WALKING WITH KRISHNAMURTI

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF NANDINI MEHTA

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This book is a work of non-fiction based on the diaries, letters, and conversations of Nandini Mehta.

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THE LAST WALK

Nandini with Krishnamurti at Adyar Beach, Madras,
in January 1986. Photo: Asit Chandmal.

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PREFACE

NANDINI MEHTA FIRST MET THE PHILOSOPHER and spiritual teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti in Bombay in 1948, when she accompanied her father-in-law, the mill-owner Sir Chunilal Mehta, to one of his meetings. Over the course of the next 38 years, until his death in 1986, Nandini and Krishnamurti became good friends and exchanged innumerable letters. Through the years, Krishnamurti shared with Nandini his thoughts and teachings, his compassion for her and her family.

Very little about the life of Nandini Mehta is in the public domain, apart from what is in her sister Pupul Jayakar's biography of Krishnamurti, *Krishnamurti: A Biography*. She remains an obscure figure, and other biographers of Krishnamurti have mentioned her only in passing. Some of the letters Krishnamurti wrote to Nandini Mehta became part of Jayakar's book. An independent booklet, based on these letters, entitled *"Letters to a Young Friend: Happy is the Man who is Nothing"* was also published by the Krishnamurti Foundation. This booklet was subsequently translated into several languages, including Hindi, Marathi, Greek, and Portuguese.

At the time of its publication, it was not disclosed that the letters were written to Nandini Mehta, though those in Krishnamurti circles of the time knew that the "young friend" was actually her. This is how Pupul Jayakar introduces the letters: "He wrote the

following letters to a young friend who came to him wounded in body and mind. The letters, written between June 1948 and March 1960, reveal a rare compassion and clarity…"

The rather obvious question often asked is: Why did he write these letters? Why did he maintain such a long and dedicated correspondence? Obviously, Nandini became a close friend and associate. She was important to him and he cared about her. Less obviously, he probably saw in her a spirituality and calmness, of the kind he sought to develop in all those who gathered to listen to his discourses.

Few understood the complex and beautiful friendship Nandini shared with Krishnamurti. One needs to understand Krishnamurti's concept of compassion and understanding, only then can one fathom their bond and respect for each other.

What is relevant and highlighted in this memoir is the way in which Nandini absorbed and understood Krishnamurti's words, how they helped her, how she tried to live her life according to his teachings. This biography spells out her life, her struggles, her path to a peaceful, spiritual existence.

This manuscript is based on her diaries, extracts of letters Krishnamurti wrote to her, which she had copied into her diaries, and letters and conversations between Nandini and her daughter Devyani (Devi) Mangaldas. Through these words, the life and thought of Nandini Mehta unfold, as does her connection to Krishnamurti.

Three years after Krishnamurti's death, when Nandini was 72, in her diary, she wrote him a letter. The letter nostalgically reminisces about the joys of walking with Krishnamurti in Bombay, Benaras,

Rishi Valley, and Sri Lanka. It also recalls a distant memory of walking with him in Ooty, and watching the world through his eyes. The letter ends with a moment of epiphany, when Krishnamurti's spiritual presence lifts her thoughts and mind. It is because of these last words she wrote to Krishnamurti, and the way in which she personally and metaphorically walked with him during her lifetime, that this memoir is entitled "Walking With Krishnamurti".

CHAPTER 1

A TREMENDOUS LIGHT

THE SKY WAS OVERCAST AND A LIGHT drizzle filled the day. As it was Sunday, my mother Nandini Mehta, who had recently turned 85, and I spent the day together at home. I noticed that her breathing had appeared slightly heavy from the morning, but she neither mentioned it nor complained.

At about 11 a.m., as was his daily routine, Kaka, my brother Vikram, dropped in to see Ma briefly. She was delighted to see him. Gazing at him with adoring eyes, she held his hand and kissed it. He showed his affection for her by teasing her a little and ruffling her hair. After he left, Ma had lunch and an afternoon nap.

At home with us was Bhagyashri, a young student of Bal Anand, Ma's school for the underprivileged. She was spending Sunday with us so she could practice conversing in English. Ma asked me to give her an evening snack and then Bhagyashri turned on the TV. Ma sat with her to watch. Doordarshan was covering the funeral of Dhirubhai Ambani who had died the day before on 6th July, 2002. Ma shook her head and asked the young girl to put on a hilarious Marathi play instead. She sat upright watching the show, laughing heartily at the jokes and banter. At 7 p.m. we sat down for dinner. Ma had peas, her favourite vegetable, and some tomato soup and toast.

Around 8 p.m. the phone rang. It was my son Aditya. He'd returned from Alibag and was very tired, but wanted to know how both of us were. I told him we were fine, and mentioned Nandinima's occasional heavy breathing. Being quite exhausted, he wrapped up the conversation quickly, saying he would come by some other day.

Ten minutes later the doorbell rang. I was surprised to see Aditya walk in. Ma was sitting in her usual chair and she said, "Aditya has come". She was so obviously happy to see him. Aditya sat beside her, leaned over and kissed her. She placed her head on his shoulder and smiled at him. Then, very clearly, she said, "Oh Ghanshyam," referring to my other brother who was travelling in Europe. There were no signs of distress, no change of expression, no outward clues for me to think she was leaving us, but for some reason, without really thinking about it I involuntarily said: "Ma, go in peace, don't worry about anything". She closed her eyes, head still on Aditya's shoulder. Less than thirty seconds later he felt for her pulse and shook his head. There was none.

On a Sunday night, where would we find a doctor? Who should we contact? Luckily, Dr. Vandana Merchant from our building was able to come by. She said Ma had passed away peacefully.

We contacted Kaka, and called Ghanshyam as well. Kaka rushed back, hurrying into the flat calling out "Ma, Ma".

Then we laid her down on her bed and sat beside her in silence. No crying out, no wailing or clutching at her. I put a piece of the bark of the pepper tree from Ojai, California in her mouth. It was from the same pepper tree under which Krishnamurti is believed to have had his first revelation in 1922. Aditya and Kaka made the arrangements for her cremation. I asked that she be put down on the ground, under the stars, just before she was transferred into

the ambulance to be taken away. There, I held her feet for a few seconds and kissed them.

Ma had truly gone in peace.

> "Have a family, a house, but do not be caught up in it or take shelter behind it. When death comes, go empty-handed, alone, unafraid, without a tremor, and there will be light. Krishnaji says, 'a tremendous light'… if not, you will be right back."
> – From the diary of Nandini Mehta, June 1975.

Devi and her mother always shared a very close bond. Nandini and Pupul at Devi's wedding in Bombay in April 1959 (above). Mother and daughter, a few days before Nandini's passing (below).

Nandini started Bal Anand, her centre for the underprivileged, in 1954. It was an expression of her understanding of Krishnamurti's teachings, and a very significant part of her life until her last days.

CHAPTER 2

THE MOTHER I KNEW

ONE OF MY FAVOURITE MEMORIES of my mother Nandini Mehta dates back to when I was a nine-year old school girl. Ma and I would walk along Nepean Sea Road every evening for an hour. My parents had recently separated, and my two younger brothers and I lived with our father and grandparents at Malabar Castle, a grand bungalow at 42, Ridge Road in Bombay's Malabar Hill area. The highlight of our day, however, was the time we could spend away from that house, with our mother. Technically, our father permitted us just one hour with her every evening. Since I was the oldest, I was allowed to go for a walk with her for an additional hour before my brothers joined us at her mother Motima's house, an old bungalow on Dongersi Road. We had to be back home by 8 p.m., no later.

I recall these evenings, and the time we spent at her house, as a time of great happiness. The house was always full of people—besides granny and Ma, my aunts and cousins would all be there to spend time with us. Motima's table was invariably laden with delicious food, there was a lot of fun, laughter, and jokes. My mother was very demonstrative and showered us with love, with hugs, with as much joy as she could share in that hour. When it was time for us to leave, she never revealed herself to be depressed or upset, even if we were. Not once did I ever hear her say a negative word

against our father, not one bitter remark or statement of anger was expressed. All three of us had an extremely strong bond with our mother from the beginning, and this continued right to the very end of her life.

Besides these evenings, from 1949 until I got married in 1959, the only significant time we spent with her was six weeks during every summer vacation, either in Ooty, Kodaikanal, or Nainital. Just before Diwali, we were allowed to travel with her for another six days, usually to Matheran. Other than that, when my father was going out for dinner, or a weekend in Poona during the horse racing season, we were allowed to go to Ma's for a sleepover. This was always special, an unexpected treat. The Fiat car would be loaded with our pillows, sheets, and clothes and we would head to Ma's house. We'd spread mattresses out on the floor of her room and sleep together. Our hearts would burst with joy when we went to bed on those nights. The three of us stood together and protected each other through the tough times, but it was Ma who was the central pivot, the focus and source of our happiness.

During the hours and days we spent with Ma, we never ever heard her complain, even if she had a health problem. If the rest of her family was going out for dinner or an event and it cut into our meeting time, she always stayed back for us.

Undoubtedly, having only one hour each day with her children must not have been easy for her. I later learnt that it was Krishnaji's words that had helped her during this difficult time.

Once I got married and moved to Ahmedabad, Ma and I wrote to each other at least 2-3 times a week. In one letter to me, written around 1964, this is what she said:

> One day many years ago, when all three of you had gone home, tearful and frightened, I went to Krishnaji in a state of great agitation: "Why can't I see more of my children?" I lamented. "A rich man has money and he wants more, and you in your own wants and desires are doing the same," Krishnaji said. "The man who is content with what he has is richer than the richest, and if your heart is full, then you have everything."

On another occasion, Ma told me that she was once very distraught and upset during the long and acrimonious court case between my parents, for legal separation and custody of the children, as it was going back-and-forth between lawyers. When she spoke to Krishnaji about it, he said: "Nandini, how will you live your life away from the children? If the whole day you are anxious, bitter, and self-centered, when you meet your children briefly in the evening what will you give them?"

Undoubtedly, Krishnaji's caution and guidance had a profound impact on the way Ma chose to carry forward with her life and deal with the situation she was in. We children never saw her agitated or distressed at losing custody of us.

In 1975, in a letter Ma wrote to me, she responded to my question on how she had managed to make our lives so happy despite the short time she had with us.

> In the past, even for a short while, whether driving with you three children or sitting in the dark on the porch at 42, talking in whispers after spending the night at my home, you say I filled you with delight. I thought of the past and I do not remember doing anything consciously. I just loved the three of you and gave up

> myself completely to you. You must also have done the same. There was no asking, we just snatched what we got, and loved every moment of it. I never, I admit, spoke of anything to depress you and you also, my three valiant children, did not talk to me of depressing things.

Ma was always a sea of tranquility. She never expressed anger. Even when she did not approve of something, she did not get annoyed or fly into a rage. She would just stay calm. I believe that my mother had a strong spiritual inclination, perhaps from the beginning, from her early childhood. In her 70s too, she had a quiet, meditative demeanour. There was a mystery about this tranquil state that was not easy to fathom, and those who witnessed the radiance she communicated often wondered about its source. It was not as if she was aloof at all, in fact, she was very engaged with us. She had a great zest for life, for travel, for nature. She was forever brimming with affection and happiness, and wanted to share with us how much she loved and cared for us. On my 18th birthday, her gift to me was a beautiful eight-page letter that began with a quote from Socrates. Sixty years later, I still read it occasionally, and find it holds so many truths. Here is an extract:

> "Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inward soul; and may the outward and inward man be at one. May I reckon the wise to be the wealthy, and may I have such a quantity of gold as a temperate man and he only can bear and carry."
> – Socrates
>
> My Dearest Deva,
> Tomorrow, according to the law, you will be free. But you will discover as you grow older, that in life there is no complete and absolute freedom. At each phase and

> point in one's life, one has and one has not, one wants and cannot have, one pursues and the thing evades us. It seems at no point is there cause to be content and satisfied. One has flashes, periods of joy and release, but they soon pass. So Deva, one has to see all this, see that there is no end to desire, that it is good and natural and praiseworthy to feel, to respond, to ache and want, but it is also natural not to always have what one wants. That life is good not because one gets what one wants (though there is temporary joy in that, certainly), but it is satisfying, lovely, and beautiful because one sees that one cannot always be gratified. To see that, one must love and ache wildly, feel passionately, desire and yet live lightly on life. Not cling and clutch, but be like a butterfly, sitting lightly on each flower.

Ma lived by the teachings she had absorbed from Krishnaji. She had attended innumerable talks, exchanged hundreds of letters, and read numerous books about his writings. She listened to him very attentively when he spoke. She talked to him whenever they met. She wrote to him and he wrote back, sharing details about her life, discussing how to deal with basic, everyday problems: a health issue, a grandson who had been bitten by a dog, the death of a friend. Unlike her sister Pupul, Ma did not delve into the esoteric aspects of his teachings, the mysticism, or the revelations of extraordinary mental states of being.

Ma adopted the principles and philosophies that made the everyday world easier to navigate, that made life bearable even in times of hardship or trouble. Her actions were based on what made practical sense to her. She tried to pass on to her three children the values she had absorbed from Krishnamurti. "Follow the truth of his teachings," she would say, "Don't merely repeat his words. You have to find out your own truth".

Humour was a very large part of my mother's family life and when we were over at granny's house, we would be comfortable enough to joke a lot. Laughter and joking didn't exist in my father's home, so we craved this more when we came over to Ma's. We could and often did joke about anything at all. Kaka, who had a great sense of humour, constantly joked about the spiritual world. One day, Pupulmasi and Ma were sitting on a sofa having an intense discussion. At one point Pupulmasi gestured with her palms at the back of her head and said to Ma, "Ghodi, you must have a holistic perception, see from the back of your head". Just then Kaka happened to enter the room, and he stood silently listening and chuckling at the conversation. The next day he purposely went close to where Ma and Pupulmasi were sitting. Pupulmasi noticed something amiss and said "Kakdi, what has happened? You are wearing your glasses at the back of your head!" Kaka grinned and replied, "Yes, I too am seeing things from the back of my head".

Such was the light-hearted atmosphere in granny's house. The conversations were never gloomy, morose, or rigid. We were free to listen or not, agree or disagree, joke or be serious, debate or refrain from discussion. At the same time, when the family gathered, there were serious debates on politics, social changes, new inventions like the computer, Krishnamurti, books read, and revival of handlooms and handicrafts. Pupul and my cousin Asit's voices drowned the voices of the others as everyone spoke loudly at the same time.

Ma was a confidante for many friends and family. If anyone had a problem, they knew they could turn to her. Issues with boyfriends and crushes were talked about as well. No matter was considered too delicate or unsuitable for discussion with her. People were drawn to her, her quiet presence, her gentleness, her smile. A number of women would come over and talk to her about the

burdens in their lives. When she walked along Dongersi Road, children would affectionately call out "Bai, bai!"

Whenever I visited Mumbai from Ahmedabad, where I lived between 1959 and 1983, Ma and I did everything together. We went to the movies, to the salon for a facial, to attend to chores, and we walked every day.

Since 1983 after my marriage ended, I have been in a relationship with Kamal Mangaldas, though I lived in Mumbai with Ma. We read books and did yoga together and often discussed Bal Anand and how to make it more meaningful for the children. She fully supported me when I restarted my studies at the age of 44, attended university, and did an M.A. in Counselling Psychology. Later, I worked for five years as a research assistant at the psychiatric department of KEM Hospital. From 1987 onward, for 22 years, I worked as a counsellor at J. B. Petit School. From 1987 I also worked actively with Ma at Bal Anand, and when her health started deteriorating in 1996, I took full responsibility for it.

Every so often at night she shared with me little nuggets of wisdom, on how to live: "Devi go down on your knees and be grateful for what you have," she would say. "Things may not always go your way. Our minds are petty, we are so short-sighted, we always want things to happen in a certain way. Who knows what is actually the right thing for us? Drop your burdens, and never, ever let go of Krishnaji's hand. Laugh with all your being. Give of yourself to all who come your way." Though she felt strongly about his teachings and lived by them, she never forced anything on us and thus none of us ever thought of rebelling. Instead she spoke to us about questioning and challenging conditioning; she helped and guided her children to be aware and fearless.

