







*the Same Author :*

## LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OVER FRANCE

A Diary of the Journey of Three French Exiles from Paris to Bombay, (*Thacker & Co., Ltd.*) Translated from French by Mathilde Camacho, with a Preface by His Excellency Monsieur Louis BONVIN, Governor of French India and Delegate of General de Gaulle.

FIRST PUBLISHED 1946

PRINTED BY J. K. SHARMA AT THE ALLAHABAD LAW JOURNAL PRESS  
ALLAHABAD AND PUBLISHED BY KITABISTAN, ALLAHABAD





THESE PAGES ARE A HUMBLE OFFERING  
TO THE GREAT RISHIS OF INDIA,  
• THOSE WISE MEN WHO LOVED THE PEOPLE,  
LIVED FOR THE PEOPLE,  
AND WHO TAUGHT THE BROTHERHOOD OF PEOPLES. .





TO  
MY COMPANION—PILGRIMS  
ALONG THE ROADS OF INDIA  
ANDRÉE REVEL  
AND  
CHRISTIAN J. REVEL



## CONTENTS

	PAGE
Foreword .. .. .	11
Introduction .. .. .	13

### PART I

I.	An Indian Treasure Casket .. .. .	25
II.	Towards Aryavarta .. .. .	28
	Genoa .. .. .	30
	At Sea—Ports of Call .. .. .	31
	• Evening and Sunrise at Port Said .. .. .	34
	The Rose Desert of Arabia—The Fiery Sea	37
	The Crickets of Aden .. .. .	39
	Flying Fishes—A Yogi Between Decks .. .. .	39
	The Mother .. .. .	42
III.	Bombay .. .. .	45
	Indian Railway Stations .. .. .	46
	A Hindu Dinner .. .. .	48
IV.	Mysore : .. .. .	50
	• Its Palaces .. .. .	53
	Its Arabian Nights' Processions .. .. .	55
	The Goddess Chamoundi .. .. .	58
V.	The Mysterious Blue Mountains .. .. .	61

### PART II

VI.	The Message of India's Temples .. .. .	73
VII.	Evenings at Madura .. .. .	76
	An Entrancing Vision of the Gods .. .. .	77

	PAGE
VIII. The Temple of Rameshwaram in the Morn- ing .. .. .	83
IX. The Rock of Ganesha .. .. .	87
The Land of Bharata .. .. .	90
The Avatars of Vishnu .. .. .	92
X. Meditation at Tanjore .. .. .	95
XI. The Secret of Chidambaram .. .. .	99
XII. The Descent of the Ganges .. .. .	115
XIII. Tom—Toms at Conjeevaram .. .. .	119
PART III	
XIV. A Poet Saint .. .. .	131
XV. On the Road to Malabar .. .. .	137
XVI. The Enchantment of the Coast of Spices .. .. .	145
XVII. The Flute of Shri Krishna .. .. .	158
XVIII. The Regard of a Sage .. .. .	168
XIX. Hampi—The “City of Victory” .. .. .	175
XX. Hyderabad the Mussulmana .. .. .	186
XXI. Two Tombs .. .. .	197
The fair in the desert .. .. .	201
XXII. The Triple Refuge .. .. .	204
XXIII. Hindu Villages .. .. .	215
The Women of India .. .. .	221
XXIV. From the Tail of a Monkey to the Tumult of the Ocean .. .. .	228
XXV. The Sacred Routes .. .. .	232

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS •

	PAGE
1. A Statue in Hampi .. .. .	3
2. Pageantry at the Mysore Dasara .. .. .	56
3. Sanskrit Teaching in the Conjeevaram Temple	120
4. Somanathpur Temple .. .. .	158
5. The Monolithic Gomateshvara at Shravanabel- gola .. .. .	168
6. Women of South India .. .. .	221

NOTE—*The photographs were taken by the author and*



## FOREWORD

This book was written during the year 1938-39, after stay made in India in 1937. It should have been published in Paris, but...war broke out.

Certain circumstances, related in our book: "Lights and Shadows Over France,"\* brought us once again to India's shores. This volume: "The Fragrance of India—Landmarks for the World of Tomorrow," will therefore see daylight in the very land where it was conceived.

From these pages, we have nothing to subtract with regard to its ideas. They are as much actuality now as if they had been written during the tragedy which is today shaking the world to its foundations. We should be able to add many pages to this book on what we have seen and gleaned again while in this country; however, they would make another volume that we may, perhaps, write in the future.

*Tellicherry, Malabar South India*  
*April 1945*

LOUIS REVEL

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Both author and publisher wish to express their thanks to the *Hindu* and *Bombay Chronicle* Editors, and to the French Review Editor "France Orient" for allowing use to be made of material already published.

\* *Lights and Shadows Over France (Diary of the Journey of Three French Exiles from Paris to Bombay)* by Louis Revel, published by Thacker & Co., Bombay.





## INTRODUCTION

The Soul of the World is in danger. It is a banal truth to write but, nevertheless, it ought to be ceaselessly repeated.

Each passing day sees humanity sliding insensibly towards an abyss of suffering and misery. Each circling year sees the contemporary world becoming more and more an arena where wild beasts—men, our brothers—tear each other to pieces. Soon, a sinister twilight will creep over the earth and the world will be no more than a vast sepulchre in which are entombed humanity's noblest ideals.

In the present world-wide frenzy, there are men who try to dam this tide of hate, discord, struggle, that is precipitating the nations one against the other. These men hope, in spite of all, that—like a solitary traveller who enamoured of beauty, force, grandeur, climbs the paths leading to the summits—contemporary humanity (or, if you prefer, the peoples or a fragment of these peoples) will contemplate from the heights of its inner vision the rich and glorious past of certain civilisations, now disappeared or sleeping, in order that it may establish an immense bridge of communication, a pipe-line, so to say, a triumphal way by means of which the modern world may glean from the past some grains of its immortal values, with which alone can be built up a civilisation on the five intangible rocks of true knowledge, liberty, brotherhood, equality, and love.

Have we not learned history? We are stuffed with history and science. We have learned of the slow rise of peoples, from paleolithic men to the so-called civilised men, who are ourselves. We have, at least, retained the history of *our* civilisation. We have studied the different

## THE FRAGRANCE OF INDIA

social changes which took place in ancient Greece from the Age of the Tyrants until the formation of the Athenian Democracy. We know, equally, from the war of Peloponnesus, how anarchy developed, how little by little the people were impoverished by a rapacious capitalism; then, we also know how, in the heart of the Roman Republic, dictators arose from the discontent of the masses who hoped (O unhappy, naive men!) that these dictator-tyrants would save them from misery. Lastly, we have studied the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire, the eternal causes, namely: economic depression, taxes impossible to support, slavery, the concentration of financial power in the hands of a few, the decrease in births, civil wars or simply wars, luxury, debauchery, the position of woman reduced to the role of servants. . . . briefly, all that we know so well.

We have read all that in our history manuals. That is the past, some will say, what has it to do with our modern times? And we come to the strange attitude of regarding history as a dusty museum of antiques which has to be visited—in order to pass our examinations—and which we shall never visit when we reach manhood. History, we think, is for children and young people. We still remember, without doubt, how weary we were, our elbows on our desk, our eyes fixed on the springtime trees growing in the college courtyard, listening with absent-minded ears to the insipid lessons delivered in monotonous tones by the professor. And in our brain were rolling confusedly the words: Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Huns. . . . How beautiful the trees are! we thought. If only we could be outside in the sun!

History lessons! Professor of history! Synonyms for tedium, when history lessons, in spite of M. Valery, ought to be living lessons, capable of enlightening, of bringing to the rising generations broad, bold conceptions, so that these generations, in their role of men, might make humanity contribute in due measure to sure progress, seeing clearly, on the one hand, that the physical, intellec-

## INTRODUCTION

tual, and moral splendour of ancient civilisations, at their apogee, are as many glowing landmarks pointing out the route to be followed by the contemporary world and, on the other hand, that the decline and collapse of these ancient civilisations are warnings of the reefs to be avoided. World history continually shows us that men repeat the same errors because they do not want to learn the profound causes of past faults, nor retain the elements that have contributed in forming epochs of glory. There is a philosophy of history that should be learned. Whether one wishes it or not, the history of humanity is composed of periods of light and shadow. These periods have their source in human nature, in the play of its most hidden forces. To learn the mechanism of these forces is to resolve the destiny of man.

• The history of our civilisation is rich in salutary lessons. First, to learn and, above all, to retain—which is more difficult—that the decline of a nation always begins when those who have the most responsibility in a state neglect, or refuse, to listen to the people's voice, the voice of the masses who suffer and beg their inviolable right to happiness.

When we consider the past, we are often seized with admiration for certain historic figures who knew how to lead their nation to altitudes that have never been attained by our modern civilisation. And why? Because these individuals, besides their genius of organisation, had in their hearts what is lacking the most in our modern statesmen: *love for the people*, as well as knowledge of the laws of nature codified in the old, eternal symbols.

The glories of Chaldea, Egypt, Greece, witness to what man in possession of these two gifts can achieve; lacking them, every nation is doomed sooner or later to decay and crumble in anarchy.

Moreover, when we regard the present position of the world, is it not one of the greatest privileges of the traveller, as of the historian, to show, in his modest way, the columns of glory erected in the past by men who were

truly wise, columns of glory marking the triumphal way to true culture and to pure civilisation?

When we seek in the buried centuries for vestiges of these columns of glory, a name, among others, emerges: INDIA.

It is a fact, whether we wish to accept it or not, that India is the Mother of all of us. She has given us everything: religion, philosophy, science, art. All that has been truly great, noble, and generous, throughout the ages, has come from India. Was it not our great Michelet, the historian, who, while seeking for the wisdom of the ages, cried at the commencement of his work, "The Bible of Humanity": "The year 1863 will remain dear and blessed for me". Why? Because he had read India's sacred poem, the *Ramayana*. In what moving terms he then wrote about India. We can but transcribe his burning words:

*"Each year, it is necessary to respire, to take breath again, to revive ourselves at the great living sources that forever keep their eternal freshness. Where can we find them if not at the cradle of our race, on the sacred summits from where descend the Indus and the Ganges, or the torrents of Persia, the rivers of paradise? All is narrow in the West. Greece is little: I stifle. Judea is dry: I pant. Let me turn my eyes for a time to high Asia, towards the profound East. There I have my immense poem, vast as India's sea, blessed, endowed with sun, book of divine harmony where there is nothing discordant. A lovely peace reigns in it and even in the midst of combats an infinite sweetness, a fraternity without limits, which extends to all that lives, an ocean (depthless and shoreless) of love, compassion, clemency. I have found what I sought: the Bible of Goodness. Receive me then, great poem!... Let me plunge into it!... It is an ocean of milk."*

Such was the first and enduring impression made on Michelet by the *Ramayana*.

To these words, we may add the lines of Max Muller:

*"If I had to seek through the entire world for the country endowed with the greatest fortune, power, and beauty that Nature could confer, I should point to India.*

*"If I were asked under which sky the human mind has best developed some of its choicest gifts, has the most deeply meditated on the greatest problems of life and discovered a solution to some of them which merits to arrest the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant, I would point to India.*

*"And if I asked myself from what literature we Europeans—we who have been nourished almost exclusively on Greek and Roman thought as well as on that of the Semitic race of the Jews—could obtain the corrective so necessary if we wish to make our interior life more perfect, larger, more universal, in fact, more human, a life not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life—once again, I should point to India."*

In our turn, we, as so many pilgrims in the past, decided to go to India, to what was the cradle of all true civilisation.

The aim of these pages is to make all those who are, or who are not, attracted to the East, aware of the real fragrance of India, the fragrance that can pervade the soul for ever. And at the same time to show to those who desire to see them, the unerring landmarks devised by ancient India that can still serve for the edification of the World of Tomorrow, the world to which all peoples are aspiring, ridden of modern tyrants, where there will be some brotherhood and stable happiness.

However, do not mistake me. India is not a country that can be assimilated in a few months. It was necessary to keep within bounds and to choose. Moreover, the goal of our pilgrimage was the temples of South India. We do not pretend to have discovered this country, others have done that long ago. The works of the great oriental-

ists of the West (is it necessary to name Burnouf, Sylvain Levi, Colebrooke, and how many others ?) have shown the depth of Hindu thought.

Would it not be interesting, even piquant, to cite those British officials who, at the beginning of last century and even before, contributed to the revival of India, to making her better known beyond her frontiers ? Do we not see these envoys of the British Government, the "Civil Servants", deciding for themselves to learn the languages of the country, whether it be Pali, Sanskrit, or any other tongue ? Among these officials was Charles Johnson, who later on became an authority on the Sanskrit language and contributed to the translation of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Upanishads*; then, Wilkins, Bradlaugh, Weatherburn, besides others, all contributed to make the brilliance of ancient India known to the world.

Before journeying as thoughtful pilgrims over the routes of India, before penetrating her inner atmosphere, it is worth-while to note that the works of all these orientalisists have completely exploded the idea that India is only a land of fakirs, of showmen of tricks, and tiger hunting. Much literature has been written in this sense which could falsify the opinions we might have about this country. We must, on the contrary, consider India's place in the world as eminently important, worthy of her secular past. Modern India has her universities, her thinkers, philosophers, scholars, artists. All—at least, we believe so—desire to see the epic grandeur of their country revived, those glorious epochs when India swayed the world by her grandeur. As the profound philosopher of contemporary India, Sir S. Radhakrishnan, has so well said in his important book, "Indian Philosophy":

*"If Indian thinkers combine a love of what is old with a thirst for what is true, Indian philosophy may yet have a future as glorious as its past."*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Indian Philosophy"—Introduction p. 53.

That is rigorously exact. All these personalities; whether of the West or the East, have been and are convinced that India ought to awaken from her lethargy and demonstrate to the world that her past glory can still serve humanity, now, in its most crucial hour.

Without entering the domain of politics, *which we have deliberately avoided in these pages*, we should like to quote the following lines of Mr. Gandhi:

*"I am married to India. I owe everything to her. I believe that she has a mission. If she fails in it, it will be a time of ordeal for me, and I hope that I myself shall not fail. My religion has no geographical limits. If my faith is living, it will surpass my love even for India..... Humanity is one. There are differences of race, but the higher the race, the greater are its duties.... India has a soul which can never perish."*<sup>1</sup>

On his part, Tagore, trying to unite all the true cultures of the world, cried:

*"All the glories of humanity are mine.... The Infinite Personality of Man.... can only be achieved in a grandiose harmony of all human races.... The awakening of India is linked to the awakening of the world.... My prayer is that India may represent the cooperation of all the peoples of the world."*<sup>2</sup>

And Jawaharlal Nehru adds these inspiring words:

*"The past of India is a long, long one, lost in the mists of antiquity; it has its sad and unhappy periods which make us feel ashamed and miserable; but on the whole it is a splendid past of which we may well be proud. We can think of it with pleasure. And yet today we have little leisure to think of the past.... But a time comes when a whole people become full of faith for a great cause, and*

<sup>1</sup> *Mahatma Gandhi*, by Romain Rolland, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 119.

## THE FRAGRANCE OF INDIA

*then even simple, ordinary men and women become heroes, and history becomes stirring and epoch-making'.*\*

Such outpourings of the soul are cries which echo within the consciousness of every human being who truly aspires to the Brotherhood of Peoples.

At this moment when a hurricane of violence and hate is raging across the world, and will rage still more through the world of the future, making the very framework of our civilisation crack, at this moment when intellectual and moral values are being trampled upon by the hordes of egoism, brutality, and lying, let us go together Reader-Friends, towards India from whom we can learn so much.

Let us make a holy pilgrimage. Let us go to the Temples of the South, remembering, however, that India's spiritual force does not reside in her stones, nor in her ruins, nor in her temples built by men's hands, but in her profound thought that preceded and presided over the building of all these sanctuaries and that can still enrich and ennoble the World of Tomorrow. Let us, then, go towards our Mother, *Aryavarta*.

We shall travel along India's great routes. We shall mix with Indian crowds. We shall see beautiful young Hindu girls with supple, graceful deportment and great black eyes, soft as velvet, clad in their harmoniously draped saris of glistening golds, blues, and yellows; we shall traverse calm villages; we shall be present at processions worthy of those of the Arabian Nights. Lastly, we shall enter the celebrated temples where we shall learn the signification of some of the ancient symbols, old as time, in which are enshrined the eternal truths on the life of Man.

Then, we shall be in a position to contemplate the sublime Figures who long ago gave unity to India and who pointed out to the whole world the eternal and unerring

\* *Glimpses of World History*, Volume I. pp. iii and 1.



path to real happiness. We shall gather to these great spiritual Leaders of Humanity speaking. We shall gather the honey of their wisdom, their profound lessons. It may be that these lessons will become the seeds of our inner life. They will be sources of energy, intrepidity, love, and knowledge, leading us up to the lofty summits where floats the strong, sweet Fragrance of India, and where the conqueror understands the secret of life.







## CHAPTER I

### AN INDIAN TREASURE CASKET

**F**AR away in the past, somewhere in France, a great sea port.....

In an animated street, near the quays where anchor the big mail steamers from Asia, a modest little shop of curios from the Far East. Among a crowd of exotic objects, an eight-year-old boy is standing alone while his parents on the threshold of the shop bargain with the merchant for some precious souvenirs. In the dim light, the child's eyes wander around and hardly distinguish the faded gold of Buddhas plunged in metaphysical meditation, the worn stuffs and shawls which doubtless at one time enveloped the beautiful body of some far-away princess in an Eastern palace, the grimacing dragons of jade and ivory, the copper vessels, the ebony tables inlaid with mother-of-pearl, the tigerskins.....

The boy's eyes stray thoughtfully from one object to another. Suddenly, they fasten upon a casket of carved wood. He approaches it and gently opens it. A perfume of indescribable sweetness exhales from the box. On the lid is carved a tree with spreading branches in the shade of which people are sitting in an attitude of meditation. The boy does not know why but he is mysteriously drawn toward this casket. He gazes at it, touches it, opens and closes it, and inhales its penetrating odour. All at once, he hears the merchant saying to his parents, indicating to them at the same time the object of his contemplation: "There is a treasure box made of sandal wood from India."

India! He remembers but this one word, India!

The boy's parents, attracted by other *objets d'art*,

leave him to his reverie. India! "The man said India," he thinks. His soul, without his being conscious of it, is filled with deep and strange feelings. This word, so striking for him, captures his imagination. It seems to him that this treasure casket contains the whole of India which he believes to know well from having read many strange stories about that country of mystery. Now India is before him, he touches it, he breathes its perfume through the box which he holds in his hands. He is so happy, without knowing why.

Inexpressible reminiscences! "To learn is to remember," said Plato. May it be that his child's soul remembers a time in the far past? It is for his inner life to respond, but the child himself is plunged in a profound dream. He lives an intense hour. He is not aware of it but he lives one of those hours the memory of which can never be forgotten. He does not know that the Indian treasure box will remain in the recesses of his memory and will very often emerge to haunt his youthful mind as well as his matured life of a man.

....There was a silence—one of those silences experienced during his years of adolescence. The soul needs time to adapt itself to the body.

One day, while on a boat taking him to Algeria, the youth, who is now sixteen years of age, sees in the distance a huge vessel. "It is the Mail from India," the captain tells him. India! Again this evoking word which stirs his mind. He thinks that later on he also will steer toward India, toward her shores. He had learned that she was also named *Aryavarta*, the country of the Wise Ones.

....Again some years fly swiftly past. Years of struggle, of work, of suffering, of hopes. A man's years. They count. But the soul of India watches over him. She took possession of all his being in the little curiosity shop buffeted by the wild sea wind and which smelled so good of the East. His study of Hindu philosophy only strengthened his belief in and reverence for India.

If he could not possess the famous treasure box of his childhood, he received, instead, from a very dear being, his son, residing in India—whom we will designate by the letter C.,—a wonderful Indian treasure casket all inlaid with ivory, silver, and turquoise.

It was the herald of a great event.

## CHAPTER II

### TOWARDS ARYAVARTA

**T**ODAY, the 13th April 1937, my great dream is realised. Is it possible? We start, or rather we are going to start, for India. Next month, exactly on the 28th May, we shall embark at Genoa for Bombay.

I cannot yet believe it, although the decision is taken. C. is waiting for us over there, A. and myself. Our friend D. will accompany us.

In my study, I find myself looking at all the Indian objects which are around me. There is the beautiful treasure casket, a small statue of Gautama the Buddha, a little ivory elephant which seems to salute me with its trunk by a sonorous trumpeting. There is also a little temple bell in chiselled copper casting a red reflection, the grave tone of which invites me, if I desire it, to recollection. And here are some old photographs of my childhood: the boat which brought me and my parents home from the far Pacific by way of the South Seas, New Caledonia, Noumea, then Aden, the Suez Canal, Port Said. They are precious to me these ancient photos for they always stir up in me a nostalgia for those far-off countries of the East, those burning seas, especially for *Aryavarta* the land of the Aryans, the Wise Ones.

*Monday, 24th May*

Feverish days. The day after tomorrow is the day of our departure. Trunks, valises encumber the house buried in its garden in the environs of Paris.

*Evening*

- A nightingale is singing in the big ash tree. It is so



sweet, so penetrating, this song, that as we listen to it we recall a passage from a very old Asiatic book: "The first sound thou hast to hear is like the nightingale's sweet voice chanting a song of parting to its mate."

*Tuesday, 25th May*

Shopping in Paris. We breakfasted, D. and I, on two croissants and coffee cream in the Latin Quarter.

*Wednesday, 26th May*

Departure, at last! Twenty-two trunks and valises to label. It's awful but marvellous. Two hours in which to gum on the labels (which do not stick) and to write on each one of them these thrilling words:

*"Steamer 'Conte-Rosso.' Berth 18, from Genoa to Bombay."*

A hurried lunch, very hurried, and at 2 p.m. the van arrives, because it is a van that we need. At last, everything is squeezed in for good or ill and we say goodbye to our house, our garden, and above all to "Mongol," our good and faithful cat.

7.35 p.m.

*Gare de Lyon.* We are installed in our compartment. With much difficulty, we have managed to fit everything in: typewriters, gigantic hat boxes belonging to my two companions, valises, rugs, etc..... The train for Italy leaves at 8.25 p.m.

7.50 p.m.

We must move everything out again and change carriages.... The porter has mistaken the coach. We are not in the one which goes direct to Genoa. What a delightful episode!

8.15 p.m.

Installed now definitively. At least, we hope so. A storm over Paris. Last goodbyes to our good and dear

friends. We are sorry to see them sad but glad to know that they are happy on our account. Arrd.,.....

8.25 p.m.

Departure for India. We are alone, the three of us, in our compartment and are deeply moved.

*Thursday, 27th May*

Crossing the Alps, still covered with snow. We had breakfast at Modane. The sun is shining brilliantly.

#### GENOA

We arrive at Genoa. It is 2.30 p.m. The descent from the mountains is most beautiful. Glimpses over the Mediterranean, so blue, of course.

On our arrival, we take some rooms at an hotel near the station and then go immediately to the office of the Compagnie de Navigation. Everything is in order. The boat will leave tomorrow at 3 p.m. We go on to the quay to look at it. It is a beautiful ship, all white, solid and yet so slender.

We then make a hasty visit, in a good old fiacre, to the Italian town, crossing the quarter of the fishermen which is very picturesque with its high houses and ex-votos. From one corner commanding the town, we look over Genoa and its terraces, framed by the surrounding mountains.

*Evening*

After dinner, we go to have another look at our beautiful ship, all lighted up now. Beside her is a Dutch steamer which will start tomorrow for Java.

*Friday, 28th May*

A very unrestful night. Oh! those tramcars of Genoa which make a din like hell. Why didn't we choose an hotel perched on the side of one of the mountains?

We start very early in the morning to visit the Campo-

## TOWARDS ARYAVARTA

Sancto, the famous cemetery where the triumph of bones reaches its greatest intensity. The site between the green hills is very pretty. We do not wish to hurt anyone's feelings, but those tombs on which stand life-size—and even larger—statues of the dead are much too realist and ridiculous. There is one which represents the deceased wearing a coat, standing with an expression of gaiety under his bowler hat placed all askew. He seems to say: "What a good lunch I have had to day!" Another statue is a true likeness of a dead woman. What has she done, poor soul? She is weeping before the gate of Hell. Happily, praise be to God, a special grace in the form of an angel allows her to take the road to Paradise. What gross superstitions are amassed by men! What false conceptions blind us! In this cemetery de luxe Death has a terrifying aspect, mournful, and unhealthy. Oh! for the funeral pyres of India, all covered with flowers, where our physical remains are purified in living flames. We are in haste to leave these places and to go on board.

### AT SEA—PORTS OF CALL

11 a.m.

The weather is glorious and warm when we embark. The ship's cabins and salons are large and light. We receive a cable from C. wishing us a very enjoyable voyage. Suddenly, from the upper deck, we see on the quay two of our trunks which have been forgotten! Heavens! our light clothing, flannel belts....one must provide for everything. We precipitate ourselves, D. and I, on to the quay in order to have them brought on board. Are the malicious Devas (spirits of Nature) already playing tricks on us?

3 p.m.

Three hoots from the ship's siren. Hats and handkerchiefs, as usual, of course. The eternal and sad good-byes at long partings. The *Conte-Rosso* glides slowly out of the dock. We set off for Asia, for India so fasci-

nating. Genoa, its mountains, its Campo-Sancto, are blurred by the heat mists and.... it is the open sea. The repose of the sea in the expectation of what is to come.

Around us on the deck, it seems already to be almost the East. Hindus, wearing majestic turbans, come and go. A fleeting glimpse of India "tranquil and immutable."

.....Evening on the sea has come. The moon rises before the ship. In the great calm, the ship's bells ring the quarter in solemn tones. Night is so sweet, so magnificently beautiful in joy.....

*Saturday, 29th May*

After a good and peaceful night in our cabins, we go early on deck. It is a marvell! In the dazzling sun, some enchanting islands announce to us Naples, reclining indolently at the edge of the blue waves.

There is classic Vesuvius, which appears surrounded with smoke, and the fairy bay. Bright sunlight floods the town, people, and all things. Over there, on the left, is Posilipo. In the distance, Pompeii, Capri....

10 a.m.

Immediately after docking, we disembark in order to pay a short visit to Naples, as anchor will be hoisted at 2 p.m.

An animated crowd in the Napolitan streets. Very narrow streets where the sun scarcely penetrates. From the fronts of the high houses hand coloured rags, shirts, sheets..... Various little shops are selling fruit, fish, vegetables, old bath-tubs, saucepans, while low carts, painted in crying colours and drawn by mules shaking gay little bells, trot past us.

A conveyance takes us through the principal streets and on to the beautiful promenade which runs along the sea front. At one jeweller's, we let ourselves be tempted by a pretty ring of rose coral. Unfortunately, we have not

sufficient time during this short visit to go and see other celebrated places.

2 p.m.

We embark with numerous passengers and the boat now starts for Port Said, towards the land of the Pharaohs.

We look once more over the Bay of Naples, then the *Conte-Rosso* heads for the South. On the calm sea, dolphins frolic joyously.

*Evening*

After an excellent dinner, we go again on deck. Before us, Messina is in view. At 11 o'clock, we enter the Straits. The scene is one of great beauty. On both sides, innumerable lights sparkle and a breeze off the land wafts to us the scent of flowers. Stromboli remains invisible. As we pass out of the Straits, the slight swell of the sea gently rocks the boat, it is going to lull us to sleep in our bunks.

*Sunday, 30th May*

A beautiful, clear day. The sea unchangingly blue. All the hours that we live are passing so rapidly. They are so light and happy, and yet so profound, that time no longer exists. The hours spent on board are never monotonous. Life is organised among the passengers: games, bathing in the swimming pools, conversations, take up all their attention. On our boat, there are Chinese, Hindus, Mohammedans, and many Italians. The latter are going to Ethiopia, the former are returning to their countries.

We have installed our deck chairs in the prow of the boat, away from all the noisy passengers. In the evening, when the stars appear and the sea swell rocks us, we see these lights of heaven as little lamps that an invisible hand balances in the infinity of time in order to point out to us the route to follow during the long life of days. Oh! how beautiful are the present hours, sad also when one thinks that they fall little by little into the past which

will never return. No, to say that the past will never return is false. The past does return, Hindu philosophy teaches us, but doubtless, with different modalities. Each passing day forms causes which will produce effects in the future and so on in the endless chain of the law of cause and effect. It is *Karma*, the law of Destiny.

*Monday, 31st May—8 a.m.*

We are approaching Egypt. The sun is resplendent. A. and D. are wearing light dresses. I, naturally, have donned a white suit. This evening, towards midnight, we shall be at Port Said, the door of the East, the place in all the world where one is most likely to meet a face one knows.

#### EVENING AND SUNRISE AT PORT SAID

11 p.m.

The moon rises over Egypt and the phare of the Port Said lighthouse sweeps the horizon. The air is lukewarm. The boat stops, the pilot comes on board. Half-an-hour later we enter the harbour. Port Said is illuminated by a thousand lights. It is the night life of Port Said. Innumerable little boats surround the *Conte-Rosso* and with hoarse cries the boatmen in their fez invite us to buy their wares. We anchor not far from the quay and by a floating passage-way we cross over from the ship to the quay. Here we are welcomed by a crowd of Arabs who also insist on selling us stuffs, bracelets, necklaces, cigarettes, and even....obscene post cards.

This crowd follows us, besieges us, while we wend our way towards the shops which remain open the whole night, as long as there are steamers coming in from Asia or from Europe. Merchants and cafes, as well as places of easy and exciting amusement, make mints of gold.

We enter the largest store where can be found every article that a traveller may need: clothing, colonial helmets, shawls for the icy nights in the desert—for the desert with its vast expanse is quite near—canes, electric pocket lamps,

jewels, articles made of embossed leather, rings mounted with beautiful precious stones, ... I buy a colonial helmet; it reminds me of my childhood. Then, through the sweet night, we wander along the streets of Port Said. Most of the houses with their large verandas have an exotic stamp about them, and at this late hour of the night the cafes are overflowing with their heteroclite clientele, in which are mixed almost all the races on the globe, daily outpoured by passing vessels. It is one of the most amazing places in the world.

We walk toward the deserted jetty where stands the statue of de Lesseps. The outline of the *Conte-Rosso*, all illuminated, can be seen in the middle of the channel. Along the side of the jetty, feluccas are moored which sway gently to and fro. They are so gracious, these barks with slanting masts. On the beach, bathed by the moonlight, the waves of the peaceful Mediterranean murmur softly. When returning on board, I am touched to see once more the Suez Canal which I glimpsed long ago with my eyes of a child.

*Tuesday, 1st June—3 a.m.*

Our departure is postponed, we shall not hoist anchor before 6 o'clock. We are delighted, since in this way the passage through the Canal will be made during the day time. While awaiting the departure of the boat, we remain on deck, under the Captain's bridge. From here, we command a view of the whole boat as well as the harbour and Port Said. What a radiant Egyptian night! All one's being expands with joy. Apart from a few twinkling lights on the barges which surround our vessel, all is quiet now on board and on the quays. Port Said sleeps at last. The passengers also. We are the only ones watching.

The sky is gemmed with stars. The desert wind brings us the characteristic odour of Eastern ports, a mingling of bitter orange peel and lemon. It is a magic night.....

Suddenly, without lingering, night fades. The houses, the palm trees on the quay, the lighthouse, the prow of the ship, everything becomes more distinct. The veil of night is lifted. Dawn is breaking. Already, the birds are waking up in the gardens of Port Said and tittering gaily. The cocks of Egypt announce powerful Baal who now with majesty appears, throwing far and wide his burning rays. The wonderful sunlight flows over the port, the Canal, the tawny desert, the blue sea. Between the jetties, feluccas unfurl their sails and like great white birds disperse over the sea, blown before a strong breeze. What a joy to be alive! This sunrise over the land of Egypt will be forever engraved in our memories.

6 a.m.

The pilot comes aboard. The Canal is going to be free. Behind us, the Dutch steamer en route for Java, which left Genoa before we did, enters the dock. It will follow us during the twelve hours' crossing of the Canal. At this early hour, the activity of Port Said is already prodigious. The shops on the quay have opened their doors to receive the eternal wanderers from the sea. A multitude of small craft furrow the port. A caravan of ships, coming from the Red Sea, moves out of the Canal. There is an Italian transport loaded with troops returning from Abyssinia, from the war that appears so sinister to the joy of living. Then, a great petrol tanker, then other boats hailing from India, China, Arabia, the incessant and extraordinary coming and going between East and West through this narrow corridor of the sea, the Suez Canal, the object of so much covetousness.

A sound of chains, several blows on a whistle, the hoisting of the anchor in the bows of the *Conte-Rosso* . . . . . We are moving. Behind us, other ships follow. Port Said, the town which never sleeps—or so little—recedes further and further into the distance and we enter the Canal.



## THE ROSE DESERT OF ARABIA, THE FIERY SEA

*Noon*

The sun is burning. On both sides of the Canal, the immense desert. On the left is Arabia, on the right, Egypt. The Pharaonic country is more indented, more mountainous. The Arabian desert has an unspeakable charm with its tawny colours, sometimes coral rose. Here are the scenes so often looked at in the old photographs of my childhood, gazed at also long ago with my eyes of childhood. I never weary of contemplating this vast horizon, the caravans of camels which pass not far from the banks of the Canal, camels the colour of the desert.

*Afternoon*

We come to Ismailia—such a melodious name—its beautiful gardens, its trees blossoming with bright red flowers, its beach on which are spread tents, bow-shaped. And always the desert.

At six o'clock in the evening, after having crossed the great lakes, we come at last to the threshold of the Red Sea. The scene is truly an imposing one. On the right, under the trees, Port Tewfik; in the bay, Suez displays its white houses; at the end, great sun-scorched mountains aureoled by the gold of sunset; on the left, Arabia and its rose desert.

The *Conte-Rosso* stops an instant in order to land the pilot and we start again in the hot night for India.

*Wednesday, 2nd June*

Wind very strong. A big swell behind us. The rolling of the boat very accentuated. The Red Sea is magnificently blue. Under this violent and burning wind, heated by a fiery sun, the Red Sea has an aspect of ancient times, of periods, so to say, pre-human, when worlds were born. The sky is nearly white, as if at fusion point. Great sheets of water, deep blue, rise in enormous irides-

cent waves, surfed with seething foam, resembling a gigantic peacock's tail unfolded. On this moving surface, there is nothing but fire, apocalyptic fire, the fire which in its metaphysical aspect creates and devours, the fire which is the most mystical of the elements. Is it not the father of light, the progenitor of heat, the manifestation of motion? "The Eternal is fire, the fire of the law," said Moses on descending from Mount Sinai, that Mount which is not far from us but just behind the heat mists over there on the horizon.

*Thursday, 3rd June—10 p.m.*

After rolling all one night and another day on an incandescent sea, we reach Massawa. The night is stifling and heavy. An Italian destroyer comes alongside the *Conte-Rosso*. There is a war going on near here, it is true. A contingent of Italian troops who have come to colonize poor unfortunate Abyssinia, disembark here. The land is often hostile in these wild places, the climate is deadly, but they start off, these troops, young, happy to be alive, with the carelessness of youth which does not see what colonization founded in blood by fascist tyrants will be. Among them is a young Italian woman, pretty, elegant, distinguished, and full of joy. She has come to join her husband, an officer, also young, who left at the beginning of the campaign and will remain in Abyssinia with the army of occupation. A lovely couple, truly. Both of them, radiant with joy and love, descend the ladder-way in order to board the towboat which will take them to land, toward the future...while poor Somali porters, half-naked, wearing magnificent turbans, rose-coloured, red, or blue (it is their only ornament), bend their backs under heavy loads of luggage, under the contempt and insults of the Italian police.

*Friday, 4th June*

The sea has calmed but the heat remains the same. We pass Perim about 5 o'clock in the afternoon. An arid

coast with only some white houses standing under the burning sun. •

### THE CRICKETS OF ADEN

10 p.m.

We arrive at Aden, our last port of call before Bombay. While the *Conte-Rosso* is coaling, we take a vedette in order to visit the port. Oh! those vedettes, they are D's terror. From the moment we disembark, as before at Port Said, we are besieged by a troop of Arabs offering us cigarettes, flowers, necklaces.... My glance turns immediately toward the beach. Alas! there are no camels. Where are the caravans of long ago which in my childhood I saw on this sand dune? Behind the desolate mountains, doubtless, on the desert tracks....

We wander along through the night. In the parched gardens, in the lanes, the crickets of Aden sing joyfully and ceaselessly. They are everywhere, in the gardens, in the arched houses, in the beds or mattresses where people are sleeping outside in the street in the vain hope of finding a little cool air. What a dizzying concert! Chauffeurs in luxurious cars offer to drive us to the town some miles distant. We prefer to go back on board for fear of missing our boat. And always and everywhere those crickets of Aden, even on the deck and on the buoys in the channel. •

*Saturday, 5th June—3 a.m.*

We go down into our cabins to take a little rest before the vessel sails. But it is impossible to sleep in this suffocating oven. We go on deck again. Bright moonlight floods the high rocks leaning over Aden. Very soon dawn comes and we get under way. Then, out on the high seas once more, the Indian Ocean. Sitting in the prow, we lose ourselves in the dream of life....

### FLYING FISHES, A YOGI BETWEEN DECKS

As the day advances, the heat becomes more and more intense. We watch a cloud of flying fishes which follows

the ship. The Purser, a charming man, shows us over the steamer. We go down between decks, we glance into the kitchens, where is concentrated the gastronomic life on board, and into the crew's quarters; we catch a glimpse of the machinery, the mechanics' dining room. Then, D. and myself, the Purser having left us in order to give some orders, continue our tour of the boat. Suddenly, in a corner between decks, a picture that stirs us deeply: on a carpet woven in warm colours, an aged Hindu is sitting cross-legged like a Buddha, the palms of his hands resting on his knees; his beautiful calm face is adorned with a long white beard; his hair, also white, reaches to his neck; he is clothed in a long white tunic; in the depths of his large eyes, shining with an infinite gentleness, is the peace of one who has overcome desire. He is the living image of the verse of the *Bhagavad-Gita*: "He who finds in himself his light and his joy is a Yogi united spiritually." On the carpet, before him in a copper bowl, some sticks of sandal wood are burning, from which rises a fragrant, pervasive perfume. Beside him, a youth with clear-cut features—his *chela*, his disciple—is reclining and sleeping a passionless sleep. Discreetly, we stop for a few seconds to contemplate this scene. The atmosphere around the Yogi seems so calm. It is the India of long ago, perhaps of today. His beautiful eyes rest upon us with love and a smile illuminates his face. It seems to us that we receive a blessing. We go on our way much touched.

*Sunday, 6th June*

Rough sea. Rolling. Flying fishes. They chase each other through the foam-crested waves.

6 p.m.

The sea becomes rougher and rougher. The passengers are exhausted by the monsoon heat and humidity which are being experienced at this season. We resist as well as we can. To add to our happiness, an order comes from the captain to close all portholes in the cabins and

salons. The barometer is rapidly falling. A typhoon is feared. We look forward to a bad night.

At dinner, the Purser comes to our table to show us, on a metal plate, a flying fish which had mistaken its direction. The poor fish, evidently believing that it was entering Neptune's fairy palace, flew into a cabin through the open porthole and there, on the carpet, it died. A sad fate for a flying fish of the Indian Ocean! It was so pretty, with its wings like nacre.

I go on to the prow of the boat to try and inhale a little fresh air. The wind, unfortunately, is blowing from behind and it is so hot. The surging billows are very majestic. Through the tumult of the waves breaking over the boat, we see the stars tracing immense arcs in the sky. On the bridge, the officers watch anxiously. In the salons, the passengers look at each other with apprehension. A woman is on the deck, ill, and the doctor is giving her injections to revive her. At three o'clock in the morning, the ocean seems slightly calmer. I go down into my cabin and sleep while the waves rush onward to make their assault upon the ship.

*Monday, 7th June*

There was no typhoon. Today, the day before the last, the weather is marvellous. The storm has passed. Faces are serene again. We are approaching Asia. We learn that the bad weather has hindered our progress and that instead of arriving at Bombay tomorrow afternoon, it will be late at night before we get into port. What a pity! We should have so much liked to arrive by day so as to be able to watch the coast of India drawing near. Let us hope that the monsoon has not yet commenced in Bombay! It would be disastrous to disembark under a deluge.

We remain on deck to look at the beautiful sunset. The sun sinks in a lovely blue light, while the clouds, fringed with orange, give a delicate transparency to the sky.

Then we go down between decks to see for the last

time our old Hindu Yogi. He is still there, this time reclining on the carpet supported on his elbows. His face wears the same imprint of serenity. From where does he come? Where is he going? It is good to have seen him once more.

*Tuesday, 8th June—5 p.m.*

Thanks be to Varuna, the God of Wind in the Hindu pantheon. The monsoon has not yet reached the continent of India. It is simply splendid weather. The land of India is approaching. Feverish preparations for disembarking. Trunks, valises are closed. Unfortunately, a small accident has happened to A. The bar of her bunk tumbled down, hitting her on the lip which is now all swollen. She is obliged to suck ice and lemon to bring down the swelling. In spite of all, joy reigns. In about an hour's time, we shall be in sight of Bombay, just as the sun is setting. We are thrilled to the depths.

From the prow, we scan the horizon with our field glasses. We can no longer contain ourselves. India is there, quite near. It will very soon appear. India millenary, with its glorious past.

*6 p.m.*

A sprinkle of gold on the calm sea. Over there on the horizon, a vague form emerges, golden, which little by little becomes distinct. It is India!

