to suffer and have the same measure of fortitude.'

Nailwal then showed me the toys which he had brought for his child; they were dolls, and he handled them as tenderly as he would his own child.

I often think of this noble friend, this son of India, who was always correct and honest in fulfilling his duties, and who had accompanied me to the high mountains. He had taken a foreigner to the most secret sanctuary of his god, and he had accepted him generously in the chamber of his own soul. He was like India itself, open

and secret at the same time; aloof, but also as sweet as a sister or a mother for a person thirsting after eternity.

Nailwal lifted his hand and pointed towards the Himalayas, which stretched for hundreds of miles like a chain of white giants or titans across the whole horizon. 'We were there,' he said. 'There, to the left, is Nilkanta, and farther beyond are the Four Pillars of Vishnu's throne.'

As I gazed at the clear horizon, I began to think of this extraordinary people which had created a mythology as gigantic as the mountain-tops which surrounded their country. These very mountains were united to their soul. One summit was the throat of Shiva, another the throne of Vishnu or the abode of their Messiah. Each mountain has its history and is a living symbol. Thus, like most people who look upon nature as something symbolic, they are for ever condemned to the eternal and the unmeasurable. In order to survive in ordinary life, and so as not to lose themselves for ever on this otherworldly plane, they have had to create an elaborate structure around them, with the result that they live almost entirely according to formulas and to the prejudices of a stagnant theocracy. Yet the more narrow their life becomes, the broader is their basis of metaphysical calculation. Lacking any real way to measure the world around, they are frequently misunderstood. Their only real measurement is the symbolism of their high mountains and their grandiose philosophy, which in turn seems modelled on these summits.

We in Chile also have magnificent mountains, but we have not interpreted them yet, and we have not incorporated them into our souls. We have not discovered the gods and titans which the Hindus have found in the Himalayas. Yet the same divine force which has been found in the mountains of India may also be discovered in the rocky *cordillera* of the Andes.

54

THE WORLD THROUGH A CRYSTAL

IT WOULD be impossible to leave India without speaking of Sister Raihana. I was first taken to see her by the Brother of Silence, Sunya Bhai. He had told me that he had listened to her silence, and that it was the best he had ever heard.

Sister Raihana is a member of a very old Mohammedan family from Hyderabad, but she believes in reincarnation and reveres Krishna. Like Kabir she is a Sufi, and because of her Mohammedan origin she has much more individuality than the ordinary Hindu. I cannot imagine her being burnt to ashes on a sandalwood pyre; on the contrary, I think she will gain eternity in her own physical form. Although she asserts that she has five thousand lives, my own belief is that she is here in the world for one life only.

I can still see her as she came to me one day when I was sick. I had been suffering acute pain, and not even the strongest sedatives seemed to be of much help. Raihana came into the darkened room, sat down and began to sing. Her voice was very beautiful and soft, and she sang old Sanskrit verses and ancient *mantrams*. I was literally enveloped by her enchanting music, and soon I began to go to sleep, and the pain left me.

When I awoke I found that she had left me a magic crystal. I gazed into this crystal, which seemed to have the light of the sun reflecting on its face, and as I stared into its intricate interior, I felt that it contained all of the Universe within it. All of the galaxies and stars seemed to glisten there. As I gazed into this crystal, I thought of the whole evolution of Indian philosophy, from extreme dualism in which the Self, or Purusha, never meets Matter, or Prakriti, to the other extreme of Vedantic monism, in which everything is one, and only Illusion or Ignorance gives the appearance of reality to multiplicity. Yet, in both dualism and monism, it is always

Ignorance, or Avidya, which is the cause of pain. It also makes men believe in the apparent union of Purusha and Matter, or in the separation of the Being from creation, and of the Atman from the Ego. Yet, in both dualism and monism, creation is illusory. In dualism, creation seems to exist because of the relationship between the Self and Matter. Yoga therefore concentrates on the Self, in order that its individuality may be recognized. Thanks to knowledge, the person who has gained liberation through Yoga comes to recognize that creation does not exist, and that the Being has never been separated from creation. In the light of knowledge, he recognizes that he and God have always been one and the same. The shadows of illusion disappear before the light of knowledge.

