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Arise! Awake! And stop not till the Goal is reached.

INTEGRAL VISION OF VEDIC SEERS*

'Truth is one : sages call It by various names'

देवानां नु वयं जाना प्र वोचाम विपन्यथा ।
उक्थेषु शस्यमानेषु यः पश्यादुत्तरे युगे ॥

1. Let us proclaim with a clear voice (*vipanyayā*) the birth (*jānā*) of gods, so that in future ages (*uttare yuge*) people may see them when their praises are chanted (*uktheṣu śasyamāneṣu*).¹

R̥g-Veda 10.72.1

ब्रह्मणस्पतिरेता सं कर्मार इवाधमत् ।
देवानां पूर्व्ये युगेऽसतः सदजायत ॥

2. As a blacksmith (*karṁāra*) blows [into his bellows] Brahmanaspati² [breathed life into] the gods. In the primeval age before the gods (*devānām pūrvye yuge*), the Manifested came out of the Unmanifested.³

R̥g-Veda 10.72.2

* Given here is one of the important, though not well-known, metaphysical hymns of the *R̥g-Veda*. It contains several seminal ideas which were more fully developed in the Upaniṣads. Its central theme is the mystery of creation, and in this it resembles the famous *Nāśadiyasūkta* of *R̥g-Veda* 10.12.9. Who created the universe? Could it be Brahmanaspati, the Primal Puruṣa? Or Aditi, the Universal Mother? Or was the universe created out of the cosmic dust kicked up from the depths of space by the gods in their primordial dance? These are some of the fascinating speculations of the great sages found in this striking hymn.

1. Once an experience is recorded in words, it becomes the permanent possession of humanity, for words have the power to re-create the original experience. Vedic sages recorded their experiences so that later generations might also see the gods as they had done. Patañjali says that when Mantras are properly recited they lead to the direct experience of corresponding gods (*Yoga-sūtra* 2.44).

2. According to Sāyaṇa, Brahmanaspati means 'Lord of food' and here stands for Aditi, the Mother of gods. Or it may mean Hiraṇyagarbha, the Primal Puruṣa, of whom all gods are parts.

3. This enigmatic statement is repeated in the *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* 2.7 and *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* 6.2.2. *Asat* here does not mean 'non-existence' but the unmanifested or unconditioned Brahman. From that arose *sat*, the manifested or conditioned Brahman (Hiraṇyagarbha), who in turn produced the gods and the whole universe.

ABOUT THIS NUMBER

The theme of this month's EDITORIAL is that Sri Ramakrishna is the ideal man for people of the present age.

THE GURU AND SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE by Swami Yatiswarananda, late Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order and Mission, is an illuminating talk delivered at the Vedanta Society of Philadelphia of which he was the founder-president.

In LIFE AND CONSCIOUSNESS Swami Shraddhanandaji, head of the Vedanta Society of Sacramento, California, U.S.A., shows that the distinction between life-energy and consciousness has an important place in spiritual life.

In OUR THREE-FLOOR MANSION Swami Nityabodhananda makes an original comparison between the Jungian concept of psychoid and the Hindu concept of Samskāra, and provides valuable hints on overcoming depression. The author who is the founder-head of the Vedanta Centre of Geneva, Switzerland, is a deep thinker and scholar and has several books in French and English to his credit.

The illustrated article TEMPLES OF BENGAL by Swami Someswarananda of Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, describes the evolution and distinctive features of temple architecture in Bengal and places the Ramakrishna temples in perspective. The line drawings in this instructive and informative article are the work of the versatile author himself.

If the major religions of the world whose roots lie deep in the myths of the Axial Period (800 B.C.—200 B.C.) are to develop into a common universal religion for all mankind, certain basic conditions are to be fulfilled : this is the theme of the thought-provoking article THE CHURCH

UNIVERSAL in this month's Forum for Inter-religious understanding. It was originally delivered as a talk in the meeting of the North American Chapter of the I.A.R.F. at Dallas, Texas, U.S.A., in June 1972. Its enlightened author Dr. Donald Szantho Harrington is Senior Minister in the Community Church of New York.

In PEOPLE OF THE NEW AGE Swami Yogeshananda of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago brilliantly portrays present day American youth who have come under diverse Eastern influences.

MAHENDRA NATH GUPTA by Swami Tathagatananda, head of the Vedanta Society of New York, gives a profile of M., the famous author of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

COME AGAIN is a short poem by M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta) translated from Bengali by Swami Jitatmananda of Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad.

After an absence of three years the *Musafir* appears again in this journal. His MUSINGS this time are on the law of historical justice working relentlessly at national and international levels.

In THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN VEDANTA Dr. Leta Jane Lewis, Professor of Foreign Languages in the School of Humanities, California University, Fresno, shows the importance of prayer as a preliminary spiritual discipline in the life of a Vedantic seeker.

Swami Vidyatmananda of the Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna, Gretz, France concludes THE RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGE IN EUROPE with an engaging account of his visits to some of the important pilgrimage centres in Europe.

THREE ASPECTS OF THE RAMAKRISHNA IDEAL

(EDITORIAL)

The historical perspective

Greatness is of two types : contemporary and eternal. An ordinary person who has attained greatness in any field like social service, religion, art or science, can influence the lives of a few thousand people but only for a short period, for his influence does not usually survive his death. But world prophets like Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, Jesus and Mohamed influence the lives of millions of people for centuries. Their influence is not limited by time. Nay, it undergoes a process of time enlargement : with the passage of centuries the glory of these prophets, instead of decreasing, goes on increasing.

There is another point of difference between the two classes of great men. After their death ordinary great men cease to be real. If posterity remembers them, it is only as a good example or ideal, and the homage paid to their memory once in a while is only a symbolic act like saluting the national flag. On the contrary, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha and Jesus are not mere symbols or legends but living realities, and it is upon their reality that millions of people have built their spiritual lives.

There is a third difference. These great prophets are accepted by vast numbers of people as their highest ideal and goal. No ordinary man, however great he may be, can ever claim this uniqueness. Each prophet or world teacher comes as the embodiment of the dominant ideal of a particular age, and his life becomes the highest moral standard and goal for the people of that age. The lives of these world teachers are thus bound up with history and in order to understand their true significance, they must be placed in historical perspective.

Man has been continually discovering new ways of exploiting nature and improv-

ing the means of production of food clothing, other necessities and also the means of transport and travel. These changes in living conditions, and the incessant wars and social conflicts that result from these changes, bring into existence different ages or epochs in history. Each epoch with its changed conditions throws new challenges to the people. These external challenges can be met only by mobilizing the inner spiritual resources of the people. It is through ideas and ideals that the inner energies of man get mobilized. The new ideals necessary for each epoch are developed by certain charismatic individuals who become prophets of new religions or new religious movements.

A civilization can continue to exist only if it succeeds in evolving new ideals suited to different epochs, and for this it must produce a succession of charismatic religious leaders. Those civilizations which fail in this historical task get replaced by other cultures. That was how Egyptian, Sumerian, Greek and Roman civilizations came to be replaced by Christian and Islamic cultures. Such an eventuality did not overtake India as a whole because a succession of spiritual leaders enabled it to renew its immemorial culture periodically.

It is to this class of prophets and world teachers that Sri Ramakrishna belonged. His birth was a historical necessity. The discoveries of science and technology and the diffusion of new social and political ideals had ushered in the modern age. There was the need for a charismatic individual who could create, and through his life vitalize, the basic ideals of the present age. This Sri Ramakrishna fulfilled through the Ramakrishna ideal.

The personality of Sri Ramakrishna had three dimensions : the individual, the universal and the divine. Accordingly, the

Ramakrishna ideal is a composite of three distinct ideals : the ideal man of the present age, the prophet of the present age, the Deity of the present age. The being known to the world as Sri Ramakrishna is the Power animating these ideals in the present age for the welfare of mankind.

THE IDEAL MAN

Meaning of the human ideal

Beyond the bare rudiments of literacy, Sri Ramakrishna never had much formal education which he ridiculed as 'bread-winning education'. Most of his youth was spent in the intense practice of various spiritual disciplines. Though for a short period he officiated at the Kali temple, he virtually lived the life of a monk depending on the charity of others. How can such a person be regarded as the ideal man for the modern age which idolizes film stars, sportsmen, scientists, politicians and, now for a change, miracle-working Yogis? Open any newspaper or magazine, and you will find displayed on almost every page pictures of men and women in all kinds of dress and posture who, while they advertise the qualities of a brand of soap or cloth, also project idealized images of contemporary society. No other age ever allowed 'lust and greed' (*Kāmini-Kāñcana*, as Sri Ramakrishna called it) to dominate the minds of its people so completely as the modern age has done. Everything in modern society is valued for the sake of money. Can Sri Ramakrishna who could not even touch money become the ideal for the people of such a society?

The answer is that an ideal stands for perfection, and this imperfect individuals cannot give. Western culture considers beauty, truth and goodness the criteria of perfection. However, physical beauty is only skin deep and is as evanescent as youth itself. Truth is sought through science, but

every new discovery of science only points to another mystery beyond. The basis of goodness is unselfish love, but in the market-oriented culture of modern society unselfishness is the most scarce commodity. The lives of scientists, artists and leaders of society are far from perfect. As for the images you see in advertisements, they are false ideals meant to tantalize ignorant people.

Perfection must be sought in the right place. Thousands of years ago it was discovered in India that perfection could not be found in the external world which is impermanent and full of contradictions. Freedom from all limitations is the Vedantic criterion of perfection. Immutable Truth, unity of Existence, boundless Bliss—this is what is meant by perfection in Vedanta. There is only one thing which is free from all limitations of time, space and causation : it is consciousness. It is in the depths of consciousness that perfection is to be sought.

The present state of consciousness of ordinary people is no doubt limited, but these limitations are only products of ignorance. Through spiritual practice ignorance can be removed and consciousness can be made to expand, 'Consciousness is the Infinite'—*Prajñānam brahma*—this was one of the great discoveries of fundamental importance made in India. By transforming and expanding his present consciousness man can attain freedom from all limitations of time, space and causation, freedom from the dualities of good and evil, joy and sorrow, love and hate. It is this total freedom that is the Vedantic criterion of perfection, and the individual who has attained this freedom is the ideal of perfection. He is known as the *Jīvanmukta*, the liberated-in-life.

When we speak of Sri Ramakrishna as an ideal man, what we mean is that he was the embodiment of this ancient Vedantic ideal of perfection in him. The characteristics of the fully liberated individual have been described in considerable detail in Hindu

scriptures especially in the Upaniṣads where he is known as *brahmavid* (knower of Brahman), in the *Gītā* where he is called *sthitaprajña* (man of steady wisdom), *guṇātīta* (one who has transcended the guṇas) and so on, and in *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* and other Advaitic treatises where he is known as *Jīvanmukta*. However, a study of these descriptions reveal the fact that their emphasis is usually on negative qualities like detachment, renunciation and remaining unaffected by heat and cold, pleasure and pain, praise and blame and other polarities. The world is looked upon as unreal, a product of *Māyā* or a place of sorrow, and a liberated individual is one who has transcended the world.

In modern society with its keen awareness of the miseries of life, greater social commitment, and greater interdependence of people, the ideal of a person remaining aloof, unaffected by the sorrows and problems of his fellowmen, cannot inspire universal acceptance. The ideal that Sri Ramakrishna lived and exemplified in his life was not exactly the *Jīvanmukta* ideal of the ancient type. It was an extension or expansion of the ancient ideal adapted to the needs of the modern age. He was conversant with the *Jīvanmukta* ideal but was also aware of its limitations. However, unlike some modern reformers and thinkers, he did not reject it or condemn it. What he did was to charge it with the power of his spiritual realizations, to give it a new meaning and purpose, and to raise it to a higher level so that it might fulfil the aspirations of the modern man. The ideal person according to Sri Ramakrishna is one who, after attaining liberation for himself, strives for the liberation of others. Such a fully illumined soul he called a *Vijñānī*. It is as a perfect *Vijñānī* that Sri Ramakrishna is said to be the ideal man for the modern age.

The jīvanmukta and the vijñānī.

Sri Ramakrishna himself made clear the

distinction between the two types of liberated individuals on several occasions :

There are two classes of Paramahamsas, one affirming the formless Reality and the other affirming God with form. Trilinga Swami believed in the formless Reality. Paramahamsas like him care for their own good alone; they feel satisfied if they themselves attain the goal.

But those Paramahamsas who believe in God with form keep the love of God even after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, so that they may teach spiritual truths to others. They are like a pitcher brimful of water. Part of the water may be poured into another pitcher. These perfected souls describe to others the various spiritual disciplines by which they have realized God. They do this only to teach others and to help them in spiritual life. With great effort men dig a well for drinking-water, using spades and baskets for the purpose. After the digging is over, some throw the spades and other implements into the well, not needing them any more. But some put them away near the well, so that others may use them.

Some eat mangoes and remove all traces of them by wiping their mouths with a towel. But some share the fruit with others. There are sages who, even after attaining knowledge, work to help others and also to enjoy the bliss of God in the company of devotees.¹

The difference between the *Jīvanmukta* and the *Vijñānī* has its parallel in the Buddhist ideals of the Arhat and the Bodhisattva, though Buddhist *Nirvāṇa* and Vedantic *mukti* belong to two levels of experience. An Arhat is one who has attained *Nirvāṇa* for himself. A Bodhisattva is one who turns away from *Nirvāṇa* (even though it is within his reach) and works for the welfare of others. Sri Ramakrishna was the first great modern teacher to introduce into Hinduism a Vedantic counterpart of the Bodhisattva ideal, though it had been adumbrated by earlier teachers, notably by Śrī Kṛṣṇa. It was this ideal that Swami Vivekananda universal-

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda. (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974), pp. 457-458. For the Master's views on *Jīvanmukta*, see p. 694.

ized and placed before mankind as the ideal of the modern age.

However, Sri Ramakrishna's ideal of the Vijñānī differs from the Jīvanmukta and the Bodhisattva in one important respect. The Vijñānī not merely works for the welfare of others, but has attained a greater degree of realization. In the vertical scale of experience, non-dualism may mark the highest level or degree; but in the horizontal scale of experience, there are other levels open to the illumined soul. Advaita may be the peak, but beyond the peak lie valleys of divine splendour. The Vijñānī does not stop with the peak but moves forward to discover new realms of experience. Says Sri Ramakrishna :

The Jñānī gives up his identification with worldly things, discriminating, 'Not this, not this'. Only then can he realize Brahman. It is like reaching the roof of a house by leaving the steps, one by one. But the Vijñānī, who is more intimately acquainted with Brahman, realizes something more. He realizes that the steps are made of the same materials, as the roof: bricks, lime and brick-dust. That which is intuitively realized as Brahman, through the eliminating process of 'Not this, not this', is then found to have become the universe and all its living beings. The Vijñānī sees that the Reality Which is nirguṇa, without attributes, is also saguṇa, with attributes.²

Jñāna is based on analysis and negation: it divides reality into the real and the unreal, matter and spirit, knowledge and ignorance. Vijñāna is based on synthesis and affirmation. It is a more complete form of experience, more integral. Says Sri Ramakrishna :

But Vijñāna means knowledge with a greater fullness. Some have heard of milk, some have seen milk, and some have drunk milk. He who has merely heard of it is 'ignorant'. He who has seen it is a Jñānī. But he who has drunk it has Vijñāna, that is to say, a full knowledge of it. After having the vision of God one talks

to him as if He were an intimate relative. That is Vijñāna.³

Marks of a vijñānī

What are the marks of a fully illumined soul? According to Sri Ramakrishna these are three: renunciation, knowledge and compassion.⁴ The relevance of the Vijñānī ideal in the present-day world can be appreciated only when we understand how important these three values are to the modern man's life.

From time out of mind, renunciation has remained the bed rock of Hindu spirituality. The Vedas declare, 'The few people who attained immortality did it through renunciation alone, not through work nor through progeny nor through wealth'.⁵ Renunciation is the key-note of the teachings of Buddha and Christ. Even Mohamed enjoined upon his followers to lead a simple life and renounce a part of their wealth as charity (*zakat*). One might think that in the modern world with its technological marvels, amenities and comforts, renunciation is an outmoded concept. Actually, however, a number of eminent thinkers have shown that it is the only way to lead humanity away from insanity and self-destruction.

The meaning of renunciation in the modern context has to be properly understood. Renunciation does not mean reducing every one to beggary. What it really means is a change from what Eric Fromm calls a 'having mode of existence' to a 'being mode of existence'. It means a return to

3. *ibid*, p. 368. Also see p. 435.

4. In the course of his talk with Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Compassion, love of God and renunciation are the glories of true knowledge. See the *Gospel*, p. 27.

5. न कर्मणा न प्रजया धनेन त्यागेनैके

अमृतत्वमानशुः ।

Mahanārāyaṇa-Upaniṣad, 12.14.

2. *ibid*, p. 30.

the natural harmony and rhythm of life. The basic drive in man is to acquire, to possess, to hoard. In modern times this instinct has been given so much unrestricted freedom that a human being's body, mind and talents are looked upon only as marketable commodities. A person is valued not for what he *is*, but for what he *has*. But the more a man identifies himself with material goods, the farther he moves away from his soul. The more he seeks fulfilment in the external world, the less his soul's aspirations get fulfilled. As a result, he finds life empty and meaningless. Says Eric Fromm, 'Modern man *has* everything: a car, a house, a job, "kids", a marriage, problems, troubles, satisfactions—and if all that is not enough, he has his psychoanalyst. He *is* nothing'.⁶ As Lewis Mumford says, 'We are changing from a society that owns things to a society that belongs to things'.⁷ In industrialized societies man works like a machine without any freedom to express his soul's aspirations through his work. Since his labour is not really his, work only alienates him from his true being. According to Karl Marx, the basic problem of modern man is this self-alienation.

The purpose of renunciation is to free man from his slavery to external objects, and to restore the full dignity of his soul and his intrinsic value as a human being. Many thoughtful people in the affluent countries of the West have now begun to realize that 'unrestricted satisfaction of all desires is not conducive to well-being, nor is it the way to happiness or even to maximum pleasure'.⁸ Renunciation is thus a fundamental need of modern man. It is the only way to eradi-

cate inequality, exploitation, poverty and injustice from society. Understood in this light, Sri Ramakrishna's practice of renunciation assumes a new significance. As the Holy Mother used to say, renunciation alone was the Master's splendour.

The second attribute of a Vijñānī is true knowledge. Renunciation is only the negative aspect of higher life; its positive aspect is Self-realization. The modern age is witnessing a tremendous explosion in knowledge. In no other age did empirical knowledge assume such vastness, power and importance as it does today. But paradoxically, science itself is now revealing the limitations of empirical knowledge. Many eminent scientists have come to the conclusion that the solution to the mystery of the universe and the solution to the existential problems of man lie in the depths of human consciousness. Vedanta regards the whole universe as a projection of consciousness.⁹ Since consciousness is inseparable from the true Self, it is through Self-realization that man attains the highest knowledge, knowledge of the ultimate Reality known as Brahman or God. Further, Vedanta holds that true bliss is inseparable from the true Self, and only by realizing it can man attain ultimate fulfilment.

In the realm of Self-knowledge Sri Ramakrishna was a veritable emperor. He experienced the bliss of communion with the Supreme Self in different ways. After practising the disciplines of Hinduism, he followed the paths of Islam and Christianity and reached the same ultimate goal through all of them. No other great soul ever acquired such a wide spectrum of higher knowledge. Sri Ramakrishna has thus become an ideal of true knowledge for men of diverse creeds and beliefs.

The third attribute of a Vijñānī is love and compassion for all people. The love and kindness that ordinary people show are usually prompted by selfish or instinctual motives of which they may not be aware.

6. Eric Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 87.

7. Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1964), p. 75.

8. Eric Fromm, *To Have or To be?* (New York: Harper Row, 1976), p. 2.

But the love of an illumined soul is utterly unselfish because he is free from worldly desires. All people do not have equal capacity to love. One of the most remarkable aspects of Sri Ramakrishna's personality is his superhuman capacity to love. His love knew no barriers of caste, creed or social status. The recipients of his holy love included not only his pure-hearted young disciples, but also bohemians like Girish and Kalipada, the sweeper Rasik, the ruffian Manmatha, and actresses and fallen women.

Illumined souls show love for all people in a general way. What makes Sri Ramakrishna unique is the intensity of love he was capable of. So great was his love for Naren, Rakhal, Baburam and other disciples that he would weep for them when they were away. Has the world ever seen such concentration of unselfish love in one person? Swami Vivekananda used to say, 'It was his unflinching trust and love for me that bound me to him for ever. He alone knew how to love another. Worldly people only make a show of love for selfish ends'.⁹

Sri Ramakrishna's kindness and compassion were as great as his love. Ordinary people may feel compassion for their friends who are suffering from some misfortune or disease, and may try to help them in some way, but very often find themselves helpless. The compassion of an illumined soul is of a higher order. He feels compassion for all those who are in the bondage of ignorance, which is the root cause of all sufferings, and tries to remove it. About Sri Ramakrishna's compassion Swami Vivekananda writes, 'So, now, the great conclusion is that Ramakrishna has no peer; nowhere else in this world exists such unprecedented perfection, such wonderful kindness for all that does not stop to justify itself, such intense sympathy for man in bondage'.¹⁰

The love and compassion that Sri Rama-

krishna showed were not mere sentiments but were expressions of his integral experience of the unity of all beings in the Supreme Self. He sublimated human love into divine love, and acts of kindness into worship of God. It was this doctrine that later on Swami Vivekananda developed into the comprehensive philosophy of Karma Yoga and preached as the new gospel of service to mankind.

Other aspects of the human ideal

We have found that renunciation, supreme knowledge and love—the three attributes of a Vijnānī—were manifested in Sri Ramakrishna not only in their fullest measure but also integrally. Of course these were not the only qualities that he possessed. He was also the perfect embodiment of some of the normal human virtues which sweeten, enrich and ennoble ordinary social life.

One of these is truthfulness. Truth was a sacred trust with Sri Ramakrishna, and he followed it to its utmost limits. Even in very small matters he would not break the sanctity of truth. If by chance he said that he would go to a particular place, nothing could prevent him from going there even if he found there was no need to go. He could not look at the face of a disciple who once told a fib in jest. Truthfulness had so thoroughly soaked even his unconscious mind that it reacted to the smallest trace of untruthfulness which might have escaped the notice of his conscious mind. One day the devotee Shambhu Mallick told the master that opium was good for stomach troubles and that he would give him a dose of it. But later on he forgot all about it. However, the manager of Shambhu's estate gave the Master a packet of opium from the dispensary. With that the Master started walking towards the Kali temple. But he felt his head was reeling and he could not

9. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1974), p. 98.

10. *ibid*, p. 187.

see the way. Then it struck him that Shambhu had asked him to take the medicine from him, but he had taken it from the manager instead. The Master at once went back to the dispensary and, finding that the manager too had gone, threw the packet of medicine through the window and said in a loud voice, 'Hullo, here is your opium.' His discomfort immediately left him, and he could see the road to the Kali temple clearly.¹¹

Another aspect of his personality was his childlike simplicity which charmed all those who came into contact with him. His simple life was lived before the gaze of men. He was utterly free from affectation and show of saintliness. Till the end of his life he remained a child of the Divine Mother in whom he had absolute trust. Whenever any difficulty or doubt confronted him, he would simply go to Mother Kali and speak to Her about it. His guilelessness and trust came from the complete absence of egoism and from his total attunement to the Infinite. This made his life a spontaneous expression of the harmony, goodness and bliss of divine life. The artificial, sophisticated life in present-day society keeps the human soul stunted, and prevents it from opening itself to the power and joy of natural life. Most of the mental problems of men and women are the result of inhibitions and repressions imposed upon them by the hypocrisy and sham of social life. Through his utter simplicity Sri Ramakrishna teaches modern people how to recover the suppleness, vitality and spontaneity of human life and how to live in tune with the rhythms of cosmic existence.

Humility was another noble quality of his. He subdued the vanity and arrogance of people by his humility. Even when learned pundits had declared him to be an Avatar

and many people had started worshipping him, he continued to be his humble old self. He never forgot to show respect where it was due. He never hesitated to learn lessons from others or to acknowledge the source of his teaching or illustration. When he once heard a devotee saying 'I know', he scolded him and asked him not to say that again. However, his humility was not mere polite manners, and was the very antithesis of the false humility which looks upon oneself as a worthless sinner. His humility was the spontaneous expression of his realization of the immanence of God in all people and the differences in the degree of divine power manifested in different people.

Two more remarkable traits of Sri Ramakrishna's personality must be mentioned here. One is the extraordinary range and depth of his mind, and the other is the astonishing emotional intensity he was capable of. Within its invisible walls his mind held the utmost limits of Jñāna and Bhakti ever reached by anyone on earth. He scaled the highest peaks of Yoga, and thoroughly investigated the abysmal depths of the Tantras. Devotional scriptures speak of five attitudes towards God: the calm attitude (*śānta*), the attitude of a servant (*dāśya*), the attitude of a friend (*sakhya*), the attitude of a mother (*vātsalya*) and the attitude of a bride (*madhura*). Most people attempt only one of these, but Sri Ramakrishna cultivated all the five moods to their perfection. The intensity with which he did this is unprecedented in the history of hagiology. These devotional moods passed through him like tidal waves. He could identify himself totally with each mood and work it up to the highest possible level. Indeed, never has the world seen such intensity of spiritual endeavour achieved at such a stupendously vast scale.

Universality and practicability of the ideal

Had Sri Ramakrishna been nothing more than a perfect embodiment of these rare

11. cf. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970). pp. 357-358.

qualities, it would have been difficult to accept him as the ideal man of the age. Mere perfection in virtues is not enough to make a person a universal ideal. Two more qualifications are necessary for this.

One is that his life must have a universal dimension. It must serve as an example to people of diverse beliefs. Among the beliefs of mankind the strongest are religious beliefs. Every religion and sect has its own set of beliefs. These beliefs derive their authority from certain fundamental spiritual truths pertaining to God and the soul. The true spirit of Islam or Christianity or Vaiṣṇavism can be understood only by directly realizing the spiritual truths each stands for. For this one must practise its spiritual disciplines. This was what Sri Ramakrishna did. A person who merely shows sympathy or tolerance towards a religion or sect will not be acceptable to its members as an ideal. Only a person who sincerely believes its truths and has gained a living experience of these will be acceptable to them. Since Sri Ramakrishna practised the disciplines, and realized the truths, of different religions and sects, his life gains the status of a universal ideal.

The other qualification for an ideal man is that his way of life must be practicable for a large number of people. In all religions which recognize monasticism, the monk stands for the highest ideal and is accorded great veneration. In India the Sannyasin is freed from all social obligations and conventions and usually leads a secluded life. Evidently, such an ideal is not practicable for all people. A holy man who sits alone in a cave or 'wanders like a rhinoceros' may be a paragon of perfection, but his way of life cannot be followed by the vast majority of people especially in the market-oriented, industrialized modern societies which put a premium on work and social life. As a matter of fact, all over the world traditional forms of monasticism have undergone a sharp decline in popularity, and more and

more people are seeking an alternative way of spiritual life.

Sri Ramakrishna was an ordained Sannyasin and could have followed the traditional path of Sannyasa, had he so wished. He could have easily avoided his early marriage. But he chose to honour the sanctity of wedlock without lowering the ideal of Sannyasa thereby. In effect this meant a synthesis of the two ways of life, monastic and lay, which had for centuries been regarded as contradictory. Through this synthesis Sri Ramakrishna has set a new ideal for modern man, which eliminates the seclusion and rigidity of monasticism as well as the lust and greed and attachment which characterize the householder's life. On the other hand, this ideal combines the purity, renunciation and discipline of monasticism with the flexibility and social commitment of the householder's life.

This is not, however, a completely new ideal. It is partly a revival of the ancient Hindu ideal of the ṛṣi. The illumined teachers we meet in the Vedas, Upaniṣads and the Purāṇas were ṛṣis. Though Sannyasa as the fourth stage of life might have been recognized even during the Vedic period, its institutionalization and rise to popularity took place after Buddha and Saṅkara. The present indications are that, though traditional monasticism may continue to flourish as the core of religion, as it should, the ṛṣi ideal may become the dominant ideal of the present age. Swami Vivekananda said, 'They had hundreds of Rishis in ancient India. We will have millions—we are going to have, and the sooner every one of us believes in this, the better for India and the better for the world'.¹²

Sri Ramakrishna did not merely revive the ancient way of life, but adapted it to suit the needs of modern men and women, and

12. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973), vol. 3, p. 284.

also changed its meaning and scope. The life he lived was not much different from the normal life of the common people of Bengal. He lived in a modestly furnished room, wore dhoti and shirt and slippers, had an oil massage before bath, ate the simple meal cooked by his wife, and chewed pan. He did everything with meticulous care, took a keen interest in the people around him, and met the prominent leaders of society. He showed how to lead a perfectly pure and intensely spiritual life in the ordinary social environment of a city or town. He enlivened the ancient ṛṣi ideal and adapted it to the

conditions of modern society. Further, he widened its meaning and purpose by infusing into it the power of the *viññānī*-ideal.

Thus far our discussion has centred on only one aspect of the Ramakrishna ideal—the human aspect. Owing to limitations of space, we have only briefly discussed a few of the remarkable aspects of the Master's life which establish him as the ideal man of the present age. We now turn to the other two aspects of the ideal : the universal and the divine.

(To be continued)

THE GURU AND SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE*

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA

Need for training in spiritual life

A disciple of the great Chinese mystic philosopher Lao Tsu narrates the following story. A young man joined the gang of a robber chief named Chi. Oneday the young apprentice asked his leader, 'Can the Tao (the right Way) be found in thieving?' And Chi replied : 'Pray tell me of anything in which there is no Tao, a law or right way. In thieving there is the *wisdom* by which booty is located, the *courage* of going in first, the *heroism* of coming out last, the *insight* of calculating the chances of success ; finally, there is *justice* in dividing the spoils equitably among the robbers. There never was a successful thief who did not possess these five qualities.'

There are principles to be learned in every activity of life, even in thieving. An apprentice in any profession needs training. This is all the more true of spiritual life. The disciple of Lao Tsu continues, 'The doctrine

of the wise is equally indispensable to the good man and to the robber... Since good men are few and bad men are in the majority, the good the sages do in the world is little and the evil done by the rest is great.' In the course of my travels in the West I have been amazed at the amount of energy which is constantly expended on destructive activities. How many soldiers, pilots, technicians and even scientists are being trained for war ? Why can't even a fraction of the same time and energy be used for training in the spirit, in making ourselves receptive to divine illumination, bliss and peace ?

The ideal, which the great sages of the Upaniṣads place before us as the goal of life, is Self-realization. But this ideal cannot be realized without spiritual awakening. However, in the religious field we see too much of ritual and ceremonial and too little of true spiritual awakening. Real religion, which is Self-realization, has for this reason become discredited. And there is now an over-abundance of religious pretenders who

* A talk given in March, 1949 at the Vedanta Society, Philadelphia, U.S.A.

claim supernatural powers and promise easy passports to heaven, while parasites unwilling to strive for moral purity want to attain salvation easily.

The highest goal can be shown only by a person who has attained it or by one who has at least gone very near it. Regarding the importance of right guidance in spiritual life, the Upaniṣads declare :

Many do not hear about the Self. Many others, though they hear of it, do not understand it. Wonderful is he who speaks of it. Wonderful is he who learns of it. Blessed is he who, taught by a good teacher, is able to realize it.¹

The truth of the Self cannot be fully understood when taught by an inferior person, for there are different opinions regarding it. Subtler than the subtlest is this Self, beyond all logic. When taught by a teacher who has realized himself as one with Brahman, a person attains the goal and becomes free from transmigration.²

Let a man devoted to spiritual life examine carefully the ephemeral nature of heavenly enjoyment. To know the Eternal, let him humbly approach a Guru established in Brahman and well-versed in the scripture. To a disciple who approaches reverently, who is tranquil and self-controlled, the wise teacher gives that knowledge, faithfully and without stint, by which is known the truly existing, changeless Self.³

Function of the Guru

What does Self-realization mean? It means the union of the individual Spirit with

the Supreme Spirit. After passing through various experiences and sufferings in life, the individual soul draws closer to the Over-soul and finally realizes its oneness with it. The Upaniṣad gives a picturesque description of this process :

Two birds of golden plumage, inseparable companions, are perched on the branches of the same tree. The former tastes of the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree; the latter tasting of neither, calmly observes. The individual self, deluded by forgetfulness of his real divine nature, gets involved in worldly life and suffers. But when he recognizes the worshipful Lord as his own true Self and beholds his glory, he becomes liberated from sorrow.⁴

We have forgotten our true divine essence. So instead of moving closer to God, we get drowned in worldly existence more and more. Somebody must remind us of our real nature. He who does this is the Guru or spiritual teacher. The function of the teacher is to awaken the disciple from his age-long sleep and show him the way to the Divine. The Guru is not like a Christian priest who stands between man and God. The word 'Guru' etymologically means a spiritual guide who removes darkness and brings light. He helps us to dehypnotize ourselves by removing the false notions we have been entertaining about ourselves.

In one of his parables Sri Ramakrishna speaks of the tiger-sheep. Once a tigress attacked a flock of sheep but, as the shepherd resisted, she fell on her side, gave birth to a cub and died. The shepherd took pity on the little creature and raised it along with the flock. The little tiger drank sheep's milk and learned to bleat and eat grass like sheep. Years later another tiger attacked the same flock and was astonished to see a tiger behaving like a sheep. He caught hold of the tiger-sheep, dragged him to a pool and forced him to look at his reflection in the water. Then the old tiger put a piece of

1. श्रवणायापि बहुभिर्यो न लभ्यः

शृण्वन्तोऽपि बहवो यं न विद्मः ।

आश्चर्यो वक्ता कुशलोऽस्य लब्धाऽऽ-

श्चर्यो ज्ञाता कुशलानुशिष्टः ॥

Katha Upaniṣad 1.2.7

2. न नरेणावरेण प्रोक्त एष

सुविज्ञेयो बहुधा चिन्त्यमानः ।

अनन्यप्रोक्ते गतिरत्र नास्ति

अणीयान् ह्यतर्क्यमणुप्रमाणात् ॥

ibid 1.2.8

3. *Mundaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.12, 13.

4. *ibid* 3.1.1, 2.

meat into the mouth of the young tiger-sheep, and told him that he was not a sheep but a real tiger. Thereupon the tiger-sheep gave up his sheep consciousness and regained his real tiger consciousness.

Swami Brahmananda used to liken the teacher to a king's minister. A poor man requests him to grant him an audience with the king who lives in a palace with seven gates. The minister grants his request, and leads him through the gates one after the other. At each gate there stands a richly dressed officer, and each time the poor man asks the minister if that is the king. The minister answers, 'No', each time, until they have passed the seventh gate and have come to the presence of the king seated there in all his regal splendour. Then the poor man does not ask anymore question. What he needed was somebody who could guide him through the gates and corridors of the palace. 'So it is with the Guru', says Swami Brahmananda. 'Like the king's minister, he leads the disciple through the different stages of spiritual unfoldment, until he leaves him with the Lord.'⁵

The human personality is like a big palace with buildings and courtyards one within the other. The Supreme Spirit comes to us in the form of a teacher, making us realize that we are not the physical body, not the mind, not the feelings, ideas and emotions, but the Spirit eternal. When we travel to an unknown country, it is wise to have a guide who knows the way. The Guru is the guide who leads us to our destination and leaves us there.

Need for a Guru

In India we take the necessity of a Guru for granted in spiritual life. When I first went to Europe I was surprised to hear

some religious groups saying that they could commune with God, hear the voice of God, get directions about spiritual life without any special training. I studied a few cases and found, as I had expected, that these people were hearing their own voices which sometimes were good. God and the divine voice are far off from an impure soul. A well-trained, pure-hearted person can certainly commune with God, the indwelling Spirit, but when impure and untrained individuals make the same claim, they only deceive themselves. And yet they say they need no outside help. My teacher Swami Brahmananda used to say, 'In this world even in the art of stealing a teacher is required.' How much greater must be the necessity for a Guru in acquiring supreme knowledge, the knowledge of Brahman!

There is no mystery in this. People go to Madame Curie to study the properties of radium; they go to Rutherford to learn about the nature of atom. As in natural science the guidance of a competent teacher is necessary, so in spiritual science the guidance of a Guru is absolutely necessary to learn the technique of realizing the Self. Here we are travelling into regions of which we know nothing. Those who do not feel the need of any teacher, who are over-anxious to be teachers of others, should remember that the blind should not try to lead the blind.

Hindu scriptures repeatedly stress the importance of the Guru. Take for instance the *Bhagavad Gītā*. In it Kṛṣṇa at first simply takes Arjuna to the battle field, without giving him any spiritual instruction. Then Arjuna pleads with Him: 'Overpowered by grief, my mind is confused regarding the right path. I supplicate you as your disciple, instruct me who have taken refuge in you.' It is only when Arjuna accepts Kṛṣṇa as the Guru does the divine Teacher begin his teaching. In Śaṅkara's *Crest Jewel of Discrimination* we find the disciple saying to his teacher: 'O Master, I have

5. Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math. 1971), p. 250.

fallen into the sea of birth and death. Save me from this misery.'

Power of spiritual initiation

Sri Ramakrishna says, 'One must have an awakening of the Spirit within in order to see the one unchanging imperishable Reality.' Mere reading and talking about spiritual truths is not enough. One should directly perceive the Light within.

How is this first awakening to be brought about? An illumined teacher does this for the disciple through a process of spiritual initiation. In all religions there are initiation rites consisting of bath, baptism, sprinkling with holy water or oil, reciting of sacred texts, rituals of worship, etc. These practices make the initiates eligible for the special privileges of the religious communities into which they are admitted as members thereby. This formal initiation is very different from the spiritual initiation we are here speaking of.

This was what Jesus meant when he said 'Except a man, be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'⁶ To be born again means to undergo spiritual awakening, to cease to identify oneself with one's body and realize oneself as the Spirit. 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'⁷ Later on St. Peter, a disciple of Christ, explained the meaning of this passage : 'Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.'⁸ The Guru is the one who transmits the Word of God. The power of God comes through the Word, the Mantra, and through the Mantra comes the awakening of the spirit.

In India we have the ideal of the *dvija* the twice-born. The word *dvija* also means

'bird'. First comes the egg, then out of the egg comes the fledgeling which will someday develop into a mature bird. All eggs do not get hatched ; all fledgelings do not grow fully. Similarly, all people do not attain spiritual realization. People are in different stages of spiritual growth. A well-known Sanskrit verse says, 'By natural birth a man is born a *śūdra*, an ignorant person ; through purificatory rites he becomes a *dvija*, the twice-born ; through study and knowledge of the scriptures he becomes a *vipra*, a scholar or poet ; through the realization of the Supreme Spirit he becomes a *Brāhmaṇa*, a knower of Brahman.'⁹ The purpose of spiritual initiation is to enable a person to become a true *Brāhmaṇa*, a knower of Brahman. The Upaniṣad says, 'He who departs from this world knowing the Imperishable is a *Brāhmaṇa*.'¹⁰ Mahapurush Maharaj (Swami Shivananda), a great direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, once told me, 'Whoever comes to Sri Ramakrishna is really a *Brāhmaṇa*.'

Spiritual initiation brings the individual self into harmony with the Supreme Self. A Chinese sage demonstrated the principle of natural harmony (Tao) in this way : he took two lutes and strung them identically. One he placed in an adjoining room, then struck the Kung note on the instrument he held. Immediately the Kung note on the second lute responded. When he struck the Chio note on one, the corresponding string of the second instrument vibrated, because they were tuned to the same pitch. If he changed the intervals on one lute the tones of the second were jangled, out of tune. The sound was there but the influence of the key-

9. जन्मना जायते शूद्रः etc.

Atri Smṛti 141-42.

10. अथ य एतदक्षरं गार्गी विदित्वास्माल्लो-

कात् प्रैति स ब्राह्मणः ॥

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.8.10.

6. St. John, 3:3.

7. *ibid*, 3:6.

8. I Peter 1:23.

note was gone. Similarly, we may read and think and talk. But all this will be of no avail unless we learn to attune our souls with the Oversoul, the Supreme Self.

The power of initiation becomes manifest only in a pure soul who intensely yearns for God. Patañjali distinguishes three types of disciples. The soft (*mṛdu*) ones cannot bear much the rigours of spiritual disciplines. The middling (*madhyama*) ones strive harder than the first. The intense (*tīvra*) type includes those who struggle intensely for realization; they have learned the secret of withdrawing their minds from outside distractions, are always conscious of the divine Reality within them and have a deep yearning for God.¹¹ Yearning for God should always be regarded as a mark of divine grace.

At the beginning of my own spiritual life the path seemed very difficult. When I asked Swami Brahmananda what I should do, his reply was, 'Struggle, struggle'. It is not enough to get directions from a Guru; one must struggle incessantly. The disciple must first of all yearn with all his heart to know the Truth. To those who are prepared for it the awakening may come all of a sudden. To others who are struggling it comes gradually.

When we are in a joyous mood, we are able to transmit that joy to others. In a similar way, a good spiritual teacher is able to communicate spiritual vibrations to his disciple. We have seen the great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna exercising this power on many occasions. They were great storehouses of spiritual power, but they used it with great caution. Normally a Guru transmits his power through a Mantra.

Power of the mantra

A monastic disciple once asked Mahapurush Maharaj, 'All persons do not get

spiritual awakening as soon as they are initiated. Will they not be benefited nevertheless?' Mahapurushji replied, 'Even though they may feel nothing at the time of initiation, the power of the holy Name given by an illumined teacher is unailing. The spiritual power transmitted to the disciple in due course transmutes him and spiritual awakening follows.'