Though I had no doubt in my mind that Ma had done the right thing by leaving my father, it was only in 2017 that I understood fully why. A document entitled "My Life" which she had written in 1949 had remained in a file in my cupboard for decades, but I had never had the courage to read it. I knew it was a detailed account of her life up until the time she decided to file for judicial separation from my father. I'd opened it once after her death, but after reading only a few pages I'd put it away. It was only in the summer of 2017 that I finally garnered the fortitude to read it. Encouraged by my cousin Radhika, I decided that if I was to fully understand my mother's life in her own words, I had to gather my wits and read the whole story. What I read in that document affected me greatly. I was saddened by what had happened. I was surprised that my mother had never ever spoken to me of the things that had happened, of what she had gone through. She had wiped it clean from her thoughts; she had moved on. This realisation was both heartbreaking and liberating at the same time. In the following chapters, I have presented an abbreviated version of her life.

Ma would tell me over and over again how deeply she loved me. She often said to me that I had been a friend and mother to her. She was and will always be my dearest and closest friend. She was sacred to me, and 16 years after her passing, I still feel her presence beside me every day.

In brief, this was the mother I knew. In this memoir, I try to trace her life as I understand it, from her diaries, letters, and from conversations I had with her over many decades. I think of her as a woman of great gentleness in outward speech, behaviour, and demeanour, but inwardly of immense strength and resilience. Through this memoir, I wish to share with others her life, reflections, and the teachings of Krishnamurti as she had shared them with me.

CHAPTER 3

A GOLDEN CHILDHOOD

NANDINI MEHTA WAS BORN ON the 4th of June 1917, in Mirzapur, a small town on the banks of the river Ganga, just 67 kilometres from Benaras, now Varanasi. At the time, the area was part of the United Provinces (UP). Both her parents, Vinayak and Iravati, were Nagar Brahmins from Surat, Gujarat. Vinayak's father Nandshanker Mehta was a learned schoolteacher, who wrote the Gujarati novel *Karan Gehlo.* His mother was known to everyone as Motaba.

Iravati's father was Thakorebhai, a successful barrister, and her mother Kiki was a strong, vocal woman, who in her later years became a municipal corporator. The two families were friends. When Kiki was pregnant with Iravati, Nandshanker had joked with her "If you have a daughter, we would like her to wed our son Vinayak". And indeed, they did marry in 1907, when Iravati was 16 and Vinayak 23.

Vinayak studied at Cambridge and after his return joined the prestigious Indian Civil Service under the British, choosing the United Provinces as his cadre. He and his bride went on his first posting to Allahabad, at which time they became friends with and grew close to the Nehru family.

They lost their first and second children, who were probably stillborn. Then came their son Kumaril, called Kumi. In fact, all their children had nicknames. After Kumi was Purnima, who was called Moon, then Premlata (Pupul), Nandini (Nancy), and Amarganga (Amru). Four girls and one boy.

Beautiful Nandini was the darling of the family. Iravati would proudly say, "When Nandini was wheeled in a pram, people would stop and stare. 'Who is this beautiful Greek child?' they would ask".

Nandini adored her father, describing him as a tall, wheat-complexioned man. She would plead with him, "Please daddy, shave your moustache. It hides your handsome face". She was also deeply attached to her mother Iravati, who was worldly, astute, and extremely caring and affectionate. Iravati was the deeply respected matriarch of her home. Though she was not highly educated, she was extremely bright and perceptive, with an innate gut-feeling about issues. Her husband would often ask her to read his files and write her critical notes in the margin.

With great nostalgia, Nandini would tell her children about the halcyon days of her childhood. During his tenure as an administrator for the British, Vinayak was posted in different places: Allahabad, Lucknow, Bikaner, Kashmir. The family always travelled with him and lived in large, colonial bungalows with outhouses, tennis courts, beautiful gardens, sometimes a rose garden as well, with pansies, sweet peas, dahlias laid out by the previous memsahib. They had a huge staff, all in uniform; men with turbans and the crest VM. And there were ponies and dogs too.

When she was reminiscing, Nandini would talk of how she felt sad when she saw the *punkhawalla*, who was usually blind, sitting on the balcony, a rope attached to his toes, moving a large fan to cool the

house. She would often sit next to him listening as he narrated folk tales. On summer nights, they all slept under the stars, their beds in a row, with the chowkidar and dogs keeping guard.

In the winter months, Vinayak would sometimes tour his province and the whole family would camp with him. The staff went ahead and put up the tents: the bedrooms, the *golkamara* (drawing room), the toilets, and the kitchen. Usually they camped in a wooded area or near a stream. The children had an Irish governess, Miss McGonigal, who travelled with them so their education would not suffer. When they lived in Kashmir, Vinayak toured distant villages on horseback in the morning, and in the afternoon, he would sit in the garden of their Srinagar home to hear the pleas of villagers and dispense justice.

In her parents' home Iravati had eaten neither tomatoes nor watermelon, as their colour was said to be suggestive of and resemble meat. However, in her marital home they were all non-vegetarian and rather Anglicized. They would eat Gujarati food for lunch, but dinner was Western cuisine: buttered quails, artichokes, candied fruits, roasts, and port or sherry. The family felt the need to be westernized or the white memsahibs would not socialize with them. They spoke Gujarati at home, but English otherwise. The girls wore frocks, long socks, Mary Jane shoes, and bows in their hair. The children were fed at 7 p.m., separately, sometimes a stew (pish-pash) with pieces of meat floating in it. From the time she was a child, Nandini disliked meat, and would quietly pass the bits to the dogs, sitting eagerly at her feet under the table.

In Nandini's childhood home everyone was treated with deep respect and affection. Whenever Vinayak met his children he would embrace them with a bear hug and endearments: "My darlings" he would often say. This was unusual for the Nagar community

they came from. In that era, very few men openly expressed their love for their daughters, and physical displays and expressions of affection were considered a no-no.

In her later years, Nandini would often recall her father's rich voice and how he sang with "deep-throated ease". Early each morning their home would resonate with his singing. She remembered how often he would break into laughter. "Several times a day," Nandini's diary says, "with his hands on his waist, head thrown back, he would laugh loudly, his belly shaking with laughter".

Nandini often told her children and grandchildren that she grew up in an environment where no one spoke a harsh word to anyone else. It was a life filled with friends, books, socializing, and the occasional party. There was an extensive library in the house, and the love for art and painting was nurtured and encouraged. There was no talk of making money, no moralizing, no long lectures. In the afternoons, friends often came over for tea, scones, and thin cucumber sandwiches. There was much laughter and joy. Years later, Iravati would speak of how deeply she had loved her husband. She would relate how he always lovingly called her "My dear", never expressing anger or using harsh or negative words.

Nandini was close to all her siblings and loved them deeply. Though she was a rather quiet child in her teens, in her younger days she had been quite the tomboy. Her sister Pupul would laugh and recount how Nandini once pinned her to a wall. "From that day I affectionately started calling her 'Ghodi'," she said. She was "A wild colt, with great inward strength". In later years, when Nandini was in dire financial straits, it was Pupul who helped her, as she might have her own daughter.

Nandini loved winters in the UP. The way the slanting sunshine at dusk threw strange lights on the peepul and tamarind trees; the star-filled night skies; the whole family sitting at the fireplace. While her siblings preferred to laze in bed, Nandini accompanied her father on his morning walks. With great fondness, she remembered being awakened early by her father for a walk through the quiet countryside. Cork flowers lay like a carpet under their feet, the wild winter flowers were also ablaze, the perfume in the air infusing their bodies. Birds twittered. One moment they flashed before them in a frenzy of activity, chattering and calling, and the next moment they disappeared, deep into the green foliage. The morning sky was a startling blue, cloudless and fresh. Some people passed them, peasants, labourers, hurrying to their work. Some rode bicycles, and stopped and saluted when they saw Vinayak.

Sometimes they passed people precariously carrying the night soil on their heads, to empty it out. Hurrying, they kept their eyes downcast. They did not salute the sahib, but walked on, leaving a stench in the air. Where did they go? Nandini wondered. It troubled and upset her that whenever she encountered these workers she did not know what to do, how to react or greet them, what to say. She was sorry that they had to do this job. It was an era in which there were no drainage systems, and the thunderboxes used by the well-off were emptied by these sweepers. She felt very strongly about this, and often brought it up with her father, asking him to bring about some change.

Nandini and her sister Amru regularly enjoyed riding on ponies, the cold wind blowing on their faces. The two sisters would sit together and write in their diaries nearly every day—a practice Nandini restarted many years later in Bombay.

In the summer months, when the plains of northern India grew intensely hot, the memsahibs and top officials, their wives and staff, all moved to Nainital. Vinayak and Iravati rented a large colonial house and the family, staff, and pets settled there for the summer months. Amru and Nandini attended a local convent school, which was several kilometers away. They would walk there, with the peons carrying their bags.

In the winter season, wherever they lived, there were lots of festivities and dances, fancy dress balls, and plays to attend. Many of Iravati's relatives visited her when they lived in Kashmir, in a lovely house on the Bund, often staying for over two months. They were not interested in sightseeing or Dal Lake. They liked sitting on the veranda, arguing and gossiping while enjoying the delicious food that came out of their hosts' kitchen.

Every year at Christmastime, Nandini's father took 15 days leave and the whole family would travel to Surat. Her grandfather, black cap on his head, would receive them at the station. The holidays were spent meeting relatives who called on them, resting, playing, or chatting. Iravati would show off her high heels, her modern hairstyle, and brown fur overcoat. Her crotchety uncle once reprimanded her, "Please remove that coat when you ride in your carriage in the narrow streets of Surat," he said, "All the dogs bark when they see this strange animal!" But Iravati was hardly one to be deterred. She was the perfect mem.

The family would go on picnics in the fields, where millet was harvested, roasted on open fires, then threshed and eaten with green chutney, cucumber, and *sakherdana* (rock sugar). While in Gujarat, the family would also travel to Dumas, where Vinayak had a family home called Nandanvan near the beach. It was a lovely, village-style house, the floors coated with cow dung, the

yard filled with fruit trees of guava, chikoo, almond, and mango, and water drawn from a well. The Mehta children and their cousins would bathe and splash in the sea, and go for long walks on the deserted beaches. They shared rooms, sleeping on mattresses lined up on the floor, and enjoyed marvellous meals.

According to Nandini, during those holidays her father became a different man. He ceased to be an ICS administrator. He wore dhotis, sat in the garden, and laughed with everyone. She wrote that looking back she could not remember a single incident of tension, jealousy, or stress between any of the siblings or cousins during those holidays. "We all shared naturally, there was no other way to function." Such were the golden years of Nandini's childhood, a time filled with joy and love.

* * *

In one of her diaries, Nandini records, "When I look back as far as I can see, my eyes and heart searching in dim places, some events stand out. I am a girl of five, we lived in the United Provinces and my parents are leaving for Europe for six months. I recall my despair, standing on the pier, clutching my little sister's hand, our grandparents standing beside us, imagining the large ship taking my family away."

For six months, while Vinayak and Iravati were in Europe, the children went to live with their maternal grandparents in Surat. Nandini remembered the house and the time spent there well. They were a very close family, but she recalled the conflict between her and her grandmother Kiki who she called Ba. "I was very attached to Rewabai (my ayah) and Ba could not bear that. I remember being scolded, deprived of some pleasures, but I remained adamant about my affections for Bai," she wrote. Kiki

finally dismissed the lady because she did not want Nandini to have such deep affection for her. "I used to run away to Vanita Vishram (a woman's home where my beloved Bai lived), which was nearby. I remember only feeling comforted when sitting on her lap and being told that my mother would come back soon," Nandini said.

The days spent away from her parents were difficult for Nandini. Kiki would sometimes threaten to lock the strong-willed Nandini in a small, dark room. This usually happened if Kiki criticized Vinayak, and little Nandini argued fiercely to defend her father.

Nandini's grandmother was a typical Nagar Brahmin of Surat; the puja room and kitchen were her domain. Nandini recalls her sitting and playing the dilruba and singing, *"Oh mother, in my next birth, find me a widower, as second wives are always happier"*. All this well within earshot of her husband. But Thakorebhai (Dadaji) had heard this dirge so often, he continued to sit on his swing, ignoring his wife's laments.

Despite the disagreements, Nandini recalls with affection the phaeton rides in the evenings with her grandparents. She would be perched up near the driver, while Amru, who was Ba's favourite grandchild, sat with Ba and Dadaji. They would stop at Rangeels and Mohammed's shop, which were the highlights of the day, with their rows of bottles filled with sparkling sweets.

Thakorebhai was a successful government pleader and a great admirer of the British. Though he did not believe in kowtowing to them to rise in life, he greatly admired their qualities of administration and justice. He was all for the glory of the Empire. Nandini would laugh when she described how while having dinner in Surat, if "God Save the King" came on the radio, her grandfather would make everyone stand up and salute King George V thousands of miles away.

As was common in the late 1800s, her grandparents had been married when they were very young. In fact, Ba was just nine at the time. Ba loved describing to her grandchildren an incident that occurred when her husband and she first travelled together. They were on a train when Kiki asked him to buy her some *chivda* being sold at the station. Thakorebhai had initially refused. Then noticing her unhappy look, he had relented, and gone out and bought some. Kiki had apparently flung the chivda out of the window. Thakorebhai perhaps realised early on in the marriage the temperament of the woman he had married.

In her later years, Ba was the leader of her community. She was domineering and tough, and held the post of a local municipal corporator. Although she was just four-and-a-half feet tall, she was fiercely aggressive. If something displeased her greatly, she would have a hysterical fit and then say all that she wanted to, including things she would not dare vocalise in normal everyday situations.

* * *

Nandini grew into a rather reserved and somewhat introverted young lady. Her beauty blossomed with adolescence, but she was totally unaware of how others noticed her perfectly chiselled face. Iravati would, in later years, proudly narrate this incident: "We were posted in Allahabad, and the young Jawaharlal Nehru had come over to talk to Vinayak. At that moment Nandini peeped into their room. Jawahar stopped and asked *"Mehtasahib yeh nihayat sunder ladki kaun hai?"* (Who is this exceedingly beautiful girl?).

Nandini's parents were unconventional in many ways. They never performed the traditional puja, nor did they claim to be religious in the narrow sense of the word. But they were spiritual. Vinayak was a man of deep learning. Iravati was a great social worker,

generous to a fault, and a devoted wife and mother. She was greatly encouraged by Vinayak who helped her set up a home for destitute children and women in the holy city of Benaras. For her work she was given the Kaisar-i-Hind Gold Medal for Public Service in India in 1928.

In Nandini's diary, she says,"When I saw my mother and father together I thought the world would be the same—that all men were gentle and kind like my father".

However, the Mehtas' unconventional, modern lifestyle did not mean that they were completely immune to the cultural forces at play around them. In 1936, when Nandini was 17, her father asked her if he should write to Sir Chunilal V. Mehta, owner of Century Mills in Bombay, to enquire whether he would consider an alliance between the two families. Nandini and her sisters were all single at the time, but Vinayak felt that she was the most suitable of the girls. She was uppermost in his mind when the letter was written. Pupul was studying abroad at the time. Nandini took his suggestion as a big joke and helped her father compose the letter.

Sir CV, as he was called, replied positively; he seemed very keen. He suggested that he and his wife meet the family first. At the time Vinayak was revenue minister in Kashmir. So Sir CV asked Vinayak to arrange a houseboat for him, where he came and stayed for over two months. He seemed thoroughly impressed with the family. Coming from the *vaniya* or trader community himself, he especially liked the idea that they were Brahmins and very "cultured". While in Kashmir, Sir CV was at Vinayak's house every day, enjoying meals and playing bridge or tennis with the family (though shy Nandini played none of these games). Sir CV must have observed the atmosphere the children were brought up in. There was dignity and harmony; and there was nothing that the

girls were not allowed to do. There were no don'ts, no fears, no authoritarian rules, no rigid laws they had to follow. The parents and children were like dear friends, and they were free and happy.

Once he was back in Bombay, Sir CV wrote to Vinayak to say that he was keen on his son Bhagwan marrying the older sister Pupul, who he had not met, but knew was due back from her studies in England. But Pupul was already engaged to a barrister called Manmohan Jayakar, who she had met at university. Vinayak wrote back to Sir CV explaining this, and suggesting that Bhagwan marry Nandini.

