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INDIAN INSTITUTE OF
ADVANCED STUDY
SIMLA

Holy Cities of India

KANWAR LAL

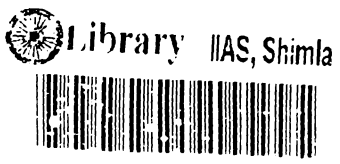
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PREFACE

Religion is, by no means, a smooth subject for a book. Of late, it seems to have acquired a stink and a stigma which are hard to explain, since the sphere of the spirit to which religion properly belongs is, or at least ought to be, coextensive with the best and the noblest in man. In our country, especially, it has come to stand for superstition and narrow-mindedness, and has degenerated, for all practical purposes, into communalism and the claiming of political rights on the basis of religious creeds. Every thing considered, there are few themes which are as dangerous as this, or in the handling of which an author will feel more acutely that he was rushing in where, these days, angels would fear to tread. Nevertheless, the decision of the Publishers and the writer to take it up need not be attributed to foolhardiness. They believe that, in the context of the modern world, few issues are of greater importance than this, of religion. If, in the final analysis, the actors in the Cosmic Drama are God, the Devil and the Human Soul, or even if the conflict should lie between Nature and Man, between her forces and our strength, it is important to find out on whose side God is, where our good lies. What constitutes good and how it may be obtained, what truth is and how man may get to it—surely all this cannot be ignored; in fact, must be sought and ascertained. And it is this age-old quest for these absolutes, Truth and Goodness, which religion stands for. Whatever form this worthy quest takes, whether of Science or Politics, of Poetry or Charity, it is but man's 'religion' that is at work. Let us not be enamoured of old labels, nor be afraid to look at the new bottles. So long as the wine within gives life and sustenance, brings health and vitality, all is well. How does it matter if the formula is called Gandhism or Marxism, Communism or, shall we say, U-N-ism ? Let all means be adopted for the happiness and salvation of man, all paths tried. The only condition is that the seeker must be sincere. And as to that, why should any one doubt the sincerity of the followers of one faith or of another ? Did not someone, some very great one among men, once say : Judge not lest ye be judged ?

The trouble with most people is that they regard it as an axiom indisputable that, like oil and water, Politics and Religion will not mix. Yet, for the Indian mind, trained as it has

been, in the last fifty years, by Gandhi's word and work, nothing could be farther from truth. "My devotion to Truth," he says, "has drawn me into the field of politics, and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means." Or, again, "For me, politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt, ever to be shunned. Politics concern nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined, in other words, a seeker after God and Truth." Obviously, the same point may be arrived at from the opposite direction ; and, in fairness, one must allow the right to the anti-religious of saying, should they want to say, that Religion bereft of politics is absolute dirt, or that their devotion to Truth draws them into the field of Religion and their concern for the welfare of nations obliges them to abolish it !

In the past, religious creeds developed into political systems. May not the present see the process reversed ? For aught we know, the political creeds of to-day may become the religious systems of tomorrow. And why not ? Nor will it matter ; not at least to the Creator, for do not even those who worship other gods worship Him ?... But I must desist. This is a preface, and prefaces, as Philip Guedalla remarks somewhere, must be written carefully, for even reviewers read them !

A line or two about the scheme of this book. It was only for a moment that we had thought of making it a study of the holy places of India, because the virtual impossibility of accomplishing such a task became apparent straightaway. Holy places in this country are, literally, countless. Every little village has its little legend, its modest shrine over some divine foot-print, its sacred tree, or its holy well. If a book had to be thought of, it had to be on 'Holy Cities'. That was the only way, and that way was taken. My only other instruction in the matter was that the number of the cities selected was to be twelve. Now, to fix the correct cities representing Sikhism or Islam, Jainism or Budhism, was easy. Not so easy, however, was the matter of deciding what holy cities of the Hindus were to be included. There was, of course, the consolation that the fertile mind of the Hindus had been so good at the job that for them all cities dealt with in this book are blessed and holy. Even so, there are serious omissions like Nasik, Ayodhya, Dwarka, Tirupati, and several more. One wishes that Ayodhya were not such a desolation as it is, that it had some resemblance to the old resplendent Ayodhya of Rama. Once

> ".....his town like Indra's City—tower and dome and turret brave
> Rose in proud and peerless beauty, on Sarayu's limpid wave"

Now it lies sad and ruined, "with temples, temples everywhere, but not a soul to pray ;" or, almost that. Of others, Dwarka and Tirupati, both holy as holy can be, did not qualify, strictly speaking, as 'cities'. Nasik, though not one of the seven holy cities of ancient India, is yet one of the most important sacred spots of Hindudom. Rama's feet have hallowed it, and here, in its own turn, is held the great Kumbha Mela. But against the

others, finally selected, it had no chance. It could make only the thirteenth and had to be dropped, ever so reluctantly. Our hope is that a second volume on this theme will follow, in due course, and all these and other important places will then be presented with all the reverence and elegance with which the Publishers have treated the cities covered in the present publication.

Before I close this rather lengthy preface, I wish to record that it has been a delight, almost an adventure, to work with my Publishers. As in the case of earlier books, with this one, too, once the theme and scope were decided upon, they left me completely free. Thus it comes about that from the first word in the Preface to the last in the text the opinions expressed and the views aired, arguments preferred and the judgments pronounced, are wholly mine and, in respect of these, I take the fullest responsibility for whatever errors and flaws, whatever defects and drawbacks, the book contains and suffers from.

Finally, acknowledgement is hereby made for all quotations used in the book. In a work like this the subject-matter whereof relates to the earliest, and yet the most continuous thought and speculations of the human mind, every new writer will have to draw largely upon what has been said by the learned, the authoritative, or even by the merely witty, predecessors in the field. We wish to assure the authors and the publishers concerned that all borrowing has been done for 'fair purposes', and in good faith. Once again, the debt, wherever due, is freely and most gratefully acknowledged.

KANWAR LAL

Delhi : 7th January, 1961

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INTRODUCTION

Holy Cities of India ! What a theme to write a whole book upon in this era of science and cynicism, in this age of doubt and disbelief ! For, to-day half the world declares openly that God is a figment of fevered minds and religion an opiate of the masses. Even the other half which professes belief in God, in practice seems to follow the Devil ; and though it pretends to be religious, it prefers to be rich ! In fact, the more enlightened and advanced among us consider it correct, and almost the fashion, to take the stand that religion is defunct, and that from the kingdom of man the gods have been banished for ever. It is maintained that, like one who has grown up, Man no longer needs such props nor toys to comfort and console him. Even if it be conceded—so the argument runs—that faith in a deity or allegiance to a religion was, at one time, an evolutional necessity, surely, now, in the light of man's scientific progress and with his superior knowledge, both these concepts are like redundant appendixes of the mind which must be discarded forthwith. After all, it is only the mentally deficient and the faint-hearted who have always sought refuge in religion and relied upon a Father in Heaven. In the present times, too, it is precisely morons of that kind who persist in clinging to the sickly sentimentalism and silly superstition which religion implies. What is more, even these believers believe but half-heartedly, almost apologetically. If at all they turn to their gods, they do so, for whatever seconds they can spare from the pursuit of pleasure or the making of money, as a weak nation turns from one power-block to another—in the hope and conviction that the guided missiles of one offer greater security

than the misguided allies of the other. They try to play safe, that is all ; like that most sensible gentleman who religiously broke all the commandments, yet prayed and sought forgiveness regularly lest, at the end of it all, Lord God should prove to be ! For, who knows ? This grand Possibility, however improbable, this numinous Assumption, howsoever algebraical its supposal, might actually be a 'reality'. Obviously, it would be imprudent to take risks. It is a pity, no doubt, that cowardice should thus make converts of us all; and fear, and not faith, should be the motive that moves our lips into mumbling the 'word'. But, then, surely, it is good to go in for insurance, even spiritual insurance, though hypocrisy be the premium for that. And since everybody realizes this, a kind of mutual understanding obtains among the members, especially the well-to-do members, of this temple-going, mosque-visiting, gurudwara-attending community. These enlightened worthies of society having followed, in all ages, the one true religion—that of Anythingness which pays, having always read and recited the only true gospel—that of Getting-on, appreciate that in the matter of faith, too, the current coin must be allowed to circulate freely. They know that Religion is just so much 'vested interest' and that birds of the same feather must be civil to one another—even if they should go about flying by different airlines ! What matters is the inner man, as the saints used to tell the sinner. Since one prays without putting one's soul in the prayer, no loss of prestige is suffered. Rather, one's spiritual tax paid, one is wholly free to divert oneself by the delights the Devil has devised for the express edification of mankind, or to endeavour diligently to cultivate the right relations with his emissaries on earth. Then, when the day's labour is over, one may cleanse the foul taste left by the compromise one was obliged to make, with wines which are delicately flavoured and were discreetly smuggled. Sipping these, or dancing with some incarnation of silk and roses, in elegant and posh surroundings which vibrate to soft music from the very latest movie, how unconvincing seems the need for any religion upon this earth and how hollow sounds the glory of God who is in the skies ! Love and pleasure, money and progress, science and politics, friendship with Mammon and the Powers-that-be—these are the proper concerns of civilized men, and not religion and worship, not prayer and pilgrimage, not sacred rivers and holy cities—certainly not the 'holy cities' of out-worn creeds and dead faiths. Who bothers these days about Benares and Bodh-Gaya, about Abu and Amritsar, about Mathura and Madura ? These dens of superstition, these symbols of backwardness, these so-called sacred sites—these are not the holy cities of the modern

pilgrim. He, wise man, does not waste his time and money on going thither. That kind of thing he leaves to those to whom that kind of thing ought to be left. He travels, instead, to Washington and London, to Moscow and Peking, if he be a worshipper of Power; or, to gay Paree and glittering Hollywood, if a devotee of Pleasure. The temples and the mosques, the viharas and the gurudwaras, the churches and the synagogues of the modern man are to be found in his steel plants and in his great, big factories where, in the shape of bombs and bombers, death and destruction for the human species are being manufactured, and neatly packed and carefully stored for use. Rivers, indeed, are still sacred, but at Bhakra and Hirakud, not at Benares or Hardwar. Nor do the people and princes of to-day, rather, the Trusts and Foundations of to-day, squander money on constructing useless houses for imaginary deities. What they build is of much greater utility, something really serviceable : military academies and homes for the war-mutilated ; entertainment centres for political refugees ; research institutes for study of increase in crime ; sanatoria for the insane, and, now and then, charming little parks which provide to the alarmingly large populations of industrial cities, a palm-size patch of brown grass. In short, the modern man does not deceive himself any more by believing in all the religious hocus-pocus which profits only the priests and other parasites of like nature. For the inhabitants of a brave new world like ours, it is impossible to accept God for He is not "compatible with machinery and scientific medicine and universal happiness". Did not Karl Marx say that religion was 'the sigh of the oppressed creatures and the spirit of unspiritual conditions' ? Has not psychology taught us that God is nothing more than the 'Black phantom of our baby fears' ? No, religion has had its day and what an excellent fool did it make of man ! Too long have the have-nots subsisted on bread and God, while the butter and wine went to the wicked. But now, thank who ? 'no priest-craft can longer make man content with misery here in the hope of compensation hereafter'. Created in man's image or not, fact or fiction, projection whether of the fears of the human mind or its hopes, sense or superstition, God was given a fair chance and He has failed. It is time now for man to depose Him and to impeach Him, to judge Him and to punish Him. And there are men who apparently do not lack the necessary courage to thunder-voice our verdict. "I see," says Mencken, "little evidence in this world of the so-called goodness of God. On the contrary, it seems to me that, on the strength of His daily acts, He must be set down a most stupid, cruel and villainous fellow." Brave words, even if rather crude for cultured ears. Maybe, they overstate

the case ; nevertheless, there can be no doubt that in this great period of man's conquest and glory, when the spirit of man soars towards new horizons in space, when the mind of man is registering a new triumph every split-second, there is no place for such cant as religion, for such nonsense as the sacred and the divine.....

In the light of the foregoing, then, nothing should seem more unfruitful as a subject of study than the one this book is concerned with. Yet, from what the author has seen in India and from what he has learnt regarding other countries in this respect, an altogether different tale emerges. Man's need for religion and his faith in God do not seem to have abated one whit. In fact, there has been a marked augmentation in the interest and zeal with which men turn to whatever divine light, true or false, shines in the distance. The reason is not far to seek. Whatever necessity for worship of God, or justification for invention of One, obtained earlier, still holds good. There has been no essential change in human nature, and in the character of human urges, which should cause a shift in his beliefs or spiritual requirements. On the other hand, whatever modification may have occurred in the human situation has brought about, by making the outlook a little gloomier, by converting this 'Vanity Fair' into an 'Insanity Fair', a strange terror of the unknown, a fear and dismay far greater than what the first savages were called upon to suffer. Consequently, our need for a refuge and a stay, for solace and consolation, for light and love, for a hope and a haven, for belief in a power greater than ourselves, and mightier than the Hiranyakashipus and Ravanas and Kansas of our era, has been intensified. It appears that in his search for knowledge, in his attempt to obtain control over matter and command of nature, Man has over-shot the mark. Like a naughty urchin who thought he was setting fire to a farmer's haystack and found that he had ignited an ammunition dump linked in a chain-connection to a series of similar stores, he is bewildered as never before. Beyond the lights that his dammed rivers and blessed reactors have lit for him, he gapes into a gulf of unrelieved darkness. In spite of the seemingly infinite knowledge which he has amassed, he still knows very little about the Great Beyond which even science admits to be terribly, terribly vast, if not absolutely illimitable. It is true, undeniably, that by patient and persistent effort, through high endeavour and noble courage, he has built up a world of plenty and prosperity, invented gadgets that lighten the burden and lessen the boredom of existence, has made night into day, robbed summer of her

heat and winter of his frost, and has conquered the seas and the skies where his ships and planes move at his bidding and not at the will of the waves and the winds. His fertile mind and constant application have so altered the face of the earth that she is what the paradises of scriptures are not, and human life upon this planet can now be so lived that it might be the envy of the gods of all the faiths, past and present, put together. Well might man contemplate his handiwork and applaud himself thereon : "How noble in reason ! How infinite in faculty ! In action how like an angel ! In apprehension how like a god !" And yet, somehow and somewhere, man has erred grievously, for, in creating all the good and the great which makes even the meanest of human creatures thrill at the thought of belonging to this species, much evil has been brought forth. Today, Man is the proud possessor of engines of destruction which can, at a wink's notice, put into sad mis-shape this little member of the solar system upon which he struts about, and end his own sorry story. Mankind has, at its disposal, genuinely effective and wholly dependable means of committing suicide at will. It is *actually* possible—if one may indulge in tautology—to bring about the extinction of the species and of much besides. So bleak is the prospect that "among thoughtful people everywhere there is a growing conviction that the final consummation of human history is near, even at the doors",.....that the "Mind is at the end of its tether. The end of everything we call life is close at hand and cannot be avoided.....There is no way out or round or through the impasse." Of course, we have cynics and imbeciles enough to say 'Amen' ! Also, if, at the bottom of every tragedy, there is a fool or a madcap, let us not forget that the present-day world has no dearth of either variety.

This then is the paradox of the human situation : Man has for his habitation this earth, fair as the heavens, and he is blessed with a life surpassingly full of possibilities for enjoyment and achievement ; yet, he has managed to sprinkle and scatter upon the stage of his existence not flowers of joy and laughter, but thorns of suffering and sorrow, not the fragrance of health and happiness, but the stench of sin and disease, not the light of love and justice but the gloom of hatred and cruelty, not the virtues of faith and humility, but the vices of pride and cupidity. His whole being is so oppressed, his vision is so distorted, that sheer desperation is now leading him to loss of sanity. His ego is making him blind to the writing on the wall which even the eyeless have begun to discern ! His soul is sick and his life one continuous nightmare. He pictures this universe in the

image of his own morbid mind and finds it nothing but a senseless mess, without reason and without rhyme. So powerful is the impact of this baneful brooding that all life seems sorrowful and it appears that from our crosses and chimeras, from the burdens on our backs and the suffering of our souls, no escape is possible, except through Nirvana of the individual or the end of the entire race. Still, so fair looks the face of nature, and so sweet is the sound of the song of this magic-bird, our life, that it is hard to believe all that. Surely, creation cannot be, root, fruit and flower, all poison, only evil. In fact, there are moments in the life of each person, nay, there may be whole years, when one is drunk with the ecstasy of existence, is delirious with the bliss of being. Thus it is that tossed upon the horns of a dilemma, confused by the contradictory, 'volte-face' aspects of life, man is sorely perplexed and therefore turns once more to his gods and goddesses, to his faith and religion, to his scriptures and to his prayers. He likes to believe—even though he cannot do that easily—that there is an Eternal Being, an ultimate Reality, a Supreme Power that has created and governs this universe; that this power or person or principle is 'good' and just ; that the lives of all beings and of all men are in the power of that Power so that nothing can be done nor will be done, nothing happens nor can happen, but as It ordains and wills. There are those who go beyond this halting approach, and their faith, unshakably firm and final, asserts the being of a God, great and good, just and wise, loving and merciful, and beyond all human concept and comprehension. They need neither proof nor definition, for He cannot be proved nor defined. They are the men who have no fear upon earth except the fear of the Lord. And on the score of their Lord's sovereignty in the entire universe, they have no doubt nor anxiety. The insignificant earth counts not, nor human life, except in this that God blesses the one and directs the other. For them the pride of man is foolish; his independence of the heavens above, a joke; the ousting of religion by science or politics, by force or argument, a vain boast; and the banishment of God from man's kingdom, the raving of a lunatic. "I wish", says L. P. Jacks, "We could get rid of all this botheration about the future of religion, this anxiety for the morrow of it. If we really believe, as some of us profess to do, that God fills the universe, who, I should like to know, is going to turn Him out of it ! Even suffering and death, which have been in the world from the beginning and will be to the end, have not been able to do that and these two, when you come to think of it, suffering and death, are vastly more formidable than the arguments of atheists or the anti-religious decrees of the Soviet Republic. The religion which has survived ten

thousand years of suffering and death will not readily succumb to anybody's logic or anybody's legislation".

Even if the A-bombs or, for that matter, bombs denoted by any other letter of the alphabet and detonated by any method whatsoever, should blow the species up, one may rest assured that God and His Universe will continue to be, and the earth will go on spinning merrily as it was doing before man appeared and started his antics. Possibly a dent or two would remain on the surface of the planet to mark the grave of man's bubble existence and his brief authority drest in which man, proud man

"Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence,—like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep....."

And the last of his fantastic tricks would have been performed. But even that shall be, so the believers believe, entirely and strictly, in accordance with the will and wish of Him

".....who boundless Spirit all,
And unremitting Energy, pervades,
Adjusts, sustains, and agitates the whole."

2

On the nature of this Deity and His attributes, there has been, since man's life began, endless talk and speculation infinite; and the range and scope of these lie between, on the one hand, utter silence in reply to any and every question about Him and, on the other, volumes of language on each aspect of divinity. Many have claimed that one can see God as one sees other men, only better. When asked by Vivekanand—who was to become, later, such an illustrious pupil of his—whether he had seen God, Ramakrishna Paramahansa had answered: "Yes, I see Him just as I see you here, only in a sense much more intense.....God can be realized ; one can see and talk to Him as I am doing with you. But who cares to do so? People shed torrents of tears for their wife and children, for wealth and property, but who does so for the sake of God ? If one weeps sincerely for

Him, He surely manifests Himself." "I believe in God", Gandhi had once said to a group of visitors, "much more than I believe in the fact that you and I are alive and I am speaking to you." And yet, like countless other believers, he had no word for characterizing his belief in God who, according to him, is unknowable, "is that indefinable something which we all feel but which we do not know. To me God is Truth and Love, God is ethics and morality. God is fearlessness, God is the source of light and life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the athiest. He transcends speech and reason. He is a personal God to those who need His personal presence. He is embodied to those who need His touch. He is the purest essence. He simply Is to those who have faith. He is long-suffering. He is patient but He is also terrible. He is the greatest democrat the world knows. He is the greatest tyrant ever known. He is all things to all men. He is in us and yet above and beyond us. We are *not*. He alone *Is*." He cannot be seen, say others, cannot be known, but may be realized. Yet the sum total of all realization of Him is either that silence which even a Buddha maintained on this issue or a veritable whirlwind of words which negate and contradict one another: He is this, He is not this, He is that, He is not that. Since He is indefinable and indescribable, formless and incomprehensible, therefore all attempts at definition and description, at conception and comprehension of Him, are bound to prove futile. When 'Positivists' undertake the task, they rattle on and on, fall into a sea of speech from which there is no swimming to any shore: God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, eternal, without beginning and without end. He is Love, Father, Mother, Light, Truth, Beauty, Goodness. He is the Ultimate and the Supreme Reality, the First Cause and the Prime Principle. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the King of Kings and All in All, the Soul of all souls, and the Being of all beings. Eternity is too short to speak His praise. Many are His forms, innumerable His manifestations: "Now he appeareth as fire, now as water, now as gloom; he is dimly seen in the likeness of wild beasts, of wind, of cloud, of lightning, thunder and of rain. All power hath he." He it is who creates, sustains and destroys; the source of all life, the fount of all force, and the final end of everything is He. He is Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute and Bliss Absolute. He is the Universal Mind. He is that Creative Force behind and in the universe who manifests Himself as energy, as life, as order, as beauty, as thought, as conscience. He is the Essence and the Eternity from which all that is emanates and to which all that returns. He is That by

which all this world is pervaded. He is a circle whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere. He is the Cosmos and the Chaos. He is, in short, Incomprehensibility Personified.

Another school approaches the matter through negation, 'not this, not this'. God is no thing; "to Him belongs neither Now nor Here." According to Denis the Arcopagite, He is neither soul nor mind, nor has imagination or opinion, or reason, or conception; neither is expressed nor conceived; neither is number nor order; nor greatness nor littleness nor equality nor inequality; nor similarity nor dissimilarity; neither is standing nor moving, nor at rest; neither has power, nor is power nor light; neither lives nor is life; neither is essence nor eternity nor time; neither is Its touch intelligible; neither is It science or truth; nor kingdom nor wisdom; neither one nor oneness; neither Deity nor Goodness; nor is It Spirit according to our understanding; neither Sonship nor Paternity; nor any other thing of those known to us; nor to any other existing being; neither is It any of non-existing nor of existing things, nor do existing things know It, as It is; nor does It know existing things *qua* existing; neither is there expression of It, nor name nor knowledge; neither is It darkness, nor light; nor error, nor truth; neither is there any definition at all of It, nor any abstraction. But when making the predications and abstractions of the things after It, we neither predicate nor abstract from It, since the all-perfect and uniform cause of all is both above every definition, and the pre-eminence of Him, who is absolutely freed from all and beyond the whole, is also above every abstraction.... Thus, to quote Hooker, "our soundest knowledge is to know that we know him not as indeed he is; neither can know him; and our safest eloquence concerning him is our silence when we confess without confession that his glory is inexplicable, his greatness above our capacity"; so that, as Reid remarks, "every conjecture we can form with regard to (the works of) God has as little probability as the conjectures of a child with regard to (the works of) a man." In short, "A God comprehended is no God", and, therefore, "A God alone can comprehend a God."

And even as no definition nor description of God is possible, He cannot be proved or disproved. Neither ontology nor cosmology, neither instinct nor intellect, neither an appeal to reason nor one to emotion, can provide proof that He exists or even that He exists not. Where such an effort is made, more likely than not, the result is bound to be similar to what was achieved after a discussion

of the subject by a theist and an atheist who having argued and contended all the night through merely interchanged their stands, the theist becoming an atheist and vice-versa. Possibly the best summing-up of the position in this respect is what was put forth in the film version of The Song of Bernadette : For those who believe in God no proof is necessary; for those who do not, no proof is possible. And yet, in all ages, men have felt that there must be, there ought to be, "some Power outside ourselves that makes for righteousness." "I do not know," said Diogenes, "whether there are gods but there ought to be". According to Lichtenberg, "Belief in God is an instinct as natural to man as walking on two legs." "The belief in the gods has not been established," said Cicero, "by authority, custom or law, but rests upon the unanimous and abiding consensus of mankind." Or, again, "The celestial order and the beauty of the universe compel me to admit that there is some excellent and eternal Being who deserves the respect and homage of men." "The being of God is so comfortable, so convenient, so necessary to the felicity of Mankind, that if God were not a necessary being of himself, he might almost seem to be made on purpose for the use and benefit of men", which echoes what Voltair said, "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him." Plato also remarked, not cynically one expects, that "he was a wise man who invented God". Since reverence, as Ruskin says, "seems to be so fixedly a function of the human spirit, that if men can get nothing else to reverence they will worship a man, or an idol, or a vegetable", we might do worse than agreeing to accept a God. In any case, there need be no foolish haste to dogmatise about this matter. "I know not," said Samuel Butler, "which is the more childish—to deny Him or to define Him." Perhaps the most sensible course is to follow the advice of that old sage of Athens, Socrates, who said that the wisest theory about the gods was to have no theory at all.....To each his own view, for this, after all, is a matter between a man and his God.

3

The ground of Religion is less slippery to tread upon, though neither less dangerous nor less infested with moon-struck guides. Nevertheless, once we accept that there is, in man, an innate urge to worship and to revere something or some one, the case for religion is straightaway established. Each man, then, must have some religion, even if he should have no God or gods. Yet religion, too, cannot be defined easily nor its development disposed of in a few words. Possibly, it began in the awe and, consequently, the propitiation of what have

come to be termed as natural forces. Then through observing the phenomena of suffering and death, and due, perhaps, to something that troubled and perplexed an early Buddha or an ancient Augustine, the elements of speculation and even hope were introduced. Finally, the moment some semblance of society had come into being, the ingredients of morality and ethics, so essential to the life and organization of social units, were added and sanctified duly by the vision of one or the oracular pronouncements of another. In some such fashion was provided the core around which grew, in due course, much ritual and ceremony, many customs and traditions. Then as man became civilized, he brought to the fashioning of his gods, an ever-increasing understanding of his circumstances and environments. For, "in religion, as with children at night, it is darkness and ignorance which create dread; light and love cast out fear"; and, "as men have risen in civilization, their religion has risen with them; they have by degrees acquired higher and purer conception of divine power." Then, instead of praying and sacrificing to his deities from hope and fear, man took to love for God and sincere worship for their own sake, for God's sake and for nothing else. The 'moral' element got converted into a deep feeling for one's fellowmen, and even for all that is alive and existent, so that man could experience, almost like a god, infinite mercy and universal love. From being "a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life", religion developed into an institution, noble and sacred. It ceased to be a "Daughter of Hope and Fear, explaining to Ignorance the nature of the unknowable," and became man's glorious link with the eternal, his communication with all that is beautiful and true and worthy in human life. Take away Man's science, and the loss is little; take away his religion and how shall it profit him if he should gain the whole world ? "Even if God did not exist", said Charles Baudelaire, "religion would still be holy and divine." Whether it be the "metaphysics of the people" or their opiate, a man's relation with God or his total reaction upon life, some religion seems to be necessary for us all. For, "nobody can deny but religion is a comfort to the distressed, a cordial to the sick, and sometimes a restraint on the wicked ; therefore whoever would laugh or argue it out of the world, without giving some equivalent for it, ought to be treated as a common enemy". Again, true religion "doth clear the mind from all impotent, unsatiable desires, which do abuse and toss a man's soul, and make it restless and unquiet. It sets a man free from eager and impetuous loves, from vain and disappointing hopes, from lawless and exorbitant appetites, from frothy and empty

joys, from dismal presaging fears and anxious self-devouring cares." Nor do the value and efficacy of this wonderful panacea end with this list of its merits. Beyond the social aspect of religion, beyond the moral commandments it lays down, there is the question of the individual as an individual. There, religion is not merely the friend of him who has no friend, it is the path to his salvation, the road along which the divine in man seeks and finds God, his true home. It is in that sense that Dean Inge says that "we cannot make a religion for others, and we ought not to let others make a religion for us," for, Religion is, as Whitehead puts it, "what the individual does with his own solitariness". Whether men have souls or not, whether life is a dream within a dream and the shadow of a shadow, or the only reality, religion, or whatever is its equivalent, is an element essential to the integrated development of human personality. "The activities of men", says Russel, "may be roughly derived from three sources, not in actual fact sharply separate one from another, but sufficiently distinguishable to deserve different names. The three sources are instinct, mind, and spirit, and of these three it is the life of the spirit that makes religion." And, further : "Religion starts from the spirit and endeavours to dominate and inform the life of instinct. It is possible to feel the same interest in the joys and sorrows of others as in our own, to love and hate independently of all relation to ourselves, to care about the destiny of man and the development of the universe without a thought that we are personally involved. Reverence and worship, the sense of an obligation to mankind, the feeling of imperativeness and acting under orders which traditional religion has interpreted as Divine inspiration, all belong to the life of the spirit. And deeper than all these lies the sense of a mystery half-revealed, of a hidden wisdom and glory, of a transfiguring vision in which common things lose their solid importance and become a thin veil behind which the ultimate truth of the world is dimly seen. *It is such feelings that are the source of religion, and if they were to die most of what is best would vanish out of life.*" (Italics ours)

This life of the spirit, or what we call our 'religion', has found diversified expression at different periods of human history. That is why we see around us not one Universal religion but several forms thereof. Still, the fact of there being a large number of these living faiths should cause no distress except, of course, to the bigoted and the narrow-minded. After all, if a hundred nations can, and can want to, exist side by side, what is wrong with a dozen religions co-existing in our world ? These are but the various dialects of the same mother-tongue,

variations on the same main theme that we have been harping upon, different paths to the same destination, different names of the same thing, different versions of the same story, different containers for the same nectar. "There are many faiths", said Tolstoy, "but the spirit is one, in me, in you, and in every man." "As one can ascend to the top of a house by means of a ladder or a bamboo or a staircase or a rope (or a lift, the modern man might want to add !), so diverse are the ways and means to approach God, and every religion in the world shows one of these ways", thus Ramakrishna. All religions, then, may be regarded as true even though "all have some error in them," and all have contributed to the betterment of man, to the uplift of his soul. To quote Vivekananda, "Each great system of faith, whether religious or 'lay', represents one portion of Universal Truth.....But petty individual vanities, due mainly to ignorance, upheld by the pride and interest of priestly castes, have always in all countries and all ages made the part claim to be the whole.....Despite their foolishness, each group has a living, beating heart, its own mission, and its own note in the complete harmony of sound; each one has conceived its own splendid but incomplete ideal : Christianity, its dream of moral purity ; Hinduism, spirituality ; Islam, social equality.....etc.....I rejoice in the immense diversity of religions and ideas..... Let them ever grow and multiply.....Variation is the sign of life.....Difference is the first sign of thought. I pray that they (sects) may multiply so that at last there will be as many sects as human beings."

All this sounds high and noble. Yet, it cannot be denied that the rival religions and warring creeds of mankind have, through petty vanity and ignorance, "upheld by the pride and interest of priestly castes", caused much misery and bloodshed, have produced and are still generating a deal of sectarian jealousy and communal ill-will. Naturally, one is tempted to condemn the whole lot of them, and to abolish religion altogether. But doing that will not solve the problem. The disease would still persist. The fact is that man is but man, as a whole, and one entity; and whether he does something in the name of religion or of science, out of commercial rivalry or religious conflict, from a spirit of love for his country or for his creed, he cannot but express himself and the values he holds dear. Religion or religions are but means of ennobling the species, of providing ideals which the human soul should strive for. The attempts of religion to achieve its objectives have often succeeded and often failed, but always with this to the credit of religion that, with every passing century, the over-all height scaled

by the spirit of man, the Highest-Flood-Level of the Soul, so to speak, has always registered a rise. No doubt, universal love and brotherhood are no new concepts and have been preached before, millennia earlier, but never did these phrases have a deeper meaning than that which they carry to-day. For, dark is the abyss and great the peril which now confront man; and his vision must be clear, his courage unfaltering. With his keener perception and sharper, more sensitive reactions, with science hitting hard and creeds like Communism tolerating no spiritual rubbish, the modern man must see to it that all cobwebs of the mind and soul are cleaned up. With manifold danger and bottomless despair staring it in the face, this generation is forced to think clearly and to believe passionately or not at all. That is why the modern seers, intellectual or spiritual, have no doubt about either the essential and desirable content of religion or its direction and role. As to the former, "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divine within by controlling nature external and internal. Do this, either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one or more or all of these—and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas, or rituals or books, or temples or forms are but secondary". With regard to the second aspect, in respect of, that is, the claims of the "welfare state" on its citizens, everyone recognises that in consonance with the growing unity of mankind and the oneness of our world, religions have not only to co-exist peacefully, they must evolve a sort of higher religion, a '*Deen-i-Ilahi*' like the one attempted by Akbar, a constitution of the United Religions of the world which embodies the fundamentals of all the faiths and their highest common factors. "If we do not abolish war, war is going to abolish us," said Toynbee. And that applies to all war, including 'religious' wars and the holy crusades. In the words of Radhakrishnan, "Today the world has become a much smaller place, thanks to the adventures and miracles of science. Foreign nations have become our next door neighbours. Mingling of population is bringing about an interchange of thought. Our religions have become forces with which we have to reckon and we are seeking for ways and means by which we can live together in peace and harmony. We cannot have religious unity and peace so long as we assert that we are in possession of the light and all others are groping in the darkness. The very assertion is a challenge to a fight. The political ideal of the world is not so much a single empire with a homogeneous civilization and a single communal will, but a brotherhood of free nations.....each contributing to the world its own unique and specific best. I see no hope for the religious future of the

world, if this ideal is not extended to the religious sphere also." Given the necessary goodwill, this should not be difficult. For the idea of tolerance, the tradition of co-existence in the sphere of religion, is at least as old as the edicts of Asoka. "The King.....honours every form of religious faith, but considers no gift or honour so much as the increase of the substance of religion; whereof this is the root, to reverence one's own faith and never to revile that of others. Whoever acts differently injures his own religion while he wrongs another's." That is all there is to remember and to realize, to believe and to practise.

Nor is there any lack of clarity as to the reforms required in the older faiths or as to the forms which our religious experiences and emotions should take. "If a religious view of life and the world is ever to reconquer the thoughts and feelings of free-minded men and women", says Russel, "much that we are accustomed to associate with religion will have to be discarded.....The religious life that we must seek will not be one of occasional solemnity and superstitious prohibitions, it will not be sad or ascetic, it will concern itself little with rules of conduct. It will be inspired by a vision of what human life may be, and will be happy, with the joy of creation, living in a large free world of initiative and hope. It will love mankind, not for what they are to the outward eye, but for what imagination shows that they have it in them to become....."

Again, in its essence, religion is not a complex concept and offers little obstacle to even the meanest understanding. "The religion of the truly religious," says Radhakrishnan, "is a simple one, without any shackles of creeds, dogmatic sentiments or supernatural elements. It affirms the reality of the spirit that broods over time and space. It has for its practical expression the maxim : 'He that does good is of God.' "To do justly, to love beauty, and to walk humbly with the spirit of truth is the highest religion." In such a sense, religion, far from counting Science as its enemy will discover her to be the greatest ally, and the "serious scientific workers the only profoundly religious people." "You will hardly find," said Einstein, "one among the profounder sort of scientific minds without a religious feeling of his own. But it is different from the religiosity of the naive men. For the latter, God is a being from whose care one hopes to benefit and whose punishment one fears, a sublimation of a feeling similar to that of a child for its father, a being to whom one stands, so to speak in a personal relation, however deeply it may be tinged with awe.

"But the scientist is possessed by the sense of universal causation.....His religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection. This feeling is the guiding principle of his life and work, in so far as he succeeds in keeping himself from the shackles of selfish desire. It is beyond question closely akin to that which has possessed the religious genuises of all ages." And what is true of the 'profounder sort of scientific minds' and the 'serious scientific workers' is true, by and large, and, of course, *mutatis mutandis*, of the profounder sort of Communist minds and the serious Communist workers. All these are men and need the life of spirit as much as the so-called religious man does. In fact, for men of today, the word religion must take on a far wider connotation than ever before. It cannot exclude from its scope any 'sincere and sane form of knowledge'. It must be 'the fellow citizen of every thinking man'. To quote Vivekanand, "All narrow, limited, fighting ideas of religion must be given up.....The religious ideals of the future must embrace all that exists in the world and is good and great, and at the same time, have infinite scope for future development." This future development must take place along the broadest possible lines, so that Religion becomes synonymous with Universalism. Then alone will it truly serve mankind, which it has great need to do. For, contrary to the prevailing notion that religion is a thing of the past, a looking backwards, a stage in the journey that is over, it is a "matter for the future". In the words, once again, of Vivekanand, ".....it is said sometimes that religions are dying out, that spiritual ideas are dying out of the world. To me it seems that they have just begun to grow.....So long as religion was in the hands of a chosen few, or a body of priests, it was in temples, churches, books, dogmas, ceremonials, forms and rituals. But when we come to the real, spiritual, universal concept, then, and then alone religion will become real and living, it will come into our very nature, live in our every moment, penetrate every pore of our society and be infinitely more a power for good than it has ever been before."

There is no fear, then, that religion will cease to be. Let us not forget that the need for religion is co-extensive with the life of the species. "As soon as man became distinguished from the animal, he became religious", wrote Renan. And as long as man's sense of the mysterious obtains and his knowledge that "the impenetrable mystery of life manifests itself as the highest wisdom and the

most radiant beauty" lasts, so long will religion endure; which means for ever, since science has but begun to uncover the layers of mystery, admittedly infinite, which make our universe. To put this in religious terms used by Vivekanand, "God's book is not finished. It is a marvellous book—these Spiritual Revelations of the world. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran and all other sacred books are but as many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded". Even if it be true that "the life of the spirit has suffered in recent times by its association with traditional religion", or that the religious sentiment has, during some thousands of years, become "corrupted in the strangest manner", it is only through the life of the spirit and through the light of religion, that mankind may hope to regenerate itself. After all, "any serious pursuit of ideas", as Radhakrishnan remarks, "any search for conviction, any adventure after virtue, arises from resources whose name is religion," so that, as Shaw puts it, "if anything is to be done to get our civilization out of the mess in which it now is, it must be done by men who have got a religion". There are signs already of a great, spiritual renaissance all over the world wherein the "reconciliation of all aspects and ideals of religious thought and worship is being proclaimed," and, "before the effulgence of this new awakening, the glory of all past revivals will pale like stars before the rising sun". In soberer language, Wells prophesied : "Out of the trouble and tragedy of these times and the confusion before us, there may emerge a moral and intellectual revival, of a simplicity and scope to draw together men of alien races and now discrete traditions into a common and sustained way of living for the world's service.....Religious emotion, stripped of corruptions and freed from its last priestly entanglements, may presently blow through life again like a great wind, bursting the doors and flinging open the shutters of the individual life, and making many things possible and easy that in these present days of exhaustion seem almost too difficult to desire."

Let us take heart. Nothing will happen to interrupt our worship, to halt our pilgrimage.

4

But whilst 'the true and the universal' religion is evolving, the 'discrete traditions' and the older faiths continue to flourish lustily. Apart from minor creeds and sects of which one may count the conventional seventy-two or as many thousands, there are, in the world today, about a dozen of such faiths and

traditions. In the alphabetic order, these principal systems of religious belief and practice may be listed thus : Animism (or Primitivism, which term covers a multitude of tenets of faith and forms of worship of the comparatively less civilized races and tribes all the world over), Buddhism (including Zen-Buddhism etc.), Christianity, Confucianism, Judaism (or Hebraism, as some people will name it), Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism. Of course, it is possible to stretch the list, but those enumerated above are regarded commonly as the major living religions of the world. Of these eleven or twelve faiths and philosophies, Shinto, Taoism and Confucianism are confined more or less wholly to certain countries, and therefore find no representation on the soil of India. The remaining eight, or nine if Animism is to be considered as one system, claim definite following—in varying proportions—in this land. The number of persons professing different faiths is, according to the last census, of 1951, as follows :

Religion	*Number (in Lakhs)*	*Percentage to total population*
Hindu	30,32	84.99
Muslim	3,54	9.93
Christian	82	2.30
Sikh	62	1.74
Jain	16	0.45
Buddhist	2	0.06
Zoroastrian	1	0.03
Other religions (tribal)	17	0.47
Other religions (non-tribal)	1	0.03

The table given above does not cover the population in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and the Tribal Areas of Assam where the 1951 census was not taken. Also, there has been much increase in the last ten years in India's population so that the figures for numbers must have altered considerably. Nevertheless, the percentage indicated holds good generally. It will be seen that the religions of the Jews, the Zoroastrians, and of the Buddhists find very meagre representation in India. For that matter, even Christianity and Islam which are, at present, two of the most widespread religions of the world, are, considering India's population, not too well-placed either. In fact, with 90% of the population professing Hinduism, with all the provocation provided by the

formation of Pakistan as a theocratic state, and with all the pressure exerted by reactionary forces, it might well have been feared that Hinduism would become the state religion of India. That the leaders of this country and the framers of her constitution kept a level head, and steered clear of all narrow-mindedness in this respect, is a matter of great satisfaction. It is not necessary here to discuss whether it is right to say that Hinduism is the religion of India as several contemporary scholars have tried to establish ; or, whether there is scope for any other religion dominating the field ever again as Buddhism once did. Nor is this the place to examine whether India's policy of secularism, of acceptance of all religions, and of the right of all religions to co-exist and flourish, was dictated from motives of political prudence, or from a genuine belief in the principle of religious tolerance, and in the true spirit of democracy. All that is relevant here is to take note of the fact that such a course has been deliberately chosen. The right to freedom of religion has been made one of the fundamental rights, so that in the India of today, as in that of her most illustrious rulers like Ashoka or Akbar, "all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion." In one of his recent pronouncements, world's leading-most historian, Arnold Toynbee, has drawn attention to this country's care for the historical perspective and respect for religious tolerance. His tribute to India on this score is worth quoting : "India is not only the heir of her own religious tradition, she is also the residuary legatee of the Ancient Mediterranean World's religious tradition. You hold a brief for Symmachus as well as for Ashoka, and you have faithfully executed this trust in framing the Indian Union's Constitution since independence. You have not made the mistake that was made by the Roman Emperor Theodosius in the fourth century of the Christian era and by the Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb in the seventeenth century. You have not made Hinduism the official religion of the Indian Union. You have established a secular regime, in which the adherents of all religions are on an equal footing with each other. Hinduism has refrained from insisting on being given a privileged status, and in this act of self-denial it has, I should say, been strikingly true to its own spirit." Indeed, it would have been a great pity if India had done less. She would have not only played false to all her tradition of broad-minded acceptance and tolerance, but also, and most certainly, jeopardised her future by cutting herself off from the true source and fountain-head of her life and strength. This last is no mere figure of speech, since what doubt can there be that she has survived chiefly, if not wholly, because she has always

welcomed, even suffered if necessary, the flow and ingress of all streams of thought, philosophy and faith. Whether these minglings and comminglings have done her good or not cannot be assessed, as no facts of history can ever be assessed—at least not truly and properly ; for one does not know what would have been the shape of things had it been otherwise. Nor does this matter since it was so destined, and few minds accept what was destined as cheerfully, as lightly and as whole-heartedly, as the Indian mind does.

It is not possible within the scope and limits of this work to trace the story of how India became the museum of religions which for centuries now it has continued to be. Nor is it, perhaps, very necessary to do that because several of the religions represented among her population place their holy cities, their Jerusalems and Meccas elsewhere. Thus, the Jews and the Christians and the Zoroastrians, do not regard any cities in India which are, for them, holy as such. To no place in India, do they make a pilgrimage, as the Hindu makes to Hardwar, or the Buddhist to Bodh Gaya. Of the followers of religions not originating in India, the Indian Muslim, alone, has come to recognise a place or two as sacred. And although Mecca and Medina remain, as they always have been, the holy cities *par excellence* and to Mecca is he, in the Quran, enjoined to go on a pilgrimage, Ajmer is regarded by many an Indian Muslim as a holy city; for, there lies the tomb of one of the most venerated saints of Islam. On the other hand, though here, in this country, Buddhism is more or less extinct, and though in the land of his birth, the strength of Buddha's followers is negligible, yet most of the sacred sites are located in India, these have always drawn large numbers of Buddhists from all over the world. Finally, Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism, having originated in India and being still very much alive, if not kicking, count several places and cities as holy. Thus, so far as it concerns holy cities, in India five faiths—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Sikhism—have any relevance, and a brief account of the history and essential tenets of these religions should not be out of place.

Hinduism.

Both from the point of view of our present pursuit as also in its own right, Hinduism is obviously the most important of the creeds we are considering. It is generally accepted to be the most ancient, even though the Jains do not concede that. It is also the most complicated and difficult to define, for it is not

a religion in the sense in which we think of religions like Islam or Christianity. There are no definite concepts or creeds, rituals or dogmas, which too strictly bind the Hindu. That is why some people prefer to label it as a way of life, rather than a religion, or consider it to be but a "convenient name for the nexus of Indian thought". Or one might say that Hinduism is the religion professed by the Hindus—the Hindus being the persons who profess Hinduism ! In fact, the term 'Hindu'—a corruption of the word 'Sindhu', the old name for the river Indus—relates, in its original sense, to geography and demography, rather than to religion : it identified the inhabitant of India. By implication, Hinduism would be the religion of India, which would be all wrong, has been so for the last 2,500 years, if not longer. That is why some scholars and priests substitute for "Hinduism", nomenclature like 'Vedaism' or 'Brahmanism', or 'Shaivism' or 'Vaishnavism', 'Sanatan Dharma' and so on. All in all, the foreigner, as also the non-Hindu, is apt to be bewildered by what appears to be a "museum of beliefs, a medley of rites" and "a tapestry of the most variegated tissues and almost endless diversity of hues". The explanation lies in the continuity of the religious experience which the 'Hindu' mind has gone through since the dawn of civilization. Beginning with Vedaism, with its frank and often beautiful worship of nature ; and passing through regions of the carefully-thought-out philosophy of Vedanta and, later, of the elaborately-worked-out ritual and dogma of Brahmanism; then imbibing the best and worst of Buddhism and Jainism, and undergoing a powerful revival brought about by men like Shankaracharya and Ramanuj ; not consumed but not wholly unaffected by the impact of Christianity and Islam, and, thereafter, by the currents of modern socio-economic or philosophic or scientific thought—Hinduism is like a vast stream that has been flowing all along and absorbing, on the way, much extraneous matter. Joined by rivulets and tributaries, obstructed by rocks of granite and welcomed by smiling plains of the softest clay, now obliged to turn its course, and another time carving its way as it would, rejecting neither the rain from the skies nor dross and dirt from the banks, never dry, incessantly flowing, visibly altered yet essentially unchanged—such is this stream. There is no other way of explaining or understanding the nature and character of this thing called Hinduism. Radhakrishnan, one of the foremost living exponents of Hindu thought and belief, considers the resultant concoction as characteristic of the Hindu attitude to religion. "While fixed intellectual beliefs mark off one religion from another, Hinduism sets

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itself no such limits. Intellect is subordinated to intuition, dogma to experience, outer expression to inward realization. Religion is not the acceptance of academic abstractions or the celebration of ceremonies but a kind of life or experience. It is insight into the nature of reality or experience of reality. The Hindu philosophy of religion starts from and returns to an experimental basis—and the Hindu thinker readily admits other points of view than his own and considers them just as worthy of attention." In that sense, Hinduism may be regarded as a "relentless pursuit of truth." On the other hand, this catholicity of outlook, this spirit of broad-mindedness, might as well have been brought about by the operation of external forces and factors like invasions or political considerations or economic necessity. It might have been a plain and simple question of survival through 'compromise' or, if you like, adaptability. For what one likes to believe is not necessarily the truth. From what one learns in history, the Hindus could be, and have been, as hard and uncompromising and intolerant as any one else, and when Buddhism was routed, it was rooted out indeed, in as grand a style as the Muslim iconoclast later on treated Hinduism. In point of fact, for all that he professes, the Hindu is a very tenacious sort. That is why he has survived. Even a man as mild as Gandhi would say that though all religions were alike and equal, he prized Hinduism above all. Nevertheless, the Hindu has, by and large, imbibed the larger perspective, and for any understanding of Hinduism it is essential to appreciate the 'geography and history of India' with which Hinduism throbs. To quote from sister Nivedita, "In every image of Shiva speaks the voice of pre-Gupta Benares. In that complex conception of Krishna which blends in one the Holy child of Vrindaban, the Hero of the Gita, and the Builder of Dwarka, we celebrate the vision of the royal house of Patliputra. In the Ramayana we unravel the earlier dream of Koshala. And in Elephanta on the extreme west we are confronted with a rendering of the great synthesis that comes after the formulation of Shiva.....what must have been the solidarity of the country when the dream dreamed in Benares finds expression a thousand miles away ?" And what is true of the synthesis and solidarity of Hinduism for the above has remained true for the rest of it. For Hinduism seems to have never discarded the old, whatever of the new it may or may not have accepted.

Yet, no religion could have endured all these tens of centuries without some frame-work however vague and undefined, without some basic principles

and fundamental articles of faith. Pressed to answer a question on that, the Hindu would say that he believes in a supreme God (and the lesser deities who are His manifestations and incarnations), in the theory of reincarnation, according to one's 'karma' or actions in the previous birth, and in the 'atman', the individual soul, being a constituent of the 'Paramatman', Supreme Soul, in which it may, by attaining *moksha* through virtue and merit, be finally merged. On the practical side, Hinduism holds Life as a duty fairly clearly defined and fully mapped out. The four-fold goal and aim of life comprises *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*—righteousness, pursuit of wealth, marriage and begetting children, and, finally, salvation. The life of the average man is divided into four stages viz, *brahmcharya*, period of celibacy and studentship ; *grahsth*, period of householder's life ; *vanprastha*, the period wherein the householder withdraws from worldly life and goes to the forest; and lastly, *sanyas*, when in the fourth quarter of his 100-year life, detaching himself completely from all worldliness, from every consideration of thine and mine, owning nothing, belonging to none, a man takes on an attitude of universal love and service or, else, of a complete unlinking of self from the rest. Some people insist on including the caste system, or the *varna-ashram*, as one of the basic beliefs. It certainly was one of the fundamentals and proved to be a boon in the earlier stages of the organization of the Hindu society, for it provided a most sensible and successful way of achieving stability and specialization. Then, in the course of time, it degenerated, like most formulae which have outlived their utility and which take no stock of the changing environment, into a veritable disease. In fact, it was, for the most part, the rigidity of the caste system which, directly or indirectly, caused much of the revolt against Hinduism throughout the last 2,500 years. Yet, in spite of all reform and rebellion aimed at this institution, it lasted so long that even in 1945 it was necessary for Gandhi to declare : "I wish to say that caste in Hinduism, as we know it, is an anachronism, must hinder the growth of true religion, and must go, if both Hinduism and India are to live and grow from day to day." Habits, whether of the individual mind, or of a nation, die hard; and although the caste system has been abolished by law in so far as it restricted the rights and privileges of any citizen, it still persists, even if as a vestigial instinct, in respect of social conduct, marriages, etc.

If the above summary of what constitutes the essentials of Hindu faith has not been simple enough, Gandhi's characteristically phrased enunciation of

the same may prove more helpful :

> "I call myself a (Sanatani) Hindu, because,
> I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures, and therefore in Avataras and rebirth.
> I believe in the Varnashrama Dharama in a sense, in my opinion, strictly Vedic but not in its present popular and crude sense;
> I believe in the protection of the cow in its much larger sense than the popular.
> I do not disbelieve in idol-worship."

Now, although Gandhi was a good Hindu, and, although a vast majority of Hindus do, generally speaking, subscribe to the views and beliefs expressed by him, there would be millions who would vehemently protest against such a description of Hinduism. The Arya Samajist, for example, would, in contradistinction to the Sanatanist, as Gandhi was, rule out altogether any connection with things like the Puranas or the Avataras or the worship of idols. Gandhi himself had to elaborate upon and to qualify his declaration of faith which he, finally and amusingly enough, put in still terser terms thus : "But one need not despair of ever knowing the truth of one's religion, because the fundamentals of Hinduism, as of every great religion, are unchangeable and easily understood. Every Hindu believes in God and His oneness, in rebirth and salvation....." With that every Hindu will agree, even the staunchest of the extremists on either side.

A matter which perhaps intrigues the non-Hindu most is the Hindu's view of God. Does the Hindu believe in one God, in one absolute God as the Muslim does, or in three, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva ? Or, in the thirty-three crore deities of the Hindu Pantheon ? Is the Hindu a monotheist or a pagan out and out ? A polytheist, a worshipper of idols or of an Abstraction ? It appears that the Hindu himself is still trying to find the answer to this most vital question, vital not only to himself but to all mankind. For whatever the superficial view one may take of his superstitions, of his seeming reverence for rivers and worship of women, of his bowing to Bo trees, and obeisance to obelisks, of his search for salvation through propiation of snakes or of stone-images, the Hindu is no fool.

The glorious Song of Creation, that one single piece, is enough to indicate the scope and flight of his thought and questioning, of his doubt, worthy of the rankest atheists and agnostics, and his daring :

> "Then was not non-existent nor existent : there was no realm of air, no sky beyond it.
> What covered in and where ? and what gave shelter ? Was water there, unfathomed depth of water ?
> Death was not then, nor was there aught immortal ; no sign was there, the day's and night's divider.
> That one thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature : apart from it was nothing whatsoever.
>
> * * * *
>
> Who verily knows and who can here declare it, whence it was born and whence comes this creation ?
> The gods are later than this world's production. Who knows, then, whence it first came into being ?
> He, the first origin of this creation, whether he formed it all or did not form it,
> Whose eye controls this world in highest heaven, he verily knows it, or perhaps he knows not.

'Or perhaps he knows not', not even he ! That is why "when asked to define the nature of God, the seer of the Upanishad sat silent", for God is "That of which nothing can be said". This, however, does not mean that the Hindu thinkers have formulated no views as to either the other aspects of the matter or the one under consideration. On the contrary, clearest possible exposition of the entire issue is available almost anywhere, from simpletons and scholars alike. "Hindu thought believes in the evolution of our knowledge of God", writes one of the latter, "It accepts the obvious fact that mankind seeks its goal of God at various levels and in various directions and feels sympathy with every stage of the search. The same God expresses itself at one stage as power, at another as personality, at a third as all comprehensive spirit, just as the same forces which put forth the green leaves also cause the crimson flowers to grow. Thus the bewildering polytheism of the masses and the uncompromising monotheism of the classes are for the Hindu the expressions of one and the same force at different

levels". The scriptures indicate the hierarchy and the order of precedence : "The worshippers of the absolute are the highest in rank ; second to them are the worshippers of the personal God, then come the worshippers of the incarnations like Rama, Krishna, Buddha ; below them those who worship ancestors, deities and sages, and lowest of all the worshippers of the petty forces and spirits". In simpler language, the images and idols are but aids to worship, and no Hindu really believes that the stone or wood, bronze or marble, before which he bends in worship, is anything more than a symbol. This is obvious to anyone who would see and understand, as it was to one European : "And yet under all the turmoil of almost senseless worship, behind all the thirty thousand and odd deities which are so worshipped in India, there is not one Hindu from Cape Cormoran to the Himalayas who would not scout the idea of there being more Gods than one, and that one unknowable, Mysterious, Absolute Holiness. The rest are but ideas, formed by man in the vain efforts to bring the Incomprehensible into comprehension."

The truth is that in the real spirit of hospitality, the Hindu has been welcoming whatever gods came along. The more, the merrier, since one knew that all were, one way and another, His messengers, His manifestations; and variety was fun, relieved boredom, even gave man some power over the gods; for, could not human beings start favouring one against the other and, in return, secure concessions and special blessings ? Whatever the view or cause, the fact remains that the gods of the Vedic age, and the gods of the 'Upanishads', and, later on, the deities of the Puranic myths and legends as also 'incarnations' like the Buddha, were added on to all the left-over from the demons and deities, spirits and powers, mother-goddesses and totems of the aborigins ; and all these became the stock-in-trade of the priests. Once produced and introduced in the spiritual market, certain brands became popular ; others had to be altogether withdrawn from circulation and nearly scrapped. Nevertheless, and a little less or more, each has served the priests and the people, providing cash and living to one, and consolation and strength to the other. The present position is this : there is Ishwara, the Absolute God, who combines in Him the Hindu 'trinity' of Brahma, the Creator, Vishnu, the Preserver, and Shiva, the Destroyer. In practice, the three are not infrequently mixed up and allowed to officiate one for the other, for essentially, each is all. As against the above approach, the votaries of one may strive to establish the

superiority of their god over the others', and endless tales exists of how Vishnu proved to be the supermost or how Shiva vanquished the other two. This rivalry has been confined mostly to the sects of Shiva and Vishnu since Brahma, though creator of the universe could not be of much use to anyone, till the next cycle of creation. Vishnu, on the other hand, as preserver, and Shiva as destroyer, would always count, and religion being both fear-born and desire-propelled would propitiate these two. They have, between them, divided the Hindus as their worshippers ; and the followers of this religion who do not worship the Absolute, will be found to be the devotees of one or the other. Further, in the case of Shiva, the worshipper may owe allegience to the great god himself, the Mahadeva, or to his 'Shakti', the female-principle, the goddess Kali, also known as Durga or Parvati, who is his wife and symbolises his real creative force ; or else, to either of the two sons, Ganesha, or Ganpati, the god of wisdom, and Karttikeya, the god of war. Likewise, in the case of Vishnu who comes to this world of ours as saviour and has several incarnations to his credit, the god may be worshipped in any of his manifestations, as also along with his shakti, 'Lakshmi', the goddess of wealth, who is worshipped, like Durga, the spouse of Shiva, in her own right, too. Of the incarnations of Vishnu, the most celebrated and popular are those of Rama, the god-hero of the epic, Ramayana ; and Krishna who figures in the other great epic of India, Mahabharata ; and of the Buddha, who having become the founder of another faith bitterly critical, at one time, of Brahmanism, has tended to lose favour with the Hindus. But Rama and more than him, Krishna are the real stealers of the heart of the average Hindu. Gandhi was a great 'bhakt', devotee, of Rama, whose name was constantly on his lips so that when the fatal bullets pierced his frail frame, the words which he uttered were 'Hey Rama, Hey Rama' ; and 'Rama-Rama' is one of the most popular salutations exchanged when the Hindus meet. Krishna, who personifies, for the common man, the delight and joys of dalliance, as well as the very highest reach of Indian thought and philosophy which he enunciated in the Geeta, is the real rival of Shiva ; and Mathura and Benares, which constitute two of the holiest cities of the Hindus, are the strong-holds, respectively, of these two.

A word about the lesser gods and goddesses, since some of them are still legal tender, and many of them are frequently met with in Indian sculpture and iconography. A few of these who are members

of the families, or associates otherwise, of the greater gods have already been mentioned. To this category, it is necessary to add, among the female deities, Sita, the wife of Rama, and Radha the soul-and-paramour of Krishna; and the river-goddesses like Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati etc. Hanuman, who as Raṃa's attendant was a model of devotion, has also been deified into a minor deity. Of the innumerable others, mention may be made of Indra, Vayu, Agni, Kuber, Varuna and Yama, gods respectively of Rain, Wind, Fire, Wealth-and-Underworld, Sea, and Death-and-Time, as also of Surya, Chandra, Shani and Kamadeva—Sun-god, Moon-god, Saturn and Cupid. Most of these were Vedic gods and stood for natural forces. Then, in the Hindu Pantheon, there is a host of demi-gods and divine damsels and sacred animals. There are the Nagas and the Naginis, or the Gandharvas and Apsaras and the Yakshas ; or the 'vehicles' of the gods like Shiva's bull, Ganesha's rat, Brahma's swan and Vishnu's 'garuda' and so on. Generally speaking, the Vedic gods are no longer in vogue, having been replaced and ousted by the more delectably conceived, more efficiently presented and more effectively boosted Puranic gods such as Shiva and Vishnu, Rama and Krishna, and their satellites. And yet, it must be emphasised, again and again, that no gods are ever thrown away, and "every God accepted by Hinduism is elevated and ultimately identified with the central Reality...", so that, for the Hindu, what a South-Indian folk song says is literally true :

> Into the bosom of the one great sea
> Flow streams that come from hills on every side,
> Their names are various as their springs,
> And thus in every land do men bow down
> To one great God, though known by many names.

Thus, though in the 'childhood' of their religious growth, millions of Hindus, even the great masters, have found image-worship helpful, it is God, the absolute and one, who is the goal. Whatever the appearances, the final stand of Hinduism in this matter is that stated by Shankaracharya in his : "O Lord, pardon me the three sins committed by me—I have by contemplation clothed thee with a shape who art shapeless, I have in praise described thee who are indescribable ; and I have ignored thine omnipresence by visiting the Tirthas or by pilgrimage to shrines".

Such, then, is Hinduism of which this seemingly long account gives but a thumb-nail sketch. Truly vast is this religion in all its dimensions of sense and senselessness, of form and ritual, of thought and imagination. Its impact on the world's mind has been great though this is not often recognised and is but rarely admitted. However, more and more scholars have, of late, begun to give it their attention. More and more persons now turn to it as to the mother of all religions, and a number of sensitive souls and powerful intellects have, in recent decades, sought, and found in it, both true solace and the most satisfactory and satisfying answers to the great questionings that perplex human beings. As Toynbee says, "...at the religious level, India has not been a recipient ; She has been a giver," and a giver She continues to be. At this crisis, therefore, in man's story, Radhakrishnan is not the only one who believes that what the warring world needs is the Hindu solution, "which seeks the unity (of religion) not in a common creed but in a common quest."

Buddhism.

Considering the number of its adherents and the force, apparent and tangible, of its impact, Islam occupies the second position in the religious hierarchy of modern India. Nevertheless, it would be both more logical and convenient to consider first the two older faiths, Buddhism and Jainism. These two originated in this country, and are, in the popular mind, regarded, however erroneously, as offshoots of the mother-religion, Hinduism. Buddhism definitely was a protestant movement, of reform of Hinduism, undertaken by a Hindu. In that sense, the Buddhists may be reckoned as the followers of a great Hindu, Buddha, just as the first Sikhs were the disciples of yet another great Hindu, Nanak. Looked at in that way, Buddhism need not be treated as a separate faith, as something apart from Hinduism. In any case, a great deal of Buddhist theology is akin to that of the Hindus and the sources and background of the thought and philosophy of both are the same Vedas and Upanishads. Even so, it would be incorrect to ignore the distinct entity of Buddhism which, till recently, before China went communist, that is, was not only a major world religion but *the* world religion, since it claimed the highest number of followers—nearly fifty-two crores. Naturally, the faith has now suffered a severe reverse, because communism does not recognise religion, does not accept either its validity or its utility. Unless there has been a modification in their stand, it should still hold good for the Communists that "Religion is the opium of the people". As Lenin

put it, "This thought is the corner-stone of the whole Marxian philosophy on the question of religion." "Marxism regards," he continues, in what is one of the clearest statements on this question, "all modern religions and churches, all religious organisations as organs of bourgeois reaction, serving to drug the minds of the working class and to perpetuate their exploitation.....(and further) Marxism is materialism. As such it is as ruthlessly hostile to religion as was the materialism of the Encyclopaedists of the 18th Century or of Feuerback. This is incontestable.....We must combat religion. That is the ABC of all materialism and consequently of Marxism. But Marxism is not materialism that has stopped at the ABC. Marxism goes further. It says : we must combat religion and to enable us to do that we must explain the source of the faith and religion of the masses from the materialist point of view. The fight against religion must not be confined to abstract preaching. The fight must be linked up with the concrete practical class movement directed towards eradicating the social roots of religion. Why do the *backward* sections of the urban proletariat, the majority of the semi-proletariat and the masses of the peasantry cling to religion ? Because the people are ignorant, say the bourgeois progressives, the radical or bourgeois materialists. Consequently down with religion, long live atheism, to spread atheist views is our main task. The Marxist says : That is not true; such a view is superficial, expressing a narrow bourgeois scholasticism. It is not sufficiently profound, it is not materialist ; it is an idealist interpretation of the roots of religion. In modern capitalistic societies, the roots of religion are principally social. The roots of religion are to be found in the social oppression of the masses, in their apparently complete helplessness in face of the blind forces of capitalism which every day and every hour cause a thousand times more horrible pain and suffering to the workers than any disaster like war, earthquakes etc. Fear created the gods. Fear of the blind forces of capitalism, blind because they cannot be foreseen by the masses of the people, forces which at every step in the lives of the proletariat and the small traders threaten to bring and do bring sudden, 'unexpected', 'accidental' disaster and ruin, converting them into beggars, paupers, or prostitutes and condemn them to starvation; these are the roots of modern religion which the materialist, if he desires to remain a materialist, must recognise. No educational books will obliterate religion from the minds of those condemned to the hard labour of capitalism, until they themselves learn to fight in a united, organised, systematic and conscious manner the roots of religion, the domination of capital in all its forms."

Whether the lords of China and the lamas of Tibet, whether the peasant and the labourer, the man in the street or the woman in the home, in these lands, understand the analysis and the approach set forth in the quotation given above or not, it is obvious that religion will find no place, make no sense, under an organisation professedly out to uproot it. Yet, whatever one's personal views or private feelings, whatever the consequences for the Chinese nation or for the Tibetans, the issue must be faced boldly and calmly. If it is held, alike by the religious and the anti-religious, that "it makes all the difference in the world whether we put truth in the first place or in the second place"; if it is believed that Truth alone prevails, not falsehood, and if it is the prayer and endeavour of all sincere men that Truth alone *should* prevail, then the philosopher and the saint must welcome this straight struggle between Marx and his Maker, between the Dalai and Chou En-lai, between the monk and Mao Tse-tung. From the cosmic point of view, from the point of view even of this species, there can be no compromise, no question of quarter given or asked, when the issues involved are of such moment and importance.

Meanwhile let us roll back the pages of history to a period, 2,500 years ago, in Sixth Century B.C. It appears that this particular era was rather unusually fruitful for religious movements, for in several parts of the world much fresh, spiritual seed was sown simultaneously. In India, two new systems were founded, or, at any rate, one was founded, and the other, Jainism, was re-propounded. One of these two, Buddhism, has disappeared from the land of its origin, but it has left a deep mark on all subsequent thought and philosophy, religion and ritual, conduct and morality, of the Indian people, to the extent that its founder, the Buddha, is worshipped as an incarnation of one of the chief deities of the Hindus, namely Vishnu. In fact, such was the nobility and perfection of this human being, the Buddha, that one is tempted to believe that he was, verily, a god upon earth. How else is such gentleness, such compassion, such wisdom, such humility, such greatness and even such 'success' to be explained? How else, indeed, except by regarding him as 'Bhagwan Buddha'? And yet there can be no doubt as to the historicity of the Buddha; nor is it any credit to him or to humanity, if he was divine and not of common clay. To quote Count Keyserling, "The born god means less for us than the man who has raised himself to be a god, and such a one was Buddha..." The knowledge that he gained, and the wisdom he attained, "became life in him,.....the word

became flesh, not as a gift from above but in the course of natural growth, accelerated by intensive self-culture—therefore, Buddha is the greatest example in history.....(It is this) which conditions Buddha's unique greatness : it is the living example which he gave. That is the explanation why in India, where no reality subsists, where all historical figures melt into dreams in a twinkling, this one man has continued to live in memory, word and image, as he wandered upon earth." For the masses in India, there has been, in recent history, another like man, Gandhi, whose life was such that "generations to come would scarce believe that such a one trod the earth in flesh and blood." Yet, Gandhi, the greatest Indian, according to Toynbee, of our own time, as "Buddha is the greatest of all Indians so far", was *born*, frail and human, a child most ordinary, and *lived* a man most ungod-like to look at ; but what a man !

The romantic legend of Buddha's life and the picturesque events of his fairy story are too well-known to be dilated upon here, and the bare facts are all that need be given. He was born in the Lumbini grove near Kapilvastu, at the foot of the Himalayas, in about 544 B.C., as the dearly loved son of a petty king, Shuddhodana, and his queen, Maya Devi. From fear engendered by a prophecy that his child, who was called Siddharta might become a 'sanyasi', or from too much love, the fond father brought him up in great luxury, and with such scrupulous care that even when Gautama had become a grown-up youth, and a husband, and a father, he knew nothing of suffering and sorrow, of disease and death, of all the ills that human flesh is heir to. Immeasurably profound, therefore, was the impact upon his gentle nature, and terrible the shock which his sensitive soul received, when he came in contact with the seamier side of human existence—so great, indeed, that, to cut a long story short, he resolved, when but twenty-nine, to renounce the world. Bidding silent farewell to his loving and beautiful wife, Yashodhara, and to his sweet little son, Rahul, both of whom slept nearby, he stole out of his palace into the darkness of the night. Riding his favourite horse, Kanthaka, and followed by his attendant, Channa, he galloped swiftly away as far as possible, and, when five kingdoms distant from home, bade good-bye to Channa whom he sent back to bear the tidings of Gautama's resolve never to return to the life he had left. For years, thereafter, this homeless wanderer tried system after religious system for gaining wisdom and attaining salvation. Knowledge and penance and devotion,

gyan and *tap* and *bhakti*—nothing gave him what he sought. Neither in the most rigorous of ascetic practices and self-mortification, nor in all the learned discourses and elaborate ritual of the Brahmans, could he find the peace and the enlightenment his soul hungered for. Then, taking his seat under a Bo-tree at what is now known as Bodh-Gaya, he took the following solemn vow : "Let my skin, sinew, and bones become dry—and welcome ! Let all the flesh and blood in my body dry up ! Never will I stir from this seat till I have attained supreme and absolute wisdom." And there, it is said, he remained, "cross legged, in an unconquerable position, from which not even the descent of a hundred thunderbolts simultaneously could have dislodged him,"; nor all the threats and temptations, so well depicted in the murals at Sarnath, of Mara, "the tempter, who holds all beings in the meshes of recurrent death by means of the net of their own clinging to existence, the lord of the pleasures of life, which have to be paid for with suffering." Finally, after years of endeavour and meditation, the Bodhisattva, attained the highest and most perfect wisdom and became the Buddha—the Enlightened One, who could say :

"Through many a round of birth and death I ran,
Nor found the builder that I sought. Life's stream
Is birth and death and birth, with sorrow filled.
Now, House-builder, thou'rt seen ! No more shall build ;
Broken are all thy rafters, split thy beam !
All that made up this mortal self is gone.
Mind hath slain craving. I have crossed the stream."

Supreme enlightenment attained and perfection achieved, the Buddha repaired to Benares, the centre and stronghold of Brahmanism. There, in the Deer Park at Sarnath, he set in motion, through his first sermon, the wheel of the Law. This discourse, given to five former ascetic-comrades of his, set forth the gospel of the Buddhist doctrine, addressed to and meant for all, "without restriction of birth, caste, race or country, preached for the salvation of every creature caught in the round of rebirth (*Samsara*) whether god or animal, demon or tortured being in hell, woman or man". The four noble truths be propounded, namely suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the eightfold path which leads to this cessation, to 'nirvan'. And he unfolded this golden mean, the middle-way between the two extremes which Jainism and Brahmanism

advocated, this eight-fold path as consisting of (i) Right Views (ii) Right Resolve (iii) Right Speech (iv) Right Conduct (v) Right Livelihood (vi) Right Efforts (vii) Right Thoughts, and (viii) Right Meditation. Once the wheel was set moving, Buddha went about for forty-five years, preaching the truth he had learnt, exhorting the people to follow the noble, 'middle course', the eight-point road to salvation. From all ranks and classes came his converts ; kings and courtesans, peasants and princes, the Brahman and the Shudra, all took to the new faith which spread like a holy fire. Then in his 80th year, the Buddha lay down at Kusinagar and entered *nirvan.* His disciples held up the torch and its flame shone more brilliant than ever until Ashoka, struck with remorse at the terrible bloodshed he had caused at Kalinga, embraced this gentle creed. The noble king lent all his power, bent all his energies, to the spread of the faith whose light, then, travelled to other lands, until at one time half the world believed in the Buddha. In India, the country of its birth, however, Buddhism was soon fought tooth and nail by the Brahmans ; and weakened by cankerous corruption from within and assailed from without by all the weapons in the armoury of religion, losing royal patronage and its pristine purity, it was soon pushed out of the frontiers of India. Its effect on the entire life and thought of India was, nevertheless, deep and lasting, so that this country has had, ever since, a religion half-Buddhist in its content. In the words of Sister Nivedita, "Amongst the forces which have gone to the making of India, none has been so potent as the great wave of redeeming love for the common people which broke and spread on the shores of Humanity in the personality of Buddha. By preaching the common spiritual right of all men whatever their birth, He created a nationality in India which leapt into spontaneous and over-whelming expression so soon as his message touched the heart of Asoka the People's king." The common people, the people's King—the phrases have a familiar ring. Things have come full circle indeed, for, today, a people's government at Peking repudiates the Buddha who voluntarily relinquished a bourgeois life that he might preach to and serve the people ! But, whether it is China or India, and Communism or Hinduism, which denies the Buddha, the charge, which Radhakrishnan levels at all such spiritual Bolshevism, holds true : "Among the inspiring treasures of the human spirit is the memory of Gautama the Buddha. Its hold over the imagination of millions of our fellow beings is immense : its inspiration for braver and nobler living for centuries is incalculable : its contribution to the refining of the spirit of man, the humanizing of his social relations is

impressive. And yet attempts are made by men fighting under other flags, earnest lovers of their kind, no doubt, to destroy the memory of that great soul, to terminate his influence. We can only attribute it to blind prejudice, to pitiful ignorance."

They say that at the time of Buddha there were as many as sixty-three confusing schools of philosophy. Buddha's revolt was aimed at their 'futile reasoning and ritualism'. Add to these the sixty-fourth, Communism, or a sixty-four-hundredth, and yet the truth of what the Buddha saw and said would be true nonetheless : There is human suffering, there is a cause for this suffering and an escape therefrom ; and Buddha's "teachings of emancipation from illusions and senses and desires constitute that escape." This last may or may not be acceptable, but let us remember that for life's suffering and sorrow, even Communism may be no cure. "Only when men shall roll up the sky like a hide, will there be an end to misery, unless God has first been known," said the Upanishads. And by God they did not mean—well, certainly not what the Comrades think !

Jainism.

As to Jainism, the faith of the followers of the 'Jinas'—the Victors—of whom the 24th and the last was Mahavira, a senior contemporary of Gautama the Buddha, there are three theories. One which the Jains themselves put forward and to which a few scholars subscribe, is that Jainism is a religion more ancient than that of the Aryans, that its origins go back into the dim and distant past, into the period of prehistory. According to this view, the founder, if a founder be accepted, would be not Mahavira but Adinatha, or Rishabha Deva, who was the first of the 'Tirthankaras'—literally, "the makers of the passage across the ocean of life", or Arhats, or Jinas, "the venerable and the victorious who have conquered all passion, desires and appetites and are the possessors of pure knowledge and the revealers of true state of things." Mahavira, the last of the Tirthankaras of the present world-cycle, came millennia afterwards and merely revised and reorganised this age-old philosophy which had been (re-)preached and (re-)propounded but a few hundred years earlier by Parsvanatha, the 23rd Tirthankara. This claim is now usually allowed with reservations and qualifications which one Hindu authority sums up thus : "There are clear indications that Parsvanatha, the 23rd Tirthankara, who is reputed to have died 250 years before Mahavira, was really an historical person and he founded a religious set known as Nirgrantha. Mahavira belonged to this sect, but gave a decided stamp

to it by his own personality. As an historical religion of recognized status, with a definite system and organization, we can hardly trace Jainism long before the time of Vardhamana Mahavira.....But Jainism seems to be much older than this period. The Jains claim that there were 23 prophets (Tirthankaras) before Mahavira and have woven absurdly fantastic tales about them. It is said for example that the first prophet lived several millions of years and his stature was about a mile high".

The second theory is that, like Buddhism, Jainism was a revolt against Brahmanism, especially against its cruel sacrifices, so that Jainism was, in this respect alone, at the other extreme with its philosophy of "*Ahimsa Parmo Dharma*", Non-violence is the supreme Duty. Otherwise—except, of course, for minor modifications—it followed the essentials of Hinduism to whose fold it has by imperceptible degrees, but surely, reverted.

The third theory is that Jainism is a limb or a legacy of Buddhism. The assumption seems to be ill-founded, and sounds most queer, at least in one example. "*Buddhism*", says Birdwood, in his Industrial Arts of India, "the religion of Nepal, Bhutan, Ceylon, Burma, Assam, Siam, China, Japan, Mongolia, Tibet and of the Kirghis and Kalmuch Tartars, or of nearly 500,000,000 of the human race, *survives in India*, the holy land of its birth, *only* (excluding Nepal and Bhutan) *in the sect of Jainas*, who are worshippers of the images of the 24 sectarian saints or Jins, from whose generic designation they take their name. But before describing these images *it is necessary to refer to the rise of Buddhism in India not simply to explain the existence of the Jainas*....." (Italics ours). This certainly is putting the cart before the horse for the 'Jaina faith, or sect, was already in existence before the Buddha, and Gautama learnt some of his lessons from its followers. In fact, what he called the 'middle course' was the middle course because it avoided alike the extremes of Brahmanism as well as of the Jaina religion. As sister Nivedita points out, "Only by accepting the Jaina tradition.....as to the influence which their Gurus had upon Buddha, are we able to account satisfactorily for the road taken by Him from Kapilavastu to Bodh Gaya through Rajgir. He made his way first of all to the region of the famous Jaina teachers." Or, again, "Buddha.....accepted.....from Jainism its fearless pity, but not contented with the dumb creatures, added to the number of those to be redeemed man himself, wandering in ignorance from

birth to birth and sacrificing himself at every step to his own transient desires..... Thus, by the debt which he owes to *both*, this Great Sannyasin, calling all men to enter on the highest path, forms the bridge between the religion of the Aryans, tracing itself back to the Vedas, and the religion of the Jainas, holding itself to be defiant of the Vedas." This is testimony enough to dismiss the notion that Jainism is a survival and an offshoot of Buddhism. It is more likely that, to quote one Jain authority, "rather Buddhism is a branch of Jainism". In fact, "from a reference to Jainism in the Rig Veda, it has been held that the system must have been contemporary with the Vedas or even earlier than the latter." This seems to be a fair stand and agrees with the extent of the claim as to antiquity allowed even by the 'Hindu' authority quoted earlier.

But whether the Jaina view of the origin of their faith is accepted or any other, the fact is that as an organised religious system and a properly formulated philosophy, Jainism dates from the time of Vardhamana Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara; and it is he who is commonly regarded as the founder of this faith. He was born in a suburb of Vaisali, near modern Patna, which was then the capital of the clan of the Licchavis. Some scholars have suggested 539 B.C., as the year of his birth but tradition puts this in the year 599 B.C. His father's name was Siddhartha and mother's, Trisala. He was thirty years old when the death of his parents made him think of renouncing the world. He gave away all he had in charity to the poor, and leaving the house entered the state of houselessness. He took the vow that, "From now on to the end of my life, I will observe equality towards all creatures; I will not do anything sinful, either with my mind or speech or body, nor will I get it done by anybody, nor approve of any such thing done by others; I repent of all the sins I have committed upto now and desist from them." His parents had belonged to the ascetic order of Parsvanatha and to its followers he went first but there he stayed not. Walking about naked and accepting alms in the hollow of his hand, he spent more than twelve years in search of perfect salvation. His manner of life was all his own : "The Venerable one lived, except in the rainy season, all the eight months of summer and winter, in villages only a single night, in towns only 5 nights; he was indifferent alike to straw and jewels, dirt and gold, pleasure and pain, attached neither to this world nor to that beyond, desiring neither life nor death, arrived at the other shore of the *Samsara*, and he exerted himself for the suppression of the defilement of Karma".

It is said that, "extreme in his asceticism, he slept and ate but little, suffered attacks from animals and men without defending himself, bore pain in silence, and even if wounded never desired medical treatment." At last in the 13th year, he reached "the complete and full, the unobstructed, unimpeded, infinite and supreme, best knowledge and intuition called Kevala ('total'). When the Vardhaman had become an Arhat and Jina, he was a Kevalin ('possessor of Kevala'), omniscient and comprehending all objects, he knew all conditions of the world, of gods, men, and demons; whence they come, where they go, whether they are born as men or animals; he saw and knew all conditions in the whole world of all living beings."

Having attained perfect understanding and become a Mahavira, Great Hero, the Venerable Tirthankara preached his gospel for about thirty years till, at the age of seventy-two, "in the fourth month of the rainy season, in the town of Papa, in King Hastipala's office of the writers, the venerable Ascetic Mahavira died, went off, quitted the world, cut asunder the ties of birth, old age, and death, became a *Siddha*, self-fulfilled, a Buddha, illumined, a *Mukta*, liberated, a maker of the end (to all sorrow and suffering), finally rid of all Karma and freed from all pains." The traditional date of his death is given as 527 B.C., but this is contended by several scholars.

The essentials of Jainism are (i) the belief that each, 'Jiva'—life, living being—has a soul, that the "entire universe is filled with an infinite number of eternal, indestructible, individual souls;" (ii) that these souls are innately spiritual and "possess unlimited wisdom, power and goodness; but their true nature is at least partially obscured by their being enveloped in matter." The Jina way of life helps these souls to be set free : "By constant meditation upon its own real character, the soul may at last rise to that realm of blessedness which is lifted up like an island above the surging waves of the ocean of *samsara*". Of course, there are several layers and levels of these 'Jivas', some being creatures of water and others of air, some belonging to the vegetable kingdom and others to the realm of animals; but human birth is essential to salvation. Only in the life of the human "Jivas", is there scope for that enlightenment and blessedness which the Tirthankaras attain. Mahavira says :

"Those who are addicted to sense enjoyments do violence to the creatures of earth, to the creatures of water, to the creatures of air, to the creatures

of fire, to the jivas of the vegetable kingdom, and to mobile beings. Such violence brings evil to them and is an obstacle to true knowledge. Therefore O Man, reflect and attain knowledge. It is extremely difficult to have human birth. The time that passes never returns. Death surprises us at any time, in our childhood, in our old age, or even when we are in the mother's womb. The hawk swoops suddenly upon the partridge. Therefore make every effort to attain true knowledge before it is too late."

But along with "making every effort to attain true knowledge", the Jaina must never overlook the doctrine of 'ahimsa'. That is a fundamental :

"Regarding all creatures that are attached to life as his own self, let no spiritual seeker, who has given up all fear and enmity, inflict any injury on them."

And

"He who himself hurts the creatures or gets them hurt by others, or approves of hurt done by others, augments the world's hostility to himself."

Ahimsa (non-violence) is the supreme virtue, the most important point in Jaina doctrine, and the conduct of men must be guided by this noble attitude of non-hurting of any kind of life, at least so far as is humanly possible. In fact, "the essence of the wisdom of a wiseman lies in this that he hurts no creature : to be equal minded to all creatures and regard them as one's own self is Ahimsa".

Jainism is a faith of great purity and, in their conduct and character, the Jains are, by and large, the cleanest and the best, of individuals. The ethics of his religion is such, the vows that a Jain takes and practises are so calculated, that he does not wilfully destroy any kind of life or cause avoidable injury to others. He has to be truthful and chaste, and, in the matter of his food, clean and sparing. He is required to be charitable and to limit self-indulgence and necessities of life.

It is important to note that the Tirthankaras whose images one finds in the Jaina temples are not gods. They are the Venerable ones, the Arhats, the perfected beings, who having attained, through their spiritual effort, enlighten-

ment and Nirvan, have disentangled themselves from attachment to the material. The Jains do not believe in any other God or gods. 'Man (alone) can attain divinity,' and God or gods are merely "the highest, noblest, and fullest manifestation of all the powers that lie latent in the soul of man." As one Jain scholar, C.R. Jain, puts it, "The householder worships the Holy Tirthankara..... He knows that the Gods whom he worships do not require anything from him, not even the devotion of a devotee; for they are full and perfect in their wholeness and spiritual Freedom. The Jaina worship is a form not of idolatry, therefore, but essentially one of idealatry.....Nothing is ever offered to Gods, to obtain any boons from them. They are the model of Perfection for unemancipated beings, having been men themselves at one time in the past. Besides them Jainism recognizes the claims of no other god or goddess to divinity".

