

A Dream of India

By
Charles Frode

“Everything you can imagine is real.”
Pablo Picasso

“A dream is nothing but a lucky idea that comes to us from the dark, all-unifying world of the psyche. What would be more natural, when we have lost ourselves amid the endless particulars and isolated details of the world's surface, than to knock at the door of dreams and inquire of them the bearings which would bring us closer to the basic facts of human existence?”
Carl Jung

“The immortal nature of the universe takes its place in the hearts of mortal humans and it also blesses them in all their sacred aspirations. With its spiritual radiance, reflecting by intense love and knowing all secrets of wisdom, it shines extensively.”
Rig Veda 3.1.18

Since the 42nd century of the Kali Yuga, during the time of the Chandela monarchs, the giant Bodhi trees at Khajuraho have spread their branches wide, flowered for a few brief weeks, and shaded the sandstone temple walls there with their huge heart-shaped leaves and purple figs. The sun rises each morning there over the eastern horizon, and when the warming light strikes the outstretched Bodhi leaves, a gathering of heart-hewn shadows and warm sunlight reaches out and converges on the carved temple walls. The dappled web of daily dark and light caresses the opulent curves and incurvate cleavages carved into the stone. The sun and shadow delicately touch arms and legs that reach up and into a longing lover's countenance chiseled into the corroding rock. The flutter of cool and warm light brushes against erotic embraces and longing gazes of passion incised into the thousand meandering lines of river stone. The precessing sunlight nuzzles the sensual tension of need and delight in sinuous and gestured men and women

sculpted out of sedimentary brown block laid block on block row on row around the perimeter of the rectangular temple.

Crane had spent the morning in the carefully manicured western and eastern groups of temple buildings taking pictures of the celebrated erotic temple wall carvings, and as the afternoon tired and waned, he and Namra, his wife, found themselves at the irregular edge of the cultivated well-kept grass areas and gardens surrounding the several temples most frequented by tourists who were drawn to the amorous and carnal scenes carved into the stone walls. The smooth grass around the temples receded gradually to the west into a vast outstretched low wooded area covered with huge colonies of enormous banyan trees with twisting reaching roots. There were also massive gatherings of more wide-branching Bodhi trees, and whole neighborhoods of light green-leafed neem trees took over sections of the forest. Crane and Namra stood a few moments as they looked over the forested scene, both lingering and absorbing the panorama taking on an ethereal almost transcendental aura with the low afternoon sunlight. When their eyes reached the far side of the forest, they noticed together the characteristic curving globe-tipped crown of what appeared to be another temple, halcyon and yet alluring, as if it were some ancient and forgotten sovereign of the forest. They looked at each other and raised their eyebrows as if to ask, Do we venture into this strange forest at this late hour of the afternoon and explore that remote, hidden temple that no one else seems to be visiting?

Two weeks earlier the husband and wife had flown in to Deli, then to Gwalior, Namra's home town. Crane was on assignment with National Geographic trying to make sense of the myriad religious practices and temples in India—Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and which gods or goddesses were represented by which temples—Krishna, Shiva, Ganesha, Vishnu, Durga, it was a jumble alright...He thought he would figure it all out as he visited each temple, talked with

people there, assembled his photos. Even though Namra had been born in India, she and her diplomatic corps parents had moved to New York when she was still in grade school, so she knew about temples only what they had been able to glean from the Internet and the travel books they had bought. Her boss at Dunnwood Fabric on West 45th had given her the go-ahead to come back with sketches, swatches, photos, anything they could turn into their new fall fabric designs with an exotic yet contemporary flair. She and Crane had been amassing notebooks of sketches, names and addresses, and compact flash cards packed with pictures of locations, scenes, textures, juxtapositions of colors, architecture, and nature. Right now the carvings in the walls of the Khajuraho temples were occupying all their attention, and she and Crane had to decide which stone carvings *not* to photograph, there were so many wonderfully rich and textural images. Another temple on the other side of the forest might turn out to be more of the same, or it could be something exciting and unique, just what they needed to take back to their work.

During the past two weeks neither Crane nor Namra had yet to make any direct or indirect reference to the quietly diminishing passion in their own busy and work-focused marriage. Throughout the seven years of their marriage neither had seen the pattern they had been creating in their work of looking at the beauty of the surface of the world, and not learning how to perceive the essential inner grace and light of things. They had been successful, very successful at capturing images, colors, and textures of the outer world's splendor and fascination, but they had not been aware of identifying or even possessing the hidden wholeness emanating from each extant thing. At the temples they had spent their time together studying, touching, and photographing carving after carving of couples and groups of lovers beautifully carved and presented to the observer as ideal, beautiful, voluptuous, sensual, and always erotically entwined in each other's arms and legs, something Crane recalled abstractly from the early days of their

marriage, something Namra wished she could reanimate somehow between them. So when they both readjusted the shoulder straps of their camera and day bags and without saying a word ventured out onto the sandy alluvial soil outside of the temple compound, neither were aware of their own private musings and wondering over the unusual unspoken attraction they both sensed towards the treed woods ahead of them and towards what they were reticent to imagine might turn out to be ancient and forgotten forces awaiting them at that temple beckoning them at the edge of the forest.

