

# PILGRIMAGE

PAST AND PRESENT  
IN THE WORLD RELIGIONS

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## *Divinity Diffused: Pilgrimage in the Indian Religions*

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That Krishna spent his early life in and around the location of Brindavan was established by a man called Chaitanya, a mystic and devotee, to whom this information was divinely revealed. Indeed, many now believe that Chaitanya himself was an incarnation of both Krishna and Radha. Today, in the many temples devoted to Krishna in Brindavan, the Gaudiya Vaishnava greet the god by dancing and singing, and they and others gain spiritual sustenance either from gazing at his image or from sharing the food that has been consecrated through its contact with the sacred image. Neighbouring villages are also imbued with the mythology of Krishna, so that holy legends are associated with specific, local places.

At the time of the monsoon in July and August pilgrims from all over India come to the town. They bathe every morning in the river Jumna, the presiding deity of which is thought of as a sister to the famous Ganges. Here they may collect water to take home and use sparingly at family altars situated far away from the holy site. They come particularly to see the *Ras Lila*, sacred dramas enacted by local children who adopt the roles of Krishna, Radha (his consort) and assorted cowherds. 'Lila' means play in both senses of the word, and these performances combine drama and liturgy in order to describe incidents in Krishna's life. To see them is to experience a form of sharing which has some resemblances to the Christian drama of the Eucharist: the plays are communal celebrations of the life of a god who unites the worlds of humans and deities. The divine force is invoked to be present in the static image of the god, just as the wafer and wine become the body and blood of Christ in the Mass.

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the Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land ideally embody an archetypal journey to a supremely sacred locality. In contrast, the *Mahabharata*, the great Hindu epic, recommends in passing a form of wandering to a wide variety of holy places.<sup>2</sup> Hundreds of shrines and pilgrimage sites are named in an order which follows the movements of the sun. While the holy places focus mainly on northern India, the heartland of the Indo-Aryan civilisation which emerged in India in the second millennium BC, they also encompass a tour of the entire subcontinent.

This broad spreading of sacred space parallels a diffusion of the divine that is characteristic of Hindu worship. Early sacred texts of the first and second millennia BC, in particular the *Upanishads*, contain a notion of an all-pervading, abstract God, while early Vedic religion seems to have avoided worship through temples and images.<sup>3</sup> Yet the concept of divinity has subsequently taken on many faces, giving form to the formless by introducing anthropomorphic gods and *avatars* or human incarnations (literally, 'descents') of the gods. Krishna's representation in Brindavan shifts with the seasons and varied locales, just as the oral tradition of the *Ras Lila* may change with each performance. He himself is also part of a vast pantheon of Hindu gods, one where lesser divinities may be seen as aspects of the greater ones, creating a loosely defined and endlessly splintering hierarchy of beings.

Such fragmentation not only aids the assimilation of a variety of cults into Hinduism, but also increases the sense of the omnipresence of divine forces. The anthropologist Chris Fuller emphasises that Hinduism postulates no absolute distinction between divine and human beings.<sup>4</sup> A priest in a Shiva temple must install the god's power in himself before commencing worship, and ritual texts proclaim 'only Shiva can worship Shiva'. Just as humans show respect to deities through a characteristic gesture of obeisance, *namaskara* – bowing the head, with hands held high, and palms pressed together – so this is also practised from god to god, and human to human. The act implies relations of hierarchy combined with interdependence which imbue both social and divine relationships in Hinduism.

A single deity can also contain a number of apparently contending forces: Shiva, for instance, embodies principles of both fertility and death, healing and crazed destruction. Among the many Hindu goddesses, some are maternal and domestic, the embodiment of art and culture, but others are great warriors, perhaps living wild existences on the fringes of civilisation, exercising dynamic but dangerous female forces. (By marrying a goddess, a god checks and harnesses the threat of her female power.) Vishnu 'the preserver', of whom Krishna is an incarnation, and Shiva personify powers that are believed to remain active in the world, and it is they, along with aspects of the mother goddess, who today receive the most worship in shrines and pilgrimages. In contrast Brahma, a creator deity, at one stage perhaps the chief god of the early Hindus, is often thought of as sunk in deep meditation or slumber now that his task is complete.

An Indian expression used to describe the process of pilgrimage is *tirthayatra*. *Yatra* implies the act of travelling, while *tirtha* is a complex



50 Procession of pilgrims at Tanjore, India. Each red flag depicts a Shiva linga.

Sanskrit term encompassing the notion of a ford, but also sometimes used to refer to holy men and even scriptures. The common aspect of these apparently diverse meanings lies in the idea of crossing over – the possibility of moving between human and divine realms, or at least mediating between them, which is evident in holy texts, places and people. Each *tirtha* can thus represent special nodes in what one author has called a kind of ‘sacred geometry’.<sup>5</sup> They are seen as especially good places for the performance of rites: acts performed and prayers uttered here are believed to be many times more beneficial than they would be elsewhere.

The practice of pilgrimage institutionalises the journey of the worshipper to *tirthas*. Often, such journeys imply an immersion in sacred time as well as space, since Hinduism distinguishes between auspicious and inauspicious times for performing important actions. Pilgrimages and holy gatherings therefore tend to occur at special astrological conjunc-tions. In 1989, for instance, the famous Kumbha Mela pilgrimage and fair

A myth is told in sacred Hindu texts about the Goddess Sati, wife of Shiva. Its details vary slightly from version to version, but the elements of the story remain reasonably consistent. Sati's father is said to have performed a sacrifice to which neither Sati nor Shiva was invited. Sati went to the ceremony nevertheless, but was insulted by her father. As a result, she is

## IMAGE, TEXT AND PLACE

Unlike Christianity, Islam and Judaism, Hinduism's foundations are based on a series of sacred texts (often difficult to interpret) rather than a single, revealed, repository of truth. Instead of the universalising and proselytising impulses that are so evident in Islam and Christianity, its local adaptations encompass ways of life that actually encourage syncretism and the case that pilgrimage is almost as important within Hinduism as it is, for instance, in Islam. Yet for Hindus it represents merely one possible pathway among many in the search for salvation.

Quite recently, and with some misgiving, I observed a pilgrimage taking the holiest of all possible baths at the Dasaavamedha Ghat in Varanasi, holding his transistor radio to his ear to monitor the cricket test match against the West Indies broadcast from Calcutta.

Called Hinduism may derive from colonial British attempts to define and demarcate an Indian system of beliefs along Judeo-Christian lines.<sup>7</sup> One Pilgrimage scholar warns us against assuming that western notions of piety and sacredness need be shared cross-culturally:<sup>8</sup>

Through the mediating powers of the image at Brindavan, then, we have been introduced to a concept of divinity and a pilgrimage tradition that is, above all else, multi-layered and flexible. Unlike the other world religions, Hinduism – as much a social system, perhaps, as a religion – cannot look back to a single prophetic founder or decisive event in historical time for its creation. Indeed, the very idea of a single tradition demarcate an Indian system of beliefs along Judeo-Christian lines.<sup>7</sup> One Pilgrimage bases much of its credibility on the other hand, on the assumption that they can gain direct access to their favoured deities. Christians themselves, amongs many other famous teachers of devotion to Krishna, may be seen as part of this tradition, and indeed in more recent centuries it has often been evident specifically in the worship of Krishna.

An important element in contemporary Hinduism, manifested not least in the practice of pilgrimage, is the expression of devotionalism (in Sanskrit, *bhakti*).<sup>9</sup> This can be traced back to the sixth or seventh centuries AD, a period when itinerant devotees travelled from shrine to shrine, abandoning their lives to the worship of a deity. Such devotion, as well as inspiring a large corpus of poetry, has helped shift the focus of some Hindu worship away from ritual sacrifice and toward human-singing and a surrendered self in love of and union with God. It has thereby allowed non-Brahmin sections of society to feel that they can gain direct access to their favoured deities. Christians themselves, amongs many other famous teachers of devotion to Krishna, may be seen as part of this tradition, and indeed in more recent centuries it has often been evident specifically in the worship of Krishna.

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was held at Prayaga (Allahabad), where the Ganges and Jumna rivers meet. On this occasion, a favourable conjunction coincided with a lunar eclipse, and the event attracted some 15 million pilgrims.

said to have died of a broken heart, or possibly by suicide. Shiva, inconsolable at her death, traversed the earth in a mad dance, carrying her body. The gods became anxious to free him of his grief and decided to deprive him of Sati. They therefore dispersed her body bit by bit, and places where the body fell became holy. These sacred sites became major pilgrimage centres for goddess worship in India.

Descriptions of Sati's fate not only provide a justification for religious practice, they also construct an image of India as a mythologically charged landscape whose holy spots are as widespread as the body of Sati herself. The very soil of India is thought by many Hindus to be the body or at least the residence of the divine, particularly in its female form.<sup>10</sup> Yet, despite their scattered locations, the spread of Hindu pilgrimage centres is largely limited to India (where over 80% of the population is Hindu), which is defined as the sacred space *par excellence*.<sup>11</sup> There is a clear contrast here, for instance, with the spread of important Christian centres of pilgrimage. If the importance of Rome and Jerusalem, or even Lourdes and Compostela, reflects the successful spread of a faith anxious literally to conquer the world for Christ, the Hindu tradition has usually been much more parochial in its range. Even so, this apparent limitation has also brought with it certain advantages, since the sacred geography has played some part in shaping the national identity of a country which has only rarely been unified under central rule. The fact that Hindus have been able to circumambulate the whole of India, visiting hundreds of *tirthas*, has helped to impart some sense of unity in the face of political and military conflict, and has also helped in the spreading of cults. In the present era, of course, political centralisation and even nationalism have emerged, and this fact has received significant ritual expression. In Benares (also known as Varanasi and Kashi), for instance, the temple dedicated to *Bharat Mata*, or 'Mother India', does not contain an anthropomorphic image of the goddess. Instead, a large, coloured relief map of the Indian subcontinent receives the due reverence of pilgrims.

Many Hindu sites are linked not only to texts, but also to features of the landscape itself, such as hilltops, confluences of rivers, caves, outcrops of rock and forests. There are seven particularly holy rivers, of which the Ganges, believed to acquire its sanctity by issuing forth from the very locks of Shiva's hair, is nowadays considered the foremost. The goddess Ganga is said to be one of the escorts of Shiva, just as the sacred river laps 'seductively', according to one author, against the walls of Benares, a city associated particularly with the god.<sup>12</sup> There are also seven holy cities which, if visited, have the power to bestow salvation or *moksha* – a state similar to the Buddhist notion of *nirvana*, which implies total, final, release from all binding attachments and the cycle of reincarnation that is the lot of humanity.<sup>13</sup> Four *dhamas* or dwelling-places of the gods provide abodes of sanctity in the cardinal directions of the entire subcontinent: Badrinath in the Himalayas, Rameshvaram in the extreme south; Puri on the east coast; Dvaraka on the west coast.

*Tirthas* are often associated with running water, and ritual bathing is of considerable importance. The seven sacred rivers are said to have

One pilgrimage scholar has described these types of formulative descriptions as 'archaic advertisements',<sup>17</sup> an apt phrase when we remember that it has been in the interests of priests, the guardians of temples and writers of holy texts, to emphasize the importance of their own sites in relation to others. We can also see from these texts the importance of a written tradition in reinforcing the status of prominent religious places. Yet we cannot regard the sanctity of pilgrimage sites as created and justified merely through texts, not least because any pilgrimage tradition has to be

bathing there and worshipping the ancestors and Gods one suffers no misfortune. . . . There is also there the Abode-of-*Lila* Ford; by three corners of holy places. . . . One obtains all his desires and goes to the world of heaven. In Saraka there are one obtains God on the fourteenth of the dark fortnight; for thus approach the Bull-banished God to world-renowned Saraka and are burned off. . . . Thereupon one should go to the Meadow-of-Kapishala, which is hard to find, his sins when one has gone to the Meadow-of-Kapishala, which is hard to find, his sins

characteristic passage from the *Mahabharata* itself:<sup>18</sup>

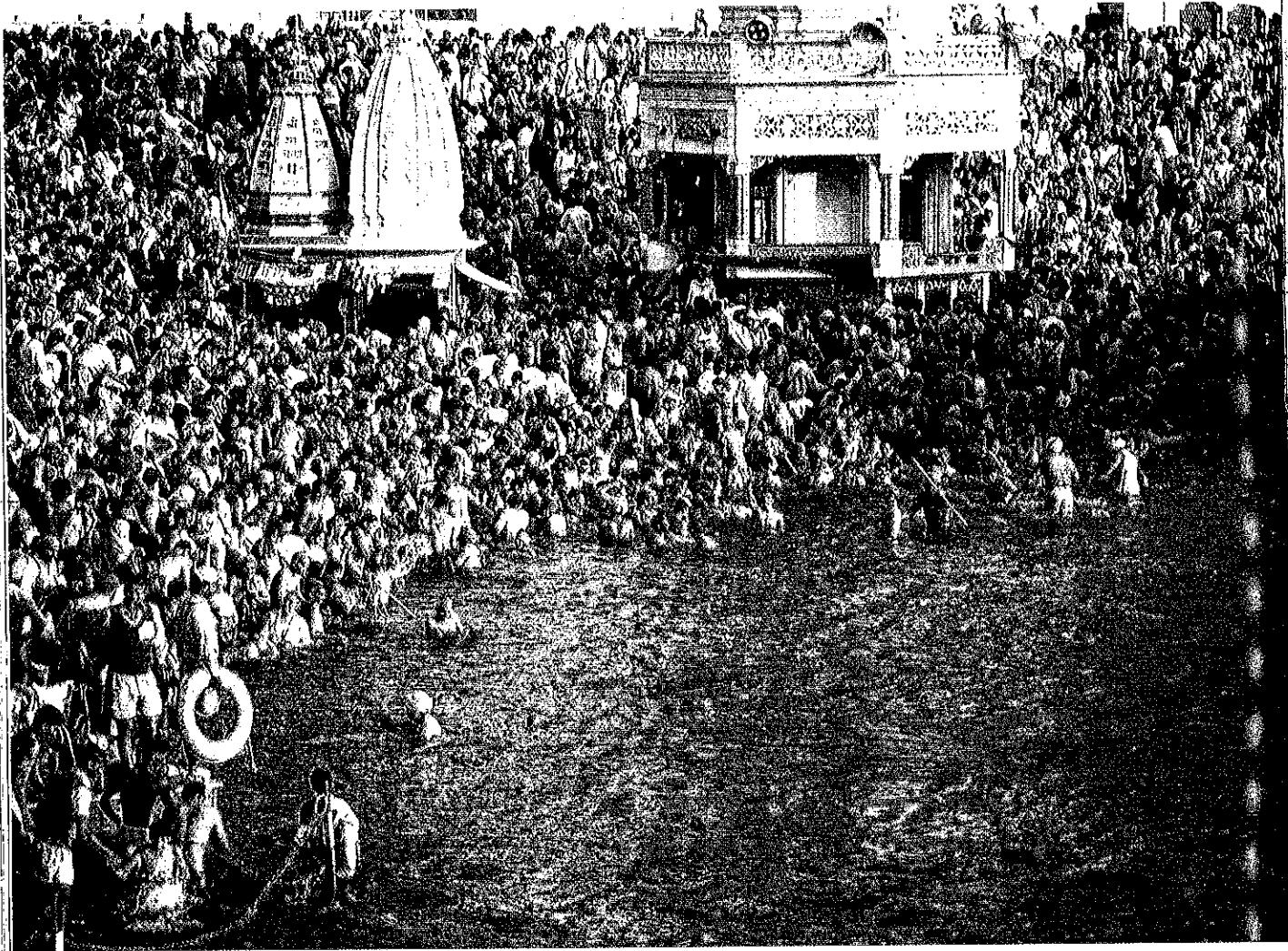
Landscapes and movements listed in the *Mahabharata* are complete-mended by other texts from perhaps the third to the fifteenth centuries AD, such as the *Puranas* and *Tantras*. These parallel the epic in that they contain no details of the physical settings of sacred sites, but are more concerned with their potential to provide spiritual rewards. Here is a summary of its opposite: 'Evil is he who stayeth among men. They also originally semi-nomadic—reveal the virtues of travel by making clear the older *Vedas*—the earliest literary documents of an Aryan culture that was Movement itself, towards between holy areas, is a sacred act. The benefits of the benefits to be accrued by the pious traveller:<sup>19</sup>

Slain by the toll of his journey.  
All his sins disappear,  
His body groweth and is fruitful,  
Flower-like the heels of the wanderer,

describethe benefits to be accrued by the pious traveller:<sup>19</sup>

More visibly at a time of Hindu revival, which comprises the eighteenth century, the city has more than seventy ghats, many built in the Bay of Bengal after some 1,560 miles. It is thought by some both to be at the centre of the world and situated high above the earth, on Shiva's bedonings while they bathe.

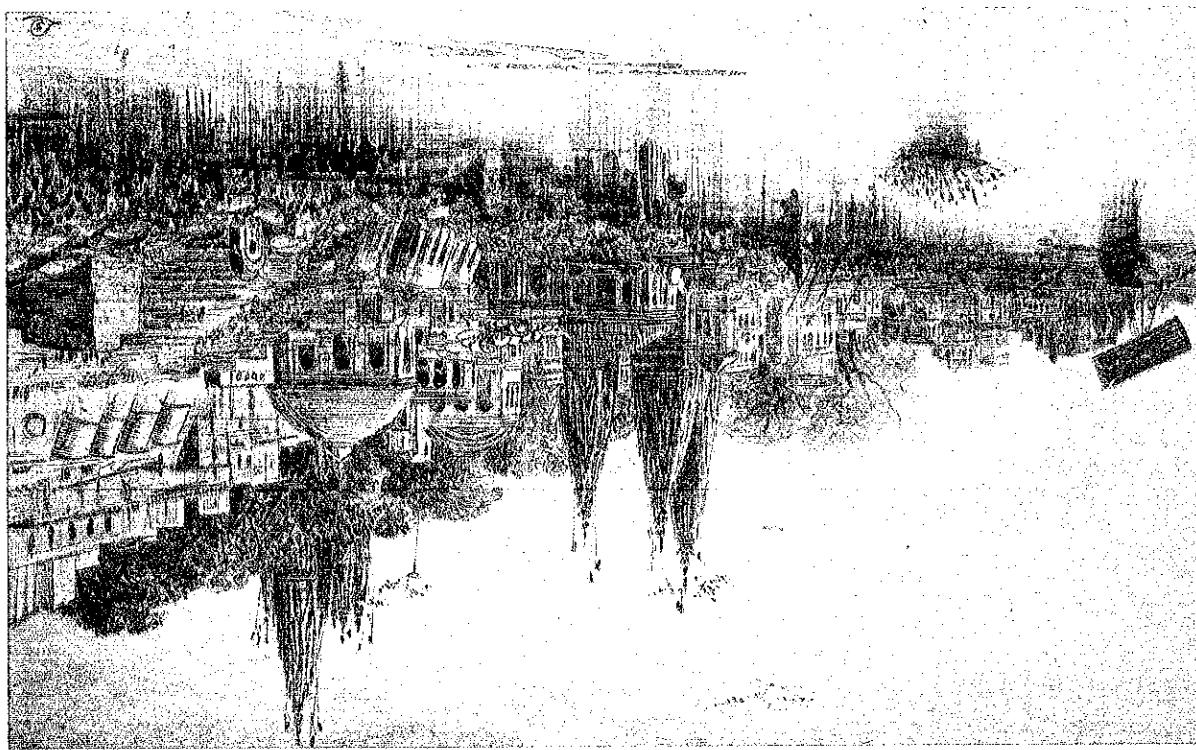
Benefits from its location on the banks of the river Ganges, whose source is high up in the Himalayas (near the home of the gods) and which flows into the Bay of Bengal after some 1,560 miles. It is thought by some both to be at the beginning of creation. The city repels rich culture that reflects the importance of the act of ablation. The city repels rich founded at the beginning of creation have developed a sacred architecture that sites as Benares (rarely a political centre, but said to have been which often takes place at dawn, the most auspicious time. Such important pilgrimage thus provides the occasion for self-purification by bathing, originated in heaven before being released to flow down to earth, and the Gangas itself is sometimes referred to as 'the flowing ladder to heaven'.



