

**A RETURN TO THE CITY:
AN INVESTIGATIVE PILGRIMAGE TO BANARAS**

by

MAHESH B. SENAGALA

B.Arch., J.N.Technological University, Hyderabad, India

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Kansas State University

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Approved by



Major Professor

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ABSTRACT

The manifest form of any given city is a function of human efforts to find meaning in life, and to satiate the other innate impulses. It is the understanding of those impulses that determines the meaning of human existence and the form of a city. Rational thought with legitimate beginnings would always lead one away from the neurotic clinging to the city as a source of existential security. The thesis proposes that the city of Banaras survives on and supports the irrational and ignorant pursuits of its denizens.

The work has been structured into three major parts:

The *first part* of the thesis is predominantly a description of Banaras. It contains photographs, graphic and textual sketches, dialogues and diagrams which help in constructing the context of the city of Banaras in the reader's mind.

The *second part* is the central argument of the thesis. It contains an exposition of the *nature of man* which establishes the premises, and forms the basis for the thesis. This section makes extensive references to the psychoanalytic, transpersonal psychological, and existential philosophical works of Sigmund Freud, J.Krishnamurti, Erich Fromm, Ken Wilber, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Da Free John, and others.

The *third part* identifies and dispels various illusions clouding the existence, life and growth of Banaras in particular, and the city (as a domain of human pursuits) in general. It also reveals the role of history, irrationality and ignorance in the rise and sustenance of the Banaras in particular and cities in general.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To wish to alleviate the burden of gratitude - that dwells in the depths of my heart - by pouring a few cliches on this page is only to be either over ambitious or inane. All that I hope here, therefore, is to relieve myself of a little if not all the responsibility.

The many contemplative evenings spent over cups of honey-filled tea and joy-filled debates with my advisor, Professor Gary Coates, have already found a secure place in my memories. He has been more than an advisor to me, and I cannot possibly thank him enough for guiding me to bring this work from a meagerly assembled draft of stray ideas to a state of more refined argument.

I owe great respect and gratitude to Professor Vladimir Krstic for the many invigorating and positively critical debates that have polished my argument rigorously during the course of development of my thesis.

I thank Professor Donald Watts for kindly and promptly sharing his thoughts on various issues covering a wide ground of knowledge.

I would like to thank Anujay Vootla and Venu Gopal Pulipaka for their constructive criticism which has tremendously helped me shape the argument in a proper way. I also thank Nagarjuna Chimata for his constant support. Finally, to say that my friends and parents have extended their love and encouragement is only to understate their active contribution to the very core of my thesis. I am indebted to them (I mean it!).

INTRODUCTION

THE PLOT:

Lord Siva, the destroyer of ignorance and the giver of Bliss, and Sage Narada, the eternal traveler and scholar-musician, are on a canonical pilgrimage around the city of Banaras. As they traverse the ten-mile circumambulation path which is marked by five canonical halts, the Divine pilgrims, through their dialogues, examine the conception of limited-man and the triumph of irrationality which formed the sub-structure of the physical city of Banaras. In their conversations are raised such issues as the existential and psychological elements of Banaras and their relationship to its physical structure, growth and proliferation of forms.



AN OUTLINE OF THE INVESTIGATIVE PILGRIMAGE:

At the outset, a disclaimer is in order: I should hasten to mention clearly what this work is not. Enough accolades have been accorded on Banaras by countless individuals. Enough documentation has been laboriously undertaken by many organizations and researchers. I do not wish to repeat either of those ventures: this work of mine is neither a documentation of the city or ghats of Banaras, nor a passive description of the form-making principles, patterns and structures of the city.

Away from all that, this work is an exercise in reason and a critical investigation of the city of Banaras. My concern is with "what should be studied in Banaras, why it should be studied, and how that study informs and affects our lives."

I shall now request the reader to take a look at the map of possible levels, stances and issues that could be taken up for the study of cities. On this map, I locate the focus, premises and the scope of my present work of investigation:

Realms of Thought/Action	Assumptions/Attitudes	Questions	Disciplines	Examples
1. Physical making of the city <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical construction - Technology - Geography and other sciences - Methods - Execution - Skills / Techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We need the city - We need the society - We need Technology - We need to live together - Principles are absolutes - Follow others - Let us assume that . . . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By what means can we build cities, maintain them and sustain them? - What are the available principles? - What are the available technologies? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engineering - Science - Planning - Administration - Architecture - Urban Design 	
FRUITS				
2. Form and space making principles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spatial and formal manipulation techniques - Geometrical systems - Movement systems - Transforming abstract to concrete - Methods - Skills / Intellect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We need the city - We need the society - We need the structures to give shape to society - We need to live together - Structures are absolutes - Let us assume that . . . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the structures for living together? - What is order? - How to express? - How to "translate" the metaphysical into the physical? - What kind of city? - What is the basis of form and space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Architecture - Urban Design - Urban Planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Aldo Rossi -Ed. Bacon -Corbusier -Leon Krier -Louis Kahn -Rob Krier -F.L. Wright -R. Venturi
3. "Structures" of civilization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Institutions - Economic and political systems - Tradition, belief systems - Linguistic structures - Culture - Methods - Intellect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We need the structures - We need to live together - We need to give structure to the society - What absolutes are available - Let us assume that . . . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do we relate to each other? - to the world? - How do we transact? - How do we sort out? - What is human nature? - What is individual and what is collective? - What is the basis of a "structure?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sociology - Economics - Politics - Anthropology - Linguistics - Philosophy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Levi-Strauss -Marx /Engels -K. Popper -J.J. Rousseau -Hannah Arendt -Daniel Bell -Derrida -R. Sennett -M. Foucault -E. Schumacher
4. Essences, Raison d'etre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reason - Reflection - Realization - Psyche / Consciousness - Investigation - Contemplation - Intellect / Meta-intellect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We are / I am - I exist - I need to figure out - I need to find out why we are - What to assume - What not to assume - Why to assume - Why not to assume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are we? Am I? - Why are we? - Who are we? - What do I/We need? - How do I relate to Thou? - What is living together? - Why cities? - Why do we live together? - What should I/We do? - What is the basis of reason itself? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Psychology - Philosophy - Metaphysics - Theology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -S. Freud -C. G. Jung -K. Wilber -Da Free John -Krishnamurti -E. Fromm -J-P. Sartre -M. Buber -Rollo May -Vivekananda -A. Camus -F. Kafka -R.D. Laing -Louis Kahn
ROOTS				

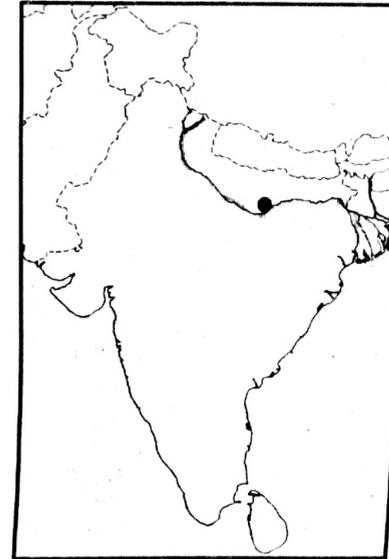
Although concerned individuals are free to study the city at any level starting at any level/stance, I do hold that unless the "roots" are strong and clear, the tree of investigation will not stand in the face of even a breeze of

reason, let alone a deluge of arbitrariness and ignorance. As it can be seen in the map, the present work of investigation is concerned with the relationship between the "roots" or "essences," the "structures" of the city and the "principles" of the physical making of the city. However, the emphasis here is on developing a theory that can act as a basis for a proper and elemental understanding the city.

Such an approach required me to take up an extensive and expansive study of material spanning psychology, philosophy and urban theory. To my disappointment, I discovered that, despite their usefulness and indispensability, almost all the theories of man that I have encountered are plagued by false and terrible presumptions of the most fundamental kind. That was when I began questioning the legitimacy of a theory's beginnings. Most of the theories in psychology and philosophy began arbitrarily although being immaculate within the bounds of their presumptions. I recognize, however, that almost all the theories are valid at different levels of diagnosis and cure for various problems of existence (which includes the relationship of man to the city and the meaning of his existence in that context). However, almost no

single theory of man at the level of self and psychology could account for the manifestation of the conception and structure of self at the level of city-making. The questions being asked here are: What is going on in Banaras? Why is Banaras the way it is? Why do the people of Banaras live and relate to each other the way they do? Are they different from other peoples and is Banaras different from other cities? What does it all mean, finally, to me and the reader? Does all this have any larger significance to man in general?

The basic intention of this thesis is to find the most fundamental and elemental basis for criticizing, understanding, and analyzing the phenomenon called city. Banaras is just a good case to study.



THE PILGRIMAGE ITINERARY

Departure from the Manikarnika ghat - origination of the pilgrimage

DESCRIPTIVE PHASE

1. Arrival at Kandava - the first halt on the pilgrimage: "CITY OF CIRCUITS"

On the way to Bhimchandi . . . : "BETWEEN THE CRESCENT AND THE LABYRINTH"

2. Arrival at Bhimchandi - the second canonical halt: "THE NAMES OF A CITY"

THE ARGUMENT

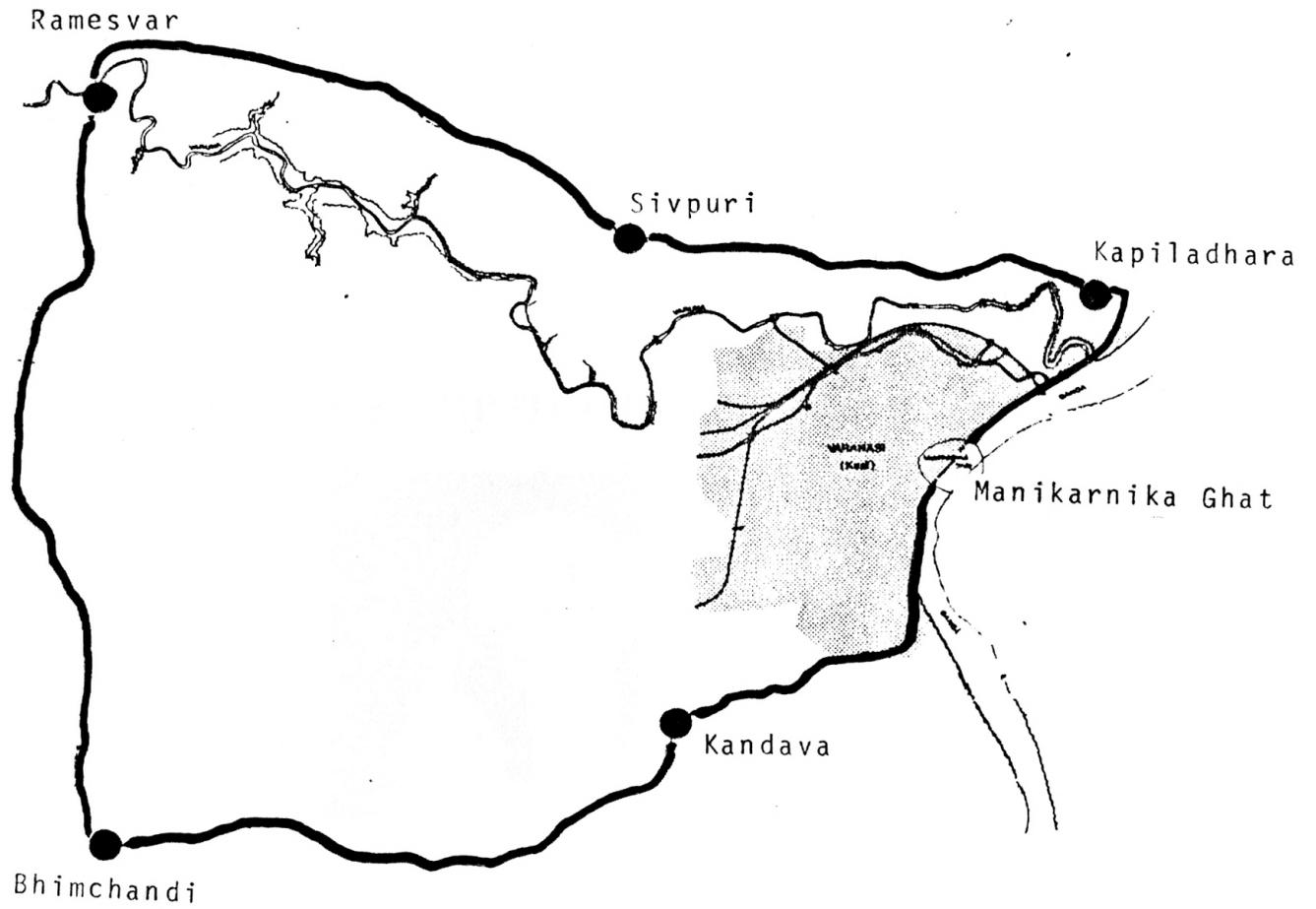
3. Arrival at Ramesvar - the third halt: "THE BASIS OF REASON"

On the way to Sivpuri along the river Varana . . . : "FORM FOLLOWS FICTION"

4. Arrival at Sivpuri - the fourth halt: "THE FALSE RELIGION OF HISTORY, MYTH AND MONUMENT"

On the way to Kapiladhara . . . : "THEREFORE A RETURN TO THE CITY"

A return to Banaras: Back at Manikarnika ghat - the end of the pilgrimage



THE DESCRIPTIVE PHASE



THE CHARACTERS

LORD SIVA: A popular God among Indians, he is one of the three presiding deities of the universe, the other two being Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu. Lord Brahma creates the world, Lord Vishnu sustains it and Lord Siva destroys the degenerated and decadent world enabling Brahma to begin the creation cycle once again.

Lord Siva is known to be a highly generous God who gives away boons very easily. He is extolled with numerous other names¹. Mount Kailasa in the Himalayas is his eternal abode, and Banaras is the place from which He presides over the matters of the universe. He is also associated with the cremation grounds, and that is one reason to call Banaras a Mahasman (great cremation ground).

Lord Siva is armed with a Trident and a lethal "third eye." Nandi, the sacred bull is his conveyance. Goddess Parvathi and Goddess Ganges are his two wives.

¹. His other names include: Maheshwara, Eswara, Mahadeva, Kasinatha, Jagadeswara, Samkara, Kailasanatha, Hara.

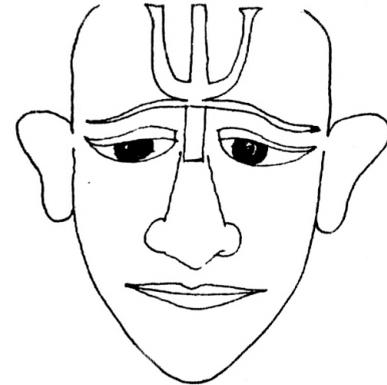


In our story Lord Siva rids himself of all his usual duties and takes on a humble but potent guise of a forty-year old Sadhu (renunciate) on a pilgrimage around the city of Banaras.

