

Pilgrimage in the Indian Tradition

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Agehananda Bharati

PILGRIMAGE IN THE
INDIAN TRADITION

This paper proceeds in five sections: the first on pilgrimage in action; the second on pilgrimage in religious literature, that is, pilgrimage as a precept; the third on Buddhist pilgrimage is separated from the more general pattern of pilgrimage, as Buddhism is no longer "Indian" in the sense the other constituent themes in this study are, and as most Buddhist pilgrims in India today are non-Indian. The fourth section deals with pilgrimage in the Hindu tradition in general, but as the tantric element is uniquely important in the peripathetic scheme of Indian religious culture, it has been dealt with separately in the sixth section of this paper, which is preceded by a topographical survey of Indian pilgrim centers.

The sections are uneven in bulk: the first section is brief, as the pragmatic angle of Indian pilgrimage has been dealt with in a fairly exhaustive manner although with regional limitations.¹ Literally thousands of pamphlets in the Indian vernaculars are available at Indian pilgrim centers and in nearby cities, travelogues, pilgrims' guides, sanctuary manuals, etc., abound² and even the Indian state govern-

¹ C. G. Diehl, *Instrument and Purpose in South Indian Ritual* (Lund, 1956).

² S. C. Gupta, *Bhāratiya tīrth-yātrāon kā bhakt-darpan* ("A Devotee's Mirror of Pilgrimages in India") (Lucknow, 1950).

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ments publish guide books to holy places as part of their tourist canvassing program.³

I. PILGRIMAGE IN ACTION

Hindus, as well as all other religious groups in India, hold that pilgrimage is highly meritorious, though not essential to spiritual welfare. To the latter clause, Muslims may be an exception—several Muslim divines in India told me that they do not regard their spiritual duties completed until they have performed the *hajj*.

I do not know whether W. Crooke's somewhat glib account of the origin of pilgrimage in India could stand contemporary anthropological criticism; but there may well be some truth in his statement: "pilgrimage in India is the result of the animistic basis of the popular beliefs, reflected in the higher forms of Hinduism and even in the local developments of Islam. Nothing strikes a newcomer to the country more than the crowds of pilgrims travelling by road or rail towards some holy river, the local abode of some god or godling, the tomb of some saint or martyr."⁴ The *Census of India* for 1911 had a similar statement, which Crooke seemed to accept: "it seems not unlikely that the virtue of a pilgrimage arises mainly from the sacred character attaching to the place itself and not so much from the desire to honour the deity whose shrine it is. If this is so, the feeling which prompts the undertaking of the journey is not a very great advance on the primitive reverence for certain places as the abodes of spirits."⁵ Crooke adds that the purificatory powers of water are believed in by all Indians. This is certainly true, the analogy between physical dirt and moral impurity being ubiquitous in perhaps all religion on the ritualistic level.

The merit of traveling per se, not of the more specified traveling for pilgrimage, appears to be first mentioned in Vedic times. The God Indra says to King Harischandra, "There is no happiness for the person who does not travel; living amongst men, even the best man frequently becomes a sinner; for Indra is the traveller's friend. Hence, travel!"⁶

³ I.e., the Government of Uttar Pradesh issued a guidebook, *Uttar Pradesh tathā samāp prāntān ke tīrthsthānān kā sankhalan* ("Survey of Places of Pilgrimage in Uttar Pradesh and Adjacent Regions") (Lucknow, 1953). Diehl (*op. cit.*) gives a good account of guidebooks and pamphlets at South Indian shrines in his book.

⁴ *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (hereinafter cited as "ERE"), X, 24.

⁵ R. V. Russell, in *Census of India*, 1911, Vol. XIII, Central Provinces Report, Pt. 1, p. 91; quoted in Crooke's *ERE* contribution.

⁶ *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, VII, 15. Traveling and the protection of the wayfarer is one of Indra's many portfolios.

Yet it appears that pilgrimage proper is not mentioned in Vedic literature; Yāska's Nirukta does not list pilgrimage among the meanings of *yātrā* (Skr. for "travel"), although this word became the most frequent term for pilgrimage in later times, and is now, in all Indian vernaculars. Though the sanctity of certain places is ancient, pilgrimage to these places does not seem to have been considered as particularly meritorious in the Vedic days. Even much later, Manu does not regard visits to the Ganges or to Kurukshetra—a very ancient sacred site—as meritorious.⁷

The law-teacher Gautama (ca. 200 B.C.), however, declares "all mountains, all rivers, holy lakes, *tīrthas* (places of pilgrimage) the abodes of seers, cow-pens, and temples of gods are sin-destroying localities."⁸

Medieval and modern pilgrimage is certainly due to the Brahmin revival, and to the ruralization of religion in the Hindu Middle Ages through its partial absorption into local, non-Brahmanic cults.

The most interesting part of pilgrimage as practiced in India seems to me the highly diversified motives of the pilgrims. One never just goes on a pilgrimage because it is a pleasant pastime or because one "wants to get away from it all"—I could not imagine any Hindu making a pronouncement to this effect. Every pilgrimage has a strictly defined purpose and scope; and the procedure is exactly prescribed, with rather little leeway for the individual's ingenuity in matters relating to travel. The dates and times at which bathing has to be performed—the auspicious moment for the dip—are laid down in pertinent manuals, but in practice they are fixed by the local priests and depend on various local considerations. For example, the *mukhyasānam* (the chief bathing fair) is held on the new-moon day of the month Māgha (January–February), and at Hardvar on the upper Ganges, at the beginning of the Hindu year (in October). At both these places and at Nasik (Bombay State) particularly important assemblies recur after six years, and after twelve years, when Jupiter enters the sign of *kumbha* (Aquarius); these are the *kumbhamelas*, at which monks from all parts of India and of all orders assemble and take out a long procession, meeting the lay Hindus on a large scale. In fact, these *kumbhamelas* are the one great monastic event, where communication between all orders is established. The seniority of a monk belonging to any

⁷ A. Barth, *Die Religionen Indiens* (Leipzig, 1879); and Manu, *Laws*, VIII, 92, quoted herein.

⁸ *Gautamīya Śāstra*, XIX, 14, quoted in *Sacred Books of the East*, II (1879), 276.

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order is counted by the number of *kumbhamelas* which he has attended.⁹

Bathing at religious centers is always meritorious except on certain inauspicious days, which are few; but there are some dates of astrological significance which confer particularly great merit.

Pradakṣiṇā (circumambulation) is an invariable observance during pilgrimage, and it often figures as the central event of the journey. The sacred object is circumambulated clockwise.¹⁰

The various points of religious significance along such prolonged circumambulation routes as the one at Banaras along the *pañcakoṣī* or at Mathura, where the various events of Kṛṣṇa's life have to be brought to the pilgrims' minds as they pass along their route, are shown to the pilgrims by a Brahmin whose specified job is this sort of pilgrim's guidance. He usually chants a *mahātmya*, a "hymn of greatness" or a panegyry of the particular spot, from the local religious guide book. These Brahmins form a special caste with local variants; there are the *Gaṅgāputra*'s ("Sons of the Ganges") and the Chowbe at Mathura—the latter are also famous as professional wrestlers—the Gayāwāl at Gaya and the Prayāgwāl at Allahabad. Their more respected counterparts are the Pāṇḍā at Banaras and other places. These, apart from showing the pilgrims around the various places of worship and instructing them what exactly to do at the various spots (i.e., what ablutions, what offerings, and what sort of ritualistic movements are to be made on each individual site), enter the pilgrims' names into big ledgers which are kept at the temples, being listed in which adds to the prestige of an individual as well as to his descendants. The Chowbe and Gaṅgāputra have a somewhat dubious prestige and their occasionally ambiguous dealings with unwary pilgrims have been mentioned in ancient texts and reported in some modern accounts.¹¹ Most of these groups run guest-houses for pilgrims, and there is an elaborate system of touting for pilgrims, the most conspicuous being at Jagannāth (Puri) for pilgrims to the car-festival.¹²

Many holy places are associated with the *śrāddha* ceremony, that is, the obligatory obsequies for the dead. For a twice-born person's father, for example, the *śrāddha* is performed 11 days after death, and then every year for 11 years consecutively, that is, if the survivor

⁹ The revolution of Jupiter around the sun takes 11 years and 314.92 days and has great ritualistic significance in India; see *The Dying God* (London, 1911), p. 49.

¹⁰ See Sir Monier Williams, *Brahmanism and Hinduism*, p. 68, n. 2; p. 145.

¹¹ *ERE*, X, 26; Kālhaṇa, *Rājataranginī*, "Introduction," I, i, 20; Crooke, in *Tribes and Castes* (Calcutta, 1896), II, 387 ff.; *Bombay Gazetteer*, IX, pt. 1 (1901).

¹² See W. Hunter, *Orissa* (London, 1872), I, 140.

cannot travel to one of the pilgrim centers where a single *śrāddha* absolves him from the duty of performing any further obsequial rite. The most important *śrāddha* center is Gaya (not Buddha Gaya, but [Brahmā-]Gaya, about fourteen miles from the Buddhist shrine); the others are Hardvar, Banaras, and Siddhpur. The ashes of the relative are preserved until the time when the obsequial pilgrimage can be made; they are then consigned to the water at any of these places, and the "mental" observances constituting the actual *śrāddha* are performed. The ashes can be mailed by parcel post to the temple authorities of any of the said places, and the immersion as well as the *śrāddha* are made vicariously, for a fixed fee, on behalf of the person or persons who cannot afford to make the pilgrimage; it has the same ritualistic validity, and no relative's physical presence is required.

There are several "shaving" rites (*mūḍanam*) which can be performed during pilgrimages; boys between nine and eleven get their heads shaved at the Subbramanya Temple in Palni, Madras State, either in lieu of the sacred thread ceremony (in case of non-twice-born castes), or some time previous to the sacred thread investiture (*upanayanam*) in the case of the twice-born. In the Panjab, Kṣattriya boys are taken to Jvālamukhi near Jullunder and get their heads shaved by a special attendant at the shrine of the Goddess Jvālāmu-khī, a tantric deity of great popularity.

