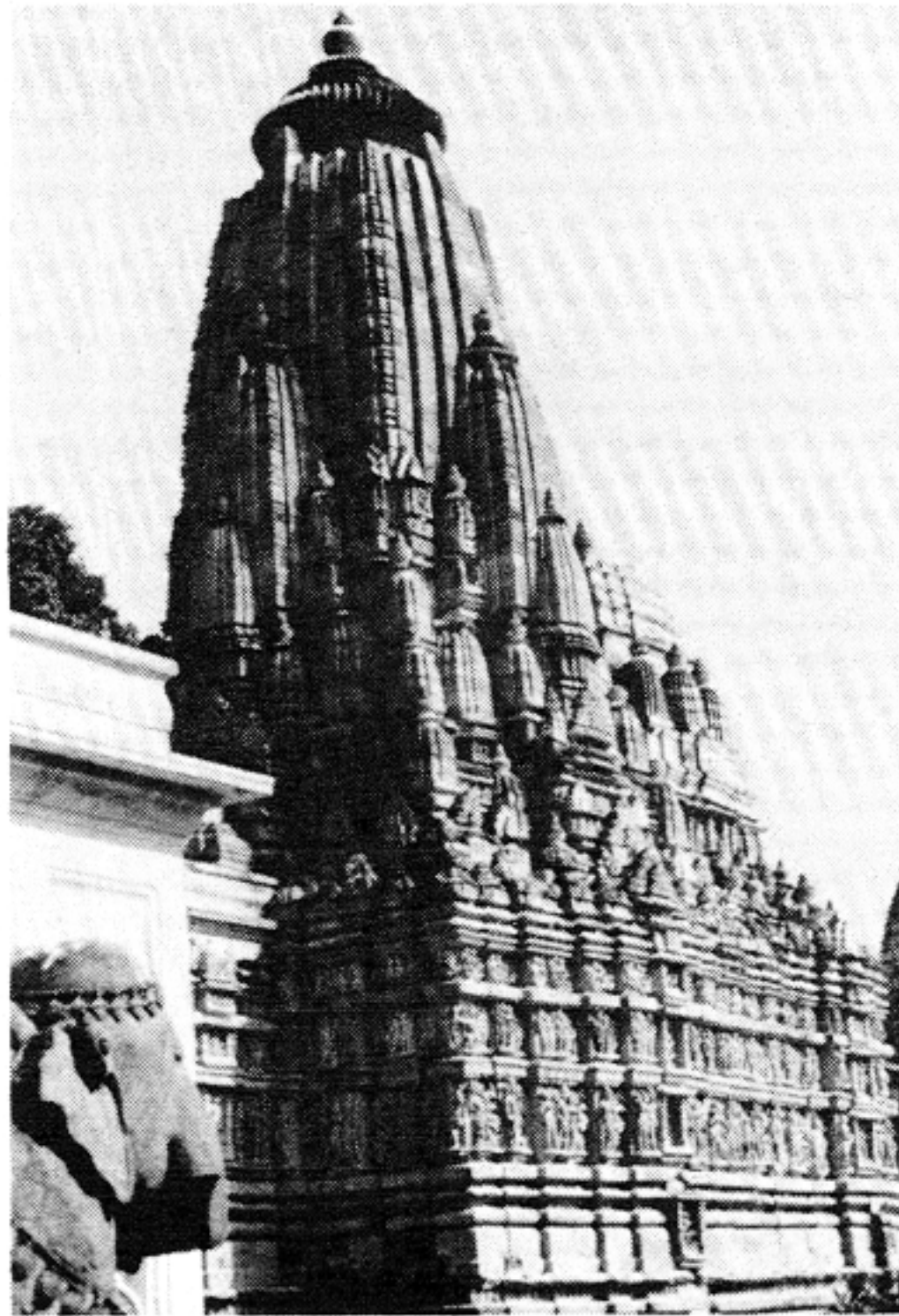


Reflections from the Ganges

Thomas F. Rogers

The memories are still vivid after just a few months. But it seems as if the events they recall occurred aeons ago—in some earlier incarnation, as the Hindus might say, or as the uncommon and totally unexpected phenomena of a particularly memorable dream. I'm thinking especially of those early mornings in June and July when, reversing the process, I would arouse from the night's unconscious and, in wakefulness, fully experience that dream in every dimension and with all my senses. I'd be lying there, covered with a thin sheet or with no sheet at all, on a

charpoj that had the roof to take cooler outdoor roof was basically of a building I that period. I rent the entire orbitant monthly The building meters from the Ganges), just before a small river—the south end Asi section of reputedly oldest city. There were as temples on



been carried to advantage of the night air. The the third floor had rented for was required to building. Its ex-cost came to \$40. was located only Holy Ganga (or hind the spires front temple, at of town in the Varanasi, India's and most sacred shrines as well either side of the

river and beyond as far as one could see in each landward direction. Varanasi (or Banaras or, according to its oldest name, Kashi) is a panoply of temples and shrines, most of them dedicated to that most enigmatic deity, who is the source both of generation and creativity and also of death and destruction—Shiva—and each of these houses has at its center an abstract stone effigy of Shiva's linga (or phallus), so revered by those who come to worship, so shocking to the neophyte tourist.