SAGE NARADA: He is Lord Brahma and Goddess Saraswathi's son. A renowned scholar, musician and an eternal traveller of three worlds, Sage Narada is the most beloved and respected of all the sages even in the Nether Worlds. He is known to feast on the conflicts between the Gods and the Demons, and hence he acquired the name "Kalaha Bhojana"².

He heads Gandharvas, the divine musicians. As a scholar he has authored "Narada Dharmasutra," a treatise on law. He has also written "Narada Pancharatna," a ritualistic work of the followers of Vishnu. Sage Narada is an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu.

In our present story, he is a young renunciate of twenty-five years old devoutly travelling with his Guru, who is none other than Lord Siva.



². Literally "the one feeding on conflicts."



JOURNEYS IN THE ONION or THE CITY OF CIRCUITS

Disguised as pilgrims, Lord Siva and Sage Narada set off on the circumambulation of Kashi. The Panch Kroshi circuit is, as its name indicates, five kroshas or about sixty miles long. There are in all 108 temples on the circuit all of which lie on the right side of the pilgrimage path. After leaving Manikarnika ghat early in the morning, Siva and Narada reached, by the same evening, their first canonical halt on the circuit: Kandava.

Kandava is a complex of little temples dedicated to Lord *Kardamesvara*³. It contains a grove of banyan trees, a family of parrots, a herd of benevolent monkeys and a sacred pond. Tired after a day's travel in the warm tropical sun, both the pilgrims rested for a while and after the evening ablutions, they sat down on the steps of the large tank. As the Sun started setting in the west, Siva began describing the uniqueness of Kashi as the Sage listened.

SIVA: Narada, O great son of the Creator, Kashi is the city of circuits. In this city, devoted pilgrims carrying food, faith and age-old stories, go circling the city following the sixteen codified sacred circuits. The city is like an onion: circuit within a circuit, one finally reaches the center where the great Linga lies. The

³. One of Siva's many "forms."



form of the city is made, remade and reasserted as people trace the footsteps of their elders. What defines Kashi, Narada, unlike the cities of hell, are neither the fort walls nor the boundaries, but the circuits of circumambulation. These circuits of circumambulation around the city and its countless temples, form not a map but a mandala in the minds of devoted pilgrims as they traverse the routes chanting and reciting the myths and stories about the places they come across. In this way the pilgrims in fact meditate the city and see the correspondence between the city of the mind and the city of the outer world. Ultimately, it is the city of the mind, Narada, that the people carry with them and possess - not the material city.



These circuits are in turn connected to the circuits at a larger level. Kashi is a part of an intricate network of sacred fields in India. *Amarnath* in the north, *Kamakhya Devi* in the east, *Kanchi* in the south and *Dvaraka* in the west form the four points of this grand pilgrimage for which Kashi is the center. As they trek the circuits, people see what they have heard about their whole lives and then they relate and recreate their own city by means of their own stories. Banaras is not just what

you see, Narada: there are many Banarases beneath, around and within the physical setting, enveloping it like the air and the mist. The one dynamically alters, corresponds to and embraces the other. It is in the correlation between all these cities that the unity, integrity and vitality of this city lies.

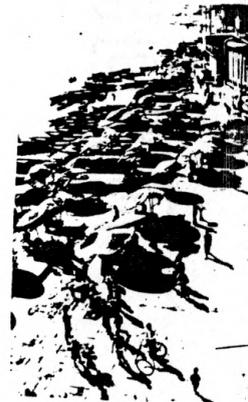
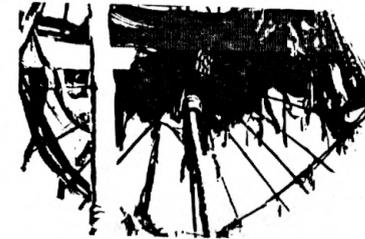
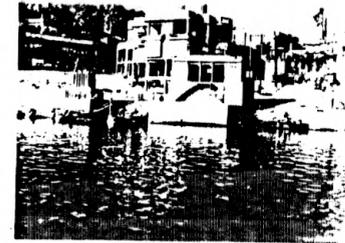
Narada, there is a distinction between the "map reading image" of the city and the "myth reading image of the city." The mandala of Kashi is a kinesthetic and mytho-poetic image of the city that one forms by experiencing it through traversing it ritually in space. You may find your way by means of a map, but with a mandala, you become the mandala. A mandala is no map, Narada, but a constellation of myths, illusions, stories, imagery, smells; in the chanting of stories the city is constantly conserved, imagined, created and revised.

Somewhere in the process of traversing the city, Narada, one transforms one's own self into the city and the city is projected as an image of one's self. We shall consider the relationship between the idea of the self and the mandala of the city at a later stage; but, now let us be content with this description of Banaras and let us move on to our next halt. I shall describe to you the most vivid and vivacious part of Kashi, the ghats, as we move along our path.

BETWEEN THE CRESCENT AND THE LABYRINTH

SIVA: Between the crescent and the labyrinth, Narada, exists a city of many levels. Stretched along the curve of the river Ganges from the north to the south of the city, like a tensed bow, the city of steps is full of power and vitality. Between the ever flowing waters of the Ganges and the ever growing labyrinth of Kashi, lies the "ghat city," the city of steps.

When you are in Kashi, when you are wading through the vein-like streets of Banaras as a stranger, Narada, you hardly know that there flows a great river which grazes lazily over the vast plains on one side of the city. Only the presence of a broken ore used to clear the drains, or a dead fish lying on one of the mud roads hints at the presence of their unseen habitat. As you walk toward the rising sun and climb the gentle slope of the hillock, you reach a point of perceptual inversion: in a moment you are faced with a spatial, spiritual and topographic reversal. Narada, at the end of the street lies a revelation, a splendor in water colors, a moment of grace in the sweeping curve of the river and the liberating

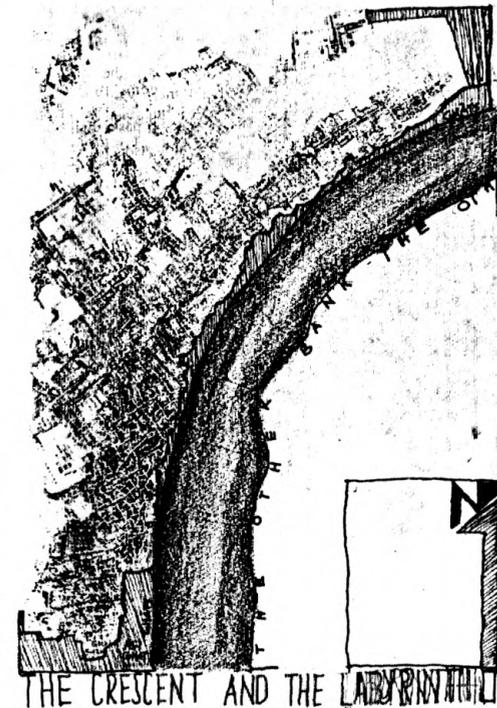


emptiness of the other bank - all in one unsuspected moment.

That moment of revelation is when you arrive at the city of steps. Kashi doesn't rise from the river bank indifferently or steeply; instead it seeks a mediating element where the clamor of the city can be reconciled with the silence of the river. You may call the mediator a ghat city - a city in itself, but it is nourished and fed by both the eternal flows of life on either side of it. However, the river, the ghats and the city do not read as three independent elements: one cannot exist without the other. Only the existence of all the three qualifies the presence of each of the others.

Like the fingers that comb one's hair, the ghats extend in a jagged manner into the city and like an assuring shoulder they support the river and provide a harbor for the boats.

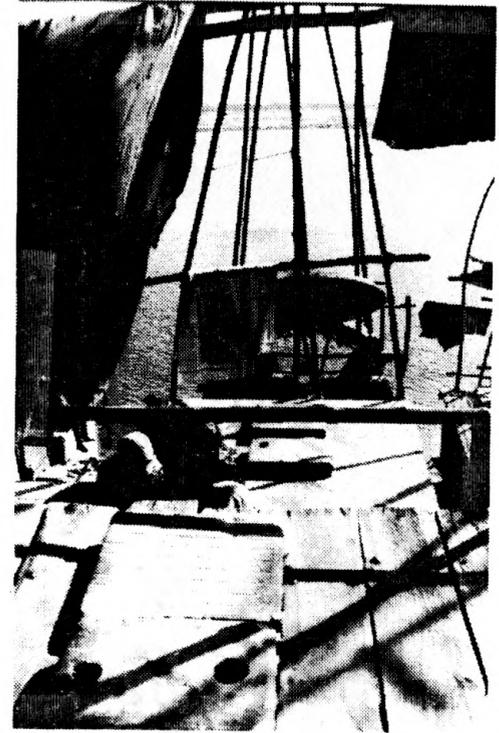
O dear sage, at the ghats, the momentum and the energy of the city of Banaras is thwarted such that it forces the city edge into a rugged, fat, haphazard, incoherent, circumstantial mass of walls, facades, spires, towers, palaces and platforms. The intersection of the city of steps and the labyrinthine Kashi is violent indeed. But the conjunction of the ghats with the river is gentle, changing



with the tide, slippery and quiet. The Ganges flows slowly, patiently and delicately like an Indian woman, absorbing all the agonies, burdens, adoration and impurities with great untouched melancholy and unfathomed depth.

The ghat city originates at the confluence of the Asi river and the Ganges at the southern end of Kashi and extends till the merging of Varana river with the mother. If you are a pilgrim, you may take a walk from the Asi ghat along the uneven terrain of the river edge. What you come across may be the most profound experience of the city: both its architecture and its life. Along the length of the ghat city unfolds the breadth of Banarasi life:

A wrecked boat can be seen capsized in the silt of the muddy clay bank. A half-naked mendicant stands waist-deep in the water, alone with a herd of imperturbable cows, water buffalos, a series of dilapidated umbrellas, Peepal leaves, Marigolds, Roses, Lotuses adore the ghats. Fat Brahmins conduct funeral oblations for bereft families. A forest of lamp-holding bamboos, a leaning temple capsized in the soft clay, a vendor of sweets, a bangle man, a rusty balustrade and a worn off rope that once held the mightiest of the boats and an abandoned tower house compete for the same place at the river's edge and the viewer's

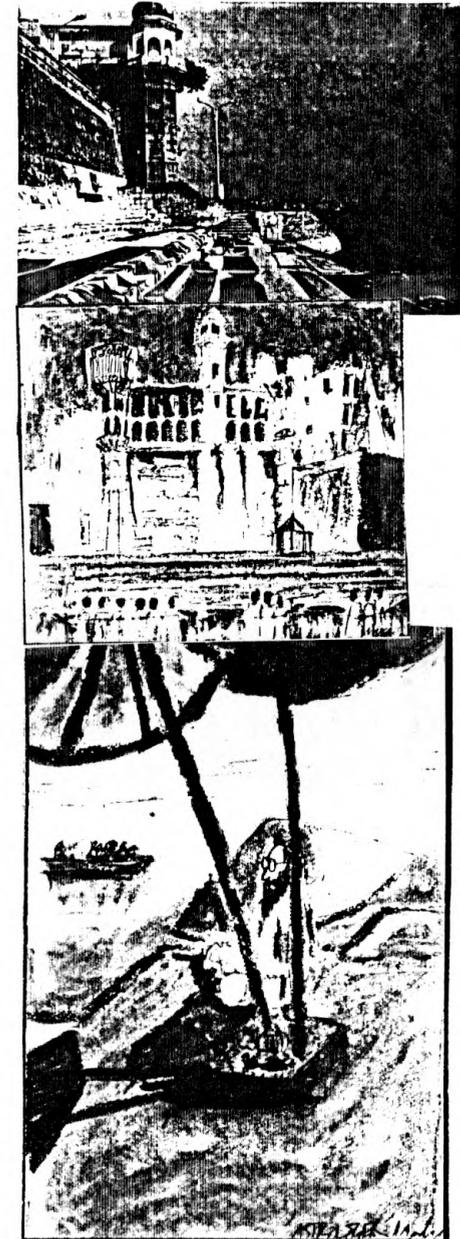


mind.

You may also, Narada, if you are patiently and curiously walking along the ghats, meet the vandalized stone plinths of the lofty palaces, a scale measuring the height of the Ganges, a blood-clad Hanuman, a bicycle, a group of mischievous kids flying kites, stray dogs, Yakshas and Gandharvas⁴. Burning corpses with swirling smoke blacken the empty edifices. Still hot ashes of a funeral pyre and a meditating yogi with a trident and saffron flag, a sandstone colonnade, a chimney, chatting fishermen with tangled nets, a dead snake, brass vessels resting on the octagonal stone platforms, graceful young girls and the floating bodies of dead infants coexist simultaneously on the craggy steps of the ghats.

Against this variegated landscape are played the reverberations of the temple bells, the buzz of the chanting and recitations, the squeak of greasy wrestlers. The strident calls of noisy crows, an astrologer's recitations, the indifferent rustle of the dry leaves rolling on the abraded stone walks, the growling of old monkeys and the chirping of the parrots add to the richness of

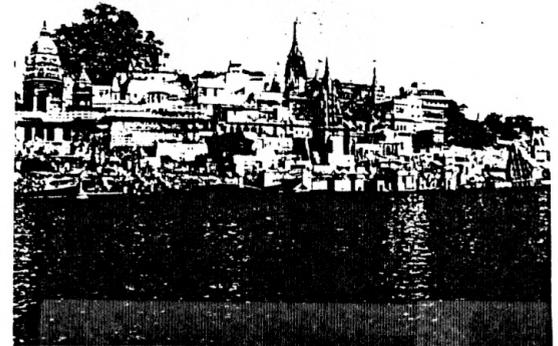
⁴. Gandharvas are the heavenly musicians in Hindu mythology.



phenomena that enthrall the participator.

Multiple perspectives, the maddening diversity of people, Gods and harsh Sun, dust and vapors over the distant horizon become an onslaught of metaphors of grotesque demons and stray gods.

There the people, in an effort to experience the fullness and completeness of the world, create certain beautiful illusions portrayed in an all enthralling fiction: Parvathi's ear rings, Divodasa's ten-horse sacrifice, a broken bow and a bride won, Vasthu - the lethargic demon, Indra with a diamond edged lethal weapon, Me with a crescent and two wives. The invisible population far surpasses the visible and dominates the visible. Ghats: the city between the Ganges and Kashi⁵. Ghats: the magnificent amphitheaters of life drama - a literal life drama where fiction and illusions are enacted with faith.

