

TRAVELOGUE

MIRABILE, Paul

**Journey on Foot through the Western Himalayas
and
Retreat at Phuktal¹**

*«The traveller has to knock at every alien
door to come to his own, and one has to
wander through all the outer worlds to reach
the innermost shrine at the end.»*

Tagore

Introduction

Buddhism, its writings and iconography, its monasteries and chants; the Himalayas, their smells of Deodar and of Juniper, their cobalt snow-coiffed peaks and lapis lazuli valleys; and the solitary voyager, pilgrim or wayfarer are inextricably entwined: attempting to excise the parts from the Whole only plunges the curious-minded into a quagmire of cliché, of beguiled erring. No Experience is fragmented, parenthetical...the Whole must be encompassed before any reality transforms into an Experience, or the Experience, at an ontological level, transforms into reality...

For ontology is the Experience in which Art is perceived as a religious synthesis, be it iconographic or scriptural. Images and sounds transform daily foot-shuffling into a lighter, bouncier step! Art and Poetry transfigure the 'little man' into a pilgrim; his daily commerce into legend...into an odyssey. The Poet is he who creates his own life...

But this must be willed! To seek Without is equipoised in Time and Space as to seek Within: they are complementary. This dual movement constitutes the Art of Exposure. It also discards, with uncurbed violence, parasites, both professional and amateur.

¹ This travelogue was written in 1996. The piece here is an abridged version of it. The full version, including photographs and maps, can be read in the supplement to this issue. — *Editor*

For the experiencing of the Whole is a life-long Way of piecing each Event into and out of one's Self. It requires absolute Exposure; and this demands total sincerity without which Exposure can have no effect upon the Voyager.

And the Way is on foot! It is the stride that permeates the body, from the foot upwards and not the contrary. The inhaling and exhaling that absorbs, the ambulatory exercise of observation amasses the fragments into that Whole.

The Experience of the Whole may begin in a museum, with a book, or at times in idle, lounge-chair conversation; however, it truly begins with a gust of hot or cold wind upon the exposed face, with the naked foot touching soft soil or veiny marble. What then is the experimental triad? Imagination-Will-Exposure! And from this triad all legends are wrought. For it is the legend that is Art, it scoffs at the pious lies of historians.

It may just be that this chronicle has been written as a panegyric to the Hungarian philologist and Voyager Alexandre Csoma de Kőrös. Undoubtedly, the author of these pages sought to emulate the great Hungarian orientalist. Him, and indeed sundry others of the same stalwart and adventurous breed. And yet, there may be another reason: to delect in the simple and primordial things of life is not a sound reason to heave anchor and set sail? Must one really err from one prison to another? This author certainly thinks not...

To retrace an Experience consists not of piecing together fragments of reminiscences, memories and sensations?..

'Il y avait peut-être sous ces signes quelque chose de tout autre que je devais tâcher de découvrir, une pensée qu'ils traduisent à la façon des caractères hiéroglyphiques.'

M. Proust

Part I**The Mountain Journey to Phuktal**

*«Over the snowy peaks of the Himalayas burns a bright
glow, brighter than stars and the fantastic flashes
of lightning. Who has kindled those pillars of light,
which march across the heavens?»*

Nicholas Roerich

The Outset

At Lamayura, five or six hours by bus from Leh, the capital of Ladakh, the Singge sanctuary lay steeped in darkness. The small prayer hall, located in a maze of mud-baked adobe homes of a complicated network of low, narrow corridors, crumbling stairways, unceremonious entries and dilapidated walls is an iconographic gem for the contemplative: the oozing walls, one of which was cleaved from top to bottom, revealed an array of colour, tone and motif reminiscent of Alchi. Hundreds of tiny seated Buddhas nudged neatly in their red niches, other pastel-like figures such as Tara (the green and white ones), Heruka, the bodhisattvas, dancing skeletons or the *turdak*, those mail-coated warriors, were all either ensconced in their ruddy recesses in seated position, or lodged in larger dwellings, fully upright. Although the paint had flaked considerably, punctuating the frescoes with ugly chasms and fissured breaches, the variegated Buddhas could be discerned in all their refined contours and intense colours: notably Amitabha, in *Dayana-asana* leg-posture, his fine hands fashioned in the mudra-position nestled between a woman figure and an elderly man; he glowed a lusty red, encased within a guild-edged greenish shadow of himself. Here, the wrathful Buddhas and the milder ones blended into a harmonious One, reconciling thus the two extremes of opposing forces. All the *Dhyani-Buddhas*, one of whom is the statue of Vairochana, the transmuter of hate, expose him to the ruthless onslaught of non-duality; the relentless quest of Harmony...Mahakala glares at the contemplator as he steps into the dank second chamber, there where Paldan Llamo and a host of dancing skeletons pin the unexpected pilgrim to his place. To penetrate the intensity of the colours and the soundness of the curves means to leap out in order to leap back in! To be passive only as a passage towards activity.

And there the Lord of Compassion: Adalokiteshvara, four-armed, pure white (but not of hate!), radiates in joy in his large niche, peopled with bodhisattvas and flying Dakini, some of whom are playing flutes. He extends his thousand arms to those who suffer a thousand circumstances of suffering, whose souls lie exposed to a thousand pinings of mundane demeure. Milarepa had been a terrible tyrant, slaughtering at will, purging and pillaging, offering his extraordinary services to the Power of Hate. His conversion transformed the Power of Hate into one of Love...of Creation! Poetry and Art...like Mahakala, that once puissant demon who crushed even the strongest of gods, but who, yielding to Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara, joined forces with Poetry and Art in the eternal cycle of Creation...

Contemplation: penetration of colour and motif. Milarepa was no Saint Bernard or Saint Augustine. Saint Bernard refused to reconcile hate and love; he never experienced the harmony of contrasts. On some occasions he would speak of love, and on others of hate. He would pray to God for the souls of the tortured, lead screaming warriors against internal reformers and external infidels. As to Augustine, in spite of his conversion, he remained ontologically manichean: one does not evangelize with a soul overflowing with *ressentiment*...

The following morning, after a somewhat stifled sleep in my tiny cell, I settled my accounts with the prior and set out on the grassy path that would lead to the village of Wanla. Grassy at first, as I ascended the rock-strewn way, the luxuriant green, however, disappeared, leaving barren-faced stone and mounds of pebbles or glacier debris. It was the third of June and although only at 3.800 metres the earth bore the scars of thick glacier sediment. Enormous white bands streaked the lees of granite, peppered palisades of vitreous rock, enameled by the flow of long, hard winters. The path snaked upwards, narrow and sinewy: it was my first pass...

I carried 25 kilos: books with some writing paraphernalia, 50 packages of Maggi (a sort of Macaroni soup), dried apricots, warm clothing, a light stove with two small gas cylinders, a sleeping bag, a tent and my Pentax. In Leh, I had also purchased a small pot and frying pan. I had borrowed the pup-tent from a friend in Leh. It would certainly bail me out if no village, monastery or shepherd's hovel were to be found.