51 Benares, India. Pilgrims performing self-purification through bathing at a ghat. Whilst the Ganges has been at the centre of worship at Benares for thousands of years, the Hindu shrines currently used in the city date mostly from the 18th and 19th centuries, after the decline of the Muslim empire in northern India.

flexible enough to accommodate different and shifting local needs. The *Puranas* themselves contain various emphases which correspond to contending sectarian and regional affiliations, reflecting the fact that different religious movements may, at any one time, be engaged in the process of creating and building on their own sacred geographies. In some cases, 'ancient' texts may even have been conveniently manufactured by priests to suit the needs of the present.

In the absence of a centralised and centralising priesthood the Hindu 'tradition' is thus characterised by immensely complex relationships between 'orthodox' traditions based on Sanskrit texts and their popular forms in regional subcultures. For some scholars, the contrast can be expressed in relatively stark terms, between a religious practice administered by high-caste Brahmin priests, which emphasises long-term welfare and transcendental goals, and one whose horizons are geographically and spiritually more confined – associated with pragmatic goals of individual welfare and less prestigious containers of the divine, such as village goddesses acting also as local clan deities.



52 Water-colour of Benares by Edward Lear. Lear spent over a year travelling around India between 1873-75, fulfilling numerous commissions to paint views of the subcontinent. He described Benares as one of the most startlingly radiant of places, full of bustle and movement.

In some cases, a site of great importance may become a paradigm for other shrines and holy places, as it features of a sacred geography could bestow some of their prestige on to lesser replicas of themselves. One anthropologist has described how Rajasthani villagers told her that the humans could actually be found within their own village, so that a circumambulation around India could be achieved without leaving home.<sup>19</sup> A similar view is often maintained by worshippers at Benares, who argue not only that the city of light is symbolically present in a thousand and places in India, but also that it contains all the other truths – and their sacred powers – within it.<sup>20</sup>

These examples show how a Hindu structure of consciousness can be maintained which is both pluralistic and yet also able to focus worship on a single location.<sup>21</sup> We also see once more the importance of Benares in the geography of Hinduism – as both a sacred centre in itself and a single location.

However, the relationships between so-called continental and local, great and little traditions, are often complementary rather than mutually exclusive. An extraordinary combination of perspectives may be produced in which a partisan view of the sacredness of a locality coexists with a broader, apparently conflicting view. This is illustrated by a response to the questions of an American scholar at a famous pilgrimage site:<sup>18</sup>

At Gaya a college teacher told me that the Phalgu River was certainly the most sacred river in all of India for the people of Gaya. To a question about the sanctity of the Ganga, he reply was that of course the Ganga was the most sacred river of India, yet the Phalgu was more sacred than it.

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refraction of other sacred places. Lieutenant-Colonel Davidson described the city in 1843 as 'the Hindoo Jerusalem',<sup>22</sup> and although his observation perhaps reflects a desire to assimilate Hinduism within a Judaeo-Christian category, it nevertheless highlights the character of the city as an embodiment of the sacred space of India.<sup>23</sup> To the scholar Diana Eck, the ability of Benares to condense sacred spaces into a single location has parallels with Hindu attitudes to texts; just as the *Vedas* can be comprehended through one mantra, so travelling the pilgrimage route around the circumference of the city can be seen as akin to circling the world. Benares is even incorporated into pan-Indian ritual practice, such as on those occasions when a groom appears at the doorway of his bride's house and announces to his future father-in-law his 'intention' to renounce the world and go to Benares in order to study the *Vedas*. Such a statement in effect invites the bride's family to dissuade him from his proposed course of action. In some parts of India, part of an initiation ceremony for young men actually requires the initiate to take seven steps in the direction of Benares.

Benares illustrates, then, the ability of a paradigmatic centre both to encompass other sacred sites and to be replicated beyond its geographical borders. Part of an original site can also be appropriated in the setting-up of a new one. Indeed, a shrine can appear when a devotee of a distant deity takes home earth or perhaps a small stone from the original abode of the god. Myths may even imply that sites are literally linked in the physical landscape. According to a story connected with the temple of Biraja, a large and famous pilgrimage site in Orissa, a priest from Benares came to the temple over a thousand years ago. He threw his specially marked cane into the well at the site. When he returned to Benares he found his cane floating in the Ganges river – implying that the well is connected underground to the Ganges several hundred miles to the north.

The construction of such stories linked to place sometimes reflects the presence of competition between sites. The anthropologist Peter Van der Veer recounts a legend associated with the sacred pilgrimage centre of Ayodhya, in Uttar Pradesh.<sup>24</sup> According to the story, King Vikramaditya met a totally black man at a point near the town. Having bathed in Ayodhya's sacred river, the man emerged completely white from the waters. The transformed stranger told the wondering king that he was Prayaga, king of the *tirthas*, who had become black by absorbing the sins of so many humans. Why then go to Prayaga (we are encouraged to ask) when even the king of the *tirthas* comes to Ayodhya to be cleansed?

Despite such considerations of relative spiritual merit, economic considerations cannot be ruled out as factors in the foundation and continued importance of sites of worship. By the eighteenth century, groups of *sadhus* or holy men, had become the principal traders in parts of north India, not least because they were able to use their pilgrimage cycles as trading networks. Today, wealthy industrialists sometimes build temples and rest houses for pilgrims in order to gain merit both for themselves and for their ancestors.<sup>25</sup> Nor can the political authority associated with sacred sites be ignored. One author states:<sup>26</sup>

Benares  
replicates  
other sites

Competing  
sites

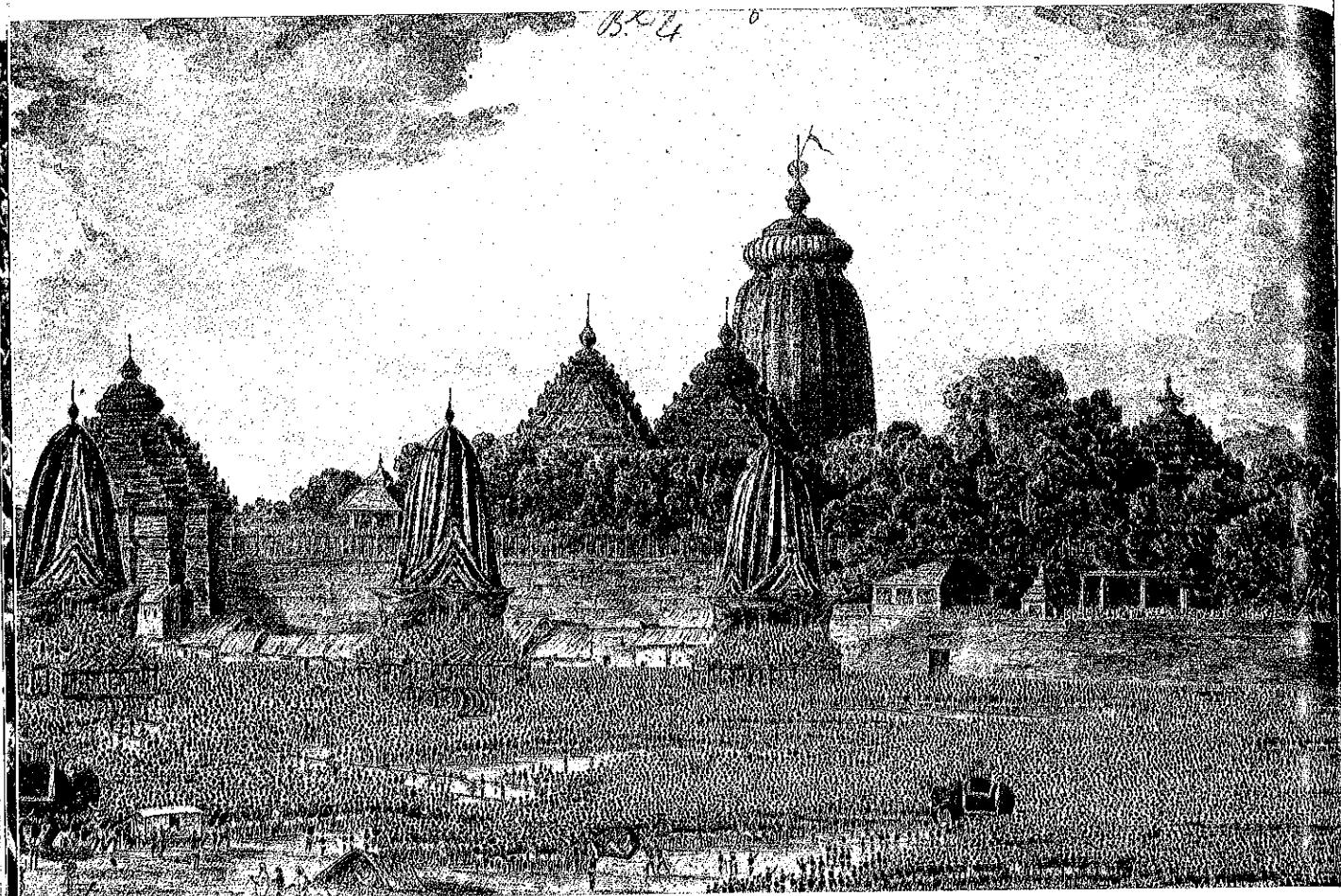
Myths attached to a site frequently reveal tensions between groups anxious to appropriate the power of the sacred place for their own purposes. Ayodhya, for instance, is considered to be the birthplace of 'Rama (hero of the Ramayana epic), and therefore holy to, the Hindu god Rama (hero of the Ramayana epic). Although most of the buildings of the town are of relatively recent date, myth and history have merged so that temples are regarded as restorations from the time of the town's sacred foundation. In the sixteenth century, the Mughal emperor Babur came to India with the intention of becoming its ruler, and visited Ayodhya. Local Muslim leaders promised him that when he destroyed the temple of Rama his desire would be fulfilled.<sup>29</sup> According to legend, although Babur succeeded in destroying the Hindu temple, his attempts to build a mosque failed because each night everything that had been built simply collapsed. Eventually, a mosque was built which left the Hindu sanctuary open to smuggle an image of Rama into the mosque, a form of religious defiance that was to prove a catalyst for violence and riots. In 1989, at the potentially explosive time of a general election, Hindus fundamentalists attempted to build a temple to Rama with bricks taken to the town from all over India, but were prevented from completing their task by the police.

After the priests had issued this statement, the British were able to enter Put without resistance. Today, power has yet again shifted hands, and patronage in effect rests with the state government of Orissa. In the modern period, Jagannatha has become the patron deity of state nationalism, reflecting new political concerns.

... the Brahmins at the holy temple had consulted and applied to Lord Jagannatha to inform them what Power was now to have his temple under its protection, and that he had given a decided answer that the English Govt. was in future to be his guardian.

A single site may have retained its importance as a sacred centre and yet served a wide range of political masters over time. Puri, the most important site of the cult of Lord Jagannatha, is one of the most pilgrimage places in India. Jagannatha possibly evolved from tribal roots to become a Buddhist and then a Hindu deity, and is known among Hindus as an image of Krishna. Kings of various dynasties, belonging to different sects and traditions, have promoted the cult, not least by ostentatiously building shrines in order to accrue political capital. In the twelfth century, the kings of Orissa constructed a massive stone temple which still stands, rising to over 200 feet (61 m). When the British took over the area, they were well aware of the importance of not damaging the temple, and their job was made easier by the pragmatic acceptance of the local priests. Shortly before British troops entered Puri in 1803, they were informed by the latter that:<sup>27</sup>

Kings and queens used to identify the icons in temples which they built or patronized, claiming divine sanction to rule and provide both water by hydraulic engineering and social control from the sacred centre. . . .



53 Painting of Jagannatha procession at Puri in Orissa, Bay of Bengal, by an anonymous artist. The 12th-century stone temple, built by the kings of Orissa, rises to over 200 feet (61 metres) and displays Vishnu's sacred wheel and flag at its summit.

government. In 1992, devotees of Lord Rama tore down the mosque which stood at his supposed birthplace, setting off waves of violence in the whole of India.

Most recently, the emigration of Hindus has begun to aid the diffusion of the sacred landscape beyond the boundaries of the subcontinent, even though over 90% of the world's Hindus still live in India. In the United States, a number of temples have been built, complementing the family altars of domestic, daily worship. Intriguingly, not only have many of these become new pilgrimage sites, but they have also been seen as duplicating the topography and patterning of their counterparts in India itself. The major temples are located in the cardinal directions of the country – east (New York and Pittsburgh), north (Michigan), west (California) and south (Texas), as if they were the North American version of the *dhamas*. Sites that are specially favoured are likely to have topographical features replicating those of an 'original' holy place. At a temple in Pittsburgh, the confluence of two rivers in Ohio has been explicitly compared with the confluence of the sacred Ganges, Yamuna and Sarasvati rivers. In this way: '... Pittsburgh was instantly made the holy Prayagraj of America; a remarkable transformation of the Steel City as a sacred centre.'<sup>30</sup>

THAT'S THE WAY IT IS

## PILGRIMAGE IN THE INDIAN RELIGIONS

Worship, or *pūja*, consists of several parts, one of which is made up of presenting objects before the deity which symbolise the human senses – food for taste, perfumes for smell, fine cloths for touch, bells or music for hearing. While the God may not need such substances as such, they do indicate respect for the divine presence. This may be followed by holding a lamp-offering in which the priest sways an oil-lamp *arati*, a form of lamp-offering in which the deity is worshipped. In all types of Hindu pilgrimage a number of wicks before the image. In all types of Hindu pilgrimage a number of wicks before the image. In all types of Hindu pilgrimage a number of wicks before the image. In all types of Hindu pilgrimage a number of wicks before the image.

Images are very frequently anthropomorphic, as it to emphasize the notion of the gods made human, or at least accessible to humans, but temples may also grow from a less obvious emblem of the divine entering the world, such as a special tree or stone. Shiva, a force representing among other things, fertility, is often associated with a phallic linga. At the heart of such belief is not only the notion that such objects are aids to worship, but also that they contain power, even if it is often claimed that Hindus should worship the god whose power is in an image, not the image itself (reflecting a mistrust of idolatry) that may indicate recent influences).

It is the spirit of utmost devotion, the Formless that is given shape in the images of the deities. Though these are used as aids in religious life, every Hindu hopes to escape someday from the necessity of using images.

authority of a holy figure such as Chaitanya at Brindavan. Over the past two centuries, pell-mell image has also been considerably boosted, both by better communities systems – railways, roads and even airways – and by higher standards of general education, increasing knowledge of sacred creation of sacred space is revealed, however, in the way that Hinduism employs physical images both to represent and make tangible the pre-sence of divinity. As one writer has put it, the image relates to the absolute in the way a dance is related to the dancer, or a dream to the physical object – usually a sculpture – and served as if it were a human of high status with bodily needs. The innermost part of a temple contains a womb-like chamber in which is located the presiding god of the temple who have worked in the service of the god, local folk deities, and so on.<sup>33</sup> For some Hindu authors, there is no contradiction between the belief in an all-embracing, all-pervading, omnipresent God and the worship of a variety of deities through images, even if the latter merely provide useful reminders of the service of the god, local folk deities, and so on.<sup>34</sup>

54 Halebid, India. Adults and children dressed in black clothes for the pilgrimage to Lord Ayyappa at Sabarimalai. The pose of the two seated boys consciously echoes that of the god himself.



(*prasad*), such as food, water, ash or flowers, which have been in close proximity to the deity. Benefit in the form of merit, good fortune and well-being is also derived from a sight of the deity (*darshan*), and, like *prasad*, this action provides a means of engaging in intimate transactions with the divine. According to some scholars, such transactions – or interactions – are of particular significance in relation to traditional Hindu thought, according to which the person is not perceived as sharply bounded, as in contemporary western models of the autonomous individual, but easily subject to influence from and moulding by the environment.<sup>35</sup>

Whatever the validity of this view, the importance of *darshan* both in pilgrimage and in worship more generally must be stressed. At the enormously wealthy temple of Venkateshvara at Tirupati, it was recently suggested that closed-circuit television be installed in the temple grounds to project an image of the god to the thousands of pilgrims who sometimes wait for hours in the rain, queuing for *darshan* of their god.<sup>36</sup> At Sabarimalai in Kerala, devotees may only catch a glimpse of the image of the deity Ayyappa, as they are surrounded by the massed throngs of other pilgrims at the shrine, and yet this sight is still regarded by many as the centre-point of the whole pilgrimage.<sup>37</sup>

The Mahabharata and the Puranas refer to the 'trithas of the heart', implying that the pilgrim should not only bathe in the waters of earthly trifles, but also in the inner virtues of truth, charity, patience and self-control. Discipline and denial in Hinduism can take a variety of forms, and may show some influence from Buddhism and Jain models. The path of renunciation (*sannyasa*) - the ultimate form of asceticism and self-mastery possible in life - is treated as a vocation by those who choose to become holy mendicants, wandering around the landscape. Ascetics also settle in ashrams at major pilgrimage centres and engage in lives of

the four fords. He who sees in the creatures the images of himself, obtains the reward of his vows, who sees in the creatures the habit of truthfulness and firm in without anger, O Indra among princes, with the habit of truthfulness and firm in senses, and free from all vice, he obtains the reward of the four fords. The man is contented, restained, pure, and without selfishness, obtains the reward of his fards. He who is without deceit, without designs, of lean diet, in control of his appetites attains to the reward of the four fards. He who has renounced from possession and He who has mastered his hands, feet, mind, knowledge, mortification, and good

merit is accrued from self-discipline and cultivation of the correct state of mind:

The sage's reply is one that emphasises the fruits of denial. Religious merit is accrued from self-discipline and cultivation of the correct state of

A person who makes a sunwise tour of the earth, boundlessly mighty brahma

about the rewards of pilgrimage.<sup>40</sup> At one point in the Mahabharata it is related that Bhishma, son of the river Ganges, asks a sage (who is also a saint of awesome austerities)

## THE FRUITS OF DRINA: MOTIVATIONS FOR PILGRIMAGE

Despite the ability of physical forms to mediate between humans and mere humans, who cannot conceive of the true nature of the divine without bringing it - literally - down to earth. It is as if they are constrained by the limited imaginations of retinued. It is as if they are constrained by the limited imaginations of conception of their ultimate unlimited freedom of movement is also worshipped in temples they become tied to a locality even though the but also constitutes the power and scope of divinity. Thus, when gods are worshipped in an image embodiment carries with it an important price. Location in an image concentrates the attention of the worshipper gods, it is also the case that such images to mediate between humans and

despite the increasing number of temples they become tied to a locality even though the the space of the temple compound, in order to reach the image one must move through the space of the temple line from the worshipper as the latter enters the temple compound, in viewing. While the deity in its sanctuary is usually located in a straight staircase, the greater the benefit will be. Just as the devotee stares at the god, so the deity stares back at the devotee in an exchange of vision.<sup>38</sup> Temple architecture is constructed not so much to accommodate con-

gregational worship but to channel the devotee towards this form of

seeing, it is the idea that the greater the benefit the more has for the mortal eye, the greater the benefit will be. Just as the devotee stares at

the god, so the deity stars back at the devotee in an exchange of vision.<sup>38</sup>

A frequent assumption behind the belief in the benefits of sacred sight-

instruction. Both ways of life provide powerful means of achieving salvation in the Hindu tradition. The *Upanishads*, for instance, define the goal of humans as the realisation that attachments to the material world, including the self, are mere illusion. These should be renounced in order to allow the self to become one with the all-pervading God and ultimate reality. The asceticism of *sannyasis* may take dramatic forms, such as the decision to keep a fist closed until the nails enter the flesh and come out on the other side. Although according to some Hindus these displays reveal a taste for the spectacular rather than spiritual progress, for many pilgrims such outward austerity reveals the presence of an inner power.