A special type of ceremony is that of atonement, or expiation, *prāyaścitta*, where ritualistic impurities due to all kinds of pollution (as travel across the sea, the conscious or unconscious eating of impure food, etc.) are to be expiated. These often require pilgrimage to shrines "specializing" in *prāyaścitta* rites unless the penitent can afford to have paṇḍits from those places come and perform the ceremony at his own home. The penitent's hair is shaved (not because "it is supposed to hold his sins," as *ERE*, p. 26, puts it, but because shaving is a pervasive feature in all *vyatirikta* ["negative"] ceremonies, as in the *śrāddha*), except for the *śikhā* or central tuft, which is left standing at any rite except monastic induction. He bathes in ten different manners—that is, immersing himself in different directions and with different accompanying *mudrās* or gestures, and the appropriate text is chanted with each of these baths, either by himself or by a guiding Brahmin of the place of pilgrimage. He then puts on fresh clothes, worships his tutelary deity, and as the Brahmin performs the *homa* (the Vedic oblations of melted butter, etc., into the sacrificial fire), presents ten kinds of gifts, the last of which being the *chāyādānam* or "shadow gift," a cup of melted butter in which he has seen the reflection of his own face. He then says to the functioning Brahmin: "This

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atonement of mine has to be rendered valid by you," whereupon the priest replies, "It is now valid." Should he die without having performed this ceremony, his descendants have to perform it; if they do not, father and son descend to hell.¹³

Apart from the secular austerities undergone by the pilgrims, such as are shared by all travelers—third-class Indian railway traveling, ox-cart transportation, and boarding at the *dharmasālās* or other pilgrims' rest houses—certain special austerities are often undergone by pilgrims. The most frequent one—getting less frequent, though, in these days, meant for atoning any of the four most grievous sins (i.e., *gohā*, *strīhā*, *brahmahā*, *gurutalpaga*—the killing of a cow, the killing of a woman, the killing of a Brahmin, and adultery with the teacher's wife) is the measuring of his body's length by the pilgrim through successive prostrations on part of the way, or even all along the route. Waddell notes a Buddhist parallel in Lhasa, where some of the more enthusiastic pilgrims circumambulate the Circular Road in this manner; a distance of about 6 miles, inculcating about 4,000 prostrations. In some cases the pilgrims' hands are protected by padded wooden clogs, the soles of which are studded with hobnails.¹⁴ According to the historian Rashid-ud-din, at Somnath: "Many of the more deluded devotees, in performance of their vows, pass the last stage crawling along their sides; some approach walking on their ankles, never touching the ground with the soles of their feet, others go before the idol upon their heads."¹⁵ Emperor Akbar, imitating the Hindu practice, is reported to have walked from Agra to Ajmer several times (about 200 miles) to visit the shrine of the saint Mu'in ud-din Chishti.¹⁶

After due performance of all the rites at the center of pilgrimage, a clay or vermilion mark is put on the pilgrim's forehead; in earlier days, the pilgrim was occasionally branded with the symbol of the deity. There are one or two places where this somewhat gruesome custom is still practiced, despite a municipal injunction at at least one of them. In South India, among the followers of Madhava and the Śrī-Vaiṣṇavas, pilgrims to the head-*matha* or monastery at Udipi (South Kanara) used to be branded on both shoulders.¹⁷ Also exclusively South Indian is the custom of piercing one's cheeks and tongue with silver needles on going on a pilgrimage; this is usually done when the vow

¹³ So according to the *Ras Mālā*, ed. Forbes (London, 1878), pp. 631–32.

¹⁴ L. A. Waddell, *Lhasa and Its Mysteries* (London, 1906), pp. 364, 375.

¹⁵ H. M. Elliott, *History of India* (London, 1867), I, 67.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

¹⁷ I have seen a person thus branded, at Bangalore in 1952; see also E. Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes in South India* (Madras, 1906), pp. 403–4.

is taken, that is, before the actual pilgrimage begins.¹⁸ Also in South India, some pilgrims keep a kerchief tied over their mouths to show that they are subject to a vow of silence (*maunam*) during the pilgrimage; variations of this are a mouth lock, available for a nominal sum at some big temples as at Kāmākṣī in Conjeeveram, and at Brihadīśvara in Tanjore; or else a silver band with a skewer piercing both cheeks.¹⁹

The *ʿAin-e-Akbarī* tells us about Nagarkot in the Panjab: “pilgrims from distant parts visit the shrine and obtain fulfillment of their desires. Strange it is that in order that their prayers may be heard favourably, they cut out their tongues. With some it grows again on the spot, with others after one or two days. Although the medical faculty allow the possibility of growth in the tongue, yet in so short a space of time it is sufficiently amazing.”²⁰ At certain shrines, the joints of the fingers were sacrificed.²¹

At the pilgrimage to the temple of Śāstā (Āyappan, Hariharaputra—the god who was the offspring of Viṣṇu and Śiva, when Viṣṇu took the guise of the beautiful Mohinī in order to cheat the demons of their share of the immortality drink; Āyappan is a purely Malayali and Tamilian deity, and is not even worshipped by other Dravidian groups), the “Āyappans” (the pilgrims take the name of the God himself, during the pilgrimage) have to subject themselves to a preliminary course of forty-one days of austere diet and complete sexual abstinence.²²

As to Muslim pilgrimage in India and Pakistan, it goes without saying that regional pilgrimage has necessarily secondary prestige for the Muslim; every Indian and Pakistani Muslim regards the *hajj* as his chief pilgrimage. However, there are literally thousands of tombs and graves of Muslim saints (*pīr-s*, *ʿauliyā-s*) mainly of the *sūfī* tradition, all over northern and central India and in Pakistan, most of them martyrs for the faith (*śahīd*), and they attract large crowds of pilgrims all the time. In the past ten years, this has had a salutary effect on the relations between the two countries, as Muslims from both sides can freely move to visit the shrines located on the other side of the “faith curtain.”²³ There is quite a bit of literature on Muslim centers of pil-

¹⁸ *Castles and Tribes of South India* (Madras, 1909), p. 399.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Abu al-Fazl, in *ʿAin-e-Akbarī*, trans. H. S. Jarrett (London, 1911), II, 313.

²¹ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Pt. 3, “The Dying God,” pp. 219–20.

²² See *Census of India for 1901*, “Travancore Report,” Pt. I, p. 98.

²³ *Pardā-e-imānāt*; this phrase has been coined by the contemporary poet Ashq and has gained some currency in both Hindu and Muslim circles along the Panjabi border between Pakistan and India.

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grimage on the subcontinent, both in Urdu and in secondary sources.²⁴ The neighborhood of former Muslim capital cities (Delhi, Lucknow, Agra, Lahore, Patna) is replete with such sites, and they are visited by Muslims and certain low-caste Hindus; on principle, every Hindu would pay homage to a Muslim saint, or, for that matter, to a saint of any religion—yet making a pilgrimage to them would not be good style and would probably even incur some disfavor on the side of the castemates. The most famous shrines visited by Muslims and low-caste Hindus are the tomb of Mu'innuddin Chishti at Ajmer, that of the Martyr Ghazi Miyan at Gorakhpur (Eastern Uttar Pradesh), Shah Madar of Makanpur. A most interesting sanctuary is that of Baba Qalandar Shah in Mysore, South India, the only one to my knowledge which is visited by high-caste Hindus, probably because it has a parallel Hindu mythological significance.²⁵ Now the erection of tombs and a fortiori their veneration is against the ^UUlemā law of orthodox Islam, and the Wahabis prohibit any such pilgrimage. However, hardly more than 5 per cent of the Indian and Pakistani Muslim population would pay heed to such stricture. The Muslim practice is clearly a copy of the Hindu model, and the observances hardly differ from those of Hindu pilgrimage: the pilgrims circumambulate the shrine clockwise, enter the tomb chamber if there is any sort of access into it to inhale the breath of the *pīr* which is thought to linger around his relics; on paying a special fee, at some places (as at the Jūma^c Masjid in Delhi) they are allowed to touch the clothes or sandals or the turban, or any of the articles he had allegedly used. Many of these tombs are believed to have iatric powers, for instance, the tomb of Hanwant Naik at Sangamner (District Ahmedabad, Bombay State), where wooden legs or arms are offered to secure relief from arthritis and similar afflictions.²⁶ Two shrines in the Panjab are thought to be efficacious in the cure of leprosy and leucoderma.²⁷

Some modern Hindu sects oppose the worship of tombs and shrines, and pilgrimage itself, very much like orthodox Islam. It is an interesting phenomenon that contemporary Hindu movements which thrive geographically close to Islamic areas tend to adopt the rigor of ortho-

²⁴ See A. O'Brien, "The Muhammedan Saints of the West Panjab," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, Vol. XLI (1911); *ERE*, X, 26, lists further reference material.

²⁵ It is simultaneously the shrine to Dattatreya and Anasūyā. See the chapter, "On Mantra," in my forthcoming book, *The Tantric Tradition* (London: Rider & Co., 1963-64).

²⁶ See *Bombay Gazetteer*, XVII, 737.

²⁷ See *Census of India*, 1911, Vol. XIV, "Panjab Report," Pt. I, p. 385-86.

dox Islam, whereas more recent Islamic sects (Ahmediya, Baha'i, etc.) have become much more lenient about borrowing or emulating observances of the Hindu-Buddhist tradition. For this, several reasons might be found. The one that concerns us here is the syncretizing influence of tantrism in various parts of India, and its rejection of any caste difference. Thus, some of the Hindu-Muslim patron saints of northern India show marked traces of tantric affiliation in their poems as well as in the *sādhana*s (yogic practices) ascribed to them by their followers; Kabīr is said to have been born from a lotus; and to have conquered the *yakṣas* and other demons by his *siddhis* (occult powers). Tradition has it that when Kabīr died, the Hindus and the Muslims fought for his corpse, as both of them regarded him as one of their saints, each of them desiring to conduct the funeral according to their specific custom.

The Ārya Samāj, the most fundamentalist school of contemporary Hinduism, disallows in effect the practices of bathing at sacred places, pilgrimage, the use of beads and ascetic marks, and gifts to mendicants that were always part of the pilgrims' observance en route and on the spot. Earlier, the founder of the Sikh religion had said: "Religion does not consist in wandering to tombs or cremation grounds, nor of sitting in meditative postures."²⁸ Guru Amar Dās, one of the ten preceptors of Sikhism, tried to prevent the Sikhs from visiting Hardvar, Banaras, Allahabad, etc. However, Sikhs—especially women—frequent the Hindus' pilgrim centers, particularly Hardvar which is close to the Panjab. Guru Nanak himself visited the tomb of a Muslim saint (Shaikh Farīd of Ajodhan), and Sikhs today visit Guru Nānak's birthplace Kartarpur (in West Pakistan) and, of course, the Darbār Saheb, the great temple of Amṛtsar. The beardless Sikhs of Sindh, the "Sahajdhāri," worship the *bhagats* (lit. just "devotees"—which in Sikh parlance has become the equivalent of a Muslim *pīr*) at their shrines.

The monotheistic Liṅgāyat Sect of Mysore teaches as one of its main tenets that there is no need of a mediator between man and God, and that there is no need for sacrifices, penances, pilgrimages, and fasts.²⁹ Actually, this is a stereotype thesis in almost all schools of Hinduism and in Vajrayāna Buddhism—of the form "if there is true devotion, etc. . . . then pilgrimage, fasts, and other observances are redundant"; yet those who feel the benefit of these observances do not

²⁸ Quoted from the *Adigranth*; see Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion* (Oxford, 1909), I, 60.

