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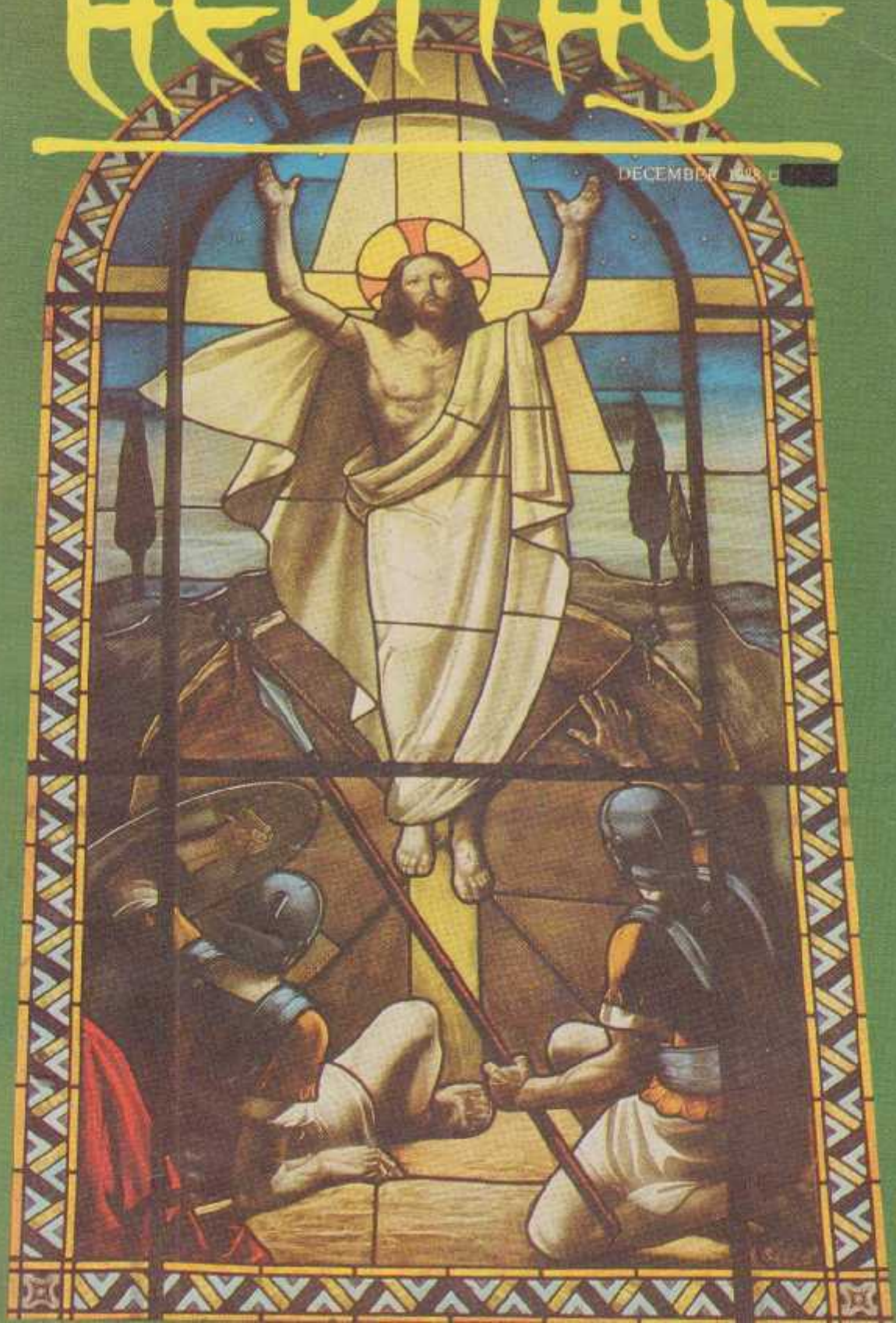
THE HERITAGE

DECEMBER [illegible]



Equally with the philosopher and the king, Indian civilisation was advanced by the potter, the weaver, the carpenter, the mason, the sculptor, the ironsmith and the goldsmith.

Now, as then, they need patrons: for inspiration and survival.

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DECEMBER 1988, Vol.4 No.12.

THE HERITAGE

Features and Fiction for Today and Tomorrow

COVER

Stained glass closely associated with the churches, is a craft of antiquity. On the occasion of the Christmas, we focus on it. (See article and photographs in this issue.) Photograph by T.N.N. Prasad.

THE HERITAGE AND THE READING HABIT OF THE PEOPLE

Any Indian who is not a downright hypocrite will admit that the reading habit of a whole generation has been affected — thanks to the multiplication of film and political periodicals. The other group of journals which thrive today are career-boosters, giving the readers a lot of information helpful to them to pass tests. The fourth category of journals are devoted to "selling" of India — through pictures and easy-reading features to be glanced through while one is travelling by air. They are, generally very well-produced and one does not need much common sense to understand that their "selling" India zeal is motivated by 'buying' advertisements.

If I congratulate THE HERITAGE after this observation, I believe you will accept it without any false modesty on your part. You have a great cause and you have yourselves said it directly and indirectly more than once — the cause of reviving the healthy and intelligent reading habit. You combine articles of high intellectual quality with those that read easy. Anybody who sees the magazine understands that you take your cause seriously. But you suffer from one great drawback: lack of publicity. I learnt about the magazine myself only this year and if I have shown its copies to fifty people, only five of them seem to have read it earlier and perhaps five more had seen it, but never read it. I feel impatient with the sad fact that such a magazine is not sufficiently known!

Calcutta —**Romen Ganguly**

We are grateful to you for what you are doing as an admirer of THE HERITAGE. We publish your appreciation with the hope that other individual readers like you, who too feel concerned with the situation, will do their bit to bring the magazine to the notice of their friends. That will go a long way in supporting the cause.

—**Editor**

"DREAMS OF FEAR NEED NOT BE FEARED"?

I put a question mark to the title of the brief essay by Devapriyo (Sept. '88) because my own experience showed that bad dreams are *at times* revelatory in nature. I lost my son Prasant who died of drowning in the sea near Pondicherry on the 21st of August 1988. On the night preceding the day of this occurrence my daughter saw in her dream the dead body of a person dearest to her. Alas, we were to soon receive the news of the death of my son.

Bhubaneswar —**Damodar Puhan**

Devapriyo replies:
Our deep sympathies, along with prayers for the departed soul, are with you. Perhaps you are right that your daughter's was a revelatory dream. In fact I began the series on dreams (in January '88 issue) with a reference to a similar dream of mine. I have already discussed the dreams that are revelatory in nature in the earlier issues. The chapter you have referred to concerns dreams of a certain kind which are symbolic. Their external form may show something ominous or fearful, but they may mean something different. I repeat, the significance of a dream can best be interpreted by the dreamer himself or herself — provided he or she has the knowledge of the subject — and if he or she is capable of an objective assessment of his or her subjective feelings and moods during the occurrence of a dream.

WOULD-BE CONTRIBUTORS TO PLEASE NOTE

- All would-be contributors are expected to have studied the different sections of THE HERITAGE.
- Instead of sending complete articles, please send the themes of your work to the editor.
- Articles submitted must be type-written. Please give your address in the article itself even if a letter accompanies it.
- In view of the large number of submissions received, it is not practical to return articles that cannot be used unless they are accompanied by stamped self-addressed covers.

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I hope, if one reads with attention all the articles in the series I have written so far, one can put one's dreams in their proper places with reasonable accuracy.

THE WORLD OF DREAMS

I am beholden to Devapriyo and THE HERITAGE for this invaluable series. I often dream of flying and now I understand, at least to an extent, why I do so. What is commendable in this series is, it takes a comprehensive view of the phenomenon of dream, embracing Eastern and Western theories on them, embracing psychology and myths, and give us convincing explanations.

Pune —**S. Rajan**

To the best of my knowledge, your series on dreams is the first study of its kind where mythology, psychology and last but not the least, spiritual insight are given their due places.

Delhi —**Rashmi Kumari**

"PHILOSOPHY OF THE OLYMPICS"

The article (Oct. '88) by Visvavasu was an excellent piece of historical and down-to-earth analysis of the greatest show on earth.

The Greeks launched it for the sake of physical excellence and mutual understanding and cooperation among societies for a better living. Centuries later Baron Pierre de Coubertin exclaimed, "O Sport! You are peace!"

But how sadly the humanity now heading towards the 21st century has failed to justify their expectations!

Bargarh — **Radhakanta Seth**

"FREEDOM OF THE PRESS"

I am delighted that such sound views (Oct. '88) are still found in print. Polarisation on the basis of castes, creeds and professions have cut our society asunder. Editors and journalists are no exception to this unfortunate state of affairs. They cry in unison when their freedom is endangered, but they rarely remember when they violate the privacy and dignity of the others covertly or overtly.

Yes, I agree with you that all said and done, we must uphold the freedom of the press, for the lofty reason you have stated: "Freedom of the spirit is a must and hence freedom of the Press." How much I wish that every editor, every journalist realised its import.

Bombay —**Mahesh C. Gadgil**

"THE THIRD CHILD"

Your second editorial *(Tides of Time)* in the October '88 number was an unusual piece. It read humorous, yet it carried a message in all seriousness. You should have carried it as the first editorial in another issue, for, this issue's first editorial was devoted to as serious a matter as the freedom of the Press.

Ahmedabad —**J. K. Vyas**

The Third Child dealt with the fundamental problem of building a sound personality of a man and it had a cautious message for the parents. Nothing can enrich the child as much as love can. And if the parents begin to look upon the third child as an intruder into their family and show signs of intolerance towards it, they will do irreparable damage to the child's personality and, consequently, to the society.

Vani Vihar —**Prativa Manjari Rath**

"The Technique of Enjoyment" by Swami Ranganathananda, published in the October '88 number of THE HERITAGE is a part of the author's work *The Message of the Upanishads.* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan).

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THE HERITAGE

EDITORS, DAUGHTERS AND DESTINY

We have reasons to be proud of the standard maintained by India's major newspapers. Only a few of them pursue the primrose path to easy popularity.

This comes to mind while reading a report that an actress won libel damages of £ 300,000 and cost of fighting the case amounting to another £ 50,000 against a British newspaper which had dished out stories of the actress's romance with a member of the Royal household. The actress's marriage had already run into troubles and the scandal totally wrecked it. The newspaper's enthusiasm has now been snubbed in a matching style by the actress's lawyer who forgets euphemism and describes the people who run it as "scoundrels" and asks, "wherein lies the courage to use falsehoods to attack a young girl whose marriage is on the rocks and a member of the Royal family who cannot take proceedings?"

It is possible for the affluent to go to the court, specially in countries where the courts are not trailed by unending backlogs of unresolved cases. But what about the Indian situation?

Let me share with you an incident that continues to cause me pain since my student days whenever it surfaces in my memory. The scene is an old Indian town; time: 1954.

It was an awfully hot summer noon. If I sat talking to the editor of a fortnightly in his residence-cum-office, it was more out of my fear for the heat outside than for my interest in his speech. But I respected him. He was a celebrity in some sort.

I could see an elderly man with a bundle tucked under his arm, peeping into the room. He was sweating. He had a companion behind him looking as rustic and dusty as himself.

"What do you want here? Both the subscription and distribution departments are downstairs," said the editor, surveying them.

The two visitors got over their hesitation and told their story. They came from a distant village in another district. They had just arrived by train and had walked to the newsmagazine's office. The older of the two had a daughter who had become a "Gram Sevika"—a social worker employed by the Government in the rural areas. A woman official was still a rarity in the villages and as such aroused strange reactions—a mixture of disapproval and suspicion on one hand and curiosity and appreciation on the other. But the male superiority was easily offended and such feelings often found vent in circulating scandals.

"My daughter's marriage was to take place the next month. But that is out of the question now, thanks to the story in verse your esteemed paper carried last week!" the father said. He sat down on the floor. He tried to keep his head steady with both his hands. "You know, there are people who are just envious of my daughter. They have not pardoned her for her audacity in competing for a job and getting it. She has to talk to several men in the course of discharging her duty, specially to the office-bearers of the Panchayat. What can she or I do if someone views it as a sign of her bad character?" He threw the question at nobody in particular. What surprised me, he had no rancour in his tone; he betrayed no grudge against the editor. He was as though talking in terms of Destiny.

"I'm so sorry!" said the editor. "It is so irresponsible of our correspondent to play with your daughter's future!" commented the editor. "We will surely say it in our next issue that the observations regarding your daughter were unfounded!" he added.

"Will you?" asked the villager, wiping his sweat. "That may do us some good," he said hopefully and stood up. "I am lucky to be able to see you immediately. We can now catch the next train to go back! God bless you." He picked up his bundle of bedding and clothes and left, after bowing to the editor.

I happened to be still in that town when the next issue of the journal struck the stands. I picked up a copy to see how well the editor had kept his promise. I went through the pages again and again. No, there was not a word of regret over the character assassination of the poor Gram Sevika.

I met the editor and reminded him of his assurance to the villager. "Oh, that!" he smiled sophisticatedly when he remembered what he seemed to have already forgotten. "My young friend, if we have to publish regrets and corrections and errata as demanded by the aggrieved parties, we have to publish a supplement to every issue of our journal," he said in his characteristic witty way.

The father must have anxiously leafed through the pages of the journal for several issues and then given up. He would have resigned to the conclusion that the editor's silence, like his frivolity, was yet another prank played by Destiny.

Thirtyeight years have passed. There are more magazines, more journals and more newspapers today. But is there any greater exercise in conscience or restraint? It is necessary for the editors and correspondents to put this question to themselves periodically.

ACCENT ON MADRAS

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

India's city-system has a certain uniqueness about it. Our four major cities are distributed over four zones of India; Delhi in the north; Madras in the south; Bombay in the west and Calcutta in the east.

1989 marks the 350th birth anniversary of the city of Madras, though, it seems, the modern Madras was founded on an ancient town in existence for centuries prior to it, with the Mylapore area as its hub. What the city signified to the British would be evident from the very title of Lieut. Col. H.A. Newell's book (1919): MADRAS, THE BIRTHPLACE OF BRITISH INDIA. But Newell admits that the birthplace of British India was already a great place in terms of the native history: "At the beginning of the Christian era Mylapore is reputed to have been a large and prosperous city, the capital of a Hindu Raja. Tradition likewise asserts that the sea has since encroached some three miles or so, swallowing up the ancient metropolis..."

THE HERITAGE will commemorate the 350th anniversary of the city with several special features and rare paintings and photographs of yesterday appearing in its next (January 1989) number. We hope, this will unfold to the people of today unfamiliar glimpses of a city so familiar to them.

YESTERDAY'S MOOD AS CAPTURED BY SHANKAR

THE NEW YEAR RESOLUTION

As we are stepping into a new year, it is worth having a look at the situation as it prevailed in 1968 From ***Shankar's Weekly*** *January 7, 1968.*

THIS MONTH IN

DECEMBER 1

1963: Nagaland becomes the sixteenth state of India.

1965: Border Security Force came into being.

DECEMBER 2

1911: King George V and Queen Mary are the first British King and Queen to land in India at Bombay. Gateway of India of Bombay is erected at that spot.

DECEMBER 3

1884: India's first President Rajendra Prasad is born.

1971: Indo-Pak war breaks out and the President declares National Emergency. It results in the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent sovereign State.

1984: In the world's worst industrial pollution disaster nearly 2,500 people die and more than 50,000 people need medical treatment in Bhopal due to leakage of a toxic gas from Union Carbide's insecticide plant.

DECEMBER 4

1796: Baji Rao II is made the Peshwa.

1829: The "Suttee" is abolished by Viceroy Lord William Bentick.

1967: The first Rocket ROHINI—RH—75 is launched from Thumba.

DECEMBER 5

1943: Japanese aircrafts bomb Calcutta during the day time.

1950: Sri Aurobindo passes away at Pondicherry.

DECEMBER 6

1956: B.R. Ambedkar expires.

DECEMBER 7

1782: Hyder Ali of Mysore expires.

1825: The first steamship 'Enterprise' reached India at Calcutta.

1879: Chakravarty Rajagopalachari is born.

DECEMBER 8

1879: The great revolutionary Jatindra- Nath Mukherji, alias Bagha Jatin is born.

1900: The celebrated dancer Uday Shankar is born.

DECEMBER 9

1484: Blind poet saint Surdas is born.

1898: Belur Math is consecrated.

1946: Constituent Assembly's first meeting is held in Constitution Hall of New Delhi.

DECEMBER 10

1942: Dr. Dwerkanath Kotnis dies in China.

DECEMBER 11

1687: East India Company is authorised to grant the first Municipal Charter to Madras.

1780: General Goddard captures Bassein fort of Bombay.

1845: First Anglo—Sikh war begins.

1946: Babu Rajendra Prasad is elected Chairman of the Constituent Assembly.

DECEMBER 12

1758: French General Lally seizes Madras fort held by

INDIAN HISTORY

the British.
1803: Under the Treaty of Deogaon between Bhonsle and East India Company, Orissa comes under Company rule.
1882: The Bengali novel 'Ananda Math' by Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the source of the song "Bande Mataram", is published.
1911: King George V and Queen Mary held Delhi Durbar. The King annuls the first partition of Bengal.
1965: The first military tank 'Vijayanta' rolls out of the assembly line at Avadi.
1971: Parliament approves abolition of privy purses and privileges of the former rulers of Indian princely states.
1976: Remains of martyr Madan Lal Dhingra arrives in New Delhi from U.K.

DECEMBER 15
1950: Vallabhbhai Patel expires.

DECEMBER 16
1971: Indo-Pakistan ceasefire is agreed upon. East Pakistan emerged as the independent sovereign Bangladesh.

DECEMBER 17
1929: Bhagat Singh and Rajguru fire at and kill Assistant Police Superintendent Saunders, whom they mistook to be Scott, Superintendent of Police.
1940: Gandhiji suspends Individual Satyagraha Movement.

DECEMBER 18
1398: Amir Timur captures Delhi from Sultan Nasrat Shah.
1960: National Museum is inaugurated in New Delhi.
1961: Indian army marches into Portuguese possessions Goa, Daman, Diu, Nagar Haveli, etc. and liberate them after four and a half centuries of Portuguese occupation.

DECEMBER 19
Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur is beheaded in Delhi.

DECEMBER 20
1757: Clive becomes the Governor of Bengal
1942: First Japanese air-raid takes place on Calcutta.

DECEMBER 22
1241: Lieutenant Bahadur Tair of Mongol Chief Hulagu Khan captures Lahore.
1853: Saruda Ma, consort of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Dev, is born.
1877: Srinivasa Ramanujam is born.
1940: Manabendra Nath Roy announces foundation of Radical Democratic Party.

DECEMBER 23
1465: Virupksha II of Vijaynagar is defeated in the battle of Tellikota by the combined Muslim forces of Ahmadnagar, Bidar, Bijapur and Golconda.
1912: Viceroy Lord Hardinge II enters New Delhi on an elephant to initiate the new imperial capital, but is injured in a bomb incident.
1968: India's first meteorological rocket MENAKA was successfully launched.

DECEMBER 24
1524: Vasco Da Gama, the Viceroy of Portuguese India, dies at Cochin.
1921: Visva Bharati is established by Rabindra Nath Tagore.

DECEMBER 25
1660: Murad is executed by Aurangzeb.
1771: Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II is installed on Delhi throne under the protection of Maratha power.
1861: Madan Mohan Malaviya is born.
1876: Md. Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, is born.
1892: Swami Vivekananda goes to the rock off the shore of Kanyakumari where he continued to live for three days.
1924: The first All India Communist Conference is held in Kanpur.
1972: Chakravarty Rajagopalachari expires.

DECEMBER 26
1904: The first cross-country motor-car rally between Delhi and Bombay is inaugurated.

DECEMBER 27
1707: Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib is born.
1911: The national anthem 'Jana Gana Mana...' is first sung in the Calcutta session of Indian National Congress.

DECEMBER 28
1688: Sivaji's son Sambhaji is captured by Aurangzeb and is subsequently tortured to death.
1885: Indian National Congress (earlier known as Indian National Union) has its first session in Bombay with 72 representatives from all over India, with W. C. Bonerji as its President.
1921: Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) opens Victoria Memorial Hall in Calcutta.

DECEMBER 30
1530: Babar dies in Dholpur near Agra.
1803: East India Company gains control over Delhi, Agra and Broach by a Treaty with Scirdia. Thus the Mughal Emperor came under British control from the Marathas.
1879: Ramana Maharshi is born in Tiruchuzhi near Madurai.

DECEMBER 31
1599: The royal consent is given to East India Company
1929: At the stroke of midnight at Lahore, Gandhiji leads Congressmen in a vow for 'Swaraj'.

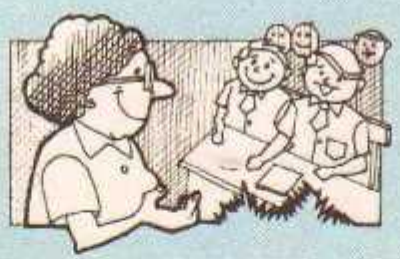
Response From Beyond

Mr. U Nu, the former Prime Minister of Burma, has called the Members of the Parliament dissolved in 1962 to resume session.

Some of the responses are likely to sound weird and eerie.

Explaining The Phrase

Uncertainty dominates the American economy following the election of Mr. Bush.



"Do you now understand what is meant by beating around the bush?"

A Simpler Solution

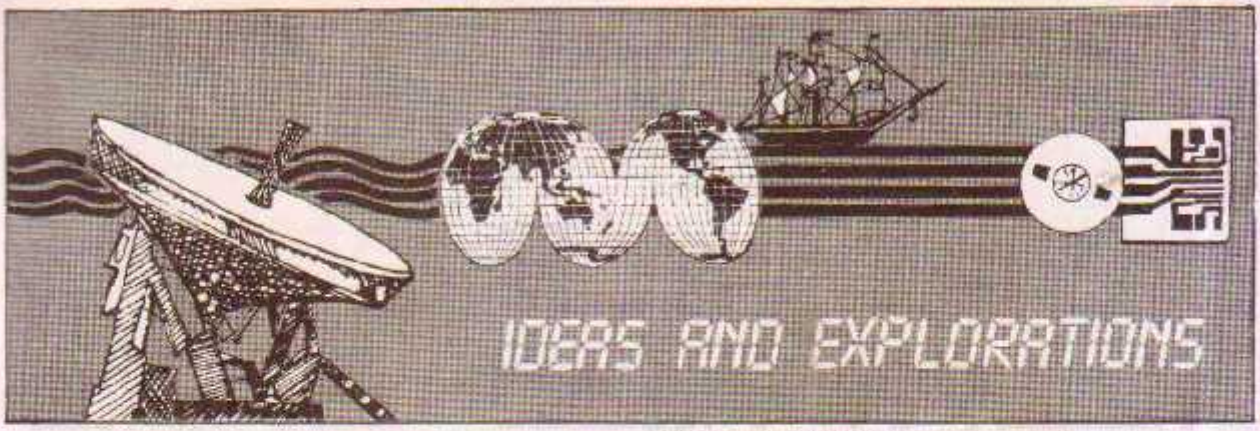
Vanniar Sangham to show black flags to Ministers.

"The council of Ministers resolves that all of us wear black glasses all the hours to spare the different organisations the trouble of showing us black flags."

Gods Are Of Different Stuff

Mr. N.T. Rama Rao considers the Buddha a social reformer and not as God.

Not the new versions of God, in any case.



RIGOROUS DIET, YOGA AND MEDITATION CAN REVERSE ARTERIAL DISEASE

Life-style changes alone, without drugs or surgery, can halt or reverse atherosclerosis, a hardening of the arteries that can lead to heart attack, researchers have found.

They cautioned that the findings were preliminary results of a study involving only a few patients. But researchers said the report could have far-reaching implications for the treatment of heart disease.

The finding involved a group of patients with heart disease who were put on a rigorous programme that included a low-fat diet, stress management and moderate exercise.

"It is extremely important to show that without drugs, just by changing people's life-style, you can get coronary artery disease to regress," said Dr. Alexander Leaf, director of the Cardiovascular Health Centre at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. "This is going to shake up physicians thinking."

"If the results continue to be as good from the study, it will be very important in making physicians consider alternatives to heart transplants, bypasses, and the other high-tech medicine they've embarked upon," added Dr. Leaf, who is chairman of the Department of Preventive Medicine at Harvard Medical School and a former chief of medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital.

The subjects in the study had all been told, on the basis of an angiogram, that they had severe heart disease. Fifty patients were randomly assigned to one of two groups. One group received traditional care, including advice on lowering their cholesterol levels and blood pressure, as well as advice on quitting smoking.

Those in the second group were given a more demanding regimen. They were put on a low-fat, vegetarian diet in which less than 10 per cent of calories was from fat, and most of that was unsaturated. This level is less than a third of the fat in the average American diet. The patients also received an individual programme of moderate exercise, and they were given stress-management training, including yoga and meditation. Those who smoked were required to quit.

A comparison of the 12 patients who have finished the rigorous programme with 17 who followed the customary treatment showed that those in the experimental programme had measurable widening of arteries—*New York Times.*

ROCK MUSIC SUICIDAL?

Rock music often encourages nihilistic tendencies and is unhealthy for young people, says Dr. Martin Kobialka, Dean of Health Education and professor of Philosophy in a Pune college.

Speaking at a seminar on "drug abuse and enforcement" organised by the customs and central excise, he said that banning rock concerts and music in India would check drug abuse.

He cited Jon Bonzo Bonham, Peter Farndan and Brian Jones of the famous rock group "rolling stones" and Dennis Wilson of "beach boys" who died young because of drug abuse. Besides, Dr. Kobialka said the rhythm and volume of rock music produces chemicals inside the brain which are similar to drugs.

He said the deaths in West Germany due to drug-consumption rose from 29 in 1970 to 623 in 1979.

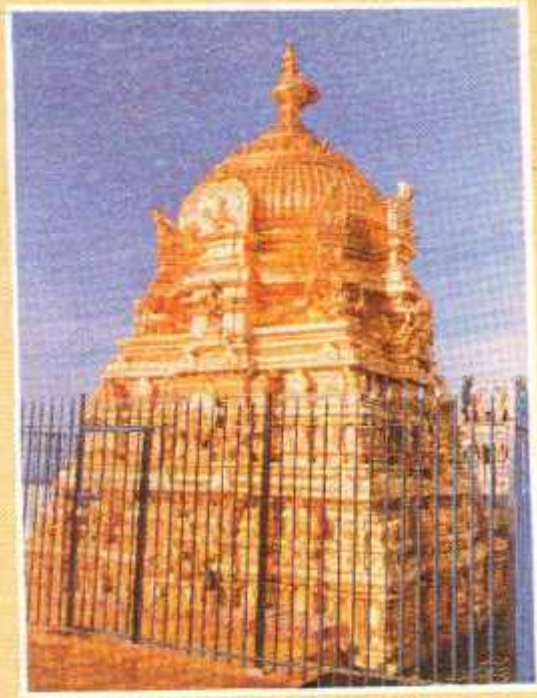
He said the seizure of hashish, opium, cocaine and other narcotics increased manifold the World over and praised Indian authorities' determined drive against drug traffickers.

MIDAS TOUCH ON MIDAS

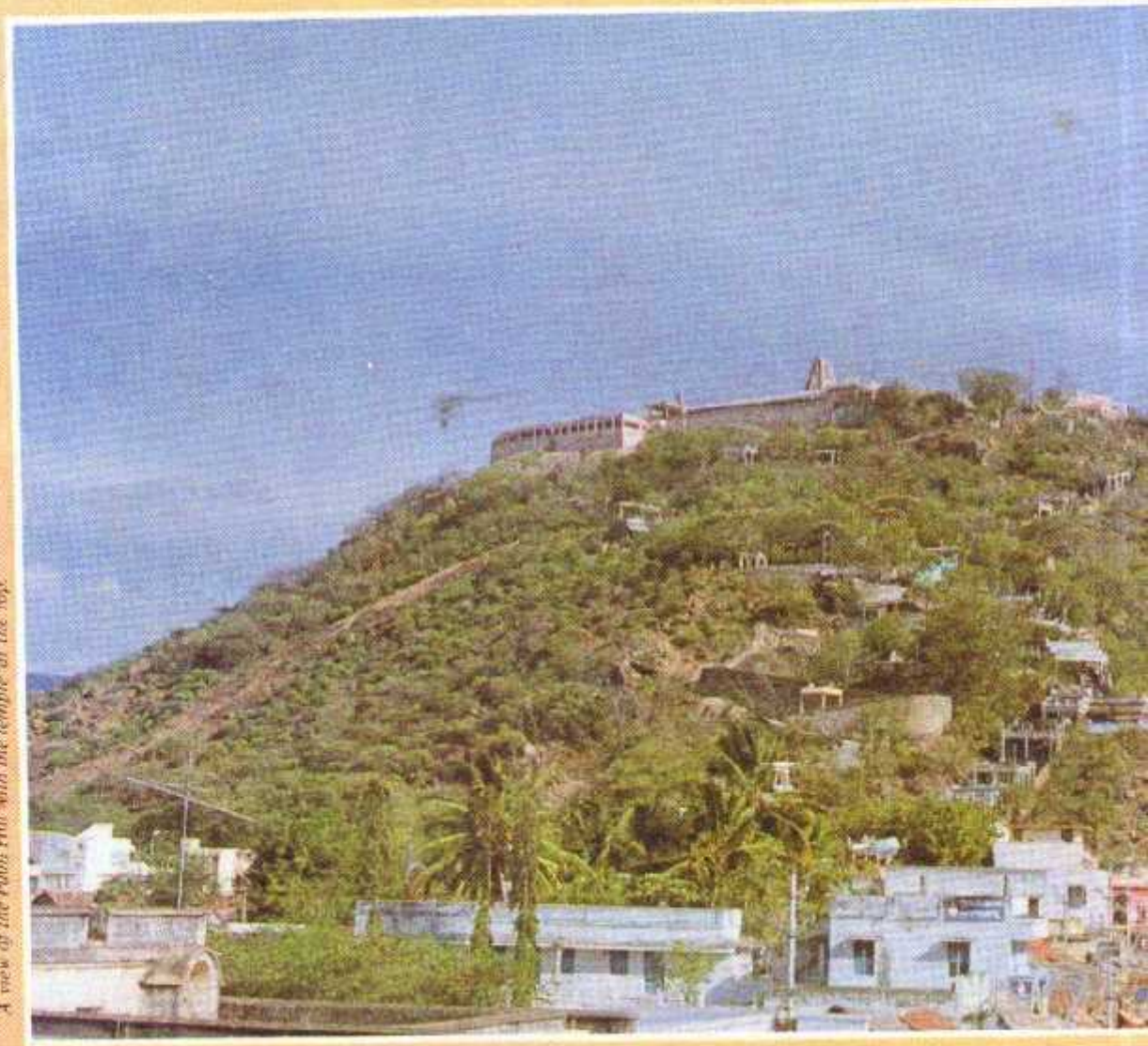
British archaeologists have reconstructed the face of the legendary King Midas working from a skull found more than 2,500 years after his death, reports AFP, quoting, *The Sunday Times.* The portrait in clay of King Midas (circa 715 to 676 B.C) who, according to legend, turned everything he touched into gold, is exhibited at Manchester museum.

The tomb of King Midas of Phrygia was discovered by a team of U.S. archaeologists in 1957, at Gorion in what is now Turkey. The two men responsible for putting a face to the legend are Dr. John Prag, the museum's archaeology keeper, and Mr. Richard Neave, an anatomist at Manchester Medical School.

The Rajagopuram of the Hill Temple.



The Golden Vimanam of the Hill Temple.



A view of the Point Hill with the temple at the top.

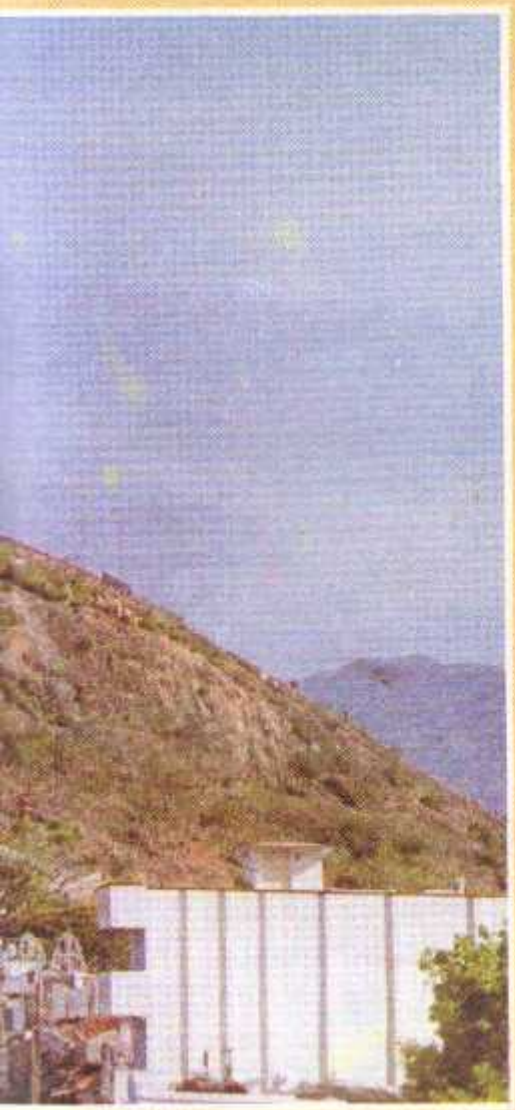
PALNI : ABODE OF THE YOUNG ASCETIC GOD

by K. S. Ramamurti

Atop a solitary and tranquil hill dwells the deity—His unusual image made of herbs.

The Palni Hill—First impressions

THE Palni Hill, sacred to Lord Muruga or Kartikeya, nestles amidst a group of hills forming the Palni Range, an off-shoot of the Western Ghats. The hill, flanked by the Idumban Hill to the East, rises in a picturesque valley overlooked by the Varahagiri and Kodaikanal ranges. Standing aloof and shy, this green-clad hill rises to a modest height of 450 feet and is too conspicuous a landmark to be missed by anyone who travels between Madurai and Coimba-



Sri Palaniandavar Utsavar

tore, particularly because of the presence, on its top, of a temple with its *gopuram* rising aloft in the traditional fashion so characteristic of South Indian architecture. The grey-and-gold towers set against the azure cloud-capped mountains and the beauty of the wooded slopes, all reflected in the steady bosom of the lake that lies at the foot of the hill do make for a scenic charm which is matched only by the resplendent spectacle the hill presents after sunset when the lamp-decked slopes and illuminated arches and towers make for a very different scenic excellence. One can never miss too the quietude, the perfect tranquillity and peace that reign on the top of the hill, along the wooded slopes and in the shady avenue that encircles the entire hill.

Lying between the hill and the Vaiyapuri lake, as it is called, is the area popularly known as Adivaram which comprises the ancient Thiru-avi-nankudi temple, a network of shops and choultries and the Giri Veedhi which is a mile-long road circling the hill, a shady walk where one inhales not only the fresh air of the mountains that lie beyond but also the aroma of a variety of flowers. This road is the scene of all the colourful pageantry and procession on festive occasions. In the months of *Chitrai* and *Vaikasi* (May-June) when the Kadamba trees are in full bloom shedding their sweet fragrance, one can see thousands of pilgrims taking this road for their *giripradakshinam* (walking round the hill) in the early hours of dawn when the air is believed to be charged with great healing properties because of the presence of countless number of medicinal herbs growing on the hill-side. As one walks round the hill enjoying the beauty of the lotus-covered Idumban tank and the endless stretches of green that lie beyond, one can see a chain of institutions, the Nagaswaram College, the Thevaara Isaippalli, the Sadhuswami Mutt and a number of smaller mutts, each of which has a role to play in the life

View of the temple

The Winch

Courtesy Information and Public Relations Dept. Govt. of Tamil Nadu.

of the temple, not to speak of a number of shrines big and small which house a galaxy of gods, goddesses and saints.

