

5. Sweeping the Road Ahead: The Hindu Darshan Bus Tour

Two round trips, traversing measurable and immeasurable spaces, lie ahead. The first journey is a loop, from Mehru village in landlocked Rajasthan to the Lord Jagdish¹ of Puri and the sea—and back. The second is a conceptual exploration of equally circular passages: between inner and outer deity, inner and outer devotion, inner and outer wandering. Through these two peregrinations I investigate in two ways the rationale of *yātrās* made neither particularly to obtain boons nor to sink the bones of the dead: first, descriptively, by telling the story of one trip; second, interpretively, by attempting to elucidate pilgrims' motivations for and understandings of such human journeys to divine powers.

In the two preceding chapters I have shown how the articulated desires of pilgrims traveling to regional shrines, and to the Ganges with flowers, are closely linked to their aspirations within this current life cycle, and acutely tuned to social and domestic pressures. Here, in dealing with still a third style of *yātrā*, and continuing to draw largely on interview statements and texts from oral tradition, the focus is on another set of values. These are connected, although most often indirectly, with the life aim of *moksha* in the sense of total liberation.

Another way of construing *moksha*, as "peace" (*śānti*) for the dead, in the context of sinking flowers, was considered in the preceding chapter. During the *darshan yātrā*, however, I believe that *moksha* is understood as the highest human aim: union with God, perfect realization of the identity of soul and supreme being, final release from *samsāra*'s flux. Evidence that bus tour pilgrims had

1. No one among Ghatyalians nor any of my fellow pilgrims ever used the name Jagannath to refer to the Lord at Puri. Everyone said "Jagdish," and throughout these pages I follow the local custom.

such a set of meanings in mind is in part their staunch denials of hoping to attain this *moksha*. A peaceful death with appropriate rites, which does not result in lingering as an unhappy ghost, is, on the contrary, an explicit aspiration held by most persons.

Many pilgrims conceive of the "road of *dharma*" (*dharmaṛāṣṭā*, a common term for the pilgrim's way) not as directly approaching the higher, ineffable *moksha*, not far less as gaining it, but at least as preparing for it. Everyone accepts as given that a supreme deity resides not only beyond all beings but within each. If a person can divest himself of excess belongings—both goods and mental or emotional attachments—he may come nearer to uncovering or realizing the deity within himself. This realization of an inner divinity should lead to freedom from all remaining personal involvements in the world of flux. For many this reduced, yogic mode of being is something to practice in old age. A majority of the pilgrims on my bus to Puri, and many others on similar trips (especially those who are not transporting flowers) were in their sixties and seventies. Some spoke explicitly of this trip as a major break in their ways of living. After they returned they would devote themselves single-mindedly to praising God.

Pilgrimage helps to loosen all kinds of bonds, but not because the waters of *tīrthas* cleanse the results of bad deeds from men's souls; not one person among my informants evinced any trust in such reputed powers of *tīrtha* baths.² Rather, pilgrimage helps because the cumulative effect of being removed from daily routines and attachments at home, of taking many powerful *darshans* of the gods, of voluntarily enduring hardships on the road, and above all of putting out money both for the sake of these experiences (the initial fare) and during them (the constant drain of rupees and paisa into the outstretched hands of *paṇḍās* and beggars) is decidedly good for the soul. The effect is one of lightening: the returning pilgrim should be thinner and poorer. The bodily rigors suf-

2. Indeed, informants universally scoffed at this proposition. I should add, however, that although they maintained no belief in the soul-cleansing power of baths in crossing places, they nevertheless bathed methodically in every one that we visited no matter how unattractive or polluted the appearance of the water. Moreover, not to avail oneself of the opportunity to bathe in crossing places was considered improper conduct. Having seen two corpses floating in the river at Prayag, I became squeamish and did not want to bathe there. I was chastised for this reluctance by my fellow pilgrims. They were decidedly uncomfortable with the thought that one could be on this famed shore and not go in the water.

ferred, the repeated exposure to divinities, and the charities practiced while journeying to foreign lands all contribute to reaching an inner, subtle goal, which is, everyone knows, unreachable through journeys on the earth.

Before going to the field, drawing mostly on texts translated from Sanskrit, I considered some apparent "irresolutions" in Hindu thought related to pilgrimage (Rose 1978). One of the grandest of these, rendered here in its simplest, starkest form, is that according to received authority—lawbooks (*dharmaśāstras*), the epic *Mahābhārata*, and numerous *Purāṇas*—bathing at crossing places is the easy, cheap, democratic alternative to difficult, expensive, elitist sacrifice. *Tīrtha* baths, all these texts assure, obliterate even the most heinous sins and bring every imaginable boon, from health and wealth to heaven and release. However, according to the same texts in different moods, bathing in crossing places is patently useless, especially for sinners. Not futile washings of the outer body, but only cleansing in "real" fords—inner truth, meditation, devotion—should be the conditions of the truly fruitful human journey.

For example, P. V. Kane tells us in his digest of lawbooks that, according to the *Līṅgapurāṇa* and the *Skandapurāṇa*, "Even if a man be a sinner or a rogue or irreligious he becomes free from all sins if he goes to Avimukta (Banaras)" (1953:630). Moreover, the *Mahābhārata* states: "If a person, after committing a hundred bad deeds, sprinkles himself with Ganges (water), the waters of the Ganges burn all of them as fire burns fuel" (Kane 1953:586). However, another digester cites the *Skandapurāṇa* as declaring this:

A man who is impure, slanderous, cruel, a hypocrite, and attached to sense-objects, though bathed in all the *tīrthas*, remains sinful and impure. A man does not become pure by getting rid of bodily impurities; but when mental impurities are abandoned, then he becomes immaculate within. Fish are born and die in the waters (of *tīrthas*); and they do not go to heaven, for the impurities of their minds are not purified. . . . He goes to the supreme path, who bathes in that *tīrtha* of the mind, which is purified by meditation, whose water is knowledge, and which wipes away passion, sins and impurities." (Salomon 1985:206–207)

And the *Mahābhārata*'s "Tour of the Sacred Fords" is prefaced with similar statements on the primary value of inner morality as

a prerequisite to attaining the fruits of external pilgrimage (1976:373).³

Precisely the same apparent conundrums were to be found in my largely unlettered informants' responses to questions about the purpose and value of *tīrthayātrā* as they practiced it. In the second part of this chapter I attempt to set forth the ideology, the premises, both of journeying and of not-journeying, from the villagers' point of view—no longer regarding these as exotically paradoxical, ambivalent, or irresolute. Simultaneous understandings—pilgrimage is ascetic versus pilgrimage is self-indulgent; pilgrimage brings every goodness versus pilgrimage is quite fruitless—form the fundamental and essentially stable ground of belief among the peasant journeyers with whom I discussed these issues.

Journey to Jagdish

The circumstances of my participation in a month-long bus pilgrimage from Rajasthan to Puri, Orissa, and a condensed account of the tour itself, are presented here.⁴ Following this narration is a consideration of the highlights and meanings of our journey to the East, to the Lord of the Universe and to the sea, which was also, of course, a round trip beginning and ending at Path Mother's shrine outside the village of Mehru.

My joining Mehru's pilgrim company was fortuitous and quite sudden. Having long wished for a chance to participate with villagers in a bus pilgrimage, I had eventually given up hope of finding such an opportunity. Ghatiyalians were happy to tell me about their past excursions, but no one happened to be embarking on another during the period of my residence. Many said that because of the poor rains (two years running) and subsequent scant harvests, no one could afford such an enterprise. Pilgrimage is, af-

3. Religious revolutionaries or reformers like the Sikh founder Guru Nanak also find the concept of inner *tīrthas* helpful in their rhetoric. Thus, Guru Nanak proclaims: "The true *tīrth* is the divine Name; it is inner contemplation of the word and it is true knowledge (*jñān*). The Guru's *jñān* is the true *tīrth* where every day is an auspicious day" (cited in McLeod 1968:211–212).