²⁹ *Bombay Gazetteer*, XXII, 105; see *Census of India*, 1901, "Mysore Report," Pt. I, p. 533.

feel rebuffed by these instructions. On the contrary, they feel that going on pilgrimages, keeping fasts, and other vows *in spite of* these instructions, are supererogatory rather than superfluous. There were very few schools in medieval India which forbade pilgrimage outright (I am aware of one only, namely, the Kāndalas, a Viṣṇuite sect now almost extinct). The more tantric the background, the more there is indirect encouragement of pilgrimage and other outward observances, even though the above stereotype "There is no need . . ." occurs in tantric treatises as frequently as elsewhere in medieval Hindu lore. Desire for emulation of the preceptors' total way of life provides a psychological clue for a paradox which is really but apparent: all the saints who have minimized the importance of pilgrimage have constantly been on pilgrimage themselves, most of them having spent their lives as mendicants and minstrels who sang their songs at places of pilgrimage for the benefit of the pilgrim. Thus, it has become customary for the pious Hindu to go on pilgrimages, to believe in their merit, and yet to state that pilgrimage is not important—just as their preceptors kept doing.

Strangely enough, no secondary accounts I have seen seem to take cognizance of the functionaries who preside over Hindu pilgrimage, the *pāṇḍā* or *pāṇḍe*; the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* makes but casual mention of pilgrims' guides like the Prayāgwāls, Gaṅgāputras, etc., but the author does not make it clear how importantly the *pāṇḍā* figures in the pursuit of pilgrimage. The institutionalized *pāṇḍā* belongs to the Kānyakubja, Sarayūparī, or Gujarati (Nāgar) castes of Brahmins, which are considered among the noblest Brahmin groups, and an enumeration of his duties should provide the transition into our second section. The *pāṇḍe*³⁰ issues annual manuals (*pañjikā*) stating the auspicious dates and times for pilgrims to worship at his sanctuary; he ushers the pilgrims into the temple and instructs them how to perform the worship in accordance with the rules laid down by his specific traditions; after completion, he enters the names of the pilgrims into the *nāmakoṣa*, the ledger referred to earlier; finally, he gives the pilgrims *prasād* (i.e., food and other sacrificial ingredients offered to the deity; that includes floral garlands [*hār, mālā*], incense, and vermilion paste of powder [*kunkum*], which the *pāṇḍe* or his delegate puts on the pilgrim's forehead, applying it with the middle finger or the thumb of his right hand). In the South, a small quantity of lustral

³⁰ *Pāṇḍeya* or *pāṇḍe*, alternative spellings—see *Viśāl Śabd Sāgar* (Delhi, 1958), p. 810.

water (*tīrtham*) is also poured into the pilgrim's hand, which the latter drinks.³¹

II. PILGRIMAGE AS PRECEPT

All Indian scriptures, canonical and semicanonical, as well as almost all commentaries, make ample mention of pilgrimage. As an observance it has been ubiquitous, but never compulsory. If we are to show a hierarchy of important observances, this would be one in descending order: (1) meditation—pious attitude to the world in general and to religious things and persons in particular (*śraddhā*, Tib. *dad pa*, and *bhakti*, Tib. *gus pa*); (2) *tapasyā* (austerity, in general and through specific observances such as fasting); (3) *dānam* (charity); (4) *yātrā* (pilgrimage); (5) *śuddhi* (physical and mental purity). This order might well be challenged by many Hindus; yet I do not think that *yātrā* would get a higher place with many.

Vedic references are sparse, as indicated earlier; and to my knowledge there are no pilgrimages enjoined, nor even recommended, in any literature earlier than the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas. The Purāṇas, and then of course the Tantras (both Hindu and Buddhist) are full of references and instructions pertinent to pilgrimage; apart from them, all these texts have abundant topography, and although the enumeration of holy places is not itself one of the *purāṇa-pañcalakṣaṇas*,³² it is subsumed under any of the five topics constituting a *purāṇa*.

As always when the injunction for an observance is given, the account or recommendation of a particular center of pilgrimage, and of the pilgrimage itself, is followed by *phalaśruti*, that is, the account of the merit which accrues through them. It is of the general form "the place *X* . . . when visited at the time *t* . . . together with the performance of observances *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, . . . yields the following results"; they are almost always both secular and religious, as the curing of a disease and securing a better existence in the next life. The exuberant accounts of some *tīrthas* (places of pilgrimage) often read like archaic

³¹ All these are given by the *pāṇḍā* with his right hand, except when the pilgrim happens to be a monk, in which case the *prasād* is given with the left, and the lustral water poured over to the left side of the *pāṇḍā*'s hand into that of the monk pilgrim, whose status is that of the *manes*, not of living persons.

³² The five thematic criteria of a *purāṇa* are: *śrṣṭi* or emanation of the universe; *pralaya-punar-nirmāṇa*, destruction and re-emanation; *mānavakalpāḥ*, or the reigns and periods of the Manus, preceptors of the human race; *devaguru-pāram-parā*, or the genealogy of gods and patriarchs; and finally *vaṁśa*, or the history and genealogy of the solar and lunar races of kings.

advertisements. This is enhanced through such literary devices as an additional, derivative *phalaśruti* (account of merits) for the meditation on, or even the mere thinking of, a particular *tīrtha*. Thus, the *Matsyapurāṇa* has a section "*tīrtha-mahātmya-pāṭhana-śravaṇa-phalam*" ("the fruit of reading and listening to the account of the greatness of the place of pilgrimage")³³ which follows some ninety verses of topographical enumeration. The final *phalaśruti* is pronounced by the *sūta*, the bard, whose business is that of the recordkeeper in purāṇic literature. The passage reads: "he who hears or listens to this eulogy (*anukīrtanam*) wholly related in the *Matsyapurāṇa*, which (eulogy) is meritorious, pure, bestowing longevity, destroying all sins, such a man becomes a possessor of Śrī [lit. the Goddess of Wealth—meaning affluence and well-being in general]."

The *Matsya Purāṇa* may be assigned to the third century A.D. A much later text, the *Brahmāṇḍamahāpurāṇa*, which Kirfel assigns to the ninth century, has a highly systematized section on the merits of pilgrimage, ranging over several pages.³⁴

It was obviously in the Purāṇic period also that terms for "pilgrimage" were used in a metaphorical sense, that is, the pilgrimage of the soul between two births; these portions are fairly reminiscent of the Tibetan Bardo accounts;³⁵ if the Bardo had any Hindu source as its inspiration, it might well have been purāṇic.

The *Matsya Purāṇa* devotes four consecutive sections to the internal sequels of pilgrimage.³⁶ The sections are indexed by these captions: (240) "section on pilgrimage (*yātrā*): thoughts on the means and proper time of a *yātrā* according to the *Matsya Purāṇa*";³⁷ (241) "account of body-vibrations caused by the pilgrimage";³⁸ (242) "account on the interpretation of dreams caused by the pilgrimage";³⁹ this refers to the dreams of persons other than the deceased—in other words, the deceased one's *yātrā* causes living people, mainly his loved ones, to

³³ *Matsya Purāṇa*, 23, 90–93 (Bombay ed., 1867).

³⁴ *Brahmāṇḍamahāpurāṇa* (Bombay, 1936); 4/3/13, and in the *Lalitopāhkyāna*, V., contained in the *Purāṇa*; in this, the God Indra himself asks the seers "*samsāra-tīrtha-yātrayoh kim jyāya*"—"what is expedient in all-over-the-world pilgrimage"—upon which there follows a very exhaustive account of the merits of the *yātrā* in general, and of *yātrā* to a large number of specified places in particular. See also W. Kirfel, *Das Purāṇa-pañcalakṣaṇa* (Bonn, 1957).

³⁵ See Evans Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (London), *passim*.

³⁶ *Matsya Purāṇa*, 240–43; it is not very much compared with the total bulk of the *Purāṇa* which has 291 sections (*adhyaya*), varying in length from 20 to 100 verses.

³⁷ "*Yātrā-nimitta-kāla-yojya-cintanam.*"

³⁸ "*Yātrā-nimittaka-deha-spandana-kathanam.*"

³⁹ "*Yātrā-nimittē-śvapnādhyaya-kathanam.*"

dream things which can be interpreted (the Bardo contains an almost exact replica of this particular notion); (243) "account of auspicious signs in explanation of the pilgrimage."⁴⁰

There is an important digest of the late eleventh or early twelfth century, the *Kṛtyākālpataru* ("the wishfulfilling tree of general duties"), which was compiled by Bhaṭṭa Lakṣmīdhara, and which has exercised a great influence on early writers of Mithila, Bengal, and northern and western India. This work was composed in accordance with a finely conceived plan, and its different topics follow the sequence of the different stages and duties of the Hindu's life as ordained by the Śāstras (codes). A. D. Pusalker avers that "no other digest attempts such a logical and comprehensive presentation of the *smṛti* material."⁴¹ The book has fourteen parts, and teaches how to discharge properly the "threefold debt" (*ṛṇatraya*), for example, to the seers, the *manes*, and the gods. The introduction says that the book deals with the entirety of the Aryan's duties, and that nothing which is not herein contained is obligatory for him. Here, pilgrimage forms one of the incumbent duties, and the eighth chapter is wholly devoted to its performance. From this it becomes evident that at that important transitional period at least, some teachers did regard pilgrimage as an obligatory observance.⁴²

I am now singling out three partially overlapping themes under which the origin of Indian pilgrimage could be examined. They are mythology, hagiography, and object topography.⁴³

The most important myth—of tantric stock—relevant for pilgrimage is no doubt the story of Dakṣa's sacrifice; it is told, in many minor and major variations, in most of the major *purāṇas*. It is imperative to pursue this particular myth in some detail; valuable information about its development has been furnished by D. C. Sircar.⁴⁴ In the tantric tradition, a center of pilgrimage is called a *pīṭha*, a "seat" of

⁴⁰ "Yātrāpravartane-maṅgalādhyaya-kathanam."

⁴¹ Pusalker and Mehendale, "Language and Literature" in *The Struggle for Empire*, Vol. V of the *History and Culture of the Indian People* (Bombay, 1957), p. 332; *smṛti* is the *terminus technicus* for all semicanonical literature which includes the law books; this is opposed to *śruti*, i.e., the revealed texts, the Vedas, Upaniṣads, and the Brahma Sūtras.

⁴² The other sections deal with the duties of a *brahmacārī*, a student; the duties of a *gṛhastha*, or a householder; the daily rituals (*ahnika*); obsequial rites (*śrāddha*); almsgiving and other charities (*dānasarvasva*); the consecration of images (*pratiṣṭha*); formal worship (*pūjā*); various vows (*vrata*); purificatory rites (*śuddhi*); propitiatory rites (*sānti*).

⁴³ For this Wundt once suggested the term "physeocharismatics"; see "Völkerpsychologie," Part 3.

