

Frontispiece: The young chief abbot of Hemis monastery, the Druk-chen Rinpoche, with his mentor, the Chief Lama or Dungsey Rinpoche, who is directing the monastery until the spiritual leader, believed to be the incarnation of the original Buddha Wajradhara, achieves maturity.

Front endpaper: Padma, the lotus, Buddhist symbol of the universe born from the ocean of first things, grows in thick luxuriance on the tributaries and lake inlets around Srinagar, the "Venice of the East."

Stephanie and Ghislaine zu Windisch-Graetz

Himalayan Kingdoms

Gods, People & the Arts



ROLI BOOKS INTERNATIONAL

Library

**Translation by John Shepley
and David Baker (captions)**

Book Design by Hannes Opitz

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**Reproductions by La Cromolito, Milano
Printed by Süddeutsche Verlagsanstalt, Ludwigsburg,
and bound by Reliure Busenhart, Lausanne**

Printed in Germany

**First published in India, 1982, by Roli Books International
4378/4 Ansari Road, Daryaganj,
New Delhi: 110 002
Telephones: 26 80 20, 27 63 25**

Published by arrangement with Reich Verlag AG Lucerne

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Kashmir

1. *The Mogul Emperors*

Nature seems to have bestowed all its gifts on the largest and most beautiful valley in the world, which according to legend was originally the home of Satisara, whose daughter Sati was the wife of Shiva, Source of Life and Indestructible Power of Dissolution.

The ascetic Kashyapa, still according to legend, lived in retirement in this region, where the highest slopes of the Himalaya were immersed in the waters. In recognition of the Sage's religious fervor, the Gods dried up the lake, producing the splendid and fertile valley whose name, Kashmir, derives from "Lake Kashyapa." Kashmir was actually a former lake basin.

In Kashmir's history splendor is mingled with tragedy, tolerance with oppression. All the arts and amenities have found expression here, among them the essential art of wisdom and serenity. Emperors and kings reigned for two thousand years, shaping the history and development of culture, and in turn building and destroying, in accordance with their faith, the temples of three great religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam.

The powerful king Ashoka (272–231 B.C.) sent Buddhist missionaries into Kashmir. It was they who founded the city of Srinagar.

After the passage of the Huns, in the eighth century, the Karkota dynasty re-established Hinduism and built temples to its gods.

In the fourteenth century, Kashmir was conquered by Islam and many of its Hindu temples were destroyed.

The Mongol conqueror Tamerlane (1338–1405) passed so close to the frontiers that the frightened sultan, in an effort to propitiate him, sent his son, Prince Zain-ul-Abdin, poet and musician, as emissary to the court of Samarkand, the capital of Tamerlane's empire, where the prince spent a few years. On his return to Kashmir, he brought with him artists and craftsmen who introduced the refined arts of Persia to the Kashmiri: papier-Mâché, embroidery, and wood carving, as well as the cultivation of silkworms (imported from China) and a greater sophistication in the working of gold, silver, and jewelry.

In 1483, Baber (Tiger), a descendant of Tamerlane, was born near Samarkand. Sultan at the age of eleven but expelled from his kingdom seven years later, he gathered a band of mercenaries and set out from Kabul on the conquest of India. He reached the Jumna river at Agra, which became his capital. Upon his entry into Delhi, he received as homage the fabulous Koh-i-noor diamond, the "Mountain of Light", symbol of the wealth of the Hindu palaces. This precious stone exercised a magical fascination over the soldiers, for it was their belief that whoever owned it would also possess indestructible strength.

As the first Mogul emperor, Baber was the founder of a dynasty that reached its glorious culmination during the whole of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A Muslim by religion, a builder and poet, Baber was fully in his element as a designer of gardens. In his memoirs, this lover of nature spoke of his passion for these paradises of trees, flowers, and fruits. The rushing waters of the Hindu Kush brought fertility to his famous "Garden of Fidelity." He complained of the drought in the Indian plain and sought new means of irrigation. The list of plants he drew

up includes, among others, the mango with its juicy fruit, the tamarind with its sweet dates, and the fragrant jasmine. This urge to create delightful gardens, which the six Great Moguls pursued in so admirable a fashion, goes back to the Persian artistic tradition in all its richness and refinement.

A remote tradition indeed! For it tells how in the fourth century B.C. King Xerxes admired a *chenar* tree (*Platanus orientalis*) with such fervor that he had its branches hung with gold amulets.

Throughout the centuries, miniatures and carpets were always decorated with flower seedlings, and silk and woolen fabrics woven or embroidered with floral motifs. Jewelers were inspired by corollas and calyxes, petals, seeds, and leaves. Such inspiration derives from a beauty ceaselessly renewed by Nature. These gardens have been cultivated for more than five centuries, and craftsmen still find their motifs in plant life.

The reign of the Mogul emperors proved a creative period in the history of India and Kashmir. The sovereigns from the steppes, passionately engaged in three dominant pursuits – the waging of war, the love of women, and devotion to all the arts – left behind renowned examples of their munificence. Under their reign the progress and expansion of the arts was prodigious, and attained a high state of perfection thanks to a liberal outlook that provided for a harmonious alliance of Persian, Islamic, and Hindu culture. This led to the creation of palaces that joined red sandstone to white marble, funerary monuments of grandiose beauty, impregnable fortresses, heroic romances, meticulous paintings, and those idyllic gardens that are preserved to this day.

Son succeeding father, each sovereign added his own glorification to that of his predecessor. Baber had decreed that his tomb be placed in the open, among the wild cherry trees that in his lifetime he had so much admired; they were arranged to bend over the tomb and protect it. The mausoleum of his son, Hamayun (1507–1556), situated in a park in Delhi laid out in accordance with classical Persian geometry, marks the beginning of a monumental architecture whose decorative impact is accentuated by the contrasting effect of other stone and white marble.

Akbar, known as the Great, was crowned emperor in 1556 at the age of fourteen. He was the first ruler to cross the seemingly impassable mountains and enter Kashmir, where he was welcomed by a display of unprecedented magnificence. On Lake Wulwar, the largest expanse of fresh water in India, he witnessed the passage of a procession of floating gardens, consisting of hundreds of boats that, like those of today, had their roofs planted with flowers.

Near Srinagar, at the top of a green hill, Akbar built the fort of Hari Parbat. His enchantment with the valley brought him back several times. These extraordinary journeys over the snow-covered routes of the Himalaya are described and depicted as long and orderly caravans, composed of a few dozen elephants, several hundred camels, and several thousand soldiers and servants. The imperial tent was a luxurious palace, its floor covered with rugs, and the section reserved for the harem sumptuously decorated in brocade, velvet, and embroidered fabrics.

Akbar's skill as an administrator allowed him to consolidate his empire, which extended from Kashmir to the Deccan and Bihar. The Himalaya, the Arabian Sea, and the Bay of Bengal were

1 *The roof of the Ladakhi monastery at Hemis is crowned by the dhwaja, Buddhist victory standard, which seems here to dominate the majestic mountain landscape all around. When waving in the wind, the colored strips transmit prayers to the gods.*

2 *Terraced fields, laid out centuries ago and still carefully maintained, stretch all the way down to the banks of Lake Phewa near Pokhara in central Nepal.*

3 *The Muslim Bukawal and the Ghujars are nomadic herdsmen who probably originated in the Punjab and still roam about with their thousands of head of sheep and goats in search of new grasslands in the area between Kashmir and Ladakh as well as in Pakistan. They take no notice of national boundaries – and here, in fact, the only frontier is the cease-fire line of 1949.*

4 *Small Bukawal children, when the tribe is on the move, spend the whole day in the saddle. The simple earring seen here is closer to an amulet or charm than to decorative jewelry.*

5 *This Nepalese girl in red silk sari is wearing the head decoration known as the sirbandi, with the "Mother moon, that rests on your forehead." The golden choker-necklace is set with precious gems.*

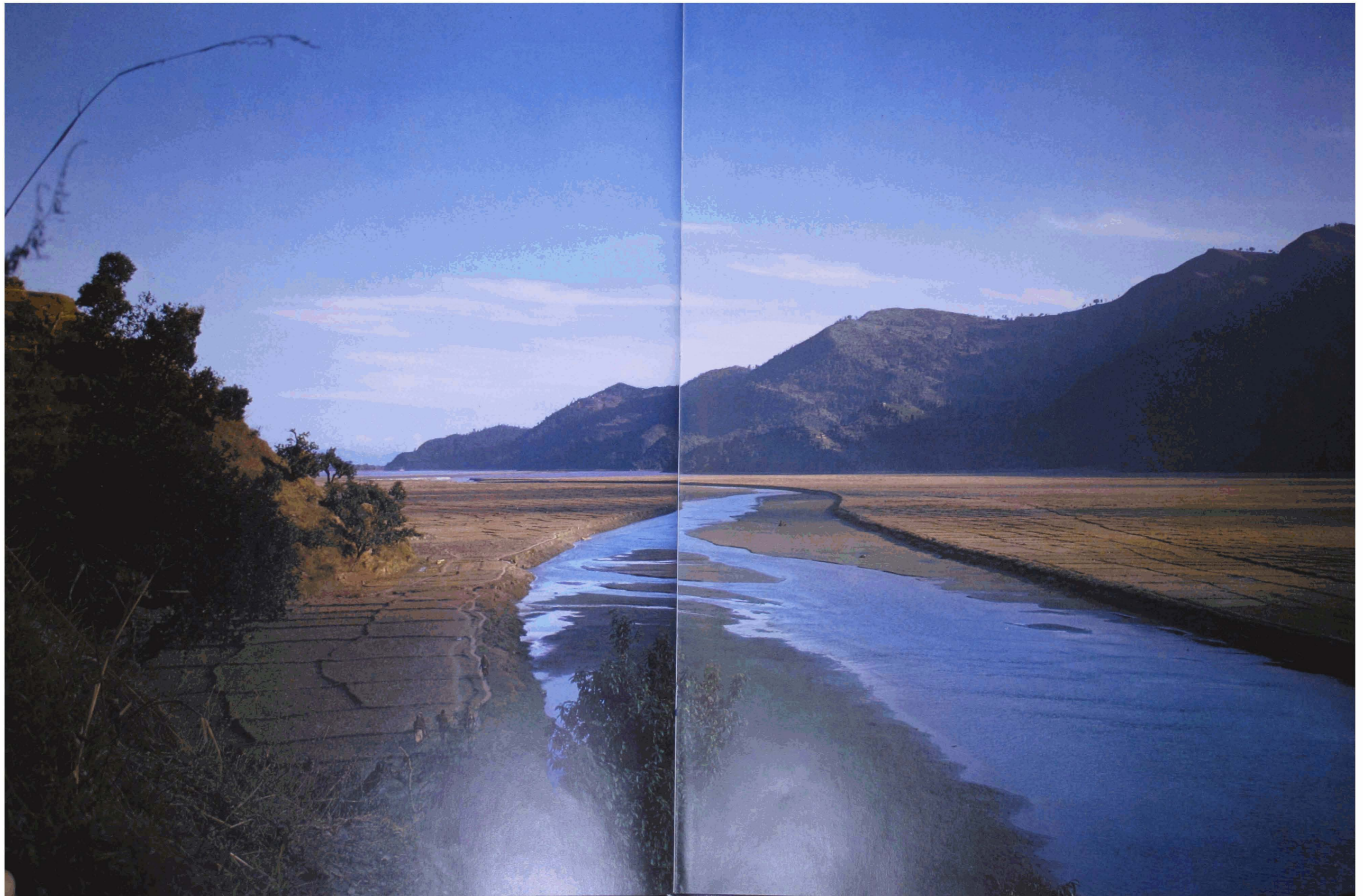
6 *A Ladakhi woman from Leh wearing the tibi hat commonly seen in that city, made of black velvet or felt, with silver hatband. The red lining can be seen on the underside of the turned-up brim, which is cut from the front. She is also wearing pearl earrings and a vest of Chinese pressed silk. Suspended from the necklace of large coral and turquoise beads is the gau or gahu, a charm box.*

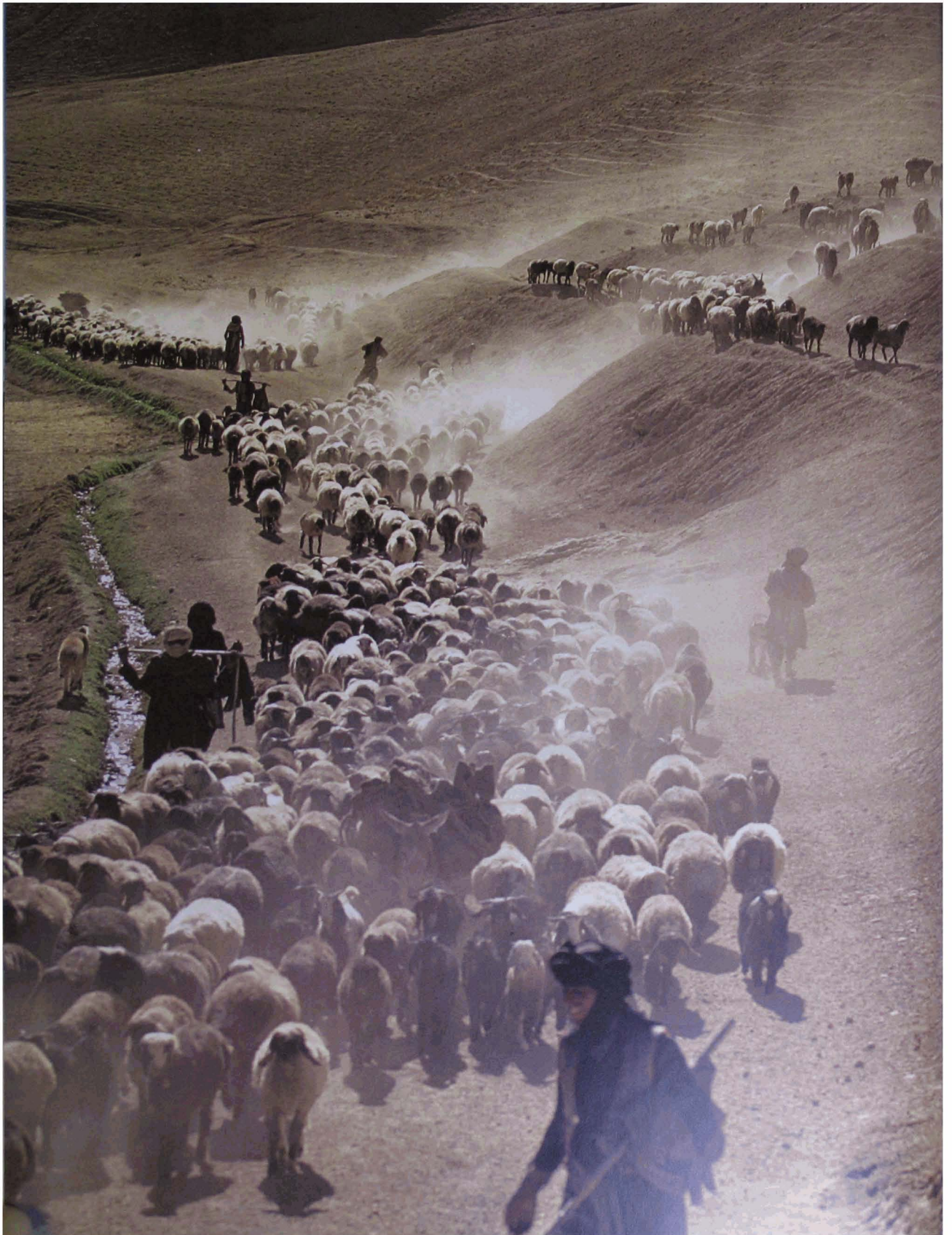
7 *The monastery-city of Thiksey rises on the right bank of the Indus, 19 kilometers upstream from the Ladakhi principal city of Leh. Its location and size make Thiksey one of the most impressive monastic settlements in the country as well as the largest Ladakhi community of the Yellow Caps, or Gelugpa sect, which infiltrated the country from Tibet. The simchung, the Abbot's residence, dominates this community of varied temples, with its rich treasure of wall paintings, statues, and the shrines known as thankas and chortens. Thiksey is still inhabited today by about eighty monks and a community of nuns. Popular mystery celebrations are held each year in the monastery courtyard.*

8 *Stele from the half-destroyed Indreshvara temple of Nepal, a Shiva sanctuary near Panauti, in the valley of Banepa about 30 kilometers from Katmandu. Pilgrims have offered the goddess flowers, rice, and tika powder (also used to make the Hindus' red forehead sign).*

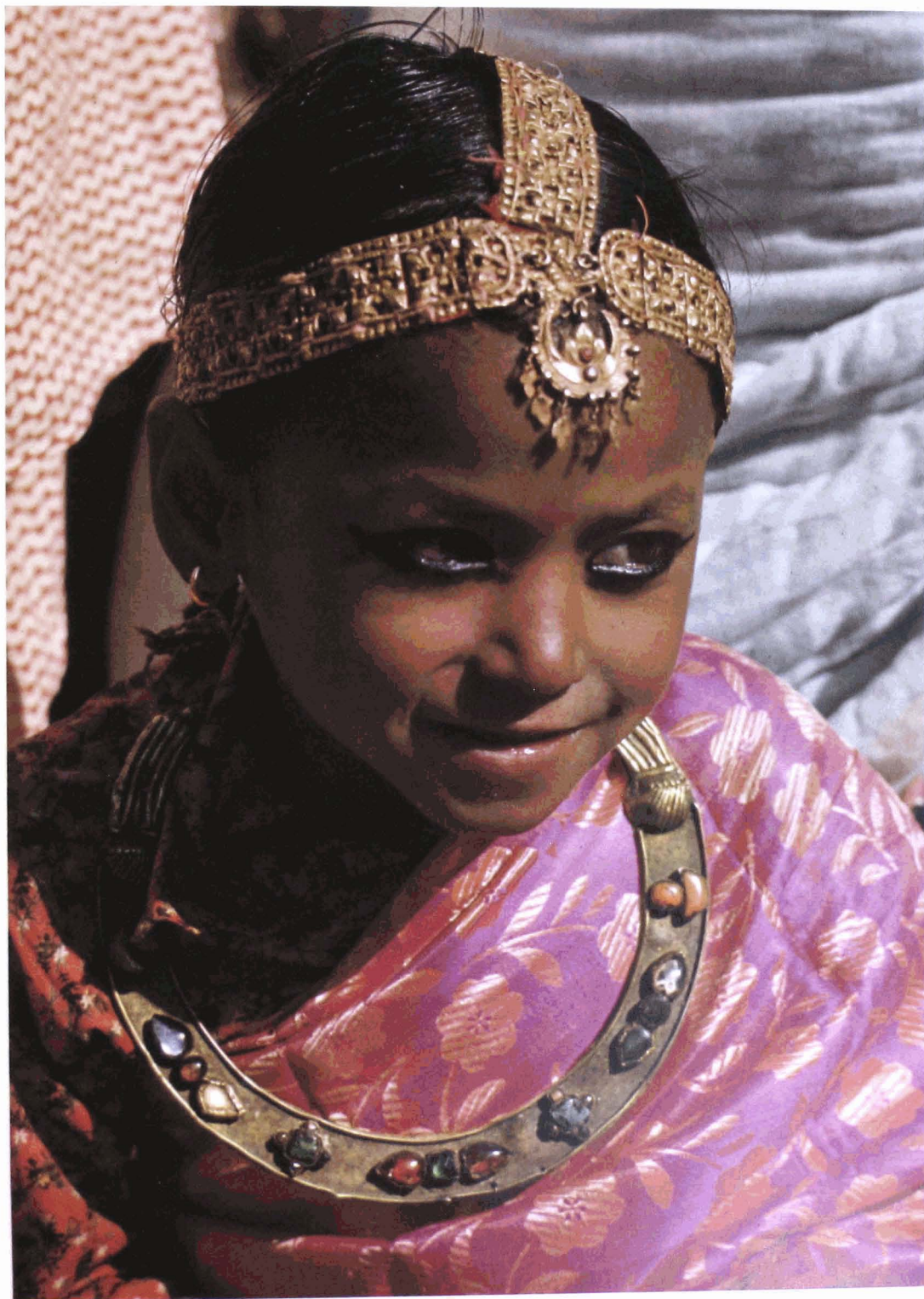
9 *Monastery of Thiksey, Ladakh. In the red-painted main Gonkhang (temple of Mahakal), full of wrathful images, stands this statue of Mahakal, a Dharmapala or guardian of the Law, with the rank of Bodhisattva. The dire appearance of these gods is meant to frighten off enemies of the faith, while the faithful can draw sustenance from the gods' manifest strength. The black-painted god with his greased hair wears a splendid silver gau charm box. The veils hanging from his hat are known as katas, scarves of friendship. This god, the Lamaist form of Shiva, appears in 75 different manifestations, either as white, black, or blue Mahakala.*





















10 *The monastery of Hemis, Ladakh. Dancers in the annual mystery festivities, representing a peaceful divinity with bell (ghanta) and small hand-drum filled with beads.*

its frontiers. A mind so attuned to space and diversity naturally embraced religious tolerance. He made concessions to Hinduism and received Jesuit missionaries at his court, whom he flattered by listening to their teachings; he also advised them, however, that he could not contemplate giving up the pleasures of his harem. With his marriage to a princess of Jaipur, the influence of India became even more marked under his rule.

The young monarch, though unable to learn to write, enjoyed and practiced the art of drawing. From Persia he summoned painters and calligraphers who worked in collaboration with Indian artists, copying ancient manuscripts and illustrating them anew. This monumental work which he personally supervised, participating himself in the creation of the miniatures, was the historical romance of the Islamic hero Aemir Hamza. Only 96 pages of the 1400 original sheets have been preserved, but even so they constitute a priceless documentation on the times.

Akbar's successor, the emperor Jahangir, continued the tradition of the flourishing arts of lavish building and landscape gardening. He chose the calm and secluded lakes of Udaipur and Lahore as sites for his enchanting palaces. The inside of walls of the Itimad-ud-Daula mausoleum at Agra, built for the parents of his beloved wife Nur Jahan are entirely decorated with floral motifs, the colors rendered by inlays of semiprecious stones.

Shah Jahan (1592–1666), the fifth emperor, left behind the Red Fort in Delhi, the Fort of Agra, and especially the famous Taj Mahal, built between 1631 and 1648. This sumptuous mausoleum was built in honor of Queen Arjumand Banu, known as Mumtaz Mahal ("Elect of the Palace"), from which the name Taj Mahal is derived, and intended to assure immortality to the memory of the beloved wife who had given him fourteen children.

Aurangzeb, the last of the six Great Moguls, reigned from 1658 to 1707. As emperor, he assumed the title of Conqueror of the World, and had himself crowned twice. In contrast to his large-minded ancestors, he was an intransigent and puritanical Muslim who sought to impose his religion on conquered territories. His campaigns took him to Afghanistan and the south, where he made Aurangabad, the city that bears his name, his capital. It was from there that he organized his celebrated royal caravans to make the long trek north to Kashmir.

The empire declined in the eighteenth century; nominally, the dynasty reigned until 1857, when India came under British rule.

2. *The Gardens of Paradise*

The marvelous gardens of paradise, strewn throughout the Mogul empire like precious stones and inspiring the art of jewelry, are the tangible expression of a sensuous art of living and a cult of nature and love. The sovereigns contributed their knowledge of botany and their attachment to the symbolism that inspired their landscape gardeners. Here are some samples of the meaning attached to plants and flowers: The so-called royal *chenar* tree had always been

associated with the country's rulers, as the fleur-de-lys was the emblem of French kings. The foliage and trunks of these century-old trees enhance the beauty of the Vale of Kashmir.

The splendid *Bombax Malabaricum*, with its flaming red flowers, is the tree dedicated to Shiva.

The jasmine is consecrated to the deity Vishnu.

The white *gloxinia* is planted in worship of Lakshmi, the goddess of beauty and fortune.

Butea frondosa, the fire of the forest, is consecrated to the Buddha.

The leaves of the Jama mango are used as offerings and in the decoration for religious ceremonies.

Two trees planted next to each other, such as the lemon tree and the orange tree, are a symbol of happy lovers. Male and female date palms should never be separated, because the same symbolism attaches to them.

The cypress is the tree of longevity. For contrast it will be planted next to a fruit tree, which blooms ephemerally.

The planting of trees at the four cardinal points and at entrance gates is governed by an underlying symbolism.

Purple and fragrant violets are a symbol of black hair.

The greatest importance is given to perfumes. It is said that a scent inhaled on awakening imparts health and well-being.

In the scale of values, colors come after scents, each having a symbolic meaning and together forming a complete harmony.

Favorite flowers are the rose, the carnation, the delphinium, the peony, the hollyhock, and many others.

Jahangir regarded Kashmir as the land most cherished by the emperors. He himself, accompanied by his wife, crossed the Pir Panjal pass (altitude 3,040 meters) thirteen times by elephant in order to reach the valley where the most enchanting *baghs* (gardens) were planted.

Nishat Bagh, or the "Garden of Delights," is of exceptional beauty. One approaches it slowly and gradually in a *shikara* (pirogue), gliding among water lilies, lotuses, and water birds, and dazzled by the sun and the flashing kingfishers.

Twelve terraces, dedicated to the twelve signs of the zodiac, have been built on the highest mountain slopes. The waters leap from one to another, fall in cascades, and gush from fountains. At the center of the mirror of water, a graceful pavilion was reserved for the ruler's favorite. There she could parade her nudity in the sun with no other covering but the ornaments presented to her by her princely lover.

Shalimar Bagh, or the "Abode of Love," was created by the emperor Jahangir for his adored wife Nur Jahan ("Light of the Palace"). In the shadow of cedars, *chenar* trees, and flowering shrubs, the atmosphere casts a magical spell in which one's gaze is dazzled by colors and each breath intoxicates with the aroma of flowers. On one terrace, a charming pavilion of white marble is reflected in the water. It was the residence assigned to the ruler's wife, while farther down a black marble pavilion housed his harem.

The Chasma Shahi garden, conceived in 1632 by Shah Jahan, overlooks the grandiose panorama of Lake Dal. Across from it, Nasim Bagh, the "Garden of Morning Breezes," designed by Akbar the Great in his role of landscape gardener, descends on terraces on the west shore of the lake, from where one looks toward the majestic mountains of the Himalaya.

These opulent rulers expressed their conception of an ideal of earthly beauty. On the shores of the lake, the walls of the palaces have crumbled, but the parks have kept their eternally renewed and restful freshness, while the impressive trees have become hundreds of years old.

The Jhelum River with its countless tributaries irrigates the valley, and crosses Lake Dal to enter the city of Srinagar and flow under its nine bridges. The capital of Kashmir takes its name from Siri, goddess of beauty, and *nagar* meaning city.

Srinagar is very populous and extends over an area of land so precious that people avoid living on it: A great number of the inhabitants live on houseboats on the river and lakes, cradled in a harmony of splashing sounds and flower gardens and spiritual beauty.

The Lotus, *padma*, image of the universe issuing from the ocean of first causes, blossoms on the surface of the tranquil waters that stretch all the way to the foot of the dominating heights of the Himalaya. Its sensitive petals open to the warmth of a ray of sunshine and to the softness of moonlight. Padma is the symbol of innocence and purity. It is born in mud, rises through the element water to shoot like a jet toward the element air, and opens into spotless flowers under the warmth of the sun to form the throne of Buddha as symbol of the Law of Perfection (Dharma) and of Knowledge (Jhana).

Despite the enchantments of the Vale of Kashmir, we were unable to resist the lure of the Himalayan heights. We were soon to set out for Ladakh along roads that ran beside the mountain streams, leaving behind the warm, hospitable, and fruitful valley, the damp earth of its rice fields, the colors of a palette that we were not to see again, as well as a people who work hard but know the sweetness of living, and the fishermen with their nightly songs and their miraculous catch. We were to climb very high into the mountains, to a desert of sand and golden granite, to be confronted with a harsh, bare nature and greet other people among whom we were to feel ourselves to be "Puyiying pa," the Stranger.

3. *Jewelry in Literature and Painting*

In India the wearing of refined and precious jewels goes back to earliest antiquity. Our knowledge of the art of personal finery was able to pierce the mists of time first of all through the oral tradition that was later to be committed to writing.

The poets set down the religious and heroic epics in the rhythm of Sanskrit verse. In these writings, demigods and their consorts, as well as mythological heroes, are minutely described as adorned with precious ornaments. These manuscripts constitute an early source of knowledge. Archaeological research on this remote period, for all its importance in other respects, does not really shed much light on ornamental art.

India, which has always displayed such color and diversity over its entire geographical expanse and in the variety of its forms, has maintained an undeniable permanence when it comes to its beliefs and customs. Over the centuries, men and women have kept the same faith in an ideal of beauty for them so perfect that it was thought to last forever.

The influences of foreign cultures destroyed nothing; on the contrary, they introduced new elements of perfection that through the skill of craftsmen and under the direction of the sovereigns mingled harmoniously to form a developed aesthetic. The goldsmiths today fashion pieces of jewelry very similar to those of antiquity and often bearing the same names as in the Sanskrit texts.

Valmiki, an Indian poet who flourished in the third century B.C. is the reputed author of a classic Sanskrit work, the *Ramayana*. As one reads this literary monument of twenty-four thousand double verses, a succession of astonishing images unfolds, illustrating the life of a period that can still be seen as having connections with the India of today. The author gives a

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description of the beauty and splendor of Shiva, and adds a complete list of the ornaments of the time, characterized by their richness and brilliance, a unique documentation, useful in studying the history of jewelry in India from antiquity to the present day.

On his wedding day, Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu in Hindu mythology, wore a crown of pearls from which an ornament was suspended to cover his forehead, ear pendants reaching to his shoulders, and necklaces of pearls and flowers that intermingled on his chest. His eyes were dazzled by the appearance of Sita, his bride, whose black hair was resplendent with jeweled butterflies. Her graceful body shone all over with fiery gems, while golden bells tinkled on her feet as she moved across thick carpets.

In the Sanskrit epic, Bhagavadgita, which recounts the exploits of Krishna, the hero Arjuna, wishing to appear disguised at the court of Rajah Virata, covers himself with feminine ornaments, necklaces, bracelets, and earrings, to which are added a gold chain and a diadem offered by a god as proof of his favors. When Arjuna journeys through the land of the Amazons in search of a white horse to be offered as a sacrifice to the gods, he is surrounded by young and beautiful women whose brilliance is further enhanced by sparkling jewels. Pearl necklaces dangle on their garments, woven of gold; their arms and ankles are loaded with rings and bells. Arjuna's horse wears a chain set with gems around its neck.

An Indian play written approximately two thousand years ago gives a description of a jeweler's shop where craftsmen examine precious stones and jewels: pearls, topazes, emeralds, sapphires, lapis lazuli, coral, and others as well. While some mount rubies in gold settings, others grind lapis lazuli or cut shells, and still others shape and drill coral. Various kinds of gold are employed, and ornamental motifs are derived from the most diverse kinds of flowers.

A treatise or sutra contains rules for leading a moral life and for daily life. It also gives a list of *samskaras*, those religious ceremonies that regulate the lives of individuals from birth to death. These texts describe a fixed ritual for each celebration, their meaning, and the symbolism attached to jewelry, each piece being mentioned by name. A wholly special religious significance was assigned to jewels, and as a result they were even more admired and respected for their moral value than for their aesthetic or material one. The *samskaras* are celebrated at the present time as in the past, with few modifications.

The ancient law governing the *stridhana*, still in force and one of the most exacting of Indian rights, was instituted to protect the personal property of wives, which consisted solely of jewelry.

While the epic literature attached great importance to a detailed description of the finery worn by its heroes and heroines, who aroused admiration by their natural beauty, enhanced by the radiance of pearls, gems, and gold, it still took several centuries before it was possible to see pictures of what artists were depicting with precision – the splendor, perfection, refinement, and grace of personal ornaments.

One day in 1817, some British soldiers, on maneuvers at the foot of a granite hill in a desolate region, probed some crevices of volcanic rock at the bottom of a wild gorge. By following tunnels, they stumbled on some caves. When they struck a light, extraordinary figures appeared to them on the dark walls; gods and goddesses, all the heroes of mythology and legend, were suddenly revealed. A world hitherto invisible and unexplored disclosed its secret to the gaze of men.

These caves, some of them natural, but most cut into the stone, have become famous and are called by the name of a small neighboring village, Ajanta, situated near Aurangabad.

They were already known as early as the second century B.C. Buddhist monks used them as a shelter against bad weather, and their settlement was to last for several centuries. After being

abandoned for a long period, they were again occupied in the fifth century of our era. According to the inscriptions, monks lived there until the eighth century. It was during this period that anonymous – and today gloriously renowned – artists decorated the walls and ceilings with frescoes. The genius of these painters expressed itself in a style of great accuracy; skillful draftsmen, they knew how to create with firm and supple lines a world of figures so alive that after more than a thousand years they seem to be living still. Thus in the cold obscurity where everything dies, the gods and heroes of legend were born in the breath of a long inspiration. The transformed caves became palaces filled with characters whom the poets had described several centuries before the painters, palaces in which the fantasy of dreams became reality.

The façades are decorated with precious ornaments, plaques inlaid with gems are set into the doors, cascades of pearls alleviate the stiffness of the columns. In this wonderful setting, men and women approach each other, moving with ease in the expression of the events they enact. These ineffably beautiful beings embrace and speak.

All the stories that recount the life of Buddha are illustrated in this place, and he himself appears throughout the cycles of his reincarnations, accompanied by his friends and disciples. For the first time, mythological images reveal heroes by giving them faces, such as the prince of *nagas* (serpents), the guardian of underground riches, the golden stag that preached at the court of the king of Benares, the river goddesses, the celestial dancers and musicians, the actors in the tale of the golden goose, the guardian angel and the miracles it performed, as well as many other deeds.

In the gloom the figures shine by the light of their jewels, sole adornment of bodies necessarily left nude because of their beauty. They wear long strings of pearls falling on their chests, twisted ones around their necks, as well as gold necklaces with pendants inlaid with huge solitaires, and necklaces of rubies or emeralds. Their wrists are adorned with bracelets, and they wear arm bracelets trimmed with pearls. Their ankles are weighed down with hoops of gold. The fine curves of the waist are exposed while the hips are encased in girdles, often of rubies, fastened modestly in front by a knot. The head ornaments are remarkable for their great variety, delicacy of execution, and elegant fantasy. There are conical tiaras, diadems fringed with pearls falling over the forehead, and turbans that seem to sag under the weight of jewels.

The imagination of the goldsmith artists seems to have been inexhaustible, and the variety of their creations is proof of it. They were craftsmen, masters of a great art, and experts in combining all precious elements.

4. *The Magic of Precious Stones*

The Mogul emperors, great connoisseurs and patrons of all the arts, exerted an influence on jewelry and gave it a new splendor. This rebirth was the result of a synthesis of Indian and Muslim traditions, the latter, as we have seen, having already been infiltrated to a large extent by Persian influences.

The jewelry mentioned in the ancient Hindu *Ramayana* continued to be executed. Although artists worked out new variations of design, the traditions were respected and each piece preserved the moral and religious values that had been attached to it. The Sanskrit names, on the other hand, suffered changes due to the influx of foreign languages and the use of an everyday vocabulary.

It is a universal phenomenon that people and nations tend to believe in the beneficent or malevolent supernatural power of precious stones, and the Muslims and Hindus were no exception. As the two civilizations underwent a process of mutual assimilation, each society adopted the superstitions of the other.

The oldest talisman, already known in India before our era and whose importance persisted throughout the centuries, was an ornament known as the *navaratna*, and worn by the rich as well as the poor. It consisted of a gold plaque set with nine precious stones, each chosen for the occult power attributed to it, and its effectiveness was supposed to be further strengthened by the favorable radiations of the stones on each other.

Not only were the nine gems of the *navaratna* thought to have an intrinsic power, they also had an essential strength based on the interaction of astral and mineral influences. Each stone corresponded to one of the heavenly bodies from which it drew beneficent rays while neutralizing harmful effects.

The *Mani Mala*, a work by the Maharajah Mohun Tagore, sums up all the complex aspects of the study of precious stones. He noted that it was important to wear a *navaratna* to protect oneself against inauspicious zodiacal influences. According to him, the jewels and precious stones and their astral equivalents were as follows: diamond – moon, ruby – sun, pearl – Jupiter, zircon – Mercury, coral – Mars, cat's-eye – Venus.

Similarly, a prayer chaplet was thought to be a hundred times more effective for the worshipper if it was composed of fine pearls, coral, rock crystal, and other semiprecious stones strung on a gold chain. The *vaipayanti* chaplet was to consist of sapphires, pearls, rubies, cat's-eyes, and even diamonds.

Indian Muslims likewise adopted the *navaratna* as a talisman. The Mogul sovereigns enhanced its importance, since this superstition gave them the opportunity to commission from their jewelers dazzling necklaces or bracelets of nine precious stones, often very large and uncut. Miniatures from the period show the emperors and high officials adorned with the magical talisman.

The Moguls attached great importance to the study of astrology, knowledge of which had always been well developed in India. Astrologers came to occupy a dominant position at the court and were consulted in all circumstances. Their predictions determined the decisions of the emperors, who acted only on astrological dates judged to be favorable.

From the beginning, Muslims had believed in the efficacy of amulets (the word comes from the Arabic *hamalat*) and talismans (*tilsam*, meaning incantation).

The carnelian, which brings good luck, was a favorite stone among males. The origin of its reputation goes back to the Prophet Mohammed, who is said to have worn a silver ring set with a carnelian. Belief in the beneficent powers of the carnelian became even more widespread when Jafar, the renowned iman, declared: "All the wishes of the man who wears a carnelian will be fulfilled."

An old custom required children to wear an amulet known as a *baba ghuli*, consisting of a carnelian engraved with a text from the Koran.

The rulers and high officials of the Muslim world wore carnelians mounted in rings and engraved with their names and titles, with precepts from the Koran and symbolic signs. These talisman rings, used as seals, were often veritable treasures. Among those that have survived the devastations of history, there is one in gold set with diamonds, and another in turquoise surrounded by pearls and rubies. Stones known as precious in the strict sense of the word were seldom engraved.

To ward off Evil, the rays of the new
Moon should be seen on the face of a Friend,
A text of the Koran or on a Turquoise.

From earliest times, as soon as men learned to recognize among all the gray stones those very rare ones which by rubbing could be made to show fascinating colors, they attributed to their beauty powers whose effects were supposed to reach not only men but the gods as well.

Over the centuries, initiates developed this occult knowledge, which was the daughter of astrology. On the other hand, belief in the radiant influences of stones and minerals was deeply rooted in society and influenced the lives of men, women, and children. Once they had invaded and occupied India, the Great Moguls and their subjects adopted the occult beliefs of the Hindus and mingled them with their own.

An absolute confidence in the beneficial aid to be derived from precious materials helped to make the art of jewelry an essentially human one, far surpassing the level of secular frivolity. It is an art closely linked to people's lives and communicates itself to them to the depths of their being. It touches all elements and expresses the greatest passions, which it confirms and symbolizes. It works its way, bringing happiness and misfortune, into the very essence of life; it decorates the rich and is the finery of the poor. Approved by the gods, it adapts itself to all religions. It attaches itself to the child at birth. It knows all the secrets of love and infidelity, heightens the coquetry of woman, and confirms the pride of men. It flatters the vanity of all, until death bestows it on posterity for the renewal of life.

Jewelers were so profoundly influenced by these beliefs, both in the conception of their creations and in the choice of precious materials, that it would not be inappropriate to take an impartial look at the subject of the magic of stones and minerals, in an effort to understand the relevant traditions of the Hindus and Muslims.

People believed that because of their nature talismans and amulets commanded cosmic forces of high frequencies inherent in the stones of which they were made, and knowledge of these forces determined the choice of materials. Their magnetic capacity was also thought to combine and harmonize with the radiation of the planets. The forces of attraction or repulsion might be good or bad. It was believed that talismans acted to attract such energies, while amulets both attracted and repelled them.

Talismans were often marked with characters having a personal significance for those who wore them. The powers of the stones thus engraved were thereby extraordinarily enhanced. The Mogul emperors were highly attached to these superstitions.

Tamerlane or Timur (1336–1405), the dreaded conqueror of Asia, one day received from his spiritual adviser a ring set with a ruby on which was engraved "Justice and Silence." This ruby, known as the "Timur" because its history begins with the wild horseman of the steppes, became the property two centuries later of the Mogul emperor Jahangir, who, moved by the conviction that this already celebrated jewel would transmit his own glory to posterity, had his name engraved on it and added that of Akbar, his father. The stone, superstitiously venerated by the Mogul dynasty, also bears the names of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. Today the "Timur," mounted as a pendant in a diamond necklace, is owned by the queen of England.

Diamonds were seldom engraved. Two such stones, however, are famous: the "Akbar Shah," of 116 carats, which bears the name of its first owner, Akbar the Great, from whom it passed to his son Jahangir, who had his name and his father's engraved on it in Arabic characters; and the "Pole Star" or "Shah," a splendid diamond originally of 88 carats, which bears the names of three kings of Persia engraved on each of its three sides.

The radiating colors of precious stones, their shifting nuances of tone, result from the play of

light and the material. The coloration of minerals has many causes, among them natural components and an indefinable pigmentation. Rays of light falling on their surfaces are caught or thrown back, and thus produce the phenomena of reflection, refraction, and dispersion, while from the decomposition of the ray of white light and its diffusion flow all the colors of the spectrum. This accounts for the remarkable brilliance of diamonds.

The conductivity of minerals varies a great deal. Most of them are good conductors of heat. For example, sensitive hands can locate a diamond by touch alone in a sackful of glass.

Certain precious stones can, depending on outside influences, become electrically charged. Observation of the electrical properties of minerals is a difficult and delicate operation. One can notice without the aid of instruments that, depending on atmospheric conditions, stones can be charged with electricity on their surface and at different degrees of intensity by the heat generated by rubbing them with a cloth. Heat and cold, dryness and humidity, act in different ways. The topaz and the tourmaline have the power of becoming highly charged and of remaining so for several hours; the diamond, on the other hand, acquires only a weak charge. Stones can be differentiated by measuring their electric charge with an electroscope.

Certain precious stones are fluorescent; others, such as the topaz and rock crystal, become phosphorescent as the result of heat. Heat is here obtained by rubbing them with a cloth or even a piece of wood. Diamonds can become phosphorescent after being exposed to the rays of the sun; they will also shine in the dark after being rubbed with wool or leather. The color they emit is generally yellow, but may also be green, red, or blue.

Microscopic fragments or particles of diamonds have been discovered in the meteoric iron of extraterrestrial matter, which suggests that the diamond is not a mineral peculiar to our world. Cubes of graphitic carbon in meteors were once diamonds that were subsequently transformed as a result of intense heat.

The electric effects of amber and tourmaline have been known since antiquity. While these external phenomena can be grasped immediately by the senses, there are others that remain hidden in the essence of things and appear only to those who have acquired the knowledge or perception of them. The adepts of India considered precious stones and metals as living materials projecting waves, and they sought to know the frequencies of these pulsations. Their purpose was to achieve a union of the forces of energy by harmonizing them with the corresponding heavenly bodies and with individuals.

The solar, lunar, and astral influences brought so strongly to bear came to be added to the individual qualities of the stones. Those who had been initiated into the study of minerals strove to know all their qualities as well as the intensity of each stone. Summing up the characteristics of each, they measured its values numerically. On the other hand, they arbitrarily designated various stones as male or female.

The following table gives some examples of the way these values were appraised:

Emerald, dark green – 302	Diamond – 315 (?)
Emerald, light green – 297	Opal – 247
Hyacinth, pale red – 305	Rock crystal – 267.5
Hyacinth, dark red – 315	Chalcedony – 270
Ruby – 312.5–315	Red tourmaline – 280
Aquamarine – 300	Black tourmaline – 290
Sapphire – 322	Garnet – 292.5
Lapis lazuli – 290	Peridot – 247.5
Corundum – 310	Beryl – 290

The diamond, an occult male stone, was considered to be a secret force of nature that communicated to the wearer nobility and purity of thought. It was supposed to grant protection

against psychic unbalance and nervous weakness, but also against enemies and the envious. Diamonds known in history for having brought bad luck constitute exceptions.

The brilliant, which is distinguished by being cut in facets, possessed the same qualities, and its force contributed to the expansion of one's powers of concentration and mental creation.

The ruby, a male stone crimson in color, was the most beautiful and cherished of jewels for its value and its occult qualities. It was thought to sustain the forces of positive impetus in one's work and activities, and to lead to success. The pale ruby, pink or barely colored, was considered to be a female stone.

The almandine or carbuncle, of a lilac red, is more magnetic than the ruby. It was supposed to encourage spiritual forces and inspiration. Like the ruby, it consolidated the organism and possessed curative powers.

The sapphire is the stone of peace of the soul. It comes in different colors: light blue, the sapphire was called a female stone; dark blue, it was considered male. The sapphire draws sympathy, calms the nerves, and soothes anxiety. Its color is sensitive to changes in atmospheric pressure. It protects its wearer against heart and eye ailments, and against accidents, while at the same time developing intuition and acting as a monitor to prevent the committing of errors. Its effects were thought to be more marked on sensitive persons, whom it protected and influenced positively by its magical power. It was supposed to develop the gift of sight, and was the symbol of wisdom.

The emerald, a female stone, was a true protective force. Its splendid dark green color made it the stone of innocence, harmony, and fidelity. It protected its wearer against the evil eye, encouraged premonitory dreams, and dispelled nightmares.

The aquamarine was a lunar stone that was worn only if the moon was favorable in one's horoscope. Its sensitivity was said to increase one's receptivity to impressions necessary for spiritual progress.

The topaz was called a nocturnal stone, and its occult strength came from the fact that it possessed a high electric charge, which made it the stone of clairvoyance. It was also supposed to exercise a beneficial effect on the nervous system and spiritual life, and could render certain services to writers and orators.

The amethyst, by its violet color, was considered the stone of friendship. Under the influence of the planet Mars, it was said to balance impulsiveness and anger, and to guard against their consequences. It purified the mind, and as the stone of priests it was supposed to guide them to spiritual progress.

The opal, whose name comes from the Sanskrit *upala*, is a stone that in the most ancient tradition of the East had the reputation of bringing bad luck. It can, however, provide a certain contentment and the harmony of a lasting happiness, but its effectiveness depends on the planetary constellation of its owner, whose horoscope must be studied. The moon's influence is opposed to the opal, and this is why nomadic peoples living under the sign of the moon feared the opal's effects.

Rock crystal possesses a powerful force of attraction and repulsion. Two perfectly round disks of finely polished crystal constituted the "magic mirror," an object that was used for concentration and meditation.

Onyx is a stone about which it is preferable to keep silent, for its properties were judged to be negative. It was sometimes used during seances of magical incantations.

Turquoise has always been and continues to be much valued in the East as a talisman, a function for which it has to be engraved with a text from the Koran. The clergy held it in particular esteem since they believed it increased the faculty of premonition.

The greatest importance was attached to the way stones were set. Pearls were to be worn only

in necklaces, because if they were set in silver they brought tears. Rubies, diamonds, and aquamarines were set in gold, while topazes and amethysts were encased in silver.

Gold and silver were regarded as polar opposites. Gold was part of solar energy and represented the positive male spirit. Silver was subject to a negative lunar current, the soul of the feminine.

The correspondences between metals and planets were seen to be as follows:

Gold – Sun	Copper – Venus
Silver – Moon	Iron – Mars
Mercury – Mercury	Zinc – Jupiter
Lead – Saturn	Aluminum – Neptune
Platinum – Uranus	

The power of incantations in magical ceremonies was reinforced by the use of precious stones, each chosen for a particular purpose. Demonology had likewise decided on the choice of metals for the instruments of its rituals; their polarities and forces were expected to correspond harmoniously with those of the precious stones employed.

Indian goldsmiths had discovered the secret of red gold, which they obtained by heating gold with tamarind seeds.

Sun and Light, dispensers of vital forces over all of nature, were of course also said to penetrate metals and precious stones by their influences. The table below gives a few planetary connections between astral bodies and stones:

Sun – diamond, ruby, chrysolite, hyacinth
Moon – emerald, opal, aquamarine, moonstone
Mercury – topaz, carnelian
Venus – light blue sapphire, agate, white pearl, coral
Mars – ruby, diamond, jasper
Jupiter – amethyst, turquoise, dark blue sapphire
Saturn – onyx, black pearl, chalcedony
Uranus – amber, amethyst
Neptune – topaz and all iridescent stones

All these gems are especially receptive to the great natural forces that penetrate them.

The magicians of the East were as familiar with life in its fundamental unity as in the multiplicity of its manifestations, but the knowledge and truth that they thought they had perceived, as well as their most profound secrets, were scarcely ever disclosed. The teachings they transmitted to countless generations were always oral and only very rarely written down. Despite their prudence, they allowed a few gleams to escape that may perhaps give us a better understanding of the deeper meaning, both religious and human, of the art of jewelry in India. This art, as a result of its spiritual strength, never underwent a decline, but rather a series of apotheoses, each time creating a new rebirth.

5. The Treasures of the East

Let us now set aside the irrational aspects of precious stones and metals, which will have evoked credulity in some readers and skepticism in others, in order to consider their sensual beauty and describe the many forms in which they were used to signify the wealth and power of men and gods.

The giant triangle formed by the Indian subcontinent between the Himalaya to the north, the Arabian Sea to the west, the Bay of Bengal to the east, and Sri Lanka to the far south, is a country whose soil contains almost all the precious stones.

Faced with this abundance, the jewelry-makers of India developed an intuitive sense for mineral substances. In the course of millennia, they became expert in recognizing the precious core in its raw envelope, and in the polishing of mineral blocks whose colored transparency they revealed. Polishing produced stones of the only form that for a long time was known and esteemed – the “cabochon.”

The Indians always had a preference for translucent stones, responding with fascination to the subtle range of their colors. Connoisseurs studied these gem stones in a variety of lighting, in the pale morning light and in the glow of evening, by the light of oil lamps and in the play of shadows. Experience and application taught them to perceive and compare the subtlety of tones and variable nuances. They recognized the flaws that disturbed the purity of gems: sand, dust, clouding, etc. Constant experimentation with the aim to impart increased brilliance to stones, led Indian lapidaries to the discovery of cutting, which was perfected over the centuries by cutters in India and Europe.

“Interlaced pearls made the branches bend, the tender leaves had the freshness of coral, and the ripe fruits were of rubies. The verdant buds were splendid emeralds. The base of the trunk had the substance of the diamond, the shaft the solar splendor of the topaz, and the top was of cat’s-eyes. All the zircon leaves glittered with a thousand fires.”

