

# UNKNOWN INDIA

*A Pilgrimage into a Forgotten World*

by

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# PART ONE

## SHRI

### CHAPTER I

#### JOURNEY TO THE EAST

The India-bound ship – Passengers of many races – Memories of the days preceding the war – The silent summons to India – Bombay – The search for Shri – A message from the Brahman.

The ship that took me to India was an ordinary white steamer of the Lloyd Triestino Line. Now it lies somewhere at the bottom of the deep sea.

During the trip I never felt the relaxation that I had always experienced before when breathing the salt air of the open sea. In all the dining-rooms and lounges on board there appeared daily notices containing the latest news broadcast. Every plank, every white-enamelled deck railing, and every human body on board vibrated incessantly and rhythmically with the throbbing of the invisible engine, and in the same way every heart quivered secretly in the face of its approaching destiny. People crowded anxiously before the notices which told of changes in Germany's laws regarding the Jews, of new armaments or new speeches by those in power, who threatened war or held out hope for peace.

The bombastic Italians who were on their way to the new empire of Abyssinia ordered wide-bellied, raffia-wound bottles of chianti with their meals. They gesticulated and talked excitedly and confidently. When the ship left Massawa they had all disappeared, having remained in Africa. In what rifle-pits among the thickets of the desert mountains are their bones bleaching now? In what prison camp did they succumb? How many of them have survived the war and the turmoil that followed in its wake?

The quiet Jewish musician from Hungary, who wanted to escape the terrors threatening his fatherland, and felt secure because of a contract that lay in his wallet, engaging him to play at a club in Penang on the Malay Peninsula – what became of him?

My memory lingers among the many people on that big ship, all those whom I dined with daily, whom I brushed up against, spoke to, or only observed. They were divided into four strictly different classes, according to the fares they could afford to pay. Into the ship's hundreds of small cubbyholes they were tucked, each one with some unknown fate, and only the thin riveted walls of steel separated them from the deep sea, at the bottom of which the ship now lies.

There was a medical student from the Philippines with his blonde German wife.

There were business men and English officers on their way back to their posts in India or Burma. And then there were Indians, students and business men, on their way home from America. A woman surgeon who was returning to her native land after having been in London. Members of a ritual dancetroupe who had been touring America and Europe for two years. The red caste-mark on the foreheads of the women shone strangely as if some secret were hidden there. But in the evenings these women, too, danced jazz and the tango. Tirelessly they wound up the worn-out gramophone. The men played cards half the day in the suffocating smoking-room.

Missionaries walked about among the Indians. They were on their way to the East to convert the people there to Christianity, these Catholic priests in dark gowns, with long greying beards. One, a Frenchman on his way to China, paced the deck silently, to and fro, every day for a whole week, with long strides, his gown flowing behind him. When he finally allowed himself to talk, he overflowed with repressed, passionate utterances.

Two nuns kept apart from the other passengers. They were holy sisters from Bayern, from the neighbourhood of Passau. They were going to instruct children in the Philippines. The handsome younger one looked like a bright angel, and the other, wrinkled and tiny, watched protectively over her companion, as if anxious over her beauty.

What has become of them all? What fate has befallen them?

About us the colours were shifting, and the sea altered its appearance. The hyacinth-blue sea that Odysseus once sailed upon was beating against the sands of Egypt. We now entered into a world where I was a stranger. Between endless dunes of yellowish grey desert sand, an artificial river-bed with well-defined edges of cement had been constructed. Desert sand tumbled down the cement slope. The Suez Canal. Carefully the ship steered forward on the narrow glittering blue waterway. From my cabin I could see, through the port-hole that was always open, far into the desert.

Now the sea had changed its name. Above a naked yellowish-brown cliff, a lighthouse arose in the middle of the Red Sea. Again the endless surface of the sea stretched out in every direction. At times we could discern mountains – mountains of the Sudan, or mountains wrapped in the hot mists of Ethiopia, or the wildly rugged and fantastic mountain formations of the Arabian coast.

After the Italians had left the boat at Massawa, the Indians began to stretch out on deck; they camped there day and night in their transparent white or coloured garments. When the other passengers succumbed to the stuffy, oppressive heat, they awoke to life. Embracing couples leaned over the railings at night, over the roaring waves.

The electric fans purred continuously at top speed. With a whistling sound, air was pumped into the stuffy cabins through openings in the white ceiling. In vain I held my head outside the open port-hole, breathing in the warm night air. It was not

refreshing. Just below me roared the water that was set in motion by the keel of the ship. The lamplight shone through the cabin windows like flames, and cast a white glow on the frothy, seething water. In the distance the sea lay black as far as the night horizon, where dark clouds gathered in the north. I went up the softly vibrating steps, as far as the captain's bridge, and there I lay down on a seat. The night sky with its countless stars was above me. The Milky Way looked strangely unfamiliar, where its wide arc spanned almost down to the surface of the water. I lay there the greater part of the night on the empty deck, while the ship ploughed its way through the Indian Ocean. I listened to the noise of the waves, and looked up into the slowly revolving heaven of stars. And I tried once again to relive in thought the confused events of those last days at home in Vienna.

I remembered that night when the mobs came rolling in over all the bridges of the Danube, and how the men held up their clenched fists threateningly towards the dark walls of the houses and rhythmically shouted in chorus: "Death to Judah! Death to Judah!" I stood there between my wife and my mother in one of the many dark windows, and we looked anxiously down at the shrieking masses; our child, a little boy, was fortunately already asleep.

In the middle of the room stood my packed trunks. My heart was heavy: at a time like this I was going to leave my wife, my child and my mother. And yet a voice within me commanded: "Go! Go! You must go to India! You must go!"

And now the Indian Ocean roared about the stem of the ship, which ploughed its way through the white foamy waves towards the East. I lay there a long time on the captain's bridge in the warm breeze, and looked up at the stars. Again I saw my goal before me, the mountain of God's revelation, called Kailas, and at its base the clear Lake Manasarovar, the lake of the Divine spirit. There, says the legend, the Atma, the eternal soul, sways upon the clear waves like a swan, untouched by fear, hate or desire.

The electric fans had stopped whirring and spreading the little coolness they could. The engines of the ship did not throb any longer. At the tables in the magnificent first-class dining-room passport officials were now seated. The passengers filed past them in long lines. "What do you intend to do in India?" questioned a dark-skinned immigration officer, clad in a white uniform glittering with gold.

"I am going to study Indian religion and philosophy," I answered.

The officials eyed me with distrust, and hesitatingly stamped my passport.

As I was shoved gradually nearer the exit, there in the crowd and the stifling heat, I happened to stand a moment beside the elder of the two nuns. "I can imagine how it must feel to be a refugee," she said slowly. "God help you."

Was I a refugee? I wondered in my surprise. I was headed for Kailash, the holy mountain of revelation, I thought. But the mountain of revelation had sunk below the horizon.

Customs-house, storage-houses, derricks, surrounded me on all sides, and the



same unrest reigned in India as in all other places on earth. On the way to the hotel I drove in an open car past an alley which was crowded with loudly-shrieking people. Thousands of them shouted shrilly, all at the same time. The chorus sank now and again to a faint murmur, but then the shrieking rose once more. Despair and joy swelled up against each other like breakers at sea. "Are they lamenting over someone who is dead?" I asked the driver in my simplicity.

"No, this alley is the gold exchange," he explained. Wild, unrestrained cries of fear or delight accompanied each tiny swing of the exchange in silver and gold. India was no fairy-land. India was a land full of selfishness, of the wild battle for bread, for money and for gold.

Tired and exhausted I drove along one of the palm-lined streets of Bombay. There was a breeze from the sea. My gaze could not be caught by the beautiful big city, the gateway of the East. My thoughts went back constantly to my wife, my child and my mother. Would there be an airmail letter from home waiting for me in Bombay?

As soon as I had washed myself and stretched out a short while on the hard tourist bed in the bare room of the hospice, I hurried away in the heat of midday to the travel bureau of the American Express Company where I had left my address.

Nothing, not a word from home awaited me. I could have cried with disappointment, the only letter there for me bore an Indian stamp. Who could be writing me from India? Indifferently I tore open the envelope. The letter was already several weeks old. An Indian lawyer informed me that Shri was in Hardvar and intended to undertake a long pilgrimage from there. If I wished for further information I should come to the lawyer's office some afternoon between three and six.

Who was Shri? I searched my memory. Shri Maharaj was the wise old brahman who was preparing a pilgrimage to Lake Manasarovar in Tibet. I had written to him from Vienna that I would like to accompany him, but he had not answered.

I decided to look up Shri's lawyer immediately. The obliging official at the travel bureau pressed a guide on me in spite of my resistance. The office was situated in an old part of the town where it was difficult to find one's way. Even if I took a car, the driver would never find the place, he assured me.

The splendidly-dressed man with a silk turban walked before me through the glowing heat of the sun. All the way he remained on the sunny side of the street, avoiding the shade with painstaking care. As I went along the stone pavement I saw blood-red spots and puddles. An epidemic must have broken out here in Bombay. Later on I found out that the red spots had quite an innocent origin – betel-chewing Indians had been spitting in the streets.

My guide spared no pains in leading me entirely wrong. Triumphant he marched me up one street and down another in the blinding heat, and at last he took me to the office of a lawyer. But, alas, it was the office of another, not the lawyer I was seeking. With a sigh I paid the talkative, gaily-dressed man and sent him away.

I now went alone on my voyage of discovery. Dead tired, I stood at last in front of the house I sought. It lay on the same street as the travel bureau, Esplanade Road, exactly opposite the starting point of my wandering, barely thirty steps away.

The lawyer's office consisted of a single room, which was filled with busy clerks. Clerks and clients came and went. A hushed, murmuring quiet reigned in the hall.

A door a bit above the level of the floor opened noiselessly, and I entered the partition where the lawyer sat absorbed in his work at a desk covered with piles of papers.

The man turned his finely-chiselled, tranquil countenance towards me. I became calm at once, although my heart still throbbed, and perspiration streamed down my face. Through the open sunny window fresh air blew into the corner room in an invigorating draught.

With a searching look his intelligent eyes rested on me. "So you are Walther Eidlitz? When did you arrive?"

"Today."

Two clerks had come in with bundles of paper in their hands, and stood waiting. But the lawyer had time for me. "And you wish to meet Shri?"

"Yes."

"Shri is no longer in Hardvar. Cholera has broken out among the pilgrims. I had a letter from Shri yesterday. He has gone farther into the mountains, to Nainital, which lies up in the Himalayas at a height of over six thousand feet."

"In Nainital?" I cried in surprise. "Doesn't that lie on the pilgrim road which leads to Lake Manasarovar in Tibet?"

He nodded assent. "Yes, to the holy lake, Manasarovar. What do you intend to do first here in India?" he continued. "Do you plan to go to Benaras? Or do you wish to meet Shri right away?"

"I wish to meet him at once."

The man smiled and sent after a telegram blank. He wrote: *Walther Eidlitz arrived today. Wishes to meet you immediately.* He gave the telegram to an errand boy. "Come here tomorrow at the same time, and the answer will surely be here."

The answer arrived punctually: *Send Walther Eidlitz here. Shri.*

## CHAPTER II

### SHRI

Farewell to Bombay – Tropical heat – Journey to Nainital – Shri and his disciples – A new life begins.

Crowds of natives surrounded me. I was in a modern city of considerable size with street-cars and double-deck buses. Several hundred thousand brown people. Light brown, olive brown, and blackish brown, young and old, in white costumes thin as gauze. Hardly one white face in the swarms of people.

Meanwhile the electric advertisements had been lit over bazaars, cinemas and restaurants. America of today and ancient Asia contrasted strongly in this city. The people have remained Eastern. Eastern are their faces, their eyes and their brown hands, and yet those hands steer the innumerable motor-cars through the crowds. They sit there squatting on the streets, they sit in the dust in their white clothes; they sit crouched in all kinds of positions, often just as the meditating Buddha is generally pictured. Above them sway tall palms. Behind them, perhaps a Mohammedan hotel is there, resembling a low shed, or a barbers stall where people sit crouched in the middle of the street masses, having their heads shaved. Only a small tuft of hair remains in the centre of the crown, marking the place for Brahma's thousand-leafed lotus flower, through which, it is said, the soul of one who is spiritually awakened leaves the body at death. On the forehead, also, men and mostly women bear the sign, carefully painted in coloured ash, the sign for the seeing spiritual eye, there in the heart of this noisy, half-American city.

For a few minutes I was drowned in Asia's seething multitude.

The big city of Bombay had vanished behind me in the Indian night. Gone were the electric advertisements, the electric arches of light and the screaming caravans of cars on its streets. Around me now were only the quivering walls of the big, wide railway compartment, and the sleeping grey figures on the benches. And outside it was night.

Shyly, for the first time I had made my own bed, and lay stretched out on my seat in the dark, gently-rolling train, and listened about me. Through all the cracks in the car the tropical night pushed its way in. What a far-reaching country this was that I now travelled through for the first time!

The night stretched out and breathed hard on me. A merciless day followed. In vain the electric fans whirled up in the ceiling of the car. The air that was compressed into the car was oppressively hot, and yet the compartment, the roof of which was sprayed with water at every stop, was cool in comparison with the air outside. All the shades were drawn down, it was half-dim in the car. Light filtered in only through small cracks, white, blinding light from the glowing skies and the

naked earth, the endless burned-up plains that the express train rushed through hour after hour.

When at noon I stepped out on to the railway platform to go the few steps to the restaurant car (there are no corridors on Indian trains), I fell backwards; I was nearly struck to the ground by the white-hot hammer of measureless heat. I should have come in November, I learned. Now it was May, the hottest month of the year in India.

Over bridges, over wide rivers, over the Yamuna, over the Ganges, the train rolled along. Outside, the enormous country widened, the warm, damp tropical night came, and after it the glowing cloud of dust that was a new day. It could not be far now to the mountain in the north, to Himalaya. But one could not see it.

One could not see it even when Shri Maharaj's car drove me through the burning heat up towards the foothills of Himalaya. Beside me in the car sat Shri's old secretary half-reclining, quite exhausted, asleep. He had fetched me at the station in Kathgodam. Later on I found out that he had just recovered from a serious attack of dysentery.

I nearly grew dizzy on that road, which took me quickly, with numerous turns, up to a height of over six thousand feet. Big crowds of apes sat brooding on the stone barriers of the bridges. The air became cooler.

Now something flashed. We caught a glimpse of a lake between the green leaves of the trees on the other side of a mountain pass. Above the glittering mirror of water, and the dry river-beds which lay hidden in the mists of the plains, the houses of a many-coloured Indian village arose, all with airy balconies. The village street swarmed with people. It led through a bazaar section, up a steep hill, and was altogether too narrow for the car. So it was left down on the shore and we climbed higher up by foot.

Through the door of a hotel for natives came an old man with large, friendly eyes and silver-grey beard. A golden brown sign was painted on his wide, furrowed forehead. It was Shri.

Something within me wanted to compel me to bow down reverently before this old man. I felt his hand – or was it the power in his blessing? – on my head.

A man of about forty, with a face like an Eastern knight in the legend of Parsifal, led me into a side room. It was Rana, Shri's disciple. I washed away the suffering of the last few weeks. I returned to Shri's half-lighted room. Merely being in the presence of Shri had made me cleaner and calmer.

Shri and Rana gave me a lot of oranges to eat – they were newly-ripened up here on the mountain slopes. I ate at least a dozen of them one after the other. They refreshed me unbelievably.

After a while I saw that a muscular, almost naked coolie was out there on the street, loading all my baggage on his head like a tower. Rana and I followed the coolie. The wind blew in from the lake, and Rana led me along the lovely green water to a house on the shore, a boarding-house which was owned by a Parsee, and

where Shri had arranged lodgings for me. There I was given vegetarian food, at that time prepared in European fashion. My new friends studied me, watching me to see how I was going to react. For Shri had not always had pleasant experiences with European and American disciples. Not all of them had been able to adjust themselves to Indian food and Indian customs of living.

In the afternoon Rana appeared suddenly outside my door. “Shri is waiting,” he called. “Come immediately.”

We wandered along the edge of the lake together with Shri. He was silent, but at times I heard him murmuring to himself, HARI OM, HARI OM. When we reached the temple of the goddess Naini we met the old secretary, who threw himself down on the ground before Shri, touching the feet of his master with his forehead. A crowd of Europeans and Indians watched. Then together with Rana he went away, the crowd dispersed, and I was left alone with Shri.

I opened wide my heart to him. I told him about my life and my work. All my hopes, my fears and troubles, all my faith and all my doubts, I laid before him. I told him also of my wife and my child whom I had left behind, alone in a difficult situation. He only listened. Not far from us there was a health resort, filled with people. All about us Indian nurses (*ayahs*) played with their charges, pale European children. None of this disturbed us.

A few days later he said to me: “For a while yet I am not giving you the higher yoga practices. For the present I want to give you only *Shanti*, only peace – Divine peace!”

Is there anything greater than Divine peace? I wondered.

Shri gave me peace – for a while. And he gave it not alone to me, but to my wife as well, who lived thousands of miles away, on the other side of the ocean, in an era and an atmosphere filled with menace and danger. The first mantra of initiation which he gave me, he sent her also. He even gave her a new name. In the letters he sent her in response to my entreaty, he called her not Hella, but Shanti – Peace. He expressed the wish that Divine peace should penetrate not only her, but should bring strength and calm to all who came in contact with her.

It was a fact, also, that many who were near Hella in the days of confusion, yes, the days of vital danger, were surprised at Hella’s – Shanti’s – unquenchable cheerfulness and firm confidence. Was it Shri’s blessing that protected her?

## CHAPTER III

### THE FOUR STEPS OF MEDITATION

Jazz and Temple bells – The legend of Lake Nainital – A reassuring dream – Rana, chief disciple of Shri – The silence of the Himalaya – First steps in meditation – Physical discomforts – Regulating the breathing – The power of the mantra – Meditation explained.

About two hundred years ago, when wondering European eyes first beheld the green glittering Lake Nainital in Himalaya, its basin was surrounded on all sides by fragrant virgin forest. The woods were filled with flowers, and with wild animals which wandered in large herds down to the shores to drink, and would not be driven away. This peaceful territory was holy. According to the Hindus, even the snake-god had given his promise that a snake-bite along these shores would not cause death.

I never saw a snake near Lake Nainital. The wild animals, too, have now been driven away. All that remains are the many coloured birds that sway on the branches of the chestnut-trees, and the apes that still reign over the steep cliffs of the south shore, and sometimes in their play push rock fragments down into the lake. In the thick forest of oaks and chestnuts, people have hewn out clearings, and built country places, from simple bungalows to the stately residences of Indian princes and the English governor. Along the shore a wide bridle-path has been made, and western warehouses, schools and banks, and a large hockey field have been built. Down near the shore the graceful temple of the goddess Naini, too, still stands, and beneath its vault, naked Indian ascetics gather. But the temple stands in the shadow of a compact building in ugly European style, containing a cinema and a large roller-skating rink. The jazz music from the cinema's sound apparatus drowns the sound of the temple bells, which hang from a scaffolding beside the temple of the goddess Naini, and are often set ringing by believers.

Every evening I wandered along the shore together with Shri Maharaj, the teacher and fatherly friend whom I had found here in India. "The holy rishis once lived on these wooded mountains," he related for me. "Rishis are high spiritual beings, much higher than man. They have no earthly body but it is said that they can assume a human body if they wish. A thousand years ago, these rishis in human form are said to have bathed every year in the waters of the Ganges. Later, when man's inner ear became closed, these ancient teachers of humanity drew themselves higher up into the mountains, all the way up to the regions of eternal snow."

"And where do they live in our days?" I asked.

The old man smiled. "In the snowy mountains about Lake Manasarovar."

The name Lake Manasarovar rang out over the water. The faraway lake in Tibet, my secret goal, appeared once again in vision before me, enmeshed in legends, the heart of the world, the last remaining bit of earthly Paradise. Four holy streams, it is said, have their source in its inundation. To the south, west, north and east. The stream that runs southward bears with it sands of silver; that which flows westward bears gold; that which flows to the north, emeralds and that flowing to the east, diamonds. And its waters in some secret way fed the basin of the lake at the shore of which I now stood. Had my wandering led me right thus far?

The music from the cinema and the regimental band had died away. I listened to the tale of how Lake Nainital had come to be.

During their wandering through the world in human form, three of the seven holy rishis had come to these mountains. They had no water and were in great distress. Tortured by thirst, they prayed to Brahma, the Creator of the world, for help. At his command they dug a deep hole in the earth, and Brahma allowed the living waters of faraway lake Manasarovar to discharge into this deep basin. Then the lake came into being, and was given the name Tririshisarovar, the lake of the three rishis.

The hockey match had ended with loud acclaim from the crowds. The excited brown and white onlookers had dispersed. The musicians in red uniforms, too, had packed away their instruments and returned to their quarters. Gently the bells in the goddess Naini's temple rang out over the water.

I looked towards the west, where the sun was just sinking behind the wooded mountains, Shri Maharaj related further about the rishis and about a hymn to the sun which they used to sing. The words of the hymn were not directed to the sun one sees with mortal eyes. It was a mantra to the spiritual sun, to that spiritual being hidden behind the sun we see. Shri sang first, and let me sing after him.

"Look deep into the blue heavens. Imbibe their depths, so that they will give you strength," Shri advised me, and then we read together a few verses from the Bhagavadgita. Every day thereafter we read from this book. The old man interpreted the meaning, the occult and yet so apparent meaning, in some of the verses. "It is the highest initiation book for all time and for all people," he exulted.

All-penetrating God Himself speaks in the world of the Bhagavadgita; The innermost God, of which Brahma, the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer, are only aspects.

In the Bhagavadgita Krishna speaks thus to his friend Arjuna: "Just as a person casts off his worn-out garments and clothes himself anew, does the immortal soul cast away the worn-out body and take on a new one. No one has the power to destroy the immortal soul, the atma."

Like a prophet of the spiritual sun, the old man stood before me. Rhythmically the waves of Lake Nainital beat against the shore. I seemed to see its sands once again, as in the past, thronged with wild animals which sought the living water. Full of joy, I realized that I really was in India, in Himalaya. Innumerable wise men

and spiritual teachers in the past had descended from those snow-covered mountains.

Next morning, shortly before waking, I had a dream. A ship bore me to a foreign land. And I heard a voice: "Everything will turn out well for you. You will be reunited with your wife. ... Give him the treasures, give him them step by step."

I arose happy. It was six o'clock in the morning. The street leading to the beach and the wide bridle-path along the edge of the lake still retained their morning emptiness. Only a few coolies trotted past with their loads on their heads and shoulders. I waited for Rana.

Rana came punctually. He was Shri Vishvanath Maharaj's most advanced disciple. By chance I found out that by profession he was a policeman of high rank, commander of a district of several million inhabitants. Shri Maharaj's private secretary spoke of Rana with the greatest respect.

"In the evening when he is off duty, no one would believe that he is a member of the police. But if he should discover an error in the discharge of duty, he is said to be like a tiger. He is well-known as an excellent tiger shot: but he shoots no other game than this beast of prey."

Rana climbed ahead of me. "Short cut!" was the word I heard most often from him during the first few days. In all situations of life, he preferred time-saving short-cuts. Without waiting for an answer, he always headed for the shortest way on these wanderings in Himalaya, steep uphill ways through the thick forest of oaks and chestnut-trees.

Far down between the tree-trunks one caught a glimpse of the lake, which lay there lead-grey in the morning light. I waited in order to look and to catch my breath. Back home in Vienna, to be sure, I had run about a good deal, especially from one pass bureau to another, but I was not in training for the quick climbing at this great height.

"It is only your legs that are tired, not you lungs," said Rana. We continued upwards. I tried to follow his advice. I made an effort to forget my legs, and succeeded. My breathing became one with the strong wind that blew through the world. My lungs were like the sails of a ship. The wind got hold of the sails, and pushed the boat forwards. Without difficulty I now climbed farther.

"Shall we pause awhile?" asked Rana.

"No, we can continue," I cried, and proceeded upwards. A new person, an untiring wanderer, seemed to have entered my being.

Rana belonged to the war casts, and was of the ancient nobility, with several hundred ancestors. "For a thousand years, time after time, they have fought against Islam," he said. I also learned later on that Rana was a descendant of India's noblest lineage, the Sun Dynasty. From Rama, the Divine hero who in ancient times ruled India, he traced his origin.

When we came up to the top, Rana suggested: "Shall we remain silent?"

"Yes, let us."



In silence we sat beside each other on the jutting rock, and listened within our souls, and we watched how the mists rose and sank, revealing a landscape of undulating woods and mountains. We looked towards the north, where at times one could just get a suggestion of Himalaya's snowy ridges.

In silence again we descended. When the way became less steep, and the rich foliage of fruit trees revealed the nearness of the lake, Rana began to talk about himself and his two little sons. He spoke of his wife, also, with whom he had lived in a truly spiritual union, and who now was dead. After we had walked along together a while without speaking, he said: "Three wishes I have in life: to find myself, my true self. And to behold the personal and impersonal God." After a while he smilingly added yet a wish, not as lofty: "I wish also once again to find the right wife."

"Don't forget that you must come to meditation with Shri Maharaj at ten o'clock," he called as we parted.

Full of expectation and somewhat shy I went, fanned by the breeze from the lake, up towards Shri's house. On the way I met young English men and women riding fine horses. They looked like young gods, these smiling youths, lifted high above the swarming masses of brown people. Most of them knew nothing of the soul of the Indian people they had ruled over such a long time. They remained strangers, even though they had lived in the country for thirty years.

In the hall of the house that Shri lived in I lingered in order to accustom my eyes to the dusk of the place, after coming direct from the sharp light outside. I rested a while in Rana's room. I wanted to wash my hands and feet once again, although it was only a short while since I had bathed. Then I went barefooted into Shri's room.

Shri did not greet me in his usual manner, with a light, friendly gesture of the hand. The old man sat motionless on the floor, wrapped in a white mantle. In dumb show Rana gave me to understand that I should sit on the floor face to face with Shri. I did so. Rana, too, bore a white mantle. Reverently he threw himself down before Shri and touched his forehead on the old man's bare feet. Then he lit a little stick of incense and placed it beside him in a candlestick. With whitish-grey ash from a glass bowl, he painted his sign on the crown of his head, his forehead, throat and breast. Now he, too, sat motionless with his legs crossed under him and his back upright.

I felt Shri's gaze resting on me. "Look into my eyes. I am your friend," he said.

I looked at Shri. Like the father of the world, the old man sat in front of me. Mightier than ever, his wrinkled face, surrounded by long black hair and a silver grey beard, rose above the white linen garment that draped his figure. Mountains and chasms, whole worlds, were to be seen in that clear countenance. He sat there like Cosmos itself, grey with age, and yet resplendent with a quiet white-gold light which had become part of his being.

I did not meditate very much the first day. I was depressed, I was not yet used to sitting with my legs crossed under me; it soon became unbearably tiresome. My

limbs got stiff and cold, and ached. Rather ashamed of myself, I got up and began to rub my numb feet, when Shri arose. Shri comforted me. Yes, for Europeans it was difficult at first. I must buy a straw mat and a deer hide, as the instruction pointed out, in order to sit more comfortably. I must slowly learn the four steps to meditation: the first one to sit, the second to breathe, the third to speak, to recite the mantra, and the fourth to sing it. I should certainly succeed, for I had brought over the spiritual power for this from earlier existences on earth, and this power must only be developed, he explained.

I remained about an hour longer in the half-dim room, where cries from merchants and coolies and grooms penetrated from the noon life of the bazaar-filled street. Sometimes a curious face peeped in through the window-pane. Rana sat on the floor, reading aloud from a book with loose pages. I was wrapped in the foreign sounds of one of the country's Indo-Aryan languages. My ear would get used to them in time. Rana read of Rama, Almighty God, who had descended to earth and fought against the powerful demon Ravana, who had ten heads, and was the one who had plunged "the three worlds" into slavery.

"Always when justice is undermined, and an excess of injustice reigns, I descend and make My appearance among men; in order to restore justice, I descend on earth from time to time." Thus God made His promise in the Bhagavadgita.

A hundred times and more, I sat opposite Shri in meditation. At that time one forgot completely where on earth one happened to be. And always I was filled with the deepest emotion and reverence when I opened my eyes and saw the uplifted expression of the old man sitting there before me, in deep silence, yet completely abandoned to the spiritual sun. Then I saw him rise and paint the sign with cool paste made from sandalwood, on my brow, my throat, and my breast, in order that my spiritual eyes might be opened.

Next time, I came to meditation with a straw mat of kusha grass, the skin of a deer and a cloth under my arm. I seated myself without any cramps now, with relaxed limbs, and comfortably. Now and then people came into the room and went away again. The servant brought in Shri's midday meal on a silver tray in a number of silver bowls, and this was the only meal the old man partook of each day. I marvelled that all these activities did not disturb me in the least.

The deepest gratitude towards Shri welled up in me. Thus far I had had only a vague idea of what it meant to concentrate and meditate. It was not much that I could attain now, either. But it began to dawn on me how meditation could develop.

Time after time I tried to concentrate during meditation. And often I saw majestic visions. But I had a secret feeling that this phase was only temptation – dangerous because it imprisoned one and made one proud and conceited. This pride about what one had seen must first be carefully cleared away, and all inner rubbish as well, all unrest, all spiritual uncleanness. One must work towards tranquillity, as towards the shore of an unknown sea, and there on that shore must

one wait, listening and devoted, until the Divine world – if it so chooses – receives one into its life.

When I rose from the floor after my inadequate attempt at meditation, all my limbs usually ached for a long while. Yet I was marvellously refreshed, and the material world shone about me with a deeper radiance than before.

It is not enough to meditate only temporarily or at a certain time of day. Shri often impressed upon me this fact: “Twenty-four hours of both day and night, asleep or awake, one must live in this spiritual atmosphere; and one must constantly try to devote oneself to this.”

Several years, years filled with many painful experiences, went by in India before I began to apprehend the meaning of the four steps to meditation.

The first two steps of meditation, which Shri described for me at Lake Nainital, to sit and to breathe, are only preparatory ones; just as the bath and assumption of clean clothing for meditation are but outer preparations.

When sitting with crossed legs beneath one, and the back perfectly upright, after a certain spell of practice one becomes able to sit comfortably relaxed for several hours without getting tired. The body does not interfere any longer. Even on pictures from a newly-discovered ancient culture in the Indus valley, at least five thousand years old, people are to be seen sitting and meditating in the same position as the Indian yogis still adopt.

The art of regulating one’s breathing, too, has been developed in India for thousands of years, and is still taught there. When the breathing becomes calmer, the wandering spirit also becomes calm. For there exists a reciprocity between the current of breathing and the human spirit. But the holy writings of India often say: by means of the control of the breath one cannot approach God. Thus breathing exercises are only a means of aiding one. What is usually called yoga in Europe is the so-called hatha-yoga, which preferably deals with the body, in which these means of assistance have become the main object. For example, by this means, according to what many assert in all seriousness, one can acquire a powerful body which can live an abnormally long time, with youth and health preserved. Also, undreamed-of possibilities and strong magic powers are acquired by this method. The answer the great Buddha gave a yogi is well-known; the latter boasted that after twenty years of severe practice he had learned to walk on the water.

“What is the use of that?” said Buddha. “For a copper coin the ferryman will row you over the river.”

“Do not waste time by practising hatha-yoga,” said my teacher Shri once. “You have already done that in a former existence on earth. Unknown powers can come to life within you, and become a temptation, and hinder you on the path.”

The utterance of the mantra, on the contrary, lets in the important things. If one looks up the meaning of the word mantra in a Sanskrit dictionary, one finds the following attempt at translation: Veda hymn, holy prayer, formula for magic, secret, charm, lines of a prayer to a Divinity, etc. But all these are only superficial

meanings.

Many years after my first meeting with Shri, I asked another Indian guru: “What is a mantra?”

Then I got this surprisingly simple answer: “A mantra is something that creates loving devotion to God.”

The Indian seeker of the truth, whether he goes along the path of action (karma), or of wisdom (jnana), or of loving, discerning devotion (bhakti), is convinced that the mantra he utters, and the Divinity he thereby calls upon, are perfectly identical. Hence the reverence for the mantra and the importance of its being correctly spoken, and the danger of its being misused for selfish purposes. The Hindu has a greater respect for the spoken word than have people of the West. Not only every word in a mantra, but practically every sound and every word in the language, is called “akshara” in Sanskrit, which means the indestructible. Akshara, the Indestructible, is also a name for God.

The true mantra should not be spoken, but sung. Brahma, the Creator, is called in the holy Indian writings “the first singer”. It is told that out of the mantra that he sang, sprang forth the creation known as our world. The Indian initiate tries to listen to and awaken the Divine sound with his entire soul, for it is the mantra of which all earthly sounds are only a shadow.

In the West, a teaching of this kind is probably utterly foreign. And yet there are in the West traces of a similar teaching. Time and again while in India I marvelled at the prologue of John the Evangelist: “In the beginning there was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God ... through this came all things to be ...”

## MEDITATION

*The first lesson* is on food. Only easily digestible food should be eaten. Half of the stomach should be filled with solid food, one fourth with water and the rest should be kept empty for movement of air.

*The second lesson* is on sleep. It must be regulated according to the age and health of each individual. One must not sleep too long or too little.

*The third lesson* is on the weather. It must not be too cold or too hot. One should be particularly careful in the change of season. Stormy and cyclonic weather is not good for meditation.

*The fourth lesson* is on the place. It must be lonely and free from the presence of those who stand in the way of meditation. It would be well if no friend or relation were present.

*The fifth lesson* is on the body. It should be kept restrained and healthy; away from those things that may cause the slightest stir – away from the tumult of the multitude.

*The sixth lesson* is on the mind. Generally there are three states of the mind –

that of thinking on some worldly object of attachment or hatred – that of wandering from object to object – and that which tends towards lethargy, sleep and inactivity. None of these states are conducive to meditation. There should be a spirit of renunciation and a lack of thirst for worldly gain and worldly activity.

*Means of livelihood.* – Certain means of livelihood are prescribed for the sannyasis. Even so, if any of these are found to stand in the way of meditation, they should be given up.

*Posture.* – Yoga can be performed in the sitting posture. In India one chooses a place which is regarded as sacred and free from pollution, such as a river-bank or a mountain cave. The place should not be too low or too high. First a mat of kusha must be spread. Over this there should be placed a layer of animal skin, either that of the deer or the tiger. To cover the first two there should be laid a square of cloth. The whole is called asana. Each must have his own asana. Nobody else should be allowed to sit on it. It must not be moved from place to place – not even from one part of the room to another.

The meditator should sit there and try to concentrate. One must be very careful about the sitting posture. The legs should be folded. The whole spinal chord, the trunk, the neck and the head, should be kept in one straight line. Failure to do this will bring about diseases of the brain, the heart and the kidneys. The meditator must be absolutely motionless. The eyes should be half-open and, though directed straight towards the end of the nose, should not be looking at anything in particular. The only way to do this is to try to look inward, or not to look at all. Now comes the most difficult part. By means of incessant practice of necessary things and the avoidance of unnecessary things, the mental changes – the jumpings of the mind – should be stopped. Some can do it by force, but for the majority this is not possible. You must follow the course of the mind, allow the mind to run, but keep watch on it, always remembering that you have a goal and that you must direct the course of the mind towards that goal.

The object of meditation may be the Personal God, His Name, His Attributes, His Companions, His Activities or His Place. There are some who meditate on the Impersonal God. There are others who concentrate their mind on the letter *Om*, which is regarded by the Katha-Upanishad as the last means of attaining the goal. In the opinion of the writer, all these practices are of efficacy, but the easiest and best course would be chanting the Name of God with love. Meditation would come of itself. To those who favour meditation the earnest command of the writer is this: chant the Name with love. It will give the desired result very quickly. This is also, in accordance with the Indian Holy Scriptures, the view of the latest school of devotees in India – the devotees of Krishna Chaitanya.

## CHAPTER IV

### VAMAN

Singing a mantra – The road to Almora – Story of Vaman, the Mighty Strider – Heat and thunderstorms – A picture of Krishna.

On the last day but one before leaving Nainital on a trip to Almora, I succeeded in singing a mantra to Shri's satisfaction. He burst out: "It is no longer Walther, but Vamandas. Hereafter your name shall be Vamandas, the servant of Vaman."

"Who is Vaman?" I asked. "When did he descend on earth?"

"Many thousand years ago," said Shri, and looked at me kindly. "Vaman was little in his outer form, but he conquered the 'three worlds'."

During the following years of my stay in India I was to become acquainted with the story of Vaman, the tale of "His three mighty steps" and innumerable more tales about the doings of God. It was not only Shri Maharaj who narrated them for me, but also his most advanced disciple Rana, and the Indian clerk Joshi, and simple farmers and coolies, who had never learned to read or write. For these stories still live in the hearts of the Hindus. However, almost every narrator altered the stories somewhat. Just like different strata of depth in the same endless ocean, the stories could at times become quite changed, suddenly assuming new radiance and life. Again they became altered, attaining more background and becoming more transparent, when I read them later on over and over in the original text. It was as if they grew upwards and yet downwards, nearer their source. But this source was unfathomable, for the source was Bhagavan Himself, He whom my friends called Krishna, from whose plenitude the Divine saviours, the avatars, descended to earth. Vaman was one of the great saviours, one of God's avatars.

Vamandas, the servant of Vaman, I was now to be called by Shri and Rana, and all the Hindus I met.

