

AMMA'S PERSONALITY IN LIGHT OF HER RELATIONSHIP TO GAIL AND TO HER YOUTH

Psychological analysis and reflections

By Dr Jacques Vigne

Psychiatrist, writer on India and psychological spirituality

Summary of the study

February 2014 has been an important date : Gail Tredwell's book was released in October 2013, [Holy Hell](#)¹, has been taken up and partially discussed by some major Indian media including those in Kerala. Large-scale allegations of concealment and lies against Sudhamani, who is promoted by her disciples under the name Amma aka Mata Amritanandamayi, have spread and become consistent. This information has expanded from a confidential circle of well-informed people to the public audience. Gail's challenging questions appeared to be the tip of an iceberg, and internet sites along with blogs widen the range of critical information available. One such website particularly stands out. "Embezzling The World" performs a serious work of investigation, supported by references and internet links. We now have a year of hindsight since Gail's book was published. It is the right time to go deeper into reflection and draw up a summary of the elements that she brings with other sources in order to have a better understanding of Sudhamani's psychology.

How could any of this happen? The mistake has been to believe that Sudhamani was at the same spiritual level as Râmakrishna Paramhansa, Swami Râmdâs or Mâ Anandamayî, because of superficial similarities in their Sâdhanâ. The deliberate choice of the name Amritânandamayî and the white outfit that Sudhamani started to wear has contributed to the confusion between her and Mâ Anandamayî. But the revelations of Gail who has been Sudhamani's personal assistant for twenty years, and many points also confirmed by a series of other people's testimonials, clearly show that she is far from having the required qualifications to reach to that level. We will see further in this study significant elements of diagnosis, revealing a severe form of psychosis during two years, when she was between 21 and 22 years old. This

diagnosis will explain many of Sudhamani's major discrepancies; they will be seen as the effects of a psychosis cleavage, resulting from the pathological episode at the end of her teenage years. Thanks to spiritual psychology, this study aims at shedding light on the confusion spread among the people, and even among some of her long term disciples, by the double personality of the actual Sudhamani. Understanding sets us free. The mistake has been, as it happens too often in popular Hinduism, to hastily divinize the guru and to take one's own legitimate spiritual desires for reality. The author's psychological analysis has been approved by Gail Tredwell herself, who sees in it a consistent and meaningful explanation of the disappointing contradictions of Sudhamani's personality, which she has witnessed for twenty years.

It's important to say that this text was reread by Gail herself. She revised the translation of the English and wrote to the author the following : "You have done a wonderful job. I think those who "dare" to read this will benefit immensely. It also made me ponder her growing up phase and her family dynamics from a different angle. Definitely something to chew on."

The small changes in text she advised were reported in the French original, so the two versions are now on par (March 2012). This appreciation is important, since Gail is the one who was personally close to Amma for 20 years and who can feel la whether the psychological understanding proposed below corresponds to reality or not.

The first two parts will deliver the key ideas; the last part will delve further into some details. Let's remark too that the ideas of this book are now taken by Rodolf Milliat, quoting also this present study. He is a leading yoga teacher in France who was recently two times in the organizing committee of the annual Conference of the European Union of Yoga in Zinal in Switzerland. He went on some points even further than I go. His article was published in the January 2015 issue of Infos-Yoga, the oldest and one of the best-known Yoga magazine in French.

Author's introduction

Dr. Jacques Vigne is a psychiatrist trained at Hospital Saint-Antoine in Paris. He has spent 28 years primarily in India, in close connection with Swami Vijayânanda, a french doctor who has been following Mâ Anandamayî for 31 years. He was, with Atmânanda from Austria, one of her two closest western devotees. Since he passed away in 2010, Jacques Vigne drew closer to Buddhism, particularly Tibetan Buddhism. His first book, *Le maître et le thérapeute*, 1991², is the only French publication dealing with the guru-disciple relation in Hinduism. He worked on this book for four years, supported by a French-Indian research grant. The last part is dedicated to making parallels with the therapist-patient relation in modern psychology. The book, entitled *The Indian Teaching Tradition* in English, can also be found online on his website www.jacquesvigne.com. It is the main book on the Hindu guru-disciple relationship in France. After almost 25 years, he felt that it would be right to compliment this book by a dozen of pages of reflection on that subject. He wishes to help seekers find their spiritual autonomy in the spirit of Buddha or Mâ Anandamayî who used to say : "There is only guru, it's God !" Thus, this new

article *Comment sortir d'une croyance de façon juste* (Changing beliefs in the righteous way) is also available on his website in French and in English. Jacques has been a regular lecturer with Gretz, the Ramakrishna Mission Center in France and was invited to represent France to speak in Kolkata in 1993 for the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's address. Jacques has written a dozen of books on spiritual psychology, the most recent ones are entitled *Ouvrir nos canaux d'énergie par la méditation* (Opening the energy channels through meditation) and *Guérir de l'anxiété-dépression et spiritualité* (Healing from anxiety-depression and spirituality). He tours in Europe conducting seminars and speaking at conferences and yoga schools. For instance at the Yoga European Union of Zinal in Switzerland.

Note : *This study is part of a long term reflection about the teacher-disciple psychology, which started with four years of theoretical work and in the field between 1986-1990. It became actual with the release of my book Le maître et le thérapeute, Albin-Michel Editions, now released again at Le Relié Editions. Its purpose is to help achieve advancement in consciousness, toward a real spiritual maturity. I do not want to disturb the faith of those who are convinced of Amma's greatness. For such people, there is a rather simple solution. Do not read my text. If such is the case, then do not criticize my text based on rumors. It wouldn't be a sign of honesty, neither intellectual nor spiritual.*

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PART ONE

THE AMMA-GAIL RELATION

Elements of psychological comprehension

By Dr. Jacques Vigne

Psychiatrist, writer on India and spiritual psychology

Instead of love, fame or wealth,

Give me truth

Henri-David Thoreau

Real praise inevitably implies the right to blame
Beaumarchais in Figaro's wedding

I met Amma for the first time during her first world tour in 1987, when she was at the chapels of La Salpêtrière and at Apprentis-Orphelins d'Auteuil in Paris. Since that time I saw her quite often, not as a scholar but as a sympathizer. However, the recent reading of *Holy Hell- Memoir of Faith, Devotion and Pure Madness*³, written by Gayatri aka Gail Tredwell, led me to question quite a few things. Having trained as a psychiatrist in Paris, I thought it would be useful to understand in depth what this book tells about the personality of Sudhamani aka Amma, to help myself and others to see more clearly. I am not part of any conspiracy against Sudhamani. I do not want to prove the superiority of another teaching or another religion to what can be found in her. I am merely speaking on my own behalf. For those who can read English, it is better to read the whole book, or at least the chapters starting from Tiruvanmalai, where Gayatri starts talking about Sudhamani. I have made a review of the book in 12 pages in French available on this very blog of *Embezzling the World*, as well an article *Changer de croyance de façon juste (Changing one's belief in a righteous way)*, which can be found on my site www.jacquesvigne.com. The readers are invited to read it as well. It can help to turn what looks like an obstacle and a crisis into a maturing spiritual path.

The study is organized in three parts :

- The first part is an interpretation of Sudhamani's psychopathological symptoms, as they show in her relation to Gail. It ends with a diagnosis synthesis.
- The second part examines the psychology of Sudhamani's youth and childhood. It aims at clarifying the link between the various pathological deviations related to that period, which spread further in time; even the official biography provides insights of the active psychopathological elements of that period.
- The third part contains comments about Sudhamani and her organization, beyond her relation to Gail. It gives more details about the first two parts.

In this study I will often call Amma "Sudhamani" because for me the name *Amma* recalls the perfection of the Divine Mother. Once reading Gail's book and hearing confirmations made by various former disciples close to Sudhamani, I came to the conclusion that she was far below that level. Admittedly, a few experience between mysticism and psychosis which occurred at 21 and 22 years old, provided her with small powers of telepathy and clairvoyance, as well as the magnetism of a never-questioned "greatness" delusion. This is startling – too much in fact – as modern public doesn't know much about these kind of subjects. Most of the people suffer from an underlying inferiority complex. As a result, they are not properly immune against the contagious infection of the compensating unlimited power delirium.

I will also talk about Gail rather than Gayatrî. Although she has chosen this name before knowing Sudhamani, that's how she was named at the ashram for 20 years, it was a phase of her life, but it is not relevant anymore to her current experience. So it is better to set her free from the past by calling her by her current name, which is her birth name, Gail.

Importance of this study

Many people tend to say, "Don't criticize Amma, she does a lot of good so we must ignore her small defects!". Yet, the Tibetans clearly say that, the greatest crime in physical violence is murder, just as the greatest crime against truth is to make others believe that one is realized when it is not the case. Indeed, people strive to follow realized masters. They can dedicate 10, 20, 30 years of their life, thinking that they are on the right path. They give away their family fortune to the organization. When they finally see that the master is not realized, they become aware that they have lost a lot of time, energy and sometimes money, and this cannot be called "doing good". Moreover, what is the proportion of donation taken in the West really given for poverty alleviation in India? According to the site *Embezzling the World* quoting, in a blog of January 2015, the site of the Indian Ministry of Finances for the declaration of 2013-2014, only 0,69 %. The rest goes for project of education and health which are mostly paying for the clients – many private funds invest in these fields because it's developing fast in India– and more than 40% are for 'other uses', we don't know which ones.

In order to have an objective analysis of Gail's book and the reactions of the organization, for the ones who read French, consider reading the study of Jean-François Mayer, published on *Religioscope* (http://religion.info/french/articles/article_641.shtml) and also on CCMM-Centre Roger Ikor websites. It sets the context and the forces involved, but it doesn't mention the psychological aspects of the Gail-Amma relation, because he is more specialized in the sociology of religions rather than in relational and spiritual psychology. The present study in this sense is original because of its psychological aspect but I agree with Mayer's presentation of the context.

Admittedly, there will always be problems in organizations ; but in this case what Gail reports represents a series of big problems, that deeply question the worth of Sudhamani as a spiritual master, in the strong and divine sense of the term. I usually avoid to criticize, each organization has its defects, passing judgement on them would never end. But here is something more serious :

- As I said before, if Gail is right, then Sudhamani has lied consistently for a long time and she loses all credibility as a spiritual master.
- It's the credibility of the guru-disciple relationship in Hinduism which is damaged in this story : as far as I know I have written the only book in French dedicated to *guru-shishya parampara*, the guru-disciple relation in India, with a last part about the parallel with the psychotherapeutically relation. That's why I

feel concerned by Gail's testimonial. It is better for the spiritual world to set its own discipline by giving elements for the public to discriminate, instead of waiting for the mainstream media to pick up the issue, because journalists are usually not trained to understand the spiritual and psychological questions.

- In this sense, it is part of my job to analyze the kind of deviations that Gail has experienced in her relation to Sudhamani. I am a trained psychiatrist and I have been specialized in Eastern and Western spiritual psychology for 30 years.
- Sudhamani has been promoted, even sold by the ashram's marketing, as the great realized wise woman of India. If only for the sake of basic ethics, it would be right to check this assessment. In the religious field too, we are in need of an institution in charge of checking the advertisements. It is both easier and more difficult to achieve than in the usual commercial field : on the one hand, there is no need for a whole food chemistry lab to check the products quality. Yet it is necessary to have a good knowledge of spiritual psychology to discriminate right from wrong, desire from delusion, reality from wishful thinking.
- When I read Gail's book, I went through a phase of disappointment and anxiety. Then came a certain joy, the relaxed joy of knowing how to look at the reality, to face it and understand what unfolds deeply. This joy helped me to understand and made me clearly see the How and the Why of Sudhamani's rising to the top of an international religious enterprise, and the reason for her current fall. It's easy for a group of devotees to offer one fine day a goddess name as a gift to their teacher Amritânandamayî in a meeting, but it's harder for that person to actually become divine. The great advantage of a psychological analysis of Sudhamani's biography-hagiography, is to deconstruct in depth the fabrication of a myth. The challenges are important : a lot of people commit to live with Sudhamani, including young people who sacrifice their professional education and normal family life. Does she deserve such consecration? The question is vital and Gail's book gives new clues to answer.

Let's be clear right from the start : if Gail is right then Sudhamani is lying, and if that's the case then she automatically loses her credibility as a spiritual master. Indeed, the sense of truth is a transmission cord that is indispensable between the master and the disciple, I already said that in the review of Gail's book. It is easy to describe or mention inner states that one has never achieved. The only proof for the surrounding people that such state has been achieved, is a complete sense of truth in the daily life of the master. So for a spiritual teacher the "little lies" are very serious. That's what I have learned from my 25 years training with Swami Vijayânda, who had spent 31 years next to Mâ Anandamayî. As a psychiatrist, I am not all-powerful, but I am not completely powerless either, and I can let the readers focus their attention on a simple sense of truth. Indeed, the latter is quickly shadowed by emotional outburst, even if they are apparently sincere.

One day, a psychologist conducted a private and anonymous survey conducted on Buddhists meditation teachers about their sexual life : many of them had serious problems and deviations regarding that issue. He talked about this to the Dalai Lama who answered : "Give me the list, it must be published for the people to know whom to avoid as a teacher." It is essential for the disciple to be correctly informed about the private life of their masters. Spiritual teaching is not a secular matter, it has its own rules, and *this* one is included.

Of course for many of Sudhamani's devotees and supporters, the series of scandals surrounding her mean the end of a beautiful dream. They are like little children who were thinking that their mummy was perfect because she was nice, and they now realize that such was not the case. Given this context, I am aware that for some disciples, the recent revelations are as painful as having a tooth removed, but it has to be done when the time has come. From the point of view of ethics and quality, one can consider that the boat called Sudhamani has already sank. It is an actual Titanic shipwreck. From the point of view of matter and quantity, it will continue to sail thanks to it's inertia, its financial asset, and the fear and ego of the disciples who don't want to acknowledge that they have mistaken the spiritual level of their guru.

I have waited a long time to feel if it was right to put this study online. I remembered the *Upanishads* where a distinction is made between *priya*, which is pleasant in the short term but non-profitable in the long term and *shreya*, which is the opposite, harmful in the short term and beneficent in the long term and which represents the best. I found out that publishing this article online was closer to *shreya*, so I did it. Of course, many people have been disappointed by Sudhamani's behavior as it is reported in Gail's book, which I analyses psychologically here, but they should know that I was the first to be disappointed too. I read Gail's book from the first to the last page. I advise those who speak English to read it too. And those who haven't read the book shouldn't criticize it. It would not be ethical. It would not even be clever. One would fall in the same foolishness as the Ayatollah Khomeiny who cast his death fatwa against Salman Rushdie at the end of a TV show presenting his book *The Satanic Verses*. He had not even read them! The advantage of reading the book before reading this article is that the reader can be aware that there is a serious problem in Sudhamani's behavior. Critics say the book is written by a disciple who is upset about not having been the favorite one. But the facts reported by Gail are far more serious.

Gail is not alone : The series of scandals around Sudhamani

We notice that Professor M. Ramakrishnan Nair, Amma's first biographer in Malayalam, supports the publication of Gail's book, with the following argument : "Gail is the person who knew best what was going on behind the scenes!"⁴ Such moral support is important and meaningful. Now, to sum up what Sudhamani is blamed for, we can quote a press release⁵ which recently circulated in the USA, right before her tour in this country. It recapitulates well the situation of mid-2014 :

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE :

CONTROVERSIAL INDIAN "HUGGING SAINT" GURU WITH LINKS TO HINDU NATIONALISTS
TOURING USA

Once again the controversial Indian guru Mata Amritanandamayi, known as the "Hugging Saint" or "Amma" (Mother) is on tour in the USA for the summer, visiting centers in Seattle, San Ramon, Los Angeles, Santa Fe, Dallas, Chicago, Boston, Washington DC, New York and also Toronto, Canada.

Born Sudhamani Idamannel in 1953 to humble village beginnings in Kerala, Ms Idamannel now controls a huge corporate empire largely initially funded by western donations but now encompassing profit making university colleges, a hospital and other commercial ventures.

Over the years there have been ugly rumors about events happening at her ashram - mysterious deaths, including those of her own brother and cousin; money being siphoned to relatives; threats made to nearby villagers; the fake nature of the so-called "miracles" she is supposed to have performed. In the past some have sought to expose her including a former local policeman and author Sreeni Pattathannam. But they have been usually threatened and terrorized into silence. The book Mr Pattathannam published was banned via court action and threats made against his life.

Then in October of 2013 the former personal attendant to Amma and her first female westerner devotee, an Australian woman called Gail Tredwell, known as Gayatri, published an autobiographical book called "Holy Hell: A Memoir of Faith, Devotion and Pure Madness". In which she alleged that over her 20 years in this close personal role with the guru she was subject to abuse and regular beatings from Amma; that she witnessed Amma, the supposedly celibate guru whom her devotees believe is a "living Goddess", often having sex with her most senior swami, Balu, known as Swami Amritaswarupananda, in what would appear to be a long term relationship, possibly going right back to the beginning. And also discovered that she was having sex with another swami in the ashram. Furthermore she was asked to act as a mule for the guru, secretly delivering bags of gold and money to her relatives' homes.

Gayatri, who was ordained as Swamini Amritaprana, herself alleged she was subject to sexual abuse at the hands of Balu, who is the ashram spokesperson and holds a controlling financial interest on the board of directors for the ashram and its global empire. Balu continues to tour to the USA despite these allegations.

The ashram went into total denial and then launched personal attacks on Tredwell via a number of ashram sponsored blogs. A cyber war erupted on the Amazon.com site for the book, as more and more devotees and ex-devotees then came forward with their own stories of abuse and dodgy financial practices they had witnessed. But this was just a prelude for what happened when the book was picked up on within India in February this year.

Overnight the Facebook site for Gail Tredwell -<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Gail-Tredwell/458540434262006> - went viral with over 30,000 Likes in the space of a week. As did the comment sites for the various Indian media outlets which took up this story. A tsunami of Indian commentators then started telling the world of THEIR bad experiences also with this guru and expressing their outrage. The book was initially only available in electronic format online. Then pirated PDF versions started appearing and whole sections of the book translated into the various Indian languages. Other Facebook sites sprang up discussing the book and thousands of comments all over internet about it.

The ashram responded savagely and Amritanandamayi then called on her political connections to move against those who had commented within India. She has connections in very high places. With new Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself amongst her devotees. He came to her 60th birthday celebrations last September - <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-at-ammas-birthday-narendra-modi-has-a-bash-in-trichy-1894458>

Court cases were launched against Indian Facebook users who had attacked her and spoken out - <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/gail-tredwell-amrithanandamayi-mutt-balu/1/345168.html> - in a blatant attempt to shut down free speech.

In a more sinister turn of events threats were made against various individuals including a bookshop owner who sold the published transcript of a three hour television interview Gail Tredwell gave with a major Indian TV network - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Qf-PqWYNjU>

The shop and home of the bookshop owner were attacked⁷ - <http://booksy.in/2014/04/04/ravi-deecce-no-question-of-withdrawing-book/>
Others who spoke out, including another Hindu spiritual leader, were also physically attacked⁸ - <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/amritanandamayi-math-accused-of-assaulting-spiritual-leader-and-publisher/1/352778.html>

Some of the attackers were arrested and found to be members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the far right paramilitary Hindu fundamentalist organisation which has been involved in violent atrocities against Moslems and other non-Hindus.

And if the public still had any doubts about Amritanandamayi's links to the RSS a huge rally was held in Kochi Kerala in April to support her and to attack the publication of Holy

Hell. Organised by the spiritual wing of the RSS, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), and with a large political BJP presence the rally stated that this book was an attack on the whole Hindu religion⁹ - <http://worldhindunews.com/2014040421077/dharma-raksha-sangam-held-at-kochi/>

Echoes of the ugly controversy over the recently published book by renowned scholar Wendy Doniger on Hinduism which Penguin was forced to pulp and is now banned within India¹⁰ - <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Another-book-on-Hinduism-by-Wendy-Doniger-under-attack/articleshow/31230610.cms>

The controversy continues. Only this last week more calls by Amma devotees to have Holy Hell banned were dismissed by a Delhi judge¹¹ - <http://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/mata-amritanandamayi-s-devotee-pleads-for-ban-on-defamatory-book-37145.html>

This controversy has spawned a number of web sites. This one in particular - Embezzling The World - has much information about Amma's financial misdeeds. In which researchers uncovered that the guru also lies about what happens to the donations gathered up in the west. That only 10% is going to actual charity and 68% sitting in bank accounts¹² - <http://embezzlingtheworld.blogspot.com/>

The ashram has never published an audited annual report or financial statement. On the foreign tours they give out glossy booklets about this guru's charities. But it is now believed that only this small proportion of the foreign donations ever finds its way to real charity. This was revealed via an Indian government foreign donations disclosure website. Links for which can be found on the Embezzling The World blog.¹³

Gail Tredwell can be contacted via her website for further comment - <http://gailtredwell.com/>

Most of the "pro-Amma" attacks against Gail rely on a simplistic and rather questionable premise: they try to show that she has some defects, "therefore" she can only tell lies. One may have character limitations and put one's ego forward like everyone else, without for that inventing a twenty year life account from the beginning to the end, especially with the obvious risk of having lots of problems, like defamation trials and attacks coming from everywhere. That is the downside of the webpage *Ammas scandal*, including of Rajita's testimonial which doesn't bring anything at all to challenge the precise accusations that Gail reports in her book. Sudhamani's devotees probably don't have the arguments for that. And yet, we can see that this site is an attempt to neutralize in a kind of magical way what we can call "the Gail effect". In a major move of hypocrisy, *Ammas scandal* website tries to make people believe that Gail is just an isolated case and suggests that her criticizing Sudhamani comes rather as a surprise. Whereas by simply looking on the Internet, one can find numerous websites where she is deeply questioned. I have already mentioned a website that makes a good synthesis with a genuine research of facts, it's *Embezzling the world*¹⁴,

that can claim to be the best enemy of Sudhamani's organization, for it clearly highlights the successive layers of lies of the organization and of the guru herself. I advise to download their series of interesting blogs and keep them on local computers, in the unlikely event that the organization succeeds in banning the website, although it is relatively well protected by the fact that it is not hosted in India. The public should be aware that complaints have been made to the police against the Internet users who dared criticizing Sudhamani online in Kerala. It reminds more of the Chinese communist party or the Arabic dictators than a Mother who is supposed to love all her children without discrimination. Moreover Sudhamani's devotees are so used to "believing", that they operate along the magical thought line : they sincerely believe that if they succeed in making the testimonials about a problem disappear, then the problem itself will disappear. Poor logic!

Sudhamani has been interviewed by a weekly women's newspaper in April 2014, after Gail's scandal went public in Kerala. She tries to justify herself by philosophizing this way : "If an individual decides to lie once, he or she can say so many other lies!" This brings a big smile to my face, for this is precisely what a growing number of people blame her for. Then Sudhamani goes on to make barely veiled threats : "I neither take offense nor have any complaints. But it's not like that with the devotees." In other words, "I am Perfect Love but beware, I can still send my goons after you if you insist!" That is more than mere manipulation or the policy of the carrot and the stick, it's probably, as we will see further, a personality split, arising from the psychosis that occurred for two years when she was 21 years old.

The devotees say in a more emotional manner : "How can you question the virtue of a woman who has hugged millions of people?" There is a simple answer to that and we all know it deep inside of us : "Quantity can't replace quality." Assessing the spiritual value of someone by looking at the growth charts of her enterprise, looks more like the way of operating a big company, than the wisdom of India. This is rather worrying for those who are sensitive to the tradition of *Sanatana Dharma*. When we challenge these serious events in a critical way, it is not about jealousy, but rather a matter of basic caution, according to the popular phrase : "Maybe it's too good to be true!"

The more the scandals unfold around Sudhamani, the less the organization reacts in an ethical way, entangling itself in its denials, and the more Amritapuri becomes *Asatyapuri*, the City of Non-truth, the Fortress of Falsity.

Elements in favor of Gail's credibility

Gail has spent almost 20 years as Sudhamani's personal assistant, from 1980 to 1999, and she has been ashram's number two for the women all along its development at that time. During one of my visits to Amritapuri, I had a talk with her and had the opportunity to ask her various questions about Sudhamani and the link that could be established with Mâ Anandamayi.

Gail is not a psychotherapist, she has written her book both to free herself from the hardships she has been through, and to inform the devotees who live at a distance from Sudhamani's personal way of functioning, and from her inner circle and their defects which are not publicized, because it would have harmed the chances of proselytism of the organization. Her book is a survival kit, a set of reflections and distancing to survive 20 years of conditioning in an ashram, but her testimonials have a greater range, for they give numerous elements for each and everyone to answer by oneself this important question : "Does Sudhamani deserve the faith that tens of thousands of devotees have for her?" Indeed, Sudhamani could be defended in another way : the facts reported by Gail cover the first 20 years of the ashram's life, when Sudhamani was between 26 and 45. Gail has left the organization 14 years ago, and one may argue that Sudhamani has acknowledged her mistakes in the meantime and corrected them. Nevertheless, let's not be naïve, when one is regularly worshiped by tens of thousands of persons, it is not easy to step down from the pedestal, that is to say a feeling of all-powerfulness, neither to acknowledge modestly and normally one's mistakes.

I have communicated via email and talked to her by phone when she was in her home in Hawaii. I have also cross-checked her testimonial with one of the first western devotees who lived by Sudhamani. He played a major role in the development of her movement for 14 years. Then he left, disappointed. He prefers to remain discreet because he knows how Sudhamani and her followers operate.

As far as I can say, I must admit that the present study relies on Gail's testimonial. If she ever says that she has lied and invented the accusations against Sudhamani, the major part of this work will collapse by itself, although it will sustain for instance regarding the financial scandals or the psychological analysis of childhood. Yet I am a professional of clinical psychology and I have good skills in detecting pathological liars. There is no such sign with Gail. In February 2014, she has also confirmed on her blog the validity of everything she has written, in spite of the attacks that she underwent. Yet, let us clarify the arguments in favor of her credibility, because this is vital to secure the validity of this study.

Undoubtedly, her reliability is greater than that of a journalist craving for scandals, who makes a few interviews in an organization to write a cheap article. Associating daily with a person for almost twenty years, enables one to have a good idea of someone's qualities and defects. A French phrase says : "There is no such thing as a great man for his attendant", the English equivalent is the proverb "*Familiarity breeds contempt.*" In this sense, being with a person daily remains a privileged position to assess someone's consistency. As I said, I don't find any evidence of pathological tendencies to lie in Gail's writings. If someone should be suspected of pathological lies, it's Sudhamani herself, we will see this further in the text. Moreover, Gail talks accurately about the exclusion of Ganga (Sarvâtma) from the organization in 1993. As I was a personal friend of his, I remember very well the way that he described these facts to me more than 20 years ago, and I could check their correctness in Gail's report. Similarly, what I have heard directly from another disciple from the beginning matches exactly what Gail says, these are then successful authentication tests. The fact that it took her 14 years to publish her

testimonial book also shows that it is a mature decision, and is neither inspired by an instant emotional reaction of passion nor vengeance. Moreover, her position outside of the organization protects her from the pressure to conceal some facts, the "dirty little secrets" as she often says in her book. So, unfortunately for Sudhamani's reputation, if someone is really credible about her, it's Gail.

Another person in charge of Sudhamani's movement gave me a different argument : "She is very powerful whereas Gail is an isolated individual, so the latter can only be true." This reminds me of Snowden's story in relation to the US secret agency. He acted as a whistleblower and enabled a lot of individuals and governments to be cautious.

Here is a Hassidic legend : it happened in Russia at the end of the Czars period. The police were actively arresting the opponents and one day, the friend of a Hassidic saint was put in jail. The Hassid went to the police station and argued so much to have his friend released that the commissioner sent him in jail too, because he suspected him of being an accomplice, belonging to the same party as the convicted man. When the Hassid came before the judge, the attorney who wanted to inflict him with a sentence told a story in order to worsen his situation and make fun of him : "Your Excellency, fairy tales are said about this misfit : one night a thief came and filled a bag with goods and was about to leave when the hassid saw him. Of course the thief started to run away but the saint ran after him saying : 'Hey don't worry! Don't have a bad conscience! I give you everything you have taken!' Isn't it a nonsensical story?" The judge asked the attorney : "Are such stories told about you? " "No, your Excellency!" "Well, no such things are said about me either. Given this context, I command to release this man!"

The reverse story could apply to Gail and Sudhamani. When we look at the life of great sages of India like Ramana Maharshi, Swami Ramdas, Mâ Anandamayî and Ramakrishna, no one can find an assistant who had lived a long time with them and then wrote a book to criticize them in depth. Maybe a few journalists passing by have interviewed a few unhappy people at their ashram and wrote critical articles. But Gail has spent 20 years as Sudhamani's personal assistant. The challenges are more substantial and the responsibility of Sudhamani herself must be involved in the failure of the master-disciple relation.

Gail could remind of the young Satyakâma in the Upanishads : he was looking for spiritual teachings and the first thing that the guru asked him when he met him was his caste, because Brahmans were more likely to receive these teachings. He answered honestly : "My mother had many lovers when she begot me, so she told me that she didn't knew who my father was !" The group of disciples around the master protested out of indignation and asked to immediately cast out this nobody's son. But the master said, "You have told the truth, it means that you are a real Brahman, you are welcome among us." Being a Brahman is not about taking a bath three times a day, filling one's lungs with smoke in front of fire sacrifices or being able to recite the *Vedas* by heart. The one who dwells in the truth is a Brahman, that is what Gail was aiming at with her book and she leads the reader to come closer to this truth. Although she

speaks about her affective relation to Sudhamani, this is not the main point of the book. The most important feature is to understand, through many examples, the disturbed relation that Sudhamani has toward truth and towards her own emotions. The public cannot be aware of these when she appears on stage in front of thousands of people in the audience and speakers blaring so loud that they prevent one from actually thinking. On stage, Sudhamani acts as a good theater player. She is experienced in this, because she started at the age of 22.

Another simple question that we can ask by considering Gail's experience is : "Why did it take her 20 years to leave the ashram?" There are many answers to that : first of all she arrived at an early age, she was 20 and took part in the foundation of the institution in all its phases. Sudhamani and the other young Swamis were more or less convinced that going back into the world was akin to going back to hell, so Gail was scared. Moreover, there was the material question, she had no job, no more friends "in the world" and her relations with her family were distant, as advised by the ashram. Last but not least, she had love for Sudhamani. It was enormous in the beginning, it rode her through high tides and low tides, but it slowly faded as time went by. She also recognizes that she met wonderful people in the organization, having to leave them all suddenly was a heartbreaking moment for her. Moreover, she was wholeheartedly devoted to her *Akka* role, the big sister of the ashram, mainly for the women. She liked to try to fix the various tensions between the Brahmachârinîs (there were 200 of them among the Indians), thus soothing the relations between Westerners and Indians, helping them to grow spiritually.

The ashram's reaction to Gail's testimonial confirms that the organization has a serious problem

The disastrous way in which Sudhamani and the ashram managed the "Amma scandal" seems to show that things have become worse since Gail left in 1998. We have seen a massive denial by Sudhamani herself about everything that Gail says. It is surprising that someone who has spent twenty years very close to her cannot say anything true or nice about her. It reminds me of a kind of emotional rejection; it may even be a psychotic denial. The agnostics blame religious people for believing what they see fit. In this case, obviously Sudhamani would like Gail to not exist anymore, and make her devotees believe so. We have been the witnesses of the violence displayed by Sudhamani's organization since the book release. We have seen the official and unofficial threats, the character assassination, the very aggressive personal attacks, the legal complaints against the TV channel which dared make an interview of Gail about her experience, the ransacking of the office of the editor of the Malayalam book made from Kairali TV interview. We are far away from the ideal image of Amritanandamayi hugging people on stage, while cameras shoot the scene from every angle, for further deemed advertisement. It is high time that we were more realistic and went to see what is going on backstage.

Let us say it clearly, like most of the people, I cannot be sure that Gail tells the truth, because I was not there when the described events happened. However, by dissecting, one can

determine that many of the facts she reports are confirmed by former disciples who left the organization and became relatively free from its pressure. My part is bound to this : If we accept what Gail reports about Sudhamani, then how to explain the logic of the psychological behavioral deviations of the latter? It is easy to understand. The present study gives all relevant details.

I too have been subjected to pressure. I had published on my website a first version of the two articles about Gail's book in early December and the psychological study of their relation. I was in retreat at Ma Anandamayī's hermitage in the Himalaya. After approximately five days, I received a phone call from a high up of the organization. Highly motivated to reach me, she somehow succeeded in finding my phone number. Apparently embarrassed by what I had written and because she was conditioned to defend at all cost her Amma, she strongly suggested that I remove the two articles from my website, under the veiled threat of being included in a trial against Gail. She has known me for 25 years, but friendship does not amount to much against the interests of a global company, even a religious one. As I was in a hermitage, I didn't want to risk being involved in a trial, so I removed the documents, to have more time to think. Later, when she noticed that I was mentioning her threats, she tried to minimize them, but I remember that they were sharp. Now that we are almost one year since Gail's book publication, I have noticed the not so brilliant way that Sudhamani and her organization operate.

Thanks to their financial success and to their substantial number of disciples, Sudhamani and her organization have gradually slipped into a deep-rooted all-powerfulness delirium. Gail has become like a good therapist, reminding us of some truths and she has deflated a big part of this delirium. Of course, this process didn't unfold without any reaction. Some are angry, like little children whose blanket or small toy has been taken away from them, some others go through depressive phases. Anyway, it is necessary during the healing process, which follows a long chronic delirium. As a matter of fact, two extremes should be avoided :

- Burying one's head in the sand, which is done by people who don't want to see or hear about the clues provided by the various testimonials.
- Massively rejecting spiritual life, under the pretext of having been deceived by Sudhamani. It is certainly not nice to become aware that one has been misled in a consistent way, sometimes for 20 or 30 years, by the little or big lies of a Sudhamani who is devoured by the ambition of becoming a star in the spiritual world. Along with the series of scandals spreading about her, one can observe that many "balloons are deflating" and basic reality is back. Sudhamani is more and more entangled in her own lies, at many levels. She is exhausted not only by the sleepless nights of her theatrical religious tours, but also deeply exhausted by the energy that she must spend to succeed in cheating on the whole world – while hugging it of course. It is an extreme ambivalence and let us remember that one of the main symptoms of psychosis is ambivalence. It highly embarrasses the one who finally becomes aware of it. It matches the devotee's state of mind after the burst of scandals which are gobbling Sudhamani's credibility as a *Satguru*. It is normal that all this goes public. It is the result of karma. As president Truman used to say : "One

can fool all people some time, one can fool some people some time, but one cannot fool all the people all the time."