All the diamonds of the ancient world came from India, and it was in the mines of that country that over the centuries the largest and most beautiful ones were found, diamonds that became famous because they adorned the gods worshipped in the temples and also, in all periods, the rulers of Asia and Europe. Until 1728, the year when diamond mines were discovered in Brazil, India was the only country known to produce diamonds. The important deposits in South Africa were not exploited until the end of the nineteenth century.

The adamantine stone was found in India on the surface of sandy, rocky soil; it was also mixed with the gravel of rivers that carried away diamantiferous strata in their currents. The Ganges was said to supply it in abundance. Mines were distributed widely over India’s vast expanse. The legendary Golconda mines were exploited in the earliest times. The diamantiferous lands of Hyderabad, equally famous, extended geographically to the important group of mines at Kollur, discovered in the fifteenth century. It was there that some of the most celebrated stones were probably found: The “Koh-i-noor,” which had 186 carats after being cut in India, was reduced to 106 carats when recut much later in England, where it remains as property of the British Crown; the “Great Mogul,” of 280 carats, the finest jewel belonging to the emperor Aurangzeb; the “Hope diamond,” blue as a sapphire, a great rarity in diamonds.

Among historical diamonds found in India, one might also mention the “Orloff,” a very pure diamond of 194 carats. The largest of the Russian crown jewels, it was bought by Prince Orloff in 1791 for the empress Catherine II. The “Regent,” which originally had 410 carats, lost more than 200 when it was cut in London; this diamond, of a rare perfection, was bought in 1717 by the Duc d’Orléans, Regent of France. The “Florentine,” a beautiful diamond of 133 carats and lightly tinged with yellow, was part of the imperial treasury in Vienna. The “Sancy,” a smaller stone of only 53 carats, owes its fame to the vicissitudes of its history; it was the property, successively, of Queen Elizabeth I of England, Cardinal Mazarin, Louis XIV, and the Spanish crown. The “Empress Eugénie,” a fine brilliant, was presented by Catherine of Russia to her favorite, Potemkin. The “Nasik” takes its name from the city where a statue of Shiva was worshipped; the diamond was inlaid in the god’s forehead as a third eye.

In northeastern India, in the region of the Mahanadi river and its tributaries, thousands of

11 *A girl from the Kashmir village of Sonamarg (2,600 meters above sea level), last stop before the climb to Zoji-La. This pass, at 3,529 meters, crosses the lowest point of the principal Himalaya chain, which divides Kashmir from Ladakh. The girl wears the characteristic cap of the Muslim Kashmiri and a protective amulet.*

12 *A fisherman on Lake Dal busily preparing his nets. This lake, beside the Kashmir capital city, Srinagar, has abundant fish and provides several fishing villages with a livelihood. The rhythmic throwing out and pulling in of their round nets is accompanied by the fishermen's religious chanting, which echoes between the surrounding mountain slopes.*

13 *Padma, the lotus blossom, symbolizes purity, holiness, and the highest spiritual development. On Lake Dal, near Srinagar, the pink lotus Nelumbium speciosum grows in thick carpets. Symbolizing the development out of the Original Ocean of the universe, the plant is rooted in the mud and must overcome the element of water as it makes its way upward to the light, to unfold in the sun its spotless blossoms evoking Buddha and Enlightenment. Similarly, the human spirit can only develop by breaking its bondage to bodily needs and passions, thus achieving the splendid jewel (mani) of Enlightenment.*

14 *A young Bukawal woman with a golden corolla pin in her right nostril.*

15 *This Ghujar woman wears a gleaming silver necklace.*

16 *Bukawal nomads have pitched camp for the night near Drass in Ladakh, not far from the Kashmir border.*

17 *Young Bukawal mother, carrying her child on her shoulder. The charms on the baby's cap are to protect him from all kinds of harm. The woman wears the typical silver jewelry of nomads in these regions, which often includes coins, as here.*

18–19 *Cheap mass-produced articles make their way into even the remotest areas. While the older women continue to wear finely crafted openwork silver jewelry, young girls more and more must be content with cheap stamped-and-pressed imitations.*

20 *A typical Ladakhi mountain village, perched on a protruding rock above a tributary valley of the Indus.*

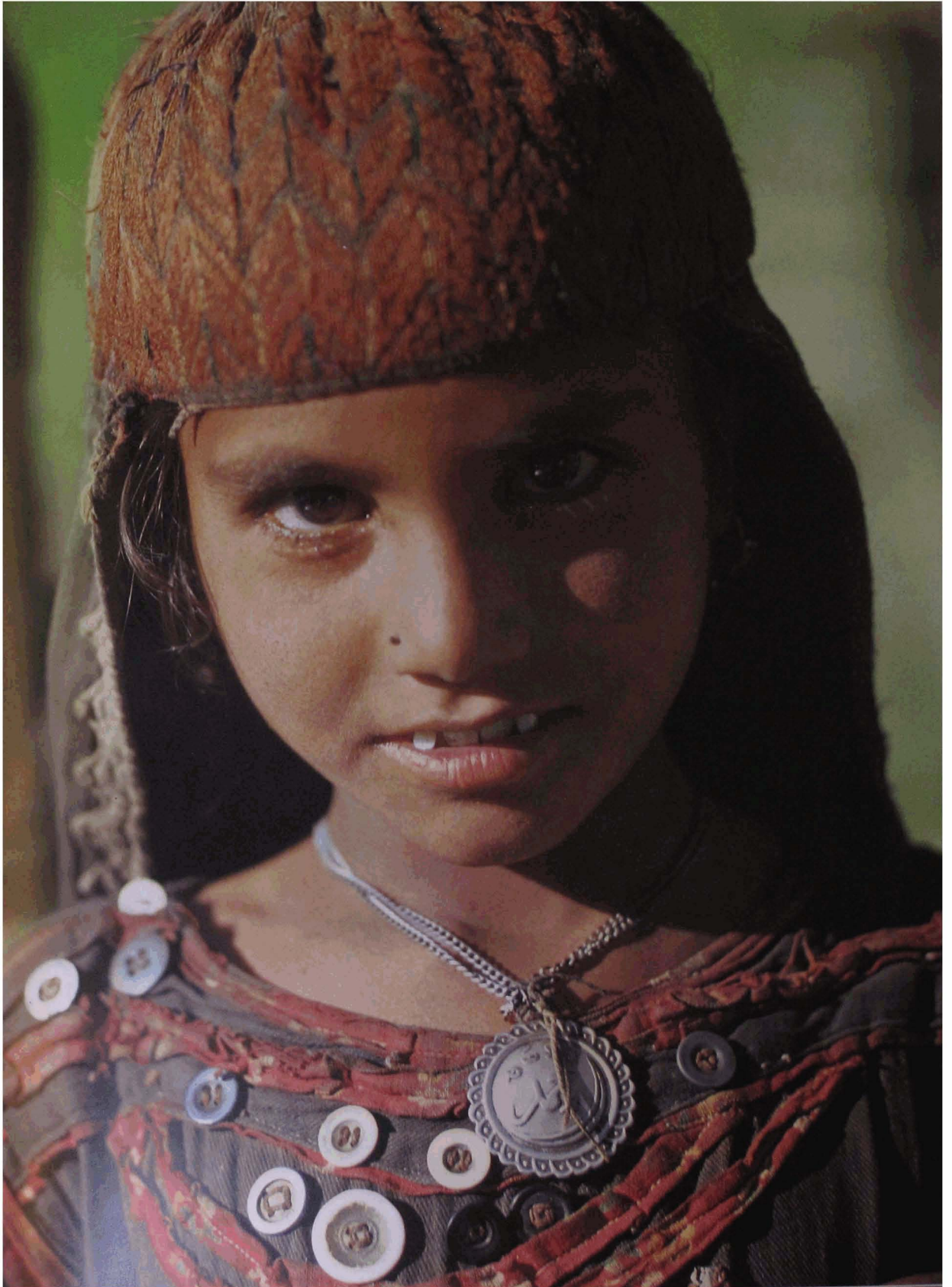
21–22 *This exotic-looking woman of the Druk-pa tribe from Karakorum on the Pakistani border has come down the mountain to Kargil. Because she is considered a magician, spiritual significance is attached to much of her rich jewelry. A curious detail: two rows of buttons, taken from a uniform of the British colonial army. Even though they live so close to the border with Muslim Pakistan, the Druk-pas are Buddhist.*

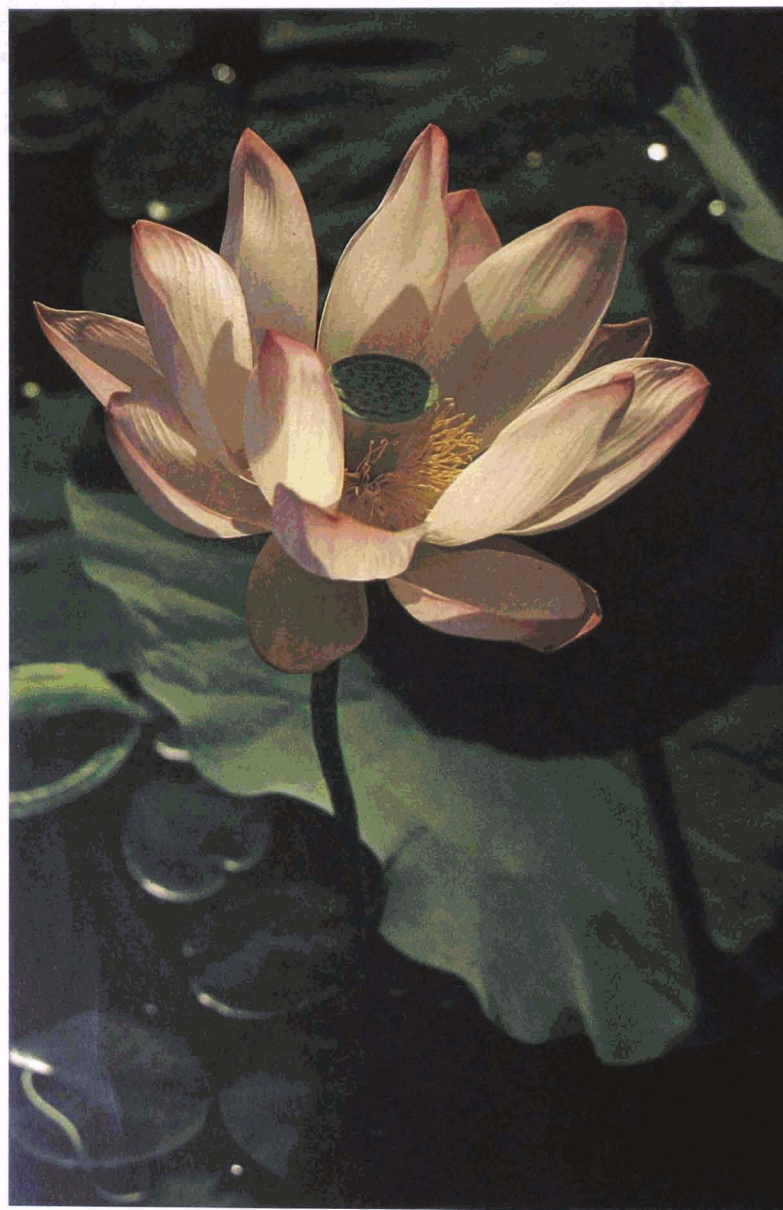
23 *The first houses in Tibetan style are seen even before one reaches Mulbekh.*

24 *A peasant woman from the old Indo-Aryan tribe of the Baltis, wearing large silver earrings, carries home food for the livestock. The Baltis, living predominantly in western Ladakh and Pakistan, were converted in the sixteenth century from Buddhism to Shi-ite Islam.*

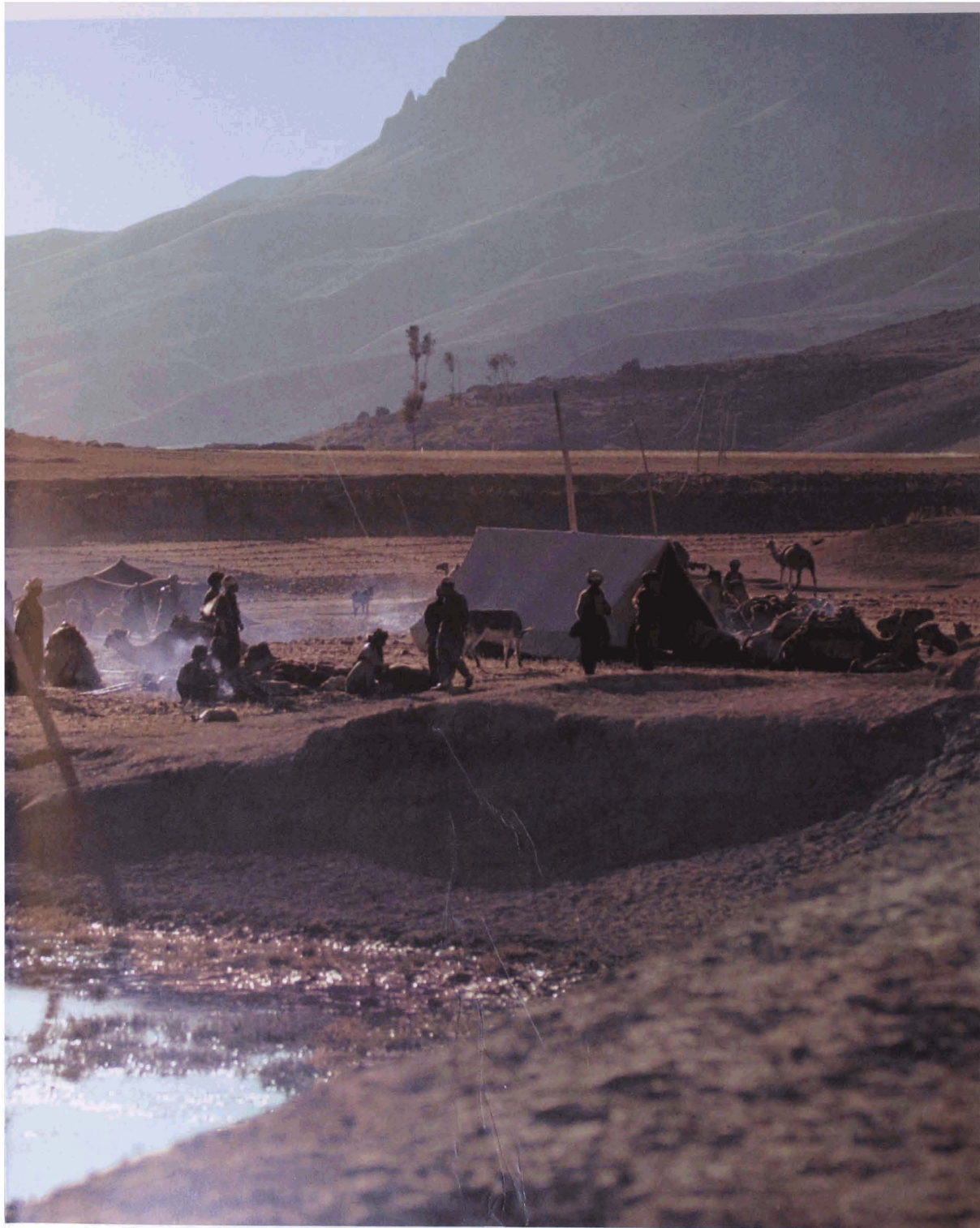
25 *This Balti woman's huge silver earrings have a half-moon design.*

26 *A Balti girl from the village of Paskim or Pashkyum in western Ladakh, between Kargil and Mulbekh, wearing a rich headdress and necklace.*



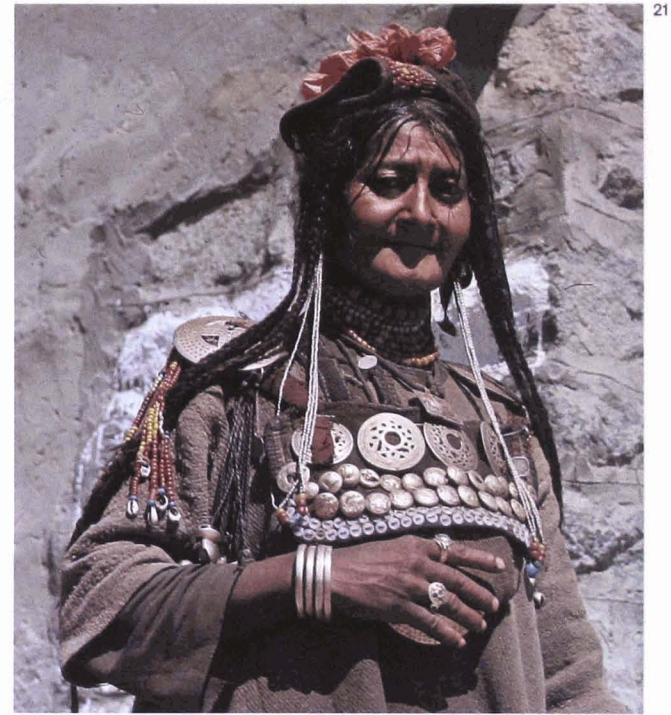
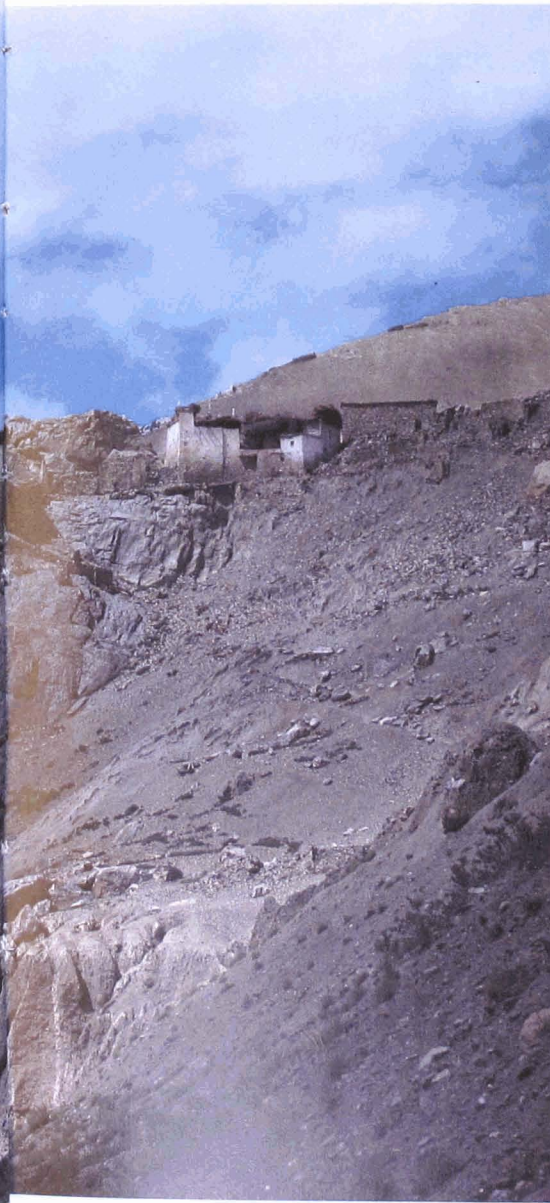




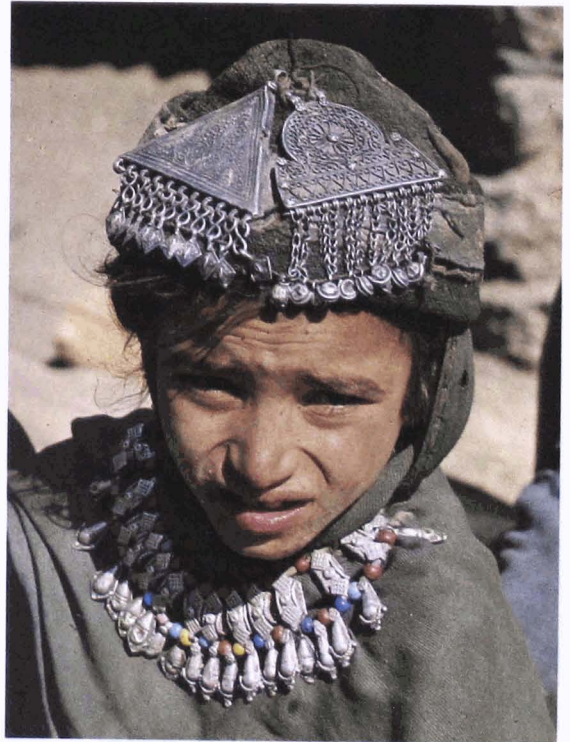
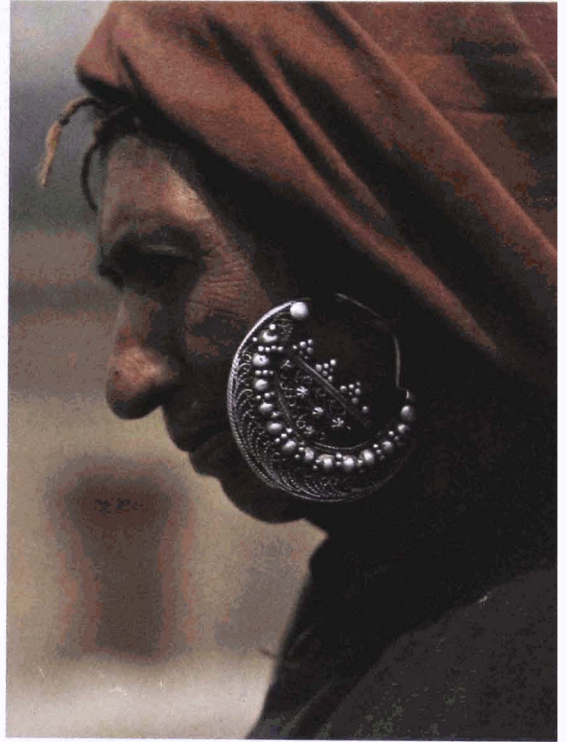


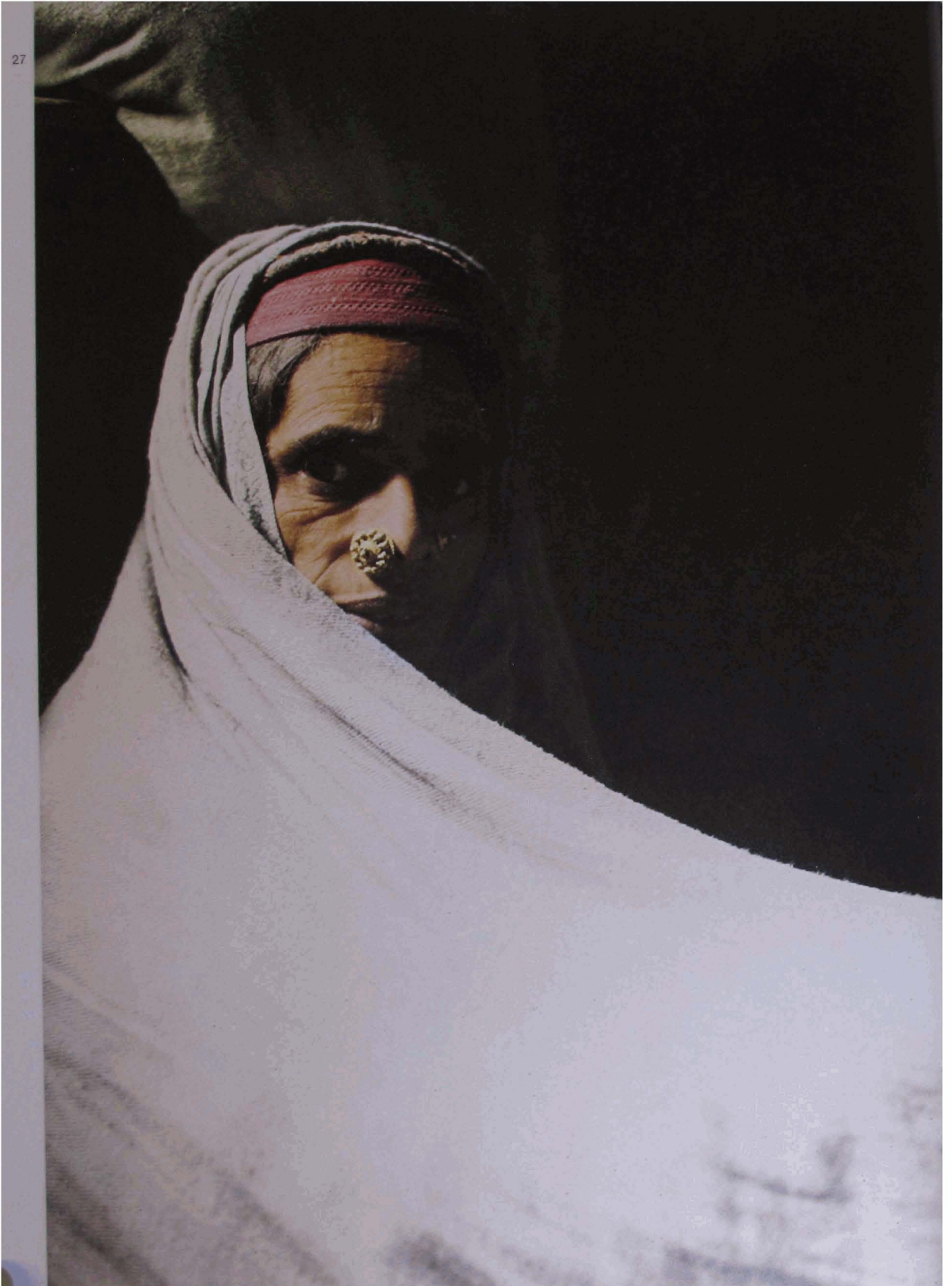












Indians went searching each year, during the dry season when the waters were low, for the precious mineral in the sandy mud. It was found mixed with other pebbles of similar appearance, which, however, were topazes, amethysts, garnets, and carnelians. Areas of diamond mines were found not far from Benares, south of the Ganges. Simla, north of Delhi in the direction of the Himalaya, was another important diamantiferous center.

Lapidaries discovered the process of polishing these stones by rubbing one against another, imparting a new brilliance to the natural faces. A similar technique was used for colored stones.

In the fourteenth century, when the Indians for the first time discovered cutting, they were dazzled by the diamond's great power of dispersion. Angles and facets projected sparkling jets of light and color. This technique was called the "Indian cut," and was perfected by Louis de Berchem of Bruges in 1476. In the sixteenth century, the Venetian Vincenzo Peruzzi succeeded in giving the diamond fifty-eight facets, which multiplied the refractions and reflections of light to such a high degree that the liberated fires of the stone shot forth in all their splendor.

The "Oriental ruby" bore in Sanskrit the most noble of names, *ratnaraj*, meaning "king of precious stones." The mines of India and Burma produced an abundance of rubies of a rare and much sought-after quality known as "pigeon's blood." Its characteristic color is a dark but very vivid red. In the East, the ruby was always the favorite stone of men, who wore it in finger rings, arm bracelets, turban clasps, and other ornaments. Refulgent in crowns, the ruby and its color symbolized fire, love, anger, wealth, and royal power.

The spinel, whose color is pale red, is a modest companion of the ruby. It is found in the same regions, often in the same mines.

It is the emerald's privilege to have the color of nature and be loved by women. Seldom a pure crystal, its transparency is clouded, but the fascination exerted by its intense green counterbalances this flaw. The lapidaries of Jaipur were specialists in the cutting of emeralds.

Sapphire blue does not change whatever the light. Like the ruby, the sapphire is a corundum; in mining regions these two stones occur in close proximity to each other. Ceylon produced highly desirable sapphires that were named after the island. Those coming from Kashmir are of an even deeper and more magnificent blue. The name of the Himalayan mountains, difficult of access, where they were found, was a well-kept secret. The valuable mines are situated in certain valleys of the Zaskar region in Ladakh.

The opal, with its iridescent reflections, takes its name from the Sanskrit *upala*. Its beauty derives from the play of colors in the milky, semitransparent substance. The heliotrope or blood jasper displays red spots in the green of its mass. Garnet mines are numerous in India, and produce a large quantity of precious, dark red almandine. Workshops that specialized in cutting these stones evolved in Delhi and Jaipur. Aventurine, whose color is a fine brownish yellow, is enhanced by its scattered golden dots; another variety, from the Madras district, is green. The moonstone was highly esteemed since it was the sacred stone of India.

Rock crystal abounds in India, and in Kashmir it is a transparent white quartz that was always admired for its purity. It is used in jewelry-making and goldsmith's work. Workshops specializing in the cutting of these crystals developed in New Delhi, due to the proximity of an important mine located south of the capital.

The zircon owes its nobility to its fire, shooting from crystalline forms and making it resemble the diamond. The hyacinth is a zircon of a yellow-orange color, of which there are deposits near Madras and in the Ganges basin.

The mines of India seem inexhaustible in the great variety of precious stones they produce. Amethysts, carnelians, bloodstones, and pink, red, and green tourmalines all continue to be extracted. And one should add precious jade and nephrite.

The seas surrounding India are no less generous in precious substances. The animal life they contain offers coral reefs and countless fine pearls to fishermen. It was the custom in India to wear pearls without drilling them; they were carried in light, transparent gauze in order to preserve their brilliance, purity, and life. It was thought that to drill pearls was to inflict a wound on them that caused them to die.

Dacca, an ancient Muslim city, is located in the huge delta formed by the tentacular arms of the two great rivers, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, whose waters, originating in the snows of the Himalaya, finally flow into the Bay of Bengal. This region, where fresh and salt waters mingle, constitutes an inexhaustible store of marine discoveries. Frogmen with smooth naked bodies, skillfully plying their four flippers, explore the tepid waters. With their feet they seize pearly shells and with their nets gather red, white, and pink flowerlike pieces of coral.

Myriads of shells are tossed up by the sea. Among the many varieties, some are chosen and gathered to be sold to the merchants of Dacca, who in turn pass them along to caravaneers who carry their precious cargo to the distant altitudes of the Himalaya. The goldsmiths of Tibet, Ladakh, Nepal, and Bhutan use these jewels of the sea in the composition of ornaments. For women, shells become rare objects originating in the waters of the oceans, which they will never see and know only through mythological tales, as a divine element.

In Buddhist ritual music, the conch, a beautiful hollow shell, is used as a wind instrument and has its place in all the temples. It is most often mounted in copper or repoussé silver and inlaid with semiprecious stones. When conches were used as personal ornaments, they were cut in large rings that married women wore as bracelets on their wrists. This custom extended from Ladakh to Tibet and northern Nepal. To make these polished white circlets more attractive, artists decorated them with engraved designs, sometimes allowing colored lacquer to flow into the grooves.

Shell carvers, known as *sankhari*, were respected artists belonging to the community of jewelers. The artist-craftsmen of Dacca are proud of their age-old reputation, which they still keep up today thanks to their loyalty to the tradition and to the perfection they achieve in the execution of their work. Their creative spirit prompts them to seek new forms, as is shown by numerous objects in amber, mother-of-pearl, coral, and tortoiseshell, all marked by great artistic originality.

In the period of the Great Moguls, a number of European travelers explored India and spent time at the court of the emperors. They were eyewitnesses of the ostentatious achievements of the sovereigns and wrote detailed accounts of the events in which they participated. To read their meticulous and factual reports is to see the fabulous images of Eastern history reborn before one's eyes.

The principal authors included Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689), a Frenchman who explored India in search of precious stones, which he offered for sale. In 1679 he published a famous account of his *Six Voyages*. F. Bernier (1625–1688) was Aurangzeb's physician, and in 1670 published in Paris a history of his visits to the East, *Les Voyages*, a model of exactitude. Schulzen, a German, published *Gedenkwürdige Reise* in 1678. Sir Thomas Roe was James I's ambassador to the court of the emperor Jahangir. His reports and correspondence were republished in London in 1899. There was also Captain Hawkins, who visited Agra from 1609

to 1611; Hortensio Bronzoni, a Venetian lapidary who worked at the court of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb and there influenced the art of jewelry; and finally Dapper, who in 1681 published in Germany an important reference work under the title *Asia*, and the Venetian Niccolò Manucci.

Among the descriptions provided by these various authors, all dazzled by the pomp of the East, one is especially astonishing, that of the "Peacock Throne."

The gallinaceous peacock of India wears the most iridescent livery in which blues are mixed with greens, a tail spangled with ocelli that it spreads out in a huge fan or allows to droop in a jeweled cascade, and an aigrette crown on its head. A sacred and emblematic bird, it is deservedly vain.

At the beginning of his reign, the emperor Shah Jahan conceived a throne that was to be an imposing expression of his "majesty," and which was to combine the beauty and veneration enjoyed by the peacock with the brilliance of precious stones, symbols of power and wealth. Shah Jahan ordered the goldsmiths of Delhi to execute the Peacock Throne.

To their nomad origins, the Great Moguls owed their liking for living in tents, as well as the habit of concentrating their wealth in objects that could be easily transported and quickly concealed from thieves who attacked the caravans. Indeed, this is why their fortune was at all times composed of jewelry.

Dignitaries and other individuals who had the privilege of being invited by the emperor Shah Jahan into the royal tent were impressed by its large dimensions and the display of refined luxury. The interior was so spacious that visitors thought they were in a palace hall. The tent was sustained by poles that formed more than forty columns, some encased in plaques of silver, others covered with gold leaf. The ground was covered with more than a hundred carpets of wool or silk, woven with budding flowers that gave the impression of walking in a garden. The walls were stretched with brightly colored silk stuffs and brocades.

The throne occupied the middle of the tent. It was in pure gold inlaid with diamonds. The canopy gave the illusion of a starry nocturnal sky of rubies, sapphires, diamonds, and pearls; it was supported by columns inlaid with such a large number of emeralds that they merged to form a single green. A bow and quiver, hanging on the throne, were both set with rare gems.

A golden sun shone above the throne – it was an enormous agate of a beautiful orange red, a variety called sardonyx. Two glorious mythical peacocks in gold set with pearls offered themselves to the dazzled and respectful gaze of the onlookers.

Their tails were spread to display a plumage of emerald spangles, and their gilded feathers were studded with sapphire ocelli. All the splendid colors of the celestial palette were represented by precious stones chosen for their most subtle nuances.

Only a few favored individuals had the privilege of mounting the silver-plated steps that led to the throne. Any other person having the audacity to set foot there would have faced immediate death by the sword.

When Shah Jahan's son, Aurangzeb, took his place on the Peacock Throne to be crowned, the precise moment had been fixed by astrologers who stood by with an hourglass in their hands to indicate the very instant favored by the stars.

In 1738, the Persian conqueror Nadir Shah crossed the Indus and spread terror in the kingdom of the decadent emperor Mohammed Shah. As a sign of his victory, he carried off the Peacock Throne, and it was thus that the glorious seat of the Great Moguls disappeared.

On the occasion of Jahangir's birthday, the ambassador Sir Thomas Roe was invited to the solemn festivities, which according to his account unfolded as follows:

"This day was the birth of the king and solemnized as a great feast, wherin the king is weighed against some Jewelles, Gould, siluer, stuffs of Gould [and?] siluer, silke, butter, rice, frute, and

many other things . . . He was so rich in Jewelles that I must confesse I neuer saw together so vnvaluable wealth. The tyme was spent in bringing of his greatest Eliphantes before him, some of which, beeing Lord Eliphants, had their chaynes, belles, and furniture of Gould and siluer, attended with many guilt banners and flagges, and 8 or 10 Eliphantes wayting on him clothed in gould, silke, and siluer. Thus passed about twelve Companyes most richly furnished, the first having all the plates on his head and breast sett with rubyes and Emeraldes, beeing a beast of a wonderfull stature and beauty. They all bowed down befor the king, making reuerence very handsomely, and was a showe as woorthy as I euer saw any of beasts only. . . When I came in I found him sitting crosse leggd on a little throne, all cladd in diamonds, Pearles, and rubyes; before him a table of gould, on yt about 50 Peeces of gould plate sett all with stones, some very great and extreamly rich . . .

Then he sent me word it was his byrth day and that all men did make merry, and to aske if I would drinck with them . . . So hee Called for a Cupp of Gould . . . and sent it by one of his Nobles to mee with this message: that I should drinck it twice, thrice, four or five tymes off for his sake, and accept of the Cupp and apurtenances as a present . . . The Cupp was of gould, sett all ouer with small Turkyes and rubies. The couer of the same sett with great turquises, rubyes and Emeraldes in woorks, and a dish suteable to sett the Cupp vpon . . .

At one side in a wyndow were his two Principall wives, whose Curiositye made them breake litle holes in a grate of reede that hung before yt to gaze on mee. I saw first their fingers, and after laying their faces close nowe one eye, Now another; sometye I could discerne the full proportion. They were indifferently white, black hayre smoothed vp; but if I had had no other light, ther diamonds and Pearles had sufficed to show them . . ." (*The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul, 1615–1619, as Narrated in His Journal and Correspondence*. Ed. from Contemporary Records by W. Foster, B. A. London, Hakluyt Society, 1899.)

Jahangir was described by other observers who noted his turban, decorated with an aigrette, and with a ruby the size of a walnut dangling to one side and a diamond on the other, while an emerald sparkled in the center. His belt was a chain of large pearls, rubies, and diamonds. Around his neck, he wore a necklace of three strands, each strand composed of four hundred diamond, ruby, emerald, and coral beads, that descended to his waist. He had rings on almost all his fingers. The sovereigns drank from chalice-shaped cups cut from a block of ruby, turquoise, or other crystal. One of these cups, in emerald and gold, has escaped destruction. The stem and upper edges of the cup are set with rubies, which also form vertical bands.

Besides descriptive texts, there are miniatures showing court scenes. Numerous portraits attest the care taken by artists to depict in the most minute detail the ornaments created by jewelers and goldsmiths to satisfy the opulent and insatiable tastes of women and rulers.

Over the thousands of years of its history, the East has always manifested its power by the possession of precious stones and metals. It equated the mineral strength of nature with human strength, and was able to assign a spiritual value to these materials while displaying them in a setting of stately sensuality, an attitude in the materials themselves and in the creations derived from them. In all its forms, the artistic heritage of the East is one of the glories of humanity that arouses the greatest wonder.

Ladakh

1. History

Storytellers, as instruments of tradition, reconstruct the past of nations in different ways. While some lay claim to giant ancestors, others, like those in Ladakh, choose dwarfs for themselves. The marvelous poetics of imaginary tales, sometimes containing a portion of truth, has a force of survival that the centuries do nothing to diminish. Even today minstrels, or *mons*, participate in all the popular celebrations and sing of a history that has become legend, the glory of King Kesar, the seductive or wicked queens, and the heroes whom the inhabitants of Ladakh want most to remember. Mythology alone illuminates the remote and mysterious past.

Ladakh's past is disclosed by the history of the powerful and prosperous empires of Central Asia whose authority stretched all the way to the Himalayan regions. These influences contributed to an artistic development that finds its source in Buddhism and whose expression resembles that of India.

The Maurya dynasty, founded about 322 B.C. by Chandragupta Maurya in Bihar, attempted by its conquests the first unification of India. His grandson King Asoka reigned over a vast empire and became famous for adopting the Buddhist religion and deciding on a policy of proselytism at the council of Pataliputra (Patna). As a result, missionaries were sent north to the Himalayas.

The Gupta dynasty, which rose in the fourth century, strengthened the empire and maintained it until the Hun invasion in the sixth century. It established Buddhism as the state religion, and built schools and universities where philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, and other sciences were taught. Sanskrit literature reached its full development, while pre-Gupta and Gupta art marked the apogee of the Indian aesthetic, whose beauty of style can be observed in the frescoes of the monasteries in Ladakh. In India today one can admire the fifth-century Buddhas of Mathura and Sarnath, the temple of Ajanta and the stupa of Sarnath, which date from the sixth century, the wall paintings of Ajanta, and finally the temple of Ellora from the eighth century. These works are the greatest achievements of this period in the history of Indian art.

India exerted a profound influence on the cultural and artistic development as well as the religious life of Ladakh. Nevertheless, Ladakhi culture was enriched above all by a strong influence from Tibet. Ladakh was part of the Tibetan empire until its fall in the tenth century. After the separation, the religious communities continued to be subject to the authority of the clergy in Lhasa, and a strong cultural current was maintained. The history of Ladakh is closely involved with that of Tibet.

At the beginning of the seventh century, the king of Tibet, Srontsan Gampo, whose name symbolically signifies the powerful and just, became famous for his liberal attitude toward Buddhism. Despite his own practice of the Bön-po religion, and the strong opposition of the Bön priests, he allowed Buddhism to be introduced and accepted in Tibet. For the purpose of having the Holy Books translated into Tibetan, he sent his minister Thonmi Sambhota to India to study for a few years under the direction of the great Buddhist masters. On his return to

Tibet, Thonmi Sambhota introduced the Devanāgiri alphabet, which is still used today in Ladakh.

The chief source of information on the history of Ladakh is the *Ladvags rgyal-rabs* ("Book of Kings"), which contains a mythology and a cosmology, as well as a genealogical list of kings whose names were hitherto unknown except from engravings on stones. These stones, whose inscriptions confirm the manuscripts, reveal a human presence in the high desert altitudes. They stand isolated, or piled in heaps, or arranged on top of each other to form walls the height of a man, known as *mani*, and several kilometers long. The stones are engraved with mantras or invocations to the gods. Others bear the name of the person who began the construction of the wall and the event that prompted it. The historical value of these inscriptions on stones is of the highest. They often mention names that otherwise would have remained unknown, serve to complement manuscripts, and in countless other ways aid our historical knowledge. A rock at Mulbekh bears the name of King Bum Ldes, followed by an edict he promulgated. The manuscripts, which from around 900 to 1400 mention only the names of sovereigns and ignore the dates and duration of their reigns, are thus completed by these stones.

The first inhabitants of Ladakh were nomadic shepherds, wanderers of the high altitudes, who lived in small black tents in which an opening allowed the smoke to escape from a fire fed with yak or goat dung. Man crouched beside the flame of life to dry himself from the snow, warm himself from the cold, prepare an oily black tea, and find in the firelight protection against the terrifying demons of the *Bön-po* religion.

Populations adhered to it under the sign of a swastika turned to the left. Imbued with shamanism, the *Bön-po* religion held sway until the introduction of Buddhism by Indian missionaries. But Buddhism was not established in Tibet and all its provinces without a struggle. The *Bön-po* rulers defended their beliefs by violence and the ritual evocation of demons.

The Tibetan king Rapalchen (Tsi-tsuk-de-tsen) reigned around 820–835. He encouraged Buddhism while introducing a number of reforms, which the *Bön* followers violently opposed. Rapalchen was murdered, and his brother Lang Darma, who had been excluded from the throne because of his loyalty to the old beliefs, was named king. He used his power to persecute the Buddhists, destroy their temples, burn the Holy Books, and drive out the monks. This repression was carried to such lengths that Buddhism seemed on the point of being extinguished in Tibet.

But the gods were keeping watch: There was a Buddhist hermit living in the mountains near Lhasa. He passed for being the incarnation of a guardian divinity. He had a vision in which he was instructed to put an end to the grievous persecution. He disguised himself by donning the sacerdotal robe of the *Bön* magicians. He put on a hat topped by a death's head, the emblem of the order, wrapped himself in an ample black cloak, and mounted a black horse. He rode to Lhasa, and entering the courtyard of the palace, dismounted from his horse and executed a ritual dance, clutching in his hands a bow and arrow by which to symbolize the destruction of the spirits of evil. The king, interested to view the demonic dance more closely, stepped forward on the palace balcony. Suddenly the dancer stretched his bow and an arrow flew, piercing the king, who fell down dead. The magician sprang swiftly on his horse and disappeared at a gallop, and no one ever saw the black horseman again. How could they? There was only a white horseman trotting along on a white horse. The metamorphosis came about by the fact that he had reversed his cloak, which had a white lining, and had washed the black dye from his horse by crossing the river.

Lang Darma's death put an end to a reign of terror that had lasted for some years.

The kingdom of Tibet had been severely shaken by the murder of Rapalchen. The symptoms of dissolution were further heightened after the death of Lang Darma. The empire was divided

into independent kingdoms and feudal principalities that were most often at war among themselves.

The chronicles mention that around the year 900, a Tibetan prince, obliged to flee for his life, took refuge in western Tibet, where he succeeded in conquering a kingdom. Kyi-de Nyi-ma-gön died leaving three sons who divided his kingdom, one receiving Ladakh, another Zanskar, and the third Guge and Purang.

Ladakh was unified by the *gyalpo* (king) of Leh, who consolidated the power of the Lha-chen dynasty, which reigned for a few centuries.

The chronicles of Ladakh have little to say until the fifteenth century. The kings are listed in the order of their succession, but the events of their reigns are seldom told.

Around the year 1040, the Indian sage Atisha, an eminent philosopher, succeeded Richen Zangpo in his task of spreading and teaching religion. This philosopher attracted numerous disciples by preaching the ideal doctrine inspired by the sutras and tantras, and founded the reformed sect known as *Kandampa*. This became, under the leadership of the teacher Tsong Khapa (1357–1419), the most powerful lamaist sect, and was known as *Gelugpa*, a name meaning “those who follow the path of perfection.” The success of this order worked to the detriment of the Bön, who nevertheless succeeded in maintaining their position in Ladakh, where they occupied several monasteries. The two large lamaist sects are the “Red Caps” and “Yellow Caps”. Adepts of the Nyingmapa sect wear red robes and miters, the color being associated in Tibet with the idea of strength and power. The Gelugpa sect adopted the color yellow, symbol of purity and spiritual elevation.

From the early fifteenth century, Ladakh was a region coveted by the kings of Kashmir, who attempted, not without success, a number of military incursions. Despite these feudal struggles, Lha-chen Bogan, who established the Namgyal dynasty, was able to secure the independence of Ladakh around 1475. Later, during the first half of the sixteenth century, the country had to defend itself against the threat of invasion by Mongol armies from Turkestan. When Tshe-wang Namgyal became king (1555–1575) in Leh, the principal city of Ladakh, he tried to extend the country’s territory by sending military expeditions toward Tibet, while part of his army occupied the regions of Guge and Baltistan.

His kingdom did not survive him. His successor, his brother Jam-wang, was a sovereign who lacked the authority to put down the rivalries between feudal lords, and Ladakh was weakened by these internecine struggles.

Jam-wang’s eldest son, Senge Namgyal (c. 1590–1645), became a famous king of Ladakh. He belonged to the sect of Red Caps and was a fervent patron of Buddhism. He invited the Grand Lama Stag-tsang-ras-chen to Ladakh, and in collaboration with him undertook the construction of some remarkable monuments: the palace of Leh, the fortress of Sheh, and the monastery of Chemre, one of whose doors bears a silver plaque with the date 1625. He is further credited with constructing the gompas of Hemis, Basgo, and Trashigang in Tibet. The scholarly Lama wrote numerous doctrinal works and had the Buddhist scriptures copied in letters of gold and silver. He also introduced into Ladakh the practice of building *mani* or prayer walls. Senge Namgyal died, on his return from a campaign in Tibet, in the beautiful monastery of Hanle, south of the Indus, which like all the others he had had built for the Brug-pa order.

Deldan Namgyal succeeded his father and further enlarged the kingdom by adding to it the regions of Nubra, Drass, and Zanskar. He built the temple of Sheh, in which stands a huge gilded statue of Buddha. Not far away is the five-staged chorten that he erected in memory of his father. During his reign, Deldan Namgyal had to face the threatening advance of the Moguls; he avoided disaster by taking a conciliatory position; and it was thus that he built a mosque in Leh.

Around 1675, the Tibetans invaded Ladakh, using the pretext of a religious quarrel between the Red Caps of Ladakh and the Yellow Caps of Tibet. The Ladakhis were defeated, and the Tibetans even seized the fortress of Basgo. King Delek Namgyal, son of Deldan, appealed to the Mogul governor of Kashmir. The emperor Aurangzeb, who had been seeking an opportunity to take control of the wool trade, sent his troops and the Tibetans were repulsed. In recognition of this military aid, King Delek was obliged to guarantee the export of wool to Kashmir and to open his market to Kashmiri merchants. He made one other concession by taking the name Agbat Mahmud Khan and accepting Islam in Ladakh.

The weakness of the last kings of Ladakh resulted in a long period of decline that was to last until the end of the Namgyal dynasty in 1833.

The feudal conflicts of the end of the eighteenth century came to be attached, at the beginning of the nineteenth, to the struggles resulting from the two major events in the history of India in the last century: the rise of the Sikh empire and the expansion of British colonialization.

Ranjit Singh, king of Lahore and member of the Sikh confederation, nicknamed the "Lion of the Punjab," led his wars of conquest against numerous countries and regions. In 1819 he invaded Kashmir, thereby pushing the Afghan forces out of the territory. At the same time, the ruler of Ladakh tried unsuccessfully to establish an alliance with the British, the better to protect himself against the ambitions of the Sikhs. The latter, however, were trying in vain to promote friendly relations with the authorities in Ladakh, similar to those that had existed between that country and the Moguls and Afghans.

In 1833, the Ladakhis, long weakened by dissension and other feudal rivalries, lost their independence.

Ladakh became a subject country, forming an integral part of the empire of Sher Singh (a son of Ranjit Singh) and represented by Gulab Singh, whose authority over the region was recognized by the Tibetans. For his part, Gulab pledged himself to respect the western frontiers of Tibet.

Gulab Singh's most daring dreams were realized by the conclusion of the treaties of Lahore and Amritsar in March 1846. These two treaties obliged the governments of Lahore and Great Britain respectively to recognize him as an independent sovereign and maharajah of Jammu.

Fate, however, had further blessings in store for him. When the Sikhs were no longer able to pay the increased indemnities demanded of them by the British, they offered to cede Kashmir to them in exchange. Gulab Singh hoped to profit by this situation, and through skillful negotiations he succeeded in persuading the British, who had need of money, to sell him Kashmir. It was thus that Gulab Singh was able to purchase, for some ten million rupees, one of the most beautiful countries in Asia. A few months later, he made his entrance into the city of Srinagar.

Under the control of the government of India and the British authorities, the state of Jammu and Kashmir henceforth assured the political conduct of Ladakh.

With the end of British rule and India's rise to independence, the maharajah of Kashmir pronounced in October 1947 in favor of his country's attachment to India. The Kashmir civil war spread rapidly as a conflict between the Indian Union and West Pakistan, which supported the attacks of the Pathans. Pakistani forces invaded Baltistan and occupied the town of Skardu, and from there they penetrated Ladakh. The cease-fire established under the auspices of the United Nations on January 1, 1949, allowed Pakistan to remain in the regions of Gilgit and Baltistan. Ladakh thus lost a piece of its territory in the north.

Ladakh was partially occupied by Chinese troops in 1962, when they annexed the region of Aksai Chin, an almost unexplored desert rich in sodium carbonate and salt. The conflict was

provoked when Indian troops tried to occupy areas claimed by China. Ladakh's borders with Sinkiang and Tibet had not been clearly defined, and China had never recognized the MacMahon Line, established in 1914 as the frontier between India and Tibet. Aksai Chin was incorporated by the Chinese into Tibet, which they had occupied since the agreements of May 23, 1951, with the Dalai Lama and whose government they had taken over by force in 1959.

