

"What do you mean by that? You should tell me." FIRST CITY spends a bimber break with the maverick guru Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, who turns your notion of 'spiritual' upside down, gives it a few shakes, and sets it on a path he'd rather have you choose

# SADHGURU



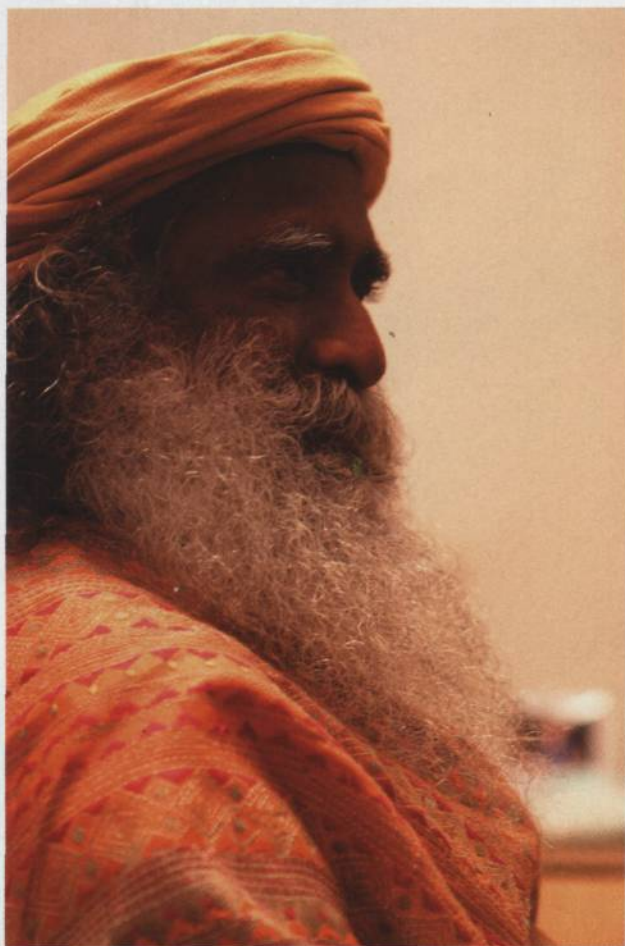
PHOTOGRAPH BY YASHAS CHANDRA



*Guru's ways will not be saintly at all. One moment he's this, the next that. He can be in so many ways. He is just playing a role... He's not always a good man; he can do anything, but a saint is always a good man, always gentle, always loving and always happy. A Guru is not like that. He will do what is needed.*

He certainly looks the part: the flowing grey beard, the saffron turban, the long *kurta*, the *kantha* stole. But the eyes, they gleam, laugh at your presumption. And the words he utters, they don't seek to cajole into a comforting spiritual path, they don't promise enlightenment. No, they don't nudge, they don't prod. They strip you of what you think you already know. Sometimes gently, sometimes cruelly, sometimes irritably. And smile as you go about fumbling for a path. One that is your own, fraught with doubt, not just belief.

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev. Guru. Poet. Yogi. He works 20 hours a day, never in one city for more than three days, advising the odd World Economic Forum about making the world a better place, as much as the government *babu* about how 'stress management' is a well-marketed myth. He loves bikes ("I ride. I like to do anything and everything. Who told you?"). Hang gliding. Skydiving. And doesn't care to conceal any of it to fit into the 'guru' image. Or even to brag about how he's only human. "I do a variety of activities, not all spiritual. Let's see, I'm managing an industry, a construction company, designing things, I'm making things happen, talking to people, spirituality, fun, and whatever else....I do it



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with utter passion."

