

8. RAM AND KRISHNA AND SIVA

Of all countries in the world, India is the richest in mythology. Her great myths have for centuries exercised an unbroken hold over the mind of the people. The names of the most outstanding men of history, whether Buddha or Asoka, are known to not more than one-fourth of the population, if that, their doings are vaguely known to one in ten, and it would be a matter of some surprise if one in a hundred or a thousand could describe their acts and ideas in some detail. The names of Ram and Krishna and Siva, the three greatest myths of the country, are known to everybody, their doings are vaguely known to almost everybody or at least one in two of the population, and one in ten would know the details of their acts and ideas, exactly what word was spoken and what move adopted at which stage. Whether the heroes of the great Indian myths ever lived or not is a comparatively irrelevant detail to the cultural history of the country, to the history of the Indian spirit definitely and, to date, also to the spirit of Indian history.

Ram and Krishna were probably figures of history and Siva may also have been an engineer who cut a channel for the great Ganga, but he might have been, on the same reasoning, a great vet, a lover or an unexampled philanthropist. To try to reduce these men to the canvas of history, as it actually takes place, would be a most comic undertaking. The story of their lives must not be tested by ordinary standards of plausibility. What can be more plausible than the fact that this story has been engraved on the mind of succeeding generations in India for fifty centuries and probably a hundred. The story was continually retold, and in the retelling, great bards and poets used their genius to refine and to deepen, and, more so, the

irresistible pressures if numberless millions brought it their own transmuted joy and grief.

The myths of a people are a record of their dream and their sorrow, an inerasable register of their most deeply cherished and highly rated desires and aspirations as well as of the inescapable sadness that is the stuff of life and its local and temporal history. Ram and Krishna and Siva are the great dream and sorrow of India. To try to achieve consistency in their stories or to weave unfailing morality into their lives and remove all that looks like being false or improbable would be like trying to rob of everything except logic. Let us straightaway admit that Ram and Siva and Krishna never existed, at least not as their stories are told, and that their records are false or improbable and, in some cases, so disconnected as to make no logical meaning. But that admission is almost entirely irrelevant. To the history of the Indian spirit, these three names are the truest and the greatest of the entire procession, so far ahead of and looming so large over the others that these appear false and improbable. Their stories are indelibly engraved on the mind of the people, the same as history is after all delibly recorded on stone or metal.

The hills of India are still the abodes of her gods who have also occasionally lived on the plains in human form and killed or tamed the serpents of the great rivers, and worshipful squirrels have spanned the seas. The transcendental faiths of the desert, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have destroyed all gods except the one that is beyond and above and their hills and plains and rivers are denuded of myths. Antiquarians or those educated in the universities alone know of the gods on Mount Olympus. The immanent faith of the forest in India, of the moon dimpling on herb and hill and water and soil at endless play, has kept gods and their human stories alive and enriching. Myths are not fables. A fable is a teacher. When a fable also entertains, that is an incidental by-product and a work of art and the main purpose is to teach. A myth may incidentally teach and it may also entertain as a by-product,

but its main purpose is neither. The short story is an entertainer. Balzac and Maupassant and O'Henry have entertained so well with their short stories that some of those are still remembered in their rich detail by one in ten of their peoples, whose lives have indubitably received depth and largeness as a result. The larger novel is also an entertainer, but its effect is more intangible, though perhaps deeper.

The myth is an almost endless novel studded with numerous stories of brilliance. If it teaches or entertains, that is only a by-product. It is more like the Sun and the hills and the fruit trees; they are all a major part of our lives. The mango and the peach become our tissue; they mix with our flesh and blood. The myth is a part of a people's tissue; it mixes with their flesh and blood. To try to rate myths as though they were lives of great men which could act as models of sublimity would be comic stupidity. Ram and Krishna and Siva are dragged down, if men try consciously to turn them into models of behaviour or thought. They are the tissue, the flesh and blood of all India. Their dialogues and oratory, their conduct and acts, the precise gesture of the eyebrow that accompanied their deeds which are depicted stage by stage with great accuracy and the exact word that they spoke at a defined moment are all a familiar part of the Indian's life. They are indeed a reference and a yardstick to him, not alone through the conscious mind that has deliberately to be brought into play, but somewhat like the composition of blood which dictates the corresponding degree of health or disease.

