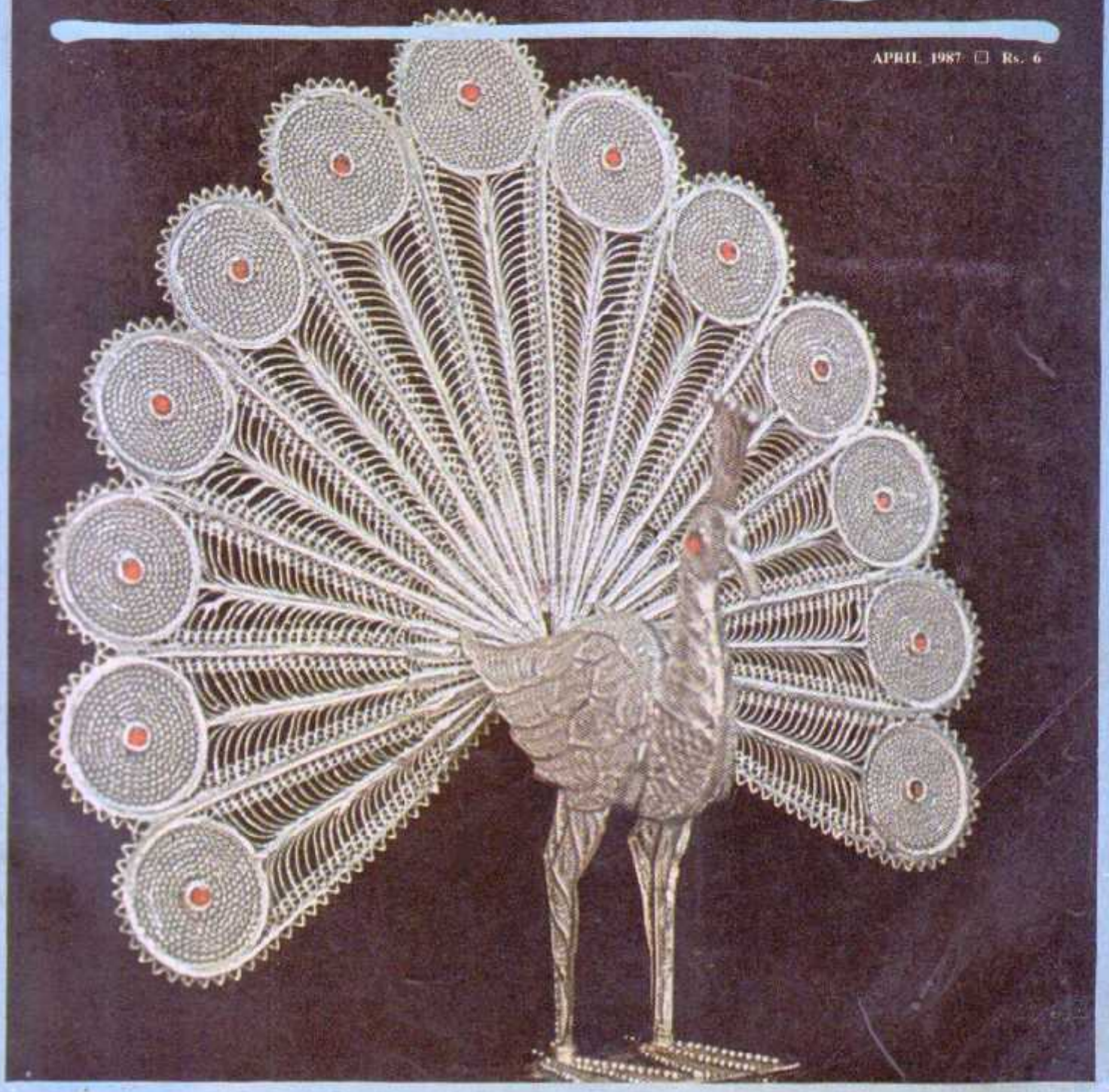
THE HERITAGE

APRIL 1987 ☐ Rs. 6



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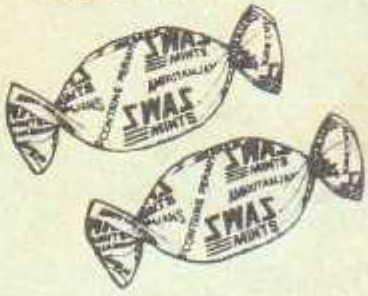

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GLIMPSES OF MAY '87 NUMBER

NEED FOR A DYNAMIC PATRIOTISM: Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer.

MEDIA AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION: Veteran commentator A. Ranganathan reflects on the reality.

MAHABALIPURAM: Author N.S. Ramaswami's last contribution.

RIVER OF MANY MOODS by Ruskin Bond and Ganesh Saili.

NRUSIMHANATH AND RANIPUR-JHARIAL: Two little-known places of hoary antiquity.

THE COMMONEST WILD BEAST OF INDIA: by Naturalist M. Krishnan. Guess who the creature is!

THE STORM WITHIN: A moving Novelette by popular Gujarati writer Varsha Adelja—as book feature.

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Subscriptions are to be sent by M.O. or Demand Draft (drawn in favour of Dolton Agencies) to Dolton Agencies, Chandamama Buildings, Vadapalani, Madras-600 026. Subscribers are requested to notify change of address at least six weeks in advance. Subscription: Annual Rs.72.00. Overseas (by sea) U.S. $12. Singapore S.$25. U.K. £8. W.Germany D.M.21. and (by air) $29 / S.$58 / £20 / D.M.50 respectively. (Rates are subject to change in freight.) Overseas subscription remittances are to be made in favour of Chandamama Publications, Vadapalani, Madras-600 026.

VIEWS AND VOICES

I eagerly read your editorials which present a clear view of the problems facing the country. You have the courage to say what others out of fear or timidity hesitate to say. Many enlightened people feel the same. Your words confirm and reinforce their convictions.

Apropos of the beautiful letter of Mickie Hardy published in January issue of THE HERITAGE, I will like to share with your readers a poem I wrote sometime ago.

Pondicherry —*Shyam Kumari*

O Thou

O my brother, thou who ploughest
Thy lonesome furrow in the crusted African soil,
Burnt by the fiery summer-sun that creates
A million mirages yet quenches not thy thirst,
May the peacock clouds of my India
Be kind to thy parched earth, to thy aspiring soul.

O my brother, thou who rowest thy boat
Tormented by the thought of crushing thy rival
On a surface mirroring the riches of Western lands,
May the magnanimity of my India holding alike friend or foe
Enlarge thy heart in boundless vasts and break thy mental bonds.

O my fellow Indian, man, woman or child
That thou mayst rise to new God-Heights
And fathom unknown depths of God-purpose
And be once more the torch-bearer of Truth's triumph
Armoured in the puissance of thy soul, break nature's fetters
And, free and pure, storm of God's radiant tops.
O Gods, secure in your far heavens
Arrested in your high poise of Power and Immortality
May you be born in the holy land of India
That your glories may be greatened further by God's Grace
And through you be fulfilled the secret mysteries of Divine Purpose.

We could have carried this inspiring poem in our poetry page. But this goes well here too.

—*Editor*

PASSING OF A VETERAN

The article on Chidambaram in the February issue was at once authoritative and informative, coming as it did from the facile pen of N.S. Ramaswami. The photographs are exquisite. But then, this is typical of all photo-features in THE HERITAGE.

Alas, N.S. Ramaswami is no more. He is most well-known for his first-hand studies on Indian History, Archaeology and Temple arts; he has authored nearly a dozen books on these subjects.

His articles, on sports events, particularly cricket, were equally readable. Lovers of books still remember his delectable reviews of old books collected from roadside vendors.

Warangal —*Dinker Sirdeshmukh*

Indeed, Shri Ramaswami's Passing away is a great loss to us. The very first issue of THE HERITAGE (January '85) carried two articles by him. While the March '87 issue carried his piece on Mohenjodaro, we will carry his last article in our May '87 issue.

—*Editor*

SALUTE TO THE MYSTIC UNITY

By publishing "The Bapu of the Durgah" by Dhananjay Desai in your section *The Other Experience* (February 1987) you have not only brought to light the rare occult powers which the Indian mystics and saints even in modern age hold, but also have contributed to the Hindu-Muslim mystic unity.

My thanks to Sisir Dutta, your artist, for his subtle, meaningful art with least exaggeration.

Cuttack —*Pradip Kumar Patra.*

ONSLAUGHT ON THE ABODE OF THE GODS

The spotlight on the Graet Himalayas was well-planned. Alas! bit by bit the deadly commercial hands are making unchecked, perhaps sponsored, inroads into this sanctuary of bliss. Modification and depletion of its vast diversity of flora and fauna for the gross commercial purposes is increasingly leading to a catastrophic eventuality—annihilation of her exclusiveness and divinity as well.

Our planners need rethinking in the developmental philosophy—the 'plan and know' slogan should be replaced by 'know then plan' so that the best tradition of the local life-styles are reflected in the vast spectrum of development and progress. A great deal of harm is done to the human and cultural ecology of this great part of the world by these half-baked policies of the so-called planned development.

And in the final analysis, a word for the planners: live with locals, know, understand and then plan in such a manner that the best form of reconciliation of the two almost internecine aims—preservation and productivity—and the greatest diversity of organic life compatible with the local culture are ensured. And this demands a broad-based strategy, with the basic knowledge that the eco-systems are dynamic in nature.

Shimla —*Kuldeep Chauhan.*

WHAT I LIKE MOST

I like many things in THE HERITAGE. But what I like most is the respect you have for your readers, the fact that you do not consider us as creatures worthy of being titillated.

Yours is perhaps the most imaginatively planned magazine in India and one of the best in the world, at least in the world of English language. You may be sure, I include the U.K., the U.S.A. and Canada—countries in which I have spent years. No other magazine gives so many short stories with such unusual features like *The Other Experience* or *Fables and Fantasies for Adults*. Your Editorials stir our conscience, your features like *Roots* and *Little-Known India* awake us anew to the wonder that is India and your articles in *Body and Mind* are of very concrete help.

Calcutta —*M. Kumar*

The Rajasthani picture on the cover page of the February '87 issue was by Shri Bhisham Pal. It was credited to a different name by mistake.

In the page 73 of January '87 number the lines attributed to William Blake are in fact from Thomas Gray and they should read:

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air".

THE HERITAGE

THE FUTURE

"The Future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of sixty minutes an hour, whatever he does, whatever he is," wrote C.S. Lewis, the celebrated English critic. Apparently innocent and humorous, the statement was depressing. It was cynical of all figurative use of the term future, of all the hopes for the fulfilment of man's dreams for a sensible tomorrow, be it the 21st century or a century thereafter.

Today we have reached a stage when we can doubt if man will reach a future even at the rate of sixty minutes an hour. There may not be man to reach anywhere.

The nuclear bomb may become the immediate cause to finish off man, but it cannot be *the* cause. The cause is man himself—atleast the so-called elite among men. The consciousness which goes on adulterating food inflicting diseases on thousands, the consciousness which harasses others through corruption, blackmarketing or hoarding, mistaking profit for prosperity and satisfaction of greed for happiness, the consciousness which exploits the people by titillating them with sex and violence and the consciousness which submits itself first willy-nilly and then quite willingly to this kind of exploitation, the consciousness which promotes pollution and destroys Nature, the consciousness that learns to develop a sinister apathy with which to bear the conduct of terrorists who kill innocent people and then flee for their own dear life, is also the consciousness which makes the nuclear bomb and, in a bid to lighten its own burden of guilt encourages a country of half-fed multitudes (like Pakistan for a concrete example) to make the bomb and obliges its neighbour, also a country of half-fed multitudes, to wonder if it too should not make one.

It appears that the Evolutionary Nisus is fed up with man. It is eager to finish man off through the action of a select few politicians and scientists. Otherwise instead of hitching their wagons to stars, these people would not hitch their wagons to star wars.

As we had once said earlier, it is only mankind superior in culture, thought and conduct that can subdue the tyranny of the wicked and the ignorant in politics, science, trade and culture, and justify the great course of evolution and march into a worthy future.

We have to be more conscious of frontiers between culture and anarchy, we have to remember that anything that is put to tune is not music, anything that is written down is not literature, anything that is screened or staged is not art. We have to resist the advent of anti-culture by a determined exercise of our will to live meaningfully and with dignity. The mediocre few holding the bombs are possessed by a kind of blind spirits. They can be dispossessed only by an enlightened humanity.

We present in this issue reflections of five persons distinguished in their fields on the future of man. After an interval, we propose to focus on the topic even more elaborately and from more angles.

SLUMP OF THE CENTURY!

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

Are you aware of the latest great event in the realm of the stars? Is it the German astronomer Dr. Kurt Birkle detecting a 'Super Nova' type that can emit light up to a hundred million times the intensity of the Sun? Is it the intrusion of a 'foreign' planet in our solar system that is instigating Neptune and Uranus to slightly deviate from their regular course?

No, it is thousands of stars being christened by a Canadian "Professor of Astronomy". One who pays him a moderate sum of thirty dollars gets a star named after him or her. On receipt of the amount, the professor sends the customer a map of the sky showing the situation of the remote star that now bears the customer's name!

The professor, of course, has made it clear in his advertisement seeking star-buyers that the transaction has no legal validity. But the caution did not deter the seekers of starhood to rush to him. He had already obliged thousands of them and has enhanced the fee to thirtyfive dollars.

In olden days it required much more than thirty or thirtyfive dollars to earn the starhood. We have the Saptarshi group of stars—representing seven great sages who had to their credit aeons of askesis. Then there is Dhruva—the Pole Star. He was originally a prince who, insulted by his step-mother in front of his cypher father, left for the forest and meditated on God. Don't believe that a few years of meditation alone earned him the starhood. One day, while he was walking with a sage, feeling a little proud of his spiritual realisations, the sage pointed out a grassy mound to him at a dense nook of the forest and asked him if he knew what it contained. Upon Dhruva replying in the negative, the sage informed him that the mound consisted of the skeletons of Dhurva himself—for umpteen times in his previous incarnations, he sat there in trance and left his body there.

How easy the Canadian professor has made the job that took Dhruva numerous incarnations to achieve! While the value of all the commodities has sky-rocketed between yesterday and today, the value of stars has made an earthward dive. Undoubtedly the slump of the century.

Otto Rank, the psychologist, speaks of four ways through which man tries to satisfy his urge for immortality. They are developing faith in the continuity of the soul, leaving offspring to continue one's line, aligning oneself with some 'chosen' group that could lay claim to some sort of eternal truth, or by dedicating oneself to some creative or scientific pursuit and believing that the result of such labours will survive one.

Otto Rank, of course, does not dismiss the possibility of some cosmic truth lying behind man's adamantine attraction for immortality. He is concerned only with the psychological manifestations of the urge. But mystics would say that the human consciousness being truly immortal, the external symptoms of this secret awareness of immortality could be not four but myriad.

Exporting one's name to the safety of the star is, obviously yet another symptom to be added to the list. This, however, is a promising proposition and, we hope, an international convention to take the business out of the Canadian professor's hands and to parcel out space for each country (with an extra portion reserved for the permanent members of the UN Security Council) is not far.

The problem is, the supply of known stars may fall short of the demand, for as the tension and insecurity on the earth increases, demand for stars would increase too. More and more affluent people would like to make the stars their alter ego—shining bright and undisturbed forever while the earth civilisations get washed away in the nuclear drain. Like old coffins being dislodged making room for the dead, the stars might be made to shed their old names in order to wear brand new ones.

The alternative solution is to determine the longevity of the stars and price them accordingly. I know at least one aged wealthy lady who refused to be tricked into buying a car because she knows—a knowledge which she shares with a privileged few—that the world's petrol stock was not going to last long. The same law of psychology will work to deter some customers from going for certain stars which were likely to be extinct in a few million billion years.

Man has already been using the stars for long. Some of the Christian saints are known by the style of stars that adorn them. The star was the insignia of every order of Knighthood. In 1861 Queen Victoria instituted the "Most Excellent Order of the Star of India" to please the royal native rulers. We also honour the celestial bodies by calling our film artistes stars. Astronomical stars influencing our destiny may be a myth, but the Hollywood, Madras, or Bombay stars influencing many a destiny is an undeniable reality.

What a pity that the twinkle twinkle little stars know nothing of their worth!

THE WAY OF NATURE IN APRIL

by RICHARD PEARSON

The pace of life has quickened to such an extent that we have deprived ourselves of the most beautiful gifts of Nature.

Poets may be of a different breed since they are sensitive to everything around them. But we, the general humanity, lost in our day-to-day life of a certain routine, must take time off to be with Nature if we are to regain our inner harmony and balance which are the pre-conditions of health, vitality and joy.

Let us consider for a moment, therefore, what is it that attracts us in Nature.

Whether we pass by the stretches of green fields or the rich and varied wooded areas of forest, or when we sit by a small, hardly noticed murmuring brook or walk by a steadily flowing river, what is it that we experience deep within us? Have you ever watched the vast expanse around you from the top of a mountain or from a ship in the midst of an ocean ?

Inspite of its varied moods, the first effect of being anywhere in the midst of Nature, in its natural state of course, is a sense of peace and calm. All the noises of a restless mind or the struggles of a turbulent heart are quietened if we let Nature work its miracle. And when the deep silence fills us entirely, we must learn to listen to the profound wisdom contained in its heart. For Nature teaches us how to live spontaneously. And that, I believe, is the greatest lesson one can learn to recover the natural harmony of our being and the sanity of collective life. For, it is only when we are in harmony with ourselves that we can be in harmony with others.

If the month of February brings in the feeling of Spring and March gives the splendid touch of that sweet season, April brings the beginning of Summer with its clear, blue skies and the touch of heat.

During this month, our earthly angels, who have been quite busy preparing their nests, rear their young.

It is easy to spot the nests of bulbuls. For, they are conspicous, cup-shaped nests in low bushes, which seem quite in contrast with the nest of kites, built on the top of palm trees. Note the different prolonged nuptial calls of these large gliders!

This is the only time of the year that the large Amaryllis present their beautiful trumpet-shaped flowers.

Also, we have the *Brownea* flowering in April. It is rather a shy tree, but one bunch of flowers is enough to catch all our attention. More noticeable than the flowers are the hanging fresh mottled new leaves!

The festival of flowering trees continues. Look for the beautiful Jacaranda, especially in the hills or in towns of higher altitudes. Nature certainly ushers in the Tamil and Bengali New Year with this abundance of its joy.

Then, we have the celebration of Easter by the "Service Trees", which blossom forth with their fragrance and a carpet of gold beneath their large, shady canopy. The botanical name for this tree is *Peltophorum Ferrugineum* (Copper Pod or Rusty Shield-bearer), coined by those who noticed their rusty, shield-shaped fruit.

1. *A large Amaryllis of a special colour, by Vidyavrata.*

2. *Jacaranda in full bloom—at Yercaud, by Vidyavrata.*

3. *Browneа—all its beauty crowded in a single bunch of flowers—by Vidyavrata.*

4. *Golden fragant blossoms of the "Service" tree—Peltophorum Ferrugineum by Richard Pearson.*

5. *The Indian Pitta with its colours brought down from some higher sphere—by Vidyavrata.*

The Mandar flowers were characteristic of the paintings by 18th century Garhwali artist Molaram.

Peeps into the Valley of Flowers and Beyond.

ON TO GHAGHARIA

Text & Photographs:
GANESH SAILI

MY EYES are blinded by the brilliant colours of a valley that wears a quilt of finely embroidered flowers. I stand and stare, wide-eyed and speechless. Flowers of every imaginable colour and hue. The air is so saturated with scent that clouds of fragrance, wafted by a gust of Himalayan breeze, storm my senses.

'Kyoon Sahib.....kya hua?' (What's happened Sahib?). The robust voice of our guide intrudes. The spell is broken. But the magic lingers, working a different kind of spell this time. *'Yeh hai—Valley of Flowers!'*

The Valley of Flowers. Lying at a height of 4115 metres, snug in the upper Himalayan ranges, it is a valley many travellers have written about, each influenced by his own sensations, his own experience. No human hand could have created such a paradisiacal garden. In fact, to my mind, none of the famed gardens of Moghul Emperors—Nishat, Shalimar, Chashma Sahi, could match this natural garden in visual splendour. One cannot help but believe the awed villagers who, with a hint of fear in their voices, whisper that at night the mountain-fairies tend this garden by the light of a million glow-worms. A garden at the gateway of Heaven that is watered by Heaven's own sacred fount—the Pushpa Ganga, or the River of Flowers. In autumn, the garden is abloom with over a thousand varieties of exotic Himalayan flowers.

Fortunately it is autumn now—the best time to be in the Valley of Flowers. So, we set out one chilly morning.

The road from Mussoorie to Tehri winds gently along wooded mountains. The nearby slopes, sprout orchards of peach, plum and appricot out of the rocky mountains. It's a bumpy ride to

A flower is like a smile!

the district headquarters of the hill-district of Tehri Garhwal. We have been here before, and drive on to Srinagar, the capital of the old Garhwal kingdom—the land of two forts. The dull-grey silt brought down by innumerable flash floods gives this bustling town a sombre look.

A small stream, a tributary of the Ganga, rushes along the bottom of a steep, rocky valley. On the banks of the stream and on the terraced hills above are small fields in which are grown potatoes, spinach, rice, barley and occasionally, appricots and peaches. On the higher slopes are forests of pine and deodar, oak and rhododendron. But not every hillside is covered with foliage; many are rugged and bare; some are masses of quartz and granite. On hillsides most exposed to the wind, only grass and small shrubs are able to obtain a foothold.

The typical Garhwali village. It's rough stone houses straddling the spur of a hill above the fields, is off the beaten track and attracts few outsiders. There are usually a half-dozen families belonging to the village, each family possessing a few hectares of land on which everyone work. Women join in the ploughing and sowing, weeding and reaping. Sometimes the women are the only ones working in the fields, because the men have had to take jobs in the plains or join the army. From an early age, children help in the fields, graze cattle, or carry milk to market. Many of these children walk eight or nine kilometres to school.

Suddenly we are engulfed by a cloudburst. During the height of the monsoon some of these cloudbursts may bring as much as two and a half centimetres of rain in an hour. As we inch our way through the deluge, a black-and-yellow road sign warns: "Landslide active. Drive at your own risk!" Seconds later, as if by order, the mountain face moves down to obliterate the narrow road. This has happened for the past eight consecutive years, each time moving the road approximately fifteen metres into the mountain. With the road gone for the ninth consecutive year, we wait.

Twelve hours and four bulldozers later, another road is carved out of the mountain allowing us, along with a cavalcade of other stranded vehicles, to continue on the road that takes us to Karanprayag. Legend has it that the great Karan was cremated here on the palm of Krishna's hand. From there the road rises steeply to Joshimath, a Shangri-la sheltered by the towering mountains. It is the winter seat of Badrinath and the priests spend the winter here when snow covers the holy shrine. In Joshimath also grow the largest, most delicious, red apples—an average apple weighing approximately three hundred grams. We buy as many as we can carry and then drive the short distance to Govind Ghat. This is the stopping point for the motorable part of the journey and the starting point for our legs.

The sacred Alaknanda River surges below the Pushpa Ganga a suspension bridge that spans it where it meets. Huge logs hurtle like so many pieces of straw over its dangerous rapids. A huge shaggy black animal crouches at the entrance to the bridge. It lifts its head and we see the famed Bhotia dog. These dogs are reputed to guard the flocks of sheep against marauding leopards and wolves, themselves not being easy prey because of their formidable size, and the thirteen centimetre spiked iron collar they normally wear.

"It's ancestor could have been a bear!" says a lanky pilgrim from the nearby *gurdwara*. "It's best you stay here tonight and get a fresh start in the morning." The climb up to Ghagharia may take ten hours! Being road-weary, he did not have to say much more to convince us. Sleep is instantaneous.

In the morning I begin walking. It is as though my dreams of the previous night continue into the daylight. The majestic mountains topped with sunlight and snow rise in all their primitive glory. Against a frieze of silver-birch trees and glistening snow peaks, I see a small village. Smoke spiralling softly signals a *chai*-shop. Soon, we join a group of pilgrims on their way to the highest Sikh shrine. Most of them have seen many summers, but faith helps them on their holy trek. The autumn air is fragrant with the scent of conifers.

The cheerful song of the whistling thrush invites us to quicken our pace up the wooded path, but at our approach the bird flies through the woods into the darkened ravines. Its plaintive anthem fades away in the distance. Legend has it that Krishna fell asleep one warm day near a mountain stream and, while he slept, a small boy walked off with his celestial flute. On waking, Krishna noticed the flute gone and in anger turned the boy into a bird; but by then the naughty one had learnt some of the music of the gods and become immortal, only stopping now and then

The Pushpa Ganga is a little larger than a mountain stream in its upper reaches.

From the flower comes the fruit, after much labour!

(as the whistling thrush does) when he forgets the right note.

The sun has ended its journey and we are more than content to give ourselves to the hospitality of a shrine at Ghagharia. We are given a room to sleep in, and although our down sleeping bags are comfortable at minus 20°C, the person responsible for the allotment of blankets insists on giving each one of our party four heavy woollen blankets. Needless to say, it is a pleasant sleep.

At the break of dawn the stars seem to have come closer to Earth. The valley is shrouded in mist. After crossing a bridge, the path shrinks and climbs steeply. A long belt of rhododendrons marks the entrance. Slowly, the stars are extinguished one by one as the sun begins to scale the towering mountains. The mist lifts slowly to reveal glaciers in several places, making progress slippery and dangerous. Curiously enough, as late as 1847, there were sceptical geologists who insisted that there were no glaciers in the Himalayas!

Below the path, the bleached bones of a horse are mute reminders of a tourist who did not return last year. It is, indeed, treacherous walking these lonely trails. Across the path is a landslide which caused the Pushpa Ganga to change her course.

Suddenly, we are there. I see the Valley christened by Frank Smythe in 1931: The Valley of Flowers. A weariness, borne of travel, creeps over us all. Our tired eyes rest upon a drooping Himalayan poppy as it hangs in sleep from a rocky crag. Seven silent streaks of quicksilver cascade off the ancient rocks to water this Eden. Aged glaciers remain the sentinels of the flowers. An overpowering fragrance pervades the atmosphere arising from the flowers towering over and surrounding us.

The guide tells us of a legend that the mountain people believe. It is said that the playful mountain-fairies are prone to whisking away a weary traveller, especially if they find him alone at noon. Slowly, a dreamful ease settles over us all.....

My reverie is broken by the sight of two botanists, Bheem and Ram, who have set up camp in the middle of the Valley. They welcome us to their tents. Agog with excitement, we listen to stories of Himalayan bears knocking on the flaps of the tents, searching for food on cold moonlit nights. They have been here for years, during all seasons, drying and cataloguing the many species of flora and fauna.

Bheem tells of a nocturnal flower which, only on auspicious occasions, blooms radiating a phosphorescent green light. Locating this flower when in bloom is not an easy task, and partaking a portion of its substance brings immortality. Mother Ganga perhaps is indebted in this Valley for the many varieties of flowers and herbs that give their vitality and immortality to the holy river. A river that provides refuge and faith for millions. Truly a part of Heaven itself.

Outside, the night has settled silently over the Valley. While the others are still asleep, I arise and stride out of the tent, heading towards the *chai*-shop some eight kilometres away. The air is chilly. At my foot the flowers are encrusted with dewy pearls. It is indeed impossible to walk a single step without crushing a flower. A great part of the Valley floor is covered in small succulent berries, violet-blue, they taste like bubblegum. In the twinkling of an eye, the sun steals forth over the lush meadows, and flashes of blue light up these austere heights. I feel like a straying wanderer from another planet as I remember the words of an ancient Sanskrit poet who wrote: 'In a hundred ages of the gods I could not tell thee of the glories of Himachal!'

At the *chai*-shop a withered old face, hunched over a half-dead fire, holds a *chillum* cupped to her mouth. As I come nearer, the eyes of an old woman suddenly come alive with hope as she asks in a crackled voice: "Have you brought Leela?"

I step back. "Leela? What Leela? I don't know any Leela."

Seeing my blank stare, hope dies instantly in her tired eyes. Sighing, the old woman takes a long drag at her *chillum*.

"Babuji, she's mad!" Says the *chai-wallah*. "She thinks that beyond this Valley is another valley. Beyond that—nothing. So any outsider who comes here, comes from the other valley and must know her daughter who ran away some years ago."

Yes. This was a world in itself. Enclosed by forbidding mountains. A native of this valley, who had never stepped out, could only imagine a similar world without.

The blare of trumpets intrude shrilly into my thoughts. It is a small group of pilgrims, overjoyed at having reached this far. I slip away, unnoticed, back to my world of flowers.

My companions have been busy taking photographs of the exotic flowers, ferns, herbs and shrubs. One of them has discovered a grave. Scraping off the carpet of moss, the letters surface painfully: Joan Margaret

Legge (Feb. 21, 1885—July 4, 1939). The epitaph: 'I will lift mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help.' A botanist, she lies here among the flowers which she loved so much. Suddenly, all of us feel like intruders. We place a nosegay gently on the grave and tiptoe away from this high shrine of God's own garden.

The next day at 4267 metres, the air is thin—sucking the very breath of life out of us. There comes another visual blow, stunning the senses; all is white, blinding white. We are before the glacial lake of Lokpal, and seven snow-shrouded peaks jaggedly pierce the skies. Clinging to the grass, we lie sprawled at the edge of a crystal lake—out of breath, tired, yet strongly exhilarated, witnessing the mist creep and crawl in the valleys below. We are alone up here, the moment lodged for eternity in our minds.

'Sat Sri Akal!' The sacred Sikh invocation to their Gurus rings in the mountains. The moment is gone. Our fellow-travellers have caught up with us. Old and young, rich and poor clamber up the cobbled paths with walking-sticks. On piggy-back, and on mules. Young mothers shield babies from the icy wind that lashes like a whip through the wiry birch. A frail but strong porter carries an aged pilgrim in a wickerbasket. He puts it down, wipes his forehead on a tattered sleeve and asks us for a matchbox. The wind claws at his clothes. The basket stirs. A voice cries: 'You can't smoke while carrying a pilgrim—can you?!'

Shyam Singh sends a baleful glare at the basket. A frown furrows his brow, a cloud comes over his face. The *beedi* is tucked behind his ear. 'Never again .....never again will I make this sixty four kilometre trip again!" he promises.

But he will, poor sisyphus, twice a week. The hundred rupees will add to the meagre income from the narrow, weather-plagued fields in the village below. Paradoxically, this spot on earth, this holy land, blessed in both Sikh and Hindu mythology, provides bare sustenance for the inhabitants of the Garhwal Himalayas.

The veiled-face of a Garhwali bride with a nose-ring that is only made in the little town of Tehri.

Lokpal is the Hindu name of the God of Directions, there being eight lokpals who guard the sub-divisions of the compass. Kuber, the Lord of Wealth, prefers the north whilst Indra, the Lord of Thunder and Rain chooses the east. One legend has it that Lakshman meditated at the edge of this lake, long, long ago. A crumbling temple marks the hallowed spot. Treading along the withered edge, past the crumbling structure, a figure catches my eye. I step closer. A bearded statue peers at me.

Ambling up to me, a strapping truck driver exclaims:

"Wonderful, isn't it?

To be here at Hemkund—where Guru Govind Singh meditated in his last incarnation!"

"True, I murmur. A rare treat indeed to be in a place doubly blessed: where the hoof-prints of munk deer dot the ethereal snow.

The clear limpid water beckons. Sitting on the rubble on the other side of the lake is a shepherd, frozen in thought. At my approach, he comes to life. Where is your herd?' I ask. 'Grazing down there—somewhere. You know goats are smart creatures. They can take care of themselves and besides—each one has nine brothers!'

'Nine brothers?

How?'

'Well, four that carry it about, two on the head to protect it, two in the shape of ears to fan it and one tiny brother behind to flick flies away. Goats are well-looked after. No Sahib? But tell me Sahib—are you too looking for apsaras?'

Apsaras? Celestial nymphs? The stuff of ancient dreams—up here?

'Oh yes!' he sighs, with a twinkle in his eyes, 'My grandfather told me once of how when he was young he stole up the mountain one moonlit night and had a glimpse of them gambolling in these waters. And so I too come up here often—but so far, no luck! Don't you think they'll turn up some day?'

'Maybe.....who knows?!' I remark.

Leaving the garrulous shepherd to his lonely vigil, I move on. A blissful silence reigns. There is something about this place, an elusive mysticism that perhaps Rudyard Kipling felt when he wrote: ".....Go find it.

Go and look behind the Ranges.

Something lost behind the Ranges.

Lost and waiting for you. Go!"

In a workshed near the new *gurdwara*, pilgrims huddle around a fire, swapping stories over gulps of steaming tea. A glass is thrust at me. It is sweet

and comforting. Shyam Singh beckons me behind the shack and lights a *beedi*. Has he ever seen the Yeti on his innumerable treks up here? In answer, a gleam comes into his eyes. Like the Ancient Beadsman, he holds my attention:

'Something strange happened to me many years ago. The snow was very heavy and one couldn't come up past Ghagharia. So, I went to work on the road below, on the road to Badrinath, I was drilling a hole in a rock face when I heard this voice saying: "Go away. Leave me alone." I could see nothing around and yet the voice was so insistent..... "He stops, takes a drag at his *beedi*, tugs at my sleeve for a light, and rambles on:

'I'll never forget it.....oh yes! Where was I? Yes, the charge exploded and I rushed up even before the dust had settled and gaped into a cave. A figure wrapped in ochre glared at me and then vanished into thin air. But Sahib, those piercing eyes will haunt me forever..!

Wiping the damp from his forehead, he walks back to his wicker-basket. A small pica surfaces from under the gravel, stops inquisitively, and scurries away. That on earth is the world's smallest hare up here in the world's tallest mountains?

The clouds envelop the seven peaks, going through them gently like ghosts to turn up on the other side. It is time to go back. A sense of camaraderie ties total strangers together as they help each other down the 3,000 stone steps that glint like pewter in the muffled sun. Ahead, Shyam Singh has halted, the basket is empty. The old pilgrim is on hands and knees, hair trailing in the wind, crawling towards the overhand. "Altitude sickness?" I venture.

"Ha! Altitude sickness. No Sahib, just pure vanity—she wants one of those Brahmakamals," he says, pointing to a cluster that sprouts near a ledge. I step closer and stop. Why do people always pluck flowers? As if in answer to my unvoiced question, her wrinkled face cracks into a smile:

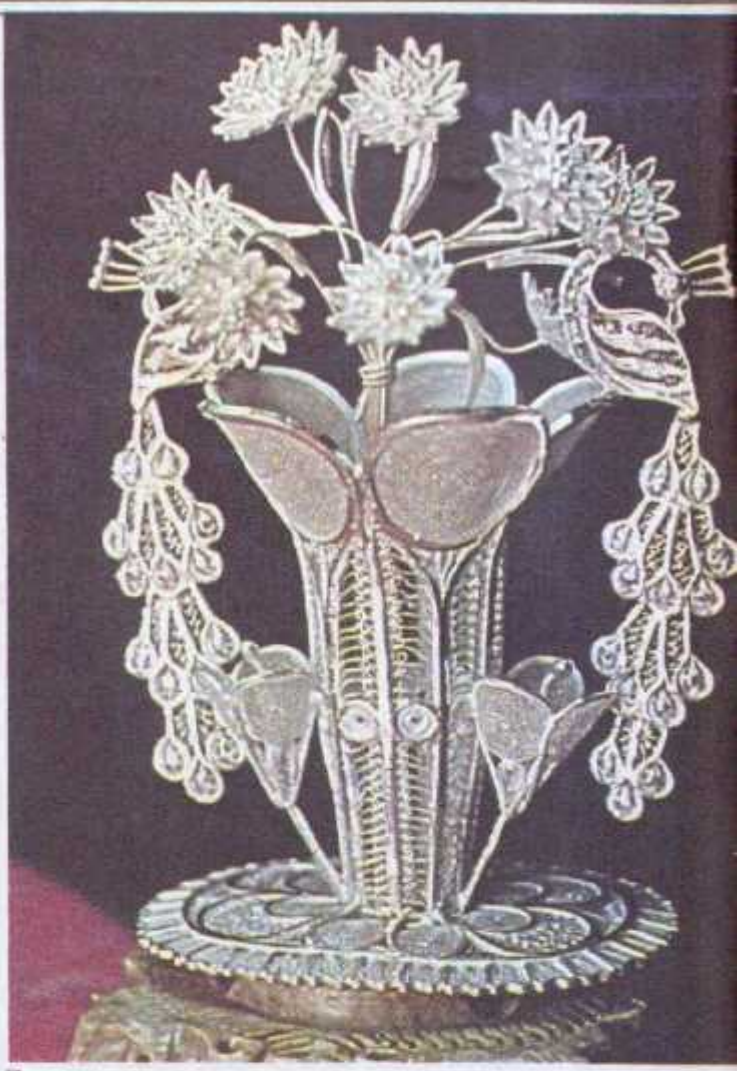
"Son, I've heard somewhere that the pollen of this flower works wonders for the skin. Don't worry, I won't be back here, at least not in this lifetime—and the flowers will bloom again. No?"