I travelled by bus from Nainital to Almora, farther into Himalaya. I sat beside the driver in the immense, rather worn Chevrolet car. The sacred word "Aum" was painted on the metal plate above the steering-wheel. The trip from the heights down the many sinuous curves of the country road was peaceful. Agaver, deep crevices, burned-up fields.

The bus stopped suddenly. In front of us, in the hovering heat of the sun, stood long columns of motor-cars barring the road. Two buses had collided. One driver was seriously injured. The metal plate was battered and spoiled. Nobody neared the conveyance. It was a quarter to ten in the morning. It was rumoured that we should have to wait until two o'clock in the afternoon before the police could arrive and make their report.

I was surprised at myself for not being in the least impatient. New cars came in quick succession. The queues in both directions grew longer and longer along the winding road. A motley activity developed all around. Men, women, children, pilgrims from all parts of India gathered on the walls, along the side of the road, in the dust of the ground and on the mountain slope. I wandered to and fro on the road with Joshi, an office boy that Shri had sent along to keep me company. While we waited for the police, he related the story of Vaman.

In olden times, God had descended upon earth in the form of the brahman boy, Vaman. At that time the powerful demon king, Bali, ruled the three worlds, that is, the earth, the underworld and heaven. Shyly the boy Vaman came to the powerful one and begged him to grant him a wish. Laughingly, the proud king sanctioned his request in advance, although the high priest of the demons, Bali's guru, warned him. The boy then asked for as much land as he could cover in three steps.

Vaman took his first step.

Surprised and frightened, the arrogant king and all who were gathered about him saw that the little boy grew while he took this step, he grew until he reached the clouds. There wasn't a bit of ground, not a grain of sand in Bali's immeasurable kingdom, on the whole of the earth and of all the starry worlds, which failed to be covered by the foot of the Mighty Strider.

Vaman took the second step. And now Bali, whose eyes opened to spiritual vision, saw that not only in the visible world, but also in the future worlds and in heaven, there were no corner that failed to be covered by the foot of the Mighty strider.

Like the rumbling of thunder sounded Vaman's voice from the clouds: "Bali, where is there a bit of land belonging to you, where I can set my foot for the third step?"

Trembling, Bali stammered: "Oh, place your foot on my head!"

The ignorant one did not yet know that even his head was not his own, that it too, belonged to God. Vaman placed his foot on Bali's head. And the touch of God's all-hallowing foot took from him not only his power and his desire for power: it took from him as well his wickedness and ignorance. Bali was redeemed. With inexpressible, overflowing love, he washed the feet of God, the source of all things, in the tears that he let fall.

"A drop of that water that had touched the feet of God fell into our world, and became the river Ganges, which flows through all India. For thousands of years back, the demon Bali has been glorified in India as one of the beloved of God," ended Joshi.

The rivers and streams in the deep valleys, seen in the midday haze that enveloped the Indian plains, suddenly assumed a new radiance. They were all tributaries of the Ganges.

The crowd of people on the road had awakened to teeming action. One of the many hundreds of them had hit upon the happy idea of digging a bit into the gravel

slope on the side of the road, which thus gradually became wider. A little car slyly seized the opportunity of slipping past, and a cry went up from the crowd. All hurried back into their cars, and while a few dozen people continued to dig and shovel, even the bulky buses got into motion. We drove farther north, up into the mountains – without having waited for the police.

The breeze fanned my hot face, and with joy I felt that a coolness came from the forest.

We had climbed from a narrow, wooded valley to an open height. Marvelling, I looked about me. In terraces, in wild streams, in groves of silver oaks and trees with red and violet flowers, the land sloped down towards a river. Rice and wheat grew down there in the depths just above the boulder-stones of the river-bed. Down on the shore under a high cliff, one could see a hut where a mahatma had lived during his lifetime. The bus stopped a minute with creaking brakes. The driver hopped off in order to pick hastily a couple of flowering branches from a shrub that was considered to be holy. We travelled farther in a close column. At one place where the river widened we saw buffaloes in the water. Mighty trees, such as I had never seen before, arched their tops over the thatched roofs of the huts. Pilgrims came towards us, many of them half-naked: they were on their return from the source of the Ganges. One pilgrim in an orange-coloured mantle waved to us. I waved back again. I was one of them, on a pilgrimage as they were. It made me so happy that this land had received me with wide-open arms.

“During the rainy period, all of these nearly dried-up streams are filled with water,” said my companion. “All the yellow-brown mountain terraces become green.”

Shortly afterwards, the air shook with an extremely heavy thunderclap. The sun disappeared. Water poured down from the skies in lashing streams. Hurriedly we tried to roll out the tent covering which flapped in the wind, and fasten it on both sides. This did not help. The pouring rain penetrated everywhere. Thoroughly soaked, we sat crouched there, while lightning struck right beside us, and thunder boomed in the forests.

“The rainy season has begun, it has come too early,” whispered the passengers.

The heavy bus, which could barely be steered, slid forward on the country road which suddenly became flooded with mountain streams, forward through the water, and through a wood which was filled with grey mist. Shri’s private secretary, who was also travelling in advance of the others in order to arrange lodgings in Almora, pressed a picture protectively to his breast. It was a picture of Krishna. Krishna was shown as a smiling boy, in the embrace of the ancient sacred word AUM. Innumerable unborn worlds are hinted at in the curves of the syllable AUM, for according to the Sacred Scriptures of the Hindus, all creation has grown out of and is maintained by this Divine word. And when the world comes to an end, all shall again return to the AUM, in which God dwells.

Thirstily the dried-up land drank from the life-giving flow of water.



## CHAPTER V

### SVAMI NITYANAND

Almora the mountain city – A letter of admonition from Shri – The Svami Nityanand – His modern ambitions – Life in the pilgrim shelter.

The city of Almora lies high up on the narrow ridge of a mountain. There is a majestic panorama on both sides, down over the yellow-grey landscape of terraces, and away towards the wall of mountains on the horizon. But the true mountain giants are usually hidden.

Almora was for a long time the capital of the independent kingdom of Kumaon. Rather more than a hundred years ago the English stormed the mountain city. Now the court of justice reigns in the former royal castle, high up on a cliff. The city is thronged with lawyers.

The hotel in Almora had a fine name, high prices and bugs. When, like the newcomer and inexperienced traveller that I was, I complained about the bugs, more mats were obligingly laid upon the floor. But Rana came to the rescue, and in answer to his polite military request, all these nests for bugs were aired in the sun for a whole day. After that the situation was somewhat better. Outside our file of rooms there was a terrace with a lovely view over the sloping rock projections with their numerous ledges. When the sky was cloudless, to the north could be seen the highest snowy tops of the Himalayas on the other side of the valleys. My room, to be sure, faced in this direction, but just outside stood the place devoted to the daily needs of human beings. The barrel system! Instead of loving humanity, I began now and then to hate some part of it. Instead of rejoicing at the picturesque crowd of people which filled the open place outside the hotel, I suffered because of them and all the penetrating noises and smells which filled the house day and night. It was a trial which I endured very poorly in the beginning.

To my surprise, Shri Maharaj retained even in this house his happy, even disposition. He did not seem to notice the musical ensemble typical of the country, which day after day played outside the entrance of the hotel those blaring melodies encouraging one to visit some cinema, or advertising some European patent medicine. It seemed as if Shri did not observe anything at all, but if I once allowed some bad thought to enter my mind, he found this out immediately. Silently he looked at me, at the most slowly shaking his head. And that was worse than punishment. In spite of the surroundings, his room had become after the first few hours a quiet, luminous sanctuary. In Almora, as well, it was an indescribable happiness to meditate in his presence.

Thus, labouriously, I took the first steps towards a completely Indian environment, for in Nainital, according to Shri's wish, I had still lived in European fashion in the boarding-house of the Parsee. The only change was that I had given

up eating meat. But it was a long, long time before I learned to like the decidedly different Indian food, which Shri's cook prepared for us in the hotel in Almora.

One evening Shri's secretary handed me a letter. Shri's son-in-law, who was visiting me, laughed. I asked him what he was laughing at. He answered: "Shri sends me a similar letter, too, every time he is dissatisfied with me."

The missive contained simple, affectionate advice for my mode of living, something like this: "Regulate your meals carefully. Eat rice only once a day. *Eat only a little* in the evenings. Learn to be patient and do not get irritated. Conquer fear and nervousness. Think of strength, and you will become strong. Learn to lead a simple life, and a clean one. It is not so important to come to Lake Manasarovar and Mt. Kailash. The true Kailash lies within you. It is this you must seek to attain."

These admonitions helped me. What was most difficult of all was to take to heart the words about Lake Manasarovar and Mt. Kailash. Rana, too, had many times hinted to me, both in words and in mute reproaches: "Your guru is here, the true spiritual teacher. The spiritual treasures you seek are here. Is it not meaningless to leave him in order to rush farther up into the mountains? Be patient."

Shri, Rana and I sat deep in meditation on the carpet covering the floor. I had just gone through a difficult hour. I had succeeded in convincing myself to refrain this year from making the long pilgrimage to Kailash and the occult realm of Lake Manasarovar. At last I had realized that Shri was right, that physically I was not yet equal to the difficult excursion, and above all I was not mature spiritually. I had much to learn as yet.

Just then a stranger entered the room. He was almost naked, had long, greyish-brown hair powdered with ashes, and gathered in a topknot on the crown of his head. His strikingly light-skinned body was as straight and muscular as that of a youth – although as I learned later, he was sixty-five years old. All he had on was a narrow, orange-coloured cloth about his loins. On his shoulders hung the skin of a tiger, and in his hand he carried a wooden sceptre. After greeting Shri and Rana, he embraced me.

"Without doubt you are coming to Kailash. I promise you that within this year you will come there and to Lake Manasarovar. You are going along with me!" were the words he uttered to my utmost astonishment.

It was Svami Nityanand Sarasvati, president of the committee for the furtherance of the ancient pilgrimages to Mt. Kailash and Lake Manasarovar. He told me that he had recently been elected as the spiritual leader of over a hundred million Hindus. At the latest Kumbh Mela Festival in Hardvar in Himalaya, where over a million pilgrims gather, he had been found worthy and suited to be the successor to the ruler of the Indian north, and ascended the throne accompanied by all manifestations of honour.

This spiritual and religious kingdom had lacked a leader for two hundred years,

because no one had been deemed worthy of the throne. Now, after two hundred years, he was the first to be given again this power, he asserted, and in answer to my questions related the following:

The reviver of Hinduism during the Middle Ages, Shri Adi Shankaracharya, founded four religious strongholds in the north, south, east and west of India, in order to strengthen religious and social justice in the lives of all Hindus. The leader of each of these four strongholds had spiritual command and jurisdiction over a fourth of the immense realm of India. As the stronghold of the north, Jyotirmath, lying in the Himalayas, was chosen. This place has a sort of spiritual jurisdiction over a number of Indian provinces, and likewise over the countries of Kashmir, Nepal, the city of Kabul, in Afghanistan and, besides, Mt. Kailash and Lake Manasarovar.

In an official document in Sanskrit, which he showed me, these honours and rights now granted Svami Nityanand were summed up:

The Great Holy of holies, who rules all spheres of spiritual life, who is a great yogi far along the path, with the power to interpret, expound and perform initiation, who knows all the religious texts, who has been given the power to chastise the four castes of Veda, the Brahmans, Kshatryas, Vaishyas, and Shudras, who has super-vision over all ascetics, who has unrestricted power to apply the rules and laws in the religious and social lives of all disciples, and whose supervision and recognition is demanded before the rulers of the civil states in this territory may ascend their thrones, he who is the spiritual leader over hundreds of millions of Hindus – he has ascended the throne in this realm of the north, in order to administer the social and religious laws there with unrestricted power ...

This man was very eager that just this year I should undertake the pilgrimage to Lake Manasarovar with him. “Later on I shall be inaccessible,” he said. “I shall travel about, borne in palanquin constantly surrounded by strict ceremonials requiring a pledge of silence, and accompanied by torches and servants.”

I was to undertake the excursion in the orange-coloured mantle borne by pilgrims. Nityanand expressed the wish that I should move into the pilgrims quarter, which we visited right away. “It will do you good to live among the ascetics. It will cleanse your soul,” he said. He would have liked me to remain there right away, but Shri protested mildly.

Nityanand was a dictator. He came from southern India, and spoke English much more fluently than Hindi. His features reminded one more of a Russian than an Indian. Night and day, summer and winter, he was dressed in his thin orange-coloured loin-cloth, with the tiger-skin over his shoulders, but otherwise naked – even when wandering high up in the mountains. In the same costume, with a dark wooden sceptre in his hand, he visited the English Viceroy and the ministers and maharajas he included among his friends. Nityanand had once upon a time lived quite another kind of life. First he was a famous young lawyer with a large

practice, then governor over three combined Indian districts as large as many a European kingdom. He was a very powerful man when he met his guru, and suddenly decided to deny the world, giving up everything – wife, children, income, position and power – and withdrew into a rock cave to become an ascetic. He told me that while in loneliness he received a command from God to take charge of the endless difficulties connected with the pilgrimages to Lake Manasarovar and Mt. Kailash.

While we sat squatted on the ground around him and Shri, Nityanand worked out his plans. He was going to introduce electricity and hygiene into the cloisters of the Lamas in Tibet. He wanted to build half a dozen pilgrim shelters along the way. He weighed and rejected the possibility of a connection by air: the plateaus of Tibet were smooth as the top of a table, to be sure, and excellent as landing-places, but the storms and mountain ridges were too great difficulties. I almost shuddered when he exclaimed emphatically: “No one is going to die on this pilgrimage!” And he added: “I shall never give up.”

To the great interest of the population of Almora, I drove in a car that afternoon with my guru Shri Maharaj and Svami Nityanand to the quarters of the pilgrims. A narrow winding road went over the steep slopes deep into the blooming forest. The last part of the way consisted of climbing a long flight of stone steps. Up on the terrace there stood about a dozen pilgrims. Their faces, necks and arms were gaily painted with coloured ash, and they greeted us by singing in chorus gladly and ceremoniously:

“AUM AUM AUM ...  
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna ...  
Hare Rama Hare Rama ...”

With astonishing potency the Name of God and the sacred word AUM echoed over mountain and valley, and through the forests and in our hearts, as we climbed the steps. In the sound A, the song rose and the tone lingeringly hovered, until in U it swelled out in full force, and at last in M it slowly died away into silence.

The song, its words and its melody, the secret which I surmised at the back of it, fascinated me with irresistible intensity.

Twilight fell. When the peaceful AUM of the chorus still echoed about us from above, I drove back with Shri to Almora again, through the blackness of the night forest. By candlelight I packed my belongings at the hotel. The next day Shri himself led me to the pilgrims’ quarters. This consisted of a large, beautiful but terribly decadent bungalow, with pillared halls on all sides, which had been remodelled as an ashram, a house for pilgrims. I was given a room to myself. It had two windows and a glass door. “Throw out all the chairs except for one or two!” Shri advised me. I did so. Now the furniture consisted mainly of a table and a very dirty carpet on the floor.

I found out that Shri intended to go away in a few days and perhaps not return for several weeks. When my teacher had left me, and the evening breeze murmured in the tree-tops around the strange house, I knew this much: for the first time I was absolutely alone.

## CHAPTER VI

### DIARY FROM THE HIMALAYAS

Singing hymns to Shiva – The Tamil from Southern India – Story about Gandhi – AUM, the great syllable – Simple diet – Preparations for departure – An attack of dysentery – Shri returns.

This is the first evening in the pilgrim's quarters. From eight till nine o'clock I sit on the stone floor with the other pilgrims on my little mat of kusha grass. The only illumination is a little kerosene lamp. Svamis sit close beside one another along the walls. Only one, a man with dark, fanatical eyes, has placed himself in the centre of the room. The others shake him and shove him, in order to get him to move. He does not take any notice. He has fallen immediately into a deep trance. At times it seems as if he were looking piercingly at me with his distorted, staring eyeballs, but as a matter of fact he is far away.

For more than an hour we sing hymns to Shiva, the Divine destroyer, who destroys earthly things and frees the spirit. One after another the pilgrims and ascetics take up the new lines gladly and eagerly. A wave beats upon the shore. And then a new one. Hundreds of them.

That is no duty-bound prayer. No, it is a song filled with joy, conscious of power, jubilant. Just as an athlete in Western lands enjoys the play of his muscles and tests the strength of his well-developed body, so do they test the strength of the soul.

To begin with, there was only shy conversation between myself and the slender, almost beardless, Tamil from South India, who was to look after me. Originally he was a clerk in a book shop in Madras. When I ask him if he has any parents or relatives, he is painfully upset. He does not seem to know if they are alive. Since a svami must leave his home, parents, everything that binds him, just as he must forget his own body, he decided to move from the south of India to the north. He had lived five years in Rishikesh, another valley in Himalaya, as a disciple of his guru. Now he wants to go to Kailash. He is young, not more than twenty-five years old, and is perhaps a bit of a fanatic.

I wake up refreshed in the morning at five-thirty. A gentle rain is falling. Clouds hang heavy over the precipices of the Himalayas.

I make my bed – that is, I hang up the quilt I have lain on, as well as the one I spread over me out there in the corridor of pillars. Today there were no bugs, otherwise they would have come in armies. But obviously bugs and war in the trenches have something in common. It is only the newcomers that get caught.

The little Tamil has taught me not to lie too near the walls. He was appalled at the thought of killing a bug, and was convinced that if he did so he would be reborn

next life in the form of one of these unpleasant insects. When I asked Shri about this, he had quite another view of the matter. "Go ahead and kill them," he said. "If you throw them out, they will return and bother the other svamis. Bugs have a miserable existence." But Rana explained thus:

"It is well that the bugs wake you at night. They are reminding you that you really ought to be meditating."

The young Tamil tells me a story worth repeating about Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi had opened an ashram (a retreat) of his own, and people came to him so that he could teach them yoga. But instead of the exalted yoga practices they expected, they received instructions to begin by cleaning the latrines. When they refused, or if someone became ill, he performed the job himself. For yoga is service. The Tamil's guru once said to him: "If one has become a yogi of renown, one must yet be constantly prepared, even in the midst of disciples or followers, to carry a trunk on one's head and take it to the railway station, without a trace of false humility. If one cannot do this, one is not a true yogi." The young Svami Nishabodh lives according to these teachings. I often think that this thin, ugly person, who cheerfully helps me and waits on me, is like an angel of light. He has become one by means of yoga.

I sit in my room in the deep peacefulness that follows meditation. I look down upon the quiet, sunny terraces on the other side of the valley, where the village of Kalamati lies.

Then I wander in the clear morning sunlight a little down into the valley. From a distance I have seen the sharp contours of a pointed, dark grey cupola, which ends in an upright lingam stone, the symbol for cosmic creative power. On coming nearer, I see that it is an old temple of Shiva. Just outside the entrance stands a mighty tree, which has recently been split and charred by lightning.

Above and below the temple there are immense stone basins filled with water. In the upper one stand two naked dark-brown men, who have just lathered themselves with soap and begun to rinse it off. I take off my shoes and socks, and wash my hands and feet. One of the men kindly takes away his copper bowl from the spouting water, so that I can get near enough to wash myself.

I go barefoot to the threshold of the temple, which is gray with age, with its roof ready to cave in. I bow deeply and reverently with my head towards the floor. The men in orange-coloured mantles approve, and nod at me.

Now I know where they go daily when they leave the pilgrim shelter with their bowls of copper and bronze, although an excellent spring gushes forth quite nearby. They fetch water from the ancient temple of Shiva, and bathe there.

Shiva, the Destroyer, is the God of the yogis, the God of death and resurrection. A thin stream of living water drops on his head where he sits, lost in deepest meditation.

I have been told that he who has chosen the Divine saviour, Rama, as his master, and wishes to worship him, must first pay homage to Shiva for three or six months

... Narayana, Rama, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Vaman ... all these are only different aspects of the one and only Almighty God.

In the large square stone pool below the temple there is nothing but green slime, from only one place does water well forth clean and clear. A man is standing there on the damp ground, drinking out of a bowl. He motions to me to sit down. In front of the pool there are aisles of fallen pillars. Small square huts topped with lingam stones lie scattered about. In one of the aisles I see a mat. People spend the night there.

Round about the temple the sombre green mountain slopes spread out, severely and majestically into a wide round bowl. As if in a field up in the Alps, I sit on the lawn in the midst of the cow-droppings. When I turn my head, I see the land slant downwards in grassy slopes, in depressions traversed by goat-paths. Down in the depths is a wooded world.

Dark grey banks of clouds hover over the mountains in the west. On the flagstones in front of the temple a demon animal, hewn in dark stone, stands praying in the midst of grazing horses and cows. Up on the sloping moss-grown pyramid of the roof, a similar demon animal stands on a bracket resembling a balcony.

A wide, curving road, which I had not seen at first, goes high over the deep ravines from the temple to the pilgrim shelter. The gradual shifting of the ground during hundreds of years has violently dislocated both the narrow stratified cobblestones and the large flat stone blocks that make up the road. It is often necessary to hop from one stone block to another. The noon daylight has become white and blinding.

“AUM,” say the pilgrims in a friendly manner when they meet me on their way to the temple water to take a bath. “AUM,” says the slender young Tamil, as an early morning greeting, when he comes into my room to wake me, bringing a metal goblet filled with dark tea.

From the word AUM, it is said, all the languages and all the Vedas have sprung. The Vedas are leaves of a tree which has its roots in heaven and grows downwards.

Now the rainy season has begun in earnest. Thunderclaps and flashes from the heavens. Each time I think that the lightning has struck one of the buildings of the ashram. But half an hour later peace reigns, the rain has ceased to fall, and the earth has thirstily drunk up all those masses of water.

The pledge of silence that Shri Maharaj imposed upon me before his departure gives me great happiness. During the entire forenoon I am not to utter a word. If I need something, I am to inform the pilgrims in writing. There exists a mighty force in really keeping silent in one's inner self. The silence of the soul, not of the tongue alone.

Slender Svami Nishabodh and I make up a strange pair. His native tongue is Tamil, mine is German, we converse in English, which both of us command only



halfway, when we go for long strolls in the woods on afternoons. On the market square and in the bazaars he has snapped up a bit of Hindustani, and now he tries, cheerfully and helpfully, to impart to me the little he has learned. Impetuously he has attacked a grammar book in Hindustani, found among my belongings, and studies at night. Then he comes triumphantly with the new rules he has just learned. Nishabodh is very much surprised at the fact that I neither smoke nor drink, and that it is so easy for me to give up eating meat. But the fare in the ashram is simple and so strongly spiced that the food burns one's tongue. Rice and vegetables and Indian bread, which is thin as a leaf, at eleven in the forenoon. A little bowl of vegetables and bread at ten in the evening. In most of the Indian ashrams only one meal a day is served. In the light of a glaring kerosene lamp, the pilgrims sit out-of-doors in the evenings in a long row, waiting for their food, while flowers about them send out their overpowering scent. People from all parts of the enormous land of India, and from all castes and conditions, have gathered here. All of them have cut themselves off from their pasts, and given up everything they owned, in order to become sadhus. All of them have not succeeded in completely forgetting caste distinctions, although this is really a requirement. Long and frequently bitter discussions penetrate now and then, the walls of my sleeping-room until quite late hours of the night. They get worked up over the provisions in regard to meals. Even Nishabodh can talk about them for hours at a time.

New pilgrims join us daily. They fill up every spot of the floor in the ashram. Nearly a hundred live in the pilgrims' shelter. And many others are housed in the various buildings in the town. Even at night they come knocking on the glass doors, and ask to be let in. Like wildfire, the news has spread through the whole of India that the committee provides entirely for all expenses, equipment, food and lodging, on the long pilgrimage. Many are real seekers of the truth, others perhaps only wear the orange mantle of the monks. They divide themselves into groups. In both the lower and upper storey Divine service is held. From above and from about, the same hymns of Shiva drift in to me in the evening. Almost all night long people are busy packing chests, and sorting articles of equipment, in the pillar alley outside my window. Coolies sit squatting on the floor, waiting. The undertaking that is going on is enormous. The nearest railway station lies one hundred and twenty kilometers from Almora. The pilgrimage, going and coming, is about six hundred miles long, and goes through passes that lie at a height of eighteen thousand feet. There is no country road. Every kerosene lamp, every sack of rice, must be borne on somebody's back. There seems to be a shortage of money, because more pilgrims than were expected have arrived. Svami Nityanand, who bears the whole responsibility, has gone to Delhi and Karachi, with his tiger-skin on his shoulders, in order to get donations from rich merchants. But India, too, feels the economic crisis. With his mission unaccomplished, Nityanand returns, ill and troubled. For the first time in the sixty-five years of his life, he has fever. But his motto is: "I shall never give up." Tomorrow, in spite of his illness, he is going to Bombay, a

trip that takes two whole days, in order to collect money for the pilgrimage.

In the pilgrim shelter we live like a big family, a family that is often troublesome and full of dissension, for new wanderers come daily and are lodged with us. We have to crowd together. The spacious attic, reached by a ladder, is already full of pilgrims who are headed for Manasarovar and Mt. Kailash. One of them, a powerful old man with a white goatee, has taken me under his wing. At one time he had been a machine engineer, and had lived in Europe for a long time. He tells me that in his youth he built thousand of Diesel motors in Stockholm. Now he owns nothing but a book, a commentary to the Bhagavadgita by Shankaracharya. When he saw that I was interested in it, he wanted to give it to me right away. I had difficulty in preventing him from doing so. When I got a hole in one of my sandals, he and the young Tamil accompanied me protectively to Almora, in order that in my inexperience I should not be cheated there. The shoemaker asked only two annas, about two cents, for repairing. But both of my protectors disdainfully turned their backs on this covetous person, and dragged me away, discussing eagerly. It was altogether too expensive, another shoemaker asked only one anna, and that, too, was too much. We wandered up and down the streets, through poorer and poorer quarters. Finally one of the many patch shoemakers, stationed out-of-doors, mended the hole for half an anna, while I stood barefooted beside him. My companions were fully satisfied. As happy as if they had won a victorious battle, these two and I set out on our return through the flowering bushes on the hillsides to the pilgrim shelter in the forest.

I am ill with dysentery. The water in Almora has a bad reputation. The little Tamil tries to cure me with a medicine he has with him. My eyes, too, are inflamed. I must have got some strong acid in them. For three days I have been nearly blind. Today I am somewhat better. Outside the rain is falling incessantly. When is Shri coming back?

Shri is here again. He returned a few days earlier than intended, because he felt that I needed him. I still spend my nights in the overcrowded pilgrim shelter, but all day long I am with Shri in the little house in the forest, which he calls Anandakutir, the hut of blessedness. A Brahman in Almora got the sudden inspiration of placing his house at Shri's disposal as long as he lives. My eyes are healed. Shri told me in all seriousness that once upon a time seekers of the truth used to drop strong acid in their eyes in order to see if they could maintain their equilibrium and composure in spite of the pain. The dysentery, too, has vanished. I take my meals with Shri, and share the light fare that his servant Govinda Singh prepares for him with such devotion. Again I perform my daily meditation in Shri's presence, in the room which seems to be illuminated by an inner light. When I open my eyes I look into his countenance.

It is not yet decided whether we are to undertake the journey over the high mountain passes to Lake Manasarovar and Mt. Kailash in Tibet this year, or if this time it will be only a shorter expedition in order to explore the way.

Shri has requested me to come to him afterwards to his home in the city of Nasik, and live there with him as his disciple, his son.

## CHAPTER VII

### PILGRIMAGE IN HIMALAYA

The pilgrims set out singing – A sacred locality – Statue of Hanuman, the monkey chief – Kaka-Bushunda, the world's Methuselah – State rest-houses in the forest – Snake mountain – A visit from a Prince – Reports of floods and disaster – Shri decides to turn back – His teachings on the return journey.

After morning meditation I sat and wrote a while. Then Shri Maharaj knocked on the door of the meditation room. "Now we must go!"

I rushed up and put on my shoes as fast as possible. We went to the pilgrim shelter where I used to sleep.

Two embroidered quilts were spread out in an easy chair for Shri. This time I, too, sat on a chair in the midst of the ascetics, who sat squatting on the floor, and I could observe them unhindered.

The newly-painted signs on their foreheads shone more brightly than ever. One man had smeared the entire upper part of his face with white earth. Behind him quite a young man, scarcely more than a boy, sat crouched. The lines on his forehead were arched over the bridge of his nose so that they seemed to form a lotus flower. One man was as dark as a negro. Two or three had magnificent white goatees. Proud as a king, the old, well-preserved sannyasi sat there, he who sleeps in the alley of pillars outside my room, and who performs the painting of his face as carefully as if he were a beautiful woman.

We sang. The fat, good-natured monk, with an ash-powdered tuft of hair placed high up on the crown of his head, was supervisor for the kitchen. He had taken special care of me, and this morning he had pressed me affectionately to his ample breast. Now it was he who gave the tone and started the singing. We sang after him.

Suddenly his powerful voice changed and became quite shrill. I saw that perspiration ran down his face. His eyes were filled with tears.

The departure took place with great ceremony. We marched in four columns. The Maharaja, the prince who had come a long way in order to take part in the festive occasion, Shri Maharaj, and I, we three led the way. Each of us bore a yellow flower in one hand. We marched and sang so that it echoed. People stood still in front of their houses and greeted us with folded hands. We tramped along with ringing steps, singing and waving our flowers. We wandered over the flag-stones of Almora's bazaar, forward along the endless street lined with shops on the ridge of the mountain. Sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left, the view would suddenly be displayed, and our gaze followed the sharply-sloping terraces on each side of the city.

We sang. This day, on which the first of the pilgrims set out on the road to Kailash, the holy mountain which is the earthly home of Shiva, was a Monday, Shiva's day. The name hovering on our lips, the name of one personal aspect of God, bore us like a swinging, billowy sea.

The landscape spread itself out severely at our feet. Wisps of fog, many miles in length, coiled over it like the thick, whitish-grey snakes that Shiva has twined together around the throat.

According to Shri's wish, we gather in a little group separated from the other pilgrim throngs. This is an enchanted wandering. A world of richly undulating forest, with clear streams in all its recesses reflecting the sky. From all directions white streams of water flow downwards, out of the bogs, the precipices, and from trees that stand sky-high. Rare and beautiful bright flowers rise softly out of the mire. The clear water in torrents and waterfalls seems no longer to be of the earth. Heavenly water, the water of life! The place where the valley widens into a strip of forest meadow is called Jageshvar, that is, Shiva, the Lord of the world.

It is one of the most sacred places in India, yes, in all the world. It is also called "The little Kailash". The great Kailash lies farther to the north, in Tibet, on the other side of the mighty snow-covered crests of the Himalayas.

A world-famous resort of pilgrims, and yet I have not as yet come across a single dry-goods shop. A dozen or two humble wooden houses, but a world of wonderful, affectionately carved wood. The tree of life, the flowering wheel of the sun, and similar portrayals in red and blue, darkening with age, frame the windows and doors of the huts. And on the shore, where the clear water flows, lies the courtyard of the temple, surrounded by a wall. Two large temples to Shiva, and numerous smaller ones round about. Balustrades with wooden roofs stretch on all sides from the slanting towers. The temple is not dedicated to Shiva the Destroyer, but to Shiva "The Conqueror of Death".

I walked beside Shri in my long orange-coloured garment, across the courtyards and through the chilly, damp halls, and at every door I received flowers. Finally I stood before a statue of red stone representing Hanuman, the chief of the monkeys, who stood with his foot on a crushed monster, just as in Christian countries the archangel Michael tramps underfoot the plunging dragon. It is not by means of human strength that he has conquered the monster. Hanuman stands quite still, deep in meditation, and has placed his hand on his forehead, which is aglow with spiritual strength. His animal cheek-bones stand wide and high.

Under a giant tree that we passed I saw another stone portrait of Hanuman, painted bright red as it always is. Hanuman holds a mountain in his hand. Rama's brother Lakshman had been wounded in battle. Then Rama commanded his faithful servant Hanuman to fetch a certain medicinal herb from Himalaya. Hanuman flew in one second from the southernmost point of India to Himalaya. But since he could not find the herb there immediately, he simply pulled up a whole mountain,

with all its forests and trees and herbs, and flew back with it to Rama. In this way, he thought, the desired herb would be sure to be there.

Shiva and Rama and Rama's servant Hanuman all belong to this mountain, and this forest. On temple walls, on tree-trunks and precipice walls, the hermits who live in the rocky caves have written God's Name in large letters: Rama, Rama, Rama ... This Name means giver of joy. In his heart, Hanuman bears the Name Rama inscribed in letters of light. It is said that it is this Divine Name that gives him his power.

There are about seven hundred thousand villages in India. Outside most of them there stands a little temple to Hanuman. People say that Hanuman prevents the demons from entering the village.

I am so contented. We wander and ride peacefully, whether it rains or it shines, through the endless forests, a wandering such as the artist Schwind or the poet Eichendorff depict – and yet a holy wandering. One can leave the little village and follow the rushing river upwards, and from the gushing water God Himself leans down.

Thus the road leads slowly up towards Kailash. Innumerable spiritual and physical events have taken place along this divine, holy road, along its slopes and its deep ravines.

It is said that the oldest person in the world, Kaka-Bushunda, lives there. He is many, many thousands of years old. He sits lost in deep meditation, and gazes upon the course of events in the world. He has seen the world go under and be reborn time and time again.

I sit on the mud floor under the low rafters that are black with age, in a wing of one of the Shiva temples. It is a pilgrim shelter, in which we have lodgings. A glaring kerosene lantern hangs from one of the beams. One must be careful not to bump one's head on the ceiling. And yet this attic room is holy. For the time being it is full of people. Shri sits on an embroidered silk rug, as if on a throne, and opposite him, squatting on the floor, are the men from ancient Brahman families who have come to pay homage to the saint, and to discuss religious matters with him. Many, also, seek cures for their ailments. More men make their appearance through the trap-door in the floor, their shadows fall upon me. Just now there have come a few who want to submit a law case to Shri. He is to advise and to judge.

In the midst of the throng of people, while some come and some go, and the pilgrims sing, and while the night-roar of the river penetrates the room, I sit completely undisturbed, with my legs crossed under me, and keep on writing.

We have spent the last few nights in forest rest-houses belonging to the State, with endless stretches of forest-clad mountains round about us. We have reached the highest point of the journey so far, the hut called "Berinag", which means "King of the snakes". It has been a very arduous march. The road goes up and down, sometimes stretching through an endless deep valley, hot as in the tropics. Buffalo

cows, goats, agaver, bananas. Then it leads straight upwards in the glare of noon. Now the mountain chain of the Himalayas lies open before us, behind three belts of forests which tower above them, inconceivably mighty. In the middle of it, a pyramid of ice about twenty-five thousand feet high, even higher than the mountains which reach the clouds. It is called Nanda Devi. Mountain upon mountain: Shiva's wife, Shiva's servant girls, Shiva's followers, all glittering with their icy rims in the sunlight, the nearest, and therefore apparently highest, Shiva the Destroyer's trident, Mt. Trishul.

What is happening in Europe? Has war broken out?

After a hot bath and a satisfying meal, I am marvellously refreshed. We are to remain two days up here on Snake Mountain. About us walnut-trees, cedars and trees unknown to me, bearing red flowers. Now there are only three days of marching left before reaching Askot. Four times more we must go down into the valleys, and up again to the mountain ridges.

When I came riding alone through the pathless woods towards Berinag on Snake Mountain, I heard the singing of ancient veda hymns nearby: it was a choir of schoolboys singing in Shri's honour the old songs which for thousands of years have been sung for kings and wise men. The boys carried a Gandhi banner which they had made themselves. Some days later when we were returning the singing boys followed us again.

The mountain species of the Himalayas remind me of those in the Grand Canyon of north America. On picking up a stone, it almost frightens one to see it immediately crushed to dust. It was impossible to hammer a nail in one's shoe with the aid of a stone, and the soles of our shoes showed sad gaps. In Askot there would be a shoemaker, I was promised.

The Raja, the petty prince of Askot, who visited us in our shelter, arrived with bad news. He told us that the peacefully winding River Kali, which could be seen from our hut, had become wild and tempestuous in its upper course. There had been heavier rains than usual. All the bridges had been swept away, the narrow road had collapsed in several places or had plunged into the abysses. The pilgrim throngs that had gone on ahead of us had met with indescribable hardships. A few men had met their death.

After a long silence, Shri decided definitely to turn back. I had often been surprised at the fact that the friendly old man had been so aloof and indifferent towards Nityanand. Now I understood Shri's attitude. Nityanand's magnificent prophecies had not been realized. He who had solemnly declared that no one should die on this pilgrimage had made a mistake, he had deceived himself and others. Shri received more distressing news. The merchants who had delivered kerosene lamps, umbrellas, raincoats and supplies to the committee for the pilgrimages, had not been paid, and they held Nityanand responsible. He became involved in unpleasant law-suits. People began to declare that he was an

adventurer, that he had never been legally elected as Shankaracharya's successor, since he lacked the knowledge of Sanskrit which was required. It is out of place for me to judge him. A newcomer to India has difficulty in avoiding being taken in, and among the throng of ascetics who deceive others or themselves it is not so easy to find one who really had dedicated his heart to God. For the friends of God like to appear in disguise. The grace of God is needed in order to recognize them.

I looked longingly from the heights of Askot, down upon the virgin green forests, the fields and the cloud-enveloped mountains in the independent country of Nepal, which seemed to lie just below my feet, on the other side of the glittering stream Kali. It was a wonderful, smiling landscape. It was very disappointing for me not to be able to wander farther towards the north, for since I was in Shri's company, Tibet, the forbidden land, would not have been closed to me as to all Europeans. Shri had received an invitation from the viceroy of western Tibet. It was rumored that for several weeks twenty-five horses had stood ready for us at the boundary.

