



I want to stop the Hitler in you: Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev

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The term 'sadguru' means 'true teacher'. If the proof of the teaching is in the following, then Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev is surely the premium brand in the spiritual supermarket. That his more than well-off followers do vote with their wallets is evident from the way his Isha Foundation has grown, from its humble beginnings in Coimbatore, into a multi-million dollar entity with 150 centres worldwide and 250,000 volunteers*.

The mystic is today a regular in the most exclusive circuits of global power, having been a special invitee at the World Economic Forum in Davos, a delegate at the United Nations Millennium Peace Summit, and a member of the New York-based World Council of Religious Leaders. In an exclusive interview, he explains the nature of his work as a spiritual guru.

Excerpts:

How does the environment come in the way of a person connecting with his or her inner self?

The environment doesn't come in the way, actually. Most human beings seek their inner dimensions only when the external world really batters them. Most people don't have the necessary intelligence to look deep within when life is good. Instead, they live frivolous lives. It is my wish that it should not be so. People should search for the most profound aspects of life when everything is well, because that's when you are most capable. So outside adversities don't come in the way. Rather, they assist them in connecting with their inner selves.

Have you noticed geographical or ethnic differences in the kind of spiritual quests that people in different nations and cultures have?

Culturally, different people have taken in different kinds of spiritual garbage into them. What varies is the time it takes to get rid of all that garbage. The more ancient the culture is, the longer it takes usually — to get people out of their old belief systems and assumptions. Physically, mentally, and to some extent, emotionally, human beings may be different from one place to another, but spiritually, there are no different kinds of human beings — there's just one kind.

With the planet heading for an ecological catastrophe, how can spiritual gurus help here?

The planet is not on the verge of a catastrophe, only human beings are. Humans have been battering the planet, so the planet is going to batter them a bit. Human catastrophe could be impending in many ways. But at the same time, human ability to act and correct things cannot be underestimated. But a lot of people will not move unless whipped. I don't wish to whip them, but nature will — it is already beginning to. So when nature whips, suddenly people may act and change a lot of things.

Spiritual gurus tend to redefine all social problems as personal ones — to do with 'inner self' etc — which is not helpful when it comes to fighting social ills.

It is only through inner transformation that you will create a healthy society. In fact, there is no society, society is just a word — there are only individual human beings. If you and me are ill, isn't that what makes a society ill? If you and me are transformed and energised, can a society remain sick?

Is there such a thing as a completely fulfilling relationship or marriage?

Well, there is such a thing as a completely fulfilling life. Fulfillment does not happen to you because of what you have. It happens because of the way you experience what you have. Whether the world happens my way or not, I've determined this: I will always happen the way I want. If you can determine the way you happen, would you keep yourself miserable or blissful?

When I am stuck in a traffic jam for 2 hours, you expect me to be blissful?

Sometimes things may not happen your way. That is so with your spouse, that is so with your friend, that is so with your traffic. But which is a more intelligent way to exist: to be in conscious action, and blissful, or to be in compulsive reaction, and miserable? That's a choice everyone can make.

But isn't it only natural to want things to happen the way you want them to?

Somewhere you have a fancy idea that the whole world should happen your way. You are a tyrant in the making! You are an Adolf Hitler in the making, but fortunately without the necessary capabilities. There are too many tyrants on the planet: they want their wives to be the way they want them, they want their children to be the way they want them — these tyrants cannot exercise their power over a whole nation, so they exercise it over their spouse. So obviously they'll never have a fulfilling 'anything' in their lives. For them, every relationship is a struggle.

It's not that things should happen 'my way' but whatever is the way of justice. Everyone has their own idea of justice. If things work my way, it is justice for me; if it

works your way, it's injustice for me.

That's just mindless relativism. Take the Holocaust. Are there two ways of looking at it — whether it was just or unjust?

Of course, I am not questioning that. All I am saying is this: the Holocaust business and the way you are looking at it, is only because the Germans lost the war. If they had won the war, you would have been very much with Hitler. But because he lost the war, and is a failure, you are now with the Jews. Suppose Hitler had eliminated the Jews, and set up the super-empire he was dreaming of, your idea of justice would have changed completely. In fact, this is exactly what has happened in different ways in different parts of the world — whole cultures have been erased, you know about them, I don't have to tell you — but you don't think of it as a holocaust, do you?

But does this absolve an individual of the moral responsibility to act in the face of social injustice?

It doesn't. But I am asking you, wherever people have done similar things [like the Holocaust] successfully, and they won the wars, and rewrote history the way they wanted, there you are with them, aren't you? What I am saying is, the moment you think somebody should happen the way you want them to, you are a potential Hitler, and I would like to stop you right here, before you become capable like him; before you become organised like him or create a Nazi party around yourself. So you can say that my work is about taking preventive action on all the potential Hitlers.

What is your understanding of politics?

There isn't much to understand there. If you are talking about politicking, it's the expression of the rudimentary human mind. If you're talking about politics as governance, that's a different thing — it's about administration.

I'm talking about politics as a struggle for a more equal society, especially economic equality.

If the rich decide to share, that's a beautiful thing. But when those who don't have anything start talking about sharing, that's an obscenity. It is the poorest of the poor who become communists. So long as only the poor talk about communism, it is not going to work. If communism was embraced by those who have, what a great thing it would have been! The whole world would be an ashram. An ashram is communist, by the way. People don't exist in an ashram by their ability to earn but according to their needs.

Why do otherwise rational, educated people still practise the caste system? Educated, yes, but rational? That's your judgment. 'Rationality' is a qualification you are giving them. Today everybody gets educated, unless they don't have the means. So education is not necessarily an expansion of your consciousness, which involves looking at

life in a larger way. Today education is just a tool for earning money, for employment, to make a living. At least that's how I think 90 per cent of the people look at education. Maybe 10 per cent look at education as a way of enhancing themselves. So being educated and being rational are two different things.

And the caste system?

The caste system came about when there were no formal training centres for any particular profession. So the family was where training and passing on of skills from one generation to the next happened — so a blacksmith's son became a blacksmith, a cobbler's offspring became a cobbler and so on. Over a period of time, we turned differences into discriminations. We started to say that the one who runs the temple is better than the man who runs the school, the one who runs the school is better than the one who runs the blacksmith shop, and so on. So from being a productive system it became an ugly, negative system.

And this is something we do anyway — with colour, creed, even gender —it's not only the caste system. You destroy the caste system; another kind of caste system comes up. Do you think there is no caste system in New York? There is, based on education, for instance — whether you come from this university or that university, or your economic capabilities — all these create their own discriminatory groups.

Why do people change differences into discriminations?

I think it's because every human somewhere is longing to be a little more than what he is. His longing is actually to feel more, but he doesn't know how to enhance himself. So the best thing is to depreciate somebody who is sitting next to him right now. If you are less than me, I am more than you — that is the understanding. We have worked like this for a long time and continue to work like that. But it's time to change it. You can't do that just by stripping off the old caste system. What is needed is to revolutionise the human mind. Otherwise it's not going to change. The caste system will reestablish itself in a thousand different ways.

*The figures are from the Isha Foundation website

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