2. *Journeys to the roof of the world*

Can the human clock, the traveler of 1975, subject to the constraints of time and losing the notion of distance, transpose himself to the year 400 of our era, to a period and on a continent where time and distance were imprecise notions linked to that of freedom, and feel something in common with the pilgrims who in that fourth century left China to undertake a journey that was to last for years through Central Asia in the direction of the western Himalaya? The venerable Fa-hsien was sixty years old when with a few companions he started out on a pilgrimage to the holy places of Buddhism. They crossed Ladakh, visited Kashmir, and pursued their journey of inquiry into India, where they learned Sanskrit in order to be able to meditate on the sacred texts. One day they reached the sea near Calcutta and embarked for Ceylon. More than ten years had gone by when, as the only survivor of that arduous journey, Fa-hsien returned to Nanking. It was then that he wrote his chronicle, the *Fo-kwo-ki*, in which Ladakh is mentioned for the first time as a country where the snow never melts and only grain ripens. In this country that had been deprived by nature but blessed by the gods, Fa-hsien and his disciples tried to see and perhaps touch such relics of Buddha as his begging bowl and one of his bones. The bowl may be a terra-cotta cup now in a monastery on the outskirts of Leh, while the bone, which for its protection had been hidden in a *dung-ten*, a stone construction, is supposed to have disappeared in the waters of the Indus at the time of the Muslim invasion of Ladakh.

In 629, the Chinese Buddhist monk Hsüan-tsang set out for India. It took him two years to reach the Indus basin, which he describes in his *Record of Western Regions*, a guide book written at the suggestion of the emperor after his return to China in 645.

Visitors to Ladakh were rare, but over the centuries various descriptive accounts of the country were written by travelers who had gone there to satisfy their particular interests. In 1631, two Jesuit missionaries, Azevedo and Olivera, tried to convert the population to Christianity. Merchants at all times sought to get rich by trading in the famous pashmina wool, woven from an underfleece characteristic of Himalayan goats. In the nineteenth century, British explorers took an interest in all the fascinating aspects of unknown Ladakh, and wrote accounts of their adventures and observations, books that are still essential today for any extended knowledge of these regions. These writers include W. Moorcroft, who lived in Ladakh from 1820 to 1822, and the eccentric Dr. Henderson, who in 1834 disguised himself as a Muslim merchant under the name Ishmail Khan in order to enter Leh. Sir Alexander Cunningham was sent to Ladakh in 1846–47 by the East India Company, and his book is a remarkable source of information. A few years later, Johnson made the first topographical relief maps of Ladakh. In 1899 and 1908, Sven Hedin, the great Swedish explorer of Central Asia, visited Ladakh and published the first photographs of its inhabitants in his book *Transhimalaya*.

At the beginning of the century, a steadily growing number of travelers felt themselves drawn to Ladakh, despite the difficulty of obtaining entry permits for the country. In those days, an

ascent to the “Roof of the World” was an exhausting and dangerous expedition, carried out on foot or by pony along poorly marked mountain trails so narrow that they increased the traveler’s vertigo in passing above the chasms they overhung. The tracks often disappeared under avalanches of snow or rock, the rarefied air made progress painful, and the soil provided little nourishment. Despite the obstacles, caravans passed through the valleys and scaled the steep slopes, ascending and descending again and again by following hairpin curves. Nothing, it seemed, could halt the efforts of men who had succumbed to the spell of the high altitudes and to the lure of exploring a new area for study and observation. There were hunters in search of the most beautiful wild sheep, *Ovis amon*, or the markhor goat with its gracefully curved horns. Ornithologists and botanists were attracted by the rare animal and vegetable life at high altitudes. There were also geologists seeking rare and splendidly colored stones among the masses of indifferent ones, and archaeologists in search of vestiges of Indus Valley civilizations. A number of expeditions were organized by scientists, one of which was the occasion for a spectacular release of balloons in Leh, for the purpose of making gravimetric observations. The Ladakhis in Leh and its surroundings, in the grip of curiosity mixed with fear, interpreted the descent of the balloons as a fall of demons. The lamas thereupon assembled in the temples to celebrate a rite against the forces of darkness.

Entry into Ladakh was forbidden in 1947 at the time of India’s independence, and the interdiction remained in force until 1974.

Travelers in Ladakh today follow, under new conditions, the trail of the great explorers of past centuries. The last thirty years have brought numerous changes, putting an end to caravans and exhausting marches. On some roads and trails, jeeps are able to drive and climb to the most inaccessible monasteries. On leaving Sonamarg in Kashmir, the road ascends to the Zoji La (*La* means “Pass”), continues through Drass and Kargil, and then rises again to the Fatu La (4,091 m.) before arriving at Leh. Everything, however, is still possible in this so little known country for those who would like to quit this road in search of adventure and new discoveries.

Having had the good fortune to undertake the adventure of visiting Ladakh, I should like to think that all its visitors made the journey with the same enthusiasm I felt, and that they entered the country with the same respect for the values of truth and beauty that lie rooted in it. The aura it emits is not imaginary, and the closer one gets the more it glows. Its luminosity is spiritual as well as terrestrial.

The Journey

Sonamarg, situated at an altitude of 2,580 meters and whose name means “golden meadows,” is the last stop in Kashmir. It displays the serenity of a landscape whose slopes and summits remind you of the Alps. The impression is reinforced by the forests of tall pines, the damp green mosses, the brooks filled with trout, and the familiar flowers – buttercups, monkshood, delphiniums, primroses, harebells, and (perhaps!) gentians.

Bazaars by the side of the road are well stocked with various goods. Busy cooks fill large pans of curried rice and grill *chapatis*, flour pancakes, which they serve to us outside. But the comfortable enjoyments of Sonamarg cannot make you forget the day’s itinerary. These stops are always mingled with the wish to be on our way. We look thankfully at our jeep, to which a small trailer is attached containing the necessities of life – a supply of water and gasoline, tents, sleeping bags, food and a few medicines – while in a meadow some little horses, descendants of heroic caravan animals, paw the ground, impatient to be trotting along the forest paths.

The trip to Drass, sixty-five kilometers away, is a difficult one because of the altitude of the

pass we must cross, the Zoji La, 3,529 meters high. The snowfall in winter is so abundant that the road is covered from November to May, and it is sometimes necessary to wait until June for the pass to be open again. In July, the monsoon, that breath from the distant sea, which dramatizes the skies of India and fertilizes its soil, reaches Kashmir, while provoking sudden storms whose uproar echoes against the mountainsides and agitates the surface of the lakes. The wind drives the clouds up from the lower regions to the pass, where they accumulate and burst into downpours of rain – bringing to mind the Tibetan myth of creation. The high mountains, including the Zoji La, form a barrier that arrests the monsoon and prevents it from reaching Ladakh, which has the appearance of a desert only rarely visited by rain.

As we ascend to the Zoji La, on a beautiful June day, we are in a state of exhilaration, filled with impatience and curiosity. The first people we meet are Ghujars, seasonal nomads taking their flocks to the pasture lands of the high altitudes. Thousands of sheep and goats are herded together by dogs and controlled by the deep-throated voices of the shepherds. These people live in *dokas*, wooden shelters whose flat roofs are made of dried dung. In winter, they return to their villages in the valleys. The Ghujars are originally from the Punjab and have long since chosen the pastures of Kashmir for their flocks. They are devout Muslims and speak a dialect known as Gujri. As a sign of devotion, elderly men dye their hair with henna. The children, serious and impassive, sway to the rhythm of the ponies that carry them, and are loaded with a great variety of amulets.

Beyond the Zoji La, in the direction of Drass, the pine forest give way to broad undulating meadows stretching like carpets of flowers with the colors of our Alpine pastures. After the long winter, spring revives the dead earth and a host of flowers, some of them familiar to us, bloom. There are buttercups, vetches and dandelions, belladonna and poppies, and also blue forget-me-nots, amid daisies and primroses. Anemones blossom alongside harebells and purple foxglove. Wild clematis, with its small brownish flowers, climbs along the walls, and the air is sweetened by the fragrant smell of mint.

Drass, on one's arrival, may look deceptive. Its cluster of buildings is situated on a plateau that is known to be one of the coldest and most snowy places in the world. In winter the temperature can drop to 50°C below zero. After Drass, the landscape becomes more desertlike, with only ferns sprouting in the damp hollows along the streams between the pink spikes of tamarisk trembling in the wind. The Drass river valley extends as far as Kargil, the town second in importance after Leh, and which is also the principal seat of lower Ladakh, to which Zaskar belongs. The town is part of Baltistan, and the majority of its inhabitants are Muslims who speak a dialect written in Arabic characters. Nature, which seems to take on new dimensions, and the contrasts between dry and fertile land, give an astonishing appearance to the site of Kargil. The ocher desert on the heights dominates the oasis of greenery stretching along the deep narrow valleys that meet at the juncture of the Drass and Suru rivers. We follow the Suru valley upstream until we find a suitable place to pitch our camp and spend the night, intoxicated by the the fragrance of the sweet-smelling plants known as *burtse*. Above 3,000 meters, the limpidity of the atmosphere gives the sky an unforgettable brightness at night. To "sleep under the stars" takes on a special meaning. The stars look larger, brighter, and more numerous. In Kargil, a woman belonging to the Druk-pa ethnic group attracted our attention by her curious appearance. She had come from some distance, her village being situated in the mountains of Karakorum. This woman, reputed to be a sorceress, wore a cloth headdress sewn with coral beads, to the top of which she had pinned a few beautiful red flowers. Her shoulders were covered by copper disks, and on her chest she wore a wide piece of leather to which four large disks and a row of smaller ones were attached. To protect her stomach, she wore a very large and finely engraved disk made of an alloy of copper and silver.

28 *The outlines of the monastery of Lamayuru blend with the strange lunar landscape 15 kilometers below the head of Fatu La (La means "pass"), 3,800 meters over Hangru canyon. This swastika-shaped monastery, one of the oldest and most legendary in all of Ladakh, is the traveler's first encounter with Lamaism as he makes his way up from Kashmir. Lamayuru is the ancestral seat of the Dogunk-pa sect from central Tibet, a branch of the Red Cap school, and with approximately 200 monks it remains one of the largest monasteries of Ladakh.*

29 *Two chortens – reliquary-shrines – dominate the entrance to the monastery courtyard at Lamayuru. In the right foreground can be seen the mast for prayer banners.*

30 *An opulent chorten, in front of a wall painting showing Bodhisattvas, in a devotional chamber of the monastery of Lamayuru.*

31 *An elderly peasant woman wearing a relatively modest perak (head-dress). If she had owned a richer one in her youth, she would have given it to her eldest daughter, in keeping with local tradition, upon the girl's marriage.*

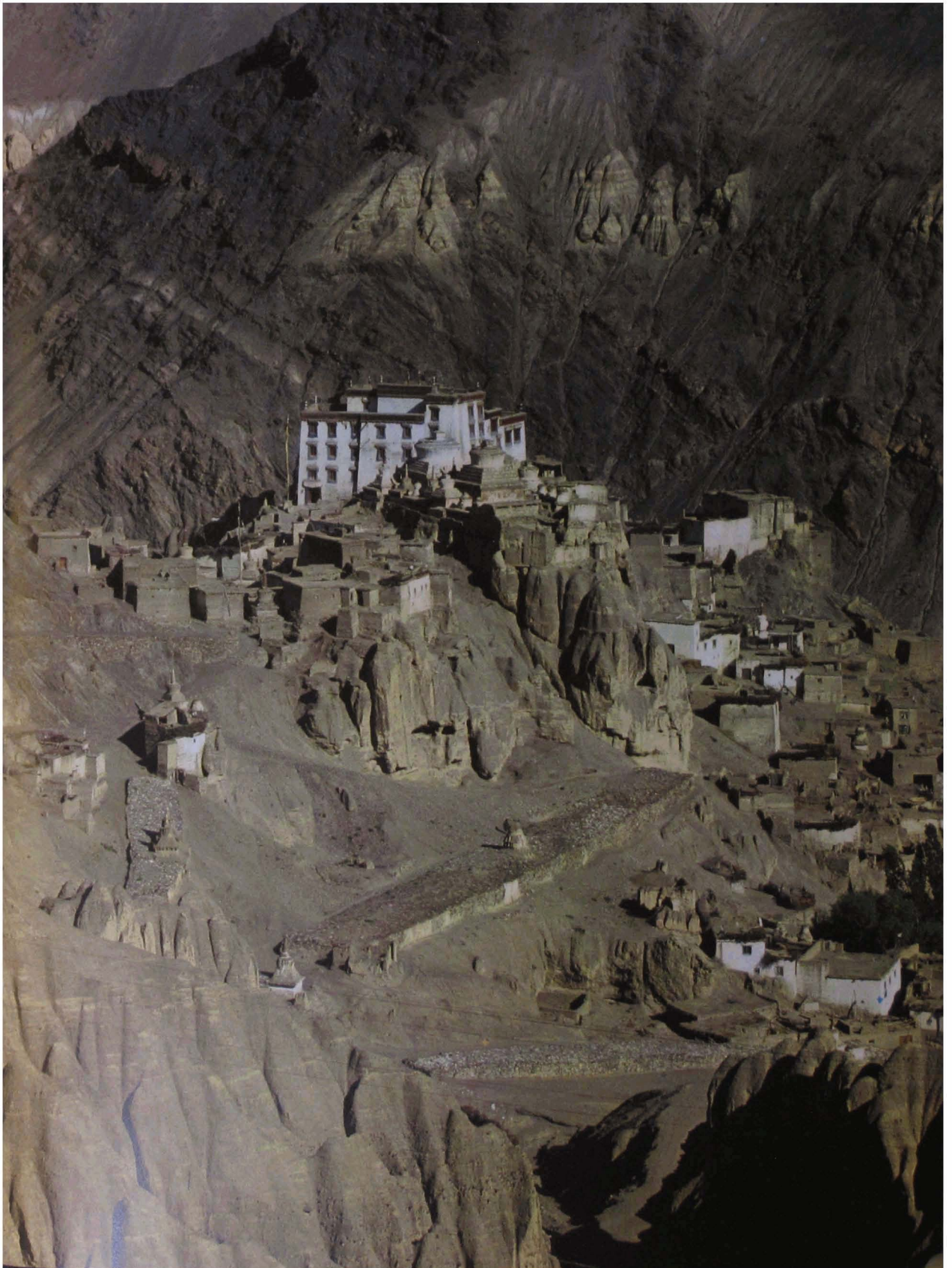
32 *A splendid perak, photographed from above. The cloth-covered leather triangle, which comes to a point in front, shades the forehead and covers the entire head. It is completely covered with turquoises of various degrees of purity, which are sewn in place. The center consists of two silver charm boxes and a mounted carnelian. Four large turquoises are set in front; the largest, nearest the front, symbolizes the head of a cobra, while the whole triangle represents the snake's wide-stretched neck shield.*

33 *Near the small village of Bodh-Karbu, 14 kilometers past Mulbekh on the road to Leh, a narrow road leads northward into the valley of the Kanji river. Here lies Chigtan, in the bottom of the valley, former chief city of the Dardi dukes of Purig or Purik, with the imposing ruins of the castle on a rock protruding over the village. In the mid-sixteenth century the Buddhist dukes accepted Islam and called themselves the sultans of Purig. After a long feud, they were finally conquered about 1600 by the "Lion King" Sengge Namgyal. The ruins of the old Kadampa monastery in the village recall the Buddhist period.*

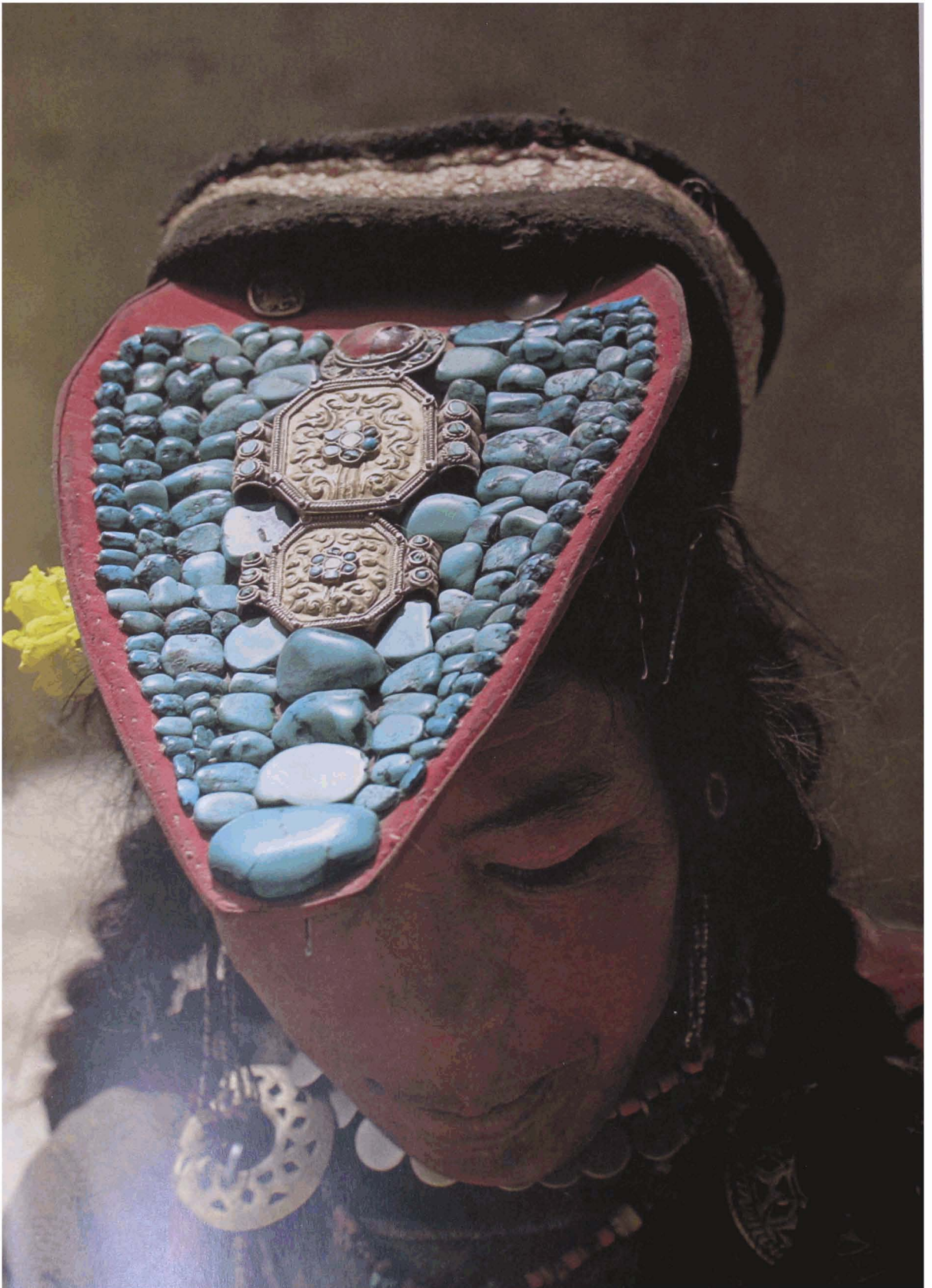
34 *A child from the village of Chigtan with amulets sewn into his cap to protect him from illness and sleeplessness and to keep him from crying.*

35–37 *The Chigtani are Shi-ite Muslims; the women, however, as among most mountain and nomadic peoples east of Iran, do not wear the veil. These young peasant women's taste in ornament shows Tibetan as well as Kashmiri and nomadic influences. Typical elements include the shoulder jewelry pieces, which reach down over the upper arm (picture 37). The cylindrical container over the charm box on the arm of the woman in picture 36 holds texts from the Koran.*

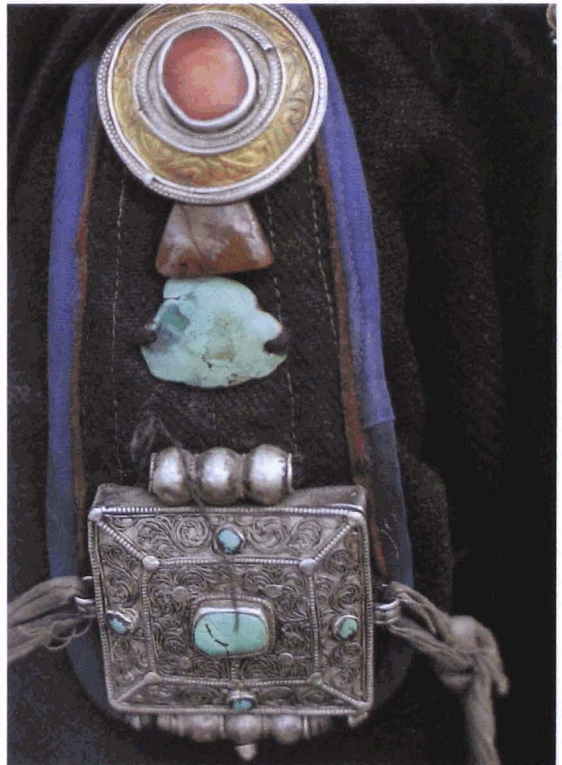
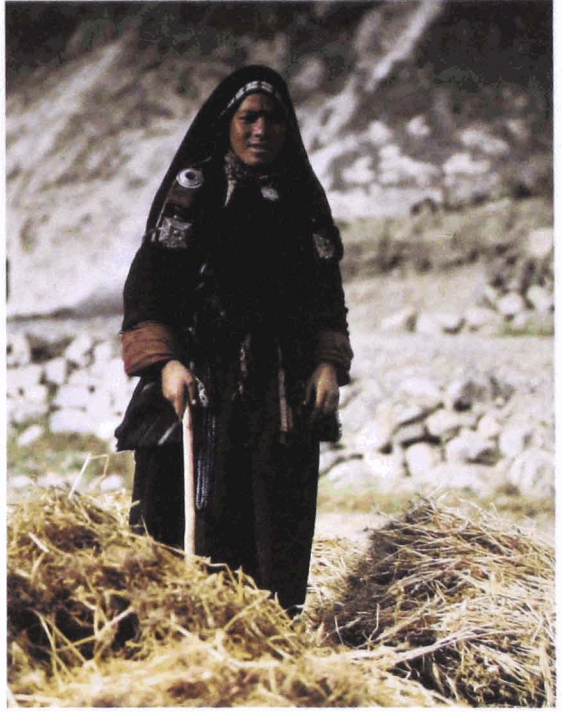
38 *Stakspi La, a pass at 5,330 meters, between the monasteries of Alchi and Sumda in central Ladakh.*















39 *The head of the pass of Achri La (4,810 m.), the lower route towards Sumda, offers a splendid circular view over the grandiose panorama of the Himalayas. In the foreground, one of our six heavily loaded donkeys.*

40 *The donkey driver who accompanied us to the monastery of Sumda, with his walking stick, which imitates the attribute of the Dharmapala (guardians of the Law), the trident, which is often portrayed as five-pointed.*

We leave the town and drive along the ancient caravan route, which the Indians have made into a good road. A few riders galloping on their little horses pass us, on their way to a wedding and richly dressed, while the Bukawal nomads go by at a slow and dignified pace, followed by mastiff dogs to guard their flocks against the attacks of wolves.

After some thirty miles, we are gripped by emotion, produced by crossing the religious frontier. We are leaving the land of men who chant the Koran and venerate Mohammed to enter the realm of Buddha, another world governed by other laws. To one side of the road toward the south stands the first Buddhist monastery or *gompa*, that of Shergol. It looks more like a large house and would not stand out but for the whiteness of its facade. It is attached to the mountain and runs deeply into it, the kitchen and other rooms being cut into a cave in the rock. A few frescoes, however, attenuate the austere simplicity of the building. After this first and quite moving impression, which any visitor cannot help feeling on entering the holy places of Buddhism, a few kilometers farther an astonishing construction appears, perched on a height that seems almost inaccessible. It is the monastery of Mulbekh, which from its summit overlooks the immense stretch of valley where the Wahka river flows. A short distance from the village of Mulbekh, to the right of the road, a giant image of Buddha Maitreya (the Future Buddha) has been carved in a cliff at whose foot stands a small temple. All over Ladakh one finds along paths and near bridges representations of deities whose protection is implored by travelers stopping to worship.

After Mulbekh, the road winds through a setting of desert dunes. By contrast, our jeep is filled with long garlands of roses presented to us by children along the road. Our hats can no longer hold all the ones we have picked. They belong to several varieties of sweetbriar; others have flowers with closed petals. The colors vary from red to pink, one particular species is a bright yellow, and their fragrance is penetrating. We are in a region where rose bushes grow wild, mountain and desert flowers whose roots find in the sand the trickle of water that suffices to make them bloom.

As one crosses the valleys, one sees women bending over their work in the fields. Their turquoise headdresses glitter like blue mirrors in the sun. Soon the land becomes dry and barren, and the jeep bounces chaotically on a rocky surface as we climb to the Namika La ("Pass of the Sky"), which reaches 3,723 meters and from where the panoramic view extends over a sea of mountains. The dizzying descent brings us to the historic site of Bodh-Karbu. It is there, as we camp near a stream, that a storm carries away our tents and all our supplies, which we have great trouble in recovering. After this experience, we were happy to find shelter in a bungalow at Bodh-Karbu.

The next day brought a surprise as we went through a picturesque village on a feast day. The women were assembled dressed in their best costumes, on their heads their richest *peraks*, in which the turquoise and carnelians are especially perfect. They carried plates brimming with flowers and jugs of holy water to welcome and honor some lamas, draped in their red woolen robes, who had come to hold a service.

The sky is an intense blue as we begin the ascent, the longest and most difficult, of the third and last pass, the Fatu La, which constitutes the highest point on the road from Sonamarg to

Leh. At the summit, 4,091 meters, two rows of low houses form a long street, attesting to the resistance of humans to the conditions of life at high altitudes and in the most severe weather. At these heights one no longer has the impression of looking down on shining peaks and dark valleys. The dimensions of the panorama are so broad that one gazes at an earth that seems as empty as a foreign planet.

After a difficult descent of about fifteen kilometers, Lamayuru, one of the most ancient monasteries in Ladakh, appears abruptly at a bend in the road. One would need a special talent to describe the scene that stretches before us, the snowy peaks piercing the indigo sky, one after another, in uninterrupted chains, and especially the fantastic forms of the strange monuments that stand on the mountainsides and seem to be upheld by giant columns of rocky stalagmites, molded by the winds and waters of the lake that in prehistoric times filled the valley, then inhabited by *nagas* or mythological serpents. From the direction of the river, one approaches the monastery by skirting some *mani* or prayer walls, whose thousands of stones are so many invocations to the gods, and circling the chortens, which contain the ashes or relics of the dead saints of the monastery. Next, one mounts by twisting alleys, between gray cubes that are merely the visible part of dwellings that extend back into caves dug in the rock. Higher up, the mountain seems to be alive; the troglodyte shelters form a façade from which strange figures emerge to attend to their tasks before the end of the day.

In the tenth century, the sage Naropa retired to the Drog-po valley to devote himself to meditation. Some years later, the Lamayuru *gompa* was built to recall his memory. Over the centuries it was enlarged by the construction of various buildings necessary for the community life of several hundred lamas belonging to the Red Cap sect. The monastery, decorated with fine frescoes, is rich in works of art, among them some ancient statues in wood or gold inlaid with precious stones. Its library contains manuscripts of inestimable value.

A zigzag road descends rapidly from Lamayuru to the Indus, and the arrival at Khalatse is refreshing. Water abounds, streams flow in all directions, and it is a joy once again to see trees and fertile fields bordered by irises.

By crossing the bridge over the Indus at Khalatse one enters the heart of Ladakh, whose capital of Leh is no more than a hundred kilometers away. On this side of the small village of Saspol, one heads south, and after crossing a narrow metal bridge, climbs a steep track leading to an attractive and fertile valley where lies the monastery of Alchi, the oldest in Ladakh, founded in the eleventh century by the sage Atisa. This *gompa* comprises four temples famous for their artistic riches, in particular the splendid frescoes that thanks to the dryness of the air have kept a remarkable freshness. They were painted by anonymous artists in periods extending from the eleventh to the seventeenth century. Their themes are worked out in forms that are expressive of Tantric doctrine and show Indo-Kashmiri influences. The dynamism of the scenes, the precise purity of the draftsmanship, the stories enacted by the figures, and the fantasy of the decorative motifs captivate the mind, which henceforth preserves the unforgettable charm of Alchi's artistic achievements.

South of Alchi, at an altitude of 3,960 meters, the monastery of Sumda, built on a ridge, overlooks the grandiose panorama of Himalayan peaks. The approach to the monastery is difficult, the ascent steep, and progress exhausting. On leaving Alchi, it takes two days first to reach the Achri La (altitude, 4,810 m.) and then make the descent to Sumda. The second road is shorter but more difficult. It crosses the Stakspi La (5,330 m.) and passes through the village of Achri. Like the village of Sumda, this one consists of only a few houses. At this altitude, the mountains seem all the more impressive for the air of absolute solitude. Near Achri there is a sacred spring whose waters flow to the village, where they ceaselessly, eternally, turn a prayer wheel, something that pleases the gods and attracts their favors. Then, free of all constraint, the

waters divide in confusion to water the barley and bean fields in which *dzos*, beasts that are a cross between a cow and a yak, browse. The dwarf goats are kept in the houses.

The Sumda monastery is particularly interesting for the large number of images and statues of divinities that it contains. For the Ladakhis, it is a place of pilgrimage.

By the recent death of two persons, the population of Achri has been reduced to nine inhabitants living in two houses. The first is occupied by a man named Sonam Paljor, his old mother, and a fifteen-year-old son. It contains three shrines, one of them housing the god of evil, whose frightful face is hidden under pieces of cloth. Entrance to this shrine is forbidden to everyone except the master of the house. Once a year, after two days of preparatory prayers, the fierce god is unveiled, and the threatening monster whom those present will try to appease is revealed to their anxious eyes. They tell the story of a man from Leh who imprudently uncovered the god and went mad, and should one sleep at its feet, one's head must point in the direction of the statue, for otherwise the sleeper will be overcome by nightmares. Each morning and evening, Sonam Paljor enters the demon's sanctuary carrying a bowl in which needles from a special pine tree burn and let off smoke whose acrid smell has the power of dispelling demons. For this reason he carries incense throughout the house so that the beneficial fumes will penetrate all the rooms.

The same god of evil has shrines in the monasteries of Hemis and Thiksey.

Despite the great poverty of the place, the wife wears a modest *perak* and a coral necklace.

We make the return descent to Alchi imbued with strange and conscious sensations of a milieu that is difficult to comprehend. We would have loved to listen to the lamas of Alchi and Sumda, who transmit orally the history and circumstances surrounding the establishment of their monasteries. Both were built in the eleventh century by Richin Sjambo on the instructions of his old guru. Returning to Saspol, we resume our travels. Ten kilometers farther, a passable track leads to the monastery of Likhir, mentioned in the chronicles as having been built at the orders of Lha-chen-rgyalpo, king of Ladakh (1050–1080). Today the gompa appears as a monumental structure of several floors, its base reinforced by sustaining walls, and which covers the top of a green ridge. Some hundred lamas belonging to the Gelugpa sect live in this monastery. Some devote themselves to the education of boys destined for monastic life. The plan of study includes the teaching of three languages and two scripts. The Ladakhis speak a regional dialect, but the knowledge of classical Tibetan is needed to acquire the subtle richness of the religious vocabulary and to read the sacred texts. Bengali and English are also taught to diligent youngsters, who, like ours, do their exercises at the blackboard.

The temple library contains the 108 volumes of the *Kanjur* (precepts) and the 225 volumes of the *Tanjur* (commentaries), arranged in compartments of red lacquered wood.

At the end of our visit, we were taken to see the workshop of an old lama, a highly esteemed artist who has preserved intact the tradition of painting. Buddhist iconography has its laws, from which it is not allowed to depart. The central theme is a point of concentration and meditation, which may represent Buddha, a mandala, a Bodhisattva, or any one of countless serene or wrathful deities. The artist's fantasy is exercised in the decorative elements of the composition, such as the landscape, flowers, or birds. We were offered tea with butter, and watched in fascination as the artist's skillful brush traced the curves of a lotus blossom.

The road to Leh passes through the village of Basgo, a historic site that witnessed bloody battles, and where the ruins of an ancient fortress and castle still stand on a long narrow ridge. On a mountain peak that pierces the sky one can make out a hermitage topped with a fragile roof, and whose ladder, the sole means of access, seems suspended in the void. Skirting giant prayer wheels, a path leads to the temple, which houses the second largest statue of the Buddha Maitreya in Ladakh.

After passing the village of Nimu, fifteen kilometers from Leh, one notices a trail on the left running into the desert. It leads to the monastery of Phyang, whose imposing buildings house an important community of lamas of the Red Cap sect who in particular maintain the ancient tradition of the Bön religion. The *Skus-shog*, the title given to the spiritual head of the monastery, also extends his authority to the Lamayuru gumpa. The monastery comprises five temples, the oldest of which dates from the fifteenth century. Restoration operations have given it a newly fresh appearance. The wall paintings are of particular interest, and constitute a collection of portraits of figures who are often identified. The temples of Phyang house valuable works of art. Among the oldest objects are two bronze statuettes of Buddha dating from the ninth and thirteenth centuries.

Leaving the monastery of Phyang, which projects its grandeur over an arid landscape, we can no longer restrain our impatience. We cross the last bend in the Indus, and there is Leh: Before us stretches the immensely wide Indus valley. The waters overflow the river bed to form a delta, and the silvery brooks flow in all directions to irrigate the plain. The mountains seem more distant, the whiteness of their summits lost in the turquoise vault. Leh, with its castle and monastery, seems to form part of the mountain in which they are rooted. We climb the highest blocks of rock to the upper temple of the Spituk monastery in order to contemplate the vast landscape still lighted by the flaming rays of the setting sun.

At nightfall we enter Leh, only to drive through it. We follow the longest prayer wall (seven hundred meters) in Ladakh southward, and go up the Indus until we find a suitable campsite on its banks.

Leh with its nine thousand inhabitants is the main city in Ladakh and lies at an altitude of some 3,500 meters. It was once a crossroads for caravan routes in the Himalaya; the principal one, now closed, led to Lhasa. Westward caravans set out for Baltistan, Afghanistan, and Persia, while to the south they went to Kashmir, Jammu, Spiti, and India. A track led northward to the Khardung Pass (5,600 m), then continued on to Kashgar and Yarkand. Caravans that were often on the move for years stopped at Leh for the winter. At present, caravans for salt, wool, and other merchandise still pass through the town, but though Leh's commercial importance has diminished, its strategic importance has on the other hand increased. The soldiers of the Chinese People's Army patrol a few kilometers away, while in the Indus plain an Indian garrison is on guard and works at the construction of a road that will be the highest in the world. The houses in Leh extend over a flat terrain at the foot of a mountain spur, upon which stand the royal palace and the monastery, twin symbols for the military and religious protection of the valley. At the top of the ridge, the remains of the ancient palace overlook the Tsemo gumpa, whose frescoes are interesting because they show the kings of Ladakh sumptuously dressed and wearing turbans. The royal palace is a massive and imposing nine-story structure, built in the seventeenth century by the powerful Gyalpo Senge Namgyal; the main entrance is surmounted by a lion that symbolizes his reign. The palace was devastated and abandoned at the time of the Kashmiri invasion in the last century. The wall paintings are a reminder of the pomp and ceremony of other times. On the roof, prayer flags float in the breeze.

The oldest quarter of the city stretches at the bottom of the hill. Its twisted narrow lanes run between small dwellings crudely built of stone and earth. Their look is poor, and one is quite surprised to see well-groomed and elegant women, draped in their luxurious shawls of Chinese brocade, adorned with striking jewelry, and wearing velvet hats embroidered with gold thread, gliding into these dark and evil-smelling hovels. What does one see by following them? The stables are on the ground floor and help to heat the living quarters on the floor above, where the winter kitchen is located. The rooms on the next floor are lighted by small windows that can be closed with shutters or plugged with paper in winter. The summer kitchen is spacious and airy,

and the everyday objects it contains, such as jugs for *chang*, silver cups, and teapots are often masterpieces of metalcraft accumulated over the generations. The chapel, which is on the same floor, contains ritual objects in hammered or chased silver, as fine as those seen in the temples. The censers are similar to the ones in our churches; a bell and a *dorje* rest beside the sacred books.

Domestic life goes on at all seasons on the flat roofs of the houses. Irrigated plots being rare, there are no gardens, and flowers are a luxury that the inhabitants cultivate on the roofs beside cakes of yak dung that dry in the sun and constitute the principal fuel. During the summer, when the temperature may reach 30° C, a tent is set up on the roof for people to sleep, to take advantage of the fresh night air or perhaps as a memory of former nomadism. In winter, with minus 25° C of cold, the Ladakhis also enjoy the terrace, where they warm themselves in the sun while spinning wool, one of their favorite occupations.

For the Ladakhis, we are *gaping* – strangers: We find everything surprising as we circulate in the motley crowd in which nomads, Tibetans, Indians, and members of various ethnic groups recognizable as much by their garments as by their features, rub shoulders.

The attraction of Leh's bazaars is irresistible. Such artisans as hatters, tailors, cobblers, metal-workers, and jewelers work openly in stalls, under the curious and observing gaze of the passersby. In the market, splendidly dressed and adorned countrywomen sell bunches of turnips along with other vegetables from their gardens. Second-hand dealers spread their curiosities out on rugs, and we sift through them looking for souvenirs. It is forbidden to buy works of art.

In an inn, we are side by side with lamas, pilgrims, travelers, and nomads. We sample native dishes while drinking tea. The menu consists of *tupka*, made of dough and meat; *momoks*, resembling ravioli; and *skir*, a stew of meat, potatoes, and vegetables. Pastries are made with *tsampa*, barley meal.

The Ladakhis are excellent horsemen. They practice archery, love sports, and participate joyously in celebrations.

Our solitary camp on the banks of the Indus is no longer such. Curious women and children will not leave us alone; tireless walkers on their way to some distant destination stop to greet us with a cheerful "*djulai*." As early as sunrise we can hear the jingling of the small bells worn by the little Tibetan horses, made to trot a rapid pace by their owners. As at the high altitudes of Ladakh, colors have new shades, sounds other echoes.

On the plateau, the days are warm, the nights cool, and the wind blows ceaselessly. One afternoon it rose in violence to a tempest that scoured the soil, stirring up so much sand that it quickly became like a dense fog, turning the sky gray and obscuring the sun. Sheltered under the flapping canvas of our tents, we could only await the night, which restored calm.

Despite all the hours we have enjoyed beside the Indus, we are seized with a desire to leave, to proceed farther and let ourselves be absorbed by the atmosphere of other temples and monasteries, to wander through empty palaces and climb rocks to explore fortresses, and to view grandiose panoramas with *gyalpos* and *shushoks*.

The architecture of Ladakh is of the feudal type known as "Himalayan," for it is marked by the same forms as the buildings constructed in all Buddhist countries – Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan, as well as the north of India. The palaces, fortresses, and monasteries are massive constructions with several stories, a sign of power, with flat roofs, and built of stone or dried bricks. Cliffs serve as foundations, walls and shelters, and rooms have often been hollowed out of the mountain. The choice of the building's site helped to make it difficult to approach, and to ensure surveillance and protection for the inhabitants of the valley.

As we pursue this great journey up the Indus to the roof of the world, we arrive at the ruins of

the palace of Shey, which stand with the dignity left to them by five centuries of isolation and history. Situated at the top of a granite knoll, the fortification walls, reinforced by large round towers, descend zigzag unto the valley to a flat terrain where a row of chortens attests to the holiness of the place.

The Gompa of Shey houses a statue of Buddha twelve meters high, in gilded copper inlaid with precious stones and partly covered with silk draperies. This statue, in front of which burns an everlasting flame, was placed in the temple in 1655 by King Deldan Namgyal. Such statues are not rare, for the donor's prestige increases with the cost of the work and the artist's with the difficulty of his labor.

Three kilometers farther, we stop to admire a view that strikes our minds as well as our eyes. Against a background of desert mountains stands a hill completely covered with houses in the form of irregularly placed cubes. It is the monastic city of Thiksey, belonging to the reformed Gelugpa order or Yellow Cap sect, and which also includes a community of nuns. The dwellings are spaced on tiers all the way to the bottom of the slopes, while the temples are situated at the top of the hill. The façade of the main temple, which opens to an inner courtyard, is decorated in carved and painted wood. The dark interior of the temple conceals fascinating frescoes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in which mythological creatures and all of Buddhist religious symbolism appear. The wall paintings in the courtyard depict the portraits of eighty-four *siddhas* or saints of Tantric Buddhism.

A small temple is dedicated to threatening and demonic gods. A monstrous bull-headed statue represents the fierce steward of Yamantaka.

The Thiksey monastery's important library contains admirably written and hand-painted manuscripts. The later volumes have been printed with the help of a wooden press.

After leaving the city of Thiksey, we continue to a bridge where we cross the Indus and join the pilgrims who have begun their journey up the river and will arrive at the same time as ourselves at the monastery of Hemis to celebrate the *mela* in honor of Padmasambhava.

3. *The Perak*

Ladakhi women are coquettes, with a charming femininity and a taste for personal ornament. They owe their remarkable appearance to their headdresses, known as *peraks* (the first syllable – *per* – is an ancient word designating turquoise). This head ornament is an original and sumptuous construction. It holds the greatest possible number of rough-cut precious stones, mostly turquoise, coral, agates, and carnelians. This extraordinary arrangement is complicated by the fact that the women interweave and sew their own thick, black, beautiful natural hair into this headdress.

Tradition tells us the origin of this costume. A king of Ladakh once took as his queen a woman chosen from a small neighboring state where the *perak* was the national headdress. The ladies of the court, and later of the whole kingdom, adopted this coiffure in imitation of their admired queen.

The *perak* turns out to be a long piece of leather, stretched with red cloth and placed over the woman's head, completely covering the top and coming down a little over the forehead. It falls over the nape of the neck and down the back, and narrows to a point below the waist. The whole piece is supposed to represent a serpent. Indeed, the front part of the *perak*, to which the largest chunk of turquoise is attached, and sometimes a charm box in gold or filigree silver and inlaid

with stones, recalls the head of a cobra. When seeing it in profile and from above, one cannot help recognizing the curves of an erect serpent. (The *naga* or serpent has mythological origins. It is related to the demigods and is connected with various symbols. "In cosmology, the serpent represents the spiral, symbol of the cycles of time, but above all it is the image of latent energy, source of sexual and mental power." Alain Daniélou, *Le Polythéisme Hindou*, Editions Buchet/Chastel, Paris, 1975, p. 335.)

Precious turquoise stones are sewn to the red cloth, sometimes over the whole piece, or fastened to each other with wax in compact rows. The stones on the head are the finest, and sometimes surround several small charm boxes. The number of stones attached to the headband of the *perak* may be over a hundred, but seldom reaches two hundred. Their quality varies; there is a great range of tones, all the way to dark green, the most beautiful color being a very pure blue – this is the result of traces of copper. Cornelians are often mixed with the turquoise.

The *perak* widens on one side into a right angle to hold a silver plaque to which are attached several rows of coral beads that fall in a cascade. They say that this part represents the tail of the serpent.

To right and left of the head, and joined to the central piece, are two large earlaps, separate and movable, made of black sheepskin. In explanation of this original feature, they say that a queen, suffering from earache and wanting to protect her ears from the cold, covered them with fur. The ladies of the court immediately followed suit. In time the useful became decorative, and the earlaps were adopted as part of the *perak*. They give it its striking and bizarre appearance. The woman's hair, done up in a tress, is sewn into the astrakhan and continues down the back, braided with strands of black wool, to fall to the hem of the skirt while giving the illusion of an opulent and very long head of hair.

Noble and well-to-do women adorn themselves with a headdress resplendent in the quantity and quality of its precious stones. Countrywomen may also own luxurious *peraks*.

These beautiful head ornaments grow from one generation to the next. A well-laden *perak* can be so heavy that it must be supported by leather straps passing under the arms. The central band that holds the stones is removed for the night, while the astrakhan earlaps, sewn to the hair, remain in place. These are removed once a month when the hair is washed and oiled. In the city, a hairdresser arranges the hair and provides the necessary care. Women in the country help each other.

The *perak* is dismantled on occasion for the purpose of replacing the red cloth to which the jewels are attached. For the length of time that this operation takes, the woman contents herself with wearing a pretty velvet hat lined with fur or with red or blue cotton.

Little girls sometimes begin wearing a small *perak* at the age of five or six. This holds only one row of turquoise stones placed on the head, and it continues over the nape of the neck and down the back with shells. These will little by little be replaced by stones, insofar as material and financial means allow. These cowries can only be worn by unmarried girls.

By the time they become adults they will have to own this important *perak*, which represents their dowry. Indeed, Ladakhi women consider their *peraks* as a "bank," since their money is invested in turquoise as a value in reserve for the periods of widowhood and old age.

A mother may offer her *perak* to her eldest daughter on the occasion of the girl's marriage. She will henceforth have to content herself with a modest headdress. Just as the eldest son inherits the land, the eldest daughter receives all the jewels and ornaments.

The number, cut, and quality of the turquoise stones on a *perak* can be a cause of considerable jealousy among Ladakhi women. A woman in possession of a resplendent headdress may be suspected for her morals.

In former times, the queen of Ladakh, the queen mother, and the court ladies wore earlaps of sable, a fur brought by caravans from Samarkand.

The custom of wearing a large ornament of gold or silver on the neck originated when a queen wished in this way to hide a disfiguring goiter.

Ladakhi women also wear other ornaments, and in truth cut a fine figure.

Clusters of pearls, strung together and attached to a central ornament, serve as precious earrings. Necklaces, each different in design, are composed of a gold or silver motif decorated with small pearls, turquoise, or coral, repeated in several rows.

Chatelaines of chased silver are fastened to the shoulders, and various small instruments useful in the care of the nose, ears, and teeth are suspended from chains.

The inlaid charm boxes, in repoussé and filigree gold or silver, are in the Tibetan tradition.

Round copper plaques, with signs engraved in the center, are attached to the belts, along with a box, likewise in copper and filled with needles. Shells, strung on leather thongs attached to these plaques, knock against each other and thus discreetly signal the passage of the women. On their wrists, women wear bracelets made of a wide piece of shell. They create the effect of white cuffs, serving to hold the very long sleeves in which they bury their hands to protect them from the cold. Such bracelets are also used as a means of greeting; women strike them against each other whenever they meet. The conches they are made from are imported from India.

As the Muslims consider the *perak* an emblem of idolatry, Islamic women wear a white headdress decorated in front with a piece of jewelry, often very costly, in which pearls and turquoise stones are arranged to form the sign of the crescent.

Little girls playing in the fields pick the wild irises that grow in abundance, and interweave them to make ornaments to cover their heads in imitation of the *perak*.

Children's plaything, luxurious ornament for women, sign of wealth, the *perak* is of great importance in the lives of the proud and beautiful women of Ladakh.

Some of the information in this chapter has been derived from A. Reeve Heber, M. D., Ch. B., and Kathleen M. Heber, M. B., Ch. B. Sc., *Himalayan Tibet and Ladakh*, Sheel Sethi, New Delhi, 2nd edition, 1976 (1st edition, 1923).

4. *The Pilgrims of the Indus*

The Indus is a river hallowed by history; its course extends over more than three thousand kilometers, from the Himalaya to the delta, and empties into the Arabian Sea. It rises from the depth of Kailas, a mountain on the high Tibetan plateau; its summit, 6714 meters high, pierces the clouds to offer the sky a dwelling for the gods, and is regarded as an invisible temple between the two worlds. Kailas controls the fluvial system of Tibet and India. It is considered as charged with cosmic energy, which it attracts and gathers like an antenna. Both Hindus and Buddhists regard it as the physical and metaphysical center of the universe. It is Meru, the Universal, the axis of all planes. Its four faces symbolize "esoteric gates": the East silver (white), the South lapis lazuli (blue), the West ruby (red), and the North gold (yellow).

Preserving in its waters the mystical power bestowed on it by the Spirits of Kailas, the Indus, in its northwest course, enters the country of Ladakh, where it waters the banks, providing nourishment for the people who live on the highest desert plateau in the world. Its valley is an oasis that stretches like an undulating ribbon of green closely connected to the banks of the river. Poplars stand straight and slender among fruit trees, apple, plum, and apricot, which contrast by the roundness of their shape; willows droop and are reflected in the mirrors of

water. The geometric spaces, carpets of intense greens, dark or light, are fields of wheat, barley, or millet, to which nature gives three months to ripen. Cold, clear water courses swiftly in the irrigation ditches that water the countryside, villages, and gardens. They are bordered by sweet-smelling and brightly colored wild flowers.

The women bending over their work in the fields are luminous under the intense sun, for their *peraks* glitter like so many large turquoise plaques. Children, adorned with simple necklaces, earrings, and small bracelets, unaware of their natural beauty, run about and play.

Dwarf goats, known as "goats of Tibet," are rare and prized by the inhabitants, who keep them in a room giving on a small enclosure on the ground floor of their houses.

Sometimes a lama will take a stroll accompanied by one of these small goats, which gives him the tool of his art. The fine and silky hairs from the animal's neck are used in making the brushes with which the artist, in the monastery workshop, meticulously paints on cloth *thankas* the infinite complexity of esoteric knowledge.

The villages look like assemblages of cubes built of dried clay and irregularly placed. Some houses, not far from the villages but already isolated in the countryside are the summer residences of the landowners. In the valley, the dwellings stand out against their natural setting, but when they are built against the mountain slopes they are hardly distinguishable from the stratified rocks into which they are sunk. Only the front rooms are exterior; the others are hollowed out of caves.

Rain and snow are rare at such a high altitude. The sky is of a deep blue, the air of an indescribable transparency, while all day long the sunlight plays over a subtle range of iridescent colors in which orange tones are mingled with yellow ones, pinks with violets.

The peace and quiet of isolation is curiously associated with vexed and terrifying divinities, who seem to derive their violent character from the mountains and their impenetrable grandeur: their sharp rocks, lethal chasms, and slippery walls; from the viciousness of winds that suddenly blow the sand into an opaque fog that even darkens the sky. There is also the harshness of the seasons, the sun, the heat, and the cold of the icy nights; the inhospitality of the desert and the shelterless heights.

Everything combines to create a reality that is both tangible and unreal, and to develop in humans a rare sobriety, endurance, and psychological and physical strength. They seem attuned to a higher reality, to which they pay homage in their pilgrimages.