The flawed side of the *Ammasandal* website is that they don't accept any criticism against Sudhamani and Balu. They are satisfied with rather noisy denials instead of accepting a step by step talk worthy of mature people. Another flawed point stands in the too easy defense of Sudhamani and her surrounding, is to say that Gail's description of her deviant personal behavior is an attack against Hinduism and religion in general. It is too easy to fall into conspiracy theory. Even if Sudhamani's status is demoted as a credible spiritual figure, that won't kill Hinduism. There have been more serious issues than that. This fall will be disappointing in relation to feminine spirituality but here again; more figures are rising in this field. As a psychiatrist, when I see the violence in the reactions against Gail, I can only link that to the reactions of a megalomaniac when they are contradicted in the field of their delirium. Yet, the very contradiction of their all-powerfulness thoughts are likely to bring a life-saving depression, for this scaling down of inflated belief has a therapeutical effect that helps to get back to real life. Thus, Gail plays the role of a therapist thanks to her book, but that's precisely the reason why many devotees, who don't want their comfortable beliefs to be disturbed and finally to heal, are angry with her. Generally, a psychiatrist is not all-powerful but not all-helpless either, he or she has the capacity to accompany the people with reflections and clarifications along a healing process.

In fact, Hinduism and religion don't need little or big lies from Sudhamani, meant to conceal the escapades of her private life. Actually, they would do much better without this. It is the same with the good reputation of the guru-disciple relation and of the feminine spirituality. These are important topics for the current humanity, and we would prefer religious representatives to be flawless. Let's be clear : If they wander off, then it is them who harm *Sanatana Dharma*. By the way, the fact that Sudhamani claims loud and clear that she will get the best lawyers of the United States to defend herself can only impress the naïve ones, but it appalls those who have a little bit of discernment. The best lawyers are of course the most expensive, so this is a case of embezzlement of money given by the devotees, in order to protect Sudhamani and her favorite disciple from the consequences of their private escapades. Moreover, using the temple of Kali to lead a defaming campaign against Gail in February is sacrilegious, and it should make those who still believe in this organization, think twice.

Gail directly contradicts the ideas of all-powerfulness of Sudhamani. Her violent reaction and of those surrounding her to the publication of the book since one year, denies obviously the official message of universal love, "Embracing The World", promoted by the organization's advertisement. It is a real meltdown. The devotees who dare to talk about it are confused and scared, because their whole world of pleasant beliefs collapses like a card castle. Many dare not risk mentioning the subject with others, because they feel too shaken, fragile, or even depressed. Depression generally comes from the loss of an actual or symbolic object. The loss of

an all-powerful divine and enlightened Mummy, definitely represents a great loss, but it is part of the psychological and spiritual maturation process in the long term. For those who are full time involved in Sudhamani's movement, the whole of their almost-professional carrier is challenged. It is sad. This may also explain while people who came with a sincere aspiration for ashram life are sometimes possessed by aggressiveness worthy of a popular wrestling match. It's time to remind them of Ramana Mahârshi's advice to the disciples and members of his own ashram, each time they had a fight : "Remember why you came here".

One can add the 'flat-trap' to this, which is sad too. Quite a few devotees have invested a substantial sum of money to get a flat in Sudhamani's place, Amritapuri. The system over there, as in many ashrams, is that you can neither give the flat to your inheritors nor sell it back to the organization as far as I know, so you lose the benefit of your flat if you cease frequenting the ashram. I have seen by discussing with devotees that this financial aspect plays much for them to continue being trapped in the system. Amma has signed an anti-slavery declaration in great pomp with the Pope Francis. However, is not this 'flat-trap' a practical way of psychological slavery? Besides, is not enrolling so many renunciates to work free for developing her organization as a multipurpose global company a kind of psychological slavery too? This should be pondered deeply, rather than to bask naively in the bliss of Mummy-Amma embracing the Papa-Pope, or movie stars visiting Amma, the religious star. Teens are the ones who are very attached to their star. Where are we, really?

In a blog from February 2014, Gail confirmed, as we saw it, that everything she said in her book is authentic, in spite of five months of intensive defaming campaign against her, mainly on Ammascandal website, which is obviously orchestrated by the organization. Of course, she didn't answer to the accusations one by one, some people considered this as a weakness, but it would have been akin to writing her book a second time. In fact, she expresses herself very clearly. Moreover, she specifies without any doubt that she hasn't been under any influence to write her testimonial, particularly not the "anti-Hindu elements". As I said previously, coming back over and over again to this clue, like many devotees of Sudhamani do, is slipping into cheap conspiracy theories, that enables them to avoid the essential questions, by playing the poor victim whose dignity has been offended. I spoke directly to Gail about the money she received from Sudhamani's organization when she left. She got \$15,000. She used a portion to buy an old second-hand car. That's all. She didn't find it useful to mention it in her book, because she found it normal to have a small financial compensation after serving the organization day and night for 20 years. The contrary would have been abnormal. Yet this was the case for most of those who left the movement. They left without any retribution, sometimes after 10 years of service. In Gail's case, there was maybe the intention to buy her silence, because she knew far too much. A proposal was made for her to be in charge of an ashram in Australia, but she had no appetite for the "sweets" of religious power. And now, thanks to her book, we know the main points she was aware of.

All through Sudhamani's official biography, and in the reactions to Gail's recent work, there is a simplistic and finally stifling opposition, between the "real believer" in God, in the

Hindu folklore, and in Sudhamani herself on one side, and all the materialistic atheists on the other side. The third path, for instance the one of an agnostic but actually spiritual Buddhism, doesn't exist in this atmosphere of popular devotion where people are split by opposition between religious matter, whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian, and the communists who represent the rest of the people in a very simple way. In fact, it is precisely because we show respect to *Sanatana Dharma* that we must be able to question the deviations of teachers who attract devotees' faith. Criticizing them is not an attack against *Dharma*. On the contrary, it is a sign of good health. A healthy body must be able to reject what does not suit.

I had the opportunity to measure the public's interest for the understanding of Amma's contradictions. I was conducting a workshop in Lyon at the end of the summer 2014 and I mentioned the fact that I was preparing a psychological analysis about her. I usually don't say this kind of thing. Among the fifty attendees, forty-one registered on the list to get this work by email. They were interested in knowing what I had found. Indeed the greatest advantage of the psychological approach is that it sheds light on many neglected mechanisms, covered by successive layers of beliefs. Unfortunately the disrupted families like Sudhamani's are numerous, but it doesn't necessarily prompt their members to propel themselves as Manifestations of the Supreme. Therefore, her case must be keenly examined.

Some political and religious groups have tried to defend Sudhamani, not only against Gail's book but also against the numerous rumors of corruption, by turning her into a martyr of Hindu issues. There are reasons for this. Deep inside, they know that this woman seriously lacks ethics, although she is revered as a perfect emanation of divine all-powerfulness.

Actually the belief that she is perfect is a caricature, twisting a reality which is more complex and full of contradictions. Of course, she massively denies all contradiction, with such confidence that it reminds of the psychotic denial of reality. This can also fit in the scope of the diagnosis. We can even notice that she must be "sincere in her lie" and she has succeeded to convince herself, this is precisely what is serious in her case. An intense deformation of reality in the long term deserves to be called a psychosis. What the public doesn't understand generally, is the notion of psychosis in sector. One can be totally delusional for instance in the way of seeing oneself and however be grounded enough to handle business in the world.

As I write, the other big "Amma" of south India, Jayalalitha, is once again in jail for having hoarded a great fortune during her several occupations as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. One is reminded of the fine line between triumph and disaster. If this is possible for the big South-East Amma, then why cling on to the idea that the South-West one is all-powerful thanks to the great fortune that she has hoarded? Everyone pays for the consequences of karma and there is always a mix of good and bad in individuals.

Even if many reasonable people keep a distance from Sudhamani, the self-proclaimed Amma, I don't think good for the administration of a given country to deny a visa to a foreign spiritual teacher. Being allowed to meet those that they consider as their master is part of the

religious freedom of people. If several thousands of people have been happy to do this on a regular basis, it is not the role of the administration to block the process, by denying a visa to the religious leader. The right attitude would be to allow her to come, while informing officially about the problems related to her, for the people to be cautious. The government plays too often the part of the Holy Church or the Inquisition, to decide which faith is the “good” one and which is not. In fact, neither the officials nor the diplomats or even the secret agencies are trained to discriminate in the religious field. Are they graduated in religion science or psychology? They don’t even have one hour of training about that. Is it the role of the administration to take action in a couple’s life to decide whether their choices in love are the right ones? This attitude can be called religious protectionism and is as narrow as the economical one. It would be better to let a healthy competition occur in the religious field as well. The governments could add a critical training about religions in school programs : not only the usual History course but also specific knowledge about beliefs psychology, their relation to violence through the mechanism of depression, paranoia and megalomania. This introduction could be done simply within a dozen of hours and society would become more mature.

I write according to Mahatma Gandhi’s mindset, who was placing truth as the supreme value. He entitled his autobiography “The Story of My Experiments with Truth”, yet acknowledging with a certain humility that reaching it is the result of long lasting efforts. He used to explain very simply : “Even if you are alone on the path of truth, follow it, others will join you gradually”.

First Part

The facts as they are reported by Gail

Why does Gail reproach Sudhamani? The best option for English-speaking people is to read the whole book. It is well written and if you don't have much time, you can start by the chapter where Gail starts meeting Sudhamani's devotees in Tiruvanamalai. Then page after page we come across numerous elements that enable the reader to assess the psychology of the one who later became Mata Amritanandamayi. You can download the book in your computer in less than a minute thanks to Amazon's kindle system. In the present text, the pages numbers refer to this format. As I told before, I have also released a detailed book review of 15 pages in a separate document in French which is already on www.embezzlingtheworld.bolgspots.com. The main points are :

Sudhamani 's relation to truth :

She often lies for insignificant things when it suits her. She can also do the same in serious situations : for example, she has concealed the fact that she had her menses. Her various biographies say with a rather naïve emotional undertone that she became "pure" after her first Devi Bhava. This is not true. We must remember that in India the popular tradition considers the lack of menses as one of the signs of a Divine Mother. In 1999, Sudhamani suffered from abdominal pain when she was in Paris and she consulted a gynecologist. Gail was there when the doctor asked her: "When did you have your period for the last time?" Sudhamani immediately replied : "15 days ago!" Gail gives many details about the way and means used to hide her periods. Another kind of frequent lie, and not minor ones, was the making of false miracles in the form of stories. Sudhamani was requiring Gail to tell them in public. This could be done for instance for her birthday celebration, in front of five or ten thousands of people. One such story is the one where Sudhamani turned into a ball of light in front of a group of men from Madras. Gail was in charge of telling this hoax to the crowds in November 1996 in the California, Sydney, Melbourne and Paris ashrams. She now apologizes for having lied this way.

Sudhamani was strongly advising to live in chastity inside her ashram and she has discarded with great fanfare the disciples who were not respecting this rule. More than this, when a disciple was daring enough to leave the organization, he or she was often accused of doing so by reason of a love affair, even if it was not true. But Gail has witnessed physical intercourse between Sudhamani and Balu, and she suspects this kind of event to have occurred rather frequently. Balu is still the number one of the ashram in the men's group under the name Amritaswarupanand. Thanks to many clues, she is almost sure that Rao and Pai, two of the first disciples, also had physical relations with her. A westerner, who she considers to be trustworthy, told her that he had a love affair with Sudhamani, probably like many other men had. Gail reports that she was there, when one fine day Amma got a letter from Pai, who had left the organization recently, blaming her for giving him a sexually transmitted disease. "Amma had the letter burned because she was afraid some of the other men would see it."

Moreover, Gail has played the role of intermediary to secretly carry the money donated for the charities and give it to Sudhamani's family. This was akin to money funneling and to promote her own family, whereas she was asking her disciples to separate from theirs. Although she was requiring austerity from her disciples, she couldn't stand her daily instant needs to not be fulfilled immediately. From that point of view, the long series of instances that Gail provides page after page, underlines a typically childish temper. If her desire had to be delayed even for a little while, she used to throw a tantrum. She wasn't limited to harsh words; she was also accustomed to beatings. Once, one of her personal assistant called Leela fell asleep while she was affectionately massaging Sudhamani's feet. "Amma became infuriated and with one of her stocky legs kicked Leela so hard that she cracked her rib. The woman was in bed for a few days after." In spite of this absurd violence, the naïve and terrorized disciple thought that this fracture was due to the guru's grace, teaching her how to focus. Moreover, Sudhamani couldn't stand anyone saying good things about any other guru inside her ashram, and she used to give instructions to her disciples for them to strictly enforce her discipline. Sudhamani was prompting detachment from the family, as I said previously, but when her brother went to hospital she was obviously deeply worried. Gail has directly witnessed this.

To get further details about the many examples, you can refer to the book itself or to the review that I made in French. I will give more of them in the following part, in order to make a diagnosis. Gail blames Balu, the number two of Sudhamani since the beginning, for forcing her into occasional unwanted sexual relations. It was thus rape. The mind manipulation was such that Gail never dared to complain to Sudhamani about these brutal and love-lacking attacks. She never knew if she was aware of what was going on. As it is said, trust was not in this three-way partnership. Anyway she has been psychologically and spiritually upset by this situation which had nothing to do with the pure love of God that she came seeking at the age of 20 in this ashram that looked good for practice. One way or the other, Sudhamani used to systematically protect Balu – whom she used to officially call "my son" like all her close male disciples – but who has been her lover for many years.

Violence

Sudhamani's violence does not only lie in the fact that she has been regularly beating Gail for years, but also in a more diffuse way, in her authoritarian way of managing the ashram. Sleep deprivation and unbalanced diet, which deeply disrupt the ashramites' health in the long term, are finally a more serious consequence of this violence. It is a common feature of cult groups, although it may also be in communities which can't be labelled cults. Sudhamani herself went through a harsh education, and we can see the classical common scheme of the beaten child beating her offspring. She seems to really believe that this violent authoritarianism, which doesn't allow any objection, is part of the guru-disciple relation. Let's quote her own words:

"Damayanti Amma was, in a way, my Guru. She inculcated diligence, devotion and discipline in me. She observed all of my actions meticulously. If there were even a little scrap left in the

courtyard after sweeping, she would hit me. When all the vessels were washed, she scrutinized them, and if there were even a tiny trace of dirt, she would scold me. If even a single twig of the broom happened to fall on the ground as I swept, she would not spare me. If a speck of dust or ash fell into the cooking pot, punishment would follow. Mother expected her daughters to say their prayers early in the morning; she would not hesitate to pour a pot of water on our faces, particularly on mine, if we were late to rise because of exhaustion.

(You will find the references of the exact page numbers of the 1989 English biography at the end of this text this text. Out of a technical problem, the automatic hyperlink between the number of the note in the text and the note itself doesn't function. So you should go there manually. Anyhow, you won't find any comments or explanation, just page numbers.)

In fact, the name of Sudhamani's mother was relevant, as *dama* means control and *yanthi* is the suffix of the causative present participle, so it means something like "the one who is controlling"... The violent scenes between Sudhamani and her mother anticipate what she did to Gail :

"Sometimes when Damayanti was about to thrash Sudhamani, the child would catch hold of her hand. Though small, Sudhamani was very strong. Unable to release her hand from Sudhamani's grip, she would then try to kick her. The little one would then catch hold of Damayanti's leg as well. Finding no other way to punish her daughter, the mother resorted to biting her. On occasion Damayanti even struck Sudhamani with a machete used to open coconuts. The mother regularly piled vulgar abuse upon the innocent child without restraint. Sudhamani could be very bold and impertinent at times when dealing with her mother. When Damayanti commanded, "Don't speak!" she would immediately retort, "I will speak!" When Damayanti said, "Don't do it!" Sudhamani would unhesitatingly insist, "I will do it!" But the more she retaliated, the harsher the punishment became. Damayanti would even curse her daughter saying, "Let this defiant girl be damned! If she grows up like this, she will surely bring a bad reputation to the family. O God, why are you not putting an end to her life life?"¹⁸

Now it is painful to hear that, especially when the death threat comes from the one who gave you life. One of the problems in the relation between Sudhamani and Gail is that they are only five years apart, and deep inside, Gail was not ready to accept the treatment inflicted by an authoritarian, and even angry Indian mother of fishermen's clan. Therefore she finally rebelled when she dared thinking : "Who does she think she is?" She understood that she was thinking she was God, which can make sense for an authentic guru in the path of devotion, but from a psychological point of view, this is often the beginning of severe deviations, caused by an inflated ego. In the great Tibetan text of spiritual practices called *The Seven Points of Mind Training*, it is said : "Blame everything on one culprit" The commentators explain that the only culprit is the ego, thus we have to consider this a failure of the guru-disciple relation between Sudhamani and Gail. Of course the devotees will say that Gail is the only one to blame, but it became more and more obvious, by reading her memoir, that Sudhamani had, and surely still has, a highly inflated ego. We can see two main reasons for this :

- Her past as a beaten and humiliated child, thus with pride, or even dreams of compensating all-powerfulness.

- The almost industrial success of her patented practice of “hug-darshan”. The organization has even put a copyright on the words Amma and Amrita. From the point of view of common sense not twisted by passionate devotion, isn't it incredibly pretentious to claim the legal ownership on the names of The Divine Mother and of Immortality? For a fisherman's daughter, lost on a Kerala coast, this global success could only inflate her ego more, all of this is logical. Of course as it is often the case, the growth of the ego was concealed under religious trinkets, by ideas of divine election and by a mission as the world's guru. The bitter pill of this spreading ego was wrapped by the sweetness of emotional devotion, like a chocolate coated bitter pill to swallow.

Another example of the danger of Sudhamani's authoritarianism comes to memory as I write these lines. It is a testimonial that I collected 25 years ago straight from the words of one of her first westerner disciples. In order to teach poverty to the ashramites, she has decided that it was a luxury to throw the used needles after each injection during a vaccination campaign, so she commanded to keep on using the same needle for everyone. The western disciple had to intervene in emergency to prevent the sanitary disaster, caused by the sudden whim of a young woman, pretty ignorant about basic medicine, but who was thinking that she was God. This incident should be verified by other witnesses, but if it's true, it's devastating.

Sleep deprivation

We have seen that Sudhamani's mother was pouring pans of cold water on her daughter's heads to wake them up in the morning and have them say their prayers. Sleep deprivation might seem to be part of a good education, but in the long term it ruins health. If Sudhamani currently suffers from insulin dependent diabetes, it is probably because of sleep deprivation that she imposed upon herself : it stimulates excessively the sympathetic system and the pancreas islets of Langerhans. Excess of insulin is secreted, and diabetes settles down insidiously. It has been proven that chronic sleep deprivation increases significantly, in addition to diabetes, cardio-vascular accidents, heart attacks and cancer, especially breast cancer. The common mechanism lies in the secretion of inflammatory interleukins and C-reactive proteins by the stomach fat. From a psychic point of view, severe sleep deprivation prepares the bed for serious delirium outburst : if dreams cannot be expressed in the night, it pressures to express in the day and it leads to deluded confusion between the dream-state level and the awake-state level of awareness. One sleeps less in Sudhamani's ashram than in many other religious communities and the delirium outbursts are more frequent, such is my opinion as an outer observer of the movement for the past 25 years. Moreover, the institution doesn't assume any responsibility. When it occurs among the westerners, they take advantage of the insurances to send the people back home, pretending they have nothing to do with the psychotic fit. This is a superficial assessment. Anyway lack of sleep renders the judgment confused and one can thus become more malleable to mental manipulation. Closed religious groups are often blamed for that, and there are good reasons for this.

Hyperactivity

In light of recent facts revealed about Sudhamani in Gail's book, we can find a new interpretation as to the social and religious hyperactivity that rules over the ashram and the organization. The latter has acclaimed Sudhamani as a Divine Mother, which implies that her personality is perfect. In fact, many devotees feel that there are problems regarding this topic but they don't want to acknowledge this. Instead, they react by a leap forward and try to forget that which disturbs them, by getting involved in social activism, through feverish religious practices, or by performing all-sided seva. All this leads to chronic sleep deprivation that weakens their ability to think quietly and freely. Is this a conscious objective of the organization?

The Paradoxes

In addition to sleep deprivation, the contradictions, ambivalence and paradoxes of the system set by Sudhamani foster the deluded "disconnect" : it is presented as universal love but everyone in the ashram knows implicitly that anyone who opposes her seriously will be destroyed at the community level and inevitably discarded. If that person is psychologically strong, he will manage, if not, he will remain handicapped.

The false predictions and lies about the Shaktiprasad, among others.

The *Shaktiprasâds* issue is a major instance of the way that Sudhamani easily delivered false predictions and it shows the puzzling ease with which the devotees may notice them, without questioning their faith toward her and the supposed relevance of her words¹⁹. This is what is said in the second version of her official 1989 biography, which is not so different from the one of 1988. Let's remember that **this chapter has been removed from the later biographies**, because anyone could obviously see that Sudhamani's predictions never came true. I checked for instance the pdf version of the 2011 biography, and the very term shaktiprasad has completely vanished. Is it the great Maya of the Divine Mother, or a plain cover up operation to avoid the ridicule?

"The Holy Mother has blessed many childless couples. They had not succeeded for many years, but she has given babies them by her resolution (*sankalpa*, i.e. divine determination). Such couples had taken refuge at the feet of Holy Mother ... She is very strict for the selection of people who deserve this grace. This selection depends entirely on subtle considerations that are beyond the realm of the human intellect."²⁰

In other more critical words, the birth of children thanks to Sudhamani's blessing doesn't work systematically. Is it then only a question of chance? At this point in the biography comes the description of four of these supposed miraculous births, triggered by the "Saint Mother." As a conclusion, Balu states solemnly, or even pompously :

"About the future of these children, the Holy Mother said: "During my meditation, a power goes out of me and comes into the womb of the mother who thus becomes pregnant. Some of these children will become perfect sannyasis. Others will lead a family life. Anyway, they will all turn to spirituality. Hearing this truth, many mothers of these children felt sad thinking that after a few years they will lose their son for the service of humanity. Thus, the Mother promised them another child who would fulfill all expectations that parents usually have for their descendants, that is to say, get a job and lead a normal family life. In the years that followed, these mothers have received the blessing of another child."²¹

With a minimum of understanding, we can see that Sudhamani's predictions are broad enough to avoid being directly contradicted : declaring that someone will either become a *sannyâsi* or lead a family life, is knocking on an open door : these are the two options offered as a way of life into the Hindu system. Saying that the child will be spiritual is also undefined, because there are many ways to be spiritual... Obviously even that blur prediction never really happened, so the whole chapter has been removed from her later biographies. We are still waiting for these 'miraculous' *Shaktiprasâds* to become miraculous *sannyâsis*.

I often heard and read people saying that Sudhamani claimed that she wouldn't live more than 60 years. But she just reached her sixtieth birthday. So we will see if this is one more false prediction. Anyway, if the prediction doesn't happen, we can guess in advance the usual answer of the gullible believers overwhelmed with devotion : "The divine Mother allows herself to stay a little bit longer in this miserable world out of pure love for the suffering humanity and to answer to the intense prayers of her disciples!" And lo! One more prediction denied by the facts will have been gulped by the dumbstruck and naively blissful devotees.

One of the first westerner devotees to be around Sudhamani, who had learnt Malayalam, confirms that these anecdotes were actually an invention of her mind disturbed by ideas of grandiosity. As he was resisting against the pressure, Sudhamani sidelined him and picked naïve beginners with a more easy to handle mind, like for instance the Gayatrî from those days, who was weakened by her flawed beliefs and her lack of self-confidence as well as of experience of life.

Balu makes Sudhamani say these very words and advices that are "proper" to say, and that the readers of Râmdas, Râmakrishna or Mâ Anandamayî know very well. Nevertheless, Gail reports that he has been accused of plagiarism due to copying whole chapters from Osho, to credit Sudhamani with them. Has she actually said some of the words of wisdom? Or does Balu pretend that she said them or did he tell her to say them? This question deserves to be clarified step by step.

A diagnosis to understand Sudhamani's personality disorders in a more structured way

One could naïvely ask me how it is possible to make a psychopathological diagnosis about someone who does so much good to the world by hugging it. This will be discussed in detail later but we can start by saying that human personality is complex and there can be good fruits from a disturbed soil, just as there can be bitter fruits from a good soil. Moreover, one can be an efficient and relatively sympathetic social worker, without pretending to be a direct manifestation of the Divine Mother, these two levels are completely different.

The psychotic side

Viewing Sudhamani's teenage years from the psychological point of view, leads to the conclusion that she probably went through a psychotic phase. This will be the main subject of the second part of this text, with specific quotes from her biography. Her relation to her surrounding was very disturbed, just like her sleep. She was feeling better in the company of animals than with human, she was talking to invisible entities, she had very surprising behaviors, in her biographies, it is said that she had eaten cow dung, glass and human excreta. Her own brother was psychologically fragile and ended up committing suicide. The official biography says that this was because he wanted to prevent her from receiving her devotees. A more critical vision would be to say that she was drifting towards a megalomaniac delirium and he wanted to prevent that, but she found a way to be psychologically more violent than him and he felt so uncomfortable that he was pushed to suicide. Psychotic people in a crisis can pass on their contradictions, ambivalence and ill-being straight to others, with strength of an almost total anger. If the person is fragile with a depressive temper, this can bring to a "successful" suicide. Thus, in this interpretation, the brother will have been the first person to be destroyed by Sudhamani, in the long series of other victims consisting of the disciples who will dare to criticize her or wanting to move away from her. Fortunately, as they were generally fully grown adults, with a link weaker than the brother-sister one, the damages are not so important and they were limited to long or short moments of mental confusion, depression or even despair, but it never went so far as suicide, as far as I know. In order to know what really happened, the best would be to question her family, but they won't probably say a word, because their interests are closely related to Sudhamani now : she gave them enough to build beautiful houses and she secured the success of the clan, it will be hard for them to challenge her seriously. They will probably prefer the legend too, although they could help to debunk it. In addition to Gail, I have talked to some of the first westerners who were close to Sudhamani, and they confirmed that the brother's disappearance was a big taboo : during their stay at the ashram or in the organization, respectively 20 years and 14 years, they have never heard any comment about that. This must of course draw the psychiatrist's attention, because the seriousness of deep psychopathology often revolves around seriously suppressed events. In order to find more clues about this death, please refer to critical websites like for instance <http://amma-taavi-kassila-sex-cover-up.blogspot.in>.

The phenomena of psychotic depersonalization that Sudhamani was going through were then socialized and “made profitable” within the Indian context. They became temporary possessions by Krishna or Kali. This kind of sacred theatre is accepted in the traditional culture of India, although it is not so common to see it arising spontaneously in individuals. It is rather regulated in the form of *Râm lîlâ* or *Râs lîlâ*, respectively Rama or Krishna’s game, played by semi-professional children and adults. We must stress the fact that this type of splitting is not the sign of a psychosis if it is isolated, but associated to other symptoms, it shows a fragile background. The quick switching between violent and “rejecting” Kali-like moods and affectionate or even playful Krishna-like moods stands pretty well for psychotic ambivalence, as soon as the mythological clothing of personification is removed. Of course, the *bhâvas* are frequent phenomena in Kerala and Bengal, but if they lead to strong personality contradictions, the pathological question has to be considered. Hindus who are aware of their tradition know the signs enabling them to discriminate. Indeed, ambivalence is a major sign of psychotic dissociation and it consists in toggling between violent rejection and overwhelming fusion. The surrounding people can suffer from that. Many examples of this ambivalence can be found, for instance when Sudhamani was back after “merging” with thousands of people during *Devî Bhâva* by hugging them. When she was in her room with Gail or other assistants, she often resorted to yelling and blows because of insignificant details, supposedly neglected in their work. One day for instance, Sudhamani came back sooner than expected from a gathering with crowds in the big temple of Vallickavu’s ashram, Gail hastily started preparing tea but as the “Divine Mother” wanted to drink something immediately she began to go on a rant, she gave her a glass of warm milk in the meantime. This was a beverage that she used to drink from time to time but not so often. This little unexpected event was enough to raise Sudhamani’s wrath, in the psychiatric language this is called crisis of temper tantrum. She grabbed Gail by the hair, threw her on the floor and cast her away, telling her once more that she didn’t want to see her again. This is a clear instance of fusion and rejection, in fast alternate ways, even if the fusion wasn’t directed to the same persons as the rejection. Sudhamani, in a not-very-brave way, was using other women to carry her burden, she was aware that they were in psychological, spiritual and material dependence, just like Gail was at that time. Gail testifies : “I have come to understand how the tales and traditions of India and the essence of the guru/disciple relationship were misused by Amma. Instead of being based on a mutually beneficial life of respect, the relationship took on the distorted roles of submission and absolute dominance ... A guru/disciple relationship without underlying peace is simply not right. Amma's mode of conduct and teachings remain far from this principle”²².

Now let’s consider the omniscience question, which is for the devotees a natural consequence of Sudhamani’s divinization. The disciples share a lot of stories where they are convinced that she “knew”. The occurrences of telepathy shouldn’t be discarded, they frequently occur within intuitive people or between people who have a strong emotional connection, but it is not as such a sign of realization, far from it. Moreover, considering the tempered description of the Buddha in Pali scriptures, it lists series of qualities, but it avoids to

mention his omniscience. Indeed that would turn him into a God, and this has always been avoided by ancient Buddhism of South. One day someone asked Ramana Maharshi what was meant when his disciples was pretending from time to time that as a jnani, a sage, he was omniscient. He simply answered: "I know all I need to know" (meaning : I know in depth all the simple cues which lead to realization.)

We can discriminate between two levels in this omniscience question : the down to earth level, where a teacher use this naïve belief to scare the disciples, by letting them believe that even if they have the slightest critical thought against him, he will know immediately and they will have to punish them. This type of omniscience reminds of God the Father as a policeman who takes merciless revenge on those who don't want to love him or bow down before him, so he "nails" them so to speak. The second level is metaphysical so we face the question of divine omniscience, which is considered as obvious by the believers. This notion is not sustainable if we take the time to consider a simple argument : if God knew everything, he would know if we are to go to Heaven or Hell, so we would have no reason left to try to improve ourselves, because in one way or the other, we are not free to choose. It would be like if the dices were loaded in advance. However, our free will is considered as the obvious vital sign of God's love for us. These kind of contradictions, basically impossible to solve, led the Buddha 2500 years ago and many other reasonable people since, to reject the concept of a personal God and to simplify the religious path, rendering it more humble and modest : for him, the way of liberation consists in following what is correct in thought, in words, in actions, in other words to practice altruism. Thus knowing what we need to do, even if omniscience was existing somewhere, we would not need it anymore.

The internal dissociation tends to be projected onto others, throwing them into paradoxical emotional states like little children who do not know anymore what should be done to get love from the mother, given the rapid alternation of her contradicting demands. The result is at least infantilization of the surrounding people, or more serious, a partial destruction of their psyche through a state of intense self-depreciation, or even depression. The main disciple, and according to Gail the lover of Sudhamani, Balu, went through a severe depression and had to be on medication. This is not what one would expect from the closest Swami of the Divine Mother, who left behind him the burden of the world to rely entirely on God.

The hysterical side

Now let's consider the second part of the diagnosis, which is hysteria. A form of intermediary diagnosis has been described since long in psychiatry, the hysterical psychosis. Although some purist psychiatrists don't like this category, it is widely accepted and very convenient to identify some forms of pathologies which are neither pure psychosis nor pure neuroses, but just in between. Let's look at the long series of hysterical type signs in Sudhamani's behavior :

Childishness

We can find examples almost at each page of what Gail tells about Sudhamani's daily life. Her needs are immediate, if they are not satisfied as fast as possible, Sudhamani will have a tantrum like a spoiled child. Her anger is theatrical, hysterical, that's the least we can say, and of course, Gail will be the only one blamed for this. How can a great guru be wrong, even once, in face of a disciple that she saved, out of compassion, from this ocean of filthy vices that the world is? For instance, when they left to make the first world tour in 1987, they had to fly for more than 12 hours, from Asia to San Francisco. Sudhamani has been unbearable the entire trip, like a baby stirring because it cannot stand to remain several hours in a car; that was her first flight. At the beginning she was cold, the clothes that she was given were not enough, she needed a hot water bag, of course the hot water bag was in the hold of the aircraft but Gail succeeded in bringing her an empty wine bottle filled with hot water, by asking the stewardesses who must have been surprised. After two minutes, things were going wrong again, she wanted to sleep, but as there was not enough room for that, she laid down on the floor. She didn't listen to Gail's warning, thus a crew member had to come and wake her up, to inform her with a bitter-sweet tone that in planes, it was forbidden to lie on the floor. Gail had to translate in Malayalam because she couldn't understand anything. So Sudhamani lay over the two seats and she let Gail cope alone, standing in the corridor. As she couldn't stand there like she would in an Indian bus, she had to find another solution...²³ To sum up that first instance of childishness, a brief comment from Gail tells more than long speeches, about her weariness toward Sudhamani after twenty years of relentless service : "I needed help, a babysitter so to speak—someone to mind, wait on, and massage Amma while she was resting".²⁴

A kind of childishness phase can be legitimate to tie strong links between the master and the disciple. Then the latter is sent into solitude to grow by himself or herself. Yet, in our case, the disciples remain day and night to serve Sudhamani's institutions to ensure the maximum development of their multipurpose business; the institutions have admittedly securing and mothering aspects, but they can also be infantilizing.

It is said in the *Mahabharata* that Duryodhana, the chief of the assaulting clan, *Kauravas*, that wanted to rip power off from *Pandavas* hands, came one morning to bow before his mother. He was about to leave for the great battle of *Kurukshetra*, that he had himself triggered by reason of his out of measure ambitions. But his mother was a saint and didn't agree with this useless war. At the same time, she could not curse her own son. So when he took a bow she said : *Yatra dharma, tatra vijaya*. "Where *Dharma* is, Victory will be". Duryodhana didn't understand – and he rushed to the battle. The score at the end of the day was not clear, so the day after he came at dawn to asks for his mother's blessing. She said the same sentence. It went on this way for eighteen days, when her mother said for the last time : *Yatra dharma, tatra vijaya* "where *Dharma* is victory will be". Finally, he got killed with all his men that very last day of the battle. This phrase from Duryodhana's mother is one of the most famous from

Mahabharata, and it sums it up in a certain way. Jainism and Buddhism also put *dharma* at the root of everything. As for the subject of this study, there is a mother-child relation between Sudhamani and her disciples. If *Dharma* is not respected on one side or the other, then consequences will ensue, no matter the affection linking them. That's *Mahabharata's* message, and it still applies today.

Staging

Sudhamani was regularly in theatrical exaggeration. When she was having a tantrum against Gail, which often happened, she used to scream that she would kill her, cut her into pieces, and hang them out in the sun to dry. That is not so nice regarding someone who had dedicated her life to her service. Moreover, we can notice an underlying but clear fantasy for what we could call psychotic scattering. One central anguish in the beginning of psychosis is the scattering of body parts all over. It is a sure sign of dissociation, and Sudhamani had it clearly, probably for years. Being temporarily possessed by a divinity and staging it in a theatrical way is certainly accepted in Indian tradition, but we have seen that it is becoming scarce in modern India. Was Sudhamani's particular interest for theatrical expression motivated by an inclination of her character toward staging? The question remains. The unbalanced excessive emotional reactions are easy to diagnose with Sudhamani, as rather common manifestations of hysteria, but through the interpretation of her biographer and her disciples, they are disguised as mythological explanations involving Gods and Goddesses. When her hysteria produces anger then it magically turns into a manifestation of Kali, and when this very neurosis produces seduction then it turns equally magically into an aspect of Krishna. The main interest of Gail's book of testimonials is that it seriously stops the "magic wand." This has the power to trigger a process of awareness and healthy spiritual autonomy among the crowd of devotees.

