

TV SERIALS:
**Movie Moghuls
Move In**

MARCH 7-21, 1986

Rs 4.00

Bombay

The City Magazine

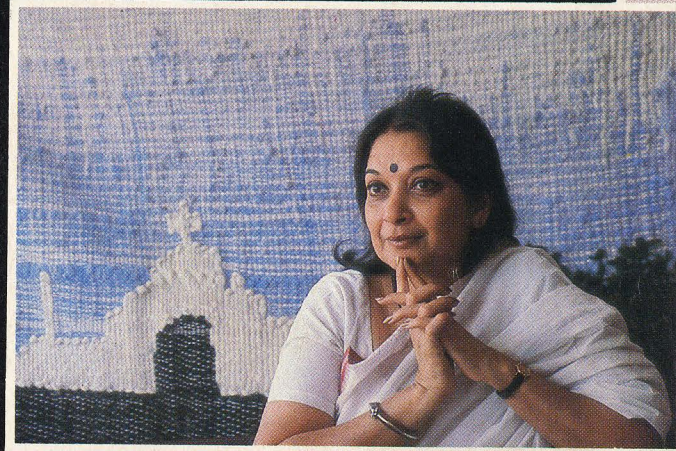
••
LAND'S END:
Five-Star War

••
MUSLIM DIVORCE BILL '86:
Whom Will It Protect?

••
LEASING:
No Holds Barred

MONIKA CORREA:

Weaving Landscapes

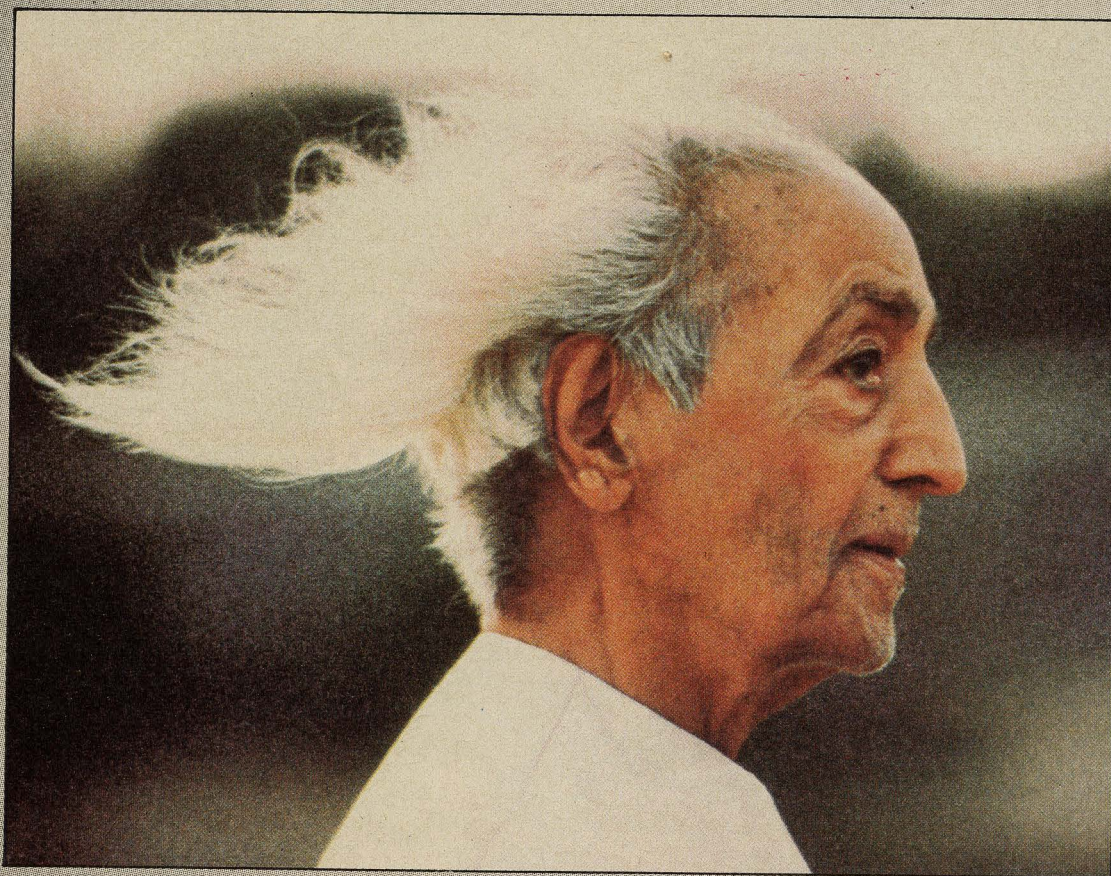


DIARY:

