

Sabbatical in India--1992

Chapter 1

How I came to find myself living in an Ashram in India



I am still pondering the strange events which have happened to me since February this year, when I followed some unknown guidance or summons to India. A casual mention in a Christmas letter from Deirdre West (a former colleague during the 1995-96 year I taught in China) that she had been to India and had been at the ashram where Sathya Sai Baba lived, at Puttaparthi in Southern India, and that she wanted to return, prompted me to call her and tell her that I wanted to go with her when she went. I must add the strange fact that I was on a year's sabbatical and this was the only time in the foreseeable future when I would be free in the winter, the only livable season in India for Westerners. The winter window was rapidly closing, so we had to speed up our plans, getting tickets and shots and visas within about a

week, as it turned out. I later recalled a friend telling me "No one comes back from India unchanged," and Deirdre had written the same about the experience of seeing Sai Baba, but at the time I poo-pooed these warnings. I was only going to see Deirdre, to do something with my sabbatical free time, and to check out this so-called "avatar"--"God incarnate" who had so impressed Deirdre.

I left Feb. 21 and arrived in Mumbai (Bombay) on Feb. 23, where Deirdre was waiting to take me to a dreadful little hotel near the airport so I could recover from the twenty-six hour journey. She herself was leaving on the morning plane for Bangalore. Exhausted, I surrendered to her plan and slept a few hours before taking a taxi for a day's tour of Bombay. Deirdre had left a note for me to find upon waking, saying that she had gone to the Bombay Ananda Bhavan Hotel in Bangalore and would stay there overnight before heading to Puttaparthi to the ashram of Sathya Sai Baba. She could wait no longer to be with her beloved guru, Sathya Sai Baba.

I managed to cram highlights of Bombay into a day's tour (my initiation into India), then left on a flight the next morning at 7 for Bangalore and the Hotel Bombay Ananda Bhavan, only to discover that Deirdre had just checked out, impatient to get to Sai Baba's ashram in Puttaparthi. Checking in at the same time as I was Karen from Holland, who was also bound for the ashram. We teamed up and went shopping to be dressed properly in punjabi suits at the ashram. Tuesday morning Karen couldn't wait and left early to go to Puttaparthi. I followed at eleven .

Puttaparthi is about three hours north of Bangalore, in Andhra Pradesh state, and the road showed me life in rural southern India, complete with monkeys in the trees and alongside the road. Approaching Puttaparthi, I saw Sai Baba's new buildings--a hospital, a college and museum on the hill, all painted in garish pastel pinks and blues, with gigantic statues of Hindu deities lining the road. Appalling, I thought. The village of Puttaparthi is focused on the ashram, with souvenirs everywhere. A guide hopped into our taxi to be my official porter, insisting that I let him carry everything. After checking in at the Ashram's foreigners registration office, paying my five rupees for a space in Shed 15-16, because of the crowds there for Shivaratri, I watched the taxi be unloaded by three more porters who pounced on my luggage to earn the tips, as my "official porter" looked on.



By the time I arrived in Shed 15-16, it was afternoon, and I found Deirdre resting on her mattress on the floor, dressed in her devotee's white punjabi suit, smiling benignly, surrounded by pictures of Sai Baba. Around her on other well-marked floor spaces were countless other foreign women on their own mattresses. The place was a vast hanger-like shed with a corrugated metal roof, and very hot, with slow-moving ceiling fans. All the women were lying under mosquito nets, trying to be still in the heat. As I wandered the aisles, looking for an empty floor space, I was amazed at all these women enduring the heat and mosquitos. Finally I put my gear down next to Angelica (from Australia) whose daughter was screaming with frustration inside a mosquito netting. "She's releasing," Angelica told me. "She and I have

been angry since we got here; we're both releasing." I realized she meant her karma from past lives. On the other side was an elderly Italian woman from Torino who came as often as she could.

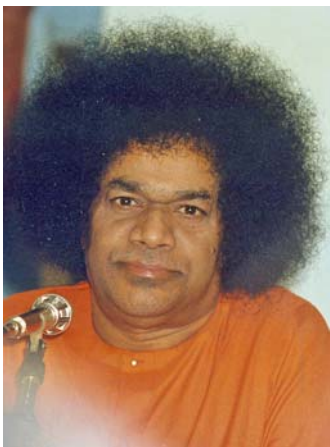
After buying some sleeping gear and renting a cot, I moved in and looked around the place--Karen was already installed under her mosquito net and

welcomed me as if she'd been there a long time. The place was like a refugee shed, with strings all over from which were hung saris for privacy. The standard equipment was a mattress (I was given one by the woman in charge), a mat, some sort of pillow, a mosquito net (I didn't get one, as I didn't plan to stay that long), a cot (optional--many slept on the floor), and a cushion to sit on during twice-daily darshans. I was quickly told (by Deirdre) that we (she) would be getting up from our rest period at 3 to prepare to line up to get a good place for the 4:30 p.m. darshan, when Sai Baba would make himself available for public worship.

After a rest, I rose in a daze from my mattress on the floor, covered my shoulders and bosom with a dupata (shawl) as I saw the others doing, and followed the early assembling crowd to the line-up outside the mandir walls, squatting where the Indian women directed me, sitting on my cushion in the sun, gulping water from my bottle, waiting to be told in what order our lines would get to enter the darshan area inside the wall. About 4:15 p.m. the lady leaders started a lottery to pick the order of entry for each line, and the women in the lines getting to go first rejoiced, stood up, walked then almost ran to get the first spots in the temple area, to be nearer to Sai Baba at Darshan. I was well back owing to my late arrival (I never managed to get into a front line).

Most of the women waiting were well-dressed Indian women in beautiful saris, but the Western women followed the rules strictly. I was amazed at the usual freedom-loving Westerners letting themselves be shoved around. I felt like I was having an experience of being treated the same as the Indians, made to line up, sit, stand, move over. We were all sisters. In fact, the women call each other sisters in the ashram. The devotees wore all white saris or punjabi suits. Men wore white dhotas with scarves designating their countries. These country or city groups would meet in circles under trees before darshan to try to sit together in case their city or country was given an interview.

About 4:30 p.m. the music started, and the object of all this adulation and competition floated into view, a small orange-clad figure with a large uncomely face framed by a huge afro. As he passed in front of the section that I was in, the ladies all reached out their arms appealing to him to look at them, call them to an interview, take their proffered letters or gifts. They were ecstatic to be in his presence. I wondered what they were feeling and what they saw in him. I did feel a bonding with the women who were enduring all this for his sake. As he wandered from section to section, from the women's side to the men's, he sometimes waved his right hand in circular motions and materialized vhubuti (ash) which he tossed into the crowd. When devotees offered him plates of lollies (candies), he took handfuls and cast them among the crowd.



Some individuals stood up and I was told they were selected to come for interviews. "Everything happens in interviews," I was told.

After darshan, I followed the section around me to the area behind the temple, where we all sat on the ground again in a line. Some one next to me told me I was lucky, as our line would get to go first. But where? I followed the ladies in their saris to a portico, from where we could look into the temple and see Baba presiding at bhajans or chants. I was next to a column, wedged in beside a patient who kept complaining as I leaned on her, pushed by the women next to me. I was talking in a whisper with a woman who spoke with a Spanish accent. When the bhajans began and Baba came into our view, she whispered, "Can't you feel the love?" "No," I answered, shrugging my shoulders. "If you look at him as a man, you won't see anything," she answered, "but if you see him as God, you will see and feel the immense love pouring out." So I looked again and tried to see him as God, but I couldn't. I already had been worshiping the Judaeo-Christian Father and Jesus Christ for many years. My conflict and confusion began at that first darshan.

After bhajans, I happened upon a line at the canteen and figured I'd better get into it before more people came. Someone told me I needed meal tickets, so I went to pick up some tickets (1 rupee for everything except the full-course dinners the Indians call "meals"). Inside the canteen there were lines in every direction and once we got to the front, none of the food looked appetizing. I got some rice with something on top and some yogurt (curds). I eventually decided that the food at night was not worth standing in lines and started on my peanut butter and granola, with some cream cheese sold at one of the shops in the ashram. After this meal, I was so exhausted from jet lag that I retired; however, the shed was so hot, even with the fans, that I couldn't sleep. After lights out and chanting the "Om" and a verse of something (at 9) the shed continued to be noisy, with children crying, people whispering, walking around with flashlights. People were still arriving at the door, knocking and coming in late looking for spots. I didn't sleep all that night, although the shed did cool off. I heard the early birds (like Deirdre) start dressing at 3 to go to line up to chant the 21 Oms

in the dark at 5. I heard the 5 o'clock group getting up and dressing to go line up for 6:30 darshan, so I joined them, still sleepless.



Morning darshan was very pleasant, almost paradisaical. Sleep-deprivation may have contributed to my feeling of bliss, who knows? The sun was just rising over the elaborate gleaming temple; birds were

singing in the coconut palms overhead. Sitting on the sand on my cushion in the cool morning, I felt the silence as reverential, waiting for God. Peace descended on us, but I still couldn't understand what was making all these women, including so many foreigners, keep this killing schedule in these miserable conditions.

Later that day I met Marie-Paule from Belgium. I had moved to a newly opened up space in shed 15 vacated by some Americans who had managed to get a room in one of the roundhouses. I asked her what on earth was going on. She had been there five months already, and had set herself up in a very posh space (relatively speaking) by a window with two floor spaces. She told me that I was not able to open my eyes because I was bound by my Catholic teachings. She agreed about the place. When she first came, she couldn't believe the shed either. "This is a refugee camp!" But now she had been staying for months. She had been here before, and knew she should come back when someone offered her a free ticket. She had sold her home in Brussels, quit her job and come to stay. There was nothing for her back there. She took me to lunch and showed me how to put salad on the rice and vegetables, with a dose of salt to prevent loss of moisture, and I actually enjoyed the meal. She introduced me to dal (lentil soup), so I had a substantial meal. She also claimed the water in the ashram was drinkable because Baba had put a lingam in the well to protect it for the sake of the foreigners. I began to regard Marie-Paule as sent by God to help me. She was a true devotee, wore only white, had a shrine in her cubicle, and told me everything she could to convince me. She even gave me a photo of Jesus. "Baba materialized this photo," she claimed. But I was still skeptical. I couldn't accept Baba as God, and I wondered what had made these women accept him.