Huffing up a dried river bed which serpentine in and out of valleys and narrow glens, I took a rest on a flat-surfaced boulder atop Prinket La, a mountain pass of 3.750 metres. In spite of the blazing sun the briskness of the air chilled my exposed cheeks. I pulled my bonnet further down over my ears. The sky, a pure indigo, clashed against the whiteness of recently fallen snow that crowned the crenellated crests of the mountain ridges. I checked my books: the *Dhammapada*, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the *Superhuman Life of Gesur of Ling*, translated by Alexandre David-Néel, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, my Sanskrit grammar and dictionary, Tagore's *Gitanjali* and my own make-shift glossary of Ladakhi and Tibetan words with English and French equivalents. These were fine companions for mountain solitude...

Ladakh, cut from the world during nine long months, suffered from a lack of fresh food. Peasants and city-dwellers stocked what they could, praying that the Kashmir road would be cleared by the military at the end of May, which unfortunately was rarely achieved. As to the new road through to Manali, built by the military for the military (opened to civilians and tourists in 1977 up to Keylong in Lahaul, then in 1989 through to Leh), this was never cleared before the end of July! Thus I counted on the villagers of

Ladakh and Zaskar, knowing perfectly well, however, that they too would not have much to offer, and if they did, there would be much negotiating...Yak meat, cheese, yoghurt and curd they surely had, yet unlike the villagers of the Sahara whose lips curled in anger whenever one dared to offer them money for the tea and biscuits shared with them, here everything had a price!

The wintry winds and snow had beaten and thrashed these mountain kingdoms terribly: reports as far south as Kulu described the mass destruction caused by avalanches, unexpected snow-storms, overflowed rivers. Homes had been literally swept away, roads chopped up and fallen into bits, villagers and tourists killed under heavy snow falls. The old man in Lamayuru had explained that all treks into the Spiti Valley had been cancelled. And to think that last year I had spent months trekking in those devastated regions.

Darkness in the mountains settled in quickly. Over the russet flames of a hastily made campfire I warmed my fingers. The clouds, which had converged as if in battle array, slowly dispersed: over the blackening rim of a ridge the dim light of the crescent moon illumined various parts of the valley in an eerie ply of convex and concave forms...

At five thirty I was up. The light was a meld of the fantastic and the marvelous!

After breakfast of tea, honey and *chapatti* I resolutely made up my mind to tackle the Aksuta road. This would not require me to follow the Yapola River for very long which would save much psychological strain, for I had been told that the path weaved in and out of a vast canyon, at times so narrow that it became barely visible. The thought of constantly keeping a shoulder to the mountain wall in order to avoid the drop was hardly any comfort. Some English trekkers had lost three horses on that trail...had they lost any trekkers?

The nervy path arched upwards and downwards following the erratic rhythm of a veiny granite and limestone mountain flank, plunging headlong into deep ravines, then charging high above the foamy river again only to repeat the same movement. I felt like I was on the back of that Nilgiri jungle elephant, contracting and decontracting to each descent and ascent. But there the elephant did all the work, I on the *howdah*, the *mahout* shouting «hut!hut!hut!» followed by the crack of the stick on the beast's leathery ear or jowl. Here my legs cringed under a weighty pack, buckled when lifting a kilo of boots, trembled when crouching or slithering under low granite ledges in which (or through which) the path seemed to vanish, only to appear suddenly again some two or three metres ahead! There were some vicious bends where I hugged the gummy bulwark like a child its mother's breast, inching along the igneous filament. That day was one of stamina and nerve.

I reached a recently well-built bridge which, according to the map, designated the bifurcation Honumatta/Aksuta. I swung down, crossed the sturdy structure, then kept to the opposite side of the steep canyon. I had been walking for six hours...

The path got worse! More and more serpentine, meandering; it now transformed into a soft sandstone debris whose unsteady deposit offered no sure foothold, crumbling into pieces and sliding into the river at a foot's touch, at present twisting into natural cavities, low and jagged, wide enough indeed for two boots but under which I had to crawl. During that whole day I hadn't met one trekker...

From the 4.000 metre ledge I dizzily observed scattered *dzo* (not to be mistaken for yaks) grazing on *nurji* and other variegated moss along the river bank. Although some *dzo* were undomesticated, this type of yak displayed no aggressivity towards the mountain interloper. If they happened to be roaming on the path at my approach, they would simply slide down the slope and there, motionless on the abrupt acclivity, maintain perfect stability. The shaggy-furred creatures would look at me with their sad eyes, shake their thick necks, then waddle down to the river's edge...

The lonely route now ran through a mammoth canyon exposed to whipping winds and sleet. The snowflakes grew bigger and thicker. I began to crunch across glistening glaciers which snaked down from the acclivities, twisted through cleaved and fissured rock, swept down into the canyon, there embracing it. This land was terrifying! Foreboding, awesome, dangerous; the old man had told me not to strike out on my own in such wild country at so early a date. I hadn't taken his advice very seriously for after all this wasn't the Yukon Territory out of whose ruggedness Jack London had written many a story and novel. I was neither ill-equipped nor absolutely alone: hamlets, villages and monasteries marked my map...

The cold numbed my exposed face, and the grey clouds percipitated the advent of darkness. Tiny bullets of hail played tick-tack against the petrified stone mass. Sengge Base Camp still lay many hours ahead, too far to be reached before nightfall. Above to the right, perched on a crag, a shepherd's hut jutted out from the pasty sky: it was too far and too high. A rather deep streamlet suddenly barred my way. Instead of wading across it, I stupidly tried to make the jump: I missed and now my feet stung with cold. Where would I dry my socks and boots in this weather? The canyon began to annoy me: the endless turns, the dismal streak of horizon, the obsessional crunching of rolling glaciers. Each new bend brought hope of the end; alas, it only accentuated the length of the valley...

Now and then roan-coloured mammals, resembling otters, darted across the snowy path, disappearing into underground apertures. They were call *piha*. I wondered whether the Ladakhi hunted them; I had never seen a peasant shouldering a rifle.

Up till now I had come across wooden bridges of a sturdy character, constructed with cable or wooden rigging. There were, too, the more make-shift spans which the peasants had done on their own by merely heaping up stone upon stone in an oblique manner on each bank, then throwing a board across the current on which had been aligned slabs of stone so that the animals could walk over without the risk of slipping on the wood. Sometimes these primitive spans were barred on each side with dried branches or hay in order to prevent stray animals from crossing or falling into the river. I had been advised to close these barriers properly after having crossed the bridge. However, the bridge I now came face to face with offered no comparison to the other types previously crossed...nor would it be comparable to the others that I would cross...

