

[00:02:30] >> The long search is open to anybody.
[00:02:32] You don't have to go to Benares, India to start it but we did.
[00:02:37] It doesn't have a tie to beginning, middle, and end.
[00:02:41] You're on it the moment you start wondering
[00:02:43] where you were before you were born, where you'll go
[00:02:46] when you die and what you're on earth for in the meantime.
[00:02:51] If you knew the answers, you wouldn't ask the questions.
[00:02:54] But other peoples' answers should be worth
[00:02:56] collecting and so should have peoples' questions.
[00:02:58] That's what we're going to try to do.
[00:03:20] >> You're probably wondering who I am and what gives me the right
[00:03:23] to launch one of these big film series.
[00:03:26] Afterall, when they've happened before,
[00:03:28] there's been unknown authority doing what I'm doing and I agree
[00:03:31] with you that you don't immediately look
[00:03:33] to a London-based, Yorkshire born, displaced theater director
[00:03:37] to guide you through other people's religious beliefs
[00:03:41] but that's to expect the wrong thing.
[00:03:44] I'm not here as any sort of authority.
[00:03:46] I'm more of a bridge.
[00:03:48] Authority this time has to rest in the people we come across
[00:03:52] and talk to and visit because it's their way
[00:03:55] of life we're looking at.
[00:04:02] >> It's one thing to sit at home and discuss Hinduism
[00:04:05] but quite another to go out to India and try and find it.
[00:04:08] For a start, who do you trust?
[00:04:11] Scholarly people talk history,
[00:04:14] devout people push their own brand of devotion,
[00:04:17] busy people have no time to talk to you,
[00:04:19] simple people don't have the words for it,
[00:04:21] and the holiest people keep their mouth shut.
[00:04:25] In Benares, I came across Mr. N.K. Sharma ,
[00:04:28] a tourist guide who turned out to be a pundit.
[00:04:31] He was my first guru.
[00:04:33] >> -- to be more confused but we have started
[00:04:35] with many already, right?
[00:04:37] The next move for us is really to try and concentrate mainly--
[00:04:40] concentrate on one thing.
[00:04:42] >> That's right.
[00:04:43] >> That's right.
[00:04:44] >> Because otherwise, we go mad.
[00:04:45] You know, even the-- if you find it very .
[00:04:58] >> My first brush with a Hindu god was
[00:05:00] in this street on his feast day.
[00:05:02] He had the head of an elephant, sat cross-legged,
[00:05:06] was made of painted clay and came in different sizes.
[00:05:10] This was Ganesha, the remover of obstacles.
[00:05:14] We were going to need Ganesha.
[00:05:19] Are you a devotee of Ganesha yourself, Mr. Sharma?
[00:05:22] >> Particularly not.
[00:05:24] I'm devotee of Kali.
[00:05:26] What does that mean?
[00:05:28] >> Kali is life of Shiva in her terrific aspect,
[00:05:33] not tolerating any wrong.
[00:05:35] >> Um-hmm.
[00:05:36] She is-- when you see pictures of Kali, she looks--
[00:05:38] she's got a bloody tongue and is carrying heads.
[00:05:41] >> Right, right.
[00:05:42] Yes. She appears very terrific.

[00:05:44] >> And many people tell that she is not a good goddess
[00:05:48] but actually she is terrific to finish bad.
[00:05:52] >> Yup. She's a violent goddess.
[00:05:54] >> Yes, violent goddess.
[00:05:55] >> But she is violent to finish the--
[00:05:57] what is bad, what is wrong, what is worse.
[00:05:59] >> But if I said to you what is god?
[00:06:01] You're not going to tell me that it is anyone
[00:06:03] of these people are you?
[00:06:05] >> All these gods, these sub gods.
[00:06:08] You're not gonna say it is Ganesha or it is Kali.
[00:06:11] If I said to you what is god?
[00:06:14] How would you put it?
[00:06:15] >> I've been-- there are different stages of belief,
[00:06:18] and the highest stage we call Brahma and that
[00:06:22] in English you can call it Supreme, Supreme.
[00:06:25] >> One supreme god, yeah.
[00:06:27] As is a potter's yard and you can find little shattered images
[00:06:31] of clay gods all over.
[00:06:33] This is not a put up job but our feet as we sat down was a part
[00:06:37] of a head of Lakshmi, wife of Vishnu.
[00:06:41] Are you telling me that an image,
[00:06:43] a clay image, really contains god?
[00:06:46] >> No. There is not god actually in it but it is a symbol of god.
[00:06:54] These statues are just like a pointer.
[00:06:58] Suppose I want to point you something like this,
[00:07:00] how long I should keep my finger like this?
[00:07:03] As long as you have not seen the object,
[00:07:05] but as soon as you have seen the object, I remove my finger.
[00:07:08] >> But aren't there some people when you point,
[00:07:10] you point because you want to see something--
[00:07:12] >> And they never, they never understand what you're pointing
[00:07:15] at so the whole of their lives they're actually looking
[00:07:18] at your finger.