The way that Sudhamani became a guru at a very young age, with a confusing easiness at 25 or 26 years old, began like a kind of theatre piece or a game. We can state in a critical way that with her disciple Gail who was just 21, the time was not so long ago when they were playing with dolls. This time the two young girls played the guru-disciple. It must have been very cute in the beginning but it raised some deep problems in the long term. Sacred theatre is fine; but staging one's behavior along the lines of hysteria, searching for secondary benefits, is not fine. Sometimes the boundary between the two is so blurred that it can make one slip towards something completely insane.

Sudhamani, who then became Amma, gained secondary benefits not only from staging and from her *bhava* times, but also from her daily guru behavior. She became the focal point of her family, of the village, of a small group of disciples, then of a whole ashram, and now of a global audience and of multipurpose undertakings. This is not meaningless as secondary benefits. Of course, altruism and charities are good for a religious movement, so she took this direction ; but we should not forget that she has built a personal empire, both from the material

point of view with huge properties and from the psychological point of view with thousands of submissive devotees. All this is not only fitted with big financial donations but also and mainly with a great hold on the minds of masses of disciples and visitors. The process is strengthened by her identification with the Divine Mother, a role that she and her disciples totally believe in. Keeping everyone in her grip isn't the sign of a thirst for power? This is likely to stimulate the ego, even if her devotees tell you, with much faith and sincerity, that she doesn't have any.

Since the time of her first *bhâva* in her mid-twenties, all eyes were on Sudhamani. Gail stresses regularly that Sudhamani was particularly careful about her male disciple's attention. The guru role that she embraced so well, entitles her to request or even demand to be the main focus of attention of her disciples in an exclusive way, even when she is not there. For instance, she told Gail who was finding it hard to meditate, to focus on her own feet and visualize them in her heart. It is a standard meditation on the guru, but Gail must have felt that in this precise situation, it was a scheme from Sudhamani to make her more dependent than she already was, so she failed to "step into" that meditation. So she found by herself that reciting her own mantra and focusing on the light in the middle of the forehead was more effective as far as she was concerned, and she performed this in the rare free moments that she had in her "service" to Sudhamani. After that, she never asked her any spiritual questions about how to meditate. This raises a real question about the quality of their guru-disciple relationship. Isn't it the role of the guru to teach the effective ways and means of meditation that actually helps the disciple? Certainly Gail was trying to rely on the idea that an "inner Amma" was guiding her at heart, but as time was passing, doubts were increasing and the more she discovered that it was her own light that was showing the way. It is this inner light that allowed her to get free from Sudhamani and go on her own way more peacefully.

The frequent anger

We have already had an overview of this symptom. This is the most known trait in the popular definition of hysteria. So one says : "she went in a tantrum like an hysterical person!", knowing that hysteria is not only present among women, it is more spread among men than we think. We need to understand that anger is only the other side of childishness : the child cannot stand frustration, thus anger is the automatic and almost mandatory consequence. We have already talked about the smashing kick to Leela. Don't go on telling me that someone who breaks the rib of a disciple who was affectionately massaging her legs and fell asleep because of sleep deprivation, is a wise woman playing mad woman. Let's be simple : it is rather a mad woman with no wisdom.

Even after Gail, as suggested by Sudhamani, took *Sannyasa* (monastic vows) from Balu who was forcing her into repetitive sexual relations – perverted situation -- the physical abuses of Sudhamani started again after a short break. She tells : "Grabbing me by the throat with one hand, she would dig her nails in and rip towards the center, scraping the skin as she went. I was then left with bright red scratch marks across my throat, and sometimes blood ... One time in a fit of rage she twisted my ear so hard I couldn't sleep on it for days".²⁵

In order to understand more deeply the psychological reasons of this violence against Gail, we must remember that in psychopathology there is an obvious link between physical violence and desire. The Indian tradition even talks, almost in a single word, about *kâma-kroda*, desire intense-anger. Anger is so to speak the backstage, the reverse of desire. Certainly, when two people are involved into an intense relation, a little bit of manipulation is acceptable. Yet when this manipulation often plays with deep fears – for instance Gail who had no support was often threatened to be thrown out by Sudhamani, not only from her service but also from the ashram – it turns into a kind of sadism, enforced with the intensity that a background of hysterical psychosis gives to anger.

One of the reasons explaining Sudhamani's frequent tantrums against Gail was rather simple : as Sudhamani had a relation with Balu and that he was assaulting Gail sexually without telling Sudhamani, the situation was akin to a three members couple. Even if Sudhamani didn't really know what was going on between them, she must have been intuitive enough to guess that something was happening and this was arousing her jealousy, bringing anger against Gail. These are rather common feelings.

In order to be righteous let's let the defense speak : in India it is common that parents or teachers beat the children. Sudhamani thus tries to justify herself this way : "I am your mother, the blows are for your own good!" she lauds her mother who used to beat her by saying that she was her first guru. We could consider this as afterthought rationalization of a basic psychopathology. It is a frequent psychological mechanism. Yet, her disciples are adults and her violence often comes with a will of psychological destruction, so it seems to be actual anger, the ordinary ugly type. Her outbursts are also triggered by insignificant frustrations which trigger her ego as the head of an ashram. This is rather ordinary. Hysterical bosses are commonplace in the world of enterprise.

It is not totally unheard of for a spiritual master to beat his disciple in order to wake him up. It is said that Nisargadatta Maharaj asked a young German disciple what the Self was and she answered in a rather naïve way something like : "it is what I experience here and now!" At that moment, Nisargadatta slapped her in the face. Obviously, he was not expecting this answer from her, it was pretentious for the young girl to say that she was experiencing the Self here and now. It is said that this disciple evolved, she learned her lesson and developed a deeper understating of the Self, while remaining bound to Nisargadatta. By cons, in Gail's case, the anger of Sudhamani was more like hysterical crisis for details and sick craving to impose her supposed authority as a guru upon a weak and dependent young girl. Sudhamani was not angry because Gail was saying wrong things about the Self, but because she was bringing milk when she wanted tea. There is a huge difference. When Gail clearly understood these psychological mechanisms, she left. In spite of any speech in favor of Sudhamani, who will remain superficial, the psychological and physical persecutions that she subjected Gail to, had no spiritual sense, they were mere practices of brutal domination. Even if they were interspersed from time to time with hugs, it was only increasing their controlling aspect, aiming at keeping Gail in affective confusion, thus dependence. In psychiatry, one theory says that it is by the mean of emotional contradictions and paradoxes between the outer speech and the inner actual feelings that parents induce psychotic dissociation into their children. Fortunately Gail was not a little child

when she arrived by Sudhamani, but she was only 21 years old so it took her 20 more years to understand what was going on, then several years of calm to really recover, and that with the precious help of sleep, food and healthy friends.

There seems to be a complete contradiction between the hugs in series of the *darshan* and right after, by the same Sudhamani, physical abuse and psychological violence made to Gail. Yet, by looking deeper, these are the two sides of the same coin, this coin is called : “desire for almighty power.” Sudhamani stuck to this desire, this glue bound her to pathological behaviors, without her being able to escape from them.

A simple reason for Sudhamani’s loss of temper could be the following : she knows deep inside that she hasn't reached the level she pretends to be, it brings about a guilt that she is not able to face either. So she suppresses it and finally the pressure is so high inside that she must let the steam off, one way or the other. So she picks the nearest female devotee who serves her to be her punching-bag, hoping that they will be terrorized enough to not testify about what is inflicted on them. With the release of Gail’s book, that hope, Sudhamani’s scheme has popped like a soap bubble.

Seduction

It is the major symptom of hysteria, and it was also major in Sudhamani’s behavior. For Indian masses, it turned into identification to Gopala Krishna, the child who steals hearts. This interpretation of her seduction temper could be acceptable if the rest of her behavior was in accordance with the purity of a divine child, but we have seen that it was far from being true. The direct seduction in relation to men was disguised as a mother-son bond. This can also be acceptable to a certain extent in the religious culture of India. Yet we have seen how, with her close disciples Balu and maybe Rao and Pai, it turned into an ordinary love affair. Moreover, the position of a mother-seductive towards adults tends to infantilize them. Gail, who was used to the ashram, was wondering why Sudhamani was tolerating so much childishness around her. The answer is simple, in fact she was fostering it and enjoying it. There was a competition as to know who would sit next to her in meetings, who would get a candy or a piece of the sari that she was wearing at *Devî Bhâva* in order to sew it on a doll to hold regularly in one’s arm. This can represent manifestation of the devotion like to child Krishna along the tradition of Hindu *bhakti*, but when this becomes centered on a living person, the risk of exploitation and manipulation, of personality cult increases. We need to understand clearly the difference, and many devotees don’t. This phenomenon is easier to understand when one notices that this childishness was both part of Sudhamani’s personal character and part of her way to gain power over people.

Greed

Immediate greed is a full feature of the hysterical picture. We can find greed for company, a hysterical person cannot stand alone, that is what we call technically anaclitism.

Indeed Sudhamani has never been alone since she started to operate as a guru. Gail tells with much delight of a secret escape from the ashram for... a 24 hours holiday in Kanva ashram. It seems to have been the single runaway in 20 years. Therefore, it is not inappropriate to think that this constant company was due to the fact that Sudhamani loved to be the main focus of attention of a group. In Indian tradition, the person of faith is supposed to spend a long time in solitude, practicing the instruction given by the guru, to be a sound and good spiritual experience, before transmitting it to others. Sudhamani obviously took a short cut to avoid that phase, neither guru nor solitude, and this can explain the problems, which occurred afterwards inside of her and around her. Her devotees keep on repeating that she gives a lot by “embracing the world” as they say, in other words embracing everyone. Yet when we think about it, the very move of hugging may be strongly ambivalent. It is giving completely but it is also taking completely. This gesture cannot be severed from its shadow, which is, taking ownership and power.

Among all branches of trade, some people have found thriving and profitable activities and they let themselves be sucked into it day and night. In Germany, for instance, some doctors become wealthy by giving consultations 16 hours a day, they are nicknamed *Kassenlöwen*, “cash lions.” It refers to the Social Insurance Institutions, *die Kassen*, that pay them for their work. This greed of Sudhamani for building a material and psychological empire has been cleverly disguised – like an octopus behind an ink cloud – by a curtain of megalomania : she is introduced as the one who will save the world. In fact a simple interpretation of her hyperactivity could be as follows : she is a workaholic. Or maybe we should say that she is a “*darshanholic*”, since *darshan* is her job...

The fact that Sudhamani is able to stay awake the whole night to give her darshan is often presented as an almost absolute proof of the Divine Energy that animates her. Yet, we have the right here again to temper this statement made by her devotees. To begin with a lot of people work at night to earn money, this doesn’t make them divine. A lot of young people go into nightclubs, they don’t sleep for the whole night because they enjoy dancing till dawn, they love it, and the music blaring in the speakers keeps them strongly awake. All this could apply to Sudhamani, who obviously likes the merry-go-round series of hugs. The loud music preventing from sleeping is also there during *darshan*. Moreover, the weather factor is significant in these traditions of night *darshans*. In Kerala like in any other too sunlit countries people are struck by wet heat for most part of the year. The night brings relief and one has the feeling that it is the right time to start operating normally. Yet in the long term, these sleepless nights lead to chronic sleep deprivation because it is not easy to recover during the day. This process is not good at all for physical and mental health, even if we appear to be in good shape thanks to a paradoxical and finally artificial excitement. One becomes like children who are restless in the night and refuse to go to bed, in spite of their parent's orders. A very old disciple who left Amma is not at all impressed by her energy to hug people during the night. He simply compares this to the strength of a woodcutter to move trunks and branches.

Sudhamani preaches the renunciation of food and bodily pleasures to her disciples and specifically imposes on them a daily diet almost without protein. But on the contrary, she enjoys fish twice a day, according to Gail's testimonial, who has been her personal cook for 20 years. It is true that she is a fisherman's daughter, but it reveals a serious lack of consistency in the ashram's life. The withering residents have often asked her a food with more proteins and vitamins, I made her the same request at a darshan in 1991, explaining the improvements to be made from a scientific point of view, but she has always refused to agree. She has just accepted to add a little more lentils in the rice soup, which didn't really solve the protein question... She officially says that for a *sâdhaka*, vitamins and proteins should come from God. So why the fish twice a day? "Certainly because she is not a *sadhikâ* anymore, but a fully realized being" could be the answer of her gullible devotees who are unable to challenge their guru, be it in the letter or in the spirit.

The disciples who stay a long time in the ashram are poorly fed, deprived from sleep and they look more and more like ghosts with a livid complexion, slender shoulders and thinness. This is how Gail describes Shanti :

"Shanti had come bouncing into the ashram about nine years before as a sun-kissed Californian with a solid meditation practice and a zeal for life. But her healthy frame had taken a beating over the years. She too had developed the ashram look—ashy skin, sunken eyes, slumped posture, and thinning hair. She too got hooked on the notion that the more you neglect and punish your body, the greater your devotion for Amma. Her face carried a constant look of deep sorrow."²⁶

In other words, Sudhamani makes dazzling promises of her love, that she is actually unable to give. Manipulation? Gail didn't escape this process of physical degradation, at the beginning she was nicely nicknamed "Amma's shadow" but at the end she was called in a more worrying way "the walking corpse." In the middle of this skinny procession, Sudhamani is not only thriving but also obese. It is true that she suffers from insulin-dependent diabetes. Yet this doesn't strike haphazardly. Chances are that the lack of sleep that stimulates the pancreas and the insulin in an excessive way has played a role. Anyway, we can suspect her diet which is excessively rich for someone who leads a mainly sedentary life despite appearances : either she is sitting to welcome people for *Darshan* or in private, or she is sitting in various means of transportation. She tries to justify the physical disharmony between her and her disciples by saying that she is "pregnant with many children." Why not face the truth and simply state that she suffers from greed on many levels, including food? The devotees will certainly be shocked by this interpretation. Maybe because, as the saying goes, "they have eyes but they don't see"... what unfolds daily in front of them.

The "trade secret" around "the" meditation of Amma is challenging. There is a copyright on IAM meditation. There are very good chances that people settle in

dependence, neglecting other forms of meditation that could be useful for them, shrinking their spiritual life to a few exercises and mantra chanting. According to a two-page leaflet which I have read and which describes the rather basic meditation of Sudhamani, I'm almost doomed to go to hell, for being aware of this practice without submitting myself to ask for official initiation, in other words paying a subtle "entrance ticket" in the form of dependency. All this is childishness shows the greed of Sudhamani and her organization which pretends to be overall and open. According to an old disciple, several people of the inner circle went together to assemble this simple meditation, and at that time, they were making fun of the credulity of the crowds for whom this meditation would become important.

As for Indian tradition, greed, *lobha*, is one of the three fundamental defects that must be fought along with intense desire, especially for sexuality and anger. They are gathered in the word *kâmakrodhalobha*. The Buddha also went in this sense. When he was asked which were the signs of spiritual progress, he simply answered in three points : "less anger, less greed, less ignorance". In order to go deeper in this subject, we can also notice that the Sanskrit word *lobha* has the same root as *love* in English and *lieben* in German as well as *belief* in English and *glauben* in German (from the medium-high German *ge-lauben*). We believe because we love, we love because we believe, and we get what we desire inside. Yet, it can be not so positive and drift to a fundamental phenomenon of psychiatry : delusion in the line of one's desire.

Anaclitism

Anaclitism is a major sign of hysteria, where the person cannot stay alone. We have seen that Sudhamani herself has never been alone, except during the brief periods of isolation related to her childhood, where she used for instance to go to sleep outside instead of staying in the house. From time to time Sudhamani made fun of Shiva who remains alone in retreat in Himalaya, suggesting that it is not so useful : yet, if she herself had done a several year retreat in loneliness, she probably wouldn't have been caught in the deviations described by Gail. I am myself writing these lines from a hermitage and I can say that when this type of life unfolds smoothly, it enables to follow the right path, the righteous middle path, beyond extreme self-deprecation or all-powerfulness feelings. We can consider that during her teenage crisis Sudhamani underwent a phase of self-deprecation, with intensely psychotic strong self-punishment features. She compensated them with dreams of all-powerfulness. They have crystallized around the theatrical play of *bhâvas*, that she more and more identifies herself to. The fact that she has frozen in this grandiose role has created an imbalance in her character. Of course *bhâvas* are part of Indian religious culture, but it is strange that Krishna or Devi are thus summoned at specific times of the week to meekly come and meet Sudhamani and her visitors who queue for that. There is something deeply in contradiction with the freedom and gratuity of divine grace. Maybe if Sudhamani had spent at least one year really alone in retreat facing herself, things may not have gone bad. The disciples, and surely herself, may say no. But how to

be actually sure? Those who have made this experience of solitude know it, how can those who haven't made it be so sure?

Mythomania and altered states of consciousness

We have seen instances of miracles that Sudhamani used to invent to credit her glory, then asking Gail, who was weak and obedient at the time, to tell them in front of thousands of people. She has invented her "purity" by claiming that she never menstruated after her first *Krishna bhâva*, her first session of identification with a god. Except that her menses never stopped, but she didn't want to admit so. She was thus trapped by her own lie. Nonetheless, it is possible that Sudhamani stopped having her menses for a few months, maybe a year or two, at the most emotional and strong moment of her practices. We know that in psychology, women who go through very stressful moments, like refugees at wartime, can stop having their menses for several months. After her inner life recovered balance, the menses surely came back, but the group around her had already associated amenorrhea to the acknowledgment of her Divine Mother state, so she became trapped in a vicious circle of lies. In the second part of the document we will look more into the details of this important and long-term lie of Sudhamani in the analysis of the psychopathological signs which had already appeared in her youth.

Anyway, we can see that things in the way she is presented have been re-written. At the beginning she was a brave little girl who fought to reach for spiritual states, now she is often presented as a direct offspring of the divine. Moreover, the founding members of the ashram who helped to promote her, or those who have worked a lot in the beginning, are completely erased from recent biographies, if only they have left Sudhamani. They don't exist anymore. Sometimes they reappear, if the ashram's policy needs them at that time. That's a poor sense of history. It reminds of the Vatican's or Communist party's stereotyped language. Of course, the real reasons why they moved away, as well as their actual criticisms of Sudhamani, are not mentioned. It is suggested that they left her because of lust or greed. Here again the truth is twisted. Those who dare to criticize Sudhamani, even in a nice and intelligent way, have no chance to climb to the top of the power pyramid of the ashram, and if they insist, they are driven out the door. So goes dictatorship... in the name of God of course.

The fact that she falls in altered states for special events, i.e. before large audiences (I have witnessed that on 2000 new year's eve at Amritapuri) impresses the crowds, thus she gets big secondary benefits. We can compare this to when hysterical patients hope that their secondary state will bring them a reward. The difference lies in the context, the glossy attractive religious coating probably conceals a dose of pathological background.

A last aspect of Sudhamani's mythomania is obvious : it's about her false predictions. Very often, she predicts that the following year will be disastrous (she sometimes based these predictions on what an astrologer told her....not divine intuition. In essence she was hedging a bet, hoping the astrological prediction came true, then she could claim credit for her all-knowing powers) and that we must pray a lot. In fact, events unfold in a very ordinary way, they are not better nor worse than they were before. In this, we could discern two weak points with Sudhamani : she is herself credulous, and she exploits her devotees' credulity. We have seen that for a long time, she put forward, in a rather risky move, the glorious destiny of the children

who were born thanks to “her” Grace and she even gave them special names, *Shakti-prasâd-s*. In fact, couples which couldn’t have children have come to ask for her benediction and then the child was born. From a medical point of view, we know that positive thinking, as well as a relaxation or feelings of surrender help a lot to foster pregnancy, at least when there is no major medical difficulty or anomaly. Those births are more accountable to people’s faith in Sudhamani than to Sudhamani herself. Anyway, she has always claimed with great fanfare that these children would have a glorious destiny, that they would form a group that would lighten the world. However, nothing comes, although most of them have now reached adulthood. False prediction? We have already noticed that the ashram has accordingly removed the chapters dealing with them, from the recent releases of her biographies. Usually ridicule kills, except in the field of beliefs which seem to withstand anything.

The split personality

In order to deeply understand the intensity of Sudhamani’s contradiction, it is good to rely on the notion of split personality. It seems to show for instance in the stories that I have already talked about : she comes back from *Darshan*, she has hugged thousands of people and played the role of the mother filled with love, she is now alone face to face with Gail or any other unfortunate assistant and she starts beating them violently without any serious reason, we feel that she does so almost by pleasure. The split personality diagnosis often goes along with the one of psychosis. There is some kind of truth in the scared opinion of the devotees who think that she is possessed by Kali when she is angry and possessed by Gopal-Krishna when she is seductive. These are completely different entities inside of her and given the irrelevant violence crises that alternate regularly, we have the right to consider that it is more due to a pathological background than a divine election. One can judge a tree by its fruits, actually all the fruits, not only some of them which are sweet and shown publicly thanks to massive pious advertisement.

When talking about split personality, it can sound extraordinary to people who don’t know psychology. But in fact, it is easy to find ordinary people who have split personality : they are gentle with their managers and customers at work and infernal with their wife and kids at home. Sudhamani is likely to have this kind of dissociation, except that she doesn’t have any manager, because she identifies herself directly with the Divine Mother. By cons, she has many consumers, namely *Darshan* visitors and she is very soft with them, the first motto of marketing is : “the customer is king!” As for her family which is her ashram, there are numerous testimonials saying that she acts like a dictator and those who dare to really oppose her and get out of the overall childish ambiance are quickly put aside, or even cast out from the institution. One cannot bargain with God, or those who believe to be ones.

Diagnostic summary

Sudhamani is likely to suffer from one or many psychotic episodes during her teenage years, which have only partially been healed by her self-therapy attempts thanks to religious practices and to the fact that she hugs thousands of people to reassure herself in relation to her bodily identity. Yet she has never received specific guidance, not from any guru nor from psychotherapists. She coped the best she could to get out of trouble. She has succeeded in developing a shamanic-like power, paying the great price of a psychotic ambivalence “(fast alternating terror/fusion) that enabled her to also manipulate other people’s feelings (hysterical aspect), manipulation with master’s touch, so to speak. I assert that her teenage pathology healed only partially, because Sudhamani’s development didn’t unfold smoothly. Persistent tantrums, serious hypocrisy at many levels including sexual life and the organization’s finance, shameless lies, psychological destruction of the disciples who want to escape from her grip and last but not least, false predictions and account of miracles. Certainly, Sudhamani remains an exceptional person but with equally exceptional internal contradictions. Honestly she doesn’t deserve to be called a wise woman nor from descent of the Divine Mother and her reality appears to be very far from the golden legend spread by her organization.

When the adoration is excessively focused on someone, it can become a problem, even according to the traditional psychology of yoga : indeed according to the latter, the four main defects that should be avoided are : *kâma*, intense desire, *krodha*, anger, *lobha*, greed and *moha*, illusion. We discover that devotion directed to an object which doesn’t deserve it makes defects all rise at the same time : we intensely desire the object to be perfect, it makes us blind and it doesn’t enable us to see its defects. This blinding leads to illusion, ignorance, which in itself leads to anger in two ways : first, when we are in this illusion, we become angry when friends try to warn us out of sympathy, to help us. Second, when we are in the disillusionment phase, we are angry at the object of devotion for having fooled us, and angry at ourselves for letting ourselves be tricked. We thus experience the four fundamental defects when devotion is diverted.

Let’s say it again : Sudhamani’s contradictions are so intense, especially her extended lies towards the crowds of visitors and finally the world, that they prompt us to consider them as serious manifestations of a split personality in the context of a hysterical psychosis. Accordingly, the high tides and low tides of Sudhamani are a good illustration for the classical proverb “there is a fine line between triumph and disaster.” Moreover it was noted that gifted children often keep on going in life with major psychological problems. Is this the case for Sudhamani in the religious field, with the gift she had for sustained sadhana in her teen years?

Looking back at the story of Balu and Sudhamani, we can consider that the grandiose ideas of the first have prompted the second to propel herself too high, without any safety net, so to speak, and this process of two-partners delirium, could have set into motion this current fall long ago. If Balu and Sudhamani had got married officially, things would have been much clearer. For instance, the public would have been cautious with a husband who overpraises his wife, and they would have put it down to the overwhelming enthusiasm of a lover, who is as excessive as naïve ; yet, in this case, Balu was introducing himself only as a perfect devotee, it

thus aroused no suspicion, no cautious attitude from the visitors or from the applicants who wanted to become disciples.

Certainly, Sudhamani's personality is much more complex than the idealized image that the organization spread with its proselytism. According to Gail's testimonial, she has a whole range of behaviors which are not compatible with the image of the great sage of India that the organization wants to display. Gail has rendered a great service to the public, especially the newcomers who ask themselves if it is worthwhile to get involved with Sudhamani. Human beings are not little children, they have the right to know before committing.

The hysterical second states lead to split, so does psychosis. Therefore, hysterical psychosis is a kind of "double split." It explains the development of Sudhamani with her double life, on stage like an actress who plays the role of the Divine Mother – very well, let's admit it – and in private life where she develops all kinds of human defects, too human. Let's note that spiritual practice is already complex in itself, without adding the burden of having to unravel what comes, in the teacher, from an authentic spirituality or on the contrary from the sequels of an old psychosis.

By reciting her mantra to the point of inducing serious psychological unbalance, Sudhamani has also probably developed some parapsychological powers. This, associated to a good sense of relationship to her "customers" and shows staged two times a week, has fostered the development of a big movement. Yet, there is a huge gap, not to say a whole world, between these rather simplistic characteristics and the human perfection implied by the descent of the Divine Mother into a woman's body. The gullible devotees have slipped into this pit instead of avoiding it.

If Sudhamani had had a good reaction to Gail's book, recognizing her past mistakes and she knew how to ask for the public's forgiveness for having concealed for instance her love affairs or for inventing a series of miracles, many devotees would have probably forgiven her, because she gives solace to many people and performs a lot of social activities. Yet, moved by all-powerfulness ideas that have been stirring inside her for a long time, especially since her Divine Mother Sâdhanâ which looks a lot like a crisis of acute delirium, she is completely unable to acknowledge her own mistakes. She thus ridicules herself in front of the general public like a little girl with her hand caught in the cookie jar, who keeps on claiming that she has nothing to do with any of this. She will certainly not solve any of her problems by massively denying her past behavior and the behavior of her surrounding, by threatening or even terrorizing the movement's dissidents with legal threats, or by leading her devotees to destroy critical books in an editor's shop. It's about falling into a kind of radical Hinduism which is meant to save a thriving religious business and to keep exploiting the golden egg goose. Is it worthwhile from a spiritual point of view?

Moreover, by denying any responsibility in the failure of her relation to Gail and the facts that Gail revealed, create a high level of ambivalence and anxiety among those who would like to remain faithful to her. Actually, this represents a clear mirror of her own ambivalence and anxiety. We can consider that these are the direct consequences of the serious psychotic moments she went through and that we have analyzed in detail.

When we think about this, the major part of Sudhamani's success is akin to the one of an inventor. He had an original idea, like the Nespresso appliance for instance, and he had been clever enough to patent it, develop it in an industrial way and finally market it on a large scale. Sudhamani's patent has been the "darshan-hug." It had never been done before, there was a need for that in the public, so the supply met the demand and the business thrived. No need to imagine a descent of the Divine Mother in order to do that. To conclude, let's note that what people don't know or don't want to know, is the fact that psychosis is contagious. If an individual is affected with a desire of all-powerfulness, many other people are likely to be contaminated, especially if the phenomenon is gradual. This is made easy by the fact that the "immune system" of these people is weak, in other words they need for instance to compensate for a feeling of powerlessness or inferiority.

SECOND PART :

Understanding Sudhamani's personality through her childhood and teenage years

For this study, I will use as a source of information, the official biography of Sudhamani, who has become Amma for her disciples, released by her ashram in 1988. I have succeeded in finding the first re-edition of 1989, which has not been altered too much, according to a former ashramite. Yet I would need a more critical biography, along with an inquiry to check the facts, especially the accounts of miracles. Indeed, the official biography tends to be a hagiography. The fact that it has been translated in 31 languages adds more confusion concealing the essential question of the quality behind the quantity of ink. Gail herself found this part instructive, leading her to a deeper understanding of Sudhamani's childhood and of the psychological problems in germ in it.

We have already portrayed the main features of Sudhamani's diagnostic but still need to look into the detail of how it is rooted in her childhood and teenage. There is a psychological logic behind that, which is important to understand. That's how we can get out of the magic thinking.

Looking at the biography, it has been written by the one who used to be a *brahmachârî* called Amritatma Chaitanya, namely Balu, one of the main characters of Gail's memoir about the ashram. Of course, he was inspired also by a preceding biography in Malayalam by Pr Ramakrishnan Nair. We have seen in the portrait that she provides of him, that he is not nice at all, by reason of his hidden relation with Sudhamani and the sexual assaults she had to endure. We can feel the idealization mechanism displayed by Balu and his group in all pages, the ashram's life is depicted like a dream, and in parallel Sudhamani is described as a pure innocent victim of her surrounding. As far as we can see, the author is not bothered by the fact that things may have been more complex than that.

It sets the stage for the current poor defense of Balu and Sudhamani. They are pushed up against the wall and accused by Gail in her book, and instead of giving issue-by-issue clear answers, they take refuge in strategic obscurity and play the unfairly persecuted children of God. This rather reminds of perverse manipulation. Yet the biography gives sufficient details to more or less understand what was unfolding, provided we read between the lines. Psychiatry training is very useful for this purpose. Moreover, I have advised at the

beginning of the study to carefully read *embezzling the world*²⁷, which delivers a good work of inquiring journalism, quoting its sources of information and giving internet links for the people to check for themselves. I advise for instance the page *What happened in 1983?* The police decide to raid religious individuals who were pretending to perform miracles, in order to check their pretenses. It seems like Sudhamani disappeared for a while at that time. Along these lines, a famous rationalist writer of Kerala asked to meet Sudhamani and talk with her about her miracles. She carefully avoided such a meeting.

The end of Sudhamani's teenage years have been characterized by the appearance of *bhâvas* phenomenon, these are inner states close to possession. In order to widen the context of this study, they can be compared to the possession phenomenon which is very famous in Africa, and which has been well studied by a writer like Eric De Rosny in his book *Les yeux de ma chèvre*²⁸ (*The Eyes Of My Goat*), released in the 80's. The main idea of the book is that possessions are used to balance the game of power inside the family. The family is more or less patriarchal and the young girls or young women are the last wheels of the last wagon. Yet, by means of possession, they can talk with the authority of their ancestors or the divinity that they temporarily embody. They can thus recover the power that they miss. This scheme applies well to Sudhamani's case, with an adaptation to the Indian context which puts forward the seduction of Krishna and the all-powerfulness of the Divine Mother. In order to have an overall look at the link between mystic and madness in India, one can read Mac Daniel's book²⁹ that I studied when I wrote my 1991 book *Le maître et le thérapeute* (*The Master And The Therapist*).

To come back to the authenticity of the official biography, Gail informs us that Sudhamani often asked her to tell invented miracles, I remind this point because it is a major fact for my study. She was not the only one, a western devotee, who also had a major role in the organization, confirmed that Sudhamani asked him to do the same. This weighed heavily in his decision to leave the organization after working a lot to build the European movement, a few years before Gail escaped from the clutches of Sudhamani. This is essential : saying or suggesting that some miracles happened is the best way to attract Indian crowds and even westerners who are fascinated by this kind of phenomenon. But how to check this topic? The core of long-term devotees are totally involved with Sudhamani, it may bend their objectivity, the same is true for her family which social status is now completely bound to the one of their daughter or sister, quickly promoted as a guru. As for the village rumors, it's difficult to check them after 20 or 30 years of emotional-devotional "brainwashing" advertising Sudhamani as a Divine Mother. Of course, some opponents had the courage to say things, including on the internet, but the actual biography should be deeply studied. Particularly before Gail arrived, we miss a few critical points of view. Of course, I don't pretend that I have read all English sources and I don't speak Malayalam so I'm not able to read this language. Yet, we can remember what has already

been mentioned : Prof. Ramakrishna Nair, the first biographer of Amma in the Keralan tongue, supports the publication of Gail's book. He says : "She is the one who knows best what was unfolding behind the curtain."

The Youth : An abused child who was forced to learn the art of concealment.

This association between violence and concealment, which is well known in psychology, is essential in this case. Because the most serious challenge of Gail against Sudhamani is to tell the readers that the latter has been willingly concealing important elements of her life for 35 years. It is a case of "forgery and falsification of records" so to speak. We need to examine if the habit of little and big lies is rooted or not in Sudhamani's childhood.

Getting used to violence

The violence of the mother against Sudhamani is presented as something useful in the biography. I have already quoted the meaningful parts dealing with the abuses of Damayanti Amma, in the section of the diagnostic about violence. The mother was asking God to make her daughter disappear. Hearing the one who gave you life, wishing your death must be hard and confusing, especially when the mother involves God in a hypocritical way, to vent her resentment on her daughter. Anyway, we can find a link with Damayanti's name, *dama* means control and *yanthi* is the suffix of the causative present participle. So it means something like "the one who is aiming at control." These episodes are important to understand the mental world of Sudhamani with Gail. In fact, she was reproducing what she had lived with her mother, including the bites. In psychology, before resorting to complex interpretations, it is better to come back to simple explanations. Abused children tend to reproduce what happened to them. It's a basic law of psychopathology.

Getting used to lies

Children who are subjected to violence often get used to lying, at least to save their skin. But the problem is that this habit strongly tends to continue, even when they are no longer directly threatened by the violent parents or brothers. In theory, the people from Kerala are presented like truth-lovers in the first chapter of the biography, which actually has been relevantly called *The legend*. Balu says with great candor at the beginning, "The truth is the fishermen's strength. They believe so much in the Truth as protector that if they go fishing without being faithful to the truth, it means jumping in the mouth of death, fierce and wide open."³⁰ If we follow Gail's thread, then Sudhamani has drifted far away from the truth tradition

and the scandal which is spreading about her will probably end up throwing her movement in the “mouth of death, fierce and wide opened.” It’s a question of Karma.

When we read the text carefully, we can find underlying contradictions, which are distortions of the truth. For instance Sudhamani’s grandfather, Velayudhan, is presented as a “Sincere and generous person. He firmly held to the ideal of ahimsa (not kill). He never allowed to take the life even of one little rat.”³¹ We are also told that the members of Sudhamani’s family were all working as fishermen, but they could also have other occupations. If these two information are linked together, why did the grandfather choose a job that he was not forced to do and which was making him kill hundreds of fish every day?