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BYU Studies

What were those sights and sounds as, at five o'clock, the sky grew light and we rooftop sleepers began to stir? First the cawing of the ubiquitous

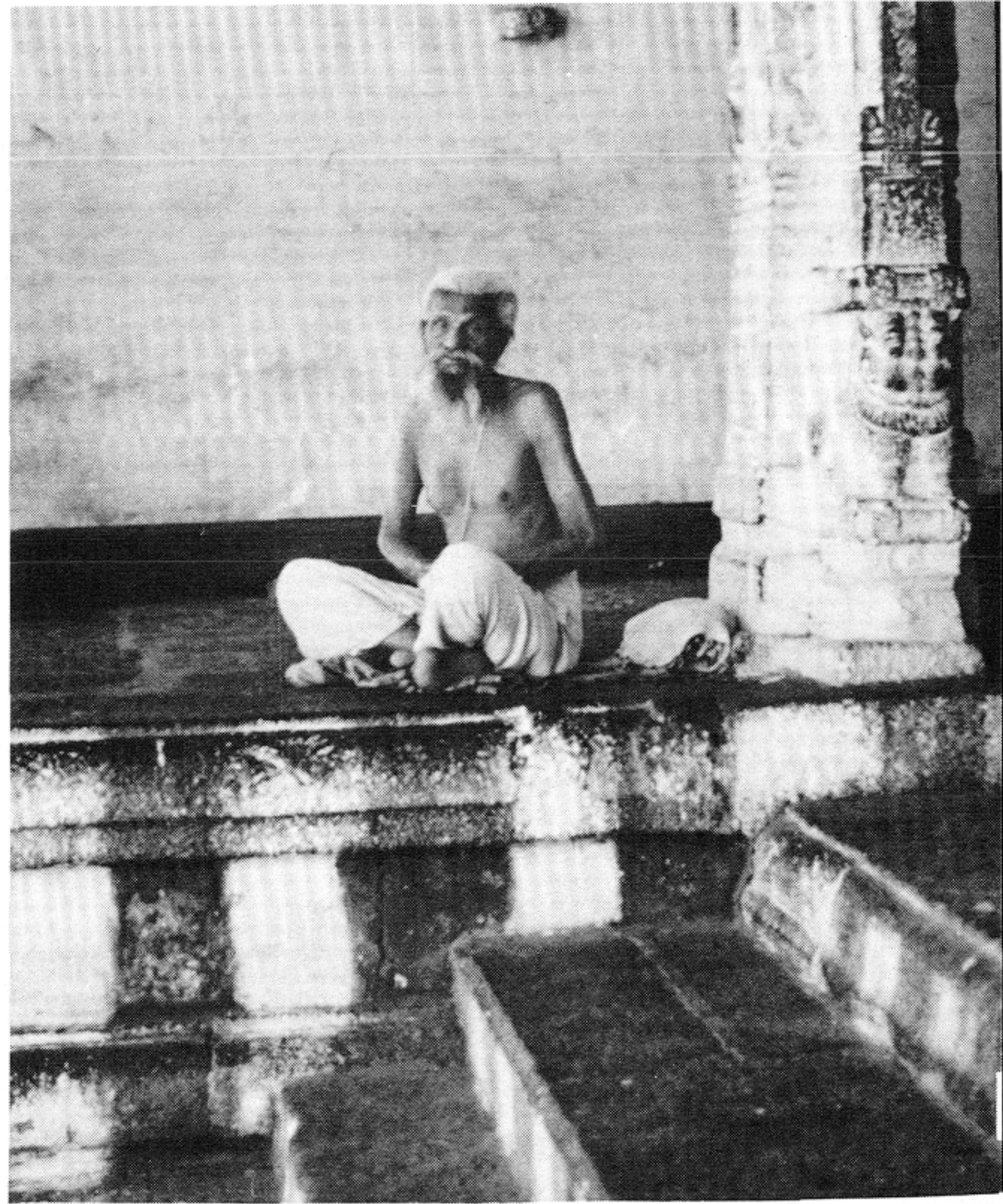
Indian crows, which, together with hordes of hawks and vultures, began to sweep and dive in search of fresh carrion—the corpses, animal or human, which had emerged on the landscape during the night or which might now be floating down the Ganges. The supply is always plentiful and ever self-renewing. (How grateful I was that these birds could somehow tell that my particular stench was less putrified and therefore insufficiently appetizing. Even so, it required a special exercise of faith to remain unperturbed as they continued to swoop just yards above my yet inert body.) Competing with the raucous crows were the gongs and chants of the temple priests who each dawn call the faithful to worship—to my ears less enchanting than otherwise because overamplified and distorted through blaring loudspeakers. (Even earlier similar sounds had already been broadcast by Mullahs from the Muslim section calling their fellows to prayer and waking many a Hindu and Western visitor in the process. This ritual is typical in fact of most cities in the north of this country with the world's still second-largest Muslim population, larger even than that of Pakistan.) Then there was the garrulous, quarrelsome old beggar woman who also in the early dawn always planted herself beneath my roof to accost the many pilgrims who deem it especially auspicious to arrive at the Ganges before sunup. The day's continuing cacophony would later be interspersed with more delightful sound—the flutes and drums of an occasional wedding party wending its way to Mother Ganga for her blessing.