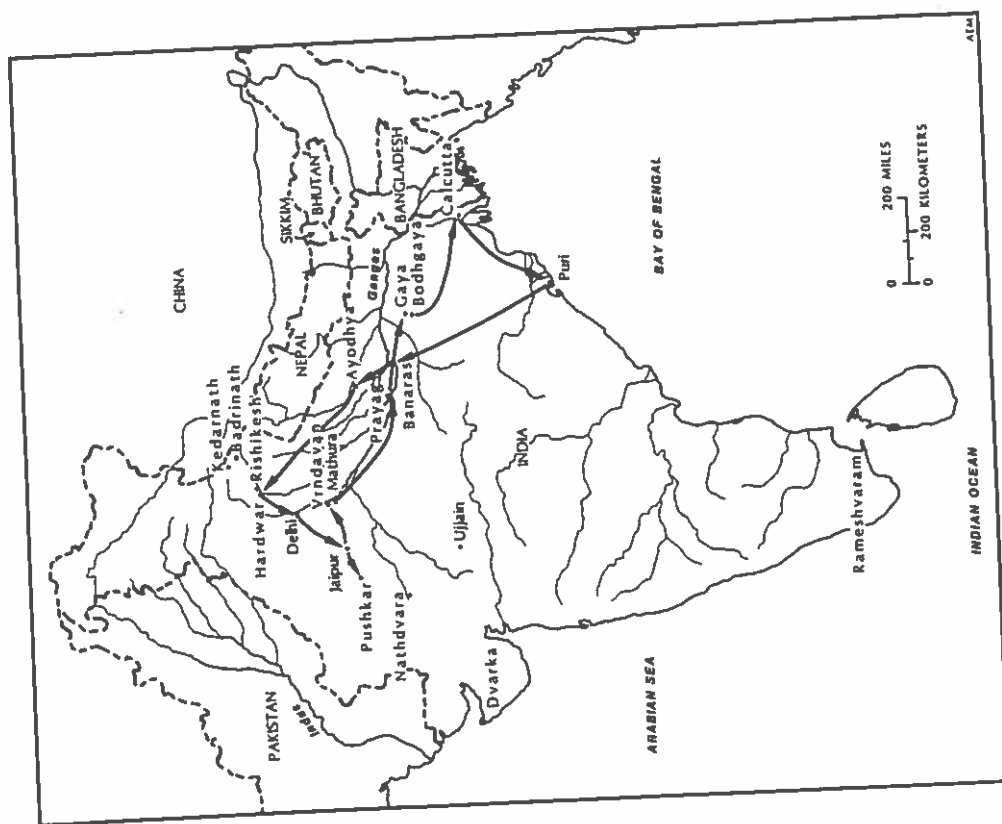
4. Copious notes, recordings, and a full photographic record may someday be developed into a complete study of this journey. For current aims, however, it does not seem "fruitful" to relate all the details. In the account that follows, then, I give essential background data and attempt to convey the journey's flavors and meanings for its participants.

About one year after my arrival in the village, when I was resigned to experiencing only Hardwar and many regional trips, I learned that the priest of the Niranjani temple, the Brahman Gam Shyamji, was about to leave on a *darshan* tour. Distant kin to the bus owner, who for reasons of his own was treating numerous relations to a free ride on this particular trip, Gam Shyamji spoke with enthusiasm of their plans to visit all the major North Indian shrines.

I gleaned this much information on the morning of September 18, 1980. At about dusk of that same day my research assistant, Bhoju, and I biked to Sawar, the nearby market-town where the bus owner lived. We sought him out and eagerly inquired about the details of the trip. Except for his dozen or so relatives, he told us, the remaining passengers were a company recruited from the village of Mehru, not far from Sawar. As is often the case, the pilgrims had been signed up by a covillager acting as agent for the bus owner. It so happened that the agent in Mehru, Nandalal Sharma, a retired schoolteacher, was yet another distant kinsman to the bus owner's family. Nandalal and his wife would also ride as pilgrims on the tour.

The bus owner at first would hear nothing of our joining the trip: No seats were left and he was already overloaded. Several persons would be sitting on backless straw stools in the aisle. He was also worried about trouble with the police if he took a foreigner. When assured again and again that Bhoju and I would gladly sit on stools and that I had a valid passport and visa, his refusals softened somewhat. When it appeared that I had in my purse the full cash amount to cover both our fares, he relented in earnest and began to think where he might borrow two more stools. We told him we would join the bus the next day in Mehru. The Mehru company was scheduled, he had informed us, to perform Path Mother's worship in the early morning, and the bus would collect them around noon.

Thus I learned of the trip on the morning of the eighteenth, reserved my "seat" that evening, packed well into the night, and breathlessly left Ghatiyali at dawn. Bhoju and I stowed our bags at the tea stall in Sawar and careened on rented cycles over sandy, thorny, bumpy paths to reach Mehru, auspiciously enough, just a few minutes before the precise, astrologically determined time set for the worship of Pathvari Ma. We rushed to her spot, directed



Map 3. India, showing some major *ħrthas* and stops on the *darshan* tour route.

ter all, as the popular phrase has it, the "rice pudding of money"—that is, however delectable and highly esteemed, it is not an everyday matter but an occasional luxury. Rice pudding is only made and savored when there is a surplus of milk; *ħrthayātrā* and the attendant pleasures of seeing other lands require a surplus of cash.

by frankly staring villagers, just as women from pilgrims' households, with vessels for sprouts on their heads, were themselves more decorously arriving, walking in clusters and singing songs of the Ganges. (The worship of Path Mother and all activities of the pilgrimage involving flowers—the bones of dead kin—are treated in chapter 4.)

At Path Mother's shrine we encountered many who would be our constant companions over the next month and went through the inevitable introductions with them. The Mehru folk, although a mixed-caste group, had a self-conscious cohesiveness derived from their identification with a single home village; they said as much. Several had marriage connections with Ghatiyali, and Bhoju and I were welcomed among them with ready acceptance, along with inquiries as to the well-being of daughters living in our village. As it turned out, some of the passengers, in addition to the bus owner's family, were also not from Mehru. In the first place, there were two Mehru, one large and one subsidiary settlement at some distance from the first. A few pilgrims came from the latter. There was also a Gujar couple from Sawar (who turned out miraculously enough to stand in the relation of "father's sister" and "father's sister's husband" to Bhoju). Harzi Kumavat and his wife and grandson came from Piplaj—a fair distance from Mehru, but they had relations among the Mehru Kumavats. Certainly, the essential division within our company, and the most important social fact throughout the journey, was the distinction between town Brahmans and Mehru peasants.

Counting Bhoju, the bus driver, his helper, and myself, our full number was sixty-three adults and four children. The caste breakdown for adults was as follows: there were fifteen Brahmans related to the bus owner of whom twelve were immediate family members, all literate town-dwellers. The remaining three were Gam Shyamji (the only Ghatiyalian besides Bhoju and me) and Nandalal Sharma, the schoolmaster who had organized the Mehru company, along with his wife. The dozen town Brahmans included Suresh, nephew of the bus owner, a young man who was acting "bus-master" for this trip. None of this group of town Brahmans had flowers (Nandalal Sharma and Gam Shyamji did, however), and all claimed that they were going "for the sake of wandering" (*ghūṃne ke lie*). They participated in bathing, *darshan*, and some worship, but none of them had *piṇḍāṇ* performed in

Gaya. They made a point of keeping themselves quite separate from the "peasants," including the Brahman peasants, despite the fact that we were all *yātrā* brothers and sisters now.

The rest of the adults in our party consisted of seven other Brahmans, of various subcastes different from the bus owner's; two Rajputs; four Caran Rajputs (that is, Carans or "royal bards" with large landholdings); seven Darogas (traditionally servants of the Rajputs, several on this trip still acting in that capacity); six Kumavats (farming potters); five Lodas (one of several farming castes in the area); five Gujars (traditionally cowherds; Bhoju, his "aunt" and "uncle" from Sawar, and a widow and her grown son from Mehru); five Malis (gardeners); two Kumhars (poting potters); one Damami (royal drummer), a widower; one Hada Rajput (actually a kind of Daroga), a widow. This totals sixty adults. The driver, his troubleshooter cum mechanic, and I completed the company, bringing the total of adult passengers to sixty-three, although I believe the bus was licensed for no more than fifty-five.

Needless to say, in a group as mixed as this one, all was not perfect harmony, and the fact that we were sharing a pilgrimage did not act as a leveler of rank.⁵ The educated town-dwellers formed a distinct front-of-the-bus elite. Among themselves they referred to the Mehru folk as the "British Battalion" or simply "Angrez" ("English"), because the peasants were in their eyes awkward and stupid like the English. Nandalal Sharma with a foot in both parties played his mediating role rather ineffectively. His town kin did not appear to respect him greatly, and the peasants obviously didn't trust him. The role of spokesman for the Mehru folk went to Gulab Singh, the sole Rajput man, an imposing and bellicose person who received deference, especially from peasants, potters, and Darogas.

5. See E. V. Daniel 1984:245-287 and I. Karve 1962 for other participatory accounts of Hindu pilgrimage in Tamilnad and Maharashtra respectively. During Daniel's pilgrimage intercaste barriers were effectively dissolved by dissolving the existence of separate identities among the pilgrims. Every member of the group shed even his name, assuming that of the deity, thus radically affirming the oneness of devotees before and with the Lord. In Karve's company there was no intercaste dining, and she was troubled by this persistent maintenance of separateness and rank. The only time my pilgrim company all sat down to dine together, rather than around separate cookstoves, was when we feasted on *prasād* in Puri. I noticed that the pilgrims seated themselves according to caste. When I asked about the appropriateness of this on the road of *dharma*, everyone assured me that it was a matter of "feeling" and a hardly a matter of *jāti*.

Two other personalities who stood out among our company were quickly given nicknames by the literate wits. One, Kalyan Singh Caran, was an aged landlord well over seventy—tall, heavyset, and hard-of-hearing as well as nearsighted. Quite intrepid about crossing the road and making his own way through crowds, he frequently wandered in the wrong direction. He was soon dubbed Sikandar ("Alexander the Great"). Sikandar often did present a comical sight, but when I interviewed him at length I found that far from being a dotard, he possessed a penetrating mind and ample self-respect. Then there was Cand Bai, clothed in prescriptive widow's drabbery which always looked soiled and rumpled, who could hold her own among men in religious "knowledge-talk." She received the half-ironic, half-admiring title of Mira, after the legendary princess-renouncer-poet devotee of Lord Krishna, whose name and deeds are common currency all over Rajasthan.

