

## ***The Siddha-Yoga to the test of the criticism.***

*by Bruno Delorme - April 2018 -*

### ***Presentation:***

*This reflection is the culmination of a project that has been close to my heart for a long time: to write about an Indian sect, Siddha-Yoga, to which I belonged in my late teens.*

*It presents itself at the same time as a historical, sociological, and psychoanalytic analysis.*

*I wanted to put at the beginning my personal testimony which opens the reflection, and this in order to show how this movement affected me at a certain period of my life, and what it also produced in me.*

*A Summary at the end of the article allows you to identify the main chapters.*

## ***My passage in the movement of Siddha-Yoga.***

*Testimony by Bruno Delorme<sup>1</sup>*

*It was during the year 1978, when I was starting my professional life and after repeated school failures, that I became acquainted with Siddha-Yoga.*

*My best friend at the time was involved in it and so talked to me about it at length. We were both in search of meaning in our lives and in search of spirituality. And Siddha-Yoga suddenly seemed to offer us what we had been looking for a long time.*

*I joined the movement a year after him, and I discovered it through two communities that were roughly equidistant from the city where I lived: the Dijon ashram and the Lyon ashram.*

*The latter was headed by A. C. and his wife, better known today for having managed the association "Terre du Ciel" and its magazine.*

*I had previously undertaken to follow a cycle of priestly formation during the 1979-1980 school year, in a Catholic Seminary located in Vienne, below the city of Lyon. The religious vocation represented for me at that time an inescapable spiritual horizon. After several experiences of monastic life, I turned towards the priesthood and priestly formation in a Seminary.*

*Then, very quickly, the attraction for Siddha-Yoga, as well as the fascination for his Hindu spirituality and the figure of his guru, his spiritual novelty too, took more and more importance and supplanted my whole Christian vocation. by including it.*

*I then joined the ashram in Lyon, located rue Neuve, on the city's peninsula, in May 1980, and I worked sporadically, trying to earn my living in odd jobs.*

*Thanks to A. C., I was able to work for a while in his "Horus" bookstore, located just below the premises of the ashram, or the "Center" as it was called at the time. This professional*

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*experience meant a lot to me insofar as, having always been attracted by books, I was able to experience this passion for the first time. Later, I even became a librarian, which I still am today.*

*I lived almost a full year in the ashram in Lyon, in the company of the other members and all those who came to frequent it regularly. In this unusual place, I met long-time disciples, others more recent like me, with whom I immediately sympathized, but also swamis who passed through the ashram to provide their teaching or to lead. "intensives", those somewhat special group retreat weekends.*

*I was never able to meet the guru, Swami Muktananda, both for reasons of travel expediency and especially for financial means which I was sorely lacking at that time.*

*This Swami kept traveling between India and the United States, but rarely came to France or Europe. However, despite this absence, I fully embraced the spirituality of Siddha-Yoga and put my trust as a new disciple completely in the person and teaching of this Hindu master.*

*Everyone who had met him kept telling me about it, and I was eager for all the testimonies I received as words of the gospel. Talking about the master with others, admiring his portraits, reading his books, hearing his voice, following his teachings, putting his advice into practice, wasn't that the best way to make him as present as possible, to prove his good faith and show himself to be a true "disciple"?*

*The main spiritual experience, the one that received all the attention and that was talked about over and over among disciples, was that of "shaktipat".*

*It designates the crucial and dazzling moment of the meeting between the master and the disciple, or between the divinity and his devotee, and is experienced individually, in the intimacy of the body and the interiority of the heart. It is an experience of divine grace, personal conversion, and inner enlightenment.*

*This experience is found in other spiritualities and religions, but in Siddha-Yoga it is at the very heart of the relationship between master and disciple. Whoever has not known her remains as an orphan of the divinity and cannot enter this marvelous realm of Shakti, this divine energy of feminine nature which shines, hidden in all souls, and which radiates supernaturally in the world.*

*Having known this experience immediately transformed the layman, who I was at the beginning, into a full disciple, even if he was not part of the inner circle of the guru, or of the circle of swamis who regularly surrounded him.*

*When I shared my own spiritual experiences with several disciples already advanced on the Path, and then with swamis who had come to visit the ashram, all were surprised at their power and intensity. And all those whom I have put in the confidence affirmed to me that I had indeed had this experience of shaktipat, which it was moreover possible to know even without the bodily presence of the guru.*

*Indeed, it was enough for me to meditate at length on his photo, to repeat the mantras in force in Siddha-Yoga, and to recite the liturgical text par excellence, the "Guru-Gîtâ", to immediately experience this intense and mystical heat. ecstatic, this subtle presence unknown to me before, and to notice these spontaneous and astonishing gestures that the presence of Shakti, awakened in me, spontaneously provoked. It wasn't until my dreams were transformed.*

*Even my friend, who had initiated me into this spirituality, was amazed, he himself only had similar experiences when approaching the guru, which was difficult, and after having lived for several months in the ashram of Ganeshpuri, India.*

*I had been the first surprised and I had sometimes even detected in other disciples, older and more knowledgeable, like my friend, a touch of jealousy for having been rewarded.*

*so quickly, and for no apparent reason, of what was considered then as divine graces often exceptional and granted to few people.*

*Far from being proud of it, my Catholic education having taught me to beware of these movements of the heart, I just wanted to share them and show gratitude to the one or those who were the cause: the guru and the divine energy. herself. This is one of the reasons that prompted me to join the movement and integrate this ashram in Lyon.*

*Life was dense there, because of the number of people who lived there permanently - between twenty and thirty if my memory serves me correctly -, the many activities in which everyone participated, and the work that we had to do inside to make the livable place. And that, without counting our professional jobs outside.*

*All these activities occupied all our time, but we were all determined to invest ourselves fully in this new and very exhilarating experience, under the spiritual direction of the guru who regularly sent us his encouragement, either by interposed swamis, or by letters that we listened to. in silence and with unparalleled veneration.*

*Normally nothing could happen to us since we were guarded and protected both by the supernatural power of Shakti and by the grace of the guru that flowed into each of us and surrounded us with an aura of pure magic.*

*This is also what I thought. Especially since I had just lived a trying and destabilizing community experience in the Catholic Seminary that I had left. I told myself then that divine grace should be more effective in Siddha-Yoga, especially because of the presence of the guru, who, unlike Christ and the first Apostles, was still alive. This represented an additional pledge of spiritual truth and religious stability.*

*But this is where I was wrong. As were all the disciples around me. This blindness, quite classic in short and that we find in many movements, was somewhat fatal to us. Very quickly, inevitable conflicts, which were simmering in the beginning, arose within the ashram and developed, aggravating the already tense situation.*

*Conflicts of power, organization of daily life, distribution of tasks, occupation of working time, interpretations of texts and instructions from above, conflicts of people and egos too, that we thought, however, very naively have long passed. As incredible as it may seem, the conversion of hearts, undeniable in most of us, as well as the presence of the grace of the guru as well as of the Shakti, were not sufficient to overcome or only prevent this type of conflict, moreover very banal!*

*This is also one of the conclusions I arrived at a short time ago, namely that if the religious vocation or spiritual conversion can change many things in a person, they are far from being able to solve everything.*

*It is not that the ashram in Lyon was more poorly managed than another religious community, or that grace was less present there. On the contrary. And the people inhabiting the ashram or the ruler, despite their very human flaws, were no worse or better than anywhere else. And I don't want to blame anyone here. Because we were all responsible for the situation which had degenerated to the point of creating the beginnings of internal splits. And it was in one of them that a friend of mine and I would soon rush into and gradually withdraw from ashram life and then Siddha-Yoga.*

*In December 1980, I left the ashram after finding an internship as a library assistant at the "Ecomusée du Creusot", a town where my parents still lived. So, I left, to the chagrin of a swami, of Australian origin if I remember correctly, who found that my departure risked not only harming my spiritual future, but also the life of the ashram in which I was living. was incredibly involved. Which she wasn't entirely wrong about.*

*As for the life of the Lyon ashram, I gradually divested myself of it, after having participated in two or three "intensives" again. But the heart was no longer there. Doubts had*

*crept into me from the conflicts that divided us, but also from the questions I had about the guru and the movement. As for my spiritual future, he again espoused my Christian religious vocation where I had left it before. Later, I joined a religious Order, that of the Dominicans, in which I remained for a few years before leaving again ...*

*In this my spiritual journey, complex as it may appear, is also a reflection of the religious convulsions of France and the West at the end of the 20th century. And it fits perfectly in this context of unprecedented upheavals, where, unlike what was happening in the past, a single vocation could no longer suffice in an existence. It is not only the times that have changed, but also mentalities. I am no exception in this regard.*

*Nevertheless, the adventure that I lived within Siddha-Yoga and the ashram in Lyon will remain as one of the highlights of my existence. And that I do not deny. On the contrary. And it occurred to me recently that it would be regrettable not to seek to remember it, especially to share it with others. That's why I formed this project to write a text about this past in order to better understand it, almost forty years after the fact ...*

*To close this brief testimony, I would like to evoke the mystical experience. The one that fascinated me so much from my teenage years and for which I was literally thirsty. The one that also became for me an ideal, and sometimes even a real obsession.*

*The Christianity that I knew at that time only accepted the mystical dimension on condition that it was surrounded by serious doctrinal safeguards, and only after having been duly tested by the fire of the theological virtues - faith, hope, charity - and ecclesiastical discipline. Even to the point of being often constrained by these determining criteria.*

*In short: in order to be able to qualify an experience as "mystical", the experience of the Holy Spirit not being sufficient in itself, the presence or rather the guarantee of the person of Christ, that of the Holy Scriptures and that, more ambiguous, of the Church. Otherwise, she was not admitted into the extremely limited field of holiness.*

*What I discovered with Siddha-Yoga no longer had anything to do with this Christian mysticism, even in its excesses or its exceptional manifestations, such as divine or angelic appearances, phenomena such as stigmata and miracles, or even the martyr.*

*Not only was Swami Muktananda's teaching apparently at least nothing doctrinaire, but he accepted all manifestations of the divine within the seemingly boundless spiritual limits of his Hinduism. Above all, his mystical experience, like those he proposed to live out to his disciples, possessed characteristics that could not but attract me:*

- first, they were direct and immediate, and ignored institutional and traditional mediations;

- then, they brought a direct confirmation of the presence of God in oneself, in particular by strong emotions, and which surpassed the very conditions of faith;

- moreover, they were easily communicated, and we obviously did not hesitate to share them;

- well, they were entirely self-sufficient.

Of course, there were spiritual references like the sacred scriptures, places of worship, rituals, siddhas, and the guru, which were regularly recalled.

But once this experience was tested, these references disappeared or were integrated into this one which could encompass everything. And as the cutting edge of the mystical experience was non-duality, endlessly privileged in the teachings, the disciple's ego was called one day to disappear in the Other or in the "Self", then the Self in the infinite ocean of divinity. The references to tradition, to sacred texts, to morality, to others, therefore, became unnecessary, and everyone could thus take advantage of their own experience, often influenced by that of the master or modeled on it, and even claim to be deified. himself.