A great myth is some kind of a composite product of epic and fable, story and novel, drama and poem, with nuclear power of such strength that it drives into the minds of all who form its people. These myths have the power to culture a people even if they are illiterate, but they have also the power to rot them with too much of changing experience. It is a matter of some regret that these myths tell a universal tale and are yet garbed in the hues of a locality. This is a regret somewhat similar to all of mankind not living in the same

place at the same time. Mankind has to live scattered at various points and these localities have each their own rivers and hills and an emerald or sapphire sea. The universal must speak through the local. This will be a perpetual problem for the education of man and woman and their children. In the process that they clean the universal of its local hues, the emotive evocations will have gone, the blood will have been drained and a pale shadow shall remain.

Father Rhine, mother Ganga and the noble Amazon are all of one piece, but the stories around them are so different. Even words have a meaning apart from what they designate or name, a meaning whose full taste and smell is known alone through long association with the local and its history. Ganga is a river that meanders through hill and valley, that ripples like the feathers of a peacock but is of unhurried gait like a heavy-hipped woman. She is of silken sound like the vibrations of the gamelan and her name is itself the compound of Gam, the one that goes making the music of Gam-Gam. To Indian sculpture, Ganga on her crocodile and her younger sister Jamuna on her tortoise are a perpetual double piece. They are certainly the most beautiful of India's women in stone, if those without a name are excluded. Between Ganga and Jamuna, one stands fascinated, so alike and yet that little difference, glued before them with the insoluble perplexity of choice. Such is the local through which the universal speaks. A way out would be to gather together the major myths and stories of all peoples of the earth, to tell them with truth and charm without trying to put a meaning or a lesson into them. Those who go round the world have a responsibility to mankind, to tell it of the phantoms that live all over the earth, for instance, of Madam Pilou of Hawaii who intoxicates a person by her presence for two days or three, but who disappears as soon as she is sought to be touched, who like smokers to breathe out their cigarette smoke into her craterholes without number and who also puffs back her sulphur with added vigour.

Ram and Krishna and Siva are India's three great dreams

of perfection. They go, each his own way. Ram is the perfection of the limited personality, Krishna of the exuberant personality and Siva of the non-dimensional personality, but each is perfect. There is no question of one being less or more perfect than another. How can perfection be of degrees? Perfection only knows kinds or categories of quality. Each may pick to his own taste, or, rather each may select the category of perfection that corresponds with his own phase of life at the moment. It is also possible that with some all the three categories of perfection may live cheek by jowl: the limited, the exuberant and the non-dimensional personalities may reside in simultaneous becoming. The great sages of India have indeed always so tried. They have brought Siva to Ram and Krishna to Siva and made Ram play the holy colours on the banks of the Jamuna. These dreams of a people's perfection with their different categories have become allied, but their distinct identity has not been lost. Ram and Krishna are two human forms of Vishnu, who comes to the earth when vice multiplies and virtue fades away. Ram came to the earth in Treta, when virtue was still not so debased, and he was built out of eight aspects and was, therefore, a limited personality. Krishna came in *Dwapar*, when vice had become stronger, and he was built out of sixteen aspects and was, therefore, a full or an exuberant personality. When Vishnu came to the earth in the form of Krishna, his throne in heaven was wholly vacant while, in the case of Ram, Vishnu was partly in the heaven and partly on earth.

On these limited and exuberant personalities, two rich stories are told. Ram set his eyes on one woman and never looked at another in that fashion in all life. This woman was Sita. Her story is in large part the story of Ram; his deeds are woven around her marriage, kidnapping and bondage, liberation and eventual return to the womb of the earth, whose daughter she was. When Sita was kidnapped, Ram was disconsolate. He cried and asked trees and stones whether they had seen her and the moon laughed. Vishnu must have remembered the

moon's laughter for thousands of years. When he later came to earth as Krishna, his sweethearts were of unlimited number. He once danced at midnight with all the sixteen thousand milk-women of Brindavan. It does not matter that they might have been sixty or six hundred, and each Gopika in this great dance-play, the Rasleela, had her own separate Krishna to dance with. The mover was unmoved. Bliss was unbroken and undifferentiated. It was without hankering. Krishna challenged the moon to laugh. The moon was grave. The limited and the exuberant personalities have been full and whole at play in these two great stories.