The relentless pace of the place bothered me. I couldn't catch up with the time I'd lost because I couldn't sleep in this hot box with all the noise and snoring and crying babies. During nap time that Wednesday I met Tina Schneider, a psychotherapist from Berlin, who was on the cot next to mine. I complained to her of the place, and she told me that she had felt the same way when she came. She had left the ashram and traveled around India, but she had always gotten sick in other places. Only in the ashram was she well, so it seemed she was meant to be here. She dressed herself in lovely punjabi suits and saris with flowers in her hair, as did the Indian ladies. Most of the women had lovely saris. In fact I wondered whether it was a fashion show. This suspicion increased later that afternoon when Christa arrived next to me from Vienna. She went about setting up her place with a joyful face, setting up her coordinated bedding and hangings and mat. Even her mosquito net was a lovely pink. She donned a sari, set up her shrine with the incense burner and picture of Sai Baba and little offering tray,

then sat on her mat and began to eat out of a jar, happily. "It's macrobiotic food. I run a health food store in Vienna." I asked her my question, or gave her my complaints. What did everyone see in him that made them come to this miserable hot place? "It's love. I was here in December at Christmas. It was heaven! Whenever I can take off two or three weeks, I come here. I blossom here. Can you see my cheeks--isn't my color good?"

The people were from all over the world; every language was spoken in the ashram. I was in a constant state of shock from it all. What did these women see in him? Why were they willing to endure all this, the miserable toilets and showers, the long lines, the heat, the terrible food, the crowds? Yet they all dutifully copied down his sayings, put up on a chalk board each day for our meditation. They bought his books in the bookstore. They bought his pictures and tapes. Their whole life revolved around Baba. The chief question asked among the devotees was "When is Baba going to Whitefield?" Whitefield, I learned, is the ashram outside Bangalore where he moves when the weather gets too hot for his foreign devotees. His anticipated sudden departure would set all the women (and men too) hurriedly packing up all their bedding and cases and scrambling for taxis to move on to the Whitefield ashram where they would remain for as long as he would stay there. Then when Bangalore became too hot, Baba would suddenly move up to the hill station at Kodaikanal and everyone would follow, at least those who could afford the taxis.

Everyone was trying to help me (or confuse me), it seemed, as I put my questions and complaints to anyone who spoke English. "What does everyone see in him?" I asked Leslie, an Englishwoman who had recently arrived and who was also on her own. "People think he's God," I said in amazement. "I'm afraid I do too," she admitted. "When I came here my left side was all tight and painful. Carrying the bags left the pain even worse; I could hardly walk. Then at darshan this morning, I was in the front row and touched his feet, and I've had no pain ever since." She was wearing the white sari of the devotee. More mystery. She confided that she was praying her husband would come here, once he heard she was cured. He was a workaholic, and she wanted him to value the spiritual life rather than the materialistic one he presently preferred.

Deirdre was steadily reading through all Sai Baba's works. We had a little talk during noon rest one day. I had wanted to hear about Australia and her plans for the future without Siyu, but she refused to talk about it. "I can't. It's simply too bleak." She had no job, no money. It seemed she had no choice but to stay here. She saw it as a call, releasing her from all other obligations. Her only purpose in life was "to sit at Baba's lotus feet." I pondered whether these women, like Marie-Paule, Tina, Leslie, Karen (who complained of terrible headaches from anger and frustration at everyone who annoyed her) and Deirdre were here because they couldn't find what they were looking for in society. Was this the only place where they could be at peace? Were they escapists? Did they need to be here? Well, I certainly didn't need to be here. I had a good

life, a job, a boat, friends, family, a good relationship with God (especially with my friend-in-all-need, St. Joseph). I thought that my God was much nicer to me than this so-called god-avatar, Sai Baba, was to his followers, expecting them to tough it out in this miserable place! I had diarrhea on Friday night, in spite of the promise that it was all right to drink the water. Christa took me to a very kind Indian homeopathic doctor who volunteered his services at the ashram. He gave me 30 tiny little white pills (pulse) to take 6 at a time, and 30 little white Chinaberry pills to take for heat exhaustion and dehydration. I thanked Christa, deeply grateful for her coming to my aid. The comforting presence of a human helped me immensely, and I felt better immediately. She said "Thank Sai Baba . Sai Ram"

I wrote in my journal: "Why am I here? Why was I pulled from comfort in Chicago into this small village to see Baba? It was nice to hear Mr. Singh [at one of the lectures] say that those who are here don't have to undergo any further incarnations. But I do not like to believe that one must be in Puttaparthi to be saved. I felt fine, with God on my side and St. Joseph as my guide, back in Chicago, turning to God at every crisis. I told Karen, when she told me that Baba had sent someone with water when she was dying for a drink, that God has looked after me every day of my life. I reject the idea that God only starts looking after one in Puttaparthi. On the other hand, I admit that one needs God even more here than back in Chicago. One must experience the emptiness of India [as far as comforts go] before one can feel one's own emptiness and need. But here the women seem to be fanatics. They find Baba as present in everything. Every simple accident of life they interpret as a sign of Baba's love for them. Didn't they have anything good in their lives before they came to Puttaparthi? They desperately need to believe Baba loves them and has called each of them to this woeful (to me) existence. They take this call here as a sign of their election, and of their not having to be reincarnated again. But isn't God kinder to his devotees than this?"

"For me the outer trappings of this life are distracting from contemplation. I can't contemplate when I am soaking with sweat in a sweltering oven, when the mosquitoes are buzzing around me, the people are talking and the smell of the toilets is gagging me, when my insides are churning with heat stress, when I'm pushed and shoved and every sense is offended. Isn't God beauty? Then how can I find him in the disorder and misery of this refugee camp?" I wrote in my journal. I wept with misery.

On Saturday evening after darshan, I met Karen, who asked me to come have a drink with her in the village at a bar. She had to tell me something. It turned out that she had met an American, Clark, from the South, who was a perfect gentleman to her, and she had fallen in love with him! Here it was again, this strangeness. How could someone come here and give up all the comforts only to revert to the vanities of the outside world? This was the same way that I felt when I saw the women vainly adorning themselves in fashionable saris. How

could they give up everything and then cling onto some one vanity here? Her frankness gave me the courage to tell her that I wanted to stand up for myself and assert my expectation of better treatment from God than the women here were putting up with. "I feel like I'm being forced to stoop over and look at the ground here," I told her. "I want to straighten up my back and look up at the sky again." I made up my mind. "I'm leaving here." I went with her to Babu's shop in the village and arranged to leave the following morning.



On Sunday morning, the crowd for darshan was huge, as Shivaratri, the feast of Shiva and the moon, was coming on Monday. I had read an address by Baba about this feast and learned that the celebration of the total waning of the moon stood for the waning of the ego and its total disappearance. As the preparations were intense, including outdoor canteens and families arriving to camp out on the grounds, I would

have liked to stay, but the lines were so long for everything that I felt it was time to go. I didn't even get in for darshan that morning. I said goodbye to Marie-Paule, Tina, Karen, and Christa and finally Deirdre, who thanked me for coming and getting her to make her move to India. (She didn't even have a return ticket to London.)

With the help of a rickshaw, I moved out of shed 15, left my women friends, with whom I felt a strong tie, and took the three-hour taxi ride back to Bangalore.

Chapter 2 Bangalore

That afternoon I found myself back again at the Bombay Ananda Bhavan, I bowed and said "Sai Ram" to proprietor B. L. Gupta, a devotee of Sai Baba. As it was a feast day, most of the guests were in Puttaparthi, so I was given a lovely double on the back, overlooking a quiet garden. The electricity was off as usual, and the toilet was not working, but otherwise, it was heavenly--cool and private, after the melee in Shed 15.

Walking around the lovely old British neighborhood around Grant Street, I encountered a British looking lady walking her dog and spoke to her. She turned out to be Laura Woodbridge, one-time tennis champion of India, who, together with her 89 year-old sister Winnie lived at 68A LaVelle Rd, 2nd Cross, in the neighborhood. She was on her way to the Bangalore Club and invited me to come along. The two sisters and the club hailed from the days of the Raj. The Bangalore Club had been built by the British for the British who lived in that lovely



neighborhood, but now it was kept going by the now entirely Indian membership (aside from Laura and Winnie). There was a large main club building with extremely high ceilings, walls covered with portraits from the Raj days and hunting trophies including a tiger. The Mysore Room had huge portraits of various Indian princes on the walls and opulent furnishings. I felt like I had walked

into the thirties.

Laura and Winnie were born in India and had lived much of their lives on cotton plantations in Chikmagalur in northern Karnataka. Their plantation home was entirely surrounded by a veranda; everyone had a room with a bath. A large living room had windows all around, with seats along the window for cooling in that unbearable climate. The girls were educated at the Convent of the Good Shepherd on the seacoast in Madras, where Winnie had been the mischievous leader of the girls frolicking on the beach. Winnie had married a planter and run the plantations herself during the war when the men had all gone to battle. She had to climb trees and cross rivers to get around. She was living in the past now, telling me of the parties they used to have, when all their friends would drive over from other plantations and stay for a weekend tennis party on their tennis court. They amused themselves by watching "the coolies" go on duck shoots and wild pig hunts. "Oh, the fun we used to have!" she repeated. Laura lived in the present, however, and kept up with the club's activities, such as the weekend's match against the Hyderabad Tennis Club. Laura's friends were the club's characters, especially Baba, a 70 year old, very fit and humorous gentleman who has lived at the Bangalore Club for 15 years. He eats in his room, walks in the morning, and discourses on Indian history and philosophy. He treated me to a history of India in which he was a noble civilized Aryan from the north, and his friend a descendent of the original Dravidians of Southern India, who had "come down out of the trees." As I laughed with these sophisticated men and reveled in the complex richness of Indian life, I thanked God who had understood my needs and given me this holiday after the misery of the ashram.

I visited the Bangalore Club again to watch Laura play tennis from 2 to 3 p.m. in the heat of the day. Afterward she invited me to come home with her for tea in their large 4 BR apartment. The kitchen was very small and unappealing, since servants, not owners, spend time in the kitchens of India. Laura said they had sold their plantations for very little (in the days after the British left India), but now they were going for a crab (10 million rupees or about \$400,000). Laura said that British are moving back to India because of the climate, but they can't afford Bangalore, so they are moving to Whitefield (Brindaven). After tea, we returned

to the club to watch the men play tennis. The news from the Bangalore-Hyderabad match was not good: Bangalore had lost by 2 games.

At the Bombay Ananda Bhavan I met Marge, whose name and country "USA" was printed on a card showing the guests and their rooms. She was waiting for her friend Hari to come, and was a true find. She had no permanent address, traveling all over India mainly, looking for some noble work to devote herself to. She had visited Mother Teresa's hospital and Jane Webb's polio hospital in Calcutta, and some place in Bangladesh. She wants to be with the poorest of the poor. We teamed up for the week, eating at Koshy's, a former British restaurant where there are wonderful punches, especially the ginger punch and watermelon drink. Since I had met Laura, I had the feeling that everyone I met was a gift sent to me by God, and I regarded Marge as a messenger and accompanied her on sight-seeing and shopping tours, as she waited for Hari's arrival. Another Sai Baba devotee, Alicia from Mexico had dinner with us. She desperately wants to see Sai Baba in the few days she has. She is researching paranormal phenomenon, like the Aztec calendar, searching for signs of higher beings in the universe. She has seen people healed by holy men in India.