[00:07:19] >> That's correct and farther God is not in a hurry.
[00:07:23] >> God is not in a hurry.
[00:07:26] Images are just
[00:07:27] like kindergarten teachers they give you a star
[00:07:30] and not require an advance stage.
[00:07:34] >> Educational toys?
[00:07:35] >> Educational toys, yes.
[00:07:36] >> Are there rules of conduct in Hindu scriptures?
[00:07:42] >> The first thing I should tell
[00:07:44] that Hindu is not a strict rigid religion.
[00:07:48] It is a philosophy of life.
[00:07:50] It is a way of life.
[00:07:52] Everybody is free to behave as his mind,
[00:07:56] his conscience deems fit and it is good
[00:08:00] as long it is not harming anybody, it is always good
[00:08:04] and nobody has to say anything.
[00:08:05] >> Do you mean that we're all Hindus really,
[00:08:08] doing various ways?
[00:08:09] >> I think at the highest state, there is nobody beyond Hinduism.
[00:08:15] Everybody is a Hindu.
[00:08:16] >> It was odd to hear Mr. Sharma use the word Hinduism and insist
[00:08:23] at the same time that Indian religion is no one thing
[00:08:26] with one founder, one bible, and one organization.
[00:08:30] Perhaps he was trying to be kind to a westerner
[00:08:33] so he used a tidy all embracing western label.
[00:08:37] Millions of people, one sacred Ganges.

[00:08:43] Millions of gods, one god.
[00:08:46] I was starting to pick up clues.
[00:08:56] >> This is how it looked in the middle of the day.
[00:08:58] At dawn, there'd been less soap and more praying
[00:09:02] but the early morning worshippers also did
[00:09:04] their laundry.
[00:09:05] And in among the midday laundry there was no end to the prayer.
[00:09:11] Where do you draw the line?
[00:09:12] Is there even a line to draw?
[00:09:15] If this religion is a way of life, there isn't.
[00:09:18] I gazed into that river
[00:09:21] and remembered the irreverent explorer who said
[00:09:24] that the Ganges is considered pure
[00:09:26] because no microbe can stay alive in it,
[00:09:29] yet just through report, devout Hindus told me
[00:09:33] that Ganges water kept in a bottle never goes bad.
[00:09:37] Pious locals cook and wash
[00:09:39] in nothing else, it's a great healer.
[00:09:43] The Ganges in other words is a goddess.
[00:09:46] She purifies everything
[00:09:48] and everyone she touches instantly and utterly.
[00:09:51] Poor people save all their lives for just one chance
[00:09:55] to immerse themselves in her.
[00:09:57] With your own eyes, you can see the garbage
[00:10:00] and you can see the faith.
[00:10:01] Both are real.
[00:10:03] That's the dilemma.
[00:10:12] >> The steady coming and going of pilgrims
[00:10:14] in Benares never stops nor does the chanting that's amplified
[00:10:19] day and night up and down the river.
[00:10:20] But every few years, there's a planned concentration of bathers
[00:10:26] at one time and in one or other
[00:10:28] of the holy places along the river.
[00:10:31] This is in Allahabad where the Ganges joins the Yamuna.
[00:10:36] This meeting lasted about a month in all and tents sprung
[00:10:39] up on the mud flats to host the rallies and the prayer meetings
[00:10:43] and the mobile sick base and the offices
[00:10:46] for lost property and lost people.
[00:10:55] >> On an ordinary day here in Haridwar,
[00:10:57] there is a 10-minute walk from the town center to the river.
[00:11:01] When these pictures were taken,
[00:11:03] there were 7 million bathers and it took 5 hours.
[00:11:27] >> Alright, how do you put in a nutshell what's going
[00:11:30] through the minds of a million assorted bathers
[00:11:34] or the mind of even one?
[00:11:47] >> You suddenly get an aerial picture of the whole
[00:11:50] of India criss-crossed by streams of people making
[00:11:54] for holy rivers and holy rivers making to the sea.
[00:12:00] We made a plan.
[00:12:02] Three-quarters of the population of India live in villages
[00:12:06] so three-quarters of the trudging pilgrims who go
[00:12:09] in search of the great river set out from, return to,
[00:12:12] and live most of their lives in somewhere like this,
[00:12:16] Bhagwanpur in North Bihar.
[00:12:22] It's a remote village 30 miles from the border of Nepal
[00:12:26] and a 5-hour jeep ride from the nearest small town.
[00:12:30] No electricity, no telephone, and their way
[00:12:33] of life that's been going on pretty much the same
[00:12:35] for hundreds of years.
[00:12:38] Shivesh Takua was born here.

[00:12:40] It was through him that the village opened itself up to us.
[00:12:55] >> Waiting for his son to graduated college.
[00:12:59] >> But he still will get married, yes?
[00:13:03] This is the old world.
[00:13:06] >> Yes.