In Legend and History

The hill and its environs which form a unique world of their own are only one part of the city of Palni, for as one moves away to the north and the west one walks into a rather busy and crowded town with its shopping complexes, restaurants, theatres, hospitals, colleges, schools, industrial units, a heavy network of transport systems and posh residential localities. But, even here, one finds a number of temples and shrines which tend to reassert the city's links with the past in the midst of all the inroads modernity has made into it.

Palni is indeed a city with a lofty past, both legendary and historical. The story goes that Agasthya, the great sage who received from Lord Shiva two hills as a gift, the Sivagiri and the Sakthigiri, had to carry them to Podigai in the South all the way from Mount Kailas. He made Idumban, his disciple and the preceptor of the Asuras, carry the two hills on his shoulders slung on either side of a rod like a gigantic balance or *kavdi*. In spite of the special mantras taught to him by Agasthya for overcoming strain and fatigue, the Asura felt the need for some halt and rest. When, however, he stood up to resume his journey after a brief respite, he found that the hills could not be moved. The bewildered Asura climbed to the top of the Sivagiri to espy the surroundings for a clue to the mystery and found to his amazement a youth wearing the meagre attirement of an ascetic, standing there holding a baton in his hand.

The youth who stood there

was none other than Lord Muruga who had chosen to renounce all possessions as a result of his differences with his father Lord Shiva over a prize fruit which he had lost to his elder brother Lord Ganesha. He had refused to be pacified even when his divine mother, Goddess Parvathi, told him not to worry about the fruit he had failed to win since he himself was a priceless fruit. It is said that the word Palni derived from the utterance "*Palam Nee*" which meant "Thou art the Fruit". It was this angry young God which Idumban had to contend with and in the trial of strengths which ensued, the Asura was killed. But, Agasthya appeared instantly on the scene and along with Idumbi, the fallen Asura's wife, pleaded for mercy. Idumban was restored to life and to His Grace. Idumban prayed to the Lord that he might be granted the privilege of standing sentinel at the entrance to the Hill as the *Dwarapalaka* and that whoever offered vows carrying the *kavdi* on his shoulders, as he had carried the two hills, might be blessed. This is the background to the time-honoured custom of carrying the *kavdi* to Palni and to all shrines sacred to Muruga. Tradition has it that it was after this event that the Hill at Palni became sacred to Muruga who chose to remain on the top of the hill as an ascetic, as an *andi* ('the penniless'), as the very embodiment of total renunciation. As one who holds the *baton* in his hand he has become *Dandayuthapani* and as a God who is eternally young and yet the very embodiment of *jnana*, he has come to be called *Jnanadandapani*, the youth who became *guru* to his own father Lord Shiva.

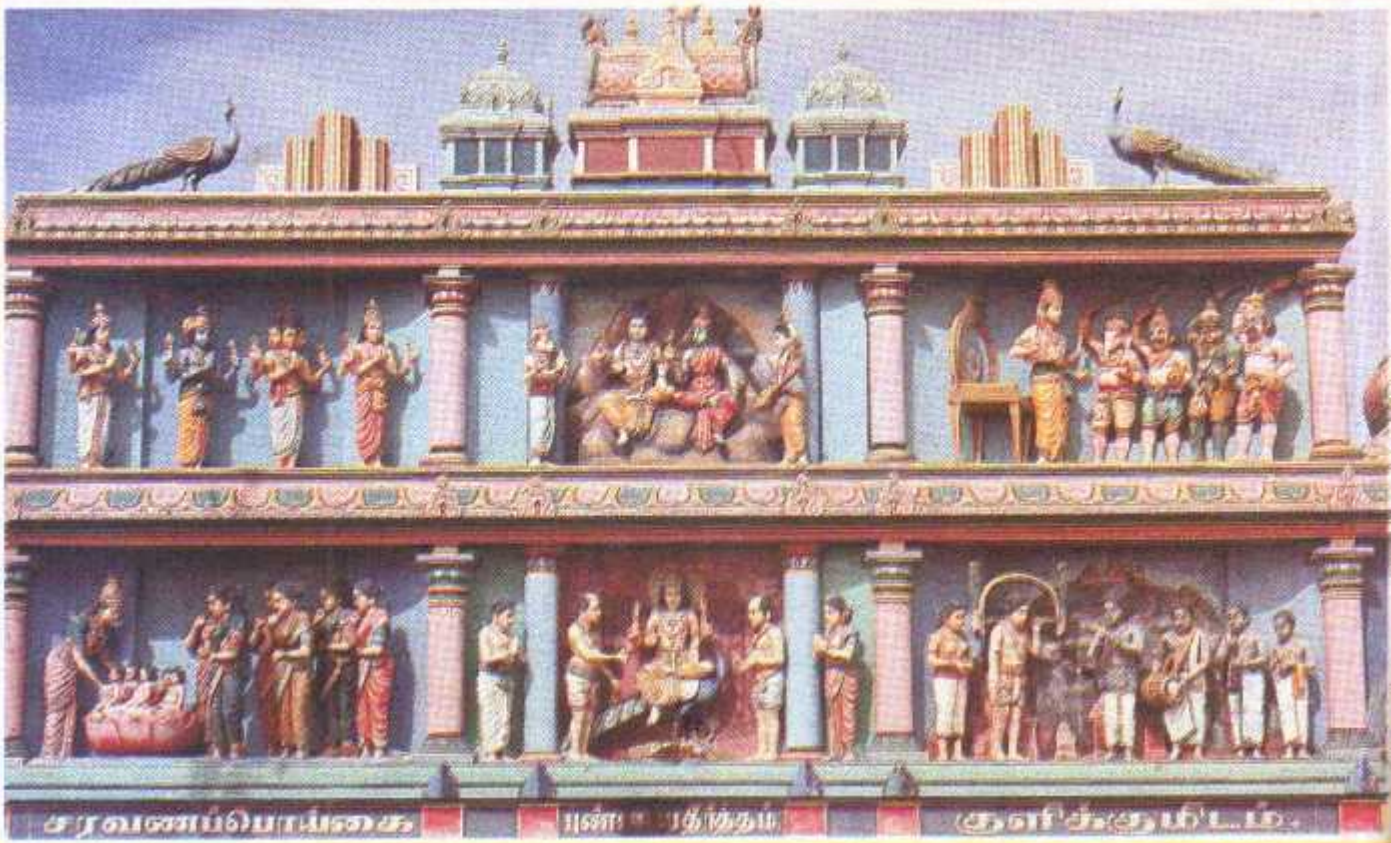
While this is the story which emerges from legends and oral traditions, we have historical versions too of the origin of the Palni temple. It is said that the name Palni derives from 'Pothini', the capital of one of its Velir chiefs which later formed part of Vyhavur of the Chera land. Palni seems to have been the capital of an extensive territory till it was taken over by Mysore and then gone over to the East India Company in 1792. We have a more interesting account of the origin of the Palni temple in a manuscript in Mackenzie's collections which is confirmed by local accounts. The consecration of the deity Lord Dandayuthapaniswamy in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple is reported to have been done by Siddha Bogar, the great mystic and saint who had founded his ashram there. It is believed that, the great *siddha* that he was, who knew the mysteries of herbal cures, Bogar made the idol of Palniandavar in the *sanctum sanctorum* with a compound of nine poisonous medicines. Hence, it is that high curative properties are attributed to the sandalwood paste and other materials such as milk, honey and fruit juices which are poured over the idol during *abhishekams*, for they are said to contain the effect of these powerful herbs. In fact, the sandal-paste applied to the idol during the last puja of the day, which is allowed to stay overnight, is transformed into a very, potent medicinal stuff, a *panacea* for many incurable diseases. This sandal-paste, known as *rakkala sandanam*, is scraped the next morning after the first pooja and given away as *prasadam*. Miracle stories of devotees who have got cured of chronic and incurable diseases like leucoderma through the consumption of this sandal-paste followed by a walk around the hill and other austerities, are so many that there is always a heavy demand for this sandal-paste.

There are again a number of historical accounts which refer to the descendants of Pulippani, one of the great disciples of Siddha Bogar who seems to have started formal worship at the shrine and introduced a few modes and routines of rituals. The various carvings and inscriptions on the temple walls bear witness to the contributions made by Chera kings to the growth of this temple. As the patron-deity of *Kurinji* or hilly tracts, Palniandavar is said to have a soft-corner for Kerala. In fact, the well-being and prosperity of Kerala are attributed to the fact that the image of the Lord of the Palni Hill is west-facing. This accounts again for the large number of pilgrims pouring into Palni from Kerala right through the year. It is also said again that Pulippani's descendants were the officiating priests at the principal shrine and that it was Ramappayyan, a General of Tirumalai Naik who introduced Adi Saiva Sivacharyas as recognized official priests conferring on the older class of priests a number of other hereditary rights relating to the service at the temple. In fact, it is the descendants of Pulippani who still hold the right of doing Puja service at the small shrine of Bogar over the *Bogar Samadhi*.

There are other stories, based on legend as well as recorded history, relating to the Hill Temple and the thirty-two constituent temples scattered in and around the town.

The Pilgrim's Progress

Yes, a pilgrimage to Palni is an experience indeed as unique as it is exciting. The pilgrim who goes up the Hill is conscious of not only the presence of an age old spiritual power but also of the burden of his own past which he carries with him, perhaps pausing at every step to recall and atone for his sins and failings and purifying himself step by step. The simple and uninitiated find their expiation in carrying the heavy burden of the *kavdis* on their shoulders as they climb up in a state of fasting, observing a number of other austerities which make for spiritual purification through physical suffering. The goal of their journey up the hill is spiritual salvation for which every experience en route prepares them. The pilgrim who stands at the highest point of the hill should realize that having reached the peak of one's wordly ambitions and efforts one should think of giving away and giving up. Lord Palniandavar stands there as the symbol of total



Temple Tank

renunciation though, ironically, it may be that most pilgrims 'give Him' only in the hope that they will get back from Him in a hundred other ways. But to the true devotee the giving itself is the thing, irrespective of rewards and recompenses. The devotion and love of the pilgrims manifest themselves in several other ways too: Many pilgrims offer their hair and it is a sight to see even young damsels giving up happily their long and lustrous locks so lovingly cherished and tended over the years. Some do *angapradakshinam*, rolling round the entire outer quadrangle with wet clothes on their bodies, hunger in their stomachs and devotion in their hearts, feeling neither the heat nor the pain. There are again devotees who pay for having the Lord taken out for a procession in the Golden Chariot or for special poojas when Palaniandavar takes on a series of *abhishekams* followed by expensive *alankaras* like the *Raja Alankara* or the Golden attire (*Thanga kavacham*). Some of them become so excited and hysterical at the climatic hour of a pooja when the *Deeparadhanai* is performed to the Lord who stands in His full splendour and beauty to the accompaniment of the sublime *nagaswaram* notes and the solemn overtones of vibrant temple bells that they send out involuntary cries "Arohara", "Arohara". And the Lord of the Sacred Hill matches all these scenes with a characteristic smile on His face, a smile that can be as mysterious as it is bewitching. One wonders whether the mendicant Palniandi is amused that so much of wealth, so much of pomp and so much of love are lavished, on one who has renounced everything and that attempts are made to transform the *andi* into a king. The paradox seems to be most central to what may be called the Palni cult.

Sri Palniandavar in the golden chariot

The Eternal and the temporal

Life at Palni seems to be a continual flow from the past into the present, a perpetual interaction between the eternal and the temporal. The city has its specific spatio-temporal setting, its own socio-cultural milieu and its own socio-economic structure but everything seems to emanate from the Hill Temple and controlled

Sri Pulniandavar

by the temple. The entire economy of Palni is determined and sustained by the pilgrim crowds who flow into it. Cottage industries like the *Vibudhi* or *Panchamirtham* industry thrive because of the large number of pilgrims who buy them and hundreds of families live only on the patronage of the pilgrim. The fabulous income that the temple gets through the *Hundi* and the various pujas and offerings is used for many constructive activities and for educational and charitable purposes. Palni Devasthanam is running two big Arts Colleges offering post-graduate education, schools, polytechnics, hospitals, orphanages and a school for deaf and dumb. The haulage winch is a great boon to pilgrims who are aged, crippled or disabled and it brings a great deal of income to the temple though the very pious still believe in reaching the temple the hard way, climbing the steps. In this and everything else, one finds tradition and custom making compromises with the demands of changing times and the gifts of modernity; but the temple itself remains as a symbol of permanance, as a symbol of what is eternal and enduring in our culture and way of life. The life of the temple goes on as ever with its endless cycles of daily routine, the temple bells chiming at appointed hours reminding the world of each of the poojas and again with the endless cycles of festivals which each month, each season brings. One always remains conscious of being a part of these recurring cycles even as one is absorbed in the lesser cycles of daily routine at the mundane level. The rhythms of the drums which fill the air from time to time announcing some festival or holy event, while they reiterate what is permanent and unchanging in that socio-cultural milieu, blend very naturally with the rhythms of an evanescent work-a-day life. This is perhaps the way in which one experiences eternity in time in most pilgrim centres but it is especially so in Palni.

In this section we have carried different kinds of articles, all revealing to us the existence of unknown laws and forces influencing our life or secret powers inherent in ourselves. What follows is yet another unusual experience. The entire incident narrated is a dream — a rare dream spanning the dreamer's childhood and a later period in one sweep. Even the point at which the story begins is a part of the dream. The dream seems to tell us that there is a plane of consciousness where we think, move and act as coherently as we do in the physical plane. Once in a while the experience of that plane takes a distinct dream-form.

Editor.

THE HILL OF THE LAMA

by Champak Chatterji

This is a tale out of my childhood. Had it ended there, I could have explained it all away as something of a fantasy. As it is, I can make nothing out of it — but there it stands, the small metal Buddha on the mantel-piece where the mellow evening light strikes it... I digress. Let the tale be told.

We, that is my parents and myself lived in a small Indian hill

station. As an only child, I remember lying alone in the upstairs bedroom of our red-roof d house, watching the distant mountains. They fascinated me with their peaks covered in clouds, their shoulders bare and grey while the lower slopes would be swathed in green. I watched them as I watched the world inside the glass marbles I played with — eager to feel something which I knew I could not touch. At night there would be the sound of rain. Thunder, the wail of the wind and great walls of water coming down. I would snuggle deep into the blanket and wait for the rain to stop and then hear the other music — of water dropping endlessly from the wet leaves and branches of trees. It was then that I would hear the brassy bray of the gyaling — the Tibetan long horn. It seemed strange that anybody should be playing at that hour. I would forget but the long and distant call of the gyaling, would return again and again, teasing, tantalising.

One day, more out of curiosity than out of a sense of adventure, I decided to find out what all this was about. The gyaling sounds seemed to come from the wooded hill opposite the town and it was there I went. The trees were thicker and bigger on that side and no one seemed to be around. I was on the point of turning back and giving up my half-hearted search when I saw the lama. He was at some distance from me and shuffling along with the sideways gait peculiar to those who live high up in the mountains. He had seen me also, for he halted and allowed me to catch up. We walked along together.

He led me to a small hill-side path that corkscrewed up. It ended in a clearing where a slate roof topped a pile of rough stones arranged into three wall-like structures. The fourth side was open and it was through this that I entered the lama's house — if it could be so called. He seemed quite alone and yet happy with himself. He puzzled me. Did he play the gyaling and that too at nights? He seemed to agree but made no attempt to explain further. What about someone to talk to and play with seeing that there was no one around? For answer he pointed to the Buddha image in the corner and chuckled. He gave me a cup of buttered tea and stated with a very straight face that he was not lonely at all and that the image talked to him, played with him and occasionally when there was nothing to do, even went with him for a little walk! I looked at the lama searchingly but he did not seem to be joking at all. It was soon time for me to return home and somehow it did not seem right to repeat what had happened to my parents. I did not want to be laughed at — nor did I relish the idea of the old man being ridiculed for his eccentric but harmless ways.

There it rested. I am not quite clear as to why we moved away from our hill station. We lived in the hot and dusty plains, hopping from one place to another. Then as I moved into my teens one after the other both my parents fell ill and passed away. A kindly uncle took me in tow. I went abroad. Soon I was an established man with a good career. Life abroad, marriage and a charming family soon banished all memories of a lonely and distant childhood.

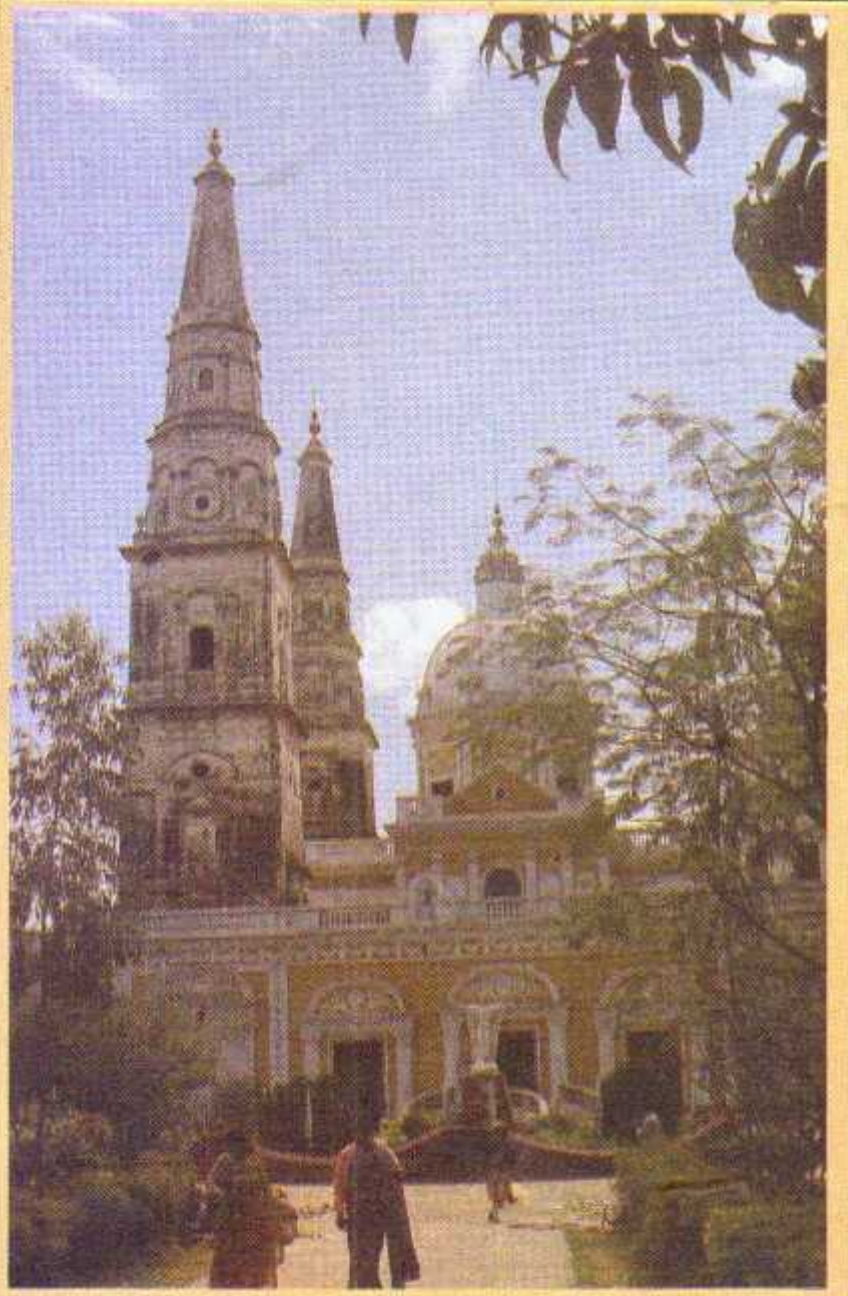
A business deal brought me back to India many years later when I was well into my middle years. Suddenly it occurred to me to go back to the hills of my childhood which were not far away. I hired a car and drove up. Although there were changes in the hill-station, there was still much that I could recognise. Our house was still there, converted into a guest house. Its red roof was still there and the driveway which led up to it glowed with poinsettias as of old. Since it was to be down memory lane, I thought of spending a night in my old room. Fortunately it was empty and the elderly couple who owned the hotel were delighted to let me have it.

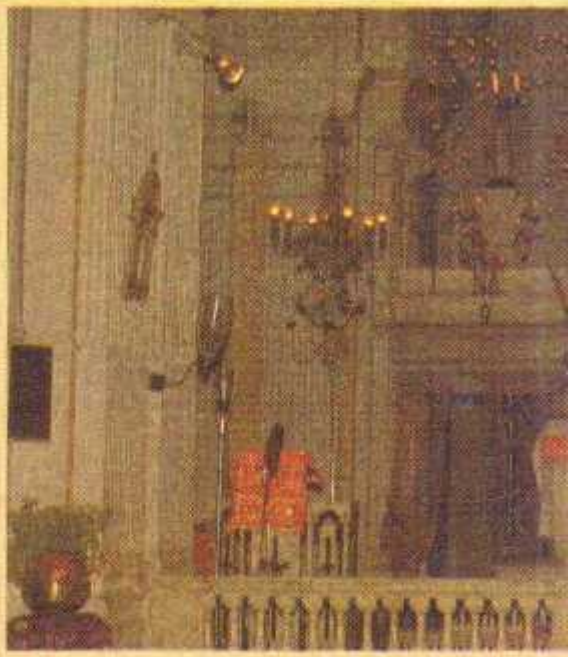
After an early dinner I retired to my room. The night was balmy. I opened the windows, the mountain air rushed in and the years seemed to fall away. I must have fallen asleep when a sound awakened me. It was deep into the night. There seemed to be nothing the matter but then unmistakably through the darkness came the sound of the gyaling — two short notes and then the three long ones, distant and calling. It seemed inconceivable that the old lama could still be alive but I determined to see him first thing in the morning before I left for back home.

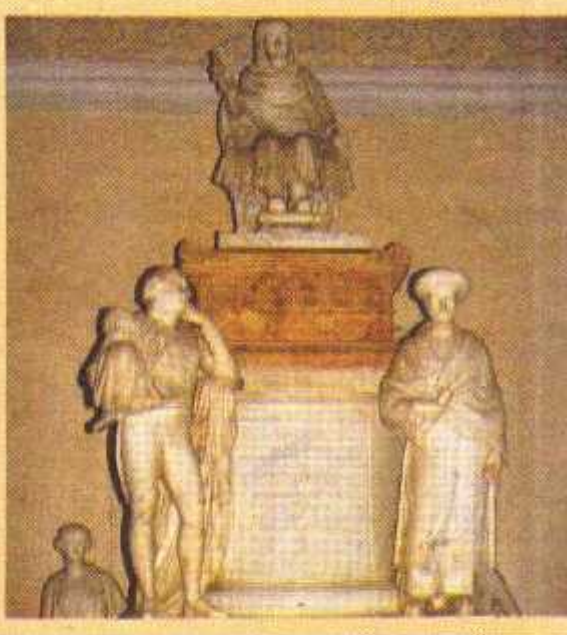
Early morning I went out. What with the gap of years I was little unsure of my directions. I asked the local people about the old lama and the gyaling that he played and his small hill side abode. They stared. None it seemed had seen or heard of the lama — not even the town greybeards who had been living in the place for the last forty or fifty years. Everyone assured me that I was mistaken — old childhood memories could never be trusted. Try as I might I could not trace the small hill path that led to the place where I last recalled meeting the lama. At last, since time was running out, I came back to my hotel to pack.

The bills had been paid and downstairs a car waited to carry me back. I went up to my old room for a last look. My leather attache lay open. Inside it and on top lay a small bundle wrapped in paper which I could not quite place. I unwrapped the bundle. A small note fell out. I read, "My son, I am sorry I could not meet you though you came to look for me. However since I could not meet you, I have sent you my friend instead. He has played and talked to me but now I give him to you."

In the bundle was the same small metal Buddha which I had seen so many years before with the lama.







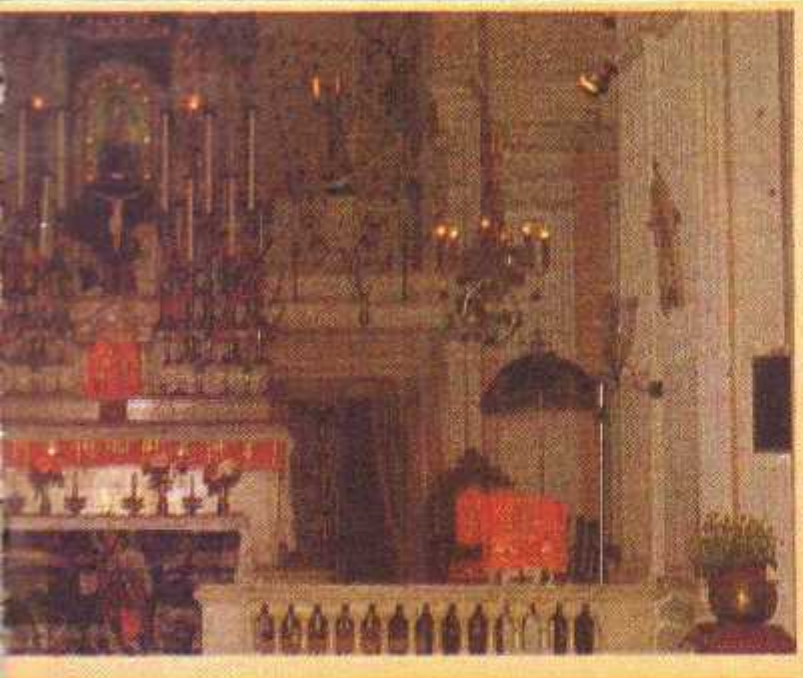
Clockwise
Side view of the church from main entrance

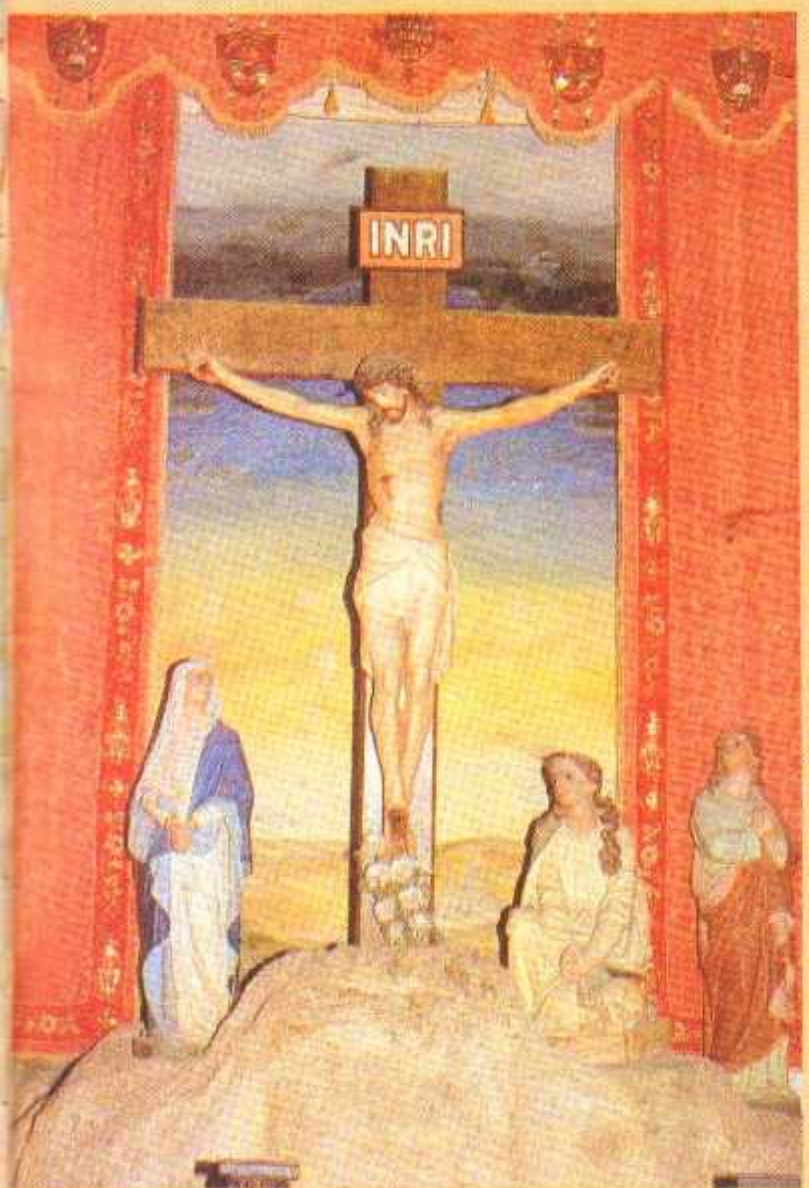
Main Alter

Main Shrine

Front view of the church

Begum (Sitting on top) with Dewan Rai Singh and Bishop Scott





THE BASILICA OF SARDHANA

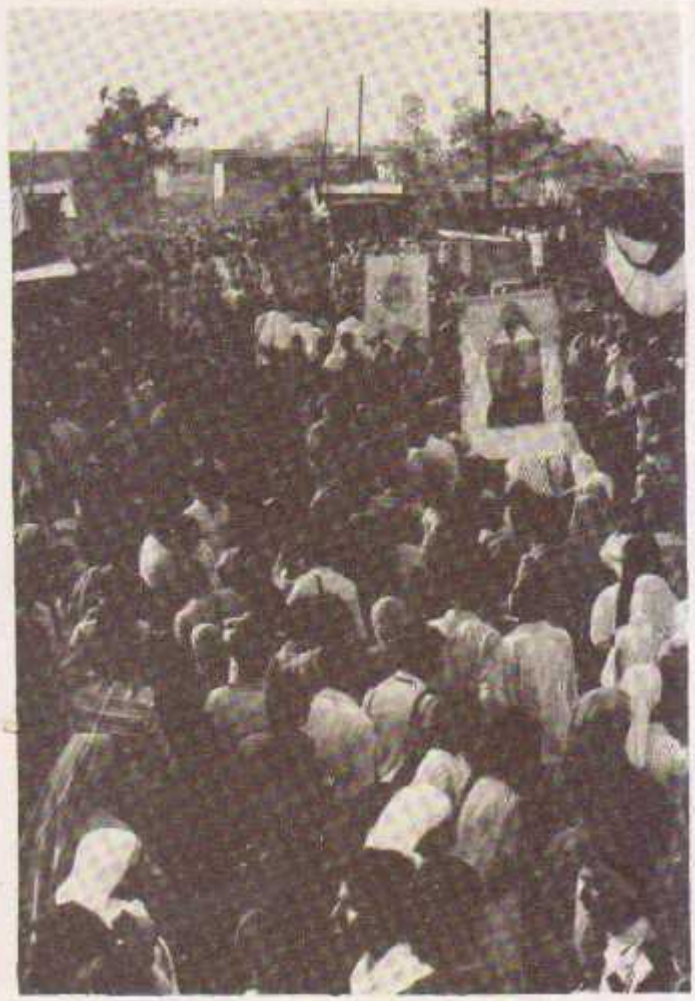
Text & Photos
by James B. Masih

AS you leave Meerut along the road to Muzzaffarnagar, Roorkee and Dehradun, you see a big yellow sign-board on your left with SARDHANA printed in bold black letters. After some 13 miles you find a big artificial lake on your left. This lake, as well as another further down, was excavated in order to raise the ground for the Basilica of Sardhana built by Begum Samru.

The Begum's life can to some extent be compared to Cinderella's. The prince charming to whom she owed her rise was Walter Reinhardt, a soldier of fortune. He was among the Frenchmen under M. Law who resisted Clive in Chandernagore in March 1757, and later found service under Mir Kasim. There Walter rose to distinction. He trained the Nawab's troops and commanded a brigade. He was nicknamed Samru.

Soon he was to raise a body of mercenaries: four battalions of infantry, one of cavalry and an artillery unit of six field guns; all officered by Europeans. For seven or eight years it was hired by the Raja of Jaipur and the Jat chieftain of Bharatpur. But it was the Nawab Najud Khan who finally awarded him his greatest reward when Samru's troops crushed the Nawab's rebel chieftain Zabta Khan. Samru was granted Zabta Khan's jagir which extended from beyond Muzzaffarnagar to around Aligarh, straddling the land between Ganga and Jamuna. Thus in 1773 came up the principality of Sardhana, since Samru chose the village Sardhana as his capital.

Sacred Image of 'Our Lady of Graces'.



Procession in the town with the sacred image of 'Our Lady of Graces'

It was in 1765 that Samru had captured the heart of Ferzana, a fifteen year old dancer in Delhi. She was a daughter of Latif Ali Khan, a nobleman of Arabian ancestry, who had settled in the town of Kotna, 30 miles north-west of Meerut. But she was just six when Latif Khan died and her mother was forced to bring her to Delhi into the dancing profession. Samru married her according to the Muslim Law and she never left his side, going even into the battlefield. In fact so successful was she as a soldier, leader, companion that on Samru's death their troops (by then comprising 82 Europeans and 4000 natives) petitioned Emperor Shah Alam II to instal her as Samru's successor. Thus when she was barely 30, Begum Samru began her long and eventful rule of Sardhana. Fearless and capable in battle, she was upright in all her dealings, generous to friends and ruthless with enemies.

On 7 May 1781, she embraced the Catholic faith in the Church of Agra. Then onwards she seems to have concentrated on building churches, palaces, bridges etc. After a brief illness she died at the age of 86.

Her most ardent desire was to raise the most magnificent Church in the whole of this country. The building of the Basilica of Sardhana cost four lakh rupees, at a time when top masons were paid an equivalent of 25 paise per day. The chief architect was Anthony Reghlini, an Italian from Padua. It was no idle boast the Begum made when she wrote to Pope Gregory XVI, "I am proud to say it is acknowledged to be the finest without exception in India."

Since a Catholic church builds its altar so that the priest and his flock face East, the direction of the rising sun which is the symbol of our Risen Lord, Jesus Christ, here too the church's facade faces East. The one inevitable shortcoming therefore is the view from the main entrance. Not only does one first see the Basilica from its side but the main gate too has not been built as impressively as it could have been made had the church not been so near the town.

The Roman domes, a large one over the sanctuary and two smaller ones surmounting the side chapels are probably modelled on the domes of St. Peter's in Rome. Eighteen imposing doric pillars form part of the veranda that runs around the church up to the wings. Although this veranda creates the impression of a square church, inside it is a perfect Latin cross.

The altar is of tastefully designed white marble, while its steps and the platform are inlaid with black and brown marble. The sanctuary floor too is covered with black and white mar-

Begum's Reign – Woman and Poor Old Man

Begum's Courage Woman and Angel of Time

ble. The Church is dedicated to Mary. On the left, as one walks up the aisle, is the chapel enshrining the famous Sacred Image of Our Lady of Graces and on the right the chapel of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. At the back of the altar, in the sacristy, are kept the relics of the Holy Cross, St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Thomas and St. Xavier, presented by Pope Gregory XVI to Begum Samru.

In the wing on the left is the tomb of Begum Samru. A monument by the Italian sculptor Adamo Tadolini of Bologna one of the best known disciplies of Canova, it was commissioned by David Dyce Samru when he was in Italy on his way to England and was completed in 1842 at the cost of two and a half lakh rupees. It is an eighteen feet Carrara marble comprising eleven life-size figures and three panels in bas-relief. Around the panels stand six symbolic figures and others immortalising persons connected with the Begum.