### THE MOTHER

The *Conte-Rosso* slackens her speed. We enter the splendid bay of Bombay. On the right, a group of islands headed by the celebrated Elephanta with its famous temples carved out of the rock.

In front of us, Bombay: its white houses, the dome of its grand hotel, the Taj Mahal; then, Malabar Hill on the left with its hanging gardens, beautiful trees, sumptuous palaces. This is Asia, the real East with all its magic, magic of colour, and also of thought. There is not a ruin or

a monument but that has its own history. Behind the town, extends a ridge of mountains. Everywhere, on their slopes, covered by forests and by an almost impenetrable jungle, are scattered temples, pagodas, mosques, belonging to innumerable religious sects. Here and there, at the hour of sunset, the last warm rays of the dying sun touch some holy edifice, a cell hollowed out of the rock, the ancient dwelling of some saintly hermit, an old ruined fortress, a sacred pool where lotus bloom....

But the boat veers round, approaches the quay, and comes alongside. C. is there awaiting us with some friends. Profoundly moved on seeing C. again. He waves us a welcome. Indian policemen come on board. They are quaint with their yellow berets and bare feet in sandals. A crowd of coolies invade the boat. They are wearing the national dhoti, a large piece of material, generally white with a coloured border, which is worn round the waist or is passed between the legs, or they have a shirt, the tails of which float outside over their hips.

C. in his turn comes up the gangway, followed by some friends and a crowd of other people. Truly, it is only India that knows how to receive and to welcome. In a few seconds, our necks are encircled with garlands of sweet scented jasmine—India's perfume.

After the usual passport formalities, we are able to descend the gangway and to plant our feet at last upon the soil of India. Then, through the swiftly fallen night, we drive with C. to Malabar Hill, where we are hospitably received in a house standing on the coast beside the sea.

1 a.m.

After long hours spent with C., all sleeps now in the vast mansion which is an ancient Moslem palace. I have made a tour of the large garden. The brilliant moon streams through the long Moorish galleries, supported by openworked pillars. The palm trees sway gently in the ocean breeze. The night is hot and yet so sweet. From nearby comes the murmur of the sea....

In my heart, a plenitude, a silence also....Why?  
Soon, I shall be sleeping in the invisible but ever present  
arms of the Mother, at last refund.



### CHAPTER III

## BOMBAY, INDIAN RAILWAY STATIONS A HINDU DINNER

**T**HE next morning, we are awakened early by the chirruping of many birds—birds of all sorts and sizes and harlequin plumage. Crows and vultures are manifestly very fat, above all the latter, which have no attraction for me. They come without doubt from the sinister Towers of Silence, where the bodies of the dead are exposed in the open air on slabs of stone and devoured in an hour or two by these rapacious birds. But let us leave the Parsi cemetery to the followers of Zoroaster and inhale the fresh, early-morning breeze from the Indian Ocean and bathe ourselves in sunlight and brightness. The grey skies of the West have disappeared and it is the enchantment of India which is commencing.

However, we have to shut our valises again as we are remaining but a few hours in Bombay. We shall come back later on. Therefore, it is another departure, with C. this time, the departure for South India, towards Mysore State, then the Blue Mountains, and subsequently towards the superhuman beauty of the temples.

We cross Bombay, but this time we see the town in resplendent sunshine. We pass by the hanging gardens of Malabar Hill, from where the view over the bay, the isles and the *ghats* (mountains), is marvellous. Bombay lies stretched out at our feet, its palaces and houses in Oriental style, its vegetation, its flame trees—trees covered with great scarlet blossoms. The scene is unforgettable. But time is flying. Our automobile takes us through the bazaar. Here life is humming.

We arrive at the monumental railway station, built

in Moresque style. We are a little late, for the train will start in two minutes. Coolies seize our luggage and all four of us climb quickly into our compartment. Once more, we receive garlands of flowers offered by our acquaintances and the train, the Madras Mail, carries us away towards Wonderland.

Our first stage will be Bangalore. For about thirty hours, shut up in our compartment, we shall cross the immense plateau of the Deccan. The train is already climbing the steep slopes of the "ghats." We reach Poona, the summer hill station. And night falls rapidly.

. . . Very early the next morning, we are awakened at a station. On the platform, a whole crowd of people is moving to and fro. Then off starts the train again. But we must describe the stations of India.

Oh! these Indian stations. They are unique. The train stops. Right now, here is one. No, not yet, it is only a cow which has taken possession of the line. Fortunately, the engine driver has slowed down in time. She is driven away with respect towards the fields. Do not forget that the cow is sacred in India. She represents the metaphysical symbol of the Earth, the Mother who not only nourishes but who possesses every mystic, cosmic, as well as human power. But we move on again and several miles further along there appears at last a little station lost in the Deccan. It is Kulluru. On the platform, a whole buzzing crowd. From where do they come, all these people? There are Mohammedans, Hindus, accompanied by their families, the women draped in their gracious saris of different colours, the children with big, velvety black eyes. They are all going to a marriage or a funeral, or perhaps they are making a pious pilgrimage. Men pass adroitly through this crowd, carrying on their heads or balancing on their hands baskets full of provisions: oranges, succulent red bananas, curry, tea, mangoes; others are carrying copper vessels filled with drinking water. In melodious tones, these water carriers chant a magic word which includes the thirst of all the travellers: "Pani ! Pani ! Pani !"

For our part, we have followed the custom of well-to-do Hindu families. Our Bombay friends have prepared a large basket for us, in which we discover a quantity of excellent eatables, strictly vegetarian: fruit, cheese, honey, biscuits.

Most of the travellers have packed themselves, for good or ill, into the train. Others have remained behind on the platform. Seated or lying on the ground in the shadow of a great banyan tree, they wait for another train, their eternal little tin trunk beside them; it is all their luggage. All this crowd speaks, chatters, while the children push each other about or, putting their finger in their nose, gaze at the people coming and going. We wait, now, for the train to start again. The strong Deccan wind is blowing and the sun is darting down its burning rays. One feels so far, so far. . . .

Suddenly, the train starts off, why one does not know. We pass through beautiful palm groves, then country scorched by the sun, where nothing but aloes grow. Everywhere, the earth is orange-red in colour. On the roads are herds of buffaloes, cows, and goats; men also, always in their dhoti; women in saris, walking with their souple steps. Where are they going? Six o'clock in the evening; the time passes. It is more than twenty-four hours since we left Bombay. We are already in the south of India, at least, mid-south. We enter the magnificent State of Mysore. .

\*

\*

\*

Fresh and fit, in spite of thirty hours of travelling, we get out at Bangalore. It is a beautiful June evening. Some excellent friends are waiting for us: a Hindu Brahman, his wife, a charming English woman, wearing the national sari. They take us to their beautiful bungalow situated near the magnificent public park, where monkeys are frolicking in the trees.

While driving through Bangalore, we recall, D. and I, the book written by Judith Gautier, daughter of the great Theophile, "L'Inde Eblouie" where she narrates with her

keen, romantic imagination the happy love affairs of the young and beautiful queen of Bangalore with the Chevalier de Bussy. (But alas! history, true history, says that the queen was old and ugly. Which to believe, oh God? Judith Gautier, of course.)

In our honour, we are received in true Hindu style. A Hindu home is always simple. This one reflects the influence of the West. It is very clean and the furniture is in exquisite taste. In the living room are large arm-chairs and sofas. On the mosaic floor are rugs or mats and some large copper trays supported by ornamental tripods, fretworked. In the place of doors are curtains of flimsy material which sway gently in the breeze; across the large window, the foliage of palm trees.

We go into the dining room where there is no furniture at all. On the mats covering the polished floor are large long banana leaves. We are seven convives in all, including the child of our hosts, a delicious little boy of seven years old, typically Hindu, with a white shirt outside his long trousers which fit closely from the knee. We seat ourselves on the ground, with legs crossed. Do not expect any chairs. Beware also of your articulations, cramp comes quickly. It is a simple question of habit. On the banana leaves, the Hindu servants—wearing white turbans and going bare-foot, silent as shadows—serve a whole gamme of very spiced curries, rice cooked to a point, different kinds of vegetables, curds, popadums—dry *galettes*, thin as cigarette paper—some sweet dishes made of almonds, raisins, and something white and threadlike resembling vermicelli. To drink, we have coconut milk and water with pepper for the digestion. A true and succulent Brahman dinner.

But listen, oh! distinguished Europeans. There are no forks, nor knives. One has to eat with one's fingers. How horrible! You forget that from the beginning of the Western nations until the end of the 18th century, Christians never made use of forks and that from Rome of the Caesars to the most Christian kings, from the luxurious feasts of

Lucullus to the magnificent banquets of the kings of France, the guests, who were nobles of high birth and exalted rank, when choosing the most delicate dishes, took them and ate them with their fingers. Was it not the wife of Charles le Bel who had as a gift in her wedding basket this barbarous instrument which is called a fork? Was it not Anne of Austria who in 1651 refused to employ this same instrument, preferring to eat with her fingers, thus giving an example to her noble son, the *Roi-Soleil*? Is it not, yet again, our own Montaigne who remarks in his *Essays* that "eating too quickly, he had often bitten his fingers?"

To eat with the fingers then is an art. In India, one uses three fingers of the right hand only, the left hand remaining immobile. It is a question of taking delicately a small quantity of rice, of mixing it with curries, curds, *dal* (a kind of lentil), and with that forming an excellent little ball that we then carry to our lips. Popadums are also used for taking vegetables. Then, the servants go round with copper bowls, filled with water, in which we wash our fingers. And, as in a home strictly Hindu they are all vegetarians, such a meal is purer, cleaner than one where forks, which have been used by others and which are more or less badly washed, are used. It is certainly more hygienic. If we add that Brahmans take a complete bath before a meal and change their clothes, we believe we are right in saying that Hindu meals are a satisfaction to the taste as well as a pleasure to the soul in consequence of the conversation exchanged in an atmosphere, peaceful and instinct with a great sweetness. But I own I prefer a fork.

... Later on, under my mosquito net, before falling asleep, I hear the monkeys frolicking in the park, making mocking laughter.

Far off, a temple gong resounds....

## CHAPTER IV

# MYSORE, ITS PALACES, ITS ARABIAN NIGHTS' PROCESSIONS, THE GODDESS CHAMOUNDI

**T**HE following morning, we leave our hosts whom we shall meet again tomorrow at Mysore. Thanks to our friend the Brahman, we are going to be the guests of the Maharajah of Mysore at the grand fête to be held in his honour on his birthday.

A three-hours' drive in automobile separates us from the capital of the State. The sun, clear and hot, pours its brightness over Bangalore, its gardens and beautiful Oriental buildings: the Indian Institute of Science, the Central College, the Sanscrit College, and how many others. In this town, the air is very pure, Mysore State being situated at an altitude of 1000 to 1500 metres. The road which unites Bangalore to Mysore is excellent and does credit to the government. It crosses pretty country, interspersed with vast cultivated plains and beautiful palm groves.

As we glide along *à toute allure*, passing ancient carts drawn by zebus, herds of buffaloes or goats, we survey this beautiful State which enjoys such a merited renown. Covering a surface of 29,483 square miles, possessing an ideal climate, it has a population of seven million inhabitants. It is a country of gentle hills, of immense forests where grow teak, rosewood, the famous sandalwood, and which are the repair of tigers, bisons, chittas—sort of leopard—and wild elephants. In the fertile plains extend rice fields, like green carpets, fields of millet, cotton, and sugarcane. In the big centres, silk, soap, and sandal oil industries are developed. Numerous

waterfalls supply the electric factories, and canals bring their life-giving waters there where before extended only uncultivated and parched plains.

Tradition associates Mysore State with the legends enshrined in the poems of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In times somewhat nearer, in the third century B. C., the country formed part of the Empire of the great Asoka. Then, towards the eighth century of our era, it had the privilege of seeing some *mathams* (centres of spiritual education) established, founded by one of the greatest philosophers of India: Sankaracharya. Later on, the State of Mysore was ruled over by three great royal families: the Kadambas, the Hoysalas, and the kings of Vijayanagar. It is to the second of these dynasties, the Hoysalas, that we are indebted for the building of the temples, the marvellous architecture of which reached its fullest development in the thirteenth century, such as Somanathpur, Belur, and Halebid.

Today, the Government of Mysore is placed under the very wise direction of the Maharajah Sri Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV.\* He is a man remarkable for his culture, nobility of thought, and for the good that he accomplishes in his State. He has had the wisdom to associate with himself, as Prime Minister, Sir Mirza Ismail, an organizer of the first order. The Maharajah came to the throne in 1891, when he was but a child. He has reigned since 1902. He and his Prime Minister, a Hindu and a Mohammedan, show what two men of different religious beliefs can accomplish when they are united by a veritable brotherhood of soul and love for their people.

It is then with ardent interest that we are driving towards Mysore. If Bangalore is the seat of the administration with its 100,000 inhabitants, Mysore is the capital with a population of 84,000 inhabitants.

Accordingly, we approach the town. It is eleven

\*At the moment of arranging these pages in order, we learn with sorrow of the death of this eminent Prince.

o'clock in the morning. The route is bordered with superb banyan trees, the branches of which bend down toward the earth and take root. Some mischievous monkeys, frisking nimbly from tree to tree, make grimaces at us. In the vast plain, a solitary hill stands out, it is Chamoundi Hill. It dominates Mysore. Its summit is crowned with a temple dedicated to the goddess Chamoundi.

We come at last to Mysore, the Charmeress; Mysore, the city with sumptuous gardens where grow palm trees, flame trees robed in scarlet blossoms, and where bloom clusters of flowers of marvellous hues: cannas, red, orange, yellow; gladioli; roses and roses; sweet-smelling jasmine. The town is wearing an air of fête. Coloured banners wave gaily, moved by the puffs of the hot breeze. In the large avenues, a whole crowd is moving about. These people have come from the furthest villages of the State to assist at tomorrow's great procession and to fête the fifty-second birthday of their sovereign.

At the hotel, we change our dusty clothes and put on immaculate white costumes. After lunch, we stroll through the streets, all decorated with flags. We admire the bungalows buried under palm trees and flowers. No tramways, no buses. But *tongas*, light little carriages with conical, pagoda-like roofs painted in gay colours, take us rapidly at the trot of a spirited poney through the streets and avenues. We catch a glimpse of the zoological garden with its beautiful park, then the Municipal Palace with its light, delicately embattled towers, the modern hospitals, the Medical College, the Government Training College; the Oriental Library; the Maharajah's College; the Technical Institute, where are exhibited works of art in ivory, sandalwood, and lacquer; the Ayurvedic College, where the ancient medicine of India is studied. All these edifices are vast buildings in Indo-Moresque style with an installation entirely modern. In the bazaar, merchants, sitting cross-legged, make mints of gold. And when evening falls, Chamoundi Hill, illuminated, resembles a great nave floating in space.



The next morning, we wend our way towards the Maharajah's palace which we are going to visit by special authorisation.

First is the great square, in the centre of which rises a marble kiosk roofed with a golden dome. It shelters the statue of the present Maharajah. At the end of the square are the monumental gates of the palace, ornamented with sculptures and paintings. Under the exterior arcades of the palace are two little temples dedicated one to the god Shiva and the other to Ganesha. Beyond the gates, in an immense park, is the palace surmounted by innumerable cupola-capped towers. The walls, balustrades, pillars, cornices, the curtains of fretworked stone, are of granite, red, black, or grey, of porphyry, or of white and green marble. The marble architraves are encrusted with semi-precious stones, blue, green, grey, red, amber, forming exquisite arabesques.

We are received on the threshold of the palace by a functionary in full uniform. He is charged with the task of showing us over this enchanted palace, a task which he accomplishes with extreme courtesy.

Here reigns the unimaginable luxe of the East. If the palace as a whole is in the Indo-Moresque style, the sculptures belong to the Hoysala school. After crossing some great halls, we enter the octagonal Hall of Marriage, named the Peacock Hall. The dome of this hall is supported by triple columns of extreme delicacy, while the light is latticed by stained glass windows. At the back is a gallery in brilliant colours, raised on massive pillars. It is from this gallery, hidden by curtains of silk and gold, that royal ladies view the princely marriage ceremonies.

In another hall, we are shown an object which is perhaps the most precious in the whole palace: the *Simhasana*, the Throne of the Lion, the ancestral throne which belonged, so it is said, to the very ancient dynasty of the *Pandavas*, heroes in the epic poem, the *Mahabharata*. The throne is of figwood encrusted with ivory, but now the ivory is covered over with arabesques of gold and silver.

It is also ornamented with sculptures representing elephants, horses, chariots, and warriors; one sees there, too, the *Trimurti*, the Trinity of the Hindu pantheon: Brahmâ, Vishnu, Shiva. The seat of the throne is of tortoise shell. The canopy, of gold and pearls, is surmounted by the fabulous bird, the *Huma*. The legend says that this bird flies continuously, without stopping, and when its shadow rests on the head of someone, that one will become king.

We now climb the vast marble staircase which leads to the Salon of Music, green and gold, where a great organ towers above everything, seats covered with splendid tapestry, green plants hiding their roots in the feet of ebony elephants.

In the colossal Hall of the Durbar, we find all the exuberance of the Orient, although the general aspect of brilliant colour, in which are mingled green, gold, orange, and blue, is of striking harmony and beauty. The ceiling, in teak wood magnificently sculptured, is supported by massive columns which form sculptured arches. The floor is inlaid with lapis-lazuli, amber, carnelian, and jasper. The doors, an assemblage of silver, rosewood, teakwood and ivory, are veritable works of art.

Then, it is the banqueting hall, followed by a suite of halls, the armoury, the portrait gallery.

Lastly, we come to the Hall of Caskets. A superb collection of boxes of ebony, sandalwood, sculptured and inlaid with gold, silver, turquoise, and with a whole gamme of precious stones. They are of all sizes. In my mind there looms the image of the old treasure casket glimpsed long ago in the sombre little shop of Oriental curios far away over there in a Western town beside the great sails of the sea. . . . In this palace, before my eyes are displayed all these marvellous treasure boxes—the passing fancy of a Maharajah dwelling in a fairy palace in the heart of India.

We leave these halls, each one more sumptuous than the other, and pass into the courts, full of silence and coolness, where at sunrise the sacred bulls and elephants come to roam. From them, we enter enchanted and fragrant

gardens where roses marry with giant cannas.

Far away, commanding the town and the palace, is the Hill of the goddess Chamoundi, she who watches over Mysore.

\* \* \*

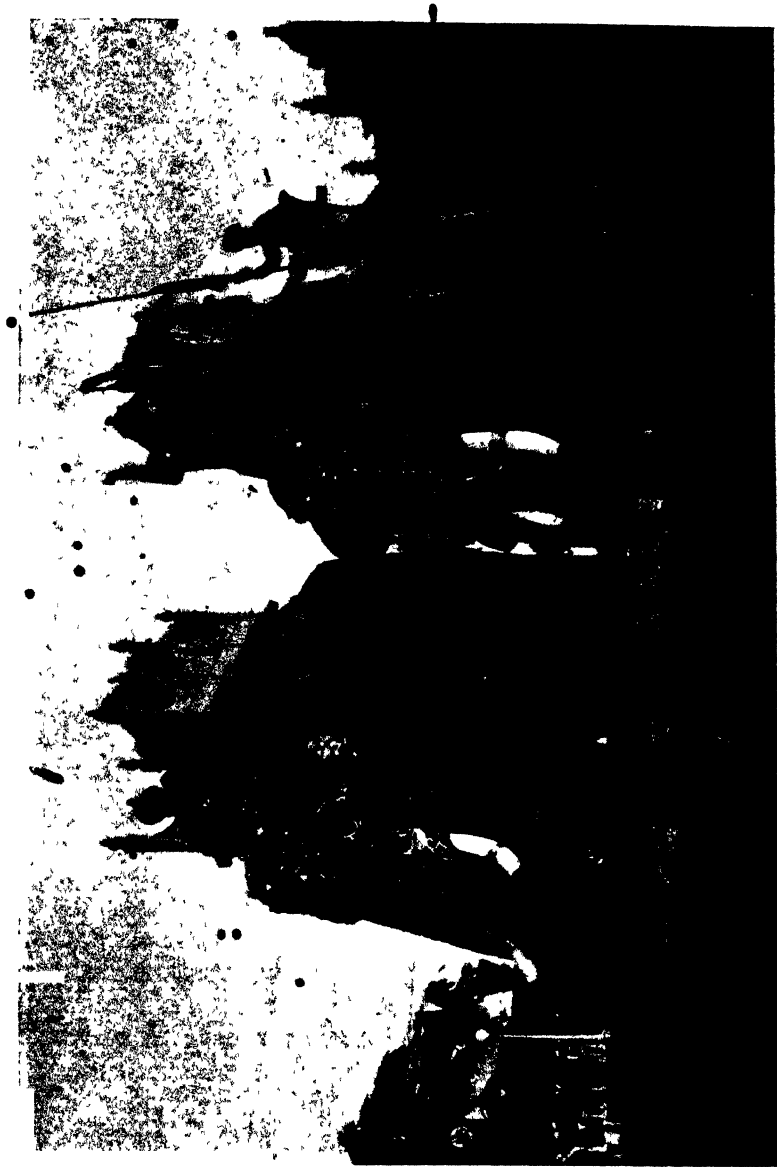
At five o'clock in the evening, our friend the Brahman comes to look for us at our hotel. With him we drive by car to the royal palace, from where the procession will start. We make our way with difficulty through the crowds, already very dense. Under a sky, green-orange, like translucent nacre, the palace, glowing with the lustre of the setting sun, seems almost unreal in its splendour so heavy with wealth.

With our friends, we proceed to the offices of Agriculture, situated in the exterior environs of the palace. We find there other Hindu guests: men turbaned, dressed in their ceremonial costumes, white trousers fitting closely from the knee, long black redingote; women in saris, little girls with their spark of diamond set in one nostril of their tiny nose; young girls with garlands of jasmine in their hair, scented with sandalwood oil. All await the departure of the procession with tranquil joy. We have been given some privileged places from where to watch this dazzling display of an Oriental procession.

We look at the crowd which ceaselessly moves to and fro in the environs of the palace. It is an Indian crowd. There are the rich and the poor, Brahmans and "untouchables," poor pariahs ostracised by their brothers. Even the poorest have washed their clothing or their best sari. Over there, is an old woman, a very old grandmother. She still has a proud allure in her much-worn blue sari. She holds by the hand her little grand-daughter in a yellow sari. The child's beautiful eyes shine like carbuncles. There is no impatience in this crowd. But do not be deceived. It is not amorphous or insensible. Like all crowds, its human passions would need but to be aroused. Man is everywhere man.

Soon it is six o'clock. The molten rays of the setting sun have turned to violet and mauve. From the palace come the cavaliers which form the Maharajah's personal guard. They are going to line up on the square. Bandsmen of the little army play naive airs, sometimes warlike. They are dressed in a shirt and khaki knickers and on their heads are majestic turbans. Others have long red or green tunics. A breeze rises, making the banderol on each one flap. On each banderol, the ancient symbol of the swastica is designed. Now the dignitaries of the town assemble and await the arrival of the Maharajah. They are followed by servants carrying baskets filled with garlands of jasmine and roses. The cavaliers' horses paw the ground with impatience. Disdaining etiquette, they accomplish, in spite of all, their necessary needs. But attentive servants with willow baskets precipitate themselves behind the animals and, with their hands, fill their baskets with the normal residue of assimilated food. All must be perfectly clean, that is the order. The eyes of the sovereign must not rest on anything fouled.

A silence. Then, a hymn is heard. The procession moves forward in order to parade along the streets of the town. On magnificent horses, lancers open the march. The band follows them. Afterwards comes the personal guard of the Maharajah. With slow and swinging steps, a caravan of camels advances, their proud heads carried high as if to inhale the desert air; on them are mounted soldiers with long, white gaiters. More and more lancers with their martial allure. Then come the elephants of procession. They advance majestically from the palace all harnessed with precious stuffs, which however allow one to see the designs painted on their hide and trunk. The fires of the setting sun reflect in their gold harness and sparkle in the precious stones which form a diadem around their head. Two of them carry thrones of gold, magnificently sculptured; another, a gracious palanquin which sways gently as he walks. On the elephants closing the procession, officers are seated in gilded chairs, erect and



**Pageantry at the Mysore Dasara**



impassive, with long lances in their hands.

The crowd tills imperceptibly. Maharajah Krishna-  
raja Wadiyar Bahadour appears. He advances alone on his  
horse. His bearing is very noble and simple, that of a great  
gentleman. His fine face, adorned by a little moustache,  
is still young. His eyes are large and contemplative. He  
is dressed in a sumptuous *lame*' costume of green and gold.  
The procession stops. The dignitaries come forward to  
present their homage to their sovereign, while garlands of  
flowers are offered and rose petals strewn around the Maha-  
rajah. It is a vision of fastuous India, of India millenary.  
But towards him, simple and beautiful, ascend like precious  
incense, the love and respect of his people.

The procession, in deep silence, recommences its  
march. Behind the sovereign, follows his green and gold  
carosse drawn by four horses. This long line of  
legendary beings continues to parade along the rvenues  
even when evening has fallen over the town en fête and  
torches and lights are kindled. In the distance, profiled  
against a star-spangled sky, the heights of Chamoundi  
Hill glow and the palaces of Mysore, the Charmeress,  
sparkle with all the fairy resplendence of the Arabian  
Nights.

While the crowd disperses, the faithful bring garlands  
of jasmine to the little temple of Ganesha. A Hindu  
priest lays them at the feet of the god, which one can just  
perceive in the gloom at the back of a little niche, among  
the flames of oil lamps. This priest is half naked; his  
head is shaved except for a strand of hair hanging from  
the back of his head; a dhoti enwraps his waist, his legs  
and feet being bare. He returns, carrying a copper plate  
containing flaming holy oil. The devotees each give  
their obole, of course, then touch the flame and receive  
the oil in the hollow of their hands, which they then carry  
to the centre of their forehead and to the top of their head.

But it is time to go and find the procession at Govern-  
ment House, where we shall again be the guests of the  
Maharajah. We meet the long file, which extends for

several miles, lighted with lanterns and torches. From the crowd come gay murmurs. We arrive just at the moment when the Maharajah dismounts from his horse in order to be received by the Dewan, the first Minister. Two giants, decorated with gold, mount guard at the foot of the staircase. The guests make a salute of honour to Sri Krishnaraja Wadiyar Bahadour. He bows slowly and then passes through our midst in order to show himself in the salons of Government House. During this moment of rest, we go into the vast tents, lighted by electricity, where we are served with tea, pistachio ices, rose-flavoured cakes, cigars, and cigarettes.... Afterwards, in order to complete the fête, we go to the field of manoeuvres where the revue of honour is to be held.

Night, a vast quadrangle, hardly lighted. In the distance, the clinking of lances. Suddenly, the field, the tribune are illuminated by powerful projectors. In front of the tribune can now be seen a mass of Indian cavaliers, standards flying in the wind. An officer on horseback presents himself before the Maharajah's tribune. At a sign from the Monarch, a bugle sounds. The whole mass of horses begins to move and, little by little, it becomes an epic gallop. In the bright light of the projectors, the various-coloured uniforms, lances, harness, sparkle and glow like precious gems.

While the fête is terminating, I gaze for the last time at this crowd in the hot Indian night, these young Hindu girls with sprays of jasmine twined in their beautiful black hair, all faces turned towards the Maharajah in his long green tunic interwoven with gold, like a god, motionless, dreaming.....

\*

\*

\*

The following morning, we set out for Chamoundi Hill. We pass the Lalitha Mahal, the palace of guests, surrounded by immense flower gardens. We reach the base of the hill and the car speedily climbs the route which



zigzags upwards to the temple.

We come to a little wooded plateau where we have to leave the car. The sky is radiantly pure in this beautiful hot morning. A strong wind blows in the trees but does not succeed in troubling the deep peace which reigns in this place. At our feet extends the vast plain of Mysore, the town, the palaces. Behind us, on a small square, begins a large staircase made of steps of stone, mounting to the summit of the hill where it ends near the temple. We climb it, passing buffaloes descending peacefully. At two-thirds of the way up, on a terrace of earth we find ourselves before a colossal statue representing a Nandi-Bull, the sacred bull. He is in a sitting posture. His proportions are harmonious. Around the stone balustrade protecting him, some faithful are placing garlands of flowers. Without doubt, a blind adoration to a divinity of stone, but which should signify homage to the power that it represents, that is to say, generation, under its two aspects—cosmic generation and human. It was the same with Apis in ancient Egypt.

A few moments later, we are before the temple dedicated to Chamoundi. It is our first contact with a Hindu temple. This one is not a large temple, like those of Madura, Tanjore, or Chidambaram, but what sweetness emanates from this modest little temple cloistered in palm trees! On the unique gopuram—a tower in the form of a pyramid—is sculptured, besides other divinities, goddess Chamoundi, painted in blue and yellow, the tutelary deity of the Maharajahas of Mysore. She represents, as do all the feminine Hindu deities, the *Shakti*, the occult power of god, one of the forces of nature which work in the invisible world.

We have not the right to enter the Temple, but we regard the coming and going of the pilgrims: people from the village around the temple or people from the plain. We see them traverse the temple courts and, at the back, between the rows of columns, disappear into the sanctuary. Above the temple, crows—the eternal crows of India—

wheel, cawing. They do not, any more than the wind, succeed in troubling the peace, the deep peace of the hill of Chamoundi.

We pass among the few houses of the poor village. From those who pass, kindly smiles greet us. A cow which we meet seems, she also, to welcome us with sympathy. Beasts, things, and people reflect what is *there*, in this sanctuary; what is there also, beyond time and men....

We had thought that some weeks later would begin our pilgrimage to the temples of the South, but we know now that it has already commenced on the hill of Chamoundi.

....In the evening, we climb again to the summit of Chamoundi Hill. A hot wind wafts to us faint noises from the town. Mysore is there, at our feet, in the faerie of its sparkling palaces, its fragrant gardens, its enchanting glory. This is the East. This is India, "tranquil and immutable," in the vertigo of the world; but it is also the India which advances always along the road of Time.

Goodbye, Mysore the Charmeress, Mysore with a name as sweet as honey! We shall come back to thee later on. We shall return to meditate in the shadow of the temple of Chamoundi the goddess.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MYSTERIOUS BLUE MOUNTAINS

**B**RAHMA having become enamoured of his own daughter, Ushas (the dawn), he took the form of a stag and Ushas that of a hind. Together they committed the first sin. Witnesses of this profanation, the gods were so terror-stricken that, taking by common accord their most frightful bodies, they procreated Buthavan, the spirit of evil, with the intention of destroying the incarnation of the first sin, committed by Brahmâ himself. But Brahmâ, recognising his guilt, repented bitterly and began to chant *mantrams* or prayers of purification, and in his grief he let fall a tear on the earth, the hottest tear that had ever fallen from his eyes. With this tear, the first sapphire was formed.

If sapphire there be in the vast, fragrant treasure house of India, it is the one sparkling with pure brilliance under the form of the Blue Mountains.

From the plain of Mysore, or from the district of Coimbatore, one can view these mountains, unreal almost, wrapped in silence and muslined in blue mists. One can survey them from no matter which point of the horizon, from the first range or from the summits, from dawn to dusk, these mountains are eternally blue, sometimes fringed with a gold dust.

“...*Mysterious mountains, Dwelling of unknown devas,  
Mountains of azure....*”

It says truly, the old song of the Malabar Coast. They are still full of mystery, these Blue Mountains, with their immense forests of eucalyptus that fill the air with their spicy aroma. If *Devas* (Nature spirits) come to

'frolic in their green glades, lit by the sun or the moon, they certainly bring with them the enchantment of colour and perfume.

The ascent to this Blue Eden is made in the "Blue Mountain Express," pompous name with which to designate the little mountain train, which the Swiss could almost envy for the hardness of its railway that mounts to the conquest of the summits by means of vertiginous viaducts and long tunnels. From the station of Mettupalaiyam to Ootacamund (Ooty in abbreviation), terminus of the Nilgiris railway (Nilgiris means Blue Mountains), it is about a three-hours' journey. Mettupalaiyam is a charming locality, hidden under exuberant tropical vegetation.

At the start of the ascent, one has a vision of palms, banana trees, bamboos, which, little by little, gives place to one of enormous eucalyptus trees. There are no partitions in the narrow coaches and, from our places, we can look at the usual spectacle of Indian trains: a crowd of Indians of both sexes, children, all chattering in the hot sun of a radiant June morning. The slopes of the Blue Mountains are steep and the puffing of the little engine gives us the opportunity to enjoy leisurely the beautiful views over the deep ravines where crystal sources sing, to look at the peaceful lakes, the waterfalls cascading from crevices in the rocks, the plantations of tea and coffee, and, on the railway banks, the lovely red patches of colour made by flowering *lantana*. As we ascend, the air becomes fresher. We put on our pullovers.

We come to Coonoor at an altitude of 5,600 feet, a hill station during the monsoon. After this halt, we clamber up the last steepes which lead to Ootacamund. Forests of eucalyptus and pines encircle us and refresh us with their pungent aroma. Brooks sing among the fragrant grass, enamelled with flowers, while on the azure of the sky is sketched in vague roundels the summits of the Blue Mountains. We catch a glimpse of a small lake and immediately afterwards is Ootacamund at 7,250

feet. The town is shelved on wooded steeps in an eternal springtime.

The luggage packed in, we start off by car for the bungalow, situated at some miles from Ooty. On this high plateau, the road, bordered on the right by high hills, follows the contour of the mountain which is covered with dense forests. On the left, the view is more spacious and extends over a range of mammiform hills, the summits of which are tufted with sparse eucalyptus slanted by the wind. We pass some carts harnessed with buffaloes. Then, the route enters the eucalyptus forest. An elbow bend, a wooden gate, an immense garden enclosed by huge dark-green trees and giant eucalyptus—it is the bungalow enveloped in silence.

\* \* \*

From the day after our arrival, a magnificent concert of birds awakens me at sunrise every morning. A *mali* (gardener) enters noiselessly to kindle the fire of great eucalyptus logs, from which exhales their wholesome odour. Mornings and evenings are cold at this altitude.

In the large garden which encircles the bungalow, there is nothing but a profusion of flowers: hortensias, fushias, giant geraniums, heliotrope, multi-coloured lions' mouths, verbena, bushes of roses, all mingling their perfume with that of carnations, jasmine, mimosa, when it is in bloom (which will be in a month's time), and forming a floral splendour at an altitude of nearly 2,700 metres.

I climb on to a hillock behind the bungalow. There, I discover different neighbouring summits. Apart from the rustling of the wind in the trees, what a silence! Behind me is a nearly impenetrable forest, the haunt of chittas (a kind of leopard), and chacals, sometimes of tigers. Before me and below me, the tranquil bungalow from where blue smoke rises, the morning fires. In front of me, far away, the undulating wooded crests of mountains and in a gap, through a veil of blue muslin,

I think to glimpse the plain of Mysore and the hill of Chamoundi the goddess.

For some weeks, we roam the roads and narrow footpaths of the Blue Mountains. We make our way into the forests, we clamber to the summits, or we go to Ooty's Botanical Garden, a veritable earthly paradise, with its enormous lilies that can be found in the clefts of the mountains, its cedar trees, its lotus floating on the mirror-like surface of pools. The most various and most rare species of trees have been assembled there, as well as an infinite variety of fragrant flowers and shrubs.

We also pay some visits to the market of Ooty. This market is very amusing. In it are heaped vegetables of East and West, sumptuous fruits, from pineapples and mangoes to wild strawberries and juicy raspberries. In another corner of the market, all kinds of things are sold: rice, grains, spices, copper vessels. . . . We linger before the little shop of a young 12-year-old merchant, beautiful as a god, with a smile which would turn pale the most lovely of the Apsaras—daughters of pleasure in Indra's Paradise.

Further on, outside the market, is the bazaar, the eternal bazaar. At first we come to the little shop of the copper-smith, vibrating with the sound of light little hammers from which are born *aiguieres* with slender, elegant shapes vases, cups, shining resplendently. Then comes the jeweller; he sells silver girdles, bracelets, earrings, pins for saris. The merchants sit on their heels on small mats. One with a white beard and a majestic turban has some little scales beside him where in which he weighs the silver girdles, turquoises, and sapphires from Ceylon.

In the animated street, a sound of music. It is a procession in honour of a god which is being carried with solemnity to the temple.

After these various diversions, towards evening, we wend our way back to the bungalow. It is the solemn hour, stirring, this one which passes each day just before twilight steals softly over everything, heralding the coming

of night. It is the hour when the setting sun spreads his mantle of fire and gold over the blue mists of the mountains. All is hushed, all will soon fall asleep. On the road, some buffaloes linger to graze wild plants. Then, from the darkening forest there rises a sound, a sound which grows and echoes through the ravines. It stops an instant, then begins again, louder. It comes nearer. It seems as if one hears sobs. It is the chacals' hour. At nightfall, they leave their repair in the forest and come in pack to the villages and solitary houses in search of food. It is better to go indoors. It is the chacals' hour, but it is also the hour of recollection. Doors and windows closed, one turns within oneself to recollect. Then, night comes over the mountains, night with sparkling stars, or night with a faerie moon, the majesty of which becomes more vivid when there passes the wind from the summits, the wind from the Blue Mountains....

An incident yesterday. During the course of the afternoon, while I was reclining on the hillock behind the buagalow and listening to the silence, I saw a tawny patch going noiselessly across the sloping field which borders the forest. I half raised myself. I did not realise exactly what was happening. Doubtless, an enormous dog! All at once, I guessed. It was a chitta which attacks cattle as well as man. It was fat, short, covered with thick, tawny fur. Turning its back, it trotted away towards the tangled undergrowth of the forest. As I was lying on the grass, sheltered by a bush, it had not seen me. It walked stealthily, with cat-like steps. On reaching the limit of the trees, it made a bound and disappeared.

This morning, I followed a narrow footpath in the forest. From time to time, I stopped to listen to the joyous little chant of the humming birds or to admire the views over the valleys. Suddenly, I had the presentiment that I was not alone, that there was someone not far from me. However, the silence, broken only by the songs of birds and the sharp little tapping on the trees of the woodpeckers, continued to be as profound. I

was thrilled. At a bend in the path, without a sound, a man of antique beauty appeared. He was walking barefooted, clad in a kind of Roman toga of undyed wool, with one end passing under his right arm and thrown over his left shoulder. In his hand, he carried a cane of carved wood, bearing strange inscriptions. He was tall and his features recalled the classic purity of the ancient Greeks. His long black hair fell almost over his eyes and into his neck, while a beard and a thick moustache framed his light-complexioned face. As he came nearer, I could see his eyes, great brown eyes reflecting blue and filled with a gentle regard that rested on me as he passed. He smiled with a childlike expression and, with his velvet steps, went on his way and disappeared in the forest.

A *Toda*. The thought leaped into my mind. I have just seen a *Toda*. From the moment of my return to the bungalow, I furnished myself with books from the library and buried myself in the study of this mysterious tribe of the Blue Mountains. During the days which followed, we visited some *Toda* villages situated on a wooded hill.

It is curious to note that, in spite of the millions of European residents who have sojourned in India, so little is known about the *Todas*. It is but a century ago, however, that two courageous English officers, while exploring this mountainous region of India, discovered a strange race quite distinct from other Indian tribes. The discovery appeared unbelievable at the time of which we speak. Fantastic stories circulated: it was said that a terrestrial paradise had been discovered, where ambrosial zephyrs caressed the exhausted travellers; a tribe of demi-gods reigned in the solitudes of the forests; the magicians of the country did not marry, nor did they die; among these beings were giants, as well as dwarfs; some of them performed miracles.

Although these statements were for the most part exaggerated, we must stress the fact that even today the *Todas* continue to be very mysterious. According to



information obtained from a good source and from my own personal observation, I am certain that the Nilgiris furnish material for reflection.

The number of Todas would appear to be limited. They are seen in groups of five or six at a time. All those whom we met were handsome and recalled to mind the statues of Phidias or of Praxiteles. The women, dressed in the same way as the men, are less beautiful and smaller. The Todas that can be seen at Ootacamund construct their dwellings in out-of-the-way places. These dwellings are composed of huts, semi-cylindric in form, established in circular excavations and surrounded by a low wall. The huts have no windows but simply a small opening through which the occupants have to crawl in order to enter the interior. In the dim light, against the wall opposite the entrance, can be seen a fire-place which serves for cooking food; on the right, a large slab of stone, raised, where all the family sleep; on the left, some utensils, a stool, some dusters, some clothing material. Although the Todas are not a nomadic tribe, they often change their place of residence in order to seek in the Nilgiris better pastures for their buffaloes.

From where do they come? What is their origin? In this respect, ethnologists are of different opinions, except on one point, that the Todas do not belong to ordinary humanity. It is undeniable that they descend from primitive races and even from prehistoric races. However, we must admit that there are Todas and Todas, that those ordinarily seen on the heights at Ootacamund, if they are Todas by birth, are not the purest specimens. The *real* Todas, it is said, have refuged themselves from the invasion of Westerners in inaccessible places of the Blue Mountains; in those vast spaces where there is still neither route nor village, where there reigns only the silence of solitudes.

It is to these pure, these real Todas, that must be attributed the extraordinary and supernatural side of their life. According to certain witnesses, the Todas

themselves maintain that they have absolute rights over the Blue Mountains, that they consider them to be their secular property. They possess very particular knowledge which proves their descent from very ancient races. They are, in truth, a patriarchal tribe living according to severe and high principles. Their writing is composed of signs resembling the cuneiform inscriptions of ancient Persia.

Their religion is infinitely purer than what some writers have wrongly described as "the adoration of sacred buffaloes." If the buffalo plays a role in their ceremonies, it is because there is a profound meaning in this, which is hidden from the vulgar, as we shall see.