"Wait until your time comes. Then Shiva will call you," said Shri.

Return march. We remained two days in Askot. During both of these days the Raja's younger brother was with us in our bungalow. The members of this noble family, whose ancestors had ruled over the mighty kingdom of Kumaon, stretching from Sikkim to Kabul, now live like country squires or landed proprietors in the village of Askot. They, too, are descendants of the sun dynasty, and can trace their origin some thousand years back. Until a hundred years ago, all of the royal family bore the extra title "deva" (god). When the English took their capital city, Almora, in 1815, and they had to retire to Askot, they discarded that name.

I glanced once more at the winding, sun-drenched Kali river, then ran ahead of the others into the wood. This wandering back to Almora was full of strange joy. Four times again up the mountains and down into the tropically warm valleys, and then up the plateaus again, climbing up steep paths. "It is not so important to go to the physical Kailash. The real Mt. Kailash, which lies in one's soul, that is what one must try to attain!" – something like this Shri had written to me as long ago as the beginning of our friendship, in the instructions he sent me.

Nearer and nearer Shiva's holy mountain seemed to come, although apparently I turned my back on it. I dreamed of him at night. His icy head and his glittering slopes were to be found within my soul, while, alone with myself on my way home, I once more traversed Himalaya.

In every shelter where we spent the night on our journey home, Shri imparted his teachings to me. He began in the shelter Tal, that lay in a murmuring forest ravine, the lowest point of the whole journey. But the light from Himalaya's snow-capped mountains fell into the ravine.

Shri said: "Today is the anniversary of that day when Krishna came down to earth. We shall celebrate it by reading together from the Bhagavadgita. Vamandas,



have you brought the Gita with you?"

No, I had not brought the Gita with me. The book had remained in Almora.

"What book have you, then?"

"Only Vivekachudamani (the Crest Jewel of Discrimination) by Shankaracharya."

Thus it happened that on one of the days when God had allowed Himself to descend on earth I sat at the bottom of the deep ravine and read this magnificent book by Shankaracharya, which is atheistic in the end, declaring the world and the personal God to be illusions: No world exists, no God exists, only the all-consciousness, the Brahman, God without form.

During the continued journey, while I walked or ran uphill and downhill, I meditated incessantly on one word from the Upanishads, which Shankaracharya had made the foundation stone of his conception: "aham brahmasmi", I am Brahman. Behind this powerful and daring word, at times, both mountains and forests and rivers vanished, and even the snowy mountain crests. But secretly, the whole time I felt ashamed. I longed for the volume of the Bhagavadgita which had been left behind in a trunk in Shri's little white house near Almora. I did not long for any particular verse which I failed to remember, no, I longed for the book itself, because this Bhagavadgita contained the words which God, Krishna Himself, had once spoken with His own lips to His disciple and friend Arjuna.

When I returned to Almora, and the outcast street-sweepers raised clouds of rank white dust with their big brooms, so that both nose and mouth became filled with it, I thought rejoicingly: "That, too, belongs to Him! It is Krishna's dust they are raising!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### ANANDAPITH – THE HOME OF BLESSEDNESS

Vrindavan, birthplace of Krishna – Flowers and beggars – Shri's house in Nasik – Building a temple to Dattatreya – The Casteless – Krishna Chaitanya.

It was my birthday on the day of my return to Almora, and it seemed as if I had never been away. The terraced landscape that had been so dried up had now become greener. The grain grew tall. The rivers were swelling, but the water was clear. And trees that were strange to me flowered like tall candelabra with white flames. The essence of each day was meditation.

And thus we finally left Almora, and travelled to Nasik.

We passed over many wide, quiet rivers. Banks of sand could be seen on their shores, and green copses and temples. Past ancient houses where people sat and sang hymns to the gods by the light of candles or of oil lamps. The narrow-gauge railway leading into Himalaya has its starting-point in Mathura, and there our journey was interrupted a few hours.

It was early morning. I drove with Shri to the city where Krishna descended five thousand years ago. A wild, noisy Asiatic crowd on the close-packed cobbled streets. Great four-wheeled buffalo carts. Cows lying leisurely stretched out on the ground. Merchants, and beggars with arms ravaged by leprosy, who stuck clamorously on to our car. Through a stunted hot copse, which had once been a flowering virgin forest, we drove to Vrindavan, where Krishna had spent His youth among the cowherds. Next year we intend to spend a few months here during the cooler season.

This time I sat only a short while in the shade with Shri, in one of the steps leading down to the holy stream called Yamuna. We looked into the milk-blue shimmering water which flowed along. Fishes with wise eyes came confidently up to us and swam away again. When I looked closer, I saw that what I had taken for fishes were really the heads and necks of rather large tortoises.

In order to get a little change to give the innumerable beggars, Shri had bought flowers and garlands from one of the many flower-girls who sat crouching in the streets. At his suggestion, I now sacrificed the flowers in the holy river Yamuna, took up the clear water by cupping my hands, and let it slowly run out again, while a priest on the shore recited a prayer. Afterwards, the priest placed a mussel shell beside me on the wet stone step, filled with a red dye such as is used for painting the sign on the forehead. I dipped my finger in the colour and painted the red sign on the head of one of the tortoises, while I thought of the time long ago when, according to the Hindu Scriptures, the God of the universe, as the avatar

resembling a tortoise, lifted the world out of the oceans of water in which it had drowned. Then the priest painted the holy sign of Krishna on our foreheads.

Nasik is one of the great pilgrim resorts of the Indians. All members of the old families of India who make the pilgrimages to Nasik leave their family tree there in the temple.

Shri's house bore the name Anandapith, the home of blessedness. It looked like a country manor. He received his guests in an enormous room. The cushions and the white clothes that were his seat, were spread on a tiger-skin. The adjacent room was his large meditation-room. Pictures of the different aspects of God, and of the teachers of mankind, decorated with garlands, hung all over the walls. I was to perform my meditation in his reception-room with the door open at the threshold, so that I could be near him and yet not disturb him.

At night the door between my bedroom and Shri's stood wide open. When I awoke at three or three-thirty in the morning, I saw, always with the same emotion, this grand old man sitting upright there in the blue light of the stars, meditating for the troubled world.

In the afternoon, Shri took me along with him on his strolls through his property. Shri was a master builder. Just at that time he was having a temple to Dattatreya built. The framework was now ready, and was marvellously beautiful. The cupola shone like a white flower.

Dattatreya is also one of the saviours who, according to the Scriptures of the Hindus, has helped to redeem the world. Dattatreya is portrayed with three heads and six arms, since he is said to have combined the strength of the Indian Trinity within himself, that of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, when he taught humanity on earth wisdom and poise. In his six hands he holds the lotus flower of the Creator, and his sounding conch, the wheel of knowledge and ruler's staff of the Preserver Maintainer, and the trident and water jug of the Destroyer. Deep meaning is hidden within the so-called "weapons" borne by these three aspects of God.

Shri always carried a little ivory statue of Dattatreya, in a blue velvet bag, on his wanderings. Wherever he spent the night, he set up this statue. Flowers were placed at its base. He sang songs for me that were written to Dattatreya. "He is my guru, my spiritual teacher," he said.

The inside of the new temple is still empty. The word AUM shines in letters of gold above the entrance. The marble sculpture of the three-headed Dattatreya, which is to stand inside, is not yet ready.

When I drove to the town I dressed in European clothes, but in Shri's home and on his property I wore a dhoti, a garment of thin white cloth which the wind could blow through. It was delightful in the heat.

Slowly the bananas were ripening, it was the first time that the young plants in Shri's garden were bearing. They spread out like hands with many green fingers.

Sometimes they stretched upwards like candles in a candelabrum. But the most delicious fruit of all was the mango. There is a sweetness and aroma in mangoes that is not found in any other fruit, but unfortunately they cannot stand shipping.

I accompanied Shri on a visit to a mango grove owned by one of his friends. Shri had often stopped with him when he had wandered about as a hermit. He had done so for many years. The fruit hung by the hundreds on long, thin green stems from the crown of the old, giant tree. Golden-yellow or lilac in colour, or purple-red, dozens of different species, with different shades of colour. “Like parrots,” said Shri. I thought that the fruit looked like the gilded and silvered nuts on a Christmas tree, hanging on their thin stems. Between the mango groves there were long stretches where grapes grew. Instead of lattices as supports, thin trees with high narrow tops had been planted. One walked beneath the grape-vines as if they were an arch of leaves. The grapes of Nasik are very famous. I had not tasted them yet. The harvest would not be ripe until April. Here and there a wheat field, a well. A team of buffalo pulled up the biblical leather sack, dripping with water, from the deep, round well-curb.

A motor-car trip on the main road from Agra to Bombay, through an endless alley of Indian fig-trees, many of which are six hundred years old. Here and there unbelievably miserable mud huts with roofs of rusty sheet-metal. In India many millions of people live constantly on the verge of starvation.

Even today the casteless men and women go about with brooms on their shoulders, cleaning the latrines. It is believed that God has commanded and pre-ordained this. And if it should happen that one of the “untouchables” thirsts for knowledge, appropriate to a brahman – this seldom happens – then he is in most cases so brave and such a lover of truth that he can be recognized as a Brahman. The great teachers of wisdom, the rishis of ancient India, had the right to make a shudra (a member of the lowest caste) or a casteless person a Brahman.

“But if one breaks the law of caste blindly,” said the Gita, “then confusion enters, all order disappears. God Himself, Almighty God, must descend upon earth in order to restore the Divine Order.”

Nevertheless, there are many Holy Scriptures that are open for all, irrespective of station in life. No one is excluded from Divine instruction.

Shri was clapping his hands: this meant that he was calling me, and silently telling me to begin my meditation. There was a guest in his room, and they were conversing, sometimes loudly, sometimes softly. Shri wore a wreath of flowers on his breast, and held flowers in his hand.

I sat down for meditation, and chased away the thought that kept disturbing me: “Why did he call me just now? Why does he wish me to meditate in the presence of a stranger?”

“If my senses, my eyes and ears, disturb me during meditation, what shall I do?” I had once asked Shri.

His answer was: “Say to them kindly: eye, your task just now is not to see outwardly, but inwardly, see the spiritual light. Ear, your task just now is not to listen to outward things, but to the music within.”

It helped. The effort within me was of help for greater concentration. When I rose, the guest had left, and Shri too had concluded his meditation. My glance fell on a picture on the wall that I had not noticed before. A young figure of golden luster, standing on the shore of a river. Shri told me that it was Krishna Chaitanya, who descended in Bengal five hundred years ago – at the same time that America was discovered. According to the Holy Scriptures He was Krishna Himself, who once again descended to earth, now as a bhakta, a servant of Himself. In this descent He is most magnanimous, granting even the unworthy the highest gift of Divine Love.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MAJESTY OF GOD

The tale of Krishna and Narada, the great servant of God – Mighty mantra about Rama – Reading the Bible with Shri.

Shri's meditation-room in Nasik often seemed to me to be coated with gold from the spiritual strength which had accumulated there during the years of spiritual concentration. In this room, and in the large, airy work-room next to it, I listened to many a story related by my teacher.

The first of the stories which I shall repeat here originates from Shri Krishna Chaitanya himself.

As all the worlds in the realm of Maya, our universe is corruptible, too. A Brahma's, a world creator's power over the universe, is also corruptible, even if it lasts a billion years. Indirectly, the inner sight of the disciple is directed towards God's incorruptible kingdom, which is not of this world.

### KRISHNA AND BRAHMA

Chaitanya once related the following to his disciples: Krishna's many-sided Divinity, such as is revealed in His own kingdom, surpasses all that can be expressed in words. Therefore I shall tell of only a fraction of His Divinity, that which is revealed in the majesty of the universe.

One day Brahma, the Creator, came to Dvaraka in order to visit the Lord. The gatekeeper bore the news to Krishna. The latter asked: "Which Brahma is it?" The gatekeeper returned and repeated the question: "Krishna wishes to know which Brahma you are." Impatient and dumbfounded, the creator of the world answered: "Go and tell him that I am the four-headed Brahma."

When the gatekeeper had received permission from Krishna, he allowed the creator of heaven and earth to enter. Brahma bowed down in worship at Krishna's feet, and the latter asked him the reason for his visit. Brahma answered: "My Lord, first answer me a question. What did you mean when you asked: Which Brahma?"

Krishna smiled. Immediately there came countless hosts of Brahmas – Brahmas with ten heads, with twenty, with a hundred, with a thousand, a million, yes, with a million million heads; it was beyond anyone's power to count their heads. Shivas came with millions upon millions of heads. Indras revealed themselves with millions of eyes. At the sight of all this, the four-headed Brahma almost lost command over himself, like a rabbit encircled by a troop of elephants. All these Brahmas sank down before the throne of Krishna, touching it with their crowns,

which they lowered to the ground. From the throne, surrounded as it was by the crowns of all these Brahmas, tones began to stream forth, as if all the crowns were singing hymns of praise to the throne of Krishna. With folded hands the Brahmas, the Shivas and the other divinities glorified Krishna thus: “Lord, great is Your mercy towards us, You allow us to behold Your feet. O infinite happiness, You have called upon us and received us in Your service. If You command, we shall bear You upon our heads.”

Krishna answered: “I longed to see you, and therefore I called upon you to come here. Are you satisfied? Have you anything to fear from the demons?”

They answered: “Thanks to Your grace, we are victorious everywhere. And finally You have appeared upon earth and destroyed the burden of sin that was dragging it down into the abysses.”

Then Krishna dismissed all the Brahmas, and they returned each one to his universe, bowing deeply in farewell.

The four-headed Brahma of our universe threw himself once more at the feet of Krishna, and said: “Today I have been reminded anew of something that I once knew very well.”

Krishna replied: “Although your universe is five hundred million miles in circumference, it is yet very small. Therefore you have only four heads. There are other universes that measure a thousand million, a hundred thousand million, and millions of millions of miles in their circumference, and their Brahmas have a number of heads in proportion thereto. And I bear all the kingdoms in the spaces of the worlds. My divinity, that is turned towards the world, is immeasurable. Who will try to perceive the breadth of My occult divinity?”

From the infinity of God, leading back to warmer regions nearer earth, is another story. This one is almost a cosmic joke, yet one can feel the pulse of eternity in it. Brahma, the Creator, Shiva the Destroyer, and Vishnu, who bears and penetrates the universe, are the main figures in it.

## BRAHMA, VISHNU AND SHIVA

Shiva once had a thought, which he did not even think out to the finish – it was only the seed of a thought: “What would happen if I stopped destroying?” This thought had hardly entered his head, when Brahma the Creator came and said: “Listen, what would happen if I stopped creating?” Just then Vishnu the Preserver came and said to them: “What do you think would happen if I stopped bearing the universe?” “I shall stop destroying!” “I shall stop creating!” “I shall stop bearing!” Thus they exclaimed, and amusedly clapped their hands.

There came a wagon rolling out of the unknown. Amazed, the gods saw that the wagon contained nothing but eggs. And when an egg fell down upon the ground,

and its shell burst, a new Brahma, a Creator, stepped out of the egg. And when another egg fell down, a Vishnu, a Preserver, emerged. And when a third egg fell, a Shiva, a Destroyer, came out. And new eggs kept falling out of the wagon.

Then all three of them became frightened, and clasped their hands and threw themselves before the Almighty. Suddenly the wagon disappeared. And Brahma and Vishnu and Shiva resumed their work.

We are taken still deeper into Maya's great river of delusion in the story of the great Narada, one of Krishna's servants and friends, to whom Krishna speaks thus: "Thou art my eye." For Narada wanders about constantly in the three worlds, looking for beings that are worthy of bhakti, God's Own power of Knowledge and Love.

Narada, when God so desires, also plays the role of the ignorant. But this is only a part of a play, in order to give instructions to beings who have turned their backs to God. Narada is an eternal servant of God.

### KRISHNA AND NARADA

Once upon a time Narada came to Krishna. The latter stood outside His palace and invited His guest to go in. "My meal will soon be ready, come and dine with Me!" Narada thanked Him gladly. "Yes, I shall take first a bath in the river. I shall come in five minutes." He went down to the river. When he dived into the waves, he felt to his surprise that he had been changed into a woman. Amazed, he touched his long hair, his breasts, his body. He still remembered that he was Narada, the great, wise servant of God. But the longer he remained in the water, the fainter grew this memory. He became Naradi, the young woman. A young man walked along the shore. She took his hand. He led her to his home. She lived with him and bore innumerable children. Her beauty vanished. The children cried and clamoured. All the troubles of life enveloped her. She became ill, became old. She cried to God. Just then she became Narada again, the wise servant of God, and the Lord stood in the entrance of His palace and called out: "Narada, the five minutes have gone, our meal is ready."

Narada had seemingly dived into the waters of Maya, in order to show her delusive power, through which all beings are misled ...

This story about Narada, who was changed into Naradi, is told commonly in India, and is very much liked. A moving-picture has even been made of the story, and it has run a long time at a great many cinemas in the far-stretching country. The greatest film successes in India, strangely enough, are not the parlour comedies, gangster films, adventure and criminal stories, where sex appeal plays the chief role, as is the case in the West. The films that are shown to full houses in India,



sometimes for several years in succession, are portrayals of the power and the Love of Almighty God, and of the ever new saviours and messengers He send down to earth.

Once I sat in the middle of an audience in one of the cheapest seats – a rough wooden bench – in an overflowing theater which resembled a big barn. I was probably the only white man in the crowd of spectators. At times rats chased one another about our feet. No one bothered about this, however, for all were completely fascinated by the performance.

Suddenly an enraptured cry sounded through the hall. My neighbours on each side of me, entire strangers, gripped my arms intensely in their excitement. They asked me breathlessly if I, a European, could really see, really understand that God had intervened.

I nodded assent.

On the white sheet before us, the miraculously liberated wise man tumbled out of his dark prison, out on to the street that streamed with light. He spread out his arms and sang jubilantly one of God's Names: "Rama!" The crowds of people about him as he went his way joined in his singing rejoicingly: "Rama! Rama! ..." Not only the people on the gleaming white sheet, but nearly all of the spectators in the theater, arising in rapture, had begun to sing so loudly that I thought the roof would cave in: "Rama, Rama, Rama ..." With all the power in their lungs they sang the mighty mantra about Rama who lifts and cleanses the fallen.

Now the spectators had quietened down and were listening. The hero, who had patiently endured so much suffering, was softly praying to God. It was the same thousand-year-old prayer that Shri had often repeated for me:

"Thou art our father. Thou art our mother. Thou art our beloved friend. Thou art the source of our strength. Thou who bearest the burden of the universe, help us to bear the little burden of this our life."

One must not imagine that the Indian religious films are insipidly sweet or that they have the skin-deep beauty of an oleograph. Perhaps they are a little too long and drawn out for our Western taste, but they are full of humour and of harsh or apt illustrations from the life of the people, and some scenes are really masterpieces. At a competition for the best film in the world that was held in Venice, one of these Indian religious films received the highest honours that ever been granted a film.

For a period of several months I was far away, quite lost in the Orient, but gradually the East and the West began once more to strive for some kind of alliance within me. When I read from the Bhagavadgita with Shri in the evenings, the portals of Germanic antiquity, the runes, suddenly opened up before me. I translated from the Eddas, from Voluspa, for Shri.

For a while, too, I read from the Bible daily for Shri. About Abraham, Joseph, Solomon, Zedekias, Elias, Josias, and above all from Paul's "Letters from Rome", and "Letters from Corinth". Shri thought that one of the darkest shadows resting on

the Old Testament were the words: Of dust thou art, to dust thou returnest. “No, of light thou art, and to light shalt thou return!”

## CHAPTER X

### INDIAN FEAST

Shri's birthday celebrations – The village postmaster – Watching the monkeys – Divali, the feast of Light – Paying evening calls – Gaiety and good feeling.

At the time of full moon in March, Shri celebrated his fifty-ninth birthday. All of us were invited to commemorate the occasion in Rana's home in Sadra. Rana and a Brahman, a stranger to me, performed a long ritual ceremony. We, Shri's disciples, his grown-up sons and daughters, and the other guests took part in this ceremony. I understood only a few words of the old Sanskrit Veda hymns that they sang, in alternating chorus, as they sat at Shri's feet. "Shanti, Shanti ...! Peace, peace, peace!"

Shri was deluged with flowers. When the singing was over, milk and water were poured over him. Each of us took a drop of the fluid that had been poured over his body, and we stretched our hand over the lighted candles placed before him. When I bowed down towards his feet and touched them with my forehead, full of the deepest affection and gratitude, he embraced me fondly, laid his hands on my cheeks and said, "I am glad that you are here today, Vamandasji."

The syllable "ji" is a friendly, affectionate form, which he seldom used. It is really the ancient word "arya" – noble. I felt as if I had fallen down upon a bed of roses.

Towards evening, still another service was held for the numerous guests. Some petty princes from the neighbourhood, too, had arrived. In the middle of the vacated dining-room on the bottom floor four banana plants had been placed in square formation, symbolizing the creation of the world. In front of them were masses of flowers, fruits, sweets, rows of lighted candles, and glowing incense sticks. All this was a sacrifice to the Highest, in gratitude for his creation, and had been borne there with upraised hands, and later on distributed among the guests.

One of these, a disciple of Shri's, was an elderly man, postmaster in a little Indian village in the south. Many years ago, while on one of his wanderings, Shri had entered his post office in search of some information. The postmaster had immediately been moved so deeply by Shri's appearance and saintliness that he looked him up the very same day. A feeling of humble affection and respect had been the result of this meeting with Shri. Henceforth, when the postmaster had a couple of free days at his disposal, he would ask Shri if he might visit him, and now he had come to greet him on his birthday. In two years he was to be pensioned, and at that time it was his wish to remain with Shri and serve him. He said to me: "How happy you must be, who have Shri's blessing, and can be with him constantly!"

Rana was like a brother to me. He lived in a fine, cheerful house, something between a bungalow and a palace, built up on smooth white pillars. Great trees surrounded it, and the walls were painted a clear green colour. Two skins hung on the walls, those of a tiger and a tigress that Rana had shot. The ceilings were panelled in white or brown. In front of the house there was a green lawn, and many-hued, bright flowers on long stalks, fruit-trees laden with fruit, and old, knotty deciduous trees. A dozen Indian servants were kept busy seeing that the plot of grass remained fresh and green by watering it with pails of water, for all the country round about was yellow and dry, burned up by the glowing sun. All the roads were covered with a fine dust. It lay there like soft down pillows. Great clouds of dust hung in the air above them, raised by wandering hordes of animals, by beggars and ascetics who walked barefoot in it. In their midst flew giant, shrieking wild peacocks. Camels and hordes of buffalo wandered over the yellow steppes. The leafy tops of the trees were alive with white squirrels and great silver-grey monkeys. One of Rana's many servants had a full-time job in keeping these monkeys somewhat at bay. With a bow and an arrow protected by a rubber tip, he shot at them in order to frighten the most impudent ones. The monkeys hopped up on to the motor-car tires when Rana fetched us. They danced at night on the roof of the tent in which I slept when the house was filled with guests. This tent was an exceedingly pleasant one of double canvas, such as those used by Indian officers. It was made double as a protection against the sun. It contained a carpet, a bed, a lounge-chair, an armchair, and a desk. A sort of verandah and a bathroom were also included.

It was good to lie in the lounge-chair and look at up the newly-sprouted leafage, and watch the monkeys.

Shri approved of the fact that the apes played on the roof of my tent at night. "They protect you. Hanuman, the chief of the monkeys, is protecting you," he said jokingly.

My guru's birthday was on a Sunday, at full moon. The Indians do not calculate their anniversaries according to a certain date. They say that they were born at full moon, or with the new moon in a certain month, or so many days with the waxing or waning moon. The gleaming white moon rules the year.

On the second day of the feasting, Monday, Shiva's day, Rana invited all the Brahmans of the district, about two hundred, to dinner in Shri's honour. They ate out-of-doors, sitting on the ground. Several cooks had been hired for the day, for Rana had some thirty other guests at the same time, who dined in the hall on the first floor.

For several days that part of the courtyard that lay in the shade at four in the afternoon had been watered with watering cans in order to lay the dust and make the ground hard and even. Now the Brahmans sat there with their legs crossed, in two long rows facing one another, waiting. There were both old men and small boys among them, and all the men had the brown upper part of their bodies naked,

except for the brahman cord about their throats. The lower part of their bodies was swathed in gaily coloured blue, red, green or purple garments. The women sat apart, also in long rows, also gaily dressed. Some of them sat in small groups of their own, divided according to caste. Patient and silent, with an atmosphere of peace about them, they sat there and waited nearly an hour, for it took a long time to prepare food for so many. On such an occasion in Europe, the crowd would have become noisy and restless.

Gradually the waiters came and placed a big dish, made of banana leaves plaited together, on the ground before each of the guests. After that a bowl, plaited likewise, for the rich soup called “dal”. Large brown balls of sugar, flour and melted butter were placed on the dishes. Those who wished to have two or three such balls were given them, and those who were satisfied with one implied so with a quiet gesture of the hand. The servants waiting on them, going the length of the long rows, dug deep into the metal pots with their hands, serving piles of rice on the banana-leaf dishes, and they poured melted butter over the rice. Small piles of vegetables were placed about the rice in the centre. Various kinds of bread, thin as leaves, were served. All this time the guests sat waiting quietly until a sign was given by the host. Then in chorus they sang a hymn to Shiva, and after that the feasting began. Tirelessly the servants bore in new dishes, more rice, thin bread and sugar balls. The apes looked on with greedy glances.

It is a fine art, which in spite of many efforts I am still far from mastering, to eat elegantly and neatly with one’s hands. First the rice must be carefully kneaded with the right hand, then it should be soaked with the water from the vegetables, and put into one’s mouth. Bread must be broken with the right hand only, with no assistance from the left. These guests, most of them quite simple people, had mastered the art.

New moon in October, called *divali*, is considered to be the most lucky day of the whole year. On that day Rama killed the demon Ravana with ten heads. Therefore in India all school terms begin on that day, and formerly the armies set out for battle on that lucky day.

*Divali* means feast of light. It is also a thanksgiving feast for the harvest, and *divali* is the first day of winter and the first day of a new year.

This feast uplifts one like a wave on the sea!

As early as dawn, the fireworks began to go off in a city that was wild with joy. From above, from below, and from all sides, there was popping. Small boys of four or five were setting off firecrackers. They popped under our feet, and sparks flew from left to right when one walked through the streets. The whole land celebrated and feasted four days in succession. At five o’clock in the morning, before sunrise, people bathed and began to eat. And between meals one munched pastry made of achanti nuts, and cakes filled with the pulp of coconuts. For dinner, sweet saffron-yellow rice and other dishes that were new to me were served.

Shri Maharaj and all his family, sons, daughters, sons- and daughters-inlaw, grandchildren, other guests and their servants, all of us sat on very low seats with our legs crossed under us. We sat in very exact order. Our host had a seat with a back to it, and a low table. I, too, had a seat with a back, but like all the other guests who had no support, my table consisted of a giant green banana leaf which was spread out on the floor. Around every “table” an ornament was painted in purple-red chalk on the slabs of the floor. It resembled a lotus flower.

Silver bowls and dishes were refilled constantly with vegetables. The food was placed in little heaps directly on the banana leaves. The meal began with rice and “dal” and different kinds of vegetables, salads and butter. Then the sweets followed. And finally rice, vegetables and yoghurt milk.

The “table” was lower than the seats. It was difficult to reach down to it. My feet were cold and numb from crossing my legs under me. When the meal was over I limped painfully out of the room, to the amusement of the others, who laughed aloud.

I joined in their laughter, and was glad that they laughed at my behavior, and at my table manners, which were not genuinely Indian as yet.

In the evening we set out to pay calls. We went from one shop to another, through the town which was brightly lit and filled with rejoicing people. There were no customers. People were out in order to wish one another happiness. Everywhere we were received joyfully, a pleasant-smelling fluid was spread out on the right hand and sprayed on our heads. “The harvest was good,” exclaimed the proprietor with satisfaction. A dish containing spices was offered us, and we were given betel leaves to chew and bunches of flowers. Wreaths were placed about our necks. Burdened with flowers and pastries, with every pocket bulging, we returned home.

Nowhere did we see any beer served, nor wine, nor any other intoxicating drink. I did not see anyone drunk. Not only the Hindus, but many Mohammedans as well, celebrated this festival of light. Outside the poorest mud huts, too, the lights burned on this evening. Huts that housed people so poor that they could not afford to light candles more than this one time of year, during the *divali* festival.

For this once I had dressed in European formal attire, dinner jacket and the white shoes that I had never used as yet. We were invited to dinner by Thakore Sahib, the ruler of the state of Vasana. The Thakore Sahib was a young man, a widower. He was one of the petty princes of India. His private income plus that of the state he ruled did not exceed forty thousand rupees. But he had a Chevrolet car, and a prime minister with a monthly salary of a hundred rupees.

An indescribable gaiety prevailed during all our meals. I sat there in my shirt-sleeves like the others, on a seat that was hardly as high as the length of a finger, and “took to my fingers”, as is narrated in the *Odyssey*. On the great oval metal plate before me lay all the sweet and sour dishes, many unknown to me by name,

arranged around a central heap of rice, and one combined and mixed, according to one's own taste, the yellow lemon pudding, the beans, and buttermilk, and yoghurt, and the many kinds of bread: capati, puri, and all the others. Everything tasted marvellous.

The Prince's palace reminded me of Odysseus' royal dwelling on Itaka, as one might imagine it. The herdsmen, who looked after cows, came and went. The castle was built in three storeys with steep wooden steps and beamed ceilings. It was originally an old manor house, magnificent but dilapidated. Wood everywhere, wonderfully carved grey wood. Every support that held up a rafter or a ceiling was decorated with carving; for example, a rider with shield and sword and wig-ornamented helmet, with mythical animals on both sides. Windows and doors stood wide open. In spite of the heat of noon, a cool draught of air fanned the entire house refreshingly. Rocking-chairs or wide sofas swung on heavy copper chains in all the rooms. Each link of the chain was made of small pictures of different aspects of God.

Here, too, there was one servant whose only duty was to chase away the flocks of monkeys that wanted to climb up on the roof.

From the dwelling of the prince on the top of the hill we drove downwards in curves and turns on frightful roads that were full of holes, deep ruts and thick dust. Around the country castle a miserable village, a group of ramshackle mud huts, clung to the mountain slope.

## CHAPTER XI

### SHIVA'S DRUM

Harvest on the Indian plains – Alan, the young American chemist – The rishi Vashishtha, guru of kings – Maya, the handmaid of God – Drums in the temple of Shiva – Mountain of the goddess Arbuda – News of German invasion of Czechoslovakia – Kaliyuga, age of discord – The avatar of kaliyuga.

The sun shone hot on the Indian plains. The crops were harvested, the stubble fields lay there staring, yellow, burned, like a desert. Worn out after a long illness, I sat day after day beside the window in the house near Kolhapur, where I was a guest, and watched how the two-wheeled harvest wagons, drawn by buffaloes, waddled along the road. The dust, raised by the clumsy wheels, filled the air and penetrated one's lungs. When the road became blocked somewhere, one could see the endless rows of heavily-loaded wagons standing still, as far away as to the distant wavy line the hills formed on the horizon. In the evenings, too, and at early dawn, long before sunrise, I heard the buffalo drivers' spurring call, and their incessant singing. The thousands of wagon loads of golden hay they were driving did not belong to them. All belonged to the Maharaja of Kolhapur.

Half-naked men stamped to the accompaniment of singing, up on the yellow wall of grass which grew taller and taller, a security against future starvation. This reserve was necessary all the more, since in this Indian State there is a prohibition against the slaughtering of cows and the importation of meat.

Then I suddenly escaped the glowing plains, and found myself on a high plateau. The sun was no longer a bitter, hostile star, the countenance of the god of death, who burned up the earth. Gladly the golden light flooded down through the cool air. A chilly wind blew through the tops of the mountain. In the evenings we sat shivering, Shri Maharaj and I, and Alan, a young American, on the cold stone slabs outside our bungalow. A cold night wind shook the windows and jerked open the doors of the house. Oh! it was wonderful to freeze a little. But the first letter that Shri dictated to me was an urgent request for warm blankets.

Alan was a chemist, thirty-one years old. Nine years ago he had met Shri when the latter was travelling in America. After that he had taught himself Sanskrit, and had saved money in order sometime to be able to travel to Shri in India, and become his disciple. The young man had tried his hand at all kinds of trades in order to reach his goal, he had fought bravely against depression and unemployment in America. He had had a position with an agent for leasing and hiring – and was dismissed when he was discovered sitting in an empty room gazing out of the window, and studying his Sanskrit grammar during working hours. Then he had obtained work in an ammunition factory and similar places,



finally in a whiskey distillery, with day and night shifts. “In Shiva the Destroyer’s shop,” remarked Shri. After a few months his usual fate overtook him again. But on being given notice this time he received the news joyfully, informing his employer that he had already intended leaving. “Leaving! Where are you going?” the man had asked. “To India.” His employer had grasped him warmly by the hand. “Yes, that is right, go to India, for you belong there. And may I ask what you intend to do there?” “I shall study yoga,” was the answer.

Alan had only a few hundred dollars, which he must spend very carefully. He had chosen the slowest and cheapest cargo boat he could find. The trip had lasted six weeks, in a third-class berth, with long detours via Scotland, Gibraltar and Marseilles. He was a bit upset and confused after the long journey by sea, and by the first acquaintance with that part of the tropical world where we sat shivering in front of Shri, on the cold stone floor of the bungalow Shanti Nivas, the home of peace, high up on Mt. Abu.

Alan’s daily grievance was that he could not sit according to Indian fashion, as I could, with his legs crossed under him on the floor. His knees were too stiff. In a bitter fight against this stiffness he had once in America broken both knees, and this did not help the elasticity of the joints. He sat there now exasperated, squatting on the floor, and made his daily effort with repeated exercise to conquer this stiffness bit by bit. When he took off his glasses one could see his good, clean, shy, boyish face. He was mercilessly honest, above all with himself. He could get very angry when I used similes that he considered exaggerated or too poetical. But secretly he, too, was a poet, according to what he confessed to me long afterwards. There had come a time in his life when he had painfully cut himself off from all poetry, and had hardened himself against it.

My little room had a window towards the east. On Mt. Abu I succeeded often in getting up before sunrise. I went out on the stone terrace, and stood there looking over the crowns of the palm trees, towards the east where the sun was to rise. When I sang the mantra to the sun, facing the heavens as they became lighter, I felt the pious intensity of countless humans for thousands of years streaming through me.

The first crystal ray gleamed forth through the feathery tops of the trees. The disc of the sun rose. I sang:

“Take away the golden light  
that I may see thy true form ...”

Soon Alan made his appearance, a bit sleepy, and we wandered over the mountain. These morning hours were wonderful, as we made our first voyages of discovery on Mt. Abu. In the beginning we generally ran home to fetch our coats before setting out, for there was a raw morning wind.

The mountain is pitted with caves and grottos where yogis and ascetics, since time immemorial, have lived and meditated day and night. Abu is enveloped in

legends. In some of them, it is said that Abu is the son of Himalaya.

On the wooded slopes of the mountain, where beasts of prey hide, and frightened flocks of apes wander about high in the trees, two ancient teachers of mankind, rishis, once had their huts. We spent one day in the hermit dwelling of the rishi called Vashishtha, deep in a luxuriant wilderness of the edge of a precipice. Some sources relate that Vashishtha was for thousands of years the guru of all the kings of the Sun dynasty, a lineage to which my friend Rana belonged. With Rana, who had come on a visit, we read from a manuscript that is said to have been written by Vashishtha. It is called Yoga Vashishtha, or the Great Ramayana, and contains teachings that were given to Rama, the son of a king and a Divine saviour, an Avatar. This work expresses great sorrow over the transitoriness of the world.

Near one of the many heights there is a row of underground caves, which had been hewn into a temple in ancient times. There in the darkness the ruler of the transitory world has her throne. Her name is Arbuda. The whole mountain was originally called Arbuda, which is one of the many names for Maya. One must wander through cave after cave in order to enter into her holy shrine. On each side of the portal built of rocks her sign, the trident, is painted in red, surrounded by the sun and the moon. The great Maya, ruler of the universe and servant of God, stepped out of the sphere of heaven down into the darkness of earth. Reverently I stood before her statue, barefoot like the others. In the underground grotto, Maya's countenance was black.

Since then I have seen and entered many temples of Maya. This handmaid of God is worshipped in India under many names. I have seen her portrayed in many forms, and in many different colours. Once I entered a temple dedicated to her in another wild mountain region, where even today tigers and panthers roam. This temple, too, was hewn out of a mountain cave. I was frightened when I saw Maya's statue there, for it rose above me in giant proportions and was fiery red.

Anxiously I looked at the priests. They looked like dwarfs where they stood high up on the dismal cliff shelves behind the statue, pouring cool water on Maya's glowing body, as if to appease her wrath. The terrible Goddess had ten arms outstretched, and held ten spears in her blood-red hands. The ten spears indicated the points of the compass, north, south, east and west, the points lying between these, north-west, north-east, south-east and south-west, and the Zenith and Nadir – that is, the space of the world. Maya's spear holds back the seeker of truth who tries to force his way into the realm of truth, God's realm, for selfish purposes, without loving service, and with a desire that has not been chastened.

Every morning Alan and I wandered about in Maya's mountain.