The nomads of the heights leave the shelter of their tents, the security of their yaks and flocks of goats and sheep, whose soft underfleece will be woven into *pashmina* shawls, the finest and most delicate in the world. Along the way they may perhaps encounter the beautiful markhor, the ibex, the marmot, or the very rare and marvelous snow leopard.

They converge from all directions, on horseback and on foot. Some tell a rosary of 108 beads (108 as a multiple of 12), and others rhythmically spin their prayer wheels. All establish contact with the Spirits by formulating mantras, magical links between separate worlds.

The traveling pilgrims walk for days and weeks to reach the Indus, forming a chain of men, women, and children, of all ages and from all regions. It follows the roads of pebbled sand, piously bordered with numerous chortens and by long prayer walls that precede and announce the monasteries, the pilgrims' goal. There they prostrate themselves at the foot of the statue of Buddha and invoke the Bodhisattvas. They worship the images of peaceful and of terrifying divinities, and present them with propitiating offerings. The great *melas*, religious feasts attended by the pilgrims, are celebrated, according to the Buddhist calendar, in the gumpa sanctuaries.

The monasteries are impressive constructions, enlarged in the course of the centuries until they constitute monastic cities. Over a distance of fifty kilometers along the Indus, six powerful

gompas rule and oversee the valley and its inhabitants. They are Spitug, Leh, Shey, Thiksey, Stagna, and Hemis.

These age-old, colossal monuments impress by the simplicity of their architecture, which assimilates itself to the surrounding nature, not as an addition to it but as its complement. The architect seems to be not man but the mountain. The monasteries appear as inlays, as it were, in the crests of steep cliffs, perched above the flat expanse of the valleys. The fortresses or royal palaces, the *dzongs*, are built at the extreme edge of these cliffs, adding their warlike strength to the spiritual strength that for the rulers was as the warp to the woof.

5. *The Eve of the Mela*

On the tenth day of the fifth month of the Buddhist year, around the time of the full moon, the traveling pilgrims, assembled in great numbers on the banks of the Indus, cross a bridge southward to follow the course of a tributary river. Despite the very long journey, they seem to feel no fatigue. The Ladakhis walk slowly, matching their pace to their breathing. The latter is itself regulated by the recitation of mantras or invocation formulas, and this gives their body movements a precise regularity that constitutes a yoga discipline.

A few miles upstream, the river is a torrent whose mellow waters have worn away the rock and molded it. It flows noisily and impetuously through a gorge overhung by steep mountains with jagged peaks. The severity of the setting is softened by the blue Ladakhi sky, the paleness and airy delicacy of pastel tones and half-tones.

Nature often plants its rarest and most astonishing jewels in arid places. Here in full bloom are roses with a wild fragrance. They grow on large and vigorous bushes in the sand, even between the rocks on unreachable slopes, where their roots find in the sterile soil the trickle of water that produces a miracle.

The pious crowd follows a path laid out in a curve so as to circumvent huge blocks of black lava that seem to have rolled down from the summits and stopped here and there randomly.

The old pilgrimage route is marked out by chortens, or funerary monuments containing the ashes of holy lamas. The pilgrims know the mantras, invocations engraved on each piled-up stone, without having to read them. In Sanskrit or Tibetan characters they recount ancient history and cite the glories of the Hemis monastery. The latter, hidden from view until the last moment, reveals itself majestically to the pilgrims, happy to have arrived at the spiritual refuge that has been preserved intact by the solitude of the desert and the pure air of the heights.

On a bank above the torrent runs a fresh brook, natural irrigation that imparts sap to the trees, as much of it as is needed to create a small grove. It is in the shade of their foliage that the *skushog*, the Abbot Superior of the Hemis monastery, offers hospitality to the visitors and allows them to pitch their tents and spread out their camps during the three days that the great annual religious celebration lasts.

One can see, down below on the road, the procession of arriving pilgrims with their little horses that trot rapidly to a tinkle of bells. The frail colts and lambs born en route are carried along like the little children and newborn infants whom the women conceal in their ample robes.

Seen from afar, the Ladakhis look alike, but there are details of dress and ornament that make it possible to identify the regions they come from. The inhabitants of the large Zanskar, Nubra, and Indus river valleys all have particular characteristics.

The men, whose bodies are hidden under greatcoats of reddish yellow wool with the look of

long wear and tear, compress the bulky material at their waists with silver belts and costly buckles.

The women look impressively dignified in their ample robes of wool or black velvet gathered in large folds at the waist. Long trousers of brightly colored silk or cotton, blue, red, or pink, extend below the rather short dress to the tops of the leather or embroidered felt boots.

Under the robe, they wear a blouse of the same color, whose extra-long sleeves are turned back to form cuffs in summer and in winter fall over the hands. A sleeveless silk vest with colorful patterns encloses the chest as far as the waist. Those women who do not wear this vest wrap the waist twice with a long sash of fringed silk knotted in front.

This outfit is completed by a luxurious cape of Chinese silk brocade in superb colors and highly decorative patterns of dragons, chrysanthemums, garlands, and suns, as well as other Chinese motifs. The cape is closed in front, covers the back, and descends to the knee. It is attached at the neck by knotted ribbons. The edges at the shoulders are covered by a different piece of brocade, woven more richly with gold and silver thread.

Most women wear the *perak*. There is a difference to be noticed: the headdress worn by women from Leh and Nubra valley ends in a point on the forehead, on which the largest turquoise is set. *Peraks* from regions farther up the Indus are cut straight in front and end in a silver baguette.

Those women who do not have *peraks* wear elegant hats of black, blue, or dark red velvet, stitched with vertical lines and lined with brightly colored cotton. This hat, eighteen centimeters high, is embroidered with gold and silver thread; it worn on the top of the head and cut in a half circle to expose the forehead, the wings being turned back in Dutch fashion.

Countrywomen often wear a goatskin to keep their backs warm and protect their garments from the rubbing of bundles; it also serves as bedding at night.

Ladakhi women wear their traditional costume proudly. They stand firm and straight under the weight of precious metals and gems with which they are adorned, as well as with their babies, who wear caps loaded with pendants and brooches.

The metal craftsmen, great artists that they are, have invented everything to decorate the heads, necks, breasts, waists, wrists, and fingers of the pretty and coquettish Ladakhi women, with their round flat faces, flushed cheeks, and slanting eyes, which close, leaving only a black line, when they give one of their charming smiles. They rejoice in their femininity and do not fail to add to their seductiveness by placing a freshly picked rose at their ear.

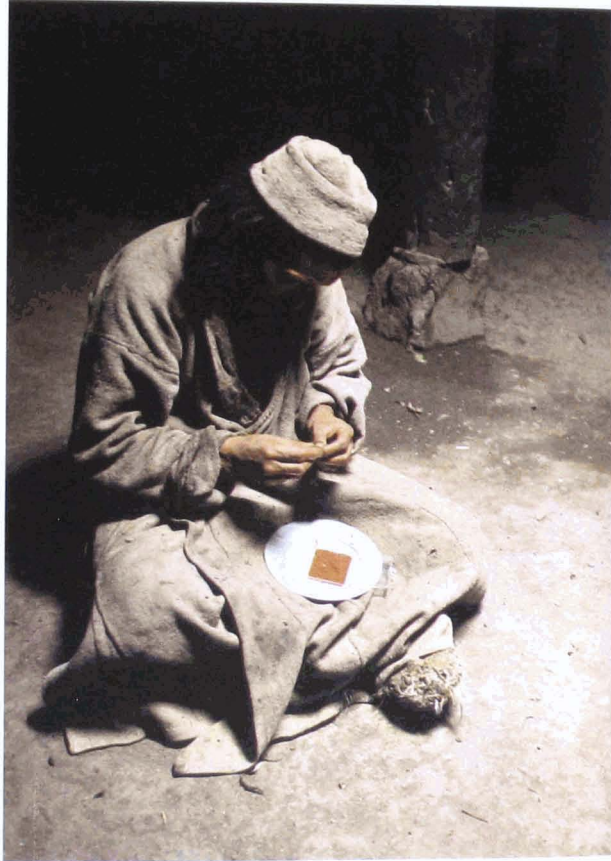
Like the women, the men oil and braid their smooth black hair. Women have several braids, as long as possible, which they interweave with wool; men wear only a single short braid. The nomads wear nothing on their heads and look somewhat strange, uncovered. Their chief ornament is a necklace of large turquoise and coral beads, sometimes interspersed with a few agates known as *gzi*. This same necklace is worn by mountain people in Ladakh as well as in northern Nepal and Tibet, all the way to the province of Kham.

Some women immigrants from Tibet display a simple and elegant appearance. In accordance with the custom of their country, they wear a Chinese silk blouse and double-breasted sleeveless coat, set off by an apron with colored stripes. Their jewelry comes from Tibet. Each wears as a pendant a gold or silver charm box inlaid with turquoise, as well as loops or dangling earrings on her ears.

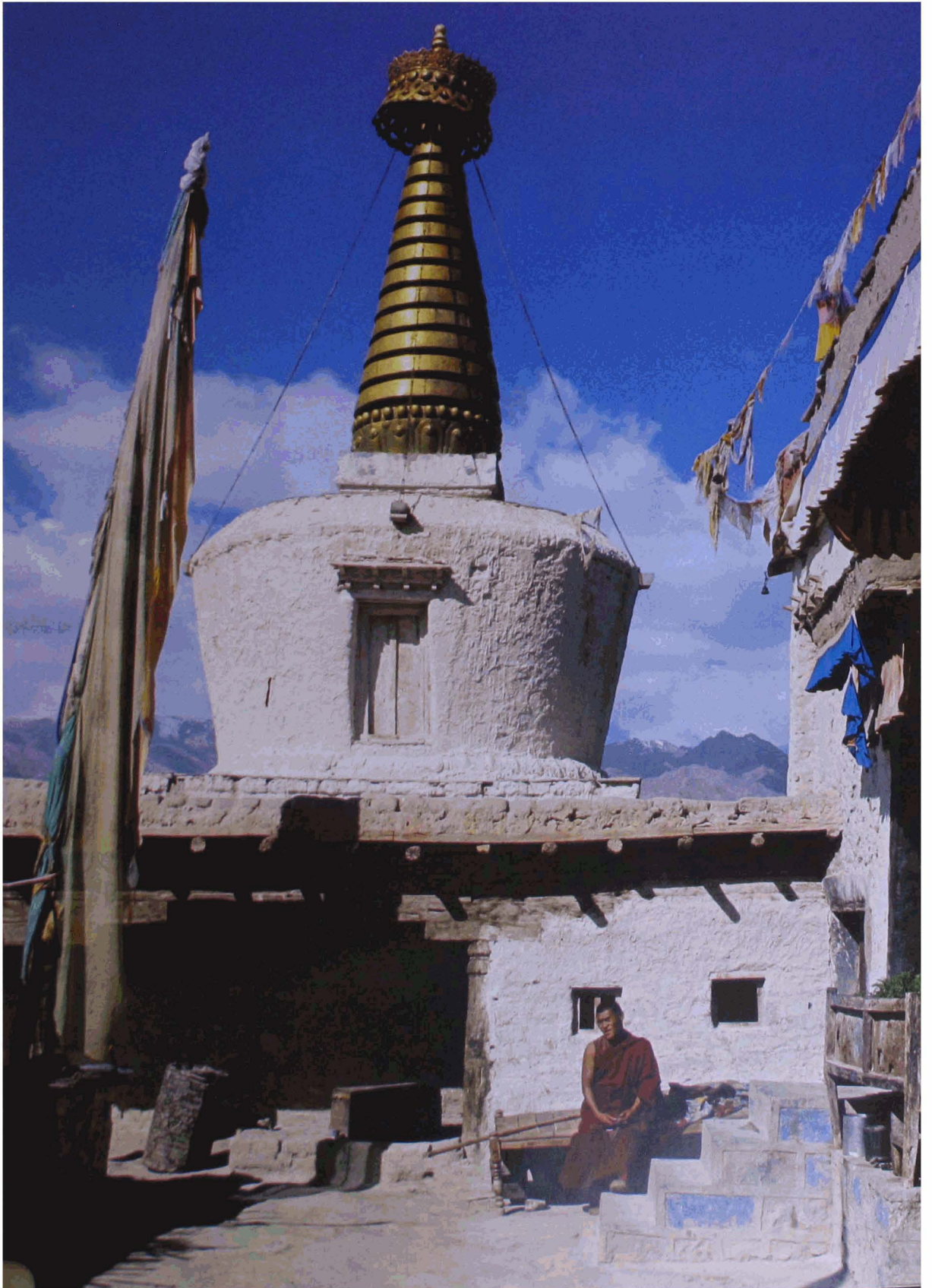
In the lively throng, amid the diversity and pomp of costumes and ornaments, the holy men, deliberately plain, circulate with ease. They have the contentment and assurance that comes from the conviction of following the path of karmic progress. Their burden is light, a flat square leather bag containing holy water, the only nourishment allowed during their fast. Higher ranking lamas have bags covered in brocade.

- 41 *The monastery of Sumda is hidden away at the borderline to the province of Zaskar at 3,960 meters, in the northern spur of the Zaskar mountain chain. It is a foundation of the Kadampa sect dating to the time of Richia Siampo (eleventh century) and contains extraordinary wall paintings and plaster works. The stone plinths in the foreground are engraved with mantras.*
- 42 *The hamlet of Achri, situated above Sumda monastery at about 5,000 meters, consists of only three houses. The room behind the small window in the center of the picture is the devotional chamber of the monastery, containing the portrait of a frightful guardian deity. The woman in the foreground is driving the goats into the barn for the night.*
- 43 *Despite the poverty of the inhabitants of Achri, this woman boasts a splendid perak. Its projecting lambskin ear coverings can be clearly made out, along with the protective goatskin on the back, and arm-rings cut from sea-shells. In contrast to the immense wild sheep and goats of the Himalayas, the household goats are very small.*
- 44 *A man in Achri sorts out coral beads for a necklace.*
- 45 *The glow of the oil lamp imparts a quasi-symbolic character to the wrinkled features of the oldest member of the tribe of Achri.*
- 46 *A lama on a terrace of the monastery of Phiyang in front of a splendid chorten with gilded roof. At left, a mast with prayer banners. This monastery of the Red Caps or Digunk-pa sect was built in the sixteenth century. Its three temples contain ornate wall paintings and statues as well as a large collection of Kashmiri bronzes (including a large-scale Padmasambhawa) said to date from the twelfth to the thirteenth century.*
- 47 *Ornately designed temple portal in the Phiyang monastery, 17 kilometers down the Indus from Leh. The heavy wooden doors bear carved and gilded mountings and decorative elements; the handle-rings are mounted on large gilded bronze sockets. The colorful ornamental motifs of the doorframe are partly symbolic. The portal was recently repainted by the monks, who also restored the frescoes.*
- 48 *This wall painting in Phiyang portrays one of the eight symbols of good fortune or Astamangala, the white rightward-curving trion horn (the dung kar), which proclaims the glory of the Law. This instrument played by a monk during devotions has a strong, deep tone and is generally accompanied by cymbals. Here the dung kar is the center of a mandala with floral motifs.*
- 49 *Lung, the ideal horse, shown here in a low relief on a chorten, is one of the seven royal symbols of a world ruler (Saptaratna) such as Prince Siddhartha. In the kingdom of the Spirit, in which the sun never sets, it carries its rider wherever he wishes to go. Here, however, the flaming Hope Diamond Norbu is mounted in the saddle. A related symbol is the Tibetan wind-horse Lungta, which appears as the bringer of good fortune on banners and house walls.*
- 50 *Low relief of a peacock on a chorten. The peacock or mayura is considered the bearer of the lotus-throne of Buddha Amitabha. Its tailfeathers (mayura-piccha), in addition, symbolize the atonement for sins – no doubt because this bird is known all throughout the Orient for its resistance to poison.*
- 51 *Seven kilometers downstream from Leh, the Spitug monastery dominates the Indus River valley. The first temple to occupy this spot was erected in the eleventh century and was in time enlarged into a Kadampa monastery. The present fortress-like complex of buildings, however, dates from the reign of King Drag Bum De (ca. 1400–1440), when the war-like Yellow Cap order under Chief Lama Lhawang Lodros built up the monastery as the base for their intended reformation of all of Ladakh. The abbot superior of the Spitug monastery, which now houses about 100 monks, is believed to be the incarnation of the holy Bakula and is the leader of the Ladakhi Gelugpa church.*
- 52–55 *A small shrine in Simchung, the abbot superior's residence of Spitug, is consecrated to the goddess Tara, who joined the Indian Buddhist pantheon in the fourth and fifth centuries and gradually assumed more and more forms. Thus for example the green Tara is the incarnation of Princess Bhrikuti, and the white Tara is that of the Chinese T'ang princess Weng Cheng, both of whom, as wives of King Srontsan Gampo, brought Buddhism to Tibet. In Spitug the 21 Taras of the four terrors encircle a figure of the lord of the Law, Je Rinpoche. The latter is an honorary title of Tsong Khapa, founder of the Gelugpa or Yellow Cap sect. The statuettes in our illustration show clear stylistic traces of the goddess's Indian origins. Outstanding here are the richness and diversity of their gold ornamentation as well as the opulent precious gems, including the turquoise especially favored by Tara. Taras are among the most powerful and best-loved divinities of Lamaism, and monks implore their help in daily prayers. Picture 55 shows a miniature Tara figure within a kind of tabernacle, and picture 54 presents a detail photograph of the same statuette.*









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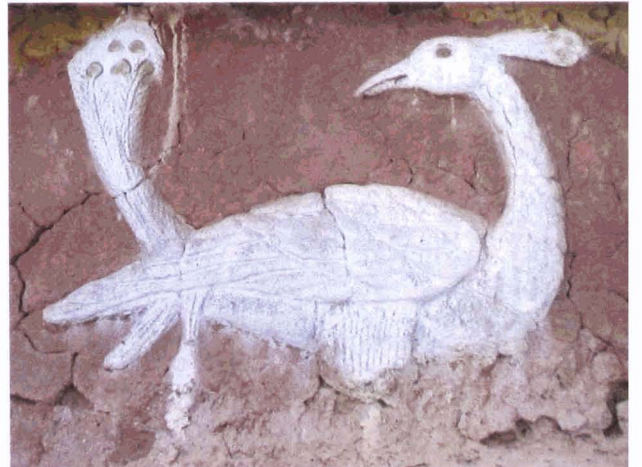
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A few beggars – or rather magicians in a country where communication with the spirits is easy at all levels and extremes meet without condemning each other – receive alms while saying “*Thugishi.*”

All these warm and cordial people are assembled in small groups, crouching comfortably around fires, joyful fires, where tall flames, sparks, gems, and eyes all shine, and voices and laughter resound.

Young girls are numerous, and are lovingly watched over and protected, always accompanied by a man who is responsible for his sisters, nieces, and any other girl from his family or clan. These girls, with the utmost ease, crack nuts or the pits of apricots with their teeth to extract the kernels, while stirring large pots of vegetables with wooden spoons. Many will make do with a bowl of *tsampa*, roasted barley flour mixed with water, the basic food of the Ladakhis. All drink tea with butter, or *chang*, a hot, transparent beverage, alcoholic and solacing.

Mixing with the sound of the cascading waters of the torrent come the voices of the minstrels and their instruments – small drum, flageolet, and cymbal.

With the sun being hidden by a ceiling of foliage, no one seems to have noticed the arrival of the clear night. The starlight is of a remarkable intensity. At 4000 meters of altitude, the countless stars seem to be the suns they really are. The moon is full, and its cold, white rays cool the earth after the burning heat of the sun.

“The Moon is the chalice of divine ambrosia drunk by the ancestors and the Gods, and which is refilled by itself.

“The Moon is the sovereign of the world of the Constellations and the symbol of the immortal spheres beyond death where the ancestors dwell.

“The Moon is the organ of thought of Cosmic Man (*Virât purusha*), the place of universal thought.

“The Sun is the origin of life and the primordial waters are the Moon. These waters are the source of everything, of what is visible and invisible. These waters are the image of All” (*Prasna Upanishad*, 1, 5).

“The Moon is the place from where wandering souls descend on earth, it is the abode of transmigratory spirits and of ancestors.” (Alain Danielou, *Le polythéisme hindou*, Buchet/Chastel, Paris, 1975, pp. 156–57.)

The silence of the desert had receded, under cover of all the sounds of life. All of a sudden, they abate. People listen, but it is thunder that they hear. Yonder, on the roof of the monastery, lamas have sounded their trumpets. The gorge resounds with the roar, and the mountain repeats the grave and powerful sounds, the manifestation of cosmic thunder, in modulated echoes. Humans are penetrated by the resonance and reunited with the forces of nature.

6. *The Monastery of Hemis*

The Hemis monastery was built by the famous king Senge Namgyal at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The largest gumpa in Ladakh, it is a group of several buildings separated by courtyards, and connected by passageways and stairways cut crudely in the rock, ladders and terraces. The child monks circulate easily in this labyrinth – red robes are everywhere in movement.

Hemis is a holy and living city, in which an Incarnate Lama resides. During the days that the *mela* lasts, the ceremonies are presided over and honored by the presence of Druk-chen Rinpoche, the thirteen-year-old spiritual head of the order, which is attached to the Druk-pa Ka-gyu tradition. He is accompanied by his tutor and spiritual teacher Tuksey Rinpoche. The religious community of Hemis belongs to the Druk-pa sect known as Red Caps, founded in the eighth century of our era by the sage Padmasambhava. The tradition is older still, since it is attached to the Bön religion, whose science of magic it has preserved, as well as all its elements of secret ritual. It also leaves considerable room for Tantrism.

The monastery, enjoying a favorable location at the end of a steep and narrow valley without egress, and at a fortunate distance from the caravan route, was largely unaffected by the often destructive historical events that took place in the course of the centuries in the Indus valley a few miles away. Far from danger, it was able to keep immense stores of knowledge intact, thanks to a library containing the *Kanjur* and some rare and precious manuscripts. Its inestimable art treasures include statues, reliquary chortens in gold and silver inlaid with precious stones, and *thankas*.

The gumpa is an imposing structure in a style conforming to the rules established for Buddhist monasteries. The connected dwellings at the back of its buildings are the houses of monks, and these communicate by alleys with the barely visible village that extends up the slopes and clings to the sides of the ravine. The hermitages are revealed by openings high on the mountain; it is there that the monks retire into caves, sometimes for years, losing the notion of relative time to immerse themselves alive in the absolute.

One approaches the monastery by ascending a path interrupted at intervals by flights of steps, and along which merchants from Leh have set up their temporary shops. They display on carpets all the things that are necessary or agreeable for dress or diet. There is also, of course, the appeal of jewelers, around whom the women crowd, hesitantly trying on rings, earrings, necklaces, and bracelets. The jewelry here offered for sale is of a modest kind, but prices are discussed at length, while the husbands stand a little to one side and are respectfully consulted.

The Tibetan antiquary offers an interesting display, a small collection of religious objects, musical instruments, and some old things for art lovers with specialized tastes.

The entrance to the monastery is on the side, where the portal leads into the large and rectangular main courtyard. To the left, a long building with a covered balcony runs the whole length of its upper floor, and whose balustrade and pillars have been freshly repainted by novices with thick coats of red, yellow, and green.

To reach the balcony, you must enter a dark corridor, go through a low doorway, grope your way to a ladder, which you climb hunched over, to arrive finally at the gallery. From there one's gaze takes in the whole scene. Across the way is the main building, five stories high. Strange silhouettes, attached to the roof, stand out in cylindrical form against the intense blue of the sky; brightly colored fabrics surround them and flutter in the air. These are royal banners symbolizing victory over the forces of evil. At the third or fourth floor the verandas bordering the whole length of the façade are made from and framed with carved wood. Observers

stationed there can draw curtains and watch the spectacle without being seen. The third-floor veranda forms part of the private apartment of the *skushog*. Elegant women in glittering *peraks* lean on the balustrades, chatting and looking down on the square.

A *thanka* of exceptional size, representing Galsas Rinpoche, the tutelary god of Hemis, has been lowered from the roof and hangs suspended against the façade. The figure is shaded by a cloth awning bordered by a fringe.

In the center of the courtyard, two mounds of dried, bleached earth serve to support poles so high that they seem to reach the height of the roofs. Prayer flags printed with texts and such emblems as the Garuda, the Tiger, or the Dragon are strung on ropes all the way to the top. A breeze blows, and with each flapping of the cloth pieces, invocations to the gods are repeated worshipfully.

Lamas hurry past or linger in the courtyard. Pilgrims arrive without letup to participate in the *mela*, their arms loaded with offerings to hand over to the monks, who gratefully receive them. These gifts, prompted by faith and loyalty, will serve to feed the monastic community and will be placed in the shrines.

On each side of the center portion of the main building, a staircase of nine steps leads to an entrance terrace to the temples. The terraces are supported by columns whose capitals and entablature are decorated with richly colored paintings and inscriptions. Fine old frescoes frame the massive wooden doors.

A few people mount the staircase of the second temple, pass through a door on the left, and follow a dark passageway to a ladder leading up to a sunlit terrace. The group waits to be admitted to a small room hung on all sides with *thankas* and containing two ceremonial seats, one reserved for Druk-chen Rinpoche, the Incarnated One, and the other to Tuksey Rinpoche, his tutor. They both give audience at this hour. The visitors enter slowly and bow to receive advice and blessings. During this verbal exchange the *katas*, or ceremonial scarves, are respectfully offered.

Some pilgrims climb the stairway of the first temple, concentrating in passing on the esoteric signs along the way. They are familiar with the countless images of the deities and their complex symbolic language, with the meanings of the *asanas* (body postures) and *mudras* (ritual gestures). They know the Seven Treasures of Buddha, the Eight Glorious Emblems, the Eight Precious Jewels, and are instructed in the Buddhist symbolism that makes it possible to identify the gods of the pantheon. Next they bend over to remove their shoes before entering the temple to attend the evening service. Barely visible forms in the shadows, all of them hug the walls and move forward with cautious steps.

The faithful are fascinated by the conical sacrificial cakes called *Tormas*, prepared in a variety of forms and colors that depends on the requirements of the divinities to whom they are offered. *Tormas* are usually a few centimeters high but can sometimes reach a height of more than a meter. They are made of a mixture of different kinds of flour, butter, and water, to which *chang*, meat, blood, or fish may sometimes be added. The faithful admire the offering, its precious substance, and the labor it required. Those surrounded by images of the deities feel that Buddha is watching them and that they ought to respond to this penetrating but smiling look. They feel no fear, there is no threat nor suffering in the ambience. Buddha is kind, and they possess the knowledge of wisdom and serenity.

The pilgrims draw near to the statue of Buddha, superhuman in size and covered with gold leaf. The gold does not dazzle them. Gold flows in the Indus, silver lies in the hills, both belong to the gods. The pilgrims have the gold of their belief in their souls. They also admire the chortens, both large and small ones in precious metals inlaid with iridescent stones. Finally, they prostrate themselves at the foot of the altars of the benevolent and the wrathful deities.

In the darkness of the temple, the flames of the oil lamps shine like stars. By contrast, a ray of bright sunlight penetrates from an opening in the ceiling and is diffused in the mist of incense fumes perfumed with sandalwood, saffron, and other undisclosed mixtures. The vivid light grazes the throne, covered with brocade, on which Druk-chen Rinpoche is seated draped in a red robe. In his right hand he holds the *dorje* or “thunderbolt-diamond” scepter (diamond: image of indestructibility; thunderbolt: force of light struggling against the darkness). The *dorje*, a male symbol, is the active element in the conquest of Knowledge and Enlightenment. In his left hand, Druk-chen Rinpoche holds the *drilbu*, or bell, symbolizing the universal Void, passive element of Wisdom and symbol of the feminine. This bell has been cast in a rare and precious alloy of eight ingredients, including gold and silver, which emits sounds suggestive of the infinity of another dimension.

In front of the throne, on a Tibetan table, the light tulle *katas* are piled. Lower down, butter lamps are placed in a row, splendid chalices in which the ritual flame, the flame of life, joy, and intelligence, burns. It is through this flame that men are united with higher beings, with whom, through the flame, they cooperate.

The holy old man Tuksey Rinpoche is seated beside his pupil. Before them, in two facing rows, the lamas, sitting in the lotus position and wearing their red miters, bend over the books of the *Kanjur* and intone the sacred texts in chorus.

Each monk places before him, on a long low table, a *dorje*, a *drilbu*, and a wooden or jade cup, which is continually filled with boiling tea with butter by young novices carrying huge copper teapots.

The awed pilgrims watch, while listening to the sacred music, giving it all the attention of their thoughts and feelings.

A lama blows into the metal mouthpiece of a seashell fitted with a chape of gold and silver inlaid with precious stones. The somber resonance, whose muffled vibrations are perceived as a manifestation of primary sound, call people to meditative worship. It is joined by the deep voice of a monk, playing freely on his bass vocal chords and intoning the recitation of the mantras, while the choir chants intermittently. The crystalline sound of the bell imparts its ethereal note. Copper cymbals clash in changing rhythms, and two large drums suspended on a wooden frame accent the musical phrasing, all this against the background of a persistent sound produced by short trumpets that are inlaid with coral and decorated with copper bells in the form of a demon’s head. Two oboes contribute a harmonious sonority, pierced with the sharp sounds of the *damarus*, or small hourglass-shaped drums. Occasionally throughout, a muffled gong is struck in regular intervals.

Together the instruments produce complex resonances, whose sound waves fill the interior of the temple. The spirt that emanates from them is meant to overcome any obstacles between earth and heaven, to join all the frequencies of the spheres. Communication beyond earthly boundaries is achieved by human vibrations that have become cosmic. The gods will be touched and respond to these invocations.

7. *The Spectacle of the Mysteries*

On the first morning of the celebration of the mysteries at the Hemis monastery, the vault of the sky with its boundless depths is of a transparent blue. The sun, celestial fire and center of creation, is the divine eye that gazes at the world.

The wandering spirits of the intermediary spheres assemble and draw near. The Dhar-mapalas, guardian deities of the Law, as much in their benevolent aspect as their threatening one, respond to the call.

The Buddhist pantheon becomes a reality. The invisible Powers of space descend to earth and introduce themselves in certain forms of matter. They will incarnate themselves in those men who for a set period of time prepare themselves for this event by an ascetic life imposed and accepted by the gods. The magical rites are practiced with meditative concentration and the meticulousness required for convoking the spirits and demons of the supernatural world.

At the supreme moment, the monks will divest themselves of their souls, emptying their bodies of their egos so that a spirit will be able to invade and possess them. Thus the intercommunication and sacrifice of the gift of self is accomplished. Each will be possessed by the spirit he has opened himself to, the face under the mask, the robe marked by its badges, colors, symbols, and attributes.

All energies will enter into the game. The Powers of Light will confront the Powers of Darkness in an intense struggle at all levels, with man as the stake in the conflict. He is weak and courageous under the burden of the constant suffering inherent in all lives. Deluded by images of terror and real or illusory anxieties, man, in order to climb the rungs of progress, will have to struggle against the demons of ignorance, illusion, fear, destruction, and death, which assail him from his first breath to his last, while eagerly awaiting their victory at his defeat. They all participate in the drama being expressed, in which man will also display his strength, his very own, as active as it is passive, and composed of the will, endurance, and patience he has acquired in the course of his numerous previous lives.

He will bear, with the smile of Buddha, the weight of his karma and that of his responsibility until he achieves Liberation by himself, through Love and Compassion. He will then emerge from his dark sheath, knowing the truth and in possession of Intelligence and Enlightenment.

The *Bardo Thödol* (Tibetan Book of the Dead) describes what is fulfilled in man. In the Hemis mysteries this whole drama unfolds in an admirably human way.

Several thousand pilgrims fill the courtyard and overflow onto the roofs; spectators pack the gallery and important persons occupy the verandas. From these elevated positions, the spectacle that unfolds is an astonishing one. The women crouching on the square are packed so closely together that they disappear under their costly headdresses. The *peraks* merge together and give the illusion of a carpet of turquoise strewn with gold nuggets. The blue of the turquoise takes on a particular softness and brilliance in the purity of the air and light.

The engaging and joyful crowd is prepared for the staging of the mysteries. They all watch, in respectful belief, Druk-chen Rinpoche, the Incarnated One, under the royal parasol, draped in orange silk and accompanied by his old teacher, who is supported by two lamas.

The honored group descends the stairs and crosses the courtyard toward a raised throne that has been placed before a beautiful *thanka*. The hieratic figures in the ancient frescoes seem to look at the lama musicians. The orchestra consists of wind and percussion instruments: oboes, horns, trumpets, flutes, small funnel-shaped or deeply concave cymbals, drums, tambourines, gong, and bells.

All of a sudden the telescopic trumpets sound, and the crowd intently observes the curious spectacle. Extraordinary creatures, disproportionately enlarged by ample costumes, radiant crowns and tiaras, and brilliantly colored masks, emerge from the dark portal of the temple and descent the stairs to the center of the courtyard.

The eyes of these masks look frightening. Their mouths open widely to simulate laughter or derision. Each detail goes to identify the celestial or demoniacal deity being represented. The figures leave the sanctuary and pass slowly from darkness into light. Unreal beings have truly

descended from the realm of the spheres, and are present here, radiant or grimacing.

Padmasambhava, the Great Master of magical arts, Guardian of the Sacred Law, and tamer of demons, descends the nine steps of the temple under a red-fringed parasol held by a lama, and accompanied by the different personalities that he has been in each of his voluntary reincarnations for the greater good of mankind.

Advancing to the rhythmic step of a ritual dance, the three principal figures and their retinue place themselves in a circle around the prayer flag. Padmasambhava, Buddha-Sakyamuni, and the King of the Demons then withdraw to go and take the seats that have been assigned them. The three masks, marked by the characteristics of their spiritual or demonic essence, move to express their harmonious relationship.

The open mouth of the demon king's black mask discloses a monstrous jaw from which emerges a curling tongue; the flattened nose exposes the nostrils, and the bulging eyes are terrifying. The third eye, placed under the skull, symbol of his royalty, pierces the invisible and unknown. This frightening mask is the necessary opposite pole to the clear and smiling face of Buddha, whose tiara is dark blue, the color of the ether and the immanent.

The staging of the mysteries proceeds. A group of some fifteen figures, dressed in splendid Chinese silk and brocaded costumes, and wearing broad-brimmed black hats topped by a symbolic jewel, make their entrance. This group of dancers is composed of magician lamas, especially feared and respected. Three of them wear aprons and are exorcists, this function being added to that of oracle for the monastery. This *rugyan*, or magician's apron, fastened at the waist by a red or green belt, covers the whole front of the robe down to the boots. It is made up of numerous small plaques, connected by a double row of round beads. In accordance with tradition, these aprons are carved from human bones that had belonged to saints; sometimes ivory is used. The small plaques and medallions are adorned with signs: dancing deities, heads of demons and animals, skulls, lotuses, wheels, horses, fish, etc.

The group begins a dance; the movements are of a rhythmic elegance. The dancers move in a double circle. Each turns on itself to the left at the same time as it joins in the displacement of the whole group, which forms a circle around the prayer flag. All of them strike the ground with their heels, a gesture symbolizing the crushing of evil. In their left hands they hold the solar emblem, or *cakra* wheel, from which flow streamers of blue silk, and in their right hands the *phurbu*, the attack weapon against demons, a magical dagger with a golden handle, a triangular steel blade, and an attached shroud.

The dancers have a skull on their chests to recall the fleeting nature of life.

The dance is pursued without stopping, the dancers quicken their cadence, and robes and veils fly. The effect is beguiling, and the awed crowd breathes an air of exaltation.

The mounting tension is, however, relieved by buffoons with grotesque masks, who during the whole performance circulate among the actors and spectators, while showing no respect for either. The young boys who wear these grinning masks are jesters, who make fun of everyone, knock off people's hats in the crowd, and strike them with their cudgels. The purpose of this whole game is to lead them back to reality by distracting their overly engrossed attention. As in reality, comedy is mingled with tragedy and the ridiculous with the sublime.

The animals destined for ritual sacrifice, a dog, a yak, a goat, and some chickens, are kept at a distance from each other. The offering is only a symbolic one. These beasts, having been sanctified by the rites, will be cared for in the monastery until their natural deaths.

The groups of dancers are steadily renewed. The variety and richness of their costumes is cause for astonishment, as is the music, which adapts itself to the symbolism of each spectacle.

A few priests, dressed in yellow costumes and wearing tiaras from which hang *katas*, enter on the scene while feverishly shaking *damarus*, tambourines in the shape of two-sided hourglasses,

made of the tops of the skulls of a boy and a girl, symbolizing the union of opposites. The tambourine is encircled at the center by a gold bracelet set with turquoise stones and coral. The *damaru* is a magical instrument whose dry sound attracts the attention of the gods and expels inauspicious spirits.

When this group has ended its dance, it retires and crouches down to witness the strange and fascinating figures who next present themselves. The crowd is struck by their singular appearance and quivers to the chaotic sounds of the orchestra.

Three dancers, impersonating the Dakhinis, goddesses with magical powers, make their appearance. They wear long green, blue, or red robes made of a heavy material, and capes that fall in a triangle over their chests. A peacock eye is set at the top of the tall blue tiaras of plaited straw that they wear on their heads. Their faces are hidden by copper visors as bright as gold. A wide opening leaves the mouth and eyes exposed, the nose is prominent, and heavy ear pendants fall all the way to the shoulders. These remarkable masks are initiation masks, worn by the priests at the time of the celebration of the mysteries and when they dance the ritual of the consecration of the *mandala*, the magical circle and esoteric center of meditation. With their right hands they shake tambourines, while bells tinkle in their left. The aesthetic and harmonious dance comes to an end, and the dancer-monks retire.

On the first evening of the celebration of the Hemis mysteries, the pilgrims are profoundly impressed by the moving ritual, and depart with uplifted spirits.

The courtyard of the gompa is deserted; the holy mountains remain as age-old spectators of the monastery.

The performance of sacred dramas and dances continues on the second day. The lamas enter into a mediumistic state and revolve in intricate circumvolutions. The spirits are inside them and command them. Their bodies are no more than mechanisms in a trance, ready to support the tension to its height.

The Tantric master Padmasambhava gave a new meaning and value to the magical rituals inherited from the Bön religion. Blood sacrifice, formerly celebrated to appease the forces of evil, was transformed into a symbolic offering.

Before the confused crowd, a naked body is carried onto the square by men who execute a wild and macabre dance around the corpse. The King of the Dead, wearing his frightful mask, makes his appearance, approaches clumsily, and drives them away. In one hand, the black monster holds a cup, a skull filled with blood. In the other, he grasps a sword, the power of destruction, which he flourishes in the air while beginning a series of impetuous, cadenced, and accelerated movements. The orchestra accompanies the King of the Dead with all the strength of its instruments, up to the culmination of his violent excitation. At this point, he thrusts his saber into the outstretched corpse, slices and destroys it, and after having devoured some of it, throws its pieces in all directions. The crowd rushes to participate in the feast of the sacrifice. But the corpse was only an effigy made of flour paste.

What talent could describe the fantastic sight of the magical ritual games and convey their profound meaning in its infinite complexity? The world beyond that of humans is impenetrable. The language spoken by the Gods through revelation to the Initiated is a narrow luminous current in the darkness.

To see the Mysteries performed is a transcendental experience. But the Mysteries of the Gods are still preserved.

Tibetan Traditions

1. *The Myth of Creation*

The Tibetan view of the earth's origin conjures up a dark void within which a light breath began to manifest itself. Slowly, over long periods of time, the air's stirring grew until wind filled the atmosphere in all directions, accelerating little by little to the point of violence. Then, suddenly, the unleashed element produced a double explosion of thunder and flashes of lightning, symbolized by the *Dorje Gyatram* in the form of a cross. *Dorje* literally means "diamond" or "prince of stones," and is the emblem of the Supreme God, adamantine, indestructible, and immutable. Thus, a jewel and its dominant qualities are from the outset symbols of the divine.

The storms and tempests brought dense clouds that filled the heavens. They became so heavy that one day they fell in rain, diluvial rains, each drop with the diameter of a wheel. The fall of the waters lasted for a great number of years, and when it stopped the deluge had formed *Gyatso*, the first ocean. The elements calmed, and the surface of the waters of *Gyatso* became smooth. But calm is not in the nature of wind, and it rose again, producing waves on the ocean. A thick yellow foam was formed, like *tri*, milk. And just as cream becomes butter, so the foam was transformed into earth, which thus was born from the oceans.

And the earth rose very high, like a soaring mountain whose summit disappeared in the sky surrounded by clouds brought by the breeze. When rain again fell, flooding the earth, the waters became salt. It was thus that the oceans of our universe were created.

The highest mountain, *Rirab Lhunpo*, whose summit disappeared in the firmament, was the abode of the gods. It stood like a four-sided pyramid, supported by columns of precious stones of dazzling brightness. The eastern side was pure transparent crystal. The opposite, western side was of silver and shone like a mirror. Veined green malachite covered the whole southern face, while the northern one was of solid gold.

The mountain was surrounded by lakes bordered by a circle of golden mountains. This chain was in its turn surrounded by a surface of water in which other golden mountains were reflected. In all there were seven circles of golden mountains separated by lakes.

Rirab Lhunpo was the center of the world. Gods and demigods arrived from all directions to occupy the mountain, which they divided among themselves. They established themselves at all its altitudes. The highest were the most beautiful and became the abode of the more powerful gods. There was no peace in the divine world, and the deities fought ceaselessly among themselves. From the slopes of the mountain the gods could see the worlds beyond the seven circles of seas and golden mountains. They were responsible for the lands that lay in the direction of the side they occupied. The crystal face governed the country of giants, beyond the outer ocean. The golden side ruled the country of riches, whose inhabitants led a life of ease but where happiness was only apparent, and there were voices that spoke of death. The gods of the southern, malachite side looked toward the land of *Dzambu Lying*. It was there, in the middle of a river, that the *prakcha* tree grew. The fruits of this tree were so marvelous and extraordinary that all creatures that ate of them saw their excrements turn into gold: The finest gold in the world was found in the waters of the river where the *prakcha* sank its roots.

Some gods left their abode on the mountain of Rirab Lhunpo to go and live in the land of Dzambu Lying. They knew nothing of toil, hunger, or sickness, and lived amid plenty. Life without suffering lasted for a very long time. The gods had great power, a power and divine strength that came to them from *samtense*, a creative meditation and a source of energy and light. This is why the gods shone like celestial bodies.

The gods enjoyed a long period of contentment until one day they noticed that the earth produced a certain substance. They wished to taste it, and finding it good, they nourished themselves on it. But the more the gods ate of this product, the more they lost their power, to the point that the light of which they were the source grew weak. The day came when the earth no longer supplied this material, and at the same time the gods lost their power of meditation as well as their longevity, and darkness surrounded them.

The gods, once so powerful and luminous, were now nothing more than human beings in the night. It was then that the sun, moon, and stars were created, and that men fell into dependency. They had to work in order to eat and submitted to struggle and suffering.

Threatened by misfortune, men lived in fear. They had to appeal to the gods for protection, which they implored by offering them gifts. They gave them precious stones, and the most beautiful ones, the rarest, with the most iridescent colors, were used to decorate their images. Bronze goddesses were adorned with jewelry. Turquoise, coral, pearls, rubies, and many other gems illuminated the shrines with their brilliance.

After a long period, the scribes, in the shadow of the temples, bent over as in meditation and delicately holding a brush between the third and little finger, applied liquid gold and silver to leaves of vegetable fiber blackened with India ink. They created, with perfect artistry, one of the most beautiful calligraphies in Asia. The Tibetans respected the sacred script as much as they did images, and thought that the Word imparts life to things. The messages orally transmitted since the darkness of time were set down in the holy books. Legendary tales took on a historical importance. It is through books that we come to know of origins, the birth of gods, worlds, and men, of precious stones and metals. Such books consist of a pile of detached sheets, vertically narrow and horizontally wide; the leaves are wrapped in cloth, often silk, and held between two blocks of wood. The books are very heavy and may weigh between twenty and thirty kilograms each. The principal works are the *Kanjur*, or Canon, containing the teachings of Buddha in 108 volumes, and the *Tanjur*, composed of 225 volumes containing commentaries and various subjects such as history, medicine, astrology, poetry, etc. The *Kanjur* and *Tanjur*, as well as all the other sacred books, are kept in the temples.

2. *The Gods and their Finery*

The Tibetan pantheon contains a throng of gods, saints, and demons, all of which have become more numerous with the passage of time. This is the supernatural esoteric world of peaceful, guardian deities, and the still more secret one of wrathful and terrifying deities.

The spiritual universe is peopled with Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, yogis, gurus, and arhats, and these supernatural beings have their female equivalents, the prajnas, yoginis, and midras.

The doctrine of Tantric Buddhism has its particular divinities. The central theme is unity in polarity. It is the male Yidam in ardent embrace and mystical union with its beautiful Dakini, the inspired female initiate likewise embracing her god in supreme happiness.

On earth, all human efforts tend toward one goal, that of remaining in permanent harmony with the divinities in order to draw down the protection of some and avoid the wrath of others. This is why, over the centuries, men have united the power of their minds and the talent of their hands to show all the gods marked by their personal signs and attributes, and adorned with the most splendid jewels.

Pious artists, monks or laymen, painted *thankas* or pictures on strips of cotton or silk, using paints in which they mixed powdered turquoise, lapis lazuli, azurite, or any other precious stone. The stones thus sacrificed were considered as a gift. Another advantage was that the mineral colorings impart a fresh brilliance to the tones.

Scultors mixed incense, the ashes of the bones of holy almas, and crushed semiprecious stones with their clay. Thus, in paints and material, gems are integrated into the substance of sacred images.

The art of statuary in Tibet is connected in an intimate and essential way with Buddhism. It originated in India and was transmitted from that country to Tibet by the Newari artists of Nepal.

In the seventh century, Srontsan Gampo, king of Tibet and founder of Lhasa, recognized the importance of an alliance with Nepal and married Princess Bhrikuti, a fervent Buddhist who exercised a strong religious influence on her husband. This event had significant consequences. From her country, the princess brought the first sacred images, including a gold statue of Buddha.

Later on, King Srontsan Gampo also wished to establish friendly relations with China, and to this end he married a princess of that country. This alliance helped to mark Tibetan art with a Chinese influence. The imprint of these two great cultures made the religious art of Tibet undergo a remarkable development.

In the course of time, artists created the statues of Buddha and the gods and goddesses, as well as countless statuettes, which fill the temples of the monasteries. They knew how to impart a superhuman gaze to almond eyes, and to lips the movement of speech and the smile necessary to life so often preached by Buddha. Artists gracefully carved the language of gesture. Each *mudra*, or movement of the hands and arms, each *asana*, or body posture, is the expression of a philosophic religious thought. All together they illustrate the divine nature and its universality.

Statuary is subject to symbolic proportions. The material employed is not prescribed, but for certain gods there is a preference for gold, silver, or bronze. Tibetan bronze is an alloy of five or nine metals, often including gold and silver. Works were executed by the lost-wax process or by sand-casting. Statues were often covered with a thin layer of gold. Sometimes only the face was gilded. A great many statues were carved in wood or modeled in clay. Their dimensions vary considerably. There are sculptures of Buddha several meters high. Statuettes, on the other hand, may be very small.

In order to gain the favors of the divinities and give the images a magical power, the hollow insides of statues were often filled with relics and mantras (invocation formulas), with a few precious stones added as an offering. The cavity was then sealed by a metal plate engraved with a double *dorje*, sign of the diamond. As a final touch to an object that was taking on life, the eyes and lips were painted before the consecration ceremony.

The representation of Buddha is based on canonical proportions. Thirty-two distinctive signs

are attached to his hieratic body and are the symbols of his personality. Among these, his elongated earlobes are a reference to his origins. Prince Siddhartha Gautama, son of a king, being rich and well adorned, wore heavy ear pendants. The accentuated deformation of the empty lobes signifies his renunciation of rank and illusory wealth. Buddha the ascetic no longer wears ornaments.

The images and statues of all the gods and goddesses wear tiaras, crowns, and necklaces loaded with pendants and clasps, as well as bracelets and rings – in short a whole variety of jewelry sparkling with precious stones.

The peaceful gods with their headdresses of an intense blue, as well as the furious demons with disordered bright red hair, wear jeweled crowns as a sign of their power, and a great variety of jewels. Goddesses, their heads bent forward, seem light under the weight of diadems or tiaras and finely worked ear pendants falling to their shoulders. Their necks and chests disappear under pearl necklaces and gold- and silverwork plaques. Chains and sautoirs fall one after another to the waist; pendants reach to the buckles of the girdles that encircle the hips. Coiled serpents bind the arms, and bracelets adorn arms, wrists, and ankles. The hands are ringed. All these ornaments are set with precious stones. Coral and turquoise prevail by the brightness of their red and blue over the whiteness of diamonds. Finely zoned carnelians and agates are used to the utmost, while rubies are less frequent.

The gods and goddesses are clothed in jewels. Man offers his treasures to the gods, but sometimes the gods also dispense them. Rinchen Dolma Taring, in her book *Daughter of Tibet* (London, John Murray, 1970, p. 1), tells how the Tsarong family of Lhasa had as an ancestor one of the most renowned physicians in Tibet, Yuthok Yonten Gonpo, who wrote several medical works destined to become classics in their field. He lived during the reign of King Trisong Detsen (A.D. 755–797). An account of his life is in the archives of the Lhasa Medical College. It mentions that he lived for 125 years and adds that the gods and demons bestowed on him an immense quantity of turquoises and other precious stones by piling them up on the roof of his house. For this reason, he was called Yuthok, from *yu*, meaning “turquoise,” and *thok*, “roof.”

3. *Gzi*

The Tibetans have given the name *gzi* to a rare and much valued stone known only in the Himalayan regions. *Gzi* has the same significance as “shining” and “splendid,” two qualities that the Tibetans attribute to this stone. *Gzi* is a prehistoric agate that is no longer to be found. All those used in ornaments today were unearthed in the distant past in different parts of Tibet, and especially the eastern province of Kham. A great number of *gzi*, among the most beautiful, are said to have been found in Bhutan. Ladakh was known to have produced only stones of inferior quality. No discoveries of *gzi* have ever been reported in Nepal. The natives of that country wear imported stones.

Some *gzi* are said to have been found when the ancient tombs were excavated in Tibet. But excavations are infrequent in that country. Possibly in the future archaeology will be able to come up with more precise data.

The actual origin of the *gzi* is unknown. We know that we are dealing with a natural stone, but the latter has often been imitated in a vitreous substance for which the fabrication process has not been disclosed.

As always when history is lacking, legends supply explanations. According to one belief, the

57 "Madonna of Ladakh" would almost seem an appropriate title for this picture. The young woman has perhaps carried her baby from very far away to reach these mystery celebrations in Hemis. She shows every sign of being just as proud of her maternity as of her splendid jewelry: the rich perak with its small pink-silk rose, the pearl earrings, as well as necklaces and beautifully worked pieces on her dress front.