What about the initiation given by an advanced, though not a fully illumined, soul? The ordinary advanced soul is about on a par with the senior in high school who, before he is ready for college himself, can still give elementary instruction to his juniors. As he himself progresses towards Truth, he strives to awaken spiritual consciousness in others. The initiation given by an ordinary Guru who is sufficiently advanced in spiritual life also brings about spiritual awakening in the course of time, if the recipient sincerely follows the spiritual path. The Mantra or Divine Name itself contains tremendous power. Sri Chaitanya teaches us this truth: 'Various are Thy names revealed by Thee into which Thou hast infused Thine own omnipotent powers, and no limitations of time for remembering those names are ordained by Thee.'¹²

Patañjali, speaking about the effect of repeating Om and other holy Names, says that it removes the various obstacles on the path and leads to the awareness of the indwelling Spirit.¹³ What are these obstacles? Illness, doubt, mental disturbances etc. Repetition of the Mantra introduces a new rhythm, harmony, into the personality which calms the nerves and unifies the powers of the mind. And in due course, this leads to the awakening of the Spirit

12. नाम्नामकारि बहुधा निजसर्वशक्तिः

स्तत्रापिता नियमितः स्मरणे न कालः ।

Siksastakam, 2.

13. ततः प्रत्यक्चेतनाधिगमोऽप्यन्तरायाभावश्च ।

Yoga-sūtra 1.29.

11. Cf. *Yoga-sūtra* 1.22.

within. A beginner in meditative life may not be able to understand the power of the Mantra. But if he sincerely repeats it, he will gradually realize its power. Swami Brahmananda says, 'Japa, japa, japa! Even while you work, practise japa. Keep the name of the Lord spinning in the midst of all your activities. If you can do this, all the burning of the heart will be soothed. Many sinners have become pure and free and divine by taking refuge in the name of God. Have intense faith in God and in His name, know that they are not different.'¹⁴

As the saints showed in the past, so in the present it has been proved time and again that the power of God does manifest through the divine Name. When the Mantra given by the Guru is treasured up within and constantly meditated upon, this power develops more and more in the aspirant. Sri Ramakrishna used to liken this process to the formation of pearl. According to popular belief, the pearl-oyster waits until the star Svāti (Arcturus) is in the ascendant. If at that time rain falls, the oyster will open its shell and collect a drop of that water. Then it will dive down to the sea bed and remain there for several months until the rain drop is converted into a beautiful pearl.¹⁵ In the same way the heart of the devotee must be open to Truth and after receiving spiritual instruction from the Guru, he must work on it with one-pointed zeal until the pearl of spiritual illumination is born.

The pure mind as Guru

Swami Brahmananda used to say, 'There is no greater Guru than your own mind'. The human Guru is not always at hand. Even if we are fortunate enough to secure the blessings and instructions of an advanced

teacher, he is not always available when we need him. But there is an inner teacher, our own purified mind, who is always present within us. Says Swami Brahmananda, 'When the mind has been purified by prayer and contemplation it will direct you from within. Even in your daily duties, this inner Guru will guide you and will continue to help you until the goal is reached.'¹⁶

What does this mean? How does the mind act as the inner Guru? The Supreme Spirit, the source of all knowledge, the Teacher of all teachers, is ever present within the heart of everyone. When the mind is purified through moral life, prayer, meditation etc, it comes into touch with this inner Light. The purified mind becomes a channel for the flow of divine knowledge. It receives spiritual guidance direct from the Teacher of teachers. When the mind thus learns to open itself to higher Truth, it can receive instruction from many sources. The *Bhāgavatam* speaks of a wandering Avadhūta or ascetic who accepted so many natural objects as his *upa-gurus*, subsidiary teachers. From mother earth he learned the secret of patience, from the air he learned detachment (as the air remains unaffected by the pleasant or bad odour), from the sky he learned freedom from all limitations, and so on.¹⁷

Many of you know how illumination came to Brother Lawrence, the 17th century French mystic who spent his life in the kitchen of a monastery. The sight of a leafless tree in mid winter stirred in him the reflection that leaves would be renewed, and flowers and fruits would appear on those bare branches. This revealed to him the presence and power of God lying hidden in all creation. The spiritual awakening that he then experienced sustained him throughout his life. In all of us the power of God is lying hidden, waiting for awakening. We have to discover the centre of divine con-

14. *Eternal Companion*, p. 297.

15. *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta Advaita Ashrama, 1975), pp. 180-181.

16. *Eternal Companion*, p. 251.

17. *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, Bk. 11, ch. 7-9.

sciousness in us, and call forth the dormant power. It was this inner Guru that Buddha asked his disciples to follow after his passing away. 'Be a lamp unto yourself' (*Ātma dīpo bhava*), he told them.

But we must take care lest we deceive ourselves. We may think that our mind has become a good Guru, that we are getting instructions everywhere, but there is always the danger of mistaking our own desires and thoughts for divine inspiration, divine voice, etc. There is no such danger when we receive instruction from a living teacher who is spiritually advanced, and are guided by him. The human Guru instructs his disciple to purify his soul by the practice of moral disciplines and self-less work. When the disciple errs, the Guru notices it and brings him back to the right path. Those who are fortunate to have the guidance of a true human Guru will not go astray. Gradually, through the Guru's blessings, the hidden faculty of intuition awakens in the disciple, and from there onwards his purified intuition will act as his Guru. This is how one's own mind becomes one's Guru.

Avatāra—the greatest teacher

The greatest teacher is, of course, the Avatāra, the divine Incarnation, who is able to bring illumination to thousands of people. Swami Vivekananda used to say that the Avatāra is a *kapāla mocana*, one who can alter the destiny of people, one who can wipe out what is written on their foreheads, that is, their Karma.¹⁸ No ordinary teacher has such a power of transformation. Jesus had the power to bring divine light to those simple fishermen who attained illumination at his touch. He also had the power to transform impure souls whom people call sinners. When he told them, 'Thy sins are

forgiven; thy faith has made thee whole; go in peace', they at once felt freed from all impurities.

But Jesus himself passed through initiation. What else was that scene of baptism in the Jordan when, we are told, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon him and he heard a voice saying: 'This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.' In modern times an increasingly large number of people regard Sri Ramakrishna as an Incarnation. He too received initiation from a human teacher. We are told that before he took up his work as priest in the Kālī temple, he was initiated by a Tantric teacher (by name Kenaram Bhattacharya) of Calcutta.¹⁹ When the teacher uttered the Mantra in his ears, Ramakrishna gave a loud shout and was absorbed in ecstasy. The teacher said he had instructed many disciples but had never encountered any one like Ramakrishna.

The Master in his turn initiated his great disciple Narendranath with the name of Rāma, and the young man's spiritual emotions were stirred to great heights. For several hours he was absorbed in a state of ecstasy. Later on, this disciple in his turn became a dynamo of spirituality—Swami Vivekananda. In 1892, the year before Vivekananda came to this country, an agnostic professor in one of the colleges of Madras argued with Swamiji regarding the truths of religion. Vivekananda just touched him, and the doubter was instantly transformed. Later this man renounced the world and lived and died a saint.

Sri Ramakrishna had the power to raise others to great heights of higher consciousness by transmitting spiritual energy even by a mere look or wish. Swami Shivananda (Mahapurush Maharaj) has narrated his own

18. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973), vol. 5, p. 325.

19. Cf. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970), p. 134.

experience as follows: 'One day I was meditating when the Master came near me. No sooner had he glanced at me than I burst into tears. He stood still without uttering a word. A sort of creeping sensation passed through me and I began to tremble all over. The Master congratulated me on attaining this state.'

Later in life Swami Shivananda himself, like many of his brother disciples, became a spiritual teacher of great power, as he was when we met him. This power manifested itself in him all the more when he became the head of the Order. About the year 1923 a spiritual seeker from Sind came to the Swami for initiation. The devotee had received a Mantra in a dream but, as he could not understand its significance, his mind had become restless. Mahapurush Maharaj took him to the shrine room, initiated him, and asked him to meditate for a time. Then the Swami returned to his room with his face radiant and his mind overpowered by divine emotion, for he knew that something significant was happening in the shrine. The new disciple had a wonderful experience. The moment he received the holy Name, a new spiritual consciousness awakened in him, tears started rolling down his cheeks and his mind entered deep meditation. When he returned to his Guru, he related how through his grace his heart was filled with divine peace. He said that the Mantra given to him during initiation was the same Mantra he had received in his dream, but now he understood what it signified. Mahapurush Maharaj then told him: 'My child, it is the Lord Himself who has blessed you today. He alone can show mercy to others. We are only instruments in His hands. The Lord manifests Himself in the heart of the Guru and transmits spiritual power into the heart of the disciple. I have dedicated you to the Lord who has taken charge of your life and destiny.'²⁰

²⁰. For more details see *For Seekers of God*, translation: Swami Vividishananda and Swami

The eternal Teacher

There is a saying that the human Guru utters a Mantra in the ears of a disciple, while the World Teacher speaks in the heart of the devotee. Real initiation takes place when God awakens the spiritual consciousness of a seeker. The real Guru is the immanent God, the indwelling Supreme Spirit who is 'the Goal, the Controller, the Lord, the Witness, the Abode, the Refuge, the Friend, the Creator, Protector and Destroyer of the universe, the immutable Repository of all knowledge.'²¹

When the ordinary teacher and the pupil meet, each tries to see God in the other. The disciple looks upon the teacher as the visible manifestation of the Supreme Spirit, the Teacher of all teachers, as a channel for the flow of divine grace. It is in this spirit that he serves him, obeys him and worships him. The well-known verses repeated by thousands of people in India express this idea :

I bow to the divine Gurn who, by the application of the collyrium of knowledge, opens the eyes of one blinded by the disease of ignorance. I bow to the divine Guru who imparts to the disciple the fire of self-knowledge, and burns away his bonds of Karma accumulated through many births.²²

I offer my salutations to the beneficent Being who is incarnate in the Guru, the light of whose absolute existence shines forth in the world of appearance, who instructs the disciples with the holy text, 'That thou art', realizing whom the

Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1975), pp. 164-165.

²¹. गतिर्भर्ता प्रभुः साक्षी निवासः शरणं सुहृत् ।

प्रभवः प्रलयः स्थानं निघ्नानं बीजमव्ययम् ॥

Bhagavad-Gītā, 9.18.

²². अज्ञानतिमिरान्धस्य ज्ञानाञ्जनशलाकया ।

चक्षुरुन्मीलितं येन तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

अनेकजन्मसंप्राप्तकर्मबन्धविदाहिने ।

आत्मज्ञानप्रदानेन तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

soul nevermore returns to the ocean of birth and death.²³

The jīvātman, the individual self, is interpenetrated and pervaded by the Paramātman, the Supreme Self. But, owing to ignorance, the soul does not realize this truth. The purpose of initiation is to remove this veil of ignorance. Once the veil is lifted, the contact can be maintained through regular spiritual practice.

23. यस्यैव स्फुरणं सदात्मकमसत्कल्पायक भासते
साक्षात्त्वमसीति वेदवचसा यो बोधयत्याश्रितान् ।
यत्साक्षात्करणाद्भवेन्न पुनरावृत्तिर्भवाम्भोनिधौ
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्री दक्षिणामूर्तये ॥

Sri Samkaracarya, *Daksinamurti-Stotra*, 4

The old law of supply and demand is at work in spiritual life too. If a seeker feels a tremendous yearning for the light of Truth, that light must come to him from some source or other. Something happens to him, his heart opens to divine grace, divine light bursts upon him. And as he moves closer to the ultimate Reality, he sees the light of the Supreme Spirit shining in all beings. And when he becomes one with the Supreme Spirit, the Teacher of all teachers, he too becomes a channel of divine knowledge for others. He serves all beings knowing well that he is serving the Lord alone, the eternal Teacher who is teaching, awakening, illuminating and guiding souls throughout the ages.

LIFE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

SWAMI SHRADDHANANDA

In Hindu scriptures 'life' is denoted by both *prāṇa* and *caitanya* or consciousness. Both life and consciousness are within our everyday experience. We feel that we are alive and also conscious. Nobody need point that out to us. Normally, *Prāṇa* and *caitanya* seem to us intertwined. For our practical life, this does not matter. But great spiritual wisdom can emerge if we can examine the two thoroughly and, if possible, separate them.

The principle of life-energy

Prāṇa is that internal principle of energy that keeps us alive. Anything—a human being or an animal, or a plant—that is living is operated by the power of *Prāṇa*. More than that, the concept of *Prāṇa* in Indian philosophical and religious books has been extended to all other forms of energy besides the biological. Any kind of energy like

heat, light or electricity, comes within the scope of *Prāṇa*. However, for the present discussion, *Prāṇa* will be limited to the life-principle in living beings.

We know that the life activity in us is most conspicuous in our breathing. If our breathing stopped even for a few minutes, we would die. So air (*vāyu*) is the most important contributing factor in the operation of *Prāṇa*. But there is another element in nature which is also essential for the sustenance of *Prāṇa*. It is water. We know we can go without food for many days, but we cannot live without water even for a short time. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.5.4) says, *āpomayah prāṇah* 'water pervades the life principle.' Now *Prāṇa* as it is known to us functions in many ways. Not merely breathing, but blood circulation, digestion, and all other physiological processes going on in the body are executed by that principle which is called *Prāṇa*. Again,

this Prāṇa must be a unitary principle. The millions of cells in our body, blood circulation, digestive organs, the heart, the lungs—all these have their own distinct functions. But there is a unifying coordination among these different activities. This shows that Prāṇa is a unitary principle. When this coordination is lost we become sick. When we are healthy there is perfect coordination. For example, if in any part of the body there is a wound, cells from other areas of the body will rush there to repair the damage. Modern physiology has discovered many wonderful secrets about the working of the Prāṇa principle within us. It is indeed a unitary central power in the living body.

With a little attention we can feel this Prāṇa in different parts of our body. If we watch our breath, we can feel it working in our lungs. We can feel our heartbeat, blood circulation, our nerve currents. The same Prāṇa is working in all these physiological processes. The Vedānta and Yoga scriptures tell us that this great power of Prāṇa can be used in the spiritual evolution of man. Man is not just a biological or psychological unit. He has a spiritual frontier where he rises to his true immortal nature. Spiritual life is the adventure of raising man from his biological and psychological status to his spiritual level, and in this adventure Prāṇa is a very important contributing factor. Prāṇa need not just rest at the biological level. It can be raised to a higher level by the techniques described in the Yoga and Vedānta.

Patañjali, the great teacher of Yoga says, *Yoga is the suppression of mental waves.*¹ Our *citta* or mind is continuously throwing out *vṛttis* or modifications. When these *vṛttis* are subdued, we can have a glimpse of our Soul which is at the back of the

mind. Now, there is an intimate connection between our breathing and the mind. When the mind is concentrated at a point the breathing is slow. When a person is looking at some beautiful landscape with wonder, he feels that his breath has almost stopped. We use the expression 'breathlessly'. 'I am watching this breathlessly.' 'I am listening to this music breathlessly.' What does that mean? That means the operation of Prāṇa through breath has become slow. And that energy has gone to the intense perception of the mind. So in the Yoga techniques the practice of Prāṇāyāma is prescribed. It consists of different kinds of regulated breathing, accompanied by concentration on the Prāṇa energy. Through Prāṇāyāma the Prāṇa is prevented from working in its own biological way and is made to work in a controlled subtle way. When we are excited our breathing becomes rapid and Prāṇa gets excited. On the other hand, if Prāṇa becomes slow and harmonious, the mind also becomes harmonious and calm.

The objective of this practice of Prāṇāyāma is primarily the calmness of the mind. But it also brings about a transformation in Prāṇa itself. From the biological level Prāṇa is raised to a spiritual level. Patañjali prescribes several other practices for the control of the mind. One method is concentration. If by the power of the will, the mind is focused on a particular object like a deity, a holy word, or a pleasant material object, the distracting mental waves slowly subside and comprehension of the spiritual Reality, namely the Soul, becomes easier. Anyway, for our spiritual life it is important that the Prāṇa does not become wild. It has to remain controlled and harmonious. The mind then becomes calm and helpful in our spiritual practice.

The Upaniṣads prescribe the method of understanding Prāṇa on a wider level. That understanding itself brings the Prāṇa under a very effective control and purification.

1. योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ।

Purification of Prāṇa means raising the Prāṇa to a level where it will cease to be biological—it will be a spiritual force. That can be done through some special meditations enjoined in the Upaniṣads. The starting point is the analysis of Prāṇa. What is Prāṇa? We know the Prāṇa within our body; but that Prāṇa is also operating in other living bodies. So the spiritual seeker has to look upon Prāṇa as a cosmic principle. The Prāṇa that is in me is in other human beings, and also in animals, birds, and in all vegetation. This is not imagination. We can see it for ourselves by the study of botany and zoology. These studies help us to understand the action of Prāṇa. Let us see the working of Prāṇa all over this earth, and then bring that observation into a contemplation. Let us try to contemplate that the Prāṇa that is operating in us is the same Prāṇa that is moving in plants, animals, birds, even microbes. By this meditation the mind becomes calm. Not only the mind, but the Prāṇa within us too becomes purified in the sense that it becomes universal and free.

Now, in the Upaniṣads this Cosmic Prāṇa has been given the status of a deity, and described under different names. The meditation on Prāṇa at the Cosmic level has marvellous effects. A person who can think that the Prāṇa in him is one with Cosmic Life, develops great serenity of mind. His outlook becomes very broad. The attachment to this little life and fear of death will depart. He feels more and more his identity with universal life. This brings love and compassion for other human beings and a spirit of fellowship with nature.

Understanding the limited Prāṇa in our individual physio-mental system is also important for the smooth functioning of our life. By the practice of Prāṇāyāma as mentioned earlier, the Prāṇa energy can be made more powerful and harmonious. This in turn, helps the better working of our physical organs and in the prevention and cure

of many ailments. By reading Yoga books many people, particularly Westerners, are drawn to the practice of Āsanās (physical postures) and Prāṇāyāma not merely for the improvement of health, but also for enhancing beauty and life-span. This hope is partly true, but there is a fallacy. The effective practice of Yoga needs some other disciplines which many are not prepared to undergo. You are expected to live a clean, pure life. *Satya*—truthfulness, *asteya*—non-stealing, *ahimsā*—non-violence, and *brahmacharya*—contenance are the most important preliminary disciplines mentioned in the *Yoga-sūtras*. When accompanied by these, Āsanās and Prāṇāyāma can certainly bring new dimensions to our physical and mental health. But we should not forget that the goal of Yoga is to attain freedom, spiritual freedom, by knowing our true nature, our Self. Lesser goals, like improvement of body and mind should not be over-emphasized.

The principle of consciousness

When we see an ant crawling on the kitchen table in search of a grain of sugar, we understand it as a unit of life. But we also see the ant as a unit of consciousness, because of its purposive behaviour. In other words, that life unit is combined together with another principle—*caitanya* or consciousness. The same experience is true with regard to ourselves. When I am breathing I am *conscious* of my breathing. I feel myself as a living entity and also as a conscious being. Thus, in normal experiences consciousness and life are mixed up together. And it may remain that way if we do not care for spiritual fulfilment. For biological and psychological life, it does not matter much if consciousness gets mixed up with Prāṇa. But when we seek spiritual enlightenment, this mixing up has to go.

Consciousness is a self-revealing experience. Nobody can see consciousness out-

side. When I see an ant crawling for a grain of sugar, I infer that there is consciousness in that ant. If I see a man sitting motionless against a tree, then I doubt. Is this man dead? I go near and try to touch him. The body is there of course, but I try to put my thumb under his nose; there is no breathing. I push it; no response. Then I say, 'He is dead'. So, consciousness in others is not a direct experience—it is inference, but my consciousness is a direct spontaneous experience for me. It does not need any other proof. Consciousness can be compared to light, because like light it reveals things. Through consciousness I know this is my body, it is four o'clock, this is space, I am hungry or angry. In other words, whatever I experience needs the light of consciousness for its revelation.

Prāṇa has its limitations. Mind too has its limitations. But has consciousness any limitation? Vedānta discusses this point in depth. Basing itself on the experience of seers and sages it comes to the conclusion that consciousness is a completely separate principle from Prāṇa and *manas* or mind. That is why in the Upaniṣads we read: 'He is the life of life.'² This means, consciousness is more fundamental than the life principle; more important than the psychological principle. 'They have comprehended the ancient Supreme Brahman who know the Life of life, the Eye of the eye, the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind.'³ The ancients did not say that consciousness comes from the brain. The brain is necessary as an instrument in the biological system to

connect knowledge with action, to coordinate all the different parts of the body. But the activity of the brain should not be identified with consciousness. When we look into our own knowledge of things, we have to separate our consciousness from the objects of knowledge. How to do that? By remaining an observer or witness. In my contemplation let me try to watch—watch my heartbeat, my thoughts. If I go on doing this, I shall see that this watching is very meaningful. This watching gradually gives me the conviction that I, the watcher, am different from what is watched. This is called the analysis of the seer and the seen, *dṛg-dṛśya viveka*. The seer, the watcher, is that conscious entity in us known as the Self, our Soul. The Soul has not the limitation of the body, or the mind, or of the Prāṇa. The Upaniṣads tell us that the Self in us—the source of consciousness—is an unchanging Reality. It does not depend on anything. Prāṇa depends on water, on air; the body and mind depend on food and many other things, but not the consciousness within us. The consciousness within us is a self-existent, timeless principle which has neither birth nor death.

After comprehending the nature of consciousness within ourselves as the silent unchanging spectator of the drama of life, we slowly go to the next step. We have to know consciousness on the cosmic level. We have to understand that there is only one Consciousness. My consciousness is not different from your consciousness. 'Those wise men who see that the consciousness within themselves is the same one Consciousness in all conscious beings, attain eternal peace.'⁴

Vedānta says that consciousness is also

2. स उ प्राणस्य प्राणः ।

Kena Upaniṣad 1.2.

3. प्राणस्य प्राणमुत चक्षुषश्चक्षुरुत

श्रोत्रस्य श्रोत्रं मनसो ये मनो विदुः ।

ते निचिक्युर्ब्रह्म पुराणमग्रचम् ॥

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.18.

4. तमात्मस्थं येऽनुपश्यन्ति धीरा-

स्तेषां शान्तिः शाश्वती नेतरेषाम् ।

Katha Upaniṣad 2.2.13.

existence, *sat*. The two are inseparable. Pertaining to me, I say: 'I exist.' Pertaining to you, I say: 'You exist.' Pertaining to other objects, I say: 'This wall exists' or 'That tree exists'. All the time we are surrounded by the experience of existence. Existence is also knowledge. There is again a third aspect, which is joy, *ānanda*. What is Existence-Consciousness is also Joy or Blessedness.

When we are seeking spiritual knowledge, we have to come out of our limited holes. We have to feel that we are surrounded by a vast total existence all the time. By analyzing the common experiences of our life, we see more and more that these experiences are really cosmic experiences. This life is not this little life, it is a Cosmic Life. This mind is not a little mind, it is a Cosmic Mind. And, this consciousness within me is not a little consciousness, it is an all-pervading Consciousness. In other words, we are parts of a vast Cosmic Reality, the *sat-cit-ānanda*. Ultimately, we have to go more and more towards this infinite *sat-cit-ānanda*, which is our Self. Normally, due to our selfish likes and dislikes, we find joy only in certain things and persons. The pursuit of Self-Knowledge leads us to the experience that our Soul, the Self in us, is not merely the eternal Reality and eternal Consciousness, but it is also eternal Peace, or Blessedness.

The Upanisads declare: 'All this is the

Self.' When we have the highest knowledge of our Self, we see that our Self, the eternal Consciousness, is the total Reality, the supreme God. Whatever we experience—any fragment of the manifold universe, is nothing but a projection of Consciousness. The sun, the moon, the mountains, oceans, millions of living beings, the Prāṇa, the mind—all these are projected from that eternal, fundamental Reality which is our true Self. Of course, for a long time, we need an objective God whom we can worship. He is our Father, Mother, Master. Vedanta calls this objective God *Saguṇa Brahman*—God with attributes. But, as we grow in our spiritual life, a time comes when that external God merges into our true Self. *Saguṇa* becomes *nirguṇa*—we can be That. This material universe is ultimately not material, it is all Consciousness. Whatever we experience is Consciousness. That is the highest truth about Consciousness. So in our spiritual life we have to develop this understanding. From simple and ordinary experiences we have to go to richer and higher experiences. And finally when we realize that all experiences are parts of infinite Consciousness, we will reach the End. The word 'Vedanta' means the end of spiritual knowledge. The highest knowledge is finding that ultimate unity in man—man's true Self.

५. आत्मैवेदं सर्वमिति ।

Chāndogya Upaniṣad 7.25.2

OUR THREE-FLOOR MANSION

SWAMI NITYABODHANANDA

Whenever a noble deed is wrought
Whenever is spoken a noble thought
Our hearts to higher levels rise . . .

How to raise our hearts to higher levels, how to light up in us the summits of the super-conscious, the Annapurnas and the Everests, how to prevent the heart from slipping down to the dark ravines of depression, spiritual dryness and melancholy?

The presence of the summit (the super-conscious), the valley (the conscious) and the gorges and ravines (the unconscious), the three zones of the psyche covering a variegated terrain for man's spiritual adventure—this is the theme of this article. An attempt is made to study the 'terrain' from the occidental and Indian view-points.

How to put the sun on the summit?

Classical answers are there from Vedantic seers and texts. But let us put the question to a psychotherapist, to a spiritualizing one who has more chances of being closer to our line of research. G. G. Jung is incontestably such a one.

Jung was very allergic to the notion of the super-conscious. Students of Vedanta know that the super-conscious is the purely spiritual constituent of the psyche thanks to which man can pose and answer fundamental questions like, 'Where do we come from? Where do we go?', and so on. The presence of the super-conscious gives the possibility of *samādhi*. The super-conscious has mystical overtones. Jung's concern for empiricism stood in the way of accepting a concept which cannot be experienced by every man.

But what is refreshing is to find in Jung's later writings a great adaptability to the notion of the super-conscious. He had no objection to accepting it if it could be assimilated to his terminology. Of this we shall speak in detail later on.

What is Vedanta's Answer? How to bring the 'sun' on *our* summits? Through meditation, *Ātma-vicāra* (investigation as to who I am) etc, but above all, the company of holy men. Even with all this the irruption of the sun's light within largely depends on our *samskāras*, the residual impressions, good and bad, and their driving spiritual power. The *samskāras* are waiting for the moment of maturation. Sometimes an outside 'climate' can help substantially their expansion.

Everyone of us possesses this psychotic capital, which is the sum total of personal and parental heritage. May be that its roots are in previous lives. They reside in the deeper levels of our psyche. Only during privileged moments are we conscious of them or their ways of evolution. St. Paul had to wait until he was on the road to Damascus for his psychotic capital to explode. The vision of Christ on the road was overwhelming and the results are facts of history. Why did Vivekananda resist Sri Ramakrishna's influence during his first meetings? His *sanskāric* capital had not yet matured.

Samskāra-Psychoid

It is very revealing to find a striking parallel thought to the idea of *samskāra* in one of the posthumous works of Jung, *The Roots of Consciousness* (only available in French and German). Jung names the *samskāra*-capital, the 'psychoid'. He did not invent the term, it was already in the existent psychological literature of his epoch. But the scope and destiny he gives to the term are his own. For Jung our psychoid which has a personal character, is the animating and directing principle at the base of our personality. Jung conceives our

personality like an ice-berg, a small part only being visible, the conscious. The rest remains hidden and largely unknown. It is called the unconscious. In his scheme there are various levels of the unconscious, personal unconscious, family unconscious, racial unconscious and collective unconscious. And at the root of the tree, the psychoid.

Let us listen to Jung :

The psychoid is a global concept covering the principal sub-cortical phenomena. It includes all the corporal functions of the central nervous system orientated towards the goal, namely, a primordial memory which wants the conservation of life.¹

A gifted living student of Jung, Roland Cahen, speaking of the psychoid says : 'The psychoid possesses the dynamics of inner life'.

The Jungian unconscious should be distinguished from the non-conscious. There is a great and powerful arsenal in us of perfections as also of imperfections of which we are unconscious. Whatever has not come to the conscious plane and not become effective, is the unconscious : the unrecognized talents, the repressed desires. That is also the zone where the mythological themes reside which engender creative imagination, as also the archetypes which are the primordial Idea-Forms the divine Intelligence has vouchsafed to man.

What bestows a spiritual character to the Jungian unconscious is the fact that the unconscious is the meeting ground of the archetypes, children of the divine Spirit, and the instincts, children of Matter. Spirit wants to annex matter; and matter desires to subjugate Spirit. This is the very texture of life.

Exchange between the unconscious and the conscious levels

There is a constant exchange between the

unconscious level and the conscious level. What remains hidden in the unconscious comes up. What is on the conscious plane goes down to the unconscious, through repressions and regrets.

The process of making conscious what is unconscious does not happen in an easy way. It comes about through conflicts that life presents to us, through contradictions which are the very nature of life. Jung calls this process, 'Individuation.' It is the process of becoming spiritually adult. Life is an advance from unconscious perfection to conscious perfection. Without this advance, this gaining new ground, life loses its quality. Arjuna's is the classical instance of individuation through conflict of duties. On the field of Kurukshetra he lived through the conflict of a Kshatriya and a non-Kshatriya. Sri Krishna helped him vitally to discover himself, to realize himself as a yogi and a fighter for Dharma at the same time.

Who directs the exchange ?

It is the psychoid, the psychotic potential in us that directs above all, this exchange between the unconscious and the conscious. As we said earlier, Jung places the psychoid at the base of the different layers of the unconscious, as the animating principle.

And now comes the question of questions : How can the unconscious submit to the influence of the psychoid unless the unconscious has got something spiritual ?

Jung answers this question by assimilating the unconscious to the superconscious.

'My notion of the unconscious leaves entirely open the question of the super-conscious or sub-conscious including one or the other aspects of psychism.'²

2

Western psychotherapy engages itself to cure disorders of psychogenetic origin ranging from neurosis to acute psychosis. The

1. *Roots of Consciousness*, p. 489.

2. *Roots of Consciousness*, p. 491.

wide range of diseases covers obsession of various sorts, hysteria, melancholy aggravated by suicidomania and so on. Psychological disorders can develop into pseudo-organic illnesses. The therapy makes supple those organs which have become rigid by mobilizing psychological energy and by giving new life to tissues which have become inactive.

Use of notion of space and time in healing : East and West

What is an obsession? An obsessed person is the victim of a fixed idea. He is incapable of standing aloof, nor practising any objectivity. His 'inner space' has become completely rigid. He does not want to listen to the well-meaning counsel of a friend, because listening to somebody means admitting the 'other' into his inner space. This he would not, he cannot. He is blocked in his inner space.

We shall use a remedy proposed by the illustrious yogi-psychotherapist, Patañjali. His method is also largely used by the occidental therapists.

In cases of obsession Patañjali advises us to project the opposite thought (*pratipakṣa bhāvana*).³ When somebody is a victim of fear he cannot project an opposite thought without expanding his inner space. His inner space is atrophied by fear. By projecting fearlessness or courage he vitalizes and expands the inner space. Expansion and contraction are the two alternatives. Why not opt for expansion?

We have an inner and an outer space at our disposal. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* says: 'Within the space in the heart are contained both heaven and earth, sun and moon, lightning and stars; whatever there is of him, in this world and whatever is not, all that is contained within it.'⁴

The *Brahma-sūtras*, bringing more light

on the topic, says: 'This space is not elemental ether, but the highest Brahman.

What is our 'outer space'?

Instead of saying I have a body I can say that I have a space which I embellish with my body. In doing so I discharge well the consequences of my first freedom in space. I have a body possessing different types of efficiency, artistic creativity, and so on. And in using my body to fulfil its possibilities I harvest joy and peace which are fruits of my inner space. Recognizing the value of outer space and engendering the blessings of inner space I have no more fear of my neighbour walking over me. This fear invades me when I have not put to good use my potential treasures.

The idea of the space at our disposal can be very effectively used for curing psychological disorders produced by alienation, loneliness etc. None is lonely, everyone belongs to the great space, of the world, of the collectivity. It devolves on everyone to feed our souls with this feeling of 'belonging to' the great space. The therapist by finding the cause of the neurosis hidden in the unconscious of the patient links the illness to a cause—nay more, he opens up a new inner space in the patient and makes him master of that space.

In the same way as the sense of affiliation with the great space can reinforce our spirits, our feeling of oneness with eternity can bestow luminosity. Eternity is not a soulless sea of uniformity. Every wave of it is explosive and intense. Says St. Augustine: 'Lord, your today, it is Eternity. From the high tower of Eternity always present, you precede all past time and dominate all future. In this eternity *nothing happens*, on the contrary, everything is present.'⁵

If we ask a person suffering from melancholia what is his notion of time, he will

(Continued on page 132)

3. वितर्कबाधने प्रतिपक्षभावनम् ।

Yoga-sūtras 2.33.

4. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.1.1-3.

5. *Brahma-sūtra* 1.3-14, 15.

6. *Confessions* 11.13.

TEMPLES OF BENGAL

SWAMI SOMESWARANANDA

India is a land of temples, and Bengal which constitutes its eastern part is no exception. Yet we do not find many big temples or temple-cities in Bengal, which are characteristic of the north and south India. Though in the ancient books and documents of Bengal we find evidences of big temples which 'looked like a hill' or which 'obstructed the movements of clouds', we do not find such colossal temples today. Perhaps the oldest temple of Bengal is the one at Barakar, which was constructed in the eighth century. There are similar temples belonging to eleventh and twelfth centuries, and later many were constructed which still exist, but they are not very big temples.

It seems geographical conditions prevented the local people from attempting to build big temples, and it was possibly this factor which brought destruction to the ancient temples of Bengal. The soil is mainly alluvial and clayey, and the terrain mostly consists of river-basins without any hills. It is difficult to get stones for the temples, and as such bricks baked out of clayey soils were depended upon. The humid and warm climate and incessant rain did a lot of harm to those temples. Secondly, but for a few exceptions, the kings who ruled over the land were not rich and mighty like those of other parts of the country who could spend a fortune on building temples. Thirdly, in the beginning of the thirteenth century Turk and Pathan invaders started pouring in. Culturally inferior, these militant races destroyed many temples which were really fine pieces of art. And fourthly, the people of Bengal generally were not much interested in building big temples as almost all of them had their own *thākurgar* (shrine) in their homes.

The Bengalis are a highly sentimental

people and as such, when they react—either in response to affectionate feelings or to reproach—the expression is very strong. This is true of their attitude towards God as well. The people of Bengal consider God to be a very near and dear one. In Bengali religious songs we find God is being appealed to, praised and even reproached by the devotees. Whether it is Śiva, Durgā, Kṛṣṇa or Śitalā, God is always considered a member of the family, and is installed in a corner of a room where He or She is worshipped, usually without the assistance of any priest, by the offering of flowers, leaves and *bātāsā* (a cheap village sugar candy). *Vātsalya rasa* (parental sentiment) is a dominant religious attitude of Bengalis, and they like to worship God as their own son or daughter. Besides this *rasa*, they like to conceive God as their affectionate mother. Śiva is considered by them a simple harmless God who cannot take care of Himself. Śiva is *pāgla-bholā* (an innocent and absent-minded person), Umā is *sneher putalī* (affectionate baby), Kālī is *khepā meye* (naughty girl) or *mā ānandamayī* (blissful mother), and Kṛṣṇa is *bāl-gopāl* (cowherd child) and *nanīcorā* (one who steals cream and butter). This kind of intimate religious approach, a simple and homely affair without any priestly paraphernalia, made the building of large temples unnecessary and was the main social cause for the absence of many big temples in Bengal.

Change in religious history

Before we discuss the temples of Bengal we should know the various socio-cultural influences that came to the Bengalis through the ages. These influences played a big role in shaping the different forms of temple-architecture,

The Bengalis are a mixture of races. In the pre-historic period the proto-Australoids used to live in this region. The Santhāls, Bhils, Kols, Mundās, Ghenchus, Kurubs are of this stock. Then came the Melanids (the present-day Tamilians are the descendants of these Melanids) and there was some mixing of blood. Then came the Alpo-Dinaris to this land after crossing present-day Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, northern part of Andhra, and Orissa. The combination of these three races gave rise to a new race called the Bengalis. Though in the physical features of this new race the Alpo-Dinaris dominate most, in culture the proto-Australoid influence is most pronounced. There are many conjectures on how the name *bāngālī* (the Bengalees) came into being. Here we may mention that in the Santhāli language *bongā* means 'god' (e.g. *singbongā* = sun-god; *cāndbongā* = moon-god). From *bongā* came the word *bongāl* meaning the land of gods. *Bongāl* and *bonga* are the ancient names of the two parts (now both in Bangladesh) of this land, and thus the people are called *bongālī* or *bangālī*, and their language is known as *bānglā* (or Bengālī). The foundation of this language is Austric, but its overall form is very much influenced by Sanskrit, a branch of Indo-Aryan languages. Later on Arabic, Farsi and English also contributed a lot to its development.

The ancient Bengalis were divided into many clans. Though in later periods these clans combined to form some princely states viz. *bangā*, *bangāl*, *samataṭ*, *pundrah*, *rādh*, *gaur* etc., the Bengalis did not give up their tribal practices in religious affairs. In the fourth century B.C. Jaina and Buddhist monks came here bringing Aryan religion but they were resisted for a long time. Some thousand years later in the fifth century A.D. Vedic religion entered Bengal. Vedic religion was more successful at first than the above-mentioned religions. Jaina influence was

limited to some parts of the northern Bengal, and Purulia and Tamruk in the southwestern part. Buddhist and Vedic religions could convert more people, though the Bengalis did not wholly give up their tribal practices. Thus the Puranic aspect of Vedic religion, and the Vajrayāna aspect of Buddhism became the dominating cultural factors in this land. Vajrayāna again was transformed into Sahajayāna or *sahajiyā-dharma* which was some sort of a folk-religion. From the tenth to the twelfth century eighty-four siddhācāryas (saints) of *sahajiyā-dharma* were born in Bengal. The Sen kings were the most important rulers in the twelfth century. Their ancestors came from Karnataka, and Ballāsen and Lakṣmansen introduced the rigid caste-system into Bengal. Defeating the last Hindu king (Lakṣmansen) the Turks invaded Bengal in the thirteenth century. The Turks and Pathans had very little culture and they were fanatic in their religious views, and so they destroyed many Hindu and Jaina temples and Buddhist vihāras (monastery). After their occupation, for two centuries hardly any new temple was constructed in Bengal. In the fifteenth century Sri Caitanya was born and influenced the Bengalis through his Vaiṣṇava cult. That movement left a remarkable stamp on the Bengali culture raising its literature, music, architecture etc. to a new dimension. In the seventeenth century came the Portuguese, but they did not succeed in ruling the country as they were interested mainly in looting, plunder and arson. In the eighteenth century came the British. In the freedom struggle Bengal became the centre of the most violent upheavals against British imperialism. In the nineteenth century many religious and social luminaries were born here who inaugurated the great cultural and spiritual renaissance of modern India. This has led to the development of a new dimension in temple-architecture of which the growing number of Ramakrishna temples are a notable example.

Periods of temple-styles

Ancient Bengalis were not familiar with temples. They were satisfied with their village gods and the *thān* (god's place; derived from Sanskrit *sthāna*) just outside their village which was under a tree or the open sky. In many villages this is still the custom. Under a tree a pitcher or a *śila* (stone-symbol of the god or goddess) or a small idol is kept. The villagers put vermilion marks on these gods and offer flowers. From the photo no. 1* the reader will have an idea of how this ancient custom is still being observed.

Many other Bengali practices in religion even today are largely derived from ancient tribal customs. Outwardly the practices seem to be Vedic with mantras etc. but if one goes into details one will find the ancient practices still prevailing. In the Hindu

marriage system of Bengal only the *sampradāna*, *yajña*, and *saptapadī* portions are Vedic, the rest (e.g. *gātra-haridrā*, the use of *durvā* grass, betel-leaf and cane-basket, *badhu-varaṇ* or welcoming the bride, etc.) are non-Vedic local customs. Some of these local customs are practised even by the Bengali Muslims. Married Bengali women put vermilion powder on the parting line of hair on the head. I have seen many Muslim and even Christian Bengali ladies, in both West Bengal and Bangladesh, putting vermilion on their head. This is also an ancient custom which has nothing to do with Vedic, Biblical, or Koranic injunctions.

After the advent of Buddhist and Vedic religions many shrines were constructed in Bengal. Here we shall refer to Hindu temples only. The following table shows different periods in the history of Hindu temple architecture.

| Period | Time | Style | Remarks |
|--------|---------------------------------|--|---|
| First | upto 13th century. | <i>rekha</i> and <i>pidhā</i> (curvilinear and pyramidal). | Early Hindu type—Orissa-style and Bengal variant. |
| Second | from 15th century onward. | <i>cālā</i> (hut type) or <i>bānglā</i> style. | Hindu renaissance—Bengal type. |
| Third | from 17th century onward. | <i>ratna</i> (tower). | Development of <i>Bānglā</i> style with towers. |
| Fourth | 19th to early 20th century. | Flat-roofed. | Western influence. Decadence in style. |
| Fifth | from early 20th century onward. | Combination of ancient and modern techniques. | New dimensional approach— a renaissance. |

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3. Sri Yatin Chakravarti, Hon'ble Minister, Govt. of W. Bengal,

Early Hindu period—rekha and piḍhā styles

In Indian temple architecture three styles are the most important. *Nāgara*-style temples can be seen in northern India, from the Himalayas to the Vindhya hills. From the Vindhya hills upto the Krishna river *vesara*-style is predominant. From the Krishna river to the southernmost part we find a separate style which is called *draviḍa*-style. In the seventh century the *nāgara* style spread from Jagatsukh (Kulu valley) to Āihole (Karnataka) and from Rodā (Gujarat) to Bhuvaneshwar (Orissa) Śaśānka, a king of Bengal in the seventh century, conquered Kalinga (Orissa) and thus the *nāgara*-style came to influence the temples in Bengal. But here it gave rise to two new styles viz. *rekha* (curvilinear) and *piḍhā* (pyramidal). The *rekha* style again gave rise to three variants—smooth curvili-

near (Orissan and Bengal types) and ridged curvilinear.