If I could ignore the old woman, the birds, and the electronic chants, I could not be oblivious to something else. What most urgently aroused me from my slumber was the awareness that sometime within that first half hour after sunrise my roof and those roofs about me would be invaded by dense packs of brown monkeys of all sizes and stages of growth, the newly born clinging to their mothers' abdomens as the mothers leaped from one cornice or precarious landing to the next and

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came within arm's length of us in search of anything we humans might have left lying about—a book, a pair of spectacles, a piece of clothing, or anything edible. These brazen mischief-makers, totally oblivious to the humans about them, would comb our territory undeterred, as if it were their turn on the roof now and ours to descend indoors. The least threatening gesture on our part would provoke a frightening show of fangs and, if we were not careful, a rabies-infested bite. The Indians have learned to be equally oblivious to the monkeys—it is the best form of self-protection—but I could not. They were too much of a novelty. It was too curious finding yourself, as you might at the zoo, suddenly inside a cage with them. And in appearance, in behavior, in their thought processes, they seemed too much like ourselves not to study. Later in the day the “monkey man” would come, bringing with him two of them, dressed in a *sari* and a *kurta*. At his command and for the rupee they collected from your hand, the monkeys would go through the postures of dance, diving, prayer, lovers' embrace—which only reinforced the illusion that you could somehow commune with them and learn their secret thoughts.

One more unforgettable sound and image which so sharply recurs is that of another venerable beggar, a refugee from Calcutta, who also made his station on the footpath by my building and who literally “sang for his supper.” What right had this utterly destitute and feeble old man, on the verge of his dying, to the thrilling, passionate voice which penetrated our souls and resembled nothing so much as that of a flamenco gypsy bewailing some dark amorous tragedy? Except that this old man on the banks of the Ganges was praising with deepest love, and in Bengali, the “sweetest” of the subcontinent's languages (he knew no Hindi), his Lord Krishna. The man so impressed us that my hosts engaged him for a farewell concert on my last night in Varanasi—again on my rooftop. During my four months in India I had religiously avoided the wiles of its ubiquitous professional beggars. But on the evening of this man's recital, I





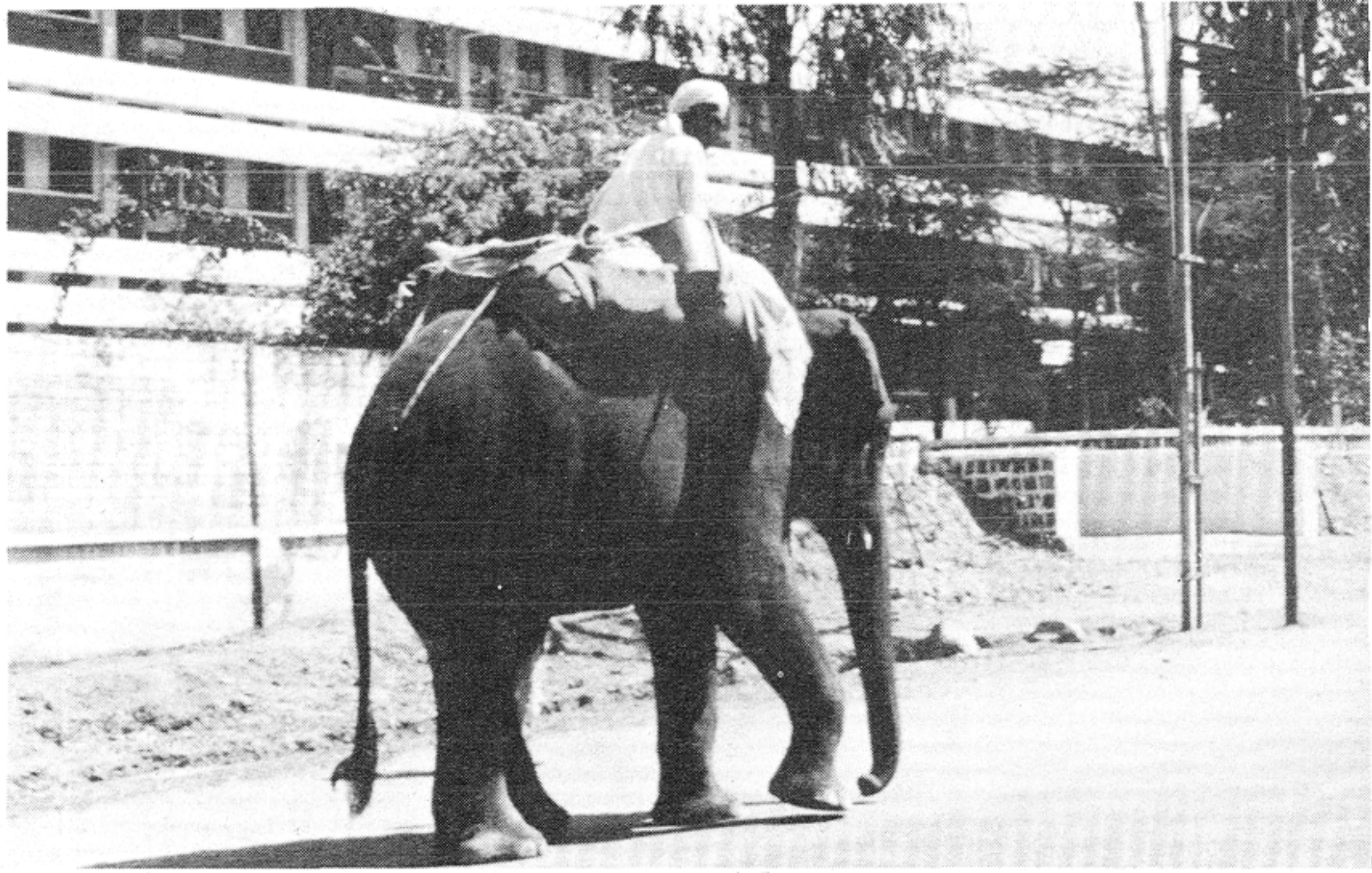
awarded him forty rupees (or four dollars), for him, I'm sure, the means of avoiding starvation for at least another month with a plentiful supply of rice. Another beggar, an amputee whom I could see from another window at the small linga and open shrine on another side of my building, never seemed to demand a contribution, but gave one instead. At midday a cow would approach his sweat-encrusted body, which he would then offer, one limb at a time, including the stump of his leg, for its surface salt. The pleasure