Yet some great doubts still remain. For it may easily happen that after death this light will go out. And what, after all, is the source of the world—of this great Illusion or Maya?

Gazing into the depths of Sister Raihana's crystal, I seemed to recall some writings in Vedic script:

'Then there was neither what is, nor what is not; there was no sky, nor a heaven beyond it. What then served as a covering? The waters of the abyss?

'Then there was no death, and therefore nothing was immortal. There was no light between night and day; the One simply breathed by itself without breathing. Beyond that there was nothing.

'In the beginning all was darkness; all was a sea without light. Then the germ that was covered by the husk was born and became One through the power of heat.

'Then came love, which embraced all things. It was a seed which blossomed in the Mind. Only poets who have searched in their hearts have been able to find the bond which connects what is and what is not.

'The ray of light then shone over all, but no one knows where it came from. There was simply will-power above, seeds and self-creating forces below.

'But who in truth really knows how all this came about? Who projected the ray of light, and where did creation come from? The gods only came after creation. Therefore they cannot know the source of creation.

'From whom, then, did this creation come? Was it made or not made? Perhaps the great seer, in the highest of all heavens, may know; but perhaps he does not.'

It is possible that God is simply an unconscious being who has created the world in His dreams and in His nightmares. Everything

comes from those unconscious waters, but no one knows how or why. The ancient Vedic poets could not explain it, and it may be that God cannot explain it either. Perhaps it is then our task to help the Creator awake from His nightmare and to lighten the darkness. If God cannot help us perhaps we can help Him, and in the process recover our lost totality.

As I gazed into the deep crystal, which was at once clear and shadowy and full of moving lights, I seemed to discover the face of Sister Raihana merging with that of the Brother of Silence at the bottom of the stone. Both seemed to be crossed by the ancient river of creation and by the waters of mystery, and I seemed to hear them say: 'Do not speak; do not ask questions. Wrap yourself in the silence of your heart, *for it is there, and only there, that poets have been able to find the bond which connects what is with what is not.*'

PART TWO

From the Himalayas to the Andes

I

THE EDGE OF THE ANDES

FOR Chile, the razor's edge is the *cordillera* of the Andes. The country itself, which is very long and narrow, lies between these mountains and the sea. With its head in the burning sands of the northern desert, and its feet in the ices of Antarctica, it will have to overcome these two extremes and to climb up to the highest slopes if it is not going to burn or freeze. This task is difficult, for the higher one climbs the deeper the abysses.

In recent years, Chile has been frequently struck by earthquakes and disasters. The whole country seems to be stirring expectantly, as though it were trying to readjust its fate. For in its present form it seems to be all that remained after some gigantic catastrophe which took place thousands of years ago. The mountains have risen from the sea, and the sea remains hostile to them. One day this long struggle between the sea and the mountains will have to be decided. If the mountains should win, then a whole continent will appear to the west of Chile, revealing perhaps the ruins of the city of Lemuria, with its temples and palaces belonging to the titans of the moon. If the sea should win, we shall all be submerged, and the old story will repeat itself. In the meantime the beauty of Chile, and the light that surrounds its volcanoes, is like the aura of a beautiful girl who suffers from tuberculosis and knows that she will soon have to die.

This fate can be overcome only if we Chileans begin to reinterpret our landscape. As India has long since proved, there is a profound interpenetration between the soul of a man and the land on which he lives. The Chilean has yet to rediscover the gods that are hidden in his mountains; he has yet to bring them into the light and introduce them into his soul. At present there is only disequilibrium: the landscape is beautiful and magnificent, but the man is

tortured by the land. Our fault has been that we have tried to impose strange gods on the landscape, and to import a civilization and culture which do not belong to this land. We in South America are neither European nor Asiatic: we are somewhat between the two. Yet, so far, we have imposed only Western values on our country; to produce a balance we should perhaps allow the gods of India and of Tibet to emigrate, since they are already being thrown out of their own countries. Chile had no sophisticated culture in the pre-Colombian era, like that of the Incas, the Mayas or the Aztecs; but Chile has an old and very powerful soul which is revealed as much in the mountain valleys of the country as in the essential nature of its people. There are titans buried in the rocks of the Andes, and if we Chileans are going to survive we will have to become new men, and we will have to rescue these titans from the depths of our own souls.

