



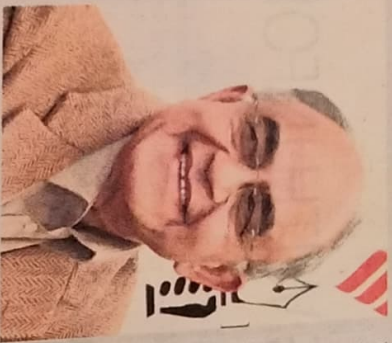
Nadine Kressberger is a French traveller based in India

'Spirituality is about forgetting myself in one way or another'

What does spiritually mean to you?
It's about forgetting myself in one way or another. You do not need to believe in God to be spiritual. Looking at a beautiful painting can be a spiritual experience, listening to a beautiful work of music, forgetting oneself when working, being 'in the zone' as the athletes say, where time gets distorted and you are no longer aware of your ego.

THE PROUST QUESTIONNAIRE

GURCHARAN DAS
is an author and management consultant



At the age of 50, you left your corporate life to pursue a personal quest, especially through writing. Was this quest always in you?
Yes, I have to give credit to my father because he was a mystic, a follower of Radhasoami's, and some things must have seeped in during my childhood. And I'd also give credit to my education at Harvard. There, I moved away from engineering towards philosophy and discovered the importance of the 'great questions'. That's really when it all began.

How did you end up in the corporate world if those metaphysical questions were so important?

It was all by accident. I was all set to undertake a PhD in philosophy in the US. But I felt I didn't want to spend the rest

travelling from town to town, surveying markets, meeting dealers in the bazaars. That is when I started writing. I wrote three plays, to much acclaim and success, and in parallel, by the age of 37, I had become the managing director of the company. It was more difficult to find time to write but I always knew this is what I would do. And at some point, I felt that the first part of the journey, the first of four aims, the quest for Artha — understanding how the world functions — was over and I got pretty depressed.

I was very concerned by moral failure, by corruption. What really hit me was that every interaction of the Indian citizen with the State was morally ambiguous. It made me want to explore Dharma. Why through the Mahabharata? Because it is unique in its obsession with Dharma, in its engagement with the world of politics, in the fact that none of the characters says, 'Let's ask God for the answer'. You are left to your own devices.

The idea or the quest for God has no resonance for you.

The desire to do the right thing, to see a world with less pain, oppression, injustice, corruption and poverty are more

the driving quests of my life; whereas the quest for God, as much as for Moksha, is still far away. Besides, these days, I am much more attracted to the second stage, Karma. I think all human beings have to come to grips with desires. We often gloss over it; we are embarrassed to talk about it. Whereas in the Hindu context, it would be a spiritual quest as much as the other three aims. It considers sexuality as a very natural human thing without all the contemporary embarrassments, the guilt and shame, attached to it.

Yet, life can seem so absurd, and going through it without the certainty of God makes it much more difficult. At times I feel life is like a rigged game of dice. One is like Yudhishtira, the most incompetent of players, knowing one will ultimately lose. The only thing we know is that we will die. In between we don't have any certainty. Sometimes I wish I had been blessed with the grace of feeling that sense of communion with infinity. But even though I am not, I get absorbed in my quests and therefore don't get troubled too often. And when I see that a book like *India Unbound* has inspired many young people, at least I feel I had made an impact, which means there may be a reason for me to be here.

If there were such a thing as God though, what would you like to ask? I do not wish to be immortal so I am not interested in what happens after death. But we are all seeking the same answer to what is the meaning of life? Why are we here?

If there were such a thing as rebirth, what would you choose for the next round?
The biggest flaw I find in my own character is self-absorption. Too much concern for myself, too much ego, always wanting to be 'somebody'. So, assuming I would come back as a human being, I would like to be more relaxed and easily fade in the landscape and easily fade in the landscape. That actually comes in the way of truly enjoying life. Self-forgetting is so central. A little bit less of 'me' would be wonderful no matter what I would be.

What is your idea of happiness? Precisely when I forget myself.

(Read the full interview on indianexpress.com/thirdeye. Send in your comments to thirdeye@expressindia.com)