he took in being so licked was clearly sensual. But who could begrudge him what might have been his only daily pleasure? Later, as I emerged onto the stoop of my house in a busy part of this very congested city of several million, I encountered the muzzle of yet another scrawny milk cow, ready to lick me too, if she could. My front door opened onto the small courtyard opposite the domicile of my landlord, an enterprising, propertied Brahmin priest. Here he kept cows and goats and buffalo in numbers hard to believe to provide his family and doubtless several customers with milk and curd and butter. It was some trick wending your way around those fairly docile beasts and carefully avoiding their ever-new piles of droppings—particularly at night—droppings which also provided the landlord with fuel.

When we first went to India, we stayed in hotels or were guests of rather Americanized Indian Christians. But when I returned, after a trip home on unexpected family business, I settled in Varanasi, living in the environs of and taking meals with Hindus. I will always be grateful for this unplanned change because it enabled me to experience, rather than simply view from the outside, the life of those who still adhere to India's most ancient, most distinctive, and still dominant culture. The present life of Varanasi, as Diana Eck has pointed out in her recent book on the city, "reaches back to the sixth century B.C. in a continuous tradition. If we could imagine the silent Acropolis and the Agora of Athens still alive with the intellectual, cultural, and ritual traditions of classical Greece, we might glimpse the remarkable

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tenacity of the life of Kashi. Today Peking, Athens, and Jerusalem are moved by a very different ethos from that which moved them in ancient times,



but Kashi is not.”¹ What holds for Varanasi is as true of much else in India—Bombay and New Delhi being notable exceptions. But while the venerable Hindu tradition (particularly through its Buddhist offshoot) has been equally as influential as the Judaeo-Christian tradition in the history of mankind, there are seemingly no ties between them, at least no direct ones. However, I did discover that Sanskrit, the sacred language of Hinduism which in its classical form was codified by the grammarian Panini about 400 B.C., has a number of striking features in common with Old Church Slavonic, the sacred tongue of Orthodox Slavs first formulated in the ninth century A.D.—features both of grammar and word roots not shared by other Indo-European languages. This only suggests that, together with Persian, the Slavic and Sanskrit languages have over the millennia maintained a close kinship. Nevertheless, since the Aryan invasion some 4000 years ago, and thanks largely to the formidable natural barriers imposed by the Himalayas and the Central Asian desert, the speakers of these languages have pursued separate existences, with very different histories and traditions.

It is unthinkable to almost every American that we would ever adopt the traditional life-style of the Indian populace—unless we were reduced to it by dire emergency (which is *not* so unthinkable). Nevertheless, the Indians have found a way to cope with a number of the problems of our time and civilization which seem to be increasingly threatening to us. Take, for example, the problem of wasted resources and pollution. I would certainly not claim that India has achieved ecological stability. The extensive deforestation of recent decades has denuded hillsides and produced increased flooding, which annually claims thousands of lives. Still, I find it hard to imagine that, given our pattern of consumption, we would do nearly as well as the

¹Diana Eck, *Banaras: City of Light* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 5.

Indians, whose population is more than three times ours, while their total living space is only somewhat more than a third of the size of the United States.