[00:13:07] >> The Takua household is a series
[00:13:10] of rooms rounded in closed courtyard.
[00:13:13] His mother, brother, sister-in-law, 2 nephews,
[00:13:17] and 3 nieces live in 1 family house.
[00:13:20] Shivesh himself is a younger son.
[00:13:23] When he was 7, his father died of snake bite.
[00:13:27] His elder brother sent him to university.
[00:13:30] Now, Shivesh is professor and Head of the Department
[00:13:33] of Philosophy in the University of Sari, England.
[00:13:37] Across the road lives his aunt.
[00:13:40] Nearby live 4 uncles.
[00:13:42] >> Well, I've got as many uncles as you like,
[00:13:44] the whole village is a series of uncles in a certain way because,
[00:13:47] you know, they all mean things to me and I mean things to them.
[00:13:52] Most of them that really aren't your uncles but that's the sort
[00:13:56] of relationship and this means simply another way
[00:13:58] of saying the whole village is one community.
[00:14:02] >> What's the population of Bhagwanpur?
[00:14:06] >> I would think around 5 and 6000.
[00:14:10] >> What do most of the villagers do for a living?
[00:14:13] >> It's a farming community almost entirely.
[00:14:16] >> Do you think they have a hard life?
[00:14:21] >> If you-- by hard times you mean are people able to spend
[00:14:25] as much on food and luxury items that they do out here
[00:14:29] in the western, of course they have a very hard time.
[00:14:32] They don't have anything like that.
[00:14:34] But if you live in a village,
[00:14:36] it's a self-sufficient community.
[00:14:38] It grows everything that it needs of virtually everything.
[00:14:42] I mean you can't-- can't grow kerosene,
[00:14:44] and it needs a little bit of kerosene to light a lamp,
[00:14:47] for instance a lantern or the like but otherwise,
[00:14:50] the village can carry on living
[00:14:52] at its present standard of living.
[00:14:54] It doesn't matter what happens to the rest of the world.
[00:15:04] >> During parts of the year, of course,
[00:15:05] there is no question of getting about.
[00:15:06] Not many people do or want to.
[00:15:08] The rest of the time, its people either walk from one place
[00:15:12] to another or take a bullock cart or a horse cart and now
[00:15:17] of course, this is the technological breakthrough,
[00:15:19] there are lots of bicycles there.
[00:15:30] >> There's a tea shop also in this regard.
[00:15:33] >> When I was growing up in this village, there was no tea shop.
[00:15:36] In fact, there weren't many people who drank tea.
[00:15:39] >> What do they drink?
[00:15:40] >> Pardon.
[00:15:41] >> What do they drink?
[00:15:42] >> They drank water.
[00:15:44] >> That's the thing to drink only?
[00:15:56] >> There are 4 schools in Bhagwanpur and once a year
[00:16:00] like most schools and colleges in India,
[00:16:03] they celebrate the festival of Saraswati,
[00:16:06] goddess of art and learning.
[00:16:08] At the boys' school, the image of the goddess sat on top

[00:16:12] of a grassy bank that represented the Himalayas
[00:16:15] with cotton wool of the mountain snow.
[00:16:24] >> By tradition, Saraswati rides on a white swam
[00:16:27] and in her 4 arms, she carries a musical instrument, a pen,
[00:16:32] a book, and a crystal.
[00:16:43] >> Shortly after 8 in the morning on the first day,
[00:16:46] the Sanskrit master, the equivalent
[00:16:48] in the west might be the Latin master and one
[00:16:50] of his pupils came to make the first offerings.
[00:16:53] Sweets, fruit, flowers, water to wash in, a change of clothes,
[00:16:58] colored cosmetic paste to mark the face
[00:17:01] as if the goddess were a real a woman and real guest.
[00:17:30] >> By the way, the food wasn't thrown away.
[00:17:32] After the goddess, it was offered
[00:17:34] to the second best guests.
[00:17:35] That's us and then to the boys.
[00:17:48] >> The center of this ritual, I was surprised
[00:17:50] to find out, isn't the master.
[00:17:53] He is the one who addresses the goddess in Sanskrit
[00:17:56] and the master is there just to prompt him.
[00:18:03] >> This process is literally trying to breathe life
[00:18:08] into the goddess by a certain ritual observation
[00:18:12] so by citing certain sorts of verses and doing correct things
[00:18:16] as prescribed in the tradition.
[00:18:19] The boy on behalf of the school is inviting the goddess to come
[00:18:24] and take her seat into this image.
[00:18:28] And from that point on, for this prescribed time,
[00:18:34] she actually becomes the seat of their goddess.
[00:18:42] >> What did the Saraswati festival mean to you as a boy?
[00:18:45] >> It meant a great deal of fun, I had a lot of excitement
[00:18:48] and of course also I think expectation
[00:18:53] of great things happening by way of reward because as you know,
[00:18:58] Saraswati is the goddess of learning.