This spiritual autonomy, no doubt relative and perhaps even illusory, was for me the object of immense fascination. Because that was exactly what I was looking for and wanted to know, this pure and endless ecstasy, this dissolution of the ego in the divine Self and its corollary, this infinite extension of the self beyond the borders of the Universe and the mental. And Siddha-Yoga suddenly gave me the opportunity and seemed to offer me the means.

At least until I realize, sometimes painfully, the limits of these methods and the inherent weaknesses of this very syncretistic spirituality.

Starting with the unique place of the guru.

For there was only one, and only one, and no disciple could claim to equal or replace the master.

But also, the resurgence of Hindu ideology, everywhere significant, with its exorbitant claim to be the "Mother of religions", then the refusal of political commitment, which served, among other things, to justify the caste system, little criticized in the ashrams and, to my knowledge, rarely condemned and never fought.

Then, the blindness to the fact that it is impossible for a Westerner to become a Hindu, even in Siddha-Yoga, because this state is reserved only for the beneficiaries. Or the

*justification of social inequalities and injustices in the name of karma, the negation of freedom in the political and philosophical sense ..., and so many other points that have gradually occurred to me over time.*

*Today, the mystical experience has become for me the place of a demanding questioning, and the milestone of a personal journey in which my loneliness is perfectly assumed.*

*Will this mystical experience be the last I will experience in this life and on this earth? And what will then be its nature, its spiritual and psychic content?*

*The future will tell, and I will find out soon enough.*

*But she has lost this magical aura, which a movement such as Siddha-Yoga had known how to adorn her thanks to spells that were actually truly little mystical. And if I have managed to demystify it, at least in part and over the years, it still remains for me a spiritual ideal that I have not given up, even if I refuse to be mystified again ...*



## *Influence and vestiges of Siddha-Yoga in France.*

### *I - Historical ...*

Tracing precisely the history of a current like Siddha-Yoga in India, before its diffusion in the West, is a challenge.

This is due, among other things, to the notion of history and historicity which are essentially vague concepts for a Hindu mind.

The traditional representation of temporality in India is often that of a set of cosmic-like cycles or circles that are called to unfold and return incessantly, like the cycle of reincarnations. Unlike the West, India early on chose Myth to the detriment of History. Which makes Indian historical research extremely difficult.

As far as the history of Siddha-Yoga is concerned, it is surrounded by a set of legends which belong to the Indian mentality, although devoid of historical foundations. The autobiography of the most famous master of Siddha-Yoga, Swami Muktananda, hardly mentions this story, especially as the siddhas, or perfect and awake beings, of whom he speaks, may just as well belong to others. currents than his.

The only siddhas remembered by religious India are those belonging to a medieval tradition, who were called "the 84 Siddhas". They would have belonged to a branch of extreme Shaivism and are claimed by both Shaivists and Buddhists. But a direct genealogical link of Siddha-Yoga with this group, still shrouded in legends, seems difficult to establish.

There remains another tradition to which Siddha-Yoga is particularly keen to be linked, Kashmir Shaivism. Such a current, very sectarian, and heterodox, even for India yet accustomed to this type of religious extremism, has been the spiritual breeding ground for a number of quite remarkable works, and which have come down to us.

This link with Kashmir Shaivism confers a sort of spiritual and traditional legitimacy on Siddha-Yoga, the origins of which are still poorly understood. All that can be said, in a more objective way, is that these should hardly go beyond the historical border of the Indian Middle Ages, a crucial period when many religious movements and sects were formed, the favor, or rather to the detriment, of the Muslim invasion and the disappearance of Buddhism.

But this is to attribute to him a seniority that is difficult to verify. Without doubt, we should rather see, in my opinion, the emergence of Siddha-Yoga towards the end of the 19th

century, a pivotal period for India with the English colonial presence, which saw the birth of many religious and political groups, including that of Gandhi, who remained the most famous.

Anyway, one thing is certain, Siddha-Yoga is one of the many movements born in India, either at the beginning of the 20th century or in the sixties, and which then spread to the West. But with a necessary passage: The United States of America.

Without this American passage, we would never have known Hindu sects or Indian gurus in France or Europe, or at least of such magnitude. America was therefore and still remaining the hub of these Indian currents, so that they can be described as Indo-American or even Indo-Californian. This is what gave a spiritual content, even a special mentality to this type of movement, which I will analyze later.

It is no coincidence that the movement has found a welcome in the United States, a country particularly sensitive to millenarian prophecies, religious tolerance, and the idea of divine election. Siddha-Yoga will have benefited from this significant cultural contribution both from a political and religious point of view.

After having been a great success in the USA, then in Europe and in France, in the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, Siddha-Yoga rapidly declined to the point of no longer being, today, than the shadow of the movement it once was. Like many sects, Siddha-Yoga experienced a wave of notoriety which it rode as best as it could, before fading away.

But during this time, which represents several years, the movement was extraordinarily successful and attracted to it an impressive number of people, most of whom were in search of themselves, meaning in their life or spirituality. It is this broad collective aspiration that fueled this movement and made it known from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic and to the shores of the West Coast.

## ***II - The heart of teaching.***

Siddha-Yoga can be recognized by a specific spiritual teaching whose heart is devotion to the master, the guru.

This type of devotion - called bhakti in India - which is found in both Tibetan Tantrism and the Byzantine Orthodox tradition, is one of the main characteristics of Siddha-Yoga. Also called "guru-yoga", it places a very intimate bond at the center of the relationship between master and disciple, but while idealizing the master, who literally represents and even embodies the divine on earth:

"Realizing God is only possible through a Guru," Swami Muktananda incessantly recalls in his autobiography

It is therefore impossible to know God, much less to unite with him, without the indispensable mediation of the guru. As if God were inaccessible without this indispensable earthly and human-divine mediator.

Such is, in substance, the very principle of this Indian spirituality which pretended to synthesize in it all other spiritual forms or those which are found in this principle. I have previously mentioned the spiritual traditions on which Siddha-Yoga feeds, such as Kashmir Shaivism which he somehow popularized. With this Shaivism, we must also note the presence of Hindu Tantrism, which is not far from the first current, which mutually influenced each other.

Let us remember that Tantrism is a vast movement that originated at the end of Antiquity, and whose main idea is to articulate together desire, often carnal, and the quest for deliverance.

This is the reason why Tantrism often boils down to a set of sexual practices, albeit sacred or covered with a veil of religion. One of the branches of Tantrism is Shaktism, which consists of a worship of the divine feminine energy - Shakti, also called kundalini - which Siddha-Yoga and Swami Muktananda have never ceased to exalt and idealize in their teachings.

One of the preferred terms, constantly used in the ashrams, and which held true mystical value, was that of shaktipat. This designates the intimate contact between the master and the disciple, and the transmission of divine grace from the guru to him. Without this mystical contact, which is also an encounter, awakening remains inaccessible and the spiritual path filled with almost insurmountable obstacles.

This Shaktism or Tantrism, based on violent exercises and unconditional love between the disciple and the master, formed an infrastructure both spiritual and psychological that everyone in the ashrams wanted to appropriate and in which each disciple recognized himself, as well as a mystical framework on which each one could rest and lean to carry out his sadhana, that is to say his own spiritual quest.

Between bhakti - devotion to the guru -, Shaivism - which conferred a kind of religious legitimacy on the movement, but of a sectarian nature -, and Hindu tantrism, we can better understand what made the specific content of Siddha-Yoga.

If we add the constant references, in the teachings, to mystics of both Sufi, Hindu and Christian origin, we will understand that Siddha-Yoga has been and remains a syncretic movement or even is a religious syncretism of Indian origin.

### *III - The decisive moment: the meeting with the guru.*

But the event which, each time and for each disciple, was decisive for engaging in Siddha-Yoga, was and remains the meeting with the guru.

This meeting, unique in its kind, but which can take many forms, is essential to understand what motivated each disciple in his personal quest and in his choice to join the movement.

As I will show later, what distinguishes, among others, a movement like Siddha-Yoga from a religious institution, like the Catholic Church for example, is the place of the guru. And what qualifies above all this one lies in the decisive moment of the meeting. This moment also has a model, that of the meeting or the various decisive encounters of the master himself with his own guru. Swami Muktananda, in his autobiography, is never stingy in sharing these exhilarating encounters with his own guru whom he describes each time with passion and emotion.

It is this same passion and this same emotion that feel and have experienced all those who made this decisive encounter with him. Surrounded in this way by an aura of magic and wonder, she appears as a true revelation for every disciple.

But what exactly characterizes this encounter and what is the exact cause?

We wouldn't understand much, frankly, about this one, if we just looked at the different testimonies, often terribly similar. And the mystery, always invoked in these singular cases, would remain. Indeed, the testimonies can take different aspects, and reflect the situations and the lived experiences of each one, like any major event. But they also tend to resemble each other because of the structure of the stories themselves, often copied or imitated from original models: those of the first disciples, themselves largely inspired by the master's stories and his own accounts of encounters. spiritual.

However, this type of testimony in India is far from unique and is even part of a literary genre that has enjoyed wide success for at least a century, and this, in all Indian religious currents. From a rhetorical point of view, we would speak of mimesis, of imitation of a primary

model, that of the meeting with a master, which then became a commonplace that recurs indefinitely and that it becomes unnecessary to explain.

But there is more.

Indeed, this type of encounter is not only the specificity of the mystical life. Because they appeal to two other major psychological events, which can also serve as models or archetypes:

- the romantic encounter, first of all,
- and the first looks between mother and child at the time of birth, then.

Without these two major events, experienced by everyone, the meeting with the guru, like the other strong encounters in existence, would not have such a captivating or so moving character. Above all, it would not cause that inner turnaround that is called "conversion", and which can forever change the course of a life.

In other words, what confers on this mystical encounter, considered unique and extraordinary by those who lived it, is precisely the memory or the timely reactivation of the two other psychic events, and which all human beings have experienced before. And the meeting with the guru, this exceptional moment of exchanges of glances, of subtle touches, of feeling of inner warmth, of dazzling, of luminosity ..., in fact reactivates at the same time the amorous encounter which once shook the new one. disciple, and that of the first glance exchanged with the mother, and which opened the newborn that he was to life.

The conjunction of these three meetings makes the last a moment considered as exceptional as it is unique, but on the same basis as the other two. What gives this meeting its mysterious aspect does not come from elsewhere or from any other dimension than the very human memories of these first contacts or these first exchanges. If we remember that the little child considers his parents as divinities to whom he owes everything, and that he then finds this unique emotional tone in the amorous exchange, the "love at first sight" which bears his name very well, it is not difficult to grasp what is at stake during the spiritual encounter with a master, from whom everything is expected, and who always happens at a critical moment in life.

In this sense, the experience of encountering the master, like the mystical experience, as simple, authentic, and pure as they appear, are in fact experiences overloaded with affect and with integrated and recomposed memories. And so, they are experiences of great psychological richness.

The accounts given by Swami Muktananda of his exchanges with his own master do not say anything else. This one is decked out with all the most prestigious titles and is full of praise for it.