Silver-birch being flexible and pliable, and neither cable nor rope steadying the span, the moment I stepped on to the bridge the whole structure gave up and swayed under my weight. As I made my way tentatively across her *horizontally*, little by little I found myself steadily sliding down her *vertically*! Without any rope-barrier, a dreadful sensation of emptiness overwhelmed me. The pliant structure, rolling to and fro, rocked in perfect harmony to the rushing winds of the narrow gorge. It tossed and pitched to the drumming resonance of the pounding flow. Once in the middle, I realized that I was

closer to the river than to the other side of the gorge! And so, with the deafening roar of the river in my ears, I inched awkwardly upwards, the birch wood giving in to each nervous step, the weight of the pack arching me now to the left now to the right. Once gaining sure ground I retrieved my Pentax and photographed her. It had suddenly occurred to me that a monograph on 'Bridges of the Western Himalayas' might stir enthusiasm in the editorial rooms of Europe. But in fact it never did...

The old villager had warned me to climb Sengge La very early in the morning when the solidity of the snow would not give way under my weight. If I waited too long I would find myself battling through waist-deep snow at 5.000 metres! And so, just as the rim of the peeping disc rose, I struggled up the coated slopes of the glistening white, the new soft rays making sparkle the caps of the icy undulating wavelets. Although I did plunge knee-deep into pockets of crusty snow the old man had spoken the truth: the freezing air of the morning maintained the compactness of its surface. In spite of this advantage the climb all but wasted me: age does not lie. At 43, one's stamina and endurance lack the fresh robustness of an eighteen or twenty year old's, no matter how strong the will to overcome. Indeed, those cross-country days, those twenty-kilometre days had widened and thrown out my chest, had obliged me to open my stride to keep pace with the 'taller guys', to draw deep breaths when breathing became uncontrollable ; half-way up the inclining slope I couldn't catch my breath! I heaved, panted and coughed...even long periods of rest proved insufficient. I decided to practice yogic respiratory exercises: ten seconds of inhaling, of retention, of exhaling, of retention and so on, whilst thumping one leaden foot in front of the other. I felt nauseous and somewhat disorientated. At least the breathing would occupy my chilled thoughts. Csoma, dressed in Tibetan garb, hands tucked under his armpits, suddenly flashed across my mind. And then another colourful image slid into view: the Hungarian's tombstone in Darjeeling, weeded regularly by the long-haired gardener...

With the white sun now full in the sky I found himself at the top, next to the flapping prayer flag, panting and coughing, my back against a make-shift *chorten* of heaped up flat stones. I felt weak but not ill. My thoughts soon steered away from the discomfort of the climb towards the might and grandeur that lay below: I was atop God's kingdom! Rippled crests, snow-capped or barren of ochre and russet, spread out in all horizons, an ocean of swirly vanishing lines and points stretching into a cloudless sky of nelumbo blue. Here and there valleys ripped through the granite bulwarks, whose spiky cants of salt and pepper shone iron-grey. A sudden wind stirred and gathered a few distant cloudlets concealed behind sparkling sommets, rushing them speedily through the lithic crenels, some trailing within the blue, others disappearing into the fissures and crevices, dashing into particles. The prayer flag flapped to the rhythm of the spectacle! This majestic sight engraved in my mind, I procured *Zarathustra*, my eyes falling on this bold phrase: '*..He who climbs upon the highest mountains laughs at all tragedies, real or imaginary...*' I lifted a booted foot and examined it: light feet? Light feet? Could I dance atop Sengge La with those booty brogans? Ah! And there was still the 'going down' to accomplish...

Yulchang was dominated by a huge fortress-like house which made me think of North Italy, especially Tuscany and her house-fortresses. From afar, this particular house, and those that straggled out behind it, blended nicely into the dun coloured backdrop of granite and tuft. However, as I drew nearer to them, and on closer inspection, I realized that the white roughcast and red-painted framework of the casements distinctly demarcated them from the ever-changing natural colours of the surrounding area, a playful ply between the light of the sun and the darkness of earthy soil and stooping blades of

buckwheat and alfalfa. A few children came running to greet me (this had never happened before), and pointed chubby fingers to the first house. They, in fact, led me round the back of it, to the left of three enormous *chortens*, and up again right in front of the dwelling where they halted in a small courtyard in which a pen and stables had been sturdily constructed. The façade of the house, imposing in height and width, contained no less than twelve perforated casements. A double wooden staircase led to a majestic door framed in unpainted planks. This was no miserable little village: to all sides lay carpets of green fields, and rising by degrees to the left of the house, the rest of the village with its monastery neatly aligned on the crest of the wide ridge like beads on a rosary. I rapidly negotiated a room for the night in the spacious house, then the owner invited me out for a stroll in the village...

After an hour's promenade, we entered a large wooden house by way of a long corridor, then down into a cellar where barrels were piled high and a group of men were seated in a circle. All the men were heavily dressed, sullen, gloomy, talking in whispers. In front of each, a brick had been placed upon which a wooden bowl lay filled with a thick creamy liquid. An old man whose beard glowed as creamy and white as the thick brew he savoured, presided the gathering; he was doing most of the talking whilst a younger man, seated directly opposite the 'foreigner', ladled out the *chang* in a very ceremonious fashion: only when a villager had taken one sip from the *chang*-bowl would he ladle out one more. This 'one sip' ritualized the solemn assembly, as the conversation passed from one man to another, each taking his sip, the ladled chant acting as the hubbed axle of a wheel that rolled on and on in a slow deliberate manner...along its ladled rut, the arm of the ladler, a mere spoke of the ancient Wheel. It rolled on and on, sluggishly, leisurely but never hesitatingly: tradition never hesitates! One sip at a time, one turn of the Wheel! One tirade at a time, one turn of the Wheel! One ladle at a time, one turn of the Wheel! *Chang* is a light alcoholic beverage fermented from barley. From what I had learned, the barley is first dried then boiled for several hours. The boiled barley is put into a sack for two or three days after which it is poured, in its liquid form, into kegs against which the 'foreigner' now reposed his aching back. Sometimes the *chang* is distilled in order to brew *rakshi*, a stronger spirit in the same way that *le marc* is distilled from the naked stems of the grape-bunch in Burgundy. The conversation, as the Wheel churned and churned, grew somewhat livier. I picked up pieces of phrases, mumbled words, laughing vowels or grounded consonants. This *chang* was certainly no sooty swill that one downed like a bar-brawler: the old villager had stated that it was a veritable institution, especially during marriage ceremonies at which time the groom's family enters the future fiancée's house with the *request-chang*. The groom's family returns a second time to the future fiancée's house and there negotiations begin for the marriage, during which the *fiancée-chang* is copiously served. However, it is only when the 'serious marriage negotiations' begin that the *listening-chang* is ladled out to both households in its usual circulatory manner. Finally, the last visit to the future fiancée's kith and kin is crowned by the offering of the *solution-chang*, the circulating of which seals the marriage negotiations. There in the cellar, however, no marriage negotiations were pending: the men merrily caused the Wheel to turn and turn and turn as it had always turned ever since the first sip had been sipped! My head, too, seemed to turn with the turning. The owner caught my eye and suddenly stood; it was time we were off to eat. We thanked the men, momentarily upsetting the perimeter, and dismissed ourselves. With a heavy head, speaking more Hindi and Ladakhi than I had ever imagined, we criss-crossed the labyrinth of lanes until the owner's house had been reached. Odd, I had always noted that when I wasn't 'quite myself' I spoke foreign languages with unusual fluency and accuracy! Perhaps this was why people or nations who cling unconditionally