Todas are divided into two distinct groups. The first group is composed of the class of the priests. These are vowed to the service of the buffaloes. They are bound to absolute celibacy and their cult is very *esoteric*; no profane has ever been able to discover it. The second group is formed of the ordinary class of laics. All efforts attempting to penetrate the secret of their language and their customs have been in vain. When they converse with other tribes or with foreigners, they employ the Kanari dialect.

Todas disdain jewels. They drink only pure milk, and eat no animal flesh whatever. No ferocious beast ever attacks a real Toda or devours any of his animals. They are the children of a chosen sect, set apart from their infancy for religious purposes.

As regards their moral life, it presents characteristics that our civilisation, called Christian, would do well to adopt. Todas love truth; they do not know how to lie. Stealing, misappropriation, is unknown to them. Christian missionaries in the Nilgiris have been so struck by their moral character that they have often given to their faithful, as example, the morality of the Todas. Besides this, they possess neither weapons nor knives. They have, then, resolved to their advantage the question of peace unarmed.

Something peculiar to their religion, is that the word

“God” does not exist in it. They are, then, materialists? By no means. They refuse, simply, to accept the idea of an anthropomorphic God. In their religious and entirely secret ceremonies, which take place in a dwelling previously purified and illuminated by little lamps, their theurgy is allied to that ancient wisdom, called white magic, which is found in the very old Chaldean and Egyptian magic. Their learning, acquired by research and purity of life, serves humanitarian ends, as the healing of the sick. Todas are, then, idealists and spiritualists and believe in the survival of their interior being.

Yes, the Blue Mountains are singular. Mysterious are those beings who believe in truth and peace and who have for their dwellings solitude and silence. Enchanted mountains! You guard your secret. Perhaps it is better so. You let only your glories be seen; your proud and wild aspect when the mountains are lashed by monsoon winds, or your beauty glistening with light at the moment of fresh and dazzling dawns or of mystic sunsets draped in gold and blue. You let the laughing valleys be seen displaying their nonchalant grace, cradled by the humming of the iridescent colibris; the paths bordered with bushes of wild jasmine exhaling their pervasive perfume, while Toda buffaloes roam in the thickets in search of nourishment. But sometimes, along the flowering hedges or the dewy paths in the vast forests of eucalyptus and pines, from the stillness there come murmurs, mysterious and gentle whispers, a rustling in the leaves. Then, all fades into silence, there is nothing but the pure fragrant air from the summits. Blue Mountains! Strange land, where violets and lotus are neighbours, where Todas observe their religious and secular ceremonies in solitudes far from the whirlpool of life, while birds mingle their song with the sobs of chacals and the music of joyous cascades...

A dream, perhaps! Beauty certainly.



## **PART II**



## CHAPTER VI

### THE MESSAGE OF INDIA'S TEMPLES

**V**ERY early in the morning, in radiant weather, we set out on our pilgrimage to the Temples of the South.

Our car cautiously descends the route zigzagging down the steep slopes of the Blue Mountains. This evening, we shall arrive at Madura, at the famous temple that hundreds of thousands of pilgrims visit each year. It will be our first stage.

How blue the mountains are today, bluer than usual! The air is full of a fragrance and the earth, everything, at this early hour breathes stillness. After two-and-a-half hours' descent, we find ourselves again amidst all the tropical vegetation of Mettupalaiyam. We leave behind us the beautiful chain of the Nilgiris which, little by little is receding in its muslin of blue mists. For hours and hours, we roll across the plains and villages of India. Palm groves bring us their freshness on the way. Far off, can be perceived here and there, a solitary hill crowned by a temple. We traverse a few small towns; one is Dindigul, with a name that tinkles like a bell. During our journey through this ever-moving panorama, we reflect upon the message of India's temples.

It has been said that certain places of pilgrimage can be centres of spiritual force from where radiate ennobling influences, not perceived by the hurrying traveller.

It is a certain fact that, although some gross superstitions are born from this custom of making pilgrimages, nevertheless, pilgrimages to places really holy symbolize the life of man, not only from the cradle to the grave, but also, say the Scriptures of India, embrace the immense

period of Man's evolution. Nations, races, civilisations are born, grow to maturity, become old and die, but the Being within survives. Emanating from the Great All, Man accomplishes his pilgrimage of evolution, garners innumerable experiences in the course of ages, and pursues without ceasing his great voyage towards the sanctuary from where he issued forth.

Some authors affirm, even, that in India at certain places of pilgrimage, there dwells one of those Wise Ones always ready to help the pilgrim who goes there with a sincere heart. However that may be, it is good perhaps to remind ourselves that a place of pilgrimage symbolizes our own nature, our own interior shrine. The ancient Hindu Gurus had, we are told, an esoteric knowledge of the links which unite Man to Nature and they communicated this knowledge to the masses by means of the architecture of the temples. The temple of flesh, said these Wise Ones, has a strict analogy to the temple of stone. A Hindu temple must, then, be the symbolical dwelling of the Supreme Principle which is within us; Principle from where we come and where we shall return. The choice of a rock, a hill, a tower (gopuram), conveys the idea of eternity; the great mast at the entrance of the temple represents the creative principle in the human organism; the temple court, the human lungs. In the centre is the Holy of Holies, the heart. In the same way, the symbolism of number which we find in architecture has its correspondences in the body of Man. Seven represents the seven orifices of the head, the seven primitive humanities, the seven worlds....

The Divinities of the Hindu Pantheon sculptured on the *gopurams* or on the walls of the temple, whether they have for name Brahmâ, Vishnu, or Shiva, and their spouses, the *Shakti* of each god, symbolize the action of the powers of Nature in man.

Figures of animals, equally, play an important role in the temples of India. Horses represent the senses; the chariot is the mind, always in movement; elephants symbolize the earth, the material body; the *Naga* (serpent),



wisdom; the celestial swan, *Garuda*, which devours the serpent, is the cycle of evolution which liberates man from the manacles of matter. While the lotus, the sacred flower, is identified with man himself: the roots which plunge in the mud, representing matter; the stem which passes through the water, symbolizing man's emotions and passions; the flower which opens to the sun being man's soul opening to the realities of the spiritual life.

Those are some of the ideas contained in the message of India's temples. Message which we are going to try to discern during the course of our pilgrimage. Naturally, we shall have to brush aside the thick brambles of superstition in order to see the supreme realities. Behind the stones, the columns, and the figures, resides the true temple, invisible, the interior Sanctuary where shines the everlasting Flame of the One Absolute, the Divinity.

Let us try to act as true pilgrims; that is to say, as seekers in quest of Truth. Let us rend, if we can, the curtain of illusion, Maya.

• • • • • Over there, on the horizon, towers in the form of pyramids are profiled against the pure, blue sky, above the green fronds of palms and white houses half-hidden under trees. It is Madura and its temple.

## CHAPTER VII

### EVENINGS AT MADURA, AN ENTRANCING VISION OF THE GODS

**T**HE sun has sunk behind the horizon in a green-orange sky. Palms and coco palms, swayed by the breeze of the short twilight, are coloured with the same tint, while the copper of the earth becomes more ardent. Herds of cows and buffaloes plod home to their stables with slow and ponderous steps. In thatched huts, women prepare the frugal evening meal. Lights light up under the great palms and little lamps in bazaar shops twinkle brightly.

The thousand-and-one noises of a Hindu town can be heard: a chant intoned by a woman's voice; the temple bell calling to prayer; the hammering of the copper-smiths; the click-clack of the tongues of the tonga drivers; the rippling laugh of a child; the crunching of the wheels of a sugarcane barrow; the hooting of owls; the barking of a dog; a dispute between monkeys.... All these sounds float through the hot night.

Far off, in the silent shining of the moon, soar the towers, the *gopurams*, of the great temple of Madura, dedicated to Shiva—one of the most important gods of the Hindu Pantheon—and to Minakshi, his spouse. The atmosphere of the temple pervades the town; it is felt everywhere.

The temple, built in the Dravidian style, stands in the heart of the city. It dates from the 16th century. In its enclosure the Palace of Versailles would find itself at ease. The glory of Madura reaches back to a remote antiquity. Here formerly radiated a great centre of culture. The temple is an immense quadrangle divided into

two principal sanctuaries: one dedicated to Shiva and the other to Minakshi. They are united by a labyrinth of enormous galleries, courts, a sacred tank, some *mantapams* (covered halls of which the stone roof is supported by columns), while hundreds of statues stand on all sides, the whole being crowned with several *gopurams* richly sculptured, an entrancing vision of brahmanic gods.

On the threshold of the temple take off and leave our shoes; we shall find them again. For no one may enter the sacred precincts unless he has first removed his shoes or sandals. We simply keep on our socks, it will be cleaner.

From the moment of our entrance into the first gallery, our glance falls upon the merchants squatting on the ground (the eternal "sellers in the temple"). They sell baskets of fruit, garlands of jasmine and roses for offerings to the divinities, and innumerable other objects. We pass on and enter the maze of galleries. In dark corners, the statues of the gods and goddesses, standing in the most various attitudes, are rendered more remarkable by the dim light of the oil lamps. There are some sculptures representing the birth of Minakshi, the goddess with eyes like those of a fish. Although the feminine aspect (the *Shakti*) of the god Shiva is generally represented under the name of Parvati or of Kali, here she is named Minakshi. Minakshi is not an official goddess of the Hindu Pantheon but rather a divinity of the village, so greatly venerated that she has survived in the devotion of the faithful. Then, continuing our pilgrimage among the gods, we come to the marriage of Minakshi with Shiva, followed by the birth of their son, Subramanyam. Further on, is a statue of their other son, Ganesha, the god whose head is like that of an elephant.

We step out now into a spacious interior court bathed in the silver of the moon. Under a light roof, a crowd of listeners is seated on the ground and listening to the descriptive recitation in Sanskrit of passages of the *Ramayana*, which are immediately translated into Tamil.

All, men and women, follow mentally the peripetiae of the heroes of this great epic.

After crossing the court, we penetrate once more into the sombre galleries of the temple. How impressive are the great, tall, sculptured pillars in the dim, flickering light of the lamps ! Along these monumental galleries, one perceives among the shadows a little shrine to a god or a goddess, a *lingam* in black stone, representing the creative force in Nature.

Suddenly, we come out into the clear, cloudless night, before a vast pool mirroring the stars. Steps of stone descend towards the still waters. It is the sacred tank of the Gold Lotus. Under the surrounding arcades, pilgrims are lying on the stone slabs, sleeping. One meets them everywhere, these immobile forms, enveloped in white shawls; they are in all the galleries. Other pilgrims, even at this late hour, are still plunged in deep meditation. There are also some who recite *mantrams* in a low voice. All calm in the company of the gods.

Morning has come. We can see now the temple in its immense proportions. Around the red-hued *gopurams* clouds of crows are wheeling and saluting with their raucous caw-caws the radiant dawn of day. In the interior courts, sacred elephants, led by their keepers, pace majestically towards their daily bath. These brave animals serve to carry the divinities in the various processions. They are nearly as much venerated as Ganesha, the god of wisdom, who, having lost his head, replaced it by the head of an elephant.

This morning, a powerful and prodigious activity throngs the temple. In the Daedalian network of endless galleries, although obscure even in daylight, one can distinguish better the lofty columns with their multiplicity of sculptures, the statues, and the bas-reliefs where the great epics of the gods since the formation of worlds are narrated in stone. We walk amongst the gods. Here, it is

Brahmâ, Vishnu. There, Shiva and Minakshi, or Parvati; then, the two goddesses, Lakshmi and Saraswati, the former presiding over the cult of Beauty and Prosperity, the second, the goddess of esoteric Wisdom. In a very dark corner, we find ourselves before the shrine of the Nine Planets, where garlands of freshly-gathered flowers have been laid. Then is seen the sacred Nandi, the bull, symbol of reproduction, encircled by a grille and canopied by a massive cupola of sculptured stone. What exuberance there is in these sculptures! The silent contemplation of a god neighbours with the choir of *Gandharvas*, celestial musicians of Indra's court, who reveal to mortals the secrets of Heaven and Earth and the harmonies of esoteric science; they are also the guardians of the sacred plant, *Soma*, whose juice possesses occult properties. Or, it is the dance of the *Apsaras*, water nymphs of radiant beauty; or again, the battle against Mara the demon and his legions, personifications of man's vices: the eternal war between spirit and matter. All the heroes of the *Mahabharata* are there, represented on the walls and pillars under the most varied forms, in a movement and an art of extraordinary power.

At the end of a gallery, a splendour floods over us. It is the tank of the Gold Lotus, glinting now with the sun's dazzling gold. On the stone steps, a dense crowd of pilgrims: *sannyasis*, ascetics of India; mendicant friars in their yellow robes, all with brilliant eyes, long hair, and thick beards, and wearing on their breasts necklaces of amber or *tulsitt* beads. Some of them are drying themselves after their ablutions, others are going to prostrate themselves before Minakshi, Shiva, Ganesha, or to meditate at the foot of a column. They have come from far, very far, from the centre or the North of India, from the confines of the Himalayas. All this crowd of men, women, children, go noiselessly from one sanctuary to another, bathe in the sacred pool, listen to the prophecies of an astrologer or to the lessons of a guru, a spiritual guide. The sanctuary receiving all the favours is that of Minakshi. She listens graciously, it is said, to all sincere wishes. One should see these long

files of people, clothed in white garments or in gay-coloured saris, carrying on copper trays their offerings to the goddess: some fruit, coconuts, garlands of flowers. They are surprising to watch, these pilgrims, above all the poor, those who have nothing but who hope. . . . In silence, simply, without haste, with their supple steps they enter the gallery leading to the sanctuary of Minakshi or of Shiva and after some moments they return, happy, peaceful, their hope replenished.

Evening has come round again, and with it our wonderment is renewed. Oh! the evenings at Madura, how instinct they are with mighty philosophy behind the curtain of illusion.

A nocturnal life commences in the temple, distinct from that of the day. Groups of pilgrims cluster in the galleries or under the arcades around the sacred tank of the Gold Lotus. One hears calm conversations, tales of pilgrimages, discussions on the Scriptures, advice given by those who are believed to be gurus. Other pilgrims isolate themselves on the threshold of a sanctuary, under the sculptured figure of a god. In the silence, swarms of bats sweep along the galleries in a whirring of wings, brushing the lingams and the gods.

Suddenly, from one of the galleries there floats strange music, composed of tom-toms, cymbals, flutes, and long clarionets. It precedes a long, impressive procession of women, young Hindu girls, dressed in saris, yellow, red, or blue, with sprigs of jasmine twined in their hair; then come ascetics, naked to the waist, wearing long, dingling necklaces around their emaciated necks. Brahmans follow, wearing the sacred thread of their caste, and chanting *mantrams*. It is the god, Shiva, who is carried each evening, amidst great pomp to the dwelling of his spouse, Minakshi. The god, on a palanquin hung with glowing red draperies, is borne on the shoulders of young Brahmans. The procession advances among the sculptured pillars under

the eyes of the gods and, little by little, winds away into the distance towards the mysterious sanctuary of the goddess, while within the temple all grows still, all sinks into silence. Amid the quivering flights of bats, sannyasis keep vigil, watching ever in contemplation and Madura falls asleep in the shelter of its gods and goddesses. But over all the stars sparkle with ardent brilliance in a nearly azure sky.

Shiva, Minakshi ! What grand symbols are enshrined in dead letters and temple stones ! Shiva, the Fire of life, is the Creator and the Destroyer, but he is also the Regenerator. He regenerates Man who journeys along the road of life. This is the reason why Shiva is represented as the Patron of all ascetics. And Minakshi, she who grants all favours, the goddess with eyes like those of a fish, she also has a legend. An ancient belief says that the female fish has but to look at her eggs in order that they become fecund. In the same way, devotees of Minakshi say that when Shiva turns his eyes towards the adorers of the goddess, immediately the spiritual life is born in them. What then is the mysterious bond which unites Shiva to Minakshi for such a spiritual fecundation to be produced ? Minakshi is the feminine aspect of Nature, the *Shakti*. She is the link between man and the highest aspect of life. She is the energy of the gods. Shiva himself is the living Fire of Spirit in each being; Minakshi is the energy of Shiva. Seeing that these different deities represent universal forces at work, not only in Nature but also in every being, we can easily imagine what Hindu philosophy has always taught: in essence, man is divine. The purpose of evolution is to find, by our own efforts, the divine power of life in ourselves. As said Pythagoras, who came to India in search of knowledge, "Man must first become a man and afterwards a god."

Oh ! pilgrims to Madura, or to other shrines, while your ascetics are keeping vigil in the immense temple, could you but realise in your inner life, not only the selfish dream of a *Swarga*, a personal paradise, but the victory of

Spirit over Matter ? You would thus show to the men of all nations, victims of the vertigo of the world, that at the heart of life there dwells a Unique Power which brings to birth the law of brotherhood, the Brotherhood of Men.

How grand is the lesson of the evenings at Madura !



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE TEMPLE OF RAMESHWARAM IN THE MORNING

**A**t the extreme South of India is a little island, joined to the mainland by an iron bridge which crosses an arm of sea. It is Rameshwaram, the spot where the Gulf of Bengal mingles its waters with those of the Indian Ocean.

A glorious sun splendours the temple, while a strong wind blowing from Ceylon swings the coco palms. Quite near, the Ocean, as green and beautiful as an emerald, chants its eternal poem.

On this clear morning, the temple of Rameshwaram offers to the pilgrims a procession in honour of Rama and Sita, the heroes of the *Ramayana*. Leading the procession is a youth mounted on a poney and drumming with batons on two big tom-toms attached to his saddle. Two sacred elephants follow, adorned with flowing draperies. After them come shrines of gold on stately palanquins containing the statues of Ganesha, Subramanyam, and lastly those of Rama and Sita, borne on the shoulders of men. A band, composed of long clarionets, flutes, cymbals, tom-toms, plays with syncopated rhythm. Then, closing the march come Brahmans hand in hand chanting *mantrams*, versets of ancient invocations. On the road which surrounds the temple, amid the screeching of parrots and the cawing of crows, the crowd hastens with devotion to render homage to the gods, to Rama and Sita. From time to time, the procession stops. Before the houses, brahman priests present the sacred fire on a copper plate and break a coconut that has been previously blessed in the temple; the milk is then spilled over the threshold of the dwelling where

garlands of flowers are designed in white or ochre powder.

What touching poetry, to see on the thresholds of their homes these women, these young girls, wearing on them, perhaps, all their fortune in bracelets of copper, silver, or gold, sprigs of jasmine entwined in their glossy hair; men of all ages; gracious children; all these beings lifting their joined hands to their foreheads in sign of respect and reverence! In the glowing sun, the lofty mass of the temple rises with its finely sculptured *gopurams*. Nearby, the sea is breaking over the sand in spray, irised by the thousand fires of the sun.

Here, we are in one of the most revered sanctuaries of India, founded, according to tradition, by Rama himself. The temple is one of the most beautiful specimens of Dravidian architecture. Its origin dates back to the 12th century. It is blended with the spiritual atmosphere that radiates from the history of Rama and his chaste spouse, Sita. When we enter the temple, we recall that the *Ramayana* is one of the greatest epic poems of the world and that, correctly understood, it leads us, scholars tell us, to an understanding of the evolution of humanity.

“*Divine poem, ocean of milk!*”

cried Michelet on discovering this ancient Scripture. The *Ramayana* shows us also, in the story of Rama and Sita, the ideal of human love, love which is inspired by the noblest ideas.

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have touched many Western hearts; nevertheless, those epic poems which contain so much truth, when translated into our modern languages, fail unfortunately, to influence intimately the lives of people. In India, on the contrary, there is scarcely a Hindu family or dwelling where the divinity of Rama and of Krishna are not adored; where the chastity of Sita or of Draupadi is not extolled; or where the courage of Hanuman—the monkey-god who aided Rama to vanquish his enemies—is not a subject of conversation. These heroes, for Hindus, are living personages, as are those of the Gospel

for Christians, modelling, kneading India's thought, even in our modern times of upheavals and violence, and it is they, these heroes, who preserve perhaps, or who help to preserve, the glory of ancient Aryavarta in the India of today.

The history of Rama and Sita brings us numerous and precious lessons. None is greater than that of the creation of a "home" from an ideal model. Political men of India, at least certain of them, consider with respect what they call the *Ram-Raj*, the reign of Rama. And the Hindu, as also every other individual, must learn that no government can be really strong, no society can be harmonious, if they are not based on the true domestic "home," where reigns the justice of Rama, where flowers the fidelity, tact, and delicacy of Sita; a home where the undying love of our heroes serves as a guide and a light. Why did Rama accept exile? Why did Sita, his spouse, follow him? Why did Lakshmana, Rama's brother, accompany them? It was not for political reasons, but for the honour of the family to which they belonged. The *Ramayana* brings, then, this message, not only to Hindus, but also to all men. Without a moral basis, the "home" crumbles into ruins; and disorder, as well as anarchy, overcomes the state in which the "home" is destroyed or corrupted.

These few thoughts show us very well what could be the fragrance of an inner life. And it seems that this fragrance floats through the temple of Rameshwaram and over the sweet city. When one wanders under the palms on the beach, when one roams through the vast, celebrated orange galleries of the temple, colour heightened by the morning sun, when one sits on the edge of the sacred tank in the laughing sunlight, when one passes by the spot where Sita emerged victorious from the test of fire to which she submitted in order to convince her husband of her purity, or when one lingers beside the cool source where Rama washed his hair after his victory over the demon Ravana, then one feels deeply this special atmosphere which is an invitation to make a solemn journey, a pilgrimage towards the centre of oneself: an invitation to live a true

life, simple and pure, enriched by learning, the life taught to us by the exalted example of Rama and Sita.

We think that for the pilgrim who accomplishes a pilgrimage to the temple of Rameshwaram—pilgrim, we suppose, freed from religious dogmas and superstition—the example of Rama and Sita may help him to formulate some sort of interior wish. He will feel that his life should be in harmony with the life of all, that it should possess this inner refinement, without which it is impossible to discern the cause, even, of life, the heart of Nature, which is beatitude as said Gautama the Buddha. We can develop this refinement, not only in the great events of life, but also in the least little deeds of our daily life. Could we not incarnate, ever so little, the infinite purity of Sita, her grace, her devotion, her fidelity, her sacrifice, her heart, inspirer of heroic actions? And as actions are, in general, but the reflections of our thoughts, could we not—to give but one illustration—when offering flowers to a friend, avoid inhaling their perfume, so that he may have that privilege? Little detail, one will say. Agreed. Little detail, if you like. But the small deeds of life, when they are inspired by lofty sentiments, are they not the seeds of an inner life richer, more *civilised*, so to say? Every civilisation which is not based on the culture of the spirit is doomed to perish in brutality and blood.

Oh! Rama and Sita, noble human heroes, you who give the example of a sublime spiritual ideal, in your atmosphere of peace and infinite tenderness there reigns a hope, the hope of the regeneration of humanity through the understanding of these ancient symbols and by their realisation in the inner lives of men.

A sweet remembrance of a luminous morning spent in the Temple of Rameshwaram may kindle in us an aspiration to possess the secret of veritable love.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ROCK OF GANESHA, THE LAND OF BHARATA, THE AVATARS OF VISHNU

**I**T is a long distance from Rameshwaram to Trichinopoly. A day-and-a-half's rolling along the routes of India. We shall sleep tonight at Tiruppattur.

Very early in the morning, before starting, we hasten to bid farewell to the sweet city of Rama. Great boats full of pilgrims are sailing on the sea this morning. We go on~~te~~ more through the vast orange-coloured galleries of the temple. We sit for an instant on the edge of the sacred tank and we think of Sita, of her prodigious adventures, while the Singhalese wind gently sways the palm trees.

At the station, we find a young Hindu belonging to the Kshattriya caste, whom we had met in the temple. He has come to say goodbye to us, his eyes brimful of tears at having to leave his new friends.

While waiting for the train, we look at the Hindu travellers. This spectacle never loses its interest for us. There they are on the platform in little groups, seated on the ground beside their metal trunks which contain, doubtless, all their fortune, for they are always closed with padlocks. One never knows what may happen! (I have never in my life seen so many padlocks!) They chat to each other while eating their curry on banana leaves. Where are they going? To where do all these eternal travellers in India go?

The train carries us away. In the distance, beside the emerald ocean, can be seen through the shimmering hot air the profile of the *gopuram* above the temple. We cross over the arm of sea by the iron bridge and then again

it is almost desert country until we reach Ramnad, a pretty and ancient little town, where we rejoin our car.

We have to travel over part of the route which we followed on going to Rameshwaram, route which traverses beautiful plains of palms. Here and there are ancient wells which serve to irrigate the paddy fields. Then calm villages with thatched roofs file past, as well as herds of goats and buffaloes. Pastoral visions of ancient times.

At Tiruppattur, where we arrive at sunset, we discover a *dak-bungalow* on the border of the fields. It is pretty, this travellers' cottage, with its colonial veranda and its nice, large rooms. While waiting for our frugal supper, which Ragwan, our diligent and devoted *boy*, has gone to fetch from the village, we visit the small temple dedicated to Shiva. Some Brahmans welcome us kindly and, curious thing, they are delighted to learn that we are pilgrims from France. A little village, hidden in the depths of British India, which loves France! It warms the heart and also stirs up many souvenirs... historical.

After our meal, we saunter for a short distance along the route in the splendid Indian night, regal in its magnificent jewellery of stars. A few moments later, we are lulled to sleep by the crickets' ceaseless song.

\*

\*

\*

A swarming and abundant bazaar; a thronging of human lives; peaceable cows which steal without compunction, here a fruit, there a vegetable; tongas drawn by lively ponies trotting rapidly past; an intense heat; it is the principal street leading to the Rock of Ganesha, the temple of Trichinopoly, which is there at the end of the street, on the summit of a rock 260 feet high.

Certain inscriptions in the temple place the date of its origin as far back as the 7th century. While we are climbing the hundreds of steps that lead up to the galleries and sanctuaries, we are approached by a Hindu journalist, correspondent of a well-known Madras journal. He has read my articles published in this paper. He knew that we

should come here one day. He puts himself at our service to show us the temple. Marvellous! News travels fast in India.

At the entrance of the temple—after the ceremony of the removal of our shoes—we find our old and touching friend, Ganesha, the son of Shiva and Minakshi. As one is supposed to do, I greet him by murmuring: "Ganesha seeks his spouse." Pathetic and lovable Ganesha! In this sanctuary, Ganesha is endued with a particular importance, for the temple is dedicated to him. Only here he is named Ganapati. We find him everywhere, in all the galleries.

He is lovable, this Ganesha. The first son of Shiva and Minakshi, he is adored in a special and touching way. He is the only one among the gods who has no wife. When the time came for him, at the command of his parents, to take a wife, he answered that he would only choose for wife she who should be comparable to his mother, Minakshi. So his mother said to him: "Then go, my son, and seek for her thyself." But the centuries pass and Ganesha never finds the one who is comparable to his mother. That is the reason why, at the door of all the temples, one sees the statue of Ganesha looking attentively at the procession of passing pilgrims. And they say to him, when saluting him "Ganesha seeks his wife."

The devotees of this sanctuary believe that the rock is one of the peaks of the fabulous Mount Meru, the legendary mountain whose base rests, symbolically, in the centre of the earth and which is the dwelling of the greatest among the gods and devas (spirits of Nature). Some authorities say that this mountain exists, as yet undiscovered, among the heights of the Himalayas. In Vedic times, Mount Meru was the land of happiness. Others think—in accord with the esoteric teaching of the Puranas—that Mount Meru is united with the "Imperishable land," the "White Island," which was situated in Central Asia at the time when the Gobi Desert was a vast ocean. At the present day, certain rumours say that this Isle still exists

under the form of an oasis surrounded by the vastnesses of the great desert. This "Imperishable Land," it is said, is united to the *Atma* in each man, the spirit. It is from this sacred land, from this "White Island," that all the *Avatars* of Vishnu—the second person of the Hindu *Trimurti*—have issued, the great Sages of pure heart, of infinite compassion. A Tibetan tradition even goes so far as to say that it is the only terrestrial spot which will never be destroyed, either by fire or by water, but will remain for ever sheltered from men, the barbarians. . . . These profound Puranic speculations in the temple of Ganesha, may invite us to study more attentively the history of humanity, the *real* history, that of its origin and of its progress.

At the summit of the rock, we find a sanctuary containing a statue of Ganesha. From the gallery which encircles it, one has a splendid view over the town of Trichinopoly and the meanders of the Cauvery, the holy river. However, without intending anything detrimental to our good Ganesha, we must say that we do not find here the atmosphere of Madura or of Rameshwaram. On this rock, the atmosphere is heavy, suffocating, the remains probably of ancient and actual superstitions. Nevertheless, the spiritual gifts of Ganesha can always be obtained. But note! He promises nothing to those who do not make an effort to obtain them. It is just, after all. Ganesha is wise, even in his perpetual search for a wife possessing the richest gifts of love, tenderness, wisdom, and sacrifice. . . .

From the Rock of Ganesha, we go to the temple of Jambukeshwaram, dedicated to the great god Shiva, which is situated about a mile from the Rock. This is a beautiful temple encircled by palm trees. It dates, approximately, from the eleventh century. It possesses some beautiful galleries with richly sculptured pillars. In the dimness of these galleries swarm enormous bats, which hang like sacks from the ceiling. Sometimes, a noise disturbs their



slumber, then it is a whirring of wings under the sonorous vaults.

Jambukeshwaram is a double name. Jambu is the name of a tree. The jambu is much grown in India, and is a beautiful tree with purple flowers, commonly called the "Ironwood tree." The other name is *Isbhara*, God manifested, the Logos of the Platonists, the Divine Spirit in all beings. It is also a title given to Shiva.

Moreover, here before us are two bas-reliefs, one representing the tree Jambu, the other Shiva with his feminine aspect who in this temple is named Parvati. A great charm reigns in these galleries and around the sacred tank girdled by columns. A Brahman offers us some pretty garlands of carnations, a very fragrant souvenir of this temple in which lives a deep sentiment of attachment to India, *the Mother.*

In fact, India owes to the tree Jambu her old name of ancient times which is mentioned in the *Vishnu Purana: Jambu-dwipa*. The sage, Parashara, says in this scripture that the earth is composed of seven continents and seven seas, *Jambu-dwipa* being in the centre of these seas.

*"It is from the tree jambu that the island-continent called Jambu-dwipa derives its name."*

Another name was also given to India, spoken of in the *Vishnu-Purana*, it was the name of one of her first Aryan kings: *Bharata-varsha*, the land of Bharata.

*"Bharata consigned the kingdom to his son, Sumati, and passed the remainder of his life in the sacred place of Salagrama; he was reborn afterwards as a Brahman in a distinguished family of ascetics... Under these princes (Bharata's descendants) Bharata-varsha was divided into nine portions and their descendants held successively possession of the country for seventy-one periods of the aggregate of the four ages,"*

representing the Great Cycle, the *Mahayuga*. Then, the *Vishnu-Purana* outpours this sentiment of veneration and

adoration for India, the Mother, in moving terms:

*"In Jambu-dwipa, Vishnu (let us remember that Brahmâ Vishnu, Shiva are, in reality, but one) is the object of the cult composed of sacrifice; moreover, he is adored in a diversity of ways. The land of Bharata is thus the best of the divisions of Jambu-dwipa because it is the land of actions; the other divisions being but lands of pleasure. It is only after many thousands of births and after the accumulation of abundant merits that living beings are sometimes born in the form of men in the land of Bharata (India). The gods themselves exclaim: 'Happy are those who are born in the land of Bharata, although they thus lose their rank among the gods, because to be born in that land is to enter the path which leads to the joys of paradise or to the still great happiness of final liberation.'"*

How could one not be grateful to the temple of Jambukeshwaram for recalling to our minds the privilege of being born in *Bharata-varsha*, the land of India. Hindus are very privileged people! But within this privilege dwells the solemn and noble duty of guarding the precious gift received.

After the temple Jambukeshwaram, there remains to be undertaken a pilgrimage to the great temple of Shrirangam, which is situated on an island in the middle of the waters of the Cauvery, where the great thinker Ramanuja lived.\*

This temple is a prodigious assemblage of porticos, *gopurams*, *mantapams* (halls of which the stone roof is supported by colonnades), and celebrated galleries. In these galleries, one sees horses rearing with the hoofs of their forefeet reposing on the fists of bold warriors or on the heads of tigers with panting flanks, portrayed with

\* Ramanuja, "the prince of ascetics," was one of the famous exponents of the Vedanta.

a movement of remarkable power. In one of the courts, the enormous chariot in wood, which serves for processions, is literally covered with deities, carved with an incomparable art. Then, there is the hall of a thousand pillars, with sanctuaries here and there. Notwithstanding all this grandeur, one can see that the construction of this temple has been accomplished over a long period of time, under the direction of various different kings, and this mars the symmetry of its structure. From the terrace of the temple, the view embraces this incongruous architecture, dominated by the great *gopurams* where hundreds of gods and goddesses are shelved. Flocks of parrots make a great din on the mouldings on the walls.

When we redescend into the galleries, we find our familiar heroes. Everywhere, on the yellow and red pillars, on the walls, in obscure corners, are seen Rama and Sita, the Well-beloved; Lakshmana and Hanuman, the monkey-god. They are all there, with Arjuna and Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu. In the central nave, on the second row of pillars, the ten incarnations on this earth of Vishnu are represented under the form of great *Avatars*.

Vishnu is a great god in Hindu philosophy. But, as one of the Puranic Scriptures says: "Some adore Brahmâ, Vishnu, others Shiva. However, let not the devotee make any difference between the three." All three are One and are the energies, the forces of the Absolute Divinity, Brahma, without a circumflex accent. Brahmâ, with a circumflex accent, being the manifestation of the former in Time.

Vishnu, called the Preserver, is often represented reposing on the serpent of eternity, *Sesha*, the symbol of infinite Time in Space. He contains the germ of the universe and projects it periodically. During these periods of cosmic activity, represented under the name of Day of Brahmâ—the Night of Brahmâ signifying the repose during the dissolution of the worlds—Vishnu sends a projection of himself into the body of a being worthy of representing this high manifestation of the Divinity. By this

projection, he is able to help men to free themselves from *Maya*, earthly illusion, so that they may enter the realm of *Sat*, Truth. Such is the very profound theory of *Avatars*: a man, having become superhuman by his own efforts and thus capable of being overshadowed by the Spirit of the Divinity.

And there, before our eyes, are represented the ten Avatars of Vishnu, among whom are Rama, Krishna, Gautama the Buddha, and Kalki-Avatar. This last one is yet to come, at the end of our Black Age, *Kali Yuga*, the Age of Iron. The Avatar Kalki will not appear on the stage of this world until mankind is ready to receive him. He will be the incarnation of the highest divine qualities. When? The answer is hidden in our hearts. All that we can do is to elevate ourselves without ceasing towards that which is the most sacred in us, "the Father who is there in the secret place," the impersonal and omnipresent Divinity, who is indicated in this admirable verse of the *Vishnu-Purana* which the Vishnuists chant in their religious ceremonies:

*"Glory to Thee (Vishnu) who is but one with the saints, whose perfect nature is for ever blessed! Glory to Thee, O Lord, who has neither colour, nor extension, nor body, nor any universal quality, and whose essence, pure among the pure, can only be appreciated by Sages or Rishis. We prostrate ourselves before Thee; Thou art in our bodies, in all living creatures. We glorify this Vasudeva, the sovereign Lord of all things, free from stain, seed of all things, free from dissolution, who is never born, who is eternal, and who is in essence the entire universe."*

## CHAPTER X

### MEDITATION AT TANJORE

**H**ow lovely is the route which runs from Trichinopoly to Tanjore ! It is an uninterrupted vision of villages in a forest of palms, where the rapturous warbling of the minstrel birds mingles with the cawing of crows and the screeching of parrots. It is, in reality, a luminous garden that we traverse and is a fitting prelude to the contemplation of Tanjore, where we arrive late in the evening.

The beautiful city of Tanjore well merits its name: the "City of Refuge." It extends among the greenness of its trees, peaceful and happy, while the Cauvery winds its calm, holy waters through verdant meadows and rice fields.

A great sorrow could soften and become calm in this city, full of exquisite gentleness, especially in the temple where all is order, beauty, peace. Here, in the vast religious quadrangle, no bazaar, no merchants, all is stillness, silence, the great silence, only broken by the carolling of birds, the cooing of doves, or by the sound, both sweet and grave, of bells chimed by the breeze.

In this temple, which dates from about the eleventh century, our eyes are drawn toward the beautiful order of everything. The central *gopuram*, as usual, like a pyramid in form, soars majestically into the pure sky above the sanctuary dedicated to Shri Brihadiswara, another name for the great god, Shiva. Here, in stone is the enormous *Nandi-Bull*, the sacred bull which, so tradition relates, developed imperceptibly during the course of ages to such colossal proportions that, to put a stop to its extraordinary growth, a nail was driven into its back ! . . . Facing us, before the entrance, is the great mast in copper in which

are suspended the bells that ding-dong when the wind blows, and nearby in a cage of latticed wood, a proud peacock, with his magnificent tail unfolded, makes gracious advances toward his timid and reserved companion.

Further on, is a little temple dedicated to Subramanyam, a beautiful poem in stone, imbued with grace and lightness. Another, dedicated to Ganapati or Ganesha. Behind the central *gopuram* are the admirable galleries containing a whole series of *lingams*; galleries with graceful colonnades ornamented with naive and exquisite paintings. Among these frescoes, we note one where Shiva is represented in his dwelling of *Kailasa* (the dwelling of the gods) with a bull lying at his feet. Here are the *Apsaras* and the *Gandharvas*, the heavenly nymphs and choristers, who while clapping their cymbals, sprinkle lotus petals over valiant warriors. Then Shiva again, vanquishing the *Asuras*, the powers of darkness.

Is it the order, the beauty which reigns in this temple, or the chiming of the bells, or again this sculpture representing the illumination of the Buddha (strange to find in this Brahmanic place!), is it all that, in its ensemble, which draws us to meditation? It little matters. But it is certain that Tanjore is a perfect refuge for thought. There is behind this temple an atmosphere which could purify our mind and raise our thoughts to an unaccustomed elevation. To him who might doubt of order, harmony, beauty, to him who might be a prey to serious anxieties, it would be good to tell him: "Go to Tanjore, to its temple, the *City of Refuge* will bring you peace." However, there is a condition: it is that we should open our mind to receive *what is there*. This does not mean that there are stones or prayer-petitions—in any temple in the world—which can bring us aid or comfort. The exterior temple is nothing. The only one which counts is that which we carry within us. Such is the eternal and wise teaching given by all the true *Sages* of humanity. Did not Saint Paul say: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God. . . . you are this *temple*?" It is an inner attitude that is needed, the

attitude of a real pilgrim, one who is without passion and prejudice, the attitude in which we try to bring to birth in ourselves greatness, beauty, order, and harmony, in a word the qualities that forge aristocracy of thought.

That is what we can find at Tanjore, elevation of mind by mental asceticism, discipline which the Hindu Scriptures expose clearly in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

*"He who is able to withstand the force of desire and passion while living in this world, before quitting his body he is united to the Spirit, he is blessed.*

*"He who finds within himself his happiness, his joy, and in himself also his light, is a Yogi who is merged in the Supreme Spirit, who is one with God."*

Gautama the Buddha, on his part, said :

*"Difficult to master, instable is the mind, always in quest of pleasures; it is good to dominate it. A trained mind assures happiness."* (Dhammapada)

So many persons turn to the exterior world to seek what is within themselves. Life is a long quest, whether it be in Art or in any other domain. Our great Balzac was right in saying: "Moral work, hunting in the high regions of the intelligence is one of the greatest efforts of Man." One lives but one does not know Life, still less its Presence, inexhaustible Source of beauty, force, hope, innocence of heart, which create aristocracy of mind. By becoming aristocrats of thought, we approach the Heart of Being, we become human in the most elevated sense of the word, we can say to our fellow man, even to the most miserable of men, this great, saving word: "You are my brother." It is the awakening to real life, it is to feel the Presence. Symbols become truth. We no longer see the goddess Saraswati as merely a cold idol of stone but as the symbol of the hidden Wisdom of the past; Lakshmi becomes the beauty of the interior life, the greatness of the realisation that we attain, little by

little, in the measure that we ascend the ladder of existence. When it is thus, we have found the Refuge, the sweet valley sheltered from storms, the peaceful valley where the laughter of life echoes joyously, like bells chimed by the breath of morning.

Tanjore! the "City of Refuge," the refuge to which we all aspire but which we so rarely find because of our follies and errors. The temple of Tanjore bids us choose: order or disorder, beauty or hideousness, peace or war, truth or illusion, *Sat* or *Maya*. All in life is a series of choices.

It is for us to choose, either the beaten track of war, violence, or the mountain path which leads to serenity of thought and heart. The happiness and welfare of humanity depends upon this choice.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE SECRET OF CHIDAMBARAM

OUR eyes are still filled with visions of Madura, Rameshwaram, Trichinopoly, Tanjore, our memory is still thronged with so many living symbols of the highest speculations of intelligence and spirit that we are in haste to start off again immediately towards other sanctuaries which may perhaps reveal to us other facets of India's ancient wisdom.

After stopping at Kumbakonam—where we visited its numerous temples, in particular that of Sarangapani Swami, dedicated to Vishnu, which possesses a beautiful, richly carved *gopuram* 147 feet in height; and that of Rama, containing pillars on which the different *Avatars* of Vishnu are featured in a vivid and beautiful movement of life—we make a great detour in order to visit Karikal and Pondicherry, two pretty towns on the Coromandel Coast. They are French possessions with limited powers and are, unfortunately, rather abandoned in spite of personalities of worth working and wishing to do more. (We sincerely congratulate those who have helped to spread French thought by the establishment of a magnificent library at Pondicherry, which certainly does honour to its founders.)

