

Encounters With Men of Miracles

Experiences Of Faith-healers, Black Magicians,
Yogis And Death Defiers



Mayah Balse

JAICO

Encounters With Men of Miracles

Experiences Of Faith-healers, Black Magicians,
Yogis And Death Defiers



Mayah Balse



JAICO PUBLISHING HOUSE

Ahmedabad Bangalore Bhopal Chennai
Delhi Hyderabad Kolkata Mumbai

Published by Jaico Publishing House
121 Mahatma Gandhi Road
Mumbai - 400 001
jaicopub@vsnl.com
www.jaicobooks.com

© Mayah Balse

ENCOUNTERS WITH MEN OF MIRACLES
ISBN 978-81-7992-851-6

First Jaico Impression: 2008

No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in
any form or by any means, electronic or
mechanical including photocopying, recording or by any
information storage and retrieval system,
without permission in writing from the publishers.

Printed by
Snehesh Printers
320-A, Shah & Nahar Ind. Est. A-1
Lower Parel, Mumbai - 400 013.

Contents

Introduction	vii
1. Living Burial	1
2. Supernatural Power from Liquor	18
3. The Miracle Worker	31
4. What is God Like?	43
5. Rebirth	74
6. Faith Healing	85
7. The Third Eye	104
8. The Astral Body	126
9. Black Magic	145
10. The Making of a Mystic	159
11. The Divination of Disease	166
12. Materialisation	171
13. Surviving without Food or Water	185
14. The Magic of Mantras	188

Contents

15.	Stage and Street Magic	203
16.	Talking to the Dead	214
17.	Daredevil Feats	223
18.	The Women Swamis	229
19.	Stranger than Fiction	240
20.	The Wonder-Working Preacher of Ahimsa	250
21.	The Theory of Spiritual Evolution	258

Introduction

Psyched experiences are more common than one supposes. Almost every third person I encountered in the normal course of day-to-day living had had direct experiences with ghosts or spirits; had been influenced by a mystic, or cured by a faith-healer.

Whenever I mentioned my subject, I got strange reactions from people. For instance, Mr. S.G. Raghu who had spent five years in Tibet and Sikkim and had some direct as well as indirect experiences with the occult, asked me: "Why have you chosen this subject?" "Why not?" I replied. "It is fascinating."

"It is strange," he said. "Being drawn to esoteric subjects is almost as if it were preordained." Some mysteries of the Universe are beyond man's comprehension, yet they never fail to ignite curiosity.

What is the difference between mysticism and magic? Is faith-healing a fact?

Can there be clairvoyance? Is it possible to recall past births? Do dead men tell tales? What happens in a

Introduction

trance state? Can a man survive living burial? Do meditation techniques arouse a fourth dimension? Can black magic kill? What happens when you die? Is reincarnation a fact? Does the mind have power over matter? Can psychic healing cure?

Science has not yet found all the answers. But, one can at least hear those who have had such experiences and what happens to them when they are passing through the psychic, paranormal and metaphysical planes. A face-to-face encounter with them may not make you a greater spiritual person, but will definitely make you a more thoughtful one.

This is a compilation of my experiences with such phenomena spanning several years and which I wish to share with you.

Mayah Balse

About the Author

Mayah Balse is a successful writer who has penned over a thousand articles and stories for leading magazines and newspapers like the “Times of India”, “Femina”, “Eve’s Weekly” and “Reader’s Digest”, among others. She has authored novels like “Just a Matter of Mistresses”, “The Singer”, “The Sensuous Saint”, “The Stranger”, “Indiscreet” and “The Cannibal” as well as non-fiction “Encounters with Men of Miracles” and “The Indian Female: Attitude towards Sex”. In addition, she has worked in an advertising agency, visualized comics and comic strips and written children’s books. She has also written for the BBC. She lives in Mumbai and has scripted serials for television – some memorable ones being Campus, Amanat, Kumkum Challenge and Dekh Bhai Dekh. These have been telecast on both Doordarshan and private satellite channels like Zee TV, Sony and Star Plus.

She is married to an Indian Air Force officer, who is now retired. They have two daughters.

Living Burial

As our Caravelle droned towards Mumbai, the young lady doctor sitting next to me asked ponderously, "Have you heard of the yogi who was buried alive?"

"Buried alive?" I asked in an astonished tone. I proceeded to reply too, albeit hastily, "No! Where is this?"

"In Hyderabad", she said. "In fact I was on the panel of doctors who watched him perform the feat. And believe me, we could observe him in that state. He was not put six feet below the earth as his predecessors were, but rather, encased in an airtight glass box, with special instruments recording his heart beat and pulse rate, which in no way influenced the atmosphere inside the box. All this comes under Yoga research."

I was sorry Hyderabad had been left behind but made up my mind to interview this Yogi when I got back but I was sceptical whether he would be alive till then. Someone else had claimed there was a Yogi who could fly through the air like a bird and I had tracked him down and found that the trail led to an aeroplane.

When asked, he had smiled sweetly and said: "Yes. I used to do it but it takes years and years of rigorous meditation. These days, there are regular flights to all the cities both in India and abroad and which is much more effortless." Specially, I thought, if devotees pay the fare!

Anyway, once back in Hyderabad I went to the Yogic Research Institute, where I had been told the Yogi would be. I was pleasantly surprised to see him still alive, though I was a little disappointed that he was out of the box. I had wanted to see him in the state of burial.

His name was Ramanand Yogi.

We all sat round the table, which was like a dining table except that there were sheets of paper on it with spectacles nestling here and there. The Yogiji wore spectacles too. When he removed them, his eyes were revealed – a pair of deep brown eyes with a compelling look.

"How do you do this miraculous thing?", I asked him. He put out his tongue and I thought it was going to be another of those jokes till I saw that he had two tongues. Like a snake, I thought. For a minute, I was too startled to ask him anything else. He twirled the two parts round, separated them and brought them together again, curling the two fangs backwards and outwards. When he had finished with the weird

exercise, he said: "This is the secret of being able to remain buried alive for twenty-eight days".

When he talked, no one could guess he had two tongues. The two separate parts moved with such coordination that his speech was perfectly normal.

"Was your tongue always like this?"

"No," he said. "In the beginning my tongue was normal. When I began *pranayama*, which entailed the holding of breath and intense concentration, I had a vision telling me I should have my tongue cut down the center, so that I could proceed with more complicated exercises."

"Were you not afraid of mutilating yourself thus?"

"No", he replied. "I went to a doctor who performed the operation. No stitches were needed. In the beginning, I was a bit uncomfortable and my tongue was puffy and swollen but it healed rapidly and I was soon able to use it for eating, speaking and of course, for remaining buried alive, which was the whole purpose of the surgery."

"What is the scientific connection between a split tongue and living without oxygen?", I asked. He gave a deprecating shrug; his eyes turned to Dr. Melkote sitting opposite him. "I am only the vehicle," he said modestly. "Why don't you put the question to our founder?"

The founder of the Yogic Research Institute was Dr.

Melkote, a gentle-looking white-haired man with a dynamic personality. He was an MLA and a medico who had been drawn to Yoga some years ago.

He asked me, "Have you ever watched snakes?"

"Not really!"

"They go into hibernation for six months at a stretch. When they do that, all processes stop. They seem to be dead, yet they are not dead. When they come out of the trance-like state, they are as well as ever, in fact even rejuvenated. Our aim is to apply this process to human beings. After all if a snake can do it, why can't a man do it?"

It occurred to me that fishes could live under water perpetually, yet man had not considered plunging himself into that state. So why this preoccupation with snakes? I let the thought pass. Mine was neither to reason why, nor antagonise. And I was keen to know more about the Yogi.

There are great lessons to be learnt by watching animals. An elephant, for instance, has fewer breath rhythms to an hour than an ape; so it lives much longer. There are certain bats in the Himalayan mountains, which go into hibernation in winter, hanging suspended from the roofs of chilly caves for months at a stretch and not breathing. The mountain hedgehog goes into its burrows in winter when snow covers the ground and deprives it of food.

Living Burial

Man too, had the latent ability to survive under trying conditions but being equipped with intelligence, he learnt to protect himself from the elements by building shelters and from hunger by storing food. So, now, he does not really need to go into hibernation even under extreme conditions. The feat of living burial awakens the elemental nature of man and contrary to expectations, is not dependent on the physical strength of a Yogi but on special conditioning to the state. In fact, fairly frail Yogis have, in the past survived living burial, and Braid in his treatise, *Human Hibernation*, published as long ago as 1850, records the case of a fakir who was buried alive at Lahore in 1837 in the presence of Ranjit Singh and Sir Claude Wade and who was dug up and revived many months later with precautions having been taken not to disturb the grave in the intervening period.

However, in ancient times, burial methods were crude. Many Yogis used to make fantastic claims. They were lowered into pits and the top of the pit was often covered with planks of wood and bedded down with earth over which some seeds were scattered so that grass and other weeds could grow. In this hidden state there was no way of observing what was happening inside the pit. Indeed, on many occasions what remained was a vermin-infested corpse. Often reports were rife of a Yogi who was presumably buried, but seen

walking in the bazaar. The voices of skepticism were loud. Yogis were denounced as bogus and mysticism lay under a cloud.

More recently, science has turned its searchlight on this intriguing problem and come up with astounding facts. Ramanand Yogi has been analysed at every stage of his inward flight into closed space by the most scrupulous doctors, using the most sophisticated instruments.

The first step came when the old-fashioned earth burial gave way to a more practical box-like structure of glass and metal. The box was meant to simulate the environment of the underground coffin. No air entered it. There were orifices in the structure at various places, but this was to allow the tubes attached to the yogi's body during the experiments to flow out, so that Ramanand's bodily processes could be under constant observation. The box was six feet long and four feet wide. The wires attached to him were meant for recording his heart rate, breathing rate and body temperature.

The initial experiments were conducted by Anand, a renowned council member of the International Brain Research Organisation. He and his colleague, G.S. China, put Ramanand Yogi through a series of experiments to test his claim to living burial. Also, there were tests to prove if Ramanand could really stop his pulse

and slow down his heart. The results of these tests on the Yogi were published in 1961 but though they shattered a scientifically accepted theory, they did not cause many ripples in the scientific atmosphere abroad. Nine years later, in 1970, at the request of a BBC television team, Ramanand Yogi, Professor Anand and G.S. Chinn consented to a re-enactment of their previous experiment.

In the 1970 experiment in New Delhi, the time spent by the Yogi in the air-tight box was short—only six hours; but the results yielded by the analysis shattered all previous theories about the inability of the mind to control complex involuntary functions. The Yogi's oxygen consumption dropped much below his base metabolic rate requirement, i.e oxygen requirement when the body is in a state of repose. By the end of the experiment, Ramanand had brought his oxygen requirement to one-fourth of that normally supposed necessary to sustain life. The miraculous had been achieved. The television team departed briskly to project their knowledge to a skeptical world. It was a triumph of mind over matter.

Ramanand described his drill, just before going into living burial.

“The night before a living burial, I have a complete meal. The next morning, after a bowel movement – either natural or aided by an enema, I am all set for the sally.

“I do not close my posterior nares with my split tongue. I just lie down in the box and take a couple of deep breaths. You will appreciate this when you consider that the oxygen I conserve now, will have to last me for the entire period of living burial. Well, after these few breaths, I go into a trance. My eyes look within at some spot between the eyebrows. Then everything becomes dark. I see a few lights moving, sometimes two, often more. Then I do not know what happens. When the maximum endurance period is reached, some automatic process awakens me suddenly and I press the buzzer indicating that I have to be released from the box. The conductors of the experiment have helpfully provided a buzzer; its benevolent grace would not have been possible in the old state of earth burial. As regards what happens to my breathing and pulse rate, the doctors will be able to enlighten you better. As for what I do on coming out of the box, I will tell you. I drink tea and smoke a *bidi*. It is very refreshing after the death-like state I have passed through.”

Many years ago, Ramanand Yogi went to the Himalayas on foot from his obscure village in Andhra. He reached Uttarkasi, a hamlet about 50 miles from Gangotri. There, he sat in a cave all alone for two years, doing *tapasya*. The place was infested with bears and snakes. “But”, he declared, “they do not harm Yogis.

Yogis have some supernatural power that repels them.” I had heard this before about ascetics in meditation. Snakes were said to crawl over their limbs without harming them and wild beasts shied away from them. A professor I knew, hazarded a theory that the beasts were repelled by the hirsute bodies and ‘no-bath’ smell emanating from these sages, but he begged me not to mention his name, as he believed holy men had the power to curse and he had indeed experienced their rage. “Perhaps they are great spiritually,” he said, “but they smell.”

I asked Ramanand Yogi what he had done for those two years in the Himalayas.

“Why, I meditated of course”, he said. “I did nothing else. It is quite a story. In the beginning I asked for money from home. I reasoned that meditation or not, a Yogi had to eat. My father was quite well-to-do and had 17 acres of land. It was this which cushioned me in my pursuit of Yoga. I was not compelled to earn a living because of revenue from ancestral property.”

Yoga was an expensive business, I thought, specially pursuit of the higher kind. You had to have an independent source of income and most of all, leisure that meant total exemption from earning a living.

“One day,” said Ramanand Yogi, “I was buying food to take to the cave, when another *sanyasi* approached me and asked: “What are you doing?” I told him I kept

a stock of food in the cave and it did not go stale or decompose because of the intense cold in the high altitudes. Often, there was no water at all and even a fire could not be coaxed out of the dampness. Then I would eat raw wheat flour with jaggery. The *sanyasi* said: 'I would not do that.' I thought he was referring to the eating of uncooked food, but he said: 'For how long are you going to ask for money from your father?' That set me thinking. There and then I resolved not to write home for money. I didn't write a single letter and they all believed I had died from the cold on the mountains. I only went back ten years later. And were they amazed!"

Ramanand Yogi emphasizes the practical aspects of Yoga. Not for him the spur of the moment miracle. He believes that long and sustained pursuit of even the simpler types of *Hatha Yoga* like deep breathing exercises and simple *asanas* will keep the body healthy. In his younger days when meditation had mellowed him enough to make him feel dissatisfied with the world and its sickness, he met Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in Delhi. Nehru asked him: "What do you think of Yoga? What about research in this realm? Our country is the originator of this tradition." And Ramanand Yogi replied: "Yes, indeed. But it should be Yoga harnessed to the curing of diseases, aided by the diagnosis of allopathic doctors."

This demand was immediately conceded, but grants were long in coming. Once Ramanand became quite desperate because a grant of one and a half lakhs that he was supposed to have received, went to Vohra, a Yogic research scholar in Chandigarh. Vohra was ignorant of the fact that the grant had been intended for Ramanand. Once the two just happened to meet and Ramanand mentioned his pending grant. When Vohra heard this, he immediately gave up his grant to Ramanand.

It was the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences which first put its foot into Yogic Research. Now with both feet in this venture and a well-tuned scientific brain power, it has put in quite a lot of capital into Research Institutes in several parts of the country. The Hyderabad Institute gets a grant of about two hundred thousand rupees a year so that it can give free treatment and hospitalisation to patients who approach it.

Yoga is supposed to cure diseases of all kinds permanently. This is not a miracle cure but a scientific one. Each specific exercise is seen to act on a certain set of organs and muscles and correct any ailment. I went there on at last ten days spaced out over the period of a month. The object was to see the Institute at work. One encountered the same faces-all resident patients, not grievously sick but living as in-patients. I

was told they treated diabetes, heart disease, swellings, skin lesions, asthma and cerebral palsy besides other diseases, through Yoga. If oral medicines were needed at all, *Ayurveda* was resorted to. No drugs or allopathic medicines were given, though diagnosis was made by qualified medical practitioners using the most scientific modern instruments.

The instruments were all kept in a hallway, partitioned off from the other sections. All of them looked brand new—there is a screening and X-ray apparatus; a machine to take the electrocardiogram and a monstrosity for the detection of cancer. They must have cost a fortune.

Outside, the surroundings were Elysian with bamboo poles supporting cool, thatched roofs, and a handful of students doing exercises. Two of these I discovered, were young boys undergoing training to take over instruction at a later date. The third was Dr Hanumanth Rao, the Chief Administrator of the Institute and the fourth was Dr Chauhan, a college Professor from an American University, staying at the Institute and getting treatment for migraine, while simultaneously rushing about collecting material for his book on Indian culture.

There were a lady doctor and a man too. The lady was for women patients and the man for the males. They were both young and one of them confessed not

being really drawn to Yoga but getting in “for want of a better job outside.” This was an easy life. There was no fast pace, no being rushed off your feet, in short – no work to speak of.

“Any major successes?”

“We have treated and cured over a thousand cases”, said Dr Shoba, “but of course there is not sufficient follow-up of the cases to assess results correctly. But yes, we have cured quite a few.”

The first day I went to see the Yoga class in session, Ramanand Yogi met me with a smile. He called a sprightly lad to him and made him perform all the *asanas* for my benefit. The boy obliged, making his body behave like India rubber and generally tying himself into complicated Yogic knots which seemed much beyond the reach of the inexperienced.

“Very easy”, said Ramanand, while the boy stood on his head and then arched his feet backwards to touch the floor behind him.

“He is my disciple,” explained the Yogi, “I am training him for greater things.” There were two or three men of varying ages doing complicated and not so complicated exercises.

“Very easy,” said the Yogiji again, and “much better than your dieting and slimming exercises. You do not have to do it for long either. Each *asana* done even twice is enough.”

Doing it even once was my greatest problem.

The boy got up from the wooden floor where he had been stretched out. The whole manoeuvre had taken him only five minutes. He was a slim lad-all muscle and no fat.

“Show the lady how to reduce stomach muscles”, said Ramanand. The boy readily obliged, lying down on the floor and doing things with his legs, while I looked down at myself wondering if I was putting on weight.

“You want to see the women’s section run by my daughter?”, asked the Yogi.

“Daughter?”

“Yes. She does Yoga too.”

I showed surprise because I had always associated asceticism with celibacy, which gave the deep strength to perform wondrous feats. And being buried alive was nothing short of miraculous.

Later, I talked to Dr Hanumanth Rao, chief administrator of the Institute.

“I am a doctor but a doctor of Chemistry”, he said.

I have a fascination for yoga.

“Tell me,” I asked. “Isn’t celibacy a necessary facet of a mystic’s life?”

“Yes, yes. It is a well-known fact. Do you know the Sanskrit word “*urdhva retaska*”? He dropped his voice on the last two words.

“No. Is it a bad word?”

He lowered his voice still more.

“Do not think I am being personal”, he said, “but when a man is enjoying a woman, all his inner strength is flowing out.”

“I see.”

“You don’t mind my telling you this?”

“Not at all.”

“*Urdhva Retaska*” literally means one whose semen has gone up,” he explained. “He who refrains from sex, not merely in deed but in thought as well, such that he conquers even the phenomenon of wet dreams, is truly a great saint. All his latent energy is not scattered in procreation but carefully preserved so that it rises and rises till it reaches the brain. That is the real secret of his mysticism. Through the ages we have honoured men who have accomplished this feat which imparts miraculous power.”

“I believe Ramanand Yogi is a married man?”

“Yes. He was married very young-before the age of eighteen. It is all in the pamphlet.”

The pamphlet about him dealt mostly with the medical bio-data and graphs taken on the occasion of the experiment. A page or two were devoted to the Yogi’s life.

At an early age, the Yogi had shown spiritualistic leanings. His parents tried to discourage him because they were afraid his ascetic inclinations would disrupt his married life. He had become a father at the age of eighteen years and in that very year, 1942, he was

intuitively guided to take up Yoga.

He looked for a Guru but was disappointed in his search. It was during this time that he had visions. In one of these in 1948, he dreamt he could survive burial in an underground pit. He tried this out and found it to be true. In the beginning, the length of time he could remain in the closed pit was short –only 24 hours. Sustained practice bettered this record and by 1951 he found he could remain buried without food, drink or air for as long as twenty-eight days. The very next year, he had a vision telling him he should get his tongue split in two.

In the year 1951, he had a narrow escape. During one of his trances, a doctor examined him and found no heartbeat and pulse. Even the normal respiratory movements were not visible. In spite of all these signs, the doctor did not pronounce him dead, because he was well-acquainted with yogic lore. Ultimately, Ramanand recovered from his trance. But one shudders to think what might have happened had the doctor been less other-worldly wise!

Ramanand had a normal sex life prior to his taking up Yoga. His first born was a daughter but after her birth when he took to practising austerities, he gave up sex and family life and spent his time in the Himalayas.

Dr Hanumanth Rao and I stood watching pupils performing yogic ablutions. There were brass kettles with curved spouts arrayed like sentinels on the ledge

and warm salted water in a cauldron. The pupils came, scooped up some water and rinsed their noses. The water poured through one nostril came out through the other.

This is one of the first lessons of *Hatha Yoga* which deals with physical development through breathing and bodily postures. Hanumanth Rao did it quite expertly. Raja Yoga is the highest form and some ascetics regard *Hatha Yoga* as a mere stepping-stone to the higher reaches of the sublime which are ascended with conquest of *Raja Yoga*.

A boy came and stood at my elbow.

“Ramanand Yogi’s son,” said Dr Hanumanth Rao unruffled, putting his brass kettle back on the ledge.

“I thought he had only one daughter!”

“Oh! The daughter was born long ago,” he said. “The son was born after Yogiji’s return from the Himalayas.” The boy stood watching his father instructing pupils under the thatch.

The Yogi’s son, I thought. Then the Sanskrit word swam into my mind unbid. *Urdhwa Retaska*.

It did not prove anything.

It only showed that even mystics could be human. But Ramanand Yogi is to be lauded, more so because he has gleaned the best from both worlds.



Supernatural Power from Liquor

“**G**oing to see Kalika Prasad Singh?”, asked a friend of ours who knew him well.

“Well, yes,” I said.

“Then take a bottle of rum,” suggested the man. “He makes better prophecies with alcohol in him.”

Dismissing this as jest, I went empty-handed. But learnt later that this was a fact.

In the course of his talk, Kalika Prasad said: “You will be surprised but alcohol has strangely powerful forces in it. I will tell you an interesting case. This happened in Delhi. One evening I was having my usual large, when I heard a car drive up. Somebody called my name loudly. I saw a man standing by a parked car. In the car, evidently in a state of collapse, was a woman. I went down quickly with the glass still in my hand, being too preoccupied to put it down.”

“The woman was gasping for breath and the husband appeared very flustered. I just dipped my hand in the

liquor I had been drinking and anointed her forehead with it. I placed some on her head and rubbed it in like oil. A remarkable thing happened. The gasping and breathlessness stopped at once and she began to breathe more freely. Both husband and wife were surprised. But I was not, I knew the amazing properties of alcohol. In the highest form of “*tapas*’ we perform *pūja* with alcohol, offer it to the Deity and drink it ourselves as *prasād*. Do you know, I generate extraordinary forces when I drink. The liquor with which I anointed the woman had more power because it had touched my lips and imbibed healing properties from my body.”

Kalika Prasad calls it ‘*prasād*’. He is also very addicted to *paan* with ‘*zarda*’ which he declares is another trigger for supernatural powers. When asked he acquired these powers, he says it is the result of intense concentration.

“I do no Yoga,” he said, “nor have I acquired any *siddhis*. All I do is sit quietly for a few hours each day and concentrate. I have chosen God Bhairav as my object of contemplation but you may choose any you wish. They are all the same. The object is not important; the method of concentration is the key. For instance, if you find yourself capable of concentrating on this glass paper-weight, you are free to do so. You will achieve the same power. Or take a stone; keep it in

front of you and think of the stone to the exclusion of everything else. You might think it is easy but it is very difficult. All kinds of thoughts come into your mind. In fact, you may think of everything else but the stone in front of you. If you succeed, some power will be unleashed from within you.”

Kalika Prasad has acquired the power to do faith-healing and has an uncanny knack of telling the future, to a surprisingly accurate degree. You need not take your horoscope along, though he says his method is astrology-based. He has a unique way of telling the future.

“Choose any number,” between one and a hundred and eight,” he said. After I had picked one number at random, he looked at his watch and started making calculations.

“What are you doing?” I asked him.

“Since you do not have your horoscope,” I shall calculate the grid as though you were born this very minute.”

This was strange!

“You will be surprised at the accuracy,” he said. “It is all very scientific.”

“Is it based on numerology?”, I asked.

“No, it is astrology, pure and simple”, he said. “But without the horoscope.”

Then he explained his system. “I ask a person to give

me a number between 1 and 108. According to astrology, we have 27 *nakshatras* (stars). Each star has four *padas*. Therefore, 27 stars have 108 *padas*. A *nakshatra* comprises 13.20' and so 108 *padas* comprise the whole area 360 degrees in the zodiac. Got it?"

I nodded. Mathematics had never been my strong point.

"If your system is based on astrology, where does clairvoyance come in?" I asked.

"Astrology," he said, "will give you the various possibilities that result from a certain arrangement of the planets. It is clairvoyance which will make you pick the correct one. It is this double element in astrology which constantly makes soothsayers go wrong. However accurate their calculations, there is always an element of chance. I am able to put my finger on that chance."

He also explained how he did it. He had no vision, nor did he see God Bhairav. He only heard a voice speaking to him and telling him what to say. Only *he* could hear this voice because he was tuned to that frequency. None of the others could hear it though they were in the same room.

It was Dastagir Baba from Bangalore who had first initiated Kalika Prasad into the mysteries of the occult.

"Dastagir Baba was a bearded sage," said Kalika Prasad, "and a great personality who would drink close

to a gallon of liquor a day and eat very little food. Once, I went to see him. It was my first encounter with him. And he asked me, 'What do you want?' At once, I replied: 'Give me the supernatural power of peering into the future.' Thereupon, Dastagir Baba laughed and said: 'Go, you will get it.'

"I went away full of joy. The very same day I happened to see a telephone directory lying open at a certain page and my eye was immediately drawn and arrested by a few words, though they were no larger in type than the others. The words were: COLLEGE OF ASTROLOGY. I chuckled, wondering if this was what the Baba had meant. Anyway, I joined the course, paying the fee of one hundred and twenty five rupees for six months."

"After this period I went to him again and told him I had taken on this course, but it still left me dissatisfied because I was always being drawn to spiritual matters. Dastagir Baba asked me to sit down and said: "Wait a minute. I will show you something." Then, after what seemed an age, we were alone – all the stragglers having gone. He turned to me and asked: "Do you know what I acquired ten days after my guru's *samadhi*?" I confessed I did not know. Thereupon, he leaned closer and said: "The leg bone of my guru." I was amazed but he was most nonchalant while bringing it out of its hiding place and handing it to me. While I was

examining it, I felt someone blow hard into my ear. I turned but there was no one there. I handed back the bone reverently to its keeper and told him I had just felt some breath in my ear. Then Dastagir smiled and said: "That means you have been initiated. Do not be afraid. That was my late Guru blowing into your ear." "I experienced the same thing", he smiled. "After that incident, I got a peculiar clairvoyant insight which far surpassed the rigid boundaries of astrological knowledge."

From Dastagir Baba's profound spiritual influence, the young neophyte Kalika Prasad was catapulted into the orbit of another sage, Bholenath from Amritsar. It was he who made him meditate and pray for forty one days to bring further super powers into his ken.

"Other mystics go away into the Himalayas to meditate and pray," said Kalika Prasad." As for me, I did not stir out of Delhi. I stayed right there, in Moti Bagh. My guru Bholenath had come to Delhi and was staying with me. We were looking for a good place to go into our trances when it suddenly struck me that there was an excellent place in the very building where I stayed."

The next day my guru and I moved into the servant's quarters after getting it cleaned. My guru and I would close the door and having effectively barricaded ourselves against the world, sit down on the floor quite

naked and meditate. There were two conditions to fulfil – isolation and the abandonment of one’s inhibitions. We found both these without going into the mountains.

Kalika Prasad’s method of prayer and meditation is a trifle offbeat. Describing it to me, he said: “God Bhairav loves liquor. His idol is kept immersed in a bowl of rum and we also take some ourselves as *prasad*.”

“You mean you drink during the day as well?”

“Yes. Anytime. It is not considered drink. It is *prasad*.”

“Some raw meat is first offered to the God and later given to a stray dog. As for us, we can take our normal diet as well as plenty of liquor. Meat is not taboo. The only pleasure we must eschew is sexual contact with a woman. Even the mind must be unblemished by such a thought. That is all, except that the liquor which evaporates daily from the bowl must be replaced as the idol has to be kept constantly immersed in alcohol. We also burn liquor because Bhairav Bhagwan does not actually drink it but breathes in the fumes which are given out at each burning.”

“But why liquor?” I asked. “Isn’t liquor bad? Why, we are constantly told not to drink. Religions talk about the evils of drinking, and even the moral police demands abstinence.”

“You have the wrong idea,” said Kalika Prasad.

Supernatural Power From Liquor

“Liquor is bad if a man misbehaves and beats his wife after imbibing it. This happens if you don’t combine it with *puja*. If it is drunk as “*prasad*”, it is not bad at all; on the contrary, it does a world of good. Liquor detaches one from subjective feelings and helps in communion with God. The detachment also aids clairvoyance. You are able to see a thing more clearly if you’re at a distance. As I told you before, liquor generates powers for faith-healing. On another occasion, I touched a man whose left side was completely paralysed. I dipped my hands in liquor and completely anointed the paralysed half of his body. In a couple of minutes, he started screaming. He said, “I feel pain. I feel some invisible force is tearing the skin off my body.” I told him to go home. It was a sign that he would be all right. Sure enough, he was.”

Kalika Prasad received a letter when I was with him. The letter was from a man who had been impressed with Kalika’s performance. His name was Ahuja. It mentioned the case of the sweetmeat merchant from Delhi who had been completely cured of his paralysis. There was also a reference to a remark about a man called Prithi Singh, who conveyed his regards to Kalika Prasad and declared that whenever he drank liquor, he felt Kalika’s presence in him.

Drink, I had heard, was used in large quantities at black magic rituals. When I told him this, Kalika

Prasad laughed and said, "But there is nothing black about my magic though I do speak about the power of liquor. But yes spirits, they say, are greatly attracted to liquor and collect in large numbers where alcohol is burnt. For this reason, practitioners of the black art assemble in graveyards for the ceremonies."

"Do you class materialisation of objects among your powers?"

"No," he replied. "Physical materialisation serves no purpose, except perhaps as miracles to astonish the layman. I have heard of mystics producing holy ash from thin air and idols from their mouths but I have seen only one man in Benares who mystified me. He was the great sage Khapadi Baba. Rumour has it that he hasn't eaten a thing for 28 years but lives only on three cups of tea a day and drugged *paan*. Here again, you see the value of intoxicants. Anyway, to come to the point, I visited him once to pay my respects and the great saint just extended his hand and grasped some air. When he opened his fist again, there were some *kismis* (raisins) in his palm. I was puzzled and thought he had kept some up his sleeve but he showed me there was nothing there. Then he performed the feat again. There were a number of people in the room and one of the men asked: "Baba, how do you do this thing?" But the old sage only smiled and extended the *kismis* for us to eat. Then, one of his disciples explained, "*Maya*

Machinder ki shakti hai."

"What else can you do?" I asked Kalika Prasad. "Well, I can see the auras of people," he said. "Every person has an aura and each aura has a different colour. Now, Mr Saxena here has a yellow aura. I can see it rising above his head." I looked, but could see nothing there.

Mr Saxena was a poultry farmer who had come from Ajmer with his daughter to see if a faith-healer could do something where doctors had failed. His daughter had lost one eye as a result of a childhood accident. She was now twenty-one years old and ready for marriage. The father was worried about her future. Kalika touched her afflicted eye and chanted some *mantras*. He made some flourishes in the air, and then declared that the eye would be normal by the next year. Miracles then did not occur instantly. I was disappointed. I had heard of at least half a dozen faith healers who had only to touch a lame man to make him walk, or touch the deaf-mutes and make them hear and talk again.

Kalika said, "We hear in our ancient classics about the curses of *rishis* and *munis*. It is very true. If you wholeheartedly wish for evil to happen, it generally does." I thought of an incident in my childhood which is very clear in my memory. I have felt guilty about it for years afterwards. There was a certain teacher in our school who was rather strict. I think her name was

Bertha. I did not like her at all. I think she sensed this because she often picked on me with questions I never knew. Thinking about it now, I feel she was only trying to help me cope with my classwork, but in those days I used to think she was doing it to belittle me in front of the whole class. About this time, I heard about voodoo and how certain tribes in Africa could harm a person by making an image of him and sticking pins into it. I went home and hunted for an appropriate doll whom I christened Bertha. Then I proceeded with the job of sticking pins into it. With each pin I uttered a curse. I must have put in at least two dozen pins. Then I hid the doll under a cupboard, lest prying eyes discover my ill deeds. A week later, Miss Bertha did not turn up. I thought she would come the next day or the next but she didn't come that whole week. Then I heard from one of the girls that she was sick. That day I rushed home and removed all the pins. I even put some sticking plaster on the pin wound to prevent the cotton from spilling out. It was of no use. The next day, I heard she had died. It may have been coincidence but I considered it all my fault. I thought I had killed her. I must have cried for hours at her funeral and for days and weeks afterwards. I even made a grave for the doll and vowed never to dabble in witchcraft again.

Kalika Prasad said, "I cursed a man once, in a fit of rage. He had first come to me when he was on the

verge of bankruptcy. I had blessed him and declared that he would make four and a half lakhs in his business. He asked me not to make fun of him. Then in a fit of generosity he promised me twenty-five thousand rupees if he made those four and a half lakhs. Of course I did not want his money. He went away. Later, I heard that his business was thriving. But he did not come to see me. Once he happened to cross my path at a common friend's house. The friend who had been present on the first occasion, asked him in jest, "Well, you haven't given Kalika Prasad his share amounting to twenty-five thousand rupees." Thereupon, the ungrateful businessman laughed and said to me, "Four and a half lakhs is nothing. It finishes very fast. Won't you bless me so I get more money?" Then I lost my temper and cursed him to lose every paisa he had. He did not believe anything would come of the curse, but it did. He had to spend a fortune on his wife who started having fits. Next, somebody in his family died and part of his money was spent at that time. Then, he started going to the races in an effort to make up his losses. In the process, he lost every bit of his vast fortune."