India needs all the holy people it can have. Unfortunately the misery of India is everywhere. In Cubbon Park, to which I walked for exercise, I saw a litter of puppies dumped on the side of the road, in the apparent hopes that someone would feel sorry for and rescue them. They were still there that evening, huddled together for warmth, an almost invisible bit of refuse. Along a street in the affluent area off Grant Street, I found a puppy running the street, with a string tied around its neck. I tried to find an owner and ended by giving it to a boy who spoke English and promised to give it to one of his friends.

Sharing a taxi on Tuesday, Marge and I went around Bangalore for a few hours, starting with the Aurobindo Ashram where Hannalore Horn has been living for ten years, studying Hindu philosophy. I perceived that Hannalore was another being I was supposed to meet in my quest and asked her what she thought of Sai Baba. She believes that he is very high and can work wonders, but he comes down to the level of the common people (including foreigners) who are impressed by the display of gross powers, like materializing gold objects. He is sporting and playing and joking and wants them not to take all these miracles as important. The Aurobindo Ashram where she lives is beautiful, the old home of the King of Nepal, donated to the Aurobindo Society. Behind the home, which now houses the Meditation Room and Library, there is the ashram, cells surrounding a courtyard with large shade tree. Flowers are everywhere. As there is no longer a swami at the ashram, there are not enough devotees to live there, so outsiders may rent a room. Hannalore lives there among hundreds of books, studying the Vegas. She pressed upon me two books by Sankaracarya: *Self-Knowledge* and *Vivekacudamani*. I regarded these as sent to me by God or Baba and accepted them gratefully.

After a visit at the Vivekananda Ashram and lunch at Koshy's, Marge and I returned to the hotel, where I met an American couple in the lobby, also followers of Sai Baba, who are training local leaders in the twelve-step program for addicts. The husband had been an alcoholic who came to see Sai Baba and after looking at him once gave up alcohol completely. I saw them as sent to teach me something, so put my questions to them. Who is Sai Baba? They told me that this coming of an avatar in Sai Baba is an event that happens only every several thousand years, and that there are only very few souls here out of all the millions of souls of all time to witness this event. To be born in this age is amazing; to be in Puttaparthi is extraordinary.

My journal records on the same page notes from two conversations--one with Dan from England, who was the knowledgeable tourist I thought I had come to India to be; the other with the couple who told me about the four ages of time. Dan had given me this itinerary for Rajasthan: take the Taj Express from Delhi to Agra in early morning, then the overnight train from Agra to Jaipur (staying at the Arya Newas Hotel), then the bus from Jaipur to Ajmer and another bus from Ajmer to Pushkar (stay in the tourist bungalows); finally take the overnight train from Ajmer to Udaipur and stay at the Badi Haveli. (I fully hoped to do this once I got to Northern India.) The Four Ages of Time were these, I wrote. First, the Sathya, the most perfect, when the Divine Consciousness shone in the world as truth, beauty, love, peace, dharma, shanti (peace), and there was no need for rulers or police, lasted millions of years. The second, the Treta, a less enlightened age, when there had to be kings to keep order, and when Rama, the Vishnu avatar, celebrated in the Ramayana ruled, lasted hundreds of thousands of years. The third, the Dwarka, when Krishna another avatar of Vishnu had to come to help, lasted thousands of years. Last, the present age, the Kaliyuga or Age of Destruction when there is hardly any light left, has lasted since 5000 B.C., and, without the periodic advent of divine avatars like Sai Baba to save and lift up humanity, all would be darkness and destruction. Baba had come, combining all 26 qualities, to save his children.

Another messenger who was sent to me in Bangalore was Hari Govinda or Martin, from Switzerland. He was staying at the Bombay Ananda, waiting for his girl friend to come back from Sri Lanka where she had gone to renew her six months visa. Hari had lived in an ashram in Tibet for twelve years and had only recently become a follower of Sai Baba. Hari told me that people who can see auras have seen Sai Baba as larger than anyone on earth; also, people who do Kerilian photography which detects energy of the astral body, the prana or cosmic energy in the atmosphere, have said that Sai Baba has so much energy, that we who are in his aura absorb his energy. Hari was healed by Josephine Sison in the Philippines. He had not been able to get his right knee into the lotus position because of an old injury. He found this woman on a beach; when she heard his story and realized that he had faith in her, she stroked his knee, which opened up and let her reach in and take out a bone and reshape it. Then she

stroked the opening and it closed up. Hari Govinda introduced me to Ramana Maharshi, a guru of Southern India who died in 1950. His ashram at Tiruvannamalai could be reached by a direct bus from Bangalore. Hari recommended I go there, for its peaceful atmosphere.

When a schoolboy, Ramana Maharshi was overcome by an intense fear of death and the thought that he had to face it himself. He held his breath till he had an out of body experience. He was drawn from childhood to the holy mountain Arunachala, where he went at sixteen and lived in a trance for six weeks, absorbed in the awareness that his nature was formless, immanent consciousness. He lived in a small cave in the mountains and was in samadhi (the state of direct experience of the divine Self within) for years. His body deteriorated; his legs were eaten by worms. He slowly came back to body consciousness and lived thenceforward in severe penance. He has produced incredible poems in Sanskrit. He is recognized as a maharishi, the "greatest."

Whose Baba is greatest? Everyone around Bangalore seemed to believe that Sai Baba is greatest, but now Ramana Maharshi was also the greatest. "Everyone says 'My Baba is greatest,' but eventually everyone has to give up the form in which they know God, because the body will die," Hari said. "Everyone has to get beyond the familiar form of God." This sounded like something I would have to do too.

Marge and I had breakfast with Hari, who talked of his experience in an ashram in Tibet. While there he had met and married a German woman (with the blessing of his guru) who bore him three children. She wouldn't live in a regular home with him, so he left her and met a Spanish woman who took him out of that ashram and brought him to Sai Baba. At Sai Baba's 66th birthday in Puttaparthi, when he first met Baba, he and his girlfriend sat on either side of Baba and each held one of his feet. Baba told them to stay.



Marge, Hari and I took a taxi to pick up Hannah and do the 5-star hotels in Bangalore: West End, Ashoka, and Windsor Manor. During our 85 rupee lunch at the Ashoka, Hannah told her story of meeting Baba in India when he was nineteen and she was twenty-two. Her story was incredible. She was an eleven-year old child in Germany, when the Nazis tried to make people join the party by operating on their children. They operated on her without her knowing what they were doing. They reattached everything wrongly. They did lobotomies on her more than once. Her father let

her be experimented with, and her stepmother, who took opium and gave it to her, helped to abuse her. A man in his 60's, her teacher, got their permission to take her on a round--the-world trip, after the war, in 1946, when she was about twenty-two. He chloroformed her and had her brought on board ship, after the ship had pulled away, claiming she was his daughter. Everyone rejoiced that she had made it. When she tried to tell people that she had been brought by force, no one believed her, but thought her an ungrateful daughter. The man bought her a Paris hat and kept her drugged with opium most of the time. For some reason, her captor took her to Baba, who was then living in a jungle, worshiping a lingam. He gave her many things then, which she eventually left in Germany, where they were taken from her, but Baba bilocated to Germany and gave them to her again. Hannah married a German and moved to South Africa, where she had four children. Her stepmother also abused those children. After Hannah's divorce, a woman in South Africa drugged her and took her to open a bank account and began pilfering from her. When she realized that she didn't have any money, she called the postmaster, who said she must come over in person, but when she went out to go to the post office, she was bitten by a dog and taken to the hospital for months and was never able to get her money. In 1972 her mother died and left her some money, which she lives on now. Hannah wears a lapis necklace to protect her from throat diseases and she bought an emerald ring to keep the poisons out of her body. She thinks "they" are after her in every country. She is hiding out here in India, but "they" are so rich they come here and work black yoga on her. Perhaps she is studying in self-defense, to understand how paranormal things "work," to protect herself -against "them."

The poverty of India came up in our discussion at lunch. I was told that in India many souls are coming into birth in their first incarnation as humans: that is the explanation for the poor and miserable life many lead here. The first human life is the hardest. Here in India there are also many very advanced souls. People in India don't live nearly as long as Westerners do. Rich women don't go out on the streets, I noticed--because of the pollution? But poor women and children are doing the dirty work, carrying dirt and stones up and down at construction sites. Do poor people here feel bound to the wheel of fate? What does their religion do for these workers? Does religion help them to transcend their ignorance and misery? In Puttaparthi religion was a beautiful escape into a magical fairytale world where gods are disguised as humans. In America, the poor have the fantasy dream of winning the lottery. In India, poor people have Vishnu reincarnations and gods walking among them. Does the ordinary Indian think about Vishnu or Rama or Krishna in his suffering? How do these gods help the poor? In the West we believe that faith saves us and that is all. It's so easy. Doing good works is the sign of our being saved.

Richard

On Thursday morning Marge and I went out on the town to shop on Commercial Street, where we looked into the jewelry stores (I bought a lapis

necklace) and sari shops (I had a sari made into a punjabi suit at the Family Store). We returned to Koshy's for lunch, where we met Richard LeVan, another long-time resident of India and a follower of Sai Baba. Richard's story was as fascinating as Hannahlore's. As a child, he lived with his stepmother and father until he was abruptly sent to live with his mother, a chanteuse, who sent him to school to the Franciscans in Buffalo. He has been many things--an actors' film agent in Hollywood among them. When he was in Monterey, Carmel, etc., he read about the masters of yoga. His favorite was Ramana Maharshi. He had a dream of Ramana Maharshi lying dead on his bed, with Sai Baba sitting on a chair nearby. Richard took Maharshi's hand, but it was cold, then Baba said to him, "You see--come to me." Richard knew about Baba for twelve years before going to India, but thought, Well, he's alive. I can wait. He had a picture of Sai Baba. His father was dying of lung cancer and his mother was going blind. His father was wasted away and unable to breathe. Baba came beside his bed and healed him, and he lived ten more years. Baba told his mother to get her eyes fixed by a certain doctor who was a Baba believer. The doctor said, "The hands doing the surgery were Baba's." She had retina implants and could see without glasses for the first time.

I told Richard that I didn't need Baba and didn't know why I had been called to see him. Richard said, "Maybe Baba needs you." That was a new thought.



Richard writes letters to Baba at Sri Sathya Sai Baba/ Prasanthi Nilayam/ Avantapur District/ Andra Pradesh 515134. Baba comes in dreams to answer him. Baba told Richard to go back to the States and wait until he heard that Baba had fallen. Later Richard heard Baba had fallen and fractured his hip, so he came to India. The first time, he stayed 3-1/2 years, then went back to the States and got a job in Carmel, where he felt he fit in. Richard had an interview in November 1989. He heard that Baba didn't grant interviews much, so he was happy not to have to expect one. During a long wait, Richard needed a candy bar for his blood sugar. Baba was facing away from him. Richard was happy to see others being made happy by Baba, so he said, "Good for you, Baba, making all the people happy." Baba turned and came to him, waved his hand in the air and produced the very kind of candy bar he wanted, gave it to him and said, "Eat that and you'll feel better."