Sita's kidnapping is in itself one of the greatest events of the story of the mankind; its record has been noted in every detail. This is a story of limited, controlled and constitutional existence. During the wanderings of their exile, when Sita was on one occasion left alone, Lakshaman, the younger brother of Ram, had drawn a circle which she was not to over-step. Ravan, the great foe of Ram, came as a mendicant and was powerless until, with the guile of humble beggary, he was able to persuade Sita out of the limits of the circle. The limited personality stays within the circle of rules. The exuberant personality recognises rules and constitution only as long as it wishes to do so and violates them the moment that their administration begins to prove irksome.

Another rich story is told of the limited personality of Ram, of the circle of rules and constitution drawn around his authority which he never overstepped, and to whose unquestioned submission he owes the three or four blemishes of his life. Ram and Sita had come back to Ayodhya and were living as king and queen. A washerman complained of Sita's conduct in captivity. The complainant was a lone person and the complaint was as frivolous as it was dirty. But the rules laid down that every single complaint was expressive of a malady, which must receive its proper remedy or punishment. In this case, banishment of Sita was the only proper remedy. The rule was stupid, the punishment was cruel and the whole incident

was an infamous happening that saddened Ram for the rest of the life. But he obeyed the rule. He did not change it. He was the perfection of a limited personality, bound by rules and constitution, and he has brought this out in his life through an incident which otherwise blemishes his record.

As a limited personality, another way was perhaps open to him. He should have abdicated and again gone into exile with Sita. He probably made that suggestion but his people were unwilling. He should have insisted. They would probably have wanted to waive or abolish the rule. No limited personality can accept such an abolition of rules, which is done under duress and is meant to tide over a difficulty with which his own person is at least partly concerned. In myth as in history, conjectures or might-have-beens are an unattractive pastime. What Ram might or might not have done is a minor conjecture compared to this ghastly submission to rules which is so characteristic of a limited personality. A contemporary debate on the cult of individual leadership as against the creed of collective leadership has aroused much interest. The debate is superficial. Individual or collective leadership may both belong basically to the category of the exuberant personality, insubordinate to rules and the constitution. The sole difference lies in whether one person or a combination of nine or fifteen persons is to overstep the circle of rules drawn around their authority. The overstepping indeed becomes more difficult if it is to be done by nine persons instead of one. But life is a continual flux and a twilight of various degrees between contending forces.

In this flux, oscillation between the exuberance of the individual and of the collective is continually taking place. The exuberant individual is yielding place to the exuberant collective and the reverse is also true. But there is another vaster oscillation within whose framework this smaller back-and-forth of the individual and collective takes place, the great oscillation between the exuberant and the limited. Ram was a limited individual of the same category as a truly constitutional democracy, which is a limited collective; Krishna

was an exuberant individual much in the same fashion as a supreme committee of leaders, whose wise judgement may ride over all rules, is an exuberant collective. Of the two questions, one, whether the individual or the collective wields power, and the other, whether the authority is limited or exuberant, the second question is by far the greater. Is authority subject to inviolate rule and the constitution? When this greater question has been answered, the turn comes of the lesser question as to whether the limited authority is individual or collective. Without doubt, the best authority is that which is wielded by the limited collective.

Ram was a limited individual. He was so out of deliberated design and conscious purpose. Rules and the constitution were no doubt there to act as a measuring standard to enforce obedience. But this compulsion from outside would have been valueless if unaccompanied by a corresponding impulsion from within. External controls of constitution and inward limits of the conscience reinforce each other. Argument concerning the primacy of either propeller would be idle; to the limited personality, the external rigours of the constitution would be but another name for the internal drives of conscience. A remarkable adjustment and parallelism of the two forces is a mark of the limited personality. Limitations are external controls but they also reach out into inward frontiers; the limited leadership is of course controlled leadership but it also reaches out into the domains of the spirit. Ram was indeed a controlled individual, but it would be wrong to stop at that description of him, for he was limited individual, whose will ran parallel with the constitution.

The story is told of the last moments of Ravan. He was without doubt the most learned man of his time, although he had put his learning to wrong ends. But this learning bereft of its wicked aims, had to be inherited for the continued use of mankind and so, Ram sent Lakshaman to Ravan to beg him for a lesson. Ravan spoke not Lakshaman came back and reported his failure to his brother ascribing it to the continuing

arrogance of their foe. Ram asked him for a minute description of what had happened and discovered that Lakshaman had stood near the head of Ravan. Lakshaman was sent back so as to stand near the feet of Ravan and repeat his request. The teaching in polity took place.