This contradiction which shines like a little lie in the biography is related to a bigger one about Sudhamani as the head of an ashram : we already mentioned that Gail tells that Sudhamani forbade the ashram residents to consume fish and all kinds of animal proteins, except dairy, but that she used to eat fish twice a day. Gail knew this because she was in charge of cooking. This contradiction is bigger, shocking from the point of view of basic consistency and ethics.

Moreover we have seen that Balu describes with much admiration the little larcenies of Sudhamani, the way that she used to secretly rob the little money or food from her parents to give to the poor. She was beaten for that. Although this seems to have been done with good intentions, it was nevertheless a training to concealment, which was gradually leading to an uncontrolled slide of bigger lies. So goes the saying : “He that will steal an egg will steal an ox,” we could go on and say : “He that lies about an egg will lie about an ox.” Maybe Sudhamani is still succeeding in justifying the inventions of miracles by saying that they are good to increase people’s faith in the religion of the Divine Mother, namely herself. The fact that these lies inflate her own ego surely does not cross her mind. Can one have a bad conscience when one has merged for good into the Divine Mother? Is it possible to keep one’s critical faculties when one has really slipped into an all-powerfulness delirium? Is it still possible to doubt, when one is moved by psychotic certainties?

To go on with the little larceny and little lies made by Sudhamani to her parents in order to feed the poor of the village, the biography mentions the child Krishna and the little innocent tricks that he used to play to his mother. Yet at a deeper level, the habit to lie is something common for abused children, because they try to survive one way or the other, and lying becomes a part of their defense strategy. This habit to cheat, supposedly for the poor, has grown in Sudhamani as an adult, into some serious financial complications, especially when it's about transferring funds between the West and Kerala. Independent websites estimate that 60% to 70% of the money donated in good faith by western devotees for the humanitarian work, is funneled towards bank accounts outside India³². According to the analysis made by *Embezzling The World*, it represents 60 to 70 million dollars “little larceny.” When the average devotees are faced with these serious accusations, they often hide behind childishness, saying : “Our Amma is a little innocent child like Krishna, who used to commit little larceny by his parents by stealing butter in the kitchen!” In this case, the “butter” reaches at least 60 million dollars. To what extent will this massive infantilization go? We recommend in this sense a blog of January 2015 on the same site who says that only 0.69 % of the total donation given to Amma

for poverty relief goes really for poverty relief.ⁱ
<http://embezzlingtheworld.blogspot.fr/2015/01/fcra-2013-2014-069.html>.

We should clearly explain that the 44,13% devoted for the building and maintenance of schools and colleges, and the 13,82% invested in the construction and development of hospitals and clinics are scarcely charitable, since they are paying undertakings for the clients except rare cases. Let's remember that presently in India, education and health are flourishing activities and attract a lot of private funds. Amma's organization is but a particular case of this tendency. Let's note also that 41,37% of the amount given for "Amma's charities" land in uses "other than those described elsewhere". Which one? The public doesn't know. They say that love is blind, faith too, but it's still disturbing to see up to which extent.

Moreover, according to Gail, there is a serious case of concealment by Sudhamani regarding her sexual life with her closest disciples, mainly Balu. He reproaches her family and particularly the elder brother Subhagan that they have tried to control Sudhamani's relationship to men. So not only was Subhagan's attitude justified, but also Balu's aggressiveness toward him becomes more understandable : the elder brother represented the main obstacle standing between him and his desire. Let's also remember that the references made to Kali, which is often used by the devotees, is no excuse. Playing the Goddess who destroys her enemies only because they are her enemies can be the sign of a naïve ego or even of a common all-powerfulness delirium, which is a clear mechanism of compensation for an abused and humiliated child. The official biography takes advantage of any occasion to glorify this compensation, without noticing that this is a highly risky and slippery subject in psychology. This type of Divine Mother, swinging between the normal and the pathological can be called *callous Kali* to play with words.

There is an obvious high level of hypocrisy, between the pseudo motherly speech of Sudhamani, saying that she is ready to welcome Gail in the ashram and forgive her everything—and the violent personal attacks, that I have already mentioned, led by the ashram against her. For instance, the website *Ammasandal*, or through the notices pinned in the big temple of the ashram in February. Both attitudes are contradictory, one can reasonably interpret them as a type of psychotic ambivalence, and no one can pretend that Sudhamani is not aware of what is going on in her own temple, 600 feet away from her room, like for instance a defaming campaign displayed on the wall, as it was the case in March 2014.

From a legal point of view, lying and cheating others is not a crime. The law cannot contain all deviations of the human behavior, it is not all-powerful, it is up to each and everyone to be educated enough to be cautious in relation to others. The law considers the human being to be an adult, not a child. Yet, in the field of belief, emotion comes first, and even intelligent and cultivated people easily lose their critical faculties and become like little children. We have seen that happening when the devotees lack critical faculties about the funds meant for humanitarian work that is secretly diverted into bank accounts often outside India. Let's also note that the long-lasting lies are more serious than the fact of having beaten Gail, because they cannot be justified by the hardship of the relation with a specific human being. Tricking someone brings bad karma. Tricking millions of people brings millions of bad karma. It's

mathematical. Now it's up to Sudhamani to cope alone with that. Large scale humanitarian work cannot compensate that well for the ethical failure.

The ideas of persecution

These ideas are commonplace within delirium, they can be found daily in psychiatric practicing. Of course most of the time they are not full illusions, they are based on a certain reality. Not everyone is good in society, it is almost normal that tensions exists and that some people want to hurt you for one reason or another. Yet, the fact that these problems mainly arise as a reaction to their own megalomaniac assertions never comes across the patients mind. The most repeated refrain of the biography is this one :

"Although Sudhamani manifested an extraordinary abundance of noble virtues, no one in the family took any notice, much less understood or appreciated her all-embracing attitude towards life. It can only be divine paradox that the little one received only heaps of abuse for all that she did."³³

Anyway this commonplace of Sudhamani's biography, depicting her like the little Cosette (Les Miserables character) of Kerala is contradicted by one of her former disciples, who remained in the organization. I've known him for 22 years. He says that it was Sudhamani who made life a hell for her parents, because she used to follow her impulses that she believed to be divine, but actually she was mainly doing as she wished. The unfair feeling of being rejected by her family is also expressed by the villagers : after witnessing all the difficulties of young Sudhamani because of her systematic opposition to her parents, they use to comment this way : "Sudhamani has been bought in Quilon in exchange for bran and rice." Her parents used to take all children to attend to religious ceremonies but Sudhamani was often left aside. In other words, her parents deprived her from everything, including God, but the little one was about to take revenge, at least that's what the devotional words of Balu say... The underlying idea saying that Sudhamani was bought, means that her own parents were not worthy enough for her, she should have had other ones. This is a frequent theme in delirium, it is called the idea of filiation. This is certainly the sign of an intense ill-being in the parent-child relation, when the latter imagine that they may have other protectors, closer to their level. Of course seeking solace in a Divine Father, Mother, or Lover is not to be blamed. It often has therapeutic effects, but it is best to be a conscious being, to know what one is doing and to clearly grasp the why and the how of a devotional projection.

With the intensification of her practices, Sudhamani could sometimes "get into the bathroom to take a shower, but she was found lying unconscious of her environment. These states were Sudhamani's mystery for the family who were convinced that she was suffering from some kind of mental aberration. The girl was a solitary traveler in her own world"³⁴ Those

closely surrounding her used to think that she was a psychiatric case. Were they completely wrong? After all her surrounding knew her best, they knew how she was behaving daily.

Generally, her ideas of persecution are emphasized upon by Balu in such an obsessive way that it creates an unhealthy psychological atmosphere. They feed a long-term resentment, and even a compensating megalomania that stands for a kind of vengeance, presented as natural against those who have humiliated her at the beginning. One can be caught in the scheme of the persecuted persecutor, it is the standard pattern of paranoia. Certainly, Sudhamani doesn't suffer from asthenic paranoia, i.e. being just distrustful against everyone, thinking that each and everyone wants to hurt her, but the megalomania question is central. In fact, this is also a kind of paranoia, but from the sthenic type, in other words, supported by a great energy.

The relation to men

This is new information for why Damayanti had a harsh way of educating:

"Her daughters had to be seen as the elites of virtue by the community. If this reputation was lost, so everything was lost at least from the perspective of the mother. In this sense, she was leading them with severe discipline. She never allowed them to speak to any man, especially those who were young. At that time, the four sides of Idamannel (family house) were surrounded by water and the mother had built a barricade around the house for protection against undesirable people. Even so, she was not satisfied and she had taken a dog at home to raise the alarm if someone was approaching. If it started barking, she was calling Subhagan, her eldest son, who used to come to see. If it was a stranger or a young man, the door was not opened. Damayanti was plagued by this concern about her daughters growing up. So her intense desire to get rid of most of its burden by marrying Sudhamani became stronger."³⁵

We must have a good understanding of the context of these poor traditional Hindu families. The parents have a very small dowry to offer to their daughter, therefore they tend to compensate this with a kind of absolute purity certificate, virginity is highly valued on the marriage market. This complete separation between men and women made the young girls compensate their affection more or less successfully through devotion to Krishna. One can wonder about the proportion of compensation phenomenon lying behind the devotional urge. This situation is a little bit sad of course, but that's how things are, it must be taken into account.

The lack of solitude

We have seen that it can look weird to put the lack of solitude in the list of problematic signs for the development of personality. Yet, speaking about spiritual practices, this solitude is a major factor for deep advancement. But Sudhamani had very few moments like this : at the

beginning she was always busy with the service to her family, then she went through a disturbed period when she had to sleep outside because her family cast her out of the house but it was alternating with phases when she was locked inside, with her family. Then she asserts that she had the realization by merging with Krishna and the truth, and she started straight away her peculiar staging of theatrical *bhâvas*. It worked better than she expected and she became quickly famous. There were few moments of solitude in all this.

According to the biography, it was only at 13 or 14 years old that Sudhamani was occasionally sent to the freshly sown paddy fields—her mission was to scare the crows and chickens. The fields were far away from the house, this occasion was her moment to remember God as the little girl was used to doing. This work gave her the rare chance to be far away from her family and to find moments of loneliness to deepen her practice. Each breeze was conveying the name of Krishna. Each step was made in remembrance of his divine shape.

If I call exceptional the moments when the teenager could be alone, that's because she almost never was in daily life. It is hard to make a deep *Sâdhanâ* under such conditions. Of course experiences can occur, that's not a problem, but will they sustain?

She started performing *bhâvas* when she was 21 years old, first for Krishna then Devî, and she continues till today in the middle of the crowds. It is very different from the biographies of India's great sages, who took the time to make a long *Sâdhanâ* in isolation, like Râmakrishan, Aurobindo or Mâ Anandamayî. The latter spent five years in complete silence, between 25 and 30 years old. Râmanâ Mahârshi experienced realization at 15 years old but he confirmed it thanks to many years of practice far away from the world. It's only after more than twelve years in *Virupaksha* that he started having a few disciples in *Skandashram*, which was a cave, thus providing him with isolation for perhaps 15 years more. That is what Sudhamani missed, and this is certainly one of the major reasons for the further complications that Gail talks about. We can recall the case of a Hindu woman who became a famous guru in the West. She had been appointed at a very young age by her master, to be his successor. After 15 or 20 years of work, she retired in isolation to practice an intense *Sâdhanâ*, it seems.

At 5 years old, Sudhamani already experienced altered states of consciousness, that her family was mistaking for psychological trouble or psychological troubles that her devotees later interpreted as altered and mystic states of consciousness. This is what Balu the official biographer says :

"These experiences have ushered in a long period of defamation of their daughter and misinterpretations of these bold takeoffs to the realm of the divine. For their part, the parents were worried and afraid that this particular way of acting could pave the way for a psychological disorder."³⁶

At the age of 9 or 10, she was constantly crying. The official biography asserts that it was out of love for Krishna, but maybe it was an ordinary depression re-interpreted and concealed

under a religious varnish. Anyway most of the people who knew her, in other terms the villagers saw things this way :

"Like someone struck with grief, the abandoned child, Sudhamani, was calling her beloved Krishna. The villagers saw her as a being living in another world. Unable to understand the reasons for the intense interior fight of the small one, they usually had sympathy for her state saying, "What a pity! Poor child. What happened to her? She always had tears flowing from her eyes. What a sorry state! Is she simply born to cry? Do the people of her family make her suffer in difficult trials? If so, what has she done to suffer all this misery?"³⁷

Teenage and the severe delusional crisis

The threats of arranged marriage, the temptation for suicide and resorting to Krishna

Between 20 and 22 years old, Sudhamani focuses her practice on Krishna then Devi. This period is already full of sleepless nights.

"Finally she was collapsing on the floor in her anxious search for the divine, but her nights remained sleepless. She was alert without closing her eyes, expecting the Lord to come at the next moment ... At the end of the ritual, she was feeling that the Real Krishna had arrived and was standing right in front of her. With a trembling body and eyes filled with tears, Sudhamani was overwhelmed by devotion and was worshipping repeatedly before the clay image. The next moment she was feeling that Krishna was about to run away and the small girl was rushing forward to catch him. Then she was realizing that everything was a product of her imagination and the earth was still only picture of the earth. This was making her explode in tears and sobbing about this pitiful situation, she kept on crying: "Krishna, Krishna! Please come and bless the one who is shredded by the aspiration of your vision."³⁸

We can wonder if this is a typical phase of the devotion process, as suggested by Balu, or the typical mood liability of serious delirium crisis, with its alternating feelings of depression and ecstatic excitement. The question remains, that important lack of sleep directly fosters delirium. The feeling of body scattering is a pathognomonic sign, which characterizes well the severe delirium crisis. Sudhamani clearly explains that she feels herself scattered. Of course, we can interpret this as the effect of her intense aspiration for the vision of Krishna, but from the point of view of classical psychiatry, this experience of scattering can signal the high risk of falling into chronic delirium. We have seen that it is relevant to ask ourselves if Sudhamani has developed her special way of performing *Darshan* by hugging, as a self-therapy, in order to try to gather the pieces of her own body, by spending hours embracing the people. Within a culture

where there is strong taboo about physical, love relationships before marriage, this may be a way she found to reassure herself and avoid stumbling into full psychosis. The risk was serious because her dissociation symptoms lasted at least for one year and a half, maybe two years. According to psychiatry, remaining more than six months with these symptoms goes beyond the frame of the serious delirium crisis diagnosis, to fall under the frame of schizophrenia. It seems like Sudhamani's self-therapy attempt worked to a certain extent. She avoided the worst.

The violent reactions of Sudhamani to the proposals of arranged marriage, don't signal a basic emotional balance. Generally we violently repel that which we most want, it is a well known psychologic fact :

"Sudhamani was busy in the kitchen to pound the dried rice with a wooden pestle when a new suitor came. She had already decided to deal with the situation in a more direct way, waving the pestle with both hands like a soldier ready to attack her enemy with a bayonet. She got up screaming in the kitchen, by threatening him, waving the pestle and making ridiculous gestures. Her mother Damayanti almost fainted with shame. However, the little one that was not willing to give up so easily, and continued her circus until the wedding group had ran away thinking she was mentally deranged. Soon after Sudhamani received her daily dose of harsh kicks and blows, but in a harder way"³⁹

All these mood swings finally pushed her to the edge of suicide, which actually reflects her enemy brother Subhagan :

"Another time, because of the unfair harassment of her family, she decided to end her life by jumping into the sea. The next moment, she thought : 'Who will die? Who will take birth? Who can harass a true devotee of the Lord?' This strong conviction had completely changed her mindset."

These suicidal thoughts must be taken seriously. In Indian society, young girls before getting married and young women just after the wedding, represent the most vulnerable group to be exposed to suicide risk, because they become aware that they have little control over their life. If the in-laws family is tough, they don't have any option and choose to escape the situation by ending their life. Moreover, Sudhamani's elder brother, Subhagan, also exposed his psychic fragility by committing suicide. We were then in a risk family. We will come back later on this topic, but we can note that we address very deep archetypes of sacred violence : in many traditions, we can find one of twin brothers who are beaten or killed, when a community is about to be founded : Cain and Abel, the *Yama* in Vedic tradition, or Remus and Romulus. The latter killed his brother for daring to step over the traces of Rome's wall that he had just drawn on the ground. Indeed, he had received his authority from Heaven and had the right to name the new city by attracting twelve eagles on the hill where he was, whereas Remus, on the other hill only attracted six eagles. It reminds of the two eagles that Sudhamani attracted to her *bhavas*, and that the devotees interpreted as Vishnu's acknowledgement, whereas Subhagan of

course attracted none. That's also Sudhamani, who had become Amritanandamayi, who had the authority to give her name to the ashram-new city, Amritapuri, like Romulus gave his name to Rome.

Talking about grounding murder, we can find in India a tradition of black magic, of course rejected by the mainstream of Hinduism, which was anyway significant in ancient times, it advises to make a human sacrifice and to bury the body in the foundations for a building to be solid, whether it is a palace, a fortress or a temple. Digging into the foundations of some building reveals skeletons which were probably sacrificed for that purpose. We can identify equivalent practices in the foundation of some religious groups, that glorify martyrdom and cement, so to speak, their foundations with blood. Among the twelve disciples of Christ, all suffered martyrdom except Saint John the Evangelist. Among the twelve imams of duodecimal Shiism, all suffered martyrdom except Mahdi, who remained available in his physical shape to come back and save the world. It's like human beings need a certain amount of human sacrifices to "consolidate" the foundation when something has to be built. In Sudhamani's history, it is the brother Subhagan, who is pushed to suicide by the ambitions and intransigence of his sister, who corresponded to the human sacrifice to "cement" the foundations of the new religious movement. This sacrifice is actually not discussed by the community because, as we saw it, there are strong taboos about it. As Rene Girard showed it, we are facing a case of sacralization that is mainly used to conceal and justify the founding violence. Yet, the official biography gives some details. They are meant to threaten with death all those who would dare oppose the all-powerfulness of Sudhamani, whose delirium had become meaningfully stronger and stiffer after this major episode. From that moment the dices were cast, the Rubicon was crossed : either she believed to be empowered with Divine power, or she was a seriously mentally unbalanced person and enough carried by her ego to push her brother to suicide. She was so trapped by the stake that she couldn't give away anymore. She was stuck like a cat that had climbed to a tree and doesn't know how to go back down. This is far from the official image of the one who embraces the world... It could be possible that the exhausting work of expansion of her movement and that which she imposes upon her disciples committed into proselytism, is a kind of atonement for the death she still feels responsible for, in spite of her superficial denial. The theme of poisoning is very frequent in delirium crisis. It can be found with Sudhamani at that time :

"During this period of intense sadhana Sudhamani couldn't sleep in another house or eat food prepared in the kitchen of a person with low-level thoughts. If there were such food to eat, she was becoming extremely agitated and vomiting. Because of this, most of the time Sudhamani used to fast. When she was trying to stay in other houses where people with low-level thoughts were sleeping, she had no rest. Yet she did not care about sleep and preferred to stay awake to meditate or to call her Beloved one. She was always afraid of falling asleep because she was sure that Krishna would come at that moment, and that she would miss the long awaited vision of his divine form."⁴⁰

We can thus find standard signs of serious delirium crisis, with poisoning ideas and obsession for purity, along with massive anxiety that actually prevent sleeping. From a critical point of view, we can consider that the religious interpretation was a modest cloth to cover the pathological process that neither Sudhamani nor her surrounding were able to deal with, neither intellectually or emotionally.

We can ask the question of anorexia nervosa, given the long fasting, the cessation of the menstruations⁴¹, insomnia and maybe weight loss in pictures, although it is hard to determine their date, in relation to the events which occurred between 20 and 22 years old and to evaluate the weight lost because of the loose clothing. There's a clue to support this view, it is the practical activities performed by Sudhamani. Anorexic people are very active, until they collapse out of exhaustion. Yet the synthesis of all elements shows that the symptomatology of serious delirium crisis prevail over the one of simple anorexia.

"After climbing a tree to pick the leaves, Sudhamani was submerged by the feeling that she was herself Krishna and she explains: "All the boys and girls below me seemed to be the Gopas and Gopis "(shepherds and shepherdesses)"⁴²

This simple sentence is in favor of bhakti and reminds of the tales of Krishna who climbs a tree after stealing the *Gopis* clothes while they bathe. If we relate this to what Gail says about the love affairs of Sudhamani with some of her first disciples, we have a better understanding. A too easy feeling of non-duality produced by too fast devotional experiences, has a strong tendency to divert toward fusional physical relations, there is nothing new in this phenomenon. If we take into account the sexual stimulation induced by important sleep deprivation, we must admit that Sudhamani was on a slippery slope with these kind of experience, and according to Gail, she actually slipped.

At this moment, she was hearing the melodious sound of Krishna's flute. At the beginning, she used to think that He was playing the celestial flute not far from her, but by observing closely the phenomenon : "she found that it was coming from within herself. She immediately burst into tears and collapsed in front of the portrait of Sri Krishna. If she happened to sleep in the blink of an eye, Krishna was appearing and waking her up."

We can find here the strong anxiety leading to important insomnia, so that, as I said, it lays the bed for serious delirium crisis. The "sound of Krishna's flute" that appears here, shows that thanks to the sound of silence that comes from the perception of the rustling of the blood into the artery next to the cochlea, Sudhamani keeps on elaborating and fabricating her relation with Krishna. I have written a 450 page book about listening to the sound of silence, it is called *La mystique du silence* (the mystic of silence)⁴³. All these could be part of an usual path of devotion, but the territory became dangerous when she thought that she had become "one" with Krishna. The danger of all-powerfulness delirium induced by these poorly balanced and integrated experiences is major :

"I started looking at nature and see everything as Krishna. I could not even pick a single flower because I thought it was also Krishna. When the breeze touched my body, I felt that it was Krishna caressing me. I was afraid to walk because I was thinking, Oh, I'm walking on Krishna! Every particle of sand was Krishna for me. From time to time, I strongly perceived myself as Krishna. Gradually, it became a natural state. I could find no difference between me and Krishna who lived in Vrindavan."⁴⁴

We must note that the identification with Krishna is known for giving a great power of seduction. One of his names is Mohan, the one who hypnotizes, the one who seduces. This is of course very useful to bind other people and make them dependent on oneself, provided that the spiritual master is himself independent from any inflation of his own ego. According to many elements that are given by Gail among others, such is not the case as far as Sudhamani is concerned. Certainly, the devotees who hasten, interpret these classical statements in the path of bhakti as signs that she is fully realized, but from a more critical point of view of psychology, we consider this as long term eruption of all-powerfulness delirium. That encysted desire will explain most of the deviant behaviors to come, reported in Gail's book.

Was the experience of union with Devi a crisis of serious delirium?

The identification of Sudhamani with Krishna the seducer has given a certain power of attraction to Sudhamani, but it was not enough to quench her thirst of all-powerfulness. The union to Devi was granting experiences that we can qualify as more full-bodied, headier because she is the one who is fitted with 18 arms holding weapons and who can cut the heads off her enemies in all directions. Is the fusion with Devi, as reported by Sudhamani, an authentic experience or a crisis of serious delirium with a compensation of all-powerfulness cleverly concealed under religious clothing? It is right to ask this essential question, because the whole credibility of Sudhamani and the one of the official Amma is jeopardized. Let's first hear the words of her family who was with her daily and who stand as the first witnesses. Indeed at that time, she was remaining locked inside of her house ; at least until the moment her brother, who thought she was acting due to insanity, told her to not come back home as long as she was doing her *bhâvas*, that's when she started to sleep outside.

"Sudhamani's older brother, Subhagan, was seeing his sister as a schizophrenic and did all he could to create obstacles for her⁴⁵ ... Suddenly Sudhamani's mood changed and she fell into a fit of divine madness . Crying and rolling on the ground, she began to tear her clothes. The next moment, she burst out laughing rolling on the ground uncontrollably. The family watched, stunned, and had no idea on how to calm the girl."⁴⁶

At some point, the family members were so discouraged by her behavior that looked psychotic that they simply let her. Sudhamani started living outside and some of her neighbors used to care for her. They noticed that she often used to fall unconscious into the backwaters.

"They would immediately get her out of the water like a fish, dry and dress with freshly laundered clothing⁴⁷ ... Often, when little one was becoming forgetful of her environment, one of the women was finding her lying in the muddy water or dirty areas. If she could not revive her, she used to carry in her arms to their house. As if she was a baby, they had her teeth washed, gave her a bath of hot water, wear good clothes and fed her by hand."⁴⁸

In clear psychopathologic terms, it is called a state of major regression in the context of the development of serious psychosis. Even the devotees themselves started thinking at some point that she had slipped into insanity :

"All these incidents have merely served to convince her family of her mental illness ... Sometimes Sudhamani was sobbing like a little child and calling an imperceptible Being; at other times she was clapping her hands and burst out laughing, then rolling on the floor and trying to kiss the ripples on the water by calling "Amma, Amma!" No wonder that these crises of the small one were considered erroneously as madness. Even the faithful who visited her during Krishna Bhavas did not succeed to understand this passionate quest of Sudhamani to reach union with the Divine Mother. Because of the inhumane treatment of her family, Sudhamani decided one day to end her life by jumping into the ocean. She beseeched the Divine Mother, "Am I not your child? Have you abandoned me? If that is so, why should I still support this body? It is a burden for me as well as for others. Accepts your child, Mother Ocean! "With a determined spirit, Sudhamani had started to run towards the ocean. When she reached it the small one was about to jump when she saw that the vast sea was Mother herself. Unable to keep her mind on the physical plane, she entered into Samadhi and she fell unconscious on the sand."⁴⁹

For those who know the story of Râmaskrishna and one of his masters in Totapuri, it reminds of the moment when the latter was so ill with chronic dysentery that he decided to kill himself by going into the Ganges, which becomes the Hoogli at Dakshineswar. When he stepped on the sand which was spreading gradually into the water, he had a vision of the Divine Mother, although he was a strict Vedântin and she made him give up his attempt to end his life.

Even the villagers were convinced that she was insane : "The villagers sympathized at seeing the state of Sudhamani although many of them considered her crazy. They said to each other: "See what terrible state she fell in! Poor girl! No one is there to look after her; even her parents have put her aside. When she was normal, she used to work day and night for them, but now they are not at all interested in taking care of her. Is she still their daughter?"⁵⁰

Let's go back a few months before, at the moment of Krishna's possessions :

"Sudhamani asked one of the devotees to bring water and sprayed everyone as if it was holy water. The news about the divine manifestation of Sudhamani spread rapidly and soon a large crowd gathered."⁵¹

We can see that Sudhamani, who was only 21 or 22, began to act like a guru. The devotees will claim that a miracle had happened, the wiser ones will say that it was too soon. Of course we can note that the Hindu tradition makes way for the gifted in *Sâdhana*. Yet when we take a closer look at the life of the great Sages from 19th and 20th centuries, we can see that they have taken a lot of time to practice before teaching. Ramakrishna started having disciples at the age of 40. Shrî Aurobindo and Ramdas too, Mâ Anandamayî, although experiencing mystical states since a very young age, lived in silence for five years from 25 to 30 years old, totally absorbed in herself, before gradually starting to meet people and answer their questions. Tibetan *tulkus*, although they seem to be driven since birth toward the spiritual path because they are the reincarnation of former spiritual masters, they benefit from a monastic education in addition to spending 10, 15, 20 years in solitude to confirm and balance their spiritual experiences. We have seen that Sudhamani considers herself to be beyond any of this. This could be the real deep cause of her further personality complications that Gail describes clearly.

Further in the story, comes a key moment of her biography, the account of a miracle. She supposedly turned water into pudding in front of a crowd of devotees. Of course, if it's real it is a parapsychological phenomenon that is worth being studied. Yet we should invoke three elements inclining us to cautiousness:

- I have already mentioned that Gail and another former western disciple of the ashram, who also "left," say that Sudhamani had the gall to ask them to tell in front of thousands of people, miracles that she had invented. If she dares to do this in front of a worldwide audience without any remorse, then what is the probability for a miracle reported in front an audience of villagers to be true? Knowing that most of them tend to blindly believe, knowing that the rumor tends to amplify things and render them more beautiful than they are? Moreover, the biography takes care to say that Sudhamani will not repeat that miracle. "To instill faith in you I'll make a miracle once, but never approach me with such desires." Of course, if the miracle was false, she would have big problems to do it again. So as far as we are concerned, let's be cautious about this story.
- Gail who spent 20 years as Sudhamani's personal assistant doesn't tell of any miracle that she witnessed with her own eyes. Yet if someone should have seen any, it's precisely her. This is a meaningful clue.
- Even if the parapsychological phenomenon was authentic, it doesn't automatically mean that the one who did it belongs to a high spiritual level. A story from the Talmud heads to the same direction : a committee was discussing some points of the law. One of the participants performed a

miracle to sustain his opinion : the walls of the room moved away from each other by magic. The committee wasn't impressed : "Miracles are not proof in a serious debate, we vote for the exclusion of this participant..." they cast him out of the meeting.

If we follow the text, we see that Sudhamani develops a stiffening of her all-powerfulness ideas, in psychiatry it is called encystment :

"I was able to know everything about everyone. I was fully aware that I myself was Krishna, not only during a particular time of the event, but during all other periods as well. I did not feel that "I was great." When I saw the people and knew their suffering, I felt an immense pity for them. I was aware that the devotees offered their greetings and applied to me as a "Lord." I could understand the suffering of the devotees without being told."⁵²

In other words Sudhamani displays here a great fundamental ambivalence : a real care for others, inseparably entangled with deeply dangerous ideas of greatness related to herself. She has developed intuition and telepathy gifts. We should know that this frequently happens by psychotic people. A certain level of mental confusion paradoxically sets intuition free. Moreover, it is not the proper sign of high spiritual achievement. I have read that in the streets of Delhi, people are able to read your mind for 10 rupees. Some astrologers too have this kind of gift, which impresses their visitors. Yet the deviation of Sudhamani and her gullible devotees lies in the fact that they interpret this as an instance of divine omniscience. During the Buddha's life, there is a quality that has never been imputed to him, it is the one of omniscience. Indeed it is a problem for God himself because it cancels the notion of human free will : if the path of life is known in advance for a spiritual being, then what freedom is left for mankind? Swami Nirgunânanda has been for three years the last secretary of Mâ Anandamayî, until the moment when she left her body in 1982. He always had great devotion for her, but he explains clearly that it would be a big mistake to believe that she was omniscient.

Of course, Sudhamani shows that she is sensitive to other people's suffering, and this charitable aspect is one of the main reasons of her social success. Yet having a partially telepathic intuition and a generous heart doesn't make one a descent of the Divine Mother in all her perfection. Yet some people need to believe this at any cost, and this need leads them to risky projections, and to be entangled in tricky situations.

At that time, some phenomenon used to occur. Balu the biographer tends to present them as miraculous automatically. For instance this one :

"Sudhamani assumed the posture of Ananta-shayana, that is to say, the Lord Vishnu resting on the thousand-headed serpent, Ananta. The posture of the girl became as light as air at that time, by her own will. It was a wonderful vision for the devotees."⁵³

There are two solutions to interpret this : either Sudhamani was really levitating and this would have been really miraculous but the biographer doesn't seem to go so far, although his words are likely to mislead people. Or she herself was feeling very light weighted, and then, how could the devotees be aware of it? The miraculous side of the situation is not there. Balu knew the life of Mâ Anandamayî, where Bhaiji tells that she could be seen dancing in a very light way⁵⁴. We are free to believe it or not, but at least a move can appear to be light, but how can we see lightness into someone who is lying still, if there is no levitation?

The following episode reported below should also be considered with great caution :

"During this period, when someone was calling tearfully to solve his problems, Sudhamani identified with Krishna, was intimating to light a piece of camphor and place the flame on her protruding tongue. She was swallowing the fire! After the *bhava*, no one could find traces of burns on her tongue. This increased the faith of the people."⁵⁵

Talking about this, a remembrance comes to my mind : we were a group of French people in a tourist hotel in Tamil-Nadu and after the dinner there was a 45 minutes show staging someone who was swallowing fire. He spent the whole time pouring burning kerosene into his mouth. In fact, I found that this show was of bad taste because in addition to the risk of getting severely burnt, kerosene can go into the lungs and cause major troubles. By cons, camphor is not liquid, but rather solid and we know that its flame is not very hot. Regularly the general public who attends to *pujâ* in temples runs its hands inside the camphor flame without being burnt. Moreover, the flame on the tongue, which is pulled forward, goes up, so it doesn't burn the mucosa which is below, and once swallowed it is immediately extinguished. Moreover the mucosa is naturally covered with saliva that evaporate when it comes in contact with the flame, this protects from being burnt. It is also thanks to feet sweat that people can walk on fire. For all these reasons, the phenomenon looks not so miraculous except for naïve crowds who need to believe at any cost.

At the time we can see a major turn of events in Sudhamani's life : her father starts accepting the notion that she could be possessed temporarily by Krishna. We remember the usefulness of possession in African cultures, for a young girl or young woman to be acknowledged by the elders of the family. Yet, in spite of this evolution, the parents came back again with their arranged marriage thing. Sudhamani then answered : "If you succeed in marrying me to anyone, I'll kill him and then come back home here in Idamannel!" Balu is raving about this behavior, but there is not any trace of such violence about marriage in the life of the 19th or 20th century sages.⁵⁶ Râmakrishna and Mâ Anandamayî were peacefully married even if the union wasn't consumed physically. They didn't burst into psychosis with murder threats. Was it because they were simply real mystics and that Sudhamani was on the pathologic side?

Here is the astrologer's prediction made to the parents, which is an inevitable episode in the context of popular hagiography in Hinduism :

"This young woman, Sudhamani is a great soul. If marriage is not yet settled, don't make any effort to move in this direction. If the marriage has already taken place, call her back immediately. Otherwise, you'll have to face a great disaster that will cause you great pain."⁵⁷

The astrologers usually have good psychological faculties. Moreover, knowing or hearing through the village rumors that Sudhamani threatened to kill her eventual husband, his advice to the parents saying to delay the wedding, is pure common sense. Presenting this as a miraculous prediction is another means to mislead the reader.