For many years I have been aware of how different we are, and I have thought that our civilization might almost be called an Oriental Christianity. Therefore I never felt I was a renegade when, in India, I let myself go and lived as a Hindu, sunk in the Dionysian essence of that legendary culture. What happened to the Dutch swami that I met in Musoori or to the French Mahatma in Ananda Mai's *ashram* I knew would not happen to me. For I am a South American, moreover a Chilean or a man of the Pacific, and great mountain walls have always blocked our access to Europe. On the other hand, I am not a Hindu or an Asiatic either, and I know it. Our values are quite different: we are too individualistic and we are too Christian, even in the thin racial layer to which I belong, that of the whites of South America. What will happen when the Indians return, and the coloured races impose themselves on us, no one knows. The process may be influenced, however, by the work we are doing today in our own souls, and by the difficult pilgrimages we are taking from the ices of the Antarctic to the Himalayas. It is possible that my own effort may have repercussions in forming the future soul of my country and of the southern continent—that is, unless everything ends beforehand in a new sinking of Atlantis.

The price that one pays for modelling the future, however, is agony in the present, especially when one realizes that one is working against one's present condition. For whoever dares to take this long pilgrimage between two worlds sacrifices himself, and has to live in a half world between the two. Thus I belong neither to the world of today nor to the world of tomorrow; rather I have one foot in each. I know that I will never again be able to return completely to Western culture nor to the religion of my forbears; but I also know I could

not embrace any other. Thus I am caught in between and lose myself. Yet this may be part of a general progression, for it has always been necessary for one world to die before another could be born.

Chile is the antipodes of India, and the Andes on one side of the earth balance the Himalayas on the other. Perhaps they are Ida and Pingala, located to the right and to the left of Sushumna at the base of the dorsal spine of that mysterious and gigantic being called Earth.

Thus Chile and India seem to be mysteriously united by mountains and fires. But, like Ida and Pingala, the Andes and the Himalayas, they will have to unite in some occult wedding, having as witnesses the unfathomable waters of the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. This wedding may already have taken place in the distant past, but then Rama lost Sita in the jungle of history. One day they will have to meet again, and, so long as they remain apart, we will be racked by earthquakes.

Yet it may be enough if only one man fulfils within himself the mysteries in the depth of his soul. For what is inside is also outside, and one man can save all men. There is an old Chinese saying about this: 'A man sitting in his room and thinking the right thoughts will be heard a hundred miles away.'

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I returned to my own country and my native city, and walked along the streets and through the old squares I had known in my childhood. I climbed the hill that overlooks the city and found the path lined with spring flowers. Then, as I walked through the city streets, I remembered my companions on other, earlier strolls. I could see their faces, could recall their voices and our discussion of the ideals of our generation. Finally I stopped beside some old gates in front of the house where I had lived. The ghosts of my parents and forbears came out to receive me. I found myself repeating these verses by Omar Caceres:

'And, now, remembering my old self
And the places where I have lived,
Which still reflect my inmost thoughts,
I understand that the feeling
That comes with all strange loneliness
Is nothing more than proof that human sadness endures.
He who breaks out of his custom,
Abandons security and familiar ways,

Can still feel when he returns
All his being bursting within him.
Then he knows that what was is still there,
And that it makes mockery of his removal.
Yet there he stands, absorbed, directionless as before,
And solitary as a mountain, saying the word "Past"
In such a way that no man can console
Him in his suffering.
He has had to take a long trip
In order to find
What he has been looking for and what he has always loved.'

One evening, almost instinctively or intuitively, I went to the old graveyard in order to find a tomb. When I found it I knew it was the grave of the Valley of Flowers, and I stood beside it, meditating and talking softly with the constant companion of my many pilgrimages through the world. As we had seen the world through the same eyes, we considered our experiences together and decided that little time remained before we would reach our goal.

I realize that the story which I am narrating here in this book will seem fantastic and unreal to many people. Nevertheless, it has been my life. It is my reality, and when I describe it I try to be as realistic as it is possible to be. The differences between my realism and that of others is that mine is a magical realism. I do not concoct it merely as a literary device, but because my life has really been magical, as other lives must also be.