For a 'householder' pilgrimage provides the opportunity to experience a form of temporary renunciation. Pilgrimage is described vividly by Rajasthani villagers as equivalent to what is intriguingly called 'the rice pudding of money', since:<sup>41</sup>

Rice pudding is only made and savored when there is a surplus of milk; tirthayatra and the attendant pleasure of seeing other lands requires a surplus of cash.

When viewed in this way, pilgrimage provides a means of divesting the self, for a time, of excess possessions and emotional attachments, and encouraging other merit-producing activities such as meditation and charity. Such travel may be associated with particular times of the year, such as festivals and/or slack periods in the agricultural cycle. Along with such common practices as prayer, the taking of a purifying bath and the throwing of flowers, fruits and money into holy rivers, pilgrimage rules ideally lay emphasis on austereities such as fasting, celibacy, the rejection of soft beds and avoidance of vehicles for making the journey. Some also emphasise that such an act of renunciation is ideally carried out alone. The pilgrimage to the temple of Ayyappa, at Sabarimalai in Kerala,

55 Mysore, India. Bus transporting Ayyappan pilgrims in 1993.



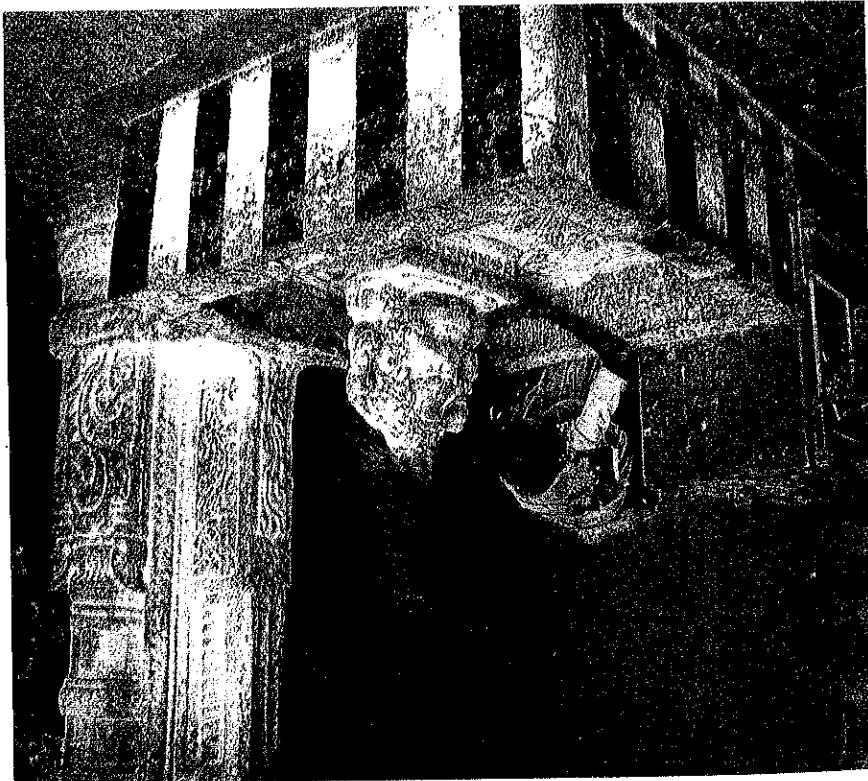
journey can be made in order to consign them to holy water. Ashes can plious pilgrim may preserve the ashes of a relative till the time when the Pilgrimage places are also associated with obsequies for the dead, and a trip, such as a picture or model of the god of the temple.

Pilgrims usually take home a holy souvenir and reminder of their arduous pilgrimage to a given place. On returning from pilgrimage to a temple, departing, as well as explicitly declaring their intention to undertake pilgrimage journeys, it is perhaps not surprising that Hindus typically give worship to Ganesh, the god of beginnings and obstacles, before proscriptions for part or all of the route. Given the frequent difficulties of reached. Pilgrims may even choose to proceed by successive body-length abodes for the gods, but also that they require effort and devotion to be Some sites are very remote, which means not only that they are suitable enced merely at a *tritha*, then, but are inherent within the journey itself. The austereies often associated with pilgrimage need not be experi-

when womenfolk irrespctive of their ages flocking [*sic!*] Sabarmati will not be conveniences etc. to the pilgrims. . . . If the present trend is continued, the day . . . it may not be desirable to provide any more 'get-there-quick' approaches . . . far off

writes the following:<sup>42</sup>  
 past, exposed pilgrims to attack by wild animals. A devotee of the cult participants, but also the undertaking of an arduous journey that, in the involves not only the imposition of celibacy on its (almost entirely) male

marks her forehead.  
 statue is covered with ash,  
 the main endosse. The  
 Ganesh by the entrance to  
 supplying an image of  
 56 Madurai, India. Devotee



PILGRIMAGE IN THE INDIAN RELIGIONS

actually be mailed by post to temple authorities and the ritual performed vicariously for those who cannot afford the trip. To die at Benares (where the cremation grounds, unusually, are seen as auspicious) and have one's ashes sprinkled on the river is considered a possible path to liberation, and some believe that a few drops of Ganges water on the tongue at the moment of death provide a means of salvation no matter where the dying person meets their end. Other holy places can at least provide the possibility of a better rebirth, such as Braj, itself the final destination of many old people from Bengal. It is hardly surprising, then, that pilgrimage as a form of renunciation is often adopted by those who feel they have achieved and completed the duties of everyday existence. Here are the words of an old woman to one pilgrimage scholar:<sup>43</sup>

We have nothing more to do in the world, our children and grandchildren are married, old people are not really wanted or needed, so we walk toward the source of the Ganges, and if we die in the effort, that is the most desirable death we can meet.

Yet, despite the sage's enlightened description in the *Mahabharata* of the attitudes ideally associated with pilgrimage, the practice among Hindus is far more varied in motivation and practice than he would perhaps have hoped. The following is a passage taken from a pilgrim's guide produced by the government of West Bengal:<sup>44</sup>

Family men come here with devotion in their heart, sadhus come with a burning desire for moksha (spiritual liberations), singers, story-tellers, and artists come to entertain. Traders come with their wares. Even prostitutes and gamblers also crowd the place along with the blind, crippled and invalid beggars. . . . Politicians come here with the intention to mix freely with commoners, to earn popularity, social service workers come forward to help and anti-social come to snatch valuables. . . .

Thus the presence of a sacred site need not inspire an attitude of pious devotion amongst its pilgrims. Furthermore, the boons requested by such pilgrims, as we have seen, may seem remote from an austere search for salvation. At Tarakeshwar, the principal site of Shiva in West Bengal (known as Gupta Varanasi, or hidden Varanasi), the local deity, Baba Taraknath, is well-known for his capacity to cure diseases, as expressed in the words of a song:<sup>45</sup>

If refuge is sought . . . with a totally devoted mind, numerous acute ailments are cured. . . . Dysentery, cough, gonorrhea and fistula in ano, Colitis, tuberculosis, leprosy and ascites, piles, severe leprosy, liver problems, all sorts of diseases shall be cured.

If the distinctly earthy claims of the song are likely to provide a cause for concern among the devout sophisticates of Hinduism, there are also strains within the tradition which go so far as to deny the validity of pilgrimage as an institution. The belief, for instance, that the divine should be found *within* the self may make one devalue the enterprise, as revealed in the words of a Kashmiri woman mystic of the fourteenth century:<sup>46</sup>

I . . . went out far in search of Shiva, the omnipresent Lord; having wandered, I found him in my own body. . . .

To some scholars of Hinduism, pilgrimage represents an institution whose rules are liberal and democratic. It is seen as constituting a sacred geography that not only links together holy sites and shrines, but also helps produce a form of social and religious unity.<sup>50</sup> Some centres of pilgrimage are indeed sacred to more than one sect, and thus social society. All pilgrims bathe effectively in the same waters, and thus social boundaires may appear temporarily in the same waters, and thus social claims also force us to consider an issue that still retains huge importance in Indian society, and moreover one which appears to embody the very

### HINDU PILGRIMAGE: UNITY AND DIVISION IN THE DIVINE HIERARCHY

Kabir himself may have refused to die in Benares, thus denying the idea of gaiety liberation through sparta location. Yet his followers subscribe to a name in his name in the city. In a way, the power of unity found a centre in the city.

the place proved too much for him in death, it not in life. Kabir himself may have refused to die in Benares, thus denying the idea of gaiety liberation through sparta location. Yet his followers subscribe to a name in his name in the city. In a way, the power of unity found a centre in the city.

... saints who have minimized the importance of pilgrimage have constantly been on pilgrimage themselves, most of them having spent their lives as mendicants and ministers who sang their songs at places for pilgrimage for the benefit of the masses. Thus, it has become customary for the previous Hindu to go on pilgrimage, to believe in their merit, and yet to state that pilgrimage is not important. . .

... saints who have minimized the importance of the sacred journey:<sup>49</sup>

Giving on endless pilgrimage, the world died,  
exhausted by so much bathing!

The notion of Benares rising in the heart has a striking resemblance, at least superficially, to the ideas of the sufi mystic who invoked the notion of an inner Kaba, or indeed the Christian Fathers who argued that the true Jerusalem lay within the self. Indeed, Kabir, the great medieval poet, often contains sentiments are common among holy figures, they although these sentiments are common among holy figures, they emphasize landscape and image that is the key to the practice of Hindu pilgrimage. Yet, although these sentiments are common among holy figures, they emphasize landscape and image that is the key to the practice of Hindu pilgrimage. And movement, in other words a detachment from the very rootlessness in and movement, in other words a detachment from the very rootlessness in pilgrimage themselves, most of them having spent their lives as mendicants and ministers who sang their songs at places for pilgrimage for the benefit of the masses. Thus, it has become customary for the previous Hindu to go on pilgrimage, to believe in their merit, and yet to state that pilgrimage is not important. . .

Divinity and not the artificial images that is to be worshipped. Divinity the mind; the holy Benares will rise up in your heart. It is the ideal and pacify the mind; the holy Benares will rise up in your heart. It is the ideal ambulating it and observing similar other practices? . . So give up attachment burning of incense, and the sounding of bells before an idol, and from circumambulating it and observing similar other practices? . . So give up attachment burning of incense, and the sounding of bells before an idol, and from circumambulating it and observing similar other practices? . . So give up attachment

examples of a false attachment to the material world:<sup>51</sup>

Broadly similar sentiments are expressed by a Shiva devotee writing

three centuries later, who criticises image worship and pilgrimage as

Textual justifications for caste are present in Vedic texts which divide society up into four classes, or *varnas*. In a hymn from around 1000 BC, for instance, each of the four *varnas* emerges from a part of the body of a primeval man who is dismembered by the gods at the beginning of time:

The Brahman was his mouth,  
of his arms was made the warrior,  
his thighs became the Vaishya,  
of his feet the Shudra was born.

This hierarchy became ratified in legal texts written by priests (of the highest *varna*), so that each class came to be seen as performing a different role according to its ordained duty: the Brahmin to study, the warrior to protect the people, the Vaishya to till the earth and trade, and the Shudra to serve the three other classes. Below such groups came the 'untouchables', those considered so low that they did not properly merit a *varna* status. Such a straightforward division is in practice full of ambiguities over the precise relationships between caste groups within the varna system, between religious status and daily occupation, and between caste and sub-caste affiliation. Yet its influence, although transformed and increasingly challenged, prevails in India. It is more than just a set of beliefs, since it recommends practices and attitudes in an idiom of purity and pollution that serves to separate groups of people through taboos on marriage, eating together and even touch. What then, does this system imply for the practice of pilgrimage?

At many sites, regional and caste structures do in fact retain control of the pilgrim's actions. *Pandas* or *purohits* – guides who issue yearly manuals stating auspicious times for pilgrims to worship at their sanctuary and who enter their names in ledgers – also typically provide food, lodging and ritual instruction according to the custom of the pilgrim's land. Sometimes, they even go on 'inverted pilgrimages' to the homes of pilgrims who have become regular patrons, bringing sacred water and *prasad* from holy sites. Agents of guides may meet pilgrims at bus or train stations, enquire about their place of origin and caste status, and then assign them to appropriate guides. Like the Turkish visitors to Mecca, Hindu pilgrims may remain for the most part culturally cocooned amongst their own people, and therefore also within the safety of their own assumptions.

Despite current, explicitly secular, legislation which bans such discrimination, deep-rooted concerns over the polluting touch of lower castes is still reflected in the exclusion of those classified as 'untouchables' from some Hindu shrines. Sacred space can thus become an arena for conflicting views on the meaning of caste. At Benares the golden temple of Vishwanath, rebuilt by the wife of the Rajah of Indore in 1777, is a place visited by almost all pilgrims, not least because of the presence of a central image of Shiva in the form of a *linga*. Since 1954, even untouchables have been admitted to this sanctuary, and as a result a second Vishwanath temple has been constructed in protest at their presence. At yet another Vishwanath temple, however, at Benares Hindu University, not only untouchables but also non-Hindus are admitted.

If guides and guardians of temples play their part in maintaining social

The history of Hinduism in India has been marked by periods of both decline and revival. Perhaps the greatest challenge to its dominance came from the emergence and spread of Buddhism in the latter half of the first millennium BC. Much later, Muslim and Christian invaders were prompted by military and political ambition as much as by the desire to spread their own version of spiritual enlightenment. Two further religious impulses, created out of the desire for reform and renewal, continue to influence Indian society.

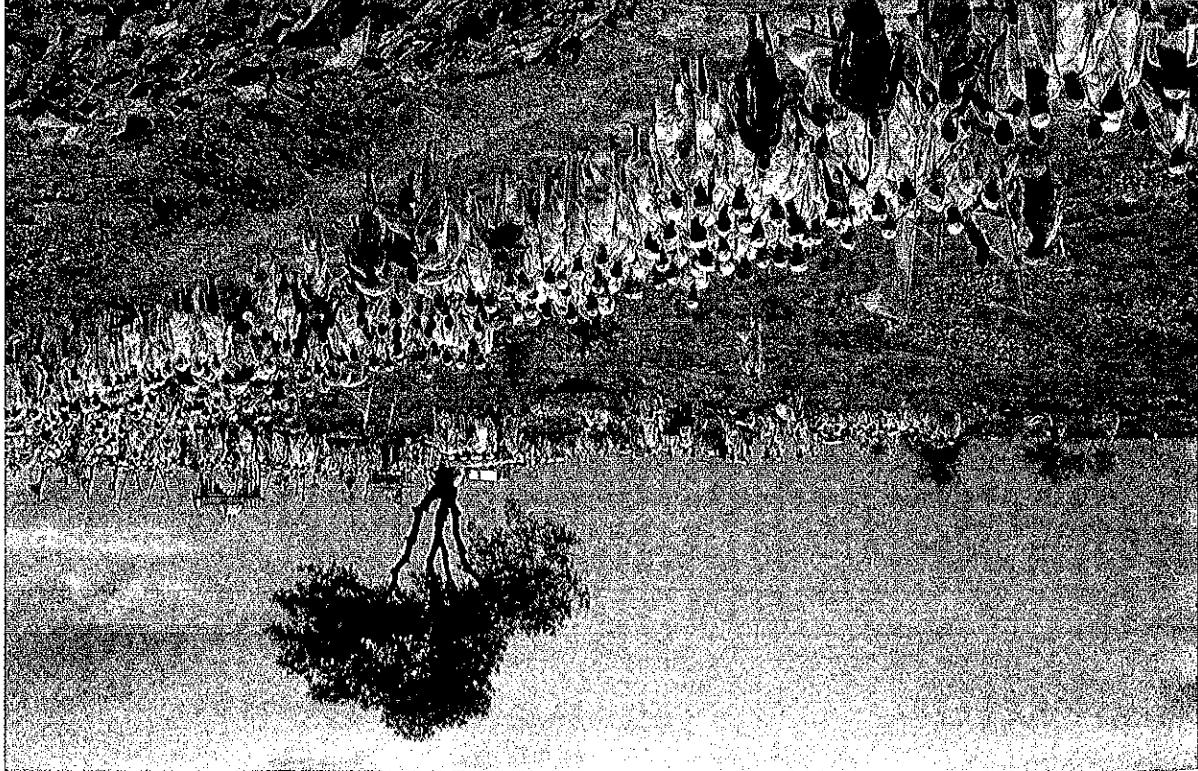
### JAIN AND SIKH PILGRIMAGE

All of the people were clean, and ate their food only after taking a bath. Then why did this separateness? Was all this walking together, singing together, and reciting while retaining separateness in this world?

The poetry of the saints together directed only towards union in the other world clash with these assumptions of division, feels impelled to ask:<sup>51</sup>

Is a colourful occasion, when people follow the annual march of images of saints, and spend much of their time walking and singing together. In the van-guard of the group walk the untouchables, followed respectively by horses, flag-wavers, wagons with the chief image, and then the rest of the saints, and spend much of their time walking and singing together. In the group of pilgrims, Karve, trained in an academic tradition whose values in carnation of Krishna.

57 Varkaris from Maharashtra on their annual touring pilgrimage-long pilgrimage to Pandharpur. During this procession from Alandi in Poona to Pandharpur in Sholapur district, This pology processor at the University of Poona, reports on a fifteen-day during the journey itself. Rawati Karve, a former sociologist and anthropologist between pilgrims at sites, these can also be all too evident



PILGRIMAGE IN THE INDIAN RELIGIONS

tinue to exercise considerable influence in India: Jainism and Sikhism. Their religious customs in general, as well as their pilgrimage practices in particular, are related to those of Hinduism in complex but significant ways.

The emergence of Jainism in the sixth century BC was roughly contemporaneous with that of Buddhism. Like the Buddha, its 'founder'<sup>52</sup> Mahavira (the 'Great Hero') made converts among members of the royal houses. However, like Buddhism Jainism was a religion originally designed to be open to all, irrespective of hereditary status, even if in practice it has adopted features of the caste system. However, while the Buddha chose the 'middle way', Mahavira adopted a form of extreme asceticism as the proper pathway to enlightenment. He spent much of his life as a wandering teacher, revered by disciples, and was the last of the Jain *tirthankaras* ('ford-builders'). This term refers to twenty-four beings who have attained enlightenment and perfect bliss, removed from the cycle of reincarnation.<sup>53</sup> They are also referred to as *jinas* or 'conquerors' of the passions.