The Begum's statue on top is of a distinctive brown marble. Dressed in the Muslim style with a Kashmiri shawl, she holds the scroll of the Moghul emperor Shah Alam II. Immediately below stand four figures. David Dyce Samru the great grandson of Samru whom she had adopted and who was conferred a knighthood by Pope Gregory XVI. Next is Innayat-ullah, the commandant of her cavalry and her first aide-de-camp. On her right stands Diwan Rae Singh, an ancestor of Motilal Nehru. Behind him, breviary and rosary in hand, stands Julius Caesar Scotti, the first and only Bishop of Sardhana, for court intrigues and the takeover by the British forced him to leave.

The central bas-relief depicts the Begum presenting a golden chalice to the Bishop during the blessing of the Church in 1829. The four symbolic figures of women just below this panel stand for Courage, Prudence, Time and Prosperity. The fifth is an old man representing the poor who benefited in the Begum's rule. Next are a child offering an apple to the Begum and its mother with another child at her breast. The last scene is meant to symbolise the Begum's maternal affection for her subjects.

Today the church is a centre of Marian devotion, such as perhaps the Begum did not dream. Twice a year, in March and November, pilgrimages are organized here and people all over the country throng its holy precincts. The image of Mary is also unveiled every Saturday when Mass is held and for the whole day on Feasts of our Lord and our Lady. But for the faithful it is unveiled any time they seek Her Blessings.

WONDERS OF THE CORAL REEF

by Binoy Gupta

Another view of a coral reef

View of a coral reef

INNUMERABLE creatures from gigantic whales to microscopic planktons live in the oceans. But the greatest concentration of life is found in the shallow waters around coral reefs.

The coral reefs themselves are the skeletonian remains of millions and millions of coral polyps. Each polyp is a small animal—a bag of tissue hardly a centimetre and a half across—encased in a cup of calcium secreted by it.

The polyps can reproduce sexually as well as asexually. The former mode is slow and wasteful, for of thousands of laryae only a few survive. The latter mode of reproduction is at least a thousand time faster. Each polyp grows or buds a sister, a replica of itself, which in turn buds many more; in much the same manner in with living cells multiply.

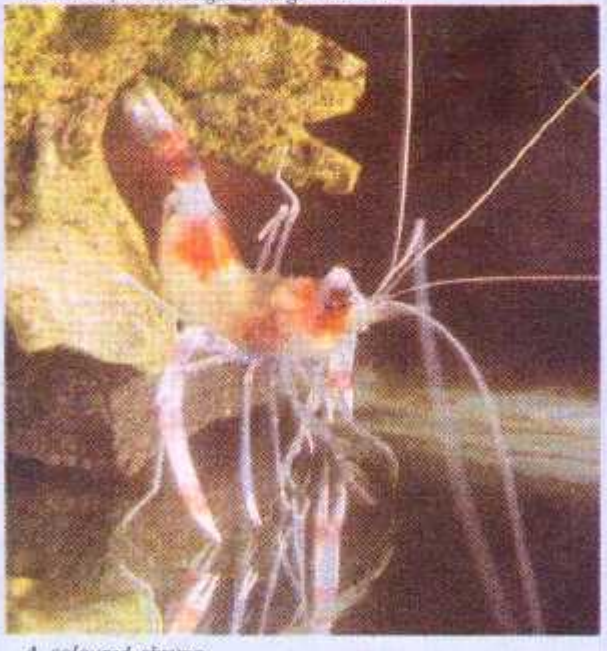
When the polyps die, they leave behind their calcium homes on which their descendants settle, grow and die: eventually forming gigantic reefs. The reef building polyps need warm, clear waters and plenty of sunlight. Therefore, they thrive only in shallow tropical waters. Different species of corals assume distinctive shapes which give them the names by which are commonly known, such as stag horn or brain coral.

A coral reef is an unbelievably beautiful eco-system. Myriads of different life forms congregate here. Generally, all life forms assume colourations which help them blend into their surroundings. For this reason, most fishes are dark blue, green or brown on the top and silvery white on their under-sides. But for inexplicable reasons, the fishes as also other creatures of the coral reefs, are not only vividly coloured in sharp

An angel fish

A clown fish amongst a large anemone

A Trigger Fish



A coloured shrimp

contrast to their surroundings, but also exhibit spots, stripes and other markings which make them surprisingly conspicuous.

The coral reef is Mother Nature's show case of her most colourful creations. But the very existence of these reefs are at stake. Left alone, they would withstand any natural calamity and thrive as they have done in the past. But human intervention and pollution, mining and over fishing—could wipe out the reefs and their inhabitants beyond resurrection.

There are beautiful coral formations around the Andaman and Lakshadwip group of islands, near Rameswaram and in the Kutch. We must conserve them. Scuba Diving, snorkelling, glass bottom boats, transparent tunnels, glass-windowed observation chambers: these facilities and many more must be provided to enable viewers observe the wonderful inhabitants in their natural surroundings.

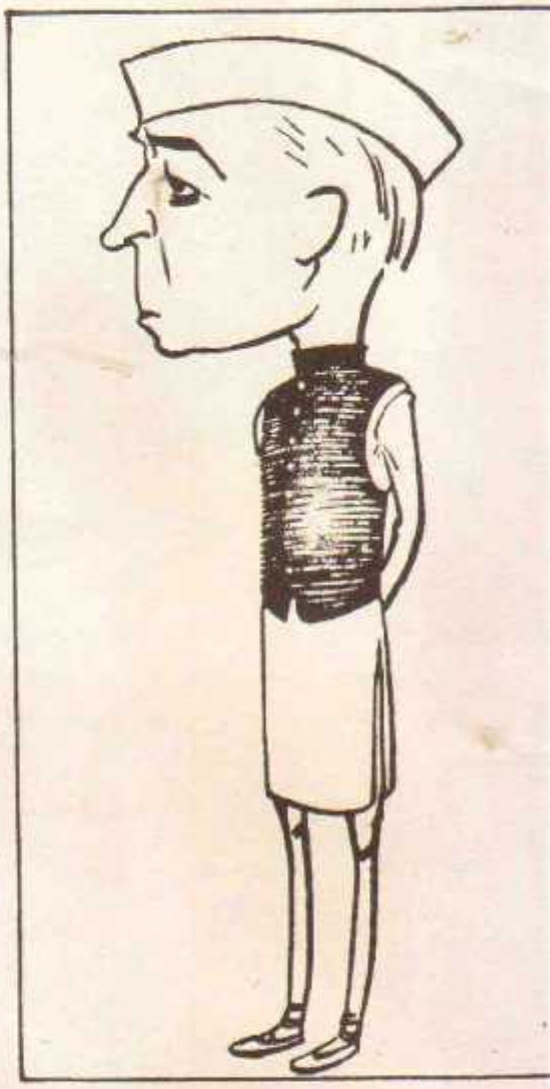
The accompanying photographs would give a glimpse of this fantastic eco-system and its inhabitants.

"NEHRU'S IMPACT ON THE CREATIVE MIND"

by Manoj Das

While the birth Centenary of this illustrious son of India has inspired several articles on his role in the history of recent times as a statesman, we focus briefly on another aspect of his personality.

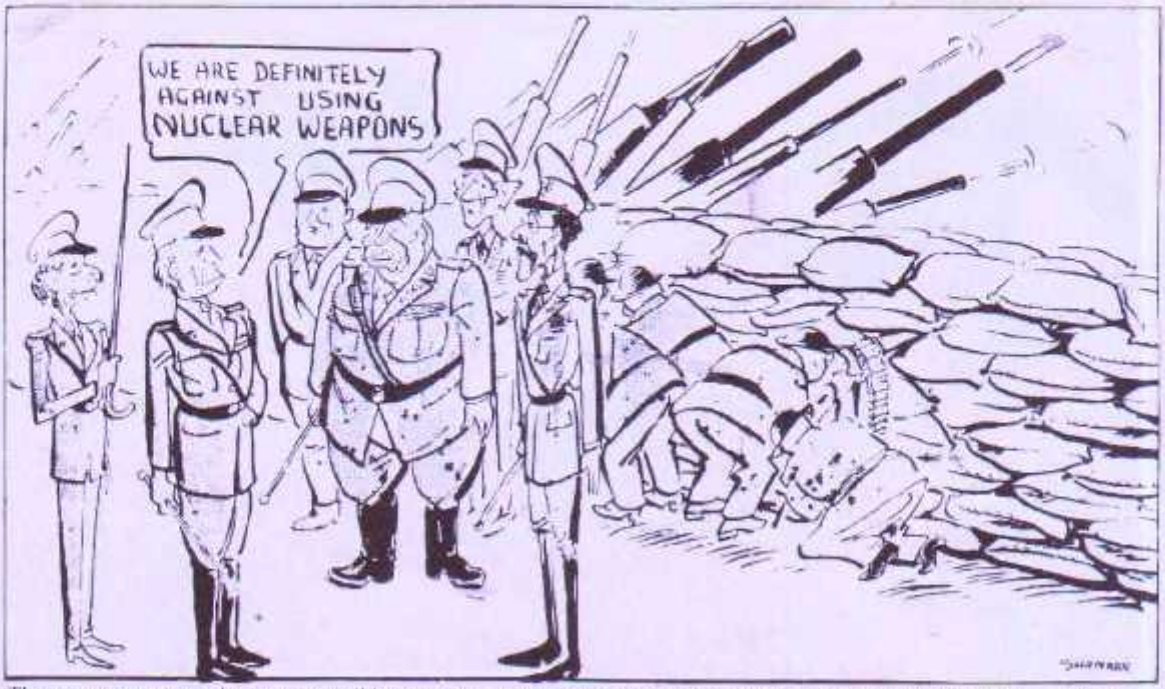
The cartoons reproduced here are by Shankar, who was well admired by Nehru.



THERE is nothing as powerful as an idea for which the time had come said Victor Hugo. And time no doubt had come for the emergence of India as a free nation, for India's voice to be heard in the arena of world politics and for the voice to be echoed in the hearts of dozens of countries of Asia and Africa still seething under colonial yoke. Time had also come for the dignity of man to be asserted. Unless that was done, how can any claim for freedom be justified?

Time, indeed, had come for all these ideas to dominate the human mind and to slowly begin materialising. In Jawaharlal Nehru these ideas found a dynamic herald. No wonder that he should catch the fascination of the people and become the spokesman of the age. And, as such, his impact, naturally, should be marked in a discernible way on the creative works of his country and his time, for, the creative writers and artists were more sensitive to the events around them – events which were by no means superficial. Apart from this prime factor which is that Nehru had become almost the symbol of the emergent ideas of his time, a few other cardinal factors too were there for his positive impact on the mind of the people in general and on the creative mind in particular. There is hardly an Indian who looks at anything however mundane or pragmatic without philosophising about it. And Nehru was a specimen par excellence, at a considerably high level, of this peculiar trait of the Indian. Nothing he uttered or wrote, be it concerning the law and order situation or the five year plan, which was devoid of a distinct touch of philosophy – words often bright with originality. But he could always find an easy access to the creative mind because he was an artiste in his communication. How much dream was mingled with his aspirations should be evident from a letter he wrote in 1930 from Naini Tal to his sister Krishna Hutheesing. He visualised "a magic city, full of dream castles and flowering gardens and running brooks where beauty and happiness dwell and the ills that this sorry world suffers from can gain no admittance." He further visualises a life that could become "one long and happy endeavour, a ceaseless adventure, to build the city of magic and drive away all the ugliness and misery around us."

Nineteen thirties and forties were decades when the Indian creative literature laid great emphasis on the theme of the sanctity of man. "Man above all" — *Sabar Upare manus satya* — Chandidas had once said which Tagore now sung in a new vocabulary and this sentiment was popularised among the intellectuals by Nehru, who wrote in his *Discovery of India*, "God we may deny, but what hope is there for us if we deny man and thus reduce everything to futility?" That was the time when while on one hand in various Indian languages a good number of fiction were being written with



The government has taken every possible measure to meet the challenge of the employees' strike with firmness — Report. Krishna Menon, S.K. Patil, Govind Ballabh Pant, Morarji Desai and Gulzari Lal Nanda.

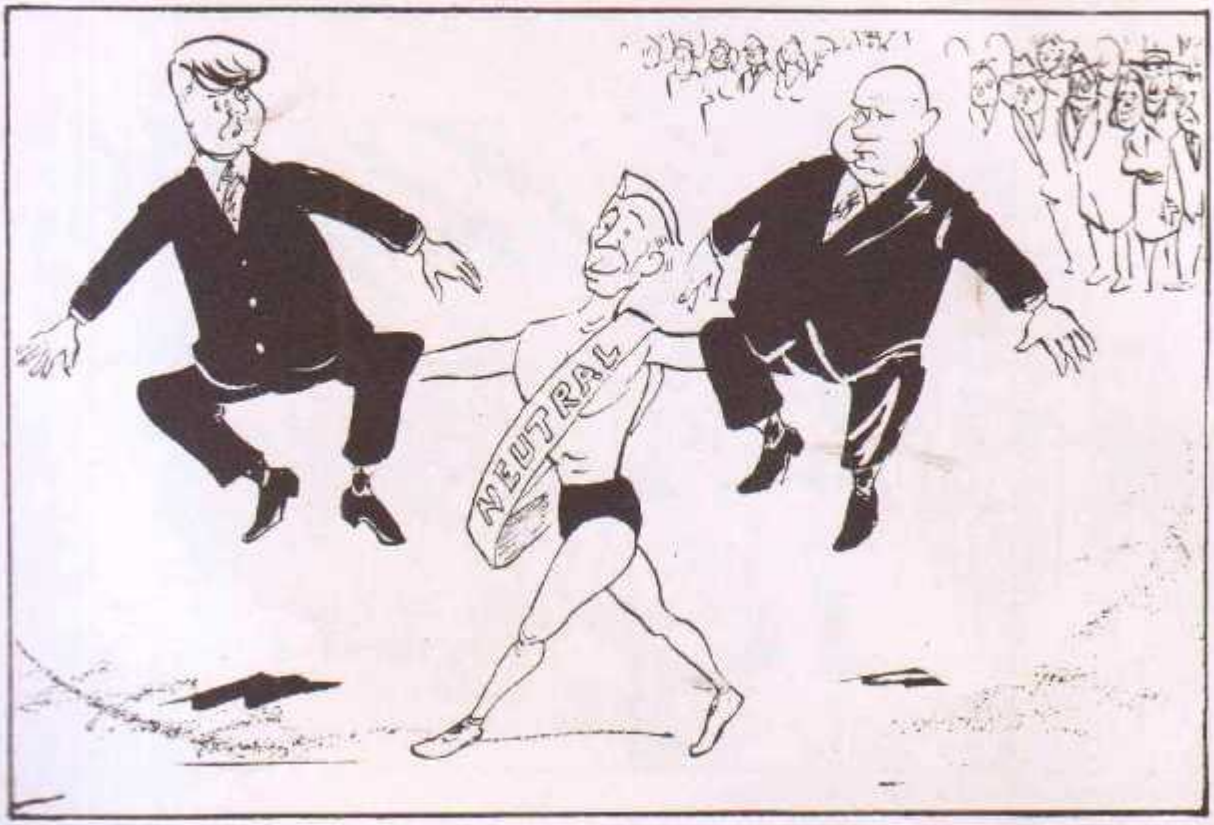
patriotic heroes possessing marked humanitarian traits, on the other hand, the Indo-Anglian prose was taking a distinct form. To this formation of great significance, I mean, the formation of the Indo-Anglian prose, Nehru's *Autobiography* was a contribution of untold value. Its popularity was unparalleled. This remarkable story of an individual inextricably involved in momentous events unfolding the destiny of his nation, humour, brought a new awareness in Indian literature. It gave confidence to and set an example before several individuals who had life-stories worth telling, and autobiographical literature got a boost. As Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, puts it, this book was "the naivete of the emergent Indo-English style of writing".

AT HOME AND ABROAD

India's prestige has risen in the international sphere.

An excellent clue to assess Nehru's mind, which also proves an equally excellent clue to the nature of his impact on other minds, is the trilogy of 'history' written by him. One is a history of the world, the *Glimpses of World History*. The second is a history of his life, the *Autobiography*. The third is a history of his country, the *Discovery of India*. This as if mapped out the precise situation of the modern man — his personality placed in relation to his own country and the world. This was the outlook that was coming into vogue among the better-educated section of the people: One must feel one's own individuality, free from all narrowness and the burden of a self-centred ego; one must know one's nation, the glory and the good that went with it, without being encumbered by any false national pride and prejudices, and one must see oneself as well as his country in the perspective of the world. Not that Nehru was the original prophet of such an outlook. The movement to cultivate this outlook had started with that fiery mystic, Swami Vivekananda, whose words are quoted by Nehru in his *Discovery of India*. The words are: "The fact of our isolation from all the other nations of the world is the cause of our degeneration and its only remedy is getting back into the current of the rest of the world." So, the idea was there in the atmosphere. But in the politico-social sphere of India of the third and the fourth decades of the century, perhaps no other public personality did believe in the synthesis of nationalism and internationalism as much as Nehru did. And in Nehru, faith and action went together. In the political history of the world hardly can we see another idealist who had so sincerely, I should rather say, so innocently, stuck to his ideal in the discharge of administrative and diplomatic duties often in the face of shocks of disillusionment though.

BALANCED NEUTRALITY



The Prime Minister is likely to meet Mr. Khrushchev as well as Mr. Kennedy

Let us look into a concrete expression of this faith of his. I quote from a speech of his at Aligarh in 1948:

"Whatever confusion the present may contain, in the future, India will be a land, as in the past, of many faiths equally honoured and respected, but of one national outlook, not, I hope, a narrow nationalism living in its own shell, but rather the tolerant creative nationalism which, believing in itself and the genius of its people, takes full part in the establishment of an international order."

It was a futuristic faith. It is this trust in the future of India that gave him the force to pilot India to her rightful position among the nations. He radiated this trust, so much so that when the statesmen of the world looked at his face they saw there something more than the India that was at the time — they saw the potential India, India that was to be.

No wonder that at home, this robust optimism of India's most charismatic leader would play a great role in supporting and promoting the national morale. This optimism was working behind numerous creative ventures of the time, literary and artistic. The influence had become an intrinsic part of the Indian creative process.

Another aspect of India's creative activity, her endeavour in science, received Nehru's very

March 1, 1953

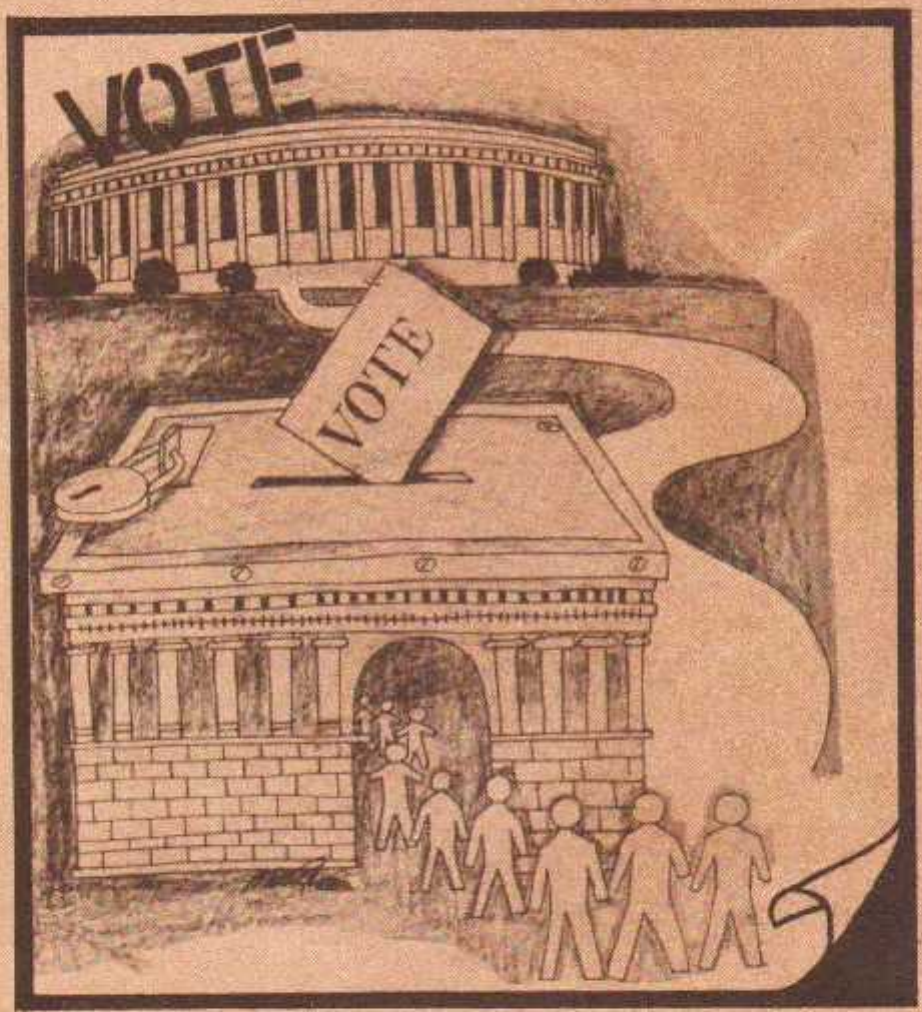
special attention and encouragement, and they are too well-known to be mentioned. And coming to matters of organisation, his contribution to India's creative talents is great. Along with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, he was the architect of the three national academies– the Sahitya Akademi, the Lalit Kala Akademi and the Sangeet Natak Akademi. He was the President of the Sahitya Akademi. A true democrat, he once said, "As President of the Sahitya Akademi I may tell you quite frankly that I would not like the Prime Minister to interfere with my work. My point is that these creative arts must be allowed and encouraged to grow with as little interference as possible. It is only when they manifestly become a social menace or a social danger that the Government must move... as I have made clear I do not want too much governmental interference in artistic activities."

It was indeed, not for him to interfere. But to leave a lasting impact on the creative mind was his historic and sublime role.

(Courtesy: All India Radio)

Democracy and Elections

by Dr. S. Ambirajan



COUNTRIES professing democracy experience the election 'fever' at periodic intervals. In India, at the national level, general elections are held once in five years; in the United States the Presidential elections take place every four years; and other countries have different periodicities governing their elections. In some countries, like the United States, it is mandatory to have elections on a precise date, whereas in other countries, considerable flexibility is allowed.

This might give the impression that elections are synonymous with democracies. While there is some truth in it, elections are far more pervasive than making Lincoln's statement "Government for the people, of the people and by the people" a practical proposition. 'Election', simply stated, means the act of choosing. Citizens of a country have to choose from amongst themselves persons to run the affairs of the State. Similarly there are many other situations

where a choice has to be made with more claimants than the number of positions available. Thus any one of the thousand odd members of a professional association could be the President of that association, but only one could fill that place. Similarly when a Pope dies, any one of the Cardinals is eligible to become the Pope, but only one of them can be actually elected. There are other situations when a person has to be chosen, not from amongst themselves, but from an outside group. Thus when we hear that Dr. So and So was elected to the Chair of some discipline or other in a University, it means that the Selection Committee chose this person from among a number of scholars considered for the Chair.

While systems of elections antedate representative governments, electoral processes in the modern era are firmly connected with systems of government. This connection has, of course, not been the same through ages. Different societies have used electoral processes in different ways since times immemorial. For example, in the Athens of fifth century B.C.— which is sometimes referred to as the cradle of democracy — power was wielded by a Council of Five Hundred, composed of specific numbers of individuals from amongst tribal demes (units of local government). The lot system was in vogue to select civil and judicial officers known as Archons. The Greek city-state assemblies, again were not parliaments in the modern sense. All adult males except slaves were members of the assemblies, but the assemblies were essentially a place for settling political rivalries of prominent families. Similarly, the Roman Republic was not really democratic in nature, though it had some appurtenances of a democratic government such as voting upon public measures and secret ballot.

It was no different in ancient India. As a rule, monarchy was the form of government, but other forms of government (such as the Republican) too existed. Although information is extremely scanty, classical Buddhist literature, especially the Jataka Tales, mention the existence of a large number of Republican Principalities. From what can be gathered, these kingdoms, notably Kapilavastu and Vaisali, were ruled by supreme assemblies composed of young and old members of particular clans. For example, the Lichchhavi clan of Vaisali consisted of 7707 members at one time. They frequently met, thrashed out administrative problems and took decisions. The assembly chose one amongst themselves to be the Head of State for a period of three years, and elected an executive council as well. We are also informed that definite rules relating to majority voting, secret ballot, quorum, votes of absentees, etc. existed. In fact, Goutama Buddha is supposed to have appreciated this form of governing: "So long... as Vajjains (one particular republic) hold these full and frequent public assemblies, meet together in concord and carry out their undertakings in concord... so long may the Vajjains be expected not to decline but to prosper." There are also appreciative references to representative forms of government in the *Santi Parva* of the *Mahabharata*.

However, the dominant political theory of Kautilya (with its ideal of a United Empire embracing the whole of India) and the objective conditions of the time spelt the end of such rudimentary forms of representative government at the macro level by the third or fourth century after Christ. While throughout India monarchy became the accepted form of government, at the local level democratic forms of arranging public affairs prevailed for the next fifteen centuries. This was inevitable because, in their struggle for living at the micro level, there had to be cooperation, consensus and adjustment among people for the day to day conduct of affairs. While oppression and exploitation were not entirely absent, the long term stability has to be explained only in terms of a consensual arrangement.

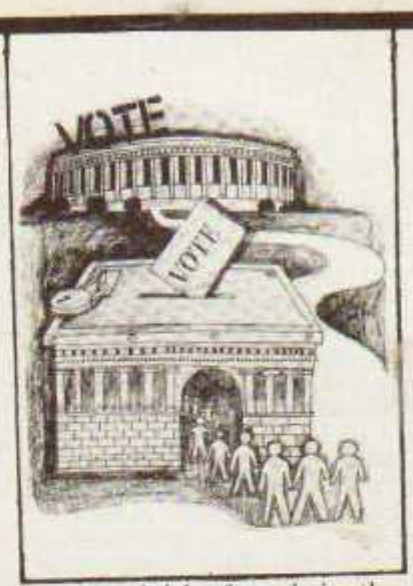
One of the most important democratic forms of village government in the pre-Modern times was the *Maha Sabha* that prevailed in medieval South India. The village assemblies composed of all adult males met periodically to conduct the village affairs, and officers were elected from among the members by rotation to head committees and look after specific subjects such as the management of gardens, water sources and finances. The assemblies were of varying sizes. The Sabha at Tottium at one time had only 46 members, whereas another Sabha at Tribhuwanamahadevi Chaturvedimangalam had more than 4000 members. Election to these offices were not by means of voting, but by the *Kudavolai* system Names of eligible persons were written on palmleaf chits, placed in a pot and shuffled. A young boy was asked to pick as many such chits as the number of individuals required to head committees. The qualifications were carefully specified. A tenth century inscription from Uttiramerur in Tamil Nadu lists the qualifications: "Those who own more than one fourth *nilam* of taxable land, reside in houses built on their own sites, are below seventy and above thirty five years of age, know the mantra-brahmana and possess experience of teaching it."

In general, ancient systems of government which used some form of elections had limited constituencies. The system of representation was more for limiting than extending citizen participation in public affairs. Another characteristic was that the government involved everybody, and elections were for appointing public officers to do particular jobs. It was only the political movements in the 18th and 19th centuries that gave an impetus to widen the constituencies by extending the suffrage.

The seeds of what we see as the ideal, that is democracy based on universal adult franchise, were sown in seventeenth century Europe. It was then that the demand for equality for all people was articulated for the first time. Much earlier Aristotle himself had said that the denial of equality to people was the cause of revolutions. Be that as it may, the theory

of democracy until the seventeenth century was negative in the sense that it stressed mainly the unfairness of the exclusion of some individuals from a share of power. As exclusion from privilege was denial of benefit, democratic theory argued against exclusion. A key element of this argument was the idea of representation developed by medieval theologians. To quote Harold Laski, they asked: "If interests are to be represented, of what interests the representative body or bodies are to be composed?" The representation of a body could become imperfect if particular individual interests are excluded.This would result in those excluded from making decisions feeling that they were not bound by them. The conclusion is that a body purporting to represent a whole should truly reflect the whole, and not parts of it. Similarly the struggle for religious toleration spilled into the political arena. In the process of fighting for the right to pursue their religious practices unhindered, people holding different religious beliefs attacked the notion of the absolute state. The movement towards the reduction of monarchical power led to the spread of the movement towards democratic practices involving more and more of citizens in the use of political power.

After the seventeenth century, the democratic concept became positive in so far as, not only exclusion from a share of power was criticised, it also actually emphasized the need for everyone's participation in the exercise of power. Democracy was thus favoured as a form of government because it could prevent people from being used by others, and could also enhance happiness. Seventeenth century philosophers had concluded that every individual had a right to happiness which was inherent in him/her as a member of society and he/she should be free to pursue it. The French Revolution of 1789 contributed to democratic thought the need to deny birth,race and creed as prerequisites for wielding power. Liberty and equality—thanks to the French Revolution — became



the accepted rights for ordering the Society. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, no one disputed the right of everyone in the community to have a share in the direction of the State. The problem for the nineteenth century thinkers, then, was not to defend democracy,but to find means of giving expression to it in practical affairs. In other words, how can Government in general and legislation in particular be subjected to people's control?

The question was answered in the nineteenth century by emphasizing elections to select people's representative who would be typical of the mass of people. It was no longer a case of electing executive and administrative officials, but of representatives who didn't have to be experts in various subjects *per se*.In the latter case, citizens were selecting (or rather judging) the qualifications of persons to do a particular job. But in the former, it was selecting someone who would be representing the people and controlling or directing the affairs of state in line with the desires of the majority of the people.

The broader the electorate the more representative the Government would be. As India has modelled itself on the British Parliament—often referred to as the Mother of Parliaments—it is instructive to see how this broadening took place in Britain in the nineteenth century. When it was originally founded in the 14th century, it was simply an assembly of representatives from boroughs and counties. Each borough and county had its own method of selection. Until the mid-eighteenth century, membership of the Parliament was not coveted, but once their importance increased, the inequities of representation and malpractices became matters of public discussion. There was wholesale bribery, manipulation and flagrant violation of the spirit of democracy. The first important step in making the Parliament an effective body to represent people took place in 1832 when the Reform Act was passed expanding the electorate considerably. The Reform Act was the culmination of the idea that Parliament was not something representing only estates, fiefdoms or vested interests, but representing individuals. Hence it abolished the so-called 'Rotten Boroughs' and 'pocket boroughs' that were controlled by wealthy individuals and aristocratic families. But even in 1832, universal adult suffrage was still a dream of the future. All it had achieved was to expand the electorate but not universalize it. Many sections of the community were excluded from the electorates, and it took almost another century before Britain acquired universal adult franchise.

Not only Britain, most other modern democracies also had kept large sections of the population from the voting booth in the nineteenth century. Leaving aside colonial possessions of Imperialist nations, even in free countries, qualifications other than being a citizen were required before a right to vote was granted. Minimum property holding and minimum educational qualifications were required in many countries. As for the inclusion of women in the electorate, it was not thought of in the nineteenth century anywhere except New Zealand, which introduced women's right to vote in 1893. Norway granted this in 1913, American women achieved this only in 1920, and women in Switzerland as late as in 1971.

Like universal adult suffrage, many other aspects of modern electoral processes that we now take for granted, came to be used after much persuasion and struggle. For example, the institution of the Secret Ballot became universal only in the 20th century. It was

clear from the beginning that open voting by raising hands (or some such method) could not escape undue influence ranging from violent intimidation to the purchase of votes through presents. The delay in the introduction of secret ballot was not necessarily due to powerful people who wanted to maintain their control over the newly enfranchised voters, it arose equally from of the opposition of philosophers like John Stuart Mill. Lack of literacy also prevented the adoption of the system of Secret Ballot. It was, however, soon realised that people should be encouraged to take their decisions on these matters rather than wait for cues from those who were accepted as superior to themselves. And the Secret Ballot was the preferred method to achieve this. It was known for a long time as the 'Australian Ballot' because it was used for the first time in South Australia in 1856.

Thus in all the democratic countries, electoral processes underwent radical changes over a protracted period. Much political thinking and active espousal of reforms by special groups preceded electoral reforms. In India, of course, there was the major problem of colonial domination by Britain. While almost since the beginning of the twentieth century, British rulers were not averse to giving some form of truncated representation, at the same time denying total freedom or self-government. Thus India acquired some experience of modern electoral system throughout the last seven to eight decades, but a sustained struggle was required for augmenting the democratic element in the electoral processes.

The earliest instance in India during the British Rule of elected individuals having a say in administration was in 1847 when Calcutta was put under a Board of Seven Commissioners, four of whom were elected by the rate payers. Indeed, 'popular' representation was allowed first in the area of local self government. Bombay in 1872, Calcutta in 1876 and Madras in 1878 had all one half to two thirdsof the members of their municipal governments elected by the rate payers, and membership of all local bodies were made substantially elective in 1882. It should, however, be noted that democracy had by no means arrived in the local government, because only 5% of the urban population and 2 to 5 per thousand of the rural population were eligible to vote. The principle of election, however, was not brought anywhere else in the Indian administration by the British in the 19th century. Sir Charles Wood, while piloting the Indian Councils Act of 1861, told the British Parliament: "To talk of native representation is to talk of that which is simply and utterly impossible."

Such an unequivocal stand could not be taken in the twentieth century because, since Sir Charles Wood's days and 1909, when the Minto-Morley Reforms were brought into action, much had taken place. The Indian National Congress had been founded and Indians educated in the writings of Locke, Rousseau, and Mill had been clamouring for representative government. The old Central and Provincial Councils, which mainly consisted of nominated officials and non-officials, were expanded and a small proportion of them were 'elected' through electoral colleges consisting of delegates from local government institutions, as well as by Muhammadan voters in separate communal constituencies. The legislative councils as constituted were no more than what Lionel Curtis described as "ornamental durbars" based "on a travesty of an electoral system".

Some improvement took place in the electoral system as part of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms in 1919, when the notorious scheme of Dyarchy was implemented. Under this the legislatures were expanded and members were elected by territorial constituencies which were either general, communal or related to special interests. The franchisefor provincial assemblies was limited to those with property, the result of which was that there were only 6,375,000 voters (many of whom were illiterate) representing a meagre 2.8% of the population. A high property qualification was imposed for the voters of the central legislative assembly, which meant only 1,416,000 eligible voters in the entire country!

The central and provincial assemblies were far from the sort of Parliaments independent countries possessed, because they acted only as a forum for airing opinions and grievances but could not determine the policy to be pursued. However, a whole generation of politicians gained parliamentary experience however rudimentary, and this in turn awakened the political consciousness of the mass of the people. The very fact that a large electorate had been created gave an impetus to the national groups to fight for its expansion. All this resulted in strengthening the nationalist movement in India, and the British Government responded with the Government of India Act of 1935. While it was still nowhere near providing a truly democratic set-up, nevertheless the new Constitution was a substantial improvement upon that of the 1919 Act, especially in the matter of involving Indians in the administration of the Country. As Sir Maurice Gwyer, who was deeply involved in the framing of this Constitution, has remarked:"the clear intention behind the Act was to set India upon the path of responsible government and to promote the complete realisation of her ambitions in this respect".