Today, after the sight of innumerable brightly-hued parrots, after having crossed pretty country, green-carpeted with rice fields, after having had our automobile engulfed in sands, nearly Saharian, under a torrid sun, we are now hastening on our way to Chidambaram, where we hope we may soon arrive. But a pilgrimage in India is well worth the inconvenience of suffering from heat, of journeying over long distances, of very often eating

only a few bananas and refreshing oneself with a little coconut milk, of going to bed very late after having searched for hours for a shelter, of getting up very early in order, at last, to visit the temple. Then one forgets all in the contemplation of what it represents of luminous knowledge, far beyond the customary horizons of life.

It seems that there is a secret in the temple of Chidambaram, one of the most beautiful of the temples of the South—so we are told. Up to now, we have not found this secret in the landscape which is unrolling before the windows of our car. We are passing through rather austere country, ascetic, one could say, scattered here and there with a few coco palms and palms. But, at last, we are coming to Chidambaram with its low houses and sparsely growing trees. We cross its fairly animated bazaar. It is six o'clock in the evening. Our boy asks the way to the *dak-bungalow*. It is right nearby and in a few minutes we arrive. A necessary and refreshing bath. Then, speedily, before night falls, a flying visit to the temple.

The temple occupies the centre of the little town. We are immediately struck by its imposing aspect and the very considerable extent of its surface. Clouds of swallows, in an ecstasy of joy, are tracing arabesques around the *gopurams*, fired with the glowing glory of the setting sun.

From the moment of our entrance into the interior precincts, after having removed our shoes, we are seized with an impression of force, an undeniable force which shakes you, hurls itself on you like a great wind. Is this the secret of Chidambaram? The temple is dedicated to the great god Shiva, as is the one at Madura. In the deepening night shadows which are stealing through the enormous edifice, we can see in the first court the obscure forms of a few sanctuaries, then some bas-reliefs representing gigantic elephants. A gong sounds. We watch the pilgrims passing silently from one sanctuary to another. The chime of a grave bell awakens echoes under the tremendous vaults of the great halls. The impression of

force returns, accentuated, perhaps, by the darkness which is filling the galleries dimly lighted by small wicks emerging from copper bowls full of oil. But it is there, present, this force. It reigns sovereignly, it envelops you, it seizes hold of you as if to transport you into a world of powerful glory, through which are passing currents of fire. Force, Light, Fire! Is that the secret of Chidambaram? I don't know. We must wait until tomorrow in order to know.

We go back to the bungalow, thoughtful in face of the mystery of this temple. What a strange evening! It is made up of profound feelings, religious fears, interior calls, of hopes also. One's whole consciousness is in movement. Some different "selves" appear, one replacing the other, or presenting themselves simultaneously on the interior screen of consciousness. Then worlds spring up, dawns of worlds, followed by icy cosmic nights, through which, like a vast ocean surge, rushes a mighty, never-stopping wind. Is this the secret of Chidambaram?

How majestic is the Temple of Shiva in the clear sunlight of early morning. It seems still vaster, more imposing than in the shadows of the night. Swallows are still wheeling joyously around the four great *gopurams*. A warm wind swings the fronds of the palms overhanging the high walls. It is not without a certain apprehension that we cross the threshold of the principal entrance. Shall we again find the mysterious force? Shall we discover the secret of Chidambaram?

Something particular to this temple is the vast quadrangle which encloses four immense courts or enclosures leading one into the other, like the ancient city of Peking. Each court has its sanctuaries. We see now, in the full light of day, the bas-reliefs of elephants which skirt the base of the hall of a thousand pillars. On the ceiling are beautiful frescoes representing various religious scenes.

Access to this hall is gained by means of a wide stone staircase. During great pilgrimages, consisting of 30,000 to 40,000 pilgrims, the statue of Shiva is placed in this hall in such a way as to enable the entire crowd to see it. Not far away is a little temple containing the *Nandi-bull*, the sacred bull, carved in stone richly carapaced. It is several thousands of years old, we are told. Afterwards, comes a very beautiful sanctuary raised to the honour of Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu; then others to Ganesha, to Subramanyam, to Parvati, the consort of Shiva; then there come the chariots used for the gods at processions.

Under the depthless blue vault of the sky, as usual, is the marvellous sacred tank, the Shivaganga, called the "golden tank." It owes its name, it seems, to the ancient King Varma Chakra who, being infected with leprosy, bathed in its waters and was healed while, at the same time, his whole body was covered with the tint of gold. This tank is certainly the finest in the South of India. It forms an immense square surrounded by two galleries, one above the other. From the highest gallery, stone steps on the North, South East, and South, descend towards the tank as well as towards the lower gallery. Around the lower gallery is a row of colonnades which support the gallery above. From the top one, under the porticoes of a *mandapam*, the view is magnificent. One can see the pilgrims returning from their purifying bath in the sacred waters and drying themselves in the warm sunshine on the stone stairways. The view which extends over the *gopurams* and over the great mass of the hall of 2 thousand pillars, is impressive with grandeur. Suddenly, the force reappears. It grips you in the innermost fibres of your being. So it is really here, this force. It is not an illusion. One cannot escape it. It comes from the temple, but from which sanctuary, from which symbol?

We leave the Shivaganga and go to another part of the temple. A sound of tom-toms, flutes, and long clarionets resounds from somewhere in the depth of one

of the galleries and at the same time the gong, heard yesterday, rings and reverberates under the vaults of the hall where we are. We follow the pilgrims who seem to be going somewhere in answer to this religious signal. After passing through a long line of wide corridors, we arrive before two sanctuaries where strong odour of incense is floating in the air. The music stops, except for the gong which resounds unceasingly. On the forehead of the pilgrims who enter and leave the sanctuaries are designed either the trident of Vishnu or the three horizontal bars of Shiva, the respective signs of these two divinities. We are, in fact, before the sanctuaries of Shiva and Vishnu, one of the particularities of the temple of Chidambaram and which makes it celebrated. For this is one of the rare temples of India where Shiva and Vishnu meet each other and have sanctuaries side by side and placed in such a way that their respective devotees can see and adore their divinities at the same time, in the same place. In reality, Brahmâ, Vishnu, Shiva are One, let us not forget. The faces of the pilgrims at Chidambaram are grave. Some of them chant *mantrams*, others are silent. Do they understand? Superstitions are so strong! We could not penetrate into the interior of the sanctuaries because it is not allowed—the remains alas! of fanaticism. We could only stay on the threshold of the sanctuaries. So much the better for us in one sense. It caused us to remain outside of the popular religious current, often dangerous and contagious, and to see sanely and impartially *what is behind* these gross manifestations, invisible unfortunately to the crowd. We listen to the gong whose grave resonance seems to awaken, besides the powers of the air, the powers of the heart, those powers which are in each one of us, good and evil, angels and demons, fire and smoke, light and darkness, a whole inner cortege which quivers irresistibly, which nothing can stop, which rushes onwards like a torrent, as if driven by some mysterious force that was sleeping in us and is suddenly aroused by a fortui-

tous shock, a desire, a long-suppressed thought that we can no longer keep buried. All comes to the light, the good as the bad, which explains the phenomena of wars or eras of peace, fall or elevation, crime or genius, evilness or saintliness, beast or angel. These reflections, born spontaneously before these sanctuaries, show us clearly that the secret of Chidambaram is roving around. One feels oppressed.

In the vibrations of the gong, among the spirals of incense, amid the scent of jasmine (beautiful accessories of superstitions, often incorrectly understood, incorrectly employed), in the middle of sannyasis, of strange ascetics, of worshippers of Shiva and of Vishnu, the existence is pointed out to us of a veil suspended near at hand. What does it hide? Will it reveal the secret of Chidambaram? Yes, we think the secret is surely there. Behind the veil, must be the Force. We are told that behind the veil dwells the Power: the *Akasha Lingam*, the lingam of ether. If the veil is lifted, the *Akasha Lingam* will appear. At last, the curtain is lifted! A smooth wall. Behind the veil, there is nothing but a smooth wall!... Where is the *Akasha Lingam*? It is said that it exists here, in this secret place. Yes, it is true, it can be there, but... invisible. Ether, is it visible? We understand. Invisible things, the *unknown*, must be seen and understood by the interior eyes of our soul, says Hindu philosophy. "Happy those who have not seen but who have believed," said another voice. The *Lingam* is the symbol of abstract creation. It is the divine procreative Force. Akasha or Ether is this spiritual and primordial essence which penetrates everything, the seminal liquor of Nature. It is also the *Anima Mundi*, the Soul of the World, the sacred Fire of Zoroaster, the Lightning of Cybele, the living Fire of universal life, life's electric and magnetic power. What immense horizons unroll before us! Behind this fire, this power, this force, what is there? Who kindles the fire of the Spirit, who sets in motion power, force, potencies? No, the *Akasha Lingam* is not

the whole secret of Chidambaram. This secret must be united to another force, more sovereign still, to a symbol yet more sacred, which is the Holy of holies, the Secret of secrets, which must be represented even here in this temple.

We now turn our steps towards the sanctuary of Shiva. The gong still resounds. We make our way through the crowds of ascetics so as to get near to the dwelling of the god. But what do we see? Now that the view is not hindered by pilgrims and massive pillars, we can see confusedly in the dim light a dazzling roof of gold, adorned with fleurons, which forms a canopy. Under this canopy stands a statue. It is that of Shiva, half-naked, with four arms. What is he doing? *The god is dancing.* It is the *Nataraja*. . . . . The Dance of Shiva! The Holy of holies, the Symbol of symbols. The Force, the Light, the Fire, the Dance. We are at last in the presence of the secret of Chidambaram.

*Ci-va-ya-na-ma.* Salutation to Shiva! says the *mantram*, powerful invocation. The god with four arms dances, his long jewelled tresses whirling in the dance, the god with the third eye in the centre of his forehead, the eye of eternity. One of his hands holds a tambour, another is lifted in sign of confidence and hope, another makes a gesture of offering, it gives. The fourth holds the fire. There is the god, standing on a lotus for a pedestal, entirely encircled by a ring of flames. Clothed in a tiger's skin, a *naga*, a serpent, serving for his necklace, one of his feet is crushing a demon, the other is lifted. The god dances. His young, slender limbs, his harmonious form, his smile, all in him expresses radiant joy. *Ci-va-ya-na-ma.* Salutation to Shiva! He dances the Dance of Life, the cosmic dance of the world. The *Nataraja* is the ceaseless rhythm of life, which never stops and which always, without beginning or end, advances in eternity. Shiva is the Regenerator and the Destroyer. He is the god of Time, his tambour has the form of an hour-glass. He calls the worlds to life, he causes them

to be born, grow, in a ceaseless whirlwind. He invites men to regeneration. The fire of life animates them because Shiva is himself the spiritual fire at the base of Nature and of Man.

*“O my Lord, Thy hand holding the sacred drum has made and ordered the heavens and earth and other worlds and innumerable souls. Thy lifted hand protects both the conscious and unconscious order of Thy creation. All these worlds are transformed by Thy hand bearing fire. Thy sacred foot, planted on the ground, gives an abode to the tired soul struggling in the toils of causality. It is Thy lifted foot that grants eternal bliss to those that approach Thee. Our Lord is the Dancer who, like the heat latent in firewood, diffuses His power in mind and matter and makes them dance in their turn.”*

says a Hindu scripture.\* Then when forms have furnished their experiences, when life through them—life for which death does not exist—has gathered the nectar of knowledge, then the great god Shiva becomes the Destroyer. He destroys the used moulds so that he may recall them to life under forms more perfect. He is indeed the Destroyer and the Regenerator, the eternal progress in the slow evolution of matter and life. All changes, everything modifies itself through the cycles of peace, war, catastrophes, epidemics, through death and life. Nothing is created but all transforms during the successive emanations of the universe—universe which exists but for Man, but for his eternal becoming, but for his glory. Nothing is static, all is motion. Even in the eternities of rest—when every emanation has returned to the original source from where it issued, the Absolute, the Unknowable Divinity—there is the Great Breath which never stops, which is the respiration of Life. When repose comes to an end, the Fire of Shiva kindles the worlds. “Seven ascetics,” say the Scriptures, “appear on the threshold

\*See “The Dance of Shiva” by Coomaraswamy.



of the temple of the universe with seven sticks of burning incense. At these sticks, the first line of pilgrims light theirs. Then each ascetic commences to swing his stick around his head in space and communicates the fire to others." It is the *Nataraja*, life awakening, the dawn of worlds, the Dance of Shiva manifesting anew throughout the seven worlds. *Ci-va-ya-na-ma*. Salutation to Shiva!

He dances, the Mahadeva, the great god, the ascetic of ascetics. In him are centred the highest spiritual perfections. He is the principle of abstract meditation which, alone, can elevate us to Him. That is the reason why He, the *Maha-Yogi*, is the Patron of all Yogis, of all true Sages. "It is the Spirit of Divine Wisdom and of chaste Asceticism which incarnates in those who become his Elect." The Guru-deva Shiva, does he not possess the "Open Eye of *Dangma*," the soul's spiritual eye which embraces the infinite fields of knowledge, of learning? *Dangma* is the soul purified, the soul which elevates itself, which dances, it also, on the crushed demons of its ancient dark, human nature. Also, for each pilgrim, each soul which lives its deepest life, its hidden life in the cell of its heart, Shiva is the Patron, the invisible but ever-present Guru who can be contemplated only with the soul's eye, Shiva's eye, which we all possess but which can open only when our nature of darkness has been purified by moral penances and meditation. We can wear the signs of a Shivaist, the black dot or the three bars, in the centre of our forehead, but as long as the soul's eye is not open to the realities of the spiritual life, so long as we have not broken the circle of our illusions, our follies, our superstitions, we are not Shivaists. To be born a disciple of Shiva is the second birth, it is to be born to the spiritual life; it is also the beginning of the soul's tragedy.

The Guru-deva Shiva is Force, Light and Fire. Even as "the seed dies in order to become a plant," so must he who is the disciple of Shiva die to himself in order to find himself. "He who would save his life must lose it," said the Galilean. But the neophyte acquires the

force to kill his passions, the *Maruts*, which are unchained in him the moment he prepares himself to lead a true inner life. He then lives a difficult life in which he must vanquish or succumb. If he succumbs, he will not succumb in vain, for he will have amassed energies for future battles. In the measure that he fastens his eyes upon the star which shines in him, the light of Shiva will grow and illumine his way. He understands, he sees. To understand, to see, are the necessary steps. Afterward, he will feel that Shiva acts within him as Destroyer and Regenerator. He destroys, he burns up the bad scoriae. The disciple will suffer from burns, he will twist like twigs which shrivel on a red-hot fire, but he will know, he has learned, that the test is necessary, that the shadows of the night must be passed through. He murmurs: *Ci-va-ya-na-ma*. Salutation to Shiva! If he has courage, if he perseveres without total failure—for there is no real fall unless one ceases to struggle—the first battles are won. Then, over his weary spirit appear the Hands of Shiva, the prodigious divine Hands. At first, the one which brings hope, confidence in the immortal energies of our being. Afterwards the one which gives. What? Love, the greatest of all gifts. Love, wise and strong, love which is an exhaustless fountain of joy, love, intrepid, which makes an individual a servitor of men; love which is never hard; love that is as infinitely sweet as the music of an Aeolian harp when the evening breeze passes over its cords; love which sparkles with light. Lastly, when other interior stages have been passed, appear the two other Hands: the one which carries the tambour and the one which holds the fire of devotion, true *Bhakti* which burns in the sanctuary of the soul. Devotion to the true and very rare Guru, the Master, the Sage, whom the disciple has discovered. Devotion which is knowledge of the laws of being and life. Devotion to the interests of others. Devotion which does not make one a slave to an individual, or even to an idea, but devotion which is communion, union with the ideal, in the absolute liberty of the

forces unfolded. Then, devotion becomes the tambour which calls the great flock of men to the fête of life.

Oh! the Hands of Shiva, what do they not represent for a disciple, in their force, their grace, their hidden powers? Hope, confidence, knowledge, force, devotion, love!.... When they appear, extended over his consciousness, the disciple sees at last that he also, in his own measure, has danced the Dance of Shiva. By a process of spiritual alchemy, he has become a real Shivaist, a son of the Divinity. "Man, know thyself and thou wilt know the universe and the gods," said the oracle of Delphi. That is the secret which every man must learn, which every man must unlock. *Nataraja!* The Dance of Shiva must be learned.

Whether it be the dance at twilight on the heights of the Himalayas, with divine choir, or whether it be the Nadanta dance of the Nataraja before the assembly in the golden hall of the temple of Chidambaram, one can only evoke the god who dances.

• *Ci-va-ya-na-ma. Ci-va-ya-na-ma.* Salutation to Shiva! Salutation to Shiva! murmur the pilgrims in the temple of Chidambaram. It is the great wind of the Spirit which passes.

In order to increase its influence and its force, Chidambaram has founded a Temple of Learning in the form of a big university, which is situated near the temple.

Spirit and Intelligence, the twins of eternity, the supreme gifts of Shiva to the human creature, intelligence at the service of spirit, spirit fecundating intelligence. Without these gifts, what are we? What is a nation, what is a race, a humanity, without these two cosmic powers which are forces set in motion by the intelligent law at the base of life, or, if you prefer, the Dance of Shiva? "Let there be light and it was light." "In the beginning was the Word." Without spirit and intelligence, we are worse than beasts. Without these two powers, we gene-

rate wars, egoism, tyranny, brutality, we become failures of Nature; we have not accomplished our mission of Men, we are nothing but the cadavres of men, animated, only by an inferior intelligence, troubled and redoubtable, which only knows how to create instruments of torture, so as to enslave life for purposes of shame, greed, and moral decomposition.

India, in her glorious past, has understood that the greatness of a nation, its virility, its moral value, depend entirely on the system of education that is given to it. The only remedy for transforming a nation is the School. What does one give as nourishment to the intelligence of the child? When the culture of the intelligence is not based on the spirit, the school engenders one of the worst evils of humanity: egoism, generator of all the deficiency causes in mankind. Spirit must be linked to intelligence. What is needed is a culture which makes the heart intelligent and which gives intelligence a noble character. Experience proves that books alone bring nothing but superficial culture. Personal relations between master and pupil are necessary. But who have we as educators in the universities of the world, or in our primary schools? These educators, men or women, in spite of their devotion and their intelligence, do they possess the necessary elements of profound life, this culture capable, as we have already said, of rendering the heart intelligent and imprinting the intelligence with the seal of nobility? Would it not be wiser to form, at first, a *School for Educators*, apt to receive men and women free from all party struggles, who, before beginning to teach, have commenced their inner regeneration by drinking from the purest sources of the wisdom of the ages, wisdom which gives the knowledge of the laws of life? Would this not be the beginning of an intellectual and spiritual disintoxication of humanity, without forgetting the physique of the race, which would lead to a renaissance of the values, intellectual and moral, of Man? Philosopher-Educators? Well! yes, why not? Will it not be necessary to come back to the "dreams"?

of Plato? The reign of philosophers? Yes, the reign and the learning of the Regenerated.

Such are the agonizing questions that every individual who has at heart a total change of the mind of the human race, must ask himself at this crucial hour through which humanity is passing. So long as men kneel before altars of matter, there will be no hope for them. So long as men cling to the dark mantle of religious superstition, either in the East or the West, there will be no hope for them. The collective mind and heart of humanity must be changed.

• • Ancient India furnished us examples of schools, universities, Brahmanic or Buddhist, which brought to this nation most glorious harvests—harvests fallen, alas! today into oblivion. Let us take such centres of culture as Taxila, Ujjayini, and Nalanda. These universities—where thousands of students came from all parts of Asia to drink at the source of learning—based their system of education on individual contacts between master and pupil, but the masters themselves were pupils in the great University of Life. What they gave to their students was the honey of their moral and intellectual experiences received through masters still more experienced in spiritual science, in the true knowledge of the laws of life. Do we not see the famous Chinese pilgrim, Hiuen-Tsang, coming to perfect himself at Nalanda in the study of *Yoga-sastra*, the knowledge of the laws of being? Did he not have, at Nalanda, the celebrated vision of the vicissitudes through which India would have to go? Thus, there passed through these universities great winds of free Spirit and free Intelligence which swept away the miasms of false conceptions, which formed real men, noble men, in whom joy sparkled.

These are the thoughts which haunted us while we were on our way to the University of *Annamalai*, the university of Chidambaram. The problems of former times present themselves also today with the same poignancy. India's universities are numerous. Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Aligarh, Benares, Mysore, to mention only the principal

ones among them, gather together an imposing number of professors and students. Some of them have an average of 15,000 to 20,000 students. They teach letters, science, law, medicine, engineering, arts. But how many among them recall the ancient lessons of Nalanda, of Taxila? We are not making criticisms. We simply put the question to the sincere scholars and philosophers of India.

The University of *Annamalai* was founded in 1929 by Rajah Sir S. R. M. Annamalai Chettiar. Its surface covers several thousands of acres. A superb avenue, bordered with pretty bungalows, the residences of the professors, leads to a large circular space where the principal buildings are grouped. There is the senate hall, a sumptuous construction, in which the jurors at the examinations hold their deliberations and which contains a magnificent hall to accommodate a thousand people. Not far from this building is the library which already possesses more than 40,000 volumes and where we are very pleased to see an important place assigned to French books. Here reign order, cleanliness, light, air, the practical installation of separated tables; all concurs to give the student a propitious atmosphere for profound meditation and intellectual speculation. Other buildings are: the students' quarters, each student having his own room with a veranda; further on is the College of Hindu music where the study of this ancient art, that had almost died out, has been revived, so that the charm of instruments such as the ancient vina, diltrouba, and others can again be enjoyed. Uday Sankar, the magnificent dancer of India, has moreover shown the way to this revival by modernising his ballets in a prestigious way. We cannot forget either another great Hindu artist, who has done so much towards resurrecting music and dancing in India and who works always untiringly for this end: we mean the famous Rukmini Devi. To see her dance is a moving and enchanting poem.

Now we come to the gracious bungalow of the young girls. Through the open windows, we cast a discreet glance

into the hall where we see charming groups of girls in their gay saris, chatting and laughing in their clear, ringing voices. Afterwards, we look admiringly at the professors' bungalows; the little Hindu temple, full of poetry, hidden in its shady retreat. And lastly, still under construction, the immense gardens where a profusion of flowers and trees will entrance all who see them with their masses of brilliant hues; the pond where amateurs of yachting will be able to give free rein to their amusement; the tennis courts....

- This model university, furnished with the most up-to-date perfections, offers, of course, the usual curriculum of studies: letters, science, philosophy, art, languages, and the study of Sanskrit.

But at the end of our very interesting visit, we repeat our question: are all these human studies worthy of India's past? The students who leave India's universities, are they merely swelling the number of the diplomaed of other world universities? If, as we suppose, the answer is in the affirmative, then the secret of Chidambaram must be solved here as elsewhere. The mind must be changed. There is but one culture worthy of a true civilisation—the culture of the Spirit. We have already said it and we repeat it: it is necessary to link intelligence to spirit. Only in this way can we have new educators in the world; new Sankaracharyas, Confucius, Leonardo da Vincis, Platos, Pythagoras, Origenes, Virgils, Beethovens, Jean-Sebastien Bachs, great Shepherds of body, soul, and spirit. Then we shall understand that the Cosmic Dance of Shiva makes it possible for intelligence to plunge into the unfathomable abyss of Spirit.

We shall always remember the Sunday when we left Chidambaram. It was at the hour of a marvellous sunset. Away in the distance, into the massed molten colours of the sunset soared the *gopurams* of the great temple and they seemed to chorus: "Glory to Life which never dies! Glory to Intelligence fertilized by Spirit! Glory to Thee,

Shiva! Glory to the *Nataraja*! Glory to the Mahadeva who dances eternally the Dance of Life." •

*Ci-va-ya-na-ma.* Salutation to Shiva! Salutation to, Man! c



## CHAPTER XII

### THE DESCENT OF THE GANGES

**A** SEVERAL hours' journey from Madras, including the crossing of a river by means of a primitive *bac* (a kind of ferry boat), brings us into romantic territory. On the borders of the Gulf of Bengal, sparkling in ripples of gold and blue, on a sandy beach, among pines and tamarinds and blocks of mossy stone half-buried under a profusion of sweet smelling wild grass, hide the monolith temples of Mahavalipuram, the Seven Pagodas, chefs-d'oeuvre of the art of the Pallavas belonging to the seventh century.

After zigzagging by a narrow path to the top of a pile of green, mossy rocks, our view extends over plains and the sea whose long swell advances and spreads itself indolently over the hot, sandy beach. At our feet, through the needly plumes of pines and the green tresses of tamarinds, rise the peaceful pagodas. The afternoon is very calm. There they are, these pagodas, but when we descend from our observatory, they hide themselves again and have to be discovered afresh. It is then a joy renewed.

Before these wonderful pagodas which are around us and marvel our eyes with their varieties, one's being is filled with a sentiment of tenderness. We are no longer in the exuberance of Madura, nor in the order of Tanjore, nor in the force and fire of Chidambaram. Here we are no longer on the lofty peaks of metaphysics but in a faerie spot of legend and dream. But legend and dream nearer to reality than are our matter-of-fact waking days. We are still among the gods, as in the other temples, but in the Seven Pagodas the gods have ceased to be far-distant stars, we do not have to ascend towards them, we no longer

have to seek for them, for they have come down to us, into our life. Here the wonderful pictures in stone show us better perhaps the sacred mission of the great Sages, as well as their humanising influence.

Before us is the high-relief of Mahavalipuram. It represents the "Descent of the Ganges." We recall a passage from the *Bhagavat-Purana*: "A long time ago, a fabulously long time ago, the waters of the Ganges had their source and flowed through the heavens. But a king, Bhagiratha, reflecting deeply over the evils of the earth and wishing to remedy them, underwent severe mortifications so that the sacred waters might be allowed to flow down and purify the valleys of men. In order to prevent the great mass of waters causing another deluge upon the earth, the god Shiva, in his great love for Man, willed to receive them upon his head. So, for a thousand years, the sacred waters were poured through the tresses of his hair until finally, in this way, they came to form seven principal sources in the Himalayas."

Part of this lovely legend is there, carved in the immense fresco of stone, hewn even out of the cliff. In it are grouped gods, animals, ascetics, sages, nagas, goddesses with beautiful, pure, naked forms. A whole creation prostrates itself before the miracle of Nature, the Mother who is tender and protecting to her children.

What living symbols, dramatic even! Is it not the history of humanity which is narrated to us in this featured stone, in this "Descent of the Ganges?" It is the gift of the gods, the gift of wisdom won. The Ganges! The sacred river carrying, symbolically, in its strong current the eternal truths, does it not represent also the cohort of the "Sons of God," the saintly Gurus, the Wise Ones, who come to tread the highway of men in order to help them to attain the mountain peaks which are named: liberty, happiness, brotherhood, peace?

From all the Hindu Scriptures a cry emerges, the echo of which rings from age to age, through all civilisations:

“*Arise, awake!*  
*Seek the Great Ones and understand. . . .*”

say the *Upanishads*. “Awake,” says Saint Paul, “and Christ will enlighten thee.” To seek the great Sages, to find those who have the sacred power to bless and point out the route to follow “out of the mud of terrestrial lies,” and, above everything else, to understand them! What a solemn task which contains within it the promise of the regeneration of humanity!

• And everywhere on this stone fresco is seen the *naga*, the serpent, the universal symbol of knowledge and wisdom and, consequently, the symbol of the “Sons of Resurrection,” the Masters of Wisdom. Whether it be the word of the Galilean: “Be ye wise as serpents,” or the brass serpents of Moses, or again Mercury in his rôle of psychopompos, conducting and guiding the souls of the dead to Hades by the aid of his *Caduceus*; whether it be the Buddha washed at his birth by nagas; Vishnu lying on the *naga-cesha*, the serpent of eternity; the initiated Pharaohs wearing tall head dresses encircled by sculptured figures of vipers; the Lord Krishna speaking of himself as being *Vasuki*, the chief of the serpents—everywhere and always the serpent symbolises the Dragon of Wisdom, the super-human Men, whose mission is to bless and to serve.

The Descent of the Ganges is certainly the cyclic return to earth of these powerful Educators bringing with them the great offering. It is the earth fecundated by the spirit.

• We find in all the ancient Scriptures of the world, an allusion made to the Sons of God, to the Watchers who watch over humanity; who incarnate among men as divine kings, as philosophers, and prophets. Those are the true spiritual chiefs of the world. They have watched over the first steps of humanity. They have given to humanity, say *Genesis* and the *Book of Enoch*, the arts and sciences, the secrets of the universe, the Gnosis; “the knowledge of things which are,” said Pythagoras; the “mysterious

wisdom that God has reserved for man since the beginning," adds Saint Paul; the *Atma-Vidya* of Hindu philosophy which, after all, is at the base of all religions, all philosophies, sciences, art. The *Those-who-know* of all epochs—Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, Confucius, Sankaracharya—form the "guardian wall" of humanity, which invisibly shelters it from still greater evils. "Built by the hands of numberless Masters of Compassion," says an old Scripture, "raised by their torture, cemented by their blood, it shields mankind since man is man, and protects him from far greater misery and much deeper sorrow."

We can in our folly reject the existence of such a guardian wall. History, alas! proves to us that this is what generations of men have done, are doing still, and cycles of darkness have succeeded to cycles of light. Scepticism, withering irony, have shrivelled up the most beautiful aspirations of the man-soul, until today there are but two camps: materialism and superstition. Certainly, it is easy for each of us to say: "The world is mad." But let us take care not to become mad ourselves. Let us take care not to create anew, in the tumult of the world, false gods, false gurus (the routes of India are full of false gurus), false doctrines, which will reserve for us further periods of mental darkness. For then the pretended new civilisation would be but the bastard daughter of the old.

Oh! these Nagas, these Sons of Light, without any doubt they are yearning to descend again and dwell with us. What hinders them from coming? We do, we men, the sons and daughters of the earth.

## CHAPTER XIII

### TOM-TOMS AT CONJEEVARAM

A CHARMING *dak-bungalow* buried under palm trees and hidden from the road by hedges of fragrant jasmine. We have just arrived, late in the evening, after wandering around in our car for more than an hour looking for the traveller's cottage.

While the "boy" goes to the town, two or three miles distant, to procure our evening meal of curry and fruit, we saunter along the road which winds round the bungalow. The soft Indian night is full of fragrance and the moon's radiant countenance beams over the countryside. Scattered lights indicate a few humble dwellings hidden under clusters of trees. The lowing of a buffalo in its stable breaks the silence from time to time. On the road, white ivory in the radiance of the moon, fireflies dance never-ending reels, forming glistening circles which break and form again. Nearby, a man's voice rises singing a *raga*.

At the other side of a plain intersected by groves and coppices, we can see hazily pyramidal forms rearing upwards into the night sky. These are the *gopurams* of the temples of Conjeevaram. Here, we are in the second Benares of India. In the seventh century, it was the residence of the kings of Pallava. The principal temple is dedicated to Shiva and the others to Vishnu. The great pilgrimage takes place in April.

But, a far-off sound is heard; it is a tom-tom, accompanying no doubt a procession. A blast of firecrackers breaks out from the direction of the temples, then a series of other squib-like explosions. From afar, the rhythmic drumming of tom-toms resounds again through

the night and the soft breeze wafts to us the echoes of songs. At Conjeevaram, the night is as religious as the day. During the whole year round, the town resounds with the beating of tom-toms and the chanting of songs. Later on, under our mosquito nets, for a long time—far into the night—we hear the resonance of the tom-toms of the great temple.

...Early the next morning, we are awakened by the cawing of the crows. The sun already spreads his wonderful wizardry over Nature. Buffaloes are grazing on the route and as far as the town it is a pastoral coming and going in the simple joy of a new day to live.

The road leading to the principal temple is broad and bordered by coco palms. Before entering the religious edifice, we stop to contemplate the beautiful sculptured porticoes on the face of the temple. We notice an adorable figure of a goddess folding her arms around a lingam while the head of a *Naga* shelters her. Such grace in all the gestures!

The temples of Shiva and Vishnu are both very beautiful. In that of Vishnu, in the *mandapam* with a hundred pillars, there are some sculptures of horses which are very striking, due to the astounding effect of vigour expressed in their movements.

Under the great columns, some attractive scenes stop us. Here, in a corner, young girls are seated on the stone slabs and chatting to one another in the shadow of god Vishnu; over there, are some boys, naked to the waist, on whose foreheads is designed in white the trident of Vishnu. They learn, under the direction of a Brahman, to repeat *mantrams* to celebrate the glory of the god; while all around them the great sculptured pillars recount the epic experiences through which Nature passes in her eternal cycle of life.

Conjeevaram throngs with temples. They are everywhere, on the great square, in the streets and lanes, large and small. Moreover, there are others in the surrounding countryside. During our wanderings, we come to a soli-



**Sanskrit Teaching in Conjeevaram Temple**





tary spot, outside of the town. It is almost a desert, scattered here and there with a few trees. All is calm and silent, apart from a joyous concerto of parrots and the echo of tom-toms which remind us that...the gods are there.

Suddenly, to our great surprise, near a little Jain temple, we discover a stele engraved with some inscriptions and having on its top two interlaced triangles. A stele of Asoka, our guide tells us. It is quite possible. In fact, Conjeevaram, the Benares of the South, did she not hear 2,600 years ago the voice of the Buddha? Hiuen-Tsang, the celebrated Chinese pilgrim of the seventh century who in his pilgrimage across India followed the traces of the Tathagata, was he not struck with admiration by this city and its temples? Although he found chiefly in the North columns erected by the Emperor Asoka, he could doubtless have found other vestiges of this epoch also in Southern India.

This stele is there, framed by a few scattered palm trees, its base sunk into the sand. We wished so much that we were able to decipher its inscriptions. If it really belongs, as is affirmed, to the epoch of Asoka, its inscriptions would resemble those carved on the pillars in the North, which have been retranscribed into modern language. However that may be, before our marvelling mind flit some of those glorious figures of ancient India who gave to their country an ideal of moral and social riches which could still serve as model to the world of tomorrow.

Asoka! Prestigious emperor who knew how to give to his people both prosperity and happiness. This is so rare that one must note it. His life is an extraordinary example of what can be accomplished by a man who has the fearful mission of being the head of a state. This life, is it still—we will not say present—living in the memory of all modern India's politicians? It is, in any case, living in his edicts, called somewhere "sermons in stone," which, carved on pillars, conserve his inmost thought.

Apart from the work of the great spiritual chiefs of India, there is nothing more astonishing or more instructive than to see in ancient Hindustan the unity of political life realised by its greatest statesmen. It is certain that the achievement of the Maurya dynasty, after the death of the Buddha, is one of the finest and most distinctive features of Indian history.

In the life of some persons, there come redoubtable hours which entirely change the career and transform the inner life of the individual. This was the case with the Emperor Asoka. From the beginning of his reign, he found himself at the crossroads. He had declared war in order to aggrandize his kingdom. When he saw the loss of his armies, the horrors of the battlefield, his soul trembled. One can easily imagine how stirring this hour must have been for Asoka. Crucial hour! Saving hour! hour of service to men, to his brothers. From that day, he embraced the wisdom preached by the Buddha, the wisdom of all the Buddhas, past and future.

For thirty-seven years, the period during which his reign lasted (274 to 237 B. C.), the Emperor Asoka proved to an immense empire that spiritual values, *real*, that is to say, can always be the levers of command for any political action. His truly Aryan characteristics, the *éclat* of his influence over all domains of social life—physical and moral well-being, art, science, philosophy, religion—show us that the lofty conceptions of Asoka on the government of a state could be followed with profit in our modern world, rent by incessant wars and violent upheavals. It is not astonishing, then, that impartial historians in their study of the life of this great Emperor have failed to find in history any other monarch comparable to him—with the exception, perhaps, of Marcus Aurelius.

In spite of the eighty-four centuries which separate us from the period of Asoka, it is easy to understand fully the reality of this truth—banal but useful to repeat—that the happiness of a people will never depend on a group of politicians, nor on the dictatorship of an individual, but

that the social well-being of a nation depends uniquely upon spiritual values. What the world is in need of, we have already said, it is not professors of philosophy but *philosophers*. This Platonist idea was put into practice by Asoka.

At the head of an Empire which extended over the whole of India, the Southern point excepted, Asoka, solicitous about the welfare of his people, observed that the changes, both social and economic, which generally accompany a great Empire's development, by the conquest of little States, with its inevitable succession of dynastic tragedies, lead finally but to unhappiness for the masses and gain for the egoistic and covetous minorities. The problems of long ago are the problems of today. Asoka discovered how to solve them. He bent towards his people. . . *He listened to its heart.* Brushing aside with a firm hand all intrigues, he adopted as moral base for his political activity Buddhism, which was flourishing in most of the provinces,—they were still ringing with the voice of the Beggar Prince—the only religion which, in the history of the world, has never engendered war.

One of the first acts of Asoka was to undertake "moral rounds." Mixing with the crowd, interrogating individuals without distinction of creed or social condition, he acquainted himself with their needs, their aspirations. He saw their sufferings. Then, he aided his subjects, not only with his gold, which is easy, but by the diffusion of moral and eternal laws, those contained in the Sermon of Benares of his Master, the Buddha, laws susceptible of contributing to the happiness of homes. Better than that, he formed a body of functionaries to whom he taught the fundamental truths of functionaryism, that is to say, how to be not merely functionaries but instructor-philosophers of the Dharma, of the Doctrine, and at the same time to preoccupy themselves ardently and arduously with the general needs of the people.

Amphitheatres were constructed where instruction and amusements were given to the masses. The selling

price of goods was controlled so that there could be no abuses or illicit profits. The energies of each one had to be spent in contributing to the general well-being of all. No privileged class. Asoka himself gave the example of a simple life from which ostentation was banished. He forbade hunting, all trials by combat between animals, alcohol. He surveyed prostitution so as to avoid any excess of sexual life. He made every effort possible to stabilize family life and to increase birth in an atmosphere of joy and peace. Military conquests ceasing to exist, financial charges were transferred to the well-being of social life. Instruction, medicine, the building of hospitals for the sick and destitute, art, all concurred in promoting the moral and physical well-being of his people. Before all, Asoka wanted for his people deliverance from the fetters of superstition, source of so many evils. He preferred service to man rather than useless and dangerous cults. He demanded religious tolerance toward the beliefs of different sects, but he wanted to dissipate ignorance by giving knowledge abundantly. National and cultural unity was strengthened by the adoption of a common language: Pali.

Asoka's efforts in the realms of philosophy and religion created material changes in the social life of India. For, inversely to what we believe in our days, he thought the material conditions of a people are in direct relation to its inner life. Let us grasp thoroughly that he did not want, in the least degree, to drowse his people with the opium of false religious conceptions for perverted ends, but he desired earnestly to energise them, ennoble them, lift them to altitudes of intelligence and brotherhood by the loftiest moral and philosophic truths.

Under Asoka's wise direction, India must have known a glory without equal. In the smallest villages, this march onward of a people along the most desired routes of unity and fraternity was felt. Wells and reservoirs were offered to travellers as well as houses of rest. Numberless feasts and distractions rejoiced all hearts. Work became

joy. Beauty broadened the customary horizons of life. In the domain of architecture, great improvements were achieved. The ancient caves were transformed into sanctuaries; nearly 84,000 buildings were constructed; the temples were adorned with frescoes and statues. Architecture, before the Maurya dynasty, generally made use of but fragile and perishable materials. But under Asoka's influence, the use, chiefly, of stone and sandstone succeeded in giving to India an enduring art, capable of defying the ravaging hand of Time. The art of Asoka has given to India many chefs-d'oeuvre, such as those which can still be seen at Sanchi, Bharut, Sarnath, Gaya. . . Thus, in the Maurya Empire, the cult of beauty welled up naturally from beauty of soul and from its joy.

But in order to give a permanent character to his achievement of social regeneration, so as to testify to the generations of the future that an eternal sovereignty cannot be won by war but *by love for the people* and its intellectual and moral elevation, Asoka had columns erected throughout the whole of his Empire on which were engraved his principal edicts. One has only to read these edicts to realise once again, fully, that the happiness of a people can rest but on service, learning, and brotherhood. Here are a few extracts from these edicts:

*"There is no higher duty than the welfare of the entire world. And the little effort that I am making has in view to liberate me from my debt towards all living beings and to render some of them happy here on earth, while they can attain heaven in the world beyond. All men are my children. They will receive from me happiness not suffering."*

*"It is with this unique intention that I have erected religious columns, that I have created surveyors of religion. On the routes, I have planted nyagrodhas for the purpose of giving shade to men and animals; I have planted gardens of mangoes, I have had wells dug, and I have had built, in a crowd of places, caravanserai for the enjoyment of men and animals."*

*“By order of the king dear to the devas, officers of Tosadi, appointed to carry on the administration of the town, must know the following: you are placed over hundreds of thousands of creatures in order to win the attachment of good men. Every man is my child; even as I desire for my children the enjoyment of every kind of prosperity and happiness in this world and in the next, I desire the same for all men.”*

*“In the past, for centuries, the murder of living beings has held sway, as well as violence towards creatures, the want of respect toward parents, the want of regard for Brahmins and cramanas. But today, the king Piyadasi, dear to the devas, faithful to the practice of religion, has made the voice of drums sound even as the voice of religion.”*

It is with such precepts that Asoka succeeded in giving to his Empire peace and happiness. What a lesson for our modern Chiefs of State, both in the East and the West!