Nandini as a young girl in the United Provinces (left), and as a teenager with her mother Iravati (top right); A portrait of Nandini's father Vinayak as a young man (bottom).

Nandini and her sister Amru, in their late teens in this picture, were close in age. They did a lot together: going to school, horse riding, writing in their diaries (above). A portrait of Nandini aged about 20 (left).

CHAPTER 4

INTO A NEW WORLD

VIJBHUCANDAS ATMARAM was from the Modh Vaniya community of Surat. He was very young when he came to Bombay in the mid-1800s to seek his fortune. His rise was meteoric and he soon became the owner of the coveted Century Mills. When his brother died young, he adopted his brother's son, who later became Sir Purshottam Thakurdas, the famous Bombay industrialist. Vijbhucandas had four children of his own. The sons were Sir Chunilal and Sir Mangaldas (who were knighted), Ranchordas, and a daughter Motiben.

They lived in a beautiful, graceful mansion called Malabar Castle at 42 Ridge Road, in Mumbai's tony Malabar Hill neighbourhood. It was said that the house had once belonged to the Bishop of Bombay. It was surrounded by lush lawns, clipped hedges, peepul, banyan, mango, and coconut trees. There was a greenhouse with seasonal English flowers grown in immaculate flowerbeds. The porch held Chinese porcelain vases and tall Greek statues holding lamps. The grand house had five terraces, two longer than a cricket pitch. The ceilings were high and adorned with chandeliers, the rooms were cavernous with long verandas, all facing the splendid gardens. Most rooms had wooden parquet floors and the house was filled with elegant furniture. Vijbhucandas and his sons regularly went to auctions and purchased chandeliers, old carved Parsi furniture, Chinese chests, Greek marble statues, porcelain vases,

sculptures, intricately carved silver bowls, and bronzes, some of them from the Chola period.

Sir CV inherited the house from his father, while his siblings inherited other sprawling properties. Sir CV was distinguished looking, slim and tall, with a face of chiselled granite. He was as comfortable in dhoti, white *dagla*, and cap, as he was in a three-piece suit with a gold watch and chain. He was an intelligent man and is said to have stood first in his M.A. exam in Bombay. He was a member of the Governor's Executive Council and also inherited the very prestigious Century Mills, which made huge profits during World War II. He was also a director in many top Tata companies and highly respected in the business world for his abilities. He was amongst the first Indians to be given membership of the Willingdon Club and Cricket Club of India.

He was married to Taraben, a short, fair lady, always bedecked in diamonds and emeralds. Taraben was scared of and dominated by her husband. But when he was away at work she asserted her authority on and commanded her large staff. She kept a meticulously spotless and neat home. Sir CV (often called Kakaji) and Lady Taraben had many children. The first three were daughters—Kusum, Ratan (who died young), and Champavati. Then came a son, Bhagwan. As was often the case in a patriarchal Indian family when a son arrived after several daughters, he was thoroughly pampered. Several miscarriages and two daughters (Lily and Jaya) later, they had another son Prahlad.

Taraben and Sir CV were very religious and did their daily puja in a special puja room where a large intricately carved silver temple was placed. Sir CV had a passion for holy men and was something of a guru hunter.

In Poona, Sir CV had another enormous and beautiful bungalow called Dunlavin, with its own ballroom, though no one ever danced there. A stream flowed through the grounds and there were chikoo and guava orchards as well. The property was once the Government House and was decked in stunning French furniture. Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata and his French wife Sooni later owned it. Sir CV bought this house, including all the delicate French furniture, from the Tata family. When he was in Poona, every morning he would head to one of the wadas where devotees of Marathi poet and saint Tukaram gathered in a room, playing cymbals, singing loudly, and chanting "Tukaram, Tukaram". The ramrod straight-backed Sir CV, who was austere, serious and foul tempered otherwise, would raise his hands and twirl round and round in devotion.

In his leisure time, Sir CV was preoccupied with the need for spiritual succour. He had large, framed photographs of those he considered holy placed around his house: Vivekananda, Mirabai, Raman Maharishi, Dilip Kumar Roy, and Jiddu Krishnamurti, who he claimed (at least in the 1940s) was the "greatest of the great".

Sir CV himself chose grooms for his four daughters. Wealth-wise they were not of the same status, i.e. they were not from rich or prominent business families. But they were all well-respected and highly regarded in their areas of expertise. Kusum married Sir Harilal Kania, the first Chief Justice of India, Champavati married an FRCS doctor Dr Shantilal Mehta, and Lily was married to Dr. Marphatia, the doctor who started the first psychiatric ward at J.J. Hospital. While the conversations at Ridge Road seemed to be centred on money and business, Sir CV thought of culture and social respectability when it came to choosing partners for his children.

Sir CV received Vinayak's reply saying that Pupul was spoken for, and asking if he would like to get his son Bhagwan married to Nandini. The two renowned Gujarati families, of Sir CV Mehta and Vinayak Mehta Esq. in a strange way glamourised each other. Sir CV was well regarded for his business acumen, his Malabar Castle home, his titles, fleet of cars, and dazzling jewels. Worldly-wise Iravati had wanted enviable matches for her daughters, and was taken in by Sir CV's credentials. Sir CV for his part admired Vinayak as a brilliant ICS man who had by then become the Prime Minister of Bikaner.

Bhagwan was an extremely eligible bachelor and had many proposals. He too had made a name for himself in the textile industry. Though Bhagwan never excelled academically, he had a sharp mind. In his youth he loved reading the classics and made copious notes. He was a good sportsman, playing tennis, golf, and badminton. Like his father, in private he had a foul temper. To outsiders however, especially to Parsis and foreigners, who he loved, he was utterly charming. The moment Bhagwan first saw Nandini's photograph, he was determined to marry her and reject all other prospective brides.

Nandini, however, was initially not impressed by Sir CV and showed a great reluctance for marriage. But her parents Vinayak and Iravati gently persuaded her to agree. Vinayak would say, "I was just like you Nandini at your age, but see how happy I am now with dear mama".

Sir CV wrote back to Vinayak to say that Bhagwan was visiting a few places on work, and proposed to visit Bikaner as well. The reason he was coming to Bikaner was pretty obvious. Later, the family learned that Bhagwan's tour of Delhi, Cawnpore, Agra, Bikaner, and Ahmedabad, was solely to see the various girls who were lined up as potential spouses by his father.

Bhagwan was a guest of Vinayak's family for a week. He gushed over the family, bought presents, and seemed very keen on marrying Nandini. Until then, the teenaged Nandini had taken it all as a big joke. She was also rather flattered at the thought of Bhagwan chasing her and making much of her. With his presence in Bikaner, for the first time she realised that the matter was serious, and it was expected that she should make up her mind one way or the other.

Her family was very keen on this match and they tried to persuade her to approve. Vinayak explained to his daughter that since she was rather introverted, and not exactly the type of girl who would go out, make friends and find and choose her own partner, this was the next best thing for her. He suggested she listen to her parents and agree on the arranged marriage. Nandini's parents pointed out that the family of Sir CV was excellent, that Nandini would be comfortably well-off, that she would surely be very happy. Nandini wasn't keen, but she drifted with the situation. She didn't realise how life-changing a marital relationship can be. Her only exposure to such a relationship was that of her parents. She naively assumed that all relationships were like theirs, based on mutual trust and deep love and caring for the other—and finally agreed to consider the proposal.

A few months later Nandini and her mother travelled to Bombay, where she and Bhagwan were engaged. Sir CV was jubilant. He told Nandini's grandfather that his family was indeed lucky to have got a Brahmin girl, a daughter of V. N. Mehta. Bhagwan and Nandini were engaged for a few years. During this time there was no romance or intimacy. Whenever Nandini visited him in Bombay, she went to his home. On one occasion, she recalled how he held a Dr. Nelson's inhaler to his nose and paced up and down the veranda discussing his adenoids and sinuses in minute detail.

The wedding was held at Madhav Bagh in Bombay, on 8th February 1939, amidst great pomp and splendour. Many national luminaries attended. Two days later, Nandini's younger sister Amru married Jayant Mehta, Bhagwan's cousin. After the ceremony, when Nandini entered the portals of Malabar Castle and stood before the towering statue of Shiva in the foyer, he appeared forbidding and angry, with garlands of skulls around his neck. Bhagwan announced to her in a stern voice, "Now forget your family. This is your family." Nandini was stunned; her heart froze when she heard those words, wondering what kind of situation she had landed herself in. She was filled with trepidation as she was utterly devoted to her family, and couldn't imagine a life without any contact with them.

After a few days, Bhagwan and Nandini left on a ship for their honeymoon in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. Amru and her husband Jayant joined them later.

During the honeymoon itself Nandini realised that this was a marriage of excessive physical demands, without a hint of tenderness and caring. Initially she resisted the pressure to give in to Bhagwan's needs and demands, but she soon accepted it as her fate and succumbed to him silently.

From the early days of their marriage Nandini understood that her marital home was a Vaishnav Gujarati household steeped in uncompromising rituals, far removed from the liberal value systems in which she had grown up. Twenty-one-year-old Nandini had never managed domestic chores in her parent's home, and the rigid culture, rites, and mores of her new home proved quite a surprise. Her mother-in-law Taraben took it upon herself to teach her new daughter-in-law how to execute household duties, and Nandini was made to start her day sitting with a large thali, separating the wheat from the chaff. Taraben's training included

running Nandini down verbally in front of the house help, lecturing her on morality and good behaviour, and telling her that she had been poorly brought up.

Two months after her nuptials Nandini became pregnant with their first child. Early in her pregnancy, she and her sister Amru visited their parents in Nainital. It was an idyllic time, and they felt loved and pampered. While in Nainital, Nandini began suffering morning sickness. Her indulgent father immediately said to his daughters: "I will rent a flat for you in Bombay, and send Souza my best cook there. He can cook whatever you want and crave. And you can have a space of your own." This was the kind of father, husband, and man Vinayak was—always thinking about the comfort and well-being of his brood. No surprise then that his family doted on him in equal measure.

Nandini and Amru stayed with their parents for about a month, during which time Nandini asked Bhagwan to join them, but he declined. He was extremely angry that she was away for so long and wrote to her threatening dire consequences if she did not return soon.

On 13th December 1939, Nandini and Bhagwan had their first child, a girl they named Devyani. An excited grandfather Vinayak wrote gushingly to Nandini welcoming his grandchild into the world. He visited the mother and child soon after, and was thrilled to spend time with the baby and shower her with affection.

A few days later, he left for Allahabad. At the railway station in Bombay, Vinayak leaned out of the train and continued to wave until the train had pulled away. It was a memory that Nandini held onto for decades, for it was to be the last time she would see her father.

Less than a month later, in January 1940, Vinayak passed away in his sleep, probably from sudden cardiac arrest. It was a shock to all who knew him. He was just 56 and had seemed so hale and hearty. His beloved Iravati was by his side when he died. Not only had he been a doting father and husband, and a man with a promising career, but he was also the pillar of strength for his family. Overcome with grief, Iravati moved to Bombay, where most of her children lived. The entire family was shattered by the reality that the towering figure, the light of their lives, was gone. Nandini held her tiny baby to her heart and wept quietly, away from the eyes of her in-laws. She found it hard to accept that her darling Daddy was no more. Who would love and protect her the way he had? Who would she talk to of her problems? She worried about how she and her siblings would console and take care of their mother, who was completely broken and enveloped in grief.

Iravati rented a house a short walk from where Nandini lived in Bombay. Pupul too had an apartment at Himmat Niwas, just across the street from her mother, while Amru lived nearby at Breach Candy.

Nandini visited her mother's home often. Though they faced many emotional and financial problems, the atmosphere there was joyous and caring, and everyone was supportive of each other.

At Malabar Castle, Nandini sank further into the chores of domesticity, which included doling out the daily ration to the staff. Her little daughter became the centre of her life, and that helped her slowly accept her father's demise. Bhagwan led a very busy life. He played golf in the morning. Then he made the rounds of Century Mills and went to his office. In the evenings he liked to go to the Willingdon Club to play bridge. When Devi was around four or five months old Bhagwan started insisting that Nandini

come with him to the club. Though she secretly disliked having to accompany him, she joined him at the club most evenings, sitting beside him as he played cards. He told her that he expected her to mix freely and entertain his friends, and that she needed to start drinking alcohol (but never eat meat), otherwise she looked like a fool in the company he kept. Bhagwan was a domineering person and extremely possessive about Nandini. Upon his instruction, she wore mostly white chiffon saris with zari borders and high heels to the club. In public, he liked to walk with his arm around her shoulder, and proclaim to others that she was his. He liked that men stared at her beautiful face, her lean form. He rather liked to show her off, and if a media photographer took a picture of her, he was flattered. Her photographs, as the beautiful wife of a Bombay industrialist, were taken by *Vogue* magazine in 1948.

With Nandini's family living close by, and her mother inconsolable after the death of her husband, there was increased interaction between them. Bhagwan began to express his dislike for her family. He gave them all unflattering nicknames, criticizing them regularly to Nandini. Only Kumi was spared, perhaps because he was a mild, quiet sort who was somewhat in awe of Bhagwan's wealth and position.

Bhagwan would get angry and wildly jealous if Nandini praised her sister's husband in his presence. Meanwhile he didn't hesitate to continually berate her and tell her she was useless as a wife. Though Bhagwan's words hurt Nandini deeply, she remained silent, rarely retaliating. Resigning herself to the fact that this was her life, Nandini settled into the routines expected of her at Malabar Castle. She performed the religious rituals and ceremonies required of her and did the daily puja, though it was completely alien to her.

In the following six years, Nandini had two more children: Ghanshyam born in July 1943 and Vikram (nicknamed Kaka), born in August 1946. Her whole existence became her three children. She was physically very demonstrative and hugged and kissed them a lot, showering them with love and affection. This did not go down well with the rest of the Sir C.V. Mehta clan, who believed showing affection was a sign of weakness. At 42 Ridge Road, there was never any show of physical affection or tenderness even towards the children.

Inasmuch as he was able to enforce it, Bhagwan tried to stop Nandini from interacting with her mother and sisters. If any of her sisters touched or kissed her he would say, "There is something unnatural in this show of affection. Please tell your family not to kiss you. If you don't, I shall tell them to keep their filthy hands off my wife." Nandini tried to reason with Bhagwan that because he had not grown up with physical affection from his parents, because they had never petted or caressed him, perhaps he couldn't understand that it was actually quite natural and normal for siblings to be affectionate to one another.

Nandini was very keen on doing social work. At different points, she wanted to volunteer at a maternity home, help edit a children's magazine with her sister, and assist with refugee relief, but Bhagwan forbade her from any of it.

Occasionally Nandini indulged her love for painting, and when feeling particularly happy she would laugh aloud and sing for her three children. This too was frowned upon. In fact her mother-in-law believed that it was immodest of women to show their teeth. On the rare occasion Taraben allowed herself to smile, she would hide her lips with her palm. She was well dressed and wore fine jewellery, and always maintained a stoic seriousness. She

would criticise Nandini saying: "You laugh too much, and show your teeth." Though Nandini did not for a moment agree with her mother-in-law's advice on joy and laughter and its expression, she seldom spoke up against it.

Despite all the splendour and material wealth of the family, there was an air of gloom at Malabar Castle. Nobody laughed or cracked jokes, there were no parties or special dinners, and guests (including relatives) were forbidden from entering the imposing gates. It was a sombre, quiet place and everyone was nervous and frightened of Sir CV's outbursts, for he had a notoriously bad temper.

While the rest of the world admired the palatial home in which the C.V. Mehtas lived, and thought them modern and liberated in outlook, the reality of it was quite different. Nandini was made to dress the children exclusively in whites. She had to look after all Bhagwan's personal comforts. If, while dressing, he found one of his shirt buttons missing, he would rant and hurl abuse. He liked to say that he was badly neglected because his wife was always with her mother and sisters. Nandini absorbed this daily dose of psychological abuse quietly, without any outward indication of annoyance. If she so much as betrayed a small sign that she was upset, he would fly into a rage.

Nandini wanted very much to fit into her marital home and do what was expected of her. After the birth of her third child, she made up her mind to try to adapt more. She started going to the club, races, and cinema with Bhagwan on a regular basis and even learnt to play golf, joining him on his morning rounds.

