

MARK EDWARDS

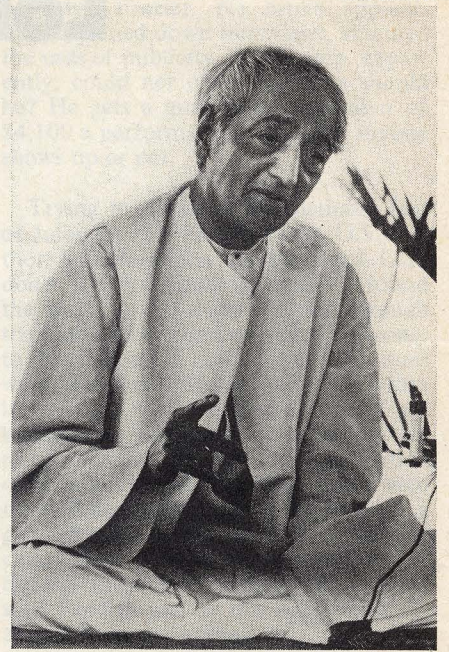
## The Durable Avatar

George Bernard Shaw once called him the most beautiful human being he had ever seen. Aldous Huxley said that listening to him was like listening to "a discourse of the Buddha." For two decades the ascetically slim, darkly handsome young mystic from India was virtually considered to be a new Messiah by members of the Order of the Star in the East, the society built around him. Then suddenly in 1929, Jiddu Krishnamurti dissolved the order and repudiated the very idea of followers. "Truth is a pathless land," he said. "And you cannot approach it by any religion, any sect. You must look within yourselves for the incorruptibility of the self. My only concern is to set men absolutely, unconditionally free."

In the past 42 years, Krishnamurti has traveled the world expounding his message in countless lectures, interviews and books. At 76, white-haired and still handsome, he remains insistent that freedom precludes a Krishnamurti "philosophy" or Krishnamurti "followers." Still, the followers persist. The dissolved sect has been replaced by even more substantial evidence of his influence: Krishnamurti foundations in India, England, the U.S. and Puerto Rico, Krishnamurti schools in England and India. The foundations sell thousands of his tapes, records and books a year. Harper & Row has published four fast-selling collections of Krishnamurti's thoughts in the past two years. And while he was once the darling of the solid and middle-aged, he has now been adopted by the young. At four packed lectures in New York City's Town Hall recently, there was only a handful of the aged faithful in the college-age audiences.

**Psychological Crisis.** Krishnamurti's lectures, like his books, are all variations on his central theme: the current world crisis is psychological—the basic problem is how to achieve the "right relationship" between human beings. The ultimate answer, says Krishnamurti, is to see things as they really are, unclouded by the deceptions of self-concern. To accomplish this, one must be "empty" of all preconceptions and all teachers, even religious ones: "Discard all theologies and all belief . . . The whole principle that someone else knows and you do not know, that the one who knows is going to teach you." Though he disowns the title, Krishnamurti is a guru whose message would end all gurus.

He was not always so disdainful of authoritarian belief. As a poor Brahman in India, he was rigidly versed in orthodox Hindu observance. His father was not only a devout Brahman but an ardent Theosophist as well. When Krishnamurti was only 14 and already a budding mystic, he came to the attention of Annie Besant, onetime intimate of



JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI IN INDIA

*The search is the solution.*

Shaw and then head of the Theosophical Society.\* She adopted the young Indian and proclaimed him the incarnation, or avatar, of the "World Teacher," the divine spirit that in Hindu mythology periodically takes human form (as in Buddha) to lead men to truth. She sent him to Oxford for his education and formed around him the Order of the Star in the East. When Krishnamurti dissolved it, the order boasted 100,000 members.

**World Series.** Today Krishnamurti's life-style remains that of a typical Eastern mystic. He practices yoga, abstains from alcohol and tobacco, and dines on vegetables. But he hardly fits the outward image of the typical guru. In the U.S., he lectures while seated in a chair, impeccably dressed in Western-style clothes. (In India he may wear the traditional white robe and sit cross-legged in a yoga position to speak, but he refuses to pose that way for Western photographers.) He scandalized European observers in the '20s by his unabashed fondness for tennis, golf and the theater. Once he confessed a strong desire to see a World Series game.

Critics still complain of the apparent contradictions in Krishnamurti—the leader who wants no followers, the mystic who wants revolutionary change but decries political reform. His answer: "The truly religious person is not concerned with reform. He is seeking what is true, and that very search has a transforming effect on society."

\* Years later when Shaw met Krishnamurti, he asked how Mrs. Besant was faring. "Very well," replied the mystic. "But at her great age she cannot think consecutively." Whispered Shaw: "She never could."

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