[00:19:01] And like the child I was, I believed that if I took a couple
[00:19:05] of my books and put it in front of the image then somehow
[00:19:08] after the festival, after the Puja,
[00:19:11] once I brought these books back home, I will just have to leaf
[00:19:15] through the books and I'll get the contents of the whole thing
[00:19:18] in my mind straight away.
[00:19:19] >> It works, too doesn't it?
[00:19:21] >> I suppose.
[00:19:23] I don't know about, you know, that is what works
[00:19:26] but something seems to have worked.
[00:19:40] >> We're not now talking about idolatry are we?
[00:19:42] We're talking about looking through the piece of simple clay
[00:19:45] to a more abstract ungraspable thing.
[00:19:48] You are looking considerably beyond the piece of clay.
[00:19:53] The piece of clay is a symbol and you invoke the symbol
[00:19:59] in order to address and communicate with something
[00:20:03] that that symbol represents which is divinity.
[00:20:07] >> I can understand that you with your mind
[00:20:09] and training could have that thought.
[00:20:11] I wonder how generally shared by very simple devout people
[00:20:15] or do they really superstitiously think
[00:20:18] that that goddess, that piece
[00:20:20] of clay is something more than clay?
[00:20:22] >> Yes. As I can see why you ask this question because it sounds
[00:20:27] like a very sophisticated point to grasp,
[00:20:29] I think I'll be very surprised if you ran into many people
[00:20:33] who believed that literally that clay was the goddess

[00:20:41] because they are perfectly aware for instance
[00:20:44] that a new clay image is bought every year and installed
[00:20:48] in this place and then is thrown away.
[00:20:51] So it's not clay you're worshipping,
[00:20:53] it's what the clay represents.
[00:20:55] >> So you're brought up to be used to disposable gods?
[00:20:59] >> Disposable clay, disposable stone, disposable--
[00:21:03] whatever material you use.
[00:21:06] But what these bits of material represent that's not disposable,
[00:21:10] and that's not something you can grasp or see or feel or touch.
[00:21:23] >> How many gods do the Hindus have?
[00:21:26] >> That's a very tricky one.
[00:21:29] Sometimes you get 330 million gods.
[00:21:34] So if you like, that's the answer.
[00:21:36] >> Three hundred and thirty million?
[00:21:39] >> I've been thinking about the 330 million gods of India.
[00:21:42] Who counted them?
[00:21:44] What are their names?
[00:21:46] Does it mean that with 365 days in a year,
[00:21:50] the gods have their festivals at the rate
[00:21:52] of about a million a day?
[00:21:55] Or are the 330 million gods just 330 million different
[00:22:00] expressions, different facets of one universal god
[00:22:04] with the number 330 million thought up to astound the mind?
[00:22:10] Or would it be right to include among the gods all living
[00:22:15] things, all plants, all animals, all parents, all teachers,
[00:22:20] all guests, everything that lives because a lot
[00:22:24] of the people we've talked to during this search do claim
[00:22:26] to see the universal god reflected
[00:22:29] in all living creatures.
[00:22:32] Now, if you start thinking about the gods in that way
[00:22:34] as including all living things,
[00:22:37] the number 330 million is a wild underestimate
[00:22:41] of the number they must be.
[00:22:47] >> What are the best known of the traditional gods?
[00:22:51] >> I supposed the most famous of course is the trinity
[00:22:54] of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.
[00:22:58] Brahma is the creator.
[00:23:01] Vishnu is the preserver, one who maintains the universe
[00:23:06] in its equilibrium, and Shiva whose job it is
[00:23:10] to destroy the world when the world begins
[00:23:13] to be thoroughly beyond repair.
[00:23:17] The Hindu idea of creation is not of one final creation.
[00:23:24] It's a cycle.
[00:23:25] It's something that goes on all the time, something in the world
[00:23:29] that we know is being destroyed now and something
[00:23:32] in the world is being recreated now.
[00:23:35] So normally this works for long periods of time
[00:23:38] and when I say long I don't mean a few years.
[00:23:40] I mean a few million, million years if you like.
[00:23:43] But there comes a stage when, so the story goes,
[00:23:47] the world just can't be maintained,
[00:23:49] it's completely beyond repair so it's got to be destroyed
[00:23:52] and another one created in its place.
[00:23:54] So Shiva does the destroying if you like
[00:23:56] and Brahma recreates another world out of that same material.
[00:24:06] >> The traditional way of representing the power
[00:24:09] of a god is to give him a goddess.
[00:24:13] She's called his Shakti, his comfort, his power house.
[00:24:17] She can be playful.

[00:24:18] She can be tremendous.
[00:24:20] She can be terrifying like the great goddess Kali.
[00:24:24] Of all the people of people in Bhagwanpur,
[00:24:30] the one who impressed me most was the one
[00:24:33] who had given up most.
[00:24:35] He is a sannyasi which literally means one who renounces.
[00:24:39] And this man has renounced everything, his name,
[00:24:42] his past, his possessions.