58 This Ladakhi woman with her particularly ornate and therefore quite heavy perak is wearing a cape, known as a go-chen, made of brocade with tendril pattern and fringe. Such shawls, as well as the silk fabrics that can be bought in Leh, are imported from China.

59 This elegant elderly Ladakhi woman has a rather modest perak. The goatskin cape or slok-pa protects the clothing while loads are being carried. The necklace is most often produced in the form seen here, by the jewelers of the city of Leh. It consists of coral pearl chains, alternating with silver disks or drops.

60 Peasant women stand waiting for customers for their vegetables, mostly turnips, against a warm, sunny wall in the Leh marketplace. They wear the bluish-black gosulma coat of yak's wool and the traditional tibi or kandob hat.

61 A precious gau or charmbox, on a necklace of turquoises and large coral beads, worn over a finely worked brocade vest of Chinese silk.

62 The hat worn by this Ladakhi woman is a typical model. The lightly conical cylinder is covered in damask and embroidered with gold thread, while the brim is lined with animal skin. The woman is wearing a heavy necklace as well as a gau, which has gzi or zi (ancient agate) stones above it on either

side. In this picture, as in Number 61, the typical shoulder piece can be seen – a kind of chatelaine or silver filigree, to which small utensils such as scissors, toothpicks, or tweezers are attached.

63 This beautiful pendant, a heart-shaped turquoise set in gold with small rubies, belongs to an émigré Tibetan woman from Lhasa, who brought the piece with her from her homeland.

64–68 The perak headdress is the principal jewelry piece of Ladakhi women (cf. the text on this subject, p. 70). Picture 64, especially, demonstrates that the perak is inspired from the figure of an angry cobra with its neck shield spread. The piece with strands of small coral pearls, which is worn across the back, symbolizes the cobra's tail (66, 68).

69 The slate board carried by this boy on his way to school in the Shey monastery (seen in background) is inscribed with Tibetan characters.

70 This three-headed deity from the Shey monastery may be a portrait of Awaloki Teshwara, to judge from the lotus symbol she holds in her right hand and the holy water vessel in her left.

71 Statue of the Gauri Tara or "golden Tara" from the Hemis monastery. It wears a coral pearl necklace and a gold tiara set with jewels. Along with the forehead eye, it also has eyes in its palms.

72–74 Only male worshippers are allowed inside the two Gonkhangs, temples of the guardian deities with their terrifying statues, in the monastery of Thiksey: entrance is forbidden to women, who are only permitted to look in from the threshold upon the grotesque sculptures, which are in part covered with veils.

72 The many-armed Yamantaka-Wajrabhairawa, or conqueror of death, the particular guardian god of the Gelugpa church.

73 An attribute of the demon Chosgal is the gigantic penis, a fertility symbol.

74 Detail from the group surrounding Gonpo or Mahakal, who is accompanied by the dark blue Kshetrapala or Zhinkyong, guardian of the battlefield. The god holds the trident and a skull in his hands. The dreadful faces of both figures are crowned with smaller skulls and veiled, lest the sight of them should kill the faithful.

75–79 When a first marriage is celebrated among the Ladakhis according to the traditional rites, in which an onpo or astrologer has chosen the mate, the festivities last for several days. High points include the ritual in the bride's home (gyangguk) led by monks, the procession to the bridegroom's home, where the gekspod or gyagchod ritual is performed, as well as the feast that follows the ceremony. All relatives and friends are invited, bhedas or beggar musicians play, barley beer flows freely, and everyone dances around the wedding cake known as a danggya – a chorten-like depiction of the world-mountain made of roasted farina or meal. Picture 76 shows the peasant women who are not family members, seated in the party tent beside the house; they have all brought gifts and formed the bride's attendants. The mother of the bride is seen (Picture 78) leading a long ceremonial dance.

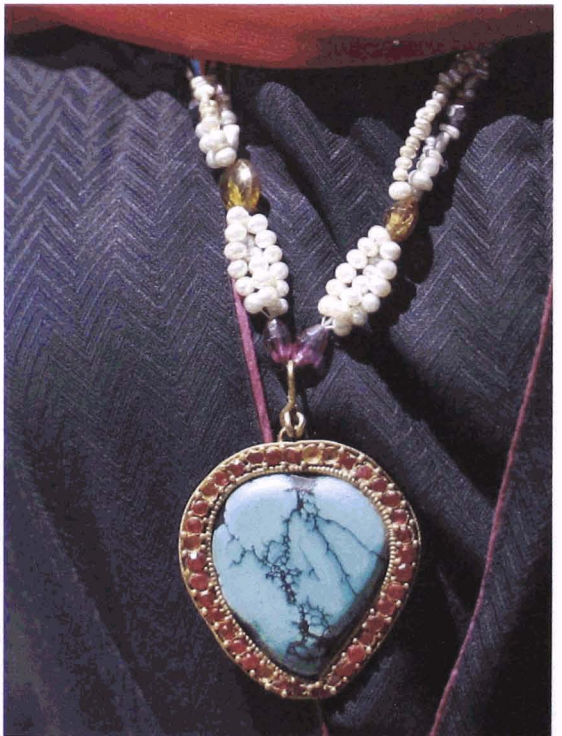
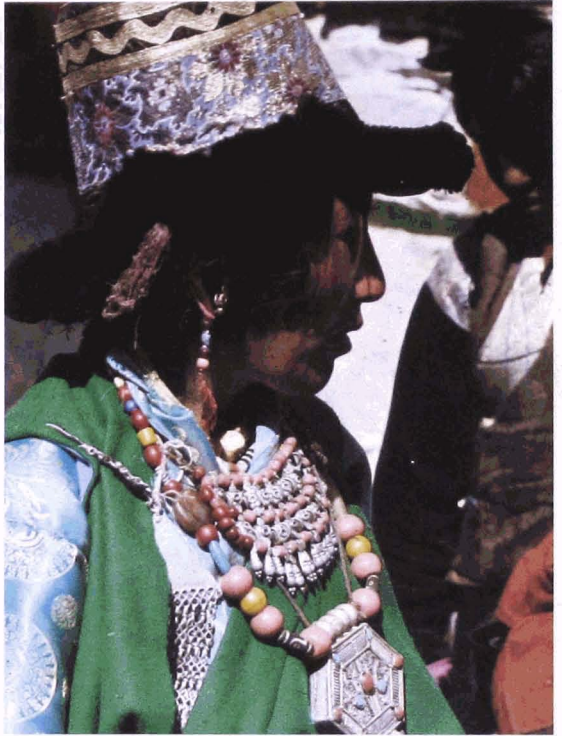
80 A dancer in the mystery celebrations in the Hemis monastery. In his red, blue, and yellow brimmed hat crowned with banners and his green mask, he represents a so-called tsan-spirit, a figure rooted in the Bön faith.

81 The youthful chief abbot of Hemis, the Druk-chen Rinpoche, present-day incarnation of the original Buddha Wajradhara, wears a red toga as he presides over a ceremony in the Hemis audience chamber. Beside him is the Chief Lama, the Dungsey Rinpoche, tutor of the young abbot and manager of monastery business.

82 Seated on his festival throne, the chief abbot of Hemis views the mystery celebrations in the monastery courtyard.





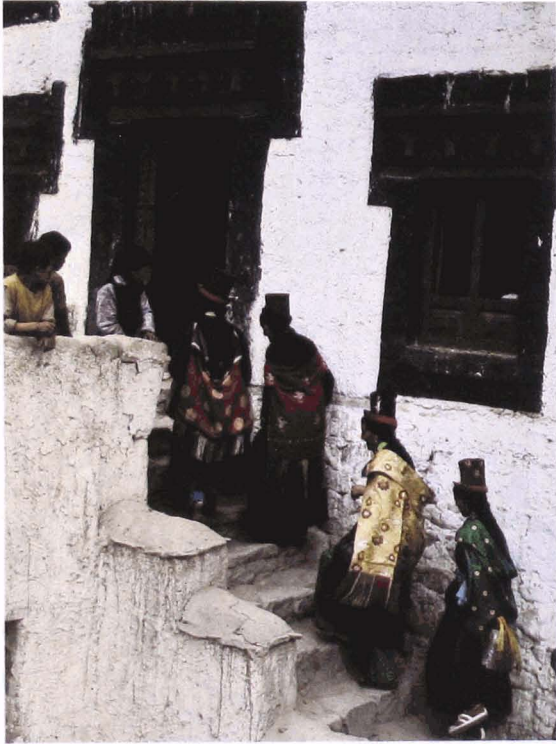








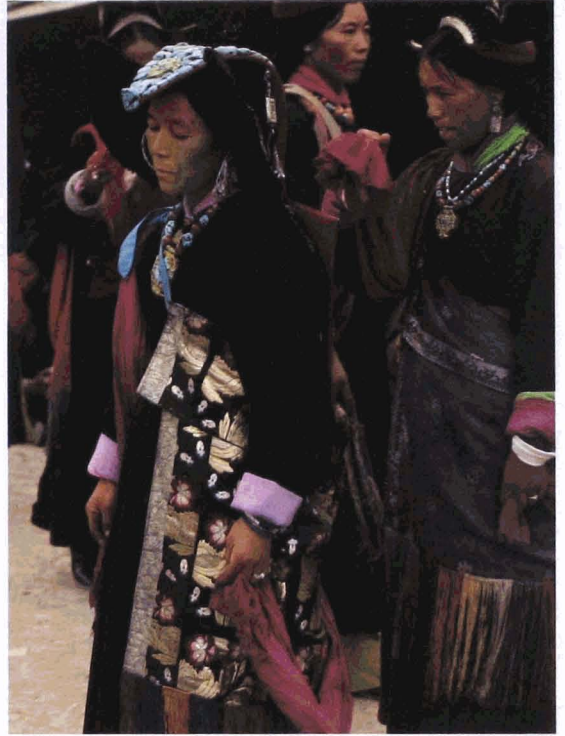




75



76









83 *One of the thirteen black-hatted magicians or zhwangs whose dance opens the mystery celebrations in Hemis. Over his brocade costume he wears a bone-apron, containing beads and symbol-plaques carved out of human bones, and swings the ritual dagger, or phurbu. The symbol of Death worn on his chest is repeated on the hat (a detail not seen in this picture), which is crowned with peacock feathers.*

gzi were the jewels of gods who kept only perfect stones and threw down on the earth all the defective ones. This is why unblemished stones are so rare.

The Tibetans say that *gzi* are found on the surface of the soil. Peasants, while working in the fields, keep their eyes on the earth in which *gzi* might be mixed. This is how the belief was born that *gzi* are petrified worms. There are tales in which these worms are still alive: "Thus a legend which circulates among the population of Kham tells about a herdsman who was tending his herd of yak on a mountain meadow, where his animals one day happened to uncover a big 'nest' full of beautiful *gzi*. The *gzi* were, however, still moving, and after the herdsman had tried in vain for a while to collect all of them, he ran to a nearby village to fetch some help. But when he returned he found the 'nest' empty except for two or three *gzi*, the rest having managed to slip away.

"A West-Tibetan tradition alleges that the *gzi* took their origin from a mountain near the town Rudok . . . where they used to flow like a stream from one of the slopes of the mountain. One day, however, a woman cast the 'evil eye' at the mountain, and the flow of precious beads immediately stopped. To this day one can recognize the spot, marked by characteristic black and white stripes, at which the *gzi* once issued." (René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*, The Hague, Mouton & Co., 1956, pp. 506–7.)

Tibetan agates also appear in mythology: "A fifth legend alleges that the *gzi* were precious stones which had been kept in the treasury of the king of *sTag gzig* (Iran). After this ruler had been defeated by King *Ge sar*, the *gzi* were carried away by the victorious troops to Tibet, where in the course of time they got scattered all over the country." (Ibid.)

Gzi owe their value to their quality, their original beauty, and the magical powers attached to them.

"The Tibetans distinguish two main types of *gzi*:

"a) Oval-shaped *gzi* up to three inches long, with alternating black (or brownish) and white stripes, and with circles in these two colours in between. These circles are called *mig*, 'eyes.' Tibetans claim that a *gzi* can bear up to twelve *mig* and that beads with five, seven, eight, or eleven 'eyes' are less common than those with one, two, three, four, six, nine, ten, or twelve *mig*. Generally, a higher number of eyes as well as deep colours and a smooth, shiny surface increase the value of a *gzi*. Especially beads with nine eyes – we may recall in this context that the nine is the most important number of the Bon – are in great demand since such a *gzi* is supposed to protect its owner from injury by weapons, to be able to counteract the evil influence of inauspicious days and to protect against the danger of falling victim to fits of apoplexy, which the planetary deity *Rahu* is supposed to cause.

"b) Roundish *gzi*, generally valued higher than the oblong ones; there are said to exist three different kinds of such beads: . . . *gzi* bearing stripes like a tiger . . . beads with a design similar to a lotus . . . *gzi* which bear a design similar to the *tshe bum* or 'life vessel' . . .; *gzi* of this kind are said to fetch the highest price.

". . . Powdered *gzi* are mixed with silver and gold dust, officinal herbs, and powdered pearls, and formed into pills . . . Pills of this kind are an expensive, but allegedly very efficacious

medicine against numerous ailments.” (Ibid., pp. 505–6. Additional data on *gzi* has been taken from the same author’s article “Prehistoric Beads of Tibet,” in the anthropological journal *Man*, no. 182, September 1952, pp. 131–32.)

These agate beads are most often strung between coral and turquoise beads on a type of necklace known as a *gzi shab*. They are also used to decorate the necklace known as a *gaul shal*, on which the *gau* or charm box is suspended.

Gzi are worn by men and women of all social classes in Tibet, Ladakh, Sikkim, and Bhutan, as well as by populations of Tibetan origin in northern Nepal.

4. Turquoise, Amber, and Coral

When the Tibetans in their fascination admire the one precious stone they prefer for its color and the beneficent powers attributed to it, they believe that they have seized the divine azure.

In Lhasa and in the most remote villages in Kham and Amdo, in Ladakh as in Nepal, turquoise stones are worn by men and women, rich and poor, and adorn the deities in the temples. The finest of them, chosen for the purity of their blues, are polished by skillful hands until they become soft as silk between the fingers. These turquoises, whose color harmonizes with gold, silver, and bronze, are set in the most exquisite pieces of jewelry, are inlaid on liturgical objects, and contribute to the richness of the goldsmith’s art. Turquoises of less value, with greenish shades veined with black, often keep their rough form and are strung on necklaces between bright red coral and balls of yellow amber.

The bond between man and turquoise is one of the most ancient. The Egyptians had already been attracted by gems, but only for their color and not their transparency or luster. In particular, they esteemed the fragile turquoise, which is the softest of gems. The pharaohs went searching for precious stones in the Wadi Meghara valley, west of the Sinai peninsula. King Snefru, around 3000 B.C., is said to have already known the valley, whose name and location was long kept secret because of its treasure. The antiquity of these mines has been confirmed by the discovery of inscriptions and objects showing also that the ancient Egyptians maintained a garrison there to protect this precious wealth.

Some centuries later, Persia was renowned for the beauty and cut of its turquoise stones, which is confirmed by a fourteenth-century Arab treatise on mineralogy. Caravans leaving the mountains of northeastern Persia with their precious load of turquoise dispersed to the north toward Russia, to the west toward Constantinople from where they were sold in Europe, and to the southeast in the direction of Central Asia, Tibet, and as far as China. It was from these journeys across Turkey that the stone acquired its name.

Certain ancient deposits are still productive today, and fine turquoises are found in Iran on the slopes of Mount Ali-Mirsai-Kuh, which by its altitude of 2,000 meters dominates a long chain of mountains in the province of Khurasan. The stone still appears in the mountains of Kerman province in southeastern Iran, in northern Afghanistan, and in Tibet where its quality is less good.

Even in strong sunlight the turquoise keeps the luster of its blue intact. Its color is, however, delicate and sometimes unstable. Bad weather can cause it to change, altering its fragile shade to a gray or unexpected green. The freshness imparted to it by certain technical processes is not lasting.

Turquoises also die. The climate may modify the surface of the mother-lode, which thus becomes whitish, but as soon as this layer is removed, the blue stone reappears. It is because the

turquoise is an opaque stone that it has always been polished into a round or oval cabochon. Only very thin stones are translucent.

The turquoise is a favored precious stone because to its natural qualities are added those that people have attributed to it. Since the time of ancient Egypt, all over the East, the Arab world, Persia, Afghanistan, and in the Himalayan countries, whole populations have believed in its beneficent powers. It is supposed to cure certain ailments and avert the evil eye. It is in the existence of this power, in addition to its beauty, that one can see the reason for the turquoise's popularity in so many countries.

Red coral is a precious stone for the Tibetans, and the value they assign it is close to that of turquoise. The Tibetans, whose artistic creations are subtle and refined, try to unite the living, colorful forces of Nature by joining the blue of the sky with the vital red of fire. Buddhist symbolism has its sacred colors, and blue is air while red is light. This is why turquoise and coral are combined in the composition of nearly all the ornaments adorning the deities in the temples. They can be seen in the jewelry worn by men, women, and children, and are used to decorate liturgical objects.

Already in the thirteenth century, Marco Polo observed that the Tibetans had an insatiable craving for coral. Coral, however, came from far away, chiefly from the Mediterranean. A lively trade was established at the time with India, where ships unloaded at Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. The precious merchandise was then transported by caravan to Tibet.

The third precious stone favored by the Tibetans is amber. It is a fossil resin coming mainly from certain vanished species of coniferous trees that flourished on the shores of the Baltic Sea in the Eocene period. So-called sea amber is gathered in the shallow waters of the Baltic, but is also present in the low regions of northern Germany, where it is extracted by excavation from alluvial terrain.

Already in antiquity amber was prized for its color but also for the curative qualities that it was thought to possess. Amber is opaque or transparent; in the latter case, it slightly refracts light. This quality is in addition to the luminous luster produced by polishing, and gives it the privilege of being used as an ornament. In color amber is a warm yellow, but the tones vary from light yellow to reddish brown. Resins similar to amber have been found in different parts of the world. In Burma the tones of amber run to dark red. But the populations of the Himalaya are particularly fond of very large yellow beads (yellow – the element earth), which women place in their hair or string on necklaces between blue turquoise and red coral.

Having become familiar with the gems for which the Tibetans express their preference, one's interest naturally turns to the ornaments for which they provide the luster and the women whose allure they heighten. Unfortunately, it is not possible in a work of this scope to undertake a complete study of the ornaments worn by the men and women of Tibet. The country is immense, with numerous ethnic groups and ornaments of a multiple variety.

Knowledge of so original an art of jewelry as that of Tibet can only be based on the last centuries. The more remote past has left no evidence, due to beliefs relating to the dead and to funeral customs. On the other hand, wills not being customary, jewelry that was not part of the family property was divided privately among the heirs. It was sometimes sold, all or in part, with the proceeds going as an offering to the temple or being distributed to the poor. Also, to attract the favors and protection of the divinities, jewelry and precious stones were offered to them.

Jewelry, along with bars of gold and silver, constituted the dowry given by the parents to the future bride. They took care to add a diamond, which was believed to have the power to protect pregnant women.

In the warm regions of India, women adorned their naked bodies with decorative ornaments of silver and tin. On the other hand, on the cold heights of the Himalaya, the women, dressed in

thick robes of yak wool or in silks and brocades, wore their finest ornaments on their heads. To their original and surprisingly large headdresses, they attached a profusion of gems and expensive ornaments. In Ladakh, the women pride themselves on their *peraks*. In Lhasa, they wore amazing head ornaments, veritable constructions in height and whose width exceeded that of the shoulders. A fillet, curved like a stretched bow, was supported at its ends on a double triangle of wood covered with cloth and placed on the head. The braided hair followed the curves from the base of the triangle, and was attached at the ends to fall on both sides of the head. More than fifty large balls of coral were fixed on the triangular moldings, in which other accessories were intermingled. There were variations in this headdress, and women in the countryside around Lhasa wore simpler head ornaments. The great diversity of composition came from the fact that these ornaments took on a different appearance according to region. One might mention the women of the Tsang district, who wore an especially becoming headdress; seen from the front, the two points of a triangle placed behind the head stood up like horns, adorned with coral and supporting a wig of hair falling as a veil. The pretty faces of the Tibetan women stood out against this black background speckled with red coral, and were framed by splendid turquoise pendants.

Among all the pieces of Tibetan jewelry, there are some so characteristic that they must be mentioned. The most widespread is the *gau* or charm box, generally square and varying in size, which contains relics or any object that may possess a beneficent power for protection. Charm boxes, which women still wear today in all the Himalayan regions attached to Buddhism, may be of bronze, silver, or gold. Generally, the filigree lid is inlaid with turquoise mosaics, and sometimes enhanced with diamonds and rubies. The *gau* is worn suspended on a metal chain or a necklace of *gzi*, the good-luck agate, mixed with coral and turquoise beads. Charm boxes too large to be worn as pendants were attached to the waist by a belt. Necklaces were worn short or very long, falling as far as the waist. They were almost always composed of coral, turquoise, agate, and amber beads. Chatelaines, still in use today, serve to hold various practical objects such as toothpicks, scissors, etc. Belts, in silver and often gilded, testify to the artistry of the metalworkers. The forms of rings and bracelets were fixed by tradition. Servant women wore a few pieces of jewelry similar to those of their mistresses, but more modest.

In the case of men, certain pieces and the manner in which they were worn indicated their title of nobility and official rank in the state hierarchy. Only high dignitaries and military men beginning with the rank of colonel had the right to wear a gold ornament on the top of their heads consisting of a small *gau* held by a double knot of hair forming a chignon. This charm box contained both relics and mantras, or incantations written on paper. Important figures charged with heavy responsibilities were thus assured of the protection of the gods and their favorable intervention when great decisions were called for.

More widespread among the nobles was the wearing, on the left ear, of an elongated gold pendant to which turquoise stones and pearls were attached; it ended in a point made of hard paste or blue-green glass. Young boys of noble families also wore this pendant.

Even poor people in Tibet wore a few ornaments, not only to satisfy their beliefs but because this was judged to be a necessary embellishment.

In order to study the customs of the wandering nomad populations on the high plateaus, in this case their personal ornaments, one must consult those rare individuals who have lived among them and written detailed reports of their observations.

To illustrate the book by Thubten Jigme Norbu (Thubten Jigme Norbu and Colin M. Turnbull, *Tibet*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1968; London, Chatto and Windus, 1969, p. 82), Lobsan Tendzin has executed an extremely precise drawing showing a nomad woman and native of Amdo in eastern Tibet. The splendor of her silk and Chinese brocade costume is

surprising. She wears three necklaces of exceptionally large *gzi*, the stones being separated by coral and amber beads. Two necklaces are strung with oval *gzi*, while the smallest one has round *gzi*. A *gau* or charm box, oblong in shape, is suspended from each necklace. Her head ornament recalls the *perak*. It is formed by a large band of cloth that divides in three behind the head and descends the back. Each band is adorned with a vertical row of large balls of amber separated by coral; *gzi* complete the ornament. A veil covers the head, falls to the shoulders, and ends in rows of pearls.

Marion H. Duncan spent twelve years as a missionary in the provinces of Kham and Sinkiang. His writings, of a remarkable exactitude and testifying to great powers of observation, are a valuable source of information. The following descriptions have been taken from his book (Marion H. Duncan, *Customs and Superstitions of Tibetans*, London, The Mitre Press, 1964, pp. 53–61):

“... The Washi gentler sex wear a fortune of jewellery, earrings, finger rings, silver bangles from the waist, and then crown themselves with dinner-plate size plaques carved in the lotus design. These huge discs are of solid gold, or of silver, or silver with gold centres; they are clapped on each side and back of the head, and suspended down the back in a triangular group. All of the gold and silver plates, each one said to represent a lover, have corals and turquoise set in diverse designs. As many as six plaques are worn by the wives of chiefs. Nor must one forget the front of these nomadic women which is studded with bracelets, silver or gold charm-boxes, amulets, precious metallised belts, jewelled flint and toilet case, and sometimes a narrow jewelled band between the eyes and down the nose. Their entire body is a blaze of colour except their bare feet which are blistered from stiff, unyielding boots which are either too large or too small...”

“Carrying a fortune in jewels may seem incongruous with old dirty clothes and smudged face but wearing them is not only a safeguard from thieves but an unbreakable custom...”

Duncan goes on to say that some women – nomads rather than those living in villages – make a display of all their jewelry, most of which has been inherited or received as a dowry. They wear their ornaments all day long, while they work at collecting yak dung, milking, or spinning wool.

Ornaments vary, he tells us. Sometimes there are huge gold or silver disks to which are attached balls of yellow amber as large as eggs, with between them, as contrast, branches of coral. Sometimes women wear silver chains with shells suspended from the waist.

Jewelry is only taken off to sleep.

All over Tibet, the nomads moved around freely in search of better grazing lands. They were the masters of the high plateaus, and were at home in the cold altitudes. To the dangers caused by hostile nature were added those of such wild beasts as bears and wolves. They guarded their flocks with the help of mastiff dogs, and as weapons they used slings. Large tents of yak wool served them as dwellings. These housed all the necessities of life, including a chest of wood and hammered silver containing their wealth. When the nomads descended into the valleys to sell their products, butter, cheese, and wool, to the people of the villages, they would always – after restocking their supplies of barley, salt, and tea – buy small bars of gold, silver, copper, or tin, which they would take one day to a metal craftsman to have made into jewelry. To this was added the purchase of ornaments and gems. Men considered these acquisitions a good investment that moreover had the advantage of beautifying their wives and making them happy. The poorest families owned a few gold or silver jewelry pieces as well as some turquoise and coral.

All men wore a large gold or silver earring set with a turquoise on their left ear.

In all regions of Tibet there are mineral deposits and rivers containing gold. But the Tibetans, even though they recognized the importance of these valuable resources, were always opposed

to mining in depth, and only allowed themselves to scratch the surface of the soil. It was their belief that if the spheres were the abode of the gods, the subsoil belonged to them as well. It was thus wiser to be poor than to draw their anger.

In certain regions, gold nuggets were considered a seed that ought to be cautiously harvested, so as not to damage the harvests to come.

The district of Derge produced iron and copper, and the town owed its reputation to its famous forges. The bronze alloy of Derge is an age-old secret that has yet to be divulged. This bronze was used to cast bells whose particular sound vibrates in the temples of Tibet. Metal craftsmen, likewise renowned, created in their workshops ritual objects that are true works of art.

The women of Derge made themselves conspicuous by a large disk of yellow amber set with red coral at the center, which they wore on their foreheads.

In Lhasa, goldsmiths and jewelers formed a rich and respected guild, while in the provinces they were associated with blacksmiths, who were scorned because they made weapons.

The great diversity of pieces in a Tibetan jewelry shop shows that the artists were sometimes able to express their imaginations freely, despite the constraints of traditional symbolism. With the addition of a higher aesthetic sense to the refined skill of the craftsmen, the creation of an art of jewelry with exclusively Tibetan characteristics was assured.

5. Bodhnath

In the seventh century of our era, Srontsan Gampo, king of Tibet, married Princess Bhrikuti of Nepal, a fervent Buddhist. At this period, Buddhism was already firmly established in the valley of Katmandu, which was the point of departure for the religious movement that spread to Tibet, where it took root in a profound and definitive way.

In the course of time, Tibetan ethnic groups, recognizing no frontiers in the Himalayan mountains, crossed the borders of their country and settled in the high altitudes of northern Nepal, including the regions of Mustang, Dolpo, Kutang, Langtang, Khumbu. Other populations related to the Nepalese, such as the Sherpas and Takals, adopted the Buddhist religion.

Famous Buddhist sanctuaries hundreds of years old add to the glory of the valley of Katmandu. As a result of the influx of Tibetan refugees, to whom Nepal has generously given hospitality, these religious centers have acquired an even greater importance than in the past. On feast days there is a considerable gathering of the faithful. Pilgrims coming on foot from the highest and most distant mountain regions join the local population to participate in the religious solemnities.

The sacred edifices are Buddhist stupas. Their origin goes back to the cone-shaped burial tumulus that the ancients raised to their heroes. After the death of Buddha, who was interred in a stupa, this construction spread throughout the Buddhist world, taking the forms of a symbolic architecture whose characteristics differ depending on the country. In Tibet, as in Ladakh, the name given to them is *chorten*. They are to be seen everywhere and vary in importance. They line pilgrimage routes, create passages at the outskirts of monasteries, and indicate hermitages.

The votive stupas to be seen in temples are often masterpieces of craftsmanship in bronze, silver, or gold inlaid with precious stones. These are reliquaries containing the ashes or a few objects of piety that had once belonged to holy lamas. Mantras or written prayers are often added. The large and small stupas in the temples are placed behind or alongside altars. The miniature stupas are veritable jewels that have their place in family chapels.

The stupa is a structure whose architecture, based on the calculation of relations and proportions, expresses the symbolic and universal principles of Buddhist theology and metaphysics.

In Buddhist thought, the stupa is a *mandala*, a cosmic diagram, the object of concentration on a central point which allows the mind to proceed to the self-exorcism of the ego in order to arrive at liberation and enlightenment. It symbolizes all the planes leading to universal abstraction. The mandala is the sphere of divine essence, which contains everything and is identified with the universe.

A great variety of mandalas, fascinating in their beauty, are painted on *thankas*.

In the valley of Katmandu there are two monumental stupas. Swayambhunath is a holy city composed of several temples and a monastery. The sanctuaries and the stupa with its gilded parasol and its prayer flags stand at the top of a hill, from which one looks over the city of Katmandu and the immense valley framed by the mountains of the Himalaya. To see Swayambhunath in all its glory on feast days while mingling with the pious and joyful crowd, to see it in late afternoon in the fire of the setting sun, and on moonlit nights until dawn, while hearing the gongs being sounded repeatedly, as well as to see Swayambhunath on days of solitude and silence – all this is a deeply stirring experience.

The Bodhnath stupa is situated on a plain northeast of Katmandu along the ancient caravan route between Nepal and Tibet. The stupa's architectural mandala, simultaneously complex and of remarkable clarity, is a unique achievement in the Buddhist world. The massive construction consists of an enormous square enclosed in a circle, and a dome from which emerges a tower.

The outer circle of the mandala is created by a wall of stone in which 108 niches, each containing a prayer wheel, have been hollowed (108 being a multiple of 12, the Buddhist unit multiplied by the magical number 9). Inside the circle is a square formed by stepped platforms. Doors on each side open on the four cardinal points. On the upper terrace, the symbolic lotus opens in a double circle bordering the imposing dome, thirty-five meters in diameter. The cupola is topped by a square tower on each side of which a pair of enormous painted eyes stares fixedly at man and infinity to east, west, north, and south. It is the gaze that encompasses and penetrates all; it expresses the omnipresence and omniscience of Buddha. A brass and gold tower rises in a pyramid to the apex surmounted by a victory parasol, emblem of supreme knowledge, the aim sought and attained by Buddhist doctrine. From the top, cords stretch in all directions, with prayer streamers attached in five colors: blue (ether), red (fire), yellow (earth), white (water), green (air).

The stupa itself is surrounded by picturesque old houses, all of which are shops where the Tibetans offer merchandise from their native country. Collectors, by much searching and an equal amount of bargaining, may perhaps be able to find a fine object: a jade bowl, a teapot in wood and chased silver, a bell, a piece of jewelry, a large coral bead, a chunk of turquoise, a *gzi*, or an original ring.

In the stupa enclosure, life is very active, in the place of prayer as well as in the bazaars. Worshippers while walking run their hands over their prayer wheels, which make noise as they turn; they clang the bell violently and its clapper makes the bronze resound, while a group of blind singers gives forth with its melodies.

For the Tibetans, the rhythm of the days is subject to the lunar calendar. The year ought to have twelve months of thirty days each, but in reality the lunar year has only 354 days, and as a result approximately one month has to be inserted every three years. On the other hand, since astrology is considered an exact science, it governs events and influences decisions. The astrologer foretells auspicious days and unlucky ones, and in order to avoid the latter, they are

84 *The stupa of Bodhnath in Nepal, one of the largest temple structures in Asia (cf. p. 114). The picture shows the step pyramid plated in bronze and gold, which stands above the cupola crowned with the victory parasol, emblem of supreme knowledge, from which cords with prayer banners lead down to the terraces. On the square base of the tower, the gigantic eyes of the all-seeing Buddha gaze in the four cardinal directions.*

85–92 *Losar, New Year's, in Bodhnath. Celebrated at the start of the new moon in February or March, it attracts a huge crowd of worshippers. For this festival lasting several days, the women wear their finest clothing of black, brown, or dark red wool, made less austere by the bright gleaming silk blouses and scarves, as well as by embroidered striped aprons. Pictures 85 and 88–92 show the fine jewelry of women from the Lhasa nobility, who fled to Nepal when the Chinese annexed Tibet.*

85 *A distinguished Tibetan lady, originally from Lhasa (cf. detail, Picture 90).*

86 *Wind and percussion instruments play an important part in the ceremonial of Buddhist monasteries, since their tones and vibrations offer a means of somehow communicating what cannot be explained. The most euphonious of their wind instruments to our ears is the gyaling, a kind of oboe with double reed and conical wooden tube, having seven or eight finger holes and another for the thumb. The bell or mouth of the instrument is made of copper and silver – as in the picture – and is often richly decorated with raised gold ornamentation and turquoise and coral insets.*

87 *Monks engaged in a ritual purification ceremony during New Year's in Bodhnath. The silver pitcher contains holy water, the nectar of immortality, while the peacock feathers symbolize atonement for sins.*

88 *Double-strand necklace with large coral beads, pearls, and dark-striped gzi (agate) stones. The gold charm box is set with turquoises, rubies, emeralds, and diamonds.*

89 *This charm box is suspended on a chain of long gzi stones of geometric design – artificial agates made of chalcidony, ivory, horn, and a kind of glass produced by a process that remains a mystery. The jewelry piece at the side is attached to the shoulder by ropes of pearls branching off from cut jade discs; these pearl strands interspersed with various precious jewels and glass beads terminate in perforated jade discs.*

90 *The gold charm box belonging to the woman shown in Picture 85. Two large coral beads stand at opposite sides of the finely worked gold hinge set with small rubies and emeralds, at the top of the box. The box itself has the same shape as the inner, concave lozenge, whose gold outline ends in emeralds at the four corners, while the outer square is just a blind, or false front applied to the box. Symmetrically set diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, and rubies complement the bright blue of the turquoise plaques.*

91 *Gold charm box, with curved lines and rich jewel settings in flower motifs, suggesting Indian-Nepalese influences. The diamond at the center is remarkably large.*

92 *Unusually ornate shoulder jewelry, the ends of which reach all the way to the waist. To ensure that the ropes of pearls alternating with precious jewels do not weigh on the shoulder alone, the pendants are also supported in part by the gold brooch set with turquoises, at center. This shoulder piece is the handiwork of a famous jeweler from Lhasa.*

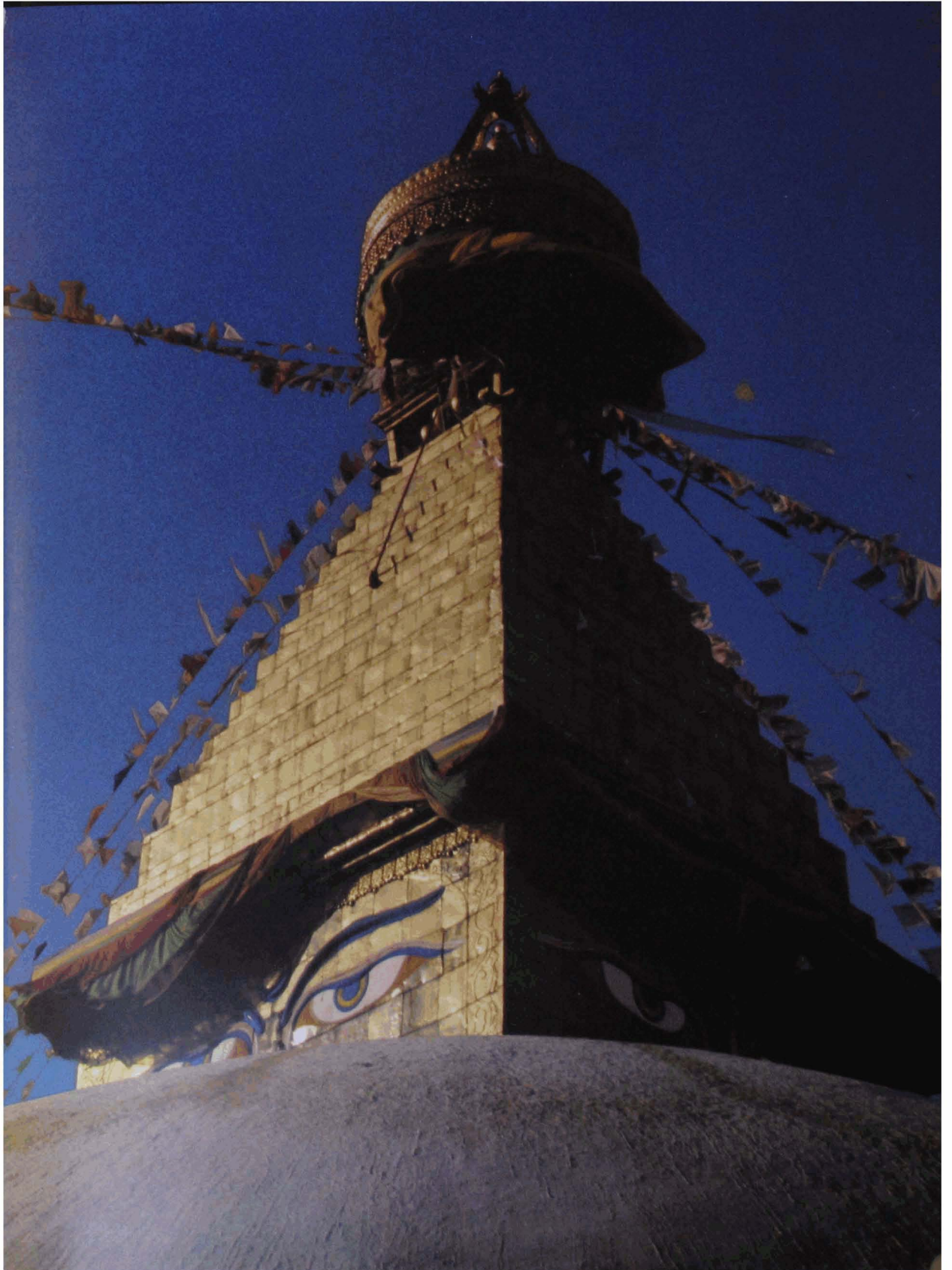
93–95 *Three photographs showing the jewelry of Tibetan women of lower social rank, consisting in part of plastic materials, as in the case of the necklace worn by the woman of Picture 94.*

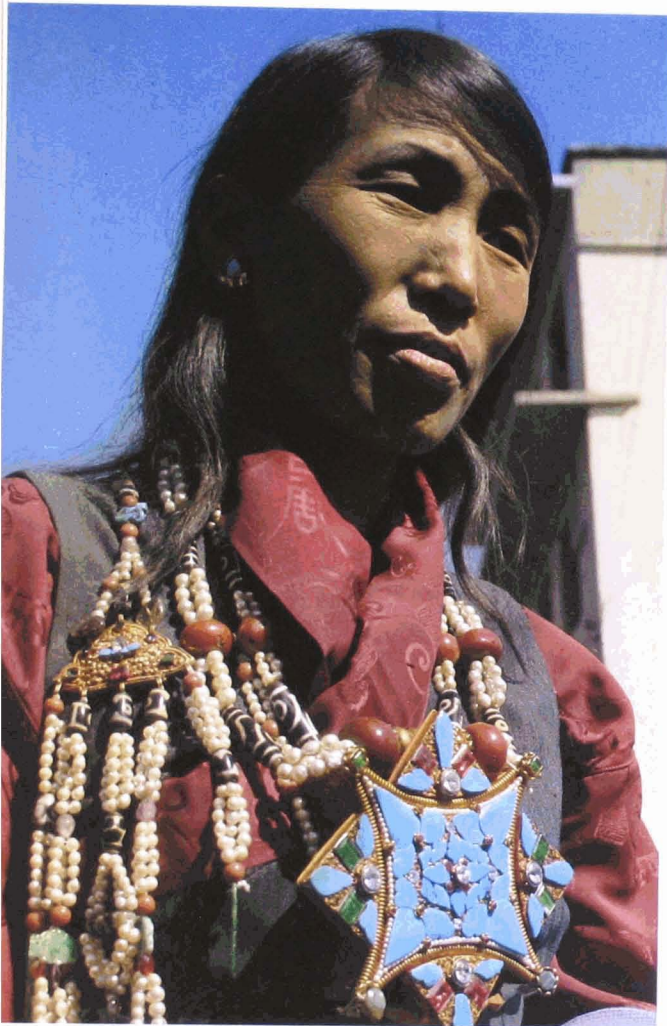
96 *This Tibetan fire-tool, a small leather pouch with brass fittings and an inlaid coral stone, is worn on the hip belt. It contains a fuse and a flintstone. By rubbing the flint on the file-like ribbed blade under the pouch, one can set off sparks which will cause a match to ignite.*

97 *Saddle horn with brass and silver mountings, set with turquoises and coral. The plate in the center bears the highly abstract stylized figure of a god, surrounded by good luck symbols.*

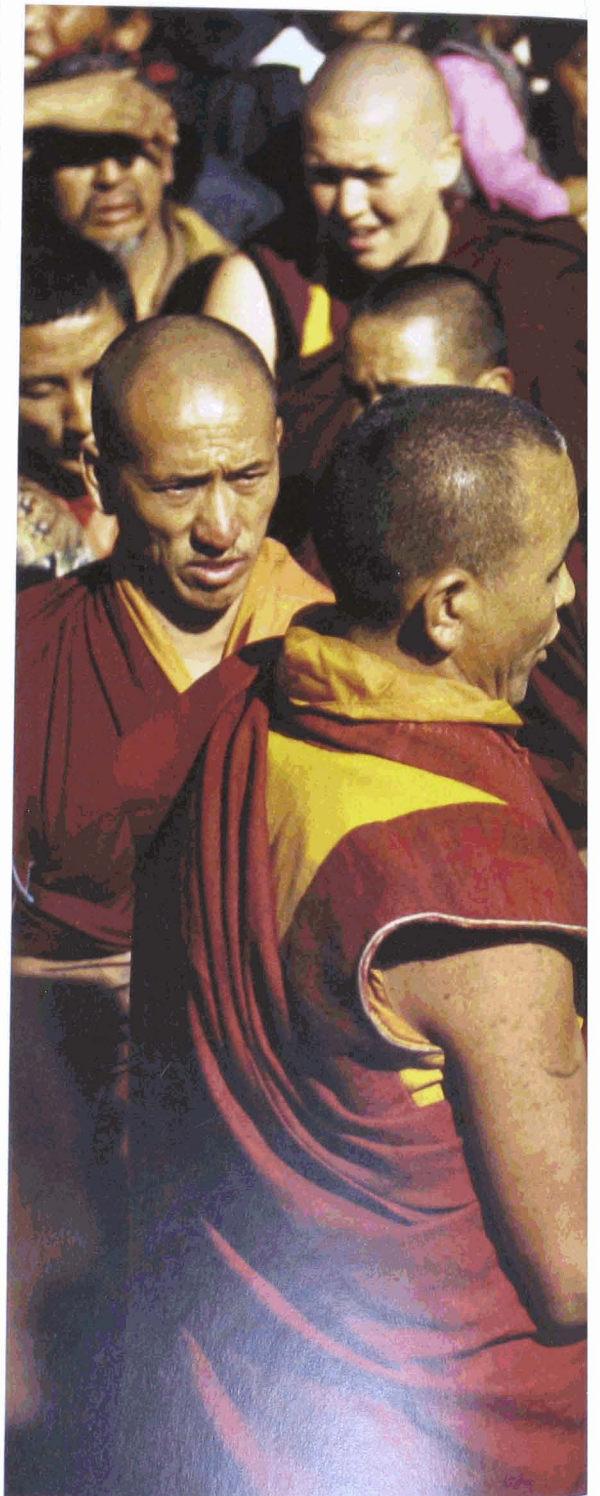
98 *A Tibetan woman carrying her child on her back. She wears a modest necklace of coral beads and gzi stones.*

99–100 *This enormous gold corolla, symbolizing the sun, with a turquoise ornament at the center, almost covers the ear of this young Sherpa woman. With refreshing nonchalance, she has combined this with a necklace of plastic pearls. This cloth strip, several meters long, wound about the hips helps support the back when heavy loads are being carried. It is set off clearly against the multi-colored dress. The clasp on the fine silver-wire girdle is set with turquoises, while a brooch in the shape of a peacock supports a chain of good luck charms.*

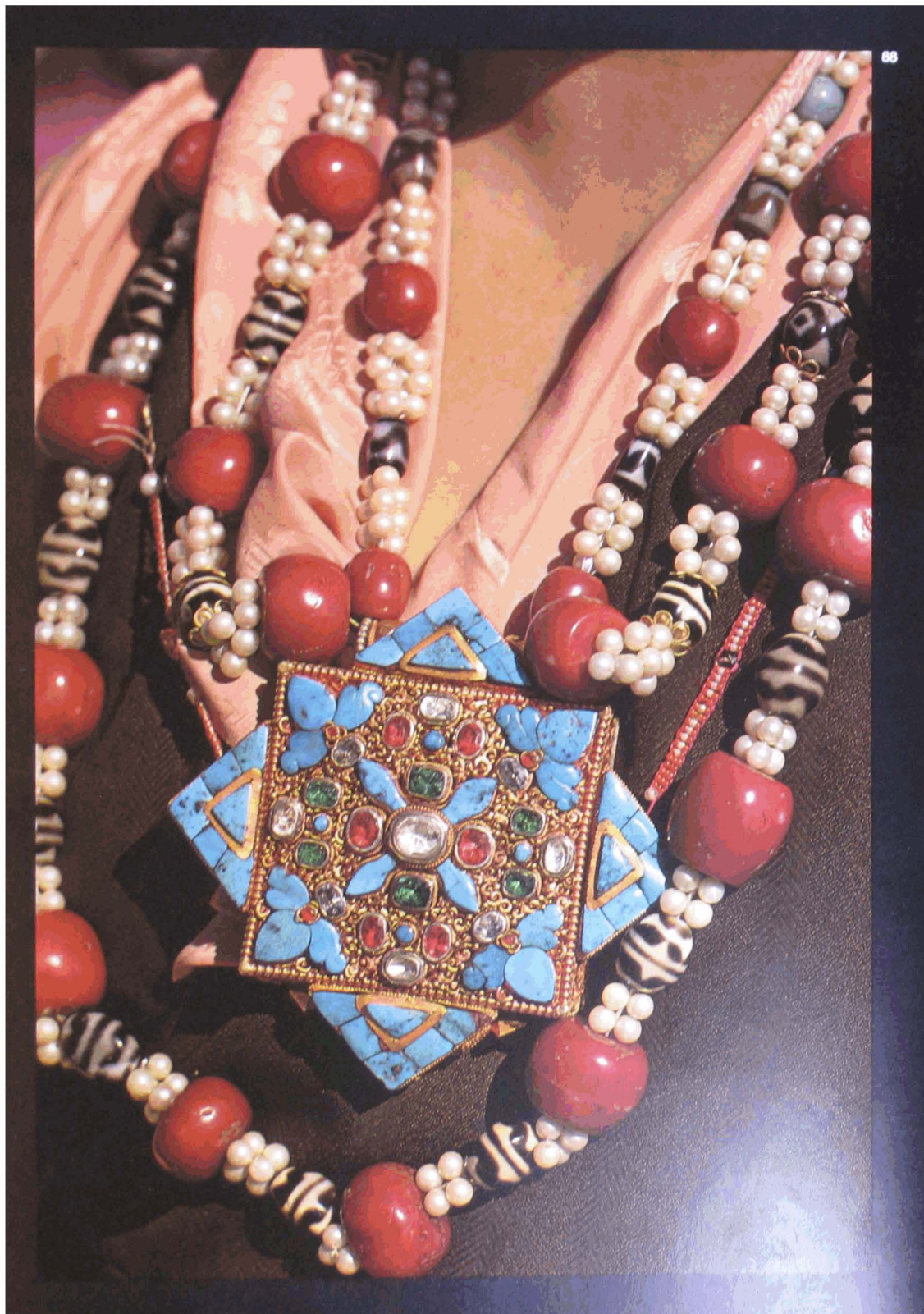




86



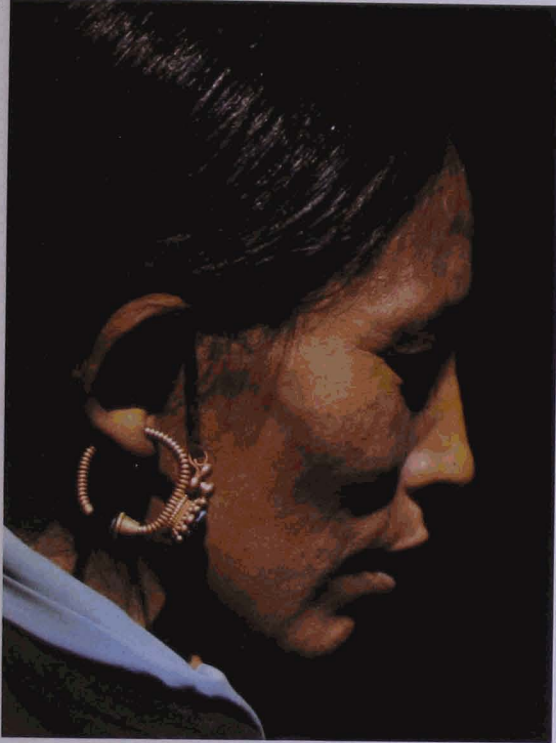






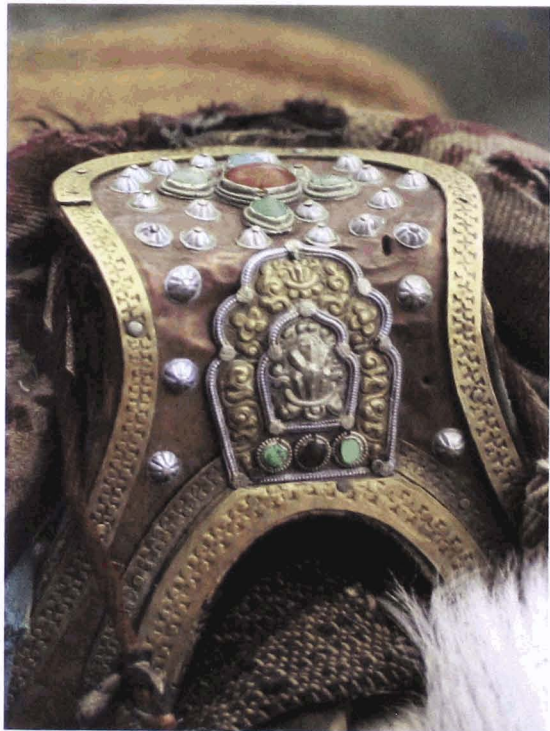




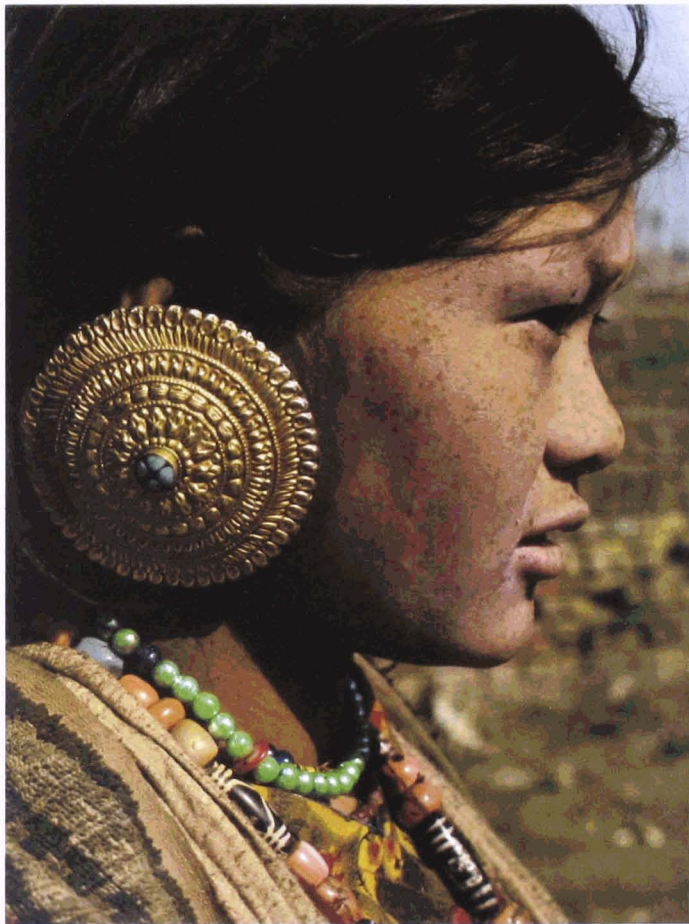


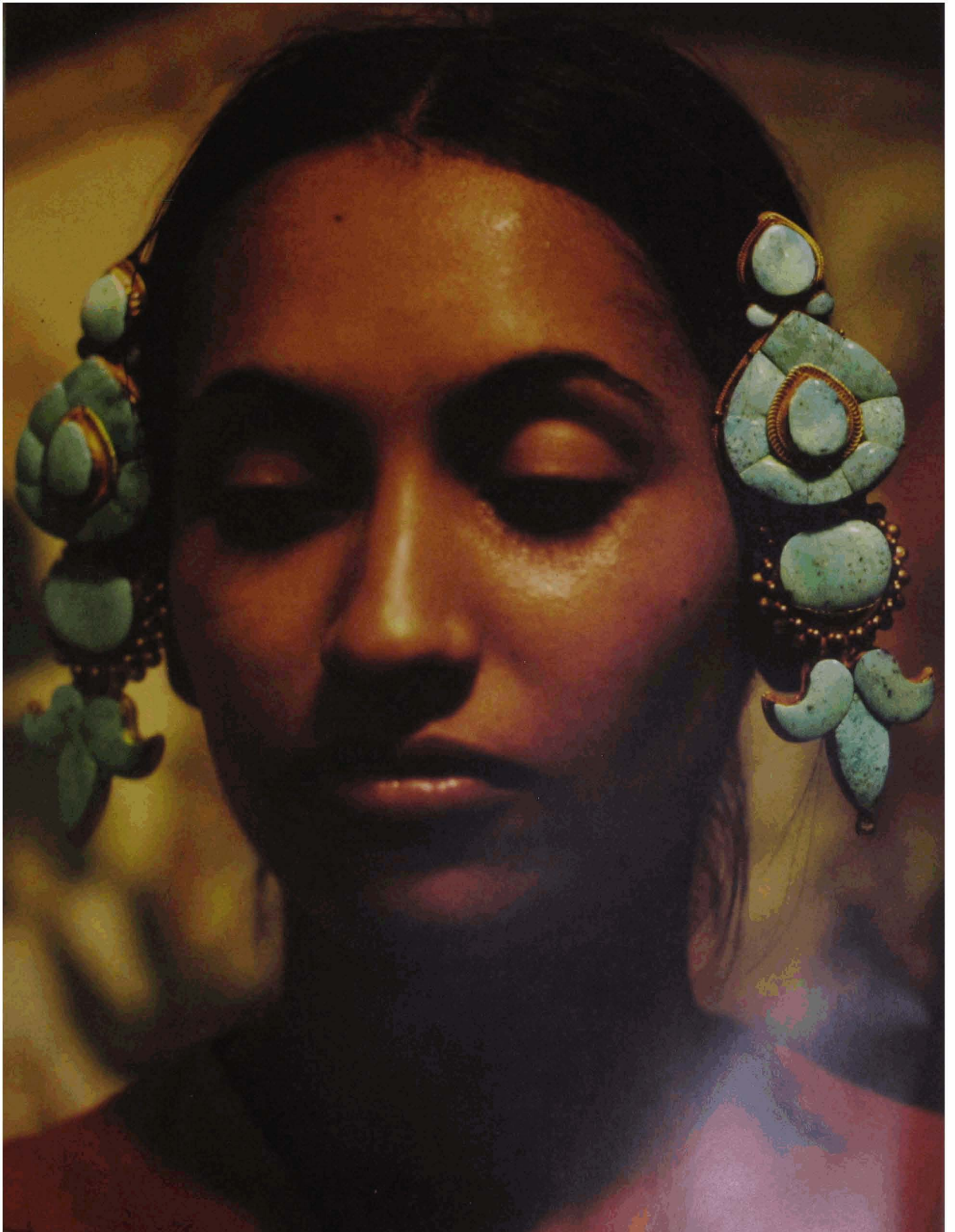


97









101 *This young Hindu woman from Nepal wears a typical Tibetan head ornament, which was originally reserved to the noble women of Lhasa, while their servant women had similar but more modest pendants. These two gold and turquoise jewelry pieces are suspended from a braided cord worn across the top of the head and concealed by the hair. This traditional headdress, which scarcely varies in form, seems to be worn but seldom today.*

suppressed. The resulting shift in time is compensated for by doubling the favorable days. The irregularities of the calendar necessitate prolonged study on the part of astrologers, who at the end of each year establish the calendar for the one to come. The months bear numbers, and the days of the week are named for the sun, moon, and planets. The intervals of day and night have the names of twelve animals.