On the subject of Christianity, Richard is less than interested. He says the Gospel is wrong, and that at the Second Coming the Father will come, not the Son again.

I told Richard and Marge of my dream of the hamburger, where the Indian woman was drawing away the meat from me and I was clutching at it to hang onto it. Richard said, "Maybe you're supposed to become a vegetarian?" By taking animals into ourselves, he says, we are drawing them into humans too early, and that is where the rapists and murderers and perverts come from. All men are not equal; some are more advanced in lives and some are only beginning as humans; they come to third world countries, where they can survive on the streets, not to first world countries where they couldn't get by on handouts and little odd jobs in roadside stands.

Richard said Baba is trying to wean the Indians from their dependence on gimmicks, etc.; e.g, he doesn't do lingams anymore. Richard occasionally goes to darshan, but with a blase attitude, since Baba told him that 95% of the people who go to darshan are criminals, so Richard should avoid darshan. He contacts Baba in dreams, which he says are more personal than interviews. When I said that I never remember dreams, he answered, "You'll know; you'll always remember." Richard has a nice attitude toward Baba. He's intimate with him, but doesn't have to stay at the ashram.

Richard is very interested in karma and has become an expert on his own karma, which has been very bad, for some reason. He recently learned that the cause of his suffering in this life is that in his previous incarnation, he was a South American princess chosen to be a goddess. She became very cruel and sadistic, and only late in life (around 1627) became remorseful. In an earlier incarnation he was John the Baptist, and in his next incarnation he will be Prima Sai Baba's younger brother. (Prima Sai Baba is the third of the Sai Baba avatars, who will come in the 21 st century. The first, Shirdi Sai Baba, lived in the last century.)

"Do not go to places to which you yourself are not spiritually connected; such visits may cause sickness and death," I read one afternoon in *Divine Memories*, as I rested in my room to escape the heat. I had begun seeking to understand what was going on from the books I had been accumulating. Hari Govinda had given me *Divine Memories* by Diane Baskin, one of Sai Baba's early Western followers. It seemed that I must have an affinity with India as I hadn't gotten sick. Perhaps I was spiritually connected with India in an earlier life? (Was I spiritually not connected with China as I had become sick there--with chronic bronchitis)? I felt that I was most spiritually connected with Goa, a Catholic state, and I deeply wanted to go there, to touch my roots in this confused time.

"Dig one deep hole rather than many shallow ones." I had already dug one deep hole in my commitment to Roman Catholicism, hadn't I? "One has to remain with one teacher with a steady commitment." Diane meant Sai Baba, but

I read this as meaning Jesus. "Mixing spiritual energies, tuning the mind to another frequency can cause confusion." This was surely happening in my case.

"Swami is like electricity; we are all different light bulbs of different wattage. When we plug into Swami, he charges us to the proper voltage our physical frames can handle and the current flows steadily." I did feel that I had been plugged into some energy source that was taking over. Was Sai Baba doing this to me?

In a chapter "Breaking Attachment to Swami," Diane wrote that she had been miserable during a 3-1/2 year period when Swami had ignored her. When he finally smiled on her again, he asked what she wanted, and she replied "devotion." When he asked what that was, she answered "love of God"; then Swami answered, "But God is everywhere, in everything, in everyone . . ." She had not needed to be miserable for that long time, feeling that she could only be devoted to and find love in Sai Baba. He was expanding her consciousness to include all creation. She had let herself become a slave to Sai Baba and only recognize God in him. I felt this was a liberating idea and felt relieved that I could find God outside of Sai Baba, as I didn't feel drawn to him as others did. I felt that in my own life, having found no one person to devote my life to and worship, I had had to accept many persons as messengers from God, so I hadn't become attached to anyone. Especially here in India I was aware of God acting through others to help me. The outside form was not essential; the inner blessing alone counted.

"Each one's power is within him," Baba had said. "By allowing a weak mind to get control over us, we begin running from place to place. When are we going to get strength of mind? Develop it in yourself; such spiritual power is in YOU. God is not external; God is not outside you. God is inside you." I felt this message was also aimed at me.

"Give up the company of the worldly-minded, the association with those infested by asurie (evil) qualities. Keep away from wrongdoing. Seek always the company of the wise, the good." This ideal of "satsang" (good company) appealed to me. I felt that I was enjoying a lot of "satsang" in India. Everyone who was "sent" to me was a believer, a follower of Sai Baba; although I was not a devotee, I enjoyed the endless conversations on spiritual matters that we were holding.

We talked about, and I read about reincarnation. Richard said that animals are incarnations, working their way up through matter, from mineral to vegetable, to animal and eventually to human forms. When I saw the starving dogs standing on the streets or nosing around the street garbage dumps, I felt compassion. Were they really souls working their way up? If we shouldn't eat meat because we bring animals too early into the human realm, what about vegetables and minerals? We shouldn't eat those either.

On Friday, March 6, Sai Baba moved from Puttaparthi to the ashram at Brindaven in Whitefield, and all the devotees living at the Bombay Ananda Bhavan went out to see him. I missed out on a car, so felt I should leave for Goa. All week I had been dallying with the idea of going somewhere--to Mysore, especially, but the "satsang" kept me back. Marge's friend Hari (from Finland or Norway) had arrived on Thursday, and they were planning to leave for Goa on Saturday. This was my chance to escape from what felt like a trap to keep me in Bangalore, especially now that Sai Baba was so near. I wondered if I could escape his power? Others had been told to stay and were still there. I got onto a waiting list for the 1 p.m. flight to Goa the next day, and went to the Gateway Hotel to wait for Richard. This 4 or 5 star hotel is an oasis right in the center of Bangalore. I sat on the porch enjoying the breeze, a state of blissful trust. If I was meant to leave for Goa, I would. I had done all I could; now I would leave it up to God. I felt detached and serene; Baba hadn't called me to Brindaven; he wasn't attaching me to his retinue. I felt detached from all forms of God, the Judaeo-Christian (Father-Son) as well as the eastern form of Baba, and felt that God was in myself. Why need I run around looking for God when God was present within me giving me this taste of bliss?

I had lunch and Richard came in and we talked till three. He told me about a vision he had had of a golden larvae that kept sending out beneficent energy--it was the golden birth process of incarnation. A yogi had told him that a monkey would come to him; it was in his chart. He had seen the monkey in a vision. We agreed on most things, but disagreed on Jesus. Baba said Jesus came to India--St. Esau, up north; that definitely must be Jesus, as Baba can't be wrong. (I remembered that Baba had told Diane several wrong things, then said they were lilas or jokes.) Where was Jesus during the "lost years"? In India of course! If Richard's mind could be so fertile and see visions, couldn't Jesus? Richard was amazing. He had dreamt of me. He was in an apartment (I had told him of my apartment in Chicago). The doors opened and a beautiful kitten walked in and sat up on the sofa and sat back and he knew that it belonged to all in the house. I was that kitten; I wouldn't be destined just for one, but for all.

On Saturday, I woke up at 5, and on a hunch that I would be going to Goa, I packed and checked out, then went with Brenda (from Australia, who meditates two hours a day) and Hari (who was moving his stuff over) to Brindaven to Sai Baba's darshan at 8 or so. I wrote Baba a letter on the back of a painting I had done and bought a rose to give to him at darshan. I would ask him if I could leave; if he accepted my gift, I would be happy. If he didn't, at least I had offered it to him. I trusted God that if I were meant to go to Goa, I would get a seat and Baba's blessing.

I looked for my friends from Puttaparthi, and the first one I spotted was Karen, who embraced me like a sister and told me she was going back to Holland on the 10th to quit her job and return to Baba's. She hasn't been happy



in her life, and she wants to feel better about herself, but she can't in Holland. She hasn't had the headaches while she's been here, which she takes as a sign that Baba wants to bless her with happiness here. I also saw Tina, Christa, and finally, Marie-Paule, with whom I sat at darshan. Baba only looked at me as I knelt up to offer him my letter, but didn't take it and passed on. I told Marie-Paule that I was leaving, but she said I couldn't, that someone had tried to leave

but Baba had kept her there. But I believed that I could find God everywhere, as Baba had told Diane, not only at Bangalore at Brindhaven. I went with Marie-Paule to her room and saw the terrible toilets and primitive accommodations and wondered again why these wonderful women would put up with that when they didn't have to, when they could find God everywhere! I kissed Marie-Paule goodbye, gave her the silk pants that had gotten put into my laundry, and went back in the taxi with Brenda, trusting that God would let me go.

That morning at breakfast, before we had gone to darshan, I had said that I wanted to go to Goa and eventually to Delhi, and Gunter, whom I had seen the day before but never met, offered a suggestion: "If you like this hotel, I know some place like it in Goa and Delhi," and he wrote the names "Doriasukh" Dominique and Assunta's house on Candolim in Goa, and "Lord's Guest House" with directions in New Delhi. I knew God was sending me there.

Hopping in an auto rickshaw, I rode over to Indian Airlines' Booking Office, where I saw the "Duty Officer" who gave me a confirmed reservation. St. Joseph was there beside me the whole time. I knew I would get to go, because I had caught Baba's eye at darshan and offered him my gift and he hadn't taken it, but my getting the reservation was his thanks and his letting me go.

Hari, Marge and I drove to the airport and boarded the plane for Goa. It was only when we were up in the air that I felt I had indeed been released from the spell of Sai Baba.

Chapter 3 Retreat in Goa

Dominique and Assunta Roderick's guesthouse "Doriasukh" is at Candolim, on one of Goa's northern beaches known collectively as Calengute. Trusting in Gunter's recommendation, I hired a taxi at the airport to take me to Candolim, leaving Hari and Marge to tough it out at the luxury Oberoi on a nearby southern beach, for \$284 for 2



days and 3 nights. The taxi crossed a long bridge over a bay, then boarded a ferry. The vegetation was lush, unlike the dry interior of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Goa has the feel of a jungle: primitive villages with huts, cattle working in rice paddies, coconut palms, heavy vegetation. The farther we got from the airport, across rivers and ferries, the farther we seemed to get from civilization. Can there be any decent accommodations out here, I wondered. I was relieved to find, across from Bob's Inn, down the beach road, on the beach, a wooden sign with "Doriasuk" and an arrow pointing to a substantial two story red stucco house with tile roof and verandahs, in the Portuguese style, overgrown with bougainvillee, palms, flowering bushes. There was one room, of course; I had known there would be, even though it was late Saturday afternoon. St. Joseph had taken care of me again. Moreover, the Rodericks were Catholics. They would take me to 7:30 Mass with the family the next morning at St. Teresa's Church, founded in 1560! The accommodations were clean, airy, with a new bathroom, and a view of the ocean from the little balcony. The family were handsome and intellectual. Dominique was the headmaster at a Catholic high school in Ajuna; Assunta taught at St. Teresa's grade school.