Nevertheless, I should perhaps qualify what I have said by adding that although my life has been magical in one sense, it has also been real and objectively visible. Whether it will continue to be so I cannot tell, for already I have begun to feel that some strange urgency, some soft breeze from another world, has been flowing into my being ever since I was touched by a hand in the Valley of Flowers. I have begun to feel that the centre of my personality and of my emotions has changed, and that I am gradually being taken out of visible reality. To put it differently, I believe that the magic in my life has begun to outweigh visible reality. If this process is indeed taking place, then I shall never be able to understand myself or to explain myself in ordinary language. Thus it may easily be that the final pages of this book will seem to be touched by an ethereal madness. It will be the madness of the high mountains and the pure poetry of the immortals.

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During my stay in Chile I had a dream. I was far away in the deep south of the country, in Patagonia, not far from the ranges of Ultima Esperanza and the Towers of Paine. All about me were snowy mountain-tops, which glistened in the clear air. I was climbing up the outside of a huge volcano, and when I reached the top, and looked into the circular crater, I saw a spring of water gushing from the interior walls of the volcano. This water was apparently the real object of my trip there, and as I approached it, I heard a voice explaining, 'This is the true water, because it springs from the interior of a crater.' I was suddenly overcome by a feeling of complete happiness.

Then as I looked at the mountain ranges round about me, I found monumental stone temples, and cities carved into the stone cliffs. When I stopped to look at them carefully, I noticed how similar they were to the temples of the Orient; they were like the caves of Ellora and Ajanta in India, and like Angkor in Cambodia. I then thought to myself that a similar race must have lived here, and that these were Andean cities and temples which had never been discovered. Perhaps they were the legendary cities of the Ceasars. But then, even though I was asleep, I knew I was dreaming.

2

THE MASTER FIGHTS THE SERPENT

LATER I decided to visit the Master. As I climbed up the long stairway that leads to his place, I looked at the pictures he had drawn which hung on the wall, and the paintings of Mount Kailas and Lake Manasarovar. I thought of myself as I had been many years before, and realized the enormous influence this man had exercised on my life. I wondered how I had ever met him and found him, and then remembered the old saying, 'When the disciple is prepared, the Master appears.' There seems to be some mysterious force which plays upon our souls, and we attract to ourselves what our souls demand. Ostensibly the Master had started me on my long pilgrimage, but in reality my heritage and blood had made me go.

When I arrived I looked at the Book of the Order. It was open, and I could see my name written there, and I could see the names of all my brothers who also served the Master. Alongside the book lay a great sword. Glancing from these to my Master, I suddenly felt very alone as though, by the force of my own will, I had remained for ever outside of these mental creations and archetypes. The Master was bent over a piece of paper upon which he was writing, and I realized that he must be more than eighty years old. He was writing verses, and he did not interrupt his work when I arrived. He had never written poetry before, but as he had stopped living in prose, he had subsequently submerged himself entirely in the rhythms of cosmic poems.

Finally he stopped and glanced in my direction. When he saw me he looked immensely happy. 'Did you meet the masters on Mount Kailas?' he asked me with eagerness.

'I was not able to, Master, and I am not even sure that they exist.'

'Faithless man! Now I know that you have fallen and that you have given yourself over to passions and to the life of the world,' he said.

'So that the branches of a tree may reach heaven, its roots must reach hell,' I replied.

'No,' he said. 'You are quite wrong. What you renounce in this world is transformed into superior values in your soul. The love which you renounce here is returned to you there in its pure and eternal form. You should save your Beloved and project your love into eternity. In this world we grow old and die; there you grow younger and younger. All life that you renounce here on earth is transformed into true life in the beyond; and everything that you accept here becomes corrupt and dies. You cannot burn a candle at both ends: if you do you will get no light, but only fire and smoke. Don't you remember what Beethoven said when he ran away from the woman he loved? He said, "If I accept your love, what will remain for my music?" Yes, and what will remain for your god? Do you remember the Greek legend about the young man who stood in the snow on a mountainside calling out the name of the girl he loved, while at the same time rubbing his chest with snow in order to quench the fire that burned in his heart? The girl heard the shout and then went up to him, but when he saw her coming the young man looked at her in astonishment and said: "What are you doing here? What do you want of me?" "I heard you calling," she replied, "and so I came." "Oh, is that so," he said. "I'm so busy with the love I feel for you that I haven't time to devote it to you!" '

'Master,' I replied, 'I will burn myself like a candle at both ends, and I will remain stretched between heaven and hell, between the Himalayas and the Andes, and between the Antarctic and the Arctic—because I am not interested in being anything more than a man.'

