

Kipling's outpost of Empire and Keyserling's wonderland are equally remote from this three-dimensional, five-sensational India of a French barbarian.

A Barbarian *in* INDIA

By HENRI MICHAUX

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I KNOW twenty different capitals, but Calcutta is the most crowded of them all. Imagine a city composed exclusively of monks—seven hundred thousand of them. Seven hundred thousand other people—the women of the city—live indoors, but they don't count for as much as the men and they do not walk abroad. You are always surrounded by men. The impression is extraordinary.

A city composed exclusively of monks. The Bengali is a born monk and all monks except the very young ones, who are carried, go on foot. Everybody is a pedestrian. They fill the street as well as the sidewalk. Tall and narrow, without hips, without shoulders, without gestures, without laughter. Peripatetic and professorial.

Their costumes vary. Some are almost naked, but a real monk is always a monk. The naked ones are perhaps the most dignified. Some are clothed

in robes with two skirts trailing behind, others have only one skirt. Their robes are mauve, rose, green, wine-colored, and white. Extremely numerous, they are calm, sure of themselves, magnetically sincere, and they have attained the kind of impudence that is achieved by sitting cross-legged meditating on religion. Their gaze is perfect. It is neither raised nor lowered. It contains no defects, no excitement, no apprehension. When they stand their eyes look like the eyes of men who are lying down and when they are lying down their eyes look like the eyes of men who are standing. They have no flexibility, no pliancy. They have all been caught up in the same net.

It is an unconstrained crowd that is absorbed in itself, or rather each individual is absorbed in himself. They are insolent, but cowardly when attacked. When taken by surprise they

are embarrassed. Each one of them lives in the shadow of his seven centres, of his lotuses, and of the sorcery of three thousand years.

They are careful to avoid every form of defilement, including the foul breath of Europeans, which smells of meat and murder. They have no contact with laundrymen, curriers, Mohammedan butchers, fishermen, shoemakers, or handkerchiefs, which preserve what ought to return to the earth, or with any of the innumerable things that keep plunging a man in mud up to his neck if he does not take care.

II

They are concentrated people and are reluctant to flow with the street traffic and the torrent of life. They maintain an inner check on themselves. Their emotions are always sheathed and never get out of hand. They never lose control of themselves, never give up the fort. They are assured and impudent. They sit down wherever they please. When they are tired of carrying a basket they put it down on the ground and sprawl out on it. When they meet a barber they say, 'Stop, give me a shave,' and they are shaved then and there on the open street, indifferent to the tumult about them. They sit down everywhere except in the places one would expect—on roads, in front of benches, or on the shelves of their stores among the merchandise, between hats and shoes. They sit down on the grass in the sunlight (for the Indian derives nourishment from the sun), or in the shade (for the Indian nourishes himself from the shade, too), or they may sit partly in the shade and partly in

the sun, gravely talking to one another among the flower beds in the parks or leaning against benches but never sitting on them. Can you ever tell where a cat is going to sit down? The Hindu is just the same. Oh, those devastated Calcutta lawns. There is not an Englishman who can look at them without shivering inside. But no police force, not even artillery squadrons, could prevent the Indians from sitting down wherever they choose.

They are immobile and expect nothing from anybody. Whoever wants to sing sings, whoever wants to pray prays at the top of his voice while he sells betel or does anything else. Calcutta is incredibly crowded with pedestrians, and one has a hard time making one's way along even the widest streets. It is a city of monks and their master, their master in impudence and the inner life—the cow.

The Hindus have made an alliance with the cow, but the cow knows nothing about it. The cow and the monkey are the two most impudent of sacred animals. Cows wander all over Calcutta. They walk through the streets or lie down on a sidewalk, blocking it entirely. They deposit their droppings in front of the automobile of the Governor of Bengal. They inspect stores, threaten elevators, and install themselves in doorways. And if the Hindu were edible they would no doubt eat him.

In its indifference to the outer world the cow is also superior to the Hindu. It seeks no explanation, no truth, in the outer world. And if it eats as much as a tuft of grass it needs seven hours to ruminate. A large number of cows wander all over Cal-

cutta chewing their cuds. They belong to a breed that does not mingle with other breeds and in this respect they resemble the Hindus and the English. Thus three different races inhabit this world capital.

The Hindu is not charmed by the grace of animals. Not at all. He looks at them awry. He does not like dogs, for dogs have no concentration. They are creatures of movement, shamelessly devoid of self-control. And, besides, what are dogs but reincarnations of creatures who would not have become dogs if they had not sinned? They are foul criminals who may even have killed a Brahman.

The Hindu appreciates wisdom and meditation. He feels in accord with the cow and the elephant, who are self-possessed and live a somewhat retired life. The Hindu likes animals that do not say 'thank you' and that do not cut too many capers. In the country there are peacocks but no sparrows. There are ibises and cranes and quantities of crows and kites. All these birds are serious.

