AN INTERVIEW WITH STALIN'S DAUGHTER

Q: What series of events turned you away from communism and what is your political philosophy now?

A: I should say I have no political philosophy. Twenty years ago when I joined the Communist party as a student of Moscow University, I believed in communism as everybody did—all my friends and people of my generation. And I was taught it since my childhood. . . .

Perhaps the studies of history and social sciences and economics and Marxism itself made me a little bit critical to many things which I could see around me, and to the things I could see in our country and in other socialist countries. Because it was not exactly what we were taught theoretically.

Later, after my father's death, I can say that I have lost quite a lot, because he was also for me the authority. I loved him, I respected him, and when he was gone I lost a lot of faith. Just personal faith and respect.

I must say that in the last fifteen years perhaps everybody in our country, especially the youngest generation, and also my generation, became more critical because we perhaps were more free to think and to discuss and to judge about things and events. And the lack of freedom everyone could feel quite evidently.

In the last five years also there were more reasons for me personally. Religion has done a great change to me. I am not saying about some formal religion—though, five years

ago I was formally baptized in Moscow in Russian Orthodox church.

Q: Do you feel your departure from the Soviet Union endangers your children in any way?

A: No. I don't think it endangers them because they knew nothing about my plans and they could not know anything. They expected me to return as I expected to do myself, and of course I was not able to inform them, neither from Delhi nor from Switzerland. So they are not guilty at all and I believe they cannot be punished for anything.

One thing about which I suffer very much is that they will miss me and their life might be changed just without me, without my presence. We were affectionate to each other.

It was quite difficult for me to decide to leave them, but the decision not to return was too serious for me. I could not continue the same life—the same useless life—which I had for forty years. I wanted to have another life—a new life—and I said, "I hope that they will understand me."

My son will be twenty-two in May. He is a medical student. He has recently been married, so of course, he's responsible for his young wife and his family. He is responsible for his seventeen-year-old sister, also. But I don't think something bad might happen with them there . . .

Q: What event determined you to turn to religion? Is yours a formal religion or simply a generalized belief in God?

A: It is a generalized belief in God. I believe that all religions are true, and different religions are only the different ways to the same God. For me, God is just the power of life and justice and when I am talking about God I am just talking about happiness to live and to enjoy life on this earth.

I feel that humanity should be one, that mankind should not be divided, there should be less struggle. The people should work for good. This is my belief in God.

RED PRINCESS

I was baptized in the Russian Orthodox church, but it doesn't mean that I prefer this church to others. It was just the following of tradition, following the religion to which my parents and my ancestors belonged. I also feel great sympathy with modern Hinduism of Ramakrishna and Vivekenanda and the Roman Catholic church because in Switzerland I met a lot of fine people who were Catholics and I also feel sympathy with Christian Science. I don't feel much controversy between these things and I do not want to attach certain labels to my religious feeling.

Q: You said you left Russia seeking freedom of self-expression. Were you implying or perhaps even stating your disapproval of your father's rule in the Soviet Union and if so, how, in what way?

A: Well, there are two points in this: First of all, self-expression. A writer needs freedom to express what he likes and that person should be sure that his books will be published. This is what I could not have at home.

Now about the politics of my father. Well, of course I disapprove of many things, but I think that other people who still are in our Central Committee and Politburo should be responsible for the same things for which he alone was accused.

And I feel somewhat responsible for those horrible things, killing people unjustly. I feel that responsibility for this was and is the party's, the regime's, and the ideology's as a whole.

Q: How did you manage to get your manuscript out of the Soviet Union? Was there difficulty involved?

A: Oh, there was no difficulty. The book was written three years ago in August, 1963. Two years ago when we had the Sinyavsky and Daniel case and trial in Moscow, I felt, with the help of my late husband, that it would be better to send the book abroad. And we did it with the help of our Indian friends.

So when I came to India in December, 1966, I asked my friends to return it to me and when I left for Rome I took it. That is all.

Q: How do you feel about reporters chasing you during your first day in Switzerland? Is it true that you told the nuns in the monastery that you found the newsmen's interest "evil and disgusting?"