'You have indeed fallen,' he said sadly. 'But even now there may be a last chance for you. I need you for fighting. My own life has been extended by the great Hierarchy so that I may help to save the world. A great catastrophe is approaching, and we shall have to use the sword; we shall have to fight against the shadows of evil. Listen now, I want to tell you something that will really get through to your soul: you can't get away from your essential being and from the depths of your heart. And do you know who is to be found in the depths of your heart? Jesus. And do you know what Jesus is? He is renunciation; and only in renunciation will you attain happiness.'

After that, the Master did not listen to anything more that I said. Instead he began to sing beautiful old songs of other times and places.

Then I shouted to him, even though I knew he would not listen. I shouted: 'Yes, Jesus Christ! But my Christ is the Christ of Atlantis!'

3

MY SISTER AND THE SERPENT

BEFORE leaving Chile, I wanted to have a last glimpse of the Pacific Ocean. I called my sister, and she agreed to go with me down to Valparaiso. There we walked over the hills above Playa Ancha, which is nearby, listening to the surf beating below us and feeling the soft foam on our faces. Together we talked of Pepita Paraná, our great-great-grandmother, whose husband had drowned at sea. It had been she who had woven the swaddling-clothes for her great-great-grandson 140 years ago.

Then suddenly my sister and I had the same thought, and that was to find our great-great-grandmother's tomb. After searching for a while we finally discovered it in a small cemetery at Playa Ancha, and we sat by it in silence as the sea breeze played over our faces. We were thinking of our childhood and the blessed days of youth. Then suddenly my sister began to speak, and to tell me about some of her strange experiences. She told me that in the mornings she would often wake up without really waking up, and that then she would experience a strange current running through her body and projecting her out of her body. She felt that she was 'flying over the mountains'. Then she told me of our old nanny, and that she had been visited by her after her death. She also told me of other shadowy and ghostly experiences.

The stars were out by the time we returned to town, walking hand in hand and feeling happy after we had visited the tomb of that ancestor of ours who had perhaps been the first to put the poison of the Serpent in our blood. I had reassured my sister by telling her of my own experiences. For her part, she had given me a feeling of absolute certainty, for my sister has never been ill, nor did she ever suffer a severe accident. Nevertheless, her experiences were exactly like mine. The spirit of our early childhood games had been

extended into later life—to her in the Andes, and to me in the Himalayas. Somehow it seemed inevitable that it should have happened in this way.

I then decided to go back to India in order to complete my great battle with the Serpent.

PART THREE

The Himalayas Again

I

ALMORA

I RETURNED to India by way of Eastern Asia and found, as I had noticed before, that everything there was horizontal. Compared with India, which is engaged in the vertical adventure of Shivaism, the rest of Asia seemed like a flat sea. As a result there is neither adventure nor mystery in most of Asia, for these can exist only in a climate produced by a congregation of individualized souls. It is true that great cultures existed in Asia, as in China and Japan. Alongside them we find animism. Buddhism is essentially horizontal. However, if in India you break through the thin layer that covers her you will fall into a Dionysian chasm. Outside of India, nothing of this happens.

After my arrival in India I went without delay up to Almora, which is the gateway to the Transhimalayas, and especially to Mount Kailas and Lake Manasarovar. The Brother of Silence lives in Almora, and spends his days there contemplating the snowy mountains to the north.

When I arrived I found that Ananda Mai was in her mountain *ashram,* and I decided to visit her for the last time. She seemed quite different and revealed herself to me in quite a new light. She was seated on a podium in front of an archway, through which I could see the snowy mountains beyond. Her gestures and her words seemed to be entirely liturgical, as though she reflected the forces of destiny. She seemed to be full of grace, and her movements seemed to be authorized by some divine spirit. For the first time in my life I had the impression of being in the presence of a supernatural being.

