

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

GSA - 4
India : The Diviners

Marina Hotel
New Delhi
Room 24

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

5 October 1960

Dear Dick:

"You are lucky, Sir; I can tell. Come this way, Sir. Tell past, tell nice future, tell birthday, mother's name, sweetheart's name, all by stars. I have letters; you will see."

His eyes under his yellow turban were warm, frank, coaxing me into the garden of the nearby Imperial Hotel. Swaying blue pin-stripe pockets sagging with mystic papers, he led me to my past and my future and my mother's name. Four other Sikhs followed us, his disciples in the future trade.

"You sit here, Sir; down here, Sir. Pay no money. I can tell you are a good Sahib (pronounced Saab and applied to anybody who is a little more important than somebody else); I will tell you many things. But you must keep all a secret." He said with a throaty voice and swift looks from the corners of his eyes: "Tell no one."

On a white-washed stone I sat, under a big-leafed tree, with the breeze too soft to stir the dappled shadows in the warm dust. The traffic murmured by on Janpath and the brass curio dealer outside the garden sweetly extolled the virtues of his statues and gongs; all was hushed by the imminence of revelation. Squatting before me -- as centuries of astrologers at the feet of kings -- he flicked his come-on card into his book of magic, testimonials, and a star chart, all bound in a Hindi newspaper, and took from his pocket a scrap of paper and a stubby pencil. He wrote quickly, head cocked, and pressed the paper, folded small, into the palm of my right hand, closing my fingers over it. The four puppets watched the play from stones in the wings.

Poising his wand over another piece of paper, he said, "Tell me name of flower. God is my witness," He raised his left hand above his head.

"Rose," I answered. He wrote it down.

"Tell me any number under ten," he said.

"Seven," I answered. He wrote down a 7, then a 6 before it and an 8 after it -- all in a line. He handed me the pencil and commanded,

"Sahib cross out number." I drew a line across the 6. "Cross out another." A mark across the 8 to balance the line. Satisfaction melted his features. I opened the slip of paper that I'd clutched in my hand; written on it were Rose and 7. The puppets nodded.

"I will tell you mother's name and birthday," he said. (Indian friends had told me about the wonders these men performed. Those men in front of the Imperial Hotel will tell you your mother's name. They ask you to write your mother's name on a piece of paper and hold it in your hand; then they write a name on a paper

and it is the same as you have written. They will tell you when is your birthday just after looking at you.) Confident and wise, he took my right hand by its fingers and examined it briefly.

"Sahib has good mind," he intoned, "but not much knowledge. You like money, but not spend on bad things, only for good things. Sahib like women, but never go outside house. Sahib like whiskey, but not drink too much. Sahib nice man to servants." He shifted slightly in the dust and caressed his right mustache. I rocked on my stone.

"I will tell your mother's name and give exactly date your birthday," he said. He opened his secret book, took out a scrap of paper, wrote on it, and put it into the palm of my left hand, closing my fingers over it. Then he gave me another bit of paper and pressed the pencil significantly into my right hand. He told me to write the name of a fruit. Mango, I wrote. Another, he said. I wrote guava. He wanted a third. I wrote chico -- an Indian fruit like a fuzzy, brown lemon. He opened his book and told me to put both pieces inside. I put the fruity slip in, but put the folded slip from my left hand into a pocket. Later I looked at it. It said Lucky Apple. The puppets maintained their silence and the traffic was hushed in the increasing heat. The diviner of my past and my future never batted an eye.

Again he opened his book. "Put money here," he said, "five rupees, ten, anything you like." I put one rupee on a card with squares containing numbers and the names of planets. Was there a flicker of annoyance? "Put finger on number," he said. I put my finger on 5 and Jupiter. A slight "Ah" escaped his lips.

"A man with no hair on head like you," he said, "and another man with mustache." He looked at me enquiringly, but I gave no clue. He wrote the letters J, M and E on my palm.

"Three women like Sahib, but Sahib has eyes for only one. Sahib like lady name begins with J?" I shook my head. "Know lady name with M?" I shook my head. "Sahib have wife?" I nodded. "Memsahib's name begin with E?" I shook my head.

"Sahib going have baby," he said definitely, waggling his yellow turban from right to left in the Indian gesture for yes and positiveness.

"When?" I asked. This could be important.

"Sahib going have baby," he said.

"When?" I asked.