How does the Indians' relatively more efficient ecology work? First—and I admit that this is largely by necessity (most Indians would probably indulge themselves as much as most Americans if they had the opportunity)—the life-style of most Indians is one of extreme austerity. Their means are terribly limited, and for that reason, as far as I could tell, nothing is ever wasted. In fact, it is an established function of certain "untouchables" to sift through every ounce of refuse. Out of the dusty trash heaps, pieces of cloth of whatever size and shape are salvaged and neatly laid aside, as is every shred of paper and every bit of plastic. Daily, at the cremation pyres in Varanasi, a man sifts the ashes to retrieve the gold from the coins placed in the corpses' mouths or the jewelry they might have worn prior to their burning. He earns a good five dollars a day in the process. But the recycling procedure really begins with those scavenger birds I described, which descend on the trash heaps in each neighborhood at the first light of day. Then come the cur dogs. Then the cows and buffalo, which feed on the leaves and stalks trimmed from plants; and the goats and swine, which in turn consume any discarded vegetable matter and then some. By the time the human sifters come along, very little organic matter is left. Rodents also do their share, but their number is kept in check by India's deadly snakes, which, though they may claim some 30,000 lives each year, also save the crops. Insects must also somehow fit into the ecological scheme. They seem to generate spontaneously in profuse numbers as soon as the monsoon arrives, and I noticed that, unlike myself, my hosts, though they were not Jains, never stamped on the large black stinging ants that swarmed across their floor—they would merely flick them away when the ants got on their person or near their food—nor seemed at all perturbed by the enormous cockroaches, an inch or more long, that congregated in the vicinity of the kitchen and the toilet. I had brought along some DDT powder with which I vowed to keep my own WC completely to

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myself. But after a while I began to feel guilty. What harm were those cockroaches doing me? The ethos of respect for all forms of life, which my hosts observed



so naturally, began to get to me, without my ever being lectured. Still, I became very comforted to see the little yellow lizards that darted around the walls and ceiling of my study, consuming so many of the bothersome insects that hovered around my reading lamp and boldly flew into my face.

Obviously, the ethic of personal renunciation and asceticism assists the Indians to reconcile themselves to the austerity which their circumstances have required of most of them. But are they any the worse off for it? Though a third of them exist under the starvation line, which is tragic and nothing to envy, the other two-thirds are, I suspect, on the whole healthier than most of us. They are much more trim. Few are overweight. (Their diet is so much lower in fats and sugars and excess protein.) And surely their immune systems are better developed, enabling those who reach adulthood to resist a variety of infectious diseases. (This is not to say that public sanitation is not still a serious problem and deserving of greater attention. The coliform count in the late summer at certain piers in Varanasi where the raw sewage runs directly into the Ganges goes as high, a British nurse informed me, as 6000. And yet, as my host pointed out, at least 200,000 Hindus in that city, throughout their lives, have drunk only Ganges water and claim that, because it is so holy, it cannot infect them.) On the whole, it seems to me that India has much to teach about basic survival to those of us in the West who consume far more than we need and who acquire far more than we can ever use, who avoid all contact with the vital, teeming earth, of which we are a part and upon which we have an unavoidable physical dependency but prefer not to acknowledge it. (Perhaps one of the most grotesque manifestations of our excessive affluence is the elaborate gas-guzzling campers, equipped with refrigerators, sinks, stoves, and portable commodes—in other words all the comforts, with which we pretend to venture into nature and then find ourselves in even closer proximity

to other such campers than to our neighbors back home.) Our materialistic acquisitiveness does more than waste resources. It has a dire effect on our

psyches, our values, and our seriously compromised spirituality. The other issues I will raise are, each in its own way, extensions of this one.

Our “hanging on” to material artifacts beyond our real need for them is paralleled by our obsession with remaining eternally young, attractive, and well preserved, even after death. I have never been anywhere where people were less fashion conscious than in India. Anything goes, as long as it will cover your essential nakedness. Nor have I ever been anywhere where the citizens were basically more modest. (The only exception that comes to mind is a hermaphrodite with “four o’clock shadow,” dressed in outlandish woman’s garb. But such persons, I was told, also constitute a social class, often serving as cooks for the wealthy.) Despite the often scanty summer attire, we never saw a naked Indian adult, but more than enough naked Europeans and Americans on the beaches in Goa and Kerala. As for this physical vessel which our own scriptures assure us must return to dust before its resurrection, I confess that one of my slight but pervasive apprehensions while in India was the fear that, in case of my own or my daughter’s death, our bodies would be disposed of in customary Hindu fashion—a truly inspired hygienic procedure, by the way—that is, burned within the first nine hours and consigned to Mother Ganga and hence into the mouth of some crocodile or else into the immense delta of silt which daily increases at the river’s mouth in the Bay of Bengal. I could not imagine a more ignominious, more impersonal, more “unhomey” fate for our remains, though probably the truth is that, as non-Hindus, we would have been considered too impure to pollute the Ganges in that fashion.

The problem of poverty is what likely comes first to most Westerners’ minds when they think of India—if they don’t also think of ornate temples and elephant-borne rajas or of dense tropical jungles, which, incidentally, in India are practically nonexistent (the Indian



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jungle is more like the canyons of our Wasatch Front). I had been warned about beggars that accost you at every street corner, warned that there are



too many to begin to help, that the most aggressive are hardened, exploitive professionals. And except for that wonderful minstrel from Calcutta, who more than earned his handout, I consistently resisted them with no unease of conscience. But after returning home, I reread Mosiah 4:26 and have ever since felt a little queasy, as I did after stamping on those ants and employing my lethal DDT.