There were rigid rules that Nandini had to follow when she went out with Bhagwan. If she bumped into her family, she could not talk to them. She could only speak with those Bhagwan approved

of. Only he could invite people to his box at the racecourse, only he could ask people to lunch or dinner with them at the club. He never gave up repeating and emphasizing that "Once a girl is married she becomes one with her husband, and must forget everything but him."

A smiling Vinayak Mehta at Nandini and Bhagwan's wedding at Madhav Bagh in Bombay, on 8th February 1939. Behind Nandini is her sister Moon (above); Sir Chunilal V. Mehta's bungalow Malabar Castle at 42, Ridge Road where Nandini came to live after marrying Bhagwan (below).

Nandini and Bhagwan soon after their wedding in February 1939.

Nandini and her first-born Devyani (Devi) around January 1940 (above); Nandini and her three children Devi aged 8, Ghanshyam aged 5, and Kaka (Vikram) aged 1, in 1947 (below).

Photographs of Nandini Mehta taken by *Vogue* magazine, at Malabar Castle in 1948.

CHAPTER 5

UPSIDE DOWN, INSIDE OUT

World War II ended, and two years later, the declaration of independence made India free. Krishnamurti returned to India in October 1947, after a nine-year hiatus. He had spent the war years in relative isolation in California, greatly traumatised by the violence of the war, particularly by the dropping of atom bombs. During the 1940s, the US government had forbidden him from speaking out against violence and from holding public meetings.

When he arrived in India, Sir CV took his two young grandchildren Devi and Ghanshyam to the airport to meet the "great man". Sir CV was a great admirer of Krishnamurti. In Pupul Jayakar's biography of Krishnamurti, she describes what Sir CV said to his daughter-in-law Nandini when he returned home from the airport. He spoke of a "wondrous young being, who ran down the steps of the plane, and like a shaft of light, came towards us".

On this trip, Krishnamurti stayed at the residence of the well-known industrialist Ratansi D. Morarji. Every morning there was an open house with Krishnamurti. Many people would gather to listen to him and meet him. Just as Sir CV had encouraged Nandini to meet all the other gurus he had welcomed into his heart, he convinced Nandini to join him for the morning sessions with Krishnamurti.

In Nandini's diary circa 1978, this is how she describes her first meeting with Krishnamurti:

> Though it was sunny outside, the room was dark. A man dressed in white sat surrounded by a dozen people. I walked into the room and quickly sat down, a little nervous. There was stillness, a quietness about the man. Soon he stopped speaking and turned around. He glanced at me, looking straight into my eyes.
>
> Once the talk was over, he came and stood beside me and asked: "Why have you come?" I felt a tremendous surge of emotion go through me. There was no conscious joy or sorrow, but I felt swept away as if by a storm—overwhelmed. I felt a need to cry, and it came from the innermost recesses of my heart, those unseen, unknown depths that the conscious mind cannot touch.
>
> I was not sad, but was I joyous? I don't know. Then I heard his laughter. I felt a hand on my head. I looked up and found Krishnaji's hand gently touching my head.

She continued reminiscing about the early meetings with Krishnamurti when he returned to Bombay again in January 1948, after a few months in Adyar, Madras. This meeting turned out to be very significant to the course of her life. Her diary says:

> Today, thirty-one years later, when I look back on those days, memory appears without the burden of emotion.
>
> I see that I went back again and again each morning to listen to and meet Krishnaji. It was the same room, with people deep in discussion. Krishnaji talked of the beauty

> of the sunset, of experiences, of memory—most of those words hardly made any sense to me.
>
> One day he turned to me and asked, "When are you coming to see me? Did you not want to meet me?" I heard this and did not reply.
>
> "Are you frightened of your father-in-law?" he asked me. "Of course not" my father-in-law Sir CV interjected immediately.

When Krishnamurti spoke of "meeting" him, he was referring to the private, one-on-one sessions called interviews that he often had with those interested in discussing their life with him. Nandini's first interview was set up for the next day. This is how she describes it in her diary:

> Krishnaji was dressed in spotless all-white clothing. His touch was so gentle, so light, in fact he hardly touches. His eyes were fathomless, chaste like a summer storm, still like tranquil waters. His laughter was like rain on parched earth. His body with its sloping shoulders was graceful. There was radiance and beauty as I walked into the room.
>
> "I will not eat you up," he said. I heard his laughter, musical notes like streams rushing into other streams. I stood there overwhelmed, uprooted like a tree washed away by a storm and thrown aside. I stood and looked at him. All my senses came to life. I was as if born anew. This is what I remember looking back thirty-one years into the past. But how can I capture that wondrous quality of that first meeting with Krishnaji?

> The first thing I told Krishnaji was about my son Ghanshyam who was born with a congenital defect in his eye. Doctors had told me that nothing could be done for it and that no power on earth could improve that eye. But I believed otherwise.
>
> Later on, I took Ghanshyam to see Krishnaji on several occasions. He sat on Krishnaji's knee and held his hand. Krishnaji put his hand on his eyes. He put his hand on his head in blessing. One day Krishnaji said to me: "Ask him, what he feels about me, does he like me?" Ghanshyam replied "Yes, I like him, he is sweet like a jalebi".

Jalebi was Ghanshyam's favourite dessert so comparing Krishnaji to that treat was indeed a compliment from the child.

Around this time, Krishnamurti started giving his public lectures on the lawns of Sir CV's home Malabar Castle. He would sit atop a beautifully carved desk and give his discourse. The entire season of public talks were given from the very house that Nandini lived in and she naturally attended every one of them.

The famous 20th century writer and critic George Bernard Shaw once famously said that Krishnamurti was the most beautiful person he had ever seen. Many people who met him felt similarly awed by his presence. "I wonder" Nandini wrote, "if there is a single person who after seeing Krishnaji and having faith in him, does not pour out all his troubles to him." Aldous Huxley is also reported to have stated that listening to Krishnamurti was like "listening to a discourse of the Buddha".

Nandini's husband Bhagwan too would talk to Krishnamurti. He often invited Krishnamurti for a drive and Nandini would join

them. Bhagwan had seen Krishnamurti at least five times during this period and had asked for his help with his problems. Nandini's mother Iravati too began meeting Krishnamurti. For years she had been unable to recover from the tragedy of her husband's premature death, but soon after meeting Krishnamurti she began to overcome her sorrow and find joy in living.

This is what Nandini said in her diary about the early interviews she had with Krishnamurti.

> I know that when I returned home after that first interview I hugged in fullness the iron bars of my window. I remember I had no thoughts except the need to go back to that room in Ratansi Morarji's house to tell him more of my life, the family I had married into, my children, of my golden days in the United Provinces, of my father's death, my sorrow-laden mother, my sisters, my brother.
>
> In these discussions with Krishnaji, the man I had married I did not mention at all. In subsequent interviews I remember telling him that no one laughs in my husband's house, and they talk of money all the time. "I want peace," I said." I want nothing of wealth or position".
>
> "Peace?" Krishnaji had repeated looking at me. His eyes seemed to be peering into my mind.
>
> "Do you love your husband?" he asked seriously one day, those gravely-still eyes looking into mine. Everything seemed to have ceased to move and function within me. "I love my family," I finally replied. "In my parents'

> home I laughed and sang, I loved painting. I used to ride and play. My father was most loved, and my mother was the star on my horizon. No one spoke to me in angry tones, no one was bothered about discussing money. My father was beautiful, my mother wonderful. All that is gone. But I love my children, my children are all I have."
>
> When I left the room that day all anchors were gone; I was rudderless.

What was this rudderlessness Nandini was referring to? Was it her coming to terms with the longstanding unhappiness in her marital situation? There were numerous reasons that Nandini was unhappy in her marriage with Bhagwan Mehta. The rigid rules, the strict food habits, the absence of laughter, affection and love, the domineering husband—these were troublesome, but Nandini considered them issues she could bear. Besides these issues, there was the constant psychological torture and abuse she endured because Bhagwan and Nandini were essentially sexually incompatible. Bhagwan's ideas of a wife's role included total surrender and acquiescence to her husband's physical desires and his were highly complex, demanding, and occasionally brutal. Yet Nandini knew no way out. As she wrote:

> I asked myself many times why I put up with so much, why I had allowed these many years to pass, and the only answer I could give myself was that once you are married you have to try to make it a success. And that had been my effort all along, to try and make my marriage happy. I thought if I kept on giving in, kept on putting up with things, one day Bhagwan would reform, one day he would change. But instead of the best coming out, he started taking advantage of me, started bullying me more.

There was another troubling issue that Nandini had kept silent about for about a year. So personal was it that she had not been able to say anything about it even to her closest allies, her mother and sisters.

Bhagwan's demands in the bedroom had grown progressively, and in 1947, they reached a level she was unable to tolerate. He had begun to insist on acts that she found physically painful and emotionally agonizing.

In mental turmoil, Nandini turned her thoughts inward. Over a period of time of listening to Krishnamurti's talks she began to realise and understand that the life she had been leading was crushing something within her. Keeping quiet was eating at her and destroying a vital part of her being.

Krishnamurti's discourses had perhaps opened her eyes to the reality of the life she was leading. No more was she willing to accept the brutality and physical violence in her marital relationship.

How did Krishnamurti help Nandini during this time? Krishnamurti's advice to her was always to act for herself, "from the depths of self-knowing. To do what one truly believes is right." Only then, he would say, can one stand up to and sustain one's actions. One cannot have a dependence on the guru, the dependence needs to be on oneself, on one's inward strength, for eventually "the guru would disappear".

In October 1948, greatly troubled by her husband's demands and behaviour, Nandini approached her father-in-law. He had always been most respectful and supportive of her and she found he was someone she could turn to. He suggested she travel with him to Poona to attend a series of talks by Krishnamurti.

At the time, Nandini was in a state of despair. One particular incident was so nerve shattering that Nandini was left in pain and anguish. However, for Bhagwan he was exercising his conjugal rights. For Nandini it was a catastrophic milestone. It was the last straw that broke the camel's back. She explains it herself:

> I wish that day I had made enough noise to attract all the family. But something happened to me that day, something so irrevocable, so final, that I made up my mind that no matter what happened to me—whether I starved or was driven out on the streets, whether I lost the children or not—I would not allow him to come near me. This was not a hasty decision or whim, it was not a passing kink in my brain. This was a sequence of events culminating in this decision. It was ten years of misery ending in a year of horror. Finally, I had made up my mind, knowing full well what my life would be after saying no to him. I passed many sleepless nights. I went through agony and torture and I knew such fear because I foresaw the consequences of my actions. But the agony of my life was such that I was prepared for anything. I was prepared to face the worst. I did not know my legal position then, I was convinced I would be putting myself in the wrong by saying no to marital relations, but I had made up my mind. I decided I would try to explain to him, reason with him, throw myself at his mercy.
>
> I prayed to God he would understand. I was in such a state of mental conflict and despair, that I was almost suicidal.

For close to one year, from March 1948 to March 1949, threats and abusive language were frequently hurled at Nandini. For

three months when Bhagwan travelled to America, Nandini and the children got a little respite. But when he came back, his wrath became worse. He would physically assault her if she refused to gratify him.

In November 1948, soon after returning from Pune, Nandini moved out of the marital bedroom into the adjoining dressing room. She told Bhagwan that she was going to be celibate going forward. Once she made this announcement all hell broke loose. He became infuriated and more forceful. Nandini suffered a nervous breakdown and was treated for nearly ten days. Shouting, verbal abuse, and psychological torture became a daily affair. During one of the fights Bhagwan said: "How dare you refuse me my rights? When you married me the contract was to give you money and home, while you gave me your body. Get out of my house; you have forfeited all rights to children, home, money, and security."

Bhagwan often threatened to make Nandini's life hell. He would talk of shutting down access to money, car, and children. He tried to keep the children away from her. He wouldn't let her take the children to her mother's house. Sometimes he wouldn't let her spend time with them at home, even though the youngest was just three years old. He claimed he would either drive her mad, or drive her out of the house. In the presence of the children he would shout, abuse, hit, and insist that he would file for divorce or the restitution of conjugal rights.

One day, Nandini was particularly distraught when she spoke to Krishnaji, "What am I to do?" she asked. "He has been violent, he attacked me, he abused me, he does not let me go near the children". Krishnaji replied: "Look, be clear, watch. Look him in the face, do not react to him. Do not be afraid. Of course physically you must protect yourself, but inwardly give him back what he throws at you. Let the flame fill your being—let it act."

The abuse did something to Nandini inwardly. Though she was raging inside she never once showed her pain or fear to Bhagwan. Not once did she shed a tear before him. Gathering inward strength she knew she would bend, but not allow herself to break.

On 11th March 1949, an argument broke out between Nandini and Bhagwan over where the youngest, three-year-old Kaka, was to sleep, resulting in an infuriated Bhagwan physically bruising her. She was shaken and traumatized.

Three days later, it was the night of the festival of Holi on 14th March 1949. Bhagwan and Nandini once again were in an argument, with him demanding Ghanshyam, who was with her, go to his room. When she resisted, a fight erupted. He struck Nandini and pressed his elbow on her neck. Nandini screamed for help. Her ayah, Kamala, came into the room and begged Bhagwan to let her go. This culminated in the entire household including the in-laws coming into the room. A lot of harsh words were said, and Nandini was told to get out of the house. Bhagwan threatened that she would hear from his solicitors the next day. There was such fury in his demeanour that Nandini feared he was even ready to strike his father, who was trying to calm him down. Sir CV eventually extricated the child at the centre of the tussle and left the scene with him. Taraben joined her son in telling Nandini to leave their house. Agitated and tormented, Nandini finally said, "I am going and not coming back". To Taraben she added: "I wonder how you as a woman do not feel for me. Suppose all this had happened to you?" Then she folded her hands in a namaskar to Taraben, and stepped out of the house.

Nandini ran out of the compound, and it was only when she had finally exited the gate that she burst into tears—of deep sorrow and humiliation. It was 10.30 p.m. She ran the 200 metres to her

mother's house. Only when she had reached the safety of her mother's home did she collapse in a jumble of emotions.

The violence with which she had been struck and driven from her marital home that day changed something intrinsically in her. The line had been crossed. She resolved to herself that day that she would never ever allow anyone to assault her again.

Krishnamurti giving a discourse sitting atop an old carved desk on the lawns of Malabar Castle, the home of Sir CV, in early 1948. Aldous Huxley once said that listening to Krishnamurti was "like listening to a discourse of the Buddha".

Portrait of Nandini Mehta taken at the famous Hamilton Studios in Ballard Estate, Bombay, in 1947.

CHAPTER 6

THE LEGAL WRANGLE

MONTHS OF ACCUSATIONS ON BOTH SIDES followed. Some family and friends attempted to broker a reconciliation. At one point, a discussion ensued between a male family member from Bhagwan's family and Nandini. He argued that Bhagwan assaulting Nandini was justified as she herself had once admitted that she had indeed provoked him. To this Nandini replied: "Please do not forget the reference to the context in which I said I provoked him. I wanted to take my children to my mother's place. He abused me violently and struck me. When he was asked whether he had abused and hit me, he said, 'Yes, but you provoked me so I hit you.' If taking my children to my mother's place and not agreeing to every word and demand of his was provocation, then the answer is yes, I did provoke him." He said that physical violence was justified in a family and Nandini vehemently opposed the idea, insisting that it was not okay for a man to strike his wife, under any circumstances. With these debates Nandini's own stance became abundantly clear to her. She would remain celibate and she would not tolerate any physical violence. Everything else she was ready to accept, adjust, compromise on. She was even ready to go back to 42 Ridge Road for the sake of the children.

All attempts at an out-of-court settling of differences or reconciliation proved futile. Bhagwan refused to allow her to see

her children, causing her and the children great torment. Nandini soon filed for judicial separation and custody of the children on grounds of cruelty. Thus began a long and protracted legal wrangle for custody of her three children aged nine, six, and three.

Against Bhagwan's money, power, and access to a huge legal team, Nandini had very little chance of winning the suit. The judge decreed that in the matter of Nandini's claims of sexual cruelty he "had no hesitation in refusing to allow the question to be put, or the allegations to be made". It was a clear reflection of the times. An era in which a judge could bring his own personal biases and opinions on the petitioner, and allow the wealth of the defendant to freely colour his judgment. All allegations of cruelty, assault, sexual and psychological torture were simply dismissed, and not considered part of the case. What gained prominence instead was the point that was made by Bhagwan's lawyers: That Nandini was immature, and had been "unduly influenced" by Krishnamurti's teachings to revolt against what was the norm in Indian culture and Indian households. And, since Nandini never spoke publicly about the violence in the marriage, this is what the media latched onto.