A: Perhaps something like that, because when I came to Switzerland I was absolutely exhausted and tired after so many things—my time in India was horrible. One year before that my husband was very ill. I was awfully tired; I felt one thing only—I wanted to rest and relax a little bit.

And, of course, I am not accustomed to correspondents. I did my best to escape it.

Q: Do you intend to make your permanent home in America or anywhere else outside the Soviet Union?

A: Well, I think that before the marriage it should be love. So, if I will love this country and this country will love me, then the marriage will be settled. But I cannot say now.

Q: Since you say the dogmas of communism have lost their significance for you, do you now intend to speak out against these dogmas?

A: I have already said that I do not intend to have any political activities and by this I mean I am not going to preach for communism nor against it.

Q: Did the Soviet attitude toward your proposed marriage to Mr. Singh cause you to re-evaluate conditions in Russia? If not, what did?

A: Yes, the attitude of government and of the party to our marriage was one thing which was I think disgustful because I cannot understand until now how in the country where marriage with foreigners is allowed by law why a person like myself was not allowed to do it by the party and by the government.

I think this is not the business of

the government at all and the whole thing finished quite tragically because my husband died in Moscow and his death made me absolutely intolerant to the things to which I was rather tolerant before. So this was quite an important reason for me to feel that it is impossible for me to return. And among other events I can mention also the courts, the trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel which produced a horrible impression on all the intellectuals in Russia—and on me also—and I can say that I lost the hopes which I had before that we are going to become liberal somehow. The way two writers were treated and sentenced made me absolutely disbelieve in justice.

Q: You said because of your name you were considered as a kind of state property by the Russian government. Would you give us more details about the demands and restrictions on your personal life made by the government?

A. There were no restrictions in the sense that I was denied something in my country. But I was told many times, officially, that I will never be allowed to travel abroad, because abroad I can meet the press, correspondents, and this is not for me.

Then secondly, I was not allowed to marry officially the Indian citizen, though he was a member of Indian Communist party.

Compared with other Soviet citizens—I had perhaps a privileged life. I had a pension from the government; I had some comforts which other people don't have. But, as you know, people cannot live only by bread. People need something else.

And I knew that work as a writer will never be possible for me in the Soviet Union.

Q: It has been said that you will get from your book $1-million free of tax. If this is true, and whatever the amount will be, how do you feel about the possibility of becoming a very wealthy woman? In other words,

what is called a capitalist?

A: Oh, well, first of all, according to Marx, writers are not capitalists because it's a different way of labor. I quite understand that my book will give me a rather substantial sum of money here which I am not going to use for myself.

I intend to give a rather big part of it to the Indian village of Kalakankar, which is the birthplace of my husband. I have been there, I have seen how poor people live, how much they need. I would be happy to establish something like a Brijesh Singh memorial fund there for the peasants of this village to help them.

Also, I intend to give a substantial sum of money to Switzerland for children's houses there. In Switzerland there are houses for orphans from all the countries, so for that purpose also.

And finally, in this country also. I am not sure just now what can be used here, but for some social purpose. I am not going to become a very rich woman because, while my children are far away from me and they have a rather more than modest life, it is absolutely impossible for me to become a rich person here. I think you understand this.

Q: There is a great deal of talk about the situation of Jews in the Soviet Union. Charges are being made that the Jewish religion and Jewish culture are being suppressed. Can you comment about this?

A: I always had many friends among Jewish people in Russia. I know about restrictions in universities and in the institutes when very talented Jewish young people are not adopted and instead of them people of other nationalities are adopted but who are less talented. This is all I know. This is what I can say as a fact because I know it myself.

Q: What do you think of modern American literature and who are your favorite American writers?

A: My favorite American writer is

Hemingway. We do not know much about modern American writers in Russia. I hope here I will be able to get acquainted. I like Salinger very much.

Q: You said there were no Communists or capitalists for you, only good people and bad people. Do you think the day is coming when leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States will embrace that philosophy, too?

A: I can say nothing about the leaders. You should better ask them.