The religion enjoyed tolerance and patronage from political rulers up until the twelfth or thirteenth centuries in north India and one of the main areas where Jainism is still practised today is in Gujarat. Later its adherents suffered persecution under Hindu revivalism and Muslim expansion, although unlike Buddhism it was never totally forced out of India. One possible reason for its survival was its ability to 'Hinduise' by adopting the major life-cycle rituals of the dominant religion.<sup>54</sup> Nowadays, although Jains only number around 3.5 million people, concentrated in the west and south-west of India, they exercise much influence through their success in commercial life.

Jainism is not a religion of *the book*, but incorporates a large textual corpus covering doctrines, mathematics, poetry and astronomy. Its texts ideally advocate the single-minded pursuit of self-purification through austerity and fasting. In this way, negative *karma* accumulated in previous births can be dissipated. The notion of complete non-violence, or *ahimsa* is extremely important, since avoiding harm to the smallest living thing can be seen as an aspect of non-attachment in the world. Jains say that the air, water and earth are occupied by countless souls, and some adherents may even put cloths or masks over their mouths in order not to harm these invisible organisms.

Although some sects reject the use of images, many Jains engage in daily *pujas* in temples to *murtis* – carved stone representatives of the enlightened beings, *tirthankaras*, who are seated in eternal meditation. Ritual practice is often similar in form to Hindu worship, also incorporating *darshan* and circumambulation. However, Jains are wary of suggestions that a 'real' presence may dwell in the images. Typically, theologians argue that offerings apparently made to an image are in fact made to the abstract virtues of enlightenment, liberation and dispassion that it symbolises.<sup>55</sup> The enlightened beings themselves are perceived as being remote, at the top of the universe, and thus (unlike in popular Hinduism) not interacting with or choosing to bless their 'worshippers'.

Two basic forms of adherence are available. Exemplary individuals, or

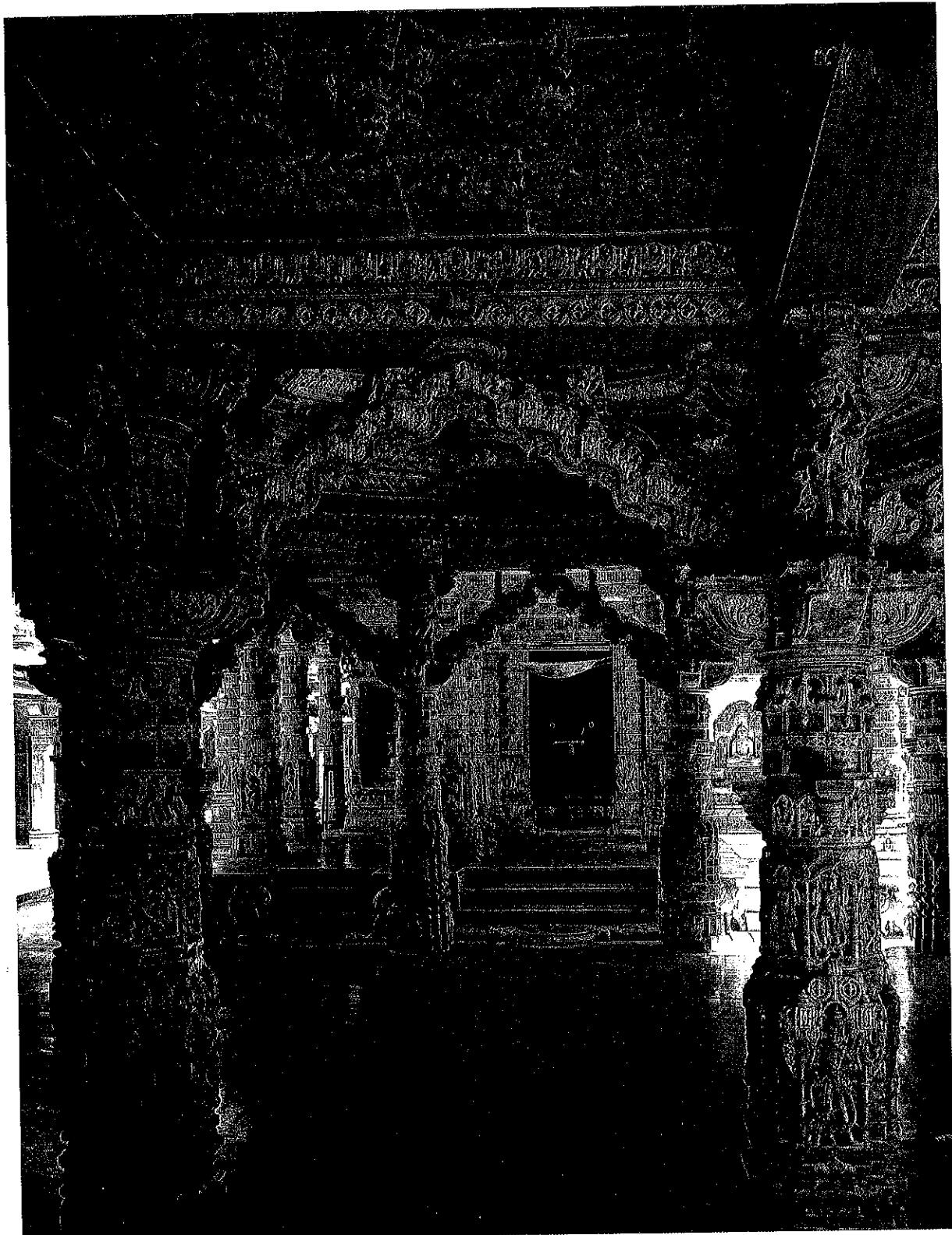
units, follow the supreme model of non-attachment of the *trithankars*. Many such renouncers are organised into single-sex travelling groups which make their way between villages and towns, wearing simple white robes, carrying begging bowls and preaching the importance of non-attachment to the material world. They walk barefoot, and carry long brushes which they use to sweep insects away from their path, lest they tread on them. Lay people follow a code of practice that is rather less rigorous, and therefore further from the path of true asceticism. However, they support and may even worship living renouncers, who can be seen as forms of divinity.

Ironically, lay Jains are well known for creating extremely successful businesses communities. The accumulation of wealth is regarded as the proper result of honest living, but a lack of attachment to such wealth is said to be demonstrated by donations to temples and religious centres. Indeed, providing money for religious purposes as well as charitable organisations such as colleges, schools and hospitals, is the most meritorious form of giving and is practised on a large scale by men. Some Jains spend much time in buses and trains, or walking, on pilgrimage to such holy sites as Mount Abu in Rajasthan or Parasnath in Bihar. A leaflet provided by the Department of Tourism at Bangalore describes 'The Jain Circuit', a suggested route incorporating all the important Jain centres in Karnataka (a state closely associated with the religion) and gives potential visitors information on both air and road connections to the sites. Such journeys to holy sites dispersed around the country can complement widespread travel for commercial purposes, and many of the important temples provide venues for annual fairs, to which non-Jains, including tribal peoples, are invited. Temples may gain fame and prove attractive to visitors for their architectural merit, and other virtuous enterprises inevitably accompany acrobatic fairs, spending large sums of money. However, sponsors of such pilgrimages spend little on pietry and also, in effect, self-advertisements.

A single individual may also choose to bear all the expenses of a pilgrimage, and it may be assumed that this helps to prevent communal pilgrimage, and it may be assumed that this helps to prevent situations of piety and also, in effect, self-advertisements.

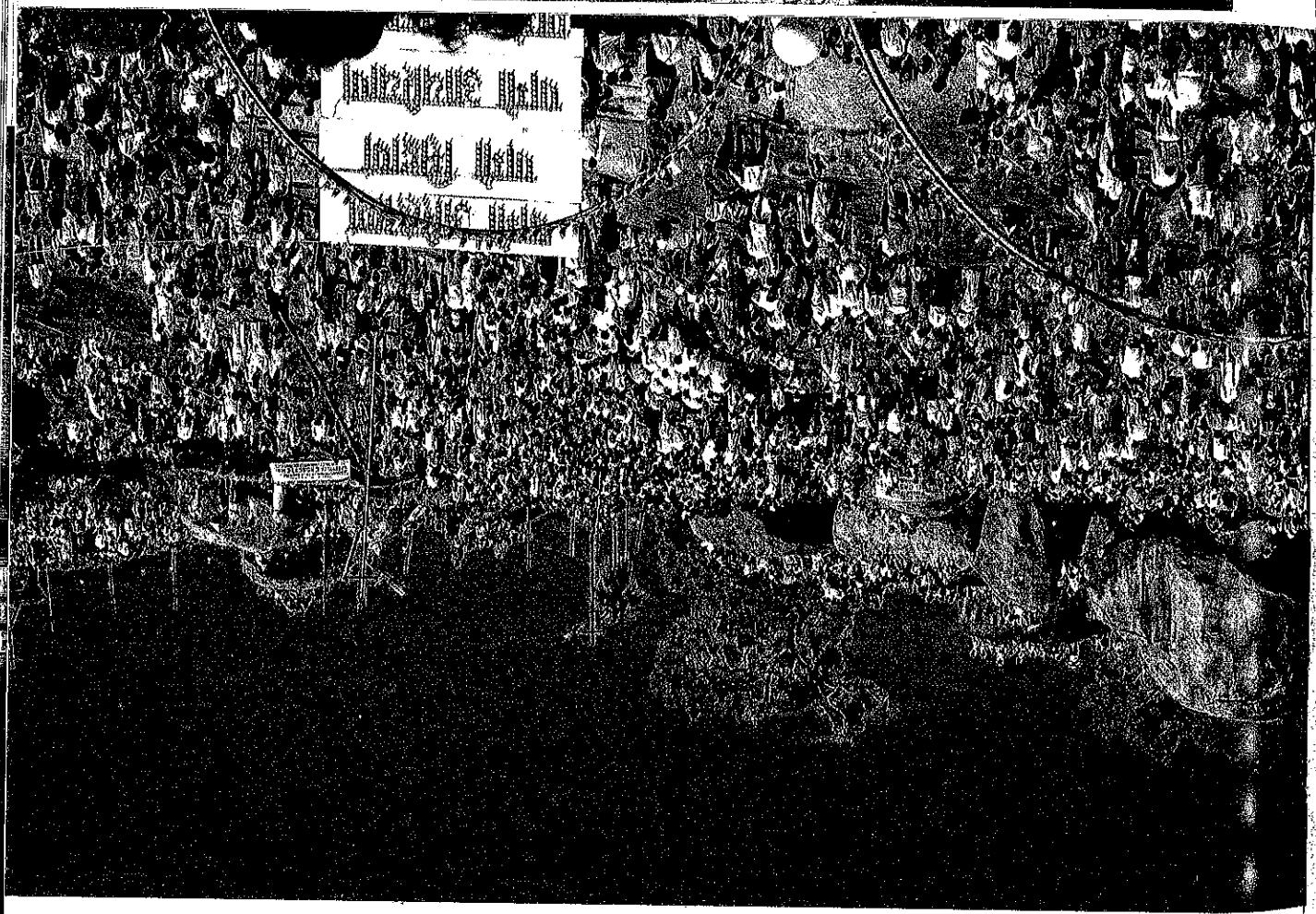
The importance of gift-giving for religious purposes can, of course, lead to situations of competition within or between sects of Jains. One scholar has described a struggle between the Digambara ('sky-clad', i.e., ideally naked) and Svetambara ('white-clad', i.e., white-robed) sects over the local pilgrimage site of Bahubali Hill in Kolhapur district, southern Maharashtra.<sup>56</sup> This was expressed in a conflict over the sacred space which involved considerable conspicuous consumption. At one point, for instance, the Svetambara constructed a temple next door to that

DIVINITY DIFFUSED



60 LEFT Jain pilgrims pouring milk over the feet of the Gomateshvara statue (not during the festival).

60 LEFT Jain pilgrims pouring milk over the feet of the Gomateshvara statue (not during the festival).  
the hilltop stands at the peak of the hill.  
which is every 12 years to perform every 12 years to  
head-anointing ceremony,  
Mahamastakabhisheka, or  
pilgrims at the  
Jain, December 1993, Jait  
Abu, fifth century and later.  
Dilwara Temple on Mount  
India, interior of the Jain  
Opposite Rajasthan,



of the Digambara: the new temple was designed to be just slightly more opulent than its rival.

A sense of the immediate significance of Jain pilgrimage festivals is provided by two recent newspaper articles. The first, from the *Deccan Herald* of 20 December 1993, describes the special honouring of the 58-foot (17.7 m) figure (billed as the world's tallest monolithic statue) of Gomateshvara at Shravanabelagola, Karnataka, which takes place every twelve to fourteen years. Thousands of pilgrims from around the country and abroad come to honour the statue, including not only *munis* but also local and national politicians. The presence of numerous journalists is also noted, including television reporters from the BBC, CNN, France and Japan, as is the decision of the state government to position over 200 closed-circuit televisions near the event to enable devotees to have as good a view of the proceedings as possible. A central part of the ritual is the bathing of the statue with offerings, including water, sugar-cane juice, milk and sandalwood. While the assembled dignitaries are given the opportunity of showering flowers and water on the head of the Gomateshvara, it is also reported that:

Mr. Sudhir Jain, a Delhi businessman, . . . bought the *pratama kalasha* [pot offering] for Rs. 15 lakh at the auction held here on Saturday. He was given the privilege of pouring holy water on the statue first.

By publicly dowsing the statue with holy water, the Delhi businessman proclaims not only his devotion but also his ability to amass the financial resources necessary to win an auction.

The tenor of the second article, describing the same event and published in the *Hindu* of 2 January 1994, is rather different. Entitled 'Of Kalashas and Karma', it focuses on Jain teachings and the figure of Gomateshvara himself. Thus:

He could have become the ruler of Ayodhya but instead chose to become an ascetic, spreading the message of peace and disarmament. . . . On December 6 it seemed so right somehow, to be sitting on the newly erected scaffolding, staring into the supremely calm face of the man-who-could-have-been-king of Ayodhya. In other parts of the country, trains were being blown up and buses destroyed. But, here . . . there was a feeling of peace.

Here, the pilgrimage festival is interpreted as a supreme example of *ahimsa* – non-violence – teaching the non-violent Jain way of life to the varied groups of people, including ascetics, VIPs and even tourists. The reference to Ayodhya has extra, ironic significance in that it calls to mind a holy city notorious for violence between Hindus and Muslims, and we are reminded in this context that the message of renunciation has significance not only for Jains but for the world as a whole in its advocacy of 'peace, hope and harmony'. Yet, both articles illustrate the amplification of the significance of pilgrimage through the vicarious participation provided by the media. A picture in the *Hindu* not only shows pilgrims happily anointing the head of Gomateshvara with water, but also a cameraman recording the event for others, far from the site itself, to witness.

Sikhism's accredited founder, Guru Nanak, was born at Talwandi in the Punjab in 1469.<sup>57</sup> He is seen as the first Sikh or 'disciple' of truth.

Nanak did not necessarily wish to condemn Hinduism outright. Indeed, Sikhism retains notions of transmission and liberation adapted from the earlier religion. However, he was opposed to hypocrisy and empty formalism in religion, and mistrusted the use of images in worship. His mistrust of pilgrimage may also have been an indication of the life-affirming as opposed to life-reنouning tendencies evident in Sikh doctrine. As part of his attempt to challenge the monopoly of Brahmin priests in spiritual matters, he produced his own hymns and stressed the need for right conduct and devotion to a personal God as opposed to participation in rituals. Liberation could only be achieved by a form of interior spirituality, involving meditation on *Akhl Purakh*, the 'Timeless Being'. The view that divinity could descend to the world in the specific form of an avatar was also denied, since divinity could be seen as perverding all differences, divided to some extent by geography, ethnicity, social hierarchy and ritual practices.<sup>69</sup>

Nanak remains the focus of much devotion from Sikhs, but he was in fact followed by nine living successors, making ten Gurus in all. Teaching in the vernacular rather than Sanskrit, they helped develop a religious community conscious of its distinctiveness and keen to adapt Hindu

I was performing art before the Lord of the Universe . . . and the whole of creation, the whole firmament joined me. Your hearts and minds, alone, were turned against it, I worshipped the supreme light. You worshipped a stone image, I contemplated the eternal world. . . . You chanted mantras without understanding them. My mind was enchanted by the unstruck music of the universe and God's presence in it. Yours was deluded by the noise of temple bells, I grieved ecstasy of the dancares and the smell of incense.

A story is recounted of a visit paid by Guru Nanak to the Jagannatha pilgrimage site at Puri. When the Hindu priests there performed the evening lamp worship of *artit* (*aratii*), they demanded to know why he had not stood up during the *pūjā*. Nanak is said to have replied:<sup>59</sup>

Although he was probably brought up in an orthodox Kshatriya family, Nanak is said to have rejected this background, embarking instead on a religious quest to the main centres of Hinduism and Islam. Nanak conducted that God was neither specifically Hindu nor Muslim, and rejected exclusivism in religion. He also rejected the caste system in principle (even if Sikh practice has contradicted this inunction), stating that moral character was more important than birth. Indeed, a Sikh proves that a person should be a Brahmin in piety, a Kshatriya in defence of truth and the oppressed, a Vaishya in business and a Shudra in serving fellow human beings. One scholar has also suggested that some of the symbols now seen as characteristic of Sikh identity were originally developed in opposition to the Hindu ideals of renunciation: the comb and the turban, for instance, signify the ordering of hair as opposed to the conscious disorder, cultivated by the renouncher.<sup>58</sup>



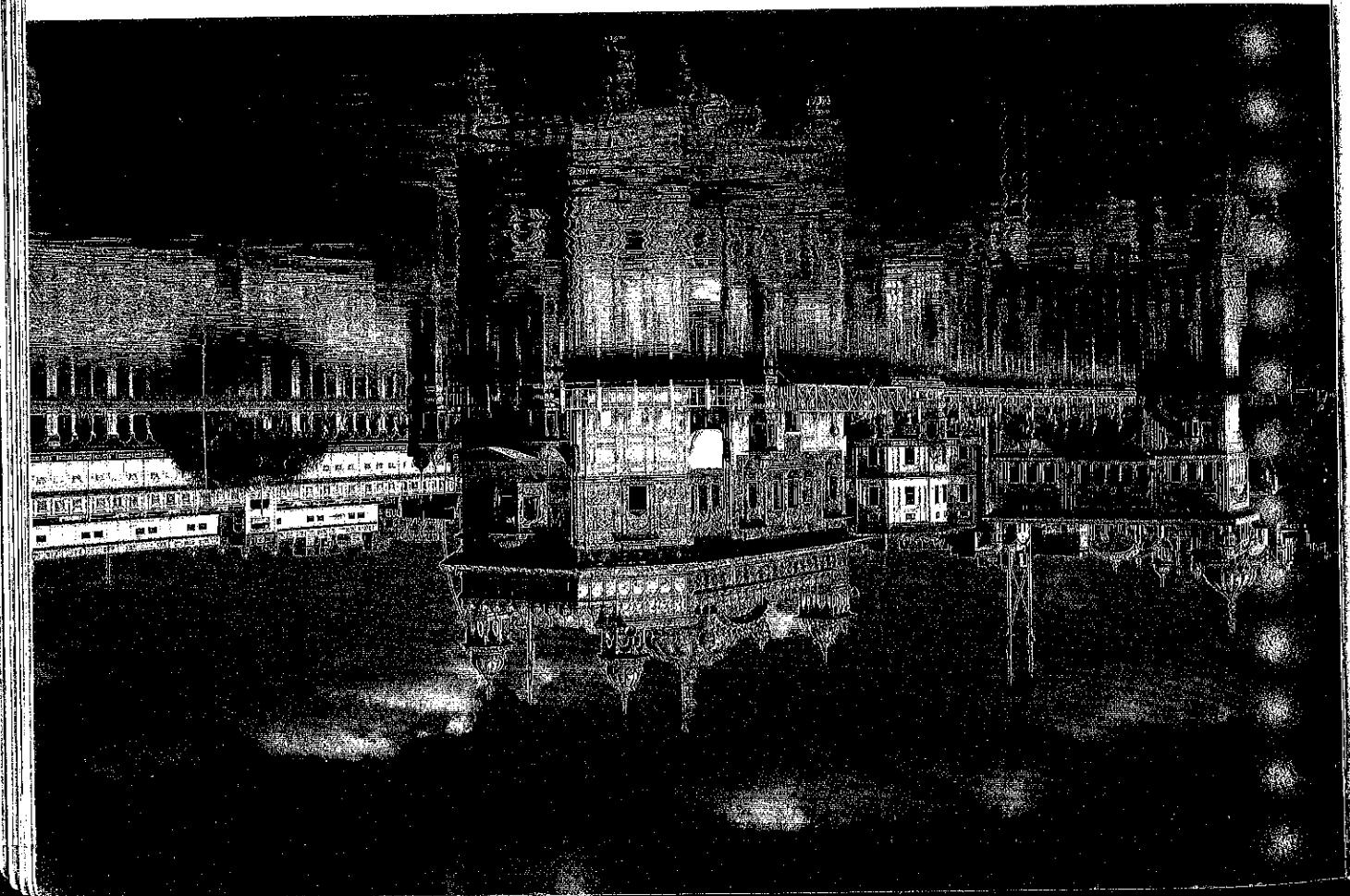
61 Sikh pilgrim bathing in the lake at the shrine of Hemkund Sahib in the Bhyundar Valley, high in the Himalayas. Sikhs believe the site indicates the spot where Guru Gobind Singh meditated at God's feet.

festive occasions for its own purposes. Sikh identity and indeed militancy was also strengthened by the need to resist increasing Mughal persecution throughout the seventeenth century, and later on the threat posed by Afghan invaders. For part of the nineteenth century, the enemy was to be the British who, in 1849, took the Punjab following the bloody Anglo-Sikh war.