Having detached themselves from all worldliness, the Arhats are represented in the nude. Actually, the Jains are divided into two distinct sects, the "*Digambaras*"—space-clothed, naked—who believe that absolute nudity is imperative for attaining perfection; and the "*Shvetambaras*"—white-clothed—who assert that perfection can be achieved without having to go about naked. "The difference," says one Jain authority, "has its origin in the idea that a person attaining to *Kevala Jnan* (perfect knowledge) comes no longer under the sway of appetites or passions and does not therefore require any food or clothing. According to the *Shvetambaras*, such a holy personage, although he need not wear any clothes, does not appear before society unclothed but clad in white robes, while the *Digambaras* hold that he does not use any clothes and appears before us all nude."

There are many other points of difference between these sects, which need not be considered in this necessarily brief survey of a faith as elaborately formulated as any other. In fact, on many points of philosophy and dogma, several theories of the Jains combine with all possible mythical fascination a deal of truly scientific explanations. Once again, it is not possible to go into details of these, but at least one such theory deserves attention. This relates to their concept of world chronology. The Jains believe that Time is a matter of cycles each of which has two movements. One, descending, is called "*Avsarpini*" and the other, ascending, is known as "*Utsarpini*". Each movement, in turn, has six periods which, in the case of 'Avsarpini', are :—

1. *Sukham Sukham* or *Sushama Sushama*—(Good Good i.e. the Best Period).
2. *Sukham* or Sushama—(Good)
3. *Sukham Dukham* or *Sushama Dushama*—(Good Bad)
4. *Dukham Sukham* or *Dushama Sushama*—(Bad Good)
5. *Dukham* or *Dushama*—(Bad)
6. *Dukham Dukham* or *Dushama Dushama*—(Bad Bad i.e. The Worst Period)

In the case of the 'Utsarpini' movement, the periods and stages given above are traversed in the reverse order; so that in all there are twelve periods which go to make the twelve spokes of the wheel of time, constitute one full cycle of time. The various stages are not of the same duration; the better ages are longer, the bad and worse one being only 21,000 years long. It is during the periods 3 and 4, *Sukham-Dukham* and *Dukham-Sukham*, that the Tirthankaras appear, 24 of them in each age. The present era of the world is a period of 'Dukham', and it began, so it is claimed, "three years and eight-and-a-half months after the Nirvana of Mahavira". Thus the world is in for a bad period of 21,000 years since then, and the only consolation, if consolation that be, for the men of to-day is that it is going to be worse for those who follow. Small comfort, that, for the non-Jains and the Jains alike. Though why mankind should be condemned to all this preordained suffering and evil is known only to the arhats !

Islam.

For about a thousand years, did both Buddhism and Jainism flourish in India in varying degree of fortune and force. Receiving the powerful patronage of Ashoka, Buddhism dominated the field and spread over half the world. Jainism remained confined to the holy land where always the Tirthankaras have appeared and, possibly, will appear; but it, too, claimed many royal patrons and wielded much influence in various parts of India, in the South-West, especially. Then a mighty wave of resurgence brought Hinduism back to power, and, though they left much treasure behind, the two milder faiths were washed away. Buddhism, the real target, was entirely wiped off the Indian scene. Jainism escaped such total extinction, but, thereafter, the number of its adherents has never been large. Nevertheless, its followers form an important community which is rich and powerful out of all proportion to its numerical strength.

Yet, hardly had Hinduism succeeded in re-establishing itself when there

appeared another opponent, at first faintly glimmering like the crescent its flags bore, and thereafter like a great new luminary with rays as flaming and flashing as those of the sun in the land of its origin. Founded in 7th century A. D. by Mohammad, the prophet of the One and Only God besides whom there is no other God, Islam is the youngest of the major religions of the world; but with its simple, practical and clear-cut doctrines, and with followers the fervour of whose faith was matched only by the fierceness of their crusading spirit, this militant creed hacked its way with the sword across the domains of Christianity and Hinduism, Judaism and Paganism. True, Mohammad had said :

O ye unbelievers !
I worship not that which ye worship ;
And ye do not worship that which I worship ;
I shall never worship that which ye worship ;
Neither will ye worship that which I worship ;
To ye be your religion ; to me my religion.

His followers, however, did not, for long, subscribe to the last two lines; so that, within centuries, before even a millennium had passed since its inception, Islam had sprawled and spread over a large slice of the known world. Mighty empires were established and rich contribution made to the thought and wisdom, to the art and culture, of man. On the debit side, it bore and, by reaction, engendered, a spirit of uncompromising hostility and violent antipathy. To the religious traditions of India and to its essential genius, Islam came as an utter stranger and, but for the brief interlude of Akbar's reign, as an implacable foe. In many ways, the new religion not only shattered the idols of the older faiths, but, in the true spirit of iconoclasm, lacerated their very souls, rode roughshod over all that they held holy or dear. This is neither the place nor the occasion to go deeper into the story, now sad and now beautiful, of the confluence of these religious currents on the soil of India. Nevertheless, it will remain a matter of eternal disgrace to her peoples that when the British left, this country was divided on the basis of religion. The Partition as such is a small matter since it may represent, merely, a sort of division of property between brothers. But the bloodshed, but the glee in loathsome crime and in the wholesale murder of the weak and the innocent, all in the name of religion, in the name of that Allha and that Ishwar of whom Gandhi would sing :

Ishwar Allah *tere nam*
Sub ko sumati de Bhagwan !

There lies the shame ! Therein is the sin that will never be forgiven, therein the blot that will for ever stain the pages of Indian history. Indeed, such darkness prevailed in those awful months that, unless the misery of man is sport for the gods, the Creator Himself might have been struck with remorse that these could be His creatures, children of the same Father !

But, to revert from these unpleasant thoughts to our present concern, Islam has been a part and parcel of the web of Indian life for a thousand years now, and there is not a point in the substance and spirit of India which does not bear its stamp and influence, where its characteristic contribution to India's national culture is not evident. In particular has it contributed, as Gandhi says, "its unadulterated belief in the oneness of God and a practical application of the truth of the brotherhood of man for those who are nominally within its fold. I call these two distinctive contributions. For in Hinduism the spirit of brotherhood has become too much philosophised. Similarly, though philosophical Hinduism has no other god but God, it cannot be denied that practical Hinduism is not so emphatically uncompromising as Islam."

Emphatically uncompromising, indeed, it is on this point of One-and-Onliness of God. This is the essence of its creed, the first article of the believers' faith which is summarized in the formula: "There is no God but Allah and Mohammad is the messenger of Allah." As the Holy Quran has it, "Whoever believeth not on God, and his Angels, and his Books and his Apostles and in the last day, he verily hath erred with far gone error." Or, more elaborately, "Righteous is not that ye turn faces towards the east or the west; but righteousness is, one who believes in God, and the last day and the Angels, and the Book, and the Prophets, and who gives wealth for his love to kindred, and orphans, and the poor, and the son of the road, and beggars, and those in captivity, and who is stead-fast in prayer, and gives alms, and those who are sure of their covenant when they make a covenant, and the patient in poverty, and distress, and in time of violence; these are they who are true, and these are those who fear."

Mohammad, the Prophet, to whom the Book was revealed, was

born on 29th August, 570 A.D., in Mecca which therefore constitutes the holiest city of the Islamic world. His father, Abdullah, had died before the child's birth and his mother, Amina, lived but for six years thereafter. Then three years later, died Abd-ul-Muttalib, the grand-father of Mohammad, who had been a man of considerable power and influence. The guardianship of the orphan child then passed to his uncle, Abu Talib, who brought him up with much affection. According to one portrait of Mohammad at that time, "we can almost see the lad with his deep wistful eyes, earnest and thoughtful, looking, as it were, into futurity, moving about in the humble unpretentious household of his uncle, or going often into the desert to gaze upon the beauteous face of nature; sweet and gentle of disposition, painfully sensitive to human suffering, this pure-hearted child of the desert was the beloved of his small circle, and there ever existed the warmest attachment between uncle and nephew." Already, it appears, "the angels of God had opened out his heart, and filled it with light".

In the 25th year of his age, Mohammad married a rich widow named Khadija. He had been her steward and she had been impressed by his business capacity. In spite of the disparity of their ages, this match proved happy for both. In the words of Ameer Ali, it "brought him that repose and exemption from daily toil which he needed in order to prepare for his great work. But beyond that it gave him a loving woman's heart, that was the first to believe in his mission, that was ever ready to console him in his despair, and to keep alive within him the thin flickering flame of hope when no man believed in him—not even himself—and the world was black before his eyes."

The soul and personality of Mohammad took another fifteen years to ripen for the revelations he was to receive. During these years, he had his share of human trials and tribulations, (—three sons born to him had all died) and he had an insight not only into the normal pattern of life's suffering and sorrow, but also into the deplorable condition of his country and his people. To quote, once again, from Ameer Ali's 'The Spirit of Islam', "Before him lay his country, bleeding and torn by fratricidal wars and inter-tribal dissensions, his people sunk in ignorance, addicted to obscene rites and superstitions, and with all their desert virtues, lawless and cruel. His (two) visits to Syria had opened to him a scene of unutterable moral and social desolation; rival

creeds and sects tearing each other to pieces, wrangling over the body of the God they pretended to worship.....The picture before him was one of dreary hopelessness. The few who, abandoning their ancient beliefs, were groping in the dark for some resting place, represented a general feeling of unrest. In their minds there was nothing capable of appealing to the humanity beyond themselves."

Clearly there was need for some light in this darkness, for some order in this chaos, for some word of direction. And one day Mohammad who was in the habit of retiring for solitary prayer and silent meditation to a cave on the Mount Hira, now called the Mount of Light, a voice came to him and said, "Thou art the man, Thou art the Prophet of God....Cry in the name of thy Lord;" and, then, followed the great revelation "telling him how from minutest beginnings man had been called into existence and lifted up by understanding and knowledge of the Lord, who is most beneficent and who by *the pen* had revealed that which men did not know".

Then, waking from his trance and feeling "as if the words spoken to his soul had been written on his heart", he came home to Khadija and told her all that had happened. Greatly agitated and trembling from excess of emotion, he asked her if she thought he was mad. And she, his good wife, and his first convert, replied : "God is my protection.....He will surely not let such a thing happen unto thee, for thou speakest the truth, dost not return evil for evil, keepest faith, art of a good life, and kind to thy relations and friends. And neither art thou a babbler in the market places....Rejoice, O dear husband, and be of good cheer. He, in whose hands stands Khadija's life, is my witness that thou wilt be the Prophet of the people".

And, to cut this account short, the Prophet he became.

When he began his religious work, Mohammad was about forty. At first, he preached 'a kind of natural religion based on recognition of the generous bounty of Allah and man's consequent duty of worship and generosity towards the poor." Then gradually he started attacking idolatry and hitting hard at vice and superstition, generally. This roused the great hostility of the Meccans who persecuted his followers so ruthlessly that he resolved to depart from Mecca. From the year of this departure, 622, A.D., dates the Hijri era of the Muslims. Followed by the faithful, the Founder and Prophet repaired to Medina.

During the next ten years, until his death in 632, Mohammad endeavoured to establish the religion af Allah, the One and Only God. The number of his followers and the strength of the new creed grew from day to day. Mecca was conquered by Islam and *Kaaba*, the central sanctuary at that place, became the holy of holies for the rising faith. Medina, sacred and holy because of the Prophet's sojourn and subsequent death there, became almost equally important.

Belief in Allah and His Prophet, the story of whose life we have briefly recounted above, constitutes the essential doctrine of the Muslim. In addition, Islam enjoins upon its followers four main obligations, Prayer, Fasting, Pilgrimage and Alms-giving. Together, they all make up the five 'pillars' of Islam. Prayers is the ritual prayer (namaz) which has to be said five times a day, including a weekly public prayer on Friday, in the mosque with others. Fasting is one 'Muslim' month's fasting during 'Ramzan' when a Muslim has to go without food or drink during the day-time. Pilgrimage means the 'Hajj' to Mecca which should be made at least once in a life-time by all those who can procure the means to do so. Alms-giving, encouraged by Mohammad from the beginning, is apportioning a certain part of one's income for the poor. Whether treated as a sort of religious tax or as an act of merit in itself, this last has always been recommended and practised widely in Islamic society. Besides these main duties, there are several minor injunctions and obligations laid down for the guidance of the Muslims. For instance, wine is forbidden, and idolatry, too, although, as stated earlier, there are shrines of saints all over the world which the Muslims regard with reverence. Images, of course, are entirely forbidden. As a fair summary of Mohammad's achievement, it is well to quote Nathaniel Micklem : "Mohammad was in his day a reformer; he made of many tribes a nation; he alleviated slavery and various hideous customs such as infanticide; he limited the number of wives that a man might possess and forbade the taking of women against their will in payment for a debt; he did away with image worship." On the other hand, and although "Islam ranks among the higher religions as a worship of the one God, who is merciful and whose will is righteousness; in so far as it keeps to the Koran it bears all the limitations of desert Arabia."

How these "limitations of desert Arabia" have acted upon and reacted to the faiths with which this religion came into contact is a vast question. Our main concern, here, is with how these limitations as well as the more commend-

able characteristics of this creed manifested themselves on the Indian soil, and affected the Indian mind. Some indication of that has been given already. In the words of Sir John Marshall, "Seldom in the history of mankind has the spectacle been witnessed of two civilizations, so vast and so strangely developed, yet so radically dissimilar, as the Mohammadan and the Hindu, meeting and mingling together. The very contrasts which existed between them, the wide divergence on their culture and their religions, make the history of their impact peculiarly instructive." The results of this impact may be seen in innumerable fields, but, so far as religion is concerned, its main contribution has been, as Gandhi emphasised, in respect of the Oneness of God. It is because of the impact and influence of Islam that the Hindu attitude towards idol-worship has undergone a significant change or that a faith like Sikhism, with its strict belief in One and Only God, has come into existence.

Sikhism.

Even though a nodding acquaintance between India and Islam was effected quite early, in the 8th century, the real impact of this faith began to be felt only after Mahmood of Ghazni began his series of brilliant and devastating attacks on this country of the infidel. He had learnt that the land overflowed with milk and honey, and that in her temples there was wealth untold in the shape of idols of gold studded with jewels, and that the coffers of her kings were stuffed with riches. Nor had the report been untrue, for when he came he found vast treasures which he and his hordes carried away as booty and plunder. This happened from about the year 1,000 A.D., onwards, and thereafter the Muslims just would not stop and could not be stopped. The invaders had little to lose and much to gain. They were crusaders as well as looters and possessed all the force of faith and all the fury of greed for gold and of lust for power. Krishna, the god of the Hindus, had said, "If you fall in battle you get the Heaven; if you are victorious, you gain the earth". And the followers of Allah had followed his advice. Thanks to the internecine enmity among the Hindus and to the grit and unity of the Muslims, regular Islamic rule was established in the north of India, towards the close of the 12th Century, when Ghori defeated Prithviraj, the Chauhan emperor of Delhi. Then, from the top of the splendid and beautiful tower, the monumental Qutb Minar, which marked the victory of Islam, rose the Muezzen's call to prayers : Allah O Akbar ; and never was the ether in India to be ever again without the vibrations of this stirring sound. As time passed, it rang shril-

ler than ever. Since the predominant faith of the natives, to wit, Hinduism, and the creed of the conquerors were opposed in form and ritual and everything except the absolute essence of both, much clash and conflict were the natural consequence of the meeting of the two. What is more, the defeat suffered by the Hindus brought about, as defeats often do, a grave debasement of morals and degeneration of thought, and an all-round disintegration and degradation of society. Mahmood had exposed the hollowness and ridiculed the impotence of the stone-gods of the Hindus ; and, instead of learning a lesson, they had slipped deeper into the slough and slime of stupid ritual and into the mud and marsh of senseless dogma. What was worse, Islam itself had ceased to be the pure faith and undefiled, of the early believers, and much sham and folly were already creeping in. Against such a background, it was natural that some men should conclude that neither of the two prevailing religious systems was worth bothering that much about; or, that those endowed with kindness and discernment, with good souls or shrewd minds, or both, should endeavour to reach the common people of both religions. Several such men followed one another. They worshipped God, who is the same for all and of all, with simple and sincere devotion, and preached the common and the commonsensical content of the two contending faiths, the essence, in fact, of all religions. Ramanand and his disciple, Kabir, were two such saintly souls. They cleared much bramble and brushwood and prepared the ground for the appearance of Nanak who was destined to be the founder of yet another faith : Sikhism.

Nanak was born, in 1469 A.D., in a small village called Talwandi, near Lahore, in Pakistan. His father was a member of the middle class. He wanted his son to be a trader, and the earliest of the commercial ventures of the son was to give away to the beggars and the needy, like Francis of Assisi, whatever money his father had given him for business. The father had asked the son to go for 'good bargains'. Could there be a bargain better than this of earning merit for the next world, of saving one's soul even if this world be lost ? Such was the light in which the matter was viewed by this youngman who had indicated, ever since his boyhood, strong leanings towards piety, and had preferred the company of *sadhus* to that of play-fellows, and prayer to what the world calls work. Even marriage and the family ties had failed to bind him to the householder's life and interests so that, before long, he left the fold of human affection for the field of godly love. Gifted as he was with a shrewd homely intelligence

and with a sense of humour, this gentle-souled man of God travelled far and wide, singing the praises of one and only Creator, one God, yet not of the Muslims nor of the Hindus ; of a God who stayed neither in the temple nor in the mosque, whose house was neither in Mecca nor in Benares, but everywhere. Foolish to him appeared the emphasis that the believers would lay on this rite or that ceremony, on turning one's face east or westward, on offering water to the sun and food to the dead. Kabir had sung :

Tell me where did you get two Gods ?
Who has led you astray ?
The same God is called differently :
Allah or Ram, Karim or Keshav, Hari or Hazrat.

and

There is nothing but water at the holy bathing places;
And I know that they are useless for I have bathed in them.
The images are all lifeless, they cannot speak;
I know, for I have cried aloud to them.
The Puranas and the Koran are mere words;
Lifting up the curtain, I have seen.....

Nanak, too, made the same attempt to synthesise Islam and Hinduism, to equate the Vedas and the Qoran, to emphasise the common humanity of the followers of either creed, and to proclaim the One God of all. Thus the '*mool Mantra*', the basic and the fundamental formula of his belief is that, 'There is One God":

"There is One God
He is the Eternal truth
He, the Maker,
Is without fear and without enmity,
He is immortal and unborn He
And self-existent."

This was the simple creed which Nanak set forth to teach. For him there was no Hindu, no Mussalman. As the popular verse has it,

"Guru Nanak Shah Fakir,
Hindu Ka Guru, Mussulman Ka Pir."

Teacher alike to Hindus and Muslims, with one Hindu peasant and one Muslim minstrel as his first disciples and constant companions, he began to preach the gentle gospel his good sense and noble heart had taught him : "There is no Hindu and there is no Mussalman". He clothed his homely message in smooth, vernacular verse which the populace could comprehend straight away :

"In the Mosque of love,
Spread the carpet of faith;
Make restraint and modesty thy circumcision;
Moderation thy fast;
Right action thy pilgrimage to Kaaba;
Make truth thy spiritual guide;
Good works thy creed;
Thus become a Muslim".

With a sly sense of humour, he ridiculed the folly of pointless rites and silly ideas of sacrilege. Thus, seeing the Hindus at Benares making offerings of water to the rising sun, he started throwing water in the direction opposite, towards the west. When asked what he was doing, he said that he was watering his fields in his village in the Panjab. He was laughed at, for how could the water get that far, so many hundreds of miles away? "In the same manner," answered the sage, "as it will get to the sun, so many millions of miles away." Or, again, when a Muslim reproved him for sleeping with his feet towards the Kaaba :

"Him Nanak answered, springing from the sod,
His quickened soul aflame with fire intense :—
What is thy faith and what thy reverence ?
Sleeps any man on an earthly spot,
With feet turned to a place where God is not ?"

And so, stern in his faith but gentle in his rebuke, with a creed simple and true, and with a heart full of love for all, irrespective of their rank or caste, Nanak wandered about from place to place, preaching, and gathering a body of followers. These were the 'Sikhs'—which is the corrupted Vernacular form for

the Sanskrit word "Shishya"—his disciples, and Nanak was their Master, their 'Guru'. After the first Guru, Nanak, who passed away in the year 1539 at Kartarpur in the Panjab, nine more were installed in that exalted position. The last of these, the tenth Guru, was Gobind Singh who died in the year 1708 A. D. Between the dates of Nanak's birth and Gobind Singh's passing away, such had been the course of history and such the vicissitudes of fortune, that the gentle disciples of the mild-tempered Nanak were transformed into a powerful community ready to take up arms against those who had oppressed or would oppress them. "If an enemy does not cease pursuing you, harming you, if your religion is in danger, if your honour is threatened, then use your weapon and armour but make sure first that you are ready to face even death in the discharge of your duty", so one Guru had advised. And the Sikhs had been pursued and harmed, their religion was in danger, their honour threatened, by the insolent might of the later Moghuls, Aurangzeb, especially. Babar had admired Nanak and, in a secret will, told Prince Humayun :

"Oh Son ! the Kingdom of India is full of different religions...It is incumbent on thee to wipe all religious prejudices off the tablet of thy heart, administer justice according to the ways of every religion.....

"Do not ruin the temples and shrines of any community which is obeying the laws of Government. Administer justice in such a manner that the King be pleased with the subjects and the subjects with the King. The cause of Islam can be promoted more by the sword of obligation than by the sword of tyranny."

Akbar had fulfilled the wise injunction of his great ancestor to the letter, and had granted the land on which the sacred pool of Amritsar stands. But the successors of these great and wise rulers forgot such golden rules of religious policy and took up the "sword of tyranny". The sect which had originated on the basis of Hindu-Muslim amity and unity was treated with bigotry and unrelenting persecution. Guru after Guru having been slain or cruelly tortured, generation after their generation having been ill-treated and trampled upon, the Sikhs were forced to become a militant community. Guru Gobind Singh saw the need and, exactly two hundred years after the birth of the Founder, in 1669, gave the call; for, "when all other means have failed, it is righteous to draw the sword." Steel became one of the symbols of the faith, and with unfaltering zeal

and ceaseless energy, he undertook the task of "training the sparrow to hunt the hawk and one man to fight a legion." The 'Khalsa', the pure and the chosen, like gold tested in fire, was the new title; and each follower was lion, 'Singh', the suffix that forms a distinguishing part of the name of the Sikh male. And every Sikh was armed, with a '*Kirpan*'; the sword; and he wore '*kes*', the long hair; kept a '*Kangha*', a comb; wore a '*kachha*', the short undergarment, like half-pants ; and wore also, an iron '*Kara*', a bangle, on the wrist. The '*Kirpan*' and the '*Kara*'—originally a large-sized iron ring which could be used as protective armour—were weapons of attack and defence; the keeping of hair obviated the need for and the worry of hair-cut and shave; the comb supplied all the toilet accessories of the fighting man; and the short underwear served as a uniform that made for agile movement. Thus attired and furnished, every Sikh became a soldier, ever ready, requiring neither notice nor preparation for battle. With the belief inspired by the Guru in the righteousness of their cause, and with the fearlessness which he himself exemplified, his followers became bold and brave like lions, indeed.

They had no doubt that

"The Khalsa shall rule
Their enemies will be scattered
Only they that seek shall be saved"

And in due course the Khalsa did rule, and the enemies, the Muslims were scattered and vanquished; but with that vanished also whatever little element of Islam was incorporated in this faith. Thus, starting as an attempt to amalgamate and synthesise the two antagonistic creeds, it ended, in respect of its essence and, to a very large extent, even in its form, as a variation, like Jainism and Buddhism, of Hinduism. To quote from Khushwant Singh's 'The Sikhs', "Sikh religion which in its inception was a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam began to manifest a tendency to revert to the Hindu fold at an early stage in its development. Although, in its general system of belief it was closer to Islam than Hinduism, in practice, in ritual and above all in social affinities, it never quite succeeded in freeing itself of Hindu influence. The trend towards a merger back into Hinduism was evident immediately after the Gurus".

Always has it been like that. Nanak's creed had been what Mohammad

had preached, what Christ had taught, what most religions have stood for, what most men desire to-day : the Unity of God and the Brotherhood of Man. Alas that the ideal should prove so elusive when it comes to the practice of the faith. The very word 'brother' has become a term of mockery. Nor is it that only the dream of '*Brotherhood of man*' has remained a dream; even within the fold of the same faith, brotherhood has not obtained. Sects within sects have grown among the Sikhs just as they have always grown in all religions. Verily, where the doctrine is kept pure, Sikhism is a great faith. Yet, in practice, even this, the youngest of the distinctive faiths of the world, the most recent of the hopes of mankind, has belied its promise; and is as good or as bad as any of the older, major or minor, Indian or non-Indian religious systems of the world. It seems that whatever the religious garb he wears, whatever the 'Name' he swears by, however clear the path indicated, however pure the ideal set before him, man, vile man, soon reverts to his true nature. Perhaps, grace is not yet for him, though he has the Gurus; the will is not his yet, though he has the Word.

5

What, then, is the remedy ? Wherein lies the salvation of man ? Religion is, as the Qoran says, good advice, and surely religion should be in a position to show the way. But, as has been observed, the way has been shown, again and again ; directions have been given, even to the minutest detail : "A man asked the apostle of Allah and said 'Is it your opinion that, if I pay the prescribed prayers, and fast in Ramadhan, and believe firmly in what is allowable, and shun what is forbidden, and do not do anything more than that, I shall enter the garden (of paradise) ?' He said, 'Yes !" And if all the apostles and the masters, founders and incarnations, have not been always as explicit as that, the broad lines of man's belief and practice have been often indicated. The eight-fold path of Buddhism, the five (or three) vows of Jainism, the five pillars of Islam, the 'Name and the Word' in Sikhism, and the essential do's and dont's of Hinduism are known to the very babes of India. Yet it availeth not ; for, not until we become like babes ourselves, may we inherit the kingdom of Heaven.

The question remains unanswered ; and let us admit that, notwithstanding all the divine revelations and easy exercises for spiritual *sadhana* which the printing presses and the blaring microphones of the modern world help to publicize, the malady of the soul cannot be cured by any religious pills and

tablets. Sharp as a razor's edge is the path of righteousness, and as narrow. Perilous is the journey, as through a virgin forest so dense that no light penetrates there except that which the traveller himself bears, and infested with innumerable beasts of the jungle, so that saints may falter and philosophers lose the clue. All the same, the common people have worked out their own rough-and-ready solutions, have built their none-too-smooth and none-too-safe roads to release. Prayer and worship for one, work and virtue for another; here love and devotion, there penance and meditation; bliss of the knowing, faith of the ignorant; the statue and the idol, the book and the word; *the rudraksha* rosary and the ochre-dyed robes; the pilgrim's staff and the *bhikshu's* bowl; the smear of ashes and the *tilak* of sandalwood-paste; shaven heads and locks unshorn; holy ablutions and sacred threads; prescribed rites and set ceremonies; keeping of fasts and giving of alms—all these and many more have served in their own way, and brought the wayfarer a stage or a centimetre nearer his goal. Of these, a few have stood out more prominently from the rest. Prayer, for example, constitutes the very essence of religious observance, and for innumerable people, prayer, incessant prayer, is all the religion they have, and all the remedy our ills need. In its various forms of petition, intercession, adoration and contemplation, Prayer, certainly has proved to be of immense value both to the individual as well as to the community. In fact, so wide is the application, and so great the efficacy, of prayer, in the spiritual sphere, that there is, in the simple words of Voltair, "no religion without prayer".

And even as there is no religion without prayer, nor is there any which does not recognise some place or the other, one spot or more, as holy and sacred for its followers. "Just as certain limbs of the body are purer than others, so are certain places on earth more sacred," thus in the Mahabharata. A visit to such places, if not enjoined, as in Islam, as a positive obligation, constitutes, nevertheless, an act of merit and piety. Where the founder or the prophet was born, or where he lived or preached, performed his miracles or ceased to be a human being; where a deity or an incarnation became manifest and displayed his divine glory; the ground which the holy saints and sages have trod and hallowed; certain spots of great natural beauty which would make the souls of men glow with a sense of moral uplift and thrill to the experience of God's majesty—all such places assume a spiritual significance and sacred association which act powerfully upon

the visiting devotee's mind. As Swami Pavitrananda rightly points out : "What doubt is there that if a devoted Buddhist goes to Bodh Gaya and sees the seat under the Bo tree whereon Buddha attained *nirvana*, his imagination will be stirred up and his thoughts will soar above all worldly things and give him an impetus to aspire after the highest goal of human life ? A Christian devotee visiting Jerusalem will find his love for Christ greatly deepened, for all the incidents of the life of Jesus associated with the place will be strongly called to his mind." So it will be in the case of all similar places. The beginnings, naturally, must have been quiet and unostentatious, with a few really pious and deeply devoted visitors who were truly holy and wholly true in the motive and object of their visit. But soon a kind of virtuous circle would set in. The coming of the visitors would add to the sanctity of the place and act as a spur for the more secular devotee. Gradually a tradition would get built up and more and more worshippers would turn up at the spot, at the little shrine. Then since man will be man wherever he may be, and since he can only simplify his material wants and not wholly do without them, setting-up of the usual organization necessary for catering to the requirements of the visitors would be the next, logical step. If some other factors should exist which normally determine the formation and growth of cities and towns, those would further assist in making the place prominent. Myth and story, tradition and emulation, would, thereafter, combine with 'the instinct people have of congregating and of worshipping at the same spot through the centuries' ; and the place would grow in fame, from day to day. Then Royalty and Piety would endeavour to adorn the holy spot. Imposing edifices, or, at times, even beautiful buildings, would be put up, and all manner of things done to add to the glory and splendour of the place. Whether from vanity or virtue, or, may be, from both, the ruler of one holy site would vie with another royal prince, and each would desire and strive that his religious capital might be the most resplendent. Thus art and architecture would lend further lustre to the city which, other circumstances helping, might also become, like Benares or Madura, Amritsar or Kanchi, a great centre of trade and commerce. In this way, a holy city would, in course of time, come to command such varied attention that its holiness plus its miscellaneous attractions and importance might procure it a round-the-year stream of visitors. A number of these might come to do reverence and to seek peace of soul ; others for the delight which the art or natural beauty of the place afford ; and some, again, who come from idle curiosity or impelled by the

herd-instinct, or from a sort of wander-lust ; and lastly, there would be those who have to supply the wants of all who visit the city from whatever motive they may. Of these last, there would be many who stay there permanently. Several others would turn up only when the 'season' warrants, during periods of prescribed pilgrimages and at the time of special congregations. In fact, the holy places might be divided into the customary categories of such cities which have large, permanent populations and also draw a constant flow of visitors ; or 'seasonal' stations, as on the hills or by the sea-side, which conduce to health or pleasure, where there may be a great rush at specified times and but a faint trickle during the rest of the year. Finally, nothing succeeds like success; and, for one reason or the other, a place may manage to catch on and become the 'fashion' in religion, acquire a certain amount of 'goodwill' in the market of merit, begin to bear the hall-mark of piety, so that whatever the cost and peril of the journey, whatever the price and penalties of a stay there, one would accept all the terms and conditions involved. This, not only because, "if the pilgrimage is not made, the shrine is not gained"; but, also, because, like the lover in whose eyes lies the beauty and worth of the beloved, the believer carries with him a spell and a charm which transform the building of brick into the House of God. Then, the relic, real or fake, emits a light divine and the statue of stone is seen smiling in benediction. To the vision of faith, the reality of the site or the shrine, of the statue or the stream, signifies little; so that, for the devotee, the hideous image at one place and the most beautiful sculpture at another; the grandest structure in some city and the shabbiest in a village; the purest nectarine waters of a sacred river and the scum-covered, foul-smelling liquid of a holy pond, are all of like value and efficacy. The so-called reality, all too material in one sense, is, in the context of spirituality, altogether immaterial, and neither considerations of health and hygiene, nor those of culture and comfort, have, as such, any place in the picture.

Such, then, is the broad story of the origin and growth of holy places. In the case of religions where, as with Buddhism, Jainism, Islam or Sikhism, there is a 'human' founder, all spots associated with him—where he was born, attained enlightenment or received revelations; where he preached the faith or where he breathed his last or got his *nirvana*—would naturally be regarded as sacred. All this would apply equally to such of his illustrious successors or followers who were especially saintly or worthy of reverence. Likewise, the incarnate deity,

having, at times, descended, as in Hinduism, as a human being, would be, in this respect, at par with the Founders. Thus, places where Rama or Krishna were 'born' or lived, or where they exhibited their prowess and manifested their glory, as also the spots where they 'died', would be considered holy, and to these, large numbers of people would repair, from belief that worship at these spots would be rewarded with greater merit. The tendency is no different from what the modern man shows in keeping intact the relics and remembrances—be they houses or furniture, manuscripts or shoes, spectacles or tea-cups, letters or locks—of Lincoln or Lenin, Goethe or Gandhi, Shakespeare or Shelley, Tolstoy or Tagore, Newton or Napoleon, Michael Angelo or Milton, Arvindo or Einstein, Victoria or Wilson, Keats or Karl-Marx. The cynic will say that the populace will ever need such spiritual bones to suck. A more charitable view is that the footsteps indicate that the 'divine' was but human, and achieved what was achieved as a human being. Looked at in that light, all that remains will serve as a reminder, at a time when men will scarce believe so, that he too was of the same clay as others are fashioned from; and this will act as an inspiration, for what one man could do, another might, if only he has the will to build the deed. This, after all, is the meaning of the Hindu word 'tirtha' for holy places—a bridge, a crossing, a path which helps one to cross over, pass through. The bolder spirit and the better has shown the way, placed a plank, however perilously poised, over the swirling waters; fixed a light, the way-farer's beacon. Those who lack the faith or the courage will falter, not because the guide was superhuman, but because the followers are sub-human. "Few are chosen", as Huxley says, "for few choose themselves."

Of the religions of India, Hinduism as the oldest and the most prominent, and commanding the largest following, claims innumerable sacred sites, small and large. One book lists 1,821 of them. The conventional number of the more important ones—which include the four '*dhams*', the 'seven holy cities', the twelve '*Jyotirlingas*' and the fifty-two places where the chopped limbs of Shiva's wife, Sati, fell—is 63. Buddhism and Jainism each have under a dozen, and Sikhism not more than six. Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, is an alien religion, in the sense of having originated elsewhere, and strictly speaking, there is no place on the Indian soil which it regards as holy in its own right. As has been said earlier, its Benares and Bodh Gaya, Amritsar or Abu, do not lie within the confines of this country. The pilgrimage, one

of the five 'pillars' of Islam, laid down in the Qoran, is the pilgrimage to Mecca in Arabia, or, to Mecca, Mina and Arafa. But there are innumerable little tombs and shrines all over the land to which the Muslim devotee, and, for that matter, many a Hindu pays a visit. Of such, the shrine of Sheikh Muinuddin Chishti at Ajmer is the most renowned, even as it is the most revered; and half the life of Ajmer revolves around the 'Dargah' of this saint. Thus, from the point of view of the Indian Muslim who, as a Muslim looks, no doubt, to Mecca as the true 'House of God', as the holy of holies, Ajmer is treated, nevertheless, as his 'holy city' in India. In respect of Sikhism, also, it is necessary to point out that there are no places which the scriptures or the Gurus singled out for pilgrimages. In fact, Nanak's crusade was directed against precisely such superstitions. "To worship an image, to make a pilgrimage to a shrine, to remain in a desert, and yet have the mind impure is all in vain. To be saved, worship only the Truth, the Name", he had said. Nevertheless the psychology which brings about the existence and development of the holy places of other faiths, applies no less in this case. The birth-places and those of death, especially of the martyrdom, of the gurus are held to be sacred and are marked and honoured with the erection of fine gurudwaras. Some of these places—for example, Nankana Sahib, the birth place of Guru Nanak, and the site in Lahore where Guru Arjun Dev was executed—are located in that part of the (older) Punjab which fell, after the Partition in 1947, to the share of Pakistan. Of the important shrines in India, mention may be made of the sikh temples at Amritsar and at Tarantaran, and of the sites, at Patna and near Hyderabad, of the birth and death respectively of Guru Gobind Singh. Of all these, Amritsar is the most important and constitutes the religious capital of the sikhs and their stronghold, commercially and politically.

It is, of course, only a coincidence but Buddhism, the faith of the 8-fold path, counts eight places as holy and sacred for the followers. All the eight are associated with the life of the Founder, and it is said that before he entered the *Mahaparinirvana*, the Budhdha himself made a reference to four of these and spoke of the merit of making a pilgrimage to them. These four places are the *Lumbini Grove* where the Buddha was born; *Bodh Gaya* where he attained enlightenment; *Sarnath*, near Benares, where he preached the first sermon and set the wheel of law in motion; and, fourth, *Kusinara* or *Kusinagar* where he ceased to be a human-being, escaped for ever the mesh and round of birth and death.

Obviously the believer will go to these places, connected with the most important events in the last existence on earth of the Tathagata, with deep feelings of reverence. The remaining four—all scenes of miracles performed by the Buddha—are known as Sravasti, Rajgriha, Sankasya and Vaishali. Ignored in the earlier Buddhist texts, while the faith was still pure and uncomplicated, and the performance of miracles frowned upon, the latter places were sanctified subsequently by myth and story, and linked, in Buddhist history, with the life of the Blessed One. Together the eight sites constitute the 'Atthamahathanani'—the 'eight great places'—of Buddhism.

Like the Buddhists, the Jains also attach great religious importance to the various places associated with their Master and the other twenty-three Jinas. The Jaina "Kalyanak Bhumi", "the sacred field of spiritual good", consists of places where the Tirthankaras were born; where they renounced the life of worldliness; where they achieved enlightenment and became *Kevalins*—omniscient and wise; and where they finally achieved emancipation, *nirvana*. The more orthodox include in this list a fifth item which is the site where any one of the Tirthankaras was last, before being conceived in the womb.

All these places would be holy for the followers of these Tirthankaras and several of them have grown to be powerful and popular centres of Jaina pilgrimage. Temples, clean and rich and beautiful temples, have been built and have stood there from remote times, and inspired the devotees with zeal and reverence. Temple-building, always a rage in India, seems to have infected the Jains in a big way so that they have put up their fanes not only at these places but at several other points, mostly hill tops. And in all these temples stand shining statutes of the great Tirthankaras, made from marble or cast in alabaster, which draw the worshippers by the thousand. What is more, the Jaina temples have been placed in clusters, concentrated at some spot of splendid isolation, so that in most cases, the Jain holy places are, literally, temple-cities. The most picturesque of these is of course, the 'Shatrunjaya Hill', the celebrated place of pilgrimage at Palitana in Gujerat, which is, to quote Burgess, "truly a wonderful, a unique place, a city of temples". The Girnar Mountain, also in Gujerat, is sacred to Neminatha and possesses a few fine monuments. Then, there is the important temple-city of the 'Parsavanath Hill', located 200 miles West from Calcutta and

dedicated to the 23rd Tirthankara. On the different summits of this holy mountain, twenty out of twenty-four Tirthankaras are stated to have attained Nirvana and as many temples built there do honour to their memory. Another centre of pilgrimage is at Pawapuri, in Patna district, again in the eastern region of India. Here the 24th Tirthankara, Mahavira, entered into the state of emancipation, attained nirvana, and a tank and a *Jalmandir*, temple in the tank, mark the holy site of his cremation. Since Mahavir is popularly accepted as the Founder of Jainism, this place is held in great sanctity and reverence.

And yet, no place is more celebrated in respect of Jaina temples, as is Mount Abu in Rajasthan. Here stand two monuments of such art and beauty that these have helped convert this city into about the most famous centre of Jaina pilgrimage and, for that matter, of non-Jaina homage. Abu is the summer capital of the Government of Rajasthan and a city of beauty and glory in its own right; but the existence of these Jaina temples has added great lustre and resplendence to this lovely hill-station, which, therefore, has been selected to represent the faith, in the galaxy of holy cities included in this book.

The Hindus, of course, seem to have a special genius for creating holy places. They have sacred rivers and sacred mountains, sacred regions and sacred cities, by the dozen. In fact, for them, the entire country is 'holy land', so that according to the Bhagvata, "It is better to take a birth in *Bharata* with even a short life rather than enjoy the happiness of heaven for a *kalpa* (4,320,000,000 years); the reason is that a man in *Bharata*, if he is so minded, is capable of attaining the fearless state of the Lord, if he leaves aside all things and thinks even for a short time of the Lord. Therefore, the prayer is that, if there is any merit still left on account of the past performance of sacrifices or good deeds or utterance of good speech, capable of yielding even heaven, let such merit help us in having our next birth in this ancient land of *Bharat Varsha.*" And it is not only that innumerable places, popularly known as 'Tirthas', have been, since God knows when, regarded as sacred; but there exists an inexhaustible body of literature extolling the particular merit of individual 'Tirthas', and laying down elaborate instructions for the ritual to be followed from the moment one thinks of making the pilgrimage till after one has returned from the 'Tirthayatra'. For example, one is advised to go on foot : "A journey to a *Tirtha* by foot is in itself a good penance, and if one employs a conveyance, he will lose half of his merit.

If he takes advantage of shoes or an umbrella, he will still further reduce the merit. If he carries on business on the way, three-fourths of the merit is gone and, by accepting a gift, he loses all merit." Or, consider this injunction to the would be-pilgrim : "Before starting one must fast at one's residence, offer worship to Ganesha and to his own ancestors, and salutations to learned Brahmans and the saints.....He must start with a pleasant and disciplined mind and in modest dress; if some other 'Tirtha' comes on the way, one should not neglect the latter. At the 'Tirtha' he must control himself; must meditate upon the greatness of the 'Tirtha' he is visiting, observe the vow of fast or eat only once a day, and his conduct and his mind must remain pure." For, "an evil mind is not purified even though one washes himself a hundred times in a Tirtha." After all, "numerous varieties of fish reside in Tirthas like the Ganga; so also flocks of birds reside in temples; for want of *bhava* or devotional sentiment in their hearts, they do not acquire any merit either from the Tirtha or from the temples. One must therefore approach Tirthas only with proper *bhava*." Apart from general statements on the merits and method of pilgrimage, there are minute instructions on every conceivable aspect of, and on each rite and ceremony connected with, this matter. The mere enumeration of these would fill a volume.

"There is no happiness for him who does not travel,.....living in the society of men, the best man often becomes a sinner.....Therefore, wander," so say the Hindu scriptures.....And so the Hindu has been wandering all this long while, wandering to his holy places, for in India "where the source and reason of all things, the motive power of all action, the main-spring of life, is religion," to travel would mean only that. Against such a background, the places seem to have been chosen wisely; not entirely by chance and thoughtless arbitrariness but with a psychological understanding and an insight most truly remarkable. Places of fascinating beauty and grandeur were utilized, to quote again from Swami Pavitrananda, "as a perennial source of inspiration, affording a supreme peace and consolation to the care-worn hearts of the people.....Indeed the beauty of a place is to the Indian mind a call to the soul from God. Sister Nivedita has rightly observed that the valuation of Niagra by humanity would have been quite different if it had been situated on the Ganges. Instead of fashionable picnics and railway pleasure trips, there would have been an unceasing onrush of worshipping crowds from the different parts of India; magnificent sanctuaries

would have adorned the place and commanded the homage of millions of pilgrims, and people would have rushed to the place to satisfy their spiritual hunger."

Spiritual hunger ! In that lies the clue to the mystery why in spite of all that can be said, has been said, and will be said, against the whole lot of holy things, against prayer and worship, temple and deity, city and river, the holy places have remained and will continue to remain the goal of countless millions. The 'tirtha', a bridge and a way of crossing, that which purifies and fulfils, helps fulfil *'tri arthas*, three great ends of existence, namely *dharma*, *kama* and *moksha*. That is why, in India, the places of pilgrimage have never ceased to draw huge crowds of people. The number of pilgrims who visit Gaya, is, according to one estimate, about a lakh per year. The number of those who visit Puri or Benares is three times as great. At Pandharpur, in Maharashtra, the temple of Vitthala accounts for a gathering, on special occasions, of a lakh and a half. And talking of special occasions, the annual car Festival of Puri or the twelve-yearly 'Kumbha' Mela, (or even the 'Ardha-Kumbh'), at, say, Allahabad or Hardwar, would draw several lakhs of pilgrims. Surely, as one authority comments, "Neither idle curiosity nor blind faith can account for the unique phenomenon, for most of the pilgrims have to undertake long journeys involving much physical discomfort and heavy expenses."

Obviously, the popularity of this institution of pilgrimage cannot but be attributed to causes of far deeper spiritual import. In fact, to the common people it signifies a positive path of salvation. Stella Kramrisch puts this in the philosophic idiom thus : "Life as a pilgrimage from birth to death has many stations. In India, death is but another station and in itself does not bring final release (moksha). Final release from all conditions of existence, from all limitations, is gained through knowledge (Brahmvidya); and knowledge, the realisation of supreme identity is the means and the end itself; it gives and is release—To the great mass of people, who are without the faculties and training to make them fit for the realisation of the supreme Principle by knowledge, other roads lie open which also lead to the centre. Pilgrimage is one; it brings joy (bhakti) and release (moksha)." Nothing less than something like this would explain satisfactorily the esteem and reverence in which the people hold the great 'tirthas' and 'kshetras' which they visit in such numbers.

One of the most important aspects of the institution of pilgrimage in India has been its effect on the socio-economic life of the Indian people. Visiting holy places has not only afforded to the individual a change from the drab routine of life, but also provided him with an opportunity to see his country and to acquire a sense of its vastness and its variety. The indirect result of all this has been the engendering of a spirit of tolerance and a feeling of brotherhood, and, for all the apparent difference and seeming diversity, a realization of a fundamental unity and a common culture. In the words of K.M. Munshi :

"This vast movement carrying millions every year to visit sacred *Tirthas* has had the greatest influence in strengthening the religious and cultural foundations of India, in bringing to every man and woman the consciousness of India's glorious past and in inducing a sense of sanctity of the motherland, unity among her children and turning their mind Godward." Or, as D.S. Sarma puts it in his "Hinduism Through the Ages" : "From time immemorial the feeling of unity in Hindu society has been fostered by the common pilgrim centres scattered throughout India, by the periodical *melas* and *jatras* where thousands of people of all classes congregate and take part in a common ritual and by the annual round of festivals, processions and ceremonial parades connected with the great public temples especially of South India." Nor is the process at an end. "These bonds of unity", continues the learned professor, "have been greatly strengthened in recent years after the gaining of independence by India. Take, for instance, the immense enthusiasm exhibited for the renovation of the ancient temple of Somnath which had been plundered and destroyed by Mahmood of Ghazni in the eleventh century. Or take the vast crowds of people numbering several lakhs who recently congregated during the Kumbha Mela near Allahabad for a ceremonial bath in the holy river. Or take again the large number of pilgrims who endure innumerable hardships and press on their way every year, to the Himalayan shrines up to the icy cave of Amarnath".

Who said Religion was on the decline and Reverence dying out? Certainly not, in India. Here, as elsewhere, the Progress of the Pilgrims is on, as it has been on all these endless ages. Here, too, as elsewhere, may the men sing, with Flecker:

"We are Pilgrims, Master, we shall go
Always a little farther ; it may be
Beyond that last blue mountain barred with snow,
Across that angry or that glimmering sea,
White on a throne or guarded in a cave,
There lives a prophet who can understand
Why men were born..."

Only, here in India, the men seem to know 'why men were born'. They seek rather the prophet who can teach how men might *not* be born; or being born, how they might lead a life which is full and sane, and happy and holy, and is informed by wisdom and lighted by love. They seek the refuge of the Buddha, of Shiva and of Vishnu, of the Tirthankaras, of the Saints and the Gurus, of Christ and Mohammad that they may attain to that peace of the spirit which passeth understanding, and to that enlightenment of the mind from which the great mystery is no longer hidden. For, without such peace and wisdom, man is but a miserable creature tossed about on a sea of sorrow; a victim of fate and circumstance, a target of that 'Antagonist' whom the atheists and the agnostics fear. With these and His grace, the human soul may achieve supreme bliss, may become one with the Absolute.

DELVADA TEMPLES : VIEW OF INTERIOR. TEJAPALA VASTUPALA

The rich Jaina brothers were anxious about the safety of their immense wealth. Then the good wife of Tejapala suggested that they should build a temple, for thereby their wealth would remain secure for ever. The Delvada shrines are dreams of beauty and marvels in marble.



1 ABU

The myths and legends of India make a fascinating study. At their best, they will stand comparison with the finest of fiction and the most imaginative poetry. Nevertheless, these religious fables are no mere idle songs of an idle day. Quite often, they help to explain, in the easy idiom of parable and story, many a natural phenomenon; also, they have preserved, in the garb of spiritual yarns, details of important episodes in the country's history. That is why those myth-makers of science, the geologists, have often found in this gossip about the gods, both clue and verification for their own guesses and theories. Likewise, the historian has learnt to respect this ancient lore, and has sought in it and discovered much valuable data and, at times, some amazingly accurate information. All in all, so rich is this mine that its diverse layers and strata should provide an inexhaustible treasure of great use and service to almost all levels of society.

Now, one field in which our religious scribes have been most active is that which concerns the manufacture of elaborate allegories on the origin and establishment of holy cities. In fact, each sacred site, whether *tirtha* or *kshetra*, town or mountain, river or lake, tank or temple, has its own one or more legends about its why and wherefore. Thus, Abu, the sacred hill which rises in such grandeur and isolation in the midst of level plains, has, like innumerable other places in India, much marvellous accounting for its being and sanctity. It is related that Nandini, the all-yielding cow of the venerable sage, Vashishta, whose *ashram* was located where the mountain came up later, once fell

down into a deep chasm which itself had been created, during a campaign to scout Nagaraja Takshaka, by the use of Indra's thunderbolt. The distressed sage approached the gods for assistance. Saraswati, the divine stream, flooded the pit and the animal floated up and out. Desiring, however, to safeguard against repetition of such mishaps, Vashishta went up to the great Himalaya, the king of mountains, and requested him to help fill up the chasm for ever. Nandivardhana, Himalaya's youngest son, volunteered to do that; but he was lame, so that some means had to be found whereby he could be conducted to the site. Arbuda, the mighty snake, then came forward to serve as the vehicle of the young mountain, provided that he, Arbuda, were suitably rewarded. The party made for the sage's abode and there Nandivardhana, perched still on the hood of the snake, settled down in permanent residence. In recognition of the services of the Naga, the place was named Mount Arbuda. But honours, though they tickle the vanity, may relieve no misery. Obliged to uphold the massive hill, the Naga would, now and again, shake and writh uncontrollably, and these tremors and quakes of the beast caused serious disturbance to the peace and meditations of Vashishta. Once again, relief had to be sought from amongst the gods, and to clip the narrative, Shiva, the Mahadeva, resident, at that time, in Benares, thrust his big toe into the earth and out at the point where, at Achalgadh, his temple stands. The pressure of the divine toe has since kept both Arbuda and Nandivardhana from shaking and quaking, although the inhabitants of the region like to believe that even now, once in the year, the mount and the mountain sway ever so little. Wonderful, all this, as an old wive's tale ! And yet, the scientist may read in it a reference to the earlier phases of Indian geology, to the 'Archæan Sea', the 'Dharwar system' and the 'Vindhya Era' at the close of which last, gigantic geological changes transformed the sea-sediments and other remnants around here into this mountain. The seismologist will learn of the volcanic activity prevailing in this area in remote times. Similarly, the ethnologist and the historian could trace in this account how the Nagas, having been driven from the North, had converted this locality into a stronghold; and how, overpowered and subdued yet once again, they were, nevertheless, permitted by the Aryan overlords to live in peace and honour and to set up their own 'Nagatirtha'.

Another celebrated legend linked with the sacred 'Arbudachal' relates to the birth of the Rajputs, the warrior clans of India. The story is best told in the grand style of Chand Bardai, the famous bard and biographer of Prithviraj

Chauhan. Once, then, "when the impieties of the kings of the warrior race (the Kshatriyas of the Vedic age) drew upon them the vengeance of Parashurama, who twenty-one times extirpated that race—dominion was assigned to the Brahmins .....But as the chief weapon of the Brahmin is his curse or blessing, great disorders soon ensued from the want of the strong arm. Ignorance and infidelity spread over the land; the sacred books were trampled under foot, and mankind had no refuge from the monstrous brood of demons and infidels. In this exigence, Vishwamitra, the instructor in arms of Bhagwan, revolved within his own mind, and determined upon, the recreation of the Kshatriyas. He chose for this rite the summit of Mount Abu, where dwell the hermits and sages constantly occupied in the duties of religion, and who had carried their complaints even to the *ksheer samudra* (sea of milk), where they saw the Father of Creation floating upon the *ananta naga*. He desired them to regenerate the warrior race, and they returned to Mount Abu with Indra, Brahma, Rudra, Vishnu and all the inferior divinities, in their train. The fire-fountain (*anal kund*) was lustrated with the waters of the Ganges; expiatory rites were performed, and, after protracted debate, it was resolved that Indra should initiate the work of recreation. Having formed an image of the *dhuba* grass, he sprinkled it with the water of life, and threw it into the fire-fountain. Thence, on pronouncing the *sajivan mantra* (incantation to give life), a figure slowly emerged from the flame, bearing in the right hand a mace, and exclaiming, "*Mar ! Mar*" (slay, slay).....

"Brahma was then entreated to frame one from his own essence. He made an image, threw it into the pit, whence issued a figure armed with a sword in one hand, with a *veda* in the other.....

"Rudra formed the third.....and the fourth was formed by Vishnu....." These were the progenitors of the 'Agnikulas', the greatest among the thirty-six royal races of the Rajputs. Obviously, in the face of such legendary testimony, with such powerful support from the gods themselves, it would have been difficult to disprove the claim of Rajasthan that Abu was hers, and the States Reorganisation Commission acted both wisely and justly in assigning this lovely hill-station, this sacred city, to the state whose summer capital it now is.

Whether the period during which this "grand convocation of the gods" was held on Mount Abu be placed in the *Treta Yuga* or the *Dwapar*, the second or

the third age of the Hindus, certain it is that this site, blessed by them all over again, gained manifoldly in its sanctity, thereafter. For centuries on end, it continued to be a most holy 'tirtha' for the Hindus, almost like a second Kailash. Large numbers of pilgrims and tourists came to visit its shrines and temples, and upon its pinnacles, many saints and sages spent years in meditation and penance. For a long, long time, till about the 11th century A.D., it flourished as an important centre of Vaishnava and Shaiva worship. Then the Jains seem to have taken a fancy to this beautiful spot—who would not ?—and they richly embellished and fully exploited it as a centre of their faith.

When and how exactly Abu was first discovered by the Jains is not clearly known. As usual, there is plenty of legend and story to indicate that the Jaina connection with the place dates back to very early times. It is maintained that Mahavira Vardhamana visited this mountain during his wanderings as a monk. Several Jaina Acharyas are believed to have gone there, after that. Again, it has been suggested that in the 10th century A.D., one Shri Udyotna Suri came to Abu on a pilgrimage which would imply that Jaina shrines were, then, already in existence on this site. Apart, however, from the allusion to the discovery of a Jaina image by Vimala Saha when he was erecting his great temple, there is little satisfactory evidence to support all the local and literary hearsay on this point; and it seems certain that the first temple to be set up on the soil of Mount Abu was the celebrated monument which Vimala built. That this first of the group of Jaina temples at Abu should have been such a splendid effort is a tribute, indeed, to the piety and genius of the great builder. The story of this devout and remarkable man, and of the construction of his magnificent temple, is as fabulous as any in the religious annals of India. What is more, it sounds almost authentic; except, of course, for such 'miraculous' touches as the Indian narrator, lay or clerical, is bound to add for effect and adornment.

Vimala Saha's shrine was built in the eleventh century when the entire region around Abu formed a part of the ancient Gurjjardesa. It appears that at that time the city which had found mention in the Vedas and the Mahabharata, in the Puranas and elsewhere, this Mount Capitalia of Megasthenes, this Olympus of Rajasthan, this Abu, was passing through a phase of comparative obscurity. The place that mattered was Chandravati, the resplendent metropolis near the foot of Mount Abu, which was, in years to come, destroyed so mercilessly

by the Muslim invader that little was left to indicate its once-glorious existence. In Vimala's time, the ruler of this Chandravati was Prince Dhanduka, a feudatory of the Chalukya King Bhima Deva I. Finding that his vassal was bent upon rebellion, Bhima sent for its quelling his very able minister and commander, Vimala Saha. Dhanduka sought refuge in Chitore, and Vimala took over as governor of the city and province of Chandravati. Being the kind of man he was, Vimala, later on, brought about, through his skill and tact, a reconciliation between master and rebel, and the prince was restored to favour and Chandravati's government. This seemingly minor campaign, which was no more than a brief interlude in the political history of the times, proved of great significance in the life of Vimala Saha. Having strong religious leanings, he had, during his sojourn in Chandravati, visited Abu and Achalgadh and had been deeply impressed by the quiet beauty of the mountain-valley. A Jaina monk, Dharmagosha, by name, providing the inspiration, the warrior turned into a man of most pious devotion, and determined to atone for "his sins of killing and others committed in state-craft". Through worship and the practice of austerities, he propitiated the goddess Ambika who appeared before him and asked what her devotee's wish was. "Mother" said Vimala, "if thou art, indeed, pleased with me, grant me two boons: male issue, and, secondly, your grace in erecting a most splendid shrine on Mt. Abu." The goddess replied, so the legend goes, that his piety had not been great enough for him to merit the grant of both the boons, and asked him to choose one of the two. The man who, as minister and commander, as governor and administrator, had never been perplexed even by the subtlest of problems, was, for once, unable to decide, and requested the goddess to give him time. "I wish to consult my wife", he said, "and would give my reply to-morrow."

Vimala narrated the great experience to his wife and that good woman told him, without the least hesitation, that he should choose to build the temple. "My dearest Lord!" said she, "No male issue has ever brought any one eternal glory or spiritual welfare. Who knows whether the son would be worthy or unworthy? Should he be unworthy, will he not undo all the good his ancestors did? Choose thou the boon, therefore, of constructing a temple that thou mayst attain happiness now and emancipation hereafter." And for that boon, accordingly, did Vimala seek, and receive, her favour when the goddess appeared again.

Then Vimala selected a site for the proposed shrine, but the Brahmans of

Abu would not let him build there. They contested his right to build a Jaina temple on the soil of a Hindu *tirtha*. "Only if you prove that a Jaina shrine once existed here, should we permit you to put up your temple," said they, emphatically. So, once again, he sat down to worship the goddess till she appeared and questioned him as to his desire. Listening to his predicament, she advised him to dig beneath a *champaka*-tree at a point marked with a saffron *swastika*. Collecting the necessary witnesses, Vimala dug as directed and, lo and behold ! the image of a Jaina Tirthankara was duly excavated which was evidence enough to prove that the site selected was, indeed, holy ground and blessed already, in olden times, with the existence of a Jaina shrine. The crafty priests were, however, not that easy to persuade, and yielded, finally, only when the wise minister offered those arguments of gold which have often succeeded where speech, however silver or strong, has failed ; to wit, ready money. He purchased the land by covering the entire area, literally, with rupees of silver—others say, with pieces of gold—minted specially in a square shape that they might be placed end to end so as to leave no unmeasured space between the coins. The greedy Brahmans were mighty pleased with the rich payment made for the meagre, 43 m. × 28 m. plot on which the temple now stands. According to Jaina traditions, the amount spent in building the temple came to, in all, 185,300,000 rupees. Considering that the land itself cost nearly 45,360,000 rupees, this figure does not seem to be altogether improbable—in fact, seems more than probable the moment one steps into the all-marble shrine, which in places is carved so richly, so exquisitely, that only seeing is believing. But of this aspect, anon, and after we have introduced into the picture, the other marvel of marble, the temple of Tejapala and Vastupala, as it is called, which was built, a copy almost of the Vimala temple, two centuries later.

Why was this other temple placed in such proximity—separated but by a short corridor—to the earlier structure, or for that matter, why do other temples stand within the same outer enclosure, forming a group, one unit, 'a city of temples' ? The answer is that such was the Jaina practice, as is evidenced in several other temple-cities of this community. Indeed, places like Shatrunjaya and Parasavanath have a far larger number of temples clustering together than is to be found at Mt. Abu. Here, there are but five of these. The earliest of the group, that of Vimala Saha and called the *Vimala Vasahi*, has been mentioned already. This is dedicated to Adinatha, or Rishabhadeva, the first

Tirthankara, and was consecrated, according to an inscription, in the year 1021 A.D., at a most holy ceremony attended by the Acharyas of the four great schools of the Shvetambara Jains. The other four are the *Lunavasahi*, the temple built by the brothers Tejapala and Vastupala; the *Pittalhara* temple, known for its big, brass image weighing about 108 maunds, above 4,000 kilograms; the *Chaumukha* or *Kharataravasahi* shrine wherein the object of worship is a four-faced central tower with four images on four sides, and the *Mahavira* shrine built just two hundred years ago. Of these four, the most important is the one called Lunavasahi or the Tejapala Vastupala Temple. This was built by these two brothers during the 13th century and, as has been said, is a replica almost of the earlier shrine. The two brothers, scions of a most illustrious family, are, like Vimala Saha, legendary figures in Jaina history. They were ministers of the Chalukya King Bhima II, and were endowed with much ability and piety, with great virtue and intelligence. They are credited with having erected a number of shrines at Girnar and other places, but the one they built at Mt. Abu, "for the spiritual welfare of Tejapala's wife Anupamadevi and son Lavanyasimha", is the most splendid. Like its model, this temple, too, cost fabulously, the amount being reckoned, according to Jaina traditions, at 125,300,000 rupees, and is, like the Vimala-Vasahi, a rare specimen of the kind of sculptural art lavished on it. Thus, out of the group at Delvada, the temples that count are but these two, Vimala-Vasahi and Luna-Vasahi. Together, they spell what may be termed as the last word in virtuosity, so far as carving of marble is concerned. The pair of them help convert this sacred hill into a place of pilgrimage for yet another kind of pilgrim—he whose religion is art. This makes Abu seven-times sacred, sacred to the Hindus; sacred to the Nagas; sacred to the Jains; sacred to the Rajputs who were created there; sacred, again, to those Agnikulas among the Rajputs to whom it belonged all through the centuries, sacred to lovers of natural beauty and constituting, verily, a place of peace and restfulness, a retreat of coolth and comfort, and a refuge from the angry sun god whose burning touch scorches, in the terrible summer, the inhabitants of the desert of Rajputana; and, sacred, finally, because of these two glorious shrines at Delvada, to all devotees of art, to admirers of sheer craftsmanship in respect of which quality the temples are, without exaggeration, altogether unrivalled.

Before we look and wonder at these exquisite pieces, let us take note of yet another curious point. The boundary-wall of the enclosure or, for that

matter, the outside, generally, of the total set-up, as also of the individual temples, is extremely plain and uninviting; so plain, indeed, that, on stepping in, one is dazzled by the "contrast from the mediocrity without to the glory within". Nor are there any tall and imposing *shikharas*, such as temples in the east or the south of India flaunt, or through which they portray the sky-ward flight of religious fervour. For all this omission, several reasons have been suggested. Possibly, the intention was to mislead the iconoclast, for low spires and an unassuming exterior were more likely to escape his notice than beckoning towers and beautiful carving on the outside. Again, the earlier structures might have crumbled or been pulled down, and the repairs and restoration undertaken might have been only partial. But, perhaps the finest explanation of such treatment by the builders has come from the pen of one ardent visitor to the Indian Dream Lands, Margaret Mordecai. Her view is that, in architecture, "the Indian starting point is different.....from all others. The Greeks built their temples on the hill tops. The Romans placed theirs in the Forum or at the intersection of the two great avenues which crossed each Roman town. Narrow streets surrounded the Gothic cathedrals, but still one facade was left on the market place. In all alike the building was designed to be seen from the outside and its principal conception was that of its exterior. In India no external effect is intended or desired. Temple, palace, mosque and tomb are reverently, lovingly guarded from the outside world. Each and every monument of Indian art was screened behind high walls like a jewel in a casket. The immeasurable truth and value of the idea, which shuts out everything discordant, vulgar or profane, and concentrates the attention of the beholder on the masterpiece alone, I was now to realize for the first time."

The contrast is noted by every visitor, and cannot but be noted, because in the words of Fergusson, "externally.....there is nothing to indicate the magnificence within," so that one is totally unprepared for the splendour of the interior, for 'the jewel in the casket', for the 'masterpiece' inside, for the grandeur and uniqueness that lie hidden. This excellence, so extolled and so extollable, begins, as in the case of the Taj, with the choice of the material which the builder used. The purest marble was procured, in fact, had to be procured, if the dream chiselling and the ivory-type carving displayed there were to be executed, if the shrines were to be "marvels, unsurpassed in the world—so entirely different from all preconceived ideas and from all other architecture." It was carried

uphill with great labour and patience from quarries scores of miles away and then shaped into these shrines by skilled and devoted hands, with further labour and patience, 'almost unrivalled in the land of patient and lavish labour.' But the marble which the visitor today sees is not marble, "as we know it, but polished and mellowed by the suns of seven centuries, to the tint and the softness of ivory. Every inch of it is carved (like an ivory carving) with an inimitable originality, variety, grace and skill, until the whole temple is one amazing piece of shining sculpture—one surpassing work of art." This is high praise, but deserved wholly, by the Vimala temple especially, and echoed by connoisseur after connoisseur, given alike by trained critics and the inexpert rustic. Indeed, in the hands of these craftsmen of Abu, the solid marble seems to turn into a plastic substance which may be carved and moulded, with incredible inventiveness and utmost felicity, into all those alluring and intricate patterns of sculptured ornamentation which adorn the temples and upon which their fame rests. This, as has been said above, is true more of the Vimala shrine which, in the words of Fergusson is "as elaborate as good taste would allow in any purely architectural object, and is one of the most complete examples of a Jaina temple." Here for the devout Jaina pilgrim there is the idol of the 1st Tirthankara, Adinatha, to whom the temple is dedicated, and in the corridors there are, in rows of cells, fifty-two other statues, to whom one may make obeisance. There is also the statue of the goddess Ambika, which, limiting the boundary of the temple on the south-west, marks possibly the site of an older shrine. But for the art-lover and the lay visitor, there is, among other attractive carvings of most fetchingly ornamental designs, that great marble dome which constitutes the supreme wonder at Abu and in the praise and commendation whereof there is nothing but superlative encomium from each and all who look at it. Similar in its fine design to the porch of the other temple, it has two additional features: the sixteen female figures called Vidyadevis placed on the brackets of the pillars upon which the single-block circle of the dome rests, and, in the centre, a pendant most exquisitely beautiful. "The whole", as Fergusson puts it, "is white marble, and finished with a delicacy of detail and appropriateness of ornament which is probably unsurpassed by any similar example to be found anywhere else.....It hangs from the centre more like a lustre of crystal drops, than a solid mass of marble. It is difficult by any means of illustration to convey a correct idea of the extreme beauty and delicacy of these pendant ornaments." Col. Tod remarks about the same thus : "The dome in the centre is the most striking feature and

a magnificent piece of work, and has a pendant, cylindrical in form and about three feet in length that is a perfect gem, and which where it drops from the ceiling appears like a cluster of the half disclosed lotus, whose cups are so thin, so transparent, and so accurately wrought that it fixes the eyes in admiration". This is not to say that the other temple is really very much inferior. On the other hand, it has its own patterns and designs which are "just dreams of beauty". There are, for example, the two ornate niches, popularly known as *Gokhs* of *Devrani* (husband's younger brother's wife) and *Jethani* (husband's elder brother's wife), which are believed to have cost nine lakhs of rupees each. Likewise, some of the ornamentation in the interior of the *Rangamandapa* as also some of the exquisitely carved female dancers and musicians almost excel, in their style of beauty and carving, anything one finds in the Vimala-Vasahi. In fact, for an average visitor to say which of the two *Vasahis* is superior is like choosing between two beautiful sisters—and one should refuse to declare any preference. Suffice it to say that both are beautiful and that both rank, as Bishop Heber put it, above them all. Such is their beauty and such is their just fame that any visit to Abu will include, nay, must include, a look at these temples. Not only is no picture of the city complete without them; but they form, possibly, its finest feature. After all, there are other sacred cities, more holy than Abu is. And there are other hill stations both more salubrious and picturesque than this Queen of the Desert. Yet, surely, there is no other hill-station which may boast of temples of such breath-taking beauty as these. That, in addition, the place should also be as holy as Abu is, makes for a combination almost unique in the world. No wonder that the sacred mountain should be so dear to the gods themselves !

There are many other holy sites and points in Abu and its vicinity. Some of these are to be found at Achalgadh, about eight kilometres north-east from Delvada. The place has beautiful natural surroundings, and from the top of a Jaina temple, built within the old fort-enclosure, one gets a panoramic view of the hills and valleys and plains of Rajasthan. The main idol in the two Jaina shrines here is a huge five-metal affair weighing nearly 4,450 kilograms. Closeby, there is the cave of Bharthari, the king who turned sage. Not too far, towards the north, rises the peak called *Guru-Shikhar*—the Saint's Pinnacle—which is over 1,706 metres (5,600 ft.) high, and is the loftiest point not only of the Abu Mountain, but in the entire region between here and the Himalayas.

But to Achalgadh one goes not so much for the Jaina temples, there, as for the temple of the great Shiva whose toe, thrust from Benares and pushed out, through a bottomless hole connecting, they say, with the underworld, at this point, keeps in their places the burden and the bearer in the legend related above. According to the Hindu traditions, this is a very ancient temple, for Achaleshwar Mahadeva is the presiding god of Mount Abu, and was worshipped as their tutelary deity by the Paramara chiefs of Abu, as well as by its Chauhan rulers. The fine life-size Nandi bull cast in brass bears a bruise which is said to be a Muslim touch. From the Torana or decorative gateway, in the compound of the temple, were suspended the scales on which the rulers of Sirohi State in whose territory Abu lay before it was transferred, in 1917, to the British, used to be weighed against gold and grain, and silver and spices, and silk and sundries. The large tank near-by is known as *Mandakini kund* because its waters are held to be as sacred as those of the Holy Ganges. There is, on the north embankment of the *kund*, a stone figure variously described as that of Arjuna or Adipala or Dharvarshadeva—the two latter were Paramara rulers of Abu—with bow and arrow in hand; and in front stand in a line three life-size buffaloes with a hole so perforated in the belly of each that the three holes lie in a straight line. In days gone by, the tank used to be all ghee and not water, and these beasts, which were then three demons, would drink away the liquid during the night. They were killed and the sculpture indicates the skill of the archer one arrow from whose bow could pierce through all the three.

The celebrated Vashishta Ashram and the Go-mukh tank, places of pilgrimage for the Hindus since times immemorial, lie on the south-western slope, and the few kilometres to these make a rough journey. Just before the Ashram is reached, there is a temple of Hanuman. Then, after a little distance, begin the seven hundred steps or so, which go down to the tank named above and to the temple which stands adjacent. The temple marks the supposed site of the ancient *ashram* and contains the images of Vashishta himself, and, on either side of him, of Rama and Lakshmana whose Rajguru he was. Two other statues hereabouts are those of Arundhati, the wife of the sage, and of his cow, Nandini, whose fall proved to be, as has been related earlier, such a blessing in disguise ! At this site, there are innumerable other, little and large, objects of interest, the most deserving of attention being the legendary *agni-kund* which was used on the occasion of the creation of the Rajputs. A few other spots of sanctity

which are located not far from this Ashram are the *Vyas Tirtha*, the *Nag Tirtha*, *Gautam ashram* etc. Yet another area which is full of holy shrines stretches between the Delvada temples and the Nakhi Lake. But before doing that, a most favourite sight-seeing spot may be considered, since it lies, speaking from the point of view of direction, between the Vashishta Ashram and the Lake area. The Sun-set Point to which many a visitor flocks for a view of the homing luminary is located, naturally enough, on the western-most tip of the mountain. From here a sheer drop of three thousand feet provides the clearest movie possible of the last stages of the sun's progress for the day, until the great god descends, seemingly into a sea, for a night's rest. The trail left behind by the divine departure glows for a while in roseate hues which spread across the skies in wavy loveliness. Then the light fades, at first slowly, then fades altogether, and the beautiful goddess of the twilight, Sandhya, beckons to the bewitching goddess of Night whose arrival will mark the end of yet another day over this city of the gods.

The shrines scattered about and around the Nakhi Lake are minor little things which have their local and rather limited value, but do not count for much to the visitor. Krishna Tirtha and Ramakund, temples of Arbuda Devi and of Nilakantha Mahadeva, or even the slightly more important temple of Raghunathaji—these will not detain one for long. Not so the Nakhi Lake, itself a holy thing for it is believed to have been dug out by the nails (*nakh*) of the gods themselves. However, god-dug or nature-delved, it is a thing of beauty; a gem of a lake; a pleasure-resort in perfect settings, surrounded by hills which seem to have been cut and carved on purpose to combine the grotesque and the lovely, with fantastically shaped rocks looking like toads and nuns; and displaying, upon and near its banks, many bungalows of the Maharajas of yesterday. And here on the bosom of this liquid jewel, the slow silent ripples smile unto themselves by day; or, by night, listen to some heavenly harmony relayed from beyond the space by the long-lost rays of some infinitely far-off star—harmony which the sages of old could hear and understand, and which the immortal soul in each of us catches, but

"……Whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it."

Not even at Abu, where, according to the Padam Purana, one night's stay procures the merit equivalent to that of giving away a thousand cows in alms !

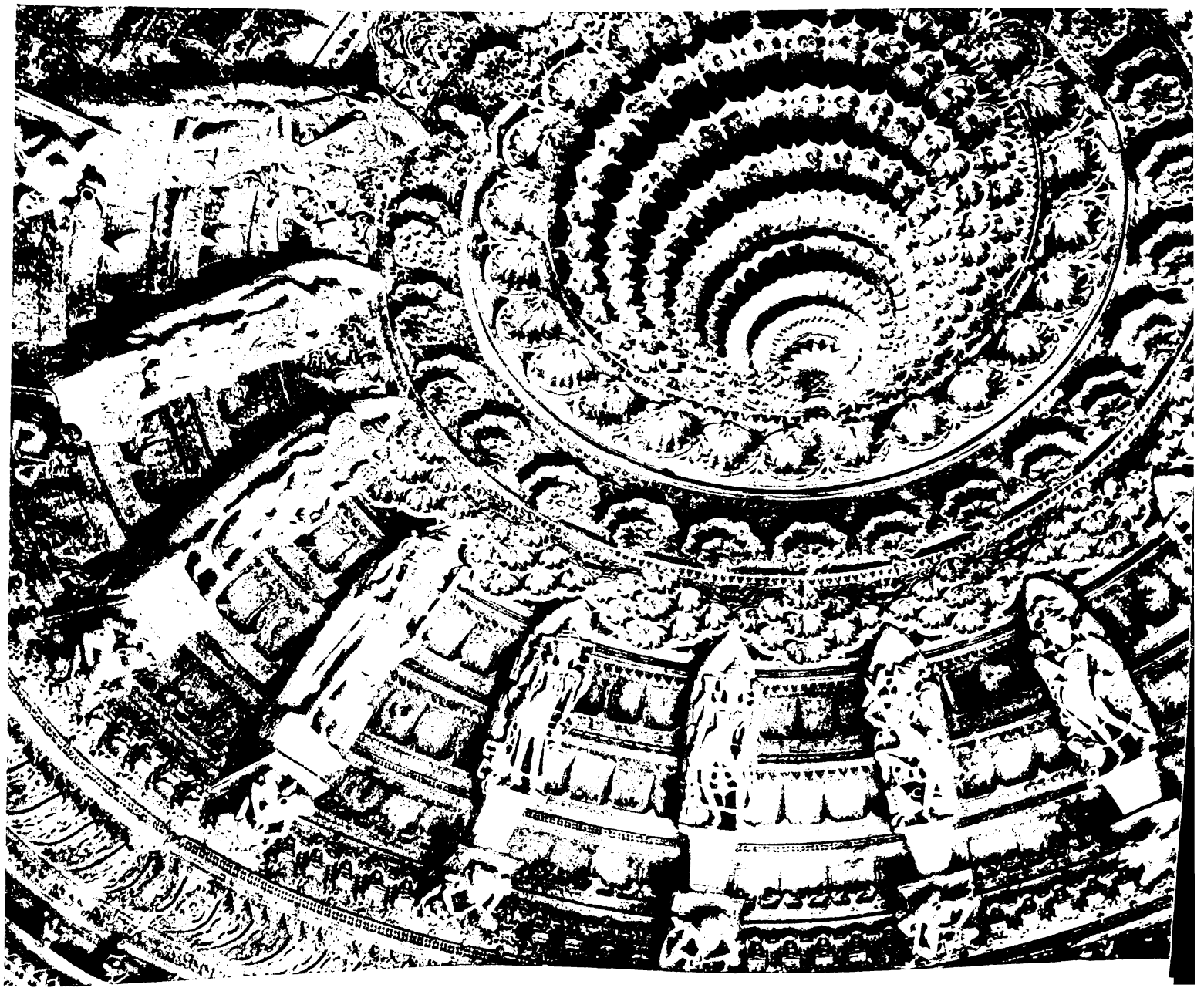
General view of Mandapa showing exquisitely carved pillars, arches and part of ceiling, Vimala Vasahi (Temple of Adinatha), Delvada, Mt. Abu. ►





VIMALA VASAHI, DETAIL OF PILLAR AND ARCH. Graceful arches stem from beautifully-cut brackets and link pillars which are decorated with horizontal bands of elegant carving.

VIMALA VASAHI, DETAIL OF CEILING : The exquisite pendant in the centre of the ceiling-which is itself a gorgeous affair of concentric rings—is a work of astonishing fineness. The figures arranged all round are those of Tantric goddesses called Mahavidyas.

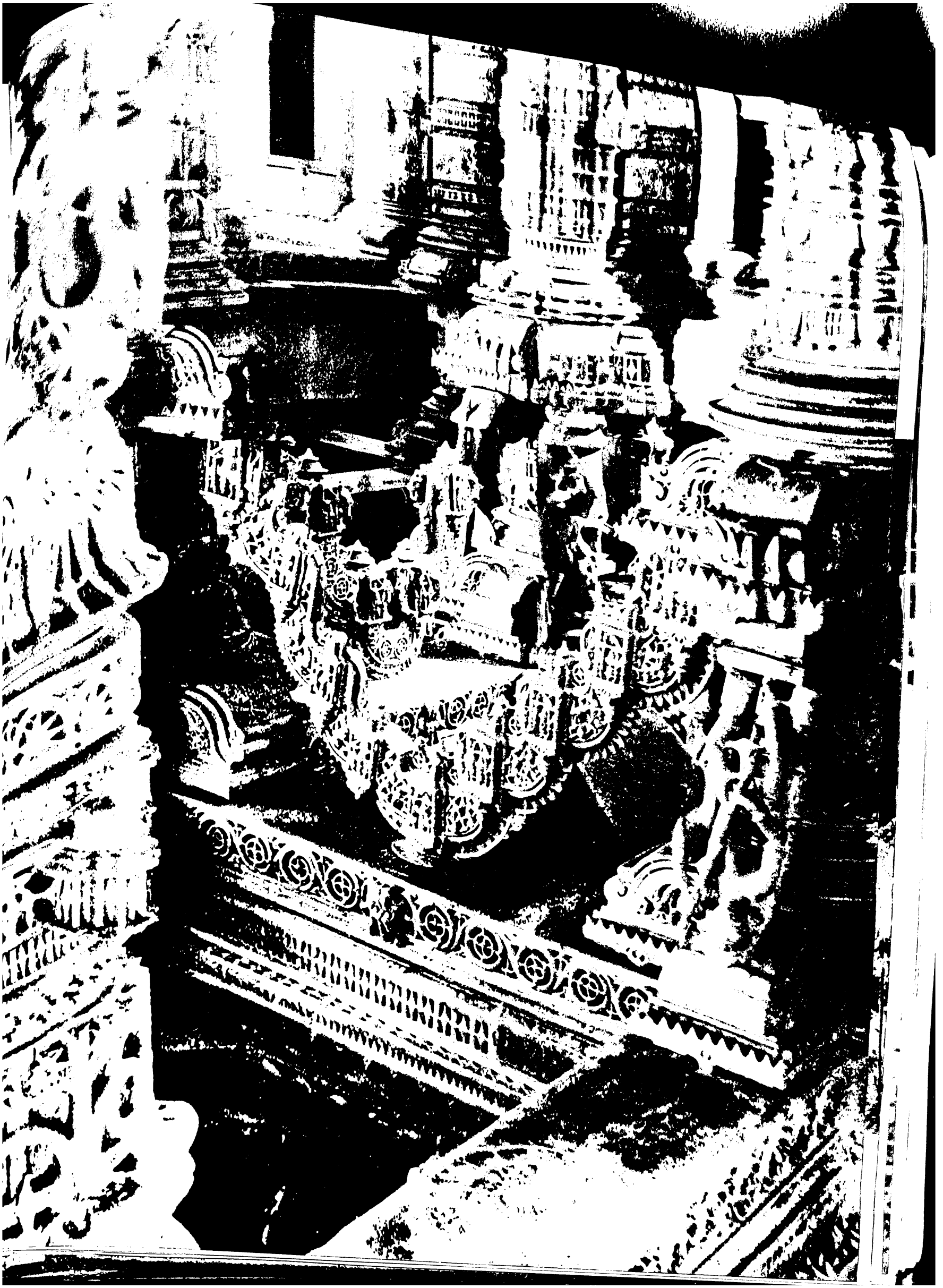




DEMON BUFFALOS : Sculpture at Achalgadh, Mt. Abu. These used to drink away all the ghee in the Mandakini Kund and were killed by a single arrow which pierced through all the three.

NAKHI LAKE : Dug by the nails of the gods and set in surroundings of breath-taking beauty, the lake is a popular pleasure-resort in the Summer capital of Rajasthan.







LUNA VASAHI, TEJAPALA VASTUPALA TEMPLE: Detail of pillar and arches. Remarkably similar in style, the carving work in this later temple is more elaborate though a trifle inferior in quality than that in the Vimala Vasahi.

VIMALA VASAHI. DETAIL OF IMAGE AND MARBLE PILLAR: Generally speaking, the figure-sculpture in Jaina art is neither elaborate nor exuberant, but tends rather to be simple and static.