Whether this was chance coincidence or dastardly design, is difficult to say. Kalika Prasad was of the opinion that it would have happened even if he hadn't uttered the curse. It all depended on fate. If you were fated to suffer, nothing could avert the catastrophe.

Kalika had lost a nineteen -year-old daughter in a train accident. She was run over when crossing the railway line. I wondered if he had seen the calamity with his clairvoyant perception. Even if he had seen it, he could perhaps do nothing to prevent it.

“My guru warns me against uttering too many curses,” said Kalika Prasad. “Curses precipitate disaster. Besides, they take as much power as the performance of good work. So why do bad when it is in your hands to do the reverse. There is another problem. There isn’t an unlimited supply of super power. For each life-saving miracle or curse, I have to spend a tremendous amount of energy which must be replaced. I replace this by doing penance for which I sleep on the hard floor and stay away from my wife. Tremendous concentration is required till you feel the new energy pulsating in you.”

So, whatever it was, curses were dangerous. Even a spur of the moment utterance could spell disaster. Indeed, Kalika Prasad was a power to reckon with. The next time I would remember to take a bottle of rum.



The Miracle Worker

I first heard about Narayan Baba from Professor Joshin of Osmania University.

“Do you know,” he said, “there is a mystic in Sanjiva Reddy Nagar who is a miracle worker? He materializes ash and idols from thin air, besides foretelling the future by just looking at your face?”

Even before I encountered the mystic, I had heard other wondrous things about him. On one occasion, he had fed three hundred people with only one and a half kilos of rice, increasing the quantity of food by merely touching the vessel. The ‘Mahabharata’ mentions a special vessel called “the *Akshaypatra*” which could do this feat and was in the possession of Draupadi. But apparently, Narayan Baba could do it with any vessel. On another occasion, a woman informed me that in her presence he had removed stones from the gall bladder of a patient, with just a superficial touch.

I got his address and tracked him down. I stood outside the little gate, looking into a green garden and warily eyed a black Alsatian on the other side. A

woman peeped out.

“Does Narayan Baba live here?” I asked.

She nodded vigorously: “Narayan Baba,” she said. She spoke only Telegu but she had understood the name. A girl came to the door and spoke to me in Hindi: “The car was giving some trouble so my father has gone to the garage to get it repaired.”

On the second occasion, another girl came to the door. This one spoke English. “Oh dear,” she said, “He just went to the market. Did you pass a blue Herald?”

“Yes.”

“That was my father. We had run out of vegetables so he has gone to Mausamjahi Market.”

The third time I really began to doubt whether the mystic who was credited with such miraculous power was synonymous with this man who blithely did mundane tasks like buying vegetables for the household and getting the car serviced. Surprisingly, he was the same man.

The housing colony of Sanjiva Reddy Nagar nestles beyond Amirpet in Hyderabad and is reached by a winding bazaar road full of cows, pedestrians and honking motorists.

Rows of identical cottages greet the eye. In one of these lives the unpretentious mystic, Narayan Baba.

Every Thursday, devotees flock to the small unfurnished room, where incense burns and people

squat on the floor with flowers, coconuts and money. Before the *puja mandap* sits a regal-looking man in a saffron silk *dhoti* with a shawl over his shoulder. People sit right round the room, all along the walls. He signals at regular intervals and they rise one by one and take turns sitting in front of him for individual dispensation. Some devotees throw money into a *thali* (a plate); others bring coconuts and flowers.

I saw him cure a deaf boy. Almost immediately after he had used his healing touch, Narayan Baba clapped his hands and the child responded by turning his head in the direction of the sound.

“Tell me,” I asked, “where did you get the power to work miracles.” He smiled.

“I do nothing,” he said. “It is my guru, the Sai Baba of Shirdi who performs these wonders.”

“And where is your guru?”

“He attained *samadhi* in 1918, but his spirit works through me.”

“When did you start? Did you choose to be a mystic or accidentally drift into it?” I queried.

“Everything is preordained,” he said “When I was three-and-a-half years old, I was kidnapped by a band of thieves. You see, I was a rich doctor’s son and was wearing a great deal of jewellery. The robbers were only interested in the jewellery. They stripped me of it and dumped me into a train going to Mumbai.”

“You must have been frightened, weren’t you?”

“I was. I got off at Dhond station and stood crying bitterly, till some pilgrims going to Shirdi found me and took me along with them to their guru. As soon as the Sai Baba of Shirdi saw me, he declared: “Lo! My child, you have come. I have been waiting for you.” He then told the devotees that I was a *Mahapurush*, who had been with him from the time of his own first incarnation as Lord Dattatreya.

“When my father tracked me down and came to fetch me, Sai Baba refused to give me up and said: “God has sent him to me.” My father tried to argue with him and asked him not to joke. But Sai Baba was in dead earnest. He had no intention of relinquishing his hold on me. When my mother heard the story, she died of shock. You see I was an only child. As for me, it did not matter whether I went or stayed. Some deep inexplicable affinity seemed to bind me to my new found guru which equaled the attachment I felt for my parents.”

It is of such encounters that mystics are made. They say a guru and his disciple always recognise each other through the sixth sense. A neophyte may have been searching years for a master. But when he comes face to face with him, he recognizes him at once. Meher Baba had a similar experience when he discovered Upasini Maharaj and so have countless other mystics since the

dawn of spiritualism.

Some mystics only believe in reaching out to inner peace. They don't like to display miracles. Narayan Baba's is a different type of spiritualism. He specialises in the miracle. In front of me, he materialised fragrant ash. It is called *vibhuti*. He asked me to spread out my hands underneath. The *vibhuti* fell like dust, grey in colour, sometimes fine, sometimes lumpy. I wrapped it up. I saw him materialise this four times for different people and each time I observed him to see if there was any sleight of hand. He couldn't have hid it in his sleeves because he didn't wear a kurta, the top half of his body being bare.

"Do it once again please," I asked.

"I can't," he said. "The ash is over."

"Over?"

He showed me his empty hand. "I can't perform the materialisation on order. Once, at a Press conference, some reporters asked me to do it for them. I couldn't. As I told you the Sai Baba is my guru. Only when he wills it, does it appear in my hand. When it is over my hands become empty, unless he wills it again. For the same reason I can give rings and idols only to some people and not to all who demand them."

The *vibhuti* is used as a panacea for all diseases. He asks patients to eat it with water or spread it on the affected parts in case of some skin infection. The deaf

are asked to add water, let the mixture settle and then put the surface water into their ears for a week.

I asked Narayan Baba if his materialisation involved the same principle as the conjuring of bunnies and handkerchiefs from hats-an act specialised in by stage magicians.

He laughed at that, as if to say: "You have not understood the value of mysticism."

Then he said: "You can take this ash home and put it in a box. It is real. The silver idol I have produced from the air will live forever. There are many such idols and rings in the houses of my devotees. As for the gimmicks of magicians, they are momentary as the mist-here one moment and gone the next. They are illusions; this is reality."

"You know," he said, "I can drive away evil spirits too. In Ahmedabad, there was a house which was bewitched. Three successive owners fled from it, because the moment it changed hands there was a death in that family. When I arrived there, a gentleman had just bought it, and immediately afterwards lost his son. I asked the man to let me stay in the house. He was diffident but ultimately agreed. I stayed there a week and there was no witchery thereafter even after I had left the place."

Narayan Baba, I was amazed to learn, has established 36 spiritual centers abroad in different parts of the

world. He often goes there for his healing sessions. They have been named "Narayan Baba Spiritual Healing Centres." In his absence, these branches are run by disciples drawn from the local population. Many are Europeans and Americans; some are Africans.

"But," say Baba, "they are all alike to me. They cannot perform miracles, but they distribute the ash that falls from the numerous photographs of my guru. This is applied on the forehead as *prasad*. But I visit these centers at least once a year for healing.

His most remarkable feats have been those in which he removed stones from the gall bladders and kidneys of patients with just a superficial touch on the skin. When he went abroad, he amazed people from the medical profession with these miracles. He showed me press clippings showing photographs of the feat.

Narayan Baba follows no system of astrology or numerology for his predictions. He knows no palmistry either. He said, "I have never been to school. I have been tutored only in Yoga." It is *Raja Yoga* which has given him his powers.

"May I ask you a personal question?" He inclined his head and waited for it.

"You are married. Doesn't the forsaking of celibacy detract from the power of the mystic?"

"You are thinking of the mystics of old," he said, "who belonged to the pages of the *Puranas*. They led

austere lives; forsook worldly pleasures and renounced the world.”

“And you are a modern day mystic?”

“One learns to live with the times. But in the beginning I used to think like you—that powers came by adhering to strict celibacy. It was Abdullah Baba who asked me to get married. He said it was all right to cohabit with a woman once one had mastered all the eight *siddhis*. So, at thirty, when I became a full-fledged mystic, I got married. If you marry after conquering the *siddhis*, you don't lose the powers. It is only those who rush blindly into marriage without mastering mysticism, who face that danger.”

“Who is Abdullah Baba?”

“Does the Mohammedan name surprise you?”, he asked. “He was a Mohammedan mystic who took *samadhi* some time back. In the beginning, he was just a fruit seller in Shirdi. He found his shop recorded the largest sales only on Thursday, which was Baba's day. One day, he followed the pilgrims to see where they were going. They led him straight to the Sai Baba of Shirdi. As soon as the Baba saw him, he said, “Stay with me. I recognise you. You were my brother in a former birth.” Abdullah Baba stayed there and became a disciple.”

As a youth, Narayan Baba went to Tiruvannamali to serve Ramana Maharshi who advised him to go and

serve Lord Dattatreya at Ganegapur. In his seventeenth year, he received a directive from Sai Baba who appeared to him for the first time after he had attained *samadhi*. The spirit of his guru enjoined on him to use his “*shakti*” to heal and guide mankind, going from place to place with no permanent abode.

In an article written about him in 1971, it states: At the instance of Ramana Maharshi, he left for the Himalayas and for a few years accompanied Ek Bhookti Maharaj to all places of pilgrimage. Ek Bhookti Maharaj was known for his exceptional knowledge of Ayurveda – the system of medicine not known to ordinary mortals and even to many sages and saints.

Narayan Baba, besides the 36 centres abroad, has established one in Karnataka State, where he heals with only “*vibhuti*” and touch. He is also building an orphanage, where homeless waifs will be taught spiritual values and who in time will act as lighthouses to lead the disillusioned in a tumultuous age.

Narayan Baba says that the realisation of God can be attained through prayer. “Believe in God and worship your *Ishta Devata* for some time daily; follow any saint you like; do good deeds in life and serve the poor and the needy by giving alms and comfort. God has given everything in abundance to humanity. But people have failed to utilise it properly; hence we have the present state of turmoil.”

“I asked him, “There is so much poverty; yet you say God has given everything in abundance to humanity. If you can feed three hundred people with less than one and a half kilos of rice why don't you solve India's food problem?”

He said, “I don't worry so much about a country. What is to happen, will eventually happen. There is going to be great destruction—a catastrophe.”

I wondered if Narayan Baba and I would survive this great calamity—he to restore spiritual values; I to sell my book.

“What is your means of livelihood?”, I asked him. “This”, he said pointing to the platter, heaped with notes and coins. It was not much. The day's collection could not have been more than fifteen rupees and he gave *darshans* only on Thursday. He had told me in the course of our talk that he had never worked in an office nor had he earned a living doing manual labour. Yet he ran a household, got two children into an expensive hill school, had a car and an Alsatian and lived in his own house.

“This is not much,” he said. “But there are people who give donations. I don't ask for it. It is given spontaneously. Just today, a lady in Africa has sent me a draft for five thousand rupees.” He pulled it out and showed it to me.

“And so I survive,” he said putting it back. There are

people who pay his fare when he goes abroad, others who pay for his board and lodging when he goes round the world and still others who give donations for the running of his Healing Centres.

“Is it necessary to be vegetarian to get this great power?”

“No,” said Narayan Baba. “But this is *Kali Yug*. The stomach grumbles and one rushes to placate it with all kinds of food. By the way, do you know the old name for *uddad dal*? It is “*mamsa*” which now means meat. In ancient times both were synonymous. In fact I believe, the consumption of flesh gives more strength for meditation of the most rigorous kind. You know, it is not necessary to fast and keep ‘*vrata*’. Why torture ourselves? If the body is happy, the mind is happy. Even Sai Baba of Shirdi never asked anybody to fast. There seems to be no perceptible benefit to be derived from fasting. At the most, it is probably good discipline for the stomach from the physiological angle.”

The Baba rose. The summons came from the strident peal of a telephone in the bedroom.

The modern mystic lives in a strange conjunction of old-world meditation and new-world symbols. He jets to Europe and Africa to lead both ebony-hued devotees as well as flaxen-haired white-skinned ones to spiritual bliss. At the same time he has mastered *siddhis* which enable him to walk on water and fly ~~through the air~~

like a bird. He can pick up thoughts in the mind by means of telepathy but he has a telephone. He can travel in the astral but he drives a car. He can feed 300 people with less than 1½ kilos of rice, yet goes to the market to buy groceries and vegetables.

This entire phenomenon was intriguing.

Deep in thought, I got into the car and drove away.



What is God Like?

Puttaparthi is a challenge even to the stout-hearted. To the squeamish, it can be hell – only as regards hygiene though. Spiritually, I was told, it is the purest place you can go to because God stays there.

I decided to risk the hygiene part. There were many hurdles to cross like some mythical voyage across the seven seas. Only, these were rivers which flowed across the road in torrents due to the providentially heavy rains that year. An odd bridge was washed away, involving elaborate detours across *kucha* (uncemented) tracks where the car swayed ominously while we moaned and prayed hoping we wouldn't get bogged down permanently.

Prasanti Nilayam at Puttaparthi in the Anantpur district, is the abode of 'Bhagwan' Sathya Sai Baba. Some call him 'The Miracle Man'; others call him 'God'. But a trip to Puttaparthi is imperative for anybody who wants to witness extraordinary phenomena. Materialisation of rings, lockets and precious stones

from thin air is second nature to him. He transmutes one substance to another; changes the shapes of objects in full view and performs miraculous cures by the touch of his hand. On special festivals like the *Shivaratri*, 'Lingams' form within him and are expelled from the mouth. I was told that some days before the occasion, Baba develops a fever, which is a sign that the sacred 'Lingams' are being born within him.

The *ashram* was overcrowded. People, beddings and trunks lay sprawled across the ground on a raised platform with a high ceiling. It was exactly like a railway platform but hemmed round by wire meshing. A couple of heads looked up from their tasks as I peeped in. They seemed at home, rather like a large community knit by something more profound than by mere blood ties. I asked an old man what the arrangements were for a stay there.

"You can stay here", he said.

"Here?" I asked. I looked around. There were at least a hundred people on that platform. Rooms were just chalk lines which cut up the room into separate sections.

"Where do you sleep?"

"Here," he said, indicating the six feet of ground on which he had spread his belongings.

There was a newly married couple too. They both turned to look at me. The young bride wore glass

bangles. The marriage party had evidently come straight to Puttaparthi. Her painted toes peeped from beneath the folds of her silk saree. At my curious scrutiny, she drew them in with a deft movement of her saree pleats.

“But there is no privacy here”, I said.

“Nothing is private before God”, said the old man nodding wisely, while the young woman not so wise, contemplated the ground and her uninitiated husband gazed at her with undisguised lust.

I glanced around. There did not seem to be any bathrooms. I enquired discreetly. Finally, it was an elderly woman who told me there were a few, some hundred yards away but they were not adequate for the large crowds. If you wanted to be up for the 6 o'clock prayer chanting, you had to wake up at 3.30 a.m. or else there would be a big queue. There was an alternative though. You could go into the fields. Lots of people did. I turned away, wondering if some hotel accommodation was available in the village.

While I stood deliberating on the road, assailed by beggars, I saw a very fair, blonde-haired young woman come out of a *jhuggi*. It was no more than a thatched hut – without electricity or running water – the sort of temporary structure builders often put up around construction sites. She was dressed in a plain saree and her hair was knotted at the nape of her neck, *Sindoor*

marked a spot on her forehead and her feet were bare. My first thought was that she was an albino. She smiled at me and I smiled back. After she had gone into the hut, I asked a shopkeeper nearby if there was any place to stay. He pointed to the *jhuggis* and said I could get one like it for four rupees a day. I would have to cook my own food. "But the ashram is cleaner," he added. I told him I had seen how clean it was. "The *jhuggi* is OK," he said. "Even Americans stay in it. They pay more too."

"Was that woman an American then?"

"Who else?" he said. "Only Americans will travel thousands of miles and stay here in *jhuggis*."

We managed to procure a room at last, with great feats of persuasion. The rent was seven rupees a day. We were told we could buy our meals in the tea-shops outside. The room was on the top floor, measuring six feet by eight feet. It had a straw mat and a fan with no regulator. There were no conveniences like tap or a bathroom. For the ablution programme, it was necessary to descend to the ground floor. A drink of water too, merited the same exercise. By the smell of the thing I thought there was a sweepers' strike on, but was told that this was the normal state of affairs. The enlightenment came from a man called Bose, a gazetted officer on two months leave, who was staying in the opposite room with his wife and two children. He intended

spending his entire period of leave there.

“The body,” he said, “gets used to physical discomforts. What is more important is mental peace.”

On my way down, I passed by a cheerless man with a tin can in his hand. He was holding his nose. “Two bathrooms for a 100 people. It’s terrible,” he said. He had evidently not found peace of mind yet. “I’m going to try the *ashram* bathrooms”, he added, as he crossed the road. I kept mum. One lives and learns.

In this connection, I recalled Gurdjieff’s theory about inner illumination. George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff was born in 1873 to Greek parents in Alexandrapol but was Russian by nationality. From the very beginning, he took a keen interest in occultism. From a series of mystical experiences which ranged from seeing a woman trapped inside a circle drawn on the ground seeming to hem her in like solid walls, to a paralysed man who half crawled up a hill to the shrine and woke up fully cured, he came to believe there was something more powerful that we could not comprehend. At Fontainebleau he started the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man. His favourite method was to ask his students to dig in the garden with a shovel till he told them to stop. Sheer exhaustion would reduce the neophytes to tears. He believed that physical discomfort was important in triggering inner springs of spiritual energy. Accordingly, he took bored,

self-centered and perplexed men and he rushed them into conditions quite the reverse of what they had been used to, thus providing the “newness” which released the hidden super-conscious forces.

Puttaparthi, then, probably accomplished something like this, transporting you from the heart of civilization to almost prehistoric living conditions, and generating within you something akin to spiritual bliss. I came out and found my way to the *ashram* again.

There I met Mr. N. Kasturi, a white haired and learned old man who sat in a tiny room half filled with books and papers. “Yes?” asked the ex-history professor from Mysore University who is Sathya Sai Baba’s historian and biographer as well as the translator of his discourses. I sat on the edge of the settee and mentioned my purpose and the book I intended writing.

“But it will be a sacrilege to write a book of this sort,” he said. “He is neither a mystic nor a magician.” I pointed out that a book on Baba had already been written by a foreigner. At this, Mr. Kasturi shrugged his shoulders. I presumed this meant that foreigners were different, though it was beyond me to fathom why.

“If he is neither a mystic nor a magician”, I asked Mr. Kasturi, “Who is he?”

The ex-history professor looked up calmly and said: “He is God. He has done neither meditation nor Yoga. He has had no guru; all his superpowers have come to

him almost overnight. There was no travail of the spirit or struggle as there has been with a great number of Yogis.”

“I believe he claims he will die in 2020 and be reborn as Prem Sai at Srirangapatnam in Mysore State (now Karnataka)?” I asked. Mr Kasturi’s lips shut up like a clam. He looked suspiciously at me, then said: “Why don’t you ask him personally? I am scared of you. You are a dangerous person. If I speak further, you may even put me in the book.”

“You are already in the book, Mr. Kasturi,” I thought to myself, but did not tell him. He would find out soon enough.

As I rose, he volunteered, “You can buy the book ‘*Satyam, Shiva, Sundaram*’, in three volumes. It will give you all the information you need.” He gave me directions to the book shop. The book was out of stock in Puttaparthi. I got hold of the volumes much later. Mr. Kasturi had written the book. The latter half comprised Bhagwan Sathya Sai Baba’s discourses translated by Mr. Kasturi. There was a lesson there, I thought.

The crowds were converging for the darshan. I joined the ladies section – a bare stretch of ground where women squatted in the mud. At the other end was the men’s section, a similar strip of ground separated by a wide stretch of no man’s land where “*Bhagwan*” would

shortly tread. A well-fed elephant stood in front of the *mandir* with a garland in its trunk. A little buzz went up, which was quickly silenced by volunteers who were an officious lot. A lady who coughed was quickly removed lest she develop a spasm of coughing at an inconvenient moment when *Bhagwan* appeared. Another was told to silence her whimpering child. Much before his dramatic entry, there were hushed and ecstatic cries of “Baba” “Baba” or “*Bhagwan*” “*Bhagwan*”. Necks craned to look. With all the preliminaries I expected a fabulously arrayed being. But the man who appeared was of average height. He was thin and dark and dressed in a cotton robe of saffron from neck to ankle. His hair was remarkably fine textured and fizzy and stood round his head like a halo. He passed, glancing on both sides and holding up a hand in blessing. People joined their palms together and touched the hem of his garment. Once, in some other city that he visited, a woman told me, people had gone so crazy they wanted bunches of his hair as souvenirs. Accordingly some of them had tried to pull out fistfuls and *Bhagwan* had been annoyed. Understandably so!

The men, who sat in their exclusive section craned their necks to look. Some of them stood up because the stately elephant was standing close to the ladies section. Baba went forward and touched its trunk and as if on cue, the elephant dropped the garland of flowers

round his neck. Baba removed it at once and handed it to an assistant who received it reverently. Baba then fed some coconut scrap to the elephant which immediately moved forward and was led away with its bells jingling.

A woman whispered to me that in a few minutes the *bhajans* would start. Meanwhile, Baba was moving about the grounds. A few people extended envelopes to him and he took them. I wondered what this was. I asked a woman volunteer. "Petitions," she said. "They have sent in their requests for interviews. Each of them has some problem-either physical or mental and they are seeking a cure."

"But why can't they ask him themselves? Why write it down?"

She looked horrified. "You can't talk to God," she said. I was told these petitions were often ignored for days together and sometimes even months. People stayed on patiently. They said they would see God when he was ready for them. However, very often they had to return disappointed. Some of them considered it a sort of *satyagraha*: not going away till they were given permission to leave by "Bhagwan" himself.

When he wants to see a person, he himself calls for the individual. This is a great occasion for the man or woman concerned and there is much eager rushing about. The party is then closeted with "Baba" in an

interview room which is located on the ground floor of the *mandir*. Baba stays in the room directly above.

An interview however does not ensure a cure. Sometimes nothing happens and you hang around indefinitely till he gives you permission to go. A blind girl, Achala Kumar from Mumbai, came off and on with her mother for three years seeking a cure. Yet at the end of the period, all she felt was a slight improvement and not total relief. In another case, a girl from Ajmer, Poonam Saxena was not affected at all, though she went in 1972 and again in 1973 with her father and stayed on for long periods on both occasions. When they finally got permission to leave, Baba counseled Poonam who had lost one eye in a childhood accident. "Why do you care so much for the physical body? It is after all a temporary vehicle which we must all discard one day. The inner self merits more attention." The message, she confessed, gave her much inner strength though she had not been cured.

Baba was on his rounds again. There were commands from volunteers in hushed staccato tones. "Draw *pallavs* round your shoulders. No blouses to be seen." They personally went and forcibly pulled down shorter *pallavs* which did not completely cover the bare midriffs. They grumbled about the lengths of modern blouses. "It would not do at all to tempt God", they mumbled. They grumbled among themselves, "Tie up your hair tight,"

they said. "Oil it liberally." "Loose hair looks so sexy."

On his part, Baba did not even appear to care much about externals. In his eyes was such a detached light. He turned and smiled and then passed by on his indifferent way.

He talked to some labourers on the site. There was some building activity going on. Ownership houses were on sale for devotees who wished to buy them. The price was twenty-two thousand rupees for a self-contained three-room flat. If you bought it, it would be for your exclusive use whenever you visited Puttaparthi. With money you could be comfortable and not rough it out with the common herd. But I wondered if in this case, Gurudjieff's theory would work.

The dome of the *mandir* was being remodeled. I was told an Australian architect who had been staying there for almost a year and had become a devotee, was designing the structure. The *ashram* was being given a new look. I wondered if they would resurrect the common bathrooms, or whether they would remain the same, providing the necessary discomfort to generate springs of inner illumination.

Half an hour later, the lights were lit. I was directed to the *bhajan* hall by an attractive girl who limped on account of a polio attack. I didn't know her name. She told me she was also a volunteer and had been staying at the *ashram* for the past one year. She had a room for

herself. The regulars were given better accommodation. Even temporary residents were allotted rooms, if Baba gave the green signal. All applications passed through him. Right now, all the rooms were full. There was a big rush for *Navratri*.

The prayer hall was already packed. I found a place outside and sat down. In a minute, a brusque volunteer came and asked me: "Are you sick?" I did not know what she meant, because there were many types of illnesses. I wondered if she was sick herself and wanted out.

Then she said: "If you are not sick, you must sit on the other side. Only sick people can sit on bricks. The rest have to sit in the mud." I went and sat on the other side but hardly half a minute had passed when another volunteer ousted me from there as well. "You are sitting in the way," she said. I got up. "Look here," "I said". "Is it permitted to stand in this place?"

An older volunteer came quickly towards us. She chided the younger one for being brusque. "Talk nicely to her," she commanded her subordinate. "The lady is writing a book on *Bhagwan*." I was not writing a book but only a chapter. However, I let it pass. If my mission was going to get me a vantage point, who was I to belittle it?

"Come with me," said the older volunteer, "You want to see Baba, don't you? I will give you a grand view of

him.” She found me an excellent place from where I had a fine view of both Baba and the crowds. I was not disturbed thereafter. Even in the house of God, writers had standing. I was not sitting in the mud any more but on cool tiles. I could rest my back against a wall.

The singing started—it was a melodious rhythm. A few minutes later, “*Bhagwan*” made his appearance, mounting a rostrum and sitting on an ornate throne with a silver head-rest. He showed his appreciation by nodding his head to the rhythm. He kept the beat with one hand on the arm rest. He looked much as a Maharaja of old must have looked like, except that he wore no crown. The same disparity between the elevated silver crested throne and the cold hard ground, the same supplicating reverence from the masses. There were life-sized portraits of himself flanking both sides and a mounted idol of Sri Krishna behind, half hidden by the throne.’

At last, the sonorous melodies faded away and Baba rose. People filed out of the hall. A majority of them went to their rooms. Some squatted in *Padmasana* postures in the empty hall. Yet others sat in the corridors. All of them sat cross-legged in silence and the lights were dimmed. I stood there, unsure about what was coming next.

“What are they waiting for?” I asked the volunteer who had given me the vantage point.

“Shh,’ she cautioned, finger on her lip, “*Dhyana*. Do you want to meditate?”

“Yes,” I said at once. I wanted to see the inside of the hall. She guided me to an empty space and I squeezed myself between two women. I sat cross-legged in a cramped stance while mosquitoes hummed about threateningly. I just could not have a go at them. My mosquito repellent was in the car and I had not made allowance for *dhyana*. The ascetics of old, I thought, must likewise have sat in silent *dhyana* oblivious of the ants and insects which stung them, till they built up a hard wall between subjective feelings and objective reality. I had not yet reached that stage.

And nor had the others, I found. Somebody coughed. A volunteer said: “Stop coughing there!” She blew her nose. She was promptly led away. Another with a child in her lap swat a mosquito. She was taken away too. A child began to whimper somewhere and was breast-fed., the woman was carted away unceremoniously. After a minute, a woman on my right sneezed. A mosquito had gone up her nose. There were cries of “Shh Shush” from volunteers.

“Look at these people,” said one girl volunteer. “Disturbing everyone’s *dhyana* by blowing their noses and feeding their babies. They don’t know the value of meditation.” I smiled and half expected her to oust me too, but she couldn’t see my face in the dark. At the

end of the *dhyana* period, the lights came on. It was a signal to rise. Everybody was scratching due to mosquito bites. Some had a delayed and angry go at the vicious creatures.

Baba was not anywhere around. "He has gone," I was informed. "He does not stay for *dhyana*. God doesn't have to meditate. He has attained his powers naturally. It is *Sadhakas* like us who have to train our minds and attain peace."

"Dinner," said someone. They all trooped off to the eating section. The more devout, I learnt, waited till Baba had his dinner. Meals in the *ashram* were sold on the basis of coupons which could be procured from the *ashram* office for a nominal sum. I learnt only the next morning that the meals were simple and filling.

That night we had dinner in one of the ramshackle restaurants outside, digesting *ashram* truths and *dosas*.

Puttaparthi can be called a one-horse town but there are no horses there. Only an elephant and plenty of stray dogs. There is only one road the *ashram* wall flanks one side of it while the other is lined with shops. Between shops, *jhuggis* have sprouted. There are photo shops and trinket shops too, selling rings, chains, and lockets and photographs of Sai Baba and Sathya Sai Baba, to those who are not fortunate enough to get materialised ones. There is good business potential and the sale is brisk. There is scope for more acumen. A

board reads, 'Houses and land for sale'. If people pay four rupees a day for *jhuggis*, they will evidently pay the earth for a decent room and bath.

Sandwiched between two shops is the American girl's rented hut. I saw her in the *ashram* the next morning. She was wearing a chain with a Sri Sai locket attached.

"Hello," I said.

"Sai Ram," she replied. This is the distinctive form of greeting at the *ashram*. It is used to mean both "hello" and "goodbye.," Only when she said it with the peculiar twang, it sounded like a foreign language.

"Are you American?" I asked.

"Yes, from California".

"And when did you come here?"

"Ten months ago", she said.

Her name was Christina Parker. Some friend had told her about Sathya Sai Baba. Soon after, when she was driving at seventy miles per hour on a freeway, she had a tyre burst. The car went completely berserk. She tried to control it but couldn't. It was swinging wildly from right to left and then again to the right. Passing cars screeched on both sides. She does not know what prompted her to murmur "Sri Sai". She did that a couple of times and the next minute she found herself safe on the roadside. She was standing there and looking at the car which was a complete wreck.

However, she was unhurt except for a slight cut on the lip. She does not know to this day how she got out of the car so miraculously.

“When my parents heard of my escape,” she said, “they were astonished. I told them about Sri Sai and how he had come to my rescue. I suppose they did not think much of my explanation and dismissed it as one of those freaks of chance. My friend who had told me about Sathya Sai Baba, had given me a chain and a locket to wear. One day, I lost them on the beach. I wanted to go to India and get one from the great saint’s own hands.”

She held out her locket for me to see. “I came to India,” she continued, “and he gave me this one. He just plucked it out of the air. But before giving it to me, he said,” You lost the old one through carelessness, didn’t you? I was mystified how he could have known. It was true. I was quite a wild girl roaming about the beaches and romping on the sands.”

“How long do you intend staying here?”

“Forever, perhaps,” she said. “My parents want me to go back but I have told them that I owe my life to Sathya Sai Baba. If it wasn’t for him, I would have died that day on the freeway.”

There were others like her and many were the miracles attributed to the Godman. On the ground floor of our lodging, there was a middle-aged couple with a

thirty-year-old daughter. They had come from Ludhiana in Punjab; they said Sathya Sai Baba had a large following in Punjab. Their daughter had been completely paralysed and had been miraculously cured two years back. The symptoms were now creeping back and they had come for a fresh dose of thaumaturgic energy from the healer.

In another case, a young wheelchair-bound American woman had been brought to him by her husband. The Godman walked right up to her, took her hand and commanded, "Get up and walk." And she got up and walked.

In yet another case it is told, two foreigners went to him. One was a believer, the other a sceptic. They did not speak, yet Baba knew their minds. He promptly materialised some money out of thin air, and gave it to the non-believer who was completely startled. It was the exact fare needed for him to go home, though for the life of him he could not make out how Baba knew where he hailed from. I heard of another case from a lady in Bangalore. She thought materialisation of *vibhuti* was some sleight of hand on the part of the saint. She was going away in her car from Whitefields, Baba's Bangalore residence when suddenly she was completely covered with the holy ash.

There is a case where Baba revived a man on the third day after what seemed like biological 'death'. The

man was Mr. V. Radhakrishna, a businessman from Andhra. He came for Baba's *darshan* with his wife and daughter. He was very sick but Baba did not immediately grant him an interview. He was sinking and the anxious wife made a trip to Baba's abode to persuade him to intervene with his wonder touch and revive her husband. Baba, with his characteristic smile told her not to worry. When Baba assures someone of a cure, he generally means it, so the wife was very much at peace. But soon after, there was no pulse and his body became cold. On the third day, the body began to decompose and give out a smell. People suggested to the "widow" that it would be wise to carry off the body for cremation. But Baba asked her to wait. After some time, Baba came and asking the tearful relatives to remain outside and he went in alone. When he came out, he let them in. They were pleasantly surprised to see the "dead" man sitting up in bed quite well. This can be construed as miraculous indeed, though sceptics may argue about it saying it is impossible to ascertain the exact moment of "death", or squabble about biological death and psychic death, declaring that the man may not have been quite "dead" but only in a coma. But when considering this case it must be remembered that men have been similarly brought back from the jaws of death by no other external power than their own mighty will to live. A striking instance is that

of Bhugra (mentioned in the Chapter "The Astral Body") who came back to life without any thaumaturgic intervention, though he had been pronounced 'dead' by doctors.