At the Federal level, the members of the Upper House (Council of States) were to be directly elected, but the members of the Lower House would be elected from electoral colleges formed in the Provincial Legislatures. Communal and Special electorates continued, but the size of constituencies was reduced so that more members were brought to the legislatures. The eligibility of voters was relaxed from the 1919 Act's position. Voters should have resided in the constituency for at least 180 days in the previous financial year. They should be paying income tax or land revenue of Rupees 8/- at least. Or they should own property of a particular specified value. For ex-

ample, in Bombay city, the property should have an annual rental value of Rs.60/-,while an annual rental value of Rs.18/- would be adequate if the property were outside Bombay. Or it must have a capital value of Rs.750/- at least. They should have passed the Matriculation or an equivalent examination. Similarly, pensioned widows and mothers, literate women and wives of otherwise qualified voters, were all enfranchised. The extension of the Franchise was such that there were 36 million voters representing about 15% of the total population of the Provinces.

Once India won its freedom in 1947, it was possible to have a democratic government based on proper representation. The Constitution of India adopted in 1950 introduced two fundamental changes in the electoral process of the country, namely:

(1) No provision for communal, separate, or special interests. As a corollary, no person was to be kept out of the Parliament on account of religion, race, caste or sex.

(2) The voting in elections was to be on the basis of Universal adult franchise, that is every individual above 21 years of age, except those who did not reside in the constituency, or suffering from insanity, or convicted of criminal offences.

Since 1951, we have had many elections– at both the General and constituency levels: India has acquired a well deserved fame all over the world for the way it has kept its democracy alive and in the manner elections have been conducted despite the phenomenal difficulties. Sometimes discordant voices are raised about our elections, especially when confronted by weak, inefficient and corrupt governments headed by elected politicians. The exasperation comes up in statements extolling the virtues of the British Raj or Indira Gandhi's Emergency rule, and in the desperate desire to be free from politicians and elections alike. However, to condemn elections is verily to condemn the democratic ideal itself.

As we have seen, the philosophic case for free democratic elections has been in the making for several

centuries, and we have achieved the right after a prolonged political struggle. It would therefore be an act of folly to give up using this great instrument of equality and liberty just because a few amoral or unscrupulous people have misused it

Even were it not a question of inefficient, dishonest and venal politicians coming to power, some analysts have concluded that elections do not really matter because of the following reasons:

(1) Public policies are formulated by administrators and experts, and by judges through court decisions. Because of the immense complexity of modern governments and the relative ignorance of politicians, the Bureaucracy runs the country.

(2) Elected governments quickly come under the influence of powerful groups which are able to pull the strings from behind. Lobbies and pressure groups such as Big Businesses, Landed Interests, and powerful trade unions are able to turn and twist the elected governments with considerable ease. There are also elite groups such as, for example, the so called 'Kashmiri Mafia' during the time of Indira Gandhi and 'Doon Goons' of the early years of Rajiv Gandhi who wielded immense power.

(3) Elections result in the tyranny of a majority. This is particularly so in countries that have single member constituencies, where candidates need not secure even a 51% overall vote to get elected. With multiple candidates for a single member constituency, the winner might have scored a mere minority of the votes. And under all circumstances, even majority 'tyranny' is tyranny all the same.

(4) Elections breed malpractices, and these are many. From deliberate gerrymandering through the misuse of the Constitution, to immoral acts of vote-purchasing, criminal acts of intimidation and booth capturing, the malpractices are many and widely prevalent. They all result in people choosing the wrong kind of individuals to rule the country.

(5) Above all, with sprawling constituencies (especially for Parliament), and voters numbering tens of thousands or even several lakhs, fighting democratic elections has become next to impossible, except for the very rich, or for political parties with immense financial resources. This, again, has led to allegations like Big Businesses controlling affairs from behind, or kickbacks in government purchases for the ruling party, for financing future elections.

Doubtless there is a grain of truth in the above reservations held against elections.But all the same, giving up elections and democracy in favour of a benevolent despot or sheer bureaucratic rule would be a dangerous remedy. As the political philosopher C.K. Allen said:

"Who elects the *elite*, and what is to prevent their title to rule being sheer superiority of cunning or of might? What are the limits of authority? If it is necessary, for the sake of order, to suppress the dissent of the Malignants, what guarantee is there that the reasonable dissent of Benignants will not also be suppressed? What government yet devised by man is really fit to decide in all circumstances, of its own omniscience, what is best for a people? And, above all, how can irresponsible power be prevented from feeding upon itself—how can authority, even if it begins with the most benevolent intentions, be restrained from the vice of all autocracy, which is to regard its own survival as the supreme consideration? All history shows that a monopoly of right is destined, of its very nature, to become a monopoly of wrong."

There can be no doubt that a free society anxious for the preservation of civil liberties needs a

democratic form of government based on elections. It is the only recourse for a disappointed or aggrieved people because they can, when the time comes, throw the tyrannical or the inefficient out of office. This has been demonstrated again and again in democratic countries including our own. True, it often happens that the wrong kind of people are elected and put in power. It is equally true that only in a democracy it is possible to get rid of the unwanted. Laski has put this clearly when he said: "If it be argued that his (voter's) choice is often wrong, the answer is that democracy lives by the method of trial and error."

But there are other equally valid reasons why elections and democracy—defective though they may be—should not be abandoned.

Firstly, participation in elections gives a sense of self-respect to individual citizens. It seeks to gratify the voter's feeling of self esteem. At least once in four or five years, however 'lowly' he may be, he is given much importance by candidates standing for elections. This confirms in some measure the worth and dignity of the individual citizen.

Secondly, elections contribute a good deal to the legitimacy of the political community in which the voters live. It enables the rulers and the ruled to be bound by mutual interests. This mutual dependence on each other also contributes to the stability of the polity. Despite the apparent instability that one often sees in democratic countries, there is a deeper strength possessed by democratic countries because of the popular participation in the selection process of the governors. And,

Thirdly, even without the reality of democracy, elections are sometimes conceded by Rulers who have the capacity to extract obedience from the citizens to find out what the people at large think. Also, elections are sometimes used as a ritual to bring people together and boost nationalistic and patriotic sentiments. In totalitarian countries, it gives people a chance at least to show their displeasure. In the Soviet Union, for instance, nearly 2 million voters cross out the ballot paper to prevent the official candidates from achieving unanimous election. This may signify, not so much the voter's dislike of the system, but their dissatisfaction over particular party candidates for their acts of omission and commission.

There are, however, two disturbing if unavoidable aspects of elections and their role in democracies that we have to be concerned about. *Firstly,* in democratic systems, public policy changes only slowly over a period of time. Though elections may bring about radical changes in the government, the structural arrangement of democratic polity puts a brake on heroic changes. A Federal system with distinct spheres of action for different levels of government, separation of the three organs of the State, namely legislature, executive and judiciary, constitutional gurantees, and in general the whole system of checks and balances ensure that things move but slowly. While this is not pleasing to those who believe in rapid socio-economic changes, others would say that herein lies the true strength of the democratic system. And *secondly,* it is almost impossible to have an ideal electoral system. Such a system will obviously have the following characteristics:

(a) Meaningful choices for the voter. If it is simply a case of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the election becomes meaningless. At the same time, there must be a manageable number of clear choices, and citizens should be allowed to exercise their franchise without obstruction.

(b) Voters must have the freedom to know about the choices he has, and the contestants must have some equality. Invariably rich individuals or individuals backed by wealth and powerful political parties are in a better position to influence the voters than poor or independent candidates.

(c) Votes should have equal weightage. This is a complex issue and not easily solved. The value of a vote in a constituency with 1000 voters is obviously much more than in another with 10,000 voters. Many practical and theoretical problems are encountered in trying to devise electoral systems that assure that all votes will have roughly the same value. But so far no such ideal system has emerged.

Though rapid social change cannot be ushered in by a democracy, and granting that the ideal electoral system cannot be realised in practice, yet democratic elections remain the best bet for a civilized system of government. What do elections achieve (or should achieve) ultimately? Elections must result in the formation of an effective and honest legislature that reflects the spectrum of opinion in the country. There is no point in blaming elections for the inadequate performance of the legislatures. Multiplying sophisticated machinery to check the powers of legislature or devising costly and elaborate structures to make the legislature more representative cannot effectively solve the problem. As Harold Laski put it: "the problem is a moral issue, where mechanical checks are out of place".

To put it very simply, in modern States direct government is impossible. We need to elect representatives to look after our common concerns. Modern society being complex, we need representatives, not only conscious and responsive to the popular aspirations, but also knowledgeable. Seen in this light, the right to vote is not simply a privilege but an onerous responsibility to be exercised with great caution. The voters have to select the right people who are honest, upright and hardworking. But then only if voters (that is , you and me) are morally upright, honest and fearless will they select individuals with these characteristics as their representatives. The solution to the present day ills in our body politic would thus seem to lie, not in abandoning democracy and elections, but in purifying and strengthening the source within, in other words, bringing about or participating in a moral revolution.

BLOOD FOR BLOOD !

by Jayant K. Biswal

IT happened just last year. I was in-charge of the Red Cross unit in my college. We decided to organise a blood donation camp. We didn't make any vigorous campaign for blood donation among our students, as we thought people should donate their blood willingly. Besides it is difficult to persuade present-day youths, given as they generally are to pursuing selfish careers or wild orgies, to come forward for acts requiring a spirit of self-sacrifice.

On the appointed day, early in the morning, the doctors and other attendants of the blood bank arrived and our boys and girls trickled in. Some out of curiosity. I went and urged my colleagues to begin donating their blood and thus encourage the students. But, unfortunately, some of them had just recovered from Malaria, some others had suffered from jaundice the previous year. And some even suspected that the blood bank people would take this blood and sell it in the black-market.

There were three or four beds on which the students lay with blood-pressure straps tied round their arms. Blood trickled down plastic tubes into the bottles under the beds. Volunteers stood by.

Suddenly I was intrigued by a sight. A boy lay there, blood dropping out of his arm into the needle. But down where one of the sleeves of his trousers was tucked up, there was some dark patch which I could not make out. Curious, I went to him and rolled his trousers a bit upward. Just below his knee the leg had been amputated and an artificial, brown leg attached. I was aghast. What made him donate his blood when his friends and teachers were reluctant to do so? I asked him.

He came out with his story.

Kishore was born in a poor family in an obscure village in Kendrapada, about a hundred kilometres from Bhubaneswar. On the 12th January 1985 he came to Cuttack and that night boarded a train to Bhubaneswar. He was standing near the door of the compartment when, at Mancheswar, he slipped and he fell on the tracks. The train passed over one of his legs completely severing it Nobody noticed his unconscious body in the dark cold night. After some hours the driver of the next train on that line saw him and at once applied his brakes. With the help of his colleagues he brought him to the Bhubaneswar Railway Police.

But in the hospital he was left on the floor for a whole night unattended, until his relatives, who had somehow got the news, rushed to the hospital. He was then taken to the operation theatre and his life was saved. Later, at Olatpur hospital, he received an artificial leg.

But he kept up his spirit. Youthful innocence and exuberance were writ large on his face.

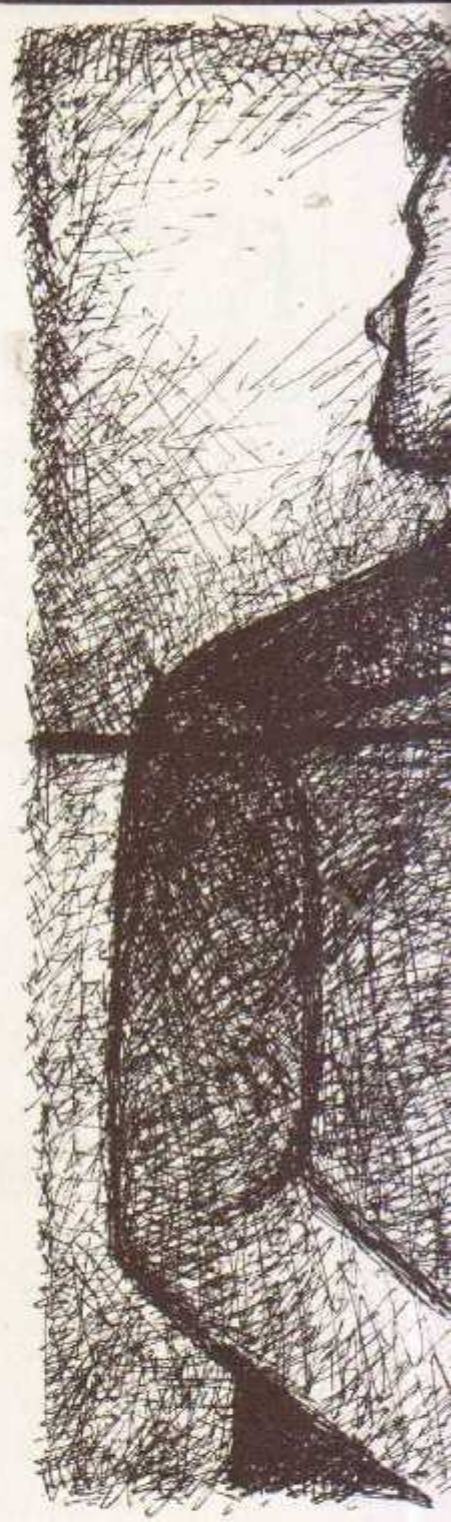
Finally I asked him what made him donate his precious blood, when he was not all that fit physically.

"Sir, when my leg was torn off, I took nine bottles of blood to come back from the brink of death. I have to pay that debt. Today, with this blood of mine, someone else might get back his life," he said with a smile

I knew that there was no end to man's cruelty towards man. That moment I realised that there was also no end to man's love for man!

SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF HEALTH

by H.R. Khanna

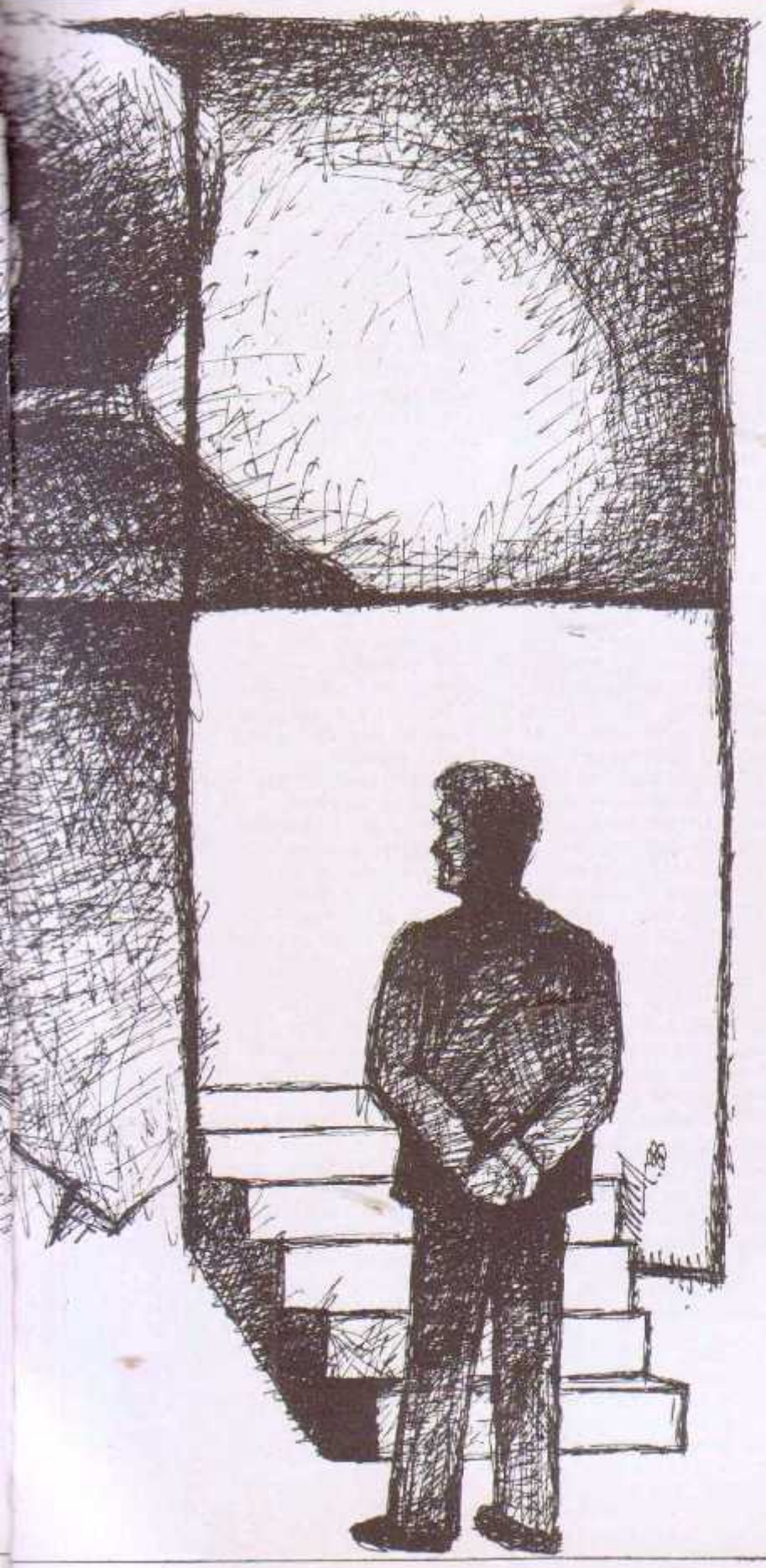


HUMAN health has a broad connotation. It is something very comprehensive and multifaceted. It represents according to World Health Organisation, a study of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Human health is something much more than physical health and while the need for physical health is a requirement which the human species shares with other animate beings, the human-beings because of their being human and as a result of their development and evolution in the course of centuries and millenia need something more to ensure a state of good health. It is in this context that the Spiritual Dimensions of Health acquire relevance and added significance.

Ever since the dawn of human consciousness the relationship between mind and matter has been a subject of serious study. The sceptics when asked as to "What is matter" might say "do not mind" and when asked as to "What is mind" might reply "Does not matter." Such intellectual escapism and evasiveness by creating a smoke-screen of puns can only add to our bewilderment but provide no satisfactory answer. Human body, it is said, is conceived not as matter but as life for it is life that gives it the essential reality—something without which it would be nothing more than a shell.

Mind and body were initially regarded by some as parallel but independent, running side by side but not influencing each other. Since then we have become increasingly conscious of the interaction of mind and body for it is such interaction, a proper synthesis and fusion of the functioning of the two, that gives shape to human life and helps it in its development. Mind is not a distinct entity within matter, any more than life is a thing that resides in the body like a man in the house. Both mind and body have to get assimilated with each other and operate in harmony to create human personality and help in its efflorescence. Life, it is said, is first within and while matter, co-eval with it in time and inextricable from it in space, is second to it. Matter in a way is the form and visible expression of life.

The omnipresent unity of mind and matter was at one time considered to belong to the domain of mysticism. No longer however it is so, for modern thinking no more questions such unity in the same way as it does not question the union of wilful thought and restless flesh in a living man. Materialist mechanism, as observed by Will Durant, was an attack against religion, and subjective idealism was an attack against irreligion; if we are not afraid of our thoughts, or our time, we may reject them both. And yet in this psycho-physical monism, materialism, idealism and spiritualism are not rejected, they meet and fuse; materialism is so far as it conceives all reality as bound together in one unbroken evolution and unity; idealism in so far as it confines all knowable reality to experience;



and spiritualism because it conceives the essence of reality to lie not in extension, solidity and weight, but in an activating power which is at once the life of the atom, and the energy and secret of genius—"a motion and a spirit that impels all thinking things, and all objects of all thoughts, and rolls through all things."

Any attempt at looking upon man as mere machine is bound to lead us astray and cloud our thinking in the same way as the attempt to equate man with other animate beings and confine him in that concept. Industrial revolution, it is said, made cities and cities made crowds and crowds unmade men. In the teeming welter of population one becomes only a number shorn of individual personality, a mere cog in a big machine. The abdication of personality has become one of the chief causes of sadness that gnaws human mind and which lurks behind the glare and glamour of modern existence. It is only the creativity of mind and spirit that can provide an escape from such depressing atmosphere. It is only those who are possessed of the mysterious flame of thought, burning brightly within them in the face of fate and adversity, who achieve the mastery of environment. Every soul, as put vividly by Swami Vivekananda, is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work or worship or psychic control or philosophy—by one or more or all these—and be free. This is the whole religion. Doctrines or dogmas or rituals or books or temples or forms are but secondary details.

Spiritualism has a close link with religion. Both provide a response to the inner cravings for a probe into the mysteries of the universe and life. Both have to be felt rather than to be put to the test of cold logic or made answerable at the anvil of ratiocination and syllogism. The fact that we do not understand some of their mysteries should not keep us from enjoying and utilis-

ing their benefits. As observed by Santayana man is not made to understand life but to live it. Spiritualism may be an offspring of religion but it has outgrown its heredity and attracts within the fold of its votaries also the agnostics, the sceptics and the non-believers. This is so because spiritualism gives a new zest for life, an awareness and desire for a larger and richer and more satisfying life. It helps in the elimination of tensions, anxieties, fears and worries and seeks to give mankind new energy and strength and with them fresh hope and faith. Time was when we thought that the advance of science would take us away from religion. Since then however, the big strides made by science have made man turn to religion and seek refuge in the concept of Supreme Power. We are increasingly realising the truth of Bacon's words that a little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion. Psychiatrists all over the world now make no secret of the fact that religious faith and spiritualism, yoga and transcendental meditation can prove most helpful in banishing the worries, the anxieties, the strains and the fears that cause more than half of our ills. They provide also the most effective cure for those in grips of maladies like neurosis. Faith, it is said, is one of the vital forces by which men live and that the total absence of it can only mean collapse. It is in the above context that I feel tempted to reproduce the words of Carl Jung who wrote :

> "During the past thirty years, people from all the civilized countries of the earth have consulted me. I have treated many hundreds of patients. Among all my patients in the second half of life—that is to say, over thirty-five—there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given to their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook."

As civilisation advances life becomes more complex and the strains on individuals increase manifold. Today science and medicine have found cure for many of the physical ailments but they have more or less found themselves helpless to find a therapeutic response to the menace of mental stresses and strains that are eating into the vitals of modern men and taking a heavy toll of their lives. Worry and tension have today become the greatest killers; they lead to insomnia, blood pressure, heart disease, ulcers and host of other ailments. The only effective remedy and proper cure for them lies in spiritualism, in identifying oneself with the Supreme Being and surrendering all action to Him. For those in grip of depression and despondency and whose life is shadowed by dark clouds of black despair as also those caught in the tumult of life or the storms and tempest of adversities which sometimes blight and disturb the landscape of individual's life, the only haven is a spiritual outlook for it is in that haven that one can have peace of mind, supreme serenity and placidity, true repose and freedom from discontent and worry. And it is in that haven that one can be a part of the universe and still be above it. As observed by Radhakrishnan :

> "Our bondage consists in our dependence on something alien. When we rise above it, we can make our nature the medium for the incarnation of the spiritual. Through struggle and suffering, man can pass from his freedom to choose good or evil to the higher freedom that abides in the steadfastly chosen good. Liberation is a return to inward being, to subjectivity; bondage is enslavement to the object world, to necessity, to dependence.

One also feels tempted in this context to quote the words of Aurobindo :

> "Man's road to spiritual supermanhood will be open when he declares boldly that all he has yet developed, including the intellect of which he is so rightly and yet so vainly proud, are now no longer sufficient for him, and that to uncase, discover, set free this greater Light within shall be henceforward his pervading preoccupation. Then will his philosophy, art, science, ethics, social existence, vital pursuits be no longer an exercise of mind and life, done for themselves, carried in a circle, but a means for the discovery of a greater Truth behind mind and life and for the bringing of its power into our human existence. We shall be on the right road to become ourselves, to find our true law of perfection, to live our true, satisfied existence in our real being and divine nature."

Human mind is the storehouse of all knowledge, the repository of great ideals and the germinating ground of noble ambitions, the place wherein great ideals are conceived and lead to greater action, wherein resolves are made and urges for greater striving born. But it is also mind which becomes the breeding place for evil designs and ignoble intentions. Talking about character being the sum-total of the bent of man's mind and about the link of mind with knowledge, Vivekananda observes :

> "If you take the character of any man, it really is but the aggregate of tendencies, the sum total of the bent of his mind; you will find that misery and happiness are equal factors in the formation of that character. Good and evil have an equal share in moulding character, and in some instances misery is a greater teacher than happiness. In studying the great characters the world has produced, I dare say, in the vast majority of cases it would be found that it

was misery that taught more than happiness, it was poverty that taught more than wealth, it was blows that brought out their inner fire more than praise.

Now this knowledge, again, is inherent in man. No knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside. What we say a man "knows", should, in strict psychological language, be what he "discovers" or "unveils", what a man "learns" is really what he "discovers", by taking the cover off his own soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge. We say Newton discovered gravitation. Was it sitting anywhere in a corner waiting for him? It was in his own mind; the time came and he found it out. All knowledge that the world has ever received comes from the mind; the infinite library of the universe is in your own mind. The external world is simply the suggestion, the occasion, which sets you to study your own mind, but the object of your study is always your own mind."

A healthy mind in a healthy body is the index of true health. Both physical health and mental health are inter-related and have a great impact upon each other. Although the dependence of one upon the other is an essential phenomenon of human life, taking things in their totality one can say that the indebtedness of physical health to the other is much greater than that of the mental health. It is in this context that one realises the importance of spiritual aspect.

Every human being is a repository of immense energy. This energy is of two types. One is the patent or physical energy which one possesses and which is visually manifest. But there is also in every being a latent energy which normally remains dormant in most beings and which one has to activate and develop slowly, gradually and as a result of sustained effort. But once that energy is developed and reaches its efflorescence, one acquires immense potentialities of strength and attains super power much beyond those of ordinary mortals. Such supreme energy is like that of the power within an atom which when it splits gives rise to tremendous energy which staggers human intelligence. And it is those possessed of that activated dormant energy who acquire the attributes of supermen. They are the carvers of destiny and architects of fate. And it is such beings who can defy the elements and about whom it is said by the poet.

> "Khudi ko kar baland itna, ke har tadbir se pehle Khuda bandey se yeh poochhey, bata teri raza kaya hai." (Raise yourself so high that before making any move, even God may have to ask you as to what is your wish.)

It is spiritual aspect of life that gives birth in man's mind to faith, to the aspiration and urge for greater action and heroic deeds. It also helps in steeling of his will power and resolve and in imbuing him with the capacity to face and overcome the adversities of life and buffets of misfortune. And it is the spiritual aspect and faith which creates in the words of the poet:

> One equal temper of heroic heart
> Made weak by time and fate but strong in will,
> To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.

There can be no doubt that it is such faith and temper born of spiritualism which adds new dimensions to one's strength and opens fresh vistas of bubbling energy within human beings. History tells us that men with faith have always exhibited many times more the energy and strength than that wielded by similar persons but without faith. Those who conquered the Everest and were the first to make their way to the North Pole and the South Pole in the face of the fury of the elements, were all men of faith, inspired by a purpose and goaded by a higher call. No wonder that persons imbued with faith are in much better position to resist disease and other onslaughts on their health and to keep it in a good shape. Psychiatrists now readily concede the immense part played by one's emotions and thinking in not only keeping one in a healthy state but also in acting as an aid to healing for those in the process of recovery and convalescence. Tranquillity of disposition and equanimity of mind, both offspring of spiritualism, have now become in a way the best guarantees for ensuring good health.

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WHEN HAIR TURNS INTO FIRE!

by Devapriyo

In the twelfth article in the series, the author leads us farther into the labyrinth of nightmarish dreams.

IN our normal life and normal conversation we use so many images. Often an image becomes a part of our common vocabulary and we stop wondering about their significance. The other day an officer was directing his assistant over the phone: "Please attend the evening flight to receive Mr. Chowdhury. You have never met him; is that so? Well, he is in milkwhite trousers and a monkey-jacket. His butterfly moustache is dyed rose."

Now, all his assistant would do is be alert to recognise the guest by a certain sign. He would not stop to marvel at the association of milk (with all its taste, flavour and nourishment values) with the linen in which the visitor had chosen to make a part of his dress nor would he think of a monkey while thinking of the gentleman's jacket, nor of the flitting butterflies and roses while looking at the visitor's moustache. Once he has known the visitor, he will recognise him by other and more valuable qualities of his, for example his manners, his voice, his style of communication, his qualification, his learning and the overall impression the gentleman creates.

This is natural. But is this always so? Things may go a little away once in a while. The assistant

receives the gentleman all right. But, say, something has made him feel uneasy. At night, in his dream, he finds himself in a jungle and is frightened by a monkey which is rushing upon him, baring its teeth. He stumbles on the ground. He wakes up with a start.

It is likely that he will not relate this dream to any of the experiences he had had during the day. But a matter-of-fact psychological analysis can easily detect in the dream a version of his experience and feelings, some conscious and some subconscious, that have preceded the night. He might have been quite familiar with a phrase like 'milk-white' or 'butterfly moustache', but not 'monkey-jacket'. The phrase might have sounded quite funny to him. As such, the figure of a monkey might have come into his imagination.

It might have so happened that at the airport the visitor shows annoyance with the assistant because the latter has failed to spot him at the right moment or to get his luggage cleared as fast as he could have liked it to be done. Maybe that in his nervousness the assistant has slammed the door of the car while a bit of the august visitor's coat is still outside it. The visitor might have bared his teeth for a moment and swore in the tone of a chattering monkey. The figure of the monkey has come back to the assistant's imagination, but, of course, he has suppressed the image from occupying his imagination in relation to the august visitor. But he might not have been able to ward off the fear that the visitor might make some unpleasant reference to him before his boss.

The airport crowd (such crowds when one is tense, can always breed the feeling of being lost) is translated into wilderness or jungle. The visitor has become the monkey. The monkey baring the teeth is the suspected anger in the visitor as well as his inherent capacity to harm the assistant. The assistant stumbling is indicative of his fear to be sacked.

Prof. Y. Popov, a Russian psychologist refers to a dream of this category dreamt by his patient. The patient finds herself running around in a room, her flowing hair changed into tongues of fire. Popov interprets this as a visual translation of the lady's knowledge of the popular phrase "hair red as fire".

But it will be too simplistic to believe that a phrase alone can inspire such a dream. If the phrase is popular in a certain region, thousands of ladies must be familiar with it. All of them would not dream their hair changed into flames of fire. The dream reveals a certain state of mind of the dreamer. If she felt pleasantly surprised, it might mean her desire for doing something startling, something dazzling—partly satisfied through the dream. If she was terrified, it might mean her fear of losing something most precious in a sensational way. Had her dignity or the very image got intricately caught up in something dramatic? She alone can say.

But being engulfed by fire can have several other significances, depending on the culture and the beliefs of the persons concerned. Of that, later.

The elements in a fearful dream could be an assortment of parts of different objects known to the dreamer. Prof. L. Rokhlin, another Russian psychologist quotes in his *Sleep Hypnosis Dreams* a dream dreamt by Tatyana in Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin:*

> About the table monsters sit!
> One is a horned and dog-faced creature,
> One has a cock's head plain to see,
> And there's a witch with a goatee,
> A dwarf, whose tail is quite a feature,
> A haughty skeleton, and that
> Is half a crane and half a cat.

Each of the monstrous beings in this dream are assortments of parts of different creatures. But each part is real and natural in its original place. The dream has culled them and made a new combination that may appear bizarre to our rational mind, but is the fancy of our subconscious!

Can nightmarish dreams have their origin outside the dreamer's mind, conscious or subconscious? That is to say, can there be supernatural elements who find access into some layer of our consciousness and terrify us?

The mystics will say that nothing can enter our consciousness unless we have made an inroad for it into our consciousness, unless we have thrown open a door, however small, for its invasion of our being. It is Macbeth's secret ambition that lets the influence of the three witches enter him, to throw him off the rail forever. In dreams too if we are threatened or terrorised by some weird powers, it is because we have some weakness in us.

To continue

JESUS

VISUALISED BY A HINDU ARTIST

by J.S. Murthy

INDIANIZATION of Christian themes and subjects are fast replacing the Western portrayals. For example, Indian Christian artists like Topno, Jyoti Sahi, Fonseca have successfully portrayed many Christian themes in Indian art form. One major contribution in this direction is the depiction of the Life of Jesus Christ in mural form beginning with the scene of the Birth of Christ done in the Indian art style by the well known artist N.K. Mishra. A Hindu, Mishra has painted the age-old Christmas motif in a distinctly Indian setting. Mary in blue saree (symbolising divinity), Joseph, shepherds and the three wise men all in Indian dress, and even the angels, in the upper left corner, have been conceived in Indian character. The cow and the sheep all appear Indian. The haloes that encircle Mary's and Baby Jesus' heads convey the idea of Indian sainthood.

This Christmas scene is just a small portion of a 5' x 21' mural painted by Mishra that adorns the Chapel Hall of the Christian Association for Radio and Audio Visual Service (CARAVS)—a Multi-Media Church Communication Agency based at Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. The mural and other paintings were done by Mishra during his three years stay with CARAVS. These paintings depict the themes of the life, teachings, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ who preached thus about His Mission on Earth :

> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised."
>
> (*The New Testament*, St. Luke 4:18)

In some of his paintings Mish ra has done full justice to the above verse by his genius of visualization. Mishra's beautiful art-work in the Indian setting stuns both art critics and novices.

Other artists whose works are hung in the art gallery at CARAVS include, Frank Wesley (Mishra's senior at the Lucknow School of Art, now settled in Australia), Vinayak Masoji (a disciple of the famous artist Nandalal Bose, and later vice-principal at Shantiniketan), J. Wilkins (an accomplished commercial art director, formerly with the *Times of India*) and Lem Patole (a freelance artist now settled in America). Besides these Indian artists some foreign women artists, namely Mrs. Naomi Wray, an American Missionary (now Secretary, All India Christian Artists' Association, Bombay), Sister Genevieve (a French Catholic Nun) and Sister Claire have developed distinctly Indian style of portraying Christian themes.

Most of these artists have done paintings for CARAVS, Mishra being the latest. He was commissioned to do some 50 paintings on the Life of Jesus Christ, including the mural. When Frank Wesley saw the mural, he was delighted and complimented Mishra on the excellent work. J. Wilkins admitted to have been transported to 'heaven' by the priceless and sensitive mural!

Such have been the spontaneous responses of his contemporaries on the work of this frail looking bearded artist who now lives in Nainital. My own experience about Mishra's Jesus is that the more I watch the paintings by this Hindu friend of mine, the closer I am drawn to Jesus Christ and His humane qualities. I have a strong feeling that Mishra's creative genius offers Jesus Christ as a friend and liberator to the many tragedy-stricken, oppressed, suffering and hapless millions of people in today's world. One has to see Mishra's exquisite creation of Christian themes in the Indian art form in order to experience the values of life so urgently needed today—'On earth peace, goodwill toward men'. (*The New Testament*, St. Luke 2:14)

A NOBLE MAN

In good fortune not elated, in ill-fortune not dismayed,
Ever eloquent in council, never in the fight affrayed —
Proudly emulous of honour, steadfastly on wisdom set;
Perfect virtues in the nature of a noble soul are met.
Whoso hath them, gem and glory of the three wide worlds is he;
Happy mother she that bore him, she who nursed him on her knee.

* * *

Noble hearts are golden vases — close the bond true metals make;
Easily the smith may weld them, harder far it is to break.
Evil hearts are earthen vessels — at a touch they crack a-twain,
And what craftsman's ready cunning can unite the shards again?

Narayana

Hitopadesa (12th cent. A.D.) (The Book of Good Counsels) translated by Sir Edwin Arnold

Since the fifteenth century B. C. when the glass came to be used widely, there has been no end to the variety of experiments that has been carried out with this fascinating yet simple stuff.