Thus, he appears as a man of exceptional stature, a true living god or an "incarnate God", a man who is both father and mother and who replaces parents, a true religious sanctuary on his own, the goal of all existence. Also, the origin of all things, the ultimate meaning of life, divine grace in person ... It is also necessary to underline the fact that, like many Hindus, Swami Muktananda considered his mother as an incarnate divinity and treated her as such. This, this devotion to the mother, on top of that, the reverence of her guru. And in the purest style of the "family romance" emphasized by psychoanalysis, where the child invents extraordinary and divine parents to escape the triviality of his birth and endow it with imaginary letters of nobility.

The guru therefore appears as the being to whom the existential and spiritual debt is infinite, for it is through him, and him alone, that spiritual realization is possible. He literally replaces or embodies God.

How could a meeting with such a man even be ordinary?

And what Swami Muktananda experienced with his master, he in turn made his own disciples experience. His charisma is therefore due both to his personality, to his spiritual background, but also to his way of reactivating in each encounter, and with each person, the memories of each person's initial and loving encounters. This explains the devotion and fascination he has shown throughout his life.

For such a being can only be revered and adored like the parents whom every child once revered and adored also fears. And like any parent who is infinitely loving his child, this guru also loved his followers, just as closely, as a mother loves her own children.

It is in these singular moments that there emerges an experience lived by many disciples, and which has always been honored in the teachings of Siddha-Yoga: non-duality. Beyond the spiritual references of this notion in currents such as Vedanta, Tantrism or Kashmir Shaivism which spread it, this non-duality appears with even more clarity in the very experience of Swami Muktananda and in his relationship with its own master.

On several occasions, Swami Muktananda mentions this non-dual experience with the latter during which the borders or the limits between his master and himself are blurred. This particular relationship where one has become the other, or even where one has been the

other, in a phantasmatic way, is also clarified thanks to the two types of encounters mentioned above, the romantic encounter remaining emblematic of a possible erotic fusion between two beings.

Besides, Swami Muktananda's master practiced a style of meditation which perfectly expresses what I am describing here, in a completely narcissistic behavior. And in this narcissism, extended to the other who thus becomes the same or the same as oneself without any further difference, the activation of a libidinal or erotic energy, barely sublimated, ends up including people in love or mystical partners. who can thus unite and merge lovingly and narcissistically without limits.

This libidinal and spiritual sphere is close to what is called in psychoanalysis the "ideal self", which represents all that the child experienced when he was still in his mother's womb and lived in almost perfect osmosis. with her. This is a phenomenon that is even more widespread also in the social world:

"In crowds, there is an archaic regression (panic, enthusiasm, aggressiveness, fusion, etc.) where everyone unconsciously renounces their own self and their individual characteristics. Everyone lets themselves be overcome by a collective feeling of love-fusion and communion-hypnosis with the leader which is explained by an unconscious return to the primitive horde. "

The primitive horde evoked in this excerpt represents the first human group theorized by Freud in "Totem and taboo", which is believed to have represented the original form of the first society, where the group could merge together with the mother after having ousted the father.

It is this experience, just as unique, that is replayed in a way during these mystical encounters. And it is she who forms the heart of life in religious communities and ashrams like those of Siddha-Yoga.

But that does not yet say what this movement is as such. A more sociological look is therefore called for.

#### ***IV - Socioreligious analysis essay.***

A first evidence, first of all, although nothing less than obvious, and which will serve me to continue my reflection: Siddha Yoga in France and in the West would never have

existed, and would never have spread, if it had not. 'had benefited from the social and political power of three major distinct movements:

- neoliberalism of Anglo-Saxon origin, first of all, thanks to which it was able to benefit from all the dynamics of the economic market and the flows of international finance;

- then Christianity, on which it relied, even sometimes by fighting it or competing with the Churches, especially in the field of vocations;

- finally, the New Age nebula, to which he owes a lot because of the many themes he shares with him, and which he has widely disseminated since the sixties.

Without the conjunction of these three great factors, Siddha-Yoga, in my opinion, would have remained confined to the narrow circle of many Hindu religious ramifications, and would never have gone outside the closed perimeter of its country of origin.

The many currents of oriental wisdom, since the beginning of the 19th century, as well as movements such as theosophy, esotericism, contemporary therapies - gestalt, bioenergy, primal cry, transpersonal psychology, Jungian psychology, sophrology, Rogerian therapy ... -, have also played a significant role in the emergence and dissemination of Hindu sects and their gurus. But the three structures I am talking about seem to me even more undeniable and have greatly benefited all the movements that emerged in the sixties and seventies.

Two other phenomena have also contributed to the spread of the spirituality of Siddha-Yoga:

- de-Christianization, particularly in Europe, a phenomenon which has continued to spread since the time of the Second Vatican Council, and which has led to a recomposition of the religious landscape in which oriental wisdom has played a decisive role;

- and the dissemination of contemporary therapies.

Personally, in the very heart of the ashram where I lived and which I attended at the time, I do not remember a single activity proposed by those responsible for Siddha-Yoga in which these contemporary therapies, with alternative and alternative medicine, were not more or less present, and sometimes even invasive.

The ashram thus offered a set of disparate techniques, often used without precise ethical benchmarks, including alternative and alternative medicine, brief therapies, astrological beliefs, Hindu liturgy, meditation, yoga, religious chants, palmistry, vegetarianism ..., and which all converged towards the same goal, deliverance in this world and obtaining



the state of siddha, that is, to be awakened. But which also implied the diffusion and the propagation of the good word of the guru as of the sect.

However, we will undoubtedly grasp even better the stake which was at the heart of a movement like Siddha-Yoga, if we remember that its own teachings were based on a fact which seemed indisputable at the time: that of 'a profound social, spiritual, and human transformation, which was then underway.

We were all like this, and each was deeply convinced of it, on the eve of a great spiritual revolution that was to change the world. However, this one was deeply ill and was going to its destruction. This was the diagnosis - of an apocalyptic and millennial tendency - that was already established at the time. It was therefore necessary to treat or renew it urgently, but with specific means, both old and new.

For the disciples or adherents of Siddha-Yoga, it was not a question of being content to passively observe this mutation as spectators, but of accompanying it with positive acts and therefore of also being actors.

This theme of mutation or paradigm shift, in fact known and rehashed since the 19th century, was accepted as a dogma even within communities and ashrams. And we were convinced that, in this "New Age" which was bound to happen very soon, Siddha-Yoga would count as such, and would become one of the essential spiritual engines likely to contribute to this immense mutation, like to the acceleration of the movement which was to make it emerge.

This change of "paradigm" was to be the sign of a global transformation in which the disciples of Swami Muktananda and the adherents of Siddha-Yoga were to participate, in particular by accompanying this process already underway with specific religious activities.

I list a few:

"Intensive" weekends sometimes bringing together several hundred people in the same place participating in a religious cult and gathered around a charismatic personality, Hindu pujas and religious rituals, devotion of the Bhaktic type, veneration and adoration of the gurus considered as avatars in the Hindu sense, that is to say embodied demigods, regular recitation of mantras - sacred and magical formulas meant to transform the human being faster and more effectively than any ritual or any meditation -, sacred offerings - which ranged from time of service graciously offered for the community, to financial donations, much

appreciated and always valued -, sale and distribution of articles, magazines and books devoted to Siddha-Yoga, active proselytism through the media ...

Thus, everything had to be put at the service of both the guru, the supreme master, and of this vast spiritual transformation that each one wanted and of which he felt a part.

Should it be emphasized that the means used both to implement this radical transformation and to try to heal souls and bodies were not unlike those implemented by Christianity for centuries, and including the sacraments - signs of the divine manifested in this world, and works of grace for human beings - were the models almost unmatched until the appearance of modern medicine?

In this regard, the spiritual and medicinal thought of Siddha-Yoga, carried by an ancient Hindu science whose success in the West still continues, Ayurvedic medicine, is in no way different from the ancient ancient and medieval medicines, made both of archaic remedies, religious talismans, and sacred formulas.

Contemporary therapies such as alternative medicine will in turn have rediscovered, on more naturalistic and neo-pagan bases, the meaning of these ancient religious remedies, still in force in India. But they would not have found such an interested public in Europe and in the West if it had not been formed or even modeled beforehand by the Christian faith and by a critique of the modern world of which anti-Westernism represents the end. point.

We can go even further.

Like the believers of American Puritanism, the members of Siddha-Yoga were persuaded to belong to a kind of spiritual elite who had been entrusted with a divine mission. In short, it was about saving the world by saving yourself.

If I wanted to give a theological basis for this belief, I would speak of divine election and predestination. These ideas, far from being Indian, are primarily of Christian origin. Thus, belonging to Siddha-Yoga was not a matter of luck or serendipity, but of a destiny almost willed by God, even of a religious vocation. And being accepted into the community was a sign of election, one conferred by both the guru and the community itself. This sign was part of the miracle and the intervention of the supernatural. Each, in himself, thus felt a little "chosen", apart, like the Christians of the first times, or before them, the Hebrews and the Jews in the Bible. One could indeed speak of divine election, predestination and even of "manifest destiny", as for the American Puritans.

*V - Attempted definition.*

But how best to qualify this movement?

Is it a religion? Indian spirituality? A sect ? A church ? A religious multinational? ...

Today, the movement takes the form of a "foundation", a very dubious name in the United States. A "way" or a "practice", terms to which the sites of presentation of the movement refer, are not sufficiently explicit and are used interchangeably by all religions and spiritualities in the world.

The word "sect" has a pejorative connotation in France. However, thanks to the contribution of the sociology of Max Weber, a less negative definition is perfectly possible and which underlines what differentiates a sect from other religious forms.

A first difference that emerges is that between the charisma and the institution.

Thus, a Church, like the Catholic Church, is first and foremost a religious institution. Its mode of operation is based on a strict ecclesiastical hierarchy and on an established tradition that dates back several centuries. It originates in early Christianity, that of the first Christian communities, of which it has retained only the memory, often reworked, and not the community form or cultural ethos, close to brotherhoods and sectarian movements.

As an institution, the Catholic Church knows a mode of internal legal regulation, canon law. The Church may promote charitable works, delegate missions, celebrate worship services, commemorate sacred events, stage liturgy, confer sacraments, but she is not a flexible and emotionally warm organization. Her original charisms, which can still be seen in the writings of the New Testament, gradually merged into ecclesiological modes of action that owe nothing to chance or personal inspiration. Even the Magisterium, even in the person of the Pope, is subject to a precise order just like the Roman clergy, whether in the Vatican or in particular churches, that is to say the dioceses of the various countries where the Church is shown.

And if the faithful can maintain an intimate bond with God or with Christ, it is established through duly recognized ecclesial mediations. Starting with the Church itself, but also the Bible, the sacraments, the clergy, the liturgy, holy places and places of worship, tradition ... It is all these mediations, which are essential, which offer the faithful this access. privileged to the divine or the sacred, and without which they could spiritually do nothing or decide anything of importance.

A sect works exactly the opposite way.