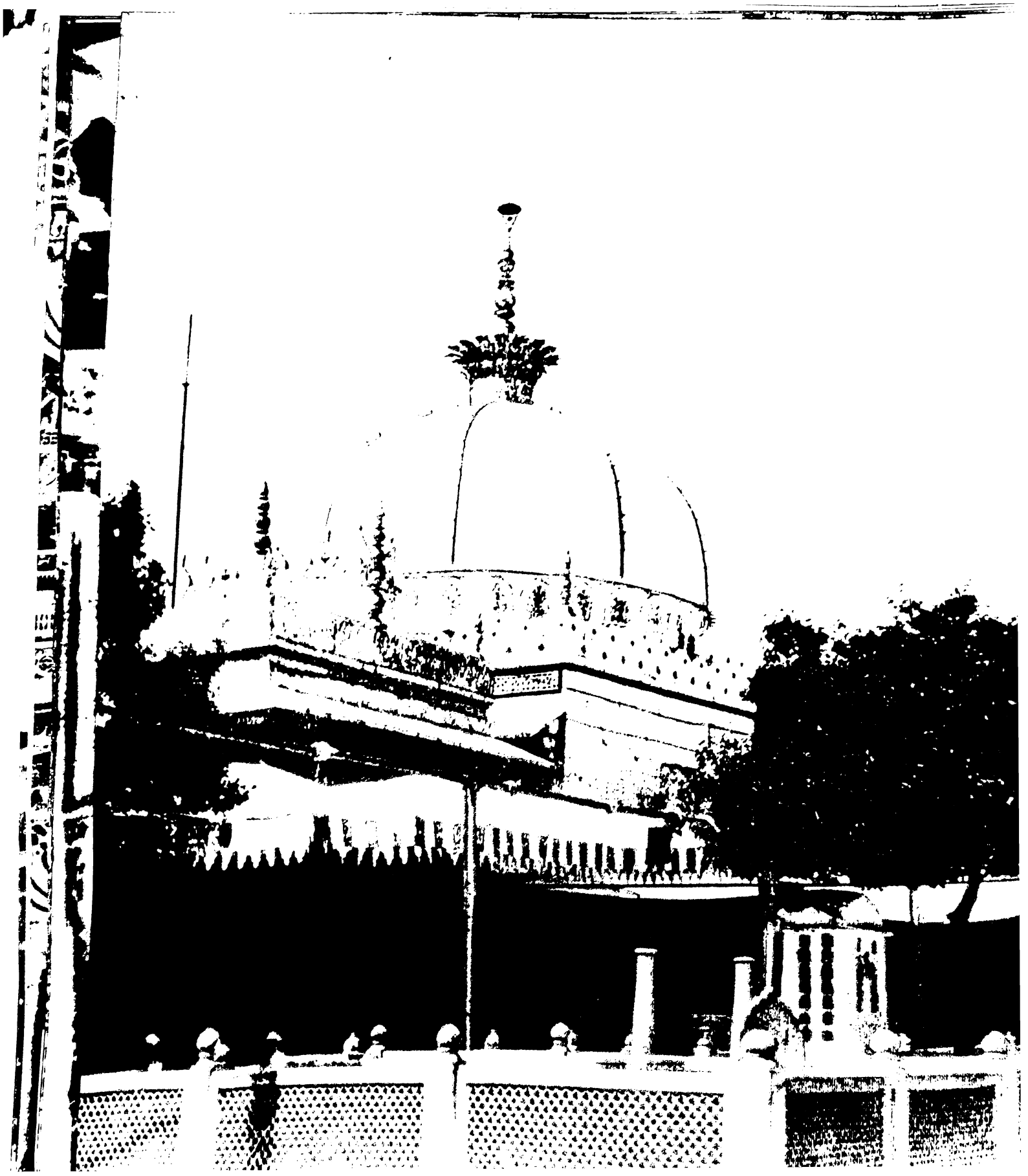


GENERAL VIEW OF A CORRIDOR AT DELVADA : Magnificently carved, the Jaina temples of Abu are dreams of beauty and contain infinite riches in a little room

2 AJMER

DARGAH OF HAZRAT KHWAJA MUIN-UD-DIN CHISHTI

Seven hundred years have gone by since Muin-ud-din the man died ; but Muin-ud-din, the Saint of Ajmer, still lives and thousands of pilgrims repair to him for light and succour.



2 AJMER

To the Muslim, Ajmer is *Ajmer Sharif*, Holy Ajmer. It is so to many a non-Muslim also; but for the former especially does it constitute a sacred city than which, in the whole world, only Mecca *Muazzama* and Medina *Munawwara* are more hallowed. This high prestige is enjoyed by the city of the goat-herd Ajaipal, because of its association with Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti who is among the most revered and the most renowned saints of Islam. So great was the piety of this man of God that he became a legendary figure while he was yet alive. After his death the legend grew, and his tomb acquired a sanctity which was phenomenal. With the passage of time, the Saint's Durgah became, and continues to be, a most important centre of pilgrimage. History records that emperors as great as Akbar have walked barefoot all the way from their own resplendent courts to kneel in humble submission in *his* court! As for the common folk, they have made the journey thither, as they still do, by the hundred thousand. An immense faith obtains in the Saint's miraculous powers and all kinds of people go to the shrine in quest of his favour. The ailing go there that they may be healed, the blind that they may see, and the deaf that they may hear. Starving beggars crowd there for their daily dole and the poor gather to pray for riches. He who has no son seeks the Saint's blessing for one, and he whose misdeeds are many prostrates himself that his sins may be pardoned. Every day a stream of pilgrims visits the holy shrine. Verily, the Durgah has grown to be a symbol of the groping and groaning humanity, of the confused, bewildered and unhappy soul of man, longing for grace and guidance, avid for

peace and prosperity, hungering for light and life, needing God, needing His love and His mercy, and finding all that at the feet of His saints and His *walis*, like this Saint of Ajmer, like the *Wali*, Muin-ud-din.

The institution of the saints is an old and familiar institution. Saints have always existed, in all ages and in all religions. Indeed, as one writer puts it, the world is never without saints and they form a hierarchy which is never incomplete since upon death they are replaced. All this is well-known. Nevertheless, the cult of the saints, in so far as it concerns Islam, deserves special notice, for it is a little peculiar that such widespread worship of tombs, relics and men should have flowered forth in a religion which strictly prohibits all such practices. Muhammad had made it perfectly clear that nothing was to be worshipped, none reverenced, but Allah. Yet men will be men; and both because of human nature being what it is, and because his followers would vie with those of other religions who had their miracle-performing, divinity-possessing prophets like Jesus and Krishna, legends were given currency which attributed miracles and divinity to Muhammad. Similarly, since other faiths had their saints, why not Islam? And so the saints came along, too. The cult began with the great mystics, the Sufis, of the early middle ages. In fact, one of the earliest of these Sufis, Hujiwiri, maintained that, "in chronological terms, the spread of the cult of saints preceded that of the Prophet. The Qoran uses the term *wali* which means literally protector, benefactor or friend, and speaks of *the friends of Allah*, upon whom *rests no fear*, nor do *they grieve*." (Qoran 10 : 63) He deduced from references in the Book that "God has saints, *auliya* (plural of *wali*), whom he has specially distinguished by His friendship and whom He has chosen to be the governors of His Kingdom and has marked out to manifest His actions and has peculiarly favoured with diverse kinds of miracles and has purged of natural corruptions and has delivered from subjection to their lower soul and passion, so that all their thoughts are of Him and their intimacy is of Him alone."

How and when the Chishti saint came to the city, which he chose to make his permanent abode, is a point of some dispute. One set of authorities maintains that he travelled with the armies of Shahabuddin Ghori who, as is well-known, defeated Prithvi Raj Chauhan, the last Hindu king of Delhi, towards the close of the 12th century, and set up Muslim rule in the north of India. Others are of the opinion that he had arrived in this country several years earlier, and

having studied Sanskrit and Prakrit in Multan, wandered up to Ajmer where Prithvi Raj was then the ruler and here he decided to stay. The popular account of his early adventures is most interesting and full of wondrous feats. As he approached the precincts of the imperial city, he sat down for a little rest in the shadow of the surrounding hills. Nearby were tied the camels of the king, and the rude drivers asked him to clear off from where the royal beasts were resting. The Saint got up and said most sweetly : May they go on resting ! Then, he and his followers walked away to put up by the banks of the great Ana Sagar. After a while, the camel drivers wanted to move along; but the charmed camels would not budge, and did not budge until, on the entreaty of the humbled bullies, the Saint graciously undid the spell. His trials, however, were not yet over. On the banks of the lake, there were many great temples, and the Brahmans and the priests objected to the defiling of its waters by the Muhammadan saint and his companions. The King was approached and his soldiers were ordered to go and deal with the offending party. But when the soldiers of the King approached the august presence, their lips began to utter, involuntarily, 'Rahim, Rahim', instead of 'Ram, Ram', and they who had come to oust him remained to support him. Then there was a great Hindu Yogi who refused to let the Saint's men profane the city's ground by their presence and would not permit them even to draw water for drinking. The great Fakir was obliged to perform yet another miracle. He commanded one of his Hindu followers to fill but one skinful of water from the lake, Ana Sagar, and lo, and behold ! the remaining waters dried up then and there; and not all the spiritual *mantras*, *tantras* and *jantras* of the Yogi could do aught to remove that drought until the Muslim Saint allowed that the skinful of water be poured back which being done, the lake was, once again, as full as ever. Again, to impress the assembled people and the Saint, the Yogi breathed upon his deer-skin seat, and up it flew into the air with the Yogi squatting upon it. Muin-ud-din smiled and, in turn, breathed upon his wooden sandals which also, it is claimed, rose straight away into the air and started delivering blows upon the head of the conceited but now out-witted Yogi.....Finally—to wind this endless tale of many such good, bad and indifferent anecdotes which illiterate fancy has woven into the story of his coming to Ajmer—he was given leave to stay there, but not in the town ; only on the edge of it. And one is tempted to add the last of the miracles in this context which was that the 'edge' became the town Ajmer today is, while the 'town' of that time is all desolation and mere wilderness !

However, it was not the miracles, not these magical tricks, that made the Chishti Saint the great flame to which all came for light. He was not that kind of saint. His greatness lay, rather, in his genuine simplicity and piety, in his unbounded charity and his humility, in his scholarship and true spirituality, in his contentment and self-abnegation, in his rigorous austerity and princely generosity. The great Khwaja who had come to India was not an impetuous youth, no raw zealot, but a seasoned 'sufi' and mature Fakir, already. He was nearly fifty, possibly older, when his association with Ajmer began. He had been born near Ghor, in Afghanistan, and had lost his parents when he was still a boy. His father had left to him an orchard and a mill. That was all the wealth the youngster of ten or twelve had inherited ; but a chance visit from an itinerant mendicant named Ibrahim Qundozi rendered even this little as superfluous. The lad offered some grapes to the guest who did not accept the proffered fruit, but gave him, in turn, a piece of mustard-cake nibbled at by himself. A miracle came to pass, for the taste of that saint-bitten food turned the lad's thought from all things material. He left home and garden, gave away mill and money, and bade good-bye to all life but that of learning and piety. He wandered about a great deal, visiting centres of scholarship and places of pilgrimage all over the Islamic world, and met saints and philosophers of the highest rank. He became the disciple of Sheikh Usmani Harooni, and, with him, went to Mecca and to Medina. It is stated that at the latter place a Voice proclaimed that Muin-ud-din had been accepted as a Friend of God, and that he was to go to India to spread the light of the true faith in that land of the infidel. The divine command was obeyed, and the *wali* set his face in the direction of his new destination. Once again, he passed through many cities, drank at the spiritual fountains of various saintly souls, and reached Ghazni, which fell *en route*, just when the Ghori ruler, Shahab-ud-din, was beginning to try his luck in India. Whether the future Saint of Ajmer accompanied the Muslim army or whether he came on his own, will remain a matter of conjecture. All that is relevant is that the spiritual kingdom of the Khwaja was founded almost simultaneously with the secular rule of Islam in India. For centuries thereafter the two kingdoms were destined to run parallel to each other. And even as, while the two lasted together, the secular was subject to the spiritual, the King was slave to the Saint, so when the great robber, Time, decided to despoil one, he could undo only the material empire, could put down only the King who sat upon the throne of gold, wore the crown that was pearl-studded, and dressed in robes so costly that these could

feed a city's population. The Saint who went about in patched garments which the poorest of the King's subjects might have disdained to don, whose throne was the dust upon which he sat, and whose crown was the thoughts of Allah and of Him alone—*him* nothing could touch. *His* empire was beyond decay. It has lasted while the other is forgotten history. Shahab-ud-din was, Muin-ud-din still is, and, *Insha Allah*, God willing, will continue to be.....

It is strange, this power of the good man, of the saintly soul whose light can attract not only the poor, humble folk who, like moths of the desert, would rush to the most insignificant candles, but also mighty monarchs who are not easily dazzled even by the most brilliant luminaries. Nor can such power be attributed to words, to pious utterances, to maxims and platitudes being oracularly mouthed from decorated pulpits. By his works, by the practice of what others are, for the most part, content to preach, will the man of God arrive. And Muin-ud-din's work and achievement in the sphere of the spirit were such that he became and has ever remained the King of saints and the saint of Kings. He lived in utmost simplicity and extreme poverty ; he ate little, slept less, and devoted himself, almost wholly, to prayer and meditation, to the reading of the Qoran and to the listening of devotional music. Of this last he was exceptionally fond and it had such a powerful effect upon him that at times he would lose all consciousness, go into a state of ecstasy, remain in a trance, for long intervals. His passion for listening to religious songs, for what is technically known as '*Sama*', is reflected even today in the celebration of the *Urs* of the Saint, the anniversary of his death, on which occasion a most delectable programme of devotional music is organized. *Qawwals* and singers of repute and talent partake in the celebrated sittings held for the singing of hymns, of *qawwalis*, in particular, and special arrangements are made to relay the entire proceedings.

The 'Urs', to attend which very great numbers of devotees come from far and near, is held in the sacred month of *Rajab-ul-murajjab* on the 6th day whereof the great saint had breathed his last, more than seven hundred years ago. To day the pilgrim goes to an elaborate 'Dargah' which covers a large area and has several rich and fine structures within its enclosure. Most of these are gifts donated, at one time or another, by royal admirers. The earliest of such constructions were the ' pacca ' tomb and a small dome over it. These were built with moneys given by Sultan Ghiasuddin Khalji of Mandu. That happened in

the year 1464 and it helped to break the comparative obscurity in which the shrine had lain since the time of the Saint's death. Earlier Muslim kings like Iltatmush had been great devotees and humble servants of the Khwaja, but it was the Khalji Sultan, who, in a sense, relit the flame of fame of the Fakir of Ajmer. Then came Akbar, great himself, and great enough to do homage, where homage was due, in a great way. Year after year, he made the pilgrimage to this holy site, and bowed his head at the Saint's feet in true humility. He added, in 1570, the magnificent Akbari Mosque and presented the prototype of the larger of the two huge cauldrons which one sees upon entering the third court. He also made a present of eighteen villages the revenues whereof were to be used to maintain a 'langar'—for free distribution of food. Akbar's patronage, if such a word may be used here, put a stamp of distinctiveness on the shrine, and added a great light and lustre to the name, already glorious, of the *Wali*. The successors of the Great Moghul, Jehangir and Shahjahan, kept up the tradition of paying homage and presenting gifts. Like Akbar, Jehangir, too, gave a big cauldron, in which Nurjahan herself cooked *Khichri* for the poor, five thousand of whom were fed by the king on that occasion. These 16th and 17th century cauldrons, of the Moghul father and son, became unserviceable in course of time and were replaced, in the 19th century, by the present ones. At the end of the first court, which one enters from the Bazar through the Usmani Gate built in the year 1930 by the Nizam of Hyderabad, stands the Shahjahani Darwaza. This is a gift of Shahjahan who also gave to the Dargah the beautiful Jama Masjid located, in the last enclosure, to the west of the tomb. The imposing and lofty gateway known as the Buland Darwaza which leads to the enclosure where the great, big 'degs' are is attributed to Sultan Mahmood Khalji of Mandu, although much of its later decoration is the work of other royal or rich donors and devotees. In the court between the 'Shahjahani' and the 'Buland' gates lies the fine Akbari Masjid of the great Moghul emperor.

The most important group of buildings is to be seen, naturally, in the last court where the holy shrine is located. The grand and graceful, marble mosque, built by Shahjahan and referred to above, is representative of the architectural excellence of that monarch's reign, and will, in the words of one critic, "charm the traveller who has not yet reached Delhi and Agra." In this enclosure, too, is the *Shama Khana* or the *Maifal Khana* where the *Qawwali* sittings are held. This was built by Nawab Bashir-ud-daulah of Hyderabad in gratitude for the Saint's

gift of a son to the eighty-year old Nawab. Several other structures, big and small, important and insignificant, crowd about and around the holy of holies which itself stands to the south of and adjacent to the building known as 'Sandal Khana' or 'Sandali Masjid,' because of its being the place where the *sandal* offering for the tomb is prepared. The sacred tomb is covered with expensive coverlets of velvet and brocade, which are daily besprinkled with *sandal* and bestrewn with heaps of *chameli* flowers exuding a most refreshing sweetness and fragrance. The *chhaparkhat* over the tomb is inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and a velvet *shamiana* stretches above like a pretty ceiling. In fact, the entire shrine is lavishly decorated and beautified with golden paint and gold-work, with silk and blossoms. There is, in the *sanctum sanctorum*, such an atmosphere of reverence, a hush of such holiness, that it is impossible to describe the feeling of a peace beatific and of benediction, of a palpable presence, which the visitor experiences. The total effect is that of a tremendous sense of sanctity and spirituality. And obviously, the Saint's blessing still counts, for long and unending is the line of seekers and devotees who file past and walk around the sacred spot. Only Hindus and Muslims are permitted to enter within the little area, enclosed by railings, where the cenotaph of marble is built over the real tomb. It is a great tribute to this Sufi Saint and to other *aulia* that not only did they never deny their blessings to the so-called *Kafirs* of Hindustan but also that the *Kafirs* themselves should have entertained such a sentiment of devotion and faith towards them. In the vast generosity of this man towards all men, in his loving kindness for all creatures of God, there were no Muslims and no Hindus. In turn, the Hindus who do reverence at the shrine of this Saint recognise and revere there not a Muslim but Muin-ud-din, the Saint and Saviour of the poor and the needy, Hazrat Khwaja Gharib Nawaz.

There are several other holy sites, *chilas*, *mazars* and *masjids*, within the Dargah enclosure and quite a few more about and around, and, on the hill-slopes, above it. One of the more venerated shrines is the Dargah of Miran Sahib. Located within the ruins of the ancient fort of Taragadh, this memorial of the Fort's first Muslim governor draws many pilgrims. Another revered shrine is that of Pir Ghos Pak. This stands on the lower slopes of the Taragadh hill, not very far from the Chishti Saint's Dargah. But in the city of Ajmer the place which comes, in interest and importance, next to the great Dargah is the wonderful mosque known as the "*Arahi-Din-Ka-Jhonpra*". This is situated off the Dargah, on raised ground, at the base of Taragadh hill, towards the south-west of

the Saint's shrine. The Mosque was built in the reign of Iltatmush, although it appears to have been commenced earlier, in about 1200 A.D. Its name derives from the tradition that it was completed in two days and a half which, to quote Fergusson, "if it means anything can only apply to the clearing away of the Hindu temples and symbols, to provide materials for the creation of a magnificent mosque to the glory of the iconoclast conquerors and their self-exalting creed of Islam.....Like the remains at Old Delhi (of the mosque called Quwwat-ul-Islam, near the Qutb), the entire plan is Muslim, whilst the columns and roofs are the spoils of Hindu temples". In fact, in his great Annals of Rajasthan, Col.Tod explicitly treats this structure, this "relic of nobler days and noblest art", as an old Jaina temple. But, whether it was initially a Jain fane or a Hindu temple, or whether it was a building wholly Muslim-built, this mosque is right glorious, truly. And of this glorious ruin, the most glorious component is the singularly elegant screen of seven arches with which Iltatmush bedecked the courtyard. The entire facade of this superb piece of saracenic architecture is nobly carved, displaying around each arch, three lines of writing chiselled ever so beautifully. The two ruined *minars* rising above the central arch were decorated with alternate circular and angular flutes, in the peculiar style of the Ghor sultans, reflected in the ornamentation of the Qutb. Indeed, in respect of their exceptionally attractive surface decoration, the two mosques, at Delhi and Ajmer, are like twin sisters. "Nothing", says Fergusson, "in Cairo or in Persia is so exquisite in detail and nothing in Spain or Syria can approach them for beauty of surface decoration. Besides this, they are unique. Nowhere else would it be possible to find Muhammadan largeness of conception, combined with Hindu delicacy of ornamentation carried out to the same extent and in the same manner. If to this we add their historical value as the first mosques erected in India, and their ethnographical importance as bringing out the leading characteristics of the two races in so distinct and marked a manner, there are certainly no two buildings in India that better deserve the protecting care of Government"—or, one may add, the unstinted appreciation of the people.

Ajmer is an old city, and has a continuous history of nearly 1,500 years during which it has passed through the rule of over fifteen dynasties and governments. No wonder that there are several places of interest and beauty where the visitor to this picturesque town would like to linger. The broad silver sheet of water called the Ana Sagar; the marble *baradaris* built on its bank by Shahjahan,

those pavilions so *petite*, and so damned by a single reference in Aldous Huxley's Jesting Pilate; the ruins of Akbar's palace and Jehangir's garden, the Chashma, the Foy sagar, the Museum, the Colleges—Mayo College, especially—numerous temples and *chhatris*—all these merit and, no doubt, will receive more than a passing glance. Again, as the headquarters of the metre-gauge section of the Western Railway, Ajmer is a very important station. Its extensive and busy workshops have, in their employ, a considerable number of Anglo-Indians. Thus, in a sense, the city becomes the focal point of several faiths, Jaina, Hindu, Muslim and Christian, and, like many other places in India, represents, in its composition and community life, an amalgam of several creeds and cultures.

The Hindu place of pilgrimage lies eleven kilometres away to the west, at Pushkar. The road skirts the Ana Sagar and winds through reach and pass of the Serpent Mountain. From several points during the journey, one may get a beautiful view of the city of Ajmer, nestling at the foot of Taragadh hill. The Pushkar Lake and the little townlet together constitute one of the holiest of *tirthas* in India. The lake itself is the most sacred in the country. Because of this lake and of that rarest of temples, dedicated to Brahma, which stands in this place, Pushkar is known as Pushkarraja, king among *tirthas*, and is regarded as one eye of the great god Vishnu, the second being that other princely *tirtha*, Prayagaraja. So holy is Pushkarraja that no Hindu pilgrimage, not even of the four *dhams*, Badari, Dwarka, Rameshwaram and Puri, is complete without a final dip at Pushkar; and it is with Pushkar that any enumeration of the *tirthas* of the Hindus begins. The explanation for all this sanctity is given in one of those quaint Puranic legends which the Hindu ear loves to hear. It is said that Brahma once wanted to perform a *Yagna* and was flying about in search of a suitable site. The lotus flower in his hand chanced to fall at this spot, and so the god decided to descend here. The sacred flower having touched, through bound and rebound, three different points, three separate enclousures were created. These were known as the *Jyeshtha* (big) Pushkar, the *Madhya* (middle) Pushkar, and the *Laghu* (little) Pushkar, and each has a special sanctity for each member of the Hindu Trinity, namely Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. The Big Pushkar, sacred subsequently to Brahma, was selected by this god for the performance of the *Yagna*, and arrangements were made accordingly. The gods were invited to attend; and all was ready except that the auspicious moment was at hand and the goddess Savitri, who had to be sitting by

Brahma, was to be seen nowhere. No *Yagna* would be complete without the wife's presence, and in desperation, Brahma directed Indra to provide him with a female whom he could make his wife. A Gujjari girl was produced forthwith and having been purified by being passed through the mouth of a cow, was, as Gayatri, duly married to Brahma and took her seat by the God's side. The *Yagna* commenced, but Shiva chose to interrupt the proceedings and was appeased only when the gods promised that he would be worshipped at Pushkar. The *Yagna* was resumed but then appeared on the scene, Savitri accompanied by attendant goddesses like Lakshmi and Parvati for whom she had been waiting. She was furious, and, uttering a curse that Brahma would never be worshipped, fled away to the top of the southern hill known as *Ratnagiri*, Mountain of Gems. There, out of an unbearable sense of humiliation, she committed *Sati* by disappearing into the earth. A fountain sprang forth to sanctify the spot, and nearby stands the attractive little shrine built in her honour.

The Brahma temple marks the site where the great sacrifice was performed. The older shrine is no more, since all the temples in Pushkar were razed by Aurangzeb. The present structure was put up in 1809 A.D. by Gokal Parekh, Scindia's celebrated minister, at a cost of Rs. 130,000. The swan surmounted aloft symbolises the god to whom this 'sole tabernacle' of its kind in India is dedicated. Within the '*antaralaya*' stands the four-armed statue of the god of creation. The steps that lead to the temple and the floor within are studded, here and there, with silver rupees donated by visiting devotees. All around the main temple, there are several other shrines and shrinelets. The existence of one of these, that of Shiva, is explained by the incident narrated above.

It is remarkable that the worship of Brahma who was originally a deity of supreme importance should have almost wholly died out. He was, no doubt, humiliated by Shiva as that celebrated legend of the endless, unfathomable *lingam* relates; but so was Vishnu. Why should his worship alone become a phenomenon of such rarity ? As usual, there are several legends which seek to clarify this. One of these has been referred to above, and, possibly, the curse invoked by Savitri's wrath had some effect. Brahma's incestuous conduct was another stumbling block in the way of his worship-worthiness. Again, he is represented, in more legends than one, as a low god who would not hesitate to produce perjurious witnesses in support of his own false statements. A more

satisfactory argument, however, is that Brahma, as the creative force, had, of necessity, to lie dormant while the universe passed through the phases of wear and tear, of maintenance and final dissolution. Till then, till the next cycle of creation, the gods that mattered were, obviously, Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Destroyer. The clash and conflict and, therefore, the issue of human happiness and sorrow, the fate of mankind, lay as between, and with, these two deities. The result was that barring an individual here or a group there who might indulge in his worship for the sake of worship, the rest of mankind could neither be expected to take nor did take any interest in a god, who was, for all practical purposes, defunct. His worship, therefore, came to be limited to this place, Pushkar, which he had chosen to abide at and which acquired, through the permanence of his divine presence, a great sanctity. In the month of Kartik (October-November), on the day of the full-moon especially, when Brahma is worshipped everywhere, Pushkar becomes the most sacred point in Hindudom. Then a single visit is enough to secure to the devotee, the abode of Brahma, and "all sins committed from birth onwards are said to be destroyed merely by a bath there". That is why a huge fair is held at Pushkar in these auspicious days and lakhs of people congregate upon this spot to reap the aforesaid merit. At this time, too, a big cattle fair takes place. This is understandable since, their spiritual welfare assured, the assembled villagers and farmers, all practical men, would welcome and utilize an opportunity like this to make deals in camels and bulls and horses which are so vitally related to their material welfare. After all, in India, the bovine and the divine have never been far removed from each other, nor action from devotion. The question is only that of priority and place, and these, one must allow in all fairness, are never mixed up.

Apart from the Brahma temple which, with its special significance, is, of course, the most conspicuous of all edifices there. Pushkar has several more temples. Most of these are of comparatively recent construction and one or two are quite handsomely built. The temple of Mahadeva and the South-Indianish Sri Rangaji are both noteworthy structures. Nevertheless, after the Brahma temple, it is the Lake which is the thing in Pushkar. As has been mentioned already, its sanctity is exceptionally great. Created by the touch of Brahma's lotus, and enriched by the inflow of the sacred Saraswati, surrounded by beautiful hills and adorned by graceful ghats, this holy piece of water presents a most attractive sight. Col. Tod who loved Rajasthan as few foreigners have, or could

have, done, describes it well, albeit with a faint trace of gentle irony : "Pushkar is the most sacred lake in India; that of Mansurwar in Thibet may alone compete with it in this respect. It is placed in the centre of the valley, which here becomes wider, and affords abundant space for the numerous shrines and cenotaphs with which the hopes and fears of the virtuous and the wicked amongst the magnates of India have studded its margins. It is surrounded by sand-hills of considerable magnitude, excepting on the east, where a swamp extends to the very base of the mountains. The form of the lake may be called an irregular ellipse. Around its margin, except towards the marshy outlet, is a display of varied architecture. Every Hindu family of rank has its niche here, for the purposes of devotional pursuits when they could abstract themselves from mundane affairs. The cenotaphs are also numerous". These temples and ghats and cenotaphs create an impression of beauty which is not easily forgotten. In the words of Huxley, "Behind the ghats rises a charming architecture of temples and priestly houses and serais for the pilgrims—all white, with little domes against the sky, and balconies flowering out of high blank walls, and windows of lattice work, and tunnelled archways giving a glimpse, through shadow, of sun-light beyond. Nothing very old, nothing very grand; but all exceedingly pretty."

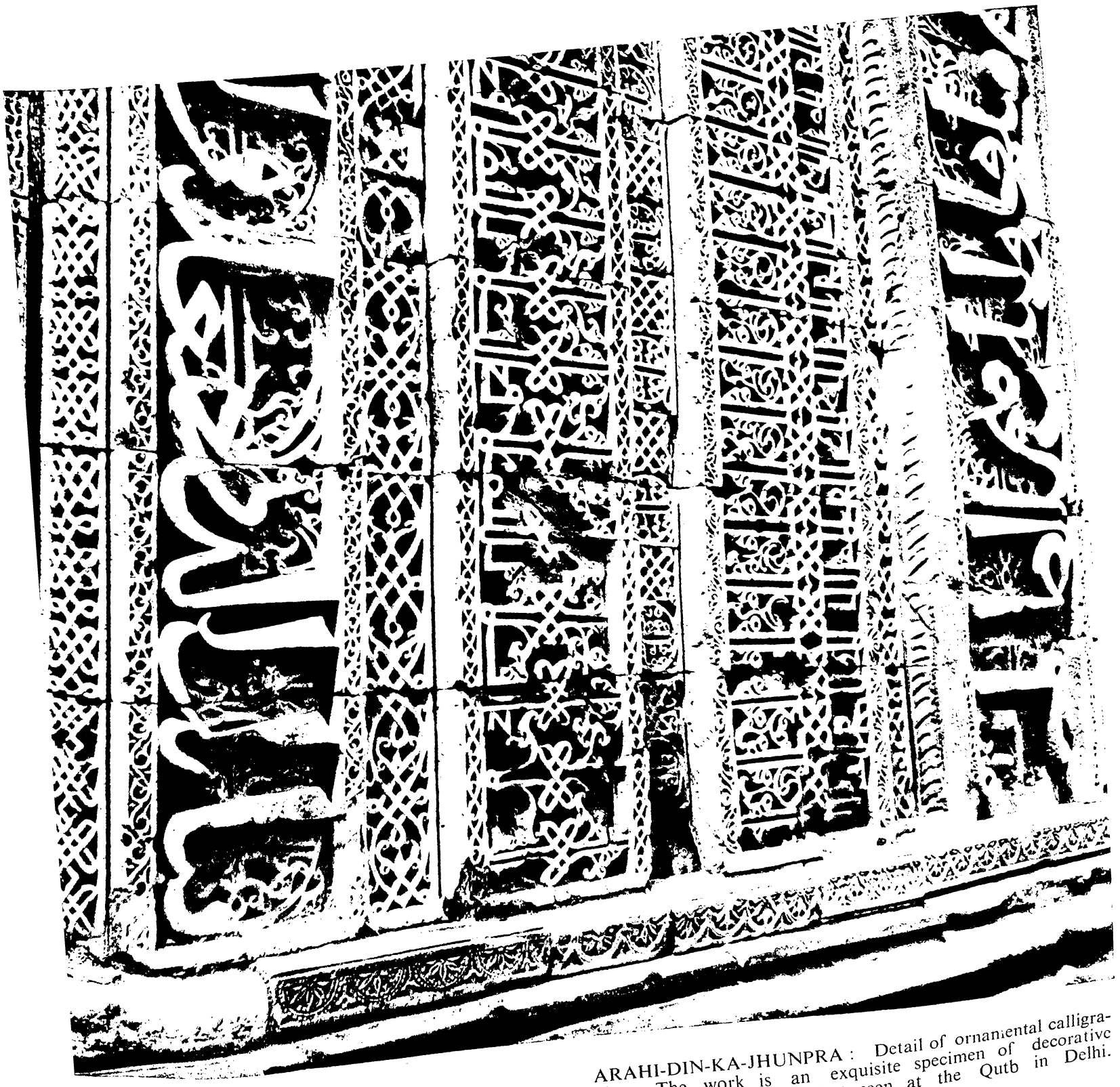
The surrounding hills, all amazingly variegated in their hues, are as sacred as the rest of Pushkar. These were created at the time of the legendary *Yagna* of Brahma that they might serve as sentinels on and guardians of the four directions. Since, after the first Hindu age, *Satyuga*, when everything and every place was holy, Pushkar was made the first sacred place, of the *Tretayuga*; since it was the abode of Brahma ; and since it was such a secluded and beatific spot, the hills and the caves therein have been the favourite haunt of saints and sages from God knows when. Names, the most celebrated in Indian myth and story, rise to one's lips by the dozen. Here lived the famous Agastyamuni, and the royal sage Bharthari. Here, in some spot or the other, was the sage Vishwamitra praying when that most beautiful of Indra's nymphs, the apsara Menaka, came to bathe in Pushkar's holy waters, and by disturbing the great sage's meditation, brought into existence that exquisite creature, Shakuntala, the heroine of India's greatest play by India's greatest dramatist, Kalidasa. And here, too, lived, in much later times, the Yogi from whom, by making daily offerings of milk, Ajaipal, the prince whom fate had turned into a goat-herd, received the blessing that he might found the city which still bears his name.



AJMER, GENERAL VIEW OF THE CITY : Parchedon top of the hill at the back is the famous fortress of Taragadh.



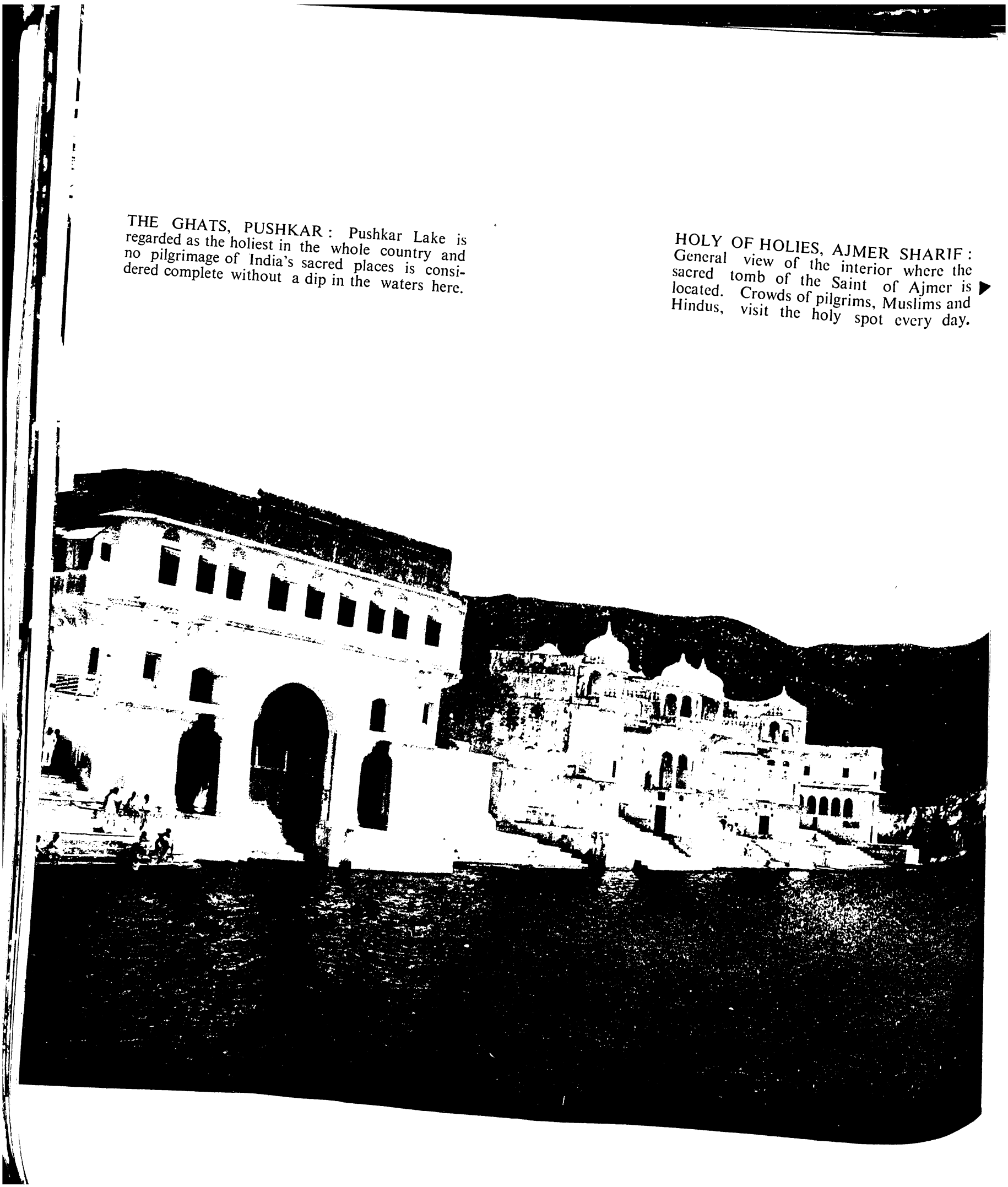
THE DARGAH : Exterior view of the shrine of Hazrat Khwaja Gharib Nawaz Muin-ud-din Chishti of Ajmer.

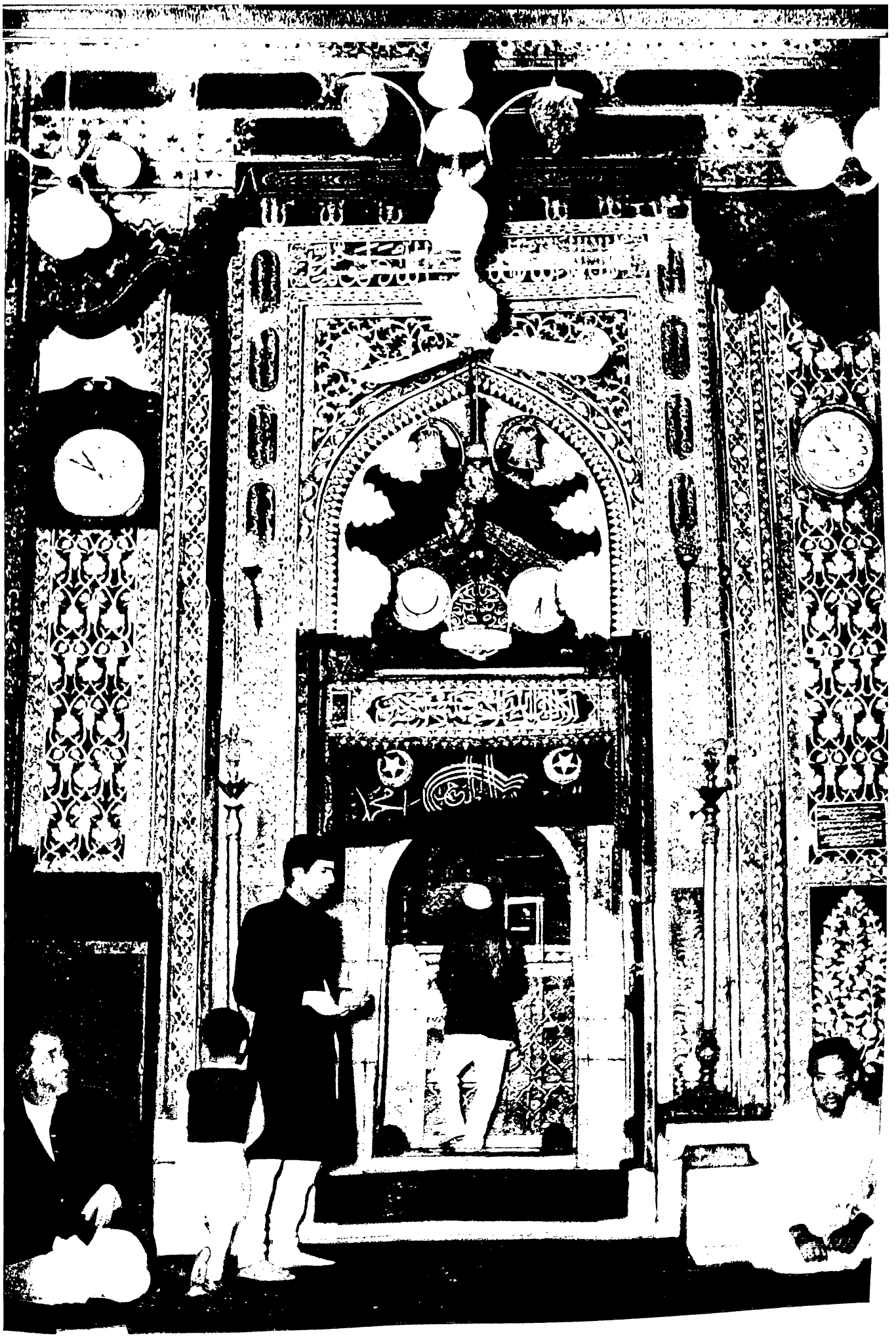


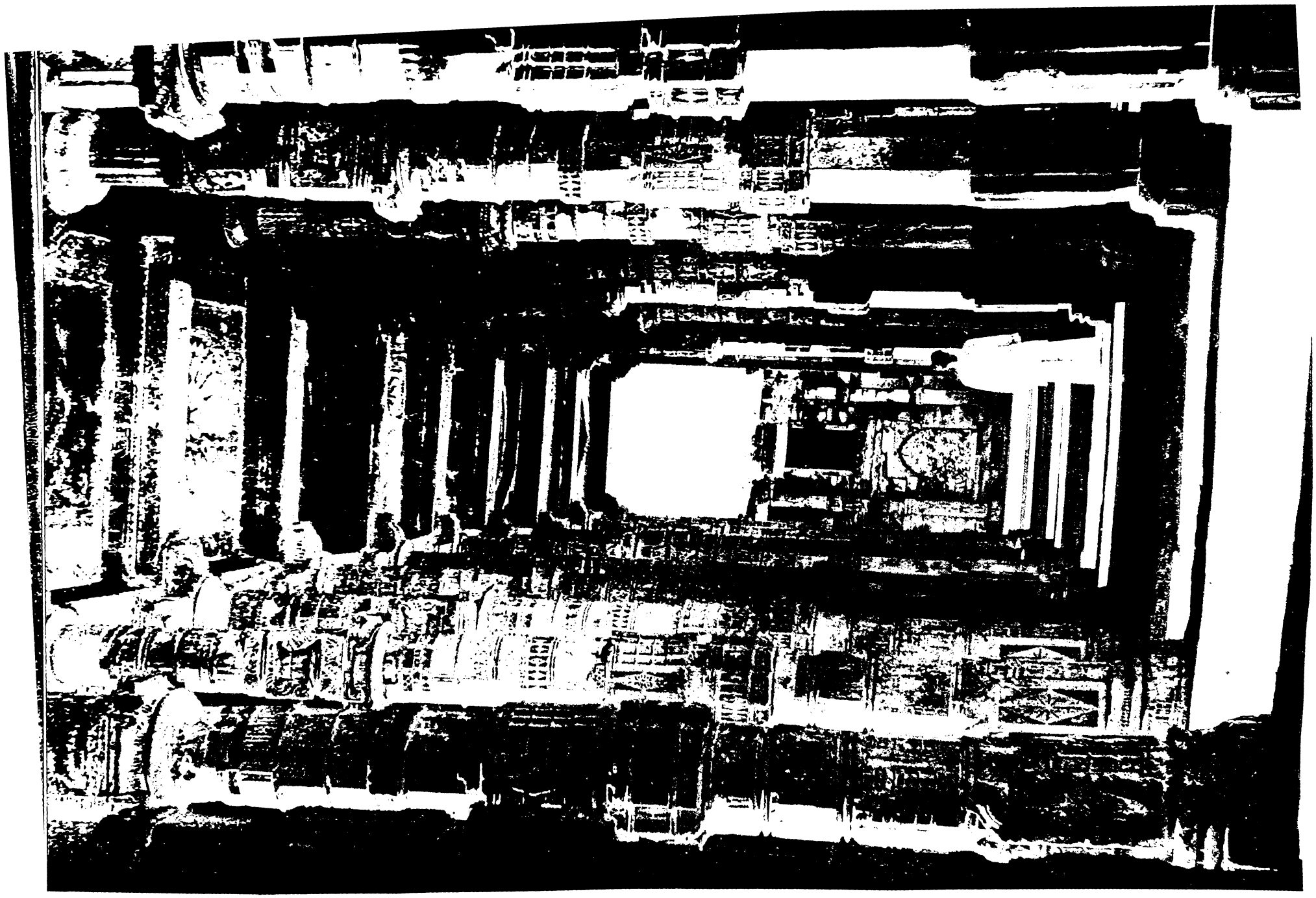
ARAHI-DIN-KA-JHUNPRA : Detail of ornamental calligraphy. The work is an exquisite specimen of decorative writing and similar to that seen at the Qutb in Delhi.

THE GHATS, PUSHKAR : Pushkar Lake is regarded as the holiest in the whole country and no pilgrimage of India's sacred places is considered complete without a dip in the waters here.

HOLY OF HOLIES, AJMER SHARIF : General view of the interior where the sacred tomb of the Saint of Ajmer is located. Crowds of pilgrims, Muslims and Hindus, visit the holy spot every day. ▶

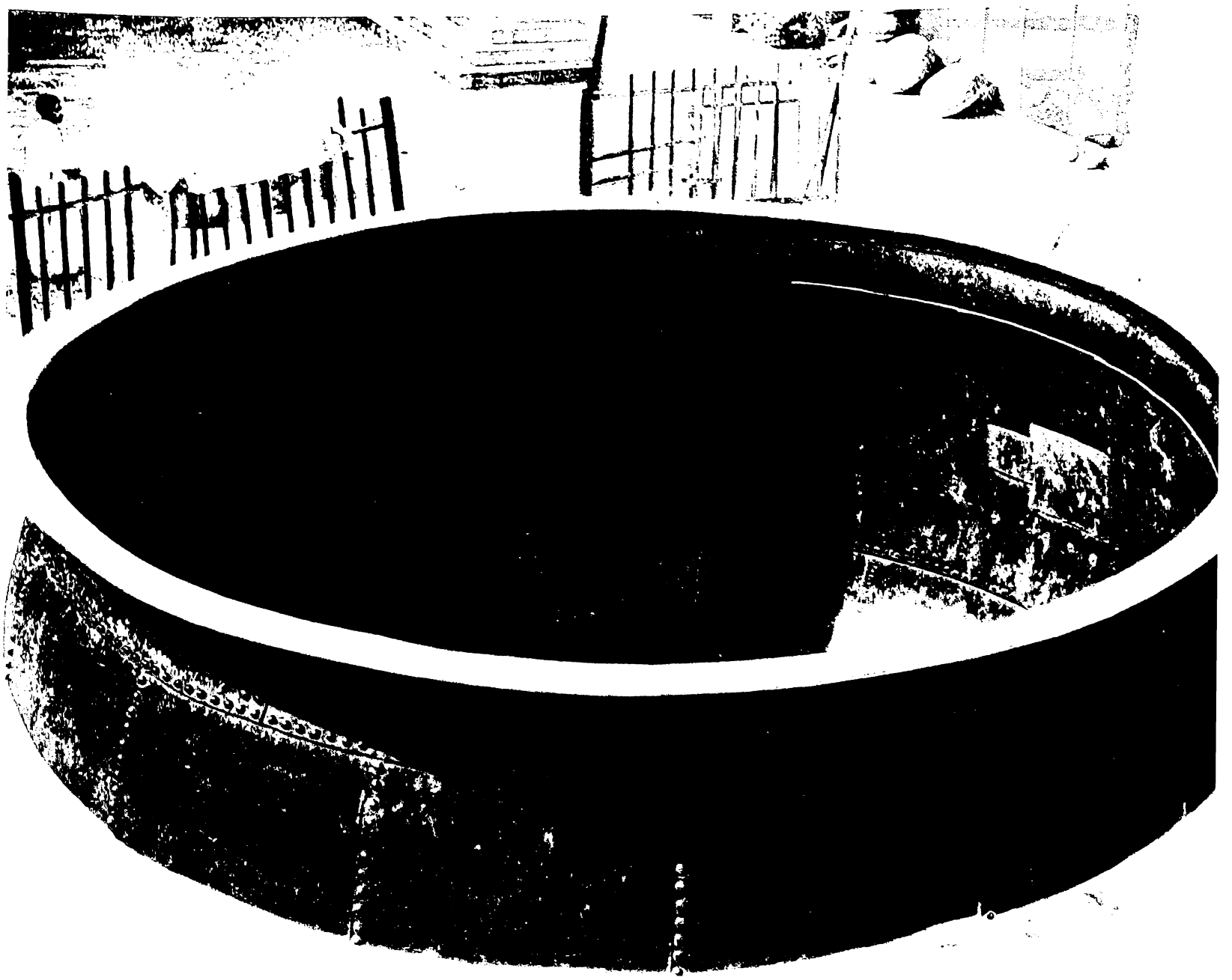


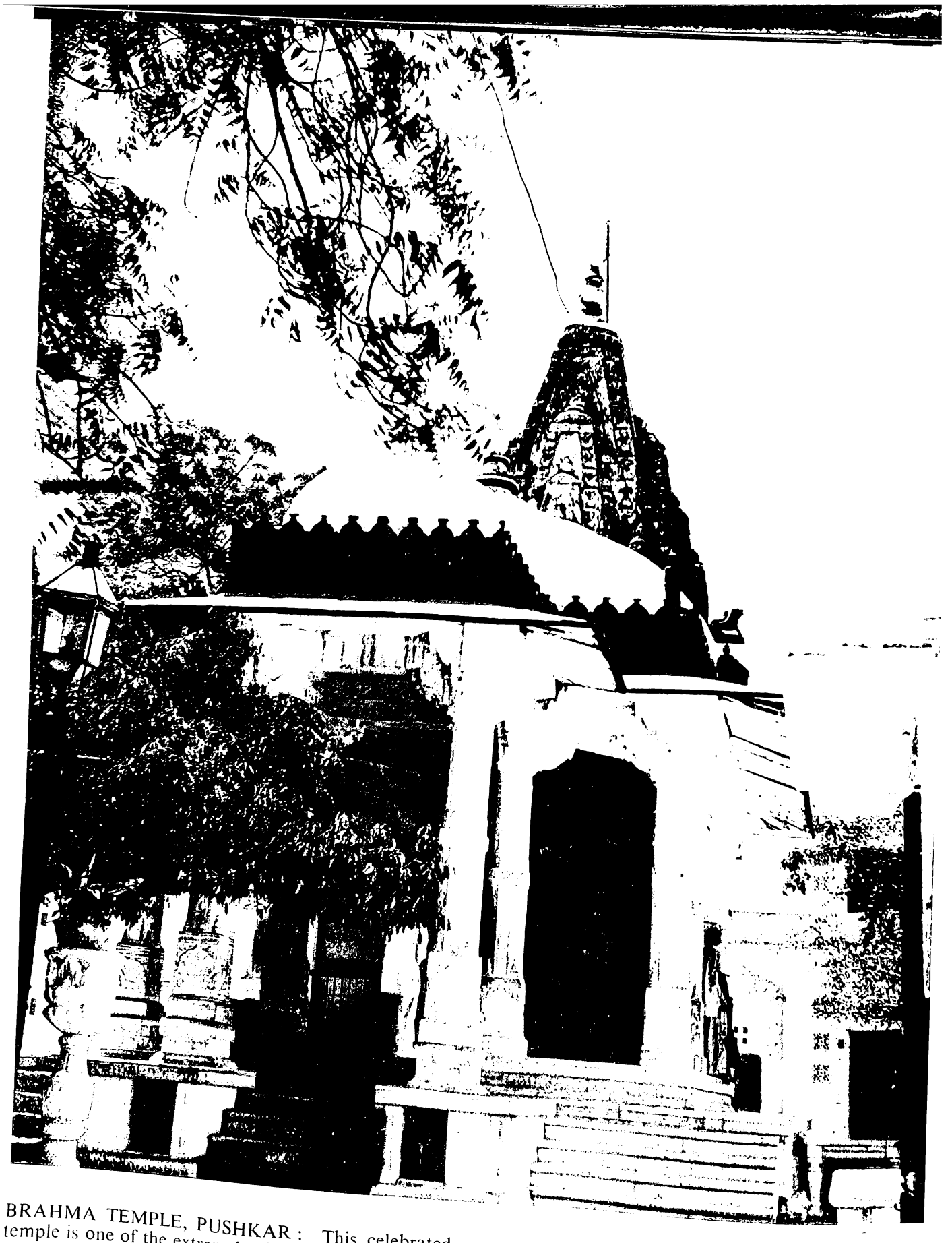




ARAHI-DIN-KA-JHAUNPRA : View of the interior. The style of carving on the pillars has given rise to the belief that much of the material used in the construction of this Muslim mosque was taken from an older Hindu or Jaina temple.

VESSEL OF CHARITY : One of the two massive cauldrons at the Dargah. The utensils one sees today replace the gifts of Akbar and Jehangir. Huge quantities of food are cooked in these and distributed free.





BRAHMA TEMPLE, PUSHKAR : This celebrated temple is one of the extremely few shrines dedicated to the Creator-member of the Hindu Trinity.

3 ALLAHABAD

THE DIP OF RELEASE

Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims visit Prayaga for a dip at the Confluence of the holy with the holy, of the Ganges with the Yamuna, and of these two with the sacred and invisible Saraswati.



3 ALLAHABAD

Allahabad, the city which bears the Muslim name for God, is one of the foremost Hindu places of pilgrimage. As a *tirtha* of the latter faith, it is generally spoken of as *Prayagaraja*, meaning "supreme among the sites for *yajna*—sacrifice". This sacred place is as ancient as any in India, for Prayaga was one of the first cities founded by the Aryans. Its sanctity is sung in the Rigveda which says that "those who bathe at the confluence of the white and black rivers, the Ganga and Yamuna, go to heaven; those of firm mind who discard their bodies here attain immortality". In the story of the Ramayana, which is the earlier of the two great epics of India, Prayaga is visited by the three royal exiles on their outward journey from Ayodhya, and there they meet, and pay their respects to, the sage Bhardwaja, the seat of whose *ashram* is still pointed out to the modern visitor. The Mahabharata mentions Prayaga more than once. While discoursing about the *tirthas* of the country, sage Pulastya tells Bhishma, the mighty warrior, that "the pilgrim who bathes at the confluence of the Ganga-Yamuna, wins absolution for his whole family and even if he has perpetrated a hundred crimes, he is redeemed the moment he touches the Ganga whose waters do away with his sins as fire does away with fuel." Again, when after the great internecine war which caused such havoc and destruction, after all that killing of brother by brother, Yudhishtra was overwhelmed with a growing sense of guilt and sorrow, the sage Markandeya advised him to go on a pilgrimage to holy Prayaga, "where every step taken procures for the devotee the merit of an *ashwamedha yajna*—the Horse

Sacrifice". Since those times immemorial and legendary, the holiness of Prayaga has continued in an unbroken line and in an ever-increasing degree. Because of its naturally attractive and politically advantageous location, it has enjoyed great prosperity and much royal patronage, so that it has associations with names of glorious kings, ancient, medieval and modern, like Pururavas and Harsha and Akbar. As for its religious importance, the story is even more glorious. The quotations given above should indicate what a bath at the sacred confluence of the two most holy rivers of India means to the Hindu. Actually, however, the sanctity attached is so great that on particular occasions when a dip is regarded as more than normally meritorious huge crowds congregate at the place. Thus, in 1954, at the time of the last *Kumbha*—the celebrated 12-yearly religious fair of the Hindus which is held by turn at Allahabad, Hardwar, Nasik and Ujjain—a record gathering of nearly six millions was present, at Prayaga, to take the coveted bath in the sacred waters on the final and the most auspicious day. Likewise, during the *Ardha-Kumbha* in the month of *Magh*—January, 1960, again lakhs and lakhs of people flocked to the holy place for the dip that cleanses the soul and ensures salvation ! According to one estimate, the number of pilgrims who, braving biting cold, took the plunge into the icy water, at the confluence of the blue stream and the white, of the Yamuna and the Ganga respectively, was nearly two millions. On the day of Mauni Amavasya, 28th January, especially, Ardha-Kumbha Nagar, the Mela area, was covered wholly by an ocean of humanity and the surface of the rivers by yet another sea, of bobbing heads ! And why not ? For the waters whether of the Ganga and the Yamuna, or of the three streams of the *Triveni*, are the most sacred in all the world, and even the deities yearn for a dip there. In fact, the *Maghsnana* in the *Triveni*—identified with the Mystic word 'Om' or AUM, representing Saraswati, Yamuna and the Ganga respectively—is a by-word for pilgrimage, and a sure means of purification.

Although, principally, the sanctity of this holy city lies in the sacred dip, Prayaga has several other reasons for its religious importance. This *Pratisthana* of the Aryans is so holy that it will survive *Pralaya* itself—so that while the Great Deluge will destroy everything else, Prayaga will be safe, since here stands the immortal banyan tree, which is Shiva personified. Then, on one leaf of this tree will Vishnu stay, in the form of a child, and await the act of re-creation of the universe. Otherwise, too, all the gods and the sages reside here at Prayaga.

Vishnu lives here as Yogi Murti, and Prayaga constitutes his right eye, the left being Pushkararaja, near Ajmer in Rajasthan. To Brahma, the place is especially sacred, because out of the five sacrificial altars of that god, this is the most prominent, and is known as the *Madhyavedi*, the central altar for the *Yajna*. It was here that he performed the sacrifice when he recovered the four Vedas. The square-shaped area which the Prajapati used as the *vedi* is delimited in the *Matsya Purana* thus : "To the east of the Ganges from *Pratisthana* (also known as *Samudra Kupa*) to the Pool of Vasuki in the north; from the Kambala and Asvatara Nagas in the West to Bahumulaka in the South." This area, Prayaga proper, contains the *Veni* or *Triveni*, the sacred confluence of the three rivers, the Ganga, sacred to Shiva; the Yamuna, sacred to Vishnu; and the invisible Saraswati, sacred to Brahma. Prayagaraja is thus the headquarters of the Hindu Trinity, is graced and protected by the presence of the entire Hindu Pantheon, and is, consequently, so sacred that "the very sight of this *Kshetra*, the pronouncement of its name or the application of its clay on the body is considered enough to free one from sin".

Nevertheless, in spite of all the sacredness of the *vedi* and the *vat*, and irrespective of its being the eye of Vishnu or the residence of the rest of the gods, Prayaga is first and foremost, the *Sangama* and the *Triveni*. The former, *Sangama*, is the point of confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna; and the latter, *Triveni*,—'twenty bow-lengths from the *Sangama*'—is the place where the fabled, subterranean Saraswati joins the two other streams. It is here, within these limits, that, for the average visitor, the holiness of Prayaga converges and here, through a dip in these waves and waters, he would seek religious merit or final release. All else is but of secondary importance ; is, at times, of no importance at all. The bath suffices and is more than all the rest of it put together. The sanctity and celebrity of Prayaga consists in this commingling of the holy with the holy. Each of the streams is by herself sacred enough to be stow the gift of purification, of salvation. Where they gather, there is, for the devotee, all but heaven. This is understandable because the sight is uniquely beautiful. Religion has always exploited Nature's loveliness and grandeur for her purposes. Here, the temptation would be irresistible and even the most unimaginative of priests, the dullest and the driest of persons, would think of sanctifying visits and baths here, since these would, in any case, be undertaken. It is natural that here, where beauty and sanctity go hand in hand, poetry and

piety should vie with each other in praise and portrayal of the great conjunction. Kalidasa would certainly not let a theme like this evade the Muses. The occasion is the return journey of Rama, Sita and party, from Ceylon, after the exile and the great conquest. As the *pushpaka-ratha*—the sky-chariot—carrying them passes over Prayaga, the god-hero of *Raghuvansha* waxes eloquent:

"Immaculate Queen! feast thine eyes on the scene
That opens before thee : where the milk-foamed Ganga
Salutes the sky-blue Yamuna's dancing ripples.
The landscape shimmers even as a gleaming garland
Of cream-hued pearls with sapphires alternating.
And there again in snow-pure lotus-wreaths
Shy blue buds quiver.....And there the spotless swans,
Bound for the trackless Manasa Lake, befriend
The mauve-winged cranes.....And there the ochre-tinted
Bright strands of the earth are dappled with sombre leaves.
And there the inky shadows merge in webs
Of argent moonbeams.....And look, there the blue-
Beckoning skies accost the earth through clouds.....
And lo, our eyes, enraptured, seem to vision
Lord Shiva's vast irradiant Form, bedecked
With sacred ash and girdled by sable serpents!"

The poetic sensibility satisfied, he, Kalidasa, too adds the pious note that "For those who give up their bodies after purifying themselves at *Prayaga* by bathing at the confluence of these two rivers—Ganga and Yamuna—the two wives of the ocean...there is no bondage of another body in a future birth and this liberation is achieved alike by the wise and the ignorant."

Indeed, the charm and attractiveness of the scene cannot but affect a man of feeling, cannot but make him think, too, because the cruder aspects of religion, its superstitions and ceremonies, force themselves upon an attention almost bewitched by the sublime aspect. The reactions are likely to be sharp, even unpredictable. Here is one possible result : "There is scarcely a lovelier spot than the *Prayaga* of Allahabad. The broad expanse of waters, the

verdant banks, and the picturesque scenery tell upon the mind and fascinate the pilgrim. Here, therefore, has superstition fixed a place for purification, through which it is obligatory on a Hindoo to pass on his arrival at Allahabad. The purification falls little short of an ordeal. You have first to submit yourself to the application of the razor from the top of the head to the toes of the feet...the eyebrows and eyelashes even not forming exceptions; and for every hair thus thrown off you are promised a million years' residence in heaven. Few rites are more absurd in the history of superstition, and it is unaccountable why no other has been preferred to this shocking operation—when hairs have their so great importance in physiology, and their value in the esteem of beauty.....Squatting in little booths erected upon the edge of the waters and mumbling their prayers like the gibberish inflicted in swearing a jury, do the Pandas of Allahabad contrive to sheep-shear their pilgrims without distinction of sex, age, or rank. The male pilgrim strips himself almost naked, and sits to pass through the hand of the barber. There were some half dozen men whom we saw to undergo the process of hideous disfigurement. The fellows looked sans their eyebrows, like idiots past all hope, and unrecognizable even by their own mothers !"

This incisive, pained and pain-giving reference is to the belief that "one should have a shave or tonsure at *Prayaga*, offer Pindas to one's ancestors at Gaya, make offerings at Kuru-kshetra and give up one's body at Kasi". And so here, at Prayaga, men and widows have themselves shaved, "men offering their moustaches and beards as well." Married women are let off rather cheap. They have their tresses cut about two finger-breadths. The cut hair is then thrown in the *Sangama*. What good all this can do to the soul and happiness of men is an issue as subtle, or as stupid, as one likes to make it out. Possibly, the justification is that, since the hair is such an ornament, and such a mark of beauty, and precisely because it is that, one must adopt an attitude of disregard and detachment towards this precious possession.

The *Triveni*—or *Veni*, as others call it, because thereabouts the river bends like a woman's braid—marks the supposed point where the invisible Saraswati meets the streams of the *Sangama*. The imperceptibility of Saraswati is thus explained by one legend : She was coming down the country, but encountering on the way with hideous demons making a frightful noise, she disappeared among

the sands on the North-west of Delhi. Travelling thence slowly and incognita beneath the earth, she at length met with Ganga and Yumuna at Allahabad. Tears trickled down her cheeks as she related the story of her misfortunes and she had been too much affrighted to assume again her visible form. Since the Hindu myths are not unoften religious versions of secular facts, the modern pandits read in this story "a mystified allusion to the swallowing up of the river Saraswatee (Gaggar) by a violent earthquake. The frightful noises are those which accompany the natural phenomenon of an agitation of the earth. The trickling tears refer, perhaps, to the percolating water which oozes through the walls of a subterranean temple at the *Prayaga*". Whatever be the reason and explanation, the belief is there that at the *Triveni* these three holy streams combine, and flow as three-in-one. Along with the *Sangama*, the magnificent confluence of the Ganga and the Yumuna, the *Triveni* is revered as a most sacred point for a dip, and it is at these two places that the pilgrim takes his bath. As has been remarked above, this bath, holy and meritorious at all times, assumes a special significance in certain seasons and on certain occasions. The Hindu month of *Magh*—January-February—is regarded as auspicious for the pilgrimage, and every year a big fair is held during this period. Whether the intention behind prescribing a cold month for a compulsory dip was to ensure a respect for health and hygiene through spiritual discipline, or whether considerations far higher than such mundane motives govern these fixtures, certainly the weather has never deterred the devotees from flocking to the waters. Their fervent faith, their joyous spirit, their high enthusiasm, their religious zeal—these accept all hazards and expenses of journey, all exposure to frost and cold, all the inconvenience and discomfort of a stay in make-shift shelters or, for that matter, in conditions of complete shelterlessness. These things have never seriously bothered the Indian. He has been used to a rough deal for centuries now, and if he has not bemoaned the lack of amenities or necessities on other counts, he certainly is not going to bewail their absence in the religious sphere. If the lover suffers not, is not one's love, somehow or somewhere, imperfect ? Why should the devotee, the lover of God, not put up with a little pain here and a bit of hardship there in the path of *his* love, in the course of his worship ? And whether it is folly and superstition, or genuine faith and free, which make him go through all the rigour and pay for all the cost which pilgrimage entails, there he goes, sure and without fail, as he has been going during all these thousands of years. The number that attended the *Kumbh* in 1954 has been mentioned already : sixty lakhs.

Imagination staggers at the idea of such vastness; but more than that it is the intellect which must reel if it should think of the implications. One in every seventy-five or eighty Indians present at *Prayaga* to take the dip ! Is the world we live in crazy that it scorns religion or are these people insane ? These who assemble in such numbers, may be to save the Sun and the Moon from *Rahu* and *Ketu*, or may hap, to be immortalized by the touch of waters in which, countless eras ego, a few drops of nectar fell when the Jupiter was in Leo or in Taurus ! Naturally, the sensitive and the sympathetic mind will suffer an agony of thought and feeling. It seems stupid, and one feels indignant. And in such a mood, Huxley's comment when he witnessed a like gathering in Benares on the occasion of a solar eclipse appears to be as cogent as it is pungent. "To save the sun (which might, one feels, very safely be left to look after itself) a million of Hindus will assemble on the banks of the Ganges. How many, I wonder, would assemble to save India ? An immense energy which if it could be turned into political channels, might liberate and transform the country is wasted in the name of imbecile superstitions. Religion is a luxury which India, in its present condition, cannot possibly afford !" And, again, "If I were an Indian millionaire, I would leave all my money for the endowment of an Atheist Mission". Many should agree with this. Only, the logical result of turning such an immense energy into political channels might.....well, one does not know, except that Mr. Khrushchev is alleged to have made a statement only recently that the Russians lived "not by the grace of God, but by the strength of the Soviets" ; and India is still uncertain whether she wishes to arrive at a similar point. She believes that she has lived, all along, by the grace of God, and her people, apparently, do not intend to give up their spirituality, or if you like, their imbecility. Also, no atheist missions are likely to succeed here where the masses are imbued so deeply with religiosity. One cannot laugh the thing away, whatever that thing which produced the stupendous spectacle of an assembly of six million people, who had all come just to bathe at one particular spot at a particular hour. This huge congregation created much confusion for the authorities, and a stampede or two accounted for the lives of several hundreds of people. But for the philosopher, it posed a vital question, and brought into focus "the constant clash of two opposing view-points—of the pilgrims on the one hand and the spectators on the other"— the same that we have discussed earlier. So, to quote one sincere spectator, "while the pilgrim insisted that this was salvation, the modern intellectual proclaimed that it was all medieval superstition. In both cases there was a fear

of facing or admitting the undiluted truth, with the result that clear thinking was impossible. The rationalists were partially right : superstition and formalism do play a part in such beliefs. But surely that is not the whole story. Behind it all lies a long tradition, and this tradition—cherished and tended in India when her culture, learning and wisdom were at their peak—was handed down to us by some of the greatest thinkers and God-realised men the world has ever seen."

There may be scant justification for keeping a tradition alive merely for th e sake of keeping it alive, merely because these beliefs, which "have to some extent lost their original significance", are "enduring reminders of a great past". Still, it is clear that "this unique gathering of millions of people stood out once again as an earnest that spirituality will survive all the blows and scoffings of this modern age." Which brings one back, full circle, to the same point, confronts the mind of man with the same issue : What is spirituality ? And is it really desirable that people should, or should be allowed to, walk on this path of 'spirituality' which admirers of India are unanimous in praising, but which, in the opinion of Mr. Huxley, "is the primal curse of India, the cause of all her misfortunes" and "has kept millions upon millions of men and women content, through centuries, with a lot unworthy of human beings" ?

Nevertheless, for the fact of survival of spirituality and the continuity of their religious traditions, the Hindus cannot be easily rivalled. Thus, along the river, where the dip has been held sacred for one knows not how long, there is the massive and magnificent Fort which is commonly accepted as "the most conspicuous object of interest in Allahabad". Yet, for the religious eye, the most conspicuous object is not this Fort which was built but four hundred years ago, by Akbar, nor all the earlier citadels that might have stood on this site, but the undecaying banyan tree, the *Akshay Vat*, which is now housed in a rather modest underground temple, in one little corner of the mighty fortress. This tree was when nothing else was here, and will be when nothing else will remain, for it is Shiva himself, the Destroyer of everything. The *Akshay Vat* has enjoyed a tradition of reverence which is linked with the remotest form of tree-worship and its sanctity has survived all the coming hither and going hence of a score of secular empires and their splendid but transient fortifications around and about it. At the time of Hieun Tsang's visit, "the great tree with spreading

boughs, and branches, and casting a deep shadow, stood before the hall of a Deva temple beautifully ornamented, and celebrated for its numerous miracles". The temple constituted, as it still does, holy ground "for all living things to acquire religious merit". The Chinese traveller noted that "if in this temple a man gives a single farthing, his merit is greater than if he gave a 1000 gold pieces elsewhere. Again, if in this temple a person is able to condemn life so as to put an end to himself, then he is born to eternal happiness in heaven". Apparently, this belief in, and practice of, religious suicide was widely prevalent in his time, for he refers to it again in connection with the description of the confluence of the two rivers where "every day there are many hundreds of men who bathe themselves and die." "The people of this country," he continues, "consider that whoever wishes to be born in heaven ought to fast to a grain of rice, and then drown himself in the waters. By bathing in this water (they say) all the pollution of sin is washed away and destroyed ; therefore from various quarters and distant regions people come here together and rest. During seven days they abstain from food, and afterwards end their lives. And even the monkeys and mountain stags assemble here in the neighbourhood of the river, and some of them bathe and depart, others fast and die". This last piece is, indeed, amusing, considering especially that contrasting the behaviour of a bull in Benares with that of men there, Huxley had remarked that being stupid and having no imagination, animals often behaved far more sensibly than men ! Obviously, even in this kingdom, that of the beasts, there are animals and animals ! Anyway, whether one went down a passage in the *patal puri*, from the *Akshay Vat* temple, into the river; or was conducted by priests, in a boat, to the holy confluence, where, with due ceremony, he was lowered down and "instantly swallowed amidst universal acclamation", the practice of making this most acceptable offerings, the gift of one's life, persisted for a long, long time. As is common knowledge, this cult of religious suicide was not confined to Prayag or, for that matter, to any one *tirtha*, or any one form. Be it through drowning in sacred waters or through being trampled to death under the Car of Jagan-natha, dying in a holy place was an act of immeasurable blessedness. Now, of course, the institution has died out, and is, like the *satee*, *jauhar*, or the killing of female infants, a thing of the past.

The undecaying, shadowless banyan tree, which is the object of worship in the underground temple inside the Fort, is a small, little affair. If, as history

records, at one time, devotees used to cast themselves down from its branches into the river, then the course of the river and the size of the tree must have altered considerably since then. Today, the only access to the immortal tree is by a flight of steps, within a part of the Fort, which leads down to a square, pillared courtyard, all done up in a manner usually conducive to creating an atmosphere of holy darkness and religious mystery. The tree of *Prayaga* has been mentioned by many historians and is held by the Hindus in very great reverance ; the Bodhi tree, at Bodh Gaya, alone may compete with it in that respect. In fact, one theory is that the tree indicates that the temple here was a Buddhist fane, until both tree and temple were taken over by the Hindus. Of course, the institution of tree worship does not belong only to the Buddhists, but constitutes, rather, a sacred element of the entire eastern system of theology. Nevertheless, it was the Buddhists who popularised such worship in India, all over again. As one writer puts it, "The Hebrews had their Tree of Life, the Zoroastrians their *Homa*, and the Vedists their *Soma*. But it was not until the Buddhists had invested the banyan tree with a sacred character that veneration for trees came into sectarian fashion in India, and the *Bel* was dedicated to Shiva and the *Toolsee* to Krishna."

In addition to the celebrated temple of the *Akshay Vat* which lies within the Fort enclosure, there are other shrines on the river bank where a vast forest of tents rises as from nowhere whenever the fairs are held. One of these, the Hanuman temple has a curious and large statue of the monkey-god in the recumbent position, with his mighty back placed against the ground. But upon this holy bank, in this sandy *enclosure* of *charity*, such temples seem to attract little attention. The eye rises again and again towards the watery fane which nature has built at the great confluence. *That* is *Prayaga*. The tiled temple of Hanuman here, on the river bank, or the ancient *ashram* of Bhardwaja in the city counts for little, if at all.

The city itself lies to the west of the *Triveni*, about 3 kms. away. The first impression is not very favourable and seems to justify the city's nick name of Fakeerabad. The comment of one visitor who saw it a century ago reads like a complete condemnation : "In all Allahabad there now rises only a single temple to break in upon the view. There is scarcely any activity of trade in this town, any hustle upon the river, any rumbling of coaches and carts in the streets, or

any throng of merchants and patrons on the thorough-fares. The population is scattered and much too thin for a city of such magnitude. The houses are poor and the shops mean. The native community makes no stir in any of the important concerns of life—in religion, trade, education politics or pleasure,—everything languishes at Allahabad". This, however, is no longer true and, on better acquaintance, Allahabad is found to be a goodly town, large and open and, in places, even beautiful. Its central situation has always procured it considerable importance. In olden times, especially, when men and goods travelled by rivers as well as by roads, its location on the bank of a river like the Ganges spelt a great deal of commercial prosperity for this place. Today, also, it ranks among the most important cities of Uttar Pradesh, and, its holiness apart, has much to offer to any visitor. The Fort, which has "the same best situation in all the town that the town has in all India", has been mentioned earlier. Located along the bank of the river Yamuna, this great edifice of red stone, built by Akbar, presents a most impressive sight. It contains, among other important items, a pillar of Ashoka proclaiming his edicts as also the over-writings of many another historical figure. Then, in the city, there are the picturesque Khusro Bagh and the tombs within which are a 'must' for any tourist who visits Allahabad. Prince Khusro was the son of Jehangir from a Rajput wife, and two of the tombs are of mother and son. The third was built for Khusro's sister, by the lady herself. The three tombs stand within the garden which is entered through an old archway. The main structure to the east is the tomb of the Prince. It is a lofty octagon which once had a most beautifully painted interior. The dome on the top swells out into a flawless globe. The elegant three-storeyed tomb of the Begum is equally commendable. Together they constitute, in the opinion of Bishop Heber, "the finest thing in Allahabad. All these are very solemn and striking, rich but not florid or gaudy, and completely giving the lie to the notion common in England, which regards all Eastern architecture as in bad taste and barbarous".

In respect of religious buildings the city is not very rich; that is, so far as temples and mosques are concerned, for it has a few fine churches. The old Jama Masjid was defiled during the Mutiny by the English and will stand for ever as a blot upon their normally good record in such matters. The Bhardwaja temple, which marks the site of the sages' *ashram* where ten thousands pupils of the great Rishi lived and studied, is an insignificant building. The case of the old

Naga temple is no different, so that this place, once full of temples and idols, is, in this respect, about the poorest of the holy cities of India.

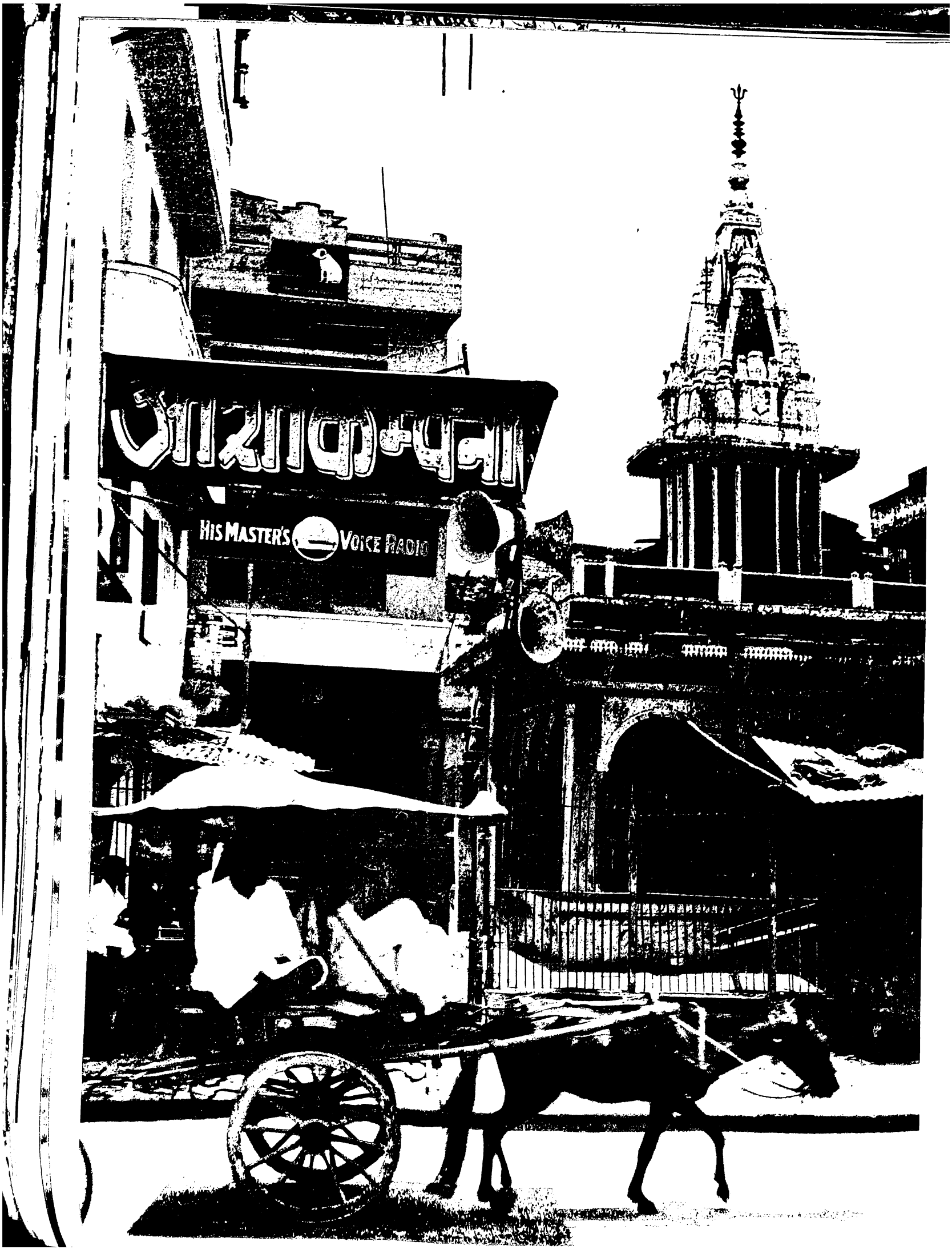
With regard to the churches and modern, secular buildings, the city is not so badly off. The University, the All Saint's Cathedral and the Museum are worth visiting. The Museum certainly will repay whatever time and attention are given to it. It possesses a rich collection of great archaeological value and exhibits some unique pieces of Indian sculpture. The terra-cottas, Roerich's paintings, and gifts which Pandit Nehru has been receiving and has passed on to the Museum here—these are especially remarkable. Here too is treasured a part of the sacred ashes of Gandhi, the rest having been consigned to the *Prayag* streams.

But greater, in a sense, than all the other attractions of modern Allahabad is the building known as Anand Bhawan—the house of India's Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The place is already on the itinerary of tourists and pilgrims, and attracts many visitors. Since Allahabad was a most important political centre during the Independence Movement, since the Nehrus, were such pillars of the Congress, and since the older home of the Nehrus, the adjacent Swaraj Bhawan, was gifted away to the Congress and remained its headquarters till the very eve of Independence, therefore many are the sacred associations which the patriots have with this abode of happiness, Anand Bhawan. But, even if there were nothing else to it except the fact that this is Nehru's home, that alone should be enough to turn the building into a shrine for the Indian, and to stamp its bricks with immortal fame.

And yet, as Nehru himself has often said this great country has had innumerable noble sons, too many to give undue importance to any. Likewise, any of her great cities, any sacred city of hers, is too great and too sacred to be very much affected by the addition of one more glorious name to the list of her inhabitants, or of one more happy or hallowed memory to the vast treasure. And so, Allahabad is neither Nehru the patriot nor Akbar the great, is not Harsha the munificent nor Pururavas—the hero of the charming legend of Vikram and Urvashi; but *Prayaga* where the grand triple divinity of the Hindus is in residence for ever; and where the sacredness of one most holy stream of India mingles with the sacredness of the other, and creates, by uniting them in a single stream, the holiest of confluences in all Hindudom.



SANGAMA PRAYAGA, GENERAL VIEW : The Sangama is one of the holiest spots for the Hindus, for here the sacred stream of the blue Yamuna mingles with the blessed waters of the fair Ganges. The boats carry the pilgrim to the Confluence for the coveted dip.


HIS MASTER'S VOICE RADIO

◀ A SCENE IN THE CITY, ALLAHABAD : A little temple, a little shop, and a little carriage ; but everywhere and for all these, is the Master's Voice.

KHUSRO BAGH : In the foreground is the tomb of Amir Khusro, son of the Mughal Emperor Jehangir. This mausoleum and two other (third not seen in the picture) constitute refined specimens of Islamic architecture of the 16th century.





SUNRISE OVER THE YAMUNA : A panoramic view of the river at Prayaga. The pilgrims and the boats are like symbols of eternity and seem most unconcerned about the modern rail-bridge and the factories in the distance.





AKSHAY-VAT : The undecaying Banyan tree which stands in an underground temple in the Fort at Allahabad. Object of great veneration, the tree is believed to have existed for thousands of years.

