

Hanuman Dancing

a short story

by

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HANUMAN DANCING

For all writers a working space of tranquillity is an essential. Personally, a warm ambience, a sense of detachment, but with the potential for momentary engagements with the outer world, would also be viable requisites for the perfect writing environment. These were all to be found in my corner room on the fourth and top floor of the Shastri brothers' hotel in the ancient temple town of Gokarna on the eastern seaboard of the Karnataka coast.

The two large windows - one on each side of the corner - were free of glass but not of the ornate metal grill used extensively throughout India for protection. My writing desk faced out over what is a productive flood plain, that, however, I could not see, as I was high up in the canopy of a palm grove. Through the other window, to my right, the land sloped up turning into a rock-face high above the hotel. The lower slopes were covered in a wide variety of trees to the density of jungle. Thus I was afforded the perfect environment for my creative endeavours.

The Minor birds providing a distinguished variety of song along with the haunting call of the blue-tailed Jays occasionally gave way to the chatter and noise of the local gang of Macaques as indeed they did on this particular day. But this was not their usual gibbering these were cries of alarm even fear.

I quickly visited the right hand window and could see the Macaques descending from the trees, hitting the ground at speed and fleeing through the palm grove. Looking back up to the cliff face - the direction from whence they had come - I was now afforded the fearsome sight of a large band of Giant Languor the biggest monkeys in India. They were descending the cliffs with a speed that was truly astonishing. The males can easily reach 5 feet when standing and some individuals have been measured at over 6. Their arms almost as long as their bodies have such power as to be able to rip a human being to shreds in minutes, if not in seconds.

They were travelling - more swarming - into the canopy around the hotel leaping with ease between the palms.

THWANK! I was face to face with one, and, by just a matter of inches and although I only had eyes for him he had no eyes for me. The large blunt mussel that contained teeth more suited to

a carnivore was squashed length ways against the metal grill as it eyed something in the corner of my room. The sudden lancing arm through the grill had me retreating in terror even though it was not aimed at me but for the bowl of fruit sitting on the corner of the table. He quickly had one piece in his face pouch and another between his teeth, then, levitation like, he disappeared skyward.

I hardly had time to recover when screams - human screams - afflicted the air with primitive resonance. I was out of my room and down the passage to the window at its end. Down below 2 young Indian girls were fleeing through the palm grove from the direction of the hotel's kitchen in an outbuilding directly below where I stood. There were Languor everywhere. Coming out and going into the kitchen and from where metal noises were emanating as this band of raiders made merry with the spoils of banditry.

The whole affair was over in seconds, rather than minutes, and soon they were ascending the cliffs - some forty metres high - with an ease belittling the difficulty that carrying such a bounty of booty one would have expected.

Now people returned. The two girls came back laughing - partly at their own fear and partly from the fear that these Jungle Reivers had bestowed.

The Giant Languor acts with impunity in India. No man would dare kill one for they are most sacred. These were the soldiers of Ram's army in his battle with the demon Ravanna and as such are cherished by all Hindus. Their king was Hanuman who according to legend was an incarnation of Shiva. The story goes like this, Anjana, a celestial being, had been cursed to be born as a Vanara (a monkey like humanoid) but to escape her fate she would have to give birth to Shiva - a seeming impossible proposition. However, after praying to Shiva and attracting his attention by great acts of fealty to the Great Ascetic, Shiva heard her prayers and granted her the honour of giving birth to him. Thus Shiva was born as Hanuman, King of the Monkey-men or as they are perceived today in the form of the Giant Languor. I have often wondered about this story and whether the ancient Indians had not seen either human like qualities in these monkeys or monkey like qualities in humans or more probably both. As such this story is probably a forerunner of evolutionary theory disguised in the trappings of their ancient culture.

My creative concentration broken I quickly made my way down to the kitchen to observe the chaos they had created. My

attention soon focused on the two girls still clinging onto each other and giggling but this was now as much from the friendly banter the eldest of the Shastri brothers was now addressing them with. A howl like roar soon brought silence to those gathered and as one we all looked up to the top of the cliff where those giants were marking their departure with a trademark salute.

Leaving the staff clearing up the mess, I figured I had enough time for a quick chi on route to a special place where I could watch the sunset - this enforced Languor interlude was to afford me a pleasure that I had foregone for sometime. Now this involved a fair walk through the town to the beach then out along a rocky promontory that was in fact a continuation of the cliff face behind the hotel.