to themselves remain dull, lethargic, almost asinine as regards language acquisition. For indeed, they cling to themselves as the patriot clings to his country, an infant its mother's nurturing but possessive breast. To remain pitifully oneself translates the attitude of the unreaching and consequently the unreached...Mevlanâ's technique of *semâ*, the cosmic dance, certainly had been created with the design to turn the ego-Self into the Other's Self...And it succeeded...But one must turn like the Wheel...And wasn't it Nietzsche who once proclaimed high atop his mountain: '...For one must be able to lose oneself occasionally if one wants to learn something from things different from oneself?..

Back in the owner's home we had a light supper in the kitchen. The Ladakhi kitchen is a lieu of sacredness! The hub of family and social life. All ceremonies and festive occasions take place in this remarkable space whose emptiness of miscellaneous items dissimulated the plenitude of the Sacred. The black iron stove in the middle of the room was rarely extinguished, continually fed with faggots by the women of the house, it being the very heart of the household for both cooking purposes and the welcomed heat it emitted during the brutal winter months. In order to kindle her, the housewoman would activate a little bellows which sent the flames dancing and the heat swirling. Now and then, she would throw in a faggot or some dried dung. A blackened pipe pushed through the smoke-hole (*yam-tong*, like the 'golden smoke-holes' of the Oghuz tents?) of the birch-rod ceiling which evacuated the fumes. In fact, the enclosure had no other outlet save this smoke-hole and the low squatty entrance of the room, generally covered by a thick curtain-like material. The mistress of the house rose from behind her stove and distributed *chapattis*, tossing them into the outstretched hands or plates of the children. In the dim light the 'foreigner' (who had eagerly accepted his third *chapatti*) noted that one of the kitchen walls bulged with copper cauldrons, pots, pans and other cooking utensils, all nicely placed on elongated niches, some of which were covered with newly cut wood, whilst others remained in their natural tamped state. The walls, too, like the floor, felt smooth to the touch, shone of well-polished clay, impeccably clean. However, the kitchen element that most fascinated me was the *ka*, that lone central pillar which bore the weight of the birch rods and the joists, all packed solidly with yak-grass and mud. For it is this pillar that once erected, symbolises the completion of the house, triggering thus *chang* celebrations and festivities galore! Symbolically, the *ka* is the Ladder that joins the house to the realm of the Sacred; at the same time, it acts as the Axis round which all fellies rotate. It is now the Nadir, now the Zenith! Connection is equipoise to separation. It is the Shaft of Light that illuminates the Darkness of the long wintry world, pulsating with warmth, invoking the Higher Order by the Lower, joining the Lower to the Higher...

The next morning, after having thanked my kind hosts, I set out fully refreshed: alas, that entire day proved to be terribly exhausting, and in the glimmers of twilight, I struggled up a spur on whose flat surfaced top Snertze, or the shepherd's stone hovel, was situated. I arrived precisely the moment in which the shepherd was leading his fifteen or twenty *dzo* up from the valley into the numerous low, stone wall enclosures that surrounded his abode. Instead of greeting the old shepherd at once, I crouched down and observed the penning of the animals. My tired thoughts drifted back to the twelve exasperating hours of jumping, hopping, skipping and sliding over glaciers and muddy debris. My hands bulged blistery red: the gradual contrast of the hot sun and the freezing snow had slowly swelled my fingers to monstrous proportions. There were moments when I couldn't feel my fingertips. The shepherd jerked his head as if he were calling to me. I jumped up and made a bee-line for the *dzo*-pens.

Although the shepherd spoke no Hindi, we managed, nevertheless, to communicate simply because the essentials of mountain life were contained in about fifty words, all of which I now knew by heart. The good shepherd invited me to pitch my tent adjacent the stone wall hovel, a safe distance from the *dzos*. Moreover, as I busily erected my flimsy annex, the stalwart man brought forth from his humble abode yak-lassi and yoghurt. Once settled in, we shared this excellent food to which were added three packages of Maggi cooked over a fire that the *dzo*-herder had expertly built with dried twigs and *dzo*-dung. For this unexpected gesture of hospitality, I offered my host twenty rupees. We conversed (this word, of course, should be understood in its broadest sense) until the *dzo*-herder's son, a strapping young lad, strode up the dark slope followed by three baby *dzos* who had apparently erred from the herd. He greeted us from afar then disappeared in the hovel. The shepherd shook my hand, and he too vanished within the entrance of the sturdy *doksar*, bending low in order to do so. I lay back: The province of Zanskar, isolated ten months out of twelve, has remained imbued in the joyous light of the Middle Ages! And is this not precisely the reason for which I, well-versed in mediaeval mind and lore, decided to traverse and sojourn in this untimely *Now*? In this utopian *Here* of Middle Earth? I inhaled the mediaeval ambiance and fell into a deep sleep. Before sunrise, I slowly descended into the harrowing gorge of the legendary land, the path of which serpentine along glimmering lees, whilst the Zanskar River herself thundered dizzily below, huge, metamorphosing into other forms both known and unknown...the echoes of her roarings bouncing off the tessellated bulwarks. Truly, this land glowed that marvelous mediaeval light; that gloaming of twilight...

PART II

The Retreat

Several days later I arrived at Purni, some five kilometres from Phuktal Gumpa. Outside I listened to the silent wind as it made the leaves of the silver birch shimmer. For a few moments my imagination ran riot: Pondicherry, where I had been working for five years, had, quite paradoxically been the starting point of this voyage to Phuktal! A chance meeting with a lad from Leh, a glance at his excellent satellite map, his finger running over the paths and passes from Lamayuru to Phuktal, his advice and encouragement; was this unforeseen Event not another contingency on the woof that weaves our narrative identity? Or had some 'hidden hand' guided me to Pondicherry in order to encounter the Ladakhi lad, to scrutinize his map, to follow his nimble finger, rejoice at the advice and encouragement? Had I been predestined to this voyage in the same way as the one over the Sahara to Tombuktu in 1972-73, and the one that would take me over the Mekong River to Northern Laos from Southern China? Or was a narrative identity a more complex process of will-power and hope? A meld of contingency and determinism struck me as the meaning behind the expression Royal Road; that Road that joins the Past to the Future via the Present...