The Śiva temple at Khudikā in Burdwan district is an ideal smooth curvilinear (Orissan) style temple. The wall of the temple goes up from the *garbhagr̥ha* (sanctum sanctorum) in a slightly inclined position. The projections of the walls are spaced. At the top there is a circular base on which rests the *āmalaka*. Above the *āmalaka* there is the *kalāśa* or pitcher, and on it rests the symbol of the deity (trident for Śiva and disc for Viṣṇu).

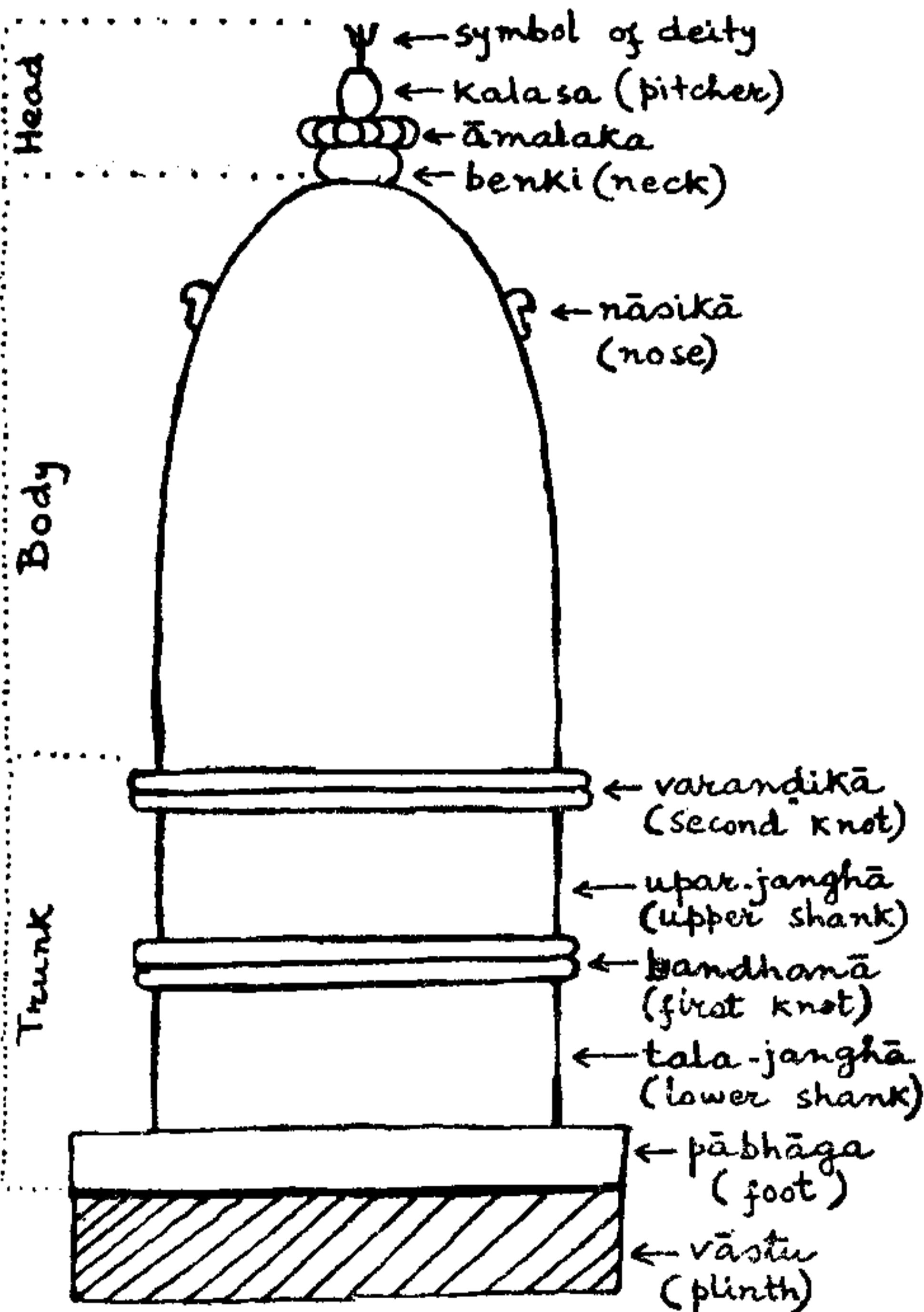
On the walls of the temple the various *līlas* (sportive acts) of the gods and goddesses are inscribed for decoration. The Siddheśvara temple at Barākar (Burdwan district) is a fine piece of this art (see photo no. 2).

The other type (Bengal type) of this style is very simple. The walls seem to rise just from the base, and there is no decoration on the walls, but the top remains almost the same (see photo no. 3).

Smooth curvilinear temples are found at Dharapat, Jagannathpur, Baital and Bishnupur in Bankura district, at Marotala, Rajnagar and Ajuria in Midnapore district, at Gaurangapur and Khudika in Burdwan district, and in other villages.

Ridged curvilinear temples are generally decorated, and it would appear as if the temple were going up step by step. The Śiva temple at Barakar (see photo no. 4) illustrates this style. Generally its three parts—base, shrine, and top—are distinct though in some temples a smooth blending of these parts can be seen (see photo no. 5).

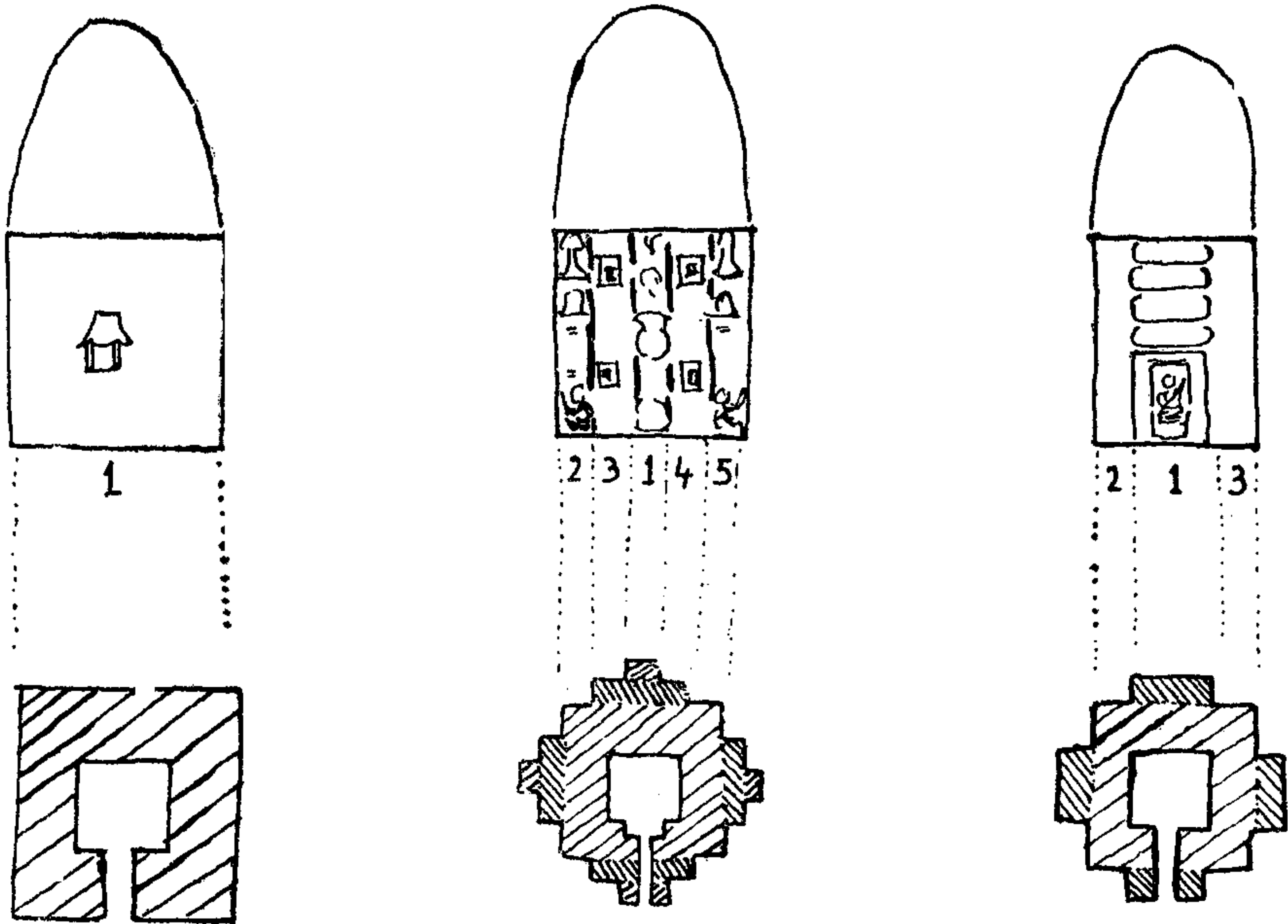
In the *rekha* (curvilinear) temples the base is generally square and there is only one door. The walls are thick (2 to 3 feet)—the outside of the walls is ridged but their inside is simple, though one or two *kulungi* (small niches to keep additional deities etc.) may be there. Construction of the outside walls is of various types: *ek-ratha* (when



Parts of a rekha temple.

the plane of the outer wall is just like the inner one), *tri-ratha* (when central portion of the outer wall vertically bulges out); *pañca-ratha* (when three portions of the outer wall bulge out), *sapta*-, *nava-ratha* etc. Cross-sections of the base and front elevations are shown below to illustrate these differences.

beams or brackets were not used. So it was difficult to make tall temples just with bricks. To construct the walls in a gradually inclined form corbels were used on the inner walls. The outer walls were straight upto one-third portion of the temple and then they followed the pattern of inner walls.



ek-ratha

pancha-ratha

tri-ratha

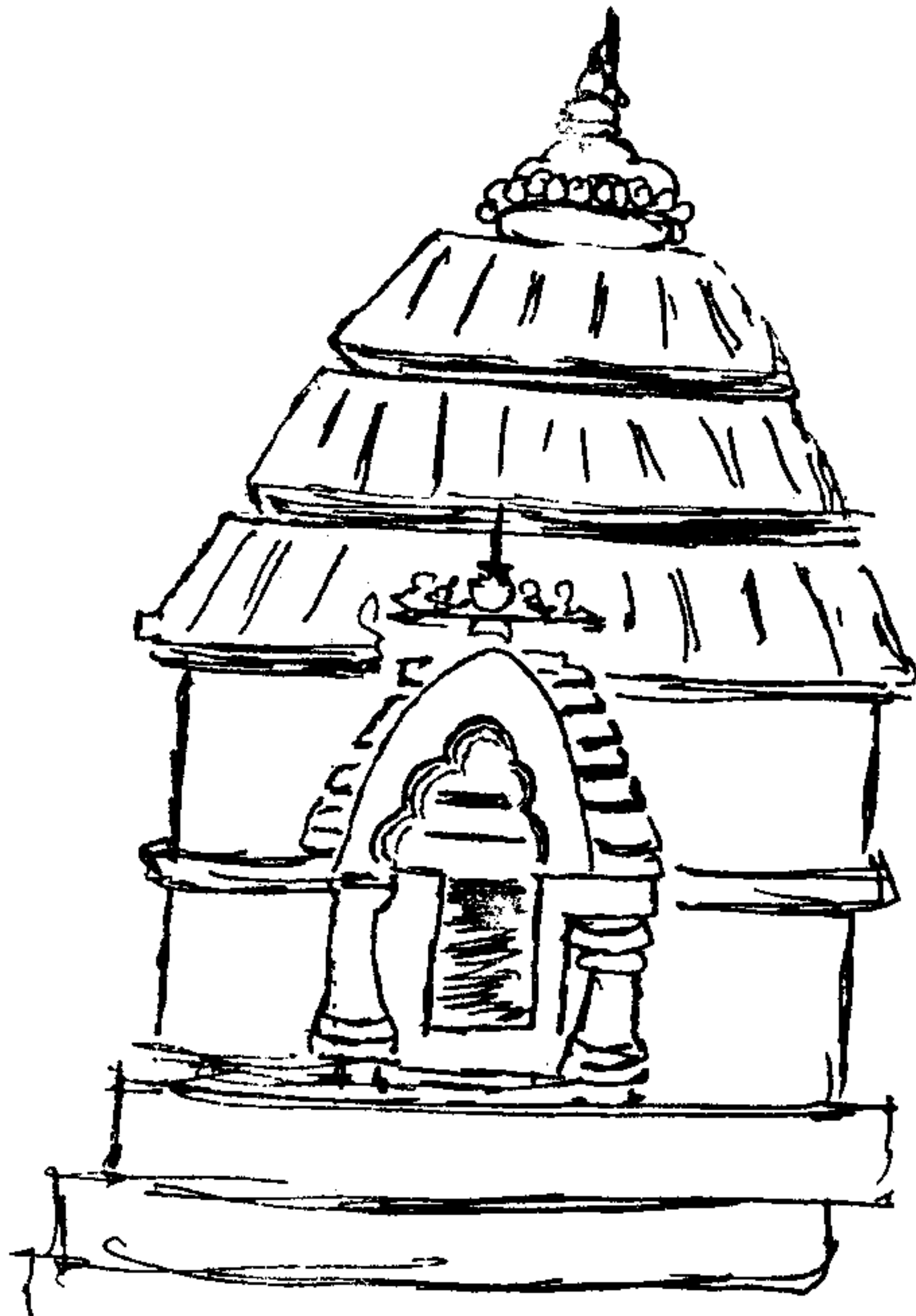
Now take the case of a tri-ratha figure. If one looks at the temple (or the front elevation) one will find that the outer wall has got three parts, with the central one bulging out. These three parts are marked by four lines. In the case of panca-ratha the five parts (or *ratha*) are marked by six lines (see photo no. 3). Because of these lines (*rekha* in Bengali) these temples are called *rekha deul* (deul = temple).

We should note that in these temples iron

This type of temple is seen at Kodla (Khulna, Bangladesh), at Baidyapur, Kulingram and Sitalpur in Burdwan district, at Hetampur and Chandanpur in Birbhum district, and in other villages.

The *pidha* type temples are generally small structures. The base and shrine are simple, but the top goes up in the form of

a pyramid. At the top also its structure is the same as that of the earlier types, though here it varies to some extent, for some extra slabs are put to rise the roof high (see photo no. 6).



A piḍhā temple.

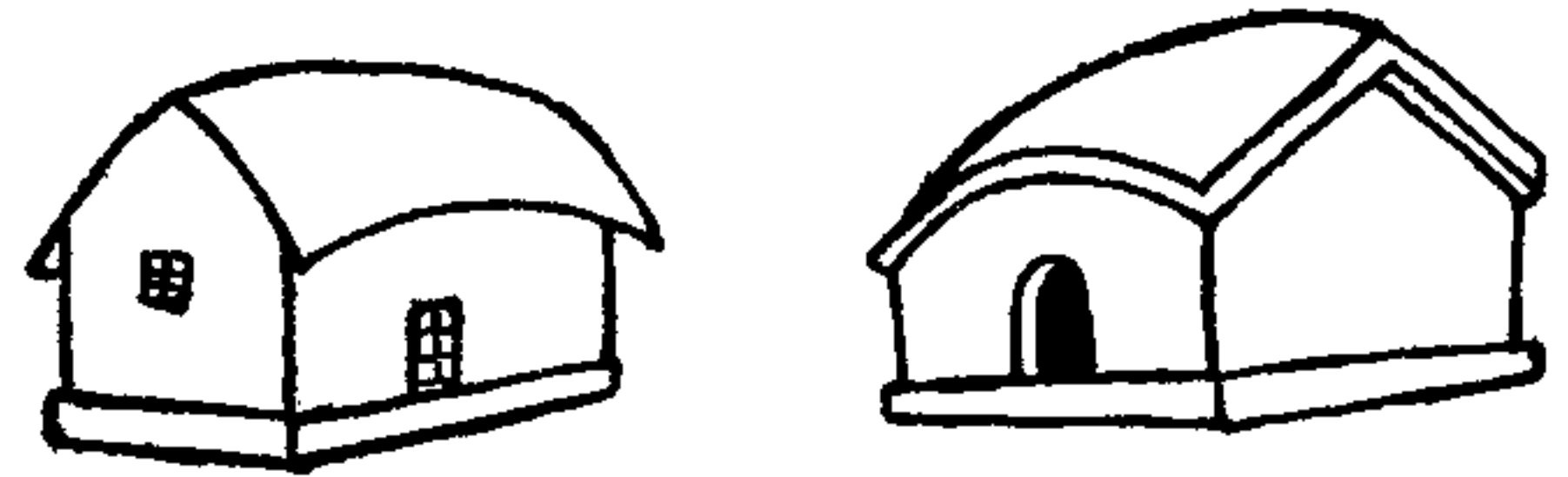
Using these two types and adding variations new techniques were later on experimented with. A piḍhā temple surmounted by rekha top was excavated in Bangladesh (Gokul's temple at Mahasthangarh in Bagura district and another Govinda temple to the north of it).

Piḍhā type temples can be seen at Kesiari, Datan and Garbeta (Midnapore), at Ekeshvara and Maynapur (Banaripur) places.

Hut type temples

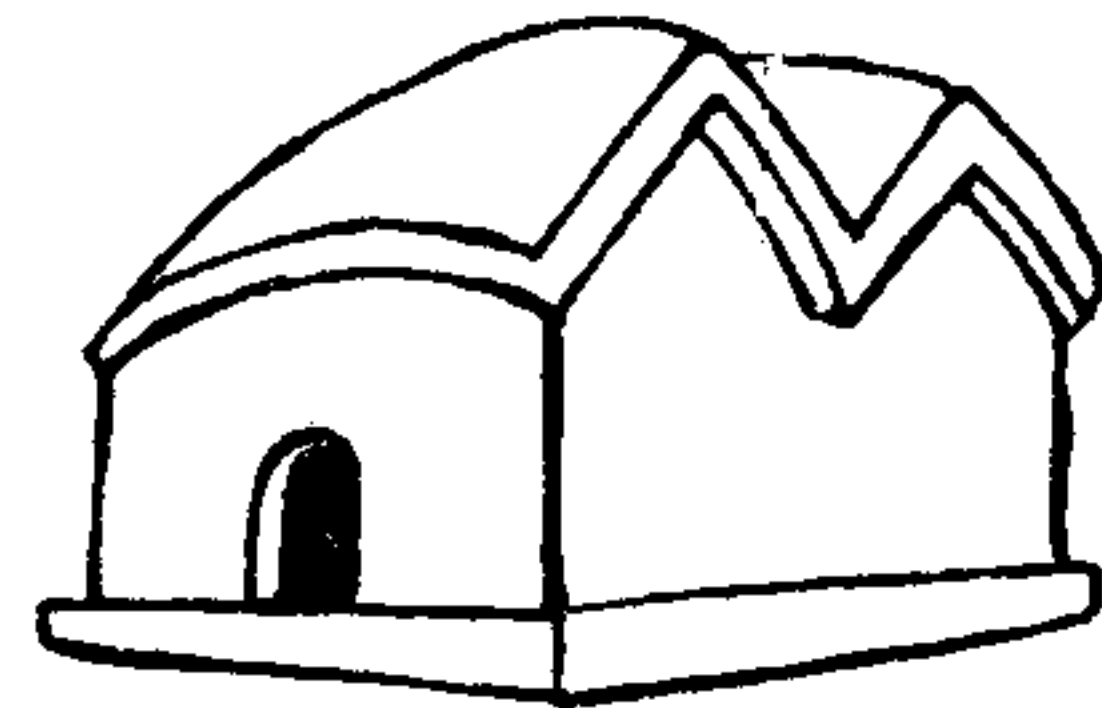
This is a peculiar Bengal style of temple architecture. The earliest dated temple found of this type is the Simhavāhinī temple

at Ghatal in Midnapore district which was built in 1490 A.D. This type derives from the bamboo-frame hut, of which the walls are made of reed and mud, and the thatched roof is curved at the ridge and lower edges. The simplest type of these temples is called *ek-bānglā* or *do-cālā* (two-roofed). (see photo no. 7).



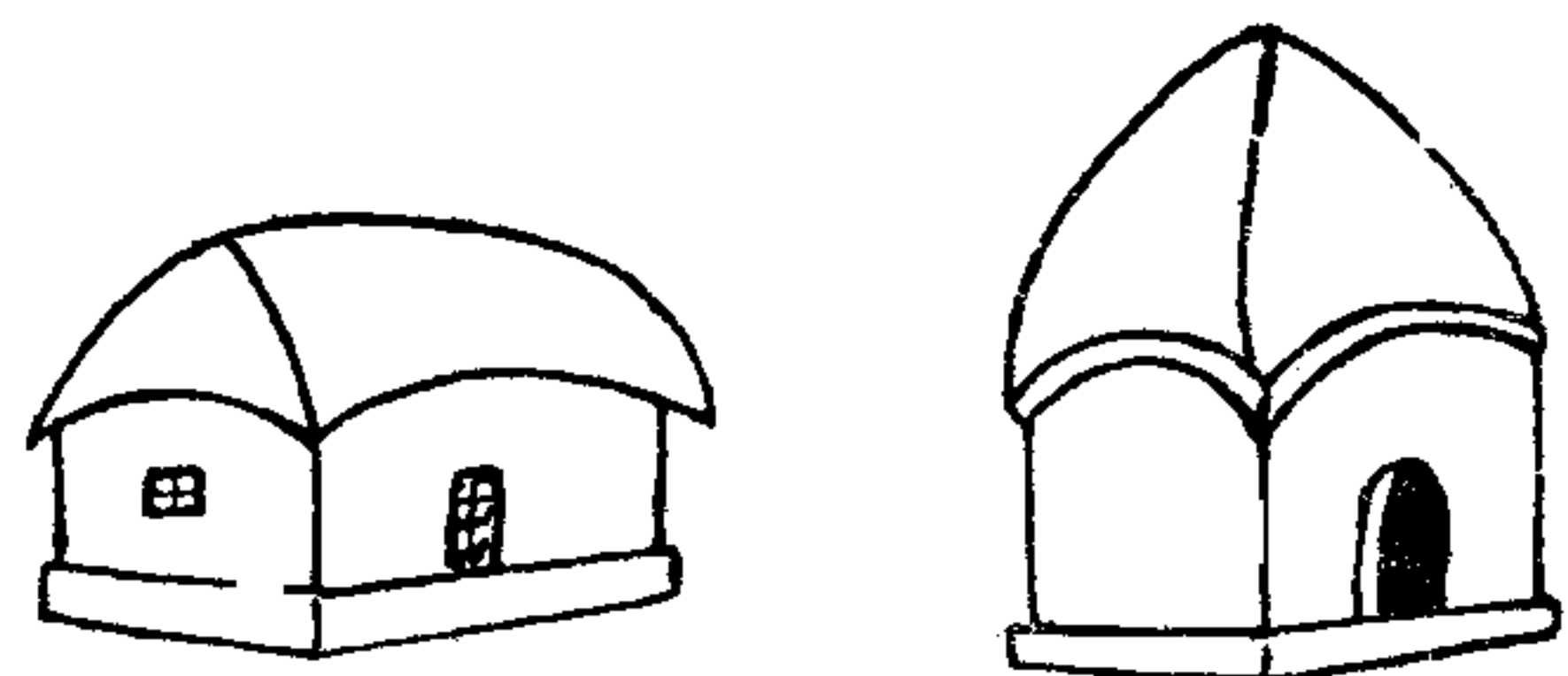
hut ek-bānglā. temple

By combining two such huts we get the *jor-bānglā* temple style. Here one hut is used as the shrine and the other as the



Jor-bānglā temple.

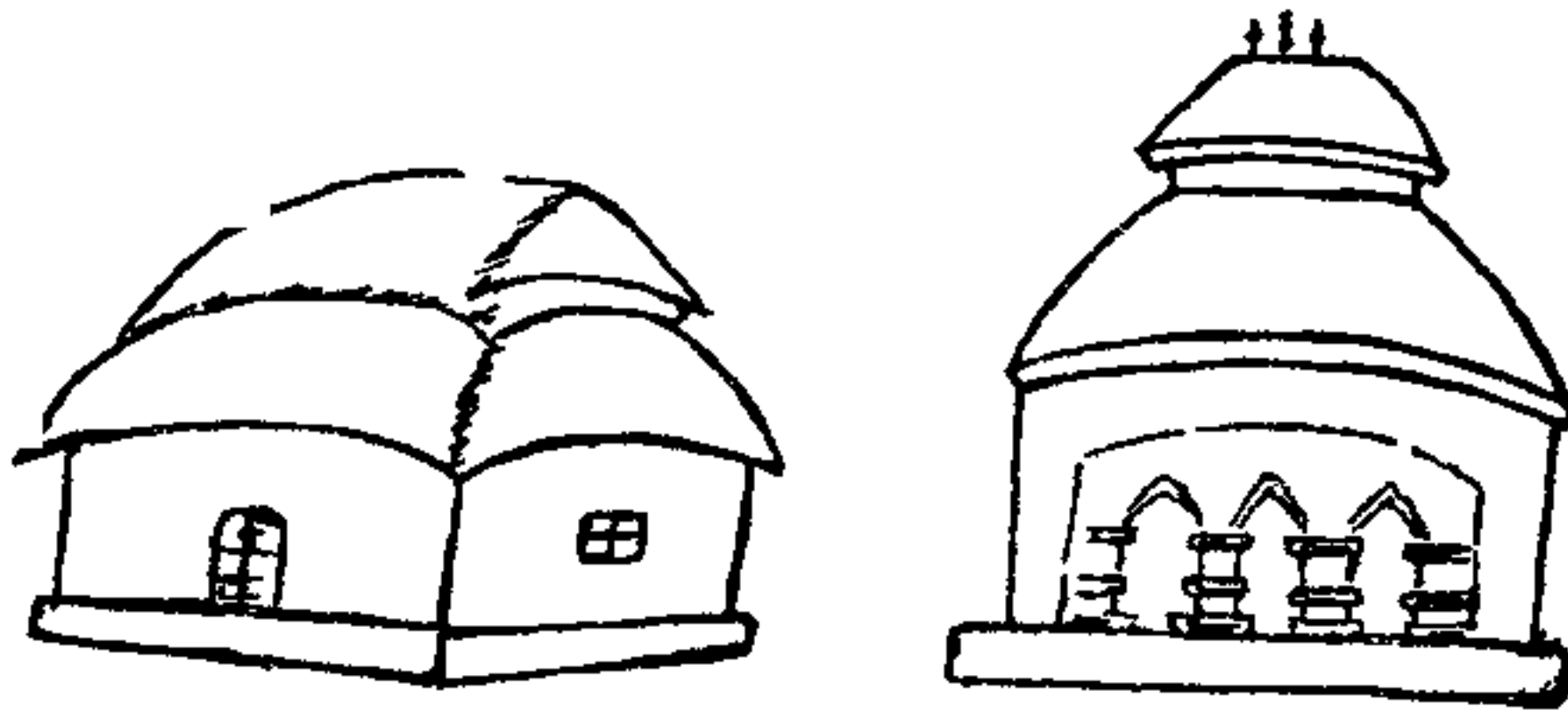
porch (see photo no. 8). *Cār-cālā* (with four roofs) temples are constructed in the form of another type of hut, almost simi-



hut Cār-cālā. temple

lar to the previous one. This is very common in the villages of Bengal (see photo no. 9). When a miniature cār-cālā is put

on the roof of a cār-cālā temple it gives rise to the āt-cālā (with eight roofs) temple style. Sri Ramakrishna's original home at Kamarpukur is a double-storied hut. An āt-cālā temple is modelled after this type of hut (see photo no. 10)



hut

āt-cālā.

temple



a rekha top on a cār-cālā temple is used. In the Raghur temple at Kamarpukur a piḍhā top is placed over a bānglā type temple.

In the ek-bānglā temples, the walls are generally thick and there is only one door. But in other hut-style temples one hut is used as the porch. Though the shrine has got only one door, the porch in front has three doors marked by four pillars and only one door on the side walls. The roof slopes steeply to which is added a curved cornice. The floor of the shrine is rectangular in the ek-bānglā and jor-bānglā temples, but in the āt-cālā temples it is square.

Tower temples

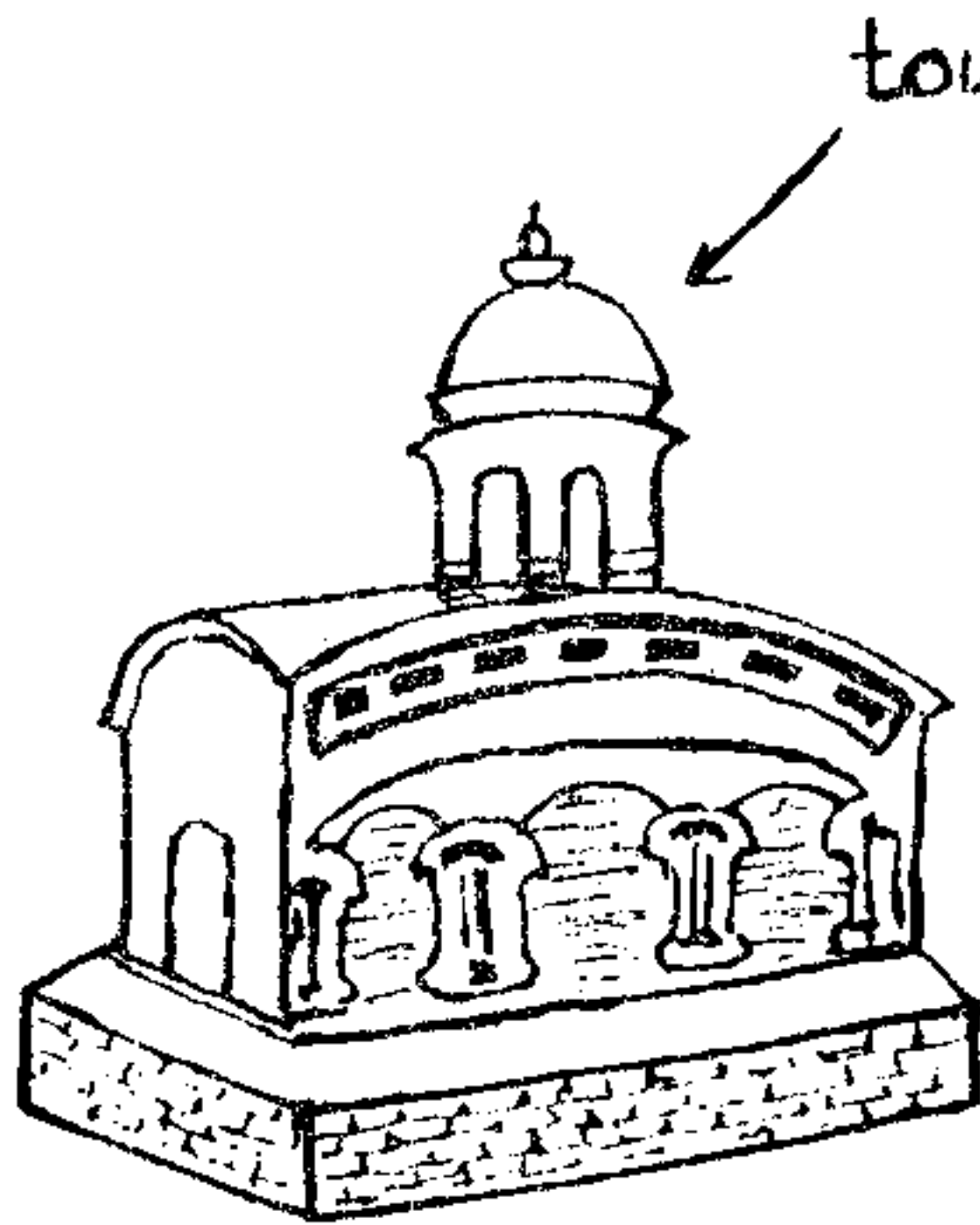
When the roof is almost flat and a tower is put on it, the temple is called *ek-ratna* temple (*ek* = one; *ratna* = tower). When four more towers are added to the four corners, it turns into a *panca ratna* (*panca* = five) temple. By increasing the number of stories and corner towers, the ratnas can be made nine, thirteen, seventeen, even twentyfive.

Ek-bānglā temples are found in Bangladesh and also in West Bengal (at Baranagar and Baghdanga in Murshidabad district). Jor-bānglā temples can be seen in the districts of Midnapore, Burdwan, Nadia and Birbhum. Āt-cālā temples are in abundance in these districts. The Kālī temple at Kālīghāt (Calcutta) is an āt-cālā temple.

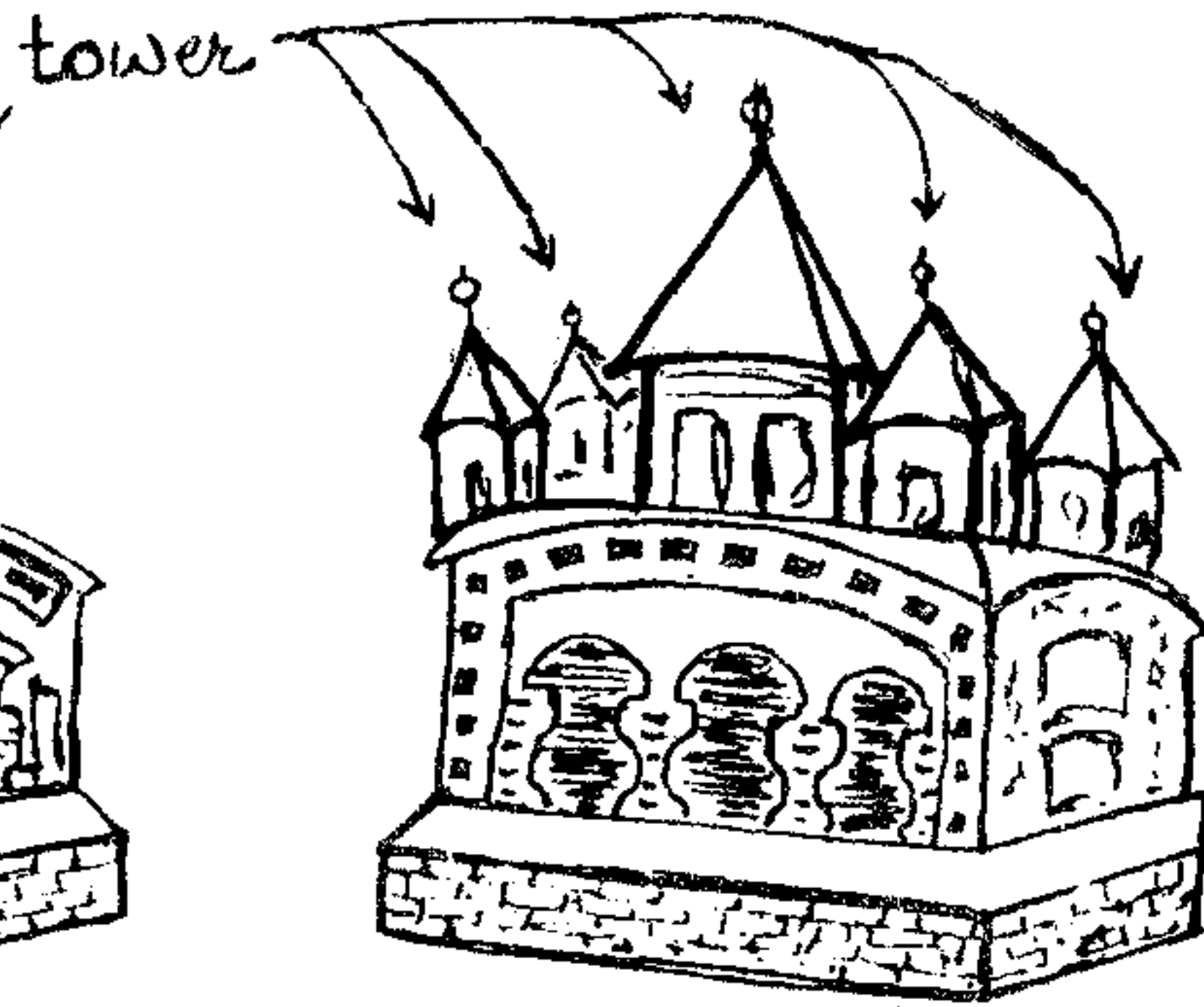
The Kālī temple at Dakshineswar is a *nava-ratna* temple (with nine towers). There is an old *pancavimsati-ratna* (with twenty-five towers) temple of Ānanda-Bhairavī at Sukharia in Hooghly district (see photo no. 11).

Later many experiments were done combining the cālā, rekha, and piḍhā styles. Here one sketch is produced to show how

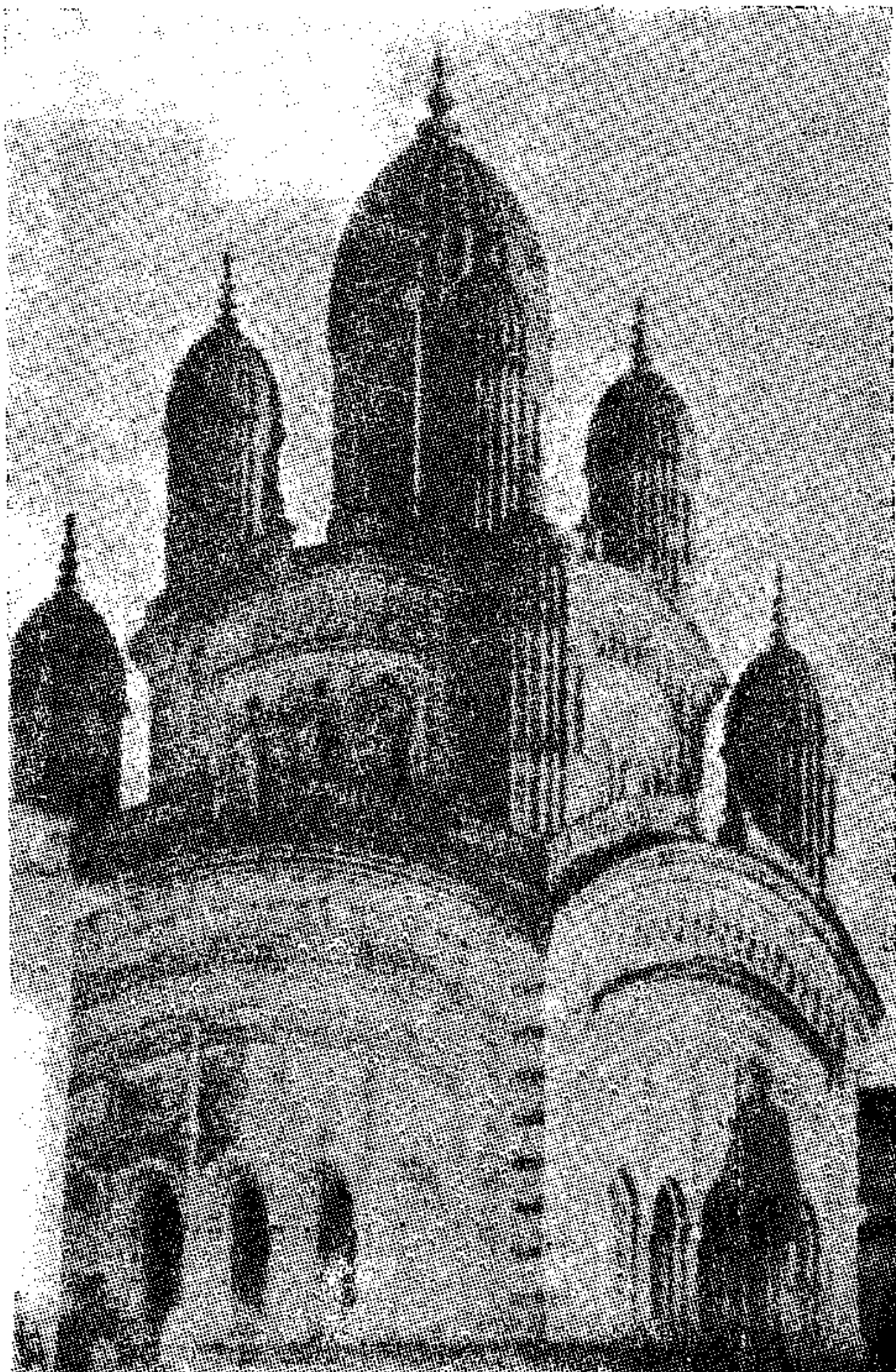
Placing towers on the hut-style temples also gave rise to tower temples. A cross-section of the base will show the difference between a tower temple and other temples. The plan of a nava-ratna temple is reproduced below.



ek-ratna temple
(one tower)

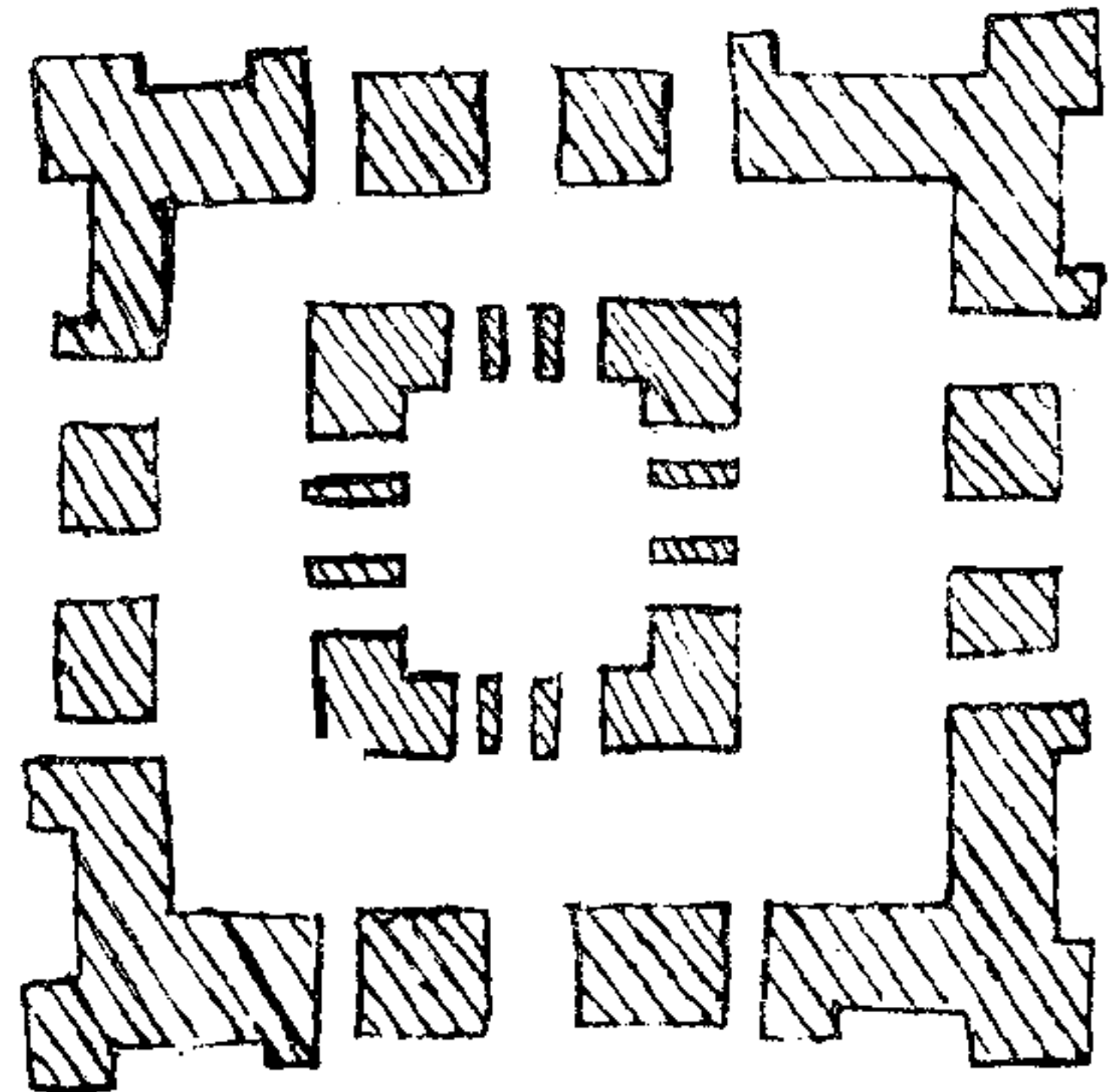


panca-ratna temple
(five towers)



Nava-ratna temple,
Dakshineswar.