⁴⁴ *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XIV, no. 1 (Calcutta, 1948), 6-7.

the Goddess; tantric literature rarely uses the more general word *tīrtha*; probably the distinction itself depends on the mythological relevance of the center: shrines of the Goddess are *pīṭhas*, sanctuaries of gods, or mixed shrines (i.e., where a god and a goddess are worshipped) are called *tīrthas* just as non-tantric worshipers would call them. *Pīṭha* seems to be a purely tantric term in the first place, although it has gained currency in other, not necessarily religious contexts in the last two centuries; thus, several colleges teaching classical subjects in the Indian tradition are called *pīṭhas*, quite literally "seats of learning," as for instance the Kashi Vidyapīṭha, one of the best institutes of higher education at Banaras.

I shall now quote from Sircar's excellent account so far as it is relevant to us; it can hardly be improved upon.⁴⁵

The earliest form of the legend of *Dakṣa-yajñanāśa* is probably to be traced in the Mahābhārata (XII, chapters 282-83; cf. *Brahmā Purāṇa*, ch. 39) and a slightly modified form of the same story is found in many of the Purāṇas (*Matsya*, ch. 12; *Padma*, *Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, ch. 5; *Kūrma*, I, ch. 15; *Brahmāṇḍa*, ch. 31, etc.) as well as in the *Kumārasambhava* (I, 21) of Kālidāsa who flourished in the fourth and fifth centuries and adorned the court of the Gupta Vikramādityas. According to this modified version of the legend, the mother-goddess, who was the wife of Śiva, was in the form of Sati one of the daughters of Dakṣa Prajāpati. Dakṣa was celebrating a great sacrifice for which neither Sati nor Śiva was invited. Sati, however, went to her father's sacrifice uninvited, but was greatly insulted by Dakṣa. As a result of this ill-treatment, Sati is said to have died by *yoga* or of a broken heart, or, as Kālidāsa says, she put herself into fire and perished. In the Mahābhārata version of the story referred to above, the wife of Śiva is only responsible for pointing out, to her husband, Dakṣa's impertinence in disregarding the great god; but she is neither said to have been Dakṣa's daughter nor to have died at Dakṣa's house as a result of the latter's ill-treatment.

... In still later times, probably about the earlier part of the medieval period,⁴⁶ a new legend was grafted to the old story simply for the sake of explaining the origin of the Pīṭhas. According to certain later Purāṇas and Tantras (*Devī-bhāgavata*, VII, ch. 30; *Kālikā Purāṇa*, ch. 18; etc.), Śiva became inconsolable at the death of his beloved wife Sati, and, after the destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice, he wandered over the earth in mad dance with Sati's dead body on his shoulder (or, head). The gods now became anxious to free Śiva from his infatuation and made a conspiracy to deprive him of his wife's dead body. Thereupon Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Sani entered the dead body by *yoga* and

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, an old work known to Albiruni, contains interpolations of a date later than the Muslim occupation of eastern India where the Purāṇa was modified; cf. I, 10, 121 referring to the caste called Jola (from *Julāhā*, weaver) said to have originated from Mleccha (Mahomedan) father and a girl of the Indian weaver caste. *Op. cit.*, IV, 43, 25, referring to Siddha-pīṭhas associated with Sati's limbs should be similarly assigned to a date not earlier than the fourteenth or fifteenth century.

disposed of it gradually and bit by bit. The places where pieces of Sati's dead body fell are said to have become Pīṭhas, i.e. holy seats or resorts of the mother-goddess, in all of which she is represented to be constantly living in some form together with a Bhairava, i.e. a form of her husband Śiva. According to a modified version of this story, it was Viṣṇu who, while following Śiva, cut Sati's dead body on Śiva's shoulder or head piece by piece by his arrows or his discus. The story of the association of particular limbs of the mother-goddess with the Śākta *tīrthas*, which may have some relation with the Tantric ritual called Pīṭhanyāsa,⁴⁷ belongs, as already pointed out, to the latest stage in the development of an ancient tale. But the story may have some connection with Buddhist legends regarding the worship of Buddha's corporeal relics and the construction of *Stūpas* in order to enshrine them (cf. *Select Inscriptions*, I, pp. 84, 102 ff., 120, etc.) as well as with those concerning the various manifestations of Buddha in the Jambudvīpa (cf. the list of 56 countries in the *Candragarbhasūtra*; I.C., VIII, pp. 34-35; BEFEO, V, p. 261 f.).

The sites connected with the lives, and especially with the *tapasyā* (austerities) of saints, seers, magicians, and other persons of charismatic impact have been the center of pilgrim attraction ever since the days of Mahavīra and Gautama, but the tendency is probably much older. Whether the pilgrimage to physical, sartorial, or other remains is a Buddhist innovation or older than Buddhism cannot be decided at present; but I would assume that the custom is older, if aboriginal proto-Indian customs extant to this day, which display some sort of relic worship, can be used as a pointer; the more so if such a custom is peculiar to an *ādīvāsi* (aborigine) group surrounded by caste Hindus who do not practice a similar custom. As an example, I would mention the Santhals in Chota Nagpur, who deposit little pebbles and pour oblations of buffalo milk over the burial site of some of their revered ancestors to which they make individual pilgrimages at least once in their lives.⁴⁸

There is a paradoxical feature which seems fairly pervasive in India: monastery sites or temple ruins are not visited by pilgrims except inci-

⁴⁷ See *Śabdakalpadruma*, s.v. *nyāsa*; cf. *aṅganyāsa* (touching limbs with the hand accompanied by appropriate *mantras*) and *śodhanyāsa* (six ways of touching the body with mystical *mantras*) from which the *pīṭhanyāsa* seems to have later evolved. Originally certain limbs were mentioned in connection with a Tantric ritual in which the names of the Pīṭhas were afterwards introduced. In explaining *pīṭhanyāsa*, the *Vācaspatya* says, "*pīṭhadevatānāmādhārasaktiprakṛtyādinām prāṇavādina-mantrena hṛdaye nyāsabhede tantrasārah*," "After pronouncing the formula beginning with 'OM' and ending with '*namah*' pertaining to the *pīṭha*-deities, the basic 'Sakti-s' and natures, in one's heart, differentiating the '*nyāsa*'—this is the essence of tantra." The association of the limbs of the *sādhaka* with certain localities may have given rise to the belief regarding the Pīṭhas arising from particular limbs of the mother-goddess.

⁴⁸ My own observation near Hazaribagh, July, 1951. See also N. Datta-Majumdari, *The Santhals: A Study in Acculturation* (Government of India Publication, 1955).

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dentially. One would expect that a site where not one but many saints assembled or lived together in the pursuit of yogic practices should offer increased attraction to the pilgrim, more than the place of some individual saint's memory. I believe I can offer a hypothesis: The Indian religious mind is averse to any sort of institutionalization; apart from the Buddhist and Jain monastic orders, and their later emulators in medieval Hinduism, there has been no ecclesiastical framework for the Hindu. He follows an individual *guru* as an individual, and he does not derive spiritual guidance from any formally installed clergy. Sacerdotal functions are vested in the hereditary Brahmin, but the Brahmin per se is not a spiritual guide, unless he de-institutionalizes himself voluntarily, either by retiring into *vānapras-tha*, the "forest-dwelling" stage (which in contemporary India means just retiring into a less approachable part of his house, abandoning all ritual except his own individual observances), or by entering monastic life (which means abandoning all observances for the sake of full-time *yogic* contemplation). Centers of pilgrimage become institutions, no doubt, in due course, but it is the institution that encroaches on the place which was originally sought for the merit the individual hierophant bestowed upon it.⁴⁹

I would adduce two almost contemporary cases of intensified "pilgrimization" due to the one-time presence of a saint. The one is half an hour's bus ride from downtown Calcutta, the temple of Dakṣiṇeśvara; it is officially a Kālī Temple, but then there are hundreds of Kālī Temples all over Bengal. The increasing number of pilgrims to the site—from all over Bengal, from other parts of India, and more recently from the United States and Europe as well—is not due to the shrine but to the memory of one particular priest who functioned there toward the end of the last century. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the reknown Bengali mystic, lived in a garden which belongs to the temple, and he used to meditate under the huge *pañcabatī*—a pippal tree (*ficus Indica religiosa*), or rather five trees clustered into one. It is this *pañcabatī* which attracts the pilgrims, and also his simple little living-room close by. The *pañcabatī* in its turn has always been an attraction to the *yogi* who seeks it out as a site conventionally conducive to contemplation.

The other paradigm is perhaps even more interesting, and illustrative of a typical dichotomy in the purpose of pilgrimage: the fire-

⁴⁹ There is voluminous literature on the hagiological order in all Indian vernacular literature. The Sanskrit precursor of this genre are the *sthala-purāṇa*'s, books about, and kept in, the great temples of Southern India, in which, apart from the usual guidance to the official ritual conducted in the shrine, there is prolific description of the lives and deeds of saints who lived in the vicinity of the temple.

liṅga at Arunācala, District North-Arcot, in the State of Madras, has been a center of pilgrimage for many centuries—it is one of the five *bhūtalīṅgas* or natural representations of Śiva—the others being the earth-*liṅga* at Conjeeveram, the wind-*liṅga* at Kalahasti, the water-*liṅga* at Jambunath, and the (invisible) ether-*liṅga* at Chidambaram. The Arunācala shrine is as old as its name (*aruna-acala*, “dawn-colored mount”). Around 1880, a Tamilian saint, Ramana Maharṣi (the title “great seer” was given to him by his early devotees around the turn of the century) settled at the foot of the hill, and in time an *āśrama* congealed around him—it is now one of the internationally known spiritual hermitages of India. It is to this place that hundreds of pilgrims come every week to pay their homage to the master who died in 1951. Now the interesting fact is that this influx of pilgrims into the Tiruvannāmalai region (Tiruvannāmalai is the Tamil for Skr. Arunācala) has doubled, but the number of pilgrims visiting the Arunācala shrine on top of the hill has increased only by about 25 per cent since 1900.⁵⁰ The reason seems to be this: unsophisticated people who vow a pilgrimage to the shrine will not usually visit the hermitage of the late Ramana Maharṣi, except incidentally—they might, for instance, be told about the sage’s powers when they worship at the Arunācala shrine; and pilgrims to the hermitage are of a more sophisticated brand, due to the fact that Ramana’s teaching was the austere form of *advaita*-monism the Hinduism of this century has yet offered. I talked to two pilgrims visiting the hermitage, one of them a lawyer from Mysore, the other an affluent cloth merchant from Gujarat, Western India. I asked them if they would go to see the sacred hill and the temple, they answered in the negative: the lawyer said he had come to pay homage to the master’s memory only, and that there were many Śiva temples all over Southern India; and the Gujarati merchant did not even know there was a famous shrine on top of the hill. Some other visitors, to Ramana’s hermitage—Tamils in particular—did and obviously keep visiting the temple on the hill—this may account for the 25 per cent increase in less than sixty years, but they do so with an almost apologetic mien, for visiting a temple is a low-brow observance compared to visiting a hermitage of so sophisticated a frame. “I shall go up because Ramana went up to worship when he came here,” a visitor from metropolitan Madras told me.