When one reflects that India—which had already in the past given so many proofs of her moral force by the voice of her most saintly sons—was at the time of Asoka one of the world’s principal centres of culture and civilisation, centre united to China, Assyria, Persia, Greece, by great commercial lines, one must not be astonished that her brilliance extended over these far countries. Consequently, India influenced powerfully the currents of thought both intellectual and spiritual, of these different peoples. The missionaries sent to these countries by Asoka had a preponderating rôle in the transmission of this light. Does not Pliny show them established on the banks of the Dead Sea? Was it not these Asokian missionaries, as well as Buddhists, who were the originators later on of the Therapeuts and of the Essenians of Judea and Arabia, to whom Jesus went for instruction? Is there not a narrow parallelism between the life of Jesus and that of Buddha? We see this fertilising influence of Hindu thought equally manifesting itself in Egypt in the form of Hermetic schools

dedicated to the cult of Isis and Osiris; in Greece and at Rome in the growth of Mysteries of Dionysus, of Ceres, and of Bacchus. Pythagoras and, later on, Apollonius of Tyanae, as well as Plotinus, did they not all go to India to draw their teachings from the source of Learning? Lastly, from Xenophanes to Zenophon, the philosophy of the Buddha, little by little, became popular through out the countries of the West.

.... While there passed before our mind this evocation of a glorious past, our ears were ringing with echoes of the tom-toms of Conjeevaram. Their resonance even mingled with our vision and it seemed to us that through the continuous passing of the centuries, these tom-toms heralded the coming of new great Educators, those who bring with them real culture based on Nature's laws and who—when a civilisation crumbles into ruins in consequence of its sins—make it possible to rebuild the world—a new world—on the ancient and everlasting bases of true learning and the brotherhood of Man.

Oh ! tom-toms of Conjeevaram, like the tambour of Shiva, continue to beat the rallying of the Pioneers, the Builders of the World of Tomorrow.





## **PART III**



## CHAPTER XIV

### A POET SAINT

I HAVE just seen a saint, a real saint. Happy are the nations to which saints are born, above all, when those saints are also poets who sing their inner vision of life.

In these modern days, a saint is a very rare sort of man, as rare as the flower of the Udumbara. By the word "saint," we do not mean a man whose merits have been easily acquired as, for example, Benedict Labre who let himself be devoured by insects, or one of those terrible ascetics who break their bones or who sit upon nails. But we are going to speak of a man truly pure and impersonal, in whom the glory of life sparkles, whose smile is as divine as a child's, and who advances over "the highways of the clouds," as said Job.

Such a man is surrounded by an atmosphere charged with sacred currents. He continually rejoices in the happiness of others. He possesses a wisdom of soul which dissipates the fogs of illusion, a chastity of body and of thought (which is more difficult) that aureoles his face, a simple joy, even humour, which temperates his powerful energy. His radiance extends in golden beams over all those who approach him. This man is fragrant. When we discover him in the jungle of life, it is as if we opened a beautiful Indian casket made of fragrant sandal wood and inlaid with ivory and precious stones. Within are found marvellous herbs, goldened by the sun, the aromas of the soul.

*Aryavarta* is the land par excellence of sages and saints. At least, it was in ancient times. I was going to meet this saint at Madras.

It is evening. We are coming back from the Seven Pagodas, where we have been contemplating the beautiful "Descent of the Ganges." On the lovely route taking us back to Madras, our chauffeur puts on speed and we spin along at nearly seventy miles an hour. We are afraid of missing our appointment. But, we shall arrive in time, for here is Madras with its bright lights. At the hotel we hasten over our dinner and off we start towards the bazaar quarter, where our saint lives. Every evening, crowds come to see him. He has been acclaimed in all the great towns of India. At this moment, he exhibits himself before me on enormous advertisements posted at the entrance to his dwelling. He is a very flashy kind of a saint, are you thinking, good at least to join the cinema stars.

You are right. Tukaram is his name. Everyone is speaking of him. He died in the 17th century. He is a saint of yesterday. We are before a Hindu cinema. Oh! not luxurious, just a big wooden hut. We follow the crowd which is composed only of Indians of both sexes. Here is the hall, containing wooden benches with backs; at the end is the screen. We install ourselves. Before us are some young Hindu girls with their parents, sprays of jasmine twined in their rich black hair. A murmur of conversation. Hindus are rather good chatterboxes.

Darkness suddenly falls over the hall. Silence. The life of a saint is being shown, the life of the Poet Saint Tukaram. A Hindu film, *pukka* Hindu, turned by Indians, played by Indian artists. A film which has been running for months in most of the Indian cinemas and translated into Tamil, Hindi,....

Tukaram is one of those poet saints of whom Indians are justly proud. They represent an aspect of Indian culture, above all, of Marathi literature. They have had a great influence on the history of India. These poet saints did not know the narrowness of dogmas nor of castes, their mission being to enlighten the masses. They

preached and sang liberty of soul by the mastery of the passions. They tried unceasingly to raise the moral level of their contemporaries by showing them, in the harassing life of every day, the great eternal realities. This was the aim and work of Dnyaneshwar, of Namdev in the 13th century, of Eknath in the 16th century, of Tukaram in the 17th century. Their poems have become the bible almost of the poor, of the disinherited.

The life of Tukaram is touching in its simplicity. In the film, it is sketched in large traits. Pretty Hindu music, slightly modernised, makes a fitting accompaniment. Tukaram was born in 1608 at Dehu, in the Bombay Presidency. His father was a farmer and also the owner of a grocer's shop. In his childhood, as afterwards in his mature life, Tukaram followed in his father's footsteps and gave his tribute of devotion to the divinity, Vithal, one of the forms of Vishnu. He became an orphan at an early age. Helped by his brother, he continued in his father's occupations. He married and had a son. When he was about twenty years of age, a terrible famine ruined him completely and, moreover, he lost his wife and son. Tukaram struggled desperately against misfortune. He married again, but alas! his second wife had such an abominable character that hell commenced for our poor poet. In the film, we see him constantly the butt of the terrible tempers of this shrew, as yet untamed. But in Tukaram there flowered that innocence of heart that is the peculiar heritage of saints. To the reproaches and shouts of his wife, he opposes his gentleness, his serene philosophy, which he expresses in his poems and sings to the accompaniment of his vina. In his simple peasant's dwelling, in the fields, seated under a banyan tree, he contemplates Nature, loses himself in her in a communion so profound that he becomes a true bard of goodness, duty, brotherhood. His soul becomes sensitive to the least breath of humanity's great suffering and acquires the faculty of discerning the snares of life, the subtle treachery of men, all that makes a calvary of existence.

The story, as it is narrated in the film, shows us a Brahman of dissolute habits, trying by his perfidy to ruin the growing influence of Tukaram. (This debauched Brahman, profiting by his position of priest to extort money from his faithful, is, moreover, well hissed by the spectators.) But Tukaram foils his intrigues. Nature, sometimes prodigal towards her true sons, brings him rich, abundant harvests which, in spite of the reproaches of his angry wife, he distributes among those who are in need. Saintliness grows in him, his radiance draws those who weep, those whose hearts are too heavy with misfortune. He comforts, he aids, he sings the truths learned in the solitude of his heart. He knows evil most certainly, nevertheless its wild wave no longer reaches him, it stops, it breaks before the dike of his love. His face with its almost childlike expression is a lamp which enlightens the way. His smile is so enchanting that in its magnetic contact, even his wife, in the evening of Tukaram's life, becomes tamed and peaceful and understands that love is of more value than hate. And both of them, according to the film, mount after their death to *Swarga*, the dwelling of the gods, where all is peace and silence.

What a beautiful life ! What a beautiful film, in which in spite of some unskilfulness and naiveté, which are moreover charming, reigns an atmosphere that enchants our soul, our eyes, and also our ears by the subtle and moving music.

As for the Hindu crowd, it throbs with all its heart. It weeps in face of poor Tukaram's misfortunes. It rejoices with him in the measure that he transforms himself and becomes a saint. It listens ardently to his poems, which are, in reality, as many counsels for the little duties of daily life.

*"How can you unite yourself to the Supreme, oh ! poor fools, by living a worldly life ? How can you find joy in a heap of valueless objects which possess nothing essential ? It is foolish to expect to sleep a happy, peaceful sleep on an infected*

*bed. Wine will surely render a drunkard unconscious even of the stuff which enfolds him and he will scorn the advice that is given to him" . . . .sings Tukaram.*

*"What good is it to be well-groomed exteriorly when interiorly our mind is filthy and covered with thick layers of lies that have accumulated during the years of our existence? Purify your mind and your language, do not be hypocrites, and be always a witness of what is passing in your mind. Why do you touch this earth, which is forever holy, when you do not even care about the merit or the guilt which results from your actions that are polluting the earth as well as your body, rendering them ungodly? Why do you not purify yourself, sanctify yourself, by freeing yourself from lust and anger? I entreat you to realise that you are the true way by which to acquire purity and saintliness, try then to follow it." . . .sings Tukaram.*

*"Old age whispers in my ear that death is approaching with long strides. Oh! my spirit, hasten thyself, I beseech thee, to discover the place where eternal blessedness is found, so that you may try to realise it. The last moment will be of short duration, because death is lying in wait, watching. It is why I pray you to free yourself from all attachments or false and unreal connections and prepare yourself to meditate on the deity of your family." . . .sings Tukaram.*

Tukaram! Your songs, your smile, your brotherhood are still discernible in this overturned world. They awaken echoes in some hearts, which is one more proof that we should not despair of humanity and that we may aspire to the day, still very far off, no doubt, when multitudes of men and women will sing the old-as-time poems in their homes. The poem of holy work which ennobles; the poem which makes man a free being, free by the unfolding of his spiritual consciousness, free of hate, free to think; the poem which brings to birth peace in the humble homes of men; the poem by which those who have become truly men hear the whispering of Nature, are aware of the little ant

which passes across the path, of the bee so busily engaged in her task, aware of the wind murmuring through the great pine forests, aware of the smallest aspirations of humanity's heart. Then, then only, shall we be able to say that the poet saints were right to sing life as it is and not as we believe we see it. Then, we shall come out of the dim blind alleys of hypocrisy and egoism to enter into the open, luculent glades of true spiritual values reconquered.

Be watchful. In life, there come mysterious meetings, very simple ones too, which show how strange are the ways of destiny. Tukaram has sung his life. We also ought to try, as well as we can, to sing our life. This melody must arise one day. It may be awakened by the chime of a bell, by a garland of fragrant jasmine, by a blue smoke spiraling upward on a summer evening, or by the meeting with a being. It is then a glance, a smile, a word, above all else a silence between ourselves and this being. . . . Afterwards, it is a sound. . . . The marvellous song begins. The sweetness of living is discovered. It is the light of life.



## CHAPTER XV

### ON THE ROAD TO MALABAR

**O**N our return from Madras and Conjeevaram, we pass through the rich region of Salem where the women are celebrated for their beauty. It is true, they are very pretty. Such charm in their graceful gestures and deportment! The Madrassi saris, too, with their vivid colours, add a special brightness to their wearers.

Very far off, on the horizon, we see appearing once more the faint outline of the beautiful Blue Mountains. How we rejoice to see them again on this radiant August morning! We catch a glimpse of the enchanting summits wrapped in their eternal muslin of blue mists.

• Before commencing the ascent, Ragwan, our "boy," goes to fetch, I do not know from where in the ravishing village of Mettupalaiyam nestling at the foot of the mountains, a succulent meal that we absorb under a shady vault of great green palms. What a gamme of spices in this curry which is composed of rice, potatoes, cauliflower, curds, pepper-water, all served on large banana leaves! Rarely has a Hindu curry seemed to us so good.

.... And this morning, very early, after a last and brief sojourn at Ootacamund on the heights of the blue and fragrant mountains, we are again *en route*. For hours and hours, we roil along, but they seem short in spite of the fatigue of the journey and the dust. There are so many things to see, above all to remember.

The car is overloaded with luggage, beddings (mattresses, blankets, pillows....). For weeks, we shall be travelling over thousands of miles taking us from the shores of the Indian Ocean in the South to Bombay, passing through

the State of Coorg, over the parched plains of Hyderabad, then Ajanta, Nasik, the Bombay Presidency, and afterwards. . . . Europe.

At present, our goal is the Coast of Malabar, Telli-cherry, where we expect to arrive this evening about 7 o'clock. In spite of our heavy load, we spin along at a good pace on the route for Mysore, after having zigzagged warily down the steep, thickly-wooded slopes of the Blue Mountains. Mysore! the city of gardens and palaces. We are going to see it once more but it will be only a fleeting view as we pass rapidly through it. They are so far off now, those days passed in roaming through this incomparable Hindu town which shelters the goddess Chamoundi, enshrined on her hill resembling a great nave.

Crack! Explosion! Break down. So much the better! While the chauffeur is doing the repairs, we shall be able to lie down under the cool shade of a banyan tree. Right here is one, in a field bordering the route. How delicious to stretch oneself on the green grass which smells so sweet! All is calm, peaceful, pastoral in the immense plain of Mysore where clusters of palms and coco palms make refreshing spots of green on the landscape. In the distance, far behind us, the beautiful Blue Mountains are still faintly visible. Birds are warbling in the trees. A few passers-by on the route. The sun grows hotter. It is 10 o'clock in the morning. Grasshoppers are singing gaily in the tall grass. Above my head, in a banyan tree aged several hundreds of years, whose branches are drooping down to the earth to take root, some monkeys look at me with an astonished air. They are doubtless very displeased. What has that one come to do here? they seem to be thinking. They scratch their heads, they frown, they jump from branch to branch with anxiety. I think they finally come to understand that I love them, that I will do them no harm—although I am not a Tukaram—because they quieten down and begin again in a neighbouring tree their reckless, happy gambols.

I almost fall asleep and I dream, not of a rapid automobile but of a bullock-cart (an ancient cart harnessed with buffaloes or zebus) which carries me slowly, hither and thither, for months and months along the routes of India....

My dear travelling companions call me. The repairs are finished. My dream melts away. We swallow up the miles. The banyans, the villages, the people fly past like shooting stars. We must be at Mysore by mid-day. Speed! Always speed. Why, oh God? To go quickly. More quickly. Stop! Before us, a bullock-cart. The chauffeur honks. The cart, which certainly dates from Vedic times, does not move. Or rather, it moves, it continues its little trot in the middle of the road. The chauffeur slows down, honks, re-honks. The driver of the cart half raises himself. Without doubt, he was fast asleep. With a special shout to suit the occasion, he directs his animals on to the side of the road by pulling their tails. But, as always, they go in the opposite direction and nearly overturn the cart into the ditch. What a confusion! My soul feels for the driver who salutes us with a good-natured smile, the zebus also, I believe.

We do not go far. Another bang. Another breakdown! We are overloaded. Humiliation for the machine.... Triumph for the bullock-cart which trots past us. Repairs and we start again, slowly this time, which enables us to contemplate at our ease the hill of Chamoundi looming little by little out of the distance in a haze of gold. On the left, before the town, under the drooping fronds of palms, are the royal tombs in the form of pagodas, where are gathered the ashes of the Maharajahs of Mysore. And now come the broad avenues of the city, bordered by sheltering trees; the palace of the Maharajah, the big square, the little low houses in the shady streets. It is two o'clock in the afternoon. Few people are about. It is the siesta hour. We are late by our time-table. We glide along through the vast parks filled with masses of

flowers. Gladioli, gigantic cannas, heliotropes, roses, are still a dazzling fairy scene under a green canopy of great palms.

. . . In the cool shade of majestic cedars. A powerful wind is playing rich, deep tones on the organ of their branches, accompanied by the cawing of crows. Rapid lunch. We must hasten. Biscuits, bread, cheese, bananas, and pineapples. Hundreds of crows trace arabesques around us. They are hungry, the poor things. Oh! one of them, more audacious than the rest, makes a sudden peck with his hungry, yellow beak, seizes a beautiful piece of bread-and-butter that our companion was holding in her hand and carries it off. What impudence! He might have carried away her finger too. No matter. We forgive him, it is a crow. . . . of India. However, he overdoes it. He is coming back, still cawing in a very exacting manner. It is like human beings, they have and they wish to have more. That reminds me of a good story which was told to me one day in the Blue Mountains.

Once upon a time, there was an ascetic who lived alone in a cave. Each day, he washed his one piece of clothing. But, alas! each day the mice gnawed away a little more of the poor garment while it was drying on the grass in the sun. The ascetic thought: "I ought to have a cat." The next day, he had one. A few days afterwards, the cat died for want of milk. "I ought to have a goat," murmured the noble man. Some good people offered him one. However, the goat, then the little goats, the result of legitimate love, the new cat, and them turned the ascetic away from his meditations. "I ought to take a wife," was the sudden and subtle thought which came into his mind. Then, he married. The milk of a goat for two and a cat is very little. With the charity they received, the couple bought a cow. It was necessary to have a stable, and a hut instead of a cave. The cow, the calf, the cat, and the wife obliged the ascetic to hire a field. Some years after all these tribulations, our saintly man had become the greatest capitalist of the village.

Such is life in this funny, upside-down world.

.... These reflections do not hinder us from saying goodbye to Mysore, to its fairy gardens, to Chamoundi enthroned aloft on her hill.

The route again. We pass Seringapatam, where there is a pretty temple, celebrated for its pilgrimages. It stands under the cool shade of a girdle of fig trees. At the end of the village, stands the ancient fortress of the Sultan Tipoo. Since the long-ago battles in these parts between the French and the English, Nature has regained her legitimate rights. The vegetation is luxuriant and rich and the sacred river, the Cauvery, which will soon swell with monsoon rains, still brings freshness to the surrounding countryside.

We stop an instant in order to enter an old cemetery where, under crumbling and forgotten tombs, French soldiers of bygone days are lying. Humble heroes of a day. What melancholy in the warm wind which gently fans the little flowers growing up here and there in the cracks of the mossy tombstones. Their effaced names will never be read again!

We also visit the exquisite palace which was formerly the favourite retreat of the Sultan Tipoo. The interior is admirable, full of paintings and fine sculptures, which recall to our minds the Palaces of Ispahan. In the beautiful park with its sleeping waters, rises the mausoleum where the Sultan was buried. But we are obliged to leave this lovely spot, full of silence, broken only by the birds singing in their flowering solitude.

At a fork of the road, we leave on our right the way leading to Brindavan, the "Versailles" of Mysore. Two months ago, we passed a beautiful evening there beside one of the largest artificial lakes in India, which supplies the whole of the surrounding country with its waters. The engineers who executed this gigantic work have united utility to beauty. There, where formerly extended vast scorched and parched plains, today, not only do beautiful and abundant harvests come to enrich the country,

but vast terraced gardens adorned with cascades, fairy fountains, glowing in the evening under the play of electric lights, make this corner a place full of charm and magnificence. Decidedly, the State of Mysore is remarkable from all points of views. As said the French historian, J. Michaud, in 1800: "The plains of Mysore are the most magnificent dwelling that Nature could offer to men on the earth."

We are now travelling along a route bordered on each side with immense forests, a nearly impenetrable jungle, the haunt of wild elephants and tigers. We quicken speed, the eternal speed, so as not to journey during the night in this rather formidable jungle, which has, however, a luxuriant, revelling beauty. We repress the temptation to stop again. C. looks at his watch with anxiety. Five o'clock in the afternoon. In these wild, wooded places, it is night about seven o'clock. We race along. The coast of Malabar is still far off, very far. We have to cross a mountain chain where the domination of the jungle extends its sovereign sway. What does it matter! Our eyes and soul are so filled with beautiful visions that it makes up amply for everything.

....Six o'clock. The route descends in zigzags. It is the magic hour. The rays of the setting sun have set the *ghats* on fire. The jungle becomes red, then violet, mauve. This wonderful scene makes us forget our hunger. Doleful discovery! Our boxes of provisions are empty. At each village we pass through, it is impossible to find anything at all, not even three bananas. There is nothing left for us to do but to think of the royal *pilaf* which is waiting for us at Tellicherry. Very prosaic, these thoughts!

Night has come. The route still zigzags down the ghats towards the Indian Ocean. Broken with fatigue, we doze. That lasts for five minutes, ten minutes.... Bang! A sudden halt. We wake up. I ask what is the matter. Another burst tyre, to a front wheel this time. I look at my watch; it is midnight. I have slept for nearly

three hours. Where are we ?

Benumbed, we get out of the car. The jungle, the vast, teeming jungle surrounds us on all sides. C. is happy. He is again in his jungle which he loves so much. A few poor houses of wood, a little bridge, the clear singing of a brook, the white ribbon of the route descending towards the far-away sea, some turbaned men who have come to look at us. A landscape of jungle illumined by a full moon, the magnificence of which in India is of indescribable beauty. What sweetness in the mild air ! And over all . . . a *noise*. The noise of the jungle. The pulsing life of the jungle. It is something prodigious. The croaking of frogs, the cristal flutes of toads, the hooting of night birds, the ceaseless tricksome song of crickets, the cheeping of innumerable insects, beasts of darkness crawling in the tangled undergrowth, making the dead wood crack, the desolate howls of chacals, the roaring of a far-off tiger, the trumpeting of a wild elephant, the sougning of the night wind that can hardly make its way through the thick, heavy fronds of the trees, and lastly, the dance of golden fireflies, myriads of living sparks which seem to have sprung out of an invisible fire. Moreover, from the throbbing earth mounts the perfume of wild jasmine mingled with the dankness of ages. How thrilling are the nights of the jungle !

We start off again. We shall always remember this forced stop in the night.

. . . . Two o'clock in the morning. The air becomes slightly fresher. We are nearing the coast of Malabar. Here are the first houses of Tellicherry bathed in moonlight. Coco palms fly rapidly past. Streets, where there are still some Indians chatting ; an avenue ; a muffled roaring, the waves of the Arabian Sea. Another street. Houses the colour of milk standing under coco palms. The car stops at last. A bungalow: the house of our dear G. . . . We are "at home."

The servants who no longer awaited us appear, their eyes puffed with sleep. We look over the spacious,

pleasant bungalow. Then a shower. Afterwards the dining room, in which are two inestimable things a cook wearing a majestic turban and.....on the table, the *pilaf*, the marvellous *pilaf* so long waited for

Alas! We are no longer hungry. Fatigue overcomes all. Tomorrow, yes, tomorrow, we will eat it with joy in this bungalow that I already love so much ....because of he who lives in it.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE ENCHANTMENT OF THE COAST OF SPICES

I AM awakened by a hubbub made by some frensied crows and the querulous bleating of a goat. I pull up the blind. A riot of light blinds me for an instant. It is seven o'clock. On this dazzling morning at the end of August, the temperature is already hot. The monsoon is over, or nearly so, on the coast of Malabar. A few days ago was Coconut Day. This event marks the end of the major monsoon and is celebrated with great pomp. Thousands of coconuts were picked and amassed on the beach to the accompaniment of many songs and dances.

Around the bungalow, the sun's rays glint through the fronds of the palms which are swaying gently in the hot morning breeze. All is adorably green. The recent rains have washed away the dust of the preceding dry months. From my window, I can see the tender green carpet of rice fields on the other side of the route. The birds are carolling with joy to see the sun again after the monsoon deluges.

We go to find C. in his bureau with its big bay window opening on to a forest of coco palms. He is already at work, attending to the daily business of correspondence, which has accumulated during our pilgrimage. We leave him with his employees and look admiringly round his office which is furnished in such good taste. All the furniture is appropriately made of Indian rosewood.

After an excellent breakfast—of which we appreciate the juice of freshly-picked pineapple and the coffee with

buffalo's milk, served by Gopal, the Hindu cook, respectful and majestic in his turban—we stroll along to the Tellicherry Club, which is about five hundred yards from our bungalow.

The eternal carts drawn by zebus or buffaloes are jogging along the very animated road. All seems joyous. Tellicherry, with its 35,000 inhabitants, is a town which seems happy. The joy of living is written on all faces, in spite of the poverty which is here, as it is in the whole of India. Without doubt, among these poor people, poverty is roving everywhere, even around the charming bungalows which border the road. But at Tellicherry, the poverty is not in rags. The streets are clean; the *jek-karts*, light carriages drawn by trotting little horses, drive gaily past; the houses hide under great green palms, as though to shield their happiness even if it be short-lived. What is the cause of this appearance of comfort? I am going to know.

The Club is a large building in Oriental style built on a promontory of rather low cliff and surrounded by extensive woodlands. It is, moreover, admirably kept by its secretary, a business man of the Coast, seconded by his charming and devoted wife. Mr. and Mrs. R. are Swiss, which is to say everything. Furthermore, they are excellent friends. The Club is a credit to them. People come from all parts of the South to enjoy its fest and good cooking. The drawing room, dining room, billiard room, the famous game of skittles, all are admirably arranged for relaxation, reading one's favourite books, games, enjoying gastronomic delicacies. On the first floor are comfortable rooms.

We go out on to the terrace with its white colonnade, from where the view is splendid. A delicious fresh breeze is blowing. Before us stretches the immensity of the Indian Ocean, whose long surge swells lazily over the foot of the cliff. The Arabian Sea, blue-green, irised by the myriad fires of the Southern sun, laps against the coast, the rocks, and an island with a dome of green palms, look-

ing like an emerald.

On the right and left are smiling bays, with almost rose sands, and, as far as the eye can see, thick forests of coco palms reaching to the marge of the Ocean. It is the Coast of Spices, the coast which smells good of cinnamon, nutmeg, pepper, ginger... Sailing on the sea are great olden-time boats with picturesque sails, carrying in their holds precious cargoes of spices, seeds, coconuts, destined for the far-off shores of Arabia and the Persian Gulf. Fortunate coast, whose gifts and beauty are provided by the earth, how could it not give a confident smile to its children who are nourished from its soil?

We are never weary of watching this scene. Sitting in the garden out on the headland, surrounded by velvety lawns, gay flowers, coco palms slanted by the sea wind, we listen to the murmur of the peaceful surge, while our eyes roam over the bays, the nearby river, the happy islands, over the immense translucent sea. Malabar coast! The birthplace of Sankaracharya, the great spiritual reformer, the philosopher, the mystic, one of the most extraordinary men of India.

\*

\*

\*

....Afternoon. After having enjoyed the savoury *pilaf*, so long looked-forward to, containing all the spices of the Coast, we set out to visit the port of Tellicherry, or rather, its beach, where great pirogues embark bales of merchandise, rice, coconuts, cashew nuts, superb blocks of rose-wood coming from the jungle through which we passed yesterday. This freight is then transported to big ocean steamers and placed on board, because there is no quay here, except for a jetty to which small coastal steamers come. Then, we turn our steps towards the picturesque river, with coco palms leaning over its banks. This is the place of repairs for curious old-time boats with raised prows and triangular sails, still permeated with the tenacious odour of spices.

We start off now by car for Cannanore, traversing

beautiful country where coco palms are predominant. On our left is the Indian Ocean. Along the furnace-like route, we admire the big parasol hats made of plaited fibre, which the Indians of Malabar wear. Here, the women generally wear white saris. Bright coloured ones, richly embroidered, are sometimes worn but chiefly by the wealthy class. As for the men, they mainly wear the eternal dhoti clinging round their legs or forming a skirt, but sometimes simply a shirt which floats freely over the hips.

Cannanore is a pretty town, as are most of the towns on the Coast of Malabar. The view over the sea is very beautiful. Here are made various objects of coconut shells: tea services, ash-trays, lamps, all encircled with silver or copper. The town was visited long ago by Vasco da Gama. We stay here for a short time and then return to Tellicherry.

This return is engfaved with charm and sweetness. Twilight is falling over the Coast of Spices. A light haze, like a gossamer, of golden mauve spreads over the coco palms. Bullock-carts are plodding tranquilly home to their stables. Women and young girls, with their slender waists and prominent hips, are coming from the wells, carrying urns of copper or earthenware on their heads. In the villages that we cross, the little lights in the bazaars are already lighted and are showing up the colourful heaps of mangoes, oranges, bananas, pineapples, coconuts, baskets in sparterie, bottles of perfume, silver girdles and bracelets, while a pungent, overpowering odour of spices impregnates every bazaar. And in the humble dwellings, as in the temples, the beautiful lamps of Malabar are kindled, lamps formed of copper plates superposed and suspended on chains, the flame being fed by a wick soaked in coconut oil.

The sun has sunk behind the islands. It is the evening. Evening of dreams and of deep peace.

\* \* \*

The following morning. From the little headland before the Club, we climb down a staircase carved in the

rock, leading on to the hot rose sands. In the shelter of a creek, we plunge into the nearly blue water of the Arabian Sea. There is no fear of sharks off this coast. What a refreshing swim! We shall be fit for the tiring day ahead: errands in Tellicherry, lunch, and then *en route* for Mahé.

While waiting for lunch, from the beach we watch the return of the fishermen. The fishermen of Malabar profit by the ocean swell to cast their long pirogues up on to the beach. With a melodious chant, they draw up their canoes on to the rosy dune. The boats are full to overflowing with sardines and other fish, ray, salmon, soles. The depths of the seas which wash the Coast of Spices are as rich as its soil. How handsome and brave these fishermen look with their copper-coloured bodies. They sell their fish immediately, and it is then poured out into large plaited baskets. Afterwards, the nets, which smell good of iodine, are spread out in the sun to dry. At the next tide, they will start out again, untiringly. In their slender pirogues, singing in their captivating rhythm, they will pull off over a phosphorescent sea, under a burning sun or by the magic light of the stars.

#### MAHE THE SILENTIOUS

....Lunch is finished, the hour has come for our departure for Mahé, a fragment of French territory some miles from Tellicherry. It will not take long to cover the distance by car. Immediately after leaving the town, the route passes under a thick green vault of coco palms. Villages come one after the other. On the right, the great voice of the sea accompanies us. The wind is fairly strong. How pretty this road is, hemmed in between two banks entirely carpeted with wild ferns! It follows the contour of the Coast of Spices. Sometimes, it penetrates a little into the interior of the land, then emerges again towards the ocean. We catch sight of fishermen's hamlets, clusters of huts before which the fishing nets are spread out to dry in the sun and wind. On the left, the railway also follows the capricious windings of the coast. We pass a

train which, of course, is full. At its doors can be seen the eternal travellers smiling, chattering, and gazing at the landscape. After a detour in the route, we come to a bridge spanning a wide river. A Hindu cipaye with white gaiters, white belt, blue uniform, gives us a military salute and asks for our papers. It is the French frontier. On the other side of the bridge is Mahé.

Mahé of India! Mahé, so marvellously described by Pierre Loti nearly half a century ago, after he had spent several hours there.

We leave the car and walk over the bridge across the river of Mahé. On our right is the mouth of the river, where great breakers are dashing over the coast. On both banks is an uninterrupted forest of coco palms. It is three o'clock in the afternoon. Even under the coco palms it is hot, for the sea wind can scarcely find its way under the thick green vault.

Here we are then at Mahé. How calm everything is! We follow the meanders of the river and we come to a little square planted with sea pines and coco palms. In all French towns, there must be a square and some benches, as at Pondicherry and Karikal. It is the custom. Here then at Mahé, there is a square with benches and, in a corner....the statue of the French Republic. This place is pervaded with infinite charm. In the first place, at this hour, it is solitary. It looks over the vast ocean and over the mouth of the river. The opposite shore of the river is a mass of flourishing green foliage and a long sandy beach. On the left, at the end of the square, stands the Palace of the Residency, empty of Resident.\* One has to say "palace" when speaking of the domicile of the official representative of a great country. In reality, it is a large old-fashioned house, built on the headland. It looks like an old provincial mansion. We enter and visit its huge rooms furnished in the mode of a century ago: the reception room with its

\*This visit to Mahé was made in 1937. At that time, there was no Administrator.

antique furniture covered by protecting covers; the dining room; the Resident's bureau, like that of a provincial notary; the rooms on the first floor which lead on to a veranda. From this veranda, the view over the river, the trees, and the ocean, is magnificent.

There is a curious thing about the park. Whereas outside there are nothing but palms and coco palms, in the Residency park there are no tropical trees, so to say, but only one-hundred-year-old trees resembling chestnuts and superb Australian pines. It seems that the first inhabitant of this house wished to forget that he was in Asia, in the India of palms, in order to think but of his little far-away province somewhere in France. In the deserted alleys, romantic stone seats, covered with moss of years, have the air of waiting for Madame la Marquise, followed by her gallant lover in powdered wig and cuffs and collar of lace. But the illusion quickly vanishes, for around the headland the Arabian Sea is breaking with roars over the coral reefs, outside the gates the green vault of coco palms shelters the road, and nearby can be seen the fishing village with huts covered with dried palm leaves. We are certainly in India! There is also the Hindu servant who accompanies us to the gates and offers us with many respectful *salaams* a superb bunch of red roses.

We go now towards the centre of Mahé. We take—I was going to say the “main street”—let us say the sanguine street, full of shade. Parrots are screeching in the trees and birds from the islands are flying swiftly past. Here and there, huts shelter under the great palms, and bungalows with projecting roofs supported by white colonnades stand in the middle of an enclosure where roses, jasmine, and bushes of hibiscus make gay splashes of colour beneath the banana trees and coco palms. All is so calm at Mahé! All is silence. On the slightly mounting road, we pass a few Indians. They are in no way different from those on the other side of the frontier. They look at us with a surprised air. Now and then, we meet an ancient cart drawn by zebus, loaded with straw, creaking and grinding

in a very pastoral way.

Ah! the French flag. A heart-warming encounter. It is the Town Hall. A very simple little house. Then, we come to the great square, in reality this time, surrounded with coco palms and other tall trees. A group of young Hindus in semi-European costume—a dhoti and a jacket—emerges from a street and advances to meet us. They have recognised C. who is very much liked at Mahé and on the Coast of Malabar. They address us joyously.... in French. It is true. French Indians. Presentation. Surprise on the part of the young men. They know me well. They have read my articles on our pilgrimage in India which have been translated into English by a friend and published in the journal *The Hindu*, a daily of Madras. They ask for some details about our voyage and are glad to talk to some compatriots whose country they have never seen—their country—and that doubtless they will never see. They are handsome, these young men, full of life, with dark velvety eyes. What are they going to do in the future? For want of employment, they will expatriate probably, as do many others, to Indo-China or elsewhere.

With regret, we leave our new friends and continue our promenade towards the bazaar, because, of course, Mahé has a bazaar. It is not a very important one, there are not many shops, but they are there, with their hoard of merchandise, their stuffs, their fruit, and their great baskets. This quarter is a little more animated than the rest of the town. Fishermen, peasants, women with their children astride one hip. But all these people are silent, hardly a sound.

Suddenly, a noisy crowd. A cipaye disperses the people with an authoritative wave of his arm in order to allow us to pass. With our colonial helmets, he certainly takes us for ministers and the wife of a minister on an official visit. In the middle of a circle of curious onlookers, a fakir is making some mysterious experiments. He contorts himself into difficult postures, dances on swords, jungles with flaming torches, swallows a variety of things,



and many other tricks that the crowd gazes at in silence, rather indifferent.

Leaving the fakir to his conjuring, as well as my companions, whom I shall rejoin later at a friend's house—where we have been invited for dinner, I return alone along the shady streets already taken. They are a little more animated at this late hour. The hot wind grows stronger, it bends the great palms, and the muffled roar of the Arabian Sea drowns the scant sounds of Mahé the Silentious.

A heavy perfume rises from the earth: the perfume of spices. It comes from the threshold of a hut where a Hindu woman is preparing her frugal evening meal. On a polished stone, she is crushing seeds of spices which she will cook in some *ghée* (melted butter) and then mix with a handful of rice. For her, this will be an excellent meal. It pursues me, this odour of spices. It exhales also from the trees.

~~Some~~ fresh, clear voices, children's voices. I am passing the school and the young students are just coming out. About fifty boys and girls, their books under their arms, are chattering among themselves. They return to their huts, or to the more comfortable family bungalow, without romping or shouting. These Mahé children are pretty. The boys are dressed in a white blouse and knickers. The girls in long dresses of different colours. Most of them, of course, are carrying an umbrella. It does not rain, it is marvellous weather, but...an umbrella is needful. It served during the monsoon, it serves now for the sun, in spite of the great palms which are natural parasols. The fact is that the parasol plays a great role in the life of every Indian. In the first place, it is a luxury, it looks well. Can it not be said also that it is symbolic? Certain bas-reliefs in the temples prove it to us. The gods are often sheltered under parasols. One could not receive with impunity the full rays of life's real sun. One must shelter oneself. The frame of the parasol represents the Great Sages who radiate the light and warmth of Nature's heart. The handle is held by each individual and he can

put himself in touch with one of these Sages and thus receive the blessings of Life. But that is another profound story. Who in India remembers it? Doubtless, a few. But let us return to our children.

I speak to the school master, who is the last to leave the school. He is a young, cordial Hindu. He greets me with a smile and speaks to me in French tinged with a slight Malabar accent that causes his speech to be slightly clipped. I ask his permission to photograph his students. Immediately, he very kindly calls them. Some stifled laughter. It is an event. Some of the elder girls of about fifteen years of age, run away timidly. I gather together the youngest among them and their various poses are quite natural and unexpected. Then begins a conversation with the school master. He speaks of the progress of his pupils, for whom he has a deep attachment, and also of the difficult future for the boys who remain in the colony.

Happy children, in spite of all! That is what I think when taking leave of this good school master. If their life is difficult later on, they will have had a peaceful childhood, joyous and untroubled under the great palms of Mahé, beside the immense open sea, for all their present poverty. They will keep the remembrance of the long-ago happy days and it will be for them a fragrance sweetening the anxieties of their mature lives.

While these thoughts are running through my mind, I suddenly find myself again on the little square, near the Residency. Indian compatriots are occupying some of the benches and are chatting tranquilly among themselves, as they do each day, while gazing out over the ocean. I install myself on an empty bench and my eyes also are drawn towards the immense moving expanse, to the great waves breaking over the coral reefs. The tide is coming in. It swells the waters of the river. I watch the manoeuvres of a fisherman. Standing naked in water reaching to his waist he bends to and fro with a beautiful gesture throwing a net, which he then draws in and lets fall on the beach. It is full of sardines. On another part of the beach, some half-

naked little girls, their hair ruffled by the sea wind, are picking up sea shells. On my left, behind the palms, the Coast of Spices coils round and plunges down towards the South of India, towards Calicut, Cochin, and far, very far, towards Rameshwaram, Ceylon....

I am alone now in the square. Far over the ocean, on the horizon, the golden disc climbs down the sky in the faerie of the evening. The great palms become purple. The river, ablaze in the red radiance, is shimmering with a myriad ripples of fire. Everything is glowing. The coral reefs between the waves, seem to be flames surging up from a deep-sea city, inhabited by Agni, the god of fire. An apotheosis splendoured by thousands of red rays. Suddenly, under Nature's invisible hand, all is transformed and turns to green-orange, mingled with soft mauve. It is the sacramental hour, the hour of recollection, where the Mother, the sacred Heart of all things, shows herself in her infinite compassion and love.

Mahé the Silentious falls asleep, peacefully, cradled by the song of the restless surge and fanned by the wind's cool breath fragrant with jasmine and cinnamon.

....In the clear night, under the vault of palms, I climb the route and wend my way towards the house of the friends where I am awaited. Another magic extends over Mahé. Through the fronds of the coco palms, lattice the silvery rays of the moon and the sparkling stars of the East. From the huts and bungalows, little lights twinkle out over the leaves of the banana trees. In the silence can be heard the flute-like laugh of a child and the crickets' tricksome tune, accompanied by the eternal song of the wind and the sea.

C's kind friends receive me with effusion. They live near the big square in a house half-colonial and half-European. In a large room on the first floor, with astonishment I see on the walls some old lithographs representing President Carnot, Loubet, and.... Queen Victoria. What a mixture! But, I am told that the grandfather of the family was for many years the mayor of Mahé.

Everything has an explanation.

In a pleasant atmosphere, we enjoy a delicious meal, composed of cooked bananas stuffed with raisins, rice with curry, chutnies containing the strongest spices of Malabar. After dinner, the two little girls sing, in their pretty voices, Hindu songs celebrating the glory of Vishnu and Krishna, accompanied by a cithare.

At our departure, this hospitable family puts into our arms a parcel containing a tea service carved by the father in coconuts and encircled with silver.

... Goodbye, Mahé the Silentious ! In the car taking us back to Tellicherry, I turn round to see it for the last time. It is sleeping, dreaming, under the stars, cradled by the waves and the wind. Tomorrow, it will awaken under the green palms to the twittering of joyous birds.

It is the last day, alas ! at Tellicherry. ~~Tomorrow~~ is the departure for our long voyage.

This morning, another swim. Then, errands to the bazaar and preparations : trunks, beddings, provisions for the journey . . . . At this moment, we have just finished lunch, a lunch in the preparation of which Gopal the cook surpassed himself. C. is lying on a sofa and we are both sipping coffee which has grown on the slopes of the Blue Mountains.

But, here is the cobbler, he is bringing me two pairs of shoes made to measure in two days. They cost three rupees the pair and will last for years. It is for nothing. Now, it is the proprietor, a huge Mussulman still young. He is bringing us some gifts: a beautiful silver cup and a superb Malacca cane surmounted with a buffalo horn. How generous these people are. It is true that the presence of C. is largely responsible for it.

Before dinner, we return to the Club. We wish to see the Coast of Spices for the last time. From under the white colonnade of the veranda, we look out over

the Arabian Sea. In a few weeks, we shall be ploughing through its mighty swell. Today, it is still more beautiful, more blue, more caressing. The rocks, the island and the coast are fringed with white spray. The late afternoon air is incomparably sweet. In the joyous bays, the coco palms bow graciously, as if to salute this earth of abundance which yields its spiced perfume. At the foot of the promontory, seagulls are skimming exultantly over the foam-flecked waves.