My narrative identity may be a stretch of that Royal Road, and by shaping it perhaps I shall be able to understand it! Have I understood why my steps are now taking me to Phuktal? Have I fully comprehended this Himalayan halt? Could it be a nostalgic plunge into the golden past that I am sluggishly accomplishing in the Present because totally unconcerned with the Future? Am I a mere tourist or rather an earnest pilgrim? Are the lieu of worship in which I have prayed cold temples of stone, or rather the warmth of the hearts of men?

A long, long voyage on the broken line of Life: And does this voyage imply a duty to posterity, an absolute inertia towards that posterity, or a prophetic vision of the Future? These thoughts tugged at me as I made my way to the monastery.

The walk, in effect, required no great exertion, although I did have to be on the alert against falling rocks caused by the gambolling *barasins*, who leapt back and forth along the ridges far above. Had anyone ever been killed by the falling rocks of a *barasin*?

At the newly built bridge, I caught sight of Yugar, a hamlet which lay opposite the monastery. I struggled up a path which wound round the gorge, and ten minutes later Phuktal Gompa, ensconced within the tuft of fairy chimneys, honey-combed spires, crags, bluffs, flat-nosed pilons, bulging white and red against the background of sandy dazzling ash and cinerous tones of hemp, sprawled out! From the old photos that I had seen nothing appeared to have changed: the immutable architecture betokened no poverty; here it bespoke rather of the nobility of the spirit...

From the jagged palisade a solitary tree emerged in full strength of its age, protecting the huge open maw of the 'Meditating Grotto', just like the cobra's hood protects Buddha from the blazing sun, parasols the Jaina saints...I approached the layered edifice along a path traced by seventeen *chortens*: those gleaming translucent drops of the Buddha; I had never seen so many *chortens* that escort the weary wayfarer to his monastery retreat. Soon I was met by an aging monk who accompanied the weary wayfarer to his little cell of stone...

The aging monk, the librarian of the gompa, escorted me to my cell: it was bursting with Juniper-leaf incense. The scent emanated a certain warmth which contrasted with the chilly dampness of the corridor. The whole cell in fact gave the impression of coziness, due, I guess, to the small square carpets that formed a quaint corner near the window, below which had been placed a straw mat and a *choksey*. I peeked out of the tiny window which offered an extraordinary view of the gorge. I turned to the standing monk who had been observing me stoically. He stood upright in the centre of the cell where no carpet blanketed the tamped earthen floor because of the stove around which bundles of faggots had been neatly stacked, and alongside of which a few tea pots, cups, bottles of sugar, tea and a poker lay strewn. He told me keep my door locked when out or at night, then left me to my own thoughts...

Night mantled the gorge with a bluish darkness, the colours of which recollected the Himalayan Series of Nicholas Roerich's paintings. I had to sit or crouch down in order to peer out of the tiny window, so low had it been encased. I had been told that some forty monks were actually residing at the monastery, and that the library contained rare books in Tibetan, Pali and Sanskrit, but also in some Western languages, notably English. I imagined that Alexander Csoma's English-Tibetan dictionary, the first of its kind, was amongst those rare books.

I lay back on the mat; gradually the images of Ngawang Tsering rose before me: the Phuktal monks were fed upon mountain solitude, their robes, the misty clouds, their hats, caves...The waters of the Meditation Grotto were always of the same level, even during the monsoons when, thundering they spurted from the gigantic maw, cascading down into the deep gorge where the thunder joined the Lungnak River. I would drink these wondrous waters, cool and apparently curative, boil them upon my stove. I filled my stove with faggots and dried dung...

The morning mist upon the mystical mountains: the sky, pale and blue, after a night of light rain. The Gelupka, a lamanist cult of the yellow bonnet was founded by Tsongkapa during the XVI century in defiance to the other lamanist sects at the time. Tsongkapa sought to re-abide by the ancient doctrine of the Buddha as preached in Northern India. This reformed denomination was quite powerful in Ladakh and in Zanskar. Why I awoke with this piece of information learned on the way to the gompa caused some confusion in my mind; in fact, I felt light-headed, almost nauseous. I splashed some water on my face from an earthen wash-basin, then wandered up to the prayer room: dark, calm and droning, the monks sat on cushioned benches, their legs crossed in *vajra*, their hands in the *mudra* of meditation, their shoulders flung back like the wings of a vulture, their throats bent like hooks, their backbones straight like arrows, their eyes fixed into space, four fingers from the point of their noses, their teeth and lips in natural respite, their tongues glued to their palates. They all appeared quite comfortable..

No one stirred as I crept in and took my place in a corner to the left where a cushioned bench lay unoccupied. The low murmuring of the *mantras* is a continuous meditative woof, punctuated by the beating of dragon-painted drums (*rnga*), the jingling of triangles, the clashing of cymbals (*aghati*) and the braying of ox-horns (*glang-ru*) and conch shells (*chas-dung*). At the foot of the Buddha sat the High Priests in throne-like chairs, coiffed in yellow bonnets, reading the *pustuk*, the Sacred Book, whose pages are turned from the bottom up, exactly the way in which the *thankas* are rolled...and unrolled...

The prayer room, one of the three of the monastery, steeped in smoky shadows (there was no electricity, only rows of candles near and round the statue of the Maitreya Buddha), suffused with camphor and copal, was ice-cold. The younger monks slapped their 'vulture' sides and shoulders as they chanted, beating their carmine mantles as if ready to take to the wing! As to me, I had wrapped my Kulu shawl snugly round my shoulders and pulled my Keylong socks right up to my bony knee caps. I observed that all the monks were barefoot: Did they not here mantle themselves with the cloth of mindfulness? Did they not here chant to prompt the lamas to rule virtuously, or so all Buddhists, high or low, rich or poor, could receive the blessings of the Buddha? Liturgical rites and prayers energize the spirit...

From time to time I stood and went outside to stretch my aching legs. The prayer hall was just to the right of the 'Meditation Grotto', inside which, according to legend, had been the original XI century hall. Deep in the big fish's mouth (for it did appear to be Jonas' big fish: like the fresco at Sumela!) some monks hurried to and fro from a well, lugging huge pails of water for the monastery kitchen. The cave, an enormous natural cavity in the face of the mountain, sheltered a few cells *in pisé* to the left. To the immediate right, the outer wall of the prayer hall, founded by Sherab Zangpo in the XV century, and in which the prayers were still in session, transpired a gluey humidity that caused all the roughcast to dribble down to the cave floor. It was on that sticky wall that a shiny plaque commemorated Csoma Sándor of Kőrös' two year sojourn at Phuktal between 1825 and 1827. He unfortunately left no document

to attest to this remarkable experience; to this truly ontological immersion with the Other. The plaque consecrated this grand gesture of reciprocity, this ultimate experience of 'togetherness'...