Then there are camels and water buffaloes, who are also very serious. Needless to say, the water buffalo is slow. He wants to lie down in the mud. Beyond that nothing interests him. And if you drive him through Calcutta he will not go fast. From time to time he sticks his long, soot-colored tongue through his teeth and looks at the city as if he had lost his way. As for the camel, he is clearly superior to the horse, Orientaly speaking. A trotting or galloping horse always looks as if he were engaged in some kind of sport. He does not run, he competes. The camel, on the other hand, moves forward rapidly with enormous strides. It is not that

the animals differ in constitution; they differ in character.

III

Every Hindu thought is magical. A thought must act, act directly on one's own inner self, on the inner selves of others, or on things. The formulas of Western science do not act directly. No formula acts directly on the wheelbarrow, not even the formula of the lever. One must seize the wheelbarrow in one's hands. Western philosophy makes one's hair drop out and shortens one's life. Eastern philosophy makes one's hair grow and prolongs life. A great many of what are generally taken for beautiful philosophical religious thoughts are merely mantras or magic prayers that possess some virtue like 'Open Sesame.' According to the *Khandogya-upanishad*, if certain words, which do not really seem so very extraordinary in spite of all the commentaries written about them, 'are addressed to an old stick it will cover itself with flowers and leaves and take root.' And this statement is meant literally.

Remember that all Indian hymns and many philosophic commentaries are primarily practical. They are not things to think about; they are thoughts that enable one to participate in the Being, in Brahma. The cultivated Hindu, who is always scrupulous, attaches particular importance to this subject. He is haunted with the fear of being detached from the absolute and consigned to that hell which is in store for Europeans. Remember this terrible teaching: 'For those who leave this world without having discovered the *atman* and its true life there is no liberty in any

world.' One cannot think of such a thing without having one's blood run cold.

Controlled respiration with a magical purpose might be considered the Hindu national exercise. One day in the station of Serampore I asked a babu who accompanied me to explain this subject in detail. Within less than three minutes, twenty experimenters, advisers, and informers surrounded us with their noses in the air, telling us to breathe in four times through the left nostril for every sixteen sharp exhalations through the right nostril, and so on and so on. They flung at our feet crumbs of wisdom concerning their extraordinary science of breathing. I never saw so many gestures in my life, though the Indian ordinarily lives without any gestures at all.

The Hindu is practical in the profound sense of the word. He wants a spiritual profit. He has no use for beauty. Beauty is an intermediary. He does not pay much attention to truth as such. What he cares about is spiritual efficiency. That is why Hindu preachers have had such success in America and have made so many converts in Boston and Chicago, where their teachings are as popular as Pelmanism.

I despair of ever being able to get a clear idea of idolatry, but at least I have seen it to a certain extent. The Hindu has idolatry in his blood. Everything seems good to him but he must also have his idol. He merges himself with the idol. He draws his power from it. He worships it. The most ancient Hindu book, the *Rigveda*, is full of hymns to the elements, to fire, air, sky, and sun. Hindus always worship the sun. In the morning they

jump out of trains to salute it, and I am not confusing them with the Mohammedans. When 'He' rises they wash in the Ganges and salute 'Him' with both hands. Did Don Juan love women? We know that he loved to love. In like manner the Hindu loves to adore. It is something stronger than himself. The Hindus do not love Gandhi—no, they adore him. His picture is in all their temples and they pray to him. Through him they pray to God.

IV

The Hindu adores his mother, the 'maternity of his mother,' the potential maternity of little girls, the offspring that children will bring forth. When the wife of a school director, or rather a spiritual adviser, dies, imprints of her feet are made and these imprints are reproduced in red in the temple beside the statue of God, so that each pupil may adore 'the mother.'

The Hindu loves to prostrate himself. He also wants to belong to a cult. That is why he prefers maternity in woman to femininity, though he also pays attention to the latter, since the Being 'abounds in every quarter and nothing must be neglected. Therefore the Hindu, who is highly sensual, knows quite well how to indulge in universal fornication.

Hindu religions, the cults of Vishnu, Siva, Kali, Durga, Ganesa, do not arise from the weakness of man but from his strength. Prayer and meditation are exercises of spiritual forces. Every temple contains, beside its altar of Kali, a picture showing the proper attitudes in which to say the prayers and mantras. One prayer takes the form of a rape. One's tactics must

be good. He who prays well makes the stones fall and perfumes the waters. He forces God. The interior of the temples, even of those that are largest outside, are small, small to make one feel one's own strength. The Hindus would much rather make twenty niches than one great altar, for they want to feel their own power. Then they say 'Om.' Serenity in power. Magic at the centre of all magic. They should be heard chanting this word in the Vedic hymns, the Upanishads, and the *Tantra of the Great Liberation*.

The Englishman washes very regularly but to the Hindu he is the symbol of filth and uncleanness. The Hindu has difficulty in not vomiting when he thinks about the Englishman. The reason is that the Englishman is constantly contaminated by various contacts that the Hindu carefully avoids. Few people bathe as often as the Hindus. In Chandernagore, which is as small as Ville d'Avray, there are sixteen thousand pools, and no matter what time of day you visit them you rarely find one that is not occupied. The Ganges, of course, does not stand empty, nor are its waters distilled. People take it as it comes. The same thing is true of water in pools. If this water were clear it would not intentionally be made dirty before one bathed in it though it might be sullied a little to prepare it.