The logic of the argument is seductive. It gets the better of me. Setting to rest my ecological concern, I pluck a tender flower. The velvety petals crumble to the touch as pollen falls into my hands. I rub it on my face. Nothing happens.

A peal of laughter comes from the old woman as if to say: What did you expect—miracles? A breeze blows the pollen off my face and scatters it over the grass at my feet. I move back to the cobbled path. Shyam Singh smiles at me. We swing back to the beaten path that pilgrims take to Ghagharia. Above, the peaks are lost in swirling mists. Are the nymphs back again for a dip in the lake? I wonder. 卐

A typical Garhwali village nestling in the lap of the looming mountains

Ship



Flowervase

"A SNOWY CHARMER."

THE FILGIREE WORKS OF ORISSA

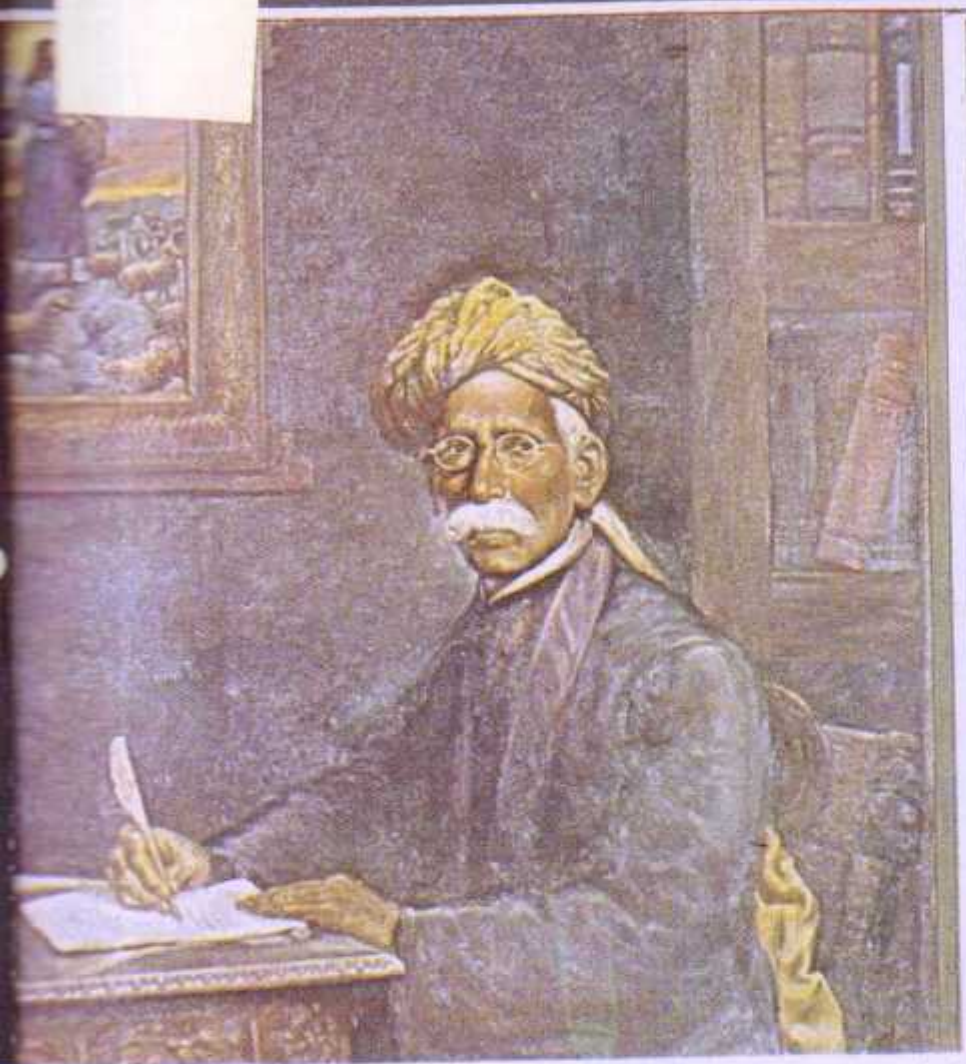
by SARAT CHANDRA

EVEN stones in India were once converted into lyrics! The chisel and hammer of the sculptor did the miracle, of which we have ample proof at Konark, Puri and Bhubaneswar in Orissa. Not only huge figures of human beings and gods and animals were exquisitely shaped, but even intricate details of ornaments and crowns were reproduced on stone with arresting elegance.

What the sculptors did many centuries ago is still being done by the filigree workers in Cuttack and other places in the State. Of course, they don't handle stones; it is silver they convert into things of beauty. In design, in fineness of work and in elegance of appearance, Orissan filigree items captivate all. *Indian Jewellery Ornaments and Decorative Designs*(by Jamila Brij Bhusan, Taraporevala, Bombay) says, "The finest filigree work is still made in Cuttack. The natural medium of this work is silver which gives a beautiful snowy appearance... Although the work is incomparable in beauty and delicacy, is no longer considered modish. Apart from the vogue that this jewellery enjoys in Orissa, the use of it outside the State is mostly restricted to a few ornaments of silver used here and there as a novelty. The art persists in the form of small boxes for holding accessories and sweetmeats, boxes used for keeping trinkets and elaborate scent-sprayers and brooches."

Actually the wide range of filigree items produced in Orissa can be broadly divided into three categories: Ornaments, decorative pieces and attractive but useful items. Varieties of traditional ornaments which Indian women are accustomed to wear such as necklaces, bangles,

Cover photo
Filigree work



Oil-painting of Madhu Sudan Das (Courtesy State Museum).

Intricate carving on stone with arresting elegance.

Photographs by K.V. RAM MOHAN RAO

...er ornaments of necklace, bracelets, hairpins, bangles, earrings

bracelets, armlets, earrings, hairpins, rings are made exquisitely by the filigree craftsmen. Various decorative pieces are also produced among which the famous ones are, the Geeta Chariot, replica of Konark Charkha, ancient ship, etc. Filigree items which are useful in everyday life or otherwise, are, photo-frames, vanity bags, match box cases, perfume containers, floral and leaf patterned purses, belt-clasps, card cases, scent-sprayers, table lamps, etc.

Many filigree items, like the Geeta Chariot have captivating charm, but the tools the artisans

Close look of ornaments in the process of welding.

Earrings, necklace etc.

SARAT CHANDRA

use are simple and few. The process too is simple. Silver, which is pure upto 99 percent, is heated to a molten point on red-hot charcoal. Molten silver is then poured into an earthen vessel (known as *poz*). This earthen vessel is so shaped that the molten silver, when it cools down on it, gets converted into rods of half an inch breadth and ten inches long in size. These rods are fed into a machine known as the wire-machine, so called because the silver rods are converted into wires of different thickness in this machine. A wire can be as fine as the thread of a spider's web. A ten inch long rod can be lengthened upto 200 feet with wire machine. There is also another machine to flatten the wires.

When these initial stages of work are passed, the wires are cut with a leaden wire-cutter into pieces as required. But before the wires are cut, a pencil sketch of the object—whether a peacock or a photo-frame or anything else—is drawn on paper. Then the artisan proceeds with the work with a pincer, bending the wires according to the design. The silver wire pieces after bending are to be joined to create the requisite shape. To join together the wire pieces, borax power and an alloy rod consisting of copper, zinc and silver are used. This welding is done on red-hot charcoal again and a mouth blower is used for the task. After the design is completed, the item is made hot in burning coal, then brought out

Drawing of Silver wire by hand. *Joining*

and a mixture of sulphuric acid and water are applied. This is done for the object to shine out. This completes the process and the item is ready for the market.

Cuttack is the capital of silver filigree craft, but filigree items are also produced at Puri, Sambalpur and Bolangir. About a thousand families are engaged in this craft out of which more than eight hundred are at Cuttack. There are altogether eleven craftsmen's co-operative societies. Producing filigree items need long hours of concentration and a skilled worker earns upto a thousand rupees a month.

This craft in Orissa has a tradition of antiquity. An Oriya journal, *Utkala Dipika*, mentions in its 1st October, 1898 issue how Madhu Sudan Das, a great patriot, gave a new impetus to this craft by setting up a factory in Cuttack. This factory, known as 'The Orissa Art Wares', employed about a hundred craftsmen, among whom the majority were filigree workers.

It is universally admitted now that, if silver filigree works of Orissa have been so popular, it is due to Madhu Sudan Das. Popularly known as "Madhu Barrister", he took it up as a mission of culture to popularise some of the traditional crafts of Orissa. Among these crafts silver filigree was a very important item. Mr. Webster, a high ranking British Official, visited "The Orissa Art Wares" and observed:

"To all who are interested in the future of Indian art, I would recommend a visit to The Orissa Art Wares, in Cuttack, a venture promoted by Mr.M.S. Das, a citizen of this town, with a view to improving the condition of the Oriya artisans. The visitor will find among wares elegant articles for the toilet table, boxes, belt-clasps, card cases, etc. in the light figure works of gold and silver for which Cuttack is famous. All that is sold here is made on the premises by Oriya workmen, their native ingenuity aided by the newer patterns which Mr. Das places at their disposal and the labour lightened by the use of machinery at certain stages."

Not only was the craftsmenship greately improved by Madhu Sudan; he also took great care to popularise this craft. In the exhibitions held in England during those years, Orissa's silver filigree works always found a pride of place and won prizes for decades. Hence, demand for the filigree items increased. The work generated great admiration among the British.

In the modern times these beautiful ornaments become an inseparable part in the classical dance, now famous, the world over as Odissi. In the Odissi dance, which is matchless for its grace and lyricism, silver filigree works play a vital role by adding beauty and luster to the artistes. On graceful dancers, these silvery beauties shine the brightest.

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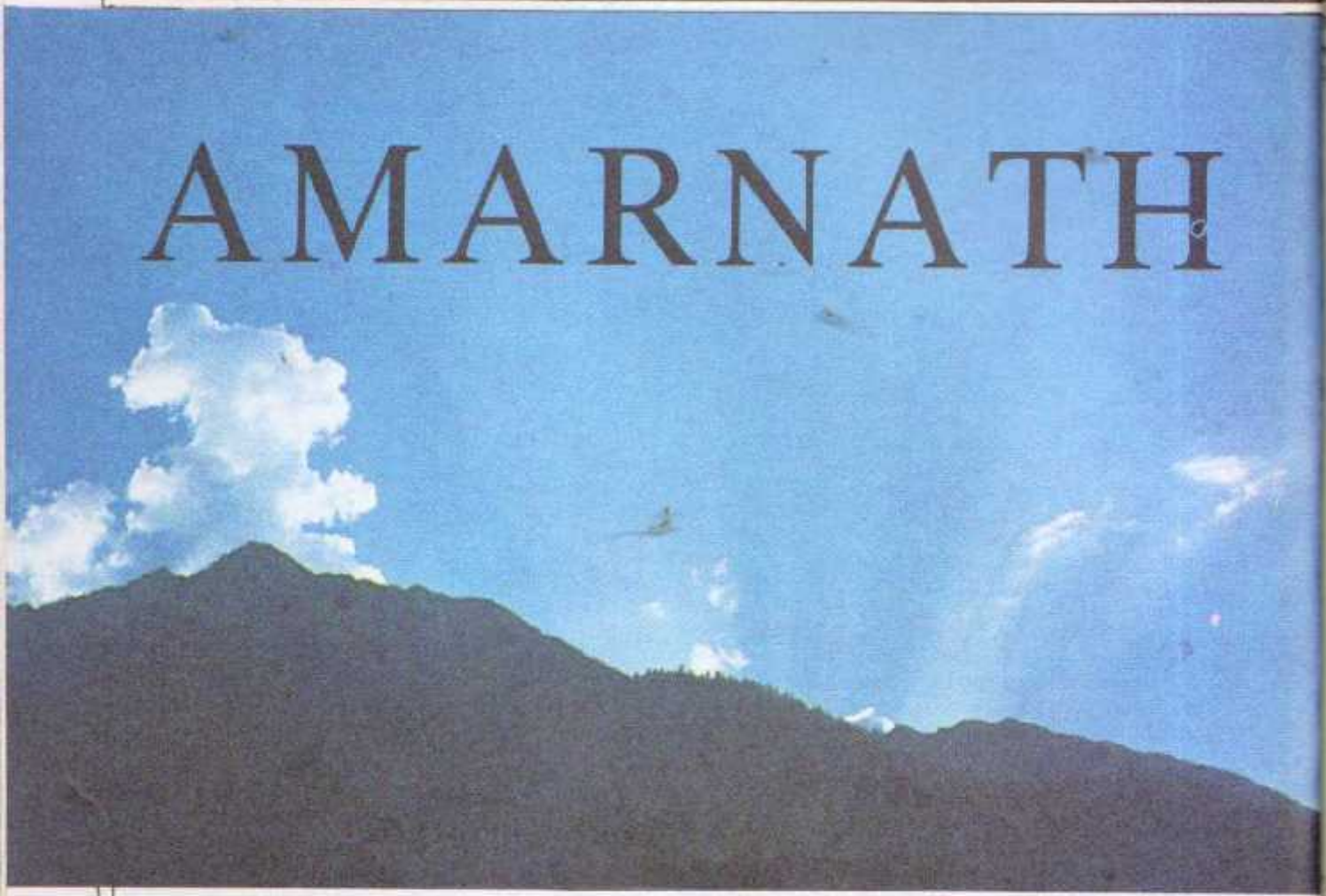
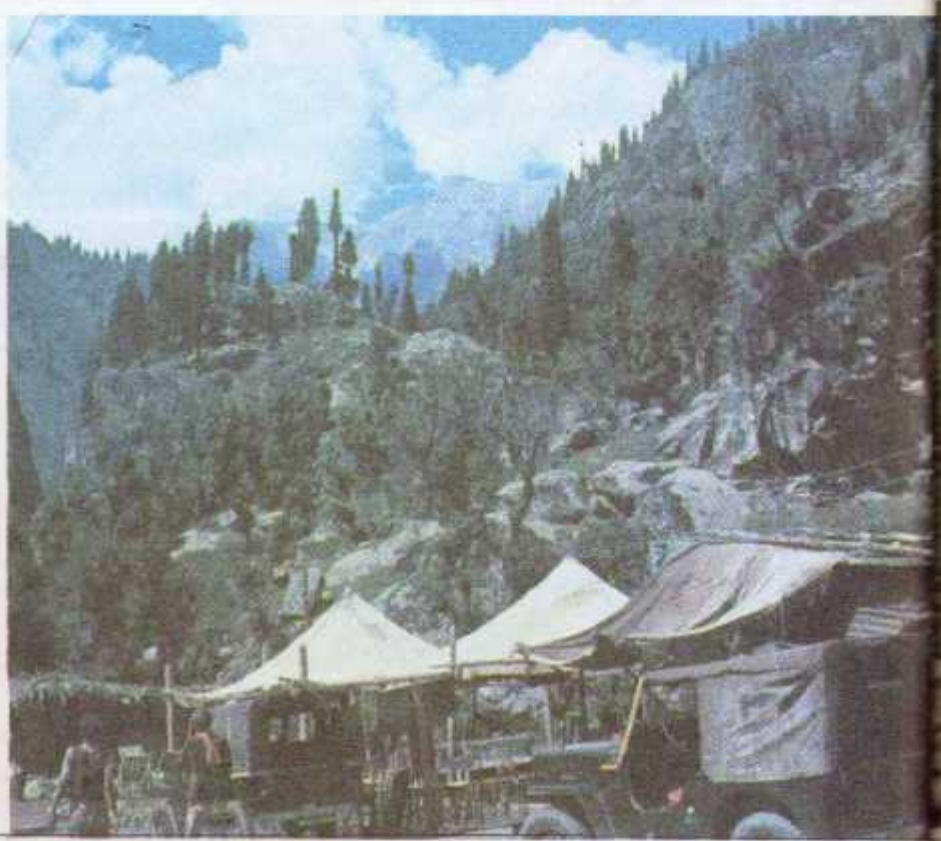
...er wire pieces after bending to create requisite shape. *Finishing & polishing stage of master pieces.* *Welding process by mouth blower.*

AMARNATH



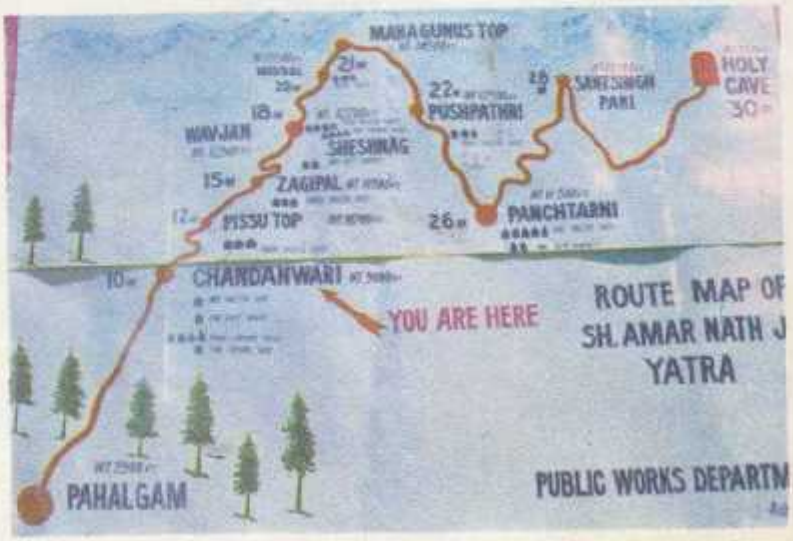
AMARNATH, the Immortal Lord. The very word has always held for me a strange fascination. I had felt ashamed that I had never visited this famous place of pilgrimage so near my home, while thousands of people from the farthest corners of India made the pilgrimage every year. Thus I had for several years been feeling a desire to make the trip.

The traditional *yatra* (pilgrimage) reaches the cave every year on the *Raksha-Bandhan Purnima* (full moon) which comes near the end of August. I decided, however, as many do, to go one month earlier. After days of elaborate preparations we finally left Srinagar for Pahalgam on the morning of 23rd July. The weather that day was very bad, which rather worried us, as the trip to the cave leads over narrow and steep mountain paths which get very treacherous in rain. Nevertheless we set out with a grim



starting point for Amarnath Yatra is a valley like place or basin formed by several small and high hills with snow mountains reflecting golden decor in the setting sun

by Dr. KARAN SINGH



(The second stop) Chandanwari with the exuberance of faun & flora

"I was struck with the beauty of Chandanwari..."

A dandi on way up.

determination to make the attempt even if it meant undergoing considerable inconvenience.

The holy cave of Amarnath beckons its devotees to a height of about 13,000 feet. It is 28 miles from Pahalgam, but small though this distance may seem on paper, in reality it is a very considerable trek. No vehicular traffic can go beyond Pahalgam, and the mountain path has to be traversed either on foot or on a horse. Due to a permanent disability caused by a series of mishaps several years ago it is not possible for me to ride or to walk along distances, particularly uphill. I was, therefore, obliged to travel in a dandi, much as I disliked having to use this form of transport.

After lunch at the charming Pahalgam Club we set off for our first camp, Chandanwari, which is eight miles from Pahalgam. By now the rain had settled into a

"Behind the distant grey rocks are covered with snow...
...the scene is both calming and inspiring. Its sedate beauty sooths the mind..."

steady sharp drizzle, turning the earth into rich squelchy chocolate.

The Lidder stream rushes and tumbles down the narrow valley and the path of Chandanwari leads up its right bank. We started at about three in the afternoon, the three ladies in the party, including my wife, insisting on walking despite the deep and slippery mud. I got into my dandi carried by sturdy Kashmiri porters, and the rest of the party either rode or walked.

Luckily, the rain was not heavy enough to block out the lovely scenery that surrounded us as we trudged along. The sound of the stream, at first about a hundred yards below us on our right, had a soothing quality. Both sides of the valley were thickly wooded. After we have traversed the first two miles of the narrow and uneven path the roar of the water grew louder and suddenly we emerged within a few yards of the stream. The water rushes along, tripping over itself as if in a terrific hurry to get somewhere. Here the valley widens, and on either side the steep mountains are covered with green. The rich grass which sweeps almost to the summit, the tall pines and birches, the numerious varieties of shrubs and bushes all add their individual shade of green so that the whole scene looks like a vast green chekerboard curving up on both sides to the sky. Some stray cloudlets separated from their parent mass, venture timorously down the mountain sides, only to get lost among the ridges.

As we proceed I throw my head back and close my eyes. The swinging motion of the dandi and the continual roar of the stream combine to produce an almost hypnotic effect. I let my mind dwell upon the majestic figure of the great Lord Shiva as he sits calm and inscrutable, lost in profound meditation. It is to the shrine of Mahadeva that I am going and I hum one of the numerous songs that have been composed to his glory.

After four hours of exhausting trekking, exhausting I may add not for me, being comfortably carried along, but for the porters and those who walked, we reached Chandanwari. Our camp had already been pitched and a hot cup of tea soon revived our spirits, somewhat dampened by the bad weather.

Before dinner we all got together in the dining tent and joined by some of the other pilgrims who were also making the *yatra*, sang *bhajans* for about an hour. I greatly enjoy these kirtans and we kept up these sessions regularly every evening during the *yatra*

This was followed by a fairly substantial dinner, after which we all flopped gratefully into bed. Before turning in I noticed with trepidation that the sky was thickly overcast.

As soon as I woke the next day, at about seven, I jumped out of bed and threw open the flap of my tent. The bright sunlight streamed in and I looked

The lovely green lake of Sheshnag...

"On all sides huge mountain peaks thurst their hoary heads high into the air."

"And yet these people of the dandi carried me up that slope with apparent ease... towards Pissu Ghati..."

out upon a clear blue sky. All traces of clouds had vanished.

I was struck with the beauty of Chandanwari, which I had missed the previous day. Chandanwari is a small camping ground, about a square mile in area, situated at the bottom of a gigantic cup, the sides of which are deeply wooded mountains which tower against the sky. In the freshness of the wooded morning sun it was very beautiful.

After an early breakfast we set out for Sheshnag, our next destination, at eight. It is seven miles from Chandanwari to Sheshnag, but the path is steep and treacherous. For about half a mile we followed the bank of the Lidder. Then we came to a murderous two mile climb known as Pissu Ghati, which rises about 2,000 feet above the river. The path is narrow and the turns sharp. In bad weather this incline becomes very dangerous and has

A distant glimpse of the entrance to the Amarnath cave.

Photographs by VENKATESH

origin and significance. This *Amarkatha* is believed to have been related by Lord Shiva himself to his consort Parvati in the Amarnath cave. There is an interesting legend regarding Pissu Ghati (actually Poushakhya Parvat.) Once the *Devas* and the *Asuras* were making their way up this mountain to pay their homage to Mahadeva. On the way they quarrelled as to who should go first, and this resulted in a battle between them. The *Devas* got the worst of the battle and prayed desperately to Mahadeva for help. Mahadeva came to their rescue and destroyed the *Asuras*.

claimed many victims. Today, however, the weather was fine, but nevertheless it was an exhausting climb.

A pilgrimage symbolizes, as it were, the long pilgrimage of the soul towards its supreme goal. Almost all the most important pilgrimages in India take the devotee along dangerous and hazardous paths in order to test his devotion. If he is deterred it is seldom possible for him to reach the goal. If he pushes on bravely with courage and confidence and faith in God he is bound to triumph.

It took the best part of two hours to negotiate Pissu Ghati. I must express my unbounded admiration for the porters who carried me up that slope. I tried walking a few yards but at that height—the climb rises from about 9,000 to about 11,000 feet—my heart started beating wildly.

And yet these people carried me up that slope with apparent ease and without a single false step. Including the weight of the dandi they must have been carrying over 300 pounds.

There are many legends connected with the Amarnath *yatra* and the various places which one traverses during the pilgrimage. These legends are found in the *Amarkatha* which is a Sanskrit account of the pilgrimage, its

The huge rocks and boulders which lie strewn on the slope represent the bodies of those demons. It is said that by climbing that mountain one's sins are destroyed by Mahadeva in the same manner as he destroyed the *Asuras*.

On reaching the top of the mountain we were rewarded by a lovely view. Far in the distance Pahalgam nestles in the mountains.

On all sides huge mountain peaks thrust their hoary heads high into the air, while far below the Lidder now a restless tape of silver, winds its way down to the plains. I stopped here for a quarter of an hour taking photographs and chatting with some *Sadhus* who were making the pilgrimage.

From here on for about four miles there is a smooth decline along which we travel at a fair pace. The scenery grows more spectacular and often I stop and gaze in rapture at a breath-taking sight. At one place opposite us on the right a huge glacier rises to over 15,000 feet. From its gleaming snows a stream drops like a lumious silver band down the sheer mountain side thousands of feet until it joins the Lidder at the bottom. On our side of the gorge the mountains are covered with green grass about three-quarters of the way up, ending in jagged rocks of a curious brick red colour of which different layers are distinctly visible. Above, a pair of magnificent eagles circle in majestic flight.

A little further on I suddenly hear a most unusual shrill whistle and see sitting on a rock about a hundred yards away a small animal covered with reddish fur, which I recognize as a marmot. I will see many more of these little creatures as I go on.

We are now at a height of about 12,000 feet, and abruptly the trees vanish, as we have passed the tree-line. From here on there is green grass and a variety of small green shrub, but not a single bush or tree.

At last we come to another stiff half-mile climb, at the top of which we suddenly come face to face with the lovely green lake of Sheshnag, about a mile long and a quarter of a mile broad, surmounted by a mighty glacier. Soon the Sheshnag huts come in sight and we pass them to proceed to our camping ground across the stream. To cross, we pass over a bridge of solid ice under which the stream flows. It looks as if it has been carved out of gigantic blocks of ivory. A few clouds have come up, but they are white, fluffy, friendly clouds, so unlike the saturnine monsters that scowled and rumbled at us yesterday. And the sun shines huge and friendly in the deep sky.

Our camp has been pitched on a lovely meadow overlooking the lake. I make my way to the top of a shallow incline and sit on a rock surveying the breathtaking view.

Before me lies Sheshnag, its water a peculiar milky green colour. Behind it a huge glacier rises to three mighty peaks of snow and ice, as if symbolizing the divine trinity of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Mahadeva the Destroyer. To the right the mass of a rocky mountain rises straight out of the lake. Behind me the distant grey rocks are covered with freshly fallen snow which, melting, comes down in a gushing stream culminating in a white waterfall.

The scene is both calming and inspiring. Its sedate beauty soothes the mind, restless from the cares and tribulations, the worries and sorrows of life. Its lofty peaks standing out against the deep blue sky raise one's thoughts above the mundane into the pure realms of the spirit. One distinctly feels the underlying presence of a power greater, stronger, purer, than one's own petty self. For a while I glimpse the lovely face of nature in its pure and undesecrated majesty. The torrent of time slackens, the problems and strifes of life pale into insignificance, and I am lost in deep contemplation.

I cherish a desire in the recesses of my heart to one day build myself a small *Ashrama* in such surroundings where, with the body and mind made pure and free from the grasping tentacles of desire and fear, ego and attachment, I can concentrate upon the unalloyed purity of nature and thereby perhaps achieve spiritual illumination. If the day comes when I am able to fulfil this desire, then I can think of no better spot than where I am now sitting, overlooking this placid lake.

The legend runs that at one time a mighty *Asura* lived among these mountains who, in the form of a terrifying whirlwind, wrought great havoc among the *Devas*. In distress they went to Shiva, but he said that he had given the *Asura* a boon not to kill him. He advised them to go to Vishnu. Then the *Devas* went to the bank of the lake Sheshnag and prayed to Vishnu, singing songs to His Glory. Pleased, Lord Vishnu arose from the Lake seated upon the back of the mighty serpent, the thousand-headed Sheshnag. "O King of Serpents" he said, "with your thousand mouths destroy this *Asura*." Upon hearing this command Sheshnag fell upon the *Asura* and destroyed him. From that day the Lake and the Mountain behind it are known as Sheshnag.

With reluctance I dragged myself back to the camp for lunch. After a short rest I went to see how my fellow pilgrims were faring. A group of about a dozen ash-besmeared *sadhus* had seated themselves on a small knoll quite near our camp and I went over and chatted with them. They are a curious race, these *sadhus*. Some are men of great spiritual achievements, but alas, many have made it a profession to live upon the religious susceptibilities of us Indians, particularly Indian women.

Sheshnag is about 13,000 feet above sea level, and at that height all of us were feeling rather breathless and oppressed.

long haired Shiva Lingam

A brisk walk to the main Sheshnag camp, then I returned and distributed warm clothing and rations to those pilgrims who needed them. By now it was evening, and we all gathered in a tent to hear a Pandit read to us from the *Amarkatha* followed by kirtan.

By the time we finished the kirtan it was nine, and quite dark. An almost full moon hung luminously between the mountain peaks. I walked up the small incline to have a view of the lake by moonlight. In the day, the lake has an air of mystery and haunting beauty, but by night this effect is greatly enhanced. Sheshnag lies calm and deep, the moonlight mirrored on half its surface. The other half lies in the dark shadow of the mountains which rise behind it, bathed in mystic light. Time stands still in this enchanted moonlit panorama, and one feels in harmony with the deeper currents of pure Existence.

Once again I reluctantly draw myself back to the camp where a simple though ample dinner awaits us. I may add that from the time we left Srinagar to the day we returned our diet was strictly vegetarian, as is customary on a *yatra*. After dinner we retired to bed, though at that height sleep was difficult and not sound.

I awoke the next morning at five, and immediately struggled out from under the masses of blankets which kept me warm at night. To my surprise it was already fairly light. I could not resist the temptation to again visit my favourite spot. I had seen the lake by daylight and by moonlight. Now I wanted to see it in what is the pleasantest and also—excepting dusk—the most mysterious time of day. I walked to the top of the hill and was rewarded as before with a remarkable view. This time a fresh delightful morning breeze played on my face and hands. The lake and the mountains lay in a pale hush and the trinity of peaks were immersed in deep meditation. I felt a great joy rise in my breast and could not restrain from singing out aloud. First I sang Shankaracharya's six stanzas in Sanskrit portraying the highest Advaita (Monistic) philosophy, each stanza ending with the words "Chidenanda Rupa Shivoham Shivoham" (My form is pure bliss, I am Shiva, I am Shiva). Then I sang a few bhajans in those delightful morning *ragas*, *Bhairav* and *Todi*.

Just as I finished my last song the first ray of sunlight struck the top of the central peak with a shaft of gold. The peak flushed, as if with joy to feel the warm caress of the sun. Slowly the sunlight covered the three peaks and moved down the mountain side. Soon the golden orb of the sun itself peeped over the mountains in the east and a warm glow of wellbeing spread over the whole area.

I descended to the camp and bathed. It is considered very auspicious to bathe in the Sheshnag lake, and several of the braver members of our party went down about half a mile to the lake to do so. I have to admit that I used the less orthodox, though certainly more convenient, method of a getting water from the lake carried up and warming it for my bath. After breakfast we all set off for our next destination, Panchtarni, which is eight miles from Sheshnag.

The holy road to Amarnath has through the centuries been trodden by lakhs of pilgrims. I feel a reverential awe when I consider how many men of great spiritual stature must have passed over the track along which my dandi is now swinging. Many giants, unknown and unsung, must have trodden this very same path. Along this the great Swami Vivekananda, back from his triumphant "conquest" of America, travelled in 1898 to pay his homage to Amarnath. Swami Ramtirath also made this pilgrimage. Along this route, over a thousand years earlier, Swami Shankaracharya, one of the most brilliant and profound intellects India has produced, is reputed to have wound his way towards the shrine of the other Shankara.

Sheshnag itself, as I have said, is about 13,000 feet but before us loomed another formidable climb the Mahagunas mountain. For three miles we climbed slowly and breathlessly. The scenery around us was beautiful. To the left of us rose the huge mountain, while to the right, hundreds of feet below, the stream grew smaller and smaller. On the mountain side the grass swept right up to the skyline, covered with thousands of delicate little buttercups making a quivering carpet of yellow. Below, near the stream there were flat green spaces across which impundent marmots scampered, whistling in glee. All around mighty glaciers and rocky peaks loomed into the morning sky.

Higher and higher rose the path, until at last we reached the top of the Mahagunas Pass, about 15,000 feet high. There we dismounted and took photographs and movies of the magnificent panorama of glaciers that surrounded us. Patches of snow lay around us, and a few wisps of white cloud floated across the sky.

From here the descent started, a long five mile decline to Panchtarni. The scenery was rugged, and the stern barren mountains possessed an impressive beauty. There are no trees at this height, and the only greenery is the grass which grows even at the highest points. The mountains that are bare have a powder grey colour. In the distance Amarnath rises to about 18,000 feet. It is in this mountain that the holy cave is situated.

On the descent we pick up speed and my dandi swings briskly along, while I divide my time between surveying the view and reading Paul Brunton's fascinating *Search in Secret India*. We stop at several places to stretch our legs and take photographs. Fresh mountain streams flow down past our feet to the river.

Some of these come from melting snows hundreds of feet above, others issue startlingly from dry ground. These latter apparently flow underground for some distance before emerging into the sunlight. Several times I hear the shrill whistle of the marmots, but fail to locate any of the little brown beasts. I want to catch a pair of young marmots and try and tame them as pets, but they are reputed to be very difficult to catch alive as they always stay near their holes, into which they dive indignantly if anyone approaches.

At last the Panchtarni plain came into sight. Here, it is said, once long ago, Lord Shiva was performing the Tandava Nritya (the cosmic dance of destruction). He was so immersed in ecstasy that while dancing, his massive locks became undone and from them five streams of the Ganga fell to the ground. These five streams (Panchtarangini) are considered to be very sacred and bathing in them very auspicious. The Panchtarni plain is about a mile long and over a quater of a mile broad. A stream flows through it which is joined by four other streams coming down from the mountains with barren angular crags. To the east in a large glacier, the snow of which has been shaped, presumably by the wind, into curious crater-like formations which I have not seen anywhere else. Through binoculars these looked very like photographs of craters on the moon.

Today also the weather remained perfect. Occasionally a small cloud would drift between the sun and us, and then suddenly the temperature would drop considerably and we would begin to shiver. But almost immediately a friendly breeze would blow the offending cloud away and we would once again be in the comforting warmth of the sun.

After lunch and a short nap I wandered off on an exploratory stroll around the camp. Invisible marmots shrieked at my approach but search as I would, I could not locate a single one of these elusive little animals. I walked to the foot of a small waterfall on the mountain behind our camp. I was struck by the profusion of small wild flowers that grew everywhere. In one place, within a square yard, I counted seven different types of flowers all of different colours. Many rare herbs grow upon these uninhabited mountains. Some, I am told, extremely valuable. There were also lovely stones lying about, some delicately veined, others sparkling in the sun with mica.