Every day, when the ceremony had finished, many of the monks gathered round me to ask questions; my Ladakhi was hardly adequate to understand, much less to answer those cheery-toned inquiries. I did, however, make an effort, whose grammatical and semantic inaccuracy doubled the delight of their Himalayan countenances: rough, rugged, coarse, as if carved out of the mountain granite like the monastery countenance carved out of this pulsating cliff...

A coenobitic existence is one in which every individual shares the same countenance: mountain solitude! But not the same Path towards Eternity. This chiasmus is what runs deep in Man, for it exposes him to an aporie: being his Being, he has thus the choice of being conscious of Being, filling it with insight and equanimity. Yet how many of us do? For this very reason the Buddhists, whilst celebrating Cham, wear the masks of their divinities: the mask that represents the Other, and consequently what we are...it is a direct means of communication with the Other; for being with the Other is Being *tout court*....

The movement of the vocals and instruments incite various meditative and contemplative levels within and without us: a sort of ontological 'temps fort et temps faible', which contracts and decontracts Existence, which makes surge existential profundity through the extension of being. Similarly, existential profundity may create ontological depth, or may have been created by it! It may, too, sprout sterile dichotomy: ontology/existentialism...form/matter...Essentia/Existentia...philosophy/theology...Here in the East, one proposition does not cancel out another, does not prove one proposition false, does not convince us of untruthfulness; they are both sound because they have been wrought from ontological and existential circumstances...they have been proved by and in Life...'Contrasts' are therefore not contradictory: they are a Harmony, a One whose emanated manifestations are all but that One, whatever form, matter or colour they may assume at one particular moment. This is not Pantheism or Monism, it is another way of loving and serving an expounding Creator and His Creation...It is a Philosophy of Life...The High Priest, a yellow conical bonnet fixed proudly on his raised head, tapped the rim of a cymbal with the ring of his middle finger; it kept the time of extraordinary long silences punctuated on every fourth beat by the powerful intone of the monks' chanting: raising slowly from the bowels...of the Earth. The High Priest would simply let the ring 'bounce' off the razor-sharp rim, as if a marble had dropped onto a stone floor: bouncing...bouncing...bouncing...like the backwash of the sea: declining...declining...declining, only to return, sometimes accompanied by 'dying voices': from sharps to lows...and lower still to the bowels...of the Earth. The *dzongs*, which lay carefully on their carmine-cushioned tripod stools were lethargically lifted to the lips of four monks, listlessly, and sounded, a lull, a bellowing vibration, or rather a dull undulation, rolling in languid wavelets that caused the very foundations of the hall to pitch and toss...

The pounding rains had ceased, momentarily: every pitch claims a particular Time and Space because a sound signified nothing in particular outside of this Whole. Would I ever be seized by this auditive Time and Space? How long would it need to seize the listener in a precise moment of Time and Space? I had absolutely no intention of leading the hermit's life; my existence merely lay in the margins of the world narrative, out of which my own was being forged *hic et nunc*...

...and that night the spiritual Dance of Mahakala began: six monks masked as Mahakala, strode out of the hall into the open Space in front of the doors, swords held high. They twirled and whorled in a slow deliberate drum beat from inside the prayer hall. A reflected beat, every three or four seconds...perhaps to each whorl (incertum). The six monks, gruesome in their colourful masks, huge and menacing, flaunted, paraded and exhibited them to all and sundry; for we are communicating, indirectly, with the Enlightened One. Around Buddha they danced, shaking their masks...a clash of cymbals was answered by a chorus of ox-horns and conchas. The silence...excruciating Silence. The six Mahakalas remained rooted to the floor, that ice-cold floor, petrified, like fossil wood. How long? The drum resounded: one foot moved then another. Another drum beat forth and the dance began anew, slowly, deliberately...druggedly. All six masked Mahakalas dashed from monk to monk, blessing them with holy water. I, too, was blessed; a terrible green mask lured at and over me...

I stepped out into the freezing night. The ox-horns blared, the monks resumed their murmuring. Tiny flakes cooled my burning face. In spite of the darkness, the contours of the mountains could be readily discerned, black against grey. A Roerich painting? Yes, I felt no desire, no 'real' desire to descend into the scorching plains, teeming with crowds of saffron and hemp colour; into the stuffy, stifling and claustrophobic Institutions, where stale discourses intermingle with crass self-esteem and tiny pleasures, where polite respect dissimulates great respect for oneself. And yet Sándor did indeed direct the Asian Society; did publish twenty-one articles in Calcutta; did work for those who despise hermits, outsiders, marginals, renegades. I remember those poignant words:

'...Dharma has mind as fore-runner becomes noble through mind, is mind itself...'

Did Sándor go native? Did he reject his poor family background, the majestic Carpathians of his fatherland to don the weeds of orgulous erring and haughty erudition? According to legend, this poor adventurer returned to his native Transylvania carrying with him a small bag of gold! But I saw his tomb at Darjeeling! Alexandre Csoma of Kőrös became what he was: a bodhisattva...

Back in the icy room, the Kulu shawl thrown tightly round my shoulders, I lay the *Dhammapada* wide open at this verset:

'...knowing this two-fold Path for gain and loss, one shall employ one self in such a way that there will be the growth of knowledge...'

With the waning of daylight the monks removed their rooster-like, conical bonnets and there on their cushioned benches stood for a full thirty minutes. No one coughed or cleared his throat; a deep, solemn silence set free the sluices and floods of the mind with fey waters, unfathomable. And the masks paraded sluggishly before the Buddha. Swords crossed silently. Footsteps thumped soundlessly. A pure epic tale of silent metonymy beyond the figures and tropes of Gesture: ...the eternal beat of the heavenly drum which vibrates within that eloquent Silence...

No! A solitary voyager would not look back, for his mission was not the pursuit of knowledge but of Life itself. That night at my lectern, going about alone, unwearied, disciplining my Self alone, remarking

the silver moonbeams illuminating the crêpe-like hoarfrost on the window pane and the acclivities of the gorge, I read from the *Dhammapada*:

'...Sitting alone, sleeping alone, going about alone, unwearied, discipling one's self alone, one can remain rejoicing within a forest...'