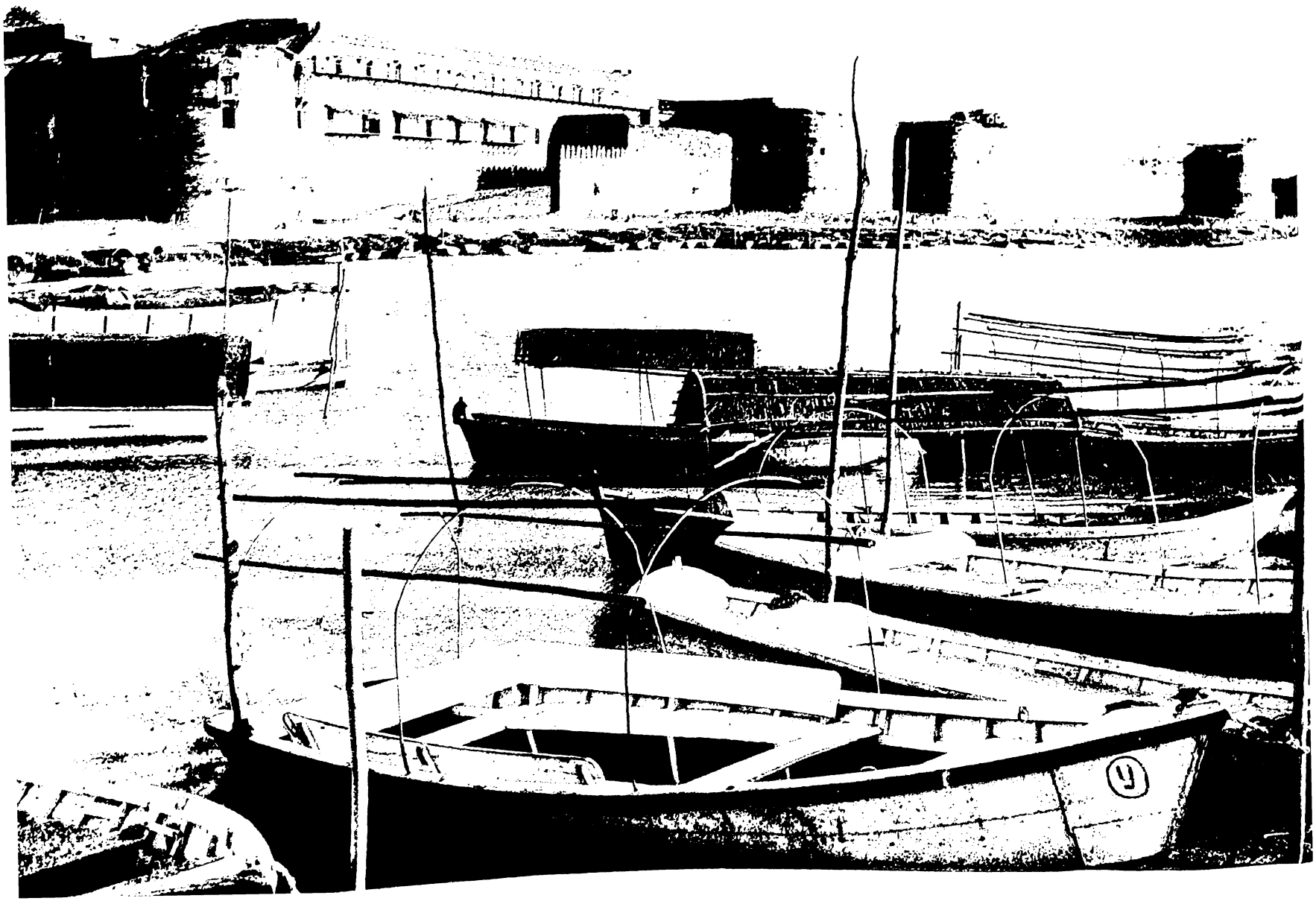


ANAND BHAWAN : Elegant residence of the Nehru family in their home town. The place is already a centre of tourist interest and even of pilgrimage.



MUNICIPAL MUSEUM : Exterior veiw of one of the most important museums of Uttar Pradesh. A part of the precious and sacred ashes of Mahatma Gandhi is treasured here.

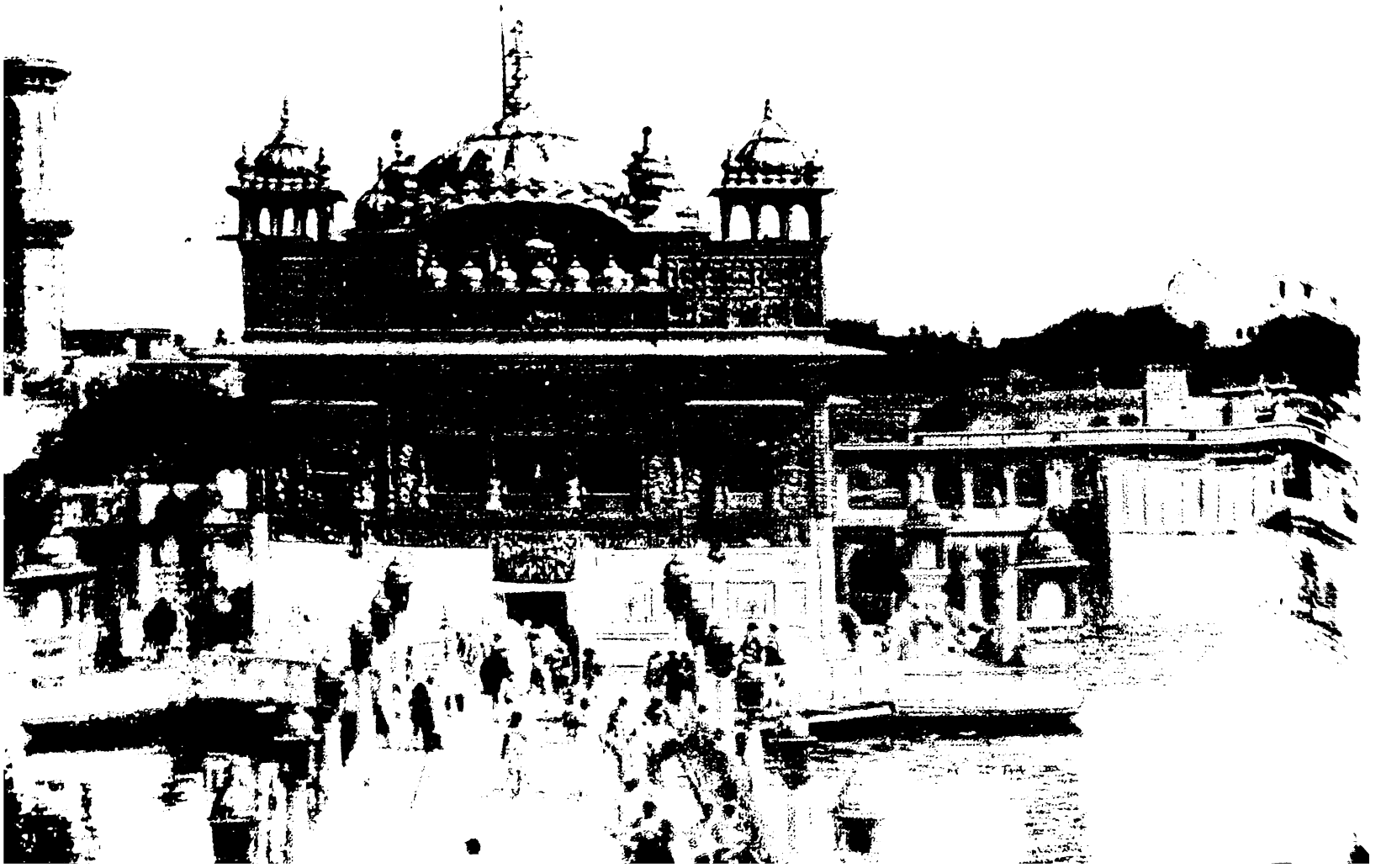
THE FORT, VIEW FROM THE RIVER : The celebrated red citadal of Akbar which he built over an older Hindu structure stretches along the bank in massive magnificence.



4 AMRITSAR

GOLDEN TEMPLE

Known also as Hari Mandir and Darbar Sahib, this most sacred shrine of the Sikhs stands in golden glory, in the midst of *amrit-sar*, the Pool of Nectar, around which has grown the celebrated city of the same name.



4 AMRITSAR

Amritsar, the city of the celebrated Golden Temple, is, indisputably, the religious capital of the Sikhs. As naturally and simply as the Hindu's mind turns to Benares, or the Muslim's to Mecca, do the thoughts of every Sikh turn to Amritsar where, in his holiest shrine, the *Adi Granth*, the Original Book, is kept and incessantly read. The city is the focal point of his faith and the centre of his culture. From here do all decrees of the *Panth* on religious matters emanate, and here are all decisions about political issues taken. From wherever he may be, he comes to this city to pay homage and to receive inspiration. It embodies, as it were, his ideals and his aspirations, because, the initial phases excepted, the history of the community is almost co-extensive with that of the city. Founded by one of their *Gurus*—Ram Das, 4th in succession—and bearing still the name another *Guru* gave to it, the place has been associated with the Sikhs from its very inception, and the subsequent story of both has but accentuated and strengthened the bond. Together the two have passed through centuries of trial and triumph, so that, to the popular mind, Sikh or non-Sikh, they now seem as inseparable as body and soul, as flower and fragrance, as word and meaning, as God and Truth. No wonder that the Golden Temple, located in the Pool of Nectar, and forming the nucleus of the city and its central light, should draw such an unending stream of visitors and devotees. They come all the year round, from early dawn to late dusk, from the city itself and from all corners of the country. They walk over the cool and clean pavements, traverse

metres upon metres of marble flooring; then pass over the pretty causeway to the holy shrine which stands and reflects its golden glory in the sacred waters of *amrit sar*, the pool of immortality, the holy tank from which the city derives its name and around which it has grown and flourished.

Tradition tells that on his way to Lahore, Guru Ram Das used to pass by a small and secluded but picturesque pool, where the villagers often came to relax and gossip. The Guru took a fancy to the little sheet of water, and acquired it as well as the land adjoining. It is maintained by some authorities that this latter was a gift of Akbar, but others hold that the Guru purchased those acres and even a figure—Rupees seven hundred—is mentioned. Whatever the mode of its acquisition, the property was converted into a village known as the Guru Ka Chak or Chak Ram Das; and the little pool became a popular resort. The Guru commenced the work of excavating it into a larger tank and building upon it a shrine for common worship; but his death preventing the operations, the scheme was executed by his successor, Guru Arjan Dev. Guru Arjan's is a great name in the story of Sikhism. He compiled the *Adi Granth;* he organised the community; he gave the name of Amritsar to the Pool; he built the shrine, *Har Mandir*, the Temple of the Lord, and installed the *Adi Granth* therein. Also, he appointed the first *Granthi*, to read and recite the Sikh scriptures, founding thereby a mode of devotion and a religious institution which are as lovable as they are peculiar to this faith. Finally, by asking a Muslim saint, Mian Mir of Lahore, who was his friend and admirer, to lay the foundation stone of the temple, he re-emphasised the beliefs and ideals of Nanak, and set up a great tradition of tolerance which is kept alive to date, so that into the holiest of holy, all may enter, whatever their caste or creed, whatever their rank or station.

The little village, founded by Guru Ram Das, had by then grown into a town. This was natural since it lay on the direct route between the two famous cities of the Moghuls, Lahore and Delhi; and since the number of the followers of Sikhism was increasing rapidly. It was therefore no longer called Chak Ram Das, but Ramdaspur. However, with the re-christening of the enlarged tank, the city, growing still and daily in size and importance, came to be known by the same name, Amritsar, and so styled it has stayed all these centuries. For this city, as for most of North India, these have been centuries of war and upheaval, of strife and ceaseless turmoil. Consequently, of those times, nothing remains in

the Amritsar of to day, literally nothing, except the immortal pool and the name : immortal, indeed !

The shrine that was built by Guru Arjan in the beginning of the seventeenth century became very soon the chief house of worship for the Sikhs. The sixth Guru, Har Gobind, greatly added to its importance by constructing the Akal Takht, the Throne of the Timeless, which became the Court of the Gurus, and after them, the Headquarters of the Panth. The city and these premises, in particular, became the symbol of the faith, and whoever amongst their foes would injure and insult them, tried to occupy and defile the temple or to pollute the tank. Such bigotry was, of course, to appear a little later, but, already, the oppression of this new and rising community was in evidence. Under the broad-minded religious policy of Akbar, and with the able and wise care and guidance of the Gurus whose goodness, combined with simplicity and sincerity of the new gospel, had attracted many people to the fold, the faith had flourished. But as soon as Akbar's eyes had closed, things took a turn for the worse. Though, essentially, neither unjust nor bigoted, Jehangir, weak and whimsical as he was, made many a grievious error of judgment. The Sikhs were badly treated and seeds of bitterness between Islam and Sikhism were sown—seeds which were to sprout and grow, in course of time, into nettles and poisonous plants hard to uproot. If anything, the lesson of history is that it is easy to start a fire : a tiny speck of a spark may suffice. But not so easy is the task of controlling the conflagration which may follow, and which, in this case, followed in such wise that untold misery was the result, and for generations thereafter people were to know the taste of hell and fury. In fact, a great deal of the enmity between the Muslim and the non-Muslim which found such disgraceful and horrible expression at the time of the Partition, might be traced to the smouldering ashes and ambers of earlier hostility which must have persisted in the blood and consciousness of the communities.

Anyway, from that time onwards, for more than a century and a half, the Sikhs had a hard time of it. The oppression which began in the reign of Jehangir with the martyrdom of Guru Arjan at Lahore, continued unabated, nay, was augmented, in the time of Shahjahan and reached the peak of relentless persecution and utter intolerance when Aurangzeb came along. For the Sikhs, the hundred years since the passing away of Akbar were so full of suffering and

misfortune, that they had to learn to resist and fight, or else be extirpated. In such a predicament, Gobind Singh, the tenth and the last of the Gurus, decided to convert the mild disciples of the gentle Nanak into a fierce band of fearless lions. He created the Khalsa and gave them their distinctive symbols as well as the gift of soldiery. Every Sikh became a fighter, vowed, till death, to the defence of the faith. Many were the years of trouble which were still to follow, but one thing had been ensured by this great leader : never would the Khalsa perish nor cry halt in any battle for the ashes of his fathers and the temples of his Lord. Long and bitter was the struggle, for, after the Moghuls, came Nadir Shah, and that personification of terror and massacre was followed by yet another deadly foe, namely, Ahmed Shah Abdali. But the Sikhs never lost heart; and, however dense the surrounding darkness, however impenetrable the gloom to them, the light of their faith was always visible.

In the context of the shrine at Amritsar, the first attempts at bigoted oppression were made by the Moghul Governor of Lahore. Soldiers were posted to keep the Sikhs away from the precincts of their holy of holies, from bathing in the life-giving waters of the sacred pool. And inside the shrine, the Muslim made merry with song and dance, and indulged in obscene and immoral practices. One Officer, Massa Ranghar, in particular, made himself so offensive and detestable that it was decided to murder him. The task fell to the lot of a team of two, Mehtab Singh and Sukha Singh. They proceeded to Amritsar and gained admittance into the presence of the commandant, on the pretext of paying their respects and revenue. Then, while Sukha Singh stood guard, Mehtab Singh's sword severed the hated head from the body of Massa. The persecution of the Sikhs was, thereafter, intensified but the brave deed of these two put a stop to the pursuit of unholy pleasure in the holy premises.

Then came Nadir Shah and along with him such confusion and lawlessness that it gave the Sikhs an opportunity to come, for a while, out of their hiding. But hardly had they declared themselves as the ruling power in the Panjab when Abdali descended with his horde. The invasions of this last of the invaders of India from the North-West, began in 1747 and continued till his 9th attack in 1767. During these two decades, several times was Amritsar occupied and looted, the Har Mandir taken possession of and desecrated, and the holy pool defiled and polluted. In 1757, especially, did the soldiers of Abdali so provoke

the Sikhs that an expedition of revenge was organised. Once again, the Muslim had taken possession of the temple and abused it foully. A band of brave Sikhs was selected and led towards the city by Baba Dip Singh, of holy memory, who had vowed that, dead or alive, he would take the shrine. The Mohammedan soldiers opposed the march, and a most bloody battle took place, a few kilometres outside the city. Yet metre by metre, the martyrs cut their way through the enemy's force, until at one point the great-hearted Baba was mortally wounded. The shrine was still far off, and as the wounded warrior reeled and fell, it appeared that it had not pleased the Lord to let his vow be honoured. Then someone reminded Dip Singh of the pledge, and nothing short of a miracle came to pass. Holding in one hand the almost-severed head, the indomitable spirit recommenced the fight with the sword in the other. Like an automaton, the weapon hacked its way until the body of the brave Baba arrived at the holy spot where it fell down as an offering, the most noble and acceptable to the Lord. Not until man sinks to a level where faith is regarded as folly and holy war as unholy, will this shining example of martyrdom lose its glory ! It was but meet that the memory of such a man should be kept alive and honoured, and a goodly Gurudwara, named after him, stands as a memorial to the hero, Shaheed Baba Dip Singh.

The Sikhs re-took the cities of Lahore and Amritsar in 1758, but lost them again to the Abdali when he came on his next expedition. Once more he made every effort to exterminate the Sikhs; but, through their tactful guerilla tactics and their invincible courage, they, yet once again, survived the ordeal. In fact, they emerged stronger than ever. They captured the city of Amritsar and rebuilt the temple which the Abdali had blown out with gun-powder. Another *Har Mandir* rose afresh amidst the Pool of Nectar, and it was more splendid than the earlier structure which the Mohammedans had destroyed. Then, when the great Ranjit Singh became the master of the Panjab, and when the Sikh power was at its most dazzling, royalty was pleased to gild this lily of the sacred pond. The Maharaja gave the shrine its marble face and its golden look from which last it received the popular name of Golden Temple. Its exterior resplendence has continued undiminished since then and its sanctity has always been respected. Only once was this latter set at naught, rather seriously. That was when, at the time of the annexation of the Panjab, in 1849, Lord Dalhousie, elated and insolent, possibly, from conquest and might, had walked into it with his shoes on,

while thousands of Sikhs unable to prevent the sacrilege, stood helplessly by. Time, however, passes, passes so swiftly. The empire of the British has gone the way of the earlier empires in India. Dalhousie and that other tyrant of Amritsar, Dyer, bubbles both on the stream of time, are no more. The *amrit sar* stays ; and the *Akal Takht*. Once again, the immortal, the timeless, has survived and vanquished the perishable and the transient. And it always will, for conquest is ever with the Lord : *Wahguru Ki Fateh.*

The sacred enclosure where the Pool and the Temple, the Akal Takht and the many other buildings, both lay and religious, stand, is a vast area. The main entrance is the Darshani Darwaza where the Clock Tower rises. The rules of decorum publicised outside require that shoes be discarded before entering the precincts, and the visitor may then proceed within. Moving along broad and spotlessly bright, marble pavements which border the sacred pool on all sides, one will notice several devotees handling the broom. That is what keeps the entire space so clean and shining. Here truly is the difference between high and humble, between rich and poor, swept off; and the dainty and the elegant deem it an honour to perform tasks and chores which are usually reserved for servants and menials. In the *Langar*, the free Community kitchen, women of wealth and men of rank will gladly knead the flour and chop the wood. To sweep the pavements, to keep the shoes, to wield the *chauri* over the Granth Sahib or to carry, like day-labourers, baskets full of earth and trays full of cement, during the *Kar-Sewa* ceremonies—all this is service of the Lord in whose eye none is great, and none lowly. Indeed, nowhere else is the business of God undertaken with greater joy and eagerness than among the Sikhs, especially in respect of such seemingly unwelcome and irksome jobs and duties.

But to revert to the pilgrimage up to the sacred Temple which has been glittering and glowing all the while in such radiant splendour ! It stands to one side of a fair-sized pool, and is gained through a marble causeway. The causeway itself is reached through a gate over which is built the Treasury. On either side of the causeway, is a row of gilded lamps which light the pilgrim's way by night. The temple itself is not a very large structure, nor, with its two storeys and a half, very high. But it is all marble and gilded copper-plate, and the sight produces a rich and brilliant impression. The four doors of the shrine indicate the complete catholicity of outlook which is such a signal feature of the religion

of Nanak. Not through one entrance as in a Hindu fane, nor towards one direction as in a Muslim mosque, but from all sides, and, essentially, on all sides, may the devotee commune with the Lord, for He is everywhere and in all directions. True, the Granthi sits on one side and instinctively the reverent eye looks up in the direction of the Granth Sahib, the Book. But the Book is the Lord and the voice carries it, spreads the Truth, all over. As has been remarked, earlier, the Adi Granth is Guru Arjan's work and constitutes a unique collection of devotional hymns, reflecting the highest wisdom of man and a most astonishing spirit of tolerance. The Granth Sahib is held in great reverence by the Sikhs with whom it takes the place of both the Book and the Apostle put together. In fact, obeisance may be made to the Book alone, since the word is Truth, and, in the Sikh faith, Truth and God are interchangeable terms. That is why when the great religious processions of the Sikhs are taken out, it is no fat and fattened *mahant* who sits in the place of honour upon a caparisoned elephant or a bedecked horse. It is the Granth Sahib which is carried aloft, in humble reverence. As Word, it symbolises all that is sacred, and makes the rest of them all—human beings with little, limited minds—level and alike.

To this Book, then, all veneration is due, and recitations from it continue throughout the eighteen hours for which the temple keeps open. Towards and in front of this, one must bow, with folded hands, and entering, may sit and listen to the sweet and sacred *bani*—speech of the Gurus—to the lofty and uplifting *shabd*—the word. In the Indian religious tradition, reverence and worship go with bare feet and covered heads, and therefore, it is incumbent upon all who visit the shrine that they should follow these conventions, and, barefoot already, keep their heads covered when in the Darbar Sahib. Also, one makes gifts and offerings, according to one's capacity and faith, and receives the *prasad*; the ritual gift of food, symbolic of the favour and blessing of the Gurus, as also part of whatever victuals one offers at the shrine.

As mentioned above, in itself this building of marble and gold which is known as the Har Mandir, the Darbar Sahib—the Lordly Court—or the Golden Temple is a structure of small proportions. The marble is richly carved, and is reminiscent of the work at the Taj. Some of the vine and flower designs are exceptionally fine. Also worthy of inspection and attention is the ornamental

chiselling of texts from the Granth Sahib. The silk and satin decoration within, and the gold-sheet covering without, help to create an effect of dazzling richness, not easily rivalled by any other shrine in the country. In addition, the surrounding tank gives the shrine an island-like appearance and makes for an over-all picturesqueness which is impressive and most attractive. All the same, for those who do not take with them the feeling of true reverence and deep religiousness, who enter the holy precincts as mere visitors, whose mind is curious and eye critical, the building, as building, lacks architectural merit. Thus Aldous Huxley remarks rather caustically: "The Golden Temple of the Sikhs is genuinely eighteen carat. It is also exceedingly sacred. Holiness and costliness make up for any lack of architectural merit. For architecturally the temple is less than nothing." This, however, is rather unjust, and not all foreigners speak in that cynical vein. All the same, from the architectural point of view, little defence is possible, and as Ferguson says, neither the Shrine's outline nor its detail can be commended.

And yet, so long as the guardians and stewards of the faith and the shrine flaunt, and feel proud of, gold or wealth, by the standards of gold or wealth shall they be judged. Consequently, as one retraces one's steps from the court of the Lord, the thought of the 'treasury' and its treasures recreates the wholly unnecessary wrangle of wrong values in the right places. Once again, one is required to admire, and, therefore, to evaluate critically, that which has no real meaning in the context of any religion, certainly not in that of Nanak. But even as the marbling and gilding of the shrine are Ranjit Singh's, a Raja's, so is the treasury symbolic of the prosperity of Sikhism, not necessarily of its piety. For those who are impressed by this kind of thing, there are rich and unique pieces of jewellery, donated by the bountiful devotee. Of particular interest is a "naulakha sehra" —a bridegroom's veil, which had been got ready for the wedding of a prince— Kanwar Naunihal Singh, grandson of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. But perhaps the most valuable of the treasures is the ornamental fan which a Muslim made from exceptionally fine threads of sandalwood, and cost years of devoted labour. Oher richish items include four pairs of gold-plated door panels, bejewelled swords and bedecked umbrellas, silver candle-sticks and strings of pearls, spades of gold and precious gems. The Treasury is opened to the public only on special occasions.

But a building of far greater importance than the Treasury is the Akal

Takht—the Throne Eternal—which stands hardly fifty yards away to the north of the tank and the temple. This institution dates from the time of the 6th Guru, Har Gobind, and is symbolic of the changed complexion of the faith. The Muslim was out to put down Sikhism and, if it was to survive, mere worship had to be combined with much secular action. Here then did the Guru sit as the temporal as well as the spiritual head. Here he presided over the deliberations of his advisers and took decisions vital to the life of the community. The 'Akal Takht' continues to be the nerve centre of Sikhism, and like the *Gurumatas* of old, all orders affecting the community as a whole are issued from here.

As with the main shrine, the Akal Takht, too, has seen a bit of history. The Muslims demolished it several times. The present structure dates from 1774 when the ground floor was built. Maharaja Ranjit Singh added the three storeys and the gilded dome which give it its present look of grandeur. Some more treasures of Sikhism may be viewed here ; but this time they are superior things like the weapons of Guru Har Gobind and Guru Gobind Singh. The gold-tipped arrows of the latter, brought from the larger 'treasure' at Nanded in the South, are of exceptional interest. Obliged by circumstances to take to the way of violence, the gentle-souled Guru, essentially a true follower of Nanak, would be kind even while killing ; and each arrow of his, sure and fatal as it was, carried with it a *tola* or so of gold to compensate, at least partly, for the affliction it caused.

The many buildings to the east are the various '*Bangas*', houses and hostels, of the Rajas and Maharajas of the pre-Independence, or rather the pre-Integration, Sikh states and of the earlier '*Misls*' of Sikh history. The Community kitchen—*Langar*, the Garden of the Guru—the *Guru-Ka-Bagh*, the Hostel—*Ram Das Serai* and the Offices etc.of the Shiromani Akali Dal and the Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee—all these lie to the west of the temple, while the Museum and the Ramgarhia Minars stand to the south and the south-west. The Museum contains some old historical exhibits, and a few rather gruesome paintings of the battles the Sikhs had to fight their way through. The Minars are more noteworthy than visit-worthy. In any case the wonderful view of the city which climbing on their tops would afford might as well, and more easily, be got from the roof of 'The Baba Atal'.

This Gurudwara, of Baba Atal, the little 9-year old son of Guru Har

Gobind, stands by another tank called the *Kaulsar*. It is located in the north-west corner of the sacred thirty-acre enclosure of the Golden Temple from which it is separated by nearly a furlong, and is remarkable both for its history and its construction. The tank, *Kaulsar*, is itself of holy association, and commemorates the devotion of a young Muslim girl, Kaulan, who renounced her worldly life to become the disciple of the Sikh Guru, Har Gobind. The temple and tower built nearby are dedicated to the memory of the young lad, Atal Rai, who, it is said, carried such a wise old head over his tender shoulders that he had earned the name of 'Baba'—old man ! This little old man is reported to have possessed much spiritual power, so much so that he was able to perform miracles. Once when he brought back to life the snake-bitten son of a woe-stricken widow, he was severely chided by his father, for the Guru distrusted miracles and regarded their performance as sinful. In atonement for his lapse, the boy took his own life, restoring thus the balance of Yamaraja's figures. This magnificent many-storeyed structure stands as a memorial to that brave spirit and over the exact spot where it departed this life. Within the walls one sees several beautiful frescos relating to the life of Nanak, and from the roof a most rewarding view of the city of Amritsar may be obtained.

But the city deserves more than a view from the roof of Baba Atal or the top of the Ramgarhia Minar. Before the partition, it used to be a most flourishing commercial centre, and a very important town, coming next, if at all, only to the Capital, Lahore. The fact that it now lies in such proximity to the border has made it strategically important, but has, otherwise, tended to reduce its population and its prosperity. Even so, it continues to enjoy not only the religious sanctity which has given it its celebrity, but also a fair amount of importance on account of its trade and commerce, and art and industry. In the age of air-transport, it has once again assumed its vital role as a central point on important routes linking India not only with Pakistan, but also with countries like Afghanistan and U.S.S.R.

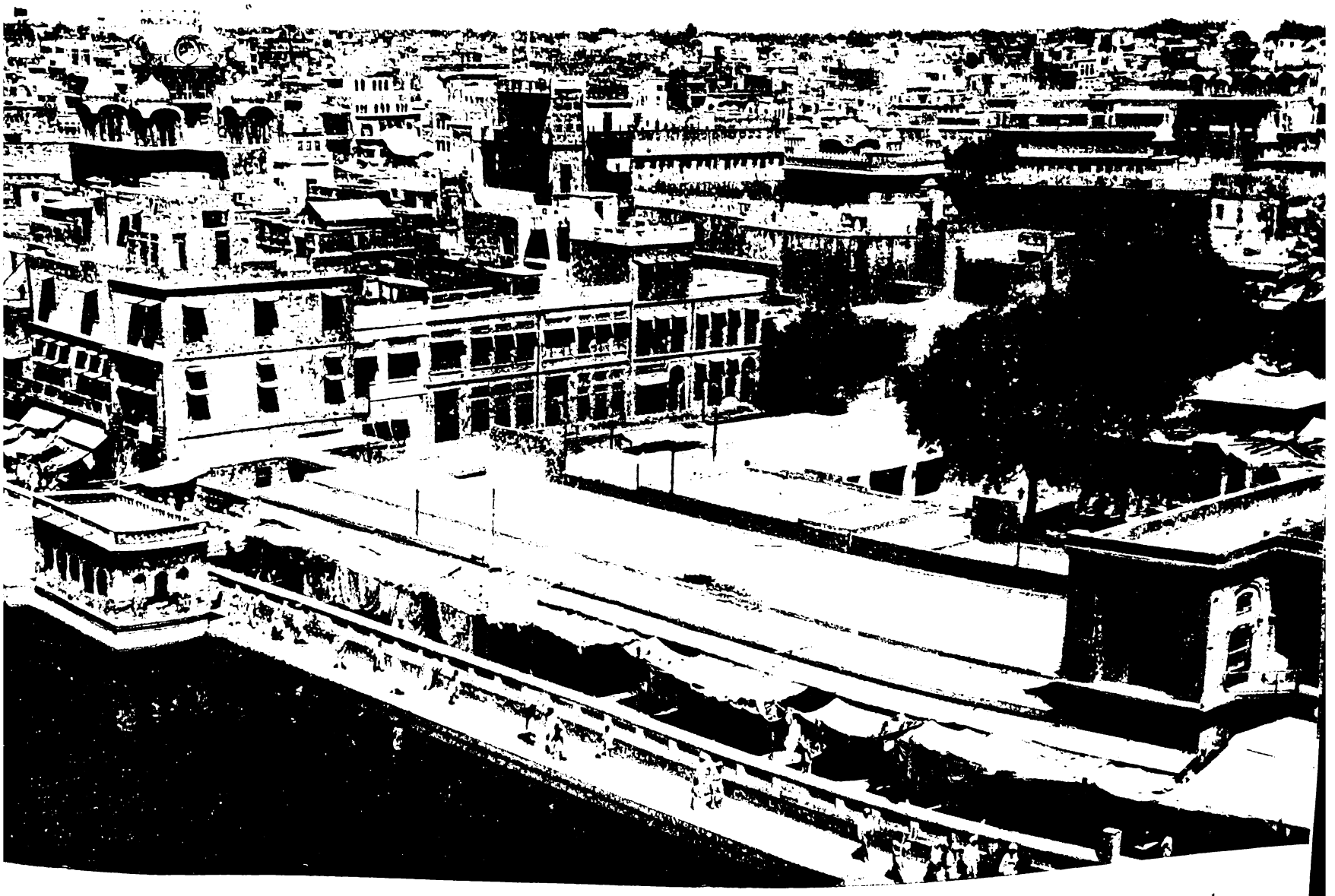
Of the other places of interest, the religious sphere claims the Durgiana temple as the foremost, though politically and historically, the Jallianwala Bagh is the most prominent. This last lies close to the Golden Temple. A road to the east from there connects with this world-famous scene of political carnage. Universally condemned at the time it happened, this will stay for ever as one of the

blackest marks on the record of British Rule in India. The bare facts of the tragedy are that after the First World War there was agitation in India against the British. Smug, once more, after her victory over the Germans, England was in no mood to consider proposals for 'Home Rule' etc., for the Indians. The Indians, who had loyally fought during the war, felt betrayed and resented what they felt was a breach of promise. There were other factors, local and larger, and the British Government had banned all gatherings of the people. A public protest-meeting was, however, held in the walled enclosure known as Jallianwala Bagh. And then happened one of those awful events which help shake the foundations of empires, and one lunatic act undoes what many wise and brave souls take decades to build up. General Dyer, a name most odious and dire to Indian ears, gave the order to fire upon the crowd which was both defenceless and completely at bay, since the only exit was covered by the soldiers and their guns. It was literally a matter of moving back to the wall, and into a well which still stands as a mournful reminder of those moments of madness. Such was the horror which this act of repression engendered that even Churchill, who would not "preside over the liquidation of the Empire", was aghast and declared that it was "an episode which appeared to be without parallel in the modern history of the British Empire". He called it an "extraordinary event, a monstrous event, and an event which stood in singular and sinister isolation". Over fifteen hundred people were killed or left dying and their martyrdom deserved, and has received, a fitting memorial in the shape of a beautiful monolith put up recently.

The Durgiana Temple, a Hindu place of worship, of Durga, is situated in a different sector of the city, outside the Lohgarh Gate on the Govind Garh side. Like the Golden Temple, it is located in the middle of a large pool but no Ranjit Singh has offered to gild it. The causeway is wider and altogether more impressive. The over-all style is a copy of the greater, the Golden, shrine. The Ram Bagh, the Public Gardens of Amritsar, are again a gift of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The central pavilion, rather small for the spacious gardens, was used, during the reign of this Lion of the Panjab, as his summer residence. Around these pretty and popular gardens, the city is clean and open and modern. Consequently, several new restaurants and centres of art and culture and recreation have sprung up in this area.

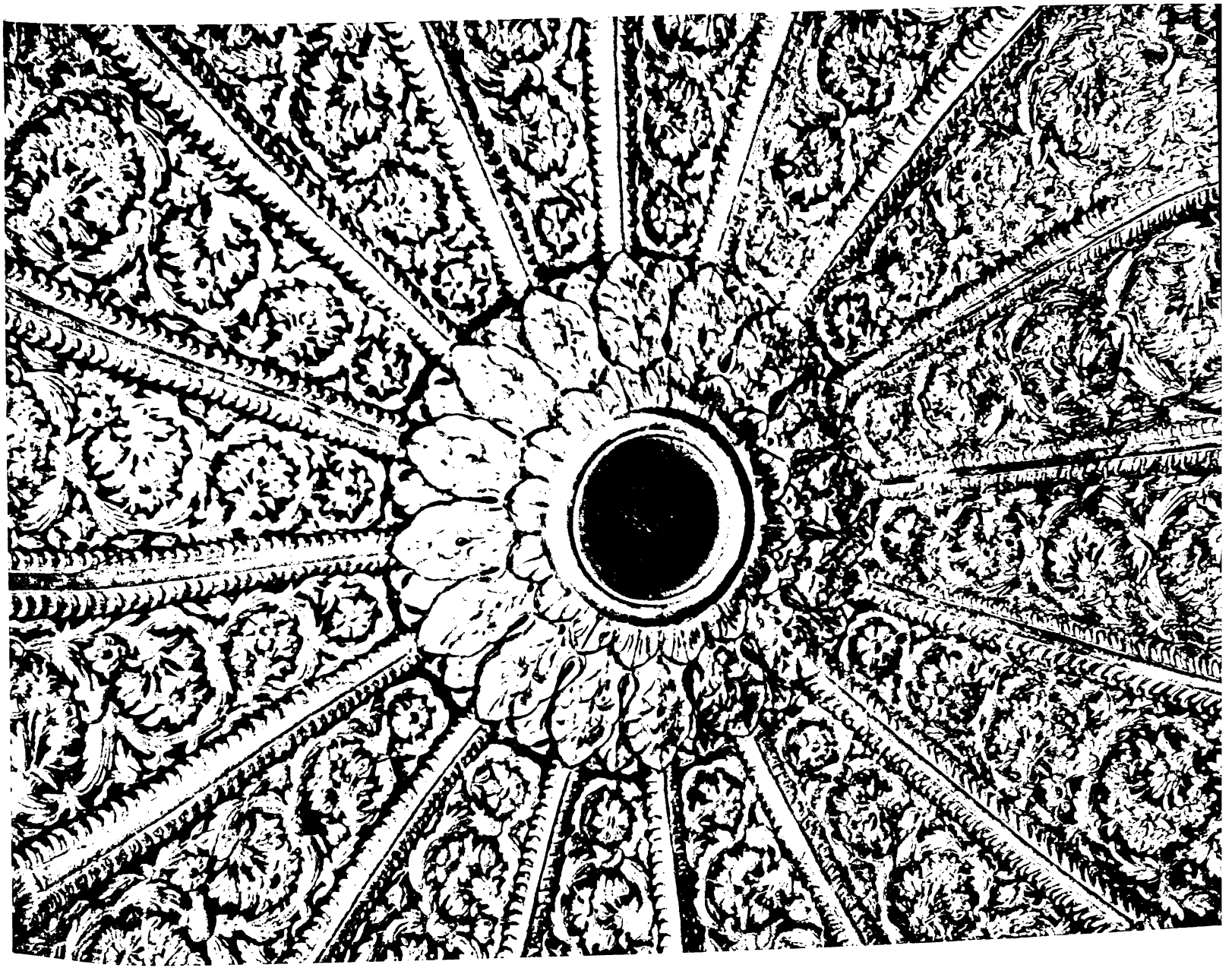
It would have been a thing most amiss if in their city of cities, the Sikhs,

who constitute a most literate community of India, did not have their own institutions of learning. The Khalsa College is not just such a one, but very much more. It is one of the oldest colleges in the country and one of the finest. Grandly housed, it lies a few kilometres off the city on the Grand Trunk Road towards Lahore, and continues to add to its great record of achievements in the educational field. Since religion, anywhere, has a tendency to be orthodox and superstitious, since truth itself needs constant and careful checking and re-checking, it is meet that the light of education and the scrutiny of research should, and should be allowed to, play freely upon the tenets of faith and traditions of the community. Of course, it is but a coincidence that the College should lie to the West of the city, and the Temple to the East, but may not these represent the two lines of thought and culture which the modern mind associates with these terms. Again, there is no denying that in a wise synthesis of these, of the East and the West, lies the progress and prosperity of the Sikhs, as also of India, as a whole. Along that line, of acceptance of the best of both, runs the path, in that direction is the goal. And on that road, towards that destination of peace and wisdom, may the Gurus lead us all !



THE JEWEL AND THE CASKET : A general view of *amrit-sar*, the pool of nectar, the Darbar Sahib known popularly as the Golden Temple, and the city of Amritsar which has grown around the sacred spot.



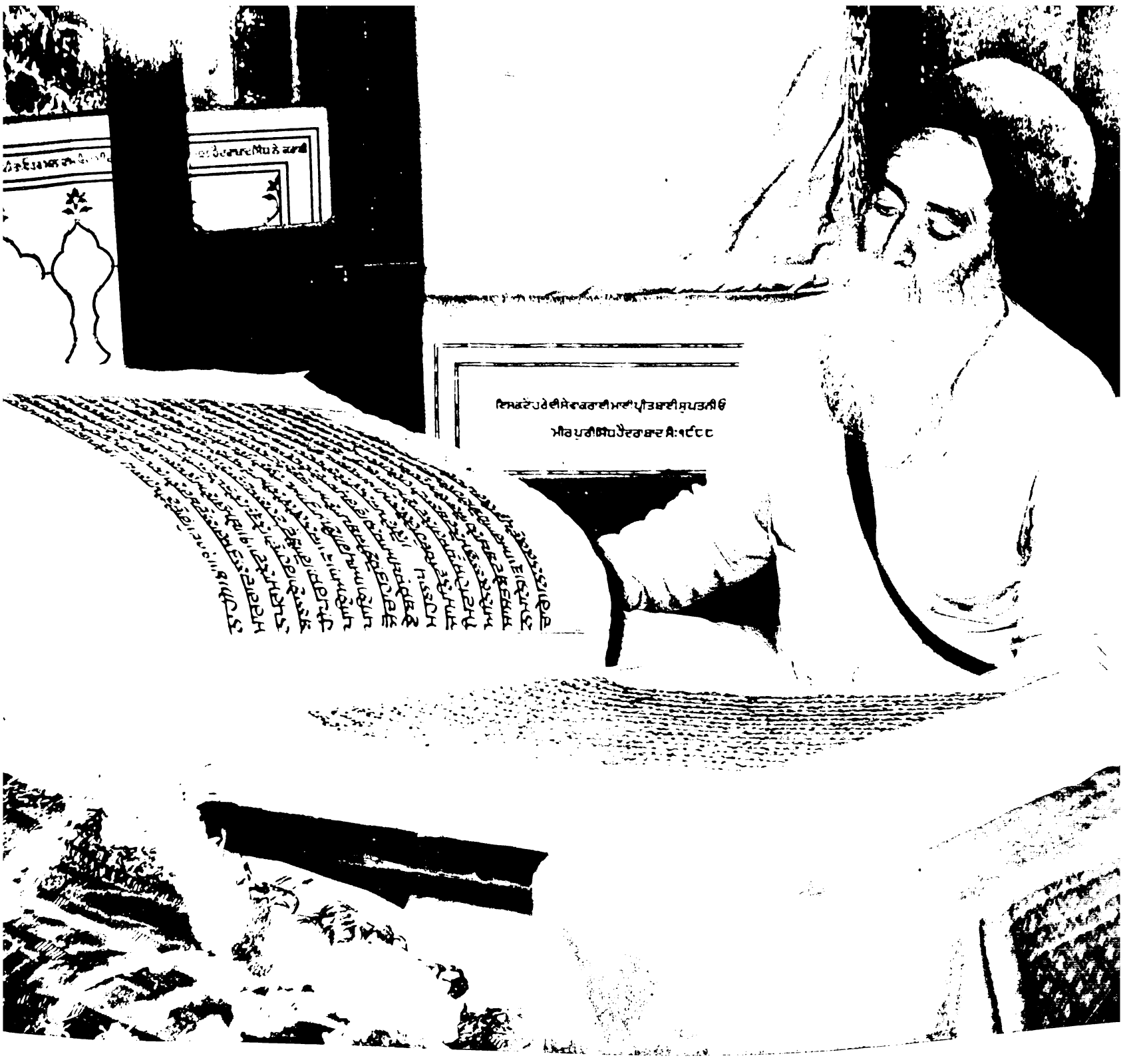


GOLDEN TEMPLE : Detail of ceiling of the central dome. The Darbar Sahib is lavishly decorated within and without in a variety of skilfully-wrought floral designs.

◀ GOLDEN TEMPLE, GENERAL VIEW : Bright and beautiful pavements of black and white marble go all round the holy tank. Their surface is kept spotlessly clean by voluntary service of the devotees.



GOLDEN TEMPLE : THE MARBLE CAUSEWAY almost always crowded with visitors walking to and from the holy shrine. The Ramgariha minar in the distance is one of the several subsidiary structures in the complex of buildings which surround the sacred tank.

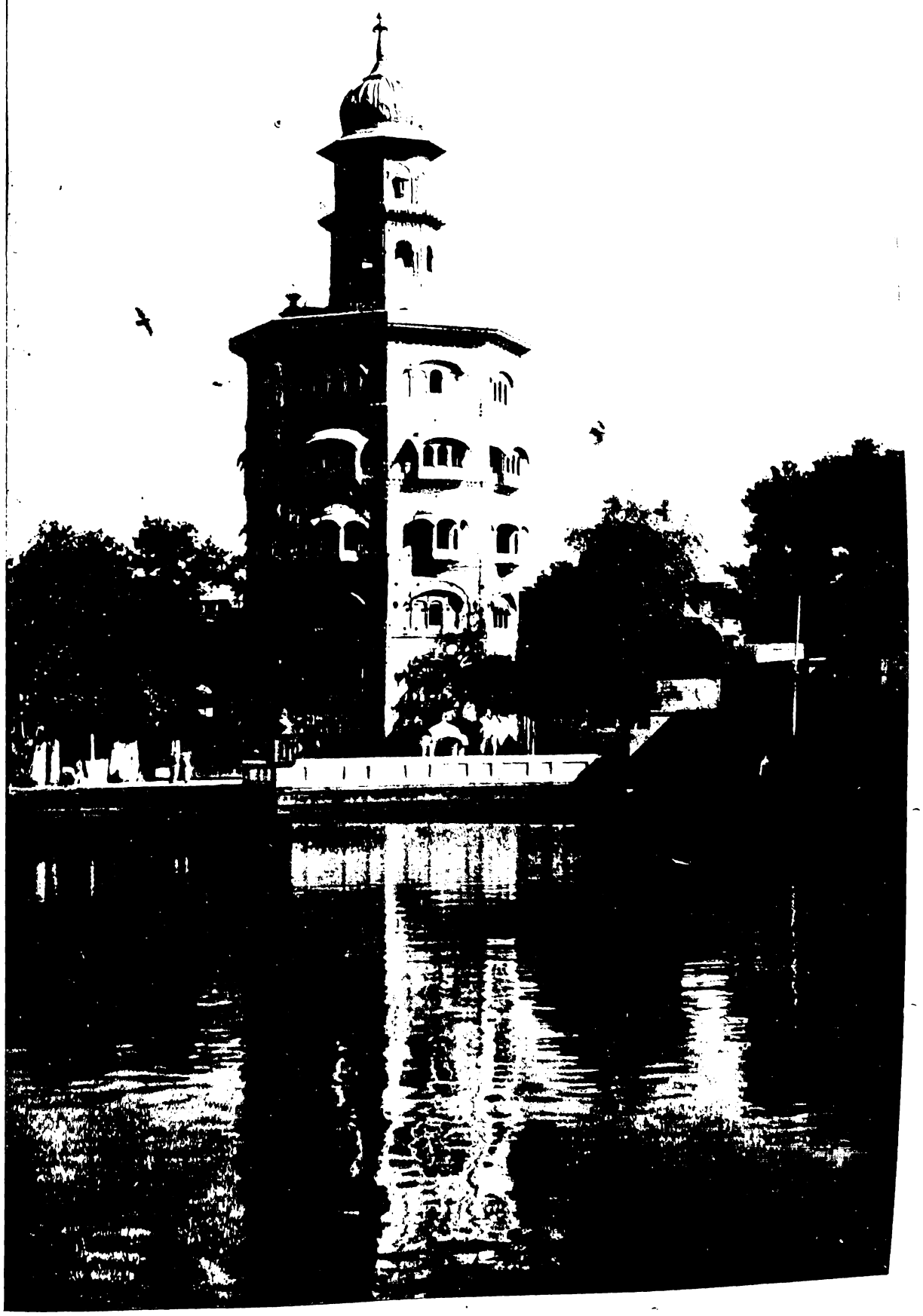


GOLDEN TEMPLE, THE ADI GRANTHA AND THE GRANTHI : The sacred scriptures were compiled by Guru Arjan Deva, and are recited throughout the time the temple keeps open.

GURUDWARA BABA ATAL : This lofty and impressive building stands a little away from the Darbar Sahib. It was built in the memory of the 9-year old son of Guru Har Gobind and commands from its top a most magnificent view of the city.

GOLDEN TEMPLE GLEAMING IN THE POOL OF NECTAR : Above the entrance, where the causeway begins, is the Treasury, and beyond that rises the Akal Takht the Throne of the Timeless.







GOLDEN TEMPLE : Shimmering beautifully in the light of the sun, reflected reverently in the waters of the pool, the Darbar Sahib is the holiest shrine of the Sikhs. The buildings in the background are Bangas of the old Misls and Maharajas.

5 BENARES

THE GHATS

Proverbial for their picturesqueness and a by-word for beauty, the Ghats which stretch along the Holy Ganges form about the most frequented area in all Benares—the holiest city of the *Hindus.*



5 BENARES

Benares, Varanasi of the purists, Kashi of the orthodox, is the first city of all Hindudom. It is India's eternal city, and her foremost centre of pilgrimage and worship. Other cities have risen and vanished, have glowed in glory for a brief while, and then faded, at times, out of all memory; but Benares has remained unchanged and, for its place and position in the world of spirit, unchallenged. It is the Mecca and Jerusalem of India, and her Rome and Athens, all rolled into one. In fact, one should talk of Mecca and Jerusalem, and of Rome and Athens, in terms of Benares, because, this city *was* when these other places were, as yet, *not*. Over this city, 'four thousand years expand their wings', so the historians tell us. *At least* four thousand, the Hindus would amend. For these latter, for the Hindus, the city, is, virtually, a by-word for sanctity, and Holy Kashi is rivalled, in this respect, only by the Holy Ganges. Both are associated with the great god, Shiva Mahadeva. One, the city, rests on the top of his *trishul*, the trident; the other, the stream, floweth from his locks; and the two together combine to make the place, for the Hindu, generally, and for the Shaiva, especially, the most sacred to Shiva who abides here eternally. Whereas Kailash is the heaven of the god, Benares constitutes his kingly residence. As the *Kashi-Khanda* puts it, "*Treyalokanagare vatr Kashi rajgaham mam*—the three worlds form one city of mine and Kashi is my royal palace therein."

The legend of how Mahadeva came to choose this place for his stay forms a part of an over-all contest of Shiva with Brahma. In the words of Heinrich

Zimmer, "Brahma to prove his superiority grew a fifth head, whereupon Siva cut it off in an access of wrath. Through this act of violence, however, Siva incurred the sin of Brahman slaughter (*Brahm-hatya*) which is one of the most deadly in the Brahman moral code. And the sin clung to his body in the form of the head that he had cut off : he was unable to get rid of it, and had to bear it with him on a long pilgrimage in search of atonement. Eventually, he was purified by the holy waters of Ganges, which wash away all sin. The release took place where Benares now stands, and for this reason Benares is Siva's favourite dwelling place on earth. He is there permanently, in the fulness of his benevolence, and this attests to the power of the waters of the Ganges (particularly at Benares) to wash away sin." Naturally the place to which even Shiva repairs for expiation of his sin cannot but be holy. That is why Benares is regarded as *Avimuktaka*, bereft of sin, and *Varanasi*, the remover of sin; and whereas other six of the seven holy cities of the Hindus give only *mukti* Benares gives *nirvana mukti*, release absolute. The city is the Mahadeva's *Anandakanana*—the forest of bliss. Therefore the devotees who come here not merely for the negative virtue of atonement, but for the positive profit of sharing the Lord's delight. Again, he "the supreme god, the indescribable light, shines (Kash=to shine) here", so that as *Kashi* the city lights the way of the believers to *nirvana*. Finally, Benares is the *Maha-shmashana*—the Great Cremation Ground, where the pleasant which is life terminates in the good which is death. The word *Maha-shmashana* should give rise to no morbid or horrid associations. To the Hindu, the fire of the daily death, or the finality of total extinction, means differently from what they would to the non-Hindu. According to his philosophy, the soul is contaminated by its association with the body, life with living, and true liberation can come only through ceasing to be. The radiance of eternity, tarnished sadly by the limitations of space and time which life imposes on the being, could be restored by the light that shines at Kashi, by the fires of *Maha-shmashana* where the five elements, released from their conjunctions and combinations in forms innumerable of the universe, will lie at rest at the time of *Pralaya*, the ultimate destruction ! In short, the several names of this great holy city of India refer at once to the attributes of one of her greatest gods as also to important aspects of her highest philosophy.

It is customary to speak of Benares as a most ancient city. Possibly, it is *the* oldest city of the world, for they say that it stands upon the first land that ever emerged from the primeval waters. In any case, the Poet's 4000 years

expanding their wings over it is not mere fancy, because even conservative estimates place the founding of the city at a fairly remote stage of Indian history. In the opinion of one scholar, Benares is "the oldest *post-diluvian* city on the globe. Nineveh, Babylon, and others had been its contemporaries. But they are all in desolation, while Benares is still in its glory. The cities of the *Allophylians* are now without even a name—much less without a trace. The cities of the Aryans have shared nearly the same fate. Benares is the only town of prehistoric antiquity that yet survives to link the ancient world with the modern, and present a retrospect through a vista of several hundred years". Likewise, Havell not only accepts the definite and historically true connection of the city with the Aryan tribe of the Kasis who established themselves in the Ganges Valley, near Benares, at a date supposed to be between 1400 and 1000 B.C., but suggests that the place might have been founded earlier. His view is that, "from its peculiar situation on the banks of a splendid river, with its eastern boundary converted by the current into a magnificent natural amphitheatre, facing the rising sun, it is not unreasonable to conjecture that even before the Aryan tribes established themselves in the Ganges Valley, Benares may have been a great centre of primitive sun-worship, and that the special sanctity with which the Brahmins have invested the city is only a tradition of those primeval days, borrowed, with so many of their rites and symbols, from their Turanian predecessors." Nevertheless, the ruins of Sarnath excepted and, of course, the Ganges, there is nothing in the present city of Varanasi, located between the streamlets *Varuna* and *Asi*, which has the hoary look of age. This is so because in this centre of religion after succeeding religion, the victors demolished and desecrated the fanes and follies of the vanquished. What the Buddhists did to the city of the era of the Epics, was done to their own Benares by the resurgent Hinduism of the Puranic age. Then the Muslim iconoclast took over; and delighting as he did in the extinction of idolatry he could hardly be expected to spare Benares which constituted the heart of Hinduism, of its culture and faith, and was, withal, such a prosperous and flourishing city. Consequently, the city of Benares as the visitor finds it today is hardly a few hundred years old, and most of its finer ghats and river palaces date from the period of Maratha supremacy. Possibly the oldest building is the Man Mandir where the 'observatory' was later housed by Maharaja Jai Singh of Jaipur. This structure is attributed to Raja Man Singh of Akbar's court, which would mean that not counting the constructions carried out with marteials which Jagat Singh pillaged from Buddhist stupas, the city's most ancient bricks were

baked but four hundred years ago ; in fact, hardly even that !

But the older Benares lives in less perishable material, in song and story, in lore and legend, in travel accounts and in the records of history. It is not possible to give here even a fraction of all the glittering and glowing descriptions of this celebrated city which traveller after traveller and visitor after visitor has left. Yet in the context of its associations with Hinduism, it should be interesting to examine a reaction or two, the view here and opinion there, of some non-Hindus who came to this city. Hieun Tsang, the Buddhist, in whose times, too, the city bordered the Ganges river and was densely populated, was favourably impressed : "The families are very rich and in the dwellings are objects of rare value. The disposition of the people is soft and humane, and they are earnestly given to study. They are mostly unbelievers, a few reverence the law of Buddha. There are a hundred or so Deva temples, with about 10,000 sectaries. They honour principally Mahesvara." Alberuni, the Muslim historian of Mahmood's times, refers to various Hindu idols of which one was "of bronze and nearly the size of a man and another of wood, covered with red leather and with two red rubies for eyes". He explains the sanctity of the Hindu *tirthas*, and notes that among the places of pilgrimage, Benares had become one of the most sacred. Among early Christian travellers Ralph Fitch, who came during the reign of Akbar, seems to have been enchanted : "Benares is a great town, and great store of cloth is made there of cotton and sashes for the moores (the trader, indeed !) In this place be all Gentiles, and be the greatest idolaters that ever I sawe. To this town come the Gentiles on pilgrimage out of farre countreys. Here alongst the waters side be very many faire houses, and in all of them or for the most part, they have their images standing, which be evill favoured, made of stone and wood, some like lions, leopard, and monkies, some like men and women, and peacocks, and some like the devil with foure armes and foure hands."

By the time, Bishop Heber came along, things had changed to the extent that Christianity was the religion of the rulers. Once Warren Hastings had ridden, through the bazars of Benares, behind the *howdah* of the Shahzada, carrying a fan of peacock's feathers in his hands. Now the Englishman was no longer Dewan for this Raja or Vazir for that Nawab, but was himself, as it were, the suzerain of India ! And those who conquer another country politically or in the

military sense are apt to rate the religion and culture of the conquered as of little account. A Bishop, more than the layman, certainly has far more reason to indulge in superciliousness and dogmatic self-righteousness. He found Benares to be a very remarkable city, more entirely and characteristically eastern than any which he had yet seen. "The number of temples", he remarked, "is very great, mostly small and struck like shrines in the angles of the streets and under the shadow of the lofty houses. Their forms, however, are not ungraceful, and they are many of them entirely covered over with beautiful and elaborate carvings of flowers, animals and palm-branches, equalling in minuteness and richness the best specimens that I have seen of Gothic or Grecian architecture". But, both as an Englishman and a Christian, he despised the people he saw. Whether engaged in their acts of piety or penance, or in begging from the "Agha Sahib" or the "Topee Sahib" a pie or two, they were rather despicable, and the great Bishop was constrained to philosophise thus: "Such are the sights and sounds which greet a stranger on entering this 'the most holy city' of Hindustan, 'the Lotus of the world, not founded on common earth, but on the point of Siva's trident', a place so blessed that whoever dies here, of whatever sect, even though he should be an eater of beef, so he will but be charitable to the poor Brahmins, is sure of salvation."

Now, notwithstanding the evident cynicism of the Bishop, this conviction that whoever dies here is sure of salvation, is gospel truth to the Hindu. For m, 'See Benares and die', is literally true, has remained so during all these centuries. And yet Benares is not a city of the dead and the dying. On the contrary, it is a most lively place and the inhabitants are known for their gaiety and for their love of the good things of life. This city which is celebrated for its fine brocade and delicious betel, for its shining brass and its contribution to classical music, this city of the crowded Chowk and the picturesque ghats, is a city of the living in the fullest sense of the word. In fact, even those who come to die here are but seeking a richer life, a salvaged life, an undying life. Rightly then, to less prejudiced eyes, Benares seems just a Hindu place of pilgrimage and that *par excellence*. To quote this time from a Christian pilgrim: "As the haven is to the wrecked mariner and home to the exile, as food is to the starving and love to the lonely, so is the holy city of Benares to the Hindus. It is here the man of business comes to end his days in peaceful calm, and hither alike the Raja and the beggar wends his steps from the uttermost parts of India to seek spiritual

blessings on the shores of the holy mother Ganges. The one stays in his river-palace ; the other establishes himself on his wooden plank under a rush umbrella; but the end and aim of both is the same."

The holy mother Ganges ! There is the clue. Here and at Hardwar and at Allahabad and at innumerable other points upon the Indian soil, it is the sacred waters of the Ganges which constitute the charm that draws the pilgrim. At Benares, especially, is the Ganges held to be more sacred, not only for it purified Shiva himself, but because taking a superb and sweeping curve it moves in a northernly direction, as if towards her fount and spring, the Kailash, so that a bath in her waters at Benares takes the devotee along that path towards Shiva's heaven. Possibly, all this is pretty poetry, sweet superstition, and merits the playful remarks of the modernised, sophisticated minds: "How fortunate" one may say, "is a Hindu sinner, to have to pass through the pleasantest of all purgatories in the form of a dip in the Ganges, and thereby secure a passport to heaven." Perhaps, again, the waters of one river are no better, nor worse, than those of another. Yet, in the realm of rivers and religion, it appears that the ruling form of government is not democracy but a strict hierarchy, so that some are queens among streams and others are humble tributaries. The Ganges is supreme, the holy Mother, the source of all redemption and the purifier of all sin. Her water is sacred and used in religious ceremonies and as medicine. To touch it, to drink it, to bathe in it when alive, to be washed in it when dead, is to be cleansed within and without, for life and beyond. And for a dip in it or to die upon her banks, men will undertake long and hard journeys. Millions of men do this year after year, as millions upon millions of them have done this during thousands of years. Surely, the phenomenon cannot be brushed aside nor has it been brushed aside by those who think and feel. "What is it, then," says one European visitor, "this magnetic spell which the Holy Mother exerts over her children—so that many spend their lives in the effort to reach her shores, and die happy if resting on her bosom ? Is it all delusion ? Does the virtue they ascribe to her waters exist only in their imagination ? I am trying to show you Benares and the Ganges as they are to the Hindu, who says that the waters have been blest by Divine Beings, and by holy men, and more I know not—except this one fact, stubborn as its kind: The Government Analyst, in his published report on

the Ganges, says that her water is the purest of the pure, and that it has a peculiar power of absorbing and destroying all kinds of impurity and contagion. And a Brahman who read this report, himself an honours man in science, said with a smile: So then we have not been so wrong all these years, after all....."

Another important point to note about Benares is that the city has been a seat of learning, about the most famous, throughout its history. With Nalanda, it made one of the two most celebrated universities of ancient India; and both because of its association with learning as well as with religion, it constituted a central point and focus for the congregation here of the finest minds of the country. As one writer puts it, "No doubt is to be entertained that in ancient Kasi were to be found the most eminent Hindoo sages, who greatly enriched the literature of their nation, and who were qualified by genius, learning, and eloquence to guide the Councils of Kings, to mould the opinions of the public of India, and to give law to the Hindoo world. Unless Benares had enjoyed a classical fame, been inhabited by a large and intelligent population, and had exercised the authority of a pontifical city, it was not likely that it would have been chosen by Buddha as the fittest theatre for first turning the wheel of his law among mankind." Its character of being the seat of learning as well as a pontifical city continued through the ages, and, so far as it concerns Hinduism, still continues. The establishment of the Benares Hindu University is testimony to the former. As regards the latter, the Hindu almanac is issued from Benares, and it is the Pandits of Kashi who are the final authority for decisions on all points of dispute in Hinduism.

The pilgrimage to holy Kashi is a complicated matter, or, perhaps, one should say that there is a variety and choice offered in this respect, and from different forms of it, diverse reward may be obtained. The completest pilgrimage consists of the *Panchkosi* visit to the 108 holy places and the orthodox pilgrim will no doubt make that because this six-day ritual brings the merit of pilgrimages to all the other holy places put together. This *Panchkosi* is confined, as the name implies, to moving within five *kos*, about 16 kms., from the starting point, so that none of the sites and shrines which have to be visited and venerated lie beyond this radius. A briefer pilgrimage, known as the *Panch-tirtha*, requires worship at five places namely *Asi Sangama*, where the river Asi meets the Ganges, *Dashashvamedha*

Ghat, *Manikarnika*, *Panchganga Ghat* and the *Varuna sangama*, where river *Varuna* joins the Ganges. Each one of these five is exceptionally holy, but the merit of going to Manikarnika is supreme. Here Vishnu himself worships Shiva and of this place one may say:

> "Nought is better than any part of the banks of Ganga,
> But there where Kashi is, is the best,
> And Manikarnika, where Ishvara gives *mukti* is the best of all"

In Benares, the temples are as plentiful as black-berries, and it is said that in this city there are more lingas, Shiva's emblems, than human beings—since each human being who dies in Benares attains immortality and is converted into this eternal symbol of Shiva. Of all these thousands of shrines and shrinelets, the first and the foremost is the celebrated temple of Vishveshwara, where resides Mahadeva, the Lord of the Universe. This temple, gilded by the same Maharaja, Ranjit Singh, who gilt-plated the Sikh shrine at Amritsar, is the city's holy of holies, and it is around this fane that life in Benares revolves, has revolved all through the ages. Towards this shrine, located not far from the Ghats, do countless pilgrims and visitors daily thread their way, literally thread it through lanes so narrow that "narrow is too wide a term for them". The devotee comes here in search of the god's blessing, the visitor to quench a breathless curiosity fanned by all that he has read and heard and imagined about this most renowned temple of Hindu history. The former will go back with a sense of bliss and upliftment, his soul content and his wish fulfilled, for he comes to seek what he carried within—his faith, his devotion. But the tourist who goes to the temple, and not to the god within, is bound to be disillusioned. Architecturally the temple is, to say the least, naught and fails both as a building and as a symbol of the greatness of Hinduism or of Shiva. The impression conveyed is poor and the feeling experienced is that of a keen disappointment.

Of course, part of the reason why the principal temple in the most sacred city of the Hindus is no architectural wonder is that the Muslim has been razing the building every time it has been coming up. Benaras fell into his hands after the defeat of Jaychanda of Kanauj, and passed through centuries of Islamic rule. The last structure was destroyed by Aurangzeb whose general policy was to demolish all the schools and temples of the infidels and to put down their

religious teaching and practices. "This he did", in the words of Fergusson, "that he might erect on the most venerated spot of the Hindus his Mosque, whose tall minarets still rear their heads in insult over all the Hindu buildings of the city." Naturally, in the case of a building so often pounded at, and located in a city which has known a series of disaster and ruin, one would build for a day, not for eternity; and the temple would be but a cover for the deity, a mere shed, rather than a palace that befits his dignity and prestige. Indeed, this prestige was once in such peril that he had to be concealed in the well known as *Gyan Vapi*, which stands in an adjacent court. When the enemy came to break the idol, the latter was thrown hurriedly into this well which, sanctified thus by the deity's sojourn, is regarded as a place of worship, and pilgrims set much store by its sacred water.

It is with relief and joy that one turns from narrow streets and shabby temples to the Ghats along the Ganga. These are beauteous and ornamental as no other ghats in the whole of India. Arrayed along the holy stream over nearly one mile, they are the most popular as also the most picturesque place in all Benares and help to make it the gorgeous city of princely mansion it is famed to be. These princely mansions, one more impressive and monumental than the other, stand behind wide tiers upon tiers of stone masonary on which, at all times, throng in colour and costume of endless and amazing variety, a multitude of visitors and pilgrims from all over the country, from all over the world. On the days of bathing festivals, and even on every morning, the entire area is one mass of "acres upon sloping acres of humanity." The wide flights of steps go down to the river as it curves ever so archly and creates a natural amphitheatre than which nothing of this kind could be more beautiful, so that the pleasant boat-ride along the Ghats can be a most enjoyable experience. For the knowing, the journey will have rich associations, and the various Ghats like Harish Chandra's, or the Dashashvamedha, the Manikarnika or the Panchganga, will remind him of many a myth and legend. But even the uninitiated cannot but be impressed by the most glorious of scenes which spreads before one's eyes. One English sight-seer, indeed, waxes eloquent : "Would you know what the city is like, this magnetic loadstar of India ? Then picture a broad and stately river, wide as our Thames at Westminster, but sparkling under sunshine and blue skies, its banks lined for miles by stately palaces, and with the richly-carved spires of the temples spiking the blue in all directions, each surmounted by a golden banneret. Broad steps lead down from the mansions to the waters, and each great prince has his own

particular flight or ghat.....and all the Ghats are thronged with thousands of pilgrims, who have travelled for months, and in some cases for years, from the plains of the south, and from the mountain villages of the Himalayas, to bathe in the sacred river. No other city in the whole world commands such love, such reverence, such devotion. The ghats are a dream of colour. I have travelled much in the Far West as well as in the East. I have seen many stately pageants, many scenes in which men and women have donned their bravest and their best but never have I seen such a galaxy of hues, such a kaleidoscope of colour as the dresses of the pilgrims present. All the colours of the rainbow—and many that the rainbow apparently has not—are there, ever-changing ever-shifting, with dazzling effect. And beside some high born Hindu lady who had broken her purdah for the pilgrimage, and who comes timidly down the ghat in her sari of pink or sea-green or orange, hard by you will see the ascetic clad in rags, the man whose whole life is one long pilgrimage. He may have been born a prince, or the son of a beggar—no one can tell....."

Indeed, no one can tell, not in Benares, where many princes have come to become beggars and many beggars, who were born princes and became kings —of a different kind of kingdom, of the kingdom of spirit. Two of the greatest names among such are those of Parshvanath, the 23rd Tirthankara of the Jains, and the Buddha. The former was born here, in Benares, as the son of King Ashvasena and Queen Vama. To mark the auspicious event, Kubera, the goblin god of wealth, "arranged to send down from the sky every day, during the six months preceding the descent of the saviour to the womb of the queen, no less than 35 maunds of diamond pieces, flowers from the wish-fulfilling trees in the celestial gardens of the gods, showers of clear water of the sweetest fragrance, divine sounds from the great drums of the most auspicious rain-clouds, and the sweet music of the singing of the deities of the sky. The splendour of Benares increased a thousand-fold and the joy of the people knew no bounds."

The entry into the womb of history, and into this city, of the other, the Buddha, was marked by no such din and dazzle. Having attained supreme wisdom and full enlightenment at Gaya, he had come quietly to this seat of learning and the stronghold of orthodoxy, that he might preach the new gospel. Here, in the Deer Park but four miles from Benares, the *Tathagata* met his five erstwhile mates-in-penance, who had left him because he had broken his vows and

had started living a seemingly worldly life. Now when he saw them again, he, the holy one said to them, "Know that I am a Jaina—I have come to give the first wheel of the law to you. Receive initiation from me—Ye shall obtain the place of Nirvana". And then with that famous first sermon, the wisdom whereof belongs not to the Buddhist alone, but is a most cherished part of all human heritage, the Buddha set the wheel of Law in motion : "There are two extremes, monks, which he who has given up the world, ought to avoid.

"What are these two extremes ? A life given to pleasures, devoted to pleasures and lusts ; this is degrading, sensual, vulgar, ignoble, and profitless. And a life given to mortification ; this is painful, ignoble and profitless.

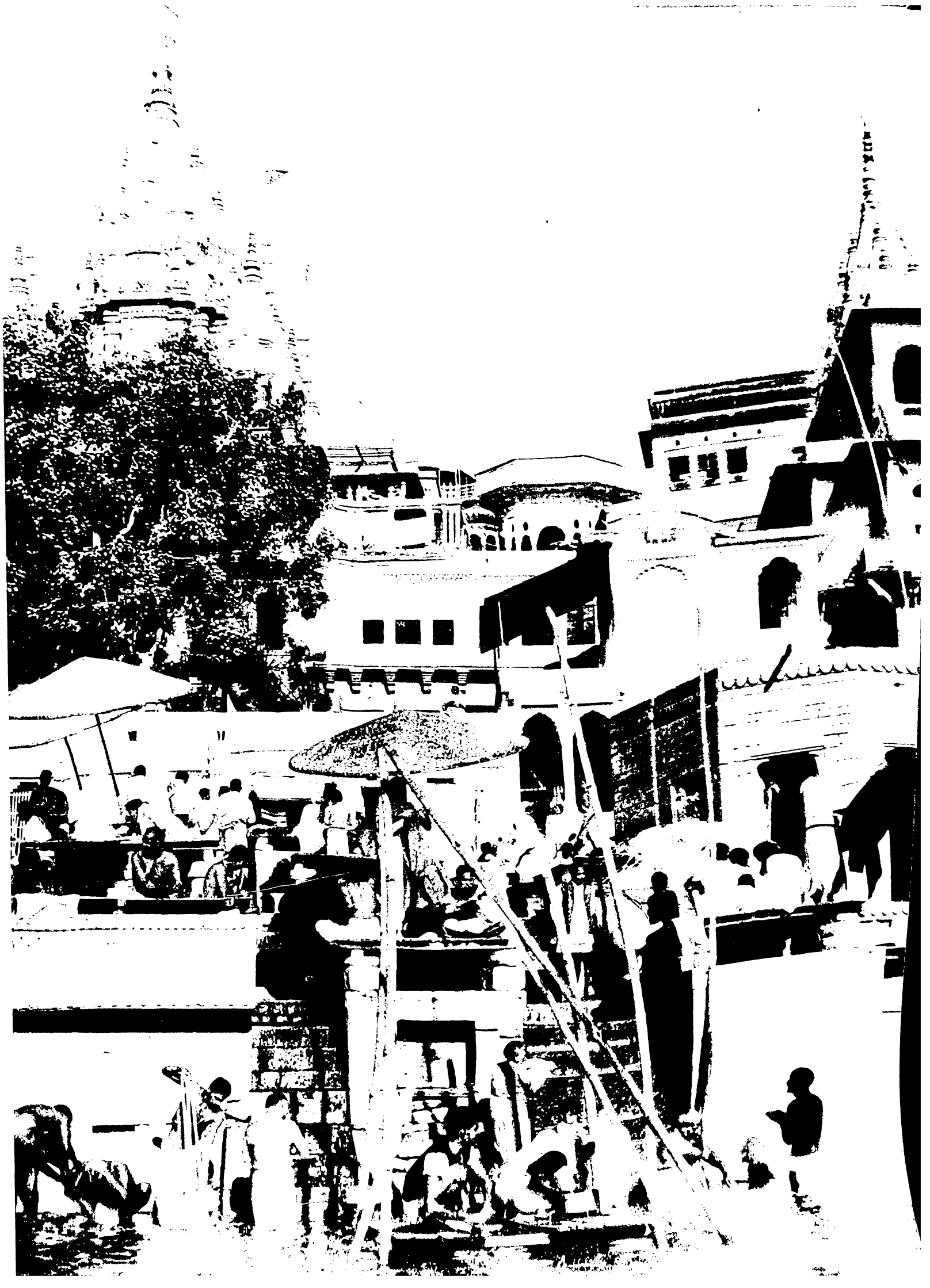
"By avoiding these two extremes, monks, the *Tathagata* has gained the knowledge of the middle path which leads to insight, which leads to wisdom, which conduces to calm, to knowledge, to sambodhi (supreme-enlightenment) to Nirvana....."

The site where the Buddha delivered this classic discourse of the golden mean is known to the world as Sarnath. For the Buddhist, it is his Jerusalem and only Bodh-Gaya may rival it in sanctity, if at all. To the archaeologist, it spells one of the richest of his treasures. With the rise of Buddhism the spot had begun to receive, naturally, a great deal of attention and veneration. Ashoka put up one of his pillars here and several stupas were built around the holy spot. When Hieun Tsang visited Benares in the 7th Century, he found, at the Deer Park, a great monastery in which 1500 priests were studying the Little Vehicle. In its enclosure was a vihara about 60 metres high. On its sides were a large number of niches in each of which was a golden figure of the Buddha, and in the middle was a life-size copper statue representing the Buddha as turning the wheel of the Law. To the west of the Vihara, he noted a stone stupa built by Ashoka-raja, and in front of the building, a stone pillar about 22 metres high, the stone whereof was altogether as bright as jade.

The modern visitors to Sarnath may still gaze at the three beautiful articles named above, the celebrated Sarnath statue of the Buddha turning the wheel; the great stupa, the Dhamek; and the pillar or what remains of it. As is well known, the splendid Lion Capital of the aforesaid pillar has been adopted as

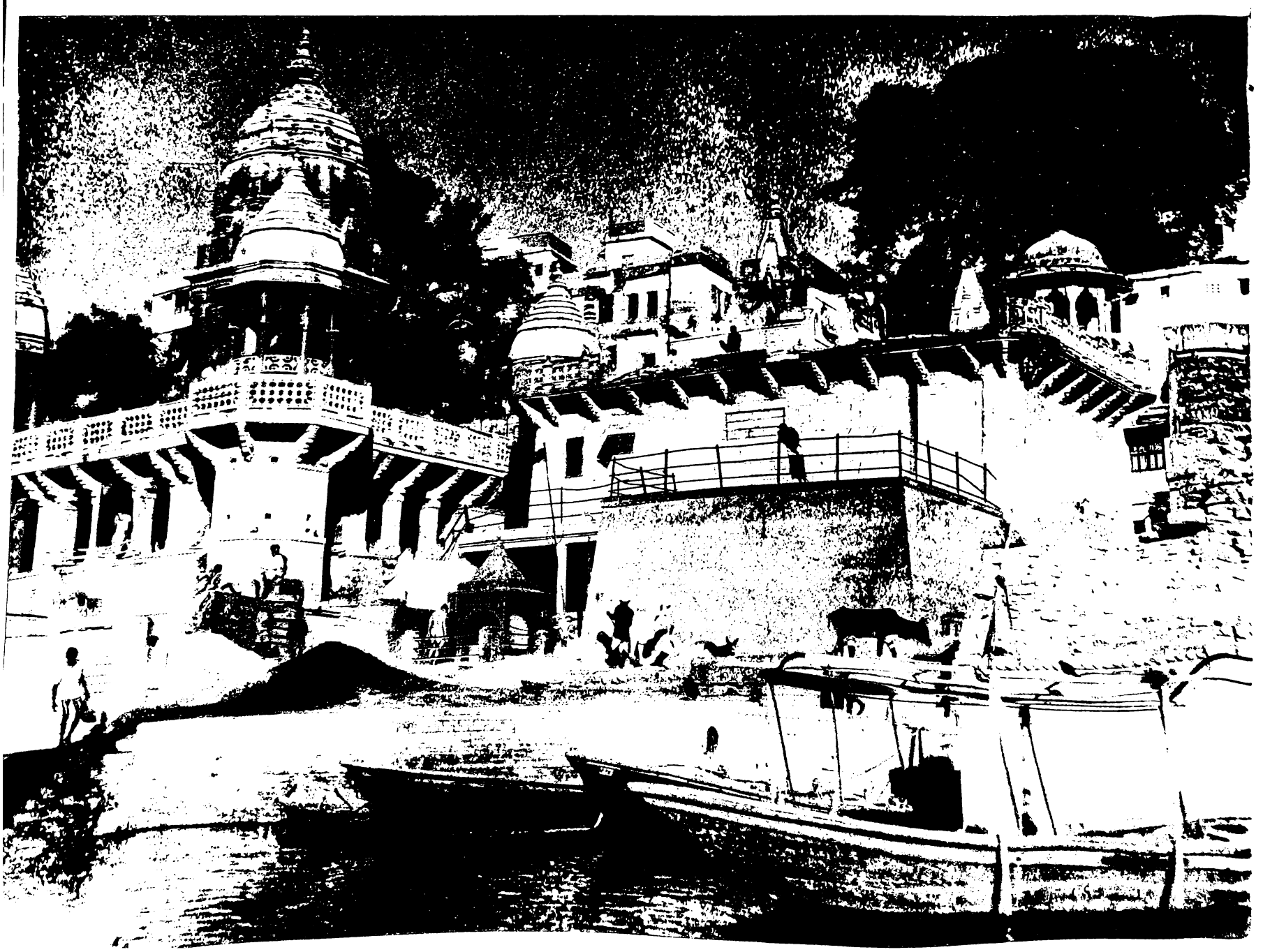
the crest of the Republic of India. This consists of 4 lions which once supported a stone wheel ; and on the abacus a bull, a horse, a lion, an elephant and wheels are carved in relief. The Dhamek—abbreviation of the Sanskrit Dharmopadesha, Dharmaksha or Dharmachakra—the great stone stupa one sees at Sarnath, is a solid round tower 93 feet in diameter at the base and 128 feet high. The building is ornamented with beautiful niches and with magnificent surface decoration. The richly carved bands form scrolls of the lotus plant with graceful stalks, delicate leaves, tender buds, and full-blown flowers. In short, the stupa is a most attractive specimen of the classical art. "With the single exception of the Taj Mahal at Agra," says General Cunningham, "there is no other Indian building that has been so often described as this great Buddhist tower at Sarnath." It is said to have been built by Ashoka on the spot where Buddha first turned the wheel of the law and forms a building 22 centuries old. Fa-Hien saw it in the beginning of the 5th century and distinguished it as "one of the eight divine towers commemorating the acts of Buddha's territorial career". The statue of the Buddha turning the Wheel of Law represents the acme of the Gupta art and may be seen in the excellent Sarnath Museum of the Department of Archaeology. The Museum contains countless other treasures. Also, among the ruins around the great tope, there are many more objects of interest. Thanks to the great veneration in which Buddha is held in this country and to the praiseworthy efforts of the Government of India in this respect, Sarnath has been taken good care of. The Buddhist have put up several modern structures of which the temple known as the Mulagandha Kuti is noteworthy. This Vihara displays the well-known murals painted by the Japanese artist, Kosetsu Nosu, which portray, among scenes from the Master's life, the threats and temptations designed by Mara to thwart the Buddha. The three nymphs, Mara's daughters, *Tanha*, *Rati*, and *Raga* personifying Desire, Seduction and Infatuation, are there, and the herd of monsters from hell. Of course, nothing availed, neither the wiles of the sirens nor the weapons of the wicked, against the will of the Wise One whose serene and purifying presence appears to permeate the entire air of Sarnath.

THE GHATS of Benares serve the citizen like a kind of combined temple and lounge. Here people meet and gossip, and bathe and wash, and relex and seek release and pray and listen to pious sermons. ▶

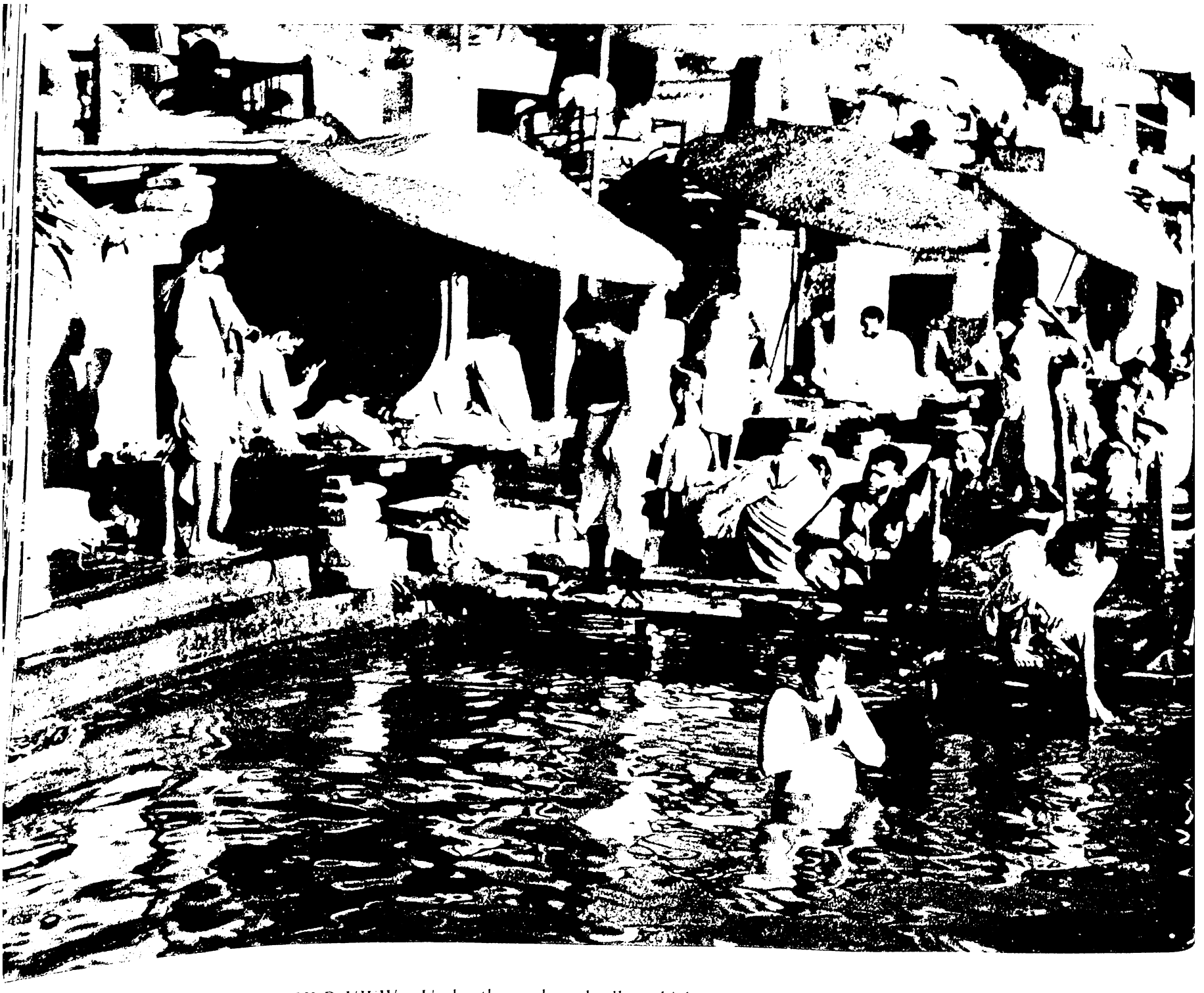


MULAGANDHA KUTI—NEW TEMPLE, SARNATH, GENERAL VIEW : It was at Sarnath that the Buddha had set the Wheel of Law in motion. The Vihara is built over the spot where the Enlightened One once stayed and enshrines precious Buddhist relics. ▶

CREMATION GHATS, GENERAL VIEW : He who dies in Benares goes to heaven. For the Hindu, death is no morbid phenomenon, for the Ganges, the Stream of Life, will continue to flow for ever, and that which the fire does not consume, her waters will purify.

