

I dedicate this book to my son, Aldo Cavaleiro,  
 for his support and unconditional love  
 during my long absences in India;  
 and to my ex-husband, Wim van der Grijn,  
 wonderful companion on my first overland journey  
 to India and Nepal.

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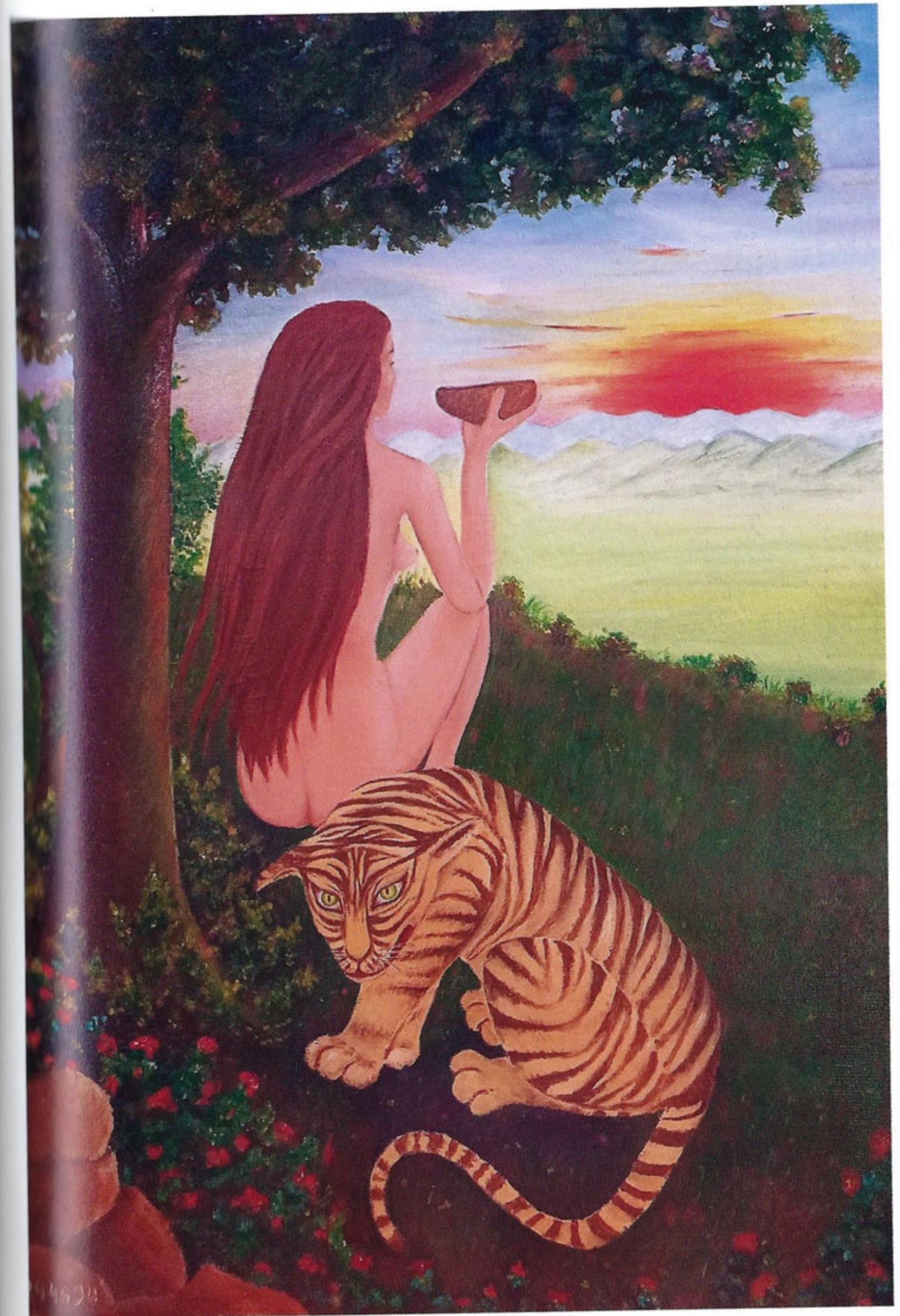
that had suggested the female yoni was practically bare and revealed the rock beneath, which dripped water all over the cave floor as if it were raining, creating rivulets and a lot of mud. For the two days preceding the arrival of the largest pilgrim crowds there was intense activity, with all the holy men gathering ice from the glacier to rebuild the lingam. But it continued to melt, remaining a poor sight with the consistency and appearance of a grotesque snowman. I felt sorry for the arriving pilgrims and glad of that painful first visit when I'd had a proper Darshan.

