

The background is a warm, golden-yellow color. It features a large, central circular motif containing a stylized lotus flower with multiple layers of petals. The lotus is rendered in a light yellow outline. Behind the lotus, there are faint, radiating lines. Surrounding the central circle is a wide, decorative border. This border consists of a repeating pattern of small, stylized floral and leaf motifs. The outermost edge of the border is a scalloped, decorative line. The overall aesthetic is traditional and elegant.

introduction

S. K. Mullarpattan was Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj’s translator for the longest time, and was with him right up till Maharaj’s passing away in 1981. I came to know Mullarpattan some years back and visited him off and on. It was enjoyable listening to ‘Uncle’ Mullarpattan’s stories and anecdotes of what transpired at Maharaj’s satsangs. He would also regale me with stories of Swami Nityananda of Ganeshpuri, Sant Jnyaneshwar and various masters, as well as with anecdotes from Indian mythology.

On a visit to him on 16th January 2011, I asked if I could view his photo album once again – the one which had photographs of Maharaj. It was always a joy viewing this album. One got a sense of what being with Maharaj must have been like. I was leafing through its pages, carefully turning the trace paper that covered the photographs and viewing the sepia-toned images that had been meticulously pasted in a leather-bound album, impeccably preserved over the decades.



I told him that it would be lovely to share this with fans of Maharaj – they would be delighted to see it. Knowing what his reply would be, I pre-empted it by adding, “Even though Maharaj used to say ‘you are not the body’.” He immediately retorted, “Exactly!” “It’s easy for you to say this,” I remarked. “Firstly, you had the opportunity to sit with Maharaj all those years. Secondly, you have this wonderful picture album that has been with you for over thirty years, which you can keep looking at whenever you want. Thirdly, there

are so many youngsters in their twenties and thirties who have been deeply impacted by Maharaj's teaching but, quite naturally, did not get an opportunity to be with him. In fact, some of them keep asking me if there are any pictures other than those on the internet."

My fourth point was one that I did not voice - he had a very big photo print of Maharaj, beautifully framed and hanging on the wall above his bed! In fact, Maharaj himself had pictures of various sages on the walls of his attic.

I also mentioned that there were many pictorial books on Advaita masters such as Sri Ramana Maharshi - some beautifully produced. Besides, the Maharshi had also said that the body of an enlightened being was like the temple of God. The message of these two contemporary Advaita masters was similar. Ramesh Balsekar, in one of his lighter moods, would narrate this amusing incident: When someone asked Maharaj if there was any difference between his teaching and that of Sri Ramana, he answered that, "The only difference between the two of us is that I'm slightly better dressed!"



After going through the album I closed it, put it back in its cardboard casing and handed it to Mullarpattan, but he said, "Keep it... I am going to be ninety-five years old in April. What use do I have for it now? Take whatever pictures you like from it... do what you like."

And so, here is this photo album for you to leaf through as well, along with other photos that have been contributed for this book. Preceding the photo gallery are

worthy tributes from various contemporary masters in India and across the world, who have been impacted by Maharaj's teaching. They reaffirm the universality of his message, as well as its relevance even today.

I was recently on holiday and saw a beautiful photo frame in a furniture shop, which I wished to purchase. My friend who was accompanying me asked where I planned to hang the frame and what picture would I put in it. I told her that I would find a beautiful picture of Maharaj, put it in this frame, and place it in the guest room.

"Beautiful picture of Maharaj? You want to scare your guests away?!" she exclaimed. We both had quite a hearty laugh on that. This reminded me of my own response when a friend, who is also passionate about Maharaj, said that he wanted a tattoo of the sage. I had jokingly remarked, "It won't be a pretty one for sure!" For, Maharaj had deeply penetrating eyes which could look quite fierce at times, and appear rather daunting to some.

G. K. Chesterton said, "There is a road from the eye to heart that does not go through the intellect." And that's where Maharaj's teaching goes - to the heart.

All said and done, in the duality that is the very nature of the manifestation, the form of the Guru is revered. Here is a presentation of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj in his various moods. We are grateful to Mullarpattan and all who contributed photographs for helping us bring this to Maharaj's devotees the world over.

Gautam Sachdeva  
January, 2012

tributes to  
maharaj



“When I see I am nothing, that is wisdom. When I see I am everything, that is love. My life is a movement between these two.” – Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

In the humble attic room of a chawl at Khetwadi in Girgaum, Mumbai, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1981) lived the life of a simple sage. Rich or poor, everyone who came to visit him from far and near was made welcome at the daily talks he gave on Advaita in Marathi.