Setting off past the vegetable market - busy with cows and goats cleaning up - I quickly made my perfunctory salutations to the giant lingam and yoni statue in a small temple just off the street. This was a proscribed courtesy for those wishing to seek union, for this union of the male and female was representative of the mystical act. I had not gone more than 2 strides away when I wound myself back, for, sinking in after the event, the sight of six young girls dancing around the stylised symbol of the sexual act was more than just a titillating taunt.

On the surface India is such a prudish society where the act of kissing in public is liable to a fine, if you are lucky, or a sound thrashing if you are not, yet it can provide a sensual sight such as this: six virgins paying homage to the sexual act in the most provocative way as they swayed their bodies in circular motion caressing the lingam with the tips of their fingers on each cycle.

These visions were soon followed by thoughts of a cruder nature and were just about to pass into depravity when I was saved by a strange scratching on my head. Looking up a young Macaque was begging for food from his place on the low roof entrance to the temple. Exchanging grimaces I quickly moved on, a little grateful for his timely intervention in the direction my imaginings were working their wicked way towards.

Wishing to avoid the main thoroughfare where I was liable to be waylaid by the numerous friends I had made over many years in visiting this ancient temple town I cut through a narrow alley that brought me out next to one of the biggest Tanks in all India.

These Tanks are used for purification during religious ceremonies as well as for simple hygiene when not. But this Tank was special and not just because of its size - some 3 football pitches in area - but also because during the Shivarati festival the stepped incline of the Tank's walls are covered in candles and the entire surface of the Tank covered in tiny boats made of leaves that double as oil lamps. It takes from the setting sun to its rise for the entire town to accomplish this task. Now I'm sure you can imagine this sight beneath a Shiva moon with no artificial light to destroy the ambience. What you can't imagine is the silence on completion as all present enter a state of union with the Great Ascetic as he completes the great cycle of death and life reborn that the festival embodies.

But that day was just another day and the Tank just a gathering place for those engaged in domestic routine. I quickly descended the steps and washed my hands, feet and face - an act of purification - before turning to witness a group of adolescent monkeys who seemed intent on teaching their younger members how to swim by throwing them in.

I hurried up the steps and hurried on. Taking a path through the houses I was soon set on a wiggling line that crudely followed the high cliff that ventured towards the sea. Then coming onto a widening stretch of the path I was soon sitting at one of the 2 tables that made for the smallest café in the entire world. The old man having only one commodity for sale soon produced it in a glass of dubious lineage - sweet cardamom tea.

I sprung a Wills filter into my mouth and leaning back against the wall now addressed the scene unfolding but a few paces away. I recognised the wife of my friend Raj Kauri along with two of his daughters and 3 other young women. They were engrossed with something on the wall - the construction of a Romalia, for this particular wall was used for the practicing and the teaching of the younger female members of the family the intricate patterned designs that were placed on the ground outside of their houses on a daily bases. With the Shivarati Festival not far off, I considered that special Romalia would be used and because of their sophistication there would thus be a need for practiced consideration. I was not wrong.

The construction of Romalia is ingenious: rows of crosses are placed in order starting from the top. Then lines drawn between these crosses bring forth the hidden symbol. In the construction of large Romalia a grid system is used and I have often wondered if this could not as easily represent a quantum

field. Then, theoretically, if one was to replace the straight lines of the grid with the wavy lines of the wave-function that exists at the quantum level of reality one would have amplified peaks where the waves intersected on a positive orientation. These natural peaks would form a pattern in the quantum field in much the same way as the crosses did in Romalia. And it tickled me at that moment that this natural quantum signature might present the transition from wave-function to objective reality - the holy grail of theoretical physics. I hope the reader will forgive me as I often have foolish thoughts such as these when my undirected mind is left to wander.

Finishing my tea and paying my dues I decided a spot of fun was now beckoning. This was, of course, another stage in the procedure of preparation for my meditation. Having followed the proscribed course up to this point, quieting the mind, an essential perquisite was next on the agenda, and therefore the elimination of the mischievous imp by exorcism a natural part of my personal requirements in regard to this matter. As I had to pass these ladies anyway it would have been churlish of me not to have made my presence felt. Not that it had been unobserved, you understand, for Raj's wife - who took a dim view of Raj's friends - had by a few well-chosen glances intimated to me her disapproval of my very existence. Raj had said to me how much he missed the Indian army where he had been a regimental sergeant major and where he was used only to the vagaries of the lower ranked officer class. While now, living back at home, he was subject daily to the whims of a domestic battalion commander - his good wife.