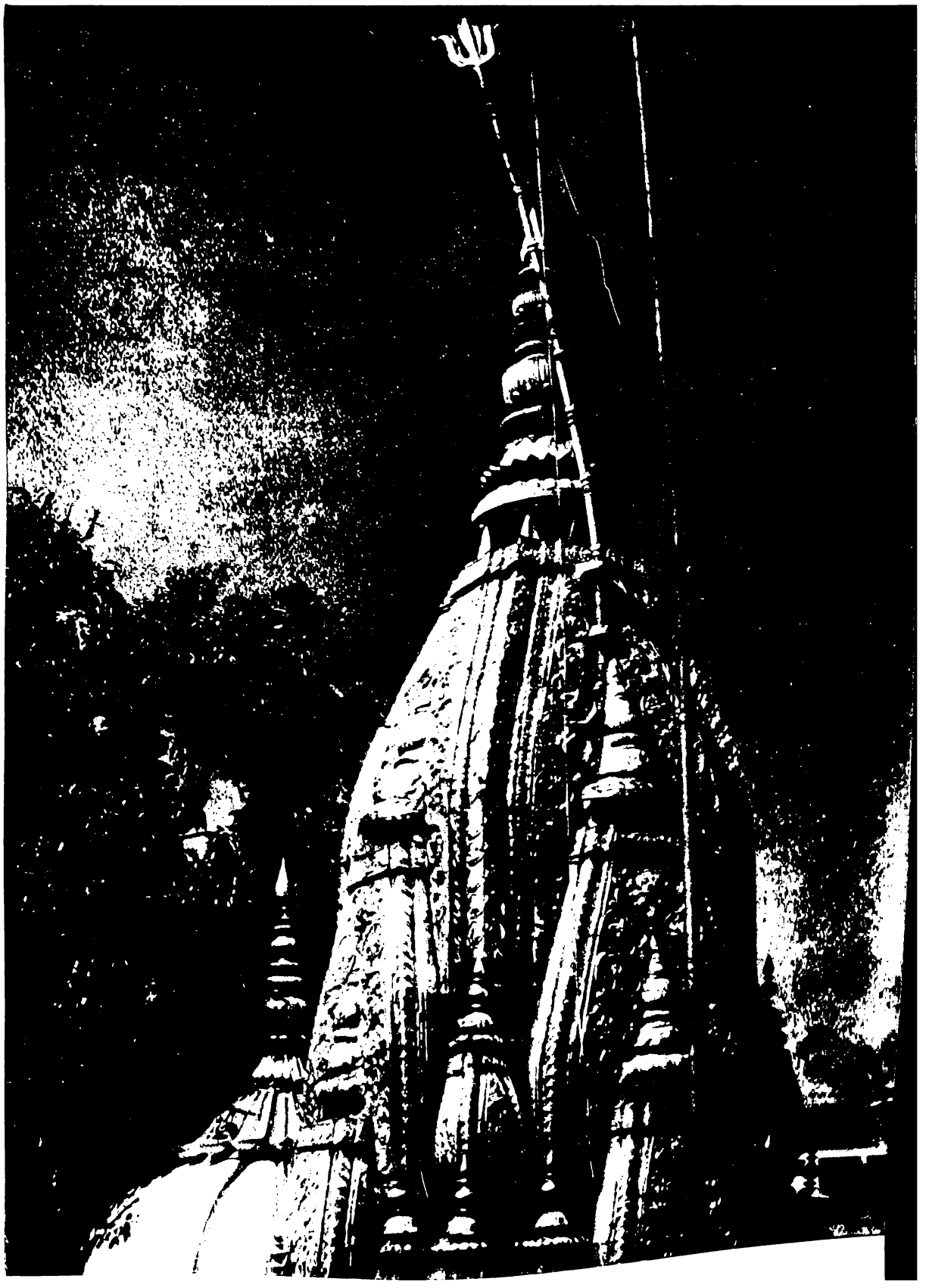






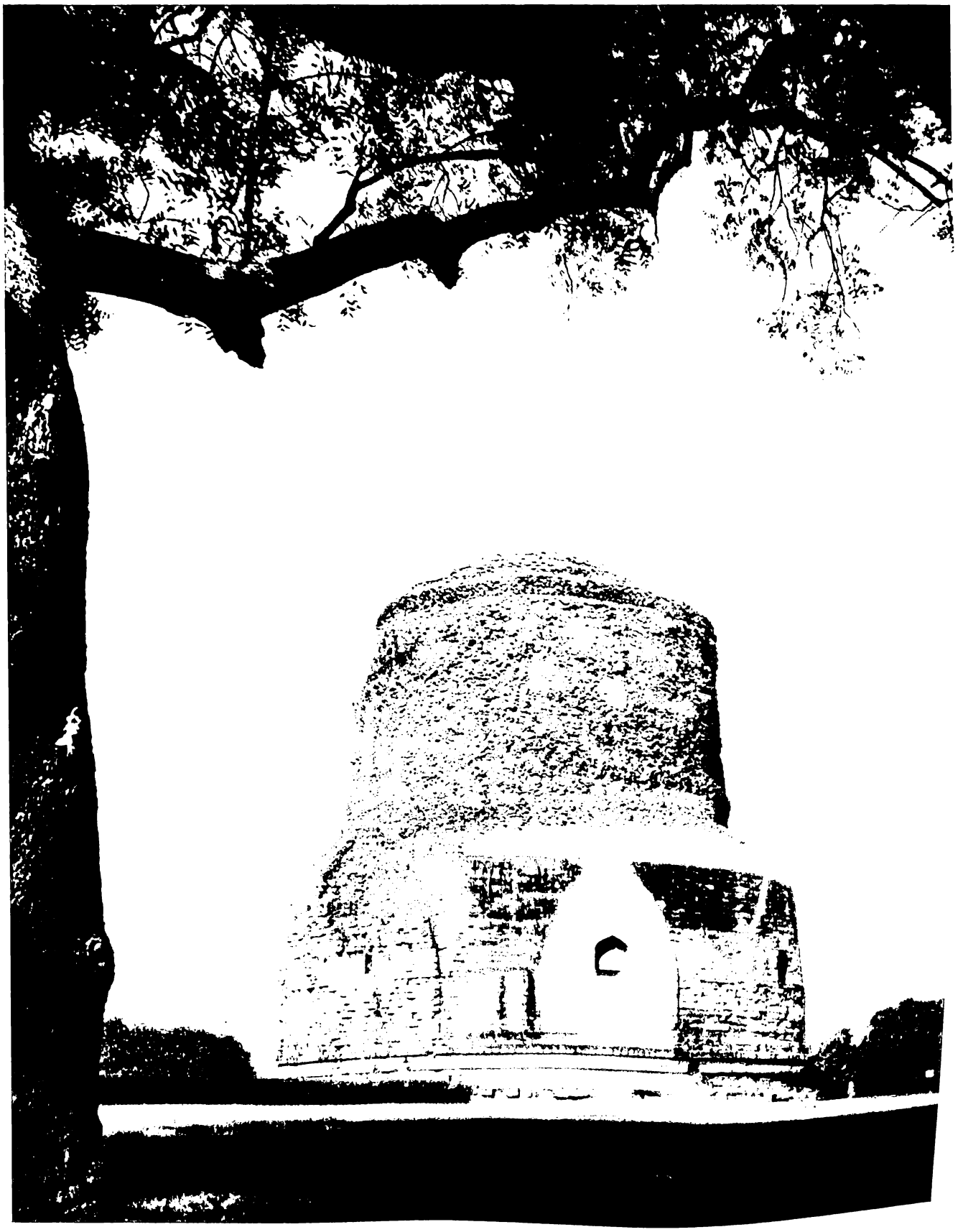
THE GHATS. ANOTHER VIEW : Under the rush umbrellas which are usually more faded and tattered than they look in pictures sit the Pandas and their clients spiritual. The bather in the foreground is doing obeisance to the Sun-god.



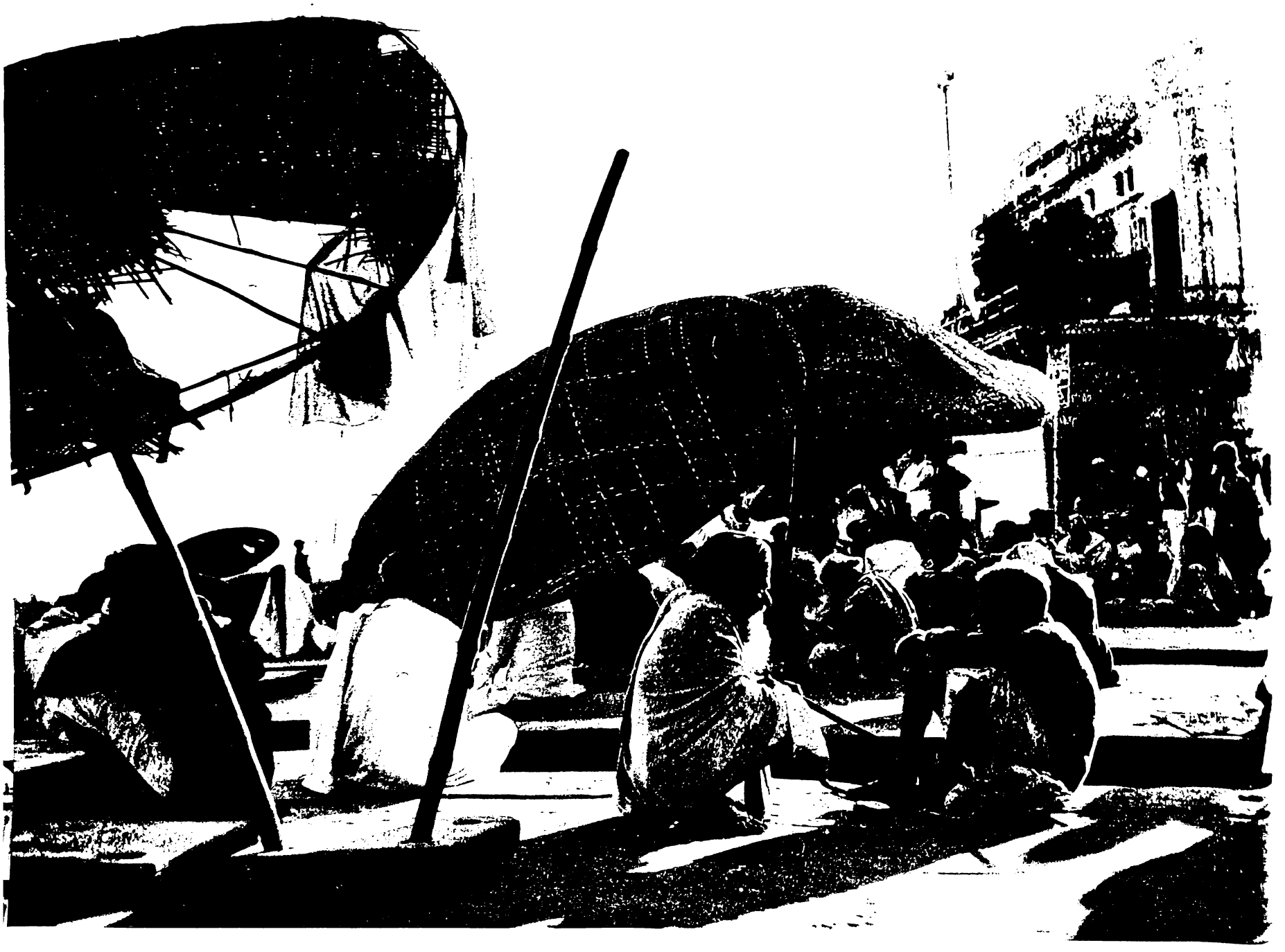




BENARES HINDU UNIVERSITY : Benares has been a famous seat of learning through the ages. The students are on vacation, obviously. In any case, the sacred cows are mere trespassers in the scholarly precincts.



THE DHAMEK, SARNATH. GENERAL VIEW: Ashoka's magnificent stupa at the sacred spot where the Buddha set the Wheel of Law in motion is now a ruin. The Dhamek is nearly as celebrated a monument as the Taj



THE GHATS, BENARES : Detail of Sun-shades under which the visiting devotee may relax or listen to wise discourses.

6 BHUBANESWAR

CAR FESTIVAL, PURI

Located about 40 miles away from Bhubaneswar, Puri with its temple of Jagan-natha, is one of the holiest of Hindu places of pilgrimage. The celebrated *Ratha-Yatra* is an annual festival during which the gods are taken out in chariots pulled by devotees millions of whom pour into Puri on this occasion.



6 BHUBANESWAR

Bhubaneswar, the new capital of Orissa, is Shiva's other city in India, and is generally regarded to be as holy as his first city, Varanasi, where he resides as the Vishweshwara. Here he is worshipped as the Tribhuvaneshwara—the Lord of three worlds—which abbreviated and corrupted forms the name of this Orissan holy city. Known in ancient days as *Ekamravana*—one-mango-forest, Bhubaneswar is one of the four most sanctified places of pilgrimage in the State, the other three being Konark, Puri, and Jajpur, sacred respectively to Surya—the Sun god ; to Vishnu under his title of Jagan-natha—Lord of the Universe ; and to Parvati. While the veneration in which the Jagan-natha temple at Puri is held is perhaps greater than what is accorded to the Lingaraja at Bhubaneswar, and, also, while the architectural and sculptural excellence of the Konark temple is of the highest order, but where the Lingaraja at Bhubaneswar scores is in its unrivalled combination of both sanctity and beauty.

Nor is the Lingaraja the only temple at Bhubaneswar. There are many more, and once there was a veritable city of them because every king and ruler wanted to build—and to build exquisitely—to the honour and glory of the deity of this most sacred region. Consequently, at one time, nearly 7,000 shrines stood here and, lifting their spires in symbolic prayer, adorned the entire area around the holy Bindoo Sagar. Of these several thousand fanes, only a few scores may be seen now. In fact, of the noteworthy specimens, all that remains is a group of about thirty temples. But these are, for the most part, well-

preserved and form a collection of monuments which for their grace and beauty stand unparalleled in the field of India's temple-architecture. Withal, they constitute a complete record of the growth and development of the skills of religious building and sculpture in Orissa, and are, therefore, of the utmost value to the art-critic and the art-historian.

Of the sacredness of this region, the *Ekamrakshetra*, the Brahma Purana says that Bhubaneswar "removes all sins, and such places are difficult to come across. It has a crore of Shiva Lingas and is equal in merit to Benares. It is known as *Ekamra* and has eight principal *tirthas*". Again, "one who performs the *yatra* here with due ceremonies and with his senses controlled liberates his 21 generations and goes to the abode of Shiva. On any day one may take a bath in the Bindoo Sagar and have the *darshana* of (1) Shiva (2) Parvati (3) Chanda (4) Kartikeya (5) Ganesha (6) The Bull of Shiva (7) Kalpavriksha and (8) Savitri. On having the *darshana* of these eight, one goes to Shivaloka. This *Ekamra* is the Shiva-kshetra, as sacred as Kashi and one taking a bath here is assured of liberation".

The name *Ekamra* is an ancient appellation for this whole area of old Bhubaneswar. As is well-known, the land all around forms the same far-famed Kalinga-desha which was conquered by Ashoka after one of the bloodiest ever of battles. According to the figures given in the Rock Edict XIII of Ashoka, "hundred and fifty thousand in number were those carried off from there, a hundred thousand in number were those who were slain there, and many times as many those who were dead". The King was struck with deep pain and sorrow and renounced warfare. To quote again from the same Edict, "Thereafter, now, the Kalingas being annexed, became intense His Sacred Majesty's observance of Dharma, love of Dharma, and his preaching of the Dharma. There was the remorse of His Sacred Majesty having conquered the Kalingas". So, from *Dig-vijaya*, Ashoka turned to *Dharma-vijaya*, from military conquest to moral conquest, which was considered by him as the chiefest victory. He embraced the faith of the Buddha and bent all his energies to its propagation. With Buddhism as the country's, official religion, Kalinga was, naturally, as much Buddhist as any other part of the empire. Innumerable sites in the present State of Orissa are associated with Buddhism; and Buddhist monuments, scattered all over the area, serve as a mine of information to the historian and the archaeolo-

gist. Around Bhubaneswar itself, there are several such remains and remnants. Of these, the most important is, of course, the Ashokan Rock Edict at Dhauli, about seven kilometres to the south of the city. Here is recorded in imperishable stone the celebrated sentiment so typical of the concept of kingship in India: "All men are as my children. As, on behalf of my own children, I desire that they may be provided with complete welfare and happiness both in this world and the next, the same I desire also for all men". Again, the site of the present temple of Jagan-natha at Puri is traditionally associated with the location of ancient Dantapur where they worshipped the sacred tooth of the Buddha which was later removed to Ceylon.

After the Mauryas, Kalinga became an independent kingdom once more. Its new rulers, the Chedi kings, had Jaina leanings and during their rule, Jainism held sway over this region. Many of the sixty-odd caves, set in the picturesque Udayagiri-Khandagiri hills to the north-west of Bhubaneswar, which today form such an attraction for the tourist, were once the residences of Jaina ascetics. Their art and architecture, representing as they do the quaint traditions of those ancient times, furnish most valuable data. Some of the ornate work in the friezes and other carvings of caves like Rani Naur and Ganesh, is strikingly beautiful and deserves careful attention from scholars and approbation from all. The Jaina influence as well as the Buddhist faith flourished here, as they did in the country as a whole, till about the 5th and 6th centuries when Hinduism began to re-assert itself, at first slowly and then mightily and inexorably. The Shaiva cult was introduced through the Pashupata sect whose leader and teacher, Lakulisha, is himself a deified and legendary figure of such importance that the early temples of Bhubaneswar all display innumerable representations of his figure. Traditionally, however, it is held that Shaivism's was a late entry into the religious life of old Kalinga, and that this *Ekamra-kanan* the one-mango-forest, as it was called, was selected for a residence first by Vishnu and only later by Shiva. This deity, Shiva, having been disgusted with the pollution of Benares through the presence of too many unbelievers, Narada is said to have suggested the selection of the *Ekamra-kanan* as the god's new residence. Since it was a dwelling-place, already, of an other god of the Hindus, Vishnu, Shiva courteously sought his colleague's formal permission to settle in the neighbourhood. This was granted and the visitor was, in fact, graciously requested to stay here for ever and not go back to Benares, at all. Shiva, however, explained that he could not

wholly give up Benares which had such holy and hallowed sanctuaries and sites, and the sacred Ganges. Then Vishnu stated that all the temples and holy sites which made Benares sacred were in this place also. Shiva was then pleased to move in, in the form of a *lingam*, as the "Lord of the Three worlds"—*Tribhuvaneshwara*, and settled down. It is the same *lingam* which the devotee sees and worships at Lingaraja temple. The explanation of some of the points in the above story is obvious enough. The Vishnu cult seems to have ante-dated the Shaiva cult, so far as this locality is concerned, and the suggestion that Shiva should not return to Benares shows that a new harmony was replacing the traditional antipathy between the two cults. Further, there is a distinct shift in the centre of gravity of the Shaiva cult, and Benares tends to lose its hitherto unchallenged importance as the focus of Shaiva worship. Now, the south-east, as, indeed, all south and east, would be willing to welcome this new god.

According to another Puranic legend, it is maintained that although Shiva never wholly severed his connection with Benares, the *Ekamravana* has always been a more favourite resort of the deity than Kashi. That accounts for Parvati's curiosity to visit this spot. She undertook the journey hither incognita, disguised as a *Gopalini*, a cowherd girl. Two demons, Kritti and Vasa by name, spied the pretty wanderer and offered to marry her. She asked them first to bear her upon their shoulders which they did. The seemingly delicate body of the goddess then assumed a supernatural heaviness and they were crushed under her fair burden. The death of the demons symbolises the destruction of evil and the purification of the area, but the goddess helped add to this negative sanctity in another way. She felt thirsty and the god Shiva dug for her the sacred lake known as the *Bindoo Saras* or Bindoo Sagar. Shiva called upon all the holy lakes, sacred streams, and the pure and purifying pools and ponds and seas and oceans of India, to contribute a drop each to the new lake. As a most auspicious collection of all these drops, the Bindoo Sagar, also called the Gosagar, is a most holy spot in all Bhubaneswar, and, accordingly, it is with a bath in this holy lake that a pilgrimage to Bhubaneswar begins. A proper ceremonial bath is regarded as highly meritorious, and is especially rewarding on occasions like the *sankranti* and the eclipses of the sun and the moon. The bath is followed by a visit to the shrine of the Ananta-Vasudeva who is the *Kshetrapati*, the guardian-deity, of this place. Then, after worshipping Ganesha, the goddess Parvati as Gopalini, Karttikeya, Nandi the sacred Bull, etc. one proceeds to the

great temple of Lingaraja, the Lord of the three worlds, *Tribhuvaneshwara*. The reward of worship of this *lingam* is stated to be "a place in heaven followed by a birth in the next life as a Yogi and one is promised then the realisation of the Pashupata yoga, and final liberation". Again, the *prasada*—the symbolic gift of the god—of Bhubaneswar is the most covetable and meritorious because it is believed that Lingaraja in Bhubaneswar is not only Shiva but a combination of both Shiva and Vishnu, of Hara and Hari.

The Lingaraja, spiritually and stylistically the most important temple in Bhubaneswar, is a monument truly worthy to be regarded as the House of God. The disappointment one feels in Benares is more than made up for in this other city of the same deity. The Vishweshwara there is but a poor dwelling for the Lord of the Universe. Looking at that most celebrated and sacred of temples in Benares, one Hindu had remarked indignantly : "The same that St. Peter's is in Christendom, is the temple of Biseswara in Hindudom. But the one is the admiration of the world, while the other disappoints all expectations. There is nothing great or grand in the Hindu sanctum-sanctorum commensurate with its celebrity." Yet here, at Bhubaneswar, seeing the Lingaraja which is both great and grand, one has the feeling that "all losses are restored." A thrill of triumph and elation passes through the blood, for the stately structure that meets the eye is a perfect piece of art. It is perhaps the finest temple in India, the 'perhaps' being a courtesy extended only to the very highest of its rivals like the great Kailash temple at Ellora, the renowned and ruined Sun-temple at Konark, not far away from Bhubaneswar, and that exquisite, though far smaller, gem at Khajuraho, the Kandareya Mahadeva. What is more, one begins to understand the meaning of all the elaborate language of the Hindu *shastras* about the temple as the abode of the deity; and, as one views the majestic Lingaraja, the jargon of ancient writers and the metaphysics of modern critics acquire suddenly both life and purpose, are lit up, as it were, by the clearest of lights.

The Lingaraja was built in the tenth or eleventh century, and, in the history of the Kalinga style of temple-building, almost exactly marks the midpoint. Beginning with structures like the Parshurameshwara, and passing through stages marked by exquisite little monuments like the Mukteshwara or the Rajarani, the art finally found its zenith and acme, its perfection and fulfilment, in this great temple of Shiva. The earlier specimens are beautiful buildings; a few of them

are exceptionally fine; their sculptural ornament and structural proportions are admirable; but, by and large, they are rather small. Now, the ambition of art is to create the giant-gem, the lion among animals, a Taj among the buildings. In small measures, perfection is achieved too often and too easily; but, to accomplish it and to sustain it in things of some scale—that is the test and trial of the true artist. The glory of a building like the Qutb at Delhi and like the Taj at Agra, like this great temple at Bhubaneswar or like the fane at Konark, consists in the creation of beauty in a monument of size and stature. In fact, in the opinion of many critics, the Sun-temple at Konark, was a grand failure *ab initio*, a born ruin, and that precisely because the stupendous proportions, conceived perfectly, could not materialize as one unit ; the various parts, constructed flawlessly, could not be all put together. Again, the bigger temple at Puri, built a hundred years later than the Lingaraja, is larger like a bison is larger than a sleek and beautiful stag, than a magnificent lion—no more ! The perfect combination of components which could be assembled and yet would make for majesty, the truest fusion of dream and reality, *that* was attained in the Lingaraja. For the temple, art of Orissa, more than that was not destined by history, and, if attempted, could only result in splendid ruins, or ruinous sprawls.

As has been remarked earlier, out of the hundreds, nay, tens of hundreds of temples, which once flaunted their flags in Bhubaneswar's skies, only thirty or so may be seen now. But this, for once, is due more to the ravages of time than, as in most other cases of the kind, to the wrath of Islam. Generally speaking, Orissa escaped the iconoclast's ire because of the region's comparative remoteness. Only twice, in the sixteenth century, did the Muslim invaders enter this part of the country with ignoble intent to destroy the Hindu sanctuaries and monuments. First, in about 1510, Ala-ud-Din Hasain Shah, King of Bengal, attacked Cuttack and looted Puri, but he was driven out soon. Then, in 1567-68, the Afghan Viceroy of Bengal, Sulaiman Khan, defeated the Orissan King at Jajpur, and laid low the temples at this place. Not long after this, however, came the conquest of the area by Akbar and it became a province of his kingdom. The result was that the monuments at Jajpur excepted, the structures elsewhere were spared the type of rack and ruin which temples at places like Mathura or Benares suffered. Thus it happens that these temples at Bhubaneswar, most of them intact and as bright as they were when they were built, stand to provide to the art-historian one of the completest records of the beginnings and development of temple-construction in

this region. True, there are two or three other places and areas where also exist similar groups which constitute a living history. The Khajuraho temples, for example, form another such assemblage but then they were all put up during a period of one hundred years, between 950-1050 A. D., whereas the Bhubaneswar monuments spell in stone a story extending over at least five hundred years. If one includes in the survey, the temples at Puri and Konark, they will all provide to the critic and the art-lover, a record and an account, at once most authentic and most astonishing, of the soaring spirit of the Hindu builder as he set about, through centuries of Indian history, the task of fashioning houses for his gods.

Although the matter of evaluation of these temples as art and architecture falls, strictly speaking, outside the scope of this work, it is nonetheless tempting to examine and admire some of the more outstanding specimens. These have been mentioned, already, in passing, but may now be given more specific attention. One of the earliest temples in the town is the Parashurameshwara. This was built in the 7th or the 8th century, and though it is rather small in size, already the carving work is of exceptionally good quality. As Fergusson remarks, "Its chaste and elegant sculptures are cut with a delicacy seldom surpassed, and there is an appropriateness about the ornaments greater than is seen in most of the temples." In this last respect, that of the sculptor's art, the Vaital Deul is all the more remarkable for its plastic elegance and graceful figures, and the temple of Mukteshwara is even richer. In size the Mukteshwara is, again, not large. It is in fact, a little smaller than the Parashurameshwara ; but such is the beauty of its proportion and sculpture that "in its class it may be considered the gem of Orissan architecture." The entire surface is carved lavishly and exquisitely. Grace and delicacy distinguish every inch of the workmanship displayed. Figure-sculpture shows a deal of progress and refinement. All in all, an amazing array, of dwarfs and animals, of alluring females and famished ascetics, of the beautiful and the grotesque, greets the eye. The interior decoration of the part called *Jagmohan* and a magnificent *Torana*, both rare things, are of special interest.

The Mukteshwara marks the culmination of the first phase of the development of the Orissan temple. Still small of size, and consisting still of the two essential portions of a temple—the porch and (the tower above) the sanctum, the *jagmohan* and the *deul*—the changes are more in the over-all planning and proportions, in the contours and curvatures of the walls and the towers, in the

placing of niches and the provision of columns, in the iconography and, finally, in respect of the sculptural motifs. In regard to these last, this temple introduces what are going to be the distinguishing decorative designs of the later creations. The exquisite *nayikas* in various poses, graceful and attractive, were the forerunners of the erotic element which was soon to be running riot and rampant all over the walls of the temples, not only in Bhubaneswar but in places like Puri and Konark, and like the remoter Khajuraho in Central India. In the Rajarani temple, which belongs, chronologically, to the first phase, the exuberance and preponderance of the new tendency may be seen in full play. Of course, the little temple which derives its name from the stone known as the Rajarania, has other reasons why it deserves notice. Set amongst pretty fields of paddy, it has a unique structural appearance because the spire-replicas which mark its tower are not a usual feature of the Bhubaneswar temples, but are allied in form more to the monuments at Khajuraho. The proportions are fine and elegant and the lotus-mounted *dik-palas* on the *deul* are, some of them, excellent pieces of carving. Yet the celebrity of this temple is due mostly to the fascinating female figures portrayed in a variety of poses and moods. With the Rajarani, the sculptural art of Orissa has already entered into that world of love and dalliance, of the erotic and the amorous, which, carving its way through such work in the Lingaraja and the Jagan-natha temples, was to culminate in the tremendous, full-blooded representations of the love-play and the sexual act, of the beautiful and the shameless, chiselled so freely on the walls of the Sun-temple at Konark, where the philosophy of the Great Delight seems to have enthused and infected the sculptor to an extent which the modern mind is unable to accept as religious in any but the widest sense of the word.

It is not possible here to deal with this question of the erotic element in Indian art at the length this issue deserves. Nevertheless, it demands at least a line or two of explanation. To begin with, one may concede that, whatever the motive, lewd and lustful sculpture carved on temple walls is to be condemned, obviously, and one need not waste too many words on that aspect of the matter. There is a limit and a point in the art and philosophy of love beyond which lie things which humanity hides away. And if this is true of the day-to-day, rough-and-ready morality, how much more objectionable would such representation of the naked and the lurid, of 'curious matings of man and beast', of the symphony of the 'sex-act' in every conceivable note, of all the play and poses of passion, of

depravity and obscenity, abnormality and perversion, be to religion ! Yet, all this will not cancel the fact that such sculpture does cover innumerable surfaces of scores of temples all over the country ; and, what is more, covers them in no uncertain, self-conscious, shame-faced, apologetic, or, even, defiant manner. This is no approach of 'by your leave,' 'I'll dare you', 'to hell with your morality,' of an adolescent exploring secret crevices of a womby world. Oh, no. The utter frankness and abandon, the zest and the joy, the perfection of workmanship and the amazing beauty of the faces and figures, the evident delight in their making, and the sanction of large-sized reproductions, in wide spaces, in endless variety, and inexhaustible variations flashing from the most prominent panels which the bright light of the sun cannot but illuminate—why all this must be the work either of mad people, of a society utterly degraded, or there must be reasons, and justifications, for all this, a sense and meaning, some religious philosophy, behind all this. One cannot dismiss it all as the hurried and mischievous coal-and-chalk scribble of a schoolboy. And, equally, one need not be too hasty in condemning all this as wholesale depravity. In fact, one cannot do this for the simple reason that much of the *mithuna* sculpture is superb art, is such exquisite and delicious carving that there is hardly any trace of the consciousness that this has anything to do with sex. The spiritual bliss, the beatific expression, the joy of inter-merging, of being one and not two, of reaching a stage where each is both—all that has been caught by the chisel with surpassing excellence, and only the crudest mind will see in those representations anything but beauty ; the evil would lie in the eye of such beholders themselves. Indeed, such work might be more than justified by the oft-accepted philosophy that *mithuna* is a way to liberation, is *sadhana* ; that the union of male and female is symbolic of the divine, that *bhoga* is *yoga*, that the sensual and the spiritual are two aspects of the same substance, and that, as Walt Whitman puts it, "the soul is not more than the body". On the other hand, the 'loose loves', the vulgar carvings, too carnal to be clean, and, too often, bad works of art, might be the result of Tantrik or similar influences and practices which were such a dominating trend of the medieval religious beliefs. All the same, let us, the men of this age, who pride ourselves on our broad-minded acceptance of the facts of life, who insist upon explaining it all to our teenagers lest they should suffer from ignorance, who allow the sex-appeal to operate upon such a mass scale through word and picture, through our books and films—let us not be squeamish nor petty in our appreciation of these sculptures.

But to revert to the temples of which the next, after the Rajarani, that should engage our attention is the Lingaraja. Consisting originally of the two portions, the *jagmohan* and the *deul*, it now has the full-fledged form of the Bhubaneswar fane, namely the *natyamandapa*, the *bhogamandapa*, the *jagmohan*, and the *deul*. The two former were later additions and are of inferior workmanship. But the *jagmohan* and the *deul*, the parts that all earlier temples consisted of, are a most refined achievement, both in respect of the structural excellence and the sculptural ornament. Fergusson thinks that "it is perhaps the finest example of a purely Hindu temple in India". And anyone who gives even a cursory glance to its stately and gracious tower will agree whole-heartedly.

It is difficult to dispose of a temple like the Lingaraja with a few sentences of high-sounding praise. It is, indeed, a rare masterpiece, and the sight of it is ennobling and uplifting in the extreme. Here, in this example, art truly rises to the occasion, to aid man to express his worship in tangible form. If the *shikhara* of the Hindu temple has a meaning, if its verticality is symbolic of the Mount Meru and "leads the worshipper upwards to that centre—the final amalaka in shape like a lotus flower or a solar halo with rays typifying the passage to heaven —of magic union with the divine", if all this has any point, then the *shikhara* of the Lingaraja achieves it all, and achieves it perfectly. The 55 metre tower is a unique piece of art. Even a seasoned critic like Fergusson is amazed : "Every inch of the surface is covered with carving in the most elaborate manner. It is not only the divisions of the courses, the roll-mouldings on the angles, or the breaks on the face of the tower : these are sufficient to relieve its flatness, and with any other people they would be deemed sufficient ; but every individual stone in the tower has a pattern carved upon it, not so as to break its outline, but sufficient to relieve any idea of monotony. It is, perhaps, not an exaggeration to say that if it would take a sum—say a lakh of rupees or pounds—to erect such a building as this, it would take three lakhs to carve it as this one is carved. Whether such an outlay is judicious or not, is another question. Most people would be of opinion that a building four times as large would produce a greater and more imposing architectural effect, but this is not the way a Hindu ever looked at the matter. Infinite labour bestowed on every detail was the mode in which he thought he could render his temple most worthy of the deity ; and whether he was right or wrong, the effect of the whole is certainly marvellously beautiful."

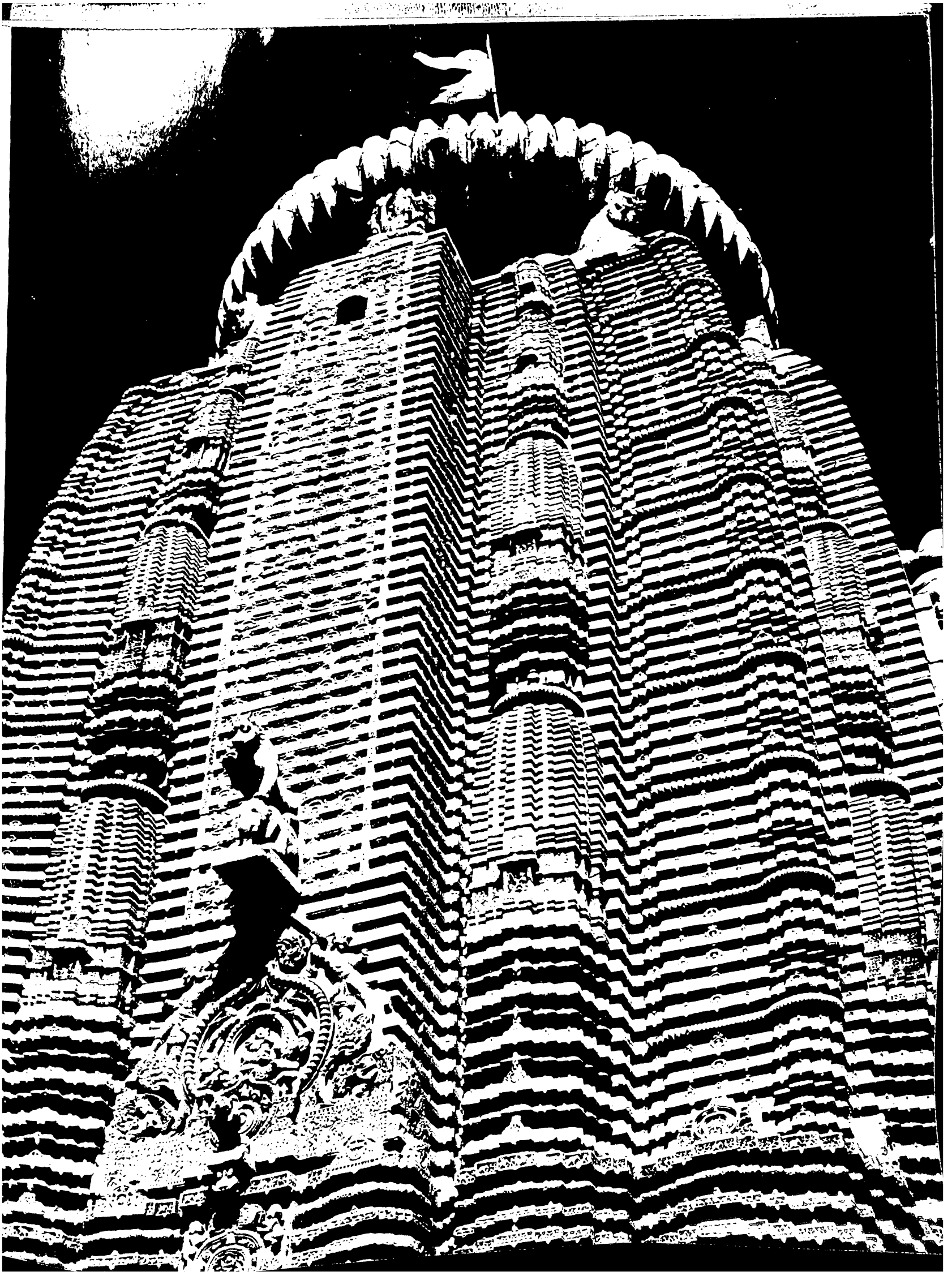
In the Lingaraja, sculpture and architecture are at last one. The design of the tower is not subsidiary to the ornament, and the exterior decoration is not an appendage to the structure. There is an over-all perfection of harmony which is most elegant and impressive, and it is such a pity that the short-sightedness of the authorities has, by placing a ban on his entry within the enclosure, deprived the non-Hindu and the foreign tourist of the opportunity to have a proper look at this grandest specimen of the Hindu temple. A view from the platform outside provided for the purpose is certainly no substitute. Not until one has seen the great monument from within the enclosure, from several angles and close quarters, in this light and that perspective, can one truly realise the exquisiteness of the thing which is the Lingaraja. For the first few moments the impact is so great that one is spell-bound, feels, as it were, in the presence of dignity and greatness personified. Then, when the total design of its grace and grandeur has been taken in, the detail of its plastic embellishment will engage one's attention in yet another spell of marvelling admiration, for as one authority put it : "all the panoply of Orissan decorative motifs is mustered here with a rare aesthetic sense ; every piece of carving serves its appointed role and enhances the majesty of the edifice as a whole." No wonder that its builders, kings of yore, thought it fit to donate whole villages to keep lamps burning always in this abode of the deity, who resides here in the form of the huge granite *lingam*.

Within the enclosure which houses the Lingaraja, there are many more shrines, some of which would be worthy of notice in their own right if they were not overshadowed by this king of them all, the great Lingaraja. To the devotee, however, all these matter a great deal and he goes round to the various sanctuaries to complete his pilgrimage. The presence of Vaishnava signs and shrines in this Shaiva enclosure is to be explained by the shift in the faith of the later rulers. They built the Vaishnava temple of Ananta-Vasudeva which stands on the eastern bank of the Bindoo Sagar. This is a copy of the Lingaraja, with a more effective grouping of the component parts since they were all built together, and presenting an appearance of ascending peaks culminating in the proud *shikhara*. Also, they changed the character of the presiding deity of the Lingaraja and invested him with the duality of Hari-Hara, instead of being only the Hara, Shiva. In a sense, the harmonious tradition of this merging of, or, at any rate, of much mutual courtesy between, these his two most important deities, is a most pleasant feature for the Hindu who visits this sacred region. The pilgrimage at Bhubaneswar starts

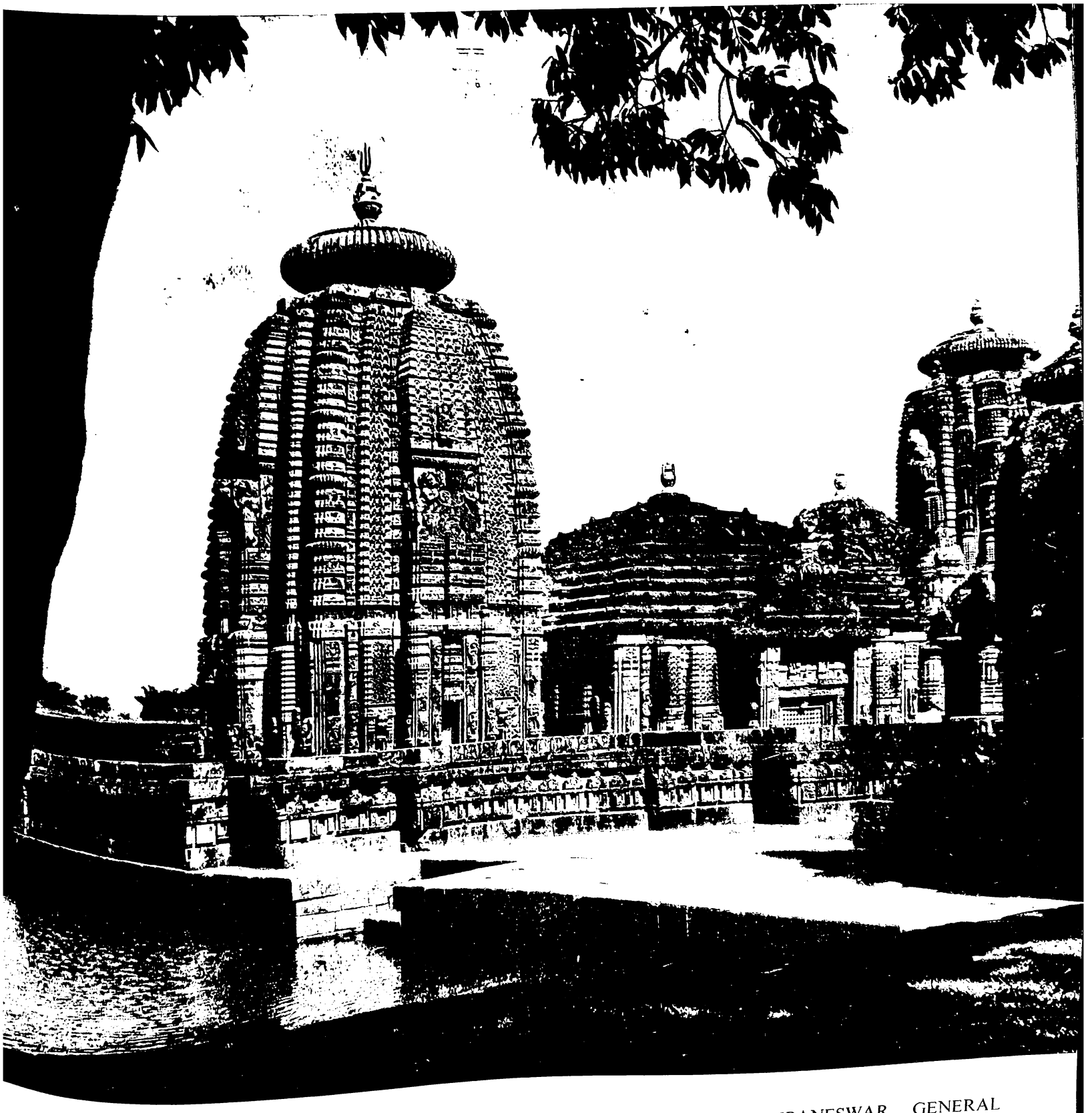
with a bath in the Bindoo Sagar but thereafter the first obeisance is at the Vaishnava shrine, of Anant-Vasudeva. In return, the pilgrim who would go to the Jagan-natha temple at Puri, must first offer worship at the Lingaraja, for so the great Chaitanya himself had done.

And, against this long-stretching back-drop of history and of the high-reaching *shikharas* of these ancient temples of old Bhubaneswar, the new capital has been taking shape. Rapidly and efficiently, with a rapidity and an efficiency possible only in modern times, huge and novel machines are raising new structures, new forms, new temples. And the forms and the structures and the temples are all different, of different material, of different designs, and of different utility ! Surely, one of the reasons why Bhubaneswar has been chosen yet once again to be the capital of modern Orissa must have been this linking of new with the old. Indeed, this association with the very best in stone and story which Orissa can rightly be proud of, should prove to be a source of true inspiration. Working in the shadow of these temples where the gods dwell, may be, the administrators of today will keep to righteous ways and govern truly, in the interest and welfare of their peoples, even as the officers of Ashoka were instructed to do. The Dhauli Edict is a veritable sermon in administration, and the words and instructions are the most clear as they are the most wise ever uttered on the subject. And all around, there are, for such as have souls and sensibility, all those exquisite sermons in stone, the Bhubaneswar temples, which carry and convey, in their look of stately grandeur and through their sanctity and art, a strange and silent peace and a great and lasting glory.

LINGARAJA TEMPLE, BHUBANESWAR, DETAIL OF SHIKARA : Crowned by a massive *amalaka*, the lofty tower of the Lingaraja is a piece of perfection. The vertical bands and miniature turrets add to the effect of immense height. ▶

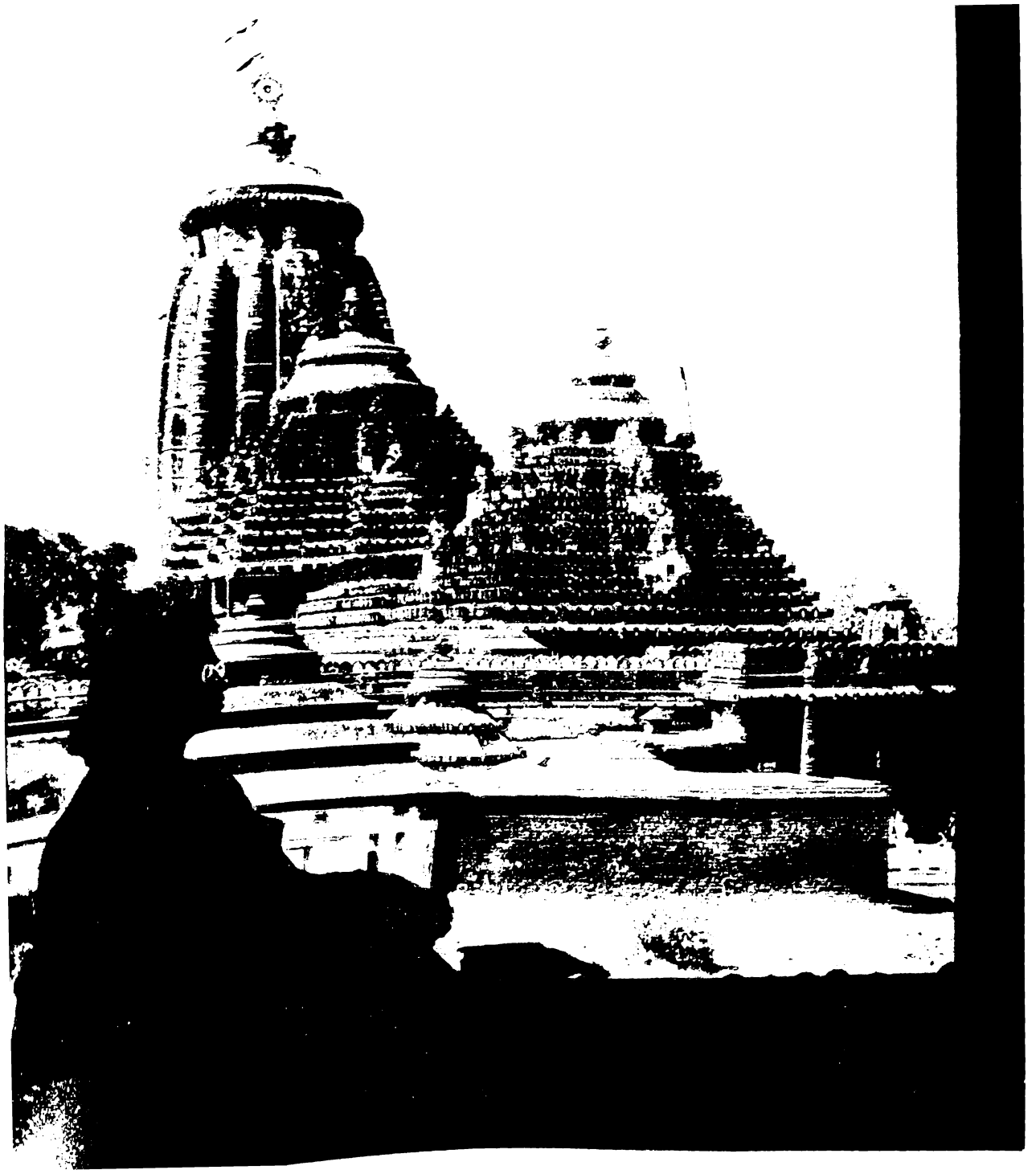






MUKTESWAR TEMPLE, BHUBANESWAR. GENERAL VIEW : Built around 975 A.D., the Mukteswar Temple is architecturally a gem of the Orissan Art. It is the only temple at Bhubaneswar which is ornamented both within and without.

◀ LINGARAJA TEMPLE, BHUBANESWAR, DETAIL OF SCULPTURE : Agni with the ram Agni is one of the eight *dik-palas*, gardians of the quarters. He is placed on the South-east.





TEMPLE OF JAGANNATHA PURI : Constituting one of his four *dhams*, Puri is one of the holiest places for the Hindu. The temple is dedicated to Krishna (Vishnu) as Lord of the Universe.

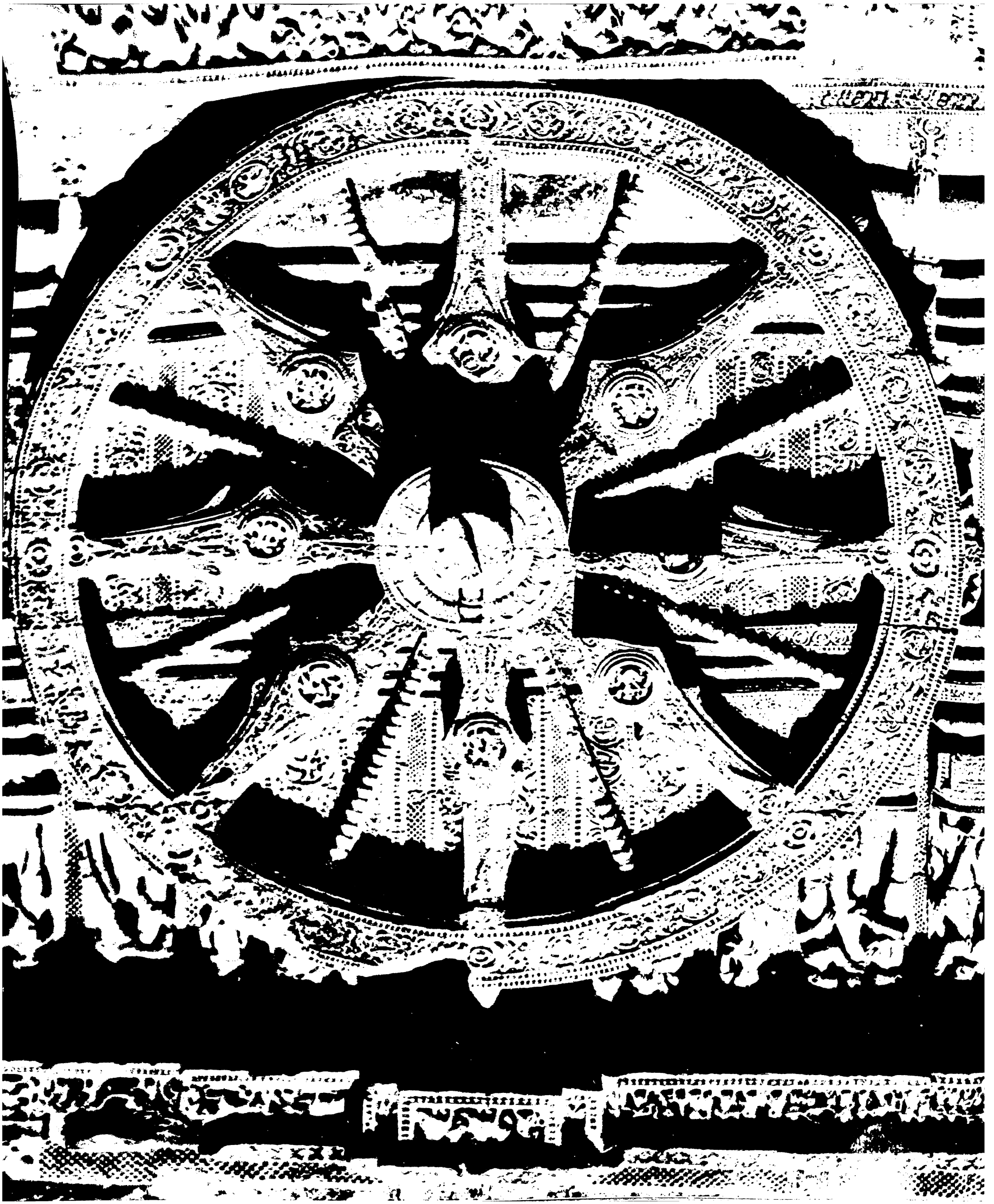


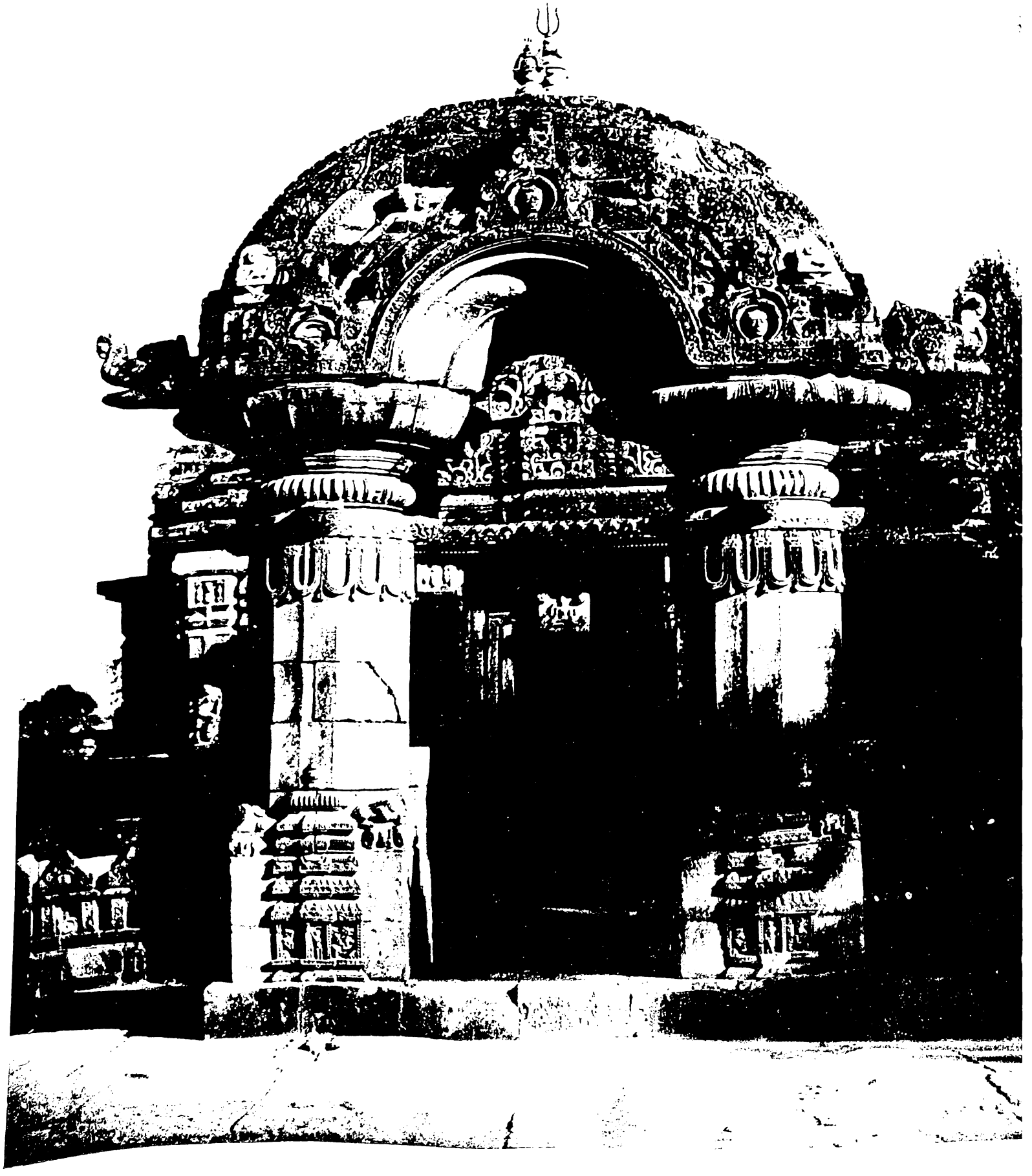
SEA-BEACH, PURI : Apart from being a sacred place, Puri located on the Orissan sea-coast is a first-rate resort for sea-bathing.



SAL-BHANJIKA, BHUBANESWAR : The Orissan sculptures of such 'apsaras' and 'nayikas' are stamped with excellent workmanship and gay abandon.

SUN-TEMPLE KONARK, VIEW OF SCULPTURED WHEEL : Dominating the sea scape in isolated grandeur, the celebrated Black Pagoda at Konark, 42 miles from Bhubaneswar, is shaped like a huge Chariot —of Time—standing on 24 massive and exquisitely carved wheels.





MUKTESHWAR TEMPLE, BHUBANESWAR, GENERAL VIEW OF TORANA : This magnificent Torana is a distinguishing feature of the Mukteshwar. The extremities of the marvellously carved arch are decorated with *makars* and the pillars are ornamented with garlands of pearls.

7 GAYA & BODH-GAYA

STATUE OF BUDDHA IN THE MAHABODHI TEMPLE, BODH-GAYA

Finally, Mara, the Tempter, challenged Gautama's right to perfect enlightenment and absolute release. What was his merit, and who was his witness to his piety? And thus challenged, the Sakya Muni made the earth-touching gesture and called upon Mother Earth to bear witness that in life after previous life, he had given freely and from true charity.



7 GAYA & BODH-GAYA

The few square kilometres which contain and bound the two places called Gaya and Bodh-Gaya are, possibly, the holiest ground in the whole of India. In respect of their sanctity, they may be rivalled, if at all, only by those two, Hindu and Buddhist, sacred spots located in like proximity, namely Benares and Sarnath. Benares is held by the Hindus a little above Gaya, whilst to the Buddhist, Bodh-Gaya is a whit more sacred than Sarnath, so that together the two combinations are about equal in the reverence they command. But, the region of Benares and Sarnath excepted, there is no other sanctified locality in the country which has, as a whole, such appeal for such large numbers of people. All the year round, do the Hindus and the Buddhists wend their way from distant corners of the country, and from far-off lands of the world, to these sites which lie on either side of the holy stream of Phalgu. Gaya blessed by Vishnu's foot, is visited every year, by lakhs of Hindus who come to offer *pindas*, food, to their ancestors ; and Bodh-Gaya, where, under the sacred Bodhi Tree, the Sakyamuni attained supreme enlightenment and perfect wisdom, is, likewise, visited by countless Buddhist pilgrims and reverenced as the most sacred spot of their faith.

Since Gaya is the city, the original place, and the other, Bodh-Gaya, however more important it may be in its own right, is the suburb, it were best to begin with the Hindu centre of pilgrimage. It is true that much of the importance and sanctity which Gaya today enjoys was conferred upon it after the

Buddhist place of pilgrimage had acquired such religious significance. In fact, part of the reason for ascribing holiness to Gaya was that the importance of the Buddhist spot had to be counteracted. Yet, it cannot be denied that Gaya was already a place of some prominence before the Buddha's visit and sojourn in its vicinity hallowed it. It certainly was a beautiful place; and with its high hills and the river valley—then all green and clean and bereft of the present-day dust and dryness—it's serene picturesqueness must have struck the fine and sensitive soul of the youth who was in search of release. Indeed, the *Lalitvistara* gives a charming description of the place as it was at the time of Buddha's arrival here from Rajgriha and mentions his stay at *Gayasirsha* hill before he proceeded to the village of Uruvela, now known as Bodh-Gaya.

The celebrated legend, which seems to have been spun out at the time of the general re-emergence of Hinduism as the dominating faith in India, is an elaborate piece of Puranic lore. The rather far-fetched story is told in the Gaya-Mahatma of the *Vayu Purana :* "A certain infidel (*Asur*) in the earliest age of the world (*Satya Yuga*) by his sanctity and severe mortification on the mountain Kolahala obtained through the favour of Vishnu the power of sending to heaven whatever person approached his body, which was so pure that it freed from sin whoever approached. By this means, besides other evils averted, the whole sinners on earth were saved; on which the judge of the infernal region (*Yama*), being deprived of his authority, united with Indra, king of heaven and other gods, and complained to Brahma, who repaired to Vishnu for advice. In consequence of this, it being necessary to use caution, Brahma told Gaya that he wanted a favour. The infidel monster, who was of an enormous size, was pleased by the civility of the God, and promised to grant whatever was asked, on which Brahma besought leave to give an entertainment on the pure body of the giant. Gaya according to his promise consented, and lay down at the south-west corner of Kolahala, at the place now called Gaya. Brahma created 14 Brahmans and gave them a great feast. When the feast was over, the infidel was about to rise, but the Lord of the infernal regions by the desire of Brahma placed over him a large rock named Dharamsila which was moreover the wife of a holy Brahman named Marichi Muni. Though the rock was very heavy, it could not keep the monster quiet. Then Brahma desired all the gods male and female, and all the saints (*Munis*) to leap upon Gaya; but all were unable to repress his struggles, upon which Brahma went to Vishnu in heaven, who created another Vishnu, and

lent this resemblance of himself to Brahma, who threw it on the gigantic Gaya, but without effect. Brahma then brought Vishnu himself who, when he came, assumed two new forms, Janardan and Pundarikaksha, and placed them on the giant; but he still threatened to rise. Vishnu then assumed the form of Gadadhar (mace-bearer), and stood on Gaya, but without effect. Brahma then made three forms of himself, Kedara, Kanakeswara, and Gajapati; the Sun made also three forms of himself, Uttararka, Dakshinarka, and Gayaditya. These six incarnations mounted Gaya, as did also the goddesses Lakshmi, Sita, Gauri-Mangala, Gayatri, Savitri, Trisandhya and Saraswati. Gaya now became quiet, and said that he would do whatever Vishnu desired, if they would give him more power. On which Vishnu put his foot on the head of Gaya, and all the deities promised to reside upon him, and that the whole extent of his person, 10 miles in length, should be called Gayakshetra. Whatever pilgrims made offerings over his head, Gaya Sir, which extends two miles in diameter, should procure the immediate admission of their ancestors to heaven; while those, who worshipped on any part of his body, should recover from all sin, even from murder of a Brahman".

As usual, there is, in this ton of allegorical elaboration, an ounce or two of meaning. Thus the might and strength of the Gaya-Asura is a figurative allusion to the power and influence of Buddhism, and the fact that to over-ride the giant, the puissance and assistance of all the gods and deities of the Hindus had to be requisitioned should be construed as a tribute to the prevailing force of the Buddhist faith. The submission of the *asura* signalises the final triumph of Hinduism; and the detail that it was Vishnu's foot which ultimately put down the monster indicates, allegorically, the supremacy of the Vaishnava sect over the Buddhists as well as the Brahmaites and the Shaivites. However, the opinion of some other scholars is different. One of them believes that the myth indicates a compromise of Brahmanism with the demon-worship of earlier times, in which case Gaya the *asur*, might be regarded as a demon of darkness like Vrita, and not a pious heretic representing Buddhism. Again, contrary to the common assumption that the Hindu's sanctification of Gaya followed the coming into prominence of Bodh-Gaya as a Buddhist centre, another scholar maintains that Gaya existed as a *Pitri Tirtha* centuries before Christ and the "legend is a *post facto* attempt to account for the sanctity of the place". On the whole, the explanation that the puranic tale allegorises the reassertion of Brahmanism over Buddhism seems to be

the most plausible, and fits in more satisfactorily with the sanctity of the *Vishnupada* as a counterpart of the Buddha's foot-prints at Bodh-Gaya.

The reason why Gaya is regarded as a place meant for the performance mainly of *shradh* for release from hell of one's ancestors, even though the original legend lays down that those who worshipped on any part of the Gaya-Kshetra should be absolved from all sin, is given in another story. After the ceremony of the sacrifice on the body of Gaya, the great god Brahma had given most liberal fees to the Brahmans of the place and enjoined upon them that they should not beg for more from others. Out of their proverbial greediness, however, the Brahmans made Dharma perform another sacrifice. Brahma then cursed them that they should live by the fees paid by pilgrims who come to perform *shradh* at Gaya. That is why the usual ceremonies performed whether on the *head* or on the *body* of Gaya are carried out entirely for the relief of one's ancestors. For that purpose, however, Gaya is, the *tirtha* par excellence. The *shradh* at Gaya is counted as one of the four ways of achieving salvation. The Mahabharata says: "A man should aspire to have many sons; the reason is that one of them may go to Gaya and liberate the ancestors by offering them *pindas* or may perform an Ashvamedha sacrifice or may let loose a Nila Bull. At Gaya there is the Phalgu river, the place known as Gaya-sheersh, and the imperishable Banyan-tree. Food offered to ancestors at this place yields never-ending results". In fact, as one of the *Tristhali*—the three most holy places of pilgrimage for Hindus, namely Prayaga, Kashi and Gaya—or, if Kurukshetra is included, as one of the four most sacred, Gaya's sanctity is for the *pindas*. Tonsure at Prayaga, offerings at Kurukshetra, discarding of the body at Kashi, and *pindas* to one's ancestors at Gaya—such is the formula. Naturally, for the correct observance of this obligation to one's parents and other ancestors, there would be much direction and ritual. Thus, before starting for Gaya, one should go round one's place of living and through a *shradh* there invoke one's forefathers to repair to Gaya along with the pilgrim, for their liberation. The ancestors usually considered for salvation through *shradh* at Gaya are twelve, six on the paternal and six on the maternal side, each of these groups of six itself being composed of three males and three females. Others restrict the number to nine or only to six. In practice, however, everyone is invoked, everyone who is dead—"all agnates, cognates, *bandhus*, those who died in childhood before they cut their teeth, those who died in the womb; those who died from fire, lightning, wild beasts, poison,

those dead in the forest, etc.; those who as a result of their bad acts have become evil spirits or are being tortured in hell, those who have been obliged to become beasts etc.; those without any relations and of any family whether one's own or of one's guru, or of one's father-in-law". Understandably enough, the consequences are, at times, quite embarrassing. Since the witnesses invoked are the gods themselves, much truth is revealed which, in the interest of respectability and worldly values, should have remained unknown. Thus it is alleged that when King Vishala offered *pindas*, three hands of his ancestors shot out to accept them—one white, the other red, and the third black. The white hand was that of the good father who had gone to heaven; the red hand was that of the grandfather who had killed a Brahman; the black hand was that of the great grandfather who had killed several sages. The latter two had been sent to hell. All three were, of course, liberated. A more curious piece of revelation was that which the sage Bhardwaja came by. When he offered *pindas* at Gaya, two hands came to collect the offering. The sage's mother then confessed that one was her lover's, the other her husband's. However, since the *shradh* performed at Gaya fetches inexhaustible merit, both the husband and the lover of the sage's mother attained salvation.

The *shradh* ceremony is performed at what is known as the *Preta-parvata*, the hill of the damned souls, or the rock of the ghosts. But apart from this spot, there are many more in the entire Gaya-Kshetra which the pious votary is required to visit. The complete pilgrimage entails going to forty-five places. Another category of pilgrims visits thirty-eight, and so on and so forth, till, passing through the stage of visiting seven, and three and two, one gets, finally, to the pilgrimage which may be confined only to one spot, the *Pret-shila*, or *Preta-parvata*, mentioned above. As has been observed earlier, most of the pilgrims come for the *shradh* at Gaya, and one may see, on any day of the year, if not at any time of the day, the sight of what one European observer calls, "human imbecility in a most disgusting form".

The most important and holy spot in the entire area is the *Vishnupada* over which stands the temple of the same name. The foot-print measuring 5 metres by 3 is worshipped with great reverence, for it is made by the sacred foot of Lord Vishnu, the Gadadhara, who abides here in this form. It is He who is worshipped here by all, even by the gods themselves. Brahma himself

acknowledges Vishnu's superiority and says in the *Vayu Purana*, "I bow to Vishnu the wielder of the mace, who is pure and unaffected by time, who abides in Gaya, and is the giver of grace". In fact, because of all this emphasis on Gaya as the centre of Vaishnav worship, it is often held that Gaya was sacred to Vishnu long before the advent of Buddhism and the resurgence of later Brahmanism; and the celebrated passage in the Rigveda—"Vishnu crossed this and placed his foot in three ways; the whole of it is compassed in his steps"—is believed to have reference not to the earth, the firmament and the heaven, but to Samarohna, Vishnupada and Gaya-sheersh—all three at Gaya! Be that as it may, the Vishnupada temple has been a place of pilgrimage for centuries and finds mention in many an historical record and account. The object of worship is, as has been stated earlier, the foot-print of Vishnu made when he stood upon Gaya, the infidel. The temple is located at one end of the old town and there are several subsidiary shrines around and about it. The present granite structure was built by Ahalya Bai and consists of the *mandapa* and the sanctum which is roofed by an octagonal pyramid about 30 metres high. The impression of the divine foot is upon a clay basin 1·2 metre in diameter. The building is, to say the least, no architecural wonder. The sanctum is altogether clumsy, although the *nat-mandir*, the square, entrance hall, is not without a touch of grace.

Not far from the temple, to the north-west, runs the road that takes the pilgrim across the Phalgu towards Bodh-Gaya. This sacred river is supposed to be the Lord Vishnu again. In fact Gaya is all Vishnu, in various manifestations. In the Phalgu, he resides as the *Avyakta*—non-manifest; only as liquid. The waters of this river which are fed by the streamlets, the Mohana and Lilajan. The latter, Lilajan, is Prakrit for the Sanskrit Nairanjana, the immaculate, and it joins the Mohana about a mile from Bodh-Gaya and then loses its identity in the Phalgu. But not its own sanctity, for the Bodhisattva had bathed in this river, and, according to the legend, had thrown his alms-bowl into it, making the wish that if he were destined to be the Buddha, the bowl should go upstream. And that it did, whereupon Gautama had taken to the six-year effort at attaining supreme wisdom. The place where the bowl was thrown is known as Kanaksar, or Swarnasar, the golden pond.

The eleven odd kilometres which lie between Gaya and Bodh-Gaya make a pleasant journey, and for the soul which has the gift of sensibility, for the man of

feeling and imagination, every kilometre of the region should prove to be full of rich associations. One can picture to oneself the Bodhisattva moving along these very paths towards Bodh-Gaya. Having left home, he had tried system after system and teacher after teacher, that he might find what he sought : peace of mind, wisdom and enlightenment. Nothing seemed to satisfy him; nothing sufficed. Neither Brahmanism nor the philosophy of the Nirgranthas, neither yoga nor asceticism, neither scholarship nor seclusion, gave him what he wanted. The last place where he had groped for light was Rajgriha, the capital of King Bimbasara, Asoka's grandfather. Here lived one Udraka at whose feet seven hundred pupils sat and learnt the 'doctrine of qualities and their effects divested from their ideas'. Yet even here, and yet once again, Gautama met with nothing but frustration and disillusionment. The flight of his fancy, the sweep of his soul, could not be content with, nor contained within, the limit and scope, all too narrow and little, of the teachings of the teachers he had come across. He left Udraka's school and with five pupils of Udraka, who chose to accompany him, he set out towards Gaya, and thence to the village of Uruvela, where beholding the river Nairanjana, with its clear water, with a holy spot on its bank, and the village decorated with brick-built-houses, trees, herbs and pastures, the mind of the Bodhisattva was greatly delighted and he decided to abide there in a forest nearby.

He stayed in Uruvela for the next six years, until he became the Buddha. During these six years he was to practise and pass through austerities and penance of unheard-of rigour. Determined to wriggle out of the grasp of the crocodile of carnal wants, vowed to a life of ruthless self-mortification, out to meditate his way into salvation, this man, the future Buddha, fixed his residence on the banks of the pure Nairanjana. He reduced his physical needs to the utmost, to a limit at which imagination staggers. And then started that heroic struggle of soul against flesh, mind against matter, of light against ignorance, of release against infatuation, of ceasing-to-be against being, which was destined to end in such glory not only for the individual who undertook it, but for all mankind. The story of his acts and doings, of his penance and patience, of his suffering and selflessness which Bodh-Gaya witnessed has been recounted and depicted at great length and in detail, in art and literature, in many lands and in many languages. Not only in the web of words, but also in carven marble and in exquisitely chiselled stone, in murals and frescoes, one may see the many scenes of the Bodhisattva's stay at this spot. One of the most memorable of these scenes is the incident of his

fainting from complete exhaustion through a stupendous reduction of his diet which had been brought down to but one grain of rice, to a single seed of sesamum ! Worn out to the shadow of a shadow, the skin and bones which his body had become was the limit of such penance. As he paced up and down, he felt a severe pain and fell down and fainted, and that jerked the mind into a new line of approach. He resolved never again to go to the extreme in self-mortification : dimly, the middle-course, the golden path of avoiding extremes, was shaping itself.

The refreshment which he accepted after his new resolve has its own charming story. Sujata, the daughter of the headman of the village of Uruvela, had adored the Bodhisattva ever since he had set foot in the forests of her village, and she had been feeding many Brahmans in order that her one great prayer might one day be granted. And this prayer was that the Bodhisattva might some day receive an offering of food from her. Now was the time for her to provide the refreshment, for the Bodhisattva had put aside his austerities and desired to partake of nourishing food and to regain his strength. Sweet was the gesture, sweeter the words as she offered the golden bowl of the purest milk-rice to the Master who sat at the foot of a great Nigrodha-tree. "My lord, accept what I have offered thee. And, may there arise to thee as much joy as has come to me."

The consequences of accepting the excellent and nourishing food prepared and offered by Sujata were far-reaching. Gautama's five companions left him for they thought that he had departed from the path of true asceticism and had no further hope of his arriving himself at or guiding them to their cherished goal. Secondly, Gautama himself grew physically whole once more. As the Ceylonese Chronicle, the *Mahavamsa*, puts it, "the Bodhisattva regained his strength, also the thirty-two signs of a perfect being, *Mahapurusha*, along with eighty-four minor signs and the glory of Heaven became manifest on his person". Finally, and this was the most important aspect of the three-fold result, he came by the first clue to the path of wise moderation which later on he was to perfect and to preach so well. Never again would he recommend to himself or to others such extreme rigour of penance and such mortification of the flesh. The Wise One who knew that even when the soul were disembodied, it should remain a soul, still be, that is, and, therefore, total extinction, *nirvana*, alone could constitute full release, knew this also that whilst the soul was housed in the tabernacle of flesh, this last could not be ignored, not entirely and wholly disregarded.

However, the task he had set himself was far from being finished, and he resumed his meditations, renewed his efforts. He went to the *pipal* tree which as the Bodhi tree was to become such a celebrated place of pilgrimage, and taking his seat thereunder said unto himself those famous words: "Let my skin, sinew, and bones become dry—and welcome! Let all the flesh and blood in my body dry up. Never will I stir from this seat till I have attained supreme and absolute wisdom!" This sounds like a contradiction of his earlier conviction, but possibly the resolve this time allowed for acceptance of food and right nourishment supplied where he sat. All the same, it is difficult to reconcile this gesture of negation with the gracious acceptance of Sujata's milk-rice.

Now, when the Bodhisattva sat under the Bodhi tree with the firm decision to arrive at perfect enlightenment, Mara, the tempter who makes (creatures) die was grieved, and like the other gods, rejoiced not. Gathering his host of demons and summoning his three alluring daughters, Tanha, Raga and Rati, to accompany him, he repaired to the spot where, bathed in a golden light emanating from his body and illuminating all the quarters of the globe, sat the Sakya Muni in meditation profound. The tempter employed all wiles and weapons, used both affection and affliction, and pleasure and terror, and virtue and violence, to make him desist from his pursuit. But nothing availed. Then, after Mara had been thus vanquished, the Bodhisattva entered, at night-fall, into the meditation which enlightens understanding, and, before the day began to break, attained the highest and most perfect wisdom. For seven weeks thereafter, the Buddha, the Enligtened One, remained where he was, now sitting, then standing, and, again, promenading along a cloistered path: yet he ate not nor drank anything, nay felt no bodily wants at all, but fed on the bliss of the eightfold path, and on the joy of its fruit, *nirvana*. According to some scholars, the temptations offered by the daughters of Mara were dangled during this period, after supreme enlightenment had been achieved, and the bewitching beauties had displayed their apsara-like grace and danced their dances of pleasure, and sung their songs of spring, where Sujata the simple and chaste had offered the nourishment, under the Nigrodha tree to which also during these forty-nine days the Wise and the Wake again went for one week. And it was during this interval, too, that the final and a most subtle temptation was thrown his way: Was he to preach his doctrine to mankind or withdraw from the world? And the mind, suffering still from the last of the illusions, reasoned thus: "This doctrine is profound,

recondite, hard to comprehend, rare, excellent, beyond dialectic, subtle, only to be understood of the wise". This doubt had been experienced by innumerable Buddhas before him, and at this point, each one of these had withdrawn, for surely those who could would, by themselves, know that which was to be known; and those who could not would not learn what was to be learnt, even from the Wise One. But this Buddha was not misled. Granted that great truths do not take hold of the heart of masses, at least not easily, and one would prefer to desist and strive no more, yet if even the Buddha would strive not, who will ? Thus he thought, and then went forth to Benares to set the wheel of Law in motion, leaving Bodh-Gaya hallowed for ever, marked indelibly with the foot-prints of the greatest man of our world.

It is easy to understand that whosoever accepted the refuge of the Buddha would honour the place where he became the Buddha. Naturally, therefore, the spot grew to be a most frequented centre of pilgrimage even in the earliest phases of the spread of Buddhism. By a curious turn of Fate's irony, it was Asoka, then a heretic, who, visiting Bodh-Gaya nearly two centuries and a half after the Enlightenment, destroyed, to quote Hiuen Tsang, "the vestiges left by the Buddha. He started at the head of a large army to cut down the tree. The roots, the trunk, the branches and the leaves were cut and divided into small particles and then at a distance of some ten paces to the west were piled a heap of the debris. He ordered a Brahman to burn them as a sacrifice to his god—Agni." But such destruction was not to be, for, to quote again from the interesting account of the Chinese pilgrim, "before the flame and the fumes had dissipated there was seen in the middle of the burning pile two trees issuing forth with leaves rich and verdant". This alleged miracle is supposed to have converted Asoka who was so remorse-stricken that he stayed by the tree day and night. In tending and restoring it, he forgot all else, neglected his duties of state and affairs of heart so ruefully, that from jealousy and ire his chief queen set one of her attendants to burn the tree once more. This was accomplished but, once again it was carefully and reverently nursed back to life. Such vicissitudes in the existence of this tree are too numerous to be recounted here. Suffice it to say, that the Bodhi Tree one sees today may or may not be the same from under which the Sun of Intelligence had shone forth; however, the general belief is that the tree which is worshipped at present "is the same *pipal*, which watered with odorous essences and perfumed milk by kings of all countries, by the clergy and

the laity of distant places" has managed to survive centuries of neglect and a series of attempts to cut it down.

Asoka built a protective wall 3 metres high around the Bodhi tree, set up a small vihara by its side, and erected a Diamond Throne (*Vajrasana*) on the exact spot where the Buddha had sat in meditation. The vihara was later converted into a beautiful temple. The present-day Mahabodhi temple is not that which Asoka built but is believed to have been constructed in the 6th century, "exactly over the remains of Asoka's Temple—and of the same dimensions—so that the Vajrasana Throne still retains its old position of Buddha's seat, the reputed centre of the universe." There are conflicting accounts of the building and repairs etc. of the structure which adorns the place now. Some ascribe it to a Brahman who was commanded in a vision by Shiva Mahadeva to erect this temple. But whoever built it in the first instance, many additions and much enrichment must have been obviously the work of later devotees. In fact, the names of several kings and rulers, Indian and foreign, are often mentioned in this context. The truth is that consequent upon the decline of Buddhism in this country, Bodh-Gaya came to be neglected and deserted. It suffered almost total eclipse for nearly seven centuries during the 12th to 19th, when, towards the end of the last century, many scholars and archaeologists turned their attention to unearth and spot-light these most-precious-ever relics and memories which humanity possesses. The ruins which the visitor looks at today are all as well restored as all possible care and cost could succeed in doing, and the spot which pilgrims from far and near come to visit presents a neat and charming sight. Apart from the accessory buildings of modern times, like the Mahabodhi, the Burmese, the Chinese, the Tibetan, the Jain and the P.W.D. rest houses as well as the pretty Museum, set up by the Department of Archaeology, there are, within the main enclosure of sanctity, the Bodhi Tree; the Jewel Shrine of the Buddha's walk studded by representations of the miraculous blossoms which had sprung forth under the holly foot-steps; several votive stupas; the quaintly, even exquisitely, carved remains of the Ashokan railing; and, of course, the great temple. Dominating the entire landscape, this last building is a most impressive and noble structure. The slander and straight-edged pyramidal tower rises to a height of 50 metres and the four replicas of the turret, standing on each corner, contribute to the solemn effect. Opposite to the entrance, a gilded statue of the Master adorns the sanctuary. The *bhumi-sparsh mudra*, the earth-touching gesture, shows the Buddha calling

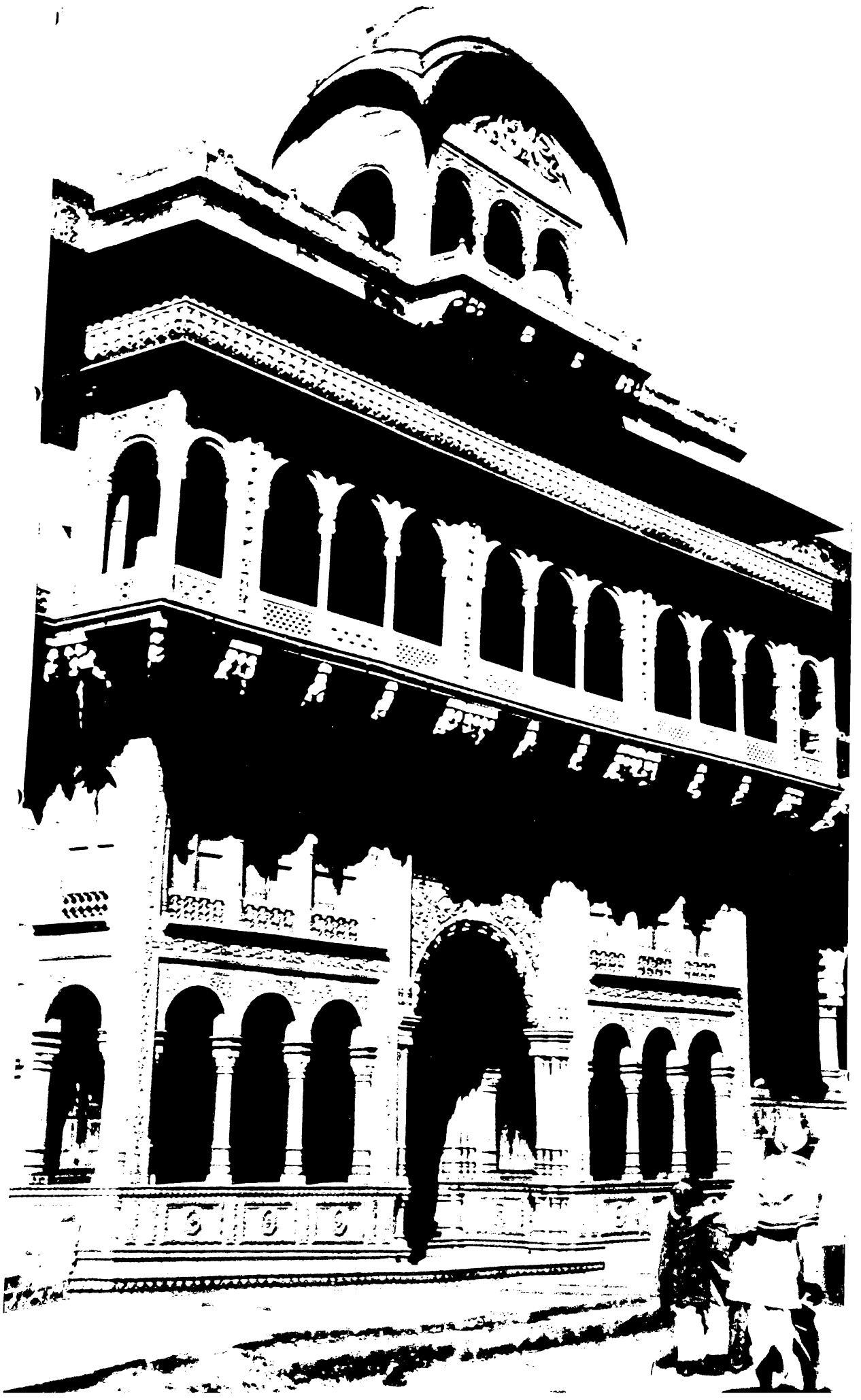
upon Mother Earth to bear witness to the sacrifices he had made in his earlier lives. The stairs on either side lead up to the middle chamber where once was placed the gold statue of the Buddha which Hiuen Tsang had seen on his visit to the place thirteen centuries ago. The terrace affords a good view of what lies around and about the holy shrine.