Every afternoon and evening we strolled together with Shri, between rounded hillocks of reddish stone, through groves of flowering old mango-trees, which had a stupefying perfume. We seldom met anyone, for although Mt. Abu is a famous mountain health resort in India, where many Indian princes have built palaces, at that time there was only one guest in the spacious Hotel Rajputana. Only the

buffalos observed us. Monkeys hopped from one tree-top to another, and high up in the palms. And on the empty roads one could imagine the tread of the devout who have walked there barefoot on their way to the cliff temple of Arbuda.

Sometimes on our wandering we could unexpectedly catch a glimpse of the plains below us in the depths to the south or the west, the great glittering yellow desert, glowing with heat, and its dried-up river-beds.

Every morning and evening we heard reverberating sounds from a copper drum in the great temple of Shiva.

“What does that beating of drums mean?” we asked.

“When a soul, an atma, awakes,” Shri replied, “then Maya too awakes. She lies stiff, wrapped in dark night, not only in cosmos, but even buried deep in the body of man. Rejoicing, her liberated power rises from the depths of the human body, up through the heart and the head to Brahma’s thousand-petalled lotus flower, to God. When the stream of Maya rushes through the lotus flower of the inner heart, then the yogi hears a vibrating tone in his heart, which is not perceptible to the physical ear.

People who have not yet awakened must be reminded of this tone through the daily reverberation from Shiva’s drum.

“Buddha, too, who is included among the great avatars of God by us Hindus,” Shri continued, “has probably known this experience. After his meditation under the Bodhi tree, ‘the tree of enlightenment’, when Siddhartha awoke completely, he left for Shiva’s city, Benares, singing:

’The kingdom of truth I shall found  
To the city of Benares I am bound.  
Loudly ringing in worlds of darkness  
The drum of immortality shall sound.’ ”

Almost every day towards evening, when all colours became brighter, we now wandered with Shri to the great white temple of Shiva, which was erected on the shore of a mountain lake, rising majestically with its pinnacled roof, its courtyards, and pilgrim shelter; it was here the copper drums sounded every evening. Once Alan shyly touched the drum with his finger, and it resounded with a deep tone. Then we sat on the slope of a promontory, and Shri instructed us. Sometimes we were silent and observed the animals that played about us undisturbed. Beetles and ants in the grass, lizards that darted away like a flash, and chameleons that glided quickly forward, stopped suddenly as if frozen stiff, and then disappeared again, often changing colour; now emerald green now purple red. Swarms of ants danced over the lake. Above the ants flew birds of rare species. Thoughtfully Shri looked up at the ants and the colourful birds. “Nothing but atmas.”

One day as we walked down to the lake we happened to see notices with giant

headlines set up in the entrance of Hotel Rajputana. We read: "The Germans march into Czechoslovakia. Prague occupied." Not only the rumbling from the drums of the temple of Shiva, but the rumbling of world history reached us.

This evening Alan was very downcast. While we sat on a cliff promontory above the glittering surface of the water, he talked about America. In his youth, during times of depression, there had been many people in that wealthy country who lived on the verge of suicide, because they feared unemployment and starvation. He told of mothers who regretted having given birth to their children. "In our own times there are so many people who suffer from fear, fear that their conditions might get worse, that they might get cancer, that Hitler and his machinery should reach us also. Do you believe, Shri, that Hitler can reach us? Do you believe it is possible that a great new war can break out that will convert the world to a heap of ruins?"

"In kaliyuga, the age of dissension, anything can happen," answered Shri seriously.

Alan jumped up and stamped his foot on the ground. "Kaliyuga! I abhor such high-sounding names!" he exclaimed bitterly. "It doesn't matter whether they are invented by rishis or by Goebbels. The *Dritte Reich* and the irrevocable Divine plan of the world, I cannot see any difference. They are fine phrases, all of them! Where does free will come in? What becomes of the atma if one is hopelessly left in the power of Hitler or of kaliyuga? Perhaps you are going to assert now that the dictators of today are atmas? They are nothing but demons!"

"Demons are atmas, also," said Shri emphatically. "We must fight the demons; God delivers them. And the dictators you are afraid of are dwarfs when compared with the mighty demons that ruled the earth in the days of yore, when Krishna came. But when Krishna killed them or placed His foot upon their heads, they entered His Divine light."

The young American stared sullenly at the ground. As plaintively as a sleepy boy he remarked: "I don't want to live in kaliyuga, the age of discord. Why can't we always have a golden age?"

"The golden age prevails always in the awakened soul," was Shri's answer.

The skies and the water had paled. We walked home, part of the time in the light of the rising moon, and part of the time in the shadow of dark trees. A breeze, heavy with the perfume of flowers unknown to me, swept past us now and again, and between times we were surrounded by the inconceivably delicious fragrance from a mango grove in full bloom.

The three of us, Shri in the middle, stepped out of the shadow of the last group of trees into a moonlit meadow in front of our white summer-house, Shanti Nivas, which rose under the sky of stars in the midst of murmuring palms.

"Is it not really a home of peace?" asked Shri gladly, and stroked Alan's ash-blond hair lightly, almost with a gesture of blessing.

We lingered awhile in the moonlight on the grass of the meadow. Alan's gaze was fixed on the ground. "Shri," he began after a while with a voice that was still

troubled, “Shri, during all this period of kaliyuga – I mean since the time of Christ – has not some saviour, one of the avatars of God, descended to the darkness of earth?”

“That was a sensible question,” said Shri gladly. “Certainly he has come! Innumerable times the holy writings have prophesied his coming, in the same way that Christ was foretold. Great wise men who lived during the golden age, have begged God to grant them the favour of being reborn in our age, the age of discord, in order to live on earth at the time when Krishna Chaitanya, who is Krishna Himself, was to return. But when this saviour really wandered among us – and this was not even five hundred years ago – He seldom performed any wonders, like raising the dead, and did not kill demons. But He was the most magnanimous of all the avatars, granting the greatest gift of all, the highest form of loving service of God (prema), even to the lowest, what no other avatara does. It was the hidden avatar of kaliyuga, the golden avatar in the form of the most pleasing form of God, the greatest bhakta, enacting the drama of being His Own servant.”

“What was His name?” asked Alan very quietly.

“Krishna Chaitanya,” replied Shri.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE MONTH OF PURUSHOTTAMA

The Indian year – Shri's brother-in-law – Bhagavatam and its Tales of God – The Song of Victory – Marching Women – Krishna.

When the first torrents of rain fell, we left the Goddess Arbuda's wet and foggy mountain-top and returned to Nasik and Shri's house, which was stronger and had a protecting roof. To Alan's sorrow, he had been obliged to return to America.

The wandering ascetics of India have the custom of spending eight months of the year on their pilgrimages, and during this time never staying long in any one place, neither in temples nor hospitable homes. But their rule allows them to break off the arduous wandering when the heavy rains begin, and during this four-month period they may live under a protecting roof and entirely devote themselves to the study of, and meditation over, the holy writings. Therefore this part of the year is called "the four holy months".

The Indian year is a lunar year. The twelve months are dedicated to the great avatars of God. But there is a thirteenth month also, an intercalary month. This month is dedicated to Purushottama; that is, the highest person.

Krishna Himself is praised as Purushottama. It is He, as the avatarin (the source of all avatars), who sends down the many avatars to the world, until finally He Himself enters the circle of saviours. The month of Purushottama descends every leap year. During this festive month, therefore, it is the custom in many Brahman homes to read aloud from beginning to end a work in twelve parts, Bhagavatam, which proclaims the glory of God Himself, Bhagavan Shri Krishna.

Shri sat on his cushion on the tiger-skin. His permanent secretary, and a brother-in-law, a yogi with a long black beard and long hair, sat with me on the mat before him, singing. The songs were in the Marathi language, the speech used by the people in the region about Nasik, and most of the songs were very simple. In a corner a couple of women sat crouched, and they joined in the singing. We men held round metal discs, or wooden discs mounted with metal, in our hands, and we beat them against each other. We marked the rhythm with them, and sang one song after another, repeating them constantly without pausing. It made one think of the waves of an ocean.

Then the man with the long black beard began to read from the great book, with a solemn, singing tone. As an introduction, he invoked Sarasvati, the goddess of the power to express the wisdom of God. She is, in one of her aspects, the Divine power of Brahma, the creator of the world, and one with him. Then he invoked Ganesh, who is usually portrayed in the form of an elephant. A little statue of him, made of stone or clay, can be seen in niches and above the entrance of many

houses in India. For Ganesh, son of Maya, the great Devi, is considered to be the master of happiness and success, the remover of all obstacles.

The yogi with the dark beard prayed that all these high powers, servants and maids of Krishna, might live in his thoughts and his speech. He took a bronze bowl and let the water in it run out in a circle about him, and caught a few drops in the cup of his right hand. Devoutly he let the drops fall on the crown of his head and into his mouth, while he repeated the mantra to India's seven holy rivers.

Now and again the speaker bowed down and reverently touched his forehead to the book Bhagavatam.

When he had read the part set for the day, we all rose and sang in chorus, clapping our hands and swinging candles over the table that was strewn with flowers. The pictures of the Divine saviours of the world that were displayed there included one of Jesus Christ.

Nobody had urged me to join in the singing. I took the initiative myself, and it pleased Shri.

The book we read from every evening is the essence of the Holy Scriptures, having eighteen thousand stanzas. It consists of an endless number of descriptions of the deeds of God, and of the revelations of God. This book is to be found in countless Indian homes, and is often the only book in the house. It is not only a wonderful literary work, it is God Himself in the form of the Bhagavatam and it can be read daily. It is the bread of life, as the Bible has been, and is yet, to some degree in the West.

The work narrates how God time and time again descends to earth in order to free it from the power of demons and rescue His bhaktas. How He, under a great deluge, descended as the avatar in the form of a fish, and drew the ark with King Satyavrata and the seven rishis. How He later descended as the avatar in the form of a tortoise, in the form of a boar, a human-like form with the head of a lion, in the form of Rama with the axe, the boy Vaman, Rama, and in the form of Krishna, who is the source of all the avatars and the innermost aspect of God Himself ...

We read the story of how Krishna descended on earth, and allowed Himself to "be born" in a dark prison cell. A grim king wanted to kill all the new-born children in order to destroy the Divine child that was to threaten his power, just like Herod. According to the Indian Scriptures, this event took place about three thousand years before the birth of Christ.

During the month of Purushottama, the city of Nasik resounded with music. Crowds of people kept wading into the river Godavari, which overflows all its banks in the rainy season. At that time the temples were inundated. The forks of the river were filled with singing crowds. On the streets and in homes, people danced until late at night, and sang of the deeds of God. The whole city of Nasik resounded with joy.

Just now the air about our house was filled with sounds of singing and of marching feet. The sounds came nearer and nearer. All of us ran to the windows. A

troop of women marched in a long line through the garden. They sang joyously and heartily: “Shri Maharaj, jai, jai, jai – Shri Maharaj, victory, victory, victory!”

It was a crowd of women from Nasik, who had assembled under a leader in order to honour Shri with religious singing. They marched around the house, following the direction of the sun, then rushed up the steps, and in a short while all, young and old, were gathered in the great hall. Some of them bore infants in their arms. Now and then these left the room in turn in order to nurse their children. They sat on the floor about Shri, and sang with such piercing voices that the walls vibrated, and they beat the rhythm with small metal discs. One began, the others joined in triumphantly in chorus, tirelessly, singing song after song for several hours.

Shri sat quite still. With a radiant, peaceful countenance, he sat in the midst of them and listened to the songs sung in praise of God, and of himself. Like a child, he clapped his hands in rhythm with the others, this man who was one of the endless number of messengers of God.

When the women had left us, and I had returned to my room, I heard Shri clap his hands. I ran downstairs. Shri was waiting in his car, and I took my place beside him. In silence we drove out of the city. Far out in the country he motioned for the car to stop. We stepped out, turned off from the road, and entered a wide newly-ploughed field. The sky was covered with heavy banks of clouds, which rose from the horizon and towered up as far as one could see.

“The earth wishes to be fructified,” Shri remarked slowly. After a while he pointed once more to the darkening sky and mumbled: “Krishna, Krishna.”

I knew what Shri meant. The word krishna can mean in Sanskrit not only Bhagavan Krishna Himself, but as an adjective also the nimbus blue or violet, almost black colour, of a thundercloud that is heavy with rain.



## PART TWO

### THE CAMP IN INDIA

#### CHAPTER I

##### “SHIVA WILL CALL YOU”

Peace in the guru's house – A rude awakening – Behind the barbed wire – Indian prison camps – Mutual suspicions – The apes look on astonished – Prison politics – Petty irritations of prison life – The haven of hospital – Hovering vultures – The song of the peasants.

I lived peacefully in my teacher's house in Nasik. Rose bushes bloomed everywhere in the garden almost the whole year round. Every morning I picked a big bunch of them and placed them here and there in Shri's meditation-room.

Shri had several times expressed a definite wish that I should not read the newspapers. My progress on the spiritual path along which he was leading me could be disturbed by my reading them. Of course he saw that current events were upsetting me, and I understood that it was wisest to obey him. However, when at times I could not repress my anxiety for my wife and child in Austria, he assured me seriously that they were protected. In order to calm my fears, he kindly invited my family to come to India, and like myself live as his children at Anandapith, the dwelling of blessedness, his spacious house in Nasik. We had already begun discussing which school in India my boy should attend when he arrived. It took a lot of trouble to get permission for my wife and child – Shanti and Gunananda, as Shri called them – to enter India. But at last, however, the official papers with the Indian Government's approval arrived.

Europe was far away, and far off too, were the mighty Himalayas, the northern boundary of India, where, on my wandering with Shri, I had never come farther than to the first ridges. Many times I asked my guru: “Shri, when shall we take up the interrupted pilgrimage to Shiva's home?”

The old man smiled in a strange way. “Wait until the time comes. *Shiva will call you!*”

I longed for the great forests, the lonely lakes, the uninhabited mountain slopes, where Shiva is enthroned in the wilderness. Often at night I dreamed that once again I lay on the rough boards of one of the humble pilgrim shelters, where the rank smoke from an open fire in the room below penetrated the cracks in the floor. The brown coolies, hired to bear Shri's sedan-chair to Lake Manasarovar, were preparing their meagre meal down there. Shiva's portrait hung on the rough

whitewashed stone walls of the house.

This portrait depicted Shiva, lost in meditation. He sat there rigid, with his legs crossed under him. His naked body was smeared with the white ash of cremated bodies. His arms were intertwined with snakes with lively tongues; these represented the snake-like desires of the world of senses that stretched after him. But Shiva did not notice them. He gazed into a kingdom which is not of this world. Below the portrait were the words: "Shiva meditating on Krishna."

Sometimes another picture of Shiva had hung in the pilgrim shelters. Once I came across a colour print of him in a bazaar, and I had hung it up on the wall of my peaceful room in the house called Anandapith. Here Shiva was depicted as the destroyer of the world. In the form of a youth he danced with ecstasy in the empty spaces above a dismally burning world, which was crushed under his strides, falling into a heap of ashes. Shiva, the destroyer, danced in order to make room for a new creation.

One morning, when it was quite early and still dark outside, I awoke out of a sound sleep. I thought that I heard the roar of thunder. Down below someone was knocking impatiently with his fists, or perhaps the butt of a gun, on the door of Shri's house. But Shri was not at home, he had gone to his disciple Rana for a few days. Now the door had opened. Heavy footsteps, like those of shoes shod with iron, stamped up the wooden stairs. An Indian police inspector in uniform, followed by a number of Indian soldiers, entered my room.

"You are arrested. Get ready immediately. Take only the most necessary things with you. And come along, for war has broken out," said the inspector.

While I was dressing as hastily as I could, they poked about in my dresser and my trunk. They pushed me into a car that was waiting. We drove through the familiar landscape, where I had driven so many times sitting beside Shri in his car. This time an Indian soldier sat on each side of me, and one sat beside the chauffeur. All of them had loaded guns with fixed bayonets. The car stopped in front of a gate in a high barbed-wire fence. In my amazement I recalled that a little over two decades ago I myself as a young soldier in the First World War had stood on guard, with a loaded gun and a fixed bayonet, outside an exactly similar barbed-wire entrance. This had been in Austria, where I was stationed as guard outside a camp for Russian prisoners of war.

Now in India I myself was being led as a prisoner into the camp, through the outer and the inner gates of the barbed-wire enclosure's double fencing, and was shown into a barrack where a few drowsy people sat waiting. During the course of the day several hundred people were led into the prison camp, transported there by car and by train. Since I had come to India on an Austrian passport, the war had caused me to become a so-called "enemy alien" overnight. Hundreds of thousands, yes, perhaps millions of people, had met the same fate as mine during these days: confinement in prison camps surrounded by barbed wire.

While Shiva the Destroyer danced, and the earth shook and trembled under his steps, and empires and other forms of government that were thousands of years old fell like a pack of cards, people all over the world were going to the trouble of building mighty fortifications of cement and steel in order to be able to retain their various systems, which, however widely differing, had yet something in common: retaliation and revenge. Because of this, prison camps were being filled. And since before the outbreak of war these prison camps had been too few, new camps were being built at top speed in all parts of the world: in Africa and Asia, in America and Australia, in Europe and naturally in India, too. Day and night the work went on, in the glowing heat of the sun, and by searchlight. In nearly every land, and at unbelievable expense, ugly barracks covered with tiles, or thatch, or corrugated iron, were set up. When travelling by train, there were long stretches where one saw nothing but barracks, one after the other. Great forests were chopped down in order to procure enough wood for the prison camps that were needed. Thousands of freight-cars and hundreds of ship-loads of barbed wire were unloaded. This wire was unrolled and quickly stretched out, twisted together into impenetrable prickly hedges of sharp wire. Grainfields were levelled by heavy steam rollers, in spite of the fact that hunger existed in many parts of the world, in order to get enough space for prison camps. Fruit-trees were cut down to add to the space needed.

The Indian camps in which I spent about six years of my life were tolerable ones. There were no gas chambers there, no flogging or torture cells, no ovens for burning human beings. They could in no way be compared with the concentration camps in Germany and neighbouring countries. The simple fare was generally good and sufficient. Naturally it consisted almost exclusively of meat preparations, and during the latter years mainly of canned foods. It was not the fault of the authorities that many of those who were interned suffered from a lack of vitamins, and lost their teeth. There was famine in many parts of India. It was my own fault that I, personally, suffered privations and sometimes starvation, for I was obstinate in my determination to retain, even within the barbed-wire enclosure, the vegetarian diet that I had learned to like while at the home of my guru Shri Maharaj, and that is a great help on every yoga path. However, in spite of the good treatment, there was no person in the camp, and I personally was not excepted, who escaped being at times overcome by despair.

Those in power in all parts of the world tried to be as all-seeing as God Himself, and for this purpose a gigantic, ingenious system of secret police was organized, which looked about with a hundred thousand searching eyes, and listened with a hundred thousand listening ears. This ghost-like monster had organs of sense and clutching arms that stretched out over the entire world, and even reached into the prison camps.

As soon as I became established in the Indian prison camp, I began to receive whispered information. "Watch out. Be careful. That person is friendly only in order to pump you. He is a spy, a Nazi agent ... That one? He writes reports for the

English. Once when he had taken a drink beyond his limit he admitted this himself. And I saw him with my own eyes leaving a report to the sergeant early one morning ... And that one? My God! Don't you know that he is a communist? He belongs to G.P.U. Don't you believe that the Russians have their confidants here in the camp, among both Nazis and Anti-Nazis?"

Anguish wore and tore at this web of a few thousand human beings.

Outside the camp, great hordes of grey and brown apes hovered. They were led by a very old he-ape, an accepted, very despotic, dictator. Just outside the outer barbed-wire fence of the enclosure there were often a great many of these animals, young and old, male and female. The latter hugged their young to their breasts. They all stared with sad and serious animal eyes at the strange world of humans behind the bars.

Sometimes we laughed at the sight, and said: "Things are splendid here, we even have a zoological garden." But then we realized the truth. The apes outside were free, and were looking curiously through the bars at us humans who were locked up in cages.

What did they see?

The apes saw human beings in the over-populated camp within the barbed wire, swarming like ants. They dug in the earth, planted banana-trees and other kinds as well. They arranged small gardens in front of their barracks. They watered the garden beds. They planted flowers and vegetables and lettuce. They worked at carpentry, or laid pipes, hammered nails, forged and welded. They mixed cement, they built with tiles and stones. They waged an interminable war against lice in their beds, and against holes in socks and shirts. They played cards, and let the worn-out gramophone spin for hours at a time. They talked, quarrelled, fought. Many lay all day idling on their barrack beds that crawled with lice, each and everyone imprisoned in a nightmare.

Each of the eight different enclosures of the Indian prison camp had its own self-government behind the bars. There, behind the carefully-guarded outer wall, a regular national-socialistic state existed. There were leaders, assistant leaders, and an inner circle. There was a Nazi organization for *Kraft durch Freude* to be found there, associations for sport and athletic contests, for music, theatricals and instruction. Whoever wished to could work at his education, whether it were the first principles in writing, or a course in some trade, or examination test. But there were also black lists, secret papers, boycotting of undesirable elements, conversion of opposing groups, punishment by flogging, attempts at the censure of letters, and Gestapo.

Nearby, in the wing for Anti-Nazis and Anti-Fascists, a strictly democratic system prevailed, with regular voting and violent election campaigns. Here they prayed openly in many languages, that the Allies would be victorious, and that the hated enemy would meet its downfall. In this section people lived constantly as if

they sat in a waiting-room: only a few days more, a few weeks, “until the application is granted”. All were waiting for their prompt release. Many of them waited for more than seven years. Behind the barbed-wire fence they celebrated the victory at the close of the war, and then had to continue waiting for years, in bitterness and mortification.

In another barbed-wire enclosure there were only Italian Catholic missionaries, including two bishops. This was a real Pontifical State in miniature, two hundred and fifty yards wide and three hundred long.

There was also a section for about a hundred Italian generals who had been taken prisoner in East Africa. They were divided into a Fascist and an Anti-fascist group, the two of them passionately fighting each other. One evening a crowd of prisoners stood up against the wire fence of one of the enclosures, and facing the neighbouring enclosure inimically, shrieked as they beat rhythmically in a talking chorus: “Du-cé! Du-cé! Du-cé! Du-cé! ... Hit-ler! Hit-ler! Hit-ler! Hit-ler!” In the other enclosure for Anti-Fascists they hanged a life-sized figure stuffed with straw representing Mussolini in the glow of a burning fire, to the accompaniment of wild acclamation, as if they had a preconception of coming events. Just as the swinging dictator was about to be lowered from the gallows and cast into the flames – this took place long after midnight – the English sergeant came marching in with a number of guards. He was stern and abrupt, and had been given the name “nutcracker”. His false teeth clashed threateningly, but he asked in a friendly tone: “Who is the artist? Who made this excellent arrangement?”

Flattered, the arrangers reported themselves – and were led away under guard to the prison barrack, since they were disturbers of the peace. Violent exclamations of indignation flowed from their comrades, and expressions of approval from the opponents on the other side of the fence.

The best possible care was given us. Even a large cinema barrack was built – within the barbed wire, of course, but with whirring electric fans to counteract the heat. The cinema was open also to the members of the European guard and to the officers. When this barrack was razed by fire, it was rebuilt within a few weeks. The work went on day and night, for the Indian agent did not want to be deprived of this means of income. We marched in three columns, under escort, out through the double fencing of our enclosures into the cinema. The Nazis marched in step, and as a sign of protest the Anti-Nazis walked out of step. Irritated by the disturbance, the apes climbed up into the leafage of the trees and showed their teeth. And there we sat, tightly packed, enveloped in the pungent smoke of innumerable cheap cigarettes, and saw the worn-out American sensational films that passed before our eyes. We saw new films, too. We observed a young queen distributing flowers and sweets among young wounded soldiers. Noisy squadrons of bombing planes dropped giant bombs, which dug gigantic craters in the earth, and before our very eyes destroyed great cities in a few minutes, perhaps that city in which one of us was born.

All was the same there as elsewhere in the world. All the problems, all the agony, the piercing pain and the hate outside penetrated easily the double barbed-wire fence of the strictly isolated prison camp, to believers and unbelievers, to Jews and Catholics and Protestants and followers of all imaginable Christian beliefs, to citizens of about twenty European countries: Estlanders, Lettlanders, Lithuanians, Finns, Bulgarians, Rumanians, Hungarians, Germans, Austrians and Italians, and also to imprisoned citizens of allied countries: Czechs, Poles, Greeks, Danes, Norwegians, Dutch, Russian ... all of them had been taken unawares by the war somewhere in the wide-stretching lands or the flowering islands between New Guinea and Irak, and between Hong Kong and Abyssinia, and now they had been assembled into one great camp in India.

All of them tried to continue their usual mode of living. Titles were kept: director or educational council. There were unbelievably many who had been managers or owners of immense plantation, with fantastic incomes, and who had moved in influential circles. Trunks were unpacked at regular intervals; at least those that had not sunk to the bottom of the sea. It happened, with the transporting of one contingent from a Dutch prison camp in Sumatra to India, that one ship in the convoy had been sunk by a Japanese U-boat. Property was piled up out-of-doors, and dinner clothes were aired in the sun to protect them from moths. Dinner jackets and swallow-tails hung on cloths-lines and waved about importantly in the breeze. Now and again one of the internees could be seen promenading on a Sun\_day afternoon between the barracks and the latrines in his dinner suit and starched white shirt, just to feel like a gentleman for an hour or two. Then the clothes were laid in camphor again, and the khaki shorts were resumed.

Property was unpacked and then locked up again. Memories were unpacked, but never locked up. As each year passed the present time became more and more empty, and hopes built on hollow phrases fell like a pack of cards, many of these thousands of prisoners lived increasingly and more passionately in the past. They revelled in it. For hours and for days they walked up and down the length of the wire fencing and related to one another what they had once eaten at such and such a restaurant, describing in detail the items of the menu and the carefully-chosen wines, and what sensations they had enjoyed at the taste of them. In the same way they told of their experiences with women, of good and of bad business deals, of how they had given this one or that one what he deserved. They eagerly sought up new friends who had not heard their stories and witticisms. Anyone coming from another camp was immediately surrounded by people who wanted to talk about their past. Many avoided one another, nauseated by the many years of living together in the same barrack. They could not tolerate the other's nearness, his stories, his way of laughing.

Some of the internees had domestic pets. They who lived behind bars had built small cages within their own cages for their pets, and they gave these animals all the affection they possessed. One man who boasted of having helped to set fire to a

number of synagogues in Germany eagerly and affectionately looked after his captive parrots, titmice, nightingales and other birds. A kindly German musician, a strong Anti-Nazi, had the hobby of taming mice. Once he placed a strange field-mouse, that had lost its way, in a cage containing a mouse family. Shyly and anxiously the tiny stranger, a female, crept into a corner of the cage, and tried to make itself as unnoticeable as possible. But the father mouse and mother mouse and all their children caught the smell of her. They were irritated and felt threatened by her presence. Half an hour later the stranger, probably of another species, lay dead in a pool of blood, bitten to death by sharp teeth. Evidently the mice had believed the shivering little stranger to be some treacherous intruder, who had crept into their territory with evil intentions.

Undoubtedly the best place in the whole camp was the hospital; that, too, of course, within the barbed-wire fencing. This hospital was open to all the different hostile parties, yet it was a fact that here, in one or another of its wards, one could really find peace. When the patients suffered from pain, their fanatical faces could often reassume a kindly human expression, like those of children. Oh, how many strange fates were revealed to me, when old men and young, who had spent decades in the tropics, related their life stories, lying in the hospital of the camp in India, during a sleepless night previous to or following a serious operation, or in the face of approaching death! At that time they were grateful for the slightest intimation of kindness, they forgot that a person who did not belong to their party, yes, who even might be of another race, lay in the bed beside their own. But as soon as they recovered, or saw a gleam of possibly false hope of recovery, their faces could become hard and scornful, or indifferent again, and they resumed the habit of boycotting or secretly reporting their companions in misery.

The churchyard of the camp lay in the left section, and was not enclosed by barbed wire. The graves were looked after carefully, and were decorated with flowers by the interned, who were escorted there under guard. But roused hate and mutual contempt did not call a halt even in the face of death. The strongest party in the camp complained that their dead were outraged by the burial of members of the opposing party in the same graveyard. In order to avoid the constant irritation on this points, the commander of the camp felt obliged to have Anti-Nazis, Anti-Fascists and Jews buried in a churchyard situated far away in the next city.

On the roof of the kitchen barracks in all of the eight sections of the prison camp sat ugly vulture-like birds of prey, crowded into rows. They were the real masters of the camp. No barbed wire held them back, no guards shot at them as they swooped in over the fences and pried into the various groups of human beings. What did these birds of prey see? They saw booty. It did not matter to them whether it was an Anti-Fascist, a Fascist, or a Catholic priest that left the kitchen barrack with a tin plate that had just been filled. They swooped down in wild swarms and seized pieces of meat. In their eagerness they sometimes aimed badly, and an ugly bloody wound appeared on the hand bearing the plate.

There lay the prison camp, like a throbbing bit of life beneath the feet of Shiva the Destroyer. But on all sides the immeasurable country of India stretched out, and on its winding dusty roads, here as everywhere between Himalaya and Cape Comorin, the ox-carts of the Indian farmers rolled in endless columns in the grey hours preceding daybreak. The song of the farmers rose and fell in monotones. It was as if the song of India, as if the entire land and the whole world were longing and begging for day to break once more, begging that over the night-enveloped earth the spiritual sun, the great Atma, might arise, visible to all:

The mighty Godhead,  
Eternal, pristine, timeless, all-embracing,  
Streams down from every morning sunbeam  
And gazes from all creatures blessed with vision ...  
The wise, the ageless, ever youthful Atma.



## CHAPTER II

### IMPRISONED – FREE – IMPRISONED

Trying to meditate in prison – Messages from Shri – Committees decide fate of prisoners – In a women's camp – Unexpectedly set free – With Shri in Mahabaleshvar – Banquet in Shri's honour – The Germans enter Paris – Back to prison – The jackals laugh at a mad world.

Within the barracks of the camp I tried to continue living as I had lived previously at home with my guru, with daily meditation, and I shut myself off egotistically. There were a few single rooms in the camp. For a while my only aim was to try to obtain one of these rooms, in order to work there undisturbed, and to meditate. At least I might find a corner place in one of the barracks. For this would mean that I had a bed on only one side of me, and a protecting wall on the other. In the Bhagavadgita I had read with Shri, "How can one find peace without meditation?" I decided to try to meditate in the midst of the noise and the crowd, and I sat on my bed with my legs crossed under me, with the natural result that I was laughed at unmercifully. In the wash-room, where the door always stood ajar, there were often twenty of us taking a shower at the same time, and it could happen that the water would be shut off just as we stood there lathered from top to toe. At such times I sang quietly to myself, forgetful of my surroundings, the sacred syllable AUM, the ancient word whose three sounds, among other meanings, mean the creation, the maintenance and the destruction of the world, and simultaneously the three phases of time, the past, the present and the future, as well as the occult that knows no time. This irritated my comrades. Sometimes, too, I might come across some neglected place in a corner of the camp, where the grass had escaped being trampled down by the many feet, a corner behind a rabbit hutch or a hen-coop built by skilful raisers of those animals, where I could meditate in solitude. With a little of the light and happiness I could derive from this meditation still glowing within me, I often went directly to the long queue standing in front of the kitchen barrack, from which there generally emanated sounds resembling those made by a crowd of hungry beasts of prey waiting for food. Once someone shouted to me angrily: "Why do you always go about smiling like a Mona Lisa? I can't understand how anyone could smile in such a situation as ours."

I had not grasped clearly as yet the fact that the external requirements of meditation, the mat of kusha grass – which, by the way, was stolen from me on the very first day of my entering the camp – the separate, undisturbed room, and aloneness, are requirements for only the beginner.

The walls of protection that I tried to build about me in the camp soon caved in. The white mosquito net, which we stretched over our beds at night in order to

protect us from the malaria insects, gave me a kind of seclusion. But it might happen that some drunken person whom I had unwittingly offended tore away the net in the middle of the night, in order to beat me and shower me with foul language.

“Be passionless, calm, peaceful, bestow on those around you your own calm, your peace, your strength!” Thus had Shri written to me, when the authorities finally gave us permission to correspond.

I was horrified when I read these words from Shri. I had lived as if a part of my being had been numbed by injections. I had been goaded about, and allowed myself to be like a puppet tied to a string. A shrill whistle awakened me in the morning. Shrill whistling summoned me to line-up on the athletic field for the daily roll-call. A whistle called me to potato-peeling and other household duties. I had to polish windows or wash floors. Someone shouted to me, and in turn I shouted to others. Where was my real self during this time?

When I try to recall the first days of my imprisonment, I only remember moving from one enclosure to another, from a barrack to a tent, from the tent to another barrack. As soon as I began to feel at home in one corner, I could be sure of getting an order to move. Innumerable times my comrades and I took our belongings and moved from one part of the camp to another. Sometimes the whole camp moved. I remember that once we travelled in a long column of buses to new barracks. In the middle of a desert steppe, all the cars stopped suddenly. We were ordered to get out. We were driven into a great square made up of brown soldiers who stood close to each other. They aimed their loaded guns at us, and commanded us to perform our physical needs. When this command had been obeyed we re-entered the buses and drove on to the next camp, where we had no more peace than before.

Meanwhile, inspection committees were at work in all the camps in order to decide which of the interned could be freed and which of them should remain imprisoned throughout the war. The committees investigated and weighed each case in the large camp, as well as those in a little camp that was nearly always snow-bound, high up in Himalaya near Darjeeling, and in camps to the south in the Nilgiri mountains, and one in Dekkhan which was inhabited almost exclusively by women. I was sent there for a few weeks by mistake; or was this intended as some kind of a joke?

No barbed wire was to be seen there. The barracks were placed on beautiful lawns, filling the spaces between groups of aged trees. European women wandered about under the trees, many of them young and handsome, dressed in light summer dresses, trousers or shorts. Some of them lay stretched out on deck chairs, and waved at me with gay parasols as I drove up to the encampment in a bus, guarded by three soldiers. A beautiful river glittered nearby, resembling “Fagervik” (Beauty Bay) in Strindberg’s drama, *Drömspel* (Dreamplay).

This camp, where lipstick and other cosmetics were sold in the canteen, and

where one dined at tables decorated with flowers and spread with white cloths, was also divided up into narrow cages by invisible barbed wire. The German women refused to sit at the same table as Jewesses or Aryan women married to Jews. These hostile factions dined at different hours and boycotted one another. The Italian and German women dined together, but even they boycotted each other and did not converse. The respectable Italian women and the Italian prostitutes from Bombay avoided and despised each other heartily. In the four corners of the assembly room used by all, the interned women divided themselves up into groups, exchanging hateful glances. Charming young creatures used every means in their power for fashioning intrigues and disparaging one another before the commandant and the investigating commission. This, to be sure, was no “Fagervik” (Beauty Bay), although there was a resemblance after a first hasty glance; no, it was rather “Skamsund” (Shame Bay). Many of these women wept secretly at night over the rumours whispered about them. A few members of the camp became insane.

When, after a short stay there, I re-entered the bus that was to take me back under guard to my former camp, women from these different groups crowded about it. All of them, both those who had scorned me and those who had been friendly, spoke with emotion, with trembling painted lips, begging me to promise to take messages to their husbands, Jewish husbands, German and Italian ones, who were within the wire enclosures for men, some of them in departments that I had no possibility of entering. Even when the wheels of the heavy, worn vehicle had begun grating on the sand, they called out entreatingly to me that I must beg their husband to try every means possible for reuniting them.

The committees worked for months. When one left a new one came. Every person that was interned – men and women – had to fill out a questionnaire, and was called in repeatedly for cross examination. Witnesses were questioned. All accusations were written down. The reports of the secret police on each person were investigated thoroughly. Judgment was passed on everybody.

One day quite unexpectedly, I was given my freedom.

Amazed, I went through the barbed-wire gate into the open. The next day I was once again at Shri’s home, and the old man took me in his arms.

The great prison camp, where hundreds of my comrades still sat imprisoned behind double iron bars, had soon vanished from my thoughts like a dream. To be sure, at times I was surprised at being able to go where I wished, and that nowhere was there any barbed wire to hinder me. I soon left the hot plains, accompanying Shri up to the fresh wooded mountain regions of Mahabaleshvar. We lived there by ourselves in a tiny house. An ancient Krishna temple rose nearby on the edge of a precipice. I often sat in the cold hall of the temple at the foot of a statue of Krishna. It represented Krishna, the Divine boy, as he grew up among the cowherds of Brindaban, walking through the forest and blowing on a flute. At the foot of the statue a clear spring welled forth. It gushed down the slope, becoming on the plains

the wide river that somewhere in the dim distance flowed past the women's encampment.

Rana came and visited us. Just as before, we sat at Shri's feet, and he interpreted the Upanishads for us. The old man was as happy as a child, and most of the time he smiled gladly like a child. But when he explained the secret teachings of the Upanishads, his words were like flashes of lightning; and it seemed as if the firmament stood aglow over us, and as if eternity, void of time and space, was revealed to us.