[00:24:45] The villagers call him Mahatma, great soul.
[00:24:49] His borrowed his hut, his bed, his lamp.
[00:24:52] He owns a change of clothes, a water pot,
[00:24:56] and a few books though he says they aren't his either.
[00:25:09] >> Mahatma Ji, what did you do for a living before you withdrew
[00:25:12] from the world and became a sannyasi?
[00:25:16] >> I was living to my guru in the Ashram.
[00:25:21] >> I was thinking about life before that.
[00:25:25] >> Before that?
[00:25:32] Before living this, I was a law practitioner in the court.
[00:25:39] >> Um-hmm.
[00:25:40] >> Yes.
[00:25:41] >> Is it something that embarrasses you
[00:25:43] to talk about-- your past?
[00:25:47] >> It is better if we don't want to know my past.
[00:25:54] >> You would me prefer me not to ask.
[00:25:56] >> Not to ask, yes.
[00:25:59] >> Why should a man leave society, leave his home?
[00:26:04] >> To be nearer to God with the object to have peace of mind.
[00:26:13] >> And the idea here is that this peace and this nearness
[00:26:16] to God cannot be achieved while a man is in society?
[00:26:20] >> Yes, that kind of experience.
[00:26:24] >> Ex-lawyer, ex-socialist politician, ex-freedom fighter,
[00:26:28] ex-man on the run from the British police
[00:26:31] and not writing his memoirs.
[00:26:45] >> Still celebrating the goddess Saraswati
[00:26:48] but this time of the girls' school.
[00:27:15] >> It seemed to strike me as odd that performers
[00:27:17] at a girl's school concert should all be men.
[00:27:49] >> What's that mark on that man's forehead mean?
[00:27:52] >> He's a devotee of Vishnu.
[00:28:29] >> This song I discovered is in honor of the god Shiva.
[00:28:33] So what you've got here is a devotee
[00:28:35] of one god singing a song about another god at a festival
[00:28:39] in honor of a school goddess.
[00:28:41] These can't be jealous gods.
[00:28:52] >> If by the way you're getting the impression
[00:28:55] of a whole community moving amiably
[00:28:57] from one pious celebration to another,
[00:29:00] that's how in some ways it was for those few weeks.
[00:29:04] The bad times would come later, black days in the calendar,
[00:29:08] the astrologers warning, drought, the monsoon,
[00:29:12] floods, weeks of anxiety.
[00:29:19] Soon this landscape will be scorched
[00:29:21] by the sun then it will lie under perhaps 10 feet
[00:29:25] of flood water ruining the temple and most of the houses
[00:29:27] and destroying the roads.
[00:29:38] >> At the moment, everybody here has something to eat
[00:29:40] but the next village is rationed to eating three days a week.
[00:29:44] I asked the headmaster
[00:29:46] of the girls' school how he managed to be so cheerful.
[00:29:49] He answered we are disaster proof men.

[00:29:53] All the same.
[00:29:54] Any action they can think of to avert, control,
[00:29:58] and diffuse disaster, they take even the most ancient.
[00:30:09] >> While we were there, 4 Brahmin priests spent a day
[00:30:12] from 8 in the morning 'til 4
[00:30:14] in the afternoon chanting Sanskrit hymns
[00:30:17] and performing a fire ritual to ensure a good harvest.
[00:30:25] >> A local Sanskrit scholar told me
[00:30:27] that this unbroken chant had been going on somewhere in India
[00:30:30] for at least 3000 years and all we were doing was plugging
[00:30:34] in to an endless sound and releasing it over the land.
[00:31:16] >> I was told I should think of the fire as the mouth of God.
[00:31:19] It devours the offerings and turns them into smoke
[00:31:23] in the same way our prayers are devoured and turned into power.
[00:31:39] >> Should I say sure it doesn't make any difference
[00:31:41] that very few people can understand the word
[00:31:43] of what's going on?
[00:31:45] >> It's the same as in the west
[00:31:47] when you need an electrical engineer,
[00:31:49] sophisticated equipment, well you get an electrical engineer
[00:31:53] from what is available.
[00:31:55] He comes and does the job, we don't fiddle with it.
[00:32:00] And so the pundits they are scholars they knew what was
[00:32:05] happening and the village came and listened reverently
[00:32:08] and respectfully waiting for the results
[00:32:11] which they know will come.
[00:32:12] They may not but as far as they are concerned,
[00:32:14] they believe it well.
[00:32:17] >> Are there people in the village
[00:32:18] who think the whole day's business is a waste of time?
[00:32:21] >> Oh I'm certain there are a few people,
[00:32:24] quite a few there may be, you know,
[00:32:25] because there are also skeptics in village and skepticism is
[00:32:29] as long established vision in India as anything else.
[00:32:33] So there are skeptics
[00:32:34] who believe this is just a waste of time, you know.