And yet what lies around and about, or even within the holy shrine, is something greater than the brick and mortar, spire and sculpture, of today or yesterday. It is the air serene and sense of deep spirituality with which the place vibrates ; it is the sacred memory of a great effort, the stupendous realization that here, 2,500 years ago, a man, a man like any one of us, made but of flesh and bone sought, sought on behalf of all mankind, and for all men, and found a way out of all the ills and allurements of life—it is these which Bodh-Gaya enshrines. True, such an atmosphere might be come by at other holy places, but, somehow, it is here at Bodh-Gaya that, more than at any other like spot, of whatever religion, one experiences that strange presence, almost palpable and yet too subtle to be wholly grasped, and an uplifting, near-ecstatic feeling of grace and beauty, quiet and purity, which Count Kaserling has put so well : "A marvellously spiritual air breathes in this holiest site of Buddhism. It is not the atmosphere of Buddhism as such, as I felt it only the day before yesterday in Sarnath. It is not that of devotion in general, as on the Ganges or in Rameshvaram, nor yet the atmosphere of consecration which surrounds a very great monument : it is the peculiar spirit of a place where a particular man whose greatness stands alone in history has found his self. Much may have contributed to the fact that this spirit has been preserved in such strength and purity; that it is reborn unaltered in every receptive mind. The chief reason is undoubtedly the fact that Buddha received his revelation even here, in the shadow of the very Bodhi tree which spreads its branches out to-day—a revelation of such intensity that it continues to shine on and on in millions of souls....The most profound, the holiest peace reigns here; all voices are lowered of their own accord. And the ancient trees softly whisper their great memories.

"Buddha-Gaya is, for my feelings, the most sacred site of the whole earth". And with that statement the followers of all faiths will heartily agree.

MAHABODHI TEMPLE, BODH-GAYA : View of the Tower. The replicas of the turret standing at each corner heighten the effect of grandeur and solemnity. The temple stands by the celebrated Bodhi Tree. ▶

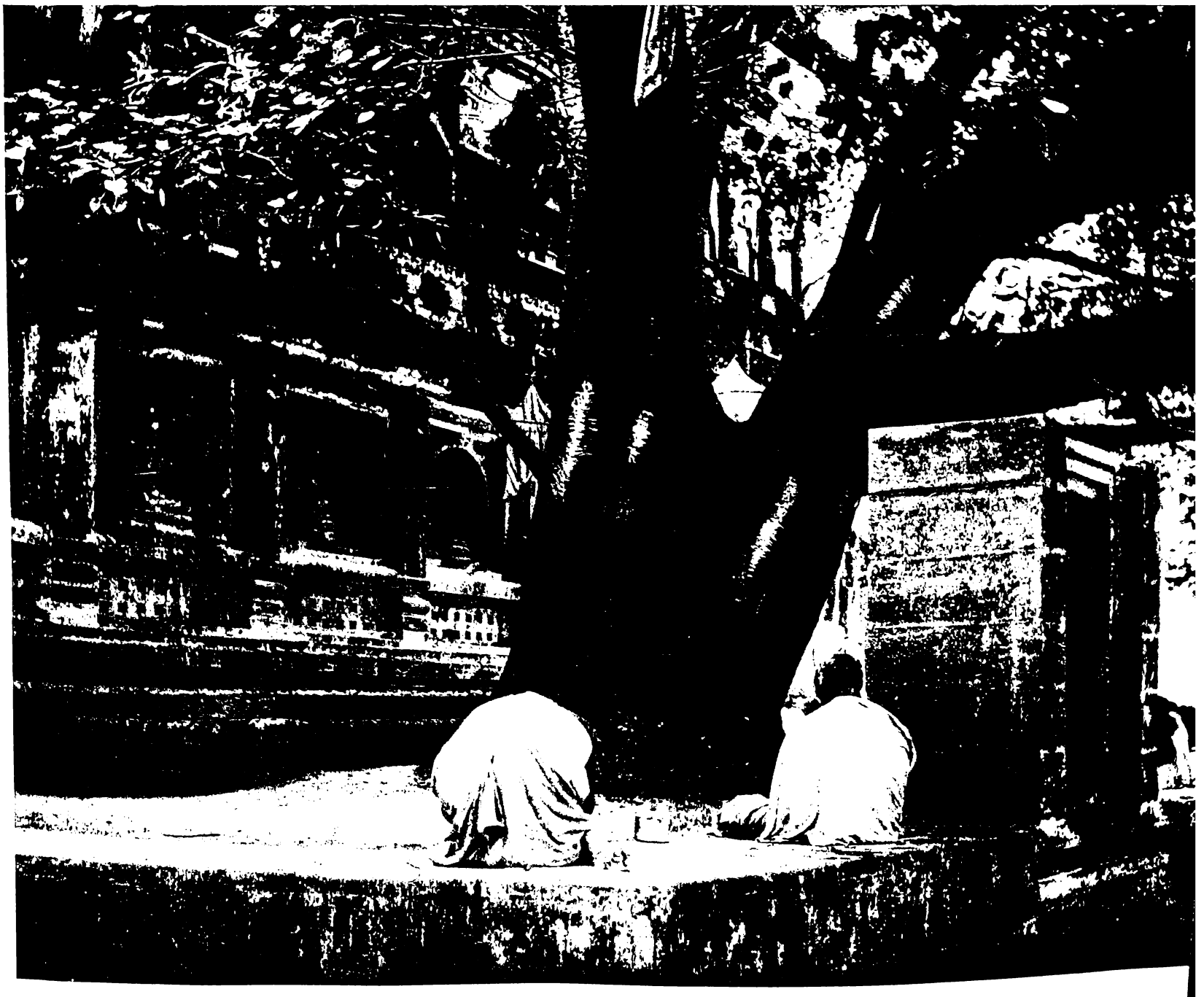




HOMAGE TO THE MASTER, BODH-GAYA : Several subsidiary structures have been constructed in the vicinity of the sacred Bodhi Tree. Some of these are temples like the above which have been put up by foreign nations.

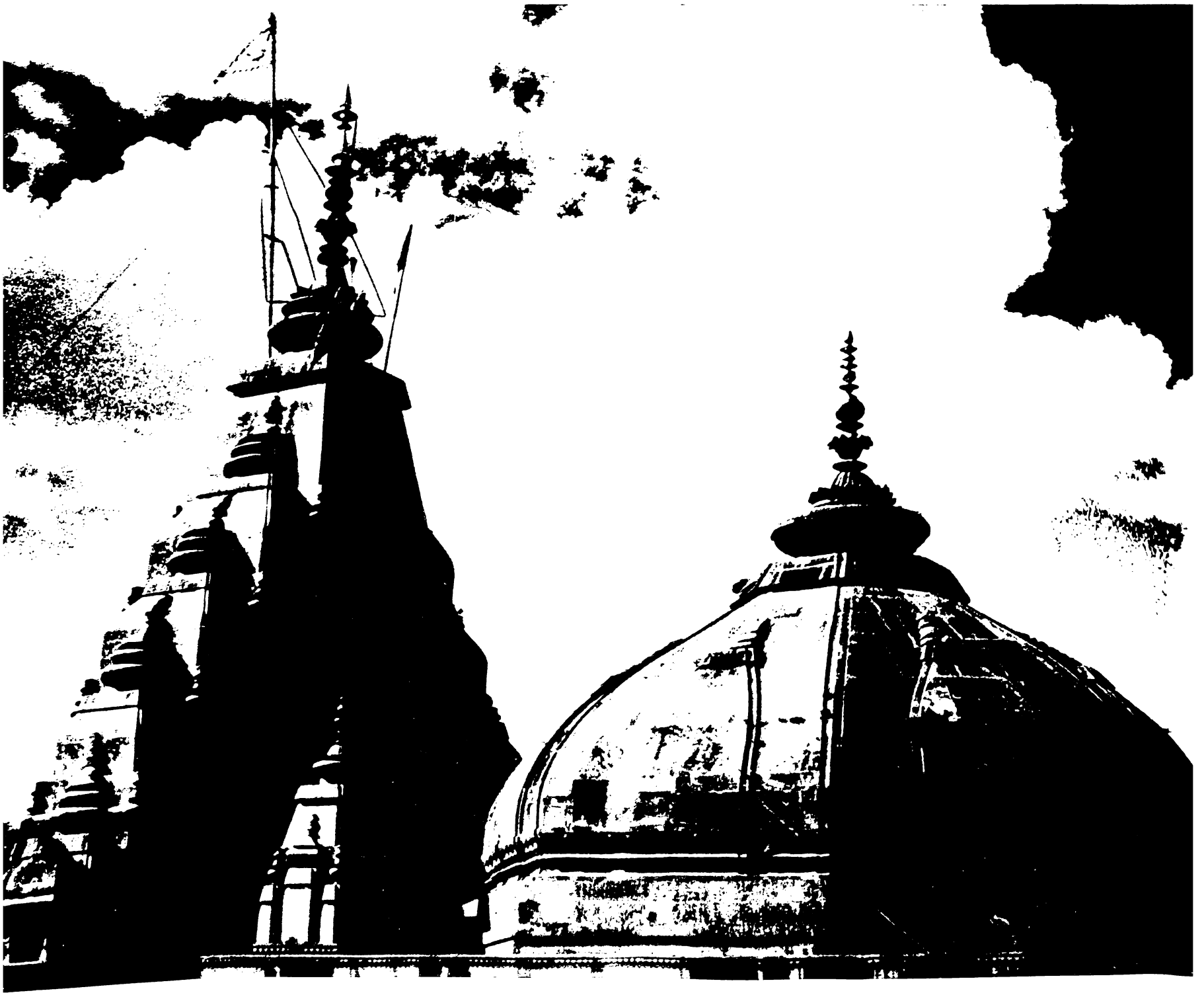
◀ A DHARMASHALA AT GAYA : The elegant frontage is typical of the style of old buildings in Northern India. Such pilgrim-houses are found in abundance in all holy cities.





THE SACRED TREE, BODH-GAYA : Here under the shade of this tree, the Sakya Muni sat 2,500 years ago and became the Buddha. In the sphere of Man's religion, there are few objects of greater reverence. Behind the Bo-Tree stands the famous Mahabodhi Temple.

◀ VISHNU—PRESERVER OF THE UNIVERSE : Tended by Lakshmi and attended upon by others, the god rests on his Ananta-bed. Gaya is sacred to this member of the Hindu Trinity who had finally subdued *Gaya*, the pious demon of Hindu legends.



VISHNUPADA TEMPLE, GAYA : View of the spire spiking through clouds in the City's sky. The temple enshrines the divine foot-print of Lord Vishnu.



THE BUDDHA, BODH-GAYA : The famous statue in the Mahabodhi Temple. The Master, serene and enlightened, is seated on the *Vajrasana* in the *Bhumi-Sparsh-mudra*, touching the earth.

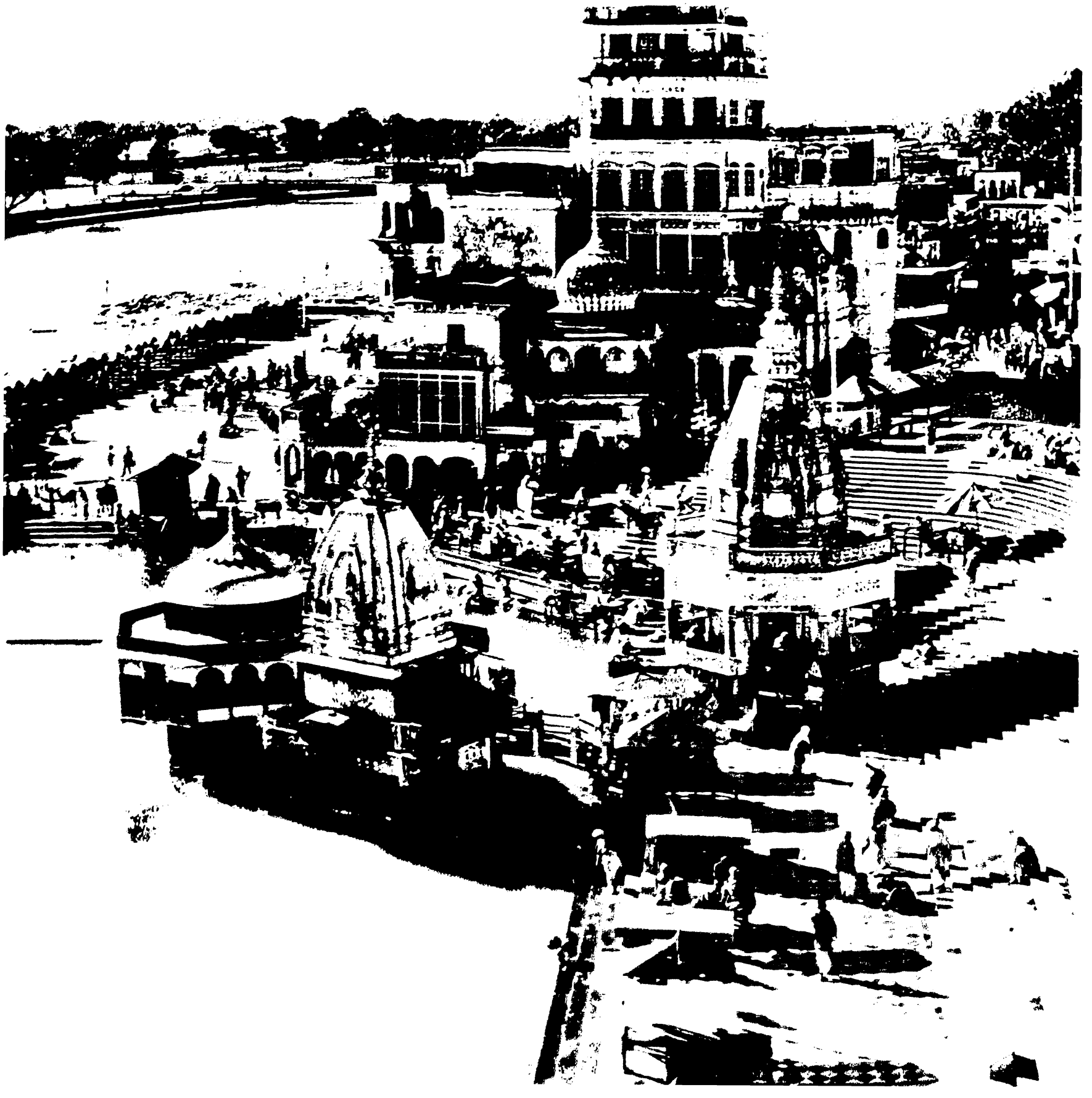


ASHOKAN RELICS, BODH-GAYA : The quaintly-carved pillars are part of the railing which Ashoka, The Great put up around the sacred Tree and the Temple.

8 HARDWAR

VIEW OF HAR-KI-PAIRI AND BRAHMA-KUNDA

At Hardwar, the Ganges enters the plains, and here, according to the charming legend of the Descent of the divine stream, Brahma and others had gathered to welcome her. Also, it was into the waters of the Brahma-Kunda that drops of *amrit*, elixir of the gods, had fallen from the *kumbha*, pot, which contained it.



8 HARDWAR

Hardwar, ancient Mayapuri, is one of the seven holy cities of the Hindus, and, being located on the Holy Ganges, is regarded, primarily, as a resort of Shiva. It nestles at the foot of the Shivaliks, against a back-drop of green forests through which the river Ganges moves towards this place where she enters the plains, and it is this sacred stream on whose right bank the city stands which sanctifies it. All the holiness of Hardwar is to be attributed and attributed wholly to the Ganges, which is supreme among all the reverenced rivers of India. The Ganges flows by Benares also, but at Benares there is the temple of Vishweshwara, and other places holy in themselves. Likewise, the Ganges at Allahabad is not the Ganges alone, but has the additional spiritual strength of two other rivers, the blue Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati. But at Hardwar the Ganges is everything that counts, and she alone, the pure and undefiled, issuing fresh from the mountains, the virgin goddess, cleansing the soul of all who seek her refuge. Here, there is nothing else but the river. One goes up to Rishikesh, and there too is but the same Ganges, only younger and fresher. One repairs to Kankhal, and there too the same stream spreads its divinity, a little, ever so little, tamed and city-bred already, a little less brilliant and a little less ebullient, yet the same Ganges still, which would accept the ashes of the dead and will wash away the sins of the deceased ! Hardwar is the Ganges; first and last, it is this greatest river of India, her most sacred waters, the stream which was the source of redemption even for Shiva. Down she comes, down the slopes of the majestic mountains, for all around in the entire region which surrounds Hardwar, rise hills and forests, green

and grand and blue and beautiful, which move the visitor to wonder and worship, and through these the white stream of the youthful Ganges runs like a slender thread of dream-like purity, like a necklace of diamonds against an emerald setting.

At Hardwar, there are no great and grandiose temples. Nor is there need for any, for, as Havell puts it, "as long as the Rishis, who laid the foundation of Indian religious philosophy, lived within sight of the god's own dwelling-places, so long as they were able to worship them in those great forest cathedrals which nature had built at the foot of the Devas' thrones, it seemed vain and foolish to build for them elaborate shrines of wood, or brick, or stone". Whatever shrines do exist, are poor, insignificant things, shabby-looking as a candle before the sun, and equally pointless; since all about the place, there is a temple incarnate, a deity personified, the perennially flowing, the ever-new Ganges. And she suffices. Every day and in normal course a number of pilgrims come to Hardwar, and all that they do, all that they are required to do, is to take the holy dip. And on the annual fair of Baisakhi, thousands assemble, and all that they worship or need worship is the Ganges, and, once again, the bath in her magic waters is all the rites one need perform. The difference is merely that the dip is a little more meritorious on this particular day. Then at the time of the *Ardh-kumbha*, held after every six years, lakhs of people congregate in the holy city, yet even on that auspicious occasion, it is the same touch of the sacred waters which is the aim and goal of everyone who comes. Finally, whenever the great Kumbha falls at Hardwar, and millions flock to the then most sacred spot in Hindudom, no temple need be visited, no bells rung, nor any idols propitiated. The bath is all things and more, combined in one. Even on this most auspicious of days, it is the bath "which gives the spiritual benefits of one lakh of *pradakshina* around the earth", so that all that the pilgrim seeks during the celebration of this ageless festival of India is the lap of the great Mother whose generosity fertilizes the fields of India and feeds her millions, seeks still the purification that her waters bring about, and the peace that her touch bestows upon the devotees who shout *Ganga Maia Ki Jai*, Victory to Ganges the Mother. That is the slogan one hears at Hardwar, the gateway to the valley of gods, the entrance to the court and heaven of Hara, the Mahadeva, according to the Shaivites, to the *baikuntha* of Hari, the god Vishnu, according to his worshippers. Besides the Ganges, all else is irrelevant, is nought.

The celebrated legend of the descent of this great stream is as charming a piece of Hindu mythology as any. Bhagiratha, a descendant of Sagara, of the Ikshuvaku dynasty, practised rigorous austerities that he might liberate the souls of his ancestors who had been cursed by the sage Kapila to eternal damnation. They had been searching for their sacrificial horse which the crafty Indra had stolen and tied outside the Sage's hermitage. The sons of Sagara were misled into planning an attack on Kapila and he duly burnt them to await the redemption which Bhaghiratha was to bring about. Pleased with his prayers and penance, the god of gods allowed that the Ganges might descend from the heavens above, so that the ashes of his ancestors be laved with her waters and purified. But who was to absorb the shock and impact of the mighty waters falling from the celestial regions ? So Shiva, the great god and gracious, offered to receive them in his tangled locks from which the stream, thereafter, issued forth to follow Bhagiratha's bidding. He led her down the mazes of the mountains and brought her to this place, Hardwar, in order that his ancestors might be absolved of their sinfulness. As is well known, this legend has been represented in a masterly sculpture at Mahabalipuram, at the other end of India; but the theme is such a popular one that there are innumerable other places where art has worked on it, in diverse material and with varying result.

The 'Descent' is, of course, only one of the several legends associated with the Ganges and this city of hers, Hardwar. The beautiful goddess, moving about in 'maiden meditation, fancy free', was destined to be the heroine of several gay adventures and the witness of many romantic-cum-religious exploits. The most interesting of these stories is that of her marriage with King Shantanu, father of Bhishma, the great warrior of the Mahabharata. It is stated that Shantanu's father Pratipa was once engaged in penance at Gangadwara, as Hardwar was then called, when Ganga appeared as a beautiful maiden, sat on his right thigh and desired him to make her his bride. Pratipa, who would not be seduced, answered her with logic unanswerable that, since she had sat on his right thigh which was the proper place for one's children, and not upon the left thigh where one's consort sat, she could be his daughter-in-law but not his wife. Would she therefore consent to be his son's bride ? And this she became, in due course, yet not that easily, for in the true style of Indian mythology there are more legends within legends, and as bewildering as beautiful. Thus it chanced that when the sage Vashista was once engrossed in prayers, the eight *Vasus*, the

attendants of Indra, had the ill-luck to fly between him and the sun. His concentration affected, the sage was wroth and cursed the *Vasus* to mortal birth. "Be born among men", said he, and since it was impossible to escape the effect of this dire pronouncement, they came to Ganga and they entreated her, and she consented, to be their mother. The idea was that as soon as they had been born, they would be cast into the Ganges so that they might get back, at the soonest possible, to their celestial abode. In return for this favour, each of the *Vasus* promised to confer an eighth part of his power upon one of her sons, the last of themselves, who should live amongst men for many years.

The contract finalized, the play began. One day when king Shantanu was strolling by the holy river, a most bewitching maiden appeared upon the scene. She was Ganga, the River goddess in human form. Divinely beautiful was she and she carried about her the splendour of lotus-blooms and the radiance of spring-blossoms. The king's heart was lost instantaneously and he begged that vision of faultless loveliness to become his bride. Her answer was that she would become that provided that he gave her such total love that he would never contradict her in whatever she might wish to do. "One harsh word and I should leave you for ever," said she. The love-stricken, *kama*-enslaved king accepted the condition and the two were married. Then, in course of time, she begot a son and went and straightaway cast the new-born baby into the Ganges. Her husband was horrified, but said nothing from fear of losing her. When the second child was born, she did the same thing, and so on, with seven of her children, the cursed Vasus, who were, thereby, liberated. However, when the eighth son was born and Ganga proceeded to deal with him as she had dealt with the earlier issues, the king's hitherto-controlled anger broke loose and even as he began to chide her for her seeming insanity and heart-lessness, she was lost to him. She revealed to him how matters had stood, and leaving this last child, Ganga-vrata, alias Bhishma, who was endowed with the gift of the Vasu's strength, vanished for ever.

Yet another legend linked with Hardwar's holy ground relates to another great figure of the same epic. This time the hero is Arjuna and the heroine, a Naga princess, Ulupi, who was the daughter of the Naga king Kauravya. Once again, the mythic tale is intricate and long and one does not know where to begin ; but assuming that the story of Mahabharata is fairly well-known, bare

references should suffice. When the Pandavas were living at Indraprastha, they had agreed that when one of them was with Draupadi, none of the others should enter, and that whoever were guilty of transgression should go into exile for 12 years. Now it so happened that one day, when Yudhishtra was with Draupadi, a Brahman whose cattle had been carried off by robbers came to Arjuna for succour. Arjuna's weapons being in Draupadi's apartments, Arjuna had to go there and though he relieved the Brahman's distress, upon himself he brought the punishment for breaking the compact. During this period of his exile, he wandered about through many regions, and visited many holy cities including Hardwar where the Ganges flows upon the plain, and here he bathed in her sacred waters. And while he bathed he was accosted by the beautiful Ulupi who wanted him to marry her. Arjuna pleading a vow of celebacy, she reasoned that the vow applied to Draupadi only and that, in consorting with the river-nymph, the Pandava would be committing no sin. He found it convenient to accept the welcome argument of the fair arguer and went and lived with Ulupi in her father's palace. She gave him the gift and power of rendering himself invisible when in water and he gave her a son who was named Iravat. This reminds one of that other child of romance whose birth is associated with Hardwar—he who became the great Drona Acharya, again of the Epic fame, the same who taught the Kauravs and the Pandavas. It appears that the scenery at this Gangadwara was, in those ages, especially conducive to romantic longings, for when the Rishi Bharadwaja saw there a sweet damsel named Ghritachi, he was fascinated and through her begot a son, the aforesaid Drona.

However, a Rishi here or a Raja there excepted, one does not go to Gangadwara in search of romance. One goes there to seek release, to find salvation, to atone for one's sins, to reap merit for the next birth. In that respect, for all that, there is, as the *Skanda Purana* has it, "no Tirtha equal to Gangadwara, (even as there is) no mountain equal to Kailasha, no God equal to Vasudeva, no river equal to Ganga. He who contemplates on Shiva at the place even for a fortnight becomes one with Shiva. No more need be said". In the *Tirthaprakasha* also it is said that those worshipping Shiva here, where he stays with Parvati, are purified and great merit accrues to anyone who takes a bath at Gangadwara. Sometimes, the specific spots where the bath is of especial merit are grouped. Thus the *Tirthaprakasha* states that "one bathing at these five places becomes purified and goes to heaven—Gangadwara, Kushavarta, Bilwa Tirtha, Nila Parvata and

Kankhal". All these five are located not far from one another. Gangadwara, is the gateway of the Ganga, so styled because here, after her long journey in the mountains, the Ganges enters the plains of India. This name is an ancient appellation used in epic and history for the present-day more common name, Hardwar. At the time of Hieun Tsang, a proper temple known as the Gangadwara adorned the place, which itself was referred to as Mayapuri—the *Mayula* or *Mayura* of the Chinese pilgrim. The sacred points which count in this context are the well-known Brahma-Kunda and Har-Ki-Pairi, the centre, both these, of the life and sanctity of Hardwar. The Kushavarta Ghat is where *Shradhs* are performed. It lies about a furlong away to the south of Brahma-Kund. The legend that sanctifies the spot states that Dattatreya, the celebrated hermit, was performing his thousand-year penance of standing on one foot when the Ganges strolled along and washed away the *kusha* grass he had gathered. The Sage was furious and, in his great anger, was about to burn her very existence away when Brahma and the other gods interceded on her behalf and pacified the enraged hermit by offering to stay in his hermitage. Since then, this abode of the gods, Kushavarta, has remained sanctified and it is believed that the *pitra-shradh* and *pinda-dan* performed here reap a million-fold merit. Nila Devi's temple is placed on the Nila Parvata—the Blue Mountain rising opposite the Ganges, while Bilwa Tirtha, where the god Shiva graciously accepted the offering of *bilwa* leaves, is marked by the temple of Bilweshwar Mahadeo, located, west of the Railway Station, in lone-some surroundings, by the pool called Gauri-kund.

But a place of far greater significance and celebrity than these last three is Kankhal, a suburb and a townlet about two miles from Hardwar, and a mile from ancient Mayapur, down the Ganges. This is a most ancient site of Hinduism and is the seat of Shiva Mahadeva whose wife, Sati, had immolated herself here rather than permit that her lord and husband be insulted in her presence. This divine lady was the daughter of Prajapati Daksha and, from amongst all the splendour and divinity assembled for her *swayamvara*, had chosen to marry the ash-smeared beggar-yogi of Kailash between whom and Daksha little love was lost. Daksha was so displeased over this seeming folly and open defiance on Sati's part that when later he performed a *yajna* here, neither she nor her husband was invited. Nevertheless, she chose to go, for a daughter required no invitation to visit her own father's house. Yet when she went there she was jeered at and her husband was maligned. Unable to bear the insolence of the gods and the insult

of her husband, she, the ideal wife, committed suicide whence the popular sense of the word *Sati*. How, consequently, Shiva avenged this outrage and mourned the death of his peerless wife is a long story and need not be pursued here ; but it is important to note, that as the spot where the entire episode of Sati's suicide took place, Kankhal is regarded as most holy, although it is not associated exactly with the later Tantrik cult of female-worship at places where the fifty-one parts of Sati's body fell, and where the *pitha-sthanas* were established. Her temple on the bank of the sacred river is an insignificant structure and so is the temple, located near-by, of Daksha where the ill-starred sacrifice was performed. It is customary, in the present-day set up of Hardwar, to perform the immersion ceremony of the ashes of one's dear departed at this place where Sati the Pure was pleased to give up her own life rather than hear her husband abused. The sanctity of the place, therefore, is great and undeniable. In fact, the very name Kankhal is but a rhetorical question : "Who is that *Khalla* (villain) who does not obtain liberation here ?" The town is larger and almost handsomer than Hardwar, and is well-known for several seats of learning, including that most celebrated modern version of a forest university, the Gurukul Kangari.

But pure and purifying, sacred and sanctifying, as Kankhal is because of these holy associations with Sati, the atmosphere which obtains here is morbid and surcharged, somehow, with a mortifying sense of desolation, different, altogether different, from the joyous and free, calm and tranquil, yet bright and lively, air of the entire scene at and around Har-Ki-Pairi, and the Brahma-Kund, which, first and last, constitute the visitor's or even the pilgrim's Hardwar. A wide expanse of view and river, broad and clean ghats, and a strange and satisfying serenity which is never submerged, remains ever super-imposed, whatever the occasion, however large the concourse that crowds there. The Brahma-Kund marks the site where Brahma had arranged to receive the Ganges on her descent to the earth and great religious significance attaches to a bath in this part of the sacred waters. Here, too, mingled, with the waters of the Ganges, the drops of elixir, *amrita*, which fell from the jar containing the drink immortal which the joint efforts of the gods and the demons had extricated from the bottom of the sea in that famous legend of yore. Again, along the bank of this sacred Kund of waters which are twice-blessed and immeasurably divine, did Bhartri-Hari perform the penance that gained him admittance to heaven. The Har-Ki-Pairi, the stairs that lead to God's Kingdom, and which are marked by the divine foot of

Vishnu, were put up originally by Vikramaditya, the brother of the said Bhartri. The modern look of marble is a present of Seths like Birla whose donations account also for the clock-tower and the islet which separates the waters of the Brahma Kund from the waves of the rest of the channel, itself a part of the mile-wide river that flows by in such majesty and with such divine grace as defy adequate description. The mountains that form the background bend in benediction as they ring in a semicircle around the play-ground of this young and splendid river-goddess, and the enchanting loveliness of the entire scene is altogether unrivalled.

The shrines and temples, as innumerable as they are, generally speaking, structurally insignificant, which cluster around the Kund and the Pairi, are dedicated to various deities, and the ghats are for ever thronged with pilgrims and the *pandas*. The round of life religious in this area around the sacred spots never ceases, and morning, evening and even noon, some ceremony or puja, this rite or that ritual, is in progress, while the bathers and the dippers seek and get the body-purifying and soul-cleansing embrace of the cleanest and the most sparkling waters of any river, anywhere. This last is no exaggeration. As the sales-talk of the people of Hardwar stresses, the *Ganga-Jal*, the Ganges-water, collected from Hardwar and carried by countless Hindu pilgrims for all manner of pious sprinkling and ritual use, and even medicative efficacy, will last uncontaminated and pure for a thousand years, whilst that which is taken from a place like, say, Benares, or Allahabad, will not endure beyond a year's storage! Be that as it may, the bath is regarded as a most holy act, and its merit increases according to the auspiciousness of the times on which it is taken. As has been remarked already, on the day of the Baisakhi, which falls on the 13th of April every year, a regular assemblage of thousands of people takes place, for on that occasion the dip in any river of India is held as auspicious, and, in the Ganges at Hardwar, it is more rewarding than anywhere else. Like-wise at the time of the *Ardh* (half)-*kumbha* and the *kumbha* fairs, the city becomes the congregating point for crowds which are truly vast, for on these days and occasions, the reward and merit of the sacred dip are immense and most coveted. Even if one is not a Hindu, is himself or herself neither devotee nor pilgrim, the experience of visiting Hardwar on such occasions is a unique one, and the spectacle which this city then presents is too stupendous to be forgotten by those who have witnessed it.

Of course, Hardwar is not the only place where the great gathering of the Kumbha is held, it is only one of the four places, where this Indian fair of fairs, of proportions staggeringly vast, is organised. The other three are Allahabad, Nasik and Ujjain, and, so far as the Kumbha is concerned, of all these, Allahabad enjoys the greatest prestige. Nevertheless, the Kumbha is Kumbha, wherever it takes place, for at all these points did the nectar fall as the jar of elixir was being carried about. The legend of the churning of the Milky Ocean for obtaining *amrita*, the drink immortal, is about the best known of all the tales of Hindu mythology and that possibly explains the existence of several variations of the details of the theme. Broadly, the salient features are that a very, very long time ago, when the gods and the demons were, once, as ever, at war with each other, the gods were having a bad time of it since the demons had, through unparalleled austerities and matchless devotion, pleased the great god Shiva and obtained the boon that their priest could restore anyone who died. Consequently, whomsoever of the demon host the gods were able to kill, was forth-with revived, and the enemy remained as strong as ever. Then Vishnu devised a plan whereby *amrita*, the drink which would render the gods immortal, or, for that matter, anyone who tasted of it, would be got and thereby eternity gained. A truce was requested and the demons were prevailed upon to join in the great endeavour, for otherwise the mighty churning of the Ocean would have been impossible. Then began that vast drama which, for imagination and daring detail, has few parallels in any mythology of the world. Mount Mandara, supported upon the back of Vishnu in the tortoise-incarnation, constituted the churning rod and the great serpent Vasuki served as the cord to turn it. The gods and demons arranged themselves on either end and tugged at the rod with all their might. For a thousand years did the churning continue and many were the obstacles and adventures which befell, and delayed the emergence of the moon-bowl containing ambrosia, the elixir of immortality. Treasures as glorious and resplendent as Lakshmi, Beauty's bright goddess, the Indian Venus and later the divine spouse of Vishnu; and Surabhi, the cow of plenty ; the *apsaras*, the nymphs celestial, and several other precious and priceless beings and things were obtained as mere by-products of this ambitious venture. Finally, the aim and goal was achieved and Dhanwantari, the physician of the gods, came up holding the *amrita kumbha*—the pot that contained the drink immortal. Then was there a great rush and scramble for the taste of nectar, and before aught could be done, Rahu and Ketu, two demons, had sipped the wonder-liquid. Vishnu, however, now took charge of the situation

and severed the heads of these demons with one fling of his great discus. Yet the nectar had already passed down their throat, so that their bodies fell dead and decayed, but their heads still exist to devour, at the time of the eclipses, those heavenly luminaries, the sun and the moon. But to revert to the tale of the *kumbha,* which Vishnu was now out to save for the gods. He assumed the form beautiful and seducing, of Mohini, and the lust-stricken demons got desire-drunk and were lured away while one of the gods, Jayant, transformed himself into a rook and flew away with the container and contents, the *kumbha* and *amrita.* For twelve days, a hot pursuit through space and sky was the result, and it was during these twelve days of the gods, twelve years of men, that the holder of the jar of immortal liquid rested self and *kumbha*, the pot, at these four places where the Fair is now held. Others say that, during the flight, drops of the eternity-bestowing nectar fell in the waters of the rivers here, so that it is these drops which have contributed to their immortality-conferring attribute.

At Hardwar, the Kumbha is held when Jupiter is in the Aquarius. A mighty concourse of people assembles and has always assembled on an occasion like this, and a tremendous amount of elaborate organization is required to handle the vast gathering. What the Kumbha meant and still means to the millions of pilgrims, what it was and what it has become, how it came to be and what has been achieved by it—all these are complex questions, and require volumes unto themselves. The current opinion is that the Kumbha Fair which was originally started as a means to the people's spiritual uplift has now degenerated into a mere *tamasha* which is a headache to the administration, and fun and entertainment to the visitor—but religion to very few. Even so, there are those who come with true devotion, and in all piety and humility. And they help in their own way to create a nucleus, as it were, of the right sentiment, to sow a tiny seed of sincere fervour, which may have far-reaching effects. Both because of the spiritual impact of saintly presence and because of the force which all congregational performance is bound to possess, those who merit the grace will find it. Gandhi who was present in Hardwar on the occasion of the Kumbha in 1915, experienced what was almost a miracle. He saw much that was disheartening, undesirable and disillusioning. He observed that the pilgrims had more absent-mindedness, hypocrisy and slovenliness than piety. To him the swarm of Sadhus who had descended there seemed to have been born but to enjoy the good things of life. He learnt something of the religious stunts which helped to hoodwink the simple

folk, and saw a cow with five feet ! He was astonished, but was soon disillusioned, for the poor five-footed cow was a sacrifice to the greed of the wicked. The fifth foot was nothing else but a foot cut off from a live calf and grafted upon the shoulder of the cow ! The result of this double cruelty was exploited to fleece the ignorant of their money, as there was no Hindu but would lavish his charity on such a miraculous cow. And yet, inspite of all this, and inspite of the fact that Gandhi had not visited Hardwar as a pilgrim, it was destined that light should illuminate his way. Here is his own report of the great experience :

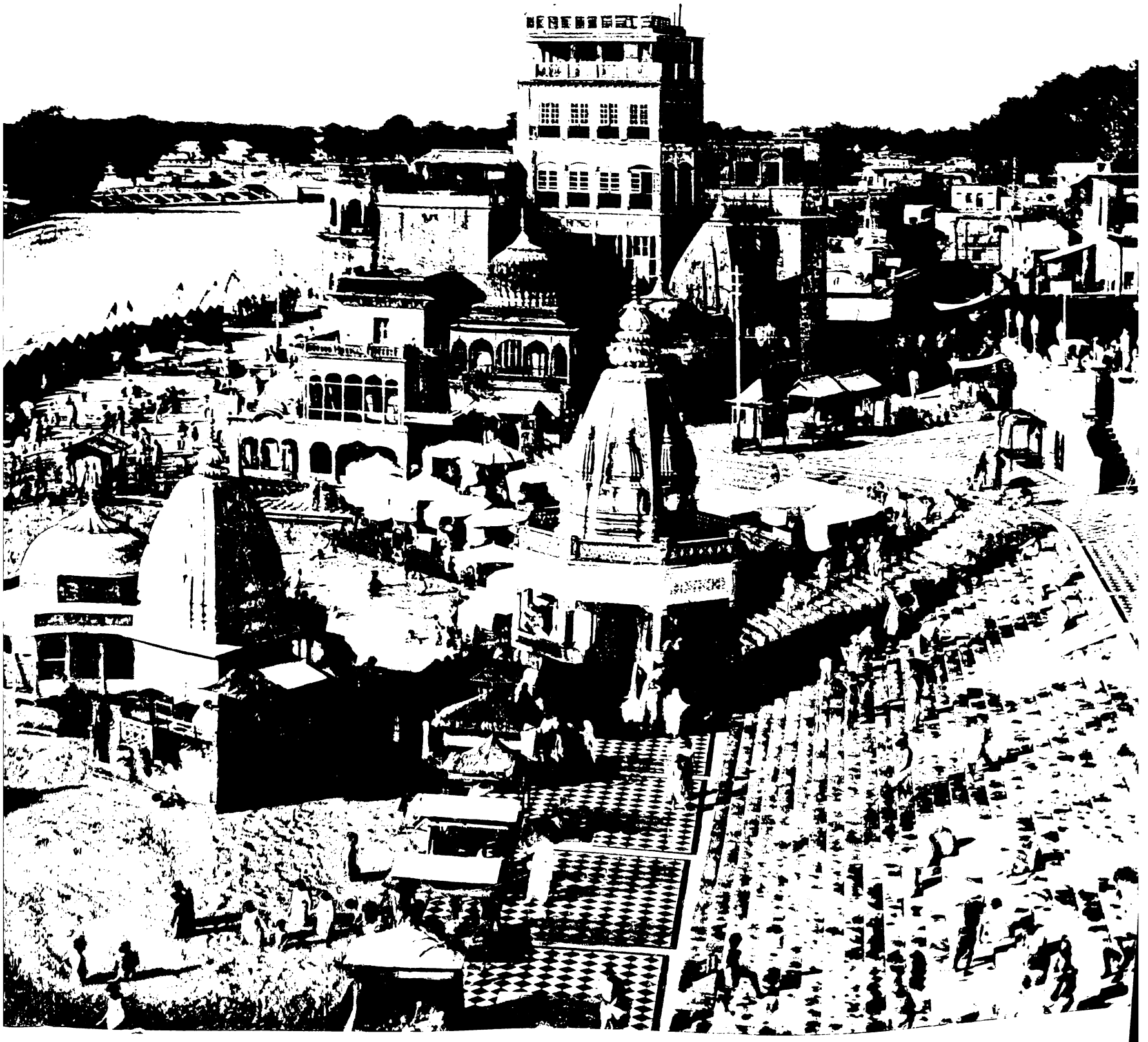
"The day of the fair was now upon us. It proved a red-letter day for me. I had not gone to Hardwar with the sentiments of a pilgrim. I have never thought of frequenting places of pilgrimage in search of piety. But the seventeen lakh of men that were reported to be there could not all be hypocrites or mere sight-seers. I had no doubt that countless people amongst them had gone there to earn merit and for self-purification.....

"I therefore passed the whole night immersed in deep thought. There were those pious souls in the midst of the hypocrisy that surrounded them. They would be free of guilt before their Maker. If the visit to Hardwar was in itself a sin, I must publicly protest against it, and leave Hardwar on the day of Kumbha. If the pilgrimage to Hardwar and to the Kumbha fair was not sinful, I must impose some act of self-denial on myself in atonement for the inequity prevailing there and purify myself." Finally, he imposed upon himself a couple of strict vows. He concluded the account with the significant words : "The Hardwar experiences proved for me to be of inestimable value. They helped me in no small way to decide where I was to live and what I was to do". That much for the sensitive soul, for the ground that is ready to receive the seed. For the land that is barren, for the soul that is blind, nothing may avail, neither the usual charm and serenity of the Gangetic scene nor the tremendous impact of the Kumbha spectacle. These the swift-rushing water of the divine stream will not wash and the benign gifts of the grand mountains will not enrich, cannot enrich, except through His Grace !

And yet as one moves along the sacred river, this time towards the beckoning mountains concealed in whose cavernous depths, some two hundred miles up-climb, the source of the Ganges lies, one cannot believe that all holiness

is in the mind alone, and all beauty in the beholder's eye. Vista after grand vista, range after glorious range, peak after glistening peak, will be-fall the path of the way-farer. The popular *Bhimgoda*, almost next door to the Brahm-Kund, is nought. But the *Sapt-Sarovar* where the river divides herself into seven streams, and the *Sapta-Rishi*, where a few charming cottages stand, half-inviting one to move no further, are set in truly vernal solitude. Rishikesh, 24 kilometres further up, is both fifty times superior in this respect and as much more celebrated. The Ganges grows purer and cleaner, and more purifying and cleansing, with every inch of ground nearer her spring and fount, and one can understand the spiritual pull and attractiveness which Rishikesh exerts with its air of calm and a fine picturesqueness. The place is frequented by many pilgrims of various sorts—those who like to meet sadhus and sages like Baba Kali Kamaliwala or the Acharya of the Divine Society, those who wish to visit and admire the finely built Geeta Bhawan and Swarga Ashram, and those who want to see the Lakshman Jhoola. This last is a suspension bridge over the Ganges and, once a rope bridge but now an iron one, is in the opinion of Gandhi, entirely out of place in such surroundings and mars their beauty. The river here is more fascinating even as she is more uncontaminated than at Hardwar. True, the place is haunted by a host of beggars, and there might be much hoax besides, but the over-all charm of the scene is captivating. Whether the sanctity of a supposed existence here of the Triveni of the Prayaga rivers blesses it or not, the Ganges seems enough, and the mountains make up for all want, if any, on that score.

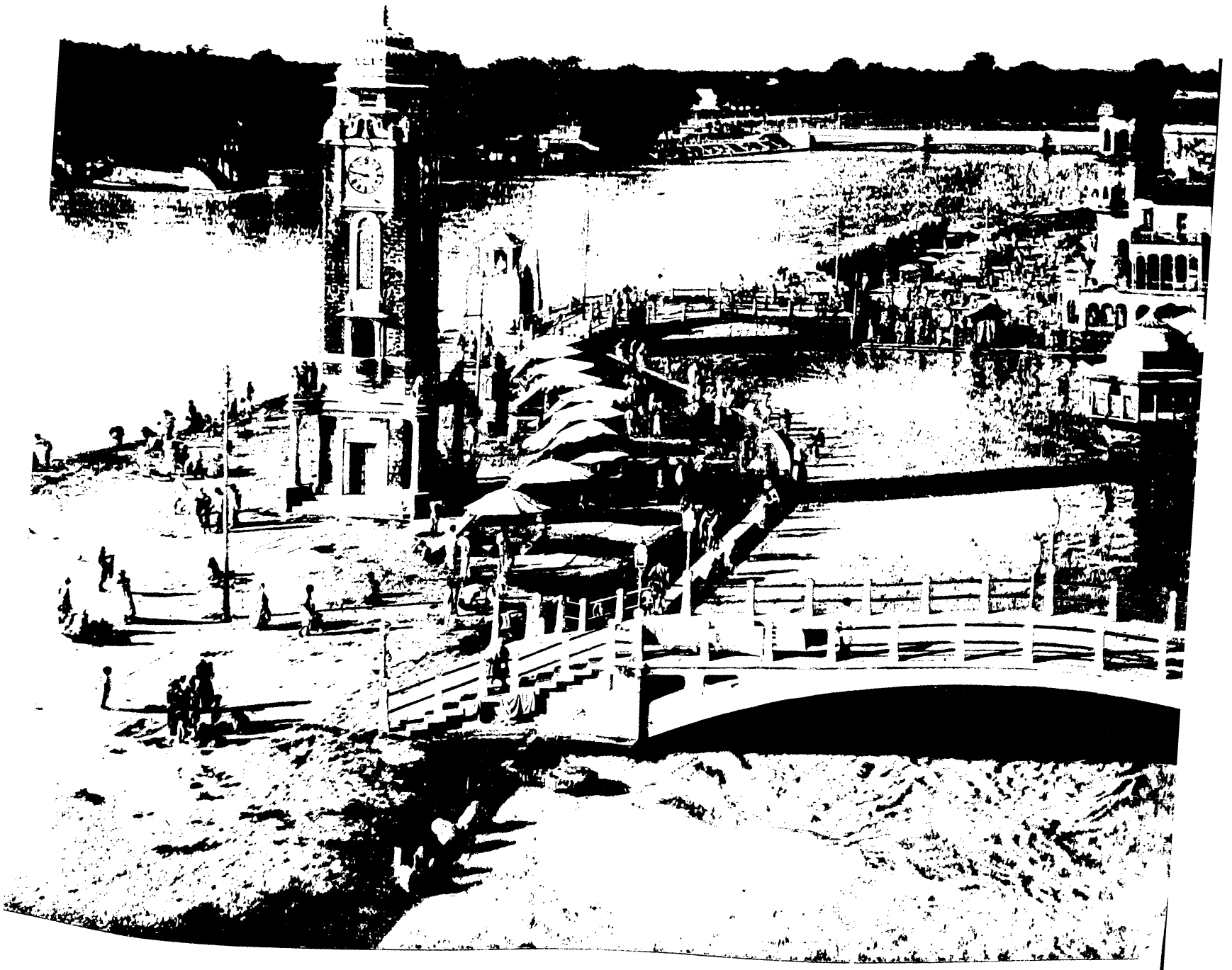
The call of these mountains so beautifully arranged is a powerful call, and those who are still discontent go up and beyond, on the pilgrimage to holy Badri and Kedar, to Gangotri and Yamnotri. In fact, we are already in the valley of the gods, and all ways lead towards the abode of one or the heaven of another. In the right season, organised pilgrimages to these more high and more exalted points of the Hindu geography are undertaken, and many people, devout and brave, join in the holy journey. Like a watery road to release, the sacred stream indicates the path; and he who, like the seekers and sages of yesterday, would move from *moh* to *moksha*, from attachment to release, may rise, along the banks of the Ganges, up and up, and higher up, and up again, and yet again, until he reaches the point where the quest will be over, where at the source of the sacred stream, the Lord of the World, the auspicious Shiva himself resides. And, there, at his feet, Life's pilgrimage will end.



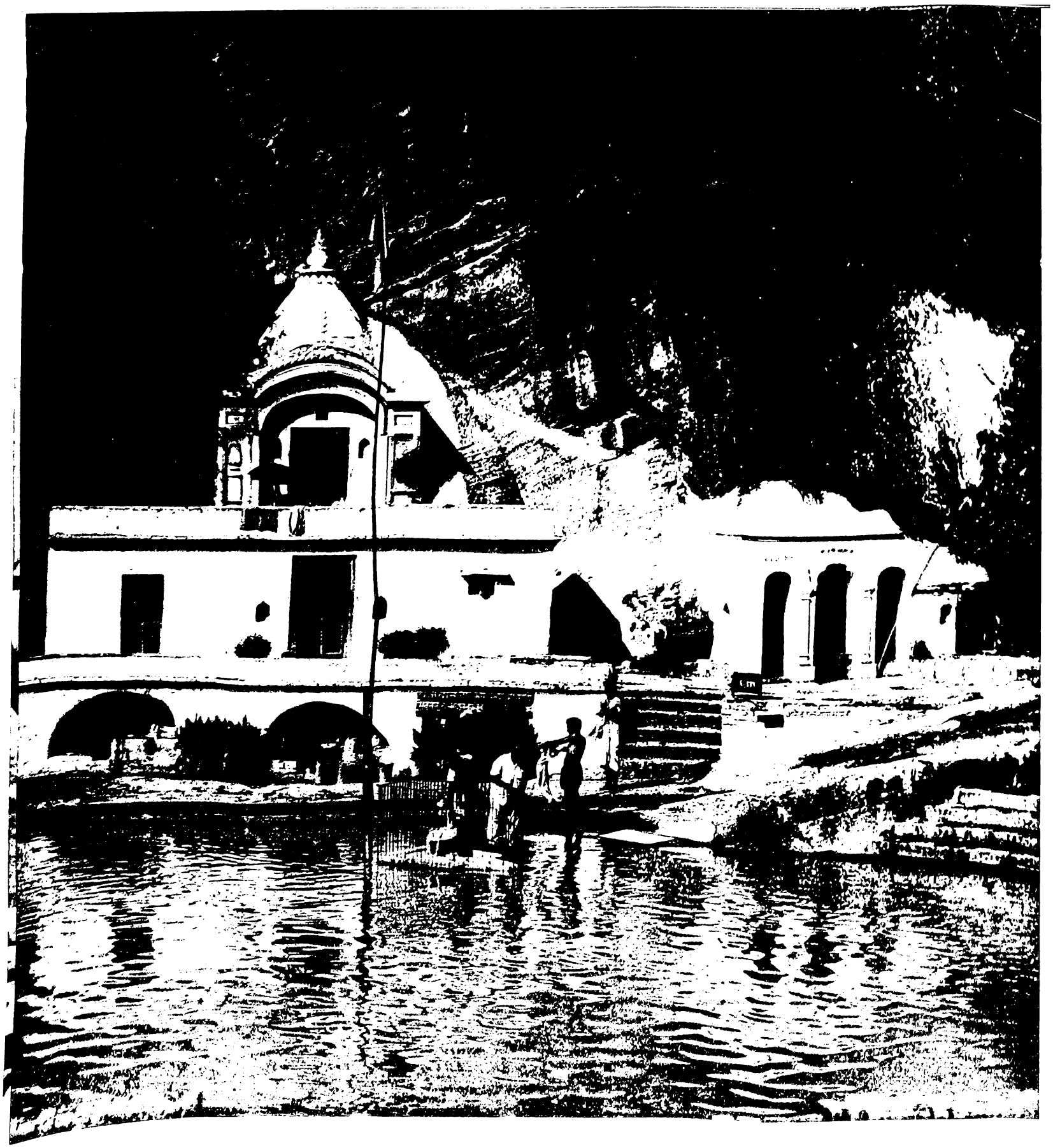
HAR-KI-PAIRI AND BRAHMA KUND, GENERAL VIEW : The holiest and the busiest spot in all Hardwar, the Har-ki-Pairi is sanctified by the feet of Vishnu and regarded as a staircase to Heaven. And blessed is he who bathes in the Brahma Kund, where the drops of Nectar mingled with the waters of the Ganges.



PINDA-DAN CEREMONY : Anand elacient borate is the ritual which marks the various religious ceremonies of the Hindus.

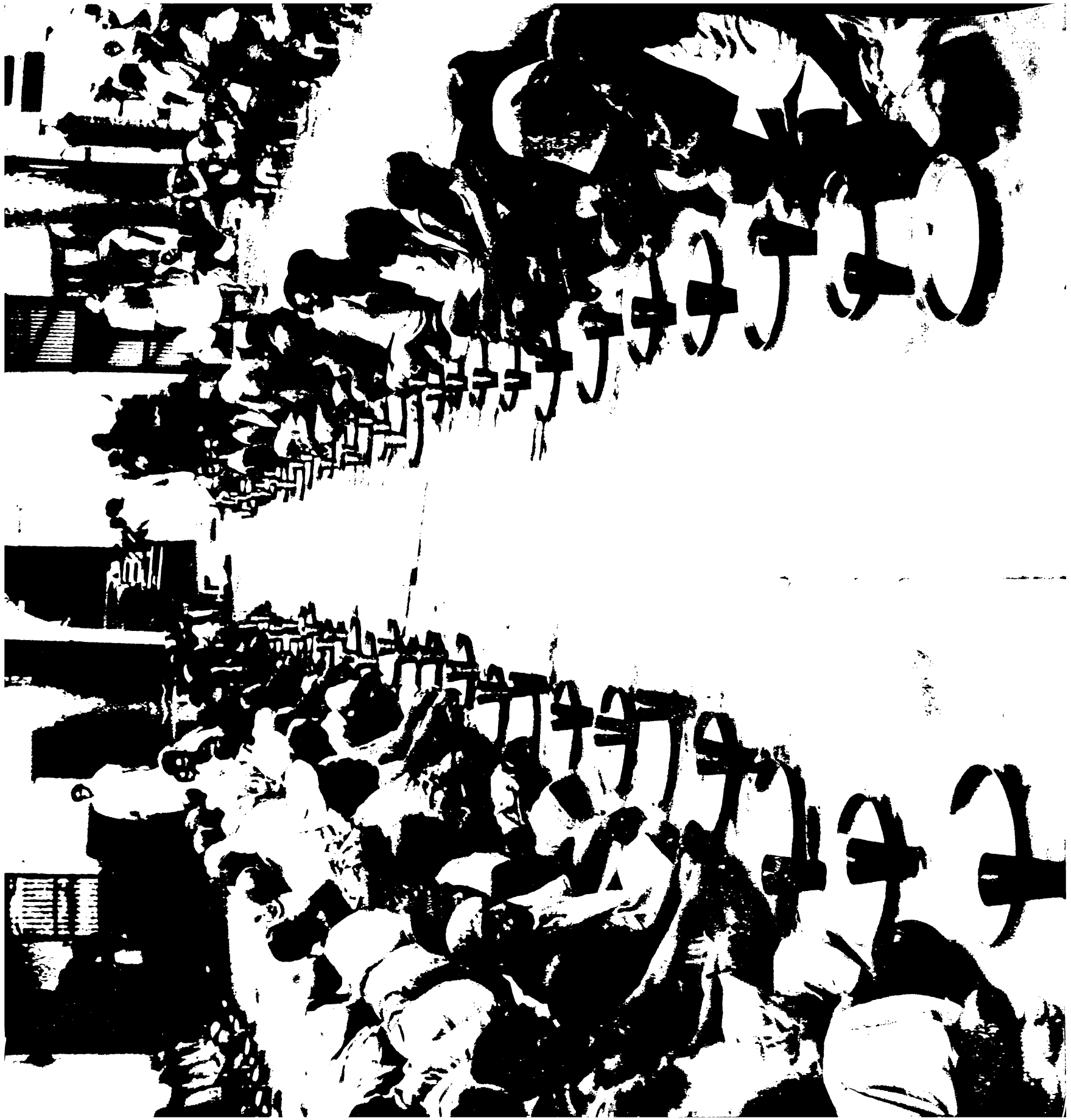


ISLET OF THE CLOCK-TOWER. GENERAL VIEW : *The bridge in the foreground connects with the Har-ki-Pairi. The holy Brahma Kund lies to the right of the Tower, beyond the platform.*



BHIM-GODA TANK, GENERAL VIEW : The holy tank is associated with the Pandava warrior of the Mahabharata. The waters are those of the sacred Ganges brought here for the hero's bath.

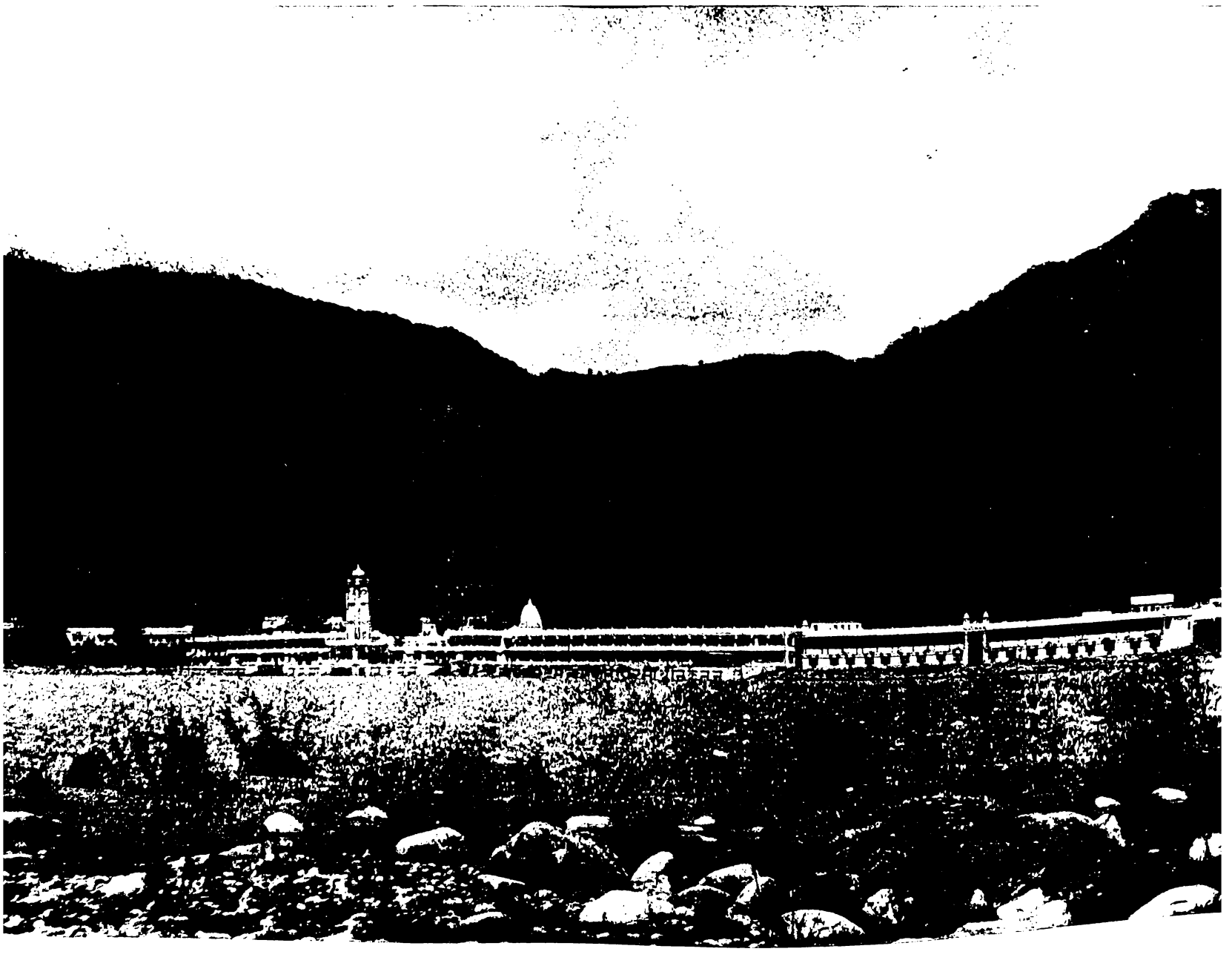
A MEAL FOR THE SADHUS : Nothing is more meritorious than feeding the Sadhus ; and larger the number, the greater the merit.



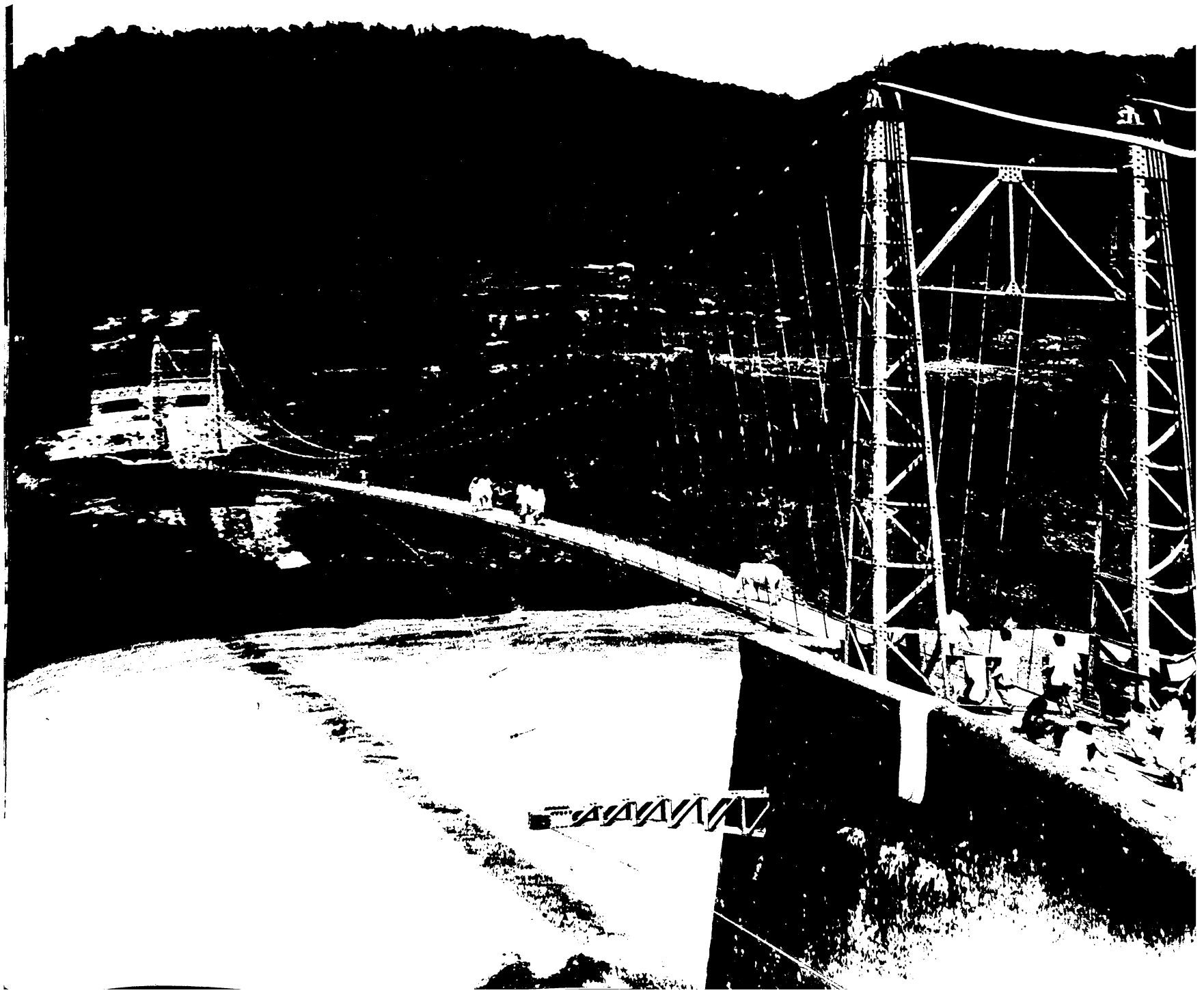


◀ GURUKUL KANGRI, GENERAL VIEW OF VED BHAWAN : Set in open space and sylvan surroundings, the Gurukul aims at reviving the ancient Indian tradition in education and at adapting it to modern conditions.

RISHI KESH : General view of Swarga Ashram and Geeta Bhawan. The impressive buildings stand along the bank of the Ganges which flows through a scene of serene beauty.



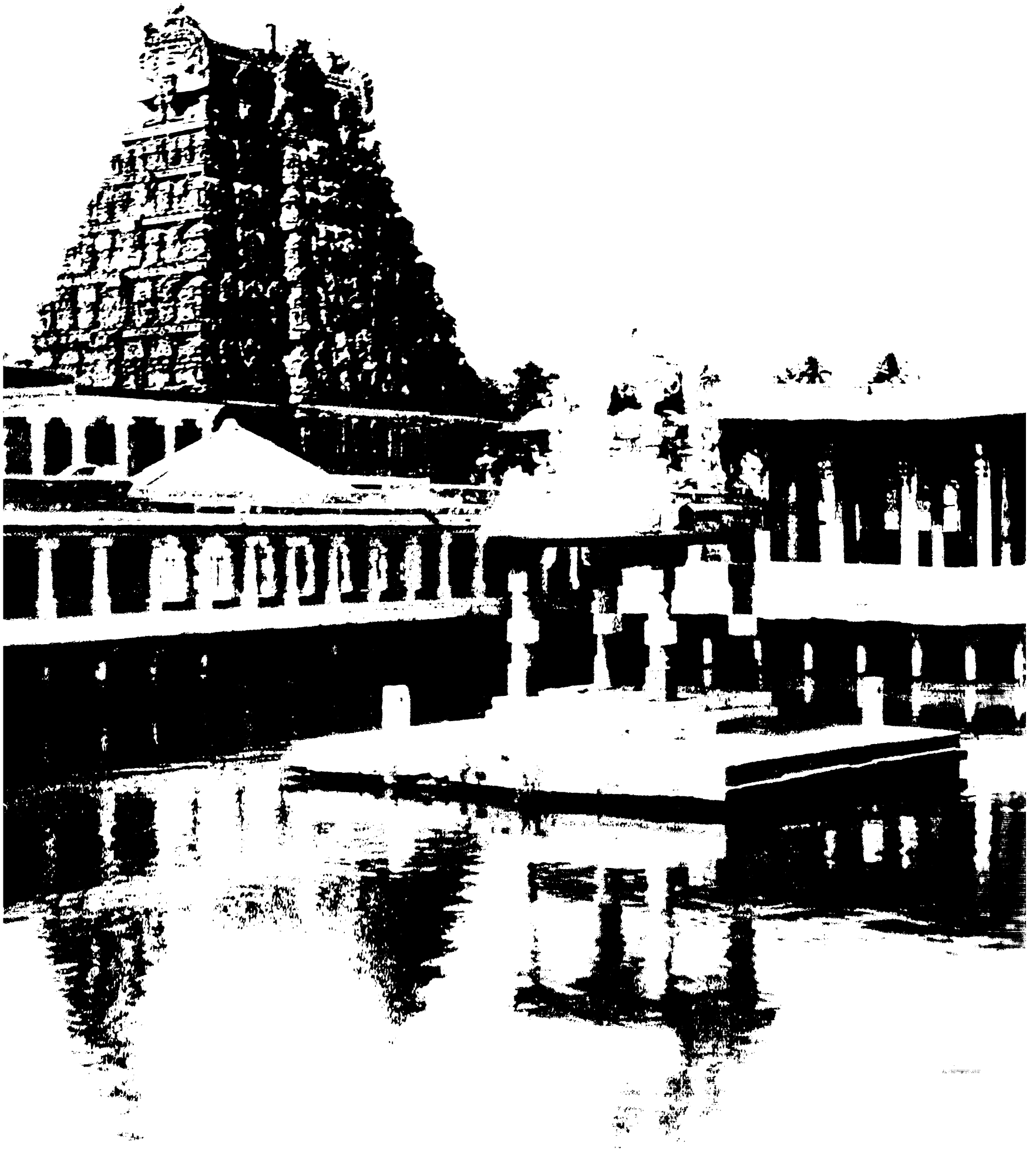
LAKSHMAN JHULA, GENERAL VIEW : The suspension bridge over the Ganges has replaced an earlier rope-bridge which was altogether more romantic as well as more in keeping with the name. The emerald forests and the diamond river create an enchanted view of sheer loveliness.



9 KANCHIPURAM

TEPPAKULAM AND GOPURAM

The waters of one will cleanse the pilgrim's body ; the verticality of the other will uplift the worshipper's mind ; and the deity within the temple will bestow peace and joy upon the devotee's soul.



9 KANCHIPURAM

Kanchi is a beautiful name which the city of beautiful temples that bears it deserves fully. Kanchi is a golden name and stands aptly for this golden belt which Southern India, personified as a nymph celestial, sports around her waist ; or which, if short for Kancheepuram—city of gold, rightly symbolises the olden golden prosperity which she enjoyed for centuries. Kanchi is a feminine name which builds up visions of lovely goddesses associated in legend and story with the sacred city, and—if one may be forgiven the sacrilegious conjunction—of the lovely women who will wear the exquisite *saris* which her expert craftsmen weave on looms as ancient, and in designs as glorious, as the culture of India. And, finally, Kanchi is a twice-sacred name, for of the seven sacred cities of the Hindus, she alone is sacred both to Shiva and to Vishnu, while the rest are sacred either to one or to the other. In this respect, Kanchi, the Kashi of the South, is greater than the Kashi of the North. In fact, this tribute she may earn in other fields also, since, equalling her northern rival as a centre of learning and scholarship and as the epitome of culture and religion, she gains on Benares in the sphere of art and architecture, and even of political glory. Mythology apart, Benares can boast of no resplendent rulers who made her their political capital as well as the religious, whereas, in the case of Kanchi, great dynasties of the south have held sway over this renowned city. Again, Benares has fifteen hundred temples, yet hardly one deserves mention as a work of art. Kanchi has less than fifty, but these are so rich that in the words of Fergusson "the two towns, Great and Little Conjivaram, possess groups of temples

as picturesque and nearly as vast as any to be found elsewhere". That, indeed, would be natural for a place "where tradition would lead us to expect more of antiquity than in almost any other city of the south", where all the major religions of India have had their turn of being the ruling faith and where sovereign after celebrated sovereign of Southern India has vied, one with the other, to paint the gilded lily. Like Benares, she too has known in the course of her long and chequered history, much ruination and desecration at the hands of the irreverent. Still, enough survives of the wonder that was Kanchi to bring home to the visiting pilgrim or the curious tourist how well the longing of the spirit which is yearning to express itself, may be embodied—in soaring *gopuras* and in magnificent monuments. Not without cause, nor without justification, is the phrase current that among the towns Kanchi is the best, *Nagareshu Kanchi*, even as among women is the beautiful Rambha and among the rivers, the sacred Ganges. Indeed, the comparisons are more apt than usual because, of the cities of India, Kanchi alone, or at least more than any other city, combines the loveliness of an *Apsara* and the holiness of a Goddess !

Kanchi, Kanchipuram, Kachchi, or Conjeevaram, as it is variously called, lies an hour's journey by car, to the south of Madras. Together with Madura, the *Mathura* and the other great holy city of *Tamilnad*, the region of the Tamils, she comprises and comprehends, for all practical purposes, the story of the life and literature, and of the history and culture and art and religion, of the Tamil people. Madura, more ancient and with a geographical location more southern represents, of course the truer Tamil element. Kanchi, on the other hand, reflects the influx of the north. Yet, the resultant synthesis which she portrays is so typically and distinctively southern, that in all matters whether of style or the soul, she dominates like a queen, accepting tributes, not rendering homage. Further, and, again, like a queen, she has given away more than she has taken. The religious map of India, especially, is what it is because of what was done, to begin with, at Kanchi. It was here that Shankaracharya first defeated the Buddhists in controversy, propounded his great philosophy, and established Shaivism. Ramanuja who followed worsted the Jains and spread the cult and worship of Vishnu. Both gained royal patronage and succeeded in founding the form of Hinduism which has been the major religious current of the country and her people, since then. Kanchi herself has continued to be an important centre of both these sub-divisions of the Hindu faith. The Shaiva has one of his most important

'Pithas' here, with the 'earth lingam' as the object of worship. Similarly, for the Vaishnava, Kanchi constitutes one of the three most important centres of Vaishnavism, namely Koil (Srirangam), Thirumalai (Tirupati) and this, Perumal Koil ; or one of the four, if Thirunarayanapuram in Mysore is also included. It is to the presiding deities of these places that, from wherever he may be, every Vaishnava prays three times a day. But it is Kanchi which, to quote one scholar "more than any other place, has permanently been the centre for the study of Vaishnava literature and philosophy. Even to this day, scholars assemble at the famous Varadaraja-swami temple to discuss and study the *Vishishtadvaita* system of moral philosophy which postulates that Vishnu and the Universe are co-extensive and, in fact, identical".

One of the earliest references to the existence of Kanchi is found in the great Tamil epic, Mani-Mekalai, of the 2nd century B.C., wherein the heroine whose name the title bears, comes to Kanchi that she might redeem herself by serving humanity. She is converted to Buddhism and takes to the life of a nun. Kanchi is indirectly indicated as being a powerful centre of Buddhism which, indeed, it was. When, in the 7th century A.D., Hieun Tsang, the ubiquitous Chinese pilgrim, visited this place during his travels, he found "more than one vihara, preaching the eight-fold path to salvation against formidable odds", implying that the faith was already on the decline. He recorded that Buddhism in the city was as old as the Buddha himself, and it is commonly believed that the Buddha had, in fact, visited Kanchi. At any rate, there is little doubt that his religion had taken deep root in this southern city by about the 1st century A.D. Kanchi is associated with several Buddhist scholars of repute, like Dignaga, Bodhidharma and Dharampala. Acharya Dignaga was the founder of the Dhyana school of Buddhist philosophy known as the Zen faith in Japan where Dignaga is revered as the 28th Patriarch. Dharampala, yet another celebrated Buddhist scholar of all times, was head of the famous Nalanda University.

Like the Buddhists, the Jains too have had their day in this city. Tiruparankundram, the pretty suburb of Kanchi which lies on the right bank of the river Vegavati, has long been known as the Jaina-Kanchi. The 'heavy odds' referred to by Hieun Tsang might have included some of the Jains' making, for this place has been their stronghold since the 7th century A.D. The city

saw much change and many upheavals, religious and political, thereafter, but, despite all propaganda and intolerance levelled against them, the determined, even if small, community of the Jains was able to keep the faith alive. The names of several holy and scholarly men of the Jaina faith, who belonged to Kanchi, are held in great reverence, and visitors who go to the Jaina-kshetra will find there many sacred memories and several quaint monuments. Especially delightful and valuable are the 14th century frescos which decorate the Vardhamana temple and which constitute a rarity not only amongst the art-treasures of Kanchi herself, but of the country as a whole.

But the light and lustre which Buddhism and Jainism lent to Kanchi are as nothing compared to the glamour and glory which the Shaiva and the Vaishnav cults were to impart to her. When exactly the decline of the first two set in or the rise of the last two began—these are matters of scholarly dispute. Several dates are suggested, but it is now generally accepted that the process began with the entry, into Kanchi's life and history, of the Pallavas with whom more than with any other dynasty, the story of this their capital is linked. The Pallavas ruled from this place over an empire which, at one time, extended from the Krishna river to the Arabian Sea on the West Coast, and it appears that they had large foreign contacts, much over-seas trade and many cultural ties with several other countries. Once again, the question as to who exactly they were and when exactly they began to rule over Kanchi belongs to the realm of History's surmises. But since they are mentioned by Samudragupta who claimed to have defeated them around 400 A.D., the period of the Pallavas' rule is taken as extending from about the 3rd century A.D. From this time to the end of the 9th century when they were defeated by the Cholas, Kanchi was their capital as also that of the Dravid-Desh or of the Tamil region known as Tondamandalam. They were in power at the time Hieun Tsang visited Kanchi and he testifies to their zeal for the Hindu faith by referring to the eighty-odd temples which then adorned the city. Again, it is certain that the Pallavas were a dynasty from the north, for they seem to have brought with them, from the very beginning, the culture and religious thought of the Aryans as distinguished from what is commonly styled as the Dravidian, and the charters they issued were written either in Sanskrit or in Prakrit.

But, as has been mentioned earlier, Kanchi did not allow a complete

superimposition of the Aryan culture and thought. Rather, this impact of the north on the south, represented respectively by the rulers and the people they ruled, took the form of a synthesis which had a quality and look all its own. In the context of religion, which is our present concern, the cults and philosophies that evolved here were altogether different from what either the Aryans or the Dravidians had known. The schools known as Shaiva and Vaishnava were, and, in a sense, continue to be, a distinctive product of the South, as what obtains under these labels in the North is something which, if not quite dissimilar, is, certainly, far from being the same. And what is true of the sphere of religion applies equally to the field of art, so that the style of temple-architecture which was developed and perfected in this region was also a thing of its own kind. Also, with all their seeming antagonism and mutual hostility, it is difficult to distinguish between the highly complicated textures of the two rival religions, or even between their temples. To quote Fergusson, "There is little essential difference either in plan or form between the Shaiva and Vaishnava Temples in the south of India. It is only by observing the images or emblems worshipped, or by reading the stories represented in the numerous sculptures with which a temple is adorned, that we find out the God to whom it is dedicated". This is substantially true and applies, by and large, to all religious architecture in South India. In the case of Kanchi where myth and legend make Shiva and Vishnu exchange such elaborate courtesies, this holds good almost wholly, excepting, in fact, only the Kailashnath Temple.

Along with the northern culture, philosophy and religion, the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon entered the Kanchi *Satya-Kshetra*. The *sanatan dharma* reasserted itself over the usurping faiths, and the deities of Brahmanism ousted the Bodhisattvas and the Tirthankaras of the Buddhists and the Jains. Great Kings put up great temples or imparted grandeur and added *gopuras* to the existing ones. And each temple was given a befitting and sanctifying legend. In the case of the more important edifices like the Varadaraja and the Vaikuntha Perumal of the Vaishnavas, or the Ekambranatha and the Kamakshi of the Shaivites, there is a number of myths which are a tribute to the wit and invention of the religious mind. The chief aim of these naive and fascinating stories seems to be to bring, in as convincing and impressive a manner as possible, the Puranic gods and goddesses into the Dravidian fold, and, through cleverly woven fib and fable, to shift their abodes south-wards. Thus, to deal first with the Shaiva

manufacturers, it is stated that the divine couple were once playing at dice when, angered at having been insulted by Parvati, Shiva cursed her with ugliness till, with Vishnu's grace, she should please him through rigorous penance. She undertook to expiate her sin at Kanchi under a mango-tree. First she propitiated Vishnu who restored her beauty and she shone forth as the Goddess *Kamakshi*—she with the eyes of love; and then she sat down meditating over her Lord. Now, to test her steadfastness, Shiva released the river Ganges where Parvati was worshipping an image of his. She was frightened at the sudden onrush of the waters but clung to Shiva's image, and gladdening the god thereby they were reunited. Shiva, then, agreed to stay in Kanchi in the form of the single-mango-tree and to mark the holy and happy sojourn there of the divine couple the grand Ekambaranatha temple was built around the same *Ekamra*. Near-by stands the shrine of the goddess Kamakshi whose legend, already involved and complicated enough, continues, grows, and is improvised upon, as it were, as new characters, human or divine, and new elements of diverse kind, demand attention or accommodation. It was considered meet, for example, that Shankaracharya, who did so much for Shaivism, should have been suitably rewarded. Kamakshi's grace came handy. He was a devout worshipper of the Mother, and finding that the Lovely-Eyed was by night prowling about as Kali, the dreadful goddess, and was causing untold misery to the people, Shankaracharya appeased her and she promised not to leave the temple without his permission. Even now, the tradition is respected so that whenever the goddess moves out in procession to the town, a halt is made before an image of Shankaracharya standing in the same temple, of Kamakshi, seeking, so to speak, his formal permission for her excursion.

Shiva's favour having been extended to Kanchi, Vishnu had to be made to bestow his grace upon the place. As narrated above, he was introduced in the story of the mythical quarrel between Shiva and Gauri, but that bare reference was not enough. Once again, a most complicated tale was fashioned and, in one stroke, several ends were achieved. To begin with, Brahma and Saraswati were brought into the picture so that Vishnu could be, thereby, further exalted. Brahma wanted to perform a sacrifice that he might realise God-head and decided to undertake it at Kanchi. Saraswati wished to thwart Brahma's efforts and, assuming the form of the stream Vegavati, rushed in a flood to interrupt the *Yagna*. Brahma then prayed to God Vishnu for succour and He the Lord Himself

appeared in a gigantic form and lay across the flood like a protective dam. Saraswati was humbled and Brahma's sacrifice successfully completed. Then the Lord appeared before them in all His splendour and glory as Devaraja. The two manifestations, *Yathoktakari* or *Taduktikar*—'one who did as was bidden' or 'that which is said, let be'—and Devaraja are both duly worshipped. The legend of the Yathoktakari was later elaborated upon, because the Shaivites had made their goddess, Kamakshi, do what her devotee had wanted, and the Vaishnavas were not to be beaten at the game. In fact, the rivalry between the sects, or, for that matter, between and among the various religions of India, has often run on parallel lines, so that there obtains an amazing sameliness, at times, even to the minutest detail, in respect of their myths, their monuments and their modes of worship. But, to revert to the Vaishnava myth-makers and their *Yathoktakari* legend, "with which even the children of Kancheepuram are familiar". In the temple of this Lord, there was a devotee by the name Kanikannan. This Kanikannan was a gifted poet and to him was deeply attached an old lady who, in her younger days, had been a dancing girl in the King's court. And once when the Lord was pleased with Kanikannan, he begged Him to rejuvenate her so that she might serve Him and sweep His temple and keep it clean. Lord Yathoktakari graciously accepted the request and the old woman became, once again, young and strong. This surprised the King and wishing to have his own youth restored, he asked Kanikannan to intercede with the Lord on the King's behalf. But Kanikannan refused to abuse the gift of his song for any but religious ends. He had done what he had that the woman might serve the Lord, as, indeed, she had wanted to do. The King was furious over this brusqueness on the part of Kanikannan and banished him from the city. Kanikannan was a devotee of the great Thirumazhisai, of the celebrated saintly order of the Azhwars of Kanchi, and he was now obliged to join the issue. He approached the Lord and addressed Him thus "Wilt Thou keep silent, O Lord of Kanchi, when our devotee Kanikannan is being ordered to leave this place, and I myself would go with him? Wouldst Thou not rather roll up thy own snaky bed and quit this ungodly place?" And the Lord, it is said, did leave the place along with the Saint and his devotee's devotee, Kanikannan. Then, the whole town of Kanchi grew dark and gloomy, and the people went and protested loudly at the King's court, so that the King was forced to go post haste after the party and to beseech Kanikannan's return. The place where the three had by then reached and from where

they were requested to get back to Kanchi is known as *Oriravi rukkai*—the spot where the Lord stayed for a whole night, and its holiness is recognised even today. The joyous festival which was celebrated on the return to the city, of the Lord and his devotees, and of light and life, is still held; and during this, the deity is carried to the very place, *Orikkai*, associated with the legend and located on the outskirts of the city, on the banks of the river Palar. The shrine, itself is situated about a mile west of the great 'Sri Varadarajaswami' temple, and no Vaishnava pilgrimage to Kanchi is considered complete without worshipping at this fane.