Esperanza, or Espy, Dominique's sister, was the main proprietor of the guest house. Three children--Luella (about 12), Clive (about 10), and Denzel (9), were lively and interested in all the guests. They had a rigid schedule of school and homework, relieved by visits with Espy, cricket, and TV on weekend evenings. I and a pet chicken were allowed into the kitchen. While we lived with modern conveniences and a good

well, the next door neighbors were living as they must have always lived in Goa--outdoors. They cooked in a huge black pot resting on stones over a fire. Domestic pigs ran around on the sand. An outhouse sat at a distance, near the bushes by the ocean. Next door to the north was an outdoor restaurant. There were signs of lines marking separation between property, but it truly seemed like people had just camped here hundreds of years ago and gradually built more substantial homes, still keeping the protective shell of woven palm mats.

I found that the main occupation of the guests (mostly Germans) was lying on the beach reading. That was perfect for me, as I had brought a backpack full of books from Bangalore--hoping to find out more about Eastern spirituality from them. Each day was the same. The sun shone uninterruptedly. The wind blew constantly from the west, cooling off the shore. Mornings and afternoons I spent on the veranda or on the beach. Every afternoon I swam in the strong ocean, getting turned over and dragged down by the waves. Espy cooked whatever I

liked--prawns and rice, vegetable omelets, noodles and vegetables, fruit salad, chicken Goan style with coconut. At night the quiet was intense, except for the barking dogs, the cocks, and the constant pounding of the surf. I read all the books I had collected--books on and by Sai Baba, *Self Knowledge* by Sankaracarya, *My Baba and I* by John Hyslop, *Be As You Are* about Ramana



Maharshi's teachings. I was free to roam the cosmos. I felt like God had contrived for me to come to this heavenly place where I was taken care of, fed and clothed by angels (Espy sewed punjabi suits for me), to give me the time, even the proper setting, to read and explore these cosmic ideas. I felt like I had been caught in a cosmic wave and cast up on the shores of India. The days slipped by; twelve days were like a timeless eternity. The setting offered the visible landscape of the sublime, a metaphor for the world I was encountering in these writers. The powerful current of the Arabian Sea was like the tide of Sai Baba that swept me up and carried me along with its power. The gentle Goans were humankind in a state

of goodness and innocence.

When I saw lovers on the beach, I felt like I was also having a love affair that was focusing my attention (if I hadn't, I would perhaps have been as bored as some Westerners seemed, lying semi-nude on the beaches or sitting around the Taj Village resort smoking and drinking). But with whom was I in love? With a mysterious power in the universe.

In this heightened state, I met Harold from Germany, who had been traveling for three years all over India, and living here for five weeks already, the longest place he had stayed anywhere. Another wandering, rootless Westerner. What are they looking for? I told him my story, sure that he was another special person whom I was destined to meet, a friend from another life. He was a total skeptic. I felt the futility of exposing faith in the supernatural to those who don't believe, but I had to bear witness to the great adventure I was on. Like the Ancient Mariner, I had to fix whomever I found and tell him my strange tale.

But my friendship with Harold was not in vain. Without him I would have been a hermit. An old Goa hand after five weeks, Harold introduced me to the wider surroundings, the flea market at Anjuna, the market at Maposa, and far down the beach, the splendid Taj Village Resort and Fort Aguada. Soon I was walking the beaches up to Calengute and down to Fort Aguada and, hopping on the back of motor-bike taxis and speeding through the countryside, enjoying the landscape, trusting in St. Joseph.

Outlined by dikes and fringed by coconut palm trees, the rice fields lay waiting for the monsoon rains to fill them with water. The houses were protected

by hanging panels of woven palm branches. Huge haystacks provided food for the water buffalo, but along the road walked a starving calf. The whole rural scene thrilled me and my heart thanked God for bringing me here, after the immensity of Bombay and Bangalore.

I made the Taj Village Resort my imaginary residence. I had breakfast there as the guest of Constantin, Nickolai, and Alexander, three Russians who were with Sandoz (which I thought was the name of a tour, but which Harold informed me was a leading Swiss pharmaceutical firm). From the Taj Village I hoped to call Kansas City. I had not talked to my parents since Bangalore. Unfortunately, the phone was only for guests and calls had to be billed to a room. From the Taj, I could walk to the fort, where I found a place by the sea which was perfect for meditation. I sat and felt this was my spot, by the rocks and the sea, watching the infinite power of God. I thought that as in these last weeks I had seen God's power at work in my life constantly, so perhaps the blessing of Baba was to make me conscious of God's power and blessing in my life. If I had only been conscious all my life, I could have seen God's hand everywhere, guiding me, as the Israelites saw God acting always in their regard through faith. (However they only saw that retrospectively; at least I saw it as I was in it.) I seemed to be mostly conscious of God acting in my life when I made a leap into the unknown and found I had leapt right into God's hands. As I looked out at the Arabian Sea, I thought of Columbus. He and his crew were so religious because they were casting off into the unknown. All the little Portuguese style fishing boats up and down the coast had religious paintings in their bows, to show their reliance on God in the unknown. I trusted that as long as I went alone, without anything, God would direct me by sending messengers to show me the way. As long as I can keep conscious of God's acting in my life, whatever comes to me comes from God, and I have retained contact with Baba (or Jesus), and certainly with St. Joseph.

Alone on the beach I experienced the infinity of Brahmin; I read in Ramana Maharshi that nothing but Brahmin exists; all else is maya, illusion. I felt bereft of all I loved--all is discovered to be maya. All the warm, changing surfaces of the earth are unreal. Alone on the beach, I experienced the wind's howling, the infinite sea's pounding, and I felt I was being blown clean of all illusion and attachment and left bereft and denuded. I felt sad at the loss of all my illusions and cherished attachments. But then I felt that my eternal Self is a caretaker, a mother to the body and its needs. The divine compassionate Mother inside has indulged the body's weakness and brought it here to Goa to be stroked in its grief.

It seems God has known my needs far better than I (or the God in me, because I selected Goa, and then was guided to this house)--peace, solitude, an image of infinity, an ideal climate, time and space to be alone to read, pray and meditate, security from a Catholic family who provide my meals to order

whenever I want them--just what I like, noodles with vegetables, prawn, mussels, various fish. This place was heaven.

At night the sannyasin from Pune came to the beachfront by our house to dance in a sunset service. Four drummers from Switzerland and Germany on African drums led the dancers who chanted and gyrated, then at sunset jumped in the water. The ashram at Pune is that of Rajnish, the guru who was thrown out of Oregon or Idaho, who had fleets of Rolls Royces.



Now he is dead, but his community is thriving among Westerners, who like his offbeat teachings, including the idea that ecstasy can be attained through sex. One cannot get in there these days without testing negative for HIV. A German girl staying in our guest house had been there five months and told me of various meditation workshops--theater, regression, past lives, etc.

One day Espy took me to see the pink house, the home of Frank and Gita Sineas, architect and interior designer respectively, from Bombay. I loved the easy open, airy feel of the rooms, all opening onto the verandah facing the ocean. Gita Sineas did the interiors for the Taj Village, and furnished her place in similar period antiques. I dreamed of living in such a home.

The family moved me into their own home when some other guest wanted a friend (who was going to stay longer than I) to move into the house. I felt that they might be sorry and I might be sorry, but I accepted this as being for my good, as whatever came to me came from God. I had no expectations except quiet and peace. The bedroom in their house had a real Goan look--a large bed and wardrobe, wider verandah with a better view of the ocean and more direct breezes; it was away from the barnyard noises of the house behind Doriasukh. Moreover, I could watch the life in the house next door where the people lived and cooked outdoors and the women were weaving new mats for the coming monsoon.

In What Form Do I See God?

I was most attracted to the writings of Ramana Maharshi, especially to the idea of surrender as a way of transcending the individual self and uniting with God. "King Janaka surrendered his mind, speech, action to the Divine in the form of the youthful sage, Astavakaa." Again, the idea is that the Divine may



have many forms. Is it whichever form most attracts us that we should follow and then surrender to God in that form? Likewise, we should invest the candle "jyothi" of our meditation in whatever form is most dear to us. Later I realized that this surrender was to the divine in the form of the Guru. The danger is that one becomes attached to the human form of the Guru. In my journal I had written "Do not fall in love with (become attached to) the messenger; do not find the messenger unappealing. The messenger is only sent to bring God's message to you, not to become a part of your life. God chooses messengers at his sport, even, though he may choose appealing, exciting messengers." I pondered this. I believed that I had recognized that God was leading me

through the words of all the people I had been learning from in India, and I wanted to stay open to these messengers. However, I did not want to become like Diane Baskin and the women at the ashram who recognized God only in one form--Sai Baba.

How could I reconcile these two divine forms--Jesus and Sai Baba? It was like trying to integrate two gods, looking with two eyes at the same thing, only each eye saw different images of God--Jesus and Sai Baba. I was trying to focus on one God and understand how there could be two forms. I felt this whole journey had been under a spiritual impulse which drew me to Baba, but his face was so strange that I did not recognize the familiar form I loved in him. But surely this all had to be God's work, and I wanted to say yes. I had a dream in which it seemed that Baba was like an egg or a stone or a loaf and a voice said, "Eat it; chew it up and eat it."

"Do not become attached to the place of the message. Every place is equally possible for God to send messages in." This was consoling to me, for it meant that God was not limited to Puttaparthi or Bangalore or Goa, or even India to send His messages or power. This meant that I could return to Chicago and still receive the power of God. I didn't know how this might happen, but I trusted that it would. Silence is important to meditation. Goa offered more silence than Bangalore, and Bangalore was more peaceful than Puttaparthi, where the noises of the canteen, the shed, the campus at night were a horrible nightmare. I felt

that I could not meditate there, but Goa was perfect. God had brought me to a place of peace and silence where I could rest and listen. I could pass as a sun-worshiper, but I was really being still and listening and reading. I would be told where and when to go next.

Having finished Ramana Maharshi, I was reading *The Autobiography of a Yoga* by Yogananda. I completely identified with his great faith that God would



assist him whenever he needed help, as long as he pursued his search for God. Reading about the astral body in Yogananda made me think I do not want to come back to this earth. I wanted to go to a place where there are no opposites of heat and cold, wellness and disease, life and death, light and darkness. I wanted to remain in the state of learning, knowing, meditating, reflecting, imagining, viewing, without all the bodily functions.

The whole process of eating and digestion is bothersome to me. I do not want sex or reproduction and all the changes of the body associated with that. I would like to be with people who are like-minded--peaceful, studious, focused on God, not diverting their energies after worthless baubles.