Every morning before sunrise I arose, and after a hasty bath climbed a hill, where I meditated. During the first months the skies of spring and summer were cloudless as I opened my eyes after meditation. Gradually the sign of a new rain period gathered over the forests. Mighty banks of clouds and thick mists came rushing up the crevices when I opened my eyes and looked about in astonishment. Clouds heavy with rain enveloped the earth. It would soon be time to leave the mountain plateau with its great forests, and with heavy-scented orchids growing on the mossy branches of the trees. The first showers had already come. The booming of thunder sounded in the distance. Poisonous snakes had begun to creep out of their water-filled holes in the earth. Flashes of rumours about the results of the German offensive in Norway and in the West reached our peaceful little home through Shri's servant, who shopped in the bazaars of the village every week, an hour's journey away. An official notice reached us, too. The permission for my wife and child to enter the country, that had already been granted and renewed, was suddenly revoked. A guest from the city reported that foreigners of hostile nationality that had been freed were being re-arrested.

Shortly before our departure, the brahmans in the little temple village of Mahabaleshvar held a banquet in honour of Shri. We drove the short distance to the gaily decorated house to which we had been invited in Shri's elegant eight-cylinder Ford, a gift from one of his Indian pupils. The old priest, who many years ago had performed the marriage rites for one of Shri's daughters in the mountain village, seemed to be embarrassed when he received us. It appeared that a few of the very orthodox brahmans in the temple village had scruples about eating at the same table as a European. It was their wish that I should not dine with the guests, but sit apart for my meal on the adjacent veranda.

Shri disagreed with them. He explained that I was his pupil, and that he as my guru had bestowed on me the brahman cord and accepted me as a brahman. There was no reason for excluding me. They discussed deeply and lengthily, without attaining any result. Finally we returned hungry to our little house. Neither Shri nor I had partaken of the festive dinner.

In my stupidity I was very proud of the fact that Shri had taken my part, that he had not failed me or allowed them to treat me like a barbarian. I did not suspect that surely, in his own opinion, without wasting words on the matter, he criticized my behaviour. To be sure, as my teacher, he had intervened on behalf of his pupil.

But my immediate reaction should have been to willingly and decisively declare that I should be glad to dine out on the veranda. I had learned nothing during my imprisonment. I had not as yet learned humility.

The next day we left the mountain village.

As we approached the plains, people seemed to be more and more excited. The Germans had marched into Paris, and were spreading out over France. The most fantastic rumours were being spread and believed. "Whatever happens, you must preserve your inner calm," Shri advised me. I tried, but succeeded only partially. Shortly after our arrival at Nasik, the familiar figure of the police inspector appeared with his followers, and a new order of arrest was presented. Under heavy guard, I and hundreds of others who had been given their freedom were taken back to the camp surrounded by barbed wire. My supposed freedom had been only a short vacation from imprisonment.

Once again I lay in the stuffy barrack, under a white mosquito net, among crowds of people who groaned under the ruins of their broken-down past, and who were full of fears for the future. I could not sleep. I could not abolish the pictures that persisted in appearing behind the lids of my closed eyes. Like the others, I was filled with anxiety. I could not quell my fears for my family, my mother, my wife and my child. They were still in Austria, where the dangers were increasing daily. Perhaps they were already in a much worse prison camp than mine. I could not overcome the worry over my own fate, the grief that my spiritual training, under the guidance of a beloved teacher, should now for the second time suddenly and apparently without reason be broken off. I sat up in bed and tried to meditate, as Shri had taught me. I succeeded. But when I lay down again, tired after the strain, the painful pictures reappeared and remained before my eyes, and my thoughts rolled along in their obligatory tracks. It was like being in a world of ghosts.

My neighbours groaned and turned restlessly in their sleep, so that the beds were creaking. Often the barrack was filled with moaning, as if the sleepers were in a nightmare.

Outside the camp, jackals were shrieking. I could not continue my sleep. A painful picture kept returning: all the people in the prison camp, no, all the people in the world, lay stretched out at the bottom of a dark prison hole. All of us were bound. We were bound in the chains of our own desire, our own prejudice, bound by our ignorance, by our lack of humility. In some ancient book I must have read this metaphor, which is more than a metaphor. Was it not in one of Plato's works? I could not recall it definitely. The prisoners in the dark cave were all staring in the same direction with eyes filled with anguish. We watched a play of shadows on a flickering wall. We saw only the dance of the distorted shadows, which we could not understand. But the real, living figures in the realm of reality, only the shadows of which fell into the cave, could not be discerned; they were hidden from us.

I covered my eyes with my hands in order to chase away the picture. I longed for

a few drops of water, and got up in order to go to the well and drink. I went quietly, so as not to wake those who slept, walking in the darkness between the rows of beds towards the door of the long, narrow barrack.

Outside, the cries of the jackals around the camp sounded even more shrilly. Soon the chorus quieted down, and only one animal continued his shrieking. It sounded like an ever-increasing roar of laughter, an insane laugh at the strange world in which we lived.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FEAST OF THE UNTOUCHABLES

The latrine cleaners and their guru – The story of Valmiki, the fallen brahman –  
Drums in the night – Singing soldiers – I pray for a guru.

I sat with my legs crossed under me on the empty football field, beyond the black sleeping barracks. In the daytime this place was filled with life and motion, vibrating with the tread of the two teams and the cheers of the onlookers, whose chief amusement at all times of the year was this sport. Now silence reigned, and the prisoners were sleeping heavily.

A quiet singing could be heard in the distance. It came from the ugly narrow quarters of the latrine cleaners. These men cleaned the many latrine barrels of the big camp with their brown hands and the help of short brooms. A big out-door fire was burning there. A crowd of happy people moved around the fire. The casteless were dancing and singing. A red banner, lighted up by the flames, waved in the wind from a tall pole in front of their barracks. This was the sign that their Valmiki-guru had arrived. That was why they were celebrating.

These Indians, who performed the most menial of cleaning jobs for the camp, were thoroughly despised by the prisoners behind the barbed-wire fence. All the race superiority of the white man made its appearance in connection with these coloured people, who were often only a shade darker in complexion than those who looked down on them. This was the only point on which the Jewish intellectual and the Nazi could agree at times. Even those, who in their own homeland were persecuted because of their race, despised these Indian servants. Foul epithets were used in speaking of them. In the camp they were seldom called anything other than blacks and niggers. Innumerable times I heard utterances such as: "That damned sweeper should have a flogging." "Quite right, Mr. Colleague." But even these despised people had their guru, their spiritual teacher, who helped them to interpret life understandingly, according to their present circumstances, and who gave them instruction in spiritual matters. In India the path to the highest goal is never closed to any person. Even the castes of thieves and prostitutes have had their own gurus for thousands of years in India.

The latrine cleaner is often too poor to satisfy his hunger, let alone to buy a bit of soap. In the beating torrents of the monsoon, perhaps he has nothing but an old ragged sack for protecting his thin naked shoulders. But yet he can often have a rough though clear conception of the fact that an eternal Atma (in the form of his individual soul and God as the Inner Guide) exists within himself, which wanders through the ages, and that he himself has brought about his hard fate in this life through his deeds in a former existence, and that according to his behaviour in the

present state of being he prepares his destiny in a future life. This teaching is known only to a few of the most profound mystics of the West: "All creatures have existed eternally in the Divine essence ... all beings were, before their creation, one with the essence of God." Yet it is understood by many an Indian latrine cleaner, who walks about in rags. Just as Krishna says in the Bhagavadgita:

"Never was there a time when I, nor thou, nor these lords of men, were not, nor will there ever be a time hereafter when we shall cease to be ... As a man throweth away old garments and putteth on new, even so, the eternal soul, the atma in the body, having quitted its old mortal frame, entereth into others which are new ... The weapon divideth it not, the fire burneth it not, the water corrupteth it not, the wind drieth it not away; for it is indivisible, inconsumable, incorruptible ... Therefore, knowing it to be thus, thou shouldst not grieve."

This ancient wisdom of the indestructability of the essence of all beings, the atma, vaguely imagined in the West, is well-known to the Hindus, to those who steer their cars with a steady hand through the crowds of great tropical cities, or speculate on the exchange quite overcome by the desire for gain, and sometimes to the despised people who perform the most menial jobs for the white sahibs in a concentration camp.

But in the camp there were none of my fellow-men who were interested in the existence of an eternal Atma.

I looked through the barbed wire towards the barracks of the coolies. They all sat in the glow of the fire round about the Valmiki-guru, and listened to his words. I was reminded of the story of Valmiki, whose name is borne by casteless spiritual teachers. He, too, was once despised by all, and his story is of great comfort to all those who have fallen, and who remain in the depths of despair, believing that they can never rise again.

He who acquired the name Valmiki was originally a fallen brahman. In ancient India a brahman who lost his caste was looked upon as lower than the lowest casteless person. This outcast had become a highway robber out of sheer defiance, and he murdered and plundered travellers who passed through the thick forest where he lived in a dark cave in the earth.

Once a seer wandered through this forest. He had no longer any personal feeling for gain or loss on earth. In his boundless sympathy for the fallen, he wandered about in search of souls that were worthy of receiving the greatest treasure of all: bhakti, discerning devotion to God.

The robber rushed out of the thick brush in order to kill and plunder the wanderer. He expected to find treasures on him. Swinging his club over the head of the old man, he was amazed at the bright smile and the child-like innocence reflected there. He hesitated before dealing the blow. "My son, why should you commit such a great crime?" asked the intended victim mildly, and without any sign of fear.



The club fell from the hand of the grim robber. He threw himself before the traveller and touched his forehead to the man's naked foot. Then he lifted his ravaged face, which was wet with tears, and said with a sigh: "Oh, great holy One, I see now what I am. In your light I can see the unbelievable darkness of my life. Oh, give me a holy mantra that can wash away the horrible dirt of my sins."

"Yes, my son, I shall do so," said the wise man. He bent down lovingly over the man who lay on the ground at his feet, until his lips reached the ear of the robber. "Repeat this mantra," he whispered. "Sing the two syllables that form the Name of God, sing: Ra-ma, Ra-ma, Ra-ma ..."

The robber cried out with fright: "Not that word! Not that word! Oh, my father, how could I dare to let my sullied lips utter the Name of God?"

The rishi smiled. "My child, repeat the syllables in reversed order. Sing: Ma-ra, ma-ra, ma-ra ... You know what that means?"

The robber sighed. "Yes, I know what that word means: death. Yes, that is the right word for me."

The hand of the devotee of God lay in blessing on the head of the downcast sinner. The robber dried his eyes, sat on the ground with his legs crossed, back rigid, and his head raised, his eyes half-closed, and his gaze directed to the tip of his nose, as the rules of meditation require, and sang: "Ma-ra, ma-ra, ma-ra ... death, death, death ..."

Many years later the same rishi came wandering through the world and passed through the same forest, stopping at the place where he had once performed initiation for the robber. He looked about. Of course there could be no human there now; only an ant-hill rose on one side of the path. The rishi looked closer, and to his surprise saw that a man's eyes and hair stuck out of the ant-hill. A man sat there motionless in the pose for meditation. He sat so still that the ants had built their dwelling over him undisturbed. He was lost in deep rapture, and only his lips moved. Almost noiselessly he was singing: "Rama, Rama, Rama ..."

The Sanskrit word for ant-hill is Valmiki. The fallen Brahman, the abhorred robber, has been praised for thousands of years now as Valmiki. He became the holy man and poet Valmiki, who composed a version of the epic Ramayana, a bottomless ocean of stories of the life of God as He wandered on earth as the avatara Rama.

While Valmiki had unceasingly repeated the two syllables ma-ra, ma-ra, ma-ra, they had automatically changed in Rama, Rama, Rama ... God, God, God ... And the immeasurable power of the Name of God, according to the legend, had not only washed away all the dirt from the soul of Valmiki, but had also enabled him to look into the bright kingdom of God with the eyes of God's power, and see how God descended upon the earth in order to save it.

"Like wonderful, life-giving streams flowing in every direction from a great inexhaustible lake, the Divine saviours descend from God eternally." Thus it is written in the Holy Scriptures of India.

“Just as innumerable sparks stream in every direction from a great fire, so do the great avatars, the Divine saviours, depart eternally from God’s ancient fire, the fire of love. In order to redeem, they descend upon the earth and other worlds, they remove the burdens of ignorance of these worlds and give bhaktas joy, and then return to their origin, the fire of Divine love.” Thus it is written in the Holy Scriptures of India.

The great fire of the casteless, the untouchables, flamed up into the night. It is not only the casteless, but God, too, who, in a deeper meaning, is called *Untouchable*. Clear sparks flew from the fire. Rejoicing, the latrine cleaners arose when their guru, illumined by the light of the fire, stood up and began to sing. In ecstasy he began to describe God’s love, God’s doings, God’s eternal acts of devotion in all the worlds and towards all beings, high and low, humans and animals. The coolies rejoiced and danced around their teacher and around the fire. As the whirl of happy people moved about in the firelight, their voices rose in chorus. They sang a Name of God. They sang in endless rejoicing: “Krishna! Krishna! Krishna!” They beat on Shiva’s drum and sang the Name of the hidden God on whom Shiva meditates continually with a blissful smile, as he sits and listens into the inner kingdom of Krishna, entwined with snakes, smeared with ashes of the dead, surrounded by the poison of the world of senses.

The peasants in a Hindu village bordering on the south side of the encampment had also lit a fire. And they were beating on Shiva’s drum. They too were dancing about a fire and rejoicing as they sang: “Krishna, Krishna, Krishna! ...”

Is there some great Krishna festival today? I wondered. I had no almanac with me in the camp, in which the festivals of the Hindus were listed. Is it the swing festival of Krishna? This is celebrated in memory of the day when the Divine boy Krishna, who grew up among the cowherds of Brindaban, was swung by his happy playmates, gopas, and the cowherdesses, gopis.

Even the Indian guards, who, in short khaki trousers and khaki leggings, marched to and fro tirelessly in the barbed-wire entrance that was sharply lighted by electricity, marched tonight with almost dancing steps, singing: “Krishna, Krishna, Krishna.”

“Shut up with that whining!” Out of the dark doorway of one of the barracks came a shower of foul words. “You swine! You dirty cattle! You damned niggers! Shut up right away!” To give strength to their swearing and abuse, one of those who had been disturbed in their slumber threw out an empty tin-can, which scraped angrily on the cement outside the barrack. It was as if a stinking stream of manure water had run out into the night.

Frightened and worried over having been the cause of complaint from the imprisoned white sahibs, the Indian soldiers ceased immediately their song to God, and returned quietly to their march between the two barbed-wire fences.

With a heavy heart I sat down on the well-trodden athletic field of the camp. I felt as if a fog had settled down over me.

I thought of my old mother who lived in the Jewish quarters of Vienna, frightened and insulted by people like those who had shrieked from the barracks just now. I saw her face before me, the old worn face under the snow-white hair, and the blue eyes that had gazed so long after me from the open window as I drove to the station on my departure to India. I heard again her brave words of farewell: “We two belong to each other, even if we are separated outwardly.”

I thought of my wife and my child. Had they succeeded in escaping the firm persecution of the Jews? Or had they been sent to some camp in Poland? Were they still alive? Information reached us seldom, and months after the time of occurrence, through the double filters of censorship.

I thought of my guru, Shri Maharaj, who had not received permission to visit me at the camp. He had been willing to make a long and troublesome journey, only to see me for a few minutes in the presence of an officer. He was not allowed to come; only in a few exceptional cases was a short visit permitted for some close relative. And yet Shri was more to me than a father. Everyone who truly desired so could be near his guru, even the despised, ragged men out there, but not I.

But the joy and trust that lay deep down in my heart refused to allow anything to discourage me.

The fires were still burning. Crowds of coolies danced and sang in the bright glow of the firelight. They cried: “Krishna, Krishna, Krishna! ...” The peasants in the village on the south side of the camp still beat their drums and danced about the fire rejoicing: “Krishna, Krishna, Krishna! ...” The marching guards had also begun singing again: “Krishna, Krishna Krishna! ...”

“O thou hidden God to whom all turn” – thus my heart prayed in the night. “O thou God, of whom I know nothing. Let me stand the test. Send me a helper, a guru, that I may learn what I have thus far neglected to learn in my life – love for God.”

## PART THREE

### SADANANDA

#### CHAPTER I

##### MY FRIEND SADANANDA

The coming of Sadananda – The path to the forgotten world – First talk with my new guru – The meaning of “The Friend of the lordless” – Questions which should not be asked.

When I prayed to God for a guru, one was already very near. One day there stood a newcomer outside the kitchen barrack, where a hungry crowd had gathered and the birds of prey circled overhead in eager swarms. He was tall and slender, and his head was shaved. He wore the Indian monk gown, although he was a European. His name was Sadananda. I spoke to him, and he answered in a matter-of-fact way with monosyllables. Our first real conversation took place at night on the football field. There he told me about an antique Greek vase he had once seen. The decoration on it was a wheel with sixteen spokes, and around the wheel were pictures from the ancient Greek mysteries and the inscription: “I have jumped off the wheel of Ixion.”

According to the conception of the ancient Greeks, Ixion was a man loaded with misdeeds, who was bound after death for all eternity to a wheel that turned incessantly – I remembered that much. But I had not grasped the fact that the Greek mysteries refer to our world as the place of misery, where every living being is bound without knowing it to a turning wheel, the wheel of repeated existences in the world of change.

I happened to think of a wheel in an old abandoned mill, which I used to stare at for hours at a time in my childhood. Its spokes were covered with grey moss. It turned round in a dark crevice whose walls were black with age, and cast up the water of the stream in cascades, which immediately fell and dispersed again: gain and loss, honour and ignominy, victory and defeat, joy and sorrow, health and illness, meeting and parting, withering, death and rebirth. The force of personal desire was the water of the stream, which endlessly drives the wheel in the world of change. All the wisdom of India strives to free mankind from this wheel of Ixion. Shri, too, considered this delivery to be the highest goal.

“Delivery from the fire of suffering in the world of change is not the highest goal,” said my companion. “That delivery is only the first step on the infinite path

that leads into God's *forgotten world*, the path on which the guru who lovingly serves God leads his disciple."

"What kind of a path is that? What is the goal?" I asked expectantly.

"The path is love, the goal is love, ever greater, ever more loving service of God. Just as it is the nature of fire to burn, so it is the nature of the soul, the *atma*, to love God. Just as a spark is evidence of a fire, because it is burning, the *atma* is evidence of God, because he loves Him. The spark is the single *atma*, the great fire of love is God. The spark is little and insignificant as compared with the fire from which it emanates. But its infinite insignificance only concerns its outward form. The *atma* is hidden, and knows nothing of his real nature, but when he awakes and begins to love God and is filled with an inexpressible longing to serve Him, then he partakes of His nature, His fullness, pureness, freedom and eternity. Then he is stripped of all selfishness, and strives for nothing but giving joy to God. Then, in devoted service, he can become a part of the Divine inner life."

"Is not the highest goal knowing the truth? My guru taught me so."

"Wisdom is not attained by wanting to know, but by devoted service alone. Only wanting to know is still selfishness and a desire to satisfy egoism."

"Is not Shanti, Divine peace, the highest?" I asked. "Think of the Buddhistic sculptures. Think of the inexpressible peace in the calm smile of the meditating Buddha's countenance. Are not all the religions of the world united in their prayer for the blessing of peace? 'May the Lord bless thee and preserve thee; may He turn His countenance to thee and give thee peace.' "

"Yes, religions are united in praying for peace, since they are still in a preparatory state and are like lessons for obstinate children. They think the only important thing is the washing away of the filth of the earth, and of the world's struggle. Observe the various religious devotees," continued Sadananda distressedly, "all of them want something of God. As if God were a shopkeeper. One demands power. Another prays for riches. A third wants a beautiful young woman. A fourth prays for a son. A fifth, health and a long life. A sixth prays for victory for his side and miserable defeat for the opponent. The Christian asks to enter heaven and enjoy eternal blessedness there. The Hindu wishes to be freed from *samsara*, the burning wheel of the world of change, and then safely sink into rapture for eternity. The Buddhist wishes to enter *nirvana*. All want the same thing, an assurance of peace, security, freedom from suffering. The case is the same with the followers of Shankaracharya. They want to realize that their *atma* is identical with Brahman, sink into the formless Divine light, where all dissension vanishes. Or they even desire to become like God. You, too, Walther Eidlitz, are among these. Did you not sing as you wandered in Himalaya: 'Aham Brahmasmi ... I am Brahman'? Moreover, you have thoroughly misunderstood this sentence from the Upanishads. It means: In my innermost soul, my *atma*, I am of the nature of Brahman, just as the spark is of the same nature as fire."

Sadananda stopped speaking. In silence we walked up and down the length of

the barbed-wire fence. Round about the camp the jackals were shrieking, withdrawing gradually deeper into the forest.

“Shri never insisted that peace was the highest aim. He said rather: ‘For the time being, I shall grant you only peace’,” I resumed after a while. “And I did not even succeed in attaining peace.”

Sadananda laid his hand gently on my shoulder. “Do not grieve, Vamandas, because you are crushed and believe you have lost everything. Krishna is sometimes called Anatha-Bandhu, the Friend of the lordless, the Friend of those who no longer own anything but their destitution and their longing for Him. Believe me, Krishna rejoices more over one who, in spite of a thousand obstructions, longs to love and serve Him, in the crowds and the dirt of the barracks within this barbed wire, than over one who meditates in the shelter and quiet of a clean, calm forest, or a room behind padded doors. You belong to Krishna. And your meditation, your success and failure, and even your illnesses are His. But whoever dares completely to subject himself to God on His terms instead of his own? Many have tried to follow the example of a Divine saviour, and say like him: ‘Thy will be done, not mine.’ But when matters become serious, when the will of God overcomes one, then fear creeps in and one whispers in secret: ‘No, I meant not thus – so far, but no farther.’ No one wants to believe that God can at times make His appearance in the form of a catastrophe, a complete breakdown. But believe me, if one can prevail upon oneself in the hands of God, then he need never worry. God takes over the responsibility for him, for all his actions. Then it is of no consequence whether he happens to be in an abyss in the world of change, or in the kingdom of heaven, for he is always in God’s kingdom of love, playing a part in the drama of God and His eternal followers, of which the world knows nothing.

Peace, Nirvana, longed for by so many, is only an intermediary state on the path to God’s real kingdom. To be sure, many remain forever in this wonderful ante-room. But he who dares to penetrate farther, with a desire to devote himself to God yet more, does not lose peace thereby. True peace is not only the becoming free from stress. The freedom from passion, so highly valued by the Indian yogi, is very much over-estimated. True peace means preserving the certainty that in the depth of one’s being one is ever inseparably united with God, in all situations and through all suffering.”

Once more we walked silently for a while, “Svamiji,” I asked quietly, “what has your guru told you about his understanding of why we live? Why do we have these earthly bodies?”

Sadananda became ardent. “My guru said: ‘We have been given this sluggish body in order to let the fire of every breath we take consume it in our devotion to God.’ But I do not expect you to understand this as yet, Vamandas. You do not even know yet who God, who Krishna, is ...”

“Oh, how I wish I could behold God,” I said.

“It is not a question of your beholding God,” my companion corrected me severely. “It is much more a question of God seeing you, that He may be drawn to you by the beauty and purity in your longing for affectionate loving service. When a person wants to see God, this wish is often a desire for self-advancement. Just as humans degrade all earthly phenomena in their selfishness, by transforming them to objects, relating them to themselves, and enjoying them so do some of them try to enjoy God.”

“How can I free myself from such egoism?” I asked.

“One should not ask such questions, either,” answered Sadananda harshly. “Even this question arises out of egoism. Pray to Krishna, the Unknown, the Hidden, to give you the strength sometime in the future honestly to beg to serve Him truly, and learn to love Him ... It is late. We must sleep. Good night, Vamandas.”

## CHAPTER II

### TEACHER AND DISCIPLE

Teaching in the midst of distractions – Sadananda's story – The golden Avatar – The scientist and scholar who taught Sadananda – Prisoners' oaths, and verses from the Bhagavatam – Spies and questioning.

This meeting on the dark football field opened the way for many similar dialogues with Sadananda. Often our conversation turned quite unexpectedly in this direction, as we wandered up and down the length of the barbed-wire fence, and often even in the daytime, when sitting in the midst of a crowd of noisy fellow-prisoners, peeling potatoes outside the kitchen barrack. He could fling out a short utterance, the meaning of which was not understood by the others. At times he sought me up in my barrack, or I came to him and sat an hour or so on his bed. He lived very uncomfortably. His neighbour was a musician who had become degenerate in the tropics, and who most of the time smelled strongly of liquor. He traded in all kinds of wares with his bed as his headquarters, and just now played everlastingly on an old gramophone that he had newly acquired. Sadananda was kindly disposed towards this neighbour. He did not differentiate between people with civil virtues and the so-called asocial element. He even held that a criminal or a harlot often had greater prospects for a sudden and complete conversion than a law-abiding citizen. There were many examples of this in the Holy Scriptures of India, as well as in the Gospels. He referred to the stories of Maria Magdalena and the robber on the cross.

Every time I came to Sadananda during those days, a most frightful noise met my ears as I entered the door. Bartering was going on from the bed of his neighbour, and, furthermore, card-players sat around the only table in the barrack, slamming down the dirty cards. Often enough they got into dispute with one another. Sadananda did not seem to be the least disturbed by all this. He called out cheerfully: "So nice of you to come and call on me, Vamandas. Come and sit on my bed." A bright dome of peace seemed to hover invisibly over the miserable camp bed. When he began his narration, my ears became deaf to all the noise.

"What brought you to India?" I asked him.

"The longing of my heart. And my meeting Svami Bon, an Indian who had been sent to Europe by his teacher, my guru later on. And above all, an Indian book that I came across in the library of the University of Berlin. It was a book about Krishna Chaitanya."

"Ah, the secret Avatar of the age of discord, the golden Avatar! Shri had told me about him."

A smile broke out on Sadananda's severe countenance. "So Shri has told you



about Krishna Chaitanya,” he said gladly. “According to what you have said, I thought that your teacher belonged to the school of Shankaracharya. You know, of course, that Chaitanya entered the order of Shankaracharya to redeem it from within, since his teaching contained only a half-truth.”

“Is not Shankaracharya right? Isn’t the world corruptible, an illusion and a delusion, yet filled with heavy pain?”

“Yes, but at the same time the world has its foundation always in God, the eternal God full of blessedness.”

“Yes, of course, what we think of as the world is really the impersonal, Divine Brahman.”

“The impersonal Brahman is only the radiance from the figure of the personal God ... It is not as simple as you believe, Vamandas. In God, the most unbelievable opposites are harmoniously united. God is simultaneously personal and impersonal. The world is separate from God, and at the same time not separate from God. The Divine saviour, the avatar, is separate from God, and yet not separate from Him. The teaching of bheda-abheda, of being separate yet not separate, as Krishna Chaitanya has explained it, is inexhaustible. When, during my studies at the University, I investigated the different systems of the Western and the Eastern philosophers, I always wished that sometime I might come across a philosophical system in which we would continue eternally without coming to an end. I have found everything I searched for in the philosophy of Krishna Chaitanya and His disciples, the treasures of which the world has not the faintest notion.”

“And your own guru?”

“My guru Bhakti Siddhanta Sarasvati was a follower of Krishna Chaitanya, and he lived in the loving service of God and made it known.”

With indescribable affection and tenderness, Sadananda began to tell me about his guru. In his youth, he had been a well-known scientist and scholar. One day the young scholar went to a hermit in the forest, and asked to be initiated. The spiritual teacher he had sought was a wandering ascetic, almost naked, wearing only a loin-cloth. His name was Gaura Kishora. Harshly, the old man ignored the wish of the scholar. “Learning and reputation in the world mean nothing before Krishna,” he said abruptly. But the young scholar did not cease his prayers, and finally the old man accepted him as his only disciple, persuaded by the endurance and affectionate loving service he had shown.

There were remarkable resemblances in the lives of Bhakti-Siddhanta Sarasvati, who had his home near the Ganges in India, and his European disciple, whom he called Sadananda. The latter, too, had breathed the harsh air of science in his youth. At the University of Leipzig he had studied comparative religion, learning various languages such as Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese. After receiving his doctor’s degree, and publishing a new edition of a well-known standard work in the history of religion, an unusually promising career as a university teacher was opened up to him. But he gave up all plans of this kind, got rid of all his

possessions, and set out for India, in order to drink at the sources and to serve the lotusfeet of his guru, Bhakti-Siddhanta Sarasvati.

Sadananda showed me some photographs of his teacher. I was startled at the close resemblance between one of these and Sadananda himself. I looked at the photograph and at my friend, and at the photograph again. It was not enough to say that they looked like brothers, it seemed rather to be the same person at an early and a later period of life. The same carriage, the same expression, the same inner strength expressed in the gesture of the hand.

When I pointed out the resemblance to Sadananda he denied it with honest modesty. Gradually, as I learned to know my friend better, I noticed that he was pining from the suffering caused by the separation from his teacher. The latter left this world in January 1937. There seemed to have been a deep spiritual bond between this guru of God's love and his European disciple. On one occasion, when Sadananda broke his customary reservation, he told me that his guru, Bhakti-Siddhanta Sarasvati, had once uttered in the presence of some of his native disciples, these words: "You, Sadananda, and I, we have been together through all eternity."

"Fate has made it difficult for you," I said, "half the world lay between you and your guru. How easily it could have happened that you had never met him."

"It was bound to be so," Sadananda replied slowly. "It was bound to be so, in order to find out whether the inner urge of my heart was strong enough to overcome all the obstacles and fight its way against the current. And yet now it seems to me to be a wonder that I succeeded in finding him. However, it was all too short a while that I was allowed to serve him this time. Next time I hope it will be longer."

"You dirty dog, didn't you hear me say ace of clubs? I'll skin you alive," shouted one of the card players, a well-known wrestler, the owner of a school of gymnastics in southern India. He looked like a giant suckling with swelling arm muscles and treacherous eyes.

"Yes, prick up your ears, so as not to miss any of the highly interesting conversation over there," Sadananda taunted me sorrowfully, when he noticed that I could not resist listening to the quarrelling of the card players. "You ask questions from a desire for sensation, just like everybody else. How well my guru understood this, when among his last words he pointed out for us seriously the following: 'As you withdraw from the lotus feet of Krishna, you will be overcome in the same measure by the enticing and repulsive forces of this world.' "

"Put out the lights! Put out the lights!" cried the European soldiers angrily, as they went on their round at this late hour of the night along the fence enclosing the Indian camp. Swearing, the card players hung blankets over the windows of the barrack. Then they continued playing.

"Take a sheet of paper and a pencil," said Sadananda. "I shall dictate a Sanskrit verse for you from Bhagavata-Purana, which can perhaps be of help to you."

‘The knot of the heart  
(the knot in the form of the false ‘I’ and ‘mine’,  
which binds the atma)  
will dissolve by itself.  
All doubts shall be cleared away  
and even his karma,  
his deeds, and the inevitable consequences of his deeds,  
shall disappear,  
when God is seen directly in his atma.’ ”

Many question arose within me as I walked back in the darkness from Sadananda’s barrack to mine. And other questions, which had troubled me my whole life, now received their answer. I was irresistibly drawn to Sadananda’s quarters. But it was not so easy to visit him, for at first he and I belonged to different groups within the barbed wire. He was German and I was of Jewish birth. I was spied on incessantly, observed and questioned: “Where have you been? What have you been doing during these last hours? To whom have you spoken?” And reports of all this were sent to the delegation that was considering which of us could be set free. Again and again I had to conquer attacks of fear, break the laws of the opposing parties and ignore the rules of the boycott, again and again I had to summon the courage needed to enable us to meet. But Sadananda appreciated the fact that I showed courage.

## CHAPTER III

### A NEW ROOM-MATE

Sharing a dish-washing room with Sadananda – A new room-mate – Piercing cries in the night – Sadananda's aggressive grace – The clothes and the real man – The breaker of enchantments.

After a removal and a consequent reorganization of the entire camp, Sadananda and I were placed in the same barrack. We lived in a little room by ourselves. There was even space for a third bed between our two.

This room had been the dish-washing room in a mess for noncommissioned officers, and was not intended for living in. It was built as a partition of the veranda. It was as hot as an oven there. The tropical sun beat down on the low slanting roof and the heavy brick walls. Besides, the athletic field was right next to it. It was impossible to open the little whitewashed window shutters, for then some stray ball would be sure to break the window immediately. To the left and to the right of our sleeping-place people sat all day long, crowded into tight rows on the veranda, watching the football matches. With every successful or unfortunate kick of the ball, these people shrieked enthusiastically or indignantly.

Meanwhile, my friend sat on his bed with his legs crossed under him. He worked eagerly, bending low as he wrote his comprehensive work. A little metal box, placed on his knees, served as a table. Beside him stood another larger metal trunk which held his books and manuscripts. All the volumes lay in exemplary order. My friend could lay his hands immediately on any of the pages, even in the darkness. In the lid of the open trunk there was a portrait of Sadananda's guru.

Shouts and whistling sounded anew from outside. Again the football bounced against our shutters. A sound of broken glass reached our ears. I tried in vain to suppress my annoyance, which was rising into what could easily become hatred of my fellows. "Is it not necessary to learn to love human beings before daring to aspire to loving God?" I asked.

"You cannot have any true love for human beings without knowing God's love," was the prompt reply. "Humans, yes, all the creatures of the world are like flowers of a flowering tree. The root of the tree is God. If you water the root, all the leaves and flowers of the tree will be refreshed. Love overflows. But you must not mistake the masks, the garments, I mean the bodies of human beings, their sensuality and their desire, for the true person, the atma, which for a while assumes one of these strange mantles. The atma is not a Nazi, a communist, an Englishman, a Jew, a Brahman, a prize-fighter, nor a man nor a woman. The eternal, inherent law of every atma is to be Krishna's eternal servant, even if it has forgotten this. You must try to concentrate your gaze on the atma."

“Can you do so?”

“I endeavour to do so.”

In our new quarters there was one inmate who was homeless. His monk's gown was similar to Sadananda's, although it was yellow instead of orange. He was one of the few European Buddhists in the camp. Some of them were excellent characters and very learned, but unfortunately I came into contact with an outsider. He was fat and had a naturally bald, shiny head. His name was Gross.

The contents of Gross' brain presented a strange picture. In his youth he had stood in a shop in a little town, where he sold herrings and cheese. Later he had become a strolling photographer, dragging his camera about with him and snapping the visitors at various seaside resorts, masculine and feminine, in more or less stages of undress. Suddenly he was seized with a longing for peace and certainty, and he made his way to Ceylon, where he became a Buddhist monk. But the part-learning that had been assembled in his brain like a tangled mass of brush, together with his aggressive nature, made him unsuitable for the difficult, profound mental work demanded by the teachings of Buddha.

Outwardly, he kept the rules of this order very strictly. At roll-call, mornings and evenings, he refused to stand in line with his fellow-prisoners. He would not take part in the work divided up by the others, such as peeling potatoes, chopping wood and other duties. He explained that the rules of his order forbade his performing work for laymen. He succeeded in holding his point of view.

With slow, dignified steps, always with his gaze fastened on the ground, according to the rules, he wandered up and down the length of the barbed-wire fencing, with his fat body wrapped in a yellow gown. Now and then he succeeded in finding a disciple who walked beside him for a few days, listening to his discourse, and later on deserting him and making fun of him. He was considered to be intolerant, and a spreader of slander and ugly rumours.

Following the removal and reorganization of the camp, all of the barracks refused to harbour Gross. Defiantly, he placed his bed out-of-doors near the football field, where the yellow clothes he hung up were a source of annoyance to many.

“He is an old man,” said Sadananda to me. “Winter is cold here. There is room in our nook. Shall we invite Gross to live with us?”

“He is aggressive,” I said cautiously. “There will be unpleasantness. I know that he has told many that I practise black magic.”

“Hm, Gross hasn't the slightest idea of what black magic is, and those who listen to him have still less,” laughed Sadananda. “But in any case it is wrong of them to scoff at his monk's gown.”

I do not know what the real intention of my friend was in saying this, whether he wanted to give me a picture of how one should be or how one should not be. Our new room-mate moved in ceremoniously, and encamped between our two beds. He lent me a book in which I found a citation from Buddha, which I can never forget:

He scorned me, he beat me, he conquered me by force! –  
If you make room for this thought, you cannot be free of hate.  
For through this hate, there will be no peace for hatred upon  
earth, only by not hating can hatred find peace.

Behind his mosquito net, and the yellow cloths he hung over it, Gross sat every day on his bed between Sadananda's and mine, with his legs crossed, meditating for many hours. He always carried a skull about with him, and, placing it before him, he meditated on the corruptibility of the earth. "I radiate sympathy and love for all human beings," he told me. But in spite of his deep trance, he was remarkably well aware of what was going on about him. He who had given up all possessions, insisted upon all his personal rights, his share of the floor of the barrack, etc. However, he was not so eager when it was a question of sweeping this floor – the rules of his order forbade him. "I understand that you wish to pick a quarrel with me," he said to me several times. Both Sadananda and I walked on tiptoe so as not to disturb him.

Gross had the peculiarity of often emitting piercing cries in his sleep, calling out "huhuhu ..." as if he were in a nightmare.

"Don't shriek like that," said Sadananda harshly, once when it became unbearable, and he turned on the light. We were in the habit of turning off the light before the required time in order that our room-mate might sleep undisturbed.

Gross sat up then, blinking, and it took some time for him to come to his senses. "It is not to be wondered at that I shout in my sleep," he said deliberately. "There are two ears too many in this room." He glanced meaningfully in my direction, for he was hinting at the secret artifices which, according to his belief, I practised in order to upset him.