Sometimes—not always—Nature can really stanch our moral wounds. It seems as if we ought to be able to feel her nearer to us. Respecting her, she would come to us and give us hope, confidence in our energies, lift us above the uglinesses, help us to forge a better humanity, in whom beauty would shine over the world, as this beauty here around us which enchants and which is manifested afar—even to the horizon, over the Coast of Spices....

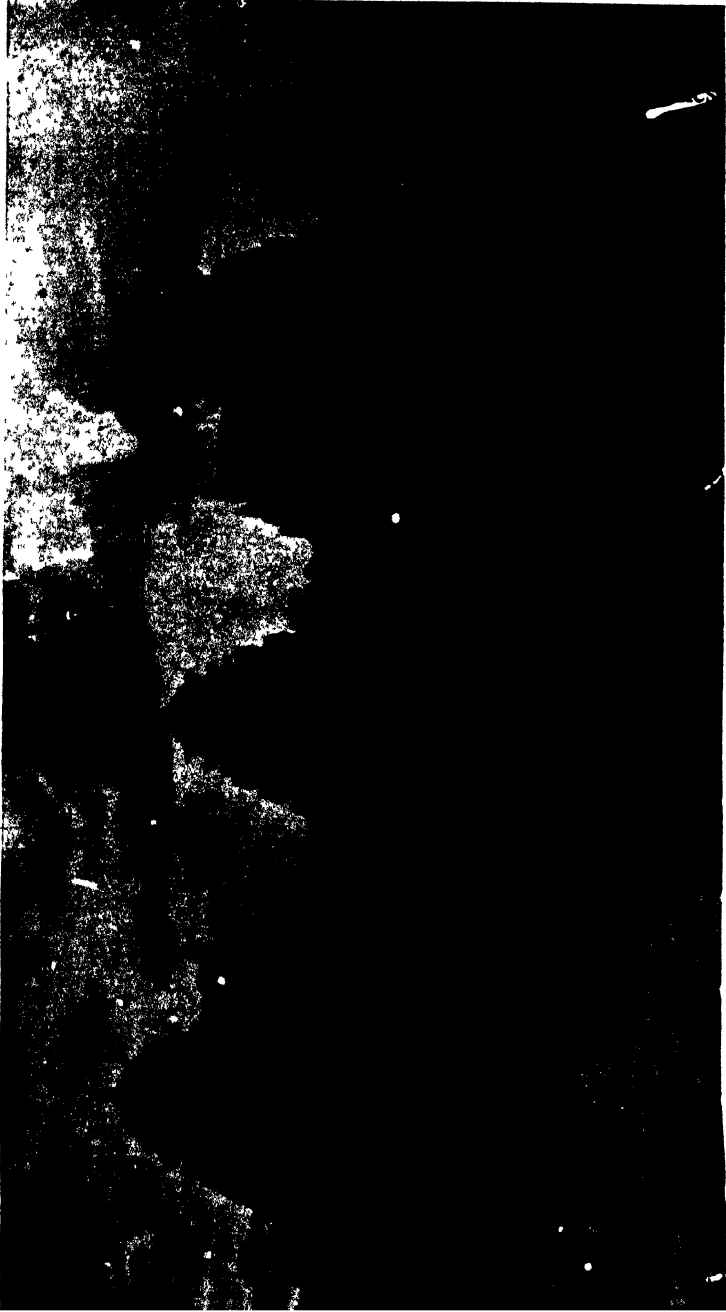
## CHAPTER XVII

### THE FLUTE OF SHRI KRISHNA

**W**E are speeding along towards the temple of Somanathpur. I close my eyes an instant in order to review in thought all that we have seen since our departure from Tellicherry. So many things have passed in rapid visions during those two days.

At first, at C's bungalow, there were the touching goodbyes of the servants, the employees; the car full of bananas, pineapples, cakes, gifts to the wanderers that we are. Then, mounting the *ghats* into the immense jungle on a delicious early morning freshened with fragrant dews, we thence traversed the State of Coorg where tigers and wild elephants hold their sovereign dominion. We left them to their solitary combats. Afterwards, we crossed on a bac—with much emotion on account of the car—a river swollen by monsoon rains, and thence arrived at one o'clock in the afternoon at Mercara, a little town situated at an altitude of about 6,000 feet, from where we obtained a beautiful view over the mountains and plains.

We had our lunch on the edge of a bank to the accompaniment of a concert of cocoos and grasshoppers, and then started off again in the midday heat in order to arrive late that same evening at Belur. The next day, we visited its beautiful temple, as well as that of Halebid. These temples are pure marvels of Hoysala architecture. There is not an inch of stone that is not sculptured with an art pushed to the extreme. The ceilings of Belur and of Halebid are admirable with scenes from the lives of the gods. On the West side of the temple of Halebid, a Shiva dancing and another Shiva with his tambour are arresting by the life and rhythm in their movement.



Somanathpur Temple





Now, as we are spinning along towards Somanathpur, all these pictures of temples class themselves in my mind with the country passed through. My mind becomes a lovely album whose pages I have only to turn.

The route that we are following is as pastoral as could be wished. Villages built of beaten earth standing in the middle of palm groves; rice fields; hills covered with green foliage; the inevitable bullock-carts jogging along loaded with straw; women carrying on their heads large baskets filled with stalks of sugar cane.

A little lake on our left and soon after we arrive at Somanathpur. It is the 29th August and a burning hot afternoon. I have special reasons for hastening to visit the temple. Today is Krishna Day. Ever since this morning, my thoughts have turned towards a deep, moving subject of meditation.

“The Day of Krishna!” It is a special day in India. A very great fête. All the devotees of Shri Krishna, and there are millions, celebrate this day with solemnity. It is at Mathura, in the North of India, that the great fête takes place, because there is the birthplace of the Lord. But, in the temple of Somanathpur, I know there will be a statue of Krishna and before it I want to recollect myself and think of the “Mysterious Lord.”

Apart from a few Hindus who are strolling through the great court of the temple, we are the only visitors. The deep silence of the noonday heat reigns, silence broken only by the joyous calls of swallows and by the wind swirling under the stone vaults.

In the middle of a quadrangle, surrounded by a gallery with sculptured pillars, stands the temple. It is in the same Mysorian style as Belur and Halebid. Although it is of modest dimensions, it is certainly the most symmetrical and the most finely sculptured of all the temples in this style.

The temple dates from the 13th century. It is built on a stone platform, to which one gains access by a few steps, and is surmounted with three pyramidal towers

that are veritable jewels of architecture. From top to bottom, the whole temple is an *orfèvrerie* of rather a lace-work in stone. On the base, outside, are sculptured epic scenes from the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Above, the gods and goddesses of the Hindu Pantheon are sheltered by a canopy or by parasols. One can never weary of looking at this beautiful sculpture which reveals the patience and the skill of the artists of that epoch.

Inside, the temple is rather sombre. A surprise. I am brought to a standstill before a stone image of Janardana that I certainly never thought to find here. It is one of the names given to Krishna and signifies "He whom humanity adores." He is standing and holds a sceptre in each hand.

However, it is not that particular figure, beautiful as it is, that I want to contemplate. It is another. I peer into the shadows, admiring the ceiling on which Rama is represented in the attitude of blessing Sita, who holds a sceptre in her hand, and then I perceive in a cellule on the South side of the temple a stone figure, barely distinguishable in the gloom, which nevertheless attracts me. It is the one.

Shri Krishna stands in his classic pose of such infinite charm, playing on his flute. He is in the centre of a sculptured portico; his right leg is crossed over the left one, his feet are bare, his ankles are encircled with jewelled anklets; his hips, slightly inclined, are covered with adornments; his two hands are poised over his flute in the gesture of a flutist, the fingers resting on the holes of the instrument, of which, unfortunately, a part is missing; his lips are half-open, as if in process of taking breath; necklaces are entwined around his neck and descend upon his naked breast; his head is crowned with a diadem. An admirable sculpture, of which the face is imprinted with a superhuman and serene beauty. Yes, it is Govinda, the divine Shepherd, thus called because he passed a part of his youth among the shepherds.

How moving is this evocation of the great Avatat

of Vishnu in this solitary temple through which howls the great wind from the plains! Still more moving on this day of days when the Hero of the Mahabharata is revered in millions of Hindu homes.

I move back a little and sit down on the carved base of a pillar so as to be better able to contemplate the statue. A whirring of wings sweeps over my head; it is a bat which I have disturbed. In the dim light, the figure and its gestures stand out still more strikingly. From it radiates an atmosphere of limpid peace. It seems, even, as though I am going to hear in a rapture, like the Gopis, the shepherds of old, in the lucent forest glens, the sweet melody of the divine flute, prelude to the *Rasa* dance....

A passage from the *Vishnu Purana* comes into my mind. I transcribe it here:

*“Krishna, observing that the heavens were illumined by the autumn moon and that the air was fragrant with the scent of the wild lily, in whose chalice the bees were humming, desired to join in the Gopis’ games... Thus it was that, surrounded by them, Krishna thought that a beautiful autumn night illumined by the moon was favourable to the Rasa dance. A great number of Gopis imitated the actions of Krishna and they roamed about reproducing what he had done. ‘I am Krishna’ said one, ‘look at the elegance of my movements.’ ‘I am Krishna,’ said another, listen to my song.’ ‘Wait miserable Kaliga,’ said a third, clapping her hands as if in defiance, ‘because I am Krishna.’ . . . . At last the circle was formed. He took them all by the hand, one after the other, and led them to their places.... Then the dance commenced, accompanied by the music of their bracelets clinking against one another and songs celebrating the delights of autumn. Krishna sang the autumn moon, the source of sweet radiance, but the nymphs could only repeat the praises of Krishna.... They followed him in all his movements, fashioning their own on his. Every instant spent far from him appeared to them a myriad of years. In spite of the commands of*

*their husbands, their brothers, their fathers, each night they went to play with him. Thus it is that the Being without limits, He whose goodness excludes all human imperfections, takes the form of a young man among the wives of the shepherds of Varaja, scattering among the shepherds and their wives his essence which is disseminated like the wind, for in the same way as the elements of ether, fire, earth, water, and air, are contained in all creatures, so Krishna is present everywhere and in all things."*

What errors, what foolish comprehensions have been amassed around this dance called Rasa and the games between Krishna and the shepherdesses ! When it would have been so simple to see that in the legend Krishna is represented astronomically and that he symbolises the Sun, around which gravitate the planets and the signs of the Zodiac under the form of the Gopis. It is the same signification in the case of the dance of the Amazonas around the priapic image, as well as the dance of the daughters of Silo (Judges **xxi**), and also that of King David before the Ark of the Covenant. It is the zodiacal progression of man in the manifested universe.

Putting aside discussions, useless for the most part, as to whether Krishna is a myth or an historical figure, I want to think only of what he represents, remembering that myths are often truer than history.

Krishna ! Name so often repeated by millions of beings, what does it not represent ? He is the man who was born about 5000 years ago, who lived as a god among men, his brothers, and gave them the teachings of immortal wisdom, the light which could guide them, as well as the generations of the future, through the dark *Kali-Yuga*, the Black Age, full of horrors, which commenced for the world at the very moment of Krishna's death.

Krishna has many aspects. He is the man become, by his own efforts, more than a man. He is the man who is, at the same time, the divinity, the power of life, the symbol of all the *Nagas*, past, present, and future, the

Sages of all times. So he is truly, says Hindu philosophy, the Instructor of all men. He commenced to give his teaching, the teaching of all ages, on the *Kurukshetra*, the historical battlefield, and symbolical battlefield of ~~the~~ the field of duty.

Before this image, I find myself murmuring some verses from the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the book which is, as said Emile Burnouf, "probably the most beautiful book which has ever come from the hand of man." Other thinkers have also said that it is "the book of humanity."

• It is true. Because, the problems raised in the *Gita* are the problems of every age. If Krishna, in his discourses, addresses his disciple Arjuna, it is because Arjuna represents humanity. We are all like Arjuna. We all have our mind troubled by our egoism. In our bitter enjoyment of life, we lose sight of the path of duty towards ourselves, towards our brother men, towards our nation, and our race. Our cowardice, our great fear of responsibility, our pride, our hypocrisy, our hate, blind us. Happy are we if there remains within us, no matter how few, some noble aspirations, because then we can say, as did Arjuna, to Krishna: "I ask thee, what is it better for me to do? Tell me that distinctly. I see nothing that could assuage the grief which drieth up my faculties, even though I were to obtain a kingdom without a rival upon earth, or dominion over the hosts of heaven." (*Gita II*)

From the divine lips of the Lord fell one by one the answers to the questions of Arjuna, the questions of humanity. Each answer enables us to consider life in its true light, stripped of the veil of our illusions. This is the reason why it can be said, without any exaggeration, that the *Bhagavad-Gita*, signifying the "Song of the Lord," is a declaration of the Rights of regenerated Man. The *Gita* is the drama of life. It gives us the solution to the problems which are preoccupying us.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* is *par excellence* the Book of Democracy; that is what gives it its peculiar radiance. It

is not necessary to be a great scholar on the subject to perceive this. It unites all men in the same Principle which "resides in all hearts." If Krishna makes no distinction between races, castes, sects, he also shows us how men, nations, can sink in the typhoon of unchained passions.

*"Men of an infernal nature do not know emanation and return; purity is not found in them, nor order, nor truth".*  
(XVI)

*"They say that there exists in the world neither truth, nor order, nor providence; that the world is composed of phenomena struggling one against the other and is nothing but a game of chance. They deliver themselves up to violent reactions and are the enemies of mankind."* (XVI)

To what must we aspire? Such is the supreme question. The *Gita* answers that man must conquer liberty by the acquisition of virtues the most divine.

*"Courage, purification of the soul....knowledge,....temperance, meditation, integrity,*

*"Non-violence, truth, sweetness, compassion for all living beings, peace of heart, modesty,*

*"Force, patience, purity....such are, O Bharata, the virtues of him who is born to a divine heritage."* (XVI)

The message of the *Gita* is a universal call to Democracy, liberty for the peoples, liberty for each individual. The great affirmation of the *Bhagavad-Gita* is that every individual, whatever he may be, rich or poor, can and must raise himself on life's path and that he has a right to his emancipation, social, intellectual, and spiritual.

*"Even if thou wert the greatest of all sinners, thou shalt be able to cross over all sins in the bark of spiritual knowledge."* (IV)

Such is the solemn declaration of the essential principles of democracy. Not a single being is excluded from

the conquest of liberty. The philosophy of the *Gita* places this principle in the light: that nobility of heart is not the heritage of a caste, of a favoured self-styled *élite*, but the heritage of all men, all women, without distinction of race, creed, colour, or of social condition. Birth, family, religion, race, do not determine an individual's rung on the ladder of life; his own qualities, alone, denote his degree of evolution. Every human being has a right to happiness; the path of happiness is for all. Its end is peace.

In the *mêlée* of the world, millions of beings are precipitating themselves, as much in the hope of appeasing their physical hunger as their soul hunger, towards issues which are but cut-throat, competition, pitfalls, snares. Whereas, in reality, all in the great combat are aspiring but to liberty and peace. We juggle with these words, we play with them, and so they remain forever cold, far-off stars, inaccessible. In the words of the great Hindu philosopher, Vivekananda, in the last century: "It is better to die on the battlefield than to live a life of defeat! The entire universe labours. Why? For liberty. From the tiniest atom to the highest beings, all work for the same end: liberty of body, liberty of mind. All things strive to escape enslavement.... Work is inevitable, but we must work for the highest goal."

Work, action, in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, is that which ought to be undertaken by every being. At its base is our spiritual regeneration, as well as that of the whole of humanity. This has been pointed out by all the *Nagas*. It is contained in the *Sermon of the Mount*, in the message of the Buddha, in all the Scriptures. Without this regeneration, what is the value of life?

When one considers the world, immediately there come to mind the words of Krishna:

*"As the flame is surrounded with smoke, so is the world surrounded with passion." (III)*

But in the soul which is wearied with seeking itself

springs up the ardent desire to chase away the thick clouds of smoke in order to discover the flame of the world, the light which warms and enlightens hearts, the radiance of brotherhood.

*"The purified man sees the soul residing in all living beings, and all beings in the soul, when his own soul sees the identity of all the parts." (VI)*

What a long way has yet to be travelled towards the realisation of this universal solidarity! But, for every nation, their safeguard is and will be, more and more, the recognition of this universal, intangible, link which unites all beings. The *Gita* demands of a people, not to renounce itself as a collectivity, but to be *what it is*, its own peculiar genius, its beneficent, genial light; in a word, to manifest its divine radiance. To manifest this divine light is the work of nations, as well as of individuals. It is to become a cristal, pure note in the universal gamme of the world. That is the goal of life, according to the *Gita*. All the rest is but shadows and nightmares.

Life is a drama only when one considers it from the brutal side of matter. It becomes a most beautiful poem of love and liberty when man is pacified. He then soars aloft to the summits of Joy. He incarnates the free Laugh of life. He has become compassion, the law of laws, compassion for every living being.

*"As he has mastered his mind by effort, the man purified of his stains perfects himself through numerous births, and enters at last into the supreme way.... He attains the eternal, imperishable dwelling." (VI)*

Before reaching these summits, man, the pilgrim, must strenuously climb the narrow path leading up to them. Meanwhile, when the heart is too heavy, when sorrow is too great, when doubt falls like a leaden cloak over daily life, there comes the sweet and mysterious music of Shri Krishna's flute. Like the harmony of the *Gandharvas*, the celestial musicians of Indra's court, it



melts the clouds amassed during the black hours, it brings a divine message of confidence and hope. It is as a shield extended with love over the exhausted pilgrim's head..

....In the temple of Somanathpur, the stone figure looms out from the shadows. A ray of light rests on the face of Krishna. Above the wind of the plains swirling under the vaults, it seems to me that the flute of Shri Krishna sings melodies on this day of fête, the glory of life, the dawn of a new world, in the eternal verses:

*"Know, son of Pritha, that I am the pure fragrance of the earth; sound in the air; in the fire, its splendour; life in all beings; continence in ascetics.*

*"I am the virtue of the strong, exempt from passion and desire..*

*"I am the sacrifice, adoration. I am the offering to the dead.*

*"I am the way, the support, the lord, the witness, the resting-place, the refuge, the friend".....(IX)*

Oh ! Govinda. The Friend !

May we find, we also, the resting-place, the refuge, the friend who guides and inspires our life !

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE REGARD OF A SAGE

**A** BURNING noon. Starting very early this morning, we have switchbacked for hours and hours over immense dried, scorched plains.

Now we enter a region somewhat less arid. From our oven-like car, we can see palm groves scattered here and there and pretty, tranquil ponds covered with flowering lotus.

We leave the main route and branch off to the left, along a road furrowed with ruts. Some miles in advance of us, we see two solitary rocks towering up from the plain. On the crown of the right-hand one rises a gigantic statue, dominating the whole of the surrounding region. On the other rock is another sanctuary. Between these two masses of rock, there nestles a cluster of houses. It is Shravanabelgola, to which we are going to visit its Jain temple.

The road, bordered with aloes and coco palms, gradually becomes more smiling. Some flowing streams, and immediately luxuriant green foliage appears. Then come the first humble dwellings of the village, little low ochred huts.

In the torrid atmosphere, we go to inspect the right-hand rock, up which we shall have to climb. An enormous rock of basalt, about 700 feet in height, on whose summit stands the Jain temple and its giant statue. At the foot of the rock is the sacred tank with stone steps descending into the water. The head of the statue can be seen from the road.

Here, we are in a great centre of pilgrimage for the Jains of India. But today, the streets are silent. It



. **The Monolithic Gomateshvara at Shravanabelgola**



is the calm life, too calm perhaps or too dead, of little Indian townships. The few passers-by look at us in surprise. Visitors are not numerous at this season of the year.

We reach the foot of the great rock on the right and are immediately assailed by some young people, coming from I do not know where, who are anxious to sell us photographs of the temple and its statue. We look with an apprehensive eye at the mass of towering rock and finally, without courage under this sun of fire, we refuse for the time being to climb, barefooted, the five hundred steps leading up to the temple. We prefer to wait until later on in the afternoon.

After this heroic resolution, we regain our car, parked in the shade of a clump of trees, and swallow rather half-heartedly some of our picnic provisions. In this furnace, one's appetite marches *rallentando*. Moreover, in the air, vibrating under the rays of an almost vertical sun, the flight of the crows and vultures circling around the rocks seems even more ponderous than usual.

Overcoming our drowsiness, we make a tour of Shraavanabelgola. It is two o'clock in the afternoon. Deep silence. Suddenly, a strange sound rings out: some blows struck at regular intervals on sonorous metal. The noise stops and then recommences. We cast an indiscreet glance through an open door into a dwelling and discover the cause. It is the hammering of the copper-smiths. Beautiful vases with graceful forms are made here, as well as trays, coffee pots, temple lamps, cups, on which are designed with precision the history of Rama and Sita, of Shiva, Vishnu, *Nagas* neighbouring with Hamsa, the celestial swan laying a golden egg in virgin space, symbol of the birth of a universe, and other images of gods. All are thus hammered out each day on copper vessels which are then sent to the various villages and towns to be displayed in their bazaars.

When the hammering, which is not too nerve-shaking, stops, nothing is heard in the silent little streets but the cawing of crows and the call of vultures. Then, the

strokes ring out again. Each man works in his own home. No factories here. It is the triumph of the artisan.

We roam around for an hour and, at last, decide to climb the five hundred steps mounting to the temple. Up, up we go, barefooted, the whole of the rock being considered sacred. Oh! suffering to the soles of one's feet.

In the measure that we ascend, the hammering of the coppersmiths diminishes. It seems no more than the tiny tapping of birds' beaks on the tree-trunks.

During this painful ascension, we pass under a stone lintel sculptured on one surface with the image of Lakshmi and on the other with two elephants. While we climb and the view extends more and more over the little town, hemmed in between its two rocks and sheltered under green palms, I think how holy the ground is on which we are treading. It was here, at Shravanabelgola, that three centuries before our era the great Emperor Chandragupta Maurya, grandfather of Asoka, retired to a solitary retreat after taking a solemn vow of absolute renunciation of all terrestrial affairs. One can still see the cave where he lived the remainder of his life as a contemplative ascetic. As in so many other places in India, the prodigious life of the Maurya dynasty stands out in its majesty. It follows you as a leitmotiv powerful, with wisdom.

Here we are, at last, on the terraces on which the sanctuaries of the Jain temple are built. The view over the plains is marvellous, with great rugged hills rearing up on the horizon. A young monk, with head shaved and clothed in a white robe thrown over one shoulder in ancient fashion, comes to meet us. He is congenial and purity shines in his eyes. He is going to guide us in our visit to the temple which is shelved on terraces of the rock.

The first sanctuary is elegantly colonnaded. On a rock in front of it rises a little pavilion in the form of a tower of which the construction is very curious, the cen-

tral pillar being suspended in such a way that one can pass a handkerchief under its mass.

Mounting up twenty-five more steps, we come to the principal sanctuary of the temple. At the entrance, above the porch, are two sculptured elephants which are brandishing their trunks over a saint sitting cross-legged like a Buddha. The ensemble of the temple is of medium proportions, not the dimensions of the great Jain temple of Mount Abu. What silence reigns under the arcades ! And, happily, a little coolness too ! Some coco palms which have grown up in the exterior court give this sanctuary a smiling aspect that harmonises well with Jainism, a religion made up of sweetness and charity.

Our young monk, calm and rather silent, leads us into the interior court. And there, all at once, without transition, comes the impressive vision of the gigantic statue of Gomateshwara, the Jain saint. Gomateshwara, son of Vrishabha, is one of the twenty-four holy personages, the Tirthankaras, who raised themselves to the summits of wisdom; the last one being Mahavira, a contemporary of Gautama the Buddha.

Larger than a statue of Ramses, this one of Gomateshwara rises to more than 65 feet in height. It is carved out of a single block of stone and, under the hand of an unknown artist of the tenth century, its rough surface has become a remarkable work. Gomateshwara stands absolutely naked, his arms hanging beside his body. Climbing plants are coiling round his thighs and arms. The face is the calm face of a sage. The upper part of the body, from the waist to the top of the head, is under the open sky and rises above the roofs of the temple. We mount by a staircase on to the terraces in order to make a tour of the colossal statue and, at the same time, obtain the view extending over the immense switchbacking plains. During great pilgrimages, when thousands of Jains flock here in crowds from the South, the statue is anointed with oil perfumed with jasmine and incense, and the arcades are illumined with copper lanterns.

In this temple, everything radiates candour. It is seen in the elegant simplicity of the architecture, in the perfection of details of the ornamentation; it also hovers indefinitely over the body of Gomateshwara, as over the face of the young monk who guides us and who speaks with such fervour of his religion.

Although Jainism is more ancient than Buddhism, there is a certain similarity between these two religions derived from Hinduism. The Jains deny the existence of a personal god but believe in the periodicity of the Universe and in the evolution of the soul through the law of successive incarnations. They say that the Buddha was the disciple of one of their holy Tirthankaras. This is the reason why there is nothing astonishing in finding statues of Buddha in their temples.

Our fervent young Jain narrates to us the life of Mahavira, who was the teacher of Jainism. He was born at Kundagrama in the Deccan in the sixth century before our era. In conformity with a vow formulated by Mahavira in one of his last incarnations on earth, he remained, with his parents until the end of their lives. Meditative, silent, he then asked his brother's permission to become an ascetic, which was granted to him. For a number of years, he meditated and studied and became in his turn a *Jina*, a vanquisher of the world. Until his death at the age of 72 years, he preached his doctrine which resumes itself in this: the man who does no wrong to any other being, or to any living thing, attains the supreme peace of Nirvana, the peace between man and his brothers, the peace between man and animals, the perfect fraternity of all that lives.

And the young monk recites a Jainist scripture (*Uttaradhyayana*):

*“Living beings of every kind must not be beaten, nor treated with violence, nor maltreated, nor tortured, nor killed. And I tell thee, the Arhats (Sages) of the past, present, and future, all say this, declaring the same thing, expressing themselves thus: ‘Living beings of all kinds must not be killed, nor*



*tortured, nor hunted. This constant, eternal, permanent, and true law has ever been taught by the Wise Men who understand all things.'"*

In the silence of the cool galleries surrounding the Gomateshwara, to which we have descended, we think of these madmen, these barbarians of Europe, who kill, pillage, and, like wild beasts, carry away millions of individuals, who assassinate entire nations under the pretext that the individuals are Jews and that they, the masters, have need of "vital space!" . . . . We think also of all those crimes of history, crimes so often repeated, wars, inquisitions, slavery; of the daily slaughter of millions of animals for the nourishment of brother-man; and we ask ourselves with anguish, as every Jain, every real Hindu or Buddhist would do: what will be the destiny of the men and the nations capable of all these crimes? How far we are from this Jain doctrine of *Ahimsa*, of *real* non-violence, which in reality is love and wisdom! . . . .

One may laugh, perhaps, at these Jains who breathe through a veil of muslin so that nothing living may be absorbed by their lungs; one may smile, also, to see them avoid killing a fly, drinking only filtered water, eating only vegetable food for nourishment, abstaining completely from wine and alcohol. Yes, one may smile at certain naiveties, but at the base of their doctrine there are teachings that we might do well to hold and apply in our own lives. They would develop in us a great respect for Nature; they would liberate us from sad hate; there would spring up in us more compassion for every living creature.

It is with regret that we leave the young monk. After saluting us in the Hindu manner—joining his hands and passing them from his heart to his forehead—he disappears into the network of galleries, serene, self-controlled, silent, and reserved.

. . . . In the little town nestling at the foot of the rock, the coppersmiths' hammers are now silent. The hush of

the swiftly-falling twilight extends over everything. Nothing disturbs the cool evening breeze but the flight, less ponderous now, of the crows and vultures and the gentle twittering of the birds who are recounting endless stories to each other in the coco palms of the temple.

A shadow grows in the sunset; it is that of the giant statue of Gomateshwara the Sage. He has been there for centuries. He gazes out over the plains and perhaps . . .  
..men ! . . .

## CHAPTER XIX

### HAMPI—THE "CITY OF VICTORY"

**A**N active government, a prosperous city. Such is Vijayanagar, the "City of Victory," the cradle of the Empire of that name, and also the ancient capital of the feudal princes of the Hoysala dynasty. It was afterwards named HAMPI.

Every morning, in the dazzling sun, the people begin their work. The city hums with activity. The bazaar is rich and abundant; on each side of its broad main street, merchants are seated on plaited mats in their shops displaying their wares before the crowds of buyers. Some are spreading out rich silks sheened with blue, gold, or red, or stuffs in which are mingled orange and the tender green of rice fields; others are extolling the elegance of their copper vases, the flavour of luscious fruits, the fine chiselling on their silver girdles, the exquisite fragrance of their perfumes. All eyes are attracted to the rare jewels, emeralds, sapphires from Ceylon, pins for saris, bracelets, rings. There are also garlands of jasmine and roses for the temples. In the air floats an odour of spices. Little chiselled bells ring in silver-like or deep tones. Then, there is the money-lenders' corner, alas! where the lenders gravely count out their piles of money. In another corner are exhibited pious images in wood representing Rama, Sita, Hanuman, the monkey-god, Krishna, Radha his well-beloved, Vishnu, Shiva, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ganesha, the elephant-headed god. All the gods and goddesses are there, as well as the great Educators. They live among the people, they came from the people, they have acted for them, they have given them rules for obtaining happiness, they have shown the people Nature's immutable laws, the means of raising themselves

above *samsara*, the ocean of births and re-births, so as to enter at last into the realm of *Sat*, eternal Truth. Yes, they are there, the gods and the Educators, present in the memory of all these people.

It is a splendid sight to see such a crowd on this radiant morning. The birds are carolling, parrots screeching, crows cawing, with the joy of living. The big, ardent black eyes of the women, clad in their multi-coloured saris, look tenderly at their laughing children; the men, their bodies like copper, have a brave, confident air; and the sacred cows roam peacefully about, swinging their great horned heads, stealing here a fruit, there a stick of sugarcane, completely deaf, or indifferent, to the shouts of the tonga drivers. It is the crowd of India, the one of all time.

It is good to live at Vijayanagar. Intelligent princes, uniting comfort and beauty, have made the town a remarkable city. We go towards the great artificial lake, sheltered between two hills, whose waters irrigate the rice fields in the surrounding plains, as well as the vast parks and flower gardens.

How gay the crowd is! Some elephants are advancing majestically, flapping their great ears; they are the sacred elephants of the temples, they have just come from their morning bath and feel satisfied and refreshed. We have been told that there is going to be a great fête this afternoon, the fête of the Serpents. So much the better! We shall thus be able to witness the magnificence of a great Hindu festival in honour of a famous cult whose origin is lost in the night of time. But before it begins, we have time to visit the town. It is, doubtless, the prospect of this fête which is enchanting everybody.

Coming back to the bazaar street, we perceive at one extremity the *Nandi Bull*, the sacred bull, with its imposing stature. On our way to visit the great temple, we pass under the Scales of the King, a stone portico under which is suspended an enormous pair of scales. The weight of the King, seated on one side of the scales, is measured in gold and precious stones placed on the other side. This measure

of wealth is afterwards distributed among the poor.

Following a narrow shady path, we come to the city's most beautiful temple, the temple of Vitthala, dedicated to Vishnu. This immense edifice is raised on a stone terrace richly sculptured with royal horses, its three entrances opening on the East, North, and South, are thronged with the incessant coming and going of the faithful accomplishing their devotional gestures of offering garlands to the divinity. The steps leading to the vast hypostyle hall are balustraded with enormous stone elephants. On each pillar, hewn out of a single block of granite, are carved gods and goddesses, and their massiveness is lightened by delicate colonnades. From the richly sculptured ceiling, hundreds of bats are suspended, indifferent for the most part, to the movements of the faithful going into the sanctuary.

In the great court is the *māṇḍapam* or covered hall, in the same style as the temple. It contains a canopy in the centre to shelter the god and goddess during the annual ceremony of their marriage, which is celebrated with lavish pomp.

Before the temple stands the chariot for carrying the divinities during great fêtes. Generally, these chariots are of sculptured wood but this one has a speciality: it is of richly carved stone. The entry to it is guarded by two elephants, nevertheless the whole block gives an impression of extraordinary lightness.

We leave the temple with some regret in order to visit the centre of the town. We take a path following the windings of a wide river, which is bordered with banyan and mango trees and is delightfully cool and shady. At a turning of the path, after again crossing the bazaar street, we catch sight of the characteristic silhouettes of some Jain temples situated on the slope of a hill. Then we come to the temples of Krishna and Rama. All the principal personages of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are united at Vijayanagar. On the North-East of the temple there is a pillar bearing a bas-relief representing Vishnu under the

form of *Avatar-Kalki*, the Messenger of Light, mounted on his white horse, as he will appear to humanity at the end of the *Kali-Yuga*, the Black Age, bringing concord among men.

We come now to a more silent quarter. What are those towers before us and that little palace over there in the Indo-Moresque style? We ask our guide. It is the *Zenana*, the *Lotus-Mahal*, the palace of the beautiful princesses. What grace in this princely dwelling supported by lofty pillars! On the only floor, open little windows, each with a wooden shutter. Not far from the temple of love is the princesses' swimming pool. The surrounding towers are reserved for these beautiful visitors who can thus see over the town without being seen by the crowd.

A far-off trumpeting brings us back to other realities. Everything is so surprising in this town! A group is forming before a long, tall building surmounted with stone cupolas. These are the famous stables of the sacred elephants, or rather the tall stalls, numbering eleven. Their keepers are very busy because the animals must be prepared for today's fête. Heavy gold draperies, palanquins with light little colonnades, are placed on the backs of the elephants who balance them somewhat impatiently.

Time is flying. There is so much to see! We return towards the centre of the town where the crowd is becoming more and more dense, and the temperature, at the same time, growing hotter. We look rapidly at the Queen's bathing pool, built in the same style as the *Lotus-Mahal*. From there we come out on to a vast square containing the Terrace of the Throne, a massive construction in granite on the base of which are sculptured processions of warriors, elephants, horses, camels, and *Apsaras*, dancers of Indra's court, whose movements represent the gestures of the gods. On this terrace is a throne of solid gold, the seat of the King when he is viewing the prestigious fêtes of the court.

Suddenly, from the beginning of a street, music bursts forth. It comes from a long procession which is advancing preceded by musicians either playing on instruments re-

sembling long clarionets, or beating on tom-toms or silver cymbals. Banners embroidered with the swastica are suspended like canopies along the streets. The fête of the Serpents has begun.

The thresholds of the Hindu houses are decorated with the emblem of the day. *Nagas*, serpents, are represented everywhere. Brahmans carry in their arms statuettes in gold or silver on which the serpent-god is carved in relief. Enterprising beggars are carrying large baskets of live serpents from house to house, so that devotees may feed them on the threshold of their homes and thus bring happiness and prosperity to their families.

The animation is intense. Many villagers have come from the environs of the town, because, according to custom, one must not dig the ground on this sacred day for fear of killing a serpent by accident. Moreover, no fruit, no vegetable is gathered or dug up, nor is any tree cut down, the *naga*, the serpent, being closely linked to the spirits of the trees and the earth.

The music continues untiringly and the procession, swelling more and more in proportions, winds slowly onward towards a hallowed spot outside the town. All the streets are decorated with flags. Here come the elephants, their keepers gravely perched on their necks, from where they direct their steeds with a click of their tongue. In the palanquins, with curtains drawn, are—one guesses—the princesses robed in beautiful saris of silk and gold and fragrant with the most rare perfumes.

The crowd moves on without haste, opening in order to let the tongas pass, in which are squeezed whole families or fat Brahman bourgeois unable to walk for long and for whom the length of the route would be exhausting. Near us are walking some beautiful young girls, their lovely round amber arms encircled with gold bracelets. One of them is wearing a green sari bordered with silver thread, another is clothed in night-blue, another in yellow spotted with blue, still another in red spangled with gold. The play of the sun's brilliant rays on these different colours,

each the chosen fancy for the day, and on the gaily decorated streets, resembles the dazzling palette of a wizard artist.

Following the crowd, from which exhales the pervasive odour of jasmine, one sees the image of *nagas* everywhere. They rear upward on all the temples or shelter with their heads the figures of gods. In Vedic times, at the dawn of our Aryan race, the serpent was considered sacred, especially the cobra. It was king of the soil, the guardian of treasures, the one who kept vigil over the magic stones.

A man nearby, following the procession, is chanting a *mantram* from the *Yajur-Veda*:

*“Homage to the serpents !  
Move they on the earth,  
Be they in the air or in the sky,  
Homage be rendered to these serpents !*

*“Be they arrows of wizards,  
Or of spirits of the trees,  
Or repose they in holes,  
Homage be rendered to these serpents !*

*“Be they in the brilliance of the sun,  
Be they in the rays of the sun,  
Have they made their dwelling in the waters,  
Homage be rendered to these serpents !”*

And the invocation continues in rhythm with the man's pace. Symbols! Symbols! reminding us of the presence of the great Saviours of the race. Where their presence shines in the hearts of husband, wife, children, they are the protectors of that home; they are the guardians of the magic stones of knowledge; they ever keep vigil, in their great renouncement, over the progress of humanity.

Symbols empty of sense for some, perhaps. What does that matter if, in the slow circling of the centuries, there are some beings who discover the Sages! “A Mahatma is difficult to find,” said Krishna to Arjuna. Every great soul is found with difficulty. Here, in India,



as elsewhere, charlatans are numerous. Woe to those who go to these showmen of apparitions! Woe to those who assume a title which does not belong to them by right, by the nobility of their character!

Wisdom is an alluring sea whose surf and reefs are dangerous. The sirens of islands beneath the sea often light, say the fables, beguiling fires in order to attract into their caverns travellers such as we all are. Happy are those who fix their eyes on the solitary beacon kindled by the true Sages, whose eternal flame will never be extinguished. Symbols of divine truth have not been invented for the amusement of the sceptic or the ignorant; they are the Alpha and Omega of profound and philosophic thought. Those who find the real Sages, and not the showmen of acrobatic feats, those who try to become at least a little lamp in the sanctuary of the One Truth of the ages, become in their humble sphere servitors of the race; they lift up for themselves and for others a corner of the heavy veil of matter which hides that which is from all eternity; they learn, in their turn, to give self-confidence to the disinherited of life. Moreover, they have realised that they can, they also, raise themselves to the path trodden by the Predecessors, the Elder Brothers of men.

On the faces of all these men and women of India taking part in this fête, on the serious faces of the children who open their big, velvety eyes wide in order to see the procession better, shines an expectation, a hope—and I think that in all the far-off crowds of the West there is also this expectation, this hope—the expectation and hope to see appearing other beings filled with love and knowledge, pure enough, courageous enough to be wise leaders of the peoples and to guide them towards a destiny of true liberty, a destiny free of fear, horrors, massacres, famines; a destiny where love will be joyous and sane in the certitude that these new men, profiting by old errors, will make it possible for the future generations to advance along the great route of humanity in a procession of joy and light...

each the chosen fancy for the day, and on the gaily decorated streets, resembles the dazzling palette of a wizard artist.

Following the crowd, from which exhales the pervasive odour of jasmine, one sees the image of *nagas* everywhere. They rear upward on all the temples or shelter with their heads the figures of gods. In Vedic times, at the dawn of our Aryan race, the serpent was considered sacred, especially the cobra. It was king of the soil, the guardian of treasures, the one who kept vigil over the magic stones.

A man nearby, following the procession, is chanting a *mantram* from the *Yajur-Veda*:

*"Homage to the serpents !  
Move they on the earth,  
Be they in the air or in the sky,  
Homage be rendered to these serpents !*

*"Be they arrows of wizards,  
Or of spirits of the trees,  
Or repose they in holes,  
Homage be rendered to these serpents !*

*"Be they in the brilliance of the sun,  
Be they in the rays of the sun,  
Have they made their dwelling in the waters,  
Homage be rendered to these serpents !"*

And the invocation continues in rhythm with the man's pace. Symbols! Symbols! reminding us of the presence of the great Saviours of the race. Where their presence shines in the hearts of husband, wife, children, they are the protectors of that home; they are the guardians of the magic stones of knowledge; they ever keep vigil, in their great renouncement, over the progress of humanity.

Symbols empty of sense for some, perhaps. What does that matter if, in the slow circling of the centuries, there are some beings who discover the Sages! "A Mahatma is difficult to find," said Krishna to Arjuna. Every great soul is found with difficulty. Here, in India,

as elsewhere, charlatans are numerous. Woe to those who go to these showmen of apparitions ! Woe to those who assume a title which does not belong to them by right, by the nobility of their character !

Wisdom is an alluring sea whose surf and reefs are dangerous. The sirens of islands beneath the sea often light, say the fables, beguiling fires in order to attract into their caverns travellers such as we all are. Happy are those who fix their eyes on the solitary beacon kindled by the true Sages, whose eternal flame will never be extinguished. Symbols of divine truth have not been invented for the amusement of the sceptic or the ignorant; they are the Alpha and Omega of profound and philosophic thought. Those who find the real Sages, and not the showmen of acrobatic feats, those who try to become at least a little lamp in the sanctuary of the One Truth of the ages, become in their humble sphere servitors of the race; they lift up for themselves and for others a corner of the heavy veil of matter which hides that which is from all eternity; they learn, in their turn, to give self-confidence to the disinherited of life. Moreover, they have realised that they can, they also, raise themselves to the path trodden by the Predecessors, the Elder Brothers of men.