Later I took a small house in the outskirts of Almora. It was on a hill facing the gigantic Himalayas, and from there I gazed towards the summit of Nanga Parbat.

There is a moment in a man's life when he feels as though destiny were working within him and directing his actions. I felt that this moment had at last come to me: the long struggle and pilgrimage had begun to bear fruit. The branches had begun to grow because the roots had sunk deep. I knew that only suicide could prevent the final fruition of this pilgrimage, which was at once natural and unnatural. For in my case this rebellion against nature was a natural act. Nature itself had committed the crime. I then began to feel one force imposing itself on others, one reality overcoming all other realities.

And then I began to dream and found myself beside Ananda Mai. She reached into a cupboard and took some fruit from it, all the time gazing deeply at me as she had done earlier in Banaras. Then she moved towards the centre of the room, holding a platter of fruit in her hand. After a moment she began to dance, but her movements were awkward, and she seemed afraid of dropping the platter. This trial seemed to be on the point of failure, and she seemed to realize it. She was fearful and awkward, afraid of a farcical result and the revelation of her impotence. Then music began to play and drums began to beat with an increasing rhythm. Soon this woman became transformed: her hair fell loose, and she began to beat the floor with her naked feet, moving the platter in her hand in time with the music. By now her face had become that of the Universal Mother—it was the face of Kali, the devouring goddess.

I was seated on a sofa, watching the incredible powers that this woman had let loose. Beside me there was another young man, who was also watching. I suddenly wished that all of my friends could be there with me, so that I could convince them of the extraordinary things that exist in this world. But then I realized that it was too late, for the Mother was looking at us while she danced, and soon she began to speak. First she addressed my companion, but then she spoke to me. 'After tomorrow, on Saturday,' she said, 'you will be killed.' Then she tried to soften the effect by what she had said by adding: 'There are many personalities within each individual and only one of these will be killed. This is how I interpret what I have seen.'

My companion on the sofa, who up until then had been convinced of the supernatural, then exploded in wrath. 'This is nonsense,' he said. 'I don't believe any of it; it is all absurd and improbable.'

I suppose he was trying to console me, but I realized that the Mother's statement had been extracted from the depths of the Universe in accordance with an inevitable fatality.

I felt my whole body shaking with vibrating currents, and the dance and the music were performed at the heart of these vibrations. Then the face of the Mother began to change its form; it began to dissolve and to take new forms, like the movement of the spheres.

2

THE THREE EVENINGS OF ICE

It was Thursday night, and I realized I had only two days left, for on Saturday I was to be killed. Throughout the evening I sat on a chair in the meditation room; I did not sit in the lotus position but sat in the manner of the pharaohs of Egypt and the initiated Popes. I looked out through the windows at the mountain-tops which were faintly pink in the dusk, and I decided to go back in time to that moment in the Kulu Valley when I had been given the key which I later renounced. I was not sure that I would be able to find it, and I knew the risk was great, for if I failed, I would have to die.

3

FIRST EVENING
THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

I TRIED to make my mind blank and struggled against hundreds of ideas and memories which swirled around me. Gradually my mind began to become calm and then, for a moment, it attained complete quiet. I tried to gaze at the space between my eyebrows and then found that my mind was held there and paralysed. I don't know how long this lasted, but I felt a soft current running through my body, gradually chilling me from my feet upward. Soon I felt the shape of my body changing, and I thought that I was floating, or that I had become dissolved. My shoulders seemed to extend sideways, and my head fell on to my chest; I felt a pendulum movement, but it seemed to be without form or shape. Rather than feeling free, however, I felt myself a prisoner within this form. Suddenly able to hear with extraordinary acuteness, I listened to the noises of the external world and of objective reality, while at the same time sensing those incipient subjective phenomena which were gaining reality within me. These two sensations struggled against each other, and I seemed to be pulled from the one to the other, without finding the key.

Then suddenly, and without any warning, I heard an acute whistle, and realized that someone was at my side. I was so frightened that my hair stood on end, and my whole body was pins and needles. Moreover, although I could see no one, I knew I was in the presence of the Abominable Snowman, and that I could understand what he was saying, even though I could hear no words. What he said was something like this: 'You have arrived at last, or at least you have reached this point. Many others have come, but I do not see them any more than they see me, although they sometimes discover my footprints in the snow. These are the explorers, who are people that

go everywhere and climb mountains, without really going anywhere, without really climbing anything. But your case is different: you will have to struggle with me throughout a whole night. I am the Angel of Jacob, and only I can open the pass to you.'