### *The Immortal Eagles*

To pass my days I took walks around the area. Once I decided to climb a side of the cave mountain to see what was beyond it. I found myself on an immense plateau with what seemed like a track running across it. Later I learned that the track is part of a very ancient road going all the way to Ladakh and Tibet. I was wondering which direction to take and whether it was worth the walk, because all I could see was endless flatness with nothing to explore, when I saw something dark moving in the distance. Again I was deceived by the altitude and rarity of the air. I kept walking toward the dark shape but didn't seem to get any closer. Only after a lot of walking could I discern the form, which appeared to be someone lying on the ground with somebody else on their knees pumping the heart for reanimation.

I had a thermos of hot chai (one of the luxuries provided by my swami friend) and was running hard, hoping to be of some help, when I got a shock. The kneeling "person" stood up and flew in my direction — a huge bird with an incredible wingspan. I feared for my life. It descended on me like a landing airplane. Following it with my eyes made me fall on my buttocks. But when it got really close, instead of picking me up with the huge extended talons that almost touched my body, as I feared it might, it gained altitude and flew away, creating a lot of wind. Now I could see that the body lying in the distance was a dead horse. "How had it come there?" I wondered. Was this ancient road still used? There was no grass for wild horses to graze on. It remains a mystery to me.

Later on at my camp, lying on the deer skin recovering from my fearful encounter, I saw not one but two huge birds circling high up in the air above the cave. I had the feeling that they were looking at me — there was nobody else around. The thought came to me that these were the two eagles that had overheard the secret discussion between Shiva and Parvati. And



Durga and the tiger. Painting by Lila Cavaleiro.

## To Hampi with Isadora Duncan

Goa was a destination for many, but for me this time it would just be a temporary rest stop between trips. I wanted to visit Hampi, 350 kilometers southeast of Goa. One of my Dutch friends was planning to go there on his Harley Davidson bike in about a week. His lady didn't want to go, so he invited me to join him if I dared — it would take 6 to 8 hours. I accepted because the alternative was a long two-day trip on buses and trains. The bike would take a fraction of that time and be much cooler. (In South India it is always hot.)

Hampi had been beckoning to me for some time. I had been there with Wim a few years back on my first trip to India. The grandeur of this magnificent city, even though it is in ruins, was impressive. In its time, in the Middle Ages when Vijayanagara was a prosperous and powerful empire, Hampi was the second greatest city in the world after Beijing. Several of its many temples, palaces, and forts of unique architecture are still standing, built from the hard granite and basalt that abounds in the area — a universe of spectacular boulders.

The most impressive of the temples, at least for me, and one of the attractions that made me want to go back, was the Vitthala Temple, best known as the "Music Temple." The exquisite structure of the musical building has no closed inner sanctum, as is usually the case for Hindu temples. It consists of 56 beautifully carved 3.6-meter-tall stone pillars on a large open platform accessed by imposing stairways. Each central pillar has smaller columns carved on and around it that produce musical notes when knocked with a stick. Originally, a piece of sandalwood was used, but they also sound when hit with the hand. I wanted to see and hear this unique musical instrument again, made of stone in the form and size of a temple.

On my first visit in 1972, there were practically no dwellers in Hampi except for thousands of monkeys and a couple of sadhus living in the rocky ruins