The line of living Gurus was ended by a conscious decision of the tenth guru, Gobind Singh. After his death in 1708 succession was invested in both the community of Sikhs and a collection of the teachings of the Gurus called the *Guru Granth Sahib* or the *Adi Granth* ('First Collection'). The latter has become a sacred text of great symbolic significance and, in theory, the only true object of veneration. The mere presence of it in any building transforms that space into a *gurdwara* or place of worship (literally, 'gateway to a guru' or preceptor).<sup>61</sup>

Nanak himself, an opponent of outward conventions including ritualism and the cultivation of austerity, did not approve of pilgrimage. In his *Japji*, or book of psalms, he stated: 'One gains but a seed's weight of merit/ Through pilgrimages, austerities. . . .' On a visit to Mecca, he is reputed to have made pilgrims there recognise that 'God's house is everywhere and not only in the direction of Kaaba'.<sup>62</sup> Yet his views in this regard have certainly not been adopted by his successors, even if journeys to rivers are generally proscribed. Pilgrimages are practised today, frequently cross-

62 The holiest of Sikh shrines, the Golden Temple at Amritsar, built in the 16th century by Guru Arjan, the fifth of the ten Sikh Gurus. Also called Harmandir, or Temple of God, it was constructed in the middle of the sacred waters of Amritsar.



the *Granth Sahib*. The settlement grew in prosperity, not least because it was situated near the Delhi–Kabul trade routes, and continued to be regarded as a holy city even though at some points in the eighteenth century Sikhs were forbidden entry on pain of death. Amritsar has thus retained its importance as a sacred centre and focal point of identity for an often beleaguered religious group that has had violent encounters with Hindu, Muslim and British political authorities.

The temple complex itself occupies some 30 acres (12 ha) in the centre of the town, and is conspicuously without images. The fact that the main temple has a doorway on each of its four sides indicates the notion that the faith is open to all. In addition, a walkway allows pilgrims to complete a ritual of circumambulation. On some occasions worship is combined with political activity, as at the time of Baisakhi (New Year's Day in the Punjab, 13 April). It has been the custom for devout Sikhs to come on this day to the Golden Temple and bathe in the pool. In the afternoon, political rallies are sometimes held, and even a large fair to the east of the town.

Sikh forms of fundamentalism and increased investment of authority in sacred scripture have emerged since the late nineteenth century, a time of perceived threat to the Sikhs from both Christian missions and Hindu propaganda.<sup>66</sup> Religio-political movements developed which attempted to reinforce a specific Sikh identity, separate in cultural terms from surrounding Hindu society. Thus a specifically Sikh form of sacred space was created; Punjabi was cultivated as a sacred language, and the Golden Temple was emphasised as a visual means of mobilising the community. At this time, also, the *Khalsa* (Sikh Order) tradition was promoted as a pan-Sikh means of preserving the community of faith, incorporating the wearing of a comb, a particular form of underwear, a sword and a wrist-band, as well as the practice of not cutting the hair.<sup>67</sup>

While the celebration of martyrdom has long been a part of the Sikh religious tradition, it has been reinforced in the past two centuries as the sense of a distinct Sikh religious and cultural identity has also developed. Demands – often violent – for the creation of a separate Sikh state have grown throughout this century, and the control of Amritsar has proved a powerful symbol of a wider conflict over the autonomy of members of the religion. For the scholar of Sikhism T. N. Madan, the contemporary situation of the Sikhs in India is rendered still more ambivalent by the state's apparently neutral recognition of its citizens' right to hold diverse religious beliefs alongside the desire of some Sikhs to choose to combine politics and religion in the conduct of community life.<sup>68</sup> Most recently, the Golden Temple complex has been at the centre of a bloody conflict between Sikh separatists and the Indian government. In June 1984, the government ordered units of its army, including Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, to storm the precincts of the temple, causing extensive damage to the buildings and resulting in the killing of over 1,000 people, including pilgrims.<sup>69</sup> Later that year, the event took on national and world-wide significance, as it provided a motive for the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

This chapter on religious traditions in India has concentrated on

pilgrimage within a single, albeit vast, subcontinent. Yet, above all, it has emphasised that the study of the dominant religious tradition - Hinduism - and its pilgrimage practices should make us aware of the dangers of treating any religious system as a static or homogeneous entity. Through pilgrimage any religious system should make us aware of the dangers of cultural and military impulses - Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, and British. Through space, it can be experienced via sacrifices at a local, village, Goddess shrine, or a sanctifying bathe in the Ganges at a pan-

While Hinduism has often been claiming both a this-worldly aspect, embodied in the life of the householder, and an other-worldly aspect, represented by the permanent ascetic, the practice of pilgrimage mediates between these two tendencies by permitting a temporary renunciation of the world.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, apart from its ability to create and sometimes accommodate considerable internal diversity to create and sometimes accommodate considerable internal diversity, Hinduism's flexibility has allowed it to assimilate as well as influence

We have also seen how other religions have merged in India which have parallels with the dominant tradition but which are also formed partially out of opposition to it. If Sikhism avoids the icon-worship of Hindusism by making a text the ultimate source of veneration, Jains either reject images outright or deny that they contain the real presence of deity. Sikhism scorns the virtues of permanence renunciation, just as its mistrust of idols and minor deities removes the possibility of pilgrimage to an endless hierarchy (even if sites associated with the various Gurus provide a variegated landscape). Recent events at the Golden Temple have emphasised how the demarcation of a sacred space, ideally kept pure from other religious impulses, can be made central to the articulation of a sense of communal identity, but also a source of tragic conflict as the boundaries of both place and community appear to be put under threat.

Hinduism's flexibility has allowed it to assimilate as well as influence either reject images outright or deny that they contain the real presence of deity. Sikhism scorns the virtues of permanence renunciation, just as its mistrust of idols and minor deities removes the possibility of pilgrimage to an endless hierarchy (even if sites associated with the various Gurus provide a variegated landscape). Recent events at the Golden Temple have emphasised how the demarcation of a sacred space, ideally kept pure from other religious impulses, can be made central to the articulation of a sense of communal identity, but also a source of tragic conflict as the boundaries of both place and community appear to be put under threat.

## Translating the Sacred: Patterns of Pilgrimage in the Buddhist World

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'Ananda, there are four places the sight of which should arouse a sense of urgency in the faithful. Which are they? "Here the Tathagata was born" is the first. "Here the Tathagata attained supreme enlightenment" is the second. "Here the Tathagata set in motion the Wheel of the Dharma" is the third. "Here the Tathagata attained Nirvana without remainder" is the fourth. And, Ananda, the faithful monks and nuns, male and female lay-followers will visit those places. And any who die while making the pilgrimage to these shrines with a devout heart will, at the breaking up of the body after death, be reborn in a heavenly world.'

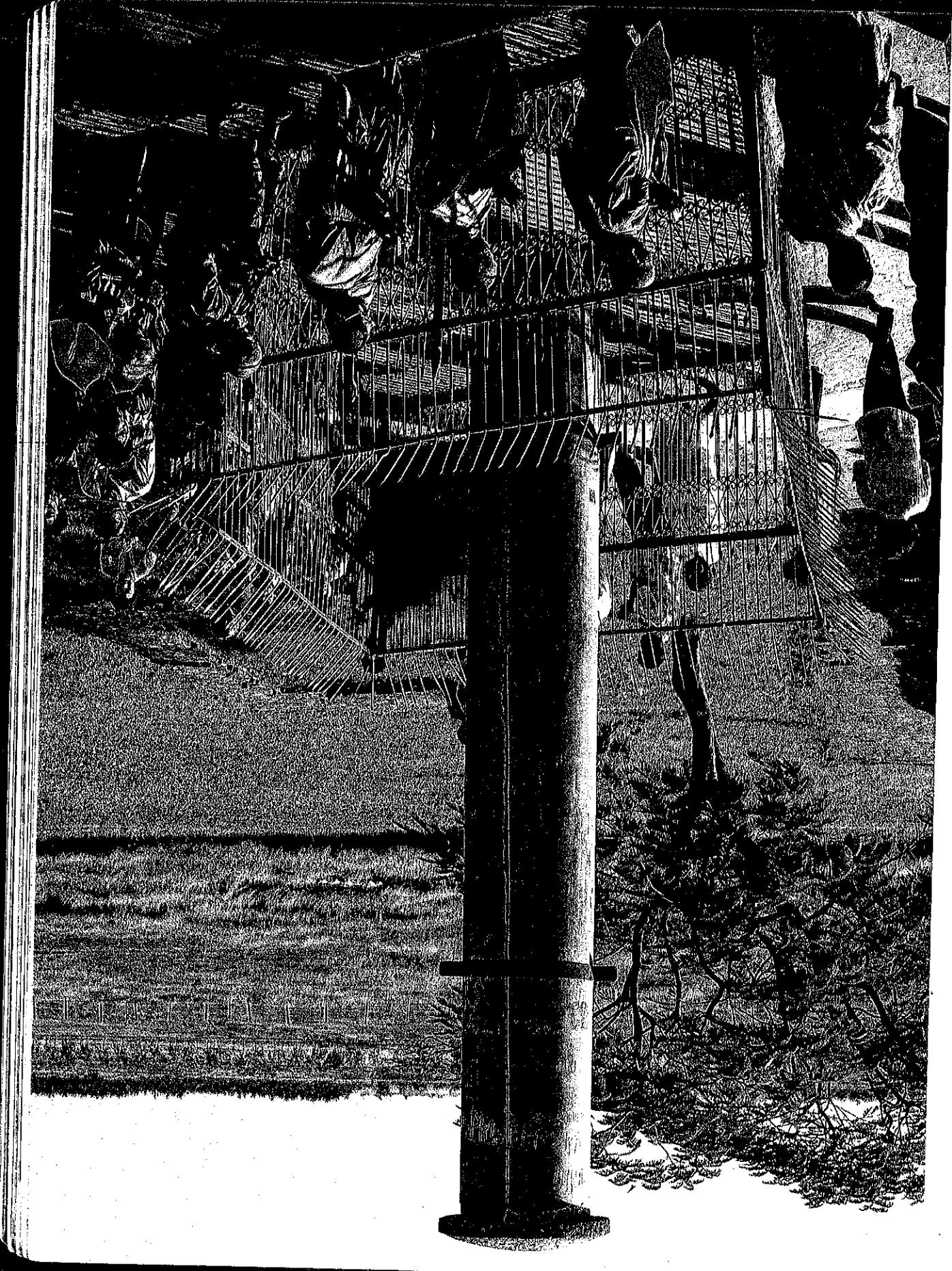
MAHAPARINIBBANA SUTTA 5,8<sup>1</sup>

**T**hus, according to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha spoke to his chief attendant Ananda in the very last discourse he delivered before his death (probably around 400 BC).<sup>2</sup> Referring to himself as the Tathagata, or Perfected One, the Buddha prescribed four places of pilgrimage to his followers. In doing so, he enshrined the activity of pilgrimage as an important act of the Buddhist's life – an act sanctioned by scriptural recommendation. He tied the Buddhist conception of pilgrimage, at least in its original form, specifically and explicitly to those places which witnessed the most significant events of his life.

These central sites were Lumbini (perhaps modern Rummimdei in Nepal), where the Buddha was born, Uruvela (now Bodhgaya in Bihar, northern India), where he attained enlightenment, the deer park at Isipatana (modern Sarnath near Benares), where he preached his first sermon (described in Buddhist tradition as the turning of the Wheel of the Dharma, or Holy Law), and Kusinara (modern Kushinagar), where the Buddha passed away and entered his final Nirvana. These places map the Buddha's spiritual biography into the north Indian landscape.

By extension, other holy sites associated with the Buddha's life were soon added to this group. Most notably, these included the Vulture Peak at Rajagriha (modern Rajgir) and the Jetavana at Shravasti. At Rajgir, the Buddha converted his two chief disciples, Sariputra (Sariputta) the master of wisdom, and Maudgalyayana (Moggallana) the master of power, and in later tradition it was on the Vulture Peak that he turned the Wheel of the Dharma for the second time, preaching the so-called Wisdom

**63** OPPOSITE Lumbini, Nepal. Pilgrims circumambulate the pillar commemorating that erected by Ashoka to mark the place of the Buddha's birth. According to legend, the Buddha's mother, Queen Mayadevi, was visiting the Lumbini garden on the day of his birth. She bathed, leant against a sala tree facing east and immediately the future Buddha was born from her right side. He took seven steps in each of the four directions, and from his footprints lotus flowers sprang up.



Sutras which formed the basis of the Mahayana school of Buddhism. The Jetavana, the grove of Prince Jeta, where the Buddha lived for twenty-five rainy seasons, was the site of the monastery built for his order of monks, the *Sangha*, by the merchant Anathapindika. By analogy, other places associated with the lives of the Buddha's chief disciples and with the *Sangha* were also added to the sacred landscape of Buddhist pilgrimage. Indeed, the Buddha himself recommended this.

In the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, the Buddha gave instructions to his attendant Ananda about how he should be buried:

A stupa should be erected at the crossroads for the Tathagata. And whoever lays wreaths or puts sweet perfumes and colours there with a devout heart, will reap benefit and happiness for a long time. (5,11)<sup>3</sup>

The emphasis is on how pilgrims should behave before, and will be affected by, the relics of the Buddha or other enlightened persons worthy of a stupa:

Because, Ananda, at the thought: 'This is the stupa of a Tathagata, of a Pacceka Buddha, of a disciple of a Tathagata, of a wheel-turning monarch', people's hearts are made peaceful, and then, at the breaking-up of the body after death they go to a good destiny and arise in a heavenly world (5,12).<sup>4</sup>

In this additional commentary on the value of relics, the Buddha extended the notion of pilgrimage from an emphasis on his own life to the suggestion that any place or material object associated with a person who had attained enlightenment was worthy of veneration.

For the Buddha, pilgrimage was a spiritual practice capable of easing the heart, bringing happiness and taking the practitioner to a heaven-realm. Relics and pilgrimage monuments, such as stupas, were important as the material focus of such spiritual activity. The *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* ends with an account of the veneration of the Buddha's dead body, the division of his relics and the building of stupas to contain them (6,20–8). The *Sutta* prescribed not only the practice of stupa building and relic worship but also the circumambulation of a holy site in a clockwise direction as a mark of veneration. Both as a spiritual action and as a practice explicitly recommended by the Buddha, pilgrimage would have a prime role in later Buddhism, not only in its focused form of the journey to the four holy places which the Buddha had described, but also in the more diffused form of pilgrimage to any place associated with a person who had attained liberation through enlightenment.

#### THE JOURNEY TO THE SITES OF THE BUDDHA'S LIFE

By focusing pilgrimage on the central spiritual events of the Buddha's life, much as Christian pilgrimage was focused on the geography of Christ's life in Palestine, Buddhism offered a different paradigm from the diffuse patterns of *Tirthayatra* which came to prevail in Hindu India. Buddhist pilgrimage became a concentrated evocation of the Tathagata's life, not only geographically but also temporally, since the ideal journey began at his birth-place and finished in Kusinara, where he passed away. Precisely this model of Buddhist pilgrimage was established by the immensely

<sup>8</sup> (from Pillar Edict vii).

These are trifling comforts. For the people have received various facilities from previous kings as well as from me. But I have done what I have done with Dharma primarily in order that the people may follow the Path of Dharma with faith and devotion.

In other edicts, Ashoka attests his concern for pilgrimage by improving the roads, building rest houses and waterings stations.

He declared the village of Lumbini free of taxes and required to pay only one eighth of its produce [about half the usual amount] as land revenue.

He ordered a stone wall to be constructed round the place and erected this stone pillar to commemorate his visit.

Twenty years was the duration, King Tomyar's reign, of the earth before the Buddha, the sage of the Sakyas, was born here.

Twenty years after his coronation, King Priyadarshi [another] name of the emperor.

accordantly, the real Ashoka did indeed convert to Buddhism and this ten numerous edicts carved on pillars and rock faces attesting to his concern for the Dharmma. Ashoka was the first Buddhist pilgrim of whom we know

The Ashokavardhana was translated into other Buddhist languages, such as Chinese, and was influential on the great fifth-century AD chronicle of Sri Lanika, the Path Mahavamsa. The poem presented a model of the ideal Buddhist pilgrim which had the merit of being not entirely unrelated to actuality. The real Ashoka did indeed convert to Buddhism and has left

<sup>6</sup> to the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya, to which he accords further worship.

Places, the Ashoka of the Ashokanandana collects all the relics of the Buddha together and redistributes them in 84,000 stupas over the face of India. Moreover, he gives honour also to the relics of Buddha's foremost disciples making various offerings at their shrines. He is especially drawn

Buddha in his own right or a Wheel-Turning Monarch (perhaps like Ashoka himself). In addition to his pilgrimage to the thirty-two holy

the dismembered body of Shiva's dead wife, those of Buddhism repre-sent the ideal body of the Great Man who could become either a

Many-to-two-to-one Places can be seen as instances of the body of the Great Man while the geography of India through the utility image of the Buddha's life. While the holy places of Hindu India could be seen as representing life.