The first time I hear him speak, is at a talk where he talks about yoga in its pure, holistic form, and not just the reductive cure-for-all it's being fashioned into. Yoga as a contemporary science. "If you drink a glass of water, that water which was not 'you' so far, becomes you when you ingest it. So, whatever gets included into the boundaries of your sensation, is you. These boundaries are determined not by the physical, but by how exuberant you are. If you are conscious, you can extend the boundaries of sensation to whatever extent you want. To a point where you can experience the whole cosmos as your self. So, yoga means just that. A technology, a certain awareness, a method, with which you can extend the boundaries of your sensation. That you can sit in a room full of people and experience all of them as yourself. This is not an intellectual idea. This is a living experience. It is an experiential reality." And in the Q&A that follows, he jolts everybody out of their preconceived notions about the meaning of life. He listens to their well-rehearsed theories, and strips them down to scratch: The path begins at *nada*. The path is *nada*. "I'm not really trying to tell anybody anything," he knocks off the wisdom quest right-away, when we begin our interview from the depths of the black bimmer that takes us through a pretty Delhi at dusk, right after the talk. "All I'm trying to do, is just demolish all their misconceptions, at least to come to a strait where they're able to understand that they don't know a *damn thing* about life," he says nonchalantly, a small smile hidden under the ample beard, "Somebody has read a piece of the *Gita*, he'll think he knows everything. He doesn't know anything. He's more ignorant than the ignorant," and he gazes at me, mysteriously. A part of my brain wonders if the description is aptly meant for the interviewer me. Another part wonders if he can read my mind as I do that. "My work is just to make them see, that they *don't* know. Because unless one does not see that he doesn't know, the question of knowing will never arise in his life. Isn't it?" he asks indulgently, schoolteacher like, "Without knowing, and presuming that you know, the very longing for knowing is destroyed. There is no possibility."

He doesn't speak from a pedestal. He speaks from experience, and with patience. For he boasts of no great pedigree, no well-publicised miracles. And he calls himself, Sadhguru, the 'uneducated guru'.

*Sadhguru means somebody who has not gone through a so-called formal spiritual education. The only thing that he has is his inner experience; he has no spiritual education as such. He's not coming from the Vedas, Gitas, Upanishads, or has had any kind of training for that matter. The only thing he has is his inner experience. Do you see, I am quite*



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*ignorant about everything except myself? The only thing that I know is myself, and that's all that is worth knowing in the existence. Really, the one thing that is truly worth knowing in the existence is yourself.*

**H**e lived a good life, a 'regular' life, till as old as 25: he went to school, he was a good student. He hung out with friends, and bugged his sister till she ran to mommy with complaints. He grew up in the 'era of Beatles and blue jeans'. He did his Bachelors in English Literature, and created the Banyan tree club in college, where students got together and talked 'about how fast you can drive a motorcycle and how to make this world a better place to live in'. But there were pockets of memory, bubbles of another force, which swam alongside. His mother was stunned by how he could remember incidents he had witnessed as a six-month-old. Somehow, nobody in the family could hold him or kiss him when he was young. And when he climbed onto tree tops for some solitude, he would find himself suddenly swaying with the wind, the branches, feeling what he could then only describe as joy, but which in hindsight, were a string of moments that spelt ecstasy, bliss, unknown meditation. But not until that day, when the 25-year-old Jagdish sat on a particular rock on Chamundi Hill, did he realise what those throbbing signs meant.

*I was just sitting on this particular rock. I had my eyes open, not even closed. I thought it was about ten minutes, but something began to happen to me. All my life I had thought this is me (pointing at himself). Suddenly, I did not know which is me and which is not me. The air that I'm breathing, the rock on which I'm sitting, the atmosphere around me, everything had become me. The more I say, the*

**Doubt is very healthy. Suspicion is a sickness. Suspicion means you've made a foregone conclusion about something you don't know. Doubt means you genuinely don't know. What's wrong with that?**

*crazier it will sound to you, because what was happening is indescribable. What is me has become so enormous, it is everywhere. I thought this lasted a few minutes, but when I came back to my normal sense, it was about seven thirty in the evening. My eyes were open, the sun had set and it was dark. I was fully aware, but what I had considered as myself until that moment had just disappeared.*

"It feels like day before yesterday," he half-smiles, almost to himself, when I ask him to remember that day. An experience that came close to this one was his recent "wonderful" trip to Kailash Mansarovar, "I drove all the way... It was... so much. It cannot be described. It's too difficult to articulate. Something absolutely beyond anything you'd ever imagined. There's so much... to it... deepening that process is an unbelievable experience..." The few moments in the half-hour drive-interview when his sharp voice softens to a near-whisper, the guru façade slips as conversation turns inward, and Sadhguru is almost feeling aloud, as it were. But it's only a glimpse. He snaps out of it instantly, pointing at many a landmark, 'Eh, what is that little building there? Oh!