For the daily newspapers it was interesting gossip to be published. A prominent industrialist's wife had left him, under the influence of a guru. It seemed just the kind of story that would shake up Bombay's high society. It was the perfect potboiler. As Pupul Jayakar, Nandini's sister wrote in Krishnamurti's biography, after the story broke, "Men looked afresh at their wives, the clans closed in… And above all, the eyes of the city turned to Krishnamurti."

Pupul Jayakar was worried that her sister's custody battle would impact Krishnamurti, but he was hardly concerned about bad press. It didn't bother him that his discourses were being quoted at great length in a civil lawsuit. He was not affected by the fact that

Bhagwan's lawyers were arguing that he had incited Nandini to act against her husband. In response to Pupul's attempt to shield him from the negative public consequences of the lawsuit, she reveals in her book, that he said to her: "Are you trying to protect me? There are far greater beings who protect me. Do not falter. Do what is right for Nandini and the children. The children are important. It does not matter whether she wins or loses, if it is right, fight."

When Judge Weston, one of the few Britons still in the Bombay High Court, finally delivered his judgment on 3rd January 1950, he dismissed Nandini's petition. She lost custody of her children, though no law could force her to live with her husband. In the judgment, Weston went so far as to state that he did not think that the dozen or so counts of physical abuse alleged by Nandini had occurred at all. He declared: "I consider the Petitioner's final act in leaving the house the inevitable outcome of a situation which was largely of her own creation."

While in personal conversations some of Bhagwan's family members had discussed and even justified physical violence, in the legal documentation it was completely denied. In the eyes of the law Nandini's claims of assault held no water. Instead, the judgment argued that Nandini had undoubtedly been influenced by the teachings of Krishnamurti. She had been led to revolt her "doormat" position, to repudiate her relationship with Bhagwan, to reject the domination of a husband over his wife.

This became the prevailing socially accepted version of the reason for Nandini's exit from the marriage. What exactly it had meant to be that doormat—the details of the incidents of cruelty or assault were left unexamined.

TIME magazine ran an article entitled "Revolt of a Doormat" in its issue dated January 16th, 1950. The story relates how the wife of one of Mumbai's textile millionaires had her eyes opened by Krishnamurti's teachings. She had listened to his words and analysed her unequal status in the relationship; she had then revolted against her subordinate position, and turned celibate.

For Nandini, the truth was so much more than that. The reality was much deeper than any media story could ever fathom. For her it was the turning point of her life. It was an endeavour to end the violence and brutality that encompassed her existence. It was a horrific situation, a desperate struggle of a financially powerless woman in which she lost custody of her children.

During this time she visited Krishnamurti in Bombay, to talk and listen to him. When he left, they exchanged letters. In a diary, written many years later, Nandini refers to this period:

> How did Krishnaji help me in 1948? He held my hand in friendship. He gave of his love abundantly, overwhelmed me with care and attention. He watched me, and helped me to watch. In his letters, never once has he appeased me or sympathized with me or felt sorry for me. He helped me get over my self-pity. His letters were never personal, they were letters written by a person who watched, listened, and cared. They were full of compassion. The state of his being was only communicated, he didn't give advice. He never praised or compromised his perception, never pushed me in any direction. He neither praised nor blamed me for my situation. When I lost my case, when my children were frightened and weeping, he held my hand.

I remember going to him, full of my problems, full of the violence surrounding me. The lawyers had been badgering me with questions: think before you speak, answer yes or no, think and only then reply. I felt as if evil walked beside me. My children were anguished and frightened. I had escaped, but I had left them in that burning, violent house. How can I help them? How can I get out of this nightmare surrounding me? I had asked him. I am caught on all sides. I do not know what to do. What will happen to my children? What are people saying? I am lonely, I am lost. What will I do with my life?

To me he had said: "Take adversity as it comes; prepare for it, be ready to meet it. Out of it comes maturity, a fullness, a joy that is imperishable." When Krishnaji smiled, the storm in my life quieted. His presence alone felt like rain, like a benediction.

CHAPTER 7

CHANGING TIMES

BY 1952, NANDINI HAD LOST the petition for custody of her children and the subsequent appeal was dismissed as well. She often found herself surrounded by venomous tongues. People started avoiding her, they accused her of ruining a family and disturbing the peace in an illustrious house. She was accused of abandoning her children. The talk became malicious and also brought in the role of Krishnamurti, who was seen as the guru who had "misled" her.

No formal custody arrangements were prescribed in the final judgment, so how much Nandini could or could not see the children was dependent on Bhagwan's whims. He understood well the children's need for their mother and although he had earlier tried to keep them apart, he did not continue to do so.

Bhagwan laid out what would today be considered fairly generous visitation rights. The children were able to see their mother for a little over an hour every evening. They were allowed to travel with her and their grandmother for six weeks in the summer and a week during the Diwali break, on a holiday paid for by him. Additionally, Nandini was allowed to visit them when they were ill. Besides, Nandini would receive a monthly allowance of Rs.1,200, though the actual payment of this was left to Bhagwan's whims and moods.

Over the course of the next one year or so after the verdict, Nandini, Bhagwan, Devi, Ghanshyam and Kaka settled into a tenuous rhythm of life lived across two different homes, about 200 metres apart. Evenings were the part of the day all three siblings looked forward to the most because they could spend time with their mother.

Devi went to J.B. Petit School at Fort, and life at school had been particularly difficult while the court case had been playing out in the media. Girls would sometimes discuss the gossip in the local newspaper. When they did that, Devi recalls hiding in the bathroom during recess, to get away from the questioning glances, the unkind things said about her mother by those who knew nothing of what the family was going through.

Did she blame her mother for leaving them? Did she feel she had abandoned them? Devi did not. Being the oldest and having witnessed a fair bit of the violence and verbal abuse in the home, she never grudged her mother's need to leave. She never doubted for a second her mother's dedication to the children.

Nandini had believed she had a strong case against Bhagwan, and right until the end she had held on to the hope that she would win custody.

No children should ever be put in a position of choosing between their father and mother, but given the circumstances of their lives in 1949-50, that is exactly what happened. In their minds there was no contest between the strict, hot-tempered, disciplinarian father who instilled fear in them, and the soft, gentle, and affectionate mother. All three siblings adored their mother and no amount of separation from her weakened this love or attachment. If anything, their affection for her strengthened with each day spent apart.

Without doubt Bhagwan recognised this great attachment. Whenever the children had been naughty, or hadn't done exactly what he demanded of them, there was one standard threat he used regularly: "You will not see your mother today." This had the effect he wanted. It instilled fear in the children, who were terrified of losing the precious little evening time they had with Nandini.

In hindsight, however, they need not have feared this threat. For in all the days and years this threat was made, there was not a single occasion on which it was actually executed. Bhagwan never kept the children from visiting their mother as punishment.

Deep down, Bhagwan realised and respected how deeply all three of his children loved their mother. When she was in London for surgery the children wrote letters to her, expressing their love. When she was getting set to return to India, Bhagwan wrote to her too: "Prepare yourself for an onslaught from the kids. Juju (Devi's nickname) will talk your head off, and the boys will manhandle you."

Credit to both Bhagwan and Nandini that though the separation was extremely acrimonious and difficult, neither spoke negatively about the other, at least within hearing range of the children.

Both parents loved their children, albeit they had completely different ways of expressing it. The siblings longed for as much time as they could get with their mother, soaking up the love she bestowed upon them. For her, love was caring, laughter, cuddling her children, showering them with physical affection. She had a tremendous capacity for nurturing. For her, love was never using a harsh word, correcting with gentleness. Love was sharing, giving, looking on the bright side of life. Whatever she learned about love from Krishnamurti's teachings was an important part of who she was. In letters she wrote to Devi years later, she describes her philosophy of love:

> To care is the beginning of love. To love one has to look upon another with care and gentleness, be it a tiny pup, a tree, or a lovely laughing child. To care, to tend, to love—is to think less and less of oneself.
>
> Krishnaji would say the more attention you give to others, the less you think of yourself, the more there is love and gentleness in you.

Bhagwan on the other hand was not a physically affectionate or demonstrative person at all. He loved his children. But his definition of love was "tough love". He was always correcting, laying down the law, judging them, demanding improvement, requiring they live and play by his rules.

He was brought up in a materialist world where money had prime importance and that is what he knew. He had tried to control Nandini with money, and perhaps it bewildered him that it failed; that she cared nothing for wealth, objects of desire, jewellery, social status, or position.

Using his own brand of humour he would tell the girlfriends he would bring home years later, "Nandini is de jure my wife, but not de facto".

Though Krishnamurti was vilified by Bhagwan's lawyers in the custody battle, he personally did not criticize Krishnamurti beyond occasionally saying that his teachings were "hocus-pocus". In other areas Krishnamurti's influence remained. For instance, Bhagwan's taste for western classical music had emerged from Krishnamurti's recommendations to him, and he would often listen to this music, playing it loudly into the wee hours of the morning.

It was Nandini's sister Pupul Jayakar who Bhagwan truly blamed for "leading Nandini astray," even though it was through Sir CV that Nandini met Krishnamurti, and through her that Pupul met him. Pupul was an independent-minded, outspoken woman, and perhaps Bhagwan did not like the strength and fearlessness she exuded.

During 1951-1952, not long after their judicial tussle, and just when the reality and routines of their lives were settling down, two incidents rocked the family again. The first was that Bhagwan lost Century Mills in a hostile takeover by the Birlas. He soon lost his directorships in various companies as well. This left him with a deep sense of loss and frustration. He never lost his self-esteem and ego, however, nor his peculiar sense of humour. Despite the dip in his business and prestige, he sometimes liked to say to his children: "I am the Prince of Wales". He had seen success very early in life, and particularly during the war years, his textile business had brought him great wealth. He had an air of arrogance and confidence that came from both financial success and popularity. Now suddenly at 37 he was without his business, with virtually nothing to do. With plenty of money to keep him afloat, he refused to work for anyone else, stating that he would instead dedicate his time to bringing up his children. This he did with an authoritarian hand. But more than that, his parental philosophy involved evoking fear in his children. His permission had to be obtained for everything, even to turn on the radio to listen to Binaca Geetmala.

Bhagwan had many eccentricities. His sons, for instance, were made to wear white on most occasions. He loved lists. Everything the children did had to be documented. The length and breadth of their suitcase had to be measured, and the number of shirts, pants, and other clothes packed in them recorded. Every month the children were administered a dreaded dose of castor oil and they had to then

note down a very embarrassing pathological report for him. Every morning he would enter the room where the three children slept and in a thunderous voice annouce: "Now no levity, no laxity, and no hilarity. I want 99.5% efficiency. Now up!"

When he chose to, Bhagwan was the most charming man alive, especially with doctors, lawyers, Anglo-Indian nurses, Parsis, and Westerners—who were his favourite people. Otherwise at home, he had a very short and hot temper and the domestic staff often got the brunt of it.

He suffered from migrainous neuralgia, and when he had an attack of one of these cluster headaches, he became totally irrational. He would go berserk, yelling at and abusing anyone who crossed his path; the children knew well to stay out of his way.

His extreme eccentricity and need to do exactly as he pleased was evident in all of his actions. Despite his refusal to give Nandini money when she was ill and needed it, on two occasions over the years, Bhagwan gifted her Vacheron Constantin luxury watches.

Once when he was admitted to Jaslok Hospital for a short surgery, he arrived there with 27 pieces of luggage! Another time, after he had lost his home at 42 Ridge Road due to the complex death-duty taxation issue, and lived at Baitul Yumn, off Peddar Road, he woke up one morning, gathered up all the silverware in the house, and sold it. In this house he would chain and lock everything up. The chair was chained to the table, which in turn was chained to the cupboard, and so on. Huge padlocks were visible on everything!

In 1971, just before Malabar Castle was to be sold, Bhagwan suddenly asked Nandini for a divorce, possibly on the advice of his lawyers. They had already been separated for close to 20 years.

Nandini asked Devi to settle the issue with him. At the time both her sons were away in America. A small trust was made for Nandini. She would receive a basic monthly allowance from the interest, but could never touch the corpus. Though Devi requested Bhagwan to set aside some money in case of a medical emergency, he refused to do so. Nandini stated that she had fought like a tigress for the custody of her little children 20 years earlier, but now she was prepared to settle quickly for any amount. In her diary she wrote: "I am free!"

Bhagwan's way of showing his love for his sons was by ensuring that they got the best education. He paid for both of them to study at the University of California at Berkeley, where they earned PhDs. He was immensely proud of them and their achievements. Though he came from a typical Gujarati business family where men ran businesses, he did not harbour any such illusions for Kaka and Ghanshyam, particularly considering his own business was now defunct. He was also deeply attached to and possessive of Devi, who he offered to send to Cambridge to study when she announced she wanted to get married at 19.

* * *

The second incident that greatly affected the family in 1952 was that Nandini was diagnosed with galloping cancer of the uterus. She was just 35 and had no money for the treatment, but was told that the cancer was spreading fast. With the help of her sister Pupul and brother Kumi she borrowed money and went to London to be treated by a famous surgeon.The day after he operated on her, the surgeon suffered a massive stroke. Nandini's diary mentions some of what occurred during the trip to London for treatment.

I remember a gloomy, dark day in London. I was alone, my brother and sister had gone out. Suddenly I started bleeding—large lumps of blood and tissue—as if something from within me had broken loose. I remember holding onto the table, soaked in a pool of blood. My mind said, "Oh God, I am alone!" And then almost as soon as I said those words, in my mind's ear a voice clearly said: "You are not alone Nandini." I heard this as clearly, as precisely and concretely as the table which I clutched onto—as undeniable, as much a fact, a reality. I felt a burden dropping away. I slowly crawled back to my bed and lay down. There was no agitation, no fearful thoughts, no tears, and soon, no thoughts at all. I just lay there. Then I tried to call a friend and locate my family who returned quickly.

Throughout my ordeal there was this sense of peace around me. It was not as if I had resigned or surrendered. It was a stillness I experienced, which kept me within an enchanted circle, Krishnaji's circle.

When I came around from the anaesthesia I knew I had not been alone even in that unconscious state. I had been under anaesthesia before and know how one feels a sudden dropping off and the blanking out of all consciousness that usually occurs. But during this operation I was not alone. I knew where I had been even in that unconscious state; that state of enchantment was with me. After the operation, lying gravely ill, body in tremendous pain, I had but to turn my head on the pillow to the left or right and it was there. My mind lay in pools of stillness and seemed to flow on and on. What magic I witnessed… how inexplicable certain things are.

In another diary Nandini explains that when her lawsuit was underway Krishnamurti held her hand. When she had cancer however, she did not get a single letter of sympathy. Her diary says:

> It was as if I did not exist. I was abandoned and yet I knew he was there. I heard him telling me from within the deep, deep inner core of my being, the hidden depth of my being, "Nandini, you are not alone".
>
> When he returned to India a year after my operation I met him and I expected the usual concern and questions about how I was, what had happened, how happy he was that it had all gone off well. But that did not happen. I went into Ratansibhai's place feeling a little low and sorry for myself. And there he was like a flower in all its flawless beauty, his calm face like a burst of sunshine, his laugh, joyous and radiant.
>
> That day… I learnt to overcome self-pity. "I" do not matter. The overwhelming joy, the abundance, the good, is all that matters. I am a mere speck, a dot, on the moving, living picture of life.

