



MOTH & THE FLAME
DANTAL &
THE LORD OF PETROL

18

*D*ialary: Ajmeer is several hours behind us. There is no sign in evidence as the car suddenly veers off the highway to the left. The Master and his party are expected at Dantal, a farming village some fifty miles west across a tortuous, road—what amounts to nothing more than a rutted dirt path. Dust plumes kicked up by our lurching car rise high into the cloudless air, a signal to all within sight that someone special is on the way, for cars rarely pass here. Thick dust covers our windows, and as it shakes free, we glimpse the ancient land.

Here and there are sudden out-croppings of rocky terrain, dark islands in the dun-colored sand. New wheat covers fertile and irrigated patches with rich green. Farmers behind wooden plows are pulled by black, horned oxen or leathery camels, manuring as they plod along. The men of this region uniformly dress in white cotton dhoti and shirts, but their heads are crowned with the brightest of orange, purple, or red turbans. The women working at their sides are dressed in vivid *ghagra choli*—long flowing red, green, blue, yellow, and purple skirts with tiny mirrors sewn onto them. Their blouses and scarves are elaborately embroidered, their wrists and ankles bedecked with silver bangles—colorful splashes punctuating the starkness of the land.

Plunging deeper into the countryside, our caravan grows as peasants drop plows and run toward the cars. After four long years, Maharaj Ji has returned! Turning back to peer through the dust-wake, I see scores of laughing, bobbing heads, white teeth, dark skin, turbans and veils askew, joyous families running en masse. Lurching along the crests and falls in the path, we arrive at last at Dantal nestled at the foot of a hoary mountain. The beauty of such an unspoiled place thrills this refugee from modernity.

In no time, the car is surrounded. Mohan-driver says, ‘Whole village, all Master initiates, five hundred! Very few no initiated, one or two peoples. Very simple peoples! Very much love Maharaj Ji!’

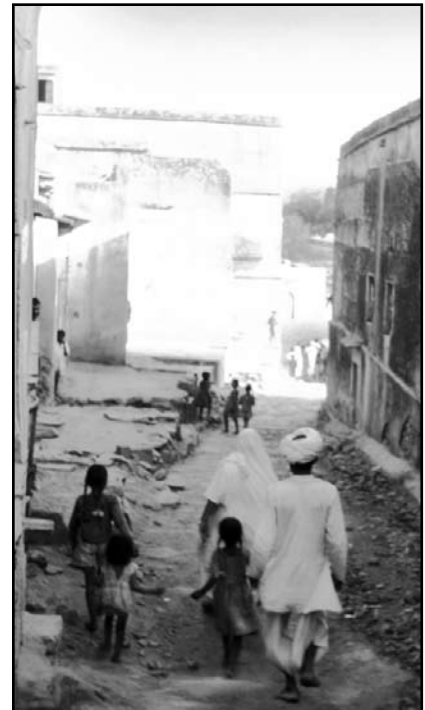
We drive the final leg through a narrow road choked alternately with tangles of banyan and mango tree roots, slow-moving cows, and blithely unaware pedestrians. Finally the narrowness and incline

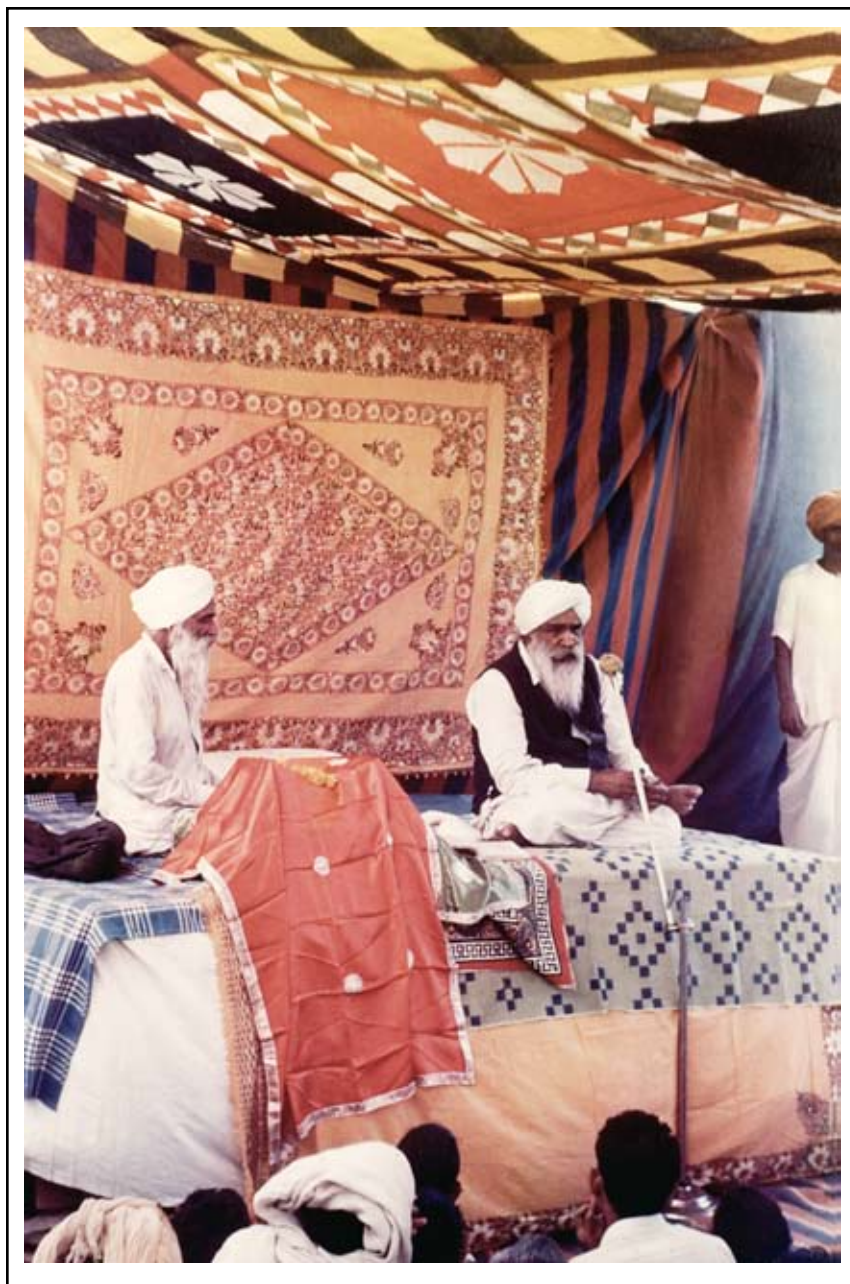
bar further passage. Master alights to greet his beloved children, many of whom try taking the dust from his shoes, applying it to their foreheads. I am almost swept away by the noisy river-like human mass and have to push and squirm to keep up. With obvious difficulty, Master labors slowly up the steep rocky path between a narrow corridor of buildings, the mountain towering directly overhead.