The Last Walk

*Asit Chandmal's
account of
J. Krishnamurti's
last days*





J. KRISHNAMURTI

The Last Walk

For the first time in almost 40 years, J. Krishnamurti did not visit Bombay this February. He was suddenly taken ill in Madras in January and flew straight to California where he died on February 17. In this, the first full eyewitness account of the unconventional philosopher's last days in Madras and California, Asit Chandmal—author of *One Thousand Moons: Krishnamurti at Eighty-Five* and a trustee of the Krishnamurti Foundation (India)—offers valuable insight into a mind that remained young till the end.

Chandmal, who has known 'Krishnaji' since childhood, reveals in this vivid, moving and very personal account that the sage lived and died as he spoke—simply and directly.

●●
I SEE him now, stepping out of the portals of Vasant Vihar in Madras, walking with his nephew Narayan, two proud Brahmins, one 90 the other 60, looking decades younger, dressed in the clothes of ancient India, striding towards the platform under the lit tree, awaited by thousands.

He climbs slowly onto the cloth-covered platform, and sits in meditation, alone, as if on the lonely high mountain where a small stream is perpetually being born as the Ganga.

Then he speaks.

"Something entered me," he tells me later that evening. "Something happened to me."

He speaks of the birth and beginning of all energy, the perception of the path into the source of all creation. At the end of an hour, he sits in silence. A child walks up with a flower. He turns and smiles and takes the white champak flower.

The child smiles. The sermon ends with the silence and the smile.

He has said it is the last talk.

●●
AMONG THE lasting images is that of my aunts and cousins weeping silently in the second row of chairs, while my nieces and daughters sit upon the ground, the sad stories of the death of kings on their faces.

It is the evening of the 4th day of January, 1986. The body has six more weeks to die.

●●
ON THE evening before the last talk on impulse, my 18-year-old daughter, Clea flew in from Singapore to see him. She has not met him since she was 13 years old, a student at Rishi Valley. We go to see him in the morning. As we enter his room he sits up in bed to talk to her. We talk about molecular biology, and genetics, and what will happen if the computer and these other technologies meet and combine and grow. What will happen to the human brain?

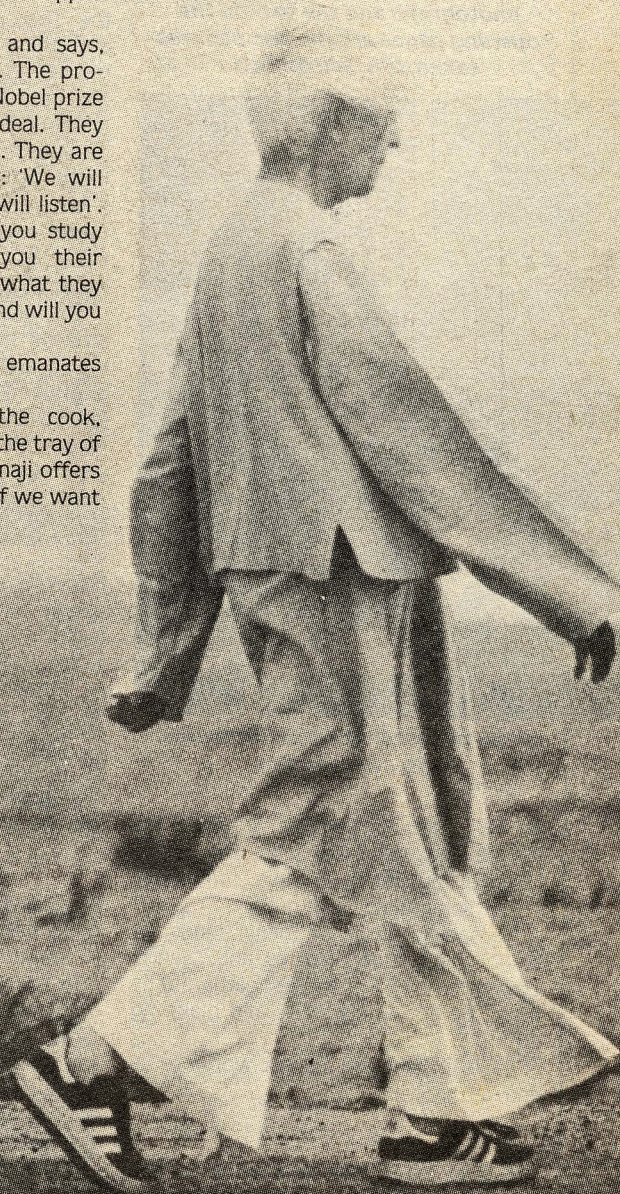
And then he turns to her and says, "You are going to Cambridge. The professors there are very clever, Nobel prize winners, all knowing a great deal. They know much more than you do. They are the authorities. They will say: 'We will teach, we will speak, and you will listen'. What will you do? How will you study with men who dictate to you their findings, and tell you to learn what they teach? With what quality of mind will you meet such minds?"