It is organized around a person with a strong charisma who brings together disciples. Its influence is due only to this personal charisma, and not to the organization of the sect itself. All the disciples are subject not to a rule, nor to a law or a tradition, but to a master, the guru. That is, to his good will and his desires. As long as the guru is alive, the sect can continue and develop, and even take off unexpectedly. But upon his disappearance, the crucial question immediately arises of the master's legacy, which is always a cause of heartbreak between the disciples, especially those who consider themselves to be his heirs.

The sect is always warm, it favors emotional human relationships and does not hesitate to encourage relational modes of fusion type. Emotions, affects, personal "feelings" and "experiences" are a natural part of his vocabulary.

The sect is a place of sharing with other individuals that one knows personally, but also of dispossession of oneself, of giving of oneself, for the guru and for the community. Moreover, the sect is above all a community, that is to say a communion of beings who generally know each other, and who maintain close intersubjective links. What differentiates it from an institution, colder and more impersonal, bringing together individuals who are often strangers to each other. We convert to a sect, or to a religion. But we enter or are admitted into a Church, to which we then belong, or that we know.

Relations with the divine, in a sect, are of the order of immediacy, as with the master, and do not support cultural mediations or unauthorized intercessors. It is this immediate and immediate contact that allows the leader's charisma to spread and unite the group. This is also what makes up the emotional content of these highly prized encounters, those with the guru, which I analyzed above, and where the fusional and emotional are always privileged. Conversely, the sole decision-making body is and remains the master. There is no representative body in the sect, and a political regime like a republic or a democracy is impossible.

In a Church, the hierarchy is imposed in order to make the institution last as long as possible. Everyone is thus in their place, in an orderly organization which, even if it does not always succeed, is intended to be harmonious and stable. Once the faithful or the cleric has died or left, his place becomes available, but this does not change and does not disappear with the person. So, it is with all the ecclesiastical offices, from the simple country priest to the monk in his monastery, from the missionary in a foreign country to the anonymous nun, to

the pope who always succeeds another on the "throne of Saint Peter" which is irremovable and remains so.

Nothing like this in the sect where the status merges with the person, the latter taking precedence over the former. The functions are not especially important in the sect, and always remain interchangeable. But it is the place near the guru that counts, the latter being merged with divine power until his death. But once the guru is gone, no one can really replace him. It is not that its place is vacant, as in churches or great religions, it is that its seat is made for one and only one person, to the exclusion of all others.

In addition, the sect reacts like a sensitive body, by the emotions and feelings which are communicated immediately to all the members, while the Church belongs to a tradition that it must perpetuate beyond itself, which forces him to ignore feelings or to domesticate them so that they do not destabilize his functioning.

This is why it favors codified and hierarchical relationships, as well as framed theological debates. And this is the reason why the Church has created universities or faculties to allow the dissemination of her message by reflection, and not by mere faith, mission, or emotion, which are by nature too unstable. Scholarship is no stranger to it, especially as it must also preserve the historical vestiges of its tradition, for example in archives and libraries.

The sect is inherently anti-intellectual.

This often-primary anti-intellectualism characterizes her fully. You don't think in a sect. We experience, we act, and we react, we feel, and we share our feelings with others to feel confirmed in our position, never definitively assured. Both emotion and sentiment are honored in all sects, to the detriment of intellect and reason. Libraries are non-existent, or consist only of the books of the guru and the sect.

Finally, the sect is its own end, especially since it prophesies a near end of the world or a radical change, and it lives by these doomsday prophecies itself. A Church announces yet another thing beyond and after itself it is a "sign" of something else or of another even more spiritual reality, like the Kingdom of God, with which it cannot be confused. And it endures in time and in history to which it contributes something.

To finish this picture, it should be noted that any sect systematically competes with established religions and with established churches, sometimes imitating them, while criticizing them and denouncing their mode of administration and their inevitable decline.

In the light of these definitions, it can be said without hesitation that Siddha-Yoga has all the characteristics of a sect.

#### ***VI - Royal treatment.***

Religious buildings and places of worship around the world almost all have the same meaning.

It is the same with the Hindu ashrams.

Contrary to popular belief, the ashram, as it currently exists in India, is not a phenomenon dating back to ancient times. Originally, it designates a hermitage as well as one of the stages of Brahmanic life.

But it only recently became a retreat center in the form of a monastic community open to the curious or to the followers, and under the impetus of Christianity. Due to the wave of Orientalism and the surge of Oriental wisdom in the West, ashrams have spread across all the countries of Europe and America. This is how this phenomenon spread and, following it, the more recent one of Tibetan temples and centers.

The first time I visited the ashram in Lyon, a strange place bathed in Hindu incense and with brightly painted walls, the mystery, and the presence of the sacred immediately struck me. But what characterized this unusual and exotic place even more was the presence of huge posters of the guru placed in the center of the meditation room, which also served as a place of worship.

Why were such photos, which the disciples worshiped as icons, enthroned in this ashram?

Beyond the conventional answers on this type of exhibition of holy images or considered as such in the ashrams and which are the object of the veneration of the adepts, there is another explanation that the theories of René Girard have given me. inspired.

In fact, such ionization of the guru does not arise only from the effects of bhakti, that is, from spiritual devotion to a master or a deity. But it stems from another phenomenon, both spiritual and anthropological.

For this honored and adored icon of the living god reflected, in fact, the very portrait of the victim emissary who, through her sannyasin vows, had devoted herself entirely to her guru as well as to her Hindu god and to her many avatars, as it should be in a Hindu environment, such as Krishna, Shiva, the Divine Mother, Shakti, Brahman ...

It is this sacrifice of his person, this total gift made by his religious devotion that made him a consecrated man, especially since he had broken his monastic vows by the practice of his Tantric Shaivism, of which the finality is the search for a non-dual mystical union by morally and spiritually transgressive means. This was one of the reasons for the veneration he received as a consecrated idol during his lifetime, and the religious fascination he exercised on his disciples or on visitors. Moreover, incidentally, a phenomenon of cultural and worship transfer had taken place, and which allowed many Western followers to unduly perceive the figure of Christ, and of Christ crucified and risen, under the face of this guru who held Jesus. for one of the many avatars of the divinities of Hinduism.

A sacred human being, and therefore consecrated, who was worshiped as a living divinity, incarnated moreover in a man. But also, a future expiatory victim charged with faults and sins, in particular of the disciples of the sect, and on a larger scale no doubt of humanity, like Christ who remained at the time, for all the high followers in the Christian faith like me, an essential spiritual reference.

Such has appeared to us this Hindu guru.

It is to this future expiatory victim that the disciples and devotees offered everything they had - symbolic or real goods, gifts, time, money ..., sometimes even their very life - as well as everything they experienced. internally. Religion of emotion, of course, but also of gift and donation, therefore sacrifice.

Because the guru captured on him all the energies of the disciples, their expectations, their hopes, their desires, their fantasies too. He was thus a guide, a protector, a father and a mother, a worshiped avatar - god living on earth -, and an expiatory victim, like other human-divine figures of Hinduism. These are all characteristics that made him a sacred and consecrated being that fascinated us so much. In fact, although this guru, supposedly awake, pure, and detached, redistributed around him almost nothing of what he had received and did not share his arbitrary and excessive power either, he nevertheless exercised a real fascination, even beyond his personal charisma.

But why so much fascination with a character who ultimately turned out to be, like many of his peers, only a very ambiguous human being?

The answer lies in this aspect brought to light by Girardian anthropology. Because this guru, with apparently unlimited powers, but with limited intelligence and unreliable morals, could not of himself exercise such fascination. He needed another element, an extra soul, in a

way, an almost divine aura, that is to say, an element that could totally transcend his person and his existence.

This element is the sacred.

That is, the fact that he was called to sacrifice himself for others.

The word "sacred", in its original definition, does not say anything else:

“Sacrificed victims are literally made sacred. It is therefore violence that is at the origin of the sacred. This is one with criminal violence:

- because the sacred has its origin in a real social crisis,
- because it is based on a collective murder,
- because the gods he establishes are only transfigured victims. "

This is the reason why this guru was considered by us, but who did not know it, as someone superhuman and treated as the equal of a monarch, a Hindu maharaja, people to whom we have long attributed supernatural powers.

As R. Girard explains, the expiatory victim, of royal origin in the history of humanity, before being led to sacrifice and death, was always treated royally, enjoying an extraordinary life, and enjoying an almost divine prestige. And that, until his ritual murder or his sacrificial death.

Considered by all his disciples to be a superior being of divine essence, but ultimately destined to be sacrificed, this guru was thus granted preferential treatment, surrounded by veneration, honors, riches, goods, women, prestigious relationships, gifts, money ... All material things that he enjoyed without sharing or restraint, but which designated him to the court of his devotees and his admirers, of which I was a part, as a divine being, that is, as the atoning victim destined to be sacrificed for the good of the community.

With this difference, that everyone was then unaware of the true significance of this ostentatious display of favors and riches from which he took undue advantage. His spiritual aura, like his apparently disinterested love, was an integral part of these same favors conferred by him, but reconsidered by the eyes always amazed, and therefore never critical, of the disciples, since, as a priori sanctified victim and sacrificed man, he also participated in the kingdom of the gods.

Community service - mentioned above and called sevâ in Sanskrit - which was imposed on all the participants of the ashram, also signified this sacrificial aspect for which each one prepared and to which he participated in his own way:



"By the violence of his austerities, an obscure man, unjustly despised, gains fame and an audience (...), a new society is being built which is dedicated to the service of others, to the assiduous practice of sevâ, a substitute for sacrifice in this Iron Age. "

But the fact remains that if this guru was so pampered, so revered, so envied, adored and deified by his disciples, it is because he was destined one day to offer himself as a sacrifice for others and to die for them. This is the true meaning of his spiritual superiority, his magnetic aura, and the incredible favors he enjoyed.

Since he had to sacrifice himself for his disciples one day, he was therefore entitled to everything.

The rest were only legends inspired by the vast Hindu mystical fund, and illusions cleverly maintained by the devotees closest to the guru who, too, benefited, at least in part, from such favors, but whom they selfishly retained, while letting believe that they had acquired by their piety, very superficial in truth, or, better still, because of unverifiable "past lives", the extraordinary merit that the guru recognized them, in particular by placing them above from the crowd of anonymous people. An eminently gratifying and prestigious gesture that everyone ardently hoped for one day, but in vain!

Moreover, as this man was destined a priori for a religious and sacrificial death, this made his disciples de facto spiritually and symbolically indebted to his person. This symbolic debt, which could only be honored with equivalent gifts, such as the commitment, body, and soul, of the disciple to his service and to the service of the sect, further strengthened the already powerful links between them and himself even.

However, and in light of these considerations, a serious problem arises when one takes a closer look at the life and death of Swami Muktananda, like that of his own guru. Namely, neither were truly sacrificed, and neither of them died a violent death.

Unlike Christ and his Bloody Passion, or a man like Gandhi, who was assassinated for his political utopias, neither Swami Muktananda nor any guru of the Siddha-Yoga lineage, past or present, ever really sacrificed himself or died a ritual and sacrificial death.