Such a fine story on deportment is hard to match and has never been excelled. Manners are certainly as important as morals, for the way a person eats or walks or sets himself down on a seat or appears and dresses and the way he talks to his kind or betakes himself in their company, always trying to be aware of any inconvenience that he may be causing them, or behaves with all creatures is indeed a question of deportment, but no less significant than any other. The exuberant Krishna who was as great a model of deportment as any limited personality would ever aspire to be, has given a memorable description of the well-mannered person or the one of stable intellect. Such a person collects and draws within him all his limbs like a tortoise; he is, therefore, in full command of them. None of them makes a slipshod movement. In the sphere of deportment, the exuberant personality at its best is indeed the high water-mark of the limited personality, however much they may differ in other spheres. Ram is nevertheless the author of the greatest story in deportment, particularly with a dying person and of superior learning.

Ram was often the listener, not alone to the person to whom he may have been talking at the moment, which every great man must need be, but also to the talk of other people. He was in fact once accused by Parasuram of designedly keeping himself in the background and letting his brother talk unimpeded and aggressively. This accusation could in fact be made with some justice. Ram was often the interested listener to wordy duels between his partisans and their foes, which sometimes had ugly and blame-worthy sequels as in the encounter between Lakshaman and Surpanaka, Ravan's sister. On such occasions Ram was the strong silent man appearing to be impartial, sometimes checking excesses of his partisans but

often putting a word on their behalf and encouraging them. This may look like having been a clear policy, but it was most certainly an expression of a limited personality who does not talk out of turn and is happy to let as large a part of the talking be done by others as is consistent with the needs of the situation. Krishna was the great talker. He also listened. But he seemed to listen only so that he could talk yet better and the magic of his words still charms the traveller on his path. Ram knew the magic of silence, the art of letting others talk except when it was necessary for him to intervene with his word or deed. Ram stands out as much through his listening silence, as through his speeches, for he was a limited personality.

The life of Ram is an essay in expansion without absorption. His exile was an occasion for unifying the country under the hegemony of one centre of power, where before it two rival centres were contending for mastery. Ayodhya and Lanka were these two centres and the wanderings of Ram took him away from Ayodhya in the direction of Lanka. On the way were numerous kingdoms and principalities within the orbit of one or the other centre. The statecraft of a limited personality came best to expression, when Ram encountered the first great kingdom that lay within Ravan's network of alliance. Bali was the chief. Sugriv his brother and Hanuman his great general were both unhappy and wanted a way out of the alliance with Ravan and into the friendship and service of Ram. Hanuman later became Ram's most devoted servant, so that he once cut open his chest to show that within was Ram and none else. Ram handled the first great encounter sagaciously and in the way of a limited personality. The kingdom was not absorbed and it stayed as it was. No foreigners were introduced into its high or low offices. All that happened was that Sugriv was crowned king after Bali had been killed in a duel. Bali's death was also the occasion of one of the few blemishes of Ram's life. Ram stood hidden behind a tree and, when his ally Sugriv came near being worsted, he shot an arrow at Bali from

concealment. This was beyond the rules. No person of decency and limited personality ever does it. But Ram could say that he was placed before a difficult choice.

Like Frederick the Great of Prussia, who so ably argued the difference between the morals of the state and those of the individual and, arising out of this difference, the possibility of preventing mass slaughter or enslavement through a lie or breach of promise and has, therefore, condoned such princes who are faithful to treaties but who may violate a treaty just once in a life time, Ram could have argued that he saved mass slaughter through the somewhat unfair killing of an individual, that he did such a wicked act only once in his life and that he set a whole kingdom on the path of righteousness without the slightest upset to anybody except to himself. Sugriv of course came into the network of the alliance of righteousness and supplied the main bulk of the forces, who eventually razed the citadel of Lanka. All this was achieved, it is true, with just one death, the killing of Bali. The kingdom remained wholly independent and its alliance with Ram was probably made out of the free will of its inhabitants. Even so, one wishes that the limited personality did not have to violate a rule, minor or major, not even once in life, not even for the sake of a bigger or a higher rule.