There were no official tour guides accompanying Crane or Namra to point out the dry, wide, shallow river bed merging with the forest they were entering, a vestige of the sacred waters flowing down from the Himalayas, from Tibet's Mount Kailāśā and Machapuchare perhaps, both sacred to Lord Shiva, and hundreds of thousands of years earlier, waters that brought the mingled blessings of celestial and terrestrial powers to cover the Earth for the kindling of the earliest Adivasi peoples who would come later to inhabit this very area. No one pointed out the once-busy, now barely-perceptible foot trail paralleling the dry river bed where they were already walking hand-in-hand to steady each other. No one needed to tell Crane and Namra to stop and feel the earth energy emerging from the ground around certain magnificent and unusually-shaped trees next to the dry river bed because they were already stopping and wondering out loud about the peculiarly pleasant sensations they were feeling in their bodies when they stood next to those giants. They carried no guide books that suggested they squat near large boulders in the river bed, rounded and worn smooth by ancient waters long ago absorbed into the earth surface, because they were already crouching down next to certain unmarked stones in order to feel the charge of the stone and water energies captured in the seemingly placid river rocks. No topographical map showed the couple points of interest in that forest inhabited to this day and for

thousands of years by unseen but seeing insects, birds, serpents, and mammals, and for thousands of millennia by the Prthivi, Varuna, Vayu, and Agni devas—the unseen earth, water, air, and fire elementals, for all dimensions and frequencies of powers were nudging and tugging the two lovers ahead like the invisible yet preeminent poles of magnetic earth.

No other human being was at hand to tell Crane and Namra to go on through the forest of giant trees protecting this unnamed sacred refuge; no one warned them to think about the waning afternoon light, how they would get back, if the other temples were closing soon, if there would be an evening train or bus to take them back to their hotel in Chhatarpur. And no one heard and remembered the tone and content of their conversation as they penetrated deeper and deeper into the woods, as the exquisite stimulation and reverberating of their outer senses awakened their inner sensibilities so that they began recognizing anew and resonating again to the frequency of each other's spirit, heart, body, and soul. They might have lingered here or there along the trail under a welcoming tree when the spirits of the forest surrounded them, and they could have come together here or there as one spirit in two bodies. The sun descended closer and closer to the western horizon, and when they finally became aware of the waning afternoon, the couple had just stepped out of the forest into a tiny clearing.

Crane lifts his head as Namra turns towards him and whispers in a loud voice, “Oh, my God, Crane, look....”

An ornately carved wall of a dark-jungled primeval building is rising up and up and up into and beyond the tops of the trees, and the monolithic structure stretches away and vanishes from view far far into the thicket of trees beyond where Crane can see. Disappearing amber sunlight from the west is bathing hundreds of intertwined and voluptuous, amorous figures carved deeply into the dripping wet, lichen and moss covered wall with a wistful and forlorn

longing that softly suffuses Crane's heart and mind. Leaves in the tops of surrounding trees are brushing against each other to the warm evening breeze arriving from the west. Warm low lambent light and shimmering shadowed leaves caress tall tree trunks brushing up against sculpted lovers embracing eternally on the strange temple wall. Crane's eyes and heart open and perceive the transparent veil pulled aside to reveal the prana life essence streaming throughout every edge and contour, filling in the texture and movement of every space, in-breathing the darkness and light, verifying the presence of every entity. Crane is feeling the immensity of both the grief and joy of living, a poignant wave that engulfs him with understanding and acceptance. He sees himself looking down at three squatting Indian women in white saris trimmed in blue preparing a charcoal brazier. They are assembling the brazier, preparing curried rice rolled in cabbage, setting the brazier in the shallow water flowing through where they are crouching, and the charcoal is lit and smoking, the smoke is incense rising up to bless the forest, the temple walls where endless lovers bless the universe, and consecrate Mother Durga, the Inaccessible, the One Who Redeems, Radiant Goddess who resides in this temple heart where Crane and Namra smell ginger, garlic, cardamom, and coriander-infused jasmine rice roasting over a sacred fire. The women's faces illuminate the shaded grotto, they are the goddesses, and the woman tending the food roasting over the fire looks up and smiles at Crane, and she reaches down into the water and splashes him with the water, and still grinning, she tells him for his ears only,

“...Water from the sacred Ganges...I bless you forever here among us...”

Crane looks to see the sacred waters gushing out onto the earth where they are all standing, flowing out from a squared, dark low opening in the temple wall, and there are elephants carved deep into the thickened opening where ferns, bromeliads, and orchids fringe the aperture, and he understands that this deep recondite door is a mysterious opening of every

woman where ineffable water gurgles from deep deep within her earth. The women-goddesses are all smiling blissfully, fragrant rice rolls are roasting, curried smoke is rising to the heavens, the light of the late afternoon is waning. Crane turns, and Namra is seated there, enthroned on an ancient granite yoni stone, and her flowing sari is emerald green silk edged with golden thread and ribbon. He sees light emanating from her body, and the light is saturating the colors of her sari, and she is glowing in pure, white splendor as Crane has never seen her. He feels his heart chakra opening to the low almost inaudible humming of Namra's golden aura, and the exquisite sparkling energy vortex of the love and passion they have been feeding and preserving for each other pulls Crane closer to Namra, and he is gliding to her side. He reaches out to his wife. They are embracing. They are one.

Once back in New York fifteen days later, Crane pours over thousands of JPEGs and is able to find only one photograph from the strange temple. The only photo, of Namra sitting on a round stone, in her customary wrinkled tan waterproof trekking pants and shirt. She is smiling and waving. Crane can't even recall taking the picture. Nor does he ever show it to her.