While all but three of the town Brahmins were in their twenties and thirties, the peasants, with a few exceptions, were of the grandparental generation. There were eighteen couples among our company, so that slightly over 50 percent of the pilgrims were making the ideal pilgrimage—that is, going to *tirthas* joined with their lifelong mates. Indeed, several gave this—the opportunity to travel as a pair—as the explicit reason for their present journey. Those who were not coupled more often than not had some kind of kin or intimate connection with at least one other pilgrim. For example, there were a mother and son; a mother-in-law accompanying her daughter and daughter's husband; a widowed younger brother's wife traveling with her husband's elder brother and his wife; a young Daroga woman who had come without any of her family in order to attend the wife of Gulab Singh as a "lady's companion." The old Damami and "Mira," each without previous connections among the company, were definite exceptions to the norm.

The bus-master Suresh, responsible for daily scheduling, complained frequently that the peasants, the "British Battalion," cared only for "bread, water, and pissing." It did indeed seem that a disproportionate amount of talk and energy was spent on these needs and on when, how long, how often we should halt to accommodate them. Of course, many of the passengers were aged and a

number of them had never traveled before, so it was not wholly unreasonable that they were greatly concerned with maintaining their creature comforts.

Everyone except for Bhoju and me had kerosene stoves, fuel, and staple food supplies. Time had to be allotted for the preparation of morning tea and at least one hot meal a day, usually a mid-day repast. The evening meal was most often made of cold leftovers from the first. A campsite or cooksite had to have plenty of water for bathing, washing, cooking. For an overnight stop the pilgrims required a reasonably secluded area where they could relieve themselves in the predawn hour when they customarily arose. It was their strong preference for open-air sanitary arrangements over closed latrines, as well as a fear of having their "pockets cut" while they were asleep by thieves said to lurk in traditional rest houses, which made them insist on bedding down around petrol pumps for most of our nights on the road. They would rather sleep under glaring fluorescent tube-lights, in a dank atmosphere of grease and gasoline, but with open fields behind, than in dimly illuminated rest-house rooms equipped with cubicle latrines that often reeked.

Of the total of thirty nights spent on the road, only the two in Puri, one in Hardwar, and one in Pushkar were spent indoors in *dhamashālās*. The rest were largely passed at petrol pumps, although we also camped on the concrete porch of a Bihar schoolhouse; in the sands of a park near Bodhgaya where a band with an amplifier played half the night; beside the road at the Uttar Pradesh-Rajasthan border, where we were treated to the perpetual roaring of trucks; and, without choice because of the *melā* crowds, at the unutterably filthy bus stand of Gaya.

When not preoccupied with the mundane details of food and sanitation, or the ever-resurgent quarrels over seat allocation, the pilgrims did tell wonderful stories of the gods and sing devotional songs. Women more often than men, but not exclusively, would break into song, usually in the morning when spirits were always higher, or sometimes to pass the time during a breakdown or flat-tire change. The morning series of songs for the gods always included Ganeshji and Surya Raj, the Sun King. These might then be followed by songs of Rama, of Radha and Krishna, of Gangaji or Badrinath.

Although dedicated to the gods, these women's songs are very simple and homey, both in terms of the devotion they express and in their portrayal of the deities themselves. The most popular song of the Sun King is voiced by a woman who says that each day she never touches food until she has had the *darshan* of the sun. If she can't see him from her own courtyard, then she climbs up on her neighbor's roof. Another addresses the Sun King's father, King Kāśan, telling him, as if he might be unaware, "Get up, Father, wake your child, he's not a child but an *avatār*."

The most favored song of Gaṇeś praised the fat elephant god's appearance attended by his two wives, Riddhi and Siddhi. Thus, its refrain goes, "Gaṇapat looks lovely with his two women, two women; your beauty so rich with two women; Gaṇanandji looks good with two women." The verses describe the services these women perform for him: "One woman fills and brings his water pitcher, the other woman readies his bath"; or "One woman brings his ornaments, the other woman readies the whisk."

Some songs were not about the gods but about the process of pilgrimage itself. The following is a charming example of this genre. It probably uses the names Radha and Rama just as typical village names rather than in reference to the deities, as the mythic Radha and Rama are never coupled.

Song of Pilgrimage

Hey Radha, there's a company going to Ganga;
Let's both make the journey, Oh Lord,
Let's go paired on pilgrimage, Oh Lord.

Hey Radha, your husband's father is going too;
How will you praise God? Oh Lord.

Hey Ramji, I will join both my hands to husband's father;
With my mouth I will praise God, Oh Lord,
In my heart I will praise God, Oh Lord.

Hey Radha, there's a company going to Ganga;
Let's both make the journey, Oh Lord,
Let's go paired on pilgrimage, Oh Lord.

Hey Radha, your husband's mother is going too;
How will you praise God? Oh Lord.

Hey Ramji, I will press both of husband's mother's feet;
With my mouth I will praise God, Oh Lord,
In my heart I will praise God, Oh Lord.

Hey Radha, this company's going to Jagdish;
Let's both make the journey, Oh Lord,
Let's go paired on pilgrimage, Oh Lord.

Hey Radha, the people of Mehru are with this group;
How will you praise God? Oh Lord.

Hey Ramji, I will veil my face slightly;
With my mouth I will praise God, Oh Lord,
In my heart I will praise God, Oh Lord.

Hey Radha, this company's going to Badrinath;
Let's both make the journey, Oh Lord,
Let's go paired on pilgrimage, Oh Lord.

Hey Radha, Ann-bai is with this group;
How will you praise God? Oh Lord.

Hey Ramji, I will veil my face slightly;
With my mouth I will praise God, Oh Lord,
In my heart I will praise God, Oh Lord.

This song suggests some particularly feminine attitudes toward the pilgrimage experience. To go "paired" with one's husband is both inviting and embarrassing. But superior both to the thrill and to the shame of this unaccustomed public exposure as a couple is the praise of God. God's *bhajan* in this context means songs from the mouth and constant devotion in the heart. The presence of in-laws, neighbors, or anthropologists cannot inhibit this true devotional emotion and its expression.

Every evening approximately around the time of sunset an *ārāṭī* in praise of Jagdish was sung by almost everyone on the bus. Suresh would switch on a small electric bulb located beneath the several deities' icons that graced the dashboard, and light a couple of sticks of incense. Above this "shrine," inscribed in broad calligraphic strokes extending across the width of the front windshield, was the motto "Lord make your journey fruitful" (*īshvar āpki yātrā saphal karē*).

The Jagdish *ārāṭī*, far from being unique to the Puri pilgrimage, is sung in most Vaishnava temples in the villages of our area. The

first verse, however, recorded on the pilgrimage, contains a single word change as noted.

Āratī of Jagdish

[Refrain] OM Victory to Lord Jagdish!
Sovereign, Victory to Lord Jagdish!
Master, Victory to Lord Jagdish!

- [1] Those who go receive fruit⁶
And a trouble-free mind, Master,
Happiness, prosperity come into the home;
the body's sufferings are removed.
- [2] You are my mother and father,
To what other shelter might I go? Master,
Without you there is no other;
on whom might I hope?
- [3] You're the complete supreme soul,
You're the inner master, Master,
Beyond creation, supreme Lord,
you're everyone's master.
- [4] You're an ocean of compassion
Caring for all, Master,
I am the servant, you the master;
have mercy O King!
- [5] You are unknowable,
Husband of all creatures, Master,
How can I with my base intellect
deserve your pity?
- [6] Brother of the poor, sorrow-defeater, Sovereign,
You're my ruling Lord, Master,
Extend your hand, Sovereign;
I am standing at your door.
- [7] Erase poisonous thoughts,
Defeat sin, Master,
Increase faith and devotion and
the service of the saints.
- [8] My body, mind, and wealth are yours,
How can I make an offering to you, Master,

6. This line as sung on the bus—"jyo jāve phal pāve"—seems to imply "those who go [on a pilgrimage to Jagdish] receive fruit." In the village it is usually rendered "jyo dhāve phal pāve"—meaning "those who praise him receive fruit."

When nothing's left
that's mine.

The *āratī*'s content is less playful and less rustic than that of women's devotional songs. At its core is the magisterial omnipo-tence of the Lord of the Universe contrasted to the lowly adora-tion of his devotee. Although ordinary people rarely speak with such poetic eloquence, the prayer-song does seem to convey accu-rately the real humility that peasant worshippers feel before the mighty gods. No one would argue or bargain with Jagdish as he might with Dev Narayanji, Bhairu, or Jaipal. In closing, the *āratī* states a deeply felt urge to surrender all to the supreme deity. Per-haps not unwittingly, the *pañḍā* at the Puri *dharmashālā* led our company in a rousing rendition of Jagdish's *āratī* just before solic-iting donations.