There are many more legends linked with the religious history of the city. Some of these help to establish the superiority of one god over another or to explain how a certain form or attribute of this deity or that came to be acquired. For instance, there is, at Kanchi, one peculiar statue of Vishnu which has eight arms instead of the usual four with which the God is normally depicted. This form of the *Ashtabhujam* Maha-Vishnu was necessitated because of a kind of indirect contest between Shiva and Vishnu. Brahma was performing a *yagna* at Kanchi and the *asuras*, the demons, came, as they do in most stories of this sort, to disturb the sacrificial ceremony. When the lesser deities failed to provide due protection against the activities of these demons, Vishnu appeared as *Narasimha*. The *asuras* ran away and propitiated Lord Shiva who came in the form of a fierce eight-legged animal, *Sarabha*. Brahma again prayed to Vishnu for help and, finding that four arms would not do, this god assumed the eight-armed form that he might vanquish Shiva. The hands bear a chakra, sword, lotus and arrow, and bow, couch, shield and mace. Yet another tale, intended, again, to establish Vishnu's superiority, relates to one more title, namely 'Deepa Prakasha' —Lustre of Light—which Kanchi's Vishnu enjoys. This time, a straight question was asked by Saraswati as to who was greater, Lakshmi or Saraswati; and, rudely enough, Brahma replied that Lakshmi was greater. Saraswati was offended and totally declining to take her due place by his side in a *yagna* he was about to perform, left her husband. Brahma, however, decided to carry on which further enraged her, and, in an effort to create all possible obstacles to the performance of Brahma's *yagna*, the goddess used her powers to the utmost. At one stage in this conflict, she managed to produce complete darkness about the place where Brahma's sacrificial altar stood; but he called upon the Lord Vishnu to help and this deity appeared duly as Deepa Prakasha, and, standing there like Light personified, made everything bright and beautiful. Then Saraswati was humbled

and grew divinely wise, and sacred Kanchi acquired yet another of her Vishnu manifestations.

And so on and so forth ; not in a manner of speaking only, but really and truly, for there is no end to these tales and legends which stretch, in song or prose, like a continuous length of fabric, woven as intricately and prettily as the silks of Conjeevaram, over the entire thousand years or more of history during which Hindu Kanchi flourished. When in the 14th century, the Muslim invader set his foot on this holy soil, Fancy was obliged to yield to Reality; and though, in course of time, and notwithstanding the later French attacks and British conquest of the town, the place rolled back into old routine, the myth-making was never resumed. Instead, the lesson that history had taught was that temples should serve as citadels and, therefore, huge enclosures and tall *gopuras*—those many-storeyed towers of observation—were added to the earlier sanctuaries and sanctums. Indeed, queer are the ways of history, as those of the Lord, for it is by strange, devious movements, that she has assisted man to make much of his achievement and in such diversified fields. But, whether invented by political necessity, or commissioned by kings, and, again, whether originally devised in religious books, or evolved by art and time, the monuments that adorn Kanchi are glorious. What is more, they present, in one vast combination, all the architectural styles and trends, all the sculptural excellence and exquisiteness, which the art of South India, as a whole, possesses; so that, the Kanchi temples help the art-critic to formulate a true opinion not only about the art of the Pallavs and their successors, but about all Dravidian architecture. The soaring *gopuras* are here and the fortress-like enclosures. There are splendid sculptures and beautiful pillared-halls and finely-built *teppakulams* galore. All in all, it is no exaggeration to say that Kanchi's greater temples, like the Kailashnatha and Sri Varadaraja, the Ekambranatha and the Vaikuntha, provide at one place what the visitor will find scattered elsewhere over the entire Tamilnad. And, as in other respects, Kanchi, the epitome and portrait of Tamilian thought and culture, becomes the South's best exponent, even in the matter of the southern style of art and architecture. Indeed, one may say that, on this count, She is Tanjore and Madura and Mahabalipuram all rolled into one.

This may sound curious since, having been affected in regard to her religious philosophy etc., Kanchi could hardly have remained truly Dravidian in

the field of architecture. And yet, history of art everywhere shows that, whatever else the conquerors may achieve and superimpose, they usually accept, cannot but accept, the canons and constructions, in the sphere of art and architecture, of the people they rule. Unless they can bring with them the artisans and the designers, and armies of masons and workmen, their needs must be content with the work of the natives; especially where the natives have their own proud traditions and their own highly cultivated sense of values. In Kanchi's case, what Fergusson says while discussing Dravidian architecture, is certainly true: "All that is intellectually great in that country (India)—all, indeed, which is written belongs to them (The Aryans), but all that is built—all, indeed, which is artistic—belongs to other races, who were either aboriginal or immigrated into India at earlier or subsequent periods, and from other sources than those which supplied the Aryan stock".

It is not possible here to deal at any length with the Dravidian style of temple-architecture or even with the vast wealth and treasures which Kanchi possesses in this field. Nevertheless, a broad view of the matter, however sketchy, is essential to the understanding of the lay-out of the south-Indian temples. Structurally, these form a species altogether different from the *Nagara* temple of the north which is usually accepted as the Indo-Aryan style. The essential parts of the South Indian temples are (a) the *Vimana* which is the actual temple itself, and contains the cell where the deity to whom the temple is dedicated is housed; (b) the *Mandapam*, the porch, often grandly proportioned and beautifully decorated, which covers the ground and passage in front of the sanctum; (c) the *Gopuras*, the four gateways in the four sides of the walled enclosure that surrounds all the larger and the more notable temples, and which constitute about the most distinguishing feature of the Dravidian temple as contrasted with the north-Indian style of religious architecture; (d) *Chaultries*, pillared halls—apart from and other than the *Mandapam*—which are placed differently in different temples and used for various purposes; and finally, (e) *Teppakulam*, one or more tanks, (or wells) at least one of which is meant for sacred baths etc. Generally speaking, the essential difference between the temples of north and south lies, "in respect of the directional emphasis in their construction, which is horizontal in the case of the southern style as against the vertical which obtains in the *nagara* temples so that the Dravidian temple carries no shikharas over its holy of holies, nor no finial or *Kalsa* (waterpot), but has instead a vaulted roof of one or more storeys."

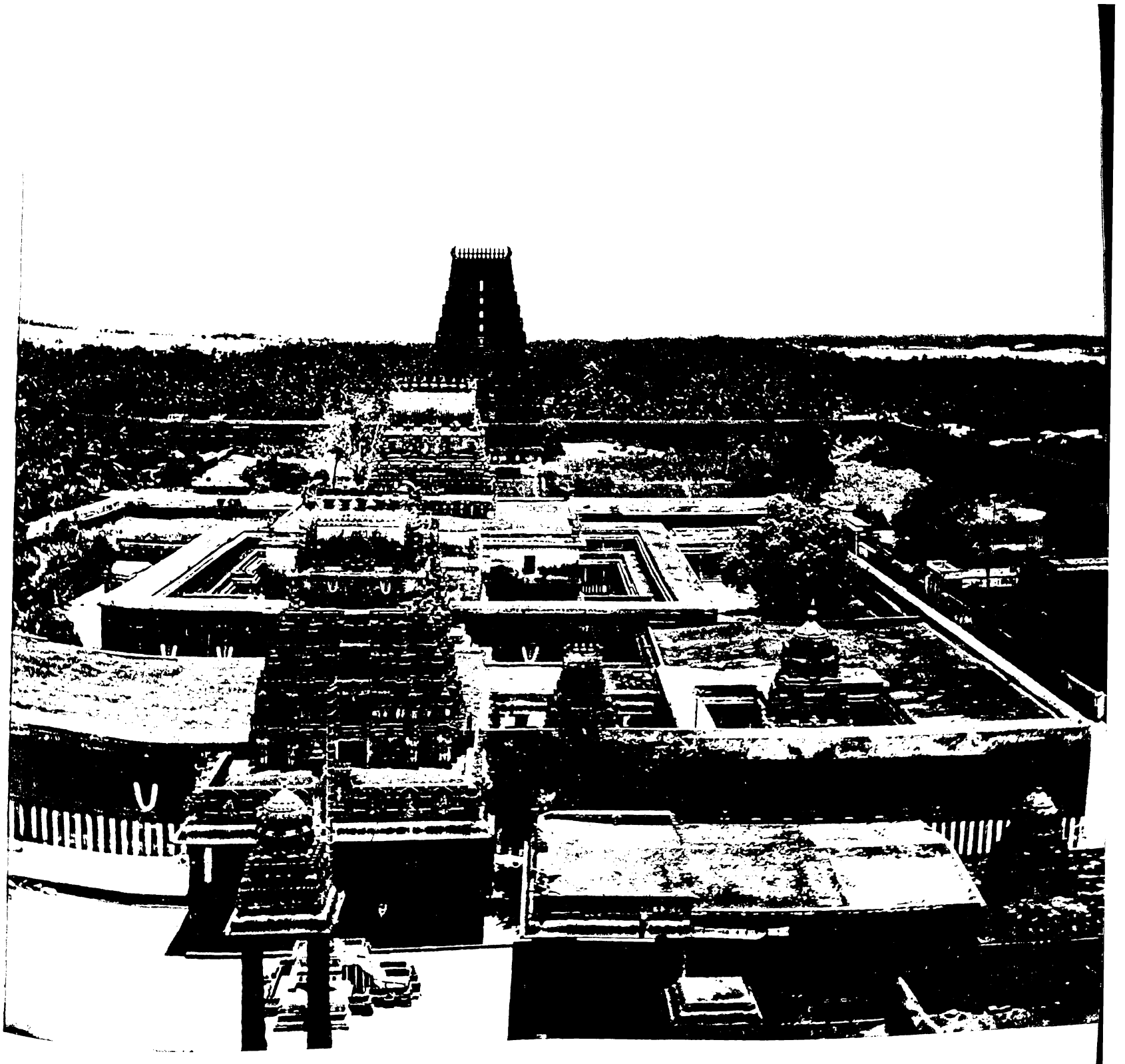
Yet, whatever might have been lost or gained in respect of the resultant impression, at least the upward-movement of the soul, the symbolisation, through the vertical, of the spiritual and the celestial, is more than recaptured by the towering gopuras which adorn the quadrangular enclosures, and which seem to outdo, in height and magnificence, all and everything in the rest of the temple put together.

Of the temples that count, some belong to the Vaishnava sect and others to the Shaiva, and are, therefore almost evenly spread over the city's two parts, namely the Little Kanchi (of the Vaishnavas) and the Shaiva Big Kanchi. In the Vishnu Kanchi, which lies about 3 kilometres south-east of the Railway, the Vaikuntha Perumal—a Pallava monument and, therefore, representative of the early Dravidian style—is one of the most important Vaishnava shrines and worth a visit. The vast enclosures are very impressive, and the central shrine is built and covered in, what is for the south-Indian style, an rather unusual manner. Its several storeys are meant to symbolise the ascent to the *vaikuntha*, the heaven of Vishnu. The entrance hall or portico, with a pillar and verandah which stands by the *teppakulam*, is a fine structure, and the sculptures on the pillars and walls, especially the rampant *yalis*, are remarkable for workmanship. Another temple of the Vaishnavas, lying again in Little Kanchi, is the great Varadarajaswami. This is a later construction than the Vaikuntha and incorporates some Chola and several Vijayanagara structures. Distinguished by a seven-storeyed Gopuram and a remarkably beautiful pillared hall, it is the stronghold of the Vishishtadvaita school of Ramanuja. The temple is reported to be fabulously rich and possesses some fine treasures as well as exceptionally attractive processional cars (*Rathas*).

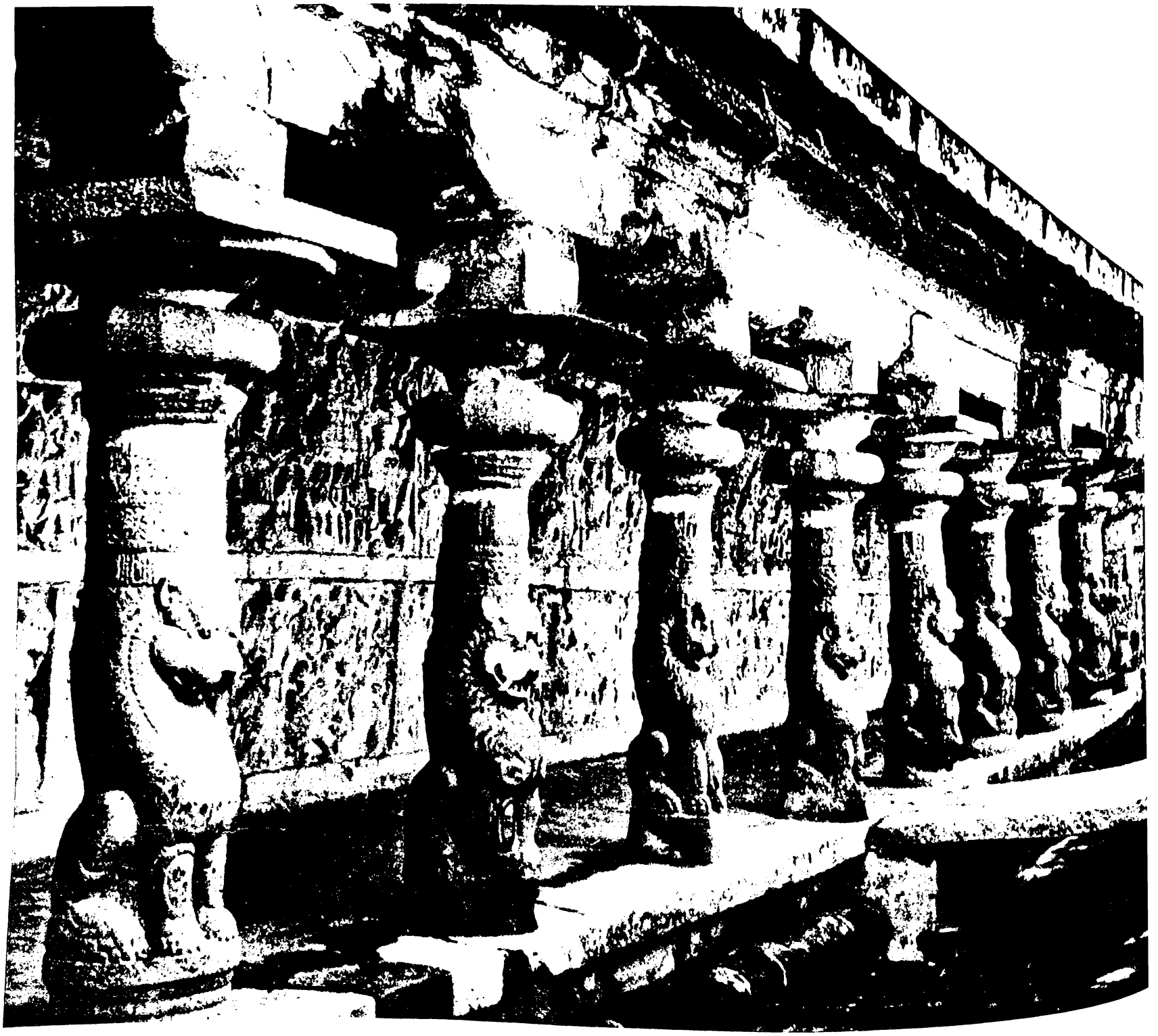
Whatever its relative ranking in the realm spiritual, in respect of architectural and sculptural excellence the Big Kanchi, of Shiva, steals a definite march over the Vaishnava fanes. The Ekambaranatha temple, belonging stylistically to the same date as the Varadarajaswami, is a far more magnificent creation. It has some first-rate gopuras, the largest being the one on the south. This is ten storeys and about 58 metres high. A hall of over five hundred columns and several large and fine *mandapas* and *teppakulams* supply other "requisites of a first-class Dravidian temple", but all thrown together, as Fergusson remarks, "as if by accident. No two gopuras are opposite one another, no two walls parallel,

and there is hardly a right angle about the place. All this creates a picturesqueness of effect seldom surpassed in these temples, but deprives it of that dignity, we might expect from such parts if properly arranged". This touch of classical dignity and elegance which one misses at the Ekambaranatha is supplied in full measure by the Kailasanatha temple. This is so holy that a single *pradakshna* around its idol will procure salvation, and is, withal, such a gem of the Pallava art that it evokes comparison with the finest in Indian architecture. It is coeval with the seven Pagodas of Mahabalipuram—indeed, there are some similar-looking *rathas* here too—and was erected by the same builder. This Shaiva shrine consisting of but a *vimana* and a separate *mandapam* is, in size, far smaller than the colossuses which have been mentioned above ; but it has a stamp of elegance and graceful proportion which those others cannot approach. The arrangement of placing the primary deity and the subsidiary ones is like that of a proper Shivalaya, and similar to that in that other Kailashnath temple, at Ellora. The ornamentation, however, is altogether different and some of the *Yali* sculptures at the Kanchi monument are all its own, and are, for their beautiful carving, almost unique in India.

This reminds one of that yet another thing of Kanchi which is unique in India : her *sarees*. The weavers of Kanchi are as artistic as they are honest, and the silks they make and the threads they use are pure and fine, and the patterns they weave are exquisite. The product, as celebrated as her temples, is amongst the country's proudest achievements, and makes for one more point in respect of which, this Kashi of the South, Kanchi, is as good as, if not better than, that other holy city and producer of silks and of beautiful brocades, namely, Benares !



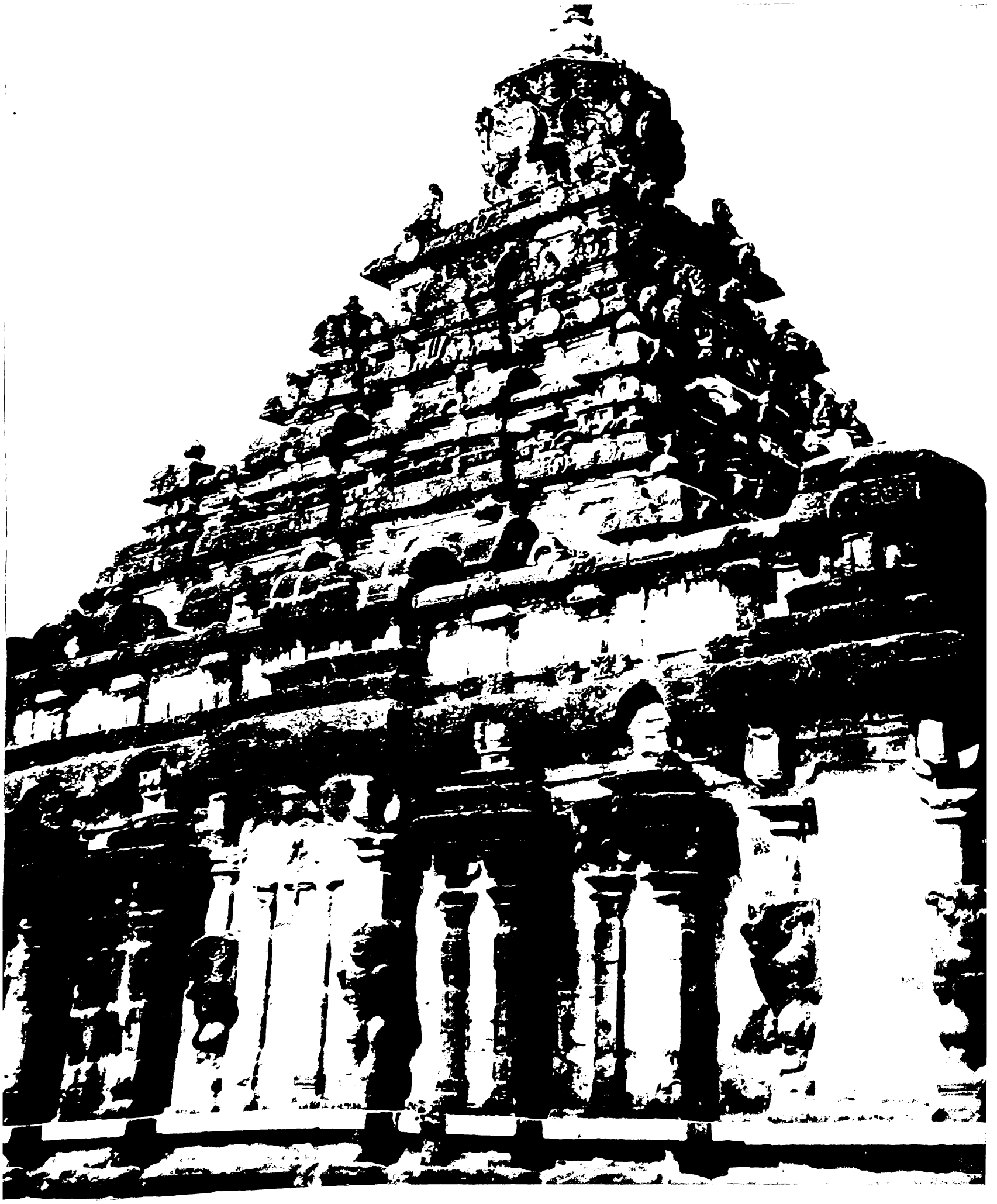
VISHNU KANCHI, GENERAL VIEW : The city of Kanchipuram is divided into two portions, Big Kanchi of Shiva, and Little Kanchi of Vishnu. Spacious enclosures, tall gopuras, beautiful pavilions and exquisite ornamentation—such are the features of the temples in both the Kanchis.

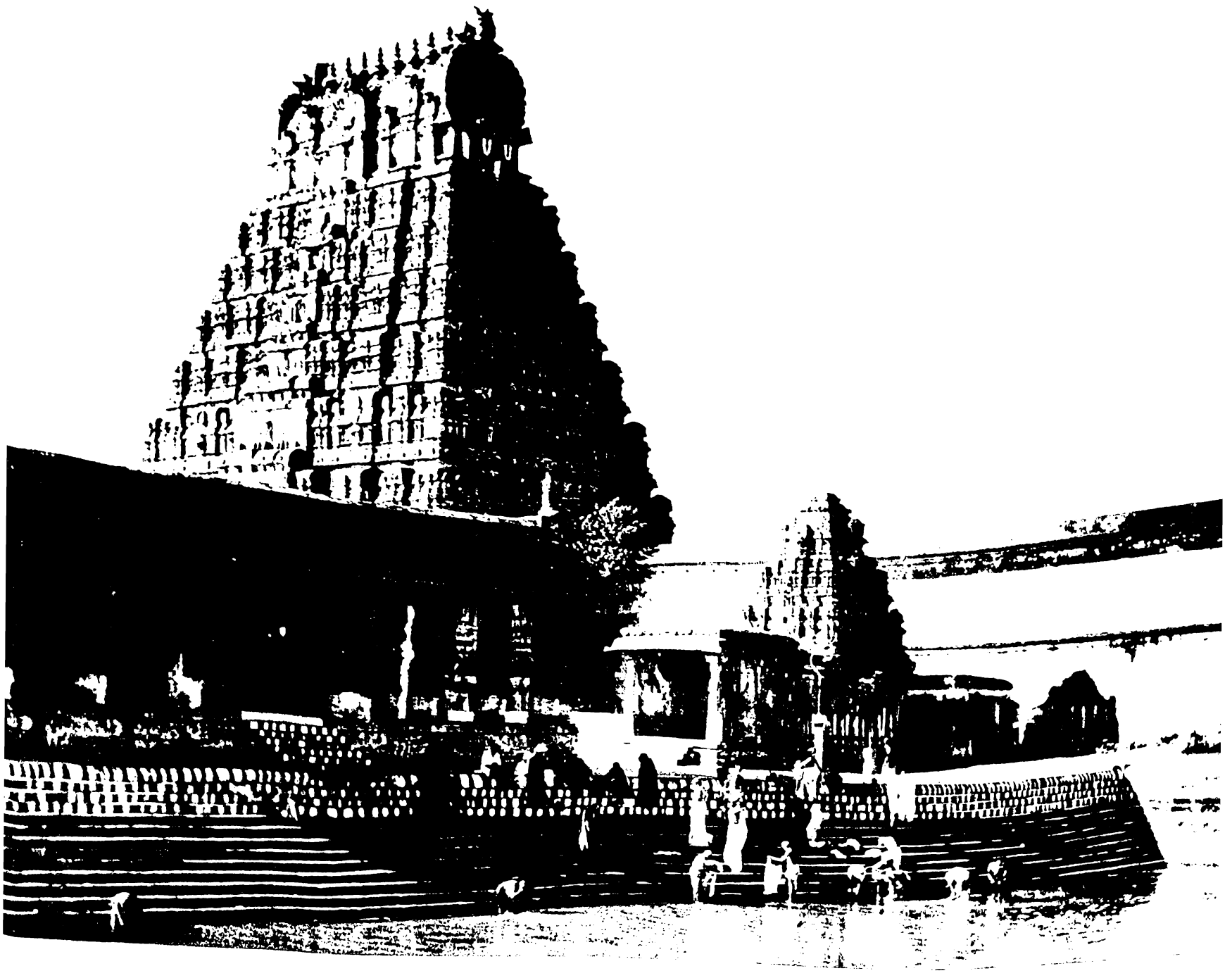


VAIKUNTHA PERUMAL TEMPLE, VIEW OF PILLARED GALLERY : The covered corridor going round the temple is decorated with carved panels and pillars adorned with magnificent, seated lions.

TEMPLE OF VARADARAJA, VIEW OF GOPURA : The Varadaraja Temple is the largest and the richest shrine of Vishnu at Kanchi. The Hundred-pillar mandapam of the temple is most magnificently decorated.

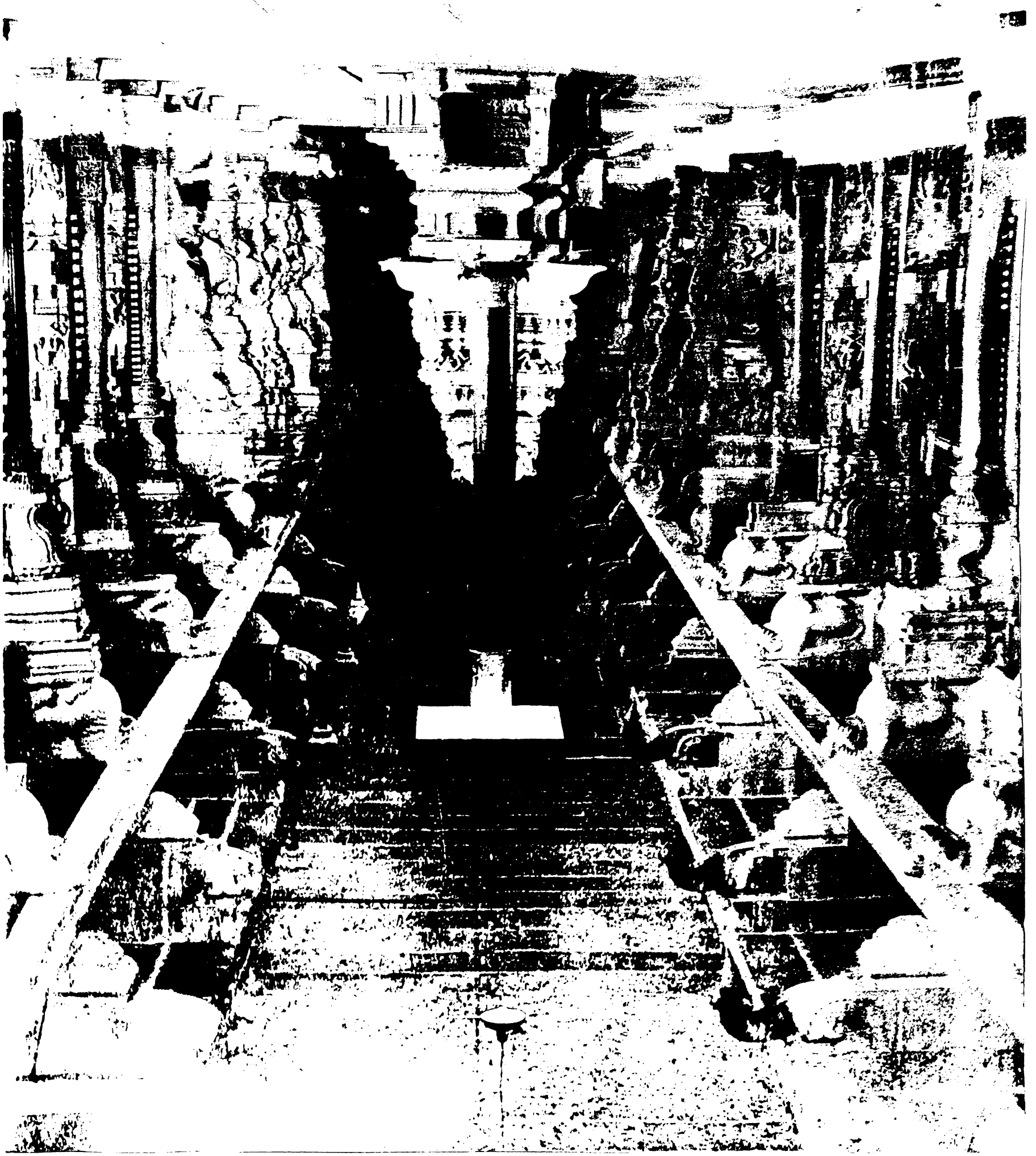






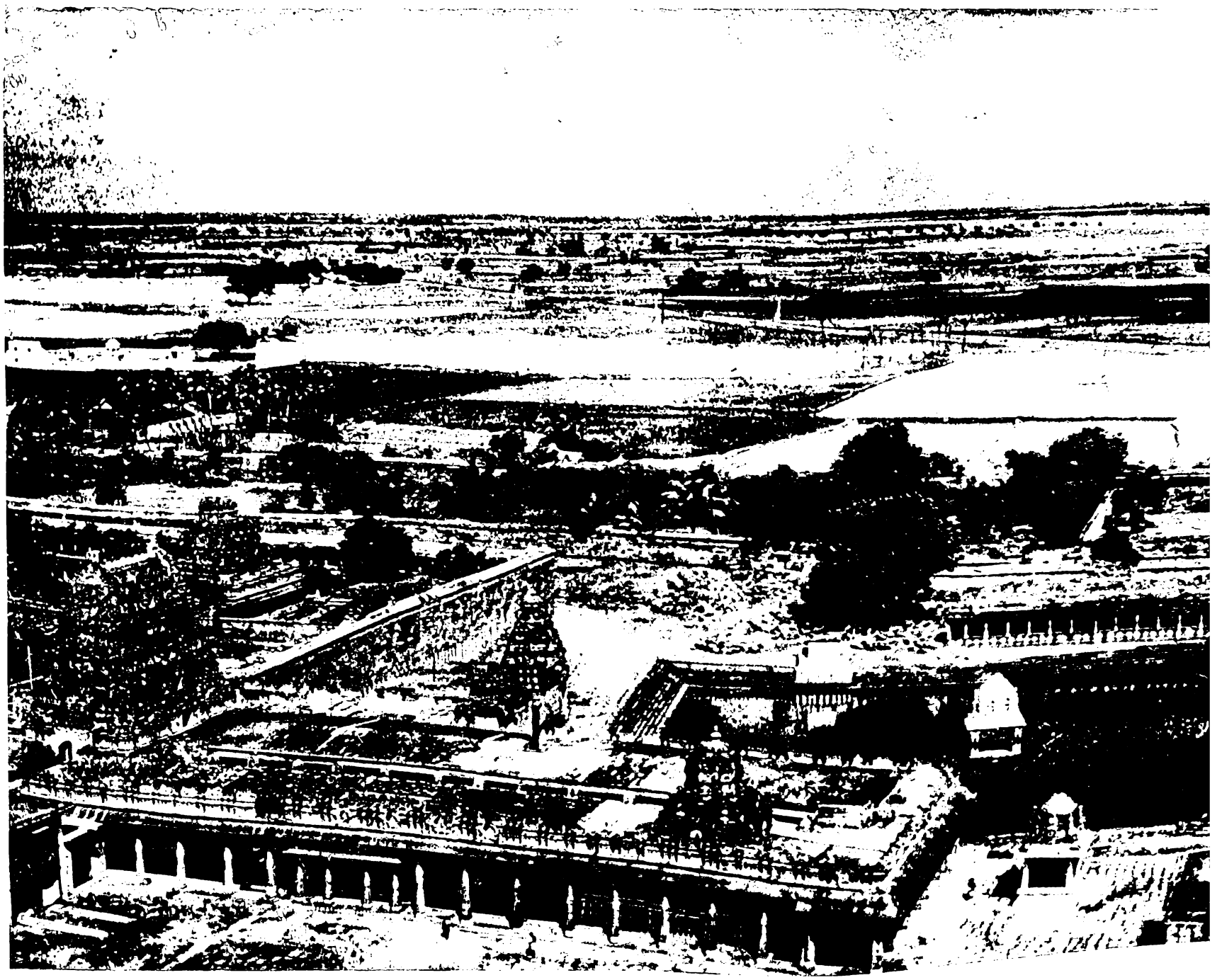
TEMPLE OF VARADARAJA, VIEW OF TEPPAKULAM, GOPURA AND HUNDRED-PILLAR MANDAPAM : The Hundred-pillar Hall of this temple is a marvellous monument and displays some of the finest carving in the South-Indian style.

◀ VAIKUNTHA PERUMAL TEMPLE, GENERAL VIEW : This 8th Century temple of Vishnu is one of the finest specimens of Pallava architecture.



◀ KAMAKSHI TEMPLE, VIEW OF INTERIOR : The pillars are carved in the most intricate designs. The Kamakshi Temple is dedicated to the goddess Parvati.

SHIVA KANCHI, VIEW FROM EKAMBARESHWARA TEMPLE. The same spacious enclosures and tall gopuras which distinguish the Vishnu Kanchi mark the monuments in Big Kanchi of Shiva.

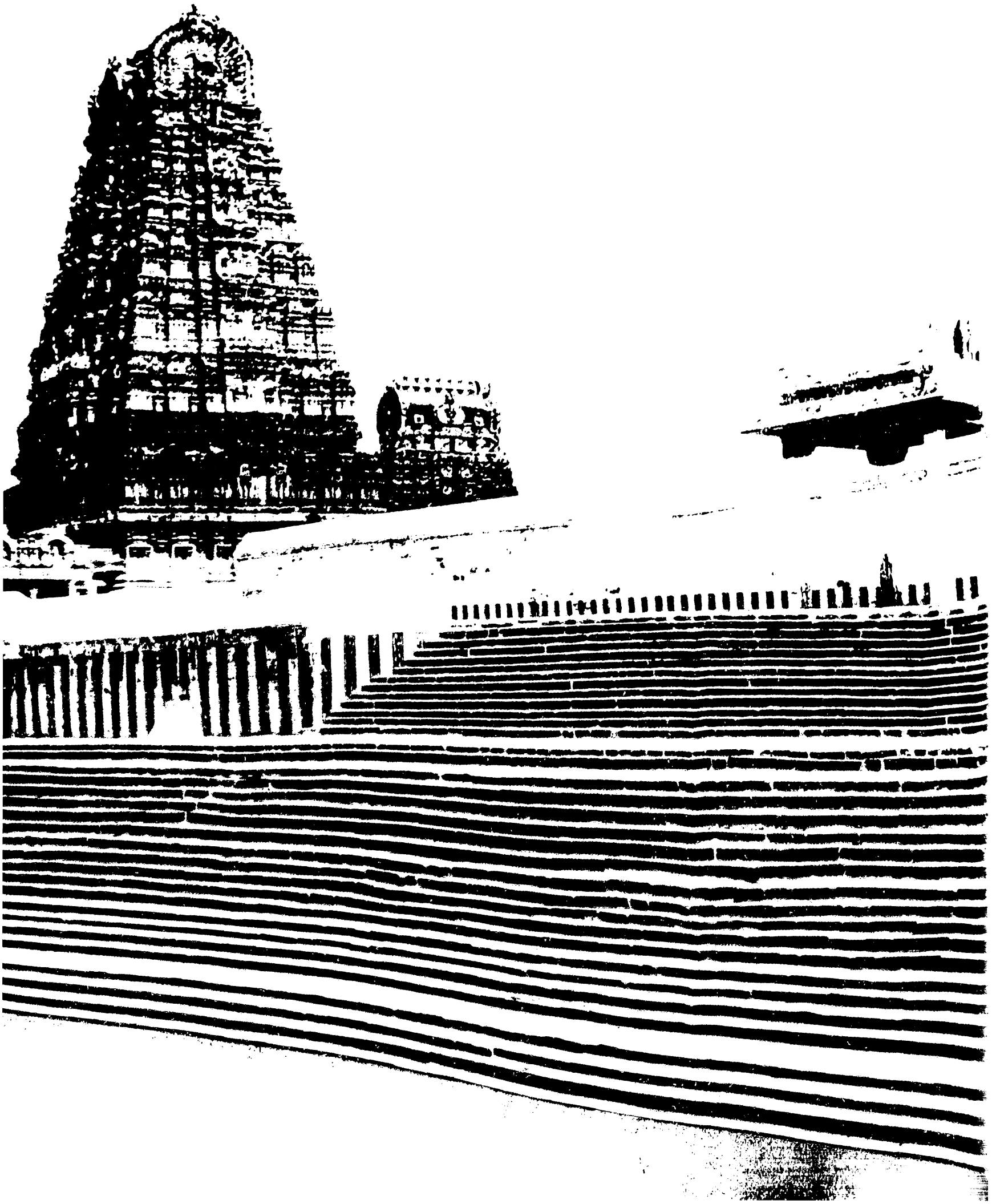


KAILASHNATHA TEMPLE, GENERAL VIEW : This temple of the Pallavas is famous for the chiselled beauty of its sculptures. The quaint tower represents the early form of the gopura. Another notable example of the same type at Kanchi is the Vaikuntha Perumal.



TEMPLE OF MEENAKSHI : POND-OF-THE-GOLDEN-LILIES AND GOPURA

Sin-stricken and unhappy, Indra, King of gods, had wandered long and far and fruitlessly. Then as he neared a Shivalingam, his soul was cleansed and there he worshipped the deity, Shiva. It was from this Pond that he had culled the flowers for his worship.



10 MADURA

Madura, where the great big temple of Meenakshi and Sundareshwar stands, is, in many respects, a unique city. Admittedly the oldest city of South India, she is the mirror and epitome of all that is Southern and Dravidian, and in that, of all that is the best and the finest. Her six letters—or seven, if you like to style her 'Madurai'—encompass such a mass of rich associations with the history and culture, religion and philosophy, and art and literature of the Tamil people that if one city, and only one, had to be selected which would reflect and represent truly and justly the life and civilization of the people of southern India, then, beyond a shadow of doubt and question, it should be Madura. Her only rival, from that point of view, could be Kanchipuram. But then Kanchi, golden and beautiful as Madurai is sweet and silvery, has far too much of the impact, direct or indirect, of the north to have remained wholly southern. Of course, one cannot put one's finger on anything particular, and say that here or in this lies the difference, that here Kanchi is not southern and there Madura is. Yet, the difference obtains definitely. One senses it as surely as one sniffs, say, the *Joohi*-laden breeze as distinct from the Jasmine-scented. One feels instinctively that Madurai is the genuine thing, and that here, if anywhere, the north has accepted the south at the latter's terms, so that the god of the North came here to wed the goddess of the South, and danced to the tune that was called—on the right foot, not the left !

Again, while Madura is the second largest city of Madras State, and,

with her population of over four lakhs, comes next only to the State's capital, she is a temple-city, in the strictest sense. One has heard of the temple-cities of the Jains, and there are other sites in the south, like Srirangam, Rameshwaram and Tirupati where, too, the temple is the place ! But one has to go and look at Madura to understand the meaning of the term. For here is this city, goodly in size, and swarming with people, yet a city which is literally built around her temple which constitutes not merely the centre and nucleus of her life, but is *all* her life. Madura, verily, lives on worship, thrives on religion, is maintained by the Meenakshi. And if it be argued that her weavers contribute as much to her life and sustenance as the worshippers, one can be sure that even they, the weavers of Madura, are first and last, the worshippers of Meenakshi ; and their stalls are set and their sales are secured all in the benevolent spread and shadow of that colossus, containing the twin shrines of Meenakshi and Sundareshwar which make the temple and the town one of the holiest in the South !

The antiquity of Madura is indisputable, and many are the references to this city of the Pandyas in ancient records and in reports of travellers. The city is at least 2,500 years old, as the Mahavansha, the well-known Ceylonese Chronicle, mentions a King of the Island who was son-in-law of a Pandyan ruler. Ptolemy speaks of it as Modoura, the emporium of the south, and Megasthenes describes it as the capital of a most glorious Pandyan Princess. Also, it is believed that in the first century B. C. a Pandyan ruler had sent an ambassador to the Roman Emperor, Augustus. There are several other references to Madura and her 'Pandiones' scattered all over the western chronicles of those times which indicate that the place was a centre of commerce and civilization, of no mean repute. Within the country, in the region of the Tamils, especially, Madura was a city of first and foremost importance. Because of her celebrated *Sangama*, the academy, she enjoyed a great reputation as a seat of learning, and while the learned scholars of Kanchi, her Dandins and Dharmapalas, specialized in Sanskrit or Prakrit, the Tamil poet or pundit looked up to Madura and coveted the stamp of excellence from her masters. The story is that Brahma having been offended with Saraswati, the latter was placed under a curse that she should undergo forty-eight mortal births. On supplication, the god was pleased to relent to the extent that all the forty-eight births might be simultaneous, so that forty-eight mortal bearers of the essence of the goddess of

learning and wisdom were created. These forty-eight formed the first Sangama—Sanskrit Sangha—of Tamilnad, and they set a standard of achievement and a measure of quality which, to say the least, do honour to the myth. Tiruvalluvar, the famed poet of the *Kural*, accepted miraculously after a preliminary rejection, was one of the members of the Sangama, and it was generally the ambition of every literary artist of those days that he might belong to the set. The latter part of the story of the celebrated epic poem, *Chilappatikaram*, the Jewelled Anklet, is laid in Madura, and provides rich descriptions, albeit poetic and fanciful, of the city as she then was. Even then, she was a place of unrivalled prosperity and great religious fervour.

This famous story of the Tamils is traditionally placed in the 1st or 2nd century of the Christian era. That sounds remote enough but is nothing compared to the mythical dates associated with the founding of the city and kingdom of Madura. According to that well-known account of this sacred city, the *Maduraittala Varalaru*, "After Shiva and his son Ugra, Kulasekhara obtained the throne on the expiry of forty lakhs, sixty-five thousand, and six hundred and fifty years. Thus from the days of Kulasekhara Pandya to the days of Parakrama Pandya 'who sleeps with the wakeful sword', the place enjoyed Pandyan rule". In a sense, even this is anticipating things because so far as legendary treatment of the theme is concerned, the story should begin, properly speaking, with the Aryan discovery of and penetration into the South, the Dakshinadesa. This Tamil county was all forests and practically uninhabited till Agastya came hither on a request from the gods. They and the Rishis had once assembled on the Himalayas and, finding the earth sinking from their weight, they decided to send somebody to the south to rectify the imbalance. Agastya being considered capable of balancing the rest of them all together, he then proceeded southwards. First he went to the Ganges and received from her the river Kaveri. Then he met Rishi Jamadagni and took from him his son Trnadhumagni, and from Rishi Pulestya, he obtained his virgin sister Lopamudra. Going further, he took from Dwarka 18 of the ruling family of Vishnu (Vrsnis), and 18 crores of two classes of people, Velir and Aruvalar. So accompanied, he reached south and transformed the forest region into inhabited country. The story is long and among the several details given in the narrative the river Vaigai, upon which Madura stands, figures prominently. If this great migration ever took place, it indicates a kind of 'march of civilization from the north into the south' and, in course of time,

this southern city became the Mathura of the Dakshindesha. She became, however, a Shaiva Mathura where the Shaivite has outshone the Vaishnava in investing his god with the lustre of love and the halo of power. The music of Krishna's flute and the spell of his *ras* dances are matched by the dances of the god of Dance, the Natraja; and whereas the gopinis of Mathura stopped the *ras* after their Lord left them and departed for Dwarka, the devadasis of Madura were to long continue their dances in the presence of the Sundareshwar who, sweetening their city in name and substance by the *madhu* dripping from his gracious looks, had chosen to abide there for ever, by the side of the Devi Meenakshi, the Fish-eyed.

The legend regarding the introduction of the worship of Shiva in Madura is as follows : Indra had been wandering about to atone for the sin of having killed Vrtra who was a Brahmin, and though he visited holy place after holy place, his sin clung to his soul. After much unhappy wandering, he came to the place where Madura is now located, and suddenly he felt the burden of his guilt slip off his conscience. Looking about for the possible explanation of such a miracle, he found a lingam standing in the wilderness. Gathering some flowers from a pond nearby, he worshipped the lingam with all reverence. Now, while the King of gods was performing this *puja*, a merchant named Dhananjaya, who happened to be passing by, beheld the act of worship, and when the god had departed, himself bowed before the deity's emblem. Then he went and informed the King, Kulasekhara, of what he had seen and learnt. This king had already had the *darshan* of the great god in a dream in which Shiva had commanded him to build a temple to him. So he got the forest cleared up and raised a befitting temple to house the lingam and, in course of time, built a town around the temple. It is said that both the temple and the town were so finely built that the god was pleased to behold them and to add to their sanctity by besprinkling them with the holy waters of the sacred stream, the Ganges, which flows through his matted locks. Thus consecrated, the shrine and the city could vie in respect of sanctity with any holy place of the north, and Madura soon became a big centre of pilgrimage.

The pond from where Indra had culled the flowers for worship is stated to be the same which now stands in the great Meenakshi temple, opposite the shrine, near the southern gopura, and is still called by the name it had then

acquired—the Pond of golden water-lilies. But the sanctity of this pond is far greater than that which would have accrued to it, had it only furnished the flowers for Indra's worship of Shiva. In fact, these waters were connected with what is one of the most powerful legends of Indian mythology. The gods were being worsted by Taraka in their eternal warfare with the demons and they were advised that only a son of Shiva could help them in their sad plight. That mighty god, a recluse by nature, was, at that time, all the more averse to any activities of the kind which would have supplied the want of the gods. This was so because of his great sorrow over the demise, in exceptionally tragic circumstances, of his wife Sati. But Sati was made to be born again as Parvati, the daughter of the great Himalaya, and to undergo heroic and unparallelled penance that she might win this god of gods, Shiva, who with fire emanating from his divine eye, had consumed the god of love himself. Then, to cut short this most fascinating of romances, when, after endless adventures, the divine couple were to beget their son, who was to be the future god of war, another difficulty arose. The all-too-potent seed of Shiva was too tremendous a thing to be put all into one conception, and fearing that a child thus begot might annihilate the entire universe, it was arranged that Agni, the god of Fire, should receive it in the first instance, in his mouth. Yet, even the fiery mouth of Agni could not bear the burning essence and so down it fell to the ground, where it formed this pond, of golden lilies, at Madura. From this, Parvati drank and, thereby, conceived the invincible child, Skand or Karttikeya, the god of war. That is why the pond is held so holy and whoever bathes there or touches the water, for him there is the blessedness of being in contact with the very seed of Shiva.

The acceptance of Shiva as their god by the southerners, or the acceptance, rather, of south and of Madura by Shiva, is the theme of another celebrated legend and one with which the Madura temple is connected in a more direct way. Meenakshi, the goddess of the city, and one of the two deities to whom the temple is dedicated, was a Pandyan princess. She had been born as a reward of a *Putreshti Yagna*—a sacrifice undertaken from desire for a son—performed by the King Malayadhvaja, the son of Kulasekhara, the city's founder, who had propitiated Shiva. The king was disappointed because a daughter and not a son had been bestowed upon him, but, worse than that, he was horrified to find that the girl had three breasts instead of two. The divine

creature—for she was no other than a manifestation of Parvati—however, assured him that not only would she shine in deeds of valour and acts of conquest, more than any son might have done, but also that her third breast should disappear when she met her future husband. Time passed, and the girl, who, because of her bright fish-like eyes, had received the name of Meenakshi, grew into a most resplendent maiden, and as brave as she was beautiful. King after king she defeated, and god after god, until Shiva came disguised as Sundareshwar, handsome beyond measure, Lord of all Beauty. And then was the maiden rendered shy and womanly, her third breast vanished, and her heart was won and vanquished utterly. She became the bride of the god who styled himself as Sundara Pandya and together they ruled over Madura and begot a son whose name was Ugra, mentioned in the quotation from *Maduraittala Varalaru* given above.

There are several and, at times, strangely conflicting versions of all these legends and of the many more which relate to this city and to the deities associated with her. A very important point of difference, for example, in respect of the last tale, of the divine couple, is that, somehow their marriage never took place, for a maternal uncle who was to give away the maiden princess deliberately failed to turn up in time, and the *lagan*, auspicious moment, passed. Even now, when the annual festival of the marriage is organized with pomp and ceremony, this detail of the drama is enacted, and every year the marriage gets postponed, until the next year's auspicious *lagan*. That is why there are two separate temples, to Meenakshi and to Sundareshwar, and not one temple to the divine couple, as the story of their union would have warranted, nay, required. Perhaps, the meaning, if meaning there be, underlying all these various points and counter-points is that they represent what Zimmer believes to be a symbolical fusion of cults. To quote from his Art of Indian Asia, "Characteristic of these legends, as of many other celebrating the holy places of India, is the fact that they represent the miraculous powers as having pertained to the site of the sanctuary when it was still a wilderness. The conquering god of the Aryans arrived, experienced its wonder-working power, discovered the old cult object of the pre-Aryan culture (the 'Sisnadeva of Rig Veda) and bowed before it. This act effected a fusion of the ancient with the later cult ; the local object of worship in the wilderness being thus symbolically accepted and absorved by the newly introduced North Indian sect—which itself was the product of an earlier syncretism".

The legendary temple or temples—the *Chilappathikaram* mentions Madura as a city of four temples—belong, of course, only to legends, for after a long line of kings whose illustrious forefather was Ugra, child of the divine couple, the Pandyan dynasty was overthrown by the Cholas, and though the latter were later ousted by the Pandyans, they were again obliged to withdraw from their famed city. This time the enemy was the Mohammedan Malik Kafur, and during this conquest, in the 14th century, a large number of the city's ancient monuments were destroyed. For two hundred years thereafter, the city was to stay under a pall of obscurity and neglect. She lost her prosperity, and royal prestige, since kings of Vijayanagaram had annexed her, and their capital was Vijayanagar, not Madura. Nature added to the affliction of the city by inflicting flood and famine, and epidemics. It was not until the association of the Nayak dynasty with this city began that things took a turn for the better. Then, once again, the place was blessed and grew prosperous, and for two centuries, for as long as the earlier era of misfortune, indicating almost a kind of balancing recompensation, Madura lived in a glow of glory. The magnificent monuments which at present adorn the city are the gifts of the Nayaks. Vishwanatha, the first of the Nayaks of Madura, built the temple or, to be accurate, the earlier portion of the temple around the two shrines of Meenakshi and Sundareshwar which, it is said, had miraculously escaped destruction at the hands of the Muslim invader. Before he took over at Madura, Vishwanatha was a young courtier at Vijayanagar. The Chola king of Tanjore had attacked Madura whose king was a vassal of the Vijayanagar rulers. The king of Vijayanagar was furious and sent his able commander-in-chief, Nagama Nayaka, to reconquer the holy city. This the Nayak did, only to proclaim himself as the ruler there. Then the king called his noble lords and asked as to who among them would go and bring back the treacherous rebel in chains of humility? And from amongst that hushed assemblage of Vijayanagar's chivalry, who should step forth to undertake that campaign, but Vishwanatha, the youthful son of the rebellious general! He, the brave lad and noble-hearted, went forth in battle array, son against father, honour against infidelity, and defeating, by the grace of God, the recalcitrant chief, brought him before their king who forgave the miscreant from gratitude for his son's services. Vishwanatha was honoured beyond all measure, and appointed as the viceroy of Madura. He ruled well and wisely, and restored much of Madura's old stability and prosperity. He rebuilt the temple and the stream of pilgrims flowed into the city once again, and with them, much wealth and

blessedness. Then, in course of time, came Thirumala Nayak, one of Vishwanath's successors who had continued to enjoy in the line of heredity, like a ruling dynasty almost, the viceroyalty of this city of theirs. He found the suzerains, the kings of Vijayanagara, too weak to deserve allegiance and, overthrowing the mask of delegated power, proclaimed himself independent. He ruled as king of the city of Madura for nearly thirty-five years, and it was during his reign that the city got her great new buildings like the king's palace and the fine Teppakulam and almost all the additional structures which constitute the glory and grandeur of the temple. Contemporaneous almost with the Moghul king, he might most aptly be styled the Shahjahan of the South. Madura was really rich in those times. And royally, almost recklessly, were her gold-filled coffers emptied that here might arise the grandiose edifices which glorify the city and their builder. Speaking of these, a Jesuit priest wrote : "His reign was rendered illustrious by works of really royal magnificence. Among these are the pagodas of Madura, several public buildings and above all the royal palaces, the colossal proportions and astonishing boldness of which recall the ancient monuments of Thebes..... The beautiful Teppakulam at Madura, the Puthumandapam and the unfinished tower of the Rayagopuram were all due to his magnificent taste".

Of the other Nayak rulers who followed, two women deserve mention. Mangammal, who for 15 years was Queen Regent on behalf of a minor grandson is as famous for her energy and ability as she is infamous for intrigue and scandal. She gave to Madura a spell of great security and prosperity, during which the kingdom was looked after so well that every good road in the Madura and Tinnevelly districts is ascribed to her. She was followed by several weak rulers, until the last ruler named, ironically enough, Meenakshi lost the kingdom to Chanda Sahib, the Muslim Nawab of Karnatic. Soon after, the East India Company entered into the field, and, through stages which are common history, Madura passed into British hands, to share a common fate with the rest of the country. As would be natural, much modernity has come her way during the centuries that followed the rule of the Nayaks ; but all that looks like a superimposed superstructure, so superficial that it almost falls apart, as a thing not her own, the moment one reaches the precincts of the vast and truly impressive temple of Meenakshi. Then, once again, the powers that be are the old gods who, thousands of years ago, were, and continue to be, the true objects of worship. It is said that when after 48 years of Muslim rule, the

Hindu raja had re-entered Madura and rushed eagerly to pay worship at the sacred shrines of Meenakshi and Sundareshwar, he found a lamp burning there already ! and he had a strange experience that the exile of Hinduism had not been longer than a night, had been but a bad dream. Some such experience the visitor is in for when he gets to the shadow of the massive and lofty gopuras. Then without and within this amazing sanctuary, one will find Hinduism writ large, and the baffling scope of this mighty religion hits one in the eye. If, as for many people who have attempted to understand it, "Hinduism consists of a tropical luxuriance of ideas and beliefs ranging from the most primitive forms of animism and phallic worship to the most highly developed philosophical system", then, to quote the words of Mr. J. P. L. Shenoy, this temple "attempts in a limited manner, to represent this odd jumble of the wildest heresies, and curious traditions and strange legends—called Hinduism".

What is more, at first sight, it seems to be doing it too in a most odd and jumbled manner. The first impression of that huge thing called the Meenakshi temple which dominates and literally sprawls over the city, is that of "an aimless aggregate of parts that seem to have been added as time and circumstances dictated during a long course of time, rather than in accordance with the requirements of a deliberately set plan, and hence it lacks unity of plan and fails in effect". Indeed, for a building—if building it can be called—which from the time it was begun took 120 years to give it its present look, to be anything different might have been impossible. And yet, the truth is altogether stranger, for the temple is emphatically not what the District Gazetteer quoted above makes it out to be. On the contrary, but for that great ambitious venture of Thirumala, namely the Raya gopura which stands in its incomplete magnificence as a symbol of human vanity, the Madura temple is not only a compact unit, well conceived and better executed, but serves, in fact, as a typical example of the great temples of South-India ; and whether it is the four great gopuras of the outer enclosure, or the exquisite pillars of the 1000-pillar Mandapam, everything forms a part of a judicious plan which starting with the first of the Nayaks was, in a sense, merely completed and finalised by his glorious and zealous successors.

It is impossible here to do anything like justice to a truly stupendous temple like the Meenakshi. A bare description would need a book. To go into details of its architecture and sculpture as art, and then as symbols of ritual and

worship, would require volumes and a life-time of study, for it would mean dealing with the entire gamut of Dravidian architecture and sculpture, and with the full range and scope of Hinduism. The thirty million sculptured figures and more, which adorn the vast walls and halls, galleries and gopuras of the great temple, contain and portray such a wealth of mythical allusion and legendary anecdote that it is an affront to art and insult to religion to dispose it of in 120 seconds or in 300 words. The remarks that are offered are, therefore, meant merely to serve as the equivalent of a passing glance, of a look though the binoculars as one's plane flies over this mighty monument to God's glory.

The temple built over a parallelogram-like site measuring roughly 850 feet × 725 feet, (260 metres × 220 metres), stands in the heart of the city, and the city has been built about and around it so that the principal streets run parallel to the walls of the temple. Accessible therefore from every direction and visible from every point, the temple constitutes the centre not only of the geography of the holy city, but of her life and economy. Whether it is the five pilgrims who come into Madura every minute of the day and wend their way to the temple, or the crowds of citizens from whose consciousness the thought of the Temple is never separated, there is but one and only one impression which any visitor is bound to gather, that the Temple is Madura; and that, for the Indian, religion is not a thing apart and asunder but that its current runs through the whole man, affects him socially and economically and not merely spiritually, has to do with his art and culture and learning and education, his birth and love, and marriage and, in short, with every breath of his being until his death, and beyond ! No other city in India, of a size comparable to that of Madura, can provide the same feeling, unless it be Agra where the Taj dominates the minds of men in some similar fashion. But then the Taj, beautiful beyond comparison, is a soulless, secular building, and, in respect of the intensity of emotion generated by either, the difference is as between the warmth of the sun and that of the moon !

Since about the most typical feature of the great Dravidian temples is the gopura, and since the gopuras of Madura, in all eleven in number, are some of the most magnificent specimens of this species, a word or two may be said about these. In the first place, the elaborate carving of endless deities on the front of these massive many-storeyed tower-like geteways is not without significance. The

rigidity of the caste system prevented innumerable unfortunates from entering within; and, come to think of it, could there be a more effective device, for providing at once a most magnificent exterior to the fanes and an opportunity to those outcasts for worshipping the deity and his satellites from afar, than that of building these edifices and adorning them with such an amazing array of sacred sculpture? Secondly, these gopuras serve to emphasise like the *shikhara* of the *nagara* temple, the flight of the prayerful soul, symbolise, as it were, the celestial which is the true abode of the god within. It is this towering verticality which, combined with the infinite intricacy and multiplicity of unique image and form presented upon its surfaces, compels and holds one's attention; and, with the eyes, the thoughts of the beholder move upward, involuntarily, towards the infinite. And this to such an extent that even seasoned critics cannot speak of it except in terms passionate and poetic.

Thirumala Nayak wanted to build the most gigantic gateway possible, not only at Madura but at several other places. Called Raya gopuras, after the name of the Vijayanagar's King, these were intended to be nearly 300 feet, over 90 metres, high. The one at Madura stands to the east. It is 174 feet north to south at the base and 117 feet deep. The entrance has 57 feet wide gateways and is itself nearly 22 feet wide. Exquisitively carved and intended to be of vast dimensions this gopura if completed 'would have been the finest edifice of its class in southern India'. Nearby stands the main entrance which leads through a long and broad avenue to yet another enclosure and then through another gopuram into a third enclosure wherein lies the holy shrine of Meenakshi. In an adjacent shrine to the north, which is reached through a passage graced with the auspicious presence of a huge statue of Ganesha, is the shrine of Sundareshwar. In front of the Meenakshi shrine, near the southern gopura, is the legendary Lily Pond and in the north-east corner of the outer enclosure stands the celebrated Hall-of-thousand-pillars which is a marvel of architecture and sculpture. The sculptural work is in the finest traditions of southern art, and deserves, in more instances than one, the compliment that it represents a triumph of the carvers' craft. This applies with even greater truth to that absolutely first-rate building known as the Vasanta Pudumantap, the Choultry of Thirumala and the Spring residence of the deity, which stands opposite the eastern gopura.

The ancient Perumal temple within the city and the famous Teppakulam,

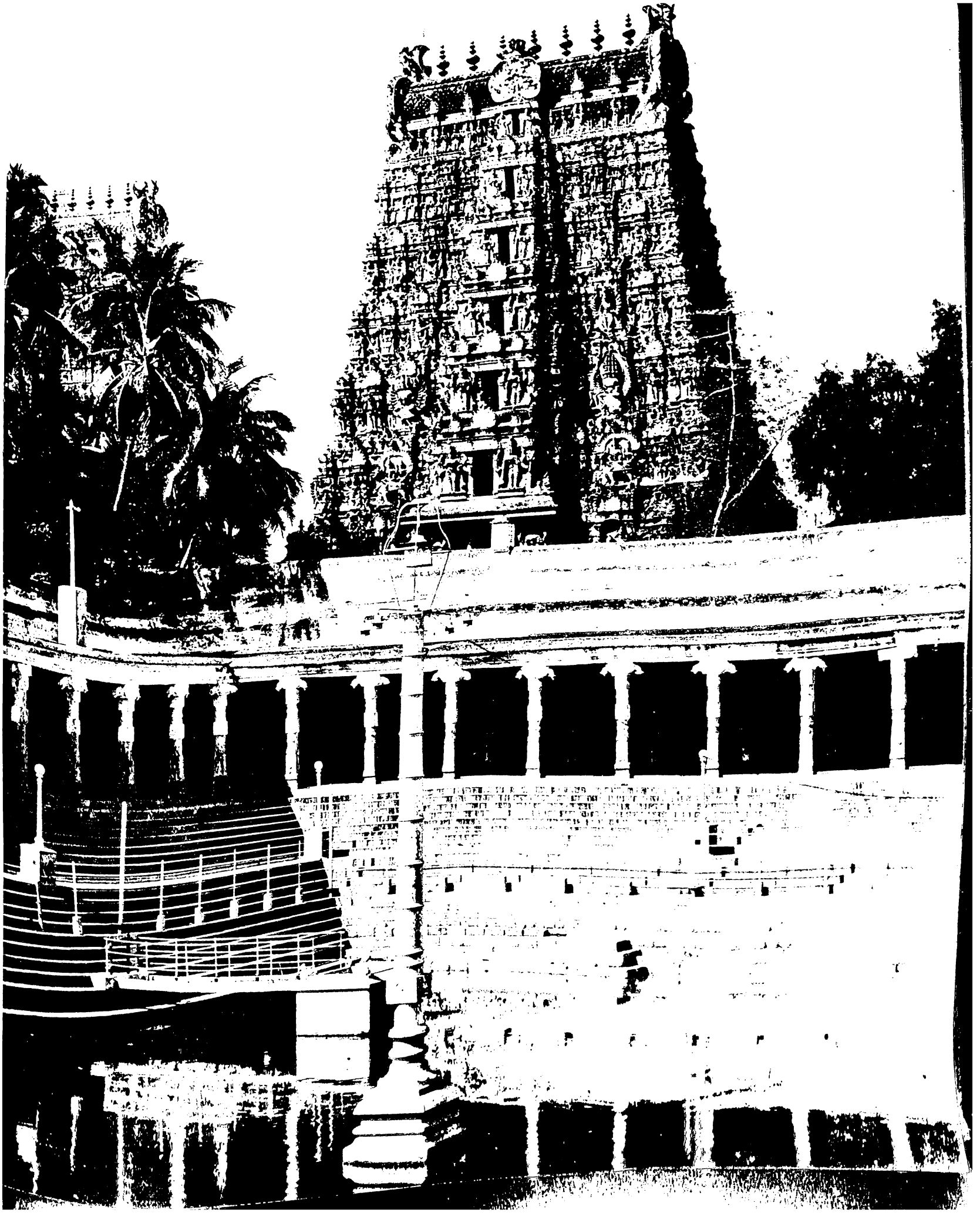
most beautiful and the biggest in the south, about 2 miles away, are other structures of religious importance. The exquisite remnant of the Palace of Thirumala Nayak lies a little off the road that leads to the Teppakulam, and is as fine a specimen of civil architecture as any to be found anywhere in India. It is a combination of several styles, the best of this, that and the other, Hindu and Mohammedan, native and foreign, and a tribute to the excellent taste of the builder, Thirumala the magnificent. Indeed the Palace is such an exquisite building that foreign critics like Fergusson have sighed over the opportunity missed by not applying the same principle while building religious edifices and by letting the temples rise in the Dravidian style.

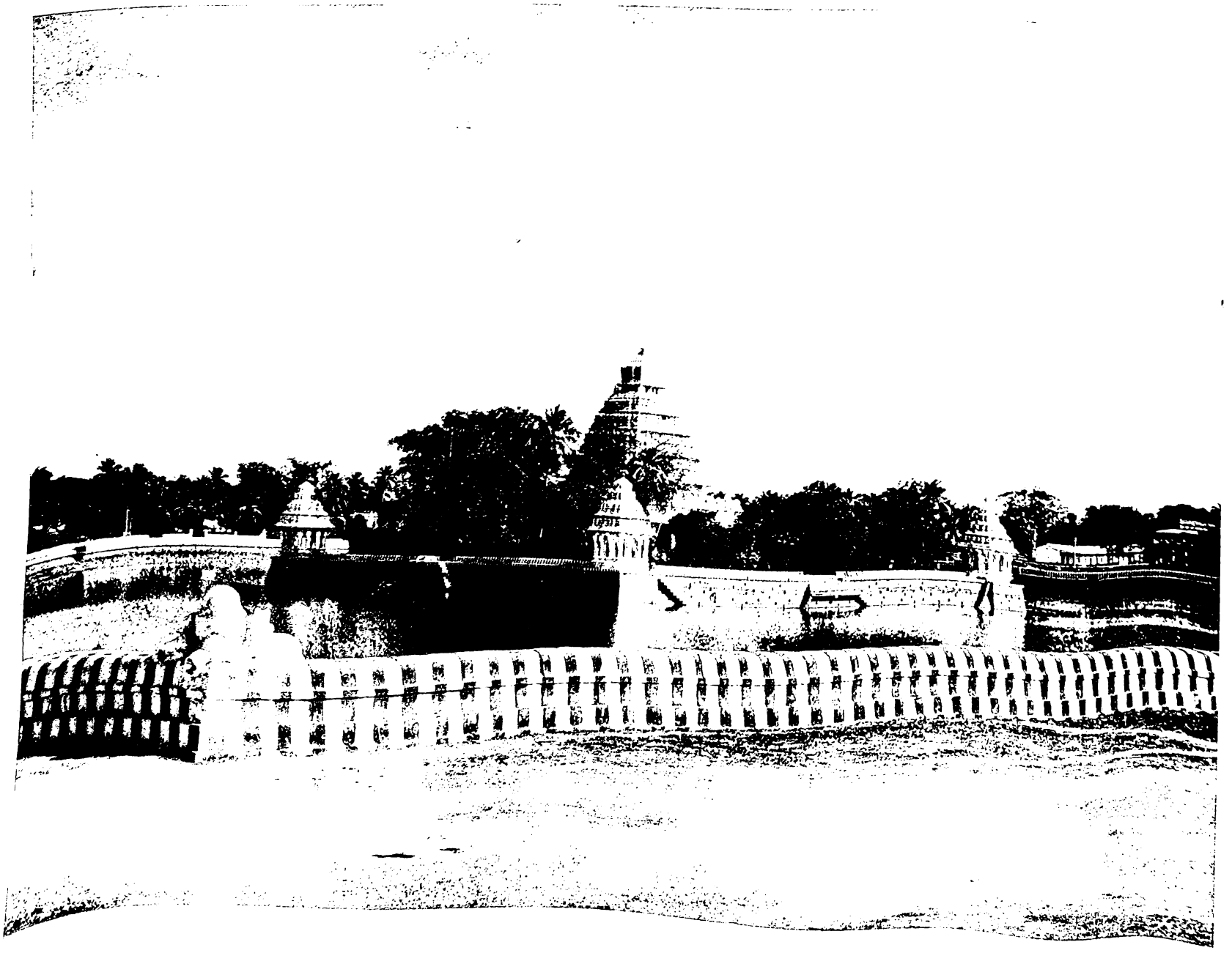
This is as rational a regret as it is uninformed. How can a people who change from foreign clothes into the true Indian costume as they near their holy city, who cannot enter their shrines unless they cleanse themselves wholly; to a people who literally accept the temple as the abode of God, and the statue of stone as the deity, who believe that not everyone can or can be allowed to construct a fane or carve a figure upon its walls, all of which must conform strictly to the canons laid down in the *shastras*, thousands of years ago—how can such people compromise on style, combine the pure with that which will pollute? One does not rouge one's soul nor apply other cosmetics merely that it might look smarter to this man or that. One surrenders it to one's god as it is, naked and pure, wrapped in its own simplicity, grand in its own infinity. The Hindu appreciates what Robert Browning says in a different, in a mundane, context :

> God be thanked, the meanest of His creatures
> Boasts two soul-sides—one to face the world with

And the other, if one may alter the original, to show his God when he worships Him !

MEENAKSHI TEMPLE : View of the Potramarai, the sacred Pond of the Golden Lilies. The impressive tower is one of the eleven which grace and beautify this magnificent temple.

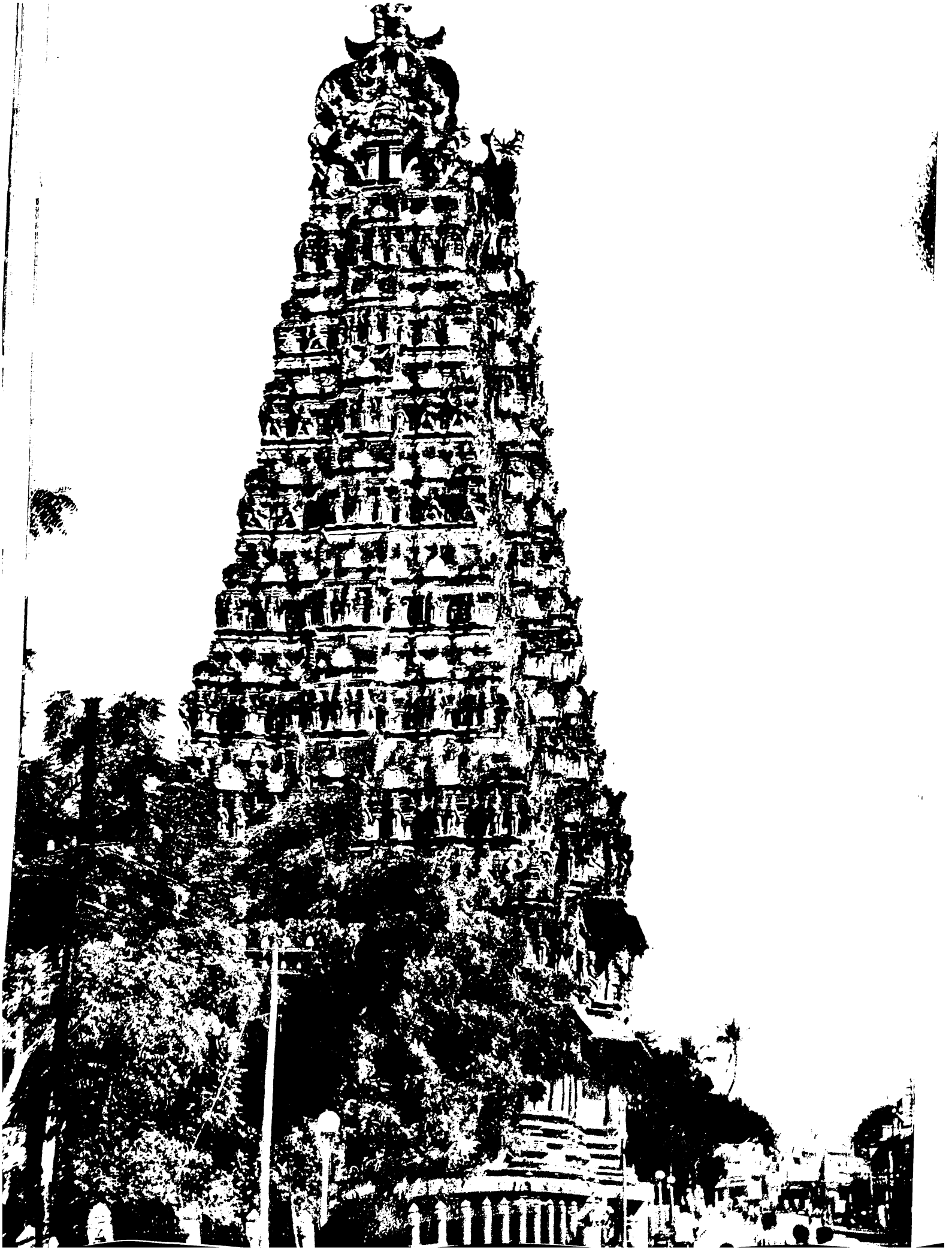




MARIAMMAN TEPPAKULAM, GENERAL VIEW : The holy tank is the largest stone-masonry reservoir in South India. The temple in the centre serves for a few days every year as the sacred abode of the goddess Meenakshi and the god Sundareshwar.



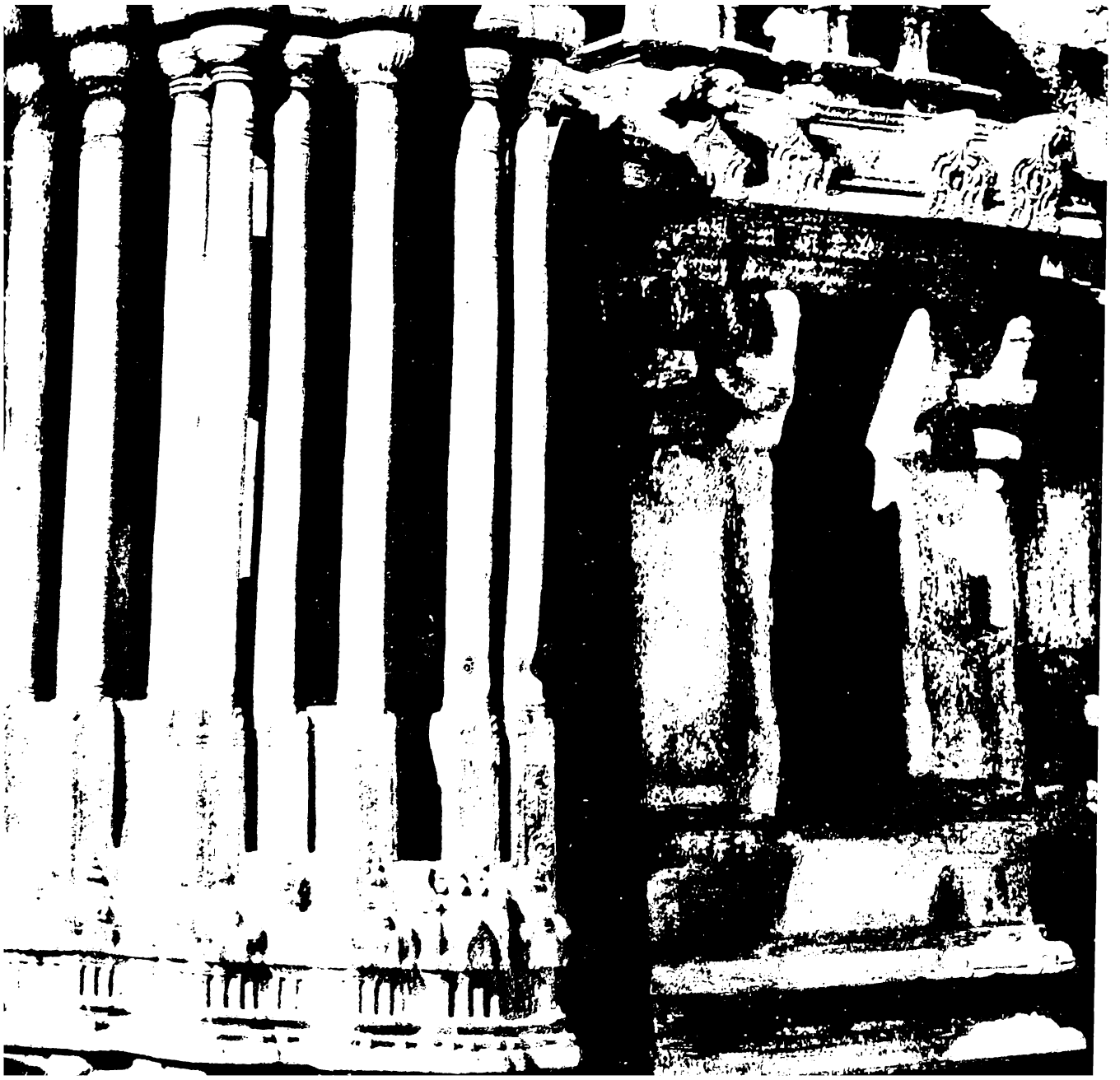
NATRAJA, LORD OF THE DANCERS : With none else is the God Shiva more pleased than he is with his devotee at Madura where, as a mark of special favour, he dances on his right foot. The Meenakshi Temple is a veritable encyclopaedia of dance poses.

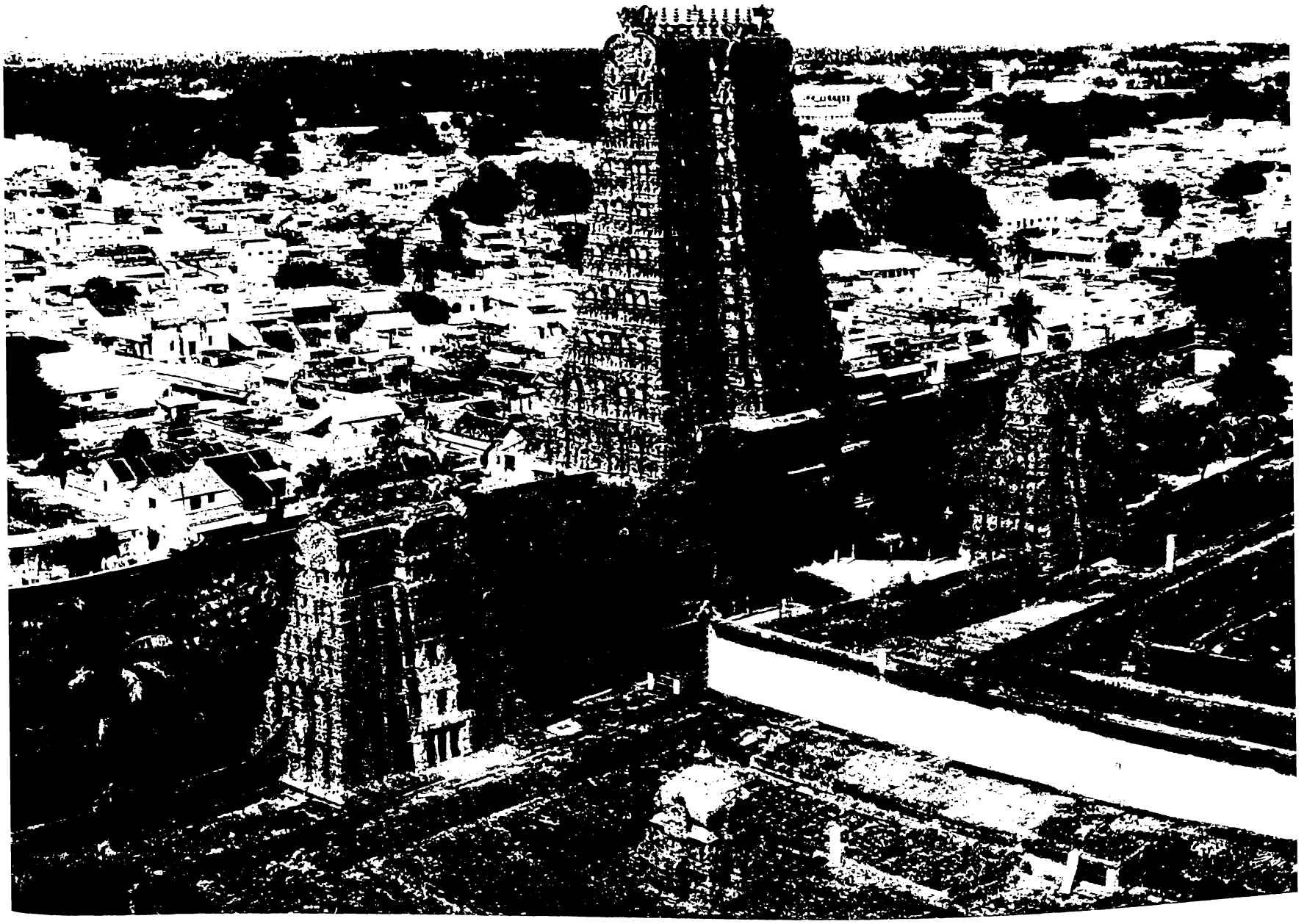




KALIKATTU MANDAPAM—THE PARROT PAVILION. INTERIOR VIEW : The Hall derives its name from the votive offerings of parrots in cages which are hung from the ceiling. The roof is supported by monolithic Yali pillars.

◀ SOUTHERN GOPURAM, GENERAL VIEW : Lofty stacks of tier upon tier of carven deities, the gopuras are a distinctive feature of the religious architecture of the South. Rising to dizzy heights, this tower truly symbolises the celestial and the eternal.





THE SPREAD AND THE FLIGHT : General view of the city of Madura from the height of the Meenakshi Temple. The gopuram which cuts the view is the western tower.

◀ MUSICAL PILLARS : Carved out of single blocks, five sets of these musical pillars stand just below the northern gopuram. The notes which they give out are pure and authentic and a whole programme was broadcast from there by the artists of the All India Radio.



GOPURAS ON THE EAST. GENERAL VIEW FROM THE INTERIOR : In the foreground is the celebrated Pond of the Golden Lilies. The gopuram to the right constitutes the entrance to the Meenakshi Temple; the other is the principal gopuram of the third enclosure.

11 MATHURA

THE GHATS

Yamuna, the river of holy memories, flows by sacred spots associated, in legend and lore, with the feats and exploits of Krishna, incarnation of Vishnu, who assumed the mortal vesture in Mathura.