Losar, or the New Year, is celebrated in February or March by our calendar, depending on the place assigned to the floating month. The new year begins with the rising of the new moon. Farewells to the year that is ending have a meaning as important as greetings to the one that is beginning. *Losar* was celebrated in Tibet with ceremonial rejoicing that went on for more than a month. Homes were restored and decorated for the occasion. Gifts were exchanged between relatives and friends. Women were engrossed in the preparation of great quantities of pastries, to be offered to all those who came calling to express their good wishes; many were distributed to the monks and the poor. *Tormas*, or sacrificial cakes, complicated in structure, were often decorated with flowers and sometimes even with precious stones. They were placed as offerings on the altars in temples and private chapels. Families, in their hospitable homes, celebrated the arrival of the new year with friends and servants. Women donned their finest robes of silk and Chinese brocade, and adorned themselves with resplendent jewelry. Servant women also wore ornaments, including the same turquoise ear pendants and charm boxes inlaid with gems as their mistresses. Everyone went to the temples daily to implore the assistance of the gods.

Today the Tibetans in Nepal respectfully preserve their age-old traditions. They gather in great numbers at Bodhnath to attend the solemn religious celebrations of the New Year.

To the sound of cymbals and giant trumpets, a procession of high dignitaries and lamas emerges from the adjoining monastery. They ascend the steps of the stupa to the tiers of the mandala, where the monks, surrounded by the crowd, celebrate the service.

Tibetan ladies are remarkable for the elegance of their appearance. They devote great pains to their coiffures as well as to all the details of their dress. Their dark robes of yak wool are enlivened by silk blouses imprinted with Chinese motifs and by colorful striped aprons.

Their jewelry is of an exceptional richness. The spectacle of so many sumptuous jewels worn by women of all social classes is a unique and dazzling one. Nor is it unusual to see precious stones glittering, not by the artificial light of night, but in bright sunlight. The fire of diamonds, the pigeon blood of rubies, the soothing green of jade and transparent green of emeralds, turquoise blue and coral red – all the colors of the rainbow emerge from the radiations of the dispersed spectrum. *Gzi*, with their subdued nuances, contain the power of magic.

Charm boxes in gold and filigree silver inlaid with turquoise, sometimes with rubies, are suspended on chains or on necklaces strung with round or oval *gzi*, interrupting and contrasting with the coral and turquoise. Heavy turquoise pendants fastened in the hair conceal the ears and thus frame the face, softening the black of the hair by their blue.

The most surprising ornament is a string of fine pearls attached at the shoulder and which falls in a heavy cluster as far as the waist. The white pearls are mixed with ruby or emerald balls, separated at intervals by plaques of engraved jade. The whole forms a composition that combines aesthetic perfection with an expressive symbolism.

Nepal

1. The High Mountain Chain of the Himalaya

To go to Nepal is to be moved to admiration, as much by nature as by man; and in experiencing it, the traveler will develop an attachment to the country that will be everlasting. This admiration will be followed by astonishment, for there where he might have believed everything to be in conflict, everything instead merges into a harmonious reconciliation of forms and opposite states of mind.

The populations of the mountains, hills, valleys, and plain belong to different ethnic groups, speak distinct languages, and worship Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, or Buddha in the temples and stupas. They do not experience any discord and harmony seems to govern their lives. Men suffer the burdens of poverty and toil, but their faces nevertheless expand in joy and brotherhood. There is a Nepalese smile that also expresses itself in song. Voices echo resonantly on the slopes and in the rice fields, all day long and into the moonlit nights.

Nepal is situated at the same latitude as northern Egypt, but its climate is determined by its altitudes, which create three parallel zones, cold, temperate, and tropical, one after another over a distance of only 240 kilometers. In the north, the Himalaya zone lies at 3000 and 8000 meters; the central zone of medium-sized mountains, also called "hills," descends to about 1000 meters; finally, in the south, the low region of Terai reaches 80 meters above sea level.

From east to west in Nepal extends the massive and grandiose chain of the Himalaya, dominating the high Tibetan plateau, sedimentary terrain of the now legendary ocean. The peaks of ice and snow trace in the blue sky the pattern of their splendid but frightening and dangerous beauty, as inaccessible as the gods whose residence they are.

The majestic peaks fall into line and their pride grows from west to east. At the frontier with India, toward Kashmir, Mount Api rises to an altitude of 7132 meters and Mount Saipal 7040. To the west of the Kali Gandaki river, whose tumultuous course from Tibet to India crosses the center of Nepal, the imposing Mount Dhaulagiri rises to 8167 meters. Its lush foundations spread in an almost uninhabited region. The whiteness of its snows is succeeded, over more than a thousand meters of steep slopes, by tangled forests of rhododendrons that bloom from March to May in an orgy of flowers with petals colored by all the shades of red.

East of the Kali Gandaki river, the peaks are linked. Annapurna I, rising to 8091 meters, seems not to mind that one's gaze extends farther to the sharp-pointed Machapuchare (6997 m.; in English, "Fish Tail"), which recalls the Matterhorn.

As you continue to fly over the Himalayan chain in an eastern direction, you come to the Kutang district, whose inhabitants fear the god of Manaslu, a colossal pyramid whose summit pierces the sky at 8156 meters. Next comes a series of seven-thousand-meter peaks as the chain approaches the Tibetan frontier. The Cho Oyo, rising to 8153 meters, appears as the advance guard of that supreme majesty Mount Everest (8848 m.), which joins earth and sky, and overwhelms the Lhotse (8571 m) and the Makalu (8481 m.).

Some of these majestic Himalayan peaks have been made famous by conquering heroes, those who lived to tell of their exploit and those who were defeated by the defensive violence of

the elements. Many of them are still anonymous, and will be baptized by mountain-climbers of the future who will be unable to resist the attraction and cosmic force of their peaks. The gods – sometimes! – allow humans to approach their abode.

In the deadly zone, that of the extreme altitudes, sounds are reduced to the violent roar of avalanches of snow or rock and to blasts of wind breaking over the mountainsides and whistling through the gaps. Around the peaks, whirlwinds gather vaporous clouds in glorious crowns that catch fire in the sunset.

Some hundreds of meters lower down, animal life reasserts its rights. Those that approach closest to the summits are the silently gliding birds of prey. An eagle has been found dead at an altitude of 7930 meters on Mount Everest. The lammergeier or bearded vulture and the Himalayan griffon have been identified at 7320 and 4575 meters respectively. The great raven and yellow-billed chough attacked the food bundles of the Everest climbers in 1971 at an altitude of 8235 meters.

The national bird of Nepal is the resplendent Lophophorus, a forest pheasant adorned with an iridescent livery and crowned with a green aigrette.

If in the course of this flight over the great peaks, one's eyes had scrutinized the slopes, they might perhaps have caught a glimpse of that splendored and solitary prowler, the snow leopard, whose thick coat of long light fur with dark spots makes it almost invisible against a background of rock or snow. It has been observed at heights reaching 6000 meters.

The principal chain of the Himalaya is a climatic barrier of which only the southern side is damp. The monsoon from India rises slowly northward to reach Nepal in June. It brings heavy rains as far as the barrier of high mountains, whose abundantly watered southern flank is covered by luxuriant forests composed of up to 3000 meters of birch trees, chestnut and walnut trees, and oaks. Above this limit, deciduous trees give way to evergreens, firs, larches, and the famous Himalayan cedars. At variable altitudes, depending on the exposure of the slopes, rhododendrons, vigorous shrubs that twist acrobatically, bloom in profusion. At the lower altitudes, the open flowers are of a flaming red, which gradually changes to pink and becomes a pure white in the higher regions. The rhododendron was chosen from among all flowers to be the symbol of Nepal, where it bears the name *lali gurans*.

The prestige enjoyed by orchids is not lessened by the abundance of these plants, which grow in the densest and most impenetrable forests. The botanist in search of an unusual specimen will have to cut himself a path with the help of a *khukri*, a large knife with a curved blade used by the peasants. More than two hundred species of orchid have been pointed out. Their beauty, a strange caprice of nature, gives the undergrowth an indefinable atmosphere. The southern flank of the great Himalayan mountain chain is truly a paradise for flora and fauna, but in Nepal this paradise is not restricted and extends to the whole country, whose riches and beauty are prodigious in their variety.

In the north, the giant mountains, buttressed by powerful spurs, overlook regions designated by the name "Interior of the Himalaya." These are high desert plateaus that extend beyond the frontier and into Tibet. There are also valleys, watered by rivers whose waters flow from inexhaustible sources, the snow and ice. They are situated at altitudes of 2500 to 4500 meters,

and separated by almost insurmountable barriers. Travelers must make fatiguing marches, risk the crossing of fragile, suspended bridges that sway over deep gorges and rapid torrents, and tolerate the diminished oxygen on the heights and the often dangerously hostile climate. The goal of these efforts is not only a conquest of nature but the search for human contact with a Tibetan population that has preserved the traditions of its ancestors. Communities are thinly scattered, and the character of the inhabitants is marked by their isolation in a crude but friendly environment. Men often know only their native valley. The inhabitants cultivate small plots of irrigated land in which barley and wheat become, in summer, fields of gold bordered by snow-covered slopes. In this same season, the flocks are taken up to pasture at nearly 5000 meters. Wild yaks graze at this altitude while their domestic brothers draw the plow in the fields.

As in the whole Tibetan cultural area where the lamaist Buddhist religion mixed with the Bön tradition is practiced, the life of groups and individuals is profoundly imbued with a belief in wicked beings and guardian spirits. The divinities have their sanctuaries in modest houses and penetrate the intimacy of families. Religious practices have as their goal to lessen the power of the malevolent spirits and increase that of the others. The lamas, their silhouettes floating in their dark red robes and whom everyone likes to encounter, busy themselves in an active or meditative way in the monasteries, which are the center of spiritual life for the mountain people. The calendar is marked with numerous religious feasts, celebrated with solemnity, such as the memory of a saint, the new year, or the harvest feasts, etc. Pilgrimages have a great importance, and sometimes require weeks of travel on foot or horseback during which the pilgrims suffer much privation. But everything involved in these manifestations is a subject of joy and an occasion for rejoicing. In the whole Interior of the Himalaya, religious edifices are a reminder that the gods are watching and must not be forgotten. There are the temples, the chortens, characteristic in style, whitened with lime and decorated with symbolic paintings, the prayer walls, or simply heaps of stones or yak horns engraved with incantatory formulas.

Despite their basic unity, the populations of the Interior of the Himalaya have developed an individualism which is manifested by the variety of costumes, headdresses, and jewelry. A knowledge of ornaments makes it possible to recognize the district and even the valleys where they are worn.

In the province of Humla in northwest Nepal, the men are characterized by a high topknot of hair on the head and several rows of necklaces strung with gems or beads of colored glass.

The territory of Dolpo is situated north of Mount Dhaulagiri. The men of this region, who wrap themselves in a wide cloak known as a *chuba*, wear their hair thickened with yak wool and coiled in huge turbans held by silver clasps embellished in the middle with turquoise or coral. They wear the foursided Tibetan hat in brocade, or the round, flat Mongolian hat in red wool, or even a fur cap. They love to gallop on spirited ponies with collars of bells on their necks whose clear tinkling provides a note of life in the great silence.

Married women wear a roof-shaped headdress made from a plaque of brass or silver. They all wrap themselves, as in a shawl, with striped woolen blankets attached in front with a beautiful clasp in the shape of a *dorje* whose three centers are inlaid with turquoise and coral. On their ears they wear large rings with a triangular bezel set with turquoise. They are also adorned with necklaces of amber, coral, turquoise, and *gzi*, and wear rings on almost all their fingers. Shells, cowries, and imitations of brightly colored porcelain also play an ornamental role.

The coquetry of these ornaments lend a seductive charm to the rather primitive uncouthness of the men and women who wear them.

It would seem necessary to refer to the remarkable study by Corneille Jest by citing the list of jewelry compiled by him (Corneille Jest, *Dolpo*, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 1975, p. 203).

Jewelry in Dolpo: "The raw material, silver, comes from ancient coins with a high content of this metal, Chinese dollars, da-yan, Tibetan or Indian pieces. Brass, *rag*, is obtained by barter and comes from northern India.

"All objects are made at the home of the customer and paid for in kind (barley or butter).

"In Dolpo, the blacksmith chiefly makes, for women:

– the *a-lon*, an earring with a bezel set with a turquoise.

– the *sdig-ra*, a clasp in the shape of a stylized vajra.

– *ser-gdub*, rings adorned with turquoise.

– the *sdig-phub*, or married woman's headdress, which consists of two rectangular metal plaques, one in silver, the other in brass, both attached to a piece of red velvet.

for men:

– an earring of a smaller cut than those for women (in silver).

– finger rings in brass or silver.

– needle boxes.

– tinderboxes.

– tweezers.

– cases and handles for knives."

The Thakkola region owes its importance to the fact that it is crossed by the principal north-south line of communication between Tibet and India. This is the Kali Gandaki river valley, followed by caravans at all times from the beginning of its course in Mustang. The Kali Gandaki is a sacred river whose waters flow through one of the most impressive landscapes in the world. For thousands of years the torrent has hollowed out gorges of enormous depth, framed by the peaks of Mount Dhaulagiri and Annapurna.

Muktinath, the chief town, is situated in a region with the appearance of a desert. The Muktinath monastery, near Annapurna, is a famous pilgrimage center. Every year it draws a large number of believers from their distant valleys. In the sanctuary an eternal flame burns, a miraculous fire fed by a thin stream of natural gas escaping from the earth. When going to the temple of fire, the women of the region wrap their heads in turbans trimmed with a fringe of small coral beads and turquoises descending as far as the eyebrows.

Farther north, forming a kind of peninsula penetrating Tibet, lies Mustang, a different and mysterious country, more lunar than terrestrial, whose enigma has yet to be completely dispelled. The West hardly knows this country, whose isolation is due as much to natural obstacles as to man. At all times the Tibetans knew the land of Lo, and the ruins of ancient fortifications testify to the historical conflicts between Tibet and Nepal. The high desert plateaux were familiar to caravan travelers, who transported salt, a precious commodity extracted from dried-up lakes, and which the Tibetans exported to Nepal and as far as India. Lo Mantang, the capital of the ancient kingdom, is an oasis in a mountainous desert where terrestrial forces have disregarded forms. The site is immense but the dwellings are squeezed into a square enclosure formed by massive walls reinforced with towers. A single gate, open during the day, gives access to the town. When the explorer Michel Peissel entered Lo Mantang, a feast was in progress and he was much taken by the dazzling spectacle. From his description of it one might quote the following passage: "As for jewels, many women were literally smothered with ornaments of silver and precious stones, the most common of these being necklaces of bright orange coralline stones alternating with turquoises. Often these necklaces were partly hidden under silver and gold relic boxes, many the size of a large camera. On their wrists the women wore ivory-white bracelets made of truncated conch shells. All these jewels, though, were outshone by their headdresses, which were composed of a leather strap running down the central parting of their hair and falling down their backs, and studded with huge turquoises,

many of them the size of a wrist watch. On some of these Egyptian-type headstraps I counted as many as thirty-two such turquoises – quite a fortune.” (Michel Peissel, *Mustang, The Forbidden Kingdom: Exploring a Lost Himalayan Land*, Dutton, New York, 1967, pp. 116–17.)

This description is especially interesting because in it we can observe that the women of Mustang wear the same jewelry as their sisters in Ladakh: the *perak*, bracelets cut from shells, and charm boxes. Carnelians seem to have been more plentiful in ornaments in Tibet than in Ladakh.

As one pursues this captivating journey in an easterly direction along the frontier of Tibet, one comes on the district of Kutang north of Mount Manaslu where the Buri Gandaki river waters the beautiful Sana valley, which deserves to be explored.

Langtang is a better known district situated seventy kilometers as the crow flies from Katmandu and easy to reach. The mountainous setting is especially striking, and the whiteness of the snowy peaks and ice fields of Gangja La are dazzling, while the greenery of pastures strewn with all the mountain flora provides relief for the eyes. The cascading waters of the Trisuli river, as well as the picturesque village of Langtang, recall the Alps. This impression is confirmed by the sight of enormous rounds of cheese produced by the highest cheese dairy in the world, Gyaltsan Gompa, situated at an altitude of 3800 meters and set up by a Swiss mission. In order to reach Langtang, mountain climbers leaving Katmandu must cross the Kakari Pass to arrive at Trisuli Bazaar. There they pursue their march northward by following the Trisuli river upstream, a hike that takes seven days. Another very attractive route is the one crossing the region of Gosaikund Lekh, where the numerous lakes and forests of rhododendron are enchanting.

Entering the land of Kumbu, the traveler, made increasingly conscious of his smallness by the great majestic Himalayan peaks, from which emerges the crest of Mount Everest, reaches the homeland of the Sherpas, whose name means “man of the east.”

The deities dwell on the peaks, and to approach them a guru had the sanctuary of Tengpoche built at an altitude of 3700 meters on the southern flank of Everest. On the northern flank stands the famous Longphu monastery.

The Sherpas have become famous for their indispensable and heroic participation in all expeditions in the high mountains. Under the most tragic circumstances, they have been faithful companions and loyal rescuers of the most illustrious mountain climbers from all countries. Namche Bazaar is the assembly point from which, with enthusiasm, confidence, and stoicism, the mountain-climbing heroes depart.

To the north, the land of the Sherpas has a communication route with Tibet by the Nangpa Pass, while to the south they inhabit the Helambu valley near Katmandu. At the Rake Ghyang monastery, spectacular celebrations accompanied by masked ritual dances are held each year. For this occasion, women adorn themselves with their finest jewelry. Again one sees *gzi*, turquoise, and amber necklaces, which sometimes include carnelians. The highly esteemed coral enhances the brilliance of the ornaments by its bright red color. One also finds repoussé or filigree charm boxes in gold and silver, inlaid with turquoises that form geometric patterns. Finally, there are heavy rings ending in dragons' heads and inlaid with turquoise and coral in the shape of a mandala. These pieces of jewelry, which might be called “classical,” are the ones worn by all women in the Himalayan regions where populations of Tibetan origin are attached to Buddhism.

2. *On Foot in the Land of the Gurungs*

Pokhara is a town in the center of Nepal with extraordinary attraction and charm. It is situated at an altitude of 800 meters at the foot of the grandiose range of the four Annapurnas, on an absolutely flat plain watered by rushing rivers whose waters still retain a freshness of snow. In Pokhara the low houses of baked bricks disappear into the vegetation. One walks between a burning sky and a dusty soil, under banana trees with huge flowers, while sampling their delicious fruit, large bananas with reddish skins, well ripened and warm from the sun. Poinsettias grow like wild shrubs in all the gardens, taking root even in the old stone walls. They lift their tangled branches adorned with bright red stars, which contrast strikingly with the gray of the dry earth, the blue of the sky, and the snows of Annapurna and Machapuchare – they create the foreground of the majestic setting. The foot of the imposing chain lies thirty kilometers from the town, but the transparency of the air brings the summits near, and to pluck a poinsettia in Pokhara gives the illusion of touching the snow with your hands at the same moment.

A few hundred paces from the town, the Himalayan peaks are reflected in Lake Phewa, the most beautiful mirror of water in Nepal. A restful softness emanates from the calm, silent lake bordered by gently rolling hills. Fishermen in motionless pirogues draw in their nets from the fish-filled depths.

At dawn one morning a young Nepalese brings us piping hot tea on the terrace of the modest Phewa Hotel. But it is hard to avert our rapt gaze from the luminous whiteness of the Annapurna peaks and the tip of Machapuchare to the north, which proudly catch the first rays of the sun. To the southwest, on the other hand, the lake preserves the darkness of the night. A few moments later, as the light dispels the last shadows, our pirogues glide to the rhythm of the paddles over the smooth and shining surface of the water. A party of six persons – my daughter, a friend, and myself, accompanied by three sherpas – has embarked on an excursion in the high hills. As we cross the lake, the image of the crushing Himalayan giants is blotted out, and we fully rejoice in a nature created to the measure of man. But all too soon the agreeable swaying caused by the rippling water comes to an end, and the pirogues grate to a halt on the pebbled bank. The arduous hike on which we are setting out begins enthusiastically. The valley displays alternating strips of dry and flooded earth. Wading barefoot through the water is painful, and we tread hesitantly and awkwardly on the uneven stones. We are surrounded by egrets, elegant in their fragility, which eye us while no doubt lamenting the fish we have frightened away. After this refreshing, aquatic stroll, we set out on a steep and narrow path that disappears into a tangle of thickets. The climb becomes increasingly difficult since we are obliged to stride constantly from one block of stone to another, something no less acrobatic for not being heroic. By the evening of the first day we have conquered close to 1500 meters. At the top of our first hill, the fresh and invigorating air fills us with strength and joy. The view extends over an immense panorama that includes the spurs of the Himalaya on one side, while on the other Lake Phewa seems to disappear into a gulf.

We are in the central area of Nepal, known for its medium-sized mountains or high hills. In the north, they can reach some 3000 meters; to the south, they fall as low as 1000 meters. It is in this part of the country that the large valley of Pokhara, which we have just left, and that of Katmandu are situated.

The paths we are treading are in Gurung territory, and form part of an immense network of paths that make it possible to reach all the villages, descend into all the valleys, and follow the ridge lines of the hills. These paths are maintained in a natural way by the constantly circulating

livestock; besides, the villagers are responsible for those that fall in their territory. Erosion obliges them to build stone steps, either by cutting them in the rock or bringing the stones from elsewhere. One would like to know how many hundreds of kilometers of paths wind over all these slopes. The steps are particularly high, sometimes set at a 60-degree angle. For hiking enthusiasts this is the great attraction of the country of the Gurungs, for there you can travel everywhere with no danger, with a good guide. Only the rivers may constitute impassable obstacles. Hanging footbridges, permanent or temporary, make it possible to cross the streams, but these fragile constructions of lianas and branches are often swept away by the torrential monsoon rains. Tree trunks offer another way of crossing, but who would care to risk it: Every year bridges are the cause of many serious accidents, and the same is true throughout Nepal.

The flora and fauna are still very plentiful, especially on hilltops where the trees have been preserved. The dense forests contain chestnut and walnut trees, mountain bamboo, bombax with flaming red flowers, sandalwood, pines, etc. Orchids are everywhere, their roots placed on mossy branches. The rhododendrons brighten the forests with the colors of their flowers as early as the month of March. Macaque monkeys leap from one perch to another on the highest branches, swinging back and forth in games of agility and equilibrium. The leopard is rarely seen. As in all countries of the world, the fox, enemy of the hen-house, is hunted. The Gurungs practice a religion less respectful of life than Buddhism, and as a result are accomplished hunters. In former times, they used bows and poisoned arrows, but today it is with rifles that they draw a bead on the stag and the wild goat. Cows, so respected by those who profess Hinduism, often fall into the gorges and become the prey of vultures, which can be seen soaring in the sky in search of carrion. Hawks fly over the villages or countryside depending on their preference for poultry or snakes. On the river banks, the kingfishers are like flying jewels. As soon as darkness falls, large bats shoot through the sky like black flashes, searching for victims in the world of insects. On such an excursion as this, one must be able to tolerate contact with mosquitoes, spiders, hornets, fleas, lice, and other bugs. Despite the danger of swarming bees, they deserve special recognition for the delicious honey they produce, and which in these regions acquires a particular flavor and a penetrating, unfamiliar aroma. Alas, the forests that protect so much animal and vegetable life are retreating as a result of the need to increase the areas of cultivation. Fields of rice, barley, millet, and more recently corn and potatoes, are cultivated on narrow terraced strips, supported by stone walls. The terraces extend higher and higher on the hillsides. Seen from an airplane, the panorama of tall hills transformed in this cyclopean fashion is an impressive sight. This is the country inhabited by the Gurungs, the most important mountain people in the zone of medium-sized mountains, and who belong to a Mongol race from the north. It is difficult to reconstruct their past since the Gurung language is not written and legends are the only historical source. By their culture and language, the Gurungs are closely related to the Tibetans, and have been influenced by them in their religious beliefs.

The Gurungs have also created a supernatural world of benevolent or evil spirits that occupy and govern celestial spaces, nature, and man. The latter feels the presence of incorporeal spirits wandering over the hills, in the forests and fields. Fomenters of sickness and death, they penetrate invisibly into houses. For their protection, each day at sunrise, the women carry in from the fountain a copper or silver vase of pure water, placing it alongside the ritual objects on the family altar as an offering to the patron god of the house. Daily life is subject to the most diverse and unexpected superstitions, which keep the mind alert and force it to act prudently. They water the bushes that are thought to shelter spirits; they throw flowers on the rocks where the spirits have taken up their abode; they greet the sun. There are some things that can be seen and heard because they have a favorable meaning, while others must neither be seen nor heard

on pain of misfortune. Even though witches live far away and are unknown, they are feared because they can throw fire – will-o'-the-wisps! Great importance is given to dreams, which are told upon awakening and the interpretation of which is the subject of much discussion. The Gurungs protect themselves against danger by making offerings to the deities on the family altar and by celebrating *pujas* or ritual prayers. Priests are summoned in serious cases, for all ceremonies involving attempts at healing and exorcism, as well as for marriages, funerals, and feasts relating to spring, the harvest, and the new year. Depending on their beliefs, they consult a lama, a Brahman, or an officiant of the local religions, the *pucu* or *klihbri*. Each priest wears a special costume and celebrates the rite that pertains to him both in and outside the homes, or in the village sanctuary, this latter being a modest stone construction. In certain ceremonies, animal sacrifice is the most important act of the ritual. The offering of the blood of a chicken, goat, or sheep is necessary in the struggle to free the souls of the living and dead from evil spirits. The Buddhists do not perform sacrifices.

Astrologers are respected and often consulted, since it is essential to a Gurung to know his horoscope, not only for important decisions, marriage in particular, but for minor matters as well. The method of casting a horoscope is highly complicated, involving a combination of elements, stars, and the calendar, and including mythology and reading the palm of the left hand.

But all this is only one aspect of a people, most of whose men have seen many countries and different ways of life. The Gurungs were warriors by tradition. In 1742, during the reign of Prithvi Narayan and at his orders, they set out from the town of Gorkha to conquer Katmandu. In the nineteenth century, they formed most of the elite regiments in Nepal and were enlisted in the royal guard. They preferred, however, to volunteer for distant foreign armies. Military service for them was an important period in their lives, and even today young men leave their families, their villages, and their beloved mountains to become soldiers in the Gurkha regiments of the British or Indian armies. This name is a reminder of the occasion in 1742 when the Gurungs assembled in Gorkha. The Gurkha regiments proved their valor in the armies of the First and Second World Wars, and fought in many battles on the European and Asian fronts. For the Gurungs patriotism is not the motive for enlisting. They serve as mercenaries because they are well paid and because they love adventure and enjoy learning new things. The money they earn allows them to improve not only the situation of their families but also the economy of the village. But however many years they may spend in the army, the Gurungs always return to their hills, climb the familiar steps, and re-enter the village as though they had never left it, but now rich in memories and heroic tales in which they identify their wounds with glory and regret nothing. They teach the things they have learned in faraway places, to read and write, to their sons, who listen with fascination to their exploits, while themselves waiting for the day when they will depart for fabulous countries.

The Gurungs possess the precious gift of good humor, and their gaiety matched ours on first contact the evening of our arrival in the village of Tamagi in the Kaski district. They gave us a warm welcome and invited us into their homes. We were immediately surrounded by smiling faces in a large, dark room where lively flames lent grotesque shapes to the living shadows. We squatted on the floor of pounded earth, which was covered with mats woven by the women from supple bamboo stalks. Near the fire burning in a square hole, we exchanged friendly looks with the slanting eyes that sparkled with curiosity. The men began a conversation inspired by an emotion that could only have come from their memories of the countries where they had lived and which we also knew. In speaking of the present, a problem emerged that was close to all their hearts, that of the village school. Fortunately, it was the role of our companion, Gordon Temple, a representative of Unesco, to resolve it in a favorable way. Finally, the men retired to

make way for the women. Their curiosity was whetted and they asked countless questions, intermixed with pleasantries. While the men speak Nepali and a little English, the women know only the Gurung language, which delights translators. During this time, the laughing but timid children came closer and closer to revive the fire by throwing branches on it. Slowly the supply of wood was depleted, and the fire, which had gone out, was covered with ashes. In the darkness of the night, everyone retired to sleep, rolled up in warm blankets.

It was only next morning as we emerged from the house into the open air, which was as invigorating as a cold drink and could only be produced by the altitude, that we became aware of the beauty of our surroundings. Beyond an immense panorama of hills and valleys, the sun lighted up the splendor of the Dhaulagiri range. The village of Tamagi spreads irregularly across the top of a hill and its slopes, which are cultivated in terraces that undulate like waves as they descend to the river at the bottom of the small valley. Large villages in the Gurung country may contain several hundred houses, but Tamagi is of medium size. The house we occupied belongs to the type of large, fine, two-story dwellings built of stone blocks. The ground floor is raised and along its entire length runs a veranda supported by wooden columns. It serves as a shelter and makes it possible to work outdoors during the monsoon rains. The second floor, which is not used as living space, is for storing the harvest. The overhanging roof, covered with thin slabs of stone, is supported by prettily decorated wooden pillars. The walls are covered with a layer of dried and whitewashed mud. Everyday life goes on in the large room on the ground floor, kept dark by a bamboo ceiling blackened with soot. After the day's work in the fields, families reassemble here to get warm, cook, and sleep. The fire is also the place where sick people lie down to die. The Gurungs do not like solitude; the more of them there are in a house, the happier they are there.

A type of poorer house that is tending more and more to disappear is built of wooden panels covered with mud, and with a thatched roof. The Gurungs take good care of their homes, and enjoy decorating them with paintings and carving the wooden columns and pillars. The women keep the interiors spotlessly clean.

After taking a walk through the picturesque maze of alleys in the village, we pay a visit to the school, situated on a promontory commanding a splendid view. The children study in the open air, and on our arrival they all rise and greet us with "*Namaste*," the Nepalese "good-day." But they quickly take up their books again in their little hands, reading the next in loud voices as though it were a rhythmic chant. They are full of enthusiasm, and nothing can distract them from their lessons because there is nothing that seems more interesting to them – an admirable example of scholastic application.

The sun, already high in the sky, reminds us that we must leave our hospitable friends. "*Namaste*" expresses the sorrow of parting as well as the joy of meeting. One accompanies the greeting with a smile and a joining of the hands.

We leave lightheartedly in our thin clothes. The sky is blue but it is not to remain so! But ignorance is bliss. Once again, stretching our muscles on the steep steps, we follow the narrow paths through the rhododendrons, surrounded by multicolored butterflies.

We do not feel alone during our hike because a number of cows, whose freedom seem to be so respected, roam around us. We pass toiling women, their faces withered but still smiling, despite the weight of the loads they carry. The wheel is unknown in the mountains of Nepal, and things are transported on the backs of men and women, loads that can weigh as much as fifty kilos. Despite the exertion, these small, slender women walk supply on their bare feet and never stop singing; their clear voices soar and rebound from the mountains to the valleys. With the help of a strap across the forehead, they carry wood and leafy branches that serve as fodder for the cows. Bamboo panniers are also used sometimes. The technique of basketwork is a familiar

one to the Gurungs, who are experts in the art of splitting bamboo stalks into thin strips, and then interlacing and knotting them to make mats, panniers, baskets, and rain mantles to cover the head and back. Rice straw is also used to make cradles and cushions.

Our journey takes us farther and farther into the country of the Gurungs, all the way to the Modi Khola river. We go from hills to valleys, out of breath as we climb, victorious on the heights, fearful during the dizzying descents. The secret of keeping up one's exertion is to eat little but drink plenty of tea. The grandeur and beauty of the landscape arouse such continual fascination that we are able to overlook our fatigue.

After the good weather, the sky became filled with dark clouds and the storm burst, accompanied by torrential rain. It was in the evening, just before our arrival in Tilahar, a village inhabited by Brahmans. Brahmans are members of the priestly caste, the leading Hindu one. A very cold welcome was reserved for us since for them we were untouchables. As we had been forbidden to enter a house, we crouched under the overhang of a roof, squeezed between the wall and a curtain of water.

After a long wait, someone brought us generous portions of rice, taking precautions in handing them to us so as to avoid physical contact. As a result of much parleying, we were offered the school as a shelter for the night, but the roof leaked and the ground was soaked. Wet and exhausted, we were pushing the desks together to lay out our sleeping bags, impatient to slip into them, when an invitation arrived for a spectacle that was being prepared in our honor. In one of the rooms, the student performers were already costumed and dancing to the sound of a creaky phonograph. It was a charming and touching spectacle, the young people seeming to want to make up by the dance for the unavoidable law governing one's reception among Brahmans. After this entertainment, we sank into a deep sleep, deaf to the patter of raindrops falling all around and on us.

Next day we are again seized by the spirit of adventure and push on with our journey, as though there were no end to the country of the Gurungs. A few days later, however, we are curbed by reality, which forces us to change direction and turn back. We tread other paths, cross other streams, climb other slopes, where we breathe the fragrance of new forests; we go through villages whose names escape us, driven to quicken our pace and further expend our strength and breath, for we can see black clouds, so alarming in the mountains, pursuing and overtaking us. Powerful lightning flashes crackle in the sky, a second storm arrives from the east, and suddenly the thunder bursts above our heads. The rain comes down in sheets, and then the drops are transformed into hailstones the size of hazelnuts. So many of them fall that the ground is covered with white marbles on which our feet slip. But the gods are watching and are on our side. At an unknown spot an old woman motions us into her shelter and generously serves us hot tea and grilled barley.

With all the submissiveness of mountain dwellers in the face of bad weather, we continue our journey. In a twilight atmosphere, one evening under the rain, we come back to the village of Tamagi, where for the second time our friends offer us a warm welcome. As soon as we enter the same large room, branches are thrown on the smoldering fire, and soon our clothes are drying to the heat of the flames. As we drink grain alcohol and eat chapatis, soft cakes of rice flour mixed with milk, we notice that the youngsters are in high spirits and that the crowd is pressing closer and closer, standing or crouching as far as the darkest corners. We are surprised to be given the place of honor in front of the only empty space, around which lamps have been placed. A young man is already beginning to beat his nimble fingers and the palms of his hands on an elongated drum, the favorite instrument of the Gurungs, and the one that accompanies their evening songs and dances. Our expectation changes to admiring astonishment when a ravishing young girl appears, wrapped in a muslin sari the transparency of which softens the

102 *The Nyatapola temple in Bhatgaon (Bhaktapur) – among the finest Nepalese pagodas – was built under King Bhupatindra Malla (1696–1722) and is consecrated to a Tantric goddess whose name has remained a mystery, and thus her statue is constantly kept veiled.*

103 *View from the terrace of a Gurung house, at 2,500 meters, looking towards Mount Machupuchare (6,997 m.), the Nepalese Matterhorn; at left, the pyramid-shaped Annapurna.*

104, 106 *This young Gurung beauty, whose regular features reveal her Mongolian origin, lives in the village of Tamaji, on the peak of a 2,000-meter-high "hill" in the district of Kaski west of Pokhara. For her dance in honor of the visitors, she has donned a muslin sari and wears a spectacular gold head-dress (cf. p. 139).*

105 *An example of everyday jewelry of Gurung women: the srimili, fine rings set at the outer edge of the ear; the bulaki, a gold trinket worn in the left nostril; and the bhiru, a necklace of large red or pink coral beads, interspersed with spiked or grainy gold or turquoise balls.*

107 *Gurung woman with srimili earrings and brilliant ear pendants in floral shapes.*

108 *The nose corolla of this Gurung woman is set with a bright red coral pearl, while large thorned or spiked silver balls alternate with the coral pieces of her heavy necklace.*

109 *Central motif of the tympanum above the famous Sundhoka portal in Bhatgaon, with its portrait of the victorious four-headed, ten-armed goddess Taleju (cf. p. 177).*

110–111 *Bronze statue of the goddess Lakshmi on a turtle, in the Mul Chowk or courtyard of the royal palace of Patan – the only one of the three Mul Chowks in the Katmandu valley which can be visited by outsiders. (Lakshmi and Shri – of whom a statue is also found here – are the attendants of Taleju, to whom the temple is consecrated.) These detail views show bronze jewelry: a bracelet (110) and an upper arm ring with inset turquoises (111).*

112 *Enormous statue, made in 642, of Jalashajana Narajana – Vishnu, sleeping on the giant serpent Ananta in the cosmic ocean – in Buddha Nilkantha, eight kilometers north of Katmandu at the foot of Shavapuri. Buddha Nilkantha is one of the four most important Narajana sanctuaries in the valley of Katmandu and the center of the festival of Haribodhini (Vishnu's awakening from his four-month sleep) in which thousands of believers strew the sleeping giant with flowers and cinabar powder.*

113 *View of the sacred River Bagmati between the temples of Pashupatinath, with the ghats or washing stations at the foot of the stone stairs. The dead are also burned here, and their ashes carried off by the current. In the left foreground, the roof of a linga shrine.*

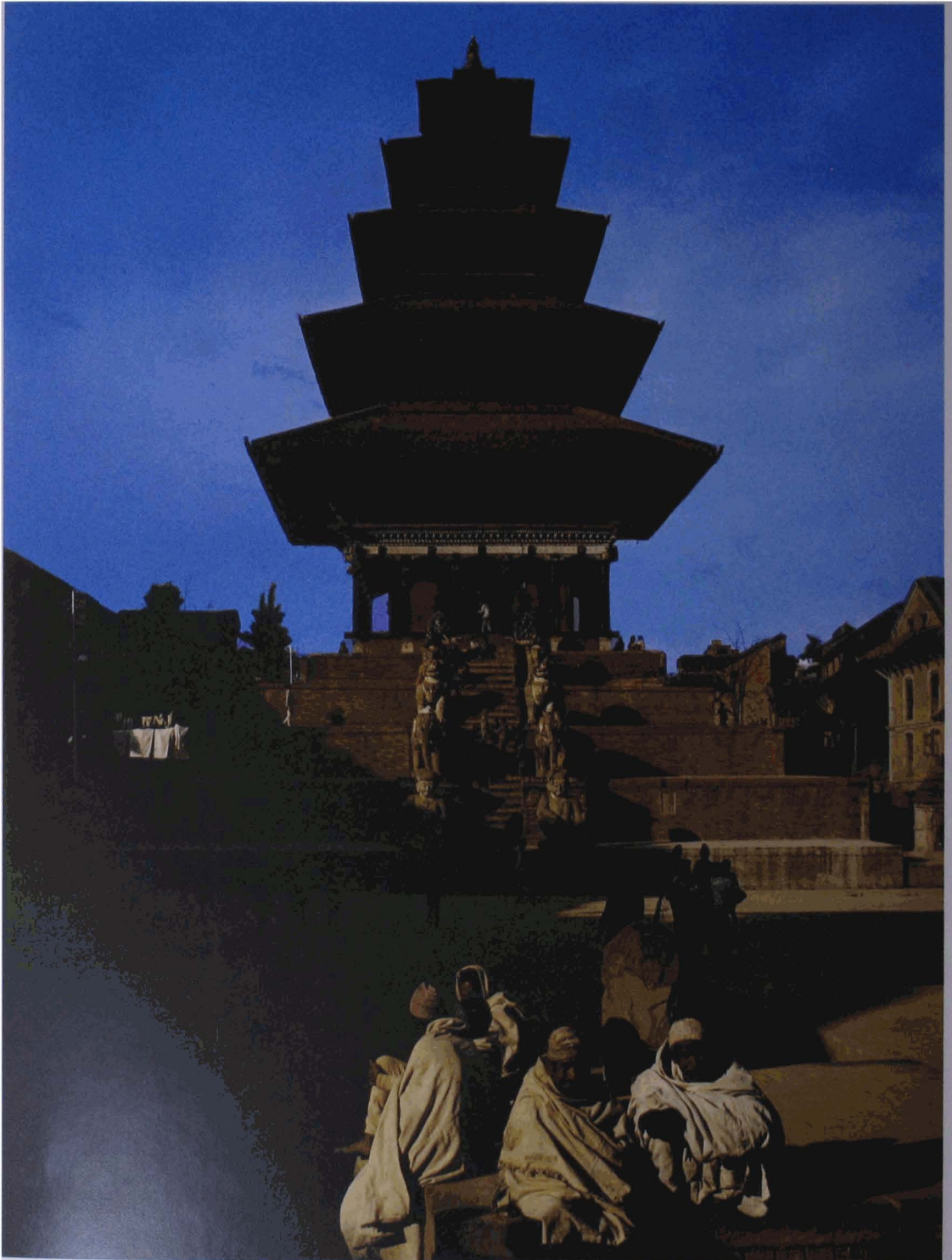
114 *In front of the dilapidated temple Trailoka Mohan Mandir in Katmandu stands this beautiful statue of the primeval bird Garuda, which was erected in 1690 upon the order of Riddhilakshmi, widow of King Parthiwendra, for her son who was still a minor. Garuda, bearer of Vishnu, defeated the Naga serpent and is especially revered in Nepal.*

115 *Non-Hindus are strictly forbidden entrance to the temple in Pashupatinath devoted to Shiva, prince of the gods, in his identity as Pashupati; the photographer managed nevertheless to penetrate unnoticed as far as the gate of the inner courtyard, on the west side, dominated by the huge gilded bronze figure of the crouching Nandi. Nandi is Shiva's carrier and the symbol of earthly fertility, and thus the faithful touch his testicles in order to partake of his life force.*

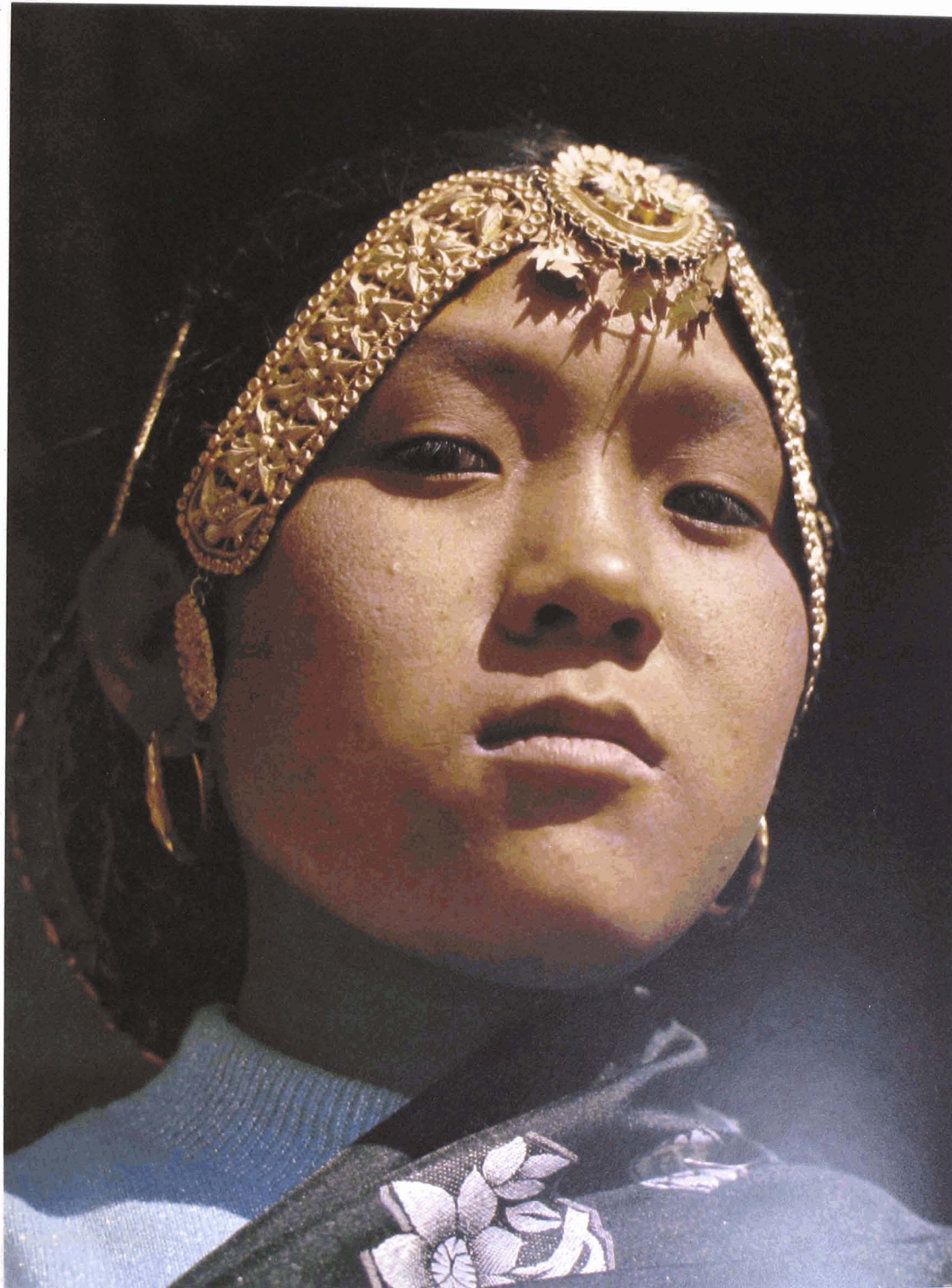
116 *Nepalese girl as guardian of a shrine in Patan.*