Most major pilgrimage centers along the popular route we fol-lowed have highly organized and highly aggressive priesthoods, whose members control to a large degree the circulation and ac-tions of peasant pilgrims within their domain. Indeed, they often board the bus uninvited at the outskirts of a *tīrtha* town and do not part company from the group until final donations are extracted at the end of their visit to that place. Peasants are naturally ambiva-lent toward these *pañḍās* and their machinations. On the one hand, they are genuinely glad to be guided, for they would otherwise have little idea of what to do. On the other hand, in a kind of stubborn reaction against *pañḍās*' acquisitiveness, the pilgrims would often demand the cheapest and briefest package of *darshan* and *pūjā*.

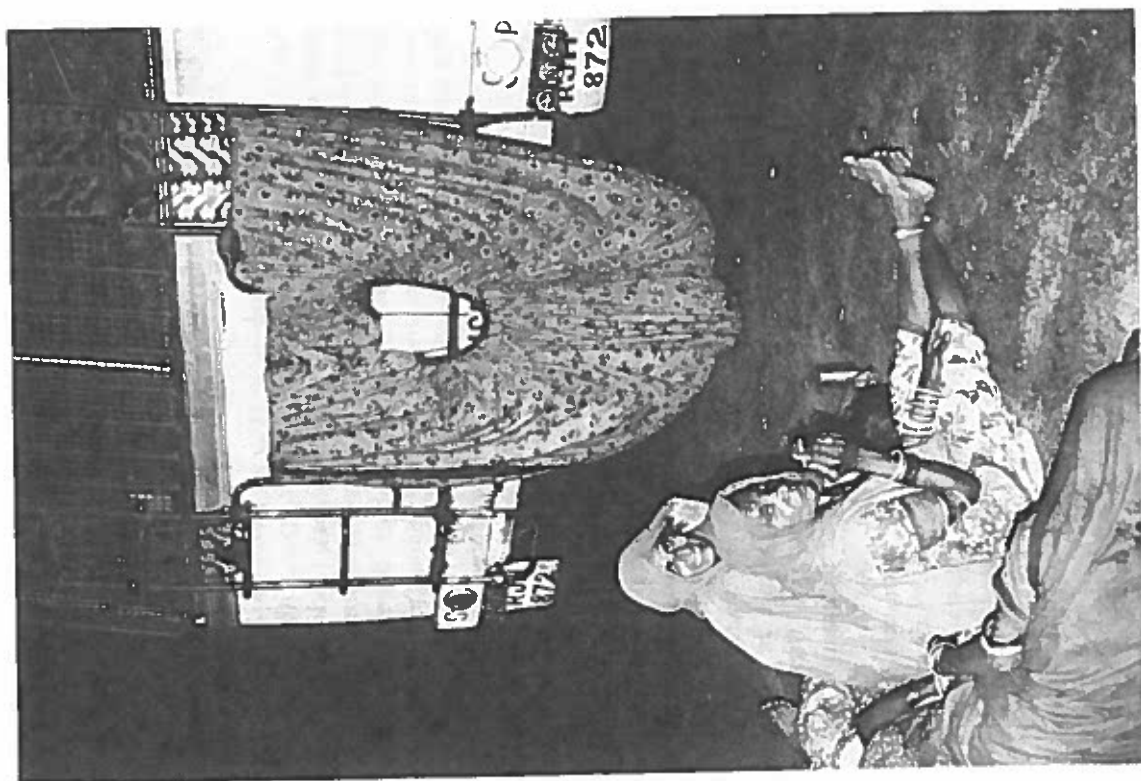
Sometimes the *pañḍās* went too far in their aggressive behavior; they might then be roundly abused, as when Kalyan Singhji summed up his opinions of the priests in Calcutta: "Don't ask about the *pañḍās*. Seeing the condition of the *pañḍās*, there is no desire to do a *yātrā*. Those sister-fuckers, they would tear my clothes! Those ones from cunts, those ones with protruding teeth! If everyone knew that *pañḍās* were like this, then no one would come on a pilgrimage. Everyone would think, we should not come to *tīrthās*." Nevertheless, every informant including this man insisted that the nature of the priests who received their of-ferings in no way spoiled the meritorious nature of such gifts.

The flour-ball offerings made at Gaya and related activities in Prayag and Hardwar (all described in chapter 4) were the only complex rituals in which our pilgrims engaged. For the rest, it was bathing, temple viewing, gifts to priests and beggars, and occasional perfunctory *pūjās*, undertaken by couples on the bathing *ghāṭs*. The town Brahmins tended to take advantage of more opportunities to sight-see than did the older, slower, poorer, and less adventurous peasant crowd. Although I preferred to stay with the peasants, considering them the "real" pilgrims, if there was a steep hill to climb or a rupee to pay, I had often to leave them sitting near the bus and accompany the Brahmins.

The essential conviction that the Lord is within, or wherever you find him, often inspired people, when things were going badly, to devalue the very enterprise in which they were currently engaged. Gam Shyamji often yearned for his much-beloved black stone icon of Niranjani back home in Ghatiyali. "I miss God," he would enunciate with deep feeling even as he enjoyed the *darshans* of Hinduism's most renowned and powerful images.

Concern with auspiciousness was pervasive among all the *darshan* bus passengers—peasants and Brahmins alike. When we suffered numerous breakdowns and got stuck in the mud several times in flood-ridden Uttar Pradesh between Agra and Allahabad, there were several hypotheses advanced as to the cause of these troubles. A number of the men blamed it on some women, known to be menstruating, who had washed their skirts and dried them heedlessly on top of the bus. The women did not subscribe to this theory, but many blamed themselves for singing the Sun King's song before Ganeshti's one morning. Ganeshti is not pleased unless he is first.

Suresh, the young bus-master, was convinced that someone among our company was under bad astrological influences. Rather sheepishly, given his pretensions to citified sophistication, he tied an old shoe as a "charm" to the front of the bus, reciting a spell intended to draw malevolent powers into the shoe rather than into the vehicle itself. Our troubles seemed to clear up soon afterward, but on that same day the women were particularly attentive to Ganeshti, so no one could be sure whose remedy had made the difference.



13. On the pilgrims' road, women relax and take the opportunity to dry a skirt during a bus breakdown.

Of the major sites visited on the outbound route up to Puri, the first three stops were all in Rajasthan (as were, symmetrically enough, the journey's last three). Each had its distinctive qualities. East of Ajmer is the district of Savai Madhapur to which we went first in order to visit the historic fort of Ranathambaur. For the pilgrims this stop was Ranathambaur Ganeshji, for it was not the monumental fort with its concentric walls and enormous gates that drew us, but a small temple of Ganeshji located within them. Considered to house the greatest Ganeshji in all of Rajasthan, this temple is the first stop for most major bus *yātrās* departing from our area, just as Pushkar is the last for those returning. Ganeshji is the god of auspicious beginnings. If Path Mother's initial worship secures a safe return, Ganeshji is prayed to for success and well-being along the way.

The next stop was Galtaji, outside of Jaipur, a place of natural beauty where waterfalls poured into tiered pools. Men bathed in the upper pool, and women below, explicitly in the runoff from the men's baths. There was a temple of Rama near the bathing spot, but only a few of our company went inside to take *darshan*; the thing to do at Galtaji was bathe. The distance from this picturesque outdoor scene to the dim and vaguely demonic setting of Mehndipur Balaji's temple complex is not nearly so great as the contrast between the two places.

Sudhir Kakar has richly described the approach to and atmosphere of Mehndipur Balaji (1982:53–56). Although situated on a small street in town rather than in the midst of village fields, Mehndipur Balaji's operations are in many ways similar to Puvali ka Devji's (see chapter 3). In recent years this place of Hanuman and Bhairuji has gained great fame—again, like Puvali, largely because of the success of a charismatic *bhopā*. It now attracts extraregional pilgrims as well as Rajasthanis by the hundreds. The place's specialty is exorcism of recalcitrant ghosts and witches.⁷

This was the single exorcistic shrine visited by our tour bus, the only one belonging to an active healing tradition where deities speak through human bodies and grapple with malevolent beings.

7. Kakar 1982:68–81 gives an interpretation of the exorcism process at Mehndipur as therapy, with a few fragmentary but interesting case histories.

In keeping with the nature of a *darshan* bus tour, our visit to Mehndipur was properly for *darshan* only. Indeed, when some of the peasants showed an inclination to sit down and soak up the spellbinding atmosphere (*bhajan*-singing was under way, and many clients swayed and panted and trembled under the influence of their possessive spirits) Suresh abruptly hustled his charges outside. He then ordered everyone to return to the bus at once.

Suresh justified his peremptory interference by alluding to the reputed contagion of possession in this place. If somebody else's ghost or witch took a notion to "play" in one of his passengers, or even worse, if any of them had their own spirit that became aroused, Suresh feared he would then be obliged to keep his whole party waiting there until the episode was finished. That might easily be a matter of days. Our pilgrims found his motives reasonable and docilely returned to the bus. We soon pulled out of Mehndipur and continued almost nonstop into the night and into the heart of Krishna country, once more traversing a distance whose meaning can hardly be gauged kilometers.

Throughout Vrmdavan, Mathura, and Gokul we were manipulated by expert *pañḍās*, but even their outrageous demands and high-pressure techniques could not spoil the simple pleasures of being in the land of Krishna's childhood. Indeed, they probably enhanced it, for as J. S. Hawley tells us in his monograph on Vrmdavan, the "simple aim" of the *pañḍās* "is to connect the place with the story, and to assure their charges that they are retracing Krishna's steps. . . . At every spot there is something the pilgrims can do to solidify the connection" (1981:35).