Ram's story of expansion without absorption, of unification with imperialism, of limited personality at work in dynamic politics and international relationships, is ever attended by the search for friends of righteousness within the camp of the enemy. He repeated his pattern in Lanka. Vibhishan, Ravan's younger brother, joined Ram's alliance. But the story of Kishkindha could not be repeated. Lanka was tougher; its vice was stronger and more learned. A fierce war ensued and the slaughter of many took place. Vibhishan was eventually crowned king and took unto himself Ravan's widow, Mandodari, as his wife. Righteousness prevailed, also in Lanka. To this day, however, Vibhishan is but another name for spy, traitor, fifth column, and betrayer of the nation or the

group, particularly in the nuclear areas of Ram's power, namely Avadh. This shall ever remain a marvel and a pointer. No bard has been able to wash away the guilt of Vibhishan. Ram, the god incarnate of the limited personality, has been unable to lift his ally into a state of public approval and, although Vibhishan had the advantage of Ram's association, his infamy is everlasting. The limited personality could not work the miracle of sanctifying his ally. Or, was it a mark of the limited personality that righteousness won but that an agent of its victory who was also a betrayer was fated for ever to bear on his name the blot of treason.

Krishna was a full man. The smile of delight and wonder never left his face and was, in the worst of situation, confined to his eyes, no matter that a great grief may have occasioned it. No honest man after attaining adulthood cries more than once or twice during a whole life time, certainly not publicly. Ram cried twice in his whole adult life, perhaps only once. Those who are ever bubbling over with tears abound in the land of Krishna and Ram and a depraved multitude believes them to be persons of deep sensitivity. The guilt belongs at least in part to Krishna. He never cried. But he makes millions cry to this day. In his own lifetime, the milk girls of Brindavan were so disconsolate that to this day songs are sung "of their eyes raining all day and night and of little streams flowing between their breasts." There seem to have been a lusty vigour in that crying, a surrender so whole that nothing of self seems to have been left over. Krishna is the great lover who awakened such a surrender, and, to this day, millions of men and women, also men who don female garb and otherwise behave like women to please their lover, try ineffectually with tears and without them to lose themselves into Krishna. This experience sometimes strays into politics and impotence combines with fraud.

From birth to death, Krishna was extraordinary, improbable and unique. He was born in the dungeons of an uncle where his father, a chieftain, was imprisoned with his

mother. All his earlier brothers and sisters were put to death on birth. He was hidden in a basket and taken out of the dungeon. He was to have been carried across the river into safety. Jamuna swelled, for deep was calling unto deep, and the more his father tried to hold the basket aloft, the more Jamuna swelled until Krishna lowered his rose-size feet to touch the river. Decades later, he had done his work. All those he had known had either been killed or scattered, some on the pilgrim's way to Himalaya and heaven. Women of his tribe were also being abducted by bands of petty robbers. Krishna was trudging his lonesome way to Dwaraka. He rested for a while amidst the branches of a tree. A hunter took his feet for a deer's limb. An arrow came shooting and Krishna was killed. What did he do at this moment? Was his last look given to the hunter and with it his compassionate smile that come through understanding? Did he stretch his hand for the flute, that must have been about, and did he play a last celestial-strain on it or did he content himself with a smile at the outstretched hand holding the flute? What went across his mind, the play of life that should delight and broaden, but which is after all a play, or the call from the gods in heaven who, without their Vishnu, were beginning to feel a lack?

Krishna was a thief, a liar, a cheat, a killer and he practised these and other crimes without the faintest compunction. He began with stealing his foster-mother's butter and qualified up to stealing another man's wife. He made the one man in the times of *Mahabharat*, who had never told a lie, tell a half lie. His own lies are numerous. He covered up the sun and caused a false sunset, so that a great enemy could be killed during this pseudo-dusk after which the sun shone again. He had the sexless Shikhandi placed before a warrior, so that Bhishmapitamah could no more shoot his arrows while he himself could be riddled with them from that unparalleled place of cover. He helped his friend to elope with his own sister.