Certainly, most of them entered religion and took vows or became renunciators, which are forms of substitution for bloody martyrdom. But no guru has espoused a martyr's vocation or had a bloody end for sacrificial ends. This raises the question both of their degree of holiness, this being proportional to the sacrifice of their person, of their awakening, because they could not ignore this type of sacrifice very widespread in India and which concerned them

directly, but also of their divine status, since it actually depends on their sacrificial death, which never took place.

Since no Siddha-Yoga guru has ever really sacrificed himself for his sect or for his disciples, much less for India or for humanity, how and in the name of what could they claim a status royal and divine which was nevertheless theirs throughout their lives?

What is at issue here, and what I would like to point out, is both the imposture of these gurus who have enjoyed an extraordinary status that they undoubtedly did not deserve, and blind faith like the naivety of the disciples, of whom I was, incapable of seeing for themselves this imposture, and who became accomplices of it by maintaining it.

### *VII - A statement of failure?*

With this spiritual sham problem, another question arises about Siddha-Yoga and its social and religious destiny.

Has he failed in his universal religious program?

What we can at least note is that the transition from the sect to the institution or to the Church that I analyzed above did not take place. As Siddha-Yoga spread and spread religiously, it lost its power, its strength of conviction and what gave it its religious being. That is, of its subversive and attractive spiritual strength.

The sociological explanation is simple: all sects abhor the administrative apparatus, and any form of administration or institutionalization, such as ecclesiastical functionaries against which they always react violently.

However, by expanding and internationalizing, Siddha-Yoga has not only lost its original Indian content, its exoticism so particular and which fascinated Western minds in search of spiritual exoticism or exotic spirituality, but it had to surround itself with administrative structures to consolidate and perpetuate its organization.

And this structure, by its coldness and stiffness, went against the spirit of spontaneity that animates any sect, and offended the sensitivity of the members who preferred to find and cultivate the fusional warmth of the beginnings and the first community. In this sense, Siddha-Yoga has not escaped sectarian logic and its opposite, institutional logic.

We can already conclude that the institutionalization of a sect is always fatal. It is her worst enemy, and the main obstacle that awaits her. And that is why cults do not have a long lifespan.

Not having been able to take this decisive but crucial step, Siddha-Yoga today languishes in the expectation not of a renewal, very improbable, but quite simply of its beautiful death. Or, at best, his return to the "mother" earth that gave birth to him, namely India.

Finally, I add a word about how it works internally.

This, despite occasional successes, has always been faulty or problematic, for at least two reasons:

- first, due to the absence or rejection of any form of institutionalization, which de facto makes it impossible to rationalize human relationships which always remain prisoners of the emotional and the affective;

- but also, because the ultimate criterion of projects, actions and initiatives was none other than the guru himself. However, even considered omniscient, he could not be omnipotent and simultaneously take care of everything and everyone.

This is why the organization of the ashrams had to be entrusted to subordinates - generally swamis - to whom the guru delegated in a very informal, that is to say very personal way, the management of current affairs, but in which he reserved the right to intervene as it saw fit. This resulted in a strange situation where the master seemed to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time, and where it became more and more difficult, during litigation or conflicts which did not fail to arise, to obtain an arbitration which was not arbitrary.

This is one of the major differences between the sect and the Church, in which the latter systematically uses law and even courts to settle internal conflicts and to adjudicate cases or disputes that arise. Here, justice is not left to the arbitrariness of a person, however spiritual or awake they may be.

Nothing like this in a sect where justice does not exist and is replaced by the word of the guru which has the value of law. However, this, as sacred as it may be, rarely escapes arbitrariness, hence the conflicts that can lead to radical exclusions, or even to schisms that weaken the sect and threaten to destroy it.

When the foundations of institutionalization, rationality and law are rejected or neglected, the whole edifice of the community continues to falter, and it is its survival that the sect plays in each crisis that she crosses. So how can we be surprised that Siddha-Yoga, which has known many crises, starting with that of the succession of its guru, is struggling today to survive and to recover after them?

One of the not insignificant aspects of this failure, both religious and political, is that it affected the disciples themselves. The failure of Siddha-Yoga - that is to say also of its guru and its prophecies - is it the failure of the disciples themselves, especially of those who left the sect and could not achieve their dream or fantasy of spiritual power? Or those who have never questioned the discretionary power of the guru who they have taken for a god?

### *VIII - Mystical experience or experience of India?*

In an attempt to analyze a movement like Siddha-Yoga, it would be incongruous not to reserve a special place for a sociogeographical actor too often overlooked, or presented as obvious, and who is India.

This may seem trivial, as Siddha-Yoga, which indeed originates from India, owes a lot to its motherly culture. But it will appear less so if one considers the spiritual experiences experienced by the guru and his disciples, by their psychological content and their emotional tone. Indeed, all that Swami Muktananda may have experienced during his intense and profound experiences and which he describes in his autobiography, he experienced in India. And not elsewhere.

It is the same for most of the disciples who have known this obligatory passage through India and the original ashram: Ganeshpuri. Everyone who has been there, and whom I have known, has all spoken of it as a unique place where unique and incomparable experiences have been held for them.

Starting with the ashram itself, which left no one indifferent. And which was as important as the meeting with the guru.

Alain C.'s testimony in this regard is edifying since he had known the ashram even before meeting his guru. And this simple sight of the ashram was decisive for him and immediately won his conviction. Ganeshpuri, therefore, who had a considerable importance in the conversion of the disciples and who counted infinitely in their own often chaotic itinerary.

One does not return unscathed from the Ganeshpuri ashram. This one, by its mystical radiance and its mysterious energy which emerges from it, leaves no one indifferent. To convert to Siddha-Yoga is both to follow one's guru and his advice and to have lived at least once in this ashram, having let oneself be permeated by the regenerating and purifying spiritual aura that he generously spreads over followers and visitors.

However, in this often-idealized view of ashram life, which looks as much like a therapeutic center as it does a military barracks, there is another actor who is just as important, but who is usually relegated to the rear. -plan: India.

This country unlike any other, and which is in itself a continent, has the particularity of making a deep impression on the minds of those who visit it. Even to the point of sometimes provoking psychic manifestations of a pathological nature.

An author, a psychiatrist by trade, has documented these astonishing manifestations in a book in which he analyzes the effects that the fascination of India may have had and still has on Western minds.

What is most surprising in what he describes, as in the borderline experiences he recounts, is that these overlaps perfectly with the testimonies of the disciples of Siddha-Yoga. These manifestations range from feelings of terror, panic, oppression, to mystical ecstasies such as the oceanic feeling of nirvana, to impressions of déjà vu, already known, to unconditional and irrepressible love at first sight for this country which is also a "mother", at the same time possessive, suffocating, mothering, adorable, devouring ...

So, the question that arises is the following: if India is indeed this country where extreme and mystical experiences arise almost spontaneously, what exactly are those of the followers and swamis of Siddha-Yoga who have lived there? In other words, if these experiences depend essentially on a particular social and geographical context, that of India in this case, what then is their spiritual quality or their mystical value, independently of this same context Indian?

A first element of response is provided by the movement of Siddha-Yoga itself.

Wherever it has spread and taken root, it has created centers similar to this same ashram of Ganeshpuri. And by systematically recreating centers that were almost duplicates of the Hindu model, it became possible for followers to experience or relive, in a similar atmosphere - with a meditation room, photos of the gurus on display, Indian food, recitations collective of sacred texts and mantras, Hindu music in the background sound, wearing of colored shawls printed with mantras in Sanskrit... -, the experiences lived and tested in the ashram of Ganeshpuri.

Another element confirms this hypothesis: all the disciples and the swamis that I interviewed at that time all affirmed to me how much Ganeshpuri was both a unique and

incomparable ashram, an obligatory passage for all and the place in which everyone had had a higher experience than all the others.

However, beyond this ashram of Ganeshpuri, it was in truth India that was at issue each time, and it was she who kept coming back in these testimonies as an unsurpassable horizon, a spiritual obsession, and a memory as fascinating as it is haunting. The disciples all thought they were talking about their spiritual experiences, which were remarkably similar to each other, but in fact they spoke of the relentless influence that India and its spells had exerted on them. Conversely, the experiences experienced in France or in the West in the different centers always seemed to them of less intensity or less profound than those experienced in India. And for good reason!

In fact, what would Siddha-Yoga and its disciples be without India's unavoidable presence and its mythical history, without its religions and multiple sects? And without its exoticism and its aura of mystery? ...

I therefore ask again the question which is at the head of this paragraph: the experiences of the majority of the followers of Siddha-Yoga, like besides of all the followers of the Indian sects, are they true mystical, universal, metaphysical, and transcendent experiences? Or are they primarily experiences of India and its aura?

### ***IX - The ashram: place of healing or regression?***

It is commonplace to assert that any community experience is the place of radical self-transformation and greater openness of mind. The very model for this type of transformative experience remains the feast of Pentecost on which the apostles and disciples of Christ received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

This is undoubtedly what any new member of a religious community can also experience, regardless of the religion to which he belongs. Evidence abounds, and so to speak, over and over again in this area. However, few dares to approach the very essence of community life which, in the case of Siddha-Yoga, takes place in an ashram.

This traditionally represents several things:

- first of all, it is generally the place of the initiatory meeting with the guru. For the ashram is his favorite place, which he himself founded;

- then, and consequently, it is the place where the game of devotion of the disciple towards the master is freely deployed, and that of the spiritual formation that the latter wants to give to the disciple;

- but it is also the place of group life according to a common and shared social model. The disciples thus meet in one place, and form a community under the direction of the master;

- finally, it is the place of an ideal of common life, which is both already present and yet to come, in the image of the Kingdom of God in Christianity.

This is the reason why the ashram is perceived as a place blessed by the presence of the guru, the one where one must absolutely live for a given time to receive all the blessings such as special graces, the place also for major experiences that range from mystical ecstasies to mental and physical trials. The ashram is thus both the place of spiritual encounter, of fraternal life, of going through trials, of discovery of oneself and of the divine, but also of spiritual or psychological healing phenomena. And that is why by thus concentrating these different functions in himself, he is so important.

But the ashram is more, or more accurately, it is different. For beyond or below all these positive characteristics that disciples and masters keep emphasizing and recalling, the ashram conveys something more problematic.

As a former French ashram chief reminded me one day, the ashram is the place of interindividual conflicts where each one clashes with the other, with oneself too, always under the gaze, even indirectly, of the guru, in order to transform and become better. But it is also a special place in that it offers the possibility, unknown elsewhere, to live strong and intense spiritual or psychic experiences, even borderline. These are supposed to lead to well-being, even to a form of total and definitive psychological and spiritual healing.

This search for psychosomatic healing, which incredibly early on became confused with the quest for spiritual salvation, is a particular trait specific to the approach of practitioners and adherents of multiple sects and sectarian or related movements. Pentecostalism in Protestantism and Charismatic Renewal in Catholicism are notable examples. Siddha-Yoga fits perfectly into this contemporary socioreligious category.