In the porch generally three doors (as in the *bānglā* style) signify the entrance, though at the Kālī temple of Dakshineswar there are five doors.



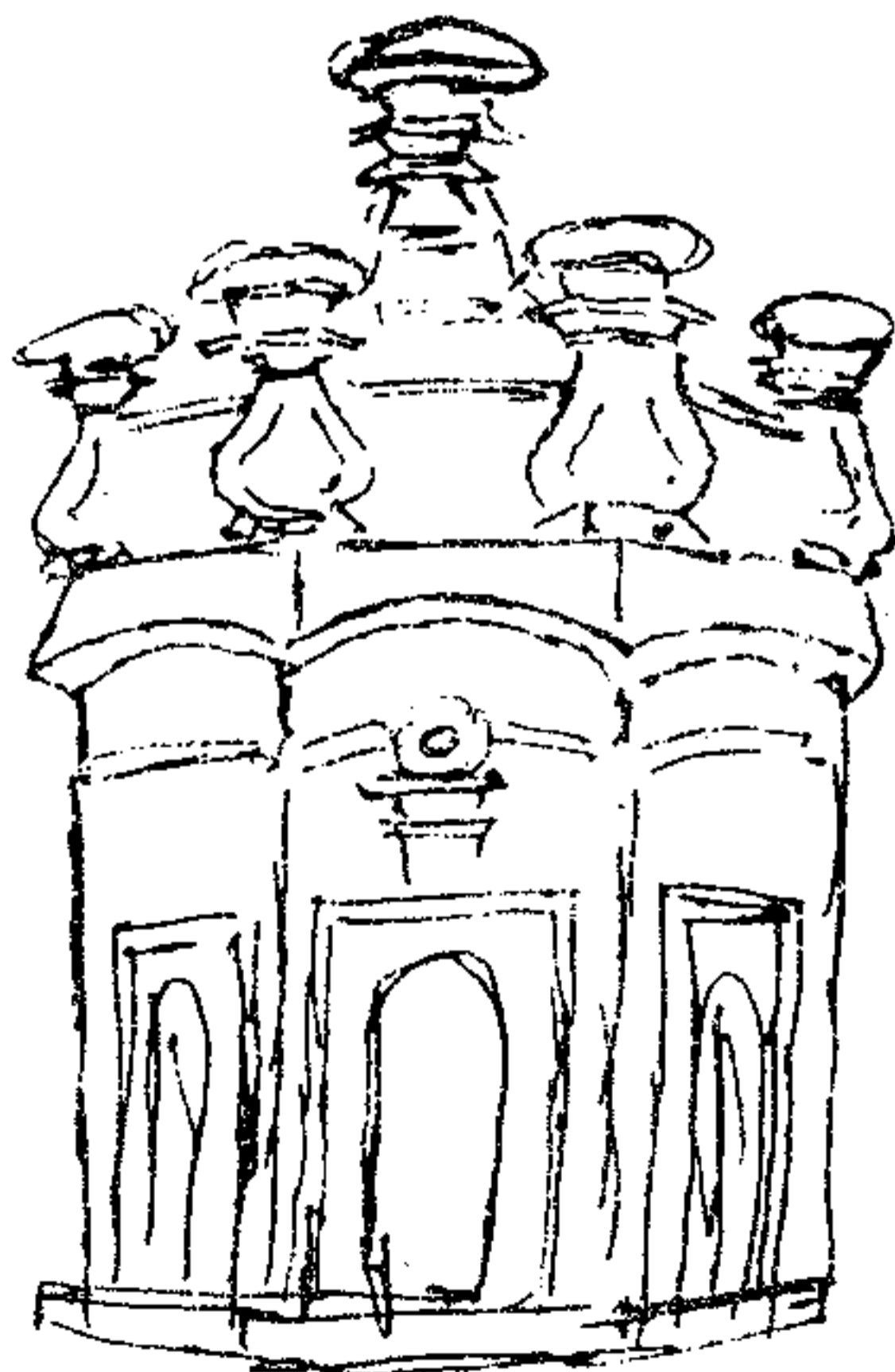
These tower temples are not a totally new style, for in most of these temples *rekha* and *pidhā* are combined to construct the top—*rekha* gives the curved face, whereas the *pidhā* is used to construct the cornice. In Bangladesh *rekha* and *cālā* styles are com-

bined in these tower temples which can be seen in the panca-ratna temple at Putiya in Rajsahi district and in the sapta-ratna temple at Comilla. In West Bengal ek-ratna temples are found at Bishnupur and Madanpur (Bankura), panca-ratna temples at Khandra and Ukhra (Burdwan) and at Dasghara and Swoaluk (Hooghly), nava-ratna temples at Alangiri and Dubrajpur (Midnapore) and at Sarpi (Burdwan), pancavimsati-ratna at Kalna (Burdwan), Sukharia (Hooghly) and Sonamukhi (Bankura).

Flat-roofed temples

Probably under the influence of the Mohammedan sultans and the British this temple-architecture came into being. It resembles a modern building in appearance. The roof is quite flat, heavy cornices are put on curved brackets, a balcony surrounds the roof, though the cusped arches and facades are in the *cālā* and *ratna* styles. It was no doubt a new experiment. The *ṣaḍabhūjā* temple at Panchrol (Midnapore) and the Chandranath temple at Hetampur are typical examples of this novel style. (see diagram below)

Temples of this type can be seen at



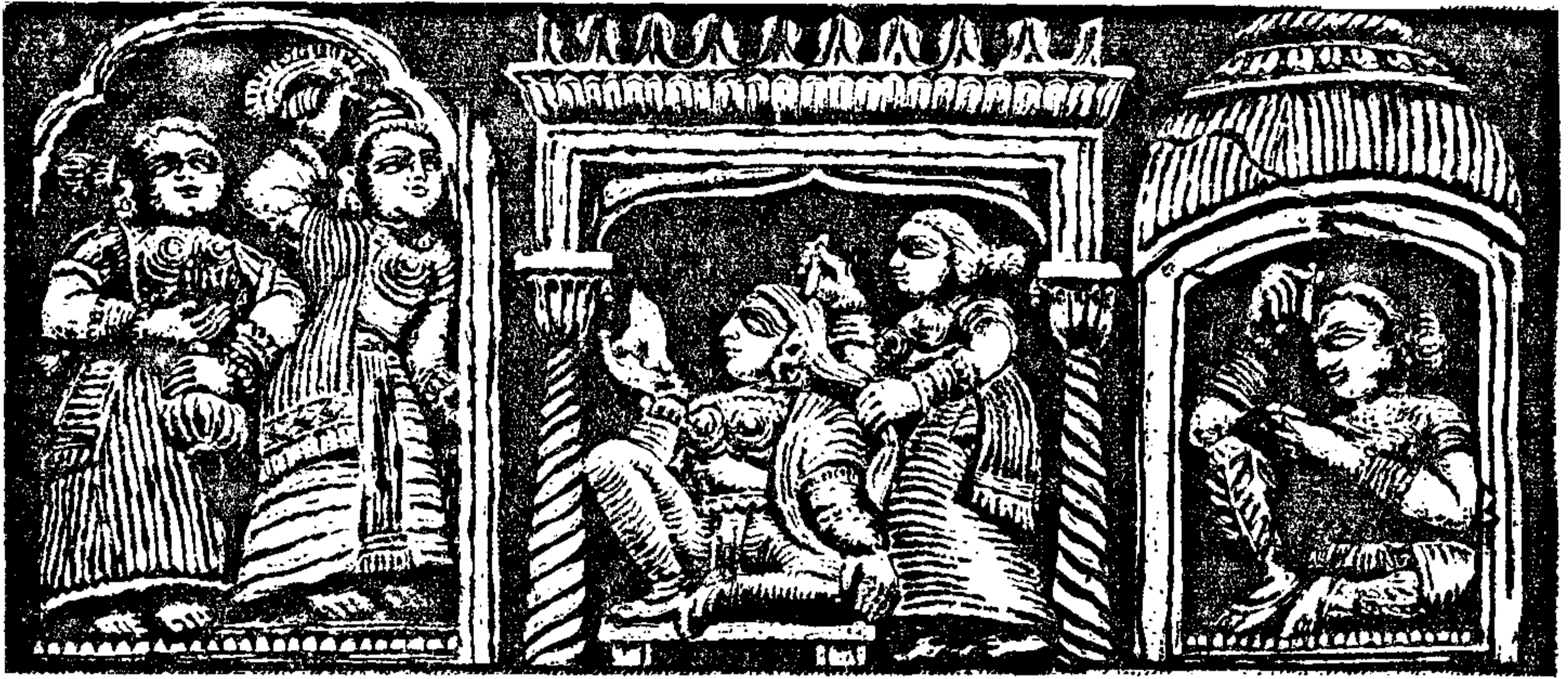
Temple at Hetampur.



Bamanpara and Kalna (Burdwan), at Kotulpur (Bankura) and Chandrakona (Midnapore). In Midnapore, Howrah, and Hooghly districts these are in abundance.

Decoration

Though in some rekha-temples there were detailed decoration on the outer walls, the temple art of Bengal reached its peak in the hut-type (*cālā*) temples. Terracotta art was used extensively and it was mainly through it that these temples, though simple in form, could show an altogether new dimension of temple art. Small square tiles—generally 3 to 5 inches in length—with bas-relief were used. Sticky clay was used to make the moulds, and by pouring clay into these the bas-reliefs were made. Then the artist used his simple home-made instruments to draw the details—eyes, brows, hair, ridges of garments, ornaments etc. After the precision work those tiles were again baked. Sometimes one tile completed the whole picture, sometimes many tiles were arranged to make a complete picture. Then these were fixed on the walls and pillars of the temples. Generally the pictures narrated some stories from the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata and the Bhāgavata. Motifs on social customs and acts were also used. Bazar scenes, war, common men and women in their daily liv-



Terracotta art at Vishnu temple, Surul.

ing, Vaiṣṇava or Śaiva monks, birds, animals, flowers, fruits, leaves and many other motifs can be seen on those terracotta walls.

The temples of Bishnupur (Bankura) and Antpur (Hooghly) are the most famous for this terracotta art. (see photo no. 12)

Earlier than this terracotta art we find the art of lime and *sudki* which were also

The deities

From a sample survey of 536 temples of the mediaeval period in Bengal (both West Bengal and Bangladesh) it is found that Śiva temples are the largest in number. The following table gives the relative number of temples dedicated to the different deities.

| Presiding deity | No. of temples | Percentage of the total number |
|---|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Śiva | 182 | 34% |
| Kṛṣṇa (single and with Rādhā) | 151 | 28·2% |
| Viṣṇu | 83 | 15·5% |
| Durgā (in various forms viz. Cāmuṇḍā, Caṇḍi etc.) | 18 | 3·3% |
| Kālī | 17 | 3·17% |
| Rāma (single and with Sītā) | 40 | 7·5% |
| Village god/goddess | 34 | 6·3% |
| Others (Lakṣmī, Tārā, Hanumān etc.) | 11 | 2% |

used in many temples, and also the work of *pankha* (paste made of small conch shells). Wood-work art was also used in the temples. All these forms of mural work, except the *pankha* work which was used to draw flowers, creepers etc. to decorate the walls, were based on religious and social themes. After the eighteenth century we find the artists draw European men, women and soldiers,

Thus we find that though, when each deity is considered separately, Śiva temples are the largest in number, Vaiṣṇava temples are the most numerous as a group. At the same time we see that folk-gods (village gods, local gods etc.) also have many temples dedicated to them. However, from the early twentieth century the picture changed. More Kālī temples have come up now, while temples dedicated to Viṣṇu, Durgā and

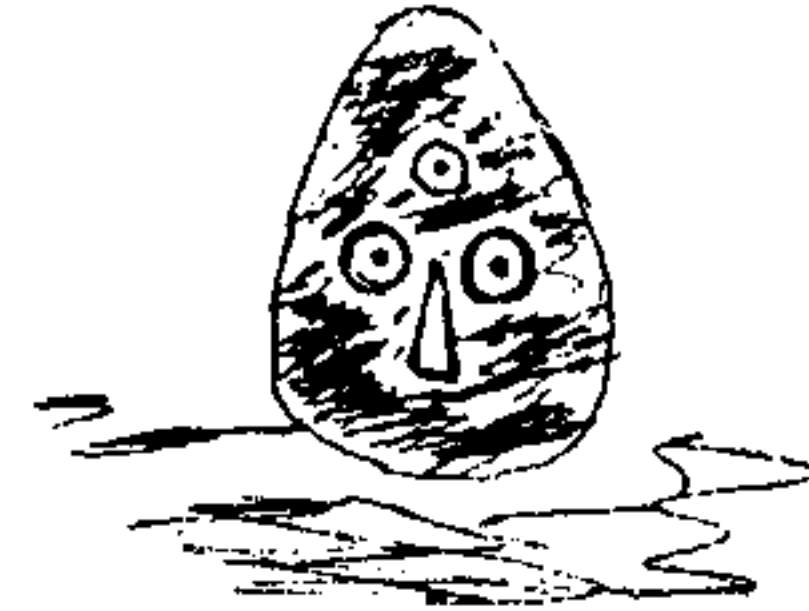
Rāma are dwindling in number. It is also to be noted that though Goddess Lakṣmī is being worshipped in almost all Bengali homes, no temple is dedicated to Her (only one temple was found in the mediaeval period). Out of the above mentioned 536 temples, only 3 are dedicated to Sri Caitanya. Another noteworthy fact is that in the present century, specially after the 1920s, hundreds of new temples have been dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna in Bengal.

In the *garbha-grha* (sanctum sanctorum), mentioned as 'shrine' in our article, the deity is generally placed on a pedestal fixed near the back wall. But in Śiva temples the *linga* is placed almost at the centre of the shrine. The image of the deity is generally made of stone or clay or wood. Except Śiva (when He is in the anthropomorphic form which is a rare case, for He is most commonly represented as *Śiva-linga*) almost all the deities are in the standing posture. We know there are four styles in the posture of deities—*samabhanga* (when the deity stands straight), *ābhanga* (the portion from the waist to the head is slightly bent), *tribhanga* (upper portion of the body inclined to one side and lower portion to another), and *atibhanga* (more bending in the figure e.g. the Naṭarāja idol). The deities of Viṣṇu and Rāma are made in *samabhanga* style, Kṛṣṇa is *tribhanga*, and goddesses in *atibhanga* style. The faces of Viṣṇu and Rāma are made in the traditional style, whereas the faces of Kṛṣṇa, Kālī and Durgā are more human though with large eyes.

It was said earlier that Bengalis are carrying on their ancient customs even today in their religious practices in the temples. In many Viṣṇu temples the deity is not anthropomorphic, but the *sālagrāma śilā* is more common. Durgā pūjā is the most important festival in Bengal, but the common people observe a number of *vrata* and *pārvana*. Many of these *vratas* could perhaps be traced to the pre-Vedic period.

Some of the important *vratas* are: *punya-pukur*, *gokāl*, *madhu-sankrānti*, *daś-putul*, *Jay-mangal*, *itu-pūjā*, *yam-pukur*, *ṣaṣṭī*, *mangal-candī*, *kojāgar-pūrṇimā*, *bhrātr-dvitiyā*, *ambubācī* etc. These religious practices helped the Hindu Bengalis to retain their religious spirit through the ages inspite of the invasions of Turks, Pathans, Britishers etc. When the Turks and Pathans destroyed the Buddhist *vihāras*, Buddhism could not survive because it was centred round those *vihāras* (monasteries). But decentralization of religious authority is the most characteristic feature of Hinduism, which is not centred around any temple or monastery, and so it survived through the ages. We have already pointed out that almost every Bengali home has its own *thākur-ghar* (shrine) or at least a corner of room set apart for the worship of the deity.

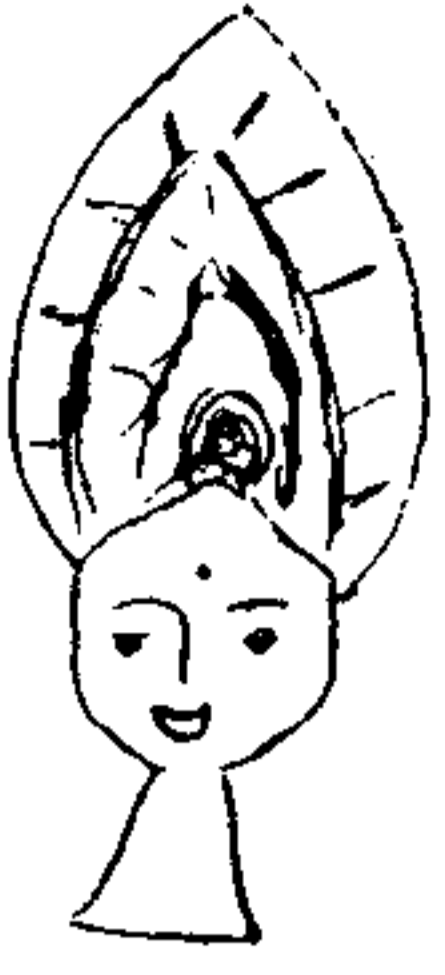
It is interesting to note that many folk- or village-gods have also their temples though generally they are placed in the *thān*. Among them Ban-bibi (goddess of the forest), Olāi-candī (goddess of cholera),



Sinidevi.

Bāba-ṭhākur (who guards the babies, cattle, and birds of a house), Sinidevī, Bāsali (also called Vaśulī or Viśālākṣī), Yogādyā, Rajballabhī, Pīr Gorācānd, Basanta Rāy (god of epidemic), Raṅkinī (who blesses the ladies with children), Manik-pīr (god of diseases), Khetrapāl, Satyanārāyan, and Dhrama-ṭhākur have temples dedicated to them in Bengal.

Banbibi, Olāicandī, Pīr Gorācānd, Sinidevi, Manikpīr, Khetrapāl and Satyanārāyan are worshipped by both the Hindus and Mohammedans though the latter name



Bara-thakur



Olai-chandi

Olāicandī as Olābibi and Satyanārāyaṇ as Satyapīr. A Brahmin priest is not always necessary for the worship of these deities, and in many cases only a scheduled caste or tribal member is eligible to act as the priest. Mantras are a mixture of Sanskrit and Bengali, for example : *dhāl taloār tāngi haste/dakṣinrāy namostu te. Or tañ tañ biṭañ tañ kapani biṭañ.../ dhun dhan dhūmabarna śakaṭ bikaṭ nayanāñ/...khetrapālañ namaḥ.* In many temples just a pitcher or two is kept as the symbol of the god or goddess. In some cases an earthen head is put on the *śilā*, in some other cases metallic vases are also used. Those who have visited the Simhavāhinī temple at Jayrambati, may have noticed that on a vase-like metallic pot a face is drawn to signify the deity.

In some temples it is seen that one deity is being worshipped as another deity. At Kantor village (in Bankura district) a stone disc with two Naṭarāja bas-relief images on two sides is being worshipped as devī (goddess). Idols of Pārśvanāth (Jaina saint) are being worshipped by the Hindus as goddess Manasā at Dharapat village and as Sītalā-Manasā (goddess) at Bhagalpur in Bankura district. Again at Madanpur the same type of idol is regarded as Kāl-bhairab. At Birahi village (Nadia) there is a Madan-gopāl (Kṛṣṇa) temple. There the deity is considered the brother of the local ladies and girls. On the *bhrātr-dvitīyā* day ladies and girls put a mark with oil-turmeric-vermillion on the forehead of the deity. In

Bengal and some other States on this day sisters put a sandal-paste spot on the forehead of their brothers wishing them a long life.

Ramakrishna temples

The temples of Sri Ramakrishna, which started appearing from the beginning of this century, reveal a new dimension in temple architecture. The blending of different styles has given them several unique features which have really created a revolution in this sphere. Let us make a brief study of three outstanding examples of this new style of temple architecture—the Ramakrishna temples at Belur Math, Kamarpukur and Purulia.

As one enters the Belur Math temple one will be struck by its similarity to Ajanta and Western Indian Buddhist caves. The side windows are in the Rajput and Moghul pattern, whereas at the top of the entrance there are three Bengal type *cār-cālā* towers. The whole front looks like a *gopuram* which is so common in the Dravida-type temples of South India. Above the *garbha-mandira* the central dome and the four domes in the four corners with a pavilion having curvilinear roof in between each pair of domes, present a fine blending of the *rekha*, *cālā*, and *ratna* styles. The inside of the hall (*nāṭmandira*) of the temple looks like the nave and aisle of a church, while the inside pillars remind one of Jaina and Buddhist cave temples. The structure of the transept, that is the middle part connecting the shrine and the hall (*garbha-mandira* and *nāṭmandira*), is like the early Chola monuments. The deities (*dikpālas* and *navagrahas*) around the shrine bear the stamp of Orissan (Kalinga) style, as seen in Konark and Bhuvaneshwar. According to the Archeological Department of West Bengal Government, it is the best temple in Bengal. The archeological encyclopaedia published by the State Government says :

'The Ramakrishna temple (at Belur Math) is so massive in size and so unique in the style of structure that there is no such temple, mosque, or church in modern West Bengal, also there never was in this land. ... Expression of the synthesis of various religions in the temple-architecture like this one cannot be seen anywhere else in West Bengal.'

Compared to the Belur Math temple (height more than 108 feet), the temple at Kamarpukur (height 45 feet) is very small. It looks like a rekha temple though the vertical slabs have given it a new look. Outer walls are made of stone whereas the inner ones are of brick. The walls have got three rathas each, but the construction of the rathas is not like that of traditional ones. Rather, these are constructed in such a fashion that the temple looks like a pancaratha. One set of rekha-ratna structure over another set has given the temple the appearance of a pyramid. At the top there is a Śiva-linga which has given the temple a new look. One cannot fail to note the presence of Java art in it. In front of the main temple there is a *jagmohan* in the Orissan style. The *nāt-mandira* is separated from the temple and looks like a flat-roofed temple with elongated cornice.

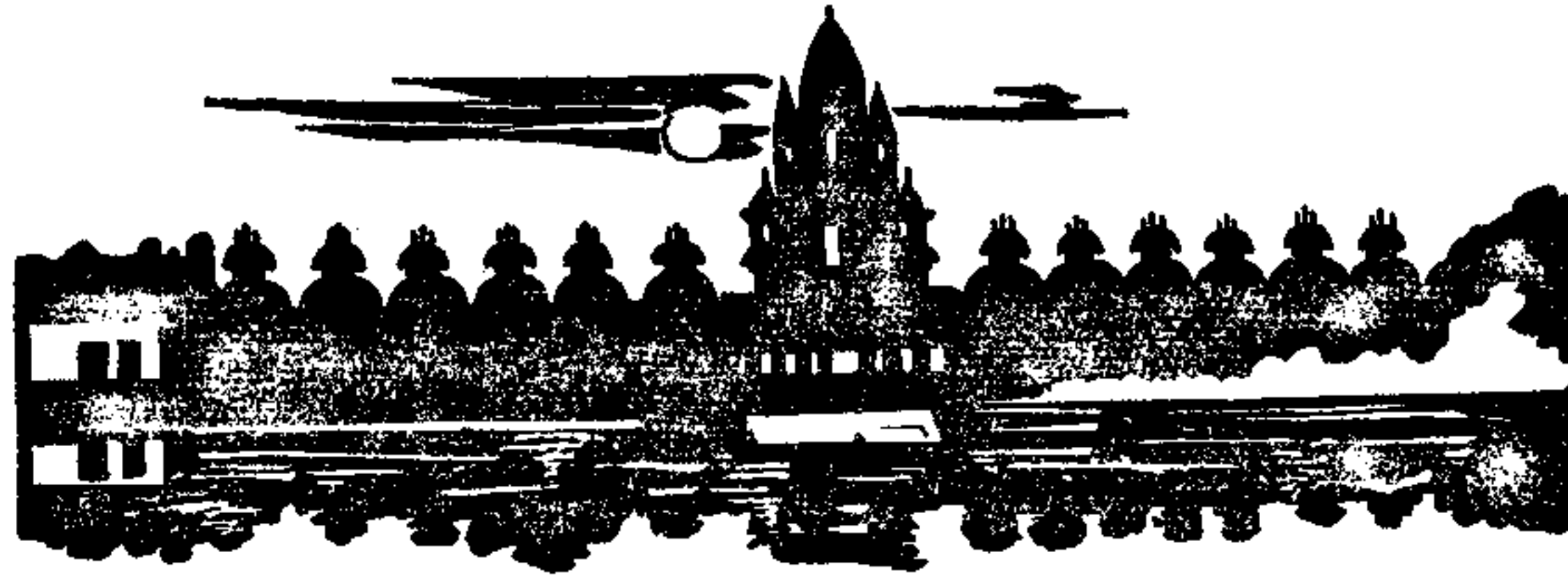
The Ramakrishna temple at Purulia has brought a totally new dimension into temple architecture. It looks like a cave cut out of huge hill. The structure is massive yet

simple, and is suggestive of the Egyptian sphinx. The top of the shrine has a huge trapezium-shaped slab over which is a replica of *pancavaṭi* (five trees). The front wall is like a tri-ratha temple. The whole temple is so unique and is such a fine specimen of art that it is altogether a new experiment in the construction of brick-walled temples.

These three temples at Belur Math, Kamarpukur and Purulia have successfully brought a renaissance in temple architecture. The temples of some of the other centres of the Ramakrishna Order are either an imitation of Belur Math temple or are based on traditional or local styles. But the above-mentioned temples are the result of a bold experiment. The temples of the Ramakrishna Order in Shillong, Mysore (Vedanta College), Ranchi, Hollywood, and San Francisco also deserve mention in this context.

Ramakrishna temples differ from traditional Hindu temples in being roomy, airy, well-ventilated, well-lighted, and spotlessly clean. They are not merely centres of worship but also centres of meditation, learning and spiritual living. They are the centres of a new spiritual renaissance set in motion by the Prophet of the modern world. Ramakrishna temples are symbols in stone of a new composite world culture uniting the traditions of the past and the present, uniting the peoples of the East and the West.





THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

DR. DONALD SZANTHO HARRINGTON

The ideal of the Church Universal

The 'Church Universal' is a myth. It is a mystical concept. It is an idea and ideal long cherished by men in every part of the world, the idea that all men are related, that mankind in nature is one, that all men stem from a common origin, have a common destiny and one day will live in perfect harmony, not only with one another in a single, united world community, but in harmony with all the rest of creation—the Kingdom of God on earth.

This idea and ideal is one which many of us cherish. It stems from the visions of Akhenaten and Isaiah, of Jesus and John and Paul, of Gautama, Confucius and Lao-Tse, of Prince Shotoku of Japan, Rabindranath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen, of Channing, Parker, Emerson and Thoreau, of Clarence Skinner and John Haynes Holmes, and—oh, how many more.

Will the Church Universal ever become a Universal Church?

But will it ever become something more than an evanescent vision, a noble ideal? Will it ever constitute a recovery of the original oneness with which the human race began—in a new and nobler oneness achieved through acts of will and common understanding and acceptance as those who were once one and became many, will become volun-

tarily one again, almost as some individuals evolve from the naivete of childhood, through a sophisticated rationality, into a second and superior level of naivete, innocence and childlikeness that is at the same time fully rational and knowing? Will this mystical concept, the 'Church Universal', ever become a Universal Church?

The way we have come

To make a reasonable start at answering a question of this kind, it is necessary for us to look back at the evolution of the church and of religion in general, for history is a continuum and the present and future always grow out of the past. To know where we are going, we must know how we have come to where we are, and what influences have brought us here.

Religion began as a tribal phenomenon. It was the central survival activity of each tribal group struggling to understand the powerful mysteries by which it was surrounded. Each tribe had its own gods who were its particular champions and protectors in peace and war, each of which was partisan towards his own people. All of the gods began as tribal deities.

Gradually the tribal deities evolved and the notion appeared that they were not the gods of one tribe alone, but of all tribes, of all mankind. Isaiah saw Yahweh as God of Righteousness, ready to reward the right-

eous or punish the sins of any and all tribes and peoples. Several of the tribal religions were reworked in their advanced stages into universal religions, designed to appeal to all men and to convert them to their teachings. Most notable among these have been Christianity, Buddhism and Islam.

Syncretic combinations

These, as well as their antecedents, were syncretic combinations of many religious influences. Judaism was a syncretic combination of elements of all of those religions in the areas around it. Christianity combined Jewish empiricism with Greek logic, made vivid with images from Zoroastrianism and the Mithraic cults. Both Judaism and Christianity may have been strongly influenced towards monasticism by the Buddhist missionaries of king Asoka who reached the Mediterranean in numbers during the second century B.C. Buddhism itself is an effort to reform and universalize the more nationally-oriented Hinduism, and Prince Shotoku introduced Buddhism to Japan in the sixth century A.D. in the hope of universalizing the more narrow Shinto outlook of his people.

From universalization by conversion to universalization by appropriation

We are now coming to the end of the effort to universalize by conversion, and entering a new, more sophisticated, more profound period of human history in which, I believe, we will universalize by appreciating, appropriating and reforming in the light of scientific knowledge these high religions of the past twenty-five hundred years, a conscious and deliberate, syncretic effort. But if we are to understand this new kind of effort to universalize religion, we must consider more carefully the period which has gone before, and how its concepts are challenged by modern science. If we are to

move from universalization by conversion to universalization by mutual understanding and appropriation, our knowledge of the great religions must be both more comprehensive and more critical, and our perspective more global.

Axial period—800 to 200 B.C.

Karl Jaspers, in his book entitled *The Origin and Goal of History* speaks of an *Axial Period* in history located between the years 800 and 200 B.C. during which all of the great world religions which formed, empowered and expressed present world cultures and civilizations came into existence, coalescing in a few hundred years of spiritual incandescence out of their more primitive antecedents. These religions provided their cultures and civilizations with inner coherence, ethical standards, individual morale and public morals capable of supporting their complex and highly cultivated structures. Until quite recently, each of them was still the primary influence, the cultic taproot from which these civilizations drew their spiritual nourishment.

A single world scientific techno-culture

But there has come a moment in history when the credibility of these great world religions in the original mythological terms of the Axial Period can no longer be sustained. Modern science, the child of the Judeo-Christian-Graeco-Roman cult, with its unique combination of Greek logic and Jewish empiricism, has created a new situation. First of all, the scientific techno-culture of the Western world has spread over the entire surface of the world and is rapidly transforming the societies of all peoples into a single world, scientific techno-culture, even though this is frequently in extreme variance to the main thrust of the religious cults, especially in the Orient. Secondly, scientific knowledge has tended to undermine many

of the central myths of the Judeo-Christian-Graeco-Roman cult, thus diminishing and destroying the foundation out of which Western culture and civilization, including science itself, evolved. A consequence of this is the widespread disintegration and chaos being experienced in the Western world, and all around the circle of the globe, today.

A new axial period?

This suggests that perhaps a new axial period is upon us which will require a major reworking of our religious myths, insights and institutions, not only here in the West but in the Orient as well. It is not only that, as anthropologist Clyde Kluckholm has said, 'We lack a system of general ideas and values to give meaning to human life in the mid-twentieth century.'¹ But in today's complex technological world there are many absolutely new individual and social *problems* brought on by scientific advance. The great religious leaders of the past did not have to face problems like genetic engineering, computer technology, the management of birth and death. We are discovering, also, that no amount of police or military force can preserve social order without internalized values inculcated, within individuals of a population so as to be almost automatic, by a vital religion. A system of internalized values capable of effectively motivating moral behaviour and undergirding personal morale is absolutely essential to the survival of any society.

While the religions of the past seem no longer adequate, they surely have much to contribute, and no society can cut itself off from its own historic continuum. But the moment has come for a major reworking like that which took place in the primal Axial Period referred to by Jaspers.

This was lucidly set forth by Henry Nelson Wieman in 1966 in an article in *Zygon*.

What generates the religious problem in the special form it assumes for us today is the revolutionary transformation of human existence now occurring. The magnitude of this transformation makes it comparable to the change that brought forth civilization from the primitive tribal life that had been the form of human existence for over a million years. To indicate the significance of this present transformation, we are adopting the words of Kenneth Boulding who calls it a transition from civilization to post-civilization.² The expression 'post-civilization' is not intended to suggest the destruction of civilization but only to indicate the magnitude and significance of the change that is occurring in our lives.

Boulding recognizes that the great transition may not be consummated. A change so radical and so swift requires adaptive change in the basic institutions that shape the conduct of human life. If these changes are not made, civilization will destroy itself and possibly all human life along with it. . . .

The change from tribal life to civilization brought with it in the course of time the change from tribal religions to the religions of civilization. This first great transition was much slower than the one of equal magnitude now occurring. Hence the development of a religion fit to sustain the life of civilization could come much more slowly than is now required to develop a religion to sustain the life of post-civilization. But, if we are to survive the transition of our time and actualize the constructive potentialities of the new age, we must have a religion that differs from the religions of civilization as much as they differ from the tribal religions that ruled the life of man for thousands of years before civilization arose.

If Kenneth Boulding is correct, along with C. P. Snow, Carl Bridenbaugh, the historian, Michael Harrington, the sociologist, Arnold Toynbee, and others who agree on the radical nature of the present transition, then civilization, along with all its religions, is a brief, tumultuous, and precarious transition from tribal life with its religions to post-civilization with its religion. The transition called civilization is brief in the sense that

1. Clyde Kluckholm, *The Scientific Study of Values and Contemporary Civilization*, *Zygon* 1.

2. Kenneth Boulding, *The Meaning of the Twentieth Century: The Great Transition*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

six thousand years, more or less, is brief compared to the preceding more than a million years of human-like existence and the following possible million and more years of post-civilization ... civilization as we know it, and the religions of civilization as we know them, are transitional from primitive tribal life with its religions and post-civilization with its religion.³

What may we expect to emerge in this New Axial Period in human history? First of all, as the new, primary, formative influence is modern, secular science and technology which already has superimposed its technoculture upon the ancient cultures and civilizations, and has rapidly transformed virtually all aspects of men's lives and thoughts everywhere in the world, we can predict that a religion for the emerging world culture will ultimately have to come to terms with the knowledge of science and the new problems posed for man by scientific technological advance.

Comparison in depth of religion and science

Secondly, it must not attempt to come to terms with science by the abandonment wholesale of these ancient faiths which so long have held world civilizations together, and which have met the test of time, history and human experience in demonstrating their ability to do so. We dare not sever the thread of history, nor imagine that we can simply cut ourselves off from the human past which has produced our present situation. Without an understanding of the ancient faiths we shall not even be able to understand our problems, where they came from or what we can do about them. There must therefore take place a comparison in depth between the traditional religious and scientific formulations of the human situation, values and destiny, including an in-depth scientific study of how the traditional

religions were so successful in internalizing value systems through the use of symbols, myths and rituals.

Consciousness and religious symbols

Paul Ricour has described three different types of relation between consciousness and religious symbols: primitive naivete as in the early tribal religion; truth at a distance, which involves the dissolving of the myth into rational explanations; and second naivete or immediacy of symbolic experience on a more sophisticated level, 'a return to the powerful immediacy of symbols—but all of this on the basis of distance, on the basis, of de-mythologization'.⁴

It is something like the development that takes place within great, charismatic individuals described by Dr. Abraham Maslow in *Motivation and Personality*, as he describes the naivete of childhood, the rationalism of youth and the recovery of childlike innocence, naivete and intuitive insight in mature age of men who are wise. He cites Albert Einstein, Albert Schweitzer and Pablo Casals as examples of men who reached the third stage of development, a stage in which character, conduct and consciousness become completely at one, and their lives consciously at one with mankind and the Universal Life.

Can this kind of thing happen in the lives of ordinary individuals? In the lives of most men eventually?

Peter Homans puts the same questions:

Is there, in the affective dynamism of religious belief, the wherewithal to rise above its own archaism? Is the fantasm 'only a vestige of a traumatic memory', or is it 'a symbol', capable of providing the first stratum of meaning to an imaginative presentation of origins, more and more detached from its function of infantile and quasi-neurotic repetition, and more and more suited to an investigation of the fundamental meaning of human destiny?⁵

3. Henry Nelson Wieman, *The Problem of Religious Inquiry*, (1966), *Zygon*, vol. 1, p. 75.

4. Peter Homans, *Zygon* 4, number 4, p. 351.

5. *ibid.*, p. 552.

Recover a sound relation with our past

I believe that as we undertake a careful systems-analysis of the functions and patterns of the great religions and their myths in the process of value transmission, we will discover that they are not only recoverable on the level of 'second naivete or immediacy' in many cases, but that this is absolutely necessary. In regaining the ability to understand and use them, to use them in a new and different way, as well as to distinguish between those elements which are useful and those which are not, we will also recover a sound and satisfying relationship with our own past, and therefore also with our future.

Already many scientists are discovering major correspondences between their own researches and the insights of the great religious myths. The entire scientific quest might be described as the search for *invariance* in the universe. That is also the religious quest, only religion uses the word God.

Correspondences between myth and scientific knowledge

The Judeo-Christian creation myth is full of elements with correspondences in scientific knowledge. It recognized, for example, the special importance in the evolution of man of the giving of names to things. I shall never forget when I came across in Suzanne Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key* what she regarded as a personal discovery that the sub-human creature who was to become man made the break-through to humanity when it occurred to him to give names to things, to generalize, to have a sound that stood not for this dog and another sound for that dog, but a sound that stood for dog in general. This giving of names was the great break-through, she suggests, and full blown language must have come within a few generations thereafter.

It made me think immediately of that passage in the Creation Myth of Genesis where God passes all of the things that he has made before the man that he may give names to them, as though God had no power to give names, but only man. And the names which the man gave were the names thereof. Here was a great poet-scientist three thousand years ago who had glimpsed the truth that Suzanne Langer rediscovered in our time in her fascinating book, as she describes the degree to which we all deal with reality through words and concepts, through symbols.

Need to emphasize a different truth

The creation myth highlighted the primary command to man to be 'fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it'. It defined man's role as the master of things, though, of course, always under the Eternal's law. This command ultimately led to man's mastery of the earth, to his science and technology. Now that he has filled the earth and subdued it, he is going to have to emphasize a different truth, his need to live at one with all God's fellow creatures and powers of nature, and to regulate population lest there come a time when there would be no more room, no resources for his life.

The creation myth would seem almost to have foreseen the ultradevelopment of science to the point where the top specialists talk a rarified language that almost no one else understands, accumulating thereby tremendous power, but chaos also. Our towers of scientific specialization become like the Tower of Babel in more than a single sense.