This shows how very well defined the purpose of pilgrimage is: Arunācala and the Ramana-*āśramam* offer different goods—they have

⁵⁰ Personal information from Sri Muruganathan, caretaker of the old shrine, in 1952.

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a different *phala-sruti*; Arunācala pilgrimage grants much the usual boons—the curing of disease, especially lung troubles (this belief might be connected with the fire that erupts from the mountain which is an active, though harmless minor volcano), and remedy from barrenness; the Ramana hermitage, on the other hand, ushers the image of the highest achievement—supreme wisdom, self-realization, but offers nothing else. The Hindu has a very keen sense of theological domain: one has to appeal to the proper authority for any particular boon. When a person loses his money, a Bhojpuri-Hindi proverb says Śivjī kī pūjā karī—“he must have worshipped Śiva,” that is, the deity of asceticism and of the monastic virtues, for example, rather than Viṣṇu and his spouse Lakṣmī, the givers of wealth. The same holds for places of pilgrimage, though in a lesser degree—some of the great centers are supposed to give virtually all the benefits from affluence and health to salvation; and yet pilgrims would, if they have the choice, rather go to a Viṣṇuite center like Tirupati in the south or Brindavan in the north, if they want wealth, and to Kāśī (Banaras), the town of Śiva, if they want spiritual emancipation.

III. BUDDHIST PILGRIMAGE

The Pali canon did not make pilgrimage incumbent on the votaries of the *dhamma*. The Pali Buddha neither recommended nor prohibited any of the observances which were customary with the Brahmins and Hindus around. Yet it seems that his attitude in this matter was much the same as in matters of other customary observance—soothsaying, *mantra* and *yantra* use, etc. are not condoned by Gautama, but they certainly are connived at. There seems to be some evidence⁵¹ that soon after the *parinirvāna* (the Buddha's decease) the practice arose among followers and sympathizers of the *dhamma*, and perhaps among the Buddha's personal friends, of paying visits to places where relics of the preceptor were kept. The desire to keep and perhaps display the Buddha's relics cannot be explained from any known Hindu precedence—nothing of the sort is mentioned in any pre-Buddhist literature. The building of memorial *stūpas* over them, following the distribution of the relics, cannot be traced to anything older—in fact, the Buddhist *stūpas* and *caityas* are the oldest instances of relic worship in India.⁵²

⁵¹ A. S. Geden, *ERE*, X, 13.

⁵² The object of Buddhist pilgrim interest par excellence is the *stūpa* and the *caitya*; Monier Williams declares the two as partly synonymous; *caitya* (MW p. 402) “a funeral monument or *stūpa* or pyramidal column containing the ashes of deceased persons, sacred tree, esp. a religious fig-tree, *ficus religiosa*, growing on a mound, hall or temple or place of worship, esp. with Buddhists and Jains, and

It may be held that one of the central ideas of Buddhism the "going forth" (Skr. *pravrajya*, Pali *pabbajja*) did rest on some previous notions connected with a form of pilgrimage. In canonical usage, *pravrajya* is a technical term for admission to the first grade of Buddhist monasticism (*upāsaka*), that is, for the first ordination. The Dhammapāda defines the *pabbajita* (pilgrim, lit. the "one who has set out") as one who has abandoned the world.⁵³ In an earlier verse, however, it says that the aimless pilgrim (using the word *pabbajita*) not only fails to secure his spiritual merit, but only scatters more widely the dust of his uncontrolled passion.⁵⁴ It seems certain that *pabbajita* did remind the early Buddhist of some sort of (spiritually inutile) stray pilgrimage, though as a technical term it never meant anything except ordained retirement from worldly affairs, that is, acceptance into the Sangha.

The instruction for the Buddhist monks to lead a peripatetic life, without settling in a home, and all the *vinaya*-sections which deal with the bhikṣus' demeanor en route must have added to the ease with which the Buddhists assimilated the Hindu practice of pilgrimage to holy sites. The verse constantly chanted in the Theravāda office is "Go ye, O *bhikkhus*, wander for the gain of the many, for the well-being of many, out of compassion for the universe, for the good, for the gain, and for the welfare of gods and men."⁵⁵

There is only the rule of *vassa* (Skr. *varṣa*), that is, the observance of the rainy period during which mendicancy has to be interrupted. The same holds for all Hindu monastic orders in which long tours and pil-

generally containing a monument"; *stūpa* (MW p. 1260) "a heap or pile of earth or bricks, etc., esp. a Buddhist monument, *dagoba* generally of a pyramidal or dome-like form erected over sacred relics of the Buddha or on spots consecrated as the scenes of his acts; any relic-shrine or relic-casket made of various materials, such as terra cotta, clay, elaborately formed brick or carved stone; often very small and portable, and enclosing a fragment of bone or a hair . . ."; Edgerton gives "relic mound, tope"—*BHS Dictionary*, p. 608—for *stūpa*, and for *caitya* "any object of veneration"—note *BHS Dictionary*, p. 232—here he says "seems to be used more broadly than in classical Skr., like the ornament on a *stūpa*, the monastic robes, cf. *caitya-bhūta*" "of the nature of an object of veneration," said of a place where a particular *sūtra* is to be proclaimed." This approximates Skr. *tīrtha* in semantical width.

The Siamese form *cedi* (*phra cedi*) both for *stūpa* as also for the designation of that part of the temple (*wat*) where the ordinations take place, contrasted with the *bot* derived from *bodhi* (tree), the second large building within the *wat*, which is used for the more general functions.

⁵³ Dhammapāda x. i. 89.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, i. 75.

⁵⁵ "Carata bhikkhave, cārikam bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya aññhāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānām . . ." *Mahāvagga 1, 10* (*Mārakathā*) (Nalanda ed.), p. 23; Geden gives a wrong reference in *ERE*, p. 14, the passage is not 1, 11, 1, but 1, 10. This passage is so very close to Indian religious sentiment even to-day that the late Dr. Ambedkar selected it for recording on his two HMV Pali phonograph records (78 rpm).

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grimages are incumbent on members. Yet it does not seem that the *vassa* period was rigidly adhered to, as Chinese pilgrims recorded long journeys where there is no remark about such interruption due to the observance of the *vassa* rule.⁵⁶

In later Buddhist works of both the schools there is frequent reference to pilgrimage in the narrower sense (i.e., as *tīrthayātrā*). The Buddha-Carita uses Hindu phraseology and states that purification from sin may be achieved by living or bathing at sacred places.⁵⁷ Such *tīrthas* are "ladders to heaven."⁵⁸ Another passage says that the Buddha created millions of mendicant ascetics whose peregrinations are pilgrimages from shrine to shrine.⁵⁹ Sacred rivers and *tīrthas* are acknowledged partly by assimilating Hindu scenes of interest, but most of them are connected with early Buddhist hagiology. The same text says: "those who bathe and offer worship in the sacred river and revere the *cāitya* . . . become *bodhisattvas* and *mahāsattvas*, and reach *nirvāṇa*."⁶⁰ A canonical text says that right-minded followers of the doctrine cherish their places of pilgrimage.⁶¹

As is the usual procedure in India, any statement which is felt to be in need of preceptoral sanction is gradually put into the mouth of the founder. Thus, the Buddha himself is said to pronounce the sacred character of shrines and other places associated with the lives of *arhants*, and to extol the merit of pilgrimage to these places; "There are four places which the follower should visit with feelings of respect and awe . . . the place at which the follower can say, 'Here the Tathāgata was born' . . . 'Here the Tathāgata attained supreme *bodhi*' . . . 'Here the Tathāgata set foot making the spot into a kingdom of *dhamma*' . . . 'Here the Tathāgata passed away into the traceless passing away' . . . and there will come to that spot followers, brethren and sisters of the order, or devout men and women, . . . and they who shall die while they, with trustful heart, are journeying on such pilgrimage shall be reborn, when the body shall dissolve, in the happy realms of heaven."⁶²

It is evident that the number of Buddhist Indian places of pilgrimage is limited, and in no way comparable to the Hindu and Jaina *tīrthas* scattered profusely over the country; the Buddha is felt to have been an historical personality, and the area of his personal preaching is pretty well defined. There is no unequivocally Buddhist *tīrtha* any-

⁵⁶ Th. Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India, passim*.

⁵⁷ *Buddhacaritam*, ii. 37.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, x 2, xv, 78.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, vii, 40, *svarga-sopāna*.

⁶¹ *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, v. 16 f.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, xxvii, 24.

⁶² *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, v. 16-22.

where in South India, and the *tīrthas* connected with the Buddha's own life are limited to Bihar, Eastern Uttar Pradesh (Gorakhpur District), the Nepalese terai and the Banaras area. The most important centers, from the oldest times on up to this day, are the places traditionally associated with the life of the founder. Kapilavastu and Kuśinagara (Gorakhpur District, Eastern Uttar Pradesh), Buddha Gayā (Central Bihar), and Sārnāth (near Banaras, Uttar Pradesh, the deer park Pali Isipatana) rank as the foremost. On these places, the Chinese pilgrims have reported at length.⁶³ Today more than in the past centuries, these sites are being constantly visited by pilgrims from the Buddhist countries, and many different denominations have built monasteries in these areas. Thus, the Burmese Sangha has a beautiful monastery at Rajgir (Rājagṛha) in Bihar; the Thai are building a large *wat* with Thai and Indian Government subventions at Buddha Gayā—it is to be a center not only for Siamese, but for Buddhist pilgrims of all Theravāda countries; at Buddha Gayā, the *bkaḥ rgyud pa* sect (the Red-hats) of Lamaism has a monastery; at Sarnath, the Muḷagandhakuṭi Vihāra, built by J. K. Birla, a Hindu merchant, offers shelter to all Buddhist pilgrims, and is administered by highly educated, English speaking Ceylonese monks and some Indian convert-*bhikkhus*. At Nalanda, on the site of the ancient Buddhist Academy, the government of Bihar has built the "Nalanda Institute of Postgraduate Buddhist Research and Pali" whose guest-houses shelter learned pilgrims from all Buddhist lands. The Japanese Nihonzan Myōhoji sect has a monastery at Rajgir (Rājagṛha), frequented by Japanese pilgrims. At Sarnath, there is also a Chinese Buddhist temple, large and very well kept by a Chinese monk. In the last two decades quite a few new pilgrims' rest houses have been built for Buddhists, at places directly or indirectly connected with Buddhism; thus, the Indian Government built a rest house at Sanchi (Gwalior), the *stūpa* connected with the Buddha's main disciples Sāriputta and Mahāmoggallāna; and a Buddhist Vihāra has been built as part of the (Hindu) Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇ (Birla) Temple in the midst of New Delhi, attracting numerous pilgrims who visit the Indian capital.