Of crimes or unfair practices in war, the incident of Karna's

chariot is a sample. Karna was definitely the most generous man of his time in both armies and was probably also the greatest in war skills and bravery and would have overpowered the unaided Arjun. His chariot stuck in the midst of battle. Krishna commanded Arjun to shoot his arrows. Karna complained of unrighteous conduct. At this stage, the *Mahabharat* breaks out into oratory, never surpassed anywhere, and perhaps also rarely equalled before or since. Krishna recalls scores of incidents and ends the poetic narration of each incident with the refrain: "Where was your righteousness, then?" Before this flow of righteous heat and lustre, all judgment is numbed and the most critical mind is swept away, at least for the time being. One recalls Draupadi and how she was sought to be stripped of her clothes in that glittering assembly of Duryodhan's court. There sat Karna and there also sat Bhishma, but they had eaten Duryodhan's salt. It is said that the salt one eats makes one's mind at least partly and there is also the additional need to be true to the giver. Krishna had at that time added endless length to Draupadi's sari, for she had remembered him for help and there seems to have been a tenderness as deep as it is unspoken in their relationship.

Krishna's devotees try to give alternative sets of explanations for each of his acts. He stole the butter to divide it among his friends. He stole it also to tease and then to please his mother's heart. He stole the butter so as to enact a perfect drama of what childhood ought to be, to let future generations dream up the ideal child-play through him. He never did anything for himself except insofar as all those for whom he did these things were also part of him. He stole Radha, not for himself, not even for her bliss, but for the countless women of all generations so that they may step out of their confining skins into an appointment with the universal. All such explanations are unnecessary. Who does not know the Krishna of that greatest song of the world, the *Bhagavadgita*? India is the one country in the world where

philosophy has been set to music, where thought is sung without being turned into story or poem. Numerous Upanishads sung the thought and truth which India's sages had wrung out of experience. Krishna distilled them all into a still purer essence, however, much later scholars have tried to point out the divergence between one scent and another. Krishna sings his pure thought through the *Gita*.

He sings of the soul, and even those who do not recognise it are swept away by his magic words of its indestructibility, of its being beyond the reach of fire, water and wind, of the body being merely an outward garb which it takes unto itself or casts away. He sings of action and beckons men to do their deeds and not to yearn for their fruit, not even to be their agent and cause, but ever to strive to be the unbound doer. He sings of equanimity, that which stays equal between pleasure and pain, victory and defeat, heat and cold, profit and loss, and all the other oscillations of life. The languages of India are unique in that just one word, "Samatwam", designates both the external condition of equality and the internal quality of equanimity. One wishes that Krishna had sung more explicitly of these being the two sides of the same coin, of equality being the condition of the society and equanimity being the quality of the person, that sees the indivisible in the midst of the divided. What Indian child has not been brought up on the musical strains of such magic and thought. To try to justify Krishna to him to deny his entire upbringing. In an ultimate sense, Krishna makes one sad. He is like the poor heart that ticks endlessly and tirelessly, not for itself, but for the other limbs. Why need that heart tick and why that added vigour and thump, whenever other limbs need it to do so! Krishna was like the heart, but he has taught everlasting generations of men to want to be like him. They may never become so, but may in the process practice his deception and killing.

A very curious phenomenon stands out in the comparative roles of Ram and Krishna. Krishna was every minutes a miracle-maker. Floods and sunsets were servants of his will

and he blotted the dividing line between the possible and the impossible. Ram practised no miracles. Even the bridge between India and Lanka had to be built stone by stone, no matter it was preceded by certain ceremonies of worship of the sea and an eventual threat. But, when the life work of either is examined in its entirety and the final balance is drawn, Ram was the unparalleled miracle-maker and Krishna appears to have accomplished nothing. Two brothers and a woman between them travelled nearly 2,000 miles between Ayodhya and Lanka and, when they had set out they were only three, of whom only two were combatants and one composed the commissariat, but by the time they came back, they had subdued a whole empire. Krishna on the other hand effected no change except transference of an existing empire from one wing of the ruling dynasty to another. This riddle of the limited personality becoming big and meaningful and the exuberant personality becoming small and meaningless, at least in the sphere of politics, is like the riddle of Time. In an uneventful life, every single moment is heavy and laden and seems too long to bear, but their collection over a period of a decade or a lifetime seems of such easy and quick flight. In an exciting life, every moment seems so interesting that its liver would like it to stay but it speeds along, although their collection over a period of a year or two would on retrospect make them appear rather long and of heavy flight. The limited god, Ram, Maryadapurushottam, the top man of limits, achieved a political miracle. The full god, Krishna, dazzled the world with his deeds and he taught it the law of life as none had done it before, but the political accomplishments of this exuberant personality were more froth than substance.