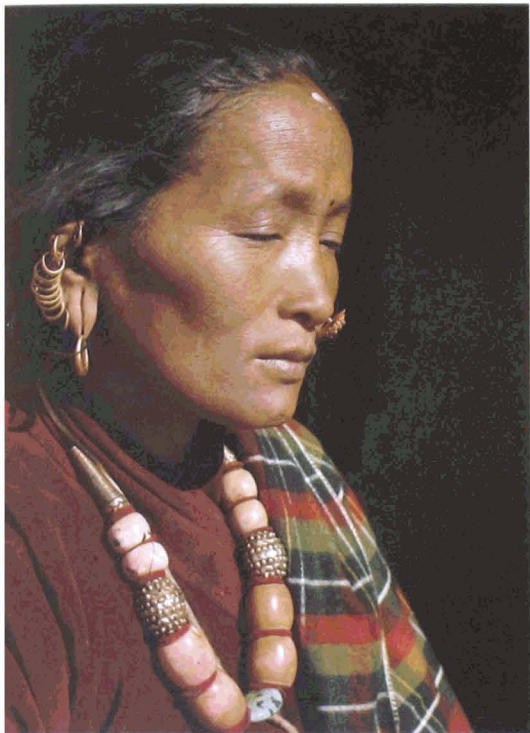
117 *A sadhu or ascetic in the temple of Dakshin Kali, which is consecrated to Kali in her frightful manifestation as the goddess demanding bloody sacrifice. Sacrificial animals have now replaced the human victims once commonly used.*

118–120 *Sadhus in Pashupatinath. The sanctuary is a site of pilgrimage for pious men from the most distant regions of India, and this fact alone explains its heterogeneous appearance. Many of the ascetics wear their hair in disheveled, mud-smeared strands (119) to demonstrate their renunciation of everything worldly. All three of the pictured sadhus wear around their neck a rosary known as the rudraksha made of pits of the Elaeocarpus janitus fruit; the sadhu of Picture 120 has even managed to make himself a curious kind of hat out of this material.*

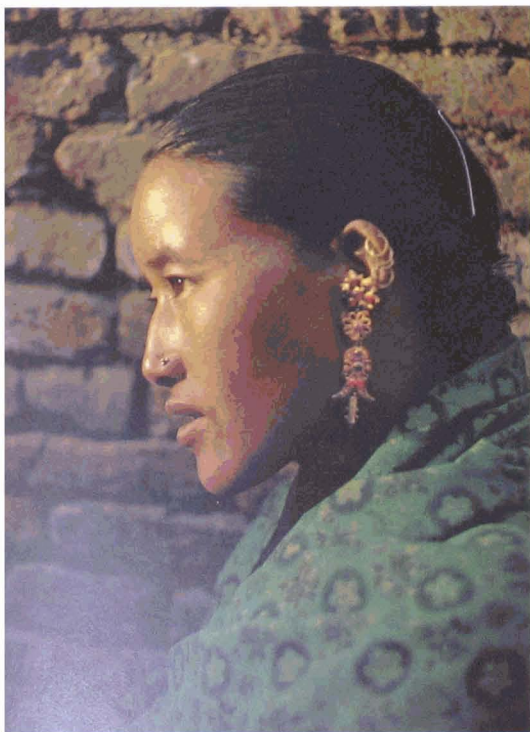








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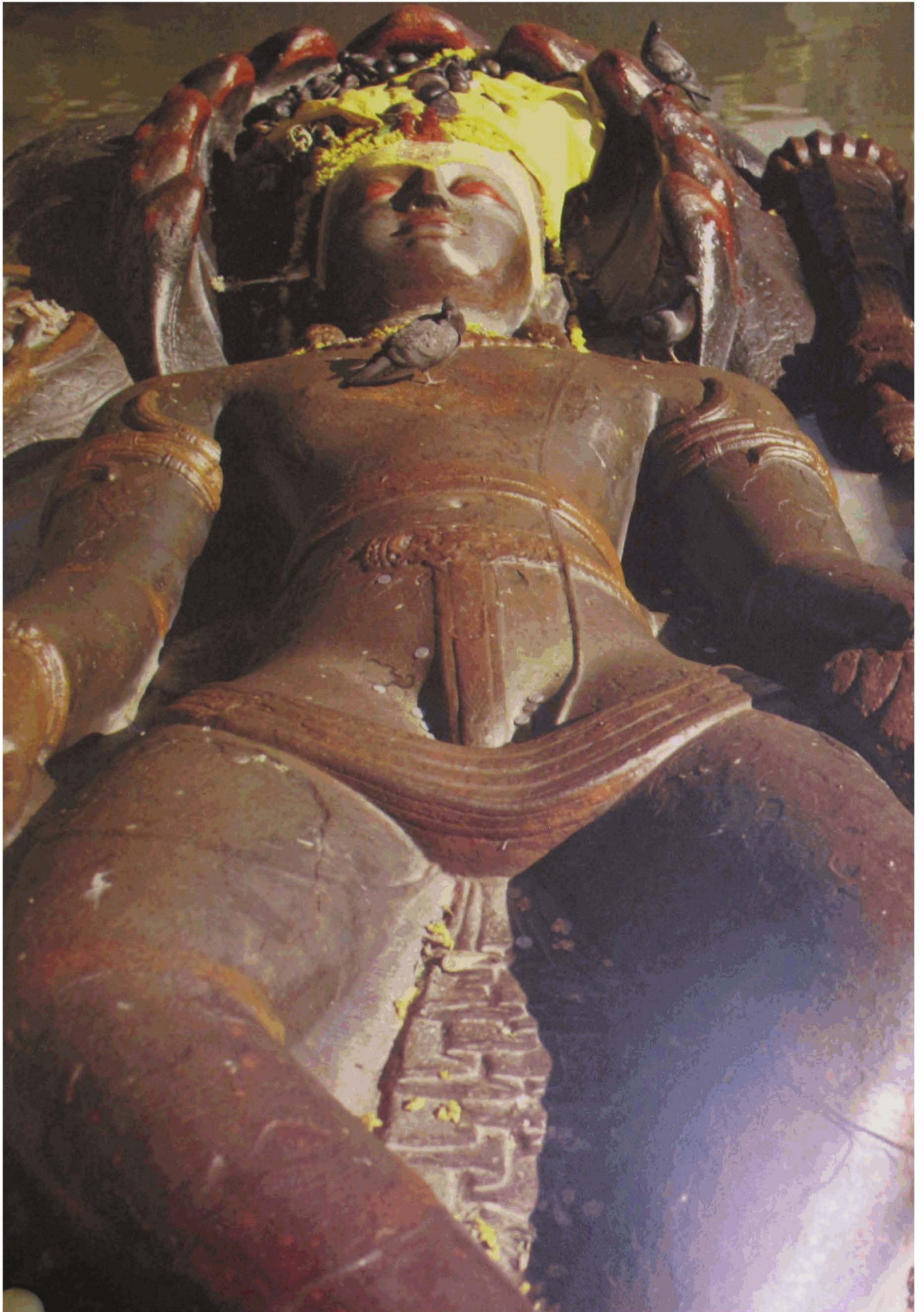


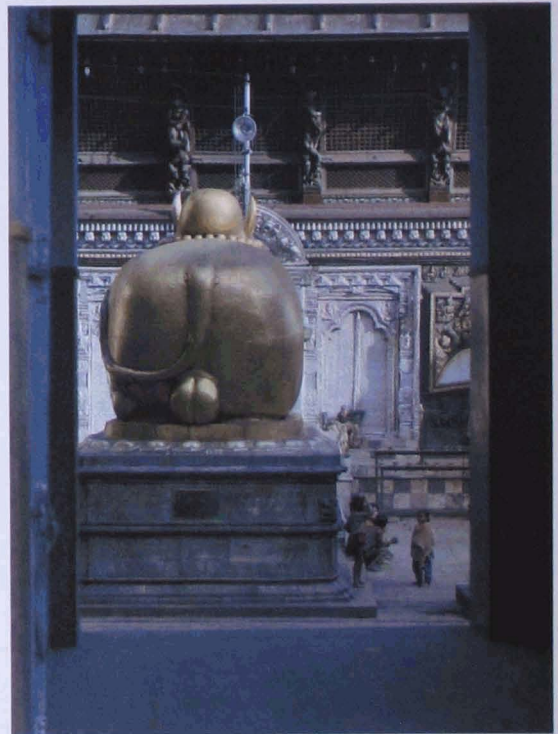
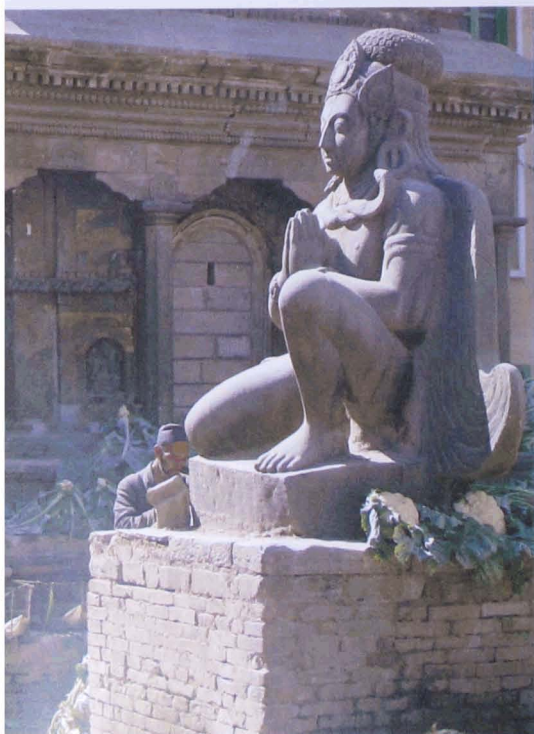


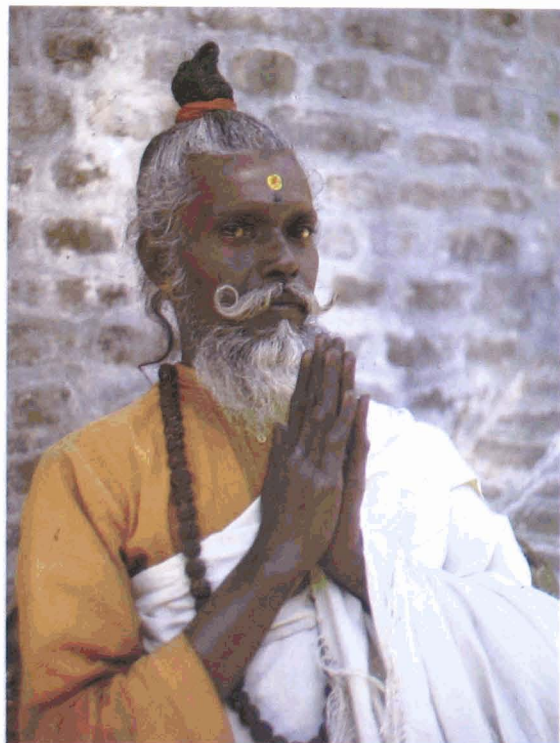
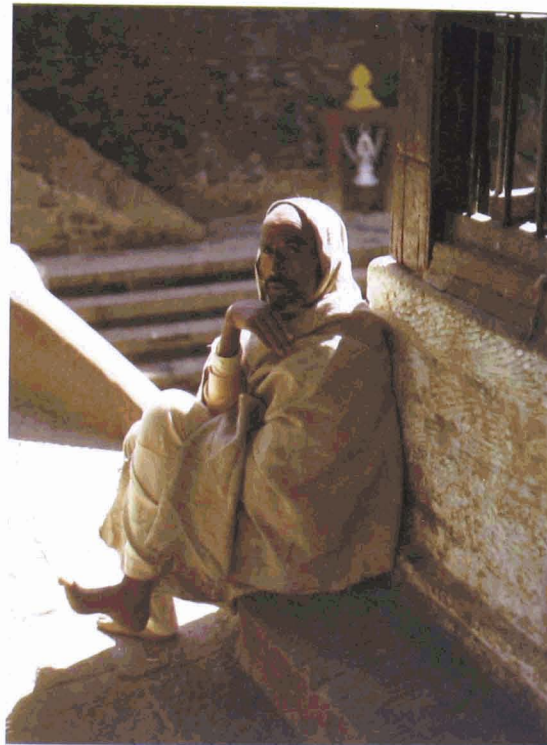
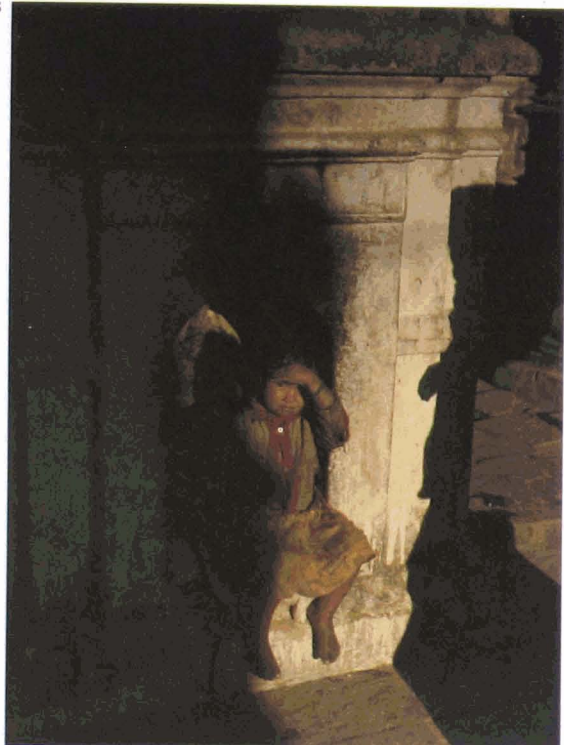
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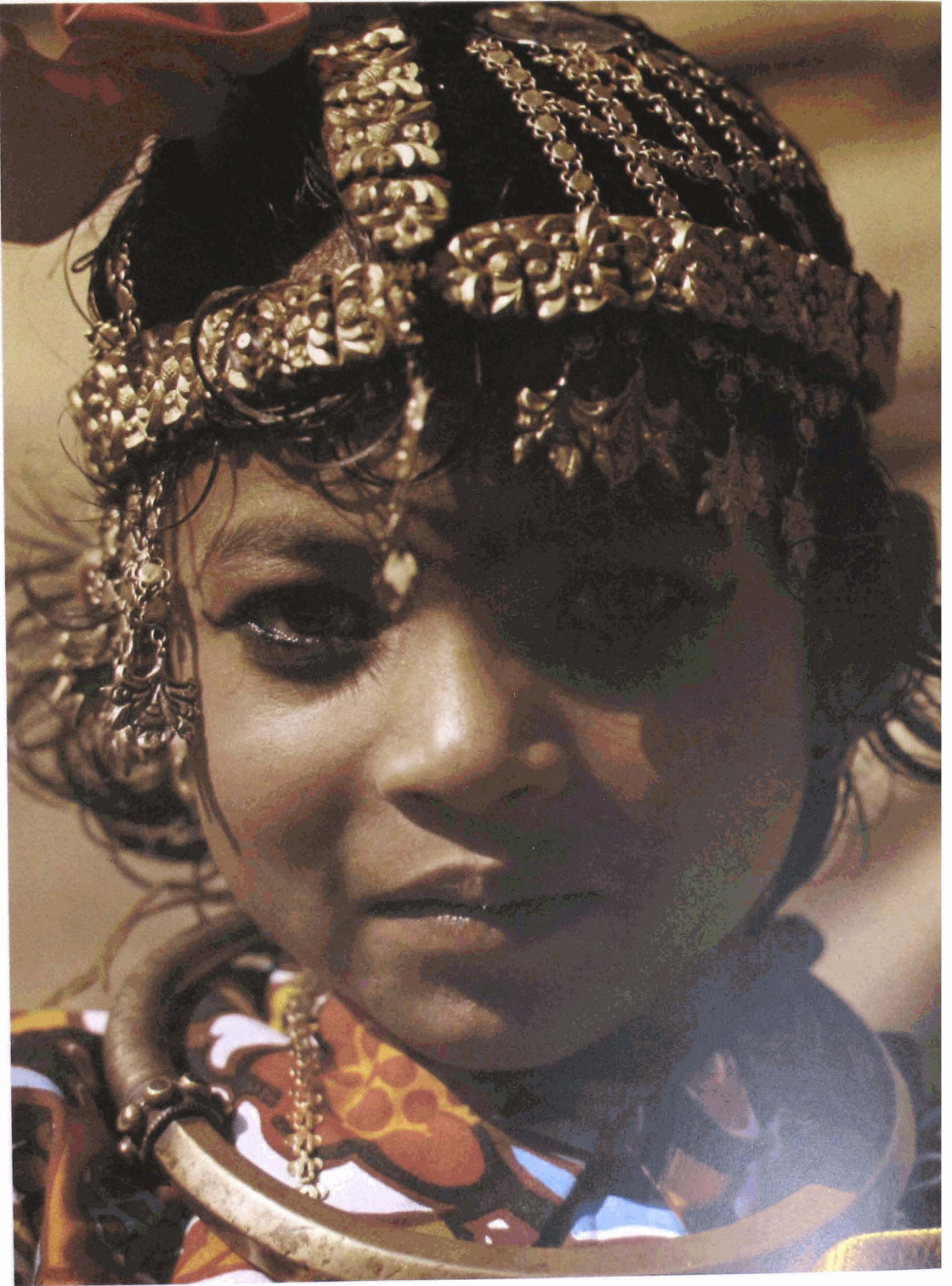
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121 *Nepalese girl with the heavy hansli or brass neck ring, worn to protect the collarbone, and only seen on children and adolescents. The sirbandi diadem is a typically Newar headdress. It is set off here by a nest of golden chains bearing amulets.*

crimson color woven with gold thread. Her supple and graceful body sways uninterruptedly to the beat of the drum, stretching itself, curving, and bending in slow harmonious movements, while her hieratic gestures simultaneously maintain a majestic languor. All eyes gaze hypnotized on the perfect grace of the dancer, her beauty heightened by splendid jewelry, among which we are able to observe a head ornament formed by two bands of repoussé gold joined by a medallion fitted with pendants that hold the coiffure and cover the temples and forehead. Two large disks in hammered gold swing between the ears and shoulders. She wears a short necklace of large coral balls separated by a few turquoises. A long necklace made of numerous strands of small green glass beads holds an ornament consisting of gold balls bristling with points and separated by disks. Her wrists and ankles are encircled by rings of gold, silver, and multicolored glass.

A second dancer, dressed in a floating sari of green muslin and adorned with the same jewelry, joins the first. The luxury of the silk fabrics and gold ornaments is in odd contrast with the simplicity of the setting. The two young girls dance tirelessly together, carried away by the rhythm of the drum. As the last glow of the lamps is extinguished, they withdraw, happy in the admiration and enthusiastic applause that they have aroused.

Next morning the sun rises on our last day. After the rains, the air is limpid and distances are blurred. Annapurna seems to have moved closer to Tamagi, and we immerse ourselves in the sight of the grandiose panorama in the hope of preserving an image of it as precise as the reality. Our friends, now joined by many others, gather in front of the house to say good-bye and pose for the last photographs. The women are smiling and charming in their velvet blouses and ankle-length skirts, made from a piece of cotton fabric with varied patterns and bright colors. They wear cloth sashes around their waists, and are adorned with all their gold, which glitters in the sun. A young woman approaches wearing a large gold disk, called a *tah* in Gurung, suspended at the back of her head; a fine piece of coral is set in the center of it. The beauty of this ornament derives from the chased design, a pattern of tangled branches with leaves, fruits, and flowers.

Gurung women adorn themselves with a great variety of jewelry, among which we again notice: small gold rings attached to the helix of the ear; gold earrings fashioned in the form of flowers; a gold corolla worn on the left nostril with a small gold ring to adorn the nose. Men and women wear different models of finger rings. Bracelets of gold, silver, or colored glass adorn wrists, and finally there are ankle bracelets made of gold balls that tinkle while walking.

Gurung women love their jewelry and are proud of it. Some pieces are worn every day, while the more valuable ones are reserved for feast days. Most of it has been bought with money saved by their soldier husbands while they were serving in the army. Many pieces have been executed in other countries by Gurung or foreign craftsmen, and one thus finds examples of jewelry inspired by Nepalese or Indian models.

In the gaiety of this gathering on the occasion of our departure, we are gripped by a feeling of sadness, for the moment has come to say "*Namaste*" for one last time. We leave Tamagi, in Indian file with a man in the lead, as always in the mountains. We descend the winding paths and numerous stone steps back to Lake Phewa, where we arrive the same evening. Next day in

Pokhara, overwhelmed by images, impressions, and unforgettable memories, we board a plane for Katmandu.

In his study of the Gurungs, the ethnologist Bernard Pignède gives the following list of the jewelry they wear:

- *marwali*: small gold earring, flat and adorned with a red stone (*tuti*).
- *srimili*: small gold rings fastened on the outer edge of the ear.
- *na-ku*: large gold rings fastened like *srimili*.
- *dhori*: small gold disk screwed through the back part of the ear above the lobe.
- *dalmar* (or *citi*): small gold earring worn by boys until the age of twelve or thirteen. It is shaped like a lozenge and hangs pincer-fashion on the earlobe.
- *bhiru*: necklace of eight to ten balls of reddish pink coral and two green stones, often combined with two or four gold balls.
- *asurphi*: ring for the left ring finger.
- *ghanmai*, *phyutani*, *hakim*: different kinds of gold rings worn on the little finger by men and women. The *kalli* is worn only by women.
- *berneca*: ring shaped like a macaroon.
- *balo*: red and green bracelet . . . in glass, worn by women. They break it on the death of their husbands.
- *khokre*, *sable*: gold bracelet worn on both ankles. The *khokre* alone is coated with gold. Those of children, especially small boys, are of silver.
- *rayi*: another ankle bracelet, carved in a series of gold balls.
- *bulaki*: trinket worn on the lower part of the left nostril.

Holiday ornaments:

- *khilip*, *zoh*, *tah*: they form a magnificent headdress, all in gold. The *tah* is a huge gold disk placed above the forehead and inclining forward. The temples are covered by two plaques (*zoh*), while the back part of the head is adorned with two other smaller gold plaques (*khilip*). Each of these ornaments is finely chased and decorated with small red stones.
- *hamel*: a necklace falling low on the chest. It is made from a ribbon to which gold medals are attached along the outer edge.
- *naogir*: a necklace of the same cut. Gold balls are strung at intervals on strands of tiny green beads.
- *arse*: likewise a necklace falling on the chest, and made of strings of small green beads to which is added a long gold ornament fashioned as a series of disks and spheres.
- *biz* or *bij*: a massive gold ornament in the form of a double crescent hanging on the chest by a black ribbon.

At the end of this list, Bernard Pignède remarks that it is hard to tell which ornaments are specifically Gurung. (Bernard Pignède, *Les Gurungs, une population himalayenne du Népal*, Mouton & Co., Paris/The Hague, 1966.)

3. Introduction to the Religions and History of Nepal

Terai, the lowlands of Nepal, is an extension of the Ganges plain. It is a narrow strip forty-five kilometers in width, but which extends the whole length of the country, eight hundred kilometers. It is bounded by the Sarda river in the west and the Mechi river in the east. Its altitude does not exceed two hundred meters. In the north, the plain halts at the foot of the Siwalik hills, the southernmost of the Himalaya.

The climate and vegetation of Terai are tropical, and life there is essentially conditioned by the heat and water. The monsoon causes considerable rainfall. During the period from June to September, the large Thuli, Rapti, Narayani, Bagmati, and Kosi rivers, which empty into the plain water melted by the sun from the snows and glaciers of the Himalaya, spread through swamps from which emerge acacias and lake villages. The birds are the masters of these landscapes, which become a paradise for them. Along with thousands of ducks and geese of various species, one can see such water birds as cormorants, pelicans with their slow and heavy flight, flamingos with the orange-pink colors of dawn, herons, ibises, and strident-voiced eagles. In the tepid water of the shallows and on the warm sands, loiter treacherous crocodiles. In contrast to the celestial freedom of winged fauna, the noble but dangerous animals find their habitat in the dense, protective jungle. These are the elephants, armored rhinoceroses, tigers, leopards, and water buffalo. At present all are fighting for the survival of their species.

Terai is inhabited by different ethnic groups. The Tharus belong to an ancient Nepalese race, while the Brahmans, members of the priestly sect, were not the only ones to come from the south. The majority of the population is similar to the Indians and speak a related language. In the heat and humidity, men stoop over the earth to plant nourishment and pleasure – rice and tobacco. The slender, graceful women wrap themselves in brightly colored saris and adorn their nudity with decorative ornaments of silver or tin, the models for which, as well as the style, bear the characteristics of the jewelry of India.

Gautama Buddha

There is a place in Terai that is the Bethlehem of Asia. Near the southern Nepalese city of Kapilavastu, capital of the kingdom of the Sakyas, the future Buddha was born about the year 563 B. C. to the Aryan family of the Gautamas, on a night of full moon in the garden of Lumbini. His father was King Suddhodana and his mother the beautiful Queen Maya. The infant received the name Siddhartha. The young prince was surrounded by teachers who taught him all the arts. He grew up enjoying all the agreeable aspects of life that had been lavished on him and tasting all its pleasures. But when he became a man, Siddhartha was not happy in himself, for his thoughts were troubled by the search for perfect happiness, that is to say happiness without suffering. Toward the age of thirty, the sated prince decided to abandon everything, family, wealth, and glory, in order to live in solitude and asceticism. After years of ordeals, meditation, and spiritual searching, Absolute Truth was one day revealed to him at dawn. He became Buddha the Awakened One. From his holy lips flowed a song of victory. Rejoicing in his state of awakening to Knowledge, he plunged for seven days into silent concentration. In a final effort to tempt him, the demon-god Mara appeared to him, but the Blessed One triumphed over the demon just as he had triumphed over all his ordeals. Filled with love for mankind, Buddha set out on the road for Benares, where numerous disciples thronged around him to listen to the Word. He wandered through the Ganges valley for forty years, teaching the Dhamma or Doctrine. The essence of Buddha's teaching is expounded in his first sermon, the "Four Noble Truths," which are *dukkha* or suffering, its origins, its cessation, and the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*. The Master taught the Doctrine of the non-self, Universal Love, he established the foundations of morality and Buddhist society, and advised his followers to struggle against ignorance and the "Great Thirst" of Desire. He insisted on the need for joy, tolerance, and vigilance. He spoke of Karma, of Death, and of Rebirth. Buddha taught not only by the Word but by Silence as well.

At the age of eighty, Buddha's breathing stopped during the supreme serenity of his meditation. His mission was accomplished, and he had reached the end of the cycle of

transmigrations. He had obtained Nirvana or the Blessedness that imparts the knowledge of ultimate Truth.

The humble Teacher, who wanted only to relieve men of suffering and teach them a discipline of life, was a founder of religion. The Dhamma gained impressive breadth, and gave birth to spiritual values that spread all over Asia. Around the Doctrine, there developed a higher philosophy, psychology, mystique, and metaphysics, in which mankind's highest summits were attained.

In his journey to the Himalaya, the reader, to whom this book may serve as a modest guide, has been given a glimpse of populations that worship Buddha, of the form of life with which this religion imbues them, as well as of the extent of the culture to which it gave birth in Tibet, Ladakh, Kashmir, and Nepal.

It is conceivable that Buddha visited Nepal in the course of his wanderings. In the year 250 B. C., King Asoka, one of the greatest sovereigns of India, made a pilgrimage to Lumbini, where he had a commemorative tower erected around which twentieth-century pilgrims still piously assemble. Asoka also traveled through the large valley where sanctuaries, perhaps dating from this period, are found that rank among the oldest and most interesting in the Buddhist world. These are the stupas of Swayambhunath and Bodhnath, and also the four stupas of Patan, whose mystery remains complete. These monuments show how the religious movement from the south took root in the great valley. From there it was to advance still farther north to Tibet, where it reached its full development in the form of lamaism. It was also by starting from Nepal that Buddhism reached China.

Hinduism

Hinduism is the most important religion in Nepal, not only for the number of its adherents (80 % Hindus to 20 % Buddhists) but also because it is the official religion of the state. A religion without a founder, its origins are lost in the darkness of the past. Its sources are the Vedas, the sacred books of India, written in archaic Sanskrit and attributed to a revelation by Brahma. The poetic and religious texts contain prayers, hymns, and magical formulas, including those relating to ritual sacrifice. Hinduism, which developed in the course of centuries, gave birth to a philosophy, an art of living, and numerous superstitions.

Over the pantheon of gods and their antagonists, there rules a trinity: Vishnu, the Immanent, inner power and source of perpetual life; Shiva, embodying the power of disintegration and rebirth, god of silence and darkness, his emblem being the *lingam* (phallus); and Brahma, the creator and organizer of the world.

Among the goddesses, Shakti symbolizes divine energy. The three gods have their consorts who are manifested under different aspects. Lakshmi is the goddess of fortune and the companion of Vishnu. Kali, the wife of Shiva, is likened to destructive time. Kameshvari is the goddess of love. Tara, which means "star," is the power of cosmic energy. All the arts, but especially sculpture, make it possible to become familiar with these deities.

Tantrism

At the beginning of the eleventh century, the monk and reformer Atisha contributed to the rise in Nepal of the cult and magical beliefs inherent in Tantric ritual. Many Nepalese sculptures attest the acceptance and practice of this doctrine, which has its temples in Patan as well as Bhatgaon.

Over the centuries, the great religions and the different forms they took have been practiced

in a spirit of tolerance encouraged by the rulers of the country. Respect for beliefs is a strongly established tradition based on the principle that there is only one religion and that the gods are identical despite their multiple manifestations.

History

The history of Nepal is above all the history of its great valley. It begins in mythology to be continued in legends, before entering into reality.

Indian civilization entered Nepal with the great king Asoka, when the Sanskrit language and script were introduced.

We know almost nothing about the early history of Nepal. It is acknowledged that a few centuries before our era and up to around the year A. D. 100, the rulers of the great valley were the Kirantis, ancestors of the present Rais and Limbus. It was during this period that Buddhism was introduced into Nepal.

The period that followed is still very obscure. The Licchavi dynasty, which reigned from around A. D. 350 to 650, is thought to have come originally from Bihar in India, where the Guptas ruled. Relations favoring the economic and cultural development of Nepal were established between the two countries. The Licchavi kings worshipped Vishnu. They are said to have been rich in gold and precious stones and to have promoted the arts. A few architectural fragments at Pashupatinath testify to these distant glories.

The Thukari dynasty, which came next, was also from India. Its founder, Amshavarman, reigned around 630. Though fervently devoted to the cult of Shiva, he proved to be liberal and tolerated Buddhist doctrine, even giving his daughter Princess Bhrikuti in marriage to King Srontsan Gampo of Tibet. This alliance cemented friendly relations with Tibet and had an important consequence – the opening of a communication route to the north. This was also the beginning of contacts with China, then ruled by the T'ang dynasty. In 646, the Chinese sent their first ambassador to Nepal.

For a long time the country was weakened as a result of being divided among a number of feudal lords. Indeed, it was only in the thirteenth century that a new and glorious period opened in Nepal with the rise of the illustrious Malla dynasty, another family originally from India. During this century, the valley of Nepal was severely tested by the attempted invasions undertaken by neighboring sovereigns. The most formidable invader was the Islamic sultan Shamuddin Ilyas of Bengal, who tried to conquer Nepal around 1350. His religious fanaticism, characteristic of Muslims, drove him to destroy all the sanctuaries, those consecrated to Buddha as well as those to Vishnu and Shiva. These events account for the fact that the monuments in the valley seldom go back further than the fifteenth century.

The great king Jaya Sthiti Malla (1382–1395), despite the brevity of his reign, succeeded in establishing order in the country and laying the foundations for a new organization that created the strength of Nepal until the eighteenth century. Being a fervent adherent of Hinduism, he encouraged its expansion and imposed rigorous caste laws.

His most eminent successor, Jaksha Malla (1428–1482), became famous for his conquests during the half century of his reign. He expanded his country's frontiers well beyond the valley. He was able to maintain the strength and unity of his kingdom, which was only broken up by his own will. In 1482, he divided the valley among his three heirs. Thus three independent kingdoms, each having its own king, were founded – Katmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur (Bhatgaon), whose glory lasted until 1768. During this long period, and despite the internecine struggles among the three sovereigns, a form of unity and amity was maintained. For three centuries, the three kings and their successors manifested a proud rivalry that was the source for

all the artistic creations of a matchless beauty and sumptuous richness that make the valley not only a jewel of the Himalaya but of all Asia. The competition was so great that it seemed that nothing could be magnificent and stately enough for the embellishment of the sovereign cities. Under the Malla kings, Nepal attained the apogee of all the arts. Artists of genius in the most diverse realms worked toward the realization of new conceptions, which they executed to perfection. Architects built temples in the pagoda style whose staged roofs are outlined in graceful curves against the sky, and splendid palaces with façades decorated in wooden openwork and with doors of bronze and gold. Sculptors brought forth gods and goddesses before the eyes of men, modeling them in clay or carving them in wood and stone. The pantheon of the three great religions became a reality at the same time that supernatural beings took on faces. Bronze was cast in the furnaces and transformed into divine statues. Wood sculptors mastered their material and rendered it transparent. Metal craftsmen fashioned gold and silver into exquisite objects and found ways to insert precious metals into architecture. Jewelers created luxurious jewelry. Newari artists and craftsmen made of art an apotheosis in the service of the gods and kings. Musicians and poets entertained the elegant courts. The artistic blossoming of the great valley under the influence of the Malla kings constitutes the fame and glory of the Nepal of today.

This period came to an end in 1768. In that year, King Prithvi Narayan, established in Gorkha and a descendant of the warrior family of the Rajputs, which had been expelled from India in the fourteenth century, set out on a victorious expedition in the valley of Nepal and made himself master of the whole country. The unified kingdom was enlarged and organized. Its eastern frontiers were pushed as far as Sikkim and in the west to Kashmir. The foundations of the kingdom of Nepal as it exists in our day were established. The present King Birendra is a direct descendant of Prithvi Narayan.

In 1816, British campaigns in Nepal were ended after a heroic Gurkha resistance by the treaty of Sagauli. Relations between the two countries became friendly and brought economic advantages to Nepal. The Gurkhas began enlisting in foreign armies.

Rivalries among members of the royal families and the nobles continued in a struggle for power. With a young noble named Rana Jung Bahadur (1846–1877) a new period in the history of Nepal began. His exploits and intelligence, as well as the brutality with which he eliminated the nobility, led him to become prime minister. Furthermore, he conferred on himself the title of maharajah, while declaring that the title as well as the office would be hereditary. It was thus that the powers of the king and his successors were cancelled by the authority of the ministers. The reign of the Ranas lasted until 1951. Their residences were huge palaces in the Victorian style, astonishing to behold in Katmandu. It was not until 1951 that King Tribuvan, grandfather of the present king, succeeded in re-establishing his authority and putting an end to the feudal regime. He devoted himself to building a democratic system. On his death in 1956, his successor, Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Deva, took power. Domestically he inaugurated a system of government based on a synthesis of the traditions of the past and the needs of modern times. This adapted democracy is called *Panchayak*. On the international level, diplomatic relations were cemented with numerous countries, and Nepal became a member of the United Nations.

The present ruler, Sri Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev was born in 1945, and succeeded his father, Mahendra, in 1972. The young monarch studied at Darjeeling, Eton, and Harvard. His travels as a student took him to three continents. The revered and very popular sovereign is married to Aiswarya Rajya Laxmi Devi Shah. The coronation of the king was celebrated with great pomp on February 24, 1975, in Katmandu.

4. *Katmandu and the Valley of Pagodas*

According to legend, a lake once covered the valley of Nepal. When the waters receded, the first people to take possession of the high plateau surrounded by the snowy peaks of the Himalaya were the Newars. They constitute a minority in Nepal, and the principal territory on which they have settled is the beautiful valley of Katmandu. The Newars have almond-shaped eyes, and are small, brown-skinned, lively, very cheerful, and intelligent. The women have a charming grace. The differences of type that one finds are due to the absorption of Indo-Nepalese elements.

The Newars have played a dominant role in the history and civilization of Nepal. A people of genius, combining all talents, they have given birth to a culture that was able to develop progressively over the centuries until it produced a blossoming so remarkable as to rank among the great artistic cultures of Asia.

The history of Nepalese art is divided into periods corresponding to the historical ones. The influences that came from India were steadily assimilated by Newar artists, who succeeded by their talent and originality in creating a Nepalese art that spread to Tibet and even China.

From the very earliest times, the Newars had recognized the beauty of metals, which they employed for the enhancement of architecture. Proof of this is provided by the impressions noted by an ambassador from China under the T'ang dynasty, who visited Nepal around the seventh century. He was dazzled by the luster of the temples and palaces, which shone like gold. The roof tiles were of copper, as well as the plaques covering the balustrades, columns, and beams, and all these things were further enhanced by semiprecious stones. Fountains played in the palace courtyards; in the most beautiful one, the water issued from the mouths of golden dragons.

When in the thirteenth century Kublai Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan and emperor of China, was converted to Buddhism, he expressed the wish to decorate the imperial chapel with images of the gods. His teacher, the Abbot of Sakya, communicated this desire to the king of Nepal, who sent him about a hundred artists. These by their labors laid the foundations of an artistic tradition that was maintained in China. Tibet employed Nepalese painters, sculptors, metalworkers, and goldsmiths, who plied their skills in Lhasa and in the monasteries. The influence of Newar artists beyond the frontiers of their country was a profound one that lasted for centuries.

The art of sculpture, whose evolution can be followed from the seventh to the twentieth century, achieves at a certain period a remarkable quality and beauty. The sculptors had as their goal to represent, especially in the form of statuettes, the gods and goddesses of Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as the Tantric divinities, and couples in the ecstasy of consummated union. They represented them young and of a perfect beauty, moving with the elegance of dancers and adorned with a variety of exquisitely designed ornaments. Newar artists seem to have been fascinated by the magic of gold, with which they covered the divine images, sometimes only the faces. They loved precious stones and were experts in the art of inlaying them in tiaras, necklaces, girdles, and bracelets molded in bronze, which thus came to life.

The symbolism of the jewelry with which the divinities are adorned has its origins in mythology. The images are the symbols of the gods, and the sanctuaries symbolize paradise, and in mythology these Edens are spaces furnished with constructions in gold, silver, and precious and semiprecious stones.

On this subject, it is important to quote an entire passage by Alain Danielou, which is of the highest interest (Alain Danielou, *Le polythéisme Hindou*, Buchet/Chastel, Paris, 1975, p. 382):

“In the beginning this world was merely non-existence. It existed. It developed. It became an egg. It waited a year. It split open. Half of the shell became silver, the other half gold. The

one that was of silver is this earth. The one that was of gold is the sky. The outer membrane became the mountains. The inner membrane formed clouds and mist. The veins are the rivers. The fluid inside is the ocean' (Chandogya Upanishad)."

The representation of Vishnu is characterized by the god's attributes, among which one can distinguish:

"The jewel Treasure-of-the-Ocean: On Vishnu's breast glitters a dazzling jewel called Treasure-of-the-Ocean. . . This jewel represents Consciousness, which manifests itself in everything that shines: the sun, the moon, fire, the word.

Individual perceptions seem to the mystic to cling to the breast of the beloved. In the myth of Krishna, when the flowers, pearls, and precious stones (which are the gods, saints, and sages) remain suspended on the neck of the one who blots out sorrows, how could the cowgirls consumed by love ever leave him?

The garland that encircles the throat of Vishnu is called the necklace-of-victory, and it is made of fragrant flowers and five strands of precious stones (which represent the five spheres of the senses).

Vishnu's earrings in the form of sea monsters represent the two methods of knowing: intellectual knowledge and intuitive perception.

The bracelets said to be made of divine substance are the three goals of life in this world: the perfection of his being, success, and pleasure.

The crown is unknowable reality.

Vishnu, and especially his incarnations, always wear a light yellow veil around the hips. This veil represents the Vedas. The dark body shines through this thin veil of gold just as divine reality shines through the sacred words of the Veda." (Ibid., pp. 239–242.)

Indra, the king of the gods in the Hindu pantheon, is particularly revered in Nepal, where each year a festival is held in his honor. On this occasion, statues of Indra are carried in procession through the streets. The god is recognizable by the third eye, designed horizontally, that cuts across his forehead. He is always represented sumptuously adorned, and the tiara he wears, inlaid with rubies and emeralds, is a masterpiece of the goldsmith's art. The same stones sparkle on the earrings and the bracelets worn on the upper arms, wrists, and ankles, while a precious girdle encircles his hips.

Tara, the mother goddess whose earliest statuettes date back to the seventh century, is represented as of an idyllic beauty and adorned with magnificent ornaments whose refinement is especially evident in paintings that show a particular abundance of fine pearls.

In the Malla cities of Katmandu, Patan, and Bhatgaon, at Bodhnath as at Pashupatinath, at Changu Narayan and Kirtipur, Buddha-Nilkantha and Balaju, Chapagaon and Godavari, Sandku and Pharping, in the villages, modest hamlets, and near isolated trees, in fact all over the valley, the gods and goddesses, as well as countless hosts of the blessed, have descended from the supernatural spheres to live among mankind. The Newar artists by their admirable art were able to link the two worlds in a living and lasting manner by building close to two thousand temples and stupas filled with sculptures and paintings representing these humanized deities.

For the Nepalese, the year unfolds in accordance with a lunar calendar marked by a great number of feasts that are celebrated with great pomp. On these occasions, parades are held in the towns, and the gods are carried in triumph. The floats are spectacular, and the Newars wear brilliant costumes and masks. Groups of musicians join the procession, and masses of flowers are worn in garlands and thrown on the ground, from which their scent rises in the air. For the populace these feasts are occasions for rejoicing in which each person mingles joy with sadness, fear with hope.

In Katmandu, in the vicinity of the square of the royal palace, near the ancient convent of

Sikunmugal, stands a large, rectangular, three-story house. A fine example of the Newar style, it was built in 1760–62, during the reign of King Jaya Prakash Malla. Two huge lions guard the entrance portal. Against the smooth, white façade, the dark woodwork forms a striking contrast. Elaborately carved wooden frames decorate the windows surmounted by tympana and by balconies with corbeling. In the wood, the artists have restored to life legendary heroes and mythological scenes. This fine palace is the abode of the living goddess Kumari, a name that means “virgin.” She embodies the spirit of the goddess Taleju, patroness of Nepal and protectress of the royal family. Taleju’s temple, a pagoda with a three-tiered roof, rises admirably over the capital.

The goddess Kumari leads a secluded existence in her palace. She has been chosen at about the age of four from a Newar family in Katmandu belonging to the so-called *Vanra* caste of goldsmiths. The family must be attached to the Buddhist cult of the Sakya sect, which attests to the interpenetration of Buddhism and Hinduism. The selection of the child, whose body must be healthy, perfect, and unblemished, is confirmed by secret rites connected with the Tantric mysteries. She must undergo, without any outward show of emotion, the ordeals of fear that are inflicted on her. Her courage and self-mastery are proof of her incarnation, confirmed by the priests and astrologers. The little girl who has become a goddess leaves her family for the palace of Kumari Chowk, where women surround her and dress her in the finest silk, velvet, and brocade robes. A crown inlaid with precious stones is placed on her head, and she is adorned with the most sumptuous jewelry. The vestal Kumari leaves her palace only once a year, on the occasion of the feast of the king of the gods, Indra Jantra. Since her bare feet are not allowed to touch the ground, a man carries her to her chariot, which is drawn by the arms of men through the streets of Katmandu.

She then appears to the populace in all her glory, splendidly dressed in a sari of red silk embroidered with gold. Her hieratic face is framed with jewelry. She wears a gold tiara sparkling with gems; on each side clustered tufts of crimson wool fall to her shoulders, but leave her heavy ear pendants showing. Her chest is hidden under a pectoral in repoussé gold, on which one can recognize the image of the fearful spirit Bhairava. A necklace holds a large gold *tayo*. Her face is heavily painted, with the forehead in red bordered by a white line. A ruby *tika* gleams in the center, and the lines of *kohl* draw the corners of the eyes up to the temples. (The *tika* is a sacred red dot marking the center of the forehead. It is made with a paste of sandalwood mixed with cinnabar.)

Kumari’s chariot is flanked by two others in which two boys have taken their places. One wears the mask of Ganesh, the elephant-headed god of wisdom, and the other the mask of Bhaivara. The cortege makes its way slowly through the awed and respectful crowd.

The goddess Kumari, symbol of virginity, reigns until she has her first period. The pubescent girl is then given back to her family. She can get married, but no man would dare deflower her, since he would run the risk of an early death.

Several legends explain the cult of the goddess Kumari, which has its origins in an obscure past. A second Kumari resides in Patan, and a third in Bhatgaon.

Once they have seen Kumari, the Newars retain within themselves the calm impression imparted by the sight of the pure goddess, until the impending day when they will suffer the impact of adverse forces.

While Kumari cannot, under pain of seeing her reign interrupted, lose a single drop of blood from the slightest wound, the extreme opposite is the very essence of bloodthirsty Kali, who represents the destructive power of time.

Kali, the consort of Shiva, is represented on thankas under a frightening aspect. The black and naked goddess – her garment is space – stands over a corpse and wears a necklace of skulls.

Her laughter is an expression of scorn for those who think they can escape her. She projects her four arms, symbols of the four directions. In one hand she holds a sword, and in another a severed head, but her cruelty has its limits – the third hand is the one that dispels fear and the fourth is the one that gives.

Kali's same gesture of death is executed and repeated every week at Dakshin Kali, located in a wooded ravine with a rushing torrent. One descends on foot into the gorge to the shrine of Kali, housed under a roof supported by four serpents. Shiva's tridents, pointing toward the sky, symbolize creation, preservation, and destruction.

Male pilgrims, arriving steadily, bring chickens or goats to be immolated. Bells ring, while in a tiled enclosure the sacrificing priests cut off the heads of the victims with a blow of the sword. The blood being offered to the voracious goddess spurts and flows freely, the executioner reserving for himself the privilege of drinking a bowl of it. Sadhus sing hymns and recite prayers. Women in festive robes bring their offerings, sal leaves rolled and pinned to contain rice, *tika* powders, incense, red ribbons to please Kali, and hibiscus flowers.

After these scenes of sacrifice, it is with a sense of relief that the traveler regains the picturesque road bordered by agaves, which runs precipitously up the mountains to descend again into the Bagmati river valley, which it follows all the way to Katmandu. Coming back from the south, he will set out again toward the north to take a stroll in the Balaju park at the foot of the Nagarjun hill. Nights when the full moon is out are sacred and favorable for ritual baths. In a large basin into which twenty-four stone dragons copiously discharge water, a great number of persons, coming from all the surrounding area, splash and bathe with cheerful excitement, while those awaiting their turn sing and dance by the light of the stars and oil lamps. Before dawn, the pious throng goes to a square basin in whose waters rests a black stone statue of Vishnu. This image is a replica of a soothingly beautiful one at Buddha Nilkantha, an hour's walk to the north and at the foot of Mount Shivari. In an enchanting landscape, almost tropical in its vegetation, lies a village that contains a marvelous surprise. Between the buildings of a monastery is a courtyard in whose center is a basin, and over the surface of the water stands a monumental stone sculpture of the seventh century representing Vishnu Narayana. The god is reclining on a bed of intertwined *nagas* (serpents), their heads raised and curving in a crown as though to protect the head of the god. The god sleeps, reabsorbing everything that exists, on the giant serpent Ananta who floats on the cosmic ocean.

In the month of October, Vishnu emerges from his long sleep, and it is then that the faithful come to offer him basil leaves. But every day a few people approach the motionless image to absorb its emanations of calm and serenity. They deck his body with flowers and red powder, while someone rings a bell so that Vishnu's slumber will not be too deep.

Pashupatinath

Eight sacred rivers, their courses confused, water the valley of Katmandu. In one of them flow waters having the power to purify the living and the dead. This is the Ganges, called the Bagmati in Nepal. Since the most remote times a holy city has grown up on its banks whose aura extends beyond frontiers. This city, Pashupatinath, may have been founded in the third century by King Pashupreksha. Since that time rulers of all periods and influential priests have, throughout the fluctuations of history, contributed to the construction of temples and symbolic *linga*. Every architectural fragment and remnant of stone are tokens of the past. Certain stelae date from the Licchavi period, while a fine statue of Lakshmi, goddess of fortune, dates from the seventh century. Soil as yet unexcavated most surely holds numerous works of art, like the admirable statue of Buddha Sakyā, whose bust alone emerges from the earth.

Shiva, the national god of Nepal, reigns over Pashupatinath, where the main temple is dedicated to him. In the city of the dead and dying, Shiva, god of the destruction of life and its rebirth, is honored. In the courtyard of the pagoda temple, with its double-tiered roof, marble walls, and gold and silver doors, stands Shiva's mount, the bull Nandin ("joyous"), a giant of strength and the emblem of the god. Made of stone and covered with gold plaques, it reclines before that other emblem of Shiva, the *lingam*. It is the bull mastered by the power of the universe. On the sacred square, forbidden to non-Hindus, the gold-pronged trident is pointed toward the sky. Farther on, the monkey king Hanuman is dressed on feast days in a purple cloak. The numerous temples, shrines, chapels, and hermitages constitute an intermediary city between the earth and nirvana. It extends over both banks of the Bagmati river. The latter then disappears into a ravine, between rocky cliffs in which caves were dug in former times and where hermits still live today.