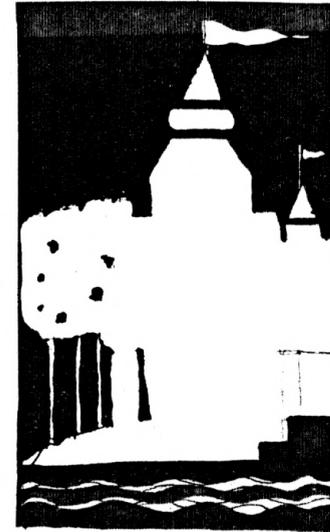


⁵. For a detailed description of various myths and legends concerning Banaras, please see Diana Eck's Banaras: the City of Light.

**THE GESTURES OF FIVE PRIMARY ELEMENTS
AND THE NAMES OF A CITY**

Traveling further west from Kandava, Lord Siva and Narada, accompanied by a group of twenty-four pilgrims from all over the country, after a walk of two days and nights, reach the second halt of their circuit - Bhimchandi.

The modest temple, built of sandstone and granite, looks heavy but soothing in the purple morning glow of a warm Indian July day. Stray clouds in rainbow colors still adorn the sky. The temple has a mandapa⁶ of a hundred sandstone pillars which majestically bear the carefully carved ceiling depicting the myths of India and of Kashi. Sitting on the temple porch, looking into the early morning mist and dew that dampens the plants and rocks, Lord Siva resumes his narrations about Kashi as the ever attentive Narada listens to him with devotion and interest. The silent sculptures of manifold deities and a few inquisitive pilgrims join Narada in listening to the magical words of the Lord.



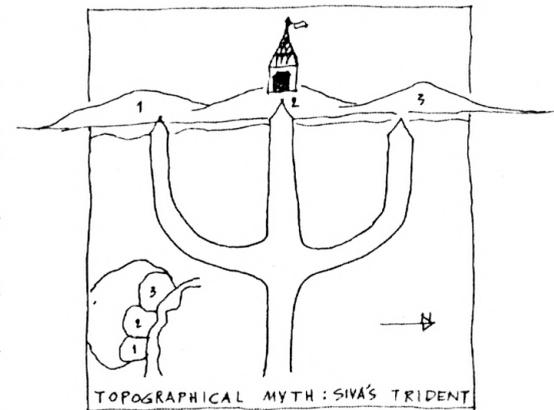
SIVA: It is no exaggeration at all to say that Kashi occupies a crucial and unique

⁶. Mandapa is a hall of pillars that usually forms the front end of a temple. However, mandapas may as well be independent elements in a settlement.

location in the whole universe. As I proceed with my renderings of the city, you may, O wise Narada, compare those renderings with all those cities which you might have visited in the three worlds.

Kashi lies at the rare concurrence of the magnificent gestures of the Pancha Bhutas, the five fundamental elements: earth, water, air, fire and sky. The land gently rises in three hills toward the sky which people interpret as my powerful Trident. My wife Ganges flows opposite to the usual direction she takes: she flows toward the north pointing to my abode in the Himalayas to the far north of Kashi. And, she follows a crescent course as she flows through the city signifying the moon that I wear on my head. The whole city grows on the west bank of the river and faces the rising Sun at which time the ghats become nothing less than the amphitheaters from which to witness the brilliance of the sunrise. Where else in the three worlds can one find such a configuration of five elements and such a unique topography?

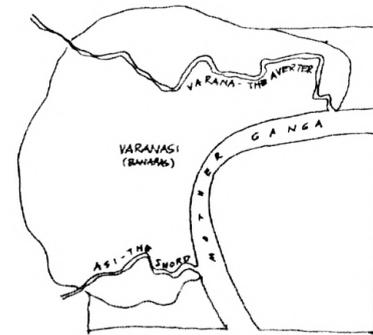
The city is bounded by two rivers: Varana to the north and Asi to the south. These two rivers guard the city from any calamities and plagues. Monsoons often bring ecstasy to the Ganges, at which time she embraces the



whole city and the city then resembles the Linga itself. All the inhabitants and pilgrims who dwell in the city when it is in such a miraculous state are believed to be liberated from all their agony.

NARADA: Yes, O Lord of the worlds, it is true that no other city either on the earth, or in the heavens, or in the nether world (Patala) stands with such divine power and auspicious topography. As it is told by those who dwell there, the city of Kashi is a personification of You Yourself.

SIVA: In addition, Narada, the people who truly dwell in Kashi are immersed in unshakable faith and observe the rituals of veneration and remembrance with great devotion. No wonder that Kashi is said to be the delight and more than that, a source of liberation for Gods and humans alike. Kashi is thus the home for all the divinities of the universe and the blessed humans who live in faith and virtue. With its Golden spires, nectar filled stepped tanks, theatrical ghats, fluttering flags over the golden pinnacles of temples, evergreen trees harboring constellations of birds and the divine presence of Ganges herself, Banaras



challenges even the Heavens in all respects. It is only in the age of *Kali* that chaos, in the name of freedom, started creeping into the city from the outskirts, transforming the city of Gold into the city of stone.

NARADA: O mighty Lord, my curiosity demands of me to pose another question to you. Unlike the conventional names and numbers of the cities of hell, Banaras seems to possess mysterious and intriguing names. What do these names signify and how do they correspond to the city?

SIVA: That is a timely question, O great Sage. A name is not a mere label that we impart to a thing for our convenience. And a name is never a part of a thing until we label the thing with one. A name evolves out of a web of circumstances, relationships, hopes, characteristics and a host of other dimensions of experience which form our world. We weave a thing into the mental world by relating a thing to that world in an effort to comprehend its meaning and order. So, Narada, naming a thing is nothing but forming a reality of your own within you while the true reality of that thing is untouched by perception.

Kashi is also known as *Varanasi, Banaras, Avimukta, Ananda vana, Rudravasa* and *Mahasmasana*.

The name *Kashi* was given to the city owing to the brilliance of its spirit and its constitution; Kashi literally means the city of light - light which you may call wisdom or enlightenment - liberating every soul that dwells within it.

The name *Varanasi* is derived from the names of the two rivers bounding the city: Varana to the north, Asi to the south, between them is the holy land of Varanasi. Varana means the averter and Asi, the sword. These two rivers were created by me to guard against the entrance of evil.

The third and the most popular name, *Banaras*, is the deformation of Varanasi itself.

Avimukta means the 'never forsaken'. Even in the time of pralaya, the great destruction, I do not let loose of the city of Avimukta. I will hold the city above the flood of fire and water and dwell in that city.

Anandavana is the 'forest of bliss'. With the forest of trees, Lingas and temples everywhere, the city is filled with the sources of bliss.

Rudravasa is the place where I in my aggressive pose safeguard the city.

I am everywhere in Kashi. Everything that touches Rudravasa becomes Rudravasa.

Mahasmasana means the great cremation ground. Unlike the other cremation grounds, Kashi is the most sacred cremation ground. It has been said that death and cremation in Kashi ensures liberation from the earthly cycles of life and birth.

NARADA: O great destroyer of evil, can you now tell me how the curious names of various parts of Kashi have come to be?

SIVA: No place in Kashi is separated from the *mandala* of the city, Narada. Naming a thing is also recognizing its role and position in the universe. By recognizing a thing's role, we tie it into a meaningful whole. So, the names tell us also our perceptions and attitudes.

Dasasvamedha ghat is said to be the location of the ten horse sacrifice mythical ruler of Kashi - Raja Divodasa. *Manikarnika* is where my beloved wife Parvathi supposedly lost her ear ring. *Manasarovar* refers to what is considered the

most sacred pond in the world that lies in the Himalayas. *Maidagin* is really the name of the river *Mandakini* in the Himalayas. Narada, Kashi is rich with stories, myths and romance. In the names of the city people seek an identity and a metaphorical correspondence with the metaphysical Reality.

THE ARGUMENT



THE BASIS OF REASON OR WHAT EXACTLY DO WE NEED?

Traveling northward from Bhimchandi, the Sage and the Lord, along with twenty-four other pilgrims of all ages, walk for two days through the woods and barren lands, ponds and cloudy skies, to reach Rameswar, the third canonical halt on the Panch Kroshi circuit. Rameswar lies on the banks of the river Varana.

The freshness of the air the night after some rain, the still dark star-strewn sky of pre-dawn morning, the pleasant smells of the month of Sravana (the smells of Jasmines, of water Lilies and Marigolds) and the awakening calls of a distant rooster piercing the darkness of silence mark the next day of the divine pilgrimage.

By the time Narada had prepared himself for yet another enlightening day, the Lord of the Lords was deeply engrossed in *Samadhi* (the state of being one with the world) with half-closed eyes and radiant body. The gentle footsteps of Narada over the water-filled stone walk-way outside the temple porch awaken the Great Lord. In that state of rare tranquility the eternal traveler and the Lord of Kashi resume their conversation.

SIVA: Narada, so far I have described the city of Banaras in a textual and pictorial mode. Now that you possess those images, let us tacitly work with them and try to see if we can weld them into a whole in which we can see the meaning of the



city and of life.

Before we take our conversation to any depth let me discuss some essential issues about why we should form a theory at all. What do you think a theory is for, wise Narada? Let us delve into it a little so that we are clear about what we would like to explore.

NARADA: O Lord, every theory is an attempt at explaining why and how the world exists the way it does (which includes how we are related to all this mess) and what we are supposed to do (meaning of life, destiny, etc.)⁷. Every theory ventures to account for the behavior of various things. Theories of science are the efforts to understand, conquer and control the so-called material world. Theories of philosophy, psychology and sociology are primarily the ways to account for human existence and behavior; it is primarily these theories which form the basis for the theories of the city. The role of a theory is to locate the most fundamental

⁷. Narada: O Lord, even a myth is a theory; every myth, in a fictional mode, ventures to explain away how things have come to be and why they are the way they are. However, not every theory is a myth. Myth is a category of theory; scientific deliberations are also categories of theory, and so are the propositions of architecture and urban design.

rationale behind any given phenomenon; in other words, a theory allows us to locate the essence of a phenomenon. A theorist would ask "what is the most fundamental truth to which it boils down?"

Aldo Rossi, in his book The Architecture of the City bases his theory on the conclusions of such theorists as Jean Tricart, Milizia, Quatremere de Quincy, and Marcel Poete. Edmund Bacon draws his basis from the works of psychologist Eric Erickson and artist Paul Klee. Leon Krier tacitly avouches Marxist theories; and Le Corbusier is said to be sympathetic to Nietzschean, and communist approaches.

Unfortunately, the legitimacy and validity of all the aforementioned urban theories depend greatly on the validity and strength of their "basis". In the process of choosing and accepting these bases, the urban theories compound the mistakes, presumptions and prejudices of their bases. Let us therefore, O Narada, be admonished about what to accept as our basis and what not.

SIVA: Narada, we are engaged in this discussion out of our interest in cities and their meaning. We are struggling to understand what is going on in Banaras, why

it is happening so and what it ultimately means to us. Let me then ask you where we should begin our argument. where shall we begin our string of reason and how shall we determine the legitimacy of that beginning?

NARADA: O Lord of the universe, cities are built by the people for the people; people such as you, me and them. To meet certain demands of the body and the mind, we build the cities. Of course we do various other things than building cities, but the city becomes the primary physical context within which those other things take place; the city is the primary domain of human pursuits. The city seems to be defined, formed and nourished by our pursuits.

But why do we pursue various things? Why can't we just be? Why should we learn and study? Why should we go to war? Why should we live together? Why should we create? Why should we, O Lord, seek omnipotence and immortality in whatever we do? Why should we love or hate? Why do we make music and sculpt stones into lively forms? Why do we write and what does Truth do to us? What is behind all these acts, structures and pursuits?

I suppose, we should begin with a solid and clear understanding of what



those drives are and what we really need as humans in order to satiate or pacify those drive(s). Various individuals have, in the past ventured to explain those primary drives which form the human psyche and shape human destiny.⁸ We should build the foundation first in order to raise the edifice, I surmise, O Lord.

SIVA: I agree, o wise Narada. We should be clear about what exactly we need - both physiologically and psychologically. We should decide what pacifies the fire within us. But first we should rid ourselves of certain prejudices. Let us not take for granted that, in the first place, we need cities. Let us not begin by saying that democracy is good or that capitalism is bad. We cannot begin our discussion with the idea that political or economic structures determine the social structure or something of that sort. Not only is that abstract, but it is not the most fundamental question with which we should begin. Certainly all the structures that we form are used to manage and manipulate various things in order to

⁸. SIVA: Narada, we have before us the contributions of such thinkers as Freud, Marx, Fromm, Jung, Sartre, Krishnamurti, Wilber, Da Free John and numerous others who gave us their understanding of what man is, and for what he ought to strive. As we proceed with our argument we shall touch upon their ideas.

satiating some fundamental drives that we possess. Certainly rocks and birds do not talk about economic and social structures; only humans do. We develop various things with the hope that they will quench our existential thirst. Let us begin there; let us begin with our existence which qualifies and necessitates all that we build and do. Let us not begin with assumptions, but with existence itself⁹.

That we exist, and that our impulses exist is not an assumption or an abstraction. That I exist is no theory or idea; I exist and I am. Although it may sound paradoxical, O Narada, the truth is that my existence is the most concrete and unambiguous fact that I experience actively from moment to moment. Existence is the most fundamental phenomenon which necessitates our thoughts, and deeds. Reason and passion are both contained within our existence¹⁰. So, let us begin there, at the root of reason and at the root of that which necessitates our

⁹. SIVA: Narada, In his essay "The Emergence of Existential Psychology," (p. 39) Rollo May concurs with our approach: "The only way we can understand and deal with human beings is to clarify the '-nature of being human'- which is ontology. 'Any theory not founded on the nature of being human is a lie and betrayal of man.'"

¹⁰. NARADA: Yes, O Lord, I agree. Sartre's famous dictum "existence precedes essence" is worth mentioning in this context.

vanities, evils, institutions, structures and cities.

Narada, I exist. I am the first thing that I sense; I am the first thing that I know is real. I am the basis of reality or the center of reality. I am. I am, and that is an undeniable, primordial, intrinsic, and elemental Truth. I am, as the being that exists and seeks, the root of all reason, thought and comprehension. Let us begin there.

Who and what judges the Truth of Reality? Or let us put it this way: who needs reality, O Narada? Only that which is Real can comprehend reality. So, who comprehends the Truth of Reality, and why do they need to do so? Let us begin with that which is real. Let us begin with that which seeks to establish reality. Let us begin with that which is the center of all.

SIVA: O Narada, based on our observations, here is what I propose to be the beginning and basis of our argument. Here is what I propose would account for almost all of human deeds and existence. Let us discuss this.

Man believes himself to be incomplete, ignorant and unhappy by birth. He

is fragmentary and seeks completeness constantly. Man is by birth, at least psychologically, imperfect. He seeks what he thinks he lacks.¹¹

I propose that the unconditional and immortal existence, complete and perfect knowledge, and boundless and eternal ecstasy are the goals of all human beings regardless of their race and origin - whether they are aware of those goals or not. I also propose for us to consider whether any form of human seeking falls outside these three fundamental existential categories. This precisely means that all of human seeking is accountable and explainable by these three fundamental drives.