Before a little house, he pauses for breath and mounts a flight of stairs, entering a tiny, darkened, two-room dwelling. I barely squeeze through the compacted crowd outside. After adjusting to the darkness within, I see Master holding the hand of someone lying under mosquito netting. The veil drawn aside, I see a man with a strong, broad face, split with a huge smile; love glistens in his eyes. Master turns to me and says, ‘See his rosy cheeks? See how robust he looks? You would never suspect that he has been bedridden for so many years. You see, he is paralyzed from the waist down.’

As a silent interchange of loving glances passes among us, the man says something in Hindi. Master translates for me, ‘He says, “It is due to my bad karma that I am bedridden, but it is my good karma that Master has come!”’ Only a strong few can accept so graciously. He is Pundit Ghansham Das—a learned disciple of Hazur. The success of Master’s mission here is greatly due to Ghansham’s exemplary influence. Before taking leave of this dear brother lying physically helpless but spiritually awakened, Master reveals, ‘It is for his sake I have come all the way here! Even the slenderest strands of love are stronger than ropes of steel.’

Master bids adieu and amazingly *jogs* down the rocky hill to where more than a thousand villagers wait, chanting Mira bhajans beneath a brightly patterned canopy. For two hours, the Master pours his heart into these lovely people, who drink each word, each gesture, each glance, enraptured. Strong tides are flowing! A handlebar-mustachioed farmer sitting near me is wholly lost in the sight of his Beloved, and a smile stretches from ear to ear as he rocks back and forth, tears streaming his cheeks. I glance around for a moment and see spiritual ecstasy sweeping the crowd. Today the tears are not of pain, but of joy.





Pathi Ji and Maharaj Ji in Satsang, Dantal, 1967 (A)

Late in the day as we take leave of Dantal, the sky darkening, the car is again pursued. This time I'm in Master's car. With eyes sparkling, he turns his head from the front seat, 'These people are simple, God is simple and *he* (the Master) is simple too!' His face is aglow, chuckling.

‘How many from this village saw the Radiant Form at Initiation?’ I ask.

‘Ninety-nine out of a hundred. There was only one man who could not see.’

‘The Radiant Form of the Master?’ I ask (in the West, ten to twenty-five per cent might reach this stage at initiation).

‘Yes. When I first visited Dantal four years ago, several hundred came for initiation and were given a sitting. Meanwhile another seventy-five arrived and asked to be initiated also. They were given instructions, the Names, and put into meditation separate from the first group. More from outlying districts arrived, also requesting Naam! This third group was also given a sitting. Then the first and second groups had to be attended for Sound. A fourth group arrived, but as it was so late they had to be turned away.’

Time, which bears heavily on modern society, means little to those living by the seasons, by the rising and setting of the sun, the monsoon cycle, the sowing and harvesting of crops, the whole gamut of rural life. We might consider this a backward place: no newspapers, no cinemas, no radio or television, no billboards, no rushing and pushing pace, no noise, no pollution, no hospital, no jail. Hewers of wood and drawers of water, their faith ingrained from cradle to pyre. Religion and spirituality are as much a part of their life as food and water—perhaps like tens of thousands of other villages across India, only here, idol worship has given way to the path of the Masters.

Lord of Petrol: ‘Forgive me, Maharaj Ji, but I forgot to get petrol (gas) for the car, and now we are out,’ confesses Ram Saroop, touching his ears—which is the Indian way of saying, ‘I’m guilty.’ The highway is still many miles distant. Master rebukes Ram Saroop for being so careless in his duties and then does a strange thing; he begins praising petrol like anything: ‘Petrol is one of the wonders of the world, it is the proverbial demon carrying the load of industry and commerce; it runs great factories and propels cars, ships, and airplanes. Petrol has helped annihilate distance....petrol has lightened man’s burdens....’ In no time it seems the car reaches the main highway safely, a span of fifty miles on an empty tank!

Realizing what has happened, Ram Saroop folds his wizened hands and bows before the Master. ‘Maharaj Ji, you have saved us again!’

‘What?’ Master replies, ‘I have done nothing. I have only praised petrol, and petrol has helped us!’