Another statement by Sudhamani must be taken with caution : "I'm not here to win anything, but to give up everything for the happiness of others." Let's be realistic to balance this : she started from nothing, she has built a financial and estate empire with many centers in a lot of countries. Of course, a part of her work is humanitarian, but many of her institutions have high fees. The investigation journalists of the website *embezzling the world*, which analyses very keenly shadows of Amma's organization, especially the financial conditions, relied on the form that each ashram is required to fill, in order to find what they avoid to publicize. They found for instance that the organization earns two millions dollars per year in bank interest, thanks to investment in foreign countries. It means that, if we consider an average rate of 5%, the amount invested must be around 40 million dollars. Whether the funds are invested in Switzerland or anywhere else doesn't change the fact that they do exist. We have seen previously that the same source estimate that at least 60% of the money donated in good faith by the devotees for Sudhamani's humanitarian work, have been diverted to her financial investments. So we are face to face with a huge holding with many commercial activities. The difference with standard companies is that in Amma's case, renunciates not only work for free, but must give a capital whose interests will enable the organization to maintain them. As for the occasional devotees, they must pay to have the honor of working for Amma. This is actually the dream of any greedy boss. For Westerners, being a renunciate in Amritapuri represents an investment into "Sudhamani's bank." They must pay a sufficient amount to cover the expenses of the ashram. This system is not as such an infringement, many catholic convents of contemplative orders require a dowry from those who want to be part of it, or at least their share of inheritance when the parents pass on. Yet, as Sudhamani claims in a very emotional way— she doesn't want anything for herself. This doesn't show to be sincere and will only convince those people who are already caught in the emotional-devotional projection that they make on her.

Another miracle account should be considered from a critical point of view : "There was a heavy downpour when the clouds accumulated on the location of the Krishna bhava. But to the surprise of all, no rain fell in that particular place where the devotees were gathered, even though it rained in torrents all around!"⁵⁹ We must remember Gail's experience who, in front of

thousands of people gathered in the big cities of Australia, was made by Sudhamani to tell the false miracle of the young German who supposedly saw Sudhamani make the rainfall in front of a group of men from Madras. If one is able to invent a whole series of miracles, why not invent one more? Isn't succeeding in cheating thousands of people, as exciting and addictive as taking a stimulating drug?

The lie about the end of the menstruation

We will further reach one of the most important points of this study, because it represents one of the most central and long-lasting lies of Sudhamani. I have already mentioned it. She warns her father that many strangers will come to live with them, he won't have any material problems anymore, he will get without having to ask, and he will always have to give a part of what he gets in charity. She predicts that she will travel abroad. She also prophesies that the villagers will love her father and herself after hating them. She concludes by claiming that starting from that day, she will always remain pure.⁶⁰ Moreover, the book was written in 1988, and re-edited in 1989. The first world tour of Sudhamani occurred in 1987 and many Westerners were already living in Vallickavu at that time. Did the biographer put in the mouth of Sudhamani in 1975, what was already obvious when he was writing? It is more convenient to make "prophesies" of what has already happened, there a few chances to be wrong. A note says as a matter of fact that "After Krishna Bhava began, Sudhamani never had her monthly period". This has been repeated since 1989 in the successive editions of the biography, there is this little footnote persistently repeated for the past twenty-five years. I have under my eyes the 2011 one, it's corresponds to the note 24 page 95. Gail, as well as other women who were close to Sudhamani, say that this is clearly a lie that has been repeated in all successive editions of her biography, of course with Sudhamani's agreement. Gail witnessed her menstruating monthly. We can clearly see here two well-known psychological mechanisms in action.

- First the "yes set." It starts with a series of events that everyone necessarily agrees upon. The predictions put in Sudhamani's mouth in 1975 were already fulfilled when the book was written, so the readers can only agree. At the end, Balu the trickster discreetly puts a note which states something delicate, saying that her menses stopped at that time. Driven by already approved series of "yes," the inattentive reader will easily agree with this extravagant assertion. This method of "yes set" is widely used by door-to-door sellers to dump their products at any cost.
- The second mechanism in play is often found with pathological liars. They are aware of what people want to believe, they mention it swiftly, sometimes in a general way, knowing that their audience will jump to it to build false beliefs. These allusions are like banana peels, spread on purpose in people's way for them to slip into wrong ideas. In this case, the Hindu devotees and even the western ones are craving to believe in a descent of the Divine Mother. In some Hindu beliefs, the cessation of the menses signals this kind of descent. Of

course, maybe Sudhamani temporarily stopped having her menses because of strong emotions, or more precisely because of successive waves of delirium which have overwhelmed her for two years. Moreover she had her menses at a young age, where there may be the interference of an anorexia syndrome. This pathology is known to provoke a stoppage of the periods along with a loss of weight; it is part of its definition. Maybe when her emotions became somewhat balanced again, the menses came back naturally. But the devotees craving for wonders had already put her on a pedestal ; because of this she must have felt embarrassed to contradict them, under the pretext of not disappointing them she stepped on the slippery slope of lie. Then she was unable to get out of this, so she kept going. All these little and big lies wouldn't be meaningful if they were coming from the president of a humanitarian organization. After all, we could consider that they are part of the private life. Yet, for someone who introduced herself as a great Saint in these times, they are prohibitive and fatal. These concealments to mislead the believers is not compatible with the ethics of a *satguru*, a perfect guru. Moreover, many devotees would have been ready to forgive Sudhamani for the mistakes of her young age if she had recognized them, all the more so now that she is 60 years old and the question of her menses and her relationship to Balu may not be relevant anymore. But the fact that she massively denies having cheated everyone, like a little girl caught with her hand in the cookie jar who keeps on saying that nothing happened, ridicules her in front of the wise public's eyes and makes her fall lower on the ladder of ethics. It removes any residual sympathy that one could have had for her. Nevertheless, many disciples tend to justify Sudhamani's lies with the following simplistic reasoning : "she does so much good that we can forgive her!" We can only be sad in front of this reaction which illustrates the ostrich pathetic policy. This is akin to not understanding anything to the main link of spiritual transmission. If this link is loose then no impulse is transmitted. We may admittedly have a huge movement, impressive because of the quantity, but not convincing due to the poor quality and authenticity of the spiritual transmission. One must really have a bad self-image to put oneself in a situation of dependence toward such teachers and to end up believing that it is impossible to do without.

The development of signs of mysticism bordering pathology

The ideas of all-powerfulness that unfold in Sudhamani are able to intimidate or even terrorize those who dare resisting her in a serious way. They will have to face her curses sooner or later, and these maledictions are supposed to manifest as unpredictable accidents. Balu tells for instance with much delight the story of a fisherman who dared to previously criticize Sudhamani and was caught in a storm after coming back from fishing and finally his boat

capsized with his load. Maybe the story is not completely invented but in such cases, we must be careful about the omissions: those fishermen are at risk everyday when they cross the reef which is strong on the Kerala coast, how many people capsized for instance per week as they are coming back from fishing although they were devotees of Sudhamani? Of course, Balu won't say a damn word about any of them. Then a scientific process implies to make statistics of the accidents happening to the people supposedly protected by Sudhamani in comparison to those who don't believe in her. At that time, most of the fishermen didn't believe in her, so they were a lot of 'unbelievers'. Even if the statistics establish that those who believed in her had fewer accidents than the non-believers, it could be also due to a phenomenon of faith, coming from the devotees themselves rather than from Sudhamani. There is an interesting experience along these lines : an amulet is given to a group, telling them that it will help them to succeed in a difficult game. The people have no reason to believe in the power of the talisman, yet they succeeded better than the group without any amulet. Thus, the simple idea of having any object which is likely to be a protection was enough for the player to have greater confidence in their own abilities to succeed in the game.

The abandonment feeling probably lead Sudhamani to a phase of anorexia nervosa :

This had become an internal conflict for Sudhamani to care even at the minimum about her body. For months, she fed on the leaves of tulsi (a kind of basil dedicated to Vishnu) and water. Sometimes when Sudhamani was coming out of deep meditation, one could hear her shouting loudly: "Amma! Amma! Where have you been? Did you come that day just to leave me? ... I cannot bear the intense pain of separation! O Mother of the universe, why are you indifferent to the call of the broken heart of this child? Please, kiss me, take me on your knees!"⁶¹

One of the main factors causing anorexia nervosa is the sense of abandonment, especially by the parents. This frame can be found by Sudhamani, who went through a whole period being physically rejected by her parents and family, she had even to sleep outside. We can reasonably think that this sad family abandonment was then projected, with a devotional disguise, onto the Divine Mother.

The depth of the ideas of self-punishment

Sudhamani has been severely punished by her mother, she then severely punished Gail. She severely punished herself in the meantime. This is an easy to understand psychological logic. It is about repetition compulsion. The scheme of self-punishment or even self-flagellation is recurring at that time. Let's give some examples :

In this coastal region, there was no proper toilet. Each family erected a small scaffolding over the lagoon and enclosed it with woven palm leaves. As there was no real floor, one

had to perch on a board to make one's needs. Numerous times, it happened that Sudhamani would be squatting in the toilet and had fallen in the lagoon having lost consciousness from the outside world⁶²

We can interpret this differently, Sudhamani used to severely punish herself by following a well-known infantile terror : being sucked by the toilet's hole and disappearing into it.

If there was an outer difficulty the little one was biting Devi and pulling her hair up until she realized that she was biting her own body, and tearing her own hair.⁶³

From a simple psychological point of view, we can see here the sad evolution of a beaten child who follows the path of despair and massively becomes aggressive with herself. We must remember that when Sudhamani used to answer to her mother's blow she was bitten by the latter. In her delirium of compensating all-powerfulness she was allowing herself a good vengeance for twenty years of humiliation by biting the Divine Mother herself. Was it a healing process? We are not required to believe that such was the case. The symptoms looked more sad than therapeutic. In classical psychiatry, we would talk about a tendency of repetition compulsion and particularly about deluded self-mutilation, this being a very significant sign of psychopathologic, perhaps even psychotic regression.

Regarding Sudhamani's vengeance against her own mother's violence, the little girl used to attack the Divine Mother when she was feeling that someone was shaking her violently inside her body and that she was feeling confused about this sensation. She used to grab a wooden paddle and threaten the Goddess. Then she was becoming aware that the situation made no sense and would give up. Her self-punishment also took the form of sleep deprivation, I have already talked about that. She then imposed that on a large scale to the disciples and the ashram's visitors. Of course Sudhamani seems to have been totally ignorant of the health issues implied by sleep deprivation in the long term : heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, cancer, mainly breast cancer for women. From a psychological point of view, it also brings the increase of sexual desire's intensity and the risk of severe delirium crisis. The most important point for her was to punish herself with sleep deprivation for not being a good *sâdhikâ*, a good practicante :

If for a moment she was without remembering the Goddess, Sudhamani had great distress and was confessing: "O Mother, I wasted so much time!" To make up the lost time, she increased the length of her meditation that day. If she happened to miss her meditation, she would walk all night, repeating mantras and praying sincerely: "O Mother, what is the value of life if I am unable to meditate on thee? Otherwise, there is simply Maya waiting to devour me."

We see here a clear sign of ambivalence : either an intense devotion or a regression to the phase of archaic terror of the gap between the good mother and the bad mother, which is

common in little children. The bad mother appears regularly; here her role is played by Mâyâ the devourer, who is the feminine counterpart of Brahman and also the counterpart of the good Mâ or Mâtâ.

We have already seen the strongly aggressive suicidal impulses of Sudhamani, who wanted to drown in the sea, saying that it was her true mother, including in its destructive aspect. Finally, her delusion stopped at the last minute when she realized that the sea-mother was the Mother.⁶⁴

The episodes that I have already quoted, in which Sudhamani would fall unconscious into polluted water or filthy places and the neighbors had to pick her up, can be interpreted as self-punishment behaviors. Like the buffalos that she had to keep when she was young, she was forcing herself to remain for hours in the water under the pretext that her body was getting warm. Identifying to a buffalo is not really a proof of self-esteem :

"Because of these intense practices (Balu intentionally uses here the word tapas, which has the same root as temperature in French, which means both warm and intense practices); the body of Sudhamani was becoming very hot, as if she was in the middle of the ardent embers. It was becoming so unbearable that she could barely keep her clothes. To get rid of the burning sensation, the little one was rolling in the polluted waters of the lagoon. At some moments, she was seen standing submerged in the waters of the lagoon for consecutive hours in deep meditation."⁶⁵

Once again, the blurry description made by Balu can mislead the believers : if Sudhamani was literally immersed for hours underwater, then it's a real parapsychological power. If some yogi can do that, it's because they are particularly gifted. If it's about remaining for hours with the water reaching the neck like a buffalo at rest, then it's just a kind of relaxation, there is nothing extraordinary, especially in a country which is always hot like Kerala. We can at most make the hypothesis of one more aspect of Sudhamani's self-punishment, treating herself like a buffalo, forcing herself to remain for hours in water that moreover, is usually polluted by local toilets.

The self-punishment delusion takes extreme forms of scattering anxiety, as we have seen, it's a well known sign that psychosis begins. In the context of mythology in India, scattering can easily be linked to the sword strikes of the Divine Mother :

"I suffocate like someone who is drowning. If you do not have the desire to come to me, please, put an end to my life. The sword with which you beheaded the cruel man and the one who was addicted to injustice should descend instead upon my neck. At least, I will be blessed by the contact of your weapon! Why still keeping this useless body that is a heavy burden to me?"⁶⁶

The suffocation delirium during the development of a severe psychosis can be serious. They can lead to suicide or criminal aggression against others. For instance, I remember a patient who was in the department where I was studying psychiatry. The psychiatric assistant who had ranked first in the previous year's exam, who then so to speak was the best psychiatrist of the year in France, told me that schizophrenic patients who had strangulation delirium were in a serious state. Indeed, after a moment, this patient made a suicide attempt by stabbing his stomach with a knife. Fortunately for him, unfortunately for the head of the department, he survived : a few weeks later he stabbed the head of the department, at the bottom of the spine again with a knife, he remained crippled in a wheel chair until he died ten or fifteen years later. The suffocation, strangulation, and drowning delirium are signs of seriousness for the psychotic people. The feelings of excitement and temporary bliss don't go against this diagnosis, because they can be often found in these kinds of delusional states.

"Every pore of my body was opened wide with intense aspiration, every atom of my body was vibrating with the sacred mantra, my whole body was rushing towards the Divine Mother like a torrential river."⁶⁷

As the human soul is complex, after the phases of intense self-punishment, the reverse phase would occur, namely compensating megalomania. Sudhamani claims almost officially : "I melted myself into the universal Mother, and I have given up all sense of pleasure."⁶⁸ Once again, it is best to consider cautiously this bombastic statement. Gail tells for instance that Sudhamani used to become eager like a spoiled child when her desires and whims were not instantly satisfied : she was eating fish twice a day while prohibiting the people of the ashram to eat some. She couldn't go without a series of thermos ready to satisfy her thirst in pleasant ways : there was for instance hot water, tea, milk, curdled milk and if Gail had forgotten one of them, she was scolded. Same thing happened if she was bringing milk instead of tea, she could be beaten for that. The believers, blinded by devotion, will solemnly as well as emotionally claim that she was doing her job as a guru to discipline a rebel assistant, but we can leave them alone with their interpretations which are in fact a psychotic denial of reality. Moreover, without the pitfall of easy criticism, as a doctor, we must learn to simply open our eyes. We have already asked this simple question : Sudhamani is almost obese, would it be possible if she had given up on all the pleasures of taste?

The regression : spiritual childhood or childishness?

We have already seen many instances of Sudhamani's regressive behavior. Let's take a closer look at his aspect. For instance many of Sudhamani's serious regressive states are interpreted by Balu as being the triumph of the *Sâdhanâ* of Devi, and this is the episode which he uses to conclude the part of the book dealing with this period :

"In those days of intense yearning for the Divine Mother, Sudhamani assumed the nature of a two year old child, the child of the Divine Mother. Her identification with this attitude of child to Mother was so complete that many of her actions can be understood only in the light of this fact. One day, coming out of meditation, Sudhamani felt very hungry and thirsty. Just then, she saw Pushpavathi of the neighboring house breastfeeding her baby. Straight away Sudhamani went to her, displaced the suckling baby, and lay in the woman's lap for nourishment. Instead of feeling awkward about this unexpected act of Sudhamani's, Pushpavathi overflowed with motherly feelings for her. Similar incidents occurred several times, until Pushpavathi realized it was safer to feed her baby out of sight of the innocent minded Sudhamani. "69

Further in the book, Balu describes with much delight how Sudhamani started to suckle a cow, seeing it as the Divine Mother, this scene is likely to raise enthusiasm and attract the affection of basic Hindu peasants, but not other people.

"One day, she came out of the temple after meditation and began to be very hungry and thirsty. There was a cow of the house that was lying in front of the temple. It had its hind legs in an easy position for anyone to suckle the milk of her udder. Considering this as an arrangement desired by God, that's exactly what the little one did! Playing the role of the calf, she drank directly sucking her breasts and thereby quenching her hunger and thirst."70

Easy interpretations and encystment of the all-powerfulness delirium

We should allow ourselves to think about how to interpret this statement made by Sudhamani :

"Humans are not the only ones with the capacity for language. Animals, birds and plants have that power but we do not have the capacity to understand. Someone who has vision of the Self knows all these things."71

Of course, the naïve reader believer will be frozen with admiration in front of Sudhamani who can talk about all this because of her experience. But understanding the animal's language is not something new. Anyone who has been living for a long time with a pet and loving it can naturally understand many things from its language. It doesn't mean that one is a descent of the Divine Mother.

The chapter with the two eagles, *Garuda-s*, presented as wonderful, must also be viewed cautiously :

"In a large tree in the homestead of Sudhamani, there was an eagle's nest. (The Eagle, under the name Garuda is the vehicle of Lord Vishnu, who is an incarnation of Krishna).

One way or another, the nest was moved and dropped. It was destroyed and the two small birds that had fallen to the ground were left there, in shock and very vulnerable. Naughty children began to throw stones and tried to kill them, but soon Sudhamani arrived on the scene and rescued them. She gave them shelter, fed them and treated them with care. Within a few weeks, they became strong enough to fly. At that time, Sudhamani released them. These two eagles always came at the beginning of each Krishna puja and perched atop the long sanctuary. They were a great source of attraction for the devotees, who associated them with the actually Garuda, the vehicle of Lord Vishnu. The mysterious connection that these two birds maintained with Sudhamani has not only added to the visual splendor of Darshan but also increased the faith of believers in the divine nature of the small one."⁷²

In more secular terms, Sudhamani had played the standard role of a big sister, by preventing what children usually do, which is playing with weak animals at the risk of killing them. Then she tamed the two birds by feeding them. So they came back regularly to see her, especially when they knew there would be something to eat. It is quite possible that Sudhamani commanded to give them a little bit of *prasâd*, the sacred food from the ritual. This is completely relevant to the religious atmosphere of India. This conditioning thus had them make a connection between their food and the ritual, and they were on time to get it. I know an Indian family who feeds the same cow at the same time every day. It doesn't need a clock, the animal comes to the door at the right time. Let's be clear, that's not a reason to consider that the family mother who gives it *chapatis* is a descent of the Divine Mother. In other words, it means that the animal has been tamed. Balu has perhaps willingly forgotten to tell us that little detail, each time *prasâd* from the *poojâ* was given to the birds, so they were conditioned to come back. Conclusion in clear terms : one more false miracle on the already long list.

What is the use of spiritual practices actually? To give peace of mind. It seems like it hasn't worked for Sudhamani, if we believe what she herself says :

"My mind is tossed like a ship caught in a storm.

O Mother, give me some peace of mind, lest I become crazy."⁷³

Indeed her behavior looked rather psychotic. The biography goes one this way, with a sentence that has already been quoted : "Suddenly, her mood was changing and she was falling into a fit of divine madness. Screaming and rolling on the ground, she was beginning to tear her clothes. The next moment, she was bursting out laughing still rolling on the floor so uncontrollable."⁷⁴ It seems like in fact this moment of the *Sâdhanâ* to Devi, or the severe delirium crisis depending from the point of view, hasn't brought peace at all to Sudhamani's mind in the long term. It rather resulted in confirming her all-powerfulness thoughts and driving her mind restless instead of calming it. Of course, the feeling of all-powerfulness seems to grant a kind of safety, but it remains as fragile as it is illusory. We can see more clearly now that Sudhamani is engulfed in the cyclone of scandals, including Gail's book, and she denies

everything. We have seen that she hypocritically plays the great lord by saying that she forgives Gail and all her enemies and that she forgets everything. But behind the scenes, she missions her henchmen to launch trials, even against those who publish comments on their Facebook page. This reminds more of the Arabic dictators or the communists than a great sage of India.

Let's give one more series of anecdotes which are too hastily interpreted as wonderful, or even miraculous by Balu the trickster :

"When someone was kneeling before Sudhamani, the white and black dog (loyal companion of the girl at the time) bent his front legs and nodded at the little one. When she was dancing in devotional ecstasy, the same dog was jumping around as if it was taking part in ecstatic dance. When the sacred conch was sounding during the evening ritual, the dog hooted a particular way closely imitating the sound produced by the instrument."⁷⁵

Pets have good abilities for imitation, so they bow when their master does and this does not represent a surprising fact. Very often, when they see them restless, they themselves become restless like excited little children. Regarding the hooting by hearing the conch, this is a common fact in India. For instance in the hermitage where I live, every evening the conch plays for the ritual and every evening too the hermitage's guard dog starts hooting the same way, thus imitating the sound of this instrument. The dog has been replaced several times, the reflex remains the same. In the villages, I have often observed this behavior. So this is a common fact in religious India, with its temples and conchs, but here, it is shown as a miracle that is likely to be believed by readers who live in western countries and who don't know much the daily life of rural Indian villages.

Balu and the other devotee's tendency to quietly induce beliefs which are actually false, is a typical of pathological lies at least, if it becomes stronger then it may become a full-fledged interpretation delirium.

When the white and black dog died, Sudhamani cast a prediction that is impossible to check, so she was not at risk at all :

"When Sudhamani answered to the question asking if she was not desperate to have lost her faithful companion, she said: "I am not at all sad about its death. Although it died, it will come back to me. Why should I be sad? "Later, she said the dog was reincarnated near the family home, but she would not reveal other details."⁷⁶

Gradually as time went by and as the devotees adulation started, Sudhamani's ideas of all-powerfulness became unwavering certainties :

The Divine Mother, with bright and soft hands caressed my head.

*With head bowed, I said to Mother that my life was devoted to her.
Smiling, she became a divine effulgence and she merged into me.⁷⁷*

So simple... But this was not enough for the young girl, she was in need of an official Divine Mission. No problem, it was offered to her on a silver platter, a few sentences further into her poem :

*Mother told me to ask people to accomplish (the goal of) their human birth.
That's why I proclaim to the world the sublime truth she pronounced,
"O human being! Merge yourself into your Self! »*

The teaching itself is not bad, but it is trivial. All Indian preachers repeat it again and again everyday. No need to utter this to be someone specifically divinely elected, yet that is what Sudhamani claims about herself. Moreover, in pompous and circumventing terms, she actually presents her identification to the Divine Mother as a simple and direct way to destroy her enemies :

"Seeing the distress of the devotees who had been harassed by the villagers, I felt the desire to destroy all these unfair people who persisted in ridiculing the devotees. Without my knowledge, the fierce nature of Devi manifested to offer refuge to the persecuted. "From then, in addition to the *Bhavas* as Krishna, the Holy Mother as she would be called from that time, gave *darshan* to the faithful regularly as Devi.

Now that's a promotion which seems akin to the fulfillment of a desire for all-powerfulness that developed from an inflated ego, in spite of a few superficial denials from Sudhamani herself. Those who were "ridiculing the devotees" were starting of course by laughing at Sudhamani. The fact that she claims that Devi's ferocity appeared without her knowing it, may well be a well-known symptom of depersonalization and easy split of personality due to hysterical psychosis. This brings of course beneficial side effects, for instance getting rid of her own brother who was disturbing her, by pushing him to suicide, without showing any trace of bad conscience. Is it the energy of the Divine Mother or on the contrary the symptomatology of a hysterical psychosis, so trivial that it becomes rather sad? Regarding the name "Holy Mother", Amma, it is limited to the inner circle of believers, even if it has been growing in time and will undoubtedly decrease because of the deep challenges raised not only by Gail's book, but also by many other critical sources about Sudhamani's behavior.

The inflated ego of "the little one" as Balu calls her, spreads to really surprising and even worrying extent, from the point of view of psychiatry :

"From that day (when I felt identified to the Divine Mother), I could see that nothing is different from my Self without form, in which the entire universe is like a little bubble ...

Sudhamani's plasticity becomes amazing, but always aiming at her own greatness.

"Once I set my heart and soul on Lord Ganesha, who removes obstacles, my being was immediately changed into the one of Ganesh, the elephant with a long trunk, a pair of tusks which one is half broken, etc. Whatever the form of the God or Goddess that I was contemplating, I was becoming it. At that moment, I heard an inner voice : "You are not different: they all melted in you a long time ago. So why should you invoke all these gods and goddesses?"⁷⁹

We can note that if Sudhamani is really convinced of these identifications, why does she need a voice coming from the sky to reassert them? She should be one with the divinities and that's that. If she needs any kind of external confirmation coming from the voice, it means that she is not so sure.

Balu claims triumphantly in a title almost at the end of the book : "The enemies of today are the friends of tomorrow"⁸⁰ This is a nice piece of positive thinking, but we should take it with caution. Not only in relation to Gail but also in relation to the many people who left after five, ten or twenty years, disgusted by the contradictions of Sudhamani, we can actually observe the reverse phenomenon. The friends of yesterday have become enemies in the long term. Moreover Gail, after taking time to think deeply, has started to testify about what she has seen and heard. We can understand that this is a noisy false note in the context of the ashram's beliefs. Yet it is a therapeutic wrong note, which shrinks the all-powerfulness delusion in which Sudhamani and her organization had gradually sunken.

Sudhamani's qualities, which have fostered her success, can be summed up as follows :

- she has invented – and patented so to speak – the "hugging-darshan"
- she is a "good friend" for the devotees and knows how to entertain them. Gail focuses that this *girlfriend* aspect has been important to her, although she has been disappointed by the failure of the guru-disciple relationship. She confirmed to me by email that she was strongly in need of acknowledgement as a spiritual seeker, but Sudhamani regularly managed to deny it to her. That was probably to dominate her more easily.
- She has a good sense of pedagogy, particularly through all kinds of stories that materializes simple spiritual teachings, sometime even simplistic, for the crowds.
- Like a super-social worker she has the ability to listen to the people's grievance, to give them solace and sometimes act to help them. Gail testifies that in fact, this help is not miraculous, on the contrary to what Balu says in the official biography, he, who is her close disciple, probably too close. Is it not strange that, although Amma's official biography is full of so-called miracles, Gail did not mention any while she was Sudhamani's personal attendant for twenty years.

- She has a certain gift to read people's mind and connect on the telepathic wavelength. This impresses the crowds and make them conclude too fast that she is a descent of the Divine Mother.
- She is frankly intolerant to contradiction, she thinks she is God and prompts to blind submission. It is useful to become a local dictator, but it's not so convenient to reach for spiritual perfection and lead disciples to that goal.

These qualities have certainly directly helped to develop a big movement around Sudhamani, starting from nothing, but they have their part of shadow. None of this makes her perfect from the psychological or the emotional point of view, and does not entitle her to be an authentic descent of the Divine Mother nor to be a Satguru, in the noble sense conferred to this term by the Hindu tradition.

The death of Subhagan, the elder brother

The clear impression that one can have by reading the account of Subhagan's suicide is that of a pathological family system. The systemic aspect of the psychiatric pathology, whether it is about delirium or suicide, has been keenly studied. Sudhamani's family was a relevant instance at that time.

"The family continued to doubt and erroneously interpret her behavior as schizophrenia. She was afraid that contact with the devotees could result in a boycott by the village and thus bring a bad name to the family. Her brother Subhagan was particularly fanatical in his aggression against the Mother."⁸¹

We can find interesting elements of diagnosis in this short paragraph. The schizophrenic label of schizophrenia came first from the family, which was the closest witness of Sudhamani's actual daily behavior. Moreover, if we follow Gail's book, the family's fear for Sudhamani's love involvement with male disciples of the same age, were not nonsensical suspicions, indeed they became true. Regarding the foreboding of a bad reputation for the family, this is also becoming true, not only since the release of Gail's book, but also thanks to well informed websites and intelligent critics against her.⁸² Moreover, we tend to reproach others for what we have inside. If Sudhamani's supporters reproached Subhagan for being a fanatic, it could be because they were so, in relation to their wannabe guru.

Then comes an episode where Subhagan and his cousins threaten to kill Sudhamani, one of them points a knife to her chest, but just like in the tradition of popular theater, he is hurled to the ground with a striking pain in the chest, at the same place where he touched his cousin. Sudhamani's mother felt this was about to get worse so she knocked on the door and took Sudhamani outside. They walked by the sea shore and she says :

"I dishonor your people. The ocean is also my Mother, she will accept me with happiness and arms wide open. I'll go in it! "Hearing these words, Damayanti slipped into mental imbalance. She started to cry, "Do not say that, O my daughter! Do not say that, oh my girl! During the *bhava* of Krishna, the Lord told me that if you ever commit suicide, all my children will fall into madness ..." One way or another, she managed to deter the Holy Mother of her plans to end her life and brought her back home."⁸³

In this episode, the pathology of the family system as a whole is clearly exposed ; the mother says that she is inspired by God, in other words has an intuition which seems superior and right, and predicts that the whole family is about to slip into insanity, because Sudhamani, who is about to commit suicide is clearly blackmailing them. She clearly sees this game. It is the beginning of a domino effect inside a family structure, which is on the edge of explosion.

Right after, Balu describes with satisfaction, the death of the cousin who had dared threatening to kill Sudhamani. He passed away by vomiting blood. He doesn't say if it occurred just after the event or much later. Therefore, the cause-effect link remains unclear. The hemorrhagic forms of dengue make people die by vomiting blood, this could be the cause. Of course, it is not a good karma to threat to kill a psychologically disturbed young cousin by pressing a knife on her chest but the hagiographic interpretation of the cousin's death is not sane, neither psychologically nor spiritually. To begin with, there is an obvious and strong inconsistency in story : if the cousin and his group really wanted to murder her, why gather in the middle of the family house to do it, knowing that they would be arrested by the police right away? One of them could have done this discretely and "efficiently". This was more about bad taste theater. Behind this patent inconsistency, we can once again find the general tendency of the biographer to turn everything into drama and present Sudhamani as the absolute innocent victim, and beyond that, to mislead the gullible reader. This may well correspond to this victimization tendency common in ordinary paranoia. Moreover, Sudhamani insists on the fact that she has nothing to do with her cousin's death and her brother's suicide, but she is protected by subtle beings that take care of getting rid of all those who oppose her. Convenient. Actually, too convenient.

With a little knowledge in psychology, this can be understood as the great disregard of the hysteric person for the disasters that she triggers around her. Sudhamani hypocritically puts forward a state of possession by the Divine Mother, regarding her brother's suicide, when she had clearly cursed him : Balu, with much satisfaction, goes on telling that Subhagan, who had been informed of the "Mother's curse" by a family which was as gullible as terrorized, committed suicide by hanging himself. He left a note talking about the unbearable stress caused by an incurable affection, elephantiasis. By mentioning this note, Balu discretely clears his beloved Sudhamani from any responsibility. Yet we can clearly see in Sudhamani's attitude and in Balu's interpretation, barely hidden death threats against all those who would dare to oppose their shared all-powerfulness delirium. In a deeply hypocritical way, they hid behind subtle beings to conceal their will to eliminate all opposition and critics. When we look at the events

from outside, trying to be objective avoiding the pitfall of gullibility, we can consider this episode like a fight between two psychotics on the one hand, the cousin and Subhagan, and a third one on the other hand, Sudhamani herself. She was the most convinced of her all-powerfulness, in other words, she was the most psychotic, and she succeeded in eliminating the two others.

What is the actual responsibility of Sudhamani in her brother's death?

Let's review the detail of events as they are reported in Sudhamani's official biography to estimate her responsibility clearly. It would be useful to have other points of view on this major episode, but they are not easy to find. Gail and another westerner that I know, arrived just after this event. They told me that it was in fact a taboo subject in the ashram, they never heard any discussion about it. This is a clue showing that Sudhamani, her family and her inner circle don't have a clear conscience about this, as we have already seen. Anyway, this is what Balu says about it. Let's keep in mind that he was certainly not carrying Subhagan in his heart, as he was the main obstacle in his relationship to Sudhamani.

(The elder brother of Sudhamani had made remarks many times, in a way that the biography calls vicious to a Muslim woman who came to visit Sudhamani as a devotee and who had become somewhat hysterical). "She rushed to the temple, burst into tears and began to hit her head on the floor of the small temple. She exclaimed in tears: "O Mother ... O Mother ... Is this what the ones who come to see you must endure?" "Hearing the cry of distress of the Muslim woman, the radiant and smiling face of the Mother changed immediately. With a terrifying appearance, she stood up from her sacred seat holding the trident in one hand and a sword in the other. With a solemn and deep tone, Mother said: "Whoever caused an unfair grief to that devotee will die in seven days."⁸⁴

When the prediction of the Mother (ie Sudhamani) reached the ears of the family's father, Sugunanandan, he rushed to his daughter's feet, seeking forgiveness for that of his son's behavior. He begged the Mother to spare Subhagan's life and to take his life instead. The Mother answered "quietly" :

"I never punish anyone. If I am insulted or harassed, I do not care. But when a devotee suffers such an insult, even God will not forgive. Everyone must undergo the fruit of one's doings. There are no other possibilities."... Seven days have passed. It was almost midnight, on June 2nd, 1978, when Subhagan, who had been informed of the prediction of the Mother, committed suicide by hanging himself. He had written a note on this occasion stating the reason was the unbearable stress caused by his incurable disease elephantiasis. His suicide created chaos and distress in the house of Idamannel.

Unbelievers-disbelievers immediately took advantage of this opportunity to strengthen their propaganda campaigns against the Holy Mother."⁸⁵

Let's state this clearly, there is no instance among the great sages of the 19th or 20th century India, whose biography has been published, who made one of their relatives die through a curse. It is a well-known psychological fact that prophecy has a self-realization power, especially for people who are weak enough to believe it. The apparent detachment of Sudhamani saying that she cannot cancel the curse and that karma must unfold its own way, will only impress the naïve people. If we look under the surface, we can identify a deep hatred for her brother who was directly contradicting her all-powerfulness ideas. She had the strength of psychotic conviction, he had the physical pain, disability along with depressive weakness, particularly because of his incurable illness : she thus won in the conflict and succeeded in eliminating him physically.

There is no intervention from the Divine Mother in the sinister completion of a family relation that was pathologic from the start. We shouldn't do as the biography does, sweep aside the accusations of the village and the clan against Sudhamani and her close family. They knew them well enough to know that they were pathologic and that the suicide didn't happen by chance. Therefore, we can find an alternative interpretation of this episode. Which is that Subhagan courageously opposed the all-powerfulness delirium of his sister, but she took advantage of his fragility. Not only because of elephantiasis that he thought was incurable, but also because the increasing conviction and number of devotees she was accumulating pushed him to suicide, "thanks" to her 7 days death prediction. Therefore, we can conclude that from a psychological, spiritual and karmic point of view, she bears a huge responsibility in his death, and this in spite of her superficial denial, represented by perfectly trivial statements such as : "karma must follow its way...". In fact, we can also re-interpret this law to explain the current predictable fall of Sudhamani and her movement : it is among others, the karmic fruit of this past liquidation, that was silenced at that time.

