

JUNGLE MEN COME TO TOWN:

To Ujjain in Central India come thousands of Sadhus - holy men who spend their lives in the jungle, only leaving it on very special occasions. This is one of those occasions - the Simhas Fair, which is held every twelve years when the planets are propitious. This year they are particularly favourable - more so than for four centuries, the astrologers declare - so the Sadhus turn out in full force.

At the Ram Ghat (the holiest spot of all) the Sadhus are given precedence in the ceremony of bathing. The Fair recalls the time when gods and demons churned up the ocean in a search for hidden treasure - thus producing nectar, which was carried away in an earthen pitcher. Wood ash serves as talcum powder after the bath - for although the Sadhus wear little clothing, they are dandies in their own way!

The bathing over, the Sadhus return in procession with their elephants. Perhaps some of them are reflecting sadly that there won't be another party quite like this for about 400 years!