But what I would like to emphasize is what one might call the other side of the phenomena of healing and conversion. Namely, this aspect of events experienced in a religious community such as an ashram by the disciples, but which is too rarely questioned,

and which concerns the psychological, even psychoanalytic, dimension of so-called mystical or spiritual experiences.

I note two characteristics of this type of experience: they are both ecstatic and regressive in nature.

The one described by a former disciple of Siddha-Yoga in his book, already quoted, will serve as an example. This tells about his first great spiritual experience which he had in the Hindu Siddha-Yoga ashram where he met his teacher, Swami Muktananda.

So, one morning, Alain C. got up to join the collective religious service in the mediation room of the ashram, and began to recite his mantra as usual, when suddenly he went into a deep ecstasy where he himself as "I", "me" or "subject" disappeared. Nothing remained in him and around him but an immense void which he calls the "All", where spatio-temporal borders have dissipated, where he himself was no longer even "him", but the to be pure in contact with eternity or with the One.

All the terms used by the author – as "Void", "All", "Being", "One", "fullness", "infinitude" ... - refer to the vocabulary derived from spiritualities, all religions combined.

This already means that this experience, as unique and exceptional as it appears, can be said in these chosen terms, and can apparently only be said in these terms, widely used in this vast literature. It is also a sign that these words are perfectly appropriate to describe a contemporary spiritual experience. In addition, the author shares his experience with us by alluding to a certain type of state of consciousness, or state of being, which is also widespread. Because such an experience, as extraordinary as it seems, is perfectly known from the register of spiritualities such as Yoga or Buddhism, wisdoms accustomed to identifying and analyzing this type of state of consciousness in their doctrine and tradition for at least two years. millennia.

This is how what Alain C. lived can easily be compared to states called "jhâna" in Theravâda Buddhism, or even "samâdhi" in Yoga.

This is described as: *"an exceptional state of consciousness, in which man is more or less free from the grip of the outside world and the obsession with his ego, and where he can consequently have the means to 'investigations superior to those we normally use. "*

In these states, what disappears is effectively the world as we usually understand it, but also thought, language, affects, memory ..., in short, everything that constitutes our usual mode of knowledge. Even the body and the feeling of being oneself are temporarily banished,



as well as the presence of others. And this is what Alain C. testifies to in his book about what he calls a "*founding experience*".

This qualifier, in my opinion, is not fully justified, as this experience seems to be more of a spiritual initiation.

An initiating experience, therefore, which does not found anything strictly speaking as it is not a "*foundation*" on which one could rely, and which would then give the possibility of basing oneself or of founding something else. The terms used by Alain C. are explicit in this regard, and we do not see how he could base anything on a "*Void*", which is also an "*All*", a "*One*" which is an "*Infinitude*" ...

An encounter with a divine person, like Christ, could perhaps have been foundational, and again under certain conditions, but certainly not an experience of self-recess and psychic personalization.

But there is more.

For in those states which can rightly be called altered states of consciousness, the person experiences something more than the sublimity of the divine or that of the higher spiritual spheres.

This is clearly reflected in a number of testimonies, including that of Alain C.

Indeed, beyond, or parallel to these states of infinitude and feeling of eternity, the author gives us other impressions which, while belonging to the spiritual register, are nonetheless of a psychological order. This is how he mentions the "*heart of Life*", the "*root*", "*the alpha and the omega*", which he would have touched or known at that time, expressions which are still of mystical essence. But he also speaks of "*the origin*", and of the "*ultimate outcome*". And more precisely from "*this point where one comes from and where one seeks to return*". Expressions that can still be read in a very spiritual way, this "point" being able to be interpreted as the Absolute or the divine.

But, for my part, I see something else.

Because these expressions beckon to another reality that is just as sublime for human beings, although a little less transcendent.

Indeed, this "point" from which we come, and towards which one tends to return, according to Alain C., can just as well be this pure state which each one knew during this unique moment of the intrauterine life, when he knew a form of osmosis and almost perfect communion with his mother. In which case, and however mystical such a quest for a "return"

to the origin may be, it is nonetheless marked with the seal of an original experience, the first in truth that each one experiences, and which is not. only spiritual.

This desire to return - literally, this "nostalgia" - is exactly what Alain C. experienced in his experience. He also says it very explicitly, and his experience of totality or plenitude followed by a descent towards the more earthly and ordinary realities of duality and suffering, does indeed state birth and memory. from birth. Not so much the spiritual birth, the one which opens to Another World, to another reality, truer, denser, and higher, but the bodily birth, the one which throws the newborn into a hard and harsh world, distressing and unknown, after having experienced an almost perfect union in his mother's womb.

This world of intrauterine life also has all the characteristics of mystical life, according to the usual descriptions given of it.

Thus, it is generally described as being timeless, or as immersed in an eternity, moreover, it is painless and all suffering seems to be excluded from it, it forms a whole, a blissful totality where the dual mode is banished, it is not structured by language but inhabited by silence, in its nothing moves and perfect stillness constitutes it, we can just as well qualify it as an experience of Being than of Nothingness or of the Void, plenitude suits it as well that emptiness, it offers a completeness and opens on an infinity, it is blessed, endowed with a dazzling whiteness, finally, no state resembles it and nothing can equal it ...

The resemblance between these two states is moreover so close that one can wonder if any mystical experience, which feeds on these terms and these expressions to define itself, would not be first and foremost an experience of life. intrauterine, although remembered, then magnified, idealized, or hallucinated, by people who have become adults, and who would seek to return to it or to relive this paradisiacal state considered as blessed and divine. This can also be called "ocean feeling".

In a previous note, I mentioned the spirituality of Taoism, which is not by chance, because one of the meanings of the word "Tao", in Chinese, given by the major text of this wisdom, the Ta- Tö-King, is none other than the "Divine Mother". The nostalgia or the desire to return to the origin, of which Alain C. speaks, would therefore find all its meaning, because it is indeed a nostalgia for the intrauterine life that India and the ashram of his guru gave him the opportunity to relive and experiment in peace. And it is not by chance either that Alain C. experienced this maternal-type experience precisely in India, a country considered to be "the

Mother of religions". Finally, it is still no coincidence that one of the popular therapies in Siddha-Yoga has been the "Primal Cry", which is aptly named.

However, one of the major features of this type of spiritual experience is that they all reach their peak in an ashram.

Why exactly?

My hypothesis, inspired by psychoanalysis, is the following: a strong, transcendent, and borderline experience, like the one described by Alain C., can only be lived in an ashram because this place effectively makes it possible to remove the defense mechanisms coming from the superego, a psychic instance of the forbidden which is particularly powerful, and sometimes even guilt-ridden and overwhelming. Once these injunction mechanisms have been lifted or inhibited, a fusion-type experience between the psychic instances of the Ego and the Id, that is to say of a transgressive and regressive nature, becomes possible. And even repeatable.

This is the reason why the disciples and the swamis insisted that everyone live in an ashram, if possible that of Ganeshpuri in India, known to be saturated with the blessings of the gurus, and to foster strong and decisive experiences. And for good reason! The guru himself kept insisting that every disciple come for a period of retreat in India. We understand better why. Because such an experience, as we see in the previous testimony, made it possible to weld the relationship between master and disciple while reactivating it later, when the time came, when it became less significant, like a reminder of a spiritual vaccine.

However, this spiritual experience does not fail to be paradoxical.

Because, on the one hand, it implies a psychic liberation by identification with a higher ideal - the divine, the Absolute, the Being, the One, the Brahman ... -, but, on the other hand, it implicitly renews the meditating towards regressive and infantile states, of the intrauterine type. Indeed, if, for its part, the deliverance sought is indeed that of rebirths which lock everyone up in an infinite negative cycle - the samsara of Hinduism and Buddhism - ecstasy or more exactly the mystical "enstasis", as for it, inevitably leads the meditator to regress towards infantile or archaic states, that is to say towards states which are the very place - psychic and spiritual - of births and rebirths. These experiences therefore imply a new birth or a return, even in a fantasy mode, within the birth cycle itself, from which the spiritual experience claims to take the meditator out and free him.

Also, as much as we can understand that a time of resourcing in this psychic state is necessary for each person in his spiritual journey, provided that it is temporary and lived as such, as much the idealization of this state is problematic, and precisely for both spiritual and psychological reasons. However, this is exactly what we are witnessing in the borderline experiences of most practitioners, followers of sects or mystics who never manage to differentiate between the two states, and who, in their blindness as in their enthusiasm, unfortunately take one for the other. This is why their spiritual outlook is always marred with infantilism, and their so-called spiritual awakening is endlessly threatened with psychological regression, states against which they fail to immunize themselves.

But these regressive experiences would not be possible, let alone conceivable, if the place where they usually take place did not favor them so much. And this place, socially maternal and maternal, which encourages spiritual passages to act such as mystical fusions, and in which inter-individual mimicry is more powerful than elsewhere, is the ashram.

Contrary to popular belief, one does not experience the other, or otherness, in an ashram. Nor that of the Other, as a god. But it is the experience of the same that is induced and spread from a single model: that of the guru. The disciples all end up looking like him, and this unique way of thinking and living the same becomes an absolute rule to which everyone must comply under pain of excommunication. Even the experience of the divine, or especially the experience of the divine, I dare say, is lived in this mode of the identical, of the similar, that is to say in the mode of the same where each one loves himself as the same, or as a same entity, which we find in what is considered to be the summit of the mystical experience, namely non-duality, which aptly speaks its name of rejection of the real and of all modes of "Duel".

The diversity of individual experiences, that is to say individual or non-dividing, thus ends up blending into a model which is also unique, and which comes from the guru. Everyone speaks the same language made up of the same expressions, the same thoughts, and the same references, and adopts similar attitudes that leave no room for any other way of thinking or being.

And it is in this spiritually very homogeneous environment, and which never ceases to unify and homogenize behaviors and relationships, that these specific experiences of the divine can take place. And it is also in this place that everyone can find in the experiences of

others what he himself has lived or ends up feeling, after having read and heard many times the experiences of the master to which his own end up conforming.

Such is the bewitching power of the ashram and of life in an ashram, of which it was said and repeated, in the one where I lived, that it replaced the presence of the guru or could even make up for his absence, always remarkable elsewhere.

### *X - What is Siddha-Yoga the symptom of?*

When I attended the ashram in Lyon, it was customary, as I mentioned above, to make a spiritual diagnosis of the world, usually accompanied by a final judgment.

If the world was doomed, it was because they were sick.

And at first sick of himself. He was on the brink of the abyss - the context of the then Cold War was not helping - and the future was more than uncertain. A new paradigm of New Age origin had then appeared and was timely, for it offered us a different worldview and an infinitely more glorious future. Since the world was going to ruin, we could try to save it, almost in spite of itself, while trying to save ourselves.

One will easily recognize in this spiritual observation an apocalyptic theme which was that of Christianity for centuries, and which heresies will have enlarged by exploiting it in all possible ways. However, this millenarianism was also shared by Siddha-Yoga in which prophecies and oracles took place, more often, it is true, in the form of rumors or secrets barely revealed than solid and public information.