At this, Sadananda dropped all his deference, and went straight to attack. He did not call his room-mate "your Reverence", nor did he address him by his Buddhistic monk's name, which otherwise he was in the habit of doing out of respect for the gown he wore. He called him by his old name from the days of the ware-shop. "Gross, don't try anything like that," he reprimanded him. "You don't shriek because of any dark and evil things about you, but rather because you yourself are filled with ugly secret thoughts. That is why you are tortured by nightmares. Because of this you live steadily in agony, and believe that others threaten you. You declare that you radiate sympathy and love, but instead you nurse your hatred. You say that you practise contemplation, but instead of this you sit there like a spider in its web, listening for something that might disturb you, so that afterwards you can complain about it. I have never in all my life seen anyone so thoroughly enveloped in egoism as you. You believe yourself to be the centre of the world that surrounds you. You dishonour the respectable monk's gown of Buddha that you wear – you old hypocrite!"

With his fat countenance drawn into lines that were meant to express the fact that he was accustomed to suffering the bitterness of injustice, Gross listened to this torrent of words. With the same expression on his face, he moved the next day, taking his skull and his writings on mercy and love somewhere else.

“Why were you so harsh with Gross?” I asked when our room-mate had left us.

“To awaken his *atma*, his soul. Even if he runs away now with his feelings outraged and injured, the impression will remain until his next incarnation. This was a far better way of helping him than if I had nourished his egoism and vanity. My guru was a master in this manner of helping. He called it aggressive grace, grace through attack. But in the West it is so easy to mistake the garments for the true figure. You know that I value the social endeavour of the West very highly. Yes, welfare institutions for the old and the sick, the right of all to have work and education, it is excellent, all of it. Protection for children and those who are ill, weak or persecuted, this must exist. In our days it is, in fact, almost the only thing that distinguish humans from animals. But when I think of all these efforts at making the corruptible, changeable world pleasant for humans, it often seems to me to be the same as if somebody had fallen in the water and was in danger of drowning. Then another comes running to help him, and manages to rescue – his clothes and his hat and his spectacles. The drowning man himself, the true person – the *atma* – is allowed to go under.”

Gradually I learned to realize that every word uttered by Sadananda was the expression of *bhakti*, discerning love of God, and that all his actions, whether friendly or scornful – he could be exceedingly harsh and stern – were based on an effort to waken the *atma* in the people he contacted, to make the *atma* realize its true nature, to be a servant of Krishna. The inmates of the camp respected him, in spite of his monk’s gown which invited derision. They were afraid of him, because he was quicker than they were at repartee. He made them uneasy, and they avoided him.

When Sadananda injured one’s feelings, his words could wound one’s self-love so deeply that the tears welled up in one’s eyes. Whoever experienced this often felt as if the very foundation of his being had been uprooted. But the blow that was so painful did not come from the intolerant sword of violence, it was more like a purifying flash of lightning. It was the same kind of a blow as that with which many of our fairy tales end – for that matter, nearly all of them originate from India. There the enchanted person himself begs: “Cut off my head. Cut off the animal head that has been placed on me.” If the other hesitates, the enchantment is not broken. But if the rescuer strikes with his sword, the enchanted person is freed from the curse, and assumes his true form again.

But it is only in fairy tales that the princes that have been changed into animals or goblins have the courage to ask, of their own accord: “Break the enchantment, give me the true shape of love. Strike, delivering sword!” In the camp they spoke unkindly of Sadananda. “He is a renegade who has betrayed his European birth and

become a nigger.” And hateful reports and false accusations were sent in to the investigation committee.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE CHURCH BEHIND THE BARBED WIRE

The imprisoned missionaries – Old Pater Lader – Dr. Fuchs, the Protestant priest – Jesuits with notebooks – Sadananda's lectures – Theological controversies – The guru holds his own.

There were a great many Christian missionaries confined in the Indian camp. One came across them in nearly every section. The entire life of the Church and all its difficulties were revealed within the barbed-wire enclosure. In the intimacy of life in the barracks, it became inevitably apparent that a poor mortal was hidden inside the clergyman's apparel, with the usual human weaknesses. However, during my six years of confinement in India it was often a great comfort to me to know that within the camp, which was rife with hate and quarrelling, there were groups of people who endeavoured to fix their gaze on eternal matters. For example, every Catholic priest in the camp held a quiet service each morning, and on Sundays an altar was raised in the dining-room barrack and Divine service was held there, where prisoners otherwise assembled in order to eat, greedy and hungry. I rejoiced when on Easter Day this room shook with jubilation over the Resurrection, and when Catholics and Protestants together joined in the choir singing. I tried honestly to see the priests of the various religious faiths as successors to His followers to whom Christ once said: "Receive the Holy Spirit! ... Go out for my sake, and make all people your disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

But bearing the message of the Holy Ghost out into the world surely means also acknowledging the Holy Ghost in all His manifestations. I had learned to know the love of God, as Sadananda explained it, as a revelation which glowed with a holy spirit. I was very much surprised by the fact that many of the professed Christians spoke disparagingly and with contempt of Sadananda. It also surprised me that most of them had not the slightest conception of the powerful stream of pure theism that has existed since immemorial times in the many-sided spiritual life of India. The priests and other spiritual brethren spoke condescendingly of the "poor heathens", among whom Sadananda was included. Only one of the many Christian missionaries with whom I became acquainted in the Indian prison camp had previously made himself acquainted with the ancient culture and religion of the people whom they had set out to convert. But many of them tried to make up for their neglect in this matter during their imprisonment.

It was a strange little gathering that for a while met regularly in our washroom, while the football enthusiasts clamoured just outside, and the big leather balls

bounced dully against our wall.

I remember some of those who attended Sadananda's course very well. Old Pater Lader sat there on a stool that he had brought along. His rough workman's hands were clasped on his knees. His coarse, wrinkled face was surrounded by an unkempt greyish beard. His fellow-clergymen were amused at his expense, and they laughed at "Kind Pater Lader", for he was not very particular about his appearance, and his white monk's cowl was often stained or fastened wrong. In his youth he had been a blacksmith's journeyman in Württemberg. Later he became one of the brethren of a religious order, and travelled to India, called there by some inner urge. There he had been caught unawares by the First World War, and had sat behind barbed wire for six years in an Indian prison camp. During the period between the two wars he had studied Latin, labouriously worked his way through a seminary and had been ordained as a priest. After that, for many years he had lived in an Indian village in the midst of the jungle, in solitude, in poverty, and the greatest privation.

"You don't know the Indian village," he said to me. "You know nothing about the superstition and fanaticism in such a village. You are acquainted only with the highest Indian culture and the Upanishads."

And yet he loved that Indian village, although he had but seldom succeeded in converting anyone during his long years of service. He loved the Upanishads, too. In the early days of my imprisonment he had come to me in order to borrow some Sanskrit texts. Of the many Christian missionaries I got to know in the camp, old Lader was the only one who had learned Sanskrit before entering the camp.

Beside Lader sat the Protestant priest, Dr. Fuchs. He wore well-fitting, spotless clothes, smiled complacently most of the time, and had a private liking for intrigue. But he was a talented man and had a longing in his soul. He often came to us in the little washroom, even when no lectures were in progress. Sadananda was harsh with him, as he was with all whom he estimated, or expected anything of. "He could have great possibilities," Sadananda said of him. "But he has had too much external success. He needs a hard blow of destiny which would crush him completely. Then his soul could really awake."

Beside Pastor Fuchs sat a layman, a quiet, white-haired geologist. Before his imprisonment he had explored mines in South America and India. So far he had only dealt with purely natural science, and had been a convinced atheist. After one of Sadananda's lectures he said to me seriously: "I should never have believed that anything like this was possible. The world in which I have lived heretofore is not the complete world. It is as if a veil had been drawn aside. A breeze from another, truer reality is felt when your friend speaks of Krishna." He looked at me aghast. "Have we entirely forgotten the true world?"

His wife was imprisoned a thousand miles away in the women's camp in south India, where I had stayed a short while. When, after many years of applying and waiting, all the separated married couples were finally reunited in a newly-erected,

barbed-wire-enclosed family prison camp, Dr. Schultheiss left us. He wrote repeatedly to Sadananda, and sent him as a Christmas gift a carved wooden plate that he made.

Tirelessly the three Jesuits noted down Sadananda's words in memorandum books they held on their knees. They were used to studying for examinations, and were also acquainted with scientific work. Not until they are forty-five years of age are they full-fledged members of their order. The novices wasted no time in the camp, they listened to lectures as previously. The Jesuits had established a complete theological faculty in the prison camp. The three who attended Sadananda's course were as unlike one another as they could be.

Young Pater Zehner did not make much of a stir. Nobody in the camp spoke unkindly of him, in spite of his white cowl and the beard that framed the furrowed brown face, from which his large eyes looked out. Without being asked, he went ahead and helped when a heavy trough of potatoes had to be carried to the kitchen, or when volunteers were sought for some difficult task. It was pleasant to sit beside him when sharing work with him. When he spoke, he chose his words carefully. "We too have them," he mumbled approvingly, when Sadananda hinted at the secrets of the Divine inner life, which are mirrored in the cult of Radha-Krishna. Zehner meant the love that streams between the three Divine persons of the Trinity. But he was evidently quite embarrassed at his own words.

Sonnenbichler looked like the archangel Michael carved in wood, and was as strong as a lion. At that time he was still only a novice. Later on he was ordained in the camp. For this purpose, one of the interned Italian bishops left his barbed-wire enclosure and came over to ours. The tall, light-haired youth lay prone during the service like the trunk of a fallen tree before the altar in the dining-room barrack. The following few days he went about in a trance. In reality his wish had been to become a sculptor. "Oh! how terribly difficult it is to learn Sanskrit," he groaned, as he stood beside me one day as we rinsed our tin plates. "How much easier Latin is! And those new, subtle lines of thought, that mobile thinking that one must master first. My brain refuses, it rises like an unruly horse."

"It was exactly the same for me in the beginning," I comforted him.

Pater Sprechmann, the third Jesuit attending Sadananda's course, came, like Sonnenbichler, from a village in Bavaria. His accent betrayed this, even though his theological studies at the University of Freiburg had put a veil of scholasticism over his country-bred straightforwardness. His eager, forced speech often hurried a long way ahead of his thoughts. It sometimes seemed as if he wanted to seize the Divine secrets with a crowbar. Dr. Sprechmann was versatile and ambitious. He was not only a theologian, but also an excellent athlete and long-distance runner, and he trained daily in the gymnastic hall. One of his aims was to win the "gold medal" for athletics in the camp.

Sadananda stood before the borrowed blackboard; he was slim and dressed in an orange-coloured garment which he himself had dyed, and on his feet he wore the

Indian sandals that are common in this country. “The Krishna you have heard about, who is named in books, the Divine hero and teacher in the epic Mahabharata and in the Bhagavadgita, is not the complete Krishna, Krishna in His entirety,” he explained. “And even the Divinity who is the foundation of the world, and the God who creates, holds and maintains the world, receiving it at last into Himself – even these are only outer aspects of Krishna. The true Krishna is a deep mystery.”

Sadananda wrote on the blackboard in his fine, bold handwriting the syllable “krish”, using the Devanagari script.

“The word Krishna comes from the Sanskrit root ‘krish’,” he explained. “ ‘Krish’ means to attract. There is not only physical gravitation, but spiritual as well. Just as the physical sun attracts the earth and the planets so that they rotate about it, so does Krishna attract the souls, the atmas of all beings, to Himself by means of love, and indescribable beauty. Krishna is throughout consciousness. He is described with the metaphor ‘the spiritual sun of all consciousness’. The atma stands in the same relation to Him, to God, as the rays of the sun to the sun itself.”

Sadananda searched among his papers. “I shall dictate to you a hymn to Krishna from the Middle Ages. It originates from Jagadananda, a devoted friend and disciple of Chaitanya:

The atma is a particle of spiritual consciousness;  
Krishna is the sun of all that is spiritually conscious.  
They who behold Krishna eternally, love and honour Him.  
He who turns away his face from Krishna, makes place for desire.  
Maya, who is near him, seizes and embraces him.  
When the demon assumes the upper hand, the spirit is destroyed.  
The same thing happens when the atma falls into Maya’s clutches.  
‘I am the servant of Krishna,’ this he had forgotten.  
He becomes a wage-earner of Maya, and wanders about aimlessly.  
Sometimes a half-god, sometimes a demon, sometimes master,  
sometimes slave ...

By those dedicated to God, he learns the truth about his own being.  
When he knows this, he no longer bothers about the changeable world.  
Weeping, he cries: ‘Oh, Krishna, I am after all Thy servant.  
When I left Thy feet, I reaped only destruction.’  
And if only once he calls in prayer ‘Krishna!’  
Krishna is merciful and frees him from attachment to the changeable world.  
He leaves Maya behind him, and yearns to serve Krishna.  
And lovingly, lovingly he approaches the lotus feet of Krishna ...”

“But what is Maya?” asked Sprechmann. “One often hears the word Maya, and now you use it. I find it interesting. Will you explain its meaning?”

“Gladly,” answered Sadananda. “The infinite power of God appears in two aspects, attractive and repulsive, leading to the feet of God, and driving away from the feet of God. Think of the two forces centripetal and centrifugal. The force which, according to God’s will, drives away from Him and hides Him, is Maya.”

“I do not understand what you mean by ‘the force that, according to God’s will, drives away from Him and hides Him’,” muttered Dr. Sprechmann.

Sadananda wrote on the blackboard the syllable “ma”. “The word Maya comes from the Sanskrit root ‘ma’,” he explained calmly, but a secret fire, familiar to me, flashed in his eyes. “Ma means to measure. As long as we egotistically measure the things about us, value them according to the measure of joy or pain they give us, we are in the power of Maya. Maya, who hides God from us, is, according to the decree of God, ruler over the measurable universe.”

“Does not the universe belong to God?” I asked.

“Maya’s universe has come into being through the grace of God, in order that the souls who do not serve and love Him, but rather wish to enjoy and measure and value egotistically, shall have a dwelling-place.”

“The universe is therefore a concentration camp of God?” Dr. Schultheiss shot in, dismayed.

“No, an educational institution,” my friend replied calmly. “When we notice that suffering and bitterness lie at the bottom of every pleasure, and when we turn towards God, longing for unselfish devotion, we touch the heart of God, and He draws us back to Him. But we cannot conceive of such a thing with our senses and our measuring intelligence. As long as we degrade the phenomena of the world by making them objects of our desire for pleasure, we can understand neither the world nor God. God’s real existence is absolutely inapproachable for our logic.”

Sprechmann raised his forefinger. “Do you deny therefore the possibility of a logical evidence of God? If so, I must oppose this.”

Pastor Fuchs cleared his throat. “For once I have the same opinion as the Catholic Church.”

“The Mother Church,” said Pater Lader slowly.

“Is not our universe, with its innumerable Milky Ways, that lie millions and billions of light years away, is not every drop of water a testimony of the majesty of God?” continued Dr. Fuchs, now in a loud unctuous voice. “My point of view is, that the farther we penetrate into the secrets of the universe by means of the acquisitions of modern natural science, the nearer we approach God.”

“The brain of man can probably imagine a faint shadow of that aspect of God which is turned towards the world,” said Sadananda. “But God does not exist only in His majestic aspect. God does not exist only for the sake of the world. Even a few European mystics acknowledge this. God has a personal existence. Our universe, that is bound by time and space, has the same relation to God’s kingdom as the breakers on the seashore have to the boundless sea. I can only repeat that one cannot enter God’s kingdom by wanting to know, but only through loving

devotion.”

“You spoke earlier about the force that draws us to the feet of God,” said Pater Zehner slowly. “Did you not call that force Radha?”

Sadananda’s pale face brightened. Silence filled the room for a moment. “Radha is a Divine entity, the original shape of the love of God. No one can approach God without the condescension of Radha, without Her bearing one’s soul.”

Sadananda wrote the syllable “radh” on the blackboard. “The word Radha comes from ‘radh’,” he said. “The Sanskrit root radh means to love, to serve, to satisfy by discerning service. That discerning love is not measurable. For even if love in\_creases for all eternity, it yet has no end, no bottom. And the immeasurable kingdom of God is woven of love ...”

Pater Zehner nodded happily.

Sadananda continued: “In the hidden kingdom of God, Radha serves Krishna ever with unspeakable, loving devotion. And at the same time She is one with Him in the same way as the glow of the fire is one with the fire, and as the scent of the rose is one with the rose. Radha never leaves the innermost kingdom of God. But one of Her aspects is mercifully turned towards the world. That aspect is called in Christian theology the Holy Ghost.”

The fountain-pens of the Jesuits glided quickly over the paper.

“I believe you have heard enough for today,” said Sadananda, and closed his volume. Those attending the lecture left us.

Sadananda bent down over the open trunk containing his books and carefully laid in the papers he had used. Silently, he looked at the picture of his guru.

“I know, of course, that my efforts will not bear fruit this time,” he said. “I am probably giving one or two of my listeners material that can later on be used in controversial treatises against Indian theism. But in any case I force them to pronounce the Name Krishna, to listen to the Name Krishna. And I am convinced that the Divine Name Krishna has such a force that it can help them in their next incarnation to approach the inner kingdom of God.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NAME OF GOD

We travel a thousand miles – The Name of God – Mystical power of sound – Importance of the Names of God – Meditation on the Logos – Monkeys race after our train.

One day I happened to hear the mantra of the Name of God on the lips of Sadananda. It was on an occasion when the whole camp had once again moved more than a thousand miles away from the barbed-wire enclosure in south India, to newly erected ones in North India at the foot of Himalaya. We had been on our way several days, and still had much of the journey ahead of us; all of us were locked into railway-carriages together with all our belongings, and we were carefully guarded. Sadananda was leaning out of an open window in an old third-class carriage “for Indian soldiers”, and seemed to be oblivious of those about him. He sang out into the wind, just as the sun sank behind the golden Indian plains.

The words were familiar to me, the melody, too. Where had I heard them before? My heart vibrated longingly at the sound, like a tuning-fork whose tones are awakened when harmonizing tones reach it.

It was the same wonderful sound that had met my ears one evening shortly after my arrival in India, when together with Shri I ascended a flight of weathered steps, in the midst of Himalaya’s flowering forests, and heard the song of the monks from the terrace of the pilgrim shelter. The sound and the secret that I suspected behind it had attracted me irresistibly, more strongly than anything that I had ever met with in all my life. I had pursued the sound, seeking it in vain – and now I had found it on a prisoner’s train that was rolling through India.

Night had fallen. The good-natured Indian soldiers who guarded us leaned forward wearily, as they sat with their loaded guns between their knees. My comrades were playing cards. “What was that you sang just now?” I asked.

Sadananda looked at me questioningly, as if seeing deep down into my soul. “That was the mantra of the Name of God,” he said.

Outside the train windows it was getting darker.

My friend instructed me: “The first revelation of the Divine world in which the soul can participate, is sound. Before beholding the kingdom of God, one hears it with an inner ear. Think of Logos, the word of God, from which all things have come to be.

The Name of God is identical with God. One should say rather: the Names of God. For in His mercy God has revealed to us many of His Names, both outer and inner ones, which encompass the whole of His Divine power.”

“The Padmapurana says: ‘The Name of God is spiritual substance (cit), pure,

eternal, perfectly free from matter (maya), since God's Name is not separate from God.' Therefore the Name of God has not only the power of easily washing away all sin, but can even untie the knot of the heart and grant the love of God."

"When one whose atma is completely filled with the love of God sings the Name of God, this has the power of waking a sleeping atma. What happens then is called initiation. By listening devotedly, while another sings the Name, and by singing it oneself, one's atma is led to its real nature, which is loving service for God."

Monotonously the song of the wheels sounded against the rails.

"And meditation, yoga ... all the other paths to God, which Shri spoke of and which the Bhagavadgita mentions, and the Gospels ...?"

"There are different paths. But we bhaktas are convinced that our own age, kaliyuga, has shrouded these paths more or less in darkness. However, when one sings the Name of God, the darkness is dispelled. Krishna Chaitanya, the Divine golden avatar of kaliyuga, has brought the Name of God down to earth as no other saviour before him has done. Hundreds of times he repeated for His disciples an ancient verse from the Naradapurana: 'Except for the Name of God, except for the Name of God, except for the Name of God, verily, except for the Name of God, there is nowhere, nowhere, nowhere, a refuge in the age of kaliyuga.' "

"Of course," continued Sadananda, "you must not believe that as soon as any person mentions the word Krishna, that it is the Name of God being uttered. The earthly clang of the Name, which your physical ears can detect, is only the shadow of the spiritual clang. It has been said: 'Krishna's Name, and all that is contained in that Name, cannot be perceived by the physical senses. But when a person, with a desire to serve, turns towards Krishna, the Name reveals itself to his tongue.' However, even the shadow of God's Name is capable of doing a great deal. It helps to lead the heart towards God. It washes away sin. Do you know what sin is, Vamandas? To be severed from God is the only real sin there is."

The lights of Delhi were getting nearer, and the endless barrack-like rows of houses, homes for clerks, coolies and street-sweepers, civil service men, and workers in the capital city of India. In a brightly-lit parlour car, which slowly glided along towards the big city on a side-track, two persons were seated. One was a high English Government official dressed in a dinner suit, probably the governor of one of the provinces, corpulent and decrepit, yet forceful in appearance like an ancient Roman procurator. And in the easy-chair opposite sat his elderly spouse in evening gown, highly rouged, and rigid. These two people, in sorry loneliness, seemed to be the only passengers in the elegant railway-carriage.

Our train went on; the big city was already behind us. Sadananda lay on the seat beside mine, hardly an arm's length away, and slept soundly. On the wooden berths, placed one over the other, our comrades were sleeping. Only the guards sat up, their guns between their knees. The window opened out to the moonlit night. I looked out at the unfamiliar landscape, saw swaying palmtops, well-sweeps, cranes and storks. Great wild peacocks, Krishna's sacred animals, danced in the



moonlight.

The Name of God ... I was thinking. Strange and unfamiliar were the things that my friend had just confided to me. And yet the moonlit Indian night seemed to me to be only a thin, fluttering veil, behind which the secret was being carried towards my heart as on a wave.

The *Name* of God, which wakens love ... “I have proclaimed them Thy *Name*, and shall proclaim it, that the love Thou hast given me may be theirs, and I myself may be theirs.” These words of Christ to God, Christ’s last, most sacred words in the circle of His disciples after Communion, came to me out of the blue Indian night.

“Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name.” Christ’s words to His Divine father when the disciples stood on the mountain beside Him and asked: “How shall we pray?” sounded in my ears.

“I baptize you in the *Name* of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.” The ancient formula for baptizing echoed about me.

“Where two or three are gathered in My *Name*, there am I also.” I was moved as never before by the words of the divine Saviour.

I recalled, too, a day long ago on the island of Patmos in the Ægean Sea. In the library of the cloister, a Greek orthodox priest opened for my wife and me the stiff, enormous pages of a manuscript of a Gospel from the ancient Christian era. It was written with silver letters on purple parchment, but the Names of God and Christ shone brighter than the rest of the writing. They were written in letters of gleaming gold.

Had we forgotten the loving power of the Name of God? Was it necessary to travel to India to rediscover the secret?

Logos, the word of God, sounded through the Indian holy writings and the words of joy with which Krishna Chaitanya, the hidden avatar of the age of discord, has praised the power of the Name of God:

“Taking the Name of God is most victorious in a many ways.

It cleanses the mirror of the heart.

It quenches the great forest fire of suffering,  
in separation from the service of God.

It is like moonlight, which opens the lotus chalice  
of the most Precious; loving service of God.

It is the inner life of beloved Lady Wisdom (bhakti).

It lets the ocean of Divine bliss increase ever more.

It gives the experience of Divine abundance  
at every syllable.

It bathes and invigorates one’s whole being.”

The night was heavy with the scent of flowers. The pleasant odour of the flowering

mango-trees floated in to the sleepers on the north-bound train. It seemed to me as if I were being transported on a boat out on to a boundless sea of Divine love, whose waves enveloped each coastline, each earthly horizon. The waves of Divine love rose higher and higher.

Dawn came. Sadananda half-reclined on his seat and gazed out of the open window. I touched his hand. "Initiate me in the Name of God," I implored.

Once again my friend looked at me as though he were searching my soul. "I am not a guru," he said. "My task in this life is to lead people to the feet of my guru. I hope you will find your guru, and that he will receive you."

The train thundered on over an iron bridge. Down in the depths the silver-grey water of a river glittered in the light of dawn. "The Ganges," said Sadananda. "Not far from here, at Rishikesh, it breaks through the mountain chain of Himalaya."

Once more I had reached Kailash, the home of Shiva.

Our train stopped at a station. "Hardvar," I read.

"One of India's seven ancient holy cities," my friend informed me. "For that matter, you have studied Sanskrit. What does Hardvar mean?"

"Of course, I know. Hari-dvara means the portal of Hari, the portal of God."

Below the railway we could see cupolas and the flat white roof of a temple. On its roof great flocks of monkeys played undisturbed. They were considered to be the helpmates and followers of Hanuman, minister of the monkeys, initiated by God.

As if by command, the monkeys swung down from the roof, and the walls, and ran after the long train, which had been set in motion again, and slowly puffed its way up the steep incline through the forest.

Delighted at the unexpected diversion the prisoners leaned out of the windows, shrieking taunting invectives to the monkeys, and threw down whatever they could find in the way of empty cigar and cigarette boxes, metal objects and tin cans, until the apes gave up the chase against humans, and turned back.

"I have lain thinking all night long about the Name of God," I said.

Sadananda nodded gladly. "Yes, I know. He who has once been overwhelmed by the magnetic power of God, by the jubilant rejoicing power of God, can never escape from it."

## CHAPTER VI

### HUMAN GOALS

The new prison camp – Reading the Bhagavatam in a tool-shed – The tale of King Parikshit – Overthrow of Kali, the Dark One – Meeting with an aged brahman hermit – cursed by the brahman's son – Belated regrets – The holy Shuka – The dying king attains the goal of life – What is the highest goal? – Love greater than liberation.

The mountains were green and wet with rain. But all the beauty of the Indian landscape seemed to fade once more as we entered the double barbed-wire entrance of the new camp, dragging our baggage with us. The tangle of rusty barbed wire was like that of all the other camps we had occupied. The people crowded there were also the same as before. They had taken along all their passions, their griefs and their fates. It was not long before the grass in the crowded square was trampled down by the many feet, and the earth robbed of its luster. But the light within me had not been extinguished, it streamed forth from my heart, it hung on the Name of God which Sadananda had sung during our journey.

In the new camp, Sadananda and I were no longer together in the same barrack. Sadananda had been directed to one in the southern section, where the Buddhist monks lived. On the other hand, I had the good fortune to live alone for a while in a tool house in the northern section, near the barbed-wire fence. This was a friendly gesture on the part of the commander of the camp, and I was very much envied.

However, the four large window openings directly under the roof had no glass, and the door was cracked. The birds of the skies flew in and out as they pleased through the open spaces between the roof and the wall. Right beside the tool-shed stood the canteen common to all who lived in this section of the camp, where home brewed ale and liquor were served until late at night – which naturally did not take place noiselessly. But in spite of all these inconveniences, this proved to be a very happy time for me. For I could work.

My friend came and helped me eagerly as I tried to furnish my new retreat. Somewhere in a heap of rubbish we found a damaged table-top, and, somewhere else, two iron supports on which to place it. These had been deemed too unsteady for use in the dining-room, but they were good enough for us. We spread a blue linen cloth on the table, such as the Indian guards used as a covering. After that the table really looked splendid. Sadananda, who was very handy, stood high up on a stool which we had placed on the rickety table. I held on to the swaying scaffolding so that it should not fall down, and he nailed old sheets which I had folded and sewn together over the wide openings in the north wall, to prevent the winter winds from the mountains from blowing right in.

Quite satisfied with our efforts, we sat there on opposite sides of the table in the bare room. Sadananda was tireless in the matter of imparting his teachings to me, although even at that time he had begun to suffer great physical pain. He burned his candle at both ends, put his whole heart into his work, and at the same time tried to teach me spiritual devotion as he had learned it from his guru.

Sadananda and I began once more reading together there in the tool-shed; we read from the great work called Bhagavatam, in twelve volumes, which I had become somewhat acquainted with at Shri's home. With Sadananda's help I read again, in the original language, the numerous stories related by the youth Shuka to King Parikshit, as the latter sat on the shore of the Ganges awaiting death.

"If I should be placed on an uninhabited island and be allowed the possession of only one book, I would surely choose the Bhagavatam of all the books on earth," my friend remarked enthusiastically.

"Not the Bhagavadgita?"

"The Bhagavadgita, in spite of its greatness, is only a beginner's book. Where the Bhagavadgita finishes, the secrets of the Bhagavatam begin. The path, Vamandas, on which you have set out is a long one. But do not tire! How often my guru lamented the fact that he had never met anyone who was prepared to devote all his strength to translating and expounding the Bhagavatam. I have begun, and have spent many years doing this. But my strength is not equal to the task. Will you help me? As a beginning, try to describe in outline the tale about King Parikshit, for his fight for righteousness and justice is probably the easiest part for a Westerner to understand."

I sat in my shed and thought: the Sanskrit word parikshit means "he who has withstood the test". As Narada before, Parikshit now also plays a role in God's drama in order to teach mankind. He is one of God's eternal companions.

Parikshit's grandfather was the famous hero Arjuna, for whom his charioteer and friend Krishna revealed the Divine song called Bhagavadgita.

When King Parikshit grew up, Krishna had already left the earth. The dissension of kaliyuga had enveloped the world. Parikshit did everything in his power, in spite of this age of discord, to re-establish the justice which had been defiled on earth. He rode through all lands in his golden fighting chariot, in order to help humans to reach the three goals set by the Vedas for each life on earth: justice, prosperity, lust for all.

I laid aside the book. This was a story highly appropriate to our own times, I thought, the story of king Parikshit, who wished to make the three human goals, dharma, artha, kama – justice, prosperity, lust – accessible to all beings on earth. These are the same goals that even today are eagerly sought after by the many hundred million human beings everywhere. And where had humanity come in its efforts to reach these goals? I shuddered at the thought.

I took up the book Bhagavatam again, and began reading and translating anew. I

felt that I must find out how the story of King Parikshit, the tested one, developed.

Strange things followed. The king, who wished to re-establish true justice everywhere on earth, arrived at the shore of a river called Sarasvati, the river of wisdom.

There Parikshit met a dismal figure on the shore of the river, a being who bore the name Kali. Kali means “the dark one”. He was the ruler of kali-yuga, the age of dissension, in which we live today. Parikshit met Kali, the Dark One, in the form of a figure clothed like a monarch who plagued the earth with his footsteps and trampled down justice.

The earth then appeared in the form of a cow, whose eyes streamed with tears, and who begged Parikshit for help. And justice appeared in the form of a white bull, which the dark despot beat madly with an iron staff. The wicked one had already succeeded in paralyzing three of the feet of the bull with the blows of his iron staff. The first foot of the white bull of dharma was the power of the judge to see clearly in meditation. The Dark One had already paralyzed this foot completely. The second and third feet of the bull of justice were the purity of heart, compassion, and mercy of the judge. These feet, too, had been paralyzed by Kali. With difficulty the bull tried to hold himself up on the one foot that was left, the foot of truth. An arduous searching for truth still exists among us, even in the age of dissension.

The story continued that Parikshit drew his bow and approached this terrible being. Kali cast off the unseemly ruler’s mantle. For he was no real king; he was cowardly and ill at ease, he was low-minded and a shudra. He begged for mercy as he writhed on the ground clasping the feet of Parikshit. “Wherever I flee, I shall always see thy bow flashing over me,” he groaned. “Oh, grant me, like all others, a refuge.”

“Even you shall not plead in vain for my protection,” answered Parikshit. “In gambling-houses, in brothels, in slaughtering-houses, in taverns, and in the hearts of all greedy men, you may dwell. These may be your five asylums.”

Parikshit was convinced that now he had bound the Dark One in abysses from which he could not escape. But he was mistaken.

Shortly after the apparent victory over the Dark age, King Parikshit one day was out hunting in a forest. It would have been a serious crime for a brahman to hunt animals, but, according to the rules of the warrior caste, this is a sport that is permitted and considered chivalrous. The king had followed game a long time, and he was tired and thirsty. In vain he had sought for a spring or a stream in the hot, dried-up forest of briars. Not a drop of water was to be found. Tortured by thirst, he came upon the twig hut of a hermit and entered it in the hope of finding something to drink.

There in the dusk sat an old man with his legs crossed, his back rigid, his eyes half-closed, deeply lost in meditation, almost without breathing.

Parikshit, whose tongue was dry and cracked with thirst, begged him: “Give me something to drink.”

The old man did not answer. He did not even invite the king to sit down on a mat or elsewhere. He did not ask him to bathe his tired dusty feet. He invited him to take nothing to drink. He broke all the rules of hospitality which King Parikshit had established on earth. An ugly thought crept like a snake into the heart of the king: Perhaps the old man is only pretending to be lost in meditation, because he considers himself superior to me, because he, a brahman, does not wish to wait on one of the warrior caste. A wild anger, the like of which he had never known, rose within him. As he turned to go, he happened to see a dead snake lying on the floor. He took up the dead body of the creature with the point of his bow, and threw it disdainfully about the neck of the old man. The latter did not move a muscle. With heavy steps, King Parikshit left the hut.

The young son of the brahman, a proud, beautiful boy, was playing with some other children nearby when this happened. When the boy observed the infamy inflicted on his father, he was distressed at the fact that a man of warrior caste could break the commandment of respect for brahmans. Wildly excited, he shouted to his playmates: “Oh, what injustice prevails among the rulers of the earth in this age! Since almighty Krishna is no longer here to punish the offender, I shall do so myself ... You shall see!”

In his wrath, the boy recited an incantation and uttered a curse on King Parikshit: “On the seventh day from now shall the prince of snakes by my command bite to death the man who has broken the law and dishonoured my father.” Then he ran home, and when he saw that his father still sat with the dead snake hanging about his neck, he wept loudly in his distress.

The wise man heard his son’s weeping, and he caught sight of the dead snake hanging down over his shoulder. Gently he removed the dead body, and asked: “Why are you weeping, my child?” The boy related what had happened. “My child, my child, what have you done!” wailed the father. “Oh, my child, you have committed a great crime without knowing it. You have invoked a severe punishment for a slight mistake. This noble king was suffering from hunger, thirst and exhaustion. And you have dared to judge the monarch who, according to the will of God, preserves justice on earth. Oh, may almighty and ever-present God forgive you for the sin, which in your ignorance you have committed against one dedicated to God!”

Meanwhile, Parikshit was having bitter regrets. “Oh, how stupidly I behaved towards the holy man. Something terrible will surely happen to me in the way of punishment. May that punishment be prompt and severe, in order to wipe away my sin.”

While he was pondering over this, he heard about the curse that the brahman’s son had uttered. Without the slightest hesitation, Parikshit abdicated, handing over the throne to his son. He surrendered all his treasure and his flourishing,

wellordered kingdom. He left his beautiful wife. He denied all worldly things, and made a promise to fast the last seven days of his life. Everything that previously had seemed to be of importance – justice, prosperity and lust – now appeared to be a heap of ashes. He thought no longer about earthly laws. He thought about things that are far above laws and non-laws. Parikshit sat on the shore of the river Ganges and began to meditate.

Just then a crowd of holy men with their disciples came down to the river. Parikshit bowed low before them. He hailed each of them in turn. And when all of them had seated themselves, he stood before them with his hands clasped together, saying: “Ye wise men, and thou Ganges river, ye should know that I have sought refuge with God, that my heart now belongs to Him. Let the snake bite me without any stir. Ye shall sing the songs of God, who penetrates all things!”

“We shall remain with this man who is a devotee of God,” said the holy men, “until he lays aside his body and enters that world where there is no longer any error.”

“Help me to spend the last days of my life worthily,” pleaded the king. “Teach me what he shall do who stands at death’s door!”

Just then, young Shuka, the son of great Vyasa, came smilingly on his way. He wandered over the earth without desire. No caste mark could be seen on him, nor did he bear the costume of a monk or a penitent. He was naked. The vault of heaven was his only garment. He was surrounded by a swarm of children. He looked like a youth of sixteen, but the holy men knew well the radiance that steamed forth from him, and they arose respectfully.

Parikshit bowed low before the newcomer, and invited him to sit down. Then the king threw himself on the ground before Shuka, who was resplendent among the holy as the moon is among the stars, and he prayed him to answer his question: “What shall a person do, who is standing at death’s door? What shall he listen to? What shall he bear in mind? Whom shall he adore? What shall he meditate upon?”

“You have asked the most important of all questions,” said Shuka. “Your question will be of credit to the whole world. He who knows nothing of the atma asks a thousand questions, and strives to know a thousand different things. And meanwhile, life is going by, at night during sleep, and corruptible pleasures, in the daytime during the strife for corruptible things. But the question you have asked is loved by them who know the atma. It speaks of the final goal.”

Now Shuka began to instruct the king about the indestructible innermost being within all creatures, the atma. And he taught him the atma’s true foundation, God. He led the listener to Mahavishnu, of whom it is said: like sun-drenched streams of dust-specks floating through an open window, the innumerable systems of worlds float in and out of Mahavishnu’s pores. When Mahavishnu exhales, worlds come to be; when he inhales, they are destroyed. But there will never be an end to the birth and destruction of these worlds. For Mahavishnu never ceases to breathe.

Shuka led his listener still farther, through the ocean of primordial cause, and

through the endless ocean of the light of consciousness into God's inner realm. For seven days Shuka related to the man, who was awaiting death, of Krishna, who dwells in His own kingdom, and once every day of Brahma descends on earth.