In the evening we had the usual kirtan. Singing at that height is quite exhausting, and after a song one feels breathless. After that we had dinner and retired to bed early, as the next day was the culminating point of our pilgrimage with a visit to the holy cave of Amarnath.

I was woken at five in the morning with shouts of "Shree Amarnath Swami ki Jai," outside my tent. Devout pilgrims were already on their way to the cave. It was so cold that I snuggled under my blankets for another hour before venturing out. We were all ready by eight and set out for the cave with a feeling of expectation and excitement. As is usual, I did not have anything at all to eat and drink until after I had visited the cave.

The path to the cave leads out of Panchtarni and goes round the mountain at the base of which our camp is pitched. For a few hundred yards it leads along the stream, then it curves and rapidly goes higher. The bends are very steep and sharp and some of them are quite unnerving, particularly as the path is narrow and the loose earth gives way under one's feet. Soon we are at a dizzy height and still climbing higher. In several places I just closed my eyes and hoped for the best when we negotiated the twists.

Higher and higher we climb for about three miles. The mighty Amarnath mountain rises in front of us. High on its grass covered slopes, just a few hundred feet below the rocky summit, goats and horses graze—black specks moving calmly upon the precarious mountainside. These animals belong to Bakkarwals, those bearded nomads who in the winter come down to the plains but in the summer move up to such grazing places as these. Their tents are also pitched up there. To see them is enough to make one quite dizzy. If those animals take one false step they will fall a sheer two thousand feet to their pulpy doom. But instinct, often a surer guide even than human intelligence, does not fail them, and they retain their foothold with ease.

After climbing for about three miles there is a sudden turn to the right and we begin to descend rapidly. Soon we come to the bottom of a narrow steep ravine, only about 150 yards broad, whose gigantic cliffs loom hundreds of precipitous feet to the skyline. For about half a mile we have to travel over solid ice. Soon the famous cave of Amarnath comes into sight, a huge cavity in the mountain. We go on almost to the end of the ravine, where about fifty yards below the cave, a tent had been pitched for us.

To the left of the cave the Amaravati stream flows down from the mountain. This is a very sacred stream and devotees are expected to bathe in it and smear their bodies with its mud before entering the cave. Here again I adopted the unorthodox course of getting the water carried in buckets to the tent, but this time I did not get it warmed up and bathed with the ice cold water. It was clear and warm, however, so the cold bath did not cause any incovenience. At that height the sun is very warm, and somehow looks bigger than it does lower down. We are all badly sunburnt as a result. After the bath I emerge from the tent clad only in a yellow *dhoti*, and then climb up the steep path to the cave.

Margaret Noble, better known as Sister Nivedita, in her "Notes

on some wanderings with the Swami Vivekananda" describes the visit of the Swami to this sacred cave. "The place" she writes "was vast, large enough to hold a Cathedral, and the great ice-Shiva, in a niche of deepest shadow, sacred as if throned on its own base." She records that Swami Vivekananda was so overwhelmed when he entered the cave that his whole frame shook and he almost swooned with emotion. "I have enjoyed it so much" the Swami said later, "I thought the ice-lingam was Shiva himself. And there were no thievish Brahmans, no trade, nothing wrong. It was all worship. I never enjoyed any religious place so much." Afterwards he would tell of an overwhelming mystical experience that came to him in the cave, in which Shiva himself appeared before him and granted him the boon of Amarnath, the Lord of Immortality, not to die until he himself should choose to throw off his mortal bonds. He would also talk of the poetry of the white ice pillar, and suggested that the first discovery of the place had been by a party of shepherds who, wandering far in search of their flocks, had one summer day entered the cave to find themselves, before the unmelting ice, in the presence of the Lord Himself.

The cave is of truly colossal dimensions. Its outer mouth must measure about forty yards across, and it is about 75 feet high and at least eighty feet deep sloping down into the mountain side. Inside, a central ice formation rising to about five feet and ending in a glistening cone, represents Lord Shiva. To the right is a block of pure white ice, about six feet high and three feet in diameter which represents Ganesha, while to the left is a smaller ice formation representing Shiva's consort Parvati. These ice formations, which form during the summer months, are believed to wax and wane along with the moon, reaching their climax on the full moon day and vanishing completely on moonless days.

The cave is one of the most sacred spots in all India. As I entered I suddenly had a curious feeling that I had been there before. The cave certainly has a very unusual atmosphere which powerfully affects many people. I felt quite overawed as I entered its hallowed precincts.

Before the ice *lingam* of Shiva my wife and I performed the traditional puja and made offerings of cash, cloth and dried fruit. Then with folded hands we all sang a hymn to Lord Shiva. The same procedure was repeated before the symbols of Ganesh and Parvati where offerings were also made.

The traditional method of distribution of these offerings is interesting. No one stays permanently at the cave, so after the pilgrims have made their offerings these are collected by the camp officer, a Government official who accompanies the pilgrimage. These offerings, both in cash and kind, are divided into three equal portions. One portion goes to the Mahant of the pilgrimage, who resides at Srinagar. The second goes to the Pandas (priests) of Mattan, another place of pilgrimage twenty miles short of Pahalgam. The third portion goes to a Muslim family of Mallicks, who also live near Pahalgam. Representatives of these three interests accompanied us to the cave to be sure that they were not deprived of their share of the offerings.

After the *puja* was over we emerged from the cave into the bright sunlight. It was chilly in the cave and in my thin *dhoti* I was shivering. Outside the cave we saw the famous pair of rock pigeons who stay near the cave throughout the year, even in the winter when not a blade of grass is visible. The legend is that these were two followers of Lord Shiva who once disturbed him during his meditation. In anger Shiva turned them into pigeons, who now always live near him in the cave. It is curious that these pigeons have been seen for scores of years, much longer than the life of a normal pigeon. Whether they are the same pigeons in some mysterious way replaced when they died is impossible to say.

We descend again to the tent where a freshly cooked lunch awaited us, after which I lay down for a while. By now the cave was completely deserted and I walked up again. This time I got a very good view of the inside of the cave and the ice formations, which are truly remarkable.

It is with reluctance that I leave the cave. Some undefinable attraction makes the parting a poignant one. The gleaming ice lingam possesses a strange power of attraction and I draw myself away with some difficulty.

We negotiated the return journey to Panchtarni at a brisk speed, and were back in camp by six. After the usual kirtan I retired to bed with a feeling of peace and satisfaction.

We leave Panchtarni early next morning, as we are to reach Chandanwari in the evening and will have to negotiate two laps instead of one. As the dandi swings along I again feel a strange pang, as if I was leaving behind some dearly loved friend. I turn to get a last glimpse of the Amarnath mountain and in my mind pay silent homage to the Lord of Amarnath.

We start the long tedious five mile climb to the top of the Mahagunas. On the way we pass to our right a place known as *Hatyara Talao* (the tank of Death) where one year forty pilgrims met their death in an avalanche which their own hymns had started. That route is now banned, as it is very hazardous.

Once we get to the top of the mountain the porters speed up and we are in Sheshnag by noon. Immediately I make my way to my favourite spot overlooking the lake and the three lofty pinnacles of aged snow.

After lunch we set off again, as we are keen to get past the formidable Pissu Ghati before dark. As my dandi travelled along on the path about five

hundred feet above Sheshnag, I felt an irresistible desire to go down to the shore of the lake. Half way down I suddenly heard the call of a marmot very close and turning a corner saw one standing on its hind legs just twenty feet from us. It was very cute and I got in several feet of film before it disappeared into its hole. We went down to the edge of the lake and drank from its ice cold water. The lake is very deep, its water falling to many feet almost immediately from the edge.

We walked along the shore and came upon a rock upon which an image of a seven headed serpent, representing Sheshnag, was carved. Finally we made our way back to the path after climbing laboriously and precariously up the hill.

The weather for the fourth day in succession remained beautifully clear. One among our party was an incorrigible prophet of doom, always prophesying bad weather, landslides and other dire calamities. Fortunately for us all, however, the weather was as good as it could possibly have been. I certainly would not have cherished having to negotiate Pissu Ghati and those other precarious inclines in bad weather.

As soon as the corner shutting out the view of Sheshnag was turned, trees began to reappear and grew denser as we progressed towards Chandanwari.

At last we cane again to Pissu Ghati. But by now I had complete confidence in the porters, who negotiated the steep descent with ease. We got into Chandanwari just before sunset, where, after kirtan and dinner, we retired for the night.

The next morning, after distributing well earned rewards among the porters, pony men and others who had helped to make the pilgrimage the success that it was, we set off for Pahalgam on the last lap of our trip back to Srinagar. The Lidder, still retaining the green colour derived from its mother lake, rushed along through its gorge. Lovely little birds, singing merrily, flitted from tree to tree. At one place a monkey sat on a rock, watching us with sedate surprise.

News of my return must have travelled in advance, as in several places Gujjars had collected to greet me, their women singing *Pahari* songs of welcome. The Gujjars are a semi-nomadic tribe who keep large herds of buffaloes and every year travel down to the plains. Their legs have much in common with the lilting Dogra hill songs.

On the way I chated with the porters. One old man, with a face full of mellow though unlettered wisdom, gave me his simple philosophy of life. *"Sarkar"* he said *"Khuda"* helps those who are patient. Difficulties and troubles come but one must bear them with patience and faith in God. Take this pilgrimage. On the first day it rained heavily and there was much discomfort. If you had been disheartened and turned back, the pilgrimage would have failed. But you had faith in God and pushed on. The result was that the pilgrimage was a great success."

Soon we reached the village of Pahalgam. Outside the first house a tiny Kashmiri boy, wearing only a little shirt, stood waiting eagerly. As soon as my dandi passed him he ran screaming with delight into the arms of the foremost porter, who was evidently his father. It was a heart warming little incident.

In Pahalgam we made our way to the club and sat upon a wooden terrace overlooking the swiftly flowing river. O Lidder, I mused, I have been your birthplace amidst the mighty three-peaked glacier. I have seen you gush down its snow clad slopes into green Sheshnag, only to emerge broader and more powerful. I have followed your twists and turns, your pools and rapids, down the narrow valley, and now you will gurgle on till at last you mingle with the slow flowing waters of the broad Jhelum.

After lunch I pay a quick visit to two local temples, and then drive off for Srinagar. As the car bowls along between lines of poplars, flanked by smiling fields of maize and paddy, my thoughts return again and again to the holy cave. How remote, how impenetrable those lofty mountains seem, how hazardous the steep and narrow path. Yet once at the cave what peace and serenity descends upon one. Thus, I venture to hope, after I have crossed the steep mountains and deep gorges of life, a deep and eternal peace awaits me. 卐

The Future Man:

A Scientist looks at the Question
From Science Fiction to Reality

We are complacent until disaster is at the doorstep when noting can be done about it.

THE FUTURE OF MAN IN THE TWENTYFIRST CENTURY

by Dr. JAYANT NARLIKAR

We have come to a condition when this is no longer an academic question, no longer the luxury of a philosopher to indulge in. The question has assumed not only pragmatic importance, but also fearful dimensions.

Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, mystic and litterateur, Dr. Jayant V. Narlikar, scientist and Dr. M.N. Das, historian, reflect on the issue from their own angles. Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, the writer, and Dr. Malcolm S. Adiseshiah, the educationist, approach the subject on the basis of three questions THE HERITAGE put to them.

IN 1975 I happened to be present at a public debate at the California Institute of Technology between the scientist Fred Hoyle and the science fiction writer Ray Bradbury. The topic of the debate was "The message of science fiction: prophetic or profane?" On that occasion Bradbury made the obvious but important point: that the life of a person like him born in the first quarter of the present century was science fiction come to reality.

To emphasize the obvious in Bradbury's point let us imagine a few scenarios of our present day existence:

1. A man entering his residential premises in an automobile activates a hand-held device that opens the garage door for him. He drives the car in, approaches a lift whose doors open automatically. He presses a button and the lift takes him to the twenty first floor. He inserts a card in a slit at the front door and the electronic lock is opened. As he enters the lights in the hall are turned on. He goes into the living room and turns on the TV, by remote control to witness the Olympic games live from a distance of thousands of kilometres.

2. From the place of an accident in a remote village the helicopter picks up the injured victim, delivers him to a waiting jet plane which takes him to the airport of a major metropolitan centre where an ambulance rushes him to a hospital. There cat-scans are taken, other medical tests are done, the patient is rushed to the operation theatre where, if necessary a heart-lung machine can take over temporarily the job of keeping him alive.

3. Because of the malfunction in the central key computer the defence headquarters are given the message that a major nuclear attack from the enemy is on the way. The automatic response mechanism comes into operation: a counter attack with nuclear missiles is launched. The enemy discovers this in no time and retaliates. A full-scale nuclear war begins.

The first two scenarios are taking place daily, more so in the developed world and will take place in the less developed world in not too distant a future. What about the third scenario? It is not only possible, it is also probable but has not yet taken place. I will return to it later.

The point Bradbury was making was that to an adult in the last century or to someone who lived on to the early part of this century all this would have sounded science fiction from the pages of Jules Verne or H.G. Wells. Yet, these scenarios are taken in his stride by man today. This phenomenon, typical only of the twentieth century in the entire history of human civilization, needs to be looked at carefully while making any forecast

for its future.

Of course, as Alvin Toffler pointed out in his celebrated book 'The future shock' the above phenomenon is the result of the rapid acceleration in the progress of science and technology. Although Bradbury was considering his own life span for gauging the march of science and technology, the more dramatic of the developments described in the three scenarios above came relatively recently. Satellite transmission of TV programmes, the all pervading use of automation and computers, jet planes, advances in medical diagnostics and surgical techniques have come up in the last three decades. It is this rapid growth in the impact of science and technology that makes any future forecast so very difficult.

Nevertheless we may broadly divide the forecast into two parts—optimistic and pessimistic. The two views are based on how man, a supposedly rational animal, reacts to the impact mentioned above.

The Optimistic View

To begin with let us consider how our store of knowledge will grow. We extrapolate on the rising curve of how science and technology will improve our communications and information transfer. If the last four decades in this field belonged to electronics, we may safely argue that the stage is now set for the advent of photonics. Whereas in electronics, the key role of information transfer and storage was played by the electrons, in photonics that role is played by photons, the particles that carry light energy.

Today in the developed countries glass fibres are replacing cables for communication. A single fibre can carry several billion-bits of information channels if the lightwave technology is used. How much information can be transmitted at the rate of one billion bits per second? Something like 10,000 two-way conversations or three hundred two-way video conference signals! And, in present technology 144 such fibres can be accommodated within a diameter of one centimetre. This already dramatic achievement is bound to improve further both in making the systems more compact and in extending the distances over which communications are possible through photonics.

The use of photonics in computers of a later generation is bound to come. Another development, already under trials, is that of parallel computing. This involves making a grid of several small computers instead of making one big supercomputer. This reduces cost considerably and may in due course also improve the speed of computing.

Why are communications and computers important? As a civilization advances, its information content goes up enormously. This information must be stored in a readily retrievable form and must be swiftly communicable in times of need. Lack of information or, worse still, assumptions based on wrong information have in the past severely disrupted social structure. In a country like India which has a large fraction of illiterate adult population, this experience is not uncommon. We may therefore hope that with the unrestrained progress in the above fields our country is bound to benefit.

The second and by no means less important is the availability of ample sources of energy and devices for generating power. India does not lack the former, but it has much to do in the latter. If one were to look to the future for a really dramatic change in our energy/power situation, two ways suggest themselves.

The first is fusion energy; that is, energy obtained by bringing together light nuclei. The Sun derives its own power this way, by fusing hydrogen nuclei to the heavier helium nuclei. In the Sun's case, this is possible because of the tremendous pressures and temperatures generated at its centre by its own strong gravitational force. Can man reproduce those conditions in the laboratory although he lacks the stimulus of strong gravity? The answer is: yes but not yet! Fusion reactors are still beyond human technology but it is hoped that they will become feasible by the beginning of the twentyfirst century. Relying on heavy water for its nuclear fuel, these reactors do not demand esoteric fuels (like the fission reactors do) and are expected to be pollution-free.

The second source is the Sun itself. Solar energy will be available in abundance for billions of years and the amount coming the Earth's way is more than several thousand times what man needs. The problem is how to tap the reservoir in a cost-effective way. Attempts range from making more and more efficient solar batteries to proposals for gigantic reflectors in space that can focus the Sun's energy and beam it back to Earth. The latter must wait till space technology attains the necessary capability in the next century.

Starting from the discovery of generating fire man has learnt the benefits of power generation. Just as tapping the energy of coal, steam and petroleum led to the industrial revolution, so another revolution is in the offing once either of the above two energy sources can be tapped.

There are numerous other benefits from science and technology that man can enjoy in the coming century—it would be impossible to list or even anticipate all of them. To me, however, it seems that the key to substantial progress in human standard of living is held by the two I mentioned above: communication of information and power generation.

The Pessimistic View

It was in the same debate at Caltech that the pessimistic note was sounded by Fred Hoyle. I can do no better than begin with his cautionary note.

The tapping of any natural resources of this planet or of the star it revolves around is shared

by its inhabitants. It is a matter of simple arithmetic that no improvement would accrue to the individual if the number of sharers goes on increasing rapidly. The developed countries have appreciated this fact and succeeded in controlling their populations and have consequently enjoyed the benefits of it. The less developed countries are still groping to find a solution to the population growth problem.

Two factors contribute to this problem. Religious dogmas stand in the way of voluntary birth control. Even in this so-called age of science it has unfortunately not been possible to break through this barrier. The second factor is sociological. Large families (especially with male children) are considered respectable even though they are no longer economically viable. The conditions have changed from the ancient days when a bride was blessed "May you have eight sons." But this message has apparently not penetrated.

The situation is of course aggravated by some of the benefits of science and technology!

By reducing deaths at birth and prolonging the human life span, science and technology have added to the population problem. This trend will continue as better and better medicines become available in future.

Can science and technology not similarly provide simple techniques of birth control? Barring dramatic breakthroughs in medical science, this may not happen in this century. Even if this does happen, are we willing to use those techniques? Can we overcome our prejudices as a society as well as, as individuals to seriously tackle the population problem?

The threat posed by the population growth is more sinister than any other danger to mankind because it builds up gradually, and so it lulls the victims into complacency. An annual growth rate of two percent may appear small but it amounts to the population doubling up in thirty five years. If we simply extrapolate this result it implies an eightfold increase in a century and a thousandfold increase in three and a half centuries. Obviously, no amount of resources is going to be sufficient to keep pace with this kind of increase. Hoyle has argued that if mankind does not exercise voluntary restraint on its numbers, they will have to come down compulsorily through catastrophic means. Large scale deaths due to malnutrition, strifes inspired by hunger leading to breakdown of the social structure, diseases etc would see to it that the human species are cut down to size.

From today's vantage point such a view looks alarmist even granting famines in many parts of the world. But this is precisely why the threat is so sinister: we are complacent until disaster is at the doorstep when nothing can be done about it.

In this respect I rank the nuclear holocaust as second in its threat to mankind. Unlike the dangers posed by population growth we are constantly reminded of the instant annihilation of all species if a nuclear war is unleashed. The destructive power and ability to strike, of the present day weapons, far exceed what existed in the second world war. Apart from local destruction, the nuclear weapons can lethally pollute the Earth's atmosphere, thus rendering survival almost impossible even after the war is over. Thanks to developments in science and technology the programmes like 'star war' ensure exactly such an outcome.

It is because its terminal outcome is so readily apparent that considerable opposition to nuclear proliferation exists today. Although many safeguards are supposed to prevent the outbreak of a nuclear war by accident, the third scenario outlined earlier is quite possible. The only real safeguard against nuclear destruction is to have no nuclear weapons at all. But can governments all over the world agree to this proposition? Can scientists be persuaded not to do research in such areas?

I am pessimistic on both counts. Man has not yet broken the barriers of nationalism to take a world-view. Maybe in the next century the progress of communications will finally break these barriers; but today that goal seems a long way away. Equally difficult is to restrict or channel scientific research away from the dangerous areas. Especially in these days of 'big-money science' if government funding is available for such areas, it will be hard for all scientists to resist the temptation. In any case, the curiosity that killed the cat may spur the scientist to the same fate!

Conclusion

This is where man is today—on the proverbial fence. The march of science and technology will sooner rather than later force him to take some crucial decisions necessary for his survival and well-being. He cannot avert the responsiblity if he is what he claims to be: a rational being. 卐

A historian looks at the question.

THE FUTURE OF MAN

by Dr. M.N. DAS

BOTH for man and the mankind, the future is a great secret. It is therefore that in all the faiths—most ancient, pagan or prophetic—sages and seers have tried to unravel the mystery of creation in their own way, keeping the vast unknown in mind. For man the bubble, the immediate future is the inevitable death which is as certain as life, yet the most uncertain in its timing and the manner of coming. For mankind the sea, the future is most remote, as illusive as the hazy horizon. Between the physical phenomenon of man's bodily existence and the cosmic phenomenon of earth's existence as the abode of living creatures, the former has received more urgent consideration in speculative spheres of human thought. Since man is face to face with death every moment, his imperative need for an answer to his life's future after death has caused the greatest concern, whereas, the mankind's continuity on earth having been taken more or less for granted, thoughts about its future have concentrated more in matters of cosmological consequences in accordance with the Creator's Will in respect of the Planet's destiny. As the Chinese sage Lao Tse put it regarding man's life and mankind's existence....

"Heaven is eternal, the Earth is everlasting.
How come they be so?
It is because they do not foster their own lives;
That is why they live so long."

History contains unbounded accounts of man's faith in his own future life. The ancient Egyptians were so fond of the body that they were certain of the life's return to it once some rituals were performed and effigies left behind. And, to the mighty Pharaoh, the pyramid was an absolute necessity for defying Time, Nature, and Man, to preserve his real body till the life returned to it after long long journey through heavens or celestial spheres. The ancient Sumerians would not even allow their gods to possess any power over their future life, since they wanted to stay on as dull grey shadows very near to their mortal remains, buried under the floor of the house, and guarded by fearful descendants who were ever careful not to neglect the spirits of the departed.

More rational answers were worked out regarding the life after death. In their intuitive vision, the seers of ancient India saw in life a process of self-unfoldment in the direction of *rtam, satyam, brhat*—the Right, the True, the Vast—a voyage in earthly and heavenly spheres of existence. Life is nothing but the soul in evolution, marching on and on "from non-being to true being, from darkness to light, from death to immortality." The theories of birth and rebirth, of the *Karmic* cycle, of the *Mokshya*, or of the Buddhist *Nirvana*, were all aimed at finding a more convincing or satisfying justification of human existence on earth. From perfection of Soul to the unity of all existence, and to the ultimate ONE, the life is a consciousness for the highest realisation. While the faith in rebirth brought satisfaction to many, *Mokshya* and *Nirvana* gave hope to others. Both in the East and the West, it has been conveyed to man that life was not worth living unless there was a sense of sin, and an endeavour for perfect goodness. As Socrates reminded his contemporaries, the cause of truth and beauty and goodness was God's cause.

No matter whether acceptable or rejectable to modern pragmatic mind, man as an individual had enough of answers in his quest to know the unknown. For mankind, too, faiths evolved regarding its ultimate future. There are the prospects of a Kingdom of God on earth, or a golden age, as well as fears of total annihilation in turmoil, coupled of course with hopes of resurrection and revival. On the whole, there has been a deep faith in mankind's onward march towards something better, higher, and nobler, and in its ultimate survival even if through disasters and darkness.

The conflict between the prospect of a brighter future and the possible disasters could arise, thought Sophocles long ago in 5th century B.C., in form of a

conflict between the law and order of a man-made society and 'the unwritten laws of heaven'. His analysis perhaps holds more good today than ever before. In the man-made society, the power of the modern man has crossed its bounds to threaten the laws of evolution. Man has advanced far enough from the invention of fire, and with his invention of the nuclear power, 'Man, of all wonders the most wonderful' has established his supremacy over the elements of Nature in order to grasp the wonders of power. Parenthetically, he has rendered the earth weak and pitiable. The warning of Sophocles, therefore, stands valid against the vanity of today's powerful....

"Old age and death leave God
alone untouched;
Time conquers all, and brings
all else to dust.
The earth's strength dies, and
dies the body's might."

Because of man, mankind today stands on the crossroads of time. Never before was there a fear about its existence as it is now. The earth has not grown old enough to die, nor has mankind walked far enough of a distance in its journey into the future to cry a halt to its own march. But yet, Rousseau's fear that man's intelligence and inventions lead him away from Nature towards an unnatural existence appears more apparent.

The tragedy for mankind's future erupted suddenly and surprisingly the day Hiroshima and Nagasaki got reduced to ashes at the dead-end of World War II. The Nuclear Age dawned abruptly heralding for mankind an unimaginable future.

> Nature, at this juncture of time, surely calls for a reaction against the prevailing atmosphere of violence and fear.

It may be said here that on the path of evolution, man, in his present shape, appeared on earth only about twenty-five thousand years ago, though other forms of life had appeared three hundred million years ago. Comparatively, thus, mankind is too recent a creation, and still more recent is its civilised existence. Only about ten thousand years ago mankind was passing through the Neolithic Age, and the earliest human civilisations came to exist during five to seven thousand years ago.

In this brief existence, mankind's achievements in spheres of thought and creativity—religious, spiritual, moral, literary and artistic became phenomenal indeed. And, finally, mankind landed itself in the age of Industrial Revolution two hundred years ago. Since then, the pace of progress in scientific inventions has become overwhelmingly spectacular, culminating at last in the coming of the Nuclear Age.

Here at this point of time, when man has reached the peak of success, two paths are seen open for mankind in future direction. First, by the conquest of the outer space far beyond the earth's gravitational force, mankind may establish a new home, resembling the heaven of human imagination where time does not run away through days, months and years as it does on earth but where life becomes long-lasting like that of gods, with the bliss of happiness which this earth does not know. Secondly, rather alternatively, mankind can perish in a nuclear devastation due to the folly of the few who preside over the destiny of mankind by virtue of might, derived from 'the man-made society' in its imperfect worst.

The future of mankind, thus, hangs on a thread of doubt. The fear of the worst tragedy is aggravated by the atmosphere that

prevails wherein the modern man appears instinctively more violent than the man of any previous generation. Gone are the days when the violence of the primitive man rested on blind beliefs such as, efficacy of human sacrifice to please the gods. Gone are the days when the most cruel among the rulers, namely, the ancient Assyrian kings, flayed alive their victims to establish state terror to keep the subjects loyal.

Gone are also the days when the tide of non-violence swept across races of mankind in the wake of Buddhist missions or the feeling of kindness in the wake of Christian missions. Gone also are the days when religious wars between Christians and Moslems or Protestants and Catholics were fought furiously in the medieval contexts of ignorant fanaticism. With everything, overwhelming majority of men in ancient and medieval ages remained within the bounds of ethics, morality, and above all, fear of God. Their violences in names of religion, faiths, or power represented only a state of mind in the perspective of time confined to a few at the social fringe. And, their non-violence, on the other hand, represented the triumph of rationality dominating the thought of the vast humanity.

Today, man's mind has turned different. Gods have fallen from their old pedestals. There is neither heaven nor hell to create hope or fear. Faiths in the fatherhood of God or brotherhood of men have lost all relevance. Instead, there is total disrespect to life and disregard for human suffering. These conditions have overcome all men in general. Individual and group cruelty has overtaken the better part of human instinct. The rulers of society as if represent this darker aspect of time, and hence is the omen of universal violence in shape of a nuclear devastation.

The chances of man's folly through physical power will thus stand challenged by man's wisdom for a higher existence.

But history has its lessons. Mankind survives ordeals for sake of earth's evolution. As day follows night and light follows darkness, better times dawn upon earth ending the ages of uncertainty. The thesis of the time will obviously call for its own anti-thesis. Science, at its height, will crave for spirituality as the man of the new age will raise himself to a higher consciousness beyond the impulses of physical successes. Seers and scientists will have to combine their efforts in mankind's 'endless adventure of existence' for the blending together of scientific knowledge and spiritual values. It is not for nothing that Sri Aurobindo had had the vision that....

"The Spirit shall look out
through Matter's gaze
And Matter shall reveal the
Spirit's face."

Albert Einstein, too, saw the emergence of a new order in the wake of man's new conquests of power. And to poet Tagore....

"In the boundless heavens the
Great Ascetic, Vast Time
keeps vigil.
He keeps vigil
For a manifestation till now
unconceived, unimagined,
That none has yet known,
That has revealed itself
nowhere."

Perhaps, a more meaningful future awaits mankind the character of which, at the moment, is beyond the comprehension of man. Philosophers, who in recent times interpreted the purpose or meaning of evolution, came to believe that evolution is not the outcome of mere chance or caprice, but of determined laws of development in the direction of a definite destination. For example, evolution to the Hegelians "ceases to be a mechanical, it becomes a Spiritual Law." Reason, being 'the infinite energy of the universe', will eventually work out a rational design for the future of mankind. The chances of man's folly through physical power will thus stand challenged by man's wisdom for a higher existence.

Nature, at this juncture of time, surely calls for a reaction against the prevailing atmosphere of violence and fear. Anticipating, as if, a newer mode of evolutionary reaction from generations to come, The Mother left the following prayer for today's and tomorrow's young....

"Make of us the hero warriors
we aspire to become,
May we fight successfully the
great battle of the future
That is to be born against the
past
That seeks to endure;
So that the new things may
manifest
And we be ready to receive."

卐

A Savant looks at the question

"Men, countries, continents ! The choice is imperative:
Truth or the Abyss."

The Future Man: More Perfectly Human or More Than Human?

by Dr. K.R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

"the principal business of present-day Mankind is to achieve a breakthrough straight ahead by forcing its way over the threshold of some higher level of consciousness".

Teilhard de Chardin (1941)

"In this great transformational crisis...can we achieve a nuclear stabilisation in time? Can we mobilise the necessary intelligence and energy for self-structuring all our other great changes ?"

John Platt (Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, November 1970)

"...everything points to a change of pace in history which might well be pointing to the end of history itself and usher in an entirely new geological age—hopefully, the age of Superman".

Amaury de Riencourt (1972)

"Must we wish tomorrow's man to be more perfectly human or more than human? In other words, must we look for the fulfilment of Man or, beyond man, for the Superman?"

Prof. Oliver Lacombe (1972)

"A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal's world.
On Nature's luminous tops, on the Spirit's ground.
The Superman shall reign as King of life,
Make earth almost the mate and peare of heaven..."

Sri Aurobindo's Savitri (1950)

IT ASKS for considerable courage and a great ground of faith to speculate and talk about 'the Future Man' at a time like the present when the survival of humanity and the very fate of the earth have become ominous question-marks. five years ago, in the course of a letter to his daughter, Sushila, Dr.Mulk Raj Anand wrote with all-sufficient brevity: "Our earth is no longer a safe place" *(Gandhi Marg*, May-June, 1982, P.428). But where can we go? We have all heard about (or seen) the film, *The Day After*, that was viewed by millions of Americans on 20 November 1983, and presently by many more in Europe and elsewhere. After exposure to it in London,

Phillip Knightley wrote in the *Indian Express* on 1 January 1984 :

"Personally, I would far rather be Red than dead. My defence policy would be to build a giant loudspeaker, and as the Russians crossed the channel.... the loudspeaker would boom out: 'We surrender, we surrender:' For another lesson history teaches us is that tyrannies do not last for ever. They come and go. But this world is the only one we have got".

You will remember that, towards the close of his life, Bertrand Russell too said "Better Red than dead", and he addressed open letters to the Heads of the two Superstates (General Eisenhower and Comrade Krushchev) and pleaded that the supreme objective of America, Soviet Russia and all other powers should be "to ensure the continued existence of the human race". It was no more a personal or political issue, for what was at stake had global and racial ramifications. And Russell reminded the two "most potent" Heads:

"Individual death we must all face, but collective death has never, hitherto, been a grim possibility".

At about the same time, the novelist J.B. Priestley wrote in the *New Statesman* (2 November 1957):

"One' ultimate weapon', the final deterrent, succeeds another... And we have arrived at an insane regress of ultimate weapons that are not ultimate...

Perhaps what we need now, before it is too late, is not statesmanship? But lifemanship'.

Since Russell and Priestley wrote, their generation has withdrawn from the terrestrial scene, and the human race has somehow (by the skin of its teeth, one might say!) enacted precarious survival, and surely this is something. But the mad arms race goes on between the superpowers, the intermediate powers, the smaller nations, and with all kinds of forged alliances and stimulated antagonisms. **A general nuclear war today might therefore mean a hundred-fold devastation compared with what was shown in *The Day After*. Further high-powered research for the manufacture of still deadlier weapons of indiscriminate destruction, or for the so-called 'star wars' and strategic defence initiatives, and for other unspeakable abominations continue to claim the choicest life-energies and the scarce material resources of the earth.** When the fateful discovery relating to the neutron bombardment chain-reaction was made in 1939, Sri Aurobindo in his 'cave of tapasya' at Pondicherry saw far into the future and wrote the sonnet 'A Dream of Surreal Science' on 25 September:

One dreamed and saw a gland
write *Hamlet*, drink
At the Mermaid, capture
immortality...
A thyroid, meditating almost
nude,
Under the Bo-tree' saw the
eternal Light...
Thus wagged on the surreal
world, until
A scientist played with atomes
and blew out
The universe before God had
time to shout

(*Collected Poems*, P.145)

This could be much worse than the splitting of a special kind of atom (Uranium or Plutonium): this might mean shaking the foundations of matter itself. In his novel, *The Sable Squadron* (1966), Simon Raven shows the mathematics student, Daniel Bond, working on certain matrices in the papers of the late Dortmund in Gottingen and stumbling upon the key to the disintegration of Matter. There are certain basic forces that regulate the behaviour of Matter and make everything hold together:

"But if once we understood the inner forces which maintain this stability..Nature's stability could be infiltrated, its basic and binding principle corrupted. There would not be bigger and better explosions..there would be..dissolution".

In the novel, horrified by this possibility, Bond prefers suicide to revealing the clue to the agents of the Big Powers that are impatient to wrest the secret and put it to 'practical use'. If Einstein's $E=mc^2$ was the key to the making of the atomic bomb, perhaps his Unified Field Theory might have led to an even more catastrophic development imperilling the Earth's existence: Sri Aurobindo saw 46 years ago that, at the rate science was advancing and with such utter amoralism attending its operations, the very bases of Matter might soon be shaken, with the whole earth going up in smoke. Sri Aurobindo saw further than the scientists (Meitner and Frisch, Fermi and Einstein), but like Tiresias the prophet of ancient Thebes, the Seer of Pondicherry too knew that people wouldn't as yet heed his warning. And so he watched and waited, confining himself to feasible spiritual action or *nishkama karma* as the occasion demanded.

Then, on 16 July 1945, the atom bomb announced its birth with a thunderous test bang in Alamagordo in New Mexico, and the light was "golden, purple, violet, gray and blue. It lighted every peak, crevasse and ridge of the nearby mountain-range", and the air blast and the roar, as recorded by General James Farrell, "warned us of Doomsday and made us feel that we puny things were blasphemous to dare tamper with the forces heretofore reserved to the Almighty". And the blast could be heard from a distance of 50 miles, the hell-flames seen from 250 miles, and the energy released was 20,000 tons TNT. Two more explosions—on August 6 and 9, over Hiroshima and Nagasaki—brought the war to an end.

The earlier war of 1914-18, although it was described at the time as "a war to end all wars", had nevertheless led to Hitler's rise and the more calamitous second world war. But where

was the peace, although the Allies had won? In 1950, Sri Aurobindo wrote again, now in a Postscript Chapter in his book *The Ideal of Human Unity*, written originally during the first world war:

"Two stupendous and world-devastating wars have swept over the globe and...altered the political map of the earth..and changed the whole future. A third still more disastrous war with a prospect of the use of weapons and scientific means of destruction far more fatal and of wider reach than any ever invented...looms in prospect; the constant apprehension of it weighs upon the mind of the nations and stimulates them towards further preparations for war and creates an atmosphere of prolonged antagonism, extending to what is called 'cold war' even in times of Peace" (Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol.15, P.577).