An authenticated case however, which defies explanation is recorded in Howard Murphet's book, "The man of miracles". Mrs. Nagmani Pourniya from Bangalore gives a first-hand account of an operation performed by Baba on a man with stomach tumour. She relates how Baba went into the room and came out sometime later, with bloodied hands, asking for water to wash them. She was terrified but the Godman said: "I have performed an operation." The "anaesthetic" had been *vibhuti* rubbed on the forehead and the instrument, a materialised knife. The next morning when Nagmani went in to have a look at the sutures, the cut seemed healed and the stomach was no longer bloated because Baba had removed the tumour. But she found that there were no stitches. He had merely held the two sections of skin together till they joined up and then smeared some *vibhuti* over the wound to facilitate the healing process.

Even this is astounding enough without the additional bolster of his miracles of materialisation which would take an entire book to enumerate. The producing of rings, lockets, statues and jewels may be attributed to "apport" – a special method whereby spiritualists pull

out objects apparently from nowhere. The explanation is that occultists make use of lower or higher spirits who “de-materialise” objects which are in existence elsewhere, carry them in that condition and give them concrete shape at the correct juncture. But his feats of changing the nature of a substance or its shape from moment to moment still defies explanation. Rock becomes candy; sand becomes a copy of the *Bhagwad Gita* while a ring can be made to change its setting on personal whim. Eye-witness accounts of these changes testify to their genuineness and some of them appear in the magazine “*Sanathana Sarathi*” which contains articles by devotees, and is published by the Sathya Sai Trust.

Sathya Sai Baba has often been accused of paying more attention to the rich than to the poor. But, there seems to be no truth in these claims. A man who tried to somehow wangle a room in the *ashram* by paying a hundred odd rupees was turned away on the grounds that Baba had not given permission the coffers are not filled by any rapacious *pujaris* as they are in temples like *Tirupathi* where the payment of a hundred rupees will ensure you an immediate *darshan* of the inner shrine. After all, of what earthly use can money be to one who can pluck what he wants from the air?

Where did this fantastic miracle man have his beginnings? He was born on November 23rd, 1926 in

the village of Puttaparthi. His parents were Sri Pedda Venkappa Raju and Smt. Eswaramma, who were non-brahmans and ate meat. Sathya was a natural ascetic with a revulsion for meat. Soon after his birth, when he was bathed and laid on a bed, the bed began to oscillate. A cobra was found underneath but before anyone could do anything about it, it disappeared. A cobra is considered an auspicious sign in Hinduism.

His early years were like that of any other child except that he was overly kind to the poor and needy. Once, when he gave too much food to a beggar, his mother reprimanded him and told him that if he continued in this manner he would starve. Sathya immediately gave up eating and subsisted miraculously on nothing at all for days together, declaring he got his food from a "phantom" old man. The description he gave resembled Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi.

He went to primary school and later to high school. It was while he was in high school at the age of fourteen, that he was bitten by a scorpion. Prompt medication was given by the local doctor but subsequently the boy became unconscious. It is believed that his character and behaviour changed abruptly after he came out of that stage. He said he was not their 'Sathya'. He was really Sri Sai. He declared that he did not want to study any more and he threw away his books. The family, suspecting he was possessed by an

evil spirit tried to exorcise the ghost but to no avail. Young Sathya persisted in this behaviour, displaying an almost superhuman endurance of the spine-chilling tortures of the exorciser.

His parents decided to give up the painful exorcising. At home Sathya seemed preoccupied and would often burst into ponderous Sanskrit syllables which he could not have imbibed in the years of limited schooling. He also started materialising fruits, flowers and sugar candy out of no where and which he distributed to everybody. Crowds flocked to see the wonder boy. His father was annoyed and asked him if he was a ghost or a lunatic. And then came the calm reply: "I am Sai Baba."

One Thursday, he gave proof of this, in front of a crowd. He asked for some jasmine petals to be brought. When his hands were full of them, he scattered them, on the floor at random. The petals fell in place distinctly to form the word 'Sai Baba' in the Telegu script. Each curve of the letter was perfect as if it had been painstakingly formed with the hand.

Soon after this, he left home and took up residence under a tree from where he gave discourses, sang *bhajans* and performed miracles. Devotees multiplied and an *ashram* mushroomed around him. He severed all family attachments declaring that asceticism should have no familial ties.

"Even now," said the volunteer with polio, "he treats

his brother and his sister like the rest of us; he accords them no special favour. It was the same with his parents-one of them died recently.”

The girl with polio belonged to a middle class family from Kanpur. Her father, P.D. Rao was still in service. She was the eldest of four sisters. Three of them were married while she led an isolated life on account of her disability. When I talked to her that morning, I had already found out her name through some regulars but she was unaware of this.

“You’re Basanti, aren’t you?” I asked.

“How did you know?”, she asked astonished.

I felt like telling her I was clairvoyant but finally told her the truth. The poor girl was quite befuddled by sainthood. She had been to Rishikesh to the Divine Life Association and sampled the entire spiritual spectrum from Ramana Maharshi to Aurobindo and found peace only here. I did not want to enhance the list. The fact was, I had been scouting around for required information from whoever was prepared to give it and then astonishing all and sundry with my lucid and penetrating divinations! She looked thoughtfully at me.

“What made you find peace only here?”, I asked “and not at all those other places?”

“Well,” she said, “I found those places too constricting. Here, there is freedom.”

She was a talkative and lively girl. She liked to make

friends and knew seven Indian languages, besides English. There was quite a crowd comprising young and old—some of them not the types you would normally associate with *ashrams*. There were educated people, from a good background; there were ruminative sorts, steeped in culture; there were millionaires who had thrown away business empires to come and live here; there were paupers too, just seeking a roof over their heads. You never knew if the woman next to you was a Maharani shorn of her privy purse or an heiress seeking peace of mind, or a labourer from the building lot. The various types probably satisfied Basanti's craving for company.

"And did you first come here, seeking a cure?"

"No, no," she said, (too quickly I thought,) "I came to find peace. If it is in our *karma* to suffer, we will suffer."

Here then I thought, was another of those static cases like Poonam's, which did not result into miraculous cures.

"I will continue to stay here," she said. "I have got used to it. One gets used to anything."

It is true. Like Albert Camus says in "The Outsider": If a man is in prison and can only see a tiny bit of sky, he will get used to watching a bird streaking across the blue space or a branch which proclaims the seasons.

"Do you get newspapers or magazines here?"

“No.”

“Then you will not know what is going on in the world!”

“What necessity is there to know?” she said.

What indeed! In fact, there were women who lived very much in the heart of what is called the civilised world and were ignorant of world events or for that matter Indian events because they opened their newspapers everyday only to look at the motion picture page. I was only overwhelmed at the futility of a young girl, an intellectual at that, speaking so many languages and bottling her talent within *ashram* walls.

I felt like telling her to write books here. But didn't. There was one book too many already. And, I thought to myself: what about me? Why was I working my fingers to the bone, writing books. For wealth? No. There was not much money in it anyway. To make a living? No, my husband made more than enough to support the family. For fame? It did not last. Then why...

I shook off the mood. My husband was calling me. “Have you finished?” he asked, “we have to set course, or the roads will be slushy again.” It was starting to rain.

Out on the road, I felt more materialistic. I met Eric, a man I had been talking to earlier. His wife had been cured of fits by the mere touch of the Godman's hem

which had brushed her hand as she prostrated herself.

“Finished so soon?” Eric asked.

“Yes.”

“Tell me what are you going to say about me?”

“It is too early to tell,” I said. “Why don’t you buy the book?” I then told him the title, the publisher’s name and roughly when it would be out.

I had become wise like Mr Kasturi. If you gave out facts, you reduced the sale by one. Little drops made the mighty ocean.

We got into the mud-splattered, white Fiat which groaned with luggage; gave ‘*daan*’ (alms) to a whining beggar and drove away.

On the way back, snatches of Sathya Sai Baba’s words came to me.

“At the present time, strife and discord have destroyed peace and unity in the family, the school, the community the society, villages, the cities and the State. The arrival of the Lord was anxiously awaited by saints and sages. Sadhus prayed and so, I have come.”

“Every step in the career of the *Avataar* is predetermined. Rama came to feed the roots of Sathya or Truth and Dharma or righteousness. Krishna came to foster Shanti-peace and Prema-love. Now all these four are in danger of drying up. That is why the present *Avtaar* has come.”

“Some of you remark that Ramakrishna Paramhansa

stated that *siddhis* or *yogic* power are obstructions in the path of *Sadhana*. Yes, *Siddhis* may lead the *Sadhaka* or spiritual aspirant astray. Without being trapped by them, he has to keep straight on or his ego will bring him down to the evil—the temptation of demonstrating his *yogic* powers. This is the advice that every aspirant should heed. But the mistake lies in equating me with the *Sadhaka*, like the one whom Ramakrishna wanted to help, guide and warn. These *Siddhis* or *yogic* powers are just in the nature of the *Avtaar*.”

In sum, Baba’s contention was the rest were spiritual aspirants while he was God and so is perfectly justified in performing miracles.

When faced with fierce competition from other yogis also performing miracles, Sathya Sai Baba said: “Certain forces attract devotees through propaganda and when the devotees succumb to the wiles, these forces make them take the wrong paths and destroy their faith and devotion. There is a vast gulf between the Sai forces and these low forces. Now that the necessity has arisen, I am referring to this fact. There is none who can stop or diminish my splendour. It has no bounds; it can meet with no obstacle. You may believe it or you may not believe it. But it can transform the earth into sky and the sky into earth and that too, in a moment. The low forces seek to exhibit, but the Divine is; it does not do anything more than be, according to

its nature. They seek to attract by demonstration; the Divine is its own evidence.”

Dispelling doubts, Baba said, “They too give things out of their hands as I do. They too wear a robe like me; they talk and move like me! But you cannot determine such matters with reference to the articles given or the language spoken or the dress worn. Can all green birds talk like the parrot? Can all worms that creep on flowers become butterflies? Can a donkey wearing the skin of a tiger become a tiger? Can a bloated pig become an elephant?”

“The trouble with us seems to be the difficulty of telling apart the tiger from a donkey and a bloated pig from an elephant, which with our very limited perception we are unable to analyse. We go by externals and reason that all those who perform miracles have some extraordinary power. Nor are we able to tell apart the real ‘God’ from the wide array of those who claim they are ‘*Bhagwan*.”

At Kurnool, which lay on our way, I heard of Saint Nilkanth Tathaji who bore a striking resemblance to Sathya Sai Baba. He was a spitting image of the Puttaparthi godman-right down to the hair. Besides, he did all the things Baba did – from materialisation and mind reading to miracles of faith healing. So does Narayan Baba who claims the spirit of Sri Sai works through him. Then there is Basheer Baba who has had a

slim volume published, that begins with the chapter: Basheer Baba, an incarnation of Sri Sai Baba, the Saint of Shirdi.

Then I wondered why, with all their super powers, they had to lay claims to divine lineage when they could all very well have shone in their own light? Unless they felt they could attract more adherents this way, since in the majority of minds there is nothing greater than Godhead.

How can these super powers be aroused in man?

Looking at the history of mysticism, one encounters striking similarities in the lives of these supermen and the exact moment of spiritual explosion. In almost every case where the upsurge of powers has been sudden, it has been associated with some great shock or injury which induced a coma. Edward Alexander Crowley (1875), the superman who is said to have made himself invisible and who generated a peculiar 'sex magic', suddenly developed his power at 15 years of age after an explosion which nearly killed him. Peter Hurkos fell from a ladder while professionally engaged in the job of painting a house. He fractured his skull; lay unconscious for a long time and was intriguingly blessed with "second sight" on coming out of his coma. Vivekananda felt a subtle shock of electricity penetrating his body, at which he became unconscious. When he came to, he found his master Sri Ramakrishna weeping with joy. "Today I

have given you my all and have become a fakir. Through this power, you will do immense good to the world.” A woman mystic and faith healer, Rajamma, fell grievously ill and lapsed into a long coma before she awoke to head her ‘Healing Ministry’. One night, in a village a few miles from Guntur in Andhra Pradesh, a retired school teacher Subba Rao one night, rolled off his bed and fractured his skull. His unconsciousness must have shaken loose some faculty because when he regained consciousness, he claimed he had superpowers and what was more, demonstrated them. He generated a strange animal magnetism akin to Mesmer’s and cured terminal diseases by just touching a patient on the head. Sathya Sai Baba too, had a similar jolting experience at the age of fourteen when he was bitten by a scorpion and lay in a swoon the entire night. When he awoke, he astonished the world with miracles.



Rebirth

Once upon a time, there were two friends, Ramu and Balu who lived in a village near a forest. Ramu was the religious sort, while the other was an atheist. They were passing by a temple when Ramu, the good boy said: "Let us go and offer our obeisance." The other boy, Balu, merely laughed and began going in the opposite direction. Ramu thereupon declared, "Well," "If you are not coming, I will go alone." Ramu had hardly gone a short distance when a thorn got embedded in his foot. Balu on the other hand, found a silver coin on his path.

When they met later, they spoke with each other and compared notes. The scoundrel suggested they go to a mystic and ask why Ramu had suffered in spite of his good intentions while Balu had been rewarded though he had disregarded God.

The mystic gave this answer, "We all get what is preordained. My clairvoyant sight tells me Ramu was to have died today of snake-bite but his good intention averted the catastrophe. Balu was to have found a pot

of gold but his evil detracted him from the bounty. The value of religion is to make life more bearable.”

Why Balu should have found a pot of gold while Ramu should have died on account of a snake bite, cannot be rationalized easily unless we put the blame on the fruits of a past life. The theory of reincarnation presupposes that the body changes from birth to birth but the soul and even the personality remain the same. Ultimately, it is the spirit or soul which is responsible for all our actions, for without it the body becomes an empty shell. If we do good in this life we will gain our reward in the next birth, says this theory; but if we do evil, it will be returned with evil, though it is difficult to see why in the above case, prayer is associated with good, while lack of it is considered evil. A person who does not believe in ostentatious demonstrations of piety or in pandering to the whims of money-grabbing ‘*pujaris*’ may well be justified in Balu’s approach, and yet be a good and kind man at heart. On the other hand, as is well known, one can pray and pray and still be a villain.

One reason for the flagellation resorted to by certain mystics or Yogis who lie on beds of nails or drive spikes through their cheeks and have their hair weighed down by heavy stones, may well be alleviating suffering in another sense. One *sanyasi* on the steps of Kasi Vishwanath Mandir in Varanasi confessed that this was, in fact, his aim. He was trying to go up the steps with his

limbs tied, which was quite a tedious ordeal. He kept slipping and the steps were wet and covered with dung. He had to climb the narrow stone steps leading to the temple lined with shops on either side selling costume jewellery and sarees. In the temple, there was ankle deep water sloshing round all the shrines, with cowdung and rotting garlands of discarded flowers floating in the water. I had no idea how he was going to accomplish the feat. But he said he would do it. He seemed to think the penance he underwent now would make God detract suffering from his next life—a sort of advance payment against suffering.

The *Upanishads* conclusively state the Hindu theory of reincarnation. Influenced by the Christian concept of heaven and hell, Western thinking was not inclined to accept this until interest in the phenomenon was whipped up by the society for Spiritual and Psychic Research founded by W.F. Barret, W.H.F. Myers and Henry Sidgwick in 1882. Though their initial experiments were disappointing because some of the mediums under survey were found to be tricksters, they culled sufficient information to make people take an interest in the subject of bodily survival after death. Myer's book, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, was one such objective treatise which, however, was more concerned with the other aspects of psychic phenomena and devoted only a page to

reincarnation.

However, with Ian Stevenson's "Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation" which appears in Volume 26 of the Proceedings of the American S.P.R., we have overwhelming evidence for the theory. These twenty cases have been specially picked from over a hundred others in the process of Investigation by the Society.

One such case concerns Shanti Devi, who was born in Delhi in 1926. As a child of seven, she seemed peculiarly preoccupied and on one occasion informed her parents that she had been born before in Mathura in the body of a woman called Ludgi. She spoke of a husband and three children. The family naturally dismissed her stories as childish fancies. But one day, a man came to Shanti Devi's house to see her father in connection with some business, and the seven year old child immediately addressed him by name in familiar tones and asked about the welfare of her husband and children. The man (who was Ludgi's husband's cousin) was indeed surprised—how the little girl knew so much about his entire family. Then she reiterated afresh her claims to a previous existence and the man confessed he indeed had a cousin who had lost his wife Ludgi. She had died while giving birth to their third child.

Sometime later, Ludgi's husband was brought to the house unexpectedly and though Shanti Devi was unaware of his arrival, she recognized him at once and

flew into his arms. Scientific investigations proceeded which took Shanti Devi to the scene of her previous birth. Experiments revealed that she recognized members of the family, knew all their names and was able to point out familiar landmarks and even direct the investigators to the house.

In another case, a boy named Ravi Shanker, born in July 1951, remembered a previous existence when he had been beheaded by an uncle motivated by the hunger for inheritance. He pointed out his murderer, though it is not known whether this sort of evidence held water in a court of law. Ravi Shanker even had a scar on his neck that indicated a knife attack and now appeared as a birth mark. This leads one to conjecture whether we carry the bruises of our previous existence into subsequent lives, albeit disguised as birth marks.

Stevenson has related such a case of a bandit called Comil in Turkey. He along with his brother, was on the run from the police with no hope of escape. When cornered, he shot his brother and then himself. His death was caused by a bullet which traversed through the chin and mouth and exited through the skull.

Mikail Fahriei, a farmer, was a distant relative. He dreamt that Comil had entered his house. Mikail's wife later gave birth to a son, Dahlam, who had two distinctive birth marks – one on the jaw and the other on his head, corresponding to the trajectory of the

bullet. At birth the baby's wound had bled a lot and required suturing and the area inside the mouth was always painful.

As a child he wanted to be called Comil, not Dahlam. Mikail had to give in eventually to Dahlam, who knew the name of his wife and sisters from his previous birth and could answer their numerous questions, even winning over the sceptical mother of Comil. He carried over phobias from his previous birth, a fear of policemen and a distaste for blood.

I met a researcher in Bangalore who was studying this fascinating subject. Dr. Satwant Pasricha and Dr. Vimoda Murthy were part of a team who had stumbled on startling data about reincarnation. Over a period of three years, eighty such cases of rebirth had come to light, mostly among children in India. The year was 1979.

The researchers had been specially trained in the brand of methodology of Professor Ian Stevenson of Virginia University in the U.S., whose investigation spearheaded the Spiritual and Psychic Research Movement in America. He had collected more than 2,500 reported cases world-wide and meticulously investigated them with the help of able assistants.

Pasricha and Murty found no less than eighty cases. When researches spotted a case, they first made contact with the family. Symptoms were then examined

in the person claiming to remember his or her past life. Details of family history, ancestry and medical records were scanned and recorded. Behaviour patterns not fitting in with the present personality were then singled out for further study.

Murty, who was then at the Department of Clinical Psychology at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences in Bangalore, spoke of a six-year old girl who was born into an orthodox Brahmin family but suddenly came up with a recipe for a non-vegetarian dish. The shocked parents thought she had picked it up from a neighbour. But it was not so. Later, the girl began cleaning lavatories like a grown-up woman would, covering her mouth with an improvised veil.

A little later, she affirmed she did not belong to her parents. She talked of a house near the railway line where she had actually lived. Researchers cross-checked her utterances and were able to actually locate the site of her "previous" life. She told them what her name had been and investigators discovered that a young woman of that name had been run over by a train some years ago.

But the investigation was not complete. Researchers had to unleash the child into the environment of her past life and observe her reactions. She not only remembered persons correctly by their names but also

Rebirth

revealed a memory for nooks where she had stored certain possessions, unknown to even the members of that family.

Another such case, involving a young girl was traced by Dr. Satwant Pasricha to Kota in Rajasthan. Shakuntala was the daughter of a silversmith named Prabhu Dayal Maheshwari. As a child of eight years, she was a playful kid and fell from a balcony and fractured her skull. They tried their best to save her but she succumbed to her injuries. A year later, some 360 kms away, a baby girl was born to a grain dealer, Shyam Khandelwar. The child had a large bleeding birth-mark on the right side of her head, at the exact spot where Shakuntala had sustained her injury. The bleeding eventually stopped and the wound healed. But as Sunita, the newborn grew up, she recalled her previous birth as Shakuntala in Kota and also how she had died after a fall from the balcony.

Pasricha went to Kota and made inquiries but could not find the house the girl had described. It was eventually found that the silversmith had shifted after his daughter's death. Sunita recognized all the members of Prabhu Dayal's family and even related events that had taken place when she was Shakuntala. Sunita finally ended up spending her time equally between both families. When she got married at the age of twenty, it was her father from her previous birth

who paid for the expenses for the lavish ceremony.

But the process of gathering information was a long and difficult one. Persons who could converse in the innumerable local dialects had to be recruited. Souls sometimes switched regions, languages and even religions. The collection of material and follow-up took Pasricha over three years and involved tracking through inhospitable terrain and uncommunicative, even hostile people.

Dr. Murthy said, "In the beginning, we advertised for people who had such memories of previous births, but there was a deluge of responses which made it difficult to sift the genuine from the fraudulent." Then they developed contacts who relayed information to them.

Most of the cases reported had one thing in common-violent deaths.

Out of the eighty cases, seventy-seven were culled for analysis. Though the age groups ranged from five years to thirty-five years, a majority of subjects were children. Some of these cases were segregated by Pasricha for her thesis, which concentrated on fully verified histories of children below fifteen years of age. Her guide for the project was Dr. Murthy.

Murthy elucidated, "Sometimes a reported case turned out an outright hoax. But it was found that adults were more inclined to lie than children. This was one reason why they preferred to make children

the subject of the thesis. Also, the lingering memory of a previous birth is seen to be stronger in the case of a child- and fades as he or she grows older.

On encountering such a child in their own family, some parents try to exorcise the 'devil' in the child, out of sheer frustration. They believed that the step was necessary as the child had been possessed. Flogging, burning and rotating them at a fast pace tied to a wheel are not uncommon primitive methods, even in this age, among illiterate people.

A surprising fact came to light in their investigations: all the cases were from the three states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. A reason could be that research had been going on for much longer in the north and they knew whom to contact when such a case surfaced.

The cycle of reincarnation apparently follows no fixed pattern. For instance, cases have been recorded from among Muslims and Christians who do not generally believe in the phenomena, though a majority are still from Hindu families. Sex is also interchangeable from one life to the next.

A man in this life could become a woman in the next. Desmond Shaw, author of "Re-incarnation for Every Man," says that he possessed a sympathy and understanding of the phenomenon of childbirth. For some time he lived in the maternity ward of a hospital

and he had memories of a distant "past" where he himself had endured childbirth. It gave him a sensitivity and understanding not given to many men.

In some people however, a sex change from birth to birth may bring problems. They may be uneasy in their new bodies and behave as if they do not belong to the sex they are born in. Women might have manly traits or be attracted to other women. Similarly, men may have effeminate characteristics and be attracted to other men.

Many doctors may explain away the maladjustment to over-production of the opposite sex hormone. But this does not explain why only some people have this problem. By this reasoning, lesbians and gays may blame their inclinations on reincarnation. But this remains only a surmise. I have not come across any gay or lesbian who recalled a previous birth!



Faith Healing

Medicos may not have discovered a cure for cancer, but faith-healers have apparently succeeded.

One such case of a young woman in her twenties, who had lung cancer, was brought to Sathya Sai Baba. She was so ill she could not walk. People carried her to Brindaban, the place at Whitefields where the miracle man stays. She was dumped under a tree for fear of infection.

Baba walked straight up to the girl who lay under the tree and asked her to raise her face. When she lifted her head with great effort, he said: "You are very sick but don't worry. You will be fine. In five days, you will come walking to this place." Her family departed with both the patient and *prasad*. Five days later, the girl actually came walking to "Brindaban", but this time Baba did not pay her any particular attention, treating her much like his other devotees. The case was followed up and the girl was well on her way to recovery.

Considering the huge crowd at Baba's place, it is considered an honour even if he utters a single word to the devotee.

I have spoken to people who have waited weeks and others who have waited even years hoping for a 'darshan'. There is no apparent order in his selection, no waiting list to be adhered to as in the case of Basheer Baba. Sathya Sai Baba will suddenly look at the devotee or walk up to him and say, "Come", and he knows that it is his turn. Those who are not so favoured continue waiting patiently for the day when they will be singled out.

In another case, Narayan Baba "cured" two children who had been deaf since birth. His method is simple. He seats both parents and child in front of him, then presses behind the child's ears. Then he puts his forefingers into the child's ears and presses hard, making the child scream in agony. Then he suddenly releases the pressure. He does this a couple of times. The screaming grows higher in pitch. Then he releases the child again. Both these cases had been examined by doctors and given up as hopeless as the eighth cranial nerve said to be responsible for hearing had been damaged. I wondered if the faith-healer, by putting a painful pressure on the dead nerve, was able to stimulate it back to life. Being adept at both *Hatha Yoga* and *Raj Yoga*, he undoubtedly knew where the nerve

was most accessible.

Narayan Baba gave materialised *vibhuti* to the parents of the deaf children. The *vibhuti* was to be added to water everyday—morning and evening and the water skimmed and put into both ears. They were asked to come back after a week.

One child, the son of a doctor, was a year old. The other, the daughter of a corporal in the Air Force was about five years of age. After fifteen days of this treatment, the corporal reported his daughter could hear aircraft taking off and landing. Thereafter, the condition was static. The girl could hear but did not have completely normal hearing.

In the other case, the effect was slower and for almost three weeks there was not even a glimmer of improvement. A therapist had examined the child soon after its first birthday, when it had been discovered it was not responding to sound. He had declared that one ear was quite hopeless but the other seemed to have a little hearing. After three weeks of Narayan Baba's medicine, the child began to show some signs of hearing. If the transistor was on, it went towards it. The therapist who paid a routine visit declared, "This is strange; the child seems to hear quite a lot." The parents, Dr and Mrs Ghosh then paid a visit to a speciality hospital in Mysore and they gave the child a hearing aid. Even here, I noticed that the cure was not

complete, because a hearing device was considered necessary. But it was certainly better than being stone-deaf.

I have personally followed up both the above cases and vouch for the veracity of the claims.

Narayan Baba is also reputed to have removed stones from kidneys and gall bladders of afflicted men with just a superficial touch. Astonished doctors have found these phenomena inexplicable. After removing the stones, he often places them in the patient's hand for a closer scrutiny. X-rays reveal that there are no stones in the organs. They disappear without a trace. I read press clippings of foreign newspapers acknowledging these miracles and also giving photographs.

In Hyderabad, he removed stones from the gall bladder of a patient in the presence of the IGP, Shri Kalyan Rao, Shri Rangaiah Naidu, the Deputy Commissioner of Police and some Ministers.

Kalika Prasad Singh has also cured many people of generally incurable conditions like paralysis and congenital blindness. Almost all these faith healers have some power that we cannot explain.

What explanation can one give for faith-healing? Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi was reputed to take upon himself the afflictions of his devotees and so relieve them of pain and suffering. He would endure the torture himself because of his yogic discipline and supernormal powers.

Basher Baba, too, is said to take on the sufferings of others in a similar manner.

In black magic, there is a theory that one can get rid of certain illnesses by wishing them onto others. Some rice and a couple of limes are first placed in front of the sick child and chanted over. Then they are wrapped up in a piece of cloth or leaves, and kept by the roadside. It is believed that the person who comes in contact with the bewitched objects in any way will absorb the disease.

One day, I was walking along the road with a friend, Suniti, when she said, "Wait. Don't go further. Let us cross the road." When I protested, she glanced fearfully at a group of objects which had been tied in a rag. Some rice was spilling out. "It's black magic," she said. "If you step on that bundle, you will fall sick." I did not believe her.

"Why are you laughing?" she said. "Black magic works." Just then a dog came and ate that rice. In a few minutes, it began to retch and contort its face. My friend pointed at it. However, I did not agree with her. "The food might have been stale", I reasoned. "It may have been lying by the roadside for many days and bacterial growth in rotting food may have been the culprit." But, my friend was not convinced.

Then, I heard of another instance. It was my friend Tehmi who told me about it. It had happened to her.

She is quite level-headed and is not easily swayed by the supernatural. One day, she discovered her servant feeding something in a spoon to her young daughter. She asked the woman what she was feeding the child but the servant did not reply and tried to hide the spoon. Later, Tehmi discovered bunches of hair and weird threads-in fact, all the signs of black magic. When apprehended, the servant confessed she had been indulging in black magic. The servant's husband had left her and had taken away their only child, a daughter. She was trying to get her back by working magic on Tehmi's daughter. If this child went, her own would come back. The woman cried and promised never to do it again but Tehmi sacked her. Said Tehmi, "I had been wondering for days on end why my daughter was losing her appetite and wasting away. Now I know why."

On the other hand, faith-healing is different. It is a force which works miracles. One healer said: "It is nothing but a conscious desire for the patient to be healed. Of course, every patient will have that desire but it does not help cure him. If somebody else also has the desire, it helps. For instance, if a wife is equally eager for a husband's recovery, he pulls through faster. It is doubled desire. If the well-wisher is a sage, this strength is infinitely greater. The mystic directs his concentration to his personal godhead or the object of

his meditation. It could be the Divine Astral or Shiva or *Ishvara* – and the same force is redirected outwards but doubly magnified for the patients to receive. It is like holding up a mirror to reflect the sun. The blinding flashes from the mirror can dazzle the eyes. It is this strength on the rebound that cures him.

Kalika Prasad has another explanation; he said; “I transpose my aura on the person I’m curing. His own aura combined with mine, help effect a cure. As two heads are better than one, so two auras are better than one.”

He narrated an example of this.

One Mr Sharma was employed in the All-India Radio news service. “Once,” said Kalika Prasad, “Sharma’s wife was seriously ill and was admitted to Willingdon Hospital in Delhi. I went to see her. She lay on her death bed. The doctors had given up hope. I looked at the lady and said: “You will not die now.” Then I came away.

The next day, the husband came running to me. He said, “My wife is out of danger. She is to be discharged. The miraculous has happened. Thank you for coming last night. But who was the old sadhu with you?”

I was surprised because I had not gone to the hospital at night; in fact, I had been peacefully asleep at home. Then, Sharma described his experience. “I was dozing in a chair by my wife’s bedside when I saw

you come in with an old sage. The two of you went thrice round my wife's bed. I wanted to talk to you but before I could say anything, the two of you had gone out through the door."

I said, "It was not me but my astral double that you saw. Take your wife home; she will be fine. But I will send some *Shakti* with her. It will keep her alive." The man agreed and for a month this '*shakti*' remained at Sharma's house. It would only come at night when Kalika Prasad slept, and hover over the house like a presence, generating a strength like some huge battery charger.

One day, some inmates of the house happened to wake up at night. They saw the disembodied form floating about. They were terrified and locked themselves in the store room. The next day, Sharmaji pleaded with me to remove the *shakti* because the family members were scared. I did so and the very next day, the wife died."

Faith healing really tests the faith. A couple of cases I encountered exhibited this truth. One such case was that of Paravati Mahadevan. She was a radio singer from Bangalore who had begun to suffer from a sore throat. The sore throat grew progressively worse. Somebody advised her to go to Sathya Sai Baba but she told them she had no faith in him. However, the doctors

were unable to do anything and her music was suffering. As a last resort, she decided to go to “Brindaban”, where Sathya Sai Baba was staying at that time.

He told her to do deep breathing exercises every morning-preferably in the open and also swallow some *vibhuti* each day. She followed his instructions and found to her dismay that the sore throat got worse than before. At times, she was gripped by a severe nausea; at other times she retched up a substance like bile. She felt so weak she almost fainted doing those breathing exercises.

When she could stand it no longer, she went back to the guru and said. “What is this you have given me? I am worse than before.”

But he only smiled and said: “Continue with it. It will seem to do you harm but it is doing you good.” Sure enough, her condition began to steadily improve till her voice was even more melodious than before. There was another manifestation in her of the Baba’s power. She suddenly felt a hidden inspiration well up within her.

One day, she had a dream in which some words came to her. They seemed meaningless at that time and sounded strange. She tried to sleep but the words kept coming—so many of them, without a break in the chain. She got up at once and jotted them down in the Roman alphabet. She looked at them but they made no sense.

In the morning, she asked someone: "Do you know what this means?" And she read out what she had written.

"Yes," was the reply. "It is Telugu lyric." Parvati was amazed. She had never studied Telegu in her life; she knew only Tamil and Malayalam. She could make out one thing in the verse though. There was the word 'Sai' at the end. She concluded that this was in some way connected with Sathya Sai Baba.

When he saw her, he said: "Why don't you sing *bhajans* here?" She readily agreed and joined the other bhajan singers who had been won over by the great sage.

At the ashram, there is a select group of these singers, all chosen by their Guru. They all dress alike, wearing the same type of saree. There are men too, playing some instrument or the other and singing devotional songs. But the miracle of Parvati Mahadevan continues. More recently she has been bursting into high-flown Sanskrit and Hindi lyrics over which she had never had any mastery.

Not all tales of faith healing have happy endings. My mother-in-law who has had some sores on her foot for the past few years, did not improve at all. And Nirmal Sabhiki, a lady from Sanjiva Reddy Nagar who went to the faith healer, had no relief at all from her intense pain. Her husband said, "The man has no super powers.

The materialisation of *vibhuti* is probably just some sleight of hand. What is more, he keeps press clippings in an album. A man who does that is suspect. If he were really a mystic, why would he hanker after material things like publicity?"

At the Yoga Research Institute, I met a woman doing exercises. She had skin lesions all over her body.

