

WHY I FINALLY STARTED WRITING



Remember that joke: “A suitcase without a handle: too heavy to carry, too precious to throw away”?

That’s how it is with my stories.

I’m overflowing with them.

Uninvented, honestly lived, real.

Stories without additives, “fertilizers,” or “pesticides.”

All organic!

They are like a Gypsy patchwork quilt: whatever was at hand got sewn together.

Golden, purple, or faded Indian patches are stitched with silk onto the heavy squares of the Soviet period.

Beside them are the neat grey-beige squares of the German period, green like the slopes of the Alps in summer, with perfectly straight corners.

Then come the neatly ironed blue-and-yellow strips of Ukrainian *nezalezhnist* (independence)...

But everywhere, dominating and mesmerizing, are the Indian patches — colorful, with worn-off gilding and a patina of age, or gaudy, kitschy and cheap; battered, coated with dust and dirt, sticky with melted sugar.

I just can't simply take all this and throw it away.

I want to — and it's time to — unload my memory, mind, and soul.

And perhaps these pieces of my life sewn together, this patchwork "quilt," may still be of use to someone, may still keep someone warm.

My grandfather had an old Soviet woolen blanket with the word "FEET" woven into one end. As a child, I wondered, "Why?" Apparently, it was assumed that people went for years without washing their feet, so it was especially important not to mix up the ends of the blanket.

There is no word "feet" woven anywhere on this patchwork quilt of mine, so it can be turned around and looked at from either end, like a kaleidoscope.

Each time, the pattern will look a little different.

Yes, it is like a kaleidoscope.

Life-kaleidoscope.

THE BEGINNING

I've had many "beginnings" in my life.

But now I want to begin with the brightest one.

It was the day and hour when India appeared in my life, still without a clear shape or a name, like the distant sound of a flute.

MY India.

The India it became for me over the years, filtered through my entire being; the India I made for myself, painted, imagined, invented — and lived.

India, like the god Vishnu, has many faces.

It all depends on what you are looking for: the exotic, yoga, tantra, mantra, wisdom, antiquity, dirt, unsanitary conditions, or diarrhea...

The last one will find you all by itself.

I came to India to become **"e n l i g h t e n e d."**

That is, to become enlightened and thereby put an end to all of the above at once.

But the desire to become enlightened didn't simply appear out of nowhere.

It had been ripening for a long time, still without a name, absorbing everything that was called "my childhood," youth, school, family, education, my invincible Motherland choking on the "highest stage of socialism," the Commies and "public opinion," collective farms, heroic "battles for the harvest," and yet another round of «victories».

Public opinion was embodied by the all-knowing retired women from the neighborhood, sitting on the bench right outside my apartment building around the clock.

You'd walk past them — and for another fifteen minutes you'd still be shivering and shaking while this "public opinion" called out its verdict after you.

Oh, thank you, my dears — all of you — for the motivation!

India appeared on my doorstep just when I had already begun to wonder, “Why not hang myself?”

It was a time when the atmosphere in the country had become as heavy as the oval of Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev’s face.

The energy in which we were expected to rejoice over “the Five-Year Plan in four years” had thickened to such an unbreathable density that you could chew it.

I was living then in my first apartment, which I had been given as a young professional after the woman who had lived there before me hanged herself. Her body was found only several weeks later, when the neighbors noticed the smell.

The apartment — a state-owned studio allocated through my workplace — had stood empty for a long time because no one wanted to live there..

But then I came along — a freshly minted artist, a young professional, completely unaware of the surreal and tragic past of the place.

And, as they say, **“Here are the keys — all yours!”**

There was a constant inspiration in that apartment to put your head in a noose.

And that was precisely when India knocked on my door — or rather, rang the bell.

Acquaintances rarely wandered into my little **“noose apartment.”**

But one evening there came a horrible, sharp ring of the doorbell, far too loud for that little hole.

An acquaintance had come and brought a strange character with him.

The fellow was dark-skinned, bearded and bald, and one of his eyes seemed periodically to **“peer into the subconscious”** — in other words, he was cross-eyed.

He had brought with him the stitched-together pages of a book.

With him, an exquisite, magnificent, radiant, bearded Guru entered my life — Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh.

And later — Osho.

Osho seeped into my life through the rusted “Iron Curtain” with which my Red-Banner Motherland had surrounded itself, in the form of a samizdat book (an unofficial underground publication) — a Russian translation from the English — titled *The White Lotus*.

The translator was unknown, but as I discovered later, when I could already speak and read English, the translation was a good one.

Reading *The White Lotus* was a very unusual experience.

The references to Buddha and his teaching stirred in me a strange, inexplicable nostalgia.

A strange and acute feeling that I had known all of this before, but for some reason had forgotten it.

It even seemed as though someone had deliberately taken my memory away from me.

As I read, I was overwhelmed by a feeling of joy, love, and a longing I had never known before.

Tears would often well up in my eyes, and I would close them and quietly cry.

They were tears like those that come when you suddenly meet someone dear to you whom you had long since given up hope of ever seeing again.

Or when, at the edge of an abyss, someone reaches out a hand to help you.

The meeting had taken place!

From then on, India — and Osho within it — was present in my life like a straw I clung to so as not to drown.

Unreachable, distant, mysterious, wise...

Enlightened sages lived there, white elephants, maharajas, peacocks, beautiful women wrapped in saris, their bellies bare, draped in gold, glittering palaces, ashrams, the sounds of sitars and flutes, exotic sweets, and, most importantly — yogis...

Reality turned out to be somewhat different, but no less impressive!

But more about that later.