Human beings build cities and megalopolises, wage wars, love, hate, land on the moon and live in order to attain something that is essentially not physiological. Man's bodily needs seem to be pretty limited and rather easy to meet.¹² But the psychological component of human existence is what becomes

¹¹. SIVA: Narada, Da Free John identifies that "our greatest need is to discover Truth." (p 77, Transmission of Doubt)

¹². SIVA: Narada, Erich Fromm tells us in The Sane Society, that "even the most complete satisfaction of all his instinctive needs does not solve his human problem; his most intensive passions and needs are not those rooted in the body, but those rooted in the very peculiarity of his existence."

problematic.

Existence is where thought and reason originate. Existence is inevitably given to us. We exist and there is no apparent choice in that. Existence is the most fundamental condition of being.

NARADA: Quite true, O Sarveswar. We cannot cease to exist. We defy death and non-existence and that is an existential tendency of life. Our existence is the most precious thing to us. Given a chance, we would love to exist forever. Immortality is the first, and essential ideal of life; man's constant desire is to live forever, and be one with the universe.¹³

SIVA: Yes, Narada, all questions begin there - at existence - and also end there - at existence. I suppose the question "why do we exist?" has no answer. We live

¹³. Narada: O Lord, Freud recognizes this fact, but due to his own prejudices and presumptions, brushes it away as a religious trick. In Civilization and its Discontents, he writes (p.21): The 'oneness with the universe' which constitutes its [oceanic feeling's] ideational content sounds like a first attempt at a religious consolation, as though it were another way of disclaiming the danger which the ego recognizes as threatening."

and we need to live; that's where everything begins. The point is best realized when one is held at a gun-point, or when one's imminent death is predicted by the doctors. Only then, perhaps, can one correctly understand the existential anguish and mystery of the human condition.¹⁴

We don't just exist, Narada, but we exist in a certain way. We need to exist in a state of boundless pleasure and also in a state of complete knowledge - omniscience. The second dimension of being is "knowledge." We exist and we know, Narada. Knowing is almost synonymous with existence. In fact, there is not a single moment we do not "know." There is this constant flow of knowledge pouring into us without any choice. To exist is to know as well(that we exist).

However, there is a third dimension to our existence: that is "pleasure." Call it happiness or bliss, pleasure is the other dimension of existence. Happiness as a state of being is yet another unquestionable existential reality, Narada. We

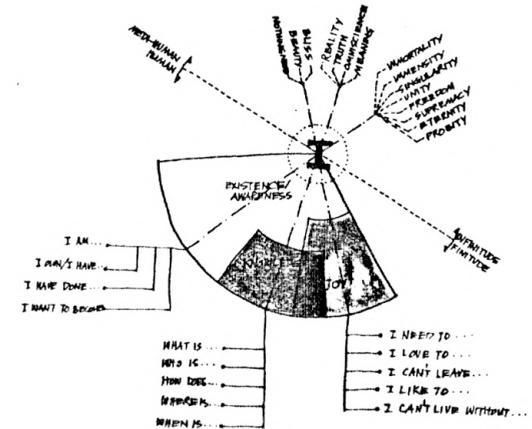
¹⁴. SIVA: O dear Sage, Camus muses in his Myth of Sisyphus that the questions of whether reality has seven dimensions or when the world began make no sense unless we resolve the worth and meaning of existence. He considers suicide as the first problem of the philosophers. To paraphrase him, there is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is worth living or not amounts to answering some of the fundamental questions of philosophy. (p. 1, The Myth of Sisyphus)

strive all the time to be happy. We need to notice that happiness is the ideal state of existence that we constantly strive to attain. Whether it is in humor, sex or in numerous other things that we pursue, we seek boundless joy all the time.

NARADA: I understand that existence, knowledge and joy are the three inseparable components of the same being and that they are the three fundamental categories of consciousness. But, I fail to see how these three drives together can account for the existence and growth of the cities as well.

SIVA: Well Narada, we are unhappy and thus seek pleasure; we are ignorant and thus seek knowledge; we are afraid of death and thus seek security in things that directly or indirectly extend and immortalize our existence¹⁵. The city is the realm of these pursuits and all forms of seeking.

Let us take a critical look here, Narada. If we observe closely the



¹⁵. NARADA: O Lord, Da Free John asserts the primacy of these needs. To paraphrase him, the ego, whether individual or collective, is eventually reduced to sorrow and despair by the inability of life to generate happiness and immortality.

happenings in a city, it soon dawns on us that the city is most often a place for rather unwise pursuits, or ignorant pursuits. We see people in an interminable and incessant motion just like the excited particles in an electric field. The pace at which they "seek" seems to increase constantly.

People seek pleasure in things which do not afford them consistent pleasure, let alone eternal bliss. People seek knowledge in a mode of knowing that prevents them from achieving a totality of knowledge. People seek existence in things that are ephemeral and false. Running after mirages is the only analogy that comes to my mind. What I am talking is not morality O Narada; this is rationality. Our cities are made out of places and events which house these unwise cravings. When people's pursuits are blocked or questioned, they feel threatened and often react violently.

Let us take a closer look at the first component of being - existence. We may notice, Narada, that people seek identity and existence in a variety of things, in the process of firmly and eternally establishing their existence (without any success though): people seek identity in their name, physical property, their achievements; in their relatives, children, knowledge; in history, mythology, and

beliefs (usually of religion). These attempts may be deciphered from such commonplace statements as:

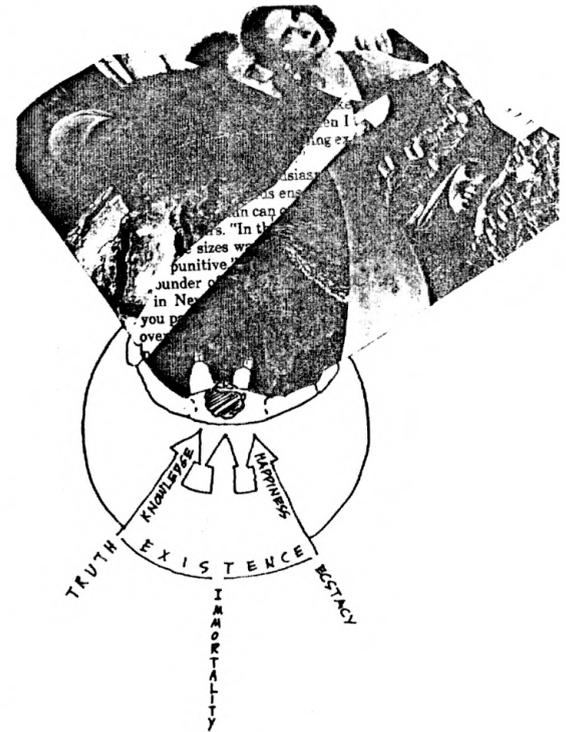
"What do you think I am? Mind that you are talking to a specialist!"
(seeking existence, identity and legitimacy in knowledge, the questioning of which may threaten the apparent integrity of the individual.)

"I am the President of the largest country in the world."

"I want the world at my feet; I want to conquer the world."
(identity from association with larger things: I am so large and secure. The great dictators of the world exemplify this point¹⁶)

"I am you, my love, you are the meaning of my life. For you I exist and my life is yours." (The lovers feel one with each other. We may notice the tendency of the being to become one with the world; in this case the lover feels one with the dearest one.)

"I am well known all over the world; I am the most famous person in the



¹⁶. SIVA: Narada, Erich Fromm in Escape from Freedom and The Art of Loving demonstrates convincingly the existential desire of man to become one with the world. In other words, by becoming one with the universe, and other people, one's existence is established for eternity in the most expansive way.

entire history of the world!" (I exist in an infinite number of minds which renders me immortal.)¹⁷

"These estates, cars and bungalows are mine." (To them is linked my existence and from them I derive the meaning of my life)

It is also a necessity of man to become one with the universe. He needs to exist in a state of Oneness and total Unity. Fascism, autocracy, sadism, masochism, love, herd instinct, conformity, dominance, fame, possession of things, etc., are all the results of an unsatiated drive to be (exist) as one with the world¹⁸. To know that one exists is to know one's identity. Unless one establishes what he or she is, one remains as a non-entity without identity. Every being strives to seek identity in things that are "great," "large" and "permanent." This tendency is reflected in owning, possessing, joining large groups, huge

¹⁷. NARADA: Lord Siva, I am reminded of what Krishnamurti once told me: "Why do people want to be famous? First of all it is profitable to be famous; and it gives you a sense of immortality."

¹⁸. SIVA: Jan, in Albert Camus' play "The Misunderstanding" quips that "no one can be happy in exile or estrangement. One can't remain a stranger all one's life. It is quite true that a man needs happiness, but he also needs to find his true place in the world."

corporations, megastructures and religious cults. The architectural and urban consequences of this drive are well before our eyes.¹⁹

Well, Narada, we may go on finding examples. But the point I want to make here is that these are the pursuits that contribute to the existence of the cities - the cities' physical existence. Cities are psychic entities. People seek to affirm their existence by means of their possessions and through their relationships to other people. It is not difficult to see that people are seeking and clinging to illusory things and ephemeral things to which they feel they can belong. Monuments, a thirst to know one's past or a society's past, a desire to make history, are all unsuccessful attempts to prolong one's mortal and temporal

¹⁹. SIVA: Narada, Erich Fromm in Escape From Freedom (p 180) observes that "It is always the inability [of oneself] to stand the aloneness of one's individual self that leads to the drive to enter into a symbiotic relationship with someone else. It is evident from this why masochistic and sadistic trends are always blended with each other. Although on the surface they seem like contradictions, they are essentially rooted in the same basic need."

existence²⁰. However, what we may notice behind those unsuccessful attempts is the drive to be immortal. They are unsuccessful, if not unwise, attempts to satiate the impulse to live forever, to be immortal and to lead an eternal existence. Cities are the concretization of these unsuccessful attempts. Banaras too is no exception, Narada. In their myths, legends and rites, the people of Banaras seek eternal existence. In their offerings to their ancestors they indirectly seek security for their life after death. Cities are rather the unsuccessful attempts to overcome the limitations experienced by man.

Let me here make it clear, O Brahma's son, what I mean by Immortality. I am using it in a very direct and literal sense, and not in any metaphorical or analogical sense. To be immortal is to be forever and for eternity without death.

²⁰. SIVA: Narada, you may cite certain instances of human behavior that apparently seem to contradict our claim. A patriot and a mad lover are two such examples. But, if we take a closer look, we may notice that a patriot "feels" one with his country, and therefore thinks that he is a part of it. A lover "feels" one with his beloved and thinks he is a part of his beloved. Both of them seek eternal existence in something "else". Although the patriot dies he hopes to become immortal through that act. The same is true with the lover who hopes to continue living in the form of his beloved. And so Camus' Kaliayev (p. 246, Caligula and other plays) muses: "To die for an ideal - that's the only way of proving oneself worthy of it. It is our only justification [of our existence]."

When I say that Immortality is the goal of existence, I do mean, literally, that living forever is the fundamental drive of existence.

So, Narada, it is in the existential security that people seek (or are told to seek) that the cities gain their form and meaning. Cities exist as long as people seek security in and through material things. Monuments galore and history and mythologies thrive as long as people live the illusion that they can find security in them. For the Greeks death was a shadowy continuation of life. Egyptians thought that the soul would return to the body after a while. At Banaras, Narada, the city as a whole, is the "Mahashmasan" or the great cremation ground. Death in the city of Banaras is believed to grant one of the highest boons of life: immortality and Bliss. In other words, if one were to believe the founding myths of Banaras, even a dog that dies in the city will be privileged to enter the eternal world of liberation. Aren't they good stories, Narada?

The "drive to know" is the second dimension of being. Without a choice knowledge ruthlessly gushes into us through our senses and mind. But never



does that seem to fill us completely.²¹ There are always things that we do not know. It is quite likely that even after a million years of human existence, we may reel in a state of incomplete knowledge: there are infinite things, events and infinite ways to perceive them. The drive to know everything will never be satiated with our present modes of "knowing." But, we are condemned to know. We have no choice but to continue knowing and seeking meaning in things around us and in ourselves. And yet we are condemned not to know anything in its entirety.²²

Lets take a closer look at this drive and the dynamic it expresses, Narada.

What does it mean to know?

²¹. SIVA: Erich Fromm in The Art of Loving observes that "The longing to know ourselves and to know our fellow man has been expressed in the Delphic motto 'Know thyself.' It is the mainspring of all psychology. But inasmuch as the desire to know all of man, his innermost secret, the desire can never be fulfilled in knowledge of ordinary kind, in knowledge only by thought. Even if we knew a thousand times more of ourselves, we would never reach the bottom."

²². NARADA: Yes, O Lord. Fromm tells us in The Art of Loving(p 29) that "The further we reach into the depths of our being, or someone else's being, the more knowledge eludes us. Yet, we cannot help desiring to penetrate into the innermost secret of man's soul, into the innermost nucleus which is 'he.'"

NARADA: To know is to become, O Lord. We know a thing by becoming that thing. We know a thing by creating that thing within ourselves and simulating its properties, or imparting to it some properties. For example, in order to drive a car we should know exactly how it behaves, turns, stops, jumps and so on. In order to play an instrument the player should become that instrument so intimately that he knows how it will respond to various conditions; what intensity of plucking the string is needed to produce a certain result. The musician is not separate from his instrument. The musician and his instrument are one. By the same token, O Lord, we become our physical selves by experiencing ourselves. To know is to become. Thus Knowledge culminates (aims to, at least) in a state of existence. With knowledge we endeavor to resolve the problem of our existence. Only in complete knowledge is there a perfect existence. Thus - we may decipher - Truth, which is the ultimate knowledge, is the ideal state of being.²³

²³. NARADA: Fromm also observes (ibid p 29.) that "knowledge has one more and a fundamental relation to the problem of love. The basic need to fuse with another person so as to transcend the confinement of one's separateness in closely related to another specifically human drive, that is to 'know the secret of man.'"

SIVA: Yes, indeed, O Saraswati's son, Truth and Immortality are, one and the same. But, the paradox here is that Truth is never to be comprehended by the human existence-caged-within-the-senses-and-thoughts. Immortality is never to be attained through any amount of perfection of our bodily existence. And that is a baffling and disheartening realization. From Nietzsche to Sartre and from Dostoyevsky to Kafka, philosophers and writers in the Western tradition have arrived at the same conclusion which inevitably led them to a sense of tragic anguish. But we will extend our reason and investigative faculties a little further and see where the clues will lead us, and if they can take us beyond the disheartening human prospect.