In the West we are simultaneously exercised over matters of equality and social status, a kind of contradiction all its own. Thus we think disapprovingly of India's millennia-old system of *varnas*, or castes. I will not try to defend the caste system, which, by the way, was imposed on the indigenous Indians by the Aryans, our own ancient uncles. But it too has its advantages. The average Indian experiences considerably less stress and tension in his daily life than the average Westerner, largely because societal roles are pretty much predetermined by birth so that individual competitiveness and status consciousness are greatly reduced. I also have a sense that, lacking our rampant Western individualism where each one is encouraged to "do his own thing" to the exclusion of his neighbor, Indian life is somehow much less depersonalized. Though it is true that in a public setting Indians, like Russians, take but slight notice of any except their own acquaintances and that Indian society is extremely fragmented, social relations being restricted not only to ethnic and caste groups but also to the many professional subcastes, or *jati*, there is nevertheless the sense that relations are discrimination-free (at least psychologically). There is a felt equality, even mutual subordination, on the part of each individual in so vast a society—an openness to one another. (I am here reminded of the pioneer sociologist Emile Durkheim's recommendation before the turn of the century that, to avert the ills of modernity, "the centers of communal life" should undergo "*occupational decentralization*," whereby each corporation and group of workers "becomes a definite institution, a collective



personality, with its customs and traditions, its rights and duties, its unity.'²)

And what of Indian aesthetics? Are those intricately carved temple facades really so magnificent, or are they a little too "busy"? And what about the adornment of the body? Surely no more elegant or adaptable woman's garment exists than the classical *sari*. I also came to admire the beauty mark on the forehead much more than some Western women's grease-globuled lipstick. But why do Indian men wear so

many gaudy rings on the same hand, paint vermilion around the soles of their feet, and, in some cases, go to such lengths with the marking of their foreheads during *puja* and for the rest of the day? Call it gaudy if we will—another way is to see it as vibrant and life-affirming. Indian taste is nothing if not baroque. We see it in their imaginative textile design, in their sharp but subtly blended condiments, and in their exquisitely subtle, Bach-like classical music—their most accomplished art, I believe. It is *our* loss if we cannot learn to like it. It's really what you get used to, isn't it?

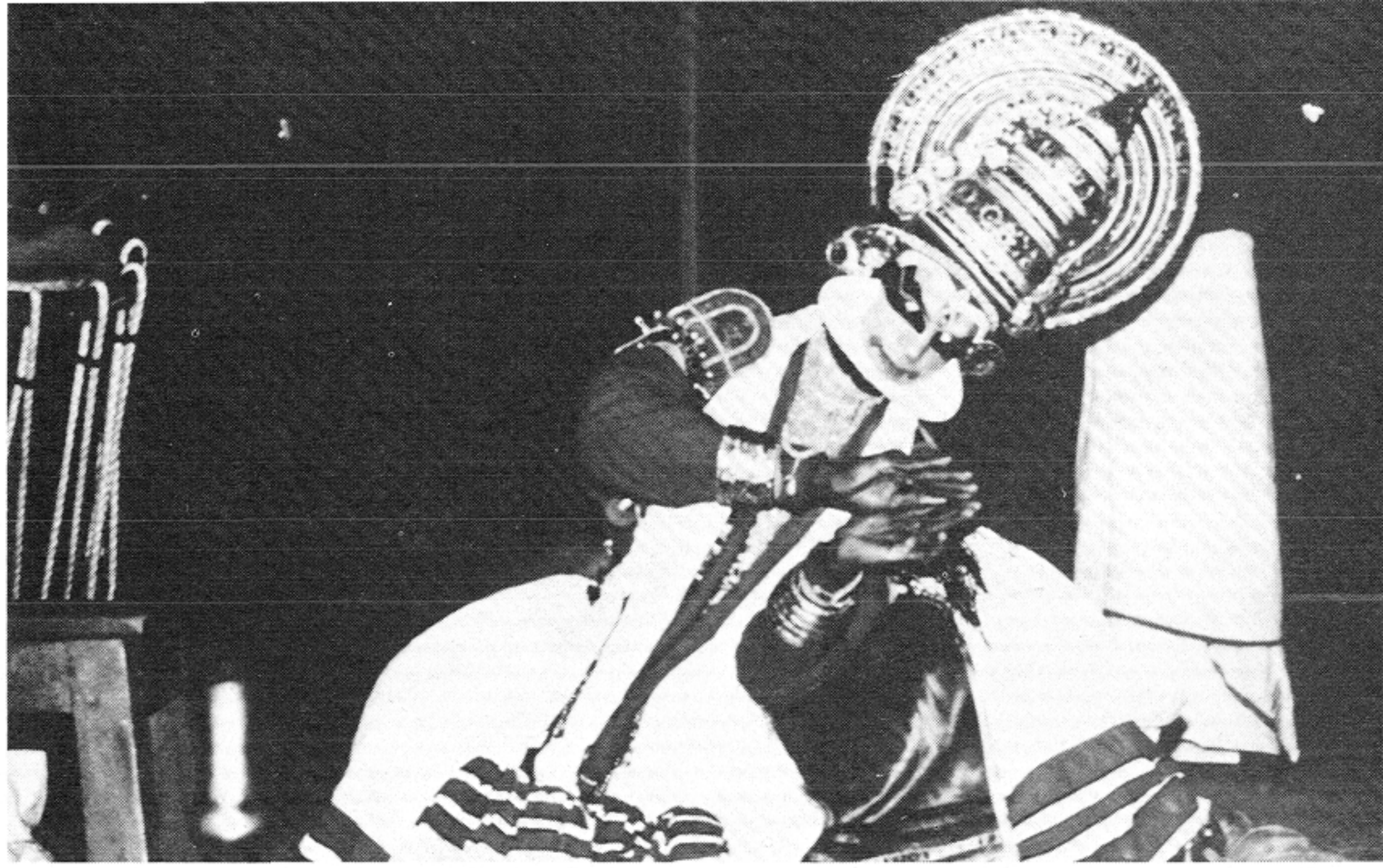
Another of the Indian mores, in common with the rest of Asia and, not many generations ago, much of Europe also, is that of arranged marriages. I have heard enough testimonials from very impressive and ostensibly quite compatible Indian couples that I must believe this system has its advantages, that the serious concern of elders who know their children well may produce better matches than the Western system where couples often quickly join together through sheer infatuation and, when that is dispelled, as quickly divorce. What such mores presuppose, of course, is an underplaying of romance and sex as life's highest end or as essential to instant happiness or as something which cannot naturally evolve between any two well-suited individuals after marriage. Although Western romantic values pervade

²Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (New York: Free Press, 1951), 390.

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India's escapist formula films, they do not as yet so much extend into ordinary life.

I do not wish to go too far in defending Indian customs



and institutions, because some terrible disparities need to be addressed, disparities which traditional institutions, holding so firmly to the status quo, in effect ignore. The economic inequities are all the more exaggerated because, as throughout the Middle East and earlier in China, it is beneath the dignity of the privileged classes to exert themselves in the world of work and thereby make the kind of contribution to society which, with their background and influence, they are so well endowed to make. In addition, many of the university students, the country's future leaders, are lazy and poorly motivated. Often, since they have been admitted to institutions by political machination, they have dangerous illusions of self-importance and foment riots and demonstrations and literally terrorize their teachers, university administrators, and other public officials. (Just try to ride in a first-class train compartment through the state of Bihar, even with a cowering railway official in your company, and try to keep the free-loading students from breaking in on you and crowding you out of your seat.) Despite the fact that India boasts a woman prime minister, the treatment of too many women remains shameful and inhumane. There are still child brides, brides murdered when their dowries don't come through, and widows cast onto the streets by their children. Women are the real underprivileged class and the ones who, as often as not, perform the most menial, backbreaking labor. Furthermore, the notion that one is by his or her merit or lack of merit born into his or her particular status cannot help but encourage the kind of social apathy and fatalistic neglect of the unfortunate which is only partially counteracted by the religious giving of alms.

But here we are faced by a dilemma, which makes me sound very contradictory indeed, because, on the other hand, so much in traditional Hindu religion if abandoned for the skepticism and secularism of the West would only compound many of India's problems and add to them all of our own. There are facets of the religious life



in India which we have lost and badly need to imitate or reacquire, unlikely as that prospect is. I have in mind the omnipresent openness to the forms of religious devotion and the spontaneous ardor of that devotion, the kind of "love affair" the Indian appears to engage in with his or her particular gods. And there is neither self-consciousness nor ostentation about such matters. They are a given, an essential part of human existence, and it is still not fashionable to disparage or question religion,

at least in public. Instead the onus is on those who do not worship or are not devout.

How does Indian religion compare with our own? In the first place, if there is still an area of the world where people build and go for worship to what they call temples, it is in Asia and particularly India. To be sure, these temples are less ancient than you might think. Most that are still extant were constructed in our own millennium. In fact, it was apparently the Greeks who, after Alexander, introduced the temple idea to India. Before that, the ancient rites which persist to this day—"temple rites" nevertheless, in our sense of the word—were performed out of doors. But like our own, Indian temples (which also have sunstones and moonstones) are laid out as *mandalas*, or symbolic representations of the cosmos. Shoes must be removed before one is permitted to tread on sacred ground, and each Hindu temple is located on a river or has a large tank installed next to it, enabling devotees to perform certain ablutions, rites of purification, before temple worship. If space permitted, I could quote lines from mankind's oldest scriptures, the Brahamana Vedas, whose incantations on various organs of the body as these are washed and anointed prior to the donning of a linen garment would not strike Latter-day Saints as so very strange. Cremation itself, which occurs outside the temples, is called "the last sacrifice" and is surely a vestige of the animal sacrifices described in the Vedas, in turn reminiscent of similar rites among both our early Aryan ancestors and the Semites. In performing

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such auspicious rites, Brahmins reverse the sacred white thread, which they receive during their initiation into manhood, from the left shoulder to the



right. (I witnessed a distinguished Brahmin priest doing just this as for twelve days he performed particularly sacred rites in behalf of his deceased mother. He was also required to wear, in addition to his thread, only a single seamless white piece of cloth. We in turn make much of what is signified by Jesus' cloak being similarly seamless.) Corresponding traditions persist among the equally ancient Parsis or Zoroastrians, now mostly situated in the vicinity of Bombay, whose youth while being initiated to the priesthood receive for lifelong wear a white undershirt. Indian weddings, too, are especially lavish. The groom arrives in a horse-drawn carriage dressed and accoutered like some great raja. Both bride and groom are adorned in kingly and queenly garb, portending, as it were, a kind of future status to which they could be heirs.