In parallel with the thirty-two marks of the Great Man in life, in parallel with the thirty-two marks of the Great Man in tradition (marks which the Buddha himself was held to possess), these thirty-two holy places can be seen as inscriptions in the body of the Great Man

In the Ashoka audience the emperor visits not only the four prescribed sites, but altogether thirty-two holy places connected with the Buddha's

Upagupta summons up local deities who were present at the actual events and provide vivid eye-witness accounts.<sup>5</sup>

Buddha's life by retelling and remaking his career from birth to death. At each site, Ashoka builds a commemorative monument and

Buddhism) visits all the important sites of the Buddha's life with his spiritual master, the monk Upagupta. This pilgrimage reconstructs the Z/4 to 23 BC, which almost entirely this way and was converted to

Ad but whose orai origins go back to the second century BC; in the poem, Ashoka (who reigned on the throne of the Mauryan emperors from about 274 to 232 BC, united almost all India under his sway and was converted to Buddhism) is said to have built a stupa at Sanchi.

Influential myth of the emperor Ashoka in the Sanskrit poem *Ashokavadana*, whose finished form dates from about the second century AD but whose oral origins go back to the second century BC in the name

የዚህ አገልግሎት የሚከተሉት ማረጋገጫዎች በመስጠት የሚከተሉት ማረጋገጫዎች በመስጠት



64 The Damekha Stupa, Sarnath, India. The Deer Park at Sarnath is where the Buddha 'turned the wheel of the Dharma', inaugurating his vocation as teacher of gods and men. It subsequently became one of the great centres of Buddhist monasticism and pilgrimage, with stupas and viharas built from the time of Ashoka onwards.

The importance of Ashoka was that his deep piety was coupled with the power and force of imperial patronage. While the Buddha's own words may have established the principle of pilgrimage for his followers, Ashoka's actions and buildings established the possibility and practicality of pilgrimage. Moreover, the emperor's own life itself became the ideal model, through the text of the *Ashokavadana*.

In this sense Ashoka's actions as emperor, convert to a new religion and pilgrim-builder extraordinaire form a remarkable parallel to those of Constantine and his mother St Helena in conquering an empire, converting to a new religion and building a series of exceptional pilgrim churches (see Fig. 25). Such rulers transformed not only the sacred landscape but the very means of travel within it, as well as the whole environment of the sacred centres which were the pilgrim's goals. In effect they created something radically new out of pilgrimage in their given tradition. At the same time they stood to gain the support of a religious system and the immense prestige of being the executors of a holy order, whether the Buddha's *Dharma* or the Church of Christ.

Like Muhammad, Buddha was seen as having recommended pilgrimage. But, unlike Islam, Buddhism never enshrined the holy places as a doctrinal *sine qua non*. Like Christianity, Buddhism focused its sacred sites on the life of a single individual, his disciples and (in the case of

When Fa-hsien and To-Ching arrived at this temple of the Jetavana, they reflected that this was the spot where the Lord of men had passed twenty-five years of his life; they themselves, at the risk of their lives, were now dwelling among those foreigners, of those who had with like purpose travelled through a succession of

countries; many of his most famous teachings: on arriving at the Jetavana Grove at Shravasti, where the Buddha delivered from the section of his account in which he describes his feelings of this venture, its dangers and personal hardships, can be grasped from the search for a more complete version. His travels in the Indian subcontinent took him as far as Sri Lanka and lasted fourteen years.<sup>9</sup> Something of the search for a more complete version. His travels in the Indian subcontinent in the then current Chinese translation, Fa-hsien decided to go to India to effect condition of the *Vinaya Pitaka* (or book of rules for Buddhist monks) company with a number of other Buddhist monks, regrettably, the emperor interceded as Fa-Hsien or Faxian), made the long pilgrimage to India. In Palæstine (see Chapter 4), a Chinese monk called Fa-hsien (also transcribed as Fa-hsien or Faxian), made her trip from Spain to

#### IMAGINATION

#### THE JOURNEY TO INDIA IN ACTUALITY AND

In about AD 400, only a few years after Egerton made her trip from Spain to India, where the imperial patronage and the support of a formidable monastic system, impelled him to the landscape. With Christianity) his mother, it built biography into the landscape. With Buddhism entered his final Nirvana.



PATTERNS OF PILGRIMAGE IN THE BUDDHIST WORLD

countries with them, some had returned home, some were now dead; and now, gazing on the place where the Buddha once dwelt but was no longer to be seen, their hearts were affected with very lively regret. (*Travels of Fa-hsien*, 20)<sup>10</sup>

Fa-hsien's account reveals many of the qualities inherent in Buddhist pilgrimage. He frequently remarked on the works and legends of Ashoka, which by his time had become a paradigm for Buddhist pilgrims. In thus reproducing the works of Ashoka through his writings, Fa-hsien, like the other Chinese pilgrims who would follow him, transformed (for a Chinese readership) the sacred map of India created by Ashoka, much as Ashoka himself had transformed the sacred topography implied in the Buddha's own *suttas*. He made great efforts to visit the holy places as well as to collect the various books he came to seek. He was strongly aware of being a foreigner in India. When the monks of the Jetavana discovered where he came from, they exclaimed

Wonderful! To think that men from the frontiers of the earth should come so far as this from a desire to search for the Law. (*Travels*, 20).

As Buddhism spread to China and South-East Asia, pilgrims would increasingly be foreigners in the Buddha's homeland, until – with the extinction of Buddhism in India in about the thirteenth century (following Muslim and some Hindu persecutions, as well as the loss of royal patronage and a certain amount of Buddhist-Hindu syncretism) – the only pilgrims at the Ashokan holy sites would come from abroad.

Fa-hsien is interested not only in sites associated with the Buddha, his disciples and the *Sangha* generally, but also in places that feature in the Jataka tales of the Buddha's previous lives. For instance, the country of Taxila (which, according to a folk etymology recorded as if it were accurate by Fa-hsien, means 'Cut-off-head') is so named because

Buddha, when he was a Bodhisattva [one who has dedicated his life to attaining enlightenment for the liberation of others], gave his head in charity to a man in this place, and hence comes the name. (*Travels*, 11)<sup>11</sup>

He remarks on the stupa 'adorned with every kind of precious jewel' which commemorated the spot. His pilgrimage-India is not only Buddha's biography inscribed as a map onto the landscape, but a hagiography of past lives in which previous incarnations of the Buddha themselves sanctified the land. Important too were spots associated with previous Buddhas, which Buddhist tradition believed had arisen before Gautama, the sage of the Sakyas. Some places were holy because all Buddhas would come to them – for instance the Vulture Peak at Rajgir which possessed 'the place where the four Buddhas sat down' (*Travels* 29).<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps most impressive in Fa-hsien's narrative is his deep sense of emotion at places of profound religious significance. This seems precisely in keeping with the 'sense of urgency' and the 'devout heart' recommended by the Buddha himself in the *Parinibbana Sutta*. Indeed, one might say that Fa-hsien's narrative enacts the injunctions implied by the Buddhist scriptures. Take, for instance, his actions at the Vulture Peak:

Hsuan-tsing's *Records of the Western World* is a mine of information about India in the seventh century. At the beginning of Book II, he gives a sketch of Indian life and manners. With every region within India which he describes, he tends to give practical and geographical information as a prelude to his description of religious sites and relics. Like other pilgrims, such as the Greek Pausanias, he frames his pilgrimage account with such details as the description of religious sites and relics. Unlike other pilgrims, he tends to give every region within India which he describes, he tends to give every region within India which he describes and nail partitions to tell the stores about many forms and countines from bones, teeth and nail partitions to describe the various reliques (from bones, teeth and nail partitions to the Indian in origin) and from Japan to Tibet, Hsuan-tsing goes to great pains and expanded into many forms and countines from Zen to Tantra (both only the Theravada survivors today, while the Mahayana has itself split and doctrinal and scriptural emphases—still existed. Of these early schools cal, doctrinal and Sarvastivada)—each with a slightly different philosophy. Theravada and Sarvastivada) — each with a slightly different philosophy. century BC; but in his time many of the earlier schools (Mahasamghika, Mahayana (or Great-Vehicle) school which developed around the first practiced in every monastery. He himself was an adherent of the stries and reliques of India. He is precise about the kind of Buddhism Hsuan-tsing's prime project is to detail the Buddhist remains, monasteries introduced by the local people and often gives a short account of the king. After used by the records, Hsuan-tsing invariably describes the kinds of coinage which he records, customs and local habits of the many countries the terrain, soil, produce, etc., in brief, sketches of other information, such as rather precise, in brief, sketches of other information, such as rather precise, in brief, sketches of the terrain, soil, produce, customs and local habits of the many countries which he records, Hsuan-tsing invariably describes the kinds of coinage used by the local people and often gives a short account of the king. After this introduction to matters of religion.

Fa-hsien was followed by many other Chinese pilgrims to India. Among those who left records of their trips were Sung-yun, who went in the early sixth century AD, and I-ching, who travelled there from about 672 to 693. Most famous, however, and most influential of all the Chinese pilgrims and translators was Hsuan-tsang (whose name is also translated as Hui-en-tsing and Yuan-chwang), who spent the years from 629 to 645 AD in India. Hsuan-tsang not only wrote an extensive account of his pilgrimage in twelve books, the Si-yu-ki or Records of the Western World, but as soon as he died became the subject of a hagiographical account by his students Hwu-i and Yen-ihsong. This biography dwells in detail on his trip to India, turning it into a paradigmatic pilgrimage. It the myth of Ashoka had been the model for Buddhist pilgrimage within China. It became romanticised and mythologised into folk tale in India, that of Hsuan-tsang became the paradigm for pilgrimage to India centuries of miraculous stories, being retold for instance during the sixteenth century in the famous novel The Journey to the West (also known as Monkey), probably written by Wu Ch'en-ge-en.<sup>16</sup>

(Travels 29) 13

Fa-hsien, having bought flowers, incense, and oil and lamps in the new town, procured the assistance of two aged monks as guides. Fa-hsien, ascending the Gridharakuta mountain, offered his flowers and incense and lit his lamps for the night. Being deeply moved he could scarcely restrain his tears as he said, "Here it was in bygone days Buddha dwelt and delivered the Surangama Sutra." Fa-hsien, not privileged to be born when the Buddha lived, cast but gaze on the traces of his presence and the place which he occupied. Then he recited the Surangama in front of the cave and remained there all night, he returned to the new town.

associated with each relic and each place. He remarks on all the Ashokan monuments he sees. As they gather pace and length, Hsuan-tsang's *Records* become a veritable biography of the Buddha through the stories associated with the sites and objects. They reconstruct a portrait of the Tathagata out of the remains which survive in material culture through the narratives which those remains evoke. Often, there is little left but ruins – even in the most prestigious sites which Ashoka and Fa-hsien had venerated.

Take for instance the Jetavana:

This is where Anathapindada . . . built for Buddha a *vihara*. There was a *sangharama* here formerly, but now all is in ruins.

On the left and right of the eastern gate has been built a pillar about 70 feet high; on the left-hand pillar is engraved on the base a wheel; on the right-hand pillar the figure of an ox is on the top. Both columns were erected by Ashoka. The residences of the priests are wholly destroyed; the foundations only remain, with the exception of one solitary brick building, which stands alone in the midst of the ruins, and contains an image of Buddha. (Records, vi)<sup>17</sup>

This is an archaeology of Buddhist India – recording not only the Buddha's own presence here (upon which Fa-hsien had explicitly commented) but also that of Ashoka. The sorry state of the present is evoked through the ruins of this once flourishing monastery where so many of the sacred texts which Hsuan-tsang had come to India to collect and translate were first spoken. But from these traces, half-vanished from the landscape, Hsuan-tsang passes to what they mean: stories of Anathapindada, as he calls Anathapindika, of the Buddha's disciples Sariputra and Maudgalyayana, of the Buddha's own miracles. The brief factual record of the remains at the Jetavana evokes a lengthy and colourful mythic portrait of the site as witness to so many sacred events.

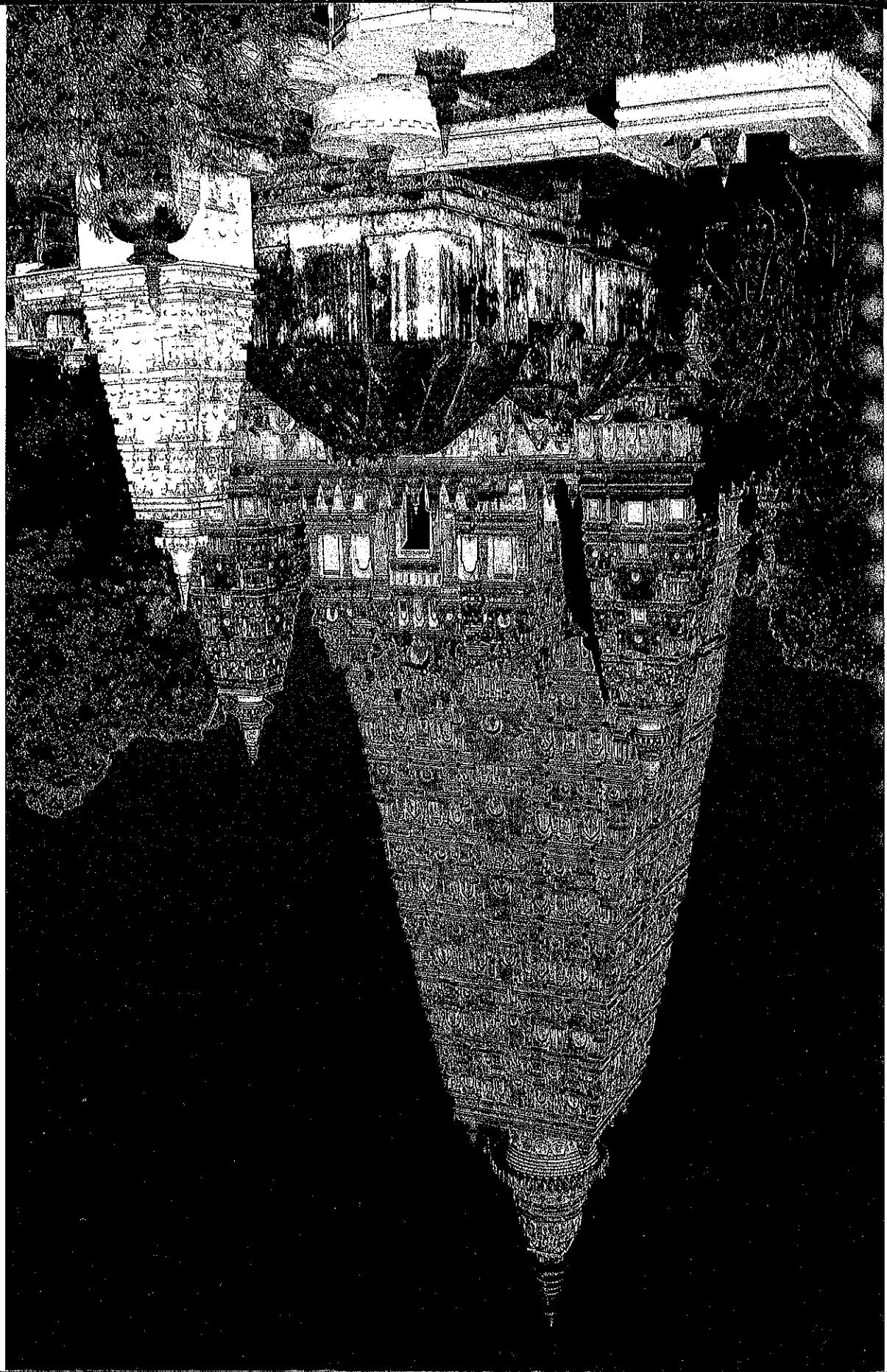
Within a few years of Hsuan-tsang's death in China, where he lived for twenty years after returning from India in AD 645 and supervised many translations, his pilgrimage had become the subject of a biographical narrative by his pupils Hwui-li and Yen-thsong. In this *Life of Hsuan-tsang*, the hero – now referred to as 'Master of the Law' and given an impeccable pedigree reaching back to the Han emperors – proclaims his purpose:

I desire to go and gaze on the sacred traces, and earnestly to search for the Law.<sup>18</sup>

The journey is presented as a ritual, in which Hsuan-tsang adopts the clockwise route which worshippers use in circumambulating a stupa for his pilgrimage through India.<sup>19</sup> Miracles, which in his own *Records* are associated with the pilgrimage sites in former times, are in the *Life* brought forward to the pilgrim's own experience. For instance, at Bodhgaya:

After a little while the light of the lamps in the building was suddenly eclipsed, and within and without there was a supernatural illumination produced. On looking out they saw the relic-tower bright and effulgent as the sun, whilst from its summit proceeded a lambent flame of five colours, reaching to the sky. Heaven and Earth were flooded with light, the moon and stars were no longer seen, and a subtle perfume seemed to breathe through and fill the courts and the precincts. (Life of Hsuan-tsang, iv)<sup>20</sup>

66 OPPOSITE Bodhgaya, India. View of the Mahabodhi Temple built on the site of the Buddha's Enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree.



The process of mythologising a pilgrim and the very act of pilgrimage, which we examined in medieval Christian culture in the case of Egeria's travels and the use made of them by Valerius three centuries later (see Chapter 4), is here in evidence over a single generation. The relics Hsuan-tsang visits are presented as immanent with sanctity and potent in his own time. They exhibit the miraculous qualities of the stories of the times of the Buddha, which he recounted in his *Records*. In effect, in the *Life*, the sacred power of the Buddha's traces (as described in the *Records*) is transposed to Hsuan-tsang's own experience and witness. The pilgrim himself, as well as the place of pilgrimage, becomes a sacred paradigm.

By the time Wu Ch'eng-en wrote *Monkey* in the sixteenth century, the pilgrimage of Hsuan-tsang (now given the surname Tripitaka) had become a parable which could be read on a number of levels. It was a vivid tale of travel and adventure in which Tripitaka's various magical companions, Monkey, Pigsy, Sandy and the white horse, surmount all kinds of dangers, quell demons, rescue ladies in distress and generally fulfil all the demands of a good fairy tale. Socially speaking, this transformation of the tradition of the highly learned pilgrimage account and the saint's life directed to a monastic audience, was most important. It presented the ideal of pilgrimage in a highly popular form, accessible through oral retellings to illiterate lay people. But *Monkey* was also a parable in which the various adventures and experiences of the characters were so structured as to represent a picture of the Buddhist doctrine of *karma* (or the relations of cause and effect in one's actions). The progress of the pilgrimage itself was portrayed as an allegory of the progress to enlightenment in the Buddhist tradition: at the end of their journey both Hsuan-tsang and Monkey become Buddhas.