Maharaj, who had met his guru Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj in 1933, said, “My Guru ordered me to attend to the sense ‘I Am’ and to give attention to nothing else. I just obeyed...” He started taking disciples in 1951, only after a personal revelation from his guru. With his direct and minimalistic explanation of non-duality, Maharaj is considered one of the foremost exponents of Advaita.

In 1973, Maurice Frydman translated the Marathi talks into English in the book *I Am That*, which helped spread Maharaj’s teachings among spiritual seekers in India and across the globe. Many spiritual luminaries and well-known writers have acknowledged the impact his words have had on their lives. Some of them have come together to pay homage to him through their earnest passages here, while others have graciously consented to share their collection of Maharaj’s photographs with you in this pictorial tribute.



Whatever I have known about Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj strengthens my conviction that in life there is nothing greater than Self-knowledge and no one greater than a person who knows and abides in it. This abidance was very natural for Sri Maharaj. He will ever stand tall as a lighthouse in the Ocean of Samsar to guide the spiritual seekers safely to the shores of liberation.

- Swami Tejomayananda

Chairman and spiritual head of Chinmaya Mission worldwide,  
and one of the foremost disciples of Swami Chinmayananda.



The book *I Am That - Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*, translated from the Marathi tape recordings by Maurice Frydman, has been one of the great publishing successes in the field of Advaita literature. It has made Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj renowned and world famous as a great spiritual master, not only in India but also in the West.

Frydman's excellent translation and superb editing translates and expresses Maharaj's words and message with remarkable clarity, and makes sure that the question and answer sessions he transcribed were concise, easy to read and comprehend. Nisargadatta's great contribution was to stress the essential I AM as a key to understanding the necessary sadhana for Self-realization. Other sages, such as Ramana Maharshi, have referred to I AM as a useful synonym for the Self, but Maharaj stressed this principle over and over again so emphatically, that it reduced his spiritual practice to a practical simplicity easily assimilated by all.

To feel 'I AM here, now, alive in the present moment' is a very powerful affirmation which immediately brings the earnest aspirant to the recognition of his sheer Existence, here and now, in the present moment. I AM is perhaps more powerful in summoning the experience of essential Consciousness-Awareness than the term Self with its built-in ambiguity of the smaller self.

Westerners, in particular, and many Indians were immediately able to appreciate the central core of the Advaita teaching and possess a simple practice which was rewarding and easily accessible to all.



Here are some extracts, out of very many, from his Talks which illustrate the power of the term I AM, which he repeated over and over again:

“The ‘I am’ comes first, it’s ever present, ever available; refuse all thoughts except ‘I am’, stay there.”

“Consistently and with perseverance separate the ‘I am’ from ‘this’ or ‘that’, just keep in mind the feeling ‘I am’.”

“Only the ‘I am’ is certain, it’s impersonal, all knowledge stems from it, it’s the root, hold on to it and let all else go.”

This continuous stressing of the essential I AM was and is, in my view, the reason for his popularity and his greatest contribution of making Advaita Vedanta easily accessible to one and all, along with a practice that, if zealously applied, would eventually lead to Liberation.

– Alan Jacobs  
President, Ramana Maharshi Foundation UK



The life and teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj have been a source of supreme assurance to so many of us who were drawn to self-inquiry in different ways. His words have a unique flavour and his responses to questions have a beauty and charm that have no parallel. His major work *I Am That* is a book that is worth its weight in gold.

Apart from reconfirming the revelations of the Vedanta, which declare a transcendental truth about the existence of all of us, Sri Maharaj addresses a large number of psychological issues that confront us. The light he throws on phenomena like attachment, jealousy and fear is so wonderful that we are left with a sense of new hope. We feel, “Yes, we can break the shackles of our bondage; we can set ourselves free.”

There is the power of truth along with a sense of humour in his utterances. For example, he says, “You are drenched for it is raining hard (in your world). It is always fine weather in my world.”<sup>1</sup> The leap from the relative to the Absolute is expressed in such a tasteful manner. We have the metaphor of the snake upon the rope in Vedanta texts. The snake, which is a mental projection, causes much fear in the onlookers and the whole town talks about it. The rope, which is the underlying truth, is silent and nobody would bother about it. Our egoistic life is after all *much ado about nothing*, to draw an expression from Shakespeare. A master like Sri Maharaj watches us with much amusement, recognising all the time that these folks have no real problems. His teachings are indeed an extremely valuable legacy he has left behind. Generations to come will benefit from the insights Sri Maharaj offers and will marvel at the directness of his approach.