Thus we were enjoined to rest where Krishna's father had rested in his desperate flight to save the divine babe from an evil, child-slaughtering uncle. The happiest exclamations were aroused by pretty *darshan* tableaux which recalled villagers' own experiences. Women sympathized with Krishna's mother on her childbirth couch and cooed over baby Krishna's draining poison from the breast of a demoness: "Look, see how God is sucking!" Another favorite was a pond where the infant Krishna's soiled clothing had been washed. People explicitly mentioned the Lord's "shit" in this context as if it enhanced the pool with very special charms. Although most of our company was highly frugal and

abstemious when it came to purchasing food, everyone bought and ate half-kilos of expensive milk sweets in Gokul, saying, "We should eat them because God does."

Toward the monuments of human rather than divine exploits that they encountered in Agra, pilgrims had a different attitude. Although the Taj Mahal and Red Fort certainly elicited much wonder and tongue-clicking, the Rajasthani peasants were not overawed. Several made remarks to the effect that "these stones are all that's left—the people who built this thought they needed it but they died like everyone. We all die." Their appreciation for Agra's glories, then, was pervaded by a kind of cynicism toward the ponderous residue of human lives, which contrasted greatly with their recent veneration of Lord Krishna's subtle traces.

Following Agra was a long and difficult passage through flooded Uttar Pradesh to Prayag. From Prayag we took a side trip to Citrakut on whose peaceful and clean riverbank the epic poet Tulsidas was said to have had the *darshan* of Lord Ram. Here those who were willing both to pay the boatman and to struggle up the hills were rewarded with magnificent vistas and moving visions of the gods. In these very hills Rama and Sita were said to have dwelt in simple sylvan splendor during their forest exile, and one of the shrines we visited was called Sita's Kitchen. The effort of the climb prompted several participants to remark on the greater value of foot pilgrimage, a sentiment rarely heard during the bus trip.

Our next camp was just outside Banaras, and we pulled into the "City of Light" shortly after dawn. After several false turns the driver eventually found his way to the parking area near Vishvanath Gali, the heart of Varanasi for all pilgrims and tourists. A brief dispute ensued as our party hovered uncertainly near the bus, between those who wanted tea first and those who felt that bathing should precede all consumption. The tea drinkers won, and soon afterwards *pañḍās* took over, parceling us among themselves into three parties. We were then led to the river to bathe and were taken on a whirlwind tour of central Kashi's most famed temples. Few could later distinctly recall any of these. My own impressions—a blur of shining icons, masses of red and orange and yellow flower offerings, hastily mumbled *pūjās*, and coins plunked down to punctuate each divine viewing—were shared by

many. We were soon on the road again with Gaya our next destination (see chapter 4).

From Gaya we reached Calcutta, an experience encapsuled in my field notes as follows:

In and out of Calcutta very rapidly indeed, as the minute we got there policemen like leeches were jumping on the bus and demanding money because of the overload. No ticket, just a straight bribe; no receipt. One took twenty, one took over a hundred, the third took I think thirty-five rupees. Suresh was fed up and [after the temple and the zoo] put ten of us in taxis and got the hell out of town. The Kali Temple was like a scene out of *narak* [a place of afterdeath tortures in Hindu cosmology], the screaming demands and clawing hands of the *pañḍās* as if the bloodthirsty soul of the goddess had infested them with some perverted transformation of her energy. Saw her, Kali, and fled. Saw one priest prying coins out of the curled fingers of our old Caran [poor Alexander the Great] who wanted to throw them himself onto the icon. Our own *prasād* (of flowers, sweets, *pampalo* [a seedy grapefruit-like item] and cucumber) was also snatched hastily and none returned with proper temple courtesy. Poor Gam Shyamji just keeps praising Ghatiyali and wishing he were back in the Niranjani temple with his *bhagvān*. After that the zoo was a real retreat.

From Calcutta we came to Puri, the end point, the high-water mark of our *yātrā*. There everyone relaxed, enjoyed sleeping in doors in *dharmashālā* rooms with electric ceiling fans and water taps, eating sweet meals of temple *mahāprasād*, and most of all, the encounter with the sea:

Interviewer: What is the greatest *īrīha*?

Pilgrim: Jagdish.

Interviewer: How is it that Jagdish is the greatest?

Pilgrim: Because the ocean is so huge.

All the Rajasthani pilgrims I knew who had made the Puri bus *yātrā*, whether in connection with sinking flowers or just to wander, thought of the ocean as a highlight of their journey. This includes pilgrims recalling trips twenty years past, as well as those who accompanied me to Puri in 1980. While some spoke of having the ocean's *darshan*, just as they might of a deity or a saint, the most common phrase for the experience of the sea was "taking



14. Taking waves; tangled bodies in the surf after morning worship at Puri.

waves" (*lahar lenā*). *Darshan*, for all its interactive connotations, does not really convey what happens in the water. The word *lahar*, or "wave," has a range of meanings that includes all kinds of extraordinary pleasure. Among its definitions in the RSK are these: "mind's enjoyment," "intoxication," "emotional love," "grace," and "bliss."

Supervised by the "fishermen" of Puri beach who play the part of lifeguards in their distinctive conical caps, pilgrims threw themselves into the waves with remarkable abandon and togetherness. If Victor Turner's general vision of pilgrimage as "liminoid" and "antistructural" is anywhere directly pertinent to Rajasthanis' journeys, it is here on the beach at Puri.⁸ During their extended frolic in the waves our pilgrim company did appear to enjoy "joyful ludic *communitas*" (Turner 1978:37). In this regard it is perhaps not facetious to cite an English-language pamphlet pur-

8. For Victor Turner's major statements about pilgrimage, *communitas*, liminality, and liminoidness, see his "Pilgrimages as Social Processes" (1974:166-230); "Liminal" to "Liminoid," in *Play, Flow and Ritual* (1979:11-59); "Death and the Dead in the Pilgrimage Process" (1979:121-142); and Turner and Turner's "Pilgrimage as a Liminoid Phenomenon" (1978:1-39).

chased at Puri and published "on behalf of Shri Jagannath Temple Managing Committee": "A dip in the sacred sea brings in broadness of mind doing away with all meanness" (*Shri Khetra Parichaya* 1976:7). This is certainly part of what Turner means by "communitas" and part of what the pilgrims experienced.

The women at least had anticipated their surrender to the ocean, having heard much about the force of the waves from friends who had previously made the trip. Among other things, they were aware beforehand that their ocean bath would involve a loss of customary modesty. These women were quite used to bathing in their clothes and changing into dry ones with dextrous ease, never displaying an unseemly inch of flesh. But they had been warned that the ocean waters were not as calm as village tanks or gently flowing rivers. Always, both at home in Ghatiyali and on the road, Rajasthanis women had teased me for wearing underpants, basically a garment appropriate only to schoolgirls in knee-length skirts. But several confided to me as we neared Puri, "Ah, when we reach the ocean waves, then we too should put on underpants like you." Of course, none of them did, nor did anyone become embarrassingly exposed in the water, at least not long enough for it to matter. Nonetheless, part of the waves' attraction was a potential for self-abandonment that included for women a disarrangement of their normally modest dress.

The breakers were very strong with a heavy undertow, and clothing was twisted, tangled, and plastered to bodies. In the excitement, confusion, and dangerous thrill of the waves, couples who usually barely glanced at one another (standard public etiquette for husband and wife in rural Rajasthan) held hands tightly. Even unconnected persons of different sexes tumbled about together in the churning foam and sand.

The sticky salty aftermath of the ocean bath, necessitating still another rinse and change of clothing back at the *dharmashālā*, also made it stand out as unique in peoples' thoughts. Moreover, this beach was the single experience of the entire journey which almost every member of our company sought to repeat. No one went back to the temple on our second day in Puri for another look at the Lord Jagdish; all repaired, as if by silent consensus, to the ocean shore. No one repeated the perfunctory "ocean worship" that had preceded the previous day's bathing. They had returned purely to play in the salt waves.

In contrast to universal emphasis on the ocean as a prime motif of the *yātrā*, only a few persons interviewed mentioned the famed *darshan* of Jagdish and his companion icons with their truncated limbs as particularly profound or impressive. I myself was not allowed to enter the temple, but my wait outside did not last long. When I asked Gam Shyamji how it was to view Jagdish he shrugged and muttered, "Well, God is God." Perhaps, always considerate, he wanted to console me. It is also true, however, that these Hindus had seen countless icons in their lives, but only one sea.

Other aspects of Puri which people did consistently discuss and recall were the meals of *prasād* served at the *dharmashālā* and the subsequent donations of cash and pledged grain made by all pilgrims. Our first day in Puri began with worship of the ocean and bathing, followed by a visit to the main temple of Lord Jagdish. Then a full meal including rice pudding was served to the entire company as the Lord's *prasād*. Rest and other temples followed, and a second meal, this one with sweet fried pancakes, another dish esteemed and relished by Rajasthanis.