But the observation was simple and accepted unanimously: on the one hand, a sick, dying, adrift world that would soon disappear; on the other, a new spirituality, drawing its strength from traditions as ancient as they were secret from India - this "Mother of religions" who generously offered her spiritual remedies - and thanks to which a redemption and a transformation of the world humanity were possible.

In summary, Siddha-Yoga was presented both as the ideal means of healing for beings in perdition, desperately seeking to save their souls and their bodies, and as the best medicine to save society which is also in perdition. A rare and precious antidote, in short, capable of curing the deadly poison prevalent in society, and of making us immune to it.

Yet this diagnosis and observation, which I fully shared with others at that time, can now be, if not reversed, at least largely qualified.

Thus, instead of conceiving of Siddha-Yoga as the related sects, as innovative spiritual healing paths and therapeutic practices appropriate to our time, bringing alleviation of anxieties and salutary responses, we should rather consider them as hybrid growths of the contemporary religious sphere in crisis, or even as symptoms of the malaise of our societies or our civilization.

What changes everything.

In which case, it would not be first of all on the world or on our societies that we would have to pass judgment and make a severe diagnosis, but on the sectarian phenomenon in general, and which has increased in recent decades.

However, this one has a long history. Without referring to ancient times, one need only look at the history of Christianity from its origins to see that the sectarian phenomenon has always accompanied it like a shadow or a double negative. Religious phenomenon produced by the instituted Churches themselves which engender or have engendered sects or sectarian phenomena, such as heresies.

In this regard, far from the Catholic Church being a successful sect, as some anticlerical minds sometimes claim, it owes its longevity, not only to its supernatural character, which depends solely on faith, but also on two specific historical factors:

- first of all, to ancient Judaism from which it emerged. But by dividing this one. Personally, I believed for a long time that Christianity was only a sect or a radical and peripheral fringe of ancient Judaism. And with whom he would have broken up, or from whom he would have become detached having been rejected, like an unwanted branch or twig, by the mother stock. A thesis accredited both by a certain Christian apologetics, the religious history of the nineteenth century and by present-day Judaism.

But this one is wrong. As I said above, no sect can transform into an established religion because of the incompatibility of the two phenomena. In fact, according to more recent studies, Christianity was a movement which would have divided or torn from within Judaism into two parts: the first would have become Christianity itself; the second, Judaism which we call rabbinic or Talmudic. The latter would thus have been built against the first, each excluding the other or excommunicating him. Christianity was thus the fruit of an internal religious split and not of a fortuitous or secondary accident.

- Then, to the unavoidable presence of Roman culture. The Roman Empire did infinitely more than cast its shadow, hated for centuries, on Christianity. He integrated it and gave it a

new lease of life from the 4th century AD, by providing it with the unique resources of its institutions. Starting with the Latin language, the administration of the Empire and the law. We can spend our time deploring and denouncing this Roman reality, as so many authors or sects have done, but it is undeniable.

This resulted in a major phenomenon, that of the transformation of the ancient Western mentality which passed entirely to Christianity and converted to the Christian faith within a few centuries. But on bases which were those of Romanity, or of Latinity, and which have continued to this day. If we add to this faith the Hellenistic culture and the contribution of Greek philosophy, which will give birth to theology, we will have a more complete and more accurate picture of what was the birth of Christianity and its historical development.

The history of the Church is therefore not that of a sect that has succeeded, miraculously or not. But it is that of a vast religious movement which has benefited from exceptional and considerable cultural and civilizational contributions. In that sense, this story is unique and no sect, Christian or otherwise, can compare to it.

The question therefore arises as to exactly what is meant by a syncretistic religious phenomenon like Siddha-Yoga in the twentieth century.

In other words, what exactly is it the symptom of?

For it is about understanding what such a movement has been and the temporary but undeniable enthusiasm it has generated. And why especially in France and on minds like those who testify to it today?

In my opinion, the crisis of the Christian faith since the Second Vatican Council with the revolutions of the counter-culture of the period of the sixties have favored the emergence of this type of movement. But this does not explain everything. In fact, if Siddha-Yoga is indeed a sect, as previously defined, then what is the religious institution against which it leans and which it wants to compete while imitating it?

I believed for a long time that it was about the Catholic Church. But this hypothesis was the one provided to me by the movement itself and by the French followers. So too oriented by the Western situation. Was it the American churches, or the other sects that are proliferating there? Not really, especially given the cult's warm welcome in the United States where it continues to thrive. So, can it be an Asian religion and possibly even an Indian religion? In which case, the situation is complicated by the fact that no religion in India is really dominant, like Christianity in Western countries.

But this vision has always been that which a certain Hinduism, rather proselytizing, was keen to propagate to make believe in an ideal religious tolerance in India. Which never was. The history of Buddhism, although it appeared in India and became a powerful religion until the 12th century, shows that it is not. And its ousting, undoubtedly violent, shows on the contrary that India is not the country of non-violence, as it has never been the "Mother of religions".

However, if there is one religion in India that has marked the religious and political landscape for centuries and even millennia, it is Brahmanism.

Surprisingly, it never appears in the speeches and teachings of Hindu sects as if it does not exist or is just an epiphenomenon. The caste system is his work, however, and it has not disappeared. Languages like Pali or Hindi also come from Sanskrit, the sacred language of India and the Brahmins. It is still in this language that the sacred texts of India - from the Vedas to the Upanishads, from the sutras to the ancient epics like the Mahabharata - have come down to us. And the heterodox Indian spiritual currents, like Kashmir Shaivism, owe a great deal to Brahmanism even in their opposition to it.

This is also confirmed when we see the way Swami Muktananda behaved and was treated. He was at the same time a wandering sadhu, a founder of a sect, a charismatic leader, an Indian guru, a living god, but also a maharaja and an officiating Brahmin. Being recognized by his peers, and not just by gurus, was therefore important to him. However, these came from the Indian world of the Brahmans and the high castes.

However, I do not believe that the Hindu religions alone were involved in this claim to become more than an Indian religion, which has haunted Siddha-Yoga so much. This showed unambiguous international ambition coupled with powerful proselytism. And these deny the Hindu religious fact to remain within the borders of the Indian subcontinent.

This is why, it seems to me relevant to admit that if it is neither the Indian religions, nor even the Catholic Church which were the competitors that the sect wanted to supplant, then it is indeed Christianity as such which was the religion par excellence that Siddha-Yoga, with its charismatic leader, its active proselytism, its spiritual syncretism, and its global aim, wanted to compete with and surpass.

### ***XI - Spiritual awakening and mystical experience.***

Was Swami Muktananda a truly awakened being?



While the question may seem surprising at first, even provocative, it is nonetheless necessary to ask.

Especially since it is extremely difficult to verify with certainty such a state of arousal in a person.

The state of awakening - bodhi in Sanskrit, which notably gave the name of the Buddha - is a state which surpasses all others, and which assures those who know it or "realize" it, as we said to the period, to be freed from all the ties that hold him back to this world, and to have definitively broken the cycle of rebirths or reincarnations.

Dead to this world, the "living liberated", this perfect sage, is fully open to the other, that of the divine. This is generally described as a world where the three supreme qualities - Being, Consciousness, Bliss - coexist from all eternity and are the attributes of the supreme divinity, Brahman.

In his autobiography, Swami Muktananda describes the meteoric rise that he experienced, or that took place in him, under the leadership of his master. As well as the ultimate beatific state he experienced at the end of his exceptional sadhana. Despite or rather by the very fact of its marvelous appearance, perhaps also embellished by the author, this story remains a typical example of testimonies of spiritual awakening in modern India, since at least that, which has become emblematic, of Ramakrishna.

If there is no a priori reason to doubt his word, nor to suspect him of fabrication, three elements, in my opinion, nevertheless pose a problem about this perfect state of awakening which he claimed to have been blessed with. in his lifetime:

**1 /** first, the effects of awakening and the achievements, especially social ones, which have resulted from it.

After this famous awakening, Swami Muktananda created Siddha-Yoga as such, and developed it in a new form which quickly spread throughout the world. In this long work of missionary teaching, of travels, of meetings, of publications also, he was himself both the apostle of his own spirituality, and undoubtedly the best there was, and this very one. which was announced by this spirituality. Both.

But then, how, in his superhuman clairvoyance, this eminent master could not anticipate the future of the movement which he had created, and which would follow the fate of so many other sects, by stagnating or by withering away? after his death?

After all, there were enough examples around him, and not the least, from the Ramakrishna Mission of Vivekânanda to the universal non-violence movement of Gandhi or the astonishing Auroville ashram which became a city near Pondicherry. All these sects, all these spiritual initiatives as remarkable as they were, all reached a peak before experiencing a sometimes rapid decline, often accompanied by unspiritual jolts.

To place the responsibility for this decomposition on the successors of the guru or on other causes as is usually done, is misplaced when we know that, in these movements, everything rests and has always rested on the master, and that it is to he and he alone had to prevent possible catastrophes and deactivate future conflicts. An ordinary and human reality, spiritually inferior, is it not, however, easier to understand than a sublime and divine reality which Swami Muktananda has always availed himself of in spreading his visions? This lack of lucidity on the part of the one who claimed to visit the highest and most ethereal divine worlds never ceases to ask questions ...

**2 /** Then, the religious syncretism of which Swami Muktananda was one of the contemporary missionaries.

Influenced by Hinduism which has been used to it almost always, and generously practiced by Swami Muktananda and by Siddha-Yoga, this religious syncretism, which was one of the main characteristics of this movement, has in fact proved to be wrong, both historically and religiously.

Indeed, no sect or spirituality has so far succeeded in definitively surpassing the great traditional religions still in force, let alone unifying them into a single universal movement. Certainly, these are not the attempts that have failed since the nineteenth century - from Theosophy to the New Age - but it is clear that all have failed. And Siddha-Yoga is no exception.

Is such a religious failure conceivable on the part of a being who has practiced, like a Ramakrishna, almost all spiritual paths, claiming that they all lead to the same goal? And so, they didn't matter much per se? Was this stinging denial on the part of historical reality only the subject of reflection within the movement or on the part of former disciples? Isn't simply remembering the sublime encounter with the guru and past experiences without questioning the future of the movement and the fulfillment of the predictions, is it not a condemnable blindness and willful ignorance?

**3 /** Finally, the mental state of the guru himself.

While it is always difficult to analyze such a psychic state, especially when it comes to a person whose semi-divine nature is enough to prevent any attempt to intrude into his psyche, this question, too, is important.

I pass over the inevitable scandals which shook the movement, but which are unfortunately not foreign to the personality of the master, and I come to the question of the nature of his spiritual state.

What authorizes me to speak of the latter is quite simply the autobiography of Swami Muktananda herself to which I am referring, and which remains the authoritative source par excellence of information on this man. Moreover, he himself has never ceased to open up his privacy by offering the reader a great deal of detail about his own states of consciousness and his moods.