Deeply imbedded in the creation myth also, as told in Genesis, is the contrast between the two sides of the double nature of the promise or Covenant of God with his people, the promise of a goodly land, that is material benefits, and the requirement of holiness, of spiritual responsibility. Joseph,

of all the sons of Jacob, who were the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel, represents the material aspects of the promise, the land, whereas the responsibility for holiness was upon Judah, the one who offered himself in the place of Benjamin at the climactic moment of the Genesis narrative, saving all of the brothers for the future. Is that not why the tradition emerged that the Messiah, the Saviour of Mankind, would come in Judah's line, not Joseph's and Jesus is born in Bethlehem in the Christian myth?

When seen from the vantage point of second naivete, the Biblical myths come alive, full of insight and guidance for man's contemporary life, helping us to understand why we behave the way we do, why we became like this, and what we must do in the future to meet the challenge of the kind of world which our own science has now created.

Similarities of the scientific and religious quests

Many scientists today see the similarities of the scientific and religious quests. Nobel Physicist, Charles H. Townes writes, 'To me science and religion are both universal, and basically very similar, ... their differences are largely superficial, and ... the two become almost indistinguishable if we look at the real nature of each'. Science has the same problems of matter and spirit, though in a slightly different form, Dr. Townes continues: 'Physicists believe today that light is neither precisely a wave nor a particle, but both ... it can display both properties. So can all matter, including baseballs and locomotives',⁶ also presumably, men!

Dr. E. N. Barbour, author of *Issues in Science and Religion*, points out that even in descriptive method science with its models is much like religion with its myths, 'Yes,

science is trying to describe reality, but it does so only very indirectly in highly symbolic and abstractive language.'⁷

There would seem to be many parallels here. For example, if light can be described as both waves and particles, which are mutually exclusive, yet both required, perhaps they can be thought of as being complementary, requiring some kind of balance between them related to the particular situation. Similarly justice and mercy at times appear to be mutually exclusive yet both equally necessary, with a balance weighed in one direction or the other depending upon the situation. Similarly man's needs and the environment's needs must be balanced, though in the last analysis man must always shape his life to the requirements of the Great Context with which he is surrounded.

Religious wisdom may be revalidated

Hopefully in the process of communication between science and religion many elements of traditional religious wisdom may be revalidated and revitalized and thus recovered for the use of our culture as it faces problems of unprecedented change and world-wide scope.

All men today are somewhat aware of the dangerous dichotomy between modern man's power and his sense of purpose. Of even greater immediacy is the dichotomy between the rapid unification of his planet accompanied by polarization of its people along national, racial and religious lines. This has led to all kinds of violence both within societies and culture groups and between them. At the very point when war must be outlawed, the present polarization seems to make it inevitable.

On the other hand, people have been brought together as never before by the

⁶ Charles H. Townes, *Zygon* 1, pp. 301-310.

⁷ Dr. E. N. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion*, (Englewood Cliffs; Prentice-Hall).

forces of modern economics and military activity. Never have there been so many interracial and interreligious marriages, nor such intimate knowledge by Western and Oriental peoples of each other. The large cities of the Orient and those of the Western world have become all alike. Ideologies may divide, religions may try to separate, but people reach across these barriers in interest and love for one another, trade, exchange ideas, marry each other, have children, and it is those children who will more and more summon the disparate members of mankind to come together. At some point the religions of the world will be called upon to join in providing common goals and understandings to help resolve the differences between peoples. The common scientific concepts and symbol systems now acceptable throughout the world should help the world's great religions to move in that direction.

Common patterns in the world's great faiths

When we study the world's great faiths, we discover patterns of development common to them all. Thus, we find that they were either built upon the early, nature-faiths of our primitive ancestors, or were sweeping reform movements within these faiths led by powerful personalities, as with Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. All of them were efforts of human beings under widely differing circumstances to come to grips with essentially the same problems: man's relationship with himself, with his fellowmen, with the forces of nature from which he must wrest his daily living, and with the Mystery lying within and behind this phenomenal world, the Power which men have called God, the Eternal.

They all passed through nature worship and polytheism to belief in one God or Supreme Principle, Creator of the universe and source of life, whose laws must be understood and obeyed if men are to live. They have all emphasized that the principal

duty of man is to love and help his fellow-man, and to do unto them as he would have them do unto him. They have all declared the law of God to be concerned with justice and righteousness, and the necessity of every man's exercising his freedom of choice to choose the righteous way. They have seen salvation as tied to the deeds that men do and sought to develop methods and codes by which men might easily distinguish between right and wrong in all of the complicated situations of life. They have all looked forward to life after death in some terms, if only in on-going influence of the spiritual achievements of each individual.

Also unique emphasis

To be sure, they have also emphasized opposite aspects of man's existence. Thus Judeo-Christianity has faced essentially outward and focused upon the building of the kingdom of God on earth. Progress was essentially social, and the individual caught up in the common effort for the Kingdom, winning his salvation in that effort. The Oriental religions faced inward, focusing upon the progress of the individual soul toward Nirvana in life after life on earth, with society a kind of exercise ground in which souls could be tried and become experienced for rebirth in the next life.

Both aspects of life are important, the progress of the individual soul and the progress of society, and it is precisely at this point that Western and Oriental religions both have major contributions to make to an emerging world religion capable of revitalizing and empowering the emerging world culture.

Universalism within each faith

Most of the world's people will move towards this coming universal religion within the context of their own faiths. They will slowly but surely eliminate their exclusive

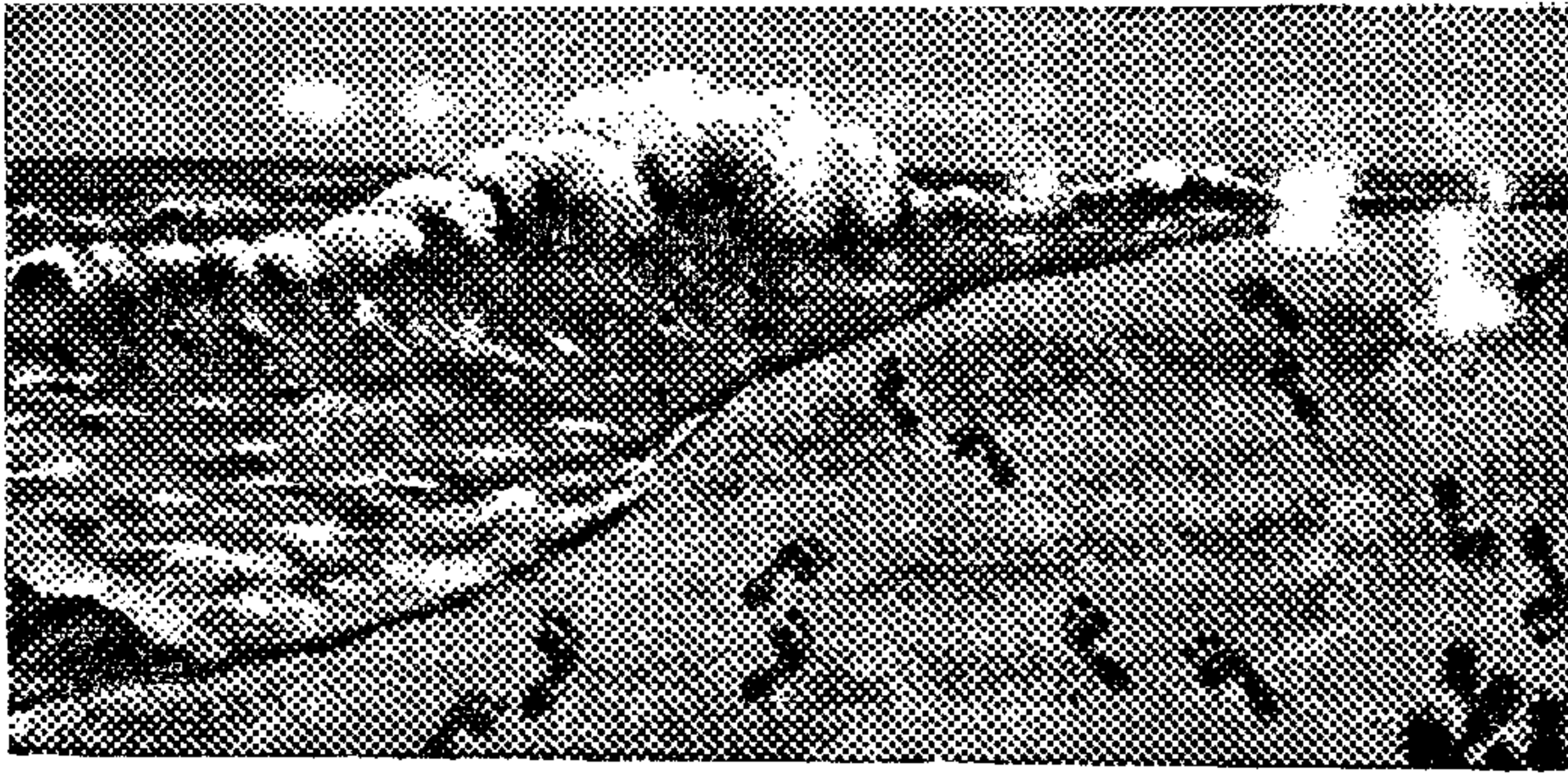
emphasis, their divisive doctrines, make greater effort to understand the religious views of other faiths and to appropriate their particular insights and values into their own religious outlooks, and out of this there will eventually emerge, here and there, at first isolated from each other, but gradually becoming aware of each other, and finally joining forces, the initial components of the coming world religion. More and more people on the spaceship earth, this one world become suddenly very small, will seek out the strands of universalism within all of the other great historic faiths, and will outgrow any exclusive spiritual loyalty, wishing to identify themselves in spirit with the whole of the striving human family. They will be joined by others who have abandoned the historic religions, put off by their emphasis on outmoded or no longer understandable dogmas and practices, but who have not abandoned the religious quest, people who long to know the universal truths of life and to live up to them in fellowship with like-minded men and women all around the world. They will be joined by the ever increasing number of courageous couples who have married across faith lines and are thus in need of a common spiritual ground on which to stand and walk in dignity together through life, sharing the special insights and values which their particular religions have given them fully, freely and equally with one another and with the wider community. These people are ready for the high, the ultimate, spiritual experience of the Church

Universal, 'from which', as William Ellery Channing said, 'no man can be excluded save by the death of goodness in his own breast.'

Religion of the 21st century

What, then, will be the religion of the 21st century, which I have called the new Church Universal which I see emerging in this new Axial Period out of the passing of the historic great religions of the past twenty five hundred years? It will not emerge suddenly! It will evolve slowly! It is emerging *in* existing religious institutions and consists of slight modifications of interpretation, the emphasizing of certain aspects of the tradition and the de-emphasizing of others, and will continue until more and more the different religious organizations and their people will be discovering how much they and others are alike, how much more alike than they are different. Ultimately it will consist of the best of the myths, legends, symbols, rituals and values of all of these great faiths, universalized, chosen for their complementary usefulness. Especially it will embrace those elements of all of the great faiths which are confirmed in their truth, for which correspondences are found in the discoveries of science.

May this ideal, this great mystical concept, this beckoning myth, of the Church Universal guide us all onward toward that one world of God which man at his best has never failed to dream.



HUMAN TRENDS

PEOPLE OF THE NEW AGE

SWAMI YOGESHANANDA

Part I : Background

Go to any gathering, today, in the United States, of those who represent the fringes of society in the fields of art, drama, the psyche or the soul, and you will hear this in every quarter of the room: 'We belong to the New Age'. What is this New Age, and how did they arrive there?

There is a popular belief in this country that every forty years a 'lost' generation is born. The elite of that generation of Americans who emerged from the First World War gained for themselves, due to their utter unwillingness to conform to the social values of the American main-stream, the name 'the lost generation'. Their thought was characterized by a complete disjuncture from the beliefs of either the previous generation or the one which followed.

In them there was a re-awakened interest in spirituality and spiritualism, in the search for anything new. That was the generation which brought forth such geniuses as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Pound and Stein in letters, Casals in music, Picasso in painting and Duncan in the dance. But their total disregard for traditional social values led equally to moral and psychological degeneracy as to brilliance and new vision.

Yet the new way of life of these radicals of the twenties could not penetrate the heart

of the Western world, partly because the cities had not yet risen to their present overwhelming cultural dominance. It was at that time quite possible for the rural population to remain, to a large extent, isolated from the vogue in fashion and conduct, of the cities. This isolation was of course reinforced, at least from our perspective, by the lack of sophisticated communications media. In that the bulk of the population lived in small towns, the values of the nation remained essentially unaffected by the generation of the 1920's.

A drastically different situation, however, held sway forty years later, in the early and mid-1960's. The growth of the highly refined media in the form of radio, television, motion picture and popular music was steadily transforming the small town into a culture in miniature replica, of the big city. Television alone has been incalculable in its influence (and let India note it well!) on the impressionable minds of children in outlying rural communities. Popular music, sold in the form of records, and played on both radio and television not only made the thought of the day current and accessible to all, but drove it deep to the saturation point through the lyrics of the music.

Just at this juncture, the mid-60's, when

the country, held in the grip of these expanding media, was experiencing an artistic and cultural revolution, the government of the United States got itself further involved in a very unpopular war in Viet Nam. The youth of the nation, hearing the political leaders talking about making the world safe for democracy, were wholly disillusioned. To them it seemed the country was needlessly interfering with the civil war of a foreign state. But when the American public learned the truth of the ghastly war crimes committed by its armies against the people of Viet Nam, the country's youth felt that the democratic and altruistic ideals of the nation had been totally betrayed. The violent anti-war riots and the anti-establishment mentality of the young brought into being another 'lost generation', whose birth and growth fostered in the country a whole new system of values often termed 'The New Age Culture'.

This radicalism, initially political, opened a psychological division which soon spread to every sphere of life and thought; a restless dissatisfaction with everything indicative of their parents' world—the 'establishment'—possessed the minds of many young people; the old status quo appeared to them as simply hypocrisy.

Contemporaneously there appeared a second powerfully disruptive social reaction, which came to be known as the civil rights movement. Its main proponent was Martin Luther King Jr., leader of the Southern Christian Conference, and later martyred, who urged the awakening community of black Americans to claim their destiny as a free, self-determining people. Because of shared moral, ethical and political goals, the civil rights movement gained a great deal of support and sympathy from the idealistic young people of whom we have been speaking. Open-minded liberalism and true acceptance of basic human rights became a standard feature of the New Age philosophy.

Two other distinguishing characteristics

were the 'back to the earth' philosophy and the prominence of Eastern mysticism. In illustration of the former, a well-known couple who decided to 'go it alone' into the rural hinterland and see how many of the 'modern amenities and refinements' they could do without, became folk-heroes overnight. For perhaps the first time since the Civil War, did the word renunciation come to have some content in the vocabulary of Western youth. The back-to-the-earth trend was the emergence of the common-sense view that the clamour of hectic city life and the ingestion of highly-processed and artificial foods is injurious to 'holistic' (one of the New Age's favourite words) well-being. Consequently many sought refuge in simple country life, eating, so far as possible, 'organically grown' (chemically untreated) foods. Highly milled grains, polished rice and processed vegetables were replaced by their opposites; a wave of Health Food shops swept the country.

Not so easy to assess as the 'return to nature' syndrome, is the import of Eastern thought on the American mind of the time. For the phenomenon is very far-reaching and pervasive, with the roots of Eastern thought in the United States stretching back to the middle of the nineteenth century—a significant distance in a country so young. We know historically that the most prominent of the early Transcendentalists, Emerson and Thoreau, were deeply influenced by Indian thought. Emerson read the *Bhagavad-Gītā* and some Upaniṣads.¹ By the time Swami Vivekananda came to this country many of the principal Indian scriptures had been translated into English.

Swamiji's establishment of the two Vedanta centres in America was contemporaneous with the founding of Buddhist and Theosophical groups, all of a subdued

1. For a fuller picture see, Arthur Christy, *The Orient in American Transcendentalism*, (New York: 1932).

and self-restrained behaviour. Some of these flourished, growing slowly, allowing their liberal expansive ideas to percolate through the society, so that by the early sixties there existed here a small but well-placed core of Eastern spiritual ideas. Books had come along, starting in about 1940, from the pens of writers on whom the spotlight had fallen : Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard, Ishwerwood, Salinger and Watts, Westerners trying to utter in our own medium the new concepts and unfamiliar insights which certain contacts had brought them. Almost suddenly, in the middle sixties, this oriental mysticism literally exploded into the awareness of the general public. Every conceivable Babaji, Guru and Avatar descended upon the country, each shouting his own creed and his own name. Ideas of *samādhi* and *satori* tantalized the minds, particularly of the young ; popular music groups heralded the new *conversio mentalis* by using song to express their adherence to, or interest in, the mystical truths of the East. The most famous musical groups to do so were the Beatles (and also in England, Quintessence), The Moody Blues, Carlos Santanna, Jimi Hendrix and the Beach Boys—some of whom became involved with Transcendental Meditation and the Krishna Consciousness Movement.

Two main reasons for this influence of Eastern music can be traced. The more innovative musicians were listening to different styles, ever in search of ideas to expand their own musical knowledge and talent. Coming in contact with Indian music—especially after Ravi Shankar's appearance at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival, these musicians became aware of what the East had been developing for thousands of years, and that in a land of meditation and spirituality. The lyrics, too, of all types of popular songs, were affected, and became noticeably more philosophical. Secondly, though Indians may not like to hear it, there came about a sort of synchronism between the

kinds of new sounds being heard and the new states of awareness of the listeners. The latter, their minds 'expanded' through experience with psychedelic drugs, were responding to the wide range of feeling, the heights and depths induced by the Indian *rāgas* with their very specific moods. This combination became a new kind of listening instrument. People accustomed to the more nerve-jolting forms of Western popular music realized that the proficient Indian musician was effecting an alteration of consciousness related to the meditative and dream-like ones the psychedelic had made them familiar with. Truly, Eastern consciousness had travelled halfway round the world in the self-contained seed-form of music. When it was played, and if the listener's field was ripe, there was every possibility that the music would grow and nourish in some way that experience (call it spiritual or not) which was in reality what these New Age people were looking for, whether they were aware of it or not.

But all of this, whatever questions it may raise, actually became a blessing in disguise. Some people saw, possibly for the first time, that in order to expand the mind, drugs were not the only way. Using the highly refined Indian music as a stimulus to achieve a meditative state, coupled with the knowledge which was now coming in from qualified teachers of spirituality and from books, young people learned to steep their minds in a mood which far surpassed the 'highs' of a drug-induced state and which led them to the doorway of the spirit, and spiritual practice. Thus the musical contact became, for the many seeking higher experience, a kind of catalyst in that direction, and even an antidote to the abuse of drugs.

During the period 1965 to 1978 the existing centres of Eastern thought also felt increased interest in their thought and work ; most of the monastics in the centre from where this is being written are the products of that era. It would be difficult to say,

probably, with any certitude, why the interest in Oriental thought mushroomed at just that time. Some answers are that the Viet Nam had created the atmosphere of disillusionment which was conducive to a departure from normative values; that in the educational background of that generation of young Americans there had been a strong push to question and rationally examine any hypothesis and not merely accept what was said by their teachers as an article of faith. Education, especially in the better schools, gave the students a fairly strong background in science and mathematics, demanding firm logic based on deduction from direct perception, or at least a sound hypothetic probability. Many young persons so educated rejected the illogical inconsistencies of Christian doctrine, with its one-life, heaven-or-hell, thesis, and were appalled by its consignment to damnation of all non-Christians. Even many in conservative Christian homes rebelled at the intolerances of their parents. Now the New Age youth culture had assumed a life of its own, independent of parental values, and never was the 'generation-gap' more apparent.

As more of the young people turned to the East in search of a rational, humane ideal to replace the fallen star of Christianity, some who could scrape together enough money journeyed off to the Orient to hunt the 'genuine article'. They scarcely needed to. Eastern masters poured into this country in increasing numbers. Many were selflessly seeking to help, perhaps; many others were simply self-seeking—seeking to build a palace of name, fame or money.

The interest in oriental religion reached a peak in the late 1970's. But a distinction has naturally to be drawn between those whose lives were superficially touched by the contact, through television talk-shows, popular music, or at University campuses, or in city streets, which includes most educated Americans, and those who were significantly influenced by the East, far fewer

in number, perhaps only a couple of million. In the second category are included not only those persons who have wholly adopted an Eastern philosophy as their faith for life, but also those who received, by their contact with the East, a permanent and valuable insight into their lives, acknowledging therewith that the Oriental approach to truth is a valid religious path; some of these again have, as a result, delved much deeper into their own spiritual roots, Jewish, Eastern Orthodox, etc.

Perhaps the most interesting effect, or effects, of the impact of Eastern mysticism have been indirect. While the oriental teachers who flooded this country in the last two decades sought generally to instruct individual groups of students and not to attack established Christianity (or Judaism), their increasing popularity amongst the young dramatically influenced the various normative sects. Here it may be worthwhile to take some special notice of the effect on the Roman Catholic Church. It was at first, as a whole, hostile. Later, when the problem of disaffected young Catholics grew into a danger, the Church decided to come to grips with the situation by discovering the cause of so massive a turning away. The Church began to realize that it was she herself who had steadily turned away, near the start of the twentieth century, from mystical contemplation and tradition, toward social service and the social gospel. Here was Eastern mysticism, offering spiritual practices taught by men who at least claimed to be spiritual masters.

The Catholic Church opened herself to this new challenge in two ways. Firstly, she reached into her own past and brought back to life the treasures of her own mystical heritage. From the early 70's onward increasing attention and adoration have been given to the rebirth of Catholic mystical life. And this has been done without diminution of the numerous works of charity characteristic of the Church.

Secondly, the means used to face the growing influence of the East, was to hold open and friendly discussion with its religious representatives in the hope of benefiting the Church and avoiding harm. The Swami in charge of our British centre and some monks of other orders were invited to the Vatican, and visited with the Pope. Gifts were exchanged. His Holiness was given a copy of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Inter faith conferences on monastic life were held. Catholic monks, priests and lay-workers have visited the Monastery in Ganges and our other monasteries. In Spencer, Massachusetts, there is a Cistercian monastery which not only allows but encourages its members to adopt some form

of yoga or Zen practice auxiliary to the traditional Cistercian life.

Because the Protestant sects of Christianity are so diverse, it is difficult to describe a corporate reaction. Some of the more liberal groups among denominations such as the Episcopal or Anglican have responded favourably, both here and in England. Their monks for example had a representation at this centre's temple dedication. But the conservative Protestants have clung mightily to their denunciation of all non-Christians. Even there, however, as we shall see in what follows, the stimulus of the New Age's intensity has brought forth a vigorous response in the depths of Fundamentalism itself.

(To be continued)

(Continued from page 106)

reply that time instead of making him move forward always rolls back on him. In truth, time is a progressive energy which pushes us forward. We place our acts on the moving carpet of the present moment. After ten years whether we want it or not, this carpet brings before us what was in the past. We call them souvenirs. This shows up time as a progressive advancing energy. If it is said that it is not time that brings up the souvenirs but it is the Self that does it, the Upaniṣad will reply that the Self is the eternal present which moves and creates the temporality. *Time is the moving space of Eternity.* The melancholic ignores this power of time. He should be helped to realize that time is an energy which flows

into the present moment and flows forward and which renews itself. The melancholic blocks this renewal either by his atrophied inner space or by his notion of time which flows not, but presses on him.

The Ātman must be fed by food of sāt̄tvic quality, by the notion of our inner space that expands into Ānanda, also by the luminosity of the eternal present that transforms time into intensity. When the self is nourished by depression, ego-centredness and melancholia, it becomes feeble and weak by malnutrition. There is the risk of its succumbing to partial death. 'Nourish well and fortify the Self. The Self will protect you.'

Here is spoken a noble thought
May our hearts to higher levels rise.

MAHENDRA NATH GUPTA

SWAMI TATHAGATANANDA

A pathetic pen picture of Tolstoy's domestic life can be found in his letter of October 21, 1910 : 'I will not conceal from you this fact that in this house I am roasted as though I were in hell. I have always thought and desired to go off somewhere to the woods, to the watchman's hut, to some poor peasant in some village where we could help each other....' In his eighty-third year he was constrained to run away from his family, and died in a railway station on November 7, 1910. Life is not a bed of roses. Men having high ideals often feel too much the pricking of life's thorns. 'In adolescence I hated life and was continually on the verge of suicide,' says Bertrand Russel. Aldous Huxley writes, 'For all of us, the most intolerably dreary and deadening life is that which we live with ourselves.' Great men are always invariably haunted by the urge to know and outgrow their finitude. They are very sensitive to their inherent potentialities as well as their limitations. It is not death but the dreadful possibilities, nay certainties, of painful rebirth till we are completely free from all bondages of ignorance that haunts us. That is the type of survival whose distressing burden has been articulated beautifully in the famous speech of the first play of Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* pentad : 'If only I can be relieved of the horror of having to endure myself for ever ! ...' Liberty is the air of the soul, the sunshine of life. Without it the life is a prison, the world is an infinite dungeon. Tragedy grinds us but rarely does our adversity turn into an opportunity to have illumination. The heavy stroke of misfortune brings enlightenment too.

These were, perhaps, the feelings, and this was certainly the mood which oppressed the 28-year old Mahendranath Gupta when, having been thoroughly disgusted with his life

in his parental home, he left it one night with his wife. The spell of depression was so compelling that he even decided to commit suicide. Such critical moments often turn out to be doors opening into a new life. That night he spent at his elder sister's house in Baranagore. The next day accompanied by a nephew he wandered from one garden to another in order to calm his mind. At last destiny took him to Dakshineswar and to the lotus feet of Sri Ramakrishna. It was some day towards the end of February, 1882. The serene countenance of the saint and the sweet words that he spoke convinced Mahendra that he was in the presence of an illumined soul of extraordinary holiness and charisma. About this first meeting he wrote in his diary : 'It was as if he were standing where all the holy places met and as if Śukadeva himself were speaking the word of God, or as if Sri Caitanya were singing the name and glories of the Lord with Rāmānanda, Svarūpa, and the other devotees.'

Sri Mahendranath Gupta—better known as Master Mahasaya amongst the devotees, and still more widely known to the readers of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by his pen-name, M.—was born on the fourteenth of July, 1854, in Calcutta. His father, Madhusudan Gupta, an officer of the Calcutta High Court, and his mother, Swarnamayi Devi, were both very pious people. Of the Master's disciples, Adhar Lal Sen and M. were academically brilliant. M. stood second in the Presidency in the Entrance Examination from the Hare School. In the F.A. Examination he stood fifth, and he graduated from the Presidency College in 1875, securing third rank in the University. He was a great scholar, and the wide range of his studies included the classics of Indian and Western literature.

In three colleges of Calcutta M. taught as a professor of English Literature, Mental and Moral Science, History and Political Economy, and, at one time, he simultaneously acted as the headmaster of three different Calcutta schools (each, in turn, for one hour a day), moving from one school to another in a palanquin. This shows what a high reputation he had as a teacher and administrator alike. M. was also intimately associated with several Calcutta celebrities of his time, like Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Surendra Nath Bannerjee, and with them worked with dignity and efficiency.

M. was a person of firm determination and stern resolve. He was severely disciplined and never made any compromise at the cost of his noble principles which he espoused as vital, valuable and illuminating. The following anecdote casts a bright light on another side of his character. Subodh—later Swami Subodhananda—was a student of M. One day Sri Ramakrishna asked him to visit M. now and then. At this, the boy said that he did not expect to learn anything from a householder. But one day he went to see M. and frankly told him the remark he had made before the Master. M. appreciated the frankness of the boy and said: 'I am an insignificant person. But I live by the side of an ocean, and I keep with me a few pitchers of sea water. When a visitor comes, I entertain him with that. What else can I speak?' A man who can say such things and mean them has the stuff of real greatness in him. He was really very humble, and in the entire *Gospel* he deliberately keeps himself concealed. Even the sharp reproaches of the Master have not been deleted. Of M. and his work, Christopher Isherwood says: "The service M. has rendered us and future generations can hardly be exaggerated. Even the vainest of authors might well have been humbled, finding himself entrusted with such a task. M. was not in the least vain."

Sri Ramakrishna intuitively knew the inner stuff of M. Long before their contact, the Master had in an ecstatic mood seen M. In that state, the Master saw that M. had been a staunch follower of Sri Caitanya in his past life. In another context the Master told M., 'You are my own, of the same substance, as the father and the son,' predicting thereby M.'s participation in his divine drama. The Master had a high regard for M.'s spiritual calibre. The Master invoked the grace of the Divine Mother for M.'s spiritual progress. He commanded him to remain as a model house-holder. 'You are well established in God already. Is it good to give up all? The Lord keeps the speaker or preacher of the Word in the world, otherwise, who will speak the word of God to the people? That is why the Mother has kept you in a worldly life. . . . Mother has told me that you have to do a little of her work.' This was the remark of the Master to M. when the latter, out of an inner compulsion to become a monk, had broached the issue before the Master. The Master exacted discipline from him. No miracle was promised to him; no secrecy was sworn to him. The Master himself did phenomenal tapasya (austerity); longing for God literally consumed his life. In those fourteen years of intense spiritual practice, his all-devouring love for God, like a lamp growing brighter and brighter, led him through heroic self-sacrifice. He had really pressed into that short life centuries of loving and giving. The Master demanded a high premium from M. too. The same old traditional path of tapasya was trodden by M. M. rose to spiritual eminence by dint of hard spiritual practice. Among the lay devotees of the Master M. occupies a very respectable position. The latent possibilities of M. blossomed forth, in later years, and transformed him into the modern Vyāsa of our age.

M. in his early life had an instinctive desire to enjoy holy company. This was his

passion. This natural tendency of his character, ultimately brought him in later years to the Master. His early contacts with the Master in due course matured into intimate discipleship. The historical meeting between Sri Ramakrishna and M. was providential. But even this close contact, although very desirable and inspiring, could not remove M.'s initial depression and make him peaceful. The idea of putting an end to his life was still present. The Master, coming to know of his mind, once and for all removed the last trace of melancholy by his divine assurance. This acted as a soothing balm to M.'s soul, and a new lease of life surged up in him. The Master's loving words of assurance that gave M. a new insight and hope, bear repetition a million times: 'God forbid. Why should you take leave of this world? Do you not feel blessed by discovering your Guru? By his grace, what is beyond all imagination or dream can be easily achieved!' In later life, M. used to articulate his deepest feeling: 'Behold. Where is the resolve to end life, and where, the discovery of God! That's why sorrows should be looked upon as a friend of man. God is all Good.' This world—'a play field of deception'—is really a hard place for everyone. An illumined teacher alone can lead us to the abode of peace. Hence, M. was perfectly right when he said, 'Human life is an excellent apology for suicide, without a Guru'.

An Avatar speaks with divine right. His naive guilelessness and innate purity captivate humanity. His answers are unambiguous, simple, direct and understandable to everyone. The native purity of the Master and his deep spiritual knowledge conveyed through his talks deeply influenced M. M. had the habit of writing a diary. For his personal benefit he kept a record of these talks. M.'s prodigious intellect and marvellous memory helped him to keep notes, with stenographic accuracy, of everything that the Master said, and of dates, places,

and persons. After the passing away of the Master, these notes became a sacred treasure and object of deep meditation. It may be remembered that during the course of about forty-six years, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* was published in five volumes based on these notes. M. had never 'fished in another man's waters'. His notes were the only source of his writing. What he added to these notes were his living conviction, steadfast faith, impressive sincerity, spiritual insight, and admirable literary skill and power of observation. We cannot but admire his extraordinary visual and aural imagination. By God's calling and his own choice he was a preacher of the *Gospel* by his pen and by his silent spiritual life. He was indeed an illumined instrument of God. He felt the supreme importance of the *Gospel*, its universality, simplicity and catholicity, and had an intensely earnest conviction of the truths it contained. He did not stop there. He made an honest and consistent endeavour to lead an ideal life combining in it the sannyasin's detachment and the householder's duty consciousness.

'A good book', as Milton says, 'is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.' A great book can be written only by a great man. Divine grace is a must for producing a great work like the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. 'This is not to be obtained but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit that can enrich with all utterances and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases.' Here, Milton speaks of divine grace. But before receiving grace one has to be totally transmuted. M. really underwent that transformation to receive grace. M. begins the *Gospel* with the famous verse of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*: 'Thy nectar-sweet words soothe lives scorched in the fire of worldliness and purify the blemishes of our heart. They have been sung by

saints and sages of all times. Listening to thy words with faith and devotion is conducive to our spiritual well-being, harmony and peace. Those who spread thy words are, indeed, the givers of the highest treasures to man.¹

Saints are the most persuasive testimony of God's existence. Divine grace penetrated M. through and through; he was thoroughly renewed by the spiritual vision of life and emerged as a fully integrated personality. His scholarship matured into wisdom, beauty blossomed into holiness, intellectual convictions turned into intense devotion to God. Carlyle holds that 'a deep, great genuine sincerity is the first characteristic of all men in any way heroic.' M. was so deeply absorbed with the divine life that it permeated his whole being and converted every thought and action into a means for God realization. The light of burning renunciation was always seen in his eyes. A divine glow suffused his whole being and his holiness and spirituality could be recognized even by a stranger. Paul Brunton, the celebrated author and seeker after truth, has recorded his meeting with M. in this way :

When at last—for he moves with extreme slowness—he enters the room, I need no one to announce his name. A venerable patriarch has stepped from the pages of the Bible, and a figure from Mosaic times has turned into flesh; this man whose shoulders are slightly bent with the burden of nearly eighty years of mundane existence, can be none other than the Master Mahasaya.. . . In that grave, sober presence I realize instantly that there can be no light persiflage, no bandying of wit and humour, no utterance even of the harsh cynicism and dark scepticism which overshadow my soul from time to time. His character, with its comingling of perfect faith in God and nobility of conduct, is written in his appearance for all to see.

Caught in the magnetic spell of M., Brunton went night after night 'less to hear . . . than to bask in the spiritual sunshine of

his presence... he (M.) has found some inner bliss and the radiation of it seems palpable.' Touched by that bliss, Mr. Brunton further stated :

Often, I forgot his words, but I cannot forget his benign personality... He has strangely stirred me. I banish the thought of sleep and wander through many streets. When at length . . . I reflect that if anyone could free me from the intellectual scepticism to which I cling and attach me to a life of simple faith, it is undoubtedly the Master Mahasaya.²

M. represented the ideal and philosophy of inward living in everything he did and said. That is character. The core of his character lay in one-pointedness. Swami Raghavananda, who associated himself closely with M. during his last six years, remarks : 'Among those who lived with M. in later days some felt that he always lived in constant and conscious union with God even with open eyes.'³ Saturated through and through with the memories of Sri Ramakrishna, M's elevated life inspired many to take up spiritual life earnestly. He was truly a refuge for countless persons in the city of Calcutta. Those who were buffeted by sorrow, suffering and despair found in M. deep solace, comfort and inspiration. M's residence, the Morton School, became literally a 'Naimiṣāraṇya'—the ancient meeting place of sages where the *Bhāgavatam* was narrated.

One of the most significant traits of M.'s character was his unflinching devotion to the Master. Almost from the very beginning of M.'s contact, his allegiance and faithfulness to the Master was phenomenal. Never, even for a moment, do we find him wavering in his total surrender to the Master. Doubt never crossed his mind about the Master's spiritual eminence and, as such, his hunger

1. *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, 10.31.9.

2. Paul Brunton, *A Search in Secret India* (London: Rider and Co.), p. 181.

3. *Prabuddha Bharata*, vol. 37, p. 442.

and thirst for the Master's association went on increasing daily. He had the unique privilege of rendering personal service to the Master in many ways and on many occasions. His firm faith in Sri Ramakrishna's avatarhood was astonishing. During the last days of Sri Ramakrishna, when the Master was at Cossipore, M. visited Kamarpukur and other holy places sanctified by the Master's early days. After hearing the detailed narration from M., the Master remarked, 'How could you ever go into such out-of-the-way places infested by robbers?' And drawing the attention of a nearby devotee, he said, 'Look at his love! Nobody has told him. Yet he of himself has with infinite care and love gone over those places and scenes because this person (pointing to himself) had walked in those places. His love is like that of Vibhīṣaṇa....' It may not be out of place to mention that M. had a wonderful experience at Kamarpukur. 'By the grace of the Master he saw all Kamarpukur as a holy place bathed in an effulgent light. Trees and creepers, beasts and birds and men—all were made of effulgence. So he prostrated to all on the road. He came across a tomcat illumined with the light of consciousness. Immediately he fell to the ground and saluted it.'⁴ He had a similar experience at Dakshineswar also.

M. was a man of mystical temperament but equally strong was the nobility of his character. Truly, deeper than his genius, greater than his spiritual insight, even higher than his scholarship, is the character of a man, which at once excites our wonder and admiration, love and respect. Swami Vivekananda highly appreciated M.'s integrity and quality of being. In one letter from the U.S.A. he wrote: 'When Ramakrishna left his body everybody gave us up as a few unripe urchins; but M. and a few others did not leave us in the lurch. We

cannot repay our debt to them.' It may not be known to many that M. was providentially instrumental in inspiring a group of young college boys to follow the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. When M. was a professor of English in the Ripon College he used to cordially discuss with these boys the great life of his Master. He told them, 'Look here, Sri Ramakrishna renounced lust and gold; therefore, to understand Sri Ramakrishna rightly, one has to come in touch with those who renounced everything and have been endeavouring to put into practice the ideals of the Master and to realize God'. After the great direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, these were the very first batch of youths who embraced monastic life in the Ramakrishna Order in 1897.⁵

Sri Ramakrishna says that the avatar comes as a human being to teach people by living the life of Truth. He serves as a great channel through which infinite divine wisdom reaches us in abundance. These words are the highest source of peace, wisdom and strength. Actually, the Master told M., 'Whatever you hear falling from this mouth, know it is the Mother that is speaking'. The divine words of Sri Ramakrishna have been faithfully and carefully recorded by M. for the well-being of humanity in the form of the book, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which is regarded as a revealed scripture of the highest order. The entire humanity is eternally indebted to M. for this immortal work. In the words of Benoy Sarkar, 'His *Kathamṛta (Gospel)*, "the nectar of words", has turned out to be the most dynamic social philosophy of the age, and this has created for him a position of one of the greatest "remakers" of mankind'. Again, 'Just as lightning surpasses all fires

(Continued on page 143)

4. Swami Nityatmananda, *M.—the Apostle and the Evangelist*, part 1, p. 40.

5. Swami Gambhirananda, *History of Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957), p. 88.

“COME AGAIN”*

M

Thy unique form I beheld
When first I came to touch thy lotus feet.
Blessed is the Rani ! Blessed is her temple !
For a living God walks in its precincts.
Whence came this jewel of a man !
Whose eyes ever radiate love
Whose face ever beams a smile
Like a boy five summers old,
Who is ever absorbed in bliss.

Hard indeed it is to know
What thou art—a man or God.
A man of earth perhaps thou never wert,
And yet thou art one who is my own,
Or else why should my heart
Be drawn to thee since the first meet?

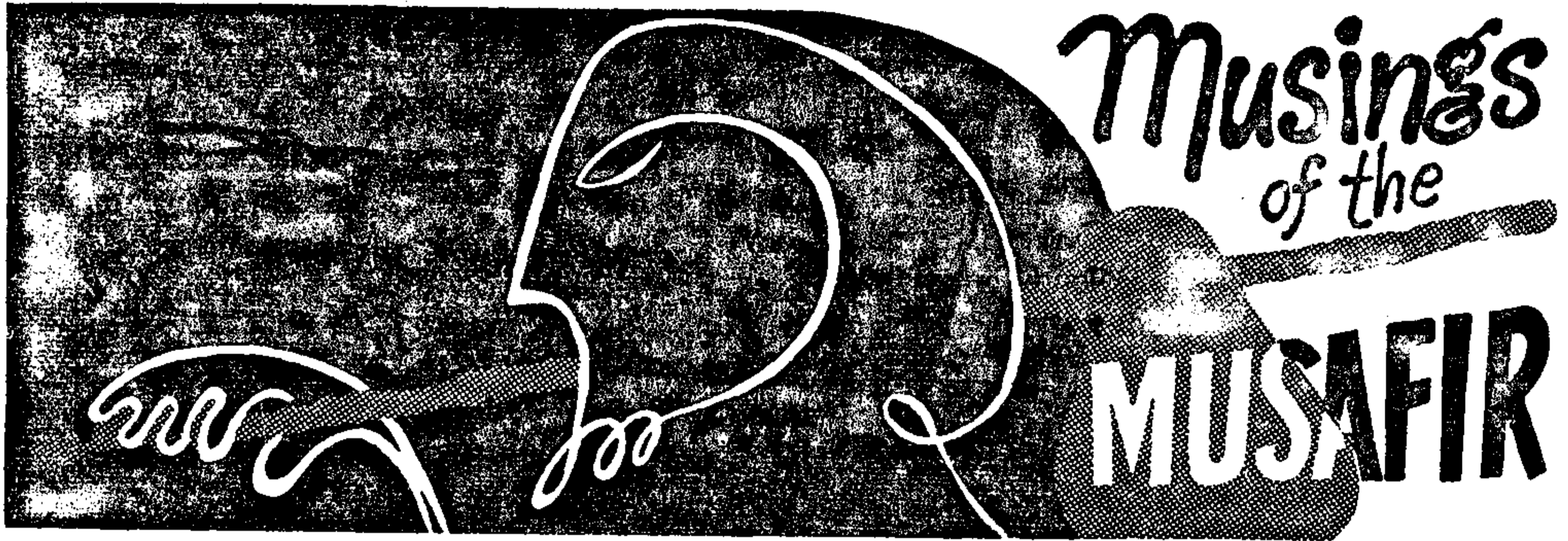
The thirst of my heart is quenched today,
The crisis of life is lifted at last.
What a wonder ! The gloom of heart is dispelled
My life has reached its fulfilment, as if
At the touch of the philosopher's stone.