That night all our company was called together to hear the head *paṇḍā* tell the story of the greatness of Puri. In sonorous tones and simple, clearly enunciated Hindi, he gave us the essential origin legend of the wooden icons of Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra.⁹ He then described the place of Puri within India's major sets of pilgrimage centers: the seven "cities" (*purī*) and the four "established spots" (*dhām*). He told how each crossing place made unique demands on a pilgrim's devotion. He reminded us, not so subtly, that we had now, twice, satiated ourselves on quality meals of *mahāprasād*—cooked food from the Lord's kitchens. Finally he got to the heart of the matter.

Who sent it from the temple? The committee-*vāle*. Why did they send it? Because you are God's guests. You are devotees. You came to do God's pilgrimage. You came a distance of seven hundred and fifty *kosh*. For this reason *prasād* was sent for you. And if you do something before you leave, then when others will come, they also

9. The origin story of the Jagannath temple, approximately as the *paṇḍā* told it, is found in English in the pamphlet *Visit Puri* (1977:8–11). The myth and history of Puri's gods have been given extensive scholarly consideration in Eschmann, Kulke, and Tripathi, eds., 1978. Two articles by Marglin (1981, 1982) analyze the relation between temple rituals and myth in Puri.



15. Puri *paṇḍā* tells pilgrims the story of the greatness of Puri and Jagdish.

will be served. What others have given, you received. What you will give before leaving will be received by others.

In the same way as the sun pulls water from the earth, and from this comes rain, then water reaches the earth and the rivers and canals are filled, and from this agriculture is possible; it is a circle.

For this reason *prasād* came and the chief work inside Jagannathji is the offering of *aṭkā*. . . . What is *aṭkā*? The gift which you will make at God's crossing place. *Aṭkā*, its name is *aṭkā*. Where is this offered? Every day four maunds of lentils, rice, and vegetables are offered to God as food-to-enjoy. After being offered as food-to-enjoy, this *prasād* is available to all. . . . From giving to all, God is happy. Your desires will be fulfilled and your pilgrimage will be fulfilled.

For this reason, for the grain-gift, whatever you give, these gentlemen have come from the temple with a receipt book. So you give your gift and take a receipt.

The *paṇḍā*'s rhetoric, with its hydraulic metaphor, was brilliant. Although the pilgrims did not meet his highest expectations, our party certainly did make bigger cash gifts and grain pledges in Puri than they had elsewhere, including Gaya. Taking waves and giving *dān* go together, perhaps. Loosening and emptying are

both vital to pilgrims' progress, especially if it is toward any kind of release.

From Puri to Ayodhya we drove almost three full days without any stops other than those occasioned by human or mechanical necessities. There was a sense of homeward-boundness and anticlimax, a lot of squabbling, and much fond reminiscing about the fun of the waves. After Ayodhya our return route included Garh Mukteshvar, Hardwar and Rushikesh, Delhi, Amer Fort, Jaipur city, Diggi, and Pushkar—the place of the “last bath.”¹⁰ An afternoon and night were spent in Ajmer, for shopping and the movies only, and then we returned, at last, to Mehru. Throughout the entire return lap of the journey several of the older pilgrims were feeling ill, suffering fevers and stomach problems. Many were weary of *darshans* and homesick for family left behind.

Rather than narrate this homeward journey, during which little of extraordinary interest occurred, I turn now to the motivations for and meaning of this third distinct style of journeying—pilgrimage for its own sake, for wandering, for merit, for cleansing, or for *moksha*. How do participants conceive of its fruitfulness or fruitlessness in connection with the aims of human life?

Sweeping the Road Ahead

In gathering pilgrims' views on *tirthayātrā*'s ineffable fruits, the questioner's role was one of persistent probing, and this should be kept in mind. *Pandās* did frequently use the concept of “fruits” and the terms *moksha* and *mukti* in ritual contexts, including prayers which pilgrims were asked to repeat mechanically. No one, however, among unlettered villagers, produced the latter terms spontaneously in ordinary discourse, and few liked to talk about their motivations as oriented toward any specific desirable results.

My standard questions, then, about “What are the fruits of crossing places?” and “Do you get *moksha*?” usually jarred upon people. Everyone responded strongly to them, however, one way or another. The first impulse was almost invariably a shrug and a

10. See chapter 4 for a description of a “last bath” in Pushkar. For Pushkar's cosmological meanings and sociological functionings, Zeitlyn's unpublished dissertation (1986) is the best source.



16. Puri *pandā* negotiates with pilgrims for cash offerings and grain pledges.



17. The *darshan* tour bus, journey's end; posing, from left to right: Suresh, the bus-master; his paternal aunt; the author; the driver; the mechanic.

denial—to fruits: “Oh, what is received?” to *moksha*: “Oh, it’s all in God’s hands!” Some persons, however, were willing to go beyond these blockades and explore the subjects more deeply.

Perhaps the most concise yet suggestive interpretation came from “Mira,” the widowed Hada Rajput who was practiced in “knowledge-talk” and spent most of her time in devotions. After a long discussion she finally summed up the relation between pilgrimage and ultimate liberation in this way: “Sweeping the road ahead, then, Brother, *moksha* happens well.” Mira clarified the “road ahead” as future lives. According to her view, meritorious activities such as pilgrimage help you on the way toward better births in which, no doubt, you may attain release. *Moksha* is thus a very distant goal indeed, and pilgrimage more a means of clearing the path than narrowing the distance.

How is this sweeping effected? From other responses to my probings one firmly positive aspect of pilgrimage emerges clearly: giving away, using up, spending money. Some believe that this giving is causally conducive to *moksha*; others just know it’s a good thing but continue to deny all higher fruits to the pilgrimage process. Along with this general agreement on the virtues of giving went a full consensus on the uselessness of bathing.

An unsophisticated, aged Mehru Brahman, traveling paired with his almost equally aged spouse, first answered my general question about *tīrthaphal* (“the fruits of crossing places”) with unusual expansiveness, saying that God gives everything to pilgrims and listing the usual components of worldly happiness: wealth, health, and sons. When I then asked if *moksha* were included among these limitless boons a pilgrim might expect, his response was totally negative.

Pilgrim: *Moksha* does not happen.

Interviewer: From going to crossing places, *moksha* does not happen?

Pilgrim: No, no, it’s a false matter. From what does *moksha* come?

From his own hand, God’s, that’s from whom. It does not come from wandering. Whatever you give, in whatever place give it. From this comes *moksha*. What kind of *dharmā* is dirtying the water? But *dharmā* is giving-and-taking.

The opposition this informant posits while discussing *moksha*—of useless bathing versus the virtues of “giving-and-taking”—was a

common valuation among peasant pilgrims, with, however, the stress laid on giving.

The old Damami pilgrim, who had clearly spent more thought on the matter than most, stated explicitly that the reason for doing pilgrimage was to spend money on the road of *dharmā*. When, however, I asked him whether *moksha* might be expected, he responded in exactly the same fashion as the Brahman, by jumping to a denial of the use of traveling and bathing in respect to that high aim. “Uh uh! Nothing will be received. ‘Why do you search for me, fool, I am here near you’ [he is speaking as God would to a deluded pilgrim]. If one’s heart is clean then, put water in the kneading-platter and bathe and it is equal to the Ganges.” My research assistant then produced a rhymed saying of identical import: “man cangā to kathautī mē Gāngā” (mind is clean, then Ganges is in the kneading-platter). Now the *kathautī* is a very humble vessel, traditionally made of wood and used for the everyday work of mixing bread dough. All its implications are thus of the unextraordinary, unexotic, and homey, in direct contradiction to the glamour of pilgrimage.

If, however, it is absurd to count *moksha* as a fruit of pilgrimage, only a few informants wholly denied that *tīrthayātrā* produces some merit. Most located the source of this “merit” (*puṇya*) or *dharmā*—like the Brahman and the Damami—squarely in the realm of expenditures. Thus a Mali couple’s opinions on the subject of why people go on *yātrās* were as follows:

Husband: Well, the money collects; for this reason we do pilgrimages.

Wife: Yes, it is a pretext made for spending money. From this pretext, *dharmā* emerges. Yes, and sin and sorrow all depart.

It is interesting to note that she appears to view the expenditure as automatically meritorious, almost in the way texts may praise bathing. In choosing to go on pilgrimage, people place themselves in a situation where, willy-nilly, money will go for religious giving as it never would at home.

Some informants considered not only that money was dispensed more copiously in the course of a pilgrimage, but that the quality of giving itself was improved in the environment of a crossing place. Another Mali and former participant in a Puri bus *yātrā* answered questions to this effect:

Interviewer: What fruit is received from pilgrimage?

Pilgrim: God knows.

Interviewer: But what do you think in your soul, what belief do you have?

Pilgrim: *Dharma's* money emerges. It is given to *paṇḍās*, to the crippled.

Interviewer: But if we make religious gifts at home or at crossing places, what is the difference?

Pilgrim: The gifts we give here remain here, but the gifts we give there reach God.

The same person denounced the notion that baths at crossing places are of the slightest efficacy.

Interviewer: But there is a belief that from bathing in crossing places all sin will be washed away.

Pilgrim: No one has such belief.

Interviewer: There is no belief that from bathing in the Ganges one becomes pure.