One of the experiments that has assumed importance

STAINED GLASS

AN ART INSPIRED BY THE CHRIST THEME

Photographs by U.N.N. Prasad

not only as a craft but also as a medium of expression for religious fervour is the stained glass craft. Although by stained glass we ordinarily understand transparent coloured glass formed into decorative mosaic, used in windows, it has been looked upon as a work of art at least

Such works, naturally, are easily vulnerable to calamities. While natural calamities, accidents and vandalism have taken a heavy toll of many of the excellent pieces of this craft over the centuries, some very old pieces have withstood the ravages of time. The oldest stained glass, according to the ***Guiness Book of World Records,*** *is to be found in the window of the Cathedral of Augsburg, Bavaria, Germany. It goes back to the middle of the 11th century. It represents the Prophets. The* ***Guiness Book*** *also records the mural of the Resurrection Mausoleum at Justice, Illinois, measuring 22,381 sq. ft. in 2,448 panels, completed in 1971, as the largest stained glass window in the world.*

since the 10th century. Egypt was almost the laboratory for this art—though it gained celebrity when it flourished in Italy.

"The technique of stained glass," according to *The New Caxton Encyclopaedia*, "consists of combining small pieces of coloured glass (red, yellow, green, blue and purple) to make a design that has previously been drawn out to scale. The pieces are fitted together by lead strips."

As the glass-craft itself progressed and proliferated, the stained glass work got promoted from craft to art. In the 16th century Rouen in France became the centre of this art, though by then most of the European countries had developed their own schools of stained glass art. Switzerland came to the forefront in this art in the 17th century.

Despite numerous crafts and art-forms coming into vogue in the 18th and 19th centuries, the stained glass continued to hold the fancy of craftsmen and other people and the churches provided them with the arena for sustaining it and promoting it. Somehow, the Christian theme has been the primary source of inspiration for the craftsmen. The artist who gave a boost to the art in the

19th century was William Morris. A glass panel in the Birmingham Cathedral bears testimony to what a team of craftsmen can achieve. This work was executed by Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, with the help of their students. The art has continued to be popular in this century both along religious and secular lines.

It is difficult to say when the art came to India. But some of the major churches in Indian cities display specimens remarkable for their bold features and impressiveness. Stained glass art also adorned some of the palaces and castles of India.

Sobha Singh

Pahari bride. Chandigarh Museum's collection. Courtesy Punjab Arts Council.

SOBHA SINGH

by Varsha Das

"I want to paint beauty and goodness in life."

Sobha Singh.

Sohni Mahiwal, Dr. Karan Singh's collection. Courtesy Sobha Singh.

ON the 21st of August 1986, came the news that Sardar Sobha Singh suffered a stroke and passed away. Immediately some veteran artists of Delhi got together and spoke very warmly about this Sikh artist who has made a special place for himself in the world of Indian art. This self-taught, self-made man with a charming personality was also known as a Painter of the religious gurus and spirit. It would be interesting to peep into his variegated life which began in the house of a Cavalier in the Indian Army and ended in the midst of rich treasures of art.

Sobha Singh was born on 29th November, 1901, at Sri Hargobindpur in Punjab. His father was in the Indian Army in the post of a Surveyor. He was also a trained Cavalier and used to paint occasionally as a hobby. The youngest among his three children, Sobha Singh, loved to paint from his early childhood. He painted on the walls and floors and was rebuked for having wasted his time. The father wanted him to be disciplined as he and all others were in the army but Sobha Singh was of a different nature. He refused to fall in line. The father too was equally adamant. He continued his efforts in harsher methods.

The little boy, one day, got fed up with it all and strongly felt that life was not worth living. He decided to commit suicide! His close friend of those days Dr. Randhawa, narrating the incident, says: "He learnt that a woman in the neighbourhood who had contracted a chill, died of pneumonia. He felt that

Guru Teg Bahadur. Courtesy: Sobha Singh.

Guru Gobind Singh. Courtesy Sobha Singh.

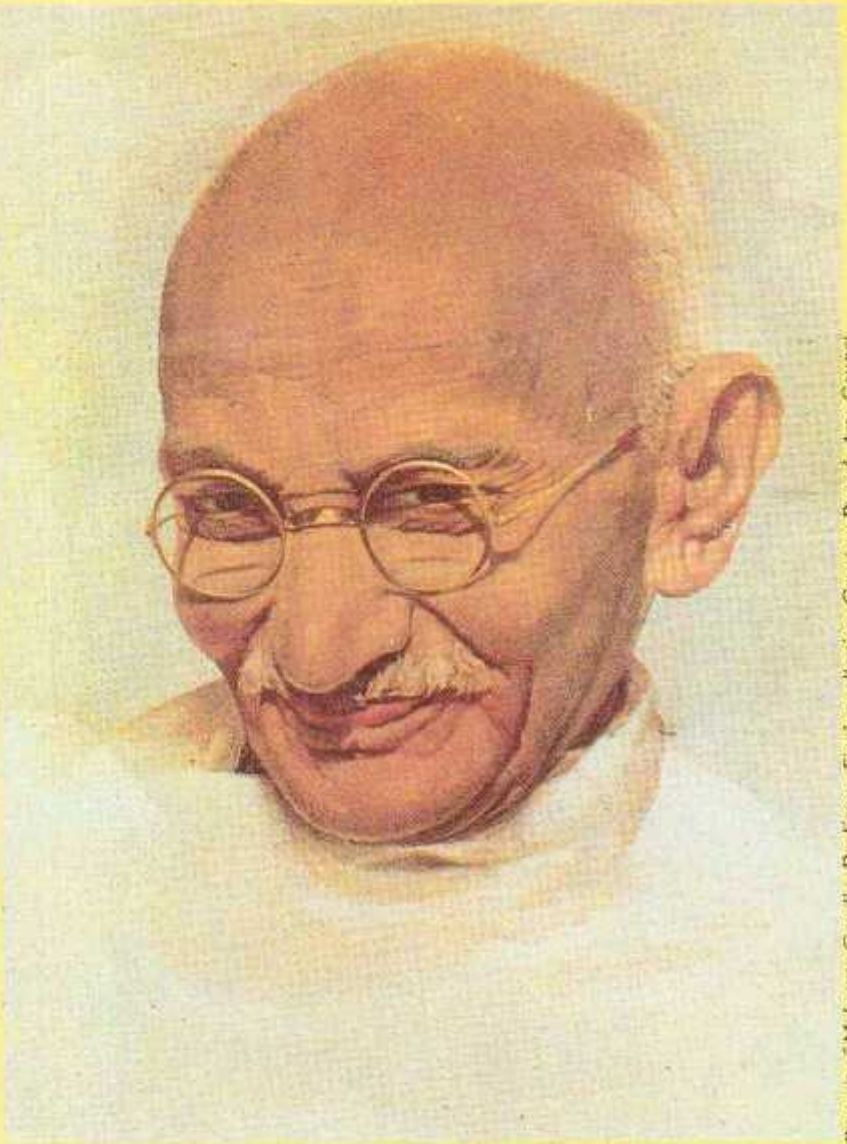
perhaps it was the easiest way to end his life. He ran towards the river Beas, jumped over sand dunes and when he started perspiring, he plunged into a creek. He did not catch a chill and felt ravenously hungry. He gorged himself with *Singharas* (trapanuts) which were growing there in plenty. He soon realised that life is a precious gift of God and deserved to be preserved and lived."

But life was not very smooth for him. Sobha Singh lost his mother when he was just 5 years old, and father at the age of 16, but he was fortunate enough to receive a mother's care and affection from his elder sister Bibi Lakshmi Devi, who was 12 years older. She was married to Sardar Mangal Singh, an overseer with the Government in Amritsar. Another advantage of staying with them was that Sobha Singh could learn scale drawing from his brother-in-law. He had earlier in 1915, done a ten months' course in Art and Craft from A.I. Industrial School in Amritsar. So far as school education was concerned, he had managed to reach only upto class V. But that was no hindrance to his career.

At the age of 17, Sobha Singh joined Cantonment and later the British Indian Army as a grade IV draughtsman. He was sent to Iraq for four years where he worked with a senior draughtsman called Zaman Ali. They became great friends.

During this sojourn he learnt English and also took lessons in music. His performance as a draughtsman was so good that he was soon promoted to the rank of head draughtsman and got a Surveyor's post. During all these years he pursued his first love —drawing and painting. He came across beautiful books on European paintings which became a source of inspiration to him.

In 1923 he returned from Baghdad, got married to Bibi Inder Kaur and resigned his job in the Army. He wanted to become a freelance painter. Near chowk Phawara in Amritsar he set up his 'Subhash Studio'. He used to watch Sikh *Satyagrahis* during the *morcha* of *Guru Ka Bagh*. The spiritual glow on their faces reminded him of Sikh Gurus who held their heads high



Portrait of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Karan Singh's collection. Courtesy Punjab Arts Council

in spite of severe persecutions. Sobha Singh felt as if he had found a theme for his art at last. But he soon shifted to Lahore in 1926. He became a successful commercial artist and churned out many works from his studio 'Echo School of Art'. In 1929, he met Dr. Randhawa and Giani Kartar Singh 'Hitkari', the father of the Punjabi writer Amrita Pritam. Both became his life-long friends. During this period he was inspired by Punjabi romantic folktales. He painted Sassi in search of Punnu in the desert. In all his works he brought out the beauty of Punjabi women. As Dr. Randhawa says: "Here, at last, I felt, was a true Punjabi artist painting genre scenes from the life of the people of the Punjab."

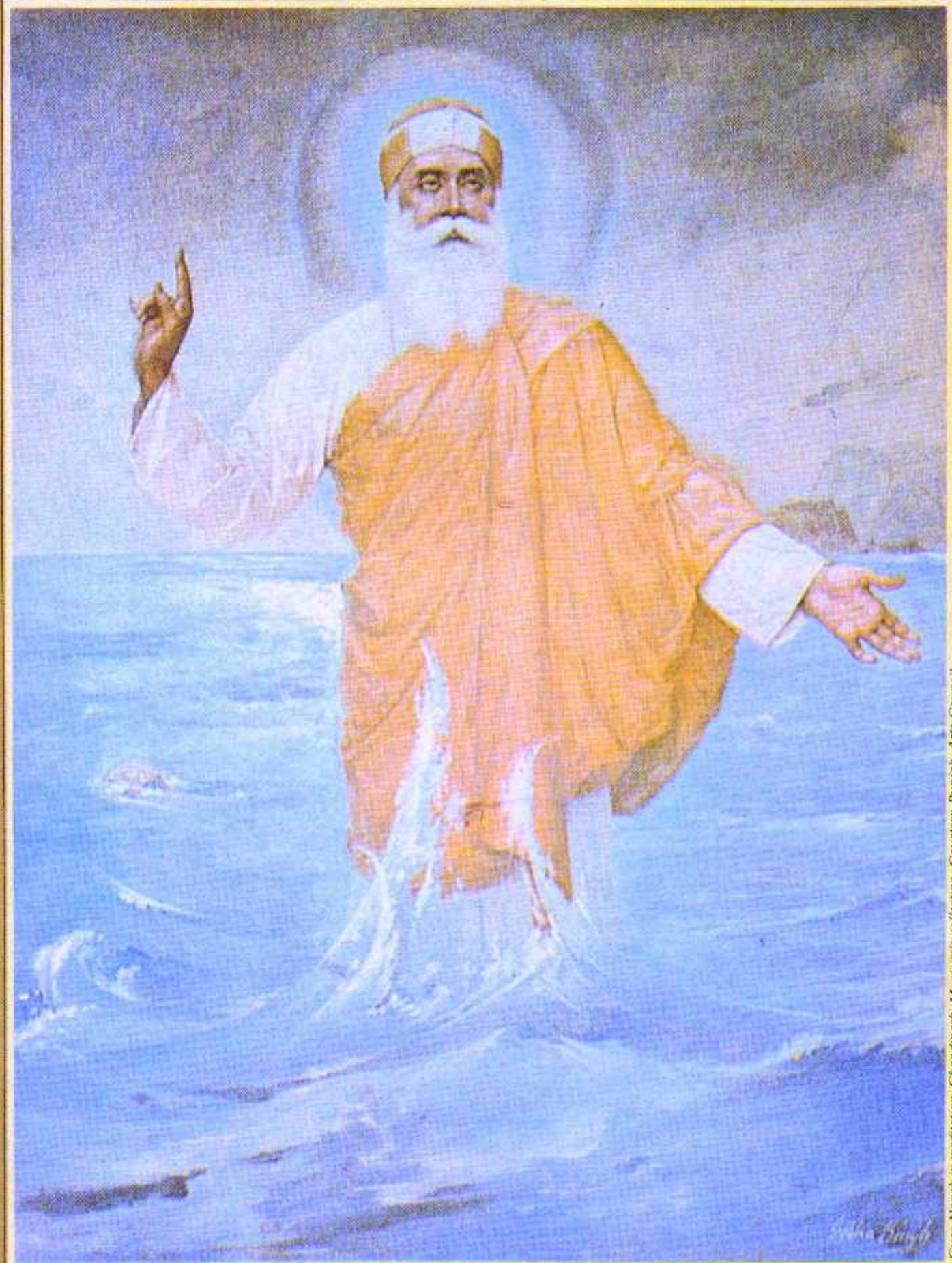
Within a couple of years Sobha Singh again became restless and shifted to Delhi leaving behind all his works and belongings. He set up his studio at Connaught Circus. His reputation as a commercial artist had already spread in the higher circles of Delhi. He painted portraits for the rulers of Princely States and posters for the Indian Railways and Posts and Telegraph Department. He also got a patron like Colonel G.D. Tete who encouraged and appreciated him. He stayed in Delhi for a little over ten years and painted once again his famous works like *Birth of Nanak*, *The Goddess of Dawn*, *The Last Resort*, *The Devil* etc. Two of his works were published in the annual number of *London Illustrated News* in 1935. He also won some prizes and medals during this period. His earliest portrait of Guru Nanak, entitled *Nam Khumari Nanaka Charhi Rahe Din Rat* was painted in the year 1937.

In 1942 he was invited by Sardar Gurbux Singh, editor of a Punjabi journal *Preet Lari*, to live with him in a colony of idealists, artists and writers. This colony was located in a village between Lahore and Amritsar. It was called 'Preet Nagar'. Sobha Singh stayed there and experimented with various forms of creative expression like poetry and short stories, as well as making sculptures and architectural designs. Both, Gurbux Singh and Sobha Singh were very strong personalities. It was difficult for them to continue together for long. They decided to part company and in 1946 Sobha Singh again shifted to Lahore.

In Lahore Sobha Singh entered new ventures like films and theatre. He was an Art Director of the film *But-Tarash*. He also met Prithviraj Kapoor. They became great friends. He even did a life-size bust of this towering theatre personality.

In March 1947 he had to leave Lahore empty-handed.

Those were the years of total confusion in India. It was very difficult for Sobha Singh to settle down immediately and start painting. Fortunately he was invited by Dr. Randhawa to live in Ambala for some time. An exhibition of his works was arranged in the Sirhind Club of Ambala Cantonment. Many of his paintings were purchased by Air Force Officers. He also went to Simla and Bombay on similar ventures. The sale of his works gave him some money and enabled him to build a cottage in the outskirts of a village called Andretta in the Kangra Valley. This was a beautiful and tranquil place, with snow-capped Dhauladhar peak on one side and lush green landscape on the other, the kind of resort that Sobha Singh always wanted, though his very first experience at Kangra Valley was not at all pleasant. As Dr. Randhawa observes: " In March 1947 Sobha Singh migrated from Lahore to India. He left Lahore empty-



Guru Nanak in meditation, Chandigarh Museum's collection. Courtesy Punjab Arts Council.

Her last wish. Courtesy All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi.

handed, leaving behind more than sixty paintings and his household goods. He reached village Andretta in the Kangra Valley along with his pupil. It was raining heavily, and a cold wind was blowing and nobody gave them shelter. He and his pupil spread their bedding on a plank in front of a shop. On seeing their plight the shopkeeper came forward and allowed them to spend the night in a shed used for storing tea leaves. It was indeed a cold reception in the Kangra Valley." But eventually it turned out to be the ideal place for him, for his mind, body and spirit were at their best. He was inspired by the miniature paintings of Kangra School, and also by their folksongs. This is evident from the details of female figures dealt by him in oil. He also did a number of portraits including the one of Norah Richards who was responsible for building a colony of artists in Andretta.

Sobha Singh was much interested in religious themes. He enjoyed reading spiritual writings of Khalil Gibran, J. Krishnamurthi and on Zen Buddhism. He specialised in painting Sikh Gurus. He brought out in his portraits their inspiring qualities for the people to find solace in it. He never painted persecutions and gory scenes of martyrdom. He used to say, " Such paintings would never allow men to forget tyranny and hatred, and blood cannot be cleansed with blood. The paintings of wars and religious intolerance widen the gulf among men, but paintings of the martyrs of peace cover up the cleavages among human beings ... Such a painting is comparable to a lighted candle which sheds its glow in a limited area, but its reality becomes very significant... The stark poverty, suffering, misery, pain and tyranny is there in every nook and corner of the country for all to see. Is there any need to paint it on paper? I only want to paint beauty and goodness in life, which are getting rarer day by day. The concept of *'Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram'* with me is *'Sundaram, Shivam and Satyam'* (Beauty, Goodness and Truth) in that order."

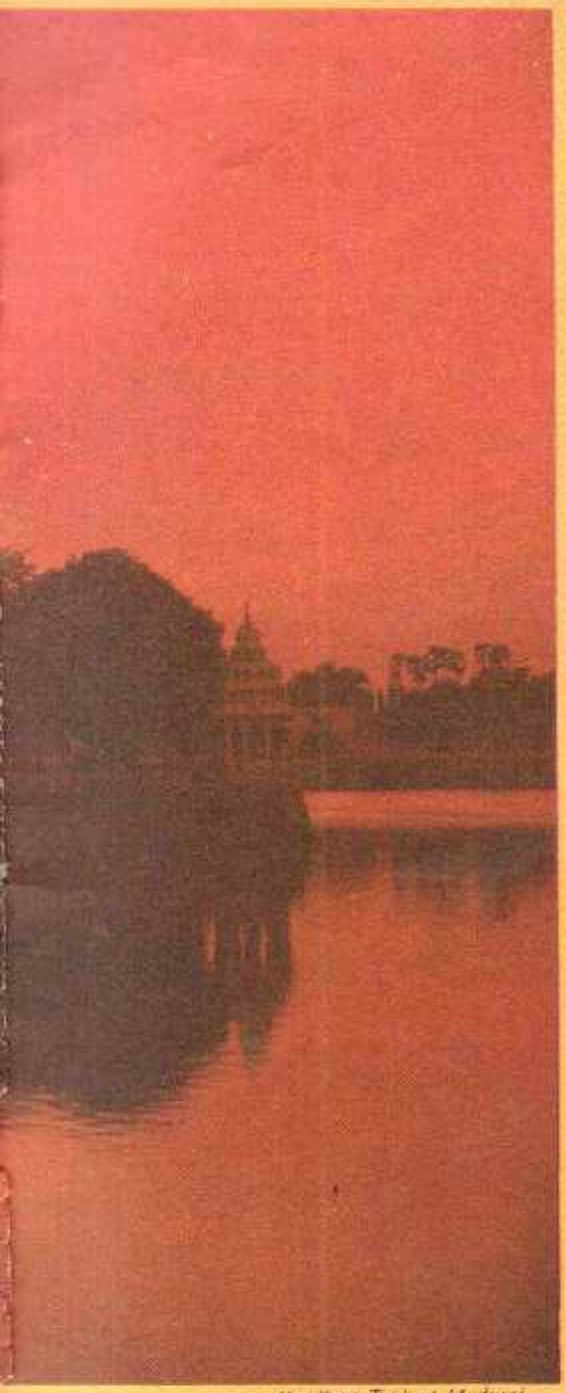
Sobha Singh has painted Guru Nanak in various moods. The image is the artist's own imagination and it is now universally accepted as an 'authentic' portrait. Besides Guru Nanak, he has painted Jesus Christ, Baba Sheikh Farid, Guru Arjun Dev, Guru Hargobind, Guru Teg Bahadur, Guru Gobind Singh, Lord Krishna and Lord Rama. He has also done landscapes, figures from legends and folktales, and portraits of national leaders. Over the years he built an art gallery of his own works which is in Andretta and attracts many visitors.

British Broadcasting Corporation has made a documentary film on Sobha Singh. He was a devout Sikh to whom 'religion was the inspiration and Guru, his life-blood.'

A sunset reflection in the water at Vandiyur Tank

THE FLOAT FESTIVAL AT MADURAI

One of the oldest cities of India as well as of the world, Madurai, preserves some of the ancient festivals in their original form so far as rituals are concerned, though new splendours and formalities might have been added to them through the centuries.



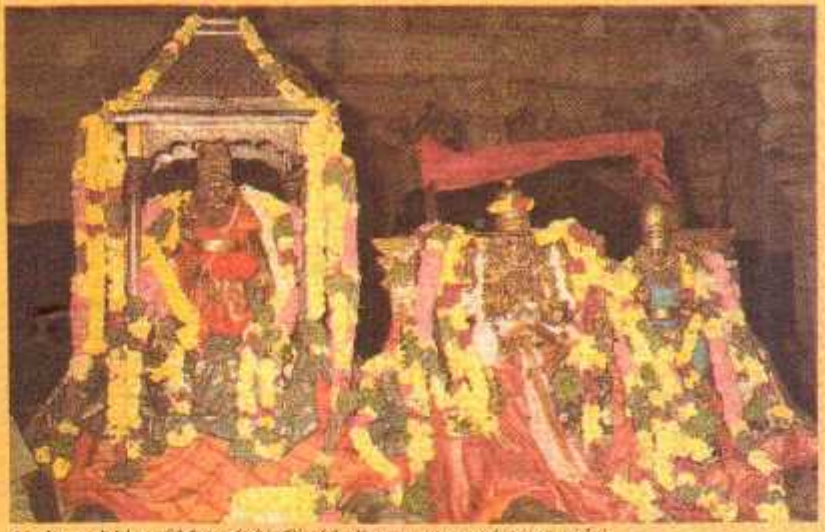
Vandiyur Tank at Madurai

One such festival is *Tai Pusam*, observed during the full-moon period while *Pushya* presides. The Tamil month Tai corresponds to January-February.

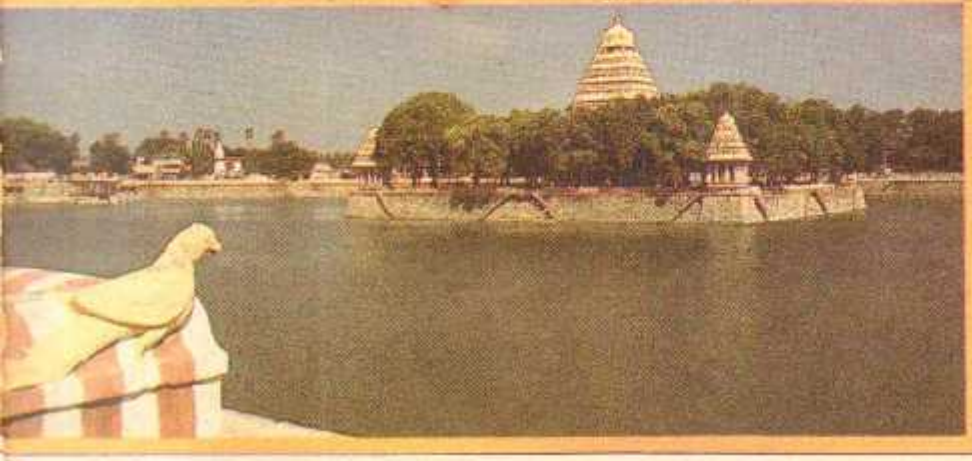
To this age-old festival the city of Madurai added a new celebration in the 17th century — the observance of the birthday of the renowned King Thirumala Nayak. A grand procession brings the deities from the temple of Goddess Meenakshi to the large lake, Mariamman Teppakulam in the eastern zone of the city. At the centre of the lake there is a temple. The deities are carried there in a boat beautified with hundreds of lamps and other embellishments. The Ancient temple music keeps on playing all through the festival.

A member of the Indian Civil Service in the colonial days, J. P. Lasrado Shenoy, leaves this description of the tank and the festival:

It measures 1000 feet on the north and south and 950 feet on the east and west, and curiously enough occupies an area almost exactly



Utchava deities of Meenakshi, Chokkalingeswarer and priya vidai.



Photographs by V. Muthuraman

equivalent to that of the great temple. It is an artificial reservoir, built by Thirumala Nayak inabout the year1645, for the use of the Goddess Meenakshi. This remarkably beautiful tank is the largest stone-built teppakulam in the whole of Southern India and is never empty as it is fed by means of a channel from the river Vaigai. Tradition points to this spot as the place where the bricks for Thirumala Nayak's Palace were made. Here too was found in the course of excavation the huge image of Ganapathi, which is now placed in the temple. Thirumala Nayak could not overlook such a propitious

An illumination of the Mandap at twilight with full moon

Deities being taken to the float at the auspicious time with traditional music

Devotees pulling the float

omen and decided straightaway to construct a teppakulam on the sacred spot. Here every morning the pious Hindu may be seen taking his bath. In the centre of the reservoir is a beautiful little island, also faced with cut granite. From the midst of the green palms and flowering trees growing on it, rises the tower of a small white temple. The four little white turrets emerging from a green background of trees are particularly graceful and the whole presents a very delightful picture. From the top of the central tower may be obtained a magnificent view of the temple towers and the palace in the distance. On every anniversary of Thirumala Nayak's birthday, which falls towards the end of January, the famous Teppam or Floating-festival takes place. After nightfall the images of Siva and Meenakshi are floated on a raft (teppam), which is dragged round the island and the Teppakulam, illuminated with thousands of coloured lights, presents a spectacle well worth seeing.

COCONUT :

THE AUSPICIOUS FRUIT

by Richard Pearson

This year we have focused our attention on some of the familiar traditional sacred plants of the country. Many, like the Rudraksha, used for sacred necklaces, the common Dhurva grass, an important part of all *pujas* or even rice, one of the staple sources of food and energy in this country, have not been featured.

Let us remember, however, that just as a soul has a special blessing when born in this country of Bharat, all the plants that have chosen to grow here too, have no doubt a sacredness and an honour and absorb the deep, wide and infinitely uplifting spirit of this land.

NOW that we have followed some of the plants in their growth, expression and marvellous gifts to man, we may be in a better position to experience for ourselves the multiple aspects of the plant life around us.

We will have to follow a threefold discipline. The first prerequisite is the need to enter into contact with the throbbing plant-life around us and the courage to communicate,—using all our six senses.

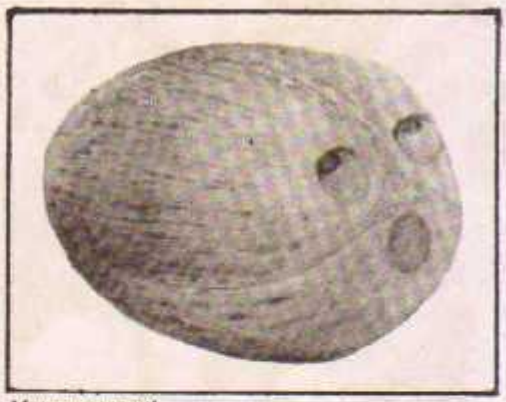
A second necessity is to be mentally and emotionally attentive and still within.

Lastly, but not least of all, after passing through periods of strong attractions and aversions, we should gradually train ourselves to observe without reaction. We will then be like well-adjusted instruments recording without distorting the input.

We see a fully dry coconut being broken before a new car after the ceremony of blessing at the temple. This is something so natural we may not even think much about it. Just consider, however, all the abundance,—the fertility and vitality that this fruit represents. In order to get at the source of this vitality let us befriend the gentle and all-giving giant coconut tree whose life-span just exceeds the average human life. It would be easier, first of all, to observe the dwarf tree with orange fruits, meant for water only ("Brahma Eelaneer"), since it does not grow so tall.

The coconut begins with the flower which, in turn, is found enclosed in the beginning in a pointed boat-like structure, placed at the base of the new giant leafy frond, almost half a metre long. The covering opens to expose a tender crest of long curving spikes studded with little cream-white glistening buds. These are some of the coconuts-to-be! When the boat-shaped bract falls to the ground it is used, after soaking in water, to make pieces of very strong binding twine. The little white buds open and reveal pollen-covered stamens. There are three hard 'petals' and three stamens. Bees abound, collecting both pollen and nectar. Later these flowers drop off leaving artistically curved dry twigs. But the base of each spike remains green and the round faintly three-sided miniature fruit begin to grow. Some of these "button fruit" fall off and children collect them to make vases and candle-stands. The coconut takes a full year to ripen. Of course it is usually plucked after about ten months for its water and the thin layer of white flesh or the dried kernel called copra.

Photo by Vidyavrata



Mature coconut

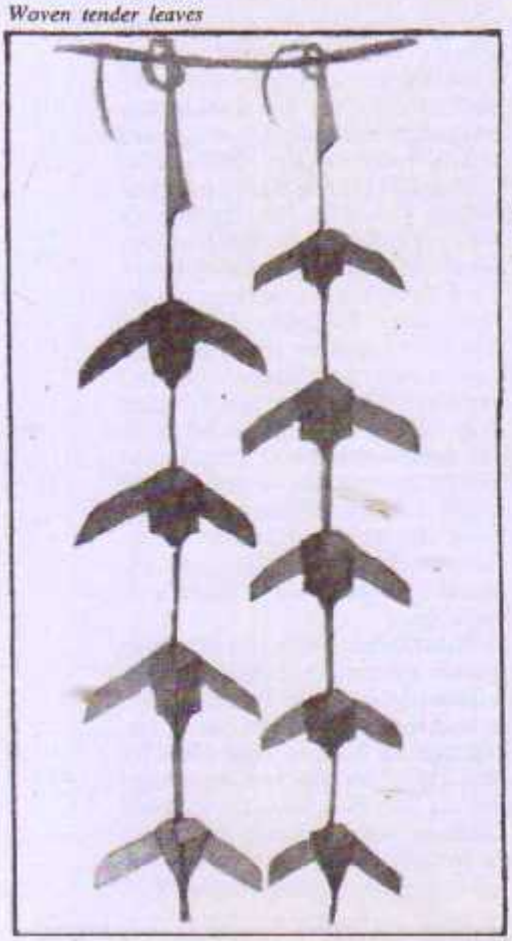
It may be interesting at this point to note that although the coconut is genetically a fairly stable tree, one does find some exceptions like the "Tairu Thengai" (Curd coconut) which contains a pulpy substance not unlike curd and tasty too. But the ripe fruit of this kind rarely germinates.

The Botanical name *Cocos nucifera* indicates the probable

origin of this wonderful tree, from the Cocos Islands. But the word Cocos also means "Monkey" either because monkeys are used in those islands for plucking the fruit or because the large nut when looked at, after it is fully dehusked, is somewhat like the face of a monkey. In fact the dehusked coconut shows three 'eyes'. One of these is the point where the embryo of the future plant is placed.

In nature the fruit is capable of rolling down the slopes of sand dunes or floating to distant islands on the sea. In fact it is common on seashores across the world in the tropical and subtropical regions, up to 20° latitude on either side of the equator. It does grow in the interior too and even well above sea-level, but not in such abundance

Woven tender leaves



There are basically two kinds of coconut. The attractive, inefficient Dwarfs and the unassuming yet inestimable Giants.

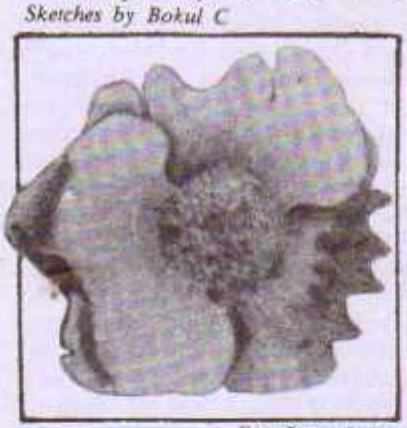
The Dwarfs have a life-span of about 30 to 40 years, but the Giants may live up to 90 years. The Dwarfs start bearing after the third or fourth year, whereas the Giants may need eight to ten years for flowering. Just imagine there are up to 30 different varieties of Giants alone, but only a few kinds of Dwarfs.

The fruits are planted flat in well manured soil and after four months the first pointed leaf appears. Four months later the seedlings are ready for transplantation. But the leaves are not yet divided into ribbon-like leaflets.

Some varieties may only yield 35 to 50 fruits a year—others up to 400!

The quantity of water in a tender coconut also depends on the variety—it may vary from quarter of a litre to nearly one full litre.

Sketches by Bokul C



Dry flower-base

The percentage of oil in the copra of the dried coconut varies too, between 60 to 75 per cent and weighs from 60 to 300 grammes.

When the oil has been extracted the oil-cake is dried and used as a valuable cattle-feed, which increases the milk production of the cows. It is also an excellent natural fertiliser as it contains potash, nitrogen and potassium in good quantities.

Perhaps there is no tree as giving as the coconut. The fruits are usually harvested six to eight times a year.

The roots are astringent and juice extracted from them helps the kidneys to function well. The small flowers are astringent too.

The water from the tender coconut is cooling and is given during fever or to correct urinary disorders. Besides it is an excellent fertile medium for growing orchid seeds or other delicate plants. During World War II when injured soldiers urgently needed body fluids, coconut-water was injected directly into the veins.

The tender coconut flesh is sweet and also good for the kidneys.

The oil is disinfecting, kills insects and removes parasites. It is easily digestible and is said to be the best cooking oil, after olive oil, of course! The oil is also used for cosmetics and soap and it is also good for massage.

The wood called "Porcupine wood" because of its dark coloured splinters is obtained from the exterior of the trunk and the base of the large frond-like leaves. It is used to make small objects.

Of course we all know that the lower frond-like leaves are periodically removed, split in two and plaited to form mats or material for roofing most of the huts in the country.

Look at the Coconut Tree swaying with the wind—braving the storm and sometimes twisted in several directions, but finally always growing upward. When well-fed they are as sturdy as true giants but quite often you may see neglected trees too that are very slim. Yet always this tree gives you the feeling of a real warrior, a hero affronting all natural hardships! Other trees' branches may break in the wind, the coconut palm sways and bends, but does not yield!

A WALK THROUGH THE WIND

by M. Krishnan

IT is late in the year, about now, that cyclones hit the east coast with unpredictable aim, somewhere along its vast, concave stretch from Kanyakumari to Calcutta. Sometimes they destroy entire settlements and often result in much havoc. People living far inland can know their fury only by hearsay—no comparable atmospheric violence affects them personally. Of course everyone learns of the cyclonic devastation of human life and property from news reports, but seldom do these reports mention its effects on coastal wildlife.

Way back in 1970, in gusty December, I was at the Point Calimere sanctuary of Thanjavur—at Kodikkarai in sacred Vedaranyam, the historic site of the passive defiance of the Raj across the width of the country from Dandi. I was then engaged in a survey of the larger wildlife of peninsular India on a national fellowship, and had been kindly provided with field facilities for my work. I was in a squat, low, thick-walled, steep-tiled cottage on the beach, with a Forest Guard to arrange for such help as I needed.

N was a remarkable character, dark, keen, and garrulous, about my height but almost two dimensional and only half my 80 kg weight of those days. Reluctantly I had to decline his offer to accompany me on my rounds, to assist me with my equipment and, as he put it, "learn wildlife". Reading sophisticated spy thrillers, from Eric Ambler and Graham Greene to Len Deighton, I have been struck by the resemblance between the way international secret agents work and my own methods of wildlife observation and record—the same circuitous, unostentatious approach, the same narrow observation from hiding, and the affectation of preoccupation with something else when a confrontation is unavoidable. Engaged in such work, one cannot afford a keen, inquisitive, questioning assistant. However, N agreed to bring me food from the far-away hotel each day, a real help.