On the faces of all these men and women of India taking part in this fête, on the serious faces of the children who open their big, velvety eyes wide in order to see the procession better, shines an expectation, a hope—and I think that in all the far-off crowds of the West there is also this expectation, this hope—the expectation and hope to see appearing other beings filled with love and knowledge, pure enough, courageous enough to be wise leaders of the peoples and to guide them towards a destiny of true liberty, a destiny free of fear, horrors, massacres, famines; a destiny where love will be joyous and sane in the certitude that these new men, profiting by old errors, will make it possible for the future generations to advance along the great route of humanity in a procession of joy and light,

While I dream, we arrive at a quiet place outside the town. In a cool, green glen shaded with palms and mangoe trees, the procession stops. The music is silent. From the crowd emerges a group of young girls and women who proceed to the centre of a circular space where stones carved with figures of serpents are standing. In the silence, the clinking of their anklets and bracelets sounds like the ringing of aerial bells. The adoration of the serpent begins. While Brahmans recite *mantrams*, powerful invocations to the *Nagas*, the women spill milk over the stone serpents. This ceremony is of great beauty. The gesture of the pouring out of the milk is one of incomparable grace. A sacred gesture with sacred thought. The spirals of incense ascending into the air are as many vows forming in all hearts. Near the stone serpents are two trees which have married: a fig tree and a margosa.

It is over. The *mantrams* have ceased. The music starts again and the crowd files past the serpents. The fête is still in the air, it is in the rays of the setting sun, it is in the flag-bedecked streets of Vijayanagar, it is in the stones of the temples where the gods are watching. It is, above all, in the souls of these people.

I climb the slope of a wooded hill in order to enjoy the view. I recognise, on my left, the terrace of the Throne, the bathing pool of the Queen; on my right, the Lotus Mahal with its graceful form, the elephants' stalls, the towers of the Zenana; and before me, in the distance, the street of the bazaar, the temple of Vishnu, the temples of Rama, Krishna . . . .

But . . . I have dreamed ! . . . I must be the unconscious prey of a magician, a *dugpa*. Sorcerers are so powerful here ! . . . I pass my hand across my eyes. What do I see ? . . . Ruins . . . ruins, all around me is a heap of ruins. It is not possible. I am mad, or else it is the heat of the sun, the fatigue of the long day ! . . . But no, I am wide awake . . . Ruins, ruins ! I can see the temples quite well with my field glasses standing there, still beautiful in their

majesty. I can even distinguish their sculptures. But all are in ruins! Over there is the bazaar street but it contains nothing but carcasses of stone, stained red by the glow of the sunset. Everywhere is desolation. . . . There is no fête, no laughter, no music, nor songs. The elephants trumpet no more. There are no flags. The crowd, men, women wearing gay saris, children. . . . where are they? There are no dwellings, no happy homes. . . . all are eviscerated. But they, the beings, the sons and daughters of men, the devotees, the gods? . . . The princes, chiefs, the king, queen, princesses? . . . The human river, where is it? . . .

Over Vijayanagar, there planes nothing but silence and the cawing of crows. Vijayanagar is dead. Ancient Vijayanagar, the "City of Victory," is nothing but a graveyard where are buried the hopes of men, where are entombed the spiritual values of a whole past glory. Only the grass and the plants are alive. The fire of man has destroyed all.

The 23rd January, 1565, the great battle of Talikota began. On one side, the Hindu armies who defended the town; on the other, the Mussulman troops. To begin with, the warriors of India seemed to win. But suddenly the Mussulmans, who waited for the attack, uncovered six hundred pieces of heavy artillery which were massed on three lines and hurled forth shells and terror. At the same time, thousands of horse-soldiers dashed forward to encircle the valiant warriors defending the Hindu city. Arrows flew back and forth from one side to the other, sowing death everywhere. Masses of enemy elephants, barbed with iron lances, crushed the wounded Hindus and even the dead. In the city, the King seated on his gold throne, distributed treasures, jewels, to encourage his men. The women moaned and wept, the children hid themselves within the dwellings. Outside the town, the river was transformed into a torrent of blood. The forces of Vijayanagar defended the city superbly. For three days

the atrocious carnage raged. More than a hundred thousand *cadavres* covered the ground. The King of the "City of Victory" was taken prisoner. For three days, they struggled step by step, inch by inch, the Hindu warriors being gradually forced back into the streets of the town under the avalanche of the invaders. By the evening of the third day, the town was dead. The Empire of Vijayanagar had crumbled in massacre, in pillage, in the violation of women and girls, in the horror of violence, cupidity, and hate.

Since then, for four centuries, HAMPI, ancient Vijayanagar, has been dead, wrapped in a shroud of silence.

While visiting the ruins, my mind evoked, according to records, the long-ago happy days, the rich and prosperous city, the fêtes (that of the serpent is also celebrated in modern India), the crowd, the sweetness of living, the temples, all that constitutes a procession of happy years. Now, before us, rise the gaunt spectres of what was once beauty and happiness. The lake is dry, the crevassed hills are bare. Trees grow with difficulty here and there. Only the river, clear again, rolls its waters between chaotic rocks. Nevertheless, what imposing buildings can still be seen amid all the heart-breaking ruins! It seems that the beauty of Vijayanagar will not die. The roofs of some of the temples have fallen in but the pillars bear witness to the sculptural riches of a glorious past. Here is a portico, a gallery, a ceiling intact; there, an admirable sculpture representing the birth of Brahmâ, some bas-reliefs, some towers. . . . What rare treasures to contemplate while wandering melancholically through the temple of Vitthala, of Krishna, Rama; when visiting the enclosure of the Zenana, the Lotus Mahal, the elephant's stables! But the ancient dwellings, the homes which sheltered happy families, all have disappeared in the tempest.

All that for what? They had believed, these people of long ago, in the Nagas, the Wise Protectors. They had active and capable administrators. But human faults, sooner or later, must be paid for. Their leaders had, with-

out doubt, also raised their souls towards the Sages, but did they practise the ideal in their own lives? Did they bend towards the people to listen to their heart? Let us leave to destiny, to the law of cause and effect, Karma, the care of answering these questions which belong to all time. .

Oh! the lesson of Hampi is engraved in its stones. It is history. Just as in Europe the millions of soldiers lying beneath the green grass of the fields are the witnesses to men's folly. Nations, empires, rise up along the routes of Time. They radiate their light for an instant, a century, fifty years! . . . Then, great tides of hate overwhelm in a few days, a few months, these ephemeral civilisations, without any force in the world being able to prevent their destruction. A *Naga* of last century, one of those great Beings who live unknown to the crowds, was right in saying:

*“No human power, not even the force and power of the highest patriotism, has ever been able to turn the destiny of iron from its fixed course, nor prevent nations falling into the darkness of decadence, like torches plunged into water.”*

Whose fault is it? Man's. Where is the remedy? With men. The lighthouse of Truth eternally sweeps the rough, surging ocean of human life. It is for men to turn their eyes towards this beacon which points out the way to follow. It is the Fire of the Spirit which never destroys, which always builds within us the “City of Victory.”

## CHAPTER XX

### HYDERABAD THE MUSSULMANA

**T**ORRID territory, great parched plains which are waiting for refreshing monsoon deluges to make them green again. From time to time, an isolated tree stands up. We roll along for miles and miles without seeing a village. The route seems endless.

We started this morning from Hampi *en route* for Hyderabad, which we shall not reach until tomorrow evening. Tonight we shall sleep at Kurnool.

After traversing Bellary, its hill burned bare by the blazing sun, we come to the country of mirages. We look out for some, but all in vain. Mirages are like pretty women, they like to make themselves desired.

Along this monotonous route, we doze with one eye. Hullo! A little hill surrounded with water. Water without green foliage! Strange! I shut both eyes. My thoughts stray towards haunting Hampi. Exclamations from my travelling companions. "The hill, the hill!" they cry. I look at the hill which is still there. But the water, where is it? Evaporated! So, I missed the mirage—at least a part of it. I decide not to close my eyes again. I open them wide and watch, I force myself to look at a straight road with bare plains on each side. I almost murmur: "Water, water! A mirage, a mirage!" It is curious how we love illusions.

A sheet of water right over there on the left! This time, I keep the mirage in sight so as not to let it escape me. It appeared suddenly, like all mirages. Yes, one would certainly say that there is water over there, a little lake. Oh! it is far away on the plain, but when we arrive on a level with it. . . . Where is it? It has disappeared as sud-



denly as it came.

Mirages are terrible. They are all the same: interferers and promisers. They interfere between you and the truth, they promise much and only leave disappointment. They are like the fruits of the Dead Sea, they fall into ashes as soon as they are touched.

I shut my eyes for good. I do not want to see any more mirages. One sees too many of them, we carry them within us, we create them eternally. Entire peoples are exploited by political or religious mirages. The whole world is a prey to mirages. Hampi! Hampi! Poor Hampi!

I shake myself and take a little book for the use of *lanoos*, disciples in certain temples of Tibet who seek knowledge. I read:

*“Alas, alas, that all men should possess Alaya, be one with the great Soul, and that possessing it, Alaya should so little avail them !*

*“Behold how like the moon, reflected in the tranquil waves, Alaya is reflected by the small and by the great, is mirrored in the tiniest atoms, yet fails to reach the heart of all. Alas, that so few men should profit by the gift, the priceless boon of learning truth, the right perception of existing things, the knowledge of the non-existent !*

*“...Learn to discern the real from the false, the ever-fleeting from the everlasting. Learn above all to separate Head-learning from Soul-wisdom, the “Eye” from the “Heart” doctrine.*

*“...Soar beyond illusions, search the eternal and the changeless Sat, the unique and eternal reality and truth, mistrusting fancy’s false suggestions.”*

....While I philosophise in my corner of the car, we arrive at Guntakal, where the railway for Madras branches off to the North and the South. We lunch in the buffet of the station, drinking ginger-ale, a drink that is truly thirst-quenching when one has crossed deserts.

Six o'clock in the evening. We arrive at Kurnool, a rather important town with large, pretty, shady squares. At the post office, we find a packet of letters coming from the Nilgiris.

In the dak-bungalow, after dinner, I write an article for the *Hindu* of Madras. Then, exhausted, we fall asleep in spite of a bed of boards, mosquitoes, and a traveller in the adjoining room who snores like an airplane engine.

The next day, we make our departure by train. Impossible to proceed by road to the frontier of Hyderabad State. Reason? No road. We must either go by rail or make a considerable detour by road, which for lack of time we are unable to do. There is no choice, so we have the car put on the train.

...Mahbukna, the frontier of the Mussulman State. Three o'clock in the afternoon. Unloading of the car, customs. Change of scenery—red fez, faces with beautiful beards. A council of war in the office of the customs employee. A charge of three hundred rupees will be made for allowing the car to pass the customs. We refuse to pay it. The employee, rough and rude, refuses our refusal. We threaten to send a telegram to the First Minister of the Nizam of Hyderabad, whom we do not know. Another council of war, further discussions, lasting over an hour. Finally, the car is allowed to pass. We pay nothing at all. It is the East—its rind.

*En route.* With our tyres, we tread the soil of India's Mussulman State. It is getting late and we want to see Hyderabad at sunset. We are obsessed by this idea and are determined to see the last rays of the setting sun shining over the town, over the minarets. So, we ask our dear car to make a great effort to put on speed. She is, however, very tired after her thousands of miles, poor thing!

The country is fairly green, fields of maize and rice. The people seem to be more robust in the Mussulman country. Saris have disappeared, or nearly so. The

women wear a becoming little blouse of various colours, between it and the skirt, the waist is bare. Some cavaliers pass us on Arab horses. In the villages, we glimpse above the tangle of trees, the minarets of humble mosques.

We spin on, on, on; the sun is already sinking behind us. It is six o'clock. The first rays of the setting sun are tinting the fields and villages with rose, red, and green.

At some crossroads, we have a true vision of Islam: a Mussulman peasant turned toward Mecca reciting verses from the Koran.

Ah! What pretty Moresque bungalows built along the side of a hill! We are now in the suburbs of Hyderabad. It is almost seven o'clock. Quick, hurry, a few more turns of the wheels! The route coils round a hill. Again, white houses half-hidden under trees.

Hyderabad, at last! The vast city is enveloped in a cloud of gold, sprinkled with mauve and orange. What a magnificent scene! Its minarets soar into the magic of the sky and its white houses and terraces are tinted with the ever-changing hues of the sunset. One minute they are rose, then they become mauve, afterwards the whole city is encircled by a red-orange halo.

Some minutes later, we are among the crowd on the borders of the city: noise, music, burnous, fez, an odour of musk, camels with their proud heads held high.... Thousands of lights twinkle out. Evening falls over a city of Islam.

The next morning at our hotel, we are awakened by murmurs in which the word Allah frequently occurs. A Mussulman in the neighbouring room recites his morning prayers.

The view from our window extends over the white city, still more dazzlingly white in the brilliant morning sun. Mosques, minarets, rise above green masses of trees and the terraces of the houses make gleaming white spots against the green foliage. On the horizon, a ridge

of hills stands out, along which run the battlemented walls of Golconda. This legendary stronghold, containing fabulous treasures, was destroyed long ago by the Mogul Emperor Aurengzeb, a descendant of Tamerlan. On the right, some domes can be seen; they are the tombs of Golconda's ancient sultans.

It is strange to feel that one is in India and, at the same time, that one is not there. The memory of Hampi haunts me.

After a splendid breakfast—a change for us from the often frugal and hasty meals of the dak-bungalows (ô mirage of good café-au-lait, boiling hot ! . . .)—we start off for a stroll at random through the capital of the Nizam, the reigning prince in collaboration with the British delegate.

The streets and the wide white avenues swarm with light little carriages, buffalo carts, men wearing a fez or a turban, with the bearing of dervishes or great Arab rulers, children who are not at all shy but decided and noisy.

Women are rather scarce in the streets and everywhere there floats a mystery of zenanas. Moreover, many of the shops advertise: "Articles for Zenanas." Poor Mussulman women, of course, walk; they are entirely veiled in a cloak of fine white material, in which a lattice hangs before their eyes in order to allow their brilliance to shine through. If they belong to a rich man they drive about in old landaux with the blinds drawn down. For medium purses, the landau transforms itself into a simple and uncomfortable tonga. Here comes a little carriage with a roof of plaited straw bent down to the hubs of the wheels. On the front sits the lord and master, an old Mussulman with a white beard, his forehead furrowed with worries. He drives the pony. Behind, as in front, a drawn blind hides from indiscreet eyes his precious feminine cargo. The master is taking his wives for a promenade. The carriage moves along slowly and we, who are walking on the pavement behind it, see the curtain suddenly fly up under the skilful push of some pretty ringed fingers, followed by delicate wrists encircled with bracelets, vanguard

of bare amber-coloured arms. A second, a flash of lightning, the curtain is lifted and, O sacrilege! four unveiled faces, eight brilliant black eyes, send us smiles that would turn pale the most beautiful houri of Mahomet's paradise. The husband, the lord who, as always, is unaware of anything, jerks on the reins in thinking of the vanity of the world. Mirage! Mirage!

The palace of the Nizam, surrounded by high walls, is situated in the upper part of the town. Beyond is Secunderabad, the English town with villas reminding one of the suburbs of London. We go back to the centre of the town.

On the pavements are groups of men with multicoloured turbans. They sit there with their legs and feet bare and make....lace. They consent, laughingly, to have their photographs taken. From behind the moucharabies which overhang the streets, we feel the magnetism of hidden eyes....

We are now in the very noisy principal street. The *Char Minar*, with minarets at its four corners and a monumental gate in Arab style, stands in this street. The minarets look over the great mosque which we are on our way to visit. This mosque is very beautiful, with arcades, domes, and minarets around which are flying clouds of white pigeons.

The whole town is full of discoveries and unusual scenes. Here is a fountain surrounded with camels; there a palace, wrapped in mystery, standing in the middle of beautiful gardens; then, a park with a sheet of transparent water covered with beautiful rose lotus; afterwards, lanes full of the odour of musk....

But, how amazing are the evenings of Hyderabad! Evenings with a hot, overpowering wind, impregnated with perfumes of Arabia. Evenings when the minarets are white in the moon. Evenings when one hears the music of Hyderabad, songs of the desert, tambourines which stir

up dancing and also . . . mirages. How beautiful are the evenings of Hyderabad the Mussulmana !

The bazaar has elegant little arches of light that glow over sabres with blue glints, Turkish slippers with pointed toes in pagoda form, fez of all sizes, essence of rose, sweets made of rose, amber necklaces, crescent-shaped ear-rings, horse saddles studded with gleaming copper, harness laden with little bells, coloured camel bags, rare, costly carpets. . . Mussulman bazaars are certainly remarkable.

From dim corners of the town float music and the sound of tambourines. Hyderabad sings and dances throughout its languorous nights.

. . . Guided by the manager of our hotel, we go to one of the houses from where this music of the evening floats and where we shall be shown the wonderful charm of Islam.

We are shown into a room with white-washed walls and carpets and cushions on the floor. In one corner, Mussulman musicians are seated on mats, tuning their instruments. The scent of roses floats in the air. Through the lace-worked ogives of the room, we can see the white minarets of a mosque standing out against a blue night sky, an Eastern sky, cloudless, jewelled with stars. Crickets are holding their gay little concert in the walls. I am reminded of the beautiful evenings of Mussulman Africa.

We sit down on some cushions. We are the only guests. A woman comes simply into the room, holding by the hand an adorable little girl, her daughter, whose little nose is adorned with a gold ring. They sit down near the musicians. The music commences. At first, it is a humming, like that of the cicadas in the tall grass. Little by little, a sweet melody develops which with tambourines accompanies the woman's song. She has a rich, warm voice. This Mussulmana is beautiful. She is about twenty-eight years old, tall, with large almond-shaped eyes, robed in a black sari bordered with silver and wearing long amber ear-rings, bracelets on her wrists, and silver

bells around her bare ankles.

Her song evokes long treks by caravan across burning, sandy deserts, evenings and icy dawns under a tent. The rhythm quickens; it is the mounting of the warriors. Then the glissando of Arab guitars evokes a beautiful Emir on the terrace of his palace, reposing after battle beside his beloved Sultana. Finally, it is again the caravan, the immense desert of rose sands... mirages of oasis with cool springs, eternal mirages!

Voice and music have died away. The Mussulmana comes towards us with a smile and asks us in broken English if we are pleased with her performance. We hasten to express our pleasure. Then, she tells us about her life: she comes from Delhi, she is married and has two children, she travels about India and earns her living by her singing and dancing.

The music begins again. Now it is a slow dance: the snake charmer. With skilful fingers, the Mussulmana forms her handkerchief into a cobra rearing up on its tail, which she places on the floor. She then dances round it, chanting softly, charming it with the tinkling of the silver bells on her ankles. Her feet scan the music. She turns, her beautiful supple body bends to and fro, and lastly she falls on her knees. The serpent is fascinated.

More songs, more dances. Islam! Islam with its disturbing beauties, its poetry, its appeal to dream...

On our last morning in Hyderabad, we pay a visit to Golconda. Half-an-hour's drive along a road bordered by green meadows brings us within sight of the donjons and ramparts of the ancient fortress of Golconda standing amid its romantic scenery of granite blocks. Ruins of a mosque neighbour with bastions, embattled towers, cannon balls—souvenirs of long-ago battles, scenes of long sieges, supplied no doubt by the famous treasures of ancient Golconda. Alas! Mosques and cannons! Prayer and war, here as everywhere else. The muezzin's chant from the pinnacle

of the minarets mingled with the wild clamour of the battle beneath.

Instead of these sad ruins, we prefer to wander in the resting place of Golconda's ancient kings which is situated not far from the fortress. Cemetery of Islam! Imposing tombs with great high cupolas supported by arcades of massive pillars. There, under each mausoleum, sleeps a sultan, a famous prince, in the divine sleep of death.

Along the alleys bordered by centenary trees, where roses and jasmine mingle their perfume, and only the song of red birds breaks the peaceful silence, we go from mausoleum to mausoleum. I venture inside one of these tombs. I read the name of a prince which I do not know. Was he a cruel warrior, or perhaps a pompous prince covered with jewels among his adorable wives? Who knows! Or, maybe he was a poet, a mystic, or both at once, as the celebrated Abu-Said; or again, a learned alchemist in the same category as a Geber.

On coming out of the mausoleum, we hear a clear voice ringing through the calm, warm morning air. A man's voice coming from a near by mosque hidden behind a curtain of trees. Sitting down on a bench, we listen to it. It is a religious chant floating on the breeze. The muezzin, doubtless. The tones mount like spirals of blue smoke ascending and mingling with the azure. A prayer to Allah! . . . . I think of the prodigious life of the Prophet of Islam.

Far away in Arabia, in Mecca, there lived a child who was orphaned and left with an inheritance of only three camels. At the age of twenty-four, he travelled, entered into commerce, married a rich woman much older than himself: Khadija. After the marriage, years of solitude passed, full of the inner struggles which only prophets experience. Nothing is known about his solitary years of meditation. One day, he heard within him the "Voice." It revealed to him his mission. He returned to Khadija, his well-beloved. She believed in him, she had faith in him and she encouraged him to obey the Voice. She became



his first disciple. It was Mahomet's mission. He became the Prophet, "he who is never unfaithful to his word," who taught the way of life where there are no more mirages. He had enemies and civil war broke out but he triumphed. Nevertheless, he, Mahomet, the man "who never lied," lived a simple life, humble, frugal, mending his own clothing, putting the nails into his own shoes, while thousands and thousands of beings bowed before him as before an inspired Prophet.

Astonishing life, above all when one thinks of what was the teaching of Islam. For five centuries, from the 8th to the 13th, from this teaching came the torch of the science, which illumined both East and West. Everywhere schools, universities were founded. Carthage, Cairo, Bagdad, Morocco, Spain and the rest of Europe saw this light appear. Mathematics, alchemy, astronomy, astrology, philosophy, architecture, poetry, agriculture, nearly all the realms of human thought in the West found themselves enriched by this Islamic contribution which had its source in Greece and above all in India.

Although India was invaded by the Mussulmans and suffered from this invasi<sup>o</sup>r, on the other hand one cannot deny that the genius of Islam enriched her in some domains, such as painting, poetry, architecture. Mogul India has left brilliant traces which can still be seen in the museums, the libraries, as well as in the unforgettable monuments of the North of India, at Delhi, Agra, and elsewhere. The great Emperor Akbar, in particular, enriched India by his genius of organisation, so profoundly human and compassionate, genius which in many respects joined hands across the centuries with that of the Buddhist Emperor Asoka. Akbar dreamed of the unity of India. All his efforts were directed towards that end. To realise this unity, how numerous were the attempts made by him in whose veins ran the blood of Tamerlan and of Gengis Khan.

Moreover, from the tree of Islam, sprang Sufism, perhaps its most beautiful flower, the profound mysticism which is love, devotion, peace, and brotherhood. "Thou

art the absolute being," cried a mystic, Sufi Jami, "any other teaching is but fanaticism, for in thy universe, all beings are but one."

Brotherhood. Unity. Then, you Mussulmans who live side by side with your Hindu brothers, what could you not accomplish by taking each other's hands in a brotherly gesture? And you, Hindus, who read and meditate on the *Bhagavad-Gita*, do you not remember what Shri-Krishna said? "I am the Soul which is seated in the hearts of all living beings." Is this not an appeal to unity, to brotherhood? Could you not then, you Mussulmans and Hindus, respect each other in practising the verses that you psalmody in your mosques and temples? The goal is high, glorious. It is worth some sacrifices.

....Behind the trees, the muezzin still chants from the pinnacle of his minaret. Thus, while away in the distant Hyderabad the Mussulmana, glitters in the noon-day sun, I think of the word ISLAM.

*Islam:* To submit oneself to the Divine.

## CHAPTER XXI

### TWO TOMBS, THE FAIR IN THE DESERT

**C**LOUDY weather. A hot wind blowing. A veiled sun for the first time since we left the Blue Mountains. We are mounting towards the North West where the blessed monsoon is still refreshing the earth, even during this latter part of September. But we miss Surya, the radiant Sun of the *Veda*, which has shown itself so rarely today. We are tempted to sing the Vedic hymn, hoping that the king of the world may reappear in all his splendour:

*"The great standard of Surya is hoisted,  
It floats in the ocean of air and  
Vivifies all beings.*

*"He rises in the heaven, the gold orb,  
The conquering and brilliant God who  
Casts afar his looks and his footsteps.  
The sun gives life to people who act  
And begin work."*

We left Hyderabad in the early part of the afternoon. It is now six o'clock in the evening. We have already covered nearly two hundred miles *en route* for the famous caves of Ajanta and Ellora, where we shall arrive tomorrow morning, if the devas are propitious to us.

After crossing the great plains of the Mussulman State, we are at this moment in search of a dak-bungalow in which to pass the night. In any case, we are well within the neighbourhood indicated by the Madras Automobile Club's guide to stopping places. Ah! here is a little building on the right. We hail a passer-by on the route. Happily, there are always a few! He makes gestures and speaks

volubly to our "boy" but we do not understand him very well. He must be speaking in Urdu. The diversity of dialects in India is a great difficulty. Here they speak Gujerati, Hindi, Bengali; there Tamil, Urdu, Telegu, Kannarese, Malayalam, and how many others. Here's to Hindi as a national language to unite all hearts and intelligences.

Finally, C. gets out of the car and goes to find out for himself whether the building in question is a dak-bungalow. Sadly, I realise that the beautiful evening hour is no longer glowing with its magic colours.: The horizon is, certainly, a mass of red fire, but that announces wind. Where are the mauves, the greens, the rose of Hyderabad? Far behind us. And those of the South? Still further away, on the Coast of Spices.....

C. comes back making a despairing gesture. It is certainly the bungalow; but.... it is in ruins." There is nothing to do but to continue our journey. In this deserted country, villages are rare and travellers' cottages still more so.

Night falls. We speed along towards a locality indicated in our guide book. For two hours, on we go while the wind beats against the windows of our car. Here come a few houses. We enquire of two turbaned men, chatting together on a little stone bridge. Nothing. No bungalow.

On, on, on, we go through the night. We eat some bananas. Where shall we stop? At Naldrug, perhaps. A dak-bungalow is indicated there. The night is so dark that we can see nothing through the car windows which, moreover, are shaking in the wind. The poor chauffeur is exhausted. As for the "boy," it is all the same to him, he sleeps.

Midnight. The route ascends slightly and it seems as if we are mounting towards a plateau. Some scattered white houses stand out against the dark, cloud-banked sky. We get out of the car and knock at a door. A brave Hindu, still very sleepy, appears on the threshold.

He half understands what we ask him and makes an affirmative sign. • It is certainly Naldrug and it is he himself who is in charge of the travellers' cottage. The devas are propitious.

The bungalow is a nice one. It seems to stand on high ground dominating a plain situated on a slightly lower level. But it is difficult to see anything in this inky night. What a wind!

At one o'clock in the morning, we are tucked into our beddings. Dinner will be for tomorrow. What does it matter! I listen to the great wind of the plains of Hindustan which is shaking our one-night shelter. I see mosques and...in the court of one of them, I perceive a Shiva dancing.... Now, it is the temple of Madura with a minaret looking over the tank of the Gold Lotus.... How strange!.... I am dreaming, doubtless....It would be too beautiful!

Our morning at Naldrug rests us a little after the fatigue of last evening. We shall have to make another long stage this afternoon.

Just as we thought yesterday evening, the dak-bungalow stands on an eminence. This high ground dominates an immense plain with soil the colour of raw sienna, on which stand up a few scattered green trees. The sky is still cloud-covered, even this great wind does not succeed in chasing away the clouds.

We visit the village which is situated lower down. An old fortress in ruins, with dungeons, embattled walls, moats, reminds us that we are still on Mussulman territory. The village stands under the shade of beautiful trees; it has, of course, a bazaar.

In a small square, we come upon a group of women Bandjars: Bohemian nomads. What beautiful women they are, especially one who is a handsome dark type. She is young, tall, clothed in a low-cut bodice made of green, red, and yellow bands and adorned with tiny span-

gles of glass, resembling mica. How picturesque she is in her full skirt, a profusion of necklaces twined around her neck, a ring of gold adorning her nose, long ear-rings falling on to her shoulders, bracelets on both arms reaching above the elbows, rings on all her fingers, even on her thumbs, and her ankles encircled with gold anklets! A large square of stuff, pinned in her hair, falls over her back, the ends of which are lifted and attached to her waist.

This group makes a curious and attractive picture. We photograph them, receiving a wild look from the one whom we have just described. True Tziganes, it is said, are of Hindu origin. Certainly those who are not of mixed race remind one of certain Hindustan types and even their language is similar. From where do they come? Where do they go, these Bohemians in their wandering journeys? They say, perhaps, the *bonne aventure*, or the bad! We must leave them to their mystery.

We remount towards the bungalow. Half-way up the hill, we are attracted by a door in Moresque style opening into an enclosure. We push it. What a ravishing place, full of calm and touching poetry!

We are transported suddenly into a scene of the time of Akbar. Standing in the shadow of some trees, a group of beautiful Indo-Mussulman architecture is unfolded before us; kiosks, arches with delicately lace-worked ogives, crowned by little cupolas and latticed balustrades. In one corner of the enclosure is a humble mosque with minarets turned towards Mecca. In another a pavilion with arcades through which can be seen, stretching away as far as the eye can reach, the plain with its colour of raw sienna. In the centre of the pavilion: two tombs, side by side.

Twin tombs, slabs of broken stone, wild flowers growing in their mossy cracks. Tombs of a sultan and sultana.

She and He ! One stone is finely sculptured and the half-effaced Arabic inscriptions are still visible. Beneath the arcades breathes the wind of eternity. She and He ! always together throughout the revolutions of time. She was doubtless his inspiratrix, as are so many Mussulman women, as was Khadija to Mahomet. A cool breath of air, softer than silk, a seed-idea which sparkles, and femininity fructifies the Well-Beloved. He works, creates and achieves. She and He, lying here side by side. They lived, perhaps, the wonderful life of living souls, aflame, with the light which enlightens, living souls who never die, who soar upwards without faltering on the way of realisation, the way of their love, living souls aureoled with nobility. She and He ! . . .

What a strong, sweet impression radiates from these two Mussulman tombs, side by side facing the plains of Hindustan swept by the eternal wind !

Noon. We start for the long stage. Goodbye Naldrug ! Farewell twin tombs !

For hours, we advance in the teeth of the wind along a road bordered with aloes. A breakdown stops us for an hour and then off we start again. The sky is lowering, the sun absent, the air heavy. The plain becomes a desert, scattered with the dark spots of a few clusters of trees. No habitation.

An exclamation from our companions arouses us out of our drowsy reverie. On our right, a whole herd of wild deer are leaping across the desert. They bound along, the noble animals, in a wild gallop towards the North West, fleeing from hunters or leopards. It is certainly not we who will stop them in their flight. We spin along at full speed in order to follow them. But they outstrip us crossing the route far in advance and then fading into the colour of the desert.

Two hours before sunset, in the far distance before us we glimpse a mass of white specks dotted over the desert.

What is going on? As we advance, we can see the specks moving. A mirage? No. An enormous crowd assembled in the desert. Empty bullock carts are standing along the route: a prodigious activity.

We stop and get out of the car. Our boy makes enquiries. It is a bazaar of a day, a fair which takes place every month, or perhaps every year. We mix with the crowd. There are Mussulmans, in majority, some Bohemians, and also many Hindus. What colour! in spite of the grey sky. Mussulman women, barefooted, astride the zebus, from whose painted horns red pompons are swinging, are preparing to depart. Whole families are grouped around their ancestral chariot with its enormous wheels. One old man, at the head of his beast, is leading the whole of his huge cart-load. He is not pleased about having his photograph taken, so he puts his fingers in his nose. These poor families come from far distances in order to sell a little millet, rice, plaited baskets.... Saris and turbans mingle in a sea of colours.

Objects for sale are displayed on pieces of cloth or even on the sand. There are quantities of the most various things: eggs, bamboo flutes, pins, pious images, seeds, mirrors, necklaces, fruit, little copper cymbals, vegetables....

At a nearby pond, almost dried up, the zebus go to drink while the men, women, and children bathe their feet. Music bursts out. It is the dancers of the fair who are dancing and shaking light cymbals in the form of *castagnettes*, while musicians play on flutes and on long primitive clarionets. These dancers are good. A well-timed rhythm, almost martial, to which they bend their knees, their busts, in perfect equilibrium. Then leaps, worthy of Russian dancers, lift them into the air, followed once more by the staccato march. This lasts for a long time and the crowd laughs with delight.

Then, the carts begin to pack up, families leave, crammed in between the two high wheels which creak and grind as they turn slowly on the way. They are



going back to their poor, far-off villages, happy nevertheless because of this rare and unexpected diversion. A moment of pleasure!

It is growing late. The day is sinking. We regain our car, followed by some men and youths who, with many smiles, bid us goodbye.

....When we arrive at Chancela, a little village lost in Hyderabad State, it is very late. Although there is a strong wind blowing, it is beginning to rain. Rain! What a disagreeable sensation in this country of the sun! It rains great drops, real drops, which transform into a deluge.

We take refuge in the dak bungalow, which stands in the middle of a field. What a dark, wet night! The rain tambourines on the roofs. The wind blows through the great trees. On the plain also, it is raining in torrents and blowing a gale. The poor folks of the desert fair will be soaked *en route*.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE TRIPLE REFUGE

**A**URANGABAD at last. We ought to have arrived early this morning but it is now five o'clock in the afternoon! A terrible journey through a tempest, torrents of rain falling without a break. We are in the heart of the monsoon. Then our supply of petrol ran short. We found a gallon or so in a village hospital and so have arrived for good or ill, more ill than good, at this town on the borders of Hyderabad State in the proximity of Ajanta and Ellora.

Owing to a special permit, we shall stay at the sumptuous dak-bungalow reserved for "officials," situated on a healthy plateau near British headquarters, but swept at this moment by monsoon tempests particularly abundant and terrible. The Indian servants certainly take us for generals in mufti. They give us military salutes, so military that we believe we shall be metamorphosed suddenly into great conquerors worthy of Tamerlan or Gengis Khan.

The view from the plateau is limited by great isolated mountains and huge bare, frowning rocks, drowned in the rain.

We start out to find a post office, carefully descending the road leading to the town which nestles in the valley. Another serious break-down stops us. Impossible to advance. I take a tonga and remount on to the plateau in order to seek help while C. and A. remain with the car. Thanks to the extreme kindness of an English officer, Major L. a military car is sent to fetch our car which can be repaired at the headquarters camp. But it will take two days. I cannot tell you how more than

kind Major L. and his charming wife, a French woman, have been to us. And their reception of an evening was simply delightful.

The following morning, we obtain information about the departure of the omnibuses going to Ajanta. Very bad news. The route is impracticable, the waters of a river having swollen to a torrent and endangering the surrounding country. Since yesterday, buses and cars have been stopped.

We are struck with consternation. So we shall not be able to visit Ajanta, the Buddhist sanctuary containing the celebrated frescoes which are unique in the world! Then, we will go to Ellora which is also a pure marvel and which we also want to visit. • Major L. very generously and kindly puts his chauffeur and car at our service, besides giving us an authorisation to visit on our way the fortress of Daulatabad.

• We set out under a sky slightly more serene, the gale having scattered the clouds. We shall have a long afternoon in which to roam through the marvellous caves of Ellora.

We speed along towards the great sombre mountains barring the horizon and contrasting sharply with the greenness of the plain which for three months has been absorbing diluvian rains. All is fresh and the trees are wearing springtime colours. Before the pass mounting through the ghats stands a tall isolated rock: it is the fortress of Daulatabad. For neighbour, it has a beautiful solitary minaret. As at Golconda, prayer and war, side by side. From the time of the Crusades, it has been the same. Humanity hardly changes. The whole of this great rock, from the base to the summit, is a mass of ancient casemates, underground tunnels, ramparts, moats containing deep treacherous waters, galleries hollowed right out of the rock. Almost a Gibraltar. From this fortress, the view is wonderful.

Rearing up before us are the great mountains that we are about to cross on our way to Ellora whose ancient caves we are so desirous to see.

The route zigzags upwards, ending on a plateau encircled by still higher mountains. We cross a village where we glimpse the mausoleum of Aurengzeb, the Mogul emperor who succeeded Akbar but who was not able to preserve harmony between the Mussulmans and Hindus.

Then, we descend a gently sloping road. Suddenly, before us appear limitless plains and on the mountain side the caves of Ellora, enormous cells hollowed right in the walls of the rock.

The history of these caves has raised many discussions. If the origin of the excavations is lost in the night of time, Indian paleographers protest when Western archaeologists attribute them to the Buddhists. The theory which holds that all the excavated temples of India are of Buddhist origin does not seem, in fact, to be exact. In the caves at first sight, there appears to be a mixture of Hinduism and Buddhism. However, the history of these two religions shows well that if the second, Buddhism, issued from the first, Hinduism, their cults have never been interlaced. The Buddhists were always opposed by the Brahmans, and even the few Buddhist communities which continued to exist in India and deserted the pure Buddhist teachings, never rallied to Brahmanism, but amalgamated with the Jains and were absorbed by them. Otherwise, it would be necessary to admit that the Buddhists became at a given moment adorers of the gods of the Brahmanic pantheon, but such a theory would be impossible to accept in view of the history, even, of Buddhism. What is conceivable is that Buddhist monks made use of the caves which had been constructed, sculptured, and afterwards abandoned by the faithful of Hinduism and installed in them their *viharas*, their monasteries. Two cults succeeded each other, then, in these tunnelled temples: that of Brahmanism and that of Buddhism. One could say of

Ellora what Monsieuf Grousset so justly said *à propos* of Ajanta; it is "the very synthesis of the Indian soul."

It is true. If at Ellora the Brahmanic element predominates more than at Ajanta, nevertheless it has the souvenir of Gautama the Buddha, the Beggar Prince—one of the greatest among men.

It is not without deep feeling that we cross the threshold of these caves firstly from the point of view of their Brahmanic aspect. Here we are under the open sky before the temple of *Kailasa*, constructed and sculptured out of the rock. *Kailasa*, the dwelling of the gods, in which is seen everywhere the god Shiva, the Destroyer, the Builder. He is there on all the pillars and in all the corners, entrancing in his many and various poses.

However, here at Ellora, Shiva becomes more gentle. In one admirable sculpture, he is beside Parvati, his consort, his Shakti. Ravana the demon is trying to make the mountain on which they are standing crumble and collapse. Parvati, trembling with terror, buries herself against her god Shiva, her friend, her refuge. The whole of this sculpture is supported by an extraordinary *éléphantomachie*. Then further on is the scene of the Kiss, the infinite embrace of two beings, one of the most striking achievements in stone that one could contemplate. In this temple, we do not see the force and cosmic power of life portrayed so marvellously in the *Nataraja* at Chidambaram. Shiva at Ellora has become more human. He has become man. He protects, produces, builds. He is more tender, he shows his love. He lets us have a presentiment of what is coming in the future, a manifestation of Vishnu, an Avatar: the Beggar Prince, the Buddha.

The divine figure of the Beggar Prince stands out more clearly in the measure that we penetrate more deeply the cave monastery, where long ago the monks and faithful of the Buddha assembled. There are no more gods. All is calm, interior. In the great halls buried under the

rock, in the lofty naves formed like overturned boats, a unique figure in stone is sheltered: that of the Buddha or of his predecessors, the Bodhisatvas. What resonance there is here! The least sound gives birth to vibrations which echo and re-echo under the great vaults. It becomes like the chime of a bell: the divine chime which can be heard in the human heart.

*"He who would hear the voice of Nada, the 'Soundless Sound,' and comprehend it, has to learn the nature of Dharana (concentration, meditation)...."*

*"Look inward: thou art Buddha."*

Thus say the Buddhist Writings.

Certainly, an atmosphere of meditation fills these caves, these peaceful cells, which look out eternally over immense plains and which narrate to us the life of the man who became a Buddha.\*

According to Ceylon chronicles, Gautama was born at Kapilavastu in the noble land of the Sakyas, lying at the foot of the immaculate heights of the Himalayas, in the year 621 before our era. His father was King Suddhodana and his mother, Queen Maya.

He was a very thoughtful youth. He often abandoned a game, a race nearly won, in the flowering parks in order to give himself up to his immense dream. His masters, the most erudite in the kingdom, were astonished at the learning of the boy prince—like Jesus on the steps of the temple confounding with his questions the wondering doctors of Israël.

At the age of eighteen, when the stars were favourable, his marriage to the sweet Princess Yasodhara was celebrated. The two fiances seated on the *gadi*, the nuptial cushion, had wedding garlands twined round their necks. When the cake was broken, rice and *attar*, a rare

\*We refer the reader to the beautiful book, the "Light of Asia" by Edwin Arnold.

and subtle perfume, were poured out and both the fiances three times, made seven steps around the fire. Their clothes were linked together, *mantrams* were chanted, alms were distributed amongst the poor, and.... a radiant dream of love commenced.

But a sacred destiny must be accomplished. In the happy palace, when the Prince rested his sleeping head, with his beautiful calm traits, on the amber-coloured breast of Yasodhara, with agony she heard him murmuring words that she could not understand. He seemed to be addressing a universe of men. "I am coming, I am coming," he said. On the terrace of the palace, the breeze swaying the great palms dried the Princess's tears.

One day, Gautama wished to see the town. By order of the King, it was adorned with the most beautiful flowers and all saddening sights were removed so that the Prince in passing might not see any spectacle to cause him sorrow. But while the Prince was passing through the streets, an old man, broken down with old age and illness, emerged from the ranks of the crowd and threw himself at the feet of the Prince asking for his help. Thus was presented to him what he never thought to see: the sorrow of the world.

At last, the hour for his departure came. During a sweet Indian night, Gautama bade farewell to Yasodhara while she was sleeping, her anxious heart oppressing her lovely breast.