Pilgrim: No, no one becomes pure. It was begun by our forefathers and we on this pretext go to see the cities.

This man's statements contain a vivid contrast between the worth of gifting in pilgrimage centers and the worthlessness of bathing. While the former offers a way of approaching God through selfless charities, the latter is a mere self-serving pretext for sightseeing. Many others agreed with this appraisal of the absolute uselessness of bathing for cleansing the soul. One woman said that sins were blacker than the soot on the underside of a griddle: "That blackness doesn't open." Another spoke of sin as "stains" that no amount of washing could ever remove.

The idea that gifting is far more efficacious than bathing was also shared by many, as was the notion that gifts made at crossing places may be channeled directly toward God. One interviewee, whose Puri journey was also several years past, confessed to having had an intention to exploit this special access. He went on the pilgrimage, he said, hoping to get the boon of a male child for his only son, as so many go to the lesser, wonder-working gods of Rājasthan. As he explained it, "I went with this 'wrong desire' [*lālac*]." The RSK specifically defines *lālac* as the desire to have something for improper reasons. The former pilgrim continued:

I thought to myself, I should take the flowers of the old man and old woman [his parents] and go all the way to Lord Jagdish [although the flowers, of course, were sunk in Goyal]. I thought, perhaps Lord Jagdish would look in our direction also and if God looks in our direction it is good. . . . If it costs one hundred or two hundred, one thousand or two thousand, that's what it costs. And if in that stream of merit my Lord may gaze. . . .

This man's rather complex thought was, it would seem, that his expenditures on the pilgrimage and for the sake of *dharma* would create a kind of stream or flow between him and God which might just work both ways. That is, on the same path along which his money flowed to God in the special setting of crossing places, God's grace might be channeled back to him and bring the fervently desired child. It didn't happen, however, which is perhaps why he used the pejorative *lālac* for his desire, and why he bluntly denied any fruit coming from the practice of pilgrimage, speaking throughout the interview with scathing cynicism.

In general, although there is certainly a range of opinions, the worth of pilgrimage in terms of *dharma*—that is, beyond the readily acknowledged enjoyment of wandering and seeing—does seem to boil down to using financial resources in a way that is qualitatively different from anything possible in the village. Most of the Sanskrit texts on the fruits of crossing places claim that gifts made in *īrti* bring many times more merit than the same gifts made at home.¹¹ The views maintained by villagers thus demonstrate a continuity with these classical teachings.

Here the essential role of the grasping *paṇḍās*, whether they grasp by crude physical assault, as in Calcutta's Kali temple, or artfully with fine rhetoric, as in the Puri *dharmaśālā*, becomes evident. It is not easy for peasants to spend money, especially for

11. See, for example, Kane 1953:600–601 and Salomon 1985:446 for the increased worth of gifts made in *īrti*. A panel chaired by Raheja at the 1986 meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in Chicago explored various perspectives on the gift in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. In a contribution to that panel (A. Gold 1986) I discussed in greater depth than I do here both textual and popular ideas about the increased value of gift-giving in *īrti*. There I attempted, in preliminary fashion, to relate these ideas to Raheja's persuasive arguments for *dāna* as a transfer of inauspiciousness away from the donor to an appropriate vessel (1985). See also Khare 1976 and Vatuk and Vatuk 1976 for some other observations on gift-giving in Hindu society.

selfless reasons. But on pilgrimage they constantly encounter *pañḍās* and beggars who forcefully persuade them to loosen their purse strings, although they may struggle against it. However unpleasant the process itself may be, there is a residual satisfaction in knowing that the money has gone for *dharma*.

Giving in the village is not as good, some said, because even if it is giving to Brahmins or temples, it is inevitably a calculated, calibrated transaction. If not made for tangible return or to repay past obligation, then it will surely be for reputation or "name" (*nām*). I was told again and again that hidden or anonymous giving was the best, and yet in the village it seemed few could resist announcing their charities. Whether it was a rupee's offering announced during a religious drama or several thousand rupees for a *dharmashālā* room, there was always a name shouted or inscribed along with the amount of money. But on the pilgrimage road, although one might get receipts from the *pañḍās* at a few large institutions, many small donations to temples, to beggars, and to priests would be made daily without any record and without anyone's certain knowledge. The intransitive verbal form "emerges" (*nikalnā, karho*)—meaning to come out, appear, or emerge like snakes from their holes or like rashes on the skin—was usually used to describe this emission of cash. Here lay the greatest merit-producing virtue of pilgrimage, and here if anywhere was the potential for increasing chances of release in some distant future.¹²

A solitary respondent among my interviewees did claim to expect immediate salvation on her journey. This was another widow, the Gujar woman traveling with her grown son. She gave this atypical response to my standard question about the fruits of crossing places: "I don't need any fruit. That which I will receive is the deliverance of my body-soul. What is the need for fruit? This pilgrimage is done and from this my body-soul's deliverance will be."

12. Egnor has poetically described giving as a technique of reducing the heavy substance of the person in order to arrive at light and emptiness. She writes: "Giving and not taking is the higher way. A sign of giving is a decrease of one's own substance. . . . Reduction of substance, hard substance, useless substance, can be seen to result in an increase of cleanness and power" (1978:56). The congruence between the notion of giving as emptying and refining expressed in Egnor's exposition of a Tamil guru's teaching and Rajasthan peasants' views is striking. Inden's (1976) discussion of making gifts to higher-ranking beings as a way of transformation or transmutation producing superior fruits is also relevant here.

Significantly enough, this woman found the whole concept of fruit opposed to that of deliverance. Her stance is consistent with the devotional approach of the *Gita*: fruits are to be surrendered to God, and liberation is a by-product of selfless devotion, quite beyond causality. The woman was not claiming that her body-soul would be delivered as a result of her pilgrimage experience, but spontaneously, as part of it. Thus she insists on the possibility of release almost in the same vein that other pilgrims deny it. A disjunction between the supreme life aim and earned fruit is sustained.

Further understandings of the subtle benefits of pilgrimage may be explored by considering, first, the resonance of *īrtihas* in popular metaphor, and second, the esoteric internalization of journeying. I take for my primary texts a well-loved women's song that finds all pilgrimage baths in the *darshan* of Rama, and a Nath *nirguṇa bhajan* advising humans that all crossing places are located in the body-soul and they should therefore perform *darshan* within and eschew outer travels.

One source of inner transformation as a spontaneous fruit of pilgrimage experience is a special kind of *darshan*—a vision depending on inner devotion as much as outer images. The following women's song, considered to be a "song of Ganges Mother," may be sung during Path Mother's worship and Celebration of Ganga, as well as in the course of any journeys that involve the Ganges River. It is very popular among village women of our area, and I recorded it frequently both in Ghatiyali and on the Puri bus. Deceptively simple, it renders a complex sentiment with brevity and conviction.

Ram's Golden Chariot

On Ganga's bank a golden chariot's come, O Ram,
On the Great Stream's bank a golden chariot's come.

Let's go, O my girlfriends, to see the chariot
Where Lord Ram's enthroned, O Ram.

Seeing Ramji's face we have bathed in all the fords, O Ram,

Seeing Ramji's face we have bathed in all the fords, O Ram,

Bathed in the Ganges at Gomati, body-souls uplifted at Badari,
O Ram.

[The song repeats, substituting "on Jamana's bank" and "on Pushkar's bank" in the opening line.]

This song's message is a variant on a theme already discussed: the worth and worthlessness of visiting crossing places or "fords" (an alternative translation of *tīrthā*, which I used in the song for the sake of rhythm). Here, the worth is found not in meritorious expenditures but rather in *darshan*. But *darshan*, as portrayed in the song, is not the temple-confined and regulated viewing of a magnificent icon, however power-imbued. Rather, it is a hierophany, the perception of a divine and radiant presence. There is a sense of joyful immanence as well as urgency. The presence is not stationary, like temple gods, but in passage. The chariot has just arrived and may well depart momentarily.

The song conveys a definite hierarchical valuation of *darshan* as superior to bathing at crossing places. All the virtues of bathing are contained in the vision of Ram: "Rāmji ro mukhaṇo dekhā cyārō tīrth nāyā." The first verb, "seeing," (*dekhā*), is a present participle; the second, "bathed" (*nāyā*), a completed past. Thus, seeing God's face is to have bathed in all fords. Bathing in fords is a good thing, but seeing Ram accomplishes instantaneously the fruits of all baths.¹³

In the song's final line, the subsumption of pilgrimage baths to *darshan* is carried further: "Bathed in the Ganges at Gomati, body-soul uplifted at Badari." The results of seeing Ram's face, then, are particularly extended to include the most exalted and difficult-to-attain of pilgrimage sites—mountain places, source places of the divine river Ganges—rarely visited but greatly esteemed by Rajasthanis. Even these are comprehended, experienced, accomplished in the divine vision. The encounter with divinity is conceived as transformative, in the way that *tīrthā* baths are supposed to be, but, everyone declares, are not. Thus the body-soul is improved, kept from decay, uplifted (all possible translations of the term *sudhārī*) in this *darshan* bath.