Sauntering to a point directly behind the Romalia under construction I gave it grave consideration.

A large square divided both vertically and horizontally with 15 lines provided a matrix on which crosses were being placed on certain intersecting lines. Once the crosses on each line were in place then lines were being drawn between them. But here was the rub, the design was skewed and not at all in equilibrium as Romalia are want to be. Obviously, well, obvious to me, they had placed too many crosses on one line and had drawn the design from these extra crosses when the lines should have been from crosses on the line above.

"No, no, no Ladies there are far too many crosses on the fifth line". I reached through to scrub out one of the crosses but my hand never made it as Raj's wife smacked it away with some force.

The giggles of the girls only increased as Raj's wife threatened me with an up turned hand making a cutting movement through the air just around my throat.

"Go away! You cheeky monkey!"

"But Madam..."

"Don't you: 'But Madam' me."

"Then I shall withdraw and pray that it is not too late to save our friendship from pregnant animosity."

"What gibbering nonsense you speak. Be off with you and make a fool of yourself somewhere else."

The girls were ecstatic and even Raj's wife was finding it hard to keep a straight face.

"Adieu, a bon chance." I chanced as I left. But the retort was instant with the shouted imitation of my poor French accent flaying out behind: "Adieu" "Bon chance" giving me a verbal lashing first in sing song, then in derision and finally in the brutal guttural tones of base Karnatakese.

Having exercised my mischievous little demon I now felt fully cleansed for the task at hand. Hurrying along the path then mounting the steps at the end I arrived at a vantage point overlooking the sea. To my right was the 7 kilometre beach and to my left the promontory that was sticking out into the ocean - my destination. The sun was fast approaching its place and so with quick long strides I crossed the beach, mounted the stairs past the monkey temple and followed a narrow path up along the cliff face. Arriving at the point where the cliff from behind the Shastri brothers' hotel turned a sharp left to become the sea cliff of the coast, I dropped down onto a spur that stuck out into the ocean.

Soon I was in position. Sitting on a natural stone seat and facing the sun setting over the ocean my entire vision was taken up with sea and sky.

Just in time for the sparkling path was opening up in front of me as the light from the sun reflected off the dancing waves and into my eyes.

Narrowing my lids to slits I concentrated on finding the Goddess in the path of light. To my surprise what I saw was the teeming mass of human bodies of an Indian street market and once established found this Image almost impossible to remove. But then again I was looking at too much detail. On drawing my perspective back so the whole of the path of light encompassed my vision - there she was. Made up of the writhing

mass of humanity she was already in motion. This was the first time I had seen her dancing. As the Image became clearer so her form moved to the choreography of the Hindu classical dance form of Bharat Natayam. Here was the walk and she was walking towards ... me.

The ecstatic moment gone I was left with just the reddening light of the sun on the waves. Turning elongated as it dipped into the ocean the blood red disc was soon lost.

That this Image was a product of the representational machinery of my brain mattered not an iota. The fact that 100 billion neurones with up to 2000 dendrite connections for every neurone - a potential permutation greater than all the atoms in the universe - only made the Image of the dancing Goddess more mystical. And the fact, that this ancient meditation technique - reportedly 6000 years old - worked just as well today as it ever had.

Shiva had blessed his students with a flawless meditation technique. By simply identifying yourself with him, you could become him - am I am Shiva am I am Shiva am I am Shiva am I am Shiva - repeated endlessly will induce this state. There is, however, an adjunct to this, for it is said that Shiva could conjure up his wife Parvati through his meditations and this searching for the Goddess was the proscribed form that it took. For the student this conjuring up of the Goddess in the student's mind is the perfect identification with Shiva and as such produces, union, enlightenment, the ecstatic moment.

A few moments was all I could afford to recover and looking directly above my head I could already see the darkening blue filling the sky. I waited - only a few more minutes - until the first star appeared then standing up I stretched my arms into a Y before turning into frozen shock.

Not more than 5 paces away was the nearest - if there were 50 there'd be 100 Giant Languor all rising and turning away from nature's great spectacle. After only a few moments where I realized that I had achieved a sort of union with these magnificent creatures I filed up after them, a straggler. Reaching the cliff top they turned right along the sea cliff and I, like a Darwinian branch on the tree of life turned, splitting and departed from my Band of Brothers