One of the characteristics that emerges from reading the deep meditations that the awakened future indulged in, such as beatific contemplations that followed one another in parallel, is their emotional intensity. Not only the one that the text suggests, but especially the one that Swami Muktananda experienced. Because this intensity is everywhere in his existence and saturates all his experiences, to the point that one can wonder how a man could withstand such powerful emotional loads in such a short time, and which have never ceased to surge on him during this spiritually very dense period?

His ultimate liberation experience, after others just as intense, was the culmination of it. After this, Swami Muktananda affirmed to live in a perpetual inner bliss, or in a state of perpetual bliss. Since then, the beatitude has never left him day or night, and has announced this beatific eternity which also awaits the disciple after death or in awakening.

However, when we know what such states mobilize in terms of energy - and it is enough to have lived a single strong spiritual experience to know it -, and what they induce in terms of inner resourcing as well as of physical and mental exhaustion, one does not stop being perplexed when reading this spiritual ascent, endlessly punctuated by visions and supernatural visitations, each more imposing than the other.

This process moreover took place according to a linear vision of time and of the mental and spiritual progress of Swami Muktananda, almost without encountering any significant obstacle and as in isolation, or rather as in a dream, as the experiences described follow one another. unreal way and in a phantasmatic or fantasized mental framework, and according to a visionary psychic deployment very unrealistic, even from a mystical point of view.

However, no human body or brain is able to support or generate such energy tsunamis almost continuously, whether for a given time, such as that described in the book, or even for a lifetime. Furthermore, no state of consciousness, whether ordinary or altered, lasts indefinitely. This, when it reaches its ultimate point, can induce an impression of eternity that we know as well in romantic relationships, mystical ecstasy or in moments of intense joy. But these, as powerful as they are, do not last, for they are not by themselves eternal and always fade before sometimes resurfacing, differently.

Swami Muktananda would he voluntarily magnify the features of his experiences in his story? Or would he have allowed himself to be deceived by them to the point of no longer differentiating their degrees of intensity, of an emotional nature, with the more cognitive leaps in understanding? Some, saturated with emotions having overwhelmed others, guided by a reason that is always disparaged and devalued?

The story of spiritual awakening, which in this regard remains a model of its kind, is that of the Buddha.

It has been widely analyzed and commented on.

By reading it, one can observe a psychic and spiritual evolution of the Buddha towards the ultimate Awakening, described according to the accounts or the sutras, according to a scalar scale, that is to say of mental degrees always more subtle and higher. But from the third stage of elevation or degree of meditation, the emotions and affects faded in the mind of the Buddha, and gave way to other states, more stable because less parasitized by passions or less constituted. of affects. Ultimately, perfect awakening represented an illumination which was liberating from all these passions, and which took place in a state of ataraxia - both stillness of the senses and of the mind - but in which a certain activity of consciousness. However, this awakening, as such, is not about affect or feeling, not even from master to disciple transmission. On the contrary.

The same thing exists in Yoga or Vedanta, where the yogi seeks a shutdown of the mind to permanently appease it.

And this is where the shoe pinches when we compare these texts with Swami Muktananda's account.

Certainly, this describes a sublime and extraordinary state in which his mind has blossomed and even expanded, almost to infinity. But this state was still saturated with elements pertaining to the mind or the psyche, such as certain lights, or even figures, affects,

feelings and emotions. So that it becomes impossible to differentiate this extraordinary state of awakening, or this extraordinary place, from Muktananda's usual state of consciousness, seemingly endlessly saturated with affect and emotion.

This is not a paradox, but a problem which has never been noted either by the master or by his disciples.

Indeed, how is it possible to live in a state that is supposed to surpass everything, starting with the emotions that disturb and delude us, and continue to feel, in this same state, impassive by definition, emotions and affects that overwhelm us? this same consciousness which, precisely, should no longer be affected by it?

Because two of two things one: either, I know the unsurpassable awakening, and I am led to transcend the usual and ordinary psychological conditioning, starting with my affects and my emotions which, thanks to this awakening, do not trap me. no longer or no longer concern me; or else, I know a high spiritual state, but in which I still experience affects which can be sublime or sublimated, but in this case, I am still affected, and I am not delivered from it.

Now, this indeed seems to be the mental and spiritual state described by Swami Muktananda. To invoke non-duality, to justify this ambiguous and difficult to explain state, is a petition that cannot be valid in this specific case. Because if we can always trust the mystics, especially when they describe their spiritual experiences, in return, they must not abuse the credulity of others to impose their visions or their point of view, without any other form. judgment. It is a question of principle or of honesty, and, in this area, ethical principles are as important as mysticism, and the latter cannot prevail over the former in the name of spirituality or the primacy of experience. Because it is precisely this experience that must be duly evaluated and validated before it is accepted.

No doubt, but that of Swami Muktananda, it will be said, has been duly validated by his own master, which should be sufficient to recognize his eminent enlightenment qualities.

Certainly, and this is how his experiences were confirmed.

However, this condition, however necessary it may be, cannot be entirely sufficient. And for a specific reason. In fact, since his master also experienced a similar awakening, he could only recognize in his disciple the mental state that he himself had transmitted to him or that he himself had aroused in his disciple, and that he developed according to his advice. But nothing else. And this spiritual state was undoubtedly the same or similar to his, and that his

own master, before, had recognized him long ago. This represents both an infinite regression and a not very virtuous circle.

Because the question immediately arises of knowing who the first master was to have validated both his own experience and that of the first disciples, and quite differently than by a call to the legendary or to the myth, which immediately involve the supernatural or the divine, which ones miraculously come to the aid of a faulty spiritual tradition.

In fact, there is a circle there which is not really virtuous, in which this recognition, which is done in isolation, does not have a universal quality, an international of masters or gurus not existing, and for cause! or being only an invention of the unbridled imagination of the founders of Theosophy or of a certain Tantrism, movements to which Siddha-Yoga was largely fed.

A master can eventually recognize the mental state of his disciple, and even better if it resembles his own. But not to give it absolute and indisputable validity. There is no such thing as infallibility in the realm of mysticism, for the latter is neither a theological dogmatics, nor a metaphysics, yet an exact science. It is the subjectivity of each person who has had an experience.

However, this experience alone cannot establish the full veracity of its content. In fact, attempting to objectify this content often amounts to unveiling it, or demystifying the experience itself. That is to say at best to relativize it, at worst to invalidate or discredit it.

Conversely, refusing to submit this experience to a form of validation that is not solely spiritual, in particular on the basis of criteria outside it of an ethical or psychological type, amounts to enveloping it in a cloud of mystery and focusing on she suspects it. These are the limits which every mystic constantly encounters, but none, to my knowledge, has ever exceeded them. Now, if the mystical experience was truly transcendent, as the mystics themselves claim, should it not also transcend this contradiction and solve this crucial problem? It is about its credibility and its intelligibility.

But what is clear in the awakening of Swami Muktananda, in addition to his affects and his still extremely passionate state, is above all his attachment. More precisely, the one he feels towards his guru. In fact, her relationship to her master over the years has endured, developed, and even increased, much like a romantic or filial relationship, by taking disproportionate proportions. This attachment, which took the form of emotional

dependence, reveals a psychological element that would contradict or contradict his arousal state, namely narcissism.

Far from being disinterested, such a relationship actually fueled the narcissism of the two men. From him, Swami Muktananda, the always obedient and submissive disciple, totally in love with his master, to the other, but who is also a "him" or the same, the adulated and idealized guru, the distances have been erased and the limits, abolished.

And if, sometimes, they reappeared surreptitiously, it was in order to let the devotional act, in love and therefore passionate, unfold again and reactivate the narcissistic bond between the two men. And this, so that they can relive the moment of the meeting, this ideal and apparently pure shaktipat. A loving, passionate encounter, full of devotion and adoration, also of reciprocal desire, and which Swami Muktananda wanted to continue as long as possible. As spiritual as such a relationship was, it is indeed part of a passionate and passionate attachment, like a narcissistic bond. Link that Swami Muktananda will reiterate with all his disciples, in order to make it last as long as possible. It will become his personal spiritual mark, recognized almost universally.

But then, in this passionate, narcissistic, even fusional relationship, how could a perfect detachment, recommended by all wisdoms, be manifested? And what kind of spiritual deliverance is this? What about awakening as well, this perfect knowledge and this exact understanding of beings and the world which, here, merges with a dazzling and loving encounter?

Love, human and spiritual, can be seen in every page of Swami Muktananda's book. Love that he wanted to spread and propagate everywhere around him, especially among his disciples with whom he relived on a recurring basis this privileged moment of the meeting but having taken the place of the master this time, it that is to say from the father. But love, however high and pure it may be, is not awakening, and desire, even spiritual or spiritualized, is not nirvana.

Drunkenness, bhaktic, shaktic, that is to say beatific, experienced, and magnified by Swami Muktananda throughout his sadhana, and the mystical, fusional love, which he demonstrated to excess, are not- are they not simply incompatible with a high degree of wisdom and the ataraxia of nirvana? And the proof that he himself was really neither delivered nor detached?

These are the questions we can honestly still ask ourselves today ...

*In conclusion...*

Siddha-Yoga represented for those who were touched by the grace of the master a unique moment in their life and like an enchanted parenthesis.

He gave them the opportunity to have intense experiences, to experience unusual events and the feeling of revealing themselves. In the enthusiasm of the first moments of conversion and in the ardor of communicative faith, the disciples of Swami Muktananda, of whom I was a part for a certain time, believed with all their might in a total spiritual renewal. The experience they had then took place both on an intimate and personal level, but also on a community or collective level, with an even greater aim. That of including humanity in this vast project of religious reintegration.

If this project failed, and if most of the disciples returned to a more ordinary life, the fact remains that this common adhesion forms a religious bond between them. Siddha-Yoga, as I tried to show in this study, could in any case fail in this immense task, incredibly ambitious and pretentious, because of its communal nature unable to evolve into religion, and especially in a religious institution worthy of the name.

Moreover, it would have been to deny what had made the very particularity of this movement and its dynamics, due in particular to the charisma of its master. Once it disappeared, the sect could therefore only slowly wither away, even stagnate and perhaps return to where it was born, in India.

The elements that I wanted to highlight and explain in the last paragraph of this reflection undoubtedly tarnish the image or the icon of the master. That maintained by the disciples still fascinated by the one who gave them a look of almost divine love.

But by accepting that this guru was not a man as pure and as perfect as the discourses of the sect still claim, by admitting the limits and the very human weaknesses inherent in his person, each disciple also admits to having been a little mistaken, not only on this guru, but also on himself. And he can finally admit that this error does not come only from Siddha-Yoga and his very charismatic master, but also from himself.

This admission of error, of personal blindness, is often difficult to produce, even after years. And we understand why.

Yet it is such an admission that I would like to make here, personally and on my own behalf, at the conclusion of this reflection. Because I too, once fully believed in the divinity of this master as in the spirituality of his movement. Until I realize my mistake.



But is it not precisely under these conditions of honest recognition and personal admission, of recognition of a lack of personal lucidity as well, that we can truly advance on the Way? These are in any case the questions that everyone should ask themselves after participating in such a movement ...

### **SUMMARY**

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