Q: Are there many other Russians who also feel that a belief in God provides strength to meet the daily challenges all human beings face? Are there many other Russians who also feel that a belief in God is important for them to meet the challenges of their life?

A: I believe there are many.

Q: Do you suppose there may be other Russian writers who would like to leave Russia to be able to express their thoughts freely?

A: I don't know. All I can say is that many of them are never printed, and quite a lot of good poetry and short stories and novels we know only in titles because there is quite a lot of modern literature in Russia which is not printed.

Q: Have you been in touch with your children since arriving in the United States and will you continue to communicate with them?

A: No, I have not been in touch with them and I really do not know how is it possible. Once I telephoned to my home from Switzerland and once I could talk with my son. The next time, after three days, when I tried to telephone again I could not get the connection with his number. And I am sure that the many letters I have written will not reach them.

Q: Of all the factors which brought you to the point of coming to the United States, which would you say was the outstanding one?

A: I think that the most important was the death of my husband. Be-

cause I was attached to him, I loved him, I respected him. When he was denied the main human rights, it affected him—and me also—and when he finally died, I felt that I myself completely changed. I have become intolerant of those things to which I was tolerant and patient before.

Q: Do you believe that religion and the basic ideas and ideals of communism are compatible? Do you believe that religion and communism can exist together?

A: I don't think that class struggle and revolution can go hand in hand with the idea of love . . . no, I don't believe it can be joined together.

Q: At the time of the death of your father, it was rumored both here and in the Soviet Union that he was assassinated. Is there any truth to this rumor?

A: About all this, you will read in my book. But I can answer that he was sick and he died; his death was the natural result of illness, nothing else.

Q: What dogmas of communism, to use your words, do you believe have lost their significance or are wrong?

A: I believe that in the modern world, in the twentieth century to which we belong, in the century of atom bomb and space flights, class revolution which can bring people to progress has lost its significance.

Because the progress in our time should be reached by the work of humanity, by the work of mankind, notwithstanding which classes are involved in this work. And the less struggle and less bloodshed it will be, it will be better for people. That is what I believe.

Q: Have you had an opportunity since your arrival in this country to read our newspapers, watch television, or listen to the radio? If you have, what is your feeling as to the free press in this country compared to the press in the Soviet Union?

A: The press and newspapers here are quite different from Russia, be-

cause here there is a lot of information—sometimes I think information which is not important at all. But still it is there. And maybe this, to some extent is better than not to have any information at all, as we are accustomed in Russia.

I cannot understand why if they write something about a new person, why it should be mentioned how much he weighs, and what he eats for his lunch. Well, I have said that more information is better than no information at all.

Q: What personal possessions did you leave in the Soviet Union? Did they include any of your father's papers, and if so, which ones?

A: There is my flat, my wardrobe, what else? About my father's papers, I had only his private letters to me, written long ago when I was a child; but all these letters will be published in my book. And nothing else is left there.

Q: Would you say that you favor a democracy set up on the form of our democracy here, as the kind of government you're in favor of?

A: Well, I believe, of course, your society has more democratic freedoms. But I will see later. Perhaps it is not so nice as it seems from the beginning. But, of course, there are more democratic freedoms here. There is no doubt about it.

Q: You said that as a grown-up person you found it impossible to exist without God in your heart. From what writings and contacts did you come to that conclusion?

A: It was not writings and not personal contacts. Perhaps it is just what one may call religious feeling which some people have, some people don't have; and as when the person who was blind one day, his eyes become open and he can see the world and the sky and birds and trees, and so it is—it is like this; this is the feeling that comes, comes to you one day. After that I began to read more.

Q: You say there is a new genera-

tion in Russia, which is discussing and questioning your homeland's present social system. Is it likely that when this new generation becomes the nation's leaders they will seek to Westernize the government by allowing greater individual and intellectual freedom in permitting free enterprise to flourish?

A: I do not know exactly what will they do, but of course it seems to me that each new generation brings new social work to society and perhaps those students who are now eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old in Russia, when they will become grown up and if they will become social leaders in the country, they will bring something more modern and more democratic. I hope so.

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