An extraordinary energy emanates from him.

Just then Parameshwar, the cook, enters with breakfast. He puts the tray of idli and ghee on the bed. Krishnaji offers us some of the food, and asks if we want tea or coffee.

When Parameshwar leaves I repeat his last question to him. He does not seem to understand. My daughter tells me not to press it. Later she said, "He is two different people, the teacher and the man." She felt he had no memory of the conversation we had just prior to Parameshwar entering the room.

But that evening, halfway during the last talk, he smiles at her sitting on the ground in front of him, and talks about genetics and the computer coming together, and its impact on the human brain. "What will happen to you then?" he asks the audience.





On Adyar beach with Radha Bernier: walking for the last time. This photograph and the two on the opening pages are the last pictures taken of Krishnamurti



At Vasant Vihar, Madras: the teacher gives his last talk

●● ON THE days that follow he meets his friends and associates from the Krishnamurti Foundation in India, sometimes alone, sometimes in a group.

He speaks to us of many things, of schools and study centres and silence. Towards the end of the last gathering he says, "Be absolutely alert, and make no effort."

I ask if these are his last words to us and he smiles.

●● THOUGH HE is weak and losing weight, and has his meals in bed, he goes for a walk every evening. Every evening it is

the same walk.

He drives from Vasant Vihar to Adyar, through the grounds of the Theosophical Society, until he reaches Radha Burnier's house on the sea. She is the president of the society, an office she won in election against her aunt Rukmini Devi Arundale.

He walks on the beach where he was "discovered", found and adopted and initiated by the sea at Adyar, 75 years ago, when Halley's comet last entered the orbit which would carry it towards the sun.

●● WHEN HE was 34, he had walked out of the Theosophical Society, and rejected everything that had been built for him, renounced everything that had been given to him, with the words, "Truth is a pathless land...if you follow someone you cease to follow truth." He had renounced more than any man since the Buddha ("Renunciation is intoxication") and yet Radha was a friend, and perhaps something at the end drew him to his beginning.

On one of those last evenings he stopped by at Rukmini Devi Arundale's house, and they spoke together. She was a great Theosophist like her husband, and Krishnaji had come to a parting of ways with them, so when they met it was after half a century. Rukmini too had six more weeks to live.

●● HE HAS been talking about his death openly and freely. He tells me one evening, "Dr Deutsch will examine me a week after I reach California. If he says no more travel, no more talks, then it's all over. The body will die in four weeks."

Then he asks, "What are you going to do with your life, sir? If you have touched the other, and are not anchored in it, you will go to pieces."

●● AT 5.30 in the evening of the 10th day of January he goes for his last walk. He is to leave for California at midnight.

As usual, he walks through the garden of Radha's house, through the walled gate, opening and closing it carefully, and turns right along the beach. There are boats and boys on the beach, darkened by the sea and sky. As he strides along the shore he is silent.

He holds Radha's hand as he walks, reaches out and touches Nandini Mehta on the shoulder, resting his hand on her

as he walks, then turns around, and walks past Radha's house to the other end of the beach, where the broken bridge ends, and the Adyar river becomes the Bay of Bengal (less than two months later, his ashes are to be scattered here). He stands silently, looking at sea and sky. He is completely alone. Then he turns and faces each direction, and becomes the silence, the sea and the sky.