The official biographer tries to win the readers sympathy by mentioning that the devotee who has been harassed by the elder brother was a Muslim—who reacted in a hysterical way due to the critical comments made about Sudhamani by her elder brother, thus automatically tagged as being "vicious." This goes along with the overall spirit of the book. Balu presents Sudhamani as a regularly persecuted Cosette and sheds the same kind of light on her devotees. The Muslim women are in a position of weakness in the Indian society, by reason of their illiteracy and the patriarchy of the Islamic law, therefore they attract sympathy from good hearted people. Yet, the fact that Sudhamani and her devotees are likely to suffer from an all-powerfulness delirium doesn't cross their mind. It would challenge them too deeply. Anyway, the behavior of the father who "rushes to the temple to ask for forgiveness for the serious behavior of his son, and to implore the Mother to spare his life and take his instead" doesn't shine to be a model of balance. It reminds us of this concentration camp, where the Father and Saint Maximilian Kolbe lost its life by offering it and taking the place of a father of many children who was sentenced to death by being walled in the "bunker of hunger".

To begin with, Sudhamani's father displays feeble-mindedness because he believes the all-powerfulness of her daughter's predictions. Then by offering his life in exchange for his son's to appease the Mother's wrath, he puts himself in a primitive sacrificial logic. A logic of childish psychosis, where the all-powerful Mother who gave you life also has the ability to devour you if she fancies to do so. The father later confessed : "People called me the murderer of my son. I couldn't walk through the village without being subject to constant criticism."⁸⁶ There is no smoke without fire, the father-son relation must have been very disturbed or violent, everyone in the village must have known it, this could be the origin of the suspicions after the suicide. Moreover, he doesn't hesitate himself to resort to suicide blackmail : "I will drink poison and die!"⁸⁷ All these stand better for the clear symptoms of a seriously pathological family than for the signs of a descent of the Divine Mother.

The fact that Sudhamani announces the return of her brother Subhagan, in the shape of her nephew Shiva after three years is nothing but a poor solace. By predicting that he will be pious and devoted to her, she turns him *post-mortem* into a devotee. With a minimum of psychological and spiritual discernment, we can notice that this apparent generosity is based on perverse manipulation. In addition to making her brother die through her curse, she would like him to surrender to her in his next incarnation and come back in the shape of an obedient devotee to kiss her feet with such terror, and to thank her for killing him. The ideas of all-powerfulness displayed by some spiritual teachers has no end, just like the gullibility and blindness of the devotees.

The way that Subhagan, Sudhamani's brother, was removed by being pushed to suicide due to her curse, represents the premise of the violence with which the opponents to the ashram's "Supreme Guide" have been regularly "disposed of." Through the destruction of their reputation, and finally their actual existence in the community. If a disciple dared leaving Sudhamani, it was necessarily to "fall" by being supposedly trapped in a relation to another woman/man or for the love of money. This behind the scenes authoritarian, even totalitarian, functioning contradicts the "hugging machine" which is portrayed on theater stages all around the world. Let's repeat this again, the mythical reference to Kali, who has the right to destroy all her enemies, is just an excuse for true deep violence.

With a little hindsight, such serious family conflicts ending with two deaths, the cousin and the elder brother of Sudhamani, are presented as an inevitable consequence of the Divine Mother's manifestation. But can we find such violence in the life of great sages of the 19th or 20th century, like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Ramanâ Mahârshi, Râmdas or Mâ Anandamayî? We have seen that no such traces can be found. Of course we could mention that Vivekananda's sister was depressive and killed herself, when he was in the Himalayas. He humbly accepted his share of responsibility for not being there in this hard time that she was living, and then he fostered, particularly because of this event, the idea of a *sannyâs* committed to the world. As far as I can remember, he was not in conflict, she wasn't opposing him for a casual all-powerfulness delirium. Whereas Sudhamani was in violent conflict with the cousin and brother, and she cursed him clearly. She cannot be exempt from her responsibility regarding their deaths. Regarding Mâ Anandamayî, one of her cousins tried to have a close love relation during her

wedding. He had to suffer from negative consequences because of that, but he wasn't opposing the acknowledgment of Mâ as a Divine Mother, he was just affectionately too attracted by her.

The development of Sudhamani as a spiritual teacher

Balu puts forward the glory of the holy Mother and her psychic powers, by putting himself into the skin of a believer :

"Ordinary believers will say: "This is an extraordinary woman who can cure terrible and incurable diseases with a single eye contact". They will also say, "She can solve your problems in the world and easily fulfill your desires." If the question is asked to someone with a more refined intellect and interest, he will say, "Yes, the Holy Mother is really amazing. She can give you a lot of psychic powers. She is a master in telepathy and clairvoyance. It's nothing for her to turn water into a very valuable rice pudding. All six mystical powers belong to her," etc.⁸⁸

Then, just like a great lord, he puts the powers aside like they were worthless, saying that actually, it is Realization that Sudhamani can provide to her disciples. Yet if we refer to Gail's testimonial who has been Sudhamani's personal assistant for 20 years, we can see that she never talks about actual miracles that she could have witnessed, at most a little bit of clairvoyance and telepathy. By cons, she clearly explains how Sudhamani was inventing miracles to feed her own legend and was forcing her to tell them in front of gullible crowds. This torpedoed Balu's rhetoric. It is easy to identify tendencies to pathological lies in his presentation. As we have seen, one simply needs to slip questionable propositions in the middle of trivial obvious evidences, to attract the reader or audience's attention on other subjects, but the little wrong seed has been sown.

Balu keeps on talking about the guru-disciple relationship. In theory, what he says is good, but the major problem lies in the consistency between Sudhamani's daily life as described by Gail for instance and the official image given in the hagiography. Even in theory, some of Balu's assertions ring like warnings and must prompt one to be cautious. Like this one for instance : "Slowly, with strict yet loving instructions, the guru will discipline and transform the personality of the disciple"⁸⁹ Does this actually trivial theory conceal the risk of domination and versus submission?

"You could never see the Holy Mother sitting on a royal throne and commanding her spiritual children or devotees to do this or that. She instructs and simultaneously gives the example by her actions. Humility and simplicity are the well-known features of greatness. The Holy Mother is a living example of this."⁹⁰

Here again, we should be careful with these spouted words. To begin with, the usual and main presentation of Sudhamani worldwide is made on a stage and on the throne of the Divine Mother, and it is this pretty theatrical image that impresses most of the devotees. It directly contradicts what Balu advertises. As we have seen previously, Sudhamani's actions towards Gail were looking more like the ones of a spoiled child, who craves for domination and thinks she is God, than the behavior of a real sage. Undoubtedly Sudhamani is active and she works hard, she has clearly been severely educated along these lines : "Even when she was eating, she was giving instructions to a person or to another, or to someone reading the letter. Often it happened that she was calling a family or individual who had come late, after the bhava"⁹¹ It is no surprise that she has attracted people's sympathy, given her good ability to connect with them at any time? But this is not enough to be a perfect descent of the Divine Mother. The public which is craving for simplistic beliefs draws this kind of conclusion too hastily and is then caught in tricky situations of dependence towards a personality actually full of contradiction.

The "negative" tendencies displayed by Balu himself were as follows : he used to say superficially that he wanted to become the Mother's slave, but he was not sincere enough to completely become so. Masochist tendencies? She herself told him solemnly between two divine ecstasies : "Son, I do not want your fortune!"⁹² That is a beautiful statement, but we must remember that Balu was only a student and had no fortune at that time. Moreover, if we follow Gail, Sudhamani was having sexual intercourse with him and thus wanted from him something more important than just money.

"The spirit of Balu was full of remorse. He fell at her feet and begged her to forgive him. He prayed, "Mother, please, purify my heart. Clear it from all unclean thought and action. Make me a perfect instrument in your hands!" She consoled him by telling him, "Son, don't worry! You came to the Mother, and now it's her responsibility to look after you and to make you perfect!" Hearing these words, Balu felt full of peace and joy."⁹³

If we refer to Gail, who reports of the physical relation between Sudhamani and Balu, it becomes clear that things have really slipped. The theory was admittedly nice but the practice was not.

Sudhamani solemnly declares : "What we get from spirituality and spiritual teachers is that without peace and tranquility no one can live."⁹⁴ In fact, Gail never got this peace and balance during twenty years with Sudhamani. She clearly says that she has lived in fear for this entire period. In the beginning, it was out of respect, and then out of mandatory submission and fear for the physical blows. Of course, the bigoted devotees will say in a sententious way that it was only because Gail failed to completely surrender to the hands of the perfect guru that she had problems and they will argue that others have found peace next to Sudhamani. Yet, the next point is much more serious to deconstruct the myth that was built around Sudhamani. She isn't described by Gail as someone who has herself reached that peace and poise. Sudhamani tends to hide this sad reality behind a mask of apparent humility and submission to God.

Balu tells about the positive effects that the belief in Sudhamani brings to the devotees and she somehow withdraws herself from that by saying :

"Namah Shivaya! Who is the Mother to bless anyone? It's just a crazy girl who wanders here and there because there is nobody to put her into the asylum for insane people. I do nothing. God does everything without doing anything."⁹⁵

Once again, if we take this statement with caution, we can interpret it as the split of the hysterical person who pretends to be paralyzed but who is perfectly conscious of the effects of her own theatrical manifestation upon her surrounding. Moreover, she knows well how to manipulate them to promote her own interests, which are her reputation as a Divine Mother. This is not a small secondary gain.

Sudhamani's admirers present her as a detached mystical woman who is in her world of union with Krishna or Devi and who doesn't need the disciple's devotion. The testimonial of a French man, who spent three weeks with her at the very beginning when there was just twenty people in the huts around Amma, tells quite a different story : he personally told me two weeks ago that he already had his own guru, who was a great Vedantin of India. Nevertheless Sudhamani called one of her assistants when he was in a private interview with her and asked him to bring a paper. She wrote a mantra on it and gave it to him, without him asking for anything. Knowing the tradition of India, this is a serious mistake coming from a guru. It proves that she was craving to recruit as many disciples as possible. Moreover, in the rural atmosphere of Kerala, it is obvious that having Western devotees leads to the strengthening of social status.

Balu describes with great delight, the miracle of the fireball which goes out from the cemetery at night to scare Sudhamani's critics.⁹⁶ Knowing now what Gail and other people say, we can wonder if this is not one more phantasmagoria, arisen from the unbalanced brain of Sudhamani who mistakes her desires for reality. It would be meaningful for the public if someone who has left Sudhamani early and has become independent could patiently inquire, reconsider all the miracles described in her official biography and check if they really happened. This person could give all the details and collect the direct witnesses' signature to have them involved in what they say. We are seriously lacking an objective biography. We have seen that a sharp-tongued famous writer from Kerala asked for an appointment with Sudhamani to ask her a few questions about her miracles, he never got one.

In 1978, Sudhamani was 24 years old and she set the core of her ashram⁹⁷. The devotees will claim that this is the sign of her spiritual gifts. Those who are wiser will note that she was perhaps too young to embark on such a venture. It is also important to look at what happened to the four first westerners who got involved with Sudhamani : Nealu, Madhu, Gayatri and Ganga. The first two have stayed in the organization and have been promoted head of ashrams—Nealu in California and Madhu in the Reunion Island. Ganga aka Sarvâtma (or Jacques

Albohair) left after 14 years and Gayatri after 20 years. Both had learned Malayalam, so they were in a good position to be more aware of what was going on around Sudhamani than the other Westerners who were always depending on the translators, and often compensating the lack of real information by the abundance of imagination and projections. Both have become very critical, not only about Sudhamani's movement, but also about herself. The believers will say that they are to be blamed, they have betrayed, but why wouldn't Sudhamani also be hold partly responsible, by betraying their sincere spiritual hopes with her own tendency to dissimulation?

At the beginning meditation was promoted in the ashram⁹⁸, but it has become less important now that economically productive and profitable activities are fostered more. In addition to the financial greed of the organization, isn't Sudhamani afraid that if the disciples meditate too much they will start thinking and criticizing the way that she operates, or even her actual spiritual level? Isn't it more cautious for her to maintain them in a devotional and childish activism?

Balu then talks about himself in the biography. He has decided to get involved with Sudhamani after a pretty emotional encounter, here is how he describes his "love at first sight" experience :

"When I reached home the next day, I realised the great change which had taken place in me. I became totally indifferent to all my usual activities. My desire to see her again intensified. All my thoughts were fixed on her. That night I was unable to sleep. Whenever I tried to close my eyes, the Mother appeared in front of me. The next day I returned to the ashram. After the second meeting with Mother, my desire to break off the fetters of worldliness became still more intense. Thinking of the Mother, I became like a madman. I forgot to eat, to sleep and to take bath. I abandoned my fancy way of dressing and combing my hair. My parents and other family members were worried by the change in me and forbade me from going to Vallickavu. The next day after participating in the bhajan, I entered the shrine with this resolve: 'Mother, if I am your child, please accept me.' Placing my head on her shoulder, Mother lovingly said, 'Son, when Mother heard you singing, she understood that this voice is meant to merge in God. At that moment, Mother came to you and made you one with her. You are my very own.'⁹⁹

The atmosphere cannot be more fusional. Of course it is a standard feature of devotion for men : it is about viewing the mother in the woman, in order to foster the Oedipus complex and sublimate the sexual forces. Yet, this mechanism doesn't necessarily operate every time, and if we listen to what Gail says, it has failed in the case of Balu and Sudhamani.

"One night as I was half asleep, I smelt a particular scent that filled the whole room. I opened my eyes and I found that this perfume was really there, that it was not just a dream or my imagination. Suddenly, I felt someone's hands stroking my forehead. I looked up and to my surprise, I saw that the Mother was at the head of the bed where

my head was laying. I could not believe my eyes. She smiled and said, "I am always with you, do not worry!" After saying that, she was gone."¹⁰⁰

To be perfectly clear, this description can depict the beginning of a love affair between two young people who are just 25 years old. In India's tradition, this is possible in a master-disciple relation in schools like the left-hand tantric groups or the *Sahâjijyas* ; in these communities it is official. Yet, if this kind of relationship is not clearly stated, then it raises the question of religious hypocrisy.

Is Sudhamani's madness the same as the one of Ramakrishna or Mâ Anandamayî

When we compare the holy madness of wise men and wise women like Râmakrishna, Râmdâs or Ramana Maharshi, we notice that Sudhamani has breached some main boundaries that separate holy madness from simple psychosis. We have already briefly considered this question, but we can now reconsider three points in a more synthetic way :

- *Self-aggressivity* : During their *sâdhanâ* time, the sages can lead an austere life, considerably reduce their food and sleep time, sleep outside, etc... Yet they don't hurt themselves and they don't tend to have such behaviors : yet in her *sâdhanâ* to make Devi come, Sudhamani had major self-punishment behaviors : eating cow dung, eating her own feces and eating glass. In the first two cases, the intestine digests rather easily what has been taken in, in the third case it doesn't, this can require an emergency surgery to remove the pieces of glass. Such behavior cannot be observed in the 20th century sages, in spite of some features that can be labeled as holy madness. For instance, Râmakrishna was jumping like an ape because he was intensely identified to Hanuman, this was fitting well into the devotion path, as it is designed in classical India *bhakti*. But eating glass or feces isn't. We are in the field of massive self-aggressivity, linked to a major pathological need for self-punishment. It is a common unfolding in the psychotic logic. As this self-punishment was becoming unbearable, the all-powerfulness delirium and identification to the Divine Mother became the chosen outlets. In other terms, the megalomaniac excitement had replaced the severe depression, along with major self-deprecation. Even in serious schizophrenia that is called vesanic, i.e. final dementia, the patients cover their body with feces, but I've never heard that they were eating theirs or that of others. If we look further, maybe we will find a few occurrences but it is anyway a very serious psychotic sign of de-structuration.
- *Hetero aggressivity* : under the convenient pretext that she is possessed during "*bhâva*", which is the presence of Devi, Sudhamani pushed her brother to suicide by predicting his death within seven days. After seven days, he felt bad enough, due to his elephantiasis illness that he thought was incurable and

probably also due to the overall psychotic unbalance that was ruling the family, to commit a suicide. We have seen the details and quotes in the last part of this study on the psychoanalysis of Sudhamani's childhood and teenage. We have seen how it can help to understand the deviant features of her behavior as an adult. The episode has been recycled in a typically manipulative way by the group surrounding Sudhamani, to suggest that all those who were opposing to "The Mother" and her all-powerfulness ideas were doomed to die, at least from the point of view of their magical beliefs. It is a perverse way of reinterpreting an act of violence, which is typical for a personality with an inflated ego like Sudhamani. Needless to say that there is no trace of cursing, in the life of the great sages of the 20th century that I have talked about.

- It is not easy for the broader public, which is not aware of psychiatry, to grasp the difference between holy madness and actual psychosis. The too easy reference to God tends to excuse everything, and finally to cast shadows and encrypt the deliriums. In order to have more detail on the subject, you can refer to my book *Le maître et le thérapeute (The master and the therapist)*, which has been re-edited by Relié in 2013, or to the English version fully and freely available online on my website www.jacquesvigne.com under the title *The Indian Teaching Tradition*. You can also read the last chapter of the first part of my second book, *Éléments de psychologie spirituelle (Bouts of spiritual psychology)* which deals with holy madness. In addition you can read the good anthropological and historical study of Mc Daniell *Holy Madness in Bengal*.¹⁰¹

Gail tells pretty well in her book about both the hypocritical and the selfish game played to devalue the former disciples who wanted to escape Sudhamani's influence by leaving the ashram. This was interpreted as the sign of the omnipotence of the disciplining guru, but could stand for a behavior that reminds more of a bad quality relationship breakup than of the equanimity of a great sage. Gail's book gives us numerous testimonials in this sense. She describes the difficulties that she herself went through after dropping her influence, as well as the sufferings of other people close to Sudhamani, that I know well too. Claiming that it's only their problem, and not Sudhamani's, would be partisan and mostly naïve. The overall impression when we read about the life of the great Indian sages of the 20th century is that the disciple who wanted to move away from the guru could do so more or less freely. For instance, Arnaud Desjardins left Mâ Anandamayî to follow Swami Prajnanpad's guidance and in that moment she said to him something like "All is one anyway." Furthermore, these sages didn't have a destructive behavior towards them behind the scene.

I remember reading about a case of suicide in Râmana Mahârshi's biography, but it wasn't a close disciple, it was only a seriously disturbed visitor, who tried to grip on Ramana when he came two or three times. One couldn't ask Mahârshi to perform miracles to heal all the psychiatric cases of the Earth. As for Mâ Anandamayî, there was certainly the suicide of one of her close disciple whose name was Abhaya. He was a good singer but he was

suffering from chronic asthma which was causing him major anxiety. It turned into a delirium, with voices telling him to kill himself. After many unsuccessful attempts, he finally succeeded in putting an end to his days by jumping in front of a train between Hardwar and Dehradum, and the ashram didn't fail in blaming Mâ for this suicide. Yet she had tried to keep him close to her to try to help him pass through the crisis, but she wasn't successful at last. In psychiatry we know that when the impulse for suicide comes along with delirium and is accompanied by voices, in most cases it ends up being fulfilled. It is then a serious pathology that psychiatrists cannot fight even with the material and organizational strength of their clinics and hospitals. Very often, they cannot prevent the fatal ending in spite of all their professionalism. To sum up, there was no opposition or curse between Mâ and Abhaya, which makes this case very different from Subhagan's one.

THIRD PART :

COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS

In this third part we will go deeper into the details about some points, or reconsider them from various points of view. The readers who don't have much time can directly skip to the conclusions, for instance from the section How to change one's belief in a righteous way, but those who find it important to have a deeper understanding of Sudhamani's psychology will benefit from reading this third part. An old friend who has been 60 years in the field of Hindu spirituality told me he worked for some years for helping survivors to disasters, civil wars, etc. In his experience, people who had been betrayed by their guru were often as much psychologically traumatized than these survivors. So, the issue is serious, and need some more development.

Some delicate questions to solve about Gail and Sudhamani

Let's go back from the psychiatric point of view, to the credibility of Gail Tredwell's testimonial. We have talked about this at the beginning of this book but it is an important subject : if Gail doesn't lie, then Sudhamani does it in a major way by denying everything. She thereby loses all authority as a spiritual teacher. Sudhamani's devotees sometimes try to advocate by saying that the main charges of Gail against Balu may have arisen from her "therapy" work in altered state of consciousness, during hypnosis induced therapies. Of course, in this deep state, it is easy to mistake actual remembrances for mental constructions, particularly if the memories come from childhood. This can be a serious problem for families, because little girls grown older can accuse their father 20 or 30 years later for having deviant sexual behaviors when they were kids, until the moment one becomes aware that these memories came back during this kind of therapies. I asked this question to Gail herself by email and her answer was short and clear : when you are 25 years old and a man repeatedly sexually assaults you, you have very sharp remembrances and you don't need hypnosis to recall them. The argument then collapses on its own, it strikes back to those who had first this twisted idea to put it in the fore.

Another potential critic against Gail in her relation to truth can be that she has read books which are critical about the relation between master and disciple, so she has been negatively influenced by them. Yet these books are there for a reason, indeed deflection often occurs. She could have rearranged her whole story with Sudhamani after reading these books, and one could argue that the fact that some relations are pathological doesn't mean they all are. She would then fall in the same trap as medical students, making all kinds of wrong diagnosis for themselves when they start learning the signs of illnesses. Yet, she had a very clear series of memories about her relation to Sudhamani and her daily behavior that she describes to us in her book. Why invent all of them? Just to enjoy having troubles with the organization?

In spite of the ashram's defenses that only consist of poorly attacking – it feels like they don't have a better answer to give – it is our duty to take seriously what Gail reports. It is not about doing this in the spirit of criticizing to criticize, but in the spirit of Buddha, who was prompting not to accept what gurus say or teach, out of submission to authority, but to examine with our reason and to raise the question of the consistency between the master's actions and teachings. Even if this text is likely to embarrass Sudhamani's long-term devotees, it will probably make them think and it will be useful for young people, who want to get involved deeper with Sudhamani, or simply honest people who want to have a better understanding of her personality. Let's reconsider some key points to discuss further :

- *The physical violence*

The first important point is the physical violence of Sudhamani toward Gail. Sometimes she wanted to have fun, but most of the time it was real. The most common interpretation made by Sudhamani's devotees is that she had the right, as she was a guru, and could use this means to break more efficiently her disciple's ego. Sudhamani also asserts that she is the mother who harshly punishes her children. Some interpret her physical blows like a kind of manifestation of Kali, who destroys everything that prevents liberation. Yet, I have worked for 4 years on a book about the guru-disciple relation, *Le maître et le thérapeute (The master and the therapist)*, recently re-edited at Edition du Relié. I have toured India twice to work in the field, and I don't remember seeing or reading about gurus hitting their disciples, except very rare episodes... those things happened once, not more. I talked about this to Swami Nirgunânanda who is 70 years old now. He was the last private secretary of Mâ and he has spent almost 16 hours a day in her room for 3 years. He has searched among his remembrances but he only found one case of such a story, it is the one of the slap given by Râmakrishna to the *Râni*, the owner of the temple where he was officiating, because she was thinking about her trials during the Kali *pujâ*. I have talked about this in an article which is now on my website both in French and English. "*Quelques déviations fréquentes des enseignants religieux et spirituels*" (*Some frequent deviations of the religious and spiritual teachers*). What could easily be accepted as obvious or easily justified by Sudhamani's naïve disciples, is in fact something quite unusual in tradition. This is a very important point and it must be taken seriously, because it stands for a broader question, than just the allegations that Gail makes in her book.

If a single guru in an ashram has a particular behavior, this doesn't mean it will be automatically recognized by the tradition. Contrariwise, the latter is there to offer guidelines in order to correct the guru's and individual disciple's behavioral deviations. The traditional rules are here also to provide a secure frame to the teaching relation. All this physical violence cannot even pass for the standard behavior of an adult towards other adults. The organization would like to make a psychiatric examination of Gail, in order to show that she suffers from delirium, which would be very difficult to prove. By rights and with all common sense, we must admit that it seems that, in spite of Sudhamani's superficial denials, she is the one who has beaten Gail for 20 years, therefore she should first have a serious consultation with an expert. That is my point of view as a psychiatrist, but it is also the point of view of any wise person who would hear this story without knowing anything about it, or who wouldn't be impressed by the allegations about Sudhamani's divinity. Besides, if a professional psychiatrist asks questions to someone during an examination regarding violent actions, and if that person answers with a big smile : "I did it because I am of divine descent," he will make lots of notes in his report.

The guru-disciple-relation is based on the sublimation of the vital force : if this sublimation doesn't work, we fall back into anger, that's when the crisis with beatings occurs. At that moment, the relation between two people can become encysted in a

sadist-masochist bond. I asked Gail what she was thinking about this aspect, this is what she answered in August 2014 :

"When I arrived I wanted her to be my Anandamoyi Ma and I, her Guru Didi Priya. That was the image I held in my heart of the relationship I wanted. Deep down, I always held fear. In the beginning it was fear out of awe and respect. This later turned to fear of her cruelty and wrath. As I became closer and saw more and more of her human side, as I described in the book I began having more of a relationship with the guru on the inside. Due to the closeness, I also developed what I referred to as my "girlfriend" attitude. Till the end though, I held love but I think it was more for who I wanted/hoped her to be. Hence the disappointment and disillusionment. I think more than anything, (sadly..desperately) I craved her acknowledgment and appreciation more than anything. To me, that was the only love I craved from her."

The devotees will certainly blame me to apply these psychological notions to the relation between Sudhamani and Gail and many other disciples, but this interpretation is at least simple and realistic. It is the role of psychotherapists and psychiatrists to first examine to see if simple and realistic interpretations are likely to explain things. Then we can move on to more complex analysis. In order to have a clear idea of the facts, it would be useful to know if Sudhamani's anger was motivated by something spiritually meaningful, or simply by the frustration of her own ego, because her orders were not fulfilled or because it took too much time to satisfy her. Of course, as we have seen, Gail gives many instances of the second type of anger, we should interview other former assistants too, who are independent from the organization, to confirm this, if they dare saying what they have in mind. According to what I've been told by a close friend of the assistant who took Gail's place close to Sudhamani, the behavior of the latter kept on happening.

Swami Nirgunânanda mentions a meaningful possible factor to explain Sudhamani's violence : he notices that she is very involved on the physical level during her long *darshan* sessions. She thus takes the negative vibrations of the people; she can only metabolize them partially, so she has a tendency to keep on remaining on the physical level, but under a violent and negative form, when she beats her assistant in private. Moreover, let's be simple : staying 12 or 16 hours hugging people must create a huge inner pressure, that needs to express itself in a way or another, bringing the anger outburst. There is a common feature between the two situations, public and private, and the superficial observers will neglect it : the all-powerfulness feeling. Let's tell it again, because it's important : some devotees may think that performing a psychological analysis of their master is blasphemy. I apologize to them, but I will keep on performing my *dharma* anyway as a psychiatrist to clarify the great contradictions of Sudhamani.

- *The question of omnipotence*

We have seen that normally omnipotence only belongs to God, and even in this case, mere philosophic reflections show that this notion has rather the characteristics of a myth, as it creates many unsolvable contradictions, mainly with the concept of human free will. Actually, these philosophical arguments have been taken again by modern thinkers. The Buddha in his time had already expressed them clearly. Yet, the devotees still grant their masters with this all-powerfulness regularly, thinking that it is proof of devotion toward him, and is also a token of love for him. In the relation between Sudhamani and Gail, we can examine this notion of omnipotence with caution; she was one of the first four westerners who came to the ashram and lived daily with Sudhamani for 20 years, but it didn't prevent her to be doubtful about her, mainly as a guru. This was thus a clear failure of Sudhamani's. Of course, one can argue that the later welcomes everyone in her ashram and that statistically, as it is a place where actual work unfolds, it is inevitable that there are some failures. Yet Gail was not an anonymous person that Sudhamani was meeting from time to time among the residents crowd, she was with her all day long, and she benefited from an intensive specific training, everybody agrees about that. This makes her further rejection look more surprising.

- *The question of dependence*

I have already talked about this in the text; it is certainly one of the most important on the path of devotion, particularly for those who have an outer guru. Of course, it can be good to commit to a teacher, but this commitment shouldn't turn into a lifetime half-blind submission. However, gratitude, if deserved, should be for a lifetime.

- *The question of truth in big organizations*

Having clear reports about specific events will be difficult, not only from those who are still in the organization but also from those who left, because they are like isolated Davids facing an institutional Goliath. It is obvious that the ashram uses the well known carrot and stick technique to silence the opponents. On the one hand is the carrot : "How dare you do this to Amma, your mother who loved you so much!" On the other hand is the stick : "If you talk too much about what you know, we will sue you for defamation!" That is how a powerful organization, moved by unquestionable beliefs, succeeds in imposing silence... up to a certain point. This threat system had a breakdown with Gail's book and well-informed websites, which succeeded in gathering significant testimonials. The broader public should be thankful to them.

- Not criticizing other people's beliefs

This could sound like a sound principle but we could note that this may be put forward by Sudhamani to keep her "children" in her grip, without tolerating any external critics. Moreover, if we go further with this concept, we end up with something akin with the prohibition of blasphemy. It does not go well with the freedom of expression and of thinking. Without pushing too far to the extremes, it is a part of human good sense and of philosophical reasoning to challenge some beliefs, particularly the ones that seem to not improve the human being but rather make things worse. A belief is a kind of self-therapy, and the scientific tendency of modernity is to assess the efficiency of therapies, whatever they may be. Why not? As Beaumarchais said in *Figaro's Wedding* "Without the right to blame, there is no flattering praise."

- Taking the risk to make a diagnosis about young Sudhamani's behavior

The naive devotees tend to divinize a guru and to imagine that he or she has always been perfect. This is not realistic. By reading Sudhamani's biography from a psychological point of view, we found many significant materials. Of course, we must note that there is a study conducted on psychic people (channels, etc.) which showed that they often undergo frequent yet temporary personality split, but don't suffer from schizophrenia for all that. Let's remember that things are not black and white.

- **A few points that deserve to be clarified in a reasonable way**

To have specific answers regarding some of the allegations made by Gail.

- Let's consider a concrete case for instance – the supposedly false miracle where a young German asked Sudhamani to show him the power of the *Mahatmas*. The rain started to fall right after he had finished his sentence. This allegation would be easy to check. Gail provides the city names, the year and the tour where she made that speech, so we could find these moments on the videos, it would be completely objective. Then we should ask Sudhamani if it is actually her who told this story to Gail, or if the latter had invented it herself, which is not so likely, as Sudhamani and thousands of people were listening. We should ask Sudhamani the details, the name of the people who were close to her when the miracle happened. The best option would be to find that young German man who was granted this miracle, as Sudhamani claims that he had instantly become a disciple. Many events like this could be simply checked, provided that the organization agrees to clarify these points, which seems to not be the case.
- Gail says that Sudhamani has broken a rib of Leela her assistant. I haven't found yet any denial from the organization in the texts that I have read, that come in defense of the organization against Gail's book, for instance on *Ammasandal*

website. Nevertheless, this episode is likely, Sudhamani could have had with another person the same violent behaviors that she had with Gail. As Sudhamani's legs are rather strong, if Leela's rib were a little bit de-mineralized, then it is normal that one of them had been broken. Leela must still be living in the ashram, but even if she has left, it must be possible to find her. Such a letter denying the rib crack episode would have been easy to produce, if it hasn't been done, does it mean that the event really occurred?

- Regarding the sudden wealth of Sudhamani's parents and siblings and the building of beautiful houses. People visiting Vallickavu can ask to see the houses from outside and assess the size of the properties and enquire with the villagers. They will certainly know if it's true whether Sudhamani's father suddenly got a fortune at that moment, thanks to a quick improvement in the fishery business that he had been working in for a dozen years. All this would help to eliminate the shadow, better than the overall denials and *ad hominem* attacks do, not to say *ad mulierem* in Gail's case, but here again the organization doesn't seem to be ready to start this kind of work. Here again this could be a sign that its conscience is not clear.
- Regarding Sudhamani's predictions, it would be interesting to list those which happened to occur and the fake ones, and then calculate a percentage true/false and to publish them on a website like ammaprediction.org. The website could be very simple, a single page with a single number. The official speech says that Sudhamani is omniscient. One just needs to look at the statistics of the true predictions in relation to the fake ones, to immediately know in a scientific way what to think about this claim. One simply needs to know how to count. My neighbor Nirgunânda in the hermitage, who was Mâ Anandamayî's last private secretary clearly says that gurus who indulge in making predictions just show their ego inflation. Indeed if they are true, the disciples are ecstatic, if they are wrong, they will look the other way, pretending that they had forgotten them. So goes the story of belief.
- **The donations question**
Big religious organizations have no problem accepting donations and encourage them. People can even give their inheritance to Sudhamani. One must take a closer look before doing so. Indeed the guru that we like may be rather unsavory after all, furthermore he/she can die at any given moment, then life becomes a hell in the ashram, we can be thrown out or feel the need to leave, but at that moment we will go away with nothing. Ashrams are not used at all to refunding donations. This is not in their religion.
- **The cult of personality**

Sudhamani's disciples sell all kinds of objects in relation to her, like medallions, crowns, dolls. For external viewers, the latter is clearly a sign of high infantilization. All of this is far from being indispensable. Mother Meera, the worldwide renowned spiritual teacher, gives a silent *Darshan* with almost no sale at the end. The Buddhist master Thich Nhat Hanh is also famous worldwide, he has written a lot of books, around 80, but he succeeds in carefully avoiding the personality cult, without repressing nonetheless some feeling of devotion among followers. Therefore, this cult is not required and if it actually exists around Sudhamani, it may be because she enjoys it. Of course, the devotees will say that she does so for the good of the crowds, but if we take a small step back, we can easily link this to her over-inflated ego.

Now let's mention the noise : some people note that the intelligence of a person is inversely proportional to the level of noise that he can stand. Frankly, we could suppose that many in the audience are intelligent and have difficulty to stand the noise, but put up with it to get the hug and feel the devotional ambience. In a general way we must be cautious about attending big religious events : it is like theatre or cinema, we have some emotions and they vanish within a few minutes or a few hours or a few days when we head home. Let's not forget one of the reasons which likely explain Sudhamani's success, as I have already mentioned, as an important point to consider : some clever or lucky inventors patent a new system, then the crowds start using it. They thus become both famous and rich. What if Sudhamani's patented discovery was to organize *darshans* where she hugs people? It would be one of the central reasons, yet not the only one, to explain her success.

The guru-disciple relation is like a love story. It is neither nice nor efficient to criticize it from outside. A lover will certainly be disturbed if someone tells him that his beloved has a nose out of joint, even if it's true. He won't give up on the relation for that reason. However, he may become mad at you for the rest of his life. In spite of this, there is a golden rule to know : beware of dependence, infantilization, even if a little bit of it is acceptable at the beginning.