Gandhi was the great descendant of Ram. He died with Ram on his lips. He modelled his life after the top man of limits and he invited his countrymen to act similarly. But there seems to have been a dash of Krishna in him and a very powerful dash at that. His letters and speeches and other writings, as they appeared from day to day or week to week,

seemed to be strung together in a consistent harmony, but as one reads them together after their author is dead, one is struck by the craft and skill that underlies the change of front and meaning in various situations. Dwaraka was paying a return visit to Mathura. The child of the seas of Dwaraka was killed and burnt on the banks of Jamuna. Several thousand years earlier, the child of Jamuna was killed and burnt near the seas of Dwaraka. But the face of this child of Dwaraka was turned towards the topman of limits and he largely succeeded in remodelling his heredity on the pattern of Ayodhya, but there was nevertheless a curious and unique mixture.

While Ram and Krishna led human lives, Siva was without birth and is without end. Like God he is infinite, but, unlike God, his life consists of events in time and many landmarks and he is, therefore, more non-dimensional than God. He is perhaps the only non-dimensional myth or concept known to man. There is certainly none other that can reach him in this respect.

When Siva opened his third eye on Kama, the god of love and burnt him down to ash, Rati, the wife of Kama and the goddess of love-making, came with tear sodden eyes and begged for her husband's return. Kama had no doubt been guilty of a grave offence, for he had tried to ruffle Siva, the great god, who meditates without form and name and whose mind is in repose, into desiring. Love had aimed well out of his reach and he was dead. But Rati, the ever gay, was for the first time sad and a widow and the world stood on the brink of a grim fate. Love-making was hereafter to be unaccompanied by love. Siva could not condone. This punishment had been well deserved. But Rati was disconsolate. Siva moved into compassion with the world in its grim fate or the saddened Rati. He restored Kama to life, but without body. Kama has since then been formless, without body, Kama is nowhere out of bounds and he may reach into everything and envelop it and permeate it. At the same time, he can now come annoyingly undetected. One likes to think that this drama took place on Kailas, the high mountain-abode of Siva. Fringed by the

soothing and transparent waters of the great lake of Mansarovar, where swans peck at pearls and at them, as also by the equally great waters of Rakshasatal, of dark depth and foreboding mien, Kailas, with its perennial snow, the silence of its solitude and its grand empire around, wholly uncramped unlike any other mountain areas, is, as the Hindu legend says, the centre of the universe and the loveliest spot on earth.

Religion and politics, God and nation or people have mixed everywhere and at all time, but more so in India. Among the greatest deeds of Siva was his demon-mourning of the death of Parvati. Siva hoisted the dead Parvati on his back and shoulders and roamed around and over the country. Parvati fell off limb, by limb Siva did not let go, until the last limb fell. No lover, nor god, nor demon nor human has left such a story of stark and uninhibited companionship. But that was not all. This story of Siva also tells the tale of the undying and sacramented unity of India. Where each limb of Parvati fell, there stands a pilgrimage. In Banaras fell the ear with the ruby at the Manikarnika Ghat and to this day all those whose dead bodies are burnt there are absolved without a doubt. In far-off Kamrup, at the eastern end of India, fell the limb, whose holy spell is unbroken over hundreds of generations and makes grandmothers of the interior warn their children against these women of the east, who bewitch their men into docile buffalos.

Brahma, the creator, and Vishnu, the protector, quarrelled seriously over the question of precedence and superiority. They went to Siva, the destroyer, for an award. He sent each of them to discover his extremities, one the top of his head and the other the end of his feet, and whoever returned earlier after completing the errand, was to be adjudged as the victor. The search lasted many ages and both returned crest-fallen. Siva admonished them against vanity. The trinity must have laughed together on this, as on other occasions, although it must be said in fairness to Vishnu that, in many other stories, he is also described as of endless sleep and size without terminus. Lest the dimensions of Siva should be fixed into the

infinite and thus given a definition, another story is told of a quarrel between his two sons over the hand of a fair maiden. Again, the prize was to go to him who went round the universe, or the domains, faster. Kartikeya was the picture of health and beauty and he lost not a second in starting on his race. Ganesh, of the elephant-trunk, traditionally lugubrious, sat pondering and perplexed and was the picture of discomfoting thought for a long while. The light dawned on him eventually and with it the mischievous twinkle in the eye. Ganesh rose and unhurriedly went round his father and successfully claimed the prize. While, as a fable, the story may teach the advantage of deliberation and slow wisdom and action arising out of it, in place of the unthinking and hurried activity, it is essentially a part of the myth of Siva, who is of endless size and can at the same time be measured by seven steps. Verily, Siva is non-dimensional also in body.