Since the end of the war in 1945, although there have been 200 or more occasions when both the USA and the USSR have made demonstrations of the use of force without actually resorting to war, a direct head-on collision has been avoided. No doubt the atomic and hydrogen bombs have been exceeded or supplemented by the Inter-continental rockets, submarines carrying guided missiles with nuclear warheads, heavy bombers with Cruise missiles, and neutron bombs that spare buildings but kill men, but it is a fact that, for 40 years, the atomic option in warfare has been held back. As M.H. Ryle has observed:

"We build and deploy nuclear weapons...to ensure that they are never used... Their destructive power is known, and has been witnessed; but since 1945, reality has been blurred as that power has remained suspended, withheld" (NS, 21 May 1982).

And yet, not only we cannot exercise them out of the arsenals of the member-nations of the Nuclear Club, they are also growing in number and sophistication and malignancy. We cannot thus be lulled into a sense of false security by the uneasy reign of the nuclear holiday. The doctrine of 'deterrence', the infantile belief that the spectral certainly of MAD (mutually assured destruction) will scare away the warmongers, merely postpones—for how long, nobody knows:—the day when, in Anthony Rudolf's words, the human race "will extinguish itself in a nuclear holocaust, will commit 'omnicide' (NS, 4 June 1982). One is reminded here of Sita's warning to Rama and Lakshmana as they went about in Dandakaranya with their uncanny bows and quivers full of arrows:

I must needs call to your mind
the hermit
who had for safe custody
a gleaming sharp sword, and
went on gazing
at it with obsessive love;
And he carried it wherever he
went,
doted on it all the time,
and so he lost his inner poise and
peace,
and lapsed from
enlightenment.

This might be Mother Earth pleading with Reagan and Gorbachev (and the leaders of other nations too, big and small, whether equipped with nuclear or only traditional weapons) to pause and weigh and consider, and roll up their nuclear and even conventional weaponry, and bury them all "deeper than ever plummet sounded", thereby ensuring human survival, the necessary condition for any future at all for the human race on the earth.

Let us now view the contemporary world situation unruffled by the headings in the morning papers, see our Mother Earth steadily and, as befits her children, with love and concern. Let us forget for the nonce the so-called Doomsday Clock, whether it is 12 minutes, 10, 7 or but 3 minutes to midnight or the zero hour. Let us try to forget, too, that ordinarily 20 or more local wars are being waged on our planet all the time, and let us also try to forget that during the last 40 years 1500 or more nuclear tests have taken place poisoning the earth and the earth atmosphere, and more test explosions are queuing for their turn. But even when all such discordances have been added up to deaden our sensibilities, there is still this flattering unction to lay to our anguished souls the world, although perilously perched on the brink, has for four decades somehow saved itself from an irrevocable plunge into oblivion. Adverting to the possibility of setting up an effective world Body "in which all questions of possible dispute could be solved as they arose without any breaking out of open conflict", Sri Aurobindo wrote in his 1950 Postscript Chapter:

"As Russia and America, in spite of the constant opposition of policy and ideology, have avoided so far any step that would make the preservation of the UNO too difficult or impossible, this third body (i.e. after the League of Nations and the UN) would be preserved by the same necessity or imperative utility of its continued existence; in the end the mass of general needs of the race and its need of self-preservation could well be relied on to make it inevitable" (SABCL, Vol. 15, P.569).

So far, however, it is a question of banking on the likelihood of the triumph of human reason and common sense and the nations' enlightened self interest. But Sri Aurobindo has linked all this with an occult Force as well:

"The indwelling deity who presides over the destiny of the race has raised in man's mind and heart the idea, the hope of a

new order which will replace the old unsatisfactory order, and substitute for it conditions of the world's life which will in the end have a reasonable chance of establishing permanent peace and well-being" (ibid., P.563)

There are doubtless the Presidents and Prime Ministers, the potentates and father-figures, the soldiers and politicians, and their alarums and attitudinisations do fill the pages of the newspapers. But behind them, or working through them, there is the "indwelling deity" of the race, and that's the real reason the world, albeit so heavily armed as to be able to destroy itself several times over, has been spared a conflagration all these 35 years since Sri Aurobindo wrote his Postscript. But he has also warned us that an indispensable "self-preserving next step"—the strengthening of the UN or its Security Council to enable it to serve as a summit Body of arbitration and control—should be taken by "the men of our day and, at the most, of tomorrow", that "tomorrow" is with us already, and there can be no delaying any longer.

Like Sri Aurobindo in 1950, others too have since strongly pleaded for a purposive regeneration of the United Nations. For example, Franklin C. Stark, National Vice-Chairman of the Campaign for UN Reform, speaking on 'Nuclear Storm or United Nations Reform', declared on 16 May 1982 at Dakota Wesleyan University:

"The great moral issue today is the folly of nuclear global suicide. The challenge is to bring into existence an alternative security system for the peace of the world... I know no better than a revitalised United Nations, strengthened and reformed to permit it to do what it was intended to do".

And this is an issue that should make everyone—everywhere—speak out his mind, give the Grand Refusal to the nuclear insanity, and the Grand Affirmation to human solidarity and peace and harmony.

I began by saying that it calls for exceptional courage and adamantine faith to start thinking about the Future Man, and I have said enough—perhaps more than enough, debit and credit :—to provide the needed inner strength to think aloud about the Future Man. Notwithstanding the persisting 'cold war' and the military lunacies that sustain it, I do believe it is permissible to look beyond the present and peer into the future. But let me distinguish between two kinds of future, the mechanical clock and calendar future, rather much of a muchness compared with today or yesterday, and the radical 'Next Future', a future with a change of pace, a future past the 'transformational crisis' in which human and earth history is now caught. We need the "self-preserving next step", the period of transition when human survival is somehow ensured and the ground is prepared for the critical revolutionary further jump—

Past the long green crests of the seas of life,
Past the orange skies of the mystic mind—

landing us in 'Next Future' or the prospective 'Life Divine' on the earth.

It is, then legitimate—not only legitimate but imperative as well—on our part to give thought to the future, the near and the far future alike, and try to clarify our ends and means. The issues that divide nation and nation, man and man, may on a narrow view seem frightfully important, even a 'life-and-death affair' justifying the unending battle of words, resources and regiments. But look: there is also the planetary view, the astronauts' view, the sheer common-sense view of the shared motherhood of the Earth that, like the midday Sun, dispels the clouds of unknowing pride and prejudice localisms and regionalisms, religious adhesions and political affiliations. In the early years of the 'cold war', Adlai Stevenson gave this grave warning to the global human community:

"We travel together, passengers on a little spaceship dependent on its vulnerable reserves of air and soil; preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work, and, I will say, the love we give to our fragile craft. We cannot maintain it half fortunate, half miserable, half confident, half despairing."

Many years later, on New Year's Day 1967, the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, issued this peremptory warning doubled with exhortation:

Men, countries, continents !
The choice is imperative :
Truth or the Abyss.

The Mother saw a crisis in individual, aggregate and global human affairs, and saw too—looking more closely—two opposite or extreme possibilities: triumph of Truth (Brotherhood, goodness, justice, charity, love, beauty, peace, harmony), *or* the gaping jaws of the Abyss: *either* survival, an evolutionary leap forward, the ardours and infinitudes of the Life Divine on the earth, *or* galloping scission and strife and self-destruction : *either* a 'Greater Dawn' in next Future *or* an unending Night, a fathomless zero ! And it is for Man himself—'little' Man, yet also potentially the Divine Man—to make his choice and meet and master his fate.

In September of the same year, seventy Eminences drawn from 18 countries, a dozen disciplines in the physical and social sciences and professionally concerned with the non-fictional foreseeing of human and scientific affairs, met in Oslo in an atmosphere of understandable pessimism which itself fuelled a phoenix-like reason for hope:

To love, and bear; to hope till
Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it
contemplates.

The participants thought that the future was worth thinking about, that indeed there should be hard and sustained thinking to some purpose if the future was to

be saved. Subsequently, a seminar was organised in Stockholm by the Nobel Foundation, and 35 notables from the natural and social sciences, philosophy and the arts, met and talked about a strategy for human survival. All this concern for the future—a future that can, after all, be retrieved from Annihilation's gaping jaws—shows a revied interest in the timeless values and verities, and the possibility of saving the world for the future Man to fulfil himself.

This 'Either.....or' "Truth or the Abyss", "New Dawn or Eternal Night" sphinx-query confronts us in varied formulations at different times in diverse contexts. For example, at the International Sri Aurobindo Seminar on Human Unity at Delhi in December 1972 Dr. James F.T. Bugental said:

There can be little doubt that the potentiality for a global catastrophe exists.....

We are at *Kairos*, a crisis point in history. We cannot take cautious steps; we must be bold, imaginative and decisive, or our cause and our dream may be lost; man himself may go into oblivion" (*Sri Aurobindo*: A Centenary Tribute, edited by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, 1974, pp. 262-3).

Again, the first UN Session on Disarmament of May-June 1978, attended by representatives from 149 States, passed this forthright Resolution:

"Mankind is confronted with a choice: we must halt the arms race and proceed to disarmament, or face annihilation".

Four years later, Rajani Kothari the social scientist said that the prevailing crisis could lead,

.....'*either* to a world more peaceful and secure as well as more just and humane, or to a world racked by increasing turbulence.....an intensification of the arms race.....growing domestic turmoil.....an eventual catastrophe no one could control.....'(*Gandhi Marg*, May-June 1982, p.83).

And thus Jonathan Schell, in even sharper terms, in his *The Fate of the Earth (1982)*:

"Two paths lie open before us. One leads to death, the other to life. If we choose the first path-.....then we in effect become the allies of death....and we will sink into stupefaction.....On the other hand, if we reject our doom, and bend our efforts towards survival.....then the anaesthetic fog will lift....and we will take full and clear possession of life again" (p.231).

But of course the most pointed, the most prophetic and most revolutionary statement of the "Either.....or" of the human predicament and developing human destiny occurs in *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo's massive 'supramental manifesto' which was thought out (there had been indeed "a continuous thinking, a high and subtle and difficult thinking") during the first world war, but revised and finalised in 1939-40, the early years of the second world war. Sri Aurobindo saw how, by successfully locating and harnessing many potencies of the universal Force, modern science and technology had made the life of humanity materially one, the wide world no more than the Global Village, but Man the user of this universal Force remained in his littleness and pettiness with nothing universal in his aims, desires or movements. Hence the current crisis in human affairs and earth-history, hence the cross-roads where Man finds himself with two alternative roads to the future branching out ahead. It is easy to take the line of least resistance, opt for the seductive road in front and ride the ego-powered car, and this will mean:

".....a chaos of clashing
mental ideas,
urges of individual and
collective physical want
and need,
vital claims and desires,
impulses of an ignorant
life-push,
hungers and calls for
life-satisfaction
of individuals,
classes, nations,
a rich fungus of political
and social and
economic
nostrums and
notions,
a hustling medley of
slogans and panaceas
for which
men are willing to
oppress and be
oppressed,
to kill and be
killed.....

A single bloated ego, or an inflamed group-ego or a mobilised national-ego will try to impose its will on other egos by ruthlessly exploiting the truly formidable means at its disposal. A universalism brought about only by science and technology, and not through the ego's progressive self-limitation and ultimate disappearance in a trancending consciousness, can thus only mean "a vast pullulation of unaccorded ideas and impulses, a surge of enormous powers and desires,—a universalised confusion and discord out of which it is impossible to build a greater harmonic life" (SABCL, Vol. 19, pp.1053ff.).

This is one path, the seemingly macadamised one; and this is the one we seem to have chosen racing faster and faster, bigger egos flying faster aircraft, or controlling unprecedented concentrations of destructive potential, and all the time not quite unconscious of the heavy tread of approaching Doom, even like the citizens of the ancient walled city of Troy with fatality ringing them round:

Slowly the shadow deepened on Ilion mighty and scornful;
Dragging her days went by; in the rear of the hearts of the people
Something that knew what they dared not know and the mind would not utter.

Something that smote that her soul of defiance and beauty and laughter,
Darkened the hours. For Doom in her sombre and giant uprising Neared, assailing the skies.....(Collected Poems, SABCL Vol. 5, pp.395-6)

But there is an alternative road, less obvious perhaps being screened by trees and their foliage, but not inaccessible; and its winding way leads to the beckoning heights. Reason and science have reared our glittering civilisation, its wasteful glory and heady pace, but something more is needed to save the future for the now beleaguered human race. "Reason and science", says Sri Aurobindo, "can only help by standardising, by fixing everything into an artifically arranged and mechanical unity of material life" (SABCL, Vol. 19, p.1055). Model follows model, each more sophisticated and nearer 'perfection' than its predecessor and the computer may one day seize full control. But human life has dimensions other and more important than the material, the measurable, the standardisable. What the human race and the evolutionary drive need are "a wide Mind, a greater wider more conscious unanimised lifesoul, Anima and that again needs an unveiling of the supporting soul and the spiritual soul within to maintain it" (ibid., p. 1056).

In other words, the present world with its criss-crossing ambitions and forces has to give place to a life of "unity, mutuality and harmony born of a deeper and wider truth of our being" Is it so difficult or impossible for individuals, nations, continents to attain to something like 'unanimity' about spaceship Earth as our only common home, about the remorseless law that will ordain our sinking together if we fail in prudence to swim together in the infinite space around us, or about the importance of building and preserving the peace rather than forever preparing for the final war and 'omnicide'? Writing in 1950, Fr. Teilhard de Chardin—one of the seminal thinkers of our century—dared to hope that such "human unanimisation" can, after all, be realised on the earth. Advancing science and galloping technology, by nearly abolishing distance, by making instantaneous communication possible provoking also or facilitating instantaneous involvement and response, by making global humanity co-sharers of the triumphs and failures, exultations and frustrations, joys and miseries, hopes and despairs of anybody—any group—anywhere, have certainly accelerated the movement of unanimisation and awakened the 'Sense of Species'—the feeling of sheer humanness—in a purposive way. People are relentlessly thrown together by the mass media, and "geographical and mental curvatures" do influence contemporary humanity. In Fr. Teilhards Words:

"Essentially, in the twofold irresistible embrace of a planet that is visibly shrinking, and Thought that is more and more rapidly coiling in upon itself, the dust of human units finds itself subjected to a tremendous power of coalescence, far stronger than the individual and national repulsions that so alarm us... The rebirth of the Sense of Species, rendered virtually inevitable by the phase of compressive and totalising socialisation which we have now entered, affords a first indication of the existence of such a field of unanimisation and a clue to its nature" *(The Future of Man*, translated from the French by Norman Denny, Fontana, 1964, pp. 301-2).

In the context of what Sri Aurobindo called "the self-preserving next step"—strengthening the UN and making it pave the way for a World State comprising "a federation of free nationalities"—such a movement of progressive and pointed unanimisation must hasten the reign of the Future man, who should be clearly more perfectly human than the best among the ego-centered yesterday's or today's humanity. Because of the current pace of 'unanimisation', the widespread diffusion of the knowledge of our 'Our World', and our realisation of the common destiny of mankind for better or for worse, it is legitimate to hope that Man may grow more and more perfectly human, learn to 'live and let live, abolish the lethal arms that threaten to abolish the human species, and fostered by sound education and sustained by a sensible social and political world order, win peace and harmony for himself and the succeeding generations.

But this "self-preserving next step" should really be viewed as a sort or holding operation, an evolutionary truce making possible the next decisive leap from Man to Superman. In one of his essays of 35 years ago, Fr. Teilhard traced briefly the evolutionary movement from the prehuman to the ultra-human:

"More than 600 million years ago the earth, like a nova of a singular kind, began to grow dimly with life..... Man is psychically distinguished from all other animals by the entirely new fact that he not only knows, but knows that he knows..... consciousness has coiled back upon itself to become thought.....

This is how the thinking layer of the earth as we know it today, the Noosnhere, came rapidly into being...." (ibid., pp. 304, 307). Thought as a paraclete power is operative on the earth, and the future will in all likelihood witness "an eventual critical point of collective reflection.... a sudden blaze of brilliance, an explosion in which Thought, carried to the extreme, is volatilised upon itself" (p.310). But Chardin also touched upon the possibility that Mankind might suddenly "fall out of love with its own destiny", care neither for survival nor "super-living", and feel reconciled "to collective death in an hermetically sealed world". It seems likely, then, that should the "self-preserving next step" fail within a reasonable time to witness the climatic climb to the next decisive plateau of consciousness, it might mean

the end of the human adventure, either because of internal contradictions or a voluntary abdication of the will to endure, strive and survive to surpass all limitations.

Let me turn now to Sri Aurobindo. Writing on 18 November 1922 to Chitta Ranjan Das, Sri Aurobindo said:

"I see more and more manifestly that man can never get out of the futile circle the race is always treading, until he has raised himself on to a new foundation".

This "new foundation" was to be "a new consciousness", a Knowledge and Power that would seize our present instruments—intellect, mind, life, body—and transform them. Sri Aurobindo named it the 'Supermind', and described its nature and working in the last chapter of *The Life Divine:*

".....what has to be developed is there in our being and not something outside it: what evolutionary Nature presses for is an awakening to the knowledge of self, the discovery of self the manifestation of the self and spirit within us and the release of its self-knowledge, its self-power, its native self-instrumentation. It is, besides a step for which the whole of evolution has been a preparation" (SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 1059).

The revolutionary shift from the mental to the supramental dispensation would mean a change from "our evolution in the Ignorance" with its darkling nights and chequered joy and pain to the sovereign certainties and adequacies of "an evolution in the Knowledge". In the world of the mental Man, there is an imbalance between Knowledge and Power, for while the enlightened feel powerless to influence the course of events, it is the kinetic man, the Asura, who wields all the power, and generally wields it perversely. At the supramental level, on the other hand, Knowledge is Power, Truth-Consciousness, and Power is flawless execution, and such execution means fulfilment and Joy.

While the future Man, in so far as he is able to contain and dissolve his normal ego and bring about (in the psychiatrist, R.D. Laing's words) "the eventual re-establishment of a new kind of ego-functioning, the ego now being the servant of the Divine, no longer its betrayer" *(The Politics of Experience)*, (Penguin, p.119), and to the extent he is able to do so, will help to usher in the New Life, yet for anything like the Life Divine, the gnostic or supramentalised life, to take root and become manifest on the earth, the quantum evolutionary passage or leap from Mind to Supermind has to take place, even as similar breakthroughs took place in the remote past, from the clod and ore to Life, and from Life in its numberless forms in plant, insect, bird, reptile, and animal to Mind in Homo Sapiens.

But the question may be asked: caught as we are in the current crisis marked by Man's capacity to destroy himself and the earth as well, where is the time for the supramental consciousness to arrive and decisively arrest the drift towards the Abyss, reverse the movement towards death, and transform human and earth-life? But Sri Aurobindo answers that, while the formation of the earth as aggregated matter, the coming up of life with its million variations and the emergence of Mind in Man were marked respectively by "an aeonic graduality", the march of millenniums and the paces of the centuries, "when the conscious spirit intervenes, a supremely concentrated pace of evolutionary swiftness becomes possible". John Platt too remarks that "against the million-year sweep of human evolution since our much earlier jump to fire and tools and speech, our whole technological transformation, even if we go back to the Greeks, is essentially instantaneous. But the present acute culmination of this transformation... concentrated into a ten to thirty year interval, is sudden even compared to a human life span" *(Bulletin of Atomic Scientists,* November 1970). And who can measure the speed of the spirit?

In Sri Aurobindo's symbolistic epic, at a crucial point in the debate between Savitri and Death, she reminds "the dark-browed sophist of the universe":

O Death, thou lookst on an unfinished world
Assailed by thee and of its road unsure,
Peopled by imperfect minds and ignorant lives...
In God concealed the world began to be,
Tradily it travels towards manifest God:
Our imperfection towards perfection toils,
The body is the chrysalis of soul.

(Savitri, 1954, pp. 699-700)

With Sri Aurobindo (as with Fr. Teilhard also), evolution is not what the scientific evolutionists make it out to be: a slow unpredictable climb out of mere mire and metal to life and mind. On the contrary, evolution is but the reverse process of the involution of Spirit in Matter. And every fresh flowering is the result of an ascent of aspiration from below being met by a descent of answering Grace from Above. Two hundred years ago, Alexander Pope wrote in *an Essay on Man:*

Placed on this Isthmus of a middle state,
A Being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the stoic's pride...
In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;
In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer;
Created half to rise, and half

to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled;
The glory, jest and riddle of the world.

Still earlier, Shakespeare put into Hamlet's mouth a tantalising speculation about Man inhabiting the ambiguous realm between the dust and the Divine, hell and the high heaven, Death and Immortality:

What a piece of work is a Man!
How noble in reason!
How infinite in faculty!
In form,in form and moving, how express and admirable!
In action how like an angel!
The beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!
And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust!

With Sri Aurobindo, however, we hear the ringing voice of certainty. The realm between is to be finally left behind, the unfinished world is to attain splendorous completion.

Today we are the half-aspiring half-despairing inhabitants of an unfinished imperfect world that is striving obscurely towards perfection and completion. As Prof. R.C. Zaehner said 16 years ago in a lecture at St. Stephen's College, Delhi, on Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin:

"Indeed, whether we like it or not, a new world is coming to birth before our eyes:

Wherever you loom there is the din of tumult,
Wherever you go there are candles and torches,
For tonight this world is heavy and in travail
Striving to give birth to an eternal world.

So said the Persian poet and mystic Jalalu'd-din-Rumi, and what he prophesied is taking place before our very eyes. Something tremendous is happening, something as disruptive and tormenting as the birth of a child. How and when will the child be born? And what kind of child will it be?" (Prof. Zaehner's lectures have since been published with the title, *Evolution in Religion:* A Study in Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin, 1971).

Teilhard thought that the Future Man would shed his egoistic separativity. "without destroying our limited organisms, we must fuse them together, synthesise them man, nothing but man, nothing less than man as the context of our ambitions and organisations. And this will be the New Man for whom all religions have been waiting". And Prof. Zaehner concluded his lecture with the wistfully ambivalent words: "Perhaps some of us will live to see the New Man. Or perhaps he will be still-born". But Sri Aurobindo's (or Aswapathy's) Yogic experience was more precise and positive:

A new and marvellous creation rose....
There were no contraries, no sundered parts,
All by spiritual links were joined to all
And bound indissolubly to the One:
Each was unique but took all lives as its own,
And following out these tones of the Infinite,
Recognised in himself the universe.....
None was apart, none lived for himself alone,
Each lived for God in him and God in all,
Each soleness inexpressibly held the whole (pp. 366-7)

This is verily the 'bootstrap' universe of unifying interpenetration and immaculate harmony.

Presently Aswapathy meets the Divine Mother and reports how he happened to swing—as in a hyperbolic-asymptotic kind of contrastive lightning movement—from a view of terrific Destruction (as during a nuclear war)—

A giant dance of Shiva tore the past,
There was a thunder of worlds that fall;
Earth was o' errun with fire and the roar of Death
Clamouring to slay a world his hunger had made—

to the sudden redemptive action by the New Race, the Future Man and Woman shaped by the Spirit:

I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers
Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;
Forerunners of a divine multitude...
The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
The great creators with wide brows of calm,
The massive barrier-breakers of the world...
Even as of old man came behind the beast
This high divine successor surely shall come
Behind man's inefficient mortal pace....(pp. 389-390)[1]

Towards the end of *Savitri*, again, after Death has been vanquished definitively and transfigured into Light, when Savitri rejects all tempting offers of personal felicity will accept everything—peace, oneness, energy, sweetness—only "for earth and men", she is now dowered with realisation of the great aim of her tapasya:

All thou hast asked I give to earth and men...
O Sun-Lord, thou shalt raise the earth-soul to Light
And bring down God into the lives of men
The superman shall wake in mortal man
And manifest the hidden demi-god...
This earth shall stir with impulses sublime,
Humanity awake to deepest self...
Nature shall live to manifest secret God,
The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine. (pp. 783ff)

Here vision, askesis and realisation fuse as poetry and prophecy, and let us cherish the vision, the boon, and await the Greater Dawn with prayer courage and faith. 卐

A Writer looks at the question

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF MAN?

"I CANNOT SEE MUCH HOPE..."

by Dr. MULK RAJ ANAND

Q. 1: Consciously or unconsciously man surely aspires for a brighter future. What, according to you, is the most formidable obstacle on the path of mankind realising such a future?

There is no doubt that human beings everywhere in the world instinctively desire to live happy lives. By happiness they seem to mean: survival in good health, with enough food, for the body, and some sustenence for the soul.

Unfortunately, due to the scarcity of good lands and plentiful harvests, those people who lived in deserts, wastelands and mountains, often swooped down on the fertile lands and appropriated to themselves plentiful fruits of the earth. And the few gave themselves more than to the people whom they subdued or to their own soldiers, servants and retainers. Later the powerful found other excuses for fighting. So small chieftains, big chieftains, kings and emperors have fought more than a million war of conquest and subjugated millions of people in human history. Men and women often survived by the 'skin of their teeth' as the phrase puts it.

There were some attempts by the defeated peoples, the slaves and 'lower people', to upturn the kingdom, but most of these revolts failed. And, in our own century, the rich who get their wealth from exploitation of colonies and empires flourished. As these kingdoms also envied each other, because some had more than others, there had been two World Wars.

In the first World War, workers and peasants, broke the Imperial order of the Czar in Russia, under Lenin, and formed a people's democracy, with commune in every village. But, later, his successor, Stalin, established dictatorship, which again tended to be one-man rule, though some sharing remained.

In the second World War the Germans, who had come late to statehood and had not conquered a big empire, wanted *Lebensraum*, space for expansion, and they began the war to wrench away colonies from their big cousins, the British and the French. The Germans were defeated by the strange combination of Cape talents and communists.

Today, the American democracy, which had helped to de-

feat the Germans and once defined a declaration of human rights, has become the biggest commercial imperialist of the world, opposed to the supposed Soviet sharing society, which is called Communist Russia. The U.S.A. neo-colonists have been preparing for a nuclear war to deter what they say is the challenge of communist aggression. They even help with millions of dollars the Guerillas, who are fighting against small socialist democracies like Nicaragua. They have armed Pakistan against Afghanistan, where the Russians brought about a communist regime and against India which has a friendship treaty with Russia.

The biggest obstacle in the path of mankind for survival against possible extinction is the preparation for a third world war, with ultimate nuclear weapons, such as missiles, laser rays and Star War satellites. The planet Earth could be abolished. Not to speak of 'happiness' or a 'brighter future'—there may be no future at all.

Q. 2: What can be done to remove that obstacle ?

First of all—what are the actual obstacles ?

I note the facts below as given by a Nobel Laureate, Prof. Sean Macbride in 1985 :

'In 1984 humanity wasted over 800 billion dollars on the arms race.

'In 1985 U.S.A. is inviting the world to engage in an arms race in space (for Star Wars), which will cost over a trillion dollars to the U.S.A. alone.

(This costing has gone up three fold in the year 1987)

'And this is when famine claims hundreds of thousands of lives in Africa.

'Over four hundred million people suffer from malnutrition.

'More that 300 millions suffer from anemia. One hundred million children are on the verge of death from undernourishment and lack of vitamins.

'30% children do not go to school.

'Some of the cures for the sick world suggested by Prof. Macbride are as follows:

'Experts say 60% of total annual military spending would suffice: to build 6,00,000 schools for 400 million children: 30,000 hospitals for 18 million patients: 50 million well-equipped blocks of flats for 300 million urbanites: 20,000 industrial enterprises which would provide jobs for 20 million people'.

I add to these figures the need for total revolution, in thinking, through the education systems of the world. World teachers might begin to include in the syllabus, from secondary school and higher education, popular accounts of the needless wars of the world. They may devise means to promote awareness at all levels. And there may be International schools, universities and workshops, in all parts of the world, to teach succeeding generations to the causes of greed and hatred, and help to evolve human beings who may aspire to non-hurting. The young may find themselves overcoming violent impulses and resolve, in small groups, in contact with each other, to sit down on the doors of authorities to abandon war as a means of settling disputes. Also the young may ask their Governments to merge their national identities in vital matters in a world Government. This means stablising the U.N.O and applying its sanctions in all countries. Youth Parliaments in each country may be elected to discuss ways and means of connecting human beings and creative writers, artists, people in the cinema, television and radio, to discover causes of tension and devise methods to remove differences.

Q. 3: How do you visualise the future of man—in the near future (say, in the 21st century) as well as in a distant future? How much will the future man differ from the man today ?

I must confess that I cannot see much hope, unless the world accepts disarmament, bans nuclear tests and abandons war, as a means of settling disputes between nations. The world peoples cannot settle down to comparative peace unless they abandon National frontiers.

But should the miracle happen that the world powers decide to disarm, in a gradual process, by diffusing the bombs, there may be a future.

As this future can only be brought about by the new young, they will be in the best position to decide what the future might be.

The 1984 prophecy of George Orwell has more or less been realised. Doris Lessing's novel after the War, shows that the sun will be darkened and an ice age will begin if a nuclear war breaks out.

Nobel Scientist, Prof. George Wald prophesies that atomic energy even for peaceful uses is dangerous as there may be leakages like that in Chernobyle in Ukraine and in mid America.

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An Educationalist looks at the question

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF MAN?

"NOT VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE PRESENT"

by Dr. MALCOLM S. ADISESHIAH

Q. 1: Consciously or unconsciously man surely aspires for a brighter future. What, according to you, is the most formidable obstacle on the path of mankind realising such a future?

1. The obstacle is (a) the individual man's self-centred nature and

(b) the community or society's unequal treatment of most of its members in relation to the privileged few.

It is the self-centred nature of man which is expressed in his selfishness, no regard for others, wanting more everything for himself, in other words following the adage Each man for himself and devil take the hind most which is the obstacle to his attaining his vision of the future.

Socially this characteristic expresses itself in growing inequalities and inequities, where man oppresses man, which man makes gains and profits at the cost of others, where a few men are able to exploit the mass of poor and helpless people.

Q. 2: What can be done to remove that obstacle?

At the individual level, it is for each man to see and accept his weakness—which is his self-centredness—and do everything possible to counter it and overcome it. Once he is conscious of his defect, he can correct it.

At the level of society, there is need for laws to restrain the exploitation of man by man, and the inequalities and inequities which result from it by placing a limit on wealth and property and income that each individual can own or earn.

Q. 3: How do you visualise the future of man—in the near future (say, in the 21st century) as well as in a distant future? How much will the future man differ from the man today?

I do not see man's future being very different from his present. There will be more science and more technology in the future. That may make man more capable of controlling and exploiting nature and may continue and intensify the present trend to impersonal relationships. But essentially men will be the same bumbling, tumbling and self-centred creatures that he is today. Man in the future will have more power over both nature and his fellowmen. He will use these powers to the same selfishness that he is using them today. Hence it is important that legislation and the penal powers of the state should be used to prevent these weaknesses getting out of hand in the future. 卐

THE NATIONAL BIRD

by M. KRISHNAN

THERE are peafowl in the sub-Himalayan Terai and there are peafowl along the sandy, wind-blown coast of Ramanathapuram, they are there in reaches of the Thar desert and also there in the great forests of Assam. Few of our birds have such a country-wide range and few are so exclusively our own, for the Indian peafowl is not to be found even in neighbouring countries as a native wild bird—the peafowl of Burma belong to a different species altogether, and the birds in Sri Lanka were introduced from India.

Moreover, barring domesticated fowl, no other large bird has been as long and as highly fancied in countries far from ours, and taken to them to grace alien settings. I have not checked the point, but probably peafowl were there in ancient Rome, and Tennyson's mention of a "milk-white peacock" in the gardens of an English mansion testifies to the slim grace of build and delicately cut-up finery of feather in crest and train of an albinotic peacock having been as highly regarded as the panchromatic iridescence of the normal bird.

Naturally then, no other choice could have been made for the National Bird, and still, when the peacock was accorded the honour in the seventies, there were dissenters. There were those who thought the Great Indian Bustard, by then threatened with possible extinction, should have been preferred and that such a step would have aided its conservation. This large fowl is quite spectacular in its own puffed-up way, but certainly nowhere near as arrestingly beautiful and elegant as the peacock; further, by the seventies it was limited to a few arid tracts in some four or five of our States, and in choosing a national emblem surely one that is virile and thriving and has a range all over the country is much to be preferred to one in its decline and with an extremely limited distribution.

There were others who felt that the *garuda*, the Brahminy Kite, with its ancient religious association as Vishnu's *Vahana*, should have had the honour—as if the peacock, which is Subramanya's *Vahana* and which enjoys much wider protection out of religious sentiment, does not have the claim! The simple truth of the matter seems to be that however unexceptionable the choice for a national award might be, there will still be dissenters.

What appeals to people about the peacock is its ocellated train of dazzling blues and greens and purple, and its habit of dancing with the train spread out in a great, vibrating, shimmering fan. Actually, the train is not the bird's tail, which consists of broad, greyish feathers rather like a turkey's but is made up of the greatly elongated plumes above the tail, the upper tail coverts, fringed with thread-like exquisitely cut up feathering along the white rachis, and ending in a big, scintillating eye of bronze and blue and green and purple. So closely is the bird linked with its dance that illustrations of it usually show it with the train outspread and raised, but to me the long, sinuous neck so richly covered with iridescent feathers, tapering to the delicately crested head, with the unspread train balancing it in a flowing queue behind, seems even

more expressive of the peacock's equipoise in movement and repose—for all the uninhibited riot of colours in its plumage, it is not flagrant in its looks.

While the dance definitely has a sexual significance and is a courtship display, the old Indian belief that the peacock, which is a thirsty bird, dances from sheer joy when the summer heat is relieved by the oncoming rain, also seems to be true. Peacocks dance when excited, even when

no peahen is around, and may stage their display even before wholly different animals, as before a captive tortoise in one instance.

To know what active, vigilant and versatile birds they are, one should study wild peafowl in varied settings. They are diurnal and spend the day largely on the ground, walking miles on their sturdy legs, through bush cover and over the forest floor. The cock's resplendent train, which is shed about the end of the year and renewed annually, is surprisingly light, and carried airily, well clear of the ground. In flight the train is compressed into a fluent streak above the outspread tail, and flying over any distance the bird often sails along on high after a few vigorous flaps of its broad wings to gain momentum and height. Once I saw a wild peacock fly across the dry bed of the Koel, in Bihar : it took off from a treetop, from a tree on a rise on one bank of the river, and sailed clean across the ¼ km stretch of barren sand like a dark meteor, to land lightly in the forest on the other bank. It was a memorable sight.

In the mornings and evenings peafowl feed industriously, scratching the ground for grain, stripping the seeds off heads of grass, picking fruits off the bushes and hunting small animals. The iconographic depictions of Subramanaya's *vahana* with a snake in the beak are not untrue to nature, for peafowl do kill and consume small reptiles on occasion. They need to drink everyday, and though they may inhabit arid scrubland, they must have a source of water, to which they will go long distances if they have to.

Peafowl have excellent hearing and are exceptionally keensighted. On sighting a predator, they come out with a loud, explosive alarm call that is well understood by all forest-living animals. However, their night vision is poor, and so they do not trust themselves on the ground when it is dark. At sunset, they flap their way up to the security of some high treetop, and where men are friendly to them in jungleside villages, may roost for the night on the dome of the local shrine or on rooftops. In deciduous forests, they usually prefer a tall dead tree to roost in, with no obscuring foliage or green twigs, and come down only when it is broad daylight. Seen up such a tree in silhouette against the morning mist, their superbly balanced elegance of build is manifest.

GEMS IN THE OCEAN

The fourhundreth anniversary of the *Narayaniyam* was celebrated a few months ago at the Guruvayur temple in Kerala. Professor Sundaram's article deals with a significant stanza of this great work in Sanskrit.