Let us now discuss the third dimension of being: "joy." Joy is the nectar of life. In acts ranging from jocular humor to the orgasmic ecstasy of sex we seek pleasure, happiness, joy and ecstasy²⁴. We may notice, Narada, for example, that

²⁴. SIVA: Narada, Sigmund Freud, in his Civilization and its Discontents underscores his "pleasure principle" (p. 25): "We will therefore turn to the less ambitious question of what men themselves show by their behavior to be the purpose and intention of their lives. What do they demand of life and wish to achieve in it? . . . They strive after happiness. They want to become happy and to remain so. . . As we see, what decides the purpose of life is simply the programme of the pleasure principle."

people desperately and frantically demand pleasure in endless repetitions of sexual acts, bars, movie houses, parties, the reading of books and other rituals where they demand nothing less than boundless joy²⁵. But these things never seem to pacify their drives perpetually.

At no time are the three dimensions of existence separate from each other. Together they form the human being.

Narada. Let me summarize what we have discussed so far. Man is a being with an impulse to be immortal, blissful, true and real, eternal, one-with-the-world, free, perfect and omniscient. Every human pursuit - whether one realizes it or not - falls under at least one of the three elemental existential propensities that we have established.²⁶ Man seeks immortal and meaningful existence,

²⁵. SIVA: O Narada, Da Free John in his book The Dreaded Gombo (p. 267) comments that "the essence of all seeking is the pursuit of Happiness in relationship. The search is based on the notion that without relational circumstances we cannot be Happy."

²⁶. NARADA: O Lord, I am overwhelmed by my memories. Over the years I have spoken to a number of people who seem to concur with our observations.

Krishnamurti once said that "Surely, the true work of man is to discover truth, God; it is to love and not to be caught in his own self-enclosing activities."

Jean-Paul Sartre declared that man is a desire to be God (but can never become one).

unshakable identity rooted in eternal freedom, total knowledge of things in the universe and omniscience, and finally seeks ecstasy that is boundless and free.

The *drive to exist* seeks culmination in unconditional immortality. The *drive to know* seeks meaning in Truth; Bliss is the sole goal of the *drive to joy*. That is all, Narada. That is what you need. That is what you have ever - knowingly or otherwise - wanted.²⁷

In eastern and western philosophy, both academic and spiritual, three distinct paths may be observed: one begins with existence and seeks the identity and meaning of the self (the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Buber, Carl Jaspers, Nietzsche, Albert Camus, Edmund Husserl etc.). The other begins with

And the Vedas say "aham brahmasmi (I am the one)." They also say "Anando brahma (Bliss is the one)." Vedas finally proclaim the one as "sachidananda" which means sat - the Truth or Awareness, chit - the intelligence, and ananda - the Bliss.

Meister Eckhart declared that by nature every creature seeks to become like God.

Fritz Kunkel said that "Being one with the universe, one with God - that is what we wish for most whether we know it or not." (See Ken Wilber's Atman Project)

²⁷. SIVA: Narada, Da Free John ecstatically declares: "We do not need sex. We do not need society. We do not need nature. We do not need universe. All this is a modification, distressful perturbation of the Well of Being."

the problem of knowledge and seeks the Truth of the Reality (David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Hegel, Ayer, Bertrand Russell, and others), and the third one begins with joy and seeks Ecstasy (Bhagawan Rajneesh, Ajeananda Bharati, Ramakrishna Paramahansa and others).

However, Narada, even a little common sense can help us show that all of human seeking outlined just now cannot possibly be fulfilled. Humans are endowed with impulses that aim at nothing less than infinity; they are also provided with bodies and minds that are limited, feeble, vulnerable, alienated and ephemeral. With the equipment which human beings are provided it is foolish to even contemplate a fulfillment of the three fundamental drives that we have recognized. What a paradox and what an irreconcilable set of opposites! Narada, the existence of the three fundamental drives has been proved substantially. The limitations and vulnerability of the body-mind is well evident to all of us. The question then is, how can life be meaningful if we are condemned to live these irreconcilable paradoxes? Is it a cruel joke of nature or is there something else to

it?²⁸ Do you remember the fate of Mr. Joseph K. of Kafka? Do you remember the tragedy of Nietzsche? Do you recall the arguments of existentialists and their "anguish?" Should human beings continually and endlessly confront the enigma and agony engendered by the apparent irreconcilability of the opposing realities of life? What is going on with the human beings? Are there any clues and what are the possibilities?

NARADA: O Lord, I suppose we are now entering a speculative phase in our argument. In order for our argument to be complete we should, with our well established basis, consider all the clues and speculate on the possibilities that lie beyond our immediate perception and thought.

I can see two conclusions, O Lord: the first one is where the Western existential stream stopped: that there is no ultimate meaning to life, and that the human being is cursed to live a life of agony and anguish unable to reconcile the existential given. In this case, reason and existence become absolutely meaningless

²⁸. SIVA: Narada, Camus' Caligula in Caligula and other plays (p. 8) muses: "Men die; and they are not happy."

and unworthy of living, leading to the conclusion that life is utterly and cruelly ridiculous. Thought, pleasure, life - all of them become meaningless. Our pilgrimage, our dialogues and our discourses, all of them should be senseless. This precisely means suicide is the only legitimate way of handling such an anguish.

So, in order for life to be meaningful at all, the only possibility is that, perhaps, human beings are Immortal in a different dimension of consciousness, and are by nature Blissful. I cannot see any other possible speculations. For the human existence to be meaningful, we have to embrace the second possibility. I know that this is a wild speculation. But this is the only possibility that answers the seemingly irreconcilable contradictions of existence. Let us, O Lord, then consider if our second speculation has any element of truth to it.

SIVA: Very well, Narada. Let us consider briefly the second speculation. Let me recall how we began our argument.

I exist. I am the first thing that I sense; I am the first thing that I know is real. I am the basis of reality or the center of reality. I am. I am and that is an

undeniable, primordial, intrinsic, and elemental Truth. I, as the being that exists, seeks, am the root of all reason, thought and comprehension.

Unless I am Real, how can I ever sense Reality and authenticate Reality? I must be the Truth. I must be the One. To know Truth is to become Truth; to know Reality is to become Reality. But if there is a Truth separate and apart from myself, how can that be Truth? If there is any Reality separate from my-Self, then how can that reality be Real? Truth must include my-Self; I must be in union with Reality. Hence, as you said a while ago, O Narada, reason tells us that I should be Reality, Truth and I must be Eternal. There can be no reality separate from my Being. There cannot be a Truth that stands apart from my-Self.

Therefore, O Sarada's son, in order for the life to be meaningful, there must be a different dimension to human consciousness which includes and yet radically transcends the ephemeral bodily existence. There is no other possibility. Let us now consider the evidence in favor of our argument, O Narada.

NARADA: Swami Vivekananda gives us a tremendous insight in this direction, O Lord. Let me recall what he once said: "The Vedantist gives no other attributes

to God except these three, that He is Infinite Existence, Infinite Knowledge, and Infinite Bliss, and he regards these three as one."²⁹

Ken Wilber concludes that "that can be said with absolute assurance. And that is why human desire is insatiable, why all joys yearn for infinity - all a person wants is Atman [the supreme being]; all he finds are symbolic substitutes for it."³⁰

Adept Da Free John declares: ". . . you are already perfectly coincident with God, perfectly Full, perfectly Realized, perfectly established in the Truth of Transcendental Existence." Elsewhere he says: "such realization is enlightenment, Perfect Equanimity (or 'Samadhi'), Transcendental Freedom, and Infinite Happiness."

We find in the Svetasvatara Upanishad (p. 86) that "when in inner union he is beyond the world of the body, then the third world, the world of the Spirit, is found, where the power of the All is, and man has all: for he is one with the One."

²⁹. NARADA: See Swami Vivekananda (1979) p. 53.

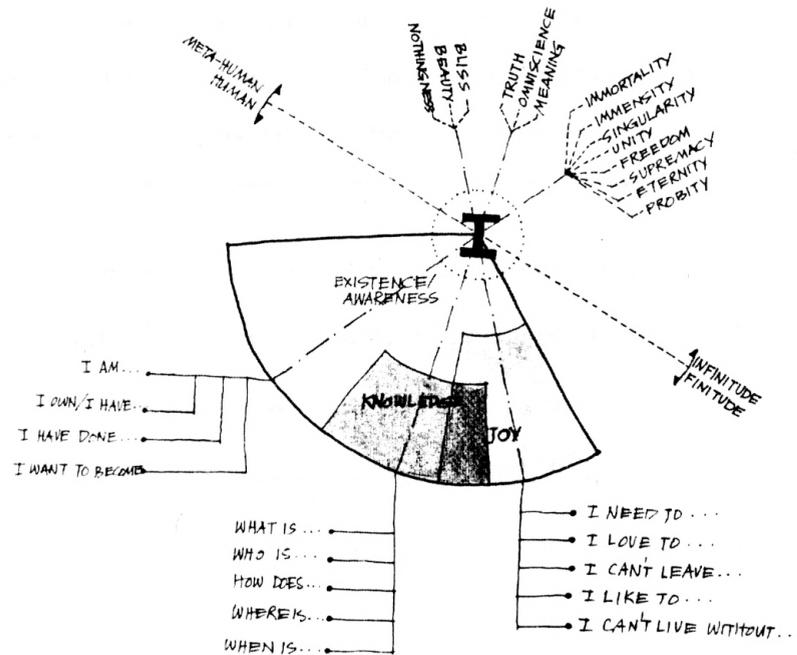
³⁰ Ken Wilber, The Atman Project.

Chandoghya Upanishad says (p. 118): "This invisible and subtle existence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Truth. THOU ART THAT."

O Lord, I am now totally convinced that the human life is a Divine mission. I am also convinced that human being is a drive to be Immortal, one with the world, all-knowing, Real, True and unconditionally Blissful. The fact that the mortal, bodily existence can never ever get closer to those goals; and the fact that there exists an irreconcilable contradiction between what he presently is and what he yearns to be, we may have to conclude that the human existence is utterly meaningless or that there is a transcendental dimension to the whole affair of life. I have also reached the conviction that there are only three legitimate goals to human life - attaining which is the only meaningful action: all we need are Permanence, Omniscience and Bliss; all we ever wanted are to be eternally one with the world, to know all and to be free of all sorrow forever.

LORD SIVA: Yes, O Narada, and from the point of view of the design of the cities, we have to realize that these fundamental and primordial needs and goals

cannot be found in things and limited human relationships. Things and relationships are transient and limited, and the wise ones never cling to them. An architecture that gives form to those ignorant and imperfect pursuits of the humans will only perpetuate the chaos, meaninglessness, and the idiocy of the prejudiced, mediocre human existence that clings to the cities. And with that thesis, we shall consider and debate a few fundamental issues that lie at the root of the city of Banaras.



ON THE WAY TO SIVPURI . . .

FORM FOLLOWS FICTION

As the pilgrims walked along the path, a mysterious voice from the sky proclaimed:

**"THOSE WHO RELINQUISH THEIR BODILY EXISTENCE IN BANARAS,
SHALL BE LIBERATED FROM DEATH, IGNORANCE AND SORROW.
THEY SHALL BE IMMORTAL, BLISSFUL AND LIVE THE TRUTH."**

The other pilgrims heard the voice and with revived spirits resumed their walk, chanting of the Lord and the city. But the divine pilgrims, disguised as mendicants looked at each other and smiled at the mysterious phenomenon and the naive and irrational faith of the other pilgrims.

Siva: O dear Sage, starting with our newly earned understanding of human nature, and beginning with the fact that Truth, Immortality, Reality, Bliss and Meaning cannot be found in things, we shall dissect the roots of the city of Banaras. With our thesis that existence, knowledge and Bliss are the three fundamental needs and drives of human life, we shall examine the structure beneath the physical city of Banaras.



Narada, the city of Banaras is predicated on numerous STORIES. Those stories, which are called myths and legends by the scholars, those sacred works of fiction sacredly held high by the high-priests of popular religion, dictate, determine and drive the masses of unthinking people. As we are going to see, it is the tyranny of fiction that, at the level of the self and also the city, determines the form of the city and its growth.

Our interest is, however, O Narada, to get beneath the sheath of fiction in order to unearth the essential and fundamental needs of human beings which are grossly misinterpreted, timidly repressed, and wilfully misrepresented by all the people of the city - from high-priests to the millions.

Narada, cities are really places where masses of humans are immersed in illusions of all kinds. Cities are, without any exception, places of illusions and places of fictions fuelled by irrationality, oppression and mediocrity. But, first, let me make it clear what I mean by irrationality: irrationality is

1. An absence of any intention and effort to employ reason,
2. An urge to accept authority as a replacement of reason and
3. An eagerness to hold on rigidly to certain prejudices, beliefs and ideologies,

and building strings of reason (no matter how focused or immaculate) from illegitimate premises and mere assumptions.

Millions of people, the entranced followers of Hitler, were annihilated along with their belief in Aryan supremacy. They lived and died within a story propagated by the great dictator. The Serbian war and the Russian collapse - aren't those the result of the most irrational beliefs, impulses and sentiments? Don't you see that the behavior of all these people reveals their ignorance of what they really need as humans? Do you see, Narada, who has been actively inhabiting, raising and ravaging the cities? Take an example from a nearby land: At Ayodhya an ancient and huge Mosque was reduced to dust just for the belief - an irrational and unfounded belief - that Lord Rama was born in that very place where the Mosque stood. A whole nation was divided and pushed into anarchy over an utterly "evidenceless cause." What existential security were they after, O Narada? And what an illusion it is to think that destroying something and erecting something else is going to perpetuate their existence! How unwise and neurotic were those people who did not know what they needed! Banaras is strewn with such irrational beliefs and blindly enacted rituals born out of mighty

myths.

A boatman believed that Kashi existed since that world came into being; an archeologist asserted that Kashi was founded by humans in 2000 B.C. One is subscribing to an illusion - sacred fiction; and the other is proclaiming his belief in the profane and unromantic accuracy of "facts." One is conditioned by the mythical consciousness and the other is possessed by a modern historical view. Although their intention was to establish the truth of reality, neither of them was even close to it. We shall consider this issue at a later time. In whatever humans do, they have to face the fundamental existential issues: sorrow, death and ignorance. Unless these impulses, agonies and issues are understood and answered, how can the life in the city be understood?