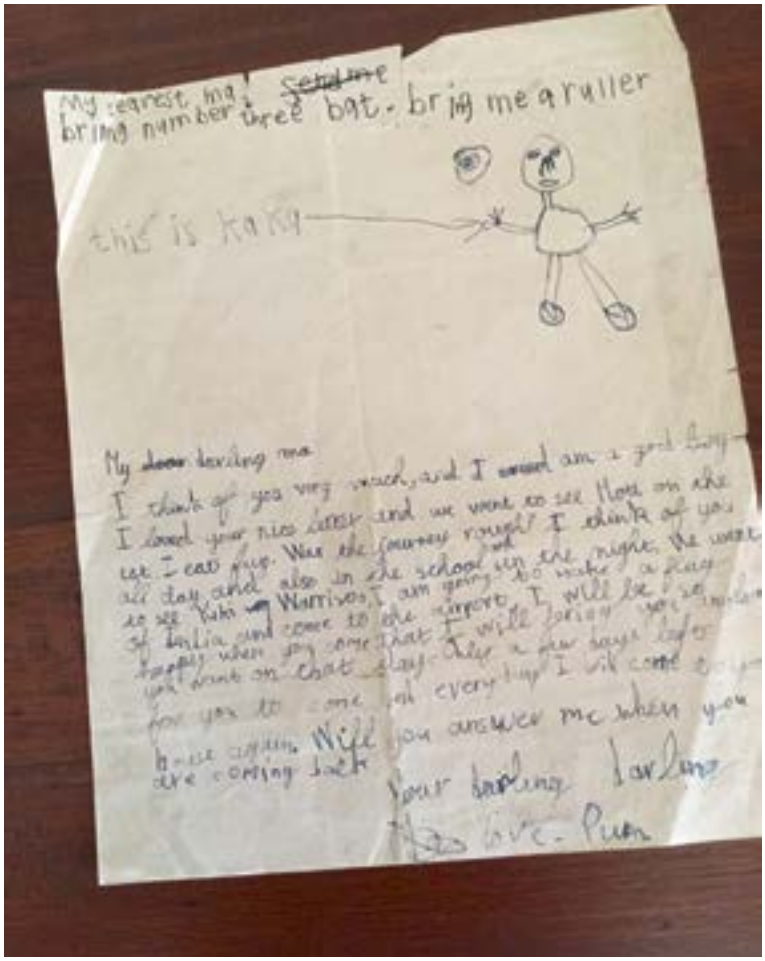
A year after Nandini's cancer surgery she fell ill again, with very high blood pressure and swelling. There was panic amongst her family—had the dreaded cancer spread? She was operated in Bombay and when the surgeons opened her up they discovered that her kidney had failed because an artery had erroneously been sutured during the previous surgery in London. Considering the surgeon had suffered a stroke the day after the surgery, one wonders if something had gone wrong during the surgery itself. How else could he have accidently sutured her tube? This time one of Nandini's kidneys had to be removed and she underwent a great deal of pain; her body was weak and traumatised.

Through all her troubles, Nandini's family helped and took care of her. Pupul was always at Nandini's side when she needed her. There was a natural affection between the two sisters although they were of such different temperaments. As children, Pupul was the intellectual of the family and Nandini the beauty. Their bond blossomed into a true friendship after meeting Krishnamurti. From January 1948 onward, they tried to attend every lecture and discussion he held in India, and spent hours exploring his teachings. Pupul would say that she considered Nandini's understanding of Krishnamurti to be deeper than her own. As grown women, reminiscing about their halcyon childhood days, they often wondered how their sensitive father, employed by the imperial civil service, a man of law and order, could not have experienced conflict in his mind and heart over his role in the British Empire. After all, the freedom struggle was in full force in the country. This issue was never expressed or discussed at their childhood home. Could this internal conflict have led to his premature death at the age of 56, they often wondered.

Across the board, Nandini's family exuded tremendous strength and support. When her grandmother Kiki heard that Nandini's marriage had fallen apart, she neither moralised nor urged her to adjust, suffer, or bear the agony of living with Bhagwan. Instead, she had firmly said, "Fateh", which in Gujarati means "Victory". Nandini was clearly part of family of strong and resilient women who took the lemons life delivered head-on.

> "If one comes to Krishnaji or his teachings with a thimble, you leave with a thimbleful. But if you come with an open heart and mind, the possibilities are endless."
> – From Nandini's letter to Devi written in the 1970s.

For Nandini's children, the highlight of the year was the summer vacation they took with her. Nandini with Devi, Ghanshyam, and Kaka (top) in Nainital in 1955; The three children with Iravati in Matheran around 1953 (middle); The three children with their cousin Shyama (holding a dog) in Nainital in 1956.



In 1952, when Nandini was in London for treatment for galloping cancer, her children wrote to her regularly. Ghanshyam, aged 9 at the time, wrote this poignant letter to his mother. He talked of eating fug (fudge) and tried to appear brave though he missed and thought about her a lot. Kaka who was six, also scribbled a few lines on top.

CHAPTER 8

BAL ANAND: THE LITTLE SCHOOL

ONE RAINY DAY IN JULY 1954, Bhima, the housemaid who worked at the home where Nandini lived with her mother and extended family, brought in two young girls. She had discovered them standing forlorn in the torrential rain beside an overflowing drain. Their mother had just died, and their father lay on a pavement nearby in a drunken stupor. The girls, Matu and Bhaja, aged two and four, were shivering, perplexed, and frightened. Nandini reached out to them. She dried their hair, she held them close, calmed their shivering bodies, and gave them a few biscuits to eat.

The next day they reappeared and stood helplessly at the gate. Nandini noticed them and gave them a snack, and this time, also a piece of paper and a crayon. The three of them sat together under the shade of a mango tree and talked and coloured.

Thus began Nandini's journey of helping the poor and disadvantaged. It was this first, spontaneous step that led towards the creation of Bal Anand, her centre for underprivileged children, mostly those enrolled in the local municipal school. It was a meeting place and a small school, built not on the virtue of promoting academic excellence or book knowledge, but on humanity. Though the children were tutored in academic subjects, including English and mathematics, the main tenets of Bal Anand were caring,

empathy, compassion, creativity, and providing the children some essential nutrition.

Nandini never considered herself an intellectual or an enlightened educator. She was educated mainly at convent schools in the United Provinces and by an Irish governess. Later, she attended two years of college in Srinagar. Though she had wanted to get involved in some charitable work for a long time, she had never actually planned for or intended to start a school. However, meeting the two girls moved her to do something more permanent and concrete.

Krishnamurti's advice was always close to her heart, and she shared his words in letters to Devi:

> "The riches of the heart are indestructible. They are the only things that remain with us through joy and pain. Without love all effort is in vain, all living is death. Without that perfume, life is an arid desert. So we have to love, to give of ourselves, laugh and work, and help others, and watch the self within us live on. Few can show concern for others. Concern has a great quality, a vital, dynamic quality of stillness and absence of the self. There can be a frantic quality in concern also, like worry or anxiety. But just to feel for another without any anxiety or worry is real concern."

As word about the Bal Anand centre spread among the underprivileged of the neighbourhood, two students soon turned to four, to 20 and went up to 125. More and more youngsters came to the little centre for a few hours every day. Every morning Nandini would sit under the spreading branches of the mango tree and greet her students.

The philosophy of Bal Anand was rooted in the way in which Nandini understood and lived Krishnamurti's teachings. Bal Anand became the meaningful expression of what Nandini wanted to do with her life. Krishnamurti had often written to her that it was very important to have some "activity". He would say, do something "that is an expression of yourself, not an activity that fills your time, which is only an escape, but an action that is the very expression of your being."

Krishnamurti's advice guided her actions. She sometimes copied out an important paragraph from his letters when writing to Devi:

> "You must feel very strongly about everything you do. If you feel very strongly, then little things will not fill your life. If you feel strongly about love, not careers or jobs, if you feel vitally, you will live in a state of deep silence. Your mind will be very clear, simple, and strong.
>
> One can feel hurt or be self-centred, one can think and feel only for oneself, but to feel affection, tenderness, care for another, to tend a plant, care for a dog, or another human being, is to have feeling that does not destroy. To look outward at beauty, to feel sympathy for poverty and suffering, to have affection and kindness, that is important. One has to find the difference between the two—between feeling for oneself and for others. If one feels hurt and withdraws, there is a hardening of the mind and heart. If your heart is full, you have everything, you are everything. Look at yourself joyfully, as a whole, and not only at the sad moments which fill your mind."

Bal Anand soon became an important centre in the lives of the underprivileged living or working in the Nepean Sea Road area.

There were no highly paid teachers, nor any special curriculum. Volunteers came and taught the students drawing, painting, weaving, craft, and stitching. As paints were expensive they would mix powdered colour or use geru to paint on the whitewashed external walls of Motima's house.

True to its name, Bal Anand was a place of great joy. Mornings started with talking with the gathered children, hearing about their fears, understanding details of their daily lives, their thoughts and aspirations. Together they would all listen to the birds calling, the sounds of nature often missed in the city. Nandini would draw the students' attention to the sound of their own heartbeat, the sounds in their minds. The children were provided a nutritious snack every day, as healthy food was often a challenge for their families; dates, bananas, bread and butter were some of the items they ate at Bal Anand. Nandini spent quality time with them singing, painting, clay modelling, or just allowing them to run freely in the courtyard.

In this space, young minds were free to express their feelings and emotions. They felt cared for and experienced affection. There was absolutely no religious instruction, but Nandini did encourage them to meditate, to sit quietly, and to delve into their own minds and thoughts. Nandini would guide them, saying "Instead of saying you love your mother, think about how you would express this love you feel for her".

Bal Anand's philosophy was to cultivate sensitivity and emotional intelligence in the young students. Nandini thought it important to develop empathy. "Help a blind man, a wounded animal," she encouraged. To the teachers she emphasized that adults must develop deep empathy and the capacity to listen to the young. "Don't just give lectures," she would say. "Don't just fill the child with facts. Teach them the art of learning."

The house where Nandini and her mother lived was built on a high plinth. Nandini's centre grew under the mango tree right under her bedroom window. Under its shade she sat and painted with the children, but not until she had first focussed on talking to them. She knew every student's name, what was going on in their lives, and she remembered and was mindful of their special fears or concerns. "How was your day?" "Is your mother home from the hospital?" "You must have been scared!" "Are you afraid of the dark?" Only after this exchange, this sharing and profoundly empathetic listening, would they go on to other activities. Nandini wanted the children to feel loved and know that somebody cared. She wanted them to be aware of their inner world and awaken their senses to the world outside. She wanted them to have fun, to laugh and climb trees, to pluck raw mangoes, but also to be quiet, to chant, to watch their thoughts as if from the outside. Above all, Bal Anand was a place where children romped around, played, sang, and where there was always someone who was responsive to them. There was no building, solid structures, or formal staff. Bal Anand ran on the power of love and the strength of Nandini's compassion.

Support came from those who saw the good work she was doing. In fact, Bal Anand soon became a family responsibility with many friends pitching in as well. Vasumati, Kumi's wife and Nandini's sister-in-law, looked after the centre's finances, meagre as they were. Motima looked after the daily snack that was given to the children. Her sisters Moon and Amru would drop by and chat with the children. The famous sculptor Pilloo Pochkhanawala sometimes taught them sculpture, actor Leela Naidu told them stories, while friends Siloo Billimoria and Dr. Padte taught English. They would sometimes weave dusters on a loom or embroider jute bags, which they sold to raise funds to run the place. Well-wishers sometimes donated funds, which took care of the school's expenses.

In 1968, the owner of the rented house where Nandini and her mother lived decided to sell it to the municipality. Nandini ran from pillar to post to see how she could relocate Bal Anand, as her young students depended on her. At one point Charles Correa offered to design a centre on another plot elsewhere, but Nandini did not want to lose the local children she had nurtured. Where would they go?

When Nandini brought this problem to Krishnamurti's attention, he merely said: "Do not worry, something will turn up." It did very soon after. In Akash Deep building, in the neighbouring compound, two garages came up for sale, and Nandini decided that that was where she would run her centre. Leela Naidu contributed significantly by helping to raise the Rs.37,000 required to buy the garages. People scoffed at the idea of a centre in a garage, but Nandini was clear as day that it would be perfect for her purpose.

The old house Nandini lived in was soon demolished and though the municipality claimed in 1968 that they would soon be building a school for 3,000 students there, to this day 50 years later, that hasn't happened. At some point a small vyayamshala (fitness gym) opened, though the rest of the plot still lies vacant, having become something of a public maidan. Nandini moved into Devi's flat at Land's End, just across the street from Bal Anand.

Although much of Bal Anand's activity shifted into the new garage premises, Nandini continued to use the open compound of the old house, often sitting with her students under a tree. She loved nature and the outdoors, and as much as she could, she spent her time with the children outside. She thought it an essential part of cultivating love and respect for nature in them. It was in the outdoors that she talked to them about creating a sense of internal quietness and calm, while still maintaining expressiveness and joy externally.

Art was central to the activity Nandini fostered. The children's paintings were always displayed on the walls of Bal Anand. They portrayed such sensitivity that they drew the attention of a member of the Rockefeller Foundation. She then arranged for a two-month scholarship for Nandini to exhibit the paintings in New York.

Bal Anand still runs out of the garages on Dongersi Road. Kashi Bane, 65, is a teacher at Bal Anand, but she first came here in 1960 when she was just seven years old. Her father worked as a domestic helper in the neighbourhood. She recalls her early days at Bal Anand and says, in Marathi, that the way Nandini taught was very different from the regular school she attended. She never taught through lecturing. For instance, "When boys threw stones at the birds or tried to catch butterflies, Nandinibai would not shout or get angry. She would calmly talk to all of us about violence, and what it does."

Nanda, another teacher at Bal Anand, said: "Nandinibai used to inquire about our families and that really touched me as no one had ever bothered to ask about my daily life or my fears before."

Bal Anand changed the course of countless lives. "Nandinibai helped us stand on our own two feet and become economically independent. She helped our families," Nanda said. Kashi recalls her father saying: "Your mother gave birth to you, but Nandinibai held your hand, gave you courage, helped you find direction in life, made you what you are today."

Throughout the voluminous correspondence between Nandini and Krishnamurti he always asked her about Bal Anand, calling it the "little school". He knew how important it was to her. Krishnamurti and Nandini often discussed education and its meaning and purpose in various letters exchanged in the 1960s. Nandini communicated some of these conversations in letters to her daughter. Krishnamurti

had told her that he could see that when she started the school she had a real love and feeling for the children, and that she did not have any theories to promote or personal agenda. She was not escaping anything either. He appreciated the fact that she "treated them as children, not as drivers' or cooks' children." Krishnamurti encouraged her to read to them and to talk to them, and to reflect on the fact that the aim of education was to "cultivate self-awareness and fearlessness". He assured her that if she continued to give of herself to the children it would have "an extraordinary effect".

Indeed, Bal Anand did much good and made a difference to many young lives over the years. It was a cherished part of Nandini's daily routine and a very significant part of her existence right until the end of her life.

Smt Vijayalakshmi Pandit, governor of Maharashtra, at an exhibition of handicrafts made by the children of Bal Anand around 1964. On her left are Nandini, Aditi, and Iravati (above). Even during her last years when she was quite frail, Nandini made it a point to be present at Bal Anand every day (below).

Even in their later years, Nandini and her siblings maintained a very close bond. Nandini with her sisters Amru and Pupul (above); and with her brother Kumi (below).

Nandini and her sons Ghanshyam and Kaka with her first grandchild Aditi in 1960 (above). Nandini with Iravati and her grandchildren, Devi's children, Aditi and Aditya, around 1963 (below).

Nandini with her grandchild, Ghanshyam's daughter Maithili, around 1975 (above). Nandini shared a close relationship with her niece Radhika, who often stayed with her when her mother Pupul was away. She is now the director of Rishi Valley Education Centre (below).

CHAPTER 9

FIND A PATCH OF GREEN

WHENEVER NANDINI'S CHILDREN MET as adults, they would remember with nostalgia the wondrous years of the 1950s when they took the annual holiday with their mother and grandmother. Summer was the most exciting time for them because that's when they had six weeks of uninterrupted time together. Nandini and Iravati would take them on vacations to hill stations like Nainital, Shimla, or Kodaikanal. It was a period of great happiness and joy during which the three siblings' only quarrel with each other was about who would get to sleep next to their mother each night.

All three greatly cherished the wonderful memories they had of these vacations. They would laugh about how Kaka with childlike innocence once described their feelings before and after a trip. As a little boy he'd said: "When we left on our holiday we were *vir pharr* and when we returned we were *vir phoos*" (meaning that like balloons, when they left on their holiday they were inflated with happiness, and when they were on their way back, they all felt deflated).