I observed an interesting phenomenon at Amṛtsar in the Panjab. Amṛtsar contains the central sanctuary of the Sikhs, who have certainly nothing whatever to do with Buddhism; in fact, hardly anyone in religious India is quite so antagonistic to it as the martial Sikhs. The Baṛā-Darbār-Sāhib (referred to as the Golden Temple by tourist agencies) at Amṛtsar is surrounded by a large cemented tank. Among the pilgrims, I often noticed Tibetans, many of them in monastic

⁶³ See Watters, *op. cit.*

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garb. When I asked the Sikh headpriest about them, he gave me the somewhat fatuous information, "They also come here to pay respect to Guru Nānak Dev" (the founder of the Sikh religion, born 1469). Of course, they do nothing of the sort. I had a hunch that their pilgrimage might have something to do with the pond rather than with the temple. Padmasambhava is said to have been born in Zahor,⁶⁴ and though Tucci identified it with Uḍḍiyāna (Urgyan) locating it in the Swat Valley, we should not dismiss the possibility that some sectional Tibetan folklore locates Padma's birthplace in this very pond—both his legendary birth and his name imply his birth in the midst of an expanse of water.

The Lumbīni Grove at Kapilavastu, the Buddha's birthplace, is represented by the mound now known as Rummin-dei, that is, "goddess of Rummin." This mound is located in the Nepalese *terai*, about 6 miles northeast of Dulha in the Indian Dt. Basti, in a location locally called Tappa Rummindei, about 2 miles north of Bhagavanpur, headquarters of the Nepalese *tahsil* (subdivision), 1 mile north of the village Padaria. The Tilar River mentioned by Huen Tsang flows a short distance to the east of the mound. The nearest railway station is Uska.

It is interesting to note that as yet this region has not attracted as many Buddhist pilgrims as would be expected, that is, in comparison with the number of visitors to Gaya, Banaras, or even Sanchi. The reason is not far to seek: the site was laid bare in 1895 only, and was hidden in the thickest *terai*; it is barely accessible even now, and it emerges only gradually from the oblivion of the ages. That a place is traditionally connected with a sacred event does not necessarily imply pilgrim attraction in India; it appears that it is the fact of being established as a pilgrim center that enhances its popularity. I asked some Burmese Buddhist pilgrims about it, and they rationalized the matter by saying that the place of the physical birth of the Buddha is after all not so important as the place where he turned the wheel of the law, that is, the site of his first sermon at Sarnath. Similar rationalizations are made by Hindus when the center of pilgrimage connected with the activities of a particular person is more frequented than his place of birth. Many more Vaisṇavas visit Tirupati in the South than Brindavan in Uttar Pradesh, the birthplace of Kṛṣṇa. However, whenever the birthplace is a well-frequented site, no such argument is held out. It seems to me that the pilgrimage frequency at a particular site is often based on expedience more than on hagiographic or mythological conscience. Gayā and Sarnath are well established as centers of Bud-

⁶⁴ See Taranatha, *Geschichte* (Schieffner).

dhist pilgrimage, the pilgrims are well looked after, and there are many people to show them the sites and tell them the deeds that sanctified the place. It is very likely that after some years the actual sites of Gautama's birth and death will become as popular as Sarnath—that is, if the government of India keeps up its efforts to popularize these sites; it was, after all, the kings and princes and the local merchants at all times who spent wealth for the creation and preservation of sites dear to them, and the Indian attitude seems to be “*jiskā rāj, uskā tāj*” (lit. “whose kingdom, his crown”) a Hindi proverb meaning that whoever be in charge of affairs, all the jobs of his predecessors descend on him.

The two most popular places, however, are still Buddha Gayā in Bihar and Sarnath near Banaras in Uttar Pradesh. They are now visited by pious Hindus just about as much as by Buddhists; the Hindus worship the Buddha as the ninth, that is, the last, bygone incarnation of Viṣṇu.

At Buddha Gayā, Aśoka had built a large temple of eleven stories and about 160 feet high,⁶⁵ each of which originally contained golden images of Śakyamuni. This building was said to have been erected on the site of what must have been the first monument on the spot where he attained *bodhi*. The ancient edifice had been rebuilt many times, and the famous temple with its many images which now occupies the site is constantly being visited by Buddhist pilgrims from everywhere. The shape is *gopura*-like, that is, trapezoid, and as there is no similar ancient structure anywhere in North India it seems possible that the form is ancient, and that the reconstructions did not diverge in important details from the Aśokan temple. The temple is really the main sanctuary of Buddhism, and there are replicas of its structure in other regions far apart; the Chamadevi Temple in Lampun, near Chiangmai, Northern Siam, struck me as a perfect miniature edition of the Bodhagaya shrine; the temple in pegu (Burma) shows close resemblance.

The most important feature inside the *sīmā* (the border,—i.e., the temple grounds) at Gayā is the ancient Bo-tree, the *pīpal* (*ficus Indica religiosa*), mentioned earlier; its arboreal ancestor is supposed to have shadowed the Śakyamuni's seat. There are many other *pīpal* trees surrounding the temple, all of them possible descendants of the historical one. The pilgrims place their offerings and pour their libations of oil, scents, and lustral water at the foot of the oldest, which they regard as the very same under which Gautama sat; some stick obla-

⁶⁵ Description of Hiuen Tsiang, see *Watters, op. cit., passim*.

tions of gold leaf to its trunk or else to the low stone stairs which surround it.

Sarnath near Banaras (the deer park, *isipātana*, Sanskrit *ṛṣipātana* is the site of the *dharmacakkhapavassana*, “the setting in motion the wheel of the Dhamma,” that is, the Buddha’s first sermon to the five Brahmin ascetics. The ancient *stūpa* on the site, visible from over a mile and fairly well preserved up to this day, may well be the one seen by Hiuen Tsang in the seventh century. The government of India keeps conducting excavations in the vicinity of the great *stūpa*, which resulted in unearthing quite a number of smaller *stūpas*. The place is full of pilgrims at all times, and Tibetan pilgrims in particular do circumambulation of the great *stūpa*, as also of two smaller *stūpas* recently excavated. Not only that, they often circumambulate the museum built by the government of India’s Department of Archaeology, obviously thinking it to be a part of the sanctuary. Unsophisticated pilgrims in India do not distinguish between museum-type objects and objects of veneration, if the former be of an iconic type.

Pilgrim history of Sarnath is extensive, and there is quite a bit of secondary material on it.⁶⁶ From the account of the Chinese pilgrims it would seem that centers of Buddhist pilgrimage were much more numerous in olden days—as would be expected, for India was partly Buddhist at that time. Aśoka allegedly built eighty-four *stūpas* near Pāṭaliputra (the present Patna), which he is said to have erected over relics of the Buddha, and the town is said to contain monasteries and hostels with thousands of pilgrims visiting them.

According to Fa-hsien, at Śrāvastī (identified with the extensive ruins at Sahet-Mahet in the Gonda District, (Uttar Pradesh) the first sandalwood image of the Buddha was erected; there also was the monastery at Jetavana said to have been built by an early lay follower, on the site of many of the Buddha’s discourses. Later, in the time of Huen Tsang, both of these were already in ruins.⁶⁷

Around Rājagṛha (present-day Rajgir, Bihar), some of the most popular pilgrim sites must have been located.⁶⁸

The Nalanda monasteries were destroyed by Bakhtiar Khilji in the twelfth century. The government of Bihar began to build the new in-

⁶⁶ There is a lot of Hindi literature on Banaras, and although it is chiefly of Hindu interest, the Buddhist sites are always mentioned, the story of the “setting in motion of the wheel” being given in most of these manuals; I am thinking of a book printed by the Sarasvatī Press at Banaras “*Kāśī Tīrthon kā saṃgrah*,” “synopsis of the pilgrim centers of Banaras,” where I remember having seen a large chapter on the Buddhist sites.

⁶⁷ Watters, VI, I, 377 ff.

⁶⁸ Note on the Buddhist Council of Rājagṛha, *ERE*, IV, 182.

stitute (see above) about fifteen years ago, and it is now the one institution in India where monks from all Buddhist countries reside studying Sanskrit, Pali, some Tibetan and Buddhist canonical subjects in a modern fashion. The place was not intentionally visited by pilgrims until recently, though some pilgrims took it in on their way to Rajgir, from where it is less than 7 miles away. During the last few years, however, pilgrims have been going there more frequently, and they do now circumambulate the ruins of the old monastic university; there is no doubt that the presence of the institute and the monks were the original impetus for this renewed pilgrimage, and it is likely that Nalanda will be a regular Buddhist pilgrim center again very soon, just as it had been in the Middle Ages.

Buddhist pilgrimage conducted largely by non-Indian travelers is thus very much in evidence in northern India today. In the Pali Tripitaka, there is no mention of any merit or advantage of pilgrimage, nor any sanction given to the practice. Gautama obviously neither encouraged nor forbade any outward observances, and it appears evident that he tolerated all the customs that were prevalent among his contemporaries, so long as he did not think them detrimental to the *dharma* taught by him: he expressed direct disapproval only where he felt they did, as in the case of caste observance. It is certain, however, that very soon after his death the practice arose among his followers to visit the places consecrated by his presence or by the presence of his relics, which had been distributed among devotees at various places, who began to build *stūpas* probably right after the founder's death.

IV. PILGRIMAGE IN THE HINDU TRADITION

There is a distinction in India between general sanctuary topography and purely tantric topography. In the first place, I repeat, the Hindu (Brahmin and orthodox) word for a place of pilgrimage is *tīrtha*, the tantric word is *pīṭha* "seat," though *tīrtha* is also used generically in some tantric texts. The tantrics refer to their specific shrines, ponds, and other sites as *pīṭhas*. The word is loaded; in the *sandhābhāṣā* (intentional language) of the *tantras* it connotes the female organ, and the *Śiva-Linga* is always represented as imbedded within the *pīṭha*, never alone.⁶⁹

As to the locations themselves, there is a very radical difference in accent; the orthodox Hindus enumerate seven places as the most important, though there is no single tradition as to locations making up this number; but the great majority of the Hindus accepts these as the

⁶⁹ See my article "Sandhābhāṣa" in *JAOS*, Vol. LXXXI, No. 3 (1961).