At Kashi everything has a story, a legend or a myth. Like the morning mist, Kashi is enveloped by fiction - powerful fiction³¹. I can tell you at a later

³¹. SIVA: O Narada, Richard Chase in his essay "Myth as Literature" (In the book Myth and Method edited by J. Miller) re-cognizes, to paraphrase him, that the older writers seem to us to have neglected a simple and fundamental truth: the word "myth" means story: a myth is a tale, a narrative, or a poem; myth is literature and must be considered as an aesthetic creation of the human conception. A myth need be no more philosophical than any other kind of literature.

stage what those stories are, but now I shall be content to suggest that "story telling" is one recurrent way of structuring and sustaining Banaras and other cities, and it seems to me that it is the only successful way. What we really learn at Kashi is about the tools for controlling cities and civilizations. In Kashi, the sacred fiction is devoutly recited in the temples and other places set apart for that purpose. In Kashi, myths govern everything with their canonical code of morality and sheer power. There are as such no physical guidelines that can be seen as separate from the general mythical conception of the city. Even the mundane details of the day-to-day life are governed by mythical code. In the Berlin of Hitler we saw one extreme of mass control and a set of illusions; at Kashi we see the other extreme way of ordering the lives of people using powerful fiction with a sense of sacrality imparted to it³². Narada, it is a lie, either pernicious or benign, that sustains a city; not Truth. Truth would only lead one away from the unwise

³². SIVA: Freud talking about religion in general says (Civilization and its Discontents, p.32): "A special importance attaches to the case in which this attempt to procure a certainty of happiness and a protection against suffering through a delusional remolding of reality is made by a considerable number of people in common. The religions of mankind must be classified among the mass-delusions of this kind. No one, needless to say, who shares the delusion ever recognizes it as such." (Underscore mine)

pursuits of the city. It is fiction that sustains the city and its pursuits. Fiction is the form giver of the city. Form undoubtedly follows fiction.

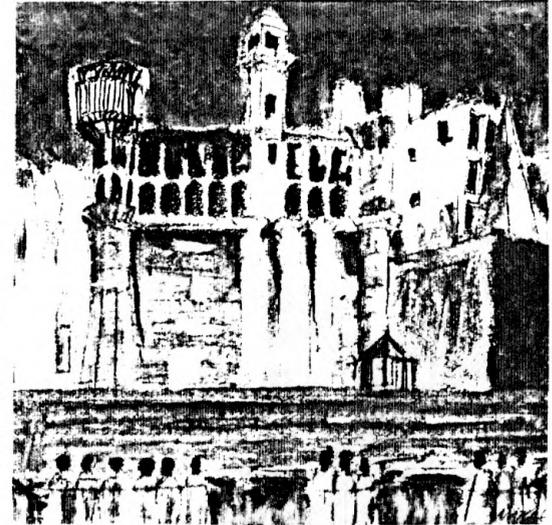
It is an immaculate fiction indeed that is at work in Kashi. There is the larger context of Gods, heavens, nether worlds, demons, yakshas, gandharvas, sages, ascetics and epics of the mythical India; and there is the fiction of the city of Kashi that fits into the larger work of sacred literature. Kashi was created at the beginning of the universe and I am the presiding deity of the city. Rivers guard the city, while the trident protects the countless temples and homes. The people brought up in the mythical tradition see the world as a work of Sacred fiction, wherein everything has a story woven constantly into the larger whole. Kashi is a utopia believed and lived.

Narada, myths are, no doubt, constructions of mind; and they are illusions so to say. Myths are devices to lead people into some unquestionable beliefs. With their archetypal power and sacrality, they are employed to enthrall the



unquestioning masses and provide them with some "answers."³³ But, realize, O wise Narada, that no temporal process ever satisfies the three existential drives. The means such as the mythologies, histories and monuments only divert one from the quest for Truth and Immortality. However, let me make it clear that the cities are sustained by means of some form of those illusions.³⁴

If you want to control, Narada, if you want to rule the people (morality comes next), tell them stories as at Kashi - not reasons. HOW you put a thing can make all the difference. If you want examples, then look around, look into yourself, look at Kashi, look at all those thousands thronging the ghats and reciting stories and look at the tragedies of Berlin and Ayodhya. What a tragedy it is that man doesn't realize what he really needs and what he ought to pursue.



³³. SIVA: Narada, the "answers" are naive and self-imposing. You may argue that those "answers" are beautiful stories and metaphors, but, unfortunately, the people in question are not children; they are grownup adults capable of employing rational thought without fear or fatigue.

³⁴. SIVA: Narada, Master Da Free John in his book The Dreaded Gombo (p. 200) admonishes us about these illusions: "Conventional religion is just another consumer product for neurotics who cannot release and let go of things, and who, being in a self-toxified state physically, psychically and altogether, need to console themselves with illusions. . . [Those illusion are] just a support for a being that cannot be free, that cannot release itself."

Instead of (non)seeking Bliss, Eternity and Unity, they drown themselves in myths, rituals and illusions of all kinds.

The secret of Kashi's integrity is neither in its magnificent spires nor in its vivacious ghats; the secret of Kashi is neither in its topography nor in its traditional structures alone. The real secret of Kashi is wide open: it is the way everything is interwoven into a huge system of fiction. It is the power of irrational belief and faith in the myths that is the essence of Kashi.

PEOPLE COME HERE TO DIE. And behold, Narada, they are only too happy to die!! Narada, death is the happiest thing that can ever happen to you in Kashi. It is SAID that even a dog can be blessed with liberation if it dies within the *Panch Kroshi*. Even if you have led a miserable life, death in Kashi is SAID to liberate you of all the agony: Moksha, eternal bliss, is the reward for dying in this city. The invisible signs on thousands of temples, ghats and houses in Banaras tacitly declare the eternal bargain: "Exchange your old physical bodies for new and shiny astral ones at no cost!" Go to Manikarnika ghat and you can see scores of people young and old, of all castes and both sexes, apparently unafraid of death! It can't get any more irrational, Narada, nor more pragmatic. Not a single



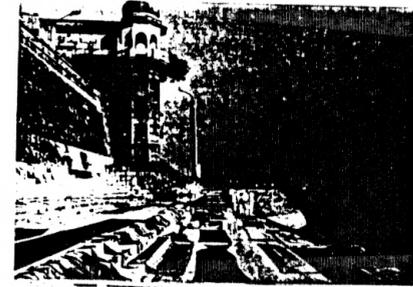
soul questions the reality of eternity, Gods, demons, heavens and other stories of Kashi's collective beliefs. Dozens of ghats with hundreds of temples are, therefore, built in order to perform the rituals of sending the immortalized soul to higher worlds! But if you introduce rationality into the city then the city as we know it melts away into Truth. If you ask the people to think and reason out their lives and existence, then, Narada, the structures fall down and cities cease to be anything that we know today. Banaras would cease to be what it is.

People in Kashi learn story telling right from the time their mothers sing lullabies under the moonlit sky; the time they play in the streets, shrines and the steps of the ghats and contemplate the emptiness of the other bank. When they grow up, they see the whole world as a beautiful work of fiction: a work where everything is well composed and is under the control of the author; the author is at the center and there are a million authors inhabiting Kashi, visiting it, imagining it. It is all imagination and illusion; and it is powerful and enthralling.

In the rugged undulation of the masculine land forms they see the trident of Siva or Mount Meru. In the feminine curves of the sweeping crescent - the Ganges -they see a mother. In the sky replete with lazy clouds is a theater where,



perhaps, a demon drinks *Sura* in the shadow of a mountain. The emptiness of that bank is an unfolded blankness posed against the lurking tightness of the stony complexity of this bank. An inclined sail, a crane, an inverted red ocean hanging from the heavens, an onslaught of hoards of Rakshasas (demons), the swords and clubs, tongues and horses. Place making, myth making: place makes myth, myth makes place. But none of these illusions and fabrications lead you to what you ought to realize in your life: Truth, Happiness and Immortality.



What distinguishes Banaras from other cities is that at Kashi the three existential impulses are duly recognized and addressed. However, the city offers to its citizens only symbolic and metaphorical substitutes in the place of real and true answers. Faith is the key, fiction and rituals are the basis, temples, ghats and ashrams are the result of those pursuits. It is the same three fundamental impulses at play wherever humans are. From Los Angeles to Ladakh, and from Boston to Banaras, it is the same three yearnings at play; but the things and ways in which those are sought gives those cities different forms. If we dig deep enough, we could see the truth of our observation.

NARADA: O Mahadev, your argument so far has given rise to more questions in my mind than answers. It is presenting new paradoxes and frightening propositions. It appears to me that you see cities as places where unquestioning masses are controlled, ordered and even oppressed (by themselves) through irrational means and methods. It also seems to me that you see cities as places of illusion - beautiful or ugly; where people with unresolved intellect and conscience lead a life based on arbitrary assumptions, intellectual slavery, imprudent compromise and hopeless mediocrity. O great Lord of the world, am I right to say that cities are mere transitory passages for attaining freedom, wisdom and happiness which lie beyond the passage itself? Is not the city like a boat or a bridge which we must leave once we cross the river? Kindly relieve me of these uncertainties and my growing mood of skepticism and doubt.

SIVA: O wise Narada, your realizations are correct. For cities to exist and continue sustaining their populations, yes, they have to perpetuate a system of unquestionable beliefs. Reason has to be either excluded totally or has to be kept

subservient to the dominant beliefs (a fake rationality). Myths, fiction and rituals³⁵ should be recognized as the major modes of perpetuating some illusions addressing the fundamental drives of life. Cities are never places of boundless pleasure: they are places of vicissitudes, instinctual sacrifices, repressions, aberrant pursuits, ignorance and conflict. Cities give shape to people's individual and collective illusions, passions and irrationalities.

Narada, cities are also constructions of people's ideals³⁶. Despite the permanence of the physical city, it cannot withstand the power of the changing ideas and ideals. See how the diffusion of fiction in the minds of the ones

³⁵. Siva: Hitler, as Erich Fromm describes in many of his books, mastered these techniques, and materialized them in his public speeches where with his symbols, stories and dramatic gestures he cast a spell on millions of people. But, we all know where the Hitler episode culminated in the end: it ended in the same place where once Alexander and Genghis Khan did: in a meaningless death.

³⁶. NARADA: O Lord, Krishnamurti once stated clearly that society cannot be changed unless man changes. Man, you and others, have created these societies for generations upon generations: we have all created these societies out of our pettiness, narrowness, out of our limitations, out of our greed, envy, brutality, violence, competition and so on. . . . Unless each of us changes radically, society will never change. (p 104, Krishnamurti to Himself)

educated in alphanumerical cities is resulting in the breakdown and meltdown of the outskirts of Kashi? Look at this endless list of destroyed cities and places in the former Yugoslavia. Masses are capable of both raising and ravaging whole cities. What really matters is what the masses are led to believe about the world, the universe and themselves. What the people think their individual and collective self is is what is expressed in their deeds and cities. Man makes himself, and man makes his cities in the image of his individual and collective self. At Ayodhya, the place ten miles from here, where the Hindu-Muslim clash of faiths resulted in reducing to dust a whole big old Mosque which is a thousand years old. It was not the physical Mosque that was decimated, Narada, but a different faith, set of beliefs and fiction that was symbolically destroyed. It was all metaphorical. People saying, "let us imagine that this stone is a God and that stone is a demon, or this tree is something else and that man is someone else." People are lost in the imaginary world of symbols, structures and mythologies.

Narada, a real quest for reason, infinite happiness and freedom would only take you away from the city and not into it. It will take you away from the city, its aberrant pursuits, mediocrity and illusions. It will leave you in a world



of no fiction and bare reality. Reason takes a different course and discourse. If you really want to look into the BASIS of things, the logic of things and the ultimate reasons for things, then you better stayed out of the city. Boundless happiness is an impossibility in the city where everything is bonded to everything else. Freedom in a city is a fictitious notion; and so are individuality, unity, harmony, immortality and progress.

There really are only two possibilities for the people: one is to leave the mundane and ignorant pursuits of the cities in search of reason, Truth and Happiness; and the other is to subscribe to the human irrationality and be content with a fictitiously meaningful life - which is in fact hell. Whether or not we know the way of Truth, we know certainly that the city-making pursuits do not lead to our existential goals.

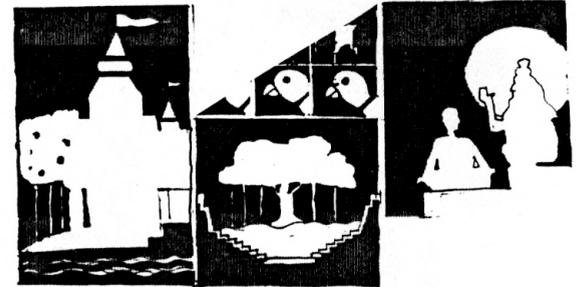


ARRIVAL AT SIVPURI

CITY and THE FALSE RELIGIONS OF HISTORY, MYTH AND MONUMENT

Setting off for Sivpuri early in the morning, Siva and Narada reached the next pilgrimage halt by the evening. On the banks of the river Varana was Sivpuri with its wayside inn and a little temple.

The weather slowly turned dark and cloudy and the sky wore a saree of lightning and thunder. Drop by drop, the rain started and grew into a heavy downpour. Siva, followed by Narada, walked into the rain and into the river. The rain was the Ganges - the primordial female- and there stood in the rain Siva - the primordial man. The incense of the damp earth, the flow of the fresh waters of the river and the rain of the monsoon, the ecstasy of the whole landscape: the atmosphere was right for a great revelation. Under the clouds and in the rain the divine pilgrims began their conversation.

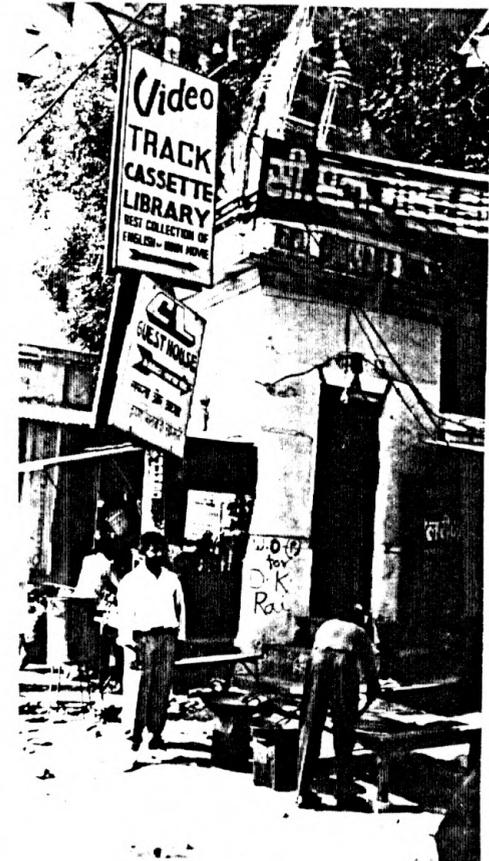


NARADA: O Jagadeswar, a close look at Banaras reveals the fact that the people here seek existential security through myths, history, monuments and rituals. I see illusions in the mythical conceptions of the city and delusions in the historical and materialistic conceptions of the city - both of which are presently shattering the city into ugly and meaningless fragments.

We hear a boatman saying with great faith that Kashi was created by the Gods at the beginning of the universe and that you - the mighty Lord of the city - have promised never to forsake Kashi. On the other side we hear an educated archeologist with a handful of numbers claiming that Kashi is no older than a five-thousand years and that most of it was constructed since the 1700s.