Who art thou, I wonder ?
Thou, the bliss of my heart,
Thou, the star of love's eyes
That thirst for the vision of God.

How can I afford to go back home?
Where else is a home for me but in thee?
My heart throbs in sorrow,
When I think of parting from thee.

But thou, the Lord of my soul,
The knower of all my sorrows,
Smiled with matchless charm
And soothed my parching body and soul.
In silence thou remained for a while,
Cast a compassionate glance upon thy servant,
And said, 'Come again'.

* Translation of the Bengali poem *Abār āsibe* by Mahendra Nath Gupta, the celebrated author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The poem is evidently an attempt to express the feelings that were roused in M. at his first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar. Owing to domestic troubles, M. was then facing a crisis in his life, and it was with a perturbed mind that he had gone to the Master. At the first sight of Sri Ramakrishna a great peace filled M.'s heart. The Master's parting words 'come again' acted as a benediction, for the disciple returned again and again until his life became indissolubly one with that of his eternal Master. The poem originally appeared in *Udbodhan*, Śrāvan 1388 B.S., p. 306, and has been translated into English by Swami Jitatmananda.—Ed.



THE WHEEL OF DHARMA ALWAYS COMES FULL CIRCLE

Had I been an Avadhūta, I am pretty sure, Nikaṣā, Rāvaṇa's mother, would be one of my *upagurus*, auxiliary teachers.

Nikaṣā was truly great. Modern philosophers write tomes to speculate on the purpose and meaning of life. If you do not go through those interminable intellectual wanderings, you are not a 'cultivated' person. Go through them and you are sure to end up in bewilderment and exhaustion. Not so is Nikaṣā's philosophy of life. She did not even write a book. But she told all about it in perfect clarity, in two or three sentences, to Śrī Rāma.

The story is told that when Rāvaṇa fell after his mad fight with Rāma in Lanka, Nikaṣā was found running for life. Terribly surprised at the woman's apparently over-much attachment to life, Lakṣmaṇa said in wonderment to Rāma, 'All her children are dead, but still life attracts her so much!' Rāma called Nikaṣā to his side and said, 'Be not afraid. Why are you running away?' She replied, 'Rāma, it was not fear that made me flee from you. I have been able to see all these wondrous actions of yours simply because I am alive. I shall see many more things like these if I continue to live. Hence I desire to live.'

According to Nikaṣā life's purpose and meaning are to enjoy God and His wondrous deeds. Golden Lanka lay in ruins. All her dear relatives including her mighty son,

Rāvaṇa were dead. But Nikaṣā did not beat her breast or tear her grey hair. She had no bitterness. She had the rare insight and sense of humour to note in the happenings of history a consummate squaring of accounts of the wondrous deeds of God.

* * *

Like all others of my age, of how many things in history have I not been a witness! I wish I had Nikaṣā's wisdom to read in them the wondrous deeds of God.

Somewhere en route half-way of his tumultuous life, Benito Mussolini wrote in his autobiography :

Therefore, going over what I have already done, I know that Fascism, being a creation of the Italian race, has met and will meet historical necessities, and so, unconquerable, is destined to give its indelible impression to the twentieth century of history.

On 25 July, 1943, after twenty-three years of dictatorship, Mussolini was overthrown, and Fascism was thrown in the garbage heap. And the twentieth century marched on without placing a wreath on his grave.

* * *

More than 38 million Germans had voted for Hitler on 19 August, 1934, and less than 4½ million against him, and thus was assured his ascendancy to peaks of power which eventually dominated world

history for years to come. Originally his determination to restore Germany to the place from where the *Diktat* of Versailles had cast her down, won him near universal acclaim of the Germans. On 1 September, 1939, Germans invaded Poland, and within two days on 3 September, Britain and France declared war against Germany, and the Second World War began. Horrors of the war—including what was perpetrated at Belsen, Dachau, Buchenwald and Auschwitz—which brought far-reaching upheavals in history are too well-known to need recounting here. On 30 April, 1945, Hitler lay dead in the debris of the chancellery, from where he had commanded his supposedly invincible armies. Germany lay prostrate in ignominious defeat. How soon was national *karma-phala*, fruits of deeds, harvested in Germany!

* * *

While at college we had on our syllabus a book on the good work done by Britain in India, in which cliches like 'the sun never sets in the British empire' were taught like *mahāvākyas*, great utterances of the scriptures. It will be considered bad taste today to mention all the 'good work' England did in India, after Pandit Nehru's magnanimous post-independence decision to stay within the Commonwealth was sanctified with the tears of Winston Churchill. The sun went down the horizon of British empire never to rise again. The world watched in astonishment how the 'half-naked fakir' became Destiny's instrument to set in motion the rolling off of the colonial empire, and the liberation of the people who had been in chains all over the world. If Britain allows her 'skinheads' to shape her modern history what else can she lose but her tiny home-island?

* * *

Most people of my age would remember Jawaharlal Nehru's 'Tryst with Destiny' midnight speech of 15 August 1947. What

uproarious, delirious joy! But how came then that flowing river of blood over the green pastures of India after the Mahatma and the nation had preached so much about non-violence for more than a quarter of a century? The indivisible India was cut to pieces; men, women, children were butchered just when history was maturing into a glorious consummation. Why did the moment of glory turn into a moment of historic agony?

Well, could it be that the Wheel of Dharma was coming to a full circle in rather a neat manner? The great poet Tagore had made a prophetic utterance, 'O my hapless country you will be made one in insult with those whom you have insulted. You will have to share the same food and drink with them in adversity'.

The vivisection of the country was a great leveller. Aristocratic people who had lost their all, found themselves in the same relief camps as the poor, receiving doles from the same free kitchen! That was democracy cooked in the kitchen of Nemesis.

It is often said that India was divided in the name of religion. That is a misreading of history. Dharma does not divide. It unites and upholds. Those who got India severed were mostly the people whom Hindus had denied their fundamental human rights as Hindus. When those very people became Muslims they had little love for the image of that India, which had denied them their rights as human beings.

Even today Hindus are not fully awake. They have yet to sufficiently expiate their past sins. Otherwise, why should there be these conversions of Hindus to other faiths?

God will teach. He can wear either a *tilak* or a fez, as it suits Him. But He will teach. If man does not behave as a human being, He will not hesitate to rough-handle him. Do not expect God to be a butterball all the time. He is the thunder-bolt as well. When we refuse to learn, He will break open our heads in a manner that we may

understand. Hindus must read history in a new light. They must hasten to claim and reclaim those who, though insulted and disowned, still linger in the fold hoping that good sense will some day prevail among brother men.

God's glory is not all milk and honey only. What about a deluge? Has it no beauty? But then we must be strong enough to take it. The great hope of India is that Hindus have not yet started pushing out Dharma by the front door!

* * * * *

Did we not witness in history how the ancient homeless Jewish people, after centuries of wanderings, at last got their homestead, Israel, in 1945? What wonder then that, once settled in their beloved homeland, they should defend it with fierce determination backed by their ever-vigilant, ever-increasing technological efficiency? What, however, is strange is that the same people who value their homeland above heaven in the world should stubbornly deny the same right to the Palestinian people. Well, perhaps this is the law of disorder in the world, which invites Providence's operation corrective in history. Israel continues to accumulate national karma with such reckless abandon that you wonder if during the ages this ancient and intelligent race really learnt anything. Otherwise how could Menachem Begin have the Tammuz reactor, the nuclear installation of Iraq destroyed without provocation, on the plea that he had the responsibility and right to make the future of the children of Zionism safe and secure? After Hiraṇyakaśipu, no one has behaved with such pre-emptive predatoriness against a hypothetical enemy and with such impunity. At the same time, Israel's own nuclear installation has been studiously kept out of bounds of the inspecting power of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Begin perhaps is not aware that there is another Agency which has been

keeping all accounts straight. He has not only rendered the destruction of Israel's nuclear installation morally defensible, but also sent a passionate invitation to Destiny to do it. It may be helpful to know that Zionism has its crucifier in its own basement. Though Śrī Kṛṣṇa taught in a very different context that you are your own friend and your own enemy, the Jewish people, under the leadership of Begin, have applied this truth partially in history and shown how to be one's own enemy!

* * * * *

Those who have read John Hersey's *Hiroshima* would appreciate why I had difficulty for nights in sleeping after reading that book. This was what the first atom bomb had done:

... some 60,000 Japanese men, women and children were killed, and 1,00,000 injured; and almost the whole of a great seaport, a city of 2,50,000 people, was destroyed by blast or by fire.

This only gives a faint glimpse of the terrible human suffering it actually entailed.

Later on, when one day I stood in the great hall of the Peace Museum in Hiroshima, where one wall depicted 'Hiroshima destroyed' and the other wall 'Hiroshima rebuilt', and read the writings on the wall, I could get an insight into the secret of Japan's amazing recovery. Japan took the scourge of history as a just spanking from the hands of Destiny, without insolence, bitterness and delusion and with graceful humility. This was heroism of the highest order.

At the same time I was appalled at the weight of the accumulated national karma that had come to settle on the developing future of America. I am aware that young America's shoulders are broad, also that some expiation was forthwith done through the Marshall Plan. But how little was that in comparison with the enormity of the

crime America perpetrated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki!

Pearl Harbour could not be enough of an invitation for the enormous deed in Hiroshima. According to some military strategists, Japan had in effect already surrendered. The atom bomb was not used for gaining victory but for testing the new weapon and incidentally for annihilating the fallen, with what moral justification not known even to thinking Americans.

It would, however, appear that Destiny took the issue on hand rather briskly. Was it why, no one knows, to defend or offend that America went, sort of deterministically propelled as it were, into war with Viet Nam? Though it is not known that some one from Viet Nam ever went back to America to prick a pin in the flesh of an American, yet for years America carried on incessant bombing, virtually converting the country's terrain into a sieve, destroying everything that came under its savage military might, and in the process sacrificing thousands upon thousands of her bright young sons, as if they were rotten eggs to be heaped in the garbage can on the wayside of history, only to purchase the most humiliating defeat in all American history, that too not at the hands of a peer, but at the hands of a so-called 'under-developed' nation? Once again it was proved that no weapon was more powerful in the world than the united will of a nation fighting for a just cause.

If America's defeat in Viet Nam were read in good part by some introspective Americans, they could read in that the beckoning of Destiny to the nation to resume the discontinued pilgrimage of the Pilgrim Fathers!

* * *

Was it also by any chance a continuation of America's involuntary expiation that fifty and more American hostages were put

through an unnerving drama of anguish by the Islamic fundamentalists of Iran? It has been said by a saint that 'the Lord breaks one clod of earth with another', meaning thereby, perhaps, that He makes use of one offender to chastise and educate another. That self-appointed custodian of God's moral order, known as Ayatollah Khomeini, offended God to such an extent by his over-wrought guardianship of Iran, that soon His thunder-bolt fell upon Iran in the form of invasion by Iraq. A Muslim country invading another Muslim country only proved that Destiny was not a party in Pan-Islamism. God is neither a Christian, nor a Hindu nor a Mussalman. He is the essence of Truth, the guardian of the Moral Order. Jimmy Carter's last moments of defeat turned out to be the greatest moments of his glory in that, by not considering billions of dollars as of any greater value than the lives of American hostages in Iran, he secured their release and a niche for himself in modern American history. It was a moment of great joy all over the world to witness the released Americans flying into the open arms of their tearful dear ones.

But could any one know beforehand what more price was Destiny going to extract from Iran for the inhuman psychological torture inflicted on the mind of America? Was the bomb explosion at Teheran which swept away 150 leaders of the powerful Islamic Republican Party, in any way an extra-price tag tied to the hostage-commodity? Who knows?

When Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran, proudly celebrated the 2,500th anniversary of his dynasty in a more than extravagant manner, little did he know that he had dug his grave in an unforeseen exile. He perhaps did not know this even when he flew out of Teheran, sentimentally taking with him some soil of his ancient land and his accumulated wealth. Now it is known that, as far as Shah Pahlavi was concerned, all the wealth of Iran was of no avail; he only

needed a sanctified little pit in the bosom of the earth to allow his cancerous body to become one with the soil of the world.

When Ayatollah Khomeini flew into Teheran like a Messiah in black toga, Iranians rejoiced for they imagined that their liberator had at last descended on wings. But soon they were to know better or bitter facts.

Iran must watch out because Ayatollah Khomeini thinks that, out there, there are 'enemies of Allah'!

So should Israel. As Bertrand Russell has said somewhere, 'Stamping out one's enemies in the nuclear age is an immoral

madness'. So Israel must watch the conduct of that scion of Zionism, whose 'enormous and dangerous arrogance' (to use the words of a Veteran American Republican) has already issued an invitation to Nemesis to have a mad dance on the ancient land of the prophets, where the blood of Christ still glistens red!

No one really knows for certain. But one simply wonders.

Well, in any case, don't you think Nikaṣā's two-sentence philosophy really works? and that she would be an excellent *upaguru* when I become an Avadhūta?

17 December 1981

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and radium all metals, and the missile is faster than the arrow of the poor savage, so the *Gospel* surpasses all books'.

M. passed away peacefully on 4 June, 1932, uttering the names of his Master and the Holy Mother. According to Hindu tradition, a twice-born person is the real person worthy of veneration. Mere biological birth is inferior to spiritual birth at which point of life one's spiritual awakening takes place. It may therefore be said that the

real M.—the apostle and evangelist—was born in February, 1882 when he first met his great Master. Devotees of M. feel it proper to observe his centenary by counting his age from that blessed day in his life. During these hundred years the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* has enabled countless people to undergo spiritual rebirth. On this sacred occasion when thousands of people remember this modern Vyāsa with gratitude, let us pay our own humble reverential homage to him.

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN VEDANTA

DR. LETA JANE LEWIS

Having read that the sages meditated and then entered into the transcendental consciousness known as *samādhi* or *nirvāṇa*, naive spiritual aspirants sometimes assume that self-realization is to be attained chiefly, if not entirely, through meditation. So many begin spiritual life over-emphasizing meditation at the expense of other spiritual disciplines such as prayer.

Initially, the inexperienced aspirant may suppose that meditation is relatively simple, that he can meditate effectively if he just sets aside the time and sits down to do it. But if he honestly tries to meditate properly, he discovers that it is much more difficult than he had anticipated. Thousands of thoughts and impulses come welling up to prevent his concentrating for more than a moment or two. When his mood is ruffled, wounded vanity, jealousy and anger rush into his consciousness with such fury that they push the object of meditation aside. This is a crucial time for the beginner. If his desire to grow spiritually is not deeply sincere, he will give up meditation in disgust.

But if at this time of crisis he feels a desperate need for help—an intense longing, which, in fact, is a type of unuttered prayer—he may attract the grace of a holy preceptor, a guru. The holy man will encourage him, teach him proper methods of meditation, and instruct him in disciplines to calm his mind. One of these disciplines is prayer, which, in the words of Swami Satprakashananda, 'is the simplest method of worship by which the mind is prepared for the practice of meditation'.¹

Often, however, there are obstacles which guru and disciple must overcome before the

latter can learn to pray effectively. If the disciple is a Westerner, the superficially interpreted Christianity to which he was probably exposed as a child may have destroyed his interest in prayer. Although Christianity had many saints during its first fifteen or sixteen hundred years, the average present-day clergyman even among the Catholics does not understand how prayer can culminate in the profound realizations of sainthood, so he and the majority of church-goers who follow him tend to use prayer superficially. Although there are always notable exceptions, many Westerners pray more sincerely for temporal blessings, which they have seen, than for spiritual gifts, which are outside their ordinary field of vision. Coming from such a background, the newcomer to Vedanta has yet to learn the value of prayer in spiritual life.

Another obstacle to be overcome may be the disciple's disillusionment with the effectiveness of prayer. Perhaps he prayed and watched others pray when some beloved person was suffering excruciating pain from terminal cancer. But no miracle happened; the cancer did not reverse itself, as it so rarely does. Seeing no sure evidence that the most deeply felt prayers are answered, the disciple may have decided that prayer is wasted effort.

If the aspirant thinks of himself as a non-dualist, the assumption that the divine Reality can be only impersonal may be an additional obstacle in the way of his learning to pray properly. If he begins spiritual life with this assumption, the aspirant will not be motivated to pray until he develops a better understanding of non-dualism. He undoubtedly read that Śankara, the great philosopher of nondualism, stated that Brahman without attributes is the only reality, the universe of name and form be-

1. Swami Satprakashananda, *Meditation. Its Process, Practice, and Culmination* (St. Louis: Vedanta Society), p. 151.

ing a mere illusory superimposition upon it. Reasoning carelessly from these premises, he may have mistakenly assumed that the personal God, that is, Brahman *with* attributes, cannot exist. But if this is true, if the personal God cannot exist because he has attributes, the aspirant himself cannot exist for the same reason. He feels, however, that he does. He eats to satisfy his hunger, and he goes to the doctor when he is hurt. As long as he acts on the practical assumption that he is a living human being, it is inconsistent for him to deny the possible existence of God. If God cannot exist, neither can he; but Śankara stated categorically that all individuals do exist, although they are usually unaware of their true spiritual nature. When the aspirant studies Śankara's non-dualism more carefully, he will find that Śankara attributed the reality of God, man, and the universe to the absolute Reality of Brahman, in which all things exist and without which there would be nothing whatsoever.

Having realized both the personal God and the impersonal Brahman in the highest spiritual absorption, Sri Ramakrishna gave non-dualists the following wise advice :

But if you seek Brahmajñāna, the Knowledge of the attributeless Brahman, then proceed to the real Sun through its reflection. Pray to Brahman with attributes, who listens to your prayers, and He Himself will give you full knowledge of Brahman; for that which is Brahman with attributes is verily Brahman without attributes...²

After he had had the vision of the personal God as the divine Mother of the universe, Sri Ramakrishna entered *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the non-dual absorption, through Her grace; and, later, when his disciples came to him, he instructed them to follow his path from

the personal God to the impersonal Brahman instead of attempting to bypass God and approach the Impersonal directly. Whereas it would be impossible for them to enter into any kind of relationship with the absolute Brahman, they could easily learn to love and pray to the omnipresent personal God.

When the misconceptions which form obstacles to prayer have been removed, the disciple learns that prayer can greatly enhance meditation. He discovers the merit of Swami Yatiswarananda's advice :

If any day you feel too disturbed or tired to meditate, you can just sit down for a few minutes and pray intensely to the Divine, 'Thou art purity, fill Thou me with purity. Thou art energy, fill Thou me with energy. Thou art strength, fill Thou me with strength.' This kind of prayer will calm the mind.³

Prayer can control the distracting thoughts, the roving fantasies as well as the animosities and anxieties, which appear in the mind during meditation. Since the unconscious mind gives rise to disturbing, destructive impulses which seem to come from nowhere, it as well as the conscious mind must be controlled. This is best done by prayer. Intense prayer releases forces within the psyche which destroy the evil tendencies in both the conscious and the unconscious parts of the mind. As prayer lifts the mind towards God, the heart is softened and the bonds of evil broken. Therefore, Swami Vivekananda advised the spiritual aspirant, 'Pray that that manifestation which is our Father, our Mother, may cut our bonds'.⁴ God does not work from outside the human being. He works mysteriously from within to cut the bonds of the heart.

The pilgrim of the Greek Orthodox classic

2. Mahendranath Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York : Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1973), p. 636.

3. Swami Yatiswarananda, *Meditation and Spiritual Life* (Bangalore : Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1979), p. 334.

4. Swami Vivekananda, *Works*, 1968, VI, p. 91.

The Way of a Pilgrim describes the transforming quality of prayer as follows :

Pray, and do not labour much to conquer your passions by your own strength. Prayer will destroy them in you!⁵ Prayer, although we are full of sin when we utter it, immediately cleanses us.⁶ It is prayer which bears fruit in good works and all virtues.⁷ Without prayer no other good work whatever can be accomplished.⁸

Because he lived constantly in the presence of God, the pilgrim did not have to struggle to overcome his evil tendencies. The ordinary aspirant, on the other hand, must struggle hard before divine grace breaks the bonds of his heart. But if he is spiritually sincere, the aspirant will *want* to struggle to improve himself; and, in putting forth his best effort, he will discover his human weakness, his inability to force himself to be the person he would like to be. He will feel the utter helplessness, which, in combination with spiritual desire, inspires intense prayer. Then if he prays humbly to God, he will receive the help he fervently desires. Through the grace of God, the bonds of his heart will be cut. His mind will be renewed, his sense of values will change, and his evil tendencies will disappear.

The struggling aspirant will be better prepared for meditation if, when he first sits down to meditate, he prays for others, especially for those towards whom he harbours grudges. According to William Law, 'Intercession is the best arbitrator of all differences, the best promoter of true friendship, the best cure and preservative against all unkind tempers, all angry and haughty passions'.⁹ Because it is difficult to be angry

towards anyone for whom we pray, prayer can destroy anger, which is one of the great obstacles in the way of meditation. In addition, the aspirant should pray for humanity in general, that all will live in peace and harmony and grow spiritually, each in his own way. 'You will be astonished', Swami Yatiswarananda writes, 'to see how quickly this kind of prayer soothes your nerves and calms your mind. Besides expanding our consciousness to some extent, this kind of prayer and salutation greatly helps us in the practice of meditation'.¹⁰

But not everyone is like the sincere aspirant who prays in order to grow closer to God and realize the Self. In the *Bhagavad Gītā* Sri Krishna mentions four classes of persons who worship God, 'the world-weary, the seeker for knowledge, the seeker for happiness and the man of spiritual discrimination'.¹¹ Although some of these people pray for earthly blessings, Swami Vivekananda says, 'All these four classes of people are good, not bad. All of them worship Him'.¹² Many have never tasted spiritual life and cannot be expected to know what it is. So when they pray, it is to the kind, omnipotent earthly father who can grant his children's desires. But even prayers for worldly things direct the mind to the divine. With each prayer the supplicant grows a trifle closer to God. Very slowly perhaps over many lifetimes, God reveals Himself and directs the supplicant's mind to higher things, to better prayers and goals. Thus, a prayer for worldly treasures can be like the Biblical grain of mustard seed, which, though initially very tiny, can grow until it becomes a large plant. So the sages main-

5. *The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues his Way*, trans. R. M. French (New York : Ballantine Books, 1974), p. 155.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

9. Quoted by Aldous Huxley in *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper, 1945), p. 222.

10. Swami Yatiswarananda, *Meditation and Spiritual Life*, p. 310.

11. *The Bhagavad Gītā*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, 1972), p. 72.

12. Swami Vivekananda, *Works*, 1964, VIII, p. 120.

tain that a prayer for one's earthly benefit is better than no prayer at all.

But it is obvious that these prayers for earthly benefit do not consistently receive the desired answers. Everyone knows of instances where friends and relations prayed in vain for someone in agonizing pain. On the other hand, we read that the prayers of Jesus, Śankara, and the great sages cured leprosy and raised the dead. Because these examples demonstrate that prayer can work miracles, they motivate us to pray. Why, then, do our prayers so often go unanswered? Jesus would surely reproach us saying, 'Oh, ye, of little faith'. The divine incarnations and perfected sages were able to perform miracles because they had faith unlike anything in ordinary human experience. True faith of a lesser order follows the first brief experience of God's presence, but the unflinching faith of a Śankara or a Jesus Christ comes only after divine absorption, *samadhi*. Jesus had such perfect faith that when he was confronted with immediate crucifixion, he prayed, 'Thy will be done' to his compassionate, omniscient heavenly Father. Only those who, like Jesus, can sincerely pray, 'Thy will be done' have the love and faith to pray successfully for others.

Although prayers for earthly benefit are seldom answered, heartfelt prayers for spiritual blessings always are. Therefore, Swami Brahmananda counsels the aspirant :

Know that he is dearer than the dearest, and then pray to him with a yearning heart for his grace and vision. Cry to him like a child; he cannot resist your tears.¹³ God's grace is supreme; without it nothing is achieved. Pray to him unceasingly for his grace. Prayer is efficacious. He lovingly hears your prayers.¹⁴ Take refuge in him. Pray constantly with a pure, sincere heart : 'O Lord, I do not know what is good and what is bad for me. I am entirely dependent on you. Grant me what I most need for the spiritual

life. Take me along the path which will lead me to the greatest good. Give me the faith and strength constantly to remember you and meditate on you.'¹⁵

Jesus spoke truly when he promised, 'Ask and it shall be given unto you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you'.¹⁶ 'What man is there of you', he asked, 'whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?'¹⁷ Sri Ramakrishna spoke similar words of encouragement :

He is our Father and Mother, isn't he? If the son demands his patrimony and gives up food and drink in order to enforce his demand, then the parents hand his share over to him three years before the legal time.¹⁸ A man does not have to suffer any more if God, in his grace, removes his doubts and reveals Himself to him. But this grace descends upon him only after he has prayed to God with intense yearning of heart and practised spiritual discipline. The Mother feels compassion for her child when she sees him running about breathlessly. She has been hiding herself; now she appears before the child.¹⁹

Prayers for spiritual gifts bring grace to the aspirant exactly in proportion to his spiritual longing. Of course, the average aspirant does not experience the ultimate divine absorption immediately. His longing is not sufficient for that. He receives the grace of God by slow degrees as he persists in his prayer, meditation, and other spiritual practices. Each honest prayer opens his heart to a little divine joy, which increases his longing. This greater longing intensifies his future prayer. Therefore, he should work to develop the habit of praying constantly.

There is no better example for the aspirant who is trying to learn to pray without ceasing than the pilgrim in *The Way of a Pilgrim*. At first the pilgrim repeated his

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 193-4.

16. Matt. 7:7.

17. Matt. 7:9-10.

18. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 196-7.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

13. Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion* (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1960), p. 252.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 270

prayer vocally in order to develop the habit of saying it on each step of his pilgrimage. Then he learned to repeat it mentally but with deliberate concentration so that his thoughts would not wander. Finally, saying his prayer became so habitual that it seemed to say itself. As the pilgrim grew in the art of prayer, his joy in it increased until he was absorbed in divine bliss as he walked unobtrusively on his way. He described his own experience of prayer as follows :

It is possible to pray at all times, in all circumstances and in every place, and easily rise from frequent vocal prayer to prayer of the mind and from that to prayer of the heart, which opens up the Kingdom of God within us.²⁰ Frequency in prayer is the one method of attaining pure and true prayer.²¹ The one thing I wish for is to be alone, and all by myself to pray, to pray without ceasing ; and doing this, I am filled with joy.²²

Prayer no longer seems dry when, in response to an ardent wish, grace opens a mine of bliss in the heart of the supplicant.

Prayer facilitates meditation by increasing devotion, purifying the heart, and concentrating the mind on God, and every attempt to focus the mind in meditation makes it easier to pray. The aspirant's prayer is directly reflected in his meditation, and his meditation is directly reflected in his prayer. Indeed, no distinct line can be drawn between advanced stages of prayer and meditation, which is also classified as prayer by Christian mystics. In *The Perennial Philosophy*, Aldous Huxley lists the four types of prayer known to Christian mysticism : petition, intercession, adoration, and contemplation. Contemplation, the most perfect prayer, is defined as 'that condition of passivity, in which the soul lays itself open to the divine ground within and without, the immanent

²⁰. *The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues his Way*, p. 148.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

²². *Ibid.*, p. 13.

and transcendent Godhead'.²³ The Vedantic mystic would consider this condition of passivity, so close to the absorption of *samadhi*, to be an advanced stage of meditation.

Both Christian and Vedantic mystics have observed that prayer changes as concentration and devotion grow. At first, the aspirant has many thoughts, which he usually expresses in lengthy prayers. For instance, he has a great need to ask God's help in combatting anger, lust, and greed. He wants to be given deeper love for God and for humanity. Such prayers are vital helps along the way, but they are not the ultimate in spiritual life.

Swami Satprakashananda describes how prayer tends towards silence as spiritual life deepens :

In the beginning a seeker of God may use many words in his prayer ; but as his understanding becomes clearer, as his spiritual feeling deepens and his faith becomes intense, he realizes that all he needs is devotion to God. So he prays to God only for devotion. He simply says, 'O Lord, may I have true love for Thee ! May I have devotion to Thee'.²⁴ As a person continues to pray to God intensely one or two ideas become the keynote of his spiritual life. Then the prayer becomes short such as 'Grant me love for Thee, grant me love for Thee'. Just one or two ideas he holds continuously. Later one or two words become sufficient and most meaningful in his spiritual life.²⁵

Prayer flows into meditation when words cease at the point of perfect concentration on the divine. When the mind is stilled in meditation, the devotee becomes absorbed in the blissful divine consciousness of *samādhi*. He then knows the One whose name is Silence, and enters the peace which passeth understanding.

²³. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, p. 219.

²⁴. Swami Satprakashananda, *Meditation: Its Process, Practice and Culmination*, p. 156.

²⁵. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

THE RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGE IN EUROPE

SWAMI VIDYATMANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

4. *Pilgrim destinations*

We now come to the fourth part of this article,* a consideration of the destinations to which the pilgrim went and goes. From the beginning man has had a tendency to venerate that which appears to him to be mysterious or holy — believing such to be the supernatural manifesting itself in the material world—his world. There was an aspect of awe and wonder, and a desire to 'redirect' ordinary physical law in his favour—such was at the bottom of the pilgrim's effort.

Natural sites. Among the sites which attracted him most were natural sites of great beauty or which seemed to possess some unearthly quality and seemed to communicate something of God to man. Springs, rivers, mountains had a great attraction for primitive man, as they tended to make the divine palpable. Many present-day sites had their origin in such places.

Sites associated with the descent of the Divine. Secondly and more important are sites associated with the appearance on earth of a divine presence. For example, in India there are numerous sites where it is believed portions of the body of the Divine Mother Sati fell to the earth. These sites are known and revered as 'Pīthasthānas'. In relation to such incarnations as Śrī Rāma, Śrī Kṛṣṇa,

Śrī Caitanya, and Sri Ramakrishna, Hindus venerate four types of sites : the place of the incarnation's birth, the place of his enlightenment, the site of his ministry, and the site of his death. The same applies with respect to Buddha.

In the Christian world sites associated with the life of Christ are regarded as supremely holy, and a great vogue for visiting the Holy Land commenced even in apostolic times and continued to the 11th century; to assure continued access to these shrines in Palestine against the opposition of the occupying Turks was one of the principal causes of the Crusades in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries. In modern times the airplane transports the pious to Israel, where by air-conditioned bus they visit Bethlehem, Nazareth, the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, Gethsemane, and Golgotha.

Not all the sites associated with the life on earth of Jesus are in Palestine. For example, at Rome in the church of Saint Salvadore one finds the Scala Santa, the holy stairs, a flight of twenty-eight marble steps said to be from the house of Pontius Pilate, which Jesus is supposed to have ascended at the time of his trial. This staircase is said to have been moved to Rome by the Empress Helene, mother of Constantine. Since centuries pilgrims have ascended these steps kneeling; for the past two hundred years, to preserve the steps from further wear, oak planks have been laid across them—which planks themselves have had to be renewed several times.

The place of the Virgin Mary in Christianity has been subject to considerable controversy—and still is. But since the 5th century Mary has been considered a divine personality. She became, in a sense, the

* In the first instalment of this article, which was published in the February issue, the author discussed the physical aspects of pilgrimage (like conquest of space and *darshan* or encounter), motivations of pilgrimage (like physical healing, penitence, salvation, etc.) and the means of obtaining benediction (like seeing or touching relics, drinking holy water, etc.). The author visited many of the important pilgrimage centres of Europe mentioned in this article.—*Ed.*

New Eve, who generated the new creation, redressing the original fault of humanity. During the 12th and 13th centuries she assumed a role often more important than that of her Son. She is the perpetual mediator for man before God. It was as though she put herself forward; or something in mankind wanted to have a Mother as well as a Father and a Son. She is more soft, more approachable, more sympathetic, and one could without hesitancy call upon her for help. The great hymn 'Salve Regina', 'Hail, Queen of Heaven', which I cite farther on in this article explores her qualities of compassion.

Mary has surely inspired many to make great pilgrimages to her shrines, with fervor. Therefore, in considering pilgrim destinations associated with the presence on earth of a divine being we must consider those whose object was to draw close to and claim the attentions of Mary.

It is impossible in this short article to list many of those pilgrimage destinations having to do with the Madonna. We may mention in passing the great pilgrimage site in Italy near the Adriatic called Loreto. A tradition of the 15th century has it that the house of the Virgin Mary at Nazareth (where Jesus spent his childhood) was miraculously transported to Loreto by angels in 1294. The Santa Casa (as it is called) has remained an important pilgrimage destination for adorers of the Mother.

Mary is said to have made many apparitions in Europe (and even in the New World) throughout the centuries. It may be useful for us to mention three apparitions which are reported to have occurred in recent years and which have inspired great pilgrimages important at the present time.

On 19 September, 1846, at La Salette in the mountains of eastern France the Virgin is reported to have appeared to two young shepherds. Over the years La Salette has become an important destination for pilgrims.

Then there is Fatima in Portugal, a site very popular since, in 1917, three young shepherds reported that they had seen the Virgin Mary there.

Most important is Lourdes in southern France, which has become one of the most popular centres of pilgrimage in the Christian world. Between February and July, 1858, the young Bernadette Soubirous claimed that she saw eighteen times (she fell into ecstasy with each appearance) in a grotto near a small river called the Gave, an apparition: a lady wearing a white robe with a blue sash, a yellow rose resting on each foot. In due course the lady declared herself to be the Immaculate Conception; that is to say, Mary, who according to Church doctrine, although conceived naturally, was from the moment of conception free from any stain of original sin. The lady instructed Bernadette to drink from a puddle of stagnant water at the base of the grotto. She did so; in a few days a spring of pure water issued from the spot. This is the famous natural source from which comes the highly regarded water of Lourdes. Bernadette, at first treated with suspicion by Church authorities, was later protected; she ended her days as a nun at Nevers in central France, where she died in 1879. Her undecayed body, displayed in a glass case in the convent church, has become a relic which draws pilgrims.

The grotto attracted the curious, and it became the custom to drink from the spring and to pour its water on affected parts of one's body; miraculous cures were reported. A church was erected just above the grotto in 1876, and over the years many additional installations have been built, including a second church and a hall holding 25,000 people. The water of the spring is now piped to numerous faucets, where pilgrims drink and fill containers, and to pools in which those who wish to do so may bathe. Absorption of Lourdes water and possibly

immersion in it are the foremost objectives of most pilgrims.

Today Lourdes receives four or five million pilgrims per year; the railroad and bus stations and the airport are continually busy, and there are more hotel bookings at Lourdes than in any other French city outside of Paris. The sick and deformed are the kings of Lourdes, and very much in evidence. They come by special trains and buses, accompanied by attendants who, as members of invalid-helping organizations, give their time gratuitously to accompany the sick, look after them at Lourdes, and conduct them back home again. This service is also carried out by relatives; one sees many abnormal children carefully watched over by hopeful parents. In the streets and before the sanctuaries people on crutches, in wheelchairs, and on rolling beds are given a special place.

My own experience at Lourdes was agreeable. The tone of the place reminded me of that of Benares; indeed the two cities are comparable in many ways. The great crowds, the diversity of visages and languages, the religious dress very much in evidence (many nuns, as well as priests and monks at Lourdes), the uninhibited manifestations of piety, enthusiasm, and ardour, numerous people openly fingering their rosaries. One is conscious of an atmosphere of holiness at Lourdes, especially near the grotto. The clamour of the church bells at Lourdes recalls the sounds at Benares of conch shells, gongs, and chanting.

During the season there are two processions each day, carried out, most impressively, in silence. (No dogs are allowed in the sacred precincts, and smoking and talking are prohibited). Thousands march in the processions, and the sick are wheeled by ever-present attendants. The procession in the afternoon is a great service of praise sung in different languages, during which a gorgeously garbed priest, accompanied by other priests, one of whom carries a protec-

tive umbrella, moves among the pilgrims showing the bread of the Eucharist in a golden monstrance. At night a procession winds its way from the grotto to the church, everyone bearing a lighted candle, and most people singing. All day long there are masses at different sanctuaries, in various languages. And many do the fourteen Stations of the Cross—scenes from Jesus' last hours, graphically rendered in ascending order around a nearby hillside, the figures of Jesus, his friends, and his persecutors, two metres in height, being in cast iron painted in gold.

Those who wish to make confessions are received in a large hall; there are benches in the centre where the penitents may await their turn. Along both sides of this hall are confessional booths. A sign above each booth declares in which language the confessor within is prepared to hear the confession: English, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and so on.

A priest seated in a small office at one end of the hall surveyed the orderly movement toward and from the confessionals. I asked him if I might talk with him. He welcomed me in and indicated a chair. I identified myself as a member of the Ramakrishna Order and expressed pleasure at what I was witnessing—a mass manifestation of piety. He said that the two great symbols of religion—water and light—were made much of at Lourdes, water the symbol of cleansing preliminary to a new beginning; and light the symbol of the enlightenment that Jesus brought for individuals and for the world. Nobody could come to Lourdes, he continued, and participate in its activities without being benefitted. One of the benefits was to realize that one was not alone, but a member of a vast religious family struggling toward goodness.

'And do miracles really occur?' I asked. 'Are there healings here?'

'Yes, an international agency of medical specialists has certified about sixty healings

over the years; and there are at least six thousand that we know about, although no one has gone to the trouble of having them certified. There are probably many more that we we don't know about. There are no magical properties in the water. Chemical analysis shows that it is nothing but ordinary mountain spring water. The explanation for the healings lies elsewhere. But of course the great miracle of Lourdes is the joy that comes from the renewal of faith and hope one obtains by mingling with the faithful in the religious observances. That miracle occurs continually.'

Tombs of saintly persons. A third category of sacred site which attracted pilgrims was the burial place of a saint. Emplacements where were entombed the bodies of bishops known for their spiritual qualities, popular religious heroes, and saints canonized by the church attracted the pious. (In Hinduism, because of the custom of cremating bodies, worship at tombs is not practised, but samadhis or cremation sites are often venerated. We find the samadhi of several of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples at Belur Math, and the samadhis of Mahatma Gandhi, Ramana Maharshi, and Sri Aurobindo attract those who like to reflect on the qualities of such souls at the place where their bodies last rested.)

In Christian practice, should the body of a saint prove to be incorruptible (considered a special evidence of purity and a mark of immortality) the body is displayed in a crystal case in a special chapel or in the crypt of a church. The belief of the pilgrim is that, although departed, the saint accords grace through his relics, the chief of which, of course, are his mortal remains.

Since the 4th century, thus, the tombs of Jesus' disciple St. Peter and of the influential convert St. Paul, as well as of other early Christian martyrs, have attracted the Catholic faithful to Rome. In the year 67 A.D., according to tradition, St. Peter was executed at a spot near the centre of

what is now the great square before St. Peter's basilica. Close by existed a cemetery where martyred Christians were buried. In this cemetery was deposited the body of the Apostle. Later a small chapel was built there and subsequently larger churches, culminating in the vast St. Peter's we know today. Recent excavations beneath the basilica have led to a tentative identification of St. Peter's tomb. The tomb of the Evangelist St. Paul decapitated at Rome in A.D. 67, was marked by a temple built by Constantine, called today the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, a popular pilgrim destination.

Let us now consider Santiago de Compostela. This extremely popular pilgrimage centre grew up at a place in northwestern Spain where, in the early part of the 9th century, was discovered the purported tomb of Jesus' disciple James the Elder. (The church of St. Thome in Madras contains the reputed remains of a third direct disciple of Christ, St. Thomas; a fourth disciple, St. Mark, is the patron saint of Venice, where his relics are shown.) James the Elder was martyred in A.D. 44 by Herod Agrippa I. That his body should arrive in Spain is one of those pious mysteries which seemed credible during the Age of Faith. (Space prohibits our recounting the story of how this is supposed to have happened.) Indeed, it seems that the more fabulous the claims, the more interesting the shrine!

In any case the purported remains of St. James became the focal point for the development of a great church and pilgrim centre. The relics were kept in a silver casket in the crypt, which can be seen today.

Thus in the Middle Ages a powerful vogue developed to make pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela. From Spain and other European countries marched crowds of pilgrims. From Britain they came by ship. Four great routes led downward through France, crossing the Pyrenees and joining to bear westward along the northern

boundary of Spain. This was the famous Way of St. James. At times the traffic is said to have reached a million souls a year. Many famous people marched on this Way, including Charlemagne (legend says) and St. Francis of Assisi.

At Paris the voyagers often started from the Tower of St. Jacques, which remains to this day in its little park on the Rue de Rivoli. The round trip consumed about seven months and wore out on the average three pairs of stout sandals. Gradually the pilgrim on this route adopted a characteristic costume. He dressed himself in a long cape which served as coat, raincoat, and blanket, held at the waist by a heavy leather belt. On his head he wore a hat with a wide brim. On the turned-up brim of this hat, or on his cloak, he attached several cockleshells; this became the mark of the pilgrim, and going on a pilgrimage became known as taking to the cockleshell. Why? Legend says that a bridegroom riding his horse along the sea to his wedding was swept into the waves and drowned, whereupon the bride appealed to St. James (Santiago). The groom rose alive and well from the sea, his clothes covered with cockleshells—which became the badge of those who made the pilgrimage to Compostela.