"Hunger plagues me no longer, although it is a long time since I stopped eating," said Parikshit. "I feel no thirst any longer, although I have ceased drinking water. I desire nothing other than to hear more and more about Krishna. Every word about Krishna that you speak is like nectar to me."

After seven days Shuka went on his way. He walked along naked, dancing and singing the praise of Krishna. Children ran after him. The mermaids that played in the river were not embarrassed in the presence of him, with only the vault of heaven as a garment. In his holy innocence Shuka did not differentiate between man and woman.

During this time Parikshit sat listening on the shore of the Ganges. And when the poisonous snake came and bit him to death, so that in a moment his body was burnt to ashes, Parikshit did not notice this, for he himself was already in the kingdom of God. He had not asked for release from the curse, had not prayed to be allowed to live, although Shuka could easily have freed him from the curse. He only prayed to hear more and more about God. And thus the curse of the brahman's son came to be an infinite blessing for him. Because of the curse, Krishna came to him and bestowed upon him Divine love, the most priceless treasure to be had.

The next day Sadananda came again. Quite unexpectedly he appeared in my room. He did not like to make appointments, and even in the prison camp he was as free as a bird. "Well, Vamandas," he called. "It looks as if you have been working. Have you thought about the goals of human beings?"

"Oh, yes, I have. The true human goals are not dharma, artha, kama – justice, prosperity, lust – but liberation from the eternal circle of births and deaths. Mukti is the human goal ... Through his love for Krishna, King Parikshit attained liberation and entered Divine existence."

Sadananda looked at me sadly. "Do you not yet understand, are you still entangled in Shankaracharya's system which you learned from Shri? Do you not see how terrible it must seem to a Bhakta that anyone can seek the love of God, as Shankaracharya has expounded it, as a means for attaining liberation? And then, if he has attained the knowledge, if he knows that he is one with the Brahman, then he should let his love for God cool off and quiet down. Then he can take the picture of the personal God which he no longer needs, and throw it in the river, as a final illusion. He himself is now the great Brahman."

"But in the story of Parikshit, I think it is said that he becomes the infinite Brahman. Is not becoming Brahman the highest goal?"

"No," said Sadananda shortly. "You know the verse from the last song in the Gita: 'brahmabhutah prasannatma ... He who has realized the nature of his atma as being of the same quality as the Brahman, one whose atma is infused with the power of God and no longer grieves, and no longer desires' ... Well, continue



reading it yourself.”

I read: “ ‘... he attains the highest love, the highest bhakti, for Me’.”

“That means,” explained my friend, “he who has realized his affinity with the Brahman, and who no longer grieves and no longer desires, but who does not remain here, preferring in his great longing to serve and love ever more, to penetrate farther, he attains the highest bhakti for God. Krishna speaks thus. The final goal is not mukti or liberation. The true bhakta, like Parikshit, laughs at such an ideal. Here in the book Bhagavatam it says: ‘God bestows mukti easily, but He seldom bestows bhakti.’ Spontaneous, unmotivated love of God, Divine love, for love’s own sake, that is the highest human goal.”

The real approach to the love of God, however, is to strive for bhakti from the very start, and avoid mukti as a tigress that wants to swallow your atma, that wants to devour the atma’s natural inclination to love and to serve God. If an atma completely has drowned himself in the ocean of Brahman, it is only Krishna Himself that can lift Him out from that terrible state, where no service of God is possible.

Sadananda came up to me and looked at me with flashing eyes. He seized me by the shoulders and shook me, and recited words from the Upanishads, so that they pierced me like lightning. These were the words: “Arise! Awake! and do not cease until the goal is reached. Svasti!” ... Then he went away.

But still the crashing lightning of love penetrated my being: as if for a minute it tore away from my innermost self all earthly coverings. “Svasti” ... that was an ancient Indian greeting that meant: sva–asti, the Self is, the atma is, the atma, filled with God’s power and love, is!

## CHAPTER VII

### THE STREAM OF DIVINE LOVE

Narayana, the first teacher of Love – Brahma's song – Narada, the wanderer – Foundation of the world of Maya – Krishna Chaitanya.

I sat in my shed before the table covered with papers. The roaring of a mountain stream sounded through the night. I thought of the stream of Divine love, flowing inexhaustibly out of God's realm, and streaming, unnoticed by the great majority, through our world of shadows.

The first guru to teach Divine love was Narayana, God in His almighty, majestic aspect. He performed the initiation for the creator Brahma, who shaped the world according to God's plan. When an atma fit for the office of Brahma awoke after the long night of sleep called world dissolution, he was surrounded by darkness. He did not know where he was. He did not know that he was in the calyx of a lotus flower, whose stem grew out of the navel of all-penetrating Vishnu. The darkness stretched out around him. Troubled by this, Brahma arose and found his way upwards in the calyx of the lotus. He wandered thus a thousand years, and yet reached no boundary. Still troubled, he turned back and wandered down towards the lotus stem for a thousand years; still he found no bottom.

Exhausted and discouraged, Brahma sat down with his legs crossed in the pose for meditation, and tried to receive the knowledge of his mission in a serving state of mind, focused on God. Then Narayana appeared and gave Brahma the four seed-verses of the Bhagavatam and instructions. He showed him His own realm and the realm of Maya and that everything depends on God as its source. While the builder of our universe later performed his difficult task within the boundaries of time and space, he was still able to remember God and never to forget Him.

At a much later occasion in Brahma's life he even got the grace of beholding Krishna as He is in Himself in His Own realm of unrestricted exhilaration and joy, Goloka, which is a deeper reality than Narayana's realm of unrestricted power and majesty, Vaikuntha. He then sang of the Divine world without fate, where no suffering lay at the bottom of every pleasure, where time is not painfully divided into past and present, but where eternal presence prevails, and where everything is woven of God's love. Brahma sang of Krishna's Own kingdom, Goloka:

“Every word is a song, every step a dance,  
And the flute, Krishna's beloved friend,  
Resounds from his lips.  
Time, which flies so fast here,  
Stands still there.

Only a few of the wise who wander upon earth  
Know of this land.”

After being initiated by Narayana, Brahma, the creator, initiated his disciple and spiritual son Narada and gave him the four original verses of the Bhagavatam.

My first teacher, Shri, and even Sadananda, had often told me about Narada. Narada is one of the great bhaktas, who, out of compassion for the unhappy beings who have turned away from God, wander about in the changeable worlds in order somewhere possibly to find a soul that is ready to receive the gift of loving devotion to Krishna. Just as the sun follows its course in the firmament, above the righteous and the unrighteous alike, the messengers of God wander about in their Divine purity, and wherever they come they bring the radiance of God’s kingdom, where they belong. What does it matter to them whether the actions of a being are good or evil, according to the world’s opinion, whether he is blessed or cursed? They see only the longing of the heart. What does it matter to them whether the ground they tread resembles, according to earthly conception, a heaven or a hell? They enter prisons, madhouses, concentration camps. No murderer, no woman of the streets, no lunatic, no child in the mother’s womb, none are excluded from the possibility of receiving Divine love, and being welcomed into the circle of God’s eternal companions.

In his wanderings, Narada once came to the dwelling of a hermit high up in the Himalayas, on the shore of a gushing river. There, near the source of the Ganges, sat Vyasa, the eternal servant of God, gazing depressedly into the whirling waters, playing a role in God’s play in order to teach the world.

Vyasa greeted the messenger of God reverently.

“Why are you so sad?” asked Narada.

“There is something which I am thinking of,” answered Vyasa in a troubled voice. “So far I have described religious laws and different forms of religion. I have succeeded in arranging the Vedas. I have even succeeded in arranging the Mahabharata and the Gita. I have condensed the essence of Upanishadic wisdom in the Brahmasutras. And yet my soul is not at peace.”

“In your beautiful works you have not yet spoken of God as He is in Himself and the religion that is directly related to Him,” Narada explained to him. “You must receive and offer yet another work that pleases God Himself and those that are His own bhaktas, then you will be fulfilled.”

Narada then initiated Vyasa and gave him the four verses of the Bhagavatam in a nut-shell.

Singing and playing his lute, he then went on his way. And Vyasa sat on the shore of the Ganges and meditated on the four verses. He saw God and His relation to Maya and how all the worlds of Maya have their foundation in Him. Then he arranged the eighteen thousand stanzas of the work that speaks only of God, of Bhagavan, and which is therefore called Bhagavatam. “The sweetest fruit on the

tree of the Vedas, the nectar of immortality, a fruit without seed or skin” – thus the Bhagavatam is described.

Vyasa related the Bhagavatam for his son, Shuka. The youth, who had lived in the bosom of God since childhood. Shuka loved to sing these stanzas, which overflowed with the praise of God’s love. And he in turn gave Parikshit, the righteous king, this work, when the latter sat beside the Ganges with the curse hanging over him, awaiting death.

Thus in India the tradition of Divine love continued, from teachers to disciples and their disciples, in an unbroken sequence through the centuries. The revelation of God wandered through the darkness and remained alive through the ages.

When, according to the Scriptures, Krishna once more descended to earth, about five hundred years ago, in the form of Krishna Chaitanya, He, too, sought a guru, in order to follow the venerable tradition.

The guru recognized immediately the exalted being that dwelt within the golden radiant youth who humbly approached him, and, rejoicing, he gave the avatar who had descended to earth the initiation he asked for. And Chaitanya departed reverently, and on his way, intoxicated with joy sang for three days this stanza from the Bhagavatam: “Even I, even I shall stride through the terrible ocean of the changeable world and reach the other shore.”

Chaitanya brought to the world a clear conception of the Scriptures that had been forgotten by then. And the stream of Divine love flowed through India like the waters of life, hidden and yet not hidden, up to our own era. The hermit Gaura Kishora, a naked ascetic dressed only in a loin cloth, gave the initiation to Bhakti-Siddhanta Sarasvati, who had studied in the fields of astronomy and higher mathematics. The latter gave the initiation to a disciple who came from Europe, whom he called Sadananda.

When I sat in the Indian prison camp, which was filled with noise and discord, Sadananda came and in his compassion he too gave a drop of Divine love ... to me.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PIGSTY

A dream in prison – Who was Odysseus? – Singing Sanskrit verses – Tümpelbaum, the unwelcome newcomer – Circe's pigsty – Tricking Circe, the enchantress – Fire in camp – Tümpelbaum's change.

*(Ulysses at the home of Circe)*

“... Then by Athena the goddess, the daughter of Zeus the Almighty,  
Taller and stronger to view he was made, while down from his head fell,  
Clustering thickly the locks of his hair, as the flower hyacinthine.

*Odyssey, VI, 229–31*

Thus when Athena had spoken, her wand she extended and touched him;  
All of the fair smooth flesh on the limbs of his body she withered,  
Shrivalled the yellow hair from his head, and the whole of his person,  
Every limb, with the skin of a man right aged she covered.

*Odyssey, XIII, 427–30*

... Spake, and her golden wand she extended, and lo, as it touched him,  
Firstly a fair fresh mantle around him was cast, and a doublet  
Covered his breast, and renewed was his body in stature and manhood;  
Dark once more was the tint of his skin, and in face he was fuller;  
Blue-black bristled the beard once more on his chin as aforetime.”

*Odyssey, XVI, 172–6*

Even before the removal of our camp, I had a dream that set me thinking. I lay in darkness, as many times before, in the row of sleepers in the prison barrack. Those lying next to me were groaning in their sleep. I tried to remember the words of comfort in a Sanskrit hymn which my friend had written down for me. The words came back to me:

“The knot of the heart  
(the knot in the form of the false ‘I’ and ‘mine’,  
which binds the atma)  
will dissolve by itself.  
All doubts shall be cleared away  
and even his karma,  
his deeds, and the inevitable consequences of his deeds,

shall disappear,  
when God is seen directly in his atma.”

“What is the atma?” I reflected. “As a man throweth away old garments and putteth on new, even so the soul in the body, the atma, having quitted its old mortal frame, entereth into others which are new...” Thus it was written in the Bhagavadgita. “This soul cannot be divided by weapons, the fire burneth it not, the water corrupteth it not, the wind drieth it not away ... for it is all-pervading, inconceivable, eternal.”

Moaning, my comrades turned again and again in their sleep, and the lousy wooden cots creaked. Often the room in the dark barrack was filled with a noise that made one think that a nightmare had seized the sleepers.

After a while I must have fallen asleep. In my dream I wandered through many lands, peeping curiously into all the holes of the earth, where wild animals attacked me. I ran through the night. The path became narrower and led steeply upwards. The sea flowed below me. I leaped through the air. Below me were clear mighty crystal waves. I fell and cried out in my fall.

From the depths of a great distance I heard the voice of my wife calling: “You are doing all that out of wantonness, *Odysseus!*”

I awoke at the sound of the word *Odysseus*. The rest of the night I lay thinking: *Odysseus?* I must find out more about *Odysseus!*

The next day I succeeded in finding in the camp a worn copy of a translation of Homer’s *Odyssey*. Astonished, as if I were reading it for the first time, I read the familiar text that had been so dear to me in my boyhood, so dear that I had almost believed myself to have been present in the Greek camp at Troy and in Ulysses’ tent and ship.

With a beating heart I read how Ulysses changed his form, his hair was blond, and again it became dark like a hyacinth, his head was bald, and later became covered with curly locks, he was old, became young, old again, and young again, his body grew in vigour, shrivelled, became vigorous again, he was driven from shipwreck to shipwreck, even down into the region of the dead, and again up into the light; Ulysses, who constantly wore different clothes, those of a king, or those of a beggar, again those of a king, who was wrapped in a different body as the goddess waved her magic wand.

I reflected: The many, as it seemed, tissues of lies, the many earthly careers in the past which Ulysses tirelessly related, were these perhaps quite true? Was he born not only in Ithaca? Was he born in Crete and other places as well? As the Bhagavadgita expresses it: “As a man throweth away old garments and putteth on new, even so the soul quitteth its worn body and enters another which is new.”

Was I, was every soul on earth, like Ulysses, a wanderer from life to life?

I read on to the end. But even on the last page of the book the wanderings of

Ulysses had not ended. He was destined in the future to wander farther, in a far-away mythical land where the stormy might of the wild sea, his own mind's storm, would no longer reach him ... But whether he succeeded in entering the kingdom of endless Divine peace, which the Hindus call Shanti, is not related in Homer's *Odyssey*.

The words of the last chapter of the book faded before my eyes. Since I was reading out-of-doors in a corner of the sports field, in the dazzling sunlight, I had put on dark sun-glasses in order to be able to read in the blinding light of the Indian sun. Now the smoked glasses had become misty on the inside.

I took them off. Before me rose a wall of twisted barbed wire, and behind that a second one just like it. No, Odysseus was certainly not in the land of Shanti, in the kingdom of Divine peace.

In the space between the walls of iron thorns, the soldiers who guarded the camp night and day strode forwards and backwards with raised bayonets. Behind me there was noise and shouting. A football match was in progress. Somebody hit me between the shoulders with his fist. "Man, how can you sit there so unconcernedly!" My comrades cried indignantly: "How can anyone turn his back on a game like this! Think of it! The East Barracks against the West Barracks – the cup-final!" Shaking his head, as if doubting my sanity, he turned away.

Sadananda came joyfully to the corner of the field where I was sitting. The monk's gown which he had dyed himself gleamed brightly in the sun, as did his narrow ivory face and his clean-shaven head. "Come along, Vamandas," he smiled, calling me by my Indian name. "This game will soon be over. We can take a stroll."

The two of us strode slowly along the barbed-wire fence. Sadananda took me by the hand for a minute. "I see that your soul, your atma, is deeply stirred. Have you noted the verse from the Bhagavata-Purana, which I once recited for you?"

Thoughtfully I repeated in Sanskrit:

"The knot of the heart *shall be cut apart* ...  
when God is seen directly in his atma."

My companion nodded assent, and gave me a glance of approval. "You will master it. It is only the rhythm that must be improved. And it is not enough only to dream of the atma, one must live in it, quite wide-awake."

As he moved, dancing rather than walking, Sadananda sang the Sanskrit verse once more.

Shrill whistles called us to the evening meal. We joined our many comrades, who were hurriedly making their way towards the kitchen, their tin plates in their hands.

Once Sadananda and I celebrated a festival day in the tool-shed. With our legs crossed under us, we sat beside each other on the newly-scrubbed floor and sang

the Sanskrit verses, which praised Krishna, the hidden God, who from time to time sends down to earth the great saviours, the avatars, in order to awaken the soul by one means or another.

But the last verse we sang was written by the avatar of our own age of discord, Krishna Chaitanya Himself. My friend, who was usually so careful about demonstrating his feelings, now sang loudly and joyfully, not at all troubled by the fact that every sound could be heard outside. He sang:

“Not riches, not noble birth,  
Not beautiful women, nor the art of poetry,  
Do I desire, O Lord of the world.  
But grant me birth after birth  
Unmotivated heartfelt love  
O my God, unto Thee!”

A coarse voice, full of conceit and self-satisfaction, bawled something outside. Angrily it approached us. A heavy body bumped up against the door of our shed, and somebody shouted: “Those confounded niggers and their swinish religion! They should be flogged to death!” Swearing and hurling insults, the man went on his way, filling the camp with his shouts.

On the following day this man, who was on good terms with one of the non-commissioned officers, succeeded in obtaining an order to move into my tool-shed as my room-mate. He arrived panting, his boxes and bundles with him. His old trousers now decked my walls. His camp-bed, with his dusty boots beneath it, now occupied the corner where Sadananda had sat singing God’s Name. The work-table, which we had so much trouble in putting together, was now chiefly Tümpelbaum’s. It was no longer Sadananda who sat opposite me at this table, but Tümpelbaum. When I looked up from my work, I looked into his spying, distended eyes. “Lock up all your things,” Sadananda warned me. “When your are out, Tümpelbaum will probably search through all your trunks.”

The first time I opposed my new room-mate, he came up to me, straddling, and standing so close that I could see every detail in his fat red face, the swollen mouth with its hanging underlip drawn into a crooked sneer, and his warm breath smelling of alcohol. He and I were at odds because he wanted to forbid my friend Sadananda entrance to our shed. “Listen now,” he shrieked. “Listen now, once for all: that nigger is never to enter my door. You will soon see who is master in this room. Do you know what you are, you, you – you are a heathen! But I, I am a Christian!”

“You don’t even know what religion, what Christianity, is.”

“I don’t know what religion, what Christianity is?” Tümpelbaum gasped for breath. Frothing with anger, he sat down.

“You must not let him get the upper hand!” Sadananda encouraged me. “You must master the situation. It must be possible for you to work in peace even in the



presence of this person.”

“He is no human being,” I burst out in my distress. “He is a dog that pokes his nose into everything. You have never spent a night by his side. The whole room is filled not only with the exhalations from his body, but even with the unclean sexual images that are always around him.”

“Tümpelbaum is not a dog, he is a pig,” remarked Sadananda drily. “But you must not lose control of the matter. Hang up a blanket between your beds, so that his exhalations cannot reach you.”

It was dark in the tool-shed. Tümpelbaum lay on his back, sleeping with his mouth open, and snoring heavily. He must have adenoids in his fleshy nose, I pondered. He should go to the hospital and let them cut the adenoids out of his snout! His breathing came in heavy gusts, like a storm at sea. I lay half-way between dreaming and waking, and was not in India now. About me was the wind-swept sea described in the *Odyssey*, the ancient epic of the Greek seer.

While Tümpelbaum snored like a snorting pig, I, like Ulysses, walked in my dreams through the rotting forests of Homer’s enchanted island Aiaie. About me the forest kept withering and becoming green alternately. The ground was hidden by mounds of mouldering leaves. I know that it was the forest which the Indians call *samsara*, or the world of change. I wandered past enchanted animals who looked at me with sorrowful eyes, seeking my lost companions who had been turned into swine by the enchantress Circe.

Hermes, the Greek messenger of the gods, came towards me. He was tall and slender, and moved swiftly with almost dancing steps. He took me by the hand kindly, and said:

“Whither, unfortunate, thus dost thou wander alone in the highlands,  
Strange to the place? It is surely thy comrades that yonder at Circe’s  
Closely imprisoned as pigs lie wallowing deeply in litter.  
Comest thou hither perchance to release them?”

Hermes pointed to the mounds of mouldering leaves which lay on the ground:

“See here! Bearing this powerful charm, in the palace of Circe  
Enter – and thus from thy head shall be wended the day of destruction ...  
Black at the root; but the flower was even as milk in its whiteness.  
Moly ’tis called by the gods, and to dig it is difficult labour,  
Labour for mortals, I mean – but to gods are possible all things.”

Not until now did I recognize the messenger of the gods who spoke to me. He wore an orange-coloured Indian monk’s gown. It was Sadananda. “Vamandas,” he said, “Do you know what the word ‘moly’ is in Sanskrit?”

“Moly – that is probably the word mula: root, source, ground.”

“That is right,” nodded Sadananda. “And who is the root of all things, their source, their ground?”

“Krishna,” I answered without hesitating. “God.”

“And the shining flower?”

“That is of course the flower of the world, which grows up out of the hidden ground.”

“Never forget for a minute that Krishna is the root of everything that exists,” warned my friend. “Then the enchantress Maya cannot harm you.”

He vanished on his light feet, and I wandered on towards the house that lay deep in the forest. A sweet song could be heard within, and the house shook as the enchantress tramped her loom, weaving the web of the world.

How I laughed to myself as Circe opened the shining door with a welcoming smile, and invited me to come in and dine, slyly mixing the poison in my wine. I thought of the source of the world, the Divine root, and drank fearlessly.

Laughing, the beautiful betrayer hit me with her staff, and commanded scornfully: “Off to the sty! Go crouch thee along with the rest of thy fellows!”

But he who possessed the root Moly could not be harmed by the poison of the sensual world. Circe shouted in amazement:

“Surely I marvel that drinking the potion thou feel’st not enchantment.

Never before hath another of mortals resisted the potion,

None that hath drunk it – when once by the door of his teeth it had entered.

Surely within thy breast is a soul too strong for bewitchment.”

I rejoiced: “Happily my heart is indestructible. My inner heart is indeed an eternal soul, an atma.”

I looked deep into the eyes of the enchantress Maya, and she revealed herself as she was. I recognized her, and she recognized me, the atma within me. I lay in her delightful bed, but she was powerless to do me any harm. Thus the night passed. The verses of the *Odyssey* streamed about me:

“While that the nymph threw round her a garment of glistening whiteness,

Delicate, lovely, and over her waist then fastened a girdle,

Beautiful, fashioned of gold, and her head in a hood she enclosed.”

The colours of the earth were reappearing. Tümpelbaum lay snoring in the morning light, his face swollen, his mouth drawn crookedly to one side. Had I only dreamt that I was disenchanting? Were we still in the pigsty? Must Tümpelbaum and I, and all my comrades, be changed into real human beings? Through the open window I heard the whistling of the sleepy soldiers who paced between the two barbed-wire fences of the camp incessantly, and signalled to one another. They, too, were

enchanted, and must carefully keep their enchanted comrades in their respective sties.

Fire broke out that day in one of the neighbouring sections of the camp, that of the Italian Fascists. The thatch roof of a large barrack was in flames. Fascinated by the sight, Tümpelbaum stood close to the fence watching the fire and the crowd of prisoners who tried to save their few belongings. "All we need is a strong east wind," he shouted happily, "so that the whole camp can burn down, all of it, all of it." He stretched out his arms as if he would gladly welcome a fire that would destroy the whole world.

The fire seemed to strengthen Tümpelbaum's self-assurance perceptibly. He began to announce excitedly, as we sat in the shed, what he thought of the world, how he would like to make a clean sweep of everything. Corruption existed everywhere, among the Allies as well as among the Axis Powers. He raged against the Nazis and the Fascists, in whose section fire had broken out; he raged against his own comrades, the Anti-Nazis, who were confined in the same barbed-wire cage as himself, and who, in his opinion, were not true Anti-Nazis. He showered his contempt on the Christian priests, the interned missionaries, he ridiculed the Jews and the few German and Italian Buddhists in the camp. Only he himself remained finally in solitary greatness. Then he described delightedly, licking his thick lips as he spoke, how he would like to punish his opponents after the victorious conclusion of the war. "Pour melted lead into their mouths, skin them alive, hang them! ... You, too, you wretch, will be hanged," he prophesied with satisfaction.

"You, too, poor fellow, are a bewitched atma," I thought. "But I must not forget that. I must always see the atma in you."

Enraged at my silence, Tümpelbaum began searching noisily in one of his trunks. He wanted to find some tool, but did not succeed. He happened to pick up a framed photograph, the portrait of a little boy. He looked at the picture a long while, and then carefully nailed it up on the wall beside his bed. "My child, my little son who died when he was only three years old," he said, as he noticed the look of sympathy on my face. Then, quite unexpectedly, he began telling me about himself, about his youth in northern Germany, and his disappointments, about the many trades he had tried in Siam and China and other countries in the East. He had been a technician, a policeman, teacher in a Chinese school. He spoke of the woman who was the mother of the dead boy. He, too, had had a child. He, too, had loved a woman. He knew nothing of her fate. She was an American nurse in the Philippines who had been taken prisoner by the Japanese.

From that day my room-mate's behaviour towards me changed. "Good morning," he greeted me heartily and a bit rowdily every morning when he woke. One day he surprised me by laying some razor blades on the table, and asking me to accept them as a gift. Razor blades were a luxury in the camp.

He even managed to behave politely towards Sadananda after this, when the latter began coming again, instructing me in a hushed voice. But Tümpelbaum was embarrassed in Sadananda's presence, and he usually vanished quickly from the shed, leaving us alone. This exaggerated courtesy, however, was not quite sincere.

"You had a visitor here while you were out, the doctor was here," he informed me once. Sadananda had come during my absence to fetch a Sanskrit book he had lent me, which he happened to need at the time. Tümpelbaum had followed my movements triumphantly as I searched among the books and manuscripts on my side of the table. "Aha, is something missing?" he grinned. "Ha, ha, the doctor carried something away with him. You must keep better watch over your friend!"

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MILK-WHITE GODDESS

On parole – Singing the Name of God in the woods – Following crowds of children  
– The temple of the Devi – Durga the jaileress.

During the latter years of our imprisonment we were permitted by the authorities in the camp to take leave of absence on certain days, and make what were termed “excursions on our honour”. We were required to sign in advance a written agreement to return to the camp punctually at a given time, and not to seek contact with any Indians. The violation of this agreement was to be punished with a long term of jail.

“Go out into the woods and sing the Name of God,” said Sadananda. “Even if you have not yet received initiation in God’s Name, you can sing it. You know so many of the Names of God from the Bhagavatam and other writings. Sing the Names and put into the song all your longing to be able one day really to serve God in His own kingdom, in confident, loving devotion. Sing: ‘Krishna! Krishna! Krishna!’ The vibrations of your song will move the sleeping atma in stones, in flowers, in birds and animals on your way, and their souls will awake for a moment and remember their true nature: to love and serve God for all eternity ... This is the redemption of the earth.”

How wonderful it was to take these excursions with Sadananda! They were only too few, however, for even then he was not well. After the roll-call on the sports field, and the repetition of this performance at the exit, we went out through the two barbed-wire gates to the open road. We went in single file along the narrow path between wet, flowering bushes that brushed up against our legs, crossed the tall grass of the meadows fresh with morning dew, and followed the river whose waters now flowed abundantly over the gravel during the rainy season. We waded barefoot in the crystal-clear, cold, running water of the streams. It was easy to shake off and put on again the Indian sandals that were fastened with only a strap over the big toe. We walked through ripening wheatfields, in which the stalks made one think of soldiers holding lances, as they beat against each other above our heads. To the north we glimpsed a mountain ridge now and then, behind the ears of grain or the leafy tree-tops.

I learned to see the world as my friend saw it. He taught me to love the Indian earth and the Indian rivers even more than I had done before. This earth is sacred, because since time immemorial Divine saviours have traversed it with their bare feet again and again. The rivers are sacred because the feet of Divine saviours have repeatedly waded through their waters.

“The true greatness of India does not lie in her natural wealth nor in her great

population, not in her art nor her history,” explained Sadananda. “India’s greatness lies in the fact that time after time the Divine saviours, emanating from and returning to God, have chosen this land as a dwelling-place. Only once has such a saviour come to the West, overflowing with the power of God. Do you know whom I mean?”

I nodded assent.

I thought of the holy bare feet that had walked through the waters of the Jordan river to the christening. I thought of how Christ’s feet had wandered over the mountains of Galilee, over the great ashlar of the temple courtyard, and over the hard cobblestones in the narrow alleys of Jerusalem towards Golgotha.

From the village nearby a swarm of ragged children came running towards us; they barred the road and stood there begging: “Sahib, cigarettes! Sahib, cigarettes!” They knew that we who were interned had no cash. Sadananda laughed and gave them sweets instead of cigarettes. Before leaving for our excursions, he generally bought sweets for the children with the special paper money of the camp. And now he began to clap his hands and sing the Name Rama, the Name of the great Divine saviour who lifted up the fallen, redeemed and purified them:

“Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram  
Patita Pavana, Sita Ram.”

And the whole troop of children marched along with us, singing and rhythmically clapping their hands. Some years later, when Sadananda had lain ill a long time in the hospital of the camp, and I made these excursions alone, the children would come running towards me asking: “Where is the Svami? Where is the Svami?” and they sang:

“Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram ...”

The singing of the children could be heard in the distance just now. Sadananda and I were resting near a spring. A Brahman came riding down the mountain slope on his donkey. When he reached the spring he dismounted, washed himself from top to toe, rinsed his mouth and drank, mumbling his mantras the whole time. We knew that he was singing the ancient formula that should change the water of the spring into the same water as that which flowed in India’s seven holy rivers:

“O, Ganga! O, thou Yamuna!  
Godavari! Sarasvati!  
Narbada! Sindhu! Kaveri!  
Make your dwelling in this water!”

Sadananda, too, mumbled this invocation to the seven holy rivers before drinking.

Without letting his hands contact the water, he took the running water into his mouth. He bathed in a crevice below a little fall. Diving and rising, spurting and spouting, he sang gaily while he bathed: “Shivo’ham, Shivo’ham, I am Shiva, I am Shiva, I, like Shiva, am Krishna’s servant.” Many Bhaktas in India worship the exalted Shiva, not as the Lord of the world, not as the Destroyer, not as the Lord of the yogis, but rather as the ideal for a bhakta. In his innermost self, Shiva is a bhakta of Krishna, and meditates on Krishna with the deepest longing. Old legends tell that the walls in the house of Shiva, Kailash, are bright with frescoes that depict scenes from the life of Krishna.

Near a group of ageing lingam stones, raised in honour of Shiva, stood a ramshackle resting-place for pilgrims and a temple dedicated to Maya, who is often called simply Devi, the goddess. The sanctuaries of Shiva and Maya generally stand near one another. The temple, surrounded by mighty mango-trees, lies on the old pilgrim road leading from the city of Hardvar to the sources of the Yamuna River high up in the regions of eternal snow. Here the great mistress of the universe bears a name that I had heard nowhere else in India. She is called Dudhya Devi, the Milk-White Goddess. This brought to my mind the dream I had had about Odysseus, and the strange words that the Greek seer Homer makes the messenger of God say to the wandering Odysseus: “Milk-White is the flower ...” Here Maya is worshipped as the milk-white mistress of the life of all the worlds.

I thought of her as the goddess Arbuda with the black countenance, before which I had stood with Shri in the cave inside Mt. Abu. And I thought of her as the giant-like, blood-red Kali in the gloomy mountain cave. Now I stood before her once again, where she had entered into daylight. She was enveloped in only a thin veil, and this time her colour was milk-white. But everywhere she was the same mysterious Maya.

According to the Indian custom, Sadananda walked three times, following the course of the sun, around the stone wall of Devi’s temple, and I followed after. She is worshipped and praised on earth under many names by those who pray for earthly gifts, for sons, for riches, for liberation from sickness.

Sadananda sat with his legs crossed a long while in the cool temple, around which Himalaya stretched in all its loveliness, with its steep forest-clad slopes, its torrents and ravines. He sang to the great Maya. It seemed as if he conversed with her.

“What did you sing to Maya?” I asked on our way home, as we walked through the forest, over meadows and grassy slopes, down the steep hills to the barbed-wire camp, where we must return at a given time. “How can one of Krishna’s bhaktas praise the mistress who bestows delusive wordly gifts?”

Sadananda smiled. “The enchantress Maya, the severe chastiser of our world, performs her task in Krishna’s service. One of her many names is Durga, which means prison. I have told Durga, the jaileress, who serves Krishna in exile, about Krishna’s hidden kingdom, which she herself does not dare to approach.”

I stopped short in my amazement. The stones under my feet crumbled into gravel.

Sadananda continued: “I told Durga about Radha, who is the personification of God’s power of rejoicing, and who serves Krishna with inexpressible love in his inner kingdom. Thus can a Bhakta of Krishna honour the great Maya, and bring her joy. For she is a devoted servant, a shadow of Radha.”

In front of the sentry-box at the entrance of the camp the dusty crowds of homecomers were gathering. Our names were called and noted down. A guard unlocked the double-barred gate for us. Once more we were confined within the walls of barbed wire.



## CHAPTER X

### THE HOLY NIGHT

Winter in the Himalaya region – Christmas celebrations – The poetry of Novalis – Meditations on the Nativity – Parallel of the Indian legend – Jesus and Krishna – The wanderings of Chaitanya.

Winter nights at the foot of Himalaya are cold and stormy. Tümpelbaum and I often froze miserably in our draughty shed, in which the three oblong windows still had no glass. On Christmas Eve Tümpelbaum had left early, in order to celebrate the occasion in more pleasant surroundings at a drinking bout with fellows of his own kind. Therefore the way was clear for Sadananda to visit me.

It was decidedly warmer in Sadananda's barrack than in my little retreat. A fire burned gaily in the open fireplace. Yet he preferred to come to me in my cold room, so that I need not spend the holy night in loneliness.

When my friend arrived he was shivering with cold, for he did not own an overcoat. Even in winter he went about clothed in only the thin orange-coloured cotton gown. I wrapped him in blankets, and, as so often before, we sat opposite each other at the rickety table. We spoke of the Divine saviour whose blessed birth on this cold night was being celebrated all over the world. Sadananda loved Christ, and I loved Christ. But Sadananda knew Him better than I did, for he knew the ever-living Christ.

"Vamandas, take a notebook and a pencil and write," he said to me. And then I received a favour I had once asked of him. He explained to me the similarities and differences in the worship of God by both Christians and Indian bhaktas. First he spoke of the courage of faith (*Wagnis des Glaubens*), in the West as well as in India. He spoke of the simplicity of child-like devotion in Bhakti and in Christianity. He spoke of the sacrifice of worldly esteem (*Einsatz der Achtung der Welt*), of the complete change of personality in human beings (*Verwandlung des ganzen Menschen*), of the meaning of brotherhood (*Beduetung der Gemeinschaft*), of the sanctity of life ... It was the essence of a whole scientific book, perhaps even of a whole life's work, which he dictated to me that night in short, forcible sentences.

From one of the barracks there came the sound of a little bell. It was the Protestant Christmas service. A few hours later the ringing of a bell was heard in another barrack; it was the Catholic Midnight Mass. But the bell-ringing and the stillness of the night were broken again and again by disturbances and yelling. Most of the European soldiers from England and its dominions who guarded us were drunk. Most of the prisoners were drunk. From all directions, from the

barracks and the canteens in the various barbed-wire enclosures, all of them hostile to one another, and from the dark landscape outside the barbed wire, the wild clamour of drunken persons penetrated our walls.

“The poor fellows cannot solve their many problems and troubles, and therefore they get drunk,” said my friend sympathetically.

The door was wrenched open. A strong gust of wind came rushing in. My corpulent room-mate staggered into the room. Without seeming to notice our presence, Tümpelbaum vomited several times, then threw himself on his bed with all his clothes on, not even bothering to remove his boots, and began to snore.

Sadananda calmly continued as before, sitting at the table. Neither the noise outside, not the sounds emitted by the sleeping drunkard, affected us. We sat in silence a while, a happy, festive silence. “Well, what are you thinking about, Vamandas?” my friend asked earnestly a little later.

I recited slowly some lines by Novalis, which I had loved since boyhood:

*“Ein Gott für uns, ein Kind für sich,  
liebt er uns all herzlich.  
Aus Kraut und Stein, aus Meer und Licht  
schimmert sein kindlich Angesicht.”*

*“A God for us, a child Himself,  
He loves us dearly.  
From herbs and stones and sea and light,  
His child-like face shines forth.”*

A smile lit Sadananda’s face. “It is fine, Vamandas, that you have brought just those lines from Europe to India.” He got up and looked at me with beaming eyes. “But do you remember the prophetic verse that the seer Novalis placed before the lines you repeated just now?”

I continued gladly:

*“Geuss Vater ihn gewaltig aus.  
Gib ihn aus deinem Arm heraus!”*

*“Pour him forth, o Father, mightily.  
Send him flowing from Your arms!”*

We remained silent. Then Sadananda placed both his hands on my shoulders for a minute. “I must go now. Think of Him who on a troubled night like this descended to the dark earth. A blessed Christmas to you, Vamandas!” With light footsteps he went away and vanished out in the blackness of the night.

While my comrade Tümpelbaum slept off the effects of his drunkenness,

hawking and gurgling right beside me, I lay on my hard bed, completely happy. I thought of the child that nearly two thousand years ago had been born in a manger, because every house and every inn of the little town of Bethlehem was filled to overflowing with boisterous guests. Humbly and fearfully, Joseph and Mary bent over the newborn child. The words spoken by the angel were imprinted in the heart of the Divine Mother. The animals in the stable breathed quietly beside the humble cradle of the child. Hardly anybody in the whole world suspected that at last the longed-for Son of God had arrived on earth. Only a few poor cowherds, led by Divine voices, came and worshipped the child. And three wise men from the East brought him their gifts.