We hear the same boatman devoutly expressing his desire never to leave Kashi because in Kashi lies the path to eternal bliss and liberation. The same archeologist, who owns a car and a luxurious house on the periphery of Kashi savors his televisions and the other commodities which comprise the alphanumerical cities; he is planning now to make more material earnings in order to quench his existential thirst and to find the meaning of life in them.

SIVA: Narada, You always drag me into the essence of things. I am delighted. The anomalies and conflicts you noticed are deeper than what is apparent: they can be traced to the self and conceptions of each individual who dwells in the city. Conflicting notions of power, myth and history are at play invisibly behind this visible anarchy. And, as we have learned, the three fundamental drives are



at the root of this drama.

In the light of our understanding of basic human impulses, I will offer you three perspectives on the problem which are necessary for a better comprehension of the problem of Banaras.

Humans are not born equal: they are born with different intellectual and physical capabilities; they are also born into different contexts and circumstances; they are born with different fates. Nor are the humans brought up toward equality. As a result there will always be people with more power and people with less power³⁷. But, unfortunately, all humans possess the same life impulses: impulses to be happy and to exist. And all of them are born into communities where people compete with each other to fulfil their basic impulses. So, there will be people who command others to do what they want and people who are commanded and subjected to the coercion of the more powerful ones. Narada,

³⁷.SIVA: Narada, what is power useful for? Unlike what Alfred Adler and Nietzsche once thought, Power is not an end in itself. Power is used to achieve certain materialistic goals in life. The drive to power is not a fundamental drive; it could be further "traced down" to the three existential impulses that we have arrived at earlier. In the everyday world, power is used toward unwise pursuits which hardly solve man's existential problems.

the success of a city depends on how well it can resolve or enforce these inequalities which inevitably exist amid the uniformity of impulses. The success of a city depends, thus, not on its technology or sciences but on the systems of human relationships and the methods used to reconcile the contradictions. However, let us not forget that once we assume irrationally that we need cities by hook or by crook, our basis itself will be wrong. Such a path only echoes man's ignorance of his essential needs.

Now let me introduce the second perspective on the problem. This is a problem of "perspectives." Humans are, by virtue of their spatio-temporal existence and their biological existence with five senses, afforded only perspectives on reality. From Des Cartes to David Hume, from Charvaka to Samkaracharya, the uncertainty of the reality of the so called outside world has been debated thoroughly. Though neither science nor philosophy could establish the true nature of the universe, they nevertheless affirm that the reality of the world is not what we perceive and think it to be. For human beings, the world is qualitative: it contains colors, smells, sounds, and other properties which the objects themselves do not possess. Unless the Reality of the world is affirmed,

how can we ever build any system or argument upon something skeptical, uncertain, doubtful, illusory and UNREAL? The major problem with various theories of political science, economics, and urban design are that they start off with the ASSUMPTION that the world as we perceive it is real. But, it needs no deep thought to conclude that things are not what they appear to be, and that Reality is not in the appearances.

For example look at that temple over there. Considering the visual aspect of experience, you can see at any given point of time and space, only one perspective of it: you can never "know" that temple as a totality of visual phenomenon³⁸. The totality of the universe is forever hidden from humans. The true Reality is impenetrable by sensory perception steeped in spatio-temporal existence and imagination. As we have already asserted, Reality is Self. I have to be the Reality if I ever even hope to perceive Reality. There is certainly an element of Truth in my existence.

That may appear simple, Narada, but whole civilizations are structured

³⁸. Narada: O Parameswar, I am reminded here of Da Free John's beautiful illustration of the same point in his book Transmission of Doubt. He puts it in a simple question : "How does this room appear when seen from all points of view?"

around conventions of perception regarding the passage of time and the occurrence of events in space. Whole civilizations are structured around different "perspectives." You may also see that people, cities and civilizations are deluded into the belief that any given perspective on reality is the same as Reality itself! Different conceptions of time and perceptions of material reality govern different civilizations. One conception led to Kashi and the others led to the Alphanumerical cities.

I shall now introduce the third perspective which had already been discussed at the previous halt: that of fiction and how masses succumb to such stories out of ignorance. People have all these limitations and illusions and with them they structure their cities.

We have the problem of inequality, the problem of differing perspectives, the problem of succumbing to irrationality and fiction.

Let me begin by elaborating on the second problem - that of perspectives. The problem of perspectives was at play when the boatman and the archeologist expressed their naive assertions about the origins of Kashi. It is a conflict between the mythical and historical perspectives with both claiming to be the true

descriptions of reality. What we need to ask here is, what is being satisfied by finding out the origins of the city, society and people. By knowing the remote past we hope to embrace intellectually the whole expanse of time. Though the individual lives for hardly seventy years, he identifies himself with his ancestors and thus falls into the illusion that he himself has such a long past. The drive to exist eternally is not difficult to grasp in these cases.³⁹ In architectural terms, people seek eternal and permanent existence in the monuments of the city. Scores of great philosophers have fallen into the same fallacy of mistaken identities.⁴⁰

³⁹. Roderick Seidenberg in the book Post-historic Man bases his entire argument on the fallacy that the societal history is equal to individual history. This urge to equate can be traced down to the fundamental drive to live as long as possible. He treats the entire society of individuals as one unit with one past and one destiny.

⁴⁰. SIVA: Hegel, Marx, De Chardin, Gebser, Rollo May, Rifkin to name a few, have repeatedly subscribed to the same fallacy as Seidenberg: they assumed that collective destiny overrides the individual destiny. Hence, they came up with such grandiose misconceptions as treating history as one inexorable force and the human being as a helpless atom swept away in that stream. Some of them have even proposed theories of ages: that human intelligence grows with time and that we are now in a rational world where collective salvation is possible. What that precisely means is that somewhere in the near future all the human beings are going to be blessed miraculously with eternal bliss, immortal existence and ultimate wisdom! Narada, what an imaginative fantasy it is. If you take a closer look at it, all those theories subscribe to the historical conception of time which

Before we get into the argument any further, Narada, let me clarify what I mean by history. I am going to use "history" in the sense that it is a mode of viewing and a way of describing the time (past). Myth is also an account of the past and a mode of imagining, perceiving and depicting the past. Neither of them are absolutes, but they are the two dominant perspectives at play in Kashi and elsewhere around the world.

That Kashi exists from the beginning of creation of the universe is a myth. That Kashi was founded by stray Aryans in B.C. 2000 is an historical assertion. That Adam and Eve are the human primordials is a myth; and that humans evolved from Apes is an historical assertion. The historical perspective asserts that there are times that can't be returned to, that they happened at "that" time. The mythical vision works with the metaphor of a circle with man at the center - he

we are going to discuss in depth. I can only pity the ignorance that impeded them from realizing that every individual is endowed with the same existential impulses, and that each one of us has to struggle to (or cease the struggle to) individually know the mystery of existence, realize the path to bliss and the secret of immortality. I cannot experience your bliss or be immortal along with you. There is no such thing as collective bliss.

can "metaphorically"⁴¹ choose to reach any point without progressing or regressing from any other. The historical view conceives of time as a straight line with the past at one end and the future at the other; the present is only a diaphanous frame of reference through which the future is transformed relentlessly into the irretrievable past called history. But, all these cases are merely convenient conceptions of time in order to meet certain psychological necessities which we have already discussed.

Let me ask a direct question here, O Narada. Where is history? Or let me put it this way, where does history exist?

NARADA: O Lord, history is the past -the memory- structured into a narrative.

SIVA: Then where is that past?

NARADA: It is not O Lord. We see the past in things that are present before us.

SIVA: OK. Let us look at that ruined temple over there. Now tell me where is its

⁴¹. SIVA: Narada, in neither cases is it possible to "really" go into the past. Just because a myth or a fiction takes us on a trip to the past metaphorically, we should not stick to them and seek eternity through them. We must find out if there "really" is a past and if so how to experience that past directly. Only the "real" experience should be our legitimate goal.



past?

NARADA: Its past is contained in its presence.

SIVA: No, I am asking you to show me the past which you associate with that temple. Where is that past?

NARADA: There is no past to that temple, O Lord. It is by lending our imagination that we construct something called the past within our minds. If not for our imaginations and mental constructions, there is no past. Without our imagination, there is no past in reality. There is nothing called history that is "out there" separate from ourselves and our imaginations. History is a fiction socially accepted upon but, it is nevertheless a constructed image. Mythologies are fictions too.

SIVA: Yes. That is what it is. That is what it is. There is time, there is history and there is nostalgia. Then there are false identities which say "I was like that in the past, I am different now because. . ."

In a mythical world such as Kashi, time is not numbered or measured - it is named. A year is named according to the stellar configurations, a month is

named according to the season or lunar positions. But neither of them are absolute measures. The reality of time is not being questioned here: only a different way of conceiving, imagining, metaphorizing and perceiving it. But, you see Narada, the historical mind which works with numbers falls into an illusion of linear progression: 1780, 1880, 1881, 1882, 1990, 2000, . . . This numbering is aptly followed by the illusion that bigger numbers indicate better times, which is the modern myth of progress or evolution. Obviously you cannot repeat the numbers as they are endless and inexhaustible. So, you travel in one direction. To this metaphor is dedicated the historical perspective. The people conditioned by this perspective are called historical beings with "historical consciousness." If history is the illusion of linear progression, mythology is the illusion of eternal repetition. However, let us be cautious here, Narada. I am not making any effort to positively justify mythologies or ruthlessly condemn history. No. On the contrary, both the ways of conceiving the past are illusions. And both the paths reveal the already asserted drive to exist forever, to live the whole expanse of time in one present moment.

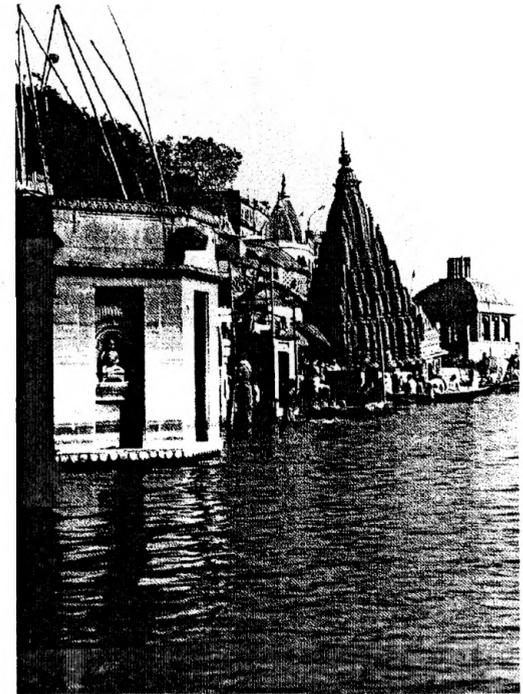
Let us take an example here. Look at that half-sunk, leaning temple on the

banks of the river. I shall present both mytho-poetic and historical accounts.

The boatman in whose boat I once travelled, said that the temple was sunk due to a curse by a Sage who used to meditate in the location the temple now stands. He said that the rich businessman who adamantly went on with the construction of the temple was aptly punished by the curse of the Sage who was said to be none other than myself in disguise. The boatman also said that he worships the deity of that temple irrespective of the level the river.

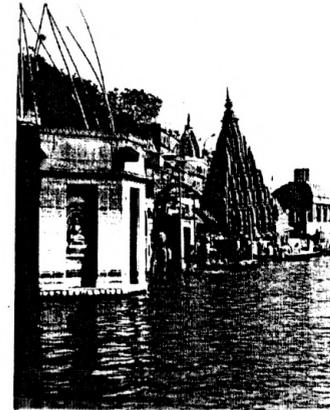
The archeologist's account is different. He said that the temple was built by a businessman in 1842 A.D. and was erected on an unstable soil without proper structural considerations. He also went on to deduce, from the style of the sculptures and motifs, the chronological period to which it belonged.

You see Narada, mythical mind constructs a story around the incidents and gives it a flavor, and on a relative basis, succeeds in approaching completeness: such a story teaches, amuses and perpetuates a system of "belief" (and not "intelligence"). It also ties that particular story to a larger work of fiction - that of the myth of Kashi and me. And the historical mind stops at some dry facts that don't relate to anything and dissolve the existence of the temple into an



archeological database catering to the scholarly needs of the so-called specialists. The beauty of the temple, the ruined ruggedness of the tilted spire and the sheer persistence of the structure are evident as a case of curse-struck splendor. By this account the ruined temple communicates to the onlookers that human artifice is not permanent and that destiny takes its toll. The Gods will have their say. In such an interpretation you see no numbers, no deliberations. Regardless of the stories, the reality of that temple remains the same; the boatman and the archaeologists go on with their interpretations of the temple's image, and build their inner worlds. The temple is what they imagine it to be. But what is the reality of the temple? How does the temple appear when seen from all possible points of view and all times simultaneously? What is Reality?

"History" is built on the false premise that memory, and therefore knowledge, has to be preserved at all costs: forgetting is seen with scorn. In contrast, myth and fiction are built around planned forgetfulness - the ability to forget the unnecessary, prune the particular and weave the remaining into an archetypal story. Historical mind attempts to reach its objective by including all the events and bringing them into one infinitely massive narrative; mythical mind



excludes the specifics, and extracts an archetypal and general story so as to live the eternal present. You can see a historian fanatically storing and preserving every needless detail and number: that Mr. President sneezed in Japan, or the Queen went shopping at 3.45 pm on the 21st of July 1989. All present-day institutions are structured around this fanaticism of memorizing the unnecessary. In the psychological jargon the "pursuit of history" is a neurotic adherence to memory (collective or individual) in which one's identity and existential security are sought.

The historical conception of existence impedes and diverts one from the essential questions of existence.⁴² Historical mind accumulates and derives its identity from that mass of data (whether it is the unstructured data of "history" or the fictional data of well structured mythology) and tries to find meaning in the past imaginatively reconstructed in the mind. The historical mind says: "I

⁴².SIVA: Narada, Paul Valery observes that "History is the most dangerous product evolved from the chemistry of the intellect. Its properties are well known. It causes dreams, it intoxicates whole peoples, gives them false memories, quickens their reflexes, keeps their old wounds open, torments them in their repose, leads them into delusions either of grandeur or persecution, and makes nations bitter, arrogant, insufferable, and vain. . . History will justify anything.

belong to all of this, and that expansive feeling gives me a sense of eternal and almost immortal existence." The mythical mind composes and builds images meaningfully, but the identity-seeking drive is the same. Unfortunately in both cases the drive to become large, eternal and to belong to something big is only partially satiated. While the historical mind seeks eternity through the inclusion of events, mythical mind seeks eternity in the eternal present - by exclusion of specific events. But neither point of view succeeds in embracing eternity; the wise mind discards both and starts questioning the notion of time and the search for immortality altogether.