A Verse from the *Narayaniyam*

by P.S. SUNDARAM

EVERY educated man in the world today has heard of the *Ramayana*, and it is not unsafe to assume that every Hindu has at least heard of the *Bhagavatam*. But even the Hindus in India may not all know that among the many versions of the *Ramayana*, not only in the different languages of our country and the Far East but also in Sanskrit itself, there is a version of it embedded in the *Bhagavatam* (as there is another in the *Mahabharata*). It is a brief resume of the great epic in just two chapters of Book IX of the purana.

There was in Kerala in the 16th century a Nambudri Brahmin called Narayana Bhattadri. His youth is said to have been wasted in idle pleasures. When he was afflicted with rheumatism he was advised by a learned and pious man to worship the Krishna idol in the Guruvayur temple. Narayana Bhattadri took this advice seriously. He also made himself master of the Vedas, the Sanskrit classics, grammar and poetics, and decided as an offering to Krishna to render the Bhagavata purana in a composition of a hundred chapters, each chapter consisting of ten stanzas, more or less. The work called the *Narayaniyam* consists actually of 1,034 slokas.

In reducing the twelve books of the Bhagavatam into his ten, Bhattadri follows the original faithfully. The Ramayana story is told as in the original Bhagavatam in two chapters. But in the end Bhattadri makes a significant change.

There is no mention in the *Bhagavatam* of Sita's ordeal by fire after she is rescued. Bhattadri with his knowledge of Valmiki makes good this omission. In the Uttara Kanda of the original *Ramayana*, the pregnant Sita is exiled out of deference to the slanderous words of a stupid man, and this finds a place both in the *Bhagavatam* and the *Narayaniyam*. The banishment of the ever-faithful Lakshmana for a high-minded and unavoidable fault is not referred to in the *Bhagavatam*, but finds a place in Bhattadri's summary.

In the Bhagavata purana, when Rama "hears of" his wife's entering the earth and thus leaving him for ever, Rama

> though he controlled his grief by the exercise of discrimination, could not, for all his divinity keep back his tears, as he dwelt on her noble qualities. Excessive attachment between men and women is productive of (grief and) fear in all circumstances. When even those who are capable of controlling their own destiny are thus affected, what wonder that the vulgar, whose hearts are bound up with their families, should suffer thus?
>
> (Translation by N. Raghunathan)

Narayana Bhattadri is evidently not satisfied with this didacticism. Rather than presuming to tell Rama how he should have known better and controlled his feelings, he asks a question:

> Was it for this, O Rama, that you took
> A mortal shape, that mortals all may know
>
> Was it for this, O Rama, that you took a mortal shape, that mortals all may know that love and justice always must conflict in mortal life, and the innocent forsook? Else why should you, self-made and self-secure, have your heart riven with sorrow? Mighty God, the one, the absolute of Guruvayur, remove my sorrows and my dread diseas.

The translation is mine and completely faithful to the original. I was tempted to add, in order to bring out what is inherent in the text, the motive of Rama's action, viz.

> That justice ever may be seen to be done and the upright judge tormented for his love.

as lines 5 and 6, but have refrained.

Narayana Bhattadri, the man who has himself suffered, can put himself in the place of Sita, Lakshmana and Rama the man. Imagine anyone advising Rama to be restrained! Here was an intensely human situation, where no one is really to blame and yet the guiltless suffer. To one who

believes in the doctrine of karma, no guiltless person *can* suffer. If he suffers, it is because he has been guilty, if not in this life then in a previous one. The Greek gods killed mortals for their sport. But the Hindu gods are just, and "of our pleasant vices make instruments to plague us".

Heavenly beings, whether Greek or Hindu, cannot be expected to know the human predicament. Children swat flies, and grown-ups crush cockroaches without giving a thought to the action. But what is the distance between a cockroach and a man compared with the distance between man and his Maker? Precisely such a question, though not so worded, confounded Job and silenced him.

Christian theology makes Jesus come into the world and be known as the Son of Man so that while being God he may also know what it is to be a man, even to the extent of saying, "Lord, let this cup pass from me", and feeling on the cross that he has been forsaken by his father at his need.

The *Bhagavad Gita* and the puranas talk of God as coming down not only as a man but even as a fish, a tortoise, a boar and a lion. But it is always to protect the good and destroy the evil, to save the world. Here is Bhattadri asking, "Can it not be that Rama took shape as a human being, not so much to kill Ravana as to find out at first hand what it is to be a man?" Would a mere God know the dilemmas that beset humanity everyday, between love and duty, mercy and justice, the "human factor" which makes so many of our conventional labels meaningless? It is a profound question which Bhattadri asks. When he wrote his work Christianity had already been in our country for quite several centuries. Whether Bhattadri's question owes anything to the preaching of Christian missionaries or not, his treatment of the Bhagavata purana at this stage of his rendition, his inclusions and modifications, are significant.

CRIME AND "PUNISHMENT"

A new progressive Egyptian law obliges one who is guilty of insulting or wounding a member of his family by compelling him to kiss in the court the aggrieved party, reports DPA.

IF BEAUTY IS IN THE BEHOLDER'S EYE

An Indian scientist in the U.S.A., Dr. R. Srinivasan, has formulated a system by which one can sit before a laser and correct one's sight in 30 seconds.

Hope, he will apply it on the gifted Indian scientists including himself living abroad and change their vision of their Motherland.

DARE THE SEA!

Within thirty years, rising seas might flood cities from Boston to Bombay—warns a famous marine biologist.

Will great Neptune's Ocean wash the sins clean from man's hands? No. These hands will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine making the green one red—and polluted too! (With apology to Shakespeare.)

MAKING THE HORSE DRINK

A hundred new books are being launched, a rupee a copy, to make reading popular among the young. The veteran author Mulk Raj Anand carried copies of the first book to school children himself.

You can carry a horse to the water (or, as in this case, water to the horse), but can you make it drink?

Performance of Therukoothu at a street corner underneath a tree.

Arjuna

THERUKOOTH

THE EXCLUSIVE SERIES INTRODUCING THE AGE-OLD THEATRE TRADITION OF INDIA

THE West is now actively thinking of bringing theatre to the audience rather than the usual other way round, because the modern technology has produced a few powerful rivals, of which TV is perhaps the most formidable since it brings entertainment right into one's home. Hundreds of years ago Indian theatre-thinkers also felt the necessity of bringing theatre to the audience, not for any threat to it from some other artistic medium, but for expanding the frontiers of presentational techniques and thus giving *naatya* another dimension. We have in our age-old tradition many varying forms of arena theatre, for presentation of which no permanently constructed stage or auditorium is required. One of such fascinating forms of arena theatre is *Therukoothu* of Tamil Nadu.

In Tamil 'theru' means a street, and 'koothu', dance. Since in our tradition, dance is

A dramatic scene from Paanchaali Shapatham

THE STREET THEATRE

by JIWAN PANI

Photos: Courtesy Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi

Perhaps nowhere in India except in Tamil Nadu, *Draupadi*, the magnificent heroine of the Mahabharata, has been deified. At the core of the extensive repertoire of *Therukoothu* there is a cycle of eight plays based on the life of *Draupadi*. Traditionally, these eight plays are performed every year on consecutive nights before the temple of *Draupadi-aamman*. On the morning of the ninth day, the character playing the role of *Bhima* smashes the clay effigy representing *Duryodhana*. With the red coloured liquid, signifying the blood of the vanquished *Duryodhana*, which spurts out of the effigy, the hairs of Draupadi are wetted. The enactment is followed by a ritual worship offered to the deity, *Draupadi*.

Except for this ritualistic performance once every year, *Therukoothu* is generally presented on a street corner of the sponsoring village, preferably under a tree which is used, at times, as a prop. The improvised stage is at the street level. There is no need for a raised platform for the acting area. Audience sits on three sides of the arena. On the fourth side, the chorus and the instrumentalists sit. Musical instruments generally used with the performance are: *Maddalam*, a drum with two faces; *Kurukuzhaal*, a double-reeded pipe like *shehnaai*; and *Taalam*, a pair of cymbals. Harmonium is used only as a drone to show the keynote *(shruti)*. Two or three vocalists form the chorus. Music of *Therukoothu* is as powerful as dramatic. It admirably blends regional folk melodies with the Karnatic school of classical music.

The *Poorvaranga*, that is, the preliminaries performed before the play proper begins, is rather brief. It starts with the invocation to *Ganesha*. While the chorus sings the invocation, an actor wearing the mask of *Ganesha* dances for a while. He then sits on a stool and is worshipped. This is followed by invocations of *Shiva*, *Meenaakshi* and *Saraswati*. The invoked gods and goddesses, except *Ganesha*, are not represented on the stage.

After the invocation two stagehands hold an improvised curtain. The *Kattiaakaran*, who may be called the *sutradhaara* of *Therukoothu* performance, comes behind the curtain and sings. When the curtain is removed he comes forward and introduces himself in third person. He then announces the play. He also introduces the first character of the play to appear on the stage. Following the announcement of *Kattiaakaran* the play begins, usually with the entry of a King or the hero of the play.

There is yet another stock character, *Komaali*, who entertains the audience with his buffoonery. He usually makes his entry in a manner that is at once dramatic and amusing. For example, he may jump into the acting area from the branches of a tree. Soon after his entry he starts singing introducing himself and then changes to prose dialogue. At times he does the function of *Kattiaakaran* and introduces other characters.

The make-up and costuming is heavy and highly stylised. The faces of major male characters are treated with a heavy colourful make-up and they wear tall sumptuous crowns decorated with bits of coloured mirrors. The magnificent wing-like shoulder-decorations also have these coloured mirrors. Faces of the villains are painted red with black and white dots. Masks are not used in *Therukoothu*, but in the play *Prahlada-charitram* the character portraying *Narasimha*, the man-lion incarnation of Vishnu, wears a fascinating mask.

Dialogues are mostly sung punctuated here and there by impromptu prose. While singing the chorus joins the actors, but the prose dialogues are spoken only by the actors. *Abhinaya* in *Therukoothu* is characterised by vigorous dance-movements. All actors, therefore, wear ankle-bells.

If the performance of *Therukoothu* is closely watched, it will be evident that the theatre form can never be definitely classified under the two popular categories—classical and folk. It has the elements of both. I have seen it admirably handling such sophisticated literary work as *Paanchaali Shapatham* by Subramania Bharati. There are a few stylized gaits executed by the actors, the aesthetic appeal of which is exactly like that of any classical dance. Simultaneously, it has a vibrancy—a theatrical vitality—that is generally found in a form of folk theatre.

Therukoothu, like any other form of Indian traditional theatre, is not at all shy of being theatrical. It, however, does not banish realism. In fact, the dichotomy between realistic and non-realistic is irrelevant for Indian traditional theatre which like Wordsworth's Skylark 'soar but never roam, true to the kindred point of heaven and home'. From this perspective, *Therukoothu* is a theatrical 'skylark'. One should have sensitive 'ears' to listen to its charming 'birdsong'.

Journey into a Bygone Century?

by C.E.M. JOAD

Is it possible that one can suddenly find oneself amidst characters and situations belonging to the past? Distinguished English author and thinker C.E.M. Joad wonders when confronted by some strange experiences of people who cannot be accused of seeking to create sensations. The passages reproduced are from Joad's *Guide* to Modern Thought.

Acknowledgements are due to Faber & Faber Ltd., London.

The Narrative of Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain.

Briefly the narrative is as follows: Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain, visitors to Paris, interested neither in French history nor in the occult, were walking in the grounds of the Trianon one afternoon in August, 1901. They met and were addressed by persons wearing the costumes of 1789; some of these persons were visible to one lady, others to both. They saw woods which are no longer there, passed by a rustic bridge over a ravine down which ran a cascade which no longer exists; saw a man sitting by a garden kiosk which is not to be found; and were accosted by a footman who emerged from a door in the palace which, through the destruction of a staircase, has ceased for nearly a hundred years to afford any exist. At the time the ladies noticed nothing peculiar in their experiences beyond a strange feeling of depression. It was only subsequently, when some weeks later they discussed the events of that afternoon, that they became impressed by the oddness of what they had seen.

On a number of occasions the ladies returned to the scene and devoted themselves to investigating the mystery. They established the fact that the woods, the bridge, the ravine, the cascade, the kiosk no longer existed, and that the door could not be used. Buildings and grounds have, as might be supposed, undergone many changes since the days of Marie Antoinette, but careful investigation has in many cases established the fact that the scenes witnessed by the two ladies corresponded in minute particulars with the geography of 1789. The identity of some of the persons whom they met corresponds with that of historical personages and their dresses were in the fashion of the late eighteenth century.

As an illustration of this latter point, Miss Moberly, but not Miss Jourdain, saw a lady sitting on a terrace whose

"... light summer dress was arranged on her shoulders in handkerchief fashion, and there

was a little line of either green or gold near the edge of the handkerchief, which showed me that it was *over*, not tucked into, her bodice, which was cut low."

Further details are given. Subscriber research gave reason to suppose that the lady was Marie Antoinette herself.

Seven years later, pursuing their investigations, the ladies read the journal of Madame Eloffe (the Queen's modiste)

'She says that during the year 1789 the Queen was extremely economical and had very few dresses made. Madame Eloffe repaired several light, washing, short skirts, and made in July and September two green silk bodices, besides many large white fichus.'

Details are then given from which it appears that one of these tallied very closely with the dress worn by the lady seen on the terrace. This is only one of a very considerable number of similar correspondences, or verifications, if it is preferred to call them that, on points of detail.

It remains to add that on two separate occasions Miss Jourdain, visiting the grounds alone, had similar experiences and again saw and conversed with eighteenth-century personages. On a third occasion she noticed that.

'... the whole scene — sky, trees and buildings — gave a little shiver, like the movement of a curtain, or of scenery as at a theatre.'

In 1914 three persons, who had lived six years previously overlooking the park at Versailles, came to see Miss Jourdain and Miss Moberly and recounted similar experiences. Their experiences had, in fact, been so frequent that they had become accustomed to.

'...the light and trees and walks being in an unnatural condition, so that at last the whole thing got on their nerves and they went away—thinking that they preferred to live in their own century and not in any other.'

While admitting that the hypothesis of the present existence of the past is beset with difficulties of a metaphysical character to which it seems at present impossible to assign any satisfactory solution, I think that it indicates the most fruitful basis for the investigation of these intriguing experiences. 卐

THE WORD

by JUG SURAIYA

The author whose features are widely appreciated has a few volumes of fiction including *The Interview*. He is a senior Assistant Editor of *The Statesman*.

THE town was built more or less in the centre of a vast plateau region, a brick-and-plaster improbability in a flat sea of long-dead lava.

Its size was a private embarrassment to its better educated citizens. It was too big to be called a village and too small to be a city. So the unhappy compromise which smacked of provincialism, "town", had to be settled upon.

The citizens did not care to think of themselves as provincial, and so did not. An altitude of 3,000 feet above sea level (if there had been a sea nearby) provided a certain seclusion and made the town the centre of a frozen two-dimensional universe. The sun and the moon and the stars were there, but only as vague possible interpretations of a vastness beyond. The Electric Corporation secretly liked to feel that the whole parabolic display was thanks to its efforts. As were the occasional thunderstorms that brought rain to the town and caused the interstices of dark loam between the ribbed lava to sprout green and bountiful.

The town was less self-sufficient now than it had been at its ancient beginning. From the neat parcel of the community, the untied black threads of roads spun away into the unknown of the outside world. Trucks rode out on them carrying the products of the several rattling mills which employed the great majority of the citizens, and rode back with bartered gifts. Actually the Board of External Trade looked on the whole thing as a bit of a concession to the world at large.

People did sometimes come from outside. Politicians canvassing for votes, or businessmen trying to open new markets. Such visits, infrequent as they were, were politely discouraged. There were no tourists, though the town had a number of historic monuments including a segment of an enormously high, strange wall which dated back to fantastic, forgotten times. The citizens were as self-supporting in culture as in politics and economics.

And so the town had been over the quiet slip of years. No one quite knew when or why it had ever been founded.

Over the flat roof-tops, the market places, public squares and the parks for children and old people, loomed the abrupt wing of the wall. Built of hewn stone, weathered over the ages, it stood

ragged and high in the central square. This position of honour was taken for granted. No one knew whether the site had originally been awarded by accident or design. It just seemed right, though no one knew why it had been built at all. People just said, "I'll meet you by the Wall in the evening" and it was referred to in public speeches and metaphorically used in conversation. "He's as firm as the Wall."

The life of the town flowed around its granite presence and slowly the cold heart of the stone had been invested with this ritual and become part of it. People did not really see the wall anymore. It was there. Its sun-baked flatness was slightly marred by the flicker of a lizard and, near the ground, with chalked scrawlings and a green tangle of things that grew at its base from the ambient strip of grass. Council meetings had repeatedly discussed ways and means to clear away the weeds and replace them with flower beds and put a rail around so that no one could scribble on the wall and dogs could not get conveniently near. But, for one reason or another, nothing was done about it.

Then one day, or rather night, a word was discovered, white-painted and sprawled on the tall black stone.

It was discovered the way a comet is, or a bacillus or a very good, still reasonably priced, artist. It was the night watchman who made the discovery. Actually the night watchman was a mere formality. There was an almost total lack of crime of any sort in the town. But as the minuscule police force kept nine to five office hours like everybody else, it was felt that a night watchman could do no harm. Give some poor old fellow a job. The town drunk was urged to mend his ways (by none other than the Mayor) and employed in this capacity. His chief employment was to see that the street dogs did not make a noise outside the houses of the town's dignitaries.

And then the watchman found the word, painted high and white and striking in yard-high letters on the wall. It was a moonlit night and he could see it quite clearly. Face rumpled in the agony of semi-literate concentration, hesitant mouth shaping uncertain letters, he read it.

He scratched his head and said the equivalent of "Gorblimey". He flashed his torch into the shadows but failed to unearth the scuttling heels of a vagrant. He looked at the word again, high on the wall where no step-ladder could ever reach, and shuddered. He had thought of ghosts. Then with the vocational philosophy of night watchmen, whose actions by necessity no one but a felon witnesses, he grunted, decided he dared not wake the Mayor, and walked quickly away. He would not tell anyone about it. They could not blame him.

Three people next discovered the word simultaneously. The sun was just about coming up. The milk delivery man rattled his pale, metallic canisters. The front wheel of the paperman's cycle squeaked and he shifted his bundle of newspapers in automatic balance. A sleepless housewife who lived in a house facing the square threw open a bedroom window in the relief of dawn. The three of them saw the word together in a pantomime of comic coincidence.

The milkman set down his canisters so hard that some milk slopped over into the pavement. A watchful stray cat darted for this unexpected breakfast and he kicked at it, missed, hit a container instead and sent it spinning onto the road, slopping milk with prodigal abandon.

The paperman got off his cycle very slowly, eyes fixed on the word, and let all his papers cascade around his ankles. He bent to scramble them up and the cycle fell over noisily.

The housewife said, "Oh!" and then shouted back into the room at her still-snoring husband, happy for the excuse to wake him.

News of the word was everywhere before breakfast. Knowing wives and mothers warned husbands and children not to go the long way via the Wall and waste time—and then suddenly discovered there was no bread for the evening meal and that they would have to go shopping for more.

They all met in the square where the Wall towered.

The Mayor came a little later, looking mildly flustered. He was ushered to a position of honour, directly below the Word.

"Who could have done it?"

"...got up there?"

"...helicopter?"

"...suction shoes?"

"...powerful spray?"

And then in a clear, plaintive voice the old man who lived at the top of the main street and who was nearly blind said, "Will someone please tell me what that word is?"

The voices hurried on, just a little faster than before.

"...advertising gimmick."

"...political plot."

"...practical joke"

"...act of God."

"...freak of nature."

"...daredevil stunt."

After some time, the old man went home.

The citizens of the town soon got used to the Word. Like the Wall that it was written on, it was just there, accepted, a part of them.

The town dissolved into indifference.

Then one day the Mayor's daughter eloped with a travelling salesman who was passing through. Shock was intensified by the vague public memory, observant after the event, that attributed to the pedlar shifty eyes and a coarse manner. It was highly unlikely that the girl could have met him, to the point of such fascination, at any of the social functions with which her secluded life was scattered.

A few days later, while gossip about the first event still raged, it was discovered that the up-and-coming assistant manager of the bank had absconded with as much public money as his office of trust entitled him to lay hands on.

That week-end the young poet who had lived in cheerful squalour at the tail end of the town was found hanging at the end of a clumsily tied rope which was attached to the rafters of his room. He was quite dead. There was no explanatory note.

From the outlying farms bad news seeped in. Cattle and live-stock were dying. The dogs had turned rabid. The law and order situation was a mess, and armed brigands roamed moonless nights. The crops were doing badly and the birds sang no more.

So a council meeting was hurriedly called. "Colleagues", said the Mayor, "a time of great evil is on us. The very moral fibre, if I may say, which makes us possible at all, is being called in question. Our way of life is threatened and stands in great peril."

They applauded his oratory but he carried on oblivious. "I speak not of personal loss or suffering." He waved aside reassuring murmurs and continued, "I speak of the disintegration," and here his voice faltered and became hoarse, "of our community. We..., someone, in our midst has sown the seed of destruction." Though many walls intervened, they looked with one impulse in the direction of the word scrawled so mysteriously on the vertiginous black stone.

The Mayor broke the trance. "Something must be done." Each man squirmed under the unacceptable load.

"But what?" It was unspoken, but there.

The Mayor said, "Let's go and see the Professor." The professor lived in a small house (next) door in fact to the insomniac housewife) which overlooked the square where the Wall stood. The little house was full of a large number of books among which the retired scholar sat and read. More than he slept or ate—or even lived, some whispered maliciously. Years ago he had taught at a great university somewhere else.

They trooped to his house in silence. They came to him in respect and with trusting belief in the totem of his intellect. He could work something for them with the magic of his mind. Like most people they had a superstitious reverence for intellect, which more often than not tells us what we do not want to know.

The Professor listened politely to their problem and then asked what he could do for them.

Rattled, they replied, "We don't know. Destroy the Word. That's what's making everything go wrong and bad." The Professor smiled and told them that he could destroy that particular word but not the idea of it, which was really the all-important thing and which they themselves had created anyway.

They tried to argue with him but he gave them a lecture on the indestructibility of Platonic ideas, a talk on phenomenological interpretation and a brief discourse on the gestalt of civic consciousness and sent them away.

A few day later large numbers of rats and other verminous creatures suddenly infested the streets. The postman was discovered stealing stamps of the outgoing envelopes and then tearing up the letters.

This time the Mayor and his men went to see the General. The General lived in a miniature castle in the town and had once fought a lot of wars in faraway lands. His bushy, grey beard covered only half the jangly medals he always wore on his uniformed chest, and the laundry woman had it that the jackets of his sleeping suits all had suspicious pinpricks on the front.

The General's answer was immediate. Give him a battery of cannon and he'd reduce the enemy to rubble. When the Councillors hummed and hawed and said that that would only be the waste of a perfectly good historical monument and would serve no good and that there were no cannons in town anyway, he got very angry and threw them all out.

Then they tried the industrialist. He was very rich and lived in a palace lit by neon chandeliers and he owned all the mills, and the bank, and everything else in town which made any money. All the really able-bodied men in town were in his employ.

Now he looked a little doubtful as his bland

gaze scanned the desperate men before him. He tugged at a soft earlobe with a well-manicured hand. He said he was not sure. It was all a question of man-hours. Expensive man-hours. Get the scaffolding together, get the men up to wipe the thing away. A blocking of time, which was capital. Now, if they made a contract. The Mayor hastened to say that the public coffers were at present quite empty. The Town Clerk it seemed had broken into the Treasury Office...

The industrialist stood up. Too bad. Perhaps they would like to come and see him again when they had a better offer. When they had gone he sighed and reached for his cigar humidor. He was dying to smoke. If they had clinched the deal he would, perhaps, have offered them one each.

The Priest was the only one left, so they went to him. They did not really expect very much from him. He was not one of those young priests who can so logically explain the workings of God by the laws of science. This one spoke of Mystery, and Oneness and the kind of love spelt with a capital "L". To tell the truth they were embarrassed. But they went to him anyway. They owed it to the town.

They put it to him in his own language, to make it easier for him. They spoke about the Writing on the Wall. The Priest asked them to pray. Prayer, he said, was the most simple and the most difficult thing in the world. Simple because one surrendered completely to God, difficult because to do so one also had to surrender oneself and to do this one had to be eminently worthy. As it was a gift to God, the Soul had to be as pure as possible. He inquired solicitously into the condition of their souls. They muttered in unison that they were fine, thanks, and hurried away.

Now the only hope left were the people. So a General Citizens' Meeting was called, the first that most of the townspeople could remember. As there was no single hall big enough to hold them all, the meeting was convened in the largest square in town—the one in which the Wall and the Word soared far above their heads.

It was a huge crowd, solemn and serious at the centre where the Mayor stood on a platform and spoke, and jovially vulgar and ragged at the fringes where sweet vendors did brisk business.

The Mayor put the problem squarely to the people. That word had to go. He pointed without looking. They understood without looking. The Word itself was quite meaningless now, if indeed it ever did have any meaning. It was an idea, an excuse, a weakness, a desire, a fear and many other individual things in them.

The Mayor asked for volunteers who would erase the Word.

The night watchman stepped up to the platform and said with quiet simplicity, "I volunteer." A shy man, he said it too quietly and the Mayor had to ask again for volunteers. But fortunately there seemed to be no other volunteers and the night watchman had his chance. He was pointed out to the Mayor and his identity whispered in the latter's ear.

The Mayor said, "Good man!" and shouted out the news to the crowd. The people all cheered and shouted, the ones at the back without quite knowing why. The night watchman blushed and scratched his head sheepishly.

The idea to volunteer had come to him quite suddenly. He had felt it was his personal duty. After all, in a way it was his Word. He had been the first to see it. And he felt very guilty at not having told anyone at the time. If he had woken up the Mayor then perhaps all this trouble would not have taken place. And he felt he owed the Mayor a lot. They said the Mayor, had saved him from drink. In which case he was grateful and wanted to show it.

He decided to start the job immediately. The Mayor and his men tried to dissuade him. They pointed out that it was evening, and that it would soon be dark. Much better to wait for morning.

But the night watchman was adamant. He would do it now. After all, night-time was supposed to be his time of duty. He briefly explained to them his plan of attack.

Tricks of perspective quite apart, the wall was really broader at the base than at the blunt, abruptly truncated apex. It was rather like a triangle with jagged sides, cut off in the middle horizontally. The night watchman planned to scramble up one of these sloping, saw-toothed sides, bearing a long-handled mop. Once at the top, he would lie flat on his belly and crawl along the edge till he reached a position directly above his target. Then he would reach down with the mop and rub the white-painted strokes out of existence. Now that he was committed to the act he saw the Word not as an evil symbol as the other did, nor again even as a mere word, but as a few scrawled lines, an impersonal objective. Which is the way dragons were slain, and medals of war are won.

Mop strapped firmly to his back, he began his climb, cutting short by this action the Mayor's eulogising speech.

As dusk thickened, people began to drift to their homes and suppers, rubbing the backs of necks that had got cricks in them from looking up so long. High above them the small figure climbed into the sky's deep purple. Soon they could not see him at all. The square became deserted, except for a few dogs who came to bark at the moon which had just risen.

Bathed in moonlight, the hero climbed on, mechanically testing each hand and foot and knee-hold before putting his weight on it. He was not frightened at all. As the night grew darker the stars sprouted, first faintly and then with growing confidence. Every now and then he would rest

and look at the stars. He thought they were very beautiful. And he did not spoil it all by adding unnecessary metaphors.

Finally he reached the top. He smiled to himself once and began to edge forward.

We shall not describe how he accomplished his mission. Homer has not sung for centuries and by tradition the acts of our heroes are carried out in a self-enclosed solitude. Newspapers report them the next day.

The next morning they found him at the foot of the wall. He was dead. While edging along backwards, his job done, he must have fallen. Above him the Wall reared; blank, no longer menacing. The word was gone.

They disposed of his body with quite a bit of ceremony. The Priest was there to say the right things and see that the right things were done. The Industrialist promised to build a marble mausoleum but unfortunately, soon after, suffered one or two business reverses and could not carry out his plans.

The Mayor declared a public holiday and the citizens felt quite elated—and toward evening, bored—at this unexpected break in the daily grind.

In the evening the General took out a straggling parade of Boy Scouts which concluded with firing of a one-gun salute as the old soldier let off the right barrel of this ancient shot-gun. Unfortunately the General's shooting form was a bit rusty and he peppered the sleepless housewife's window with bird shot. She came out and screeched at them all and the Boy Scouts ran away gleefully, leaving the General spluttering. It was quite a fracas.

The Professor bestirred himself (now that the poet was dead) to pen a few appropriate stanzas, and sent them in to the newspaper. The poem was returned with a letter which said that it was against the policy of the paper (known for its fearless and frank journalism for half a century) to publish contributions in verse. However, if the contributor was willing to treat his offering as an advertisement, the rates per line were appended below.

The Professor thought this over for a bit and felt forced to decline their very kind offer. 卐

Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.

And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them.

And the Scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst,

They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?

This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.

So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground.

And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?

She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

— St. John

The Mendicant

by SHREEKUMAR VARMA

A MENDICANT appeared in our temple one day.

He was dark and emaciated and looked substantial only because of his long matted hair and beard. He held a trident in one hand and a begging bowl in the other. He wore only a loin-cloth and his face and body were covered with ash.

I was reclining in the rickshaw waiting for the children to come from school. It was a bright afternoon and I could hear the whistle of the train passing four miles away. A hot breeze blew dust and bits of paper along the road. I sighed and wiped the sweat off my face. The entire village was waiting for the rain.

People were commenting on the sadhu.

"Now, where has he come from? All sorts of people walk into our village nowadays!"

"I hear he arrived by bus from town."

"Is he a holy man with powers? Do you remember that one who came some years ago?"

"All frauds! Come to fill his belly at the expense of gullible villagers."

"Shh! Great uncle says he's a descendant of Lord Siva."

"Descendant? Your great uncle will believe anything. That day he was showing me some large footprints outside his house saying they belonged to Siva! Tell me, does Siva have nowhere else to go? Does he think Siva to be a giant? I told him, it is only Kandan the wrestler, but he wouldn't listen to me."

I lay back lazily listening to all this talk. I could hear the children playing and shouting beyond the school wall. Those two would soon be here. If they hadn't been regulars, I would have asked them to take another rickshaw. Chandran the fat one was all ready and waiting for passengers. But it was a question of my daily bread.

I took out a *bidi* from behind my ear and lit it. My mouth was dry and the smoke felt sharp and bitter. Before I could finish the *bidi* there was a roar and the children were rushing out. I threw it away and sat up. Finally they came, holding their school bags, Arun the plump little boy and his elder sister Baby who was in the fourth.

They seemed shy and slow in the midst of the noisy battalion of children. I helped the boy up and then we were off.

Their father Panikkar lived in a large ancestral house half a mile away. His wife's family had lived in the village for hundreds of years and now Panikkar looked after their landed property and wealth. He was also the managing trustee of the school. As the children jumped off, Revathy amma, their mother, appeared in the *nalukettu*.

"Come on, Chellappan, stop by and have some buttermilk," she said and called out to a servant inside.

I dismounted, untied the towel from my head and wiped my arms and face. Revathy amma disappeared inside with the children. She was a quiet gentle woman unlike her husband who had a nasty temper and a lot of power. Nobody in the village dared to cross him. His brother was the District Collector and lived fifteen miles away in Kottayam. Panikkar's favourite threat was: "I'll send word to my brother and then you've had it." As a result of this, the entire village looked upon the Collector as some sort of demon who could be unleashed at a word from Panikkar. Only a few had ever seen the Collector, but there grew a legend around him. "He's six feet tall and bald-headed. His arms are like columns of iron." Someone else said, "He has a one-foot moustache that sticks out like wings. His eyes are terrible. One look from them and you're paralysed."

But there was one man in the village who had more contempt than fear for Panikkar. That was the timber man. I don't know his real name, but everyone called him Mudalali or Boss. He had a saw mill and a couple of lorries and was believed to be one of the wealthiest men in the area. The saw mill was the noisiest thing in our village and sometimes the high-pitched whine continued late into the night. Several people had tried to get him to shift its site, but the only effect this had was the appearance of yet another shed next to it, equipped with a similar machine.

Mudalali and Panikkar were always at loggerheads. There must have been some previous enemity. I have heard that they were actually brothers, Panikkar being the legitimate son, but I can't say if this is true. Another story had it that

Mudalali had been in love with Revathy amma from the time they were children and Mudalali resented this man from outside who came and took her away. Anyway, the village was divided into three: Panikkar's supporters, Mudalali's supporters and those who remained neutral like me. I drove Panikkar's children to school and back every day, and every week when the theatre on the road to Mankavu village changed shows, I took Mudalali's wife and her sister and their children for the evening show. I suppose no one felt I was important enough to be won over exclusively.

Parukkutty came down with the buttermilk. She laughed and said, "How're you keeping, Chellappan?" as if she were my grandmother. Parukkutty was only fourteen and always laughing.

It was a large glass. I took my time and then handed it back to her. As I turned to go, she frowned and shaking her head said gravely, "Terrible things are going to happen here."

"What are you talking about, Parukkutty?"

She jerked her head towards the house. "He and Mudalali are fighting in the school committee. Mudalali is also standing this year. God knows what will happen."

"What will happen? One of them will win, that's all."

"Yes, but there will be a fight before that. Both sides are strong. No one has ever opposed him before. Raghu chettan of Thekke Muttam says there's sure to be a war. I'm scared."

"Nothing for you to be scared of. They won't come after little girls like you. And what have you been talking about with Raghu of Thekke Muttam?"

She blushed and ran.

But there was some truth in her prediction. Each side was sharpening its knives and discussing strategies and looking very important. When two members of the rival groups met, they snorted loudly and spat contemptuously on the ground and walked away haughtily or else called each other names which was, of course, a prelude to a fight. Over the next two weeks, the tension slowly mounted though there were no serious fights as far as I could see.

I did not bother too much about these rivalries because I like to keep sane as much as possible. There was no question of justice or rights involved here, just the whims and fancies of two stubborn men. I carried on as before.

Two days later I was sitting in the rickshaw waiting for the Kottayam bus to come when Chandran the fat one said, "That swami in the temple is no ordinary one, you know. He doesn't speak or eat."

"Doesn't eat? Then how does he live?"

"I don't know. Some of these holy men are like that. They come down from the Himalayas and they don't eat at all."

"I don't believe it. Who told you?"

"Everybody's talking about him. He stays in the temple all day and night."

The swami was indeed turning out to be a mystery. As days passed, no one could get a word out of him and he would touch nothing that was offered to him. If anyone persisted in questioning him, he made deep sounds in his throat and his eye-balls vanished upwards into their lids. "He's burping," said a young man. "He must be filling his stomach with stolen food after nightfall."

"No, no," said another. "He's chanting Om, Om, Om. He's taken a vow to say nothing else."

I posted myself inconspicuously at the temple to test these theories. After about five hours I got thoroughly bored. He sat immobile in the same place and I heard him utter nothing other than those rumbling, undecipherable sounds. I thought, perhaps these Himalayan swamis are different from our local ones.

Nothing seemed to affect him. In the evening, quite a few of the devotees who came to pray at the temple gathered around him and sang bhajans and chanted the Lord's name. Several elderly people and women poured out their problems to him. He remained silent, staring unblinkingly at them. A retired schoolmaster said, "He doesn't say a word, but there's something strong and impressive about his posture."

A sharp-tongued old lady circumambulating the temple caught sight of him and cried out, "It is disgraceful, you can't allow him to come naked into the temple."

