



MOTH & THE FLAME  
MUSIC-MASTER

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*E*arly Spring, 1967: Maharaj Ji and his caravan of two crowded cars prepare for a two-week Satsang tour of Agra, Indore, Baroda and Ajmeer. Extremely weak from 'Delhi-belly' (amoebic dysentery), I'm left behind, heartbroken for I had so wanted to go. Just before getting into his car, Master pauses and waves me over, saying: 'If you feel better by this afternoon, you may come to Indore with Master-ji by train.'

*Master-ji* as I then learned is the nickname of Partap Singh, a widely acclaimed master of classical and devotional Indian vocal music. He is also called *Pathi-ji* ('hymn-chanter'). His task is to sing soul-stirring bhajans (hymns) of the Saints, around which Master Kirpal bases his discourses. Master-ji has incredible built-in volume control, and whenever the electricity fails, rendering microphones useless, as often happens here, Satguru Kirpal will give him the nod. There is something almost supernatural about Master-ji's beautiful and evocative voice, which, without loudspeakers, can carry across huge crowds. Partap Singh stands a little over five feet, and the white beard which frames his noble face is about a third as long as he.

Against insistent advice of several well-wishers and the commanding Dr. Mool Raj to stay put, even the thought of staying in the empty ashram is unbearable. Bricks, mortar and memories are no consolation. I simply *must* be with my beloved Guru! Master-ji and I hire a three-wheeler, broken springs and all, to take us to the train station. I grit my teeth, as every bump and jolt from the pot-holed streets sends sharp pangs into my gut. Most auspiciously, all cramps disappear the moment we board our Gandhi-class (third-class) coach. Even though we sleeplessly pass the next night and day in our sweltering, over-crowded berth—jolted, jostled and covered with soot from the black smoke-belching coal-fired engine—my sadhu-like companion and I spend most of our time in blissful meditation. Master-ji lies on the bare metal floor wrapped in a thin muslin sheet (his unwound turban) like a moth in a cocoon, meditating, while passengers sitting on benches above try not to put their feet on him, little knowing his exalted status in the spiritual world.

At one point, Master-ji's face emerges from his shroud, emanating serenity and beatitude. In lovely broken English, he says, 'My Master Sawan with me all night. He ve-r-r-y beautiful, ve-r-r-y bright! Face like full moon! I love, He love. You love, a-a-l-l-l is Love!' We both laugh a long time, like drunkards in a tavern.

After some gentle prodding, Master-ji shares a little of his life:

'I chela [student] of Shahanshah. Shahanshah write many God-songs, and teach me all ragas [modes] of Indian classical music. Shahanshah once great champion wrestler of Punjab, then become vairagi sadhu [a renunciate]...spiritual wrestler! You know I many times sing bhajans of Shahanshah in satsang. Master very much love and respect. Very powerful meanings in his bhajans. Shahanshah also came to Hazur Baba Sawan Singh, many times. He see Hazur one with God... and the beauty of God, both! I came to Hazur maybe thirty years ago, and took Naam. I also see Master Kirpal with Hazur many times; he already most great disciple of Hazur. Baba Kirpal already Saint, he like older brother to us. Hazur give *hukam* [order] to Master Kirpal to sit by his side, conduct satsang and help sangat [congregation]. Once he sit by Hazur at big initiation. Hazur give order, 'Kirpal Singh, you give Naam!' All see Light and hear shabd dhun [Sound Current]. Big *shakti*! [spiritual power]. I there.'

'How did you come to this Master?' I ask.

'When Hazur left *chola* [physical coil] I verrry upset! No want live this world! My born name, Partap Chand, from Hindu family, but then I decide not to shave, not to wear shoes until I find Hazur and happiness again. Not go anywhere! Hazur say to sangat, "Kirpal Singh my very own self." But I not care. Then Master Kirpal write me letter: "Master-ji, come and visit me in Delhi." I not listen. Again he write, but I not answer. Third letter said, "If you don't come to me, then I will have to come to you!" I think, "What I lose in going to see?" and take train to Delhi. When I reach Sawan Ashram, I see Hazur Baba Sawan Singh sitting in Master Kirpal's chair. I no believe! I rub my eyes! Hazur still sitting there, so I bow head to his feet. When I get up, look at him, Master Kirpal there! He say "Stay here with me. Serve Hazur and sangat." I call wife and son from Punjab, and never leave!' After a pause, he clarifies his own position: 'Arran-ji, I only music-master, but our Master is *Ruhani* (spiritual) Master.'

Master-ji now begins teaching me the words and melody of a Hindi bhajan.



Music-master—Partap Singh & Sant Kirpal Singh Ji Maharaj

1963 - photo by Lucille Gunn

***I did not know***

*I did not know mind had drawn a veil  
But You were here within me;  
I searched for You in the Q'uran  
and other sacred scriptures,  
But did not know You were  
in the book of my heart;  
I looked from door to door  
But did not know  
You were in search of me;  
I searched from house to house,  
But did not know  
You resided in my home;*

*I was looking for a gem,  
But did not know  
the Treasure-house was within me;  
I thought the world was full of thorns,  
But did not know that within me  
was an blooming garden;  
I tried to find a hiding place,  
But did not know there was no place  
where You were not present;  
Shahanshah was looking for a name,  
But did not know  
that You were Nameless.  
—poem by Shahanshah*