The Hindu behaves very seriously in the water. He stands upright, knee-deep. From time to time he ducks and the sacred water of the Ganges flows over him. He spends some time this way and also washes his clothes or his rags. His teeth he cleans with particular care. And if the sun is shining he prays to it.

But there is no laughter. Near the big city centres, near the jute factories, one occasionally sees a few little rascals trying to swim, actually trying to swim in sacred water. They have even been seen splashing one another. But these spectacles are happily rare.

In spite of all this, Hindu filthiness is proverbial, although the clothes the Hindus wear are often clean. It is a curious thing that when a painter does a picture of their dirty interiors and ragged forms, he always represents them in the cleanest way. Filthiness itself is depicted with cleanliness. The holes in the garments are clean. European paintings of the last century, on the other hand, depict almost nothing but crumbling walls covered with lizards, interiors with dusty, broken furniture, and the heads of people who seem to be suffering from skin diseases.

V

Everybody knows the kind of novel in which an unspoken word or a lowered gaze cause two young people who love each other to be separated for years. The girl wanted to say 'yes,' she wanted to smile, but she failed to do so, and it takes three hundred pages to straighten things out, though it was all so simple at the beginning.

The Bengali's whole existence is lived out in this way. He would rather accumulate all kinds of regrets than intervene too quickly. When a film scenario calls for an emotional thunder storm the director has the greatest difficulty in reproducing this phenomenon. For Indians do not react. They do not smile. They give no outward signs. Their eyelids do not move. When they are excited they merely

move a little more slowly. They even prefer unhappiness because they are so fond of situations that contain density. They like to feel the great forces of fate rather than their own individual forces. They breathe seven times before speaking. They do not want immediate results.

The Indian is incapable of making any definite sign to indicate 'yes.' He does n't nod, he simply moves his head so that it describes part of a circle, as if to say, 'Oh, well, after all, everything considered, if it really is necessary to you, as a last resort, all right.' Ask him if he wants to accept a lac of rupees or if he is a real Brahman and he will not reply with a decisive 'yes.' It will always be a long, undulating, dreamy 'yes.' His neck will move like a swan's as it makes a gesture that still has certain negative elements.

I once took malicious pleasure in looking at the plates severely when my cook brought me a meal. He at once began moving them about nervously in a perfectly useless way, separating them and gathering them together, pushing them away from

him and then drawing them an inch or two nearer. When I had almost finished eating I stopped with the same air, so that he at once began looking around again without ever doing anything useful, changing the position of the saltcellar in relation to the olive oil and the dessert spoon in relation to the plate or gently rubbing one edge of the table cloth and then another. This lasted twenty minutes, and he was evidently deeply embarrassed, yet he would never ask, 'Well, what's the matter?' From anything like that he would guard himself carefully.

Why does this remind me of kite-flying? The Bengalis, who play no games at all, fly kites, even grown-up people twenty-five years old. Mature, serious men unwind the strings of their kites on the roofs of their houses, looking far up into the sky as they try to break the strings of neighboring kites. Thus they indulge in combats a hundred yards up in the sky, hardly realizing that they are playing any part in the struggle and allowing the wind and destiny to govern their lazy, meditative play.

Here is a chapter from *Kleiner Mann — was nun?*, which was reviewed in our columns a few months ago and has since become the novel of the year in Germany.

A CHILD Falls Ill

By HANS FALLADA

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ONE night the Pinnebergs awoke to unfamiliar music. Their baby, Murkel, was awake and crying. 'Murkel is crying,' whispered Lämmchen quite unnecessarily.

'Yes,' said Pinneberg quietly and looked at the illuminated dial of the alarm clock. 'It is five minutes past three.'

They listened and Lämmchen whispered again, 'He's never done that before. He can't be hungry.'

'He'll stop soon,' said Pinneberg. 'You'll see. We'll soon be able to go back to sleep.'

But sleep was impossible and after a while Lämmchen said, 'How about putting on the light? He is crying so bitterly.'

But where Murkel is concerned Pinneberg is a man of principle. 'By no means. Understand? By no means. We have worn ourselves out. We can't bother about his crying at night. If

we let him alone, he'll know that he is supposed to sleep when it is dark.'

'Yes,' Lämmchen began, 'but . . .'

'By no means!' Pinneberg exclaimed with emphasis. 'If we once start in we'll have to be getting up every night. Don't you remember the first night? He cried much longer then.'

'But he's crying so differently now. He's crying as if he were suffering.'

'We must put up with it. Lämmchen, be reasonable.'

They lay in the dark and listened to the child's crying. It kept on incessantly and sleep was obviously out of the question. But it must stop. It had to stop. And it did n't. Was n't the child crying more bitterly than usual, Pinneberg asked himself? This was n't his usual cry of rage or hunger. He must be suffering.

'Perhaps he is in pain?' Lämmchen inquired gently.

'Why should he be in pain?' Pinne-