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most important *tīrthas*: Kāśī (the canonical name for Banaras, spelled Varanasi in official records since 1947); Prayāg (the area around the Triveni, the confluence of the Ganges, Yamunā, and the mythical Sarasvatī near Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh); Mathura, the birthplace of Kṛṣṇa, eighth and most popular incarnation of Viṣṇu, in Uttar Pradesh halfway between the Indian capital and Agra; Hardvar (“Gate of Śiva”; Vaiṣṇavas, however, as well as many Hindi-speaking North Indians who are not necessarily Vaiṣṇavas, pronounce and spell Haridvar, i.e., “Gate of Viṣṇu”) on the upper Ganges, about 20 miles from Dehra Doon and 50 miles from Delhi; Ayodhya, birthplace of Rāma, seventh incarnation of Viṣṇu and hero of the Rāmāyaṇa epic, in Uttar Pradesh, near the present Faizabad; Dvāraka in the State of Gujarat, the city where Kṛṣṇa ruled as king; and Kāñcī-puram, the present Conjeeveram, about 50 miles south of metropolitan Madras. In place of Mathura and Dvāraka, Nisik in the State of Maharashtra, one of the sites for the *kumbhamela*, and Avantikā, the present Ujjain in Rajasthan, are sometimes listed. In this most frequent enumeration, be it noted, that there is only one South Indian shrine. It is a strange fact that all Hindus, even the southerners themselves, regard the North as the more universally important pilgrimage area. The southern shrines and bathing places, especially in Tamilnad, have local reference more often than not, and their mythology is based on the writings on and by the Tamilian saints, particularly the sixty-four preceptors of southern Śaivism.⁷⁰

There is one interesting phenomenon which has so far evaded occidental writers on Hindu observances. It seems that certain shrines are believed to have a joint purpose, and that they fall into a pattern of worship and mythology, guided not by any particular mythological event, but by some specific quality in the represented deity. It is an iconographical pattern. The places are often far apart, and the distance seems to be no consideration. Thus, the Devī (i.e., the *magna mater* in the Śaivite and Śākta traditions, and in all specifically tantric traditions) is worshiped at three different places with reference to the shape of her eyes: the Goddess Minākṣī, the “fish-eyed” one, is worshiped in the large, magnificent temple of the same name as Madura. She is a purely Dravidian goddess, the word “*mīna*” for fish, though used in classical and later Sanskrit, being definitely a Dravidian loan;⁷¹ the Goddess Kāmākṣī, that is, “with libidinous eyes,” who has her

⁷⁰ For a very good survey of the southern pilgrimage complex, refer to Diehl, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ I am indebted to Professor Emeneau of the University of California at Berkeley for this information.

shrine in Southern Kāñcī (Conjeeveram); and the Goddess Viṣālākṣī, "of huge eyes," whose shrine is at Banaras. Now Madura and Conjeeveram are not more than about 200 miles away from each other, but Banaras is over 1,500 miles from both; yet, South Indian devotees group the three shrines together, in spite of the fact that the Goddess Viṣālākṣī at Banaras has a very small, indeed almost what I would call a theoretical, temple—a little hutlike sanctuary located in the midst of the former Muslim *mahalla* (municipal district) of the city; there is not even a regularly appointed priest in charge of the shrine. I could not find out if there has ever been a proportionately large temple of Viṣālākṣī at Banaras, at the present site or elsewhere. North Indian pilgrims are not conscious of this "triangle"; I asked the head priest of the Viṣvanāth Temple, the most important shrine in Banaras, and perhaps in Śaivite India if he knew about the Goddesses Mīnākṣī and Kāmākṣī. He knew about them indeed, and told me they were located somewhere in the South, but he knew nothing about the connection pattern with the local "Viṣālākṣī."⁷²

V. PILGRIMAGE TOPOGRAPHY

1. *Sacred rivers*.—Although almost every river, or for that matter most of the small rivulets, in India have some sort of religious fame, the large streams are *tīrthas* for all Hindus. However, river confluences have always had the highest prestige—perhaps a sort of additive fame attaching to a place where more than one river can be bathed in at the same time. Thus, there are the seven sacred confluences, the most important being that of the Ganges and the Yamuna at Prayāga; the site is called *triveṇī*, meaning "a confluence of three (rivers)," the third being the mythical Sarasvatī river, which is believed to join the two through a subterranean approach.⁷³ This is the site of the most impor-

⁷² In Bengal, there is an interesting confusion not noted before; it might provide a precedence for explaining certain similar confusions in the realm of pilgrim-interest. The Bengali pronunciation of *Viṣālākṣī* is "Biṣālākhi"; but as "lakhi" is close to their pronunciation of "*lakṣmi*," i.e., the Goddess of Prosperity, spouse of Viṣṇu, "Śri," the Bengali tradition confuses the "*lakhi*" of "*Viṣālākṣī*" with "*lakṣmi*"; and as there is no distinction whatever between the palatal and the cerebral sibilant (in fact there is only one phoneme in Bengali for the three sibilants *s*, *ś*, and *ṣ*, namely, "*ṣ*") folk etymology misspells *Viṣālākṣī* as "*Viṣalakṣmi*," and carrying the error to its logical conclusion, the Bengali devotee worships the (Banaras-dwelling) "*Viṣālākṣī*" (i.e., "the one with huge eyes," *viśāla* + *akṣī*) as "*Viṣa-lakṣmi*," i.e., as the Lakṣmī who cures snake-bite and other poisonings! They are not aware that *Viṣālākṣī* is *not* Lakṣmī at all, but the equivalent of the Bengali Kālī or Durgā, and that she has nothing to do with snake—or any other—poison.

⁷³ The Sarasvatī is not entirely "mythical"—there certainly was a small river flowing into the Ganges up to the early middle ages, but its merging with the two at Prayāga is almost definitely a myth. The Bhīṣma Parvan of the Mahabharata mentions a river Sarasvatī which joins the Ganges near Banaras, which is about 80 miles east of Prayāga.

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tant of the three Kumbhamelas, the assembly of up to a million lay and monastic Hindus every six years. This site is the confluence par excellence, and all other sacred confluences are called "Prayāga" after it; as such, it is also called "Bhaṭṭa-prayāga," that is, the Prayāga of the Brahmins. The next in importance is the Viṣṇu-prayāga, the confluence of the Alaknanda and the Leti in Garhwal, in the western Himalayan *terai*. Then about 80 miles to the southeast from there, there is Nanda-prayāga, the confluence of the Alaknanda and the Nanda; then of the Pindar and the Alaknanda near the Pindari glacier in the Almora district of Uttar Pradesh, called Karṇa-prayāga; of the Mandākinī and the Alaknanda, the famous Rudraprayāg, in Tehri Garhwal; of the Bhāgīrathī (i.e., the upper Ganges) and the Mandākinī, that is, Deva-prayāga, less than thirty miles from Rudraprayāg; and finally the confluence of the Krishna and Vena rivers in the State of Andhra, the Dakṣiṇa-Prayāga (i.e., Prayāga of the South). With the exception of the main Prayāg (Allahabad and the Uttar Pradesh) last, all of the acknowledged confluences are situated in a small area along the Alaknanda, that is, in the districts Tehri and Pauri Garhwal, which is a veritable cluster of sacred places, and the classical assembly line of the Himalayan teachers of yore.

All sources and estuaries of the sacred rivers are highly esteemed places of pilgrimage; Gangotri, close to the Tibetan border, located in the District of Dehra Doon, is hard to reach and involves quite a bit of climbing; yet it is visited by thousands of pilgrims every year, and I have seen old women slowly ascending with the aid of staffs. I asked several of them, and their answers were quite stereotyped to this effect: "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." Deaths, however, are far less frequent than one would expect, and during a whole summer—1951—which I spent at Gangotri there was only one pilgrim reported to have died from strain and exposure. There is no built sanctuary at Gangotri, and the pilgrims' observance consists in bathing in the ice-cold river which is less than 5 yards in width at this spot. Gangotri has some twenty monastic establishments, and some of India's most renowned saint-scholars have their *āśrama* in the forest around the site, for example, the late Swami Tapovanam, one of the most celebrated contemporary commentators on Vedānta philosophy. Pilgrims went to him and to other famous monastic personages for *darsan*, charismatic vision, which confers blessing and spiritual strength. Other famous sources and estuaries are Amarakantak, in the Vindhya mountains,

the source of the Narbada; Mahabalesvar in Bombay State, of the Krishna and Vena rivers; and, of course, Ganga-sāgara, the estuary of the Ganges, in West Bengal.

2. *Dhāma's and other non-aquatic pilgrim centers.*—Places mythologically ascribed to specific deities or divine forms are called *dhāma's* (abodes) and almost every Hindu has heard their names; votaries of the various deities regard it as an office of high merit to make a pilgrimage to the *dhāma* of their chosen or tutelary deity (*iṣṭadevatā*) at least once in their lifetime. Thus, the *dhāma's* of Viṣṇu, especially in his form as Kṛṣṇa, are the famous Jagannāth (“Juggernaut”) at Puri, Orissa; this is the place of the famous *rathayātrā* “car-procession” festival held in August. The current notion that pilgrims threw themselves under the wheels of the *ratha* (chariot) to find death and salvation is largely incorrect. There have been, and are accidents—over five hundred people get hold of the ropes to pull the huge vehicle, on which the three deities of the shrine (Kṛṣṇa, his brother Balarāma, and his sister Subhadrā) are carried in procession, and it did happen that some pilgrims got pushed under the wheels.

In spite of its Vaiṣṇava provenience, there are strong tantric features in the worship of Jagannāth at Puri. It is not known to most Hindus—and it is certainly not made known to the pilgrims who come to the place, for fear of losing the more orthodox among them—that the “*prasāda*” (food distributed among the devotees after it has been offered to the deity as an oblation—thought to be food touched by the god and returned to the devotees for their benefit) is sprinkled with wine on certain occasions; it is then referred to as *mahāprasāda*, that is, the “great” *prasāda*. This term has strange connotations in different traditions. Among the Sikhs, *mahāprasāda* is simply a euphemism for meat—as the Sikhs refer to all food as *prasād*;⁷⁴ among Assamese tantrics, *mahāprasāda* is the *sandhā*—term for human meat. It seems to me that the epithet *mahā-* prefixed to *-prasāda* is the same derogatory sense as in certain other words whose derogatory sense as codified by Pāṇini.⁷⁵ In the context of religious observance, the analogy might have been felt at times when tantrism began to flourish as something distinct from conservative religion.

Some other *dhāma's* of Viṣṇu are Dvāraka in Gujarat (mentioned earlier as one of the seven great *tīrthas*); Badarīnāth the only Viṣṇu-temple of importance in the Himalayas—about 50 miles from Gango-

⁷⁴ The Panjabi (and Hindi-Urdn) word for a *rotī* or *chappati*, i.e., the staple wheat cake, is *prasāda*, even in completely mundane parlance.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Mahāvaidya*, lit. “great doctor” euphemism for death; *Mahāpañḍita*—a poor or phony scholar; *Mahājyotiṣi*—an inefficient astrologer, i.e., one whose predictions turn out to be false.

tri, and Tirupati in the District of North Arcot, 80 miles from Madras.

Badarīnāth is one of the most intriguing places of pilgrimage. In the first place, it is very difficult to reach, as the bridle path from Gangotri is even steeper and much more erratic than the path leading up to Gangotri from Uttarkashi and from the plains. Next, there is a large magnificent temple at Badarīnāth, built in the fourteenth century. It remains totally uninhabited during eight months of the year, and is covered completely with snow during a larger part of these eight months. The head priest is a Nambuthiri, that is, a Brahmin from Kerala, the southwestern corner of India, an intensively tropical area. He belongs to the caste of the great Śaṅkarācārya, preceptor of the Daśanāmī Sanyāsī order of monks. He died about A.D. 780 and is said to have vanished into the mountains either here at Badarīnāth or else at Kedārīnāth (see below) about 100 miles due west from Badarīnāth; it has been the greatest ambition for the Kerala Nambuthiri Brahmins for many centuries to be appointed head priest at Badarīnāth. During the cold season, the priest either returns to South India, or else he stays at Haridvar or at another religious center in the Himalayan regions which are inhabitable throughout the year.