And in the afternoon, a crowd of young men, educated but unemployed, whiled away their time, making fun of him. But the sadhu might as well have been deaf. He sat like a statue, paying no heed to them. Only once did he falter. A young man said, "Show me your snake and the poison in your throat. Where is Ganga? Loosen your hair and let us see. They say you're Siva!"

"Oh, he's quarrelled with Ganga. That's why he's come down here."

"Better be careful of him. Could be a cannibal. That's why he refuses fruit and rice. No one's safe with him around."

At that instant I noticed a pained look in his eyes, of a creature tormented beyond tolerance, but the look soon passed.

As I said, two weeks passed in this way, with minor quarrels which were, for the most part verbal, and the swami attracting a larger crowd every day. On the day of the election, more than half the village gathered in front of the school. Baby and Arun sat on one side of the school verandah dispassionately licking ice-creams, while Revathy amma hid herself in a corner. On the other side sat Mudalali's family, looking triumphant and confident of a win. I heard that some of the supporters had even sought the blessings of the swami. A six-year old boy with a cloth bag ran nimbly through the crowd selling

peanuts. A stall had sprung up selling lime juice.

It was a terrible day to be locked up in a crowd. Everyone was sweating. Many were fanning themselves with sheets of paper. I hoped the heat wouldn't trigger off anyone's temper.

An important looking man with glasses walked around, peering intently at everyone's face. "That's a reporter from Kottayam," Chandran told me. This challenge to the long-held post in the school trust committee was attracting a lot of outside attention as well.

Suddenly someone shouted, "The Collector's coming!" There was a hush and then the cry was taken up. And sure enough, with loud noises, a jeep tumbled down the stony path followed by a car. A uniformed policeman jumped down from the jeep and ran to open the door of the car. Everyone waited impatiently to see this man of legend, the Collector, the brother of Panikkar.

A small harmless looking man in a jibbah and dark glasses came out of the car and waded through the crowd without looking at anyone, followed by the policeman who shook his stick at the curious onlookers pressing in. A schoolboy's voice rang out loudly in the silence, "This is not the Collector, they've sent someone else by mistake." The crowd muttered agreement, equally disappointed, then burst into laughter to let off their tension. The Collector walked straight to the school building, nodded briefly at his sister-in-law and the children and rushed inside. The policeman followed him, shutting the door behind him.

It was a long wait for the results. By five o'clock, half the crowd who had turned up simply to share the initial excitement and probably to see the Collector, had melted away. I found a cool spot under a tree and, spreading my towel, sat down with Chandran. At 5.30, one of Panikkar's men burst open the door and shouted out, "Panikkar Sir has won! Long live Panikkar Sir!" A section of the crowd cheered robustly while others began to boo and jeer.

In the melee that followed, one of Mudalali's men approached me. "You have to take amma and the children home. Quickly." Mudalali's wife, a fat woman with a grim expression, and her children were standing behind him. I hurried away to get the rickshaw.

The ride to Mudalali's house was in utter silence. Nobody spoke a word. When I got back to the school it was completely dark. The sky was growling ominously and there were flashes of lightning. There were a few people still standing around. I looked for Chandran and found him. "Any trouble?" I asked.

"No, but there will be. Now they say that Panikkar had brought a man from somewhere to cast a spell on Mudalali. That's why he lost. And they say that Mudalali's son is ill because of his evil influence."

"I didn't notice any illness when I dropped them back."

"That's what they say."

"Are they talking about the mendicant in the temple?"

"Yes, I think so," said Chandran.

"I must see if he's all right", I said and got back into the rickshaw. I don't think I've driven the rickshaw so fast in my entire life.

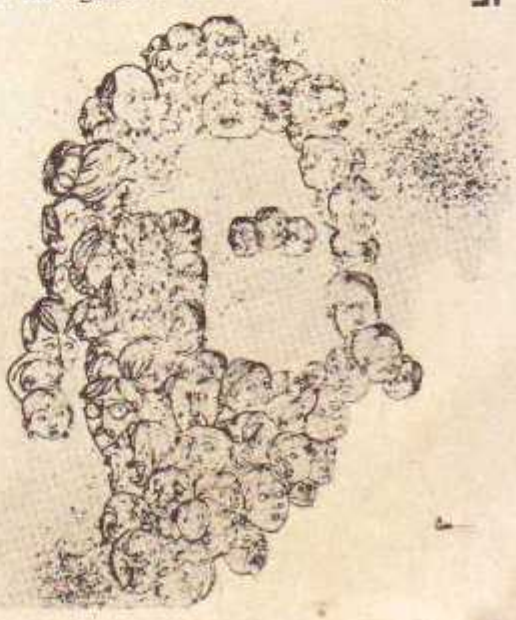
The rain began as I rushed into the temple. The *pooja* was over and the people coming out scattered for shelter. The sadhu was nowhere to be found. Even the priest couldn't tell me anything.

Finally, after searching for nearly forty-five minutes, I came upon him under a tree near the school wall. He was bleeding into a puddle of water and lay as if dead. I shook him and called out. His eyes opened and from his throat there came that rumbling sound, emerging right from the pit of his stomach. Turning my face away from the beating rain I pulled him up and said, "Please come with me." But he could hardly walk. I propped him up and half dragged, half carried him to the rickshaw. For a skinny man he weighed a lot.

I took him home.

For three days and three nights he lay in a stupor. I disregarded his Himalayan habits and fed him rice gruel and tapioca. When he regained consciousness I tried to talk to him but there was no indication that he had ever been initiated into human conversation. On the fifth day, as I lifted his head onto my lap and fed him steaming gruel, uttering soothing words at his moans of pain, he suddenly looked up at me and smiled. The smile shone through all that dirty, unkempt hair and lit up his eyes. It was his sole expression of gratitude and then it vanished.

But that evening when I returned home, I found him gone. I never saw him again 卐



Mr Banda's

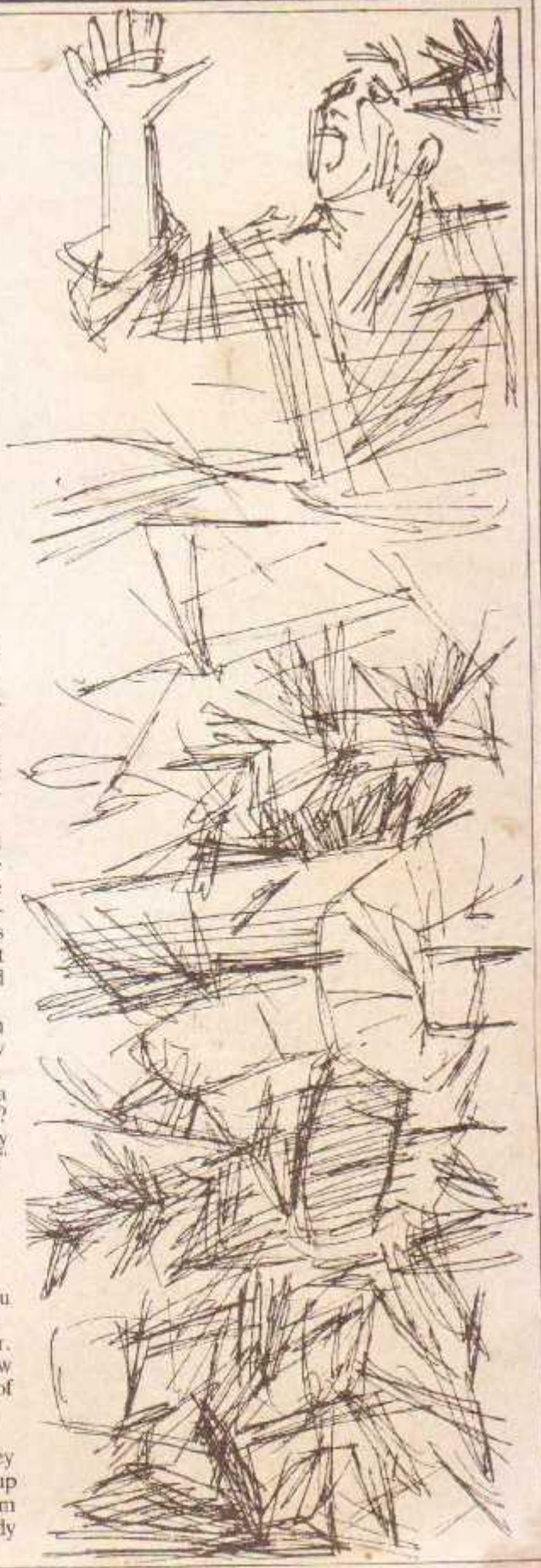
THE sturdy, young boar came out from the dark, wild forest to greet the magnificent moon at full bloom, spreading its silvery sheen across the slender blades of the endless expanse of rice plants. A mild breeze swayed the green grass and the gentle, undulating movements were like heavenly snakes sliding sensuously on the eternal plain. When the boar crossed the paddy fields his shining back looked from a distance like a dolphin cutting across the waves of a honey-coloured shimmering sea. He continued his regular beat and stopped at Mr. Banda's highland plot.

Mr. Banda was a traditional farmer, well respected in the village for his diligence and success. He is seen from early hours till after dusk, threshing paddy, watering his experimental nurseries, pruning, grafting or dressing the plants. With the incentive to grow more food gathering momentum, his efforts and devotion to work inspired the village farmers. He produced invariably the best crop and his advice was always sought after to solve agricultural problems. The timing is critical for sowing paddy and Banda does not look up to see the clouds move but uses his practical knowledge to advise farmers when to till the land.

The boar always stops at Mr. Banda's, like humans who make habitual stops at known revered places of worship to make offerings and obtain divine protection before continuing their onward journeys. The boar stopped not to obtain protection before his rampage in search of food, but to greet his friends. At the outset, he had been tempted to dig into the sweet potatoes that grew so luxuriantly in Mr. Banda's garden. But the bulbous sweet potatoes, the tender ground nut shoots, the chilli plants, the red and green tomatoes, the lanky manioc stems, the fully laden papaw trees, the heavy weight jack fruit, all pleaded with the wild boar,

Episode

by MINEKA P. WICKRAMASINHGA



"Please go away, don't destroy Mr. Banda's orchard with your unclipped harsh paws and your clumsy snout. We want to repay Mr. Banda who looks after us so tenderly. Bountiful it must be for the love and affection he showers so abundantly on us every morning and evening in this parched weather. Please go elsewhere. There are many other fields you can stamp and dig till your stomach's content."

That was how they kept the wild boar away. And again, there was this hefty crossbred Ayreshire whose one-pointed stare was never shifted till the boar had gone a safe distance. That was then — many moons ago. But now they all are dear friends — the yams, the fruits, the plants, the cow and most dear of all is Josey, the white heifer with red and black marks.

The boar sniffed and sensed a different vibration in the air today. The plants were sulking, the cow reclining afflicted with grief.

"What's the matter with you Heftiee? On such a splendid night like this why are all of you sulking? Your eyes are always sad to look at and when they are moist with tears even my hard heart is melting." Heftiee looked aside.

"Come here Josey. What's this all about?"

"Haven't you seen,?"

"Seen what"?

"The other half of the garden."

"No! What garden, Josey? What garden are you talking of?" the impatient boar inquired loudly.

"O.K., O.kay, don't shout, you will wake Mr. Banda. I'll tell you everything because I know everything. Did you see those lovely bunches of bananas on the plantain cluster?"

"No, I didn't."

"Oh! You wild one, you don't see anything. They were so heavy that Mr. Banda had to prop them up with V-shaped supports to prevent the trees from collapsing. They were ripe, bright yellow and ready

to eat. They were very attractive to look at and I'm surprised that you did not see them. Mr. Banda had covered them with dried coconut leaves."

"Oh, that accounts why I didn't see them" the boar interrupted.

"Oh no! The bananas were too big to be hidden from curiosity's gaze."

"That may be so, but I didn't see them because they were covered," the boar protested.

Josey was not convinced. "I don't agree. How can you see bananas when you thunder around with your snout pointed to the ground?"

"All right, forget about my vision," the boar responded peevishly. "Tell me why did he cover the bananas?"

"That was to ward off the evil eye and to prevent the squirrels and the birds nibbling them." Josey paused.

"So what happened?" snapped the impatient boar.

"Wait, Wild Boar, wait! Let me swallow the cud first....Well...Where am I now...Oh yes, Mr. Banda had sold the crop five days ago to the boutique keeper, who was late in collecting them. Yesterday afternoon two stooges of Kamal, you know Kamal don't you?"

"Yes, that's the big thug and bully. Isn't he the one who owns that luscious peanut farm? I have been sniffing that farm for a long time. The nuts are tender and should be delicious at this time of the year. That farm has not escaped my surveillance and its ripe for exploration. So what did this tough Kamal do?"

"Not Kamal himself, but his stooges entered Mr. Banda's premises when he was watering the fields and asked for the bananas saying that the boss wanted them for an alms-giving. He explained to them that he has already sold the bunches and told them politely of his inability to help their boss. Yet, these two ruffians pestered Mr. Banda undauntedly, saying they are for the boss. Mr. Banda who has now come to the end of his tether told them firmly to leave him alone."

"Damn good." The boar interrupted.

"You know, Mr. Banda had always minded his own affairs and had never been over-familiar with anyone. I saw him last evening pacing up and down looking a worried man," Josey continued excitedly, "Yesterday, late in the night, when he was fast asleep, the two thugs came stealthily armed with swords and batons and destroyed half the plantation."

"Oh no! Why didn't Heftiee charge at them?"

"Ma was tied. She tried desperately to break the thether and scraped her neck badly. She mooed hysterically. I got up and I too mooed as loud as I could hoping to wake Mr. Banda."

"Poor man!" sighed the boar and blew his snout. "You should have seen him at sunrise, Heftiee continued, He was horrified when he discovered that half his small cultivation had been deliberately hacked. He wept. He wept loudly. He ran hither and thither shouting widely in a delirium.

'MY CROPS.....MY CROPS'

"Oh, What a shame! He had successfully prevented the birds from nibbling the ripe bananas, but could not ward off the human evils," commented the boar pensively.

"It was painful to see the pathetic sight of a dignified and adorable man weep. He wept incessantly muttering to himself, 'What wrong have I done to merit such a brutish act?' And that was not all. They came again this afternoon, the same toughs, dressed brightly with sarongs tucked up and shirt sleeves rolled to display tattoo marks. Politely, but with penetrating sarcasm they asked Mr. Banda if he has changed his mind. He told them to take the bananas away and destroy the rest of his crops. They laughed insolently and carried away the bunches of bananas."

"Oh, no, they didn't," interrupted the boar showing visible signs of anger.

"Oh yes," affirmed Josey.

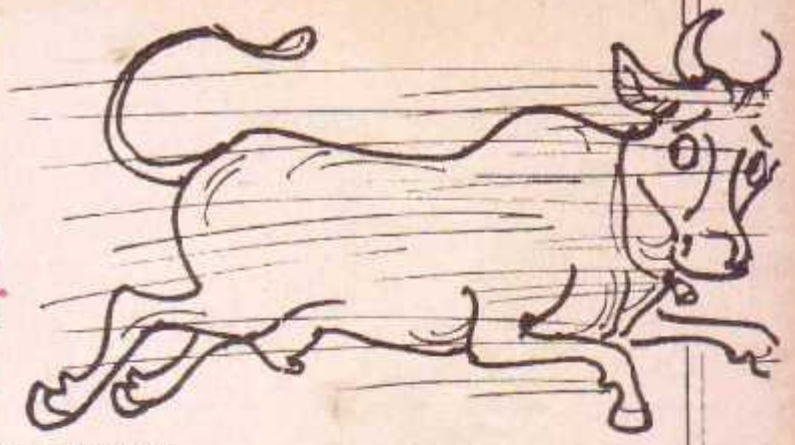
"And they got away unharmed. I can't believe it. If I had got caught digging somebody's yam plot, I would have ended up a sizzling roast for supper. You know Josey," the boar said thoughtfully, "when wicked humans indulge in evil deeds other humans say, 'Such bestial acts! The law of the jungle has manifested'. But in the jungle we animals don't destroy plants unnecessarily."

Heftiee who had been listening attentively stood up and looked directly into the boar's eyes, like in the old days before they became friends; the penetrative stare was not charged with anger, only an appeal to an old friend.

The boar nodded, "Peanuts, in truth, are my delicacy."

He thundered away in the direction of the peanut farm. Heftiee stared until the boar was out of sight. She mooed joyously.

A Fable of our Time



by DHANANJAY DESAI

THE great guru, Gappidas, sat in majestic silence, diving deep into an ocean of fathomless wisdom, while his disciples waited in breathless expectation.

At last the spell of silence was broken and the guru made an epigrammatic statement, "Seeing is not believing", articulating each word slowly, clearly, as if it were a precious mantra. The disciples received this revelation with awestruck reverence and nodded their heads, vying with one another till all the heads were nodding so vigorously that the entire assembly seemed possessed by a mighty sprite of wisdom.

When the initial ecstasy had subsided, the disciples felt the need to understand the purport of this pithy saying, so one of them said, "Blessed are we, oh great master, that you have deigned to pour your godly knowledge into our earthen receptacles. But it is beyond our little minds. Would you kindly condescend to explain? Till today we knew that seeing is believing!"

At this, the master said, "It was many years ago when, as always, India was passing through a crisis and I was a schoolboy that the incident I am going to relate took place. In those days, India was ruled by three old men who quarrelled and bickered like kids. I was, though, a mere schoolboy, very religious and observing a number of vows, one of which was not to eat my lunch before I had fed a cow.

"It was Sunday, a day when I observed silence. I had fasted on the previous day and I was eager to have an early lunch. So I was in search of a cow, but perhaps the Almighty wanted to test the sincerity of my vow and on that day, since early morning, not a single cow was to be seen anywhere near my house. But while I sat cogitating furiously on and alternately praying vigorously for a holy cow, I sighted in distance a cow which brought tears of gratitude to my eyes and made me happier than Keats when he first read Homer.

"Since I was observing silence I could not give utterance to my joy, but Vinoba-like, I clapped my hands and gave a broad, beatific smile and rushed into the street with *chapatis* in hand to feed the holy cow. But as fate would have it, the cow took fright at my sudden approach. So I ran, but the cow ran faster, and it became a veritable race between us.

"As a result, some devout Hindus, as religious as I was, thought that I was a butcher chasing a cow. Hence they came to its rescue with sticks and knives in hands which threw both the cow and me into a worse confusion. The cow ran like a string of lightning and the street soon became a chaotic scene of a milling mob, crying and screaming and groaning, while the cow ran on, knocking down everything and everyone that came its way.

"I was in the thick of this pandemonium, about to be beaten to a pulp by the furious mob, when some Muslims, thinking me to be a Muslim whose life was in danger while he was being faithful to his innocent vocation, came to my rescue with daggers and dispersed the crowd. Taking this heaven-sent opportunity by the forelock, I ran home at a speed which would have put an Olympic athlete to shame.

"Once I reached home, I did not stir out for fear of being a target of popular wrath, though I am sure, nobody had the faintest idea of who I was or how I looked. After my escape, larger crowds, both Hindu and Muslim, gathered on the scene while the cow had disappeared.

"Subsequently, communal riots flared out in which shops were broken open and houses were set on fire and half a dozen lives were lost while many more persons lost their limbs and the curfew was clamped on the town for the next twenty-four hours.

"At last, the riots were quelled, but for many days on end, a heated controversy went on in which the Hindus demanded that the killing of a cow should be made a serious penal offence and the Muslims asked for a judicial inquiry into the affair in which an innocent professional beating an unruly cow in sheer self-defence was murdered by Hindu fanatics. Hence I say that seeing is not believing."

This is the first in a series of articles edited by Maggi Lidchi based on talks and workshops held at The Healing in Evolution Congress which took place in Auroville between the 11th and 19th January 1987.

The Congress attempted to introduce therapeutic approaches which consider the whole man as an evolving being and in relation to his environment.

Since breathing is so fundamental to life it has been chosen as the first healing therapy in this series.

* * *

Veronika Langguth gave a practical session with demonstrations, at The Healing in Evolution Congress. Born in Germany in 1947, she started lessons in 1974 with the founder of Breathing-Therapy, Professor Ilse Middendorf, at the Institute for Breathing Therapy and Breathing Psychology. Since 1973 Veronika has studied the literature of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and since 1976 has visited the Pondicherry Ashram and Auroville several times with her husband, Helge Middendorf.

Their common interest in bio-architecture led them to rebuild a house on the principles of energy-giving materials. Integral Healing Therapy includes the psychology of natural living, nutrition, healthy clothing materials, bedding, building materials, also Bach flower remedies, Magneto and Colour Therapies.

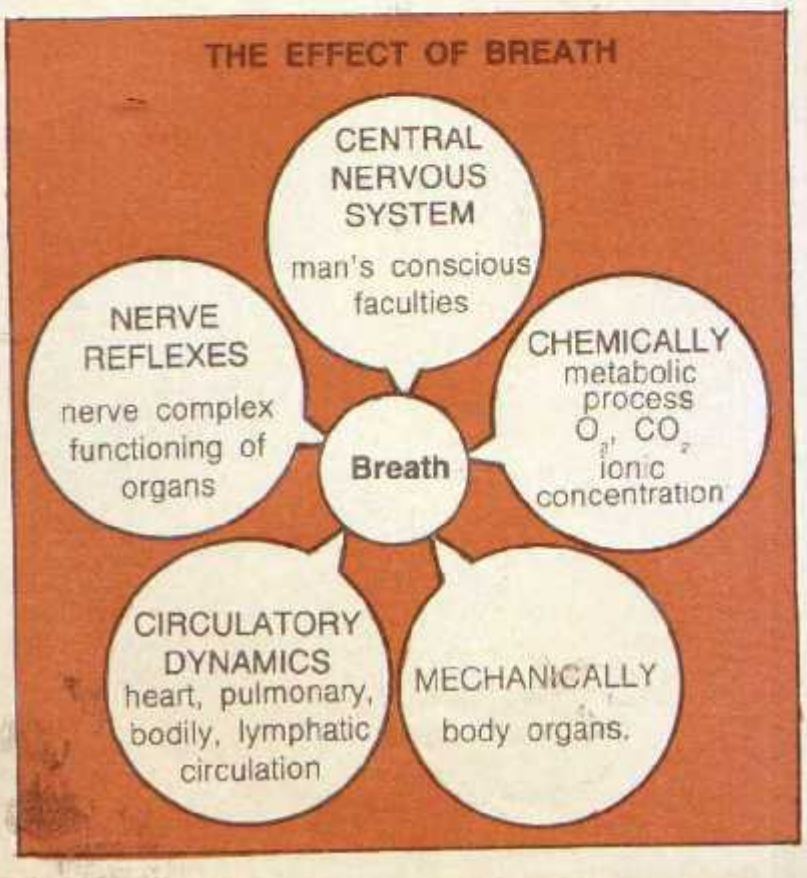
MOST people hardly give "breathing" a second thought. They take it for granted. People today have quite an estranged relationship to and understanding of the internal workings of their bodies. Our society judges the body principally on external merits such as beauty, strength and all the feats the body is able to perform. Only after it has stopped functioning perfectly do we become aware of the significance of this wondrous, highly adaptable organism. And it is our respiratory system which reacts most sensitively to physical and psychic changes. We say breath is life and indeed it is.

Breathing is not only the functional exchange of life-giving substances; it is also the means through which man establishes a relationship between his inner self and his immediate environment. In Greek, the word "pneuma" stands for breath and diaphragm as well as for spirit. And in the Bible it is said that God formed man from dust and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Breath brings about consciousness; the conscious being of man.

This is a schema of how breathing affects our Health:

Three forms of Breathing

Breathing differs from all other autonomous functions of the body in that the respiratory muscles react, on the one hand, to vegetative stimuli within the respiratory centre and, on the other hand, can be directed at



WHAT DOES BREATH MEAN?

will by motor fibre impulses from the cerebral cortex.

Firstly, we are normally not conscious of the breath which flows through our body. It is only when we yawn or sigh or hold our breath in a situation of fear or shock that we become aware of it. Secondly, we can work consciously with our breath, drawing it in, holding it for a certain time, exhaling it at will. This form we all know from Pranayama. The third form is "The Breath which can be experienced", because you learn to become aware of your inherent unconscious breathing but without altering its flow by conscious will-power. Only by observing the free flow of our breathing do we develop a sensory awareness which permits us to experience our inherent laws of breathing and, by that, our inherent healing forces. This discipline was developed by Prof. Ilse Middendorf in Germany about 50 years ago.

It takes many exercises before people reach a satisfactory stage of simply "letting" the breath come. Relaxed inhalation is particularly difficult.

Ilse Middendorf says:

Breathing "requires a very balanced approach; you have to give yourself over to your breath and wait for it to come 'of its own accord' and at the same time attentively participate in the breathing motions. It is all too easy either to be totally unaware of your breathing or to be too forceful about it. If we breathe naturally, this rhythm moves the whole 'being', which is a collection of forces interpenetrating each other and forming an indivisable oneness. The unconscious mode of breathing is part of the autonomic nervous system and accompanies every act of the body, be it physical, mental or spiritual. Whereas anxiety restricts our breathing, joy permits it to flow freely."

Imagine something very joyful and beautiful. Do you feel that your body becomes wide and that breathing-movements can flow through your body easily? And now imagine something painful. Do you perceive that now you feel quite narrow in your body and that the flow of breath is hindered?

We can easily perceive the connections between our physical and our psychic beings and their relations to our breathing movements. Every activity changes our breathing pattern. When we are under stress our muscles become tight and inflexible. The normal functions of our organs are disturbed. Either there is a sensation of narrowness and cramping, or a sensation of lassitude. The natural balance of the body is disturbed and a free flow of breathing is hindered.

Let me explain the difference between sensation and feeling. If two people experience a cool breeze, both of them perceive this as coolness. This is sensation. But one person may say, "How nice and cooling" whereas the other might say: "It's freezing." This is feeling.

In order to experience your own inherent breathing movement stretch and relax your hand according to your own rhythm. Do you feel that each time you stretch, you inhale and each time you relax you exhale? In this way you get to know your own inherent laws of breathing.

Now stretch your whole body as spontaneously as you can, like a cat or a dog. As you stretch you automatically inhale, and in relaxing you can whisper the sound "hu" as you breathe out. Allow yourself to yawn or sigh—it is a very good way for the whole person to relax. Now close your eyes and perceive. Do you feel that you are breathing more freely and that you are breathing more wide, relaxed and refreshed? The body and mind are relieved and opened to new things.

If we have a problem we tend to look at it like a hypnotized rabbit which means that physically we become narrow and hardly any breath can flow through. But if we stretch we perceive a greater flow of breath widening our bodies. Then we rid ourselves of all fear and anxiety and more easily find the solution which lies waiting behind the problem.

So Breathing Therapy connects the physical spheres of movement, health and bodily aptitudes, as well as the spiritual and mental spheres of thought, feeling, sensitivity and intuition. There is no "right" or "wrong" way, only what comes naturally for each person.

In general we can differentiate between two ways of breathing which at the same time overlap each other.

TWO STEPS TO APPROACH BREATHING

Firstly, there are certain exercises like stretching exercises , pressure points or vowel space exercises, which cause a movement of breath in certain areas of the body. Through these we experience in an increasing way our breathing-laws. By this means we come in touch with Universal forces capable of revitalising our physical existence and our bodily functions. We become more healthy and learn how to stay healthy. At the same time we gain physical and psychic flexibility.

The second step is Movement through Breathing. Here we build breathing spaces. Slowly there accumulates a substance which wants to go into a direction. This we call Movement out of Breathing. I will refer later to this second step, now I would only like to point out that we experience different levels of consciousness through Movement out of Breathing.

Whereas Breathing out of Movement helps us to gain better health and to get in contact with our Healing Force, Movement out of Breathing attracts people who want to work on developing and widening their consciousness, people who are aware that human beings are in constant process of Evolution and Transformation.

Focusing-Perceiving-Breathing

I would also like to introduce another law which is the interdependence of Focusing, Perceiving and Breathing.

Only if I am present in a certain part of my body through a process best described by Focusing can I perceive. Perhaps I can also sense the expanding and contracting movement of my unconscious breathing in this part. Gradually I learn how to become conscious in various other areas of my body, and as I am there, so is my breath. Focusing, Perceiving and Breathing always go together. When a specific area of my body moves in a respiratory movement, then I not only sense this region but I am also consciously concentrated in this area of my body. If one of these three components is employed, the other two follow automatically.

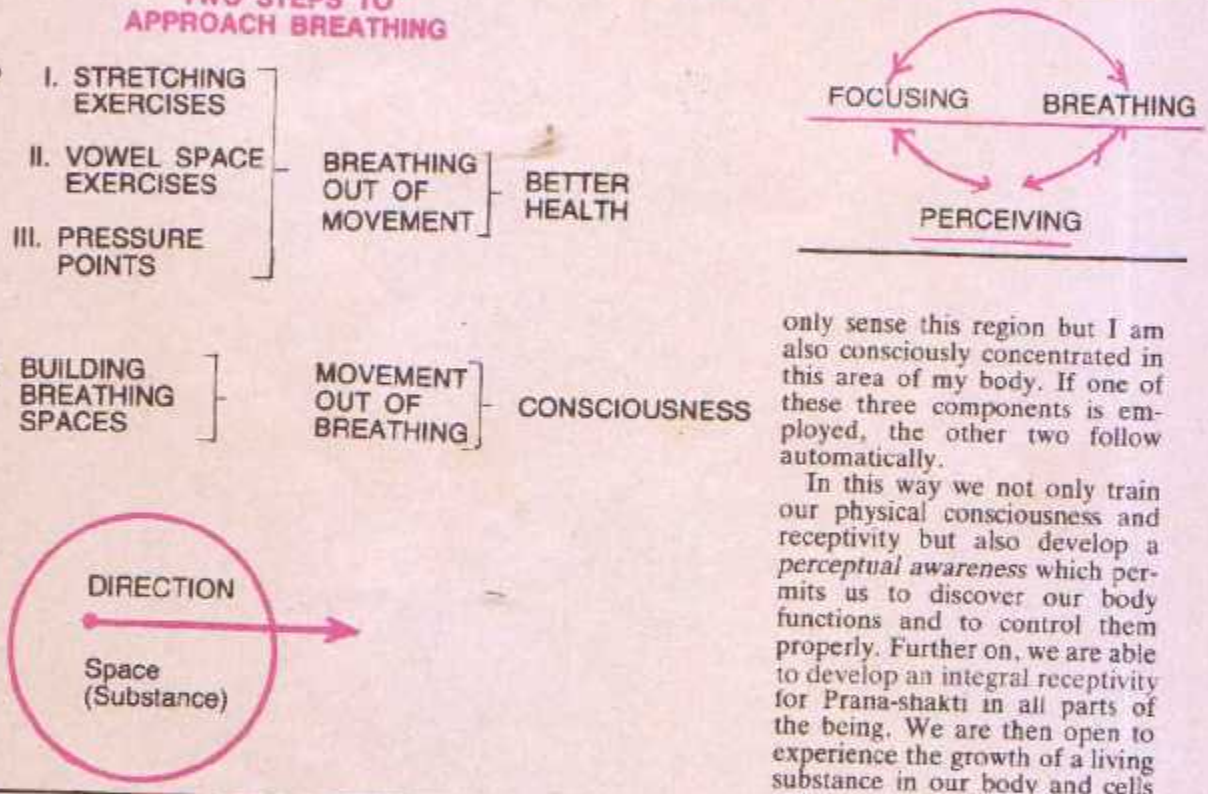
In this way we not only train our physical consciousness and receptivity but also develop a *perceptual awareness* which permits us to discover our body functions and to control them properly. Further on, we are able to develop an integral receptivity for Prana-shakti in all parts of the being. We are then open to experience the growth of a living substance in our body and cells which can be stabilized and used in everyday life and work. We will be able to approach our real self, and we may experience integral self-awareness, self-realization and transformation.

Devotion Awareness/ Faith-Aspiration

This little illustration shows different important abilities connected with breathing which we can make use of in every day life.

If we remain in devotion alone while listening to our breathing movement we can easily be carried away by dreaming.

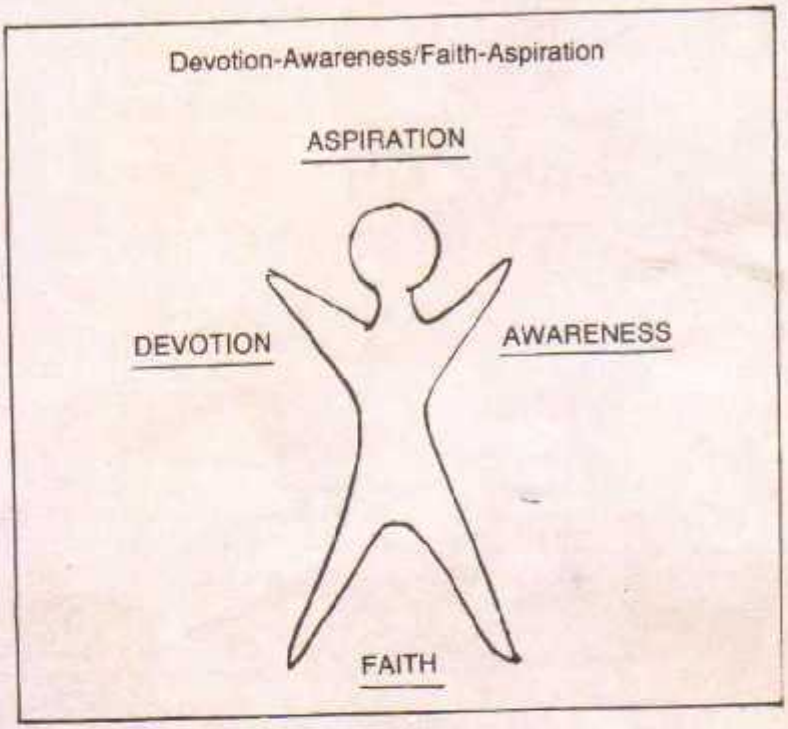
If we remain in *awareness* alone we may not be able to relax; a middle course must be



found between the states of devotion and awareness, and we have to find this middle path anew throughout our whole life.

Faith is a faculty which *people* gradually develop as they get to know their own inherent breathing-rhythm. If they develop faith in their body and furthermore, faith in themselves, this results in faith in their fate and finally faith in the Divine.

Aspiration towards transformation is the secret aim of all human beings, and in Breathing Therapy it becomes a steady guide, whether conscious or unconscious.



Practical work using breathing as the Key

People come to Breathing Therapy for different reasons. The *first* group consists of people who seek relief from *physical* or *psychosomatic disorders*, that is, people suffering from Asthma, emphysema, high or low blood pressure, back pain caused by a slipped disc, neurosis, disturbances of the organs, sleeplessness, fatigue.

The *second* group consists of people who want to be more conscious of their bodies or who want to learn how to prevent illness. *A steadily growing* group comes because of the desire for the growth of consciousness. They take Breathing Therapy as a way of Yoga—breathing Yoga. Also artists of all kinds like actors, singers, dancers, musicians benefit through the experience of breathing consciously.

In the Institute in most of the cases change of diet is advised. If necessary Breathing-Therapy is supplemented with Bach-remedies, Magneto Therapy, Schussler biochemic tissue-salts and Colour Therapy . Sometimes we advise additionally the consultation of a Homoeopath or Acupuncturist.

If we consider the meaning of the Greek word "therapeuo", which means to serve, to accompany, to heal, this is a fine description of what a therapist in Breathing Therapy is doing.

So we work in the field of prevention as well as rehabilitation.

Old physical habits are replaced by a sense of awareness of the physical: the main emphasis is on wiping out old habits which are harmful for human posture and composure.

Here is an exercise. Sit on your stool so that you feel the hard surface pressing against your 'sitting' bones. Move forward and backward in order to find the highest point of your 'sitting bones.' Now imagine the hair just on the very top of your head being pulled—this will help you to straighten your spine in line with the apex of your head. This way of sitting will permit you to develop a healthy spine as it follows the body's natural laws.