"Don't go to faith healers," she said. "There are no miracles. For something to be really beneficial, one must try things oneself. Yoga is scientific, they say. So, I am trying it. In a miracle at the hands of a faith healer, you do nothing."

I thought of the saying—easy come, easy goes.

"I did go to a faith healer, though," she said. "All traces of my lesions went and I was perfectly fit for a year but they came back again at the end of that period."

Thaumaturgic power however, can accomplish a lot of things, as is shown by experiments not only with people but also with animals and plants. In Canada, a scientist named Bernard tried to study the germination of plants and the healing of wounds in mice under laboratory conditions. He took barley seeds and watered them with ordinary water. In another experiment, he watered the seeds with water that had been specially influenced by a faith healer through psychokinesis or as our mystics would put it—water over which

some *mantra* had been uttered. Both sets of seeds were sown and watered simultaneously, but showed marked differences. The “*mantra*-treated” water helped one plant grow at an abnormal rate while the ordinarily watered plant grew more slowly. Similarly, the wounds in mice healed more rapidly when touched by the faith healer.

An American clergyman-cum-chemist by the name of Franklin Loehr pioneered laboratory research on the power of prayer. He says that power, as real as electricity or sunlight, can be generated by prayer. He experimented with the effect of prayer on plants. Two identical sets of seeds were planted simultaneously. All controls such as sunlight, soil and water were kept constant; the only difference was that one set of seeds was prayed over. At the end of a certain period, both sets of plants were compared to ascertain their rates of growth. After a series of such experiments, he analysed the data. It showed that prayer had the strange power to hasten the rate of growth in plants. The reverse was also tried out and some plants were prayed over with the purpose of negating their growth. Even this was found to work. This finding opens up tremendous possibilities in the field of blessing and cursing. It means that mere thoughts can hinder or enhance physical symptoms in a positive way.

When I mentioned this to Dr Hanumanth Rao of

the Yogic Institute, he said: "Faith is like maternal love. I have heard of two sick infants with severe infection. In one case, the child was not allowed any contact with its mother. In the other, the mother could see her child, but through a glass pane. The one whose mother came and watched her baby, albeit through glass, got faster results than the other one."

Maternal love is as strong as faith. It can pass through anything, even walls, through which you cannot see but only hear. Babies at least, you might say, sense or understand. But what of plants and animals who do not have the same attachment for a faith healer as a mother has for her child?

Presumably, plants and animals cannot feel, see or hear, as we can with our five senses. But do they have a sixth sense? Do mice feel the vibrations through some hidden source or sense? None of these questions can really be answered unless man learns, as he has learnt other things, how to understand the speech of animals. I heard of a case where *vibhuti* intended for one person was passed on to another and then another, till it reached a city many thousand miles away across the sea. It still affected a cure, though the third person had not seen the faith-healer at all. This discounts the explanation of any vibrations, unless these vibrations can be transmitted through something as inanimate as ash.

Of course faith healers confess that not all cases can be cured. If your life line is short, you are bound to die. Also if your *karma* merits that you suffer, you will suffer. "When I see such a case," said Narayan Baba, "I do not even touch it." Sathya Sai Baba has been known to ignore certain people for days on end even if they come and stand in front of him and touch his feet to draw attention to themselves. Also, mystics have their share of failures in faith-healing, as do doctors in their particular sphere. And if things go wrong, there is the refuge of the fatalistic: It was destined to happen."

The lady who had suffered from skin lesions and been cured for a year only to suffer a relapse, told me a frightening thing.

"Faith-healing may be a fact," she said, "But it doesn't last. I was completely cured but look at me now." Her body was full of festering sores. "No faith healer can do any thing for me again. It is irreversible."

If this is true, it opens up the frightening prospect of blindness and deafness reverting to the old state, like that portrayed in the beautiful film 'Charlie,' where a mental retardate is turned overnight into a brilliant man; falls in love, only to learn he will revert to the old state when the result of the experiment wears off. His only solution is to walk out of his lady love's life in a final, desperate renunciation.

Unless follow-up medical studies are conducted in

faith-healed people, it will not be possible to say whether the cure is temporary or permanent. One person I met, seemed to think relapsed cases could be treated with a fresh dose of divine energy from the mystic, provided the same faith healer was available. Apparently, the disease had some loyalty to the particular mystic under whose sway it had come. Others said they did not mind even if their child had hearing restored only for a year. It could be considered a boon, because in that short time he could be taught how to speak, which would have been doubly difficult if he had never heard at all.

In healing of this sort, it would be short-sighted to discount the power of the patient's mind. It was Feroze Parakh of Secunderabad, an affluent businessman who related to me the strange case of Jassobhoy. He had known the lady and met her during both stages of her "illness". She was a very fussy old woman who suffered from arthritis. She was also unable to stand strong light. In the beginning, it was only sunlight that was offensive. Later, even an unshaded electric bulb used to annoy her. This was not just fastidiousness because it was noticed if she encountered light, her eyes would water and turn red. Towards the end, her condition got so bad that dark paper had to be wrapped around all bulbs in the house or at least in the room she occupied.

Then, suddenly, she lost her mind. She turned so

senile that she reverted to the understanding of a seven year-old. When this happened, there was a remarkable transformation in her physical condition. Parakh told me that every trace of her former complaints disappeared. She did not complain of pain in the joints any more. In fact, she could on occasion run down several flights of stairs and even skip with all the exuberance of a child. Her eyes showed such extraordinary improvement that she could even stand bright sunlight without sunglasses.

In another case, a childless woman, in her intense desire for offspring, simulated the exact symptoms of pregnancy. She had nausea and other accompanying discomforts and astonishingly, these persisted even when the pregnancy test turned out to be negative. Her husband was told that his wife was not pregnant. In the beginning, he believed this but when his wife's stomach started bloating with the passage of the months, he had second thoughts and came back to the same gynaecologist. Again, the test was negative. Puzzled doctors took X-rays suspecting a tumour but saw nothing. When the 'pregnancy' was well-advanced, the gynaecologist called the couple to his consulting room one day and carried out a test. He asked the husband to sit down. He then gave the wife a sleep-inducing drug. Her eyes began to feel heavy and she lay down on the couch. Soon, she was fast asleep. An astonishing thing

happened at this juncture. Her stomach began to deflate like a balloon, till it reached its normal level. The astounded husband watched the process still further, when the effects of the drug started wearing off. By the time his wife woke up, her stomach was back to its bloated size. The doctor had demonstrated convincingly to the husband that the "symptoms" were all in the mind. When the effect of the mind was minimised even physical manifestations of sickness could disappear without a trace. In the above cases, the power of the mind was neutralised by natural causes in the case of the old lady and by drugs in the case of the "pregnant" one.

The same thing could conceivably happen when a patient "abandoned" himself to a faith-healer, with complete trust, thus playing down his own will. This could also explain why saints with "thaumaturgic power" advised cure-seekers to give up their egoism and surrender to the divine force which exemplifies the vastness of the Creator and the minuteness of man.

Though this explains some cases, it excludes the ones where animals and plants are involved, unless we can credit these with "sensing" in a different way wherein they do not have to play down their egos and be self-negating.

The temporary nature of a cure could be then blamed on a patient's self-assertive tendencies. If the symptoms

crept back, it meant the mind was growing powerful again and needed to be put through the crucible of negation to minimise its effect. Hence, another visit to the faith-healer is deemed necessary. This suggests there is some inverse ratio of balance between the body and the mind. The more powerful the mind, the more prone the body to physical illness, while a diseased, retarded or senile man will hardly ever succumb to long standing, serious physical ailments. A study of mental institutions will reveal that the inmates seldom fall sick in the "physical" sense. Nor do inmates of *ashrams*, who have wiped out all trace of their individuality by self-surrender which gives peace of mind and minimised mental activity.

When I stated my theory to a faith healer, he said: "I won't say you are talking nonsense but you are being premature in your judgement. Can you explain, with this theory, how the dead can be brought back to life?"

He confessed he had not been able to bring a single dead body back to life but he had heard of men being resurrected thus. So had I.

Paul Brunton in his book, *A Search in Secret India*, speaks of a Yogi in Benares who brought a dead sparrow back to life by focusing the sun's rays through a magnifying glass onto its still form and staring hard at it. Sri Raghavendra Swami of Mantralaya, who was Basheer Baba's first mentor, is credited with bringing

back to life the dead child of Venkat Desai who stayed near Gadag. During some festive celebrations at Venkat Desai's house, his child accidentally fell into a vat of mango juice and was drowned. Raghavendra Swami, it is said, immediately ordered the child to be laid before him, sprinkled some holy water on the corpse and restored it to life. His method, whatever it was, worked. Artificial respiration, too, may bring about the same result.

Brunton states that in the case of the sparrow, the effect lasted only for a short while. The sparrow flew round a couple of times, then fluttered and fell to the ground, quite dead.

The sage shook his head. "I still think you're being premature." he said. "It is true a cure is sometimes temporary but that happens if the healer is not well-integrated within himself. If he is spiritually sound, this is not likely.

The trouble is, how does one recognise a well-integrated faith healer?



The Third Eye

Is there a third eye?
This is a very valid question posed by those pursuing the study of Indian mythology and Indian spiritualism.

Satyanand, a lesser known mystic, claimed that indeed, there was one. Only people had become so absorbed in crass materialism, that they had lost the capacity to use it. But it was there all right and it was the privilege of a few who still retained their six senses, to call it into use for the benefit of those who could not use their three eyes.

“Let me see it,” I said.

“You can’t see it,” he said, “It has been closed for ever.”

“Then how do you say there is a third eye?”

I could see that he was getting annoyed but was too much of a mystic to show it. This is not to suggest I have not come across *sanyasis* with foul tempers. In fact, there was an ascetic traveling to Delhi by the Frontier Mail and I recall he got down at a wayside station and slapped a man who had made some offensive remark

about "religious nuts". The man was not one of those who believed in turning the other cheek and let the holy man have it with wild punches and the foulest of abuses, till a policeman intervened.

Yogic discipline, however, is generally associated with passivity of the non-violent sort and there is an apocryphal story about the sage, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who came in contact with two rogues. The rogues abused him foully, to which the pious man made no answer but merely smiled. Then they slapped him. As soon as they touched him a strange thing happened. The violence of the antagonists was absorbed into the sage's body and it turned black, while the two offensive men became as meek as mice.

A psychologist would undoubtedly say that the two bandits had merely given vent to their resentment and hence felt calm. But what of the sage himself? Apparently, the theory is that strong emotions are taboo for ascetics. Moderation in everything is the rule. But this suppression of feelings and actions, far from going underground and causing mental tension and complex neurosis, is miraculously channelised into a source of wonder-working energy.

Coming back to the mystic with the third eye, let us look for proof of this phenomenon.

"I see with my third eye," he said, "that you do not believe me." Since I had already voiced my scepticism at the start, I let this pass.

“Let us try an experiment,” he said. “Sit down.”

Imagining he was going to give proof of his third eye by foretelling my future, I sat down.

“Close your eyes,” he said.

“Why?”

“We will find your third eye for you.”

It was weird. In Lobsang Rampa’s book, “The Third Eye”, there is a description of an operation performed on a Tibetan Lama to open this eye. An opening is made in the centre of the forehead and another dimension is opened up, which is distinct from the three dimensions we see with normal vision. The mystic is then able to see, not only what is before him in the physical sense, but also what is apparently hidden away within the mind of man. He can go backward and forward in time too and see situations that were enacted aeons ago as well as events still to come.

When I told Satyanand this, he laughed and said: “It is all bogus. Anyone who says a surgical operation is necessary to reveal the third eye is talking a lot of rubbish. This eye does not look outside as in the case of the other two eyes; in fact, it is used for looking within. It is this eye that is used in meditation. To focus it, you have to close the other two eyes which delay the process with their physical distractions.”

This idea is similar to the “Faculty X” which Colin Wilson talks about in his book “The Occult”.

The Third Eye

He says: "Man's consciousness is as powerful as a microscope. It can grasp and analyse experience in a way no animal can achieve. But microscopic vision is narrow vision. We need to develop another kind of consciousness that is the equivalent of the telescope. This is Faculty X. And the paradox is that we already possess it to a large degree, but are unconscious of possessing it. It lies at the heart of all so-called occult experience."

Satyanand looked at me. "You're scared," he said. He was right. Come what may, I did not want to turn into a mystic in the course of writing this book. In fact, Kalika Prasad had predicted that I would renounce the world but had not specified when. He had seen through his clairvoyance that I would come in contact with a bald, pot-bellied old man who would greatly influence my spiritual life. My fears were indeed, well-founded because this mystic boasted all these traits.

Once again, he asked me to close my eyes.

"It is not dangerous," he consoled me. "In a minute or two, you can open them again." I closed my eye and sat quite still. Presently, I felt a ticklish sensation between my eye-brows. It was not caused by touch. I felt it off and on at intervals of two minutes. Then it went away. Presently, Satyanand asked me to open my eyes. I did. In his hand, he had a rod, rather like a water diviner's rod. He said it was an ordinary object and not a magic one.

“You had the sensation,” he said, “even though I did not bring the rod in direct contact with your forehead. All I did was move it about an inch away from your third eye. The sensation you felt was just the long dead eye, reacting feebly to the stimulus. You can go home and try this experiment on anybody. With their eyes fully closed they will be able to say when you are waving the rod between the eye-brows and when you are holding it away.”

I have tried it many times since and found it worked even on others. Though I must confess I have not had a single manifestation of clairvoyant vision. The art, I was told by Narayan Baba, has to be developed painstakingly through meditation.

In this context, it will be pertinent to quote an instance from the childhood of Sri Basheer Baba, which M.S. Ramakrishna mentions in the booklet brought out on the saint's thirty-first birthday.

“A gradual flowering of spiritual potentialities in the boy did not however go unnoticed by the school mates as well as others in various walks of life in society. On one occasion, he could predict with accuracy, the questions that were to appear in the ensuing examination and this created a big sensation in the school.

One day, the headmaster was badly in need of a certain amount of money. The boy who observed him in that desperate and despondent mood, offered to help him out of the predicament. The boy (Basheer Baba)

asked him to give a chit of introduction stating that he (Basheer) was staying at his house. This was immediately complied with. However, the Headmaster asked Baba not to bring any loan which he would not be able to repay. The boy consented to the condition and along with the chit of introduction left for Pulivendla. In a short while, he returned with the exact amount of money needed by his guardian. The Headmaster could not believe his eyes. Afterwards, the Baba revealed that the money was brought from a relative of the headmaster living in Pulivendla. A long, long while ago, the headmaster had given a loan to the said relative and after a passage of time, both the parties had forgotten wholly about the episode.”

Basheer Baba had somehow ferreted out the fact with his uncanny perception.

In another instance, Kalika Prasad was involved. “I felt ill at ease that morning,” he said. “And this was not a physical illness, mind you. I only had some premonition of calamity. I had to drive to work but I did not feel like taking out the scooter. Just then, a friend drove past. He asked me what I was doing at home and I told him I wanted to go to work but my feelings were all black. He laughed at me and said: “All right soothsayer! Get on the pinion of my bike. I’ll take you.” As I stood there in the sun, I had a strange vision. The scooter had fallen on its side and lay precariously in a ditch. I told my friend: “Look, hold your scooter. It’s falling on its

side.” But the friend laughed some more and said, “Falling? No, no! It’s perfectly fine. In fact, it is standing quite upright.”

Anyway, I got on to the pinion and we set out. We had hardly gone half a kilometer, when a cyclist darted out of a bylane. My friend swerved to avoid the fellow and we both went sprawling in the ditch. I had suffered a grievous blow in the stomach and had to be hospitalised but I was conscious enough to note that his scooter was lying on its side at exactly the same angle I had seen in my vision.”

Lord Shiva is the God with the third eye. He was the God of Destruction (of evil) in the Hindu Trinity and when he was angry, it is believed, he opened his third eye and reduced his adversaries to ashes. In human beings, the third eye is present but they can never open it. It is meant for looking within. It is the eye which gives some men, what scientists call ESP or extra sensory perception and the surprising thing is they do not have to be either a mystic or a magician to experience its working. In the business of everyday life, one encounters many people whose hunches are generally right. Among the latter, are men who seem to have an uncanny knack for winning at cards by sheer guess-work or telling which horse will win a race. How does one explain this?

Enthusiasts of the new science, “parapsychology” explain this by saying that thoughts make waves in the

psychic ether and these are picked up by sensitive individuals. If, for instance a mother is over-concerned on behalf of the child, the child will sense the anxiety and generally have a fall. This explains telepathy perhaps, but what of clairvoyance that concerns the future?

According to esoteric lore, the universe is made up of not four elements, but five. The first four are air, water, fire and earth and the fifth is the Akashic Principle. The Akashic Principle is supposed to be a record of all that has ever happened and will happen in the universe. Everything that is uttered or enacted is said to leave its mark here and clairvoyants can consult this and predict events in the far future or delve back into the past and dig up long lost memories. Only, there is no compulsive and deliberated act. It is more a process of evoking consciousness. It is the same process as delving into one's own memory. It sometimes happens that you forget a particular name. It is there in your mind but you somehow cannot recall it just then. All attempts to pin it down end in failure. Then you give up the effort and just sit passively and your mind throws it up for you of its own accord. The subconscious mind performs this action. In clairvoyance too, it is the subconscious that is active while the conscious is minimised.

When asked why only some people had this knack, Satyanand explained that it was all the result of one's

"*karma*". Those who have performed good deeds in their past life, acquired this faculty in the present one. I did not think so. Almost all the persons whom I had encountered and who possessed this clairvoyant faculty had one trait in common: their dissociation from the subjective world. They had all cultivated a habit of introspection which detached them for short intervals from their surroundings and all of them without exception were introverts. A man's psychological make-up then, was responsible for this unique hypersensitiveness to coming events.

Varying negative moods are indicators of this tendency of dark shadows of the future to cast their influence on the immediate present. For instance, if you were not clairvoyant, you would perhaps blame a particular black mood on the weather or "getting up from the wrong side of the bed" or any one of numerous other silly causes, but though things go wrong from start of day to finish, you would not attribute your depression to impending disappointments. Understandably so, because though your aerial picked up the gloom of things to come, you would not be in a position to ascertain what the events were. Clairvoyance is a capacity which goes one stage further than foreboding. Yet it falls short of absolute certainty, though there are some whose antennae are so sensitive that they are sure a thing is going to happen.

The third eye can be roused from its slumber by

hypnosis, trance states and even drugs. But, it is dangerous to do so. In the trance state, it is possible to become possessed by all kinds of spirits who speak through you. Satyanand had seen many people go into trances. Once, in a temple in a village, a young girl had gone into a trance. The ringing of the bells, the eerie blowing of the conch at dusk, the clashing of the cymbals and the monotonous drone of the voices singing *bhajans* made the young girl an easy medium. The smoke from the fire that the priests had lit for the puja, added to the effect. She said she was the goddess Durga. She talked a lot and laughed and cried and was quite hysterical. People touched her feet. The girl uttered prophecies in that state.

It was found later that what she had uttered in the name of prophecies were not prophecies at all, but wishful thinking. The girl turned mad later because what had entered her was not the spirit of a goddess at all but some evil ghost. This was exorcised in the primitive way by burning and flagellation but it did not work. I heard later that her family had taken her to a mental hospital somewhere in the north and admitted her there.

Narayan Baba of Sanjiva Reddy Nagar is a clairvoyant who is also credited with miraculous powers of healing. When you go to him for consultation, he makes you sit on the ground in front of him. He sits before a framed photograph of his guru, Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi.

There are images of gods and goddesses placed round the base of the framed picture which is festooned with flowers. There is an overpowering smell of incense. Incense, I was told, is one of the evocators of clairvoyant images. On occasions, it can be used as a trigger to set off a chain of thought.

Narayan's method of prophesying is not involved. He looks at the questioner as the query is asked, then just turns back to stare in concentration at the photograph. His expression when he does this is most calm and detached, hands folded together in his lap. It is almost as if he is looking at a cinema screen. Then he turns back and conveys to the person exactly what he has seen. Many people have vouched for the accuracy of his predictions and he has personal letters from admirers to prove it.

I saw him rattle off prophecies to a dozen people at least but since they spoke in Telegu, it was impossible to make out what they were saying. In the couple of instances when he spoke in Hindi, he did not prophesy but delved into the past and gave characteristics of absent children.

A war widow of my acquaintance asked him for particulars about her husband because a couple of astrologers had told her he had escaped detection and was still alive in Pakistan. He had been shot down with his aircraft over Pakistan and declared dead by the Red Cross. Narayan Baba clarified he had not died at that

time. He had been shot two or three months later in a POW camp, where he had been killed with fifteen others who had refused to betray military secrets.

In another case, he looked at a lady named Mrs. Bannerjee who had come to consult him about her son. She had come alone, yet Narayan Baba said to her: "Your son has a large mole somewhere along the left side of the back." The lady confessed it was true and was amazed how the sage had divined it as this was her very first visit.

He told a man even before the latter could ask a single question: "You are fighting a law suit and it will be resolved in March in your favour."

"Baba" I asked him later, "How do you know what is going to happen?"

"I don't know," he said. "But Guru Sai Baba of Shirdi tells me."

"You stare at the glass frame of his photograph," I queried, "do you see what is going to happen as one sees pictures on a cinema screen?"

"No," he replied. "I just see my Guru and he tells me what reply to give... He speaks to me but you cannot hear it."

This falls into the category of clairaudience or specially perceptive hearing. So, apparently in addition to the third eye, there is a third ear which we have lost to antiquity.

Tales of Hindu mythology frequently mention the

sudden manifestation of heavenly voices which proclaimed joyful tidings or sad news. It was a story-telling device used by the writers of our ancient epics to circumvent some inconvenient portion of the narrative where the hero or heroine had to be informed about happenings at some other place, without the intervention of another party. Today's fortunate scribes can resort to letters, telegrams, telephone conversations, radios and television in the course of their stories. Their forefathers in the literary profession had to rely on heavenly proclamations.

Narayan Baba hears Guru speak. Since Sai Baba of Shirdi has already attained *samadhi*, it is possible for his astral body to take possession of Narayan Baba and speak through him. If the latter were in a trance state he could be called a spiritual medium but Narayan Baba, when he gives his predictions, is perfectly aware of his surroundings. In fact, he speaks about some repairs that have to be done on his car, gives orders for his black Alsation to be fed and rises to answer the telephone.

Most of the sooth-sayers I met, agreed that this was in fact the safest way to give prophecies. Of course there were several systems like astrology, palmistry and numerology but an authority on any of these, if he was gifted with clairvoyance as well, would make remarkably accurate prophecies.

Narayan Baba confessed he knew none of these

methods. In fact he had never been to school. He worked by instinct. He did not hold trances. He held that they were dangerous.

Instinct is a well-chosen word. It will be worthwhile in this connection to mention an experiment conducted on mice, by R. Chauvin, a scientist at Sorbonne in France. He wanted to test if animals really possessed ESP. The mice were placed in a cage, bifurcated by a partition which was low enough for them to jump over. The bottom halves of both cages were equipped with metal wires which were partially electrified to give a mild shock. It was possible to adjust the wires so that only those in a particular section of the cage received the shock. The order was a very random one. The experiment revealed that the mice could sense instinctively which part was electrically charged and which was safe, even though care was taken to dodge around with the manoeuvres. Similar experiments in both the U.S. and Holland yielded the same results.

In the same way, the neanderthal caveman who had inherited this instinct from animals in whom it was very keen, may have used it in his danger-filled life. With it, he could uncannily know when a storm was brewing; where the wild beasts lurked; which herbs and berries to eat and which to avoid. As his brain developed, he became wiser and this instinct or sixth sense was sullied over by a superior intelligence which did not believe anything unless it was conveyed to him

by his five senses. Gradually, in the course of evolution, man began to pay attention to microscopic detail and lost the capacity to look at things in a withdrawn manner. He was so busy analyzing the world around him that he lost that inner perception the savage had possessed. Thence, came the scientist ever hankering after proof.

In this context, it is interesting to mention a primitive custom thought to be prevalent among the Santals, a tribe in India. It is a well-known fact that the stump of an amputated limb constantly shrinks and has to be frequently adjusted to the artificial limb. The scientific process for an amputation too, is elaborate and tedious. Flaps of skin have to be left hanging so that afterwards they can be folded over and stitched. According to hearsay, the Santals have a shortcut method. This consists of plunging the stump in hot oil to which some herbs have been added. Initially there is pain, but the resultant stump is smooth and even, without a useless fold anywhere and what is more, it never shrinks. If this is true, it is certainly worth investigating the method, which just shows that instinct can sometimes achieve a result which science often stumbles upon after years of myopic struggle.

I asked Kalika Prasad his method of clairvoyance and he said, "I will not pretend that I see Bhairav Baghwan in a vision. I don't know what other clairvoyants see or don't see. I see nothing." Once a person came to me

and touched my feet while I was prophesying. I moved back and asked him, "Why are you touching my feet? I am not God." Thereupon he said, "I am not touching your feet. I am honouring Bhairav Bhagwan who is standing behind you." I turned to look but saw no one there.

As to how he made these predictions, he said he got the feeling that it was not he who spoke at all. It was God speaking through him. When a session is on, Kalika Prasad closes his eyes and makes vague passes in thin air with his hands. Anyone who knows his methods is aware he is not to be interrupted when he is in this mood.

On the first occasion when I visited him, I did not know this and asked him a question midway, as one would do in a normal interview. He stopped speaking abruptly and then looked at me vaguely as if he had not heard the questions. When I repeated it he said: "The mood has gone." Then he walked out of the room. It was then I realised that in such evocative moods, he was not to be interrupted. When I asked him if it was a trance, he said: "No. But afterwards, I sometimes do not remember what I have said." As he takes both liquor and *paan* with *zarda* during these sessions, this memory lapse could be attributed to the effect of intoxicants which are known to blank out certain portions of experience. For instance, a man who goes on a binge remembers little of his utterances at a

party the night before. Also, he would probably talk nonsense. Kalika Prasad talks sense. In fact, he makes dreadfully accurate prophecies. One at least in my case has already come true.

There is a great deal of similarity between a clairvoyant and a writer. Both use almost similar methods to evoke images. For instance, it is in a completely passive state of mind that the flood of words is fastest. You feel them coming with such spontaneity, that when you read them afterwards, you feel it is not you but someone else who has done the writing.

A writer-friend who is abroad now, once told me that he had a theory regarding this phenomenon. One day in the coffee shop, he expounded it. He said that it was quite clear that writers were specially receptive individuals and their works were nothing but transcriptions of words they had picked up from the psychic ether and which had been left there by long dead, creative souls much greater than them. The works of past, present and future authors then, were nothing but frenzied outpourings of these thoughts which were being churned out, generation after generation, by the same few souls through the agency of different and distinct bodies.

“This explains the reason why you find almost similar ideas in two widely separated authors though each is often ignorant of the existence of the other’s book. It is the root of the saying: “Great minds think alike.” The

truth is they don't think alike. It is the same mind thinking or writing through two different people."

If this is true, then it makes writers nothing more than powerful spiritual mediums. Quite a comedown I should say.

This theory applied quite well to the case of Parvati Mahadevan, the singer from Bangalore who under Sathya Sai Baba's influence, began to burst forth into lyrics, couched in at least three or four languages that she had never studied. This also accounts for many authors particularly among the stalwarts of English Literature who had probably never been to school, but for some reason had burst into exceptionally good prose.

In Mumbai, there is an old lady who writes. If you ask her educational details, she says, "Not beyond the second grade." She got married at the age of seven years and that was the end of her education. At fifty-five years of age, she suddenly developed the urge to write and in ten short years has become a prolific writer in both Marathi and Konkani. Her plays have been staged throughout the state. They have also been aired over the radio. She has scripted talks over the All-India Radio, too. Her name is Mitrabai Kabad.

This theory then certainly holds water, though if it were suggested that a writer writes by instinct, it would definitely draw a laugh.

People would not however, laugh at clairvoyance via

instinct. That is believable but not the process of writing. This is so because for some inexplicable reason, writers are considered intelligent. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Both are gifts which have to be carefully cultivated. Yogic discipline and meditation are necessary for developing the sixth sense. Stacks of paper and a clear mind is necessary for a writer. All types of meditation are not considered helpful in developing this faculty. In fact, the latest variety, 'Transcendental Meditation', which has taken America by storm, is supposed to give only inner peace and holds forth no promise of cultivating clairvoyance in its practitioners.

A magician, Ted Comfort, who is paradoxically part-time magician and full-time-scientist, has developed this sixth sense to perfection. So have others like the late P.C. Sorcar and Gogia Pasha, who perform the X-ray vision trick on stage. Ted Comfort tells of the time when he walked down three floors in a strange building completely blindfolded, got into an unfamiliar car and drove like that through the traffic of Denmark. The Danish people, who had blindfolded him for the feat and were sure he had no way of 'seeing' physically with his two eyes were astounded and made him repeat the performance along new roads. He did so without knocking down a single obstacle or going into a ditch.

"How did you do it?" I asked him. "Did you see with your third eye?"

The Third Eye

“What third eye?” he asked. “This is pure and simple science. It works on the same principle as that of a radar. When some obstacle passes within a particular radius, my mind goes beep, beep, beep.”

When I asked him for details, he refused to say anything further for fear that others would imitate him. In connection with the blindfold trick, it is worth noting how people who are genuinely handicapped with respect to sight or hearing, like the blind and the deaf, usually develop the compensatory sixth sense to a marked degree, or if not, at least enhance one of their existing senses.

Some prophecies are made through spirits. The so-called clairvoyant mediums go into a trance and the dead soul enters their body to proclaim imminent happenings. In this connection, a spiritual medium in Tamil Nadu says: “You can either call your near and dear ones who have passed away, or if you want to fetch no one in particular, then any passing spirit will be pleased to make the prophecy.” Spirits of the dead also possess clairvoyant sight, but having no physical bodies, have to use mediums as transmitters of their messages.

It was the magician Alamoury’s daughter Carrie who told me of an incident somewhere in the border areas just before the war. A young pilot had just died in an air crash. Simultaneously, a séance was held somewhere else. The boy’s spirit was not specifically called but he

came and gave a message. It said, "I lost a valuable ring and have now discovered that my bearer has taken it. I saw it with him when my spirit flew away. Please take it and give it to my mother." Sure enough, a search of the bearer's quarters unearthed the item.

In another case, the clairvoyance seemed more remarkable. In a certain séance I attended in Mumbai, we had exhausted our supply of personal questions and sought general ones. My father asked: "Who will be the first man to land on the moon?" This was five years before the first moon landing and I recall we had all laughed, considering such a thing a remote possibility that would evade our lifetime and appear some hundreds of years afterwards. But the name came quite clearly: "Armstrong." Since the only Armstrong we had heard of then, was Louis Armstrong, we dismissed this as a joke. It was only five years after the prophecy that we realised it was genuine.

Science has recently taken a great deal of interest in clairvoyance or 'ESP', as the latest tag goes. They have been kindled by the apparently inexplicable phenomena of uncanny prophecies, thaumaturgic powers, telepathy and talking to the dead. Though some label the people interested in these areas as pseudo-scientists, this new branch that purports to conduct scientific tests in these supernatural spheres, comprises psychologists who call themselves para-psychologists. Many universities all over the world, have full-fledged

The Third Eye

research departments for ESP and allied manifestations. The pioneers are Duke, Leningrad and Andhra and they are doing valuable research in hitherto un-researched realms.



The Astral Body

Yogis and mystics have, over the years, been credited with the power of being able to fly through the air. For this, they pay a high price—the severest form of austerity and deprivation. Often they resorted to starvation, exposure to the elements and even flagellation to bring the *shakti* to that particular point of receptivity when it could detach itself from the physical body and travel on its own. The *shakti* or disembodied strength was nothing but the astral body, which in the normal waking condition, corresponds closely to the physical, being almost a double of it.

Detaching this etheric mass from its grosser twin, the physical body, is a knack which takes a great deal of practice. According to the *Gheranda Samhita*, you must perform the necessary essential *Khechari Mudra*—a yogic stance which entails the cutting of the lower tendon of the tongue, to allow it freer movement. Next, the tongue has to be elongated by stretching it to its maximum with a pair of tongs, after lubricating it

generously with butter. When this is done for sufficiently long, the appendage becomes so pliable, you can curl your tongue inwards and backwards till it touches the space between the eye-brows. But its real purpose comes only later when, having acquired more flexibility through sheer practice bordering on an obsession, the mystic is able to close his posterior nares, the route to all life-giving air. When that happens, he is advised to gaze at the space between his eyebrows. The astral body then detaches itself from the physical and he is able to fly through the air. In this state of disembodied suspension, neither hunger nor thirst is experienced. There is no deterioration in the physical sense. But there is danger to mental health, unless the neophyte is under the careful discipline of a guru who guides him at every step.

Ramanand Yogi has an interesting, if somewhat frightening, variation of the same thing. He has not only cut away the lower tendon of the tongue but has also slit it down the centre into two vertical sections like a snake's tongue. With this mutilation, he is able to remain in underground pits for 28 days at a stretch. His description of what he feels when inside the airtight box is also similar to that given in the *Gheranda Samhita*.

I wondered if he had any experience of astral projection. On one occasion, he showed me the *Khechari Mudra*. He was standing on a veranda and I

was some distance away. Suddenly, he began to beckon me by signalling with his hands. He could not speak. His mouth was wide open and his tongue seemed locked. Dr. Hanumanth Rao and I rushed to his side. He silently pointed to the tongue inside his mouth. It was pasted to the back of his mouth from his nasal cavity to the bottom of the throat. I looked inside. The appendage stood erect like a wall between the respiratory tract and the outer atmosphere. He kept it like that for about five minutes. Then he began to expel the accumulated saliva over the veranda railing. He must have spat at least ten times. Then he said: "That was the *Khechari Mudra*. When a yogi does it he cannot swallow his spit, the action that is so involuntary otherwise. The collected mass of fluid comes out at the end of the *mudra*. It keeps coming in a continuous stream, but after five minutes, it just stops and does not come again for a long, long time. Then, a yogi can hold a *Khechari Mudra* for as long as he wishes."

