

From New Jersey to Vraja: Journey of an Editor

DR. MARGARET H. CASE of New Jersey is one of the most eminent editors and has been through hundreds of Mss. at the prestigious Princeton University Press for over two decades. Apart from her "love" for editing she developed inclination for the land of mystic India for decades. Today she spends half of the year in Vraja to "live another life". In an exclusive interview to **GAUTAM CHATTERJEE** in Vrindavan she shared her professional ponderings and spiritual aspirations as well.

GC: You had two decades of experience as an Editor at the prestigious Princeton University Press, and are now the Editor of the Vraja Nathadvara Prakalpa Series. Will you explain how this happened?

MC: Well, I happened to be in Vrindaban for the Govindadeva Conference in April 1991, and Shrivatsa Goswami, who convened the conference, asked me if I would edit the papers that were given there. A year and a half later, I took early retirement from Princeton and now I spend about half of each year in Vrindaban. Meanwhile, I worked with my friend Asimakṛṣṇa Dasa on his book about Saṅgi, being published in the series. I am looking forward to working on future joint projects between Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana and IGNCA. I have known Kapila Vatsyayan for many years, ever since she came to Philadelphia in connection with Stella Kramrisch's Conference on Manifestations of Siva.

GC: How did you become interested in India in general and Vraja in particular?

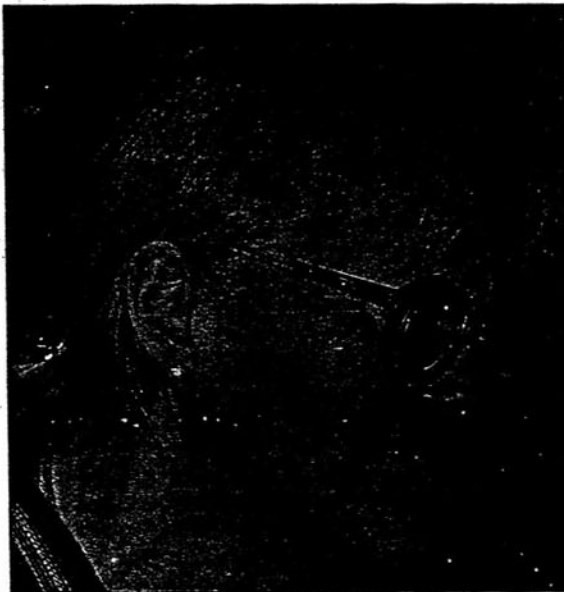
MC: I have been interested in India since I was in college, but I can't say where that interest came from. In 1957 I came to India with a scholarship sponsored by students at Smith College, and travelled by ship through the Suez Canal. I was tempted to stay here then, but returned to America and took a Ph.D. at the University

of Chicago in the history of India. My dissertation was on the Aligarh Movement.

While I was a graduate student I compiled *South Asian History 1750-1950: A Bibliographic Guide to Dissertations, Articles and Newspapers*, which was published by Princeton University Press. I did some part-time teaching and freelance editing for the Press while my children were little, and then in 1974 began working at Princeton as a copyeditor. Very soon I was invited to begin acquiring manuscripts on South Asia and in time also came to be in charge of books on the Middle East and the rest of Asia. Through this I met a great number of scholars and made many good friends. Among them was Jack Hawley, whose first book, *At Play with Krishna*, was written in association with Shrivatsa Goswami. Through this connection I met Shrivatsa, and our families became friends through mutual visits. In 1990 Shrivatsaji came to Princeton for a three-day conference and invited me to come and spend some time in Vrindaban. My visit coincided with the Govindadeva Conference in 1991 and in spirit I never left Vrindaban after that.

GC: So from college days you have nurtured this attraction to India and you have made several trips to India. Tell us something about your own discovery of India and its people in your own perspective.

MC: When I first came to India, it was as if in some



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way I was coming home — although everything was very new to me, it also seemed very familiar, as if I was seeing something I had been missing for a long time and had only been able to feel very comfortable here. I came knowing very little about Hindu religion—and was full of questions. Since they were not the kind of questions one asks for a research purpose but for my own interest, I simply listened and watched and lived here—as a child does. Living in Vrindaban I was engulfed in a rich cultural environment and I have been fortunate enough to learn a lot. Meanwhile, I am also fortunate to be able to do work I love—editing.

GC: After spending some years in Vraja, you might have some thoughts about the people's cultural sensibilities. Will you elaborate?

MC: I am not able to generalise from limited experience, but the atmosphere at Jayasimha Ghera is quite wonderful. The arts are cultivated as a crucial part of spiritual development and this carries on a tradition that seems to express the very essence of Indian culture.

GC: How do you estimate the IGNCA endeavour in the context of cultural sensibilities?

MC: I think it's wonderful how much has been accomplished in both recording and stimulating all the arts. I am well aware of the formidable problems involved, but I am impressed with how well the holistic approach to culture and the arts has in fact worked to document and revive many aspects of the very rich cultural heritage of India.

GC: As an Editor you have been through hundreds of manuscripts. How is the concept of art in time and space related to book publishing?

MC: I feel that a book—a scholarly book—should be seen as in itself a work of art, not just a scholastic exercise or research report. In this way it can express the creativity of the author and to a lesser extent of all the people involved in its production. A book is a product of humanistic culture, and should reflect that level of concern. This was an idea that was for many years dominant at Princeton University Press and that is why it was a joy to work there.

GC: What is your advice to young Editors who

would like to see a book as a work of art?

MC: I think the most fundamental element is interest in the book—why has the author written this, and is it an interest I can share? A book based on an interesting question, even if flawed, can be of interest to a lot of people. The Editor's job is to help the author communicate what he or she wants to say to the appropriate audience—it's a service, profession, one that involves working with interesting people and ideas. Most Editors work anonymously and are not promoting their own ideas, so if it's important to someone to have his name on his product, editing is not a good profession to choose.

GC: What is your advice to young Scholars? And what are your thoughts on the use of diacritical marks?

MC: My advice to people who want to write books is that same as that to Editors: what is it that interests you? Can you interest your readers in the same subject? Can you keep their attention through your arguments? And can you make your points in the first and last chapters—all that many scholars will ever read—so that those who are not specialists in your field can learn from and be stimulated by your ideas?

About diacritical marks, I can only speak about transliteration from Devanagari script. Here there is an accepted system of exact transliteration, using diacritical marks, and I think it should be used. I take as my patron-saint in this Frederic Salmon Growse, Collector of Mathura District in the 1870s, who pointed out that any other course was the result of carelessness or English ethnocentrism, or both.

GC: Finally, will you speculate on the future of the world of books as we are face-to-face with computer and video technology?

MC: Computers and data bases are wonderful tools for research and scholarship, but for presenting analysis and for enjoyment, books will not be superseded. I think more books—including scholarly books—are written nowadays than ever. Do you know anybody who doesn't want to write a book? So book will continue to be published.

GC: Thanks a lot for sparing your valuable time.

MC: Here in Vraja, no "thanks", only Radhe! Radhe!