I pondered over all the particulars of the sacred story, which is known to all of us. But I thought, too, of another holy child who descended in India thousands of years earlier. That child, too, entered the world on a dark midnight, and the scene of his coming was even more lamentable than the stable in Bethlehem. The Krishna child descended in a prison. His father and mother were chained to the prison wall with heavy iron links. A wicked king called Kamsa, who resembled the dismal king of the Jews, Herod, ruled the land at that time. He had killed all Krishna's brothers, for it had been prophesied that a son of these parents would one day dethrone and slay him.

The Bhagavata relates that Vasudeva, Krishna's father, received the Divine child first in his spirit. Then he communicated the Divine being to the spirit of his wife Devaki. While she bore the holy child, a radiance that illumined the whole house surrounded her. When the boy was born, both of the parents recognized with awe the Divine majesty of the child, and they fell down on their knees before him, singing hymns in his praise.

But although Devaki, the young mother, knew very well that her son was eternal, almighty God, her mother heart was filled with fear. Anxiously she pleaded with the newborn child: "Oh! hide Your Divine majesty, so that the terrible king cannot see who You are." Krishna obeyed the anxious mother and hid His majesty. He now looked like a helpless human child.

While the exhausted mother fell into a deep sleep, the father took the child in his arms, at Krishna's command. His chains fell away. The gates of the prison opened up before him. Vasudeva walked past the sleeping guards, and, clasping the child, went out into the dark night. The Yamuna River swelled there in front of him. His heart knew which way he should go. The waters of the river parted for him, so that he could walk with dry feet between the roaring walls of water. Unharméd he reached the opposite shore and continued his way towards the pastoral country Vraja, still carrying the child. Here, too, all were asleep. The animals slept, the people slept. The cowherd king, Nanda was asleep in his home. The cowherd queen, Yashoda, slept. She had just given birth to a daughter, but was still in a deep trance and did not know whether it was a boy or a girl that she had given birth to.

Carefully, Vasudeva entered and laid the Krishna child on her breast, and he

took the daughter of the cowherd parents in his arms. He returned the same way that he had come, and laid the little girl in the arms of his sleeping wife. The gates of the prison were locked once more behind him. The child began to cry. The stupefied guards awoke and rushed to the king with the news that he had expected with fear in his heart, year after year.

Filled with grim determination, King Kamsa burst into the prison, seized the newborn child by the feet, and threw it against the stone wall in order to crush it. But the child ascended in the air. And in the enchanted night, a voice was heard: “You wretch! You thought you could kill me! I am Maya. All this has happened according to the will of God. Krishna is in safety. Woe to you, King Kamsa. You shall not escape destruction.”

The two stories now became interwoven – despite other differences. Trembling before the wrathful King Herod, who commanded that all the newborn children in Bethlehem should be killed, Mary and Joseph fled with their child to Egypt. Jesus was in safety. The child was taken safely into the temple of God, and old Simeon recognized the promised Messiah. He took Him in his arms and cried out joyfully: “Lord, allow Thy servant to go forth in peace ... For my eyes have beheld Thy splendour.”

Krishna grew up in safety in the land of the cowherds, although Kamsa sent his mighty demons across the river to destroy him. As soon as Krishna touched them, their terrible bodies fell down dead. But at the same time their real natures were freed by the touch of Krishna’s hand, or His little feet or His childish mouth. They entered into His Divine light.

Many other scenes told in the Bhagavatam about Krishna’s childhood awoke in my memory. Once the little boy sat on Yashoda’s lap, and, as always, she was filled with overwhelming love as she looked at Krishna. Satisfied with his meal of mother’s milk, the child yawned sleepily. When the mother looked into the child’s open mouth, she beheld to her surprise the whole earth and the sun and the moon and the starry skies. “Who are you, Krishna?” she asked wonderingly. The child closed its mouth again and smiled up at her. And over-whelmed with mother-love, Yashoda immediately forgot what she had seen and fondled and kissed little Krishna.

Another time, Yashoda was going to bind Krishna by way of punishment. The little boy had crept up on a stool and broken a pot of butter. He had then eaten a lot of butter, and had also shared it with the monkeys. However, the cord that Yashoda was going to bind Him with was too short. Other cords did not suffice, either. She tied extra bits to it, but the cord was not yet long enough. Soon the neighbouring women stood about her surprised at her vain efforts to bind Him. The cord would not suffice. At last the boy, who stood crying, saw that his mother was trembling from her efforts that were all in vain, and that sweat was pouring from her face. He, the Eternal One, whose infinity the greatest yogis and wise men, even in deep meditation, have been unable to fathom, felt sorry for his mother, and became an

obedient child, allowing himself to be bound by the one who loved him so much, that she had spent all her efforts in her service for Him.

The door of the tool-shed was jerked open. Three drunken men stuck their heads through the opening. "Tümpelbaum! Tümpelbaum! Tümpelbaum! Come and have another drink!" they shouted. Unwillingly, Tümpelbaum grunted in his sleep and rolled on to his other side. The men began hoarsely singing a vulgar street song, then they slammed the door and tottered on, supporting one another, intending to repeat their performance at the next barrack.

The stories of how God time after time descended to earth, are entwined one with another. He, too, the hidden Divine saviour Krishna Chaitanya, about whom the West knows nothing, had been born at midnight. A full moon night in spring illumined the earth. But an eclipse of the moon was approaching. The bright disc of the night sky darkened. People began to sing. Many entered the Ganges, full of reverence, in order to bathe there, and, according to ancient tradition, to invoke God during the eclipse of the moon. All of them sang. Just then Krishna Chaitanya was born. Wrapped in the Name of God, the sound of which caused the firmament to tremble, Krishna Chaitanya came to the world.

His coming, like the birth of Christ, had been proclaimed before.

One of the eternal servants of God had descended before Chaitanya and longingly prayed to God for many years that the golden avatar might descend to earth from God's kingdom. He came. When the child descended it is said that immense crowds of strangers streamed joyfully to the house of the amazed father, and fell on their knees before the child, bringing it rich presents. These strangers were Brahma the Creator, and Shiva the Destroyer, and other exalted beings, in disguise. Neighbours and friends of the mother of the child came to her with gifts.

In order to test the character of the child, they later placed before him jewels, coins of gold and silver, silks, a clod of earth, and lastly a book, the Bhagavatam. Without hesitating, the boy grasped at the book in which God's deeds of love are praised, put his arms about it and clasped it to his breast.

Assuming the role of bhakta, Krishna now as the avatar Krishna Chaitanya, made his way almost through the whole of India. He was the most generous of all the avatars and granted the highest gift of loving service of God even to the unworthy. Once it happened that two notorious robbers attacked His bhaktas, because the robbers were infuriated when they asked them to sing the Name of God. In the end even they were converted, and began singing the Divine Name.

Krishna Chaitanya did not perform many miracles. He slew no demons. Seldom do we hear of his having healed the sick or raised up the dead. But many thousands of people were healed by him of the most terrible suffering that exists – the illness of being turned away from God. I repeated softly to myself the mantra that Sadananda had taught me:

“Praise to the most generous one,  
to Thee who bestowest love for Krishna,  
To Thee Krishna, called Krishna Chaitanya,  
who shines like molten gold.”

For forty-eight years Chaitanya wandered upon earth, as the Scriptures say:  
“Wrapped in Radha’s golden light and Her love of God.”

Towards dawn the disturbance outside quietened down. Was it singing that I heard, the singing of Christmas songs? “Silent night, holy night.”

Like two blooming rose-bushes, shooting forth from the same root, the tales of the saviours from the East and the West stretched their branches above me:

*“Ein Gott für uns, ein Kind für sich,  
liebt er uns all herzlich.  
Aus Kraut und Stein, aus Meer und Licht  
schimmert sein kindlich Angesicht.  
Geuss Vater ihn gewaltig aus.  
Gib ihn aus deinem Arm heraus!”*

That night it seemed to me as if I had stood all my life at the bottom of a deep well, longingly looking up at the little bit of sky visible through the hole at the top. I saw a beloved star there. It was called Christ. But now I had begun to climb up the sides of the well. The star shone nearer and brighter with more and more increasing love. And now it was no longer alone. On all sides of it shone other wonderful stars, other brotherly saviours, a whole starry heaven of God’s fathomless love, which streamed down towards me. The saviours of God who descended to earth, one after another, seemed to be different. They shone with different radiance and different strength. Some were heavily veiled, others less so. And yet they were not really different. All were revelations of the Only One. They all originated from the same light, the same ancient light, the same original Divine being.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE GATE OPENS

Sadananda falls ill – Engineering a visit to hospital – Lines from the Padma-Purana explained – Why I had come to India – The hidden purpose of the prison camp – Sadananda hovers between life and death – Translating the Bhagavatam – He comforts the hospital menials – He fasts, then decides to live – World history in the making – The escapists – News from my wife – I dream of release – Sadananda set free – A letter from Shri.

When Sadananda handed me a bundle of loose sheets from the Padma-Purana, which he kept in a silk cloth, he was already very ill and lay in the camp hospital. This was after the first abdominal operation, when the doctors were convinced that he was going to die. I had managed to get a look at him now and then through the window. He lay there stretched out, motionless and pale like a corpse, in the room which the patients called the death room. But one day, to my surprise and delight, I received a note written by Sadananda himself. I read the few lines that my sick friend had written: *My dear Vamandasji, do not remain in God's antechamber, in the infinite light of the formless Godhead. For the true Krishna never enters that place ...* It was signed: "Always in the one service: Sada."

A postscript was added: "*Vamandasji, can't you visit me sometimes here in the hospital?*"

It was strictly forbidden for us who were interned to visit anyone lying in the hospital. But with a little ingenuity I managed this, even on the following day. I complained of serious eye trouble, and was sent to the hospital under escort for treatment.

The old eye doctor was one of our comrades, a prisoner like ourselves. He had been the favourite pupil of a world-famous professor at a German eye clinic, and had been sent out to the Dutch Indies for scientific study. The First World War had prevented his returning home, and he had remained on the wealthy island of Java even after the war was over. As superintendent of a sanatorium he had managed gradually to forget the ambitious dreams of his youth, and he had sunk into the pleasant life of the tropics. The white-haired old man now began writing according to form in his card system, noting down the details in regard to my person. Then with skillful fingers he lifted my eyelids, smeared them with a silver preparation and other drugs, and at my own suggestion decided that I should return the next day for further treatment.

"Why, Vamandas! What a sorry sight you are!" exclaimed Sadananda with a laugh that turned into a grin of pain, and he stretched out his thin hand to me warmly. "What is the matter with your eyes? Tears are running down and leaving

black streaks on your face!”

“My eyes have been treated with *lapis infernalis*.”

“Is there something wrong with them?”

“Nothing at all.”

“I see, you have done this in order to enter the hospital and visit me. That is very kind of you.”

During the short half-hour that I sat beside Sadananda’s bed, he told me many hidden truths. Finally he gave me the lines about Krishna’s inner kingdom from the Padma-Purana to translate. They were the same lines that he had sung some months previously for the milk-white goddess, during one of our long walks in the forest.

The Padma-Purana manuscript is said to originate from the ninth century, thus it is about a thousand years old. But as all the Scriptures it is based on the eternal Word handed down through an oral tradition that has been passed on from innumerable generations from guru to disciple. The translation caused me a lot of trouble. The text was printed in a very old-fashioned way; the words were not separated from one another, but each line of verse was forged into one block of words. And where the various words melted into one another, the sounds were changed and had been assimilated. It often required long, patient listening to the rhythm of the lines and their inner significance, before their meaning became clear.

During the time that I sat and translated, my room-mate also sat at the farther end of the room. Without saying a word, he had given up his share of the table, and had made himself a new one out of an old box. He now felt more at ease and could engross himself in his favourite occupation, that of solving mathematical problems and geometrical figures. It was very hot, surely more than 100 degrees in the shade, and the flies were pestering him. They were attracted to his perspiring, red face. Tümpelbaum kept hitting at his tormentors with a fly-killer, which he thwacked many hundreds of times angrily, not far from my neck. But this did not bother me. As carefully as I could, I wrote down the words of revelation that Krishna, the hidden God, had spoken as He smiled calmly in His kingdom, and addressed His devoted bhakta, Shiva.

I felt as if I were wandering in an unknown land, on a path towards a distant mountain. To begin with, the mountain appeared to the wanderer like a solid, bright blue wall of clouds. But as he came nearer, it stretched out into a landscape of hills and valleys, woods and lakes, and the wanderer met the beings who lived there. It is just in this way that the veiled kingdom of Divine love reveals itself gradually to the soul striving for the service of God.

This is no dream, it is not poetry; it is pure reality. A gleam from the eternal realm of archetypes has always, since childhood, penetrated my life. Often, even as a boy, I have awoken frightened out of my sleep, as I had been rescued after a long, endless wandering: I have forgotten something, I have forgotten something infinitely important!

What I, and all of us, have forgotten and lost, I had to travel to India to be



reminded of; the land where there is no guilt and no fate, where that which has been done will be undone. The ground one treads there is not earthly soil. Time there is not earthly time – every moment is no longer painfully divided into past and future. The happiness experienced there has not a layer of sorrow always lying at the bottom. There is no death there. “Each word is a song, each step a dance ...” But one cannot enter there, if one desires to do so selfishly; only through unselfish loving service of God can this land be reached. Before the first morning ray of the veiled land can be discerned, mountains of night must be traversed.

When I first set out for this realm – open to all, yet thickly veiled from our sight – and kept stumbling and beginning the climb once more, my life was filled to the brim with the utmost despair. Yet in a world of barracks, where everything of spiritual value that I had once attained seemed to be lost, where every path ended, after a few steps, in a tangle of barbed wire, and where one would be shot at if one tried to go farther, even here in my despair I made an effort to make my way on a path that led to the land where there was no guilt and no fate.

Sadananda came and helped me to find the open gate of Krishna’s inner realm of Vraja, where one can proceed eternally without coming to an end. It was only in order to find him – I know that now – that I had undertaken the journey to India. In order to find him, I would gladly wander the whole distance around the globe. Yet I had to enter a prison camp for the purpose of finding him. Thus the long years of my life.

Five times Sadananda was laid on the operating table during his imprisonment in the Indian camp. Each time he placed himself completely in the hands of God. Once, before awaking from his unconscious state, he sang for an hour without stopping: “Krishna, Krishna, Krishna! ...” The medical attendant, one of our comrades, asked him afterwards why he had called that Name incessantly. Sadananda became embarrassed, feeling ashamed that he could not hide his heart better.

For about two years my friend lay in the camp hospital, with only short intervals of respite, and several times he was placed in the room for the dying. I often sat beside his bed in one of the wards. My real instruction began at this time, when I had to fight for every opportunity of meeting him.

Even in the hospital Sadananda worked much of the time. When I arrived, I usually found him, as previously in the barrack, sitting with his legs crossed on his bed. His little metal trunk lay on his knees, serving as a table, and he wrote eagerly. Often, however, I found him sleeping. Then he lay with his head under the sheet, resting after a sleepless night of pain. All about him in the hospital there was noise and disturbance. I waited calmly until he awoke.

When we were together, he looked over the translations I had completed since our last meeting. He often criticized me, complaining that I worked too fast, not precisely enough. “Nobody expects you to be a racer,” he once said to me. “One can speed on tracks of dead gravel and ashes. But on the spiritual pastures of the

Bhagavatam, where God and His friends play their eternal games, one should tread with reverence.” He showed me in which attitude of soul I should approach my work. “You must bow down inwardly before every line of a verse, every word, as if they contained the final revelation. And then you must remain quiet, listening, until the original text itself takes the initiative within you and begins expressing itself.”

Once he warned me: “A notebook containing translations of the Bhagavata should be a model of neatness and order. This order attracts Krishna’s grace. Each pencil, each sheet of paper, can be a means for serving Krishna and bringing Him joy. My guru insisted on such order, which colours all one’s life, and he was an example of what he preached. For one thing, he ate, like all Hindus, with his fingers. But he touched his food only with the tips of his fingers. It was not like eating, when he partook of a meal, but rather like praying.”

For a long time Sadananda observed a pledge of complete silence, writing his answers and remarks on bits of paper, and in this way many of his utterances have been preserved, and I treasure them.

One day he asked me: “Why are you so upset, Vamandas? It troubles me.”

Then I told him that a cat had been killed in the camp, just before we on the sick-list had marched to the hospital. “A crowd, myself included, surrounded the dying animal. The cat was not quite dead as yet. It wanted to creep away and hide, as animals do when they know they are going to die; it tried to get up in order to escape to some dark corner, but it sank down whining again and again. Its back was broken. I did not know what I ought to do. Should I have taken a stone and thrown it at the cat, in order to end its misery? I did nothing, I just went away. What should I have done?”

Sadananda’s eyes flashed. His whole being was afire. “You behaved quite wrongly, Vamandas. You should have knelt beside the dying animal, in spite of all the staring eyes about you. And you should have sung Narasinha’s mantra in the ear of the animal. You know that I have given you that mantra, the verse about Krishna’s great avatar Narasinha, who tears away like a spiritual lion the veil of Maya from the atma with its diamond nails, and wakes it to life. If you had done this, the animal would have been reminded in the hour of its death that it is an atma, belonging only to Krishna; and that his inner mission is to serve Krishna for all eternity.”

Sadananda was loved by the Indian boys who performed the most menial work in the hospital, that of emptying night-chambers, and the like, for the European prisoners. It made him very unhappy once when one of the German internees persisted in trying to incite the boys against him by means of slander. But they took no notice of this. He, the European Mahatma, understood their language. He instructed them regularly. They sat crouching in a circle on the floor about him, and listened to what he had to tell them about the descent of Krishna to earth, and of God’s great avatars. The superintendent of the hospital forbade this instruction,

and demanded heavy fines from the poor boys. But they kept coming to Sadananda. They came to him with their troubles. He paused in whatever work he had on hand at the time for their sake. He always had time for them. He even helped these boys, who were excluded from the schools, in their patient efforts to learn to read and write. Every time that I visited the hospital I saw one or two of these boys sitting in the narrow strip of shade outside the toilet-houses, squatting on their heels and ready in case the gruff voice of any sick sahib called them. They held a pad of writing paper and a reader on their knees, and tried to copy the involved figures of Hindi script.

In the hospital, in the whole camp, and in the bazaars of the neighbouring communities, the rumour began to spread that Svami Sadananda had started fasting. He preferred to die rather than be forced to continue eating meat. After one of the operations with life or death in the balance, the German doctors, his own comrades, had tried to persuade him, for his own good, to drink *bouillon*. I had often witnessed the agony he experienced, when time after time during his confinement in the camp he had been forced to choose between starvation or partaking of food that his religion forbade. He had tired of this now. Although still very weak after the severe surgical treatment he had undergone, he had begun to fast. The hospital attendants had been instructed to serve his meals punctually, and let the food stand beside his bed until it was time for the next meal. Sadananda continued his fasting.

Not until the evening of the sixth day of his hunger-strike did I succeed in entering the hospital as a patient. When I came into his room, he was so weak that he could only show his recognition of me with an expression in his eyes. As I sat silent beside his motionless body I was sure that I was looking at my friend for the last time.

Suddenly he began speaking in a clear, surprisingly forceful voice, and he gave me the same command as often before: “Vamandas, take a pencil and paper and write. I shall dictate to you in Sanskrit, a prayer from the Padma-Purana. It is directed to the Divine Pair, Radha-Krishna, the two who are one:

‘That which is I, that which is mine,  
In this world, in a future life,  
May all this be borne today  
As a sacrifice before your feet.

I am thine, Krishna! I am thine, Radha!  
With my body and all my deeds,  
With my spirit, and with every word  
My tongue speaks.’ ”

When Sadananda finished, I asked him: “Svamiji, don’t you really wish to live a

little longer?”

He smiled, and said humorously: “Yes, today when I saw you walk past my window, I decided to try to continue my life on earth a little longer – in order not to break off the instruction I have begun giving you, before you are capable of making your way alone.”

My friend broke his fasting. A new stage of companionship unfolded for us that evening.

While I received my instruction, almost unperceived by my comrades, world history was in the making. The fronts of the scene of war in four continents were pushed forward, and withdrawn again. These changes cast heavy shadows into our camp, where everything continued seesawing up and down. Men who had previously been disregarded or unnoticed suddenly became influential personalities in the barracks. And those who had been highly respected, and greeted with fond flattery, sank down among the masses, degenerated, and disappeared. One year followed another. We began to get grey and lose our teeth. Once I happened to stand in the queue outside the canteen behind a man who had always been exceedingly particular about his appearance. Now I saw a bedbug walk calmly out from the collar of his ragged khaki shirt, and down his back. As the years had gone by he had converted everything he owned into drink, even his fine suits that were made by a well-known English tailor. The members of the camp celebrated every little victory with a drinking bout, and they drank again to drown their sorrow after a defeat.

A group of mountain climbers who had been taken unawares by the outbreak of war during an expedition in the Himalayas could no longer stand the confinement behind the barbed wire. They succeeded in carrying out a well-planned escape. Some of them got far away into Tibet. But one of the bold, hardened men had succumbed to the privation they suffered. We saw the others again in the camp after they had served a term in the camp prison. They had either been captured, or, ill with fever, had dragged themselves through the mountain tracts and voluntarily given themselves up to the police. One of them, who had held out the longest, told me that towards the end he could not bear the loneliness of Tibet’s windy desert plateau: the roaring of the storm, the rushing of the torrents in the mountain crevices, and above all the strange thoughts that stole over him at night. He told of the greed of the people there, their desire for silver coins. He told us of a ghost-like deserted village, where there was not a single living person. And of a village near\_by, where he had been driven away by stoning as he approached it, tired and hungry. He showed me a deep scar on his forehead that he had received on this occasion. “Not until later on did we find out that a few villages near Lake Manasarovar had been completely depopulated by the ravages of smallpox. The people in the village where we were stoned were beside themselves with fear that

we were contaminated.”

I was horrified at the man’s story. Why, I had come to India with the intention of crossing Himalaya in order to reach Lake Manasarovar. Now I heard that even in these regions human beings hated one another, and suffered fear, greed and sickness. Oh! It was just as Shri had said. The lake of the Holy Spirit is not to be found on earth; it lies in quite another world.

I was sitting beside the bed of my friend in the hospital when I received a card from my wife, sent from Sweden. I had heard some time previously that she and our child had found sanctuary in the eleventh hour in this hospitable country. My wife wrote: *We must thank God that your beloved mother is dead, that she need no longer suffer in the ghetto camp of Theresienstadt.*

I bowed by head. My mother had been a proud, fiery soul. There was no egoism in her. She had had only one last wish in life: to see her son once more. This great longing had kept her alive for years in an environment in which the majority succumbed. But the fulfillment of this one burning wish had been denied her.

I could not prevent the tears from streaming down my face. Some of the patients in the ward noticed this, and stared curiously. Sadananda took my hand, “Vamandas, your mother is with Krishna, in Krishna’s realm,” he said comfortingly.

The next time I visited Sadananda he told me of a dream he had had. “I dreamed that I was released from the camp. But when I went out through the gate to travel to Brindaban, where a friend, a disciple of my guru, lives, I was stopped by the guard. He said to me: ‘Yes, you may go. But you must take the little child with you.’ ” Sadananda smiled. “It was a bright, healthy youngster. But its eyes and ears were sealed with earth. Vamandas, do you know who that child was?”

Oh, I knew. It was myself. It was my spiritual eyes and ears that were sealed with earth. Whimsically, but at the same time with my heart quietly rejoicing, I answered with a mantra he had taught me:

“Reverence for the guru who opened my eyes,  
as if with a little staff smeared with the salve of wisdom,  
and took away the darkness of my blindness.”

We both laughed. “We have some way to go as yet, before getting that far,” Sadananda remarked.

Shortly afterward, Sadananda was suddenly given his freedom. He travelled to Brindavan, the region where Krishna Himself descended five thousands years ago. There, on the shores of the Yamuna river, Krishna had spent His happy youth among the cowherds.

The hospital ward seemed empty when Sadananda had left, although every bed but his was occupied. Kahosta, formerly a ladies’ hairdresser from Vienna, who had introduced permanent waving successfully among the young Chinese women

of Haza, glanced disdainfully at his remaining comrades in the ward, and said: "It's awfully dull here now that the Hindu fellow has left us. All of us miss him."

But I was happy and full of confidence. I was sure that I would see my friend once more. There was only one thing that troubled me, and that was the complete silence for so many years of my first guru, Shri. Was he silent because he felt that in many ways I had been unfaithful to him? He had wanted to lead me to the exalted goal of knowing the truth. But during my association with Sadananda I had learned that unless one's heart is filled with the discerning love of God the greatest wisdom is nothing but chaff, like empty husks which it is useless to try to thresh.

I wrote a letter to Shri, trying to describe in detail the inner evolution I had experienced. For several years he had observed a pledge of silence. He neither wrote nor spoke, he only meditated for the harassed world. But now he broke his pledge. I received a letter in his own handwriting. Shri wrote: *My dear Vamandasji! You have spent your time in India well. I bless you. I bless you for what you have done. And I bless you for what you are going to do in the future.*

A few days after receiving this missive, I was quite unexpectedly released from the prison camp. As I passed through the two iron-barred gates, the guard asked as usual: "To the hospital?" The English non-commissioned officer escorting me answered: "No, he is free." There were still several thousand men behind the barbed wire of the camp.

## CHAPTER XII

### FAREWELL TO INDIA

Good-bye to prison – I visit Shri in Mahabaleshvar – Alone in Bombay – Gandhi is welcomed by vast crowds – His son sings – Sadananda's visit – I am initiated by Svami Bon – Embarkation for Europe – I fly from London to Sweden – Reunited with my family.

When I left the camp, the first visit I made was to Shri. He had retired up in the mountain regions of Mahabaleshvar, where I once had spent a summer with him. Just as before, I sat at the feet of the good old man. He kept the pledge of silence he had held for so many years. But every morning and evening, when I bowed deeply before him, he stroked my hair with his slim hand, by way of blessing, and looked down kindly at me with his child-like, innocent, happy smile. Rana, too, was there. Once again Rana and I wandered together in the woods, where wonderful orchids were growing on the mossy branches of the trees, and where now and again one would be surprised by a glimpse of deep valleys and ravines in the open spaces between the foliage of the trees, and sometimes even a glimpse of the faraway sea.

From Mahabaleshvar I travelled to Bombay, in order to obtain a boat reservation to Sweden. For it was now more than eight years since I had seen my family, and my courageous wife had carried the burden of responsibility quite alone all this time. Now she had nearly reached the end of her strength. She had written: *Come and take care of our child.*

I was quite alone in Bombay, as I hastened from one government office to another, and everywhere I had to fill in long questionnaires, in order to prove that my journey was necessary. Not only myself, but whole armies that had fought in Asia, were waiting for a chance to get home. Sadananda was far away, he and his friend, Svami Bon, had travelled to Assam, in the farther end of India near the Chinese border. I had written to him, to be sure, that I would like to meet him once more. But to what avail were letters or telegrams, when the whole of India had been paralyzed for weeks by a general post and telegraph strike. Unforwarded letters and telegrams lay in heaps on the floors of the empty post-offices. There was a rumour of a threatening railway strike as well. Bank clerks, who demanded a rise in salary, were distributing printed sheets on the streets instead of sitting at their counters. Sometimes long columns of demonstrators marched through the town with bright red banners that bore the hammer and sickle. Bombay had changed decidedly during these years that had passed since I landed there. Only the shrill chorus of voices from the gold exchange remained the same.

One day I read in the newspapers that Gandhi had arrived in Bombay, in connection with important political matters. That evening I entered a crowded bus,

and went to the distant factory district where the Mahatma lived and held his daily prayer-meetings. There is not a palace in the whole of the wide-stretching country that had not gladly received this old man as a guest. But on his visits to large towns he preferred to live in the slums, in the midst of Indian factory workers and the casteless, because he felt that he was their brother.

I stood wedged in this crowd of people, many of whom had never eaten their fill, or had never learned to read or write, or had never been allowed until recently to perform other work than the most menial. Many of them lifted up their infants, so that they might once in their life see the Mahatma. The millions of poor Hindus did not see in Gandhi the successful politician or the lawyer. They loved him because they felt he was a saint, who had entered the political arena out of love for the oppressed people.

Gandhi sat up on a platform on an easy-chair, facing the assembled crowd. He looked tired, his hands lay folded on his knees, and his eyes were closed. It happened to be that day of the week when he usually observed silence. Therefore another person read his short speech. But when the loud-speaker sounded, the first words we heard were not those of Gandhi. To my surprise, the mighty resonance of the first lines of the Isha-Upanishad rang out in the square framed with factories. For thousands of years the study of the esoteric teaching of the Vedas had been introduced with this Upanishad. Even Shri had observed this when he instructed me. This Upanishad contains the essence of the secrets of the Vedas, which the casteless of India were formerly strictly forbidden to share in. Now it flowed in rhythmical waves over the heads of the untouchables:

“Isha vasyam idam sarvam  
yat kinca jagatyam jagat ...”

These lines mean: “May the whole universe, and all that moves in this perishable world, be enveloped in God, the Divine Lord ...” But the ancient Sanskrit has a fullness and richness that makes it impossible to translate the lines with the conciseness of the original. The words intimate, too, that we might be ever conscious that our world is filled with God, invested with God, inhabited by God, permeated by God.

As I stood in the midst of the crowd of people who trembled under the force of the thundering words, I thought: this line from the Upanishad is like a threshold. If one has benefited by the meaning of the line, one can live in the midst of the world, with its noise and strife, without being engulfed. Only then can one tread the endless path that starts here, leading on into the realm of Divine love.

The voice of the Upanishad had died away; the crowd, too, was quiet. One of Gandhi’s sons began singing up on the platform. The verse that he sang was also familiar to me. It was one of God’s Names, that of Rama, that Sadananda and I had often sung together with the happy children on the slope of Himalaya.



Ten times, twenty times, Gandhi's son sang the Name Rama. Then he said to the crowd, "Sing with me!" Shyly at first, but gradually louder and full of joy, they sang, all of them, latrine cleaners, coolies, street sweepers, workers from the cotton mills, and women whose work was to stand half-naked in the motley mixtures of the dye-works, wringing long lengths of wet, dyed cloth; forty or fifty thousand people sang, and I with them. Gandhi's son showed the people with raised arms how the rhythm should be marked by clapping their hands. And all of us clapped our hands and sang at the top of our voices:

"Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram  
Patita Pavana Sita Ram."

It seemed as if they never wanted to stop singing rapturously the Name Rama, the Name of the Divine saviour who had descended to earth and lifted up the fallen.

Many of those singing turned hesitatingly, perhaps for the first time, towards God. The old man, who tells in his memoirs that the Name Rama freed him from all fear, sat on the platform listening. No one could have guessed then that, before the opening of a similar meeting for prayer, a fanatic was to shoot down the Mahatma, in order to silence the voice that tirelessly insisted that one must love one's enemies.

Gandhi had disappeared into the hut where he was living. The crowds stormed the buses. I realized that I should probably have to stand where I was and wait at least an hour. Then I decided to take one of the nearly empty buses that went far out into the country.

Feeling quite elated, I saw how we passed through ugly suburbs, between barracks, factories, gravel heaps, garages and hangars. I tried to understand what Shri had taught me, and what is explained in the Upanishad, that there is not a speck of dust that does not have its ground in God, and that my own heart has its ground in Him.

When night came, I got off the bus at random, and asked a passer-by somewhat anxiously if there was a street-car or bus that went in the direction of my hostel. The man laughed. "You do not need to ride. Your hostel is only a couple of hundred steps away." Without knowing it I had returned home.

At the hostel a letter awaited me, and was handed me by a messenger. It was the news I had been waiting for. The American Express Company notified me that a sailing reservation had been booked for me on a day not far off. The next morning I began my rounds again to the various government offices, breathed once more the particular air of these places, and filled out blanks. By dinner time I had all the necessary papers in my possession, and they were stamped according to requirement: permission to leave India, British through permit, Swedish entrance permit, etc. In my heart, however, I was a little downcast at having to leave India,

which I loved, without having once more seen my friend Sadananda – and without having been initiated.

Dejected and exhausted, I lay down on my bed in the heat of noon, in a room that I shared with four old men. Suddenly it seemed to me that I heard Sadananda's voice. He came in with swift strides, tall and slim in his light monk's gown. Once in the camp he had said to me: "If you really need me, I shall come to you, even though I am a thousand miles away." And now he had come, to my overwhelming surprise. "Get up, Vamandas," he said. "Hurry up! Time is precious. Put on your best clothes. Svami Bon is waiting in the carriage below."

"We cannot stay here longer than two days, perhaps three," explained Sadananda, as we hurried down the wooden steps of the tall house. "We came only to meet you before your departure for Europe – and Svami Bon will give you the holy Name of God and the Indian rosary of Tulasi pearls."

Sadananda's friend, Svami Bon, sat in the two-wheeled carriage that stood in front of the door, the man who had been sent to Europe by his guru, Bhakti-Siddhanta Sarasvati. He was the first Bhakta that Sadananda had met. Svami Bon, whose fine features and calm eyes I had seen in a portrait shown me by Sadananda, appeared older than I had expected him to be. I touched my forehead to his feet by way of greeting, and climbed into the carriage. He embraced me heartily. We drove away. We did not bother about the two men in Indian dress who stood in front of the door of the hostel, and eyed us suspiciously. They were probably members of the secret police.

We spent only three days together. We walked barefoot through the masses in the courtyard of the great temple of Narayana. This temple is the seat of Indian orthodoxy, and in its halls the pandit expounds the writings in song for a circle of listeners, who squat in a circle about him. We passed on. The three of us sat together on the seashore. We dined together, endeavouring first to sacrifice the food to God as a gift of love, and receive it again from Him as Divine grace, and partake of it in communion with Him, a mutual meal of love.

"*Take the spiritual treasure you have found here in India into the West,*" said Sadananda to me, as we said farewell to one another at the Central Station, in Bombay.

The train that my friends were taking left the station. They returned to Brindaban, the region where the boy Krishna had once spent his happy youth in the woods among the cowherds. And I boarded the great ship that was to take me to Europe.

The stately but exceedingly overcrowded luxury steamer seemed to me to be unreal, a thing of dreams. There were nine of us lying in three layers, one over the other, in a cabin intended for two. During the fourteen days of the voyage the loud-speaker could be heard incessantly in all corners and nooks of the big ship. The musical programme was constantly interrupted by military orders or disciplinary messages. English generals and privates, army chaplains and nurses, were returning

home on this ship, and even a large group of cabaret artists and dancers in uniform. The latter had given performances in the great forests of Assam and Burma, in order to make life a little brighter for the worn-out troops at the front. All day long they lay on the boards of the deck, in short khaki trousers or light bathing-costumes, as if they were at a seaside resort. In the evenings they danced in shimmering evening dresses with the British officers on the festive, brightly-lit deck. "Forget, forget all that has happened!" seemed to be everybody's motto. Meanwhile, nine hundred returning Italian prisoners of war, taken on as passengers by the overcrowded ship at the last minute, camped on a lower, darker deck, tightly crowded. When the Calabrian coast was sighted, these Italians shrieked wildly and rushed to the railing, causing the mighty ship to lurch. On the following morning they landed quietly in a devastated Naples, in a long column, each man carrying his heavy pack on his back.

We travelled on. Impatience and anxiety filled those on board as the ship made record time from Italy round a large part of Europe, past the coasts of Morocco, Spain, Portugal and France. Then we entered the English Channel, and the waves became greyer. I, too, was impatient, and my heart was filled with a longing for home.

I flew from London, although the ticket was altogether too expensive for my pocket. A fog hung over England, fog enveloped the aeroplane, and one could hardly see as far as the tips of its wings. For a long while we dived down into air-pockets, one after another, but when we flew over the North Sea the sun was shining. The sun shone on the granite cliffs of the Swedish coastal islands. In the roar of the motor I sang aloud, unheard by anyone. I sang the mantra of the Name of God, which bestows love, and which surely had never sounded before over this land and these waters. I sang the words of joy with which Krishna Chaitanya, the hidden Avatar of the age of discord, had praised the might of the Name of God.

At midnight, holding my worn tropical helmet, and breathing the cool, fresh air of the north, I stood on the railway station of a little Swedish town.

A few steps away stood my wife with her head bowed. It seemed as if she had lost hope of my ever returning. Beside her stood a slim thirteen-year-old boy. He had been a little child of four when I had seen him last. He called out in a clear voice: "Father!" and relieved me of my travelling bag. Hella, whom Shri had called Shanti, Peace, looked up and came to me smiling. Just then it seemed as if we had been parted only a few days.

In the room put at my disposal in a hospitable home at the edge of a wood, I began relating my experiences to my wife. All night I sat beside her bed and related, and I continued my story during the days and nights that followed. Yet I noticed that I had only reached the beginning of the inexhaustible that I had to tell. I saw how my wife blossomed when I told her about the love of God in India, and I sang for her the bhakti songs that my friend Sadananda had taught me.

“Father, may I listen?” asked my son, who had shyly opened the door of his bedroom, and stood barefoot before us.

“Yes, sit down beside us and listen,” said my wife. I continued my song. It was one about Krishna Chaitanya. Outside the open windows the weeping birches were murmuring in the light breeze. How amazing! ... It was the murmur of trees in the North, no longer the roar of the rivers of Himalaya.