I wanted to sit in a hide, on a dune overlooking the sea, to watch the pigs that hunted crabs along the tide-line at nightfall—I suspected (as I do still) that they were not genuinely wild but only domestic stock run wild, and wanted to observe them closely for some token of such reversion. I had given N money for two gunny sacks and some bamboo poles (for the hide) and he had promised to bring them along with my lunch.

Then, shortly after noon, all at once it was dark and a cyclone was upon us with unannounced ferocity. Hastily I shut and bolted the door and windows to seal the cottage against the typhoon, but could do little to lessen its fury. All day long and all night long the rain beat down with a vehemence that rattled even the deep-piled country tiles of the roof, and the banshee shrieks and howls of the wind were almost continuous. Across the narrow beach, the sea which was shallow for almost ¼ km and smooth with hardly any waves, grew suddenly ebullient and raised great breakers that came crashing down on the shore with predatory hunger. Only by looking at my watch with the aid of a flashlight could I tell whether it was still day, or night.

Late next morning the cyclone ceased, totally and abruptly as it had begun. Black massed clouds still coursed across the sky which shone with an incandescent blue-green luminance through the ragged rifts in the moving, dark canopy, and the sea was a dark olive-brown, unruffled sheet : in the hollows on the sands there were placid pools and puddles. What dominated this fantastic, unearthly scene was the wind, silent now except for a soft, sustained hiss. Up to my knees it was utterly inert and still over land and water, but from knees up it was blowing a regular gale. The flat-topped trees and bushes, now stripped of their foliage that lay strewn and unmoving on the ground below, shivered and shook in the gale, and it was only by leaning my weight into the wind that I could slowly force my way through it.

Hastily making myself a cup of coffee, I took out the dry biscuits I had prudently brought along. Here was the opportunity to go for a long walk along the wave-line, after fortifying the inner man, to study how the vegetation and animals had fared during the typhoon. I knew, of course, that they would have survived it in the main—otherwise they could not be there at all—but expected a fair amount of strewn death : even the solid insulation of the cottage, built long ago to withstand cyclones, had seemed vulnerable.

N turned up with an enormous basket of food and profuse apologies just as I was setting out. I asked him to wait for me at the cottage till I came back, but he was dead set on accompanying me. It was best to carry nothing that the wind could pluck away from one, and I took only a Leica with a normal lens, slung over

my back by its strap.

It was like walking through an invisible resisting force. The light was bright by now, but visibility poor because of the wind stress. Pushing through to the sea's edge, I turned to see where my companion was—he was even farther away than he had been, literally repulsed by the wind. I shouted to him to get back to the cottage, and pushed ahead.

There was nothing living in sight. On the shore, where the sea had reached much farther out than usual, there was a thin assorted litter of the dead fish, crabs, shellfish and jellyfish, but mainly deadwood in bits and pieces—there was no wrack, for no thalloid algae grow in this sea. The kites, crows, gulls and terns that crowd the sea's edge were naturally not there, and even crabs were not to be seen. The seaward slope of a scrub-clad dune had been invaded by the cyclone and was now a miniature cove, so that I had to climb the dune to proceed, and at its top I almost walked into five or six jackals lying down in a huddle behind a screwpine bush. They rose instantly and fled upwind at incredible speed, swift grey wraiths that vanished into the gale that held me almost stationary—I was puzzled by their speed till I realised that going flat out they had the wind force well above them and faced no resistance.

Evidently the animals found refuge lying up in hollows behind the dunes and, away from the sea, in the shelter of thick bushes that formed a serried wind-break against the cyclone. As I expected, in spite of the impressive litter of twigs and foliage that lay strewn around, the vegetation had suffered no crippling damage the herbs had their life in their subterranean stems and soon regrew lost aerial shoots, and the hardbitten shrubs, low and twiggy, were interlaced by the wind into tough hurdles. The trees were stunted, thick-boled and flat-topped, offering minimal purchase to the wind, and if some of their branches got torn off they regrew them in due course. Again I was struck by the floristic resemblance that quite dissimilar ecological influences can result in—the vegetation here, not specifically but in character, was rather like that of the far north-western Thar desert of Rajasthan—the infinitely slow-growing, xerophytic tree, Salvadora, so typical of those arid tracts, was in the distant south only here.

Beyond the dune I came upon a remarkable sight, a long, strung-out line of some two hundred brownheaded gulls, all in eclipse plumage, all standing utterly immobile in a queue facing the wind, plumage sleeked, heads withdrawn into the shoulders, beaks and smoothly rounded breasts offering no resistance to any air current that might stray beneath the mainstream. I walked between the sea and the birds, hardly 4 metres from them, counting them roughly as I walked, and leaning into the wind to steady myself took several photographs of them—they were wholly indifferent to me.

I was feeling exhausted, and wanted to rest for a while in some sheltered dip and maybe wait like those patient gulls for the wind to die down a little before turning back, so that it might not send me scurrying back to camp at a run. Ahead of me there was a long sandspit jutting into the sea, that could be reached only by going a long way round, and beyond it and hidden by it I could glimpse a crowd of birds which I wanted to identify.

Across the water the spit was quite close by, and here the sea was bound to be shallow. I waded in and slowly made my way through knee-deep water towards the spit—being on a lower level now, I could not see the birds at all. Suddenly I found I was chest-deep in the water—the cyclone had scooped out a trough here. Far away, to my right, I could see a pack of dolphins leaping in and out of the sea, and just ahead of me a reddish halophyte that grew on the spit. I inched me way forward, feeling each cautious step before taking it.

I felt something long and thick gently brushing past my legs and then another—looking around I saw that I was surrounded by the dolphins. They were bigger than me, and kept racing round and round me at top speed, in a mad, impetuous dance on the surface of the water. Suddenly one of them would dive, and a moment later I would feel it brushing gently past my legs. Then, all at once, they raced away from me, far out to the sea.

It was all over in a minute or two. I felt no fear, not even amazement, but just stood there, thrilled to the very marrow. From my reading I knew that alone among wild mammals dolphins were said to have a positive feeling of friendliness towards men, but why they chose to greet me in this fashion is more than I can tell. I have no clear recollection of my passage back to the cottage, helped by a wind that was now almost gentle, but recalling the experience even at this distance of time, am still filled with a sense of wonder and a feeling akin to gratitude.

1988 marks the birth centenary of this renowned poet of decadence and regeneration.

THE IMPORTANCE

"A great poet in writing of himself writes his age," said T.S. Eliot. This is applicable to Eliot himself. He has been hailed as the liberator of modern English literature and eulogised as a great poet and an outstanding critic of the twentieth century. He himself is 'the unity of his work'. No doubt, the 20th century English poetry and literary criticism would not be what they are without T.S. Eliot. He dominated the English literary scene for nearly four decades and, for many, set the taste for the age.

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born at St. Louis, Missouri in 1888. He did his M.A. at Harvard in 1910. He studied French literature and philosophy at Sorbonne in 1910-11 and on return to America, continued to study philosophy at Harvard and received some instruction in Sanskrit and Indian philosophy. He went to Germany with a travelling scholarship and then came to England where he studied philosophy at Oxford. In London he worked as a teacher, bank clerk, editor and director of the publishing firm of Faber and Faber. His first volume of poems *Prufrock and Other Observations* was published in 1917. In 1922 he published *The Waste Land* and founded *The Criterion*. In 1927 he became a British citizen and in 1928 declared himself "a classist in Literature, royalist in politics and Anglo-Catholic in religion". In 1948 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature and in 1965 he left us for good. This is by way of an introduction to Eliot's life.

Eliot had the advantage of viewing the English literary scene both as a foreigner and a native. In his early life he had seen a society which was more corrupt and hostile to spiritual values than that of Europe. After coming to England he presented himself in keeping with the British manners, with umbrella, striped trousers and bowler hat. He rejected the American style of living and never returned to America except as a visitor. He acquired the characteristic English reticence. He liked English cheese. He was tall, thoughtful, reserved and spoke in measured and solemn tones even when in a lighter vein. One such anecdote is recorded by Hugh Kenner:

"After *The Confidential Clerk* was produced a journalist, teased by implication he could not pindown or simply assigned a term of duty at poet-baiting wanted to know what it meant. 'It means what it says' said Mr. Eliot patiently. 'No more? certainly no more'.

'But supposing' the journalist pursued, 'supposing you had meant something else would you not have put some other meaning more plainly?'

'No', Eliot replied, 'I should have put it just as obscurely.'

Eliot's poetic pilgrimage starts with a gloomy vision of the rough world and closes with a happy realisation of the world of essences. Eliot is a conscious artist and his poetry gives us the impression of a voice or an articulating consciousness, submerged, controlled, and contemplative, 'looking before and after'. 'The more perfect the artist, the more separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates', says Eliot in *Tradition and the Individual*. Hence the man who suffers is said to be other than the mind that creates the poem.

From the beginning Eliot seemed torn between two extremes. He insisted on order and wrote about disorder. And writing about disorder he slowly moved away from the domain of literature into theology which gave him his materials. Looked at from the perspective of Eliot's later work, his poetry down to *The Hollow Man* seems to be a pilgrimage through the inferno of modern city life.

His poetry may be divided into two parts. The first part, culminating in *The Waste Land*, presents the vast panorama of futility and anarchy that is modern life, the limbo of suffering. The second part, culminating in *Four Quartets* presents the world of regeneration. Eliot's impersonal

OF T.S. ELIOT

by Bijay Kumar Das

Extracts from the Presentation Address by ANDERS QSTERLING (Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy)

It is not possible in this presentation to indicate more than the most immediate fascinating features in the complicated multiplicity of Eliot's characteristics as a writer. The predominating one is the high, philosophically schooled intelligence, which has succeeded in enlisting in its service both imagination and learning, both sensitivity and the analysis of ideas. His capacity for stimulating a reconsideration of pressing questions within intellectual and aesthetic opinion is also extraordinary, and however much the appraisal may vary, it can never be denied that in his period he has been an eminent poser of questions, with a masterly gift for finding the apt wording, both in the language of poetry and in the defence of ideas in essay form.

Nor is it due only to chance that he has written one of the finest studies of Dante's work and personality. In his bitter moral pathos, in his metaphysical line of thought, and in his burning longing for a world order inspired by religion, a civitas dei, Eliot has indeed certain points of contact with the great Florentine poet. It redounds to his honour that, amidst the varied conditions of his milieu, he can be justly characterized as one of Dante's most recent successors. In his message we hear solemn echoes from other times, but that message does not by any means therefore become less real when it is given to our own time and to us who are now living.

Mr. Eliot—According to the diploma, the award is made chiefly in appreciation of your remarkable achievements as pioneer in modern poetry. I have here tried to give a brief survey of this very important work of yours, which is admired by many ardent readers in this country.

Exactly twenty-five years ago, there stood where you are now standing another famous poet who wrote in the English tongue, William Butler Yeats. The honour now passes to you as being a leader and a champion of a new period in the long history of the world's poetry.

With the felicitations of the Swedish Academy, I now ask you to receive your Prize from the hands of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince.

theory of poetry, one suspects, springs from his personal unhappy life. 'The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality', wrote Eliot.

As recent research shows his marriage to Vivien Haigh-Wood was a failure. Vivien married Eliot 'to stimulate him' but failed miserably. "Vivien wanted to enjoy life, found Eliot inhibiting and inhibited, yet worshipped him," said Stephen Spender. Bertrand Russell who came to love Eliot 'as if he were my son', had done something to spoil Eliot's first married life. Eliot was deeply upset about it. After Vivien's death, Eliot married his private secretary Miss Valerie Fletcher in 1957.

This personal sad life has helped him to create impersonal and objective poetry in his later period. It is interesting to note that almost all of Eliot's references to the historical past are to incidents celebrated in literature; his history is bookish rather than archaeological.

On the other hand, to arrange the processes of history into cycles, systems, progressions, is to enter the maze of events:

Think now History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors,
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guide us by Vanities.
Gerontion

Patterns do exist—in history as in nature and like: 'Birth and Copulation, and Death'.

The Waste Land is the meeting point of all his earlier poems.

NOBEL PRIZE

Acceptance Speech by T.S. Eliot

When I began to think of what I should say to you this evening, I wished only to express very simply my appreciation of the high honour which the Swedish Academy has thought fit to confer upon me. But to do this, adequately proved no simple task: my business is with words, yet the words were beyond my command. Merely to indicate that I was aware of having received the highest international honour that can be bestowed upon a man of letters, would be only to say what everyone knows already. To profess my own unworthiness would be to cast doubt upon the wisdom of the academy; to praise the Academy might suggest that I, as a literary critic, approved the recognition given to myself as a poet. May I therefore ask, that it be taken for granted, that I experienced, on learning of this award to myself, all the normal emotions of exaltation and vanity, that any human being might be expected to feel at such a moment, with enjoyment of the flattery, and exasperation at the inconvenience, of being turned overnight into a public figure? Were the Nobel awards similar in kind to any other award, and merely higher in degree, I might still try to find words of appreciation: but since it is different in kind to any other, the expression of one's feelings calls for resources which language cannot supply.

I must therefore try to express myself in an indirect way, by putting before you my own interpretation of the significance of the Nobel Prize for Literature. If this were simply the recognition of merit, or of the fact that an author's reputation has passed the boundaries of his own country and his own language, we could say that hardly any one of us at any time is, more than others, worthy of being so distinguished. But, I find in the Nobel award something more and something different from such recognition. It seems to me more the election of an individual, chosen from time to time from one nation or another, and selected by something like an act of grace, to fill a peculiar role and become a peculiar symbol. A ceremony takes place, by which man is suddenly endowed with some function which he did not fill before. So, the question is not whether he was worthy to be so singled out, but whether he can perform the function which you have assigned to him: the function of serving as a representative, so far as man can be, of something of far greater importance than the value of what he himself has written.

Poetry is usually considered the most local of all the arts. Painting, sculpture, architecture, music, can be enjoyed by all who see or hear. But language, especially the language of poetry, is a different matter. Poetry, it might seem, separates peoples instead of uniting them.

But on the other hand we must remember, that while language constitutes a barrier, poetry itself gives us a reason for trying to overcome the barrier. To enjoy poetry belonging to another language, is to enjoy an understanding of the people to whom that language belongs, an understanding we can get in no other way. We may think also of the history of poetry in Europe, and of the great influence that the poetry of one language can exert on another; we must remember the immense debt of every considerable poet to poets of other languages than his own; we may reflect that the poetry of every country and every language would decline and perish, were it not nourished by poetry in foreign tongues. When a poet speaks to his own people, the voices of all the poets of other languages who have influenced him are speaking also. And at the same time he himself is speaking to younger poets of other languages, and these poets will convey something of his vision of life and something of the spirit of his people, to their own. Partly through his influence on other poets, partly through translation, which must be also a kind of re-creation of his poems by other poets, partly through readers of his language who are not themselves poets, the poet can contribute towards understanding between peoples.

In the work of every poet there will certainly be much that can only appeal to those who inhabit the same region, or speak the same language, as the poet. But nevertheless there is a meaning to the phrase "the poetry of Europe," and even to the word "poetry" the world over. I think that in poetry, people of different countries and different languages—though it be apparently only through a small minority in any one country—acquire an understanding of each other which, however partial, is still essential. And I take the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature, when it is given to a poet, to be primarily an assertion of the supranational value of poetry. To make that affirmation, it is necessary from time to time to designate a poet: and I stand before you, not on my own merits, but as a symbol, for a time, of the significance of poetry.

During the first phase of his poetic career Eliot was an anathema to many and his Nobel Prize winning poem was a disaster to the modern world. (It is interesting to note that a poet like Rabindra Nath Tagore who compared Eliot's early poetry to influenza against which he needed to protect himself, finally translated his *Journey of the Magi* into Bengali.) Eliot visualised a waste land. This land may be anywhere and it can exist at any point of time. But Eliot introduced the fertility rites and the celebrations of renewed life. In his memorial lecture on Yeats, Eliot says that the great poet is the man who "out of intense and personal experience is able to express a general truth: retaining all the particularity of his experience to make it a general symbol". This is what *The Waste Land* does. The presence of sterile degeneration and the necessity of regeneration and change is the general truth behind it and is its central theme. But there is nothing clear cut and simple about this experience in the life of the individual. For Eliot, the vision revealed or the hints and guess permitted constitute the end of the search. No doubt, Eliot is obsessed with a failure in love and yet he relates it to the religious concepts of sacrifice and purgation. This is what makes *The Waste Land* great.

By the time Eliot composed *Four Quartets* 'Christ the tiger' has already become 'the wounded surgeon' 'who remembers the way to your door'. The quest for belief has also become the very substance of Eliot's poetry.

Eliot is a poet of vision. His poetry begins with failure, frustration and hopelessness, in a word, with emphasis on the negative aspect of life, but ends with success, fulfilment and hope for mankind in future. The poet who begins with the failure to sing the love song ("the Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was never sung!) ends with the benediction: "And all shall be well and/All manner of thing shall be well." (*Little Gidding*).

THE HERITAGE

GLIMPSES OF JANUARY '89 NUMBER

ACCENT ON MADRAS

For some people in the world *Madras* means a fine cotton fabric — or a bright colourful kerchief worn on the head in the West Indies — because they were made in Madras.

But Madras has made tremendous contributions to the making of modern India. Through a bunch of well-researched articles THE HERITAGE will commemorate the 350th anniversary of the founding of the city.

GLIMPSES OF OLD MADRAS: Culled from the accounts of travellers, fortune-seekers and administrators.

MADRAS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS: A review by A.S. Raman.

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY AT ADYAR: A compact account of this unique world movement and its headquarters at Madras by G. Naganathan.

Features on Kalakshetra, the old monuments of Madras; Light on the Armenians' advent to Madras, stories behind the names of the places of Madras and other interesting accounts, along with paintings by the DANIELS.

AND ALL THE REGULAR FEATURES AND FICTION TOO.

by Anton Chekhov

DYADECHKIN is throwing a party. They're seeing the New Year in and congratulating his wife Melania Tikhonovna on her birthday.

There are many guests. All are respectable, well-to-do, sober and staid people. There isn't a single bad egg. All faces are beaming with amiability and a sense of personal dignity. In the hall, two are sitting on the big oilcloth-covered settee: Gusev, the landlord, and Razmakhalov, a shopkeeper, from whom the Dyadechkins buy on credit. They are talking about suitors and daughters.

"It's not easy to find a man nowadays," says Gusev, "who is a non-drinker, hard-working... It's not easy!"

"It's the home that counts. Order, Alexei Vasilievich! There won't be any... home... when there isn't any order... in the home..."

"If there's no order in the home, then... exactly... There's much folly abroad in this world... Ahem..."

Beside them on chairs sit three old ladies adoringly watching their mouths. Their eyes express amazement at the "wisdom" of the speakers. Guri Markovich, a cousin, stands in the corner and inspects the icons. There's a noise in the host's bedroom. The young ladies and gentlemen are playing lotto in there. The stake is one kopek. Near the table stands seven-year-old Kolya, weeping. He wants to play lotto, but they won't let him. Is it his fault that's he's too young and hasn't got a kopek?

"Stop blubbering, you fool!" they counsel him. "Come on, what are you bawling for? You want Mum to give you a thrashing?"

"Who's that bawling? Kolya?" comes Mum's voice from the kitchen. "I haven't whipped him enough, the scamp. Varvara Guryevna, pull his ear for him!"

Two young ladies in pink dresses are sitting on the hostess's bed, which is spread with a faded chintz coverlet. Before them stands Kopaisky, a young man of about twenty-three who works for an insurance company. From the front, he looks very much like a cat. He is trying to impress the girls.

"I don't intend to get married," he says, putting on airs and loosening his high, sharp collar with his fingers. "Woman is a radiant point in the human mind, but she can ruin a man. A most evil creature!"

"And men? A man can't love. He does all sorts of coarse things."

"How naive you are! I'm not a cynic and I'm not a sceptic, but I still understand that a man will always stand on the highest point as regards feelings."

Dyadechkin himself and his firstborn Grisha, are pacing from corner to corner like caged wolves. Their souls are in torment. They imbibed heavily at dinnertime and they now passionately want to follow it up

Dyadechkin goes into the kitchen. His wife is dusting a pie with castor sugar.

"Melania," says Dyadechkin, "you could serve up the *hors d'oeuvres*. The guests would like some..."

"They'll have to wait. You'll eat and drink it all up now, and then what am I to serve at midnight? You won't die. Go away. Get out of my hair."

"Just a nip, Melania... You won't run short of anything because of that. May we, please?

"You're a menace! Go away, I said! Go and sit with your guests! What are you hanging about the kitchen for?"

Dyadechkin sighs deeply and walks out of the kitchen. He goes to look at the clock. The fingers are pointing to eight minutes past eleven. Another fifty-two minutes before the longed-for moment! This is awful! The expectation of a good drink is the hardest of all to bear. Better five hours waiting for a train in the cold than five minutes waiting for a drink. Dyadechkin looks with loathing at the clock and, after pacing about for a short while, moves the big hand on another five minutes. And Grisha? If Grisha isn't given a drink immediately, he'll go to the tavern and get a drink there. He doesn't feel like dying of misery...

"Mum," he says, "the guests are annoyed because you haven't served *hors d'oeuvres!* You're

starving them to death! You could at least let them have a tot!"

"Wait a bit... It's not long to go... Quite soon. Stop cluttering up my kitchen."

Grisha slams the door and goes to look at the clock for the hundredth time. The big hand is merciless! It's still almost where it was before.

"It's slow!" says Grisha to console himself, and he moves the big hand seven minutes forward.

Kolya runs past the clock. He stops in front of it and begins counting the time... He desperately wants to see the moment when everybody shouts "Hurray!" The clock with its immobility cuts him to the quick. He gets up on a chair, looks round apprehensively and steals another five minutes from eternity.

"Go and have a look—*quelle heure est-il* ?" says one of the young ladies to Kopaisky. "I'm dying of impatience. It's New Year, after all! New happiness!"

Kopaisky scrapes his heels together and hurries off to the clock.

"Devil take it!" he mutters, looking at the hands. "What a long time to go! And I could eat a horse... I shall definitely kiss Katya when they shout 'Hurray!'"

Kopaisky goes away from the clock, then halts... After a moment's thought, he turns round and accelerates the coming of the New Year by six minutes... Dyadechkin drinks two glasses of water, but his soul is in torment! He paces up and down, up and down, up and down... From time to time his wife chases him out of the kitchen. The bottles on the window-sill are sheer torture. What can he do? He can't bear it any longer! Once again he clutches at the last resort. The clock is at his service. He goes into the nursery, where the clock hangs on the wall and is confronted with a spectacle that is disagreeable to his paternal heart: before the clock stands Grisha, moving the minute hand.

"You... you... What are you doing? Eh? Why have you moved the hand? You fool! Eh? What for? Eh?"

Dyadechkin coughs, dithers about, scowls horribly and waves his hand.

"What for? Er... Shift it and to hell with it, the wretch!" he says and, pushing his son away from the clock, he advances the hand even further.

It is eleven minutes to New Year. Dad and Grisha go into the room and begin setting the table.

"Melania!" shouts Dyadechkin. "It's nearly New Year!"

Melania Tikhonovna runs out of the kitchen and goes to check her husband's announcement. She looks at the clock for a long time. Her husband is not lying.

"Now what am I to do?" she whispers. "The peas aren't ready for the ham! Hm. This is murder. How am I to serve it to them?"

And, after a moment's thought, with a trembling hand, Melania Tikhonovna moves the clock back. The Old Year regains twenty minutes.

"They can wait!" says the hostess and runs back into the kitchen.

THE MIRACLE

by Shraddhavan

WITH the Storyteller in our midst we strolled the moonlit seashore. The full moon inspired him to eloquence, and each month when it came round we would accompany him like this to enjoy the cool evening air, the silver light upon the Bay of Bengal, and the anticipation of his tales. When he chose a convenient place to rest, we would settle ourselves around him in positions which allowed us to admire at once the beauty of sky and sea, and the mobile expressiveness of his features and hands.

"The story I want to tell you tonight," he began slowly on this occasion, "appeals to me for two reasons. One is that I believe it actually happened more or less exactly as I tell it to you; the other... well, perhaps the other reason will appear from the tale itself.

Now that they belong to the past, foreigners and Indians alike enjoy hearing about the bygone magnificence of the Indian Princes — those rulers who manged to retain into the twentieth century a measure of medieval sovereignty: diamonds, rubies and emeralds, cloth of gold and figured silks, marble palaces and tiger-hunts in the depths of dark green jungles, caparisoned elephants and gold-plated Rolls-Royces, polo ponies and racehorses, princesses of fairy-tale beauty veiled from view by fretted screens and spangled gauzes while in India, but who appeared with bare shoulders and incomparable jewels foxtrotting the night away in the ballrooms of London and the Riviera, the epitome of romance... fabulous wealth, glittering ostentation, careless authority over unquestioning adoring masses: a legend of kingship. The best of them were surely ennobled by a truly aristocratic sense of responsibility to their States and their people; more — like many European aristocrats — were mere selfish boors gilded with the veneer that wealth and tradition can supply; yet others perhaps were pampered and effete, the degenerate products of too-long self-indulgence.

But the Maharajah of whom I wish to tell was like none of these. The glossy books that commemmorate those vanished splendours neglect to mention such states as Virpur — though it was surely not unique: A few square miles of boulders and thorny scrub, scattered with less than a dozen squalid villages, the largest, saddest and ugliest of which hunched its sagging roofs beneath the stained walls of the Maharajah's residence, just north of the point where the road from Rajkot — no more than a dusty track — crossed the river. This conjunction — the original reason for the town's importance — no longer justifies its existence; for nowadays the river-bed is dry for eleven months of the year, and the ford where the Rajas used to exact tolls and block the passage of armies — so that their alliance had some value in the old days — no longer presents any obstacle to the few insignificant travellers who for obscure reasons of their own choose to pass that way. The floods of history have swept past and changed their course, leaving Virpur stranded, out of the picture. By the second decade of the twentieth century, when the last Maharajah succeeded his father, British control had long precluded any possibility for an ambitious ruler to improve his position by martial skill, conquest and plunder. Instead, on the taxes he managed to extort from his impoverished subjects and the remnants of his grandfather's fortune, Jaswant Singhji managed to run a car and to maintain one wing of the ramshackle mansion he had inherited from his forebears — the former 'Winter Palace', a hell of heat in the summer.

The 'Summer Palace' — a somewhat airier construction on a small hillock some ten miles to the West — was in the possession of his cousin, a slightly younger man who eked out a similarly unprincely existence on the income from another half-a-dozen equally deprived villages; this he supplemented with what was left of the treasure which his father, the younger brother, had managed to salvage after the death of their mutual grandfather — thus initiating the bitter quarrel that animated the cousins still, a full fifty years later. The younger cousin had at least managed to keep the loyalty of his wife, a princess from another small and unimportant royal family, and was rumoured to receive a certain amount of support from her brothers. Presumably, under her supervision, the floors of the Summer Palace might occasionally be swept, and the rooms perfumed with incense now and again. But from the Winter Palace all womanly influence had long been absent: rats ran in the courtyards, spiders ruled the ceilings, and behind tattered hangings and dilapidated furniture an army of stinking squeaking shrews endlessly pursued an inexhaustible horde of cockroaches.

The Maharaja had in his employ three courtiers. The first, his body-guard, was a sullen and oafish ex-wrestler who resembled the legendary Kumbhakarna on three points... his preference for sleep above every other activity; his demand for gargantuan meals when awake; and his capacity, when roused, for horrifying destructiveness. The second, the cook, was a more influential figure than one might suppose, for on his success or failure in satisfying his master depended to a large extent the relative comfort and peace-of-mind of everyone else within the Raja's reach... and the master seemed

to acknowledge grudgingly the extent of his dependence upon this supplier of his bodily needs. The third was his 'minister' — an impecunious B.A. the Raja had got hold of by advertising in Rajkot, who fulfilled his manifold duties as chauffeur, secretary, nurse and companion, with his mind always more than half-occupied with his irregularly-paid salary and dreams of what he would do if only he could get away from Virpur.

And I believe that I can vouch for the accuracy of this tale because it was told to me only a few years after it happened by that same impecunious fellow — an old college-friend of mine, Devendra Divanji by name. We chanced to meet again at the marriage of a relation of his who was also known to my family; and since we had been close friends at school, each naturally wanted to hear from the other where life's paths had led us since our college days. At first I was impressed when he told me that he had found employment as Chief Minister to his Serene Highness the Maharajah of Virpur. But he laughed at my raised eyebrows and said, "Oh, it wasn't so grand as it sounds! Have you any idea where Virpur is? The man disgusted me. Do you know, his favourite sport was having me drive him out in his car so that he could shoot pigs from the back seat — he wasn't even a good shot, but it made him laugh if he could just graze some poor swine and set it screaming and scampering. The peasants were terrified of him and kept out of his sight as far as possible. I suppose every man of spirit had left the State long ago. I only once saw one of his subjects stand up to him — and that man would have been an exception anywhere, I believe; there was something really remarkable about him."

After that, for several months, Deven and I met quite often; and one evening, knowing my love for a good tale, he told me the story I now tell you. He began:

"It all happened because of the Maharajah's quarrel with his cousin... and because of the British. What lucky alliance his grandfather or greatgrandfather had made which preserved the 'independence' of the State of Virpur, I have no idea. But in any case, by the time Jaswant Singhji's father was born most of the neighbouring states had been taken over by the foreigners already; as he grew up there was no chance for him to make a name for himself as a warrior, even if he had the inclination — the days for that were past. So what was left for him? A life of pleasure with his women and flatterers — food and drink and distraction. The state was small and divided, so he didn't have the resources for building huge palaces or travelling abroad as some of the bigger rulers did. Apart from his pleasures, all his energies went into the quarrel with the minor branch of the family, which had started even before his father's death. Any skill his ancestors might have had in statecraft had dwindled to a passion for intrigue, focussed on this last chance for him to uphold the family honour by extending the territory under his control and increasing his income. And when Jaswant Singhji succeeded his father, he inherited the quarrel too. Like his father, my Maharajah had no interest in becoming the type of 'model ruler' the British would have approved of: European schools, good roads and railways, agricultural reform and hospitals and welfare programmes for the poor — none of that would ever have entered his mind. Where would the money have come from? To him the State was his private inheritance and he was only interested in collecting the revenue — and anything else that caught his eye. Which of course didn't endear him to his subjects; most of them thought that they would be better off under his cousin, although personally I doubt it. The sweetmeat on the other fellow's plate is always bigger, they say; and I don't think that Natvar Singh's people were any better treated than our Jashubha's. In fact the two cousins were remarkably alike. That was part of the problem: each as proud and obstinate and grasping and wilful as the other.. But because of the British there was no question of them going to war over their disagreement, as they would have done in the old days; instead they went to court, and the dispute dragged on and on, and no one ever got anything out of it except the lawyers — and even they complained that their fees weren't paid.

And meanwhile, just over the border sat the foreigners, always backing the weaker party so that nothing ever got resolved, and watching and waiting for any excuse to march in and take over. That was their kind of honour: before they did anything, they wanted to have a reason that at least *sounded* convincing. So there was that Political Agent — Kerr, his name was — hovering around, with his spies everywhere, just waiting for his chance.

And he got it. It must have been in my fourth or fifth year there. One afternoon during the *navaratri* festival, Natvar Singh was murdered. The news ran through Virpur like wildfire, and of course everyone assumed that Jashubha had got his way at last. For everyone knew of the enmity between the cousins, and everyone knew that the Maharajah was a man without the slightest scruple. What more likely than that he had hired someone to kill his cousin as the only way to claim the whole of the State for himself at last? Perhaps only the Raja and I knew that, much as he would have liked to destroy his hated cousin, Jashubha was the last man to arrange to have him murdered — otherwise it would probably have been done long before; but a violent death to Natubha would provide Mr. Kerr with the perfect, cast-iron, excuse. And we had no doubt that now that the thing had been done, Kerr would not hesitate a moment before taking advantage of it. Jashubha realised this perfectly. As soon as he heard the news, he turned to me with an ashen face — and not a word.

As I told you, the man disgusted me. But if the British got him, I would be out of a job. And at the time, he owed me almost a year's pay. This consideration gave me quite a sympathetic interest in

his fate: I wanted to save him if possible — at least long enough for him to pay me. So I went to Sankar Shastri. He was a Brahmin... and a true Brahmin — I mean, not only by caste, but by nature too: a man of character and a knower of the Shastras. He was the priest of a small temple in the town, and very simple in his way of life."

The Storyteller paused in his recollections; His expression had been absorbed, concentrated on recalling as accurately as possible the long-ago words of his friend; now he paused, looked keenly at us younger ones, and said in another tone:

"You know, in the old days, a Brahmin, a priest, would live purely from gifts: his duty was to serve the Divine, and the Divine in man; he would teach or heal or perform rites or do whatever service his upbringing fitted him for, but these were not commodities for sale. People — in those day — used to feel privileged to make gifts to Brahmins. Farmers would give a part of their produce at harvest-time, rich men might give cows or cloth and feel that this was their *dharma* — their way of contributing to a rich and harmonious society. Now all that has almost died out, and even men of knowledge have to sell their services in order to survive just like everyone else — which bodes no good for the future of learning, I fear. Already when I was a young man, these things were changing fast. But according to what Deven told me, this Sankar Shastri still clung to the old ways and trusted in God and would never ask or expect any payment for his service or advice. He was an expert in astrology and in the traditional ways of healing, according to the Ayurveda; and the ordinary people trusted him, for he was known to everyone for his simplicity and probity. Deven told me:

"As soon as I entered the house he realised that I had come on some urgent and confidential errand. Perhaps — most likely — he felt some distaste, for he knew me as the Raja's man, but he gave no sign of it. Our conversation went something like this:

"You may have heard, Shastriji, that our Raja's cousin, Natubha, has been murdered."

A grave nod: "Yes, they say so."

"And probably you are also aware that most people believe that our Raja is responsible for the deed?"

"It is quite understandable."

"I assure you, Sir, that he is not."

"These things are a part of politics."

"Sir, the sun is setting: this is not an hour for lies. I am ready to put my hand upon the sacred Gita and repeat: our Raja has not engineered this thing." He gave me a long look. I felt that he was ready to believe me, and went on:

"What I need to know from you, Shastriji, is: How are the King's stars?" I had brought Jashubha's horoscope with me. The priest took the roll from my outstretched hand and studied it wordlessly for what seemed to me, in my haste, a considerable time. Finally he looked up and spoke. "From midnight tonight until dawn the day after tomorrow the King's life is in extreme danger. With the second rising of the sun, the danger will diminish — if he survives until then." "Is there any place of safety for him, any possibility of a refuge?" This question was still unvoiced in my mind when he continued, "So long as he remains inside the palace, he is relatively safe. The danger is greatest in the open air."

Half an hour later I was in the car on the road to Rajkot — for I saw only one possibility of making sure that Jaswant Singhji would not be compelled to leave the palace in the course of the next day. On the road, I had time to think a little. What exactly would Kerr do? Of course he would report the bazaar gossip to the Police Chief in Rajkot and make him get the Magistrate to issue an arrest-warrant. That would take some time, but not much. Kerr would turn up with a posse of armed police by next morning at the latest, to arrest the Raja. But would that be sufficient for their purpose? If they could get him convicted of the murder, of course it would be easier for them to confiscate the State, or to put his cousin's young nephew in as a puppet-ruler under their control. But to satisfy a court of law, they would have to produce some kind of evidence that he really was responsible for the murder; and with a clever defense-lawyer, that might prove too complicated for them. At any rate, too long-drawn-out: Sankar Shastri had said the danger was immediate; he had not suggested the possibility of an execution following a protracted legal wrangle. Kerr would want to be quicker than that. Riots, maybe? So that the British could intervene to maintain law and order and save lives? But both our town and Natubha's were so small, and their populations so cowed, that they would hardly provide any effective riot-material. To force an entry into the palace, they would have to bring in hundreds of 'rioters' from outside — it would be too clumsy and obvious; Kerr would be craftier than that. And the Brahmin had said that the King would be safe inside the palace. So what would their plan be? Suddenly I saw it — I think I even laughed out loud. Kerr would simply have a couple of their fellows — natives or Englishmen disguised as natives — waiting outside the Palace; when the Raja came out—whether of his own accord, or led out under arrest by the Police — these fellows would shoot him down. The assassins would disappear without trace — vengeance of course, a most regrettable incident... with the added advantage of providing an excuse for harassing the remaining branch of the family, who must surely be responsible. Well, I hoped to be able to forestall the clever Mr. Kerr.