"Tell me," I said, "does this *mudra* give the power of astral projection?" Ramanand said something to Dr. Hanumanth Rao in Telegu and the latter translated for me. "He says flying through the air is all bunkum. Those who say they can do it are bogus."

Ramanand's account of his living burial corresponds closely to what is mentioned in the *Gheranda Samhita*, except that he has no knowledge afterwards of any

astral travel. It is quite possible that his astral body, under this severe pressure, becomes detached from his physical and roams about while he is in a trance state. But it does not store any impressions. It is the same when we sleep and dream, except that if somebody put you into a closed box while in that state, you would undoubtedly suffocate and die. Why Ramanand Yogi does not suffer a similar fate, when in his living tomb, is one of the mysteries for which science has still to find an explanation.

As one magician said, "There is in this world a great deal we cannot explain in plausible terms. It is certain there is some force beyond us and a handful of us inexplicably have been able to channelise that power and work miracles and superhuman feats. But we still cannot put our finger on it and say, "It is here and this is what it looks like." Nor can we explain why it should be the prerogative of a few. Unless you can say, "As some are beautiful while others are ugly, some clever while others stupid; some rich while others poor, so some acquire super powers while others do not." This sounds suspiciously like a believer in God, preaching his sermon to an agnostic, but gives no real answer to the materialists who hanker after proof.

All occultists believe that material objects – both animate and inanimate, have astral counterparts. This etheric double is more tenuous than physical matter but

grosser than mind or spirit. For this reason, it can pass through walls or solid objects. In fact, your astral body is nothing but your ghost which in life is connected to the physical body by a hazy cord made of the same substance as the astral body. This is like the umbilical cord. When a baby is born, the cord is intentionally cut and it begins to live an independent life. Similarly the astral body is said to be linked to the physical, which has to be nourished with food and drink and adequate hours of rest, to keep its nebulous counterpart in harness, or as the hackneyed expression goes, to keep body and soul together. If the body is not nourished, the astral may sever its connection. This happens at death and once the connection is severed, it is believed it can never return to the same body again, though belief in reincarnation attributes that it returns to inhabit other bodies in a series of interminable lives which will continue till *mukti* (peace) is reached.

The belief is that man is a web of desires, hopes, feelings and aspirations. Till the pursuit of materialistic bliss persists, he will continue to be reborn, but when he finally reaches a state of resignation or "*vairagya*" and says "Enough", he will form part of the cosmos, or if you will, God, which again perhaps scares people more than the thought of being born again. The known is always less frightening than the unknown. Life, as we see it, is known to us. It is the fear of the unknown that

awaits us after all the lives are over that is overwhelming. The essence of man is his ego. The individuality of separate lives, however trying, is thus more welcome than the terrifying concept of merger with the Divine Whole.

When dreaming, you must have often noticed a peculiar phenomenon. You are in two worlds or rather, your astral continues the dream while the physical hears sounds in its own sphere, like the ringing of a bell or a baby's cry. You know you have to get up but are assailed by an uncontrollable desire to continue the dream. Sometimes you have probably been able to get up, attend to the interruption and then go back and continue the dream. If this has happened, you have been travelling in the astral. You find on awaking the second time, that you remember the tail end of your dream, but not what transpired before, which is a hazy jumble of bits and pieces. Mere dreaming is not travelling in the astral. It is only when you bring back full memories of the experiences, when the conscious is as much a part of the dream as the subconscious, that you can be said to be an astral traveler. In short, when your astral body whirls away on a journey, your conscious mind must accompany it.

There are easier ways of doing this apparently than the entire business of splitting tongues and much else besides. One mystic recommends a simple exercise

which can be done by any layman and not necessarily a yogi. Just sit in a chair in a relaxed position. You need not even assume the *padmasana* or the lotus stance of Yoga. When you are completely relaxed in the chair, you concentrate on one part of your body, say your thumb or little finger. Then you consciously raise the astral finger and will your physical counterpart to follow it. A spiritual medium who calls down spirits of the dead, often finds his hands moving without his volition and spelling out messages. In that case, the astral bodies of departed men are said to be working on his fingers and endowing them with energy.

There is another method for the would-be-astral traveller. You sit relaxed in the same position, preferably on an empty stomach. Then you place a bowl of appetising and strongly-flavoured food in the next room. Next, you close your eyes and try to visualise yourself standing in front of that food. When you have reached the point where you can smell the food even with the door closed, you have succeeded. It is not your conscious mind that has experienced this sensation but the astral body which has surpassed its physical boundaries. To test yourself and no cheating, try again with another bowl of food which has been brought by somebody else so that you do not know its flavour. Wait for your astral to relay the experience on a mental trip to the next room.

The Astral Body

I have tried the second method a couple of times and succeeded, though the friend who helped me with the experiment attributed my success to a strong sense of smell.

In our waking life we experience instances of the heavings of the astral body. One such is the phenomenon of twitching. The superstitious say: If your left eye twitches suddenly, it is a bad omen; if it is the right, it portends good. Sometimes a whole hand or a leg experiences this movement, over which you seem to have no voluntary control.

This is said to be nothing but the whimsical astral body asserting itself or getting restless, though materialists will probably pooh-pooh this explanation.

Another very common phenomenon is the foot going to sleep. When you rise after prolonged sitting in one position, you experience a cramp. When you try to walk, you find the affected leg moves slowly and awkwardly as if it doesn't belong to the rest of the body. Pinch it and you will not feel the pain. This is because the etheric part which corresponds to that leg has moved out of alignment. You beat the leg on the floor a couple of times and the astral counterpart soon returns, enabling normal movement. What causes the tenuous body to depart, is the rather restricted blood circulation in the parent unit of that limb.

The astral body is a very complex phenomenon. It

can travel across two levels. At the first level, it moves about in realms which are the exact counterparts of our physical world. It can also, on occasion, transcend these frontiers and pass into a higher plane inhabited by the astral bodies of departed souls. Again, it can move backwards and forwards in time, which accounts for people who remember past births. There was the case of a young girl of six who suddenly declared one day, "This is not my house." Then she went on to describe another house in a distant city where she had left behind a husband and children. The little girl's family was completely mystified and made enquiries. They found that every detail of the girl's narration was true. The woman she spoke of had died shortly before the girl's birth.

But such cases are rare and this memory tends to disappear with the passage of time. When they do occur, they are reported in newspapers as phenomenal happenings. It is only some astral bodies which carry memories of a previous birth into a subsequent life. A majority of us forget who we were.

A spiritual medium whom I encountered gave a curious explanation for liking or disliking certain people at first sight. She said that we carried within us vague impressions of past lives. If, for instance we had disliked a certain person in a past birth, we would feel immediately repelled on encountering his spirit in an

unknown person in the present one, though when questioned we would not be able to give reasons for the aversion. The causes were dead in our memory and only the emotional reactions remained. Similarly, when two people meet and fall in love, being drawn inexplicably to each other, it is safe to assume they had been lovers or husband and wife in a previous life. Only, they do not remember their past connection.

“Have you ever experienced,” she said, “a feeling that you have been in a similar situation before; that words are being uttered and actions performed that are vaguely familiar. Have you been led to remark that the very situation has occurred before with an almost verbatim dialogue?”

“Yes,” I said, “once or twice.”

“That,” she said, “is because your astral body has already experienced the event before it occurred. It has gone ahead of time in a dream that you do not remember. But when the same thing occurs you have a vague feeling that it has all happened before.”

The astral body cannot control a physical environment. If it encounters a vase and tries to pick it up, it finds its hand goes through it. It is not visible to the naked eye, though Mr. Shivsagar, who has written a book in Marathi called “Parlok Sadhana,” has taken photographs of mediums in trances with a special device and has published plates in his book showing

the forms of spirits superimposed on the "possessed" person. Some of these forms, specially of famous men long dead, are so distinct as to be easily recognisable even with regard to facial features. In some, they are hazy like smoke but show a marked tendency to assume postures and stances which they had been habituated to when alive.

I tried to find out if there was any mystic or yogi who claimed to have entered the dead body of another person in the astral form and given it animation enough to move. There were many ancient claims, I heard, but none of them were verified.

There was also the story of Sankara who travelled all over India in the century and established four ashrams. People credited him with being able to fly through the air. How else could he have covered so much distance in such a short space of time? Besides, in those days there was no faster mode of transport than the animal drawn vehicle. This sage is attributed with the fantastic power of inhabiting dead bodies. Once, it is said, he entered the dead body of a king who had a hundred wives.

The story, though apocryphal, makes interesting reading. One day, Sankara had an argument with a rich Brahman called Mandana Misra as to whether the solitary life of a celibate was better or the married one of a family man. Now Mandana Misra was married to a

lovely girl called Ubhayabharati who was reputed to be the incarnation of the goddess Saraswati. Sankara was a celibate. The argument went on and it was decided that the loser should obey the dictates of the winner. Thereupon, Sankara declared that if Mandana Misra lost he would forsake his wife and become a celibate. Mandana agreed, on condition that Sankara entered the married state, in case he was defeated.

The debate between the two was long-winded and sometimes spiced with details about sex, provided by his comely wife, a merry third participant. They were trying to embarrass Sankara. Ultimately, Mandana lost and Sankara said: "Come now, be true to your word. Leave your wife behind, follow me and become a *sanyasi*."

Thereupon, Ubhayabharati challenged, 'How do you know the merits and demerits of sex if you have never tasted it? Sankara was nonplussed and conceded the point but not the argument. He said he would go along and investigate how it felt.

Ubhayabharati smiled. She knew Sankara had vowed to remain a celibate. He could never sample the wares without flouting the vow. But she had not reckoned with his miraculous powers of astral projection.

Sankara went into a cave and lay down. He announced to his disciples that he was going into a deep sleep and was not to be disturbed. His body was to be

rigorously guarded till he woke up in due course. So, the great sage lay down and soon his astral body rose like a mist and wended its way through the streets but nobody could see it.

Along that road was passing the funeral procession of king Amaruka who was a man of great sexual prowess and a hundred wives to vouch for it. Before the king was placed on the funeral pyre, the pall bearers laid his corpse down on the ground for a minute because it was heavy. Immediately, Sankara entered the dead king's corpse and it came alive.

All those assembled were astonished. The pall bearers were frightened. They immediately carried Amaruka back to the palace. But none was more surprised than the chief queen, when she beheld her husband. As the days passed, she became more and more convinced that this was not her husband. Amaruka had been relatively stupid; this new one spouted maxims like a philosopher. She reported the matter to the learned council of ministers but not before Sankara had had his sampling of sex.

The ministers smelt a rat and being ambitious men, among other things, they ordered that every corpse in the kingdom be burnt.

The workers went round destroying corpses and soon enough came to the cave where Sankara's disciples were keeping vigil. The disciples were terrified and

protested that their master was not dead and would wake up soon. But orders were orders. The attendants had no sooner laid his body on the flames, than Sankara re-entered his own body and the king's discarded shell fell down in the palace quite dead.

Everything was all right except for the fact that Sankara's hands were slightly singed. He went straight to Udaya Bharati and reported the story saying, "This is what happens to a man who dabbles in sex. He gets his fingers burnt."

The spirited girl acknowledged defeat but said she would accompany her husband when he undertook "*sanyas*". Sankara agreed but there was a condition. In case man and wife even looked at each other, she would turn to stone.

They set out on the journey. At Sringeri, Mandana turned to look at his beautiful wife and immediately she became a statue. She was enshrined there as Saraswati, whose incarnation she was, and a temple was built round her. It was one of the four *ashrams* of Sankara. Even today, if you go there, people will tell you this story.

While scientists elsewhere are still resolving whether parapsychology (the study of paranormal phenomena) can be classified as a science, the Russians have made great strides in the field and taken it for granted. With a complicated gadget called the Kirlian device, they

have been able to photograph the auras of people and plants. They call this "bioplasma"—a kind of "fourth state of matter" other than the physical, which cannot be seen by the naked eye. The bioplasma given out by animals and plants can be photographed with this instrument in which a "high frequency energy passing along an electric coil between two metal plates, converts bioplasma into a electrical substance which can be captured by means of a photograph."

With this device, man should soon be able to capture the state of dying on film and see exactly what happens to this non-physical matter when the physical body ceases its functions. Till this is done, our only knowledge of the astral realm can come from surmise or accounts of mystics who have developed the capacity to see with their third eye, those things in the subtle realm not perceptible to normal sight.

"Bhagwan" Rajneesh asserted the capacity could be developed. There is intense energy in the head which moves the eye balls and activates material sight. When this energy is bottled within, by a fixed and glassy stare, your eyes become unseeing like a dead man's eyes and the pulsating force finds its way out through the third eye, enabling you to "start seeing things you have never seen...feeling things you have never felt." The energy is like fire and sometimes there is no outlet for it, the opening having atrophied through years of disuse. In

such cases there can be an explosion within the head which leaves a bullet hole in the centre of the two eyes. Tibetans, he says, were aware of this and devised an operation which enlarged the opening and facilitated the movement of the explosive energy.

But mystics, who have obtained enlightenment, are reluctant to disclose their experiences. Our knowledge of the subtle realm then, has to be gleaned from dissociated accounts of people who have come very near death, though scientists may attribute their experiences to fevered hallucinations.

One such man was H.L. Bhugra from Bangalore. In his own words: "I was in a hotel on Wellington island, Cochin. Those who dined there on Thursday, 26th July 1962 were taken ill. I suffered from food poisoning due to tinned fish. As the days passed, my illness increased and became acute. A doctor was called in but there was no relief. He advised shifting me to a private nursing home. I was there till the 3rd of August, but my condition went on deteriorating."

"Hiccups then developed and all the organs in the abdominal region were affected. The pain was unbearable. The doctor in charge of the nursing home did not want me to die there. He advised my removal reiterating that nothing further could be done for me. I was brought to my hotel room and left there. That night and the following day, came an experience which

cannot be obliterated from my memory as long as I live.”

“I was in great pain the next day. I prayed with all the strength and faith of my soul. As the thought ended, my breathing stopped with a long-drawn sigh like a rattle. The hiccups also stopped. I became semi-conscious or so I thought. I felt very light, as if I was being lifted up and up...all soul... no body. Then I was near another figure-vague and hazy. He was carrying me like a baby. His face was bearded and kind and I felt no pain.

After that Mr. Bhugra says that he does not know what happened. He felt an unbearable tugging and the pain which had been absent when he was floating above, returned to torment him. He woke to find himself lying on the bed as before. With a violent retching, he brought out his food on the bed-clothes, on the floor, in fact all over himself. Then he fell into the deep sleep of exhaustion. When he awoke the second time, the pain had disappeared and for a moment he thought he was dead. He tried to float above his mortal remains but found he was anchored quite firmly to his physical body. He got up quite fit, washed himself and went down.

The hotel manager, he says, literally jumped up when he saw him, imagining he was encountering a ghost. He was soon convinced that this was not so. Even the doctors were surprised at the miraculous rallying powers of this businessman from Bangalore. This man

later consulted many mystics in India and also some Tibetan Lamas and they told him that what he had experienced was no hallucination at all but an actual confrontation with death.

Some people believe there is no such thing as the 'silver chord' connecting the physical body with the astral. They say this has been invented by occultists to prevent people from dabbling too much in the astral realm. There will be an understandable fear of its severance, making a return to the human body impossible. But even without this non-physical leash, it is doubtful if many would venture into voluntary astral projection. The field is vast, the dangers limitless, the rewards few. Though it has been discussed by western occultists as a wonderfully safe source of espionage, its depths have still to be fathomed.

There is a natural wariness among us of things that reek of the occult. We associate astral travel with ghosts, haunted houses and possession by devils.

Kalika Prasad, a mystic I had encountered earlier, remarked to me when I left his house: "Ma'am, if you are not afraid, I will send a *shakti* with you," "when you leave. So, when you sit down to write, you will not be alone but have a force to help you. It might help you write a better book."

Before I could speak, my husband said: "No, thank you."

At home, I grumbled, "Why did you stop him?" I asked my husband. "I could have got some real first hand experience to write about, besides producing a best-seller."

"Write the book yourself," said my husband, "And I'm damned if I'll have some chap's astral body sitting at home with you while I'm away at the office."



Black Magic

I was wondering how to track down someone who practised black magic, when Saroj, a friend of mine who stays in Maredpalli in Hyderabad, told me about her experience. One day, she could not find the hundred-rupee note she had kept in her purse and felt it had been stolen. So she went to consult a man who specialised in black magic. He charged her three rupees and gave her a brick with strange markings on it to keep under the fireplace and a lime to keep beneath her pillow.

“And did you find the money?” I asked.

“No” said Saroj, “He had told me I would see the thief in a dream, but all that happened was, I slept soundly for three whole nights, instead of worrying about the loss.”

“Where is this magician?” I asked.

“I don’t know exactly,” she said. “Somewhere in Bowenpalli. A servant called Durgamma took me along winding roads and then through slums and drowsy cattle to a little hut where the old man sat.”

Minutes later, Saroj and I were sitting in the drawing room of the house where Durgamma worked. The lady of the house, Mrs Laxman had also had some experience with this man, following the theft of a clock from the house.

“He first asks you,” said Mrs Laxman, “to place a coin on a page from his tattered book. The page has strange markings on it. Then he consults another book. Then he gives you bricks and limes. Saroj knows about it.”

The man had given Mrs Laxman a similar lime to keep under her pillow and consequently, she had seen the thief in her dream. There were actually three suspects and the first time she went to the hut, the magician had enumerated the three with uncanny precision. All of them were servants; two males and one female. He then gave her some uncooked rice in addition to the brick and the lime. He asked her to give a little to each of the suspects. He was sure the thief would not be able to masticate the grains while the two innocent ones would grind it to a paste with their teeth.

Mrs Laxman did as she was told and sure enough, the woman and the older man servant ground the rice to a smooth paste while the twelve-year-old boy spat out whole grains. But when Mrs Laxman confronted him with the accusation, he did not own up, but

defended the inability by insisting his teeth were not sharp.

Later, she saw this same boy in a dream but after she had thrown away the brick.

Durgamma then related the case of her own daughter who had been cured instantaneously of a dreadful stomach ache. She also claimed that rickshawallahs kept bewitched limes under their seats to draw passengers to them.

Bricks with markings on them; bewitched limes; magic rice and witch-doctoring! This, I had to see. "Let's go to him," I said. "Durgamma can direct us. I'll drive."

We piled into my car. Upto a point the road was good; then, we had to descend to an uneven and rugged mud-track, full of puddles and pot-holes, where the car was in danger of getting stuck. It had rained a little the previous night and there were puddles on the ground. I wished I were driving a jeep instead.

Presently, we stopped off the track and under a tree which leaned forward. A horde of urchins rushed up and swarmed around the car, extending their hands. They wanted money. The numerous miserable huts reflected the dire poverty of their owners. In one of these, in semi-darkness sat a man surrounded by charts and lockets, weeds and limes. There were one or two clients squatting on the ground in front of him. When

they beheld us, they moved to one side of the cowdung floor and made room for us on the worn mat. They looked us up and down and whispered something to each other in Telegu.

The magician summoned us to enter and we passed into the shabby interior, bending our heads in the low doorway. His coat and cap were hung on a nail in the wall. He wore a torn *kurta* and *pyjama* and squatted unshaven on the floor. I sat in front of him.

“So you have come,” he said. I told him nothing about the book I was writing. Neither Saroj nor Mrs Laxman have acted as informers because our visit to this place was on the spur of the moment.

“I will tell you all about my art,” he said to me. “Have patience.” Then he began relating the case histories of his clients who had met with success. I wondered why he had not thrived in the same manner. If he had so much power, why didn’t he use it to raise his lot?”

“There was a police officer,” he said, “who had seven tolas of gold, and ten tolas of silver. It was stolen and he came to me. He was a police officer but he could not catch the thief. I looked at him and said: “There is a couple near your house—a police constable and his wife. They are the culprits.”

“Thereupon, the police officer asked me, “What are their names?” I told him that would not be possible. He

then confirmed that indeed there was a couple who fit that description, very near his house."

"Tell these people," I told him, "that you have consulted me. That will scare them and make them give up the loot. They know of my powers."

"The police officer went away and did as he was told. When he came next time, he said, "I told them about you but they only laughed. They said there was no such thing as black magic." I was very angry with them for belittling my powers and decided to teach them a lesson. I cursed them to suffer from diarrhoea. I said some *mantras* on a lime and gave it to the police officer. I asked him to throw it in the direction of the couple's house. Soon, they developed diarrhoea."

It was possible then with black magic, to choose the manner of illness. But there were drugs in the market to circumvent it. I wondered if the couple had gone to a doctor. But I didn't say anything.

"No medicine will work in such a case," said the witchdoctor. "This is the case with any disease caused by black magic."

I had heard black magicians could make a man insane or cancer-ridden at will. It was quite a terrifying thought.

"Don't worry," said the magician, "I do ill only to those people who deserve it. The good ones are not troubled. I fight all crime. I am a good man."

A sort of "Mandrake the Magician", the comic strip character who worked behind the scenes to baffle and mystify criminals, I thought.

"You're thinking of someone?" he said.

It was amazing and a trifle disconcerting to realise he could tell me all I wanted to know without my having to ask a single question. In fact, he sensed my thoughts at every juncture, rather uncannily. In one case, I had thought of the idea in Hindi. Later on, I tried English and then, even my mother tongue, Konkani which he had no way of understanding. Yet, he guessed the question correctly at every point. It meant that telepathy had no language barrier. It spoke a universal language which could transcend the man-made barrier of speech. This was also supported by the examples of telepathy between a mother and her baby as well as two infants who had not yet learnt to talk.

"You are scared of me, aren't you?" he asked. He spoke in a hybrid mixture of Hyderabad Hindi and high-flown Urdu, sprinkled liberally with Telegu words.

"No," I said.

"You are good," he said. "You will give a poor man publicity."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"I know everything," he said. "Nothing is hidden from Gulam Hussein."

Gulam Hussein was fifty years old. His Pir (Guru) was

a short almost dwarfish man who came from the region of Bidar, and had lived to the ripe age of 118 years.

"It was this man," said Gulam Hussein, "who taught me all I know. He was a short man but had a long name – Zahiruddin-Shah-Khadir Nakshabandhi.

"Are you married?" I asked.

"I am not only married," said Gulam Hussein. "I have eleven children. But not one of them has learnt the art from me."

"Why?"

"It is a difficult and treacherous process." he said. The way is long and the ordeals many. You have to sit at midnight in lonely graveyards, you have to stand in neck-deep water and do penance. Besides, it is very dangerous. One false move and the very energy which gives you the power to destroy, can boomerang on the possessor with dastardly effects."

"How long did you take to acquire the power?"

"I have been practising for eleven years now," he said, "but the initiation is tough. Do you know, for forty days and one, I had to sit all by myself in a lonely house closing my eyes and meditating. I survived on thin *moong dal* and *chappaties* which I cooked myself. During this time there were a great many distractions. The spirits whom you seek to subdue and harness, trouble you a lot with terrifying sounds. They run across the roof, whistle shrilly through doors and windows, rattle

the tiles and make weird noises in the night. They break window panes, throw stones and generally try to deter you. This is a test of the most severe sort. If you live through all this without giving up the chosen path, then you triumph and the spirits who have been troubling you, become your slaves.”

Gulam Hussein was a labourer in the fields, a brick layer and later even a sweeper, till he came to be initiated into black magic by his *Pir*. For magic to work, two things are necessary—a client’s name and his mother’s name. With these two details you can make or mar a person.

“I know two types of magic,” said Gulam Hussein, “The *Siphili* which has a bad effect and the *Arabi* which has a good effect. For the *Siphili* type of art, you have to go into graveyards, particularly on the midnights of certain like *Diwali*, eclipse days, *Amvasya* (new moon), *Poonam* (full moon) and *Dassera*. There you have to kill some animal to appease the spirits with blood. Goddess Bhanumati, who is the deity of destruction and black art, is pleased and gives the practitioners added power. Blood and liquor are the two things most necessary to woo her. The more the blood, the happier she is. For instance, if you are killing only a chicken and some other black magician is killing a goat, she will forsake the first place and go to the second. The highest category of blood, however, is human blood, but no one

kills people these days. In the olden days, it was quite rampant and till recent years, dacoits offered human sacrifices in the jungles. Burning liquor is another way to attract evil power. So it is not only drunk by the practitioners of black magic but poured over a bonfire made of sticks and rag. Then they cook the slaughtered animal and eat it. It is quite a ritual.”

For the *Arabi* variety of magic, Gulam Hussein declared, just meditation or the name of *Allah* was enough. This had to be done for twenty-one days. During this period, you had to live without sex and also refrain from meat and drink. But after gaining the power, you could resume normal life.

He showed me the tools of his trade—limes, herbs, lockets made of metal, bricks, charts with Urdu lettering and two tattered books handed down from his *Pir*.

“It is all here for you to see.”

“Why do you use a lime and not any other fruit?”

“Well”, he said, “you are supposed to use anything with juice in it, but a lime is the cheapest.”

Gulam Hussein charges three rupees for each consultation. Sometimes two or three sittings are needed. He says he gets upto seventy people in the course of the whole day and almost a hundred on holidays, which is more than what many medical practitioners get. Besides, he has no expense, apart

from his food and the limes. Herbs grow wild; bricks can be collected from building sites by the handfuls and his house is rent-free being one of those mud and straw structures which sprout overnight even under a vigilant municipality hell-bent on slum clearance.

“Look at these lockets,” he said, “and gave me one to examine. It was empty and one end of it was open. “When I give it to a client,” he explained, “I stuff it with herbs and seal it myself so that the herbs remain inside.”

“And what are these herbs?”

“Well you have certain herbs for certain specific illnesses. For instance, the ‘*jadi-booti*’ is connected with insanity. The *pulli-chattu* is a plant which has the property of magnetism. If encountered wild in the jungle, it can pull a man to his death like an electric live wire. A mere speck in the locket can serve its purpose.”

I wondered how he went about collecting it, if it was so treacherous a plant.

“I am insulated,” he said, “by certain spells that I utter. Anyone else is vulnerable.”

I took some weeds in my hand and smelt them. They smelt like ordinary grass. I wondered if he was using in reality only grass and working his so-called wonders through hypnotism and auto-suggestion.

He gauged my suspicion and said, “They are not

harmless. If you wish, you can come into the jungles with me when I am collecting them.”

I was definitely not going into any jungle with him.

“These plants grow wild in Nizamabad.” he said. “There are tubers too with special properties.”

“Take this down,” he said, for I had long since produced my note-book and pencil since it was impossible to hide things from this man for long.

“Some popular herbs are called *Tatti-haunsa*, *ragta-jada hanuman jadda*, *pilli-advu*, *pitte kadu*, *putta gada pulli-chattu* and *jadi-butti*,” he explained.

It took me ages to get that down. He reeled off those names to me probably because he knew I would never know what the names meant or even if I did, I would probably never be able to indentify one from the other.

“These names are useless to you,” he said, “without the *mantras*.”

“And what are the *mantras*?” He smiled mysteriously and closed one of the tattered books which had been lying open near him. I understood from this gesture that the interview had concluded.

“Well,” he asked Mrs Laxman. “Have you found the clock?” She started to tell him about the helper boy and how he had not owned up.

“In that case,” said Gulam Hussein, “we will have to trouble him. What shall we give him? A stomach ache?”

“No, thank you!” said Mrs Laxman. “If he dies, I will

be responsible. I will only blame myself for having dabbled in all this.”

It was true then, when people said, a black magician could literally get away with murder. All the powerful forces would work insidiously and it would seem like natural death but it would be a premeditated and cold-blooded killing.

“We won’t make him die,” said Gulam Hussein. “Only squirm with agony and suffer. It is all in my hands.”

I remembered what Mrs Nimmi Sharma from Trimulghery had told me at a party. “Black magic might be powerful,” she had said, “but just let it come in contact with a pure strain of the highest spirituality and it is doomed. My father was a great devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba. Unknown to him, his rival in business was performing black magic on him to ruin him. Once, my father was praying, when the holy lamp flickered, and its flame grew larger and larger. My father was surprised. A little later, the wife of this business partner came running to him. She was in tears. She said her husband, for some inexplicable reason, had fallen down quite dead. The time of death synchronised with the time the flame had magnified. The evil art he had been practising to harm my father, had been repelled by the forces of good and rebounded on the black magician.”

Saroj said, "The lime didn't work."

"Then we will have to try an egg," said Gulam Hussein. I heard that in black magic, they made use of eggs, too. They were one stage higher than limes in terms of power.

I rose, and so did Mrs Laxman. I wondered what the fate of the egg would be under Saroj's pillow and could not suppress a smile.

"I will need your photograph," I said to Gulam Hussein. Gulam Hussein indicated his assent almost coyly.

"With pleasure," he said, "but you will have to take it yourself. I have never had a snapshot taken in my life."

We passed out of the low doorway.

"You came by a rotten road," said Gulam Hussein. "There is another way. Don't turn right on the way back but go straight."

We followed his instructions. There wasn't as much water collected on the roads as there had been on the mud track. But a certain stretch of the road was no better than the other one. In fact, in some parts, it was worse. No pot holes here, I thought but moon craters. We almost keeled over, because half the road was on another level. It took all my expertise to wrestle with the steering wheel and not break an axle.

Yet, as the car bumped repeatedly and we bounced

Encounters With Men Of Miracles

repeatedly I could not suppress a smile. I wondered if it was Gulam Hussein's way of punishing us for my mental jest about the egg.



The Making of a Mystic

Can anyone become a mystic? Bhakta Vishita says: "Seership is such a science that few will fail at it. It is safe to say that in our present stage of evolution, seventy five percent can become partly lucid, seventy five can become sensitives, forty five can reach the second degree of seership, thirty two the third, fourteen the fourth, five the fifth and two the highest degree of seership. Out of one hundred men, fifty can become seers; out of two hundred women, one hundred seventy can become so."

Yet one finds more males than females among the current sages, though recently with the woman's lib movement, some attention is being paid to women mystics as well. But the sages who jet abroad to spread our brand of mysticism far and wide, are still very much men; so are the local sadhus to whom the devoted rush for all physical, mental and emotional ills.

Nor is the number of current seers indicative of these generous statistics. In fact, the estimate of Robert Graves seems closer to reality. He said to Colin Wilson:

“Occult powers are not so rare: one person in every twenty possesses them in some form.”

A magician I met endorsed this view. His name was V.G. Kalkundrikar and he had made a deep study of astrology. “Do you know,” he said to me, “mystics are made by planetary configurations? I don’t mean the run of the mill magician of whom there are so many. There is nothing in magic really—no supreme power, no dabbling in the astral. The variety of stage magic you see is just sleight-of-hand and trickery with specially manufactured gadgets. Even a phenomenon like levitation has a perfectly reasonable explanation, but if I tell you the secret there will be no trick in it. It is the same with apparently hypnotising the audience or even materialising bunnies from hats, or sawing a lady in half. What I was referring to, was true “mysticism”, the striving for super powers through spiritual bliss. I have found that only people born at certain times will be right for mysticism.”

“How do you know?”

“Not by magic, I can assure you,” he laughed. “I have completed a study of astrology. The mystic realm has always been a passion with me. I am busy collecting the horoscopes of all the sages and saints I can encounter and studying the planets at the time of their birth. I have made some astounding discoveries.”

“Won’t you tell me about them?”

He hesitated for a fraction of a second and then said, "I am writing a book about my discoveries in Marathi. But I will give you a rough idea of the part that concerns your work."

I waited with bated breath.

"Sages and saints," he said, "can only be found in four broad categories out of the twelve signs of the zodiac. There again, not everyone who is born in one of those four signs, can become a mystic. It happens only if that particular sign is ascendent at the time of birth. The ascendent is a very sensitive point in any horoscope. By 'ascendent' we mean of course, rising in the east at the time of birth."

I learnt that this ascendent retains that position for only two hours, a terribly short time in which to produce an appreciable number of mystics, though population statistics mentions that a child is born every minute at some place in the world.

"The first sign responsible for the acquisition of *siddhis*," said Kalkundrikar, "is Meena (Pisces). Sant Tukaram and Ramakrishna Paramahansa, were influenced by *Meena*. People with *Meena* in the ascendent and who take to the mystic path, will be able to realise the fruits of their penance and meditation very quickly and without undue effort. Miracles will also come easily to them, almost like second nature.

The second sign is Dhanu (Saggitarius). But since

Sagittarius is made up of intellect and faith it will be more balanced. Vivekananda belonged to this sign. There was a fiery element in him which was always reaching out to the others. There was authority in his speech which often glimmered with great wisdom. But again it must be mentioned that people with *Dhanu* in the ascendent will not perform miracles. It will be against their grain to do showy things to attract attention. They will draw people to them nonetheless, by their intellectual power and 'bhakti'.

The third sign, Scorpio, is peculiar. This ascendent is made up of complex components. In this category you will find saints, engineers, doctors and even robbers. All these people are Raj Yogis. If they drift into sainthood, austerity will be an alien word to them because they are great lovers of life and comfort. They will tend to make a great display of their super powers, win love and admiration from their audience and of course ensure an inexhaustible supply of money to enable them to live a leisured life. But there is something talismanic about them which will make material comfort come their way without their specifically having to seek it out."

This probably explains why we have so much evidence of the luxury-loving sage or prophet, who literally lives off his devotees in five star-hotels, jets all over the world at somebody else's expense and puts his

children in expensive boarding schools, besides loving his food and drink and basking in the public limelight. This love of the luxurious life is to be blamed on the sage's horoscope and does not in any way make him less of a mystic. It only makes him more of a man! Not to speak of the shadow it casts on the entire tribe of mystics, even the austere ones, who have to suffer the taunts of observers. In a world where success, even of the spiritual sort, is measured in terms of material gain, the Scorpio "ascendent" mystic often makes the biggest splash, which may dazzle us enough to disregard the true sages who sit in the shadow.