Hand gestures or *mudras* are a salient feature of Buddhist mural painting: gradually my Self in forest-retreat discovered their ritual importance during prayer. Graceful sweeps of the hands, long silvery fingernails combing the frosty air, like the Buddha Himself, the energetic index finger indicating the full, waxing moon. The word itself means 'seal', and symbolized Buddha's mental powers, His teachings, His meditation, His courage, His public testimony. Buddha's pointing finger intrigued me: a philosophical (metaphysical?) gesture of pure demonstration, of pure yes-saying, a Yes-Sayer, or the vital certitude of that which demonstrates and that which is demonstrable. The chanting grew and grew more frenetic. Eyes scanned the scriptures quicker than I could catch the vowels and consonants. The hall filled with fervour, an overwhelming sensation that I found difficult to control. The two thick wooden doors of the prayer hall had been left ajar for some unknown reason: wisps of chilly mist trailed in, circling above the bobbing heads, scanning the scriptures like a cluster of maddened fumes. Some heads welcomed the ticklish whiffs, others covered their tonsured pates, shiny to the touch, with carmine hoods or yellow bonnets. A sudden burst of rain swept in but no one appeared affected. Then a phrase of Tagor slipped into my mind quite unexpectedly:

'...The first essential of art is that it should communicate a vision never before expressed on the subject...'

I recalled Mahakala at Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim during the Cham Festival, his face unexposed, hidden by the silken cloth, sword ready to defend his mask (or face?), to slice through ignorance, Mahakala, brimming over with laughing skulls, those of Bhairava, filled with bloody (libations)! Remnants of Brahma's lay. He, too, in dancing position, Mahakala, skulls (unsmiling) clinging to a tiger's skin which garnished thick muscled thighs, robed in red and green, flowing penants and a beggar's bowl in hand, outstretched, crossing a bulging blue belly over whose enormous hump hung jewels of variegated colours. And again it suddenly dawned upon me:

'...was there any 'particular' reason for being Here and Now?..Was this being Here and Now a Mask, or the face of some infantile impulsion which contained a twisted mouth of unreality, of convulsed thoughts, of a grotesque regard upon the world in general?.. Another Desert, yet this time without Lawrence, without Burton, without the heroic crutch?.. A phantasmatic escape from...from Responsibility?..'

A dull thud! The tough-hide *gna* beaten with a curved stick vibrated a dead thump. Thump...the frame rattled, the painted dragons rattled their scaly tails, and from their open mouths red-tongued orange flames lashed out these solemn words which I happened to overhear:

'...the eternal beat of the heavenly drum which vibrates in the world as life and death vibrate...expounding and transmitting of the Truth on the wave-length of universe...'

Gna-Cham continued slower and slower: the solid sound of the triangle made appear, or so I believed, a vision so clear, so limpid of a primitive *chaitya*, three-naved, at the end of which a giant Buddha, seated on His throne, sat before a bigger *stupa*, both monuments situated in a vaulted ambulatory supported by thirteen-inch thick length ribs. The whole ceiling right up to the loft bore those powerful nerves which the thirty pillars bolstered, groined and dense in the shadows of the ambulatory. The vision, nonetheless, remained ambiguous: there I sat indeed, but the surroundings appeared so familiar, like a Christian church-grotto in southern Turkey or in northern Syria! Behind the giant *stupa* the odour of camphor, urine and screaming bats. A wicked stench indeed, it seemed to converge there like the decomposing corpse of Father Zossima. From afar the temple lay in statuesque repose: the serried pillars, bare, not those of buff backgrounds, encasing Bodhisattva warriors of grey, orange and ochre robes. A pity indeed: I had forgotten to count the number of ribs and joists.

'Untergehen! Untergehen!' rang the *relmo*. The face of that Buddha, of brow serene, sensual, inactive, looming large in its golden rimmed green nimbus, pursed its lips in a compassionate smile. In His hand he held a shell bowl from which a lotus of *nelumbo* blue sprouted...

The mountains can provoke powerful and insane visions; trigger unfathomable obsessions: was any particular peak overwhelming me? Would the obsessions, if any, transform into a Style? How was one to overcome that obsession? Perhaps by donning the mask and dancing with the laughing skeletons...to dance, yes, to dance to the service of thought...to the service of *leaping*...

And so I began to go 'go down' as the bold glowing sun rose over the village of Yugar, setting afire the rushing waters of the Lungnak, promising many a new Dawn to come...Untergehen!Untergehen! Was it not time for this subterranean soul to rise once again to the surface? This habit had endured long enough...

...'Death, thy servant, is at my door. He has crossed the unknown sea and brought thy call to my home.

The night is dark and my heart is fearful -yet I will take up the lamp, open my gates and bow to him my welcome.

It is thy messenger who stands at my door...'

Nicholai Roerich 'Agni Yoga

En hommage à Alexandre Csoma de Kőrös



VIVEK, Nenmini Dilip & SENGUPTA, Rakesh

The Tourist and Enlightenment: Man Fridays of Fanny Parkes

There is something common between transgression and travel. The commonality is not as trivial as the deconstructionist's notion of the "other". The material of the commons, of transgression and travel appear in the Indian concept of *Kala Pani* and the rise of the Western tourist. One may see *Kala Pani* as an expression of the pre-modern superstitious residual kernel of a feudal society whereas the tourist is modern in his/her bearing. However, if we look at the point of departure of a transgressor¹, from tourist we can truly appreciate Said's definition of Orientalism as "an act of geographical violence" (Said 2001). The banished transgressors go into the unknown familiar whereas the tourist comes to known unfamiliar. The tourist's departure in itself is a transgression following the "act of geographical violence". The determination of the tourist can happen, a travelogue can be written once we understand how the universal of tourist comes about. In his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan speaks of "master signifier" as one for which all the other signifiers can represent the subject (Lacan 1992). The proof of this formula lies in a fundamental inversion (in the line of Hegelian reflexive identity), of the generalized (totalized) signifier which can represent the subject for all the signifiers. In the present context the colonial system propagates to give the chance to any of its subjects to become tourists; however the tourist is determined only when all the others have been made into colonial subjects. Herein lays the universal of modernity, represented in its proletarianized kernel given by the tourist. After all the tourist travels in search of the sublime into the territory of transgressors who are too afraid to cross into the unknown familiar.

On 19 June 1822 the *Marchioness of Ely* set sail from Gravesend, England embarking on a near five month voyage to Calcutta, India. Among the many passengers on board were a minor English civil servant appointed to a new posting to India and his wife, Fanny Parkes. Following her mother's request, Fanny would maintain a journal of her "thoughts, feelings and adventures", and as she describes enthusiastically, "vagabondising over India" for twenty-four years, which would finally culminate in the single edition and almost forgotten *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*. A score short of two centuries later the new edition of her writings appeared as *Begums, Thugs and Englishmen-The Journals of Fanny Parkes*, selected and introduced by William Dalrymple the award-winning historian and travel writer.