When I reached Rajkot, I drove straight to the British Doctor's residence — the Medical Officer in charge of the Hospital there. We knew each other slightly; he had treated the Raja on a previous occasion. But of course he was not very willing to turn out 'in the middle of the night' — although it was barely nine o' clock. But apart from those few, those very few, whom one can trust, there are many

whose services can be bought — for the right price. Sankar Shastri was a Brahmin, a traditional Indian physician, and as I told you, he would never ask for a fee. But the British Medical Officer was a 'canny Scot': for him it was a point of honour never to sell his services too cheaply. So before we could talk about symptoms, we had to talk about money. He asked for a hundred rupees. That was a large sum in those days... but of course a Maharajah must be prepared to pay for what he wants. I promised the man twice as much and told him that the car was waiting and would bring him home as soon as he had examined the patient... the Raja seemed to be very seriously ill and needed urgent attention. By midnight we were at the Palace. Before I ushered the Doctor into the Raja's room, I asked him to take a little refreshment. I presented him with a tray on which stood a glass, a bottle of the very best Scotch whisky, a soda-siphon, and five hundred rupees in gold. He understood perfectly. His examination of the patient was brief and cursory, and within ten minutes he was back in the car on his way home, with the remaining whisky — and his fee, of course. But he left behind him a signed prescription on his headed notepaper, advising, apart from several medicines, total rest for the Raja for at least two days: "Must not be moved or disturbed", it read. I felt that my mission was accomplished.

And so it proved. The next morning at around ten, Mr. Kerr and the Police Commissioner arrived with a van-load of armed Police and pushed their way into the Palace, waving their warrant. I met them in the hall, and politely assured them all cooperation in their investigation, but regretted that the Raja would be unable to meet them today; I showed them the doctor's note. They were disconcerted, frustrated, furious — but what could they do? It was signed by their own Medical Officer.

They contented themselves with posting their men all around the palace, no doubt under strict instructions that no one should be allowed to go in or out. Possibly they were also instructed to shoot the Raja down if he should happen to show himself. And, of course, before they left, Mr. Kerr and the Commissioner had to have a peep at the suffering monarch — just to make sure that he was really there. Fortunately Jaswant Singhji was displaying a somewhat unexpected talent as a tragic actor, and, as on the night before during the doctor's visit, gave a most convincing performance. Possibly Typhus, I hinted — or maybe the Plague! They hurried away. And a couple of furtive strangers who had been hanging about in the hallway of a house opposite the palace gate also took themselves off and were never seen again.

We kept up the charade throughout the day, in some anxiety as to what would happen next. For we felt sure that Kerr would be contacting the doctor and pressing him to return to give the Raja a clean bill of health as soon as possible. But the night passed, and the second dawn came and went. The period of danger indicated by the astrologer was over — the sun stood high in the sky. Again, around ten in the morning a van arrived from Rajkot. This time it carried away all the police who had been guarding the palace. There were no replacements. About an hour later, we heard through a servants' grapevine that Natvar Singhji's assassins had been found.

As I told you, Natubha was scarcely less hated than his cousin; yet his subjects must have been a little less abject than his cousin's for two of them had found the courage — or desperation — and ingenuity, to rid themselves of their ruler. And his wife must have commanded a certain degree of respect and sympathy, for it seemed that some villagers loyal to her had traced the men and brought them to the police — perhaps ready to sacrifice two of their number to save everyone else from the rigours of an enquiry? — anyway, the murderers made a full confession, and by noon the whole world knew of it. Jashubha was out of danger. I really forget the details — I only remember the relief.

In that moment of relief, I was able to collect most of my pay. And Jashubha himself asked to see the Brahmin so that he could reward him for his help; he may have felt the advisibility of having such a useful informant 'on his side'.

But when I went again to Sankar Shastri, he was most reluctant to go with me to the palace. "That is no place for a simple man like me," he said. He was right; his own room, and the temple yard it opened onto, was probably the cleanest place in Virpur. It was not simply that it was whitewashed and swept and sprinkled with water and filled with a pleasing fragrance; more than that, I felt, stepping across the threshold, that I left outside an air dense with everything mean and ugly, thickened and dir-

tied with greed and fear, grasping and cruelty, all that was petty and ignoble. I stepped again into an atmosphere I had known as a child, in my grandmother's home: something simple and pure and fresh and sweet. I experienced a little inner leap of recognition, like a sense of lost innocence rediscovered, a strange quiver that almost brought tears to my eyes. And he carried that atmosphere of purity with him. When finally I had persuaded him, saying, "For my sake, please come; the Raja is expecting me to bring you to him" — he stood in the tawdry squalor of the Reception Room, his plain white clothes and simple composure a striking contrast to Jashubha's grubby silks and haughty bluster. Looking back now, I almost see the one surrounded by a cloud of darkness, while the other radiates a faint white light in the midst of that gloomy hall.

But the Raja was making a real effort to be gracious. When we entered he stood up — or rather, raised himself slightly in his seat for a moment — and with a gesture, offered the Brahmin a seat: an unheard-of honour. But Sankar Shastri remained standing, his head bowed. And he refused to accept any reward... land, cows, gold, clothing — nothing. There was no cause for gratitude, he said; he was a simple man, he needed nothing, possessions would only be a burden to him, he was in God's hands, and so on. And although the man was obviously, compellingly sincere, I could see that Jashubha was getting restless — because he was at a loss what to do next; such a man was completely out of his experience. So I intervened: "If our Raja wishes to give you something, please do not refuse. It is the duty of Princes to give to Brahmins; kindly allow him to fulfil his wish."

The Brahmin stood silent a long moment. Then he raised his head and for the first time looked full at Jaswant Singh. "Maharaj," he said, "if I made a request, would you fulfil it?" Jashubha flung back his head, indignant.

"I am a King and a Kshatriya," he said proudly. "My word is my bond. I have promised to give whatever your ask. Shall I hold water and make an oath?"

"That is not necessary, my lord," the other rejoined in his simple way. "My request is that you withdraw your claim to your dead cousin's estate."

The Raja's eyes flashed. Even I felt that the priest had gone too far; he had touched Jashubha's most sensitive point: I told you that his hope to reunite the State under his own rule was the very keystone of his ambitions.

"That is not a matter for giving; that is a matter of State policy, which you must leave to me and my minister. Choose again."

Again the priest bowed.

"I have told you that I need nothing. This is my only request, which I have mentioned only at your insistence. You are free not to give. Kindly permit me to take my leave."

But there was something about the Brahmin that make Jashubha feel ashamed to let him go without anything at all — especially as he had boasted that he would take an oath upon water. He tried to argue with him.

"This is a matter of my prestige, my family honour; the dispute goes back to my grandfather's time... it is impossible for me simply to drop it now."

The priest replied, "Your dispute was with your cousin. Now he is dead; let the quarrel die too."

"But his wife is there."

"Just so, Maharaj; you have mentioned your Kshatriya honour. Is it consistent with your honour to trouble a woman, a widow, your late cousin's wife, whom you should protect and revere?"

The Raja stared at him incredulously. I was wondering when the thundercloud would burst, regretting that I had persuaded the priest to come. Out of my embarrassment I blurted, "Shastriji, the Raja wishes to benefit you, in gratitude for your help to him. If he grants what you ask, in what way will you be benefited?"

In that room whose atmosphere was dense with every shade of ignoble selfishness and perverted pride the Brahmin's quiet voice sounded out like a clear temple bell through shifting mists and darkness:

"My ruler will be praised."

The expression on the Raja's face first showed genuine shock, and then shifted subtly into one I had never seen there before. After a moment he spoke — his voice too was altered.

"Minister, you have heard. The case is to be dropped."

I bowed in acceptance of his order, glad to be able to conceal my astonishment. When I raised my eyes, I saw that the Brahmin too had bowed his acknowledgment and was leaving his hands joined in *namaskar*. And then—the most astonishing thing of all: Jaswant Singhji rose from his seat, stepped forward to the spot where the Brahmin had stood, bent to touch the floor with his hand, then placed it for a moment on his head... literally 'taking the dust from his feet..' — except that the priest's feet had been spotless and left a clear print in the age-old dust upon the floor.

I worked in Virpur for seven years. But in all those years, that was the only occasion — in that moment of involuntary tribute to one of his subjects — that I saw in the Maharajah a flicker of decency ... even a spark of the true princely spirit. How could such a thing happen? Something so startlingly inconsistent and out of character? When the natural order gets violated like that, isn't it what we call a miracle? I have thought about it again and again in the years since, and it seems to me that it was a kind of miracle. Some power of purity and truth within the Brahmin compelled a moment of sincerity in that degenerate fellow.

At the time I simply hurried to usher our visitor out, pretending that I had not seen...he would never have forgiven me."

INTERLUDE

by Achla Bansal

I winced as the strap of my bulging shopping bag bit into my shoulder. As usual I had ended up buying more than I could carry. Just to save another trip to the market. How I abhorred coming here. Not that I disliked shopping. But selecting a saree or picking up a pair of chappals was very different from picking lady's fingers.

Haggling with the vegetable and fruit-vendors, picking the best—this I had learnt in a decade of married life—got on my nerves. I didn't have my husband's patience who would remain on his knees, sorting out, oblivious of the filth, the stray dogs and cats, the humid, unbearable heat of a July evening. I stood by fanning myself, cursing myself for having come. But that he insisted upon. "How else will you learn?" he would reason.

But that was in the beginning. I was no longer a novice, having at last learnt to differentiate between the good and the bad. So now I shopped alone. My husband, who was an old hand at doing household shopping, having done it all through his childhood and adolescence, was now content at merely commenting on my choice. It annoyed me no end so I took to shopping in the morning when he was away. The vegetables once cooked tasted the same. It did not matter if the cauliflower was not milky white or the cabbage not a perfect round. The fruits he commented on with a vengeance. They were never up to the mark.

I cursed silently as a car whizzed past me, almost knocking me over. To my astonishment it screeched to a halt a few yards ahead of me, the driver, who happened to be a woman, stuck out her head and waved to me. The car was reversing, she couldn't possibly...

"It's you, Aparna, isn't it? Imagine meeting like this, after all these years," she gushed, clasping my hand. "Don't you recognise me?" She asked in a hurt voice.

"I ... You are Aruna..."

"Yes, yes, Aruna Saighal I used to be then. You took so long recognising me—your best friend. What fun was college life. Come get in, we'll sit somewhere and have coffee—just like old times."

I looked at my watch. "I have to be home. The children will be coming."

"We'll go to your place then. We'll have coffee there. Remember, what good coffee I made? You were hopeless at it. And since your venerable cook refused to make it while cooking lunch, it was I who had to make it," she laughed.

The house would be in a mess, I couldn't possibly take her there, I thought distractedly. "The children will only be back at half-past one..."

"Then what's the problem? Let's go to our old haunt," she said opening the door. "Keep your bag on the back-seat", she said eyeing the bag on

my shoulder. Embarrassed, I slid it off.

She kept on a constant chatter while she dextrously manoeuvred the car. I glanced at her expensive silk saree, the diamonds adorning her long, manicured fingers and wondered how she had changed from a shy, ill clad teenager to an immaculately dressed lady. I too had changed, I mused, from a starry-eyed adolescent brought up in the lap of luxury to a humdrum housewife, dressed conveniently, economically, in a nylon saree. How I abhorred nylon. But no longer could I afford to be in silks, at least not when out shopping.

We sat sipping our coffee. "You never came to my marriage," she accused.

"I didn't get your card," I retorted.

"Oh, never mind. I got married in a hurry. It was all over in a week's time. Rajesh was settled abroad and had come to India to get married. I hardly knew him when I accompanied him... it's an old story now. We are back in India," she sighed.

"You aren't happy to be back?"

"Well, I'm not exactly thrilled. It's so filthy here. But in a way it's good to be back. At least I know my whereabouts. There... I felt lost. Rajesh kept so busy. I was terribly lonely... homesick. Silly of me, I know, but everything was alien to me—the people, their customs. Even Rajesh. He just could not understand why I couldn't enjoy myself. 'Alone?' I would ask. 'Make friends then,' he would laugh and say. I tried, but.... Tell me about yourself," she smiled at me.

"There is nothing to tell. I have always been in Delhi."

"Oh, that's lovely. You must have been meeting all our old friends—where are they?"

"I have no idea. After marriage I lost contact. I couldn't keep up... I had no time."

"Yours was a love marriage, how could you have time for others," she teased.

I winced as I remembered my early married life. I had walked into our two-room flat with stars in my eyes. Just back from a glorious honeymoon, I had no idea what life had in store for me.

"I'm afraid you'll have to manage the house on your own," my husband informed me. "We can't afford a servant."

"Don't worry, I'll manage," I said gaily.

"If you want, we could call Mother. She can guide you..."

"No, I'll manage," I said hastily. Who wants a third person in the house and that too a mother-in-law.

I toiled from morning till night. But failed miserably. For a person like me, who till now had never ventured into the kitchen, turning out perfect meals was well nigh impossible. I couldn't blame him, could I, when he raved about his mother's cooking. Neither could I be blamed, if while making love I planned the day's menu. No wonder our marriage was on the rocks. But in our country marriages don't break up—not even disastrous ones. We stay put, unabashedly producing children.

Fed up with my lousy cooking he wrote to his mother. She arrived. With a condescending look on her smug face, she set about teaching me. Soon, under her expert guidance, I became a perfect cook. Even she couldn't find flaws in my cooking.

Lest I become lax again, she took to staying with us six months in a year. And those six months were sheer hell for me. I didn't mind cooking, in fact I had even begun to enjoy it, but her constant supervision and endless chatter made me nervous. To remain confined in that matchbox of a house, with her for company, was nerve wracking.

"Hey, where are you? I have just to mention your husband and you go wool-gathering. Is he so enchanting even after so many years?" Aruna teased.

The enchantment lasted till the honeymoon. After that began the slow, but sure process of disenchantment, I thought wryly. The monotony of day to day living, the money crisis which reared its ugly head towards the end of every month, the total lack of comforts I was used to, disillusioned me. And him. He blamed me for lack of organisation. Baffled and hurt, I kept silent in the beginning. Slowly, I learnt to retaliate. And so the verbal battle between us went on, slowly corroding our marriage.

"Where do I drop you?" I heard her asking.

"Oh, don't bother. I'll take a scooter," I said flippantly.

"Don't be funny I'll drop you. Where do you live?"

"Anand Niketan."

"Oh, you stay in one of those beautiful bungalows."

I kept quiet. I could not bring myself to contradict her. I could not tarnish the image she had of me, that of a pampered, rich college girl. My riches to rags story I did not want to unfold before her.

"I'll get down here," I said as the car swept past the bungalows.

"Which is your house?"

"One of those," I said pointing to the blocks of poky little flats.

"Aren't you going to ask me in?" she asked plaintively.

Mutely I led her to my house. My mother-in-law, who sat ripping an old, discarded sweater, looked up curiously as we entered. God, let her keep sitting in the verandah, I prayed.

"Where is you bag?" she asked, following us to the drawing-cum-dining room.

"It's in the car," I mumbled. In my anxiety I had forgotten all about it.

She looked Aruna up and down, estimating

her.

"Have you got my oil? My legs are troubling me," she began. Knowing too well what was to follow, I escaped to the kitchen saying, "I'll make coffee."

"But there is no more sugar. I made halwa. Haven't you brought it? I reminded you in the morning," she said accusingly.

"I forgot," I murmured.

"Let's go to my place,"Aruna said coming to my rescue. "We'll have coffee there."

"But..." I began, then changed my mind. I was tired of being an abiding daughter-in-law, a dutiful wife and a doting mother.

"I'll be back in an hour's time," I told my gaping mother-in-law.

"But the children..."

"The lunch is ready. Please give it to them." I said, determined to get away.

"Don't forget to get the sugar," she reminded as I got in the car.

"What an irritating woman! How do you put up with her?" Aruna asked.

"Just as I put up with everything else," I said in a flat voice.

She looked at me quizzically. I was in no mood to enlighten her.

"I wouldn't tolerate her if I were in your place. Why don't you tell her to go and live separately," she said spiritedly.

"Can't," I said irritably.

"Why can't you? What's happened to you, you used to be so assertive," she mocked.

"It's all a matter of circumstances," I said dully.

"What circumstances? It's all up to you. Why do you let somebody run your life?"

I did not answer. She would not understand.

"Tell me one thing. Have you never felt the lack of money—don't misunderstand me, I just want to know if love can compensate for riches. After marriage, I acquired all the money I lacked in my childhood. I went around buying... and buying. It was exhilarating. Slowly, the charm wore out. I have everything... and yet..."

Bewildered, I looked at her. What possibly could she lack?

"You needn't look so sad," she laughed. "I have everything... a gem of a husband," she added with a fierceness I could not fathom.

I was a little disconcerted as she swerved the car into the driveway of a palatial house. Maybe I shouldn't have come—me in my nylon saree.

"Relax, there is no one around," she said gaily as we settled down in her exquisitely done drawing-room. "I'll get coffee," she said getting up.

"Can't someone make it for us?" I asked, intrigued. Surely, she must be having a retinue of servants.

"No, no, I want to make it for you. Like old times, remember?"

I remembered. How could I forget those carefree, fun filled days. It was sheer madness, the way we lived, day to day, without a thought of the future. On the slightest pretext we rushed to the Coffee House. I chuckled as I remembered how once, on a cloudy day I had coaxed the whole class to play truant and go to the Coffee House. We didn't know where to look when the Head of the Department, whose class we had skipped, sailed in and occupied the table next to ours. "I won't be taking your class today. I thought I'd inform you," she said sweetly. We gulped our coffee and made our escape. Never again...

"Hello, I'm Rajesh," a male husky voice broke into my reverie.

I looked up. So this was Rajesh, Aruna's husband with the Midas touch. He might have been handsome once, but now he looked positively ridiculous in his gaudy outfit. His balding head and expanding midriff showed despite his efforts to conceal them. He stood surveying me, a supercilious smile on his thin lips, his eyes devouring me.

"You have a bewitching smile," he smiled. Or leered?

"Oh, you are home," Aruna stood transfixed in the doorway.

"Aren't you going to introduce her?" he rasped.

"This is my friend, Aparna..."

"Your friend? Why, she looks much younger than you. You have maintained yourself beautifully," his pale, snake-like eyes slithered down my face and remained fixed on my breasts. I felt my flesh crawling. What was so nauseating about him? He was only complimenting and it was as if he had ripped away my clothes, his eyes boring into my flesh.

"I must go now," I said picking up my purse.

"What's the hurry? Have your coffee. I didn't see your car—never mind, the driver will leave you. Where do you stay?" he asked, his voice a caress.

I looked at Aruna's expressionless face. She still held the coffee tray, her knuckles standing out.

"Don't just stand there holding on to the tray," he said irritably.

She put the tray down, spilling some of the coffee.

"God, you are so clumsy. Why don't you let the servants do the serving. At least they know how to," he muttered.

I walked past her. She did not stop me.

"Didn't know you had such gorgeous friends. Where were you hiding her? Quite a change from your stupid, cow-like friends," I heard him jeer as I passed the open window. I halted, wishing her to retaliate. She just stood there, mutely... cow-like.

I waited the next day. Maybe she would come on the pretext of returning my bag. But she never came.

A new parable on an old one

THE WOLF MEETS THE LAMBKIN

By Dharanidhar Sahu

THE lambkin was separated from the great flock and kept on wandering in the forest. Feeling thirsty, she walked briskly to a noisy mountain stream and started drinking from it.

In the higher tier of the hills a wolf too was drinking from the same stream. As soon as he saw the lambkin down there, he felt hungry. He walked down to meet her assuming an air of extreme vexation. "You are muddying the water I drink," the wolf said, "and I must eat you for that!" The lambkin found herself in a hopeless situation. "Any attempt to escape is as unrewarding as an expression of nervousness," thought she. But she was astonished at the false charges levelled against her. "But how?" protested the meek one. "You were drinking upstream and as far as we know, whether muddied or clean water cannot flow upstream. Only fishes can," she observed.

The wolf whose hunger was quite controllable and who was in a mood to find some justification for his action so that his hunger and his conscience were simultaneously satisfied, charged the lambkin for disturbing the fishes who in their turn swam upstream and downstream and muddied the water from the very source of the stream to the sea. "Every action," he pointed out, "however innocent and small it may seem to its doer, has the power to set off a chain of reactions, to turn many things upside down, to cause many inconveniences to others. The doer is responsible for all that and is answerable and punishable. Ignorance, you see, is hardly an excuse."

The lambkin found in the wolf a thinking being who knew that killing a creature for one's pleasure was improper

"You see, Sir," the lambkin said, "this mountain stream is naturally turbulent, foaming, whirling and cascading down. It is not possible for tiny creatures like the fish to muddy it. Fishes are always on the move and it is quite unlikely that I have the power to terrify them. Kill me if you must, but please do not try to convince me and your conscience that you have enough good reason to kill me. If you believe in the doctrine of sin, you are only multiplying them by your trumped up excuses!"

The wolf found the lambkin sufficiently rational, but by then he had really grown hungry. He informed her that her mother had been a nasty ewe who had once insulted him by throwing dirt on his face when he was caught in the farmer's snare. Now the daughter had to pay for the guilt of her mother. He also added that he had already waited too long and would not wait any more.

The wolf spoke with a tone of finality and advanced towards the lambkin who stood still. She decided not to run for her dear life. "Of all the hunted creatures," she mused sadly, "the sheep is the most delectable, and the most easily capturable creature. Antelopes and deer and hares and bandicoots and skunks have known how to give their pursuer the slip; even goats can run well. But woe to my race! Only God can save us from an easy extinction. Physically plump and slow, temperamentally innocent, we seem to prove most inviting to the ruthless predators!"

Soon, however, the little creature realised that it was hardly the time for lamenting the fate of her species. "Great Wolf," she said calmly, "I understand your anger. My mother, I know, enjoyed no reputation for decency. You have every reason to avenge your humiliation. Here I stand before you, an inviting heap of mobile meat, a meek, dainty, weak creature waiting for your ferocious teeth and claws. I can give no fight. I cannot save myself by bleating my lungs out!"

"Now you are talking sense, poor lambkin," said the wolf grinning. "Had I not been as hungry as I am, I would have spared you. By not running away at the sight of a wolf and now by submitting yourself to my teeth and claws, you have filled my head with bizarre thoughts. You know, I am used to chasing and catching my quarry through might, speed and cunning. But you seem uncommon. You neither try to run away nor plead for your life." The wolf came closer and gazed at the lambkin.

The lambkin averted his look and began: "Dear Sir, there is an instinctive tendency in the weaker creatures to do the needful to escape extinction. Ours is only a long, desperate, pathetic race to stretch the life a little longer. Hounds, lions, tigers, wolves, hunters and butchers are always on the prowl. They engage their physical power, ingenuity and various technical contraptions to capture us, skin us and gorge on us. They wound us with teeth and claws, arrows and bullets, sink their sharp teeth into our warm throbbing flesh, flay us alive and lick their lips as you are doing now. But I should not be sad for all that, nor do I grudge you or your pleasure. You have every reason to eat me as I have good reason to champ on grass and twigs. But there is only one thing about you that makes me consider you lucky!"

"What's that?" asked the wolf who had begun to ignore his hunger.

"You will not understand," the lambkin said, "unless you think over your actions. Look at me. I am not a sheaf of cut grass. I am not a sack of green pods. I am a living creature, with a consciousness that can imagine and suffer tremendously, with active cells and nerves which react sharply to injury and can experience inch-meal excruciating torture. I have a sense of ambivalent purity and spontaneous innocence which can be most outrageously violated, most atrociously insulted. You can hold me in your terrible grip and uproot all my hair one by one; or you can wash me, caress me, comb me, deck me with flowers, pamper me, feed me with twigs of my choicest plants and allow me to frisk about; you can also leer at me, make playboyish passes at me and then flay me tenderly relishing my agony. Why, you can even carry me to your den, nourish me till I grow fat and more sumptuous. Have you ever thought what a great power you have over this living creature who is as responsive to feelings as you are?"

"No, no!" cried the wolf, quite confused. "No, Lambkin, I have never thought of such things. I simply do not understand why you want to be subjected to such tortures before dying."

"I am just making you conscious of certain possibilities. You have stupendous power over this

frail and fragile creature The pleasure of power lies in being aware of it, not in the act itself. The act confines the actor to a moment of easy pleasures. On the other hand, the awareness of the possibilities liberates and spreads and keeps on spreading. Once you kill me, you reduce me to a lump of lifeless flesh. By one stroke you separate the animating spirit from the flesh, mind from the body, and change nerves into gossamer threads. You get the gross and forfeit the subtle. You get the thing and forfeit its significance. You eat my flesh as I eat the fallen leaves. I tell you, Wolf, the ecstasy of owning a living creature and extenuating that privilege is ineffable. You have within your power not only a few pounds of soft flesh to cloy your basic hunger but all the sensations of living mobile creature who can be tortured to no limit, who can be subjected to many forms of agony that your wolfish nature can contrive. You can..."

"Stop it, stop it, please," cried out the perplexed wolf, stopping his ears with his forelegs. "You drive me crazy; you make me feel giddy; you push me into some strange territory of ideas. I kill only to eat. My hunger pushes to action instinctively. I am used to chasing my quarry, for they usually run away from me. That is the rule of the game, this necessary game of the chaser and the chased. The rule also permits us wolves to pounce on our victims when they least expect it. But look at you! You are so different! Ha ha! You even try to teach me some funny methods of torturing you! Now, though I am hungry, I can bear with your walking away. Or, if you so desire, I can escort you to your owner and make a meal of him. Frankly, Lambkin, I have made up my mind to spare you."

"Thank you, Wolf," the lambkin said smilingly, "I thank you for these kind words. But such an assurance holds no meaning for a creature like me. My fellow sheep scramble for life desperately inspired by a desire for survival. If they escape death narrowly, they thank their fate as if there is nothing more to fear in the future, as if something momentous has been achieved! If you let me go, I shall go to my keeper rejoicing over my incredible escape from a wolf. He will pat me, caress me, feed me, fleece me, fatten me and ultimately sell me to a butcher who will kill me."

"Then what should I do about you?" asked the perplexed wolf. "I should not advise you to leave your keeper and live in the forest. Why weep over the general destiny of all domesticated animals? Now that I am not interested to cloy my ordinary hunger by eating an extraordinary lamb, you can go back and make the best of your remaining days. Your knowledge about your destiny may make you initially miserable, but I believe it will enrich you in some way."

The lambkin ignored the observations of the wolf and said: "Sometimes I do not understand certain very simple things about life. My keeper is a fine potter and an artist in some sort. He produces clay pots and carves fine pictures on the wet ones with a stylus. Some of his pots break before they are baked and some of his well-baked pots show faults and are rejected by the customers. The remaining pots are sold out and they also break sooner or later. Pots, you know, are made to store water. A leaking pot with magnificent art does not tempt a customer, does it? I know why my keeper goes on with his unrewarding work. He is like any other. He wants to spend time that way in recreating himself in the process of earning a living. That's it." The wolf yawned opening his mouth deliberately. "You glib daughter of an ewe," growled the wolf, "why do you try to get so familiar with me and talk all these things? I am not interested in your potter and his art. If I spare you I have to find out another animal. Go away as soon as possible!"

"I just wanted to say," began the lambkin quietly, "that life is not worthy of so much attention. Pots break; the spirit that animates the creatures vanishes without a trace. Your kindness and cruelty make little or no difference to me in the long run."

The wolf who wanted to live like any other wolf in the forest, a wanton, lonely and wholesome life, was in no mood to be influenced by the remote sentimentalism of the lambkin. "Poor creature!" he said, "You live and yet go on slighting life. You are eloquently condemning life which, apart from other things, enables you to think this way, gives you the prospect of contradicting it. What prevents you from loving life even after knowing about its transience and other shortcomings?"

The lambkin had perhaps begun with a sly attempt to confound the predator and escape. But slowly she was so much carried away by her own arguments that she began to believe in what she spoke and was really prepared to die with an invincible smile of a martyr. She was inspired by the irrefutability of her arguments and wanted to live up to them. The cool conviction of the wolf and his easy way of glorifying thoughtless, rapaciously healthy life that goes well with all predators had already warmed their way into her and addled her innocent nihilism. She suddenly remembered certain precious things life can offer as palliatives.

"Beauty," said the lambkin, "is a good pretext. Creation, appreciation and possession of beauty. Forget what I have said if that does not suit you. Now you have another prospect before you. You can love me and keep me with you. My cute physical loveliness and innocence can catch your fancy. My fine golden fleece if tenderly caressed would flow down with glossy undulations. If we love each other we may discover some subtle significance in life despite its shortcomings. You love life, I believe, for the wrong reason. By loving someone outside you, you may have some good reason to love life. We may sit, chat and watch the sunrise and the sunset. This big forest may offer us enough to talk about and enough to be silent. When I am outside I would remember that there is someone waiting for my safe return. When you are outside you would remember that there is someone waiting for you in the den wishing your safe return."

The wolf abruptly caught hold of the lambkin. "I shall eat you up, lambkin," cried he. "Then do it!" she said. He lifted her and just then their eyes met: the ferocious eyes of the wolf and the calm eyes of the lambkin beaming with innocence and wisdom, defiance and surrender. Some extraordinary feeling overwhelmed the wolf. He dropped her, walked a few steps backward, and ran into the thicker area of the forest and soon got lost.

THE ANGEL'S FEAR

by Sunil Gangopadhayay

Translated from Bengali

by Swapna Dutta

THE Angel appeared and said, 'Come.' Startled, I cried 'What! Now? So soon?'

The Angel's smile held mixed strains of pain and amusement. 'That's what everyone says' he said, 'They all feel that I've arrived before time.'

'Won't you grant me a little while to prepare myself?'

'There's nothing to prepare for! You won't carry anything with you, you know.' Determined to remain dignified to the very last, I held up my head high and said, 'I'm ready. Let's go.'

'Leave your body here. You won't need it any more.'

I lovingly stroked my dearly loved body the way a mother caresses her child and said, 'Very well. Detach me from this body of mine.'

My body fell on the broken steps of the pond like a wet and discarded garment as I stepped into the water with him. Two bodiless beings flitting about, the way grasshoppers flit about and play on the lotus leaves!

The Angel asked me in a slightly curious voice, 'Do you have any unfulfilled desires? Any particular craving? Any latent longing? Or a forbidden fancy? A wish to climb up a few more steps of Fame?'

I gazed at him for a few moments in an eyeless stare and said, 'I shall always remain dissatisfied where women are concerned. So will my thirst for beauty. But that is nothing! I also know that I'm not slated for immortality. But I do have a little regret for leaving a game unfinished.'

'What game? The game of dice? You can't take me in with that old story! I know that famous fable about playing dice with death!'

'No, it's not the game of dice. It is another game. I had planted a seed in the ground. It grew into a sapling and then a tree. Then the flowers bloomed and turned to fruits and the fruits turned to seeds. Fresh trees sprang up from the seeds and so it went on ....and on! One day, as a flower bloomed on the tree, I went up to it and said, "Stop!" And the flower stood still. It went on spreading its fragrance out. Its petals never dropped. The sunbeams and the moonlight tumbled closely among the petals and pleaded "Drop down, little flower, drop down and die! Its your destiny!" But the flower remains fresh and intact to this day.'

'What are you trying to imply by this story?'

'It is not an allegory. It is an incident in my life. Or you might call it my own individual game. I feel I ought to release that flower.'

'Very well. You may go back.'

'Won't you wait for me? Here, beside this same pond? I am a gentleman. I promise you that I shall come back. Sure and certain.'

I stepped out of the water and stepped into my body, the way one gets into one's clothes. Then I ran back. I plucked off the flower from the tree and set the petals floating in the breeze. Each petal flew its own way. Then I uprooted the tree and killed it by tearing it up, bit by bit. A faint fragrance—that of the flower—still lingered in the air. 'Good bye!' I called out to the fleeting fragrance.

And then I returned to the pond. But there was no Angel there! Wasn't he supposed to wait for me? I called him again and again by his name. But there was no reply!

Why did he go away? Was he afar afraid? Afraid of what?

And what was I to do now? Where would I go? Having got rid of all that I ever possessed, there was nowhere I could return!

BY THE GLOW OF THE GENTLE FLAME

by Shreekumar Varma

PART ONE

At first I thought it was a forest fire.

From the window of the Inspection Bungalow I could see spires of flame shoot up into the darkness. The sounds followed, crackles and sniffles, as if the forest was smothering a coughing fit.

Fascinated, I stood watching. I could see the shifting contours of trees, and a soft yellow brightness began to bring the sky closer. I was lost in the beauty of the sight for a minute or two. Then I jerked up and ran out of the bungalow, crying out to the attendant and to my assistant Rajasekaran.

We ran in the direction of the fire. Several people stood in the village street, talking excitedly among themselves. They seemed frightened and refused to answer our questions.

"Is it a forest fire?" I shouted impatiently.

"Forest? Fire?"

"Must be fireworks," an old man said, laughing nervously. "The temple festival is coming, isn't it?"

We ran out of the village, hurried across the small bridge and reached the edge of the first thicket. It was then that we knew. The fire danced like a mad wailing demon, its strands of golden hair tossing in the wind. The demon was astride an enormous brooding hulk of darkness, consuming it slowly.....

It began three days ago, when I arrived in Vanchalur village in my jeep with Rajasekaran and a surveyor. The preliminary surveys of the dam site and field-work had already been done, and I'd been sent to assess the situation and prepare a report on the people who would be displaced. Several previous governments had planned to construct a small dam over the Palayar river which is actually a tributary of the Bharatha Puzha, flowing past Vanchalur and diving into a valley before it turned a curve and trounced off to the south! For some reason or the other, mostly political, the dam had remained on paper till now.

Properly channelised, the waters could benefit a considerable population settled in the surrounding areas. But the dam would also displace some forty or fifty families, rendering them homeless. The Department had deputed me to meet the families after conducting a second survey of the areas which would be affected.

I had barely settled into the Inspection Bungalow when the people started filing in with their petitions. I put them off, saying, "Please give me time. As soon as the surveyor does his job I'll be ready to answer your questions."

But they had probably been rehearsing their complaints days before my arrival. Everything came tumbling out.