11 MATHURA

Mathura, birthplace of Lord Krishna, the 8th incarnation of Vishnu, is one of the foremost sacred cities of the Hindus, and, for millions upon millions of them, has the pull and sanctity which Bethlehem has for the Christians. In this ancient city, set picturesquely by the beautiful Yamuna, in this city of North India, from where for the historians of old, Hindustan, Land of the Hindus, began, did Vishnu the Preserver, who incarnates himself whenever evil preponderates in the world of men, appear as Krishna, nephew of the wicked Kansa whom he was destined to destroy. Here and in its sylvan suburbs, Gokul and Vrindavana, the god spent his boyhood and youth before he migrated to that other city of his, Dwarka, located on the west coast of the country, from where, in later years, the Krishna of that celebrated epitome of India's wisdom and philosophy, the *Bhagavad Gita*, emerged upon the stage of history, or, at any rate, of mythology. And in consequence of those years of childhood, full of delightful pranks and endearing antics, and of a youth filled by an unparallelled array of heroic deeds and of gay romances, which Krishna spent here, there is not an inch for miles and miles around this city which is not hallowed by some act or adventure of this most darling deity of the Hindus. Countless pilgrims constantly visit these scenes and sites, associated with the life of the Gopal Krishna and throughout the year many fairs and festivals are held in Mathura and its environs which commemorate and celebrate the various events connected with the divine cowherd's sojourn in these parts.

But Mathura of the Krishna is a later Mathura, is, in fact, in the opinion of many, but a myth invented only about a thousand years ago. The city, which may claim an antiquity as old as that of any other place, was founded as Mathura by Shatrughna, a brother of an earlier incarnation of Vishnu, Rama. He conquered, on behalf of his divine brother, this whole area which was then but a jungle, called Madhuvana occupied by aboriginals who were perhaps the ancestors of Mairs and Meenas of later days. Their king was Madhu and he and his son Lavana were killed in battle. The city then founded by Shatrughna was called Madhura—a compliment to the vanquished and a gesture of courtesy which were entirely in character, where Rama or anyone connected with him was concerned. Then, in course of time, Madhura came to be corrupted into Mathura, but was, for some time, known also as Shurasena, capital of the Shuraseni kings of the Yadava dynasty in whose hands it passed from the rule of the Solar race to which Rama belonged. The story of Krishna is connected with the fortunes of this royal line, for his mother Devaki was the daughter of its Ugrasena. Her brother was Kansa, the cruel and evil incarnation of a demon called Kalanemi, who deposed his father and usurped his throne. Now, Devaki was married to Vasudeva, and a prophecy having been made that a child of these two would kill the tyrant, Kansa, this bad king put his sister and brother-in-law into prison and took care to destroy every issue his sister bore—but one, this Krishna, the eighth of his sister's children, who was to end the evil embodied as Kansa. When he was born, miraculously the guards went to sleep, and the gates of the prison flew open, and the high and swift waters of the flooded Yamuna receded before the steps of Vasudeva who carried the divine child out of Mathura into Gokul where he exchanged him with the daughter of Nanda and Yashoda. And as he came back into the prison, into his own cell, with the girl, the infant from Gokul, the guards awoke and Kansa came running in, and picked the girl and dashed her on to the stony floor. But this time the triumph was not the king's, for the child, Yoganidra, vanished and a voice, like the voice of thunder, bespake the warning that Kansa's days were numbered and that he who would terminate his evil life and reign had taken birth already.

During years of a child's life in the opulent household of doting Yashoda and the fond Nanda, Krishna grew into the boy whose pranks and tricks were not only the joy and delight of the men and matrons of all Gokul, but have continued, throughout these tens of centuries, to be a source of endearing

pleasure and pious amusement to innumerable generations. The *Balgopal* would steal away the butter which his foster-mother had churned with such labour and had kept out of his reach with such care, or break the churning pot itself, and indulge in several other like antics which are popular themes for the Hindu story-teller, and poets as great as Surdas have put them in immortal verse. But, already, the king's men had told Kansa about Nanda's son, and attempts had been made to do away with the child. For example, Pootna, the female demon, had tried to strangle him to death, but had been herself killed and, through the bon-fire made of her huge carcass, provided much fun to the swains of Gokul. There were many more incidents which spelt equal danger and were thwarted with equal success. Alarmed, however, over the safety of the precious lad, Nanda moved with family, cows and Krishna, to Vrindavana, where for the next few years of his adolescence, the divine and divine-looking boy led the life of a cowherd. And never was a cowherd finer and sweeter, and more princely and more charming, and merrier and madder than he, this Krishna. And it wasn't that the cows and the kine were not looked after. On the contrary, when Brahma wanted to be funny and took away the cows and cowherds, removed them out of sight, the divine lad, himself Vishnu, created a whole new and absolutely identical set of men and animals who replaced the abducted group so well that neither the parents and masters nor the beings created were in any doubt that they were not the real ones. Brahma was of course humiliated, but that is another story. Oh, no, it was not the cows who were not right—they lowed with joy at the sight of Krishna and milk flowed freely from their udders. It was the damsels of Vrindavana who went wrong. Or, so the inhabitants of Vrindavana thought, for this gay grazer of cattle who bedecked himself with a yellow scarf and a crown of peacock feathers, had a charm so irresistible that when he played upon his flute, the *gopis* of the locality left their homes and their husbands, and out they came into the beautiful night and they danced, with their Kanhaya, the celebrated *ras* dance ; and in the music of his flute, in the beauty of his face, in the magic of his person, and in the merriment of his making, they forgot themselves wholly, and to them mattered naught else. And though Radha, the wife of Ayana-ghosha was his favourite, each *gopi* felt that she was equally loved, for between each two of them was Krishna himself. This *ras-lila* of the Lord, is perhaps as popular a subject for representation in word and paint as any other event or aspect of the fascinating life of Krishna, and even now, at the time of the general celebrations of *Janma Ashtmi*, this favourite dance is re-enacted with great zest and eclat.

The *Janma Ashtami*, the anniversary of Krishna's birth, falls usually in August, during the rainy season, and though it is celebrated all over India with much pomp and piety, in Mathura, feelings of unsurpassed enthusiasm and gaiety mark the festivities. These cover not only the god's birth but also his amours, his *lila* and *ras*, love-play and love-dance, with the *gopis* of Vrindavana. In the Indian calendar, the month of *Sawan*, rather the whole season of rains, is regarded as the season of love; and it was during this period of majestic clouds, and against a background of woodland greenery and the flooded river, and while the peacocks, for which Mathura is famous, roamed and gave out their shrill and musical notes, Krishna, the Appolo of the Hindus, had played upon the flute and made merry with the cowherd-damsels of Vrindavana, had stolen their hearts which they had bartered away, laughingly, for a love and joy which surpass understanding, so that a whole sect of the Hindus learnt to worship the Gopis who knew the Lord, and knew how to surrender to Him their all, their everything, their bodies and their souls, their now and their hereafter. Vast and amazing are the range and the ramifications of this cult and philosophy of *bhakti*, especially of Krishna and his paramour, Radha, and whether one considers it a thing immoral and dissolute, or appreciates what the votaries claim to be its deeper significance, the phenomenon is not easy to ignore. But of this, a little later.

Yet, Vishnu had taken on the human form, of Krishna, primarily to destroy Kansa and he could not afford to neglect that supreme duty for long. Dalliance is all right, in its own place ; but if a choice has to be made, men, as Tagore says somewhere, must choose their work against their women. And so, when, in due course of time, Kansa's call came, Krishna left for Mathura with his brother Balrama, who had been the seventh child, before Krishna, that is, of Devaki but had been transferred miraculously to the womb of Vasudeva's other wife, Rohini, and had been brought up in the same house-hold, that of Nanda, with Krishna. There, disposing of the giant wrestler appointed to handle them, Krishna then made short work of Kansa, and ridding earth and Mathura of that evil spirit, relieved men of their misery. He freed his parents and put Ugrasena back on the throne. But Jarasandha, the king of Magadha, who was brother to Kansa's wife, attacked Mathura and, finding this region full of troubles, Krishna migrated with the tribe of the Yadavas, to Dwarka, which became the capital of his new kingdom.

It is said that Krishna of Dwarka never forgot Mathura and his cowherd friends and the *gopis* of Vrindavana. But whether he remembered them or not, Mathura and her people never forgot him. Mathura, and Vrindavana even more than Mathura, is all Krishna, though, according to the popular version which the Vaishnavas and the Vrajvasis advance so indefatigably, other faiths like Buddhism, Jainism and Islam did, at various stages of Mathura's history, succeed for some dark centuries in covering the true light with false shadows. Innumerable sites and places are pointed out to the modern visitor which are supposed to correspond to the scenes of the various adventures of Krishna. One of the more important among these is the *Kansa-Teela,* at the Katra site, where stood the great palace of Kansa. And here when the resurgent Hinduism was in glory and Vaishnavism in Mathura in the ascendant, stood a great temple of Keshava Deva which was the most sacred in Hindustan and rivalled only by the temples of the Vishveshwara at Benares and the Jagan-natha at Puri. It had been razed in earlier invasions and, during the time of Jehangir, Bir Singh Bundela had spent thirty-three lakhs of rupees to rebuild this shrine. But Aurangzeb ordered this to be demolished and a vast mosque was erected on the site. The mosque still stands but a temple is being built just behind it, for the area is held holy, since if this were the ground where the palace stood then Krishna must have been born somewhere here. The pond, not far from the *Teela,* is known as the *Potra* tank for it is held that the baby clothes of Krishna were washed in its waters. Considering that Krishna was straightaway removed to Gokul, it is not clear as to what clothes of his could have been washed here. The piece of fiction is, however, but one of the many such which one is likely to encounter in this holy region. In fact, there seems to be a great deal of truth in the assertion of one *panda* of Mathura who, promising to tell the truth about it all, stated that though the account of Krishna and his life was not false, only three things really associated with him remained in all this region : the Vraj Bhumi, the Govardhan and the Yamuna ; and that all else was nothing but superstition and credulity.

Apart from the *Kansa-Teela* and the sites and monuments around it, one other place in Mathura linked with the life-story of Krishna is the ghats. On one of these, known as the Vishram Ghat, Krishna is supposed to have rested after he had put an end to Kansa's existence, and, naturally, this spot is regarded as about the most sacred in the city. Since, after the unpleasant

task of slaying his uncle, the deity had bathed and cleansed himself in the waters of the Yamuna, a bathing festival commemorates the act, and great is the concourse of pilgrims who take the bath, in the river here, which abounds in shoals of tortoises. An additional reason, in fact, now almost the primary reason, for the sanctity that attaches to the bath at this annual gathering which takes place in the month of *Kartik*, November, is that, on that day, Yama, the brother of Yamuna, had gone to his gracious sister and she had fed him well and plentifully. Pleased with his sister's care and courtesy, the god of death declared that whoever would bathe in Yamuna's waters on that day, should be absolved of his sins, and would escape Yama's purgatory. However, since the ghat is sanctified through association with Krishna, and since the waters of the Yamuna are sacred at all times, there is a constant flow of visitors and devotees, and the scene at the time of *Arti*—the vespers—is especially charming and full of the spirit of devotion. The most important temple of Mathura, that of Dwarkadhish, stands nearby.

But in the matter of association with the life of Krishna, the place that really counts is Vrindavana—the forest of Basil plants. True, Gokul has its claims, and the house of Nanda, where he is supposed to have been brought up, its own sanctity. Yet, since the most glamorous portion of the god's stay in these localities was while he played the role of cowherd, every inch of sacred Vrindavana, lying six miles to the north-west of Mathura, is full of memories for the Vaishnava who can go as sentimental as he may over all the magic which legend and lore have so richly woven about this picturesque place. One of the twelve *vanas* which surrounded Mathura, Vrindavana is the most celebrated and whereas Mathura has been Buddhist and Jaina and what not, Vrindavana has been, and is, only Vaishnava, nay, only Krishna's, for, in the context, even the name Vishnu sounds out of place, and though both are the same, the incarnation, Krishna, seems, somehow and strangely, to be greater, and more glorious, certainly more glamourous, than he who became incarnate, viz. Vishnu, the Preserver-Member of the Hindu Trinity. In fact, in Mathura and Vrindavana, one does not talk of Shiva or Vishnu, but of Krishna, god of gods, who by interposing the mount Govardhan, which he had lifted upon his little finger, defeated Indra's design to deluge with his rains the place and people and cows and cattle of Vrindavana ; who, as has been stated earlier, could outwit Brahma, the Creator, and though, essentially, the Preserver,

could create at will ; who spotting Shiva in the disguise of a *gopi* had taken him on in a whirling dance and at once exposed and yet welcomed that deity who, supreme elsewhere, is allowed to live with an odd temple to his honour, like a foreigner with a passport graciously allowed him—it is of that Krishna, light of heart and bright of soul, who through his *lila* seems to have reduced everything to a child's play, or to a young man's frolic, that one thinks of and worships at Vrindavana.

Apart from the innumerable temples—some of them of no mean architectural excellence—which raise their spires in his praise and glory, the pilgrims may see the spot on the river bank where the Child Krishna overpowered Kalia the king of serpents, who haunted a whirlpool in the Yamuna, and was so poisonous that cows would faint from the fumes that issued from the waters ; he may see the *Kadamba* tree upon the branches of which the mischievous Krishna hung the garments of the *gopis* who were bathing and did not know what to do. And he may walk into the shrubbery-like plot of ground where he is supposed to have danced with the *gopis* in his frequent *ras* gatherings with them. Such trysting grounds, for a collective dance or for the private and exclusive meetings with Radha, are stated to be scattered all over, as indeed they would be, if there is any truth in all the romantic legends told about Krishna, the cowherd, and where the entire area is one idyllic woodland and sylvan scene. It is these strangely fascinating tales of his romancing which make for the peculiar sanctity of Vrindavana, so that as one scholar put it, "the birth-place of Krishna is not half so sacred as this place of his amorous adventures. He appears to owe his apotheosis more to his liaisons than to his miracles. He excites the enthusiasm of his followers more by the stories of his early gallantries than by those of the honourable exploits of his maturer years. In Brindaban he tended cattle, stole milk, played upon the pipe, and danced, sported and philandered with milkmaids ; and the scenes of his gay amours are reckoned as objects of the holiest veneration. To the Vishnuvite Brindaban is the land of poetic dreams—the Elysium of his fondest aspirations. How it has been immortalized by the Muse and has called forth the noblest and most melodious lyric in the language ! If there be a spot of ground on earth in which the historical, and the poetical and the fabulous are so charmingly blended together that we would not separate them if we could, it is the little town of Brindaban, which lies under pure sky, and is washed by the waters of a crystal stream".

This is very well put, and but for the little hint about all being not quite right with the sporting and philandering, a most fair picture of this most bewitchingly beautiful spot, Vrindavana, to which many a Vaishnava and wandering mendicant wends his way from the deepest possible feelings of religious devotion. About the issue of the god's sport, as about many matters relating to Hindu religion, there is the sublime side as well as the absurd. The latter is obvious enough, and Krishna the king who had sixteen thousand queens might have been, when young, no better nor worse. Was he but a dissolute youth, out to corrupt the morals of young women, making them deceive and disregard their parents and husbands? When, in the incident of the stolen clothes, he insisted upon the milkmaids coming out in their state of undress, was he behaving like a gay Bohemian and amoral, say, of the Naughty Nineties, who wanted to see 'beauty double every charm it seeks to hide'? And, in conducting his amour with the married Radha, and in making her prove false to her husband of fair fame, was he merely indulging a sort of Byronic or Cassanovian pleasure of seducing a beautiful woman whom he had in any case determined to cast aside. Or, throughout, was he merely behaving like a god, for if a king can do no wrong, how could a deity do aught which was not right? And further, if Krishna was a god, was he not but leading the *gopis* from the dance that life presses us into, into the dance of a truer life, of a life spiritual with God as the partner of each? Was not the music of the flute the call divine, which compelled the soul steeped in slumber and bound by mundane considerations and material values to come to the Lord, in full surrender, to come naked of all illusion, clinging to no garment of worldly respectability? Finally—and however one may look at it—the Bhagavata is clear on this point: "In case of those who have their minds concentrated on me, their *kama* (erotism) towards me is no *kama* at all....."

As for Radha, surely the allegory is not altogether without sense or beauty, that she represents the soul of man, who must after the god; for "the sound of Krishna's flute is the voice of Eternity heard by the dwellers in Time and when Krishna plays thereon, it rains delight, resounding like a cloud". In fact, there are those who read a meaning altogether different; and in the romance eternal, Krishna, the incarnate, becomes the human soul and Radha is Divine Wisdom. Attached to other *gopis*, who represent worldly pleasures, Krishna forgets Radha; but finally he recognises, and surrenders to, the spell of Radha,

whose hair he would braid, and whose clothes he would wear ! And even if this latter interpretation is both far-fetched and conducive to the Vallabhacharyan sort of philosophy, one need not therefore condemn him who lures the sensual through the sensuous, that the next stage of the spiritual might be easier. In any case, the Lord, like the world, hath all, and it depends upon the vessel how it filleth itself from the Ocean of the Infinite.

Possibly all this is wish-wash, and the myth merely personifies the story of the vanquishing of Buddhism as Kansa, by Vaishnavism represented by Krishna, and the life and concept of Krishna himself are no more than a concoction—more attractive than any, and broadened in scope, as need arose—of many a historic figure of earlier times. Indeed, one interesting theory is that much of the Krishna-and-gopis or, to put it in general terms, the love-and-music and song-and-pleasure attitude of the Bhagavata religion was occasioned by and directed to counteract the strength and fervour of the Buddhist faith in Mathura and the north, and of the Jaina faith in Rajasthan and Gujerat. The clever manoeuvring, calculated with psychological accuracy, succeeded but too well, and when Mathura was conquered, and Rajasthan converted, Krishna was taken to Dwarka in order that Gujerat might be annexed to the Vaishnava kingdom. One writer seems to hit the nail right on the head when he says that "from austerity the natural reaction is licentiousness, and people falling off from the severities of Buddhism (and of Jainism) embraced a creed which they found to come home to their bosoms....." What is more, the philosophy was so well-devised that "the refined Hindoo abjuring all sensual interpretation, attached a character of spiritual love to the Dalliances of Kanya and Radha. The soft idyl of their pastoral adventures fell in melting strains and found an echo in the feeling and sentiments of a worldly laity. Vishnuism, inculcating the worship of Krishna, had been moulded and fashioned with an imagery, which, kindling the imagination, at once enthralled the hearts of the females and the warm-hearted Rajputanees crowded to his shrines, drawing all the youth of the country after them". This is no idle eloquence, for not only did Rajasthan contribute to the Krishna Bhakti cult a devotee as great as the celebrated Meera of Chitor, but even without the help of a Rajputanee having to draw the country's youth behind her, many a noble Rajput worshipped at the feet of the Kanahya in royal fashion. The name of the famed Man Singh of Akbar's court rises to the lips, first of all, for his temple of Govindjee in

Vrindavana is even today the finest in all Mathura and Vrindavana. He had fallen seriously ill during an expedition to Kabul and had vowed that he would build a shrine to Govindjee on his recovery. The splendid monument was built to fulfil that vow, and its massive structure and elegant sculpture are a tribute to the engineering skill and the artistic taste of the Rajput builders. Its proud pinnacles were destroyed by Aurangzeb so that what one sees today is but a truncated monument. But even in this ruined state, it is, in the words of Fergusson, "one of the most interesting and elegant temples in India, and the only one, perhaps, from which a European architect might borrow a few hints". It is the idol of this very temple which links Mathura in yet another way with Rajasthan and the Rajpoots, for the statue is now in the famous temple at Nathdwara to which place it was removed.

But for one fine temple, however mutilated, and for one idol still in worship, however far removed its present location from Mathura, there are scores of monuments and hundreds of statues which once adorned this ancient city and are now no more. In her long and chequered history, Mathura has passed through the rule of several dynasties and the sway of several religions, so that often the successors have pulled down the fanes splendid of their predecessors and put up their own, which in turn, were duly demolished and buried, temple and idol, under the next that rose upon the same site. Thus, for example, from the remains of Buddhist pillars, railings, figures and inscriptions unearthed from the area around the mosque of Aurangzeb, it would appear that the Hindu temple which was demolished must have itself been constructed over the ruins of a Buddhist monastery, possibly the same which Upagupta built during the reign of Ashoka. Indeed, the entire city is one of the richest archaeological fields in India, and some of the finest specimens of the Mathura style of sculpture, of the classical age, have been found here and around here. That should be no matter for surprise, for this glorious city of the Mauryas, and the southern capital, for all practical purposes, of the Kushan kings, has known much former splendour. Naturally all this splendour and all this wealth, Kushan, Buddhist or Hindu, has lain buried under the earth all these long centuries, and although much has been discovered, far more must have perished, or has still to be unearthed. Of the finds, many of which have been housed elsewhere, 10,000 may still be seen at the Curzon Museum of Archaeology, near the Railway Station. It possesses possibly the finest collection of antiquities ranging from the 3rd century B. C. to about

1000 A.D., belonging to the Maurya, Sunga, Kushana, Gupta and Medieval periods of Indian History. For a story of the history and art of the Kushanas, this museums the foremost in the world ; and although many are the pieces, relating to their rule, which adorn the shelves and stands, nothing is grander than the great headless statue of 'The Great King of Kings, His Majesty Kanishka', which Stuart Piggott regards as a most outstanding statue and worth a visit to Mathura for itself.

Yet, in the context of religion, one does not go to Mathura for the statues of Kanishka, but for those of Krishna. Alas, that these are, generally speaking, poor and insignificant, which is as surprising as it is, from the point of view of art, mortifying. It is surprising because Krishna, in his role of the cowherd, especially, was supposed to be surpassingly, bewitchingly, beautiful. As perfection of the male figure, as the beau ideal, Krishna should have been given a "Phidian image of the Indian Appolo", and not what is found in the temples of Mathura and Vrindavana. Likewise, Radha, supremely alluring in the feminine sex, fails to impress. The standing statue of Buddha and the attractive females in the Museum are greater homage to art and idolatry than the Hindu statues. In fact, the poet has all along done greater justice to Krishna and Radha than the sculptor ever did :

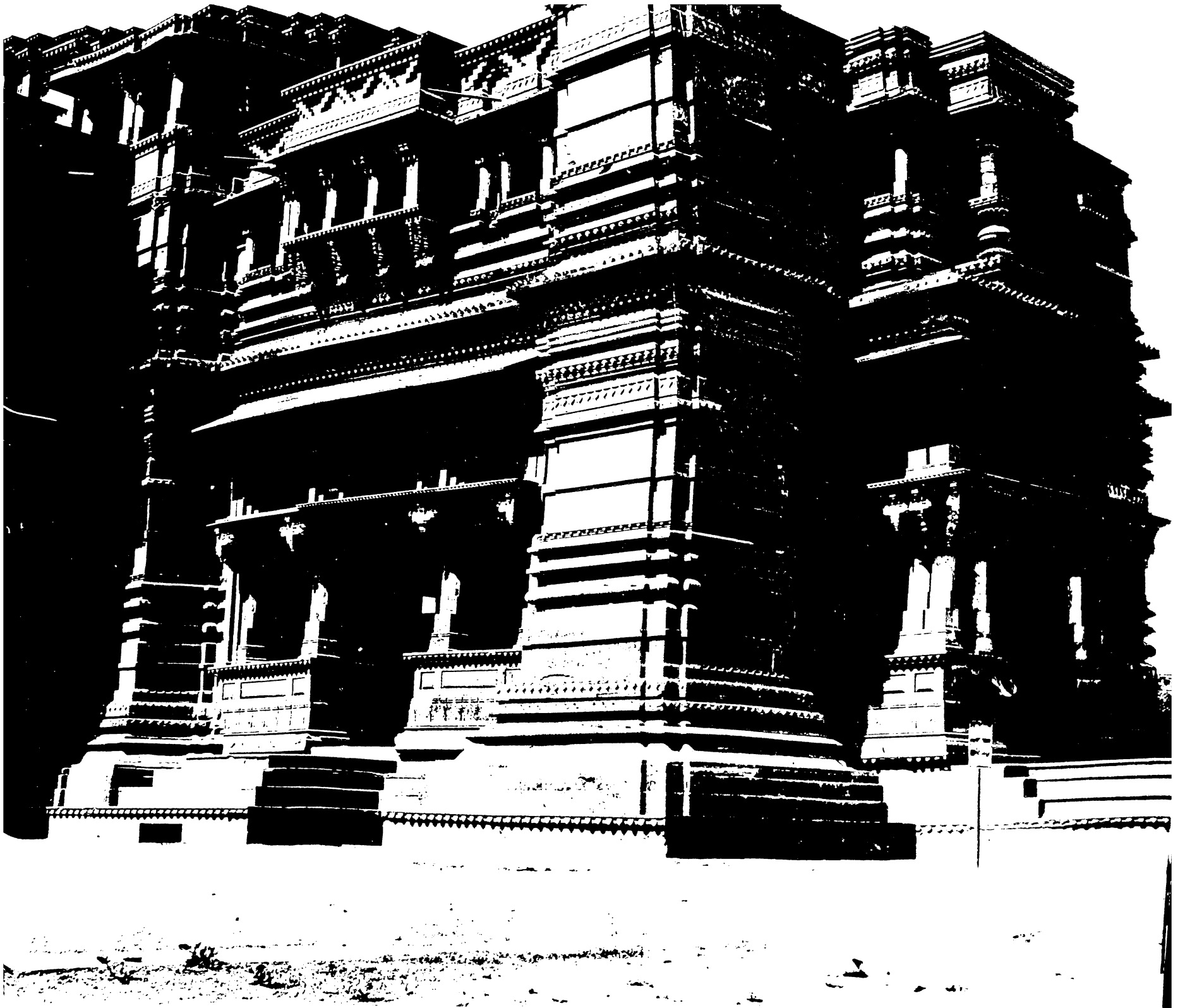
> She the fair white moon, He the dark blue cloud,
> in the sky of life both roving,
> She the beautiful pearl, He the blue-waved sea,
> Radha and Krishna both loving
> Like body and soul, like statue and stone,
> like flower and fragrant vine,
> In the grove of honey, Lo, they meet by tryst,
> at the homing hour of kine.

Yet to the eye of faith and fancy, all this is of no account. The pilgrims have been and are more than content with what they see and worship in the shrines of the Balgopal and the Kanahya, whose eternal play this world is. By his incarnation, and nearly 25 years of stay at Mathura and in the area around, the god has imparted for ever a sanctity and holiness to this whole region which are as proverbial as they are unique. This last because, whereas other sacred

cities of the Hindus, absolve one of all sins committed elsewhere, but not of sins committed in the sacred places themselves, Mathura the place of places for the Vaishnavas, has the distinction of being able to destroy even the sins committed in Mathura itself:

Mathurayam Kritam Papam Mathurayam Vinashyati

And whereas in other sacred rivers of India, purification is from a bath therein, the Yamuna's water at Mathura will purify one even if a mere drink is taken. For those who believe that "there is only one scripture and that is one sung by the son of Devaki, Krishna, as the Bhagavad Gita; there is only one God and that is Krishna; there is only one *Mantra* being the various names of Krishna; there is only one duty and that is the worship of that Krishna," believe also that of all the cities sacred to Krishna, Mathura, this city of Paradise, is the supreme and the most truly sinless and holy.



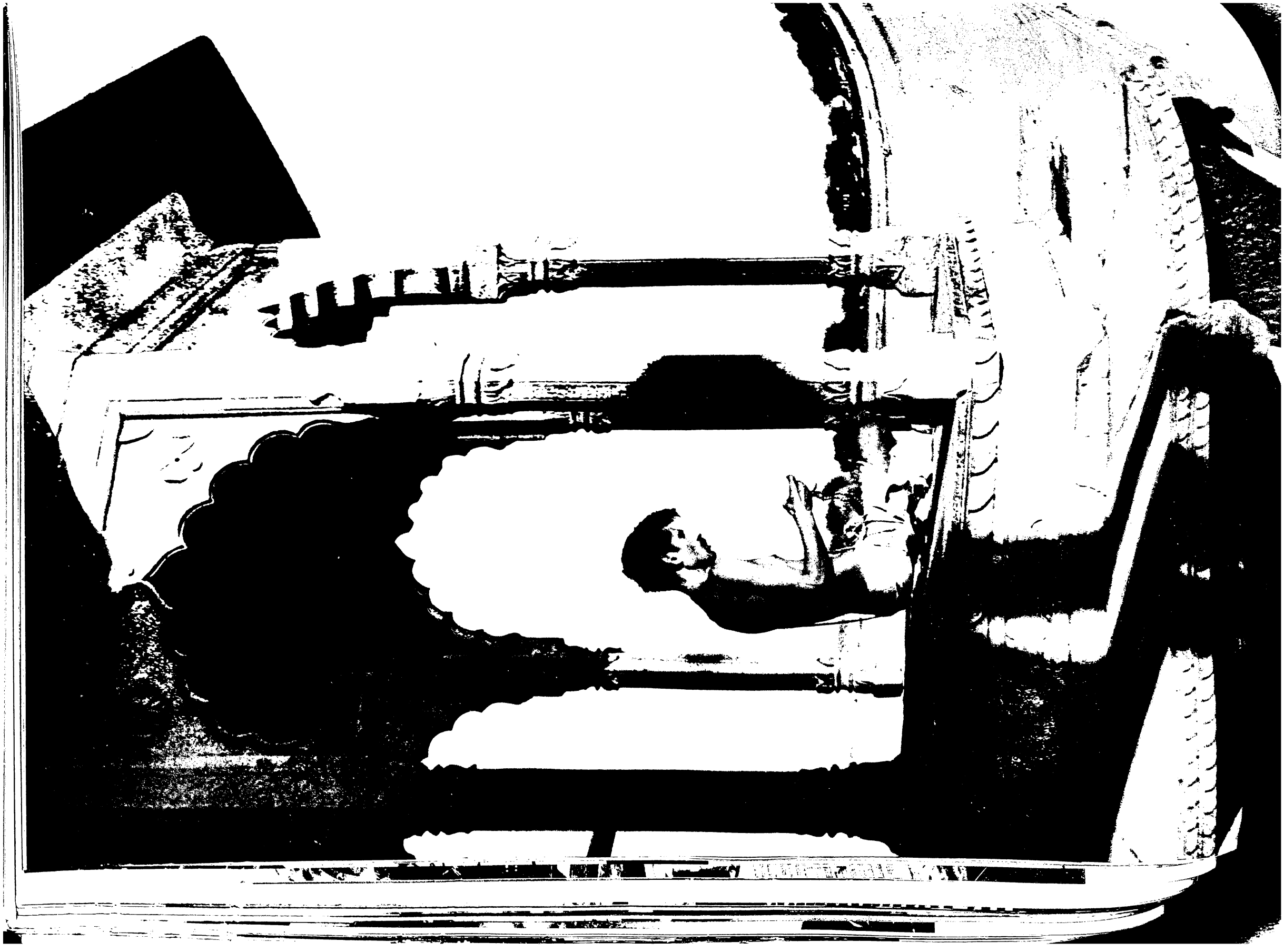
TRUNCATED MAGNIFICENCE. TEMPLE OF MANSINGH. VRINDAVANA : This 16th century temple of Govindji, built by Maharaja Man Singh of Jaipur, is one of the most beautiful in Northern India. Its top storey was destroyed by Aurangzeb's orders.

DWARKADHISH TEMPLE, MATHURA: VIEW OF THE SPLENDID ENTRANCE: Mathura's principal temple stands not far from Vishram Ghat, and has been fitly and proudly dedicated by the Mathura-vasis to *their* Krishna as king of Dwarka. ▶

POTRA KUND, MATHURA: View of the sacred tank near Kansa Tila. According to tradition, the linen of the baby Krishna was washed here.



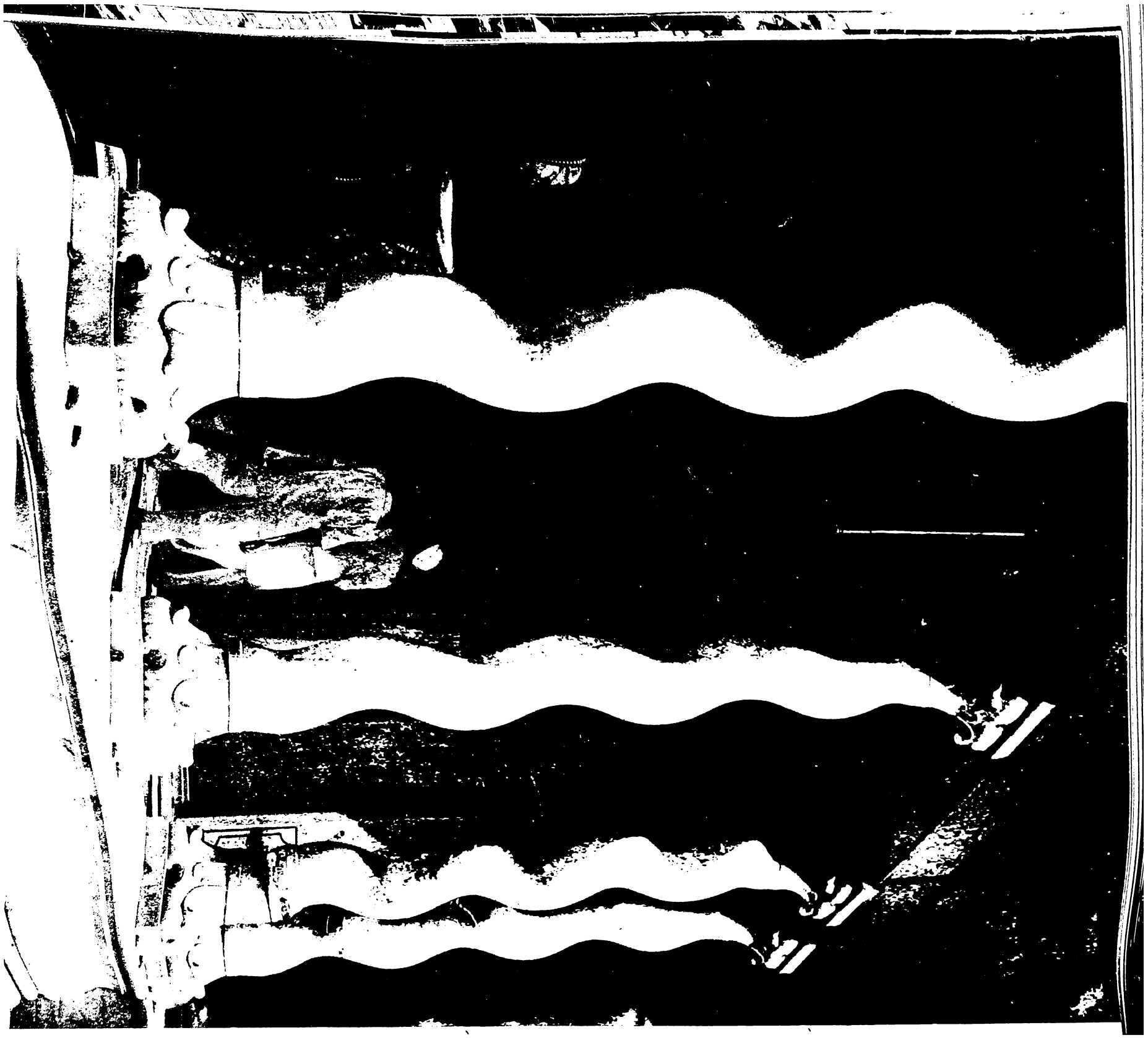






KADAMBA TREE, VRINDAVANA : The Kadamba is intimately associated with several episodes of the Krishna Legend. From such a tree, he had leapt upon the Naga Kaliya, and it was upon the branches of a Kadamba that he had hung the stolen clothing of the Gopis.

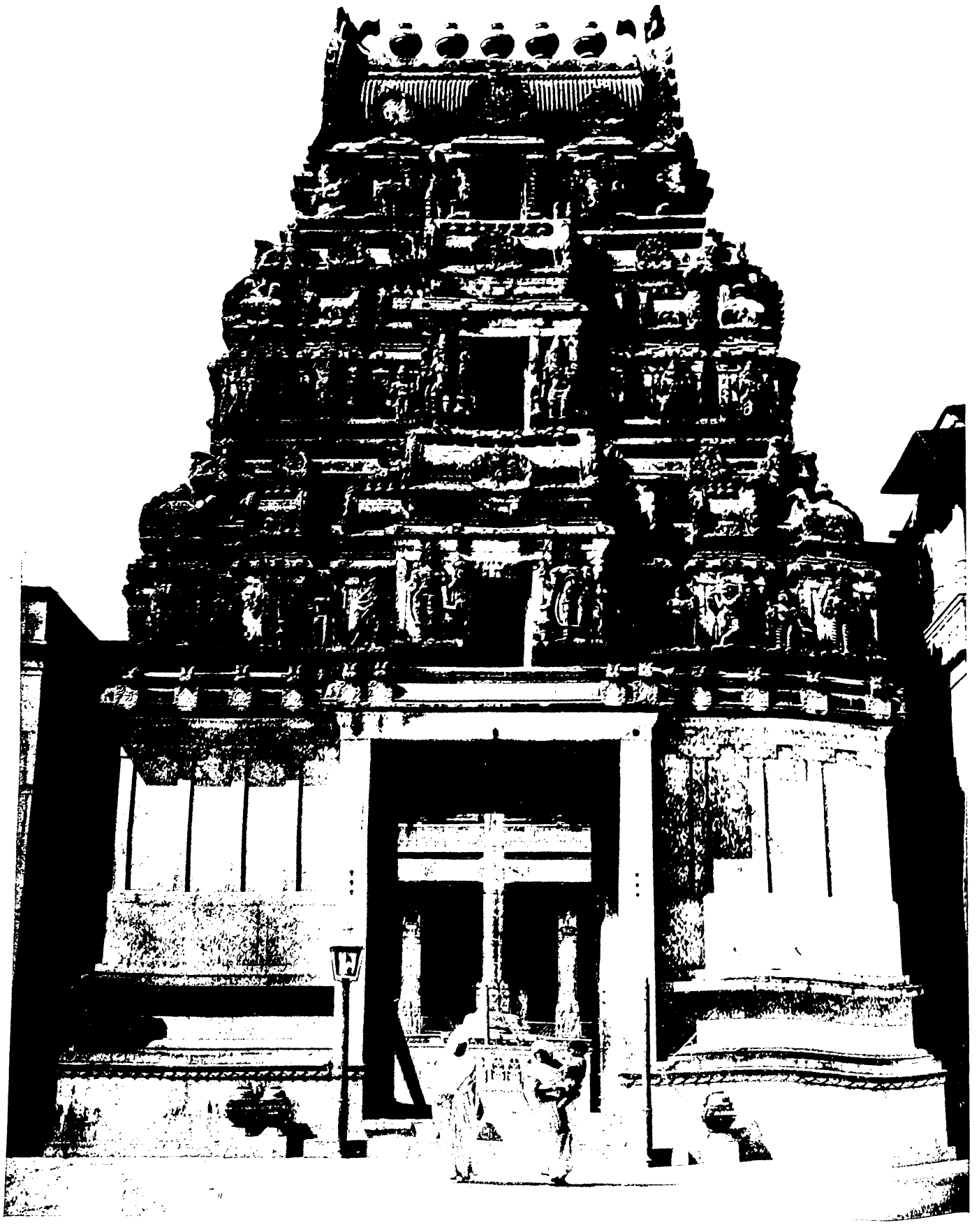
◀ PRAYERS ON THE YAMUNA, MATHURA : Gracefully and lightly built are the Ghats of Mathura. They have several such picturesque projections jutting out upon this river of holy memories.



◀ SHAHJI'S TEMPLE, VRINDAVANA, DETAIL OF PILLARS : The twisting supports of the roof are a distinctive feature of this richly-built temple which is one of the foremost modern structures in old Vrindavana.

SEWA KUNJ, VRINDAVANA : GENERAL VIEW : Locally known as Sewa Kunj, this little forest of a few trees and many bushes is traditionally associated with Krishna's ras-dances with the gopis of Vrindavana.

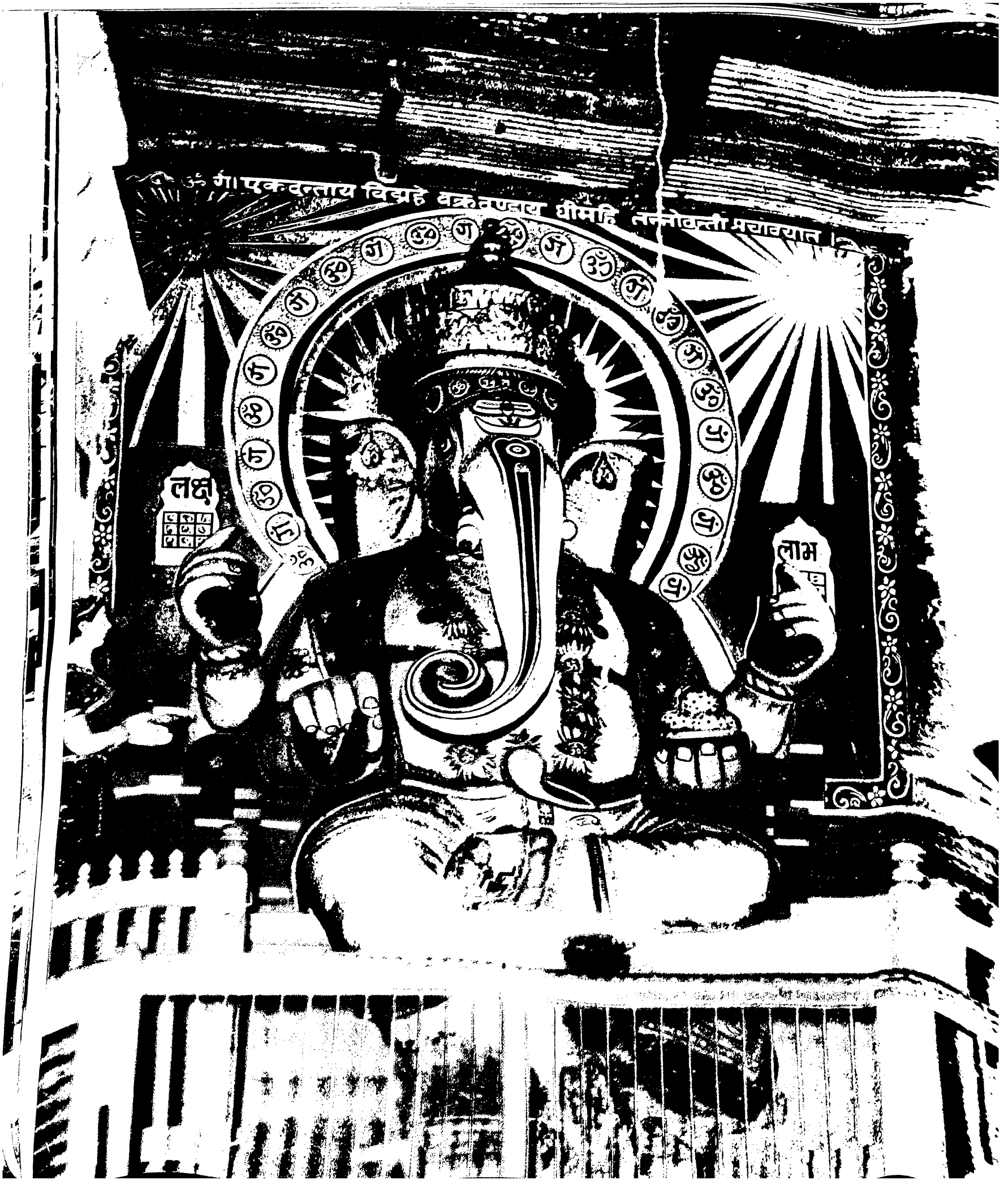




RANGAJI'S TEMPLE, VRINDAVANA : VIEW OF INNER GOPURAM : Pilgrims and devotees come to Vrindavana from all corners of the country. Built to their own style, this temple is a tribute of the South-Indians to the god of Vrindavana.

STATUE OF GANESHA AT MAHAGANESHA TEMPLE

Ganesha, son of Shiva and Parvati, is the god of wisdom and of all that is auspicious. He is the destroyer of difficulties and is therefore invoked at the beginning of new ventures and enterprises. The elephant-head and the rat-mount signify the god's role as remover of obstacles.


ॐ गं। एकदन्ताय विद्महे वक्रतुण्डाय धीमहि तन्नोदन्ती प्रचोदयात्।
लक्ष
लाभ

12 UJJAIN

Ujjain, Ujjaini for sweet, Avantika of the classical age, is that eminently sacred and secularly pre-eminent city of India which might be chosen to represent, wholly and fully, the splendour that was Ind and the culture that was Hindu. No other city, old or new, extant or not, could possibly contest with Ujjain her right to this position; or contesting, as Benares or Mathura or Ayodhya might, not allow her superior claims. Holy, indeed, Ujjaini is; for she is one of the seven sacred cities of the Hindus, and one of the four where the *Kumbha* fair is held. She is washed by the Elixir-pure waters of the Kshipra which gracefully curves and coils about the city like the silk-smooth tresses of a beautiful woman or like an auspicious serpent of the great god Shiva. And here stands that deity's mighty and famed temple of Mahakala where they worship one of the twelve *Jyotirlingas* of Shankara, the mere sight whereof is stated to liberate the soul and to save the devotee from untimely death. Yet, when to this high sanctity of the city are added her status as the central point through which, for the Hindu astronomer, the first meridian passes, and her glory in the field of learning and art, and her renown in the realm of commerce and conquest, then, verily, she forms what is, without question, the brightest jewel in the diadem of Indian cities; and, in all that makes for lustre and grandeur, she emerges true to her name, Ujjaini, the Victorious!

And yet, Ujjain or Ujjaini is but one of her names. She has had several of them; so many, in fact, that she was known as *Pratikalpa*, the city which had

existed from all time and had a separate name in each new *kalpa*. Of the countless appellations which cling about her like garments of memory, one, Avantika, has been mentioned already. This is said to have been her name in the third *kalpa*. In the first two *kalpas*, she was known as Swarnshringa and Kushasthali. In the fourth *kalpa* she assumed the name of Amrawati. In the fifth, they called her Chudamani, and in the sixth *kalpa*, she was spoken of as Padmavati. Her present name, Ujjain, is a shortened form of Ujjaini—Pali for the Sanskrit 'Vijayani'—by which she came to be called in the seventh *kalpa*. There are others like Bhogavati, Hrnyavati, Kanakshringa, Vishala, Shivpuri, Kumudvati; but one is not sure whether several of these are not ornament and epithet indicating her olden glory and great opulence rather than her real names. The point, however, is that even Ujjaini is a recent acquisition almost, and refers only to the last but one phase of her many-storeyed existence. Yet, so rich is the story of her existence that even in this one phase the narrative must be broken into several sections like Ujjaini of Asoka and Ujjaini of Vikramaditya, Ujjaini of Kalidasa and Ujjaini of Bana Bhatta, and so on. And all this not in a manner of speaking only, but because the tale deserves the telling. Indeed, throughout her long history, until about the year 1000 A. D. when Bhoja, the Paramara king, shifted the capital from Ujjain to Dhar, the city was a flourishing centre of trade and commerce and of learning and culture. True, the decline had set in earlier, after the fall of the Gupta Empire, presaging, as it were, the decline of Hinduism and the influx, with the onslaught of Islam, of a whole new way of living and believing which was to alter the face of this country beyond recognition. But even though the city was no longer what she used to be, no longer the *Vishala Vishala*—'great among-the-great', of Kalidasa, still, for all practical purposes, her eclipse began only thereafter. Then, for centuries, clouds of obscurity managed to hide it under a pall of neglect in all other respects except her religious importance. That never dwindled; and the city continued to draw her stream of pilgrims to the Mahakala and the Harsiddhi, to the Kshipra and the Kumbha-Mela. Now, once again, Ujjain has started coming into her own, and with the establishment of the Vikram University and the regular celebration, on an All-India scale, of the *Jayanti* of Kalidasa, the city is being restored to its rightful place on the cultural map of India. And it is time that were done, because, for India, Ujjain is the city of Kalidasa, and of Vikramaditya. The latter gave to India the *Samvata* era; and the former, Kalidasa, bequeathed that to his country which none else could. As Shakespeare is to England, so is

Kalidasa to India, and the tribute which Carlyle paid to Shakespeare and the evaluation he made of that priceless treasure of England apply *mutatis mutandis* to this other case : "Will you give up your Indian Empire or your Shakespeare, you English ; never have had any Indian Empire or never have had any Shakespeare ?"—thus he had asked and answered prophetically : "Indian Empire or no Indian Empire ; we cannot do without Shakespeare ! Indian Empire will go, at any rate, some day, (as it has gone) but this Shakespeare does not go, he lasts for ever with us....." Let Ujjain ever remember and let India never forget that Kalidasa lasts for ever with us, and that, in rightly honouring this his city, India is but honouring herself, and rediscovering her own heritage.

But we anticipate, for the story of Kalidasa's Ujjaini is a thing of much later times. The city had existed for centuries on end before the great Bard immortalised her in his matchless verse. In fact, if mythology and all the references in the Brahmanas and the Upanishadas, the Epics and the Puranas are to be regarded seriously, the age of the place must be measured by the *yuga*, and not by centuries or millennia. What is more, even in these august and hoary references, the narrator starts off almost always with the tacit acceptance of the city's prior existence, so that what Wilson says about her is doubtlessly true: "Few cities, perhaps, can boast of a more continuous reputation, as it has been a place of great note from the earliest periods of Hindu tradition down to the present day". Again, it is but appropriate that the first historically authentic placing of this city of romance and literature should be connected with a literary production like the Swapna Vasavadatta, with Vasavadatta whose father Mahachanda Pradyota is mentioned as one of Ujjaini's illustrious kings. This is of immense significance, because the apparently popular theme of the romance of King Udayana of Vatsa, and Vasavadatta—India's gift—the peerless daughter of King Pradyota, has received detailed treatment at the hands of writers of all varieties and religions, and furnishes, indirectly, a mine of information about the life and conditions of those times. As expected, even then the city was already a resplendent capital of Avanti—or rather of its northern half—which was one of the sixteen political divisions of the country, and one of the four foremost monarchies, viz. Magadha, Vatsa, Kaushal and Avanti. These were times almost contemporaneous with the period of Buddha, and Avantika was a well-known city which fell on the direct route from Rajagriha to the South. Indeed, history records that she was connected with Alexandria in Egypt and was a

great commercial emporium and intellectual centre of those days. The descendants of this King, Pradyota, are supposed to have ruled on at Avantika till about three hundred years before Christ. Then through usurpation, Shishunaga, a minister of the last of these kings, established himself on the throne ; but his dynasty was soon ousted by the Nandas and the city formed a part of their kingdom for about a hundred years. Thereafter, Binbasar, King of Magadha and father of Ashoka the great, took her, and Ujjain re-emerged as a city of fame and importance.

Binbasar appointed Ashoka as the governor of the province of what was known as Avantirattham, with capital at Avantika—Ujjaini. He was about 18 years old at that time and his several years' stay here was fraught with events of great political significance. The Ashoka of this period of governorship was not the celebrated Dharmashoka of the post-Kalinga times, but the Chandashoka, Ashoka the terrible, whose high-walled Hell-Jail, *Narakagar*, which was equipped with all imaginable instruments of the most refined torture, still stands as a well-known landmark among the sites and ruins of the old city. It was during his governorship here that he married his first wife, Vidisha-Mahadevi Sakya Kumari, the daughter of a merchant of Vidisha, who became the mother of those celebrated, royal, Buddhist preachers, Mahindra and Sanghamitra, and whose link with Vidisha explains the construction, at nearby Sanchi, of that world-famous glory of Buddhist art, the great Stupa. Lastly, it was from Ujjain that at the death of his father, he proclaimed himself King, took over the Maurya government, and held the throne against the claims and allies of his elder (step-) brother Suman whom and, if tradition is to be believed, several more—the number ranges between six and ninety-eight—of his brothers, he killed in the ensuing struggle for succession. During the reign of Ashoka, Avanti continued to be a province of great political and strategic importance and enjoyed the status of being one of the four provinces which were governed by princes of the realm. As against his earlier gift, the Jail, Ashoka now set up at Ujjain a great university which was celebrated for its faculties of Mathematics and Astronomy.

With the decline of the Maurya dynasty, Ujjain was again submerged in gloom and obscurity, and was ruled most probably by the Shakas who were defeated, according to popular tradition, by the legendary Vikramaditya, in about 57 B. C.—the year *from which* the Vikrama Era begins. On the other hand, there *is little* historical evidence to support this theory and it is now

generally accepted by scholars that the celebrated Vikramaditya of Ujjain, one of whose nine gems—*Navratnas*—was Kalidasa, the poet, is no other than the great King Chandra Gupta of the Gupta dynasty, of the golden age of India. That would place Vikramaditya and Kalidasa into the 4th century A. D. which is still far off from the point in Ujjain's story where the Mauryas depart. The probable reconstruction and order of events of these dark centuries are that when the Shunga Pushya Mitra made away with his Maurya king, Brihdaratha, and himself became the ruler, among other changes, capital of Avanti was shifted to Vidisha. Ujjain lost her importance temporarily, and had little to gain or suffer from the fortunes and reverses of the Shungas or their successors upon the erstwhile throne of the Mauryas. Possibly, she was more affected by the rise of the Malavis, who were staunch believers in republican principles, and who gave this part of the country the name of Malwa. The Satvahans then enjoyed a short-lived supremacy in this area ; but, for the next century or even very much longer, it is the Shakas who held sway over Ujjain and the tracts around her. Whether Vikramaditya, the legendary King of the 1st Century B.C. defeated them, or whether it was Chandra Gupta, Vikramaditya II, who, four centuries later, vanquished them—this will long remain a matter of much scholarly difference and prejudiced dispute. The argument involved is lengthy and the stand taken by some authorities has been dogmatic and irrational. Nevertheless, the prevailing view of the matter is that which Nehru takes in his Discovery of India : "There is no trace of any such ruler round about 57 B. C. when the Vikram Samvat era should begin. There was, however, a Vikramaditya in North India in the fourth century A.C., and he fought against Hun invaders and pushed them out. It is he who is supposed to have kept the 'nine-gems' (of whom one was Kalidasa) in his court.....The problem then is this : How is this Vikramaditya who existed in the fourth century A. C., to be connected with an era which begins in 57 B. C. ? The probable explanation appears to be that an era dating from 57 B.C. existed in the Malava in Central India, and long after Vikram, this era and calendar were connected with him and renamed after him". Yet, so persistent is the glorious legend about the Vikramaditya of the 1st century B.C., that even Nehru, perhaps characteristically, is constrained to add : "but all this is vague and uncertain."

One of the reasons for accepting this theory is that all through the works of Kalidasa there runs a uniform current of peace and prosperity, of a serene joy

and fulness of life, which are all so manifestly associated with the golden age of Indian history, the rule of the Guptas. Indeed, in the rich and expansive description of his city, in that exquisite lyric of his, the *Meghadoot*, Kalidasa's first tribute is to her wealth and opulence and in respect of love and romance which often go hand in hand with good living and affluence. The exiled *Yaksha* is telling the Cloud Messenger to carry a message to his beloved wife in Kuber's mythical and magic city of Alaka, in far-off Himalayas, and says :

Sverve from thy northern path ; for westward rise
The palace balconies thou mayst not slight
In fair Ujjaini ; and if bewitching eyes
That flutter at thy gleams, should not delight
Thine armorous bosom, useless were thy gifts of sight.

Then, the architectural grandeur of Ujjain, "where the palaces were like mountains and houses were like palaces" having been alluded to, the poet speaks of love and romance, of Vasavadatta and Udayana, so richly associated with her :

O, fine Ujjain ! Gem to Avanti given,
Where village ancients tell their tales of mirth
And old romance ! Oh, radiant bit of heaven,
Home of a blest celestial band whose worth
Sufficed, though fallen from heaven, to bring down heaven on earth.

And now the poet is unable to repress the *Shringar-rasa*, the erotic sentiment, which is given full vent and play ; and he conjures up a wondrous world of romance filled with fragrant river breezes and lotus-blossoms, and of passion and perfume, and "prints of dear pink feet which an added glory lend." But considering that Ujjaini is such a holy city, too, Kalidasa, himself a worshipper of Kali, now turns his attention to the great temple of Mahakala which must have been, in those times, too, a most important centre of worship and pilgrimage. To that the Cloud is now directed :

Black as the neck of Shiva, very God,
Dear therefore to his hosts, thou mayst go
To his dread shrine, round which the gardens nod

When breezes rich with lotus-pollen blow
And ointments that the gaily bathing maidens know.

And the cloud must not miss the evening worship at the Mahakala :

Reaching that temple at another time,
Wait till the sun is lost to human eyes ;
For if thou mayst play the sublime
Of Shiva's drum at evening sacrifice.
Then hast thou in thy thunders grave a priceless prize.

Reference is then made to the dancing girls who, with richly ornamented fly-whisks in their hands, performed before the deity, and who are considered by many scholars, to be the fore-runners of that great institution of the Devadasis of the temples of the south.

The women there, whose girdles long have tinkled
In answer to the dance, whose hands yet seize
And wave their fans with lustrous gems besprinkled
Will feel thine early drops that soothe and please,
And recompense thee from black eyes like clustering bees.

But the charms and allurements of Ujjaini are not yet over. Eager as the lover should have been to make the Cloud speed with his message without delay, he asks the messenger to stay in this beautiful city for one night—for Ujjaini is celebrated for her nights, as Benares is for her mornings and Ayodhya for her evenings.

However, the Cloud must with sunrise journey on his way,

"For they that labour for a friend do not delay".

Which means that the time already spent in Ujjain was not delay but almost a merit !

After the glamour of the Gupta's age and Kalidasa's glorification of the

city, came yet another period of comparative fade-out. The White Huns having descended on India, Ujjain suffered in the general fate, and it was only when Yasho-Varman came along that she was rescued and reset on the path to fresh laurels and distinction. These came to her in full measure when in the 7th Century, Harsha-Vardhan graced her with his presence and munificence, and Bana, his court-poet and biographer, made her the object of compliments as golden and glowing as those which she received from Kalidasa. "In the country of Avanti there is the city of Ujjaini and her splendour is greater than that of Paradise. She is in the land of the pure, the very home of the golden age, and is verily like a second earth which Mahakala, the great god Shiva, the lord of the three world, has made for his stay.....Here the palaces are as lofty as the mountains and the houses as grand as palaces.....Her thousand ponds are adorned with lilies and lotuses and in her streets the gems and pearls are so heaped that nothing precious now remains in the waters of the oceans. All around the city flows the Kshipra whose waves are agitated by the touch of the pots and vessels of the youth-intoxicated beauties of Malwa; and, jealous of the Ganges which rises aloft the forehead of Bhagwan Mahakala, her ever-arched eyebrows touch and cleanse the high heavens".

Hyperbole, indeed, but whoever loved who loved not with moon-beams and star-dust ? And possibly, in this last reach of her magnificence, when she was the Capital of the Emperor Harsha, she was at heights which deserved the poet's fancy. However, a little less or more, she nonetheless reached the zenith of her glory. From that point she fell once again, and went on falling. In course of time, Bhoja shifted the capital to Dhar and then came the Muslims who looted her riches and destroyed her temples. First Iltutmush and then the Khiljis dealt severe blows to this flower of a city. The Mahakala temple, once a fane of fame and radiance, was razed and it was not till centuries later that the Scindias put up the structure today known by that name. During the time Ujjain was under the Sultans of Mandu, she acquired one of her more beautiful monuments, the Kaliadah pleasure-palace, which is stated to have been built over a holy Hindu site, and around a blessed Brahmakund. From the Mandu Sultans, the whole of Malwa passed into the Moghul hands of Akbar and his successors. Jehangir, who stayed for a while in Ujjain, is reported to have been deeply impressed by her religious men like Jaduroopa. After Aurangzeb's reign, Jai Singh of Jaipur was the governor here. At this place, so celebrated for its association with time and

space—the temple of Mahakala, point through which the first meridian passes, etc., and with mathematics and astronomy—he put up one of his five observatories, the other four being at Jaipur, Mathura, Delhi and Benares. This observatory, marking the end and perfection of the stone-age of astronomical instruments, is not only extant but is in proper trim and working order. By now, however, the Marhattas had begun to make attacks on the Moghul domains, and on Jai Singh's suggestion, Malwa was ceded to the Marhattas from amongst whom it fell to the share of the Scindias. They made Ujjain their capital at first, but soon fixed upon Gwalior as their seat of government. Even so, they brought to bear their attention and generosity upon her religious heritage, and helped restore her ruined temples as well as build new ones like the Gopala Mandir. They also re-imparted to her, through setting up Ujjain's celebrated library of rare Sanskrit manuscripts, that sense of her greatness in the field of learning and scholarship for which she was justly famous throughout her long history. After all, it was to her sage, Sandipani, that Krishna, Balrama and Sudama had been sent that they might complete their education. And it was in her universities that Ashoka, Kalidasa, Bana and other scholars of repute and merit had sat for the highest examinations ! As has been mentioned earlier, it is, therefore, but meet and fitting that a national government should make every attempt to assist in this trend of re-emergence and reinstatement of Ujjain as an important centre in the field of learning and culture as she is in that of religion and pilgrimage.

In this last, it has its unquestioned place. Not only because the Kumbha is held here, when Jupiter is in Scorpio, and at that time the city becomes, for the Hindus, the holiest spot in all the world, but also because in Ujjain stands the Jyotirlinga of Mahakala, which is regarded as about the most sacred in the country. In fact, the tradition of this temple and of the worship of Mahakala here and in this region, is of as great historical value as it is of antiquity. Many scholars believe that the Shiva worship spread from here, and Ujjain—the Victorious—represents the triumph of Shiva over the demon Dushana, or Andhaka or Tripurasura—Huns or tribals or Andhra's ruler?—who used to harass the inhabitants of Avanti. It was in response to the pious propitiation of Shiva by a holy Brahman of the place that the earth opened up and the Lord Mahakala manifested himself and destroyed the demon. Then the deity was begged to reside here for ever which he agreed to do, and since then, in the words of Bana, "in this city abides the God Himself bearing the name of Mahakala, abandoning

his love of residence at Mount Kailasha—that god, the lustre of the nails of whose feet is kissed by the rays of the jewelled crests of gods and demons; he, the holy one, who tore asunder the great demon Andhaka with his sharp trident ; and besmeared his body, with the ashes of Tripurasura". There is no end to the praises which are sung by poet and saint of the great god. This deity already much honoured at the time of Kalidasa, was more than ever firmly established at Ujjain and an elaborate ritual of worship existed which indicates that although the 'Pashupata' sect was losing ground, it had not been altogether wiped out.

The temple stands at the southern end of the town, in a spacious enclosure in which may be seen remnants of older shrines. The five-storeyed building which rises by a holy tank has one underground floor and the deity is enshrined there. It was through the idol which stands here that the first meridian of the Hindu geographer was supposed to pass. They say that the Mahakala temple of Ujjain of yore was an altogether vast and magnificent structure and the present-day *Chaubis-Khambha* gate was the entrance thereto. Some of the old statues and sculptures which lie along the walls of the corridor are valuable pieces. The mandapam opposite the entrance is a handsome structure, and so is an ancient temple lying to the south of the main building.

Not far from the Mahakala temple, towards the river ghats, and beyond a temple of Mahaganesh, which houses a truly huge statue of this auspicious son of Shiva and Parvati, there is the picturesque temple of Har-siddhi, the patron goddess of King Vikramaditya. The story goes that at one time the divine couple being at a game of dice, two demons, Chanda and Prachanda, caused much havoc all around and even hurt the poor Nandi, Shiva's bull. Then the god called upon Parvati, his *Shakti*, to go and deal with the offenders which, assuming one of the nine principal forms of the goddess Durga, she duly did, accomplishing thus the business of Hara, the Mahadeva, whence the name Har-siddhi. The temple is located by the Rudrasagar tank and is decorated by two tall lamp-stands erected close to a well inscribed Samvat 1447. The Har-siddhi is an important temple of the Shaktas as it is believed that the elbow of Sati, Shiva's wife, had fallen at Ujjain.

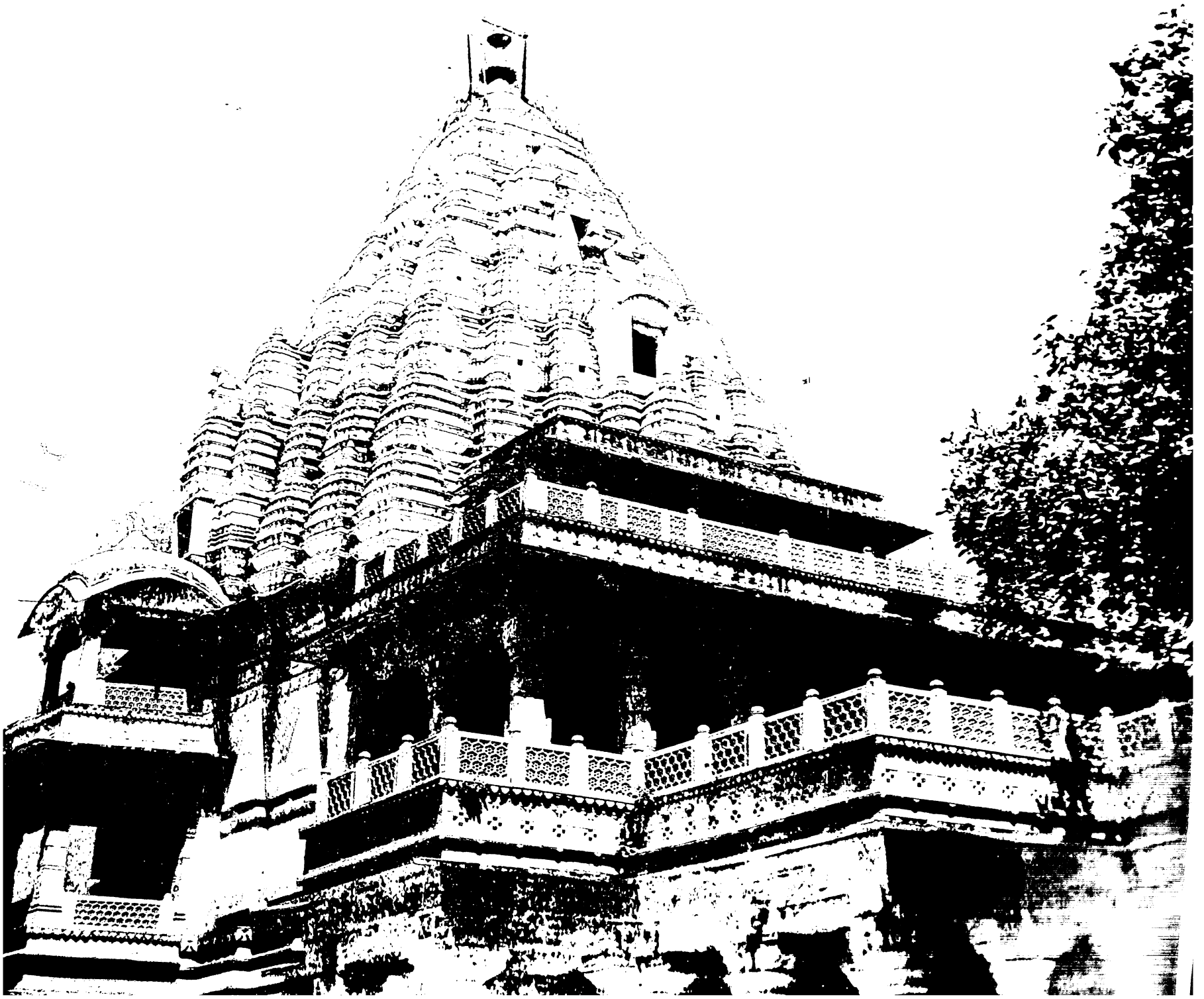
The river ghats lie nearby. The Kshipra is a fair stream. She flows north-wards, to Kailash, and is regarded as most holy. There are several

legends concerning her origin. According to one of these, she is the blood of Vishnu. But the commonest belief is that she was created after the sage Atri's three-thousand-year-long penance with one arm uplifted. As a result of this penance, two streams of refulgence began to flow from the eyes of the great sage. One of these went up, skyward, and became the god moon, Somadeva, who therefore is regarded as Ujjaini-born ; and the second stream of light is this river, of great literary and legendary fame and sanctity, and, therefore, also known as Somavati. Besprinkled as she is with the drops of *amrita*, which fell from the *amrit kumbha*, the pot of elixir, and carrying the merit and holiness of the penance of the Sage aforementioned, great is the reward of a bath in her waters. The ghats are extensive and goodly and get covered with throngs of people on all important and auspicious days. The Kumbha fair, sacred and significant wherever it is held, enjoys in Ujjain, also, supreme sanctity and universal regard.

Of holy sites and sacred shrines, there is no end in Ujjain. In the city itself there is the impressive-looking *marble-spired, silver-doored* temple of Gopal Krishna built by the Scindia Maharani Baija Bai. Far distant from the faith of the Hindus, but not too far from this temple, is located a most beautiful mausoleum of the Bohra community, a monument which is any day worth a visit. But it is as one steps outside the city that one finds a multiplicity of spots and structures which are richly associated with religious lore and legend. These spread out in all directions, literally. On the site of the older city, which, with its Mahendra Marg and Sanghamitra Marg, is reminiscent of Ashokan days, there is the *Akshayavat*, which, is supposed to be linked, under the ground, with that at Prayaga and which, it is claimed, Aurangzeb tried to cut down and destroy. Other places of importance include the temple of Garh Kalika, the goddess whom Kalidasa worshipped ; the Kalabhairava temple, with associations with the Kapalika sect of Shaiva worshippers, near which stands the old prison of Ashoka ; and the Bhartri Hari cave where this royal poet and sage of India is believed to have carried out his penance. Then, in another direction, along the Mangal Marg—the road to the Mangalashwara temple standing at the north end of the town—there are several other sacred shrines and maths. One of the most important of these is the Ankpat (the Gomati Kund where Krishna cleaned his slate) the hermitage of the sage Sandipani with whom Krishna and party studied. A charming story is related in this context. When Krishna had finished his studies, he asked his teacher what *dakshina* he could make in

token payment. The Sage, who knew who his pupil was, said that he would be content if everytime he thought of his pupil, he could see him as manifest. But the wife of the sage was not so sure of the god-head of Krishna, and so she asked him to restore to life their dead son Datta, which Krishna readily did. Thanks to the practical woman, it was that revivified boy who continued Sandipani's family which, it is stated has existed in unbroken line since then. The Mangaleswar Temple dedicated to the planet Mangala, (Mars), is a fine shrine, and a most popular one. Like the Moon, this planet is also stated to have been Ujjaini-born, which would indicate that it was discovered by the astronomers of Ujjain. Indeed the existence of a whole temple of the planets, at the Triveni site, is evidence of the importance Ujjain attached to the science of the heavenly bodies.

The Triveni, as also the Navgraha temple, lie in yet another direction, along the road, in the east, to Indore. The winding Kshipra takes another turn and the temple is situated in sweet sylvan surroundings, close to the Sangama. The other two rivers which constitute the confluence are known as an old Rewa (not the present-day Rewa) and Kshata. But not only are there conflicting accounts of this matter, the holiness attaching to the Sangama called Kshata (and at one time identified with the Rudra Sarovar) is miles from that which the Triveni at Prayaga enjoys. To each her own, for what one has that the other has not ; and to imitate is not always to succeed. Thus, though Ujjain has her Panchakosi, and twenty-eight tirthas, and in the Mahakalavana, countless lingas, in these things she cannot emulate Kashi and Varanasi. And yet Ujjain does not have to imitate this or emulate that, for she is herself as rich and holy as any city, if not the holiest and the richest of them all.

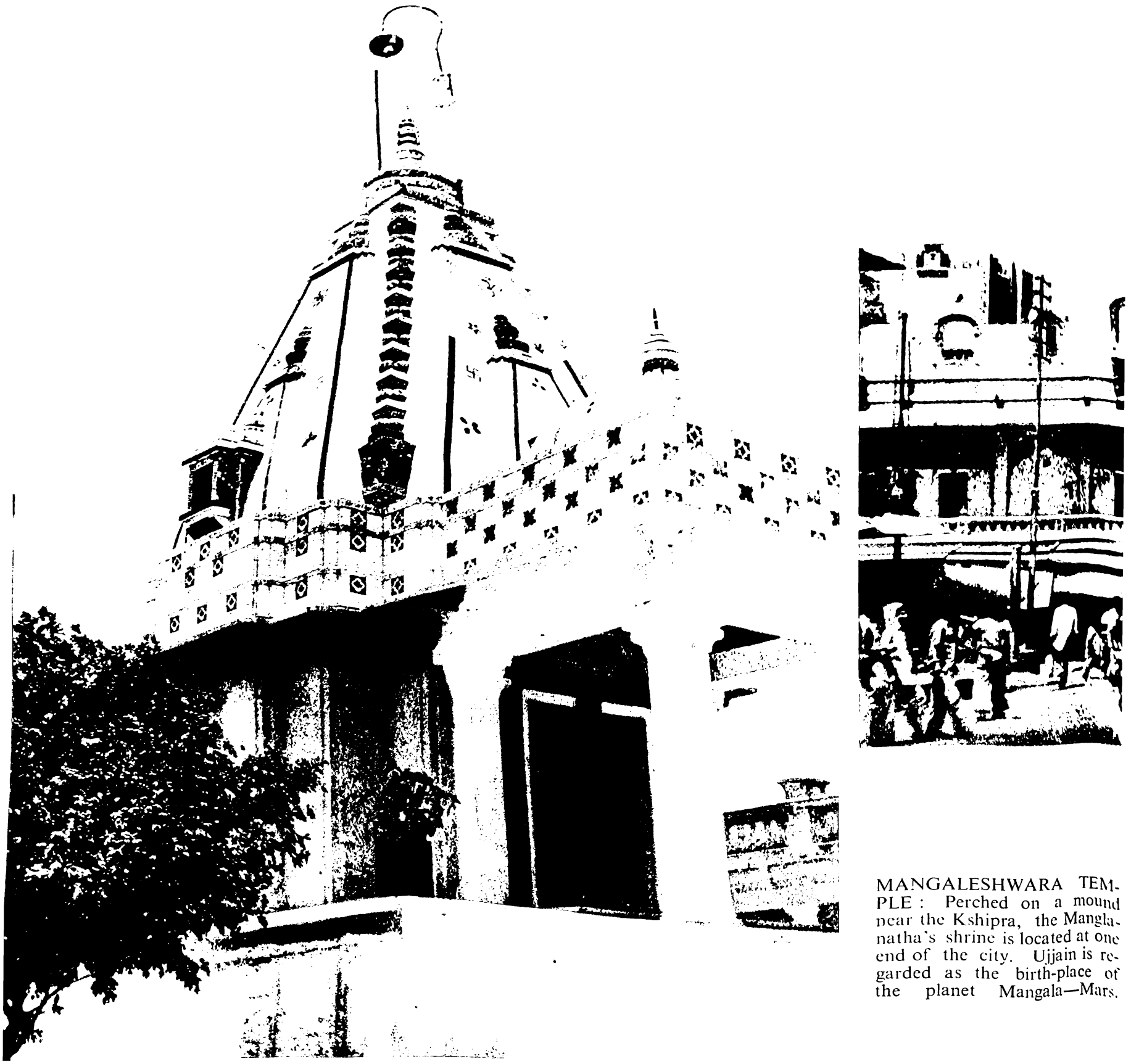




THE SANGAMA AND TRIVENI, GENERAL VIEW : Here the Kshipra is joined by other holy streams. The leafy and luscious grove of trees all but conceals the ancient Navagraha Mandir—Temple of the Nine Planets.



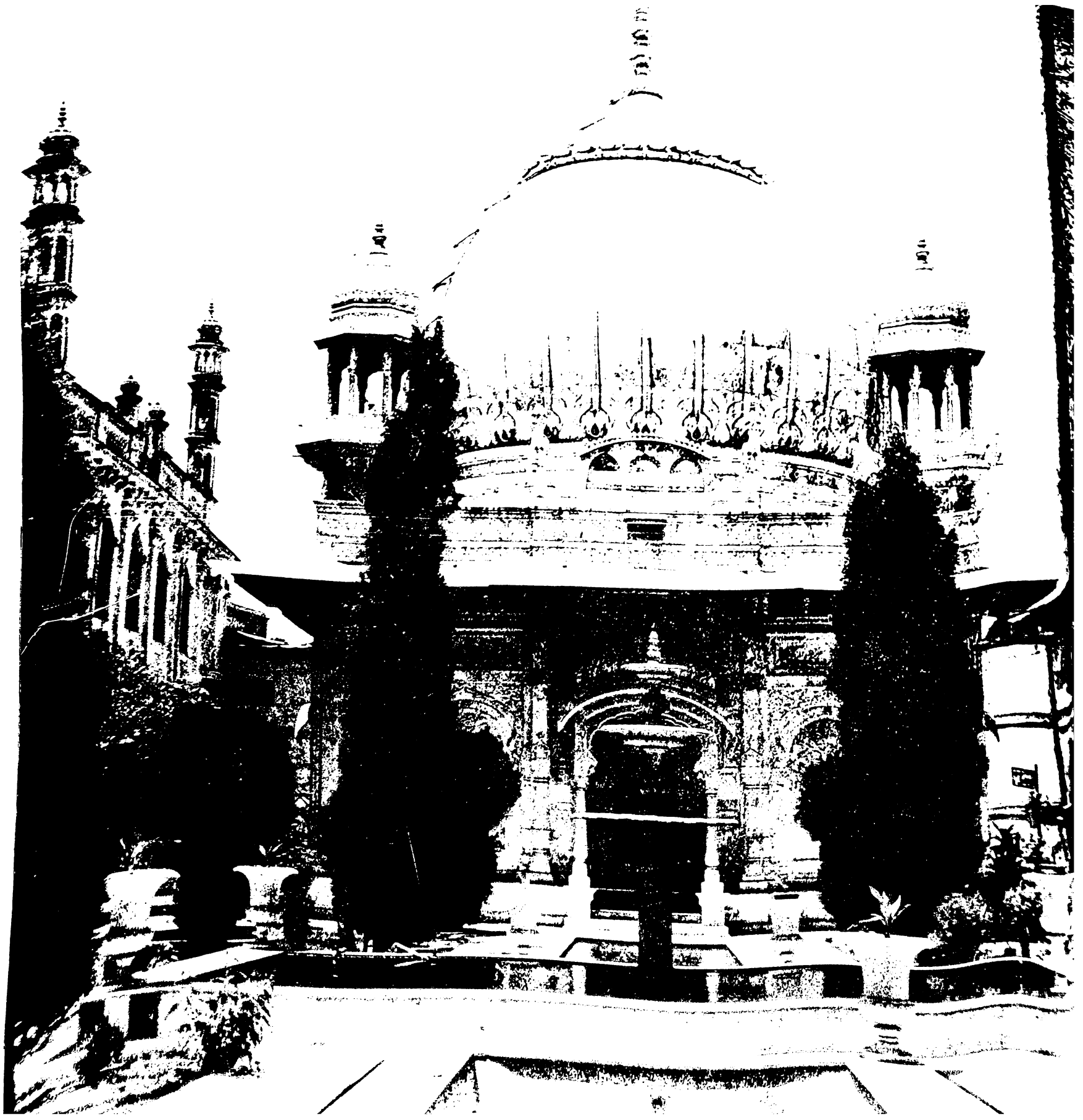
THE GHATS, GENERAL VIEW : The Kshipra is Somadevi, the river of light and twice blessed because of the drops of nectar which fell into her waters aeons ago. The city is situated on the eastern bank.



MANGALESHWARA TEMPLE : Perched on a mound near the Kshipra, the Mangla-natha's shrine is located at one end of the city. Ujjain is regarded as the birth-place of the planet Mangala—Mars.



GOPAL MANDIR, VIEW OF ENTRANCE : Standing in the heart of the City, the Gopal Mandir, dedicated to Krishna, is a magnificent gift of the Scindia Maharani Baija Bai.

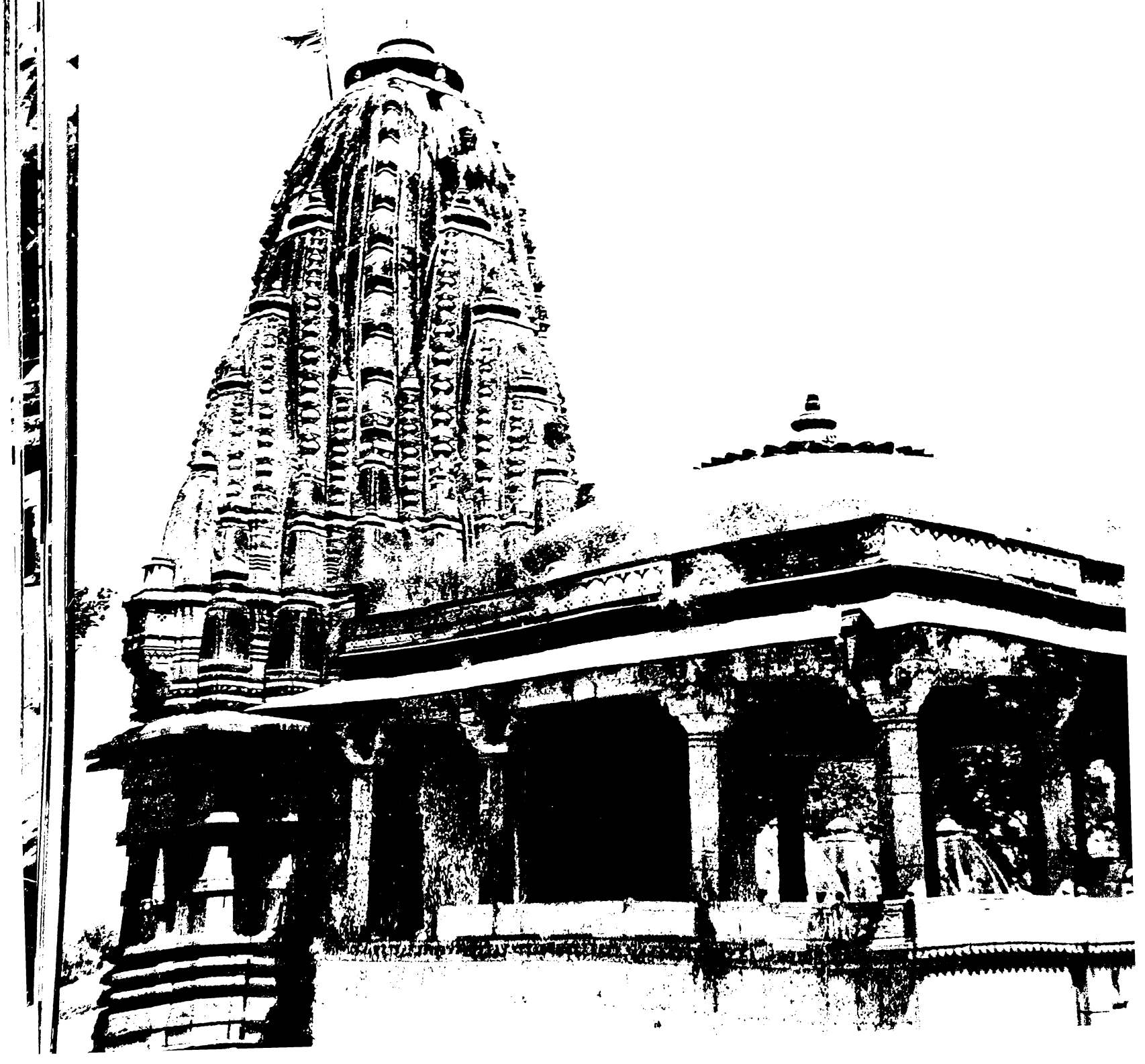




HAR SIDDHI TEMPLE, GENERAL VIEW: This temple of the goddess Parvati, spouse of Shiva, marks Ujjain's importance as a Shaktipith. In the foreground stands one of the two picturesque lamp-towers with spaces provided for scores of lights.

◀ BOHRON KA RAUZA, GENERAL VIEW: The Bohras are a rich community, though their numbers are small. This impressive structure rises in picturesque surroundings of peace and serenity.

BRIDH KALESHWAR TEMPLE : The fine little shrine of Kaleshwar is located near and to the south of the Mahakala temple and is regarded by many as very holy.



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