The pilgrim moved ahead, aiding himself with a tall staff to which he attached his bundle of necessities and a gourd in which he carried drinking water. Going, he stitched a red cross to his back; returning, he switched it to the front of his garment.

On the day of departure, with the parishioners assembled, the pilgrim attended a solemn mass; and he carried letters of recommendation from the pastor of his local church. These allowed him to be accepted by Church authorities along the route, in monasteries, pilgrim resthouses, and hospitals. A whole string of churches, too, grew up along the Way of St. James, some of which became pilgrimage sites also. During the trip the pilgrim gained a bit of

money where he could by doing odd jobs. Sometimes his return was very much delayed; at a council at Rouen in 1072 the Church threatened with excommunication any wife of a pilgrim who, too soon concluding that she was a widow, married again.

Whom would we encounter eight or nine hundred years ago on the Way of St. James? Christian laymen and their wives, seeking salvation; knights fulfilling a vow made to go pay homage to the Disciple at Compostela if they should survive some contest of arms; monks and priests making the trip as the crowning achievement of their lives. Plenty of beggars, robbers, and swindlers of all sorts. Merchants, of course, as things had to be bought and sold on a route so frequented. Bakers of bread. A good number of masons, builders, architects, as there was construction everywhere along the Way of St. Jacques. And finally government and Church agents, occupied in trying to keep matters in reasonable order for the protection of the pilgrims.

And today the traffic is by no means diminished. By tourist bus, by airplane, by private car the pilgrims still go to Santiago de Compostela. One of the brahmacharis of our Greta Centre Vedantique made the trip by bicycle. And those who like to hike with a pack on the back and camp along the route have rekindled the custom of making the journey (or at least part of it) on foot.

But of all the places where one goes to venerate the body of a holy person, to me the most attractive is Assisi. This small mountain town in central Italy is renowned for its associations with St. Francis, whose life so recalls that of Jesus. Years ago I asked the guidance of a wise European. 'Where', I asked, 'can one go in Europe where one will "feel something", as one feels something at Jagannath in Puri or at Vishwanath in Benares?' He promised me that I would feel something in Assisi, and

when subsequently I went there on pilgrimage, I did. It was joy that I felt—that's the only word—from the lower town where is situated the Portioncule (a small chapel around which the order of St. Francis began its life) to the old medieval fortress above the city—a vibration of joy. Others have spoken of the same.

Assisi is all built in rose-coloured stone, on the slope of Mont Subasio. Its tiny streets are bordered with ancient facades from which hang pots of flowers. The town, still encircled by the old walls, has hardly changed since the middle ages.

The story of St. Francis' life (1182-1226) is too well known to be repeated here. Suffice it to say that Francis had several visions of Christ and of the Virgin. It is said that one Christmas he organized a nativity pageant; and when he went to embrace the wooden doll in the manger that represented the newborn Babe, the infant Jesus came to life in his arms. Loving the wonder and beauty of nature, he preached love for all created things, animate and inanimate. An outstanding characteristic of St. Francis was gratefulness—an appreciation of God's grace, which he expressed in joyfully serving others. This is the Franciscan spirit which one encounters even today, not only in Assisi but in Franciscan monasteries the world over.

There are number of places associated with St. Francis which the pilgrim will wish to visit. The great church containing his tomb. A nearby church where is displayed the body of St. Claire, a disciple and friend and holy woman who founded a parallel order for women. My favourite is the Portioncule, where St. Francis died, which now forms the holy of holies of a great basilica built over it.

I cannot resist inserting an anecdote about Assisi which will seem pertinent to those who have chosen monasticism as their path. Swami Prabhavananda made a pilgrimage to Assisi in 1959. His guide to one of the

installations was a young Franciscan monk, recruited for the work of guide from the local Franciscan monastery. Swami Prabhavananda, interested to know something of the rule Franciscans followed, asked the young monk: 'Tell me, what austerities do you practice?' The reply, which the Swami enjoyed repeating with a knowing look, was: 'Community life'.

One could make a very long list of other sites in Europe where pilgrims have gone, or go, to venerate the body of those they consider saintly. For example, Vezelay, in central France, reputed to house the relics of yet another follower of Jesus, Mary Magdalene. In recent years pilgrims have begun to make their way to Nevers, not far from Vezelay, to pray before the body of St. Bernadette. Equally at Lisieux in north-western France, to visit the tomb of St. Teresa of the Infant Jesus. And the burial place of the beloved Pope John XXIII at St. Peter's in Rome attracts continually increasing numbers of those who wish to solicit his grace.

I had an experience last year which gave me a taste of what the atmosphere must have been at pilgrimage localities during the middle ages. It occurred in Guatemala, where the peasants of today, in their simplicity and religious fervour, may be thought to resemble the common folk of Europe of a thousand years ago. In the ancient capital of Antigua there stands the church of St. Francisco. In a niche in the wall of the nave is the burial place of the 17th century Pedro Bethacourt, considered a saint by the people of Guatemala. It is believed that wishes made at Pedro Bethacourt's tomb will be granted. It being a Sunday, the square before the church was a busy marketplace, and in the church one found crowds of pious Amerindians on their knees, praying, telling their beads, and lighting candles. There was a considerable line of people waiting to kneel before the tomb of Pedro Bethacourt. I joined the line,

reflecting on what petitions must be close to the hearts of these humble people : perhaps a barren woman praying for a baby, a man thinking the saint might help him find a job, a girl hoping for a husband, a sick person desirous of healing, an old woman praying for a holy death. The sweetly curious aspect is that it is the practice to rap three times on the grill protecting the tomb before expressing one's wish, to attract the saint's attention! As in my turn I knocked, I sensed the age-old faith of the pilgrim : he is there, and he will help.

Relics. There were not enough whole bodies of saints to fill the demand, so one had to make do with lesser relics. These may be parts of the body of a saint : a bit of bone, some locks of hair, cuttings from the fingernails, or clothing or other objects used by the revered person. The objective of the pilgrim was to draw close to the Ideal in the presence of something closely associated with him or her. The crowds before Sri Ramakrishna's relics displayed at Belur Math on his birthday express the same aspiration.

In the Middle Ages those in charge of pilgrim centres vied with one another to have and to display the most remarkable relics possible, for the pilgrim 'business' was lucrative. Competition ensued as to who possessed the most remarkable relics. Crowds gaped at the following, all purported to be genuine : Mary's wedding ring, a feather from the wing of the Archangel Gabriel, Jesus' navel, some drops of Jesus' blood. Relics having to do with the Virgin Mary were always attractive to the pious ; many churches displayed a belt, a robe, a veil, a pair of shoes, a pair of gloves that had supposedly been worn by her—even drops of her milk. Pieces of the cross on which Christ had been crucified were popular, and as we know, King Louis XI of France built an entire church in Paris, the Sainte Chapelle, to house one

of the most splendid of all relics, the purported crown of thorns worn by Jesus at the time of his condemnation by Pilate. Even today we find learned discussions going on about the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin, the supposed burial cloth of Jesus, on which a likeness appears, perhaps of him.

As for the saints, there was such a demand for their relics that the body was sometimes dismembered with, for example, one arm going to one sanctuary and one to another. These were displayed in gorgeous reliquaries of crystal and gold. But less credulous observers began to notice that if all such relics were genuine, some popular saints must have had arms or heads or other members much in excess of the customary number !

The Church tried to regulate such abuses, but the traffic in relics became so scandalous, and the competing claims so preposterous, that by the 16th century the question of relics was one which helped launch the Protestant reformation.

Images. The adoration of images had its place in Christian worship, and famous images attracted pilgrims. Even today we see that this trend continues, as we watch the crowds praying before the Virgin of the Pillar at Chartres, kneeling before the statue of the Immaculate Conception above the grotto at Lourdes, or embracing the figure of St. James the Elder above the high altar at Santiago de Compostela.

Among the most popular images have been, and are, what are called the Black Madonnas. There are several dozen of these in France, several in Germany, and at least one in Switzerland. There is no doubt that these representations of the Mother and Child have attracted fervent homage for centuries. Of the many Black Madonnas in existence today only a few are believed to be authentic—that is to say, to have come down intact from the far past ; many presently enshrined in chapels and churches

appeared in historical times or are recent copies of ancient images lost or destroyed.

The Black Madonna is a statue of Mary, usually seated, holding Jesus in her arms or on her knees. She has a noble, almost impersonal look on her face. The Child faces the world in wonder (as well He might!). Mother and Child generally wear crowns. The images are usually small, rarely more than seventy centimetres (two and a half feet) in height. That at Rocamadour in southwestern France—a famous pilgrim site for a thousand years—is even smaller. The figures are carved of wood. Crown, jewels, and clothing are touched with reds, yellows, and blues. But the peculiarity of the Black Madonnas is that the face and hands of the Mother and Child are black—a strange colouring in a part of the world where clarity of complexion is seen as a mark of beauty. (In eastern Europe Black Madonnas are venerated in the form of icons. We remember, for example, that in June, 1980, Pope John-Paul II presided over a vast gathering at Czestochowa, in Poland, where in the sanctuary of Jasna Gora is enshrined a celebrated icon of Black Madonna, regarded as the patroness and protector of the nation.)

Many legends concern the ancient Black Madonnas, that they came from the East (it is true that some have an oriental look, and some wear turbans), that they were never fabricated but emerged from the ground or from springs fully made (like the so-called *svayambhu* [self-born] *lingams* found in different parts of India), and that they have a 'mind of their own', with special preferences for certain shrines over others.

This is a complex subject to which, in France, many articles and several books have been devoted. We shall touch on the subject briefly in speaking of two celebrated Black Madonnas, called Notre Dame-sous Terre at Chartres and Our Lady of Hermits at Einsiedeln in Switzerland.

One of the foremost pilgrimage destina-

tions in France is the cathedral at Chartres. So it has been for ages and so it is today. Foreign friends visiting the Centre Védantique Ramakrichna in Gretz often set aside a day while in France for going to Chartres and back. The American Express company runs conducted tours from Paris several times a week. Why do people go to Chartres so enthusiastically today? Some go to see the famous stained glass windows, some for religious reasons; many report that there is a wonderful atmosphere in the great edifice. But I think that the principal motivation is to honour those of the past who contributed to the construction of such a work of art, and to experience vicariously the spiritual intensity of those who built so magnificently as a means of expressing their faith. Chartres is no doubt a triumph of Gothic architecture; but more so, it is a triumph of religious fervour.

In his *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* Henry Adams quotes a letter written in 1145 describing the spirit of devotion with which people participated in the construction of the Chartres cathedral. The quarries from which the building stone came were ten kilometres away, and all materials had to be dragged on carts.

Who has ever seen!—who has ever heard tell . . . that powerful princes of the world, that men brought up in honour and wealth, that noble men and women, have bent their proud and haughty necks in the harness of carts, and that like beasts of burden they have dragged to the abode of Christ these wagons. . . . When they have reached the church they arrange the wagons about it like a spiritual camp, and during the whole night they celebrate the watch by hymns and canticles.

Like many other churches in Europe, Chartres appears to have been built on the emplacement of a previous pagan (Celtic or Druidic) place of worship. There is today in the crypt a deep well dating back to Gallo-Roman times which seems to explain the origin of the original sanctuary—another case of 'holy waters'. It is thought that the

well always had a religious character and attracted worshippers even before the coming of Christianity. It is said that the first converts to the faith of Jesus were martyred there and their bodies thrown in the well. Later pilgrims drank from the well, feeling that they were absorbing holy influences from those courageous souls, their religious forebears, who had made the supreme sacrifice ages before.

Chartres has always been, in the words of Henry Adams, the abode—or more correctly the royal palace—of the Queen of Heaven. Of course no physical relics of Mary are there displayed, as according to the belief in the assumption of Mary—that she ascended physically to heaven at her death—none could exist. The traditional link with the Virgin is the presence at Chartres since 876 of what was long called a tunic (actually a piece of silken veil) that she is believed to have been wearing at the time of the Annunciation. This relic has attracted a great surge of pilgrims over the centuries. Kept in a jewelled reliquary, it was the principal attraction of the cathedral. This 'holy tunic' can be seen to this day in the treasury of the church.

In effect, there are two Black Madonnas at Chartres. The image on the ground floor dates from about 1510. She is called the Virgin of the Pillar, since she is elevated on a single stone shaft. She has a reputation of being a miracle worker, and one finds always many pilgrims praying before her in the flare of numerous candles.

But the Black Madonna that interests us more is she who is enshrined in the crypt below the high altar, near the ancient well. She is called Notre Dame-sous-Terre, Our Lady below Ground. Various legends explain her origin, and some even hold that she predates the Christian period in France. It is the type of figure I have described above, a primitive seated Mother with Child on her knees. The present image, carved in dark, unpainted walnut, is a modern copy

of the ancient image destroyed in the Revolution in 1789. Many conjectures bear on these Black Madonnas. Why, for example, their curious oriental appearance. Why is the colour of their skin so unaccountably black?

Jacques Huynen, in his book *L'Enigme des Vierges Noires*, responds :

Thus our medieval sculptors in using in their design the colour black indicated in the clearest terms that the Black Madonna was for them at the same time the Christian Mary, the celtic earth goddess, and the Egyptian Isis, bringing these ideas all together in a profound representation of the feminine principle of the universe—the source of all earthly life, and at the same time the source of all religion and the source of the life of the soul.

Whether the medieval European mind actually thought of the Mother of Jesus in this fashion, conceiving of Mary as the Divine Mother of the Universe, or Shakti, this we cannot know. I have never seen any reasonable evidence showing that medieval European man thought along these lines, although it is true that Mary was as early as the 5th century defined officially by the Church as the Mother of God.

Some explain the black complexion very simply, that these Madonnas were carved from wood which darkened naturally with the passage of time. This is how Father Matthöus Meyer of Einsiedeln accounted for the skin colour of Our Lady of Hermits. Others claim that fumes from the candles burning before these images century after century darkened the features. Another has proposed the theory that the skin of the Virgin was deliberately coloured black (like the flesh tone of Mother Kāli) to distinguish her from an ordinary comely human mother. It was an iconographic technique applied by Europeans to set the Mother apart from humankind in the same way that Hindus added multiple arms to their deities to proclaim them other than mere mortal man.

This is a fascinating subject and one which may never be clarified to the satisfaction of all.

I would like to complete this discussion of images by referring to Our Lady of Hermits, a Black Madonna at Einsiedeln, Switzerland. This is a great monastery and church in a small city near Zurich. There are eleven yearly feast days celebrated there, the most important being the Feast of the Consecration of the Lady Chapel, on September 14. Last year I was among the thousands of pilgrims present on that day.

This day was enlivened in former times by parades, the enactment of religious dramas, minstrel shows, and the frequent firing of guns. Things are more restrained today, but still impressive. An early mass takes place at 6.30 a.m. The high mass at 9.30 is made splendid by the presence of many visiting priests, gorgeously vested, and an elaborate musical programme. Pilgrims are too numerous to take communion at the altar, so priests go out into the congregation delivering the Host, which people receive in the mouth, reverently kneeling, or in the hand. Vespers is at 4.00 in the afternoon. A great procession forms at night, in which the Host in its glittering monstrance is carried in pomp around the square before the church illuminated by innumerable vigil lights, to the exultant pealing of bells from the twin towers and the full-voiced singing of the pilgrims.

Long ago the place was covered in deep forest. In the 800's there arrived a hermit whose name was Meinrad. ('Einsiedeln' means hermitage.) This hermit's cell soon became a centre of monastic activity which in the years to come blossomed forth into the great community we find today of Benedictines. The fathers now have several branches outside Switzerland. They carry on educational work. The present abbot is the fifty-seventh in the succession, and there are about two hundred members in the community.

After St. Meinrad's death his relics were venerated, and today his skull, set on a golden base and encrusted with jewels, is exposed on festive days in a niche just below the Virgin in the Lady Chapel. Tradition has it that the enormous baroque church of today stands on the emplacement of Meinrad's cell. The original chapel was dedicated to the Redeemer. But during the 10th, 11th, and 12th centuries the monks became more and more devoted to the Virgin. The Black Madonna enshrined today was completed in the 16th century and is known as Our Lady of Hermits. The image is a noble late Gothic work of art, not quite four feet in height, from northern Switzerland or southern Germany. Mary is standing with the Babe in her arms. The image is made of wood and painted. The faces of the Mother and Child are said to have been painted originally in flesh tints, but they have gradually darkened and turned a silvery black.

Clad in gorgeous robes, which are changed according to the season, the Mother and Child dominate the sanctuary. The Mother carries a sceptre in her right hand; her left arm supports the Baby. Both wear tall jewelled crowns. With his right hand the Baby gives his blessing; in his left hand he holds a dove. Shooting out from behind the image are radiant flames which become golden clouds, and from these clouds, encircling the image, forming an aureole, dart gilt lightning bolts.

The first recorded miracle at Einsiedeln took place in 1338. By the 15th century Einsiedeln was celebrated all over Europe and was ranked among the leading pilgrimage destinations in Christendom. It is said that 230,000 pilgrims visited the shrine for the celebration of 14 September, 1446, a vast throng considering how thinly populated was the Europe of that epoch.

Daily before this lovely statue—in whose presence one undeniably 'feels something'—the monks of Einsiedeln chant the gra-

rious Latin hymn to the Mother, 'Salve Regina'. This has been done every afternoon for more than four hundred years. In this song mankind pours out its troubles and longings, asking the Mother for help. How reminiscent are these words of those of the 'Sri Sarada Devi Stotram' and all other hymns to Mother, sung from time immemorial :

Hail, O Queen of Heaven, Mother of compassion—
our life, our delight, our hope. Hail.
Children of Eve in exile, in our misery
we cry to Thee.
We are sighing after Thee, sighing and sobbing,
in this valley of tears.
O Thou our intercessor,
turn toward us Thy gracious regard.
And after this exile, make us behold Jesus,
the blessed fruit of Thy womb,
O compassionate one, O pure one, O dear Virgin
Mary.

And she does help, for why else should they come, and continue to come, century after century? Only God can know what inner changes have occurred here in the shadow of the Alps, and in countless other pilgrim sites—what rise of hope and faith, what birth of noble resolutions, what consolation and spiritual regeneration experienced as a result of the pilgrim's effort.

New pilgrimage sites. It should be noted that new pilgrimage destinations are continually establishing themselves. Where holy people have been born, or attained Truth, or ministered to others, or left their bodies—to such sites ordinary men and women, hungry for consolation, soon begin to come and continue to come.

Our age has seen the establishment in India of many new pilgrim localities having to do with Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and the direct disciples. Swami Vivekananda's passage in America produced such devotee destinations as the Vivekananda Cottage at Thousand Island Park and the Vivekananda House in South Pasadena. And in Europe devotees go to Mont-Saint-

Michel with more faith, joining those who have been going there to ask favours of the Archangel for more than a thousand years, because Vivekananda blessed the Mont with his presence in September of 1900. And they fold their hands reverently before the Leggetts' rented mansion at 6 Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, or sit awhile in the little mountain chapel, the Zur Hohen-Stiege, at Saas-Fee, Switzerland, where he offered flowers to the Mother in August, 1896, feeling blessed to be in the same place where such a being once was.

International traffic. The religious pilgrimage has now become internationalized. Brown and yellow faces are as common today at Lourdes as is the sight of school teachers from Chicago and plumbers from Madrid walking the ghats at Benares or labouring up the slopes to Gangotri. Some old sites are falling into disuse, while new sites, commemorating holy influences more significant to present needs and aspirations, are finding favour. The taste internationalizes, the expanse broadens, but the old motives prevail.

5. *Summary : value of pilgrimages*

When Sri Ramakrishna got back from the one long pilgrimage he took, in 1868 to Benares and Brindaban, he spoke a bit disparagingly of the experience : 'One who has it here (in the heart) has it there ; and one who has it not here has it not there, either. All that is there is here.' And from the highest standpoint that must be true. We understand that the sacred shrine we wear our feet out to get to is already in us. And yet, the *darshan* of that inner shrine is not so easy to obtain. Outer wonders and prodigies attract us. Besides, the life we live here below is made up of hours that must be filled in one manner or another. Making a pilgrimage is an action of a positive nature, bringing with it perhaps in addition some spiritual benefit. It may be more or

less a distraction, but at least it is a worthwhile distraction.

It is the body that goes on pilgrimages, a body made of matter. Behind the body we know so well there is another, called the subtle body, also made of matter but matter very subtle. This is the receptacle of all our karmas, of impressions from all actions. Every action we take, every thought we think, has its place in the subtle body, ready to fructify later on, for our good or for our impairment. Thus our present life is determined, as is determined what happens in the future. Thus each of us forms his own destiny.

For this reason, the pilgrimage can be justified as a means, innocent and interesting, to obtain *darshan*, to make beneficial impressions on the subtle body. If a religious pilgrimage is taken in the prescribed spirit, it helps us to a development where pilgrimages will no longer be necessary. The conquest of space will then be all of inner space the destination will be that pilgrimage destination which is purely lighted within, and the encounter will be the encounter we have been straining toward all our lives.

(Concluded)

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

THE SAVING CHALLENGE OF RELIGION: BY SWAMI BUDHANANDA. Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras 600 004. 1980. Pp. xv+272. Rs. 28.

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition has the uniqueness of contemporizing religious truths in terms of both the variables of dialectic and the invariable of experience. Whereas Sri Ramakrishna represented the centrality of direct perception in spiritual life, Swami Vivekananda, besides being an incomparable exemplar, himself, of this centrality, gave it firm bases in both traditional and modern dialectical patterns.

The resulting spiritual sensibility, unifying reason and revelation, *jñāna* and *vijñāna*, seems to have determined, also, the basic modalities of Ramakrishna Vedanta literature. First, there is the literature of the *philosophia perennis*. The *Gospel*, articulating with disarming simplicity and directness, the eternal truths of spirituality is, in this area, the generic archetype, the crest-jewel, of modern spirituality, illuminating, with uncanny subtlety, virtually every landmark of the Divine Ground. Second, we have the literature which relates the interior spiritual landscape to the dynamics of exterior, practical living. Swamiji's *Complete Works* is, doubtless, the defining mould of this genre.

Swami Budhananda's book, obviously, belongs to the latter category. It is a penetrating study of some of the most crucial problems that we face

in our life today. And the areas that the Swami explores in the eighteen essays that constitute the book, evidence a remarkably comprehensive range. Beginning with the 'Saving Challenge of Religion', the Swami takes us through several areas of contemporary concern, such as, notably, 'Religion in the Nuclear Age', 'The Challenge of Religion to Modern Man', 'Can one be Scientific and Yet Spiritual?' 'Youth, Dharma and the World', 'Sanctification—the Supreme Revolution', 'Good Life and Great Life' and 'Joy of the Illumined'.

The thematic variety achieves, however, a unifying focus in terms of the fundamental tenet of Ramakrishna Vedanta: faith in a totalizing, holistic approach to life. Therefore, the Swami begins the book—after providing a significant framework, through select passages from saints and sages, of the saving nature of religious challenge—with a trenchant analysis of the two strident voices that clamour for attention today and constitute an implicit challenge to the *samanvaya* spirit of Ramakrishna Vedanta. The first voice, the secular one, declares with enviable but essentially naive confidence: 'God is superfluous. We have developed ethics wherein God is redundant. We have worked out sciences wherein nature explains everything. Fool, matter is all that matters. God is bosh. Give up soft-headedness. Cultivate your brain!' This is, in effect, the collective voice of behaviourism,

instrumentalism and semantic positivism. They reduce the complexity of human psyche to observable, bodily and mental behaviour, correlate human intelligence and skill with the mechanics of experimental operations (the clock, the calendar and the computer representing the calculus of time and space) and debase the nature of every word—the Word of words, 'God' not exempted—to the level of verbal games of hypostatization.

The other voice is gentle, often bypassed if not stifled totally, but firm and insistent, reflecting the intensity of authentic experience: 'Listen, hearken, O children of immortality, who dwell in these celestial regions, I have *known* and *seen* and *experienced* that supreme spirit, who is beyond the darkness of all illusions and delusions. Only by knowing him does one pass over death; there is no other way to the Supreme Goal.' (emphasis added)

The implicit dichotomy between these two voices, says the Swami, relays itself on almost all the levels of life today: between 'the egocentric' and 'the cosmocentric' life styles; 'the dispossessed' and 'the possessed' representing respectively 'the bondage of indigence' and 'the bondage of affluence', 'the radical young' and 'the conservative old', 'the surface' and 'the depth' scientists, the mechanists and the mystics, reflecting 'the modern phenomenal perspective' and 'the classical spiritual perspective'.

The pathological outcome of these 'exclusive gospels', says the Swami, is often overlooked because there is also, alongside, an impressive 'collective awakening' everywhere, an awakening the Swami rightly holds, to be 'the result of the work of many sages, heroes and revolutionaries'. This creates a peculiar paradox: we have the materials requisite for awakening but we do not yet have viable modes of 'converting' this 'awakening' into 'individual betterment'.

The saving grace of religion lies precisely in this area: it gives modes of total 'transformation' by assigning 'socio-economic measures' their proper place in terms of the essential 'spiritual striving' of man. This can become viable only if necessary correctives are evolved for the dichotomous gospels of secularism and spirituality. For the alleged custodians of the spirit, religion should cease to confine itself to the dogma and crystallize itself around the nucleus of *anubhava*. Fundamentalist attitude towards imponderables such as sin must give way to realism and benevolence. 'The greatest need of the world', as the Swami says, 'is to see the whole life process of the entire mankind in perspective, to *correlate*

every effort of the movement towards ultimate freedom, and to order society in freedom, accordingly.' Implicit here is an enlarging of the frontiers of religion so that 'whatever is conducive to the all round development of man' becomes religion. Thus, the Swami cogently argues, if Russia makes a plea for nuclear disarmament it is not just a political strategy dictated by geopolitical interests. It is 'religion, but with an unfamiliar face', 'a face unlike itself', voicing 'the partial and unheeded intimations of the not sufficiently accentuated, the undefined religious impulse of humanity'.

In this sense 'all freedom movements everywhere in the world are movements of religion'. But, then, such a view can be a mode of release only, the Swami rightly cautions, 'so long as "these movements", truly seek the emancipation of man and not the ego-centric hegemony of a sect, party, or creed'. As such societies, particularly developing societies, planning desperately for regeneration, should remember that not only social evils themselves but also certain ways of ending these evils are self-destructive. As the Swami trenchantly puts it, 'even food going with freedom will not be enough for man, unless wisdom is also ensured. *Fat and free animals are not necessarily wise.*' (emphasis added)

Mistaking freedom,—social, economic, political—for transcending wisdom has been our recurrent tragedy. It has led, says the Swami, to the distortion of the three basic quests: 'the quest for immortality, emancipation and bliss'. Robbed of spiritual correlatives these have been dismissed as either fantasies stemming from (to use a phrase by Lovejoy) 'metaphysical pathos' or regarded as, at best, imaginative metaphoric counterparts of the 'real miracles' that science and technology perform with their incredible range of gadgets. But this dismissal and distortion has a deeper reason. It is due, as the Swami's brilliant analysis shows, to the essential dialectic that Vedanta has identified long ago: the dialectic of *Māyā*, the mistaking of the *upādhi* for the 'real essence', the equating of *vibhūti* (the spiritual splendour of the *ātman*) for the streamlined brilliance of our chromium, stainless world. An overplus of *upādhis* (especially erotic ones) and technological *vibhūti* makes us equate robot-power with *ātma sakti*. This is the essential trap in which, as the Swami says, 'we have no way of knowing that we are not knowing. So what we know is no knowledge but not knowing even that we are not knowing'.

Out of this dialectical and existential 'blind' alley there is only one way: the way of the

illuminated. It is appropriate, therefore, that the book should end with a graphic discussion of the illumined, the nature of the joy imperishable that they experience.

In effect, with its impressive range, the subtlety and depth of its perception, and above all its sense of immediacy, *The Saving Challenge of Religion* is a book indispensable for anyone interested in contemporary patterns of life and thought.

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THE WORD AS REVELATION—NAMES OF GODS: BY SRI RAM SWARUP. Published by Impex India, 2/18 Ansari Road, New Delhi 110 002. 1980. Pp. 160. Rs. 75.

Words are the expression of the divinity in man. They enable him to conceptualize Reality in its entirety. About the origin of language various theories have been advanced, but the theory of divine origin is more convincing. God reveals the Word and creates the world out of it. The Grammarian's theory of *Sabda-Brahman* is the best formulation of language-reality relation. Whether words are divine revelations or human creations, one fact is clear that they relate man to reality. Without words human civilization would be reduced to animality.

Sri Ram Swarup, the author of the book under review, makes an admirable attempt to study human speech in relation to man's deeper psyche and religious consciousness. His discussions are lucid and touch upon several concepts of modern linguistics. Systematic study of the language of the older texts can lead us to communicate with the minds of our ancestors, which, otherwise, would be impossible. Although words, at times, conceal their true purport, they usually reveal the mind of the man to a large extent. Proper understanding of the ancient texts provides wider perspectives for our present as well as future course of action.

Concentration on some words procure unique power as well. The whole idea of *mantra* is based on this conviction. If words constitute the basic reality, the utterance of names or meditation upon them must produce the desired result. Recitation of names of gods provides the devotee an opportunity of communion with the deity. The author of the book is right in his stress on the theory of monotheism underlying the polytheism of Hindu religion, ancient and modern.

The work is a notable contribution to the

science of semantics in general and to Vedic exegesis in particular.

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University of Jabalpur.

SADHANAS FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE: Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras 600 004. 1981. Pp. xvi+166. Rs. 5.

This is an inspiring collection of essays which first appeared in the 1980 Special Number of the *Vedanta Kesari*. Though the essays are brief out of necessity, this collection serves two purposes. On the one hand, it provides its reader a wide range of religious disciplines from which to gainfully and intelligently choose what he needs to supplement his own spiritual practices. On the other hand, it serves to foster interreligious understanding.

There are two sections concerning Sadhanas in the Christian and Persian traditions. Sadhana in Islam has unfortunately not been dealt with. The Prologue, and the three sections containing well-arranged essential teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda have added immensely to the value of this book. 'Advaita Sadhana' (section 4) by Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan, and 'Sri Śankarachārya's Teachings on the Steps to Concentration' (section 9) by Swami Budhananda deserve special mention.

Simple in language, direct in treatment, almost totally free from the chaff of metaphysical speculations, this book is a valuable addition to the growing literature on spiritual life. We hope that the spelling errors will be eliminated in the next print.

SWAMI ATMARAMANANDA
Belur Math

UGU

VIJNANA SUDHA : BY V. B. SHANKARA RAO. Published by Vajhu Jaganmohana Rao, Indian Bank, Machilipatnam 521 001. 1981. Pp. 102. Price not mentioned.

This book is a modern attempt to bridge religion and science. The book is divided into four chapters with many sub-headings. The first chapter under the caption 'Atmacarita' explains briefly and directly many philosophic terms like avyakta, sat-padārtha, etc. The author does not aim to bring out the thought of any system of Hindu philosophy in a uniform way, but presents a flower vase of stray thoughts on religion and science. Though this small volume is of little

help as an advanced course, it will certainly be a source of inspiration and interest to those who intend to know the basic tenets of Hinduism in general perspective. The language is simple and the style and flow of words prove the author's

ability to wield the pen effectively. Though an 'Errata' is supplied at the end, still some printing mistakes remain unnoticed.

SWAMI TARAKESHANANDA
Mayavati

NEWS AND REPORTS

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

[We are giving below a synopsis of the Governing Body's Report on the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission for the year 1980-81, issued by the General Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, on 26 January, 1982—*Ed.*]

Under the chairmanship of Swami Vireswarananda, the President of the Ramakrishna Mission, the 72nd Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at the Belur Math premises at 3.30 p.m. on Sunday, the 24th January, 1982.

The Governing Body's Report for 1980-81, placed before the meeting, is given below. Notwithstanding several difficulties and problems cropping up in some of the Mission institutions, our dedicated workers remained true to their ideals and steadfastly carried on the selfless services of the Mission including strenuous relief and rehabilitation programmes in places devastated by flood, cyclone, drought and such other calamities.

During the period under report a sum of Rs. 69,55,267/- was spent by the Mission towards Flood Relief in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Orissa and West Bengal; Cyclone Relief in West Bengal; Drought Relief in Bihar, Rajasthan and West Bengal; Disturbance Relief in Assam and Tripura; Medical Relief at Sagar Mela in West Bengal; Earthquake Relief in Nepal; usual Relief Work in Bangladesh such as distribution of milk, food-stuff, clothings and medical assistance; and Rehabilitation Work in West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat. Besides, different gifts valued at Rs. 49,26,276/- were distributed among the needy people of these areas.

During this year the Math and the Mission did considerable Pallimangal (Integral Rural Development) work for economic self-reliance for the villagers through Agro-Economic Service, Pisciculture, Crafts, Schools, and several Mobile Dispensaries.

Besides Relief and Rehabilitation Work the following new developments took place during the

year: A new Arogya Bhavan Block at Belur Math; Two Mobile Dispensaries, one at Raipur, and the other at Kamarpukur (under Pallimangal Project conducted by the headquarters); Medical Service Van at Vrindaban; a School Library Building at Malda; and a Braille Library Building at Narendrapur were inaugurated.

A Universal Sri Ramakrishna Temple, Vivekananda Institute of Education and Culture and a Vivekananda Health Centre at Hyderabad; Swami Vivekananda Centenary Auditorium at Bangalore; Sri Ramakrishna National School Building at Madras; a Library Building and Vivekananda Hall at Tiruvalla; two new Math Centres, one at Lucknow and another at Kankhal; and also a Homoeopathic Dispensary at Dinajpur in Bangladesh—were declared open.

In addition to the above, the Mission conducted 9 Indoor Hospitals which served 35,336 patients, and 62 Outdoor Dispensaries which treated 39,44,973 cases, and 761 Educational Institutions which had 92,772 students.

The Mission's sister Institution the Ramakrishna Math, had 7,549 students in its 28 Educational Institutions and Hostels, and served 5,97,471 patients through its 23 Hospitals and Dispensaries.

341 Educational Institutions and 48 Medical units including Mobile Dispensaries, and Libraries were conducted, and various Economic Programmes were implemented in Rural and Tribal areas.

A Week-long International Convention of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math in December, 1980. Over 14,000 Delegates from different parts of the country and abroad participated in it.

Excluding the Headquarters at Belur, the Mission and the Math had respectively 75 and 66 Branch Centres spread throughout the world.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Rural Reconstruction—the Basic Proble

Although India has made spectacular progress during the post-independent period in several sectors like education, agriculture, industry, science and technology, it still continues to be one of the poor countries of the world. One main reason for this is the inertial drag of the villages, where live 70% of the population, on the nation's economy. Without massive rural development work this country cannot attain overall economic prosperity. Anyone who cares to study rural development work in India cannot fail to notice three things :

1. Left to themselves, the villagers are unable to improve their lot ; they need external help.

2. The help that the Government is extending to villages is not benefiting all sections of society equally.

3. Economic changes, especially when brought about through Government agencies, create tensions among different sections of the village community converting villages into battle grounds for caste war, class war and party war.

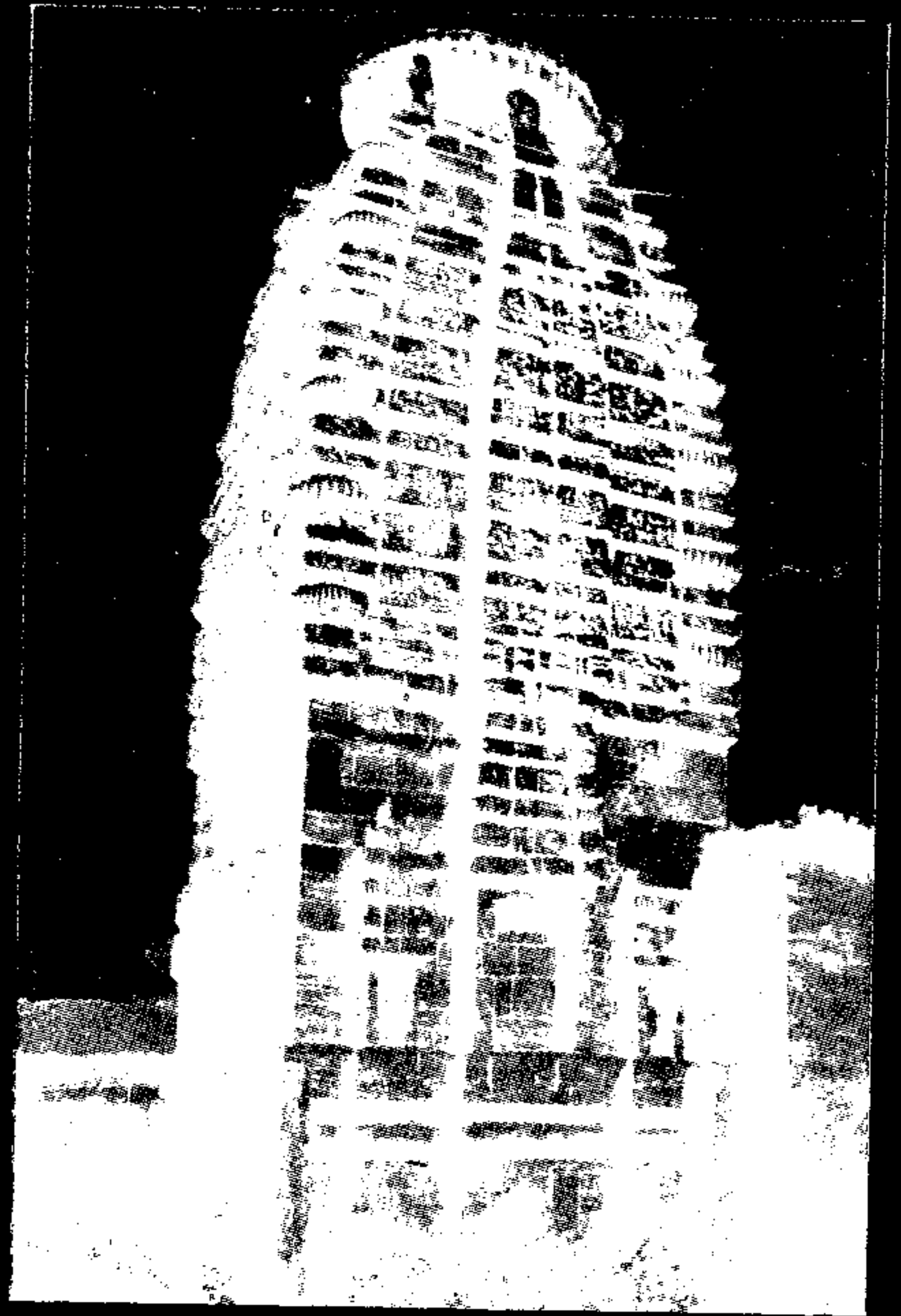
Though Gandhian economy was abandoned by the Government soon after Independence, it continues to exert a powerful influence on the Government's economic policies, planning and social welfare schemes. The pertinent question here is why the Gandhian way of rural development has failed in India. In his famous book *Asian Drama* Gunnar Myrdal, the internationally known economist and sociologist and Nobel laureate, attributes its failure to its inability to overcome the basic inequalities in Indian society. 'But all these efforts to create machinery for self-government, cooperation, and popular participation without changing the basic social and economic structures are essentially attempts to bypass the equality issue', he says. 'And this attempt to evade the problem of inequality is in large part responsible for the failure of these reform policies.' D. R. Gadgil in *Economic Policy and Development* holds that the failure of Gandhiji's approach 'lay essentially in not recognizing the need for thoroughly demolishing the older institutional and class forms before a new synthesis could be attempted.'

It cannot be denied that the Government is doing a lot towards village uplift. But paradoxically, these efforts usually benefit those who are already better off than most. The Government official 'is not sent out to start a revolution on behalf of the Government, but to accomplish something practical', points out Myrdal. 'To do this, he naturally deals with the propertied class and the dominant castes. He can work with them, and they are more receptive, since they stand to gain most from his efforts. It is equally logical that the lowest classes consider him to be only a Government agent in no fundamental sense one of their own.'