Frightened to death, I struggled all that night with the Angel.

4

SECOND EVENING
THE LAST FLOWER

I WAS unable to find the key, and so, sitting again, I tried to go back in time to the Valley of the Gods. Again I experienced the vibrations, the fainting spells and the feeling of cold ice on the spine. Then I found myself paralysed and caught like a prisoner between two universes in a moment of pure emptiness and supreme anguish. I knew then that I had already gone very far, and that I had reached the point of no return. I knew that if I could not find the way out, or the key, that I would be lost for ever and that I would die. I felt I had lost all control over the process and that I was completely immobilized and outside the world, caught in a fainting condition whose power is unequalled, and lacking the ability to return to my body although not really being outside it. The event I had so much feared had taken place. I knew I could no longer depend on myself, but realized that I was an image of destiny and that I could do nothing else but wait for it to be fulfilled. The key seemed to be lost for ever, and I could not remember how I had opened the door before.

At that moment I wanted to convince myself that I was listening to a voice, and receiving thoughts formulated by somebody else. I knew there was somebody else there, and indeed wanted to believe that there was somebody else there, even though I could see no one. And so I spoke to myself as if it were that other being who was speaking to me, as I had always dreamed she would speak at that very moment. And although it was I who spoke, I convinced myself that it was not me. And she or I then said:

'Look at this flower, here, in my hand before you. Leap, jump into it and remain there, before you die!'

And then I jumped, letting go of myself and entering into the flower. At last I had found the key and was free!

Finally I had got out of myself, and I saw my stationary, pale body sitting in the ebony chair like a dead man. She was in front of me, and I was within the flower in her hand. She then spoke. 'Once I taught you how to look at the flowers, and now I will teach you how to listen to them. For they are your own flowers, since you have always had the garden within yourself. Let us go into this garden then and listen to its music.'

And soon I began to hear the cosmic music which was nothing more than the music of my own flowers, or lotuses, in my garden. Everything began to vibrate in unison, and with her I went jumping from flower to flower, and from petal to petal. We went very deep and also very high, and, although we went hand in hand, I knew that in reality I was within the very small flower in her hand.

5

THIRD EVENING
THE MYSTICAL DEATH

WE HAD now reached the point of *experiencing the last undreamed-of misfortune, in which everything was sunk under the waves of her last farewell.* She had become transformed, and, since I was in her hand, or within the flower in her hand, I suddenly began to see, as she raised her hand to smell the perfume, an immense head. As the hand was raised, the head grew to a gigantic size and seemed as big as the world. Then she put the flower in her mouth, and I found myself being torn to pieces by her teeth so that finally nothing of myself remained, and I was turned into an easily digestible paste, as edible as a lotus-seed.

That day was Saturday, and I was killed by love.

6

THE VOID

ONE of my egos had died. Everything that was unnecessary in me had been expelled, while the rest had been assimilated within the body of the lover. Thus a murder had taken place and also a wedding. Nevertheless, I was there as I had been before; I had returned to my ordinary size and was standing with my dead companion of the Valley of Flowers. We were both of the same human size, but we were also changed and different. I discovered this when I looked at her and asked, 'Why do you have such big eyes?'

And she replied, 'All the better to see you with, my dear.'

Then I asked, 'Why do you have such big ears?'

And she replied, 'All the better to hear you, my dear.' Then, after a little, she walked away from me along a snowy path. Finally she stopped and looked back and said: 'From here, you will have to go on alone. I can be with you only up to this point.' Then she smiled, and I smiled in return. There was not the least sadness between us.

Slowly I began to climb, and finally, in the midst of the high mountains, I found what I had been looking for for such a long time. And I found that everything was so simple, and so different from what I have been writing in this book. I was overwhelmed with the desire to explain it all, but at that very moment the Brother of Silence, Sunya Bhai, who is really the Void, appeared. He placed a finger on his lips and said: 'Shhh, shhh! The end has come! From here on you will have to live in Silence. . . .'

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