The Lands of the West, to which Tripitaka (whose name means the three baskets of Buddhist scriptures) and his pilgrim party come, are described not as the 'real' India of Hsuan-tsang's *Records* but as an ideal world:

Everywhere they came across gem-like flowers and magical grasses, with many ancient cypresses and hoary pines. In the villages through which they passed every family seemed to devote itself to the entertainment of priests and other pious works. On every hill hermits were practising austerities, in every wood pilgrims were chanting holy writ.<sup>21</sup>

Passing through this perfect landscape of piety and Chinese aesthetics, the pilgrims arrive at the Vulture Peak itself. They are met by a heavenly bureaucrat named, with wonderful Chinese precision, the Golden Crested Great Immortal of the Jade Truth Temple at the Foot of the Holy Mountain. Buddha himself greets them and orders his disciples to give them the scriptures to take back to China. Yet the scriptures Tripitaka receives have nothing on them, and the pilgrims must return for new scriptures with written texts. As the Buddha explains,

It is such blank scrolls as these that are the true scriptures. But I quite see that the people of China are too foolish and ignorant to believe this, so there's nothing left for it but to give them copies with some writing on.<sup>22</sup>

The real India, which by the time Wu Ch'eng-en was writing was no

longer a Buddhist country at all, is here completely subsumed in a divine world. The Buddha's court at the Holy Mountain, with its attendant deities (Boddhisattvas, Vajrapans, Protectors, Arhats, Planets and deities (Boddhisattvas, Vajrapans, Protectors, Arhats, Saints and deities (Boddhisattvas, Vajrapans, Protectors, Arhats, Impartial Court in China. The empty scrolls of blank scriptures are an allegory for the philosophical idea of Emptiness underlying all the manifold fictions of the phenomenal world, which was taught as the supreme doctrine by the Mahayana and Tantric schools of Buddhism that flourished in China in the sixteenth century. In effect, as the pilgrimage of Hsuan-tsang became a rich parable for the process of Buddhism itself, what remained were not the facts and actualities of the India visited by the real Hsuan-tsang long ago, nor even many of the myths and stories which he himself related. Rather, what was evoked was the sense of a place from which the pilgrim could bring back a relic that would be useful for everyone back home. That relic was the scriptures which Tripitaka had collected by the Maurya, a pilgrim's progress, to an ideal and celestial sacred purposeful journey, a pilgrimage for the goal of salvation.

Even as the Chinese were visiting India to gaze at the holy places and gather the writings of the Law, other pilgrims from other countries were themselves travelling for the same purpose. In the seventh century AD, Buddhism influence reached Tibet, and in the eighth the Tantric master Padmasambhava came from India and definitely established Buddhism there. From the eighth to the eleventh centuries Tibetan scholars-mystics such as Marpa the Translator were visiting India to gather Tantric initiations and writings in order to diffuse them in Tibet. Thus it was that the Mahayana tradition of Sanskrit Buddhist sutras and commentaries was translated and adapted to the needs of both Chinese and Tibetans.

In the sixth century, the translated and adapted Buddhism of China made its way via Korea to Japan. For Japanese Buddhist pilgrims China, rather than India, would become the goal for the discovery of sacred texts and the visiting of the central temples and holy mountains associated with particular sects or schools of Buddhism. In the early ninth century, the Japanese monk Saicho visited China and in 805 brought the T'ien-t'ai form of Ch'an Buddhism to Japan, where it was renamed the Lin-chi school of Zen. And in the thirteenth century, a former Tendai monk called Dogen brought the Ts-o-tung school from China, which was renamed Soto Zen in Japan. Just as the history of the transmission of Buddhism in China is inseparable from the history of pilgrimage to India, so the process of bringing Buddhism to Japan was one of pilgrimage to China. Soto Zen in Japan. Just as the history of the transmission of Buddhism in China is inseparable from the history of pilgrimage to India, so the process of bringing Buddhism to Japan was one of pilgrimage to China.

## PILGRIMAGE DIFFUSED: SECTS AND SACRED CENTRES OUTSIDE INDIA

These Japanese pilgrims to China were remarkable scholar-monks, like Hsuan-tsang himself. Something of the flavour of their project is caught in the legend of their leader Kukai. In the twelfth century the Lin-chi master Eisai introduced the Rinzai form of Ch'an to Japan. In the early ninth century, a former Tendai monk Kukai brought the Millkyo (in Japanese, Shingon) school from China to Japan. In the twelve-th century the Lin-chi master Eisai introduced the T'ien-t'ai form of Ch'an to Kyoto. In 816, his countryman the monk Gensha, Tendai, would become the goal for the discovery of sacred texts and the visiting of the central temples and holy mountains associated with particular sects or schools of Buddhism. In the early ninth century, the Japanese monk Saicho visited China and in 805 brought the T'ien-t'ai form of Ch'an Buddhism to Japan, where it was renamed the Lin-chi school of Zen. And in the thirteenth century, a former Tendai monk called Dogen brought the Ts-o-tung school from China, which was renamed Soto Zen in Japan. Just as the history of the transmission of Buddhism in China is inseparable from the history of pilgrimage to India, so the process of bringing Buddhism to Japan was one of pilgrimage to China.

in the diary of Ennin (later known as Jikaku Daishi), a senior disciple of Saicho in the Tendai school and later Abbot of Enryakuji, the great monastic headquarters of the sect at Mount Hiei near Kyoto.<sup>23</sup> Ennin was in China from 838 to 847, surviving the persecution of Buddhism which prevailed there in the 840s. His diary, the first in Japanese literature, is an immensely revealing account of the practice and flavour of Buddhism in late T'ang China. His major pilgrimage was to Mount Wu-t'ai, which was sacred to the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, Manjushri (Monju).

Ennin is keenly aware of the sanctity of the place:

When one enters the region of His Holiness (Monju), if one sees a lowly man, one does not dare to feel contemptuous, and if one meets a donkey, one wonders if it might be a manifestation of Monju. Everything before one's eyes raises thoughts of Monju. The holy land makes one have a spontaneous feeling of respect for the region.<sup>24</sup>

The ordinary expectations of social status are transformed in a place where anything can be a divine sign and where miracles are to be expected. Ennin captures not only the sense of reverence but also of heightened emotion:

For the first time we saw the summit of the central terrace. This then is Mt Ch'ing-ling, where Monjushiri resides, the central terrace of Wu-t'ai. We bowed to the ground and worshipped it from afar, and our tears rained down involuntarily.<sup>25</sup>

For Ennin, this precious mountain complex of monasteries and holy sites is the equivalent of the holy places of the Buddha's life in the experience of Fa-hsien and Hsuan-tsang. Wu-t'ai is immanent with magical potency, like the relic-tower Hsuan-tsang's biographers had him encounter in Bodhgaya. Ennin records a miracle image that 'emitted light from time to time and continually emitted auspicious signs'.<sup>26</sup> He experiences miraculous happenings himself:

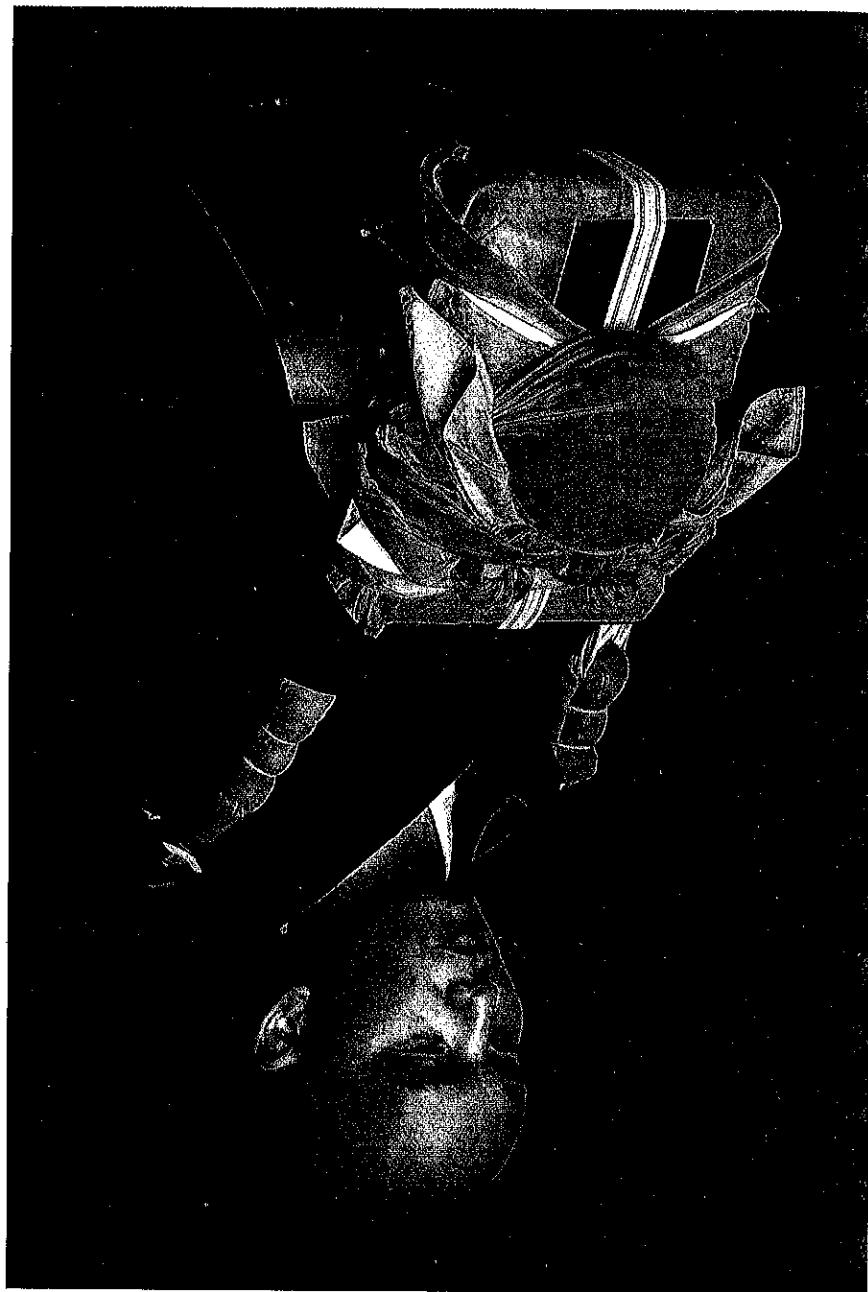
In the hall I suddenly saw five beams of light, shining straight into the hall, and then suddenly they were no more to be seen. Isho, Igyo and the others were with me in the hall, but all said they saw nothing, and they marvelled without end.<sup>27</sup>

He finds numerous relics from India, including bones of the Buddha and even (buried apparently beneath a pagoda) 'a pagoda of king Ashoka which they do not let people see. It is one of the 84,000 pagodas made by king Ashoka'.<sup>28</sup>

Ennin's Mount Wu-t'ai fulfils the emotional and devotional needs of, say, Bodhgaya in the experience of Fa-hsien and Hsuan-tsang. But, while it retains some of the potency of the Buddha's life through its displays of relics, it is not directly associated with the Buddha himself. Instead, like many of the sacred mountains of eastern Asia, it is the residence of a Buddhist deity (in this case Manjushri) whose own life, powers or teaching can bring about enlightenment. In effect, in the great diffusion of Buddhism through north-east Asia, the importance of the historical Buddha became exemplary in a general sense rather than the unique paradigm of the Buddhist path. Many other deities, enlightened masters and human beings who had achieved Buddhahood provided sacred places, relics and stories (in regions much more accessible than India) to

the faithful of China and Japan. Such spiritual people, although often specifically associated with a particular sect, were revered by devotees of other Buddhist sects. Despite Enni's own preference for the Tendai sect, he notes that such sacred centres as Mount Wu-fai (or indeed Mount Tien-fai itself, from which the Tendai sect came) were also sacred to Buddhists from other Chinese schools, such as Ch'an (Zen) or Hu-a-Yen. In Japan, the places established by or associated with the Japanese pilgrim-monks and religious reformers themselves swiftly became holy.

67 A Soto Zen novice from Bhakti temple prepared to set out on pilgrimage. In his travelling pack he carries a bag of earthing utensils, a selection of passages from the works of Dogen, the founder of Soto Zen in Japan, and a letter of recommendation from his abbot.



PATTERNS OF PILGRIMAGE IN THE BUDDHIST WORLD

In the same imperial embassy which had dispatched Ennin's teacher Saicho to China to bring back the Tendai school in 805, was another monk, called Kukai. When he returned to Japan in 816, Kukai (later to be known by the title of Kobo Daishi) founded the Shingon sect and established its headquarters at Mount Koya, fifty miles from Kyoto. He was eventually buried there, and Mount Koya became and still is an important pilgrimage centre. But even more significant was the island of Shikoku, to the south of the main island Honshu, not far from Mount Koya. In Shikoku, Kukai had been born; there he became enlightened and there he performed many of the esoteric practices of Shingon.

The pilgrimage to the eighty-eight holy places of Shikoku is one of the most important in Japan. It has been brilliantly described in English in Oliver Statler's vivid account.<sup>29</sup> The pilgrim's path at Shikoku follows Kobo Daishi's footsteps, circumambulating the island clockwise, as if it were a stupa. It begins at Kukai's mausoleum on Mount Koya, from where pilgrims go to the coast and take a boat to Shikoku. Temple no. 1, where the traditional pilgrim's route starts, is closest to the Kii peninsula on the mainland, where Mount Koya is located. The pilgrimage route stops at eighty-eight specifically numbered temples, most of them belonging to the Shingon sect but some to other schools such as Zen and Tendai. There are also numerous unnumbered temples en route.

Although the pilgrimage evokes other saints who visited the island, it is essentially a ritual enactment of Kobo Daishi's life, taking in his myths, spiritual activities and the places where he dwelt. It is also a trip in the footsteps of Emon Saburo, a man who had refused the Daishi alms and who had come to seek him out in Shikoku and ask forgiveness. Nearing death and worn out from continuous encircling of Shikoku, Emon Saburo finally met Kobo Daishi at the site of Temple no. 12, where he received absolution and died. The Daishi buried him and planted his staff beside the grave. The staff grew into a cedar tree, which still marks the spot.<sup>30</sup>

The pilgrimage to Shikoku is thus an enactment of Saburo's penitence, but it is performed in the alms-begging manner of the Daishi which Saburo had failed to revere. In an *Exhortation for Pilgrims to the Sacred Places of Shikoku*, handed out by the priests of Temple no. 1, the pilgrim is advised to perform

ascetic training in the form of standing before the gates of strangers and asking for alms . . . every day at about twenty-one houses, following the example set by the Daishi.<sup>31</sup>

The pilgrimage is seen as an opportunity to cultivate one's spiritual life in ritual abstinence essentially through faith in Kobo Daishi. The pilgrim is to imagine Kukai accompanying him on his journey. As the *Exhortation* puts it:

he who merely follows the Daishi with his whole heart can have his prayer granted.<sup>32</sup>

Pilgrims evoke this faith by circumambulating the island, often dressed in a traditional pilgrim's outfit (which includes sedge-hats, walking staff and a bell) and reciting the Daishi's mantra, 'Namu Daishi Henjo Kongo'. As the *Exhortation* advises its readers:

mountain.  
In the early 19th century, so the  
Hokusai's series of prints in  
representations such as  
Fuji, 19th century. Just as  
celebrated as a national ritual  
pilgrimage to Fuji was  
new technique of  
photography was used later  
in the century to record and  
dissimilate the image to the sacred  
mountain.



The whole pattern of Buddhism in China and Japan became indebted to the Law not only for its physical introduction but also in its very ideology and practice. To be a Buddhist in Japan is hardly separate from occasionally (or often) undertaken a pilgrimage. This may be to a sacred mountain such as Fuji, to a string of temples sacred to a particular deity (for instance the 33 sanctuaries of Kannon), to the holy places of a particular sect (such as the 25 temples of the Pure Land School or the 100 temples of the Nichiren school), or to a series of sanctuaries

were itself made by the enlightened one whom the pilgrim to Shikoku evokes memories of a previous pilgrimage, that of Kukai to China, which evokes himself brought back from China.<sup>34</sup> The pilgrimage to Shikoku attained fundamental scriptures of Shingon, said to have been those attained enlightenment, Statues were shown among the relics scrolls of the original Buddha. At Temples 24, 25 and 26, at Muroto where Kukai (whether actually by the Daiishi or not), the original pilgrimage of Kukai to China is evoked. Whether through a display of relics and other treasures brought from China without other intention or thought, calmly and without haste, with 'Namu Daiishi

Henry Kongo, on one's lips - that is how to make the true pilgrimage.<sup>35</sup>



69 Japanese pilgrim beggars wearing traditional garb and carrying drums, 19th century.

located in a sacred place, like the 88 shrines on Shikoku or the 1,000 temples in the Higashiyama section of Kyoto. In Shikoku, such pilgrimage involves not only the confrontation with relics and myths, but also the acquisition of talismans that bring healing, the writing of letters by pilgrims to the Daishi and the fulfilment of a whole nexus of personal anxieties, problems and desires.<sup>35</sup> The importance of Shikoku was such that miniature versions of the 88 holy places were subsequently established in other parts of Japan, such as Tokyo and Soma. Here, those who could not make the arduous trip to the real Shikoku could nonetheless fulfil a penitential vow and attempt to walk alongside Kobo Daishi.

#### MANDALAS AND EMPTINESS: PILGRIMAGE AS METAPHOR FOR THE PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT

Ultimately, in Mahayana Buddhism pilgrimage became a symbol for the spiritual path itself. On the level of fairy tale we have seen this in the way the novel *Monkey* transformed the travels of Hsuan-tsang. In Japanese culture, the image of pilgrimage took a peculiarly poetic and haunting turn. It suffuses the writings not only of monks like Ennin or Dogen, but also of the great Japanese poets. Take this poem by Issa (1763–1827), one

changes of mood; their very shape — he touches on the many moods of pilgrimage, and the these images — their juxtaposition, the associations of their words, almost Bassho's poems evoke very concrete and simple images. But through the age of 50.

For Bassho the particular goal was less important than the wandering itself prose account in the tradition of Bennin. He died on such a pilgrimage at wrote several diaries of these journeys, which included poems within a and the deep motivation for attaining an interior state, an ecstasy. He

wind.<sup>39</sup>

Sumida in the August of the first year of Jyōkyō (1684) among the walls of autumn ecstasy under the pure beams of the moon, I left my broken house on the River thoseands of miles carrying naught for his provisions and returning to the state of Following the example of the ancient priest who is said to have travelled Weather Exposed Skeleton describes his motivation for pilgrimage: the dust of the world still clings to me,<sup>40</sup> In the opening of his Records of a pilgrimage, dressed, as he puts it, like a priest, but priest I am not, for north, Bassho spent the last ten years of his life going on a number of the priest Butcho, whose hermitage he visited in his pilgrimage to the became known as a poet fairly young. He trained in Zen meditation under Matsuo Bassho (1644-94). Bassho was born into a Samurāi family and came in the classic writings of Japan's most celebrated haiku master, Perhaps the supreme blend of poetry with the theme of pilgrimage path of personal progress leading to enlightenment.