I dreamed that I could retire and come to India, where prayer comes naturally, or where the external world does not attract me with distractions. It would be like spending the last third of my life in contemplation and faith, searching for God alone. I could be like the forest hermits (*vanaprastha*) who, having fulfilled all family obligations, retire to a solitary place and engage in full-time meditation. Only I would retire to the beach. I would not be burdened by distractions, if I could find a place where I wouldn't have too many hassles. Even here in Goa there are two worlds, an astral world and a physical. The foreigners on the beach live in the physical world, desiring their bodily and sense gratification. I felt like I had been caught in a cosmic wave and cast up on the shore of eternity, onto another planet or star, as if my India were different from theirs. Like the Little Prince, I had my own special star right here in India.

My life became a ritual. In the mornings, I would arise early and watch the activities and hear the sounds of the morning: the crowing roosters, the cawing crows, twittering birds, the roar of the receding surf which had reached its high tide during the night, the clucks of hens mustering their chickens, the barks of dogs, the tinkle of the bell on the breadboy's bike as he summoned the cooks from the homes to buy their morning buns. I watched the old woman light the fire under the large black pot, feed the pigs out of several bowls; the boy cleaned his

bike and rode off with his bookbag. A cart with two white bullocks was led down to the beach by men who were collecting sand in bags. I spent mornings on the beach walking. Sometimes I walked to Fort Aguada. The wide sand beach after the retreating tide left many crabs stranded. They would be well away from their holes in search of water when I would pass, and they would have to scurry back to their homes. Large cuttlefish would have washed ashore during the night. The fishermen were pulling their narrow dugout outrigger canoes ashore for the day.

Afternoons , aside from walking into town to buy post cards or going to the bank or riding the bus or motorbike taxi to markets, I spent most time on the beach alone, counting Harold as my only beach friend, whom I usually greeted toward the end of the day and told of my day's adventure and my cosmic delights, which amused him. Otherwise, I was like Israel, whom God led into the desert to speak to her heart. Detached from friends, possessions, cars, home, family, etc., I became aware of the action of God in my life. Here God could speak to my heart, for I was alone and not desirous of anything but food and drink and the stimulation of natural beauty. Goa was ideal for me. There was not much sightseeing, there was sufficient comfort and privacy, so I was not distracted by discomfort and lack of privacy as in Puttaparthi. There were cool breezes, so I was not suffering from the heat. The ocean breeze kept the place fresh, dry, not too humid--an image of heaven! When we don't seek for things, we receive them. Seeking first the kingdom of heaven (which is within), all things are added to us .

After reading at the beach, I sometimes felt existentially alone, then God would send someone to talk to to break my loneliness. One day it was Sr. Louisa, a Franciscan of St. Anthony's home, who had been working in Madra Pradesh, in the jungles. She was only twenty-eight but looked older from the hard life: the roads were only navigable by walking. She had to walk six or eight miles a day. She had come here to Goa to recover her health. At dinner, Espy would talk to me. I needed that current of contact, that satsang with other believers. Another evening I talked with a young Hindu mother on the beach with her son. She was adorned in her sari, with orange flowers in her hair. She told me about Holi, a coming Hindu feast when colored dye would be thrown everywhere.

I adopted a ritual for dinner, which I took alone. I came back from the beach dirty and sweaty, so I would shower, then put on a punjabi outfit which were as comfortable as pyjamas. Then I would sit and watch the sunset, burn incense, listen to bhajans, meditate. I felt I was the temple of the Holy Spirit. Watching the sunset on the Arabian Sea from the verandah, through the palm trees, I felt blessed to be there at that moment in time, my material needs supplied by that Catholic family who were below praying the rosary together. Espy was a sort of saint, unselfishly working for the good of the family, caring for

the guests and the children, sewing for the guests, a model of selflessness, faithfully bringing my meals.

Living with the Rodericks in their house was like staying on board a small ship, with the captain, family and crew, and I their only passenger, in my stateroom with the verandah overlooking the ocean. At night I could see the twinkling lights of freighters anchored out at sea from the Goa harbor. How beautiful the darkness over the ocean. From my little perch, I felt face to face with the great darkness, the unknown. It was an act of faith that had launched me into the unknown world of India. Harold had argued that this life is all there is but I had insisted, "It isn't enough." All this beauty tells me there is more than this life. In the darkness, how would one know there was a majestic ocean out there? Only the arrival of the sun can reveal it. I knew there was something out there that I was trying to discern.

I felt Goa was mesmerizing me; it might become like the land of the *Iotophagoi* in Homer. I could imagine staying on there till I had to return to Chicago, but I felt I should see something of Delhi, and my architect father's joy that I would be going to India "to see the Taj Mahal" made me press on toward Agra and the North of India. I decided to travel on March 19, St. Joseph's Day, by which time I would have been in Goa twelve days. I had to go to Indian Airlines in Panaji on Saturday to get the ticket. Afterwards, I took a taxi to Old Goa, to see the remains of the original Catholic settlement there in the 16th century. St. Francis Xavier's skeleton was visible in a silver casket in the Church of Bom Jesu, but I felt nothing spiritual, and wondered at how the Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans from Spain and Portugal could have built such immense replicas of their cathedrals in fragile, jungle settlements. Now the government of Goa maintains them for the tourists. I went to St. Monica's Convent, now the Mater Dei Institute, where there was one nun sitting on the floor in prayer. I wondered if anything would come to me from the miraculous crucifix, but no--nothing.

Back on the beach I read and meditated. The ocean's roar was the voices of thousands adoring the majesty of God. Against the ocean's roar, no lesser sound could be heard. Distracting sounds of this world--the howls of dogs, roar of motorcycles, hammering, chopping of coconuts, buzzing of saws--all were silenced. The beaches at Goa were the perfect place to meditate, for they directed my thoughts only to praising God, not to any lesser activity. I gave Harold my daily positive thought lecture. It was nice to have someone to disagree with so entirely. I felt like I was really and intensely awake in India. I was aware of the action of God in my life from moment to moment. I saw whatever came to me as coming from God's hands, and I saw my own actions as limited, limiting and untrustworthy. I saw my illusions, how easily I spun fantasies out of nothing. How good it was to see every bit of creation as meaningful. Even the cheeping of the chickens calling for their mother was meaningful to me. Their little souls were just beginning their thousand year ascent to enlightenment, yet

how intimately tied they are to the present perishable world. Why couldn't Harold see this?

My first Sunday I had gone to Mass with the Rodericks at St. Teresa's and had enjoyed the lilting waltz hymns sung gently by the parishioners. My last I took the bus to Calengute to a mass which turned out to be for children, in the Cochinin dialect. The children surrounded the altar. The music again sounded like western waltzes accompanied by violins. I figured out that the Gospel was about the Transfiguration, when Jesus took Peter, James and John up to the mountain to pray with him and was transfigured in their sight. This clue was what I had been looking for--Jesus in meditation had been transformed and his face shone as the gurus have done. Being with Elias and Moses put him in the company of other avatars. I asked Jesus to be my guru, to teach me to pray. I sought other examples of Jesus going off alone by himself to pray--the 40 day fast in the desert that we had read in the Lenten Gospel last week. Truly this Lent was special for me to be living this prayerful experience. By contrast to the sublime natural and spiritual worlds I was experiencing, the tourist shops in Calengute seemed tacky and empty. How could people come to India and only find them?

Walking back to Candolim on the beach, I met Harold trying to help a German couple who were being arrested by the police for nudity. With some talk we got them off. I told them I didn't think it was fair for foreigners to come and take over the beaches so the natives didn't feel free to bring their children to the beach, for fear of running into naked foreigners. I felt later as if I were put here in this Western atmosphere as a trial run to see if I can carry my precious self-realization into the world without spilling it. In all this beauty, it's easy to see only God, to follow only God's will, to avoid contact with anyone who isn't "satsang." When I returned to Chicago, I would have this brief training period of following God-consciousness to fall back on. I wrote: "What will Delhi turn up? Who knows? I hope some spiritual company shows up there."

Before I left, I made a watercolor painting of the Rodericks red house set on the sands, surrounded by the wall and fringed by palm trees and flowering bushes. In the foreground I would have liked to put all the activities that took place on that sand: a black pig with a crow on its back, a hen digging around in the sand for food for her brood, the boys playing cricket, the baker with his bicycle selling loaves of bread, the black cooking pot, the ladies squatting, weaving protective mats for the monsoons, grandmother putting out food for the pigs, a crow purchasing on a coconut palm waiting to steal one of my sponges.

I looked forward to my evening encounters with Harold and took his picture as the day for my departure neared. He told me that if I really believed I was getting so much from India, I should stay here and break my contract, etc. He turned the tables on me, making me the practical one and himself the idealist. With certain persons I feel a spark of recognition, as if we had known each other

before. I immediately feel familiar with them, as if we were resuming an old acquaintance. Harold was like a crab who scurried back into his hole.

The last day in Goa I spent returning to Anjuna to the flea market to exchange a pair of pants and buy some lapis necklaces and paintings on silk. Back at the house by three. I finished *The Tiger's Daughter* by Bharate Mukherjee, which gave a good picture of the mixed feelings of an Americanized Indian girl upon returning to her own crowd in Calcutta. At the beach, the catamaran was still anchored offshore, the waves were large from the usual stiff westerly tradewind. The tide was way out, perhaps because of the full moon. Full moon parties used to be held on the Goa beaches by the Pune devotees, but they have been outlawed and the Westerners now go 45 kilometers north for their parties. The beach was almost deserted. No sign of Harold to say goodbye.

I walked and prayed and felt the presence of the Holy Spirit; I imagined an immense temple within me, as high as these skies and blown clean by these winds, a Hindu-Christian temple. That night I walked on the sands outdoors to watch the full moon rising--the symbol of the complete consciousness and the end of ego.

In the morning I said goodbye to the Rodericks and paid the remaining bill--an extra 475 rupees had been added for something--tipped Espie and Suneitha, then took the 8:30 taxi for the airport and saw Goa for the last time--all the fields and coconut palms and lush vegetation. The plane was delayed two hours coming from Cochin, so I sat there waiting and trusting St. Joseph to provide. After the beauty of Goa, what could Delhi hold?

Chapter 4

New Delhi

I arrived in New Delhi at 4 p.m. on St. Joseph's Day, March 19, and dodging colored powders that everyone seemed to be throwing for Holi, went straight to the airport tourism counter and gave the gentleman the number at Lord's Guest House (which Gunter had given me in Bangalore) and asked him to call and tell them I had arrived and please save a room for me. (I had called from Panaji on the previous Saturday to book a room and had been told to call when I arrived). The man at the counter tried to discourage me: "Why do you want to stay there, Ma'm? It's a very small place, only 150 rupees." He had directed the German couple ahead of me to a hotel where the rate was 650 rupees, of which I assume he would get a commission. I persisted in sticking with the Lord's, even when the prepaid driver didn't know where we were going except that it was in Hauskhaz. He finally found the place, near the Aurobindo Market, behind the shopping center on the Aurobindo Marg. A placard on the three-story pink guest

house announced: "All are invited to chanting and meditation every Tuesday from 6 to 7:30."