The spine is a very important part of the body. All our nerves are connected with it. Our whole life long it is possible to alter our body's posture and the position of vertebrae and discs between the vertebrae. Our lungs continue growing till the end of our life: if necessary, new alveola can be built and at places, where they are not needed any longer, they disappear. Of course all these processes need patience. Just as you can't pull a plant in order to make it grow faster but must give it the right soil and protection. You can help your body to develop naturally and healthily with a trained sense awareness which is developed through the breathing exercises.

In fact breathing movement goes through our whole body down to the toes. If you realize that there are connections between all muscles of the body it can easily be seen that the breathing movement caused originally by the breathing muscles is passed further on in the form of a wave through the whole body. If you observe a baby or a cat you can see this movement.

There is another subtle breathing-force which moves through the whole body and could best be described as Prana Force.

This subject will be covered next month. Further practical exercises will be given and Health and Ill-Health in relation to breath will be considered.

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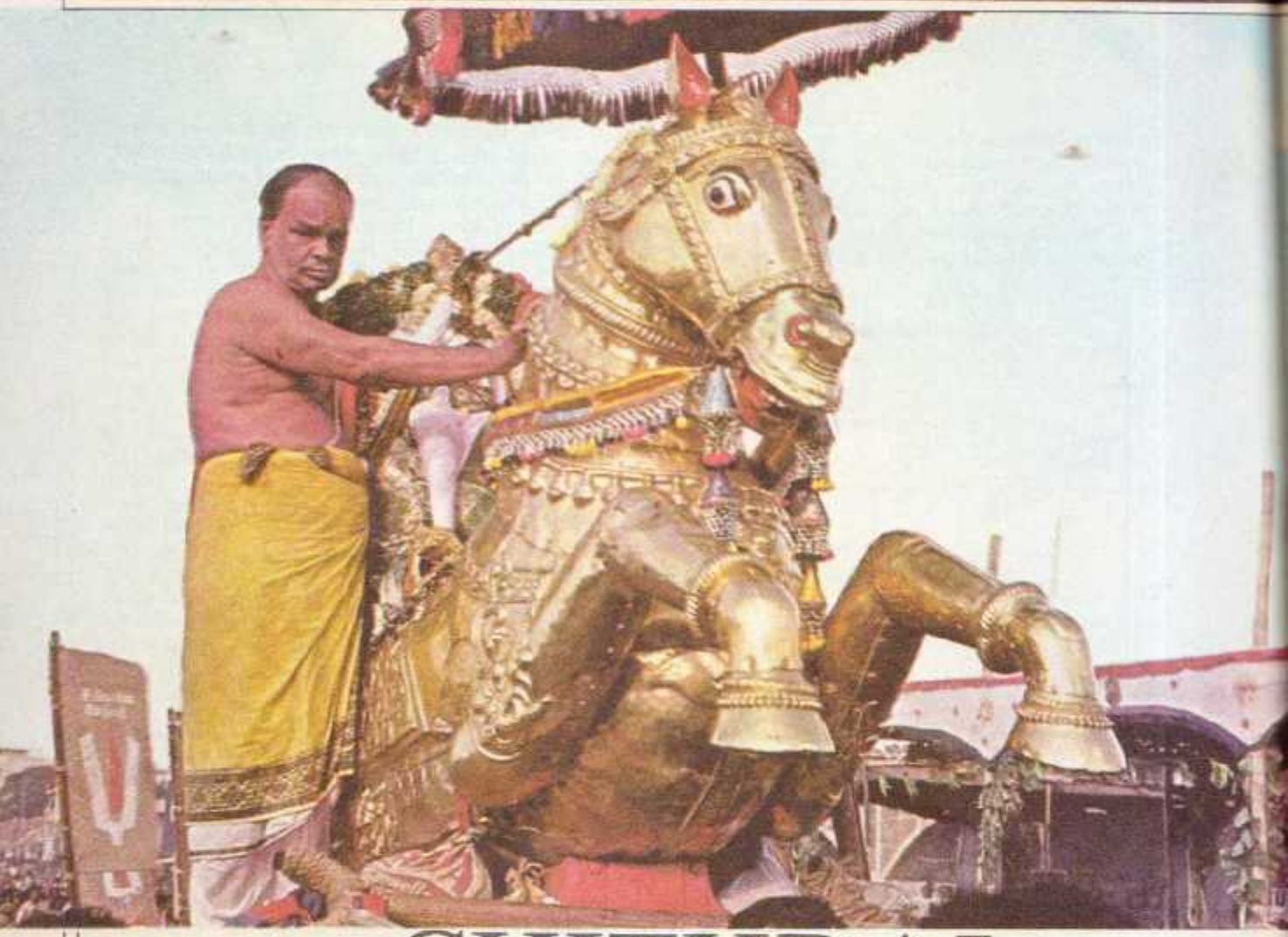

CHITHRAI AT MADURAI

MADURAI in Tamil Nadu, one of the oldest cities in India, famous for the Meenakshi-Sundereswarar temples, is known as the 'City of Festivals'. Of the many popular festivals conducted here the Chithrai festival is the most important one, held in connection with the marriage of Meenakshi and Sundareswara (Parvathi and Siva) during the month of Chithrai or Chaitra (April-May). The festival continues for twenty days with two main stages: the wedding of Meenakshi and Sundareswara and Kallazhagar's visit to the marriage and his entering the Vaigai river.

Vishnu, the brother of Parvati.

bearing the name Kallazhagar, resides in the temple of Azhagarkoil, 20 kms north of Madurai, situated at the foot of the Azhagar hills amidst green and beautiful environment. Paramaswamy is the name for the chief deity and Sundararajan in Sanskrit and Azahar in Tamil is the name of the utsava deity. He is so called because of his enchanting figure.

Procedures of worship in this temple are more or less similar to those at Tirupati. This is one of the 108 important Vishnu shrines. 4 kms up hill, is the Nubura Gangai, a sacred spring.

Kallazhahar proceeds to perform His sister Meenakshi's marriage with Sundareswarar at Madurai. During His journey He rests at some places, witnessing the several entertaining events like 'cock fight', 'ram fight', etc. Due to His leisurely travel, He cannot arrive for the marriage in time. Up to Tallakulam He travels by palanquin; there He rests at the Prasanna Venkatachalapathy temple. This temple was built by the famous ruler of Madurai, Thirumalai Naicker. Devotees from the surrounding villages gather here to receive and worship the Lord. A big mirror is placed in front of the Lord. The devotees have His *darshan* through the mirror. Following this, the *Thirumanjanam* or holy bathing of the Lord is performed by the holy water brought from the Nubura Gangai at Azahar hills. Only then the Lord is supposed to look handsome.

After this ritual and the adornment of the deity, specially his wearing the garland offered by Andal, the Lord gives *darshan* to His devotees and proceeds to Madurai mounted on a golden horse. He enters the Vaigai river; His brother Sri Veeraraghavaperumal meets him midway and informs Him that Meenakshi's marriage is over! Disappointed that the marriage was performed without His presence, Kallazhar returns home from that very spot. This occasion of his entering the Vaigai river and His meeting with Sri Veeraraghavaperumal is the most im-

riage was celebrated during the Tamil month of Thai at Madurai and Lord Kallazagar's entering the Vaigai river was celebrated during the Chithrai month at Thenur near Madurai. The programmes as followed now were formulated by the ruler Thirumalai Naicker.

The Tamil New Year begins with the Chithrai month. The colour of the silk in which Kallazhagar is dressed is believed to forecast the salient features of the coming year, astrologically. White colour indicates prosperity whereas green and red denotes moderate and worse periods ahead.

portant feature of the Chithrai festival.

During this festival which takes place during the full moon, devotees who are under a certain vow perform tonsure of their children. Some distribute brown sugar to the spectators and others attired in fancy dresses merrily dance and sing.

On His return route, on the north banks of the Vaigai river the Lord first visits Ramaraya Mandapam and spends the night in Sri Veeraraghavaperumal's temple at Vandiyur. In the morning He travels up to Thenur Mandapam on *Sesha Vahanam*. By midday He proceeds by *Garuda Vahanam* from Thenur to Ramaraya Mandapam where He gives His Dasavathara (ten incarnations) *Darshan* to His devotees. The next day, he starts in the Flower Palanquin to Appan-Tirupathi and rests there. Then He reaches His abode at Azhagarkoil.

In ancient times, the holy mar-

"I DON'T WANT HIM!"

Retold by VINDUSAR

VIMAL felt repulsed at the idea of having to go out of his house at that hour of the night. Darkness and cold made the atmosphere most inhospitable.

But he had to go. His old mother was seething in pain. His wife and sister insisted on his calling Bhattacharya, the reputed physician living on the other side of the river.

Vimal stepped out into the open carrying a stick and a lantern.

"Bhattacharya charges a rupee for a visit. But at this unearthly hour, I'm afraid, he will charge one and half rupee!" he told himself.

Suddenly a gust of wind bashed him. "Good God, will the physician venture out of his house in this situation? He will charge no less than two rupees!" Vimal thought and got quite annoyed with Bhattacharya. "Somebody should some day tell him that he is unjust!" he told himself as he approached the river.

"Will you take me to the other side?" he asked the ferryman who sat close to a little fire he had made inside his hut.

"The water in the river is not deep enough for the boat to ply," said the boatman, drawing a puff of smoke from his *bidi*.

"Then how do people cross the river?" asked a vexed Vimal.

"They just cross the river! Why, hasn't your Maker given you a pair of legs? Why not use them and plod through the river?" the boatman asked in return.

After some hesitation Vimal entered the river. He advanced with cautious steps, holding the edges of his dhoti on one hand and the lantern in the other. "The physician, when he will learn that he must plod through the knee-deep water, will surely raise his fee to three rupees!" he murmured and cursed the physician. The fellow ought to be taken to task for his greed, he was sure.

He entered the physician's compound at last. He knocked on the door. A window opened upstairs. Asked a lady leaning out through the window, "Are you looking for the physician?"

"Right," said Vimal. "But you need not wake him up. Just tell him that I won't care to pay him three rupees. I'd go rather back without him! Let him keep his physicking to himself! Three rupees! No, I don't want him!"

And he was outside the compound in a bound and returned home, shivering partly due to cold and partly due to anger.

The pundit in the temple was going on with his discourse on a couplet from a scripture: How often does man try to measure the action of Grace in his own light, in keeping with his own sense of logic!

Back in house, he saw his mother asleep. "You took the trouble unnecessarily. Bhattacharya had paid a visit to our neighbour's house. He readily came when we called him. He gave medicine to mother and she is on her way to recovery. What is great with Bhattacharya, he refused to take his fee saying that he had been already paid by the neighbour for his visit!" Vimal's sister informed him, beaming with joy.

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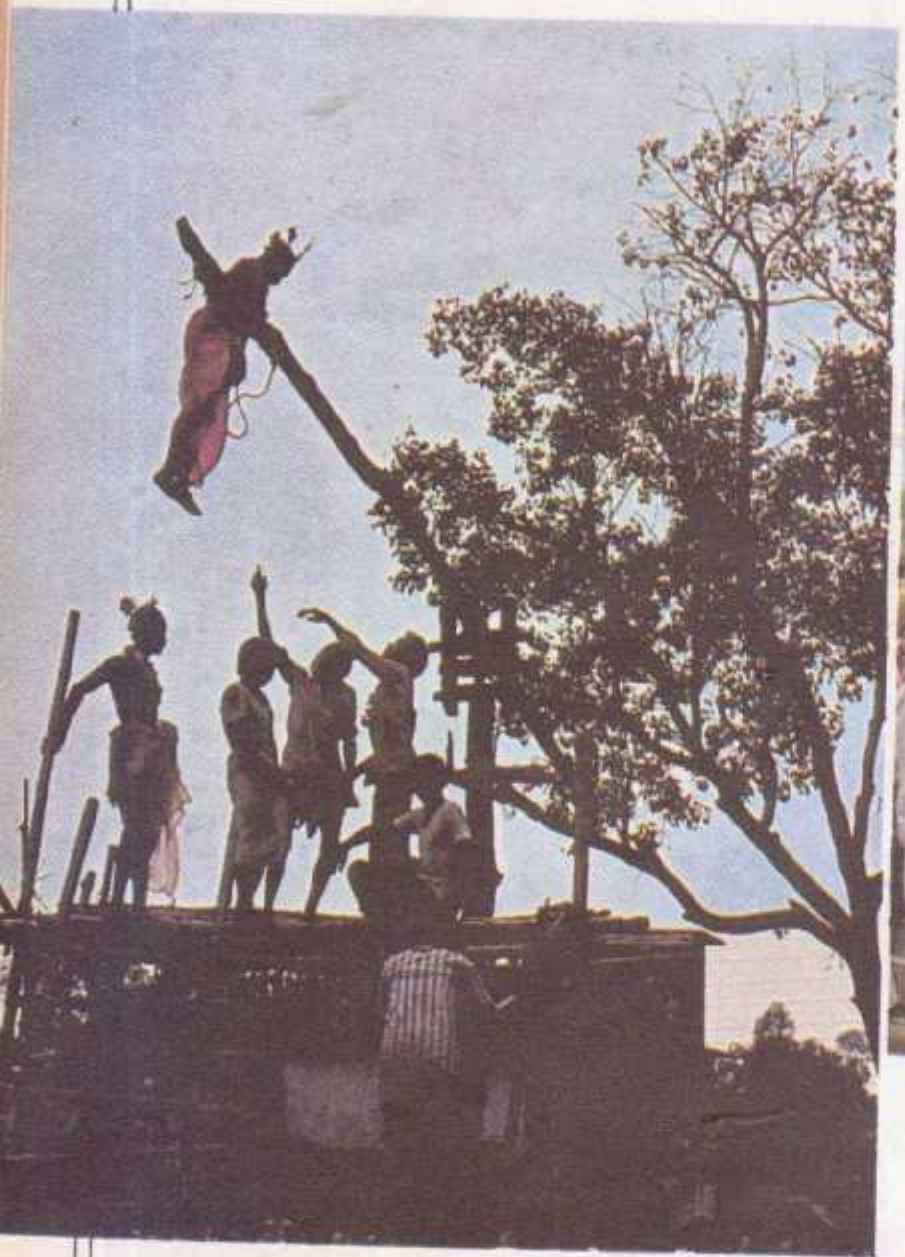


The Charhak festival which is celebrated with the Shiva temples as its centre in Eastern India and in several other parts of the country, falls this month, spread over three days (or more) including the New Year Day according to the ancient Indian calendar and the Vishva Samkranti.

MOST of them are in ecstasy—jumping or holding their hands high, shouting the glory of Lord Shiva. But amidst them there are some who are in sort of trance. They may present an awe-inspiring sight to the spectators, but they present the very image of quietude, though one of them is lying on a plank studded with sharp nails, carried by his fellow-devotees, another has pierced his protruded tongue with an iron spike, a third one has a pair of containers nailed to his flanks on which burns two flames and fourth one is hanging by the skin of his back from a crane-like device so on and so forth.

They are devotees of Lord Shiva, doing penance in this unusual way, for which they might have been under a vow earlier.

How did this tradition of self-mortification as a ritual develop? Some say that it is a degeneration form of Tantric practice; others—and they have a greater force of argument behind them—say that this was born out of the devotee's determination to show that his concentration on the

CHARHAK
FAITH'S TRIUMPH OVER PAIN

A devotee hanging from a hook holding him by the skin of his back. From Charles Gold's ***Oriental Drawings*** *(1791)*

deity defied all physical discomfiture.

A third thesis is that this too is a form of sacrifice—a Yajna—when the natural craving for physical comfort is sacrificed to prove that one was not a prisoner of the body. One was above pain if one could live in the spirit. That is the devotee's goal. Those who practise this penance, say that they achieve the goal in various degrees. Even the bystander can feel that from the calm these devotees exude. In any case it demonstrates how much one's body can endure when one has disciplined one's mind.

My Camp-mates

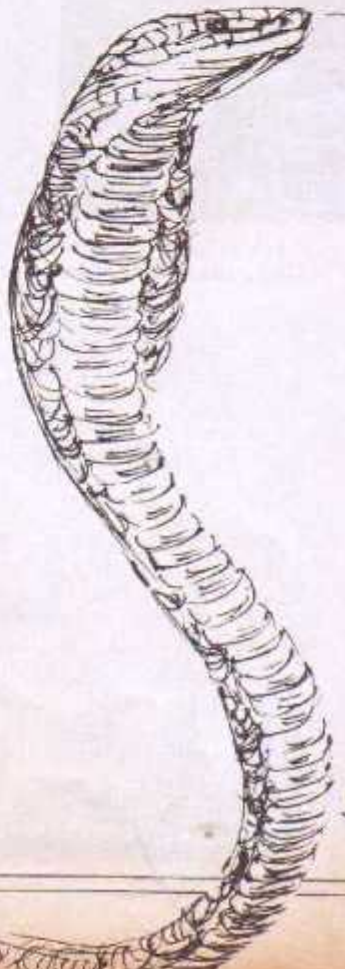
by S.K. DUA

MY official duty often takes me to forests. During my long spells of sojourn in the forests, no wonder that I should have memorable experiences with the denizens of the green world.

Not very long ago I was in a camp constituted of a tent and beside it a small room made of aluminium sheets. The room was meant for storing my clothes, books, etc.

And this happened on the 19th of September, last year.

Under the roof of the aluminium shed there were fittings which lent themselves conveniently for little birds to make their nests on. Lately, I saw a pair of sparrows settling down on one of them. The male sparrow



n the Forest

had developed the habit of diving towards my mirror and fighting its own reflection on the glass. It would attack the reflection with its beak and then retreat only to descend once again for a fresh attack. This drama went on while I sat before my mirror shaving. It was a folding mirror and, before I left my room, I took care to fold it.

It was the season for the sparrows to build their nests. More of them intruded into my camp. Several of them were active in my small room, collecting straws and putting up tiny shelters in every possible corner. Their chirping continued from dawn to dusk. Soon the nests were filled with eggs.

However, after they had taught their young ones how to fly, the birds left the room, pair after pair, excepting those two birds mentioned earlier. It was perhaps because of the male bird's determination to finish his 'enemy'—that is, his own reflection—that inspired him to stay on and his mate followed suit.

In Summer the room became a furnace and in Winter it became an igloo. But these two sparrows did not mind the extreme temperatures in the room.

But one day I became impatient with them. They had started scattering straws and dirt all over the floor and it was a task for me to clean it. At times, if I had forgotten to fold my mirror, I could hear the male sparrow's battle against it from the adjacent tent and had to come into the room again to do the needful. It disturbed my siesta.

I dismantled their nest. But, the next morning I found them busy reconstructing it.

That irritated me. I placed a stone on the spot where they intended building their nest. I was satisfied that they will leave the room thereafter. As a precaution I placed stones on every possible site for their nest-building.

But I met the obstinate male sparrow the next morning again. That was the 19th of September, last year. He was chirping loudly and flying into the room. I was holding my tooth-brush in my hand. In a spurt of anger I threw it, aiming at the bird.

A different kind of noise surprised me. It was a hissing. I looked at the origin of the sound and to my horror found that my tooth-brush had fallen on a ferocious black viper. It had raised its hood which swayed in a slow movement. It stood quite close to me.

Instinctively I leaped up and was outside the room in a bound.

I realised that I owed my life to the sparrow. Never again have I tried to dislodge it. In fact I have made room for it. The two sparrows are my camp-mates and the male sparrow finds it great fun to attack my mirror. Occasionally he looks at me, perhaps as much pleased with me as I am with him.

Ruskin Bond – As I know Him

Text & Photos: Ganesh Saili

We have carried major contributions by distinguished writers with reminiscences on them by their nearest ones. For Ruskin Bond it has to be a friend, for friends are the only nearest ones he has. Ruskin Bond's contribution appears as the book feature.

"HAVING an affair *again?*" I hear a voice complain, as I climb a flight of steps up to Ivy Cottage. My fears vanish as I find Ruskin Bond talking to a stray water-spaniel sitting outside his doorstep. The dog just wags his tail.

"Stupid chap... has spent the whole night out. Last time he had to be treated by the vet, in the middle of the monsoon!"

But I, having known Ruskin Bond for over two decades, find nothing unusual in this. In Mussoorie, his fame is of another kind. At fifty, he has become a sort of patriarch looking after the affairs of his large hill-family. He is, today, such stuff as legends are made of. But like Alice in Wonderland, let us begin at the beginning.....

After a brief spell in Bishop Cotton School, Simla, the road to be taken was pointed out by the publication of his first story in 'The Illustrated Weekly of India' by the then editor, Mr. C.R. Mandy. It was a simple skit about his maths teacher. The school authorities were not amused, they held back his character certificate. But to him, "Simla has a special place in my affections. It was there that I went to school, and it was there that my father and I spent our happiest times together.... We stayed on Elysium Hill; sipped milk-shakes at Davico's; saw plays at the Gaiety Theatre; fed the monkeys at the temple on Jacko; picnicked in Chota Simla. All this during the short summer break when my father (on leave from the Air Force) came to see me. He told me stories of phantom rickshaws and enchanted forests and planted in me the seeds of my writing career. I was only ten when he died. But he had already passed on to me his love for the hills. And even after I had finished school and grown to manhood, I was to return to the hills again and again...."

A few months later, he left school, and never went to college. "I was content in furthering my education in second-hand shops... these are the *real* tourist spots in any town. In an hour, one can see the tales of a hundred failures and a thousand broken dreams!" But the winds of change began to blow and he had to go abroad where homesickness was to haunt him.

Loneliness dogged him in solitary wanderings. Memories of another world haunted him. A 'home' that was very *different*. Today, he reflects... "So many people, given the opportunity to

leave India, are only too ready to do so. Yet I, who have had several chances, hang on like a leech.

"What keeps me here?

"Time and again in the past, life had been a little rough and I had thought of how I could make a better living in Canada, like my brother, or in England, like my cousins. But I do not feel drawn to these places."

"I am terrified at the prospect of going away and not being able to return. This almost happened when, as a boy, I went to England and then did not have enough money to get back. For two years I saved like a miser until I had enough for the journey back.

"Does my birth keep me here? I bear too close a resemblance to a Nordic grandparent to pass for a typical son of the soil. But India is where my grandfather came as a young man. And on my mother's side, the ancestral tree probably goes back to the time of Timur the Lame. Surely that entitles me to a place in the Indian sun?

"Or is it the land? But so many of my fellow-Indians have been born here. Yet they think nothing of leaving the land, of moving from the mountains to the plains, from the villages to the cities; from the country to another country.

"Yes, the land does hold me, but **India is more than a land. India is an atmosphere. Over thousands of years, races and religions of the world co-mingled here and produced that unique indefinable phenomenon, the Indian; so terrifying in a crowd, so beautiful in himself.**

"And oddly enough, I'm one too—as Indian as the postman or the *paanwala* or your favourite member of Parliament. Race did not make me one, nor did religion. History did. And in the long run, it's history that counts.

'Home' had always meant the world of ordinary people like 'The Box Man' who hawked odds-and-ends; 'The Kitemaker' dreaming of setting the kite free; the world of railway stations, over-crowded with travellers, shouting coolies, stray dogs, stray station-masters and stray human-beings.

"I missed the *tongas* of Dehra Dun. I remembered the roads lined with neem and mango trees, eucalyptus, Persian lilac, jacaranda and many others." Out of nostalgia was born his first novel *The Room on the Roof*. It won the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize, at the age of twenty. Since then, there has been no looking back.

Initial stints at odd jobs left him cold. "I knew that I was to be a writer while at school," he says, adding, "The only other thing I was good at was football and that couldn't last forever!"

"As a youth, I discovered that I had one gift—or a knack, if you prefer,—of writing a certain kind of story or essay... I have gone along with this gift for the past thirty years. It has never let me down. Everyone's got one gift. The difficulty often lies in discovering what your particular gift is."

His love for the mountains brought him to Mussoorie; a small hill-station hanging on to the Himalayas. He came here a stranger. Few knew him then and those who did, smiled at this crazy fellow who proposed to make a living by *writing*. Armed with a smile, he was prone to spend hours doing things which were apparently useless. One of these strayings found him in the Mussoorie Cemetery. An unusual grave caught his eye. On hands and knees, he scraped the carpet of moss. Painfully, the words surfaced through over a hundred monsoons. He had just uncovered the grave of *John Lang*—the first Australian-born novelist. One grave lead to another; the next had a simple inscription: "One of the six-hundred" (one of the survivors of the famous 'Charge of the Light-Brigade').

Even today, it is not unusual to find him wandering over the hills spotting wild-flowers with children or listening patiently to the local baker's complaint of poor yeast. As the years rolled by, this Dr. Do Nothing has slowly become an institution in Mussoorie.

When on earth did he find the time to churn out all those tales? For, it is impossible to catch him at the typewriter tapping out his stories. And for a good reason too—he hates the typewriter. "I am a real writer, in the sense that I need a pen and paper to be able

to write!" he says with a smile. This true follower of Lao Tzu writes his stories tucked away in bed.

He concedes: "I am sensual and lazy. Moments of inspiration do come, but most of the time I find myself writing principally because the wolf is at the door." A classical under-statement from one who authors two or three books for children every year. "But I can't talk about my stories until they have been written. If I do, they don't get written, the creative process having been talked out of me," he hastens to add.

Stories that have no complex plots. Being a true romantic, he is content transmuting the ordinary into the beautiful. His characters are simple and know no satire. Police-Inspector Keemat Lal in *An Axe for the Rani* is moved by compassion for the thirteen-year old murderess and keeps the case pending, jeopardising his chances for a promotion by consoling himself: "I should never have been a policeman."

Some eyebrows have been raised against the repetitive use of the first person in his stories. But what is a writer, but what he sees and feels and creates?

This is done effectively in *A Flight of Pigeons* (filmed as *Junoon* by Shyam Benegal). The story is based on an actual historical incident, everything really took place and he has used his talent to make it all come alive. A brief introduction leads on to a diary-form of narration. Maybe it is for the first time that we see the events of 1857 through the sensitive eyes of a person of mixed parentage.

Ruth's English father is a clerk with an Indian-Christian wife. She is caught between two worlds in times that generate intense hatred. It is a world that sees people using the Urdu style of polite conversation. Individual human-beings reach out to help each other: the Pathan Chachi feels for the Christian widow and her daughter, the Lala rises above casual distinctions of caste and creed. Isn't this what national integration is all about?

While the life of a writer gives him freedom, it is also coupled with loneliness. Bond is hypersensitive to questions about freelance writers: "To be a freelance writer anywhere in the world, and more so in India, is to know difficulties of many kinds. But without a moment's doubt I can say that I have no regrets whatsoever for having chosen to be one. Writing in the hills, on the hills and its people is, to say the very least, a most rewarding experience..."

"I know what torment writers have to go through in order to first create (and then publish) a novel or a collection of poems or stories... I respect those who have found success, and I have every sympathy for those who are still trying and having a hard time... I suppose being published in the West does help a writer's reputation, but it puts some of our better Indian-language writers at a disadvantage. In India it is difficult for writers, especially freelance writers, to live comfortably, let alone make money. Save for a handful who have made their name, almost all of them are poorly paid and shabbily treated..."

An interviewer once asked him if he had achieved what he had set out to achieve—romance? Bond answered: "Perhaps that is why I'm still writing. I'm looking for romance... to tell the truth, I suffer from an acute sense of failure. I have not been able to write the things I really set out to write... and it isn't Time that's passing by, it's you and I!"

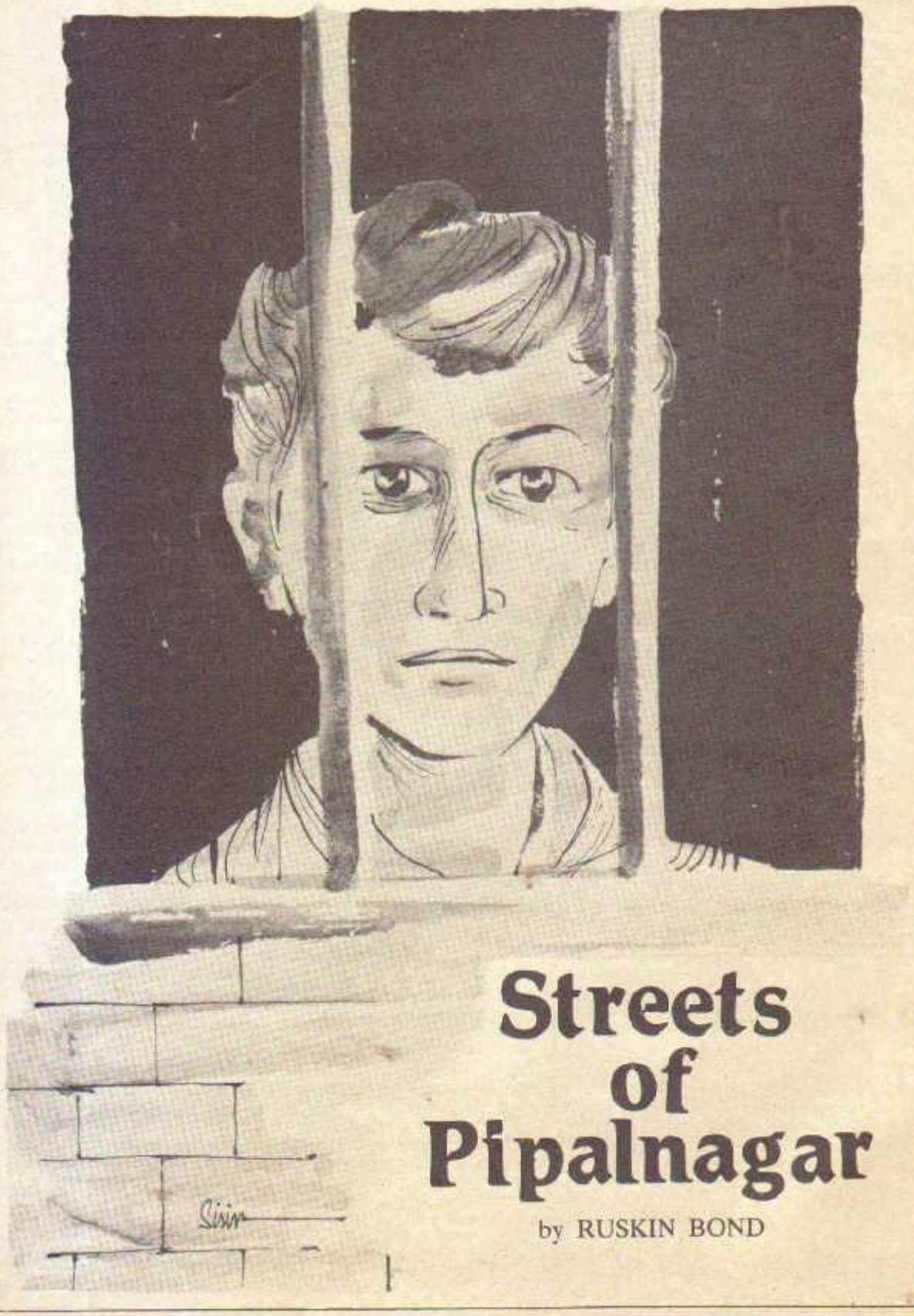
Did he enjoy his stint with *Imprint*? "It was great. But reading so many manuscripts did make inroads into my time and hampered my own work. I gave it up—who could put up with moving from the hills to Bombay? No! Nothing against Bombay—nice place to visit, but I just couldn't afford the rents!"

Though *Grandfather's Private Zoo* is the most popular with children, his own favourite is *Angry River*. It does have that elusive lyrical quality that brings it closer to a prose poem than a story. Maybe he likes it because what he could not achieve in poetry, he does in prose.

Bond loves children, a love that permeates most of his stories for them. He regrets that the land which gave the world *Panchtantra*, could not do more for children's fiction. Meanwhile, his own *Looking For Granny's Glasses* (pub: Julia Macrae) has just been nominated for the Carnegie Medal in England.

In his fifties now, Bond has managed to stay single. How did he do this? I ask. With a naughty twinkle in his eyes, he lifts one straight out of Oscar Wilde:

"Marriage is a romance in which the hero dies in the first chapter!"



Streets of Pipalnagar

by RUSKIN BOND

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SOME of the moving forces of our lives are meant to touch us briefly and then go their way.

MY BALCONY WAS MY WINDOW on the world.

The room itself had only one window, a square hole in the wall crossed by two iron bars. The view from it was rather restricted. If I craned my neck sideways, and put my nose to the bars, I could see the end of the building. Below was a narrow courtyard where children played. Across the courtyard, on a level with my room, were three separate windows, belonging to three separate rooms, each window barred in the same way, with iron bars. During the day it was difficult to see into these rooms. The harsh, cruel sunlight filled the courtyard, making the windows patches of darkness.

My room was very small. I had paced about in it so often that I knew its exact measurements. My foot, from heel to toe, was eleven inches long. That made the room just over fifteen feet in length; for, when I measured the last foot, my toes turned up against the wall. It wasn't more than eight feet broad which meant that two people were the most it could comfortably accommodate. I was the only tenant but at times I had put up at least three friends—two on the floor, two on the bed. The plaster had been peeling off the walls and in addition the greasy stains and patches were difficult to hide, though I covered the worst ones with pictures cut out from magazines— Waheeda, the Bombay actress, successfully blotted out one big patch and a recent Mr. Universe displayed his muscles from the opposite wall. The biggest stain was all but concealed by a calendar which showed Ganesh, the elephant-headed God, whose blessings were vital to all good beginnings.

My belongings were few. A shelf on the wall supported an untidy pile of paperbacks, and a small table in one corner of the room supported the solid weight of my rejected manuscripts and an ancient typewriter which I had obtained on hire.

I was eighteen years old and a writer.

Such a combination would be disastrous enough anywhere, but in India it was doubly so; for there were not many papers to write for and payments were small. In addition, I was very inexperienced and though what I wrote came from the heart, only a fraction touched the hearts of editors. Nevertheless, I persevered and was able to earn about two hundred rupees a month, barely enough to keep body, soul and typewriter together. There wasn't much else I could do. Without that passport to a job— a University degree— I had no alternative but to accept the classification of "self-employed" — which was impressive as it included doctors, lawyers, property dealers, and grain merchants, most of whom earned well over a thousand a month.

"Haven't you realized that India is bursting with young people trying to pass exams?" asked a journalist friend. "It's a desperate matter, this race for academic qualifications. Everyone wants to pass his exam the easy way, without reading too many books or attending more than half a dozen lectures. That's where a smart fellow like you comes in! Why should students wade through five volumes of political history when they can buy a few 'model-answer' papers at any bookstall? They are helpful, these guess-papers. You can write them quickly and flood the market. They'll sell like hot cakes!"

"Who eats hot cakes here?"

"Well, then, hot chappatics."

"I'll think about it," I said; but the idea repelled me. If I was going to misguide students, I would rather do it by writing second-rate detective stories than by providing them with ready-made Answer Papers. Besides, I thought it would bore me.

II

The string of my cot needed tightening. The dip in the middle of the bed was so bad that I woke up in the mornings with a stiff back. But I was hopeless at tightening bed-strings and would have to wait until one of the boys from the tea-shop paid me a visit. I was too long for the cot, anyway, and if my feet didn't stick out at one end, my head lolled over the other.

Under the cot was my tin trunk. Apart from my clothes, it contained notebooks, diaries, photographs, scrapbooks, and other odds and ends that form a part of a writer's existence.

I did not live entirely alone. During cold or rainy weather, the boys from the tea-shop, who normally slept on the pavement, crowded into the room. Apart from them, there were lizards on the walls and ceilings— friends, these— and a large rat— definitely an enemy— who got in and out of the window and who sometimes carried away manuscripts and clothing.

June nights were the most uncomfortable. Mosquitoes emerged from all the ditches, gullies and ponds, to swarm over Pipalnagar. Bugs, finding it uncomfortable inside the woodwork of the cot, scrambled out at night and found their way under the sheet. The lizards wandered listlessly over the walls, impatient for the monsoon

rains, when they would be able to feast off thousands of insects.
Everyone in Pipalnagar was waiting for the cool, quenching relief of the monsoon.