Perhaps in Japanese literature became an image for the whole sense, pilgrimage in Japanese literature became an image for the whole himself as a Japanese poem brings him not only to Hu-neng but also to Tesshu's pilgrimage poem brings him not only to Hu-neng but also to memory of something personal to the writer — the image of far Japan. thousands and miles of fields and made to bring back the instantaneous Sixth Patriarch Hu-neng is both generalized in the wind sweeping the like this one by Tesshu (1879-1939):

On Visiting Sōkei, Where the Sixth Patriarch Lived.  
The holy earth is overspread with leaves,  
Wind crosses a thousand miles of autumn fields,  
The moon that brushes Mount Sōkei silvers,  
This very instant, far Japan.<sup>41</sup>

In a single image poet juxtaposes the grandeur of a famous sacred site with a very private and simple act of veneration. Likewise, many Zen masters caught the flavour of spiritual experience in pilgrimage poems like this one by Tesshu (1879-1939):

Kamijī Yama,  
My head bent  
Of itself.<sup>42</sup>

centre not of Buddhism but of Shinto): Kamojī, the consecrated hill in the inner precincts of the Ise Shrine (in fact a writing a poem in only seventeen syllables. He describes visiting Mount of the finest of all masters of the haiku form, the succinct medium of

When worn out  
And seeking an inn:  
Wisteria flowers!<sup>40</sup>

He does not need to describe relief or joy; the image of the wisteria, placed where it is, does the work. His poems also evoke moods and experiences not often recorded by those who idealise the pilgrims' path:

Fleas, lice,  
A horse pissing  
By my bed.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to his pilgrimage poetry, Basho wrote a number of prose travel sketches. He worked on and perfected the tradition of the prose account of pilgrimage in Japanese literature, and ultimately created *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (also translatable as *The Narrow Way Within*), which is quite simply one of the most masterly and evocative travel books ever written. In the *Narrow Road*, the pilgrim's journey becomes an external metaphor for an inner progress. For instance, after visiting an ancient willow tree celebrated in a poem by the classic poet Saigyo, where 'for the first time in my life, I had an opportunity to rest my worn-out legs under its shade',<sup>42</sup>

after many days of wandering I came at last to the barrier gate of Shirakawa, which marks the entrance to the northern regions. Here, for the first time my mind was able to gain a certain balance and composure, no longer a victim to pestering anxiety, so it was with a mild sense of detachment that I thought about the ancient traveller who had passed through this gate with a burning desire to write home.<sup>43</sup>

The stages of the journey, in this instance the gate to the north, become symbols of the traveller's inner state. The 'first time' of rest under the fabled willow tree of poetry prefigures the 'first time' of composure for the pestered mind. The pilgrim is not only the 'I' who has gained 'a certain balance and composure', but also the ancient traveller with his burning desire to write, the 'Travel-Worn Satchel' and 'Weather-Exposed Skeleton' of Basho's earlier pilgrimage accounts. The text freely plays with Basho's earlier texts, with the great tradition of pilgrimage poetry in Japan (for instance the work of Saigyo) and with the model of pilgrimage as an activity in Japanese culture. Mirroring Zen doctrine, Basho paints a portrait of the road which is also a portrait of the self, a picture of an outer process which is untendentiously, suggestively, a picture of an inner voyage.

The places which Basho visits and chooses to record can all be read metaphorically as states of mind. Their names – for instance, the waterfall 'See-from-behind', the 'Murder Stone', the 'Shadow Pond'; above all the 'Deep North' – are as suggestive as Bunyan's 'Slough of Despond' while masquerading as actual places rather than heavy allegories. They do not demand to be read metaphorically, and the book can be seen as a straightforward factual record with a few poems thrown in. But it can also be read metaphorically without any forcing. As in haiku itself, where a philosophical or metaphysical reflection is embodied in a brief and concrete poetic expression (usually quite unphilosophical, apparently),

It hardly has a goal in the sense of a specific place – a Bodhgaya, Mount shows how any journey can become a voyage inside as well as outside. In effect, Basho's narrative can be taken as a pilgrimage manual. It

In a flood of reticent tears,<sup>45</sup>

I dredged my sleeves

The holy secrets of Mount Yudono,

Forbidden to betray

it carries powerful emotion:

Yet his silence is not a dry silence, repressed by the rules. On the contrary,

obey as a pilgrim.<sup>44</sup>

I saw many other *H*<sup>o</sup> of interest in this mountain [Mount Yudono], the details of which, however, I retain from betraying, in accordance with the rules I must

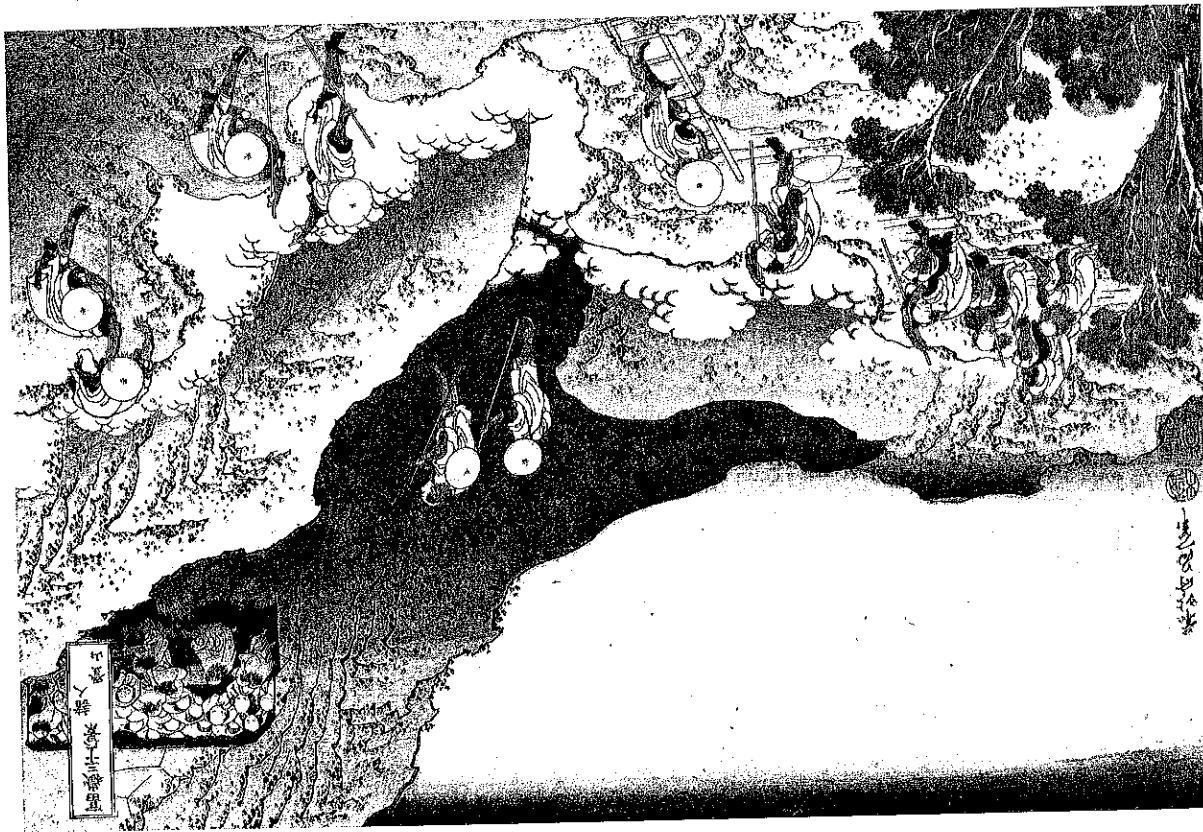
to his readers:

the painter Kaeemon whom he meets en route, the holy awe of the sacred sites, Like Pausanias at Eleusis, Basho does not reveal the holiest secrets the aesthetic beauty of landscape, escape or mountain, the fineness of the concubines at Ichiburi or the parting from his travel companion Sora, Basho's journey becomes a path through many worlds – the sadness of

summit.  
The print shows climbers at different stages of their pilgrimage to the peak of Mt Fuji. The print illustrates the series of groups of pilgrims on the mountain, from the series "Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji", 1823-9, woodblock print, extensive narrative.

To Katsushika Hokusai,

so the Narrow Road as a whole is an extended concrete reflection of an inner spiritual journey. As such it represents a culmination of the haiku vision by expanding it from the brevity of a seventeen-syllable poem to an extensive narrative.



PATTERNS OF PILGRIMAGE IN THE BUDDHIST WORLD

*inner  
outer*

Wu-t'ai or Shikoku – but only the suggestive, ambivalent image of the Deep North. It takes in many places, some famous for history, some famous in poetry, some famously sacred. It also touches sites personally meaningful to Basho, such as the hermitage of his own meditation teacher Butcho, and others, unknown, just glimpsed as the traveller passes by. Basho shows pilgrimage bared to its Zen essentials as existential journey without goal, as metaphor for a spiritually lived life.

In contrast with this spiritual vision of a space without goals, a journey for the sake of the spiritual state of mind in which one travels, Tibetan Buddhism established a version of pilgrimage focused on sites of remarkably complex symbolism. For many Tibetans Mount Kailas (over 22,000 feet – 6,700 m – above sea-level in Western Tibet) represents the centre of the world. In the words of Lama Anagarika Govinda, 'to Buddhists, [Kailas] represents a gigantic Mandala of Dhyani-Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as described in the famous *Demchog Tantra*: the "Mandala of the Highest Bliss".'<sup>46</sup> At least for learned and initiated Buddhist practitioners, the sacred mountain was mapped on to a Tantric text, so that the circumambulation (or *parikrama*) was a journey through a sacred space, a huge natural mandala which was held to be the abode of many gods. In the words of the Japanese monk, pilgrim and (perhaps) spy, Kawaguchi Ekai, who visited Tibet in 1897–1902,

As far as my knowledge goes, it is the most ideal of the snow-peaks of all the Himalayas. It inspired me with the profoundest feelings of pure reverence, and I looked up to it as a 'natural mandala', the mansion of a Buddha and Bodhisattvas. Filled with soul-stirring thoughts and fancies, I addressed myself to this sacred pillar of nature, confessed my sins and performed to it the obeisance of 108 bows . . .<sup>47</sup>

The initiate pilgrim to Kailas approaches the mountain in this spirit of 'soul-stirring' contrition. But what he or she experiences is the Tantric ritual of entering a mandala. In Lama Govinda's words, the pilgrim

approaches the mountain from the golden plains of the south, from the noon of life, in the vigour and full experience of life. He enters the red valley of Amitabha in the mild light of the sinking sun, goes through the portals of death between the dark northern and multi-coloured eastern valleys when ascending the formidable Dolma-La, the Pass of Tara, the Saviouress – and he descends, as a new born being, into the green valley of Akshobya on the east of Kailas, where the poet saint Milarepa composed his hymns, and from where the pilgrim again emerges into the open, sunny plains of the south, assigned to the Dhyani-Buddha Ratnasambhava, whose colour is that of gold.<sup>48</sup>

For Govinda, the *parikrama* of Mount Kailas is a meditative as well as an actual journey – a voyage through life and death. Its stages represent passages through the abodes of different deities, like the quadrants of Tibetan mandala paintings. At the peak of Kailas is located the Tantric deity Demchog (known also as Chakrasamvara, Heruka or Paramasukha), whom the ritual of this pilgrimage celebrates.

At the same time, Kailas is famous for its historical saints, such as Gotsangpa and in particular Milarepa, Tibet's most famous yogi and poet. Before their destruction after the Chinese invasion of 1959, its valley was



71 Portrait of Matsuo Basho  
dressed as a pilgrim, Japanese, 17th  
century.  
water-colour, ink and

the site of a number of important monasteries by Lake Manasarovar. Pilgrims to Kailas venerate not only the great Mandala of Demchog, but also the cave of Milarepa and the site of the lake (Manasarovar) in which Buddha's mother, Queen Maya, was said to have bathed in a dream, to remove all human impurities before the Buddha's conception. The Buddha was described as descending into her womb from the direction of Mount Kailas, appearing like a white elephant in a cloud. So great was the faith of Tibetans in Mount Kailas and so fervent their sense of its sanctity that Kawaguchi Ekai 'noticed several young pilgrims of both sexes performing the journey according to the "one-step-one-bow" method, commonly adopted as a penance.'<sup>49</sup>

But, like Basho's vision of an inner journey matching the outer, the image of Kailas carried inner implications for Tibetans:

[Kailas] is called Meru or Sumeru according to the oldest Sanskrit tradition, and is regarded to be not only the physical but the metaphysical centre of the world. And as our psycho-physical organism is a microcosmic replica of the universe, Meru is represented by the spinal cord in our nervous system; and just as the various centres (Sanskrit: Cakra) of consciousness are supported by and connected with the spinal cord (Sanskrit: Meru-danda), from which they branch out like many-petaled lotus-blossoms, in the same way Mt Meru forms the axis of the various places of the supramundane world.<sup>50</sup>

Despite a deep difference from Japan in culture, tradition and even in its kind of Buddhism, the Tibetan pilgrimage to Kailas – at least in its ideal form – resembles that represented by Basho. The rich symbolism of deities, mandalas and mountains is mapped through microcosm and macrocosm in such a way that the *parikrama* of Kailas is both a physical journey and a metaphorical one. It is a voyage to the centre of the energies of the body as defined in Tibetan Buddhism and through the process of life and death. Like the Zen poetry of Basho's narrow road to the Deep North, the Tibetan imagery of incremental symbolism evokes a pilgrimage whose meanings are focused on the inner life as well as concerned with the outer difficulties of getting to Kailas and going round it.

#### TRAVEL AND SAINTHOOD: THE PILGRIM AS HOLY MAN IN BUDDHIST TRADITION

Pilgrimage gives charisma

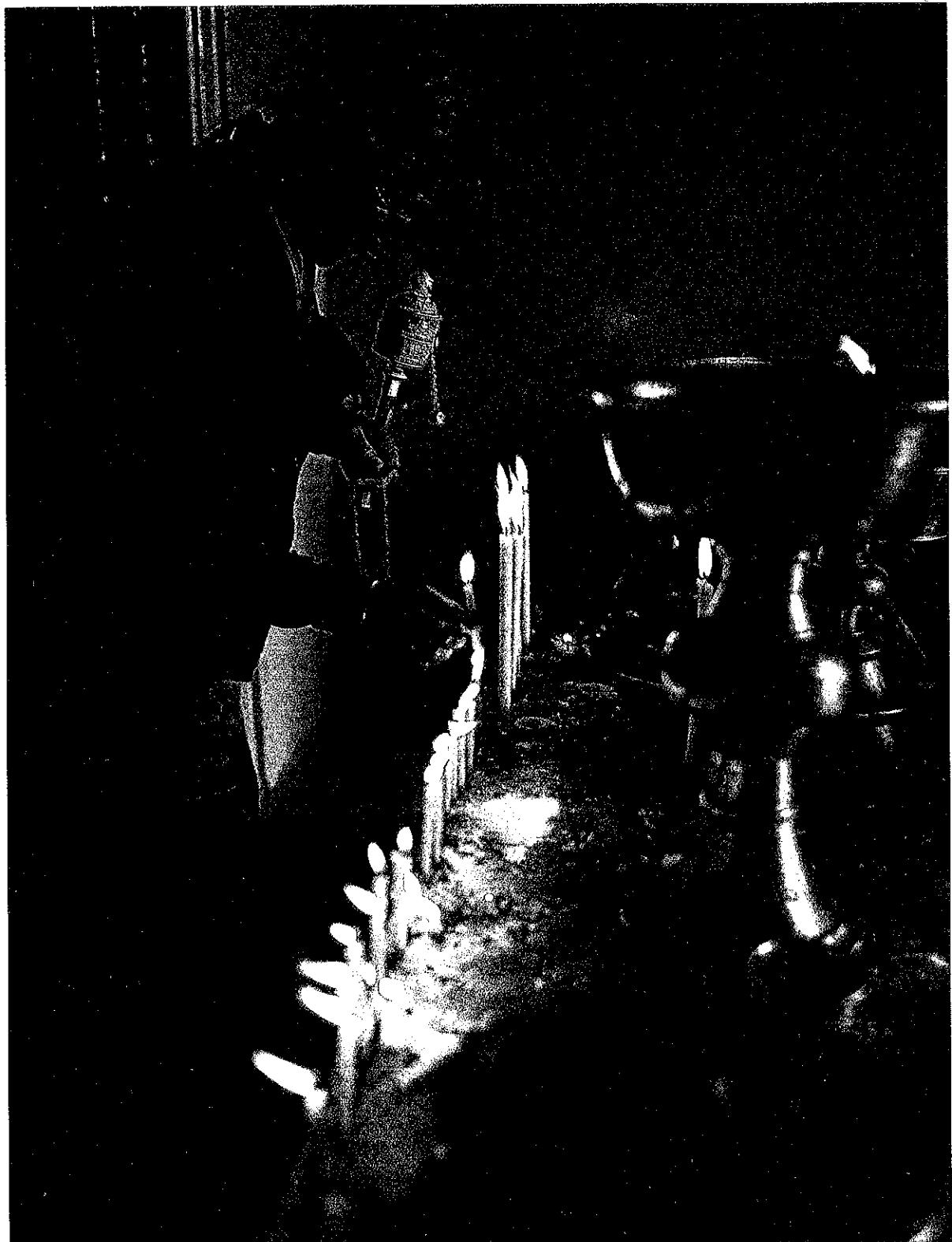
We have seen how, in subsequent literature (for instance the novel *Monkey*), pilgrims like Hsuan-tsang themselves came to be regarded as saintly, even as Buddhas. In Japanese culture, Basho as pilgrim holds a more potent position than he does as merely a classic poet. He is the archetypal Zen-poet, the Zen master as poet, the pilgrim. Just as the pilgrimages to Palestine by Christians such as Willibald or Egeria came to signify, in later accounts and hagiographies, that these were truly saintly people, so the pilgrimages of Basho came to imbue his life and works with an added charisma. This process of sanctifying the pilgrim is still very much alive in Buddhism. In the Theravada traditions of South-East Asia, the link between pilgrimage and sainthood has become a particular feature of the veneration of important Buddhist monks.

Let us take the recent case of the Thai meditation master Phra Acharn

Mun, who died in 1949 at the age of 80.<sup>51</sup> Not only had he trained a number of illustrious disciples, but he was himself regarded by many as an arhat, or fully enlightened being. His life, as it has been recounted in the hagiographies written and published by his pupils since his death, was one of rigorous meditation practice and constant pilgrimage. His wanderings brought him into contact with wild animals and other dangers which had the effect of testing and purifying his mind. As he grew more saintly, Acharn Mun gathered many disciples around him who followed him in his wanderings; and he performed a number of what in other religious traditions would be regarded as miracles. These included curing the inhabitants of a village in Laos called Ban That of smallpox.<sup>52</sup> By the time of his death, the Acharn's ashes were regarded as relics and were much sought after.<sup>53</sup> In effect, pilgrimage - regarded as a monk, in the way the Buddha had himself wandered, as well as paying homage to holy places - became one of the defining features of Mun's sanctity.



## PATTERNS OF PILGRIMAGE IN THE BUDDHIST WORLD



ordination. He explained this by saying that he had no home or relatives, since his affiliation was to his *wat* (or monastery) and his life was dedicated to Buddhism; for him there was no past, present or future, and because there were no parents or grandparents left in his home village, he could freely go on pilgrimage.<sup>54</sup> Warren's journeys as a monk led him to his spiritual master, Acharn Mun, to encounter them with demons, wild beasts and a long lone pilgrimage through most of Indochina including Thailand, Laos and Burma. One of the miraculous results of his spiritual attainments, as reported in the popular stories, was the ability to fly through the air in meditative concentration.

Even today in modern Thailand, the ideal of the pilgrimage as a means to renounce the world, one's personal history and one's home in order to confront a spiritual world is very much alive. The basic paradigm for this model is the Buddha's own life.<sup>55</sup> But in Thailand, instead of visiting the relics of the Buddha, ordinary pilgrims may have some access to the sanctity of exceptional monks by visiting them with amulets to be blessed.<sup>56</sup> Such amulets may perhaps be seen as the modern equivalent of the cult of relics. They may represent images both of the Buddha and of illustrious monks like Luang Pu Warren. Today pilgrimage in Buddhism is seen to offer not only the possibility of venerating the sacred traces, but even the much rarer and more ideal opportunity to follow the Buddha's own path to enlightenment itself.

73 opposite Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhgaya, India.  
Tibetan woman pilgrim performing devotions with candles and a prayer wheel in her left hand.