The last of the signs responsible for sainthood is Cancer. When this is in the ascendent, *Hatha-Yogis* are born who believe in the Yoga of body control. They perform fantastic feats like stopping the heart-beat and pulse, having themselves buried alive to defy the elements and display the sturdiness of their bodies. Some of them even stop their blood from flowing and often go into long trances where the body seems dead but is actually in a state of hibernation. It is sought by this process to lengthen the life span.

As one mystic, Avinash Chandra, put it: "I often go into trances of meditation where I see nothing, though my eyes are open. My breathing slows down and I am dead to the world, yet fully alive mentally. A man who does this can defy death."

This is mentioned in our ancient texts where a man's life span was measured by the number of breaths he took in his lifetime. According to this method of calculation, nature has given every man a total of 21,600 breath rhythms, which he must use up daily during the course of his sleeping and waking life. So, a person whose breathing is slow in rhythm will apparently live longer than one who takes quick, short breaths. The whole purpose of going into hibernation is to increase one's life span. It is rather like putting money into a bank instead of using it up. Only in this case, you put your unused breaths into a gigantic breath bank instead of using them up. You get thereby at the tail end of your life, a new lease of survival. It actually makes no difference whether you take those breaths now or use them up later. In fact it might be more prudent to take that span of life when you are younger and can enjoy it, rather than spend your youth in meditation and get a bonus of extra breaths at a doddering old age!

The breaths have been measured out to you by destiny, just as money is measured out and you will get just that much and no more. So what is called "defying death" is really nothing more than a postponement of the evil hour. No one can really fight death, though there are sages in the Himalayas who are reputed to be 200 or 300 years old. Even Meher Baba, who made the

wild claim that he would not die, died, though that is not the correct word. A mystic does not die but attains "*samadhi*" a word which was coined, I think, as a face-saving device to make the mystic seem superior to other men and set him distinctly apart.

Under the sign of Cancer, fall sages like Aurobindo Ghosh, Dyaneshwar Maharaj and Gulvani Maharaj, There may be others today, who have elevated *Hatha-Yoga* to a fine art.

Mustafa, the mystic and magician, for instance, does dare-devil feats like having a man jump on his stomach from a great height, putting a nail in one eye and taking it out through the other. But when I asked him if he was born with Cancer in the ascendent, he said, "I happen to be born on 6th January 1936 at 8.41 pm." This assertion apparently topples Kalkundrikar's carefully formulated theories about mystics. But Mustafa comes to the rescue saying, "I feel I must be an exception to the rule – for you must agree I am a revolutionary character."

Perhaps even the flesh mortifiers whom you see standing on the steps of Varanasi with pierced lips and withered limbs, were all born with Cancer in the ascendent. Only no one has asked them.



The Divination of Disease

Do human beings have different vibrations at different times? Can the presence of a certain disease in the body give forth waves which make it possible to diagnose it and describe the symptoms?

According to Gurdial Singh, this is entirely dependent on the swing of a pendulum. It reacts in different ways to different people and different illnesses. From its oscillations, he can predict not only what ails the patient but also whether or not the man is capable of being cured and if so with what particular system of medicine.

He described his method as "radiesthesia" which is neither an avant-garde mechanism nor another gimmick of faith healing. It is a strictly scientific way of analysing the waves emanating from a patient's body at various times in both sickness and health.

His method brings to mind the theories of Franz Anton Mesmer who spoke of the human body having tides which were ever moving in health but stagnant in illness. To get these tides moving again, Mesmer used

magnets. Later, he found that magnets were not really necessary because his own body acted just as well. With a mere touch, he could get the tides to move and thus effect a cure.

Gurdial Singh uses the currents given out by a patient's body, only to diagnose disease. His method of treatment is a well-known one. But he is of the opinion that the method may vary for different physicians. He himself believes implicitly in homeopathy, studying it as a hobby in his early days till it grew into his greatest obsession. His dedication is revealed by the fact that he takes no money at all for his fantastic cures. Even the medicines are given free of cost.

His method of analysis takes just a minute or two. There is no detailed physical examination; no verbal narrations of symptoms on the part of the patient; no time-consuming blood and urine tests or X-rays. There is no delay as there normally is, when he analyses with the help of modern scientific instruments. With his short-cut method, both organic disturbances as well as the presence of tumours or stones can be detected at once and pin-pointed to their exact localisation.

"Can anyone practise this system independently?" I asked him.

"Well, almost everyone," he said, "The first requisite is that a doctor's mind must be completely devoid of selfish thoughts or preconceived notions. Secondly, he

must be sensitive to signals not perceptible to all, which means he must be gifted with a certain degree of extra sensory perception. Thirdly, he must be absolutely impartial in his treatment – not influenced by the financial or social status of his patients.”

The science of ‘radiesthesia’ according to him, is not a novel concept. It was in existence ages ago. In fact, it was practised in India in ancient times by the high priests who had developed the science to a marked degree of efficiency. Later, when political considerations ruled the roost, the method was abandoned and mercenary instincts prevailed. When Gurdial first salvaged the system from its cobwebs of disuse and started practising with chains and pendulums, many people were suspicious and felt it was some kind of black magic. But there is no witchery in the system.

The word ‘radiestheisa’ was actually coined by a Frenchman. Gurdial showed me a brass pendulum he had got from France. He said he had chanced upon a book on the subject and had immediately been enthralled. He was tempted to experiment. With a spurt in the number of patients, he had been finding it extremely difficult to devote time to routine analysis. With this short-cut system which took just a minute or two, he was able to attend to many more sufferers.

He also found that the diagnosis in each case was remarkably accurate. He often cross-checked to see if he was right by first diagnosing a disease with just the

pendulum and then verifying with the patients to tally symptoms. He was invariably proved right. He was very hopeful of this avenue of healing and started prescribing his medicines only on the basis of this method.

Gurdial who is in his fifties now, was born in Malaya and came to India at the age of sixteen but he was almost thirty-two before he started taking an interest in the divination of disease.

He said that at Delaware in Oxford there was an Institute where electronic gadgets detected disease using that method. But many scientists abroad have been using magnetised gadgets as well as pendulums of brass or steel with the same degree of success. By a system of elimination, Gurdial found that wood suited him best.

He showed me a kind of wooden reel threaded on a metal chain. When he held it in front of a patient, the pendulum first moved in a left to right motion and then lapsed into a circular oscillating movement. Gurdial could they say what ailed the man.

There are two methods of analysis. One, where the doctor is in direct contact with the patient. He can use touch to ascertain what is wrong. With the second method, it is possible to analyse bodily secretions in the same way and get accurate results, even if the patient is absent.

Next, he displayed a pendulum made of many brass

reels threaded unto a chain. With it, he was able to conduct an analysis of blood, stool and urine. With each patient, he used a different number of reels. Some needed three to come in tune with his own vibrations; others needed more or less, depending entirely on their fields of frequency. But in every case, the patient had to be brought on the same wavelength as the doctor by subtly adjusting the number of reels. Pendulums could be of metal or wood; they could be magnetic or non-magnetic; even electronic. The material was unimportant. It depended on the inclination of each analyst.

“As a water diviner douses the earth for water” he said, “so we douse the body for ailments.”

“Does that mean you can do water divining too?”

“Yes,” he said. “The principle is the same. It is similar to the instance of a man driving one type of car, who is asked to drive another. It is not difficult. There is just the question of getting used to the feel of the thing. But personally, I wouldn’t like to branch off into water divining as I have more or less specialised in the divination of disease.”

As I left the place, highly impressed by this statements, I wondered why he hadn’t ever contemplated oil!



Materialisation

Strange things happen in the house of Lila Singh – strange because there is no scientific explanation for them. Nectar drips down the glass frame of a photograph, gold and silver idols appear suddenly though no one has physically put them there and various pictures of gods and goddesses exude *kumkum* and *vibhuti* (holy ash) as well as a violet-coloured powder which falls perpetually from the frame. At times, people who come for *bhajans* complain of being pelted and find on looking down that dry fruits have appeared out of thin air. On rare occasions, there is even a diamond.

I wouldn't have believed these phenomena if I hadn't gone there and seen them for myself. Everyone is welcome in the house of the Singhs and on Thursdays there are evening *bhajans* when the materialisation is seen to increase.

The Singhs could hardly be called “super” people. In fact, they disclaim being the generators of these manifestations. They are a quiet and devout couple. He is Assistant Manager in a reputed firm and she is an

ordinary housewife, though admittedly, a very religious one. They came to Mumbai from Kolkata, Mr Singh says, "We came with empty hands and found everything that we needed quite easily due to God's grace." Lila seemed a sensitive woman. Her husband told me she often went into trances, particularly during her meditative spells when she was not aware of her surroundings and gave way to tearful bursts under great psychic stress.

Materialisation has been quite common in the history of spiritualism. Madame Blavatsky, who came to India and headed the Theosophical Movement is said to have made rare varieties of flowers appear out of thin air besides materialising a cup and saucer. Poltergeist phenomena have been experienced by a wide variety of mediums who have made tables rise, materialised objects out of air and even floated in the air like Daniel Douglas Home. More recently, Keith Rhinehart of Washington has materialised tiny plastic discs, inexpensive ornaments and even a bronze Roman coin from the second century A.D. A colour movie filmed on him in Seattle showed Rhinehart producing black stones from his ears. These came from inside him; appeared as bulges in the neck and dropped out subsequently through the ears. An Indian parallel is perhaps Sathya Sai Baba, who, on the night of Shivratri, is seen to take '*shivalingams*' out of his mouth.

The '*vibhuti*' materialised by living "saints" out of their bare hands, as well as that showered from the photographs in Lila Singh's house is different from the objects produced by western mediums in that it is said to possess healing properties. A man who complained of aches and pains found them disappearing mysteriously on application of the holy ash. Another who rubbed the nectar on his spine was cured of a slipped disc.

How did these phenomena begin with Lila?

"In the beginning," admitted Singh, "There was nothing extraordinary about our lives. We were a perfectly content and commonplace couple. When we got married, I was twenty and my wife was barely fourteen. She has been educated only till the eighth standard. She does not speak English, only Hindi. It was in Kolkata that inexplicable things began to happen to us. I will not call it my wife's power. She was merely a vehicle for some forces beyond us."

Lila was almost thirty-seven years old when things started happening in quick succession. In a hut close to their house, there lived a pious, old, woman mystic called Mahadevi Amma. Lila was a frequent visitor to Amma's house. One day, she gave Lila some "*vibhuti*" which had materialised from the photograph of Sathya Sai Baba. Lila was delighted with the "*prasad*." She went home and immediately put it into a bottle.

The next morning, her husband asked her: "Why have you stuffed so much *"vibhuti"* in one bottle?" She saw that the *vibhuti* was overflowing from the bottle. She promptly removed some to reduce the level but she was very puzzled. The next day, the same phenomenon occurred. The fragrant ash had spilled over. When this continued, they tried another experiment. They emptied the contents and left just the empty bottle. The next morning the '*vibhuti*' had not only filled the container but overflowed in the usual manner. That was the first manifestation.

The next one occurred when the Shankaracharya of Sringeri came to Kolkata. He presented Lila with a picture of Sringeri Shardeshwari. They hung it in their house and the very next day, holy ash started falling from it. Next, a friend of Lila's, Mrs. Sambamurthy gave her two photographs which also developed the same capacity for materialisation. "My wife," said G. M. Singh, "used to complain that her hands and shoulders ached. The entire photograph which is life-size, used to be covered with holy ash. It took her hours to get it cleaned and the next day it was as profuse again.

From Kolkata, the Singhs went to Jalandhar where Lila inaugurated the Sathya Sai Seva Samiti. Then they came to Mumbai where they have been living now for the past four years. They had thirteen children, of whom three survived.

Mr. Singh said, "When a gold or silver idol or a diamond appears in the house, my wife generally has a prophetic dream about it, in which she is told the name of the person for whom the gift is intended. When a person of that name comes along next day, she is not surprised but takes the materialised object and hands it over to the visitor who is startled but happy."

Evidently, there was no such dream message about me, because I was handed a coconut and two bananas. Even this was most welcome during the prevailing difficult days with their sky-rocketing prices. I was embarrassed by the gift and worried about trespassing on their generosity, but Singh assured me: "Believe me, we experience no difficulty. People speak of high prices and shortage but to tell the truth, nothing seems to touch us. It is the grace of God. I often ask my wife: "Do you need more rice or sugar?" But she assures me that there is plenty. I can sense she too is puzzled by the abundance and we both know that the cereal or rice has multiplied miraculously, but Lila believes we must not tell anyone because no one will believe it."

I asked Lila how she accomplished the spectacular materialisation. She spoke in a soft voice, almost under her breath and as she was a heart patient, I had to strain to catch her words.

"I do nothing but prayer and meditation," she said. "As for the phenomena, I can't explain them myself."

They just happen. The dreams are more solid. Sometimes "*Bhagwan*" comes and says: 'You are mine and I am yours. You are doing well. Be good. Nothing else matters.' Once I had kept two glasses in my room. One was filled with sweet lime juice; the other with coconut water. I drank up the lime juice but the other glass stood there for the whole day. *Bhagwan* came in the evening. I did not want to give him the coconut water because it could have turned sour. But he said: 'Give me the coconut water.' And he drank it." Her description matched that of Sathya Sai Baba, many of whose framed pictures are displayed in Singh's house.

Avtar Krishna Ahuja, a Delhi businessman, who owns the Ahuja Finance Corporation, is another person capable of generating these phenomena. He has a huge photograph of Sathya Sai Baba which exudes '*amrut*' (water of everlasting life). Once, he was given a picture of Guru Govind Singh by a friend of his. Ahuja hung it up all right but felt diffident about its capacity. His last thought was: "This picture will not exude anything."

"When I woke up next morning," he said, "I was surprised to find the new picture completely covered with holy ash while the older one had temporarily stopped exuding "*amrut*". It was almost as if the power had been transferred from picture to picture." This shows that it is not the subject of the pictures that

matters but the nature of the person possessing them which involuntarily causes these strange phenomena.

Ahuja also held *bhajan* sessions in his house. Once during one of these sessions, the water kept in a jar turned into honey when the prayers ended. He confessed that sometimes he was puzzled by knocks on doors and windows. For instance, if he was alone, raps would suddenly be heard on the inside bedroom door and not on the main door, though he knew for sure there was no one in the bedroom. Sometimes, he flung the door open to make doubly sure and was greeted by an empty room. Once a friend of his was hanging a picture in the adjacent room, when he heard a couple of thuds. He thought the frame of one picture had accidentally struck another, but soon after, he felt some object hit his hand. He looked and found it was a variety of dry fruit. He quickly called Ahuja to tell him that dry fruits were raining out of nowhere.

Kusumatai Sharma runs meditation classes at Santa Cruz on Thursdays. There is no fee for the lessons she takes. She is a disciple of Swami Muktananda of Vajreshwari and has been doing "*tapasya*" for the past twelve years. Hailing from a well-to-do family, she gave up pleasure of the flesh for a life of penance and austerity. She stays with her family, believing that one must be part of "*samsara*", yet out of it. Her strictures are tough and cannot be followed by any but the

strong-willed. She eats boiled food which she cooks and eats at once. She believes that food cooked in the morning must not be consumed in the evening, even if it is refrigerated. One should not have servants to slog for you. Consequently, she does all the manual work with her own hands. When not doing work, she meditates. She disowns that she has powers, though her disciple confessed to me that, on certain occasions, there had occurred involuntary materialisation. Once, as she sat at her desk full of thought, all varieties of out-of season flowers appeared in front of her. Once in the sleeping state, she suddenly felt something cold and clammy touching her. She woke with a start to find she was completely covered with tulsi leaves. On yet another occasion, she had crossed the passage to go from her room to her daughter's. As she returned after having woken up the girl, the latter was surprised to find her mother's back shining with a resplendent light which was so blinding that she could not bear it.

Siddhis, they say, come naturally when you have progressed a great deal on the path of meditation. But the neophyte is constantly warned not to succumb to the temptation of yielding to them. Their demonstration is likely to distract him from the ultimate aim of God-realisation by inflating his ego. Kusumtai warns her pupils that it is like a game of snakes and ladders. The higher you go up the ladder of sublimity, the greater the

chances of encountering a snake's mouth and sinking lower than the least. When she herself experiences these manifestations, she relays to her *guru*, Swami Muktanand that she "does not want them." He then counsels her on what to do.

Ahuja had an interesting simile when we discussed this power. "Power can be of two types," he said, "Either you can turn into a giant and break your chains or you can become as small as an ant and slip out of them unobtrusively. Our power conforms to the latter instance."

This somehow fits in with my theory of self-negation mentioned in the chapter on "Faith-Healing". It also has a marked similarity to the power of a spiritual medium, who by sublimating his will and identity, is taken over and used by some force beyond him. Yogis say it is not beyond us. It is the God in each of us being stirred awake. According to them, there are three principal nerve-currents within the spinal column. The *Ida* and the *Pingala*, which flank the central one, are bundles of nerves, while the middle one, *Sushumna*, is hollow. For the ordinary man, the *Sushumna* is closed and he works only through the *Ida* and the *Pingala*. In the highest form of meditative ecstasy, the *kundalini* which lies coiled at the base of the spine is awakened, the *sushmuna* opens and a new hitherto unexperienced current ascends to the different "lotus-centres" and

finally reaches the brain. Then the Yogi becomes God.

The way is long and painful and fraught with many dangers—both emotional and mental. It is on record that *Sadhakas* have struggled for years and yet made negligible progress, while some have given up in despair. Only a few reach the pinnacle. There is however a short-cut method that is equally treacherous. A shock of some kind or severe physical injury has, on occasions, shaken awake the force which courses up the *Sushumna*, (see chapter “What is God like?”) and bestows supernormal powers. Men who have experienced this, have come out of coma declaring they are either “God” or his agents on earth and have given full proof of their newly acquired powers.

Some of course, either through modesty or ignorance, have been content to remain just “super men”.

Even with regard to the power to perform miracles, there are two schools of thought. Some shun these manifestations as obstructions in the path of God-realisation. They say, “What purpose do miracles of materialisation serve? They are merely conjurer’s tricks.”

Avinash Chandra is one such man. He has had twenty years experience in the mystical realm. The Divine Life Association where he studied *mantra-vidya*, does not believe in the development of *siddhis*. Their aim is to realise the Absolute.

Of people who can materialise things out of thin air, Avinash Chandra says: "They are merely *Hatha-Yogis*. What they do might seem miraculous but it is not *Brahma Yog*. In *Brahma Yog*, you attain the greatest heights of spiritual experience. You and God become one. I have personally seen and talked to *devas*. I can show you how it is done."

When I asked him to summon the *devas* from their heavenly abodes, he looked uncomfortable. Then he said, "It is not good to disturb them unless there is an imperative need." I told him the need of the moment for me was the proof of their existence and of his being able to materialise them. Then he said, "Even if I call them you will not see them. They will be visible only to me."

I wondered if he had personally encountered and seen the feats of the miracle men he dismissed so cursorily. "Yes," he said, "I have seen Sathya Sai Baba. There is none who can touch him as far these materialisation goes. But I don't think he is God. God would have no ego."

God knows! After all, the attributes of God have been defined by man!

Speaking of meditative trances, Avinash said, "There is a manoeuvre by which your life force comes into your head at some point between your eyes. Then you feel neither pain nor discomfort; neither hunger nor thirst.

Your intense concentration makes you as omniscient as God. You really see with your third eye. Others may not see it, but in the trance state, your third eye is fully open and you see the *devas* before you as physical manifestations, almost as if you are looking at them with your everyday eyes. With a slight shift in focus, you can also see things happening in the distant future which a *Hatha-Yogi* with all his power cannot see.”

There is another type of materialisation where sages have appeared in distant places to devotees in the guise of beggars and sometimes even as animals and then miraculously vanished. Sai Baba of Shirdi, in his lifetime, is believed to have given many of his staunch devotees this type of *darshan*. People who do not believe he is reborn, say that he still appears at Shirdi in various forms, to test a devotee’s goodness of heart. Once, Swami Muktanand appeared to a woman devotee in grave danger. She later found out he had not left the *ashram* at all, though he had assumed an extremely solid form when he visited her. These are what Dion Fortune in her book “Psychic Self-Defense” calls “thought forms”. She says that a powerful thought can actually create a very tangible form, so real that it can be mistaken for the physical. In the condition between sleeping and waking, it is possible for the astral body to emerge and transform itself into any form—human or animal. She narrates a personal experience—

one night, she went to sleep with thoughts of wrecking vengeance on a friend who had done her ill. In the middle of the night she half woke, to see a creature halfway between a wolf and a dog, exuding from her body. Soon, it jumped off the bed and went out as though it possessed a life of its own. It was only later, when she had forgiven her friend and tried to forget the injustice, that the creature she had produced entered her again, dissolving into shadowy ectoplasm and being drawn along the silver cord into her body. This was accompanied by a violent physical and emotional upheaval which left her bathed in sweat.

Scientific laws say you cannot produce something from nothing. What is said to be materialised from empty space, is in reality, already in existence. It is the spirit from the higher or lower astral which fetches the unseen object and gives it in the materialiser's hand.

Whatever explanation we give, falls short. Materialisation is an indisputable fact for which science has still not found any explanation. If you think oozing of ash or *kumkum* from a glass frame is subterfuge, try this experiment. Take any glass frame in your house and try sticking some stuff on it while it is in the upright position. You will find it just does not stay. Then go along to any of the houses cited and experience the materialisation.

Science may not yet have stumbled on a conclusive explanation but there are a few theories floating

around. One of them is that there is another dimension called the fourth plane that is distinct from the three visible ones. Let us just suppose that worms, for instance, can see only two dimensions, especially if the worm is on an apple from where it can't see the roundness of the fruit. We were in a similar situation when we believed that the earth was flat, till it was conclusively proved to us that it was round.

Now we live in a three-dimensional world and just when we have taken it for granted, a fourth dimension is slowly being revealed to us. It has perhaps been there all the time just as the other half of the world has always existed. Now some people have developed the power not only to catch glimpses of this fourth dimension, but also to lower its field so that facets of it come into our three-dimensional world. Just how this is done cannot yet be fathomed without hanging the entire fabric of miracles on the peg of yet another theory, which might explain everything that has ever puzzled humans – from faith healing and clairvoyance to miracles of materialisation. It has been dealt with in the last chapter and though it may raise a smile as an idle, albeit interesting speculation, it might yield something for the parapsychologists to chew on.



Surviving without Food or Water

How long can a man survive without food or water?
Three days? A week? a month?

Seventy-six year old Prahlad Jani has survived, by his own admission, for sixty-six years without partaking a morsel of food! Or drink!

His power was not present at birth. He was a normal boy living in the town of Ambaji in North Gujarat. Then a miraculous thing happened when as a ten-year-old, he visited the shrine of Ambaji. He was a changed person. The goddess of the temple at Ambaji blessed him. He claims that she endowed him with the power to produce “amrut” (life-giving juices) from his upper jaw which did away with the need for food or drink for sustenance. Since then he has enjoyed an illness-free existence, without a doctor as much as touching him.

But in 2003, he had a whole panel of doctors observing him. Not because he was ill, but because he intrigued them with his fantastic claims. Therefore,

they transported him to Sterling Hospital and observed him for ten days, without giving him food, water or life-sustaining drip. But they subjected him to a sonography test twice a day.

The results stunned them. The gentle-eyed, snowy-haired old man had survived the ten-day examination, unfazed. The medical fraternity had to admit that the man had indeed existed without food or water. They also found out he did not pass any stools during that period of observation. A strange manifestation was that his bladder had urine in it, but did not pass from his body. They next day, the entire amount of urine was gone. It had been absorbed by the body itself. Dr. Dinesh Desai was amazed. He had not encountered such a case before.

Some years ago, urine therapy advocated by the late Shri Morarji Desai had generated both amusement and skepticism among people. But did urine indeed have amazing properties to rejuvenate and cure? This needs to be explored.

Prahlad Jani himself was unaffected by all the interest his bodily functions had generated. They were talking of ten days. He had gone on without outside sustenance for 66 years!

The panel of the Association of physicians of Ahmedabad who had examined Jani consisted of a radiologist, a physician, a cardiologist, a neurologist, a

neurosurgeon, a gastro-enterologist, a diabetologist and an ENT specialist.

They were all convinced about the veracity of Prahlad Jani's claim. One of the panel doctors, V.N. Shah pronounced Jani's physiological functions on par with any normal person in good health. But the plain fact was that no normal person could continue without consuming food or water or passing stools and urine. Jani's condition baffled the doctors.

Jani's case has generated interest in Delhi, where the Defence Institute of Physiology and Allied Sciences plans to conduct further research on him and unearth the mystery of this miraculous feat of Prahlad Jani.

But what is more amazing in this strange case, is why it has taken sixty-six years for the phenomenal ability of this man to come to light.



The Magic of Mantras

Do you want to know the secret of never growing old?", asked Avinash Chandra, a man who has specialised in the science of *mantras*. He was thin, with a narrow, wrinkled face and quite bald too. I wondered why he had not tried out the formula himself.

But apparently, he did not mean 'physically old'. That would put the cosmetics industry out of business. "I can teach you to lengthen your life span," he said. "It is a very simple exercise."

He proceeded to demonstrate it. "Close your left fist quite tight," he said, matching his action with the words. "Then raise the forearm slowly upwards. Then as slowly, lower it again. Next, do the same thing with the other arm, bending it at the elbow. Continue alternately for as long as you can. The longer you are able to keep at it, the longer you will live."

The only trouble with this was you would land up with countless surplus years, with nothing to fill them up, except perhaps the exercise.

“There is a *mantra* too,” said Avinash Chandra, “that you must utter simultaneously with the drill. Different *mantras* suit different people and are entirely dependent on temperament.”

“How does a *mantra* help?”

“A *mantra* produces vibrations. Planets too produce their own vibrations and so affect a person’s psyche. Planets make the individual what he is. A *mantra* can make him what he wants to be. Even if the planets are against him, he can battle them on their own ground by producing counteracting vibrations with special *mantras*.”

This was a refreshing change from the usual theory of predetermination and *karma*, though whether it worked was a moot point.

Avinash Chandra learnt the magic of *mantras* from the Divine Life Association in Rishikesh, started by Swami Shivananda in 1925. When he attained *samadhi*, the working of the Institute was taken over by his disciple Swami Chidananda, but not before the founder had penned a dozen books on spiritualism and seership, among them, “Meditation” and “What happens to the soul after death?”

Many mystics have emphasised the value of a *mantra*. Sathya Sai Baba has given some people the *mantra*, ‘Om’. He urges them to look at a candle or *diya* and murmur ‘Om’. Mahesh Yogi who carried the cult of

Transcendental Meditation to the West, speaks of a *mantra* which is secret between man and God. Initiates are given the *mantra* in a whispered private session. Once they have it, they are good and ready for their sally into meditation. As to why this *mantra* is "secret", a disciple of Mahesh Yogi's explained, to Jacob Needleman: "When you're instructed in the use of your *mantra*, you're told how to use it properly so that your mind will go to more subtle levels. It's like a seed that's planted. To misuse a *mantra* or tell it to someone else is like pulling out the seed to see how it is growing."

The *mantra* or chant of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness is 'Hare Rama, Hare Krishna'. Their leader, Swami Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada was Abhay Charan De, an MA from Calcutta University before he renounced the world at his Guru's desire and began to spread enlightenment abroad through the Krishna Consciousness creed.

There are others like Dadaji, a man with supernatural powers who does not believe in the Institution of Godheads and says every man is his own Guru and hence has no need to be given a *mantra* by anyone. The *Mahanaam* is within each man. Balyogeshwar, the boy who skyrocketed to sainthood overnight, (some say "possessed by the spirit of his dead father"), gives the "*Maha-mantra*" and says, "*Bhagwan say milvan dunga*" (I will arrange for your tete-a-tete with God).

Balyogeshwar who hails from Dehra Dun, has attracted a large following in Western countries and amassed material wealth which include an aeroplane and a fleet of cars, and experiences which range from enthusiastic receptions of welcome to embarrassing brickbats which include pies thrown in the face.

So much for *mantras*. Now to descend to their usefulness—the story of Sita Ram Baba's encounter with a Yogi who stopped a train from moving by uttering a *mantra*, will aptly illustrate the point. Sita Ram Baba was Avinash Chandra's guru but I could not ferret the special *mantra* out of him, which the Yogi used to cleave trains to the rails. Sita Ram Baba had evidently not divulged it for the fear that others would use this method instead of resorting to chains provided by the railways.

Sita Ram Baba, before he renounced the world, was a fireman in the railways. His job was to put coals in the engine and set them ablaze. Once, his train halted at Hatraj station for an interminably long time. People peered out of windows to see what was wrong. It was first believed there was some technical defect but though a check was conducted from end to end, nothing was found amiss. The engine driver asked Sita Ram Baba to feed coals into the engine. Even then the train refused to budge.

The ticket checker and the station master came to

the engine and asked what was wrong. When told that nothing was wrong, they looked puzzled. Then the ticket checker happened to mention that the problem was perhaps on account of "that crank". When questioned, he revealed that he had just ousted, a ticketless *sadhu* who was traveling to Varanasi, from one of the first class bogeys.

Sita Ram Baba who had heard of the supernormal powers of sages, leapt from the train and went in search of the holy man. Someone told him the man had crossed the railway lines and marched off in the opposite direction. Ultimately, he found him sitting under a tree on a torn rug.

"I have cursed the train not to move," said the sage. "I uttered a mantra and the wheels have got locked. I will reach Varanasi somehow even if I have to walk, but that damned train will never move."

Sita Ram Baba spoke with him and the sage finally agreed to return to the train after much persuasion. Sita Ram Baba related the story to the ticket checker who immediately escorted the grumpy sage back to the first class compartment. No sooner had he done so, than the whistle blew and the train began to move.

It was this incident which left a deep impression on the young fireman's mind and he decided to leave his profession and specialise in the science of meditation and *mantra vidya*. Accordingly, on the imperious sage's

advice he went to a graveyard in Aligarh. It was while he was meditating here, that Avinash Chandra chanced to stumble on him one night. He says he saw a spectacular sight. Sita Ram Baba was sitting with his eyes closed, floating several inches off the ground and from his head there shone a bright, yellow light. Avinash Chandra at once touched his feet and became his disciple.

Avinash Chandra was compelled by force of circumstance to seek some employment and temporarily give up thoughts of spiritualism. He joined the Indian Air Force. When I asked him why he had done that, when with his learning and psychic inclination he could have climbed high up the mystic path, he said, "Both my parents died and I was compelled to earn a living. I got recruited easily and it was a good life. They gave us free food and uniforms. Besides, I could go 'sightseeing' without it causing a dent in my pocket.

However, the spiritual bond had not been completely severed, because right through his professional life, he had a yearning to just run away from materialism. Once, as a corporal, he obeyed his inclination and escaped to the Himalayas. During this time, he stayed for four months in Rishikesh at the Divine Life Association, until he was traced and brought back to the military yoke.

He said, "I was thrown into the guard room and was

awaiting trial but everytime my case came up for hearing, I uttered a *mantra* and something happened, which postponed the event. The first time I recall, I saw a great, shining light entering the C.O's office. I told my colleague that the case would not be tried that day. And strangely enough it was not, because something else came up at the last minute. The second time, a similar thing happened and the third brought still further postponement, till they grew tired and shelved the case. And every time, mind you, I said my *mantra* and saw the Divine Light entering the C.O's office. It floated in and heralded my welfare. But every time I talked about the light, everybody laughed at me and thought I was quite mad. It had become a sort of joke. I don't know why anybody who wants to renounce the world is not considered quite sound by people. But they don't know what they are missing. With meditation and *mantravidya* you can hold the whole world in your grasp."

Avinash Chandra learnt many things at the Divine Life Association which has branches all over the world. "They teach you," he said, "what is life and what is death. They tell you the reasons for transmigration of souls. They also instruct you in the magic of *mantras* and the science of meditation."

Meditation, according to Chandra served a dual purpose. After a spell of meditation, you felt rejuven-

nated enough for physical exertions of the highest sort. This is borne out by the Harvard research of Dr Benson and Dr Wallance who have analysed this condition of restful alertness and found what they labeled “a wakeful hypometabolic physiologic state”. They found that Maharishi Mahesh Yogi’s Transcendental Meditation done for just five to ten minutes, caused an average decrease in oxygen consumption of 17%. This was greater than that achieved after six to seven hours of sleep.

Meditation, according to Avinash Chandra, helped you memorise things without much effort. He had tried it out on several occasions and it was infallible. But add a *mantra* to it and it was exquisite. But of course everything depended on the choice of the right *mantra*.

He recited *slokas* from Sanskrit texts in a melodious voice. He quoted portions of the *Upanishads* which are the systematic exposition of all mystical experience. According to the *Upanishads* a man’s individual soul after death, goes to the “*Akash*”. There the soul (*atma-jiva*) enters the air. Then it comes down to the earth as rain and enters the water. On earth, it goes into the ground and is reborn as food. If a human being eats the food, the soul it has thus imbibed becomes a human being. But if an insect or animal imbibes the “*atma-jiva*”, the soul will be born in the animal kingdom. This is the process of incarnation. It is possible with the use of

mantras to ascend higher in the evolutionary scale in the next birth, even if your *karma* merits that you enter the body of an animal. This may appear nonsensical, until you realise that this theory has, in devious ways, come down to us in the present day. I had heard of *brahman* priests counseling people besieged with bad “*grahas*” (planets) to recite 100 *slokas*, ten times a month, but the recent report in a leading English weekly about an English Doctor of Divinity came as a surprise.