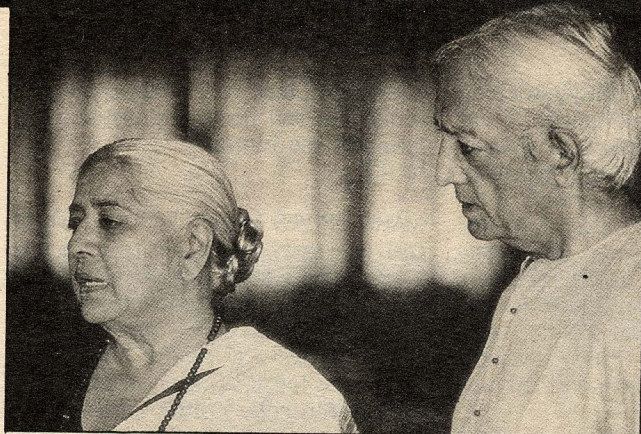
He turns and starts walking towards Radha's house. He lets everyone precede him. His hair streams behind him, like a comet's trail.

We reach the house and he lets everyone pass through the gate. He stands aside. When he is alone he once again faces each direction for a few moments. He sees the sand, the sea, and the sky, and that is his farewell.

●● THAT NIGHT, at midnight, he comes down the circular stairs from his room on the first floor, and his old associates are standing in a half circle to say goodbye. He greets each one of them, and at the last, Pupul Jayakar, whom he asks jauntily, "How do I look Pupul?" and she replies, "Very young."

I meet him on the plane. He is wearing a grey Huntsman jacket, dark grey trousers, and a maroon scarf. The plane takes off just after midnight, and Krishnaji leaves India for the last time, not far from the place where he was born, just after midnight, 90 years ago.

●● AT 4 AM on January 24, I phoned Dr Parchure from Singapore. He had just returned from the hospital, and told me that Krishnaji was in intensive care. Though Krishnaji had always said that he did not want to go to hospital when he was dying, they had had no choice. Krishnaji was in great pain. The doctor said the he could not treat him without knowing the cause, and the tests could only be done in hospital. He was admitted to Santa Paula Memorial Hospital on January 22. I read later in the doctor's report that an ultrasound test had earlier revealed a 3 cm mass in the right lobe of the liver and within a week it had grown to 8 cm. A needle biopsy was unsuccessfully attempted, and then serologies (involving the application of monoclonal antibodies) revealed cancer of the pancreas which had spread to the liver. After consultation with a top oncologist it was felt that no further diagnostic tests were



Krishnamurti and Pupul Jayakar: discussing Foundation matters in Bombay



With Mary Lutyens: lunching in London with his biographer

necessary. Krishnaji was told that there was no chance of recovery. He asked for and was given all the facts. He was discharged on January 30, since he wanted to leave the hospital and return to Pine Cottage at Ojai.

•••
MY AUNT Pupul Jayakar, her daughter Radhika Herzberger, the Director of Rishi Valley School, and I travel together from Delhi via Amsterdam to Los Angeles, reaching Ojai on the evening of January 31. Professor Krishna, the head of the Rajghat educational institutions has left a day earlier, and Mahesh Saxena, the secretary of the Foundation in India is to come as soon as he gets a passport and visa.

Pupul is travelling Business Class, while we are on excursion tickets. Radhi and I carry a silver urn with us. There is a vacant seat next to us, and the urn rests on it. We buy the Amsterdam-LA-Amsterdam tickets at Schipol airport. Since it is an excursion fare, we have to specify the return date. Radhi and I look at each other, knowing fully the implications of giving a date. Finally, we decide on February 16.

On this flight to Los Angeles too there is a vacant seat next to us and Radhi looks after the empty urn while I sleep.

The next morning, on February 1, Pupul, Radhi and I go to see Krishnaji at Pine Cottage. He is lying in bed, and though he greets each one of us individually for a few moments, he hardly recognizes us. His attention span is a few seconds. His eyes close after each greeting. I stand aside in a state of deep shock. Was this the man I had walked with at Adyar three weeks earlier?