*"I will depart," he spake; "the hour is come!  
Thy tender lips, dear Sleeper, summon me  
To that which saves the earth but sunders us;  
And in the silence of yon sky I read  
My fated message flashing. Unto this  
Came I, and unto this all nights and days  
Have led me; for I will not have that crown  
Which may be mine: I lay aside those realms  
Which wait the gleaming of my naked sword:  
My chariot shall not roll with bloody wheels*

From victory to victory, till earth  
 Wears the red record of my name. I choose  
 To tread its paths with patient, stainless feet,  
 Making its dust my bed, its loneliest wastes  
 My dwelling, and its meanest things my mates;  
 Clad in no prouder garb than outcasts wear,  
 Fed with no meats save what the charitable  
 Give of their will, sheltered by no more pomp  
 Than the dim cave lends or the jungle-bush.  
 This will I do because the woful cry  
 Of life and all flesh living cometh up  
 Into my ears, and all my soul is full  
 Of pity for the sickness of this world;  
 Which I will heal, if healing may be found  
 By uttermost renouncing and strong strife....  
 Oh, summoning stars! I come! oh, mournful earth!  
 For thee and thine I lay aside my youth,  
 My throne, my joys, my golden days, my nights,  
 My happy palace—and thine arms, sweet Queen!  
 Harder to put aside than all the rest!  
 Yet thee, too, I shall save, saving this earth;  
 And that which stirs within thy tender womb,  
 My child, the hidden blossom of our loves,  
 Whom if I wait to bless my mind will fail.  
 Wife! child! father! and people! ye must share  
 A little while the anguish of this hour  
 That light may break and all flesh learn the Law.  
 Now am I fixed, and now I will depart,  
 Never to come again, till what I seek  
 Be found—if fervent search and strife avail.\*

Three times, he went away. Three times, he returned. Then, he went out into the night.

Years of search began. For seven years he sought for a remedy which could deliver the world from sorrow. Prince Gautama had become the Beggar Prince. Clothed

\* *The Light of Asia*, Book the Fourth, by Edwin Arnold.



in the yellow robe of a mendicant monk, he went from village to village along the routes of India, his begging bowl in his hand. Over his emaciated body, summers of fire passed and torrential rains of monsoon seasons. And when he passed by, calm and recollected, with the light of radiant dawn in his eyes, all hearts were flooded by a fountain of joy and happiness.

A village in the valley of the Ganges. It is Gaya. Far off, soar the snowy peaks of the Himalayas. Here it is that the Lord obtained his supreme illumination, that Gautama became the Buddha. Seated under a fig tree, assailed by the most diverse temptations, calm, immutable, his interior gaze fixed upon the goal that he sought, his consciousness mingled with the universal Consciousness. He *saw*, he *understood*. Before him unfolded the long pilgrimage of Man through the vicissitudes of birth, death, and rebirth. He saw the goal for man to attain: to become Light, Knowledge, Peace, Love, the four jewels of man become a Man—a Buddha. He communed with the sources of life. He received Nature's kiss, the eternal message that she reserves for every being who asks for it, "Ask and you shall receive." The message of all the Buddhas, all the Christs. He had become the Light, the Knowledge, the Peace, the Love.

His mission commenced. He came back to the palace of Yasodhara and to that of his father. To them all, to his Well-Beloved, to his son whom he blessed, as to all, he showed the way leading to sovereign Peace. Thence, for forty-five years, Gautama the Buddha in his yellow robe paced the great routes of India, delivering his message to the thousands and thousands of beings who followed him, the message contained in his first sermon of Benares.

Oh! these lessons. Who does not feel when reading them or listening to them, even the indifferent ones, a breath of pure wisdom, like a wind coming from very far, from infinite spaces where Time exists no more?..

"The books say well, my brothers," thus commended

the Lord Buddha at Benares, in the park of the gazelles.  
And he continued:

*"Each man's life*

*The outcome of his former living is;  
The bygone wrongs bring forth sorrows and woes,  
The bygone right breeds bliss.*

*"That which ye sow ye reap. See yonder fields!*

*The sesamum was sesamum, the corn  
Was corn. The silence and the darkness knew!  
So is a man's fate born.*

*"He cometh, reaper of the things he sowed,*

*Sesamum, corn, so much cast in past birth;  
And so much weed and poison-stuff, which mar  
Him and the aching earth.*

*"If he shall labour rightly, rooting these,*

*And planting wholesome seedlings where they grew,  
Fruitful and fair and clean the ground shall be,  
And rich the harvest due.*

*"If he who liveth, learning whence woe springs,*

*Endureth patiently, striving to pay  
His utmost debt for ancient evils done  
In Love and Truth always;*

*"If making none to lack, he thoroughly purge*

*The lie and lust of self forth from his blood;  
Suffering all meekly, rendering for offence  
Nothing but grace and good;*

*"If he shall day by day dwell merciful,*

*Holy and just and kind and true; and rend  
Desire from where it clings with bleeding roots,  
Till love of life have end:*

*"He—dying—leaveth as the sum of him*

*A life-count closed, whose ills are dead and quit,  
Whose good is quick and mighty, far and near,  
So that fruits follow it.*

"No need hath such to live as ye name life ;  
 That which began in him when he began  
 Is finished: he hath wrought the purpose through  
 Of what did make him Man.

"Never shall yearnings torture him, nor sins  
 Stain him, nor ache of earthly joys and woes  
 Invade his safe eternal peace; nor deaths  
 And lives recur. He goes

"Unto Nirvana. He is one with Life,  
 Yet lives not. He is blest, ceasing to be.  
 Om, mani padme, om! the Dewdrop slips  
 Into the shining sea!

"This is the doctrine of the Karma....."\*

Then, the Lord taught the four holy Truths on suffering.

*First:* that Universal suffering is.

*Second:* the Cause of suffering. It comes from desire, the deceiving mirages of our desire for earthly possessions. From that comes struggles, concupiscence, wars.

*Third:* Cessation of suffering, by the purification of our desires.

*Fourth:* the Way, the Noble Eightfold Path: pure faith, pure speech, pure acts, means of pure existence, pure application, pure thought, pure memory, pure meditation.

Such is the path which leads to liberation.

And when the Blessed one, lying like a lion on a bed of leaves, prepared to quit this world, he addressed his last words to his faithful disciple, Ananda, and to the others assembled around him in tears:

\* *Ibid.* Book the Eighth.

*"It may be, O Ananda, that you think thus: the World has lost its master, we have no longer a master. One ought not to think thus, O Ananda. The doctrine, Ananda, is the rule that I have taught and preached, there is your refuge when I am gone. Work with diligence for your deliverance."*

The world had lost a Man. But his light remains for ever. By it, the Lord is always present in the spiritual atmosphere of humanity.

Today, two hundred millions beings in Asia—we do not say India, except Ceylon and Nepal—as millions of souls long ago, meditate, repeat, and sing the *Pancha-Sila*, of which the following are the "Three Jewels" or "Three Refuges":

*"Buddham saranam gachami,  
Dhamam saranam gachami,  
Sangham saranam gachami."*

*"I take refuge in the Buddha,  
I take refuge in the Doctrine,  
I take refuge in the Community."*

## CHAPTER XXIII

### HINDU VILLAGES, THE WOMEN OF INDIA

**T**HIS evening, sitting in a room of the dak-bungalow writing these notes, I listen to the raging wind and rain. Tomorrow morning will be our departure for Nasik, the last stage of our journey to Bombay. Afterwards, there will be our final departure, the one for Europe.

The great journey is coming to an end. We shall see no more the temples of Shiva, Vishnu.... We shall see no more the blue pigeons wheeling around the *gopurams*. We shall hear no more the creaking and grinding of bullock cart wheels, nor the click-click of the tonga-driver's tongue....

This evening, before my eyes come scenes of Kailasa, the Kiss, and above all my mind is filled with the marvellous life of the Buddha. I see him still, trudging on foot through the villages of India, clothed in his yellow robe, his begging bowl in his hand, leaving wherever he passed a furrow of love and wisdom. The villages of India! ... He loved them. In a few days, I shall see them no more. Before time can efface the impressions gathered during the course of our long pilgrimage, I want to imprint several souvenirs in my mind so that later on I may be able to turn with precision the leaves of the album called memory. Album of yesterday, album of past joys. Bygone times, a fireside corner, dear souvenirs!...

For the ordinary tourist, a route is always a route. There are villages that one crosses, people whom one meets, and...dust. In India, of course, there are villages, people, and dust. But *there is something more*. The curious

will see nothing or very little. They will say, as the traveller did who was asked his impression on India: "Oh! very pretty, but what dust!"

The Hindu people, do not forget, is essentially a pastoral people. In my opinion, one cannot know India unless one visits her villages. In every country, it is the peasant who forms the armature of the nation and India has not escaped this law. The regeneration of a people must commence in the village. So, let us try to sing the heart-stirring routes of India.

Along the Indian routes, burned by a sun of fire, and during the summer months, refreshed by monsoon rains, all the hours of the day are different and possess an inexpressible charm and power.

At first, there are the exquisite morning hours, fresh and dew-pearled in the green palm groves and in the tangled jungle, filled with its strange noises.

Perhaps it is a village on the route to Mysore, Tanjore, Kumbakonam, no matter where. Under the fronds of palms, through which the sun is filtering, the village awakens at an early hour. Parrots, the bulbul with its marvellous song, colibris with bright or delicate tints, sing in the mango trees their morning hymn to Nature, while crows, swallows, and blue pigeons wheel around the gopuram of the little temple purpled by the rising sun. In the hedges, hop the "seven sisters," strange brown birds which go in groups of seven. It is a joyous concert of whistling, trills, cawing, screeching, and cooing. In the tender green rice fields, herons march about gravely. Monkeys frolic in the branches of the banyan trees or hold mysterious and endless councils on an old half-crumbled wall. In the temple court, peacocks strut about spreading out their moire tails adorned with glistening blue and gold discs. From holes in the trees, heads of lizards suddenly appear and with their supple little bodies they quickly glide away through the rugged bark. From bushes of wild jasmine comes the humming of bees at work,

while large rose and red butterflies hover delicately over the flowers of hibiscus and lantana. What pastoral charm in these villages, nestling under great palms! Humble and patriarchal life of past ages, the same today as it was in the time of Krishna. Exquisite freshness of the early ages, not yet polluted by the lies, egoism, greed, and brutality of modern man. Simple life, certainly too poor and perhaps too isolated for modern times. Poverty is so great in India!

• • Let us go into one of the poor dwellings, built of beaten earth and covered with a roof of dried palm leaves. As soon as dawn breaks, awakening the village sleeping in its deep peace, the man and woman begin their toilet, bathing themselves by pouring water drawn from the village wells over their bodies. In their willow cradles, the babies of India still sleep, naked or nearly so, tranquil, sometimes grave, in their adorable attitudes, watched over by pious images of Shiva, Lakshmi, Saraswati, suspended to the white-washed walls. In one corner, the mats which serve for beds are already folded. Perhaps there is a table, a chair, a glass, a chest, some stuff bought at the bazaar. . . . A vaulted opening leads into the place serving as kitchen, where goat's milk is heating on a fire of twigs or wood. In the air floats an odour of spices and incense. These huts are very poor.

Outside, in the lovely light of sunrise, latticed through large palms, in a hollow corner serving for a humble veranda, the woman clothed in her sari replaces her husband who has been accomplishing his morning religious duties, and there she also lifts up her thoughts towards the object of her devotion: Vishnu or Shiva or Ganesha. Then, with joined hands passing from heart to forehead, in a gesture of offering, she salutes the divinity of her heart. Religious routine in which, unfortunately, enters superstition upheld severely by the Brahmans. During the course of the morning or the afternoon, they will go to the temple to place a garland of jasmine at the feet of the god or goddess.

While the woman remains at home to look after the children or goes to the nearby ricefield to transplant young rice plants, her sari drawn up around her hips, her feet in water, the head of the family goes to the fields. Clothed in a *dboti*, his inevitable *lota* (copper pot) in his hand, he goes to plough the fields or lead his cows, buffaloes, or goats to a place of pasture. Very often when the child is an adolescent, he is charged with this mission of his father. Then, seated under a banyan tree, beautiful as an antique god, he watches his herd. In this case, the man tills the ground with primitive labouring instruments or, harnessing his buffaloes to a long cart, goes to a neighbouring village to load it with hay or sugarcane stalks.

The bazaar becomes animated, the sellers open their shops, and the life of the village begins. One hears the blacksmith hammering on his forge. Before their doors, spinners are sitting at their spinning wheels; basket makers with reeds skilfully plait baskets of various forms; the shoemaker manufactures different sorts of sandals. The big-bellied money-lender is always there, awaiting his too numerous clients.

On the road, the footpaths, or on the threshold of their houses, the people chat to each other about the recent news, of what has happened here or there, in a village nearby or even very far off. It is a known fact that in India, news travels hundreds of miles with a prodigious and disconcerting rapidity that is almost miraculous, if miracles existed.

The noon hour arrives. Oh! these burning noons when people and beasts all repose, when even the crows seem to doze. Only the grass-hopper's voice shrills from the tall grass. . . . There is in this noonday hour something unchangeable, something which was, is, and ever will be, in spite of men: an aspiration to silence, to rest.

Then, activity begins again in the village, as well as on the roads. The routes of India, as we have seen, are never solitary. These women with the deportment of a goddess, where do they go carrying on their head a copper vessel and their baby astride one hip? Some begging



friars pass, as well as whole families squeezed into bullock-carts. Off they go, the eternal travellers, quietly, without disturbance, happy to go away somewhere, to their parents, friends, for a death, a marriage, a holy pilgrimage....

Then, in the villages, there are the children of India. At the door of the temple there are two naked little boys of about five or six years old seated on the ground like two Buddhas near their pretty, young mother, bamboo flutes, bananas, and coconuts spread out before them. They have beautiful, calm features and dreams in their great eyes. Here is another of twelve years old, perhaps, who sells copper trays at the bazaar. He is seated cross-legged, a turban swathed round his head, alert in his gestures and with a smile that is an enchantment. But how well he knows the value of an anna. Then, there is a baby, three years old probably, sitting naked before the door of a sanctuary. He has fat, round cheeks and a straight little bust. He is so grave, perhaps he is hungry. With his finger, he traces circles in the sand; his meditative eyes observe these circles with supreme attention, for him they certainly represent astonishing things—all his life!...

Far away in the South, at Rameshwaram, there was a little girl of ten, alert, fine, joyous, wearing a wide gathered skirt and sparks of diamond in her little nostrils. She was named Saraswati. She developed a friendship for us, above all for C. and she often danced and sang for us. Her gestures, her poses, where had we seen them? Ah! yes, it was at Madura on a sculptured pillar or at Tanjore, Chidambaram, in some venerated sanctuary: a gesture of an Apsara, a pose like Lakshmi's beside her god. Like ourselves, her family had come on pilgrimage to the temple of Rama. Saraswati, you are beautiful, my child, and you do not know it. Guard this treasure of your grace. Happy will be the husband who will be yours later on. Let us hope that he will be worthy of you.

On fête days, and they are numerous, the village as-

sumes another aspect. Fêtes march in pair with the seasons, they are determined by the flowering of the jasmine or by the wind blowing from the South, by a day of full moon, or by the birthday of a great Sage, a religious ceremony in honour of a god. Then, the village dons its most beautiful attire.

If it is the day of Pongal, the Aryan Christmas, celebrated in January when the sun passes into the mysterious and profound sign of *Makara* (Capricornus)—sign linked to the forces of Nature—the fête assumes a particular solemnity. It lasts several days. From the eve, all houses are full of guests, relatives, friends come from far in order to celebrate the ceremony together. Each one thinks of something with which to decorate the house. Designs of flowers and garlands are traced on the threshold with white and red powder by means of white metal moulds. To the great joy of the children, the walls, floors, are cleaned; the doorposts are adorned with propitious colours; images of Krishna, Ganesha, are placed in view. In the stables, after a more rigorous cleaning than usual, the horns of the cows and buffaloes are painted in different colours, while garlands of flowers are hung around their necks and little bells attached to their fetlocks. All the cattle are given a supplementary ration of forage.

Just before dawn breaks on the first fairy day, all heaps of ordure are burned. Then, after bathing, everyone puts on their best and prettiest clothing. The women begin then to cook the newly picked rice. The dish of rice at Pongal is a severe trial. The least details must be observed with great care: the rapidity with which the fire is kindled, the time which the milk takes to boil, the direction that it takes, each fact has an important signification in the life of the village. Because the gods and their different forces are mixed up in these traditions. When the dish is ready, it is offered to Surya, the sun, the giver of life. Afterwards, it is divided among the members of the family, the friends, and also . . . the old companion-servitors with four feet.





**Women of South<sup>1</sup>India**

Then, late at night, the village becomes hushed, silent, all sleeps. It was a moment of happiness, of gaiety. It does not often come.

At the time of marriages—when the astrologer has decided the day according to the position of the stars—the calm of the village is broken by music and the beating of tom-toms.

It is a question of constructing a home on solid foundations. The true home is the armature of a nation, of every true civilisation.

In the West, it is the custom for the man to choose the woman he wishes to marry. In most cases, the woman also knows how to put herself forward. In India, in many instances, it is the parents who arrange according to their wishes the marriage of their children. This custom, although it sometimes proves successful in application, has become much corrupted. It comes from ancient India where we find it in all its original purity.

At that far-off epoch, there were three kinds of marriages: first, the marriage when the two spouses remained in their parents' home; the second, when, with their parents' consent, the young couple left their family in order to found a new home elsewhere; the third, the marriage when the two spouses made a resolution to remain chaste throughout their life in order to realise a deeper life, the spiritual life. Their mission was then to serve humanity.

Moreover, each of these marriages was decided by the guru, the true sage—not a charlatan—he who knew by his learning the aptitudes of both of the fiances. These unions were, it seems, truly blessed and wise, because they were made with knowledge of the occult laws of life. To-day, times have changed so much. True learning is a very rare bird which does not often build its nest in homes.

The Hindu woman, as every other woman in the world, is the guardian of the home. If she does not accomplish her duty of wife and mother, she ruins the home and the

state. The *Bhagavad-Gita* announces this danger:

*"The ruin of a family causes the ruin of the eternal religion of the family; the religion destroyed, the entire family is pervaded with irreligion. By irreligion, women become corrupt, from the corruption of women, confusion is born."*

This is why in all homes, whether in the village or the town, one must honour the woman, the wife who is also the mother. She must be the centre of the family, its life, its moral and physical support. Without her, the home becomes a parched desert.

Moreover, the ideal for a woman is found in ancient Scriptures:

*"A woman is the half of man, his veritable friend.*

*"A loving woman is an eternal springtime of virtue, happiness, and fortune.*

*"A faithful wife is his best auxiliary in the search of celestial beatitudes.*

*"A wife with gentle language is a companion in solitude, a father in counsel, a mother in all times of distress, a repose on the journey across the wild regions of life."*

Such is the teaching of the *Mahabharata*.

And the following are other qualities that she ought to possess:

*"She must be beautiful and noble, considering her husband as her god, and serving him the same in misfortune as in prosperity, health, or illness.*

*"She ought to rise early in the morning, honour the gods, keep her house clean, supply the sacred fire of the home.*

*"Devotion to her lord is the honour of wife, her eternal heaven."*

The "Laws of Manu" add:

*"A wife ought always to be in a good humour, to conduct with skill the affairs of her household, take great care of her household utensils, and not be too extravagant in spending."*

Oh! women of India and everywhere else, is this not a beautiful ideal?

But, some may ask, what about the man, has he been forgotten? Has he no duty except that of allowing himself to be adored? No, indeed, he has not been forgotten. Let us read the rules established for his use in the "Laws of Manu":

*"Everywhere where women are honoured, the Divinities are satisfied; but when they are not honoured, every pious action becomes sterile."*

*"His wife and his son are as his own body."*

*"A man should wear his hair cut, as well as his nails, and his beard. He should be firm in his austerities, he should be pure, diligent in studying the Vedas and all that can be good for him."*

*"He should guard himself from atheism, hate, hypocrisy, pride, anger, and ill-humour."*

What man can boast of having lived in full accordance with these rules?

To the ideal of a wife is added that of a Mother. It even excels the former.

*"May thy Mother be for thee as a divinity. A mother surpasses in value a thousand fathers. The man who kisses the feet of his mother lives in heaven."*

The word "Mother" ought to be sacred for a Hindu. From his infancy, she is often for him a model of abnegation, the first to give way in a useless discussion, the first also to pardon and establish calm and peace. Was it not

our poet-saint, Tukaram, who said:

*"A baby goes instinctively towards his mother to ask for her help. The mother knows exactly what he desires and hastens to him with joyous love. A baby makes no distinction between a cord and a serpent; he would touch fire. He knows nothing—but he knows his mother."*

In the last century, was it not Vivekananda, the great philosopher-mystic, the disciple of Ramakrishna, who, in his conferences in the United States, cited his mother as a model of Hindu women: "It is my mother," he cried, "who in my life and in my work has been my constant inspiration."

By all the ancient leaders of India, those "builders of Unity," the woman, the Mother, guardian of the home, is honoured. And, as rightly said sometime ago a Mussulman lady, the Princess Niloufer of Hyderabad:

*"Let us not, however, deceive ourselves by thinking that we have only to teach our village sisters and nothing to learn from them. Unsophisticated and thus unlike many of us who suffer from a little education and many complexes, their simplicity has the virtues and the fascination of the great primeval things of life. With them nature still retains its pristine meaning and the elements, water, air and earth, their original use and value. Poverty and the caprices of the seasons have brought to them the dignity of labour, and hardships the fruits of endurance. The produce of the fields, on which a large part of our stability depends, is as much the work of their toiling hands as those of men. Their life does not admit of such luxuries as seclusion; above all, centuries of association have brought them together, despite differences of race or religion, in the courtesy of a common interest. These are some of the lessons which we, who wish to work for their uplift, their education and the lightening of their burdens, can well learn from them."*

Yes, indeed, the merits of the women of Hindu villages are great. These mothers and wives are beautiful examples,



in truth, for "the high social classes of India."

Certainly, a great deal remains to be done with regard to the emancipation of woman in India. If we see today devoted Hindu women occupying themselves with social service in the towns as in the villages, there are still very many women in India who are lowered to the rank of servants and who are in total darkness with respect to the great horizons of life.

The Maharani of a great Hindu State, speaking one day on the rôle of woman in modern India, rightly said:

*"An ideal feminine education, leading to a wider, freer life is difficult to realise. It must be one that will prepare its pupils for all human duties—those of the household, as mother, daughter, wife, and those of the State as useful members of the community. It must be practical as well as theoretical, physiological as well as psychological."*

In India, as elsewhere, so many formidable problems remain to be solved. The homes of India need air, above all in the poor classes of society. The many, patient sacrifices of the village women ought to have their reward. In the meantime, we can murmur this sweet prayer from the *Ramayana*:

*"Make me a spouse like Sita;  
Give me a husband like Rama."*

We have seen the coming of the dawn in the villages, we have assisted at the villagers' daily life, as well as at their fêtes, we have visited the poor dwellings and contemplated for an instant the ideal home. It remains for us now to consider the most moving hour of all: the evening hour when everything, people, animals, things, assume a special aspect.

How shall we describe this aspect of the routes of India in the evening, between the hours of five and seven?

Let us take some different village scenes. In the centre of the village is a beautiful temple, Vishnuist or Shivaist, with an ancient gopuram. Before the temple extends the great sacred tank with steps of stone leading down to its tranquil water. On these steps, used by generations of beings, women in their saris are bathing, the wet cloth allowing their sculptural forms to be seen. Their long, black hair is spangled with drops of glistening water. On the other side of the tank, the temple's sacred elephant is calmly entering the ripples for his twilight bath.

Near the temple, under the *pipal* trees (fig trees with heavy branches), some children are playing. Strolling along a path across the rice fields are some young, laughing girls, taking their evening walk, sprays of jasmine twined in their black hair.

The herds come plodding along the village tracks, peacefully and joyously returning to their stables which smell sweet of newly-mown hay from the great plains. From within the temple, a bell announces an offering to the divinity, devotion propitious to the evening meditation.

Then the stirring hour comes. First, the gopuram announces it. Its red stones glow in the rays of the setting sun; then, the whole temple is illumined, the serene waters of the tank reflect the sky's purple salute to the earth; the thatched roofs of houses, beasts, people, are all aureoled by a fairy light so intense that it makes everything seem unreal. Then, from the magic palette all is suddenly transformed, red is changed to an incomparable orange-yellow light.

Nature has donned her mystic robe, her robe of prayer, the one which Gautama the Buddha wore during his long wanderings across the land of India. Everything is flooded in this light. It lusters the tiniest blades of grass, and glows over a little girl standing naked in the middle of a shady pond, with her hair falling on her neck, picking lotus among iridescent dragon-flies for an offering to the goddess Lakshmi.

Together with this orange-yellow aureole descends an infinite peace. The birds sing their evening hymn. From the warm earth rises the sweet fragrance of jasmine.

Night falls. Under the great palms, the little lights of the bazaar shed their smoky brightness, while the lights of heaven sparkle in all their magic brilliance. In the humble dwellings, the mother rocks her baby in the eternal gesture. While the gods watch in the fragrant Indian night, all grows hushed, all falls asleep in the mystic atmosphere of *Aryavarta*.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### FROM THE TAIL OF A MONKEY TO THE TUMULT OF THE OCEAN

**T**HE repairs to our car are finished. We bid farewell to kind and hospitable Major L. and his wife, our compatriot.

At a very early hour, we set out via Nasik for Bombay. We stop on the way at Aurangabad to visit the exact, but smaller, reproduction of the Taj Mahal. At Agra, the famous "poem in marble" was erected by Shah Jehan to the memory of his beloved, Mumtaz-Mahal. At Aurangabad, the little Taj Mahal was erected by Aurangzeb to his mother. Unfortunately, we have no time to visit the caves in the town.

We again follow the route leading to Ellora, as it is also the way to Nasik. A pale sun peeps out from behind the clouds from time to time, but the sky looks threatening. A last look at the fortress of Daulatabad and its neighbour the minaret; then, after climbing the steep *ghats*, we put on speed as we have to make a long stage.

The caves of Ellora appear before us again. We stop for a moment to look at them, cloistered in their impressive solitude. Then, redescending towards the plain, we cross the pretty village of Ellora. It is a place full of poetry. Perched on a tiny hill in the shade of beautiful tall trees is a little Shivaist temple, with a vast staircase descending to a brook singing as it winds along beneath a tangle of green. Two Hindu women are washing their saris in its crystal water. A joyous concert of birds fills the air with sound.

As we leave the State of Hyderabad to enter the Presidency of Bombay, everything becomes Hindu again. No

more fez, nor little blouses, nor horsemen, but saris, *dhotis*, the sign of Vishnu or Shiva on the forehead, and all the familiar sights. On the road, we photograph a group of unhappy little children, led by an old man. They are quite naked and look very poor.

At noon, we take a hasty lunch in a village. The weather becomes worse and worse and we start off again under a heavy shower. The road is worn away by the monsoon torrents which for hours beat down on our brave car. Waves of mud rise to assault the bonnet and veil the windows. Even the wind-screen wiper is broken. We make it function with some cord as well as we can in the storm whose force throws us to one side of the road. The trees are bent under the great blasts of wind. Sun! Sun! Surya! Where are you?

Five o'clock. In a moment of calm, we arrive at Nasik. We shall spend the night at this last halt on our long journey before arriving at Bombay, in order that we may have time to visit the town, so celebrated for its pilgrimages. As at Rameshwaram, the figure of Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana* predominates at Nasik. It is a very holy city and one of the most ancient towns of India.

Nasik takes its name from the Sanskrit word, *Nasika*, which signifies *nose*. A legend narrates that it is in this very place that Lakshmana, the younger brother of Rama, cut off the giant Sarpnaka's nose. Sarpnaka was the sister of Ravana the demon who carried away Sita, Rama's sweet spouse. There is yet another legend which says that the temples of Nasik, and they are numerous, were all built from the ashes of the tail of Hanuman the good, brave monkey-god whose astonishing deeds of bravery in defence of Rama and Sita are recounted in the *Ramayana*. This is one reason why the monkey is considered sacred in India. There are also other reasons, very profound ones, for treating this quadrumane with respect, above all the anthropoides, for according to the teaching of Hindu philosophy, it is not man who descends from the monkey

but the monkey who originally came from man by monstrous crossings. However, that is another story which would make the bones of the late Mr. Darwin turn pale. To come back to the legend, Hanuman, fleeing from Lanka in Ceylon where the demon Ravana had covered our brave hero's tail with an inflammable product which caught fire, leaped into space and in one jump reached Nasik, his country. There, alas! the monkey-god's worthy ornament fell into ashes, and in each spot where these ashes fell on the soil a temple sprang up....

What a picturesque story! But the real cause of the town's sanctity, without doubt, is Rama's presence. One is shown the place on the brink of the river that flows through the city where he bathed. It is true that the temples are very numerous, they are everywhere, in the streets, in the lanes, even on the rocks that emerge from the river. All of them have their special legend. The most beautiful of these temples is the one standing in the centre of the city. There are also many caves in the country neighbouring the town, but alas! we cannot for want of time visit them.

.... The last stage of our journey is coming to an end. Starting from Nasik very early this morning, we are now in view of Bombay. A hot, violent wind penetrates the car. Happily, this monsoon gale chases away the clouds and allows the sun to smile for an instant over the great town's suburbs. But what is that tumult? The Indian Ocean which has broken bounds. At a turning in the road, we see its enormous waves curling over the beach and hurling clouds of spray over the road. Bombay. The Sea! Going back to the West. The end of the prodigious voyage.

We are silent. Our eyes are filling with the last scenes. Over the sea, the Island of Elephanta is fringed with seething foam. We should have liked to visit these famous caves but the furious ocean bars our way. Malabar Hill

appears on its headland jutting out into the bay. Here are the bungalows, the palaces, the hanging gardens, and lastly the Mussulman palace, our one-night refuge, where the only sound is the eternal voice of the sea.

.... Evening in my large room. I listen to the great booms of the ocean. The wind is blowing a gale.

Tomorrow, the inevitable departure. The luggage, still covered with the red dust of India's routes, stands ready in the middle of the room. We were unable to go on the day fixed by our timetable, as the ship that we intended to take had been thrown on to the coast of China by a typhoon and was unable to sail. So we are obliged to travel on a slower boat, taking about three weeks to reach Marseille. It is a beautiful liner, however, and we have a spacious deck cabin. Nevertheless, the pounding waves of the Indian Ocean will buffet it mercilessly and then.... it is the season of cyclones. No matter! Tomorrow, we shall leave C., our dear companion, who made our wonderful dream come true. As on our arrival, our necks will be entwined with garlands of jasmine and roses, like those which are laid in the temples at the feet of Shiva, Lakshmi, Ganesha....

On this eve of our departure, souvenirs come thronging back. They form a procession which will accompany us far away over the ocean to the land of France, like an unfading fragrance: the Fragrance of India.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE SACRED ROUTES

**F**ROM the deck of the ship speeding us away towards Europe already vibrating under the tramp of marching armies, we watch the land of India receding little by little into the distance.

The ghats, the islands, Malabar Hill, gradually obscure in the grey mist and disappear from sight. Ended the great pilgrimage! Ended the radiant voyage!

On the horizon, there is nothing now but the Arabian Sea on whose roaring, heaving surge our good ship is rolling. Evening comes and the lights on board shine out over the crested waves. We hide ourselves in a corner of the deck sheltered from the wind in order to think, to exchange impressions with her whose picture will never fade away.

India! Is it possible to believe that the Mother will no more lift up her voice in the world, that her wisdom will no more enlighten the peoples who are physically, and morally hungry? We cannot believe it. If India as a living soul were to disappear, the entire world would be plunged into still deeper darkness. But that is impossible. The ancient splendour and glory of Greece, of Egypt, and Chaldea, are buried beneath the sands of deserts and oblivion. Among the heroic civilisations, India, as the ancient and vigilant guardian of all true civilisation, must stand ever at her post.

Her soil, it is true, has suffered the violence of barbarous invasions. And what invasions! Greeks, Mussulmans, Huns, Mongols, all these hordes have in turn unfurled in gigantic waves over the plains of Hindustan, striking and shaking the foundations of this immense em-



pire, vast as Europe, Russia excepted, and peopled with nearly 400 millions of beings. Epic struggles, merciless massacres, sometimes even presaging the total collapse of the Empire. But neither the carnage nor the battle cries of Attila's horsemen, the armies of Alexander, nor those of the Mogul emperors, could beat down India's passive resistance. Through all these vicissitudes, her soul has remained alive. We say expressly her *soul*, that of long ago.

"So," some will say, "all is then perfect in India." No, indeed, all is not perfect. India, as every other nation, has her weaknesses. She has also committed grave errors, it would be futile to deny it. Moreover, there is her great poverty amid her natural riches.

In writing these pages, our role has not been to describe what others have already related. Our aim has been to spread the fragrance of India, to make this wonderful fragrance breathed, her Spiritual Fragrance, ancient and immortal. It is the most beautiful gift that she could offer to us.

For this offering, we must love her. But to love India, it is necessary to go to her, to understand her. One must commence, as we have already said at the beginning of this work, by freeing ourselves of those false conceptions which make us see her through the eyes of charlatan yogis, whose only sanctity is that which we ourselves attribute to them. "Magic!" "Mysterious India!" "Fascinating India!" So many awkward epithets which mask the real India. Certain travellers, thirsting for the marvellous, imagine that on disembarking on the quay of Bombay or Colombo, they have the right to share the secrets of some mysterious Brahman, or that on account of their good looks, a Mahatma, a real one with flesh and bones, a great sage, is going to lead them away to an *ashram*, a nearly inaccessible retreat, in order to make of them no more or less than "initiates." Moreover, when they come back to the West, these seekers for spiritual treasure, these hunters after mysterious personages, assume grave, solemn airs, saying: "I knew a Mahatma." These attitudes, in reality, only

hide their disappointment at not having met such beings, or for not having themselves been able to play the role of a Mahatma; this word signifying Great Soul.

It is indeed so. One goes to India as one goes, when in Paris, to the Chatelet theatre. One wishes to see a fairy story, some "tricks," a tree which grows in five minutes, watch in hand, phantoms which pass like the breeze over a moon-lit field, one wants to have a little thrill, and above all, oh! above all, to have the air, as we said, of being wrapped in a sumptuous mantle of mystery. *Mystery! Mystery!* We ourselves are one but we do not seem to have the least idea of that. In fact, the mystery of our being does not interest us. Or, it makes us afraid—with good reason. To discover the mystery which we carry within us needs courage, intrepidity, and we do not possess them, even when there is question of getting rid of the *immondices* which lie at our door.

Then, some will sigh, with a touch of melancholy, if India is no longer thrilling, if India is no longer mysterious, where to go now?

Let us reassure these anxious ones. *There is mystery* in India. That is a sure fact. Even in the time of Cyrus and Alexander, or during the first Chinese dynasties, the reports of travellers or of the conquerors were filled with anecdotes about the "marvels" performed by certain men in the fabulous country of Hindustan. So the attributing of mystery to India reaches to the highest antiquity. But the true mystery is not generally what one thinks it is. The tricks of fakirs, the occult powers, are after all but a very small part of mystery, doubtless the most attractive side for many persons, but certainly the most deceiving, the most dangerous, and the one which masks, let us repeat it, the real India.

The true mystery of India resides in her Hidden Wisdom.

If India by her immortal genius has contributed more than any other nation to the progress of the world, if during milleniums her light has radiated over humanity, if she has

crossed with impunity through violent tempests of iron and fire, it is thanks precisely to her Hidden Wisdom, this armour forged from the male energy of Truth, forged by Nature herself. This wisdom is beyond time and the terrible greed of men, this formidable greed, sometimes unconscious but generally conscious, which makes even the most sacred ideas serve personal ends. It is beyond time and men, because Truth is the hidden energy, the hidden heat, the hidden light of Nature. It can be veiled, distorted by men, but sooner or later it will reappear, always true to itself in its sparkling noumenal beauty.

The powers of Man and of Nature are *one*. Should man discover in himself these powers, he will discover Nature. She will reveal her secrets to him. In the words of an old book of Asia: "She will open wide before thee the portals of her secret chambers, lay bare before thy gaze the treasures hidden in the very depths of her pure virgin bosom." Then the being in us will see the goal towards which gravitate the Cosmos and all creatures, "the goal," says the same work, "beyond which lie, bathed in the sunlight of the Spirit, glories untold, unseen by any save the eye of Soul."\*

That is the mystery of India. There resides her real magic.

During the revolving ages, India's Great Sons have built up her hidden Unity. They have taught but one Truth: "the accumulated wisdom of the ages." It is this wisdom that has inspired all culture worthy of the name. If Greek culture has influenced Western civilisation, we must not forget that, in spite of the inestimable benefits of Greece to India, the ancient Greeks themselves were also sons of Hindu thought. As has already been mentioned in a preceding chapter, Pythagoras went to India in order to draw from the very source the principles which constituted the foundation of his doctrine and which in its turn

\**The Book of the Golden Precepts*—most of these precepts are translated from Tibetan.

influenced Plato, Socrates, and even Aristotle to a certain degree. Apollonius of Tyanae, Plotin, did they not follow in the footprints of their predecessors, in directing themselves towards far-off India? China, Persia, Islam—the three-fourths of Asia—these civilisations which had already been influenced by the missions of Asoka, were they not attracted by India's wisdom? That is the reason why ancient India is our Mother. In the measure that we Westerners make our intellectual and spiritual genealogy reach back to India shall we learn to love her and to consider in its true light her wisdom, the patrimony of every man.

Listen well. In order to understand and adopt the genius of India, does not mean to lessen the marvellous intellectual and spiritual values of the West. East and West ought to understand each other. The West has need of India. India equally has need of the West, of the best that it has in its civilisation. It is not a question of India imitating the West. She must remain herself, at the same time borrowing from the West certain of her intellectual, artistic, and even spiritual values, as well as the methods capable of bringing her more well-being and of lessening her misery and poverty. Modern Hindus ought to remain faithful to the teachings of their Mother, on condition that these teachings be cleansed of superstition and error. It is to this task that long ago men such as Mohan Roy, Dayanand Sarasvati Swami, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and others consecrated themselves.

To India then can be applied the magnificent phrase of Michelet when he cried:

*"There are peoples who are necessary."*

Yes, it is true. There are peoples who are necessary. India is necessary to the world. At present, the black forces of hate, brutality, hypocrisy, egoism, superstition, prostitution, and alcohol, ravage the earth. Nevertheless, above these human cyclones stand Ideal Figures who are as many sacred routes for humanity. Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Sankaracharya, Confucius, Zoroaster, Moses, Maho-

met, Pythagoras, Plato...., all in their purest teachings point out the Glowing Landmarks on the sacred routes of Truth, Nobility, Brotherhood, Peace.

Who will follow them ?

The World of Tomorrow will be what we want it to be. If we desire above all things true knowledge, the knowledge which brings liberty and peace, not slavery and dictatorship, either fascist or nazi, then let us not neglect the sublime teachings of the Guardians of the Sacred Routes. May all beings open their soul to the realities of life, to the fundamental laws of the universe. Above all, may they not close their soul. This would be too grave. There would be no longer a beacon, there would be no more a route, there would be but the darkness and chaos of barbarism.

If, on the other hand, we lift our eyes without ceasing towards the world of light where dwell for ever the Guardians of humanity, its *true* Educators, then we shall be able to say with the great Bergson:

- “The great moral figures who are engraved in history take one another’s hands across the centuries, above our human cities: together they compose a divine city that they invite us to enter.”\*

The jungle of India still echoes with the songs of Vedic hymns; those that were sung from the very dawn of the Aryan civilisation; the divine melodies of Shri Krishna’s flute are still vibrating in the discourses of the *Gita*; the philosophy of Sankara still inspires the lives of multitudes of beings; while in Ceylon, Nepal, Tibet, the sublime figure of the Buddha stands out and indicates to us the way of peace. The great Sages raise aloft their glowing torches, flooding with their sacred radiance the routes which lead towards them, the Masters of Life and Death. These routes, after all, are but one: the route of wisdom that lifts a man above himself and makes of him a conqueror.

\* H. Bergson—*Les Sources de la Morale et de la Religion*.

To inhale the fragrance of India is to enter the atmosphere of these Great Beings, to enter the magic of their presence. The discovery of this magic renders all men brothers in the purest of democracies.

During last century, one of these Sages wrote from the snowy mountains of the Himalayas:

*"There was a time, when from sea to sea, from the mountains and deserts of the North to the grand woods and downs of Ceylon, there was but one faith, one rallying cry—to save humanity from the miseries of ignorance in the name of Him who taught first the solidarity of all men. How is it now?"*

The question arises again at the present hour. Can we answer it?

In the depth of every being, there echoes the soul's cry demanding to realise itself, to project on to the exterior screen of life what it is in reality, in the full liberty of its consciousness. This human soul does not want to be a slave, it does not want to have its voice stifled by foreign hands. For this cry is the burning aspiration of its most intimate and sacred being—the aspiration of all peoples towards a sure happiness, towards the fragrant shores of peace and liberty.

From ancient India there comes the eternal call, still resounding in our overturned world like a sonorous gong:

*"Seek the Great Ones and understand."*<sup>1</sup>

Such is the call of the Mother to her children. It is for us to answer by chanting the verse murmured for millenniums in the temples of India, verse which each morning in the vigil of our life should be our invocation:

**"LEAD ME FROM THE UNREAL TO THE REAL.  
LEAD ME FROM OBSCURITY TO LIGHT.  
LEAD ME FROM DEATH TO IMMORTALITY."**<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Upanishads.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*









12012



12012