Mrs. Pukar, the proprietor, greeted me and gave me Gunther's room on top, with a terrace. I knew right away that I had been sent to her. She listened briefly to my tale of how I managed to find her, then told me, "You are blessed. People go all over New Delhi before they find this place. Do you meditate? Come with me now. I was just leaving when you called.

Thursday night is our chanting and meditation night at the Muktananda Ashram just across the road. Tonight is Holi, and there will be special dancing."

That was my introduction to the Muktananda Ashram, and to meditation. Mrs. Pukar was to be my guru. I called her Mama.

The women and men at the meditation center were seated on the floor facing the seat at the front (reserved for the guru) with three pictures over the seat--of Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, the present Guru; Muktananda, her guru, the one for whom the ashram was named; and Nityananda, the guru of Muktananda. All these people were unknown by me, but I was to learn much about them. What an evening of bhajans and dancing! The girls were dressed in their loveliest saris and punjabi suits, circling a light as they chanted. The men took their turns at circle dancing too. I could see how Hindu families live with their religion. If this had been a group of young Americans dancing, there would have been much silliness and smirking and laughing; the Indians were modest and restrained, shy and even awkward dancing in front of others, but willing to try. Mrs Pukar tried to urge me (feeling very conspicuous in my warm up suit) to join in, assuring me that I would feel very comfortable and would be a star. Afterwards we all were invited down to the basement for prasad (blessed food) of sweetened chick peas on banana leaf plates.

Afterwards, I managed to book a call from the Pukars phone to Kansas City to my parents. Mother told me "Come home; I'm dying." Dad told me she was dying and that my sister Kathleen had said to come right to her house when I got to Kansas City. Jean Gentry (the woman attending my mother) told me mother was dying, but that I didn't have to come home if I couldn't. I worried all night, but finally gave it all to the Lord. What could I do? I decided to wait to leave until Saturday and take a sightseeing tour of Delhi the next morning--one of the several day trips I had originally considered, e.g., south to Agra-Jaipur-

Udaipur, or north to the holy places like Rishikesh. I would stop at the Air France counter on the way home and see if I could make a change in my reservation.

After a day packed with sights of Delhi--the Qutab Minor, the Bahai Lotus Temple, Indira Ghandi's home, the embassy area, the Ghandi Memorial Park, lunch, the Hindu Temple Complex, the Red Fort--we arrived at Connaught Place at 6 p.m., too late for Air France. I decided not to leave on any long trip the next morning, as I hadn't solved my reservation dilemma (i.e., found an earlier reservation), nor had I seen the Taj Mahal--the one thing in India that my father had wanted me to see. I ate dinner with Mama on the terrace. I was exhausted, and she was talking about meditation, which seemed to be her chief theme. She told me to bathe and come back down and we would meditate, and she would give me a mantra.

About 8, I returned and she told me to say "*Ram*," the Lord's name, or better, "*Om Namah Shivayah*," while breathing in and out. It sounded odd to my ears, but I trusted that she was truly the one to reveal it to me. She took me to the meditation room and tried to play a chanting tape, but the machine was broken. She told me, "You have to get your word (mantra) from an authorized person and meditate with a guru at first. I am an authorized person. After that, you may meditate on your own." She told me to sit anywhere in the room, which had cushions around the carpeted floor and instruments like the ones I had seen at the Muktananda Ashram on Thursday night which sounded so ethereal. I closed my eyes, tried to still my anxieties about my mother, used both mantras and passed a quiet but unspiritual half hour with Mrs. Pukar in meditation. Afterwards she lent me two books by Muktananda--*The Mind* and *Meditate*. I accepted them as given to me by God for my development, and, still upset, went to sleep by saying "Ram" and slept well, though there were two men living in the adjoining room who woke me after 10 by calling to ask if they could come over and talk. It was the only place I had lived in India where I had a phone in my room, and I regretted it. I refused.

The next morning, I arose at 5 to try to get the 7 a.m. bus for Agra. Through the dining room I could see Mama meditating in the bedroom and she came to ask what my trouble was and willingly called the tour bus company to stop, but the bus had already left. She invited me into her bedroom to meditate with her and her husband, so I joined them. Afterward she told me to go for a walk in Deer Park, which I found nearby--a large park with fitness trails, badminton courts, workout bars, ponds, and deer, rabbits, peacocks behind fences. Many people were enjoying their Saturday morning ramble. On that walk, I felt that I really wanted to come back to live in India. People seemed relaxed here in New Delhi. The neighborhood around the park was an upper middle class one, with many large homes with driveways in which up to 4 family cars were parked. Returning, I had breakfast, and Mama told me not to let my mother upset me. "You were so peaceful when you came; now you have let this upset you. Maybe your mother will live till you get home, if you pray for her." I

felt that God was speaking to me through her, pulling me back from my intense worry. I placed a call again to Air France and found that for \$175 I could get on an earlier flight, but it had to be Sunday, and that would mean I would have to leave without seeing the Taj Mahal. I decided to see the Taj Mahal on Sunday and trust that Mother would live.

Saturday afternoon I meandered about Hauskhaz, eating masala dosa at the Madras Cafe in Green Park for only 13 rupees, conversing with an Indian businessman who showed me his apartment overlooking the Deer Park, sitting on the rooftop garden of the Lord's Guest House reading Muktananda's *The Mind* and then *Meditate*. I was struck by the quote: "When you meet a friend and feel joy, is that joy in your friend or in yourself? The truth is that the joy you find in all these things is simply a reflection of the joy of your own inner Self." This was a truth I had often felt; in fact, I had already realized that the chief enjoyment I receive from things comes from within myself. That is why I enjoy traveling alone; I get more out of things when I share them with my Self. The joy in something is blocked or submerged when I try to share it with another. Further thoughts by Muktananda along these lines struck me: "In the day we wear ourselves out, but in sleep we refresh ourselves by turning out the lights and retiring within. We are completely alone during sleep. We do not want our wife, our husband, our friends, our possessions. We do not eat anything, earn anything, enjoy anything. Yet while we are sleeping, the weariness of our waking hours is removed independently by the strength of our own spirit. In the morning, we feel completely rested." How wonderful to be encouraged to turn within for everything, rather than without. I felt that my life, although I had lived alone since I was thirty-five, had been focused outwardly on people. I was a thoroughly socialized person.

I walked to the Aurobindo Ashram up Aurobindo Road and discovered the new guest house there to be a wonderful place to stay, with private rooms, balconies and private baths, for 250 rupees a day, including four meals (tea or tiffin is the fourth). I met a Buddhist nun from LA staying there who's been in Tibet and India since 1985. Talking to her was difficult; she wouldn't look at me and seemed vague and spacey.

I was now trying to meditate morning and evening, as the Pukars had given me example. Muktananda encouraged me: "We meditate not to attain God, but to perceive the God who is already within us," Muktananda had written. "God, the Self, is apparent in all one's inner feelings, one's inner understanding, and one's inner knowledge. He is closer than anyone or anything; it is only because of our weak understanding that we are not able to know Him."

I booked a tour bus for Agra leaving early Sunday morning. Ma wanted me to go with her Saturday evening to hear a talk at the ashram, but after waiting for her I walked around the neighborhood and missed her when she left. I ate dinner and retired early, but the boys in the next room were listening to TV loudly

and calling me to let them come over. When Ma returned about 9, she came up to ask where I had gone. When I told her of the annoyance next door, she moved me downstairs to another room, but I couldn't sleep there either, with my shoulder bothering me, and the new sounds coming from the guard walking back and forth and talking. Moreover, I felt claustrophobic, since there was no outside window. I woke early to go to Agra, and told Ma of my problems with the room, so she moved me to yet another room on the other side of the house.

The bus picked me up at 7:40 a.m. and the only seat left was next to a fat African, so I crunched up my arthritic right shoulder for the 200 K drive-- five hours of misery--over the narrow Indian roads, blocked with lorries and carts. I read Muktananda's *Kundalini*, about the divine energy in Shakti being unlocked by a Guru's touch or look, or by the saying of a mantra, etc.; "*Shaktipat*" is the term for the descent of the divine energy into the individual, which starts the process. I believed that I had received Shaktipat somewhere--was it from Sai Baba or from Muktananda's writings and the saying of the mantra? As I was already hooked on devotion in Bangalore and felt it flowing in Goa, the *shaktipat* must have come from Sai Baba. Maybe it happened that last day in Whitefield when Baba looked at me?

In Agra we visited first the Agra fort, a mogul throne seat with lovely harem quarters and views of the Taj. All the rooms had the same inlaid marble pillars and long sunken pools for bathing and some for spraying rose water to cool and perfume, as at the Red Fort in Old Delhi. Akhbar and Shah Jehan had lived here, as had Mumtaz, the Shah's adored wife for whom he built the Taj. After visiting the Fort, we had lunch. I sat with a Dutchman who's studying city planning in Delhi. We talked about bustees (slums); he said India has great plans for urban renewal, but can't move the people out of the bustees. After lunch we spent about an hour looking at things our guide wanted us to buy--rugs, carvings, brass, textiles, carved sandalwood boxes for 300 R--all very expensive. Finally, about 4:15 p.m. we finally were taken to the Taj and given an hour to enjoy it. I let the wind blow me about on the spacious platform. I felt as if I were viewing a Platonic ideal--the only "real" Taj among all the imitations. We left at 5:30 p.m. and stopped about 6 at Akhbar's red tomb--the "poor people's Taj"--which has a park with deer, peacocks, and monkeys.

Finally, by 6:30 p.m. we were on the road for New Delhi, stopping for dinner at 9 p.m. at a terrible spot where the atmosphere was so revolting that I could barely eat the fried rice and vegetables with tofu that was concocted over open fires under a shed. We were so rushed that I gave the rest of my plate to a starving dog, and we set off again in the dark. This time there was a strange sound coming from the engine. Our driver stopped to check every so often. Finally he just stopped altogether around 10 p.m., about 36 K from New Delhi. By 10:30 p.m., I gave up on the driver's getting the bus repaired and struck off on my own. After several attempts, I flagged down a passing Delhi-bound bus and for 5 R took my seat among all the men, feeling certain they would tell me where

to get off to get to Hauskasz. And they did. I caught an autorickshaw and was back at the guest house by 11:40 p.m., which is more than I can probably say for those left on the bus. One advantage of traveling alone is that I can make these changes when I please and not have to worry about convincing another person it's safe to do. I slept well in my new room after taking a bath.