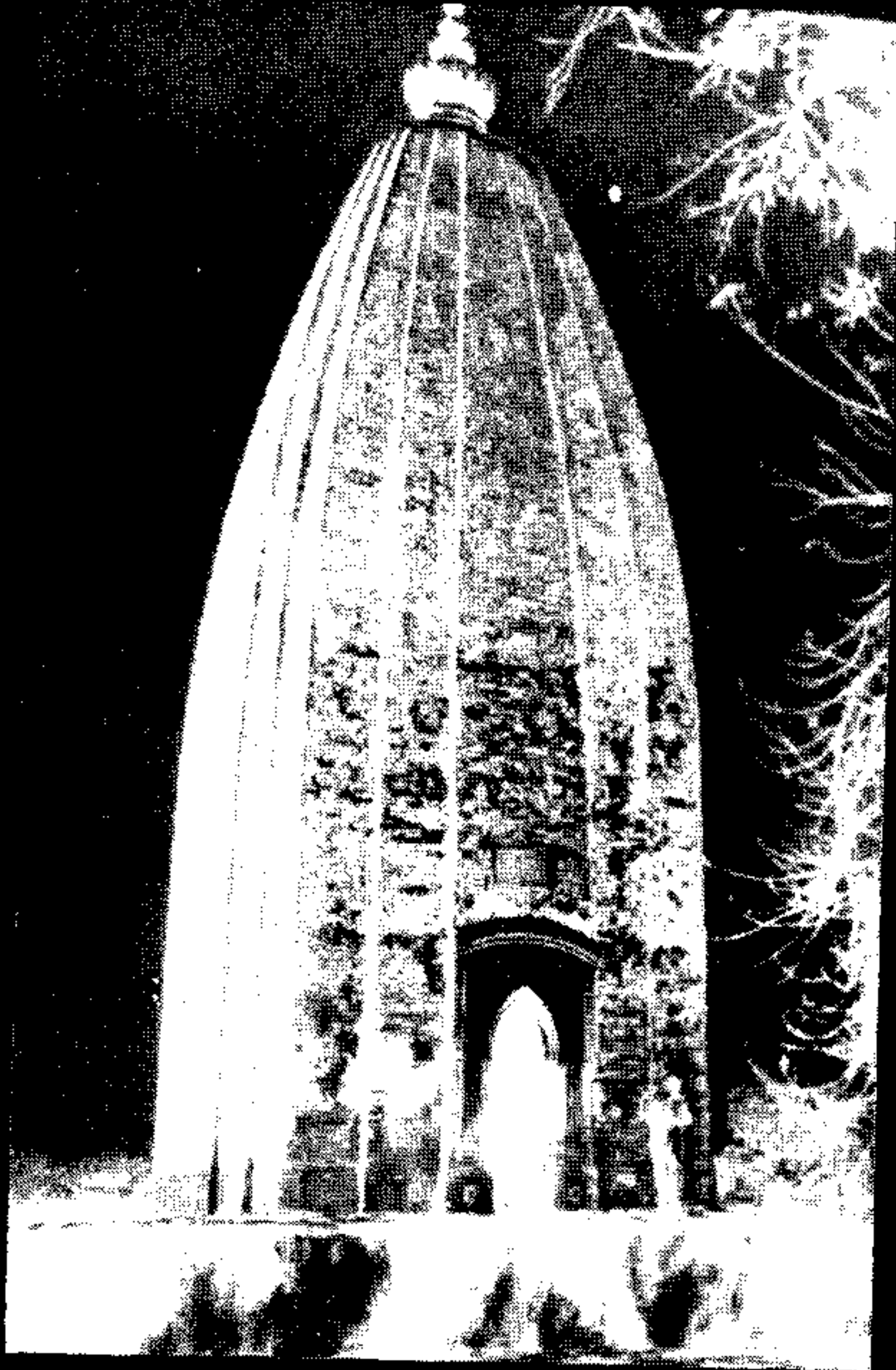
The conclusion therefore is that rural uplift measures attempted without simultaneous efforts to break down the existing inegalitarian institutional barriers are not likely to produce the desired effect. This means that village integration must precede, or go hand in hand with, economic uplift, and for this it is necessary to bring about basic changes in the outlook, beliefs and ideas of villagers. This is the fundamental problem of rural reconstruction. (Its solution will be briefly discussed in this column in the next issue.)



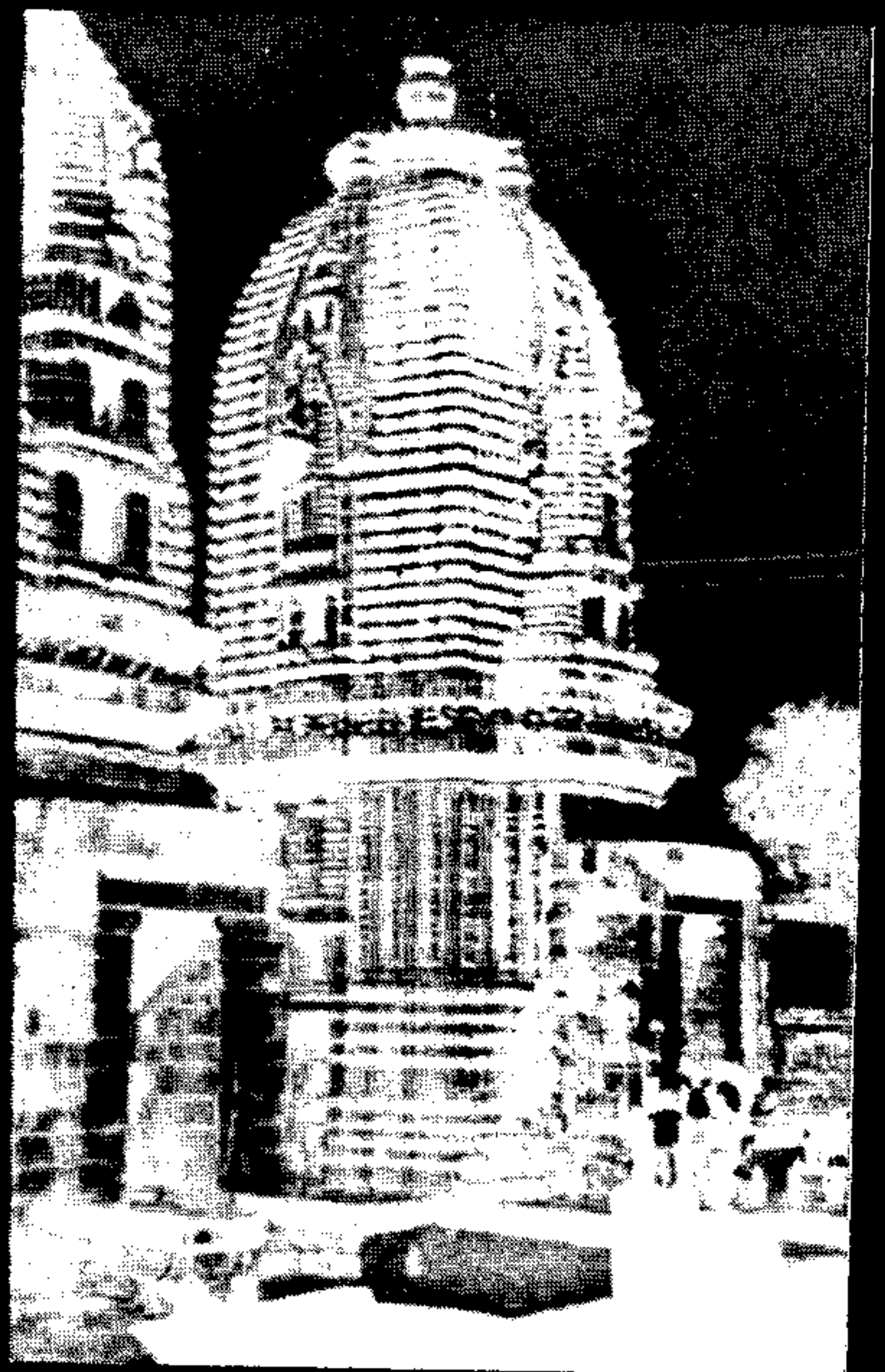
Manasa-than, Deshra



Shiva-temple, Barakar



Shiva-temple, Bhandirvan



Shiva-temples, Barakar



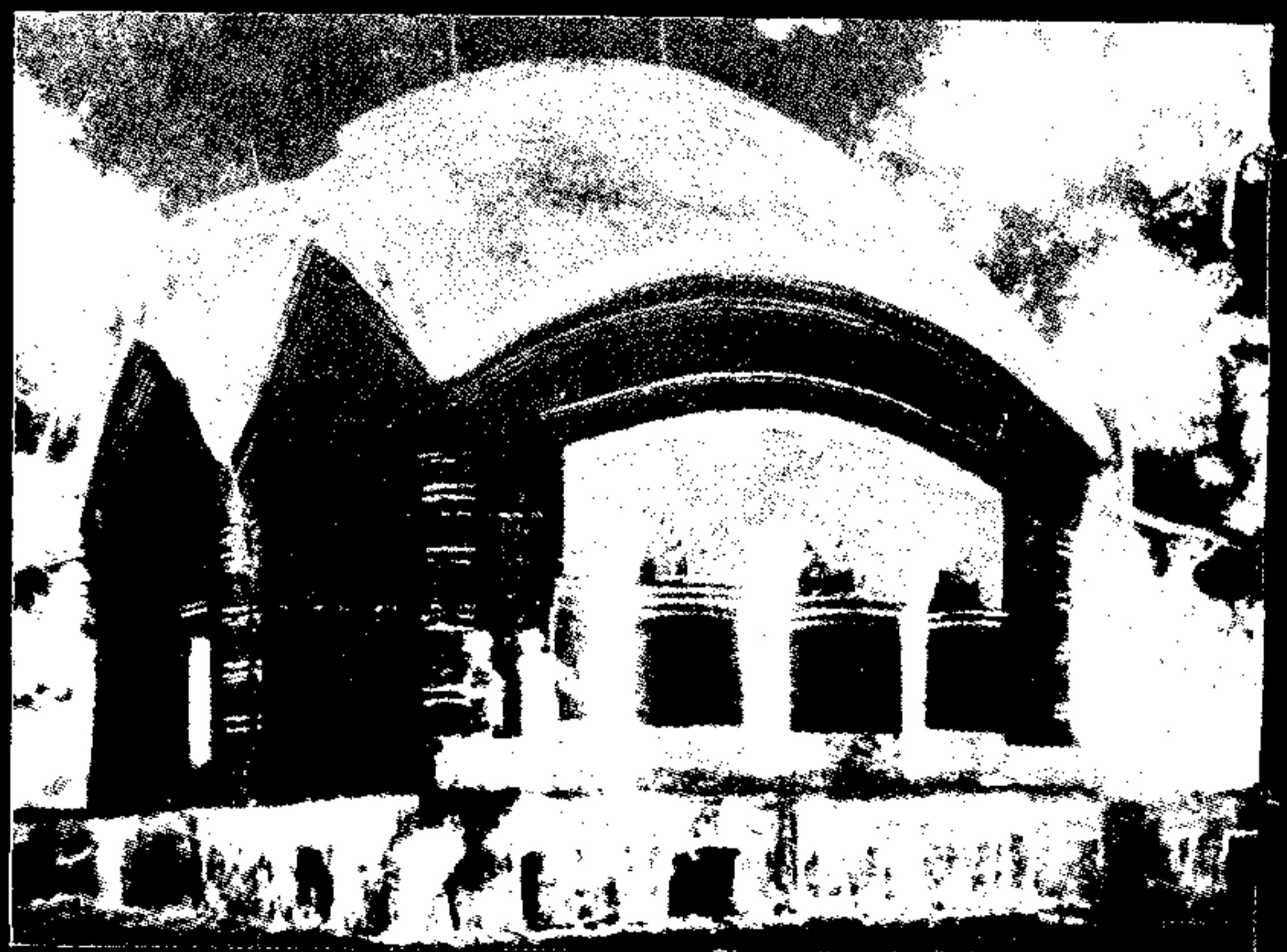
Shiva-temple, Kumardihi



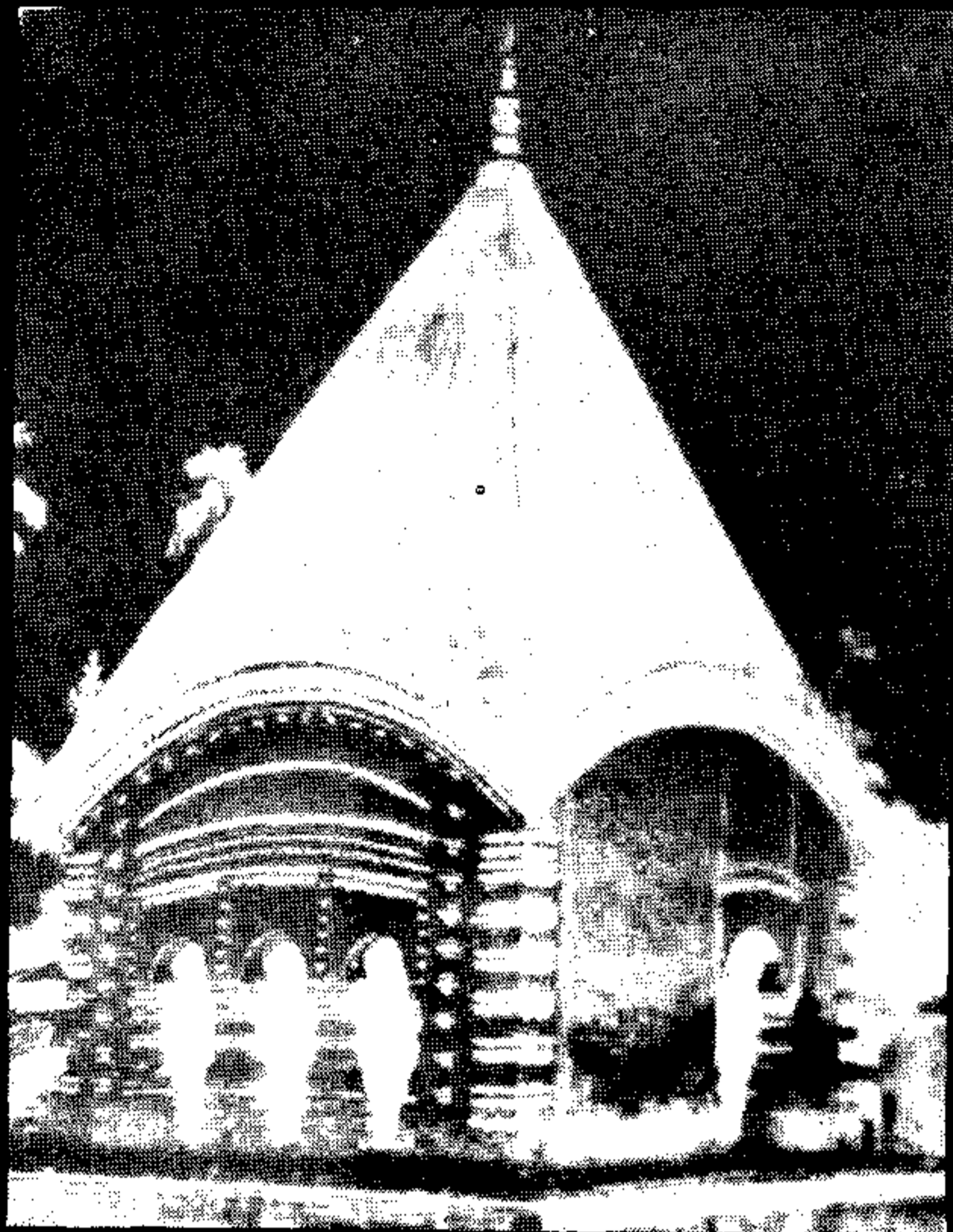
Krishna-temple, Datan



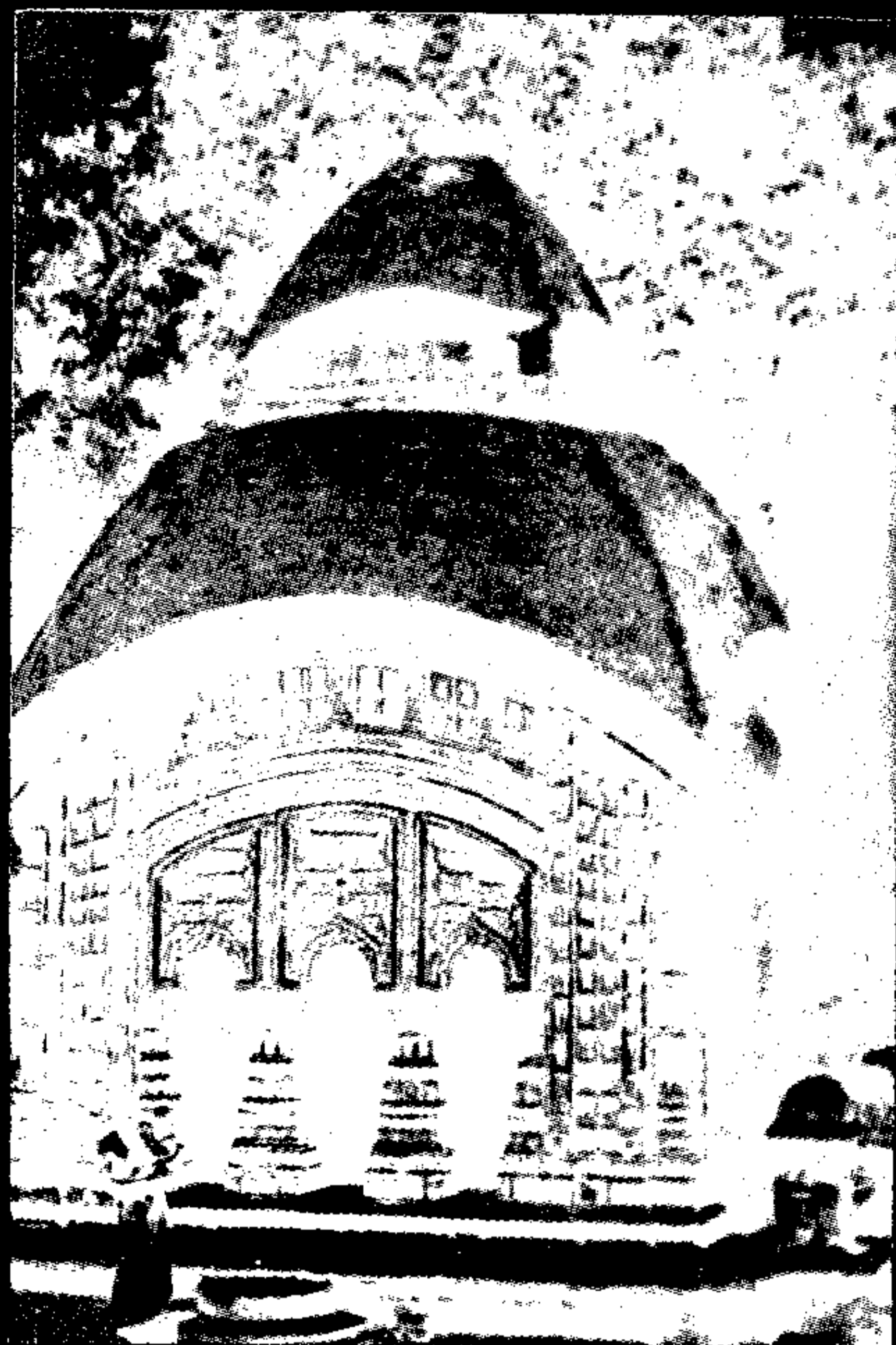
Ek-bangla temple, Handial (Bangladesh)



Vishalakshi-temple, Senet



Krishna-temple, Putia (Bangladesh)



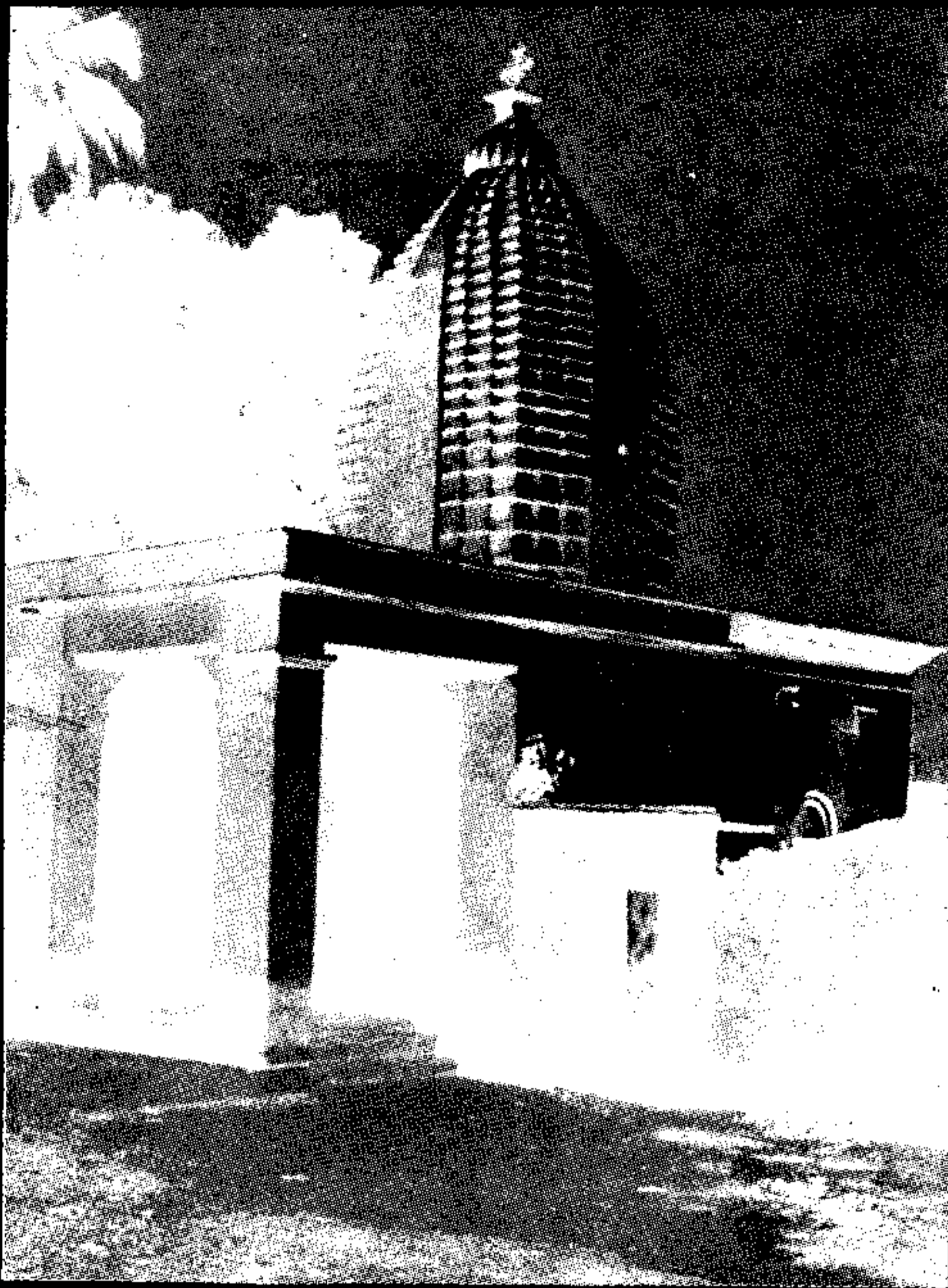
Vishnu-temple, Jhikira



Durga-temple, Sukharia



Terracotta art, Bankura



Chaitanya (Gour-Nitai) temple, Kulia



Ramakrishna-temple, Purulia

[THE RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGE IN EUROPE
PHOTOS—Order of arrangement and legends.]

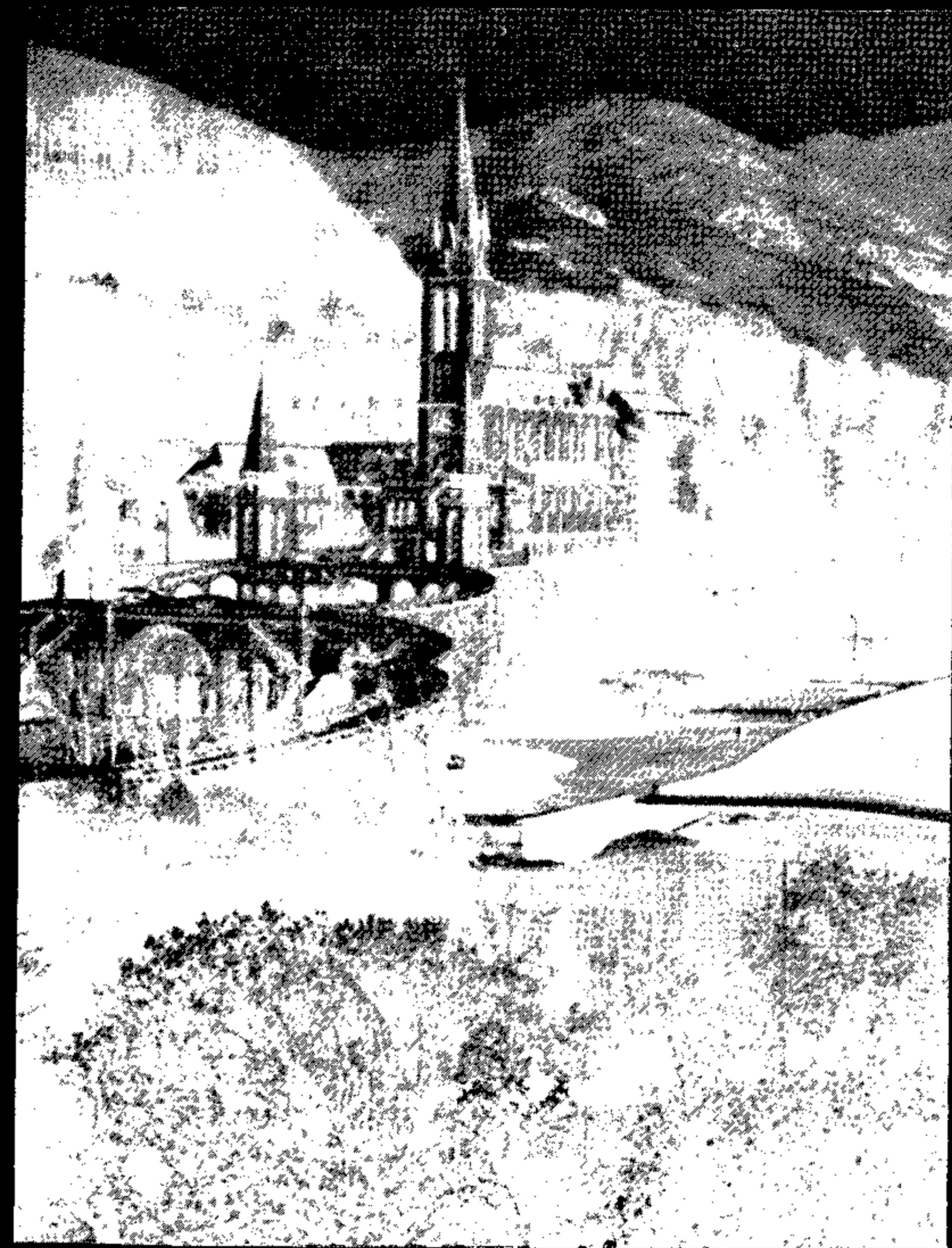


A Pilgrim,
15th century

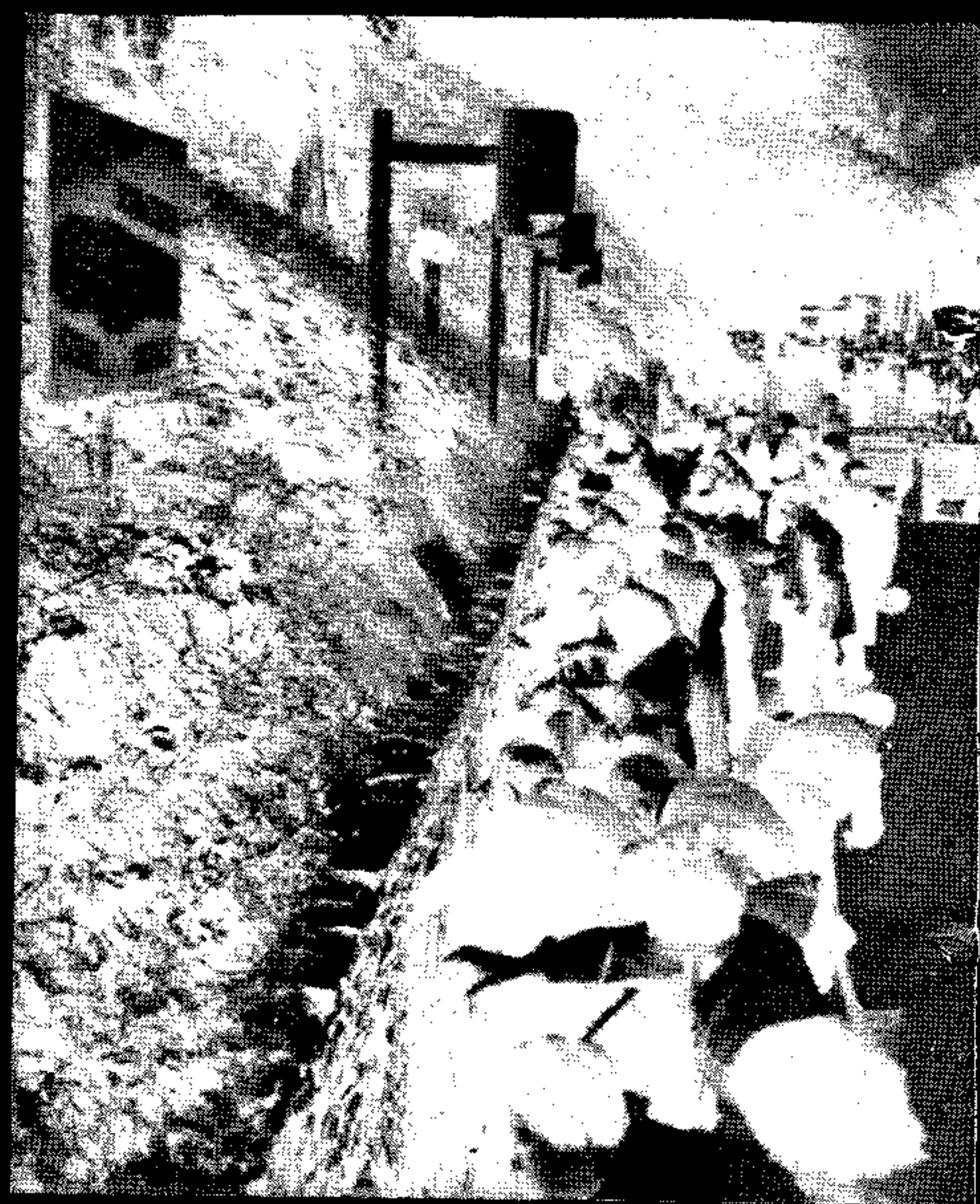
St. James the
Elder, statue
from the church
of Santiago de
Compostela,
Spain. Note the
staff and the
cockleshell on
hat and coat.



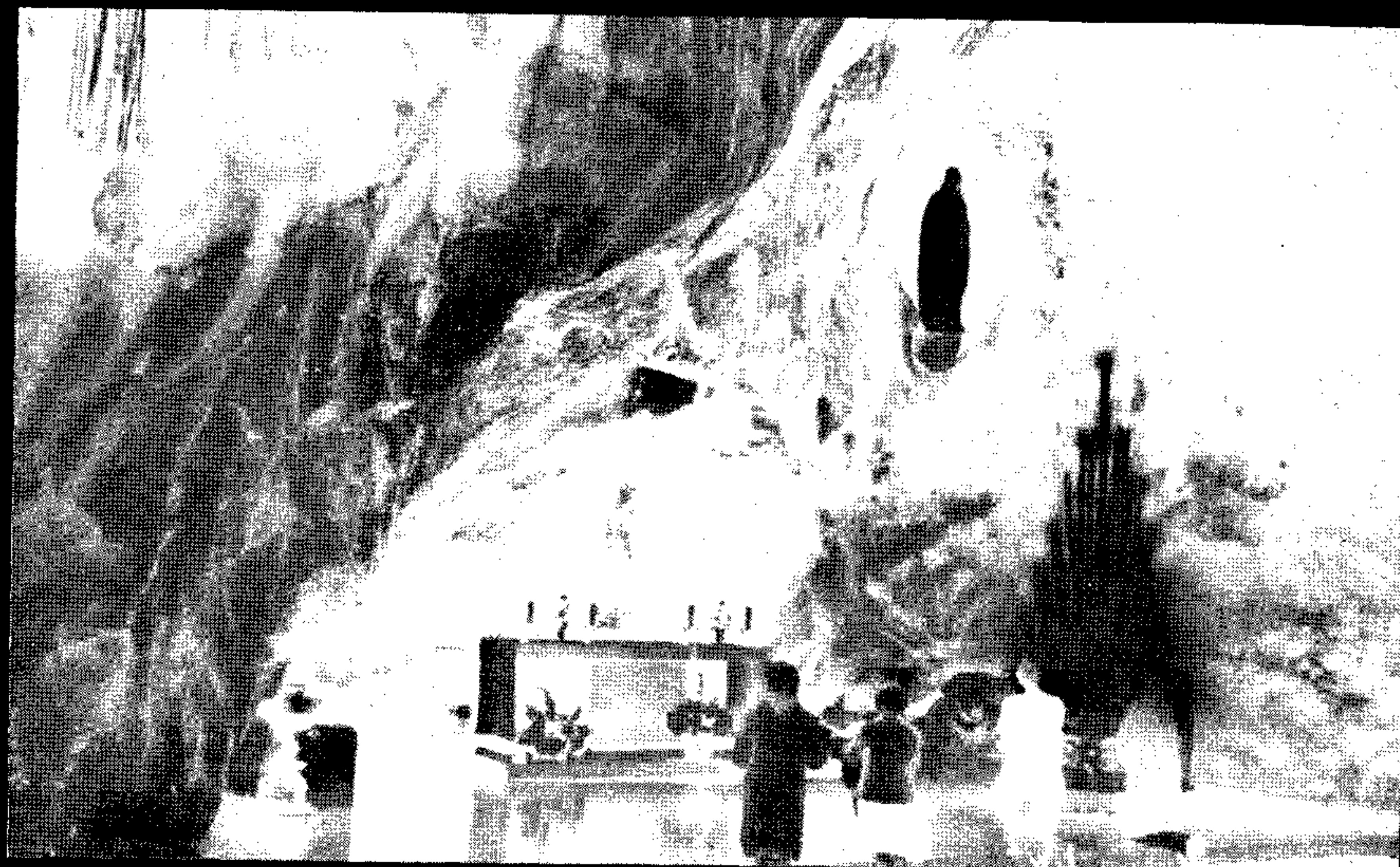
Lisieux, France: statue of St. Therése of the Infant Jesus, and basilica
where her body is entombed.



Lourdes ; the basilica and the river Gave. The Grotto is visible at the base of the church.



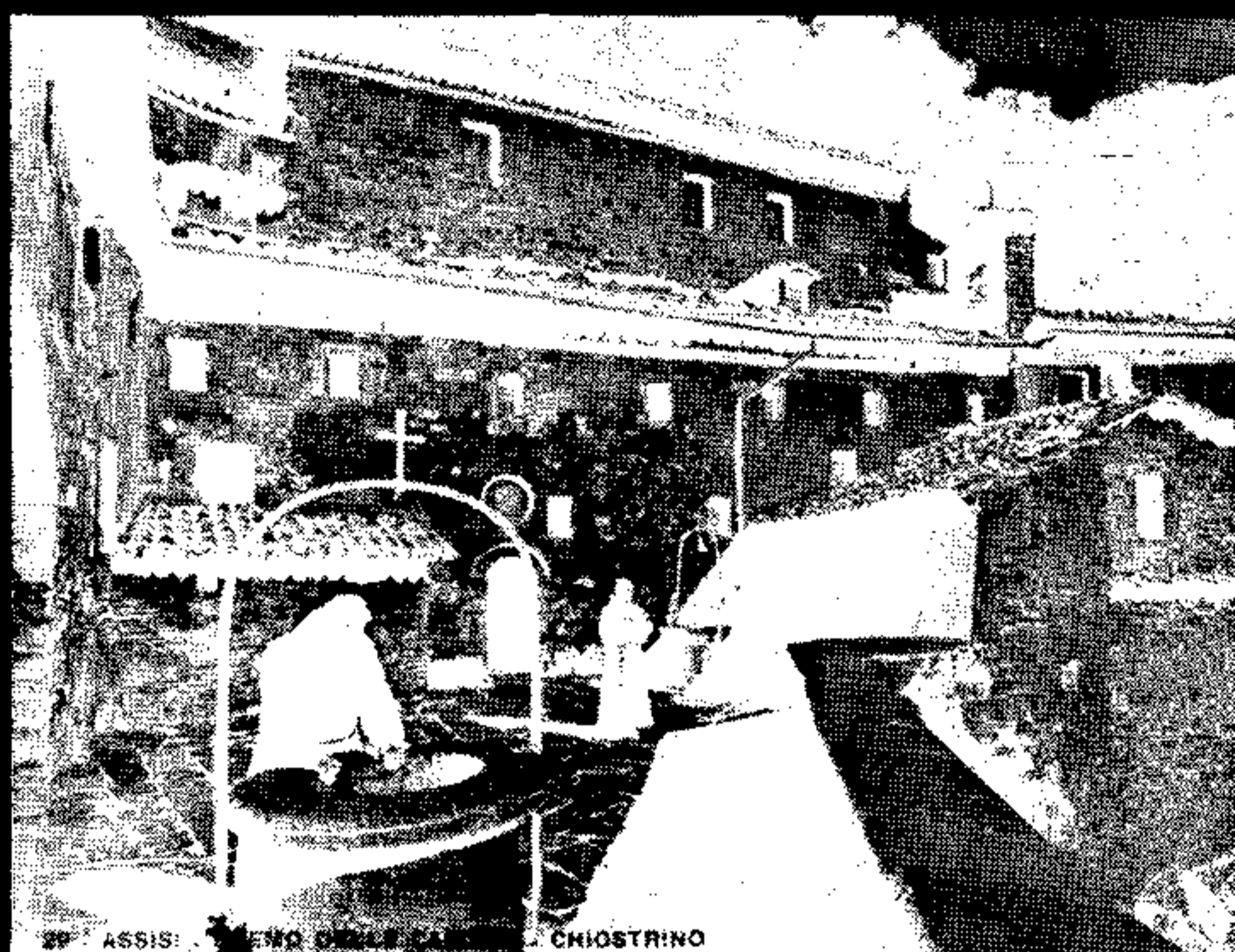
Lourdes : pilgrims drinking Lourdes water and filling containers.



Lourdes : the Grotto



Assisi, Italy.



Assisi: Franciscan monks of the Prison House (carceri) where St. Francis got the stigmata.



Assisi: the Portioncule, inside the basilica of St. Marie of the Angels where Francis and his early followers lived.



Assisi: Fresco by Giotto on the wall in the Basilica of St. Francis. The scene shows the father of Francis snatching away his worldly clothes and the bishop covering the saint with his cloak.



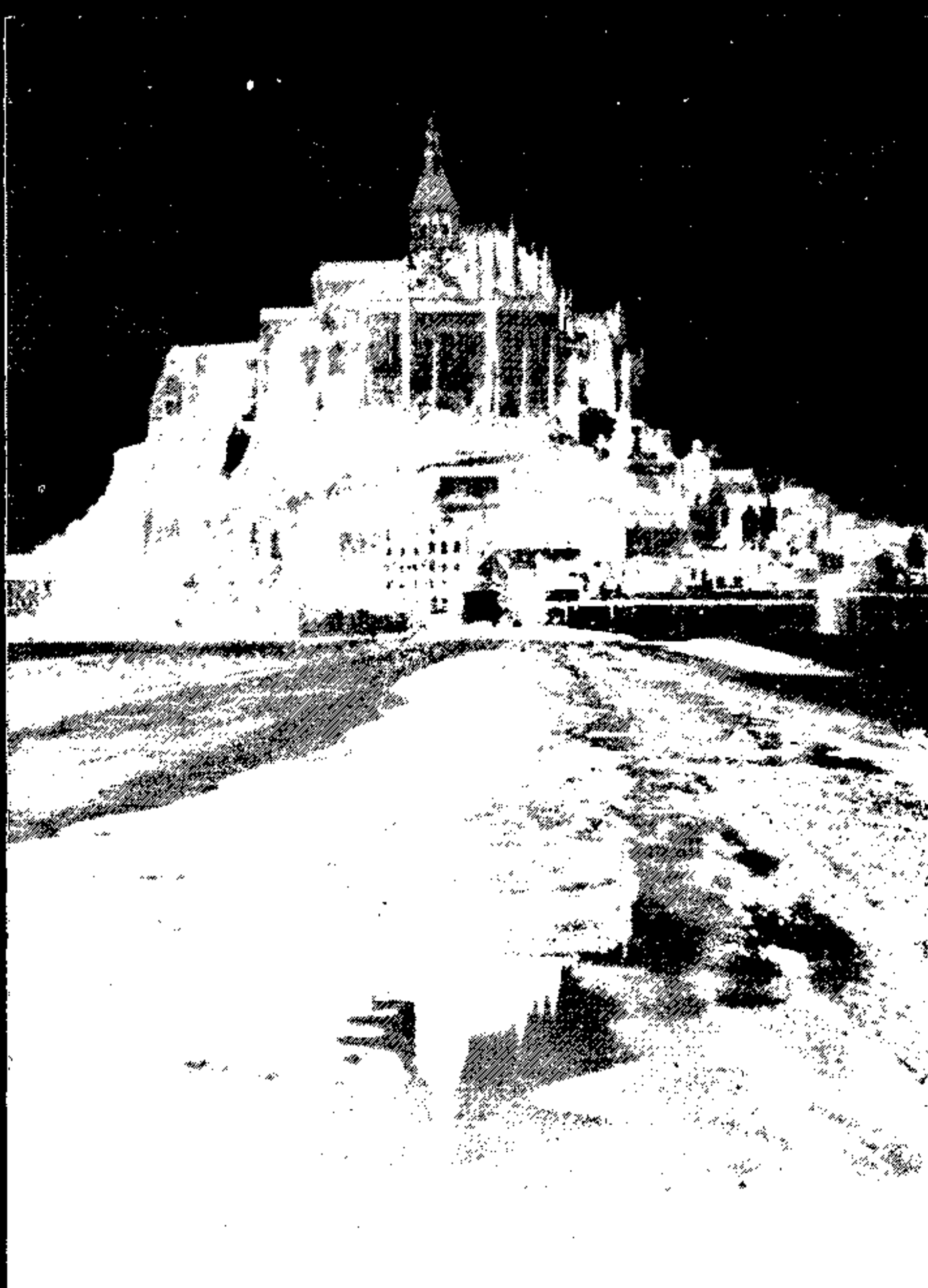
Chartres cathedral, France.



Chartres: Our Lady Below-Ground.



Einsiedeln (Switzerland), Black Madonna and Child, without ceremonial robes.



Mont St. Michel, France.