But this is hardly an antiwandering song, for where is the radiant deity found? Where does hierophany occur? On the bank of the Ganges, on the bank of the Jamuna, on Lake Pushkar's shore. These are all great *tīrthas*, and it is at these places that Ram's golden chariot is encountered. This is after all a song of Ganges

13. Much in the same fashion, texts praising baths may claim that a drop of Ganges water accomplishes everything that a hundred horse sacrifices or a lifetime of ascetic practice accomplishes. Such hyperbolic statements are common coin in Hindu literature.

Mother and not a song of Ram, according to the village women's own system of classification, which employs both categories. Its message, then, is twofold: to view a deity is a much greater transformative experience than bathing in any crossing place, but the divine presence is to be found *at* crossing places. This is a way of reconciling mechanical and devotional approaches to the fruits of pilgrimage.

In suggesting that devotion to a radiant god "with qualities" effects a salubrious bathing of the unitary body-soul, far more powerful than that brought about by superficial rinsing in the waters of crossing places, the song approves pilgrimage so long as the goal of encountering divinity is maintained. Yet it also leaves open the possibility that journeys are unnecessary. Gam Shyamji, yearning for Niranjani's black marble icon, or Madhu Mali, singing of Ghatiyali's *cār dhām*, both expressed aspects of this understanding. Sohan, my friend and sometime cook, responded to the question "Is God found in *tīrthas*?" by tapping her chest and saying with an indulgent smile, as to a child, "No, God is in this jug." The clay jug is a common metaphor for the fragile body as container of an imperishable soul.

A *nirgunī bhajan* performed by Ghatiyali's Nath-led singing party takes a far stronger position against external journeying. Rhetorically posing the question "What Is Outside Wandering?" in its refrain, the *bhajan* employs the term *batākānā*—a verb associated with the miseries of lost souls. Yet the reference is to visiting *tīrthas*—a wandering usually denoted by *ghūmnā* with its connotations of pleasurable aimlessness. The one who wanders (*batākānā*) is trapped in a maze, condemned to futile, circular motion like a ghost; but the one who wanders (*ghūmnā*) is irresponsible and free, like a holy man. The *bhajan* then answers itself, predisposed by the pejorative weight of *batākānā*, with a statement that effectively denies the value of all external pilgrimage: "Sixty-eight fords are right here, see them. Take *darshan* in the body-soul."

The verses go on to pose homologies between external crossing places or enshrined deities and locations within the human body: Jagdish is in the *jāṅg* (thigh); Kedar—referring to the Himalayan shrine of Kedarnath—is in the *kamar* (waist); Chatrapati—a royal title of Lord Vishnu—is in the *chātī* (chest). As is evident from these examples, the identification of outer with inner *tīrthas* is based on sound homologies. There is at least an alliterative rela-

tion between each name of deity or crossing place and its bodily equivalent in the hymn. Yet the message of this hymn is not heard merely as an extended geographic-microcosmic pun.¹⁴ As it is summed up in writing by my Nath assistant, the teaching is both straightforward and mysterious: "Hey Human! You should obtain full knowledge of your own body. Within this 'body-shaped-like-a-soul' (*ātmā-rūpī-sharīr*) exist all crossing places."

Concepts of inner pilgrimage in terms of virtue and purity of mind—briefly discussed in this chapter's opening—are standard accompaniments to pilgrimage propaganda. In Sanskrit texts (and their simple Hindi versions) outer journeys may be lauded while foundations in the primary necessity for inner truth are retained. Popular devotional poets of both *nirgunī* and *sagunī* traditions, as well as reformist leaders—from the early South Indian Virashaiva saints through the Arya Samaj's founder, Dayanand Sarasvati—all totally disparaged external pilgrimage rituals. Yet despite their rejection of the practice, they appropriated the vigor of pilgrimage imagery to their own purposes.¹⁵ Even Kabir's legendary insistence on *not* dying in Kashi, as much as it was a denial of vain external hopes of salvation, can be seen as a dramatic co-opting through inversion of pilgrimage ideology.

Rajasthani villagers' strong skepticism over the worth of superficial bathing—its reduction to "dirtying the water"—is not at all out of line, then, with received wisdom in many streams of Hindu tradition. The Nath *bhajan*, however, rather than referring to diffuse preferences for ideas of inner morality or devotion probably

14. Sounds have both inherent meaning and power in Indian tradition. A Hindu ethno-linguistics would be far from Saussurean.

15. Sarasvati, for example, writes: "*Tirtha* is that by means of which the ocean of misery is crossed: In other words, I hold that *tirthas* are good works such as speaking the truth, acquisition of knowledge, society of the wise and good. . . . No places or water of rivers are *tirthas* [italics his]" (cited in Yadav, ed., 1976:60). Paltu Das, an eighteenth-century Hindi *sant* who lived in the North Indian pilgrimage center of Ayodhya, declared in his verses the full futility of external worship and pilgrimage—valuing instead the words of the guru in his heart: "I won't take my final rest at Kashi / Or take the pilgrim's walk around the town / Should I reach Prayag, I won't go to the bathing place, / Nor will I sacrifice myself to Jagannath at Puri. / . . . Sadhu, I'll abandon all God's names / to take the one my guru gave" (cited in D. Gold 1988). Ramanujan's translations of twelfth-century South Indian saints' devotional verses reveal simple scorn for external religion: "With a whole temple / in this body / where's the need / for another?" (1973:153).

derives from specific yogic practices: techniques of directing the breath along subtle channels to nexes of inner concentration.¹⁶

Most villagers, of course, know nothing of such esoteric practices, except perhaps as awe-inspiring rumors. But the notion of a "body-shaped-like-a-soul" is not alien to the common person's way of thought. An understanding of the human body as microcosm is popularly held and can readily accommodate a homology, such as the one posed by this *bhajan*, between specific sites within the body and on the earth. Moreover, as informants sometimes told me, nothing is outside that was not previously inside—giving priority to the inner as source of substance and power. Their ground for this assertion was a prevailing image of creation itself emerging from within, a village version of the cosmic-egg motif.¹⁷ Most Ghatiyalis, then, accept the antiwandering *bhajan*'s message as consonant with cosmic realities.

The same persons who accept the premise that everything outside is also and primarily within, are clearly not discouraged from making pilgrimages. Such knowledge rarely impedes external actions, although it may console those whose outer journeys and rites have brought disappointment. This chapter, which began with reference to textual irresolutions regarding the moral value of journeying as totally efficacious and totally useless, closes with similarly construed tensions between external ritual and inner devotion or discipline. Such ambivalences—in the literal sense of mobile valuations—are deeply rooted in and expressive of Hindu tradition. On the *darshan* bus tour temple viewing, river bathing,

16. There exists in esoteric yoga a teaching in which the adept may direct his breath to particular parts of the body. This is spoken of as an inner pilgrimage whose vast fruits, for the yogic technician, may be harvested without any regard for external, behavioral virtues. The *Yoga Darshana Upanishad* tells us: "Your sins will be washed away, whether you have made love with your wife or even with your own daughter, if you carry out the pilgrimages within your own body from one *tirtha* to another" (cited in Varenne 1976:211). See also Eliade 1969, 1975 on the internalization of ritual in yoga, and Morinis 1984:282–299 for an interpretation of Hindu pilgrimage in relation to concepts of homologies between macrocosm and microcosm.

17. For the cosmic egg, see Dimmitt and van Buitenen 1978:32. The creation tale I recorded from a caste genealogist of the Gujars who visited Ghatiyali during my residence there told of the egg being made from the body-grime of Spotless-Shapeless and nourished into growth—until it cracked in two—in the hands of a primeval goddess. Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva then emerged from the shell, whose top half became the sky and its lower half the earth.

and brahmanical rites often seemed to be the least meaningful parts of the journey to participants. Many felt at heart that it was their inner resolution to go and the outer hardship and expense endured as signs of that resolution which validated whatever fruits, gross or subtle, they did or did not hope to attain in this life or future lives.

6. Conclusion: What Is Outside Wandering?

This book attempts to answer the question "What is outside wandering?" not as the Nath *bhajan* poses it, rhetorically and didactically, but as the anthropologist creates it, literally and evocatively. I have gathered up and then surrendered the fruits of my own fieldwork pilgrimage, a process that has certainly involved some sorting, ordering, polishing, paring, and trimming of these fruits. The results are composed of fact and flavor, ritual paraphernalia and chorused or antiphonal voices, data recorded, experiences felt, inspiration, and intuition. In conclusion I reconsider the process of composition and review some of the concepts on which it reflects. I recapitulate styles of journeying and reemphasize the nature and significance of returns.

Stephen Tyler, in his contribution to an anthology concerned with the art of ethnographic writing, suggests that a postmodern ethnography (which doesn't yet exist) would be, among other things, "an evocation of quotidian experience, a palpable reality that uses everyday speech to suggest what is ineffable, not through abstraction but by means of the concrete" (1986:136). Such has been my enterprise here, to a large extent. But it is not Tyler (read two years after the bulk of this work was completed) whose sensibilities I emulate; rather it is India itself.¹ To suggest what is ineffable by means of the concrete is a dominant Hindu process.

The infinite profusion of name and form, icon and story that makes Hindu tradition so dense yet permeable is neither solely

1. It is probably not irrelevant that Tyler's own early fieldwork and ethnographic writings were based in South Asia.

Fruitful Journeys

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