[00:32:36] We should go and do something about it rather
[00:32:38] than have these high priests chanting scripture
[00:32:40] but I do think the majority of the village do believe
[00:32:44] that this is something important and efficacious.
[00:33:45] >> These men are what're usually called
[00:33:47] in the west high caste Hindus, Brahmins.
[00:33:50] By that I don't mean rich or powerful.
[00:33:53] I mean high caste.
[00:33:55] If you think of a man born again and born again working his way
[00:33:59] up a spiral, good deed by good deed, good life by good life
[00:34:04] and going up through one caste after another, you could say
[00:34:08] that these men are supposed to be near the top.
[00:34:10] And the prayer they repeat every morning is special to them.
[00:34:25] >> Somewhere a morning hymn started.
[00:34:27] We couldn't locate it 'til we looked up.
[00:34:54] >> The blossoms that he is speaking are
[00:34:55] for the village temple which is dedicated to the god Shiva.
[00:35:09] >> It's rather difficult to recall how I used to feel
[00:35:10] as a boy but I think it was one of getting carried away
[00:35:14] on huge big waves of something or the other.
[00:35:18] You got there and here were crowds of priests
[00:35:20] and other people and suddenly at some precise second
[00:35:25] or minute I couldn't understand, things went bang.
[00:35:29] And then once the bang started it was such a huge big bang

[00:35:34] that you got carried away with it.
[00:35:35] And things started happening all over you and your bones
[00:35:39] and your marrow and everything.
[00:35:48] >> What is down in that darkness?
[00:35:51] >> This stone, symbol of Shiva and Shakti.
[00:35:56] >> That-- you wouldn't be wrong
[00:35:58] to see something remotely sexual in this?
[00:36:01] >> No, you wouldn't be.
[00:36:04] We have seen that Shiva is supposed to be the destroyer god
[00:36:09] in some ways and yet you see his representation happens to be
[00:36:14] in terms of the male and female sex organs.
[00:36:17] That's what it vaguely looks like and that's
[00:36:20] of course the sign of fertility.
[00:36:22] So clearly the idea being suggested to you is,
[00:36:25] and I hope you grasp it, everyone does that destruction
[00:36:28] and creation aren't seen as utterly distinct things.
[00:36:32] One leads into the other so the--
[00:36:34] Shiva the destroyer is also represented
[00:36:36] as a sign of procreation.
[00:37:07] >> It's odd to think that these pieces of masonry cold
[00:37:10] and meaningless in a western museum were once surrounded
[00:37:14] by noise and flowers and pairs and drumming.
[00:37:17] >> There's nothing in this faces to suggest here are men
[00:37:23] who know they are worshipping one of 330 million gods.
[00:37:27] As far as you can see, they're worshipping just one god.
[00:37:30] But I started with the idea of a vast number and it stuck.
[00:37:36] >> I'm still troubled about the 330 million gods of India.
[00:37:39] And the trouble isn't the number,
[00:37:43] 330 million, but the word gods.
[00:37:46] If you could call them Hindu saints,
[00:37:49] the numbers would be less of a problem and it wouldn't seem
[00:37:51] to be too bad a label.
[00:37:53] After all Hindu gods
[00:37:56] like Catholic saints have their festivals and feast days.
[00:38:00] They are the objects and means of devotion.
[00:38:03] They are regarded as a pathway through to God and seen
[00:38:06] as reflecting God back on to the earth like a mirror.
[00:38:11] Whereas the Mahatma who lives on the outskirts of Bhagwanpur
[00:38:15] to try and help me to grasp what the gods wear.
[00:38:18] The words he used could easily have come
[00:38:21] from a devout Catholic talking about a Christian saint.
[00:38:25] He described the real god, Brahman, as the powerhouse
[00:38:31] and the 330 million visible gods as light bulbs
[00:38:35] which were working off divine electricity.
[00:38:39] Of course, the comparisons between the gods
[00:38:42] and the saints do collapse very soon.
[00:38:45] For a start, you can't place many
[00:38:47] of the Hindu gods in recorded history.
[00:38:50] Most of them were born before it.
[00:38:52] And there is no Hindu equivalent of the papal office
[00:38:56] that examines the claims of new saints and decides
[00:38:59] which one should be admitted and which shan't.
[00:39:02] But just to dislodge the word gods
[00:39:05] for a bit does lessen the feeling of being overwhelmed
[00:39:08] by a multitude, especially when you were brought up not
[00:39:12] to believe that there is more gods than one.
[00:39:20] Tell me if I'm wrong, but I gather
[00:39:21] that traditionally,
[00:39:23] Hindu society splits into 4 main castes.
[00:39:26] They are the religious leaders, that's the Brahmins,

[00:39:30] the military leaders, the businessmen, and the castes
[00:39:34] that serves the other three, the Shudra.
[00:39:36] Can you say what caste these boys are?
[00:39:39] >> No. I'm afraid I can't.
[00:39:41] I just know them that they are boys and--
[00:39:43] >> So boys, young boys on a heap, I mean, they're just boys.