III

I woke every morning at five as soon as the first bus moved out of the shed, situated only twenty or thirty yards down the road. I dressed, went down to the tea-shop for a glass of hot tea and some buttered toast, and then visited Deep Chand, the barber, in his shop.

At 18, I shaved about three times a week. Sometimes I shaved myself. But often, when I felt lazy, Deep Chand shaved me, at the special concessional rate of four annas.

"Give my head a good massage, Deep Chand," I said "My brain is not functioning these days. In my latest story there are three murders but it is boring just the same."

"You must write a good book," and Deep Chand, beginning the ritual of the head massage, his fingers squeezing my temples and tugging at my hair-roots. "Then you can make some money and clear out of Pipalnagar. Delhi is the place to go! Why, I know a man who arrived in Delhi in 1947 with nothing but the clothes he wore and a few rupees. He began by selling thirsty travellers glasses of cold water at the railway-station; then he opened a small tea-shop; now he has two big restaurants and lives in a house as large as the Prime Minister's!"

Nobody intended living in Pipalnagar for ever. Delhi was the city most aspired to, but as it was two-hundred miles away, few could afford to travel there.

Deep Chand would have shifted his trade to another town if he had the capital. In Pipalnagar his main customers were small shopkeepers, factory workers and labourers from the railway station. "Here I can charge only six annas for a hair-cut," he lamented. "In Delhi I could charge a rupee!"

I was walking in the wheat fields beyond the railway tracks when I noticed a boy lying across the footpath, his head and shoulders hidden by the wheat. I walked faster, and when I came near I saw that the boy's legs were twitching. He seemed to be having some kind of fit. The boy's face was white, his legs kept moving, and his hands fluttered restlessly amongst the wheat-stalks.

"What's the matter?" I said, kneeling down beside him; but he was still unconscious.

I ran down the path to a Persian-well, and dipping the end of my shirt in a shallow trough of water, soaked it well before returning to the boy. As I sponged his face, the twitching ceased, and though he still breathed heavily, his face was calm and his hands still. He opened his eyes and stared at me, but he didn't really see me.

"You have bitten your tongue," I said, wiping a little blood from the corner of his mouth. "Don't worry. I'll stay here with you until you are all right."

The boy raised himself; and, resting his chin on his knees, he passed his arms around his drawn-up legs.

"I'm all right now," he said.

"What happened?" I asked, sitting down beside him.

"Oh, it is nothing, it often happens. I don't know why. I cannot control it."

"Have you been to a doctor?"

"Yes. When the fits first started, I went to the hospital. They gave me some pills which I had to take every day. But the pills made me so tired and sleepy that I couldn't work properly. So I stopped taking them. Now this happens once or twice a week. What does it matter? I'm all right when it's over, and I do not feel anything when it happens."

He got to his feet, dusting his clothes and smiling at me. He was a slim boy, long-limbed and bony. There was a little fluff on his cheeks and the promise of a moustache. He told me his name was Suraj, that he went to a night school in the city, and that he hoped to finish his High School exams in a few months time. He was studying hard, he said, and if he passed he hoped to get a scholarship to a good college. If he failed, there was only the prospect of continuing in Pipalnagar.

I noticed a small tray of merchandise lying on the ground. It contained combs and buttons and little bottles of perfume. The tray was made to hang at Suraj's waist, supported by straps that went around his shoulders. All day he walked about Pipalnagar, sometimes covering ten or fifteen miles a day, selling odds and ends to people at their houses. He averaged about two rupees a day, which was enough for his food and other necessities; he managed to save about ten rupees a month for his school fees. He ate irregularly at little tea-shops, at the stalls near the bus stop, or under the shady *jamun* and mango trees. When the *jamun* fruit was ripe, he would sit on a tree, sucking the sour fruit until his lips were stained purple. There was a small, nagging fear that he might get a fit while sitting on the tree and fall off; but the temptation to eat *jamuns* was greater than his fear.

All this he told me while we walked through the fields towards the bazaar.

"Where do you live?" I asked. "I'll walk home with you."

"I don't live anywhere," said Suraj. "My home is not in Pipalnagar. Sometimes I sleep at the temple or at the railway station. In the summer months I sleep on the grass of the municipal park."

"Well, wherever it is you stay, let me come with you."

We walked together into the town and parted near the bus stop. I returned to my room, and tried to do some writing while Suraj went into the bazaar to try selling his wares. We had agreed to meet each other again. I realised that Suraj was an epileptic, but there was nothing unusual about his being an orphan and a refugee. I liked his positive attitude to life: most people in Pipalnagar were resigned to their circumstances, but he was ambitious. I also liked his gentleness, his quiet voice, and the smile that flickered across his face regardless of whether he was sad or happy.

IV

The temperature had touched 110° Fahrenheit, and the small streets of Pipalnagar were empty. To walk barefoot on the scorching pavements was possible only for the labourers whose feet had developed several hard layers of protective skin; and now even these hardy men lay stretched out in the shade provided by trees and buildings.

I hadn't written anything in two weeks, and though one or two small payments were due from a Delhi newspaper, I could think of no substantial amount that was likely to come my way in the near future. I decided that I would dash off a couple of articles that same night, and post them the following morning.

Having made this comforting decision, I lay down on the floor in preference to the cot. I liked the touch of things: the touch of a cool floor on a hot day; the touch of the earth—soft, grassy, grass was good, especially dew-drenched grass. Wet earth, too, was soft, sensuous and smelt nice; splashing through puddles and streams.

... I slept, and dreamt of a cool clear stream in a forest glade, where I bathed pleasurably. A little further downstream was another bather. I hailed him, expecting to see Suraj but when the bather turned I found that it was my landlord's pot-bellied rent-collector, holding an accounts ledger in his hands. This woke me up, and for the remainder of the day I worked feverishly at my articles.

Next morning, when I opened the door, I found Suraj asleep at the top of the steps. His tray lay at the bottom of the steps. He woke up as soon as I touched his shoulder.

"Have you been sleeping here all night?" I asked. "Why didn't you come in?"

"It was very late," said Suraj. "I didn't want to disturb you."

"Someone could have stolen your things while you were asleep."

"Oh, I sleep quite lightly. Besides, I have nothing of great value. But I came here to ask you a favour."

"You need money?"

He laughed. "Do all your friends mean money when they ask for favours? No, I want you to take your meal with me tonight."

"But where? You have no place of your own, and it would be too expensive in a restaurant."

"In your room," said Suraj. "I shall bring the meat and vegetables and cook them here. Do you have a cooker?"

"I think so," I said, scratching my head in some perplexity. "I will have to look for it."

"I'll come at seven," said Suraj, turning to go. "Don't worry, I know how to cook!"

Suraj brought a chicken for dinner—a luxury, one to be indulged in only two or three times a year. He had bought the bird for seven rupees, which was cheap. We spiced it, and roasted it on a spittle.

"I wish we could do this more often," I said, as I dug my teeth into the soft flesh of a second leg.

"We could do it at least once a month if we worked hard," said Suraj.

"You know how to work. You work from morning to evening, and then you work again."

"But you are a writer. That is different. You have to wait for the right moment."

I laughed. "Moods and moments are for geniuses. No, it's really a matter of working hard, and I'm just plain lazy, to tell the truth."

"Perhaps you are writing the wrong things."

"Perhaps. I wish I could do something else. Even if I repaired bicycle tyres, I'd make more money!"

"Then why don't you repair bicycle tyres?"

"Oh, I would rather be a bad writer than a good repairer of cycle-tyres." I brightened up. "I could go into business, though. Do you know, I once owned a vegetable stall."

"Wonderful! When was that?"

"A couple of months ago. But it failed after two days."

"Then you are not good at business. Let us think of something else."

"I can tell fortunes with cards."

"There are already too many fortune-tellers in Pipalnagar."

"Then we won't talk of fortunes. And you must sleep here tonight. It is better than sleeping on the roadside."

V

At noon, when the shadows shifted and crossed the road, a band of children rushed down the empty street, shouting and waving their satchels. They had been at their desks from early morning, and now, despite the hot sun, they would have their fling while their elders slept on string charpoys beneath leafy neem trees.

On the soft and near the river-bed, boys wrestled or played leap-frog. At alley-corners, where tall buildings shaded narrow passages, the favourite game was *gulli-danda*. The gulli—small piece of wood, about four inches long, sharpened to a point at each end—is struck with the *danda*, a short, stout stick. A player is allowed three hits, and his score is the distance, in *danda* lengths, he hits the *gulli*. Boys who were experts at the game sent the *gulli* flying far down the road—sometimes into a shop or through a windowpane, which resulted in confusion, loud invective, and a dash for cover.

A game for both children and young men was *Kabbadi*. This is a game that calls for good breath control and much agility. It is also known, in different parts of India, as *hootoo-too*, *kho-kho*, and *atya-patya*. Ramu, Deep Chand's younger brother, excelled at this game. He was the Pipalnagar *Kabbadi* champion.

The game is played by two teams, consisting of eight or nine members each, who face each other across a dividing line. Each side in turn sends out one of its players into the opponent's area. This person has to keep on saying "Kabbadi kabbadi" very fast and without taking a second breath. If he returns to his side after touching an opponent, that opponent is "dead" and out of the game. If, however, he is caught and cannot struggle back to his side while still holding his breath, he is "dead".

Ramu, who was also a good wrestler, knew all the Kabbadi-holds, and was particularly good at capturing opponents. He had vitality and confidence, rare things in Pipalnagar. He wanted to go into the Army after finishing school, a happy choice I thought.

VI

Suraj did not know if his parents were dead or alive. He had literally lost them when he was six. His father had been a farmer, a dark unfathomable man who spoke little, thought perhaps even less, and was vaguely aware he had a son—a weak boy given to introspection and dawdling at the river-bank when he should have been helping in the fields.

Suraj's mother had been a subdued, silent woman, frail and consumptive. Her husband seemed to expect that she would not live long; but Suraj did not know if she was living or dead. He had lost his parents at Amritsar railway-station in the days of the Partition, when trains coming across the border from Pakistan disgorged themselves of thousands of refugees or pulled into the station half-empty, drenched with blood and littered with corpses.

Suraj and his parents were lucky to escape one of these massacres. Had they travelled on an earlier train (which they had tried desperately to catch), they might have been killed. Suraj was clinging to his mother's sari while she tried to keep up with her husband, who was elbowing his way through the frightened, bewildered throng of refugees. Suraj collided with a burly Sikh and lost his grip on the sari. The Sikh had a long curved sword at his waist, and Suraj started up at him in awe and fascination, at the man's long hair, which had fallen loose, at his wild black beard, and at the blood-stains on the white shirt. The Sikh pushed him aside and when Suraj looked round for his mother she was not to be seen. She was hidden from him by a mass of restless bodies, all pushing in different directions. He could hear her calling his name and he tried to force his way through the crowd, in the direction of her voice, but he was carried the other way.

At night, when the platform was empty, he was still searching for his mother. Eventually the police came and took him away. They looked for his parents but without success, and finally they sent him to a home for orphans. Many children lost their parents at about the same time.

Suraj stayed at the orphanage for two years and when he was eight and felt himself a man, he ran away. He worked for some time as a helper in a tea-shop; but when he started having epileptic fits the shopkeeper asked him to leave, and the boy found himself on the streets, begging for a living. He begged for a year, moving from one town to the next, and ending up finally at Pipalnagar. By then he was twelve and really too old to beg; but he had saved some money, and with it he bought a small stock of combs, buttons, cheap perfumes and bangles, and converting himself into a mobile shop, went from door to door selling his wares.

Pipalnagar is small town, and there was no house which Suraj hadn't visited. Everyone knew him; some had offered him food and drink; and the children liked him because he often played on a small flute when he went on his rounds.

VII

Suraj came to see me quite often, and, when he stayed late, he slept in my room, curling up on the floor and sleeping fitfully. He would always leave early in the morning before I could get him anything to eat.

"Should I go to Delhi, Suraj?" I asked him one evening.

"Why not? In Delhi, there are many ways of making money."

"And spending it, too. Why don't you come with me?"

"After my exams, perhaps. Not now."

"Well, I can wait. I don't want to live alone in a big city."

"In the meantime, write your book."

"All right, I will try."

We decided we would try to save a little money from Suraj's earnings and my own occasional payments from newspapers and magazines. Even if we were to give Delhi only a few days trial, we would need money to live on. We managed to put away twenty rupees one week, but withdrew it the next when a friend, Pitamber, asked for a loan to repair his cycle-rickshaw. He returned the money in three instalments but we could not save any of it. Pitamber and Deep Chand also had plans for going to Delhi. Pitamber wanted to own his own scooter-rickshaw; Deep Chand dreamt of a swank barber-shop in the capital.

One day Suraj and I hired bicycles and rode out of Pipalnagar. It was a hot, sunny morning, and we were perspiring after we had gone two miles; but a fresh wind sprang up suddenly, and we could smell the rain in the air though there were no clouds to be seen.

"Let us go where there are no people at all," said Suraj. "I am a little tired of people. I see too many of them all day."

We got down from our cycles, and pushing them off the road, took a path through a paddy field, and then a path through a field of young maize, and in the distance we saw a tree, a crooked tree, growing beside a well. I do not even today know the name of that tree. I had never seen its kind before. It had a crooked trunk, crooked branches, and it was clothed in thick, broad crooked leaves, like the leaves on which food is served in bazaars.

In the trunk of the tree was a large hole, and when I set my cycle down with a crash, two green parrots flew out of the hole, and went dipping and swerving across the fields.

There was grass around the well, cropped short by grazing cattle, so we sat in the shade of the crooked tree, and Suraj untied the red cloth in which he had brought our food. We ate our bread and vegetable curry, and meanwhile the parrots returned to the tree.

"Let us come here every week," said Suraj, stretching himself out on the grass. It was a drowsy day, the air humid, and he soon fell asleep. I, too, stretched myself out and closed my eyes, but I did not sleep; I was aware of different sensations. I heard a cricket singing in the tree; the cooing of pigeons which lived in the walls of the old well; the soft breathing of Suraj; a rustling in the leaves of the tree; the distant drone of bees. I smelt the grass, and the old bricks around the well, and the promise of rain.

When I opened my eyes, I saw dark clouds on the horizon. Suraj was still sleeping, his arms thrown across his face to keep the glare out of his eyes. As I was thirsty, I went to the well, and putting my shoulders to it, turned the wheel, very slowly, walking around the well four times, while cool clean water gushed out over the stones and along the channel to the fields. I drank from one of the trays, and the water was sweet. The deeper the wells, the sweeter the water.

Suraj was sitting up now, looking at the sky.

"It's going to rain," he said.

We pushed our cycles back to the main road and began riding homewards. We were a mile out of Pipalnagar when it began to rain. A lashing wind swept the rain across our faces, but we exulted in it and sang at the top of

our voices until we reached the bus stop. Leaving the cycles at the hire-shop, we ran up the ricketty, swaying steps to my room.

In the evening, as the bazaar was lighting up, the rain stopped. We went to sleep quite early; but at midnight I was woken by the moon shining full in my face—a full moon, shedding its light all over Pipalnagar, peeping and prying into every home, washing the empty streets, silvering the corrugated tin roofs.

VIII

The lizards hung listlessly on the walls and ceilings, waiting for the monsoon rains, which would bring out all the insects from their cracks and crannies.

One day clouds loomed up on the horizon, growing rapidly into enormous towers. A faint breeze sprang up, bringing with it the first of the monsoon rain-drops. This was the moment everyone was waiting for. People ran out of their houses to take in the fresh breeze and the scent of those first few raindrops on the parched, dusty earth. Underground, in their cracks, the insects were moving. Termites and white ants, which had been sleeping through the hot season, emerged from their lairs.

And then, on the second or third night of the monsoon, came the great yearly flight of insects into the cool brief freedom of the night. Out of every crack, from under the roots of trees, huge winged ants emerged, at first fluttering about heavily, on this the first and last flight of their lives. At night there was only one direction in which they could fly—towards the light; towards the electric bulbs and smoky kerosene lamps throughout Pipalnagar. The street lamp opposite the bus stop, beneath my room, attracted a massive quivering swarm of clumsy termites, which gave the impression of one thick, slowly revolving body.

This was the hour of the lizards. Now they had their reward for those days of patient waiting. Plying their sticky pink tongues, they devoured the insects as fast as they came. For hours they crammed their stomachs, knowing that such a feast would not be theirs again for another year. How wasteful nature is, I thought. Through the whole hot season the insect world prepares for this flight out of darkness into light, and not one of them survives its freedom!

Suraj and I walked barefooted over the cool wet pavements, across the railway lines and the river bed, until we were not far from the crooked tree. Dotting the landscape were old abandoned brick kilns. When it rained heavily, the hollows made by the kilns filled up with water. Suraj and I found a small tank where we could bathe and swim. On a mound in the middle of the tank stood a ruined hut, formerly inhabited by a watchman at the kiln. We swam and then wrestled on the young green grass. Though I was heavier than Suraj and my chest as sound as a new drum, he had a lot of power in his long wiry arms and legs, and he pinioned me about the waist with his bony knees. And then suddenly, as I strained to press his back to the ground, I felt his body go tense. He stiffened, his thigh jerked against me, and his legs began to twitch. I knew that a fit was coming on, but I was unable to get out of his grip. He held me more tightly as the fit took possession of him.

When I noticed his mouth working, I thrust the palm of my hand in, sideways to prevent him from biting his tongue. But so violent was the convulsion that his teeth bit into my flesh. I shouted with pain and tried to pull my eyes and counted slowly up to seven, and then I felt his muscles relax, and I was able to take my hand away. It was bleeding a little but I bound it in a handkerchief before Suraj fully recovered consciousness.

He didn't say much as we walked back to town. He looked depressed and weak, but I knew it wouldn't take long for him to recover his usual good spirits. He did not notice that I kept my hand out of sight and only after he had returned from classes that night did he notice the bandage and ask what happened.

IX

"Do you want to make some money?" asked Pitamber, bursting into the room like a festive cracker.

"I do." I said.

"What do we have to do for it?" asked Suraj, striking a cautious note.

"Oh, nothing—carry a banner and walk in front of a procession."

"Why?"

"Don't ask me. Some political stunt."

"Which party?"

"I don't know. Who cares? All I know is that they are paying two rupees a day to anyone who'll carry a flag or banner."

"We don't need two rupees that badly," I said. "And you can make more than that in a day with your rickshaw."

"True, but they're paying me *five*. They're fixing a loudspeaker to my rickshaw, and one of the party's men will sit in it and make speeches as we go along. Come on—it will be fun."

"No banners for us," I said. "But we may come along and watch."

And we did watch, when later that morning, the procession passed along our street. It was a ragged procession of about a hundred people, shouting slogans. Some of them were children, and some of them were men who did not know what it was all about, but all joined in the slogan-shouting.

We didn't know much about it, either. Because, though the man in Pitamber's rickshaw was loud and eloquent, his loudspeaker was defective, with the result that his words were punctuated with squeaks and an eerie whinning sound. Pitamber looked up and saw us standing on the balcony and gave us a wave and a wide grin. We decided to follow the procession at a discreet distance. It was a protest march against something or other, we never did manage to find out the details. The destination was the municipal office, and by the time we got there the crowd had increased to two or three hundred persons. Some rowdies had now joined in, and things began to get out of hand. The man in the rickshaw continued his speech; another man standing on a wall was making a speech; and someone from the municipal office was confronting the crowd and making a speech of his own.

A stone was thrown, then another. From a sprinkling of stones it soon become a shower of stones; and then some police constables, who had been standing by watching the fun, were ordered into action. They ran at the crowd where it was thinnest, brandishing stout sticks.

Sisip

We were caught up in the stampede that followed. A stone—flung no doubt at a policeman—was badly aimed and struck me on the shoulder. Suraj pulled me down a side-street. Looking back, we saw Pitamber's cycle-richshaw lying on its side in the middle of the road; but there was no sign of Pitamber.

Later, he turned up in my room, with a cut over his left eyebrow which was bleeding freely. Suraj washed the cut, and I poured iodine over it—Pitamber did not flinch—and covered it with sticking-plaster. The cut was quite deep and should have had stitches; but Pitamber was superstitious about hospitals, saying he knew very few people to come out of them alive. He was of course thinking of the Pipalnagar hospital.

So he acquired a scar on his forehead. It went rather well with his demonic good looks.

"Thank God for the monsoon," said Suraj. "We won't have any more demonstrations on the roads until the weather improves!"

And, until the rain stopped, Pipalnagar was fresh and clean and alive. The children ran naked out of their houses and romped through the streets. The gutters overflowed, and the road became a mountain stream, coursing merrily towards the bus stop.

At the bus stop there was confusion. Newly arrived passengers, surrounded on all sides by a sea of mud and rain water, were met by scores of tongas and cycle-rickshaws, each jostling the other trying to cater to the passengers. As a result, only half found conveyances, while the other half found themselves knee-deep in Pipalnagar mud.

Pipalnagar mud has a quality all its own; and it is not easily removed or forgotten. Only buffaloes love it because it is soft and squelchy. Two parts of it is thick sticky clay which seems to come alive at the slightest touch, clinging tenaciously to human flesh. Feet sink into it and have to be wrenched out. Fingers become webbed. Get it into your hair, and there is nothing you can do except go to Deep Chand and have your head shaved.

London has its fog, Paris its sewers, and Pipalnagar its mud.

Pitamber, of course, succeeded in getting as his passenger the most attractive girl to step off the bus, and showed her his skill and daring by taking her to her destination by the longest and roughest road.

The rain swirled over the trees and roofs of the town, and the parched earth soaked it up, giving out a fresh smell that came only once a year, the fragrance of quenched earth, that loveliest of all smells.

In my room I was battling against the elements, for the door would not close, and the rain swept into the room and soaked my cot. When finally I succeeded in closing the door, I discovered that the roof was leaking, and the water was trickling down the walls, running through the dusty designs I had made with my feet. I placed tins and mugs in strategic positions and, satisfied that everything was now under control sat on the cot to watch the roof-tops through the windows.

There was a loud banging on the door. It flew open, and there was Suraj, standing on the threshold, drenched. Coming in, he began to dry himself while I made desperate efforts to close the door again.

"Let's make some tea," he said.

Glasses of hot sweet milky tea on a rainy day.... it was enough to make me feel fresh and full of optimism. We sat on the cot, enjoying the brew.

"One day I'll write a book," I said. "Not just a thriller, but a real book, about real people. Perhaps about you and me and Pipalnagar. And then we'll be famous, and our troubles will be over and new troubles will begin. I don't mind problems as long as they are new. While you're studying, I'll write my book. I'll start tonight. It is an auspicious time, the first night of the monsoon."

A tree must have fallen across the wires somewhere, because the lights would not come on. So I lit a small oil-lamp, and while it spluttered in the streamy darkness, Suraj opened his books and, with one hand on the book, the other playing with his toes—this helped him to concentrate!—he began to study. I took the ink down from the shelf, and, finding it empty, added a little rain-water to it from one of the mugs. I sat down beside Suraj and began to write; but the open was no good and made blotches all over the paper. And, although I was full of writing just then, I didn't really know what I wanted to say.

So I went out and began pacing up and down the road. There I found Pitamber, very merry, and prancing about in the middle of the road.

"What are you dancing for?" I asked.

"I am happy, so I'm dancing," said Pitamber.

"And why are you happy?" I asked.

"Because I am dancing," he said.

The rain stopped, and the neem trees gave out a strong sweet smell.

X

Flowers in Pipalnagar—did they exist? As a child I knew a garden in Lucknow where there were beds of phlox and petunias; and another garden where only roses grew. In the fields around Pipalnagar I had seen the thorn-apple—a yellow buttercup nestling among thorn leaves. But in the Pipalnagar bazaar, there were no flowers except one—a marigold growing out of a crack on my balcony. I had removed the plaster from the base of the plant, and filled in a little earth which I watered every morning. The plant was healthy, and sometimes it produced a little orange marigold.

Sometimes Suraj plucked a flower and kept it in his tray, among the combs, buttons, and scent-bottles. Sometimes he gave the flower to a passing child, once to a small boy who immediately tore it to shreds. Suraj was back on his rounds, as his exams were over.

Whenever he was tired of going from house to house, Suraj would sit beneath a shady banyan or peepul tree, put his tray aside, and take out his flute. The haunting notes travelled down the road in the afternoon stillness, drawing children to him. They would sit beside him and be very quiet when he played, because there was something melancholic and appealing about the tunes. Suraj sometimes made flutes out of pieces of bamboo; but he never sold them. He would give them to the children he liked. He would sell almost anything, but not flutes.

Suraj sometimes played the flute at night, when he lay awake, unable to sleep; but even though I slept, I

could hear the music in my dreams. Sometimes he took his flute with him to the crooked tree, and played for the benefit of the birds. The parrots made harsh noises in response and flew away. Once, when Suraj was playing his flute to a small group of children, he had a fit. The flute fell from his hands, and he began to roll about in the dust on the roadside. The children became frightened and ran away, but they did not stay away for long. The next time they heard the flute, they came to listen as usual.

XI

It was Lord Krishna's birthday, and the rain came down as heavily as it is said to have done on the day Krishna was born. Krishna is the best-beloved of all the Gods. Young mothers laugh or weep as they read or hear the pranks of his boyhood; young men pray to be as tall and as strong as Krishna was when he killed King Kamsa's elephant and Kamsa's wrestlers; young girls dream of a lover as daring as Krishna to carry them off in a war-chariot; grown-up men envy the wisdom and statesmanship with which he managed the affairs of his Kingdom.

The rain came so unexpectedly that it took everyone by suprise. In seconds, people were drenched, and within minutes, the street was flooded. The temple tank overflowed, the railway lines disappeared, and the old wall near the bus stop shivered and silently fell, the sound of its collapse drowned in the downpour. A naked young man with a dancing bear cavorted in the middle of the vegetable market. Pitamber's rickshaw churned through the flood-water, while he sang lustily as he worked.

Wading knee-deep down the road, I saw the roadside vendors salvaging whatever they could. Plastic toys, cabbages and utensils floated away and were seized by urchins. The water had risen to the level of the shop-fronts and floors were awash. Deep Chand and Ramu, with the help of a customer, were using buckets to bail the water out of their shop. The rain stopped as suddenly as it had begun and the sun came out. The water began to find an outlet, flooding other low-lying areas, and a paper-boat came sailing between my legs.

Next morning, the morning on which the results of Suraj's examinations were due, I rose early—the first time I ever got up before Suraj—and went down to the news agency. A small crowd of students had gathered at the bus stop, joking with each other and hiding their nervousness with a show of indifference. There were not many passengers on the first bus, and there was a mad grab for newspapers as the bundle landed with a thud on the pavement. Within half an hour, the newsboy had sold all his copies. It was the best day of the year for him.

I went through the columns relating to Pipalnagar, but I couldn't find Suraj's roll number on the list of successful candidates. I had the number on a slip of paper, and I looked at it again to make sure I had compared it correctly with the others; then I went through the newspaper once more. When I returned to the room, Suraj was sitting on the doorstep. I didn't have to tell him he had failed—he knew by the look on my face. I sat down beside him, and we said nothing for some time.

"Never mind," Suraj said eventually. "I will pass next year."

I realized I was more depressed than he was and that he was trying to console me.

"If only you'd had more time," I said.

"I have plenty of time now. Another year. And you will have time to finish your book, and then we can go away together. Another year of Pipalnagar won't be so bad. As long as I have your friendship, almost everything can be tolerated." He stood up, the tray hanging from his shoulders. "What would you like to buy?"

XII

Another year of Pipalnagar! But it was not to be. A short time later, I received a letter from the editor of a newspaper, calling me to Delhi for an interview. My friends insisted that I should go. Such an opportunity would not come again.

But I needed a shirt. The few I possessed were either frayed at the collars or torn at the shoulders. I hadn't been able to afford a new shirt for over a year, and I couldn't afford one now. Struggling writers weren't expected to dress very well, but I felt in order to get the job, I would need both a haircut and a clean shirt.

Where was I to get a shirt? Suraj generally wore an old redstriped T-shirt; he washed it every second evening, and by morning it was dry and ready to wear again; but it was tight even on him. He did not have another. Besides, I needed something white, something respectable!

I went to Deep Chand who had a collection of shirts. He was only too glad to lend me one. But they were all brightly coloured—pinks, purples and magentas... No editor was going to be impressed by a young writer in a pink shirt. They looked fine on Deep Chand, but he had no need to look respectable.

Finally Pitamber came to my rescue. He didn't bother with shirts himself, except in winter, but he was able to borrow a clean white shirt from a guard at the goal, who'd got it from the relative of a convict in exchange for certain favours.

"This shirt will make you look respectable," said Pitamber. "To be respectable—what an adventure!"

XIII

Freedom. The moment the bus was out of Pipalnagar, and the fields opened out on all sides, I knew that I was free, that I always had been free. Only my own weakness, hesitation, and the habits that had grown around me had held me back. All I had had to do was sit in a bus and go somewhere.

I sat near the open window of the bus and let the cool breeze from the fields play against my face. Herons and snipe waded among the lotus roots in flat green ponds. Bluejays swooped around telegraph poles. Children jumped naked into the canals that wound through the fields. Because I was happy, it seemed to me that everyone else was happy—the driver, the conductor, the passengers, the farmers in the fields and those driving bullock-carts. When two women behind me started quarrelling over their seats, I helped to placate them. Then I took a small girl on my knee and pointed out camels, buffaloes, vultures, and parriah-dogs.

Six hours later the bus crossed the bridge over the swollen Jumna river, passed under the walls of the great red fort built by a Moghul Emperor, and entered the old city of Delhi. I found it strange to be in a city again, after several years in Pipalnagar. It was a little frightening, too. I felt like a stranger. No one was interested in

me. In Pipalnagar, people wanted to know each other, or at least to know about each other. In Delhi, no one cared who you were or where you came from. Like big cities almost everywhere, it was prosperous but without a heart.

After a day and a night of loneliness, I found myself wishing that Suraj had accompained me; wishing that I was back in Pipalnagar. But when the job was offered to me—at a starting salary of three hundred rupees per month, a princely sum, compared to what I had been making on my own—I did not have the courage to refuse it. After accepting the job—which was to commence in a week's time—I spent the day wandering through the bazaars, down the wide shady roads of the capital, resting under the jamun trees, and thinking all the time of what I would do in the months to come.

I slept at the railway waiting-room, and all night long I heard the shunting and whistling of engines which conjured up visions of places with sweet names like Kumbakonam, Krishnagiri, Polonnarurawa. I dreamt of palm-fringed beaches and inland lagoons, of the echoing chambers of deserted cities, red sandstone and white marble, of temples in the sun, and elephants crossing wide slow-moving rivers.....

XIV

Pitamber was on the platform when the train steamed into the Pipalnagar station in the early hours of a damp September morning. I waved to him from the carriage window, and shouted that everything had gone well.

But everything was not well here. When I got off the train, Pitamber told me that Suraj had been ill—that he'd had a fit on a lonely stretch of road the previous afternoon and had lain in the sun for over an hour. Pitamber had found him, suffering from heatstroke, and brought him home. When I saw him, he was sitting up on the string-bed, drinking hot tea. He looked pale and weak, but his smile was reassuring.

"Don't worry," he said. "I will be all right."

"He was bad last night," said Pitamber. "He had a fever and kept talking, as in a dream. But what he says is true—he is better this morning."

"Thanks to Pitamber," said Suraj. "It is good to have friends."

"Come with me to Delhi," I said. "I have got a job now. You can live with me and attend a school regularly."

"It is good for friends to help each other," said Suraj, "but only after I have passed my exam will I join you in Delhi. I made myself this promise. Poor Pipalnagar—nobody wants to stay here. Will you be sorry to leave?"

"Yes, I will be sorry. A part of me will still be here."

XV

Deep Chand was happy to know that I was leaving. "I'll follow you soon," he said. "There is money to be made in Delhi, cutting hair. Girls are keeping it short these days."

"But men are growing it long."

"True. So I shall open a Barber Shop for Ladies and a Beauty Salon for Men! Ramu can attend to the ladies."

Ramu winked at me in the mirror. He was still at the stage of teasing girls on their way to school or college.

The snip of Deep Chand's scissors made me sleepy as I sat in his chair. His fingers beat a rhythmic tattoo on my scalp. It was my last hair-cut in Pipalnagar, and Deep Chand did not charge me for it. I promised to write as soon as I had settled down in Delhi.

The next day when Suraj was stronger, I said, "Come, let us go for a walk and visit our crooked tree. Where is your flute, Suraj?"

"I don't know. Let us look for it."

We searched the room and our belongings for the flute but could not find it.

"It must have been left on the roadside," said Suraj. "Never mind, I will make another."

I could picture the flute lying in the dust on the roadside and somehow this made me feel sad. But Suraj was full of high spirits as we walked across the railway-lines and through the fields.

"The rains are over," he said, kicking off his *chappals* and lying down on the grass. "You can smell the autumn in the air. Somehow, it makes me feel light-headed. Yesterday I was sad, and tomorrow I might be sad again, but today I know that I am happy. I want to live on and on. One lifetime cannot satisfy my heart."

"A day in a lifetime," I said. "I'll remember this day—the way the sun touches us, the way the grass bends, the smell of this leaf as I crush it . . . . ."

XVI

At six every morning the first bus arrives, and the passengers alight, looking sleepy and dishevelled, and rather discouraged by their first sight of Pipalnagar. When they have gone their various ways, the bus is driven into the shed. Cows congregate at the dustbin, and the pavement dwellers come to life, stretching their tired limbs on the hard stone steps. I carry the bucket up the steps to my room, and bathe for the last time on the open balcony. In the village, the buffaloes are wallowing in green ponds, while naked urchins sit astride them, scrubbing their backs, and a crow or water-bird perches on their glistening necks. The parrots are busy in the crooked tree, and a slim green snake basks in the sun of our island near the brick-kiln. In the hills, the mists have lifted and the distant mountains are fringed with snow.

It is Autumn, and the rains are over. The earth meets the sky in one broad, bold sweep.

A land of thrusting hills. Terraced hills, wood-covered and wind-swept. Mountains where the Gods speak gently to the lonely. Hills of green grass and grey rock, misty at dawn, hazy at noon, molten at sunset, where fierce fresh torrents rush to the valleys below. A quiet land of fields and ponds, shaded by ancient trees and ringed with palms, where sacred rivers are touched by temples, where temples are touched by southern seas.

This is the land I should write about. Pipalnagar should be forgotten. I should turn aside from it to sing instead of the splendours of new places.

But only yesterdays are truly splendid. . . . And there are other singers, sweeter than I, to sing of tomorrow. I can only write of today, of Pipalnagar, where I have lived and loved.

THE END

Printed by B. V. REDDI at Prasad Process Pvt. Ltd., 188 N.S.K. Salai, Madras-600 026 and published by B. VISWANATHA REDDI on behalf of CHANDAMAMA PUBLICATIONS, Chandamama Buildings, Vadapalani, Madras-600 026 (INDIA). Photo typesetting: Prasad Process Pvt. Ltd., Editor: MANOJ DAS.

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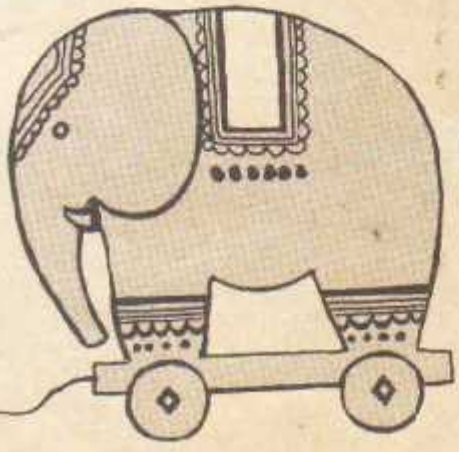

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