Water holds an essential place in Hindu ritual. It is necessary for purifying ablutions and the cult. On the west bank, ghats line the river, and it is there that the faithful take their ritual baths, the sick passively await the last moments of their earthly existence, and the dead are burned on pyres so that their ashes may afterwards be thrown into the hallowed waters of the Bagmati.

The banks are joined by two stone bridges. Overlooking the river stands a row of square monuments with four doors, each housing a giant *lingam*, symbol of the universe. This is why stone *lingams* of exaggerated size project forth from *yonis*, the source of creation for universal nature. More than a hundred *lingams* are scattered all over, housed in chapels or lined up like trees along paths where the siddhus walk fingering their beads. A wide staircase leads at the top of Mount Kailasha to a forbidden temple. Countless monkeys, much respected, leap from the rocks to the trees and add an entertaining note to these places where the atmosphere is heavy.

The town of Pashupatinath is the seat of the Pashupata sect, one of the oldest in India, which is thought to have come to Nepal around the sixth century. Each year, during the nocturnal feast of Shiva in February, thousands of siddhus from the south of India come to visit the Benares of Nepal. Despite the crowd, a few siddhus in the lotus position absent themselves from this world, while others appear to wander around telling their beads. Their bodies are covered with ashes, and long hair frames their emaciated faces marked with symbolic signs. One of them stands out because his head, shoulders, and chest are hidden under a mass of necklaces of Rudraksha seeds (*Eleocarpus janitus*). These large brown seeds are used especially by the lamas to make rosaries, which they employ in their invocations to the fierce deities and demons. For Hindus, the reddish color of the seeds symbolizes the eyes of Shiva.

Despite its scenes of pathos, one leaves Pashupatinath with a profound sense of the harmony between the two worlds of life and death, which are only words expressing two phases of permanent existence.

Bhatgaon

A few kilometers from Katmandu, a road branches off from the Chinese highway for Tibet, and passes through a grove of *Sallagheri* pines. The trunks of these beautiful trees, rare in the valley, are respected because they are regarded as the columns of a natural temple. Women go there, as to a sacred place, to take a little rest in the outdoors with their children. Beyond the wood, the road skirts a pond whose waters look inviting but conceal a danger that drives away bathers. A serpent – a transformed magician, no less – is said to dwell there.

All of a sudden, the wonders of nature pale beside the wonders of the city that comes into

122 *Celebration of the first menstruation of a young girl among the Newar (description, p. 179). The girl in the picture wears a crimson silk dress and the so-called tik mah neckband over her hansli as well as a thin gold neck chain. Her sirbandi diadem, like the tik mah, is made of repoussé gold plaques sewn onto a velvet ribbon with a green glass bead border, while the lonson headdress of gilded bronze has been developed into an over-elaborate construction of floral and leaf motifs with a peacock.*

123–127 *Sometime between the ages of four and eleven, but in any case before reaching puberty, Newar girls are betrothed to Narajan the god of love, an incarnation of Vishnu, in a symbolic engagement celebration. These photographs were taken during a ceremony of this type in Katmandu.*

123 *This girl wears another variation on the sirbandi headdress already shown (Pictures 121, 122), as well as a brilliant tik mah neckband with glass bead border.*

124–126 *One of the brides of the god wears a magnificent pectoral piece made of chased gilded brass, while another boasts a heavy neck-ring of gilded bronze with inlaid jewels, and a third, the tik mah necklace. The girls in Pictures 125 and 126 also have the holy red tika sign on their forehead, in the spot where the god has his third eye.*

127 *One of Vishna's young fiancées arrives late, looking down upon the ceremony which has begun without her.*

128 *Newar woman with the typical head scarf, half-twisted and knotted behind. Along with a smaller corolla-type ring through the upper edge of the ear, she wears large pendant earrings in the shape of discs of gilded copper or brass, 5 centimeters long, with an inset coral pearl and floral reliefs.*

129 *The living goddess Kumari Devi at a window of her residence in Katmandu (cf. p. 161). The balcony of the temple built in the style of a Newar palace is a good example of the outstanding woodworking technique of the Newar craftsmen.*

130 *Streets of Nepalese cities are completely integrated into the local life, insofar as traffic conditions will permit. This lane in Bhatgaon contains a display of pottery and, in the background, dyers at their work.*

131 *Brahman youth with a heavy neck ring made of silver, horn, and multicolored stone tarsia.*

132 *Newar children at a religious celebration in Katmandu, accompanied by musicians. The boy in the foreground has four charm boxes at once on his chest, and like the other children wears a loincloth with silver decoration and bands of bells on the calf.*

133 *Main entrance to the former royal palace in Katmandu. In the background, the hallmark of the city: the Temple of Taleju.*

134–137 *Coronation ceremonies for King Sri Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, on February 24, 1975, in Katmandu – though he had already succeeded his father to the throne in 1972.*

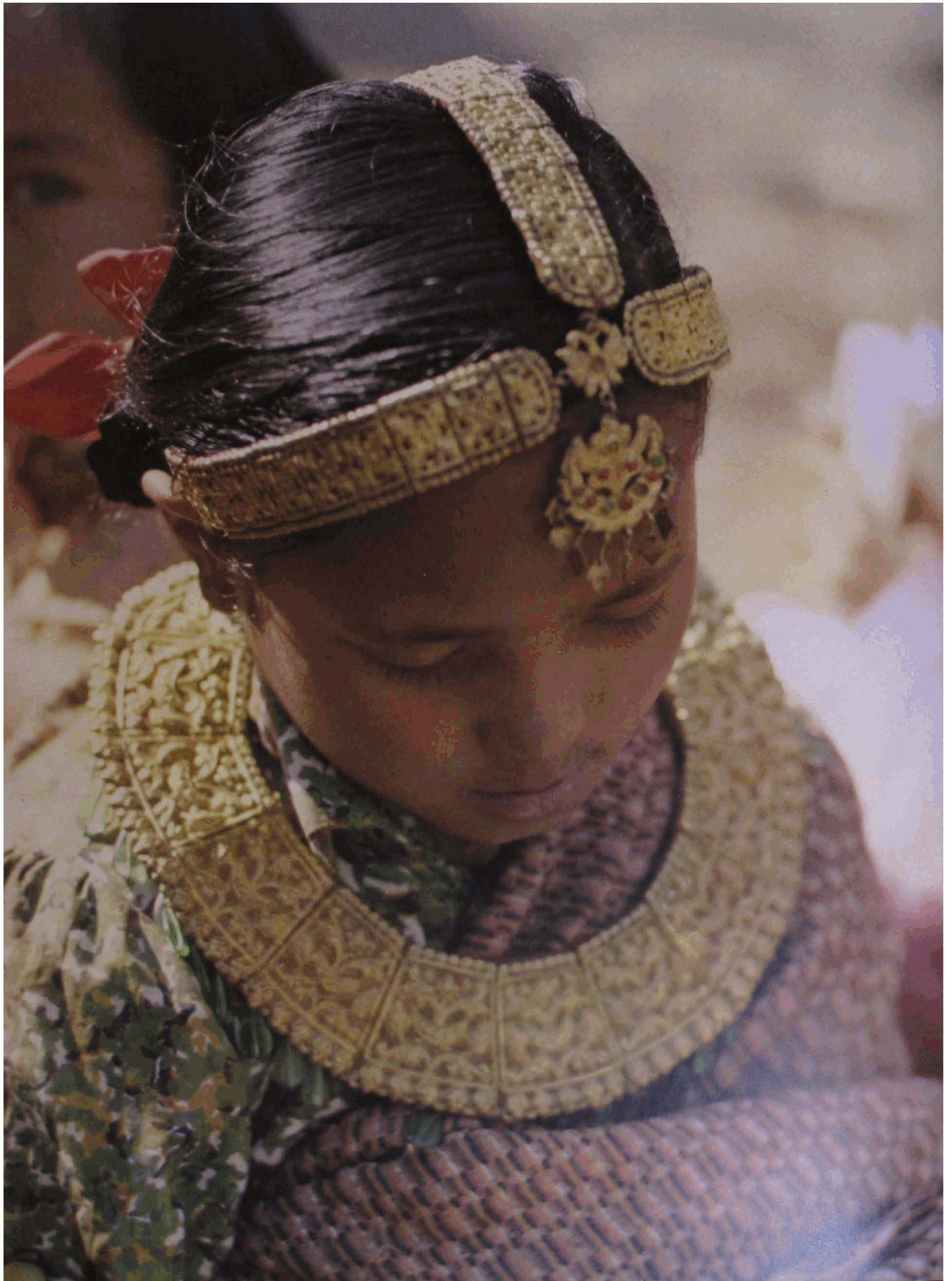
134 *After the coronation ceremony King Birendra, accompanied by high dignitaries, greets his subjects who have assembled before the palace.*

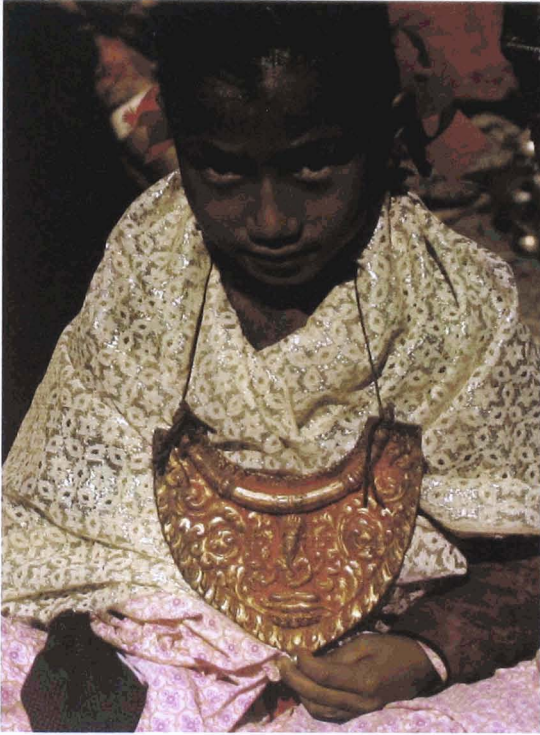
135–136 *Two Nepalese princesses in attendance at the coronation ceremonies. The one in Picture 136 is shown before the Hanuman-Dhoka portal, main entrance to the royal palace, with one of the twin stone lions which bear statues of Shiva.*

137 *The royal couple, dressed in red and white, riding on the ceremonial elephant in the procession through the streets of Katmandu. The animal, accompanied by the royal guard and elephant trainers, is richly decorated and painted in good luck colors for the occasion. This scene, with the colorful throng gathered between the ancient temples and palaces and on the roofs to greet the god-king, could have sprung right out of the pages of "1001 Nights" – were it not for the state automobiles.*

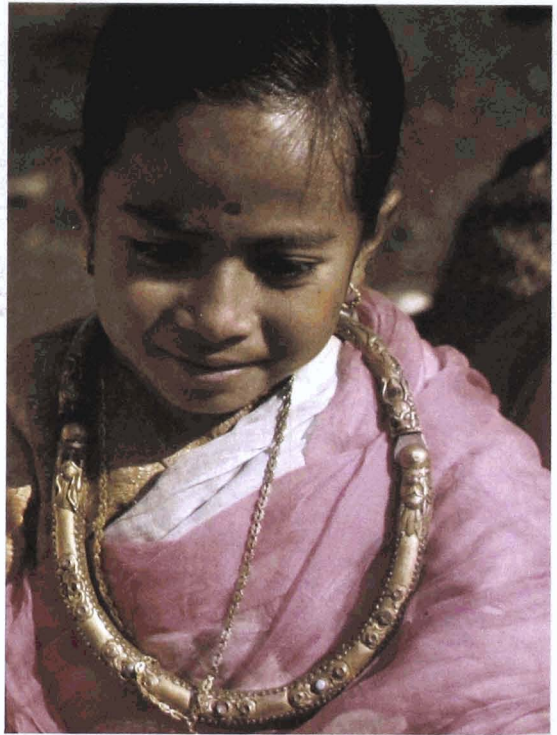
138 *Fields in the valley of Katmandu near Patan. Thanks to state-sponsored building of modern irrigation facilities in recent decades, the Katmandu valley today, in terms of surface yield, is among the most fruitful agricultural areas in Nepal. Along with rice, maize, and wheat, potatoes are also grown.*



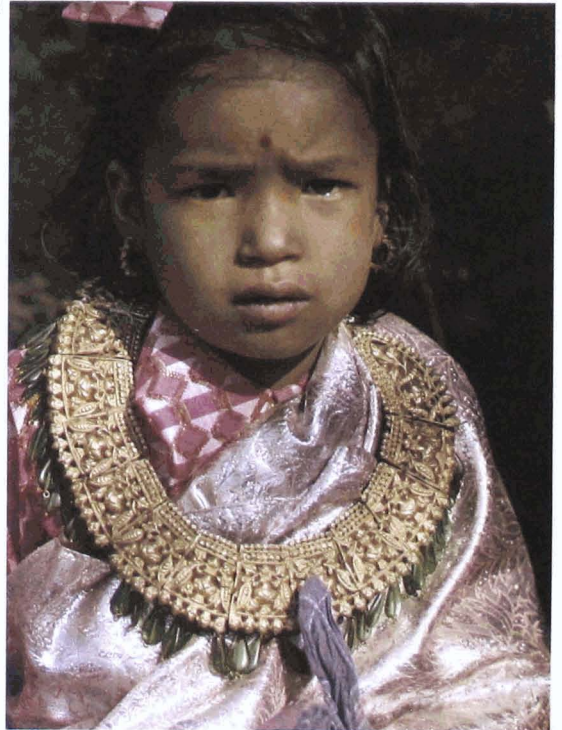




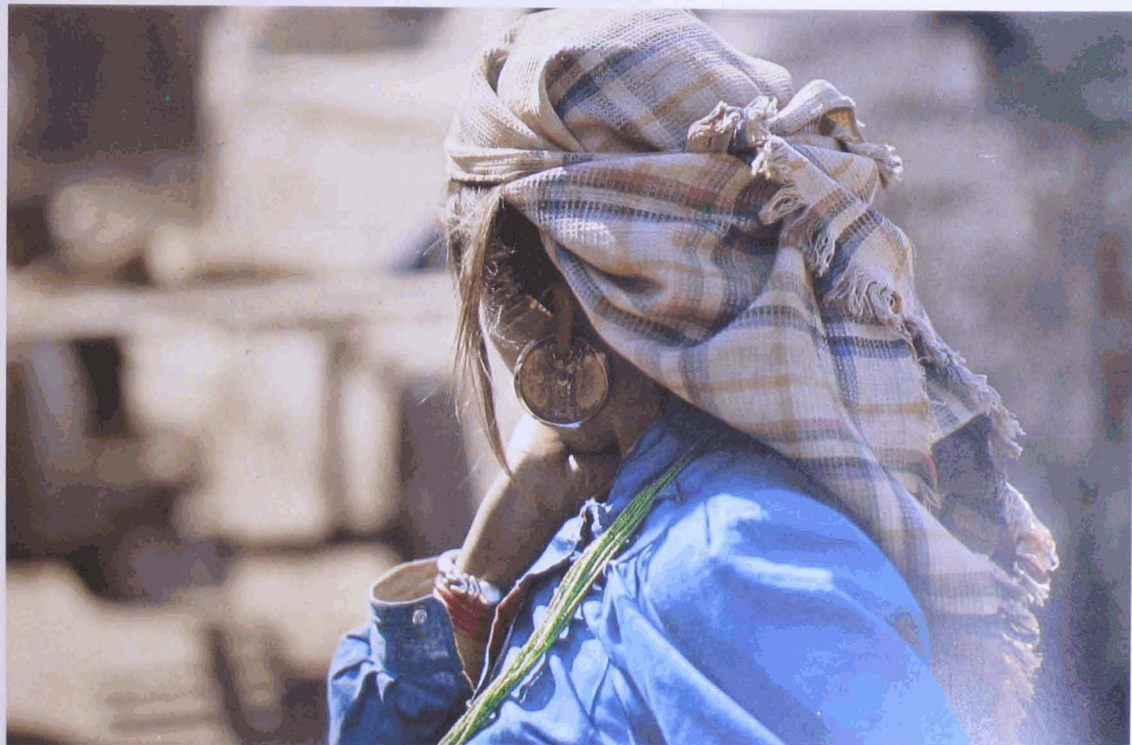
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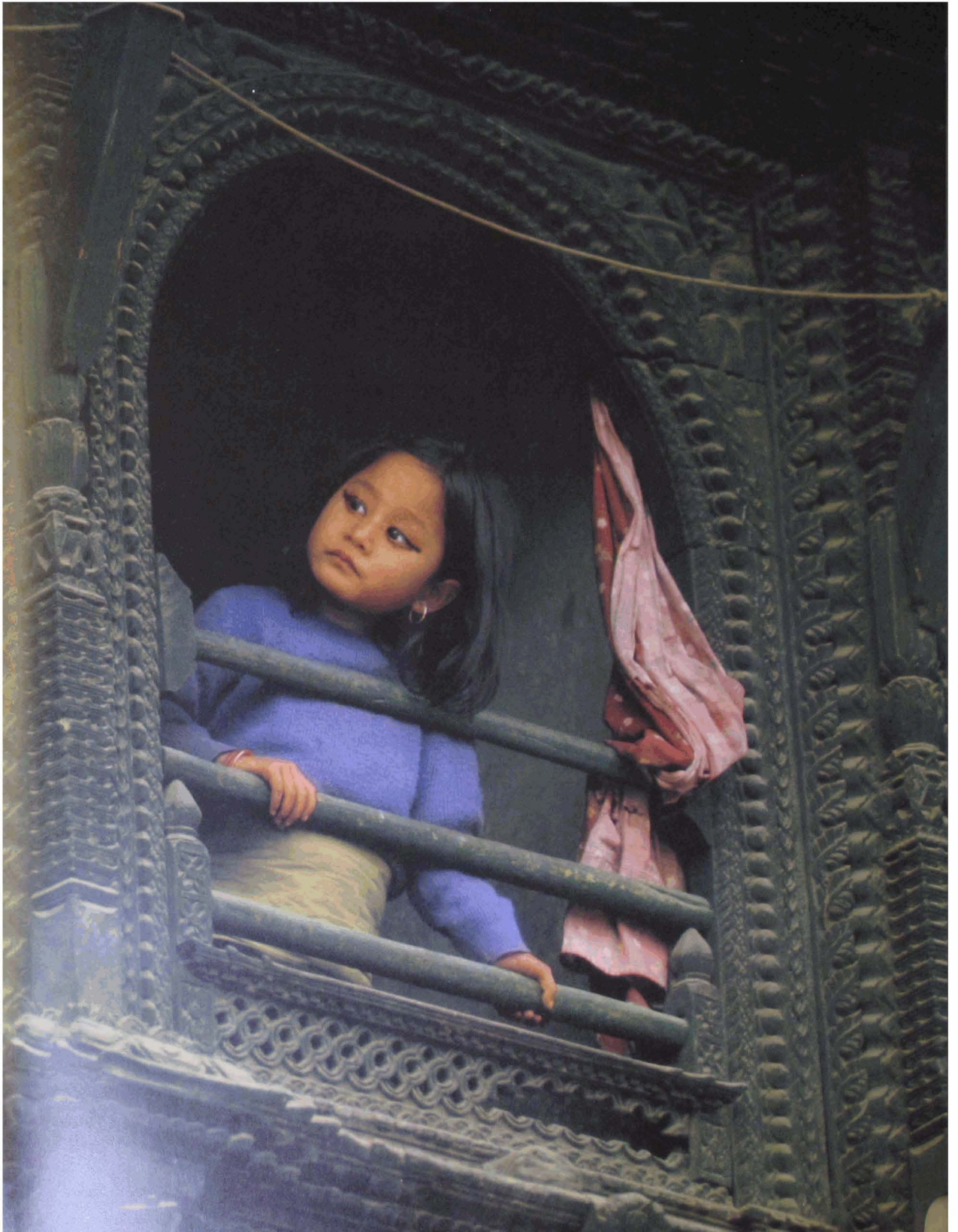


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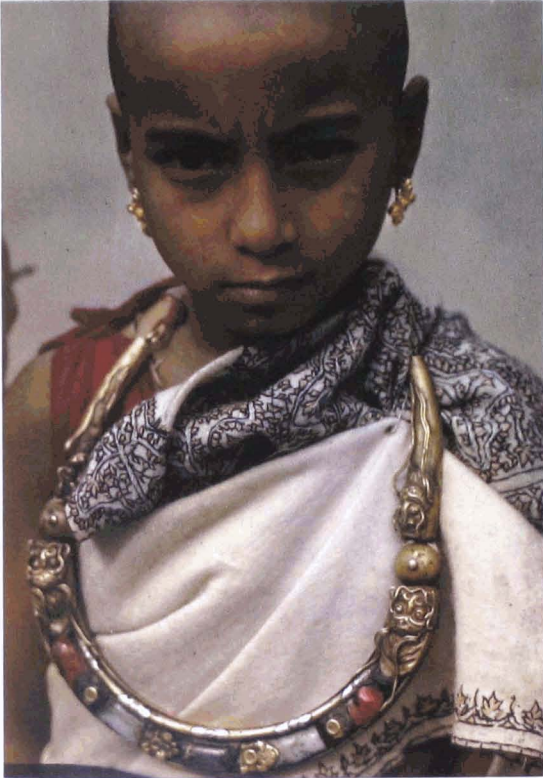
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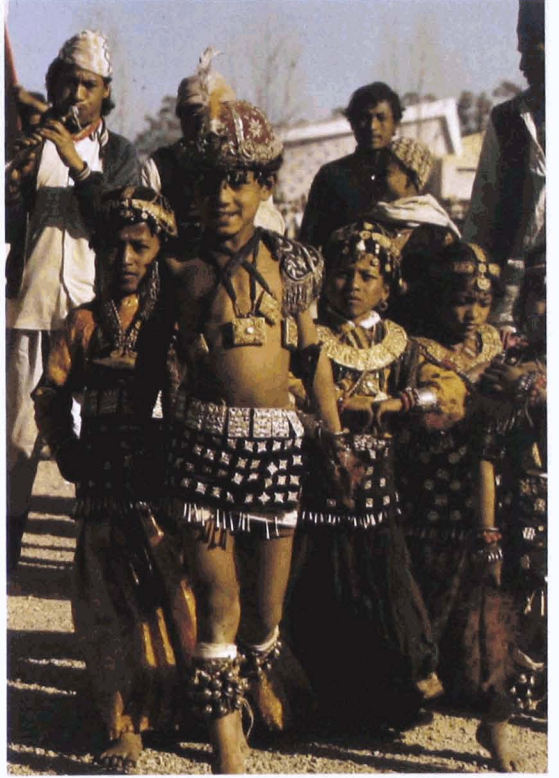




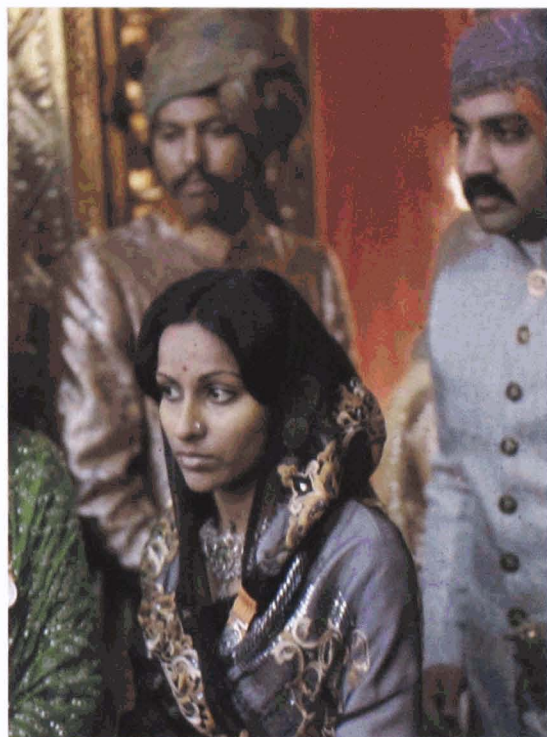
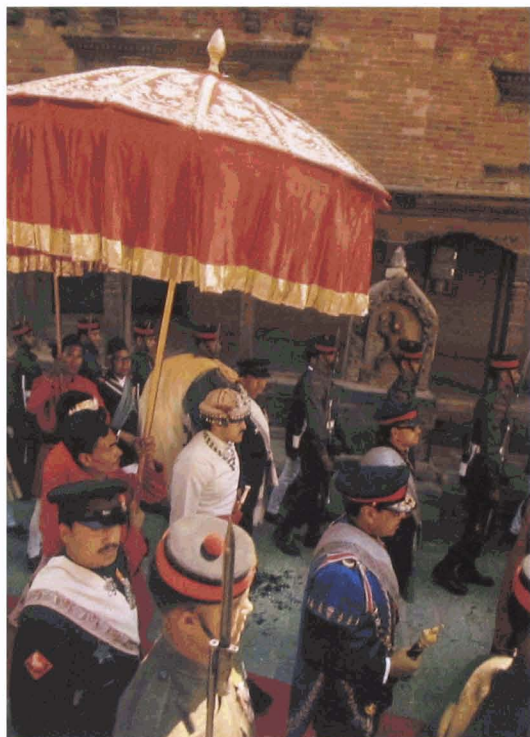
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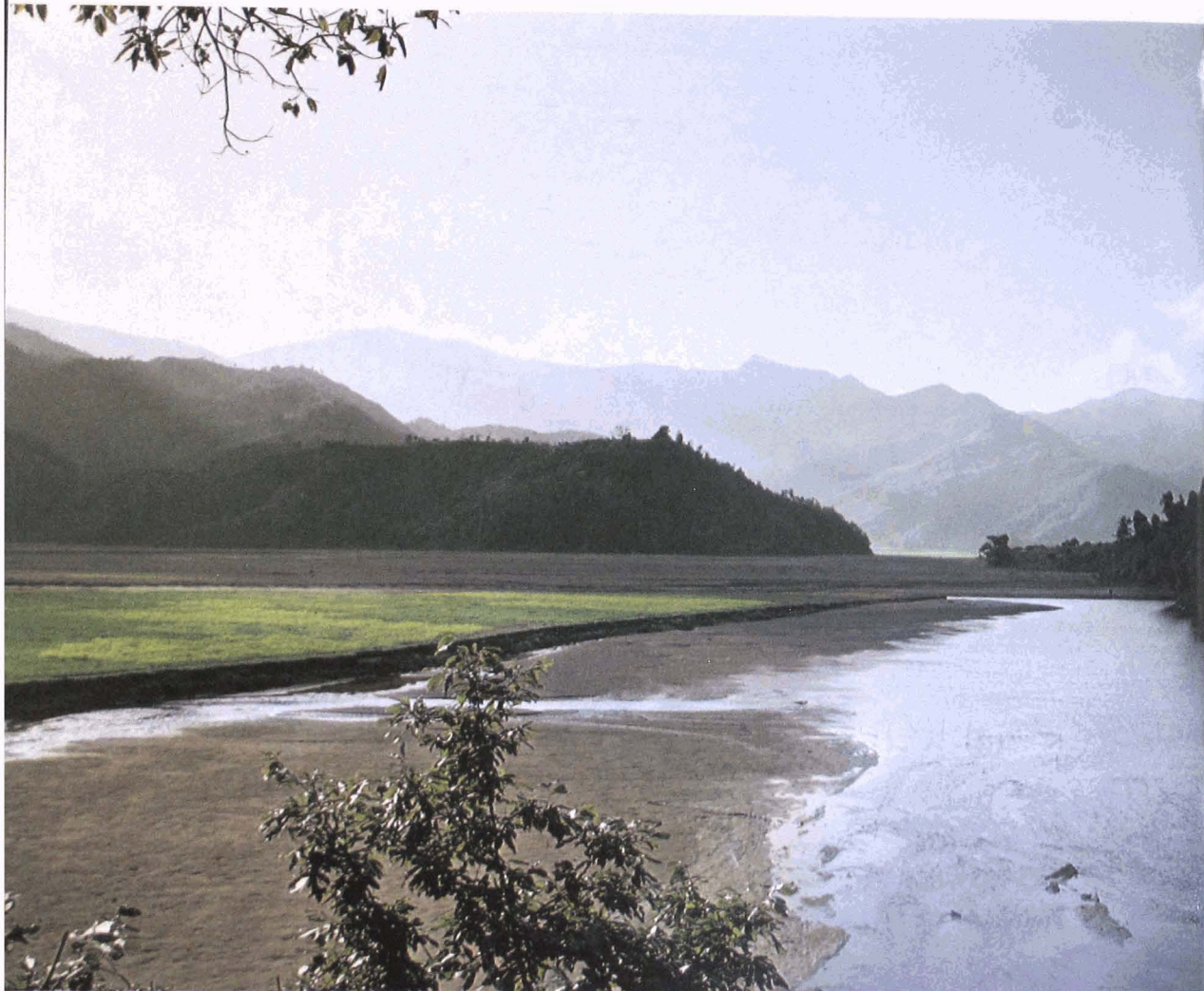












139 *The west bank of Lake Phewa near Pokhara – at an altitude of about 800 meters. In the background, the “hills” of the central highlands, an area inhabited principally by the Gurung. Luxuriant subtropical vegetation flourishes in the Pokhara valley.*

view. In the country of the gods, men wanted to rival and surpass them, and did so with the creation of the three Malla cities, Katmandu, Patan, and Bhatgaon, three jewels of Nepalese art that figure among the wonders of the world.

Bhatgaon (“city of rice”) is also called Bhaktapur (“city of believers”), because the faithful who inhabit it are Bhaktas, fervent adherents of Vishnu. For this reason most of the temples are dedicated to him or to divinities close to him. Legend places the foundation of the city as far back as the ninth century, but its true founder was King Ananda Malla in the thirteenth century, who wished to have the royal city designed according to the contours of Vishnu’s conch.

The Malla sovereigns succeeded one another, each adding to the glory of his predecessor. Jaya Yaksha Malla (1428–1482) decided on the location of the palace and had the city surrounded by protective walls pierced by four gates. Jayat Prakash Malla (1644–1673) and Sita Mitra Malla (1673–1696) pursued the construction of palaces and temples. King Bhupatindra Malla (1696–1722) was a great builder whose memory is perpetuated by a remarkable monument.

A tall monolithic column, its base sunk in a square stone block, stands before the old royal palace. A *naga* or serpent coils around the top, and its head, on which a bird is poised, stands out against the sky. On a large capital in the form of a lotus blossom is a throne, supported at its four corners by fantastic animals. The king, frozen in shining gold, is seated on his throne with his hands joined in an attitude of prayer. His steadfast gaze is projected on the Durbar, which he had inhabited, and the admirable works of art that he had caused to be carved and painted. Before him, to the west, is the “Lion Gate.”- These animals, which the Nepalese know only in stone, today guard the museum of thanks. Facing the king is the famous “Golden Gate,” a work commissioned by Ranjit (1722–1769), the last Malla king of Bhatgaon. His seven traitorous sons and the Gurkha invaders caused him to lose his kingdom.

The Golden Gate, in gilded bronze, is covered by a gracefully curved roof. It is a masterpiece of Nepalese metalwork and one of the finest in the world. The typanum is surmounted by the Garuda bird surrounded by *naginis* and serpents. In the center is the goddess Taleju with three faces and multiple arms, flanked by Shri and Lakshmi to symbolize two sacred rivers, the Ganges and the Jamuna.

This gate leads to the first courtyard of the Sundoka palace, which has seven of them. In one of them is the fountain of sacred serpents. In stone and bronze, these reptiles raise their gilded heads while a sea monster bearing a rat on its back holds a goat’s head in its jaws. The temple of Taleju and the palace of Kumari are situated among the numerous buildings of the royal palace. Kumari’s palace is decorated with frescoes, the oldest in Nepal.

From the top of his pillar, King Bhupatindra still contemplates, east of the Golden Gate, the beautiful red facade, embellished by carved wooden window frames, of the palace he had built. Below the roof, a gallery in openwork wood pierced by fifty-five windows runs around the building. On the palace square stand the temples of Batsala and Sdhilakshmi, both with towers in the Shikhara style.

By following an alleyway behind the temple of Pashupati, one comes on a square, the Taumadhi Tole, that offers a marvelous sight. The temple of Nyatapola, with its five-tiered pagoda roof, holds sway by its grandeur and the balance of its proportions. Philosophical and cosmic ideas, as well as spiritual and religious thought, presided over the building of the famous Nyatapola temple. Its structure was determined on the basis of the number five, recalling the five fundamental elements of the cosmic universe, the five directions of space, the five colors, the five elements of the personality, the five negative forces, and the five wisdoms.

In 1702, on the occasion of the consecration ceremony for the temple, King Bhupatindra climbed – as the Newars now do every day – the tall staircase bordered by fantastic creatures to reach the entrance to the sanctuary on the fifth terrace. On feast days – Bisket, Jatra, the feast of Indra and the cow festival – spectacular processions file past the temple on the large square, with the whole population participating in costumes and masks.

In Bhatgaon, as in all the enchanting towns of the valley, idlers seek out the picturesque charm of the narrow streets in order to observe the activities of the Newar craftsmen, whose talents show no sign of slackening. The men belong to the guild of *citrakars*, who repaint the beautifully carved beams in the temples and fashion masks out of clay and papiermâché, which are later painted and worn in processions. In the workshops, jewelers make jewelry, wood sculptors show that they are still masters of their art, potters form clay vases on the wheel, and women weave the black fabric from which they will make their wide skirts trimmed with red. Also on hand are the *gainé*, minstrels who sing while accompanying themselves on the *sarangi*, a small viol. Cardplayers play with cards representing the avatars of Vishnu, while other players throw the dice, here replaced by cowries, and lovers of *tharaki* move their bone or ivory pieces as in draughts. Those who rejoice in a pleasant, easy life smoke a wooden water pipe, or hookah, while thinking of the gods and unconsciously contemplating the beauties of their city.

Patan

Patan (Lalitpur) is an abbreviation of Lalita Patan, meaning “city of beauty”. The Newars also call it “Yella” or “the preferred city”. At first, Patan was a fervent center of Buddhism, which explains why it was built in the shape of a *mandala* (Sanskrit for “circle”) defined by five stupas placed in the four directions. These are said to have been built by order of King Asoka, more than two thousand years ago.

A religious capital since its beginnings, Patan became the capital of the country in the fourteenth century. Today 167 monasteries and temples dedicated to the divinities of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Tantrism attest to the holiness of the sites in all periods and the spirit of tolerance that reigns among the believers.

The visitor to Patan cannot help being fascinated but also swamped by the complex intercommunication between cults and the number of divinities represented under all aspects of their various incarnations. He is likewise dazzled by the breadth and richness of artistic expression in all realms. It is one trait of the Newar character to have a keen sense of aesthetic values. The architects knew how to build temples, palaces, and houses whose different styles each attained a high level of perfection. They possessed an astonishing mastery of the materials employed – stone, wood, brick – which they were able, thanks to the skill of metal craftsmen, to enhance with precious metals such as bronze, copper, and gold. They brought the Shikhara style, originally from India, to its full expansion. The temple of Krishna Mandir on the palace square in Patan is one example of it. Nepalese artists gave the pagoda its most original and graceful form.

The square of the old royal palace, or Durbar, contains an impressive group of buildings

erected in the course of the centuries, the sixteenth and seventeenth having been the most active under the impetus of the Malla kings. Six large temples come one after another. The Krishna Mandir is an imposing monument of stone in three stories. Opposite it is a pillar with Garuda. The sanctuary of Jagat Narayan, consecrated to Vishnu, is in the same Shikhara style; clay from the holy Bagmati river was used in making the bricks for its construction. Four pagodas give the Durbar Square a unique character of beauty and originality. The three-tiered roofing of Hari Shankar, consecrated to Shiva-Vishnu, dominates the others by its height. On a tall column, Yoga Narendra is represented in an attitude of prayer, protected by a serpent inclining above his head. The Bhimsen pagoda closes this series of splendid monuments.

The square is enlivened by a crowd of idlers and merchants. Peasants offer fruits and vegetables of the valley, and basket-weavers their baskets and sandals. Shops are set up near the temples, where women buy *dhagos*, tresses of red or black wool to be added to their hair, and bracelets of colored glass, which only married women wear and break when they become widows. In the stalls, merchants still offer strange little animals in gilded bronze inlaid with porcelain cabochons imitating turquoise and coral, as well as statuettes of Tara, Kali, or some entwined Tantric divinities.

The visitor who wishes to discover the lesser known treasures of Patan will put himself in the hands of young Newars, about twelve years old, who offer their services as guides. They already know all the subtleties of the fantastic mythology and all the curiosities of their town, which they talk about and describe with enthusiasm. They are the best guides, for at this innocent age the Newars can get away with anything; thus they take their clients into the Buddhist and Tantric sanctuaries less known to foreigners, they handle the treasures, seeking those they think are hidden, they question the lamas, who excuse their indiscretion. It is by following them through the maze of dark and dirty alleyways that one gets to know the workshops of the *Shakyas*, the goldsmiths who have imparted so much brilliance to the cities. The Temple of Gold is one of their masterpieces, with a history that goes back to the thirteenth century. The three stories of this pagoda are covered with splendidly finished plaques of gilded metal. By climbing the ladder-stairs of Newar houses, one can meet wood sculptors who have preserved the great tradition of the art of carving wood for the decoration of windows, doors, and furniture. There are also craftsmen who heat and hammer copper to form utensils and receptacles, including ewers in the characteristically Newar style. In the jewelry shops, women discuss their jewelry orders at length.

In a small courtyard encircled by houses, one comes upon the Mahabuddha temple, built in the Indian style in the fourteenth century by Abhaya Raj, a priest of Patan, near the still-existing monastery. The building is entirely in terra cotta, and the tower is decorated all the way to the top with small niches, each containing a statue of Buddha – there are nine thousand of them. This temple was destroyed by an earthquake in 1935 and rebuilt exactly in accordance with the original by Newar artists and craftsmen, in itself a demonstration that art is still alive in the valley.

It was in the course of a walk that we happened upon a surprising scene. In accordance with Newar custom, when their daughters first begin to menstruate, the parents invite all the members of the family to their home to celebrate the happy event of the child becoming a woman. On this occasion, as we saw, the young girl is dressed in a robe of crimson silk, and her forehead is painted with red paste made by mixing blood and powder. She wears a necklace of repoussé gold plaques sewn on a piece of red velvet, on the outer edge of which glass beads are attached imitating emeralds. This necklace is called a *tik mah* in the Newari language. A headband of finely chased gold is placed on her head, and leaves of gold on which the sacred peacock is seen in miniature are set in her black hair, with a ruby and an emerald to add a note of

color to the gold. Thus adorned, and accompanied by her mother, the girl leaves her house and takes a short walk in the street. Then she re-enters the house and must stay in a dark room until the next moon. To keep her from falling in love with the sun, she is not allowed to see a ray of light. After this trial, the astrologers are consulted on the choice of a fiancé.

Katmandu

Travelers coming from distant countries or other continents are able to feel at home in Katmandu, a crossroads of different peoples, cultures, and religions. On this February 23, 1975, the eve of the day on which Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev was to be crowned king of Nepal, a few of the visitors walked slowly without letting themselves be swept away by the liveliness of the continuous human stream that flowed through the tangle of squares, streets, and alleyways from daybreak until well into the night. The colorful crowd moved briskly and the noise was in tune with the general spirit of animation. The visitors heard distinct languages and dialects, and recognized Newar girls with their almond eyes, the fine features of young Brahmans, the slanting eyes of Thamangs, the slender silhouettes of Tibetan women, and the thickset heaviness of Khampas arriving from the northern mountains. By contrast, the Indian women enveloped in saris walked the way they danced. From all directions in Nepal, people had set out for the capital to participate in the spectacular event of a man being deified and crowned king. In this mass of humanity, each is recognizable not only by his face, but by the costume he or she wears and the jewelry with which he or she is adorned. In the human warmth, an odor of flowers is diffused in the air; it is everywhere, as are all the colors. They are worn strung on necklaces, women and children make piles of them on the offering trays, and they are spread out on the ground as on Oriental carpets.

At nightfall, the numerous Nepalese, Chinese, and Tibetan restaurants are filled with customers. For the art lover, the most attractive is the Tachi-Takay, where the rooms are decorated with wall paintings by a Tibetan who has tried to show Lhasa, the Potala, the monkey legends, and other mythological tales.

In the clear night, rendered almost white by the full moon, the uproar is deafening. The crowd listens to the hymns sung in the sanctuaries, and priests of all religions ask the blessing of the gods for the sovereign. In the street, some musicians express themselves by playing the flute.

The whole city of Katmandu is lighted up. The pale moon holds sway over thousands of electric bulbs that decorate the monuments like necklaces of luminous pearls. In front of Singha Durbar, the stretch of water takes on the dimensions of a lake reflecting the white government palace. In old Katmandu, the quarter of the former palace of the Malla kings has become an Asiatic fairy-tale setting. Lighted by beacons, the pagodas and towers take on other dimensions. The woodwork of the temple of Shiva and Parvati screen the rays that fall softly on the divine images. The royal pagoda of Taleju is as prodigious as the goddess herself, and its silhouetted roofs and gilded bronze doors produce enchantment. Katha Mandap, a wooden temple as its name indicates, is a singular pagoda dating from the eleventh century. On Hanuman Dhoka Square, an illuminated pagoda seems to be surrounded by a triple round of dancing figures carved in wood and polychromed; these allegorical figures serve to support the stepped, lean-to roofs. The round tower of the temple of Hanuman, dedicated to the goddess Durga, dominates the courtyard by its five-tiered roof. The moon softly illuminates the enchanting temple of Degutale, while a few steps away electricity penetrates the grills and lights up the giant and monstrous gilded head of Shveta-Bhairav. From its enormous mouth, rice beer flows in abundance on feast days. Eyes nearby are raised to the seven-headed serpent surmounting the golden window.

In the small hours, fog invades the city at the same time as countless women and children who alone have the privilege of entering the Durbar quarter and sitting on the temple steps, barely visible in the misty air.

On the morning of February 24, 1975, the sun rises over Katmandu, which is only a single beating heart. Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev is enthroned in accordance with the ancestral rite in the ancient palace of Hanuman Dhoka, where the first part of the ceremony, celebrated by Brahman priests, is held. First the sovereign must undergo the ritual of physical and moral purification, for which earth and water are used. The earth comes from the beds of sacred rivers, each having a particular power. That from the Himalaya imparts wisdom, and it is the same for the water. Next the sovereign is anointed and goes to the main courtyard of the palace, which is dominated by four pagoda towers. It is there, in the open air, that the coronation scene takes place. Vedic hymns are intoned by Brahman priests; the huge purple-draped drum resounds, while musicians play the *mohali*, the Nepalese oboe. Birendra slowly ascends his throne, which is placed in an easterly direction. It is a marvel of the goldsmith's art. In the chased gold, one recognizes the figures of hindu mythology. The back is formed by nine erect cobras whose heads curve forward. The canopy is a peacock wheel, and lion, tiger, and leopard skins are spread on the ground.

The sovereign takes his place on the throne. He is dressed in white and wears as decoration a brooch with a large solitaire and a double necklace of emeralds and pearls. At his side, his wife, Aishwarya, is dressed in red, and her coiffure is set off by a diadem of brilliants. At the solemn moment, two priests approach carrying the crown, which they place on the royal head. It is in the form of a helmet and is entirely covered with gems and woven with pearls, amid which shine diamonds, rubies, and emeralds, while the brim is laden with a fringe of pear-shaped emeralds. At the top, a plume from a rare bird of paradise sprouts from a sheath of fine pearls. Simultaneously a Brahman hands the king the gold scepter and sword.

The coronation is also the religious consecration of the king, who for the Nepalese is an incarnation of Vishnu.

The ceremony over, the king rises and leaves the palace, at first on foot under a canopy, in order to be among his subjects. Then he returns to the palace, where a second exit is prepared. The king is seated next to the queen under a baldachin, which is placed on the back of an elephant covered with purple and gold and whose body has been carefully painted in symbolic colors. The animal's forehead is covered with a heart-shaped piece of red velvet to which pieces of gold are attached and topped by a crescent moon in diamonds, placed horizontally. The royal elephant is followed by others, carrying the Prince of the Himalaya, the Prince of Everest, and members of the royal family. Also in the entourage are the rajah of the mysterious land of Mustang, a princess of Bhutan, and high dignitaries. The procession of elephants advances majestically on a red carpet between the pagodas. Close to one of the pagodas, men in white and wearing fezzes burn flowers and incense. The steps, the terraces, the statues, and finally whole temples disappear beneath the crowd of children and women, the latter all dressed in bright colors and adorned with jewels. The men are packed closely together outside the reserved limits, all along the route of the triumphal procession.

The pomp and spectacle of the coronation is the fulfillment, in the twentieth century, of the most fantastic scenes in the *Thousand and One Nights*. The participation of the whole population in these memorable days shows that it is from their traditions and beliefs that the Nepalese draw their strength and joy of living.

5. Newar Jewelry

During an exploratory stroll through one of the less crowded quarters of Katmandu, we, being curious to discover whatever we could, took a blind alley leading into a courtyard where a surprising sight awaited us. Some twenty little girls were undergoing their first religious initiation. The ceremony in progress is called *vihee*, and is the symbolic marriage of the girls with the god Narayan, the incarnation of Vishnu that brings the world the message of divine love. For the Newars, the *vihee* is a sacred rite of particular importance. It is celebrated for girls before puberty, generally between the ages of four and eleven. On the day of the ceremony, as soon as it gets light, the little girls take a ritual bath. They are then dressed in silk robes and adorned like young brides with sumptuous jewelry. These pieces are often very old, and include such specifically Newar ornaments as the *sirbandi*, a head decoration in chased gold, and the *tik mah*, a very beautiful necklace of gold plaques engraved with floral motifs. One also finds the gold *tayo* pendant. It is obvious that the little girls who take part in this ceremony all belong to rich families from a high caste.

The children are taken by their mothers to the place of initiation, which is often a sanctuary of Ganesh, the elephant-headed god who is the patron of schools. In their hands they hold the symbolic key that opens the door of knowledge. On their arrival at the meeting place, the little girls crouch down to take a short rest; then they are covered with flowers, their finger- and toenails are painted with *simrik* coloring, and a stripe is drawn on the middle of their heads. The *tika* is placed on their foreheads and offerings are brought to them, which each holds on a plate. When the ceremony is over, the Newar girl is the spouse of the god Narayan. This marriage cannot be dissolved, and when later on she marries a man, the ceremony is only a civil one. This is the reason why women can easily get a divorce, and why at the time when widows were burned, this horrible custom could not be applied to Newar women.

Newar goldsmiths are specialized artists, each fashioning only a certain type of jewelry. They still keep up their ancestral traditions today. Their entire lives are consecrated to this form of art. Crouched in their stalls, they spend hours making the same minute and extremely skillful gestures, while using their naked feet and a few special tools – chisels, files, small hammers, etc. – for the decorative motifs. They are inspired to a great extent by nature and like to engrave an abundance of floral motifs. Jewelry is often the property of a family for generations, and is considered a patrimony that not only must not be squandered, but on the contrary one should try to increase.

The *Sakya*, one of the highest Newar castes, is divided into groups set up according to their trade. A group's trade is hereditary. This is why boys start very early to practice the art taught to them by their fathers. *Sakya* goldsmiths work in gold and silver, and are called *lu kami* (*lu* means "gold"). Among the principal pieces of Newar jewelry, one might mention the following:

- *tik mah*, Newar necklace. Made of gold plaques exquisitely engraved with various motifs, flowers, leaves, birds. The plaques are sewn on a background of velvet on whose outer edge oblong beads of green glass are attached.

- *tayo*, Newar necklace. This long necklace is made of plaques of gold or gilded metal, chased and sewn on velvet.

- the two bands hold a pendant (Newar, *cauphwah*) in gold, or copper covered with a thin layer of gold, oblong in shape with longitudinal facets. This pendant was formerly executed in large dimensions and was worn suspended on the chest by a string. The living goddess Kumari wears one, as do high-caste Newar women on the occasions of their symbolic marriage with the god Narayan and their real marriage. Young men present them to their fiancées.

- *mangal-sutra*, Nepalese necklace. This good-luck piece consists of several strings of small colored glass beads holding a heart-shaped pendant. It is worn only by married women, who remove it on the death of their husbands.
- *tilari*, Newar necklace. The necklace is composed of several strings of small colored glass beads, and holds a pendant consisting of several disks that separate balls ornamented with points. This necklace is worn only by married women.
- *sirbandi*, Nepalese headdress. Four ornaments diverge from a central rose. One falling on the forehead consists of a star above a crescent moon. There is a saying, “Mother Moon rests on your forehead.” Three bands, formed of gold or gilded plaques engraved with various motifs, encircle the head.
- *bulin*, Newar head decoration. A plaque in gold or gilded copper, representing a peacock on a floral background, it is worn above the temple.
- *lonson*, Newar head decoration. A disk fifteen centimeters in diameter, in gilded brass, repoussé, engraved, and pierced. The chosen motifs are flowers, leaves, butterflies, etc. This disk is worn by women on the top of the head, sometimes behind.
- ear pendants, disk-shaped, diameter five centimeters, in copper or gilded brass, the edge of the disk is raised, decorated with a repoussé motif of flowers, inlaid with a blue or red stone.
- *dhungri*, Newar ear ornament. A large rose with floral or geometric motifs, with a red cabochon in the center.
- *phuli*, Nepalese nose ornament. Represents a flower with a ruby in the center, almost always an imitation. (The list of jewelry in Nepal has been taken from the study by Professor Andreas Hofer, Heidelberg; Archiv für Völkerkunde, Vienna, 1973.)

Newar women still wear a great variety of earrings, bracelets, finger rings, and ankle bracelets. Within the scope of this volume, it is impossible to give a complete list.

Muslims have been settled west of Katmandu for a number of centuries. They engage primarily in commerce and handicrafts. Their speciality, it seems, has always been the manufacture of glass bracelets known as *curas*, from which comes the name *curaute* given to someone who makes them. Up until recently the *curautes* worked in the villages and turned out attractive bracelets in colored glass. They bought the material in India and worked according to techniques used in that country. Today glass bracelets are made industrially, and the *curautes* must content themselves with selling them. They peddle their wares from village to village, and make an appealing display of them in all the towns in the valley of Katmandu.

Page 185: *Kama Dev, the famous Nepalese Hindu dancer, demonstrates the lotus mudra. Mudras are the various hand and arm postures adopted in meditation exercises or religious rites.*

Back end paper: *The Red Cap monastery of Stagna lies about 25 kilometers south of the Ladakhi principal city on a cliff spur in the middle of the Indus plain. It was founded in 1580 by a stepbrother of the "Lion King", Sengge Namgyal.*