[00:39:46] >> Yes, yes, agree.
[00:39:47] >> What about the untouchable?
[00:39:50] >> The untouchables happen to be a subclass of the last of these,
[00:39:55] Shudras, since they were eventually seen
[00:39:58] as being dirty jobs, it tended to sort of, you know,
[00:40:01] keep them away from the others and thereby supposedly sent
[00:40:05] to whom Gandhi later called Harijans, men of god.
[00:40:09] >> But what about caste as it is today?
[00:40:15] >> Caste in a straightforward sense
[00:40:17] of the term represents simply an institutionalization
[00:40:23] of the division of labor,
[00:40:25] different people do different things.
[00:40:29] So calling them by different caste names is one way
[00:40:33] of identifying who does what.
[00:40:36] What's gone wrong-- what seems to be wrong today is
[00:40:42] that these caste functions have become hereditary.
[00:40:51] >> The Brahmin tradition
[00:40:52] and it's a religious tradition sees a man's life pegged
[00:40:56] out in 4 distinct stages.
[00:40:58] Somewhere between the ages of 7 and 13,
[00:41:01] a boy from a high caste family is prepared for his initiation,
[00:41:05] his ritual birth and he makes his entry into the first
[00:41:09] of the 4 stages of his life.
[00:41:21] >> To mark this second birth, a sacred thread is slipped
[00:41:24] over his left shoulder and he's taught the prayer
[00:41:27] of the twice born.
[00:41:38] >> When you went to your initiation, Shivesh,
[00:41:40] were you more impressed by the fun of it
[00:41:42] than by any religious significance?
[00:41:44] >> In most ways but I was quite aware that it was very,
[00:41:47] very important which I mustn't take lightly.
[00:41:50] >> Isn't a boy in those circumstances also aware
[00:41:52] that everybody of all ages seem to be gathering
[00:41:55] to do something for him?
[00:41:56] >> For him, yes.
[00:41:57] >> Not very--
[00:41:58] >> Already, yes.
[00:41:59] This is-- this is part of the idea
[00:42:01] that the boys gradually seizing to be a boy
[00:42:05] and becoming a responsible agent and the fact
[00:42:08] that all these people and all these things have been gathered
[00:42:11] just especially for this occasion marking something
[00:42:13] about him means that he's beginning to see
[00:42:16] that he's something important from now on
[00:42:18] and he must do certain things,
[00:42:19] behave in certain way than the others.
[00:42:46] >> The said ceremony itself is just a climax
[00:42:48] of sometimes months of preparation.
[00:42:51] When it's all over, the twice born are cleaned up as
[00:42:54] if they were starting their lives all over again.
[00:43:06] >> If he's a Brahmin, the next step
[00:43:08] as it was a few hundred years ago would be for the boy
[00:43:12] to leave home, join his guru, his teacher in a forest retreat
[00:43:16] and learn the scriptures.

[00:43:18] It's different these days.
[00:43:19] Only the symbols are left, wooden wheels for a chariot
[00:43:23] and umbrella and finery to mark his new status in society.
[00:43:34] >> Stage 2 starts with marriage, probably an arranged marriage
[00:43:37] and setting up a house with a wife you may scarcely know.
[00:43:41] And in riding around Benares with my guide, Mr. Sharma,
[00:43:44] and hearing him say, "In India we don't marry the girl we love.
[00:43:49] We love the girl we marry."
[00:43:55] >> This is your brother Umesh, right?
[00:43:59] And he's the head of your household.
[00:44:01] >> Yes.
[00:44:02] >> What does that mean in practice?
[00:44:03] Does that give him great authority?
[00:44:05] >> Well it means that, you know, he's the man
[00:44:09] who has overall responsibility for the reign
[00:44:12] of the family together and all the things
[00:44:14] that he's supposed to do.
[00:44:17] All the matters referring to the family will be referred
[00:44:19] to him in the first place.
[00:44:21] >> Your brother's main work is farming?
[00:44:23] >> Does that involve--
[00:44:25] it appears he had to involve a good deal of moving about?
[00:44:28] >> Yes, it does.
[00:44:29] You know, he would put in some-- start off early in the morning,
[00:44:33] set off to farm and in the previous evening he would have
[00:44:35] looked around what field, what farm needs attention,
[00:44:38] which needs supply and which needs weeding and so forth
[00:44:41] and he would have talked to his men, you know, servants
[00:44:43] and others in the evening.
[00:44:46] And early morning, he will go around and send them off
[00:44:48] to the field doing their cup of jobs then sort of later
[00:44:52] on around or just before, he will carry some food and water
[00:44:56] to them which is where they have been working.
[00:44:58] This is their sort of break if you like.
[00:45:01] >> Is that part of their wages, the food?
[00:45:06] >> No, this is quite separate from the wages they will get
[00:45:10] at the end of the day.
[00:45:11] >> In money?
[00:45:12] >> No, in grains.
