

Udaipur

Marble provides both its substance and its income, with the gliding hawks watching over its eternity. Across the water comes the echo of stones on cloth, women wanting to complete the freedom of daily life. Children play in the water, like their cousins everywhere. Together, they form a ribbon of color on the ghats, piercing the haze with pink, vermilion and lemon-yellow.

Across the water, tourists are pilgrims at the temple. Some take back the temple, with photographs to show at home. Others leave the temple alone but take back their god-kissing the stony ground, offering flowers and themselves. The scent of sandalwood fills the spaces between the statues. Paste is there to savour, to use. Red provides both benediction and comfort. The tourists stare at the carvings of gods, their creatures and their sex. But the truth is not seen by many - just its manifestations and its rules. Coconut is an appropriate hard edge for all.

Beyond the temple, commerce goes on for millennia. The silk trader takes care to explain the cut, the style. His pride will be seen by others. The art dealer takes care to reduce his commissions. Pride? Yet the young artists work hard to please, with fine brushes and finer, historic color. The excitement of the trip to London shines through, to exhibit and share their skill. May their god preserve their dignity. They are not a side show, but disciple of Krishna, and ageless design. Occasionally some novelty comes into the work - for them, or for their clients?

The antique dealer takes care to explain that he wants to be in the guidebook, so you can trust his discerning eye. Yet the greatest antiquity of all is beyond his reach. It is within the hearts of all. It is within the heart of the shepherdess, with her ragged flock, and her lunch balanced carefully on her head. It is within the heart of the driver, as he avoids the crazed pilots of gasoline spewing trucks. It is within the heart of the Palace guide, sharing what he knows, and what he does not. Perhaps it is most hidden in the heart of the temple keeper, as he confuses faith, with interest, with tips. But it is within his heart if he looks - no one else can find it.

Evening approaches, with a cooling breeze across the marble seats, calming the heat into quiescence. In the town, the lights of a wedding procession sparkle in the narrow streets, the music defining joyous Dharma. Above, the full moon echoes the depth of the marble, drifting lazily across the water. There is only the poetry of life. Anyone is able to hear the moonlight tell its story.

Across the water, the palace shines its presence, as a signal to the world. The Maharanee is home, pondering her contribution to palace, people and city. Will she awaken, with the reality of the dawn chorus?