A thought of the Dalai-Lama can help clarify the situation: "The best of all religions is the one that makes you a better person," and this equally applies to independent spiritual movements. Here is a simple thought, but demanding also, because it prompts to change one's religion or group if no more improvement is possible in the current one. We can be involved in service for an organization, but if it must be done at the expense of great dependence towards the teacher and a tendency to lie to protect his interests or defects; this is not likely to help improve ourselves. We must undoubtedly be able to question our commitment to the organization. Of course, the guru is called *jnanamurti* in Hinduism, namely the statue, the manifestation of knowledge, and it is the projection of the disciple so to speak that makes the latter evolve more than the perfection of the guru. This explains the actual improvement of some of Amma's disciples, but it doesn't prevent them from being confused when they face the

critics against their guru and when they have eventually to admit that there is no smoke without fire.

The path of devotion, preached by Sudhamani, relies on belief, more than the path of knowledge does. Speaking about this, we can conclude this section with a fundamental thought from Nagârjuna : “Believe what you want but don’t grasp at them.”

THE REACTIONS TO GAIL’S BOOK AND THE FUTURE OF THE MOVEMENT

At the beginning of this part, I have already exposed the reactions of Amma and her movement to Gail’s book. Now that we have a better understanding of the psychological mechanisms involved, we can come back to the question regarding the future of the organization because the text is coming to its end.

Gail has done her job by writing this book, now it’s up to the devotees to do theirs by reconsidering Sudhamani and by asking themselves if their faith has been properly placed. If we wish a healthier future for her movement, the first thing to do would be, for her, for her closest people and for Balu, to publicly acknowledge their past mistakes and to do something to repair the damages. For a Swami, the solution could be to go for a few years in complete retreat for instance in the Himalayas in order to understand and master his own mind. If Sudhamani doesn’t succeed in going this way, many people who took care to be informed, for instance with Gail’s book or other sources, will leave the movement. When I previously said that Sudhamani had a pathology from the start, a kind of hysterical psychosis, I mean that : she is not only a person diagnosed with a bad condition but this is a handicap. Sudhamani’s spiritual development took some weird and contradictory turns because of this pathology. The people who follow her suffer from these contradictions too. We must nevertheless remain aware of the difference with other cases of patients with hysterical psychosis, who don’t turn out to become like Amma. One must be pretty gifted in a certain way to understand a few things and turn a fragile psychological background into a religious and rather commercial success story.

In Kerala where people have a generally dark shade of skin, a young blond woman with blue eyes like Gail couldn’t go unnoticed. She had become like a kind of advertisement logo for the organization and for its success. Therefore, her runaway has had a striking effect, like thunder in a quiet sky; it was a trauma for many devotees.

Following Gail’s testimonial about Sudhamani’s ordinary personality up until 1999, how big are the chances that she has improved herself since that date? Of course, Sudhamani is 60 years old now and the need for physical relations with her male disciples has surely declined naturally. But there is no reason for her craving for power over the disciples (men or women) to decrease, as the system’s way of operating hasn’t been challenged, at least not inside the organization. Power is addictive and those who have some often become slaves to it. New testimonials like Gail’s one, are not likely to come from the disciples who remain in the inner circle of the organization. Knowing exactly what is currently going on requires assistance from the inner circle of Sudhamani, who have left the institution and who are courageous enough to

dare say what they have seen. The institutional speeches are likely to remain bafflegab, “Keep moving, nothing happened!” indeed they have too much to lose both at the financial and psycho-religious levels. They will probably compensate the departure of old devotees who know too much by the recruitment of new ones much more naïve. The institutional machinery will stand, but with a deep malaise. Things will never be as before, as during the ‘years of innocence.’ Lying by pretending not to know will become a permeating habit.

Let’s say it once again; a dose of realism must temper the hope for a healthy evolution of the situation, i.e. apologies coming from Sudhamani. If someone has been worshiped for dozens of years by crowds and dwells in an all-powerfulness delusion, it will be really difficult for that person to acknowledge its mistakes. In November 2013, one month after the book was published, I wrote that, “There will be danger of ordinary, ugly sectarian reactions. First, by trying to keep silent about the embarrassing book. Second, if that is not enough, by attacking personally the author, allowing *ad hominem* attacks, making people believe that the book’s author is insincere, with financially vested interests or has been paid by enemy groups to harm Sudhamani’s reputation. Devotees will go on saying that she is part of a conspiracy, or even trying to suggest that she is mentally challenged or even asking a corrupt lawyer to make her undergo a psychiatric expertise. One will try to simply demonize her in the eyes of the public, to try to cast doubt.” Coming back to this text in August 2014, these fears have been widely confirmed. There is unfortunately little surprises in the functioning of human nature.

The underlying argument to the *ad hominem* attacks against Gail is both pathetic and illogical. Even acknowledging that she has a few defects, doesn’t make her account of what she has seen and heard in 20 years near Sudhamani, completely fake and worthless. By cons, we can consider that the current challenge in Sudhamani’s movement is a good moment for introspection and discernment. One must not mistake devotion for megalomania, love for all-powerfulness desire, Self for inflated institutional ego, charity for global enterprise. As Christian Singer said in the title of one of her books, one must learn how to make good use of crisis.

Even if, due to the highlighting of her personality troubles, Sudhamani’s reputation is deflating like a balloon that was too highly inflated, Hinduism will survive. And even if some usual forms of popular religion, like divinization of the guru, are disturbed – spirituality will survive without any doubt. Along these lines, one can read with great benefit the new book written by the Dalai-Lama - *Beyond religion*. It focuses on ethics and the spirituality which is common to the whole of mankind, religious or agnostic, in spite of the deceptions that arises from some forms of beliefs. Corruption often comes from the blend between greed for power and the hypocrisy of some leaders, which can lead to totally useless holy wars in some regions. Being the recipients of personality cult corrupts still more some religious leaders, who would be better off committing to serious spiritual practices, instead of living day and night on stage. They thus look like -- professional theatre actors.

Of course, there will always be groups of people too scared or too lazy to question themselves. Who keep on believing without questioning Sudhamani, but it will never be like it was before. Doubt will gnaw on them : “What if Sudhamani was a big, big liar?” This is the situation without any make-up.

The exemple of Sabbataï Zevi or the Titanic wreck

For those who know the story, the ongoing fall of Sudhamani and her movement can remind of the sad events of Sabbataï Zevi's fast rise and fall. It also reminds of the Titanic wreck. This liner was believed to be unsinkable, and it finally hit a mere iceberg and sank. We can talk about the wreck of the Sudhamani liner and her supposedly unsinkable organization. They didn't know they would come across an iceberg, in other words the testimonial book of a close disciple, who had the courage to say what she had seen and heard, in spite of all kinds of threats and intimidations against her. From an ethical point of view, we can consider that the ship has already sunk. It will keep on going materially for a while because of its psychological and material inertia, and because of its proselyte activism which, as we said, enables to replace the former devotees who are leaving with new more naïve ones.

Sabataï Zevi was born in 1526 in Smyrna and died in 1676 in Ulcinj Albania, which was then part of the Ottoman empire. He rose very high between 1564 and 1566, when he was considered to be the Messiah. Many followed him, including Germany which was torn by 30 years of war, and where the Jews were regularly victims of pogroms. It seems like his wedding with Maria from Poland in 1664 played a role in his Messianic delirium. Indeed starting from 1656, Sara had visions telling that she would marry a messianic king who would save Israel. According to some authors, she was mentally ill, according to some others she had an excuse because she was forced to live in a catholic convent. We know that the nuns are convinced that there are Christ's brides, namely the Messiah. Yet the difference is that the Catholics don't wait for his immediate return, whereas the Jews do, this brings confusion. After many adventures, Sabbataï Zevi has been summoned by Istanbul sultan to bear a so-called truth test : the day after his judgement eh had to be targeted by an archer : if he was the Messiah then the arrow would move away from him, otherwise he would be killed. The other option was to convert to Islam. That was so to speak the shock between two delirium, on the one hand the Jew Messiah, on the other hand the Islamic all-powerfulness. In this case, the Islamic delirium was the most powerful one. Zevi and his wife and many of his followers carefully chose conversion and they finally died in a rather peaceful exile in Albania. This exemple must remind us that religious movements are also mortal.

Sara's influence was very important in triggering the messianic delirium. The two-folded delirium is very famous in psychiatry. The love feelings fuel the phenomenon. From a critical point of view, there is another instance of such kind of case : before proclaiming himself as the

prophet of the Almighty, Mohamed was an employee of Khedeedja, a business woman, they were married. He certainly had inner experiences but he was still confused about his prophetic mission. His confusion raised because of Khedeedja who was in love with him. This was the beginning of the expansion wars of Islam, like a way of confirming the victory of the all-powerfulness feelings on the battle field. This could be called a phenomenon of compensation.

The major question is the following : if we follow what Gail reports about the love relationship between Amma and her biographer disciple Balu, aren't we before a case of delusion, with a stimulation of her all-powerfulness feelings by her lover? The current confusion around Amma would be then the logical consequences of this initial deviation.

It is likely that we will be facing a series of drama like this one : bigoted devotees who have never even had a cup of tea in private with Sudhamani, claiming that they know how she actually is, better than Gail who has spent 20 years daily with her. Why? Because they had a few experiences of happiness and light by hugging her or meditating on her picture, or because she told them two or three nice words in a crowd of 10, 000 people and it instantaneously inflated their ego like a soap bubble. This is a phenomenon of faith, certainly fostered and stimulated by the staging and the proselyte speech that accompanies the *darshans*, but which in the end only has a faint connection with the actual Sudhamani. In a nutshell : "Go! Your faith has saved you." In a more critical way this stand for a phenomenon of projection, and we could claim, like Solomon does in the Bible about vanity : "Projection of projections, and all is projection!"

All these defense reactions of the organization only add bad karma to the guru and her surrounding. In order to reassure the disciples and devotees, we can say that it is the guru who accumulates the main bad karma when she makes others believe that she belongs to a higher level than her actual one. The disciples also have their share of responsibility, but in a smaller way. Their weak point will be about not having displayed enough discernment from the start, or on the way, although many clues were increasingly telling that something was suspicious, or that there were serious problems. After all, if Sudhamani is fighting the ghost of the hysterical psychosis past, it is her problem. The key to solving the riddle is to understand clearly that ethics, *dharma* is above belief, above *vishvâs*. If the latter helps to be more ethical, make the people better, then it is welcome. If it is the contrary, then it leads to lies, to hypocrisy, to daily violence, and it is better to drop it. The devotee identifies to his object of devotion. The bigger the feeling is, the more the identification will be complete. The major question is this : "Will a disciple of Sudhamani be happy if after dozens of years of sincere effort, he notices that he is developing more and more features of hysterical psychosis?" This point should be considered deeply. Moreover, those who know but remain silent because they are afraid, should meditate on this quote from Albert Einstein : "The most dangerous people are not those who do harm but those who watch in silence!"

Let's come back to the campaign against Gail : At the moment when I'm proof reading this text, it has been launched, and it seems to decrease since April 2014. It seems like Sudhamani and her inner circle were very scared, proof is that they are likely to hire one of the

best lawyers in the USA to defend her. Moreover, they have launched through their network, a defaming campaign against Gail, to suggest that she wasn't mentally reliable. All this has been done against a woman who lives quietly on her island in Hawaii by making her sadhâna, and who had the idea of writing what she has seen during her twenty years of personal service next to Sudhamani. This can remind of another story : In the middle of the year 2013, Asaram Bapu, 74 years old, who was a famous fisherman commenting on the Ramayana in front of big crowds and who happened to be very rich, has been arrested for having sexual relations with teenage girls. His son was detained for the same reason. The disciples refused to acknowledge their guru's mistake and they demonstrated to set him free. Yet the noose is tightening and it is now almost sure that father and son are guilty, so they are still in jail waiting for their sentence. They had a double reflex : as they had a lot of money they hired a man called Jetley who is said to be one of the best lawyers in India and they made a defaming campaign against the girl who filed the suit, saying that she was mentally disturbed. Actually, these two ashram dark stories have many common points.

When one makes a planned campaign to ruin someone's reputation, it is a case of *character assassination*. This term gives a lot to think about, it must be taken seriously. It is a form of mechanism of scapegoat, a whole group cowardly beats a person like an attempt to suppress him, to feel temporarily and superficially reunited in an act of common violence. It eases for a moment the tensions that were growing in the group, as René Girard showed, before they come back –they will definitely come back because their real causes have not been addressed – and another victim is chosen. Even if blood doesn't spill, it evokes an actual murder. One wants that person assigned by the group's leader to cease existing at the level of what he can communicate to others. It is sad to see so many people, who think they are spiritually elevated, let themselves go cowardly, like sheep, to be accomplices of a group murder. Of course the devotees may say that it is Gail who started by trying to destroy Sudhamani's reputation. This is not completely false, but Gail is alone and independent to do this from her quiet retreat on her island in Hawaii. Whereas Sudhamani's organization is multimillionaire, subjected in a childish way, even an infantile way, to its leader. It is the fight of David against Goliath.

For many people, the psychotherapy method is about sitting together, considering the problems and talking about them to find solutions. There is risk to be transfixed by the problems, to see the glass half empty, whereas the devotees will have the reverse risk, in other words they have the tendency to see the glass half full in relation to their object of devotion. As we say in psychiatry, it can cause to develop a delirium in the field of one's own desire. The advertisement of Sudhamani's movement focuses on her social work. Here again let's be cautious. Amritapuri's institutions, the education institutions, the ayurvedic center, etc are not all charities, many are "for profit" institutions. Therefore, Sudhamani's movement looks like a company with multiple activities. Moreover, most of the religious movements in India also perform social work, at least because they benefit from big tax exemption. By saying this, I don't want to deny the quality of Sudhamani's social work but merely put it in perspective.

The challenge of Sudhamani's personality portrayed by Gail's book is certainly a big disappointment for religiosity in general and feminine spirituality specifically. Indeed, there will be no dearth of religious or spiritual male teachers, often male chauvinists, who will lecture us, saying : "You see! We told you not to assign any religious responsibility to women!" Yet I think that the feminization of the spiritual teacher's role represents an underlying tendency of modern humanity and it will grow, in spite of Sudhamani's personal problems, which are after all a grain of sand on the shores of a big lake. Along these lines, the reader shouldn't go on believing that by criticizing the relation between Sudhamani and Gail (among others), I'm criticizing the whole of the guru-disciple relation in India. *On the contrary, out of respect for this concept, I point at the deviations that it brought in Sudhamani's case. The dharma, the righteousness, is far above the devotion to a guru, even if they should ideally match.*

So goes the saying, familiarity breeds contempt : yet the position of Gail, very close to Sudhamani, and her testimonial, are essential to understand that the latter's psychology. We can remember the anecdote of Ramakrishna and his disciple Rakhai, who further became his successor under the name of Brahmânanda. He was young at that time and it was hard for him to stick to celibacy. He was thinking that Râmakrishna himself was not telling the truth when he was saying than he never had any physical relations with his wife Sarada Devî. Just like the poor in India, Ramakrishna used to sleep alone in a small room with his disciple in Dakshineshvar. One night Rakhai saw him going out of the common room discreetly. He thought : "That's it, I got him! I'm sure that he is going to see Sarada Devî!" He waited a while then went to a bush, not far from the door of Sarada Devî's room, which was open. Suddenly he heard footsteps behind him, it was Râmakrishna who had gone out by reason of his bodily needs and who had seen him. The master immediately understood his disciple's intention, laughed out loud and said : "Congratulations! You are right, you must observe the guru, not only during the day but also during the night!" The difference is that according to the book that we rely on, it is clear that Sudhamani didn't succeed in the test made by Gail.

Let's come back to the latter, we can notice that she had a surprising destiny : for 20 years she has worked to help build Sudhamani's movement and now, with a single book, but a heavy one, she contributes to debunk it. We should not be afraid of paradoxes, she was certainly right in both cases : as long as she was believing in Amma, it was right to help her develop her movement, and now that her experience doesn't enable her to believe anymore, it is right to warn other devotees or followers about the existing problems. This alternating scheme relates into my mind to the symbolism of *Durgâ puja* : at the beginning of the nine nights of worshipping, the beautiful statue of Durgâ made of clay from Ganga is inaugurated, and at the end it is dropped into the water where it came from. Mud returns to mud. It's a beautiful example of the impermanence of life, including the life of cults and other religious manifestation.

If Sudhamani's movement was a small one, Gail's book wouldn't be fair, it would have been better to let the devotees settle their family problems on their own. But in this case, Sudhamani is a major public figure, therefore the public has the right to know how she actually behaves when she is not on stage. With the release of Gail's book, the ideal image displayed by

Sudhamani is suddenly fitted with thorns. We can ask ourselves the following legitimate question : “if Sudhamani is not realized like she and her disciples claim (at least those who remain in the organization) then what is her actual spiritual level?” I won’t take the risk to answer this question, it is up to each and everyone, who is committed with Sudhamani, to try to have the true information about her current behavior, including in private, out of the theater staging of *darshan*, and to examine if it is worthy of trust or not. Anyway this is the moment of truth for Sudhamani’s devotees. Will they be able to gather and ask her to apologize for all the lies that she has told and her series of behavior, unworthy for a true sage? Or will they remain silent out of fear? If they know how to ask, and if Sudhamani apologizes, then the situation will become healthy and sane. Otherwise, it will be complicated and will drift further away from dharma. Unfortunately, we are already far ahead on the second path. Anyhow, the solution is still here at hand for individual devotees : regain their autonomy.

Which is more true about Sudhamani : her tantrums when she destroys physically and psychologically the assistants who help her or her *darshans* with industrial hugging? Unfortunately, I feel like answering : her private crisis. Indeed at *darshan* time she is “at work,” in a professional presentation, official, and finally artificial. It doesn't mean that many people in the audience won't have any positive experience. Yet they need to understand deeply that their experiences come from their faith more than from Sudhamani herself. Moreover, there is of course the stimulating effect of songs and rituals blended together in the middle of a big crowd. Above the door of Sudhamani's *darshans*, we should put the famous sentence of Jesus : “Go, your faith has saved you!” along with the saying : “In union there is strength.” It would simply be clearer.

I see four options to interpret the fact that it took Gail 14 years to release her book :

- She was so traumatized that she needed a lot of time to recover and think clearly : she herself gives this explanation.
- At the same time, she remained for a long time unconsciously terrorized, thinking that the sky would fall if she dared criticizing the “Divine Mother” and reveal her “dirty little secrets,” a phrase used often in her writing.
- Gail was moved by a kind of professional conscience as a writer : she needed time to make things clear and talk with poise, without any desire for vengeance, but also without fears that would have prevented her from telling the truths that needed to be said.
- Last interpretation : Maybe Gail wanted to give a chance to Sudhamani? Even if only to rescue herself from this situation in honesty : to let her apologize sincerely for her grave mistakes. To argue, with the excuse that these incidents were between 15 and 30 years ago, when things began. It was youthful mistakes and now she has improved herself with experience. We have seen that the chances are scarce for things to go this way. We should be realistic.

Big civil wars often take place in organizations, some “*Mahabharatas*” by reason of mere details. They are not there by chance, in fact they represent power conflicts between clans

which are frozen in mutual opposition. It is better not to get involved in there. Yet the controversy triggered by Gail's book is deeper than that. It is Sudhamani's credibility as a guru which is jeopardized. Of course we shouldn't throw the baby with the bath water : Sudhamani has achieved some social work, although not without serious questions about embezzlement of funds, she has a definite ability to gather crowds, along with real pedagogic capabilities to pass on simple religious messages through stories, etc. Moreover she is intuitive. Yet she has diverted the traditional guru-disciple relation, she centered it too much on herself, and thanks to this, she has built an empire. Even if her disciples disagree, let's say it clearly. It led her to have an inflated ego and her weird behaviors arise from that.

Gail had a few regrets about her *Akka* position when she left. She was the big sister of the ashram. But thanks to her book, she is once again the big sister because she helps the residents and the visitors to regain their independence and to look for their way inside of themselves, above all. Even if her book is hard to read on the spot, it is in the long term for the good of the people, for them to be happy, *lokâh samasthâh sukhino bhavantu*, as the famous mantra says. Old like India itself, and which belongs both to no one and to all.

Sudhamani's realization would have been a good idea. Both for India and for feminine spirituality. Yet an intense longing for something may bring the thought that's it's already granted, when it is not. Briefly, desire can lead to delirium. In reaction, the anger of a growing number of devotees or disciples of Sudhamani can be understood. No one likes to be fooled. If you are sold a so-called genuine product and notice that its quality is worse than it was claimed to be, that it's a fake, the buyers won't be happy. We must also discriminate between the basic religious faith of the people, which cannot be proven, and the belief in a spiritual teacher, that can be put to the test by observing his lifestyle and the consistency between what he says and what he does, including in private. If inconsistencies can be found about major points, we have the right to question the teacher without abusing the basic religious feelings of the people as Hindus, Christians or Muslims. On the contrary, that is rendering them a great service in the long term. The advantage of the guru system in India is that one can check their authenticity, as long as he and his closest witnesses are alive. Thus it is different from the basic religious belief which is difficult to question, because they deal with personalities, blurred by the erosion of time and the superimposition of legends, thus generally letting belief become the main value.

It is important to come back and to think about the conspiracy theories, which allege that Gail is part of a huge plot against Hinduism. In fact, if she is right then it is Sudhamani who, thanks to 30 years of constant and well-planned lies, made the level of Hinduism drop. Indeed the spine of the spiritual transmission in the latter, is the guru-disciple relation, thus it is important not to undermine it with large-scale dissimulations. Needless to say, it can happen, and Hinduism will survive this, but it is not what's best. If cheating has occurred, talking about it is to provide an essential service to the devotees and spiritual seekers all over the world. In the short term, it will probably lead to disappointment and tears, but in the long term it will be for their good. Hinduism doesn't need teachers who cheat on the people, then finally the whole world for dozens of years. It is still healthy enough to reassert this simple truth. It can also do

without fully realized people for a while, but it cannot do without sincere people. As I have said, we can observe a growing number of devotees who are angry to have been fooled for so long by Sudhamani. This is completely understandable, but although anger is there, this phase too must be overcome. Furthermore, we could compare fooled devotees' anger to a kind of tsunami wave coming back, actually more dangerous for Sudhamani and her organization than the one which swept the Keralan coast in December 2005.

In reaction to this, either the disciples and devotees are disturbed, or they are in a kind of psychotic denial of reality, which is far sadder. Yet I have also heard positive testimonials about this belief crisis. A young woman who is founding a little enterprise between France and India, knows very well the ashrams of this country, especially Râmanâ Mahârshi's. She had an "Amma phase" which was linked to her companion who had great faith in her. The challenges about her became the drop of water that made the vase overflow in her relation to her companion, and she clearly confided that since she doesn't believe in Amma anymore, her meditation has blossomed, it became clearer and more genuine. This is probably because she doesn't waste most of her energy in trying to justify things than are not worthy of it. She has separated her own psychological problems from those of this Sudhamani, and she feels better this way.

We could have predicted the reaction of Sudhamani to this study : officially she will say that she forgives the author, that she is ready to hug him and forget everything; especially if he gives up on what he said—but behind his back she will try to give him trouble in very unhealthy ways. The organization will try to find people who have known him a little bit and to make them say that he is not a good person. We have already seen the first of the reactions of the organization. It will surely involve a psychiatrist with overinflated credentials, barely a devotee of Sudhamani, who will remain in a planned superficiality and won't discuss the key arguments of the text, and who will make sure not to go point by point into the details of the symptoms analysis. He will cautiously hold on to a general and common argument basically saying : "How can one make a psychological analysis about a lady who does so much good and embraces the world?" and the case will be buried... at least for those who wish to do so, because of their strong emotional dependence.

Back to some aspects of the "Amma phenomenon"

Beyond the hazards of the spiritual teacher relation : what protects us actually?

Very often, people remain attached at any cost to a belief or a problematic teaching, because they feel safe, in almost a magical way. Indeed the feeling to be protected gives strength. Psychology researchers have made a simple experience that I have already briefly mentioned. An easy game of skill was chosen and the volunteers were split in two groups. One

of them got talismans, saying that they were blessed and efficient. Of course, maybe half of them, or a quarter was actually believing in their power. Yet that little faith made them have a better score at the game than the other group, which wasn't feeling protected at all. Life is full of uncertainties and religions have always played their role in providing a subtle dwelling for their devotees. It ranges from the little prayer before traveling – we never know – or the simple amulet with the grace of a great Saint, or the blessing of a supposedly heavenly Father or Mother. Nevertheless, this customization of the proposed protection – sometimes unfortunately imposed – by the path of devotion is not the only way.

We can also chose to go along with Jainism-Buddhism that leads to the fact that ultimately, beyond the charms, gurus, prophets, saviors and (G)ods – so soft and comfortable that we sometimes wonder if they are not like blankets – there is Dharma, the righteous Law. That is what protects us actually. It is not justice according to the terms of Civil Code, but righteousness. With Wisdom, it stands for the two faces of the same coin. Wisdom is the righteous thought and the righteous action that naturally arise from it. The first one is full attention, the second one is full altruism. When we drive with wheels of Wisdom and Righteousness, the journey is easier, faster and we go further. These are essential, even if the theists path covers them with the mythological forms of a personal god. In this sense theists ask : “who is protecting who?” But the jain-buddhists ask themselves this less personal question : “what is protecting who?”

Ma Anandamayî was claiming to any listening ear that there was only one Guru, it was God. The Buddha declared in one of his last teachings *atma dîpo* : “Be your own light.” It is interesting to note that he was advising to come back to the *atma*, namely oneself, one's own self, whereas he was saying also that there is neither self nor Self. In fact when we are confused either about contradicting teachings or a teacher who is full of contradictions, the good reflex is to come back to oneself, to what is felt in a direct way, empirical, and true. It's a rescue measure, even if we cannot yet access the Power-Knowledge beyond the little self or the little me.

It is worth, in the context of this study, to think about the accurate words of the Buddha. He pronounced them 10 months before his death, during his last rain retreat, next to a village called Beluva. He had been very sick, but he had recovered enough to teach to the monks who had gathered. Ananda, who had been his assistant for several dozens of years, came to tell him that the monks were waiting for his teaching : the Buddha answered :

“What, then, Ananda, does the order expect of me? I have preached the truth without making any distinction between doctrine hidden or revealed; for in respect of the truth, Ananda, the Tathagata has no such thing as the closed fist of a teacher, who keeps some things back.

Surely, Ananda, should there be any one who harbors the thought, 'It is I who will lead the brotherhood,' or, 'The order is dependent upon me,' he should lay down instructions in any matter concerning the order. Now the Tathagata, Ananda, thinks not that it is he who should lead the brotherhood, or that the order is dependent upon him...

Therefore, O Ananda, be ye lamps unto yourselves. Rely on yourselves, and do not rely on external help. Hold fast to the truth as a lamp. Seek salvation alone in the truth. Look not for assistance to anyone besides yourselves. "And how, Ananda, can a brother be a lamp unto himself, rely on himself only and not on any external help, holding fast to the truth as his lamp and seeking salvation in the truth alone, looking not for assistance to any one besides himself?

Herein, O Ananda, let a brother, as he dwells in the body, so regard the body that he, being strenuous, thoughtful, and mindful, may, whilst in the world, overcome the grief that arises from the body's cravings. While subject to sensations let him continue to regard the sensations that he, being strenuous, thoughtful, and mindful, may, whilst in the world, overcome the grief which arises from the sensations. And so, also, when he thinks or reasons, or feels, let him so regard his thoughts that being strenuous, thoughtful and mindful he may, whilst in the world, overcome the grief which arises from the craving due to ideas, or to reasoning, or to feeling."¹⁰³

The Buddha makes sure not to advise to focus on his image or to repeat his name like a mantra. His teaching is older than the bhakti cults which unfolded in the Middle Ages in the special circumstances settled by the occupation of parts of India by Muslim forces. The Buddha tells the monks to focus on themselves, on their sensations, on the understanding of their mental functioning—that is the way of liberation.

The feeling of “magical protection” can arise from belonging to various groups, whether they are made around a teacher or in the frame of a religious movement, or in the context of a party following an ideology. This protection is conditional, but in an unhealthy way because if we leave the comfortable cocoon of the given belief, we are threatened to be instantly annihilated by the all-powerful heavenly Daddy or Mummy, who will go into a violent tantrum by reason of our “treachery.” In psychological words, it is typically a psychotic infantile terror. I think that questioning this “magical protection” represents a deep reason for the disaffection for both the great religions and the great ideologies that has been going on in Europe since 50 years. Let's compare it now to the protection brought by the fact of following what is right: it is conditional too but in a healthy way. It represents a law, the same for everyone and if we follow it, we have good results. If we don't follow it, the results are bad.

It is up to us to understand, and then choose. There is no more Daddy or Mummy up there, as all-powerful as whimsical, ready to explode in anger and destroy us on the spot if we don't obey or if they wish to do so.

The Buddha had already seen the danger of relying on someone when it's about spiritual life. He tells a story about this, it is worth quoting :

“Once upon a time, a bamboo-acrobat set up his pole and called to his pupil, Medakathalika, saying: ‘Come, my lad, Medakathalika, climb the pole and stand on my shoulders!’

Then the master suggested that they should watch and look after each other during their performances. However, Medakathalika said that each should look after himself, which would be the better way. The Commentary adds that, in this performance, the end of the pole rests on the forehead or throat. The man who thus holds it must watch the balance closely and not attend to the man at the end of the pole.

The Buddha related this story at Desaka, in the Sumbha country, to the monks, and said that, in the same way, each monk should look after himself; by guarding oneself, one guards another; this is done by the cultivation of the four satipatthanas (foundation of attention). Through forbearance, non-violence, loving kindness, and compassion. Thus, monks, in protecting others, one protects oneself.”¹⁰⁴

The truth that missed the mark

In the internet websites that question Sudhamani, and there are more and more of them, she is accused of having published a charter of her ideas for the future of mankind, which is a copy/paste of another charter written about the same subject by the UNO. I didn't have the time to check the facts by myself but if they are true, then this is not brilliant. If a school teacher notices that one of his pupils has made a brilliant presentation which happens to be a copy/paste of a Wikipedia article on the same subject, he will give him a bad note and he will pinch his ears for him to understand the lesson and never do this again. Who will dare giving a bad note to Sudhamani and pinch her ears? By the way, will she understand the lesson?

The procedural stalemate of Sudhamani's devotees

A devotee of Sudhamani, Cijith from Mamangalam near Kochi, fell from grace when he read Gail's book and he couldn't stand its content. No one knows if he is an accomplice of the organization, anyway he filed a complaint to the police. He used the 135A section of the Indian Civil Code “Promoting enmity between different groups on ground of religion, race, place of birth” and in the purest style of passionate paranoia, article 120B “criminal conspiracy.” This is how India Today from 13th March 2014 reports the answer of MV Niskesh Kumar, chief editor of Reporter Channel, which is one of the five organisms targeted by the complaint :

As a responsible media house, we have only reported the allegations of Tredwell that she was repeatedly raped at the ashram by the head priest. We also aired a programme criticizing the police in registering a case against those who shared posts regarding the revelations of Tredwell" ... "Freedom of the press is being gagged by initiating cases against media organizations in the state. The court verdict asking police to register a case itself is also condemnable. In fact, these cases are filed to silence the press. Those who try to threaten us by filing cases should understand that we are not afraid of telling the truth, and will continue our journalism with courage and honesty."

A complaint has also been filed against lawyer Deepak Prakash, for having himself filed a complaint in relation to the alleged rape of Gail Tredwell by Balu :

A case has also been registered against Supreme Court lawyer Deepak Prakash, who gave a complaint to Karunagappilly police station asking them to file an FIR over Tredwell's allegations since saying it was a cognizable offence. Interestingly, the Mutt has not filed any defamation suit against Tredwell even though the book was published four months ago. I have done only my duty as the citizen of India. IPC 202 clearly says that intentional omission to give information of offence by person bound to inform will be punished with imprisonment. I have bought the book of Tredwell and on reading it, I found that a crime had been committed. I gave a complaint to police. It is my social responsibility to bring it to the notice of the authorities, Prakash told IndiaToday.¹⁰⁵

A devotee also asked the Court of Delhi for the ban of the publication of Gail's book in English for the whole of India. Fortunately, the president of the court debunked him, saying that it was up to the government to ban a book, not a court.¹⁰⁶ In the case of Kerala where the organization has a lot of influence, we have just seen that through one of her devotees, she has succeeded in making the local state police ban the transcription of Gail's Malayalam interview given in February to Kairali TV. So there is an obvious contradiction between what the Delhi Court says – it's not up to a court to ban a book – and the local actions where a judge allows himself to do what he sees fit. This is unfortunately another instance of the Indian government's weakness regarding the freedom of expression and the protection of authors.

Let's come back to this law aiming at protecting the religious feelings of people : some religious movements or big commercial companies misuse it to cover their corruption issues. Using the state of India against the author and modest editors to silence them is a perverse technique. How can they afford for dozens of trials at the same time? So they prefer to remove the book that was criticizing the big religious movement or the big company. All this is also linked to a religious psychology tending to the submission to a stiff family system. Critics are not welcomed. This is deeply different from classical India where debate was the major point of religious activity. One can read about this subject the book *Argumentative India*¹⁰⁸ from Amartya Sen. Robert Thurman also noted that in a conference about the rebirth of Ananda the Buddhist University. He made it in Delhi in November 2013 and I had the chance to attend to it. He was

reminding that in this university which has blossomed from its creation in the fourth century since its destruction by the Muslims in the twelfth century, the president could be challenged at any time. If a scientist or a yogi coming from outside was starting a contest in the form of a debate against the president, and could succeed in defeating him by the relevance of his arguments, he was taking his place. It was not a system of beliefs, devotion and submission but the quest for relevance and intelligence. It is in fact more attracting for a modern spirit.

The darshan of Sudhamani and the shortcomings of devotion

I report here the diagnostic impression of a psychologist and psychoanalyst who went several times to Sudhamani's darshan, including to a remote place in Kerala : during her teenage years, Sudhamani went through strong experiences of body destructuring, that can be called shamanic or psychotic. She kept on experiencing them as kind of danger, and one of the ways that she found to go back into her body and re-root herself, like a kind of self-therapy, was to hug the people. Of course, it protected her against psychotic decompensation but it had side effects, because she also took the negative vibrations of the visitors, without being able, in spite of what the disciples believe, to actually transform them. This can be one of the reasons for her behavior disturbance which may occur as soon as she leaves the darshan theater stage. As often in psychiatry, the attempt of self-therapy becomes a problem more than a solution. Moreover, Sudhamani is trapped because no one can imagine her doing anything but hugging the people like she did millions of times. Even if she has turned this self-therapy consisting in hugging people into a profitable business, it could have been at the beginning a way to avoid psychosis, or to extract herself from a borderline condition. This doesn't match a pure descent of the Divine Mother, as her inner circle would like us to believe.