Ganesh of the elephant trunk is a unique character, as much the handicraft of his father as of his own slow but deep wisdom. When he was a little boy, his mother had asked him to keep watch in front of her bath and allow entry to none. Siva of immediate reactions tried to push his way in, but Ganesh of set loyalty barred the way and the father smote his son. The grief of Parvati knew no bounds. The first living creature that passed that way was an elephant. Siva lopped off the head of the elephant and put it on the trunk of Ganesh and, since then, this elephant god of deep wisdom, the alliance of man's intelligence and the elephants loyalty, marks the beginning of every act in a Hindu home. A salutation to him is a guarantee of success. I have often wondered if Siva did not act out of character in this instance. Was the act justified? Even if he brought Ganesh back to life and thus revived the grief-stricken Parvati, what of the mother of the elephant-calf who lost his life as a consequence? But the question is answered in its very asking. In the new Ganesh, both the elephant and the old Ganesh continued their existence and neither died. And what an existence of perennial delight and

wisdom it was, which only a comic mixture of man and elephant can be!

There is yet another act of Siva, slightly more difficult to justify. He danced a challenge dance with Parvati. Step for step, Parvati out-matched Siva. Then came the crescendo. Siva made a movement and lifted his leg high. Parvati stood stunned and bewildered, unable to make that gesture so unbecoming of the modesty of woman and astounded at this unfair mode to which her husband had resorted. But the dance of life consists of such bumps, which a squeamish world calls obscene and against which it tries to protect the modesty of its women. When Siva made that gesture of vigour, was it to clinch the issue and gain a victory in an encounter that was going against him or was it, at least equally, the result of a natural crescendo of a dance of life that was warming up step by step?

Siva is not guilty of a single act which can indubitably be described as without justice in itself. He is in this manner the sole creation known to man, everyone of whose acts is justifiable in itself. One does not have to seek for the cause of an act in an earlier one, nor for its effect in a later deed, nor provide for its justification. Life is such a long chain of cause and effect that god and man have both sought remote justification for their acts. Such remote controls are, however, open to grave misuse. Tortuous and skilful reasoning is enabled to validate wholly unjustified acts. Truth may thus come out of a lie, freedom out of enslavement, and life out of murder. Against such wicked reasoning, there is only one remedy, the concept of Siva, for he is the embodiment of the principle of immediacy. Everyone of his acts contains its own immediate justification and one does not have to look for an earlier or a later act.

This great myth of non-dimensional immediacy has given world two other visions of grandeur. When Gods and demons churned the ocean, there was poison before nectar could come. Someone had to drink this poison. Siva took no part in the

wars between gods and demons nor in their co-operative endeavour to churn the ocean, but he drank the hemlock so that the story could proceed. He held the poison in his neck and since then he is known as Neelkanth, of the Blue Neck. The other vision is worthy of worship in all ages and climes. When a devotee had refused to do worship to Parvati alongside of him, Siva took on the shape of the Ardhanarishwar, half-woman god, half-man half woman. I have often found it difficult to picture to myself this composition in every detail from head to toe, but the vision is beautiful.

I have no intention here to trace the intermittent decay of these myths. Through centuries they have been falling prey to degeneracies and the seed that matures into perfection rots in certain circumstances into devilry. Devotees of Ram have intermittently tended to become wife-banishers, those of Krishna stealers, and of Siva lovers of carrion. In its process of degeneracy and distortion, the limited personality becomes narrow, the exuberant, dissolute, and the non-dimensional, episodic and amorphous. A degenerate Ram is the ripening of the narrow personality, a degenerate Krishna that of the dissolute personality, and a degenerate Siva that of the formless personality. Ram lives a double existence as limited and narrow, Krishna as exuberant and philanderer and Siva as non-dimensional and episodic. I will not be so stupid as to suggest a remedy except to proclaim: O India, Mother, give us the mind of Siva, the heart of Krishna, and the world and deed of Ram, create us with a non-dimensional mind and an exuberant heart, but a life of limits.

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