During the 1950s, Nandini and Krishnamurti's friendship had grown and they regularly exchanged letters. Not just Nandini, but most of Nandini's family became attached and dedicated to Krishnamurti and his teachings. When Krishnamurti spoke in Bombay they all

came to hear him. Although some of them admitted that they didn't quite understand the discourses, no family member wanted to miss his talks. Just being in his presence was important; his aura was deeply calming.

Whenever Krishnamurti was in Bombay, Iravati hosted family dinners with him. She would make a huge effort to cook a lot of food and extend impeccable hospitality; for her it was an act of devotion. Nandini's eldest sister Moon and her children Asit and Shyama would also be present. Around a table heavy with delicious food, laughter and conversation flowed. No abstractions or deep spirituality was discussed. Talk would include the children and often be about mundane things: books read, places visited, the latest gossip, the newest thrillers, the latest films, and so on.

It was an open atmosphere in which everyone spoke fearlessly. At one of these suppers, Krishnamurti related an incident in which Maharishi Mahesh Yogi was travelling abroad. He said that the Maharishi was sitting cross-legged on the airplane seat and had started to levitate. Hearing this, Kaka burst out laughing. Krishnamurti looked at him and said calmly "There are more things in heaven and on Earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Horatio."

Kaka was often unabashedly sceptical about incidents or experiences that were outside the realm of scientific explanation. Yet, he was deeply interested in being with Krishnamurti and never missed a single talk when he was in town. Kaka had a great sense of humour and would often tease his mother or mock her devotion to Krishnamurti. "The Lord is in town," he would say with flourish, when Krishnamurti arrived in Bombay.

Ghanshyam too never missed Krishnamurti's talks and had the deepest reverence for him. Devi learnt the practical aspects of living the Krishnamurti way through the example of her mother. This devotion to Krishnamurti spanned four generations. Moon's son Asit Chandmal was devoted to Krishnamurti and later published two photographic books on him. Devi's daughter Aditi Mangaldas is a performing kathak dancer. Even today, the flyers and brochures announcing the themes and content of her performances often include quotes from Krishnamurti. Since 2006 she has been in a relationship with Armin Sprotte, who was educated at Brockwood Park, Krishnamurti's school in England, as his parents were deeply interested in Krishnamurti's teachings. Pupul's daughter Radhika Jayakar Herzberger joined Krishnamurti's Rishi Valley Education Centre as a teacher in 1982, and went on to become its Director, a position she still holds. Her husband Dr. Hans Herzberger is also deeply involved with the school at Rishi Valley. Additionally, several children from the family have studied at Rishi Valley.

When Krishnamurti was in Bombay, he often walked at Hanging Gardens on Malabar Hill, where different people would join him. Nandini frequently accompanied him on these walks. Krishnamurti, Pupul, and Nandini would also go for long walks at Worli Seaface. Years later, Nandini would recall these walks with affection. In her diary she wrote:

> I remember those evening walks along the promenade by the seaside with Krishnaji. Pupul and I would stride beside him. Krishnaji spoke of many things. Look at the sea, do you see the waves dashing against the rocks? Look at the darkening horizon, this house, that tree. At every moment his attention was drawn to something. As a friend once said, "nothing could escape the magic of his glance".

The correspondence between Krishnamurti and Nandini spanned 38 years. Krishnamurti's letters to Nandini were always handwritten, usually on light-blue onion skin paper. Later, when he switched to a typewriter, he continued to handwrite letters to her. The letters often began with a greeting, an enquiry of health and mental state, and a short update on what he was doing. This was followed by words of guidance, a message or discourse, before closing with, "Sia bene, sia benedetta". Be good, be blessed.

Krishnamurti wrote to Nandini as one would to a dear friend and confidante. He talked about the mundane as well: his health issues, his difficulties and problems. He mentioned the people he had met and talks he had given. He told her that she was in his consciousness, and he was deeply concerned about her health, her family. He asked how her "little school" was getting along, and how Nandini spent her day. If she did not reply soon, he chided her. Even in later years, there was interest in all the little things in the lives of her children, grandchildren, and extended family. She wrote to him about her daily life, details of her family, the problems she encountered, the concerns she had. They shared with each other their thoughts and contemplations.

Nandini listened to Krishnamurti intently. She thought through the principles and philosophies, and used them in her everyday life in a practical way. She would say that Krishnamurti had taught her that life is strange and uncertain, and unless you are extremely awake and intelligent, or mindful, it can break you. She reminded herself that he had asked her to keep awake, like a flame that is always burning, without smoke (i.e. without motives). To all her children she would write about the flame, the perfume, building a sense of self-awareness. "When it is there, all problems dissolve into nothingness and without it, the heart, mind, and body are an arid, parched desert," she said.

When Nandini wrote to Krishnamurti about an illness in the family or some fear she had, he would often write back telling her not to worry. His advice and consolation was often just a few pithy statements, referring to himself using the plural "we":

> "Face the fear/problem. Don't get panicky. We will be there with you. We will look after things."

Krishnamurti's letters proffered nuggets of advice on living a happy, healthy life. And Nandini would often copy significant sections into her diary. For instance, he wrote:

> "Look after yourself wisely and don't let fear darken your health. Be wise and definite about your health. Don't let emotion and sentiment interfere with your health, nor self-pity belittle your actions. There are too many influences and pressures that constantly shape the mind and heart; be aware of them and cut through them. Don't be a slave to them. To be a slave is to be mediocre. Be awake, aflame."

> "You know you ought to spend some time by yourself, not to rest or go to sleep, but to take stock, not to be overwhelmed by the family and circumstances, to empty the mind of all its contents, memories, pleasures etc., to start anew and to be completely still and empty. Do this, my dear, do it and don't just think about doing it. Do it as naturally and simply as you brush your teeth and take a bath."

Krishnamurti used the word "awareness" to talk of mental alertness to the external world, a mind free of desire and full of love, what Buddhists refer to as "mindfulness" "inward observation". Start

with the external and then slowly move to examining the internal, he would say. Address a problem from both sides, externally and then internally as well. The agitated mind cannot watch. One needs to first still the body. Then start observing the mind and one's actions—without judgment, he advised.

As the years went by, Nandini's children moved away. Devi married Harshavadan Mangaldas in 1959 and moved to Ahmedabad. Nandini would visit the family in Ahmedabad often and had a deep and close relationship with Devi's husband and two children Aditi and Aditya. Ghanshyam went to the US to study at the University of California at Berkeley in 1963. He returned to India in 1971, married Meena Munim a year later, and moved to Brisbane where he taught at the University of Queensland. Nandini's diary mentions her great joy whenever she would talk to her gentle Ghanshyam and his daughter Maithili on the phone from Australia, or when the family visited India once a year. Kaka also studied at Berkeley from 1968 to 1977. He then became a professor of mathematics at the University of Mumbai and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, and in 1997 married Indra Munshi. On 4th June 2014, Nandini's birth anniversary, he succumbed to cancer.

Krishnamurti held great affection not just for Nandini, but for her family as well. When Krishnamurti was in California in the 1960s he made it a point to meet Nandini's sons Ghanshyam and Kaka. He wrote a detailed letter to Nandini about the conversations they had and his observations of her boys.

In 1967, Nandini and Devi went to Gstaad on Krishnamurti's invitation to attend his talks in Saanen. Again, in 1971, he invited them and Devi's children, this time to Brockwood Park, where they attended his discourses over four days.

Iravati (Motima) doted on Krishnamurti. She had mourned her husband's premature death for nine years, but after meeting Krishnamurti she had felt a large part of her burden had lifted. She was a gracious hostess even in her senior years. When Krishnamurti stayed with her daughter Pupul at Himmat Niwas building in the early 1970s, she would personally and lovingly supervise the preparation of Nagar delicacies.

In April 1976, Moon died suddenly at home, in the flat she shared with Motima. Motima was shocked and utterly devastated. That night Nandini took her mother to her home, where she wept in profound sorrow. No words could console her. Nandini held her mother to her heart and wept with her. After the death of her daughter, Motima was a broken woman. Soon after, she suffered a mild stroke and became bedridden. In January 1977, when Krishnamurti was in Bombay, he made it a point to visit her. She was weak and frail, but delighted to see him. For over an hour, Krishnamurti, who always called her "Amma", held her hand and chatted with her. Motima passed away a few months later.

Whenever he was in Bombay, Nandini never failed to meet Krishnamurti or go for his talks. On a few occasions she and Pupul accompanied him to Rishi Valley, Ooty, Delhi, Sri Lanka, and other parts of the country where he had a lecture series. For Nandini, every moment with Krishnamurti was an opportunity to learn something new, to understand life and the world better.

One day, Nandini was visiting Krishnamurti at Pupul's house at Himmat Niwas in Bombay. He called her to the window and pointed to a tree outside the window of the flat, a flash of green in the concrete jungle. He said to her: "Every day I have been here I have looked at that green tree. To me it has been all the forests of the world, and that one yellow flower, all the flowers on Earth,

though the tree is full of dust and in the midst of filth." Nandini related this conversation to Devi in a letter adding:

> When I looked at that tree, indeed it was an incredible green, a green I had never noticed before. That one remark from Krishnaji had within it all the wisdom one could think of; all the beauty and dignity of life, and the grace and charm of living. "Life is to be enjoyed" Krishnaji said to me, "Be happy". So I tell myself, you, and all who will hear me, to find that patch of green, that oasis in your life.
>
> The green patch or spot has to be within you, independent of all outward events. A source of strength, a spark. It cannot by its nature be lodged in another, no matter how much love we have. It is the lamp that lights our way, which no one can take away from us. In this uncertain life, one has to find that inner strength. Call it faith, or call it holding God's hand and never letting go.

Nandini's letters and words are her legacy. She would often say that she did not have any material goods or gifts to give her children, but she wanted to share with them the principles and tenets by which she lived her life. From 1959, until Devi moved back to Bombay in 1983 after the breakup of her marriage, mother and daughter exchanged letters at least twice a week. Nandini wrote regularly to Kaka and Ghanshyam as well. She wanted to share with them the benefits of what she had learned from Krishnamurti. To Devi she would say "what I write to you is first my meditation". One letter states:

> I think that it is the duty of every parent to see, as much as possible, that their children grow up in love and

> understanding, in care. That they are able to cope with life, have a clear mind, and all this can only come about if they have no fear. Children must learn to be thoughtful, to observe, and to doubt and find out, to know when to act and when not to act, to know themselves. To yield verbally (to appease or pander to someone) or to be aggressive, is the same thing—it destroys. I have seen both in action. Peace at any price, to pander to someone, to please them, so that the person is in a good mood—this policy is a disaster. There will be bullying and blackmail outwardly and subtly. Stepping on another, or be stepped upon. You can be used as a doormat. I too was the yielding kind. My instinct was to be that, but one has to watch most carefully what one's inclinations are, they are most suspect. Watch them, be awake, know what you are doing.

Nandini loved to read. She read Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, she read Chinese philosophy, books on Buddhism, the Upanishads. Some of her favourite authors however, were D. H. Lawrence, Gerald Durrell, Anais Nin, P. B. Shelley, and several Japanese poets. Whenever she was touched by some words of wisdom, or by beautiful passages in a book, she copied them out and shared them with Devi. Nandini loved this passage and quoted it from *The Diary of Anais Nin:*

> "When anxiety sets in like a fever, cold and hot waves, chills, be calm. Know it for what it is: anxiety. Do not explain it away by blaming any particular incident, experience, for then it becomes magnified. When depression suffocates you like a London fog, think that the cause is not as great as you may think. A small defeat, a small frustration, a small discord may set it off.

> You must see the transitoriness of moods. Beware of exaggerated reactions to harshness, brutality, ignorance, selfishness. Beware of allowing a tactless word, a rebuttal, a rejection, to obliterate the whole sky."

Different parents give different kinds of advice to their children. Nandini's advice was never about material success. Instead it was about refining one's personal, internal qualities. "Don't constantly demand things from life," she would write. "Let things be and happen. Take very little, be content with less, don't develop a greedy mind, enjoy gazing at life in wonder and delight." On the subject of love, she once wrote to Devi:

> Deva, share your richness and capacity to love with others, give it to all those who are part of your world. Share your warmth, your outpourings of feelings and then you will never age though the years may come as they inevitably must. But the spring of your inner being will be replenished and renewed by the very act of giving. By its nature love flows out, like a river, swift and life-giving, like a tree that shelters and creates. Love cannot rest in stagnant pools, it has to flow. But it keeps within its banks, orderly, maintaining its own vitality and beauty. The world is so poor, it refuses to understand this. Or it is perplexed and gets furious with a person who is not acquisitive.

When she found it relevant, Nandini often included short quotes from Krishnamurti's communications to her.

> "I am afraid there will always be problems. But settle the problems as swiftly as they arise and don't carry it over to the next day. Be very alert and aware of every thought

> and feeling. Be tremendously alive, in spite of everything. I must see you like that… Meditation is a marvellous thing. It destroys everything, but the real."

Devi worked as a counsellor and Nandini would discuss with her the virtue of treating each person she met with a mind that was a blank slate. "Don't have an image of a person, don't judge them as you talk to them, but listen…" she would say. These letters were important to Devi because they helped her live her life, sort through any problems she was facing, develop a sense of calm. Nandini wrote:

> Live through life dealing with light and darkness, to use Krishnaji's words, "Like a morning after the storm, like new rain has washed a leaf, sparkling and clean". When he talked to me, he showed me what allowing a problem to take root in the mind, allowing it to come over and over again, does to the mind. He said be aware of every thought. Do not let a reaction go without noticing it, and do not judge or justify. Do not pursue the path of gratification. Watch the mind. Do not say, this is good, I want it. This is bad, out with it. Sit on the banks of a river, let the waters go by, watch and observe. If you have a thought, explore, watch it, and move on. Do not look back. Be alert. One has to live Krishnaji's words, see clearly for yourself, and bring order into your daily life.

Sometimes Nandini digressed from more practical discussions to examine other topics. On the meaning of renunciation, she wrote:

> What may be right for you will come as it should, and not as you want. Do not try and shape events. Have you not realised that when something good happens, it

> comes without a struggle, with no plan. It comes and gives its magic and its joy. One has to let the memory of that fleeting joy go too. That is true renunciation. The true giving up. As Krishnaji says, renunciation is not the saffron robe and the reciting of mantras. It is unknown to all but the one who puts away happily and without struggle the glimpses of joy he/she has had. Krishnaji said the outer gestures are child's play, but to have had a glimpse of joy and to wipe it out, to not hold to the memory of it, not ask for more of it, that is true renunciation. Ponder this.

When they lived together in Mumbai after 1983, Devi would sometimes come home to find her mother sitting in a chair by the window, an air of calm across her face, looking out at the sea for long periods of time. When she asked her what she was thinking about Nandini would reply, "Nothing. My mind is calm and still, without the incessant chatter of thought". From her diaries and letters, it is abundantly clear that Nandini had indeed found her patch of green.

> "A person can only be prepared to meet evil, violence, fear, by living wisely. By fearing it we attract it, and it enters us. Instead, face it, be aware of it, but don't react to it."
> – From Nandini's letter to Devi, written in the 1970s.

Nandini at her daughter Devi's wedding with Harshavadan Mangaldas in Bombay in April 1959 (above). Nandini at Ghanshyam and Meena Munim's wedding in December 1972 (below).

(Above from left to right) Pupul, Devi, Nandini, Aditya, Krishnamurti, Aditi, Amru, and her granddaughter Anjali at Pupul's home, where Krishnamurti stayed when he was in Bombay, in 1970. Nandini, Kaka, and his wife Indra Munshi, in Mumbai in 1998 (below).

CHAPTER 10

THE LAST WALK

IN OCTOBER 1985, KRISHNAMURTI, aged 90, arrived in India for what would be the last time. He was still physically fit, despite some nagging health issues, and had an active schedule of talks planned. Nandini went to the talks in Rajghat, Varanasi, in November and wrote in her diary that the experience was extraordinary. She felt radiant and found the discourses full of significance. However, she knew that Krishnamurti's health was failing drastically. At one point he tripped and fell in a mango grove and Pupul and Nandini wondered if the end was nigh.

Though Krishnamurti was feeling unwell and losing weight, he continued his schedule of talks. He knew that the end of his life was near and stated so. He said to Nandini, "My travelling days are over. Those days are gone for good, Nandini. I may die soon". He wanted to travel back to Ojai for his last days. He was scheduled to leave on 10th January 1986, and a number of medical tests were planned for when he returned.