•••
THE NEXT day he is much better and is

able to talk for a few minutes at a time to many of his close associates. Mary Lutyens, the daughter of the architect of New Delhi, and other members of the English Trust have also flown in, and all of us lunch together everyday at Arya Vihar, a few hundred yards from Pine Cottage.

And so the days pass. Some see him, some don't. Some leave, some remain. He speaks to some, he is silent with others.

He asks me, "What are you anchored in, sir?"

After a moments hesitation, I answer, "In you, sir."

"I'm gone," he replies.

•••
THE DOCTORS are unable to say how long the body will live. It is unpredictable, it could be a matter of a few weeks or a few days. Not a few months.

One afternoon he asks to be taken outside the cottage. He is carried out and sits silently under the pepper tree where he had his first experience of enlightenment in 1922. He asks to be left alone.

Then he says: "Take me a little further so that I can see the hills." This is done. He again asks to be left alone. There are groves of orange trees around him, with many oranges and the fragrance of their white blossoms.

He bows his head slowly to the sky and the hills.

•••
ON WEDNESDAY, February 12, Halley's comet has circled the sun, and is on its journey away from the sun. Pupul phones that Krishnaji has been haemorrhaging. A violent storm comes from the Pacific Ocean. The Ojai Valley and the roads leading up to it are lashed with unprecedented rain for two days. Mudslides block the roads leading to the

valley, there is danger of total isolation at the far end of the valley where Pine Cottage is situated, some homes are evacuated, and television crews are seen in Ojai filming the deluge.

The storm passes on Friday, February 14.

I speak to Krishnaji that day. I say, "All your life you have helped others, you have been concerned about others. You have helped me all my life. May I ask you, if it is at all possible, can I help you? I am not talking about the body, that is being looked after, I am asking how can I, how can we, help you?"

He listens with his eyes closed. He opens them, smiles and says very seriously, "Don't let anyone spoil the teaching."

Then he closes his eyes again.

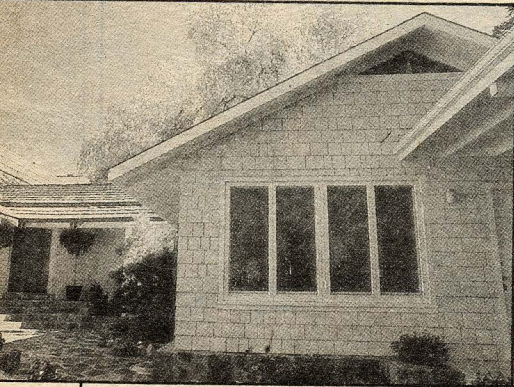
He later calls to see me and asks about my visit to Silicon Valley. What is the latest in computers? Are the Russians spying? Are the Japanese catching up? He listens very intently and I am (and perhaps he's too), momentarily back in Rishi Valley, and he is the Krishnaji I know, engaging in dialogue and discussion.

•••
ON FEBRUARY 16, he is in great pain. I hear his pain when I go to Pine Cottage at 11 in the morning. When there is respite from the pain I go into his room and stand at the foot of his bed. He recognizes me and holds out his right hand, and beckons me to come nearer. He holds my hand and his grip is strong. He asks, "Are you all right? Are you comfortable? Are you all right?" I say, "Yes," and he closes his eyes.

I leave the room.

•••
THAT NIGHT I cannot sleep though I am exhausted. At eleven o'clock the

ASIT CHANDMAL



**Pine Cottage, Ojai, California: where
Krishnamurti died**

atmosphere becomes frightening in my room. The fear persists. I want to be with someone.

I force myself to sleep. An hour later I am woken up by my hostess. "Krishnaji has just died." I am disoriented and for a moment do not know where I am and what she is saying. She repeats "Krishnaji has died."

●●
I JUMP out of bed, dress quickly, and just then Mark Lee comes to pick me up. Mark, a very close associate, had specifically been entrusted by Krishnaji to bathe his body after death ("I have always been a very clean man, wrap it in a cloth, I have no nationality") and to cremate his body without any ritual, rite or ceremony whatsoever.

Mark asks me for a dark tie. I give him a black silk Charvet tie which Krishnaji had given me years earlier. I grab a pair of socks, and see the initials JK on them. He has always given his material possessions (mainly clothes) to others. In the few weeks before his death he had virtually given away all his clothes, both Indian and Western, to some members of the three foundations.