There are, of course, important differences as well. The claims made for the Hindu gods or for those whose lives they are meant to bless seem less universal and more limited to the peoples of the subcontinent itself, more like the Hebrews' exclusivity than like the claims made for Christ. The Hindu gods are less historically grounded, with those now most prominent incidental or nonexistent in Vedic times. (Shiva is in fact a Dravidian borrowing.) Moreover, the principles of voluntary suffering and self-sacrifice by an omnipotent god for all mankind and of the forgiveness of and imperative love for one's enemies—the ultimate Christian ethic—seem distinctive to the Christian tradition. One of my teachers introduced me to a *shloka* (or proverb) that could be translated as follows:

What is the goodness in a man if he is good to those who have helped him?

Only he is considered good who is kind even to those who have done him harm.

But when I asked if this sentiment were central to Vedic or Upanishadic ethics, she readily conceded that it was exceptional.

The answer given by the Savior to the question of why a man was born blind clearly separates his doctrine from all the fatalistic or deterministic

theologies of the world. When even the disciples wondered, "Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" the Savior's singular reply was "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:2-3).

In many respects, however, the major Asian religions clearly anticipate the Sermon on the Mount. There is also, both in Hinduism and in Buddhism, the aspiration to reunite with the cosmic divine and to acquire a godly nature through ascetic self-denial and right living. There is a concept of eternal progression, though the developmental stages are seen as involving more than one earthly probation. Consider this distinctively LDS statement from Brigham Young:

If anybody wants to know what the Priesthood of the Son of God is, it is the law by which the worlds are, were, and will continue for ever and ever. It is that system which brings worlds into existence and peoples them, gives them their revolutions—their days, weeks, months, years, their seasons and times and by which they are rolled up as a scroll, as it were, and go into a higher state of existence.³

How reminiscent this now seems of the thought one encounters in Hindu and Hindu-derived statements. In addition there is the interesting principle of *bhakti*, or divine love, according to which "God is like a father to his son, like a friend to his friend, like a lover to his beloved"; and "What God wants from man is his love to Him, his surrender to Him and his service to Him. It is only from the love of God that the knowledge of God arises. Unless man has the love of God he can never know God and his greatness and grace."⁴

I have no illusions that many Indians live up to the lofty universal precepts which are so vividly and unabashedly extolled in Hinduism.

³*Discourses of Brigham Young*, selected and arranged by John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Press, 1925), 201.

⁴S. Rangachar, *Early Indian Thought* (Mysore: Geetha Book House, 1964), 239, 240.

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Like most Christians, most Hindus observe the highest ideals of their religion mostly in the breach and by default. It is also doubtless true that the relative innocence of Indians is protected by their limited opportunity to become acquisitive, promiscuous, or highly critical of their traditions. Still, among them are individuals who remarkably exemplify the very values we hold sacred. Two such were the gifted and giving teachers I was fortunate to engage in Jabalpur and Varanasi. Shrimati Dr. Rama Pande, with a Ph.D. in Vedic Sanskrit, gave up a promising scholarly career to serve her family's needs. Without making a fetish of her faith, she renounced the wearing of jewelry ten years ago and more recently the viewing of films, even those with scripts written by her brother who is a successful screen-writer in Bombay. She did this so that she would be less distracted by this world and have more time for others. Without my requesting it, she provided me with a simplified version of the Sermon on the Mount in Sanskrit, and she is sought after not only by friends and family but also by the young prospective Methodist ministers who study with her to resolve the disputes that arise within their Christian community. My saintly Hindi teacher in Varanasi, Shri Virendra Singh, after concluding his own formal schooling at age fifteen, founded a village school for illiterates, which, after eight years, enrolled 120 students and required the assistance of three additional teachers. He refuses to wear his Kshatria caste thread as a sign of status, confronts his Brahmin landlord and others when they are duplicitous and manages to win their respect in the process, and his personal life would be exemplary for any Christian. He and his wife gave up tea (an unheard of sacrifice in India) so their *girls* can attend a better school. Both Dr. Pande and Mr. Singh radiate that special "light" we read about in John and in Doctrine and Covenants 88, as does Reverend K. Singh, the former Brahmin who is now the dynamic minister of the Assembly of God church in Jabalpur, and who one Sunday unhesitatingly invited me to preach the sermon.



I have come to realize that in the things that matter most there are others in this world, not even Christian, who have much to teach us. My associa-

tion with such people has only further enhanced my respect for the gospel of Jesus Christ, which, without necessarily attributing it to Him, they so impressively exemplify. What these people have to offer, like the gospel itself, is so simple and accessible, yet so free from glitter and sensation, that for the most part they go unnoticed, though their worth is known to those whose lives they touch and whom they motivate to become *their* better selves. Theirs is the sainthood to which we should all aspire. Solzhenitsyn's eulogy of a simple Russian peasant woman (who in Soviet society is everyone's scapegoat—the butt of scorn—*and support*) is a fitting tribute to such persons:

We all lived beside her, and never understood that she was that righteous one without whom, according to the proverb, no village can stand.

Nor any city.

Nor our whole land.⁵



⁵Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Matryona's House," in *We Never Make Mistakes*, trans. Paul W. Blackstock (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1963), 100.