Monday I woke up with my shoulder aflame. After telling Ma about my adventure, I did laundry, wrote cards from the Taj, then took a ricksha to the Crafts Museum in Pragati Maidan. I was happy to see all these different craftsmen and women displaying and doing their work--metalwork, tie-dieing, crewel embroidery, kilim making, woodcarving, silver inlaying, while a group of musicians entertained us on native instruments. I hadn't brought enough money, so was limited in what I could buy. My shoulder was killing me. I could hardly move it, so I returned to the Guest House, washed my hair, took pain killers and Neprosin and lay down till I felt a slight easing of the pain, then walked to the postoffice to mail the cards. I looked in a jewelry store at an astrological bangle with all the nine stones in it, which I coveted, after reading about such a thing in Yogananda's autobiography. I bought sweets and ate dinner at Lord's and then meditated to a chant of "*Om Namah Shivayah*" that Mama had given me, entitled "The Blue Pearl." It was beautiful and almost made me forget the terrible pain.

That night I slept in the only position possible, with my right arm straight out. I told Ma in the morning and she told me to go to the Phoolworth clinic down the road. She even walked down the road to show me where it was, and I returned later at 9 a.m. when it opened and saw a physiotherapist at 9:30 a.m.. I was given a deep heat treatment by the physiotherapist at the clinic and told to come back tomorrow when an orthopedic doctor would be in.

I had hoped to buy gifts in New Delhi, but the pain prevented me from doing much shopping. However I did get to the Cottage Industries Emporium on Jaypath Road, the main road into Connaught Place from the south. I bought a few inexpensive items and looked for astrological bangles. The only thing that looked like what I wanted cost thousands at a real gem jeweler. I returned to the Crafts Museum to see if a small dhurri rug was still there that I had liked, but it was gone. The pain in my shoulder was by then terrible. I bought a couple of small things and returned to the Guest House where Ma lent me a hot water bottle which I placed on my shoulder. When I could, I started packing. Air France had said I could have two bags that weighed no more than 38 kilos. If my two bags from Goa had weighed 21 kilo, then I could use the Eddie Bauer bag and put my books in the other bag I had come with and use my backpack as my carryon. By then I was looking forward to getting out of India. Maybe the pain would cease when I left?

Walking the streets in the afternoon, I saw stray dogs decorated with flower chains from Holi, bulls sitting in the roadway, servants guarding the entrances in military uniform with what looked like guns, servants all over. One

couldn't live in India without them: the heat, the bugs, the dust the lethargy--how could one carry on energetically as one did in the States? Flower-framed Guru pictures (mostly of Shirdi Sai Baba) adorned taxis.

At six Tuesday evening I went to the meditation room where Mama Pukar had lit the candles, put out a tray for flowered offerings and opened the harmonium. Her husband came in and tuned the drum and set out the bells and other percussion instruments. Several women came, then a man. Each played an instrument and we chanted "*Om Namah Shivayeh*" for half an hour, then meditated thirty minutes in the dark, then chanted another twenty minutes and then received a final blessing on all those who sang. Mama handed out prasada (sweet blessed food). Mr Pukar told me that public meditation in their home has really blessed the place. Before, they had all sorts of strange guests coming and the place had bad karma. They had asked Baba Muktananda, who had told them to chant and meditate; then whoever came would be sent by the Lord, and so it was. When Mr. Pukar asked how I felt during meditation, all I could say to describe it was that I felt like demons were being cast out. In fact, I was so miserable from the pain that I felt like there was nothing enjoyable in life, so I should give myself up to the inner life. I felt like my nerves were all on edge. Earlier that afternoon I had even taken a swing with my plastic waterbottle at one of the begging women who reached into my rickshaw with her baby when we stopped at a light. I was coming unglued from the pressure of my sore shoulder plus the anxiety about my mother, plus the pressures of India. I took the hot water bottle to bed with me again.

The next morning I went back to the Phoolworth Clinic to see an orthopedic doctor, who ordered an x-ray, which showed a calcium spur on my shoulder. I had had this for some time and had even had it x-rayed in Chicago in 1987, so I was familiar with the condition, but never had it hurt like now. The doctor told me that my shoulder was locked, "very bad," and that I should continue the heat treatment and do exercises but not have a massage. The heat treatment made it feel better. It was strange, this illness. Back in Puttaparthi I had asked Sai Baba (mentally) to heal my shoulder, and here it was flaring up beyond anything I had ever experienced. Was this a divine joke or lila? This pain had started after my trip to the Taj Mahal, which I now regarded as a cursed trip. I was not called to India to be a tourist. The only place I had really set my heart on seeing had brought this on.

I walked over to the bookstore in the Aurobindo shopping center and looked at books and bought four on India's arts and crafts. I looked again for my astrological bangle but it was gone. The woman assured me that she could get me another one by Thursday, for the same price (2500 rupees or about \$80). I had lunch at the Szechuan Wok where 1/2 tandoori chicken was 53 R with the tax and a spring roll was 35, plus 11.50 for a Limca. Total 101.50 R--the most expensive meal I'd had in India--over \$4!

I told Mama that my trip had been focused on the inward journey and when I tried to focus on the outward journey here in North India, God had turned me on my ear and all my plans along with them. Agra was my nemesis! New Delhi was my dark night. Ma thought either the African gave me some of his bad karma or I had some bad karma of my own left and I was going through a fast burn to cleanse me to make room for God. I hoped so. It was hard to meditate with pain like this. She said I was very tense. How could I not be?

"O Lord, you have pierced me. My plans come to nought. I see no plan but chaos. For me there is nothing to see in India, nothing that I enjoy eating, no TV, no sounds (like music that I enjoy listening to on the radio back in the States), no companions. Even in the ashram and in Bangalore I had had support from friends; here I had only Mama telling me to meditate and all my problems would be solved, and Muktananda advising me in his writings). There is nothing for me here; on top of that, my body is in constant pain. All I have is my inner Self and I haven't been able to make contact. I thought in meditation that God had given me my body and has the right to recall it or to destroy it.

In this gloomy mood, I wrote in my journal, "What have I gotten from India but a big pain in the shoulder. Damn India!"

Later that evening I did exercises and discovered the muscles of my right shoulder were all frozen and the slightest jar caused great pain, so I concentrated on pushing the muscles from right to left. In the morning I tried thinking of my left arm doing the exercises and let my right arm follow along. Focusing on my cooperative and pain free left side I could get my right arm to go along with the exercises. My right arm had trouble cooperating and behaving, but at least I had a program. I would force the muscles beyond the pain.

I wondered whether this lockup was Shakti playing in me. Ma had told me that her husband was locked into a meditation pose for hours when he first started meditating. She had also told me that people were healed from within once Shakti started working --first, the physical, then the spiritual problems. . Maybe this suffering was a way of healing me? Was I "releasing" as I had been told in the ashram? Why was I so obsessed about what was happening to my body? I identified too much with my body. I was afraid I would catch a cold or get diarrhea and hepatitis from the food. I prayed to transcend my body.

I walked around the neighborhood, photographing houses, noticing the tents where the homeless lived, and marveling at the ingenious little businesses that the poor used to support themselves--little carts loaded with vegetables rolled right up to the door, the milk delivered by motorbike, the street dhoubis ironing clothes in front of a home, using coal-heated irons; the little cooking sheds thrown up on a street corner, the barber whose outdoor shop was a stool and a mirror fastened to a tree. Only in India could people start these little street

businesses without a license. Richard had said it was to accommodate all the souls that were being born for the first time as humans.

The construction site next door to the Lord's Guest House was a hive of activity, India in microcosm. The marble cutter had his machine right there, slicing the marble perfectly. The cook had set up a little canteen with clean cups, a kettle and tea brewing for the coffee break. In India the tasks seem to be broken down to the human level. One could easily walk up to a job site and, without bothering about unions, just get employment by offering a service.

In the homes of the rich, the servants live and work for little. The physiotherapist told me she pays her cook R. 700 a month--about \$28 U.S. All these servants have spoiled their employers' children, who have no responsibilities but schoolwork and who spend their time watching TV or playing video games. The physiotherapist sent her son to the US to study, to become independent, with no one to run his errands or wait on him. She was afraid he would marry and not be able to afford servants of his own and not know how to live without them.

After some shopping to buy my coveted bangle, I went to the Thursday nite chant and meditation service at the Muktananda Ashram with Mama. I liked the chants, especially "*jyota se jyota*".(Light from light). From pictures I was becoming familiar with the faces of Muktananda, Nityananda, and Gurumayi, who was in the U.S, Ma told me. I met a Western woman there who was working with Mother Teresa's group in New Delhi. She liked to come to the Muktananda Ashram every Thursday evening for the chanting. I bought several books which I had to stuff into my bulging book-case.

Around 11 I went to the airport where I discovered much chaos and confusion, many lines that I had to stand in--to pay the R. 300 departure tax, to show the two tags and check my luggage in. St. Joseph (my travel agent) sent me a Canadian woman who gave me the extra 100 rupees for the departure tax, and then an airport attendant who let me get through with 40 kilos of luggage, although it was written that only 23 kilos were allowed. Even the "only one hand baggage" rule seemed not to be enforced. After checking in, I lined up to go through security. I could see why they said to be there three hours ahead for my 1 a.m. flight.

The flight from Delhi to Paris took nine hours; the layover in Paris another eight, the flight to Chicago another nine hours.

I got home in Chicago Friday around 6 p.m. the next day.. My magic journey was over.

Epilogue

When I arrived in Kansas City on Holy Thursday, I found my mother was indeed not well, but it was her mind, not her body that was unwell. She had begun to show signs of dementia. I had little time to tell them of my trip to India, perhaps because they would not have understood it. I did tell my sisters and some nephews, who mostly thought I was crazy.

On Friday, I picked up my father at the office of my brother-in-law Bob Miller, where Dad went every day to write checks, get his important papers copied, etc. I took him out to lunch at Wendy's, his favorite restaurant, where he could get a "senior discount," then drove him around Kansas City, showing him the redbud trees and lovely homes, passing a number of buildings he had designed and churches and schools. That evening Dad showed me slides from long ago—pictures of his sisters, now all dead, family pictures from when we were small or from Mother and Dad's travels.

It was a sort of "life review" I realized later. That night Dad had a stroke, and within the next few days as the family assembled from around the country (fortunately it was the Easter holiday), we realized that he was dying. By Wednesday of Easter week, he died. It was a wonderful time for a Catholic to die, within the week of the Resurrection. The church for his funeral filled with all the liturgical symbols of resurrection.

When I returned to Chicago, almost the first person I talked to about India had been there herself and told me that there was a Siddha Yoga Meditation Center, a place where Muktananda was the Guru, right there in the city of Chicago, and I went there for many years afterward.

My shoulder? I went to a doctor, who had it x-rayed. The x-ray showed the calcium spur which I had had since 1987 had dissolved. Was it a Sai Baba miracle?