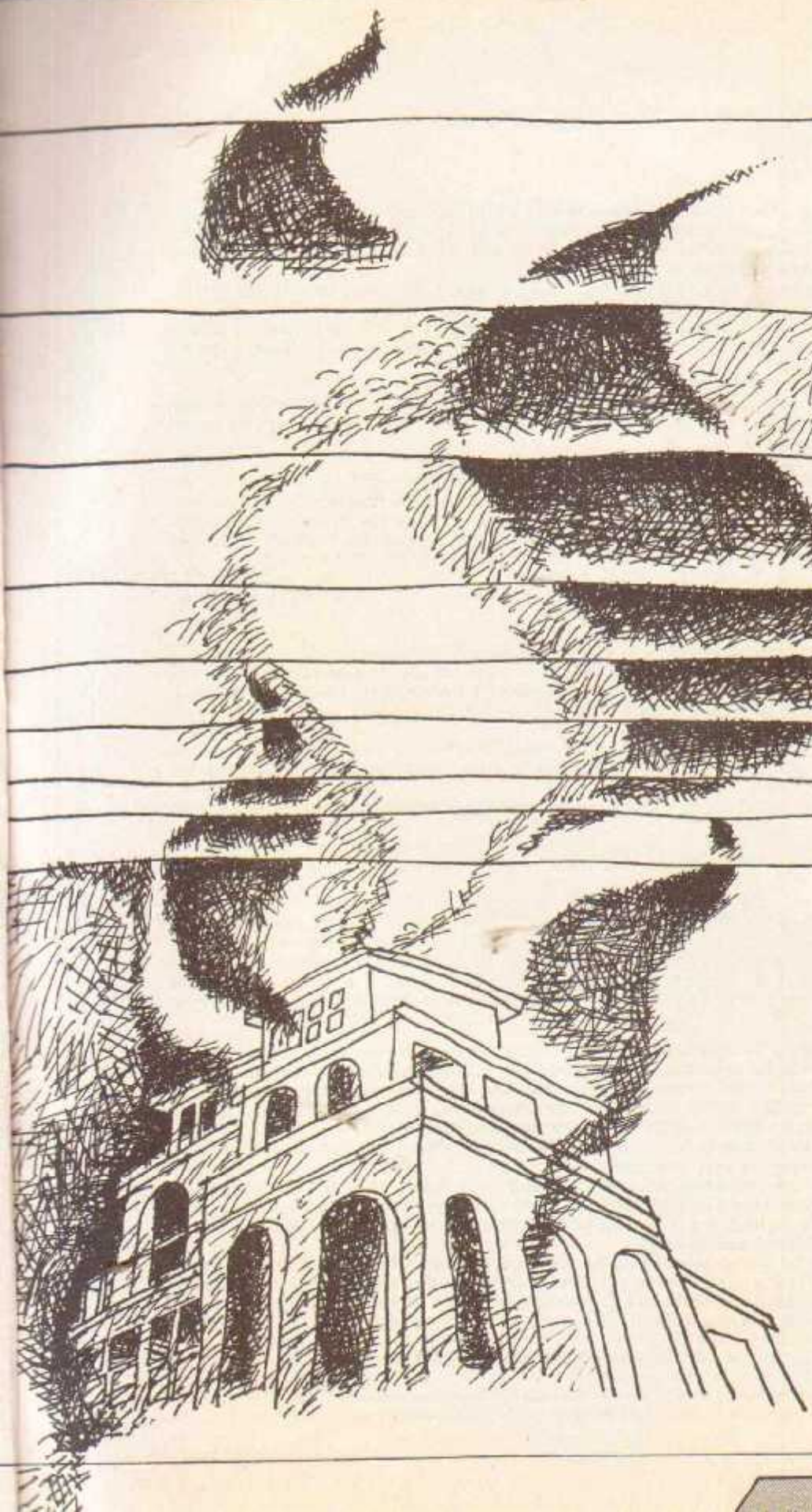
"Master, we built our house only three years ago. The expense has been so great we're still paying off the loan. I can't bear to think of the house being destroyed, our entire family without a home! We put all our money together and used teak. About the compensation...."

"Sir, we've been staying here outside Vanchalur for more than ninety years. My grandmother was born in this house. She got married here, my mother was born here, she got married here, then I was born here and I too was married in this very same house. My children were all born here. Now you come and say...."

"I won't allow it! Coming and taking my house away! What does the government gain by taking my house away? If they want to build a dam, let them go somewhere else where there are no houses. Sir, I've studied up to the 10th. I know something of the law, too!"

"Read this, sir! It's a document going back to '63. Clearly states we won't be moved. Let me tell you it's not some worthless piece of paper, it's from the government. Now this is another one. Again '63! It gives us full rights. You can't change the law, can you?"

There was also a group of young men who came around with sticks and nasty frowns just in case I became difficult. I listened patiently to all of them and then explained that I was simply not the person equipped to take



action. Once the surveyor had marked out the concerned areas, I would call them all and listen to them and receive their petitions, which I would take back to the Department. None of the villagers were very convinced. As far as they were concerned I was one of the villains of the piece and, properly propitiated, I could either save their houses or double the compensation.

It was as I sat on the long armchair in the verandah of the Inspection Bungalow, having seen the last of them file out, that I first heard of the Valiakavu Unni Nairs.

Rajasekaran came out into the verandah, holding two stainless steel tumblers of steaming coffee. He handed one to me and sat down on the parapet. He took a tentative sip, blew at the coffee and said, "There's one big party who hasn't come as yet, sir."

"And who's that? I thought the entire district turned up!"

"The Unni Nair of Valiakavu. He has that big house past the bridge. One of the first things we'll be doing is to clear that part of the forest, and then we'll have to use more than three-fourths of their land. It's the largest chunk we'll take from a single family."

"Past the bridge? That's the jungle."

Rajasekaran smiled and gestured dangerously with his coffee. "That's the whole problem about the environmentalists. You remember they came to the Department last month? The residents are only worried about their own little bits of land, but the environmentalists are protesting against the forest being cut down. But there's nothing we can do about it. All the first surveys have shown that the water has to be diverted. Unni Nair owns several acres of forest and agricultural land. And the house is right in the way."

"And yet he hasn't come!"

"They're a strange family. That's what the people say. Don't have much to do with the rest of the village. They live their own lives and don't bother about others."

"Nothing strange about that."

"There's old man Unni Nair, a young couple and a small girl living there," Rajasekaran went on. "The young man's not quite right in the head, it seems, and the wife looks after all the affairs. Though they own so much land they've only leased out a few pockets here and there for cultivation, I don't think they make very much out of it. Used to be a very wealthy family once upon a time."

"And the small girl?"

"She's about eleven or twelve. Doesn't go to the Vanchalur school. They say it's the lady who teaches her." Rajasekaran finished his coffee with a small gurgle. "If you want to know more about them, I could ask the attendant to come over. He's a local."

I looked at my watch. "Okay, we might as well get a bit of the local gossip while we have time. It could help us prepare the report."

The attendant of the Inspection Bungalow was an old man with eyes that swam with deep memories. His khaki uniform was frayed, and stiff with starch. Once he began to talk, the interest captivated him and carried him along.

The Unni Nairs were a very old family. Their lands stretched almost down to the valley, and their influence extended to every area of activity in the village. People sought their blessings when a marriage was arranged, they were consulted before sowing and harvesting, no one dared to send their sons out of the village without calling on the Unni Nairs and obtaining their permission. The Vanchalur middle school and high school were run by them. They were trustees of the Sastha temple and orchestrated the annual festival, bringing famous Kathakali performers and musicians over to Vanchalur and hosting the celebrations almost single-handedly for seven days and nights.

But there came a split in the family. As usual it was over property division. In the wake of the family partition of 37, there was a great deal of dissatisfaction and the family was divided into the Valia Unni Nair section and the Kochu Unni Nair section, led by the patriarch of the time and his younger brother respectively.

"That is Kochu Unni Nair's building you see there now," the attendant Nanu Pillai said. "In 1952, the old man Valia Unni Nair was done to death and his house was burnt to the ground."

Our surprise must have registered sharply on our faces, because Nanu Pillai paused in his rambling and smiled. His smile was sad, making his eyes swim even more.

"What is the use of having money and power and buildings if you're not happy? A family has to adjust to each and every thing, only then can it carry on undivided and whole to the next generation. That's what God has decreed." The old man shook his head and relived the years of strife, staring blankly into space. When he spoke again, his voice sounded tired and broken.

"When brother fights brother, the entire community is living in troubled times. Valia Unni Nair was already past sixty when this took place. He was an unbending sort of man, very principled but also very stubborn. His younger brother was a short, hefty man with the most explosive temper. When he was cross it took some time for him to react, but once he reached boiling point there was no saying what he'd do! Several deaths in the village have been unofficially traced to him."

The old man's gnarled, wrinkled hands were trembling, whether with the strain of remembering or due to his advanced years I could not tell.

"People say he gathered a few men from the village and burnt his brother's house down. And before that he himself went inside and hacked his brother to death and dragged the body out to the courtyard for everyone to

see. Of course, the police came and investigated, and it was in the papers for a long time, but they couldn't fix the blame on anyone. The incident died down."

Rajasekaran said in a tone full of wonder, "You mean he killed his brother and burnt his house and went scot-free?"

"I told you, their influence was complete in the village. No one dared to bear witness against them. If there was trouble within that family, they were content to stay out of it. But Kochu Unni Nair did not go free. The law couldn't get at him, but you cannot cheat the One above who sees everything. Vanchalur Sastha dispenses justice in His own way. That same year his wife gave birth to a son. She died in child-birth. The boy grew up mentally retarded.

"Kochu Unni Nair couldn't get over the shock. He became convinced that it was his crime that had brought about these misfortunes. His guilt was horrible to watch. From a man of stature, he was soon reduced to a pathetic creature. After that he lived only for his son. He spent most of his days in the temple, trying to give up his guilt to the Lord. When the boy was twenty, he used his influence and got him married to a girl from a poor Nair family in Angam Road village, not far from here. She was bright and educated. A very beautiful girl, you might see her one of these days. Poor girl!" Nanu Pillai sighed deeply.

"And what about the little girl Rajasekaran told me about? He said there's a child whom the lady educates herself."

"That's her sister," Nanu Pillai replied. "After her mother died, Parvati's uncles would have nothing to do with her sister, so she was brought over to stay with them. Parvati manages everything. For how long I can't say. She's a little past thirty now. Her husband is not much better than he used to be, and the little girl needs to be brought up with all the care she can get. God only knows what is going to happen."

We were all silent for a while. I could hear the wind whistling through the trees and the sound of an axe striking heavily on wood, echoing through the forest. The driver was humming a loud film song as he merrily threw water over the jeep. There was a sudden chill in the wind and I clasped my arms about my chest and shivered.

That evening, leaving Rajasekaran and the surveyor to do their job on Temple Hill, which was a bald rock with no temple at all, I walked idly across the bridge and to the edge of the forest. A stream separated me from the forest. It bubbled on, rippling as the wind played gently on its transparent skin. I could have skirted the stream and reached the other side, but I folded up my dhothi and waded across. The water was knee-deep and wrapped coldly about my legs, making my hairs stand up, sending a rapid tingling sensation all over my body.

Kochu Unni Nair's mansion loomed up before me. It was a massive structure, roofed with tiles and built with teak and stone. The outer verandah itself could have accommodated my entire house! But the building had gone to seed. Without maintenance, without even a rudimentary attempt at cleaning up, the house presented a neglected, haunted look. I had a sudden feeling that the house was empty, bereft of occupants, with only cobwebs, aged creaking furniture and the reverberating sighs of memories to keep it going before it gave a final gasp and crumbled down into its foundations!

I walked on past the wildly growing shrubbery, down a cobbled pathway to the stone-steps that led up to the verandah. I climbed up the steps. The verandah lay deserted. An old rocking chair stood as a mute witness to the desolation of the bungalow. I went up to the heavy carved door and called out: "Anyone in?"

There was silence. Even the sounds of the forest softened to a hush. I shouted out once again, then I began to beat my fist on the door. There was no response. Perhaps my initial feeling was right after all, perhaps this was an empty haunted house! I turned back and walked down the steps and away from the house. I gave it a last look, taking in the large awkward structure, its windows like misty eyes watching my departure with satisfaction.

I had just finished crossing the stream when I heard someone shout at me to stop. A thin man, bare-chested and wearing a dhothi, was running up from a thicket that began on the east side of the house. He bunched up his dhothi and splashed through the water. He reached me and stood panting.

Getting back his breath, he tumbled out the words, "Is it Father from the Temple Hill?" He had wide staring eyes and a severe crew-cut that left bristles on his head. His eyes searched my face voraciously and I thought of an eager child waiting for a gift.

"Tell me! Are you my father from that Temple Hill?"

I said as evenly as I could, "No, I'm an outsider. From the Government." I began to explain my mission, but knew instinctively that he would not understand. This was the retarded son of Kochu Unni Nair.

"You're Kochu Unni Nair's son, aren't you?" I asked.

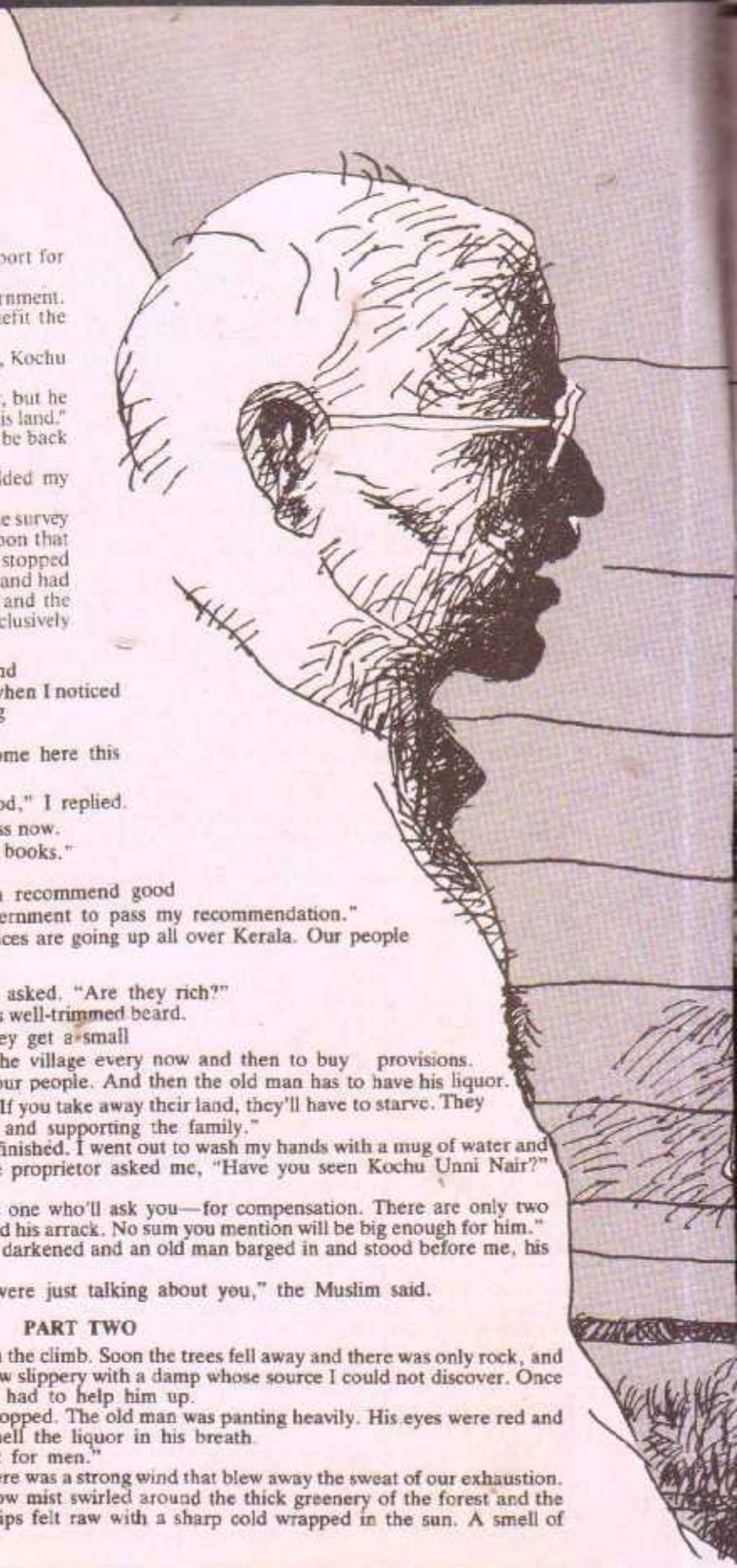
He blinked twice and looked sharply at the house, then he leaned closer and said, as if disclosing a secret, "Yes, but I have a real father. He lives on Temple Hill. One day he will come and take me away from this place! Every day I wait here." His face drooped. "But he doesn't come."

His misery was so intense that it affected me deeply. "As long as God is in his heaven he will take care of you," I said with feeling.

He stood there like a small despondent boy staring into space, yearning for the smallest glimmer of hope.

"Chetta, you're out here! I've been looking everywhere for you."

I knew it was his wife Parvati, running down the bridge. I couldn't take my eyes off her. Her hair was thick and reached down to her knees. She wore a plain mundu-sari, and no jewellery except for a wedding ring and a single copper bangle on her left hand. Her face was pleasant and intelligent.



I introduced myself and told her about the report for the dam.

She smiled. "We have no quarrel with the Government. We know one day everything will go. Let it benefit the people at least."

"Perhaps I should speak to your father-in-law, Kochu Unni Nair," I suggested.

"Yes, please do that. I don't know where he is, but he will have no objections either. We don't need all this land."

"I'll do that," I said. "It's rather late now. I'll be back tomorrow morning."

I smiled encouragement at her husband, folded my palms in a namaste and turned away.

But the next morning I was busy assisting in the survey work advising the surveyor, and it wasn't till noon that I could get away from Temple Hill. Starving, I stopped at a small hotel in the middle of the main street and had lunch. The hot white rice on the plantain leaf and the variety of side-dishes engaged my attention exclusively for several minutes.

I paused in the midst of this hearty labour and relaxed for a while, leaning back on the wall, when I noticed the Muslim proprietor of the hotel watching me with amusement. I smiled back at him.

"Sir seems to be the hungriest man to come here this whole month," he said, his eyes twinkling.

"Well, then all credit must go to your food," I replied.

We got talking and he said, "You're our boss now. Everyone seems intent on being in your good books."

"I'm afraid there's nothing I can do. It all depends on the survey report. I can recommend good compensation, that's all. It's up to the Government to pass my recommendation."

"Then you must do your best, sir. Land prices are going up all over Kerala. Our people have very little money."

"What about the Valiakavu Unni Nairs?" I asked. "Are they rich?"

"They used to be," the man said, scratching his well-trimmed beard. "But now they're almost like the rest of us. They get a small income from their land. The lady comes to the village every now and then to buy provisions. I sometimes think it's hardly enough to feed four people. And then the old man has to have his liquor. He's drunk most of the time. It's very difficult. If you take away their land, they'll have to starve. They don't have anyone who's capable of earning and supporting the family."

I resumed my lunch and we were silent till I finished. I went out to wash my hands with a mug of water and returned, wiping my face. As I paid him, the proprietor asked me, "Have you seen Kochu Unni Nair?"

I shook my head.

"Well, you will, and soon enough! He's the one who'll ask you—for compensation. There are only two things in his mind—the security of his family and his arrack. No sum you mention will be big enough for him."

As if prompted by Providence, the doorway darkened and an old man barged in and stood before me, his eyes boring into mine.

"A hundred years for you, mudalali, we were just talking about you," the Muslim said.

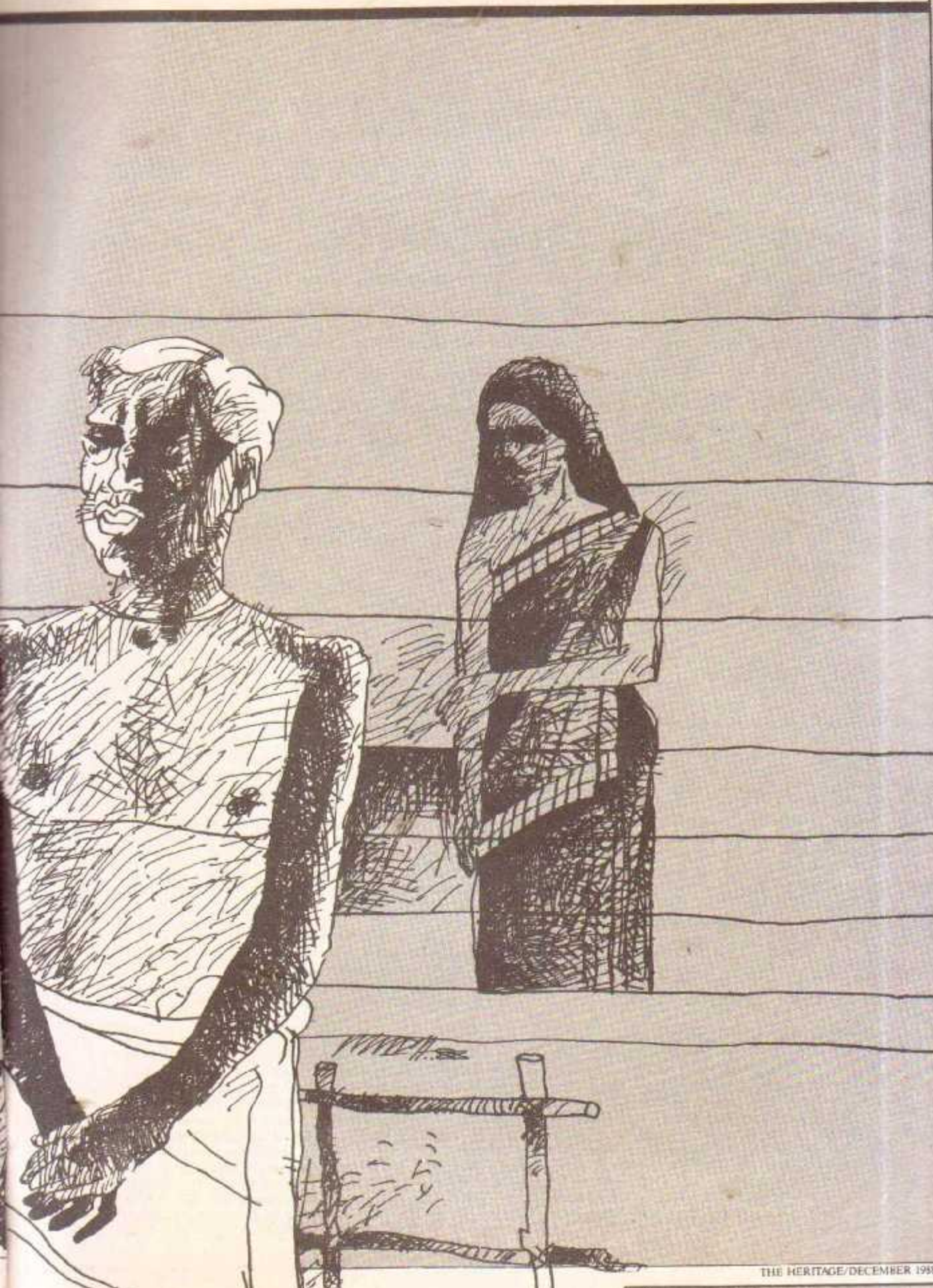
PART TWO

Birds rose up with startled cries as we began the climb. Soon the trees fell away and there was only rock, and a few shoots of stubborn grass. The climb grew slippery with a damp whose source I could not discover. Once or twice Kochu Unni Nair stumbled and I had to help him up.

We reached the crest of Temple Hill and stopped. The old man was panting heavily. His eyes were red and boiling. When he turned to me I could smell the liquor in his breath.

"Treacherous place," he gasped. "Not fit for men."

The sun hit us squarely on our faces, but there was a strong wind that blew away the sweat of our exhaustion. I walked to the edge of the rock. Down below mist swirled around the thick greenery of the forest and the scattered dots of the village. My nose and lips felt raw with a sharp cold wrapped in the sun. A smell of eucalyptus wafted up.



The old man plonked down, leaning back with palms on the rock. His dhothi, soiled and a little torn, rode up his knees, but he made no attempt to cover himself, such was his distraction.

He stared deeply at me as he had done in the hotel. His nose was curved and cruel like the beak of a hawk. He was still getting back his breath.

"You think I want your money? Did they tell you how greedy Kochu Unni Nair is?" He gave a loud broken laugh. "I'm not a man any more. I'm only a tattered umbrella standing over my family."

I said as gently as I could, "We have no intention of disturbing your family. The dam is for the good of the people. There are a lot of benefits."

"At the cost of my house! At the cost of my family!"

"Your daughter-in-law seemed quite reasonable. She understood the benefits of the dam. And she told me you'd have no objections either."

"Don't talk about her!" he growled. "Parvati! Don't you dare talk about that girl. She dripped her life away like a candle! I will protect that flame with my life."

I walked back to the edge. "Come," I invited him. "Come here and I'll show you what exactly we plan to do. You can see the landscape clearly from here."

Kochu Unni Nair gave a snort. A look of cunning came over his face. "Yes, I know what you plan to do. Lure me to the edge of that rock and give me a push! That will be the end of all your problems!" He pointed a shaking finger at me. "You! You're all the same. Why should I listen to you or anyone else?"

"You're crazy! Why should I want to push you?" I was getting angry in spite of myself. I controlled myself with difficulty. "I'll give you time to think it over. I can only do what the Government tells me."

He suddenly rose and came up to me. Standing very close, he dug inside his shirt and brought out a rustling brown paper packet. "Here!" He thrust it at me. "Take it! Read it! You will understand. Even you will see the innocence of that girl."

"What are you—?"

But he was already bounding away, on his way down. "Stop!" I ran after him. "You'll fall!" I followed him hurriedly, slipping and running and cursing under my breath.

Kochu Unni Nair didn't speak a word after that. He walked stubbornly away, not allowing me to return the packet or follow him to the house. I stood there in the middle of the street, watching him walk away, a small husky old man, bent over with guilt and tragedy.

Back at the Inspection Bungalow, I opened the packet, tearing away the brown paper. It was a book, a student's exercise book, and filled with neat handwriting. A cursory examination revealed that it was a diary, and most probably Parvati's.

It was at this point that I did something I'm thoroughly ashamed of to this day. I should have sought out Parvati and returned the book to her immediately. But curiosity got the better of my principles. I read it!

I sat back in the comfortable armchair in the verandah and was soon immersed in the book. I didn't even realise that it was getting dark. Only when my eyes began to ache did I realise that I was straining to make out the small, carefully etched words in the dimness and I got up and put the light on. I called out for Nanu Pillai, but he was nowhere to be seen. I went into the kitchen and made myself a cup of coffee. With the cup resting on the arm of my chair, I resumed reading, taking little sips of the hot beverage.

What can I say now about the diary? It was as though I were being exposed to chunks of life of this innocent village girl who became a part, and later indeed the edifice, of a high-born but eccentric family. The diary was her best friend. She unburdened herself completely in those pages. Sometimes she addressed it directly: "Dear Book", or "My Dearest Friend", or once, "You lucky pages, your innocence is such a contrast to what I've seen."

But whatever she'd seen hadn't made her bitter. There was a deep well of human understanding within her that made her seek out the best in people, indeed seemed to bring out the best in people, if those pages were to be believed.

The diary covered about seven years of her life, perhaps the most crucial ones. It began when she was a young girl, fresh out of school, eager to gulp in all that the world had to offer, went on to talk about her marriage and her life in Kochu Unni Nair's house with a retarded husband and the grim silence of those unrelenting walls, and finally ended for the sheer reason that routine and dullness left her with nothing new to record.

The pure streams of crystal prose unearthed little islands of verse now and then, as if certain moods burst uncontrollably through the delicate skin of her soliloquy and flowered into emotion.

None of the entries was dated. Only the passing of the years was indicated. Sometimes there was a white pause between two paragraphs, sometimes the shade of the ink was different, and that was the only hint of an intervàl.

An early entry while she was still a young girl:

"I miss school! I know it's a mad thought, but I keep remembering all my friends, especially Chandrika and Mehru. A year ago if someone had told me I'd be missing school, I wouldn't have believed her. Now I think of the fruits we used to pluck from the Swami's garden and the day the three of us almost got swept away in the river and how that cow chased Mehru all around the school compound. I even miss our classes!

"It seems such a long time ago even though it's hardly a year. Chandrika has left, and I don't know when I will see her again. But Mehru is not far away, she's only three miles from Angam Road, and I do sometimes meet her. Mother is still not well. I think she's never been very good after Janu was born. Janu is very mischievous. Yesterday she upset kumkum all over my blue skirt, the one with the frills, and I don't know if I'll ever be able to wash it off. Today I didn't feel like staying at home. I ran out and wandered all over the village. I think I know everyone in Angam Road! But then I saw Father sitting all alone on the bench outside the post office, looking so sad. He's been worrying ever since he lost his job. I pray to Devi that he gets back his job or another one."

And after a few pages:

"I feel like a butterfly! In my yellow blouse and red skirt I ran through the green fields and I felt light and as if I was flying in the air."

"I took out Janu into the village for the first time. Everyone wanted to carry her. She looks so plump like a ball. I went to Devaki's house and Viswanathan chettan was there and played with her a lot."

"Last night I heard a voice
that called me in a dream
I think it was an angel
But the mist had covered her."

"What fun it is to run!
My feet become like wings
The grass is like a green cloud
somewhere in the sky!"

"My Dearest Friend, I don't know how to tell you this. I feel so scared and lonely. Only you will understand. I don't want to get married. Mehru says girls shouldn't get married until they are above eighteen. Father is never in the house, he comes home very late in the evenings. Mother is always talking about my marriage and shedding tears. Tell me, is marriage something to cry about? I don't know what is happening. I don't want to marry anyone. I think I'll run away from home."

"Tomorrow is my wedding! I feel nothing at all. Mehru asks me if I feel excited. I don't. I don't know why. I feel it will be like going to the temple as usual and praying and coming back.

"He is from Vanchalur. One Kochu Unni Nair's son. They don't tell me anything. And I can't keep asking. can I? What will he be like? Supposing he is cross-eyed? Or has a big mole on the side of his face? What if he turns out to be strict and silent like Chellamma chechi's husband? I'll tickle him till he laughs! Mother hugged me and started crying again. I don't know why everybody becomes like that when they think of marriage. I'll know tomorrow!"

The next entry was apparently written after a considerable lapse of time. It began after an entire blank page, and the ink was black.

"My Dearest Diary, I've neglected you for so long! Mehru says people change after their marriage. But I'm the same old Parukutty of Angam Road. This is a completely new life. I feel I'm living somewhere far away, in another world. This house is so big, twenty times as big as ours. And it's so dark. There are shadows moving about all the time, I feel that all the people who lived here long ago and died are still waiting in the house, moving about and watching us and just waiting, waiting. I didn't tell you about the wedding. It was so crowded and it got over so fast. His father says he didn't invite anyone at all, but people still came and you can't stop them from coming to the temple. I wore a gold-bordered sari and he wore a gold-bordered dhothi and no shirt. I thought he looked very handsome. Of course, I couldn't keep staring at him!

"I didn't know about his illness till later when we came back home and we were at the feast. We had to sit and eat together and then he started picking up food from my leaf and eating. I thought he was being playful and laughed, but his father came up and looked very angry. He scolded him a lot. Afterwards, Mehru called me to the garden where the calf is tied and told me that he wasn't well and that his mind didn't work. Mehru looked so sad that I burst out laughing. At first I didn't believe her. He doesn't look ill at all. At night he began to play hide-and-seek with me and then I realised he was like a child. If it's an illness I don't think he should be scolded all the time."

This was followed by another poem:

"The sky is dark and moonless
My house is sad tonight;
Its rooms are large and filled with sighs
and thoughts of bygone days.
My friend is shedding empty tears,
he's like a sullen child.
I sing and watch him melt in sleep
by the glow of the gentle flame."

"His father drank a lot tonight and began shouting at him. I didn't know what to do. I was scared at first. He even slapped him once and then I couldn't keep quiet. I went up and pulled his father by the hand and took him to the kitchen and served him his food. At that moment I didn't even care if he was angry. But he wasn't angry. He finished eating and then he began to cry like a baby. I was so surprised! He called me his daughter and then he said—'Oh, why isn't God punishing me? Why am I not suffering? Why did it have to be you, my daughter?' "

"His father still gets angry, but he's like a child when I talk to him. He loves his son a lot, but I think he feels sorry that he's not well. I think that is why he drinks so much."

"I'm so happy today. Janu has come to stay with us. After Mother died, Father was looking after her. And now he too is gone and she was staying with Raman Uncle. Yesterday, he came here and said he wouldn't be able to look after her any more. I didn't say anything, just looked at Chettan's father. He told Raman Uncle, if you can't look after your own sister's daughter, it's all right, there are people who can. She will live here with us in this house. I was so happy! Now there are three children in the house!"

I kept the diary aside and lay back in the chair for a long time, my mind crowded with thoughts. Fire-flies danced around in the darkness outside. Nanu Pillai seemed to have returned. I could hear him moving about in the kitchen. I stood up and stretched. My limbs ached. I picked up the diary. I suddenly felt I had to return it without losing a moment.

Armed with a torch and the book, I left the bungalow and walked towards Kochu Unni Nair's house. I walked carefully. The darkness was oppressive and yielded reluctantly to the torch-light. Twigs and dry leaves crackled loudly under my feet. I prayed there were no snakes about. I passed the bridge, walked carefully around the stream and was soon before the hulk of the house. One or two windows were dimly lit and a single naked bulb hung outside.

Two ghostly figures stood on the verandah.

As I neared the house I could make out that they were Kochu Unni Nair and Parvati. Their raised voices suggested an argument. I was half-way up the steps when something made me stop. They were talking about me!

Much of the conversation was lost in Kochu Unni Nair's drunken grunts and senseless protests, but I gathered that Parvati wanted to surrender whatever land the Government wanted and he would have none of it. he wasn't going to give up without a fight.

I didn't know whether to groan or to laugh. They were getting heated about a problem that hadn't even arisen as yet! I wanted to go up and assure them that there was no immediate danger, and no point in getting into an argument so soon! But I still held my peace.

Kochu Unni Nair said, "I don't know. Just leave me out of it. All I want is to do good for my family. It's up to you now."

Parvati tried to reason with him. "Father, it isn't that! What I'm----"

"It's not in our hands any longer. It had to happen. Yes! This house will go and we will go. It had to happen. That's how history works. No one can cause so much harm and live in peace. I have brought it all upon me. Wait and see. Tonight we will see—"

He ran inside the house like a drivelling madman. Parvati hurried behind him, calling out his name. I stood still for a moment, then slowly began the walk back. The book was still clutched in my hand.

I reached the Traveller's Bungalow, had a light dinner and went to bed. Sleep came easily, tired as I was. Two or three hours must have passed before I was woken by the loud crackling sound.

The fire raged on all night.

I had only one concern, to save the occupants of the house. I called Rajasekaran and told him to round up a few men and locate the family.

When he came back, his face was black with smoke and very grim. "I'm sorry, sir. No one has survived."

It was as if a great weight had descended on me. I felt tired and useless. The thought kept nagging me that somehow I could have saved that family.

I walked forward. The variety of frantic sounds rode back into my consciousness, young men shouting and ordering as they passed buckets of water from the stream, the roar of the fire as it breathed in the wind and threw itself about in triumph.

Finally I told Rajasekaran, "I'm going to bed now. See if you can stay and help."

"Yes sir. We'll try and retrieve as much as possible."

What's there to retrieve now, I thought, as I walked back, the exhaustion crunching into my bones.

The next morning I had visitors. A middle-aged villager with a young girl.

The man came up respectfully. "She came and left the girl with me last night. I was told to contact you if anything happened."

"Who told you?" I asked, a little impatiently.

"Parvati Amma from Valiakavu," he said.

The little girl stood there, watching me nervously.

"She gave a letter for you."

I took the envelope from him and tore it open, trying not to show my excitement. The handwriting was familiar.

"Sir. I don't know why I should trust you or burden you, but I feel my sister will be safe in your care."

That was all!

There was a long moment of silence. I carefully folded the letter, put it back in the envelope. I looked at the little girl. Her eyes were wide and scared.

"Janu," I said gently.

She seemed surprised that I knew her name.

"Come to me," I said.

THE END

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