"He's deaf," said the puppet on the left.

"When?" I asked, never taking my eyes from the spaniels in front of me.

"Next year," said my seer.

"When?" I asked.

"Maybe by end 1960." (What a terrible foreigner, stubborn as a bullock and has no money.)

(Hmm. Left home second of August, she wasn't pregnant then; August, September, October, November, December.) I shook my head.

He consulted my palm again. "You live long time," he said. "The government

likes you. You get promotion."

"Which government?" I asked.

"You Air Force?" I shook my head. "You Army?" I said no. He looked at me imploringly and then said happily: "You private."

"When your birthday?" he asked. I told him and then wrote it on my palm as he said to. He studied the scrawl.

"Sahib born under lucky star; you have good period starting now," he decided. "This year Sahib has three B's, building, baby and business." (Strike three, you're out, I thought.) He opened his magic book again to the star card.

"You put money here," he said. I shook my head -- gently, for he was a genial soul -- and started to get up. He reached into a pocket of his flowing vest and pulled out a brown, nut-like bead.

"Take this," he said, "good luck like rosary bead." It was my turn; I pressed the bead into his hand, closing his fingers over it, and murmured with a smile,

"Thanks" -- but you need it worse than I do -- and then I walked away.

Politics, sex, and the weather take a conversational back seat to astrology in India. Although not everyone believes it, many business men and politicians consult astrologers. Aircraft are full on days auspicious for travel and I know of a chief mechanic who refused to begin repairs on an aircraft because the day was not auspicious. India abounds with tales of astrologers' prowess. My acquaintances claim for them accurate predictions of serious motor vehicles accidents, of the deaths of relations, of large inheritances, and one friend told of a mysterious illness cured by following the astrologer's advice to move a cooking fire.

So I was doubtful that I'd seen the best there was in front of the Imperial and went another morning with two American friends into the suburbs of New Delhi to see a man who was reportedly able, though not first class. We sat with this slim, gray-haired man of about 45 on the floor of his small room. He was a teacher by profession, but read stars on the side. At the end of the session he would take no money. Long before that, however, we were convinced of his sincerity because of the uncharitable things he said -- that the wife was unfaithful and that the husband drank too much. (He rarely touched the stuff, but his eyes were red with hay fever that morning.) After their turn came mine.

He asked me to write my name and birth date on his wood-framed slate. He wrote down my wife's name and age. Then he drew a magic square and filled it with criss-cross lines. He wrote numbers in the spaces between the lines. By counting these numbers and adding in certain others derived from our names, ages, and birthdays, he told me about myself. He had me write down these emanations.

My best life stars are from age 42 to 51, he told me, and my bad days were over in December 1959. After reaching 56 I'm to become a God-fearing, pious man, passing my life spiritually until my death at 76. I am, he said, "a man

of tolerant nature, shy and submissive, but very intelligent." I had wished to rise high, but with "the birth of your third child all these ideas were smashed." (Teacher Raj Madan had first calculated that I had two children. When I told him three, his chalk ticked furiously around the slate. The stars still said two children. My third child upset him much more than it -- a he -- did me.) During the rosy years between ages 42 and 51, I'll not be able to save money in spite of my "miserliness and economies." My wife is to suffer during all these years as she has an internal weakness, but I have "patience for this." "Despite all this," he said after tickings and mutterings, "she will entertain your friends nicely."

My wife's parents are not going to have any more children, Madan said. (As they are both over 60 and live in Florida, I knew they'd be relieved to hear this. I wrote them the news.) Our friend added little else worth recounting. Soon everyone graciously said goodbye and we left with our futures neatly tucked in our shirt pockets.

Back at the hotel I got out the telephone book and looked longingly at the advertisement of Pandit Sri Ramesh Chandra Battacharya, M.R.A.S.(Lond)., "India's greatest tantrik astrologer and palmist of international fame." "Despaired persons are strongly advised to test the powers of Panditji" who has "wonderful predictions to solve intricate problems," said the advert. This remarkable man also offers a Bagalamukhi Blessing: "To overcome enemies it is unique. Gets promotion in services and in winning civil and criminal suits and for pleasing higher officials it is unparalleled. Puja (prayer) expenses Ordinary Rs. 9-2, Special Rs. 34-2, Super Special with life-long effects Rs. 184-4."

Sincerely yours,



Granville Austin

Received New York November 21, 1960