[00:45:26] >> We've talked about class and caste a lot
[00:45:28] yet from observation these workmen are certainly not
[00:45:31] servile to the people who employed them.
[00:45:33] >> I shouldn't think so.
[00:45:36] They-- for all practical purposes,
[00:45:38] they have been absorbed into the-- to my larger family.
[00:45:43] >> This is your mother?
[00:45:47] >> She has moved out of the household stage I gather.
[00:45:52] >> Yes, she has.
[00:45:53] She has, if you like, entered into the third main stage.
[00:45:58] >> Which is?
[00:45:59] >> Which you could call the stage of withdrawal.
[00:46:02] So she's sort of gradually moved more and more
[00:46:05] into the background devoting more and more of her time
[00:46:07] to religious and spiritual matters.
[00:46:10] >> How many hours a day does she spend doing that?
[00:46:14] >> To me it seems very many hours.
[00:46:17] Far too many but I didn't suppose she thinks she is
[00:46:20] putting in enough.
[00:46:23] >> The fourth stage isn't for everybody.
[00:46:25] It means renouncing name, possessions, and caste.

[00:46:29] The Mahatma marked the break in his life
[00:46:32] by disappearing somewhere or rather for 14 years.
[00:46:36] He was met again by chance and persuaded back to the village
[00:46:40] on the understanding that he isn't the man he was.
[00:46:44] >> Shivesh, there's no evidence from your behavior
[00:46:46] but I gather he's your uncle?
[00:46:48] >> Yes, he is my uncle or shall we say being more faithful
[00:46:52] to the Hindu tradition, he was my uncle.
[00:46:58] >> I get an impression of very good relations
[00:47:00] between very young people and older people maybe pre-stage 1
[00:47:05] and the people in stage 3.
[00:47:07] Is it a fact that this stage system does make
[00:47:10] for easier relations between the old and the young?
[00:47:13] >> Absolutely.
[00:47:14] I think the close relations between the children
[00:47:18] on the one hand and say people
[00:47:20] on the first stage should normally be their grandparents.
[00:47:24] It's utterly close.
[00:47:26] I didn't know what one of them--
[00:47:28] one group of them would do without other.
[00:47:31] >> At the end of the Saraswati festival,
[00:47:36] the images of the goddess from all the village schools were put
[00:47:39] in build up carts and paraded
[00:47:41] around the village before being flung into the village pond.
[00:47:44] >> The idea is that the goddess was commissioned
[00:47:49] for a particular job to occupy that thing of clay
[00:47:55] when she has done her job the concluding ceremony makes
[00:47:58] that quite clear.
[00:47:59] Your job is accomplished, now we'll take the life back
[00:48:02] out of this image and you'll be the goddess that you were.
[00:48:05] Go wherever you are, wherever your natural home is
[00:48:07] which she probably does and then whatever is left
[00:48:11] over is just the ordinary clay.
[00:48:14] So corpse if you like.
[00:48:15] >> A corpse?
[00:48:16] >> It becomes a corpse.
[00:49:08] >> That may be a corpse and this may be a thing or possession
[00:49:12] but nobody can say it's gloomy.
[00:49:14] Is it a religious thing you're watching
[00:49:17] or is it a great triangle?
[00:49:19] >> What you are doing both of this entire--
[00:49:22] someone from your sort of tradition would tend
[00:49:25] to think well it can't be religious.
[00:49:26] But then why should religion be something so utterly grim?
[00:49:31] Fun and religion don't seem to exclude each other
[00:49:33] and that's the way you seem to--
[00:50:27] >> Maybe I'm being over tidy but I've been trying to work
[00:50:30] out if there's one single thing
[00:50:32] on which all devout Hindus might unite.
[00:50:36] They didn't seem to share a creed.
[00:50:39] The beliefs of a devout intellectual would scarcely be
[00:50:42] recognized by a devout peasant.
[00:50:45] Maybe that what unites them is to be found in ritual or action
[00:50:52] or the daily routine
[00:50:53] but certainly all the devout Hindus I visited had a
[00:50:57] household shrine.
[00:50:58] They had a ritual bathe.
[00:51:00] They went to the temples.
[00:51:02] But then you come across the Sannyas figure,
[00:51:05] the man who breaks the ties.

[00:51:08] There, the pattern does break down.
[00:51:10] He has no shrine.
[00:51:11] He visits no temple.
[00:51:13] He is beyond the gods.
[00:51:16] I asked the Mahatma if he could tell me why it was necessary
[00:51:19] to withdraw from social life and his answer was that he had
[00:51:23] to in order to get nearer to God.
[00:51:27] And perhaps that is where all devout Hindus converge,
[00:51:31] in their will to come closer to god
[00:51:34] by whatever means best suits them, worship
[00:51:37] and devotion for the ordinary man, knowledge and the mind
[00:51:41] for those who have the gift for it, no way excluded,
[00:51:44] no way preferred, so long
[00:51:46] as the destination gets nearer overtime.
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