

WHY IS THIS SILENCE SO LOUD?

SEAN CAMPBELL

A meeting with Nanna Garu - extracts from a devotee's Journal, Christmas Day 1997 at Andhra Ashram near Ramanasramam.

SATSANG is being held on the roof, and we are late. Well we aren't, actually. He is early - but the effect is the same. The roof is choked with hundreds of Indian women in bright saris sitting at the feet of a small man perched on an iron bed at the far end. A wonderfully colourful awning flaps vigorously over His head but He doesn't seem to mind. He just gazes softly back at the audience in total complete silence. He is so ordinary and yet... I have come half expecting to see a comical and motherly figure complete with apron and bonnet, but all impulse to laugh vanishes before this Silence, My God, the Silence! So deep, so profound, so ringing, so stilling—what have I stumbled upon?

A man at the door motions us to join a small knot of Westerner sitting at the front by the bed, so we began to thread our way through the thickly packed bodies towards them. I have never experienced anything like it. Something is pouring out of this man. I feel as if I am wading through treacle - I can barely remain upright. A part of me is steadily sinking, being swallowed up by the deafening silence growing around me, free falling deep within...



I don't remember sitting down but I do remember the monkey. Someone has brought Nanna Garu bananas and the cocky thing has crawled under the awning on to the bed, and is bolting them right under His nose. It should be ludicrous - instead it seems natural, in keeping with what is emanating from Nanna Garu. But I can't take it all in, my mind keeps going white. All I can do is stare transfixed as His deep, deep, liquid eyes pass slowly over everyone, lingering here, lingering there.

They touch mine, look into me with a glance that goes on for ever. I experience a feeling of melting and soft burning and my head becomes hot - white hot. I think, stupidly,

-"Why is this Silence so loud?"

Then all thought vanishes as a wave of pure Love washes through me leaving tingling Bliss. I experience both thrill and deep shock because I recognise those eyes instantly, though I have never seen them before in a living being. However, I have seen them in pictures of Tibetan monasteries—many times. "BUDDHA'S EYES"—striking, alarming even. I have been both attracted and repelled by



their stylised, half lidded stature. Never though have I thought that they were anything other than a symbolic representation of an abstract ideal - they just aren't human! But incredibly, I am looking into them right now.

Then they move on, but they keep coming back! I just can't believe the Silence - it's so beautiful. I am immersed in Bliss with Arunachala for a backdrop. And then, with the gentlest of smiles He simply gets up and goes out, leaving me stunned and immobile.

I spend dinner, and the rest of the night in a state of mute incomprehension - blown out of Mind and though by something so vast that I can never grasp it - not that that matters a damn.

26th December

I haven't slept a wink - how can I in the face of something as elemental as this? I have spent the night burning - literally. My skin seems alive with a fizzy, tingling sensation and absurdly, my head feels like a flower opening. It doesn't just open though, it goes on and on, layer upon layer of petals opening out right through the night. Maybe it is fanciful, but I feel expanded, vast - the periphery my body brushing against trees and people 50 yards away. I can't analyse this, I just have to go with it - see where it takes me.

Why is this Silence So Loud?...

8.00 AM finds me sitting scrunched up in the midst of the same throng, perhaps seven or eight rows back from the front. Not as close as yesterday but I don't Care - about that or anything. I haven't the presence of mind!

He comes in and sits on the edge of the bed again. A Brahmin starts to chant a long Sanskrit prayer which goes on interminably, and all the while Nanna Garu clasps His knee and gazes unwaveringly up at Arunachala. There is such a look of quiet adoration of his face that I unexpectedly find tears streaming down my own cheeks. I feel overtaken by love for Him, for the Mountain, for everything... and my body begins to express what my mind cannot, and my heart longs to.

It must be a bit later, I don't really remember; the Brahmin has mysteriously disappeared, and Nanna Garu begins once more to make love to us with those eyes. Once more His gaze sweeps slowly back and forth, touching mine, then moving on - back and forth - eyes of softest compassion and love. And the Silence deepens, and deepens. My awareness narrows to a tunnel focused only

upon Him. Somewhere else there is whole noisy, crowded world around me, but I am oblivious to all that now. All I can register is the roaring in my ears, the burning, and those eyes.

And they keep on returning to meet mine -frighteningly, thrillingly - then He beckons. I don't want to believe, do want to believe, am too scared to believe that He means me. He must be waving at someone behind me - so I don't move. But He beckons again, and a third time and then a moment of sheer terror, and joy, as the Indian women behind me prod me to my feet. I think I am going to die as, for the second time in twenty-four hours, I thread my way to the front. Only this time there is no sinking back into anonymity, no relief from exposure. I wish I could express just how readily at that moment I would really give up my life for His acknowledgement and love, and at the same time how much I want to run and hide from it!

How waves at His feet and I collapse in a pool of sunlight to the bed. Looking up I can't see a thing for the



Sun's glare, and something small and far away within me says -

"Typical! God invites you to sit at His feet and have Darshan, and you continue to sit where you can't see Him!"

Perhaps something similar occurs to Nanna Garu because He chuckles, and tells me to move to His right. I do so in a state of near automatism, bereft of any will of my own. If He asks me to stand on my head at this point, I'll try to!

There then follows a gentle interrogation about my origin, work, how often I've been to India, where I am staying. All the while He strokes my hair, touches my forehead, pats my arm with such simple love and tenderness that I feel like a lover, a child and a disciple all in one. I feel so SEEN.

Two hundred people are present, but such is the intimacy of the exchange that there might as well be none. There is a quality of totally directed love, and gentle acceptance about this man that I have never encountered before. Completely at ease in His masculinity He is also completely feminine and He draws a total trust from my heart that I didn't know was there. He seems to speak to all parts of my being in a wordless flow of knowing whilst those eyes of love pierce mine scant inches away. Indescribable, ineffable - the experience is debased by trying to describe it - never have I seen such beauty, nor felt such inner peace and warmth.

I have no awareness of time sitting there, closing my eyes when I become full, then opening them again for more - always to encounter His gaze looking into and through me. There is such a feeling of fullness, of the drop seeing the Ocean and in turn being welcomed by it, of being cherished by it - and all the while I am at the centre of a burning, melting fire - a fire of Love.

This is a Man who has realised through Ramana's Grace; who has taught Ramana's way for many years; who honours Ramana above all other Masters. He is a Jnani of impeccable pedigree, and exponent of Self Enquiry, and He slays my doubting, questioning mind with the spear of a Mother's love, and sets a fire of devotion ablaze in my heart. Eschewing words and explanation He leads me to the core of Silence within, and we meet there in perfect fusion. There are not words for This, there can never be...

I sit there for half an hour, before He rises to go. And I sit on afterwards in that place, unable to find my feet, unwilling to leave, holding Arunachala steady in my view. Touched by Grace a sigh of Surrender that comes from my heart is beautiful and lingers on.

Later that day I find myself at Ganeshan's house again, sitting in Satsang with the others. At the end he comes up and apologises for having failed to get the message through to me. Mystified and disorientated I look blank, so he adds: "It was a message to tell you not to come to morning Satsang today, but to go to Nanna Garu instead"

"Thank you, I received in anyway, Geneshanji." I reply, and say no more... How did he know?

Archival Courtesy: Baby garu, Hyderabad