Nandini, Devi, Ghanshyam and his family, Kaka, Aditi, Pupul and her daughter Radhika, and Asit travelled to Madras to attend his last talk and meet him before his departure. Krishnamurti was staying at Vasanta Vihar, the Krishnamurti Foundation Centre.

One evening at the centre, everyone sat together and talked, and though feverish and unwell Krishnamurti managed to converse and

even joke a little. At one point he asked all of Nandini's family to sit in a circle on the floor with him, holding hands in quiet meditation. It was a very significant moment for everyone, a memory that still lives on.

On 10th January 1986, his last evening in India, a group of his friends and associates drove with Krishnamurti to the beach. The sun was setting in a fiery burst of flames, casting blazing rays over the sky. The beach was full of people standing and waiting for Krishnamurti. The sky too seemed to be waiting. Krishnamurti walked well and looked rested. Nandini walked for a while alongside him. She knew this was going to be her last walk with Krishnamurti. At one point he reached out and gently touched her shoulder. No words were necessary.

On the way back, Krishnamurti let everyone move ahead so he could fall back. When he was about to exit the beach, he stopped, facing the ocean. Then he turned and directed his gaze and a salutation one by one to all four cardinal directions. With that gesture he said his last goodbye to India, at the very site where Charles Leadbeater of the Theosophical Society had first noticed him, 75 years earlier.

During those last few days Krishnamurti had said to Nandini: "There is something wrong here (pointing to his body). If I am going, I will take charge and inform you a few days before I go. You will have time to come, or not. I am not afraid of death. You have to accept it Nandini."

"How will I say goodbye to you?" she asked.
"You will not say goodbye," Krishnamurti replied.
"Will I never see you again?" she asked.
"You will see me," he said.

The doctor had wanted to have Krishnamurti's prostrate checked when he got back to California. Krishnamurti had decided that if something was found to be wrong, he would not undergo any operation, he would let it be. Soon after returning to Ojai it was ascertained that Krishnamurti had pancreatic cancer that was spreading fast. He was desperately ill and in immense pain. Knowing that the end was near, Pupul, her daughter Radhika, and nephew Asit left for Ojai, arriving there on 31st January 1986. Nandini decided not to go. She wrote Krishnamurti a letter that Pupul hand delivered to him.

> Dear Krishnaji,
> My pranams and love to you. I shall not say goodbye. I hope you are not in too much pain. Asit told me that you had pain on the flight and had to use a wheelchair. I am so sorry that you have had to suffer all this pain and discomfort. Pupul telephoned Asit and he told me of the results of the biopsy.
>
> I have no words to fully express my agony at what has happened. It all seems so wrong that you have to bear pain. It is a nice day Krishnaji, even for Bombay—it is cool, the sun is sparkling on the waters, the birds call out. Everything is as it ought to be, but you are ill, very ill, and you are going away, but I shall not say good bye to you.
> Nandini.
>
> I wish I could have been with the others in California, but my body is telling me to remain behind and be quiet. Devi, Ghanshyam, Kaka, Meena, Aditi, Maithili, and Aditya send their pranams to you.

Krishnamurti read the letter and kept it by his bedside. He told Pupul to tell Nandini that he sent her his profound love, a message that was recorded on tape and shared with Nandini later.

During the next two weeks, Krishnamurti's health deteriorated significantly and his days were filled with pain and agony. Close to midnight on 16th February 1986, the great 20th-century teacher and philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti passed away at Pine Cottage in Ojai, California. Outside the window of his room stood the pepper tree under which he had his first revelation at the age of 27.

In Bombay, Nandini received the news by telephone. She was expecting it. There was no loud weeping, wailing, or hysteria. She shed silent tears that day. Then, as Krishnamurti had wanted of her, she wiped them dry and faced the reality of a world without him.

* * *

Though he was physically gone, Krishnamurti was by no means a forgotten force. Years after his passing, recalling the immense joy that came over Nandini in Krishnamurti's presence, Ghanshyam wrote to his mother about those times. She mentioned it in her diary:

> Ghanshyam writes to me in gentle tones of Krishnaji—of his going away, of things which can never be the same. Of Krishnaji's gentleness to him and to me. Of walking and laughing with Krishnaji. Of his radiance, and what a joy and delight it was to be with him, to sit and eat with him, to be in his presence. Has that all gone?
>
> Ghanshyam writes, "I will never see the same joy and radiance on your face that you had when Krishnaji

> was there. But do not forget his last message was his profound love for you."

Though Krishnamurti died in 1986, Nandini's diary has many letters addressed to him even after that date. Whenever she had worries, problems, family issues, she would turn to Krishnamurti, asking him to take care of those who were troubled, or had illnesses or setbacks. She felt assured that Krishnamurti would take care of things for her family. After all when he was alive he had often said to her that she was in his consciousness. She believed his protection continued even after he was physically no more.

In one of her letters to him she recalled with happiness walking with him: Walking beside him on dusty Panchkoshi Road in Varanasi and in the green hills of Ooty. The walks in Rishi Valley where they went to Thetu village, in Sri Lanka beside the Galle Face Hotel in an open green space, and in Bombay at the Racecourse or along Worli Seaface or Carmichael Road. "I always had a strange feeling walking with you—it was such a joy to be part of that group that walked beside you," she wrote.

In his lifetime Krishnamurti never spoke about God or an afterlife—he always talked about living this life well. Nandini would often quote him and tell her children "It is no good bemoaning the past; it's finished and over and it is a waste of time to wish it were different. What is important is to live in that flame without regret, without want, without expectation." Nandini lived her life according to what she had learnt from Krishnamurti's teachings. To Devi she wrote:

> We die many times before our death, made fearful by our own thoughts. We live in an age of pain. There is a way, and Krishnaji has shown it. We have to pick up the

> key and walk to the mountain top. In any case we have to die but once. So let us live now as if it were our last day—ending and giving up all we have, putting aside all our worries and dislikes. Walk lightly, be ready for whatever may be.

Nandini would frequently remind herself that he had asked her to keep awake, aflame, completely alive and whole. When she looked at a river, she recalled him saying that she should be like a mountain stream, ever flowing, with no resting place, full of life and beauty. "The less there is thought of the self, the more energy there will be to give of oneself, to be happy and grateful," he would say. His advice to Nandini was often simple, "We can never step into the same waters twice, and what has gone can never come back again. So each day should be full, as it never was before, without compulsion, without envy, without conflict, without the me, me, me."

In 1988, Nandini's first great grandchild Karma Vivan (nicknamed Nayaa) was born to Devi's daughter Aditi Mangaldas and Iqbal Kumar. The little boy spent a large part of the first three years of his life with Nandini and Devi in Bombay. His presence filled Nandini's life and she was totally devoted to him, staying up all night if he was ill, playing with him, feeding him. He too was very attached to his great grandmother, sleeping next to her with his leg over her body. After those early years, he spent many of his vacations with Nandini and Devi in Bombay.

Nandini was devoted to her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren—two more, Ayesha and Amaya, children of Aditya and his wife Mamta, were born in 1995 and 1997. None of them recall ever seeing her melancholy or depressed, moody or brooding; she was always tranquil, yet had a great passion for life. She regularly wrote letters to her children. When she saw them, or any of her

grandchildren, her face lit up with a smile and she would take their hands in hers and kiss them.

So it was a great shock to all those around her when Nandini started showing signs of memory loss and dementia in 1995. She started having hallucinations of being attacked and assaulted, but luckily they were short episodes that soon passed. Slowly, her handwriting started to deteriorate and she was unable to write letters or her diary. Her three children and close family were greatly saddened by this. She had been their rock during all their difficulties; their foundation was shaken. Nandini's three children, grandchildren, sister Pupul, and niece Radhika often stated that they could not understand how this could happen to someone who had led such a disciplined life and was mentally so strong. It was a painful truth to accept. Even in her last years Nandini did not spend her time lying in bed, except at night or for a short afternoon nap. Until the end, she continued to visit Bal Anand every day, nurturing the lives of the hundreds of children who passed through its doors.

On the night of 7th July 2002, at the age of 85, the end came swiftly and unexpectedly, as she rested her head on her grandson Aditya's shoulder, the name of her older son Ghanshyam on her lips. Aditya later said, "I had always dreaded the thought of someone so close passing away in front of me, but Nandinima passing away was most peaceful. She was an amazing human being". Her son Ghanshyam echoed the sentiments of others when he referred to her as a "unique and transcendental" being.

Not just among family, Nandini was loved and respected among the women who came to swab floors, wash utensils, and cook in the high-rise apartment buildings of the Malabar Hill area. She was the one who had provided the much needed protective space for their children while they worked. Along with their mothers, local

electricians, plumbers, and shop assistants mourned her passing. They recalled how she had taught them drawing and painting, and guided their hand as they wrote their first letters. One of her students compared her to a banyan tree, under whose shade all of them found shelter.

Not much is known about Nandini Mehta in the Krishnamurti world. At best, she is remembered as the friend to whom Krishnamurti wrote the letters published in Pupul Jayakar's biography of him. These letters were also published in booklet form with the title: *Letters to a Young Friend: Happy is the Man who has Nothing*. The title captures Nandini's life: She was a beautiful woman who lived anonymously, owned virtually nothing, but nourished many lives. But she was so much more than what is publicly known of her: a gentle soul, strong willed, ahead of her time, a deep thinker, an infinitely caring and affectionate personality. She truly lived the life Krishnamurti advocated in his talks.

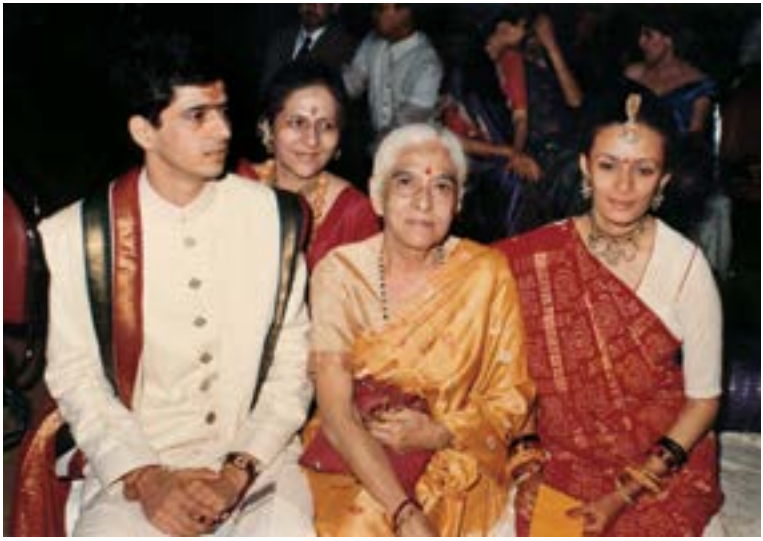
Very aptly, Pupul Jayakar once compared her to a subterranean stream that nourishes and sustains life, but is never seen.

Nandini and Krishnamurti listening to Beethoven at Asit Chandmal's home in Bombay around 1980, during his annual visit to India.

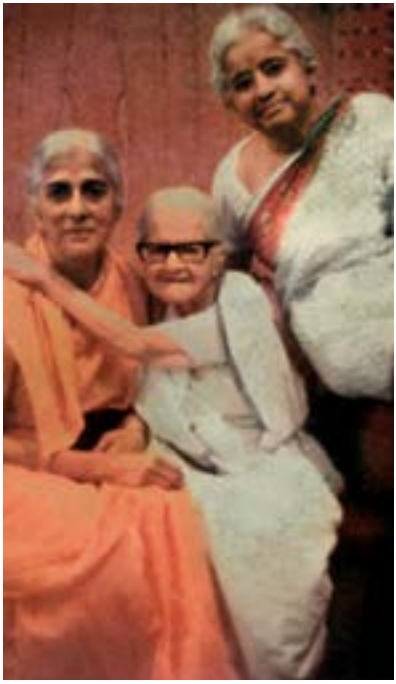
Krishnamurti and Nandini walking, in Madras in January 1986, on his last visit to India (above); and having a discussion after a talk at Rishi Valley in the late 1970s (below).

Nandini with Devi and Aditi, at the birth of her great grandson Karma Vivan who she called Nayaa, in 1988 (above). Nandini looked after him for a significant part of the first three years of his life when he lived with her and Devi in Mumbai (below).

Nandini with great grandchildren Ayesha and Karma Vivan around 1997 in Delhi (above). And sharing a joke with great granddaughter Amaya in Mumbai around 2001.



Family was everything to Nandini. She was always concerned with everyone's health and well-being. Nandini at the wedding of her grandson Aditya with Mamta Dalal, in 1992; Devi is sitting behind them (above). And with her mother Iravati and sister Amru circa 1977 (below).



Nandini at home in Mumbai around 1995, with a picture of Krishnamurti on the wall. Photo: John Panikar.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt gratitude goes out to my cousin Radhika Jayakar Herzberger for setting me off on this journey, and for her continuous support over the years. After my mother passed away in 2002, Radhika urged me to preserve her letters, diaries, and papers. For the sake of my children, grandchildren, other family members, and those interested in Krishnamurti's teachings, it was important that Nandini Mehta's life be remembered in her own words. Since her passing, I have kept my mother's letters by my bedside, and turned to them in times of joy and sadness.

Whenever Radhika visited Mumbai, we sat together for a few hours every day transcribing my mother's letters and diaries. I would read aloud and Radhika would type. We would discuss things together, just as our mothers Nandini and Pupul had done 60 years earlier when they explored Krishnaji's teachings. It was a magical time as we laughed, questioned, argued, and often wept together.

Though our work was nearly finished by early 2017, without a narrative account to hold it together it remained fragmented. What was the next step? Should it remain typed and formatted in a seldom-opened drawer? My daughter Aditi insisted that I connect the fragments in an account of Nandini's life, my son Aditya urged me to at least give it a try. My three grandchildren Karma Vivan, Ayesha, and Amaya, and my niece Maithili encouraged me and held my hand whenever I felt discouraged by the magnitude of the task. I am grateful for their support. I would also like to thank my cousin Asit Chandmal for permission to use photographs of Krishnaji.

In December 2017, my daughter-in-law Mamta introduced me to Niloufer Venkatraman. I was fortunate that she agreed to work with me on this project. I am grateful for her sensitivity, patience, and perseverance in shepherding me through the process, and editing and rewriting this memoir. I struggled to begin, but eventually writing about my mother and her life became a source of deep joy. With Niloufer's collaboration, this manuscript has become a coherent narrative that I am happy to share with my family and anyone else interested in the life of Nandini Mehta.

– Devyani (Devi) Mangaldas
August 2018

FROM THE EDITOR

I agreed to collaborate and edit this project with Devi Mangaldas because the basic story I'd heard about her mother was intriguing. As the months went by, however, I began to realize that this was much more than a memoir that needed documenting. On more than one occasion, I found myself stirred by a number of emotions. Understanding Nandini Mehta and the philosophy with which she lived her life has on several occasions caused me to re-examine myself, my behaviour, and the way in which I've handled a situation or relationship. I have stopped and asked myself whether I could approach a setting with more compassion, generosity, or kindness. As the materials Devi had worked on slowly started to become a coherent manuscript, I found that many of Nandini's profound words made me think harder about life and about the materialism our existence is focused on. I believe there are valuable life lessons in her writing. Her life is inspiring, and has the capacity to open up valleys of hope in bleak moments.

I never had the opportunity to meet Nandini Mehta, but I certainly wish I had.

– Niloufer Venkatraman

Nandini Mehta first met the philosopher and spiritual teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti in Bombay in 1948, when she accompanied her father-in-law, the mill-owner Sir Chunilal Mehta, to one of his meetings. Over the course of the next 38 years, until his death in 1986, Nandini and Krishnamurti shared a beautiful friendship.

This biography traces her life, beginning in her childhood in the United Provinces, to the end in Mumbai—a journey dedicated to family and the underprivileged. It highlights the way in which Nandini absorbed and understood Krishnamurti's words, how they helped her, how she tried to live her life according to his teachings, and how she helped others. She was a member of the Krishnamurti Foundation, India, and Bal Anand, the centre for underprivileged children that she started, continues to be associated with it.

In a nutshell, this memoir traces her life's story, her struggles, and her steps to a peaceful and spiritual existence.

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