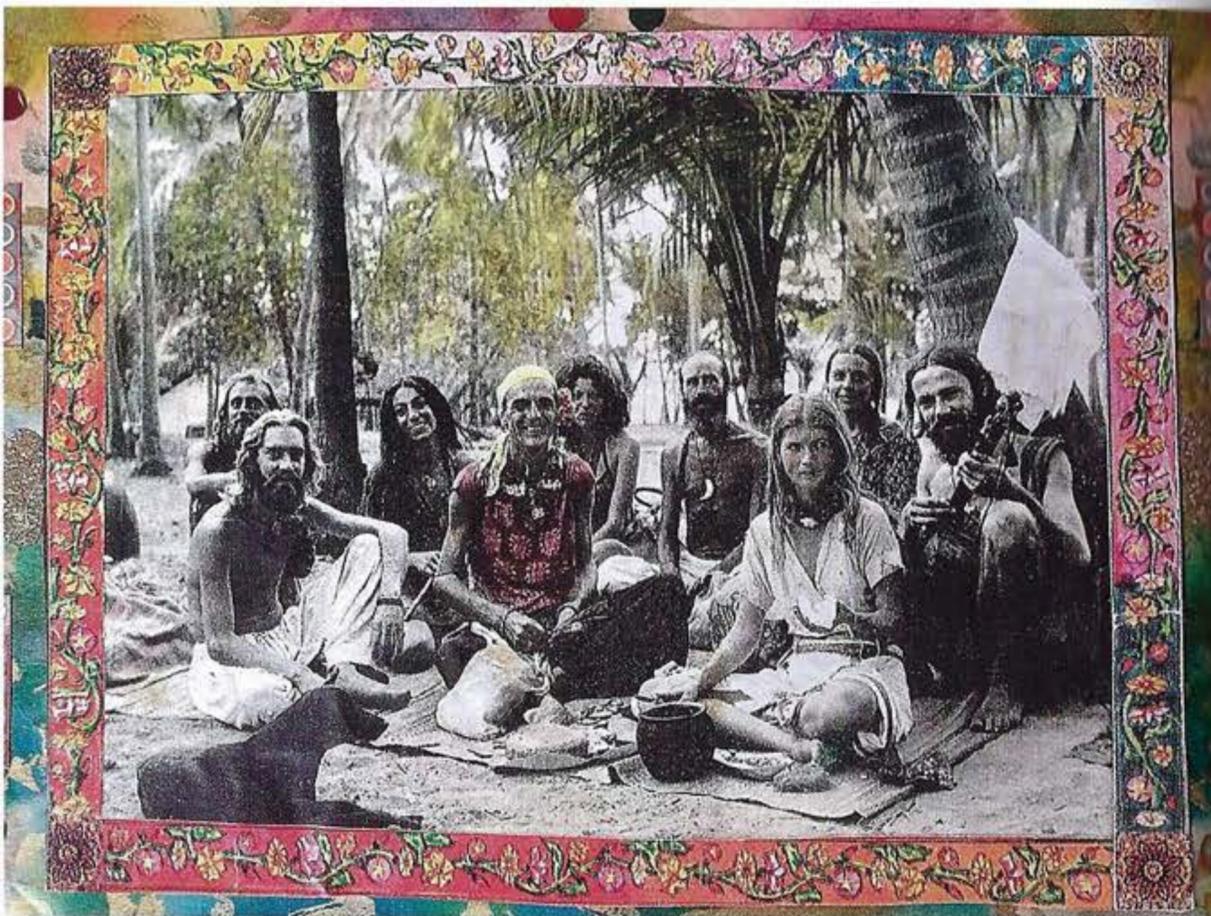
along the southern bank of the Tungabhadra River. A few farmers lived farther upstream on the north bank. The main avenue-bazaar with the great ancient Virupaksha temple at one end was in ruins, completely deserted — even the temple itself was in a bad state of repair and had few visitors. The Vishnu temple, overshadowed by huge trees farther down and closer to the river, was better maintained at the time, for it received devoted visitors regularly. Close to the entrance to the site was a chai shop/restaurant shack, the only one in the whole area and run by a local family. They served the food on a large banana leaf, with a small heap of stones and a slingshot beside the *puris* (deep fried bread) to discourage monkeys from stealing them. The trees were home to hundreds of them as it was a good spot to obtain easy food, whether offered by the temple devotees or stolen from the clients of the restaurant. They'd jump as fast as lightning and snatch a *puri* from my hand, much faster than I could get to the catapult.

The monkey god Hanuman, a very important Hindu deity, is said to have been born in Hampi. His temple stands on top of Anjaneyadri Hill (which bears his mother's name), north of Hampi across the Tungabhadra River. In the *Ramayana*, the epic that describes the adventurous north-south journey of Lord Rama to recover his wife Sita who had been kidnapped by Ravana, the demon king of Sri Lanka, a decisive factor for the success of that venture occurred in Hampi. It was there that a powerful army of monkeys led by Hanuman joined Rama's forces and led the way to the south and to victory. This is an indication that Hampi's importance is much more ancient than the Vijayanagara Empire (1336-1614), of which it was the capital.

### Flashback — Gopal Swami

On that first visit to Hampi, Wim and I had stayed for a couple of months with two lovely old sadhus in a half-broken temple by the river: it was my first contact with Hindu sadhus. One of them, Gopal Swami, was special, a real master of chylum making, and he spoke English. He had a family temple at Hospet but spent most of his time in Hampi. In a subtle way he showed us a lot, in and about ourselves. We learned important things from him, although he didn't pretend to be a teacher. The other sadhu, Gurubai, was a very silent man, almost invisible but always there when needed. He cooked and acted as a kind of assistant to Gopal. Both were very loving, gentle, and wise. Every second with them was bliss and joy.