Let's note that from the point of view of the visitors, it is a typical feature of the ego to try to be loved by someone famous. If this desire increases it becomes delirium, it is then called erotomania. Needless to say that this aspiration is rarely satisfied, bringing an intense frustration and finally withering because of the frustration itself. Gail describes very well this process of psycho-spiritual consumption in some long-term residents of the ashram, we have seen Shanti's case for instance, who came from California.

It is permissible to ask a rather simple question : Do people really unfold on the spiritual plane when they go through Sudhamani's hugging? Given some testimonies, we have the feeling that it doesn't happen, except in some rare cases. This can be explained by the fact that on the one hand the people satisfy their own ego by being hugged by someone famous and on the other hand they step into a circle of dependence towards Sudhamani's ego, who works day and night to build an empire. Do these two factors ensure spiritual advancement or is it the contrary? We could also argue that going through Sudhamani's embrace is a regression therapy,

as we become again like babies in the mother's arm. Of course, regression can be therapeutic but it can also be pathologic. Psychotherapists will say that it is "fifty-fifty".

Let's quote now an instance of darshan that many people had, a rather positive one. The person who reports this is a psychologist and psychoanalyst that we already mentioned above, who follows the Vedanta type path and who comes from time to time in India. She was with me and a group of French people when she got this darshan from Sudhamani in a remote place.

"I had the great opportunity to be in direct contact with Amma several times in various occasions in India as well as in France, and also when she was in her ashram for 2000 new year's eve, and also in another occasion in India. I had been chosen to give from hand to hand in full humility, the *prasâds* to distribute for several hours in the night. Sitting less than 3 feet behind her, being the direct witness of strong sharing and transfer of spiritual loads occurring in the hugs, so energetic in their authenticity. Sudhamani was giving herself to comfort the people she was hugging, whispering a few words in their ears until physical exhaustion. At 3 o'clock in the morning the single bouquet of flowers given by a Hindu was offered to me from her own hands and transmitted in the direct contact of our eyes.

She is simply GURU because she has fostered the connection to the Being into those who had come close to her, and who were ready to access it. It is through her and through what she conveys that many people were thus connected to the Immanent Light enabling them to transcend themselves. The physical person of Sudhamani and her body-spirit must be considered as substratum, taking care not to get attached to it. Even if I'm aware that paradoxically that body of Sudhamani achieved thanks to donation, the construction of a state-of-art hospital, healing the bodies of Hindus of Kerala. It is through Sudhamani that transmission of energetic loads of the Spirit connects the Being of many of those who have been touched by Grace in the 'contact.' Being touched by Grace, that is the great Opening and the great Expansion."

This person has been practicing psychotherapy for 35 years and has read my diagnostic interpretation of Sudhamani's personality and she agrees with me, given the elements brought by Gail. Yet she places stress on the fact that in spite of the weak points of their personality, spiritual teachers have more or less the same message, which is to look inside of us, to look for our true nature and try to find it. This is the message that we should keep, the rest is part of their own Karma. This can be a key for those who are feeling disappointed by Sudhamani right now and wish to get back their psychological and spiritual autonomy.

Let's come back to the darshan itself : it seems like Sudhamani actually has a technique, that is what I noticed whenever I attended to a few darshans since 1987, although I must admit that my last visit occurred 6 years ago. As she is relatively intuitive, she picks the people that feel to be more emotionally malleable; she singles them out, asking them to sit on stage. She gives them a little bit more than the others, the hug lasts longer, she whispers two or three longer

sentences in the ear, a little bouquet of flowers instead of a sweet or a packet of ashes. Thus the people feel special in front of the multitude, their ego is flattered, they feel like coming back, she remembers them and plays this little game again, until they become dependent.

I have mentioned above that this type of seduction could operate so successfully because it was rooted in the tendency to erotomania which is inherent to the functioning of the ego itself. The erotomaniacs, often women, think that a famous man loves them. For instance, when the president speaks to the nation, with a zoom on his face on the television screen, the woman thinks that he is winking at them, smiling discretely to show that he is in love particularly with her. Of course critics could object that the whole path of devotion is an erotomania projected onto a mythological-metaphysical heaven : the all-powerful God Creator loves me personally, me, the insignificant particle among 7 billions of individuals. Now that is stimulating and comforting for the ego! It is a potential trap of devotion. Yet it also has positive aspects as well. It creates a strong relation with an entity that appears to be positive, a perfect god or a consistent teacher. It brings great benefits through identification, and one the qualities of the focused entity as a mirror reflects the original image.

In Sudhamani's case, we have seen that she had a personality full of contradictions, so let's say it simply, what we reflect like a mirror, may not be worth the price. An instance comes to mind : in one of Sudhamani's ashrams outside of India, a long term devotee, very close to the local representative had an inspiration from Amma – according to what she says – telling her to make public all kinds of true or false accusations against the representative. The ashram was in trouble, the media came to inquire and the center itself ran the danger to be closed. It would certainly have been simpler to remain discreet and “wash the dirty linen in private.” Thus, it is not inconceivable that after 20 years of sincere devotion, the devotee who looked perfectly normal and even nice, had inherited hysterical psychosis traits from Sudhamani herself, thus explaining her sudden destructiveness. This mechanism could explain this incident.

What about the awakening of love for Sudhamani through little favors during darshan?

One says that love is blind, it is often true at the religious level and this law is rooted in psychology. Love is linked to concentrated desire, which is fed into the brain particularly by neurotransmitters called endorphine. They are responsible for appetite and the ability to focus. When our attention is focused on obtaining the object of love, nothing can stop us, we can become violent without reflection. We are not into morphine or heroine, but endorphin... This also applies to another type of desire which is food. The following observation has been made with babies : when they suck the breast, they literally stop hearing and seeing. Once the devotion process is triggered, it becomes so satisfying that we shut down the little outer signal that could warn us that something is wrong, that things are not as simple by the teacher as we wish them to be, and that finally the ideal image could have thorns. An Italian friend, serious spiritual seeker who has a sound and solid practical experience about psychology, went to Sudhamani's ashram after I advised her to do so. At that time I hadn't read Gail's book yet, as it was not published. She didn't like the place and she simply told me : *Sono come drogati* “they

look like drug addicts.” With her feminine intuition, and before studying closely the path of devotion and its shortcomings, she may have hit that very well.

Let's say it again to conclude the subject. I don't want to blame the whole path of devotion, but I want to underline that its power is two-folded. If it aims at a religious teacher who is full of contradiction, and many can be found in all traditions, or at a violent divine entity advising you to go and kill the group next door under the pretext of a so-called holy war, then this devotion will be more a problem than a solution. This religious violence is a current problem and it gives a lot to think about. This can explain the growing number of people, maybe two thirds of humanity that lead an honest and even spiritual life without needing to refer to a religious belief or any god.

Thus, we have seen that erotomania could be one of the shortcomings of devotion. On the path of knowledge, megalomania is a potential shortcoming too. By often suggesting that one is the Self or the Divine or the Nature of Buddha, one can wind up believing it... for real. The ego, instead of dissolving into expansion as it should do, spreads : “dissolving, spreading” let's be watchful about the boundary between the two processes!

Let's come back to what occurs in visitor's minds when they start to think that they have a personal relation with Sudhamani. Especially if they are young and if they feel the need for spiritual experience, they will tend to take a leap and they will start making retreats at the ashram. The main practice in this case consists in reciting the *Lalitâ Sahasranâm*, the thousand names of the Divine Mother. In a sense, there is nothing to object about this, it is a classical scripture of Hindu devotion. Yet, the problem comes from the fact that it is of course centered on Sudhamani, as the supposedly manifestation of this Divine Mother. Therefore each new name, repeats over and over the same basic message : “Sudhamani is all-powerful” and thus logically : “I'd better surrender to her completely.” We are caught in a kind of functioning, akin to the one of an authoritarian political party, where obedience to the ideology is the core value. Let's recall that Jayalalitha, who was Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, is now barred from this post out of confirmed cases of corruption. However she continues to be venerated by the masses and has her photo everywhere in the state, where I just spent two weeks. On one propaganda poster, she is even seen sitting and kissing a young man who kneels in front of her. To put it concisely, she starts playing the “Amma of Kerala” to try to improve her political drawbacks.

Let's come back to the Amma-Sudhamani who is our subject : we have seen that the expectation of the newcomers in the ashram for unconditional love is high. But actually they remain frustrated, maybe because she doesn't want to give it or more simply she is not able to do so. This frustration of the disciples cannot express itself in general against Sudhamani in the form of anger, because of the big devotional pressure of the ashram's system which protects her like a wall. So it turns against themselves in the form of self-aggression. In other words, in the religious context it becomes an excess of asceticism : people don't sleep well, don't eat well and perform *seva* like workaholics, desperately longing for an extra bit of love from Sudhamani, which in fact never comes, or comes in such a whimsical way that the confusion only increases. This system can go on for weeks, for years, or even 20 years like in the case of Gail, until the

moment when the person understands and leaves. The adventure ends in a bad way, with, on Sudhamani's side, a behavior of sadly repetitive anger that violently throws the “deserter,” through defamation. In fact, the human quality of a person is more obvious in the way that she deals with the separation than in the way that she plans seduction.

A recent instance, a rather sad one, is the reaction of Sudhamani against Gail when she published her memoir book. People say that she flatly declared angrily that it was only pure lies.¹¹⁰ If her conscience is really so quiet, why did she have this tantrum? Doesn't it precisely confirm Gail's testimonial about her, depicting her as a person who is unable to stand contradiction? Actually, Sudhamani had been afraid for 15 years, since the day Gail left, to see such book published, and to see all that part of her bad karma, the abnormal behaviors that she had with her or that she witnessed, raised to the surface and being exposed in public.¹¹¹ Gail was presented like the model disciple, the ideal one – namely the perfect slave. I remember that the devotees used to put her picture next to Sudhamani's in their ashram bus, both pictures being stuck to the rear-view mirror. But when she left, she was forgotten. As soon as she released the book in which she dares saying what she knows, a defaming campaign, obviously planned by Sudhamani herself, has been organized against her. It included “testimonials” of individuals who are part of her influence orbit, and who are undoubtedly ready to lie to avoid being in trouble with her. After praising Gail when she was the model disciple, now she is laid bare, trying to uncover any of her little defects.¹¹² This is not clever and in fact it smells like the chaos announcing the end of a reign. There is no dharma in there, it looks more like accounts settlement to protect a business, to keep on enjoying the golden egg goose. We can mention two kind of moods about this : on the one hand, a cheap move after a relationship breakup, where the dogs are unleashed after the cuddles. On the other hand, the Stalinist or Maoist system, where the friend of yesterday, if he dares questioning the dictator, happens to be mercilessly flushed and abused by the party's propaganda. Where is the true spirituality what is his basically a scapegoat scheme?

Between reality and virtual, a blurry twilight

Sudhamani has taken advantage of the virtual obsession of modern society. More and more activities are performed alone in front of a computer screen, like love encounters, banking operations, and even secret spiritual teachings that can be easily found on Google. From Erotic to Esoteric, through economy, the individual mainly becomes a *homo virtualis*. By adopting the ancestral tradition of darshan and by making it more intense through the hugs, Sudhamani re-injects so to speak a little dose of reality into the overdose of virtual. This go far to explain the attraction of crowds to her meetings.

Anyway, we also have the right to be critical and to wonder if the contact with Sudhamani during the darshan is real. The devotees say that she has developed equanimity and that she loves everyone equally. Critics will say that she so is exhausted by the crowds, that she gives her darshan in a mechanical way, even in an industrial way, because it is not possible to do so otherwise. We are thus facing a pseudo-reality instead of an actual real phenomenon. And the visitors who want to have Sudhamani as their guru suffer from this, because they end up

becoming aware of this through their own experience. They wanted to run away from virtuality and slipped into a pseudo-real situation, they moved then from Charybdis to Scylla. They don't know their guru in any other context than on a theater stage during darshan or bhajans, or on this wider theater stage which is the domain of the ashram at Vallickavu. Is it a true guru-disciple relation? In this sense, Gail's book set things back in their proper place and induces a healthy awakening for many people. As I have said clearly previously in the study of the relation between her and Sudhamani, the latter suffers from a split personality. Setting a real relation with someone is not easy, doing it with someone who has already a "double personality" is harder, almost impossible. Projections will take the place of real relation.

In which spirit does the charity occur?

An objection is raised against Sudhamani's critics. Because of them people will donate less for the charities, therefore less poor people will be helped. Of course, this argument deserves to be raised, but there is an answer full of common sense. We don't lack charitable associations and NGO, including in India. The people can donate to one or the other very easily, after making sure to be informed about their honesty. Moreover, given the serious allegations of funds embezzlement¹¹³, it is permissible to precisely wish that people get used to donating to other NGOs rather than to Amma's so called charities.

If I was a poor man in India, I would certainly be happy to get a ready-built house, offered by Sudhamani's movement : yet is it a reason to consider her a Divine Mother? Is the administration of the Indian government considered this way when it helps the poor? Of course one could say that the government is only re-distributing the money that it doesn't own because it is public funds : but isn't Sudhamani doing the same? At least for the part that she re-distributes and not the one that she funnels toward her accounts outside India, according to the analysis made on *embezzlingtheworld*? Easy money has been a factor of corruption for Sudhamani and her movement, especially thanks to the Western tours.

Moreover let's come back to a major point : after thinking a lot about Sudhamani's contradictions, I realized that one of the important reasons for her social work, the one that she makes her disciples perform, is a kind of defense in advance. She knew that Gail would publish her book one day, and she can now use the wildcard that she had prepared since long : "How can one say such nasty things about me when I do so much good to humanity?" And some people have been naïve enough to believe her, neglecting the complexity and contradiction of the human soul.

Sudhamani probably stopped giving sannyas because she wanted to protect her reputation too : According to Gail; she saw too many initiates failing (mainly sexual scandals) and leaving. We may think she was getting embarrassed as it made a mockery of her to be giving sannyas to people who could not live up to it. She was blaming the individuals. She was afraid of ridicule. It was not from any good morals or honesty on her part.

Why doesn't Sudhamani foster meditation?

Regarding Gail, Sudhamani wasn't allowing her any holiday and almost no time to meditate. Maybe because she felt intuitively that if she had some, she would start thinking normally by herself and would become aware that she was being manipulated and she would leave. In fact, that's exactly what happened. A few months after her first two weeks of holidays following 19 years at the ashram, she left. In a general way, Sudhamani warns against intensive meditation. Behind the pretext of "protecting her children" against the bad side effects of such practice, she protects herself actually. If some of her disciples could gain an actual spiritual experience through their own meditation practice, it could compete with her all-powerfulness ideas. By so doing, she keeps them like busy little children, thanks to the rattle of chants and service. And people like it, they come, the masses flock, the crowds accumulate, and the critics become numb. By the way, I have already said that the intelligence of a person is inversely proportional to the level of noise that he can stand. Those who have attended Sudhamani's programs will perhaps find that this statement is true. Blast is about exploding –and when the loudspeakers are at their higher level, we say they are at full blast... Noise explodes the head as well as the thinking, for which purpose, but to make the people more malleable to propaganda?

How to change one's belief in the right way

I have already written a whole article about this subject. It is published on www.jacquesvigne.com, but additional reflections came to my mind as I was making the final editing of the present text. This additional thinking will probably help the disciples and followers of Amma to turn the current crisis into a factor of advancement on the spiritual path instead of an obstacle.

To begin, let's quote the Dalai-Lama ; although being part of a tradition where the guru is highly valued, he explains that reading good books as well as performing a serious work of meditation inspired by these writings, can help a lot in moving forward, independently from any guru. In fact, a good book is better than a bad guru. Moreover he simply advised someone who was complaining for having been disappointed by his spiritual master : "Be neutral towards him and stop thinking about him all the time!" This neutrality recommendation is not in contradiction with the publication of Gail on her remembrances about Sudhamani, but is in the best interest of the public. By reading her book and talking with her on Skype, I felt that she has reached a good level of neutrality regarding her twenty years of life at the ashram, even if it took her a long time to manifest and express herself.

When we think about it, it is not such a big problem to switch from high school to university. Yet we may forget the anxiety of the student at that delicate moment. We can have a training in an ashram with some kind of childish executives, or even infantilizing ones, but afterwards, we take the responsibility to organize our studies by ourselves in a mature way.

Starting to go to university doesn't make us forget what we have learned in the high school that we have just left. Leaving a teacher after becoming aware of his limits doesn't make us forget what we have learned next to him, thanks to him, or sometimes in spite of him.

Belief is rooted in involvement. For instance, an experiment has been led in psychology. People were asked to agree to place an advertisement for a company by sticking a little paper on their mailbox. Then they were asked to get involved a lot more by putting a big advertising billboard on the street by their yard. The people who had refused the little paper have almost always refused the big billboard. Those who accepted the paper accepted the billboard. Somehow they didn't want to have the feeling that they were contradicting themselves. It is the same with Sudhamani's movement. Those who have invested a lot are ready to believe all kinds of big inconsistencies and swallow many "bitter pills." Whereas those who are less involved keep a better objectivity.

The devotees are sometimes caught in a belief like gnats in a spider net ; yet there is a difference : the gnat shakes restlessly to get out, whereas the devotees are at ease, in spite of all the things going wrong, and they snooze quietly.

Sudhamani's dolls are more than an entertaining whim invented by an exotic movement. They are a powerful symbol, they express in a heart-rending pathetic way, the regressive attachment to a person who is supposed to be perfect, but who hides a long list of personal problems. They represent both a desire and a delirium, a comfortable blanket and a gnawing pain.

Actually, the problem of belief is rather simple : the devotees will regularly tell you with an apparently quiet look, but hiding a deep need to reassure themselves : "I am sure of what I say because I have had experiences!" Yet the experiences themselves result from many factors, thus they are fabricated, and the very nature of fabricated things is to be disintegrated after a while. The Buddha is one of those who best highlighted this process, and modern psychology is full of such instances. We can refer with much benefit to two articles of mine in 2013, *Le questionnement du Bouddha à propos de Dieu (Buddha's questions about God)* and *L'expérience de Dieu (The experience of God)*. www.jacquesvigne.com

When there are lies in a couple, if one of the partners lies more or less to the other, it is usually wise to know how to clarify and turn the page ; but if the person who cheats in a constant way is a so-called spiritual master, why the hell following him? After all, he doesn't need us and we don't need him.

The inner work is long and complex enough in itself ; it is better not to have one more trouble in disentangling by the spiritual teacher, that which arises from righteous spirituality from that which represents the sequels of a former and improperly healed psychosis. The

disciples don't have the energy, neither often the capacity, to be the psychotherapists of their masters; it is better for them to move away.

One of the deepest needs of our time is for a spirituality free from any all-powerfulness delusion. The modern spirit is becoming more and more demanding from that point of view, but the Buddha was already very clear about that, in relation to the inflation of popular devotion that was ruling at that time, and which had tendencies to drift towards mild delirium.

We can now wonder why Sudhamani's devotees are so patient in front of her little and big lies. They say for instance : "Amma, I know that you lie but I love you!" Does it stand for co-dependence? Since the last twenty years, this co-dependence has been a major notion which emerged in couple's psychology. Is it also applicable in some cases of guru-disciple relation? It took Gail 20 years to realize that she had to escape from Sudhamani's influence, then it took her several years to find balance again. Some other people seem to have failed to get out. Isn't it about falling in a kind of co-dependence, of emotional-devotional addiction? And how to have true spiritual advancement if, in addition to being in addiction, one refuses to even acknowledge it and to consider getting out of it? Without giving moral Buddhists type lectures to the path of devotion as a whole, we can anyway remind that according to Gautama, the pleasing experiences are in fact deeper traps than unpleasant experiences because they put us to sleep and settle us into attachment, whereas the unpleasing ones wake us up and bring detachment. This should be nuanced, but we cannot help thinking about this basic rule when we see crowds queuing to get a hug and a candy. The pleasant part of this experience is temporary, it has much to do with the all-powerfulness delusion, and I have already developed this concept above: "I have been in the arms of an internationally famous personality!" Of course, many people go through life, crippled by a huge inferiority complex, this feeling will then be a solace for them, but the all-powerfulness thinking in itself is like a banana skin, the ego slips on it, including the religious one. It ends in bigotry and sectarianism, which is very common in the world of religious movements, and Sudhamani's one is no exception. In other words, the all-powerfulness idea is like a female tiger, it is dangerous to come close to it, to cuddle and caress it, even if it's very tempting...

Gifted children often have psychological problems further in life. This is often due to the precocious inflation of their ego, indeed caused by their very gift. According to the testimony of Gail and other people who moved away from the organization, Sudhamani doesn't escape this tendency.

The commitment into a belief is like an investment into the stock market : if the stocks drop, one must be able to quickly step back, otherwise instead of losing a little, one may lose a lot.

One solution would be to make the difference between Sudhamani's teaching which is classical, even trivial sometimes, and her person, which hold a long series of problems. Yet this is not how a Satguru should be. He must be consistent, that's why we venerate him. Classical teachings of dharma can be found in books. By the way, I have already mentioned that a good book is better than a bad guru, in the long term it induces less problems. Moreover, for those who would like to give a comparative side to this study speaking of the teacher-disciple relation, we can recommend Lean Oakes *Prophetic Charisma- The Psychology of Revolutionary Religious Personalities* Syracuse University Press, USA, 1997. It would be interesting to examine till which extent Oakes' analyses fit in the case of Sudhamani.

The *Sanatana dharma* assigns the function of dissolution to Shiva. It is not forbidden to discern his action into the fall of the ephemeral glory of a spiritual teacher. *Namah Shivayah!*

More than we think, the authority of some beliefs are based on psychotic infantile terrors. We think that mummy and daddy are all-powerful and if we dare resisting them, they will annihilate us instantly. In an implicit and disguised way, this threat is widely used by Sudhamani and her inner circle of disciples to force the devotees into submission. Needless to say, this is not healthy, neither psychologically or spiritually.

I don't cherish grand illusions : many devotees will be too entangled into the net of beliefs to read a whole text that questions their object of worship, they won't even start reading it : so goes the belief, so go the emotions...

Last reflections

We can wish that this text gives way to a reasonable debate with really responsible members of Sudhamani's movement. Yet the main problem consists actually in the fact that they are not really responsible, they just follow the orders of Sudhamani and her inner circle. So far, we have seen that the political line that has been defined, is to not discuss Gail's allegations, but rather denigrate them massively and try to cancel her credibility by making a character assassination. In other words, ferocious and unfair personal attacks. Many disciples seem to be spiritually and emotionally unable to accept that Sudhamani could have, or can have shortcomings, and to face how these new revelations could make an evolution in their belief. Yet it would be the right attitude. Indeed Sudhamani has tried to sweep aside the challenges of Gail to get rid of them by calling them : "web of lies" that don't deserve a single thought. Obviously, she mistakes her wishes for reality. We can even say that she is raving in the sense of her desire. This leads to the loss of credibility in relation to the part of the public who has remained reasonable. Fortunately, even the veteran disciples still have their inalienable freedom to leave the movement, like many others have done before. They will thus take back their spiritual autonomy and the opportunity to make a healthier *sâdhanâ* without having to dedicate

their energy to cover the troubled behavior of the two heads of the organization. They will understand that is a vain fatigue.

In the tradition, a guru had a limited number of disciples and even when they were a large in number, they were still accessible. But in the movement gathering crowds, the spiritual masters, or alleged masters, are almost always seen on a stage, where they can easily display a calculated behavior to impress favorably the disciple. A proverb states that familiarity brings contempt. Yet in the biography of the sage from the 19th and 20th century there is no deep challenge made by those who were at their service in a close way. In spite of this, it is the case with Sudhamani thanks to Gail. In Mâ Anandamayî's case, I can report the direct testimony of Swami Vijayânanda who explains very well that he hadn't been prepared to admire her, by the means of praises written by the ashrams, etc. when he met her, because he hadn't read anything about her or from her. Yet he spent 19 months almost non-stop with her, except a day, and that's when he was convinced of her greatness. So he proved wrong the proverb : "familiarity brings contempt." On the contrary, Gail's experience confirmed it. The bigoted - devotees have a tendency to reassure themselves by thinking that Sudhamani is actually Kali and she is able to cut the head of her opponents as she wishes. This makes one smile because we can see that, out of fear that her ship sinking, she rather relies on the best American lawyers, thus using the power of money to replace the one of the true Divine Mother, which she seems to sorely lack. All this fuss is only meant to try and silence a woman like Gail, who has no financial resources and who lives quietly on her island but who made the error to say what she had seen and heard. It appears that Gail is the real Kali, who cuts the head off a Sudhamani who is more and more entangled in the karmic fruits of her lies at many levels. She "shrinks" her in other words. She removes from her a reputation of Divine Mother that she wasn't deserving. This can also remind of the situation of David and Goliath, as we mentioned above. The giant of the organization is taken down by a stone thrown in the middle of the forehead, in other words a testimonial consisting in collapsing Sudhamani's credibility as an authentic teacher, satguru.

I hope that this text will help many people to get out, or best, to not be caught into the spider web of dependence to a Sudhamani self-proclaimed Amma. In this sense, the advantage of Gail's book is that if a healthy person reads the book before falling into the net of Sudhamani's propaganda, he won't feel like going to see her, not even by curiosity and he will keep the distance.

When Sudhamani's devotees tell me that she is realized, I will think about the smiling answer of Ghandi when he was told about the western civilization : "It would have been a great idea!"

To end, let's go back to a simple concept : Ethic is above belief and feelings and the guru himself. The latter should serve ethic, not the contrary. As for the disciples, there is no shame in mistaking when the relevant elements were not available to evaluate a spiritual teacher ; but once we have them, keeping on mistaking consciously is a shame. Along these lines, about the

fact of recognizing that we were mistaken, the famous proverb is perfectly relevant : “better late than never.”

I have talked a lot in these reflections about non-submission, about this return to independence that goes well along with the growing of awareness, like it was the two facets of the same coin. In this sense, don't go on believing me just because I am a psychiatrist who has spent 27 years in India with a spiritual teacher and who has written a whole book translated in English about the relation between guru and disciple. The problems and questions underlying Sudhamani's issues have come out in a condensed form in Gail's book and various websites that gather critical testimonial about Sudhamani. Read them, listen how your heart resonates, how your mind thinks, and you will develop a clear vision. This is enough. Former disciples of the organization have warned me that, not knowing how to answer in a reasonable way to the critics of this study, they will maybe try to harm me in a way or another. If it ever happens, I can say that I will defend myself by informing the public about their behavior in real time through internet. This will certainly not improve their image that has been shadowed in the past year.

Truth can be shocking on the spot, but in the long term, it has the power set us free. Moreover, a belief which has been major for years can vanish one fine morning when we wake up. We simply become aware that we don't believe it anymore. That is the inalienable freedom of the human being.

I wish that the above reflections could bring the minimum of vital psychological clarity in this devotional passion and confusion that has been stirring Amma's movement for at least one year, and which continues underground.

The disappointment with a spiritual teacher is not something new, neither in Hindu tradition, not in others. Let's remind what Mâ Anandamayî was claiming with conviction : “There is only one Guru, it's God!” Along these lines, the Dalai-Lama was also advising with simplicity when this kind of problem was happening with a teacher : “Stop thinking about it all the time and be neutral.”

Jacques Vigne, October 2014

PS : You will find a French version of this text on the web site www.embezzlingtheworld.blogspot.com in the blog at the 16th of October. A French and English version of “How to change one's belief in a righteous way” and “Some reflections about the frequent shortcomings of spiritual teachers” are also available on the website jacquesvigne.com. They complete this small book.

Moreover, I am currently involved into demanding activities and travel. Then I'm practicing a sustained sâdhanâ in a hermitage. The readers should then excuse me if I suggest they not send me any mail. By writing this article, I wanted to give the elements of reflection that I was aware of. I have not much more to explain, I switch to other subjects and works. It's now up to any reader to integrate them, examine them one by one and see if they are right or not. I have stated clearly what I had to say. I know very well the official version of Sudhamani's ashram as I have been visiting it from time to time for 26 years and I have read it carefully on the internet, no need to remind me. I don't have the opportunity to go into online debates with Sudhamani's devotees or her opponents. Let now everyone be mature and find the truth inside.

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¹ Tredwell, Gail (Gayatri) *Holy Hell: A Memoir of Faith, Devotion, and Pure Madness*. Wattle Tree Press, Maui, Hawaii, 2013.

² Re-edition Le Relié, 2013. Gandhi explained clearly : « even if you are alone on the path of truth, follow it, the others will join you gradually »

³ Tredwell, Gail (Gayatri) *Holy Hell: A Memoir of Faith, Devotion, and Pure Madness*. Wattle Tree Press, Maui, Hawaii, 2013.

⁴ www.embezzlingtheworld.blogspot.com

⁵ First on the site « guruphiliac » but reposted on www.embezzlingtheworld.blogspot.com

⁶ //www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QF-PqWYNjU

⁷ <http://booksy.in/2014/04/04/ravi-deecee-no-question-of-withdrawing-book/>

⁹ <http://worldhindunews.com/2014040421077/dharma-raksha-sangam-held-at-kochi/>

¹⁰ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Another-book-on-Hinduism-by-Wendy-Doniger-under-attack/articleshow/31230610.cms>

¹¹ <http://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/mata-amritanandamayi-s-devotee-pleads-for-ban-on-defamatory-book-37145.html>

¹² <http://embezzlingtheworld.blogspot.com/>

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ www.embezzlingtheworld.blogspot.com

¹⁵ Op.cit p.206

¹⁶ Id. p. 42

¹⁷ Id. p. 43

¹⁸ Id. p. 44

¹⁹ Id. p. 211

²⁰ Id. p. 211

²¹ Id. p. 218

²² Id. P.323-324

²³ Id. p.181

²⁴ Id.p.256

²⁵ Id. p.255

²⁶ Id. p.305

²⁷ embezzlingtheworld.blogspot.com

²⁸ From Rosny Eric *Les yeux de ma chèvre*. Plon/Terre Humaine

²⁹ Mac Daniel June *The Madness of Saints : Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* ; University of Chicago Press, 1989

³⁰ Id. p.IX.

³¹ Id. p.6

³² See the concise documentation provided by the web site www.embezzlingtheworld.blogspot.com

³³ Id. p.47

³⁴ Id. p. 67

³⁵ Id. p. 63

³⁶ Id. p.13

³⁷ Id. p. 22

³⁸ Id. p. 62

³⁹ Id. P.65

⁴⁰ Id. p. 66

⁴¹ Id. p.83, note 1

⁴² Id. p.68

⁴³ Vigne Jacques *La mystique du silence* Albin-Michel, 2002.

⁴⁴ Id. p. 69

⁴⁵ Id. p. 88

⁴⁶ Id. P. 114

⁴⁷ Id. P. 103

⁴⁸ Id. P. 104

⁴⁹ Id. P. 102

⁵⁰ Id. p. 103

⁵¹ Id. p. 74

⁵² Id. p. 76

⁵³ Id. p. 77

⁵⁴ *Bhaji Matri Darshan*, Ma Ananndamayee ashram, Kankhal 249408, Hardwar. published in French by les éditions Terre du Ciel, translated and presented by Jacques Vigne, see the chapter about yogic powers. A version can be found online on www.anandamayi.org, in the section of texts in French

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Id. p. 79

⁵⁷ Id. Ibid.

⁵⁸ www.embezzlingtheworld.blogspot.com/notanopenbook

⁵⁹ Id. p. 80

⁶⁰ Id. p. 83

⁶¹ Id. p. 97

⁶² Id. p.100

⁶³ Id. Ibid.

⁶⁴ Id. p. 102

⁶⁵ Id. p. 106

⁶⁶ Id. p. 124

⁶⁷ A Biography op.cit. P125

⁶⁸ Id. p. 123

⁶⁹ Id. p. 107, 108

⁷⁰ Id. p. 112

⁷¹ Id. p. 109

⁷² Id. p. 115

⁷³ Id. p. 114

⁷⁴ Id. p.114

⁷⁵ Id. p. 118

⁷⁶ Id. Ibid.

⁷⁷ Id. p.126

⁷⁸ Id. p. 130

⁷⁹ Id. p.131

⁸⁰ Id. p. 153

⁸¹ Id. p. 131

⁸² <http://embezzlingtheworld.blogspot.com> which is also a portal for other sources about the same subject

⁸³ Id. p. 133

⁸⁴ Id. p. 141

⁸⁵ Id. Ibid

⁸⁶ Id. p.153

⁸⁷ Id. p.156

⁸⁸ Id. p. 283

⁸⁹ Id. p. 285

⁹⁰ Id. p. 286

⁹¹ Id. p. 293

⁹² Id. p. 287.

⁹³ Id. p. 187

⁹⁴ Id. p. 291

⁹⁵ Id. p. 292

⁹⁶ Id. p.145

⁹⁷ Id. p.162

⁹⁸ Id. p.177

⁹⁹ Id. p. 247

¹⁰⁰ Id. Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Mac Danielle Sandra *Holy Madness in Bengal* University of Chicago Press, 2009

¹⁰² *Mata Amritanandamayi- A biography* by Amritatma Chaitanya (Balu) Amritapuri, Kerala, 1988, 1989, p.124.

¹⁰³ Nyanaponika Thera *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation – A Handbook of Mental Training Based on the Buddha’s Way of Mindfulness* Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1962, p.136 extracts from Dīgha Nikāya 16, (3).

¹⁰⁴ Samyuta Nikāya, 47, 19 quoted by Nyanaponika Thera *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* BPS, 1962, 2005, p.143

¹⁰⁵ read more on : <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/amritanandamayi-mutt-row-gail-tredwell-five-news-organisations-booked/1/347997.html>

¹⁰⁶ <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/petition-in-hc-wants-ban-on-book-by-former-aide-of-amritanandmayi/>

¹⁰⁷ KS Lal *The Legacy of Muslim Rule in India* Voice of India, Delhi

¹⁰⁸ Sen Amartya *Argumentative India Rupa*, Delhi

¹⁰⁹ Swami Rāmatirtha *Le soleil du Soi* Accarias, 2006.

¹¹⁰ <http://amma-taavi-kassila-sex-cover-up.blogspot.com.au/2013/11/Sudhamani-Inner-Circle-Black-Ops-Named-And-Shamed.html>

¹¹¹ see on website Ammascandal.com

¹¹² see for Gail Tredwell's defense on the internet and a set of the main critics about Sudhamani on a website that the organization has been trying to ban since long <http://amma-taavi-kassila-sex-cover-up.blogspot.in/> and especially <http://amma-taavi-kassila-sex-cover-up.blogspot.com.au/2013/11/Sudhamani-Inner-Circle-Black-Ops-Named-And-Shamed.html>

¹¹³ All details can be found for instance on the website that has already been mentioned www.embezzlingtheworld.blogspot.com

ⁱ <http://embezzlingtheworld.blogspot.fr/2015/01/fcra-2013-2014-069.html>