The most important *dhāma* of Śiva is Somnāth in Kathiawar (Gujarat), which had been razed by Muslim chieftains in the fifteenth century and which was reinstalled only about twelve years ago, with the president of India presiding over the function. To my knowledge, this was the only instance in independent India where pilgrims were "organized"; religious organizations—both of a monastic and a lay character—collected funds to send pilgrims in impressive numbers to the spot.⁷⁶ I had the impression that the Government of India, otherwise somewhat averse to public denominational worship, condoned the event in the pursuit of "cultural, secular efforts."⁷⁷

Other *dhāma*'s of Śiva are Mallikārjuna on the Śrīśaila mountain in Mysore; Mahakāleśvara in Ujjain, north of Indore; Oṃkāra, on an islet in the Narbada river; Kedārīnāth in the Himalayas; Bhīmaśaṅkara at the source of the river Bhīma, near Poona (Bombay State); Tryambakanāth "the three-eyed lord," near Nasik, on the Godavari; Vaidyanāth (Baijnath) in the Santhal Parganas, Bihar;⁷⁸ Nāganāth

⁷⁶ The All India Arya Hindu Dharma Sewa Sangha in Delhi, the Devaswam Board of Travancore and Cochin, and the Sanātana Dharma Pratinidhi Sabhā of Nagpur, to mention a few.

⁷⁷ This phrase is often used by Sd. K. M. Pannikar, who believes that the perpetuation of religious observance can be the business of a secular government also, albeit only *sub specie culturae*.

⁷⁸ Monier Williams wrongly identified it with the Vaidyanath Temple in Ahmednagar, in the former state of Hyderabad; the *dhāma* is in Bihar, and is

(Nāgeśvara, Lord of the Nāgas), beyond Ahmednagar; Rāmeśvara, on an island about 1 mile from Dhanushkoti, Madras State off the Indian mainland; and Ghṛṣṇeśvara at Ellora, near Aurangabad.

Of these, Kedārnāth and Rāmeśvaram are the most interesting for our purpose. Kedārnāth (like Amarnāth in Kashmere) in the Himalayas does not have a temple, the object of worship being a natural *liṅga*, that is, a stalagmite in a cave (Amarnāth in Kashmere is also a *liṅga* of ice). At Banaras, there is a large, beautiful temple controlled by the Thampi sect of southern Śaivism, and the merit accruing through a visit to this shrine is said to equal that of doing the tedious pilgrimage to the mountains. This is a frequent phenomenon in India: important and meritorious place of pilgrimage have a sort of regional substitute in far-off places, saving pilgrims the toil of physically visiting the original site. Thus, the Ekāmbareśvara Temple at Conjeeveram (Madras) has a little low corridor which is closed by a small metal gate; the corridor is said to be a subterranean connection to Kāśī (Banaras), 1,500 miles away. The gate is not opened at any time nowadays, but the priest told me that if a person insisted on creeping into the passage, circumserpeting the sanction, he would acquire the same merit as from a pilgrimage to Banaras and the circumambulation of the *pañcakōṣī* (the circumferential path of about 25 miles around the city of Banaras 1,500 miles away). However, he added, it has not been known that anyone dared the feat. Other vicarious shrines also offer to the pilgrim the merit of Banaras, that city being the pilgrimage center par excellence. "The place is a veritable Kāśī"—is an idiom found on many blurbs of less illustrious shrines and centers.

Rāmeśvaram ("the Lord of Rāma," i.e., Śiva) is the ideal distant target of North Indian pilgrims; its distance (almost 2,000 miles from the Panjab) is an additional attraction, if not in fact, at least ideally so. Even the extant temples are large and very old.⁷⁹ The sanctum is a *liṅga* which is said to have been installed and worshiped by Rāma himself when he was on his way to Lankā to recover his wife. There is a belief current among the pilgrims that if water drawn from the Ganges at the Maṅikarnikā Ghat in Banaras, part of which has been offered to Lord Visvanāth in that city, is poured over the *liṅgam* at Rāmeśvaram, the latter grows in size! I have met at least two persons who undertook this long-distance ritual, one by train, the other by air.

probably the most popular Śaivite center of pilgrimage in northeastern India. The Vaidyanatha Temple in Ahmednagar is of purely local importance and does not have the status of a *dhama* (see Monier Williams, "Hinduism," p. 178).

⁷⁹ Built by the Pallava rulers in the sixth or seventh century.

VI. THE TANTRIC ELEMENT IN INDIAN PILGRIMAGE

The purely tantric tradition of four *pīṭhas* was not known to occidental scholars until recently. Monier Williams seems to have had a vague idea about four shrines dedicated to the Goddess. He wrote: "there are also four celebrated shrines of goddesses: Mahālakṣmī at Kolapur, Bhavānī near Sholapur, Reṇukā at Mātāpura, Yogeśvarī about 80 miles from Ahmednagar."⁸⁰ But these are random minor shrines.

Most of the early tantras, both Buddhist and Hindu, refer to four *pīṭhas*. Sircar thinks that the conception of the four *pīṭhas* may have been associated with the Buddhist tantric notion according to which the adept can rise to *mahāsukha* ("the great bliss") through the esoteric practices involving sex.⁸¹ He quotes a Buddhist tantric text called Catuspīṭhantantra ("the tantra of the four *pīṭhas*") and its commentaries, one of which was copied in A.D. 1145.⁸² This text speaks of the four *pīṭhas* as *ātmapīṭha* (the "shrine of the self"—strange sounding Buddhism indeed, but not infrequent in Sanskrit Buddhist terminology), *para-pīṭha* (the shrine of the transcendent), *yoga-pīṭha* (which is self-explanatory) and *guhya-pīṭha* (the secret, i.e., esoteric shrine) and it deals with the various kinds of Vajrasattvas (tantric Buddhist divinities) and their intercourse with the Yoginīs, with Prajñāpāramitā and others. "This philosophical concept," D. S. Sircar avers, "of the Catuspīṭha was either the cause or the effect of the early recognition of four holy places as *pīṭhas*."⁸³ He adds, "it is difficult to determine what relation the Catuspīṭha could have with the Catuspīṭha Mountain near Jajpur in Orissa, and with other Sahajayāna conceptions of "four," for example, the *caturānanda*, "the fourfold bliss."⁸⁴ The Hevajra Tantra, composed around A.D. 690⁸⁵ enumerates the four *pīṭhas*, and to my knowledge this is the earliest enumeration: (1) Jalandharā (definitely near the present Jullundar, East Panjab); (2) Oḍḍiyāna (or Udḍiyāna, Urygan in Tib., misspelled Udyāna, viz., "garden" in the Bengali *Dohakośa* ed. Shahidullah) in the Swat Valley;

⁸⁰ See "Hinduism," p. 179. None of these shrines are identical with one of the classical tantric pīṭhas; and on this count, there are at least two hundred shrines of goddesses in India, of equal importance as the ones mentioned here.

⁸¹ D. C. Sircar, "The Śākta Pīṭhas," *JRAS*, XIV, 11.

⁸² Note H. P. Sastri, "Cat. Palmleaf and Selected Paper Manuscripts belonging to the Durbar Library, Khatmandu, Nepal."

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 11. This, of course, ties in with the important problem of the hypostasization of centers of pilgrimage; on this crucial theme see M. Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), *passim*.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* The mountain is a purely tantric shrine, and Orissa in general is a "tantric" region par excellence.

⁸⁵ See B. Bhattacharya, *Sādhana-mālā* II, p. xliii, and Snellgrove, *The Hevajra-tantra*, I, 14-15).

(3) Pūrṇagiri (the location is doubtful), and (4) Kāmarūpa (Kamrup in Assam)—at present the only *pīṭha* of the four actually visited by institutionalized tantrics.

The same tradition is followed in the Kālikā (chap. lxiv, 43–45) Purāṇa, which calls them (1) Oḍṛā, “seat of the goddess Kātyāyanī and the god Jagannātha, (2) Jalasaila, seat of the goddess Caṇḍī and the God Mahādeva, (3) Pūrṇa or Pūrṇasaila, seat of the goddess Pūrṇeśvarī and the god Mahānātha, and finally (4) Kāmarūpa, seat of the deities Kāmeśvarī and Kāmeśvara. These four *pīṭhas* are allocated to the four directions, but this is pure theory, and stands in accordance with the tradition to allocate every ritualistic locale to a direction of the compass, and hence to group them either in fours or in tens, sometimes in groups of eight (i.e., omitting the zenith and the nadir). In reality, however, even the alleged locations of the four main *pīṭhas* are very irregular indeed: Oḍḍiyāna, in the Swat valley, is the only far-western site—Kāmaūpa and possibly Pūrṇagiri are in the extreme east, and Jālandharā again in the middle northwest (Panjab). None of the four *pīṭhas* is situated in the south, in spite of the fact that the Kerala region has a strong tantric (Śākta) element in its culture; in one form or another Śakti is the tutelary deity of Kerala.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Although D. C. Sircar’s list in “*The Śākta Pīṭhas*” is very elaborate and possibly almost exhaustive, he does not list three extremely interesting tantric pilgrim centers. They are shrines dedicated to Śakti in her three forms as “. . . mother,” *Mukhāmbikā* in North Cannanore on the Malabar Coast. She is the “mouth-mother,” i.e., the idol shows the lower portion of the head only; then there is *Hemāmbikā*, the “golden mother”—the name has no bearing on the shape of the idol, which is probably quite unique in India: it consists of only two female hands protruding out of a little artificial well. The legend says that the officiating priest once cast lewd glances at the goddess when he was administering her ritualistic bath, and she sank into the water with shame, and has been concealing her full form in the water ever since, holding out her hands only for the benefit of the devotees. The third “*ambika*” is the famous “*Bālāmbikā*” “girl-mother,” a synonym of Kanyā Kumārī, the goddess of Cape Comorin—“Comorin” being a Portuguese corruption of “Kumārī”; there is a convent of Belgian nuns at the place—India’s southern tip; Christian missionaries have been there since the early eighteenth century; a Tamilian nun told me that the Christian belief was that “Kanyā Kumārī,” i.e., “Virgin Goddess” is actually “Kanya Mary.” Until 1920, when the temple authorities barred non-Hindu entrance into the shrine, Christians entertained the notion that the goddess was none but the Virgin, usurped by the heathens for their purpose. To my knowledge, there is no secondary literature whatever, so far, on these three Kerala shrines, in spite of the fact that South Indian tantrics—by no means only Kerala tantrics—hold the shrines in high esteem and that they have been well-frequented centers of tantric worship and pilgrimage for centuries.