When we arrive 15 minutes later at Pine Cottage, Krishnaji is already bathed and wrapped in a simple white cloth, with a pink and grey blanket up to his chest. His face is unlined, peaceful, beautiful, with a faint smile.

Dr Deutsch had been with him when he died at 10 minutes past the midnight of the 16th (or 0.10 am on February 17). He had not been in any pain since about 8.30 pm when he had fallen into a deep sleep.

I cannot help kneeling at his feet when I see his body (I have never in my life been able to prostrate myself before

anything or anybody, but this time it is an inevitable and natural movement). There are two or three others alternately keeping vigil in the room. Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* is by his bedside, and *Palgrave's Golden Treasury*, the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, *Italo Calvino's stories*, *The Berlitz Dictionary of Italian*, *Alphonse Daudet's stories* and *Gustave Dore*. Books in English, Italian and French. His Patek Philippe timepiece with an ancient Greek coin on a chain on the table.

I make calls to India to break the news.

●●
THE UNDERTAKERS are to take the body at eight in the morning. A few minutes before that I pluck a white camellia from a bush in the porch outside the room where Krishnaji's body lies. I also pick up a camellia which lay on the floor, because he had once asked me while walking, 30 years ago, "Have you ever picked up a fallen flower from a dark lane?" and had shown me the flower he had just picked up.

I put the fresh flower at his feet. I do not think it is a rite or ritual. The flower is from all of us. I go out to put the flower in a glass of water and keep it on a table in the room.

I return to find the face wrapped. The face that has taken centuries to refine, and who knows what otherness to make divine, that face would not be seen again.

●●
THE UNDERTAKERS come. The body is put in a brown cardboard box which is then closed. It is 8.10 am. The body is carried through the porch on a trolley to the waiting station wagon under the pepper tree. It is a sunless sky.

We watch in silence. A great flock of hundreds of grey geese fly East in a perfect V formation over the body in the station wagon under the pepper tree. There are three cars which follow the station wagon for almost an hour to the Ivy Lawn Cemetery at Ventura. The crematorium is besides the Pacific Ocean.

The blue steel door of the cremation oven is raised. We examine it to see that it is clean, that there are no other ashes in it. Then the box with the body is slid into the oven, the door closes and the flames are started. It is 9.10 am.

At 11.10 am the attendant fills the silver urn we had brought from India with the ashes. Carrying the urn we step

outside. At that very instant, the sun comes out and floods the urn and the lawns of the cemetery.

●●
MARK DRIVES Mahesh and me back to Ojai. I am carrying the urn in my lap. It is warm, almost alive, like an animal. It is like that for an hour, before the warmth slowly gives out, as we reach Ojai.

The ashes are divided into three urns—one for America, one for England, and one for India. "Scatter the ashes. Let no one tread on them. Grow trees over them. Let it be anonymous."

Ojai Valley awoke to the news that morning, and the news spreads gently. There are no crowds, not even groups of people, only the silent separate mourning of deeply affected human beings.

●●
MAHESH AND I fly from LA to Delhi on the evening of the 19th. We change planes at Amsterdam reaching Delhi on the 21st morning. On both flights, there is a seat vacant next to Mahesh where he keeps the urn.

Pupul receives the ashes at the foot of the plane. She places a rose on the urn, takes it from us gently, and drives straight to her house at 11 Safdarjung Road, where Krishnaji stayed when in New Delhi. When she steps out of the car there is a sudden and unexpected down-pour, a hailstorm which drenches my aunts and cousins as they carry the urn to the foot of a great tree on the lawn, where Krishnaji once gave a discourse. The urn is surrounded by flowers. The lawn is white with the hail stones for a moment. Just then the sun also rises. Standing there I feel the sacred. "If there are only five people who will listen, who will live, who have their faces turned to eternity, it will be sufficient".

●●
I CANNOT write anymore. I have been writing since five in the morning for six hours, writing on the dining table in Sterling Apartments, where he used to sit and eat—there was so much laughter. I sit on the chair opposite his. He once told me, when a great friend of his had died, "When someone dies, there are one or two persons he or she may want to see. They will only come back to a house where there is no violence, where there is love."

Time does not pass, only you and I do.