“An English Doctor of Divinity, Dr. George King claims that he knows how to store the spiritual goodness of prayer, in order that it may be released in times of stress and strain, for instance-war, floods, famine, etc; The prayer is stored in a “prayer battery” which resembles a plastic box camera. Contributors chant a Sanskrit prayer in the direction of the battery, while five people close to it recite prayers on their behalf.”

Avinash Chandra has twenty years experience in the mystical realm. His meditation and *mantra vidya* has given him great powers. He gave proof of his ability by telling my whole future, from the colour of my saree and the design on my bangles. Verification, of course, will have to wait till all he has predicted actually happens.

Then he said to my husband, “Close your fist and don’t open it till I tell you.” Then he drew the shape of a palm on a piece of paper. He looked puzzled. “I wanted to draw your fate line,” he said, “but I don’t see it

clearly in my mind's mirror. In fact, I think you don't have a fate line at all! My husband extended his palm and sure enough there was no fate line indicated at all. Besides this was the first time he was meeting him and he could not have had a peek at his palm since he had been sitting far away from Avinash Chandra on the other side of the room.

"I am a palmist," said Chandra, "In fact, I follow the system of palmistry for predicting, but there is no need for me to look at anybody's hand. I know beforehand all the lines that are inscribed there."

I asked him how he had developed this faculty. "Try this experiment," he said. "and you will be able to develop the faculty yourself. Wake up early in the morning and try to look at the rising sun for as long as you possibly can, uttering at the same time a certain *mantra* that I will give you. Widen your eyes as you do the exercise and try not to blink. You will find that you can keep this up for longer and longer intervals of time with each subsequent try. Of course, your eyes will water. They are meant to. But keep some butter handy. As the tears run down your cheeks, don't rub your eyes but daub them gently with a soft cloth and apply butter to the closed lids. When you are able to do this at bright noonday, you will have achieved a great power. On full moon day, when you look at the moon, it will seem remarkably close, so close that you will be able to see it

distinctly as if you were standing on its surface.”

This seems to be nothing but getting the retina to bear more intense forms of light, so that when the subtle one is encountered again, each detail is sharply observed. The eye has got used to different shades of brilliance and the palest of these now seems very distinct. The same effect can possibly be achieved by reading smaller and smaller print each successive day till the eye gets accustomed to reading even microscopic type. Then, take a page with a large bold type and see the relief that is experienced at the absolute clarity. The end of torture often results in the highest form of ecstasy. It would perhaps be feasible with his heightened perception to see lines on the palms of people sitting several feet away on the other side of the room.

Mantras were sometimes so powerful that they could influence events in the physical world with their vibrations. Avinash Chandra told me the story of a girl who was weak in mathematics. Her planetary configurations at birth were responsible for this drawback. Planets, in fact, determined our strong and weak points and our likes and dislikes. Chandra gave her a *mantra* to be said everyday before tackling the subject. He claims that the *mantra* produced counteracting vibrations which defeated the ill-placed stars and got her a very high grade in the subject.

On another occasion, he tried the magic on his own son. This time it was not with regard to any particular subject but all the subjects. Exams were approaching and the boy's progress seemed hopeless by all standards. Chandra's wife pestered him to teach the boy something. Chandra had no patience and said: "Go, give him this *mantra*. He will pass without even appearing for the examination." The wife was astounded and did not believe it would work. But it did. That year there was a strike at the University and all schools and colleges in Delhi were affected. The exams were cancelled in toto and everyone was promoted to the next class irrespective of their grades in class. This can of course be attributed to coincidence. But the theory of vibrations cannot entirely be discounted, because it explains phenomena like the exercise of the evil eye whose waves affect the object and also those occasions when you want a thing desperately and get it; though, the latter can be attributed to a powerful will and a singleness of purpose. This concept of vibrations is also said to be responsible for curses working in an evil way. It is impossible to say however, whether these results are caused by the *mantric* vibrations or by our thought waves. It would be pertinent to assume that the *mantra* by its repetitious chants gave our desires and aspirations a solid body and an intensity of concentration which

could not have been achieved without it.

Mantra vidya or the study of verbal vibrations suggests that each word has a different tremor which affects the atmosphere. It also vibrates the inner *yogic charkas* which revolve and ultimately bring the mind to communion with the astral world. This happens when meditation and *mantra vidya* are combined. With only the *mantra* you might get an effect without fully understanding it. With meditation, the circle is complete and you are a complete spiritual personality.

A precious stone too, has its own vibrations which, together with planetary configurations, affects the course of our lives. That is why you are enjoined on wearing a diamond or a ruby or an amethyst according to the sign under which you are born. The cosmic rays concentrated in the stone give off vibrations which pass through the nervous system and bring the whole mind to a better state, in that it is psychologically soothing. It is like having a certain talisman or a *mantra*. Tension is thereby averted and in a relaxed frame of mind, one can concentrate and get maximum results.

The crux of the matter seems to be a relaxing of inhibitions – a total surrender. In the scriptures, there is this story of a Yogin named Shandla who went stark naked before Maharaja Janak, when the king had organised a seminar attended by distinguished *Brahma-Gyanis* from all over the country. They came fully

clothed, but she came stark naked and so shocked the assembly. When challenged, she gave adequate reasons for her nakedness and asked why man or for that matter woman, should resort to subterfuge when God intended each to be natural. In certain sects like the Digambara Jains, *sanyasis* roam stark naked because they feel that is what God intended. Animals remain in the skins of their birth and so should men, they argue. Shandla reasoned that evil was in the eye of the beholder and not in what was beheld. If it was seen in the correct light, it ceased to be evil. Mankind was responsible for putting all sorts of connotations on dress or lack of it and devising restrictions. Raja Janak was duly impressed but it is difficult to conjecture whether it was due to her fiery discourse or her beauty of form but he got down from the elevated rostrum and touched her feet.

Avinash Chandra said to me, "I know you are writing a book on mysticism, but you shouldn't. You shouldn't write because there are hundreds of books on the subject and they all say more or less the same thing."

"This one won't."

"If you really want to be different," he said. "you must write it subjectively and not glean bits and pieces from the experiences of others. That is *Gyan Yog*. Don't merely be a *Gyan Yogin*, but be a *Brahma Yogin*. I will give you a *mantra*. Learn it by heart. Sit still and try to

meditate and repeat the *mantra*. When you have had true mystical experience, write the book. You could call it, "My journey to Heaven". Then write another – "My journey to the world of death." This could be all about traveling in the astral."

"Let me see your palm," he said. "I am sure you have a pronounced Mount of Jupiter." He got up and came to me, glanced at the palm and said: "My God, just look at that mount. You will become a *Yogin*."

My husband took my arm and steered me out of the house. I looked at him. If I became a *Yogin*, he would have to become a *Yogi* and at the moment he did not look one bit like one. I wondered what had upset him.

Then it struck me. He had evidently heard Avinash Chandra narrating the story of Shandla and Raja Janak.

"All *Yogins*," I explained on the way back, "are not in the same class."

"No," he said, "but all men are!"

I never did get those magic *mantras* after all.



Stage and Street Magic

Stage magic in India is in the doldrums. Gogia Pasha, perhaps the greatest master of show-biz magic we have produced, has almost retired from the field. In fact, a few years back there was a report about him in the papers, which said he was looking for a successor. He hails from Dehra Dun and though he has a number of children whom he could have trained, not one of them is really interested. P.C. Sorcar, another great doyen in the field, is dead and gone. His most famous item was the "tongue cutting" operation where he lined up doctors on the stage while he coolly snipped off a sizeable bit of his assistant's tongue. For sheer spectacle, both these men were unsurpassable. So is Lal whose name is still heard in magic circles.

The variety of magic one encounters now, is a combination of sleight-of-hand tricks and illusion. But of course one must know how to put it across. When you say "sleight-of-hand" it might seem easy, but according to Lamoury, it takes hours of practice.

Mr. Herbert Lamoury has been practising magic for the past thirty years. His is not a full-time profession. He was an apprentice in the Nizam's railway and ended up as Works Manager. Magic was in the nature of a hobby. He tried to develop "mesmerism" to give his magic more variety. "You have to put a dot on the wall," he said, "and concentrate on it without thinking of anything else. It is not too easy. I gave it up after a while. Sleight of hand came more easily to me. But even then I practiced a trick at least 15 to 20 times in front of a mirror before doing it on stage."

He had varied experiences. Once, while going from Aden up the Persian Gulf, he encountered Egyptian magicians called "gully-gully-wallahs" who miraculously produced hens from their sleeves; though, as a magician, he was sure they were not concealed on their person. This can probably be attributed to the elemental nature spirits and to the phenomenon called "apport" though occultists say to "apport" this form is difficult for spirits to accomplish in bright surroundings.

In Lalguda, Lamoury met a Mohammedan mystic who was a bit of a ventriloquist. He spread his "shop" before Lamoury and asked if he could display a trick. Lamoury agreed, at which the Musim called a spirit named Abdullah. When the disembodied soul actually came, he carried on a long conversation with it, the magician speaking in a low bass and the spirit in a high

falsetto. The spirit's voice seemed to come from above. Lamoury says it may have been ventriloquism but what happened was definitely inexplicable. The magician told Abdullah to go and get him the biggest diamond he could find. A little later the magician stretched out his palm and the "diamond" just dropped into it. Of course the stone may not have been a real diamond, but in this case it was not the quality of the precious stone that was important but the nature of the feat.

V.G. Kalkundrikar, though tied down to a staid desk job, is many-faceted. He is a magician, homeopath and an astrologer. "If one thing doesn't work I can always fall back on the other," he says. However he is equally proficient in all of them. He performs all varieties of table magic and stage magic using complicated gadgets, some of which he has patented. "I get most of my gadgets from Mr. Tayadi," he said. "You don't have to have special powers. Anyone who learns to use these gadgets can become a magician. You get special playing cards. I bought a set for Rs. 25/-. In Japan, where magic is still very much in demand, one can get magical gadgets at almost every department store."

Kalkundrikar confessed he also made use of scientific aids like magnets, electricity and invisible nylon thread. The aim was to create the illusion of something strange and bewildering which, after all, is the purpose of all magic.

Kalkundrikar was interested in magic from childhood. Most children are thrilled by magic shows but his predilection went a stage further. When he was in the 7th class, he often played truant from school and went to the street which flanks King's Koti in Hyderabad. Scores of charlatans would be squatting on the pavements. There were witch doctors selling all manner of powers, said to cure anything from senility to scorpion bites. He was fascinated by their colourful clothes and their array of bottles. He would sit on the opposite pavement and watch them for hours, sometimes talking to them. Kalkundrikar says he can catch scorpions even now, without being harmed by them but he does not do it with any *mantra*.

On the streets of India, there are many snake charmers who are adept at catching and training cobras. I met such a man in Mumbai. He, however, insisted that there was no trick in that. One caught the snake unawares, drugged it and then removed the poison, selling it to Institutes who paid almost the price of gold. There used to be, until recently, varieties of street magicians in the Indian bazaars, who held shows in crowded places. People huddled round and threw coins when the show was over. The magician then raked in the profits and moved forward to the next locality for a repeat performance. Even this brand of nomadic magicians has disappeared without a trace.

Their repertoire of tricks included making a boy disappear from a basket and conjuring a variety of objects from an upturned bucket which was first examined by all and sundry for signs of subterfuge. One still finds on the streets, however, the self-torturers who come with a tough, plaited rope and whip themselves to a swooning state while simultaneously performing a dance set to weird music. The flagellation leaves raw red marks on the man's bare back. At the end of the dance, the 'masochist' goes from house to house and person to person, displaying his bruised back and collecting coins. Then the man's wife whips out some ointment, coolly applies it to the back and they go off, perhaps to the next site for a similar show.

In Secunderabad, I saw a snake charmer who told me he could bring a dead snake back to life. I asked him to perform the feat. He thereupon produced a snake and a mongoose from his bags and staged a fight between them. In the confrontation, the snake got the worst of it and began to writhe in agony on the ground. It was bleeding from a number of places but the mongoose was merciless. It kept on the attack till the reptile lay quite still. Then it picked up the lifeless snake between its teeth and deposited it neatly at the snake charmer's feet as if it had gone through this drill several times. The man picked up the reptile and demonstrated its lifelessness by flinging it to the ground

several times. The snake lay motionless each time. Then the man waited for about two minutes. Next, he took from his bag a piece of cotton, dipped in some liquid which I could not see. He squeezed the distended cotton into the snake's mouth and presently the reptile stirred. In a little while it was moving slowly. The man opened his basket and the snake climbed painfully into the refuge. The snake charmer executed a smart *salaam*. I gave him a rupee.

"Five rupees," he said.

"For one feat?"

"For this feat" he replied.

"Every time I do it I go through much mental effort. I give a part of my soul to the snake so that it revives."

"He probably radiated some psychic energy akin to that of a spiritual medium," I thought.

I gave him the money and he went away. I observed he had dropped something. It was a squeezed—out piece of cotton. I picked it up. It had a familiar smell. "Alcohol", I thought. It was indeed a trick of spirit!

Kalkundrikar often followed street magicians because some of them did intriguing things. One of them came back after years and said to Kalkundrikar, "I have become old. I've watched you following us as a child. I will teach you a few tricks if you pay me well." Kalkundrikar thought he would ask for an astronomical sum. But the man who stood with tattered clothes

turned his tired grey head towards Kalkundrikar and in a supplicating tone asked for a meal and one rupee. Kalkundrikar was overcome with sympathy. He had watched the man performing on the streets in his heyday and he was really good. Some of his tricks were masterpieces of illusion. He taught Kalkundrikar five very good tricks and then disappeared. Kalkundrikar never saw him again. Poverty and lack of appreciation have effectively throttled a very significant brand of street magic which might have been carefully nurtured even twenty years ago by anyone who cared to preserve it.

We may have killed street magic through neglect but there is still hope for the stage variety. There are hundreds of part-time magicians who make a supplementary living, giving shows in school and colleges or even in hired halls on special occasions. But they cannot devote all their energies to it because they hold full-time jobs elsewhere. One such magician with plenty of potential is Ted Comfort, who is part-time magician and full-time scientist. He is a musician too and plays the organ in church.

Comfort gave his first solo show when still in college. The principal of Nizam's college, Mr. Turner wanted a foretaste of the magic show, lest it fell short of expectations. Comfort declares he made the table rise. Turner was so baffled by this that Comfort who was to

have given one item was asked to hold a full-length magic show and the rest of the items on the variety program were cancelled.

In 1979, he went on a foreign tour to Copenhagen. Being in the army, he got only eight dollars foreign exchange. His schedule was a six-day stay but he stayed for four months. With enough foresight, he had taken with him his magic equipment. He took furlough and stayed abroad giving shows.

I asked him how he could arrange all this without knowing anybody. "It is very simple", he said. "Magicians are a close-knit community. As soon as I landed in Copenhagen I made frantic calls to all the Danish magicians whose names I could unearth. They held a meeting where I performed Indian tricks. Some of them were quite new to the Danish audience. I was a hit and a number of shows were arranged. In one of them, I drove a car blindfolded through strange streets."

"How does magic here compare with the variety abroad?"

"One trouble with magicians abroad," said Comfort, "is that they are too mechanical. Indian magicians do it more through skill. They can even perform without a stage if need be. No set-up is required. Once, I had to perform with people all round me. I was on a haystack in Orilla in Canada. This can be inconvenient and

embarrassing with sleight-of-hand tricks.”

According to him, magic is a harmless deception. Diversion is a very important factor of magic shows. This is why Comfort has beautiful girl assistants dressed in glamorous clothes. He tells the audience, “Look at my hands and at this container. There is nothing there”. I have timed the act; so a beautiful woman comes on stage just then with a tray. While the distraction lasts, I can manoeuvre things. A magician has to be a good speaker too, to hold attention. There must be jokes and stories interspersed, to establish a rapport between him and the audience. Magic is essentially show-biz and so it must be flamboyant and captivating. Gorgeous costumes, coloured lights, appropriate music and humour create the atmosphere for the illusion.”

Mustafa the Mystique, who labels himself as both a mystic and a magician, displays magic which is a combination of Oriental and Western Magic; tricks and illusion; Yogic feats; extrasensory perception and telepathy thrown in for kicks. He says he has not invoked any nature-spirits or any spirits from the higher or lower astral world.

He said, “Anyone can become a magician if he is really interested. However, to be a good magician, you should have skill, dexterity and the gift of the gab. You have to be a good orator and showman. A mystic,

however, must have something else. He need not be a showman or an orator. He must have a psychological disposition towards his art. He must have a certain psychic build-up.”

Mustafa believes in the sixth sense. It is there in all of us to a certain degree but it is not developed. In fact, it is better developed in animals.

“A mystic is not necessarily a magician, and neither is a magician a mystic,” said Mustafa, “as is commonly supposed. A mystic in the true sense would be one who seeks direct intercourse with the Almighty Creator in elevated religious feeling or ecstasy. A magician normally indulges in the pretended art of producing marvelous or amazing results apparently with the aid of spirits or secret forces of nature. He actually does skilful sleight of hand tricks and excels in illusion. ‘You see what you don’t see and you don’t see what you see.’ However with my revolutionary methods I do not agree totally that a mystic must necessarily be religious. He must, however, be in search of truth.”

Mustafa too, is only a part-time magician. A triple graduate equipped with a Certificate in Business and Industrial Management, he is employed as a sales representative in a leading organisation in Bombay. He says he incurs heavy expenditure in the manufacturing of his magical apparatus, so he charges for his performances. Sometimes he finds himself spending

more than he earns. He takes great risks doing death-defying feats. He passes nails from one eye and out through the other, sometimes even taking them out of his nose or mouth. He chews blades and glass; stops his pulse, drinks concentrated Nitric and Hydrochloric acid; hammers pins into his body and can even stop his blood from flowing out.

He says he does these feats more for the applause than for the money. Besides, he feels secure because other magicians do not dare imitate his dare-devil feats which belong strictly to the realm of Hatha Yoga.

The part-time magician then is still holding fort in an increasingly difficult age when he is being paid less attention and even lesser money-his pastures of entertainment having been gradually denuded by a gargantuan medium of mass entertainment: the cinema.



Talking to the Dead

Media who work through spirit agencies at séances have always been considered as step children where mysticism is concerned. In fact, sages in search of the Absolute do not look favourably on this branch of the supernormal, calling them 'daityas' (demons). They think this preoccupation with lower agencies will mar their onward progress into blissful regions. Swami Shivananda gives the example of King Bharata of Rishiba who renounced the world and became a *sanyasi*. But he was constantly distracted from his thoughts of God by a deer whom he came to love greatly. It became such an obsession with Bharata, that when he died, his last thoughts were of the deer, so he was born as a deer in his next life. Swami Shivanand says: "The last thoughts of the spiritualist will only be thoughts of spirits. They cannot have thoughts of God. Hence, they will enter the region of spirits only...No one should therefore allow himself to become a medium."

But looking at it rationally and in a wider light, one

sees that this much-maligned activity is not really an offshoot of mysticism but its very basis. Prejudices aside, let's face it. Jesus Christ is no longer just a human. Neither is Sai Baba of Shirdi. When Rajamma says, "Jesus talks to me!," what is she doing, if not communicating with the dead? When Narayan Baba says, Sai Baba is working through me," what is he, if not a powerful spiritual medium? The question may be one of degree but it is certainly not one of kind.

Spiritual mediumship is perhaps the most spectacular of all the branches of mysticism. In this field, you have telekinesis, psychic photography, apports and materialisations as well as clairvoyance, clairaudience, automatic writing, and psychometry (study of a dead man's characteristics by contact with his personal belongings).

All philosophy does not provide you with direct proof as mediumship does. If you pursue Yoga, for instance, you may have to wait years to feel the stirrings of the divine. In spiritual communication, you directly contact the people who have passed on and get a picture of life after death. A spiritual medium asked me: "If you are scheduled to go to the U.S., will you not find out everything about the country from somebody who has gone there? Will you not take his advice? In an unpredictable life, the only absolute certainty is death. Since we know we are all going to pass on one

day, isn't it wise to find out where we will go and what life will be like on the other side?"

Then he said: "Spiritualism, mysticism, Yoga or prayer should be a means and not an end in itself. Anybody who gets into this should consider it in the light of a walking stick. The stick should be thrown away at the correct time. If you hang on to it, you may always have to rely on it. All these branches are allied. The esoteric force linking them is the same. Their purpose is to find a unity in diversity, which is the thirst of the soul for the supreme stage in evolution."

He considered none of them higher or lower in scale. The diagram, in fact, was not a graph. It was a wheel with spokes. Each branch had its origin on the circumference and went towards the centre. They all had to meet one day when the impact of realisation came. If somebody was intolerant of the other, it only meant he was far from his goal at the centre of the wheel. If he was close, he would find little difference between his philosophy and his neighbour's, since the distance between the spokes would be very slight.

Where was this astral world with which one communicated?

Nuclear physics said that two types of matter with different vibrations could occupy the same space. The astral plane then was not some place far away in the heavens. It was very much around us. All types of

spirits existed and moved in their subtle bodies and at times even passed through us but we could not see them because their vibrations were different. Just as a radio converts electronic waves to sound waves, a medium who could bridge the two strata of vibrations and make them visible or audible to each other, had to exist in that plane.

I attended a séance where the medium went into a trance. It was a spectacular sight. First, there were prayers, followed by sonorous hymns in Sanskrit. Then there was a brief silence, after which the tremors started. The medium's hand trembled so much you could not distinguish the fingers. A faint, though shrill sound started with the syllable "Om". It was long-drawn and I could not immediately make out from where it came. It sounded like an echo from a faraway place. Then, it came closer and closer till it entered the medium. The hand tremors ceased and she suddenly seemed infused with a new, authoritative voice. She got up abruptly, commanded silence and went round from person to person still speaking in that shrill, strange voice. Her predictions were not always accurate – sometimes they were way off the mark. But unless the audience agreed whole-heartedly with her, she showed her resentment or rather the spirit's resentment, by giving the one who disagreed a couple of hard slaps on the back.

At the end of the trance, she surfaced, sitting on her chair and heaving a great sigh. Then she got up and speaking in her normal voice declared that the séance was over.

I wondered if a medium remembered afterwards all that she had said in the trance state. Her husband, who also went into trances, did not give particular predictions, but general lectures on philosophy. He asked me not to mention any names when I wrote about them. But he answered all my questions.

About trances, he said, "There are two types. One is the semi-conscious trance where the spirit is not completely in control and the medium has a feeling that he is witnessing distantly what is taking place. In the deep trance state, the medium loses all consciousness of his surroundings."

"Is it true that a strong-willed person cannot become a good medium?"

"Yes. In this sort of exercise a complete surrender is necessary. In fact in all types of mysticism, the ego is a drawback and the one who erases his personality, is able to commune with the ultimate reality much faster."

"Does spiritual mediumship drain one of energy?"

"On the contrary, it helps one to recoup. The universal force is boundless. The medium is merely a channel for it. Since it passes through him and then

into others, specially in spiritual healing by mediums, he cannot fail to be benefited by it, because the energy in its passage, will leave something in him as well. He will become more buoyant due to contact with another vibration.”

The purpose of music and chanting, he said, was to create vibrations which affected the psyche and so had a soothing effect. The atmosphere was built up and properly charged, to facilitate the establishment of contact with the astral world.

The Hindus were well aware of the powerful effect of vibrations. They built domes for their temples so that the *mantras* they chanted at prayer would reverberate and echo back in circles. The belief was that sound creates electricity. In modern times, scientists have negated that and say that electricity gives birth to sound.

Spiritual media have been known to do fantastic things. Besides the usual phenomena of apports and materialisation brought about by an almost tangible substance called ectoplasm, spirit healers have accomplished the incredible in medical science, baffling doctors with their cures. You have the Phillipine healers for instance, who are powerful mediums, not just one or two but scores of them, who are taken over by “surgeon guides” and perform complicated operations without chloroform or any

other anaesthetic. There are no instruments, the entire procedure sustained by mere touch – a touch that can even make an incision. There is hardly any blood and no side-effects at all. The patient does not go through a period of convalescence but walks off the operation table quite fit – the offending tumour or organ having been removed. Recovery is instantaneous. Two Indian mystics who have achieved similar startling successes are Satya Sai Baba who conducted a major operation without an anaesthetic or instruments but only ash and Narayan Baba who removed stones from the kidney of a patient by just touching the skin superficially.

The Phillipine healers, if brought to India, would in all likelihood create a veritable sensation. I asked the medium who had told me about them as to why we didn't invite them to give demonstrations in the country.

“No foreign exchange,” he said, “is being allotted for this sort of thing. Spiritual mediumship in India is still very much in the dark. Those who do practise it, fight shy of admitting it, because of unwarranted criticism. The few spiritualistic circles that exist, are still private ones, though there are societies for psychical research in Delhi and a couple of other places.”

Most of the work in this realm has been done by Western countries. The Society for Psychical Research was founded in 1882 by W.F. Barret, F.W.H. Myers,

Henry Sidgwick and an intellectual called Edmund Gurney. It was possible for them to make detailed studies because spiritualistic mediumship was relatively in Western countries and not behind '*purdah*' as it is in India.

Here, it has always been considered in a derogatory light. In the olden days, when a spirit entered a man, he was flogged and burnt in several places so that the spirit left him in peace.

Throttled thus and condemned in Yogic circles, it did not develop but was driven underground where it simmered in an underhand way, often associated with black magic. Quacks and charlatans were quick to take advantage of gullible people and so sprouted a money-making variety of mediums who still thrive. There is a veritable horde of such men who have made mediumship a profession. Till recently they charged a paltry sum for a sitting, at which they gave vague prophecies and messages from departed souls. Whether this was real or engineered, it is difficult to say.

It is this professional jugglery which has given all spiritual mediums a bad name. The genuine ones who have stuck by it, either conduct their séances in "closed-circuit" private groups or try to associate themselves with the other branches of mysticism. One woman who held spiritualistic séances in the evenings, refused to grant me an interview. She ran a nursery

Encounters With Men Of Miracles

school during the day and she was afraid that knowledge of her after-dark activities, would jeopardize her career in education. Another mystic who said he could show me "*chamtkar*" (magic), did a host of materialisations which were very spectacular, but he said he was not a medium. He was "God."



Dare Devil Feats

There is a woman who recommends tiger's flesh for rejuvenation. She had consumed large quantities of it when she had conceived her son Janardhan and consequently he grew up to be a superman. She herself is no ordinary woman. Though over sixty years of age, she can still swim in a well, climb trees and chop wood. She has all 32 teeth intact and no grey hair.

Where she obtained tiger's flesh is another story. During the British regime in India, she was employed as domestic servant in an English *sahib's* household. The '*sahib*' was very fond of *shikar*. Often, he went away into the jungles on hunting expeditions and returned with magnificent dead tigers. Janardhan's mother was poor and could not afford to purchase meat very often. She thereupon hit upon a brilliant idea. She collected and preserved large quantities of the tiger's discarded flesh in the deep freeze in her *sahib's* house and cooked and consumed quantities of it from time to time. During this phase she had just conceived Janardhan Das. Anybody

wanting to follow her example in the present times will no doubt be greatly handicapped by the 'Preservation of Wild Life' movement which zealously guards our dwindling population of tigers.

But, what does her son do for a living?

He performs daredevil feats with apparent ease. For instance, he can blow up a hot water bag to such a great extent that it can even hold a man. The bag eventually bursts on account of his sheer lung power. He breaks solid bricks or coconuts on his head. He can push thick-five inch nails into his nose, break massive iron chains with ease. These chains are normally used for tying up elephant's legs. He can bite right through an iron nail; lift a big pot full of water with his teeth; shove a steel hook through his nose; bring it out through his mouth and walk on fire.

What makes a man do death-defying stunts?

The main incentive, according to Mustafa is applause. Mustafa, known in real life as E.B. Surty, is another stunt artist. He performs feats like lying on a bed of nails while a number of men weighing more than him, jump up and down on his body. He subjects his body to blows with iron and steel bars which even strong men cannot bend. He hits himself so hard that the bar bends. Another feat is having a fruit or vegetable cut in half on his stomach by his assistant who does the act with one stroke. Here, accuracy, skill

and raw courage are needed.

Among his other impressive feats is the Houdini escape, where he is handcuffed, put into a bag and locked up in a trunk. He vanishes in three seconds and his assistant is found in the box instead.

Since early childhood, Mustafa had been attracted towards magic. He would spend nights trying to fathom the tricks of magicians he had seen. In his youth, he was physically weak and timid, usually bullied at school by the rest of the boys. This had a psychological effect on him. In fact he was so eager to outwit his persecutors that he made redoubled efforts to overcome his shortcoming. He took to body-building and Yoga at the age of sixteen. At twenty years of age, he won the first prize in a contest for the best physique.

He says: "I acquired immense knowledge even without the help of a *guru*. I could stop my pulse, drink nitric and hydrochloric acid, stick pins into my body and eat glass and nails. I could also walk on fire without being singed and break coconuts on my bare forehead."

He discovered that the human body could be subjected to a lot of pain, torture and punishment and that it was possible to bear all this through sheer will power. The mind was a very powerful force.

In certain stunts, he follows a system of self-hypnosis. He said: "I hypnotise myself so as not to feel pain. It is

just a question of mind over matter.”

That could be true, but doesn't the flesh deteriorate?

Mustafa apparently had suffered no ill-effects from his feats. In fact, he had been approached by quite a few doctors and others in the medical profession, who had been interested in understanding how he had achieved the humanly impossible.

Auto-suggestion is all very well as far as pain goes but what about the prolonged effect of such stunts on the human body?

I got the answer to my last question when I looked at the career of Tehmuras Sarkari. He took to body building and the performance of dare-devil feats for the same reason as Mustafa. He had been a weakling in his youth too. He had been rejected by the army as he was considered unfit. He started playing games desperately and developed his physique so much that the army took him on.

He shot to prominence in 1942, when at a fair he tried his hand at the “See-your-heart-working” stall and created a sensation. With Sarkari's heart the machine seemed to go haywire. Baffled doctors rushed him to hospital and found amazing details. It was seen that Sarkari had made his heart stop beating for 45 seconds: Many Hatha-Yogis do this, including Ramanand Yogi who goes into living burial.

The capacity of the body to control complex

involuntary functions like the pulse, heart and blood circulation has baffled scientists from time to time. In tests conducted many years ago, two researchers, Anand and China solved a mystery that had puzzled medical men. This was the apparent ability of Yogis to “stop their hearts” so that they simulated the condition of death. Recording instruments gave away the secrets of the trick. It was found that Yogis held their breaths, contracted their chest muscles and drew in their stomachs to build up pressure near the heart. They thereby minimised the blood flow, so much that the heartbeat was almost imperceptible to the probing of a stethoscope and the pulse very faint indeed. In reality, the heart beats were accelerated during the feat, though indiscernible to the casual observer.

The sub-conscious is most closely related to the system of nerves known as the sympathetic nervous system, which carries out automatically the activities of the physical organism. The process of digestion, the beating of the heart and respiratory action are now all involuntary or subconscious activities. It is believed that they were at one time conscious actions. But the process of evolution stripped them of this status and mechanised them.

It is possible to bring these involuntary activities back under conscious control but it is dangerous to do so. It is stated that Sir Francis Galton, the pioneer of

Eugenics tried to tame the automatic breathing process and bring it under voluntary control. In the course of his experiment, he was dismayed to find that he had forgotten how to breathe! As a consequence, he spent a very tense day and night, taking each breath with conscious effort till the old involuntary rhythm was re-established.

Daredevil feats too are equally risky. Self-hypnosis apart, they can cause much internal damage. Tehmuras Sarkari had perfected a feat in which he balanced iron girders on his back while a car with four passengers drove over them. One ill-starred day, the car went out of control and landed on Sarkari's back. He twisted his spine but was not deterred from performing stunts. A bone-setter repaired the damage and Sarkari was back in the limelight just fifteen days later, which shows that dare-devil feat performers develop tremendous rallying powers.

But fate is stronger! One day in 1965, Sarkari rose from his bed rather early in the morning disturbed by a tenacious rat. He lunged at it but fell over a chair. The doctors said the inside layer of his stomach was torn and he ought to retire from the stunt performing arena. The handle of the chair had pierced his stomach. And so finished an exciting career-brought to a gory end by a mere rat!



The Women Swamis

For centuries, the Indian woman has been at the receiving end on account of her sex. She has had to stomach downright insults too, which have been passed down to successive generations via religious books, couched in the most condescending language. For instance, there is a passage which says:... “for if they take refuge in Me, even those who may be low in origin like women, carpenters, craftsmen and serfs in one of the texts reach the supreme goal.”

How we reconcile this attitude with the basic equality of the sexes is anybody's guess. Or probably, a majority of us have never glanced at such books. Other religions too have echoed the same views. Mahavira, for example, believed that a woman could never be liberated directly. She had to strive to be born in the body of a man in her next birth so that she could aspire to the dream of self-realisation.

The Buddha too drew the line at women where religion was concerned, though ultimately he gave a rather reluctant assent to their initiation. He had his

own reasons for the denial. A man, he felt, could easily gain control over his sexual instinct because it was an active urge. A woman's menstrual cycle on the contrary, was a very passive and involuntary activity over which no control could be expected. For this reason, a man rose while a woman fell, as far as renunciation was concerned. It was later seen that what was considered a drawback, was indeed an asset where women were concerned, because being passive, they found it to build a shield around their urges, while a man, being aggressive by nature, was hard put to succeed.

Today's women mystics have proved different things. Some of them believe it is not necessary to renounce the world. One can live in it and yet be far from it. They have husbands and families and what is more, perform their dual roles to perfection.

Nirmala Devi Srivastava is an unusual kind of mystic. She was the only one I encountered whose body gave off vibrations. She said: "Touch my body and you will feel the energy coursing through my veins." I touched her and felt nothing. But when she put her hand on my head, I could feel my eyelids and waves of sensation passed down into my fingers and ultimately into my legs. She said: "When you feel these waves, you know at once that you are in contact with a realised person. If nothing happens then the mystic is

not worth it.”