Narada, the pseudo-rationalists - called historians - and others subscribing to those particular illusions, substantiate their pursuit with the argument that they are looking for some truth, reality, ultimate causality and so on. I have already exposed how aberrant it is to mistake perspectives of reality for reality itself. There have been people trying to demonstrate that Romans and Greeks had better cities and that then it was like "that"! Not realizing that historical arguments and historical times are also constructions of mind, they propagate poor fiction and fragmentary fiction. Historical memory (as opposed to mythical memory) keeps

the wounds open and keeps the old hatreds alive. A chaotic Bosnia, a fragmented Russia, a burning India and the ailing countries of eastern Europe are examples of the madness created by a people's adherence to excessive and meaningless memory.

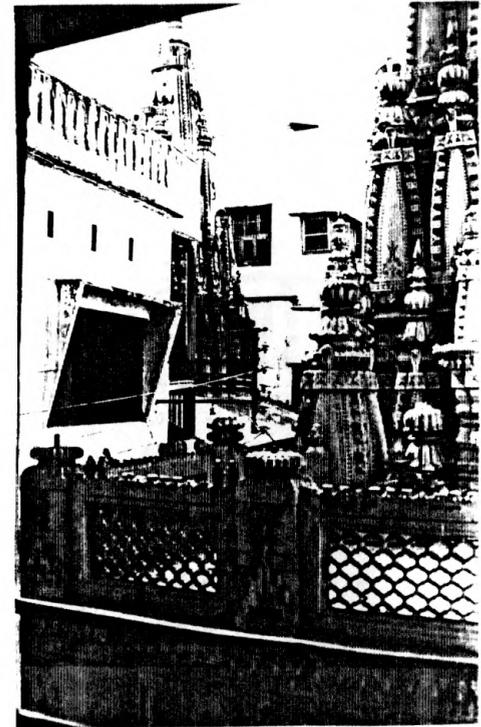
Historical memory - the knowledge which constantly reminds you how distant you are from your "roots" - breeds nostalgia. It breeds a desire for a return to the imaginary good times of that imagined past. Nostalgia can wreck even the mega-structures of the seemingly stable societies: the giant of Communism is now shattered into pieces by some parochial and nostalgic sentiments of people who longed for a return to their "ethnic roots." Cities were restructured and monuments, reconfigured. Mythical memory deals with the ideal past in a different manner; a manner in which nostalgia is intentionally avoided.

To eliminate nostalgia, the mythical mind of Kashi propagates rituals of re-creation and rejuvenation of time, by reenacting and repeating archetypal times and models⁴³. Mythical consciousness also tries to satisfy the impulse for a

⁴³. Siva: Narada, see for an elaborate description of such rituals, myths and methods Mircae Eliade's Cosmos and History.

return to the past or possessing the past. To become nostalgic is no crime: it is human. You have to deal with that inner call in the best way possible. So, either you should have time-machines in every house, or mythologies and rituals promising a continual resurrection of the past. Better yet, one might realize that holding on to either limited perspective is foolish and relinquish such pursuits. Nostalgia is a symptom of the unsatiated impulse to live happily forever.

Let me further give you more examples of how various rituals in Kashi deface the past intentionally. The temples are constantly repainted, renovated and prevented from showing any signs of aging. The streets and houses are ritually rejuvenated for every festival. In the cities of hell, which are typical of the modern age, there are no adequate methods of countering the feeling of the relentless erosion of time; there the past is never to be recovered - not even metaphorically.⁴⁴



⁴⁴SIVA: Narada, it has been said that the language of myth is metaphor. Through rituals and other means, primordial times and primordial people are invoked in the present at will. Architecture is a metaphorical and analogical device. But, the spread of the "historical perspective" signified the death of architecture, and the monopoly of the textual document. Text, photographs and the electronic media are the major modes by which history is "preserved." There is a fundamental difference between text, other media and architecture in that

Well, I don't need to go any further to expose the roots of the conflict that you have noticed in Kashi: the clash between the spiritual ideal and the lure of material gains; the clash between mythologies and history. At Kashi you are witnessing the battle between the Gods of creation and the apes of Darwin.

In what is is everything, Narada. It is in what is that a historical man looks for the hints of the past and hopes for the future (though he doesn't realize this point). History is the way you categorize, imagine and treat things that exist in the present itself. History does not exist in reality and there is no such thing as a "past" that we could experience as a reality. Reality is in the present. What you



language is a literal articulation of an idea whereas architecture is a tacit, figurative and symbolic construction of our understanding of reality in the formal and spatial domain. While language is a pragmatic device, architecture is a metaphorical apparatus: architecture speaks in metaphors. In alphanumeric cities, even the metaphorical devices are replaced by alphanumeric devices. A whole world is devoured by the micro-chips and CD-ROMs.

take as historical realities are constructions of the mind that are not "out there".⁴⁵

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There is no absolute force called history. Whatever you learn is based on what is. In what is is reality. There is no Rome and Piranesi other than the ones in your mind, no Le Corbusier other than the one your mind constructs, no history other than your imaginative re-creation of the past. Good imagination results in good fiction: such as Shakespeare's drama or Veda Vyasa's Maha Bharata. Bad imagination and false perception result in history books and in the alphanumerical cities.

If the wisdom of what is were to dawn on people, they would stop

⁴⁵. NARADA: That is quite true, sir. Ken Wilber made a similar comment in his No Boundary: "For although I do not directly see the past, nor feel it, nor touch it, can remember it. . . . The mystic agrees that when I think of the past, all I really know is a certain memory - but, he adds, *that memory is itself a present experience.*"

⁴⁶. SIVA: Narada, the difference between history and literature is the way you prepare your mind to look at them: A book called "Russian History 1740-1920" is viewed differently than if it were to bear the title "The wrath of the Czar - a novel." Of course, you then realize what a poor fiction it is. Narada, let me remind you that both the titles are a way of interpreting reality, but, shouldn't be mistaken to reality itself.

running around and rushing into the future via eight-lane highways and hundred-story buildings. Once ambition dies and wisdom and proper thought dawn, once the spuriousness of historical thinking is comprehended, the cities stop spreading out, growing high and exploding violently. Narada, unless the change occurs at the level of self, even the strongest walls and strictest laws are not going to thwart the diffusion of cancerous human cravings. No physical ordering principles are going to come to your rescue. But, Narada, the trouble here is, that the one who truly realizes what is, would be rendered incapable of ambition and of life in the mainstream.

A system of faith and fiction leads to Kashi.⁴⁷ A fanatical adherence to numbers, events and ambitions results in the nurturing of the Alphanumerical cities. An obsession with numbers, economics, graphs, statistics and calculations would lead to the Alphanumerical cities. But, a true course of reason and quest

⁴⁷. SIVA: Narada, Krishnamurti once observed, to paraphrase him, that the theories of better cities or ideal cities are unwise pursuits in themselves which would never take one closer to the Truth and bliss. Revolution within society is like the mutiny of prisoners who want better food and clothes within the prison. But, the revolt born of rationality is like an individual breaking away from the society, and that he calls creative revolution.

for perpetual happiness would only take you away from all that. Cities, in themselves, are places of meaningless pursuits.⁴⁸



⁴⁸.SIVA: By meaning I mean the way humans reason out the relationships between various things and their existence. By meaninglessness I mean that the failure of the pursuits of humans in a city to relate to the fundamental and ultimate questions of existence, Narada. By the time the people are disillusioned by the reality of existence death devours them and leaves a legacy of a meaningless past behind them.

THEREFORE . . . A RETURN TO THE CITY?

Having left the last canonical halt on the pilgrimage, the pilgrims head back to Manikarnika ghat - a return to the city.

SIVA: We have traversed a long path, O Narada. We have explored, debated and discovered many things. Here we are on the way back, returning to the bounds of the city again. It is time for recapitulation and rumination.

NARADA: At the end of the pilgrimage, O Lord, I feel that I now have a clearer perception. I am now equipped with a tool, a sword and a torch with which I can wade through the muddle of unreason and irrationality.

The world is not the same again for me. I landed in a Banaras which was romantic, surreal, secure and much different. I am now returning to a city whose essence is as clear as a cloudless sky.

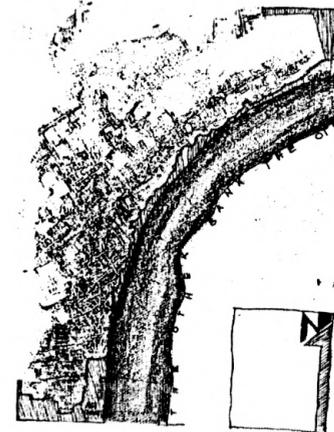
When we look at Banaras, we certainly intend to learn. What we learn depends on what we think we should learn. What we think we should learn



depends on what we think we need. In the end, what we think we need is what governs our perceptions, methods and goals. Therefore, the logical conclusion is that unless we are absolutely clear about what we need, we cannot study anything. Hence the goal of our dialogues has been to attain absolute clarity and rationality of thought.

Humans live according to what they perceive they need. Their perceptions of their needs may change whether or not their needs do. In our exposition of human nature and needs, we had identified certain irreducible and fundamental impulses of human beings. All of human pursuits can be traced down to those existential essences. Beginning with the premise that the city is the primary domain of human pursuits, we had arrived at the conclusion that the way city is perceived and made depends on what the people think they ought to pursue in their lives. The form of the city, therefore, is a direct function of a people's perception of themselves and their needs.

It is clear from our understanding of human nature that human needs are the same no matter where people live. Immortal and ceaseless existence, Truth and Bliss are all that human beings have ever needed, and will ever need. And,



as we have seen, these infinities can never ever be achieved by clinging to things, concepts and perceptions.

That a dip in the Ganges would purge them of all sins; that death within the bounds of Banaras would free them of all sorrow; that worshipping a God would bring them boons, would then appear differently if the people realize what they are really and existentially driven to do.

We began the pilgrimage, O Lord, with wondering how different Banaras is; we are ending this journey with the realization that beneath the superficialities, Banaras is, in essence, no different from the other human habitats. Although the ways in which the existential goals are pursued may differ from city to city, the goals themselves remain the same.

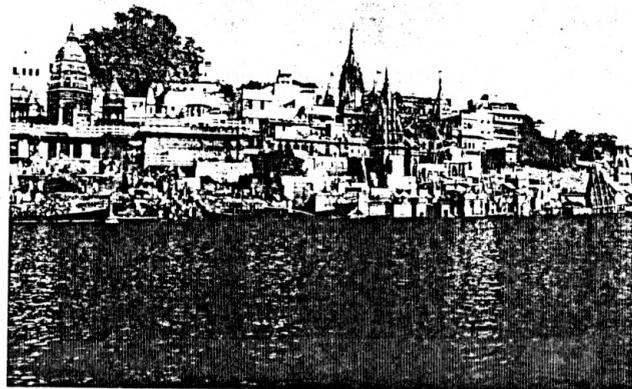
SIVA: Yes, O Sage. It is important to resolve the existential predicament first if any meaningful discourse has to begin.

Self is the fountainhead of life, and self is the subject as well as the object of life. Existence, knowledge and joy are the fundamental drives of life. This realization has to dawn on the people for any meaningful action to take place.

However, these three categories are not a mere checklist of things; recognizing the essential nature of these drives is only the beginning of a journey toward Truth, Eternity and Bliss. Narada, seeking infinities in transient and ephemeral things is unwise and ridiculous. Only a rigorous and passionate rationality with legitimate beginnings can ensure a meaningful existence.

Banaras, despite addressing the existential issues more directly than any other city, fails to move beyond the sphere of metaphors, fiction and symbols imposed by the religion. In this regard it is no different than any other city. It is irrationality that rules the city of Banaras.

In the end, O Narada, we are returning to the city, but like a drop of water on the lotus leaf, we shall remain freely in the city without clinging to its forms, pursuits and beliefs. Whether we return to the city or not makes little difference to us.



AT MANIKARNIKA GHAT
THE END OF THE PILGRIMAGE

AUTHOR: O patient reader, here ends the dialogue and here ends the fiction. The divinities return to their cities while I am caught in the existential dilemma of whether to be or not to be a part of the city-making pursuits. However, the drama at Banaras continues despite my realizations and deliberations. Let me then describe the grandeur of the return of the divinities:

When the discourse ends, dawn is almost there. The moment our pilgrims step onto the grand steps of the oldest theater of the world - Manikarnika ghat - the world is filled with splendor. A thousand conch shells sound-off in rapture. The clouds of mysterious colors become a procession of a myriad elephants with all the thirty-million Gods riding those herds of Indra. Ganges is ecstatically rising step by step to touch the footsteps of her Lord. The mist clears off and the blanket of eternity is unveiled on the "other bank." Ten-thousand devotees chant the Siva-mantra: "Om Namahsivaaya".

Lord Agni flares in brilliant reds as he transforms the ephemeral into the

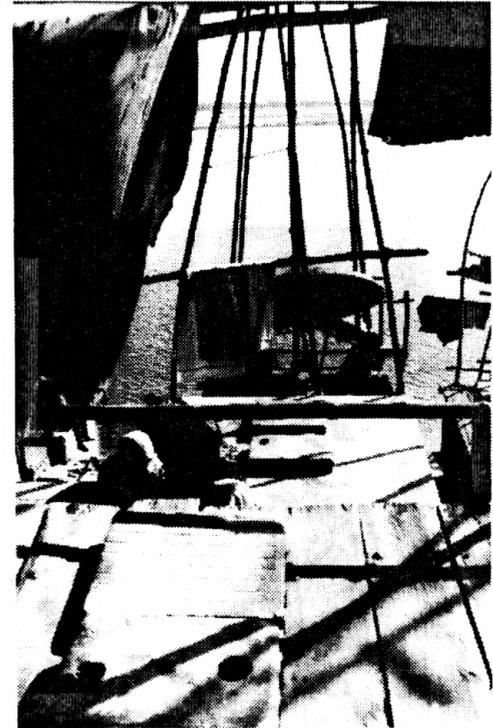


eternal. The blue-black smoke from the burning pyres swirls into the sky and soars heavenward. In the backdrop are seated imperturbably one hundred mendicants in yogic postures. A serene tranquility envelops the grand drama.

A great fiction is enacted with supreme faith and fidelity. The city for dying, the city of liberation, metaphorically echoing the presence of the other world, continues its spree of spiritual success.

The worn-off pieces of the dilapidated palm-leaf umbrella flutters in the morning breeze, as the slender bamboos hold high the lamps for the ancestors in the heavens.

Narada and Siva discard their disguise. The great Sage bows and salutes to the Lord and the Lord solemnly blesses the eternal traveler. Playing his Mahanti (string instrument), chanting the "*Narayana mantra*" and ruminating on the fresh memories of his pilgrimage, Sage Narada rises into the clouds and departs on yet another journey. And the Lord of Kashi, invisibly walks into the veins of the labyrinth of the "Never Forsaken City" - thronged by the animals, humans and Gods.



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