Through Fanny Parkes's writings one notices and begins to comprehend the evolution of one of the many archetypes of the colonial citizen subject-the tourist. The tourist- in search of exotic experiences, colorful trinkets, visual wonders and in a sense a new world. The tourist, unlike the traveler who seeks adventure, traces a unilinear path tied down by her fear of the unfamiliar, yet keeps an open eye for anything which is different. The unfamiliar piques her interest and satiates her voyeuristic tendencies. For the tourist the journey itself has to be recorded in proximity in a detailed narrative. In Fanny Parkes,

¹ With transgressions come concepts of impurity, infusion as such, as we see in earlier travel narratives. At some point the tropes of travel, disease, infection somehow get cauterized together.

soon after she embarks on the voyage to India one observes the attention to detail- descriptions of changes in weather, seasickness, the sailors' rituals of Crossing the Line which she and her fellow passengers participate in and avenues of amusement to fight the fatigue of an enervating journey including among other sport, fishing expeditions². Writing about catching a shark she notes, "During the time of the *battue* on the third day, three sharks were astern, we caught one that had a young one by her side. When opened on deck, a family of twenty-four were found, each about twelve or fourteen inches long; the mother measured seven feet. The shark is said to swallow its young when in peril, and to disgorge them when the danger has passed. The curious birds and fish we see relieve the tedium of the passage" (Parkes 2002). The details are not only characteristic of the alienation which she has to grapple with, but also an indicator of her coming to terms with the unfamiliar, marking her point of departure – of becoming the archetypal tourist.

The Empire so to speak is a prerequisite for the tourist. Colonies have to be established before the tourist ventures out into (un)charted territory in search of the exotically familiar. The colonies have to be thus penetrated further for the tourist to bring back trinkets and other collectibles to satisfy curiosities and *Schaulast* – the pleasure of viewing. Fanny Parkes too embarks on a journey with the anthropological gaze to view already explored wonders. Landing at Carnicobar to replenish supplies of food and water, she describes the island as, "[...]...covered to the edge of the sand of the shore with beautiful trees; scarcely an uncovered or open spot was to be seen. Off the ship the village appeared to consist of six or eight enormous beehives, erected on poles and surrounded by high trees; among these, the coconut, to an English eye, was the most remarkable." Her fascinatingly detailed account of the Churuk Puja or 'swinging by hooks' accents the inquisitive eyes that examine the thousands of people including the remarkable, "[...]...Voyagee mendicants; their bodies were covered with ashes, their hair clothed in mud

² Opening her entry for 22 July 1822 she writes, "What a strange, bustling life! This is baggage day; all the trunks are on deck- such a confusion! I am suffering from *maladie de mer*, the wind is contrary, we tack and veer most tiresomely; the ship pitches; we cling about like cats, and are at our wit's end, striving to endure our miseries with patience." Nine days later as the *Marchioness* crosses the Equator, she closes her account of the customary frolic on board in high spirits, "In the evening the sailors danced, sang, recited verses, and spliced the main brace (drank grog), until very late and the day ended as jovially as it began. Several times they charmed us with an appropriate song, roared at the utmost pitch of their stentorian lungs, to the tune of 'There's na luck about the house'.

We'll lather away, and shave away,
And lather away so fine,
We always have a shaving day
Whenever we cross the line.

With sorrow I confess to having forgotten the remainder of the ditty, which ended-

There's nothing half so sweet in life
As crossing the line.

'Rule Britannia' with a subscription for the ruler of the seas, was the finale, leaving everyone perfectly satisfied with his portion of salt water. It was agreed the rites and ceremonies had never been better performed or with greater good humor."

and twisted round their head; they were naked all but a shred of cloth" (Parkes 2002). How does one trace the view of the anthropological gaze one might ask? In continuation to the parallel developments witnessed in science and technology and trade leading to the discovery of sea routes and the New World, the principles of observation and objectivity were adapted for anthropological studies. The tourist views through these same lenses of observation and objectivity to differentiate the trinket from the actual archaeological or cultural artefact. Science and technology as such provides also the alienation which informs the tourist. This view from the decks of ships also creates the tourist subject as opposed to the people confined to the holds of ships-slaves, workers, etc. akin to cargo transferred as objects.

The visual dimension which makes the familiar local sights exotic also maintains the illusion of the voyeur and piques the vaudevillian nature of the tourist in the trinket. This is possibly a manifestation of commodity fetishism which in different dimensions leads the tourist to view certain sights not from an exotic angle but more of facing something grotesque or horrifying. Thus each tourist faces the dilemma of Robinson Crusoe characterized by a curious and inquisitive nature mixed with the fear of the unknown. This however is overcome by the tourist in the form of traveling with a retinue of Man Fridays in attendance, foraying into the 'so called' unknown but in the company of familiar faces. Fanny Parkes states upon her arrival in Calcutta, "I thought India a most delightful country, and could I have gathered around me the dear ones I had left in England, my happiness would have been complete." and continues, "The number of servants necessary to an establishment in India is most surprising to a person fresh from Europe..." (Parkes 2002).

Following the 2004 tsunami, the Sri Lanka Tourist Board issued a statement, "In a cruel twist of fate, nature has presented Sri Lanka with an unique opportunity, and out of this great tragedy will come a world class tourism destination." Isn't the idea behind the government's response just an extreme version of Fanny Parkes's own observation quoted in the end of the previous paragraph? In a certain sense the category tourist is determined after a void (in the lines of Hegelian antithetical determination), as what Naomi Klein states as the "blank slate". And it is a seeming "blank slate" on which Dalrymple has created the opposition of Fanny Parkes and the Eden sisters. Fanny Parkes, the simple wife of a lower class Englishman in search of the pure and the exotic, understanding the local customs and colors is opposed to the Eden sisters who are seeped into the role of the master and never quite grasping the narratives of the natives. However, it is with Fanny Parkes's remark about the servants this seeming contradiction breaks down. Here Fanny Parkes in her role as the innocent prattler, (Zizek 2002), comes dangerously close to the basis of her and the Eden sisters's existence – to the 'ground' of their existence, (cf. Hegel's Logic), it is here that she reveals her position as a subject who is always already subjectivised. (So is the case with the Eden sisters). On the other hand, Fanny Parkes and the Eden sisters appear as moments of derivation of the universal of Enlightenment Man³ – because of the void or the "blank slate" in their determination as tourists becomes a point of determination of the proletarianized colonial citizen-subject. The objectivity of the tourist derives from the subjectivation (Sengupta, 2012) of the proletarianized subjects; thus even the most subjective moments of the travelogue are nothing but the objective illumination of the symbolic order (Zizek, 1989). The narrative of travelogue (as far as all narratives are

³ cf. The abstract labor appears as a moment of the movement from many capitals to capital I general (Rosdolsky, 1992)

part of symbolic order) operates on the ground of impossibility – the impossibility of tourist as such⁴. Tourist is impossible without the empire. Tourist exists because that which will make the tourist impossible has already been taken care of. The faraway has come within the borders of both space and time, of history. The impossibility of the tourist is also the backdrop for the possibility of history of the nation-states.

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⁴ If there were not so many servants to maintain it, there would be no tourism in the colonies, if there was no disaster displacing millions there would be no opportunity for the tourism destination.