Nirmala Devi asserted she could raise the *kundalini* with these vibrations. I was surprised because traditionally, the *kundalini* takes years of severe penance and meditation to activate. In Yoga this term features often. It is said to be the subtle energy which lies coiled like a snake at the base of the spine. The spinal column has three parallel lines running through its length. The *ida* and *pingala* are clusters of nerves while the *sushumna* is a hollow passage. In the highest form of *tapasya*, the *kundalini* is believed to uncoil itself and traverse through the *sushumna* till it reaches the brain and makes the Yogi akin to *Ishwara* or God. This is the ultimate bliss of self-realisation.

She told me how she had accomplished this feat in such a short time. “I give the water of life to a seed,” she said, “which just flowers by itself. Everyone has a *kundalini* but it is dormant. Before birth, when the child is a foetus, Divine Love passes through the brain to enlighten it. But as soon as the umbilical cord is cut, a gap is created in the *sushumna*. Because of this vacuum, the powerful *kundalini* cannot rise to the brain.” Nirmala Devi creates vibrations which fill the void and get the subtle energy moving again so that you experience the bliss of realisation.

Her power does not decrease due to the giving. On the contrary, it intensifies. She says she is only a

passage for the power of "collective consciousness" so it leaves its effect within her like some giant battery charger. This is the reason why her body permanently gives off vibrations. She can also feel on the tips of her fingers, vibrations which reveal to her, the characteristics or the state of mind of any person she encounters. She does not have to touch him but she knows all about him.

Her raising of the *kundalini* in others has interesting side effects on the aspirants. Any illness automatically disappears in the process of activating the *kundalini*. Countless people have been cured thus. "But," she said, "this should not be considered an end in itself but only a by-product of the primary desire to attain self-realisation."

Was it necessary to renounce the world in order to attain self-realisation?

"Not at all," she said, "There is no restriction of any sort. You can be a vegetarian or non-vegetarian, married or single. Self-realisation is not dependent on physical denials at all. Anyone can achieve the supreme ecstasy of spiritual bliss."

Nirmala Devi herself is happily married to an officer in the Indian Administrative Service. She was born on March 21, 1923, in Nagpur into an Indian Christian family. She attained the realisation of God without the aid of any Guru. But she did not know how to awaken

it in others.

In May 1970 at Nargol, some miles from Bombay, she was sitting under a tree when she received enlightenment. It was revealed to her that she could activate the *kundalini* in others by just touching them. She tried it out and found she was emitting vibrations.

She traces all illnesses—even cancer, to a stagnation of the subtle energy. An awakening of it is what people call “faith-healing.”

The last picture she presented as I went down the stairs was not that of a goddess on a pedestal but a very down-to-earth, affectionate grandmother, with a little girl on her hip and another clinging to her sari pleats.

A disciple of hers had earlier whispered to me: “When you write about Mataji, give us a draft first just so you don’t misconstrue the facts with your inexperience.” I waited for Nirmala Devi to echo the same sentence but she didn’t. Perhaps she already knew, from the vibration on her fingertips, exactly what I was going to say!

Rajamma Devanandan is a different type of mystic. She confessed she did not even have to touch a person. Sometimes she just talked at a prayer meeting and people went away cured.

How did she explain this miracle?

“The power lies in prayer,” said her husband, “When she prays, people rise fully cured of their sickness and

the dead come back to life.”

They both guaranteed an eighty per cent cure rate in the cases if Rajamma was let into the wards of public hospitals and lunatic asylums. But no one gave permission for such mass curing. In fact, many people, including doctors, had a tendency to ridicule it. But her prayers, indeed worked.

Rajamma did not look her sixty years but a sprightly forty. When I told her this, she smiled and said: “I was a physical education teacher before I took to faith-healing.”

How this unique pair rose to almost supernatural levels from their mundane beginnings, constitutes an interesting story.

Rajamma was born in 1910 into a Christian family in the Cuddapah district of Andhra Pradesh. When she was twelve, and a boarder at St. Ebbas Girls’ High School, she had her first vision. She was ill with cold and fever when Lord Jesus Christ appeared to her, standing on a cloud.

This might be dismissed as a fevered hallucination or childhood fancy but subsequently she had other visions. These came after her marriage. Once, in a dream she found herself on a river bank. There was a great throne in front of her with a majestic person seated on it. He asked her to build a wall along the river bank with a hundred bricks in each row. After she

had finished it, he gave her a small book called. "The Narrow Way." When she woke up she asked her husband: "I brought a small book. Where is it?" As she was running a fever at that time Devanandan thought she was delirious. And there was no sign of any book.

It was after she had received enlightenment in a dream that she realised she had healing powers. Her first chance to try these out came when a seventeen-year-old girl fell sick. For five days, she had touched neither food nor drink, nor had she passed stools or urine. The doctor had given her the twelfth injection when Rajamma entered the room. Rajamma knelt by the bedside and prayed loudly. The moment she did that, the girl fell unconscious. Rajamma was in a fix. The relatives thought this coma was a result of the prayers. They sent up loud lamentations. Just then, Rajamma heard the voice of God whisper that the girl would be fine if she were anointed with oil. Rajamma did this and the sick girl not only opened her eyes but sat up; got off the bed; rolled up her bedding and declared she did not need it any more!

Rajamma's cures displayed an upward graph. She has to date "lengthened" short legs of polio victims; made the paralysed walk again and even cured cancer! The Devanandans have six children. This seems to discount the popular theory that sex and superpowers don't go together.

A woman mystic who is part of our mundane world, yet remains aloof from it, is Anandamayee Ma. She believes in renouncing worldly ties and seeking purity of thought and action. She felt it was only in this way that one could achieve oneness with God.

As a young girl of thirteen, she was married off to Sri Ramani Mohan Chakraborty. In the joint family atmosphere, Nirmala, as she was then known, was often disturbed by the sound of a flute which she heard at odd moments. What was even more perplexing was the fact that nobody else seemed to hear the piercing sound. Doctors were puzzled. They could neither understand nor cure Nirmala. The preoccupied spells were labeled "trances".

With the passage of time, these trances multiplied. They were full of abandon and she often forgot her surroundings when she lapsed into such states. Sometimes she erupted with rare, other-worldly wisdom in soul-stirring discourses. Or she sang hymns in a language difficult to comprehend.

Her first disciple was her own husband. There is a story told of how he was repulsed by an invisible barrier that sprang up to protect her. When he tried to touch his wife as she sat in quiet meditation, After this strange experience, the man became her willing pupil and received religious initiation at her hands. Rechristened Bholanath, he acquired a surprising

detachment from conjugal life, so that the ties between him and Nirmala were no longer bonds of flesh but in an instant became a spiritual communion of souls.

Her experience seems to tally with the view held by another school of thought which says that renunciation of the sexual urge leads to greater spiritual powers. The Sanskrit phrase "*Urdhva Retaska*" exalts celibacy. A person who refrains from sex both in thought and deed is said to turn into a great saint. The latent reproductive energy is not scattered in animal lust but rises till it reaches the brain and imparts miraculous powers. But a person who eschews sex in spite of having the opportunity, as in the case of married couple who voluntarily sever ties of the flesh, the energy is redoubled and the spiritual ecstasy is all the greater.

Another woman who renounced the world in pursuit of the Divine is Ma Yogashaki Saraswati, the inspiration for the Yoga movement abroad. Born in Varanasi, she married and had children. Later, overcome with some unquenchable thirst for a higher spiritual life, she renounced the world in 1961. She is the first woman *sanyasin* to preach yogic wisdom throughout the world as a panacea for psychosomatic ailments and as a secular system for mental development.

She says: "When miraculous powers are attained through the preliminary practice of these (yoga)

techniques, some persons of lower spiritual aspiration use them for demonstrating powers of thought reading, forecasting of future events etc. At a more advanced stage, the practitioner can call spirits from the astral world. With greater perfection, it is possible for him to admit his subtle body into the body of another. All these powers are distractions and a true Yogi attaches little importance to their attainment.”

Lila Singh of Santa Cruz in Mumbai, is a woman who specialises in materialisation of objects. She says these occur by themselves in her house (See Chapter on “Materialisation”). She and her husband had thirteen children. Later, she renounced the world in her belief that one could be a part of “*Samsara*” (life) and yet be out of it.

I met a young man who said, “There are two types of mystics—those who can do miracles and those who can’t. Those who are able to perform them, show us their wonder working skills. Those who can’t do them, declare vehemently that they shouldn’t be done because they are obstructions in the path of true realisation.”

I don’t know. I can only say that these so-called super powers exist. I have met both men and women who have demonstrated them. Some have been married; others have been celibates; some have been strict vegetarians; yet others have claimed they derived

powers from the consumption of meat and liquor.

Supernormal powers then, neither seem to be discriminators of individuals, nor mercifully, can they tell the difference between a man and a woman. If they were partial, we would probably still be in the deep dark ages when a woman could not attain "*moksha*" directly but had to be born first in the body of a man before she could aspire to attain self-realisation.



Stranger than Fiction

You will suffer from spondylitis after a couple of years.”

This was not a prophecy uttered by any astrologer or palmist. It was the prediction of a doctor. The only amazing thing about it was that he did not fathom this with the help of scientific diagnostic equipment like X-rays, ultra-sound, blood tests and the like. He pronounced the disease by just feeling the vibrations of the body.

Meet Dr. Ramakant Kini, whose method of diagnosis defies explanation. If you go to him for a consultation, he does not ask what ails you. You don't have to tell the symptoms. He asks you to just hold out both hands in a thumbs up signal and then he feels their vibrations. He knows exactly what is wrong with you. Not only at the present moment but what will befall you in the future as well. Amazing but true. The rush at his consulting room testifies to his ability.

He is of indiscernible age but confessed to being a little over eighty years. From 4.30 pm to 8.30 pm every working day, he meets his patients in his consulting

room at Bombay Hospital in Marine Lines, a crowded area in South Mumbai. Appointments are made several months in advance with people coming from as far afield as Nasik, Nagpur, Kolhapur, Goa, Rajasthan and UP. He is a Fellow of the American Geriatric Society, Fellow of the International College of Angiology, and Fellow of the International Association of Polypaths. His speciality is Parapsychology. In spite of these impressive medical qualifications, he is a simple man with gentle manners who cures by touch. His reputation is legion both in India and abroad. He is also a painter par excellence and the walls of the waiting room are decorated with his art – impressionistic paintings of Ganesha, landscapes and sketches.

Inside his inner sanctum, where he examines patients, he keeps Ganesha and Shirdi Sai Baba on his right hand side wall- where incense sticks burn. Then he makes you sit in front of his desk, asks you to hold up your thumbs and feels their vibrations.

He took five minutes to pronounce his verdict on the disease I could expect to have “Spondylitis” – I told him I had no symptoms of the disease but only high cholesterol. He dismissed the latter with a wave of his hand and said it was nothing. Regular exercise and a low fat diet would cure that. It was the spondylitis and osteoporosis that he was worried about. It got me

worried too. But he reassured that it need never happen. Prevention is better than cure and he would never let the disease attack.

Next, he made me sit in front of the idols of Ganesh and Shirdi Sai Baba and touched my head with *vibhuti*. He prayed and then gave me *tirth* (holy water).

Then, he went back to his desk and wrote out the prescription- all ayurvedic medicines which I could buy at the pharmacy outside.

I sought another meeting with him, not just as a patient, but to ask how he did this miraculous thing. He was more than willing to oblige, in spite of his busy schedule.

Dr. Keni calls it psychic healing.

“How did you acquire this ability?” I asked.

He said he had acquired it from his mother. She was an uneducated woman but blessed with a great gift for curing by touch. As a child of six or seven years, he went around with her on her healing missions. Sometimes the patient was a man and she would make the child touch him. Miraculously, it alleviated his pain. Later, when he chose the medical line, she prophesied- “You are training to be a doctor, but mark my words- you will turn to spiritual healing.” Her words came true, years after she had made the prediction.

It was in 1971 that Dr. Keni came in contact with a vibrant personality, a man whom he refers to as

Mr. Krishnan, who introduced him to spiritual and psychic phenomena. Even after this, Dr. Keni was wary of stepping into this realm as he was a medical man by profession. But he later realised that medical science and psychic healing, far from being contradictory, are in fact synonymous with each other. A dramatic personal experience turned his life around.

In 1972, Dr Keni developed acute pain in the back which confined him to bed. An X-ray indicated lumbar and cervical spondylitis. He was prescribed a plethora of drugs and was also warned of the possibility of paralysis, if he moved from the bed. He did not want to become an invalid for life. That was when Mr. Krishnan asked him to contact Harry Edwards of the Spiritual Healing Sanctuary in Guildford, Surrey, England. Dr Keni wrote him a letter, and less than a week later, got a message that the healing had started. Healing? But Dr Keni had not yet met the man. That was when he realised that the “healing” could also be done by remote control. It was called “absent” healing then. The pain disappeared in a few days and Dr Keni could move about without a corset or medication. Doctors who treated him called it a rare miracle beyond the realm of medical science!

Later, he attended a séance at the instance of Mr. Krishnan where he received a message from a spirit guide who selected him for a healing mission. The

medium was very insistent that Dr Keni should free his mind from all doubts and prejudices. After the meeting, Dr. Keni had a feeling of tremendous energy and superlative confidence. His palms became warm and his fingers came alive with trembling vibrations. He felt he could cure a sick person by just touching him.

Through a spiritual medium, Dr Keni met his GUIDE, who had been a physician-cum-surgeon on earth two hundred years ago and had built up an international reputation. He was now dead and needed an instrument to practise out his principles in this field. Dr Keni was thus drawn into "Intuitive diagnosis" and "Psychic Healing".

Dr Keni who has written several books on psychic healing says: "The healer is merely a channel. There is evidence that the healer co-operates with doctors and surgeons who are no longer in this world and who are far more intelligent and who have greatly progressed on the other side and who continue to use their rich experience and talents through instruments called healers, on this side. There is no doubt that two of Britain's most famous healers, Gordon Turner and Ray Branch, are actually helped by outstanding men, just as Harry Edwards was helped by Pasteur and Lister."

According to Dr Keni, spiritual healing is not opposed to any medical treatment. It actually assists it. In 1959, each of the London Hospital Authorities was

asked permission by the National Federation of Spiritual Healers for its accredited healers to go into hospitals to heal patients who requested it. More than three hundred hospitals today have officially permitted it. A book by Harry Edwards, "The Evidence of Spiritual Healing", actually records 10,369 healings done in four years and case histories of people who made astounding recoveries even after doctors had pronounced them terminal.

Closer home, in Bombay Hospital, it was due to the initiative taken by Shri Shriyas Prasad Jain, Chairman of the Hospital Trust, that Dr Keni could practise spiritual healing in addition to his geriatric practice. Dr Keni has authenticated and testified cases relating to 47,806 ailing persons. In some cases the cure had worked through remote control, without any personal contact or touch. Psychic healing does not always require body contact. Sending thought waves over thousand of miles can accomplish miracles too, even on atheists and sceptics, according to Dr Keni.

The only condition is compassion on the part of the healer for the patient and a genuine desire to cure the ailment. There are limitations however on psychic healing. Amputated limbs or organs cannot be willed back. The genetically stunted cannot be made tall, nor can a person's IQ be increased. Certain case of terminal illness cannot be cured, nor can the dead be brought

back to life. Some faith healers blame these non-cures to a person's karma or destiny. But Dr Keni says this area is one which does not respond, for inexplicable reasons. But opines that such cases are very rare.

Dr Keni says: "Fields such as psychotherapy, psychohypnosis as well as psychiatry were for many years frowned upon as unwanted intruders. Today, they are widely accepted and so will spiritual healing".

Another field of spiritual healing that Dr. Keni talked about was psychic surgery. Bodies operated upon with bare hands without the use of anaesthesia. People flocked in thousands to far off places like Manila and Brazil for cures – A man who performed this kind of surgery – Jose Pedro de Fretis – later referred to as Arigo-claimed to be possessed by the spirits of doctors and surgeons, particularly a German doctor called Adolpho Fritz who is said to have dictated prescriptions and performed operations through Arigo. Dr Keni relates in his book, "Psychic Healing", how Dr Henry Andrija Puharich, a doctor from North Western University with a keen interest in psychic phenomena went all the way to Brazil with a team of well-known physicians to collect evidence of such operations. He saw him driving a knife into a tumour and removing unwanted growth without anaesthesia, hypnosis or antiseptics. Bleeding was no more than a trickle.

Arigo practised surgery undeterred till the Regional

Council of Medicine in Brazil and the Roman Catholic Church brought court action to stop the “Illegal” practice. What saved him from a jail sentence, was curing Senator Lucio Bittincourt from lung cancer that had been declared incurable by doctors!

I asked Dr Keni if he was the only qualified doctor who had taken to psychic healing in this country. He smiled with amusement, and said, “Most of the successful physicians and surgeons all over the world are basically healers. In my opinion, only studying in colleges and getting degrees and diplomas do not and cannot make them doctors unless they have healing potential in their genes. Unfortunately, doctors are not aware of their psychic healing abilities and therefore have not developed the art of healing along with their medical experience. Dr. B.C. Roy was a great surgeon, a greater healer and an able Chief Minister, all rolled into one. And so were Dr. A.V. Baliga and Dr V.N. Shirodkar. Spiritual persons like these have been the salt of this earth.

However, one highly qualified physician who gave up his medical practice and took whole-heartedly to spiritualism and healing, is Dr Deepak Chopra. Healing through his books which are all international best sellers, he has become a household name.”

“Do you know of any world-renowned doctor-cum-healer who has not felt shy about proclaiming that

spiritual healing is more beneficial than and superior to medical science?," I asked. He instantly told me of an amazing psychiatrist whose research in the Occult sciences has made him a Renaissance Man: Dr Brian Weiss, a practicing psychiatrist and ex-chairman of Psychiatry at the Mount Sinai Medical Centre in Miami, Florida. He has authored many international best sellers like "Many Lives, Many Masters"; "Through Time into Healing", "Only Love is Real"; "Messages from the Masters and many more. His amazing work speaks about a way to transform one's life and find inner peace, health, happiness and fulfillment by drawing on the wisdom of the spiritual guides to capture the healing energy of love."

Faith healers and mystics in India notably Satya Sai Baba and Narayan Baba, among others are credited with having done similar surgeries. They are not qualified surgeons or even doctors for that matter. How do they perform these miraculous feats? Possibly through the intervention of spirits of surgeons in the psychic ether?

On December 9, 1976, Dr Keni lost a very dear friend, in Harry Edwards who had been the turning point in his life. He treasures the message he got from him – It said: "My dear Doctor Keni... I have completed my duty on this plane, I am so glad you are doing the healing work so efficiently and sincerely. You

will have one more GUIDE to help you – Me.... Harry Edwards. You are now rightly my co-worker. My blessings to you.”

And so the good work of psychic healing goes on.. not as an opponent to medical science but as a ally to it.

But Doctor Keni laments there is a problem. Even today many people fight shy of admitting they were cured through psychic healing. Patients often forbid him to divulge their names. They wish to remain anonymous.

Till the winds of willing acknowledgement blow into this branch of healing, much of it will remain a closed door cure. It might take another step up the evolutionary ladder – the revelation of a fourth dimension perhaps, to bring it into the open and give it the recognition it deserves.



The Wonder-Working Preacher of Ahimsa

Muni Sushil Kumarji is a person with mysterious powers. He had become invisible before he was scheduled to leave on his foreign tour. The more conservative Jains had been violently opposed to his world tour because it meant flouting the traditional tenets laid down by Jainism, which permitted monks to travel only on foot. Here, he was going to board an aeroplane, which unleashed a storm of opposition within the sect. It didn't die down even when the Muniji clarified the matter quoting instances when Mahavira himself had crossed the river Ganges several times.

On the eve of his departure, some of his adversaries came looking for Muni Sushil Kumarji, with a view to prevent him from boarding the plane. Muniji was sitting rapt in meditation right in front of them, yet they seemed unable to perceive him. In fact they asked several of his disciples where he was! We were wonder-struck because he was sitting large as life before them,

but we didn't say a word. They passed by him several times, looked high and low and finally departed. Such is his power."

This was Mr Tej Prakash Kaushik speaking about the first monk of the Jain religious sect to leave his country's shores in its three thousand year history. The Muniji departed on a foreign tour to preach a Universal Religion to people in Canada and the United States. He took with him his close disciple, Ashok Muni. Both were clad in the simple vestments of Jain monks, with white sheets to wrap around themselves and a cloth across their mouths to prevent insects and germs from being caught and destroyed in the course of their inhalation. They also carried brooms made of wool to brush living creatures from their path, lest they unwittingly step on them.

India's ten million Jains all owe allegiance to their founder, Mahavira who preached his creed of non-violence in the 6th century B.C. He enjoined on them to be vegetarians, prescribing a diet of cereals, vegetables, milk and ghee and prohibited them from taking life in any form. Their monks took the vow of celibacy; constrained to walk barefoot and employ no other means of locomotion.

The Muniji incurred the displeasure of the more orthodox by flouting two of these tenets-once when he boarded a plane in Delhi, though he dutifully walked

the twenty miles to the airport and the other time when he put on a pair of rubber sandals at the insistence of officials at Honolulu airport.

The Muniji brushed aside the objections of his rigid kinsmen by saying, "If our religion is for humankind then we must make use of modern conveyance."

Muni Sushil Kumarji otherwise leads a frugal life, observing all the austere tenets of Jainism rigorously. He lives in a small room, sleeps on the floor even in the US; does all his chores without the help of servants and meditates at 4 a.m. daily. No woman is allowed into his presence after sundown and even when they do come for *darshan* in the course of the day, he keeps his eyes lowered. It is said there is a ritual in which he periodically has his hair pulled out when he is meditating, just to prove that a Yogi in his sublime trance-state feels no pain.

In Chicago, the Muniji astonished people with rare psychic feats. In a private psychiatric hospital there, he went into a semi-trance state and diagnosed the emotional states of people from the colours of their auras, which he declared he could perceive. The symptoms he relayed were infallibly accurate.

Another feat he demonstrated was varying the temperature of different parts of his body at will. Yogis who have advanced far in their meditative techniques, as we have seen, are able to do this merely by

concentrating on that particular part of the anatomy.

The Muniji was also able to change his brain-wave states from Beta (wide awake) to Alpha (deeply relaxed and perceptive) and Theta (light trance, recovery and pre-sleep). He spoke of meditative trances in which the bodily functions ceased and even the mind died. Just a void remained and you entered astral worlds where the intellect did not apply and experienced a rapture-which you could not put into words.

Dr. J.S. Martindale, a staff psychologist said that the Muniji's divination of emotional states in others, was done "through some kind of telepathic communication. What he did was quite real and within the bounds of what we know can happen. In India, mystics are able to diagnose ailments in various parts of the body, to tell if they (people) have been unwell, are unwell or are going to be unwell."

More spectacular is a feat attributed to the supernormal power of Muni Sushil Kumar by his follower Mr Tej Prakash. In his own words, "Once when I was in the mist of a house-warming ceremony, an incident occurred, which left me baffled and ruminative for days. I had invited a friend of mine, Krishan Sharma who had brought his six-year-old son along with him. While the grown-ups were engaged in exchanging pleasantries, the child climbed up the window ledge, lost his balance and plummeted down

four stories. There was pandemonium all around. We went downstairs and saw the child lying unconscious in a pool of blood. Somebody brought a sheet to wrap up the boy, while another man went to inform Muni Sushil Kumar about the disaster.”

“We were just carrying the child to Gangaram Hospital when we were intercepted by the Muniji himself. He touched the still form of the boy and blessed him with *jivan daan*, a fresh lease of life.

“At the hospital, a strange thing happened. We unwrapped the boy and laid him down on the table for examination, while one of us told the doctor exactly how bad a fall the boy had had. Then we all filed out. Imagine our surprise when the doctor appeared a few minutes later and asked us to take him away. My first thought was that he was dead but the white-robed specialist said, “Are you joking? This boy hasn’t fallen from the fourth floor at all! Why do you exaggerate so much? He must have had a slight toss somewhere. There are a few bruises. I have dressed them and you can take him away. Then I will have room here for more serious cases.”

We just stared in consternation at each other, not knowing what to say. But we were convinced that this was the supreme power of the Muniji. But how on earth could we convey all this to a practical man of medicine?”

Sushil Kumarji doesn't profess to be the incarnation of any God. He declares however that this is his seventh birth, that he was a *sanyasi* in all of them and that he is destined to be born once more in his eighth and last exile on earth, as is revealed by the Bhrigu Samhita, after which he will attain *moksha*.

Muni Sushil Kumar was born on 15 June 1926 in a small village called Shikohpur, now known as Sushilgarh in Haryana.. At the age of eight, he left home, never to return. He went to Shri Chotey Lalji Maharaj and became his staunch disciple. Just before his twenty-fourth birthday, Sushil Kumarji became a Muni and was initiated into the rather austere order of Jain monks, giving up the many temptations of the mundane world.

He crossed several examinations in his brilliant academic career, namely *Shastri*, *Prabhakar*, *Acharya*, *Sahitya Ratna*, *Vidya Ratna* and others. He also launched two magazines called *Pariksha* and *Naya Sahitya*. For a while he was organiser of the Literary Department of the *Stanakvasi Jain Sangh*. He had in him the attributes of a poet, historian, writer, orator and ascetic, which enabled him to cull exactly what he wanted from life and make it coherent for the masses. He believed implicitly in the importance of education and established three schools-the Bhagwan Mahavir Vishwa Vidyapeeth affiliated to the Rashtriya Sanskrit

Sanstan; the Shri Mahavir Vishwa Vidyapeeth affiliated to the Varanaseya Sanskrit Vishwavidyalaya and the Ahimsa Ayurvedic Maha-vidyalaya in Delhi.

His ideal was an inter-religious coordination – a harmonious blend of all the faiths of the world. He believed the present state of strife led to schisms, which pushed people further apart instead of uniting them in a common philosophy. He drew a simpler analogy by comparing all religions to cattle. He said, “It struck me that all milk is white, in spite of the different coloured kine from whom it was milked.” By the same reasoning, it followed that all religions yielded the same wholesome fruits but we cavilled at the outward differences and lost sight of the underlying unity.

He said the experience of communing with the Divine and the act of meditation which achieved it, was not the prerogative of any particular religion but was the property of Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and other faiths alike. The truth was not with any one religion. In fact according to him, “Anyone who says he is the only one in possession of the truth, is not telling the truth.”

The Founder of a very popular organisation, “The World Fellowship of Religions’, Muni Sushil Kumarji preaches unity of all religions based on the cult of Ahimsa. India’s ten million Jains do not believe in any specific God but think each man has implicit within

him, the potentiality to ascend divine heights, if only he takes the trouble to kindle the spirit awake. Muniji carries the doctrine of *Ahimsa* a step further when he says that one can flout the cult not merely by destroying life but even by thinking ill of others, offending them in devious ways or wounding their sentiments.

His foreign tour, according to him, was aimed at neither promoting Jainism nor discussing theology but rather showing the world the underlying unity and oneness which lies at the root of diverse religions. His cause gleaned active support in India and was patronised by political stalwarts like Dr Rajendra Prasad, Dr S. Radhakrishnan, Shri Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, Shri Morarji Desai, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, Shri Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and Smt Indira Gandhi.

Mere science and technology, according to Muni Sushil Kumar, are not sufficient to resolve our problems. "Truth," he feels, "is eternal. Science and religion must go together if the world is to be saved."



The Theory of Spiritual Evolution

The human mind has always been fascinated by the strange and the unknown. Man's momentous evolution has been punctuated by inventions and discoveries that have provided the answers to many problems. Yet, a sphere remains outside the pale of scientific understanding.

What is apprehended by the senses but cannot be comprehended by the mind, can hardly be dismissed as mass hysteria or the mania of cranks. There can be no doubt at all that of late, such phenomena are becoming too numerous and widespread to be ignored.

Ours is not a strictly religious age where blind faith holds sway. This is *Kali Yug*, the age of doubt and dissensions; of curiosity and questioning. Years ago, perhaps, religious dogma had such a hold over mortals, that even the greatest of miracles were taken in their stride. To question the given was the most heinous crime; to ponder over the complexities and contradictions in any of our religious scriptures was blasphemy.

But today in the age of science, the quest for facts is never complete. Man is always trying to fathom the subterfuge behind some apparently mysterious phenomenon, to understand the sleight of hand behind some "magic".

He hankers after proof. When he sees bewildering events, he refuses to believe the evidence before his eyes. But, these things lie beyond the scope of his understanding. Yet it cannot be denied that something spectacular is happening to us. The age which has witnessed something as phenomenal as a moon-landing, is also in the throes of another, more subtle transition.

In the seeming chaos of nature, there seems to be some primeval pattern unfolding in the Universe. Darwin called it the theory of Evolution and said that the ape was our remote ancestor who developed gradually to become modern man as we know him today. What passed between, is lost in prehistory as an unchronicled saga of ape and super-ape who took the first step towards civilization with the faint stirrings of what were probably the beginnings of intelligence. Just how this moment of explosion took place, we will never know because we have not yet found the "missing link" between the last ape and the first man.

What happened to the missing link?

The explanation could well be that there is no missing link. At one moment of "intellectual

explosion", the ape turned from animal to caveman. Perhaps the very first apes who stood on their hind legs, lost their inconvenient tails and displayed the first glimmerings of intelligence were initially laughed off as freaks. Then, when they became too numerous to ignore, they may have been looked upon as super apes. By standing up they narrowed their vision and made it more concentrated. This was the stairway to brain development.

There is a curious, almost parallel phenomenon taking place today. There is some metamorphosis which awes us but leaves us with a definite feeling of unreality.

We view with a mixture of suspicion and veneration the sudden splurge of supernormal phenomena which in recent times have swept us off our feet. More and more men and women find some inexplicable power stirring awake within them. Nature is not discerning in the choice of persons, because we find these super beings hailing from all walks of life, from all religions and from all parts of the globe.

What is the explanation for the abundance of supernormal energy in so many human beings? An answer could well be found in the very same theory of Evolution which Darwin propagated and which we have come to accept as an integral part of civilisation and life. Life as we know it today, is still in the process

of evolving. The first step came when the ape became a cave man. He had then developed on the physical plane. Next came the mental growth which was at once stupendous and undeniable. Man set himself complicated tasks and fulfilled them. He advanced in science, technology and medicine. He launched astronauts into the universe in an attempt to fathom its secrets. He invented bombs that could destroy millions in minutes. Yet something was lacking.

The third phase of development on the spiritual or mystical plane came next. God and Nature apart, there is some force or energy which is stirring awake, more in some people than in others. In Yogic theory, the "*Kundalini*" or energy force in man is symbolised as a coiled serpent lying at the base of the spine. Could there not be some connection between this "*Kundalini*" and the ape's tail which disappeared long ago, leaving its astral vestige in a concentrated force at the base of the spine?

In fact, the process has seemingly been going on for years. But in the beginning, men who showed such manifestations were few and far between. When they did occur, we called them magicians or mediums or mystics and regarded them as interesting freaks. Science often turned its back on such phenomena and refused to believe them. Occasionally, such men were regarded with awe and elevated to phenomenal heights

of adulation. This led to the birth of religions. But even here, much depended on the age in which such a man made his appearance. Born at an inopportune time, many men and women paid for their peculiar powers with their lives. Countless people who demonstrated “mystic” powers in these times were burnt at the stake as “witches” and “heretics”.

Just as apes didn't cease to exist with the evolution of a new man, “normal” men and women will perhaps not cease to be, even if a newer and superior being should make its appearance. So we will have three parallel creatures existing side by side in a brave, new world.



About Jaico Publishing House

Jaico Publishing House has published over 2000 titles in a diverse range of subjects such as adults' and children's literature, history, humor, games, religion, philosophy, health, psychology and self-improvement. Our eminent authors include Sri Sri Paramahansa Yogananda (Autobiography of a Yogi), Khushwant Singh, Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandaya, Eknath Easwaran, Nirad Chaudhuri, M.V. Kamath, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, Osho, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and Robin Sharma.

This book is a graphic face-to-face account of encounters with unusual men and women – the faith-healers, the flesh mortifiers, the mystics who materialise ash and honey, black magicians, yogis who stop their pulse and heart beat, death defiers who get buried alive and live to tell the tale, spiritual seance mediums who act as transmitters between the living and the dead, and much more.

Some mysteries of the Universe are beyond man's comprehension, yet they never fail to ignite his curiosity. The very fact that these psychic phenomena cannot be exhibited by everyone, adds to their peculiar allure.

This book is an objective sally into this realm.
What gives some mortals these super-powers?

Science has not yet found all the answers. Hear what the mystics and miracle men say in their own versions of what exactly happens to them on the psychic, physical and metaphysical planes, when they are going through these experiences.



Mayab Balse is a successful writer having penned over a thousand articles and stories for leading magazines and newspapers like Times of India, Femina, Eve's Weekly and Reader's Digest among others. She has authored novels *Just a Matter of Mistresses*, *The Singer*, *The Sensuous Saint*, *The Cannibal* as well as non-fiction *The Indian Female: Attitude Towards Sex*. In addition she has worked in an

advertising agency, visualized comics and comic strips and written children's books. She has also written for the BBC World Service. She lives in Mumbai and has scripted serials for television, the memorable ones being *Amanat*, *Campus*, *Dekh Bhai Dekh*, and *Kumkum Challenge* which have appeared on both Doordarshan and private satellite channels like Zee TV, Sony, and Star-Plus.

ELEVATE YOUR LIFE. TRANSFORM YOUR WORLD.

JAICO  BOOKS

WWW.JAICOOBOOKS.COM

Spirituality

ISBN-13: 978-81-7992-851-6



9788179928516