Our nearest and only neighbors were, of course, the monkeys. I remember the first morning waking up literally surrounded by monkeys, big and small, mothers with babies hanging on their chests, all standing close to



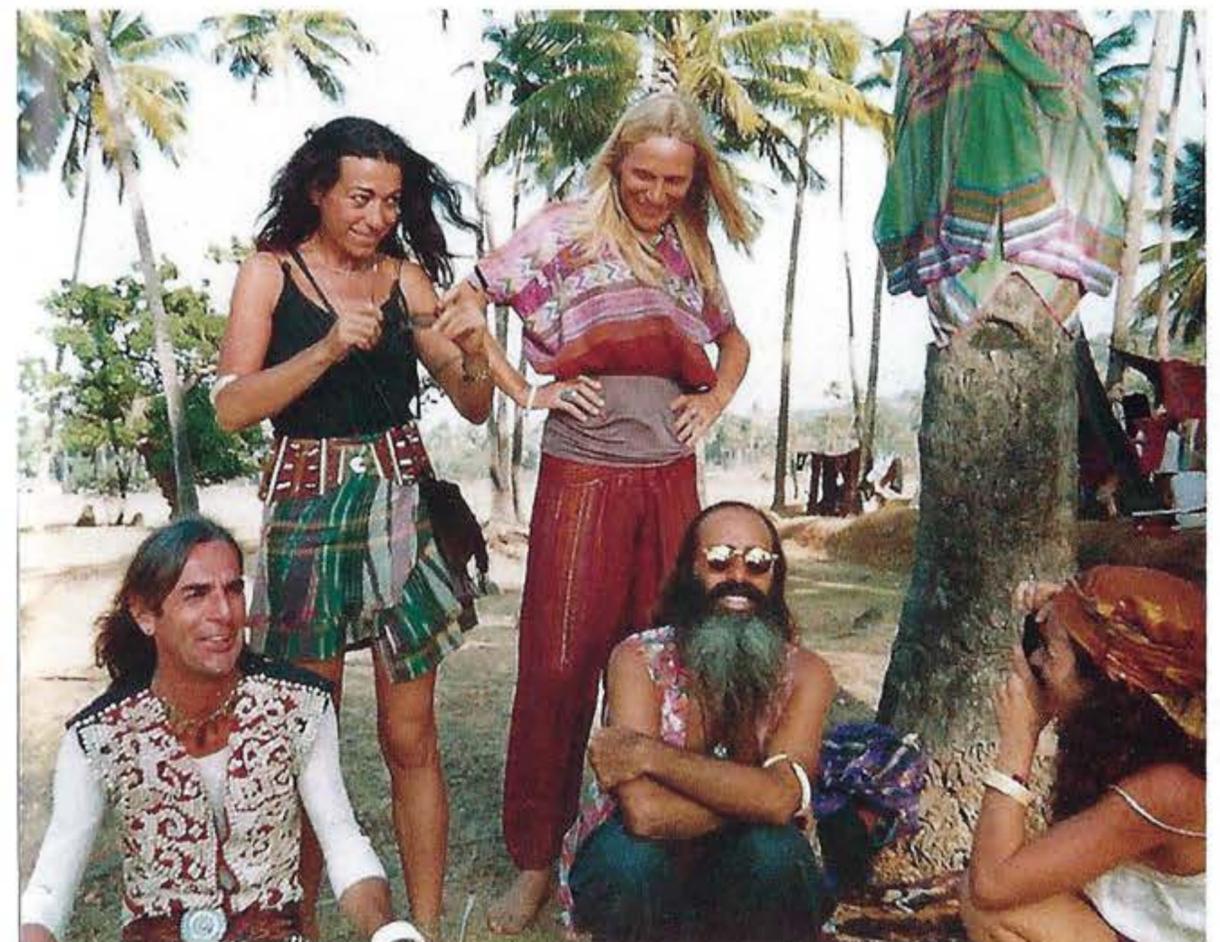
First Goa flea market. Lila Cavaleiro back 2nd left.  
Lela Pina and Victor Bandeira back 2nd and 3rd right. 1975.



Lela Pina and Lila Cavaleiro, South Goa, Palolem beach.



Amarnath Cave, Lila far right.



Lila standing left, Victor Bandeira seated right, Goa. 1986.